

Pachyderm



by R. W. Schneider

LOU
SASHA
ALEX

somewhat younger
somewhat older
enjoys his work

Lou and Sasha are on their first date. They're eating on the terrace of an unusual and somewhat challenging restaurant in Port Jefferson, New York. I've supplied gendered nouns and pronouns for them, Lou female and Sasha male, but these can be adjusted to suit the actors cast. The server, likewise, can be of any gender.

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A picnic table on a restaurant terrace. Spring.

LOU

It sounds like you're looking for somebody to be your lock screen.

SASHA

What's a lock screen?

LOU

Jeez, don't you have a phone?

SASHA

Yes, I have a phone.

LOU

Does it have a crank on the side?

SASHA

I'm not that old, Lou. I may seem antediluvian to someone of your tender years, but I don't type two spaces after a period and I *do* own a smartphone.

LOU

The lock screen is what you see when you turn it on.

SASHA

That's called a "lock screen"?

LOU

Yeah. Where you make a pattern or press your finger.

SASHA

I thought it was a "splash page"—a high board for plunging into cyberlies.

LOU

A splash page is for a web site.

SASHA

And you think I'm looking for someone to draw a pattern or enter a code—or press a finger into me?

LOU

Not to enter the code or press the finger—just be the screen.

SASHA

Like a sign that says, “no trespassing”?

LOU

Yeah, exactly. You want unauthorized people to keep out—except for your lock screen person, of course. She’d be authorized.

SASHA

But she’d have a code that other people could enter, or a pattern to make? You’d be the keeper of my pattern?

LOU

Only if I agreed to be your lock screen—which, frankly, sounds like pretty shitty.

SASHA

I’m not aware of looking for a lock screen. I’m acutely aware of looking for lunch. Does this place have waiters?

LOU

“Servers.” Good luck finding one.

(A server appears instantly.)

SERVER

Hi, I’m Alex and I’ll be your server today. What can I get you?

SASHA

Perhaps a menu?

SERVER

No problem-o! Here you go!

(The server puts two rubber duck bath toys on the table and exits.)

LOU

How cute!

SASHA

But not very helpful. Aren’t you hungry?

LOU

I’m alright.

SASHA

Are all the servers smart alecks?

LOU

“Smart alecks”! There’s another term I haven’t heard in a while!

SASHA

Antique vocabulary is part of my charm.

LOU

Know any ancient verbs, or just nouns?

(Sasha squeezes the rubber duck in front of her nose. It squeaks.)

SASHA

Don’t crack wise!

LOU

Oh! That’s good! To crack wise. Regular verb: I crack; you crack; he, she or it cracks wise. How ancient did you say you were?

SASHA

My geologic period is in my profile. You read it and contacted me anyway.

LOU

You didn’t lie about your age?

SASHA

No. Did you?

LOU

No, actually. I didn’t.

SASHA

Smart move: no need to make yourself more of a fledgling than you are.

LOU

“Fledgling” nothing! I’m an egg! *(a beat)* So... we didn’t lie about our ages. Have we got some weird honesty thing going? Like a cult, or something?

SASHA

The tiny cult of those who don’t lie on their profiles! Do we do it on principle or from lack of imagination?

LOU

I think with me it's just a habit. Lies are hard to keep track of.

SASHA

Maybe your cult involves ancestor worship, too? Or veneration of your elders?

LOU

People who are scared of age are scared of death. I'm not.

SASHA

Scared of death?

LOU

Scared of either.

SASHA

But you don't like lock screens?

LOU

No. And I don't want to be one.

(Pause)

SASHA

Have you eaten here before?

LOU

Several times.

SASHA

How do we order?

LOU

It depends on how badly you *want to* order. How *orderly* you are and your tolerance for *disorder*.

SASHA

They're serving other tables. I saw a plate of sauerkraut go by. And please don't say it was probably ordered by a sourpuss.

LOU

Or a kraut?

SASHA

An ethnic sobriquet on our first date? Am I being tested?

(The server brings two glasses of water and pours a beer for Sasha. He exits.)

SERVER

There we are...

LOU

You didn't order that.

SASHA *(sipping)*

But I'm happy to have it. I'd be even happier if I had something to eat.

LOU

You could order the sauerkraut. It's called *choucroute a l'alsacienne*.

SASHA

French major?

LOU

French minor. My major was sarcasm.

SASHA

It sounds like you're looking for someone to be the butt of it.

LOU

Does that scare you?

SASHA

Disons...que j'appréhende.

LOU

Touché.

SASHA

What do you want?

