

Awkward by Gary D. Moore
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The conversation did not particularly appeal to Robert. He nodded in polite agreement with Clare's Aunt Ruth.

Robert remained silent...pondering why he agreed to Clare's family gathering. Why ricocheted in his mind like an echo in a canyon. However, Robert also could not understand why an intelligent and beautiful woman like Clare dated him. He pondered that perplexity while Aunt Ruth grumbled and meandered about mundane aspects of politics and society.

"It's horrible!" she complained at the end of her tirade. Perhaps her vent is done, Robert mused.

The garden mirror ball reflected two people discreetly exiting the house. A young woman dabbed lipstick off the man's lips. Robert felt a pang. He finally realized the ruse.

An hour passed before Robert settled unobtrusively into a chair removed from the crowd and superficial conversation. He gazed at the beautiful and ornate garden that Aunt Ruth meticulously manicured and tended. Roses, gardenias, and trestles of morning glories, contrasted with carefully shaped evergreens and scrubs. The floral bouquet assaulted his olfactory nerve while the garden setting emanated a blissful peace and tranquility. The scene calmed his uncomfortable state of being.

"Hiding," a female voice softly said.

"Yes, ma'am!" Robert replied with a sheepish grin.

"I do not blame you," the distinguished gentile woman said as she eased into an adjacent chair.

Robert poured southern style iced tea in her glass, and then filled his. He sipped. Robert did not realize how dry his throat was until he drank the tasty and cool liquid.

Minutes passed before Ruth's sister, Anne, spoke. "Clare is not honest about her relationships," the woman said.

Robert slightly smiled.

"This is not the first time she brought someone...to meet the family," the elderly Anne softly added.

He chuckled.

"You know?" Anne asked in a whisper.

"It does add up," Robert softly replied.

The two outsiders ignored a migration into the house after the wind switched direction and perceptibly cooled the late Summer air.

"They are friends since grade school," Anne offered. "It is only secret to his wife," she added.

"It is a bit disconcerting. However, I have not invested a lot in our relationship... that makes it easier to step aside," Robert honestly, but awkwardly commented.

"Clare does not know...you know...does she?" Anne inquired as she pulled her light jacket tighter.

"No, ma'am!" Robert tersely replied.

Anne slowly nodded, and then sipped the last of her tea. She held out her glass. Robert refilled it.