

The Tolltaker

by

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Based on the novel

By

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FADE UP TO

A CHEAP METAL BRACELET,

One of three worn by a YOUNG WOMAN pouring two ice cream sodas behind the lunch counter of a Woolworth's.

Grabbing the sodas, the young woman brings them to BOBBY BURKE, a bubbling young boy of five, and his PAWPAW, a grizzled working-class specimen in his late 40's.

Fading in over this are the words "JUNE, 1970." They fade out again.

BOBBY

PawPaw, what if Daddy dies before he comes home?

PawPaw squirms at the question. Coming to his rescue is the young waitress, who puts the ice cream sodas on the counter in front of him and Bobby.

YOUNG WOMAN

You waiting for your daddy to come home?

Bobby nods.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

(looking at PawPaw)

Nam?

PAWPAW

Yeah. He's due home in a little over a month. It's been a long wait.

YOUNG WOMAN

I know what you mean. I got three brothers. One's already been over there, one's ready to come home, and the other just left. I used to worry a lot, until Poppo...

She nods in the direction of an ELDERLY MAN behind the jewelry counter on the opposite side of the store.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

...showed me this trick.

She jiggles the bracelets on her wrist.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

See these? One for each brother. They have their names engraved on them. Poppo told me if I wore them while my brothers were away, it would keep them safe.

BOBBY

(amazed)

Wow! Does it really work?

YOUNG WOMAN

(shrugging)

Well, it kept my first brother safe when he was over there, and it seems to be working on the second. It's probably just psychological, but the important thing is they keep me from worrying about them because I can believe they're safe.

BOBBY

Can I get one, PawPaw? Please?

PAWPAW

(to the young woman)

Where'd you get them, if you don't mind my asking?

YOUNG WOMAN

Don't mind at all. Poppo sells them right over there at the jewelry counter. He'll also do the engraving.

PawPaw looks at Bobby. His face is irresistible. PawPaw knows he has to give in.

INT. WOOLWORTH'S JEWELRY COUNTER - DAY

A SMALL WOODEN BOX is taken from a drawer and placed on the counter top. The lid is taken away, revealing several of the SafeKeeper bracelets inside.

Bobby, eyes wide in wonder, looks at them.

POPPO (O.C.)

Do any of these strike your fancy, young Bobby?

Before Bobby can say anything, Poppo takes the box away.

POPPO (cont'd)
No, no - I don't think any of these
will work. We need a special one.

Reaching behind Bobby's ear, he produces a bracelet out of thin
air.

BOBBY
(dumbstruck)
Whoa-hoa...PawPaw, did you see that?

PawPaw did indeed. He smiles and nods.

POPPO
Now, I need to know your father's full
name.

PAWPAW
Robert C. Burke.

POPPO
B-e-r-k or B-u-r-k-e?

PAWPAW
B-u.

POPPO
Alrighty. I'll be just a minute.

Turning to his engraver, Poppo bends over the SafeKeeper.
There's a moment of scraping and buzzing, then he holds the
bracelet up.

POPPO (cont'd)
Okay now, Bobby, this is the most
important part. You have to wish your
daddy safe three times, but only at
the same time I fasten the chain on
your wrist. It's like making a wish
before you blow out the candles on
your birthday cake. Can you do that?

Bobby nods eagerly.

POPPO (cont'd)
Okay, here we go. Put your arm up
here...

Bobby lays his arm on the counter.

POPPO (cont'd)
Close your eyes.

Bobby does.

POPPO (cont'd)

Three times, Bobby: I wish my daddy
would come home safe.

BOBBY

I wish my daddy would come home safe.

POPPO

Again.

BOBBY

I wish my daddy would come home safe.

POPPO

And once more.

BOBBY

I wish my daddy would come home safe.

Poppo fastens the bracelet on Bobby's wrist with a pair of
needle-nose pliers.

Bobby opens his eyes slowly, experimentally. Nothing happens.
Then, suddenly, a blinding FLASH OF LIGHT explodes from the
bracelet. Bobby staggers, as if punched in the gut.

PAWPAW

What the hell?

(to Poppo, angrily)

What did you do to him?

POPPO

I...I don't know...This has never
happened before.

PAWPAW

(to Bobby)

Are you alright?

Bobby's face is glowing.

BOBBY

It worked! It really worked. Daddy's
coming home, PawPaw! I know it!

Poppo reaches over the counter for the bracelet on Bobby's
wrist.

POPPO

Do you mind if I...I see that again?

PAWPAW

(brusquely)

I think you've done enough.

He slaps two-fifty down on the counter, grabs Bobby's hand, and drags him away.

EXT. CITY STREET - 1969 - DAY

A pretty young woman, JUDY BURKE, wearing a man's leather jacket a size or two too big for her, stands with her hands draped sadly around the neck of a handsome young man of working-class stock. Her husband, BOB BURKE. Bobby's dad.

VOICE OVER from an adult Bobby comes up.

VOICE OVER

My dad was called up for duty in Vietnam in 1969. He was supposed to be classified 3A because he had a wife and kid, but he was drafted anyway. When he got called up, he had to go out to Fort Dix for eight weeks of training, and then down to Louisiana for eight more.

EXT. SEASIDE, NEW JERSEY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A FERRIS WHEEL stands prominently on the boardwalk.

VOICE OVER

That summer, he had a 30-day leave before he had to report for duty. I have plenty of memories from that time, but it seems like they all blend together into that one day at Seaside.

EXT. BEACH - IN THE WATER - DAY

Four year-old Bobby's dad is holding him as a swell builds up around them. Judy stands nearby.

JUDY

(shouting happily)

Here one comes!

Bobby's father lifts him, screaming and laughing in delight, over the swell as it flows by.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Bobby's dad kneels next to a splendid SAND CASTLE he and Bobby have just built. Bobby runs up from the surf, holding a SAND CRAB out by its claw.

BOBBY
Daddy, look! For the moat!

His father takes the crab and drops it into a water-filled trench around the sand castle.

BOB
Okay, but we're gonna have to let him go when we're done, alright?

Bobby nods eagerly.

TIGHT on the crab, dangling for a moment over the "moat" before Bobby lets go and drops it in.

INT. PAWPAW'S CAR - 1970 - DAY

PawPaw drives as Bobby hums softly in the passenger seat, happy with his new SafeKeeper.

Looking up, Bobby happens to notice an unremarkable LATE-MODEL SEDAN pulling out of a driveway ahead. It's coming this way.

BOBBY
Who's that, PawPaw? That's our driveway.

PawPaw glances at the strange car as it passes.

PAWPAW
I don't know, Bobby.

BOBBY
Look - they've got uniforms. They must be policemen.

PAWPAW
No, they're military...

He starts to say more, but then cuts himself off. Instead, he just watches the car recede in the rear-view mirror.

INT. PAWPAW'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sitting by herself in a rocker, Bobby's mother Judy gazes out the window. Her eyes are red from crying.

Eyes wide and anxious, Bobby approaches his mother. Seeing him, she gathers him in her arms and hugs him tight.

Paw-Paw stands by stoically, watching.

EXT. PAWPAW'S HOUSE - 1973 - DAY

A working-class neighborhood of modest, mostly semi-detached houses in Northeast Philadelphia.

A gold Plymouth Duster sits at the curb, its trunk open. Judy, cradling a box under one arm, leads Bobby, now eight, from the house to the car. Standing on the porch, watching them go, are PawPaw and GRAMMY, Bobby's grandmother.

Putting the box into the trunk of the car, Judy slams it shut and goes to the driver's side door. Before she gets in, she spares a quick glance at Grammy and PawPaw. There's conflict, uneasiness, in her eyes.

PawPaw returns the gaze steadily, betraying no emotion.

Judy gets in the car, starts it, and drives away.

INT. JUDY'S CAR - DAY

In the passenger seat, Bobby twists around to look at his grandparents' house. They're still on the porch, getting smaller as he and his mother leave them farther and farther behind.

EXT. BANK OF A CREEK - DAY

A chattering brook in a wooded section of Northeast Philadelphia. Bobby explores the creek, hopping from rock to rock.

Bobby comes to a stop. Ahead is a huge STORM DRAIN emptying into the creek from a wooded slope.

Bobby approaches the mouth of the drain for a better look.

INT. STORM DRAIN - DAY

Bobby's face appears as he crouches down to get a look inside.

VOICE OVER

Ever since I found out my dad went MIA
crawling through tunnels in 'Nam,
looking for Vietcong, I wanted to do
the same.

Bobby looks down: there's a shallow but steady stream of water burbling out of the mouth of the pipe. Bobby looks back inside the drain.

BOBBY
(calling)
Hello?

His voice echoes back to him.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Hey!

Same thing. Bobby considers for a moment.

BOBBY (cont'd)
(to himself)
Don't be a baby.

And he steps into the storm drain.

INT. DRAIN PIPE - DAY

It's dark, getting darker as Bobby goes. Sounds in here are compressed, almost metallic.

Bobby pauses and looks back over his shoulder. The mouth of the drain is starting to disappear around a curve in the pipe. He looks ahead again, and listens.

WATER, trickling and plopping.

Bobby begins moving again. As the light fades, he lets his hand brush along the side of the pipe for guidance. Then his fingers fall into empty space.

Bobby stumbles, then stoops for a closer look.

INT. INTERSECTING PIPE - DAY

A smaller pipe that intersects with the larger one. Bobby looks in.

BOBBY
(whispering)
Cool...

He continues on his way.

INT. MAIN PIPE - DAY

Walking deeper in, Bobby glances back toward the entrance. It's no longer visible. Just a splash of light reflected on the walls.

He hesitates. Then, taking a breath, he pushes ahead. And stops. His hand is caught on something poking out of the side of the pipe.

He takes a closer look. One of the links on his SafeKeeper bracelet has become caught on a thin strip of rebar sticking through the concrete.

Bobby tries to work his hand free. No luck. He tries again, then stops. Something's wrong.

The water. Its trickling sound is no longer there. Bobby peers hard into the gloom ahead of him, and is hit in the face with a blast of hot, fetid air.

BOBBY
(gagging)
Ugh...God!

After turning his face away from the stench, Bobby looks back down the pipe. There's something down there. Darkness, roiling, like a kind of smoke, and hidden within is a SHAPE, coming closer. Bobby hears a leathery, rasping VOICE.

VOICE
Bob-beeeyyyyyyy....

Panic beginning to set in, Bobby struggles harder with the bar of iron. It finally comes free. He looks up.

The dark smoke-thing is close. Way too close.

Bobby runs, splashing through puddles, stumbling, falling, getting up again. Ahead, the mouth of the pipe has become visible once more.

Bobby casts one last terrified glance over his shoulder. Then he leaps and...

EXT. ALONG THE BANKS OF THE CREEK - DAY

...lands face-first in the muck outside the storm drain.

The air around him fills with LAUGHTER. He looks up.

On the slope around the mouth of the storm drain are about a HALF DOZEN KIDS, all laughing at him.

Bobby climbs to his feet and sees that these kids are several years older than he.

KID #1
(laughing)
What's wrong with you?

BOBBY
(breathing hard)
There's...something...in there....

More laughter.

SEVERAL KIDS AT ONCE
He pissed his pants!...Shouldn't you
be home in bed?...Whatcha runnin'
from, the tunnel monster?

A girl, LISA, climbs down the slope toward him.

LISA
(to other kids)
You guys are so mean! Why don't you
leave him alone!
(to Bobby)
Are you okay?

BOBBY
I think so.

He looks at his arm. There's blood streaming from a cut in his
elbow. The other kids come the rest of the way down the slope
and duck through the entrance to the storm drain. One of them,
GLEN, pauses.

GLEN
(menacingly)
This is our tunnel, and if we catch
you down here again, you'll wish the
rats had found you first!
(to the young woman)
You coming, Lisa?

Lisa nods.

LISA
Yeah.
(to Bobby)
You'll be okay, but Glen's right. You
shouldn't be down here by yourself.

She moves away to join the others. Bobby watches her go.

BOBBY

Don't go. Please, don't.
It's...it's...dark, and the air's
changed, and there's something in
there. I know there is.

LISA

(halfway into the storm
drain)

That's so sweet. But nothing's gonna
happen. I gotta go. But don't try to
follow us, okay?

And she's gone.

Bobby takes stock of himself. He's a mess. The first thing he
checks for damage is the SafeKeeper.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - 1973 - DAY

Bobby stands in the open doorway, a walking mud puddle.

