



**TRUE BLOOD'S ADINA PORTER**  
**Digging Deep into the Dark Side of Motherhood**

BY **ANDREW FISH** PHOTOGRAPHY **JESSE HILL**  
MAKEUP **AUTUMN MOULTRIE** /EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS/KERSTIN FLORIAN

In a town where vampires profess peace and harmony with one side of their mouths and feed on people with the other, where werewolves ravage, and witches raise the dead, there's still room for a very human, very personal villain on HBO's "True Blood" — a manipulative, abusive mom. Lettie Mae Thornton was an alcoholic who was nothing but trouble for her daughter, Tara, whom she neglected as a child, until a bogus exorcism got her off the bottle and onto a sanctimonious pedestal under the guise of newfound faith. She went on to denigrate Tara's every move and ignore her suicide attempt in favor of putting the moves on the reverend who came over to help the girl in crisis. Adina Porter's portrayal of this damaged and damaging soul is packed with heavy-hitting malice, spiteful arrogance, denial, self-hatred, and the subtle maneuvering necessary to keep Tara in her life.

A friendly, funny, engaging presence who bears little resemblance to her fiercely dislikable character, Porter is having a blast on the hit supernatural series. Working closely with Rutina Wesley, who plays Tara, Porter gets that back-home feeling of New York theater. "When the lights are being set [and we're] waiting to be called," she says, "we talk about what's in the subtext. That's working with Rutina. She's also a theater person; she went to Juilliard. It's the best of both worlds. It's the juiciness of theater — a lot of the cast are New York theater actors — plus the coolness of HBO. Talk about lucky!"

Amid her enjoyment of the role, Porter has given a lot of thought to the unsound mindset of Lettie Mae and parents like her. "People give birth and they think, 'This is something that belongs to me,'" she relates. "For Lettie Mae, Rutina belongs to her so she can do whatever she wants — because, 'I put clothes on her back and I fed her.' It's the same person who kicks their dog, and it's cowardly. I'm sure she would rather do it to the man whom she created Tara with, but he might hit her back. But she has been beating up her daughter long enough that she either won't hit back very hard, or she can psych her into not hitting back. It's an easy target, and I think that's why people do that to their kids."

Digging deeper, Porter feels that behavior like this is rooted in issues of self worth, which brings a universal element to the story. "In my head, it's obvious that Lettie Mae is damaged. She was sold a bill of goods when she was younger, and she bought it hook, line, and sinker. She thinks she's not worthy because she's a poor, black woman. She just doesn't know. Whatever she can hide behind, whether it's alcohol or playing the victim, I can

relate to that. I've had enough therapy to know it's not true, but there's still this kernel inside of me that I could totally access — and if I were in a different time and place — water and grow."

Porter balances the importance of exposing bad parenting and the dark side of religious fervor with the thrilling challenge it presents. "I think the religious one is such a juicy addiction to hide behind because you could be so righteous as an excuse to be hurtful," she opines. "You don't even have to be a parent. You know when you're in a relationship, you can say something to make your point or you can say something to destroy them. Maybe I like having a safe place where you can get ugly and do all the stuff you want to do, so that when it's real, you go back to Therapy 101: breathe and count to ten." The Bronx-raised performer especially relishes Lettie Mae's moments of supposed clarity that inevitably end in ruin. "Pull 'em in, pull 'em in, and then — sock 'em!" she exclaims with a laugh.

Yet no matter the dysfunctional dynamic, there's a love beneath it all. "It's the only relationship that she has," Porter explains. "They've been together for a long, long time. And I think I show my love the best way I know how, but I don't have a lot of practice in showing it. And I think also sometimes there's a self-fulfilling prophecy. If it gets too good, you feel like you don't really deserve it so you have to mess it up. But she totally loves her daughter. And Tara doesn't always make the best choices; maybe she learned too well from her mother. I think they both have learned how to press each other's buttons."

Porter has a lot of admiration for show creator, Alan Ball, and the writers who weave the chaos and conflicts together. "We're talking about this character going through all these intricate changes, and it's because of these wonderful writers who are doing this. It's delightful," she beams. "Alan loves actors and seeing the actor's process, so when you're lucky enough to be with someone who respects actors and is so creative, it's pretty awesome." Lettie Mae plays a small role this season, "but I'm coming back bigger next year," Porter reveals. "For Alan Ball to say, 'Something's going to happen so you're gonna have a lot to do' — wow."

