

The Wheel

By

J.L. MacDonald

EXT. BIKE SHOP - NIGHT

A young man in full bike gear exits the shop. He calls over his shoulder to a co-worker who stands in the doorway.

PAUL
See you tomorrow.

NEWTON
You betcha - safe ride home.

EXT. CITY STREET - SAME

Rain pelts down on PAUL as he fights for right of way in rush hour traffic. An impatient car passes too close and sends a wave of gutter water into Paul's face.

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTMENT FIRM - OFFICE CUBICLE - SAME

KALI (28) pounds numbers into an adding machine. Looks at final total. Taps pen against her lips. A co-worker's head pops up over the cubicle wall.

CO-WORKER
So, how does it look on paper?

KALI
(grimaces and shakes head)
Not very good.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAUL'S CONDO - UNDERGROUND GARAGE ENTRANCE - SAME

Muddy and soaked, Paul activates the security gate and enters on his bike.

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - BIKE ENCLOSURE - SAME

Lit by a bare florescent, a slight youth dressed in dark, grubby jeans and oversize jacket nervously messes with a bike. The jacket hood, tied tightly, conceals most of his scruffy face. The door to the enclosure is locked, a flap of chain link cut and bent open.

The rumble of the SECURITY GATE startles the thief. He grabs the front wheel he has removed, shimmies through the flap, and scurries to a concealed corner of the garage.

(CONTINUED)

Paul rounds the corner into the underground. He narrowly misses running over the THIEF. A brief and awkward dance as they block each other's passage. Apologies are mumbled.

Paul notices the hole cut in the enclosure door. His eyes travel to the wheel in the thief's hand. The colourful ornaments on the spokes of the wheel spark recognition in Paul's eyes.

PAUL

Hey!

The thief skirts around Paul and up the exit ramp.

PAUL

Stop!

EXT. PAUL'S CONDO - UNDERGROUND GARAGE ENTRANCE - SAME

Thief has a head start, but Paul gives chase on his bicycle. At the garage entrance, Paul looks right. Nothing. Paul looks left and sees thief high-tailing it around the building towards the alley.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ALLEYS - SAME

Thief leads Paul through a back-alley maze. Paul almost gains on him but is delayed by an obstacle (car? wheelchair? kitten?).

Made anxious by his near capture the thief decides his odds of a clean escape are nil. Without breaking stride, he hurls the wheel through the air.

Spinning, it sails over a dense hedge and makes a loud clatter as it hits the ground on the other side. The thief ducks down a side street and into anonymity. Seconds later, Paul enters the same alley, pedaling wildly. He stops midway at crossroads. He sees nothing. Sighs and slumps.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - FRONT HALL - LATER

Paul enters, dripping and wheezing, his bike helmet askew.

KALI (O.S.)

Paul?

Paul peels off wet clothes, goes to bathroom, grabs towel, dries hair

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

You're not gonna believe what just happened! I get to the bike locker and some guy is stealing your wheel! I chased him and I almost had him...

Paul rounds the corner of the hallway, his monologue cut short by the sight of his girlfriend, Kali, perched at the dining room table in her conservative office attire.

The table is set as though for a board meeting. A pitcher of water and drinking glasses are in the middle of the table. In front of Kali is a report folder. To her left is a kitchen timer, set for 2 minutes and ticking.

KALI

Paul - have a seat, please.

Kali gestures to a chair. Stunned, Paul moves toward the table and slowly lowers himself into the chair.

PAUL

What's all this?

Kali ignores Paul's question and points to the pitcher.
Water?

Paul shakes his head, puzzled. Kali pours herself a glass and takes a sip. Paul braces himself.

KALI

I'd like a relationship that I can take to the next level - a more serious commitment. A successful partnership.

Paul breathes out, relieved. He relaxes and smiles, nodding.

KALI

But not with you, Paul.

Paul's face falls. He stares at Kali, hurt.

KALI

I've calculated the numbers.

PAUL

What are you saying?

(CONTINUED)

KALI

After careful consideration I have decided to terminate the relationship.

PAUL

Kali! Our relationship is good.

KALI

(sympathetically)

Paul, it was good...the first two quarters were great.

PAUL

I don't understand...

KALI

Simply put, you are too high risk. All the details are outlined in the report.

Kali opens the folder, takes out a page and sets in on top of the folder.

This pie-chart illustrates the breakdown of our relationship.

Paul stares blankly at the colourful wheel as Kali slides the report across the table toward him.

PAUL

(grasping at straws)

What about the sex? We have more sex than anybody I know. We have sex all the time.

Kali nods reluctantly.

PAUL

So, the sex was good.

Kali looks up and to the left, purses her lips and makes a "comme ci, comme ca" motion with her head.

PAUL

You were faking?!

Kali points to a large wedge on the pie chart.

KALI

Eighty seven percent of the time.

The kitchen timer DINGS.

(CONTINUED)

KALI
Dinner's ready.

Kali stands and collects the luggage she has already packed and heads toward the door.

Paul pushes himself up from the table and follows her like a lost puppy.

