

Dupe
by
John Dowgin

DAY 1

A carnival midway. Late morning. Every booth shuttered tight save one.

A wheel of fortune with twelve bright numbers spinning steadily, a clicker ticking off equidistant nails on the circumference. The WHEEL OF FORTUNE sign over the booth flickers; all the letters are never lit at once.

BUDDY leans against the wheel. Forties. He's worked this wheel for a long time, he's going to work it for a long time, and he doesn't feel one way or the other about that.

The wheel stops. With no conscious thought, Buddy spins it again. And again.

The LITTLE BRAT strolls up.

LITTLE BRAT

My dad told me this thing is rigged.

BUDDY

Your dad told me he wanted a son.

The Little Brat moves along in a huff.

Across the way, the shutter slides open to reveal SONYA, the fortune teller. Her sign claims her name is "Madam Zartella". Stars, moons, suns adorn her booth, but the focal point is a crystal ball that may well have been stolen from a bowling alley. Her flowing dress and fake jewelry has seen better decades. She flips the sign on her door from CLOSED to OPEN.

BUDDY

Guy walks into a bar carrying a pair of jumper cables. Bartender says, "Hey you, don't start anything!"

SONYA

It's like you're trying to talk to me.

BUDDY

Good morning, Madam.

SONYA

Says you.

BUDDY

It'll pick up. School's out. Little brat from yesterday's wandering around.

SONYA

I heard. Most salesmen don't mock their customers.

BUDDY

What salesmen you been dealing with?

SONYA

Most salesmen don't openly mock their customers.

BUDDY

It's a new business model. Foster repeat business by cultivating resentment.

SONYA

It plays to your strengths. He's just going to go play some other wheel.

BUDDY

Wanna make it interesting? Evens he'll be back, odds he's wisened up.

SONYA

Spin it.

Buddy spins the wheel. An even number comes up.

SONYA

We'll see.

The Little Brat comes back. Pops a dollar on a number. Spins. Loses. Fumes for a moment, then scurries off.

BUDDY

Double or nothing?

SONYA

I didn't bet anything.

The sounds of approaching fairgoers. Buddy goes into full on barking mode.

BUDDY

HEY YA HEY YA HEY YA STEP RIGHT UP AND GIVER HER A SPIN!!
LUCK BE A LADY AND IF YOU LOVE THE LADY SHE'LL LOVE YOU BACK!
IT'S THE EASIEST PRIZE YOU'LL EVER WIN ONE WIN ONE SPIN ONE
PRIZE...

Over the above, the fairgoers amble
past, never even think about stopping.

BUDDY

HEY YA HEY YA cheap lousy bastards...

SONYA

I knew they weren't going to stop. Chalk one for the fortune
teller.

BUDDY

You got to tell the person before it happens.

SONYA

What fortune tellers you been dealing with?

Sonya's phone rings. She answers.

SONYA

Yeah. (Beat.) Hey. (Beat.) So? (Beat.) And? (Beat.) And that
relates to me how? (Beat.) Yeah. Well you remind that
spineless jerk there'll be an ice rink in hell the day my fat
white backside walks back into his life, let alone that
filthy hellhole he calls a diner. Capisce? (Beat.) OK. Bye,
mom.

Hangs up. Sonya's mind is a million
miles away.

BUDDY

A termite walks into a bar. Asks, "Hey, is the bar tender
here?"

Sonya smiles.

SONYA

That one didn't make me want to punch you.

BUDDY

See? Keep at something for three years, you improve!

SONYA

I'm gonna take a break.

BUDDY

I'll holler if it picks up.

You do that.

SONYA

And she's in her shack. Buddy looks at the shack for along time. Turns. Starts spinning the wheel.

The Little Brat curries on. Spins the wheel. Loses. Heads off.

RONNIE and DENISE, a pair of Jersey Shore cast rejects, pass by. Denise slows at Sonya's sign.

RONNIE
Come on, Denise, gimme a frikkin break.

DENISE
I want to know my fortune, Jesus, what?

RONNIE
There's nobody there!

BUDDY
The madam is in. She's just inside. Collecting her powers.

RONNIE
Why don't you burn the ten bucks, at least it'll keep you warm.

DENISE
Get a job before you tell me how to spend my money, OK?

Ronnie heads off, muttering.

DENISE
Um... Hello? Madam Zar...

