

Six Feet off the Ground

H. C. Turner

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A ten-year-old child manages to be hopeful, tragic, fun, and endearing all at once, despite dysfunctional parents.

Six Feet off the Ground, by new novelist H. C. Turner, is the emotionally gripping tale of three lives unmoored. It's a rough ride for Ed, Marcie, and Will, and Turner has the gift of making it seem all too real while proffering a sense of possible, and very needed, redemption through the perceptions of a wise, innocent child.

Ed Dorris is a burned-out, drug- and booze-addled reclusive and one-time rock star; Marcie is the substance- and chaos-addicted, husband-chasing sporadic love of his life; and Will is their irrepressible, highly imaginative ten-year-old son. Ed is unaware of Will's existence as the story opens; the discovery of his offspring sets events in motion.

It may be Ed's story, but the star, hope, salvation, and hero is unquestionably Will. The resolve and dignity with which he drags the dual anchors of an absentee (however unintentional) father and an addicted, abusive, and neglectful mother is instantly uplifting and ultimately heartbreaking for anyone having been in similar circumstances.

Will never flinches. He adapts. He justifies and rationalizes the behavior of the adults into whose care he has been forced by genetic chance, constantly moving on to the next adventure. The determination with which this boy struggles to balance his entire tottering world is both poignant and reassuring. Will's perspective manages to be hopeful, tragic, fun, and endearing.

Though the subject matter is ponderous, *Six Feet off the Ground* still manages to offer moments of humor and action. These are dysfunctional people after all, and, whatever else they may be, dysfunctional people are rarely boring. Turner, who works in the music business, adds special insight into the perils of that milieu.

The narrative offers glimpses of both Ed's and Marcie's childhoods and learns that abuse of both the substance and familial variety are family traditions for both. Readers are reminded, subtly, that the adult survivors of child abuse are worthy of our compassion as well, but that there comes a time when it is necessary to banish the past in order to function as an adult. Turner sometimes gets a bit heavy-handed pointing his readers to the intended conclusion, but these moments occur infrequently.

In focusing on the indomitable charm of Will, the author hits his truest stride. With more-professional cover art and some strongly targeted marketing, *Six Feet off the Ground* could achieve even greater heights.

In the end, Turner leaves the reader with the sense of a hopeful future. Even if, instead of becoming the double agent or race-car champion of his "Willie's World" imagination, he simply grows up to be just another boring, functioning adult who doesn't pass the cycle of addiction and abuse on to the next generation, Will is going to be okay.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (September 23, 2013)

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