



# Pizza Surprise

Dave King

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Life in Beatty

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# About the author

Dave King, retired high school English teacher, married for 30 years (to the same woman for all 28 years), and father of three children was born in Topeka KS but currently resides in Jefferson City, Mo. In 1990, Dave and his wife, along with their two very-young children, left KS and moved to Taichung, Taiwan where they lived for the next 5 years. Before returning, they had adopted their third child. Since being delivered into this world, he has lived in four states and on two continents. It is hoped that his experiences in all those places has positively influenced his writing.

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# Pizza Surprise

It was February 1976, just a few minutes past 6 PM, when Greg pulled into the driveway at 1315 Elm and parked his Dodge Challenger behind the Mercedes-Benz 450SL. The snow that had fallen a few days before was nearly gone. Greg turned off the car and let out a huge sigh when he looked at the Benz. He lusted after that sleek animal, fantasizing about getting behind the wheel of the 5.0 liter, overhead-cam speedster and hoping that he could make it yield to his demands. He was quickly thrust back into reality when his mother's head appeared out of the front door of the three-story house.

"Greg, honey, will you grab the garbage can? It's there on the curb. Bring it with you before you come inside? Brad forgot to get it." Greg grimaced, opened the door to the Challenger and stepped out onto the freshly-resurfaced blacktop driveway, just missing one of the piles of snow that he and Brad had created while shoveling off the driveway.

"What? How about telling the Incompetent Infant to come and get it himself? My hands are full with these ridiculous books!" he yelled, holding up the Trigonometry and British Literature texts so she could see them.

"Please do your brother a favor and bring it in, Gregory dear." Mack McGuiley's oldest son grimaced a second time in reaction to the combination of his name with that

word that rhymes with one of nature's most-maligned 4-legged creatures. He looked again at the Benz and then gently set the books on the hood of his father's hi-octane phaeton. Smiling sarcastically – and making sure that Mrs. McGuiley was still looking – he pointed at where he had placed the books and walked to the curb. In less than a minute, the favor for his little brother had been done, and the galvanized waste can – emblazoned with “1315 Elm” (courtesy of black spray paint left over from repainting Mack's BBQ grill) – was placed in the garage next to a powder-blue Honda 4-stroke street bike. “Gotta get that baby ready to race real soon,” Greg whispered. The Honda was Greg's vehicle of choice when the weather was conducive for parking the Challenger, and racing it a primary source of entertainment when his mother didn't harp about racing it being so unsafe.

“Bradley, you're gonna wash my truck next week as payment for fetchin' the can!” Greg yelled as he – via the garage door – entered the 4000 sq. ft., 5-bedroom, 3.5 bathroom three-story Tudor that the McGuileys had called “home” for over 20 years.

“Real funny, dude. I bet the junker don't make it to then... I saw black smoke comin' outta the tailpipe when you pulled up,” Brad replied. Greg retaliated by launching the Brit Lit book at him; it landed at his little brother's feet, depositing its loose contents onto the shiny, hardwood floor.

“Nice job, doofus! Better clean it up before Mom sees it!”



“Let me worry about that, Bradley... you should worry about whether or not you’ll wake up tomorrow morning.” With that said, he then grabbed the 10-year who was not much smaller than the high-school senior and tackled him; they landed on top of the book and its related handouts. The brothers rolled back and forth on the floor, smacking first into the couch and then into its matching black wrought-iron and mahogany coffee table. Ceramic coasters from that table tumbled off and hit Brad squarely between the eyes. He feigned tears, and Greg let him go then offering his brother his right hand and pulled him to his feet. Greg was glad that Brad was 10 and not 6 and hoped that Brad was thankful that he had not gotten hurt more seriously.

“Now, now, little brother,” Greg said, “Even though there’s blood, it’s not that much... you’ll survive.” The wrestling match ended just as Sally McGuiley entered the living room.

“Greg, thanks so much for getting the garbage can. And, by the way, Shawna called as you were pulling up. I told her you’d call her back after you had some dinner. Oh, and when you talk to her, would you please ask if she could stay with Brad tomorrow night while your Father and I go play cards at the club?” Greg glanced at his brother as their mother’s attention was drawn to a car back-firing in the street. He took the opportunity to wipe off the blood that lingered on the bridge of Brad’s nose, moving the evidence of their little tussle from his brother’s face to his own jeans.

