

THE RIDE TO HEAVEN

An eight year old boy is unexpectedly given a unique look at what happens after death with the help of a Taxi Driver named Gerald.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

A little boy named Shawn Marshal approximately 8 to 10 years old is bouncing a ball outside a well kept suburban home. There is no one around because this is not the type of neighborhood where the parents need to watch their children 24/7. All the lawns are immaculately groomed. After bouncing the ball a few times Shawn decides to bounce the ball higher. Unfortunately, the ball gets away from Shawn and rolls into the street. The ball ends up in the neighbor's yard across the street. Shawn quickly goes to retrieve his ball. After Shawn has retrieved his ball, he notices a poster that has gotten caught on a low hanging branch. As little children tend to do, he curiously picks up the poster.

INSERT - POSTER IN SHAWN'S HAND

"We will get you where you need to go, even if you don't know you are supposed to go there. We have everything ready for you. You don't even need to give us a call. We are the ultimate taxi service." There's a picture of a taxi at the bottom of the poster.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Confused, Shawn starts to walk back across the street with his ball under one arm and the poster in the other hand. He does not notice the bus coming down the street. Shawn only looks up when he hears the horn.

FADE OUT.

INT. OLD YELLOW TAXI - NIGHT

Shawn is seen on the back seat and appears to be sleeping. In the front of the cab is a middle aged man who is driving with his knees and has a clipboard on his lap. He is humming a fifties' crooner tune to himself.

SHAWN

(Sleepily)

Hello? Where am I? Where's my ball?

Shawn suddenly notices the humming of the driver.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
(Frightened)
Excuse me! Mister?! S'cuse me!
Mister! Where am I...

Gerald slowly turns around to look at Shawn. His eyes widen in surprise. Gerald looks down on his list, almost as if he was double checking it.

GERALD
Well now, this is funny. When they told me I had a pick up today I was expecting someone older. Poor kid. Sometimes I don't understand this job. I mean, it's not like I have a choice. I'm stuck doing it anyway but I don't understand it. Why you? Did you have some sort of terminal disease or something?

SHAWN
(Leans back with a look of complete bewilderment on his face)
Um... S'cuse me. I don't mean to be rude but what are you talking about? Terminal illness? I'm eight.

Gerald has been continuing to hum the fifties' crooner tune but at Shawn's words he stops dead.

GERALD
(Incredulous)
Wait a minute, you're eight?! That can't be right!

SHAWN
Yes, I'm eight but what does that have to do with anything? You still haven't told me where I am! My parents are going to freak out! Are you some creepo or something?

GERALD
(Sad laughter)
No, kid. I'm not. Lemme just double check your name. You are Shawn Marshal with one L, right?

SHAWN
(Scared)
Yes, I am.

GERALD

Then unfortunately for you, it looks like you are in the right place.

SHAWN

And where exactly is that?

INT. MARSHAL HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Meredith and Richard Marshal are sitting down in the living room. They are both professional looking people. It is clear that they have just gotten in from their respective jobs and are still dressed in their work attire.

MEREDITH

(Exhausted, but relieved)
Phew! It feels so good to be off my feet. Work was a mess today. So many clients didn't show up for their appointments. You know, some days I love working in the mental health field but other days I wonder if I should not be a patient myself. How was your day, dear?

RICHARD

Oh, you know. The usual. Um. So what are we doing for dinner tonight?

MEREDITH

(Chuckles)
Oh, you're such a man. Either thinking with your stomach or your other thing.

Richard comes over behind Meredith and wraps his arms around her chest in a loving gesture.

RICHARD

(Coyly)
Well I was thinking with my stomach because I didn't eat anything all day, but now that you mention I could think with the other thing too if you're in the mood.

MEREDITH

(Conspiratorially)
Not now! Shawn's upstairs! It's only five o' clock. We can't do that now.

RICHARD

(Confused)

Are you sure he's upstairs? Because I went up to say hi to him when I got in but he wasn't in his room.

MEREDITH

What do you mean he wasn't in his room?! He didn't tell me he was going to a friend's house.

Meredith gets up from the chair and heads towards the stairs.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

That's really not like him. Maybe he's just asleep and he didn't hear you knock. I'll call up. We are having his favorite for dinner after all. I'm surprised he doesn't smell it...SHAWN! DINNER'S ALMOST READY! We're having lasagna! With extra meat! It's your favorite! Shawn!

Meredith slowly heads up the stairs while looking back at Richard.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

He must really be out of it. I'm going to go wake him up. Will you watch the food so it doesn't burn?

INT. MARSHAL HOUSEHOLD - CONTINUED

Richard Marshal stands in the kitchen, sipping on a beer while watching over the lasagna that is cooking. Suddenly his peaceful moment is interrupted by Meredith running frantically down the stairs and into the kitchen.

MEREDITH

He's not up there! He's really NOT up there!

RICHARD

I am sure he just forgot to tell you he was going over to a friend's house. I am sure if you call the Hanson's you will find him over there playing some video games with Mark. If it makes you feel any better I will call them now.

