

FADE IN:

**EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYGROUND - DAY**

A chilly, fall afternoon.

Two boys play an after school game of "Knights". The playground equipment has seen better days: paint-chipped sliderails and monkey bars, rusted swing chains, a heavily-dented metal slide.

But in the eyes of one of the boys it's not a shitty, derelict playground, but a castle! Complete with battlements, towers, and arrow loops.

JUSTIN CRANTZ (13)

Or, in this case, "Sir" Justin, stands in front of his opponent, his mighty "sword" (a stick with some heft in it), pointing at his target. His "shield", a Spider-Man backpack, is at the ready for a counter blow.

JUSTIN

(valiantly)

*I've come for the princess! Now, we will battle so I can save her, kiss her, and doth touch her...*

(flubs it)

*...Bozoms!*

ZACH HORTON (11)

Justin's younger cousin. He stands in the shadow of "Sir" Justin. He, also, has a "sword" (a thin stick with a bit of a limp), but no shield.

ZACH

(corrects him)

It's bosoms, not bozoms...

(then)

...And you can't "doth" touch someone. That doesn't make sense.

Justin reaches into his hoodie pocket, takes out an OREO COOKIE, pops one in his mouth.

JUSTIN

(chewing)

How would you know how to say it?!

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)  
I heard when Chelsea Nichols tried  
to kiss you, you threw up all over  
her!

ZACH  
That's not what happened!

JUSTIN  
My brother said only faggots do  
that!

ZACH  
Stop calling me that!

JUSTIN  
Does Aunt Rachael know her son's a  
FAGGOT!

Zach's heard enough...

He tosses the limp stick, grabs his backpack, storms off.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)  
Hey! Where ya going?!

No response.

Justin fumes at the lack of response. Full of rage, Justin  
charges Zach and shoulder checks him.

Zach crashes onto the ground, landing on his back.

Justin climbs atop Zach and pins his arms down, his black,  
gritted cookie-stained teeth gives him the look of a crazed  
maniac.

Zach thrashes, squirms and screams for Justin to get off.

Justin forms a viscous wad of BLACK SPIT and, ever so slowly,  
lowers it towards Zach's face like an elevator of grossness.

CAW... CAW...

Justin, startled, looks behind him.

THE WAD OF SPIT

breaks off Justin's lips as he turns his head -- the target,  
Justin's eye -- and, by inches, just misses Zach's face.

(To Zach, that wad of spit was just as potent, and more  
deadly, than Xenomorph mouth acid.)

A CROW

roosts in a tree not far from the playground, watching the two boys scuffle.

Justin gets off Zach, keeping his gaze on the thing that intruded on his fun.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)  
Stupid bird! Piss off!

CAW... CAW...

Justin clenches his black, cookie-stained teeth.

MOMENTS LATER

Justin finds a softball-sized stone and tosses it to himself, calculating wind, distance, speed...

JUSTIN (CONT'D)  
...Ten bucks says I can hit it from here.

ZACH  
No way.  
(then)  
Plus, isn't it bad luck to--

Justin cocks his arm back and HURLS the rock at the crow.

The rock cuts through the air...

*CRACK!*

Upon impact, the crow explodes in a mass of feathers and blood.

Zack winces.

JUSTIN  
Told ya! You owe me ten bucks!

ZACH  
I didn't agree to the bet.

JUSTIN  
Liar! When you said "no way" that counts as a challenge, so you owe me!

ZACH  
I can't! I'm trying to save for--

Justin marches up to Zach, punches him in the shoulder.

Zach whelps.

JUSTIN

The next one's gonna be your balls!

ZACH

Ok! Fine! I'll give it to you at the bus stop tomorrow.

JUSTIN

You better...

(then)

Now, let's go check out my kill!

**EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD WOODS - PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER**

The boys are a few yards from the playground, near a line of trees that separate the woods from the rest of the neighborhood.

THE CROW

a bloody pulp of feathers, broken bone, and blood, its skull and body caved in from the impact.

JUSTIN

See that? I'm a natural.

(British accent)

*Now, to take my home my trophy.*

Justin bends down, grabs a tuft of feathers. He pulls, yanks, and tugs until, finally, a FEATHER rips off.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(British accent)

*This will do nicely!*

Justin sticks the feather behind his ear, does a cheesy hands-on-hips Robin Hood hero pose.

ZACH

Ew... you shouldn't put that there, you might catch something.

JUSTIN

Yeah, I've caught something, alright. The "wussies." From you.

(then)

Well, I gotta get home. Later, queer.

Justin stuffs another Oreo in his mouth, scurries off.

Zach, a little uneasy, looks down at the dead crow.

**INT. JUSTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Justin, in his jammies, sits on top of his bed, crossed-legged, reading a comic book.

JUSTIN'S MOM enters...

JUSTIN'S MOM  
Lights out, kiddo.

...And bangs her foot against a skateboard.

JUSTIN'S MOM (CONT'D)  
Jesus, your room is like the house  
in Home Alone!

JUSTIN  
What's Home Alone?

JUSTIN'S MOM  
Old Christmas movie. We'll watch it  
this year.

JUSTIN  
Lemme just finish this--

JUSTIN'S MOM  
--No sir, you are not pleasant when  
tired.

Justin's mom takes the comic book, puts it on his desk, and pulls the covers back.

Zach jumps underneath the covers.

Mom tucks him in, kisses him on the forehead.

JUSTIN'S MOM (CONT'D)  
Goodnight.

Justin's mom clicks the lights off as she leaves.

**INT. JUSTIN'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Justin, up way past his bedtime, is underneath the covers, reading his comic book by flashlight.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Justin clicks the flashlight off. He sticks the feather from his "hunt" earlier in the comic book for a bookmark.

He gets from under the covers, goes to the window...

A CROW

sits on the mantle outside.

Justin stares at the crow. He bangs on the window to get it to shoo, but the crow doesn't flinch.

Furious, Justin bursts open the window...

JUSTIN

Go away you stupid...

Justin goes speechless...

HUNDREDS OF CROWS

roosting on rooftops, lightposts, and trees... all eyes of various colors -- blue, brown, and white -- are locked onto the boy that killed one of their own.

A storm of deafening CAWS fill Justin's room. He slams the window shut, backs away from the window...

THE GLASS

cracks and webs as hundreds of beaks peck relentlessly at the window.

Justin turns to run. He trips over the skateboard and smashes his jaw onto the floor.

He opens his mouth to scream, but can't...

His tongue is bitten in half.

Justin calls for help through a blood-filled mouth...

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(muffled)

Mom! Da--

THE WINDOW EXPLODES

a sea of crows flood the room.

THE FEATHER

in the comic book is exposed as Justin's screams fill the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. GRAVEYARD - MORNING**

MOURNERS are gathered around the casket, a yearbook picture of Justin next to it. Justin's mom is inconsolable. JUSTIN'S FATHER comforts her the best he can.

Zach, bags under his eyes, pallid, detached, gapes at the closed casket in disbelief.

...He saw him just yesterday. He was *alive* yesterday.

CAW... CAW...

Zach stiffens, terror in his bones.

He looks to the distance...

A CROW

watches ZACH, then flies away.

FADE OUT.