

Dining With A Cursed Bloodline: Bulletproof on Thanksgiving

written by Andrea Lambert | November 26, 2018



A velvet patterned Thanksgiving dress drops over my bulletproof vest. Sports bra over black mesh restricts buckle bulges. The vest's bulky belt further puffs flaring skirt. Meant to hold guns, I suppose. I don't want to take a life. I just want to live. A witch in Gilead. My magic word is "Amazon." I bought this bulletproof vest instead of a gun in the end times. In the dark days around the 2018 midterm election.

The third civil war is on. A shadow war. Battled in the streets. Online. Through cyber warfare. By AntiFa. Russian spies. The Resistance. Proud Boys. People of Color. Activists. Anarchists. The Manosphere. The alt right. Witches. The Magic Resistance. Loose coalitions of those for and against white supremacy.

The moon waxes to November's full Beaver Moon. I'm on my period. Carefully pouring my Pixie menstrual cup of blood into an empty screw top Vanilla Extract bottle. Vanilla essence hides the primal odor. Herpes womb blood is a powerful ingredient for my arsenal. The magic resistance requires balls to the wall commitment. It's on.

My father grew up in Reno. Tells me everyone here packs heat. The Reno Gazette-Journal reports a local shooting a day. I will not die like a lemming in the rain of bullets to come. October 1 is my birthday. October 1, 2017, a rain of bullets hit a festival at Vegas's Mandalay Bay Casino. Massacre. PTSD beat into my soul that if something happens a few times? Like rapes? Or attempts on my life? Or mass shootings? Always could happen again. At any time.

For two years, I cower inside my House of the Rising Sun. Afraid for my life. Refuse to make local friends. Family only. Like the mafia without crime. I

lunch with my father's Republican friends. The wife makes no secret of the pistol always in her purse. I write her off. Gun-ownership is a deal-breaker. I must take steps to protect myself. I want to feel safe in the biggest little outside. That may never be possible.

"Be prepared," chant the Girl Scouts of my youth. Dawn of the election. No invasive canvassers about. I calibrate warmth with safety to take out the trash. Hair trigger terrified as a Vietnam vet. I would be weeping on a cot in a shelter if not for my family. Their colonizer inherited blood money keeps disabled me alive. Aware of this paradox? To live seems evil, yet imperative. To commit suicide over the wrongs of the past? Donate my estate for reparations? Unpalatable, messy and no more likely than the improbable mass suicide of my entire demographic. I am betwixt and between my social justice conscience and my brute will to survive. *One Life to Live*.

"This time, Baby, I'll be, Bulletproof. This time, Baby, I'll be, Bulletproof...." sings La Roux. Anthem. I danced to this electro hit in Los Angeles clubs under Obama. When I did not live in fear. When I could still dance freely with abandon. My November 2018 playlist is every remix of this song on Spotify. I pull a grey sweater dress over the bulletproof vest. Pull up red knee socks. Button a sensible cardigan. Cover it with a buttery white leather trench coat. Perfect old lady drag. Down to the fake paunch. Taking out the trash in the chill air is a breeze. Protected like a fear condom.

Thanksgiving morning. I try on the green dress over my bulletproof vest again. Some family supports Trump. We have a no politics at the dinner table rule, but I know everyone else will be drinking. I doubt my own family would shoot me, but... Do you read the news? Happens all the time. Especially at holidays. Especially in Nevada. Where even I, who am most certifiably insane, could get a gun if I waltzed into Cabela's, smooth talking with enough cash.

Domestic violence PTSD is not being able to trust even and especially those most near and dear to me. Afterparty era: a man I was engaged to tried to slit my throat. La Roux era: a different man I was engaged to tried to strangle me to death. Had there been a gun on either nightstand? These Entropy essays never would have existed. If I let my Bipolar rage out of the cage at dinner? Uttered the ugly genocidal truth beneath our mocking merrymaking? All bets are off in Trumplandia. Anything can happen.

It is terrifying to live like this. It is terrifying to live in this mind. In this body. In these times.

A Vegas con man says to a Princess on *The Royals*, "You have to trust somebody, sometime." His words echo in my mind. The vest's velcro scratches my back raw. I am never able to wear it for longer than ten minutes. A lingering five hour dinner would be torture. Such a bold defensive move is offensively excessive. I re-grasp reality. Climb out of PTSD psychosis. Set the bulletproof vest on a shelf in my closet. Leave it behind until this third civil war beats a path to my door. Try with all my will. To trust the family I love. Not to pack heat at this festive occasion. The love of my extended family is real. They want to feed me. Laugh with me. Not kill me. As they always have.

I put on glittery tights and a burgundy velvet American Apparel dress. Family in the front: high necked and long sleeved. Party in the back: cut out revealing my healed self harm scars, ribs and spine. I pull on a vintage black velvet jacket to hide that eyesore. Black leather trench coat, because it's freezing. Sigil of Bahomet earrings for that "Extra Satanic zing," as Ms. Mead says in *AHS: Apocalypse*.

Aunt Sandy drives me to my aunt Ruthie and Uncle Jim's house. I peer at the passing brick hobbit mansions beneath my black veiled chapeau. Feel the scotch tape on my nipples because I still don't own a bra appropriate for this dress. Look down at my knee high combat boots crossed daintily in the well of Sandy's car. Keeping my chilly feet warm and toasty. I smear burgundy lipstick over an enormous cold sore. Who am I kidding? Not them. My family will all be in everyday clothes as usual. I will sit there like a charity countess in my hand me down or gifted finery while no one says a damn thing about it.

