

To the Beauties Go the Spoils

Lynn Ermann April 1, 2001 Updated: Feb. 1, 2012
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Back in the '80s, "Saturday Night Live" ran a sketch about a black man who goes undercover as a white man and discovers a world infinitely more privileged than he ever imagined.

I thought of this sketch recently as I was walking home from the ice cream shop with an absurdly towering, sprinkled, triple-flavor swirl of frozen yogurt in an extra large cup, all given to me at half price. The guy behind the counter had taken my order after being somewhat disdainful with his previous customer -- an overweight older woman.

When he turned to me, he smiled broadly, as if I were an old friend. "What kind of ice cream do you want, dear?"

I pointed to the chocolate frozen yogurt.

"No other flavors?" he asked.

Just one was fine.

"But you want more flavors! As many as you want -- and sprinkles!"

He ended up giving me three flavors in an extra-large cup, no charge, When he handed it to me, he nodded, still grinning, and said: "Anything for you. You're so pretty!" That was when I realized I am living a truly charmed life.

When I got home, I reported this discovery to my best friend, David, who is apparently not living a charmed life -- by his own account. "It's nice to hear someone admit it finally," he said. "I mean, you get sick of attractive people saying they don't get treated differently."

David was just brimming over with stories to the contrary. Like, just the other day, he had been at the bank in a long line with this other guy when a good-looking woman entered and wandered around for a moment. Out of nowhere, an employee appeared and offered to personally escort the woman to a teller.

"Hey, what about us?" the guy behind David said, annoyed. Then he yelled, "I wish I were a cute girl!"

I am a cute girl.

There. I said it.

I've never written about it because I've never admitted to myself that my appearance does give me advantages. After all, people don't come right out and say, "I'm giving you this because you're pretty." Besides, I'm usually obsessing over flaws, and don't notice.

Various family in my formative years has led me to think of myself as the underdog. But, in reality -- as the ice cream shop is my witness, I'm treated better than other people in countless situations, ones that I don't even think twice about.

It's a condition I am sure to appreciate in about 15 years. My aunt, an attractive but "older" woman, told me recently that she was on a business trip and was assigned a tiny cramped room instead of the one she reserved. The next morning, her young, attractive colleague sauntered into the lobby and cheerily exclaimed, "They have the best suites here!"

Here's the problem: an entire class of privileged people walk around utterly oblivious to their advantages.

Admittedly, discussing the perks that come with good looks (and youth) may annoy readers. Only isn't the following [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) quote infinitely more irksome: "I never look at myself and say, 'What a pretty girl!' Never. I mean,

I've grown into myself, and like myself now, which I didn't then, but I never think I'm fabulous or beautiful. I think I'm . . . OK."

Not to single out Paltrow, who was being polite and probably honest. It's just that however she feels about her appearance (and I'm sure she does feel insecure -- that business breeds insecurity), she is a beautiful woman to the outside world and is treated in kind.

But if a Hollywood starlet won't own up to her obvious good looks, where does that leave your average cutie? Humility may be good manners, but it is also part of an illusion -- the classless, we're-all-alike society we pretend to inhabit. As we all know, no one has any unfair advantages in this society and everything is determined by hard work and perseverance.

I propose that actresses on late night talk shows start really being humble and say, "I got the part because I have longer legs than the other girl, but I really can't act very well." Singer Jewel can write songs about batting her baby blues to fame, and [Elizabeth Wurtzel](#) can pen a tome titled, "Why Most Depressed People Just Slit Their Wrists, But I Got a Book Deal."

Doesn't real honesty include acknowledging the easy parts of life? The fact is, some of us get more ice cream. The least we can do is admit it.