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Goodbye Little Plastic Forks, Hello Elegant Insanity

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A ring with class, D2
FREE (!) lodging, D3

Goodbye little plastic forks, hello elegant insanity

By GLENNA ANDRADE
Special to The Bee

Since the children had behaved admirably at the photographer's, I crooned in my best Miss Pat's Playroom voice, "Mommy is very pleased with you. I'm going to take you out for a special treat. We're going to have lunch at a real restaurant." It was not every day the three children were well-dressed and well-behaved, so I could not help but be proud.

As I look back, however, this was to be more my treat than theirs. I'd braved McBurgers often in the past where I'd contended with flying straw wrappers, squirting packets of catsup, and standing in a long line only to find it was the wrong line to return an onioned hamburger. I welcomed the vision of having my three adorable children accompany me to an elegant restaurant. I would not wait upon them, a waiter would attend upon us. We'd dine with silver and china instead of plastic forks and foam dishes; we'd hear the ardor of Sinatra instead of "Order twenty-five." And too, I chose an establishment which elicited a sweet wave of nostalgia, where I had in my more frivolous days rejected a sophisticated and handsome suitor. I did not tell them, of course, but I would recapture the tranquility which came with being childless and single, if only for a brief hour.

I congratulated myself on my timing as we entered The Garden Room; it was 11:30 and the restaurant was very nearly empty. The children stood by my side, wide-eyed and respectful.

"Look at all those big hankies," Keith whispered.

"Those aren't hankies," Kevin scoffed. "They're tablecloths. You know, like we have at Thanksgiving."

Because I was engrossed in the soft strains of "Close to You," I neglected to explain that we must wait to be seated. Karen and Kevin sidled away and Keith tugged at my hand, whimpering he wanted to go too.

"Come back here!" I hissed as delicately as I could.

"I want the seat by the window," Kevin called, slinging himself into a nearby booth.

"Come and look at all the lettuce and the radishes and the cucumbers and these white stringy things that look like worms . . ."

"Get over here, Karen. Keep your hands out of the salad bar."

The headwaiter appeared from nowhere. "Would you like to be seated? I've a spot near . . ." He turned around slowly. "Or, how about over there where your son is bouncing up and down."

"Thank you, yes. That would be fine." I was determined to maintain my composure and control my children simultaneously.

We were each handed a menu, which was rather superfluous since Kevin was the only child who could read. As it turned out, I didn't need to recite much of it to the two younger ones; they both knew exactly what they wanted.

"Never mind reading anymore, Mom," Karen interrupted. "I want pie."

"But Karen, we're here for lunch not dessert."

"You said we could have anything we wanted, and I want berry pie and ice cream and hot chocolate."

"Yes, that's true. But I meant for you to have something good for you, too."

Overhearing our dialogue, the waiter asked, "Would you like to know the specials today?"

"No," Karen snipped. And repeated her order.

"Karen," Kevin scolded. "You must wait until he asks."

"But I'm hungry," she said, sliding down in her seat until only her nose showed.

The waiter smiled indulgently. "And what would the one under the table like?"

Keith scrambled back into his

Insanity

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seat. "A hamburger, please. With no onions."

"I'm sorry, sir. We don't have hamburgers."

"Mommm," Keith whined, "I want a hammm-burrrr-gerrr."

I scanned the menu again.

The waiter sniffed, "We do have an exquisite ground sirloin patty. Fresh, tender . . ."

"That would be fine," I sighed. At this point, I was becoming agreeable to anything as long as it would be served without too much delay.

Kevin glanced up from his menu and frowned. "What's a quickie?"

It took a moment for my blush to subside as I translated to the waiter, "He means quiche." When I told Kevin that it was made with eggs, he deepened his voice, "Well then, I think I'll have the steak and lobster instead."

It took another moment for my palor to subside after I calculated the cost.

Coughing politely, the waiter said, "I'm sorry, sir, but the steak and lobster is only served at dinner. Now then, we have some delicious spaghetti on the child's menu."

While we awaited lunch, the three children developed the anticipated facial tics, knee jerks, and muscle spasms, so to keep them occupied, I reviewed table manners. "Keep your napkin on your lap. Do not slurp your drink. Rest your knife on the edge of your plate when you're done." Unfortunately, the napkins turned into parachutes, the water into whirlpools, and Kevin used his knife as a catapult, flipping a pat of butter past Karen into the next booth.

I had just sipped my wine when Kevin spilt milk down his trousers. Warning the children to behave, I marched him off to bathroom. When I returned, the food had arrived and the children appeared accommodating, so I began to relax.

atop the spill in front of me. "There now," he crooned, "That'll make it all better." The children bit their lips and rolled their eyes towards the ceiling.

"Thank you, anyway," I replied, mustering all my remaining dignity, "But we're leaving now."

All of a sudden, a handsome gentleman in the next booth shouted, "Damn, there's butter on my pants!" Jumping up he scowled to his companion, a young blonde, "Damn, it must have been those kids." And in a strangely familiar voice he added, "What kind of an

Upon salting my food, however, I discovered they'd replaced sugar in the salt shaker, and reaching for my wine, I found the glass empty. I stifled their sniggers with an icy stare and equally cool words. The table was hushed as we finished our meal.

Soon, the lunch crowd began filling in, and the busboy hurried up with my coffee, happily humming "I Only Have Eyes For You." Thankfully, he didn't notice the seats had acquired a bad case of cracker-crumb dandruff, the carpet had been repatterned into a tweed, and the candle centerpiece now displayed various spaghetti wicks. When I tilted the easy-pour container, the lid splashed into my coffee, sugar flooded the cup, the hot liquid streamed into the saucer and slurped onto the table.

"Oh, dear," the waiter said wryly. "It looks as if Mother has had an accident!" The children smiled graciously. "Would you like another cup?" he asked and flipped open a clean napkin, smoothing it

idiot mother would bring three children to a nice restaurant?"

Thirty pairs of eyes stared at me as I slunk towards the cashier. Keeping my back towards my once-rejected suitor, I prayed he wouldn't recognize me.

I had just paid our check when I heard the echo, ". . . damned kids," reverberate across the room, but now the voice belonged to the waiter. "How am I going to get my tip without making a mess?" he wailed to no one in particular.

Glancing over, I saw that Kevin had placed the money in a tumbler of water and turned it upside down.

I rushed the children out the door, pretending not to notice his predicament, concentrating instead on the words of the background music, "Three Coins in the Fountain."

"Thanks, Mom, for a wonderful lunch," Kevin said, more out of a desire to appease than to please.

"This was real fun," Karen snickered. "Let's do it again soon."

"Tomorrow? Mom?" Keith asked.

"No," I replied. Any mother who would take three children out to a nice restaurant a second time had to be "out to lunch."