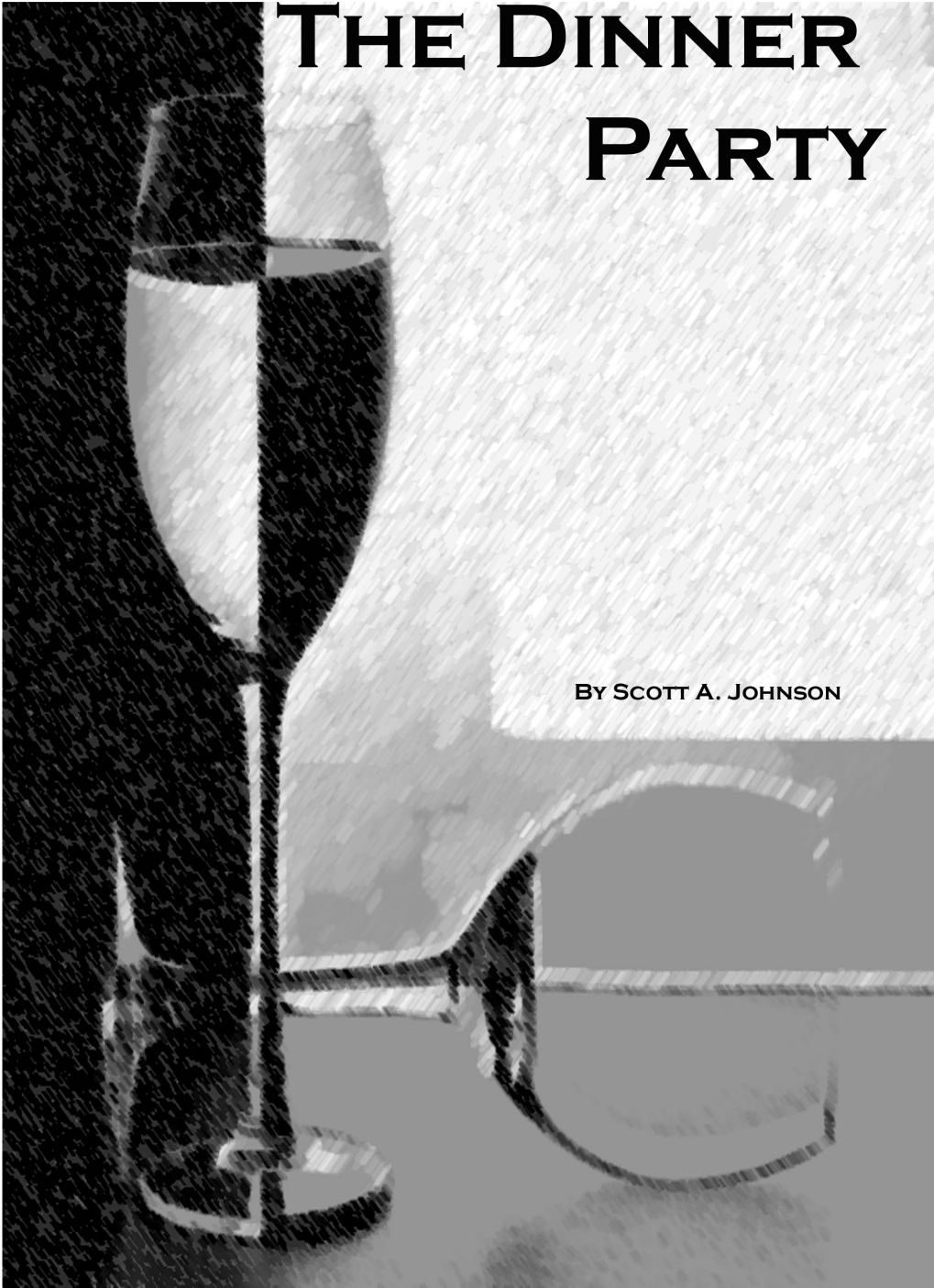


THE DINNER PARTY

BY SCOTT A. JOHNSON



"Don't worry Lacy," said Gwen with a sly grin. "Believe me, after tonight, you won't have to worry about another man breaking your heart."