JUDY (O.C.)

(a shriek)

Bobby! What on earth have you been
doing? You're filthy!

Before Bobby can reply, Judy starts herding him toward the
bathroom.

JUDY (cont'd)

I got a pizza, but you can't eat like
that. Go into the bathroom and get
right in the tub. I'll keep the pizza
warm in the oven.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - A SHORT TIME LATER

It's moving day; boxes are everywhere.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Bobby, cleaned up and dressed in
his pajamas, and his mother chomp on slices of pizza. Judy looks
at the SafeKeeper on Bobby's wrist.

JUDY

Bobby...How long are you going to keep
wearing that?

BOBBY

(his mouth full of pizza)
Wearing what?

JUDY
That thing on your wrist...the
watchamacallit.

Bobby looks up at her.

BOBBY
SafeKeeper.

JUDY
Okay, the SafeKeeper. How long are you
going to wear it?

BOBBY
Until Dad comes home.

JUDY
But, Bobby, what if...

BOBBY
(cutting her off)
He will.

JUDY
But Bobby...

BOBBY
(more firmly)
He will.

JUDY
It's been three years...

BOBBY
(almost a shout)
He WILL!

JUDY
(sighing wearily)
Alright, Bobby - I don't want to
fight.

They go back to their pizza, a stony silence between them.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Bobby is rummaging through some boxes, his bedroom door ajar
behind him. He finds a FLASHLIGHT, and holds it up triumphantly.

VOICES - one Judy's, the other male - drift down the hallway
from the living room. Bobby takes a step closer to the door so
he can hear better.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Judy is talking to a newcomer, NICHOLAS MADONNA, 27, the buff current object of her affections.

NICK

How's the unpacking going?

JUDY

I'm just about done. I've been on my knees all day, scrubbing out the cabinets. I don't know what to say about the people who lived here last - you can tell a lot about a person when you clean their cabinets.

NICK

(playfully)

Well, I'll just have to keep you out of mine, then.

JUDY

(giggling)

Nicholas Madonna, are you trying to hide something from me?

NICK

Maybe.

He leans in closer to her face.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM

Bobby listens, full of trepidation, to the sudden silence from the other room. Then, it comes: the KISS. Outrage rises within Bobby, and he slams the bedroom door with enough force to get the message across to the two lovebirds in the living room.

FLASHBACK: JUDY WORKING IN NICK'S TRUCK

Nick lounges in the driver's seat as the truck idles. The words "NICK'S ITALIAN WATER ICE" are emblazoned across the front and sides.

The adult Bobby's VO comes up.

VOICE OVER

I'd known who Nick was for the past couple of years, but he didn't really come into my life until last year. That's when Mom started working for him on his water-ice truck.

Behind Nick, at the serving window, Judy is happily dispensing Italian water ice to expectant little hands.

INT. CORNER DINER - DAY

Judy and Nick are sharing coffee and a booth.

VOICE OVER

Then, when Nick parked his truck for the winter, they should have stopped seeing each other. But they didn't. Mom continued to see Nick several times a week. That caused some big problems.

INT. PAWPAW'S KITCHEN - DAY

There's a shouting match going on between Judy and PawPaw, who appears to be winning. Grammy frets nearby, while Bobby stands as silent witness.

PAWPAW

(shouting)

Only a cheatin' hussy would carry on like that with another man when her husband was off at war! But I ain't surprised, gettin' knocked up at 16!

Reduced to tears, Judy bolts from the room.

INT. PAWPAW'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The four of them - PawPaw, Grammy, Judy and Bobby - sit in tense silence around the dinner table.

VOICE OVER

It was during that period that I realized the subject of dad came up with Mom less and less often. In March, the government announced that Operation Homecoming in Vietnam had concluded, and every POW had been returned. Case closed. Dad went from "missing" to "presumed dead."

EXT. GARAGE AT BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

Bobby is moving boxes into the garage.

VOICE OVER

Then in June, we got our own place, so Mom could be close to her good friend Nick. It's like she didn't believe any more. Only PawPaw and I did. Only PawPaw and I still heard that word "presumed."

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

DOZENS OF SCHOOLCHILDREN scamper about the yard, waiting for the doors of the school to open. Bobby enters through the gate and heads for a little group of kids to one side.

One kid, JOE, a boy about the same age as Bobby, looks up.

JOE

Hey, Bobby. How'd the moving go?
What's the new place like?

BOBBY

(shrugging non-committally)
It's alright. It's got some woods behind it, and a little creek, and this big tunnel you can walk into.

JOE

Man! I wish I could live there. I don't know why you didn't want to move.

Bobby looks troubled.

BOBBY

It's...It's just that we moved right downstairs from Nick.

JOE

(understanding)
Oh...

BOBBY

I think they were kissing last night.

JOE

Kissing?

BOBBY

Yeah, right in the living room. I couldn't believe it.

Joe shakes his head.

JOE
 Man, your dad's gonna kick his ass
 when he gets back. What're you gonna
 do?

Bobby's expression is bleak. He doesn't know.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER THAT DAY

Recess. The school yard's full of frolicking GRADE-SCHOOLERS. In one corner, a pick-up hand ball game is underway.

It's Bobby's serve. Bases are loaded. He holds the ball out, and positions his other hand beneath it. He's feeling the pressure.

Bobby glances over at third base, where Joe expectantly awaits the serve. Joe meets his eyes, senses Bobby's anxiety, and gives him a quick, encouraging nod.

INT. SCHOOL - BOYS' LAVATORY - DAY

A group of kids including Bobby and led by Joe and bursts rambunctiously through the door. The SCHOOL BELL is RINGING.

Two of the boys, RANDALL and EDDIE, pause at the urinals to relieve themselves. As they do, Joe sneaks up behind them with an empty JUICE CARTON that he's picked from the trash. After delicately placing it on the floor, he stomps on it. The carton bursts with a LOUD BOOM.

Both Eddie and Randall jump, but Eddie jumps and turns, splashing Randall with a stream of urine.

RANDALL
 (to Eddie)
 You shithead!

EDDIE
 (flustered)
 I'm sor...

The other kids in the bathroom are rolling with laughter.

JOE
 Eddie got so scared he pissed
Randall's pants!

As everyone laughs, Randall sneaks up behind Joe with a carton of his own. He stomps on it, and there's another BOOM, with a geyser of sour milk that falls mostly on Joe.

RANDALL

(to Joe)

Ha! Looks like someone pissed on your pants!

Suddenly, it's a free-for-all. All the boys grab empty cartons from the trash and stomp on them as hard as they can, getting juice and milk everywhere.

This goes on for a few riotous moments, then:

VOICE

(booming)

What is going on in here?

Everyone freezes, and looks at the door. There stand TWO OLDER KIDS, one of whom wears a WHITE STRAP that runs diagonally across his chest with a METAL BADGE pinned to it. He's carrying a SOFT BALL MITT.

EDDIE

Oh, shit - Rudy.

Rudy, the one wearing the white strap, strolls through the bathroom, surveying the mess left by the carton fight.

RUDY

You know that little kiddies could get kicked out of school for this, don't you?

No response. All the boys stand cowed and silent.

RUDY (cont'd)

(to his companion)

What do you think we should do with them, Bruce?

BRUCE

I don't know.

Rudy swaggers over to Bobby. He's about a foot taller, so Bobby is left staring at the safety badge on his chest.

RUDY

(nearly screaming)

You wanna end up in prison? Well? DO YOU?

BOBBY

N-no...

JOE

We can't go to prison for...

Rudy turns on him.

RUDY

SILENCE!

(to Bruce)

You hear this, Bruce? We got ourselves
a smart-ass...

(to Joe)

Tell you what I'm gonna do, smart-ass.
I'm gonna take you to the principal's
office and tell him I found you in
here, alone, popping cartons. Let's
see if you rat out any of your kiddie
friends. That okay with you, smart-
ass?

Glowering, Joe stays quiet.

RUDY (cont'd)

Bruce, take these little kiddies
outside and make them stand by the
fence. If any of 'em try to move, swat
'em on the ass with this.

He throws the softball mitt to Bruce. Then he turns back to Joe.

RUDY (cont'd)

I'll take this one to Fornerette.
C'mon, smart-ass.

Bobby and the other kids watch silently as Joe is led back
through the lavatory door.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Bobby, Randall, Eddie and the others throng around Joe, who
looks somber.

JOE

I didn't tell on any of you.

RANDALL

What happened?

JOE

Fornerette called my folks.

EDDIE

What do you think they'll do?

Joe waves his hand dismissively. The gesture is unconvincing.

JOE
Ah, nothing.

But Bobby knows better. He looks at his friend with deepening concern.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

Bobby crosses the baseball diamond on his way home from school. He freezes at the sound of a familiar voice.

RUDY (O.C.)
Well, lookie here. Looks like we got
ourselves another one of those little
kiddies crossing our playground.

Bobby turns and looks. There they are: Rudy, with Bruce at heel next to him.

BOBBY
(stammering)
I...I'm on my way home.

RUDY
(flatly)
You're a liar.

Bruce grabs Bobby's arm and flings him against a chain link fence.

BRUCE
You know what we do with liars? We use
them for home base.

Rudy comes closer and lowers his face inches from Bobby's.

RUDY
Now, I'm gonna ask you something, and
you better not lie.
(with cold menace)
What. Are. You. Doing. On MY
playground?

BOBBY
(his voice small)
I'm on...on my way...home.

Rudy shakes his head in disgust and stands to his full height.

RUDY
Bring him.

He walks away as Bruce tries to follow, holding Bobby by the scruff of the neck. Bobby struggles, and manages to aim a kick at Bruce's shin.

BRUCE
OOOOWWWW! You little shit!

He sinks a powerful punch into Bobby's gut. Bobby falls to the ground, clutching his stomach in agony.

RUDY
(spinning around)
What'd he do?

BRUCE
That...that little shit KICKED me!

Rudy jumps onto Bobby and turns him onto his back.

RUDY
(screaming into Bobby's ear)
Don't you ever, EVER do that again!

BOBBY
(starting to sob)
Please...I'm just on my way home. Just let me go. Please.

RUDY
If that's true, how come I never seen you come this way before?

BOBBY
We just moved...this weekend. Please, I'm not lying...I gotta walk home this way. Honest.

Loosening his grip somewhat, Rudy considers this.

RUDY
Well, that changes things slightly. That makes you a patron of the playground. Do you know what a patron is?

BOBBY
Yeah. My dad served in Vietnam 'cause he's a patron of the country.

RUDY
No, that's patriot, not patron. A patron is like a customer, and customers usually have to pay for the places they patronize.

Looking up, Rudy notices a young boy, JEFFERY, crossing the playground nearby.

RUDY (cont'd)

Hey, Bruce - go take care of Jeffery.

Bruce departs, intersecting Jeffery. They exchange a few words, then Jeffery reaches into his pocket and hands Bruce a coin. Rudy, meanwhile, lets Bobby climb to his feet.

RUDY (cont'd)

(to Bobby)

You see? That's Jeffery. A patron of the playground. An appreciative patron. He understands it costs money to keep the playground safe for little kiddies like yourself. Ten cents a day. And in return, me and Bruce make sure you don't get hurt on the way home.

BOBBY

But I can't pay you for...

Rudy shakes his head sadly.

RUDY

Bobby, Bobby, Bobby...Don't you understand? We're the toll takers, and that's the toll. We all have to pay. It's in the constitution. To live in a great country like America and have a beautiful playground to play in. I don't make the rules, I just enforce them.

BOBBY

But I don't think I can give you ten cents a day.

RUDY

I think maybe Bruce needs to explain it to you. Bruce?

Bruce, who's returned from Jeffery, seizes Bobby's shoulder in a Vulcan death-grip, causing Bobby to yelp in pain.

RUDY (cont'd)

Don't make this hard on yourself, Bobby. One way or another, you're gonna pay the toll. If you don't have the money, we'll take it out on your ass. So don't be dumb.

(MORE)

RUDY (cont'd)
Just pay it, and be grateful you have
a playground to walk through.

BOBBY
I...I don't know. I'll try.

RUDY
You'll do more than try. You'll do it,
or else. Tomorrow. Got it?

Bobby nods wearily.

RUDY (cont'd)
Good.

Satisfied, he walks away, with Bruce right behind. Bobby lingers
for a moment, looking miserable.

