

# Dining With A Cursed Bloodline: Oyster Suicide Ripples Outward

written by Andrea Lambert | June 25, 2018



How to perform food writing without talking about Anthony Bourdain? As a food writer I must pay homage to the master. On June 8, 2018, Bourdain hung himself in a hotel room in France during filming of his CNN show *Parts Unknown*. On television he exhibited an exuberant bon vivant personality. I never had the faintest clue he had mental health issues.

Many hide their pain until it breaks them. By exhibiting my own pain in these Disability porn Freak Shows I smear across the Internet? Lift the velvet curtain for the price of your eyeball's time? Creative exhibitionism is my coping mechanism. Catharsis yields survival. Unhealthy? Being disabled, health isn't an option I have.

Legendary handbag designer Kate Spade's suicide was June 5, 2018. A few days before Bourdain's. It hit me even harder. She hung herself on a red Kate Spade scarf tied to her bedroom doorknob. Dead chic. Taught me no matter what pretty baubles one might have, suffering from mental illness was real and valid. Even the most wealthy? Famous? Glamorous? Could, would and do take that final solution if their depression is deep enough.

Kate Spade's final gift to me? I grip it more firmly than any piquant leather cactus purse in the eloquent eulogies I read. Validation. My guilt stops over feeling mental agony while surrounded by Sierra splendor. To weep desolately onto antique bone china felt sacrilege before. I didn't feel I had the right to suffer if it was only internally.

Lifetime of ableism beat that message into me. Only physical on paper problems are real. Mental or psychiatric problems aren't real problems. You can't see them. Only their results. Which can be blamed on other things. Like being a bad person. Or demons. I prefer the psychiatric Kool Aid to religious

bone broth. Until Kate Spade committed suicide, I didn't think I had the right to suffer while others had it so much worse. I fell into a guilt spiral about feeling terrible. Yet Spade had it so much better. Her anguish had to be as bad if not worse than mine if she offed herself over it. Q.E.D. Kate Spade gave me permission to feel my pain sans guilt.

"The best way to honor Anthony Bourdain's death to me is eat a damn good meal in his name," I tweet. The forty-first birthday dinner I savor with my mother at the Atlantis Casino Sky Terrace Oyster Bar lingers in my mind. Best meal I've had in Reno outside of my Uncle Jim's cooking. I retroactively dedicate that meal to the now dead master of culinary media. Invite two suicide dead I love to a dinner séance performed here and now on the page.

2017 late September evening. My mother and I sit in her car in the casino parking lot. Listen to the last of a Rachel Maddow radio broadcast on the dire news of the day. We walk through chill air to the glass double doors of the Atlantis. Enter the clear glass elevator column. Ascend.

The Sky Terrace Oyster Bar is located on a wide multi windowed walkway over Virginia Street. Between the parking lot and the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa proper. Cars pass beneath on the sooty asphalt. Pinot Grigio lit by turquoise and hot pink neon in true Reno casino fashion. Teal squiggles on 1980s carpet. Whose idea was this interior design? What drugs were they on? I don't think I could handle shit that hardcore. The garish decor belies delectable seafood. Drowned in enough creamy white wine sauce that I don't even care how far away I now am from the coast. Or what opioids and meth are being consumed, alternated with slaps of wet flesh, in the hotel rooms around. Or life savings lost at roulette wheels below.

I only know Bourdain as a celebrity chef whose respectful cultural anthropology fascinates. His show explores other cultures through the medium of food. Bourdain's inquisitive, exploratory nature might have enjoyed this taste of Reno we are about to embark upon. Reno is an eccentric taste. Pink neon lit brandy cream sauce doused in cigarette ash cremains.

Reno was put on the map by the Gold Rush. Made a destination by the divorce boom. The arid desert ground is shit for farming, so Nevada built a viable economy with vice industries such as divorce, gambling, drinking, prostitution and cannabis. While *Parts Unknown* did do a Las Vegas episode, Reno is too small town rinky dink for it's purview.

I think of Reno as Las Vegas's morbid little sister. While Vegas is out grinding her youth away at a Bachelorette party? In platform heels? A body con bandage dress? Drunk off her ass? Shooting speedballs? Reno is reclining in a doily-draped home. In a vintage slip. Black silk kimono. Sipping coffee. With a cat. Candles lit in séance to WWII wedding photographs.