Lacy gave a weak smile. She doubted anything that Gwen, or her friends, could do would cheer her up. It couldn't. Dennis was her first real boyfriend. Sure, she'd dated through high school and her freshman year of college, but never seriously. A kiss here and there, but no boy was ever allowed to break her underwear rule. Dennis was the only man she thought about growing old with. He made her feel alive, beautiful. She gave him her virginity after dating for over a month, and the next morning, he was gone. She found him later, his arm around another girl's waist, and he acted like he'd never seen her before. Worse, when she tried to talk to him, he laughed at her. Like anyone would believe a stud like him would go out with, let alone bed, someone as dowdy and plain as she. It was the single most crushing blow she had suffered in her life.

Gwen listened to her cry, hugged her tight when Lacy asked why he would leave her. Together, they laughed over imagined revenge schemes, each one more ridiculous than the last. Gwen was her truest friend. But despite everything, she still felt hollow inside. She ached for him in a way she was sure no one could ever understand.

Now, as they walked up the path toward the stately mansion, she couldn't help but wonder whom these friends of Gwen's were. "It's just a dinner," she said, and "you'll never see men the same way again." It was a sisterhood, Gwen explained, a support group. But more than that, it was a way for jilted girls to gain strength from one another, and never be manipulated by sex-crazed apes again.

Gwen rang the doorbell and smiled mischievously to her friend. Lacy had no illusions. If this group consisted of women like Gwen, all of them slender with full hair and perfect skin, all of them brimming with confidence, it would only serve to remind her of her own imperfections. Her hair, though blonde, was straight and wispy around the edges. She was not obese, but could no way pass for thin. It was no wonder that she gave in to Dennis so easily. In truth, he made her feel beautiful and she craved him. And it was no wonder that he left her for the cutesy cheerleader-type. Compared to her, Lacy was hideous.

Lacy raised her eyes when she heard the door open, only to be pleasantly surprised by the girl who answered. She was roughly the same build as Lacy, every bit as average, down to her mouse-brown hair. There was, however, something about her that Lacy envied. It was the confident air that radiated from her, the way she held her head and the ease of her smile.

"You must be Lacy," said the girl as she took Lacy's hand. "I'm Rhonda. Don't worry honey, we take care of our own."

"But I'm not one of your own..."

"Yet," said Gwen with a wink. "You will be soon enough."

The main hallway was lavish in its decor, with heavy velvet drapes lining the walls and candles providing the only light. Rhonda closed the door behind them and took their coats. Another woman, closer in beauty to Gwen than either she or Lacy, emerged through a doorway at the far end.

"Gwen!" she squealed as they hugged and kissed each other on both cheeks. "This is Lacy? Hi. I'm Terry." She hugged her warmly.

"Is everything ready?" asked Rhonda with a raised eyebrow and a sideways grin. Terry nodded.

"Come to the parlor," said Rhonda. "We have a few things to discuss before we get on with the evening."

The parlor was cozy, smaller than she would have expected. Gwen and Terry sat in two brocade chairs while Rhonda took Lacy's hand and sat next to her on a matching loveseat.

"Lacy," she began. "You know why you're here? It's because of a man. A boy hurt you, made you feel less than your worth. He treated you like shit. Right?"

Lacy nodded. It was true, what she said, but it ran so much deeper than that. Inside, she felt empty thanks to Dennis. There was a feeling that she would never be whole again, as if her virginity and dignity were organs he'd pulled out and put on display. She would always be that stupid slut that gave it up for Dennis. He used her. She could have handled it if he'd at least had the decency to call, to break up with her, to string her along for a few days anyway. Something. But he used her. Deposited his seed

and left her before she even awoke the next day. Angry was too slight a word, as was hurt. She wanted to cause him pain. She wanted him to suffer for his callousness.

"Go on," said Gwen. "You can tell her. We've all been through it."

"He..." A dam burst inside her chest, pouring out through her eyes. "He called me a stupid cunt," she sobbed. "I wasn't good enough in bed to keep him. He said I should be grateful I ever got laid."

Rage blazed in the eyes of the other three girls.

Rhonda pulled an ornate box from the shelf behind her and lifted the lid. Inside, nestled on a bed of white satin, was an onyx spider with a blood ruby inlay on its belly. A black widow. She glanced up to find that Terry and Gwen wore identical pins, though how she had not noticed them before she could not guess.

"That son of a bitch..." muttered Terry.