“Can do, Mom... and she will probably remember the last time she ‘babysat’ our little demon here: she still has

the bruises.” He looked at his watch. “I better call her back right now being it’s Friday. I think we had plans tonight but I just can’t remember. I’m gonna get a-hold of Shawna now, Mom. Try to keep the Smurf out of the study until I’m finished talking to her, okay?” Greg exited the living room and went into the kitchen. He grabbed a pitcher of lemonade from the refrigerator and poured himself a glass, plopping in the ice cubes after it was already full.

“Honey, please don’t be on the phone too long,” Sally asked as she followed him into the kitchen. “Your father’s expecting a very important call from Mr. Smythe.” Greg nodded his head as he strolled back through the living room on the way to the spare bedroom that doubled as his father’s office-at-home. Just as Greg closed the study door, Mack McGuiley entered the living room. With the grace of a defensive tackle, he placed a dry kiss on his wife’s right cheek and then sat down in the Chaise lounge that was to the left of the picture window. Mrs. McGuiley, tucking her legs under her body, positioned herself on the couch that faced the window. Her attention was then caught by the coasters that were supposed to be on the coffee table. Without saying a word, she stood back up and returned them to their proper place. Glancing then at her husband who had buried himself in the afternoon newspaper, she released a pregnant sigh, picked up a copy of *The Ladies’ Home Gazette* and pretended to read.

“Hello? Is Shawna there? This is Greg... Greg McGuiley.” There was nearly two minutes of silence on the other end after Shawna’s mother said she would try to find her,

“Greg? You still there? Sorry you had to wait so long. I was in the garage playing with Rags.”

“It wasn’t that long. Mom said you called, so... I’m callin’ you back.” Greg tried to remember the last thing he and his girl friend of over three years had talked about.

“Good! I’m glad you did! Where have you been anyway? Aren’t you usually home by 6 on Fridays?” Thinking that this could become a long inquisition, Greg sighed, then sat down in his father’s leather office chair, putting his feet on the desk in the process.

“We... the guys and I... we did some runnin’ around after practice. That’s all. Tim, Jay and I we... we just drove around. Practice got over early, so we had some extra time.”

“I know that practice ended early tonight, silly. That’s why I called your house before 5 in the first place. Since you are finally home, I was wondering if I could meet you somewhere?” There was silence as Greg thought about what she might have in mind. Just what does she want to talk in person that she doesn’t want to bring up over the phone?

“What do you have in mind?” It was the only thing he could think to ask.

“In my mind... that is such a funny concept... what is in my mind? Anyway, I have in mind to see you face-to-face for the first time in ages and actually have a regular-type conversation. You know? Something more substantial than just saying ‘Hi!’ when we pass in the hall. That is what I have in mind.” Sensing her irritation, Greg quickly came up with a plan of appeasement. “And there’s something I

simply must show you.”

“Hey, that sounds great!” That did not come out like he had intended. “Ah, I mean, the part about us meeting somewhere sounds great! I want to see you... and talk to you too, Shawna...” and then the hard part “...and to maybe apologize for being, well, for being so distant...” yeah, that’s the word, he thought, “To apologize for being so distant the last couple of days.” There, that should do it, he assured himself. Greg felt that he had the situation under control. “How about this? We head to the Pizza Zone and grab one of those cozy tables close to the kitchen door?” He was confident that she would go for his idea.

“Uhm... I don’t know... we had pizza for dinner just last night... what kind of pizza do you think we should order?”

“Any flavor you want, lady! It’s doesn’t matter to me... and it’s my treat!” There was a short pause; maybe she was thinking about all the different toppings available at the Pizza Zone? Greg utilized the quiet to formulate another idea. “And how about this: I drive over to get you?” Might it be possible? Could he dare? The idea of asking to borrow the Benz suddenly produced a line of sweat on his upper lip.

“It would be quicker if I just met you there. Your house is but three blocks from the Zone, and you’d have to come all the way over to the other side of town to get me. Let’s just do it my way, okay?” Greg let out a sigh then hoped that Shawna hadn’t heard it. Asking to borrow the Benz would have to wait for another day. She had won... again.

“Mom! I’m leaving for awhile. I’ll be back before 11! Or

11:30 at the latest!”

“Sal, what did he say? What is he up to now?” Mack asked from behind the paper.

“Okay, dear, just remember to take your front door key. Your father and I will already be in bed by that time, and the garage door will be locked.”

“Where’s he going? What is that boy doing now?” This time he put down the paper and looked at his wife of over 25 years.

