

# Food for Thought

Written by Daisy Griffin

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### **Characters:**

**Sarah:** She is a skeptic and a realist, but hasn't always been that way, and still clings to her childhood belief in happy endings. She is most comfortable, but perhaps not happiest, when things are familiar and easy. She has been with George since college, but something about their relationship has been bothering her and she hasn't been able to be honest with him or even herself about it.

**George:** An accountant and Sarah's boyfriend. In life, he tends to take the path of least resistance and just go with the flow. He isn't one to question his circumstances, and one thing he has certainly never questioned is his love for Sarah. He takes her to dinner in order to propose to her, and while he is a little nervous, there is no doubt in his mind that she won't say yes.

**Waiter:** An enigma. A smooth-talking waiter with the air of a black and white movie villain. He sits back and watches the strangeness of the food he serves take its toll on the people who eat it.

**Customers 1, 2, 3, and 4:** Restaurant patrons.

*Lights come up on a cafe. There are three tables each with two chairs, the center one slightly in front of the stage right and left ones. CUSTOMERS 1 and 2 are seated at the stage left table, CUSTOMERS 3 and 4 is seated at the stage right table, and GEORGE and SARAH are seated at the center table.*

SARAH: You know, I'm actually glad you had the idea to mix up date night this week- this place looks incredible!

GEORGE: I'm glad you like it. I just hope the food is as good as Mark said it was.

SARAH: Me too. But if it isn't we can always go back to Antonio's!

GEORGE: Sarah, you know how much I love you, and love going to Antonio's, but we have been going there pretty much every Friday night since college, and I am getting a little sick of eggplant parmesan. Besides, I wanted tonight to be special.

SARAH: Why? (*joking*) It's not our anniversary or something, is it? (*serious*) Oh my god, did I forget our anniversary?

GEORGE: *(flustered)* No, it's not our anniversary. I just... thought you deserved a special night out! For... being an amazing girlfriend.

SARAH: *(relieved)* Oh. Ok. *(she picks up the menu)*

*(As SARAH reads the menu, GEORGE takes a small box out of his pocket and checks that the ring inside it is still there.)*

SARAH: George?

GEORGE: *(hastily returns the ring to his pocket)* Yes?

SARAH: What exactly did Mark say about this place?

GEORGE: That is has a romantic ambiance and that the food is "life changing."

SARAH: Ok. Well, there don't seem to be any actual food items on the menu.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

SARAH: All the choices are vague words like "Bravery," and "Hope," and "Childhood Memories."

GEORGE: Really? *(he opens up his menu and reads it)* Huh. You're right. All it says under appetizers is "Déjà-Vu" and "The Desire to Feel Less Deeply About Things."

SARAH: And look at the motto on the top: "Whenever you feel like life is unbearable and illogical, just remember that it is, and someday you'll die, so you might as well eat good food until then."

GEORGE: That's... depressing.

SARAH: *(teasing)* Well, I guess it's just what you get when you take restaurant recommendations from your SoulCycle instructor.

GEORGE: He did use to be a chef, you know.

SARAH: At McDonald's.

GEORGE: He worked in a well-established fine casual eatery.

SARAH: Honey, that means he worked at McDonald's.

*(the WAITER has now re-entered and is serving a half-empty glass to CUSTOMER 1)*

WAITER: Along with your order of "Personality", I must ask you the following question: Is your glass half empty or half full?

CUSTOMER 1: My god, did someone already drink out of this?

WAITER: That is also an acceptable answer. *(The WAITER exits again)*

SARAH: What on earth? George, I think we should maybe just go to Antonio's.

GEORGE: Already? Come on, aren't you a little curious to see what happens?

SARAH: *(reluctantly)* I guess so.

GEORGE: *(turns around to talk to CUSTOMER 3)* Excuse me, do you have any idea what's going on with this restaurant?

CUSTOMER 3: I wish I could tell you! All I know is that I ordered "Patience" two hours ago and it still hasn't come.

CUSTOMER 4: *(staring at SARAH and GEORGE intently.)* Are you two dating?

GEORGE: Um, yes, we are.

CUSTOMER 4: Well, I just thought you should know that "love" is nothing more than a chain of chemical reactions in the brain. Society tries to tell you otherwise, with its endless glorification of romance and its excessive amount of love songs, but that's just a load of crap. Love's not poetic, or magical, it's an evolutionary mechanism developed to ensure the survival of the human race.

SARAH: Excuse me?

CUSTOMER 3: I'm sorry, she's been acting like this since she ate too much of that Cynicism earlier. *(turns back to CUSTOMER 4)* Deborah, we've been married for ten years!

*(The WAITER returns)*

WAITER: Good evening and welcome to The Sans Cafe! My name is Jean-Paul, and I will be your server tonight. If you have any questions about the menu, please let me know.

SARAH: Actually, we have quite a few questions about the menu. Like, how exactly is it possible to order "Beauty," or "Knowledge," or "That Cozy Feeling You Get While Inside During a Thunderstorm?" Are those names for different dishes? Why doesn't the menu explain what's in them?