SONYA

(Bursts out and, in a semi-outrageous Eastern European accent...)
Jo Reggelt! Morning good to you! I am Zartella, traveled from Hungary here to you have your fortune tell.

Denise hands Sonya ten bucks. Sonya peers into the crystal ball, pouring on a few extra servings of 'Madam Zartella' for effect.

SONYA
You are from close to here.

DENISE

Um... Yeah.

SONYA

Your whole life have you lived here.

DENISE

Sure. Grew up on Davidson, but then dad lost the dealership when I was fourteen so we moved in with my Aunt Cecille over on Oak Street, until she lost the house in the second divorce, so then we all moved in with my Cousin Ronnie over on DeKalb until the sinkholes started to get real bad...

SONYA

SILENCE. Please. Understand I wish not to rude be. I only must put the focus on your soul so as I read your future can.

DENISE

Um... sure.

SONYA

You've a man.

DENISE

Yeah, I do. Ronnie. He's ain't much but he's mine.

SONYA

Long time have you known him.

DENISE

First day of Kindergarten. He put worms in my Lunchables.

SONYA

Together long time have you been as well.

DENISE

Since he threw up in the pool at Jamie DeRosso's graduation party. I held his hair. He thought it was cute.

SONYA

He is not an easy man.

DENISE

Wow. Oh... You're good. WOW.

SONYA

Please... But you love him.

DENISE

Yeah... I know, yeah... Does... Does he?

SONYA

Yes. Deep under all, yes.

DENISE

How can I... You know... Get him to show it?

SONYA

(Staring deeply into the ball)

There is a thing the he likes that you do.

(Denise just giggles)

Do more this thing.

DENISE

Thank you. Thank you! You've a gift. I really do love him, you know. When we're together, it's just... I'd do anything for him. You know? I just love him.

RONNIE

(Off-stage)

Yo, Denise! Lessgo!

DENISE

GIMME A SECOND, YOU TOOL!

She hurries off.

The Little Brat comes back, lays down a dollar, spins Buddy's wheel, loses. Sulks off.

As MUSIC masks is, there is an EXPLOSION of movement; hours of fairtime speed by in a moment, as actors move triple time. Some spin the wheel, some get fortunes, most just pass by. At the end, the Little Brat spins, loses, and sulks off in triple time.

Buddy and Sonya are left alone.

BUDDY

I don't get why this is so tiring, I lean against a counter and move my arm three feet in either direction every so often, that's it, eh? It shouldn't be this way. What do you say, Madame Z, am I right?

Over the above, Sonya's been counting her money. She's counted it twice. She doesn't like either result.

BUDDY
Hey? You OK? Madame Z? You hear me? (Beat.) Sonya.

SONYA
Hm? Oh. Nothing.

BUDDY
You OK?

SONYA
Sure.

BUDDY
Hungry?

SONYA
Hm? No. I'm good.

BUDDY
I'll buy.

SONYA
No, it's not. Um....

BUDDY
I know. Just lemme buy. OK?

SONYA
OK. You buy, you pick.

BUDDY
We do it fair. One to five we go the fried meat place, six to ten we go to the fried dough place, eleven or twelve we really treat ourselves, go to the other fried meat place.

As Buddy spins the wheel, JACKSON the handyman enters and begins working on the wires of the flickering Wheel of Fortune sign.

The wheel lands on three.

BUDDY
Fried meat place!

As they start to go...

JACKSON
Fried meat place got shut down.

SONYA
Too many rats?

JACKSON
Nah. Not any rats. All of a sudden like.

BUDDY & SONYA
Fried dough place.

They head off. Jackson gets all of the lights working. But once he leaves, a new set of letters flickers out.

DAY 2

The midway. Next afternoon. A rain falls.

Buddy. And no one else.

Footsteps.

BUDDY
HEY YA HEY YA HEY YA STEP RIGHT UP ...

Someone runs past, trying to get out of the rain.

BUDDY
And.... give her a.... spin.

Sonya comes out of the shack. Sits.

BUDDY
A man runs into a bar and asks the barkeep, "Give me ten shots of your best whisky." The bartender sets up the ten glasses. The man starts drinking them as quickly as the bartender serves them. The bartender asks, "Why are you drinking so fast?" "You'd drink fast too, if you had what I have." The bartender asks, "What do you have?" "Seventy cents." (No response.) I tell you that joke a month ago, you'd have tried to hit me with your crystal ball.

