

The Luncheon Party: Amy Hutton

I placed a large bowl of brightly coloured salad onto the table, along with a jug of home-made dressing, and a basket of freshly baked rolls, stood back and eyed every detail. The knives and forks were evenly spaced alongside elegant green plates, and golden napkins spiralled in crystal glasses. Everything was perfect. Exactly as I wanted it.

When the man arrived, he looked around with his usual smug expression. He was sweating, of course, and mopped his brow with a stained handkerchief—his thin hair plastered about his puffy face. I showed him to the chair opposite mine and he thanked me for the kind invitation, talking as he ripped into a bread roll and shoved a piece into his mouth. Damp circles ringed his armpits, and a button was missing from his shirt, his gut oozing through the gap in the thin material as he sat. I smiled, making sure he felt welcome, covering a shudder as I recalled the stench of his foul breath against my cheek.

The remaining guests took their seats, and we all spoke of the warm weather and the cool change bound to come, as we laden our dishes with cold meats and fresh vegetables and toasted the idyllic afternoon.

At first it seemed as if he was clearing his throat—a small noise no-one noticed but me. I calmly sipped my wine. He reached for his glass as he spluttered—the water spilling over his lips and splashing down his cheap shirt. When he began to claw at his throat, people suddenly leaped up, loosening his tie and slapping his back, while his bilious face changed colour. First pink, then red, then purple. I waited for blue.

He was on the floor now, his eyes bulging and his doughy face finally the shade I'd been yearning for. Overripe blueberry. Someone was shouting, asking if the man had any allergies. I feigned shock and shook my head. 'I don't know', I said while thinking, *Peanuts. He's allergic to peanuts.*

The ambulance was coming now. I could hear its siren's song. But they would be too late. As I silently enjoyed the chaos swirling around me, I poured a little dressing onto my salad and pushed a forkful into my mouth, marvelling at how just a touch of peanut oil can make all the difference in the world.