“He’s going to see Shawna. Dear, by the way, what was Mr. Smythe going to call you about?”

“Smythe? What does that old windbag want? I have no idea... what time was he supposed to call?” Mack picked the paper back up and then said softly but not too softly for his wife to hear: “If the boy hadn’t been in such a hurry, I’d given him the key to the Benz.”

In less than 15 minutes Greg was at the Zone located at the corner of 17th and Pitchford, the largest of Beattyton’s three pizza parlours. But Shawna had arrived 5 minutes earlier. She was sitting at one of the tables in the back, accompanied by a pitcher of Coke and two ice-filled glasses, Greg glanced around the half-full restaurant, pretending to not notice her. They appeared to be the only high schoolers in the Zone. She stood up, waved her arms like she was shoo-ing away a swarm of angry honey bees, and then quickly sat down. Greg laughed a bit too loudly for the surroundings then jogged right to the table. “Excellent table selection! Don’t lose it... I’ll be right back... gotta go to the can,” he said, then started walking backwards, waving his

right hand in the process.

“I already ordered our pizza,” Shawna continued.

“Okay, so what are we having?” Greg nearly yelled in response.

“Sausage. How’s that sound?” Greg put his right index finger under his chin and stared at the tobacco-stained ceiling tiles directly overhead as he opened the men’s room door. “Perfect! I knew you’d approve.” Shawna then smiled, a fragile yet exuberant expression, one that revealed that not only was this person sure of who she was, but was sure of where she was headed. Right after Greg disappeared into the men’s room, Shawna took a brush out of her purse. She quickly pulled the pink plastic through her hair, feathering back the silky blond strands, then letting them fall naturally over her shoulders. Greg ran back to the table just as she was putting the brush away.

“You caught me. Now my image is ruined. Please promise to never tell anyone that I primp in such an overt manner,” she said. Greg looked around and shrugged.

“You’re such a kidder.” He wanted to play along with the confession. But what did she say on the phone? That she has something to show me? “Your public display of vanity is safe with me... scout’s honor.” He held up the traditional Boy Scout hand signal, the thumb holding down the pinkie while the three middle fingers stood at attention. “I think I’m doing this with the proper hand... I think.”

“You were a boy scout? I can’t picture you being a boy scout...”

“Yeah, but not for long. I gave it up in junior high...”

didn't care for all that outdoors... smoke and dirt. Camping out in the woods, that kind of stuff. Actually, I have to confess... I hated camping. I hated setting up tents, cooking my own food, fighting off the bugs. The worst part about it was sleeping on the ground. Man, there ain't nothin' like sawing logs in your own bed... in your own king-sized bed!" They both laughed but Greg's was too loud for the setting.

"What else can I get ya besides a sausage pizza?" the waitress said, interrupting Brad's dissertation on the finer points of camping. "There's a special tonight on cheesy bread sticks." Their waitress, name-tag emblazoned with "How can I help you? Patty," was middle-aged and wore black, thick-rimmed glasses with a thin silver safety chain.

"Why do we need anything else? Won't the pizza be ready soon?" Shawna asked.

"Problem," the waitress replied, allowing her glasses to slip down the bridge of her nose. "There's a big party at the college and we're way behind on making their pizzas. If only you had called in your order ahead of time. So how about some bread sticks?"

"Fine," Greg said. The waitress forced a business-like smile and was about to walk away when he pointed towards the kitchen.

"But since our pizza isn't even in the oven yet, how about adding extra cheese and sausage? Since we have to wait so long?" He asked, displaying a Cheshire-cat smile in the process. "No extra cost, right?"

"Maybe... I'll see what I can do," replied Patty the

waitress. She then pushed her glasses back up her nose and moved away from their table to sell more breadsticks.

While they chewed on cheesy – but greasy – breadsticks, they talked about school. High school: a community within a community, a city enclosed by glass and brick where all the comforts of civilization were at their fingertips. At Beattyton Senior High School, a student could stroll down to the cafeteria, even if it wasn't lunchtime, and buy anything from an ice-cold apple to a lukewarm taco, all thanks to the highly-influential students of Mr. Moran's Modern Business class. Shawna's favorite teacher was Zachary P. Moran. Moran's Minions, as she and a handful of his other business students were affectionately called, even pandered for a soda fountain machine to be installed in the cafeteria since using the coin-operated soda machines were too much like playing the slots. But the senior class knew why their request had been denied: the school board had gotten flak from parents about allowing the students too much freedom.

