

## Tiezzi's Board

**Ham Martin**

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*Tiezzi's Board is a sensitive novel about human relationships and the many ways that love can be expressed.*

In Ham Martin's novel *Tiezzi's Board*, a gifted yet frustrated woodcarver discovers a magnificent mahogany board whose dark history almost destroys him.

Joe is a woodcarver by trade and an artist at heart. He dreams of creating a body of work that will reflect his obsessive abilities—of leaving enduring beauty behind. But the need to support his wife and son keeps him busy renovating kitchens instead. He works for demanding, unappreciative clients who treat him like a lowly workman.

When Joe discovers an enormous mahogany board hidden away in an old woodworker's shop, he believes that it will be the catalyst for the fulfillment of his destiny. Its mysterious owner, Giordano, is happy to sell it to him. But then Joe discovers that the board holds dark secrets; they have high costs, and they upend his world.

On its surface, the novel is about the skills, process, patience, time, and risk involved in making a beautiful table. Joe's ancient craft is described with care, reflecting love for woodworking. But at a deeper level, the story is about the struggle inherent in raising a craft to an art form and the self-evaluation that meeting such a challenge involves. Joe's love for the materials and tools of his craft is captured in palpable terms, via the scent of wood, the feel of its smoothness, and the sight of its luminous beauty. These elements, along with his prized collection of vintage tools, are reminders of the craft's long lineage, evoking what Joe thinks of as a simpler, slower age that would have suited him better.

Gripping flashbacks fill in the backstories of the cast, revealing why they chose to do what they did. There are depictions of Joe's perilous financial situation, in the form of bills paid just in the nick of time and his wife leaving the shower wrapped in their only decent towel. But Joe's wife's tender, even sacrificial, love for her husband is clear throughout, particularly when she marshals the strength to give him the time and solitude that he needs to heal from his broken dreams.

The novel traverses decades in a flowing manner, and its Christian underpinnings break through as people measure their thoughts and actions against the teachings of their faith. Here, people are unafraid to question whether God is in charge once events spiral out of control. And though death figures large in this story, it is made less significant than the new ways that people find of looking at life, prioritizing forgiveness and love. The result is a sensitive story about human relationships and the many ways that love can be expressed.

In the moving novel *Tiezzi's Board*, a man's dreams clash with his lived realities and love triumphs over despair.

KRISTINE MORRIS (August 23, 2022)

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