"What we're offering depends on silence," said Rhonda. "You can never tell what happens in this house. The pin you should always wear, but never ostentatiously. What we're offering is freedom from men's control over you."

Lacy listened eagerly. She wanted to be free, to walk with the same confidence that the other three so easily commanded. She wanted to fill the yawning emptiness he'd left in her belly. Moreover, she wanted Dennis to suffer. She wanted to know that the power was hers, not his.

"Please," she said quietly. "I want to belong."

The three smiled as Rhonda removed the spider from its cage and pinned it to her lapel.

"You're one of us now," she said brightly. "You're a sister to us. Let men everywhere be afraid."

"Good," blurted Terry. "Now can we eat? I'm starving!"

Food? Was this how they coped with rejection and loss? She found it hard to believe that any of the three could be emotional binge-eaters. They were too thin and beautiful. Unless they were bulimic as well. Eating and vomiting up food wasn't a habit she wanted to build.

Rhonda giggled and took Lacy by the hand and led the group back through the main hall toward the back of the mansion. They passed through several sets of doors until they stopped outside a room that lay deep within the core of the house.

"Remember," said Gwen. "The power is yours. Not his."

Lacy looked confused. Before she could ask what was meant, Rhonda threw the doors open into a room in which there was only one pool of light. In it, there was a table. Strapped to it, lay the naked and struggling form of Dennis, his mouth covered in duct tape.

Beside the table was a preparation area, consisting of a griddle and condiments, knives and oils, the likes of which Lacy had only seen in the elaborate kitchens of television chefs. She looked down at Dennis. The whole scene was too surreal. Here he was, naked, bound with his arms and legs apart, vulnerable to her will. Only moments ago, he'd held her in some kind of power, diseased and crushing. Now, his whimpering form drew neither longing nor pity. He simply was there, nude and ridiculous on a table, watching as Terry hummed and selected a meat cleaver from the butcher's block.

"First," she said gaily. "We'll start off with appetizers." She advanced on the table, approaching between Dennis' legs and gestured for Lacy to do the same. She brought a length of line from her apron pocket and looped it around the struggling man's scrotum and pulled hard, stretching the skin tight and pulling his balls downward. She handed Lacy the cleaver.

"The first stroke is yours," she purred into Lacy's ear. "How bad did he hurt you? Go on. No one here will tell. He deserves it, doesn't he? Before he does to some other girl what he did to you?"

Lacy looked down on the stretched flesh, his bulging testicles and felt disgusted. It wasn't what Terry wanted her to do, it was that, only days before, she'd allowed him to touch her with those things. She'd kissed them, licked them, and their adjoining parts. She slowly raised the cleaver high above her head, making sure that his eyes followed, then brought it down with one strong stroke. The resulting stream of blood was more than she expected, as was his reaction. She thought he would scream, maybe cry out. Instead, he made a choking sound, as though trying to inhale and exhale at the same instant. His

stomach spasmed, his body to bucked wildly against the restraints, then he collapsed. His body simply shut down, and he fell into deep unconsciousness.

"Bravo!" cried Rhonda, clapping. Gwen also applauded while Terri held up the string with the ruined prize still tightly bound in it. "Now sit," she said, gesturing to a chair and table. "You've rid yourself of his influence. Now it's time for us to celebrate."

Lacy watched as Terri, with great skill, separated the testicles on a cutting board and rolled them in a bowl of a yellow powder.

"Parmesan and bread crumbs," she said with a smile.

When they were covered to Terry's satisfaction, she placed them on the grill and hummed to herself while the smell of cooking flesh filtered through the room. It was not as Lacy imagined it would be, acrid and foul, but sweet, like fine steak. It made her hungry. A moment later, Terry plucked the sizzling morsels up with a pair of tongs and put them on a bed of lettuce.

"Cheese balls?" asked Terry with a grin.

Lacy took one gingerly from the serving dish. It was smaller than it had seemed when he was forcing them into her mouth. The heat from the grill shriveled them a bit until they were just bite-sized. She glanced around to see the other three, eagerly awaiting her reaction. She took a deep breath, as she always did when trying new things, and popped it into her mouth.

As the nugget burst between her teeth, the juices from within mingled with the parmesan in a singularly wonderful taste. It was unlike anything she'd had before, but it made her ravenous for more.

"Well?" said Rhonda, who was busying herself with stemming the bloodflow from Dennis' groin with clamps. "What do you think?"