Richard walks over to the wall phone and picks up the receiver then begins to dial the number.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Hi, Steve. Is Shawn there with you?
He's not here and we're thinking he
just forgot to tell Meredith that
he's hanging out with Mark today.

(Two beats pass)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Really? He's not? Um, thanks. We'll
keep calling around. If you hear
anything will you let us know?

Richard slowly hangs up the phone. A pregnant silence slices the air between Richard and Meredith. Richard looks at Meredith with a look of concern.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(Voice wavering)

I'm sure he will be okay. He's
probably just at somebody's else's
house.

Richard and Meredith meet in the center of the room and embrace. Both are dreading that something horrible has happened to their son.

INT. - YELLOW TAXI (CONTINUOUS)

Shawn and Gerald are in the midst of a conversation. It appears as if Shawn is more awake now. Gerald is no longer driving with his knees but rather gesturing on either side of the window as they pass certain points.

GERALD

Well, now that you understand that
there's no going back...I guess
it's about time for me to explain a
couple of things. See, what they
tell you in the Bible about Heaven
and Hell...eh, they KIND of got it
right but they missed a few things.

Shawn leans his elbows curiously on the back of the driver's side headrest.

SHAWN

Like what? I didn't even get to say
goodbye to my mom! And I wasn't
picturing Heaven this way. Where
are the pearly gate things?

GERALD

(Chuckling)

Oh, even though I was once was one before, you humans amuse me. The stories they tell you guys....pearly gates. Really?! You don't think we've upgraded in the eons and eons we've been here? I mean, it is the 21st century down on earth and you guys have more sophisticated ways to protect buidling then iron barred gates. We got rid of the pearly gates like I think...? What is it now?

Gerald pauses and counts on his fingers.

GERALD (CONT'D)

1...2...no, 4 eons ago! The people from Purgatory kept trying to climb over and it was getting really annoying. As far as what you think Heaven is, we're not even close to there yet. See, if you look out the back you can still kind of see Earth and the spot where you got hit.

In spite of himself, Shawn's curiosity gets the better of him and he looks out the window.

SHAWN

(In a childlike wonder)

Wow, this is weird. I always thought those out of body experiences were just in those creepy horror movies my mom would never let me watch. But I don't understand, why am I all fuzzy? Where is all the blood and stuff?

GERALD

Well, what you're looking at now, you have to understand that time is different. It's only been a minute here and to us we can't see the core of death because once you realize you are death you realize it's not such a horrible thing. So we don't see the earthly form of it. We see ourselves as whole.

Suddenly, Gerald is in the back seat next to Shawn but the car is still moving. Gerald came through the back seat. He sits with his legs crossed and facing Shawn.

SHAWN

So, I can kind of see that. I used to have a scar on my knee from when I fell off the bike but I don't see it anymore. And not to go off topic...but did you just go through the back of the seat?

GERALD

(Smiling, or as best as he can for being dead)
Yeah, I did. You're not seeing things. Actually, now that you're dead you can see things clearer than you did before. Also, let me explain a couple of things. Now that you're dead, you do have a responsibility. It's kind of like Heaven Homework but not really. That's just the best I can come up with.

SHAWN

(Groaning)
Ugh! I never liked school!

GERALD

Well, this assignment won't last long but you do have to do it. See, it's the dead's responsibility to watch over the world. But it's a new dead person's responsibility to let those they left behind to let them know they're in a good place. We already figured out how you're going to do it unless you don't like it or come up with something better.

SHAWN

Okaaaay. What do I have to do?

GERALD

You know that poster you saw on the tree? Well that has something to do with that.

INT. - LOCAL T.V. STATION

A room full of reporters are getting ready for the 6 o' clock News. There are some reporters standing in line at the station manager's office while others busily type away at their desk. Suddenly, one stands up holding the phone away from her ear.

SHERRIE

Hey, a hot story! I just got a hot tip from my contact down in the police department. We better get there before the other News people do. Apparently, there's been an accident on Turner Lane and there might be injuries.

INT. MARSHAL HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT (ON EARTH HALF AN HOUR LATER)

Richard and Meredith are frantically pacing in the kitchen. Finally, Richard just stops suddenly by the table where his forgotten beer sits.

RICHARD

I can't take this anymore! We need to call the Police. Maybe Bob is on shift. He might be able to pull some strings.

Richard picks up his beer and chugs the rest of it and then slams it down on the table.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I swear when I get a hold of him...Shawn's backside will sting for a week! I can't believe he would just run away.

Meredith who has collapsed into a kitchen chair, looks up at Richard.

MEREDITH

(Through sobs)

Really, how could you think about punishing him at a time like this?! Something doesn't feel right! I'm so worried...

Richard comes over to Meredith with a tissue.

RICHARD

Here.