EXT. BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

There's a row of garage doors running along the side of the
building. One of them is open.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Bobby trudges into view, dusty and dejected. He looks into the
garage.

Judy's inside, moving boxes around.

BOBBY
Hi, Mom.

JUDY
(looking up)
Hi, Bobby. How was school?

BOBBY
Okay.
(peeks in one of the boxes)
What's all this?

JUDY
That's your dad's glass animal
collection.

Picking up an object from the box, Bobby peels back the folds of
newspaper to reveal a delicate, CARVED-GLASS ANIMAL. He gazes at
it with a reverent expression, then wraps it up and puts it back
in the box.

BOBBY

Do you want me to take this box
upstairs?

JUDY

(shaking her head)
No, I'm just going to leave all this
stuff down here for now.

Bobby gives his mother a puzzled look, and then suddenly it all
falls into place. Nick. The kiss. His mother notices his
expression.

JUDY (cont'd)

Bobby - are you okay?

BOBBY

(lifting the box)
Yeah, but why don't we set the animal
collection up in the living room? I'll
carry it up.

JUDY

No, I want it left down here for now.
I thought maybe we could get some new
things for the wall in the living
room.

BOBBY

But we can finish Dad's collection. We
can keep adding to it and Dad'll be
really surprised when he gets home.

JUDY

(sighing heavily)
Bobby, they're staying here. And
that's final.

Defeated - for now - Bobby puts the box back on its pile. He
turns to his mother.

BOBBY

Well, can I have another dime for
school so I can get a Dreamsicle at
lunch?

JUDY

I suppose.

BOBBY

Thanks.

And he ducks back out into the sunlight.

EXT. FENMORE STREET - DAY

Bobby walks out of the apartment holding the FLASHLIGHT he found yesterday. When he gets to the sidewalk, he encounters Jeffery, the boy he saw getting shaken down by Bruce.

JEFFERY

Are you okay?

BOBBY

Huh?

JEFFERY

I saw what Rudy and Bruce were doing to you on the playground.

BOBBY

Oh, yeah. I'm okay.

JEFFEREY

My name's Jeff, and I live over there.

He points to a duplex across the street.

JEFFEREY (cont'd)

What's your name?

BOBBY

Bobby.

JEFFEREY

They do that to everyone, you know. Rudy and Bruce.

BOBBY

Nobody stands up to them?

JEFFEREY

He's a safety. We have to listen to him.

Bobby doesn't necessarily buy that, but he keeps quiet.

JEFFEREY (cont'd)

(looking at the flashlight)

So - what're you doing now?

BOBBY

I was going to explore a tunnel I found yesterday.

JEFFEREY

You must mean the runoff drain.

BOBBY
You ever been in it?

JEFFEREY
Tons of times. You wanna go now?

BOBBY
(nodding enthusiastically)
Yeah.

The two of them start walking down the street together.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Jeff leads Bobby down a well-worn path through the brush. They arrive at a concrete hatchway poking up out of the ground.

JEFFEREY
This is one end of it.

The two boys peer inside. There's a ten-foot shaft descending to the meeting point of four tunnels.

BOBBY
(looking up at Jeffery)
This isn't the same tunnel. It's too small.

JEFFEREY
No, but it leads to the one you were in. It's a short-cut.

Bobby looks back down the shaft.

INT. TUNNEL

Two figures shaded by the glare of their flashlight approach through the tunnel.

BOBBY
Wow! This is swift!

The two advance closer then stop, playing the beam of their flashlight over a stout BRICK WALL that blocks the tunnel.

BOBBY (cont'd)
This is the end?

JEFFEREY
Yup.

Bobby looks more closely at the wall. It's coated with several generations of graffiti. He brushes his hand across the brick and comes to rest against a prominent etching that reads THE TOLLTAKER.

BOBBY

Who's the Tolltaker?

(as Jeff shrugs)

It's not Rudy, is it?

JEFFEREY

(shaking his head)

Not unless it was carved in there when he was, like, two. My brother says it's been there for as long as he's been coming down here, and he's been coming down since he was 13. He's told me stories about a...thing that lives down here.

Bobby looks at him.

BOBBY

What kind of stories?

JEFFEREY

(reluctantly)

I...I can't tell you. Not down here.

EXT. STORM DRAIN - DAY

Bobby and Jeffery are sitting on opposite sides of the concrete channel leading from the mouth of the drain.

JEFFEREY

All this happened when I was a baby, but I hear my Mom and Dad talk about it from time to time. There was this company that wanted to build these houses in that field, and before they could, they had to put in all these sewers and drains and stuff. When they were digging this tunnel, they caused a great big sinkhole, which they filled up, but the next day it was back again. And the next day after that. And so on. And then one of the men working got sucked into the ground like it was quicksand.

(MORE)

JEFFEREY (cont'd)

When they pulled him out, he was just crazy, talking about some thing - he couldn't even say what it was - that wanted money to let him - them - cross its...lair. They took that guy to the hospital and he died. Two days later, the same thing happened again, only this time, the guy was already dead when they pulled him out of the ground. By that time, the company was getting nervous. They made some deal with the city over the storm drain and pulled out.

Bobby is stunned.

BOBBY

Has anything ever happened to anyone in the tunnel since then?

JEFFEREY

Not that I know of. I mean, you hear things, but nothing...

Shrugging, he gets to his feet, in preparation to leave. Looking thoughtful, Bobby follows.

BOBBY

Does Rudy come down here? He called himself the Toll-Taker on the playground.

JEFFEREY

I've seen him down here a few times. I don't see how he could not know the legend. He only lives three blocks over.

They begin to walk away, toward the creek. Bobby spares a backward glance at the mouth of the storm drain.

At the edge of the shadows inside is what looks like a coil of black smoke and maybe - maybe - the outline of a bony hand.

Not sure whether to believe what he's seeing, Bobby backs away, then turns and runs after Jeff.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Bobby sits at his desk amid a ROOM-FULL OF STUDENTS. He looks over at an EMPTY DESK across the aisle. A strip of paper taped to the front identifies the desk's usual occupant: Joe Clarke.

Fresh anxiety - tinged with guilt - registers on Bobby's face, and he looks away.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Bobby and Jeff leave the schoolyard and head home.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Bobby and Jeff are crossing the playground.

RUDY O.C.
Aren't you little kiddies forgetting
something?

The two boys freeze.

BOBBY
(in a low voice)
C'mon, Jeff. Let's make a stand
together.

Conflict roils behind Jeff's eyes for a moment, but then he gives in. He reaches into his pocket and hands Rudy a dime.

JEFFEREY
Sorry, Bobby.

A heavy hand falls on Bobby's shoulder. Bruce. Bobby tenses, then bolts, the seam of his shirt tearing from Bruce's grip.

Bobby runs as fast as he can, with Bruce closing the distance behind him, and Rudy taking up the rear. Bruce is inches from grabbing Bobby's shirt again when Bobby takes sudden evasive action, jotting to the left as Bruce's momentum carries him straight forward.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Bobby's almost flying as he rounds the corner, sprinting across yards in a desperate effort to stay ahead of Bruce and Rudy, who round the corner seconds after him.

Suddenly, Bobby hears A MELODY from what sounds like a calliope. He looks. Approaching down the street is Nick's Italian water-ice truck. Nick is behind the wheel.

This is Bobby's only hope. With a last look over his shoulder, he takes off down the street to Nick's truck and sanctuary.

INT. NICK'S TRUCK - DAY

Bobby races down the street and lands, gasping, on the step leading up to the truck's interior. Nick stands up just as Bruce and Rudy make it to the door as well.

NICK
Whooooaaa....Take it easy there, boys.
No need to run - I'll wait. What would
you like? Water ice? Soft pretzel?

RUDY
(glaring murderously through
the door at Bobby)
No.

NICK
Okay, then. So if you'll excuse us...

He shuts the door in Rudy's face. Sitting down, he starts driving.

NICK (cont'd)
(as he drives)
Those kids giving you problems?

BOBBY
Nah...Just some guys havin' fun.

Nick looks at him in the rearview mirror.

NICK
You know, bullies are by nature
cowards.

BOBBY
(frowning)
Huh?

NICK
You ever notice how, in Batman, the
Penguin, Joker, Riddler - as soon as
they see that Batman's gonna win, they
turn around and run. They're cowards,
just like all bullies.

Bobby ponders this skeptically.

FLASHBACK: BOARDWALK - EVENING

Bobby, his dad and Judy stroll along the boardwalk amid the jabbering electronic mayhem of the arcades and the rides.

VOICE OVER

I didn't see how Nick could talk about courage. He hadn't been to a war. On his final leave, Dad managed to keep off the subject of him leaving. Most of the time.

INT. FERRIS WHEEL CAR - EVENING

Bobby and his dad rise to where the very last rays of the sun are reddening the air. The car stops. Bob glances over at his son and notices the distracted, troubled expression on his face.

BOB

What's wrong, sport?

BOBBY

Are you going to come back, Daddy?

BOB

Come back?

BOBBY

I heard Mom and Grammy and PawPaw talking, and they said some people never come back.

Bobby's dad ponders how to answer this difficult question.

BOB

(after a beat)

You afraid of how high up we are here?

BOBBY

Yeah, a little bit.

BOBBY'S DAD

But you're still up here, seeing all these pretty lights you wouldn't be able to see if you'd stayed down below.

BOBBY

Yeah.

His dad ruffles his hair.

BOBBY'S DAD

That's being brave. That's what I'm trying to do. That's what Mommy's trying to do, and that's what I want you to do. You understand?

BOBBY

Yes.

Bobby's father looks at him wistfully, taking in the details of his face.

BOBBY'S DAD

Now you're gonna have to take care of Mommy til I get back. Do you think you can do that?

BOBBY

(with extreme solemnity)
I promise.

Bob can't help cracking a smile at Bobby's earnestness.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Present-day Bobby is walking alone down the beach.

He passes out of the sunlight under a pier. The beach gets narrower and narrower, until it disappears into the water. Undaunted, Bobby treads into the water, and rounds the corner of the pier.

EXT. UNDER NIGHTMARE BOARDWALK - DAY

A far more sinister-looking boardwalk - dark and scary, like a lair of trolls.

Bobby finds himself chest deep in water that crashes violently against the pilings. Some distance behind him is the light of day. Then it's snuffed out. Bobby turns to look.

Darkness. The darkness, from the storm drain, coming upon him like a colossal, menacing thunderhead.

Bobby tries to run, but it's not easy in the deep water. The rotted underside of the pier is pressing closer. Putting his fingers between the boards, Bobby shakes them as hard as he can.

BOBBY

(shouting)
Help! Help!

No one helps. Bobby continues forward.

It soon becomes apparent that the roof has changed. It's now concrete. And curving. What's more, most of the water has disappeared. Bobby realizes - he's in the storm drain.

Crouched low, he starts to run. Soon he comes upon the brick wall covered in graffiti. He bends closer. There it is, etched in the brick: THE TOLLTAKER.

There's a sudden, scorching blast of NOISE and Bobby spins around. The Dark is right behind him, around a curve in the tunnel. It speaks.

VOICE
(in a TollTaker rasp)
Bobbeeyyyyy....You can't hide from
me....

The thing is inches from revealing itself.

VOICE (cont'd)
Bobbbbbbb-eyyy...you never paid your
toll....

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby wakes up, rigid with fear.

BOBBY
(a desperate wail)
MOMMMMMMM!!!!!!!

He sits up in bed, sweaty and breathing hard.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Mom?

No answer. The apartment is dead quiet, except for the RUSTLE of leaves through the open window.

Bobby gets out of bed, fear still clinging to him. He approaches his bedroom door and goes through into the hallway.

The door to Judy's room is ajar. Anxious at what he might find, Bobby pushes the door open and sees -

Nothing. An empty room. The bed hasn't even been slept in.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bobby turns around toward the living room. The light next to the front door is on. Only the screen door is closed. A ghost of suspicion in his walk, Bobby goes to the door.

EXT. BURKE APARTMENT - NIGHT

The screen door opens, and Bobby steps out into the yard. Along with the wind, there is now LAUGHTER, a man's and a woman's. When he gets far enough into the yard, Bobby turns and looks up at the second floor, at Nick's apartment.

The light in the second-floor window is on, and in its glow is Judy, her back to the window, laughing at something said by a dark mass deeper inside the room.

