

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

Robert remained silent...pondering why he agreed to Clare's family gathering ricocheted in his mind like an echo in a canyon. Robert could not understand a rational reason for being there anymore than he understood why an intelligent and beautiful woman like Clare dated him. He pondered the 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.

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

An hour passed before he settled unobtrusively into a chair removed from the crowd and its superficial conversation. Robert 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 wonderfully assaulted his olfactory nerve while the floral garden emanated peace and tranquility. This calmed his uncomfortable awareness.

"Hiding," a voice softly said.

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

"Don't blame you," a 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 liquid.

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

Robert smiled.

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

He chuckled softly.

"You know?" Anne asked in a whisper.

"It adds up," Robert softly replied.

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

"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," Robert replied honestly, but awkwardly.

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

"No, ma'am," Robert replied with a wry smile.

Anne chuckled, and then sipped the last of her tea. She held her glass as Robert refilled it.