



The Grace of the Ginkgo

Michael R. Hardesty

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Hardesty takes advantage of his narrative's twenty-four year time frame to create a wide cast of memorable characters that populate David and Liesl's world. These include Dexter, a dangerous fugitive who confronts them in a road rage incident, Emily, a single mom who David meets while tending Liesl in a local park, and Samantha, a banal but lovable teenager who becomes Liesl's embedded babysitter.

There's also Sheila, the wealthy, married, and promiscuous mother of one of Liesl's classmates, and Joel, a teenage schoolmate of Liesl's, who David stumbles upon in a compromising position with his granddaughter. Enter Justine, a recently divorced and transplanted classical musician on whom David has definite designs. Next comes Alan, a grad student Liesl falls in love with while away at college, then Nestor, a brutal family abuser who preys upon his wife and daughter, both clients of Liesl, now a counselor at a woman's shelter.

As David flits between crudity and gentility, the story itself seamlessly conveys the reader between humor and poignancy, hope and despair, performing arts and violence. David's final two dramatic acts beg the questions: were these noble and courageous deeds, or evil and cowardly actions. Is this a man of probity, sometimes failing his own standards, or is he an immoralist, wrapping himself in a mantle of culture?

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