SONYA
You tell me that joke a month ago, I would have hit you with my crystal ball.

BUDDY
And now?

SONYA

Seventy cents gets you a pretzel pack.

Sonya's phone rings. She checks the number. Lets it ring till it stops.

BUDDY

What's the ball say? Sun gonna make an appearance today?

SONYA

(Peers into the crystal ball)

The weather will shift periodically throughout the day, after which it will grow dark.

BUDDY

(Mimicking Denise)

You're good. You're GOOD.

SONYA

Shaddap. What's the wheel say?

BUDDY

Odds we get a break, evens we're washed -

The Little Brat runs up carrying an umbrella.

He slams a dollar down. Spins. Loses. Slams down another dollar.

BUDDY

Son, I've got a secret for you. A little business acumen to pass on to you, some financial type advice, if you will. All these prizes I got back here? I buy 'em wholesale. Works out to well less than a buck a piece. So here's the wholesaler's number...

LITTLE BRAT

I just want to win.

Spins. Loses again. The Little Brat sulks off.

SONYA

Buddy, why don't you...

BUDDY

Hm? What?

BUDDY

Sorry. (Pause.) I was gonna talk to Wilson tonight, don't know if I told you...

SONYA

Anyone can talk to Wilson. Question is will Wilson listen.

BUDDY

I was thinking of asking for a move. Over to B lot? Off the carousel.

SONYA

It'd be good for you.

BUDDY

Good for you, too.

SONYA

Why would he move me to B lot? He's got seventeen games and four sideshow freaks would give him a better cut than I would right off the carousel.

BUDDY

I could ask him if-

SONYA

No.

BUDDY

I don't mind asking-

SONYA

I know you don't. OK? I- Just. Thanks. Thank you, but... Thank you.

BUDDY

Eh. Well. He's probably not gonna move me anyway.

SONYA

You should ask, though. It'd be good for ya. You're a good barker.

BUDDY

Let's ask the wheel.

Buddy spins the wheel. Lands on a three.

BUDDY

Nope. Gonna stay put.

SONYA

Wheel doesn't know everything, Buddy.

BUDDY

It knows enough.

The Little Brat comes back through the now pouring rain, carrying an umbrella. Slams a dollar down.

BUDDY

Your persistence would be charming were it not a clear symptom of psychosis.

LITTLE BRAT

Spin it.

Buddy spins. The kid loses. He starts to walk away.

LITTLE BRAT

When am I going to win, huh? I've been playing this damn wheel all summer, WHEN AM I GOING TO WIN?

BUDDY

Ask her.

LITTLE BRAT

Huh?

SONYA

Buddy...

BUDDY

Predictions are her racket.

The Little Brat goes up to Sonya. Sees the Ten Dollar sign on her booth.

SONYA

Forget it, honey. This one's on the house.

She looks into the crystal ball.

SONYA

Play again. Right now.

The Little Brat goes to Buddy's wheel. Lays down a dollar. Buddy spins the wheel. The kid wins.

LITTLE BRAT

I won. I won!

BUDDY

Good job, son, now pick...

LITTLE BRAT

I WON!

The Little Brat runs off, never even bothering to collect a prize.

A long silence. The rain starts to taper off.

BUDDY

Well done, fortune teller, well done.

SONYA

You got a set all right.

BUDDY

What?

SONYA

Play innocent, then pull that crap.

BUDDY

Sonya-

SONYA

I know a thing or two about rigged wheels, my friend. If you're gonna run one, fine, but own up, that's all I'm saying.

BUDDY

It's not rigged.

SONYA

Buddy-

Two fairgoers enter and approach the wheel.

BUDDY

My wheel's not rigged!

The fairgoers look at each other and move on.

BUDDY

Oh, for... You see? You see, Sonya? That's wrong. Just wrong!
I run a clean wheel, but it don't take much to...

SONYA

Buddy.

BUDDY

What?

SONYA

Stopped raining.

BUDDY

So.

SONYA

Shut up and bark.

The rain ends. A wave of fairgoers enters. Time speeds up again. Many wheel players, a few fortunes are told.

Time Slows as a family of fairgoers enters. Mom, Dad, Boy .

BOY

Hey dad, I'm going to spin!

DAD

No, Jimmy-

BOY

It's my lawnmowing money!

