

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.

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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...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 report folder. To her left is a kitchen timer, set for 3 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.

Paul's head drops into his hands. 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 dinner date.

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.

INT. BIKESHOP - SAME

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

(CONTINUED)

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".

PAUL

"She-tox"?

NEWTON

Girlfriend detox. 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, checking for true. 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.

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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. Says nothing.

NEWTON

Paul - Kali has one hundred percent moved on and you're sitting here spinning your wheels. You need to let it go!

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. Look Paul, I know you're there. Pick up.

Paul stares at the bike and chews despondently. He turns and looks at the answering machine.

I'm swinging by in half an hour. Shower, shave, and for God's sake find something clean to wear. But first, change your fucking phone message. [beep!]

Paul turns his attention back to the bike. He reaches out and plays with the coloured spoke ornaments on the wheel before giving the wheel a gentle spin.

INT. NEWTON'S CAR - SAME

PAUL

Where are we going?

Newton flips a postcard sized invite towards Paul.

PAUL

(reading the title on the card)

"True Love"?

NEWTON

It's a party!

PAUL

(studying the card)

It's an *art show*.

NEWTON

It's an art show *party*!

Paul flings the invite back at Newton.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Take me home - I'm not going.

NEWTON

It's Friday night. I'm not taking you home.

PAUL

Turn around. Turn around *now*.

NEWTON

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

PAUL

Newton, I know nothing about art.

NEWTON

Me either! Isn't it great? It's the perfect icebreaker, "Excuse me, Miss? This is my first time - can you pop my art-cherry?"

Paul smiles in spite of himself and shakes his head warily. Newton, sensing he has gained territory, pushes ahead.

NEWTON

Trust me -