

# Dinner Party

by  
Bob Ingraham

An electric-chair Comedy

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PO Box 2373, Avila Beach, CA 93424

email: [ingetal@aol.com](mailto:ingetal@aol.com)

"THE DINNER PARTY"

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A room, empty except for an electric chair against the back wall, and a large dining table off to one side. The table is set with white tablecloth, crystal, etc. When the curtain rises there is only one man on stage, an Electrician dressed in a coverall with tools around his waist. He is kneeling, installing an electric switch, much like a light switch in a home, on the end of an arm of the electric chair. He is just finishing.

A Guard enters with a Condemned Man.

ELECTRICIAN

All finished with the switch.

GUARD

Works?

ELECTRICIAN

Perfect. Good idea. Now nobody has to do the dirty work, huh?

GUARD

That's the idea.

The Electrician leaves. The Guard straps the Condemned Man into the electric chair. There are clamps on his wrists, but his hands move enough so that he can flick the newly added switch. There is a clamp around his neck and a metal cap fitted on his head.

GUARD (CONT'D)

See this switch? You flick it like this and it does you in. We've got to go get the Judge his anniversary present, so we'd appreciate it if you'd take care this while we're gone. We want to see how this thing works.

The guards exit. The Condemned Man turns his head with difficulty to see the dining table. A Young Woman enters, takes a seat at the table, not noticing the man or electric chair.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh, what a pretty setting.  
(running her hand along tablecloth)  
This is so beautiful, so romantic.

She sees the Condemned Man and goes over to him.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Oh, hi. Were you invited to our dinner party? It's for Judge Crampton and his wife, Mimi. It's their fiftieth anniversary. They're such a lovely couple. He's a wonderful man. So . . . so . . . just. A just man. Do you know him?

CONDEMNED MAN

Balding?

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes. Yes. And a good golf swing. (dreamily) He's so honorable. . . the way he talks and makes. . . judgements . . . (looking at electric chair) Are you sure you were invited? Wait. You're in some sort of trouble, aren't you? Did you do something wrong? Of course you did something wrong or you wouldn't be here. Did you kill someone? In a robbery? A bank robbery with masks and a getaway car and blonde by your side . . . and one of those old cars with the . . . no? (peering)

CONDEMNED MAN

I didn't kill anyone. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

YOUNG WOMAN

Surely they don't do this to people who are just in the wrong place at . . . were you double parked?

CONDEMNED MAN

Walking. I had just taken a walk in the country.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's not so bad. I've done that.  
(She covers her mouth) Maybe I  
shouldn't say that. (looking  
around) Is that against the law  
now?

CONDEMNED MAN

There were these young kids there.  
Dead. Murdered . . .

YOUNG WOMAN

(shocked)

You're . . . you're Howard Moon,  
the couple killer? The one who  
hated love? That crazy man who  
killed all those young lovers?  
That maniac who went around looking  
for people in each other's arms  
and. . .

oh. . .

(backing away)

CONDEMNED MAN

(resigned)

I didn't kill them. I'm not the  
couple killer. They have the wrong  
man.

YOUNG WOMAN

(moving back toward him)

Really? Like Richard Kimble? You  
mean you're one of those poor men  
who are mistaken for a killer and  
you take the rap and you spend your  
whole life looking for the one-  
armed man? Oh, you poor man.  
Somebody should help you. Where  
are people's priorities, anyway?  
I'm sorry I can't help right now, I  
have a dinner party to attend...

(The Judge enters and the

Young Woman returns to  
the table)

Your honor! It's so good to see  
you. Mrs. Crampton, you look  
wonderful. Are those new earrings?

JUDGE

She always looks nice, my Mimi.  
 (to Mimi) Oh, Mimi, you're soooo  
 cute. (kisses her)

YOUNG WOMAN

Your honor, this man here in the  
 chair, he says he's innocent. He  
 says it was all a terrible mistake.  
 He says he's just a victim of  
 circumstances. The world has  
 wronged him, turned its back on  
 him. His wife, his kids, his mama.  
 . . (sobbing) they're all praying  
 for him . . . they know he's  
 innocent . . . they know he's a  
 good man. . . (notices Mimi's  
 dress) Mimi, didn't I see that  
 dress at Chez Caprice?

JUDGE

Young lady, this man is guilty.  
 Beyond any doubt. I should know.  
 I presided over his trial.

CONDEMNED MAN

(to Young Woman)  
 I have no wife or kids.

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Judge)  
 Did you hear that? He has no wife.  
 No kids. Sure he's guilty. He's  
 guilty of being alone!  
 (runs to him)  
 Ohhh, you poor, poor man. . .  
 (crying at his feet)

CONDEMNED MAN

(disgusted)  
 Stick a sock in it.

