



The Table Turners

Eldridge Rodney

BookSurge

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John and Delta Turner and their three children live in a shotgun house in a low-income neighborhood in New Orleans. By working two jobs and quietly enduring the bigotry he confronts every day, John manages to save enough money to move his family out of their dangerous neighborhood and into a larger, safer home—a place where the couple can raise their children to be respectful, successful citizens. Finally, all of their hard work seems to be paying off.

But before they step foot in their new home, tragedy threatens to pull the family apart. Freddie, John and Delta's youngest son, and other members of the family respond to the disaster by working even harder and finding a deeper faith in themselves and God. Others, including the couple's eldest son, Brandon, turn to drugs, alcohol, or infidelity for solace. The parents are not immune to mistakes either. Even as John works to develop his own company, he falls victim to his skewed definitions of manhood, hurting the very people he is trying so hard to provide with a better life. But through steadfast determination and love, the Turners strive to rescue themselves from lives of unhealthy choices. When their ordeal is over, the family is left with a stronger faith in a higher power.

Eldridge Rodney infuses his family epic, *The Table Turners*, with a fresh, optimistic tone. While his characters flirt with despair and nearly lose hope, readers will appreciate the effort they put into rebounding from depression and addiction. At the same time, Rodney manages to avoid any sense of easy success; John, Delta, their children, and their extended family earn their triumphs with evident sacrifice.

The story covers the years 1975 through 1996. Keeping characters consistent over decades can be a challenge for writers, but Rodney maintains their identities and allows them to develop throughout the novel according to their own individual strengths. He also manages to achieve a delicate balance between the vibrant present and the haunting past by incorporating memories and flashbacks into the narrative.

Tension is a traditional part of any family saga, and Rodney creates emotion-filled text that practically hurts to read. For example, "Freddie let Reesa hold the gun while he got a bowl from the cupboard and the milk from the refrigerator. Reesa awkwardly held the handle of the gun with both hands, the black, slender barrel pointed up toward her face. She placed her left eye to the barrel, squinted, and tried to see down the dark narrow tunnel. Her grip was loose on the handle of the gun, so she held it by the trigger. Her grip was still insecure, so she gripped the trigger and placed her right eye on the barrel."

The book's only shortcoming is its dialogue, which occasionally reads more like a deliberate message than a natural conversation, like in this exchange between cousins Freddie and Joe: "All I'm saying is that I have been called to teach you the Hebrew names. If you decide to use the names or not is on you. But if not, we're still part of the same body of Christ." Despite this one drawback, *The Table Turners* will entertain readers and even make them cheer.

ANDI DIEHN (October 11, 2011)

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