



The Turner House

Angela Flournoy

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There ain't no haints in Detroit.

So spoke Francis Turner—patriarch and provider, former preacher and current truck driver—when his children claimed to have seen a ghost. A rising homeowner set to banish all the old ways for the promise of the new, Francis was having none of it. He and his wife worked hard to secure that house, to move up from Arkansas to Detroit, to make this life possible. He would not be haunted by the past.

And so a myth was born, where any one of the Turners might later repeat that phrase and be telling about so much more than haints.

The Turners live on Yarrow Street for over fifty years. Their house sees thirteen children get grown and gone—and some return; it sees the arrival of grandchildren, the fall of Detroit's East Side, and the loss of a father. Despite abandoned lots, an embattled city, and the inevitable shift outward to the suburbs, the house still stands. But now, as their powerful mother falls ill and loses her independence, the Turners might lose their family home. Beset by time and a national crisis, the house is worth just a tenth of its mortgage. The Turner children are called back to decide its fate and to reckon with how each of their pasts might haunt—and shape—their family's future.

A major contribution to the literature on American families, *The Turner House* brings us a colorful brood full of love, pride, and unlikely inheritances. It's a striking examination of the American dream and a celebration of the ways in which our families bring us home.

The Turner House Details

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From Reader Review The Turner House for online ebook

La Tonya Jordan says

Francis and Viola Turner moved from Arkansas to Detroit (The Motor City) during the end of WWII. Their marriage produced thirteen children. Overall, they had a happy life. As adults, the children reflect on their childhood as their childhood home on Yarrow Street, in Detroit, maybe foreclosed by the bank. The story of Cha-Cha's haint (ghost) takes center stage? Was it real? Has it come back? Did the haint ever leave?

Share the laughter, tears, smiles, and wonders as the Turner children reflect. See reflections of your own family in the large clan of the Turners. Each child has his/her own personality with his/her own drama. Enjoy the laughs.

Quote

Next time around she would look for a simple, hardworking man with a good heart, humble aspirations. It was just as Lucille had said: she was eighteen years old and had too much life in front of her to be without love.

Lelah had half a mind to tell her sister that slot machines would never get this money, that if anyone got her money, it would be a proper roulette table. She felt ashamed of herself for the thought.

"I think you have a position within your family that affords you a lot of respect but not much true friendship, or a sense of individuality. This ghost, or the memory of it, has bothered you your whole life, but it's also made you feel extraordinary, chosen."

Sarah says

When the National Book Award nominations for 2015 came out last month, I got on the library wait list for several that interested me. The first one I received was Angela Flournoy's "The Turner House." It is the story of an African American family in Detroit. In many ways, the family's ups and down are tied to that of the city. Along with Francis and Viola and their 13 children, Detroit and Yarrow Street are major characters complete with bad decisions, hard times, hopeful redemption and fierce love and loyalty from her family.

I enjoy generational family novels for the history and hidden secrets that usually impact the often clueless future generations. The young never suspect the old of what is hidden. I like seeing how and if birth order impacts a character.

I am torn about this novel. On one hand it is very well written, but on the other I felt a distance from the characters and the story. The story meanders through time, siblings and generations, but at the end I did not feel satisfied. I would not have nominated it for an award.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

After reading *Detroit: An American Autopsy* by Charlie LeDuff, I've wanted to read more about Detroit "natives." Flournoy takes a family that is deeply ingrained in the city and tells their story alternating between a few weeks in the 1940s and 2008. In 2008, the oldest brother of thirteen children is trying to figure out what to do about his family home. His mother has failing health and she owes more on the home than what it is worth.

I read this book because it was nominated for the National Book Award and while I don't think it is much of a personal favorite as a few of the other finalists, I do appreciate the vibrancy and currency of the setting and the realism of the siblings in the family who have all found different ways of coping (some successfully, some not so much.) The most compelling character to me is Lelah, who tries to hide her gambling problems from her family. The less successful element to me is the haint story line - I think the family stands on its own and didn't even need that element in there. After all, "Humans haunt more houses than ghosts do."

