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**Pass the Damn Salt, Please:**  
*A comedy of manners,  
language and relationships*

A FREE SAMPLE

by Dan McLaughlin

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PASS THE DAMN SALT, PLEASE:  
A COMEDY OF MANNERS, LANGUAGE, AND RELATIONSHIPS

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## Chapter 5

### *1<sup>st</sup> date*

“Oh there you are.” Riley.

“Sorry am I late?” Rachel.

“No, no not at all.” Riley.

“It has been ages since I last went bowling.” Rachel.

“Well I know I mentioned a lunch, but I figured since you were a super secret special spy and all, the sounds of the bowling alley would shield us from any of that surveillance stuff.” Riley.

“You figured that out all on your own, did you?” Rachel.

“Well when I say I figured I mean it was an old *Mission Impossible* episode I saw. And honestly, I am in the bowling for the shoes. I have always felt that nothing says “quality” to a lady more than wearing used red and black shoes that slide on wood.” Riley.

“Yeah those dingy white soles really do catch a girl’s eye.” Rachel.

“Not to mention the shoe laces.” Riley.

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“Shall we go and pick out balls?” Rachel.

“You took the words right out of my brain. So what color bowling ball girl are you, oh she of the Purple Dragon Merry-Go-Round?” Riley.

“Oh dear I had hoped you had forgotten that.” Rachel.

“That is something a guy does not easily forget. But on to the ball.” Riley.

“Good lord look at all of them.” Rachel.

“All the colors of the plastic rainbow.” Riley.

“Not to mention all the possibly swirley thingies color combinations. Hmmmm, now should I go all conservative and choose a dark solid color?” Rachel.

“OK you COULD play it safe...” Riley.

“Well bowling is a sacred rite.” Rachel.

“Practiced in red and black used shoes with accompanying big blocky shirts with monogrammed names.” Riley.

“If you are lucky. Nice shirt, by the way.” Rachel.

“Thanks, my name is not really ‘Buddy.’” Riley.

“Yeah I know. It’s Really Riley.” Rachel.

“I had hoped you had forgotten that.” Riley.

“Not a chance. But still, it’s a nice shirt. Now back to the choice of ball. I gotta admit I am more going in the direction of that pink and purple swirley baby.” Rachel.

“In for a penny in for a pound being the thought behind the action.” Riley.

“Yes, I mean if you are going to go bowling, you should just go ahead and do the whole thing, right?” Rachel.

“Absolutely. Me, I am going to just go with this here black one.” Riley.

“The conservative black one I passed on? You bastard! Are you messing with my mind?” Rachel.

“Let the games begin, my friend. Let the games begin.” Riley.

“Now as I understand it, the point is to roll the ball down the wooden thing...” Rachel.

“Lane.” Riley.

“And knock down all those pear shaped things.” Rachel.

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“Pins.” Riley.

“And there is all that math thing.” Rachel.

Strikes and spares and carry the 10’s. Don’t worry I will keep score.” Riley.

“And the point is to knock down the most ‘pins.’ So who goes first?” Rachel.

“Please, you go first.” Riley.

“Oh look, my ball is broken. It has holes in it.” Rachel.

“Uh-huh. They are where you put your fingers in. No, move them over one.” Riley.

“Like this?” Rachel.

“Yeah. Go ahead now.” Riley.

(She rolls a strike.)

“Oh goodie a striker! That’s good isn’t it?” Rachel.

“Uh huh. Let me guess, this is the first time you’ve ever bowled?” Riley.

“Why yes it is, you big manly man. (Laughter.) Well maybe the first time since I spent every weekend in

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high school on a bowling team that took the state championship three years running. Then there was intramurals at college. Then the bowling league at work.” Rachel.

“I have the distinct feeling I have been hustled.” Riley.

“Let’s just say I can keep score in my head.” Rachel.

“And you were last in high school a few summers ago?” Riley.

“OK that is extremely delusional but in a very kind way.” Rachel.