DAD

I told you no games until after rides-

BOY

It's my money!

DAD

After the rides-

BOY

This is America, Dad, I can spin if I what to with my money!

DAD

After the rides-

MOM
 JOE FOR GOD'S SAKE LET HIM SPIN I GOT A MIGRAINE SIZE OF A
 BUICK.

The Dad takes a deep breath, gives the
 boy a dollar.

SONYA
 Jimmy. Take seven.

BOY
 Huh?

BUDDY
 Huh?

SONYA
 Play the seven. Just saying.

DAD
 Play the seven, son. She is a fortune teller.

BOY
 But daaaa-ad, I wanted to play the

MOM
 A BUICK.

The Boy puts his dollar on the seven.
 Buddy spins.

Seven wins. The Boy collects his prize
 and the family heads off.

SONYA
 I'm good.

BUDDY
 You got lucky, Sonya.

SONYA
 I'm GOOD. I don't mind a cheat, Buddy. Just be straight about
 it, OK? I can go 'back there' and get this.

BUDDY
 I run an honest wheel!

She heads into her shack. She slams the
 door.

Jackson enters, starts to futz with the
 still malfunctioning lights.

JACKSON

I could help you with that, you know.

BUDDY

What?

JACKSON

That honest wheel thing. Wouldn't be hard. I just run a wire from the axel down to a little switch by your foot-

BUDDY

You can't fix a neon sign and you want to touch my wheel?

JACKSON

You know... if I ran the wire from the wheel to the sign...

BUDDY

I run an honest wheel!

Buddy heads off.

JACKSON

Well that's your problem, then.

Jackson gets the lights working. Heads off. As soon as he's offstage, another two lights blink out.

DAY 3

The Midway. Sonya sits outside her booth. Buddy comes back to his booth carrying some food.

Buddy eats in silence, sets up his till.

Sonya cleans her crystal ball.

A few beats pass.

BUDDY

Hamburger walks into a bar. Bartender says, "We don't serve food."

She stares at him. Then starts to laugh in spite of herself.

BUDDY

Hostile audience dictates shorter material.

Look, Buddy...

SONYA

The Little Brat enters.

BUDDY

Oh, for God's sake kid, haven't you-

The Little Brat points to Sonya.

LITTLE BRAT

There she is!

Two other Little Brats follow The Little Brat on. They are BRAT 2 (a boy) and BRAT 3 (a girl).

BUDDY

What is this, Children of the Corn get in free day?

LITTLE BRAT

It's her.

BRAT 2

Her?

BRAT 3

Bull.

LITTLE BRAT

It was her. Honest. She tells the future.

BRAT 3

She looks like that drunk Harry Potter teacher.

SONYA

I'm sitting right here, kid.

LITTLE BRAT

Show some respect, dude. She's got powers.

The kids just stare at Sonya for a little bit, not sure what to say.

BRAT 2

I'm hungry.

BRAT 3

I'm thirsty.

LITTLE BRAT

Ask her something.

Beat.

BRAT 3

People pay you ten bucks to answer dumbass questions?

SONYA

Yep. That'll be ten bucks.

BRAT 3 goes for her wallet.

SONYA

Sweet Jesus I was kidding, kid. Come on. Someone ask away. No charge.

BRAT 2 steps forward.

BRAT 2

Umm. Who's gonna win the Yankees game tonight?

SONYA

The team that scores more runs.

BRAT 2

Um. I guess. OK. Cool.

BRAT 3

Let's get outta here.

BRAT 2

I want to see the guy who bites the heads off things.

LITTLE BRAT

Wait! Wait, watch this! Madam Zartella, if I play the wheel right now, will I win?

Beat.

SONYA

Yes.

LITTLE BRAT

What number?

SONYA

Seven.

The Little Brat pops a dollar down on 7. Buddy spins the wheel.

Seven.

BUDDY

Of, for the love of...

See! SEE!!!
 LITTLE BRAT

OK, that was cool.
 BRAT 3

Jimbo'd love that!
 BRAT 2

Let's go find him, he's with Twist-Top and the twins near the
 fried meat place!
 LITTLE BRAT

Dude, no! I hate rats!
 BRAT 2

Nah, they got rid of 'em!
 LITTLE BRAT

The BRATS scurry off. All except BRAT
 3, who looks at Sonya for a bit before
 leaving. Sonya just looks at Buddy.

