

JUST A BIRD

Written by
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INT. ARIA'S LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Slow panning shot of open boxes in an empty living room: someone is clearly moving out. In the boxes: high-tech birdwatching gear, pictures of exotic bird species, wild photography awards, bird paraphernalia everywhere. A couple of almost full suitcases on the floor.

ARIA (O.S.)
But it's not just a *bird*.

MOLLY (O.S.)
But 4 a-m! No fucking way I'm going.

INT. ARIA'S KITCHEN — CONTINUOUS

REVEAL: A middle-aged woman, ARIA, is sitting in the kitchen, making sure a huge camera lens is spotless. There is an open laptop in front of her, from which MOLLY's voice comes out.

ARIA
You said you'd take me there!

MOLLY (O.S.)
Yeah, and you said in the morning!

ARIA
But...

MOLLY (O.S.)
Aria, it's been four years now. You can go alone. Gotta go now, see you on Friday!

Molly ends the video call. Aria grunts, puts the lens down, takes her phone out and starts texting. We see her become increasingly frustrated, then start making phone calls. SERIES OF SHOTS: different calls, all with the same result.

ARIA
Look, I know you said you couldn't, but Molly just bailed out and no one wants to come.
(listens, nodding with annoyance)
Yes, I know, but this is my last chance, once I leave the country... it's not just a *bird*! I told you about the promise...

ARIA (cont'd)
(different phone call)
It is not easy to take, I need the
right light, and I will be taking it
against the sun... no, it cannot be any
other bird!

INT. ARIA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Aria's phone chimes, she picks it up and we see LITTLE BIRD's text message on screen: "AND DON'T FORGET THE PICTURE!" Aria sighs and puts her face between her hands. After a pause, she lifts it with a changed expression: it is the face of determination.

INT. ARIA'S GARAGE - 4 AM

Aria enters the garage through the house's back door, dressed in camouflage attire, sleeves rolled up and as awake as if it was 4 pm. There's a wild-looking, all-terrain Jeep waiting for her. She gets her backpack, lenses and other photo equipment into the trunk, getting everything ready.

She closes the trunk, fixes her hat and unrolls her sleeves; when undoing the right one she stops for a second, staring at her arm. We CLOSE ON a big SCAR on her right forearm.

Aria finishes unrolling the sleeve, dismissing her thoughts, gets in the Jeep and opens the garage door with the remote. She fastens her belt, holds the wheel, and then she pauses for a moment and stares into the cold night.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOLLY'S LIVING ROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

This is a small goodbye party for Aria. In the background, a group of middle-aged mixed people are chatting, playing, having a good time. There are also a few young persons. In the table we see drinks, snacks and poker cards. In the foreground, Aria and Molly are talking. Molly seems half-worried about her other guests, while Aria largely ignores the party.

MOLLY
Did you go?

ARIA
I'm going tomorrow.

MOLLY
Tomorrow?! You leave tomorrow!

ARIA
Yeah well, I made a promise.

MOLLY
Well you shouldn't have! She can't just ask you out of the blue. What if something happens and you miss the flight?

Aria looks worried, but not about the flight.

MOLLY (cont'd)
You didn't find anyone to take you. Are you going to be OK? I mean I would go but 4 am...
(pauses)
But there haven't been any other attacks in 4 years. I mean the chances of...

INT. ARIA'S GARAGE — PRESENT

Aria looks to the copilot seat, at a pepper spray bottle. She looks back, holds the wheel and puts the car key in the ignition. The loud BROOM of the all-terrain Jeep breaks the dark of night and we see it disappear in the distance.

EXT. MEADOW — MINUTES BEFORE DAWN

Aria comes in walking in a dew-wet meadow, binoculars in hand and a big camera lens hanging from her neck. The sky is starting to clear. There are a few houses scattered in the distance.

The excited chatter of morning birds fills the air, but Aria keeps looking for something she can't find.

Aria looks back; the landscape looks more and more desolated. She looks at her phone: it shows no signal. She looks worried.