“Sometimes you have to be kind to be kind.” Riley.

“In the right measure.” Rachel.

“Kind to be kind,” Riley.

“It’s a VERY good sign.” Rachel.

“On the other hand, you know sometimes being cruel is just well, cruel.” Riley.

“Not kind?” Rachel.

“In no kind of measure.” Riley.

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“Cruel is just cruel.” Rachel.

“It’s a pretty clear sign.” Riley.

“Baby, cruel is just cruel.” Rachel.

“It means that I despise you baby.” Riley.

“When you are cruel you’re just cruel.” Rachel.

“Twang twang twanga a twang twang.” Riley.

“I think that was an earlier draft.” Rachel.

“I don’t see that version ever climbing to the top of the charts. Although I do like the twang part.” Riley.

“Absolutely. It’s your turn.” Rachel.

“I beg your pardon?” Riley.

“It is your turn to bowl.” Rachel.

“You sure?” Riley.

“Really Riley, it’s your turn.” Rachel.

“You are having way too much fun with that.” Riley.

“Really. Riley? I can do this all night. Remind me to thank your parents if I ever meet them. At any rate,



you'd better bowl." Rachel

(Gutter ball.)

"Nice use of the entire lane." Rachel.

"You know, I did that on purpose." Riley.

"Uh-huh." Rachel.

"I didn't want to make that whole math and adding thing too much of a chore for you by giving you actual numbers. Zeros are so much easier to add." Riley.

"Uh-huh. I think I can handle it. Go again, sport." Rachel.

(Another gutter ball. Laughter.)

"OK I can explain that one too." Riley.

"Go ahead, hot shot." Rachel.

"First of all, I would like to point out that I used a completely different gutter in that shot rather than the previous one. Logic dictates, therefore, that if I merely average those two shots I will get one of those 10ie thingies." Riley.

"Uh-huh. Is there a second of all?" Rachel.

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“Oh you betcha, I am just getting warmed up.” Riley.

“Verbally, maybe. Bowlingly, no.” Rachel.

“Bowlingly?” Riley.

“It is a word.” Rachel.

“In a game of Scrabble with your family who may love you, maybe. Englishingly, no.” Riley.

(Laughter.)

“OK. What is your second point?” Rachel.

“It’s so simple I am surprised a super spy such as yourself does not recognize it.” Riley.

“Englishsize it, Riley.” Rachel.

“Well I am just luring you into a false sense of security.” Riley.

(Laughter.)

“OK well you hold that thought while I go again.” Rachel.

(Another strike.)

“Now, hot shot. Explain to me how this false sense of security argument works in bowling.” Rachel.

“Well, uh see you get this false sense of security because while it LOOKS you’re like cleaning my clock....” Riley.

“Yes and while I build up a big lead in points.” Rachel.

“Yes exactly, and then you get overconfident.” Riley.

“Because I have this big lead in points...” Rachel.

“Yes we’ve established that so there you are cruising along thinking you have this thing won...” Riley.

“Because I have.” Rachel.

“OK well um let me take my turn and I will explain it further.” Riley.

(Gutter ball. Laughter.)

“OK, now on the plus side I would like to point out the ball stayed on the wooden part...” Riley.

“The lane.” Rachel.

“Thank you the ‘lane.’ It stayed on the ‘lane’ much much longer this time before it went in the gutter.” Riley.

“Congratulations. Now roll again.” Rachel.

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“Hole in one.” Riley.

“That’s golf, hot stuff. Clubs. Smaller ball. Outdoors.”  
Rachel.

“Oh. Right. Of course. Thanks. Nine ball side pocket.”  
Riley.

“That’s billiards, Einstein. Cue stick. Ball bigger than  
golf, smaller than bowling. Indoors but on a table.”  
Rachel.

“Crap. So what is it exactly I am shooting for here?”  
Riley.

“You? I’d say a one.” Rachel.

“OK. One.” (Pause.) “Not a hole in one?” Riley.

“No, just one. Trust me. Now roll.” Rachel.

