Ms. Willner - 2003

I distinctly remember my amusement when I first discovered the whimsical array of forks, knives, and spoons. I was almost proud that I worked as a busgirl at a restaurant that embraced incongruous silverware. Though the knives varied awkwardly in size, the prongs of the forks were slightly askew, and the spoons were scratched with age, they barely made a sound when thrown upon a table. Eight place settings could be transported with no difficulty when a large party arrived unexpectedly; those sets would quickly be in their designated areas before a full minute passed. Being a naturally clumsy person, imagine my joy when I found that the featherlike cutlery hit the ground without alerting my manager or the patrons.

Nothing made me happier during my working hours than the convenience and true beauty of that quirky silverware.

But then, one day, tragedy struck.

Suddenly, the source of my happiness was gone.

Horrified, I opened the dinnerware drawers and was immediately blinded by something unfamiliar: new sparkling SILVER forks, spoons, and knives.

When I demanded an explanation, my boss nonchalantly informed me that the old silverware that I had loved so dearly was simply not Duner’s material any longer. Apparently, Duner’s material now included cumbersome cutlery. It didn’t take long to figure out that although these new eating tools were certainly luxurious, their splendor was merely a disguise to hide the many disadvantages that came along with them. They were massive and heavy, making it quite a chore to carry more than four place settings at once without dropping at least one knife. These knives made hideous noises when they fell, attracting the evil death glares of my manager and the condescending sighs of impatient patrons. While I had been able to carelessly toss the old silverware onto the tables without a second thought, I now had to consciously place the new utensils down in order to avoid disrupting the atmosphere. I also now had the maddening job of polishing the silverware, since it attracted water stains like a white shirt attracts ketchup.

Although these new shiny things were more pleasing to the eye and my boss, I frequently found myself reminiscing about the good old mismatched days.

When life was simple and carefree.

When the silverware wasn’t silver.

When I could sneak a bite of steak from the kitchen instead of bashfully picking up yet another fumbled fork.

I learned from this dinnerware disaster that every convenience has its drawbacks. Although the old silverware was more easily cleaned and transported, it was dull, ugly, and heterogeneously sized and shaped. The new silverware was impressive: blatantly more reflective of the fancy food served at this upscale restaurant. Yet it was bulky, heavy, and difficult to keep spotless.

This observation is not confined to the restaurant: it is encountered every day in our society. A scratched and bent fork is often overlooked when placed next to a shiny and expensive one. When people judge each other by appearances, they make this same mistake, choosing someone whose faults cancel out their virtues. Physical traits may sometimes be far from perfect, but inner beauties are abundant, even if they don’t always match up with expectations.