

## A Delicate Dance

**Austin Gary**

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*This is an illuminating must-read for those who devour family dramas.*

Austin Gary's novel, *A Delicate Dance*, delves into the tangled two-step of familial love, being overshadowed by a parent, and, ultimately, forgiveness.

For Thad, living beneath the weight of his overbearing, critical father, noted writer Clarkson Gregory, suffocates him. Thad's asphyxiation is made heavier by the fact that his family suspects him of being homosexual, and that the adult son is trying to become a writer in his own right. Being extremely close to a childhood friend of the same gender only helps to fuel the parents' suspicions about their son's sexuality and provokes them to maintain an attitude of thinly veiled homophobia. To complicate matters further, Thad attempts to come to terms with all these issues by writing Gregory's biography.

Using a memoir as a narrative structure, Gary jumps from scene to scene and paints a brilliant portrait of the narrator, his sister, and his parents, and the complex relationships in the family. Gregory's wife, Susan, remains devoted to the literary giant despite his temper, delusions, arrogance, and addictions. To quote one of Gary's deliciously apt literary similes: "As for mom, her patience with dad's idiosyncrasies made Job look like a slacker." Many of the book's sentences contain large parts separated from the main phrase by dashes. Such stylistic choices, as well as titling the chapters with Latin phrases, underscores the erudition and verbal finesse possessed by Thad and Gregory.

The book also deals with the timely issue of caring for one's parents, as Thad's sister, Tina, finds herself caring for the ailing man after Susan passes away while Thad attempts to keep his distance from a dad he considers toxic. Within the biography, Thad tries to defend Gregory against one of his detractors even as he recounts prickly events in his dad's life. The book's genius of Thad coming to terms with multiple people in Gregory's life adroitly underscores the narrative's poignant theme of reconciliation. As Thad grows up and struggles to differentiate himself from his father, he shows the universal need to establish himself on his own merits.

As Thad dances around the issue of whether to repair his relationship with his father, there are many beautifully done scenes with Thad and his childhood friend Ben, at different ages. The closeness of the boys as they grow into young men hints at a burgeoning romance between them.

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JILL ALLEN (December 4, 2015)

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