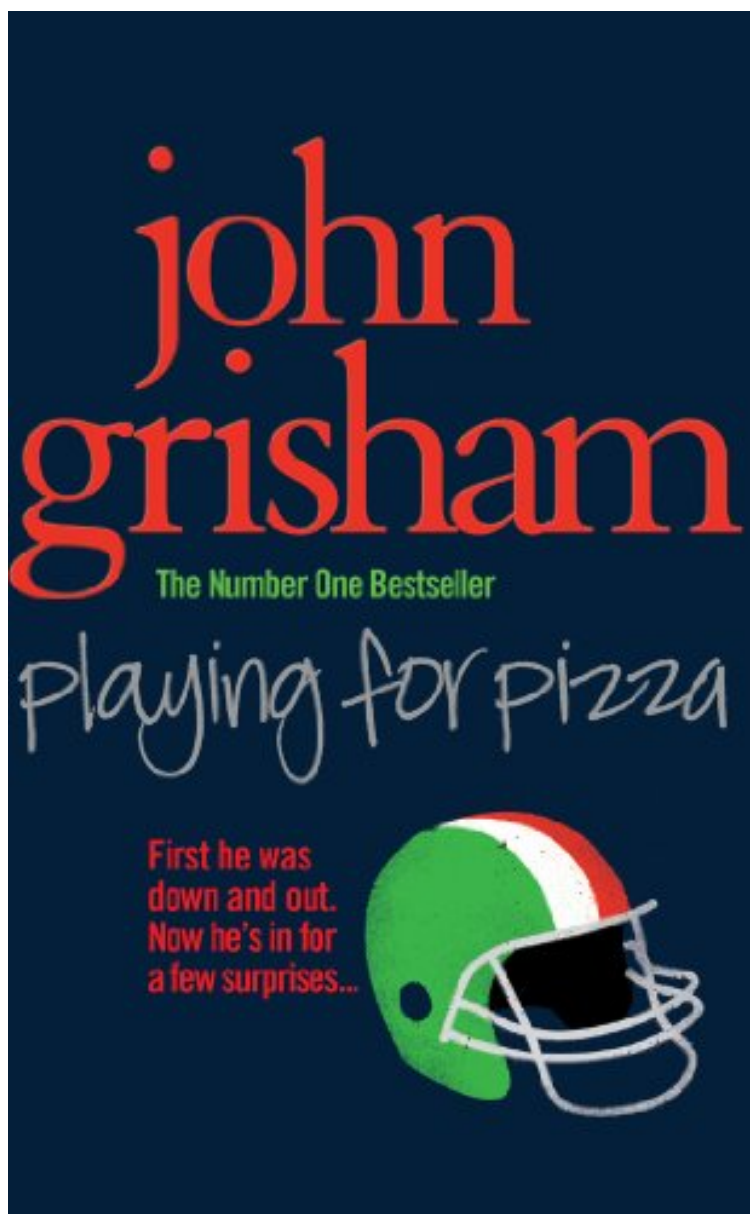


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# Playing for Pizza



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMoving away from the legal world to American Football, Grisham keeps you mesmerised with twists and turns of plot and wonderful characterisation. An American classic from the No.1 bestselling master thriller writer.With a 17-point lead and just minutes to go, Rick Dockery provided what was arguably the worst single performance in the history of the NFL. Overnight, he became a national laughing stock and, of course, was immediately dropped by the Browns and shunned by all other teams. But all Rick knows is football, and he insists that his agent, Arnie, finds a team that needs him. Against enormous odds, Arnie finally locates just such a team and informs Rick that, miraculously, he can in fact

now be a starting quarterback for the mighty Panthers of Parma, Italy. Rick reluctantly agrees to play for them at least until a better offer comes along and heads off to Italy. He knows nothing about Parma (not even where it is), has never been to Europe, and doesn't speak or understand a word of Italian. The land of opera, fine wines, extremely small cars, romance and football americano certainly holds a few surprises for Rick Dockery.

