

Dining With A Cursed Bloodline: Wounds of the Mind, Wounds of the Body

written by Andrea Lambert | September 24, 2018



My domestic partner died in surprise suicide. Some things you never get over. I have this complex that it would be wrong to totally get over her. Play the merry widow. Indiscriminately fuck meth head lumberjacks picked up in casino bars. Squander Reno's reinvented respectability.

I don't believe in slut shaming. There's nothing wrong with a woman fucking as many consenting men and women as she pleases. Just use protection. But I saw. Over and over. In San Diego. Portland. San Francisco. CalArts. How our Puritan born society debases promiscuous women. Tars and feathers them with words. I have my dignity back. I don't want to lose it again. Must not poison these still new waters. There shall be no sleeping my way around this biggest little city. I want to stay.

I couldn't revert to the wildness of my twenties. Middle aged with gray blue bob. Body withered. Mind a horror show. Back a lotus boob of open sores. That vow of celibacy is protective. If the haunted herpes doesn't scare them away? Any man would recoil in Trypophobia at doggy style.

I pick away at these back sores for two years. Don't let them heal. An anxious, masochistic habit. I want to suffer. Senselessly. Even more than the mental illness imposes. For a time? I perversely want the outside of my body to look as diseased as the inside. Forcing others to see my pain for what it is. I don't know why I want this. Thanatos. Freud's death drive.

I've never met anyone sharing my same burden. Lonely road. Suicide widow of a domestic partnership. Destroyed by grenades in the battle for same-sex marriage. Katie proposes in the celebratory rush of first legalization. We win a dream wedding contest. White roses and eucalyptus. By the planned date? A legal stay halts our marriage's legitimacy. We have the wedding anyway. In defiance. By the time gay marriage is truly legal? Katie is dead. Civil rights battles have heavy losses. We are a casualty of the struggle.

I feel married to a dead woman still. Although the law denied us.

Right before she dies, Katie gets a tattoo of a red "A" between her breasts. She collects vintage editions of *The Scarlet Letter*. I pretend the "A" stands for my name, "Andrea," as I bury my face in her cake frosting flesh.

Does this need to punish come from guilt over her suicide? Blame is one of the phases of grief. How did I not I notice she was suicidal? There are signs. I curse my past alcoholism. Rip a scab off my back. Damaged goods, I should have died instead. I want to bleed for Katie. Red blood like her red "A." Did it stand for me? As well as Hester Prynne? Both scarlet harlots she loved? I never dared ask. In the silence of death, she can never answer. I will sacrifice the rest of my life to her memory. Katie ruined me for anyone else. As only a woman can.

I learn that picking cuts so they don't heal is a form of self-harm. I try to avoid that. After catching Katie in the bathtub cutting slits into her hand. She had self-diagnosed, unmedicated Borderline Personality Disorder. Symptoms include self-harm and suicide.

Performative okay-ness permits me to live among normal people. With a few, medicated, psychiatric disabilities. "Fake it till you make it," To pass unnoticed in the neighborhood. Take the trash in and out. Pick up the mail daily. Keep my pain hidden away. I must walk a spider thin tightrope to avoid institutions yet stay on Disability benefits. I could be trapped in a psych ward if the wrong people notice me slip at all. Self-harm must stop. Coconut oil just makes the sores fluid. Raw. Easier to tear scabs off. I brainstorm an even more batshit healing method. Crystals! Will it work?

Wounds of the the body heal faster than wounds of the mind. Easier to mend skin than synapse.

The LA within me will never be washed away. No matter how many hot baths I lather up in with Juicy Pomegranate and Mango Infusions SoftSoap. In Los Angeles, crystal therapy would be done expensively in a white walled clinic or spa. Roughneck Reno does not offer such woo woo frivolities. Not that I could afford them. Outsourced.

As a teenager I went punk. Still live by DIY. Cutting my own hair. Home exposure therapy for PTSD. By viewing of all of *American Horror Story* repeatedly. Staring down terror from behind a screen helped me feel safe again. Could I DIY more esoteric pseudoscience? Ought to try. Raw rose quartz and crystal points sit underutilized on my coffee table. Time to put them to work.

I close the living room blinds. It wouldn't do for my elderly neighbors to see me California out like this. Arrange rose quartz in a circle on the white sheepskin rug. Take off my clothes. Slather my body with coconut oil. Lay inside the circle. Pile cut crystals on my ravaged back. Lay like this for hours. Every day for weeks.