"Ave Satanas! Invoca Azazel! Ascendit! Maledictus erit! In English: "Hail Satan! Call upon demon Azazel! Ascend! Cursed be." On Thanksgiving I muster penance for the great Curse of America which cannot now be undone. America was never great. America was founded in annihilation of tribes. I am one among thousands birthed of the deaths of those who held this land before. Tonight we must feed on Turkey and stuffing as it is traditionally ordained. Are we devouring tryptophan? Souls? Or complicit guilt for the land we squat? Every year remaining silent and docile about this is more difficult. Every year it is a harder pill to swallow than any in my bottles.

Perhaps there will only be merrymaking. As we, mixed of colonizers and Latinx, pour gravy over genocide. With blood inscribed deep on a silver tureen. I know the cruel history of Thanksgiving. It shames and horrifies me. I know the curse for my madness and chronic illness comes deep within my ancestral DNA. I don't blame my genetic mental illness on an ancient native curse on my paternal ancestor Myles Standish, as I once did. Makes a great story, but the past is lost to us now. Many generations of breeding and spawn birthed me. The insanity genes may have shown up much later. They're on both maternal and paternal sides. Genetic mental illness is not a curse. Or shamanism. Just science.

We arrive at my relative's house for a meal that feels as unholy as *AHS: Apocalypse's* Black Mass. We won't be eating the hearts of sacrificed innocents to summon Satan, however. The antichrist is only televised. The Devil does not exist. He is a plastic cameo on my etsy earrings. Evil is in mankind alone. My family is not evil. Am I?

My dear extended family is most certainly not headed by any antichrist. Uncle Jim cooks Thanksgiving dinner all day every year with his trademark culinary panache. Everything that comes out of his kitchen is gold. I am aflutter for delights ahead as I open their glass door with Sandy and her cane behind me. Barking lapdogs and a sugar high toddler greet me.

My contributions are in my purse. Many book shaped Christmas gifts. No one will wonder why.

A store bought pecan pie. I flailed. Had to pick up my Klonopin instead of baking the Pumpkin Pie as tasked. Muscled through my third benzodiazepine withdrawal of the year that week. Gets in the way of homemade baked goods when you can't get out of bed.

Is it sacrilege to find Sandy's Gilroy garlic cashews delicious? Ruthie delightful as she tells a story about the joys of staying off social media? I don't know. I compartmentalize. My family has nothing to do with the origins of Thanksgiving. They, like me, were just born here in the last 70 years. Are just trying to live. Their joy and conviviality lifts me into a better place than these dark origin thoughts. Ruthie sets out white engraved and silver rimmed bone china on the kitchen table for a buffet.

"I never use it and it's Thanksgiving. Why not?" she says. I have to agree. The same usual Sunday Dinner crowd clusters to pounce. No wild cards here. What was I thinking with my "Bulletproof" anthem? No need. I am safe for this biggest little holiday feast.

I load a plate up with succulent dark meat Turkey. Two kinds of stuffing: one Paleo from Uncle Jim. One traditional bread from cousin in law Jamie, who met familial cooking obligations so much better than I did. Her homemade chocolate chip cookies sit next to my sad Raley's pie box on the bar. Although the red wine is flowing, it is invisible to sober me. Having downed a cold grapefruit soda. Gotten stoned to the gills beforehand.

I add Ruthie's trademark Pea Salad, a Thanksgiving tradition. Scoop creamy mashed potatoes. Pour gravy over. Despite Satan on my ears? Curses on my lips? My dearly departed Grandma's black veil is lifted. I left my grieving wedding rings tucked away at home. Only the tan line remains. All is merry and bright. Somehow, I think not of the dead but the living. Their vibrant chatter around me as we assemble in the dining room.

The Twitter I eye over hors d'oeuvres is awash with #ThanksgivingClapbacks, tips on avoiding toxic conversations and difficult questions from Baby Boomer relatives about being a writer. Because I see these three generations of family so often? They understand all aspects of my peculiar situation already. See no need to pry uncomfortably. It is not their practice. Aunt Ruthie has assured me she doesn't like asking people uncomfortable questions. I too don't like asking others questions I wouldn't want asked of myself. So I do not.

Other than grunts and exclamation of delight? The Thanksgiving table is as peaceful as the blankets of snow on the Sierras. My toddler second cousin does his usual weird food selection bingo on what he will eat. We do not say grace. We do not reflect on the origins of Thanksgiving. Because we all know the terror, blood and death underscoring our feast. Or are too young to know, like this innocent child. I tuck into my second helping of Turkey, stuffing and pea salad. The cold pea globes pop beneath my teeth to reveal green health goo inside.

My aunt lifts her wineglass. Toasts: "I'm thankful for my family this Thanksgiving." My uncle on my other side lifts his wine. I lift my water. We

all seem to feel that is our real reason for being here. No, that does not absolve any white guilt for the stolen land our homes are built upon. Yet we are trying to eat. Now is not the place for me to cast blame on them for what I am as well. Aunt Sandy lifts my empty plate away to be washed by a live in family friend.

The conversation steers to things learned young and remembered forever. I remark to my uncle that the last verse of the Robert Frost poem, "Walking by Woods on a Snowy Evening," is inscribed in my brain. Memorized it in seventh grade. The lines have touched my soul over and over when on insomniac deadline. A jazz musician behind his day job, Uncle Jim is an artist also. Has kept similar long hours to rehearse his saxophone. Knows the poem. Remarks that it's resonance gives it that longevity. I agree. We repeat the verse together. Bloodlessly yet bound by bloodline. To remember again.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep.
And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to go before I sleep."

– Robert Frost