WAITER: I see that you are confused. The answer to your perplexity is, however, quite simple. We serve exactly what it says on the menu, nothing more and nothing less, and as in most things in life, you will probably never understand it completely but you might learn to pretend you do and just move on.

*(CUSTOMER 2 suddenly stands up, holding a cell phone)*

CUSTOMER 2: That was my agent- I'm heading to Hollywood! *(she and the friend she is sitting with embrace enthusiastically, and she calls to the waiter)* Thank you, thank you! I'll be sure to give the cafe five stars on Yelp!

GEORGE: Wow. What did she order?

WAITER: Fame.

GEORGE: I'd like some of that, please! What does it cost?

WAITER: Only \$5.25, your privacy, freedom, happiness, and sanity.

GEORGE: I see. In that case, I'll pass.

SARAH: George, can you stop with this nonsense, please? This is ridiculous. You can't condense abstract concepts into concrete objects! And definitely not into gourmet meals!

WAITER: Or can you?

SARAH: *(after a moment of confusion)* No! No, you definitely can not!

GEORGE: Sweetheart, he's obviously kidding, so don't take it too seriously.

WAITER: I'll give you two a minute. *(steps aside)*

SARAH: Fine, maybe I am taking this a little too seriously.

GEORGE: *(teasing)* Maybe just a teeny bit. But if you really want to leave, that's ok. I wanted tonight to be memorable, so I tried being a bit adventurous. But I'm realizing now that that's not who we are. We're not adventurous or spontaneous- we have a going to the same restaurant every week kind of relationship. And that's what I love about us. We don't need to try new things, because we're already happy with what we've got.

SARAH: *(suddenly cold)* Oh. I see.

GEORGE: So? Should we go?

SARAH: You know what, I actually feel like trying something new is exactly what I need right now. *(to the waiter)* Excuse me, can we get... *(scans menu)* two "Mystery Meals" please?

GEORGE: *(in a harsh whisper)* What are you doing?

SARAH: I'm being spontaneous.

GEORGE: But we don't even know what's in the "Mystery Meals!" They could do something completely crazy to us!

SARAH: I thought you said the waiter was “just kidding” and that I was “taking this too seriously”.

GEORGE: *(coldly)* Alright. Whatever you want.

SARAH: *(to the waiter)* As I was saying before my boyfriend interrupted, I would like the two most mysterious “Mystery Meals” you have to offer.

WAITER: Excellent. Two “Mystery Meals: coming up. *(he places a basket of breadsticks on the table)* And here is your complimentary Angst and Existential Despair to start you off. *(he then quickly exits. SARAH takes a breadstick and is about to eat it when GEORGE interrupts her)*

GEORGE: Wait!

SARAH: What?

GEORGE: Are you sure you want to eat that? Didn't he just call it “Angst and Existential Despair?”

SARAH: Who's the one “taking it too seriously” now, huh? It's only a breadstick.

GEORGE: Alright, fine. *(he grabs a breadstick and he and SARAH stare each other down as they each take a bite)*

SARAH: So, how was work today?

GEORGE: Oh, just the usual endless number crunching. We got a new vending machine in the break room though, so I guess something remotely interesting happened for once. *(an odd look comes over him and he puts his fork down, suddenly serious)* Do you ever think about the inevitability of death?

SARAH: What?

GEORGE: *(suddenly clutches her hands in desperation)* Sarah- I'm not ready to die.

SARAH: *(confused)* Of course you're not ready to die- you're not even middle-aged.

GEORGE: Sure, but is there any real guarantee that I'll be alive, say, five years from now? Or even five minutes from now?

SARAH: No, I guess not. But there's no use in fixating on that when you know that it's far more likely that you'll just keep on living. *(GEORGE gets up dramatically, and moves to the center of the stage)* George? Where are you going? *(the lighting changes to put GEORGE in spotlight)* Honey, you're in the middle of a very nice restaurant, it's not the time to have an expositional speech. *(the WAITER enters with a violin)* Oh, you have got to be kidding me.

GEORGE: *(to the audience, very dramatically)* What did you want to be when you grew up when you were ten?

SARAH: *(to herself)* Why couldn't we have just gone to Antonio's?

WAITER: *(wistfully)* I wanted to be a writer.

CUSTOMER 3: I wanted to be an acrobat.

CUSTOMER 1: A detective.

CUSTOMER 2: A princess.

CUSTOMER 4: A world famous dog trainer!

*(GEORGE, the WAITER, and the CUSTOMERS all turn to SARAH questioningly)*

SARAH: *(giving in)* I.... think I wanted to be a ballerina?

GEORGE: *(to the audience again)* I wanted to be an astronaut. *(WAITER begins playing emotional music on the violin)* I would gaze up at the stars at night, and tell myself that one day, I'd be up there, looking back on Earth. I would be exploring the universe, making new discoveries, making a difference. And now look at me- I'm an accountant. No kid dreams of



someday dedicating his talent to a soulless corporation, clinging to little things like a new vending machine to try and find light or meaning in an inconsequential life. And sometimes I look out our apartment window to try and see the stars, and the lights of the city have washed them out into darkness.