Chapter 11 It was a hospital bed, that much appeared certain, though certainty was coming and going. It was narrow and hard and there were shiny metal railings standing sentry-like along the sides, preventing escape. The sheets were plain and very white. Sanitary. The room was dark, but sunlight was trying to creep around the blinds covering the window. He closed his eyes again; even that was painful. Then he opened them, and for a long silent minute or so he managed to keep the lids apart and focus on his cloudy little world. He was lying on his back and pinned down by firmly tucked sheets. He noticed a tube dangling to his left, running down to his hand, then disappearing up somewhere behind him. There was a voice in the distance, out in the hallway. Then he made the mistake of trying to move, just a slight adjustment of the head, and it didn't work. Hot bolts of pain hit his skull and neck and he groaned loudly. Rick. Are you awake? The voice was familiar, and quickly a face followed it. Arnie was breathing on him. Arnie? he said with a weak, scratchy voice, then he swallowed. It's me, Rick, thank God you're awake. Arnie, the agent, always there at the important moments. Where am I, Arnie? You're in the hospital, Rick. Got that. But why? When did you wake up? Arnie found a switch, and a light came on beside the bed. I don't know. A few minutes ago. How do you feel? Like someone crushed my skull. Close. You're gonna be fine, trust me. Trust me, trust me. How many times had he heard Arnie ask for trust? Truth was, he'd never completely trusted Arnie and there was no plausible reason to start now. What did Arnie know about traumatic head injuries or whatever mortal wound someone had inflicted? Rick closed his eyes again and breathed deeply. What happened? he asked softly. Arnie hesitated and ran a hand over his hairless head. He glanced at his watch, 4:00 p.m., so his client had been knocked out for almost twenty-four hours. Not long enough, he thought, sadly. What's the last thing you remember? Arnie asked as he carefully put both elbows on the bed's railing and leaned forward. After a pause, Rick managed to say, I remember Bannister coming at me. Arnie smacked his lips and said, No, Rick. That was the second concussion, two years ago in Dallas, when you were with the Cowboys. Rick groaned at the memory, and it wasn't pleasant for Arnie either, because his client had been squatting on the sideline looking at a certain cheerleader when the play came his way and he was squashed, helmetless, by a ton of flying bodies. Dallas cut him two weeks later and found another third-string quarterback. Last year you were in Seattle, Rick, and now you're in Cleveland, the Browns, remember? Rick remembered and groaned a bit louder. What day is it? he asked, eyes open now. Monday. The game was yesterday. Do you recall any of it? Not if you're lucky, Arnie wanted to say. Ill get a nurse. They've been waiting. Not yet, Arnie. Talk to me. What happened? You threw a pass, then you got sandwiched. Purcell came on a weak-side blitz and took your head off. You never saw him. Why was I in the game? Now, that was an excellent question, one that was raging on every sports radio show in Cleveland and the upper Midwest. Why was HE in the game? Why was HE on the team? Where in the hell did HE come from? Let's talk about it later, Arnie said, and Rick was too weak to argue. With great reluctance, his wounded brain was stirring slightly, shaking itself from its coma and trying to awaken. The Browns. Browns Stadium, on a very cold Sunday afternoon before a record crowd. The play-offs, no, more than that the AFC title game. The ground was frozen, hard as concrete and just as cold. A nurse was in the room, and Arnie was announcing, I think he's snapped out of it. That's great, she said, without much enthusiasm. Ill go find a doctor. With even less enthusiasm. Rick watched her leave without moving his head. Arnie was cracking his knuckles and ready to bolt. Look, Rick, I need to get going. Sure, Arnie. Thanks. No problem. Look, there's no easy way to say this, so Ill just be blunt. The Browns called this morning Wacker and, well, they've released you. It was almost an annual ritual now, this postseason cutting. Im sorry, Arnie said, but only because he had to say it. Call the other teams, Rick said, and certainly not for the first time. Evidently I won't have to. They're already calling me. That's great. Not really. They're calling to warn me not to call them. Im afraid this might be the end of the line, kid. There was no doubt it was the end of the line, but Arnie just couldn't find the candor. Maybe tomorrow. Eight teams in six years. Only the Toronto Argonauts dared to sign him for a second season. Every team needed a backup to their backup quarterback, and Rick was perfect for the role. Problems started, though, when he ventured onto the field. Gotta run, Arnie said, glancing at his watch again. And listen, do yourself a favor and keep the television turned off. Its brutal, especially ESPN. He patted his knee and darted from the room. Outside the door there were two thick security guards sitting in folding chairs, trying to stay awake. Arnie stopped at the nurses station and spoke to the doctor, who eventually made