I run an honest wheel.
 BUDDY

Yeah?
 SONYA

Yeah. Cause if I could rig this, thing, there's no way I'd
 have let a seven come up just now.
 BUDDY

No?
 SONYA

No.
 BUDDY

Six.
 SONYA

What?
 BUDDY

Six. Spin it.
 SONYA

Buddy spins the wheel. A one comes up.
 SONYA

You really are an ass, you know that?

BUDDY

There's no way I can win this, is there?

SONYA

Win what? You're playing with me!

BUDDY

If I spin and you guess right, you're my charity case. If I spin and you guess wrong, I'm messing with you? IT'S A WHEEL. I SPIN IT. IT LANDS ON SOMETHING. MAYBE YOU GUESS IT, MAYBE YOU DON'T. END OF STORY.

BRAT 3 comes back on, alone. She sits at Sonya's booth. Looks at her for a long while.

SONYA

Where are your friends?

BRAT 3

Looking for their friends.

(Beat.)

Can I ask you something?

SONYA

Sure.

BRAT 3 puts ten bucks on Sonya's table. Sonya goes to hand it back.

BRAT 3

I'm not your charity case.

SONYA

OK.

(BRAT 3 isn't sure how to start.)

Are you asking me what your question is? Cause that's a tough one, but I can-

BRAT 3

My dad's a real dick.

SONYA

OK.

BRAT 3

Treats my mom like hell. "Lazy whore". "Fat slut". Real original crap like that.

Like he won't nurse a beer and watch 'Cops' all morning, but no, he's God's gift cause he's got a diner he's gotta pay off the health inspector to keep open, and he thinks no one knows...

SONYA

Is that so?

BRAT 3

Yeah. But... look, I'm sorry, this is really stupid.

SONYA

It's not.

BRAT 3

I don't know why I'm telling you this.

SONYA

I think you do.

BRAT 3

Maybe. (Pause.) It's just... I mean, it's not always bad. You know? Cause he can kind of make mom happy. Or sort of not so angry. And that's something. I know it is. But I just... I mean, he's supposed to feel like something to me, right? Except he doesn't, and he doesn't care. You know? So I know I shouldn't care about it either, except, but then it kind of hurts every time I look at him, like there's something there that's sucking out of me what it should be putting in? And I feel stupid for expecting it to be there every time I see him, and instead just... just one time I want to feel about someone the way every says I should, the way normal people do-

SONYA

It's gonna get better.

BRAT 3

Yeah?

SONYA

Yeah. You'll find something. Something you love to do. And it'll fill that part of you up. It might not do much else for you. But it'll do that.

BRAT 3

OK. That's better than nothing. I guess.

BRAT 3 starts to go.

SONYA

Honey.

BRAT 3 stops. Sonya holds out the ten bucks. BRAT 3 takes it back.

SONYA

Now give it back to the Little Brat. I saw you pick his pocket when he ran off.

BRAT 3

You're good.

BRAT 3 leaves.

BUDDY

Giving the customers their money back, is not a very stable long-term business model.

SONYA

You spin a wheel under a broken neon sign. Could you shut up about business models for more than five minutes? Maybe?

BUDDY

You tell people things they already know, twisted a bit so they don't know they know it. So how about you come down off it for five minutes. Could you do that? Maybe?

A loooong silence.

The Little Brat comes back in, with all of the original BRATs plus a few more. Every one has a dollar in his hand.

Jackson comes on, but holds back when he spots the kids.

The Little Brat goes to Sonya.

LITTLE BRAT

We all want to play the wheel, right now!

BUDDY

Well, STEP RIGHT UP THEN, KIDDOS!

SONYA

All of you?

LITTLE BRAT

Yep? Who's gonna win? Watch this, guys, she's good! Who's gonna win?

SONYA

None of you.

LITTLE BRAT

Huh?

SONYA

None of you. Luck doesn't look good on the wheel any more.

LITTLE BRAT

So... We shouldn't play?

SONYA

No. Not today. Maybe not tomorrow even. Ask me again in the morning.

The kids leave. Sonya stares at Buddy, then heads into her shack, flips the sign closed.

Buddy looks to Jackson. Jackson leaves, laughing hysterically.

DAY 4

A row of people ten deep at Sonya's booth. No one at Buddy's. As everyone moves in accelerated time. Buddy watches Sonya rake in a hundred bucks and send away ten seemingly satisfied customers.

