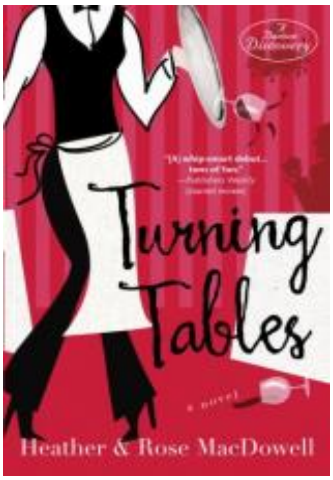
Turning Tables

by Heather MacDowell and Rose MacDowell



About the Book

Downsized from her boutique firm, Erin panics as she watches her career ambitions plunge into free fall. Why else would the savvy twenty-eight-year-old take a job as?a waitress? A favorable word from a family friend gets Erin in the door at Roulette, Madison Avenue?s newest exclusive haunt and home to a celebrity chef with a talent for cutting-edge cuisine and spotting the weakest link.

Life behind the apron is even worse than she imagined?from mangling orders to overimbibing at a wine seminar, Erin finds herself in hot water with the egomaniacal chef *and* the owner?s outrageous wife. And then there?s the dismissive, surly clientele, all but Daniel Fratelli, a flirtatious TV news producer. Is Daniel really as down-to-earth as he seems? Or will he eventually succumb to one of the many glamorous uptown girls in his own social circle?

Determined to prove that she won?t crack under pressure, Erin begins to master the art of waitressing?becoming part shrink, part slave, and part foie gras hustler. But her continuing series of disastrous missteps quickly sends her right back to the bottom of the food chain. Forced to prove her commitment by organizing the storage area and alphabetizing produce after hours, Erin wonders if she?ll ever make it back to the real world. But with a little help from her quirky best friend, she comes up with an idea that might take her life in a whole new direction?and that?s just the first course?.

Discussion Guide

1. How has **Turning Tables** changed your perception of fine dining and celebrity chefs? Describe the most extravagant meal you?ve ever eaten. How did it compare to a night at Roulette?

2. What keeps Erin from quitting sooner? Is it just the money that motivates her to endure the job longer than so many other new hires have in the past? How long would you have lasted as an employee at Roulette?

3. How do the power structures at Roulette compare to those at most workplaces? How is status achieved in the restaurant?s kitchen, versus in the ?front of the house??

4. What is Rocket?s role in Erin?s life? What traits and life experiences do she and her dog share? In what ways do Fritz and Rocket play matchmaker, expressing what Erin and Daniel aren?t able to tell each other?

5. What was Erin hoping to get out of her semi-relationship with Phil? What were the plusses and minuses of sleeping with him? How did your opinion of him shift throughout the novel, especially after he proved to be a cranky restaurant customer?

6. Discuss the power of publicity captured in the scenes featuring Evelyn Harker. What does it take for anything?a restaurant, a clothing line, a vacation spot?to become trendy? When does the tipping point occur? How do critics such as Harker rise to the top of their game and develop the ability to decide the fate of a product, or a person?

7. Did Erin?s upbringing prepare her for Roulette? How did she feel about her family before and after their visit to Roulette? Did her father do the right thing by helping her snag such a lucrative waitressing job?

8. What did Cato teach you about the art of persuasion? How could his approach to waiting tables apply to other aspects of life that call for assertiveness and an in-depth understanding of the ?audience??

9. Discuss the food and wine described throughout the novel. Which selections sounded sublime? Which ingredients seemed outrageous? Does the hyper-competitive world of haute cuisine enhance or overwhelm America?s palate?

10. Were you surprised by the amount of money Erin and the other servers made in a night? Would their strategies for taking control of the ordering process seduce you into running up a bigger tab?

11. How would you characterize Daniel? What makes him a special guy? Why did he tolerate Sonia? What was at the heart of Erin?s anger after Daniel took her to the ill-fated party?

12. How do Erin?s college friend Rachel and restaurant friend Cato complement each other? What is the dynamic in each of those friendships? In what way are they different?

13. What motivates Erin to make such a bold move in the closing scenes? By the end of the novel, how has she changed? Would you have taken the job with Design Refined, stayed with Roulette, or opened your own business?

14. Between them, the authors have almost fifteen years of experience waiting tables. How do you think their background made writing the novel easier than it would have been for those less seasoned? How would it make it harder?

15. Describe the worst boss and the worst job you ever had. Is it true that a boss must be as demanding as Carl in order to earn respect? Is there any job you would not take, no matter how precarious your financial situation became?

Author Bio

Heather and Rose MacDowell are identical twins who have waited tables in some of the best (and worst) restaurants in

Manhattan, Nantucket, and San Francisco. Today they live on opposite coasts and write by email and phone. They dine out frequently and are big tippers.

Critical Praise

?A spirited debut?. The setting sparkles.?

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