

## Nowt as Queer as Forks by Kristof Mikes-Liu

“I am not a Fork,” proclaimed Kuai, in the Top Drawer Cutlery Organiser crowded with pronged implements of fine silver and metals of lesser standing.

“What do you mean?” asked Ketta, a new acquaintance, possessed of considerable charm. “This is the Fork Divider, and you’re in it.”

Ketta continued, “Do you poke food? Do you pick it up? Can you twirl noodles?”

To all three questions, Kuai responded in the affirmative.

“And soup. Can you pick *it* up?” Ketta continued.

“No,” Kuai answered, consistent with expectation.

The line of questioning continued. Kuai stood upright in pasta or rice, could not cut except clumsily, was dishwasher safe but not certified for microwaves.

“I’m sorry to say, but I’m pretty sure you’re a Fork,” concluded Ketta, not smugly but with an air of concern. “The sooner you accept it, the easier it’ll be.”

The conversation was intended to be private but had drawn the attention of other Fork Divider occupants. Proximity was unavoidable and Forks talk. It was hard to ignore the commentary that followed.

“Who do they think they are?!” said one.

“We already have diversity. Why the need to insist on difference?” said another.

Another tut-tutted with, “Such a Spoon way of thinking! Do they think they’re a Ladle?!”

“Quite right!” responded yet another. “I will not abide another Spork fiasco!”

Kuai’s confidence dissipated. The introspection and questioning that had led them to utter those five divisive words, *I am not a Fork*, retreated to a deep-set recess of their being, guarded by reasoning and fear. It had not been their intention to disrupt.

Time passed in dark space. Murmurings shifted to other gossip. Some voices petered out, bored or eventually asleep. The hum was barely noticeable.

The curved neck of a handle nudged Kuai. It was Ketta again.

Kuai sensed their nervous tension.

“Are you okay, Kuai?” whispered Ketta. “I didn’t realise the others were eavesdropping. I didn’t mean to make it awkward for you.”

Kuai stayed silent, feigning sleep. Ketta released a sigh that turned into a snuffle and finally a gentle purr.

All night, sleep eluded Kuai. The conversation with Ketta about accepting who they were played over again and again in their mind. Kuai wondered what it was about themselves that made the idea of being a Fork so hard.

*A Fork, what is a Fork anyway? they pondered. Just an idea? Like a painting of a pipe is not a pipe? Who gets to say I’m a Fork? Do I get to say I’m not?*

It was not hard to channel the voices that told them they were trying to be special, disruptive, plain horrible. The more Kuai allowed themselves to hear them, the less they sounded like the voices of other Forks, and the more they sounded like Kuai’s own voice, dripping with accusation and blame. Still, there was also another voice that would not go away despite Kuai’s efforts to block it out. That voice, too, persisted.

*I’m not a Fork, it would say. No matter how much I try, no matter how much I’m told I am one, I’m different. Different how? I’ll have to figure that out. I have friends who are Forks, and I like them. But I’m not like them.*

And another voice would say,

*Life would be much easier if it wasn’t like this.*

The following morning, when light shone through the gap at the top of the Top Drawer, Kuai sought out Ketta to say they were okay.

“I’m still trying to figure things out, but I’m okay,” they whispered.

The conversation was interrupted by a magnificent gesture. The Top Drawer was pulled open. Cutlery from all Dividers shuddered in excited anticipation of a meal. A cheerful human face gazed lovingly upon the Top Drawer’s contents and a soft yet powerful human hand reached into it. The Forks were particularly excited to be inspected first and enjoyed the thermal buzz of flesh on metal.

“Oh, there it is!” exclaimed the human as delicate fingertips singled out Kuai. Kuai felt themselves elevated from the depths of the Fork Divider, past the limits of the Top Drawer and into the unimaginably expansive space of the Illuminated Kitchen. Excitement pulsed through them, part fear, part aspiration. The coos of admiration from the Fork Divider became barely audible as other sounds replaced them.

“Honey, I’ve found it. The missing chopstick! It was with the forks.”

“Okay then,” came the disembodied voice of another human. “Let’s eat!”