

## NOTES

Love never has been, nor will ever be, synonymous with perfection, so how is one expected to endure a long-term relationship? In Bridget Grace Sheaff's charming romantic comedy, *The Next Table*, we meet two strangers, who, in a chance meeting at a restaurant, just might have found their unexpected soul mate. Or maybe they haven't met their special someone. Only time will tell. This romantic comedy is perfect for that loveable pairing of the cute girl next door and the all-American boy next door and should be entered in either Duo Interpretation or Duet Acting.

*Two cafe tables sit side-by-side onstage. TOBY is already seated at one table, his back to the other table. ERICA sits in the seat directly behind him, so they are back to back. When she pulls out her chair, he turns around, they make brief eye contact and share a smile, and then she sits. They both read the menu. After a second, ERICA sneezes.*

*Beat.*

TOBY: Cute sneeze.

ERICA: What?

TOBY: You have a cute sneeze.

ERICA: Oh. Thanks? You should hear me cough sometime. *(She quietly rolls her eyes at herself in a "What is wrong with me?" way and goes back to reading the menu.)*

*Beat.*

TOBY: Gesundheit, by the way.

ERICA: Thank you.

*Beat.*

ERICA: Do you speak German?

TOBY: What?

ERICA: Sorry... Gesundheit is German. I just... never mind.

*Beat.*

TOBY: It's just a thing people say when you sneeze.

ERICA: Right, like "Bless you."

TOBY: Right.

*Beat.*

TOBY: If I had said "Bless you" would you have asked if I was a priest?

ERICA: No.

TOBY: Okay.

ERICA: Are you?

TOBY: What?

ERICA: A priest?

TOBY: No... I just... you sneezed.

ERICA: Right. Yes. This is my fault.

TOBY: For sneezing?

ERICA: Kind of.

TOBY: That's silly.

ERICA: Yeah.

*Beat.*

ERICA: Gesundheit is a fun word.

TOBY: I was just thinking that.

ERICA: Yeah. (*Realizing she's interrupting*) Sorry. I'll let you... go back to... not being a German speaking priest or whatever.

*Beat.*

TOBY: Have you (*clearing his throat*) ever been here before?

ERICA: Like... do I come here often?

TOBY: No, like, have you ever gotten the salmon?

ERICA: Oh. Yes, actually.

TOBY: How was it?

ERICA: I got food poisoning.

TOBY: What!?

ERICA: Oh my—I was totally kidding. I really didn't. That was just a stupid joke.

TOBY: Okay.

ERICA: Really, I don't know why I said that. It just slipped out.

TOBY: Yeah, okay.

*Beat.*

ERICA: You're not going to get the salmon now, are you?

TOBY: I'm thinking no.

ERICA: Really, I didn't... get food poisoning

TOBY: I'm kidding. I wasn't going to get it anyway.

ERICA: Oh. Good.

*Beat.*

ERICA: Soup is good.

TOBY: Which soup?

ERICA: No, sorry, just... in general, I find the soup to be... good... most of the time.

TOBY: Ah.

*Beat.*

TOBY: Are you eating with anyone?

ERICA: No.

TOBY: Oh?

ERICA: No, I like eating at restaurants alone.

TOBY: Is that a joke?

ERICA: That one's actually not a joke.

TOBY: Oh.

*Beat.*

ERICA: How about you?

TOBY: I don't know if I ever thought about it.

ERICA: I meant, are you eating with anyone?

TOBY: Oh, no, I mean yes, I mean... not right now.

ERICA: I can see that.

TOBY: I'm on a blind date.

ERICA: Ew.

TOBY: I'm sorry?

ERICA: (*lying*) Nothing... I just sneezed again... is all.

*Beat.*

TOBY: What's wrong with blind dates?

ERICA: I really sneezed! I wasn't—

TOBY: My friends set it up for me. I've never met her.

ERICA: That's, like, part of the point... right?

TOBY: Yeah... I guess you're right.

*Beat.*

TOBY: She could be perfectly wonderful.

ERICA: Or she could be awful or... a Republican... or eat cotton balls or something.

TOBY: Eat cotton balls?

ERICA: People do weird things.

*Beat.*

TOBY: If she turns out to be the love of my life, you're going to feel pretty stupid.

ERICA: I feel pretty stupid all the time, not much changes that.

TOBY: Sorry... I shouldn't have—

ERICA: (*laughing*) You were kidding, I can appreciate that.

*Beat.*

TOBY: At least my joke was funnier than saying that the salmon gives you food poisoning.

ERICA: Are you still on that?

TOBY: I'm just saying.

ERICA: You should focus on your date.

TOBY: She's not here yet.

ERICA: Well, then maybe focus on the fact that she could very well have already come in and left the second she saw you.

*Beat.*

TOBY: Do people really do that?

ERICA: I was kidding!

TOBY: No, like really, do they really just leave before getting to know you?

ERICA: I don't know. I mean... I can imagine it happens. But I only ever imagine the *worst* things happening, okay? So, don't take my word for it. I don't know you, I don't know her, I'm just going to sit here and eat soup because I happen to like most soups.

*Beat.*

ERICA: Though, it's a little hot outside today for soup, so/ maybe I'll get—

TOBY: I'm not like you, okay. I'm an optimist. I give most people the benefit of the doubt and assume they wouldn't judge a book by its cover.

ERICA: Sure.

TOBY: And I think if she did show up and she did walk out... then it's her loss. Not my loss. It's her loss.