

HOME BASE

BY CORY BARNETT

FADE IN:

EXT. CRUMMY COUNTRY BUS STATION - DAY

PAUL, 12, picks up a pay phone receiver and dials.

OPERATOR 1 (V.O.)

(On Phone)

911, what is the emergency?

PAUL

My mom's been hurt real bad. She's  
in the house, not moving. I think  
she's breathing.

JAKE, a young 8, watches his brother as he kicks at the  
wheels of a red wagon. It's loaded with their belongings.

Paul temporarily zones out and holds the phone away from his  
ear.

OPERATOR 1 (V.O.)

Son, son? Are you still there?

PAUL

Yeah, I'm here.

OPERATOR 1 (V.O.)

Where are you now?

PAUL

Uhm, yeah, we're on two-eighty-  
seven, just north of town. It's the  
last house out. Nobody will be  
there though, just her.

He hangs up the phone before his voice can crack. Tiny  
streams of tears run down his cheeks; he quickly wipes them  
away before facing his brother.

Paul rolls up his shirt sleeves, covering a BLOOD STAIN.

INT. CRUMMY COUNTRY BUS STATION - DAY

FIVE PEOPLE sit on the four benches that make up this station. One man reads the paper while another dirty looking man talks to himself about the joys of TV dinners. Everybody seems to be going out of their way to mind their own business.

The boys walk close together, holding hands and keeping their distance from the others. When they reach the teller window, a faint fog of cigarette smoke filters through the partition.

A thin, undernourished CASHIER with kinky brown hair puts down her Glamour magazine to examine the young boys. Her bus station uniform is missing the top three buttons showing off a flat freckled chest and a St. Christopher's medal.

CASHIER 1

What can I do you for?

PAUL

We'd like two tickets to Corpus Christi, please.

JAKE

I'd like to sit in the aisle.

CASHIER 1

Don't matter to me where you sit. Where're your folks?

PAUL

They're waiting for us at the beach. Could we have our tickets, please?

CASHIER 1

Don't see how I can give you tickets without your parents or nothin'. Go home. I'm sure your mamma's worried sick about you.

She quickly puts up a "This register closed. Please go to the next counter" sign. Paul looks to the sides of her booth and sees that her counter is the only one. Defeated, they go outside.

EXT. CRUMMY COUNTRY BUS STATION - DAY

Paul sits down next to the wagon and takes a Texas map and some crayons out of a backpack. He outlines a route that takes mostly highways to the Gulf of Mexico.

PAUL

Well, we'll have to find another way to get you there.

He checks a piece of paper from his pocket for an address and writes it in block letters at the top of the map. He makes a big arrow pointing to their destination.

PAUL (cont'd)

We're going to walk for a while. Maybe someone will pick us up on the way.

JAKE

Which way do we go?

Paul thinks for a while, checks a compass attached to his front belt loop, and then picks up the handle to the wagon. He heads east along the interstate.

INT. RAMSHACKLED HOUSE - DAY

It's almost sunset. LEANN, the boys' mother lays on a gurney with EMS ATTENDANTS working on her. They hurry her out the door to a waiting ambulance.

Several POLICE OFFICERS stand around looking through drawers and an imitation leather phone book.

A stalky plain clothes officer, CONNER, slams through the door. He eyes another, younger and less fit detective, MICHEALS, before picking up a framed photo of Leann's family. He glances over to the gurney.

CONNER

Shit.

MICHEALS

Where the hell have you been?

CONNER

Geez, ma, lighten up. I got my own problems to worry about without you crawling all over me.

MICHEALS

What did he do this time? Skip school? Not eat his vegetables? I mean Jesus, you're almost an hour late.

CONNER

The little shit made it all the way to Houston, this time.

MICHEALS

Have you thought about military school?

Conner ignores him.

CONNER

So, what's going on here?

MICHEALS

Woman, early thirties, beaten unconscious. We have her husband and two children missing.

CONNER

There's a lot of blood on the carpet by the TV. There may be another victim somewhere. Let's keep looking for the kids. The bastard a wife beater?

MICHEALS

Dunno, family just moved in a couple months ago.

CONNER

So we're assuming he took off with at least one of the kids?

MICHEALS

For now.

CONNER

Put out an Amber alert on both of them.

Conner takes some old school pictures out of a heavily used photo album.

MICHEALS

At least one of the boys is still alive. We think he may have been the one who put in the call from the bus station. But, the lady at the counter can't remember anything without her lawyer present.

CONNER

What about the woman?

MICHEALS

Paramedics say their mother-

He flips out a black book and looks for one of the pages before remembering her name.

MICHEALS (cont'd)

Leann will pull through. Soon as she's conscious, we'll see if she can tell us where they might be headed.

EXT. LONESOME HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Paul pulls a sleeping Jake in the wagon. Both look sunburned and dirty. A truck stop looms ahead. The parking lot is full of trucks.

EXT. EAT 'EM UP TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Paul positions the wagon in front of the outer window. Inside large MEN clad in plaid shirts and grungy overalls shove hamburgers into their mouths. All heads are turned to a TV in the back of the room.

A pretty brunette NEWSCASTER says something that can't be heard from outside. Her image disappears to be replaced by three photographs. The boys' pictures are small and placed side-by-side beneath their father's (TONY) on the screen.

