



A Gentleman in Charleston and the Manner of His Death: A Novel

William Baldwin

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Once deemed "the most powerful man in the South," Charleston newspaper editor Frank Dawson met his violent death on March 12, 1889, at the hands of his neighbor, a disreputable doctor who was attempting to seduce the Dawson family governess. Drawn from events surrounding this infamous episode, the third novel from the Lillian Smith Award-winning William Baldwin pulls back the veil of a genteel society in a fabled southern city and exposes a dark visage of anger and secret pain that no amount of imposed manners could restrain, and only love might eventually heal.

With a southern storyteller's passion for intricate emotional and physical details, Baldwin, through the fictional guise of Capt. David Lawton, chronicles editor Dawson's fated end. Having survived three years of bloody Civil War combat and the decade of violent Reconstruction that followed, the liberal-minded Lawton is now an embattled newspaperman whose national importance is on the wane. Still, he remains a celebrated member of Charleston's elite, while in private life moving amid a pantheon of proud and beautiful women—Sarah, his brilliant wife; Abbie, his sensual sister-in-law; Mary, the all-knowing prostitute; and Hélène, the discontented Swiss governess—each contributing to an unfolding drama of history-haunted turmoil.

Though Lawton loathes the South's cult of personal violence, by the customs of his era and place he is duty-bound to protect his household. Unable to act otherwise, Lawton meets his rival in a brutal physical contest, and in the aftermath, Sarah, Abbie, Mary, and Hélène must make peace with their own turbulent pasts.

War, earthquake, political guile, adultery, illegitimacy, lust, and murder—all the devices of gothic romance—play a role in this tale closely based on the lives of Charlestonians who lived these events over a century ago.

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Antonio Ritchie:

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