Young Woman stands up quickly, shocked.

YOUNG WOMAN

Killer! Murderer! Couple killer!

Judge and Mimi take seats at the table. The Young Woman  
 joins the others at the table. A dashing Young Man enters.

YOUNG MAN

Your honor, ma'am, miss. . . (to Young Woman) May I take the seat next to your loveliness? Hmmm? Say yes. Please do say yes and I'll be ever so delighted.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes, you certainly may!  
(Giggles)

YOUNG MAN

(to Young Woman)

I think I feel my heart fluttering. You're so witty. You must have gone to school. The University. Your father was an engineer, your mother a nurse. But no, not you, you wanted to study the arts. You wished to be creative. Such a twinkle in your eyes. You got that from your sweet little mother, didn't you? Twinkle again for me, will you?

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Judge)

He's just darling, isn't he?

JUDGE

(to his wife)

I do believe they're hitting it off, don't you, Mimi?  
(Mimi giggles)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

We're hitting it off, too, Mimi and I. We've been hitting it off for fifty years, haven't we Mimi?

(He winks at her)

Young Woman and Young Man applaud

MIMI

(To all)

He's sweet, isn't he?

JUDGE

Is everyone hungry? The food should be here soon.

Hershel and Dora enter.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Hershel, you son of a gun, I was beginning to think you wouldn't make it. Dora, you're as lovely as ever. Such a wonderful pair the two of you make.

Hershel and Dora take seats at the table

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Hershel. How're things at the University? (to all) Did you know that Hershel was just appointed chairman of the Philosophy department? Why, I remember when he was just fresh out of college, without a care in the world, and now. . . a respected philosopher!

HERSHEL

(to Young Man and Young Woman)

You two make a nice pair, so fresh, so young, so. . . alive! I'll bet fifty years from now we'll be celebrating your anniversary. Yep, things are a changin'. I'll be old. Dora here will be as fat as Mimi. You'll both be wrinkled. Maybe Dora here will be dead by then. And of course Mimi and his Honor will be long gone....

JUDGE

Call me Jimmy.

HERSHEL

As old Parmenides used to say . . . things are always changing . . . or when Socrates would ask . . .

DORA

Now, Hershel, these people don't want to hear about Socrates and all those philosophers. (to all) I tell you, he's always thinking, this one. Always.

(MORE)

DORA(cont'd)

We'll be in bed at night and I'll want to hold him, I mean, well, we can all be frank here, we all know what I'm talking about, I'd be in bed and he and I will be, you know, no clothes on, and I'll say, let's turn the lights off and play tickle, but my Hershel, he says to me, temperance, dear, temperance, or he would quote some German man or something. . . You see what I mean, though, don't you, he's always thinking.

HERSHEL

Now, Dora, you know that's not so. Oh, yes, I suppose I do think a bit, perhaps more than most, but a philosopher has to think. I mean, that's his job. The mind is a muscle, and it has to be worked all the time.

DORA

See? See what. I mean. (She hugs Hershel) You think soooo hard . . . I love you so much.

MIMI

(kissing the Judge)  
And I love you, your honorable mister poopie woopie.

YOUNG MAN

(to Young Woman)  
And perhaps, if you keep twinkling that way, maybe, just maybe I'll love you, too.

YOUNG WOMAN

Ooooh, he's so dreamy!

The Servant enters with a tray of food and bottles of wine and begins serving.)

JUDGE

Ah, the food. Hungry, Mimi?  
(to others)  
My Mimi, she eats like a horse!

Mimi giggles. Hershel notices Condemned Man and stares for a moment, then holds up his hand.

HERSHEL

Wait! There's something I have seen here.

He gets up and crosses toward the Condemned man.

HERSHEL (CONT'D)

There is a condemned man in here. Perhaps none of you have noticed. (They all look at each other) One often misses a condemned man. It looks as though he is going to die. Be dead. Stop thinking. No more ego cogito ergo no more sum. I think we should show this man some sort of last honor. I mean, even a bad man is still, by definition, a man. He is simply a certain kind of man, a certain class of man. But nonetheless a man. Perhaps a toast would be in order. Yes, a toast to a condemned man.

YOUNG MAN

Before he's really toasted, ha ha ha ha.

They all laugh.

JUDGE

The food looks delicious. Why don't we take care of that after dinner. Right now I propose a toast to my wife. It has been fifty years.

YOUNG MAN

Here, here! (raising his glass)

They all raise their glasses except for Hershel.

