

Broccoli & Morning Glories

a poem by Rose Jermusyk

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Characters

DAUGHTER, a vegetarian of five years and Italian-American descent

FATHER, Daughter speaking in the voice of her father who is a 6-foot-3-year-old

Scene

DAUGHTER: My father

is Roman Catholic,

a Rosary-Carrying Catholic,

which is to say

Very Catholic.

The smiles I get from this guy

are never sweeter

than when I'm in the kitchen

making him food.

FATHER: Oh, sweetie,

DAUGHTER: he says,

just home from a long day at work.

I'm at the stove.

Water's boiling in the pot.

Something's simmering in the saucepan.

FATHER: Oh, sweetie,

DAUGHTER: he says grinning

from ear

to soon-to-be-offended ear,

FATHER: Whatcha makin'?

DAUGHTER: Pasta with broccoli.

FATHER (*suddenly, irrationally furious*): Goddammit, Rose, god-fucking-dammit!

Why don't I eat veggie lasagna, Rose?

Why do I never fucking eat

veggie fucking lasagna?

DAUGHTER: Because there's no meat?

FATHER (*yelling, like he does*): Because broccoli is the suckiest fucking thing
about veggie fucking lasagna, Rose!

Goddammit every day I get up at the ass-crack of dawn

to go keep a bunch of dick-cheeses in line

and then I get home late

and Mommy isn't even fucking here

and you're making fucking broccoli.

Fucking.

Broccoli.

DAUGHTER (*miming and mimicking*): He throws his briefcase on the ground,

FATHER (*still yelling*): Goddamn mother-fucking shit-fucker, Rose,

DAUGHTER (*still miming and mimicking*): and kicks it across the room.

FATHER (*full-on temper-tantrum*): I'm a nuclear engineer.

Nuclear fucking engineers eat real fucking food.

Goddammit, Rose. Goddamn mother-fucking shit-fucker.

DAUGHTER (*mostly not bothered*): He storms off to gorge himself on Netflix

while I put the finishing touches on the broccoli sauce,

(*miming adding ingredient til end of stanza*) which I've been spiking

with cayenne pepper

since before he pulled his car into the driveway

and throughout the whole of his tirade.

(*nostalgic*) My father's bedroom door
was across the hall from mine as a kid,
and when he got up in the morning
my little legs
would make a mad dash for his side of the bed,
(*proud*) still warm.

(*not bothered*) I fix him a bowl of pasta
with broccoli
and hand it to him,
standing between him
and his queue,
and remembering

(*nostalgic*) I was so small
I couldn't even take up half his spot
and still
the only place for him to sit
as he put on his socks
was right on top of my feet.

(*still not bothered*) My father takes the bowl from me
in exchange for
the sort of scowl you'd expect from
an overgrown, petulant toddler
who is only eating what you give him
out of a combination of
a lack of options
and
disdainful protest.

I do not stay to see his reaction to that first bite.
I'm back in the kitchen

fixing myself a bowl
and remembering

we moved to a house
that had made
mad dashes to his side of the bed
impossible,
but I would tap on my window
overlooking the driveway
until he looked up at me to wave.
My father used to call me Morning Glory
because I always
made sure to wish him a good morning.

The lawn of that house
was full of weeds
instead of grass anywhere,
but by the side of the house
that spring
a pile of morning glories grew.
The only lovely thing in the yard.
They were soft
and purple
and a vine I imagined one day hugging the house
just as I liked hogging my father's side of the bed.

I went on imagining it
til the day he asked me

FATHER (*calm and loving*): Hey, sweetie,
you gonna help me in the yard today?

DAUGHTER: Doing what?

FATHER: Killing the morning glories.

DAUGHTER: (*pauses stunned and confused*)

You wanna kill the only flowers in the yard?

FATHER: They're weeds, Rose.

DAUGHTER: (*pauses to consider*)

Are we planting new flowers?

FATHER (*annoyed*): No, the weeds'll kill'em.

DAUGHTER: (*pausing to think and then speaking with hope*)

So why can't you just leave them

and someday

they'll grow

and climb on the house

like a cottage in a storybook?

FATHER (*incredulous, Italian-style*): Because those fucking stories always end

before they get to the part where the goddamn weeds

climbing on the side of the fucking house

make the goddamn roof cave the fuck in, Rose.

DAUGHTER: (*pauses to absorb before continuing*)

I opted to stay inside

and heard him grunt

as he hacked away at the

soft,

purple

blooms

so he could better grip

and tear out their roots.

He came inside

wet with sweat,

brown from dirt

and a natural swarthy I did not inherit,

grinning from

ear to ear.

The morning glories?

Dead.

Gone.

Obliterated.

My father stands before me
as I finish filling my bowl.

His bowl

(*mock incredulous*) has been licked clean,
(*excitedly*) pasta obliterated.

FATHER (*calm and loving til the end*): Oh, Sweetie,

DAUGHTER: he says,

FATHER: I don't know

how you did it,

but you managed

to cancel out the suckiness.

DAUGHTER: I hand him my bowl,

now his second helping

(*shrugs, still not bothered*)

I know.