

The Dinner

by Herman Koch

On a summer's evening in Amsterdam two couples meet at a fashionable restaurant. Between mouthfuls of food and over the delicate scraping of cutlery, the conversation remains a gentle hum of politeness - the banality of work, the triviality of holidays. But the empty words hide a terrible conflict and, with every forced smile and every new course, the knives are being sharpened. Each couple has a fifteen-year-old son.

Together, the boys have committed a horrifying act, caught on camera, and their grainy images have been beamed into living rooms across the nation; despite a police manhunt, the boys remain unidentified - by everyone except their parents. As the dinner reaches its culinary climax, the conversation finally touches on their children and, as civility and friendship disintegrate, each couple shows just how far they are prepared to go to protect those they love.