HERSHEL

Wait. This man is going to die. At least we can invite him to our dinner. A condemned man deserves a dinner.

MIMI

That would make it his last supper. Hee hee hee.

JUDGE

We can't do that. He's a killer.

HERSHEL

Of course we can. We're free human beings with free wills. Everybody stand up.

They all look puzzled.

HERSHEL (CONT'D)

Come on. Stand up.

They all stand up.

HERSHEL (CONT'D)

Now, let's move the table over. This man deserves to be at a table.

YOUNG MAN

Why?

HERSHEL

You're young. You don't understand. You don't know what a man is. His essence. A man's essence deserves to be at a table.

JUDGE

He can't eat. He's clamped down.

HERSHEL

My God, man, all men are clamped down! Come on.

The Young Man and Hershel move the table over in front of the electric chair so that the Condemned Man ends up seated between the Judge and Dora as they all take their seats again.

DORA

(To Condemned Man)

My Hershel knows what you're going through. He really does.

JUDGE

Shall we toast?

HERSHEL

Wait. Perhaps this man would like to say something before he passes on.

YOUNG MAN

What could he possibly have to say?

YOUNG WOMAN

That's a good question. You're good at asking questions.

JUDGE

Heh, heh, I'll bet he's good at a lot more than that, sweetie.

MIMI

(nudging the Judge,  
raising her eyebrows)  
Jimmy!

HERSHEL

Questions are questions. Answers are answers.

DORA

(lovingly)  
Oh, Hershel . . .  
(to all)  
Did you hear that? Right off the top of his head. Every day it's like that.

HERSHEL

Please, everyone, for the sake of justice, let us hear what this man has to say. Quiet, please.

CONDEMNED MAN

(stirring for the first  
time)  
I have nothing to say.

YOUNG WOMAN

If you don't have something nice to say don't say anything at all.

DORA

Hear that, Hershel? She's already learning philosophy from you.

HERSHEL

Now, Dora. . .

JUDGE

Okay, okay. Speak your heart, young man. Killer. Murderer. Speak your peace.

(MORE)

JUDGE(cont'd)

(to all) You all realize this man  
has murdered twenty-four young  
lovers in their cars on hillsides  
as they were . . .

The Judge becomes excited as he speaks, then all of them  
become excited, interrupting each other.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Well, the lovers were. . . you  
know. . . all naked and. . .

MIMI

. . . and the girls . . . and the  
boys all sweaty and . . .

JUDGE

. . . like you say . . . all sweaty  
. . . and. . .

YOUNG WOMAN

. . . those men with no pants on  
and. . .

YOUNG MAN

. . . the women. . . they undo  
their bras and. . .

DORA

. . . they kiss . . . she licks his  
chest, his arms . . .

MIMI

. . . she whispers naughty-  
naughties. . .

DORA

. . . kissing and licking and. . .  
.

JUDGE

. . . panting and breathing and  
biting . . .

YOUNG WOMAN

(startled)  
Biting?

HERSHEL

(standing up, yells)  
Stop! Stop! This man is going to  
die.

JUDGE

Yes! In fact. . .  
 (calling off-screen)  
 Guards! Finish with this man! Then  
 let's start with appetizers.

But instead of guards coming in, a Courier enters, and reads from his notice.

COURIER

Excuse me. I have a message from  
 the governor.

JUDGE

What message?

COURIER

A man condemned to die was  
 pardoned.

JUDGE

Who?

The Condemned Man looks up.

COURIER

(point at Condemned Man)  
 That man! The real couple killer  
 has confessed to killing twenty-  
 four lovers.

DORA

You see? You see?  
 (to Condemned Man)  
 Your prayers. They worked.

Courier exits.

JUDGE

Everyone. Our man here is  
 innocent.

YOUNG WOMAN

You poor man. You poor, poor man.  
 His poor wife and kids.

YOUNG MAN

You're a good man. I could tell  
 you were innocent the minute I saw  
 you. When I first walked in I said  
 to myself, that man is innocent.  
 He's a good man, a damned good man.

(MORE)

YOUNG MAN(cont'd)  
He's the stuff that keeps this  
world turning.

DORA  
A fine man.

HERSHEL  
A good man.

YOUNG WOMAN  
A great man.

MIMI  
A big man! (giggles)

HERSHEL  
Once again, justice has been  
served!

Dora and Young Woman help the condemned man to get free from  
the electric chair.

The condemned man stands before his electric chair.

CONDEMNED MAN  
(looking around the table)  
Yes. Everyone. Join hands...  
tightly...

They all happily grab hands.

DORA  
Are we going to toast?

BLACKOUT