

Table Five

Sally Long

iUniverse (Dec 1, 2016)

Softcover \$19.99 (286pp)

978-1-5320-1146-7

Table Five is an exciting work of suspense and adventure.

Sally Long's *Table Five* is a thrilling crime drama full of unexpected surprises as it moves from a restaurant in New York to the black market in Eastern Europe.

Courageous Lantana's dreams stretch far beyond her small town in Nebraska. After divorcing her unfaithful high school sweetheart, she starts over by moving to Albany to manage a successful restaurant, La Ventana. She begins to settle into her new life and even starts dating someone new. But as the years pass, she becomes restless and strives to open her own place, though she lacks the financial means to start.

Lantana's familiar life dramatically changes, though, when her boss leaves her the restaurant and all of its assets, including diamonds she finds in her boss's desk. Their discovery thrusts Lantana into the dangerous waters of an illegal operation, leading to exciting travels through Europe to discover the diamonds' worth.

An intense prologue is followed by a dramatically different opening, creating intrigue. Every chapter offers unexpected surprises, though perhaps without enough focus on the main conflict. Some extraneous scenes distract from and complicate the mystery and disrupt the novel's pace. The central mystery is solved easily, though, and no unresolved problems clutter the ending.

Characters are consistent, unique, and relatable, especially those who work in the restaurant. La Ventana has the typical food industry crowd, from an inappropriate owner who sleeps with his staff to an overly dramatic chef and a promiscuous bartender. The chemistry between the restaurant's employees is an interesting accompaniment to the dramatic mystery, and federal agents investigating the owner's death, with their suspect motives, add an additional level of intrigue. There is unnecessary and reductive attention given to the sexuality of Eastern European women characters, however.

Lantana is an engaging and complex protagonist. Despite her peculiar conflict, she has identifiable goals, and she is not corrupted by the prospect of her potential fortune. Though her relationship with her boyfriend is strong, she is clear about not wanting to remarry. Her outward self-sufficiency sometimes wavers with him, though.

Dialogue is most fluid between characters of the same nationality; foreign exchanges have a forced feeling. There are welcome moments of comedic prose, especially with Lantana's dog, Kellogg, that offer relief within the fast-paced drama.

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EMILY KUBAL (December 8, 2020)

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