Bobby watches this scene, anger building on his face.

EXT. FENMORE STREET - DAY

Bobby and Jeffery are walking along the street, talking. Jeffery, amazed, spins on Bobby.

JEFFEREY

Your mom's fucking Nick!?

Bobby grabs the front of his friend's shirt and throws him against a fence.

BOBBY

(an explosion)

NO!!!!

JEFFEREY

Hey, man, take it easy.

BOBBY

(releasing Jeff's shirt)

It's not like that.

They continue walking.

JEFFEREY

You know what adults do in bed together at night, don't you?

BOBBY

(indignant)

Of course!

JEFFEREY

My brother says they fu....

Bobby again turns on Jeffery.

BOBBY

SHUT UP! My mom's NOT fucking Nick!
She wouldn't do that.

(MORE)

BOBBY (cont'd)
He's just too friendly. He's helping
my mom forget about Dad, and he's
helping her believe he's not coming
home when he really is. And I need a
way to make her see what Nick is
doing.

(a beat, then abjectly:)
I just don't know what.

Jeffery looks at him, then pats his shoulder sympathetically.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - A LITTLE LATER

Bobby and Jeffrey enter through the gate. The yard around them
is filled with OTHER KIDS playing. The two boys see Joe standing
off by himself. He turns toward Bobby, revealing the nasty
bruise surrounding his eye and continuing along one side of his
face.

BOBBY
(reacting to the bruise)
Jeez....

Joe tries to shrug it off.

JOE
It's not that bad. Remember when I put
that baseball through the Shaeffers'
window?
(tries to make a joke of it)
Then I had to sleep sitting up for a
week.

He, Bobby and Jeffrey form a little group against the schoolyard
fence.

JOE (cont'd)
How 'bout you? What's up with Nick?

BOBBY
Don't ask.

Joe looks at him for a beat. Then he looks away.

JOE
Nick doesn't seem so bad to me.

BOBBY
(turning on him)
WHAT? He's trying to take my mom away
from my dad. That's stealing!

JOE

He can't steal your mom if she doesn't want to be stolen.

Bobby looks irritated.

BOBBY

Look, Joe, I'm sorry I can't walk to school with you anymore, but don't you get it? Nick was the reason I had to move away...

JOE

(cutting Bobby off)

Move away? This has nothing to do with you moving away. You're the one who doesn't get it. Maybe it's not Nick's fault at all. Maybe it's your mom's.

BOBBY

(shouting)

STOP IT! Just stop it! You're just mad because my dad's a prisoner in Nam, defending his country instead a' home beating the shit outta his kid!

Bobby instantly regrets having said it. Looking as if he had just been slapped, Joe slowly rises to his feet.

BOBBY (cont'd)

I'm sorry, Joe...

Joe doesn't stick around long enough to accept the apology. He turns around and walks stiffly away until he's lost among the other kids in the yard.

Bobby and Jefferey watch him go.

JEFFEREY

I hope I didn't cause you guys any problems.

BOBBY

(brushing it off)

Don't worry about it. It wasn't your fault. I'll try to talk to him tomorrow.

As he says this, he doesn't notice Rudy standing nearby, listening, but pretending not to.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Bobby's crossing the playground to get home. He's not surprised to hear Rudy snarling behind him.

RUDY (O.C.)
You little shit!

Bobby turns to face him. Bruce, as always, is at his master's side.

RUDY (cont'd)
You think you're slick, don't you? Did you think you could get away? Did you really think you could just jump on that truck and that would be the end of it?

Bobby glares back at him. Rudy gives him a hard shove in the chest.

RUDY (cont'd)
Don't look at me like that, punk!

BOBBY
I don't have it.

RUDY
You don't have what?

BOBBY
Your toll. I don't have it.

As if it were possible, Rudy's face gets meaner.

RUDY
What, is that a joke? You mean after all this, you still don't have it?

Bobby nods defiantly. Rudy looks a little surprised.

RUDY (cont'd)
You know I'll kick your ass?

Bobby nods again. For a moment, Rudy looks confused, although in no way less threatening. Then a new idea occurs to him.

RUDY (cont'd)
I heard what you said to your buddy today. It's a shame. I thought you guys made such a cute couple...So, tell you what - I'm gonna give you a chance to make it up.
(MORE)

RUDY (cont'd)
I'm gonna give you a chance to be
noble. You know what being noble is?

Bobby shakes his head.

RUDY (cont'd)
Well, you're gonna find out. I'm gonna
give you a chance to be noble and get
your little buddy outta trouble.

BOBBY
(confused)
What?

RUDY
Your little buddy back there. Joe.
You're gonna do the noble thing and
keep him outta trouble, 'cause
tomorrow I'm gonna escort him up to
Fornerette's and tell him - oh,
you're gonna love this - I'm gonna
tell him I caught the stupid little
shit in the bathroom popping milk
cartons again. Again!

BOBBY
No, please don't...

RUDY
Gimme one reason why I shouldn't.

BOBBY
'Cause his dad...

Bobby trails off as the connection is made in his head.

BOBBY (cont'd)
You know...You know what his dad'll
do...

He stands silent a moment, astonished at the depth of cruelty
he's witnessing. Rudy shakes his head, deflecting all
responsibility.

RUDY
I'm not gonna do anything. This is all
your doing. It's your fault. You did
this, not me.

BOBBY
You can't...Look, I'll pay.

He starts to reach into his pocket, but Rudy shakes his head.

RUDY

Nah...I don't think that's gonna do it.

BOBBY

I'll double it. I'll give you a quarter.

Rudy looks at him doubtfully.

RUDY

You have a quarter on you?

Bobby shakes his head.

BOBBY

Tomorrow! I'll bring you a quarter tomorrow.

RUDY

That's not gonna do anything about today, will it?

BOBBY

Well what, then? I'll give you one the next day, too. I'll give you a quarter every day, for the rest of the year.

Rudy thinks about it, then nods.

RUDY

Alright, maybe we could do business with that. Maybe I could cut you some slack. Gimme a quarter a day for the rest of the year, and your little buddy gets off...Just make sure you don't forget. That won't be pretty.

He leaves. Bruce follows.

EXT. BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

Bobby comes up to the screen door and does a double take at what's on the other side. He opens the door.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

Nick's standing there, looking the slightest bit uncomfortable.

NICK

Hey! Your mom had to work an hour late. She called and asked me to make sure you got home okay.

Bobby looks skeptical. Nick knows right away what he's thinking.

NICK (cont'd)

She called your grandmother, but she wasn't home.

Bobby goes to the sofa and plops down.

NICK (cont'd)

Do you have any homework or anything you need to do?

BOBBY

No.

Nick sits down on the sofa next to him.

NICK

What do you do in the afternoon? Watch TV?

BOBBY

Sometimes.

NICK

Well, I was hoping we could do something together to surprise your mom. Maybe make dinner for her? Or finish some of your unpacking?

Neither idea seems appealing to Bobby. Then he has a brainstorm.

BOBBY

(grinning)

I know what we can do.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Bobby and Nick are putting the last of the carved-glass animals from his father's collection into the display case they've just put up on the wall.

The door opens and Judy enters, frazzled from work.

BOBBY

Surprise!

For the first moment, Judy looks surprised. Then it becomes horror. She turns on Nick.

JUDY
Nick! How could you?

Nick looks like a deer trapped in someone's headlights.

JUDY (cont'd)
You had no right. No right!
(turns on Bobby)
You're responsible for this, aren't you?

BOBBY
But...

JUDY
I specifically told you the other day
I didn't want this displayed in the
living room. We've been through this!
You know how I felt about bringing
these up now.

NICK
Judy, it's my fault. It was my idea to
do something to surprise you. I just
thought...

JUDY
(venomously)
You thought what?

She sits down on the sofa and buries her face in her hands.

NICK
Judy, please - I didn't know. I'm
sorry.

JUDY
(muffled by her hands)
Go. Just...go.

Nick departs with a last glance at Bobby. It's surprisingly sympathetic. Bobby approaches his mother slowly.

BOBBY
I didn't mean to hurt you, Mom, but
Nick wanted to surprise you...

Judy looks up. There's a tear running down one cheek.

JUDY

(cutting Bobby off)

You knew I didn't want this put up in the living room, Bobby. You knew!

BOBBY

But I don't understand why. It's Dad's and he would've wanted it up. Don't you care about dad anymore?

Judy looks stung.

JUDY

Bobby, that's not fair. I love your father and I always will. You know that.

BOBBY

No I don't! The only thing I know is you're trying to bury him in the garage in a bunch of boxes! He'll be glad to see it when he gets home...

Judy stifles a sob.

JUDY

Bobby, stop it! Stop it right now! We've been through this before. The military says your father isn't...

BOBBY

(cutting her off)

NO! YOU stop it! He is coming home. He IS!

JUDY

(close to breaking down completely)

You think I don't miss your father, too? Oh, God, I'd give anything to have him back right now. Anything, Bobby! I loved your father more than anybody else, and I've been lost without him. But the military says there are no more POWs. They said all along they didn't think he was captured, that he was...killed.

BOBBY

He wasn't! They're liars. Even PawPaw says...

JUDY

Your PawPaw says a lot of things...

BOBBY
(screaming)
He's ALIVE! He IS! He's alive, and
he's gonna come home! You'll see - MY
FATHER'S COMING HOME!

He bolts from the room.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - LATER

Dressed in his pajamas, Bobby stands at his bedroom door, peering through the crack into the hallway.

Through the crack, he can see Judy and Nick pressed close together on the couch, talking.

Judy bursts out laughing at something said by Nick, who looks pleased with himself.

Bobby softly closes the bedroom door.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - LATER

Bobby's door opens and he emerges. He pushes open his mother's door. An empty room - another unslept-in bed.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

The door opens, the light flips on, and Bobby enters.

Reaching into a box, He pulls out a LEATHER JACKET, the same one that Judy was wearing that long-ago day she had her hands draped so sorrowfully around the shoulders of Jamie's father.

INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carrying the jacket, Bobby pushes open the bedroom door and lays it on the bed.

He lingers a moment, then slips out of the room.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - LATER

Bobby's sleeping in his bed. The sound of the front door opening wakes him, and he sits up slowly, as FOOTSTEPS proceed softly down the hall outside. JUDY'S BEDROOM DOOR OPENS.

Throwing back the covers, Bobby gets out of bed and opens his bedroom door. He tip-toes into the hall and, shielded by Judy's partially closed bedroom door, looks into her room.

Judy's on her knees, clutching the jacket to her chest, crying softly.

Bobby stares gravely at the sight of his mother crying. Then he departs.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

As usual, Rudy's glowering fearsomely.

RUDY
You got something for me?

He shoves Bobby hard against the brick wall of the school. Jeffery, who's been walking next to Bobby, stops and stares. Rudy turns on him.

RUDY (cont'd)
Scram!

Jeffery scrams.

RUDY (cont'd)
(to Bobby)
You got a one-day free ride. Now it's time to pay.

Trying not to let his anger show, Bobby reaches into his pocket. Then he freezes, horrified.

RUDY (cont'd)
(impatient)
Well?

BOBBY
I...I forgot.

RUDY
What?!

BOBBY
(speaking quickly)
I had a fight with my mom. I forgot to get the money from her today...

But Rudy is already turning away in disgust.

RUDY
You never had it.

BOBBY

But I'll pay you! I'll pay you
tomorrow!

RUDY

I heard that somewhere before.

He begins to walk away.

BOBBY

(shouting desperately)
Don't tell on Joe! Please!...You can't
do this, Rudy! You can't!

RUDY

The toll must be taken, Bobby. The
toll must be taken.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER

At recess, Joe, Eddie, Randall and Bobby are all peering hard at something across the schoolyard. Joe looks especially worried.

EDDIE

What do you think he's up to?

Across the yard, Rudy and Bruce approach the entrance to the boy's lav. Rudy slips inside while Bruce stands guard, waving off anyone who wants to go in.

RANDALL

I don't know. I heard Rudy actually
got a kid arrested once. The kid'll be
in jail til he's 18.

Joe shoots a glance at Bobby.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Class is in session, but THE TEACHER is standing in the open doorway talking to FORNERETTE, the principal. Rudy is there, too.

The teacher calls out Joe's name. Looking slightly ill, Joe gets up from his desk and exits.

In the row behind, Bobby's anxiety ratchets up a notch or two.

