

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.

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)

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 some 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, 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 thick, bound report.

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

(avoiding his question)

Paul - we've been in a relationship for a while now.

PAUL

(nodding)

About six months.

KALI

Exactly eight months and eleven days.

(pause)

Paul, I'm at that age where I need to consider my future.

Kali pauses and points to the pitcher.

Water?

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

KALI

I'd like a relationship that I can take to the next level - a more serious commitment. I want 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 and there is a projected probability of a low return. Simply put, you are too high risk.

PAUL
What are you saying?

KALI
After careful consideration I have made the decision to terminate the relationship.

PAUL
But...I thought our relationship was good.

KALI
(sympathetically)
Paul, it was good...the first two quarters were great. But in the beginning of the third quarter interest started to lag and now it's good only forty six percent of the time.

PAUL
But, we have so much fun together...

KALI
Only thirty two percent of the time.

PAUL
I don't understand...

KALI
All the details are outlined in the report. I'll be happy to sit here while you look it over and answer any questions you might have.

Paul stares dumbly at the report that Kali slides toward him.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Kali, hold on a minute! Can we talk about this rationally?

KALI

Talking would be moot. Discussing our options rationally may result in a reconciliation, but trends indicate relationships that endure one or more breakups have a success rate of only twenty three percent. It is not in my best interest to invest any further time in this venture.

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

Eighty seven percent of the time.

Paul's head drops into his hands. 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

What about your bike?

KALI

You keep it.

PAUL

(wounded)

It was a gift.

(CONTINUED)

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

INT. BIKESHOP - SAME

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 refuses to take it. She
says that without a wheel it's one
hundred percent worthless - like
me.

NEWTON

Ouch! Hell hath no fury like an
investment broker 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 - 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".

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

"She-tox"?

NEWTON

Girlfriend detox. I read about it in Men's Journal Online. 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 - 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.

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 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...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.

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON

Paul - what did I tell you? You need to get rid of her stuff. You're sitting here spinning your wheels and Kali has one hundred percent moved on. 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 - 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. 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.

INT. PAUL'S CONDO - COMPUTER ROOM - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Paul enters computer room. He yawns, bleary eyed and sets his cup of coffee on the desk above the keyboard. He boots up his computer. A flurry of "New Message" notices litters his desktop.

The phone rings. Paul gropes for the handset. As he brings it towards him, he bumps the handle of the cup. A coffee waterfall cascades onto his keyboard.

PAUL
(to himself)
Shit! Shit! Shit!

Paul brings the handset up to his ear.

PAUL
Hello?

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON

Well, it's not perfect, but I'm glad to hear your working on a new phone greeting.

Paul picks up the keyboard with one hand and shakes it upside down.

PAUL

Dammit! I just drowned my keyboard with coffee.

Paul hits keys randomly. There is no response from the cursor on the screen.

PAUL

Fucker!

NEWTON

Fuck her? I hardly know her! Did you get a chance to open the folder I sent before you effed up your computer?

PAUL

Yes, I read your stupid folder. And I posted that stupid bike on craigslist last night and woke up to a bunch of stupid messages that I can't access now because you phoned and made me spill my stupid coffee. This is all your fault.

NEWTON

Oh, Grandma, what misdirected anger you have!

PAUL

All the better to shove my fist down your throat with.

NEWTON

Don't worry about the responses - we'll check 'em at work. Bring the bike with you - you'll be rid of it by the end of the day. You can sell the lucky winner a new front wheel while you're at it.

(pause)

Ya did good, Paulie. I'm proud of you.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

You owe me a new keyboard.

Paul hangs up on Newton and trudges out of the computer room.

INT. BIKESHOP - LATER

Paul and Newton read through Paul's thirty eight craigslist responses on the shop computer. Newton is gleefully engaged. He takes command of the mouse. Paul is an annoyed bystander. The weather outside matches Paul's mood: unpredictable with something a-brew.

PAUL

Stop! Stop reading messages! Just let me contact the first person who responded!

NEWTON

If you're giving the bike away, make it matter. Give it to the *right* person this time.

Paul, agitated, shoots Newton a dirty look and stomps over to the bike which is perched on a stand in front of a wall of wheels.

PAUL

You were the one pushing me to just get rid of the thing and now that I've decided to you want me to consider the options?

Newton is consumed and oblivious. He opens up a new message. He smiles as he reads.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Newt, I don't want to interview and check references for every person that wants it. I just want it to go.

Paul impatiently flicks the coloured spoke ornaments that adorn the wheel.

NEWTON

OK, alright.

Newton quickly types a response.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL
I want it to go NOW.

Newton hits "send".

NEWTON
(looks over at Paul)
Consider it gone.

INT. BIKESHOP - LATER

A heavy rain beats against the windows of the shop. A young woman, DESTINY, walks in the door. She carries a large, lumpy plastic bag. Paul is in the back room, sulking while he takes inventory. Newton, behind the counter, looks up. Grins.

NEWTON
Miss Destiny, I presume?

DESTINY
You presume correctly.

NEWTON
Did you bring the item you mentioned in your email?

DESTINY
(lifts the bag up)
Affirmative.
(gestures towards bike)
This the bike?

Destiny sticks a hand in the bag and pulls out a wheel.
Think it'll fit?

Newton looks at the wheel in her hand, then at the wheel on the bike. His eyes widen. His jaw drops.

NEWTON
I'm not sure - I'll have to get the expert out here. Just a sec.

INT. BIKESHOP - BACK ROOM - SAME

Newton rushes into the back room.

NEWTON
I know I said I'd deal with this for you, but you should really take care of this yourself.

Newton grabs Paul and steers him toward the front of the shop. Paul resists like an obstinate child, but is no match for Newton who is heavier and stronger.

INT. BIKESHOP - SAME

Destiny stands examining the bike. Her back is to the boys. The commotion of their scuffle as they appear in the doorway separating back room from the shop proper attracts her attention.

She turns toward them. Like Newton, Paul's reaction is one of utter disbelief. In Destiny's hand is the stolen wheel. Paul can't help smiling. She holds the wheel up.

DESTINY

Will it fit?

Paul hesitates for a heartbeat. He looks into the eyes of Destiny. Still smiling he walks with confidence towards her.

PAUL

(nodding)

It'll fit.

CUT TO BLACK:

CUE MUSIC: Bicycle Race by Queen.

ROLL CREDITS: A happy couple, Paul and Destiny, bike together in tandem with credits.