Bark says

This review and the rest of the crap I write can be found at my blog [Bark's Book Nonsense](#)

I was under the impression that this was a book about a haunted house.

At about the halfway mark I finally realized that I was quite mistaken. Yes, it took me that long to figure things out.

This is a book about suburban decay, family dynamics and little life dramas. It's well written but it's not a ghost story, not even close and that's entirely my own fault. I guess I saw the word "haint" somewhere in the description and I saw nothing else. But because I had purchased the audio during a sale I was determined to finish it. Am I glad I did? Not particularly.

Viola and Francis raised 13 children and somehow managed to survive it with their sanity intact. I shudder just thinking about it. Anyway, Viola is now widowed, her health is ailing and her grown children are faced with dealing with the family home that's been mortgaged to the hilt and is now worth next to nothing because the neighborhood has gone to crap, along with the economy.

This book does not focus on all thirteen siblings (thank the lord, I never would have been able to keep track) but instead tells the struggles of the oldest, ChaCha, who feels the weight of the world on his shoulders and has the specter of a haint hanging over him, the youngest, Lelah, who has a gambling addiction and Viola and Francis by flashing back to the past.

It's a well written story but honestly I never felt attached to any of these people. They are real and real flawed, I'll give you that, but I didn't like any of them all that much and thus reading about their struggles (many of their own making) got a bit tiresome in the end. The book also never resolves the main issue of The Turner House and that bugged me.

Basically it is a tale of family dramas but unfortunately none of them were very juicy or devastating, if you ask me.

The narrator was decent but at times several of her characters sounded too similar and I got a little confused as to who was speaking.

Audiobook Challenge: Book #3

HA Mount TBR Challenge: Book #4

HA Pages Read Challenge

2017 Horror Reading Challenge I can't count this. Boo!!!

See this and the rest of the crap I write at my blog.

Rebecca Foster says

In Flournoy's debut, the 13 grown children of Francis and Viola Turner must put aside personal baggage to decide what will become of their parents' Detroit house during the financial crisis. The novel prioritizes the oldest and youngest children: Cha-Cha is haunted (literally) by a teenage experience, while Lelah's gambling addiction lost her a job and an apartment. Through flashbacks to the 1940s, when Francis first left Arkansas, Flournoy shows how important this house has been. To me, though, it felt like there were too many characters; if there were a reduction to, say, six or seven siblings, readers could get to know them all.

(Non-subscribers can read an excerpt of my full review at [BookBrowse](#).)

Related reading: *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* by Ayana Mathis is a very similar, and slightly better book. I was also reminded in places of *A Spool of Blue Thread* by Anne Tyler, which also features multiple generations and class struggles.

stacia says

The Turner House is the story of 13 siblings (most notably, the eldest, Cha-Cha, and the youngest, Lelah). It's a beautifully drawn narrative that transitions through time, alternately telling the 1940s story of parents Francis and Viola and shifting between the perspectives of their middle-aged children. At the core of the narrative are a haunt and a family house in Detroit that needs either to be sold for much less than its worth or paid off by each sibling at a price far higher than its value. But thematically, it feels like a story about how we build homes and with whom. What happens when the homes we've built can no longer house us? What happens to the mind when it cannot find rest in the sanctity of a family abode?

It's also about the state of Detroit just before Obama election (Spring 2008), before Kilpatrick's conviction, before bankruptcy and before the water crisis. It explores what black families were (and are) facing as their beloved city shifts through collapse and slow repair.

It also explores gambling addiction which is something I've never read described with language as engrossing as Flournoy's.

You'll want to read this when it's out in April. It's lovely and powerful without being tragic (which is quite a

feat for a black family novel).

Elyse says

Knowing that this story was inspired by the author's personal history added additional warm feelings from the start. Yet, I had read mixed reviews soon after wanting to read it. I knew it was nominated the national book award in 2015....and was still curious...enough to buy it for a \$1.99 Kindle. So...I finally took time to read it...(much of it during my sauna resting time on my old Kindle)....and I liked it. It's one big family saga...(the type of books I'm a sucker for).

