

Strike Zone
By
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Pedro Fuentes settled his nerves and took a deep breath. He was on one of his better streaks and was thrilled to have some bragging rights over his friends. Crashing pins, children laughter, rolling balls, and a few old televisions filled the bowling alley with fun. He was calm after starting poorly at one of his bowling matches. It was unusual for him to have four open frames to start a game. After he settled down, cracked his neck, relaxed his shoulders, he got his stroke again and dominated the pins.

“Let’s see what you can do Pedro,” Arnold shouted. Pedro smirked while the other two guys with them chuckled. Pedro knew that Arnold was trying to get him off his game. One more strike in the final round and he and his team would tie their opponents at one game a piece.

One more deep breath and Pedro rolled his strike ball Tidal Wave. The blue and silver swirled strike ball whirled down at 18mph and crashed into the pins. Nine fell immediately but one was almost hesitant until it fell. John and Pedro cheered and pointed mockingly at Arnold and Antonio.

Pedro started bowling with his friends sporadically after being laid off from Gordon-Hirschel. They handled reservations from low budget to luxury hotels. Bowling was a sport he loved as a teen but allowed work and school to interfere with playing. During the time off he picked it up again and started bowling with his friends from college and church.

All four guys were married and none told their wives about their guy’s night. To them they wanted privacy. This was their moment to relax and get away. They desired to enjoy themselves and bowl.

“Take that Double A,” Pedro said. Double A referred to Arnold and Antonio who frequently teamed up to go against Pedro and John. They were not related but both men had a Mediterranean look that most people assumed they were cousins.

“All tied up, good for you,” Antonio sneered. “We’ll see this next game.”

“Anyone up for another round,” Arnold said while walking to the bar.

“Not for me,” Pedro answered.

“Worried, it’ll affect your game,” Arnold said. “I’m buying.”

“Affect my game,” Pedro said mockingly. “You know it relaxes me.”

“All the more reason for you to get a beer,” John stated. “Go ahead and bring back a bucket.”

Arnold nodded and headed to the bar. The bowling alley was running a special so each person in the group could have one, and there would be one extra beer leftover. That one always went to the buyer. There were leagues further down in the alley, but the four men loved coming there at least once a month, sometimes twice.

All four guys had two balls. None were professional but John had an opportunity to get into the PBA. The top ball was for strikes, the other for spares. The strike ball had a nice curve when rolled to hit the sweet spot right to the side of the head pin. The spare ball was better for going straight to clear the remaining pins left behind.

Pedro was cleaning his white and heather gray mix spare ball when a familiar perfume caressed his nose. He sniffed a few times and looked around.

“Maria,” Pedro said to his wife. He had his arms open and a smile to match.

“Don’t Maria me,” she said. “I thought you were at the office going over the budget and making sure you can hire new people.” Pedro got a new job working with a temp agency as a manager. He worked his way up to supervise two offices. The temporary agency was called upon to fill 50 jobs for a regional insurance company and Maria assumed this was taking all of Pedro’s time.

“I was,” Pedro lied.

“I know you’re lying,” Maria said. Arnold was returning with the bucket of beer when he saw Maria standing by Pedro.

The one thing that impressed Antonio was Maria’s figure. She wore deep blue skinny jeans that hugged her petite and curvaceous figure. A light jacket hid her lavender satin top. Antonio checked her out and then glanced at Pedro. Like Pedro, he felt weird because his wife thought he was at the office.

“Stop checking me out Antonio,” Maria snapped. “I can feel your eyes on me.”

“I didn’t do,” Antonio started, “sorry.”

“Does your wife know you’re here,” Maria asked. Antonio shook his head. Maria pointed to John and he did the same as Antonio. Maria looked around to see Arnold with the bucket of beer in one hand.

“I’m just here to get beer,” Arnold said.

“Unbelievable,” Maria said. “We’re a team, a family.”

“I just wanted to come to a place with out having to explain myself.”

“It’s bowling. You think I’m so mean, that I wouldn’t understand you coming to bowl,” Maria said. “Do you know me?”

Pedro dropped his head. His bowling friends mirrored the same look. They all could see Pedro and Maria’s spat but felt the same in their lives. Antonio felt so bad that he began to text his wife to let her know where he was.

“We’ll talk later,” Maria said. “I’m not going to put my business in public. So enjoy your game,” she snarled.

“Maria I’m sorry, I promise...” Pedro began but stopped when she walked away.

Maria had tears in her eyes and rushed to the door. She was far enough way so Pedro couldn’t see her tears. Itzal Watkins, ex-employee of Pedro, walked in and met Maria’s eyes in the foyer. “You okay?”

“You where right, he was here,” Maria said. “I’ll be there tomorrow.”

Itzal paused for a moment and then said, “oh the rally.”

“Yeap,” she responded.

He nodded and she left the bowling alley. Itzal smiled a little and continued to walk into the building. Itzal had known that Pedro came in the bowling alley often and through his conversation with Maria at his rallies, assumed she didn’t know about him going out. To her it wasn’t where he was, but that he was leaving without her knowledge. She felt like if he could keep this secret, what else could he be hiding.

