

THE COMBINATION

by

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OVER BLACK:

A voice, speaking in a manner of different inflections -- frustration, exasperation, kindness...

PAUL (V.O.)

What's the combination, Mel? ... You gonna tell me the combination today? .  
.. It's time to let go, Mel ... Time to let go.

FADE IN:

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

A rural street corner, a white house nearby. The occasional car passes and the grass is summertime green. A makeshift --

MEMORIAL

rests on the corner by a road sign. A stuffed bear, flowers, and a picture of a LITTLE BOY, no more than five, in a popsicle stick frame all reside there.

There's a RED BIKE there, too. Training wheels, paint chipped and fading. It's back tire is misshapen, but the frame is sturdy and whole.

A chain with a COMBINATION LOCK secures it to the road sign, faded white numbers in increments of five.

A pair of --

BOLT CUTTERS

appear. The business end of the cutter slices through the rusted chain with ease.

A strong pair of hands lift the bike away.

EXT. CORNER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the backyard, mowing his lawn, is BART, 60s. His black socks and plaid shorts the chief reason why fashions change.

The man with the bike is PAUL REED, 39. With his casual good looks, he makes a case for t-shirts and blue jeans.

They exchange a friendly nod. Bart cuts the engine.

Paul looks up to the sky, holds out his hand. A single drop of rain splashes onto his palm.

BART

No worries, Paul. They didn't call for rain today... You know, the missus waters them flowers every other day just like clockwork.

From the road, a set of tires *SCREECH*.

Paul whips around, stares intently. He slowly turns back, and offers a grateful smile.

PAUL

Well, I sure do appreciate that. You be sure and thank the missus for me.

BART

Ayup.

Bart fires up the mower.

THE MEMORIAL

Minus the bike, it resumes its lonely vigil. The *CLANK* of metal against metal, the *SLAM* of a car door. An engine comes to life and Paul drives off.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LATER

Paul's truck pulls into the driveway of a big old house with a wrap-around porch. A giant weeping willow with a tire swing is the only dressing on the freshly cut grass.

He gets out, heads to the back of the truck and lifts out the bike with a grunt. He slowly passes the open front door.

PAUL

I got the bike, Melinda. I told you I  
was gonna get that bike, lock or no  
lock.

There's no response from inside. None at all.

Paul hesitates then, bike in hand, disappears around the side  
of the house.

INT. GARAGE - EVENING

A single light bulb hangs from the spruce ceiling studs.  
Screwdrivers, hammers and saws on every wall.

A picture of the boy from the memorial sits on a work table.  
Next to it, a small brown baseball mitt.

The red bike sits firmly in a vice grip.

SERIES:

Paul works on the bike.

-- He dutifully turns a screwdriver.

-- New pedals are attached.

-- New tires set in place.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

A radio on a shelf. The ballgame is on.

Paul switches it off, tugs at the light chain above. The  
garage is left in darkness.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

The sky is aglow with a purple hue as the rising sun  
encroaches upon the last remnants of night.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Paul's truck is parked out front of a --

BIKE SHOP

A modest storefront with a lone neon and pictures of, what else, bikes in the window.

Paul stands at the front door. He holds two cups of coffee.

Along the sidewalk comes DAN HANNIGAN, 47, bike shop owner. He grins when he sees Paul outside his door.

DAN

Don't you sleep?

PAUL

Nope.

DAN

Well, either you're planning on bein' constipated all day, or one of those is for me.

Paul holds out the steaming cup.

DAN

Three sugars, lotsa cream?

PAUL

Black.

DAN

Perfect.

Dan fishes for his keys and they enter the shop.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Paul turns the pedals on the bike. The wheels spin effortlessly. He squirts some oil on the chain.

LATER

-- Paul shoots a coat of red spray paint on the bike.

LATER

-- Paul screws a silver plate onto the front of the frame. It reads: RED RIDER.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LATER

The bike leans proudly on its kick stand. It's shiny and good as new. A RED BOW is fastened to its seat.

In a red baseball cap and hands on hips, Paul admires his handiwork. He looks through the screen door.

PAUL

You should really come out and take a look.

THE SCREEN DOOR

You can see inside the house... just not good enough. A whisp of blonde hair can be made out along the back of a chair. The TV is on, but no sound comes from it.

Again, there's no response.

Paul sits on the porch swing.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LATER

Paul sips a beer. His eyes fixed on the modest --

HOUSE

next door. It's decorated with streamers and colorful balloons. In blue letters, stretched between two chipped pillars near the front door:

HAPPY 5TH BIRTHDAY ELIJAH!

A YOUNG BOY in a party hat greets arriving GUESTS. In their hands are gifts wrapped with pretty paper and bows.

## PAUL'S FRONT PORCH

Paul finishes off his beer, grabs the bike and heads over.

PAUL  
Hey, Darrelle.

DARRELLE BIGSBY, 38, AFRICAN-AMERICAN. He's Sunday afternoon casual and smiling, holding a beer of his own.

DARRELLE  
Hey, Paul. Care to join the party? Got some burgers cookin' out back.

PAUL  
Yeah, I can smell 'em. But I just come to give a gift.

He holds up the bike.