"The Turner House", has been in the Turner family for 50 years....home to parents Frances, Viola, an African American couple, their 13 children, and grandchildren. THIRTEEN children....(my own mother was the 10th child in her family - the baby)... I was afraid I'd never keep track of all the characters...but it's not a problem!!! This large family loves & loathes each other. To gripe and bemoan one another -was the way these characters expressed their love- (no sappy sugar coating pleasing going on). Too many challenges and frustrations going on with individual lives to - follow-the-clan and do as told.

There are two running storylines which weaves the past and present together....

The past: ...is about the lives and difficulties from when Frances and Viola moved from Arkansas to Detroit, Michigan.

The present is the year 2008. All the children are grown. Some are married. Viola is frail, and Frances passed away long ago. The oldest son, Charles (called Cha-Cha), lives with Viola along with his religious wife.

The youngest daughter, Lelah, has a plate of problems: gambling addiction, evicted from her apartment and relationship struggles with her young adult daughter and grandson.

The Turner House is vacant - in complete shambles- but the children need to decide what to do with the the home they grew up in.

Detroit's economy is hurting - the housing market is not a sellers market for anyone..houses are devalued.

And their house is especially in need of work if they are serious of selling it.

This wasn't a perfect novel...but I liked it. There were times when the author did things with her writing that I might be guilty of, (which is why I'm not a writer)....she changed topics so quickly at times ...as if an idea just 'popped' into her head and she just felt like sharing a memory, this second).

I'm guilty of that....I could have shared a 'memory' a few times with this review...as this book reminded me of my cousins messy family drama- at times.

However, I enjoyed it. (more than I was expecting actually). It was easy to visualize the Great Migration and experience modern urban life in Detroit...(the legacies and history, the changes, black and white race issues, and family pride).

Plus...I laughed plenty! charming characters!

Jamise // Spines & Vines says

What a disappointment! This family story had so much potential but the story development never materialized. There were several moments where I felt like the author was rambling and I as the reader was thinking what is she talking about. When I finally came to the end I was left with the feeling of nothingness. Yes it was about family ties, struggles, sibling rivalry & love, however I expected more depth. Reading this book kept me in a continuous fog, no vision & unable find direction.

Rating 2.5 stars

Jaidee says

4.5 "solid, moving and engaging debut" stars.

2016 Honorable Mention

Ms. Flournoy has written a very strong first novel that is full of raw emotion, minute traumas and the struggle to live, love and die on one's own terms.

Ma and Pa Turner are from Arkansas. African-American and poor. Full of hopes and dreams for themselves and their family and they move to vibrant Detroit. As their brood grows to thirteen children the city starts to die and become dangerous and chaotic. Each of the brood have their own struggles and the story focus primarily on the oldest boy (Cha-Cha) and the youngest girl (Lelah).

The story goes back and forth in time skillfully and compassionately. These are characters that all have their own desperation, addictions and hurts but underneath it all want to live despite being poor, despite discrimination, despite petty rivalries.

Each sib is part of a whole but their particular story is individual and despite their closeness there is fear of deep intimacy, dependency and support of each other.

This book is so damn real. Real people living real lives. Trying hard to survive in a world where they are forsaken because they are black, channeling their anger on each other rather than dominant forces that leave them helpless, gasping for air, wanting a piece of pie to live a life full of love, desire and beauty.

I was so very moved reading this novel. I remember having a lover in Ann Arbor in my twenties. When I would visit we would go into Detroit(for concerts or dinner) with utmost caution and fear. I lacked any understanding of the lives of the people that lived there. The suburbanites(mostly white and Asian) viewed the African Americans with either fear, contempt or bleeding heart liberalism but mostly a combination of all three. These same suburbanites allowed Detroit to die. They then blamed the victims of their privilege on this death.

Ms. Flournoy's book is important not only for the family saga but as a microcosm of what happened to a once flourishing American City. She painted a beautiful family portrait not as people that are oppressed or heroic but rather as flesh and blood beings that like all of us want to flourish.

