

In at the Deep End

by [Janet Charlesworth](#) (August 2024)



Dinner Party (Julie Held)

Of course it was his own fault. Ted knew, as soon as he opened his mouth, that he was going to be in big trouble. He also knew that he couldn't keep silent a minute longer. All this tolerance and acceptance, turning the other cheek, forgiving one's enemies, doing good to those who treated him badly, loving his neighbour as himself, was all beginning to infuriate him. He was feeling such growing fear and anxiety he wasn't sleeping properly, and could barely be civil to his friends let alone the next person he encountered who couldn't speak a word of intelligible English. The last one had been a teller in his bank, who had been entrusted, by whoever ran the bank, to have access to, and be instrumental in, the management of Ted's money. And so, here he was, in at the deep end, expressing his frustrations and anger to the assembled around the dinner table at the home of a very wealthy friend of his who had invited him along to meet some people he knew who were involved in the local political scene.

It was a lovely evening. They were all sat around the outside dinner table, and the view from the wide terrace of the ocean spread out below them, the mountains in the distance, the paling blue of the sky, and the growing streaks of red and orange across the horizon were spectacular as the earth, in his part of the world, slowly turned its face away from the sun and into its night's rest. Not so long ago, he would have been relaxed and content, sat back in his very comfortable dining chair enjoying the view, the excellent food and wine, and the company of his host and other guests. But it seemed those days were gone, and he was beginning to feel that he would never feel that way again.

To be fair, he hadn't raised the topic. It was a chap called Horace, who was hoping to be elected to the local Council, who had started it all. Horace was a smug kind of fella. Wealthy of course, as most people were in their part of the world, and very pleased with himself and his life, which he felt was unassailably secure. He was oblivious to the cracks growing

ever wider in the ground he and his life were standing on. He seemed to think that the world was in fine shape. Ted had begun to call such people "flat-earthers." Horace was the sort of person who was thoroughly insulated from the unsettling signs of societal breakdown, clearly visible to Ted every day. He would be the type of person to slap Ted on the back, and encourage him to be more positive, to look on the bright side, to remember what a fine democracy he lived in, freedom of speech, and all of that, and to count his blessings.

Ted was beginning to blame people like Horace for what he felt was the slow destruction of that once-fine democracy.

He had endured Horace's expression of his ideas and plans for the community without saying a word. He had tried to focus on the fine view, and the excellent coffee and brandy his host had served after an exquisite desert. Why spoil a lovely evening he thought. Let it go, let it pass. Who cares what Horace thinks. He probably won't get elected anyway. And then he had suddenly realized that if he didn't speak out about what concerned him, he was part of the problem, and there would never be a solution. He would be an observer, not a participant, an ivory tower resident, not a man on the street, and wasn't democracy about being involved, about speaking of things that matter to one, about voting and citizenship. And so he had quietly placed his brandy glass on the table, and sat forward in his chair. He had been aware that his host also adjusted his seating position on seeing the change in Ted's. When Horace stopped speaking for a moment, to take a sip of coffee, Ted moved in. He started by offering his comments on Horace's plans for the community and pointing out that they would not be popular for this and that reason, and, if implemented, could well destroy the community, and then he ventured into the state of provincial politics, and then the state of federal matters before moving on to how he felt about the state of the western world generally and the growth of globalization. Among other things, he talked of the breakdown

in freedom of speech under the pressure of political correctness and the necessity to not offend anyone, and the increasing feeling he, and many others had, of a loss of place, a loss of home, a loss of culture and a loss of security.

A long silence had followed. Ted had waited, but had wondered if he should maybe just get up and leave and offer his apologies to his host the following day. Then his host had said, firmly, but very quietly, Thank you Ted. I agree with every word you have said. And, I am not alone in that. There will be a few others around this table who feel as you do. Some of the guests nodded. His host continued, I feel those of us who would like to discuss these issues further should meet again. Would next week at this time be convenient? Again there were nodding heads around the table. Ted was astonished. Then gratified. So he was not alone, and if he hadn't spoken up about his true feelings, he would never have known that.

He was beginning to feel better. Maybe something could be done after all.

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