

FADE IN

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

1949. Oil derricks drill the flat Texas earth. The rigs GROAN and CLANK as they probe for crude.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Bus moving.

SPLAT.

A bus tire hits a pot hole on the road, splattering greasy water.

INT. BUS

EDDIE TIPTON, 18, in jeans, t-shirt and sneakers, stares out the open window.

EDDIE

Mom, this place smells like skunk oil.

Eddie's mother, CATHERINE, 40s, sits beside him wearing a nice dress, oxford shoes, hat and gloves.

CATHERINE

Eddie, get your face out of that window. A bug will fly into your mouth.

EXT. THE ROAD

Bus rattles past a city limits sign.

Farr Point, Texas - Pop:1826

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

A few shops - grocery store, dry cleaner, courthouse, post office.

The bus SQUEALS to a stop, weary passengers get off.

Eddie and his mom step off the bus, scarred suitcases in hand. They move to the front of Hall's Grocery Store.

HALL'S GROCERIES

Eddie and Catherine survey the little town.

FRED HALL, 50, dashes from the grocery store. He aims a bone saw at the skies and fires imaginary bullets.

FRED

Take that, ya damn Japs. That's for
Pearl Harbor! Pow, pow, pow, pow,
pow.

Fred's wife, FRIEDA HALL, 50, rushes from the store, grabs
Fred and hauls him back inside.

Eddie and Catherine exchange a look.

EDDIE

So, where's our place?

NED (O.S.)

Scuze me.

They turn to see NED COTTON, about 50. The older Black man
has a scar on his neck.

CATHERINE

Yes?

NED

Ma'am, are you Mizz. Tipton?

CATHERINE

Why, yes! Thank-you. I'm Catherine
Tipton, and this is my son, Eddie.

NED

I'm Ned Cotton. Mizz Paget sent me.

Ned and Eddie exchange a grin.

TRUCK MOVING

Ned steers his old green pickup truck, Catherine in the
passenger seat. She smokes a cigarette, her arm outside the
truck's window.

Eddie, seated on the suitcases, bounces about in the truck's
bed.

STREET

A lake in the distance.

EDDIE

(Cranes his neck)
Something out there.

Eddie sees an oil flare pipe in the distance, an orange flame
flickers at its top.

NED

(Shouts out his window.)
Mr. Eddie, that water you looking at
is Christo Lake. Maybe I take you
fishing there one day.

EDDIE

Not that. Way out there. A flame. An
orange flame.

NED

Aw, that's just a flare pipe. It
burns off gas from them oil derricks.

Eddie is mesmerized by the faraway flare.

EXT. THE PAGET HOME - DAY

An impressive two-story house. Further up the driveway a red
Cadillac gleams in the sunlight.

Ned's truck pulls into the driveway, stops.

Catherine steps from her home. Eddie grabs suitcases and
jumps to the ground.

FAYE RUTH (O.S.)

Well, there you are!

FAYE RUTH PAGET, shapely, about forty, parades toward them.
She is dressed in tight jeans, colorful top, red cowboy boots.

CATHERINE

Mrs. Paget...?

FAYE RUTH

Lordy, call me Faye Ruth. I can't
stand high-brow talk.

Catherine shakes her hand but Faye Ruth prefers to hug.

CATHERINE

Hello...

FAYE RUTH

You're our new teacher, Catherine
Tipton! Oh, and you must be Eddie.
What a cute high school senior!

Big smile for Eddie.

EDDIE

Thank you, ma'am.

FAYE RUTH

Catherine, come on inside and take a look at your rooms. Would you like a little Jack Daniels bourbon? Maybe I shouldn't ask a school teacher.

CATHERINE

Just a Dr. Pepper, please.

EDDIE

I'll check out the back yard.

FAYE RUTH

What a good idea, Edward. I have a darling fountain back there.

Faye Ruth takes Catherine's arm and steers her to the front door. The knocker in the shape of an oil derrick.

Eddie moves down driveway.

CADILLAC - DAY

Eddie admires the expensive car. His hands caress the fins, the hood ornament.

NED (O.S.)

You like that fancy car, Mr. Eddie?

Eddie turns to see Ned trimming a hedge with clippers.

THE PAGET BACK YARD - DAY

As Eddie moves to Ned he sees the fountain, a concrete donut adorned with bronze frogs.

NED

Mighty ugly, ain't it?

EDDIE

Why frogs?

NED

Frog Petroleum. The name of Mizz. Paget's oil company.

EDDIE

Ah.

NED

(Beat)

You and your mama start school tomorrow, yeah?

EDDIE

That's right.

NED

My daughter graduated college.
Senfronia lives in Atlanta.

EDDIE

Senfronia?

NED

Mizz. Paget got her a scholarship to
college.

Ned clicks a lozenge in his mouth.

NED (CONT'D)

You want a Luden's?

EDDIE

Sure.

Ned tosses his box of Luden's cough drops to Eddie.

NED

These Luden's tastes good.

EDDIE

Thanks, Ned.

Eddie pops a lozenge into his mouth.

INT. THE PAGET HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Expensively decorated. Velvet chairs, plush sofa, Oriental
rugs, floor-length drapes.