No one plays the wheel in all this time. Buddy just spins it absentmindedly.

As the last customer leaves, the Little Brat comes on, looks to Sonya. Sonya shakes her head no. The Little Brat heads off.

Sonya hangs up a sign: BACK IN FIVE MINUTES, and heads into her shack.

Buddy stares at Sonya's shack for a while. Then he spins the wheel. Watches it intently. Just as it finishes spinning, Jackson comes on with a stepladder. As he talks, he works on the lights.

JACKSON

Anybody win?

BUDDY

Hm?

JACKSON

That spin. Any winners? (Beat.) Why'd ya spin it, anyway?

BUDDY

Habit.

JACKSON

You've been spinning that wheel all morning, but you been watching the madam.

BUDDY

It was nothing.

JACKSON

And that was the first spin today you actually watched.

BUDDY

If I keep saying it was nothing, will you eventually believe me?

JACKSON

No. So I'm going to guess that spin was "Odds I'm going to say something to her, Evens, I'm not." (Pause.) See, cause it's what you call a binary problem,, and it came up evens, and you're still sitting here. And you like your odds and evens spins, I've noticed. (Pause.) You know, this is the most enjoyable conversation we've ever had. (Pause.) Now, I've got some diagrams on how I can rig your wheel...

BUDDY

NO!

JACKSON

Wave of the future, man!

BUDDY

A rigged wheel. Why bother? Life just rigs it for ya. You know how I ended up running this wheel? You got any idea how?

JACKSON

No.

BUDDY

Well neither do I! Look. Look at all these poor bastards wandering up and down this midway. Look at 'em good. You know what separates any one of em from any other one of em? From you, from me, from George Washington or Elvis Costello or Jeffrey Dahmer?

JACKSON

Elvis Costello?

BUDDY

I LIKE ELVIS COSTELLO, OK? BUT. Their wheel landed on three instead of four one day, that's what. One day, one of 'em came up heads when it counted. And the rest didn't. So, so what if I spin a wheel to figure out which way to turn sometimes? At least I'm not kidding anyone. Least of all me.

JACKSON

All well and good. But don't get caught thinking it's random.

BUDDY

It's a wheel!

JACKSON

Yeah. Except you're always the one spinning it.

All the lights go on. Jackson tips his hat to Buddy and heads off.

Sonya comes back out, takes away the "BACK IN FIVE MINUTES" Sign.

Buddy looks at his wheel, looks to Sonya, begins to get up when a Customer comes up. A man in a suit.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Are you, um... Of course you are. Sorry. Sorry. Do I... Just....

SONYA

The money on the table lay, yes.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Um, OK. Look, I don't normally do things like this, I just... Some people told me that you see... things.

SONYA

Things, yes. I see you not yet the money on the table lay.

The man lays his money down.

SONYA

Now I see customer.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Ah. Ha. Excellent. Um, OK, here it is. My brother, he does... well for himself. Very well. Generally. And he brought me... this.

The man lays a stack of papers on the counter. A financial prospectus. Charts, graphs, etc.

SONYA

Your brother money from you want for... investment.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Yes.

SONYA

But you say your brother well for himself does.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

He does.

SONYA

So then he need you why?

WELL-DRESSED MAN

He doesn't. He says it's the biggest thing he's seen in a decade. As sure as it gets. And he wants me in on the ground floor because we're family.

SONYA

I do not business matters of this kind...

WELL-DRESSED MAN

No, no, you don't understand. I'm not asking you to look at any of it, I just... What do you think? What do you see?

SONYA

I think nothing faster destroy family than money lost.

A pause.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Thank you.

The Well-Dressed Man leaves. Buddy looks like he's about to say something, then doesn't.

SONYA

Question have you, funny looking wheel spin spin man?

BUDDY

Yes, as a matter of fact. That Serbo-Croatian-Pigeon-Borat accent, which Bond movie did you pick it up from?

SONYA

You may want to oil that wheel. I don't sense anyone's luck changing, I wouldn't want it to rust.

BUDDY

You could have cost that guy millions.

SONYA

See his suit?

BUDDY

Of course.

SONYA

Notice anything about it?

BUDDY

It was... nice. Recently pressed. A little shiny, probably not his best...

SONYA

IT WAS A SUIT, DUMBASS. Who wears a suit to a carnival?