his way down the hall, past the security guards, and into Ricks room. His bedside manner lacked warmth a quick check of the basics without much conversation. Neurological work to follow. Just another garden-variety brain concussion, isnt this the third one? I think so, Rick said. Thought about finding another job? the doctor asked. No. Perhaps you should, the doctor thought, and not just because of your bruised brain. Three interceptions in eleven minutes should be a clear sign that football is not your calling. Two nurses appeared quietly and helped with the tests and paperwork. Neither said a word to the patient, though he was an unmarried professional athlete with notable good looks and a hard body. And at that moment, when he needed them, they could not have cared less. As soon as he was alone again, Rick very carefully began looking for the remote. A large television hung from the wall in the corner. He planned to go straight to ESPN and get it over with. Every movement hurt, and not just his head and neck. Something close to a fresh knife wound ached in his lower back. His left elbow, the non-throwing one, throbbed with pain. Sandwiched? He felt like hed been flattened by a cement truck. The nurse was back, holding a tray with some pills. Wheres the remote? Rick asked. Uh, the televisions broke. Arnie pulled the plug, didnt he? Which plug? The television. Whos Arnie? she asked as she tinkered with a rather large needle. Whats that? Rick asked, forgetting Arnie for a second. Vicodin. Itll help you sleep. Im tired of sleeping. Doctors orders, okay. You need rest, and lots of it. She drained the Vicodin into his IV bag and watched the clear liquids for a moment. Are you a Browns fan? Rick asked. My husband is. Was he at the game yesterday? Yes. How bad was it? You dont want to know. \*\*\* When he awoke, Arnie was there again, sitting in a chair beside the bed and reading the Cleveland Post. At the bottom of the front page, Rick could barely make out the headline Fans Storm Hospital. What! Rick said as forcefully as possible. Arnie snatched the paper down and bolted to his feet. Are you okay, kid? Wonderful, Arnie. What day is it? Tuesday, early Tuesday morning. How do you feel, kid? Give me that newspaper. What do you want to know? Whats going on, Arnie? What do you want to know? Everything. Have you watched television? No. You pulled the plug. Talk to me, Arnie. Arnie cracked his knuckles, then walked slowly to the window, where he barely opened the blinds. He peered through them, as if trouble were out there. Yesterday some hooligans came here and made a scene. Cops handled it well, arrested a dozen or so. Just a bunch of thugs. Browns fans. How many? Paper said about twenty. Just drunks. And why did they come here, Arnie? Its just you and me-- agent and player. The doors closed. Please fill in the blanks. They found out you were here. A lot of folks would like to take a shot at you these days. Youve had a hundred death threats. Folks are upset. Theyre even threatening m... Revue de presse Fans of John Grisham live for his legal thrillers, but now and then he serves up something unexpected. Thats exactly what he does, with great success, in *Playing for Pizza*. USA Today Enthralling. PeopleScore another one for Grisham... This is a fish-out-of-water tale that perfectly suits his strengths as a storyteller. USA Today A light-hearted story of football, food and love. Richmond Times-Dispatch Football in Italy? Who knew? Grisham means to have a sweet time with this story of a fallen NFL quarterback. And he does. Daily News (New York) Delightfully comic... a deeply satisfying story. The Boston Globe Charming... the author's love letter to Italy. Publishers Weekly From the Paperback edition.