Recalling her early days on set, she admits, "I didn't know that Stephen [Moyer] and Anna [Paquin] were together. No clue, because they're professionals who think, 'Let's not take this for granted. Let's respect this because we know it's not going to last forever. We know it's not ordinary.' I feel that from everyone. As well as it's very easy to get killed off, so let's keep everybody happy and show up on

The advertisement for Seed Kitchen is a vertical collage. At the top, the word "seed" is written in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, with a green leafy sprout growing from the letter 'd'. Below this, there are three horizontal panels of food: a bowl of fresh salad with shredded carrots and cucumbers; a chocolate brownie on a plate next to a cup of coffee with a banana slice on top; and a stack of colorful vegetable and fruit toppings. The word "macrobiotic" is written vertically in white, lowercase letters across the middle panels. At the bottom, three cupcakes with different frosting colors (brown, white, green) are shown. The word "vegan" is written vertically in white, lowercase letters across the bottom panel. Below the food images, the text "eat in or take out" is centered. At the bottom right, the contact information is listed: "310-396-1604", "1604 pacific avenue", "venice, ca 90291", "open daily 10 am to 9 pm", and "seedkitchen.com". The signature "by Eric Lechasseur" is written in a cursive font at the bottom left of the text area.



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time!” As for her work with Alexander Skarsgård, she’s all smiles. Porter recalls a dream sequence in which Skarsgård’s character, Eric, was wearing Lettie Mae’s dress. “That guy looked better in that dress than I did,” she grins. “You cannot dress that man down! And what a sweetheart. When you first look at him, you think, ‘Okay, you’re really attractive. You should be obnoxious.’ When he talks, he’s just this really sweet person with a lot of vulnerability, which I think even makes him *more sexy*.”

Porter, whose own children were adopted, entered the world of “True Blood” under trying circumstances. She was pregnant when she first auditioned and was waiting for the results of her

another time where I got to tap into that kernel of insecurity that society puts out about the way one looks.” Having dispensed with body-image issues some time back, the actress declares, “I’m returning my Spanx!” Porter has also appeared on such shows as “Judging Amy,” “The Guardian,” “Crossing Jordan,” “NYPD Blue,” “American Dreams,” “House M.D.,” and “CSI.”

Noting that in her experience, “the bigger they are, the kinder they are,” Porter has fond memories of her work with David Fincher and Aaron Sorkin in *The Social Network* (2010). “I had a very small role in this film, yet not for a second did anyone on that set make me feel as if I wasn’t an integral part of this ensemble.

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genetic tests. “I got a phone call from my doctor saying that the genetic testing was really bad,” she recalls. “It was crushing. And then an hour later, I got a phone call from my manager saying, ‘It looks like you got “True Blood.”’ I’m very happy for the family that I have and the way that it was built, and I’m very happy to be part of the ‘True Blood’ family. The universe just kind of intervened. To be devastated and then to get this news that you’ve been waiting for your entire career. It all worked out for the best. It really did, and I have a wonderful family.”

A graduate of SUNY Purchase, Porter performed on stage in New York at such venues as the Public Theater, the Manhattan Theatre Club, and Playwrights Horizons. She won an Obie award for her performance in “Venus” in 1996 and appeared in Molière’s “The Misanthrope” alongside Uma Thurman in 1999. Her first screen role was in PBS’ “A Texas Childhood” with Bill Irwin, followed by three episodes of “Law and Order” in the early and mid-’90s. In 2001, she performed on Broadway in “The Women” with Jennifer Coolidge, Hallie Kate Eisenberg, Cynthia Nixon, Amy Ryan, and Jennifer Tilly.

Moving to Los Angeles in 1996, Porter appeared in *The Peacemaker* (1997) with George Clooney and Nicole Kidman, as well as on “Brooklyn South,” before winning a role in the television movie, *Gia* (1998), starring Angelina Jolie. “I had a nice, juicy scene where I get to tell Angelina Jolie off,” she notes. “It was yet

Just another example of the professionalism, kindness, and respect that I have been lucky enough to encounter in this business.” Up next for the thespian with a gift for intensity is another maternal role in *Think of Me* with Lauren Ambrose and Dylan Baker. “In real life I’m a really good mom, but on screen I can play moms who have issues,” she remarks. [Just before press time, Venice learns that Porter has landed a role in Aaron Sorkin’s HBO pilot, “More as This Story Develops,” featuring Jeff Daniels, Emily Mortimer, Alison Pill, and Kathleen “Kick” Kennedy, daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.]

Her role as the cool and masculine Ricky in the HBO movie, “Lackawanna Blues” (2005) — alongside Mos Def, Macy Gray, Terrence Howard, Rosie Perez, Delroy Lindo, and S. Epatha Merkerson — holds a special place in her heart. “It was a blast being able to hide behind that toughness mask,” remarks Porter. “I’m from the South Bronx, but that was only an address. My parents definitely took us out of the neighborhood to see the world. So it’s always still an act for me. I’ve never been in a gang. I’ve been in two fights in my life, sixth grade and fourth grade. I know you’re supposed to take your earrings off and put rings on. Maybe I read that in a novel. It’s fun to pretend to be rough and tough, but I’m not. I’m a puppy.” ▼

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