LOU

In my victim? In the special someone who'll be the butt of my sarcasm?

SASHA

What do you want *to eat*? If the server comes back, the subject of lunch might come up.

LOU

You honestly think he'll come back?

SASHA

If he does, I'll gently allude to our hope that someone will fitch food from the kitchen and bring it to our table, this being how restaurants traditionally operate.

LOU

Sarcasm! You take me back to my college days.

SASHA

Not that long ago...

LOU

The Ruben sandwich is edible. Stay away from the fish and chips.

(As if possessed by the same thought, Sasha and Lou pick up their rubber ducks and squeeze them solemnly. The server suddenly appears.)

SERVER

Ready to order?

SASHA

Two Ruben sandwiches. One with a side salad...

LOU

... and one with fries.

SASHA

Another beer for me... and a glass of *Château Neuf du Pape* for the lady.

LOU

He's kidding. Just water for me.

SERVER

Two Rubens, one side salad... You know the Ruben comes with fries anyway...

LOU

I'll eat his fries. Ketchup, please.

SERVER

Got it! So you want the side salad on the side?

SASHA

As its name implies, yes.

SERVER

Righty-o! Is that all?

LOU

That's all for now, thanks.

SASHA

Thank you, Alex.

(The server vanishes.)

SASHA (CONT)

That wasn't so hard.

LOU

You were masterful.

SASHA

But *you* knew what to order.

(The server reappears. This exchange is FAST.)

SERVER

Dark rye or marbled?

LOU

Dark.

SASHA

Marbled.

SERVER

Righty-o!

(The server vanishes.)

SASHA

Maybe the thing you resent about lock screens is the supposition that people *have* a code, the notion that you (or anyone, for that matter) can be unlocked if someone knows your pattern or presses their finger in the right place. If you've been dating online for a while, you may be tired of people trying to hack into you—guessing at your pin and getting it wrong.

LOU

That's dating hell, alright. Is there an alternative?

SASHA

We could face the obvious fact...

LOU

The elephant in the room?

SASHA

The pachyderm in the pantry...

LOU

Is there a pachyderm in the pantry? That would explain a lot of things.

SASHA

The pachyderm is that we're locked. We've always been locked. We'll go through life mostly on our own. Nobody will ever fully know us and we'll never know them.

LOU

Lonely.

SASHA

But more dignified. People could stop drawing random patterns and expecting other people to burst open like daffodils in the spring.

LOU

Okay, so we're doomed to fundamental solitude. Doesn't that invalidate the whole point of dating? I mean, why are we here?

SASHA

I guess because there are degrees of companionship that don't require a code.

LOU

Nobody has my code. I never knew my code. I've forgotten it.

(The server reappears with a glass of wine for Lou.)

SERVER

Here's your merlot. And for your side salad, French, blue cheese, Thousand Island or vinaigrette?

SASHA

Blue cheese.

SERVER

I'll get that right in for you.

(The server vanishes.)

LOU

You'll gag on the blue cheese. I did.

SASHA

Thanks for the warning. Why did we come here if the food is bad?

LOU

The clients of this restaurant are either hosting a job applicant—sometimes several completing applicants—or going on a date with someone new. The service is unpredictable, the food is uneven, and the seating is uncomfortable. It's the secret of their success.

SASHA

Unusual business model.

LOU

How does this person handle ambiguous situations? How does he deal with unreliable people? What's his frustration threshold? You learn more about people here than at any restaurant I know.

SASHA

So it's a test? A test you're subjecting me to?

LOU

I've seen people red in the face here. I've seen people scream. You did relatively well; you only assaulted me with a rubber duck.

SASHA

I understand that you wanted to get to know me—to learn my limitations—and that’s flattering—in a way—but wasn’t there a gentler way?

LOU

It’s my treat. You can choose next time.

SASHA

If there is a next time.

(The server reappears with the check.)

SERVER

I’ll just put that right here for you, no hurry at all. Thanks for coming in today!

SASHA

No food?

(But the server has vanished. Lou picks up the check.)

SASHA (CONT)

Let’s eat someplace else.

LOU

Suits me. *(Reading the charge slip.)* But this place was quite reasonable. And the Merlot is quaffable.

SASHA

We got off lightly. I’ll leave a tip.

LOU

If you insist, but really, it’s my treat!

SASHA

I bequeath my side salad to the pachyderm.

(Lou leaves cash on the table. Sasha adds a tip.)

LOU

I know she’ll be grateful.

(They exchange smiles and leave. A moment later the server enters with two Ruben

sandwiches and a side salad.)

SERVER

Well! How do you like that? Some people...

End of Play