

In the Fall of 1966, I was living in a sweet little house in the rural outskirts of Yellow Springs, Ohio. My housemate, Lynn, was as beautiful as Brigitte Bardot. Her saving grace was she didn't seem to realize she was a goddess, and she was friendly with everyone, including me, who had spent my entire 19 years losing a battle for self-esteem.

I had managed to acquire a boyfriend, Mike, a biker and fellow college student. I worried that he and Lynn bickered constantly until the night he went into her room and not mine. Their apparent antagonism had just been foreplay. This betrayal seemed so consistent with my expectations, and I felt such a need to be cool, that I just sucked it up and we were all

living together in superficial harmony when Thanksgiving Day arrived.

One reason Lynn liked having me around was that she had never learned to cook. I wasn't good at it, but I was fearless. My early attempts consisted of throwing every spice we had into some kind of sauce for meat and pasta. The results were edible though often not pretty. It was understood that I would prepare the holiday dinner.

In the morning, as I was starting the turkey, we had a surprise visitor. Lynn was expecting Hans but had been afraid to notify Mike or me. It turned out her fatal flaw was she didn't know how to handle multiple suitors and would just shut down at the first sign of conflict. Hans was an exchange student from Germany who

shared her blonde good looks, and Mike was pissed. Lynn seemed incapable of talking to the two of them together, so as I was making the stuffing, she and Hans went for a walk. When she returned, she turned her full attention to Mike, leaving Hans to fend for himself. Then she chatted with Hans, ignoring Mike, then back to Mike with Hans out in the cold. After Hans assured me he would stay for dinner, I went back to my cooking, suddenly happy. I thought I had transcended my resentment toward my housemates, but there it was, along with a delicious dose of karma.

An hour or so later, the doorbell rang, and it was Charlie, another of Lynn's admirers. I had him to thank for finding me this place, so I insisted he stay for dinner

and that he join Lynn, Mike and Hans in the living room. I could hear enough to know the men were jockeying for Lynn's attention and that she was miserable. Humming a happy tune, I put the potatoes on to boil and the yams in the oven.

Just as I had finished prepping the green beans, there was a knock at the front door and a booming voice announced, "It's the King of the Road!" It was actually Steve, Lynn's ex-fiancé, a tall, well-built trucker with movie star good looks. I rushed to welcome him. The panicked expression on Lynn's face as I insisted that Steve, too, must stay for dinner had me thanking the gods.

I had invited my friend Alan to join us. Alan was in his 30s, older than the rest of us, but emotionally fragile, having spent a

few years in a mental institution for what I came to believe were actual psychic experiences. Fortunately, he arrived just before the meal was ready and missed most of the drama, but he picked up the vibe right away. When I checked on the group, he was in a corner, twitching. Mike was seething and Hans, Charlie and Steve were preening for Lynn's attention – a futile pursuit since she was no longer in her body.

“Almost ready!” I announced cheerfully.

When I got dinner on the table, it was quite a spread: turkey with stuffing, yams, mashed potatoes, green beans, rolls, cranberry sauce – the standard fare for most cooks but well above the quality of my day-to-day efforts. We all sat down to eat – me, Lynn, Mike, Hans, Charlie, Steve and

Alan. The tension was much thicker than my attempt at gravy, and there was no conversation, only the determined clacking of cutlery against plates. In fifteen minutes, the meal that had taken me over six hours to prepare was gone.

Alan left before pie, then Hans and Charlie drifted off shortly afterward. I took Steve to my room to cap off what, for me, had been a lovely day. My only regret was the brevity of our feast. Ever since, I've served holiday meals in courses.

Copyright © 2024 by Susan Church-Downer

All rights reserved.