Voices from a doorway just off the room.

FAYE RUTH (O.S.)

What do you think?

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Well, it's small but nice. Eddie can
sleep on the side porch.

Porcelain frogs on mantle. Ceramic figures of lords and ladies
on tables and bookshelves. A bar cart with liquor bottles.

A staircase leads to upstairs rooms.

INT. TIPTONS QUARTERS - DAY

Faye Ruth shows Catherine around. Bed, desk, chest of
drawers.

Catherine drinks a Dr. Pepper. Faye Ruth sips bourbon from a crystal glass.

FAYE RUTH

Look, I added a desk so you can grade papers.

CATHERINE

I see.

FAYE RUTH

Now, Catherine, you can use all of downstairs and especially the kitchen, naturally. But I ask that you stay in your rooms when I have one of my cocktail dinners.

CATHERINE

Dinners...?

FAYE RUTH

You know, parties for my circle.

CATHERINE

Ah.

FAYE RUTH

Friends in the oil business. You'll see.

Eddie walks in with suitcases.

CATHERINE

Thank you, son.

FAYE RUTH

Oh! You call him son. That's so adorable.

CATHERINE

Thank you.

FAYE RUTH

Would you like some ice cream, Edward?

Faye Ruth gives Eddie her biggest smile.

EXT. FARR POINT HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT DAY

Rambling stone building. Concrete mascot of a panther.

Bikes and cars parked in front. BELL RINGS.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Students move to and from classes. Eddie leans into his mom's class room. He gives her a wave.

INT. CATHERINE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

A teacher's desk faces student desks. A blackboard.

CATHERINE
Everything okay?

EDDIE
So far. You?

Catherine shrugs.

CATHERINE
I could use a cigarette.

EDDIE
Why not light up a Chesterfield in the middle of class?

CATHERINE
Charming.

She writes her name on the chalkboard: "Mrs. Tipton English I and II"

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Eddie walks, observes his fellow students.

INT. AUDITORIUM ENTRANCE - DAY

Hand-lettered sign: "MOVIE MONSTERS CLUB MEETING TODAY AFTER SCHOOL" Eddie studies the sign.

He turns to go to his next class and collides with REENIE FONTENOT, a pretty student.

EDDIE
Oh. Sorry.

REENIE
Watch where you're going, city boy.

Eddie gazes at Reenie as she glides away.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Big assembly hall for school events. Rows of seats, stage. Two students on stage in a make-believe sword fight.

Eddie sits and watches as LONNY and HILLYER kill each other over and over.

HILLYER
You the school teacher's boy?

EDDIE
Yeah.

LON
You want us to put you out of your misery?

HILLYER
Guillotine or crocodile?

EDDIE
Take your pick.

Lon and Hillyer jump from stage, slouch in seats near Eddie.

HILLYER
I'm Hillyer Ward. The zombie next to me is Lon.

LON
Bonjour.

HILLYER
Lon's an egghead. Half of what he says I don't understand.

LON
You don't understand anything, simpleton.

HILLYER
(To Eddie)
What's Dracula based on?

EDDIE
Vlad, the impaler.

Lon and Hillyer nod.

LON
Let's go have a peach Nehi.

HILLYER
Lon knows how to get into the soft drink machine without paying.

EDDIE
Yeah?

HILLYER
Lon's a regular Sherlock.

LON
You're a ghoul.

HILLYER
Frankenstein.

LON
Dark Scorpion.

As the three boys amble away together, they stab one another with invisible knives.

INT. THE PAGET HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Well-equipped kitchen with appliances, a table and chairs. Pots and pans on the range.

Catherine and Eddie at the kitchen table finish dinner.

CATHERINE
I spoke with Superintendent Waldron today.

EDDIE
Yeah?

CATHERINE
One college scholarship is available but you'll need to make good grades to qualify.

EDDIE
I can do that.

CATHERINE
Come on, son. I want you to go to college.

EDDIE
But my future is with the circus.

CATHERINE
Hilarious. Finish your meat loaf.

EDDIE
What do you think of all her frogs?
Did you know she has a company called Frog Petroleum?

CATHERINE
Son. I learned a secret today.
(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Ten years ago Mr. Lawrence Paget was murdered.

EDDIE

Murdered? As in killed?

CATHERINE

Out near his oil field. People say it was a crime of opportunity.

EDDIE

Shotgun? Knife?

CATHERINE

He was beaten to death with a pipe. Now don't mention this around Mrs. Paget. It'll make her sad.

EDDIE

I can't say anything. I'll be riding an elephant in the circus.

CATHERINE

So very, very funny. Eat your turnip greens.

EDDIE

Mind if I take a walk?

CATHERINE

Where?

EDDIE

Just around town. Check things out.

CATHERINE

Well, be home by nine. We need to get some sleep.

Eddie pretends to cut his throat with a kitchen knife.

EDDIE

AUGGH.

CATHERINE

You'll put Bob Hope out of business.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Eddie moves alone through the quiet town. He pauses in front of the Rig Theater. Marquee: "KNOCK ON ANY DOOR - STARRING HUMPHREY BOGART"