INT. FORNERETTE'S OFFICE - DAY

Bobby sits across the desk from Fornerette, having just told his story.

FORNERETTE

Why do you think Rudy would lie?

Bobby shrugs.

FORNERETTE (cont'd)

I don't know either. But I do know you might lie to keep one of your friends from getting in trouble again. But you know, Bobby, even that's not a good reason to lie. And that troubles me even more than you going into the bathroom to smash cartons. Is your mother home?

BOBBY

No, she's at work.

FORNERETTE

Your father?

BOBBY

He's in Vietnam.

Fornerette scowls.

FORNERETTE

Okay, I'm going to call your mother later today and tell her what happened.

BOBBY

But you can't! It was me! You have to believe me. Joe didn't have anything to do with it. I swear, he didn't...

FORNERETTE

(sharply)

That's enough!

Silenced, Bobby broods in his chair.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

Judy stands over Bobby, a stern expression on her face.

JUDY

You're grounded tonight, young man.

BOBBY

But they were just empty cartons, Mom.

JUDY

And why did you go down and tell the principal it was you and not Joe who did it?

Bobby sighs.

BOBBY

Because he just got caught doing the same thing Monday, and his dad beat him really bad, and if he finds out Joe did it again, it'll only be worse.

JUDY

(softening a bit)

Is his dad still drinking?

Bobby nods. Now it's Judy's turn to sigh.

JUDY (cont'd)

Look, I respect what you're trying to do, but you just can't take blame for others like that.

BOBBY

I know, but please - just this once? Call Joe's mom and tell her it was me before his dad finds out. Joe was hurting so bad he couldn't even come to school yesterday, and when he came today, he was all sore.

JUDY

(caving)

Okay, I'll try. I think I still have her number.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - LATER

Bobby's sitting on his bed, back against the wall, dispiritedly throwing a hand ball in the air and catching it.

Judy enters the room and sits at the foot of the bed.

JUDY

I talked to Joe's mother. I told her what you said, and said that if Joe's father wants to, he can talk to you. Is that okay?

Bobby nods. Judy remains seated on the bed.

JUDY (cont'd)
We need to talk, honey. About a lot of things...I want you to stop trying to come between Nick and me.

BOBBY
But I don't like him...

JUDY
(interrupting)
You would if you gave him a chance.

BOBBY
And what about Dad?

Judy looks suddenly weary.

JUDY
Bobby, we've been through this over and over. For three years I've waited for your father to come home... Three years! The government has declared him dead. He's not coming home, Bobby. He's not.

BOBBY
He is.
(jingles the SafeKeeper on his wrist)
PawPaw bought me this SafeKeeper. I got it before he was missing. Before he was missing! I know as long as I wear it, he's okay.

JUDY
Come on, Bobby. You can't use a bracelet to keep someone safe. It's a superstition. It's not real.

BOBBY
You weren't there. Something happened when he put it on my wrist. It was magic! I know it was.

JUDY
Okay, Bobby. Let's make a deal. Give Nick a chance. He's not your father, but you could be friends with him. And if your dad comes home, we'll never see Nick again. Alright?

Bobby pouts without saying anything.

JUDY (cont'd)

I want you to stop being mean to him.
And I want you to stop being mean to
me. Which brings up something else.
What you did to me last night was very
mean.

She waits for a response from Bobby, who just glares sullenly.

JUDY (cont'd)

The jacket?

Still nothing from Bobby.

JUDY (cont'd)

Do you know how much you hurt me when
I came down and saw the jacket? You
don't seem to realize how much I love
your father, and how much that jacket
reminds me of him. Or maybe you do.

BOBBY

I wasn't trying to make you cry. You
used to wear it all the time. You used
to talk about Dad all the time.

JUDY

I understand, Bobby. And I'm not as
angry about that as I am about you
going outside late at night without my
permission. You know better than that.

Bobby's frown deepens.

BOBBY

You weren't here.

JUDY

You knew where I was.

BOBBY

(looking at her accusingly)
What about the other night?

JUDY

What other night?

BOBBY

The other night when I woke up
screaming because I was having a bad
dream and you weren't here. I looked
all over and I didn't know where you
were. And I was all alone!

He bursts into tears. Chastened, Judy gathers him into her arms.

JUDY

Oh, God, Bobby...I'm so sorry. I didn't know. You're right. I should never leave you alone, even if you know where I am. I'm sorry and I promise it'll never happen again. Okay? It'll never happen again.

And she cradles Bobby, murmuring softly into his ear.

INT. NICK'S CAR - DAY

A souped-up Coronet: quite a fine looking set of wheels. It's cruising along a highway on a beautiful summer day, Nick and Judy all smiles in the front while Bobby's in the back seat, gazing distantly out the window.

EXT. SEASIDE, NEW JERSEY - ESTABLISHING

The same Ferris wheel, overlooking the same beach.

EXT. SEASIDE - BEACH - DAY

Bobby, Judy and Nick set up camp on the beach. Reaching into a BIG CANVAS BAG, Judy pulls out a TUBE OF SUNTAN LOTION.

JUDY

Let me put some lotion on you guys.

BOBBY

(sullenly)

We don't need any lotion. The sun's not even out.

JUDY

Just because it's hazy doesn't mean you can't get sunburned. Nick, take your shirt off and let me put some lotion on your shoulders.

Nick obliges, and Judy massages the lotion onto Nick's shoulders. Dismayed, Bobby forces his way between them.

BOBBY

Okay. I'll take some.

Sparing an amused glance at Judy, Nick shuffles aside to let Bobby take his place. Judy rubs some lotion onto Bobby's back. When she's finished, Bobby plops onto his towel.

Judy, meanwhile, hands the tube of lotion to Nick.

JUDY
Nick, could you put some lotion on my
back?

Bobby's head snaps up. He makes a grab for the tube of lotion.

BOBBY
I'll do it, Mom.

JUDY
Let Nick do it, Bobby. I don't want
any to get in my hair. Go check the
water and tell us how warm it is.

BOBBY
But I wanna help!

JUDY
Bobby, I said no.

The two fight over the lotion until the cap flies off the tube and a stream of lotion shoots into the air, most of it landing in Judy's hair.

JUDY (cont'd)
Bobby!!

She slaps Bobby's leg.

JUDY (cont'd)
Stop being such a baby! Go play down
by the water for a while.

Bobby turns and stalks off toward the water.

EXT. BEACH - BY THE WATER - DAY

Bobby sloshes gloomily through the water. Eventually, he comes across A BOY about the same age, building a rather sad-looking SAND CASTLE.

BOY
(looking up at Bobby)
You wanna help?

BOBBY
(evaluating the sand castle)
It's kinda small. Last time I was
here, my Dad and I built one the whole
length of the beach.
(MORE)

BOBBY (cont'd)
They had to get bulldozers to knock it
down. But this one's not too bad.

Squatting down, Bobby uses one of the boy's plastic buckets to
gather wet sand and mold it into a rampart.

EXT. BEACH - A LITTLE LATER

Bobby and the boy have built a little sand castle with walls
that don't run quite straight, and corners that have begun to
sag a little.

Nick appears, sopping wet from a dip in the water, with Judy
right behind. Seeing the castle, Nick grins broadly.

NICK
What're you guys building here? It
looks like a sand castle.

BOBBY
(without looking up)
Yeah.

NICK
You know, I'm the all-time champ of
building sand castles. You want some
help?

BOY
Yeah!

JUDY
Wouldn't that be great, Bobby? It'd be
just like the one you made with your
father. Do you remember that?

BOBBY
(noncommittally)
Yeah, sure.

Nick drops to his knees to help.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

Bobby, Nick, Judy and the other boy are building what appears to
be the Al Hambra of sand castles. Nick is clearly the foreman.
There are six towers, with a wall running between them, and more
sand buildings in the middle. There's also a moat, with a bridge
crossing it that connects to a little gate in the wall.

Finishing, the four stand back to admire their work. Judy beams
at Bobby.

JUDY

What do you think, Bobby? I think it's even better than the one you built with your father.

A mischievous glint appears in Bobby's eyes.

BOBBY

GODZILLAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!

And he charges the sand castle. Leaping into the air, he lands right in the middle, crushing the buildings and part of the wall.

JUDY

(appalled)

Bobby! What are you doing?

Bobby looks up at Judy. An ugly scene is brewing. Then, suddenly, Nick charges the sand castle as well.

NICK

AAAAAAGGHHHHHH!

He jumps, lands, and more of the castle is obliterated. Not wanting to be left out of the fun, the other boy leaps into the fray, and they all roll, kick and stomp until the castle is nothing more than a mound of soggy sand.

Judy looks flabbergasted.

NICK (cont'd)

(looking up at her)

It's a guy thing. You couldn't understand.

He gives Bobby a little wink.

EXT. BOARDWALK - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Bobby, Nick and Judy stroll along the boardwalk, playing arcade games, going on rides, etc.

VOICE OVER

That was the buzz phrase for the rest of the day. Nick and I laughed at people we saw, pretended the stringy cheese on the pizza was snot, and belched as loudly as we could when we drank birch beer. Whenever Mom gave us a look, that's what we would say: "It's a guy thing."

The three approach the Ferris wheel. Bobby and Nick are happily devouring spools of COTTON CANDY, while Judy keeps her distance a few steps away, looking unhappy.

Seeing the entrance for the Ferris wheel, Bobby's eyes light up.

BOBBY

Let's go on the Ferris wheel! Huh? How 'bout it?

JUDY

You sure you want a woman hanging around with you? Going on the Ferris wheel is another guy thing, isn't it?

NICK

I think maybe we can include a woman. What do you think, Bobby?

BOBBY

Yeah, I guess we could. This time.

They walk up to the ticket-taker at the entrance.

INT. FERRIS WHEEL CAR - EARLY EVENING

Bobby sits between Nick and Judy as the car rises into the humid air.

VOICE OVER

Of course I couldn't help thinking about Dad and the last time we were on this Ferris wheel. I was doing the best I could to keep my promise. But it was just me, the only thing between Nick and Mom, the only thing keeping them apart.

As Bobby leans forward on the seat, Nick and Judy's hands find each other behind him.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

My body was too small. It wasn't enough to hold back the flow of feelings between them. I couldn't help thinking that I was just temporarily interrupting the flux, but could never stop the flow.

INT. JUDY'S CAR - DAY

Bobby gazes out the window as Judy drives, bopping along to the AM pop blaring from the radio.

The car passes a particular house, and Bobby starts showing interest, looking hard at it through the window. Its windows are dark; no car sits in the driveway.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Bobby silently regards Joe's empty desk.

INT. PAWPAW'S KITCHEN - DAY

Grammy's washing vegetables in the sink while Bobby slouches against the counter behind her.

BOBBY

Grammy, can I walk over and see if Joe is home?

GRAMMY

Is that the boy you used to play with when you were still living here?

BOBBY

Yeah.

Grammy turns toward Bobby and dries her hands on her apron.

GRAMMY

The Clarkes over on Filmore?

BOBBY

Yeah. It's just two blocks.

GRAMMY

(reluctantly)

I don't know, Bobby...If it's who I think it is, there may have been an accident.

BOBBY

(his blood running cold)

It was Joe, wasn't it...?

GRAMMY

No, no - it wasn't him. It was his father. He...Oh, I don't know how to say this - he died. His father was in an accident and he....he died.

Bobby looks thunderstruck.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Looking uncomfortable, Bobby stands at the front door and presses the doorbell.

The door opens, and JOE'S MOTHER appears. Mournful words are exchanged, and Bobby is admitted inside.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - OUTSIDE JOE'S BEDROOM - DAY

As Bobby climbs the stairs, Joe's bedroom door comes into view. Joe's inside, lying on his bed. His left leg is encased in a CAST.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bobby enters, his jaw hanging open.

BOBBY
Your leg - what happened?

JOE
(looking away)
My dad.

Waves of sympathy break over Bobby's face. He sits down on the edge of the bed.

BOBBY
I'm really sorry, Joe...I never meant
for this to happen. It's all my fault.

JOE
No, it's not. My mom told me you tried
to take the blame for the cartons. She
told my dad, too. But he didn't wanna
hear it.

His mouth twitches, but he says no more.

BOBBY
That's alright, Joe....Don't...You
don't have to tell me.

Joe looks up at Bobby. There are large tears forming in his eyes.