“OK. One.” Riley.

(One pin is knocked over. Laughter.)

“Yes!” Riley.

“Congratulations. And you are quite right.” Rachel.

“I am? In what?” Riley.

“Yes, I am feeling quite secure now.” Rachel.

“Yes, but it is a FALSE sense of security. Your turn right?” Riley.

“Yes.” Rachel.

(Another strike.)

“All part of the master plan. You are playing the part of the dupe to perfection.” Riley.

“By my winning 30 to 1?” Rachel.

“That’s what the score is? Crap. I mean, of course. My turn, yes?” Riley.

“Go ahead.” Rachel.

“OK. One.” Riley.

(One pin in knocked over. Same pin as before. Laughter.)

“Now are you feeling nervous?” Riley.

“30 to 2? I don’t think so.” Rachel.

“Let me explain. Knocking down one pin one time could have been just luck.” Riley.

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“Clearly.” Rachel.

“Doing it twice means it’s replicable. And if it replicable that means I could do it again. And again. And again. Feeling nervous yet?” Riley.

“Oh you bet, science boy. You rolling a series of ones has me shaking in my shoes. Roll again.” Rachel.

“Oh ye of little faith.” Riley.

(Gutter ball. Laughter.)

“And three times makes it science! Clearly I have perfected the gutter ball as part of my bowling repertoire.” Riley.

“Clearly. You know there are professional bowlers who don’t throw that many gutter balls in an entire season as you have managed in the first few frames here today.” Rachel.

“Well clearly I have nothing but the highest level of respect for the modern professional bowler. But the lack of the strategic use of the gutter ball in the modern game has to be of concern to the true purists of the sport. Traditionally the great leveler or psychological monkey wrench of the sport, the gutter ball in the modern game is seldom utilized.” Riley.

“And I suppose you have a theory that explains this?”  
Rachel.

“Oh yes, several actually.” Riley.

“Imagine my surprise. Care to share?” Rachel.

“Not at all. One is the technical difficulty of a well-thrown gutter ball. You have got to work very hard to do a proper gutter ball. And clearly the modern professional bowler does not want it bad enough. You have to put in a lot of work in the off-season non-conditioning to be able to roll a gutter ball on demand. It’s clearly not like the old days when there was a definite on and off-season. Remember both the mental and physical elements have to be working in peak tandem to bring together a streak of gutteriness like this.” Riley.

“So you just can’t expect to walk up and throw a gutter ball every time?” Rachel.

“Oh no.” Riley.

“Wouldn’t the modern professional bowler point out that the goal of the modern professional bowler is to score more points than his or her opponent and that a gutter ball gains no points and thus there is no earthly reason to want to roll a gutter ball?” Rachel.

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“Only professional bowlers with no knowledge of the history of the game. Remember, it was the gutter ball, which won the Lesser Pasadena Bowling Classic for Claude Bogaard in 1963. It was the gutter ball which won the Greater Visalua Open for Isaac Cole in 1954 and let us never forget the role of the gutter ball in the victory of O. F. Waterhouse in the More Or Less Middling Rancho Cucamonga Invitational 1961-1963.” Riley.

“So what you are saying is that you have to make sacrifices to attain this level of achievement with the gutter ball?” Rachel.

“Well I don’t want to get ahead of myself and claim that I am anything close to being a champion of the gutter. Bowling is just a game of one frame at a time. And what the great gods of bowling can give with one frame they can take away in the next. Sometimes that gutter seems as wide as the Grand Canyon and the ball practically leaps right in. Then next frame it is the size of a straw and there is nothing you can do to get the ball in. Sure with technique you can keep the good times going a little longer and cut down on the bad times. But bowling is a game of streaks, no doubt about it.” Riley.

“What has been your best moment as a gutter ball roller?” Rachel.

