



DINNER
By Paul Smith

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CHARACTERS

Hilda McKenzie – 80

Ernest McKenzie – 82

Jonnie - 24

The dining room of Ernest and Hilda McKenzie's English country cottage.

A table is laid for dinner.

On one of the dining chairs is JONNIE. He is slouching to one side. His hands are tied to the arms and his legs to the chair legs.

HILDA is seated in a nearby armchair reading a magazine. The radio is playing some light classical music.

The scene – apart from the slouched body – is all very quaint and English.

JONNIE suddenly jerks into life. He slowly regains consciousness.

JONNIE *(almost delirious)* What the...

HILDA *(rising and going to JONNIE)* Oh, goodness.

(calling out) Ernest, he's coming round.

JONNIE What?

HILDA It's ok. You're fine.

JONNIE Who are you?

HILDA I'm Hilda. It's ok. You've had a nasty accident. Are you in any pain?

JONNIE My head.

HILDA Yes, you bumped yourself badly. But you're ok.

ERNEST enters. He is wearing an apron and wiping his hands with a tea towel.

ERNEST Are you ok young man?

JONNIE My head.

ERNEST Yes, you had a nasty accident. It's ok. It's not bleeding anymore.

JONNIE *(realising his limbs are tied down)* What the fuck is all this?

HILDA It's all ok. You were injured. We couldn't get you on to the sofa and we were worried you were going to hurt yourself.

ERNEST So we thought we needed to secure you. It's ok, you're quite safe.

HILDA Here, have some water.

HILDA offers him some water in a glass. She holds it to his lips and he drinks.

HILDA There, I'm sure that feels better.

JONNIE Yes.

ERNEST And, I'm just getting some dinner. Hope you're hungry.

JONNIE What?

HILDA Roast dinner. Our favourite. We love it.

JONNIE Get these things untied.

ERNEST Oh, we can't do that. Not at the moment anyway. ***(he exits)***

HILDA They are all quite secure. Ernest was in the Navy. Not a lot he doesn't know about knots, I can tell you.

JONNIE Untie me you stupid woman.

HILDA Ah, ah, ah. No need for that is there? But for us you might have been in a far worse state than you are now, so be thankful.

JONNIE I can't move.

HILDA We know. It's for your own good remember. It's ok. We will feed you some dinner when it's ready. Can you smell those roast potatoes. Honestly, I don't think I have ever eaten better ones than those that Ernest can produce. Not sure what his secret is. Whenever I do them they just don't have the same crisp. And his gravy! That's all in the vegetable juice I believe! More water?

JONNIE No.

ERNEST enters with some pots on a tray.

ERNEST Won't be long now. Not sure what condiments to set for today. So I brought in a selection.

JONNIE I'm not hungry.

HILDA Often the case after an accident, but you need to build your strength up.

ERNEST How about a glass of something. Come on Hilda let's offer the lad a beer.

HILDA Oh, why not. Would you like a beer lad? It will help with the pain.

JONNIE Sure.

ERNEST ***(As he speaks, he goes out to the kitchen and returns with two bottles of beer and two glasses)*** I hope you like your beer at room temperature. That's how it should be. Some youngsters want it almost freezing! I'll pour it for you. Here you go son.

ERNEST opens the bottles and pours the beer into the glasses. He lifts the glass to JONNIE's lips. He drinks.

ERNEST There, I bet that feels better.

JONNIE Yes.

ERNEST What do you fancy Hilda?

HILDA I think I might be a bit daring and have a glass of that Blue Nun you have in the cupboard.

ERNEST Goodness, that's been there a while. I'll pour you a glass. ***(he exits)***

HILDA Lovely.

JONNIE Let me go.

HILDA Oh we couldn't possibly do that. Errrr....what's your name?

JONNIE Jonnie.

HILDA Yes, we thought it was. ***(calling out)*** It is Jonnie, Ernest. We were right.

ERNEST ***(off)*** Thought so.

HILDA That was what we thought you said when you asked last night. We couldn't make it out properly. You were a little delirious. But through the mumbling, we thought Jonnie or Jimmy or....something else, I can't remember what. Still, Jonnie. That's fine. Jonnie.