As she walks farther away, she starts to have second thoughts. Still she trudges on, but, as if to confirm her fears, there is a sudden bark in the distance. Aria stops on her tracks, racing heartbeat, and looks all around: there is no sign of dogs anywhere near. She seems paralysed. This is the moment of truth. Is she going to continue or not?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARIA'S LIVING ROOM — A FEW DAYS AGO

We see Aria's laptop on a video call with EVELYN, her pregnant daughter. Evelyn is calling her from the terrace of a luxurious, tropical-looking house.

EVELYN

Really, I'm so happy that you're moving in with us.

Aria smiles.

ARIA

Have you decided on the name yet?

EVELYN

Yeah, in the end we went for Alondra.

ARIA

Alondra?

EVELYN

It's Spanish for lark. I was thinking of your poem.

ARIA

"To A Rising Skylark"?

EVELYN

Yeah! That one. You told me it was because of it that you became a birdwatcher, and look where you are now. I would like her to be as passionate and determined as her grandma.

(laughs)

To rise like a Skylark.

ARIA

I think you are exaggerating.

Evelyn laughs cheerfully.

EVELYN

As a matter of fact, I called you because there is something I wanted to ask before you come here.

ARIA

What do you need, Little Bird?

EVELYN

(excited)

It would be great to have the best picture of a lark rising against the sun. I haven't found a single good one. I would like that to be your baby shower gift for her.

EXT. MEADOW — PRESENT

We hear barking again, this time closer. Aria tries to keep herself calm through her breathing. She hangs her camera around her neck and moves her hand towards the pepper spray bottle.

In that moment, a growl that sounds too close to be safe startles her. At the same time, the figure of another WOMAN comes approaching from the distance.

WOMAN

Ben! Come here!

A small dog emerges from the grass, a few meters away from Aria, and runs towards the woman.

WOMAN (cont'd)

(shouting at Aria)

Oh, I'm so sorry. They don't bite. They just like scaring birds.

(to the other dog)

Thomas!

A big, black retriever approaches her running and barking.

WOMAN (cont'd)

Sorry to have scared you!

(to the dogs)

Let's go.

As they disappear into the horizon, Aria stands straight and takes a deep breath, instinctively grabbing her scarred arm. She seems calmer, but her face is a mix of anger and worry.

ARIA

They like scaring birds. Wonderful.

She looks at her watch and puffs. She continues walking and looking, and walking and looking, but the chirping of birds has faded and there are no skylarks to be seen.

The light gets brighter and Aria looks at the sun slowly rising. She keeps searching, but the light is becoming increasingly bright. The sun now stands up high in the sky.

Aria stops, unable to believe such absence of sound and life. Such bad luck.

EXT. MEADOW - SUNRISE

But not all hope is lost. When she is about to leave, the grass suddenly appears to move right in front of her. But it's not the grass. Mimetising with it, a brown, freckled bird walks about and moves rapidly. CLOSE ON the SKYLARK. Aria exclaims in silence, paralysed.

Swiftly moving her hands towards the camera, she stands in position, bringing the massive telescopic lens up.

She half squats, calculating the possible trajectory of the bird's flight and pointing with the lens below the sun. She is going to get the perfect composition. She waits. A few seconds pass, and then IT HAPPENS! The skylark rises in the air, flying almost vertically towards the sun. As it goes up we hear its legendary notes filling the fresh morning air.

Aria follows it with her eyes until it becomes just a speck right below the blinding rays of the sun... and then she shoots, only once.

As the shutter closes, the image of the skylark flying against the sun freezes in the screen, captured forever.

The scene becomes slow-motion and the screen fades to black.

INT. EVELYN'S BABY ROOM - EVENING

Open with black screen. Reveal: a close-up of Aria's photograph of the lark. As we zoom out, we appreciate the most stunning shot of a skylark in full flight, wings extended against the bright sun, in a luxurious frame. It is hard to believe that any photographer could have captured that moment with such perfection and beauty.

As we continue to zoom out, we see that the framed photograph stands above a cradle, as the centerpiece of a lovely, pastel-coloured baby room. In the cradle sleeps a baby. It's Evelyn's daughter, ALONDRA.

THE END