

Rositsa from the Valley of Roses

Even though Rositsa was named for the flower that was the most famous one in Bulgaria, and even though she lived in the central part of the country where roses grew so well, she had no interest in roses or anything else that had leaves. Her family had high hopes she'd eventually take over their rose water producing company, but she didn't want anything to do with it.

What Rositsa loved was learning, and not just what she learned in school. Whenever she worked with the roses, she put some of her earnings away to buy books. She liked books about history, books about the stars and planets, and books about people, especially famous Bulgarians. It made her a little sad that very few people that lived outside of Bulgaria knew anything about all their famous Bulgarian writers, freedom fighters, musicians, dancers, and scientists. Some Bulgarians developed computer technology that was revolutionary. There were also Bulgarian theologians, saints, scholars and architects that had done amazing things.

"When I grow up, I'm going to go to college. After I graduate, I'm going to write books about famous Bulgarians for all the world to know about," Rositsa often told her parents.

"We can't spare you from the rose water business for all those years of college. I'm sorry honey, but we're hardly making it as it is," her mother often said.

"Then I'll win a writing contest or some other contest and give you the money to hire someone else. But I have to go to college, Mama, I just have to go."

Rositsa continued to work at her family's rose business, helping to collect the flowers, and picking off the petals and bringing them to the processing center where they were used to make rose water. The rest of the year she helped with packaging the rose water and sending them all over the world to fill orders. She helped care for the rose bushes too but her heart wasn't in it. All the time she pruned or weeded, she was thinking about the book she was reading or something she was writing.

"There's a spelling contest in Plovdiv next month," her best friend Katya told her one day in November. "Why don't you enter it?"

“Yes, I think I will,” Rositsa told her. “I entered a writing contest last month. I wrote an essay about Ivan Vasov. That one is an international contest and if I win the whole world will learn about the man who wrote the story about how the Bulgarians gained freedom at the end of the nineteenth century.”

“Why did you write that story rather than how we survived communism? Why don’t you tell the world how hard our parents and grandparents had it, and then how hard they worked to develop businesses or get an education or do any of the other things?”

“I’ll write about those things too, but I wanted to start with my favorite author, my hero.”

“You’re such a dreamer, Rositsa, but don’t ever change!”

Rositsa entered the spelling contest and won third place. Just as she promised, she gave the money to her family.

“We can’t keep this money,” her mother told her as she handed the money back. “What our family needs is you, your help.”

The next day Rositsa told Katya about her conversation with her mother. “I feel horrible even thinking about going to college. But I also don’t want to give up my dream. I thought parents wanted to help their children have a better life.”

A few weeks later, Rositsa found out she didn’t win the writing contest. She didn’t tell anyone, even her friend Katya, but her mother asked her about it.

“Maybe I’m not smart enough to go to college.”

“You can’t give up on your dreams just because you don’t win a contest, especially with so many people entering it. Can I read your story?”

After Rositsa’s mother read her entry, she told Rositsa that she was wrong to push her to continue to work at the family business.

“You need to go to college. We’ll be okay honey.”

“I’ll have summer off and I can help then.”

“That’s when we need help the most.”

“I’ll help, I promise.”

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Rositsa went to college and so did her friend Katya. They both studied accounting. During her sophomore year, she entered another writing contest. She wrote a story about how her family's rose water business and this time she won.

While she was in college, Rositsa went to see a movie about Jesus. After the movie, some missionaries from America talked about what God did to save all people. Rositsa knew those stories well and by the end of the evening, she became another Bulgarian believer, one of many from her dear homeland.

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After she graduated from college, Rositsa and Katya started an organization to help Bulgarians start their own business. She also helped her family reorganize their company to make things more efficient and to increase advertising and sales. Last year her father carved a wooden plate with her face in the center and below it the words (in Bulgarian) "Our best rose, planted by God in the garden of our family, bringing beauty and joy into the lives of many."