"My God!" said Lacy, the juices from the tasty morsels dripping from her lips. "It's fantastic!"

Terry beamed. "It's an old family recipe," she said as she deftly severed and diced his penis. After a few deft strokes with her knife, she heaped the pieces onto the grill.

"Wait'll you taste the rest. This just has to cook for a few minutes."

"Now," said Gwen. "What part of him were you most attracted to?"

"What do you mean?"

"When you first saw him, what made you want him?"

Lacy blushed, unsure if she could even admit to such a thing. It seemed so juvenile, but what did she have to hide from these, her newfound sisters?

"His ass," she giggled. "It just looked so perky and round..."

"The ass!" cried the others in unison, letting her know that they'd been through the same thing themselves.

"I was hoping you'd say that!" squealed Terry. "I have a great recipe for that! Gwen, wake him up. He has to feel this!"

Gwen nodded and went to Dennis' head, producing a large syringe from beneath the table. "Adrenaline," she said, reading Lacy's eyes. "It'll wake him up and keep him awake so he feels everything for a while."

She jammed the needle into his jugular and pressed the plunger. Dennis drew sharp breath as his eyes snapped open and he struggled to sit up.

"Shhhh," said Gwen in his ear. "We didn't want you to miss this."

His head lolled from side to side as he fought to free himself. His struggling only paused momentarily as his eyes widened with recognition when Tracy and Rhonda pulled a long serrated blade from beneath the cook station and slid it under his legs. His face contorted into a mask of agony as one pushed and the other pulled, sawing through the tender meat of his backside. Ragged noises came from his throat as he tried to cry out. When at last his buttocks were separated from his body, he went limp again.

"He's no fun," said Gwen as she slapped his face irritably. "He passes right out."

"It doesn't matter," said Terry. "We're almost past reviving him. One more time should do it." She turned to Lacy. "See, I need to cook some of the intestines along with the rump roast. It really brings the flavor out."

Lacy was enthralled by the display of such skill. Clearly they'd done this before, and many times, but as certain as she was that only days ago she'd be appalled, now she found the whole display fascinating. It was empowering, intoxicating even, the way they reduced this bastard to the animal he was. He treated her like a cow, now it was his turn.

His body jerked again as Gwen hit him with a second adrenaline dose. He gagged and rasped. He struggled so hard one of his own shoulders dislocated while trying to pull himself free from his bonds.

"Last round," said Gwen sweetly. "Say goodnight. Burn in hell."

His body tightened as the massive hook entered his body just above his pelvic bone. Terry pulled hard against it. She strained as it cut through the flesh up to the base of his sternum. When it punctured his diaphragm, Lacy smiled as he struggled to breathe. His face changed to a bluish tint and his eyes bulged even as Terry and Rhonda pulled at his intestines, cutting them free with poultry scissors, and placed the sticky mess into a foil roasting pan around the now skinned pieces of his own butt.

"You deserve this," said Lacy into his ear. "You know that."

When he finally stopped struggling, his eyes stayed open and glassy, staring at Lacy in a way that made her feel warm and powerful.

"Roast will be ready in about an hour," said Tracy between seasonings. "Why don't you start on the dip? Anyone want this last cheese ball?"

"Ummm, I do," said Lacy shyly. "Unless someone else does. "I don't want to be greedy..."

"Nonsense," said Rhonda. "You earned it!"

Lacy took the other cheese ball and savored it in her mouth, letting the juices run down her throat as before, but being careful not to let any dribble down her chin. It was just too good to waste.

"Mmmm," she purred as Gwen brought over a tray with crackers and a bowl containing the minced penis. "That has to be the best thing I've ever tasted."

"Wait'll you try the cock-dip," said Gwen with a smile. "It's kind of like pâté, but better. Less salty. The slow roasting really brings out the flavor."

"And while we wait," boomed Rhonda, bringing over goblets which she'd been filling from the crimson river that flowed from Dennis' mangled body. "A toast!"

"A toast!" they cheered.

"To our new sister!"

"To never being powerless again!" called Lacy.

"To the sisterhood of the Black Widow!" giggled Gwen.

They raised their glasses and drank deeply, as Lacy realized that now, finally, she was in control. The fresh coppery taste on her tongue flooded her with warmth, the kind she wanted, and finally got, from her man.

