
FADE IN:

EXT ESTATE GROUNDS DAY

Tables are set up on the grounds of a modest estate for the lesser items up for sale. A quiet auction takes place under a nearby canopy, with BIDDERS raising their numbered paddles.

A boy of nine, MARSHALL, is examining a carved BLACK BIRD. His MOTHER notices him with it. A bare flicker of a smile crosses her face before she goes back to examining a stack of "frames only" full of slashed portraits and broken mirrors.

Marshall's sister, BECKY, four years older than him, holds an antique brush and mirror set out of her shadow to admire. Her long hair flows unfettered down her back.

Their FATHER approaches from near the big tent, carrying a rifle and a shotgun.

FATHER

Estate sale my ass. Garage sale for rich people.

MOTHER

Don't you have enough guns? You're not taking him hunting again.

FATHER

I don't have a shotgun.

MOTHER

And the other?

FATHER

It was one price for both.

She scowls and looks at Marshall.

MOTHER

I'm sorry there weren't any toys here, Marshall. Do you like that bird?

FATHER

He doesn't need it.

MOTHER

If you can get two more guns he can have something that will make him happy.

MARSHALL

It's okay.

MOTHER

(to Becky)

They're real ivory. I don't think they know what they have or they'd be in the big tent.

Becky glances nervously at her father, then sets the brush and mirror down and walks away from the table.

Her Mother pauses, trying to decipher her daughter's actions. She then picks up her own choice from the tables: a plain, utilitarian serving bowl.

INT APARTMENT/MARSHALL'S ROOM DAY

Marshall's bedroom is spartan for a nine-year-old. A few free posters hang on the wall. The bedspread does not portray the latest merchandising scam.

On a wall shelf, among an assortment of happy-meal tie-ins and a couple Bionicles, sits the black bird from the auction.

Marshall sits on his bed reading. He looks up, bored, tired, and glances at his toy options. He goes to the shelf and reaches for the newest Bionicle, less dusty than the others.

Instead he moves his hand over and picks up the black bird. He returns to his bed, wiping the dust off it. He turns it over in his hands.

It is about the size of a woman's shoe. It's general shape resembles a pigeon, but the face is an androgenous person's, with crystal eyes looking sideways from a cocked head.

The eyes get his attention. He holds the bird up so they can catch the light. He moves it real close to his face, then closer still, noses touching. He holds it...then exclaims:

MARSHALL

Cool!

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVAL

A stereographic image of a period street scene: A horse-drawn carriage on a dirt street. The picture is brownish, with circular edges fading out of focus.

Marshall removes his gaze and blinks to wet his stinging eyes. He looks back inside the bird:

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

The picture has changed to one of PEOPLE in a parlor. The photos are always candid, even clumsy, their subjects seemingly unaware they are being photographed.

MARSHALL (O. S.)

Cool.

INT APARTMENT/KITCHEN NIGHT

A homemade birthday cake with ten candles sits on the dining table in front of Marshall. His Mother snaps a picture.

MOTHER

Blow them out, honey.

Marshall blows with all his might. He gets them all.

His Mother aims her cheap camera at Becky, who recoils as if it were a weapon. Becky's hair has been cropped off.

MOTHER

I want a picture of what you did for attention on your little brother's birthday.

Becky storms out of the room.

MOTHER

Your Father's going to be upset!

Marshall ignores her and tears into a gift-wrapped book.

MOTHER

You'll have friends over next year.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

A MAN with a large moustache is eating at a large table. (Marshall's parents have a muffled ARGUMENT off screen. The word "birthday" is all that can be made out.)

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

The man is reading in bed next to a sleeping WOMAN.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

The man is in bed again, naked and exposed from the waist up. A different, YOUNGER WOMAN, stands nude beside the bed.

INT MARSHALL'S ROOM NIGHT

Marshall pulls the bird quickly away from his eyes. He blinks to wash the image away.

After a moment or two, he chances another glimpse inside the bird. It isn't any better. He jumps off the bed and puts it back on the shelf behind everything else.

INT MARSHALL'S ROOM DAY

Marshall and MICKEY, same age, sit on the bed with a checker game between them. The door opens and Marshall's Mother peeks in.

MOTHER

Let me know when you're hungry,
honey; I'll make you and your new
friend some lunch when I get back.

She beams at Marshall and closes the door without an answer.

MICKEY

I'm bored. Why don't you have a
computer?

MARSHALL

I don't know.

MICKEY

Everyone has a computer.

Mickey gets off the bed and goes to the shelf.

MICKEY

Your sister's got boobs.

MARSHALL

I know.

Mickey picks up a toy from the shelf.

MICKEY

Have you ever seen them?

MARSHALL

Don't talk about stuff like that.
It's your turn.

MICKEY
I'm tired of checkers. Computer
games are better.

He takes the action figure and begins wildly bending the arms
in a simulated fight.

MICKEY
Arr! Arrr! 'Specially the fighting
ones.

MARSHALL
Stop it! You'll break it!

MICKEY
So?

He puts it back and grabs another one.

MICKEY
You've probably never seen any
boobs.

MARSHALL
...I have.

MICKEY
My dad's got a whole stack of books
hidden under the towels we never
use. But now he has the computer.

Mickey picks up the black bird. Marshall gets up from the
bed, uneasy. Mickey sets the dull figurine back down.

MICKEY
I'm going home. I don't want to eat
here.

MARSHALL
Look in its eyes!

Marshall picks the bird up and points to the eyes. Mickey
warily brings it close to his.

MARSHALL
And it changes when you look away.

MICKEY
Hey, cool! This guy's got an axe in
his head!

MARSHALL
Let me have it.

Mickey pushes Marshall away with a stiff arm.

MICKEY

I think his wife did it. Cool!

Marshall grabs the bird and peers inside.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

In the same bedroom, POLICEMEN are present in the room as a DOCTOR examines the man in bed. There is an axe stuck in his head. The sheets are soaked with blood.

Marshall holds the bird out, horrified. Mickey grabs it back.

INT APARTMENT/HALLWAY DAY

Marshall has the door to the linen closet open, parting the stack of towels at the bottom of the shelf. He tucks a small bundle into the gap, then pulls it back out.

He looks around before unwrapping the black bird from a small towel. He stares at it long and hard. Finally he brings it to his eyes.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

The bedroom has been cleaned up, the body removed. The only person present is the MAID, now fully clothed and helping herself to the contents of a jewelry box.

Marshall wraps the bird back up and hides it in the towels.

INT MARSHALL'S ROOM DAY

Marshall comes in carrying school books and is struck cold. Becky is sitting on the bed, looking into the black bird's eyes with the trace of a smile on her face. Marshall drops his books.

MARSHALL

No! Don't!

He grabs the bird roughly out of her hands.

BECKY

Sorry.

MARSHALL

How did you know?

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For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
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