I move my red lingerie ass into the witchcraft room for this dinner séance. Light a white candle. A stick of Goloka Lavender Masala incense. In honor of the recent suicide deaths. RIP Anthony Bourdain. RIP Kate Spade. RIP Katie Jacobson.

Katie was my girlfriend. My fiancée. My domestic partner. My wife. She committed suicide on October 15, 2012. Before her, suicide was only Kurt Cobain through celebrity distance. This time it hit home. Right next to me in bed, home. Waking up next to the corpse of the one I love the most, home. My heart dead inside of me. Shattered like a fake glass diamond. I will never get over her death. I still wear her wedding ring with her six years gone. There will never be another.

I kneel on white velvet pillows. Inside octagonal designs of tumbled amethyst. Rose quartz. Quartz crystal shards. Stones laid out in a sacred geometry diagram from Pinterest. There are many different ways people get interior design tips off Pinterest. Eight points marked by Major Arcana cards connected by straight lines cut with the "Temperance" Tarot card. Using the exact same technique I used to cut lines of cocaine a lifetime ago. I'm sober now. Some skills are retained forever. I still know how to cut a straight line with a card. Better not to snort it after. Then the stone lines shimmer forever on the hardwood floor in pink and purple iridescence.

I lay my hands on sacred talismans on the altar stone. To draw out their power. To call upon the spirits. My own baby tooth. A childhood gold locket. A ball of my grey hair. Wedding gift day of the dead brides. My dead wife's bedazzled Sweet Valley High compact.

I recite in Latin, "In nomine Invocatio Mallum. In nomine Maria Magdalene. Spiritus invoco. In the name of the Horned God. In the name of Mary Magdalene. I call. Spirits of suicide, come to me. Come join me for a ritual meal."

I unplug the moon lamp from its USB charger on the wall. Set it on a wooden stand. Under the altar. In the center of the room. Atop a Birchbox box holding other personal effects. My powdered menstrual blood in a vanilla extract bottle. My fingernail clippings in grandpa's gold inlaid box.

The night before, I burn those fingernails and dried menses blood powder in the altar candle. The pungent smell of burning human flesh. Indelible from any other incense. Unmistakeable once smelled. I only know what my own body smells like burning. I hope to know no other.

"Burn the witch!" I burn my own fingernail clippings to seal myself inside a house protection spell. Exorcist crab walking to touch my foot to every door in my home. Warding it with a blessing. A security system of Satan. Finally, I feel safe again after an unsettling evening. Go to sleep. Wake to Bourdain's death screaming from CNN push alerts on my iPhone.

Despite it's supernatural stigma, Crab is my favorite yoga pose. Not only because it makes me look possessed. With leg lifts it's even better. Not just for the thighs, but for the soul. I weigh 110 pounds now. From all that anxiety yoga? Worrying? Working myself to the bone on impossible dreams? Legs like chicken wings. Birch twigs. Katie wrote of me, "Her bones would be hollow like a bird's" letter pressed onto our wedding invitations.

I stare into the candle flame. Reimagine that past Atlantis birthday dinner.

Now. Again. With the ghosts of Katie Jacobson, Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade. A dinner party of the dead. Spectral forms sit at the white table clothed table under turquoise neon. We are in the Lost City of Atlantis in a Sky Terrace above the clouds. The silverware plunks heavily as I place the white cloth napkin in my lap. I order the Oyster Pan Roast. Tender oysters out of their shells sautéed in rich brandy, cream and tomato. I urge ghost guests to feed on sips of succulent cream sauce. Cow fat nourishes the living and the dead.

Bourdain wrote "Vegetarians are the enemy of everything good and decent in the human spirit, an affront to all I stand for, the pure enjoyment of food." He lifts spoonfuls of oysters of to his spectral lips. As do I. Each tender bite yields a slight touch of sand from the ocean's floor far away. For desert, there is a hunk of New York Cheesecake. Dense cream cheese over crumb crust. We dive in with petit forks until it is gone. We feast on creamy savory and sweet. In my mind. In memory. In fantasy. In memorial. Ritual dinner with ghosts of the dead I have loved. This ritual brings me closure. I hope it honors them. What would these three ghosts of suicide think of my country casino séance?

Katie? I imagine she would have loved it's gritty glitz as she loved all things Nevada. She even named our cat "Nevada." I sing my kitty a ditty that goes, "Oh, the state of the cat of the state of the cat of the cat of the state of Nevada!"

