



Epistle to My Lord Concerning My Sons' Future Spouses

BY BETH ANN FENNELLY

Because I will not be around forever, Lord,
I find myself considering those who will feed my sons
after I'm gone, Lord, for my sons are joyous eaters,
joyous and prodigious, but care not for the ways
of the kitchen, despite my attempts at instruction.
Forgive them, Lord, they know not how to cook.
Still, they're accustomed to eating well,
so I think, Lord, humbly, Lord, that you might
bear that fact in mind when choosing their spouses,
be they female or male or non-binary,
because I'm down with that, Lord, and believe
you are, too, for God is love, hallelujah.

Even when my sons were young, Lord,
I educated their palates, even when they were toddlers
I gave them ingots of Parmigiano Reggiano,
from Parma, Lord, the real deal, its name tattooed
on the rind. Yea, I have let them gnaw, Lord,
its salty nutty sweetness calving onto their tongues,
I have taught them to savor that grainy crunch
of tyrosine crystals which the ignorant fear is mold
but is in fact the glory and gift of the aging process,
praise be. And I've steadied many a child's paw
on the planchette of parmesan, careful
to clear their fingers from the microplane's teeth,
to shower a host of angels into the fettucine's
steamy embrace. Yea, my sons have feasted, Lord,
and your name has been exalted on their tongues.

Lord, smite my enemies who are even now indulging wicked thoughts about my extravagance, and swinging the word “privilege” about like a rolling pin looking to connect with a skull, for verily I shop at thrift stores, drink tap water, and, at this very minute, am sporting socks with holes, and furthermore please remind those haters that when you were chilling at Simon the Leper’s crib and allowed that woman to anoint your head with perfumed oil, Lord, prompting your disciples to meanly observe that such pricey oil might instead be sold to feed the poor—you defended her, saying she prepared you for your burial: *For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.* And thus, Lord, when my sons have me not always, grant them spouses, but not the kind who buy green shakers of powdered, shelf-stable “cheese food product” containing plant cellulose—aka wood pulp—that Kraft dares to call “parmesan.” That shit is nasty, Lord, can I get an Amen.

If I may press my case, Lord, and surely I don’t deserve more than you’ve already given me, but your ways are unfathomable, Lord, and you’ve proven yourself generous beyond reason, so perhaps you will see fit to select for my sons spouses who not only buy real cheese but transmogrify it through holy fire; yea, gift them talented home chefs, who come to the marriage bed bearing cookbooks that fall open to recipes freckled with grease. Such chefs, I submit, would be ideal, but—if I may—

perhaps do not send them chefs especially skilled in the art of beef bourguignon, Lord. Beef bourguignon being my signature dish, Lord. Beef bourguignon being my sons’ favorite to such an extent that my eleven-year-old once asked if he’d be allowed to come home from college when I serve it. Consider that, Lord, I pray. Consider my youngest growing anxious at the prospect of missing my beef bourguignon seven years hence, and you’ll understand that his future spouse best not attempt it, Lord, because mine is just that good.



In truth, Lord, there exist a few recipes
I make so well and so often that my sons' spouses
might avoid them altogether, simply because
their attempts can't live up to mine, Lord,
which is no fault of their own, I simply got there first,
and shaped my sons' taste buds in my image.
I admit I have ruined my sons for certain meals
prepared at the hands of others, ruined them
with my willful, profligate excellence.
I'm thinking here of those meals my sons eat
until their cheeks flush, eat until their foreheads
shine, eat until their breathing grows labored,
eat until they unbutton their pants,
which is disgusting, Lord, and flattering, Lord,
in equal measure. Disgusting and flattering,
the way, clearing the table, they turn their backs
and hunch to lick their plates. Maybe ten dishes, Lord,
I've brought to that pinnacle at which plate-licking,
though lowly, is justified. Ten dishes, or maybe
twelve, Lord, that we might proactively retire,
to prevent the spouses of my sons from bitterness,
for verily you warn against the gall of bitterness.

Lord, when these spouses confide to their friends,
"I don't even *try* to make lasagna, because his mom's
was *so* delicious," heed them, Lord, and bless them,
bless them in their humility and reward them
with many offspring. These fifteen dishes—twenty, tops—
I will enumerate, Lord, in a subsequent epistle.

Your faithful servant, etc.

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