ERNEST enters with glass of wine.

ERNEST There you go Hilda.

HILDA Thank you dear.

ERNEST Cheers.

JONNIE Will you tell me what's going on?

ERNEST Well, we had a bit of a shock when we heard you last night.

HILDA I thought one of the bookshelves had collapsed. It happened some years ago and gave me a right old fright.

ERNEST But it wasn't was it? It was you breaking in and tripping over the windowsill.

HILDA Cracked your head on the sideboard you did. Lost a lot of blood.

ERNEST Out cold you were.

HILDA Well, we weren't best pleased as I'm sure you can imagine. Broken vase and blood soaking into my pile.

ERNEST Anyway, we thought we won't call the police. We'll sort the situation ourselves.

HILDA Well, it's not the first time.

ERNEST So, anyway, we managed to get you up and tend to your wounds.

HILDA But we didn't want you waking up if we were asleep, so we gave you a little something to keep you rested.

JONNIE You drugged me?

HILDA Well, we didn't know how dangerous you were. It was that or calling for the police. Anyway, that's why you were out of it for so long.

ERNEST You would rather we didn't call the police, yes?

JONNIE Yes.

HILDA Well there we are then. No harm done.

ERNEST We didn't want to get anyone else involved if we didn't need to. It can get so messy can't it?

JONNIE Yes.

HILDA So, we did you a favour really.

ERNEST And the ropes and knots were to make sure that when you woke up you weren't violent with us. I mean we don't know you from Adam.

HILDA So, why did you burgle us in the first place.

JONNIE Need money.

ERNEST For drugs?

JONNIE Don't do drugs. Just money to live on.

HILDA Where do you live Jonnie?

JONNIE Homeless.

HILDA We guessed as much didn't we Ernest.

ERNEST Yes, thought that you had seen better days. Felt a bit sorry for you.

HILDA What on earth made you come out to this out of the way place.

JONNIE Better chance of not being seen. Didn't think anyone was here. Thought it might be empty. Was gonna kip for the night.

ERNEST Well you did that ok.

HILDA Here have some more beer.

JONNIE Thanks.

HILDA lifts the glass to his lips again and he drinks.

JONNIE You're..... very kind.

ERNEST Think nothing of it.

JONNIE So, now, you know I'm not dangerous. Can you let me go?

HILDA Oh, I don't think so. Not just yet. We need to be sure.

ERNEST Let's have some dinner first. I'll go and get the vegetables. *(he exits)*

HILDA You will have to forgive us for being careful. We're not young, as you can tell. We just want to be certain you won't do anything nasty to us.

JONNIE Sure.

HILDA But I am getting the feeling that we have nothing to worry about.

JONNIE You don't. Untie me, let me go and I won't ever come back.

HILDA I think you're right. Don't you have any family?

JONNIE Nah. Parents dead. No family. Well.... not that I know of.

HILDA Oh, that's sad. I am sure your parents would have wanted to help and support you if they were still here.

JONNIE Maybe.

HILDA We didn't have children. Mutual decision. Just enjoyed our own company too much, I think. So, we never tried.

ERNEST enters with covered dishes and serving spoons, carving knife and sharpening steel.

ERNEST Here we go.

HILDA Mmm lovely. I was just saying to Jonnie that we tied him to the chair as we weren't sure of his motives. But it seems he isn't intent on harming us which is a relief.

ERNEST Oh it is.

HILDA No family either.

ERNEST Oh that's a shame.

HILDA Well, here's dinner.

ERNEST uncovers all the dishes and starts to dish up on the plates.

ERNEST Do you like all the vegetables?

JONNIE Yeah ok.

HILDA Oh, we love them all too.

ERNEST I'll give you a selection. Potatoes, broccoli, red cabbage, carrots, peas.

HILDA Oh, yummy.

ERNEST There you go, ok?

HILDA That look good to you?

JONNIE Yeah. *(he looks about the table)* What about the meat?

ERNEST starts sharpening the carving knife.

HILDA Oh yes, the meat.

ERNEST Mmmmm yes, the meat.

ERNEST continues to sharpen the knife. Puts down the steel, picks up the carving fork and heads for JONNIE.

BLACKOUT

SCREAM