PAUL
You're not going to stay?

KALI
I have a plans.

Paul gazes at Kali awkwardly. Kali turns and opens the door to the hall.

PAUL
What about your bike?

KALI
You keep it.

PAUL
(wounded)
It was a gift.

KALI
Paul, I spent less than one percent
of my time riding that bike.

Paul leans against the wall and watches the door swing shut. Kali's footfalls fade as she walks down the hall.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL BACKYARD - DAY

The stolen wheel lies on the ground next to three metal trash cans. A young woman carrying a garbage bag emerges from the back door of the house. She crosses the lawn and deposits the bag into one of the cans.

She sees the wheel. Walks toward it. Stands over it. Picks it up and takes it inside the house.

EXT. BIKE SHOP - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER - DAY

Paul and Newton sit on the steps of the shop eating lunch. It is a beautiful fall day and Newton, chatty and bouyant, consumes his hearty looking sandwich with gusto.

(CONTINUED)

Paul, caved in on himself, quietly eats a sad peanut butter sandwich. His hair is unwashed - in need of a cut. His clothes look to have been picked out of the dirty laundry hamper. His sunken face is unshaven.

Two young women walk by on the sidewalk. Newton addresses them and makes small talk. They smile and slow their pace. Newton introduces himself and Paul, but Paul's palpable ennui repels them. They quicken their pace and depart.

NEWTON

Dude. You gotta get rid of the long face. Those pretty girls wanted to say hello and you scared them away with your pity-puss. [pause] She's been gone two months, Paulie. You gotta get back in the race.

Paul looks at Newton and shakes his head, dejected.

NEWTON

C'mon. It's like riding a [Newton jerks his thumb back toward the shop]. Speaking of bikes - you don't still have Kali's, do you?

Paul looks down at his feet. Fidgets with his half-eaten sandwich and mumbles something. Newton interrupts.

NEWTON

Speak up, darlin' - I can't hear you.

PAUL

I think I should keep it in case she changes her mind.

NEWTON

Paul - I read the report. There's a zero percent chance that she's gonna change her mind. What you need to do is check yourself into "she-tox".

Paul gathers the remainder of his lunch and trudges back up the stairs and into the shop.

NEWTON

(calling after Paul)
Girlfriend detox, Paul. Until you cleanse your environment of all

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON (cont'd)
things Kali, you won't be able to
recover from your addiction to her.

Newton waits for a response. Silence. Frustrated, he shakes his head.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - KITCHEN - LATER

The kitchen is a shambles. Unwashed dishes are stacked on every inch of counter space. Paul picks through the piles and finds the cleanest vessel: a 32 ounce, glass measuring cup.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

1. Cereal hastily poured into measuring cup.
2. Milk sloppily poured onto cereal.
3. Hand groping through utensil drawer. Grabs only available tool - a slotted spoon.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Paul stands eating cereal out of measuring cup. With each scoop, milk drains through the slotted spoon and back into the cup. He chews and gazes at Kali's bicycle, which hangs on the wall like a piece of art. The phone rings. He lets the answering machine pick up.

KALI (V.O.)
Hi - you've reached Kali and
Paul. Leave us a message...[beep!]

NEWTON (V.O.)
Paul, you pathetic piece of
shit. Take. Her. Off. Your.
Machine.

[pause] I know you're there.

[pause] Pick up.

Paul stares at the bike and chews despondently. Newton da-da-da's the first few bars of *The Girl From Ipanema*. Paul turns and looks at the answering machine.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
I'll be there in half an
hour. Shower, shave, and put on
your least dirty frock. But first,
change your fucking phone message.
[beep!]

Paul turns back to the bike. He reaches out and plays with the coloured spoke ornaments on the wheel. He gives the wheel a gentle spin before turning off the light and exiting the room.

INT. NEWTON'S CAR - SAME

PAUL
Hey, we just passed the theater! I
thought you said we were going to
the movies.

NEWTON
(laughs)
I lied. I had to say something to
get you in the car.

PAUL
(agitated)
Where are we going?

Newton flips a postcard sized invite towards Paul.

NEWTON
A party!

PAUL
(studies the card)
It's an *art show*.

NEWTON
It's an *art show party*!

Paul flings the invite back at Newton.

PAUL
Take me home - I'm not going.

NEWTON
(nodding emphatically)
No.

PAUL
Turn around. Turn around *now*.

Newton pulls over to the curb and cuts the engine.

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON

Too late - we're here. Might as well go inside and look around.

Paul glares at Newton. Newton smiles broadly.

EXT. GALLERY - NIGHT

Newton strides confidently towards the bright windows of the gallery. Paul drags behind, sullen.

NEWTON

It's Friday night. As bachelors it's our civic duty to make ourselves socially available.

Newton opens the front door of the gallery and waves Paul inside.

Paul - do your duty.

INT. GALLERY - SAME

Paul and Newton circulate around art and people. Paul tentatively eyes the artwork. Newton is more interested in the young women that populate the gallery.