JOE

No, I want to...I can't talk about this with anybody. Mom doesn't want to talk about what really happened, especially since Dad...died.

He pauses, reliving the horrible events.

JOE (cont'd)

Mom tried to stop him. For the first time ever, she really tried to stop him. So he threw her down. She was begging him, and he...he smacked her in the mouth and...

(a heavy silence)

That's when she told me to run. Just run next door to the Kriskis.' I got up and squeezed past him before he knew it, but he caught up with me. Right at the top of the stairs, he kicked me and I...

(pauses)

...I flew in the air, and I landed, and that's when my leg broke.

He gives a little concluding shrug. Then he looks up, sees Bobby's questioning eyes, and continues telling the story.

JOE (cont'd)

He told Mom to take me to the hospital. He said it was all her fault and she shouldn't have interfered. He told her to tell the doctor I fell down the stairs. Then he left.

Bobby sits for a moment, digesting all this.

BOBBY

What happened to him? Is he really...is he really dead?

JOE

Well, we went to the hospital. He went out and got drunker and drunker. He ended up getting a bottle and drinking it by the river. The police told Mom when he left there, he got into the wreck. We didn't even find out about it until we got home the next morning, and the police were there waiting for us. That's when...when they told Mom that Dad was dead.

Bobby contemplates the horror of losing a parent.

BOBBY
(after a beat)
I'm...I'm really sorry, Joe.

Joe looks straight ahead, a trembling set to his mouth.

JOE
I'm not.

BOBBY
What?

JOE
I don't feel bad...That he died...I'm
glad he died.

BOBBY
You don't really mean that...

JOE
I do...Really, I do. I'm glad he's
dead. Everyone thinks I'm supposed to
feel bad, but I don't. Don't you try
to make me feel bad about him too. I
hate him. I hate him for what he did
to me, and I hate him for what he did
to Mom...He was a mean, no good
sonuvabitch, and I just wish he
could've died sooner.

He breaks down into wave after wave of shuddering sobs. At a
loss for what to do, Bobby finally takes Joe in his arms and
holds him tightly.

JOE (cont'd)
Everybody's talking about how
wonderful he was, and how great, but
he wasn't! He was a drunken bag of
shit for as long as I can remember! He
was shit, shit, shit, SHIT!

The rest is lost amid his sobbing. Bobby holds on, trying his
best to see his friend through.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - DAY

Judy is talking earnestly on the phone.

She hangs up and looks at Bobby with a touch of pride and
affection.

JUDY

You must've had some visit with Joe today. Sarah says that Joe hasn't been as withdrawn as he was before you went over there. He hadn't been talking very much or even eating. Whatever you said to him, she wanted me to tell you thanks.

With a bit of false modesty, Bobby grabs a soda from the fridge and drops onto the sofa.

BOBBY

It was nothing.

(looks up at her)

Did she tell you how he broke his leg?

JUDY

(slightly hesitant)

Yeah, he fell down the stairs.

BOBBY

That's what she told Joe to tell everyone, but Joe's dad really kicked him down the stairs, went out and got drunk and wrecked into a telephone pole.

Judy comes over and sits down next to Bobby.

JUDY

Yes, she did tell me that, but I didn't know if you knew.

BOBBY

(honestly bewildered)

How could his dad hate him so much?
Why would he want to hurt him?

Touched, Judy gives him a gentle hug.

JUDY

I guess maybe Joe's dad didn't really believe he was hurting him. I guess he thought he was helping Joe by teaching him not to be bad. It wasn't right, but he wasn't deliberately trying to hurt Joe, I don't think.

Bobby reflects on this in the protection of his mother's arms.

EXT. APARTMENT - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Nick's water ice truck is parked by the open bay of his garage. Holding a WATER CARTON, Bobby comes down the steps and into the garage, thrown a little off-balance by the carton's weight.

VOICE OVER

Because of how well things went at Seaside, Nick asked me if I wanted to work on his water ice truck that summer. I resisted at first, but then he said the magic words: he'd pay. Mom didn't like the idea because she thought I was too little, but we talked her into it. Two against one.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Bobby and Jeffery sit on the curb, keeping a volley going between them with a HANDBALL.

VOICE OVER

With the end of the year coming, we'd gone to half-days and I was going over to Grammy and PawPaw's house after school. I knew I didn't have to face Rudy on the playground anymore, but that didn't mean I didn't have to face him at all.

Without warning, Rudy, the ever-loyal Bruce at his side, appears and snatches the ball in mid-air.

RUDY

Did your boyfriend here give you my message? We were looking for you yesterday.

BOBBY

I don't walk through the playground anymore, so I don't have to pay your toll.

RUDY

(highly amused)
Excuse me? What am I hearing?

BRUCE

You still owe him for last week.

RUDY

Yeah. You still owe me for last week.
Didn't you learn anything from what
happened to your friend? Didn't you
learn what happens when you don't pay
the toll?

An authoritative presence looms beyond him. A TEACHER.

BOBBY

Hello, Miss Brower.

Rudy turns toward her.

RUDY

Hello, Miss Brower. You look just
lovely today.

MISS BROWER

Hello, boys. Don't you think you
should be getting in line? The bell's
going to ring any second.

BOBBY/RUDY

Yes, Miss Brower.

She walks away. Before Rudy walks away as well, he leans down
close to Bobby.

RUDY

(with chilling menace)

I'm gonna take that toll. I swear to
you, Bobby, I'm gonna take that toll.

And he's gone.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bobby, Judy and Nick sit around the dining room table, playing a
board game.

VOICE OVER

That night Nick came over and set up
for a game of Life. Mom was a doctor,
Nick was a teacher, and I was a
lawyer, and I wasn't sure what I did,
but I knew it was good because I made
more money than Nick.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby sleeps in his bed.

VOICE OVER
I went to bed happy. Which made the
dream I had so much more unexpected.

INT. TUNNEL

Bobby cringes against the clammy wall.

TOLLTAKER (O.C.)
(one long rasp)
Bob-beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.....

Where'd that come from? Bobby looks, but can see very little in the dark. Taking his chances, he picks a direction and runs.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Bobby runs out of the storm drain, which in his dream has been transplanted to one of the city streets in his neighborhood. It's growing stormy out.

He takes a quick glance back. That dream-darkness is flowing out of the drain like foul, exhaled breath.

Rain spitting down, Bobby starts running as hard as he can. He closes in on the front door to his apartment, then hits it with all his might.

Bam! Locked.

A shadow like a nest of squirming worms falls on Bobby's shoulder.

TOLLTAKER (O.C.)
I want you to see, Bob-beeeyyyy...

Like a trapped insect, Bobby turns to face his doom.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby wakes up in his bed. He looks around, disoriented.

Everything's where it belongs: the clock radio, the little black and white TV, his Colorforms. It was a dream. Bobby sits up.

TOLLTAKER (O.C.)
Bob-beeeee.....

Bobby looks. The Darkness is flowing through the window behind him.

He bolts from his bed to the bedroom door. Locked. Bobby looks for escape routes, then sees the closet. There's no other choice but to hide. He opens the closet door...

And finds himself face to face with the Dark, curled like hair within the open door. Legs - crab legs - are reaching out from around the edges.

TOLLTAKER (cont'd)
I want you to seeeeeee,
Bobbeeyyyy....Your mother's a whore.

The dark cloud parts.

BOBBY
(pushing himself away)
No!!

Bobby falls on the bedroom door knob, and is surprised when it turns easily and the door opens.

INT. BURKE APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bobby stumbles into the hallway, which is hushed and dimly lit. He gapes. Is this another dream?

There's noise: TWO VOICES, whispering low. They're coming from his mother's room.

Bobby approaches the cracked-open door and the voices get louder: they're gasping and moaning.

Bobby gently pushes at the door.

Inside, two forms lie in Judy's bed, partially covered by the sheets. Nick and Judy. They're having sex.

Undetected, Bobby sinks back into the shadows.

INT. PAWPAW'S KITCHEN - DAY

Grammy is peeling carrots while Bobby sits on a stool nearby. PawPaw enters, sweeping Bobby from the stool like a prize at a football game.

PAWPAW
Hahhhhhh! How's my favorite grandson?

BOBBY
(laughing)
I'm your only grandson, PawPaw.

PAWPAW
That's why you're my favorite.

He sets Bobby down on the counter.

PAWPAW (cont'd)
How's everything going at the
apartment?

BOBBY
Okay.

PAWPAW
Nick treating you good?

Bobby hesitates.

PAWPAW (cont'd)
What - you mean he's not treating you
good?

BOBBY
He's alright.

PawPaw frowns.

PAWPAW
Just alright? That's not good.
Wouldn't you want it to be better than
just alright?

BOBBY
I suppose.

PawPaw gives him a long look.

PAWPAW
You know, Bobby, you can always talk
to me. You would tell me if anything
was wrong, wouldn't you?

BOBBY
(wishing this conversation
would end)
Yes, PawPaw.

PAWPAW
Has Nick been coming around there?

BOBBY
Yeah...but he lives there.

PAWPAW

(quickly)

No - He lives upstairs. There's nothing he needs in your mother's apartment... Now, I want you to tell me, Bobby, has Nick been down there?

Bobby considers what he should say.

BOBBY

(after a long pause)

Yeah, he's been down.

PAWPAW

When?

BOBBY

(confused)

What?

PAWPAW

When was the last time?

Grammy looks at him.

GRAMMY

(reproachfully)

George...

PAWPAW

No! I need to know when the last time Nick was in your apartment. You can tell me, Bobby. I need to know.

BOBBY

(surrendering)

Last night.

PawPaw has the look of a detective zeroing in on a particular clue.

PAWPAW

What time last night?

BOBBY

I don't know, PawPaw. I was in bed. I... heard a noise, and I got up. I went out in the hall and I saw Nick in Mom's room.

PAWPAW

Saw them doing what?

Bobby squirms uncomfortably. PawPaw's tone becomes very serious.

PAWPAW (cont'd)
 Bobby, did you see Nick and your mom
 in bed together?

GRAMMY
 (scoldingly)
 George!

But Bobby's evasive look tells PawPaw all he needs to know. He stands bolt upright.

PAWPAW
 (thundering)
 JEE-SUS CHRIST!

BOBBY
 (close to tears)
 Don't get mad, PawPaw! Please don't
 get mad at her!

With an immense effort of will, PawPaw restrains himself from cursing.

BOBBY (cont'd)
 You're not going to yell at her, are
 you? Please don't make her mad at me,
 PawPaw!

PAWPAW
 (barely holding it together)
 No, I'm not gonna do anything to make
 her mad at you, Bobby. You did the
 right thing telling me. I'll take care
 of it.

Turning around, he stalks out of the room.

INT. PAWPAW'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Bobby and Grammy sit in uncomfortable silence as Judy and PawPaw shout at each other in the other room.

The kitchen door swings open and Judy storms through, trailing a cloud of outrage and humiliation.

JUDY
BOBBY! Get your coat!

PawPaw follows her through the kitchen door. Bobby hesitates.

JUDY (cont'd)
 Get your coat! NOW!!

PAWPAW
Don't yell at that boy. What you done
wasn't his fault.

GRAMMY
George, please don't...

PAWPAW
Helen, shut up!

Judy grabs Bobby and pulls him toward the front door.

PAWPAW (cont'd)
That's right, run away, just like you
done to your husband.

Judy turns on him.

JUDY
My husband is dead! Your son is dead!

BOBBY
Mom, don't...

PawPaw points to him.

PAWPAW
Do you see? Look what you're doing to
your own son!

JUDY
Me? You're the one who keeps filling
his head with those crazy ideas about
his father being alive. It's hard
enough coping with Bob's death without
you fighting the truth!

PAWPAW
Don't you turn this around - we're not
talking about me! We're talking about
you cheating on your husband. You were
a floozy in high school, you're a
floozy now, and I won't have you
carrying on that way in front of my
grandson!

Grammy jumps in commandingly.

GRAMMY
George, enough! Both of you - enough!

The two combatants fall silent.

GRAMMY (cont'd)

Bob is gone, and all this bickering
and blame-laying isn't going to bring
him back.

Judy and PawPaw level hard stares at each other. PawPaw jabs a
finger at her.

PAWPAW

You ought not to be doing what you're
doing, and if that man were any sort
of man at all, he would have more
respect for another man's wife.

He storms out the door. Judy drops heavily onto the couch.

