

The Wheel

By

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EXT. BIKE SHOP - NIGHT

PAUL, (30), exits the shop dressed in foul-weather bike gear. He calls over his shoulder to co-worker, NEWTON (28), 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.

(CONTINUED)

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 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.

(CONTINUED)

KALI (O.S.)

Paul?

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

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, naked except for the towel, 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 60 seconds and ticking.

PAUL

What's all this?

KALI

Paul - have a seat, please.

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

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.

KALI

I've calculated the numbers.
[pause] After careful consideration
I have decided to terminate the
relationship.

PAUL

(laughs nervously)
Kali! Our relationship is good.

KALI

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

The tentative smile on Paul's lips vanishes.

KALI

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

PAUL

I don't understand...

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

KALI

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. Stunned, he picks up
the pie chart.

The kitchen timer ticks. Paul and Kali sit engulfed in an
uncomfortable impasse.

The timer DINGS.

Kali jumps up.

KALI

Dinner's ready.

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

Paul pushes himself up from the table. He clutches the wet
towel in front of him and follows Kali like a lost puppy.

PAUL

You're not going to stay?

KALI

I have 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.

(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.

INT. BIKE SHOP - DAY

Paul and Newton tune mountain bikes side by side in a corner
of the shop.

Newton tackles his bike with gusto. He is 6 inches shorter
than Paul, but weighs twice as much. Neatly shaved, his
appearance, like his clothes, are clean. Today he wears a
t-shirt that says, "MY OTHER FRIEND IS IMAGINARY".

Paul halfheartedly fusses with the gears on the bike in
front of him. His sunken face is unshaven. His unwashed
hair is in need of a cut. His clothes have the look of
being picked out of the dirty laundry hamper.

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! 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"?

(CONTINUED)

NEWTON
Girlfriend detox. Until you rid
yourself...

Newton quits mid-sentence and lets out a laboured sigh.

NEWTON
I'm not doing this. I can't do
this.

Paul breaks character.

PAUL
Hey, man. Sure you can. We've
done this scene a hundred times
before.

NEWTON
(frustration building)
I know how many times we've done it
- that's why I can't anymore. It's
always about you (feigns Paul)
"poor me - Kali dumped me". Again,
and again, and again. Your sorry
head's so far up your ass that you
never even think about asking how
I'm doing. Not once have you ever
said "Hey, Newt. How are you
doing? Everything OK with you?"

PAUL
I'm just following the script.

NEWTON
You always bring the script into
this.

Newton points his pair of pliers at Paul.

NEWTON
You know, I wouldn't mind getting
dumped for a change. Anything's
better than playing a two
dimensional cliché so that the
viewer can identify with your pain
on a deeper level.

Newton begins to pace and gesticulate wildly.

NEWTON
I hate being typecast as the
stereotypical buddy because I'm
short, and fat, and (searches for
word) unfuckable.

PAUL

Newton...Newt - you're not
"unfuckable".

NEWTON

Paul, I only ever get to talk to
one girl, and **you** always end up
getting her.

PAUL

Always getting the girl isn't all
it's cracked up to be. It's kinda
boring, actually.

NEWTON

That's an asshole thing to
say. You don't deserve to get the
girl. Paul, you don't deserve to
be Paul. (to camera) I want to be
Paul.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Newton, just be yourself.

NEWTON

(to camera)

I want to be more than myself. I'm
tired of being that shallow guy.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Newton, we're supposed to be into
the next scene already. We don't
have time for this.

NEWTON

(to camera)

Oh. Well. Maybe you've got time
to re-write the entire script sans
Newton.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Fer chrissakes. Everyone break for
lunch. (to Newton) Not you, Newton.

Paul walks offset shaking his head. Newton stands his
ground defiantly.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

You do know the writer doesn't take
kindly to ultimatums?

Newton nods but doesn't budge.

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DIRECTOR (O.S.)
I'll present your demand, but it's
your ass. Go have lunch. Enjoy
it, it might be your last meal.

INT. BIKE SHOP - A FEW HOURS LATER

Paul and Newton are back on set. Newton paces
anxiously. Paul sits comfortably on the counter, confident.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
OK, people. We have a verdict.

Paul and Newton glance at each other, then give their full
attention to the camera.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Apparently we can't do this script
without Newton.

Newton looks all self-important and smug. Paul's confident
air has vanished.

PAUL
(to camera)
I don't need him! I can handle
this on my own!

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
No, actually you can't. Paul,
Newton is the external force that
pushes you to move on. Without him
you'd be stuck sitting in your
apartment staring at your
ex-girlfriend's incomplete bike.

Newton...you can be Paul for the
rest of the script. We are going
to let you do this once, only once,
and you are never to bring it up
again. Is that clear?

NEWTON
Yes, yes! Thank you!

Newton does a happy dance. Paul is dumbstruck.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
We'll pick it up from the next
scene. Someone get Newton a
script.

(CONTINUED)

Newton pulls a well-worn script from his back pocket and waves it in the air.

NEWTON

I'm good to go - I've got all of Paul's lines memorized.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Paul...

PAUL

(still dumbfounded)

Huh?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

You're going to be Newton for the rest of the script.

Newton looks at Paul and grins. Paul looks at Newton and then back at the camera mouth agape.

TO BE CONTINUED...