BUDDY

Yes. Yes, there was also that.

SONYA

He made a special trip to see me, probably on lunch. He knew the deal was bull. He just felt bad about saying no to his brother. He wanted an out. I gave it to him.

BUDDY

Some day you're going to have to explain to me how taking someone's money to tell them something they already know is helpful.

SONYA

I'd be happy to, except that would require you actually listening to someone.

BUDDY

Yeah, well, it's all academic now anyway.

SONYA

What's that supposed to mean?

BUDDY

It means it's a moot point, not worth debating...

SONYA

I know what 'it's academic' means, Christ! What do you mean?

BUDDY

I talked to Wilson. And he's gonna move me to B-lot.

SONYA

Good. Cause after three years of rigged wheels and mocking your customers and the same four 'guy walks into a bar' jokes, I suggest you not let that wheel hit you in the ass on your way down the midway!

Denise reenters. Sonya spots her just in the nick of time and adopts her accent.

SONYA

You to your wheel spin now go, thinning hair man with the belly of beer. Denise! My dear! How have been you? Forgive me, as I argue with the carnie monkey people.

DENISE

Hey, Madam, um...

SONYA

Your man everything with good is?

DENISE

Oh, yes. Absolutely.

SONYA

What I said other day you helped, eh?

DENISE

You know it. We're just as in love as ever.

Sonya smiles at Buddy.

RONNIE (O.S.)

Yo, Denise!

DENISE

PUT A SOCK IN IT, TURDFACE. Anyway, Madam, here's the thing. See, Ronnie's brother Nicky has got this garage, over on Continental Avenue next to the Denny's? And I've been telling him for months, "Ronnie, go ask Nicky for a job, he's the only boss you're gonna talk to who's not gonna run a credit check," you know what I'm saying?

SONYA

You saying I know, yes.

DENISE

And then yesterday... He asked him. He asked him for a job! I coulda died!

SONYA

So Ronnie a job has now?

DENISE

No, Nicky ran a credit check anyway. But! Nicky said he knows a guy who knows Dominican Frank who lives down on South Street next to the Korean nail place? And that Dominican Frank knows a guy who knows Cuban Frank who runs the garage on the other side of the Korean nail place, and he says Cuban Frank's nephew is going to have to go back to the state pen cause he didn't report as a sex offender when he moved in upstairs from the Korean nail place! And Cuban Frank can't run credit checks or else the Feds might link him to the meth lab downstairs from the Korean nail place! So he said he's gonna put in a good word for Ronnie to take the nephew's spot on the lube crew when that happens!

SONYA

That is.... news that is good?

DENISE

Sounds like a sure thing to me! So I wanna know. When's Ronnie gonna propose?

SONYA

Propose? As in the wedding, the bride here comes?

DENISE

Yeah! His life's finally coming together, I just made assistant manager at Supercuts, now's the time! Madam. If he doesn't propose soon... I'm gonna have to bail. Three years is enough, you know?

SONYA

Almost a sentence, it is.

(Stares into the crystal ball)

SONYA

He propose will tomorrow.

DENISE

TOMORROW! AHHH YES! If he proposes tomorrow I'll have the ring for Chantal's barbecue on Saturday and I can wave it in her fat face and tell her to suck it-

SONYA

Or never.

DENISE

Never? Tomorrow or never?

SONYA

Not always so specific is the ball.

DENISE

I can live with that. He proposes tomorrow... Or that's it. OK. Cool. OK. I can... Tomorrow or never, huh?

RONNIE (O.S.)

Denise! They got a fat lady show, I want to see if she looks worse than you in a bikini!

DENISE

Yeah, I can totally live with that.

(She heads off.)

BET SHE WEIGHS MORE THAN YOUR CREDIT RATING, YA PRICK.

BUDDY

I've gotta admit. You might've actually helped her.

SONYA

(Waving a ten dollar bill)

And the feeling mutual is. People just want some sign. A little push towards what they know is right, Buddy. I just give 'em... Confidence. There's nothing wrong with-

BRAT 3 reappears. She has a black eye, and a fat lip. Sonya freezes at the sight of her.

BRAT 3

So, um...that part in the ball where you saw shit working out? Get it checked. I think it might be smudged, or blurred, or broke, or something. Cause, you know, I appreciate you didn't use that bullshit accent with me yesterday. But it might've been better if you had.