A large "Wanted" heading flashes above the pictures followed by a 1-800 number for information. Paul nudges Jake.

PAUL

Wake up. They're looking for us.

Jake gets up slowly and sees their pictures just before they're replaced by the friendly-looking Newscaster. He's startled fully awake and shoves his thumb into his mouth.

A slight man, STUART (30's, in a bright red gimme cap), catches a glimpse of the boys in the window and tries to signal the waitress for the check.

PAUL (cont'd)

Don't start that. Aunt Gladys won't want another baby. Come on, you have to be a big boy now.

The boys move cautiously toward the rigs. Paul tries all of the rear doors until he finds one that is unlocked. He lifts Jake up and motions for him to scoot back and be quiet.

Paul hoists the wagon into the back, knocking over a cardboard box in the process. Jake's eyes flicker to the door. He shoves his thumb back in his mouth.

INT. CEREAL TRANSIT TRUCK - NIGHT

Paul slaps Jake's hand down as he jumps into the back with his brother. They maneuver their way to the far end of the rig, hiding themselves and the wagon behind large boxes of cereal.

EXT. EAT 'EM UP TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Stuart runs out of the diner, searching under the rigs.

He tries the doors to several trailers, finding them all locked. He's about to open the door that conceals the boys when a LARGE DRIVER rounds the corner to confront him.

LARGE DRIVER

What the hell do you think you're doin'?

STUART

Nothing. I thought I dropped  
something over here.

While Stuart tries to placate the man, the truck behind him  
pulls out.

INT. CEREAL TRANSIT TRUCK - NIGHT

When the truck starts up, Paul puts his arm around Jake,  
holding his hand down so that his thumb can't reach his  
mouth. Jake falls asleep that way.

FLASHBACK:

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

TONY, the boys' father, slams Leann's head against the wall  
and slaps her face. Blood trickles from her ears and nose as  
she goes limp. Jake SCREAMS in the background.

BACK TO SCENE:

INT. CEREAL TRANSIT TRUCK - NEXT DAY

Very little light filters through to the back of the truck.  
The two boys sleep soundly, clutching one another. The truck  
takes a sharp right turn and hits a curb, waking the brothers  
as it pulls to a stop.

From outside they can hear the happy HOLLERING of a woman.  
The cab door SLAMS shut as the boys scramble to the truck's  
doors. Paul eases the door open just a crack and jumps out,  
motioning for Jake to stay put.

EXT. BESIDE TRUCK - DAY

Paul exaggeratedly presses his body against the truck and  
sneaks to the side to peer around to the front. He sees a  
tall, heavy set MAN hugging a small, thin RED-HEAD in a  
housecoat.

The driver puts his arm around the woman and they go inside.  
Paul turns back to his brother and helps him lower the wagon.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

They pass a sign announcing that they are entering Graham, Texas.

JAKE

I'm hungry, can't we stop and get nothin' to eat?

PAUL

It's somethin'. And yeah, I'm hungry, too. We'll stop at the next place we see.

JAKE

There's a place up the road, race ya.

The boys run up the road to a well-stocked convenience store. Paul runs a little slower because he's pulling the wagon, but he still reaches the store right after his brother.

They sit on the curb as Paul takes the money out of his pocket.

The door to the bathroom swings in the wind.

PAUL

If this is going to last us the whole way, we gotta watch what we spend.

JAKE

We could just take the stuff.

PAUL

We're not stealing, got that? I'm probably already gonna go to jail. You're not coming with me, hear? We just have to save some for later.

Jake shrinks away from his brother.

JAKE

I could eat a sandwich.

PAUL

Me, too. Tuna and bread'll have to do for now.

INT. SACK AND DRAG CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Both boys go to the right at first.

PAUL

Go get the food. I'll be right back.

Paul gives Jake a nudge to go down the food and candy aisle.

INT. SACK AND DRAG CONVENIENCE STORE - CANDY AISLE

Jake holds two cans of tuna and some bread in his arms. He heads back toward the front of the store, almost passing the candy section, but he turns back.

Jake looks around to make sure that no one is watching and takes a Crunch bar, shoving it into his waist band.

He grins and goes to the checkout counter to wait for his brother.

BEAUTY PRODUCTS AISLE

Paul looks closely at all of the hair dyes before choosing a moderately inexpensive one with a happy dark haired woman on the box.

CANDY AISLE

He eyes the candy on his way back to the front where his brother is talking to the CASHIER.

COUNTER

Paul steps up to the counter and piles his items on something that looks like a Marlboro mouse pad only larger. The man looks at the odd assortment and rings it up.

CASHIER 2

I don't remember seeing you two around.

PAUL

No, sir. We just came in for some snacks and stuff for our folks. They're up the road a bit looking for a place to stay tonight.

CASHIER 2

Only one place. That's Rosie's. She may be all filled up with boarders.

PAUL

Well, I'll tell them. We might go on to the next town.

CASHIER 2

You should be able to find a nice motel twenty, thirty miles east or west of us. That's thirteen dollars and sixty cents.

Paul hands over his money and shoves the change in his pocket.

PAUL

Thanks, Mister.