

Grammar Police (Working Title)

"Hello, could I speak with the owner please?"

"Yeah. That's me."

That's I, he thought, but didn't say. Instead, he asked "Mr. Pizza?"

"Sure, Mr. Pizza. Captain Pizza. The King of Pizza. Whatever you wanna call me."

"No, I mean your name's not 'Pizza'?"

"My middle name's Pizza, for sure. What can I get for ya?"

"I'm afraid you don't understand."

"I understand you called Pizza's. I *thought* I understood you wanna order a pizza. You want a pizza?"

"That's not why I called."

"Ok, then. You want spaghetti? Chicken cutlet? Chicken cutlet's real good. Fresh."

"I didn't call to order food."

"Well, that's what I got the phone for. Listen, I got enough insurance. I don't need a warranty extension. I don't need to buy nothin, unless you got a deal on pizza boxes."

"I just want to help, to help you look better."

"Oh, advertising? Maybe. Call Tuesday, but during the day. It gets busy at night."

"No, not advertising. I want to help with your sign."

"I don't need a sign. I just bought a big new one, out front. Love it."

"No, not a new sign either. I just want to fix your sign."

"Fix it? There's nothing wrong with it. It's only been up a week. I checked it on the way in."

"I beg to differ, sir."

"It better not be broken. I paid good money for that sign. What is this, one of those scams where you want me to pay for protection, like, for my sign? Forget about it. I got cameras front and back, and my brother-in-law's a cop."

"Not a scam, sir. Your sign is not broken. I'm just asking you to fix the word on it."

"Pizza's? Look, I know normally you'd put my name on the place, but I thought it'd be better to just say what we sell. Keep it simple. Nothing extra."

But that's just it, sir. There is something extra."

"Huh? What's extra?"

"The apostrophe."

"The what?"

"The apostrophe. An apostrophe is supposed to indicate possession."

"I don't know about possession, except if I don't sell some pizzas, the bank's gonna possess my restaurant. So, ...you gonna buy one? It's a little slow right now, but in about half an hour you'll get a busy signal if you call in. I can't talk all night."

"That's exactly what I mean, sir. You sell pizza. That's what the sign should say, 'Pizza'!"

"Well, yeah, I guess I coulda saved a letter, but I figured if I put Pizza's, people might see it, and be like, subconsciously, 'I'll buy *more than one*.'"

"Yes, I understand, sir, but Pizza's with an apostrophe isn't more than one."

"What?"

"You could have put 'Pizza,' as in the category, or 'Pizzas,' with no apostrophe, to show more than one, or even Pizze, P-I-Z-Z-E, as the plural is written in Italy, but the way it is now, it looks like your name is Pizza."

"Look, bud, if I spell pizza with an 'e' at the end, everybody's gonna think I can't spell. Nobody's ever asked me if my name is Pizza, until tonight. So, if you wanna order a pizza, or ten, with or without apostrophes, go ahead, but I ain't changin the sign!"

"I'm very sorry to hear that sir."

He hung up.

...

The little things are important, he thought. If we don't fix the little things, they turn into big things, and the whole country deteriorates. *I'll have to teach him a lesson, but not right now.*

He turned, and faced the screaming man who writhed in pain on the upholstered chair.

The man paused from screaming long enough to pant "Why are you doing this to me?"

He seemed to reflect a moment before answering.

"I'm doing it to maintain appropriate usage of the English language."

"What?"

“Usage – the proper application of the rules of grammar.”

“You’re hurting me!”

“I think, more accurately, that you’re hurting yourself.”

He stared at the man, whose tweed business suit was natty, but wrinkled, and the pants of which, like his formerly shiny Oxfords, were stained in blood.

“I was sitting next to you at the café, enjoying a Darjeeling tea and a warm scone, and you decided to use (he paused on the phrase) *offensive* language.”

“I’m sorry, mister, but I don’t remember swearing. Can you please let me out of the chair?”

“Hmm, I suppose I will, in another hour or so, provided you get the message.”

“What message?”

“I would like you to understand the difference between the word ‘literally,’ and ‘figuratively.’ You made a statement to your friend that you were *literally* sitting on pins and needles waiting for that call from your boss about the bonus for the new account.”

“You were eavesdropping?”

“I was...listening, and I heard every word. You were, at the time, *figuratively* sitting on pins and needles. Now, you are *literally* doing so.”

The man in the chair moaned, but didn’t speak.

“Yes, I think another hour should do it, and you’ll have learned your lesson. Do you think you can last an hour? Don’t say ‘no’ or I’ll make it two, or three.”

“Ok. Yes. Yes. I’ll make it. I’ll literally...”

“Yes?”

“I’ll literally make it.”

The man in the chair gritted his teeth.

“Good. I’ll be back in a bit, though it may *figuratively* feel like days. Heh, heh.”

The man moaned again.

“I’m going to bring you some company.”

“Company?”

“Yes. Your companion from the café.”

The man sat up, and winced from the new pain it caused.

“But she didn’t say anything about pins and needles.”

“No. No, she didn’t.”

The man in the chair seemed to relax a little.

“But she did say that she was, *literally*, laughing her head off.”