“Gosh Really Rachel, that is like asking who is your



favorite child...I remember the time my Dad first took that darn bumper thing out of the gutter and I got my first gutter ball in the very next roll, and everyone all and came over and congratulated me...There was my first gutter ball on the professional circuit in Tulsa in 1983...and there is my current record threatening tear that I am on right now...but you know I think the gutter ball that meant the most to me was in Cedar Falls last winter. It was at a charity event for handicapped kids, who were also orphans and uh, Katrina victims and I was not even the one rolling the gutter balls. It was those kids, those darn brave kids, those darn, brave, plucky kids, um, do I need to add ‘courageous.’” Riley.

“That’s implied with ‘brave.’” Rachel.

“Meaning ‘No’ I do not need to add?” Riley.

“That is correct.” Rachel.

“OK so it was those darn brave and...” Riley.

“Plucky.” Rachel.

“Plucky, thank you, plucky kids who kept rolling those gutter balls that really brought home how lucky I was to be in a sport where anyone can be the same, as long as they have the courage to roll. And to live in a country where the handicapped kids are free to roll a gutter ball, and other people will pay good money to

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watch. Courageously. Brings a tear to my eye even to this day.” Riley.

“A truly affected moment here with professional bowler Really Riley.” Rachel.

“Uh don’t you mean affecting Rachel?” Riley.

No, I am good with ‘Affected.’ And we will be back with more 4<sup>th</sup> frame action here at Badana Dome right after these messages.” Rachel.

(There followed a very enjoyable game of bowling (final score = 185 – 28) followed by an equally enjoyable meal.)



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## **About the Author**

Dan McLaughlin was born in Hollywood during halftime of a Rams Colts game. Although the Rams scored a touchdown soon after his birth to tie the game, the Colts then scored 17 points to win. This, along with multi-decade stints at UCLA and as a government bureaucrat has given Dan an appreciation for the subtle and sometimes capricious agency of action and words.

Among his philosophical influences he cites Thomas Kuhn, David Springhorn, Paul Feyerabend, the Reduced Shakespeare Company and Bullwinkle the Moose. When not working as the local history reference librarian at the Pasadena Public Library, Dan can be found working merrily in the garden, pacing nervously during any UCLA game where the lead is less than 25 points, or walking sedately the beloved puppies with his even more beloved honey, Vendi.

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In addition to *Pass the Damn Salt, Please*, Dan has written *ICE Girls*, a novella which examines the story of the Little Match Girl from the point of view of management, and the musical *Oh No, Not Emily!* an operetta which describes what happens when a modern fake Emily Dickinson poem is sold to a very post-modern English Department. *ICE Girls* was nominated Best Storytelling album by the good people at Just Plain Folks (2009) and *Oh No, Not Emily!* received a best Theatrical Album from the same people in 2006.

Before that he and Mark Sellin were the comedy phenomenon “2 Guys from the 70’s” where they served to remind people of the emotional honesty of the 1970’s for reasons that remain unclear (both then and now) but were amusing to them (both then and now). Before that, again with Mark and several other friends, Dan wrote, directed and acted in several plays at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Southern California, including their greatest hit *Ye Olde Tale of Goode King Arthur* with its associated “Laughter Workshop.” Also from that era he created radio play versions of the Trojan Horse *The Big Horsey Ride* and the Odyssey *Going Home and Getting Lucky*.



***For further enjoyment, explore these websites:***

*ICE Girls*

The book at: <https://www.createSPACE.com/3346080>

The book on cd at: <http://cdbaby.com/cd/danmclaughlin>

The book as audiofile at: <http://www.digstation.com/DanMcLaughlin>

*Oh No, Not Emily!*

Original cast album at: <http://cdbaby.com/cd/totallyhonest>

All things Emily at: <http://ohnonotemily.com/>

Selected clips form the show at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/ohnonotemily>

*Tales of Ulysses*

*Chapter 11: the Big Horsey Ride* at: <https://www.createSPACE.com/1722919>

*Chapter 12: Going Home and Getting Lucky* at: <https://www.createSPACE.com/1722920>

*2 Guys from the '70s*

Performance clips at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/2guysfromthe70s>