JUDY

Bobby, why didn't you come to me? Why
didn't you tell me what you saw last
night?

BOBBY

(an indictment)

Kissing in bed! With no clothes on. I
know what that is!

JUDY

You should have never seen what you
did. I was wrong. But I like Nick, and
I want to keep on seeing him. And I
thought you liked him too.

Bobby glares obstinately.

JUDY (cont'd)

I love your father every bit as much
as you do, but I'm beginning to love
Nick, too. And I know he's beginning
to love us. I just wish you could let
him be friends with us. Let him be a
part of our family...

(a horrible thought occurs to
her)

Oh, God!

GRAMMY

What, dear?

JUDY

Nick took the day off because of the
weather. You don't think that's where
George is going, do you?

Grammy's face reflects Judy's look of horror. Judy rises quickly to her feet.

JUDY (cont'd)
I've gotta use your phone.

INT. PAWPAW'S KITCHEN - DAY

Judy is on the phone, anxiously waiting for the other end to pick up. Finally it does.

JUDY
Nick! Thank god I got you...
(suddenly confused)
...what?
(to Bobby and Grammy)
He says there's someone there to see us.
(to Nick)
Well, tell him we'll be back in about 15 minutes. But, Nick - my father-in-law hasn't shown up there, has he?
Well... He found out about last night, and now he's coming over to confront you. Don't let him in, Nick. We'll be right over. Just don't let him in.

INT. JUDY'S CAR - DAY

They're driving down Fenmore Street. The apartment comes into view. PawPaw's car is parked out front.

BOBBY
Look! PawPaw's here already.

JUDY
(to herself)
Dammit, Nick! I told you not to let him in.

EXT. APARTMENT - DRIVEWAY

Judy's car pulls in and comes to a stop. Judy hops out.

JUDY
(to Bobby & Grammy, still in the car)
Stay here - both of you!

They immediately get out and begin to follow her. Judy bursts through Nick's door and up the stairs to his apartment.

JUDY (cont'd)
Nick?...Nick?

At the top of the stairs, she finds Nick, PawPaw and some STRANGER sitting calmly in the living room.

JUDY (cont'd)
(thrown off-balance)
What is this? What's going on?

Bobby and Grammy come in. The first thing Bobby notices is the stranger, a slightly nervous burn-out, who looks older than his actual age, which can be no more than 25 or 26.

NICK
(cordially)
Why don't you come in and sit down?
Bobby, Helen? This involves you, too.

The three find seats and sit down. Nick gestures at the stranger.

NICK (cont'd)
This man was a friend of Bob's. He
came to talk to you.

Judy looks at him with sudden interest.

JUDY
Bob? Does he have something to say
about Bob? What is it?

NICK
I think I should let him say it
himself.

JUDY
(turning toward the stranger)
I'm sorry, I didn't get your name...?

STRANGER
Gary. Wheedleman.

JUDY
And you knew Bob?

GARY
I was in 'Nam with him. The same unit.
Tunnel Rats.

He chuckles anxiously, as if he thought this were funny.

JUDY
But, what...Why....

Then she remembers the only question that really matters.

JUDY (cont'd)
Is Bob....Is he...?

Gary nods. Judy gasps and Grammy, sitting next to PawPaw, begins sobbing softly in his arms. Only Bobby looks confused.

BOBBY
(frustrated)
What? Is he what?

Everyone ignores him except Judy, who pulls him closer.

JUDY
Tell me when?...How?

GRAMMY
(composing herself somewhat)
What's a Tunnel Rat?

GARY
Guys who were sent down tunnels to sniff out the V.C. You went down with a flashlight, a pistol and a knife. The orders were to kill any V.C. you come upon. The air was hot, dank...You were always covered in mud, never knew when you might snag a trip wire...You had to volunteer for it.

He snorts mirthlessly.

GARY (cont'd)
When some guys get short, down to their last 30 days, their attitude starts changing. Sometimes they get a death wish, like they're invincible. Or they say 'I'm too short for this shit' and won't let so much as a fly land on them. Bob was neither. He pulled his weight, right down to that last day.

JUDY
You were there? You saw him? You know what happened?

Gary nods.

INT. VIETCONG TUNNEL

It's a muddy burrow through the earth. Their weapons drawn, BOB and GARY push forward with their flashlights. They're both wet.

GARY (V.O.)

The first man down said the tunnel ended at a well. But the guys who found it swore they saw two V.C. running in. It was Bob who figured out it was a water trap. You can jump in and come out the other side, which is what Bob and I did. We were able to make good time for the first half hour or so. Then we ran into trouble.

Sudden GUNFIRE shatters the darkness of the tunnel.

BOB

(yelling)

V.C.! Back! Back!

INT. DIFFERENT VIETCONG TUNNEL

A line of VC SOLDIERS moves quickly through the darkness, trailing Gary and Bob at the end of a length of FISHING WIRE. Each is shirtless, with a HAND GRENADE strapped to his back.

GARY (V.O.)

They had us strung together by fishing wire. The wire ran through the pin of the grenade on my back, then back to the grenade on Bob's back. If you fell behind, well, that would be the end of you.

Gary feels a tug on the line from Bob behind him.

GARY (V.O.)

Those guys were moving fast. Bob was wounded, losing blood. He had a hard time keeping up.

Gary wraps as much of the wire around his hand as he can, trying to build slack for Bob.

INT. ANOTHER VIETCONG CHAMBER

Bob and Gary rest as their captors talk noisily with another squad of VC they've met in the tunnel. Bob edges closer to Gary and holds out an object for him to take. His DOG TAGS.

BOB
Wheed-man...Get my tags.

Gary's eyes fill with dread.

BOB (cont'd)
I'm not gonna make it another stretch.

GARY
Stop! We're gonna make it out. Both of us.

Grinning weakly, Bob presses the dog tags into Gary's hand.

BOB
Make my load a little lighter, then.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rising slightly from his seat, Gary holds out his hand toward Bobby. In it are the dog tags.

GARY
He wanted you to have these.

Bobby takes them and stares at them as if they were some incomprehensibly alien object. He looks back up, and the room around him suddenly goes out of focus, isolating him in his confusion.

Gary continues with his story.

GARY (cont'd)
When we started moving again, it didn't take long for Bob to start falling behind...

Then an odd thing happens. Gary's lips keep moving, but the sounds coming out of them are meaningless. Pure gibberish.

Bobby looks around at the others in the room. It all seems to make sense to them. Grammy is still crying while PawPaw stares heavily into empty space. Judy's eyes are red and tearing.

Bobby looks back at Gary as he finishes telling his story. Like a radio that's finally been tuned to the right frequency, his speech once more becomes understandable.

GARY (cont'd)
Then the wire stopped tugging at me.

He falls into silence. Nobody in the room tries to fill it. Bobby glares at him, his eyes growing wet.

BOBBY
 (almost offering it as a
 suggestion)
 It's not true...

No response from those around him. Bobby moves over to his PawPaw.

BOBBY (cont'd)
 PawPaw...

PawPaw doesn't appear to see him.

BOBBY (cont'd)
 (pleading)
 Please, PawPaw, you gotta tell them.
 This is Nick. This is Nick doing this.

PawPaw looks away sorrowfully.

BOBBY (cont'd)
 (his voice rising)
 This is Nick! This is Nick doing this!
 He set it up.

JUDY
 (without much energy)
 Bobby...

BOBBY
 (screaming)
 THIS IS NICK! Why doesn't anybody
 listen to me? Nick knows this guy - he
 set it up!

He starts backing away from Nick, who looks darkly at the floor.
 Bobby hurls the dog tags at Nick's head.

BOBBY (cont'd)
YOU'RE doing this! This is you! You're
doing this.

Nick doesn't react at all.

JUDY
 Bobby, please....

Bobby throws an ASHTRAY, which shatters on the wall behind Nick's head. Then he throws something else. Then another.

BOBBY
 THIS IS YOU!! Why are you doing this?
 This is you!...This is you!...This is
 you!

Turning, he runs from the apartment.

EXT. FENMORE STREET - DAY

The door to Nick's apartment is flung open and Bobby flies out. He runs as fast as he can down the street, until his way is blocked by a large object wearing a Safety strap. Rudy.

RUDY

I've been looking for ya, Bobby.
Where've you been? You can't say you
weren't expecting me.

Bobby looks at him, wild-eyed. Then he slugs him in the jaw. Rudy steps backward, shocked to the core. Seeing this triggers something in Bobby, and he begins raining punches on Rudy, who staggers under the blows.

RUDY (cont'd)

(calling)

Bruce! Bruce!!

Bruce appears and pulls Bobby, his arms still flailing, off his boss. He frowns at Rudy's split lip.

RUDY (cont'd)

(dabbing his finger in the
blood)

He caught me off guard.

Bruce forces Bobby down while Rudy sits on his stomach. Bruce kneels on his outstretched arms, pinning him from that direction.

BOBBY

(screaming helplessly)

I DON'T HAVE IT! I DON'T HAVE YOUR
GODDAMN QUARTER!!!!

RUDY

Well, I'm just gonna have to take
something else, won't I?

(slips his finger beneath the
SafeKeeper chain)

What about this piece of crap?

BOBBY

(shrieking)

NOOOOO!!

He starts thrashing harder.

RUDY
(to Bruce)
Hold him!

BRUCE
I'm trying!

Rudy manages to get his finger under the SafeKeeper chain again and pulls. Bobby sinks his teeth into Rudy's arm, hard enough to draw blood.

RUDY
(outraged)
OWWW!

Using Rudy's pain to his benefit, Bobby throws him off. He pulls away from Bruce, who's staring in disbelief at the blood welling on Rudy's arm, and escapes.

EXT. CREEKSIDE - DAY

Bobby runs along the banks of the creek, Rudy and Bruce's howling voices nearby. Then, disturbingly, they split, going in different directions.

BRUCE (O.S.)
(shouting)
I'll get him down this way!

Bobby stops. A short distance ahead is the entrance to the storm drain.

He runs toward it.

INT. TUNNEL

Bobby is around the bend in the tunnel when he hears Rudy's voice booming at the entrance.

RUDY (O.C.)
Bruce! He went in the storm drain. Go
in the other way.

Bobby suddenly remembers: there is another way. He's trapped. He frets a beat, then continues forward, deeper into the tunnel.

BRUCE (O.C.)
(from the darkness ahead of
him)
I'm in the tunnel. Do you see him?

RUDY (O.C.)
(behind him)
No, but the little shit can't be far.

Bobby gets to the smaller pipe he saw branching off the main pipe when he first found the tunnel. He pauses just outside the entrance. It's only large enough to crawl through on his belly, and there's at least an inch of mud on the floor already.

Bobby thinks twice about crawling in, but he hears RUDY'S VOICE and thinks again. He plunges into the side tunnel.

INT. SIDE TUNNEL

Bobby crawls along through the mud, which is getting thicker. Pretty soon it gets impossible for him to continue forward. He hears RUDY AND BRUCE in the main tunnel behind him.

Then he hears GARY'S VOICE in his head.

GARY (V.O.)
It didn't take long for Bob to start
falling behind again...

Bobby squeezes his eyes shut, trying to block it out. He can't.

INT. VIETCONG TUNNEL

Gary and Bob are being pulled along behind the squad of Vietcong soldiers. Gary again has as much of the wire as he can wrapped around his hand.

It's biting deep into his flesh.

GARY (V.O.)
My hand was tugging more and more. I
was starting to get desperate.

INT. SIDE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Bobby struggles furiously with the voice in his head.

BOBBY
No...It didn't happen.

He hears RUDY'S VOICE at the entrance to the side tunnel.

RUDY (O.C.)
Bruce, wait! There's another tunnel.

As if that weren't enough, Bobby sees the pipe ahead of him begin to fill with the smoke-darkness and the dreaded snake-like form of The Tolltaker within it.

BRUCE (O.C.)
(hesitantly)
You're gonna go in there?

RUDY (O.C.)
No, you're gonna go in there!

BRUCE (O.C.)
Not likely!

Ahead of Bobby, the Dark is getting closer, reaching for him with squirming fingers.

RUDY (O.C.)
Just do it! That's an order!

The Dark is inches from Bobby's fingertips.

BRUCE (O.C.)
He went down this way, c'mon!

RUDY (O.C.)
(calling after him)
Bruce!

And he's gone. Bobby's clear from behind, but it's too late, and he watches as his hands disappear into the dark. Then his elbows. Then his shoulders. Then...

