

Should Have Gotten Delivery Instead

by Erin Zulkoski

A large Supreme pizza, extra pepperoni, no green peppers. This is the pizza ordered by the person on the other end of the telephone. This is the pizza that will never get picked up. It will sit, growing cold, the cheese becoming hard, the crust getting soggy, the whole pizza unpalatable and inedible. No home to go to, no stomach to nourish, no midnight snack for whomever ordered it. It sits abandoned, like an orphan, on the counter of the pizza place where I work.

The call came in at 6:00 p.m. I told the person that his order would be ready in half an hour. A reasonable time frame, allowing for preparation and baking, plus a window of about ten minutes to account for any unforeseen mishaps, like having to cut up more vegetables, or running to the cooler to grab more cheese. I would do my job, making this man his pizza, and all he had to do was come see me in thirty minutes to pick up the finished product. Easier said than done.

The pizza was made to his specifications. It baked to a golden brown in a 650 degree oven for seven minutes. I took the pizza out of the oven, slid it on the wooden cutting board, and used the giant mezzaluna to cut it into twelve slices, the cheese gooey and hot, the crust baked to perfection. I slid the pizza into the cardboard box, grabbed the order ticket and carefully tucked it into the front of the box, and set the pizza on top of the oven where it would stay warm until it could be picked up.

6:30 p.m. came and went. No big deal. The pizza would still be warm. 7:00 p.m. came, and still no sign of the man coming for his

meal. 8:00 p.m. By then, a hint of concern was starting to surface. The man was an hour and a half late, but I put my worry aside, understanding that things come up, and maybe he was dealing with a sick child or had gotten an important phone call; perhaps a rich uncle had died and he was speaking to an attorney about his inheritance. But still, I kept glancing at the box on top of the oven, wondering when he would come for his pizza. 9:00 p.m. By then, my worry was full-fledged. Two and a half hours late. Where was he? Was he okay? Why hasn't he called? I felt like a mother, worrying about her child that was past curfew.

I decided to call the man, to see what was keeping him from his now lukewarm pizza. I wanted to call earlier, but a co-worker made fun of my concern, stating maybe he ordered the pizza as a joke. A joke? How could she say that? This pizza was no joke. This pizza was ordered with the intent of being picked up and consumed. I dialed the phone number I wrote down on the order slip. The phone rang and rang, and was finally picked up by voice mail. I left a message, hoping I didn't sound too desperate or needy, and then hung up. The same co-worker who mocked me asked if I got an answer. I told her no.

"Maybe he died on his way here," she said. My eyes grew wide with terror, flashes of the poor man, on his way to pick up his pizza, struck by an on-coming car, or swerving off the road to avoid hitting a cute little raccoon and crashing into a tree. My mind raced at the endless possibilities one could die while driving to get a pizza.

I chastized my co-worker, claiming her a heartless wench, and scolding her for being so cruel. She told me to "chill out, it was just a joke." No. This was no joke. This man was almost three hours late getting his pizza, and she's busy cracking jokes. She's a regular Bill Cosby, this one.

10:30 p.m. The kitchen is now closed, the pizza joint closes at 11:00

p.m. He had half an hour to come in for his pizza. Funny, that's how much time I had originally given him....The irony was not lost on me. I begrudgingly cleaned the kitchen, the entire time I kept casting nervous glances at the box on the oven. I walked over and shut off the oven, and picked up the box. The cardboard was soggy on the bottom, and grease stains had soaked through the sides. I set the box on the counter, and finished my cleaning duties.

At ten til eleven, the bell on the door clanged, indicating someone had just walked in. I anxiously peered out of the kitchen to see who had come in, my spirits lifting in hopes it was my man. Just as quickly as it had soared, my spirit came face-planting down. It was my brother, coming to give me a ride home from work. He came over to me, said hello, and grabbed a glass to get himself a soda from the fountain.

"Dude, I just cleaned that," I said as he hopped up on the counter, sitting next to the forgotten pizza. "Now your ass germs have compromised the integrity of my clean surface." My brother is such a dick sometimes. He took a long swig of soda, let out a belch, and looked down at the box next to him. "Hey, did you make a pizza to bring home? What kind?" He lifted the lid and sneered. "Gross, how old is this thing? I think the cheese just moved by itself." He shut the lid and took another drink of Mr. Pibb.

"For your information, no, I did not make that for us. Some guy ordered it like, five hours ago and never came to get it. Shari thinks he died. Shari is also a bitch." My brother looked at me, his eyes wide. "What's the name of the guy that ordered it?" he asked. I gave him a quizzical look, my head cocked to the side. I told him the name. His eyes bugged out of his face and he started choking on the soda he just drank. "Oh my god!" he sputtered through his coughing fit. "He died! He's dead!" "Ha ha, very funny. God, what is it with you people today? Death is not as hilarious as you fucks think it is." I turned to grab my belongings so we could leave, but

he grabbed my wrist. "No, I'm serious! There was a big car wreck on the highway! A guy got t-boned by a another car that ran a red light through the intersection! The guy that ordered the pizza died!"

I had my coat in my hands, but dropped it to the ground. I was dumbfounded. Dead. He had been on his way to get the pizza I made for him, and he died in a car accident.

I guess he should have had it delivered.

