



THE DINING ROOM by A.R. Gurney

STANDISH: I've got to go. I can't even finish my cocktail. Something very bad has happened. Henry was insulted down at the club. Binky Byers made a remark to him in the steam bath.

Binky made a remark, and apparently a number of the newer members laughed. Poor Henry was so upset he had to put on his clothes and leave. He called me from Mother's. I telephoned the club. I spoke to several people who had been in the steam bath. They confirmed the incident. I asked to speak to Binky Byers. He refused to come to the phone. And so I've got to do something about it.

He said— *(Checks himself)* Claire, I want you to leave the room. *(Hesitatingly; looking from one to the other)* Mr. Byers... made an unfortunate remark... having to do with your Uncle Henry's... private life. *(Taking a deep breath)* Mr. Byers, who had obviously been drinking since the early afternoon, approached Uncle Henry in the steam bath, and alluded in very specific terms to his personal relationships. His—associations. In the outside world.

I'll demand a public apology from Binky in front of the entire grille. I imagine I'll be seriously hurt. But I can't stand idly by. *(Shouting them down)* Now listen to me! All of you! *(Bertha has been heading back to the kitchen)* And you too Bertha! *(He points toward a chair on the side. Bertha crosses, as everyone watches her. She sits on the edge of the chair. Everyone turns back to Standish)* There is nothing, nothing I'd rather do in this world than sit down at this table with all of you and have some of Bertha's very fine celery soup, followed by a leg of lamb with mint sauce and roast potatoes. Am I right about the sauce and potatoes, Bertha?

There is nothing I'd rather have than that. But I have to forgo it. My own brother has been publicly insulted at his club. And that means our family has been insulted, that means this table, these chairs, this room, and all of us, including you. Bertha, are being treated with scorn. And so if I stayed here, if I sat down with all of you now, I wouldn't be able to converse, I wouldn't be able to laugh, I wouldn't be able to correct your grammar, David, I wouldn't be able to eat your fine meal, Bertha. *(Turning to Emily)* I wouldn't even be able to kiss my handsome with goodbye. *(He kisses her. It's a passionate kiss)* Goodbye, dear. Goodbye, Winkins. Goodbye, David. Goodbye, Bertha.