DARRELLE  
Well now, that's one fancy machine you got there. You shouldn't have, Paul.

Paul waves him off.

DARRELLE  
Elijah! Come on over here and see what Mister Reed got for you.

Elijah turns, spies the bike. He comes bounding over like a little spring-heeled Jack.

ELIJAH  
Wow! Is that mine, daddy? Is that mine?

DARRELLE  
Gotta ask Mister Reed that question.

Elijah looks up to Paul, his big brown eyes pleading --  
*Please! Please! Please let it be mine!*

PAUL

Well, let's see... it's got a bow on it. It is your birthday... Yeah, I guess it's yours.

Elijah squeals with delight and hops on the bike. Before he can pedal away --

DARRELLE

Elijah, you forgettin' somethin'?

ELIJAH

Thank you, Mister Reed.

Elijah takes off down the driveway.

DARRELLE

Wait, son!

Darrelle sprints after Elijah, presses his hand lightly against the boy's back to keep him steady.

Paul watches them, raises his head slightly. He has to. It's all he can do to keep the tears in.

PAUL

(above a whisper)

You're welcome.

A WOMAN in a yellow sun dress comes over. This is SHIRLEY, mid thirties. She sides up to Paul.

SHIRLEY

Hey, Paul.

(to Darrelle)

Uh, honey, you better go get your brother. He's cookin' them burgers like hockey pucks and he's ashin' all over 'em.

Darrelle glances into the --

BACKYARD



where his BROTHER, 40s, stands over the grill in big dark sunglasses. He's in a white apron, a spatula in one hand, and a lit, long-ashed cigarette in the other.

Darrelle sighs.

DARRELLE

Hey, Shirl, you see what Paul got for Elijah?

SHIRLEY

Yeah, I see... That was awfully nice of you, Paul.

PAUL

My pleasure.

Together they watch Elijah and Darrelle.

SHIRLEY

How's Melinda doing? We don't see enough of her, Paul.

PAUL

Yeah, I know. It's a work in progress.

She puts a hand on his shoulder.

SHIRLEY

I stopped by the memorial the other day to put some flowers down... Something was missing.

Paul rubs the back of his neck.

PAUL

I thought... I mean... I could go pick another one up at the shop. They had a lot of nice bikes there...

SHIRLEY

You kidding? Look how happy you made him, Paul. We're honored. Really. Besides, you try takin' it away from him now.

Paul grins, looks down.

Elijah circles the driveway, Darrelle close behind. The boy's contagious laughter echoes throughout the yard.

SHIRLEY

So, you want a burger, Paul? Somethin' cold to drink?

PAUL

Nah. Doctor says I'm gettin' too much ash in my diet.

They share a brief laugh when --

SHIRLEY

Darrelle, what is it?

Darrelle and Elijah have stopped in their tracks. They're eyeing something. Darrelle looks to Shirley and points.

PAUL'S FRONT PORCH

Standing on the steps in pajama bottoms and a light sweater is MELINDA, mid thirties. She grips the railing of the porch, takes an unsteady step forward.

She blinks at the sunlight, brushes her disheveled hair away from her pale face. She locks eyes with Elijah.

PAUL

Excuse me--

He races over and gently takes Melinda by the arm.

PAUL

Mel, what are you doing out? Are you okay?

DARRELLE'S DRIVEWAY

ELIJAH

Daddy, is that Missus Reed?

Darrelle hesitates -- hasn't seen her in a while.

DARRELLE

Yeah, that's her, son.

FRONT PORCH

MELINDA

I... I'd like to sit, Paul.

PAUL

Yeah, okay. Okay.

Paul helps her up the steps to the porch swing. He carefully lowers her onto the seat. He sits next to her. The swing gently sways.

Elijah, seated on his bike, gazes back at Melinda. A smile forms across his face. He lifts a small hand and waves.

Melinda raises her arm halfway, waves back.

MELINDA

Oh, Paul...

Paul shuts his eyes tight. No stopping the tears now. He puts his arm around her shoulder and pulls her in close.

PAUL

I'm sorry, Melinda... I'm so, so sorry...

Melinda puts two fingers over his lips.

PAUL

I never should have taken him... I never should have taken him that day.

Next door, Shirley joins Elijah and Darrelle. She says something. Elijah continues to pedal circles around the driveway

MELINDA

You shouldn't say things like that.

Paul buries his face in his hands.

PAUL

I still wake up and I see him... If  
only I'd grabbed him a moment sooner  
I... I could've pulled him back...

Melinda cradles his head, the soft skin of her cheek resting  
on his hair.

MELINDA

It's okay, my darling. It's okay...

The porch swing continues its gentle rocking. Melinda holds  
onto Paul as if he might slip away.

PAUL

I always knew the combination, Mel. I  
just wanted to hear you say it... Just  
once. Damn old lock was just so  
rusted...

MELINDA

(softly)

Eleven seventeen thirty.

The giant weeping willow with the tire swing casts a long  
shadow as the sun begins its final descent.

Melinda kisses Paul on the cheek.

MELINDA

It's time to let go now, Paul...

FINAL FADE OUT.

MELINDA (V.O.)

It's time to let go.