Richard dabs the tissue on Meredith's eyes.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 You're right. I'm sorry. I don't
 mean to upset you even more. I'm
 just scared too.
 (Two beats pass and the
 phone rings)

Both Richard and Meredith look at one another, neither one wanting to pick up the phone. They are scared as to what might be on the other end. Finally, Richard steps over to the wall phone and picks it up hesitantly.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (Quietly)
 Hello...?

BOB (V.O.)
 Richard, it's Bob.

Richard, frantically excited, looks back at Meredith and his eyes are expectant.

RICHARD
 (Extremely fast paced)
 Hi, Bob...we were just about to
 call you. I have a question. We
 haven't seen Shawn all afternoon
 and we were wondering if you heard
 anything...

BOB (V.O.)
 (Interrupts)
 Slow down, Richard. Sloooow down.
 No, I haven't seen Shawn and I'm
 not saying I know anything, but we
 just got word of an accident a
 couple blocks from your house.
 There's no guarantee that it's
 Shawn. So don't freak out. I just
 wanted to let you know. I'll call
 you when I know anything more.

INT. - YELLOW CAB (CONTINUED) (FIFTEEN EARTH MINUTES LATER)

Gerald and Shawn are still in the Taxi but the Taxi is slowing down to indicate they are almost at their destination.

GERALD
 So you're sure you're okay with
 that?

SHAWN

I can't think of an easier way to do it. It's not really what I had in mind for my day. I only wanted to go play Halo 4 but now I have to let my parents know somehow.

Shawn, looking out the window.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Hey, we're slowing down. Are we almost...

(Half a beat passes)

...in Heaven?

GERALD

Don't be so frightened. It's not this big bad scary place. It's kind of like Netherlands but without all the creepy stuff and Michael Jackson.

Gerald starts to laugh but stops suddenly when he sees Saint Peter outside the window and the look on Shawn's face.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Hi, Pete. Forgive me. That was a bad joke. Michael's a good guy but I just had to do it.

To go along with the updated pearly gates that Gerald has referenced earlier, Saint Peter has a rye smile on his face and he's standing on a Segway outside of the cab which is now parked in front of a building that says "Check-In Here". There are two "Q's" branching off the building. One Q is for Heaven and the other is for Hell.

SAINT PETER

(Chuckles and leans into the driver side Taxi window)

You know, it's no big deal. I'm sure Michael would find it funny. He's the reason half those sickos come up with jokes anyway. They just don't know it's him giving them the material in the first place. Humor is a good thing.

Saint Peter steps off the Segway and opens the back door of the Taxi.

SAINT PETER (CONT'D)

You must be Shawn Marshal.

SHAWN

Yes, sir!

Shawn steps out of the Taxi.

SAINT PETER

Sorry for the abrupt pick up. The boss will explain why you're here so early, but as Gerald said...first you have to get the message back to Earth.

A beat passes and Saint Peter puts his hand on Shawn's shoulder. Almost like a concerned uncle.

SAINT PETER (CONT'D)

Gerald said you guys have come up with a way you are going to do it?

SHAWN

Yes, sir!

SAINT PETER

Well if we're going to go with that method we have to get you down the hall. Cause we have about five minutes until it begins. So why don't you follow me and sign in so we can head down the hall.

A quarter of a beat passes and Saint Peter chuckles while leading Shawn over to a Guard Booth.

SAINT PETER (CONT'D)

Make sure you sign in under Heaven though because we've had a Shawn Marshall with two L's that wasn't that great of great person coming in today too. Even though we run a pretty awesome ship here, it's pretty hard to fix a mix up once it occurs. So let's try and avoid that.

(FADE OUT)

INT. - MARSHAL HOUSEHOLD - (FIVE EARTHLY MINUTES LATER)

Richard is pacing by the phone and Bob has still not called to inform the Marshals as to what is going on. Meredith is sitting quietly in the living room chair with her head her hands. Suddenly, off camera the phone rings.

RICHARD
(After a beat)
I'll go get it. Hopefully that's
Bob.

Richard exits towards the kitchen to answer the phone. Almost immediately he yells back into the living room.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Turn on the News, dear!

As if coming out of a trance, Meredith quickly gets up and turns on the T.V. to the local ABC affiliate. She finds the broadcast already in progress and what she sees on the screen makes her heart stop.

MEREDITH
(Yelling)
Richard! Get in here! The News is
covering an accident and I don't
know but it looks like it's only a
few blocks from here.

INTERCUT - TELEVISION SET

A News reporter is standing in front of crime scene tape. We see in the background Shawn's ball and we also see the wreckage of the bus. There is a body bag but we cannot see that Shawn's earthly body is inside of it.

INT. - MARSHAL HOUSEHOLD - (CONTINUED)

Richard and Meredith sit down on the floor, completely transfixed on the Television.

RICHARD
(Disbelieving)
It can't be, is that...Shawn's
ball?

INTERCUT

The poster similar to the poster in the opening scene envelopes the screen or at least the Marshals's T.V. set. The only difference this time is that it has Shawn's face on it and the words, "I'm home" printed in big letters at the bottom.