1939

Silver Secrets for Santa

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol19/iss4/11

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DEAR MOTHER,

Christmas is, practically speaking, just around the corner, and I've a birthday in two weeks as well. All of a sudden here at school everyone has taken an interest in flatware, choosing patterns and buying pieces. And I'm right with them. Now's the time to start, or we may end up with no sign of silverware.

When Great-Aunt Hattie asks you what I want for Christmas, please tell her it's flatware I'm after. It will be a good start, and I'll love her forever if she'll give me a cover or two, you know, the complete setting for one person's place.

I snooped about a nondescript store last week, looking for a bargain in silver. While browsing around I came across Margie, and she hooted when I revealed my mission. She said it's pure folly to buy flatware from an unknown concern. It isn't just the guarantee that counts; it's the name behind it.

Margie has just completed her set, and she has 20 kinds of pieces for what she presumes will be an average income and average sized family. I remember that Jane had 34 pieces in her set, but that's for a super penthouse with lots of white tie entertaining on the calendar.

I want silver that I'll be proud to hand down as an heirloom, silverware in every sense of the word. You have plated ware, don't you? After my encounter with Margie I went to a reliable retailer and asked him the relative prices and wearing qualities of sterling and plated ware. Sterling costs quite a bit, and he assured me that the plated ware is in lovely patterns and wears like the proverbial cast iron.

I remember grandmother telling me always to judge sterling by its weight; the heavier it is the better and the longer it will last. With silver plate the shank should be firm and steady to indicate a durable base. A smooth finish, well-covered curves and tips indicate heavy plating, too.

But sometimes I wonder how grandmother could have concentrated on her vitamins when she had to eat with a veritable rose garden. We're streamlined now, and we've heard art principles until we live in a glorious mist of line, form, color and texture. Designers believe that the decoration, if any, should follow the structural lines of the piece. No laces or flower gardens, just simplicity.

The principle of simplicity doesn't make the choice any more difficult, either. I saw pattern after pattern...
Flatware chosen in good taste adds the last smart touch to a table setting.

of flatware that was strikingly plain. You could use it for 25 years and still be eating "with" style and loving it.

When I buy my table linens and china I want rich-looking pieces—rich through lack of detail. I've always looked with longing at service plates that have only a bit of design around the edge. That's another reason I want plain silver, I guess, because you know china and linen and silver and even centerpieces should all harmonize to make the kind of table that literally takes your breath away when you look at it.

There are lots of people who think that plain silver will scratch badly. All silver scratches, I learned, unless it is entirely covered with design, and I'm going to be watching to see that mine will have the best of care. With all the talk about marrying plain flatware, perhaps I'll even invest in a set of those gaily colored handles on knives and forks that can be purchased at the nearest five and ten.

This is what I've decided to get for my flatware set of eight:

1 pie server
8 butter knives
8 dinner knives
8 butter spreaders
1 carving fork
1 carving knife
8 luncheon forks
8 dinner forks
8 salad forks
8 oyster forks
1 serving spoon
1 serving fork
8 five o'clock teaspoons
1 sugar spoon
8 large soup spoons
4 tablespoons
8 iced tea spoons
8 dessert spoons
8 teaspoons
8 bouillon spoons

Joan chose her pattern last week and was so excited about it she began right away on her set. The tiny shapes of the coffee spoons intrigued her and she bought two of them, and then got a knife just to be practical. I think I shall begin with teaspoons and then knives and forks, because they seem so essential. When I get through with those I can start having fun with all the odd pieces that you can't help but love.

I'll pick out my silver pattern and send you the number and name of the manufacturer. I hope you'll like it.

Your loving daughter,

Barbara

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