INT. TOLLTAKER LAIR

Bobby's head, shoulders and outstretched arms poke through a completely featureless, gray surface. It extends away indefinitely, without borders or dimension.

Astonished, Bobby climbs the rest of the way through the wall. He turns and inspects the surface he just crawled through. It's unblemished.

Bobby stands up and begins walking, wide-eyed, wondering how far he has to go before he comes out the other side.

Suddenly, the gray around him changes: darkness blooms, as if in a negative image of someone striking a match. The waves of darkness coalesce into a form and Bobby finds himself standing before the Tolltaker.

TOLLTAKER
Bobbbb-eeyyyyy.....

He's a stooped creature, completely covered - except for his face - with a black shroud. On his face he wears a cheap Halloween SKULL MASK.

TOLLTAKER (cont'd)
It's time you looked at my face,
Bobby.

A tentacle snakes out of the shroud and seizes hold of the mask.

BOBBY
(recoiling)
No!

Too late. It's done. As the Tolltaker pulls aside the mask, he suddenly inflates to an enormous size. Bobby looks up and sees Rudy's face above him, big as the sky.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the Tolltaker is again man-sized, although the cheap plastic skull mask is now a cheap plastic RUDY MASK.

TOLLTAKER
You recognize this guy, Bobby?

He transforms again. This time, it ends with Bobby looking at a cheap, plastic NICK MASK.

TOLLTAKER (cont'd)
I got your mom, Bobby. She's mine now.
You know who I'm going to take next?

A vine-like tentacle coils down Bobby's arm and curls itself around the chain of the SafeKeeper.

TOLLTAKER (cont'd)
I'm going to take your Dad, Bobby.

Bobby slaps his free hand over the SafeKeeper.

BOBBY
No!

The Tolltaker transforms again. Now he's the school principal.

TOLLTAKER
I'll always be with you. I can wait as
long as it takes. I always get my
toll.

Bobby starts trying to uncoil the tentacle on his arm. It just wraps around again in different places, toying with him.

He hears GARY'S VOICE again, echoing through his head.

GARY (O.S.)
Burke! You back there?

INT. VIETCONG TUNNEL

Gary shouts desperately over his shoulder.

GARY
BURKE! You gotta stay with me!

He looks at his hand. The fishing wire is starting to draw blood.

INT. TOLLTAKER LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Fighting the images in his head, Bobby claws more frantically at the tentacle twining around his wrist.

BOBBY
You can't! I won't let you!

The Tolltaker is now a Vietcong soldier.

TOLLTAKER
There's nothing you can do, Bobby.

INT. VIETCONG TUNNEL

His voice ragged with panic, Gary shouts into the darkness behind him.

GARY
This isn't good, Burke! You're falling behind!

The fishing wire coiled around his hand slides back and forth through the bloody fissure it's carved in his flesh.

GARY (cont'd)
BURKE!! I can't hold it anymore.
Burke! It's cutting my hand...

INT. TOLLTAKER LAIR

Bobby's close to tears.

BOBBY
Please...

INT. VIETCONG TUNNEL

Gary makes one last, strangled cry into the darkness.

GARY

BURKE!!

He's cut off by a final, jarring tug on the wire, which is followed by a DEAFENING CONCUSSION. Gary is thrown forward and smoke starts filling the passageway.

INT. TOLLTAKER LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Where Bobby stands, shell-shocked in horror.

TOLLTAKER

You're going to pay my toll, Bobby.

Bobby shakes his head slowly.

BOBBY

(softly, sadly)

No....I'm not going to pay. Not now,
not ever.

And he pulls at the SafeKeeper chain with all his might.

BOBBY (cont'd)

(as he struggles with the
chain)

You're too late. You can't take your
toll, because my father is dead. He
died in a tunnel three years ago.

The chain resists breaking for a second or two, but then one of the links snaps, and Bobby's wrist comes free.

With a SHRIEK of pain and fury, the Tolltaker shrinks to invisibility, the limitless gray chamber disappears, and Bobby finds himself again on his stomach in the tunnel, looking into the eyes of a LARGE RAT.

Bobby speaks to the rat, in low, neutral tones.

BOBBY (cont'd)

My father is dead...

The rat scampers away. Bobby doesn't notice.

BOBBY (cont'd)

My dad is dead.

To Bobby, it's the worst phrase in the world.

BOBBY (cont'd)
(voice trembling)
Dad....

Then it starts: a low cry of anguish, getting louder, from deep within Bobby. Tears begin pouring from his eyes.

VOICE OVER
This was the first time I ever cried
over the loss of my dad. I remember
thinking I should probably be crying
harder. I didn't need to worry: there
would be plenty of that in the coming
months.

INT. PIPE JUNCTION

Bobby sits cross-legged in the intersection of the four pipes, beneath the shaft that leads up to the summer sunlight. He stares vacantly, tiredly, downward at the mud.

VOICE OVER
I don't know what I really experienced
in the tunnel, but it felt real...
Poppo had lied. The SafeKeeper never
kept my dad safe. It just kept me safe
from the truth. My dad was dead... My
dad was dead.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The open hatch in the field over the storm drain. Bobby's head appears as he climbs up the shaft.

RUDY (O.C.)
There he is!

Rudy and Bruce run up to him.

RUDY (cont'd)
You're mine!

Bobby makes no attempt to resist. He looks wearily into Rudy's face.

BOBBY
What are you going to do now, Rudy?

He holds up the hand with the SafeKeeper and its broken chain.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Here... If you thought you could hurt
me by taking a chain off my wrist,
you're dumber than Bruce is.

Bobby opens his hand, letting the SafeKeeper drop into the dirt
and brush below.

Rudy clearly doesn't know what to do. He decides to stick with
his original intention.

RUDY
Then we're just going to have to beat
your little ass.

At that moment, there's a COMMOTION down one of the paths
leading through the brush. SEVERAL KIDS appear, leading Nick.
They're the same kids Bobby came upon the first time he crawled
into the tunnel. Lisa and Glen are among them.

Nick takes stock of the situation by the manhole hatch.

NICK
Is there a problem here?

RUDY
Nothing we need some bozo water-ice
guy to deal with.

Nick takes a none-too-friendly step toward Rudy.

NICK
Is that what you think?

RUDY
You can't touch me. I'm a minor.
You'll go to jail.

Nick opens his mouth to reply, but Bobby cuts him off.

BOBBY
It's alright, Nick.

Rudy looks at him scornfully.

RUDY
What are you gonna do?

Bobby returns the look.

BOBBY
Split your lip. Again.

The older kids around them break into mocking HOOTS and HOLLERS. Bobby spares a quick glance at Lisa. She's smiling at him.

RUDY
He just got a lucky shot...

Nick takes a step back.

NICK
Alright, if you want another busted lip, it's up to you.

Rudy focuses all his anger and hatred and humiliation on Bobby.

RUDY
Bruce! Hold him!

Bruce starts forward, but Nick's hand claps down on his shoulder.

NICK
No. You gotta do it by yourself.

RUDY
(close to rage)
Bruce! Hold him. If that guy touches you we can have him arrested and thrown in jail! He can't do anything!

Glen places his hand on Bruce's other shoulder.

GLEN
But I can.

Now Rudy looks whiney.

RUDY
C'mon, Glen! It's the playground toll. You used to take it from me!

GLEN
Yeah, and I didn't need help. You wanna take it, take it yourself.

Rudy fumes helplessly. Bobby holds up his fists.

BOBBY
You want some more?

Another round of HOOTS and HOLLERS. Even Nick has to crack a smile. Seeing the deck stacked against him, Rudy leans menacingly toward Bobby.

RUDY
We'll settle this later.

BOBBY
No. We'll settle it now.

Rudy's beginning to look trapped.

RUDY
Alright, ya little maggot - it's your
lucky day. I'm gonna forget about the
toll. For now.

BOBBY
(taking a step forward)
Forever.

Taking a corresponding step back, Rudy's foot twists on a rock and he goes sprawling. He holds his hands defensively over his face as Bobby drops heavily onto his chest.

RUDY
Okay, okay...Forever. Your toll's been
canceled.

BOBBY
And Jeff's.

RUDY
And Jeff's.

BOBBY
Everybody's.

RUDY
Everybody's. Look, I'm sorry, man -
I'll leave you alone. Now can I please
get up?

Bobby's mouth twists into a sour little grin.

RUDY (cont'd)
(a touch more plaintively)
Please?

Bobby shakes his head disgustedly. This is the guy he's been afraid of all this time? He stands up and steps across Rudy to Nick.

BOBBY
Let's go, Nick.

Nick gives a little flick of his head, like a cowboy's sidekick tipping his hat, and the two of them start heading down the path. Before he goes, Bobby turns toward the other kids in the field.

BOBBY (cont'd)
(to the whole group)
Y'know, I'd be careful going in that
tunnel if I were you. There're rats
down there the size of grown men.

He throws a quick, brilliant smile at Lisa, then turns and bounds away down the path after Nick.

EXT. FARTHER DOWN THE PATH - DAY

Bobby catches up with Nick and they walk in silence for several seconds. It's Nick who breaks it.

NICK
You know you scared your mom silly
running off that way.

Bobby nods regretfully. Nick stops, and puts his hand on Bobby's shoulder.

NICK (cont'd)
Look, Bobby - I swear I didn't have
anything to do with Gary...

BOBBY
(cutting him off)
I know.

The weight of Nick's hand feels good on Bobby's shoulder. Reassuring. Protective. He smiles up at him.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Thanks.

NICK
For what?

BOBBY
For just... being there, I guess.

Now Nick smiles, touched and not reluctant to show it.

BOBBY (cont'd)
(after a beat)
Do you think you're gonna... you
know... stick around? Maybe for a
while?

NICK
Yeah, I think I could. I'd like
that, Bobby.

He and Nick begin walking again.

NICK (cont'd)
You're going to have to go home, get
washed up and come down for a water-
ice to celebrate your victory over
Rudy.

BOBBY
Okay.

NICK
Lisa's going to be there.

Bobby looks at him as if he didn't hear that right.

NICK (cont'd)
That's her name, right? I told them
I'd give them all a free water ice if
they helped me find you.
(he grins teasingly)
Leeee-sa.

BOBBY
(grinning self-consciously)
She's too old for me.

NICK
You got that right. Still, it's nice
to know she thinks you're cute.

They come out of the field and find Judy waiting anxiously on
the sidewalk. Seeing Bobby, she sweeps him up and covers him
with kisses.

JUDY
Oh, Bobby, thank God. Don't ever do
that again. Please don't ever do that
again. I was so worried.

BOBBY
I'm sorry, Mom.

She holds him out at arm's length to look at him.

JUDY
What happened? You're filthy.

BOBBY

I'll tell you after I get cleaned up.
Nick invited a bunch of kids over to
his truck to celebrate the fight.

JUDY

(puzzled)
Fight? What fight?

BOBBY

With Rudy. I won!

Judy looks up at Nick, concern darkening her eyes.

JUDY

Who's Rudy? Did Nick let you get into
a fight? Are you hurt?

BOBBY

It's a guy thing, Mom. You wouldn't
understand.

Judy frowns: that's not her favorite phrase in the world. But
then Bobby turns earnest.

BOBBY (cont'd)

That... thing that Gary gave me... and
I threw at Nick...?

JUDY

Yeah?

BOBBY

Did anybody pick it up?

Judy waits a beat, then reaches into the pocket of her dress and
comes out holding Bob's dog tags.

JUDY

Do you think you might want to keep
them?

Bobby eyes them uncertainly, then holds out his hand.

BOBBY

Yeah.

She drops them into Bobby's hand. Bobby looks at them sadly, and
the sight of him sends a wave of emotion surging through Judy.
She pulls him close.

JUDY

I love you so much.

BOBBY
(hugging her back)
I love you too, Mom.

Judy stands up to her full height. The three begin to walk toward the apartment.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Y'know, I think I'll have to have a
talk with PawPaw.

JUDY
Really?

BOBBY
Yeah. We have to get him turned around
on Nick.

Nick and Judy exchange glances. Nick looks so hopeful.

JUDY
(to Bobby)
Well, then, we'll just have to work on
him, won't we?

The three walk toward their apartment building, around which a CROWD OF NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS is beginning to gather. No longer a division of two and one, they're now whole, the beginning of a new family.

FADE TO BLACK.