"Are we done playing with our pretty rocks now?" Murmured putting stones back in their pouch. Eventually, the sores heal into brown dots with pink insides. Were the pretty rocks just a placebo? A hard barrier between the sores and my

marauding nails? Or was there real magical energy coming off of them? I will never know. Raised atheist. Forever a skeptic. I do know that when I lay down within a protective circle of rose quartz, a palpable sense of peace engulfs me. I do know that my back's bloody lotus became smooth and brown. Whatever the cause, I'll take whatever healing I can get.

I'm not sure if I believe in crystal's healing power, but I should work on a healthier diet. I weigh 100 pounds. One frightening morning: 89. Carless sabbatical from supermarket food led to malnutrition. A friend suggests ordering canned pineapple. I hop online. Two days later, a flat of Dole Pineapple Chunks in 100% Pineapple Juice shows up on my doorstep. When I look at that fruit floating in it's sweet, sweet juice? A craving overtakes me. A deep hunger long ignored.

After the cardboard box is recycled, I attack. Unscrew the first green lid. Curses! Thwarted again! Plastic seal. I rip it off with my teeth. Violently. Splash a gout of pineapple juice down my front. Tear the sundress off. In black and white striped panties. Without washing the juice from my cat scratch stomach. Squat on a kitchen chair like *The Naked Ape*. Drink a long draught of juice from the jar. Sweet and cold. Grab a long fork. Skewer chunks. Stuff them into my mouth. It fills me up with some unknown vitamin. A? B? C? D? This is why I'm so terrible at proper nutrition. Deep sips of juice. Forkfuls of succulent fruit. The jar is drained.

I repeat this pleasurable ritual often. Learn to pull the seals off over the sink. Gently, so not to make a mess. Washing my sticky hands afterwards. Trying to nurture. Rather than destroy. This body I have such a conflicted relationship with. Seven more jars of pineapple chunks sit in the pantry. A week later they are gone. I order more. Along with a flat of Dole Mandarin Oranges in Light Syrup. Canned fruit provides nutrients my body desperately needs.

To eat healthfully? I don't only need fruit. I need vegetables. So I go out back. I don't have a garden out there, but a patch of what my chef cousin identifies as an edible green. Purslane. Growing like a weed among the wet grass. I tear the leafy stems up by the roots. Crunch.

When the apple harvest is plentiful, I make "yard salads." Purslane. Crabapples. Dandelion greens. Yellow cherries. All it needs is balsamic vinaigrette and you could serve it up in a restaurant. Each time I pluck a yard salad, I fantasize about going inside. Washing. Chopping. Arranging. Plating. Dousing it with oil and vinegar. I never do. Always, these salads are eaten al fresco. Under the shade of the cherry tree. Bites of tart crabapple. Dirty purslane roots thrown on the grass.

I nibble free range greens. Read *Resilient Survivor*. My aunt thinks this book about a doomed straight couple might help me. Her friend, the author, sent it over. Signed with a new writer's enthusiasm. For an afternoon, I am transfixed by Marlene Livingston Curry's life story. Growing up midwestern in a strict Seventh-day Adventist church. Seems so foreign. I was raised heathen in California.

Curry's legal husband commits suicide in a river. Leaving mistresses and financial problems behind. This sane suicide widow recovers easily. Guided by her God. Bible verses. Her many children. I feel bereft. My wife left me all alone. I tried so hard to drink myself to death among her funeral flowers. Curry's Christian God won't help me. I'm a witch. Sold my soul to Satan under a solar eclipse. Not sure if I even believe in the Devil, but middle age is time for afterlife estate planning. I'd like to own at least one of my choices.

All religions provide basically the same things in different colors of Kool Aid. The ritualized comfort that an unseen force will help. Lisa Marie Basile's *Light Magic for Dark Times* offers grief spells that give me hope. Could I find solace deep in Wicca? Spirituality got me sober. Healed my back. Wouldn't hurt.

I go into the witchcraft room. Get to work on my hands and knees. Realign amethyst and rose quartz pebbles. Rowdy kitten messes up the pattern. Eight pointed star connected by lines of tumbled rocks. Sacred geometry to hold demons, if you pay attention to Pinterest. I don't believe in demons. Reject Christian fairy tales. My geometry holds ancestral and marital ghosts within the central altar. As I line up scrambled stones with the Temperance Tarot Card, a sense of peace comes over me. Like a Tibetan monk making a mandala with sand.

I survived my wife's death. The survivors guilt may never heal. I am doomed to live on. Haunted. Entombed in this House of the Rising Sun that is my sacred chapel. Safe place. Paradise. Private psych ward. Agoraphobia prison. Like the ball and chain of the old folk song. I will live. Pineapple to protein bar. Spell to stone. It is my fate to be the survivor.