Ms. Flournoy I so look forward to your future novels.

Mocha Girl says

The Turner House is a solid family-oriented debut novel which focuses on Francis and Viola's marriage and their thirteen children. Alternating passages and flashback sequences provide glimpses into the family's origins in rural Arkansas and detail the hardships and challenges as they migrate to Detroit in hopes of a brighter and more promising future for themselves and their brood. The story primarily focuses on the father's (Francis), the eldest son's (Charles), and the youngest daughter's (Lalah) struggles adjusting to their familial roles, their spousal issues, their children, and their own private hauntings amid the societal demands worsened by added pressure stemming from intra-family drama, strained work and interpersonal relationships.

The author does a great job of describing the socio-economic changes of a bustling WWII-era Detroit to its modern-day decline via Francis's viewpoint - it's almost as if the city itself is a separate character. For Francis, and many others, the motor city was a source of wonder, hope, and disappointment. Initially, his limited education combined with institutionalized racism restricted job opportunities and forced segregated housing. Nonetheless, his perseverance and hard work allowed him to purchase a home for his growing family and we see through his eyes how the gradual decline of the city is reflected in the deterioration of the home and neighborhood.

This is a novel about family, love, and overcoming obstacles, facing fears and playing the hand life has dealt. Recommended to those who like family-themed novels and/or those dealing with the Great Migration.

Read In Colour says

I hate to compare books, especially ones that are really well written in their own right, but this reminded me of Ayana Mathis' *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie*. The thing that made it better, in my opinion, is that the characters are tied together. In *The Twelve Tribes*, even though the characters are siblings, their stories are written in such a way that they can stand alone and there's little interaction between the siblings as adults. So while we see them interact as children, once they move into the adult world, there's very little dialogue among them - stand alone stories. While *The Turner House* doesn't delve deeply into the lives of all the Turner children, Flournoy gives us a good sense of how their lives have turned out based on the adult children's whose lives she chooses to explore. I'll have to take time to flesh out more thoughts, but this was a really good read.

karen says

"There ain't no haints in Detroit."

this is just a great old-fashioned family story with wonderful spirit and sympathetic characters; one part american historical, one part contemporary housing crisis, with ghosts, addiction, illness, and the myriad conflicts that affect a family over the course of their lives both together and apart.

the turner family consists of thirteen siblings born in detroit to viola and francis, now grown and mostly scattered, many with children of their own. their newest crisis involves their childhood home, and its staggering \$40,000 mortgage, despite currently being worth only one-tenth of that sum. viola has gone to live with her oldest son cha-cha and his wife, "temporarily," but her age and illness make it likely she will never return to the old house, and a consensus needs to be reached between her children about what is to be done with it, inspiring strong reactions both practical and sentimental.

the focus is primarily on the oldest and youngest of the turner siblings: cha-cha, weary, put-upon, feeling responsible for all his younger brothers and sisters, questioning his marriage, his memories, and his sanity as he begins to see both visions and a therapist; and lelah, divorced, secretly squatting in the old turner house, having been evicted after losing her job to the ripple effects of her gambling problem, determined to work it all out for herself without her daughter or the rest of her family ever finding out. she's unsure of how to take the first step, just as she'd been when she moved back home the first time, after the collapse of her marriage where she'd

tried to figure out why she'd married Vernon in the first place, why she hadn't thought of any other plan for herself. At the twenty-four-hour mark she sat up, a new question in her mind: what would she do now? She was twenty-two years old, and the only answer that came was *work and raise your daughter*. Now, back at this place, Lelah saw it had cost too much to aim for so little.

the remaining eleven siblings make appearances, some more brief than others, and francis and viola are also voices in the mix, tracing the family's roots from francis' migration from arkansas to the black working-class neighborhoods of detroit in the 1940's, leaving viola behind as he struggles to navigate this new world and its temptations and the burden of his responsibilities.

it's a really well-developed story of a family big enough to have their own mythology, and while it does only focus on a few members of the family, there's enough revealed in anecdotes and asides that you get a sense of how the family operates as a whole, plus you have so much wonderful material about the gradual change affecting detroit itself, and i'd much rather have that than more people-parts:

The old Packard plant stood in more or less the same state of decay since the last time he'd driven by it - blasted-out windows, cryptic messages graffitied across the walls, the scars of past fires evident here and there. What depressed him more than the ruined factory were the houses farther up the boulevard that he'd coveted growing up, now blighted and abandoned. Those big houses, with their high porches so far off from the street, could have easily housed a family with thirteen children. Now the wide center islands on some blocks were so overgrown with weeds and grass, a child could hide in them.

there may not *be* any haints in detroit, but detroit itself *is* a haint, whose past haunts its present, and the turner house is the corpse in the middle of it all.

it's a good story - there's nothing showy about it, just good storytelling, a clear voice, and a confidence that the reader will stay engaged. and while it has some hard truths in it, it's not some bleak tragedy, like that other book with many pretty daughters in the detroit suburbs, *The Virgin Suicides*. it's made up of mostly small personal struggles as lelah and cha-cha forge their own solutions to their problems without the safety net of relying on their family - alone in the crowd, sometimes veering into the family curse as a result: *It was a particular sort of Turner weakness: self-sabotaging self-righteousness masked as self-reliance.*

it's a really impressive debut, and i look forward to seeing what flournoy does next.

come to my blog!

Terryn says

I laughed so much...the characters remind me of my own family. In particular, the character Lelah was so real and well-drawn -- I wanted to know what else happens to the Turner family and Lelah even after the book ended. Strong debut!

Ruthie says

SPOILERS!!!!

I was really excited to read this book, it sounded so promising, but ultimately I felt let-down. There were so many elements to this story, and each could/should have made for an intriguing read, but I think the author took on too much.

The Turner family is comprised of 13 siblings growing up in a 3 1/2 bedroom house - now there is the set-up for some great sibling dynamics! Just the day-to-day details would have been fascinating to me...where did they all sleep, eat, how did they manage with one bathroom, how did they not kill each other...but we get almost no details about how it all worked in this house.

The Turner house was originally on the edge of a white Detroit neighborhood, now it is one of a few left as homes are foreclosed upon, torn down, abandoned etc. Well there must be some great tales to be told here - how did the white neighbors react before they fled to the suburbs? How did it feel to live in a community that changes, goes through the riots, and then declines so drastically? We get almost no info in this book!

The father left the South, coming to Detroit for work. He reunites with the wife and child he left behind many months later, after almost no contact - how did that go? How did they settle in together after the time apart? How did they make friends? How did they decide to live in an area that was home to mostly white people? How were they received? We get a bit about the reunion, then not much else.

Thirteen children grow up ,and for the most part, do well. No teenage pregnancies, no real tragedies, pretty impressive for the era and yet we get little idea of how these parents did such a good job keeping their kids away from drugs/gangs/crime/cults/whatever that the 60's/70's/80's etc offered.

Instead we get a big story about the eldest son and his possible "haint" and how it affects him,his wife and their marriage. The "vision" brings to the fore issues in there marriage, and the author handles this well, but that was not what I thought this book was about! The other storyline that dominates is the youngest daughter and her gambling problem. This too is handled well, but once again, not whatI was led to believe the book is about.

In the end, many story lines are introduced, none were resolved. Many characters are introduced, only two are even remotely developed. The big issue, the title character, the house - is also left in limbo. So frustrating!

There was not one character in this book I liked or cared about - maybe because there were too many, maybe because none were fully realized, maybe because the ones that seemed like they may have been the most interesting were given short-shrift by the author...I gave up caring mid-way through the book and just read to find out how all the story lines would shake out - and I never did!

Denise says

The Turner House is basically a long story about a large family that included 13 children. Through a series of flashbacks, the reader learns how Viola and Francis (the parents) decide to move to Detroit from Arkansas. Their house on Yarrow Street is central to the story. Cha Cha, the eldest child and his sister Lelah are prominent in the near present story. Unfortunately I did not become engaged with any of the characters or the story. It was just a good read for me not a great one. 3 stars