"We even could have asked for more homework, and the board would have turned us down," Shawna said as their pizza arrived. Greg's attention was immediately captured by the aroma of the melted Parmesan cheese, spicy sausage and baked-to-a-crisp, cracker-like crust. Even before Patty the waitress finished laying the napkins and plates on the table, he was yanking off a hot slice. Shawna giggled.

"Looks like you are starving... mind if I grab a piece before you inhale the whole thing?" Greg feigned a pout,



then separated another piece from its companions and laid it on her plate. "Thank you. And, by the way, is this a common characteristic of the seniors on the team?"

"Only the ones with good hands... which doesn't include Jay Thomas." Shawna knew he was joking. Unlike the other girls in the senior class, she made it a point of keeping track of who on the boy's basketball team was excelling: Shawna was the head score-keeper. As a sophomore, she volunteered to be a water-girl but was soon promoted that same year to the coach's official score-keeper. Often the brunt of Greg's sarcasm, Jay Thomas led the team in steals and was second in scoring. Shawna bit into her piece of sausage pizza, gasped, then dropped the remaining portion onto her plate.

"What do they bake these things with? Nuclear fission?"

"You've discovered The Zone's secret process, and it's now outta the bag," Greg said as he reached for his third piece. "But be very careful who you share the secret with. The walls... they have ears," he said, stuffing nearly the entire piece into his mouth.

In less than 15 minutes, Greg had eaten 5 slices, Shawna 2 and one was left over; they agreed that Greg could take it home and stick it in the fridge. Shawna pulled a roll of peppermint breath mints from her purse. She pointed the roll at Greg, and he shook his head. Greg then leaned back, put his hands behind his head, and belched.

"Bluto feel better now?" Shawna asked. Greg smiled as he thought of himself as Popeye's nemesis.

“Better than a coon in a chicken coop.”

“You’re such a hick.”

“Can’t help it. I suppose a man is always gonna have hick blood in him, no matter how far he gets from the hills. How’s that saying go? ‘You can take the man out of the hills, but you can never take the hills out of the man’?” The waitress came back to the table just in time to catch Greg’s philosophic remark.

“You a poet or something?” Patty the waitress asked. Greg squinted to get a better picture of their server. Where did she get the idea for that hairdo?

“No, he’s just a plagiarist.” Shawna answered. “One with a keen sense of the ludicrous.” The waitress peered under the black-framed eyeglasses and stared first at Shawna and then at Greg. Then, without saying a word, walked away. The two teenagers leaned forward and laughed too discreetly to be heard by anyone else in the restaurant.

“What’s a plagiarist?” Greg asked.

“Don’t you ever pay attention in Senior English? A plagiarist is someone who copies what someone else has written.”

“Oh, I get it... kinda like when Sommers tells us to do some research for one of his take-home essays, and we go to the library and copy what we need from the encyclopedia?” Shawna scowled.

“What’s this we stuff? Only basketball players copy from the encyclopedia. We true plagiarists are much more devious than that.” Greg forced himself to listen to Shawna ramble on for a few minutes more about how she writes re-

search papers but soon bored of the topic. Shawna noticed that she had lost his attention and poured the rest of the Coke into his glass.

“So how’s your dad doing?” she asked. What? She wants to talk about my old man? And might this be related to what she has to show me?

“My dad? Oh, he’s doing great. The plant is doing great... everything he touches is doing great. The guy’s a regular Methuselah...”

“Midas,” Shawna said, interrupting him. “No, I mean really... how’s he been feeling? It’s only been a few months since the stroke...”

“Ah heck! You got me there! I don’t know how he’s doin’!” Shawna scowled, and Greg noticed her stern expression. He lowered his voice. “Am I the guy’s doctor or something?”

“So what have you and your dad talked about? Lately?”

“Lately? I guess I talked to him last week... I don’t know...”

“So what did you talk about last week? How about Trig? Remember how he helped me last year with it? Did you ask for his help with Trig? I don’t think I could have even gotten a C in Trig without your dad’s help...”

“No, we didn’t talk about Trig. Shawna, the guy doesn’t want to help me with Trig or anything else related to school,” Greg’s voice was too loud again.

“All he cares about it that stupid dry-cleaning plant. I mean, it makes me sick to my stomach how he spends 12 hours a day there – 6 and maybe 7 days a week – tellin’ one

guy to do this, and another to do that. You'd think he was some kind of dictator or something!" Greg caught Shawna trying to look directly into his eyes and he shivered: he hated when she did that. To resist her, he glanced over at their waitress who was also looking under her glasses in their direction. "That's it... I'm done talkin' about my old man."

