

# Dining With A Cursed Bloodline: Nip Slips for Christmas

written by Andrea Lambert | December 31, 2018



Dolly Parton warbles sentimental carols. Triggers Yuletide parental invitation. Grandma is in her grave. Holiday hosting? The torch must be passed. So it is.

Christmas Eve, we dine en famille at the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa Oyster Bar. Fake white Christmas trees glitter blue at the entrance. Midair on a bridge. I look down from my seat above Virginia Street. Torrential rain hits black asphalt. Windows reflect aqua neon the from the all-you-can-eat Sushi Bar. Garish in darkness below. Interweaving with fairy lights on parking lot oaks. A vision of light and dark. Water falling fast.

I sip double espresso from a demitasse. Stare down a plate of Seafood Fettuccine. Tender mussels. Scallops. Jumbo shrimp. Cloaked in garlic cream sauce. I pick up a fork from a navy cloth napkin. Sip and crunch a tiny mussel's whole being. Taste rich garlic wine sauce. Tender noodles wound around. Bite scallops saturated in butter. So many fats to love!

Afterwards, we minivan to the Grand Sierra Casino. Driving rain reflects streetlight's shimmer. We muscle through a frozen parking lot to the entrance. Showers of crystal chandeliers over penny slots. I wear the wool little red riding hood cloak grandma left me. Strong red lip. Knee high vixen boots. Walk the long corridor to the Grand Theatre. Feel rambling, gambling, reckless eyes on me from a high stakes poker table.

"Sorry boys, I'm wed to the dead," I emote. Diamonds shine ice from left hand. High heels click clack hard on cream marble. "You think you want this? You couldn't handle the sores. My sexual restraint is for your own good."

Grand Theatre line signage reads, "No Weapons. Metal Detector. All Bags Searched." Precautions for this "Holiday Dreams" Cirque akin to TSA. Given current rash of mass shootings? Advisable. Vegas' Mandalay Bay Casino is the Grand Sierra's sister. October First could happen here. December Twenty-Sixth could be us. The bulletproof vest I left behind ruins my figure. Vanity, thy name is death.

As a woman of ambiguous heritage, I undrape cape automatically for pat down. Suspect by profile. Ethnic in scarlet. Left ring finger begs the husband question, "Where is he?" *She* is ashes to ashes. Far away. Dead as disco. Most strangers resist this Diamond Doggie Dare. Perhaps sensing my central tragedy. I can't let go. Even in death.

Oversize "Witch, Please," purse open for inspection. Casino Security scopes gauzy hankie and keys for AK-15's. My ticket scans. Inside, my father quips they let him keep his pocketknife. Says Security looked at the knife. Looked at him. Profiled.

Said, "Well, sir, that better stay in your pocket." Had I the pearl-handled pistol in my occult tote needed by such red riding rape bait? I'd be in jail. Injustice pique dulls as, "Holiday Dreams." performs how far Reno is from Vegas. Behind Security checkpoints this is a low-rent Cirque Du Soleil rip off talent show. Mediocre acrobats MC-ed by a Mrs. Claus chanteuse. Audience plant clown calls himself Mr. Poop-in-pants III. Bellows buzzwords "yoga" and "college" as if they're hilarious.

"What's so funny about all that?" I wonder from Orchestra Seat G6. Hearing Trumplandia's laughter at California signifiers denied them. Dispossessed rural white men surround me. How many other good old boys got a pass at the metal detector? How much of this audience is packing? Thinks lesbianism is a sin? Euthanizes maniacs as a public service? I remove red hooded cape to be less conspicuous. Zero in on the bright stage to avoid panic attacks. Christmas bauble projections on green screen. Aerialist pair in red backless leotards glides through the air in perfect sync. Balletic leg gestures. Amateur husband and wife duet work filler acrobat acts between these Vegas off-season starlets. Scantly clad wife spins three feet of curly tresses in a circle. Head and torso flying. Ice skates locked around her husband's white rhinestone neck. My mother asks if she has hair extensions.

"Yes." I whisper. "In her taxes they're probably a business expense." When Nutcracker neon fades to black? Finally, relief. I peek at my iPhone. Weather app predicts snow very early tomorrow.

Christmas morning. Snuggled in on the green velvet couch under warm yellow flowered afghan. I wake just in time for promised snowfall. See only darkness outside. Dawn reveals dull sagebrush. Dead lawn. Black lines drawing bare trees. If there was snow? It didn't stick. Despite lacking a winter wonderland? I am in it to win it for Christmas morning magic. Beginning with a hot bath. Sparky tights. Black velvet American Apparel ice skater dress. Waist corset boned. So deliciously low cut I can't wear a bra. White fur stole connects neck to velvet bosom. Hopefully catching any nip slips.

None of my jewelry feels right. Pearls won't do. A darkly jeweled cat collar almost chokes. Ordered from same Etsy shop as both cats' collars. Matching? We're squad. One cat hisses. The other bites. I memorize Latin curses bulletproof. Not exactly an effective gang. If real disaster hit Nevada the state. Nevada the cat, plump gray and white, placidly lays on an ochre velour armchair. Unphased by her fussy Yule dress. Feral kitten Betty Illuminati? In a red velvet pet dress with no such chill? Nowhere to be found. Social

anxiety fiercer than mine. Other people terrify him. I am his one and only human contact.

I drape white lace curtains over the cherrywood table. Set three places with watercolor flowered china. Fill a mysterious Freemason teapot with coffee and eggnog. Fry greasy bacon. My folks arrive late. Sit for brunch. Swallow spinach mushroom scramble. Bite into cream filled oozing Pan Dulce. Bodega Marketon was the only store open. We sip caffeine from bone china teacups. Set on perfect petite saucers. With faerie watercolor flowers.