PAUL

(whispers)

Newton, I know nothing about art.

NEWTON

There's art here? Hadn't noticed.

Newton palms Paul some cash and jerks his head toward the bar.

Go buy us some charm. I'll do a once through and find out where the best "art" is.

As Paul stands in line at the bar, Newton performs a methodical pass through the gallery. His mission is stopped short by an explicative, ejected from a darkened alcove in the gallery.

DESTINY (O.S.)

Fiddle-fucker!

Newton peers into the darkness. Inside, an elfin bohemian DESTINY (29) spits a string of impressive curses at a sculpture as she tries to fix technical difficulties.

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON

Personally, I find "flute-sucker,
trumpet-fucker" works best.

Destiny looks over, too frustrated to be amused.

DESTINY

Do you know anything about wheels?

Newton looks at the sculpture. At the center of the piece is a bicycle wheel. Newton grins. Paul arrives at Newton's side, a beer in each hand.

NEWTON

Nope. But this guy does.

Newton takes a beer from Paul, clinks bottle necks and then saunters off leaving Paul and Destiny in the dark.

DESTINY

Somebody broke it.

PAUL

Broke it?

DESTINY

Well, they didn't break it, break it, but they did fuck it up. It was working fine before it got stepped on.

Destiny points to the sculpture.

The wheel is set in motion by the turntable. The motion of the wheel generates energy, which causes this light to go on. The light shines through the wheel...or it's supposed to. With the wheel fucked up, nothing works.

PAUL

Do you have a couple of pliers?

DESTINY

(eyes widening)

I will soon.

Destiny bounces off in search of tools. On her way out of the alcove she flicks on the light. Paul sips at his beer.

As he assesses the damage Paul absent-mindedly toys with the coloured ornaments on the bent spokes. Awash with recognition, he realizes the wheel is Kali's front wheel.

(CONTINUED)

Destiny returns. She holds up her findings one by one.

DESTINY

Allow me to introduce Mr.
Plier...and Mrs. Plier. The
perfect couple.

Paul sees her for the first time in the light and becomes bashful. He smiles shyly and trades his beer for the tools. He begins to straighten the spokes.

PAUL

(clears throat)
Where did you find this wheel?

DESTINY

It found me. It was out by my trash
one morning. [points to the
sculpture] This is made entirely
from found objects.

PAUL

You collect lost things?

DESTINY

(sips Paul's beer)
Lost things. Broken
things. Things other people think
are worthless. What some people
consider garbage just hasn't been
looked at in the right light -
hasn't found it's true "Destiny"
yet.

Paul glances up to see her pointing at her nametag.

PAUL

"Destiny"'s your real name?

DESTINY

(sips beer)
Truly. Damn hippie parents. And
they're surprised I grew up to be
an artist.

Destiny watches Paul as he works and smiles wickedly.

I should really be asking who you
are and what you do, considering
you just got to third base with my
sculpture.

PAUL
(blushing)
I'm Paul - this is pretty much what
I do.

DESTINY
Molest art?

PAUL
Only on Fridays. The rest of the
time I fix bicycles.

DESTINY
Lucky me.

Paul finishes tweaking the spokes. Destiny resets the sculpture and switches the turntable on. The piece works flawlessly.

Ecstatic, Destiny turns off the alcove light and the two of them stand and watch the sculpture in silence.

Paul turns his attention to Destiny.

PAUL
What would you do if you had the
rest of that bike?

Destiny looks at Paul. She raises an eyebrow and grins.

EXT. BIKE SHOP - MORNING

Paul rides up to bike shop. Kali sits on the shop stairs. Her hard-edge appearance seems softened. She is dressed less than conservatively but as though she wants to make an impression. Paul dismounts and wheels his bike cautiously toward her. Kali stands and walks down the steps to meet him, sheepish.

KALI
Hey! I thought I'd come and see
how my bike was doing.

PAUL
Oh...I gave it away.

Kali's hopeful smile drops.

KALI
You gave it away?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL
To a girl.

A flicker of hurt twists Kali's features.

PAUL
She really wanted it.

An awkward silence passes. Kali studies Paul's shoes.

KALI
Does she ride it more than I did?

PAUL
She doesn't ride it at all.

KALI
(looks up at Paul)
Well, if she's not using it, could
I have it back?

Paul reaches down to his pannier. He takes out an invite and gives it to Kali.

PAUL
You'll have to ask her.

Paul shoulders his bike, maneuvers around Kali and enters the bike shop. Kali is left, mouth agape, staring at the exhibition invite in her hand.

EXT. GALLERY - NIGHT

The opening night of Destiny's solo show: a series of kinetic sculptures made out of found objects and parts of Kali's deconstructed bicycle.

Kali walks up to the gallery and stops. Several people walk by her and enter. Kali does not go in, but stands and looks through the window at the artwork. Her eyes rest on a familiar face: Newton.

Newton talks to Destiny in the center of the gallery. Kali watches as Paul joins them and embraces Destiny. Kali watches a moment more and then walks away.

THE END