

The Wheel

By

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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.

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.

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 being mumbled. Paul notices the wheel in the thief's hand. Paul's eyes land on the hole cut in the enclosure door.

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?). The delay gives the thief the opportunity to ditch the wheel. Without breaking stride, he hurls it through the air. The wheel sails over a dense hedge and the thief ducks down a side street and into anonymity. Seconds later, Paul enters the same alley. He stops midway. Sees nothing. Sighs and slumps.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - FRONT HALL - LATER

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

KALI (O.S.)

Where the hell have you been?!

PAUL

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

You're not gonna believe what just happened...I was riding home - this asshole car soaked me - then I get to the bike locker and this guy is stealing your wheel...and I chased him and I almost had him...I almost had him but then...

Paul rounds the corner of the hallway and is confronted by KALI - his girlfriend. Made up and fed up, she stands with arms crossed. Behind her is an elegantly laid table for two: candles, wine, fancy eats with linen napkins. Soft music plays.

KALI

Fuck!

PAUL

(meaning the wheel)
I'm sorry - I'll fix it.

(CONTINUED)

KALI
(meaning the dinner)
It's ruined.

Paul, oblivious to Kali's romantic efforts, misunderstands her frustration.

PAUL
No, no...it'll be fine. I'll get
you a new wheel tomorrow.

KALI
Don't bother. I'm leaving.

PAUL
Don't go. I'll just have a quick
shower and then we'll have dinner.

KALI
No, Paul. It's too late.

PAUL
(looks at watch)
Too late? It's only 7:30.

KALI
For **US** Paul. It's too late for
US.

Kali grabs her bag and heads for the front door.

PAUL
Is this because of the wheel?

She pauses and looks at Paul with contempt. Kali vehemently slams the door as she exits.

INT. BIKESHOP - DAY

Paul and NEWTON, his jovial co-worker, tune mountain bikes side by side.

NEWTON
So...Kali all moved out yet?

PAUL
Pretty much. All but her
bike. She says it's worthless -
like me.

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON

Ouch! Hell hath no fury like a woman whose front wheel hath been stolen. What are you gonna do with it?

PAUL

I don't know. I think I should keep it in case she changes her mind.

NEWTON

Paulie - she's not gonna change her mind. What you need to do is check yourself into "she-tox".

PAUL

"She-tox"?

NEWTON

Girlfriend detox. I read about it in Esquire. Until you cleanse your environment of all things Kali, you won't be able to recover from your addiction to her.

Newton spins the wheel of his bike. Paul watches the revolutions thoughtfully.

EXT. BIKE SHOP - 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.

Paul, caved in on himself, quietly eats his sad peanut butter sandwich. His appearance has deteriorated. 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 - you're crampin' my style. Those pretty girls wanted to say hello and you scared them

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON (cont'd)
away with your pity-puss.
[pause] She's been gone two
months, Paulie. You gotta get back
in the race.

PAUL
Nah...I really don't feel...I'm not
ready.

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 says nothing.

NEWTON
Paul - what did I tell you? You
need to get rid of her stuff. Let
go of the damn bike!

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

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - FRONT HALL - LATER

Paul enters an almost barren apartment. All niceties that were Kali's have been removed.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - KITCHEN - SAME

The kitchen is a shambles. Unwashed dishes are stacked on every inch of counter space. Paul picks through the piles and finds the cleanest pot. He fills it halfway with water and sets it on a burner turned to high.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

One cup of prepared tomato sauce is slopped into a large, glass measuring cup.

A handful of pasta is thrown into the boiling water.

The measuring cup is put in the microwave.

Pasta hastily drained and dumped into the measuring cup of heated sauce.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Paul stands eating pasta out of measuring cup. He listens to his answering machine messages, chewing and gazing at Kali's bicycle, which hangs on the wall like a piece of art.

KALI (V.O.)

Hi - you've reached Kali and Paul. Leave us a message...[beep!]

PAUL'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Paul? It's your mother. You haven't let me know whether you and Kali are coming for Thanksgiving dinner. I need to know if you two are coming so I'll have an idea of how much food to prepare. Call me back...[beep!]

NEWTON (V.O.)

Paul, you pathetic piece of shit. Take. Her. Off. Your. Machine. Check your email - I sent ya something. Open it. Read it. Follow it. But first change your fucking phone message...[beep!]

Paul stares at the bike and chews despondently. He turns and looks at the answering machine. He turns his attention back to the bike and sighs. He shuffles out of the room. As he exits, he erases all messages on the answering machine and flicks off the living room light.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - COMPUTER ROOM - SAME

Paul sits in front of his computer. The only light in the room is cast from the monitor. He double clicks to open Newton's email message. The sole item in the body of the message is a folder titled "Get Over Her".

Paul mutters under his breath. Chews his bottom lip. Double clicks on the folder.

A long list of links opens in a new window. Paul slowly mouses down the list:

get_over_her.org

shetox101.com

tell_your_mom_she's_gone.com

[etc.]

He hovers over the last link: craigslist.com. He pauses a moment, then clicks.