"Greg, it is his business... and he does have the right to run it anyway he wants to, doesn't he?" Why does she keep looking at me that way. She knows it makes me uncomfortable.

"Yeah, he can do whatever he wants... whatever seems right and perfect and all that... and in the meantime, he totally forgets that he has a family at home that should mean more to him than pressing all of Beattyton's shirts and pants!" The image of Mack McGuiley puffing on one of his trademark \$10 Cuban cigars insolently popped into his mind. "He can just stand there, with that cigar in his mouth, and pretend that he is listening to me when I know he's not. Cigar in mouth and his beloved clipboard in hand. I... I could cut my throat right there in front of him and he would keep on writing!" Greg nearly yelled then grabbed his glass and finished off its contents.

"Young man, if you insist on being so loud, we will have to ask you to leave," Patty the waitress said as the last drop of Coke finally let go of the bottom of the cup and dove into Greg's left eye.

"Sorry, ma'am, sorry," Shawna responded as Greg grabbed a napkin and wiped his eye. "Please forgive my friend

here... it's all my fault," she continued. "And he promises to not make any more noise, right Greg?" she asked. And there she goes again! Drilling into my brain with those blue laser beams! The waitress, like she had done before, focused on Greg over the top of her glasses, grunted irritatingly, then walked to another table.

"Who does she think she is? We've been coming to this place for as long as I can remember..." Greg said. "And how long has she worked here? A month? If that long? If I wanted to, I could just walk into that kitchen and demand she be fired... that's what I could do!"

"Greg, you're upset... I shouldn't have pressed you into talking about your father." She quickly looked around the room; more than a few of the other pizza patrons were staring at them. She then reached for her purse and began to frantically rifle through it.

"Upset? Me? Upset? All I'm trying to do here is enjoy a little pizza... and she has the nerve to come over here and tell me to be quiet? I can talk as loud as I want, and... and she can't do a thing about it! I know the manager of this place. Heck, I even know the owner! Dad went to high school with Rick Skelton! I doubt that she's even met Rick Skelton, the owner of all 4 Pizza Zones!"

"There! I found it!" Shawna said, holding up the small but shiny object. "I just remembered what I wanted to show you. I've been wanting you to look at my watch. It... it won't keep time. Maybe the battery needs to be changed?"

"What? What are you talking about now? Your watch?" Greg looked at the gold-plated timepiece that dangled from

a thin, gold band as Shawna held it before him. "Wait... isn't that the... the watch I got you for your birthday last year?" Greg continued to look at the timepiece even as Shawna laid it gently on the table in front of him. It was a 18-carat gold Rolex that Mr. McGuiley had helped Greg pick out. "But... but it was lost... you said that you lost it..."

"Did I say that? Silly me... what I meant was that I couldn't remember where I put it... that's what I meant to say." Greg picked up the watch and turned it over; on the back were the letters SHP.

"But the watch was lost... you were hysterical when you told me that you had lost it..." Greg said. "Did I tell you how upset Dad was that it came up missing? And how much it cost?"

"No, you didn't! And please don't tell me. I... I don't want to know, Greg." Shawna got up from her chair and sat on the benchseat next to Greg. "It doesn't matter how much you paid for it... I'm just so thankful that you got it for me... and very thankful that I found it again. This is what I wanted to tell you about... to show you tonight."

"After last summer, I... I totally forgot about this watch... the one I got you for your birthday," Greg whispered as Shawna put her right arm around his shoulders.

"I think all it needs is a new battery," she said.

"Shawna, I got you this for your birthday because..." Greg's eyes started to tear up.

"You told me last year... more than once... why you gave it to me... you bought it for me for my birthday. You said that you wanted to get me the best present that a girl

could ever get. And it is the best birthday present that I've ever received," Shawna's left hand began to lightly rub the back of Greg's neck, sending goose-pimples down his spine.

"Here's your bill," Patty said, holding it up as she waited for one of the teens to grab it. "Oh, and what do you have there? Ah, that is a nice watch. What's the occasion? Or never mind... it must be somebody's birthday." She then laid the bill on the table, pulled a pen out of her apron, and scratched something on the bill. "There. I took it off... no charge for the extra cheese and sausage. Have a good evening."