*(the WAITER stops playing and bows along with GEORGE, as CUSTOMERS 1-4 leaps out of his seat to applaud. The lighting returns to normal as the WAITER exits, and SARAH stands up, upset and hurt.*

SARAH: Well, that was all lovely and poetic, but do you really believe that? That just because your job isn't as exciting as an astronaut's, your entire life is meaningless?

GEORGE: Don't get me wrong, it's a nice, comfortable job that I'm lucky to have, but I don't want to die having done nothing more meaningful with my life than be an accountant.

SARAH: What about me, George? Am I not enough meaning for you?

GEORGE: *(snaps back to reality and goes to her)* No! No, of course not. I'm sorry, I didn't- *(takes a breath)* I don't even know if life has any inherent meaning, but if it does, it has something to do with love. And I love you. I don't want my job to be my legacy, I want you, and my life with you, to be my legacy. That's actually why I brought you here tonight. *(he starts to take the ring out of his pocket)* To ask you this-

*(the WAITER suddenly returns with SARAH's meal, plopping it down in front of her seat )*

WAITER: Here you go! One "Mystery" Meal.

SARAH: Oh! Thank you!

GEORGE: What about mine?

WAITER: Oh, my apologies sir. The cook had to taste a bit too much of his new dish today, and that's been affecting his performance.

GEORGE: And what dish might that be?

WAITER: "The addition of crucial plot points," I believe.

*(The WAITER exits. At this point, the other customers have also exited the cafe, leaving GEORGE and SARAH alone.)*

SARAH: So, um... what were you saying?

GEORGE: It can wait a bit. Go ahead, try it. *(they return to their seats and she takes a tentative sip, of her drink, then grimaces)* What does it taste like?

SARAH: Like.. a crisp autumn morning and the emptiness of memories you know you've forgotten.

GEORGE: Really?

SARAH: *(she takes another, larger sip)* No. It tastes like vanilla.

GEORGE: *(laughs in relief)* Of course.

SARAH: *(she takes a bite of her meal, as GEORGE pulls out the box and puts it on the table. A strange look comes over her)* George?

GEORGE: Yes?

SARAH: I don't like change.

GEORGE: *(joking)* You don't like change? Like nickels and dimes kind of change?

SARAH: George, I'm being serious. I don't like change. Like the kind of change when I was seven and we started buying Corn Flakes instead of Cheerios or when I was ten and my mom painted over my pink bedroom walls with white without asking me, or when I moved in with you

because I realized that having a philosophy major was not a guarantee that I would be able to support myself with a stable job.

GEORGE: Ok, so you hate change. That's ok, I hate change too! And nothing has to change between us.

SARAH: *(gently)* I'm not done. You see, change is terrifying, because it means- it means the unknown. It means you'll be stumbling through a darkness so impenetrable you can't even be sure if you're going forwards or right back where you came from. But sometimes you have walk head-on into uncertainty because all you're certain of is that you can't stay in the light anymore. And you just have to hope that you come out the other side a better person than you were, or at least a wiser, more complete one. That may have not made much sense, but the point of it is...  
*(she takes a deep breath)* George- I think we should break up.

GEORGE: *(gets up, showing her the ring box)* Sarah-

SARAH: I'm not sure, not definitely. But, at the very least, that question that I'm pretty sure you're going to ask me- I don't think you should. Because I will probably say yes. But I won't mean it.

GEORGE: Sarah, you don't know what you're saying-

SARAH: Why are you an accountant?

GEORGE: What?

SARAH: Why did you choose to be an accountant, why do you keep doing it, if you really hate it so much?

GEORGE: I... don't know. I'm good at it. Sometimes I feel like it's the only thing I'm good at.

SARAH: See, that's just it. You don't lead a fulfilling life by only doing the things that come easy to you. Just because something is comfortable or what you've always done, doesn't mean it's the best thing for you as a person. It doesn't mean it's the best thing for us. And we'll talk about this more later, but right now, I need to pee. Like really badly. *(she kisses him on the cheek)* I love you. *(she exits)*

*(GEORGE slowly sinks back down into his seat, looking at where SARAH just exited. The WAITER returns with a bowl of chocolate ice cream)*

WAITER: Sorry about the wait- here's your order: "Exactly What You Need Right Now." *(he places it in front of GEORGE)*

GEORGE: *(still looking at where SARAH exited)* What on earth was in that mystery meal?

WAITER: Honesty.

GEORGE: Oh. *(he tears his eyes away and examines the dish suspiciously)* So what is this really? *(sarcastically)* Will this make Sarah still want to be with me? Or make me suddenly happy again, or rich, or famous?

WAITER: No. It's just ordinary chocolate ice cream.

GEORGE: *(takes a bite)* This *is* exactly what I need right now. Thank you.

WAITER: You're welcome.

*(The WAITER exits, leaving GEORGE eating ice cream alone as the lights fade to black)*