Stuffed, we retire to the front room winter wonderland. Christmas carols by drag queens and Elvis pour from a Spotify playlist. A fake black plastic tree bedecked with silver bling. Presides over a white sheepskin rug beckoning rolling about on. Making snow angels. I hand out shiny red boxes tied with gold ribbon. "To:" and "From:" tags preserved each year since infancy. I didn't want anything for Christmas. Am overjoyed by a new Roomba. Solving filthy carpet issues. An Apple Surveillance Camera for home safety. Domestic gifts a lone widow can get excited about. Some dark sided jewels. Wireless earbuds. Finally! I'll cease alarming neighbors with wee hours screams. Insomnia binge *American Horror Story* until the end of time.

Christmas Dinner is at Aunt Ruthie and uncle Jim's house. I carry my offering of Instant Pot eggnog cheesecake under saran wrap. Three generations of blood and marriage greet us with hugs. Kinfolk extra jolly. I'm just extra. White fur on the outside the red cape. Serving Anastasia Romanov realness.

Their buffet presents bloody Prime Rib with horseradish. Rich pesto lasagna. Layered deep with creamy ricotta. Homemade noodles. Ruthie's signature Pea Salad. Romaine salad with pomegranate seeds and vinaigrette. I fill a silver edged china plate. Sit at my usual place card at the Generation X kid's table. Poinsettia tablecloth flows into designated Baby Boomer table. Where they humble brag vacations and refinancing. The only child present decides he's "The boss." Sits wherever he pleases.

I whisper to cousin Lauren, "I have to write an essay about tonight for a magazine. Please say pithy bon mots I can use."

"As usual," she sighs. "Don't worry. I'll buzzword it up."

Her husband overhears. Contributes: "I painted a stripe of mustard yesterday. Not as a painting, but to get the perfect Instagram with cured sausage." These Vashon Island farmers runs foodie Instagrams from their couple's only doublewide. Their past roommate's untreated Borderline Personality Disorder was a problem, Lauren relates. By our maternal bloodline's curse, my cousin is Bipolar. Still capable. Working to open a restaurant named after a notorious pyromaniac. I am much less able than she. Hit harder by both maternal and paternal DNA. I'm Bipolar with extra bonus Schizophrenia. Anxiety. Hair-trigger hyper vigilant PTSD. Have had to be on Disability these last ten years and forevermore.

I titivate the kid's table with the story of my unpaid stint as Brand Ambassador bikini model.. Stuff bloody beef into my mouth. When that online

swimwear company ghosted my instagram? Effectively firing me from... Not a job? The field of fucks I did not give was as vast as Alaska. Modeling is not my delusion du jour. Writing could be. I gulp black coffee sans Bailey's Irish Cream. Announce the approach of my five year sobriety date. I used to be blackout drunk at holiday gatherings. Hazy memories pre rehab. I ask Lauren if I ever flashed my tits at the dinner table.

"No," she says. I pray all nip slips in sobriety are hidden by this lush fur. May grandma's ghostly modesty watch over and protect mine. Dessert continues in the same vein of coffee and Sauvignon Blanc. Eggnog cheesecake is a big hit. I lift a bite to Revlon Top Tomato lips. It is everything the first trial run failed. That cake dissolved into eggnog sauce over dense cookie corners. Liquidity haunts festivity. Eggnog. Coffee. Booze. Blood.

"The moon was full, and I was unsupervised," read tank tops Facebook advertises. Precise to my taste. Mined data bought and sold.

December twenty-first. Winter solstice. Full Cold Moon. I am alone. As usual. Proper for balls out Yule blood magic. I take into the bathtub: white candle bright. Two tea lights in pink rock salt holder. Grandpa's funeral crucifix. Holy silver blessed by a priest. Sigil of Bahomet cameo. Pendant broken off old Etsy necklace. Chunks of raw rose quartz. Full moon charged crystals. Vanilla extract bottle refilled with two months worth of carefully collected liquid menstrual blood. Turn bathroom lights off. Recline nude in tub. Draw a protective circle calling upon the four directions and elements with the white candle's flame. I invoke the House of the Rising Sun's previous residents.

I call aloud, "Spirituum. Great-aunt Theda and "Butch" Butcher. Builders of this home. Janet and Dewey Lambert who thrived here til death. Guardian ghosts. Come to me. Here. Now."

I open the priceless bottle. Pour a deep red pentagram on the stark white tub. Rub bare hands in moon womb blood. Draw red sigils on porcelain. Look up at the bathroom mirror. Silver under dark vanity bulbs.

I never temp fate by chanting "Bloody Mary," before it. I only do witchcraft that feels safe. Solitary, ethically given bodily fluids of my own don't scare me. This innocent bloodbath with wash away in hot water and soap. I set Wiccan and Christian talismans on either side of the tub's stoppered drain. Pagan rites blur to Byzantine Rome.

I say, "The Horned God, or Jesus, were born on a Full Cold Moon past to the Triple Goddess Virgin Mother Mary. May ancient Gods and Goddesses cast blessings upon me. Honoring their winter solstice with blood of my womb." Ringless hands smear the dark red pentagram between outstretched legs.

"Ave Maria," I cry to the heavens. "Ave Hecate! Ave Jesus Christ! Ave Satanas!" Scarlet moon blood pours over my nakedness. I am reborn. In solstice moon sync with the holy birth of Christmas.