Anthony Bourdain, so recently dead that he is still disoriented by the afterlife, might suck down that brandy cream sauce with avid curiosity as to Reno casino culture as lowbrow neo-Vegas kitsch. Think about how he could spin it into a CNN segment. Remember acutely he is now dead. All contracts null and void. Money meaningless on the other side.

Kate Spade's ghost would be carrying the California Dreaming Surf 3D Van Crossbody purse of her own design. Hook it gently across the back of her chair with soft manicured hands. While still living she ate finer things. Might turn up her nose at this stew. Reno's cuisine isn't much next to New York's. She too is acclimating like jet lag to the afterlife.

"With this bell, spirits dispel," I say. Ring a bell three times. Return from the Lost City of Atlantis to my House of the Rising Sun. The stick of incense burns down. I blow out the white candle. Lay my hands upon the silver crucifix blessed at my grandfather's funeral.

I say in Latin, "In nomine Jesu Christi beneficia. In the name of Jesus Christ, blessings." Above the crucifix, my dead wife's black and white funeral card where she looks away under a black veil. I weep. Suddenly. Torrentially. For those taken too soon by the pains of life.

I turn off the fairy lights. Leave for the living room. Sprawl on a green velvet couch under a silver lamp. Think about suicide. Pervasive in mind and media these days. There is a point in everyone's heart. When their pain is so great. They could choose death at their own hands. Rather than fighting the mind's war in their foxhole hellhole any longer. I am not there yet.

I have made suicide attempts. In 2001 I threw myself over the hoods of cars in Duboce Triangle. Ended up miraculously unwounded in a psych ward in San Francisco. There were nights in Los Angeles those hard first few months after my wife died. I white knuckle gripped the wooden headboard of the bed of our madness. Bed that she died on. I held the carved bar to keep my hands from moving to take my own life. To join her.

Even now, I know the drawer where I keep the box cutter. A big razor my father innocently bought at Home Depot when I moved in. I could slit my wrists in a warm bath. An option. Bit too messy for my taste, though. The smell of my own blood makes me physically ill. I use that box cutter routinely to slash open the Amazon Prime packages that supply me with provisions.

In the same routine way, I take two of my Schizophrenia medication Saphris every night. To get to sleep. To wake without hallucinations. Hearing voices. Knowing deep in my dark heart that if I took all of the Saphris in my possession at once I would fall asleep forever. Never to wake again. Death is never far away. The tools of death are the same as the routine tools of life. Death is an option I own.

Over a decade ago. When I worked. Before I went on Disability. An Executive Assistant supervisor told me one of my strengths was ownership. I think she meant my way of taking ownership over projects. The nonprofit's filing system I organized. Or employee manual I wrote for my replacement. She was correct on a deeper level about my character. I own my own shit. While I will never own a Kate Spade handbag, I own the tools of my own death without ever using them. Don't we all? Kate Spade used her scarf. She designed the tool of her own death. She owned that shit.

"It's the last cool thing you'll ever do," sang a band of the early millennium about suicide. Cool is a cheap tacky mythology to toss over tragedy. Like plastic slipcovers on pews of a Vegas wedding chapel simulacrum.

The forces that keep me from suicide are twofold: Masochism. Former BDSM sexuality sublimated into getting off on pain. Enjoying living in misery. I know that's kinky, but things get sublimated weird when you stop having sex. My wife got to die. Escape this shit show. Because I didn't, I am punished by being forced to live on without her. Until someone or something else beyond my power kills me. Then finally my true love and I might be reunited.

The second force that keeps me from suicide is love. Seeing the hurt that ripples outward to touch everyone who ever knows or knows of a suicide. How Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade's suicides touched and triggered so many thousands that only knew them via media? How my wife's suicide almost destroyed me? My skin on the surface is bronzed tan. Soft with coconut oil. If my skin looked like my insides? Wracked with third degree burn scars.

"Burn the witch!" My insides burned almost to death by the flame of love ending in suicide. My love of the living prevents me from joining the dead by my own hand. Inflicting those same brutal scars upon anyone else I love. I'm

a masochist, not a sadist.

To quote Anthony Bourdain, "It's been an adventure. We took some casualties over the years. Things got broken. Things got lost. But I wouldn't have missed it for the world." Now he is dead. My love of the dead is strong enough to invoke them, but my love of the living is strong enough to keep me alive.

"I will survive," sings Gloria Gaynor from my record player. Through the years.