She leaves.

Sonya puts her ball under the counter. She begins to collect her things.

BUDDY

Sonya.

Sonya heads inside.

BUDDY

Sonya! She's... A man walks into bar!

Sony slams the door.

Buddy sighs. Spins his wheel. Doesn't like the number that comes up. He turns off the lights.

Day 5

Quiet. Carnival's not open yet. Neither the wheel nor the fortune teller stand are manned.

Sonya comes out. Looks around. No one there.

She sits. Places her crystal ball on the stand. Looks into it. Leans in closer. She's looking at her reflection. Touches a wrinkle on her face. Runs her fingers through her wild hair.

She knocks the crystal ball to the ground. It rolls offstage.

She takes out her cell phone. Dials it.

SONYA

Hey. Mom? It's me. Listen... I know I left bad. But-

Buddy comes on. Carrying the crystal ball.

They look at each other for a moment.

Buddy places the crystal ball on its stand on her counter. Then he lays ten dollars next to the crystal ball.

She doesn't move for a moment.

SONYA

I'll call you back.

She hangs up.

SONYA

Lonely. Wants everyone to think he's a hard ass. Thinks nothing of taunting a little fat kid to get him to come back to his wheel on a repeat basis. Possibly runs a crooked wheel. (A long pause.) No. He... I don't think he runs a crooked wheel. Cause he's... Good. Deep down. A little twisted. Fetishizes bar room jokes to a strange degree.

But he'll make sure someone down on their luck has a plate at dinnertime. Not sure how his choices in life brought him here. So he tries not to make any anymore. Easier that way. So why would he rig his wheel? His wheel's his life.

BUDDY

You're good.

She pushes the crystal ball to him. He looks into it.

BUDDY

Stubborn. And stubborn. And smarter than she knows. And stubborn. From a place she wants to forget. And will, cause she's stubborn, did I mention. Wants to help people. Not sure how. But she gets by with... a skill. Something more than just spinning a wheel. Something I could never do.

SONYA

Something you're doing now.

They look at each other.

BUDDY

Fortune teller and a carnival barker walks into a bar...

Sonya's phone rings. She laughs, turns to go get it.

Buddy smiles at her, turns back to his wheel.

SONYA

Wait!

She takes an envelope from under her counter, hands it to him. Her phone continues to ring.

SONYA

Wilson dropped this off for you.

She hands it to him. He reads. She answers her phone.

SONYA

Mom? Yeah, hi, sorry. Listen-

Buddy tears up the letter from Wilson.

SONYA

Buddy, what are you... Mom, sorry, one second... What are you doing? What was it?

BUDDY

A new slot on B lot.

SONYA

That's great! Why...

BUDDY

One new slot on B lot.

SONYA

Buddy, come on. It's B lot! It's right off the carousel, you'll....

BUDDY

You want to get some dinner?

SONYA

It's ten in the morning.

BUDDY

You want to get some breakfast?

SONYA

What are you... nothing's open. Nothing opens till the carnival does.

BUDDY

Not here. Someplace.

SONYA

Yesterday you were two inches from calling me a con artist.

BUDDY

No, I think I did call you a con artist. And I was wrong. And it's fine if you say no. Really. I don't have much would make someone want to have dinner with me, I know. But I'll tell you what I do have. An ex wife. An ex house. I've got two dollars and thirty seven cents in the bank until the check I wrote for milk this morning clears. I've got a studio apartment where I pirate cable from my deaf neighbor so everything's closed captioned, but you get used to it. It's across the street from a Korean nail place and, as I just learned yesterday, from an unregistered sex offender and a meth lab. I've got this wheel. And I've got you. And I like talking to you. I don't want to know your secrets or your social security number or whether or not you like Elvis Costello. I just... want to keep talking to you. For as long as we've got things to say.

A long pause. Suddenly Sonya puts the phone to her ear.

SONYA

What? (Beat.) OK. (Beat.) OK. (Beat.) Ma? (Beat.) Love you. (Hangs up.) She heard everything. Said if I came home now she'd never talk to me again. (Pause.) I know a Chinese place. They got a jukebox. Elvis Costello's on it. I like Elvis Costello. You like Chinese food?

Buddy thinks about it. Turns to his wheel. Spins it. He slams his hand down on the wheel, stopping the arrow at a particular number.

BUDDY

Yeah, I like Chinese.

Black out.