



A GREAT SPILLING OF PIZZA SAUCE

Sasha Pearl



Identigo, “identity-to-go”—a pop-up pre-employment background check agency. It’s in an old office building on Wall Street in Kingston where a teenager rolls my finger tips over a glass pad, capturing my loops and whirlpools into a computer database, my tiny ridges, my identity. Some palmists read only the finger prints of the hand—the frequency waves of personality. In this case, the only requisite is that my personality is not a felon.

I am awake thinking about a few things besides getting fingerprinted. My pinhead-game console of whack-a-mole for minor matters. Like, is this beer recalled? Should I order the car part I need (wiper motor) from carparts.com, or pick it up from the salvage yard? Is that even the part I need? I am thinking about repairing the ceiling plaster that has caved in in the guest room at my mom’s house (where I stay), and that I don’t really

I’m sleeping before I go get fingerprinted for a job I don’t know if I want. The dispatcher says the office where I go to get fingerprinted is in a “sketchy” part of town. He is very worried that I won’t find it, or that if I do, I won’t go inside because it doesn’t look like a legitimate agency. I’m going to

know how to do that but I watched some YouTube videos. I need herbs, I need accessories, I need doctors’ appointments, I need mesh tape and joint compound. I need to talk to a loan officer at a credit union. In other words I am considering lack and disrepair—the potholes in my life that need filling and smoothing over before they betide convenience chaos.

I visited a psychic last summer. She was a real piece of work. Her cat was named Princess. She said god wanted us to meet. She told me I have a heart of gold and I like to look at the moon. She knew this because I was visiting a psychic parlor. She said I’m not a hypocrite so I have a lot of enemies and that I should pray for them. She asked if I ever considered buying a condo. She said some spirits are haunting me but she didn’t know their names right then. She said don’t call my friends when I don’t know what to do—“they don’t know what they are doing either.”

The psychic told me to talk to my grandma and her sister and to ask them for help. They are dead, which is about the only state of people I feel comfortable asking for help from: my capacity for interdependence diminishes above ground. They were two nice Jewish girls from an orphanage in the Bronx. I lit some candles to talk to them and the wicks turned toward each other as the candles burned. A yellow and a green candle (I know who is who), standing on a plate, the wicks glowing and probing fire like paranormal proboscis. They looked like they were fighting over how to influence my destiny from the beyond place. They loved books and the ballet

and fighting with each other and being right. They would drink too much wine and argue about the difference between being a democratic socialist and a social democrat. Then my great aunt would knock over a chair and demand to be driven to the train station. I was not attentive to them in life, and their stories about the movement or the party, or their old names, their gold fillings, their chin hairs, knick knacks from Egypt, or the way one always smelled like cantaloupe and the other like musk. What would they want for me now?

I have a few other things on my mind too. Most relate to jobs. I'm going to drive a lady to the doctor who suffers from extreme light sensitivity. I called her, she was gardening at night. She gets up at 4 pm and she wears a bucket on her head when I drive her places because headlights make her sick. There are many types of light that impact her negatively. She needs me to go into the dentist's office while she waits in the car and make them turn off all the lights in the office, then lead her in. She brings some old fashioned lamps with her, so I am to plug those into the wall in the exam room where she will consult with the dentist. She says everyone needs everything to be *normal normal*. "And... I just CAN'T do normal," she says. Everyone is always asking if she is really sick or just crazy, as if she is trying to trick them by being exactly who she is.

The psychic says I am attracted to eccentric people and unusual situations and that it's mostly made for an interesting life, but that I'm easily led and often in my own way. I haven't said "no" very much. I don't know how she nailed this one, or what star told on me. I am thinking about a dream I had where I was standing on a ladder spilling pizza sauce on everything by accident. If you've ever spilled pizza sauce you know it happens in an instant but takes the rest of your life to clean up. It leaps into corners.

I woke up to a faint sound I thought was the upstairs neighbor having sex and I listened really closely until I realized it was a dog snoring at the foot of the bed.

I am thinking, no, I'm dreaming, about some other things: My sleeves are full of twigs but my shoes hold no stones.

The hole in the ozone will heal itself by 2040 but the Great Salt Lake will be dry in 5 years. Bitcoin mining computers produce heat that is harvested to grow flowers in controlled environments. The nervous system is designed to seek connection, and to reflexively protect itself—scanning always

like a surveillance system, looking for threats and soul-to-soul contact. Life is a great filling and emptying, a great skittering across the ice, a great spilling of pizza sauce from an unnecessary height.

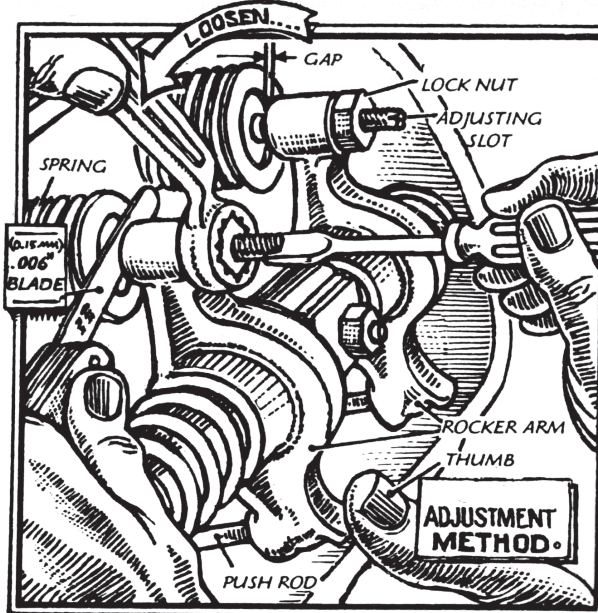
My stepfather who is now 82 sits at the table making a drawing of the goddess Nike.— "Quite a terrific little goddess if you ask me," he says.

He keeps a reserve of six or seven gallons of Stewart's ice cream in the basement chest freezer which he calls "the archives." Because of his physical condition he's not able to climb down the stairs to get to it, so he's always making formal requests to me, his archivist.

Sometimes with his hands folded on his round belly he'll stare off into space. When I ask him what he's thinking about he replies: "death."

I put my ear to a seashell and I hear two pedal steels and a ping pong table. When the Doritos truck passes I feel thunder and see lightning. From my dream ladder, the waterfall of pizza sauce, where Adonis and Aphrodite met, I'm patching the ceiling with my data and my accidents. My victories smushing up into the lathe—hooking to the ceiling of striving, supporting the dead weight, the heavy matter that I am falling asleep under.

■ *Sasha Pearl is the author of Bus Poems and II Plus (McSweeney's, 2022)*



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