Itzal worked for Gordon-Hirschel. He was laid off with Pedro and his best friend Henry Hall. The company moved the jobs to Korea and every since then he has held rallies to protest their existence in another country. Itzal’s main idea was to get people to boycott business that helps Gordon-Hirschel. Maria had showed up twice before but felt great to know that she would be there in support again.

The league bowlers where leaving so this allowed Itzal to get an alley to himself. He surveyed the area and notice a lane not that far from Pedro and his friends that was open. To his surprise, they kept bowling and took in one of the bucket beer deals. They might not have been

jovial but they were still playing. Itzal was not a good bowler but figured since he was there he might as well have fun and mess with Pedro.

“You’re still here,” Itzal said while getting the neon orange house ball into the rack. Pedro was shocked to see Itzal but nodded.

“You know him,” Antonio asked Pedro.

“Yeah,” Pedro said. “Hey Itzal.”

Pedro sipped on his beer. He got up to bowl and took his focus off Itzal. He sighed and rolled Tidal Wave. Strike! It was the fifth one in a row. John cheered him on and Double AA were impressed.

“I saw Maria when I came in,” Itzal remarked.

“Yeah, she was here,” Pedro said.

Itzal bowled the neon color orange ball and hit three pins. “Almost,” Itzal said. There were a few more frames of no talk between Itzal and Pedro. Itzal was amazed that after what he assumed had to be an argument between Pedro and Maria, his ex-boss he had put together an amazing game. However, Itzal didn’t come over to clean the dust from the gutters with his house ball or admire Pedro’s game.

Pedro had just bowled his seventh strike in a row when Itzal said, “When are you coming to a rally.”

“Let it go,” Pedro said. “They left. That’s what happens.”

“Hmm,” Itzal said. “My wife left me due to that. Is that what happens?”

Pedro sighed. “I don’t know, sorry to hear that.”

“Is he bothering you,” Arnold said after picking up a three pin spare.

“You going to do something about it,” Itzal replied.

“He’s harmless,” Pedro said and put his arm out to stop Arnold from getting into a potential fight. “Itzal, what do you want?”

“I’m just bowling,” Pedro got up to bowl his eighth frame. “Wanna know what’s funny,” Itzal said to Antonio. He didn’t know the man, but didn’t care. He wasn’t going to be rude and yell to Pedro while he was bowling. Itzal knew Pedro could still hear him. Antonio didn’t respond. “Wives are like businesses,” Pedro bowled and got his eighth strike. “Sometimes they leave un-expectantly.”

“What’chu saying man,” John responded. He was tired of Itzal who was laughing loudly.

“It happens, that’s life,” Itzal said. “Especially when secrets are involved.”

Pedro snapped his head and got close a little close to Itzal. He wasn’t as big or tall as his former employee but was fearless. “I’m tired of your crap. You got where you where because of me, don’t forget that.”

Itzal put his hands up and stepped away. He walked to his ball and hit four more pins. Pedro assumed it was over. When it was his turn he cracked his neck and got back up to bowl again. Some of the people around began paying attention to that fact that they could see a perfect game.

“Amazing,” Itzal started. “I’ve never seen a man bowl the perfect game while his wife leaves in tears.” Double A and John glared at Itzal. Pedro sighed and bowled. Strike!

Pedro was going to say something but sat down. “That was low man,” Arnold said. He was visibly upset. With only one more frame, many couldn’t believe what was going on.

“I wonder if she knew about you, if she would cry harder,” Itzal responded and made sure to emphasis you.

“Enough,” Pedro yelled. He jumped at Itzal and grabbed his shirt. “What do you want,” Pedro yelled.

“Get off me.”

Itzal shoved his attacker and Pedro punched back. Pedro’s friends and people standing around broke up the two men while took another swing at one another. The manager came in between them and looked at Itzal.

“I don’t know you sir, but you have to leave.”

“I have every right to be here,” Itzal called out.

“Not if you’re causing trouble. I could press charges.”

Itzal looked at Pedro then at the manager. “I’ll leave,” Itzal stated. “Good luck, Pedro.” There was no shred of sincerity in his words.

Pedro didn’t respond. He just watched his former employee grab his jacket and head around the corner to leave the bowling alley. The audience cheered and Pedro went back to shaking off the thoughts of Itzal. After his friends bowled, he was up again.

He tried not to think about it. Realizing that it would blow his chances, he sighed and didn’t look at the score. Between his multiple strikes and John’s high score, they had already

clinched the win. Even Double AA was rooting for him to get three more strikes for that proverbial perfect game.

It took less than five minutes total but Pedro bowled. Strike! Strike! Strike!

The audience roared and cheered with each strike. Pedro knew that waiting for him at home was trouble and an argument. However, for that moment he was somebody. He would have his picture in a gold frame on the wall with the two other guys who performed the same feat in that bowling alley. He would be immortalized.

In spite of the pain, he caused his wife and confrontation within Itzal. Pedro bowled the perfect game.

To learn more of Pedro's secret pickup your copy of Repeat Offender today.

Characters are from the novel Repeat Offender by Ricky LaVaughn

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