

TYLER TEXAS

FADE IN

(SUPER) MOBILE, ALABAMA 1954

EXT. WIND BREAK NEXT TO A PECAN ORCHARD - DAY

Robins egg blue sky. Two AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS, both age 12, sweat as they walk along the edge of a pecan orchard swishing sticks back and forth hitting trees and bushes.

EXT. EDGE OF PEACH ORCHARD - CONTINUOUS

Boys talking as they walk past a peach orchard.

EXT. FOREST OF LIVE OAKS - CONTINUOUS

Boys walk through a forest of live oaks, moss dangling from the branches. One boy eats a peach as they pass a shanty with an OLD AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUPLE sitting on the porch. The old woman smokes a pipe as she rocks back and forth.

EXT. LONG WORN FOOT PATH - CONTINUOUS

The boys laugh as they walk through a thicket of wild berries, then down a long, worn path towards a creek in the distance. They both look left, stop and stare.

PREACHER (O.S.)

Boys, you go on home --- go on now!

Disturbed, troubled look on their faces as they see an African-American male hanging from a tree. They nod their heads, then slowly turn and run back up the path. PREACHER, mid 50's, with salt and pepper afro, GRUNTS as he lifts the man just below the hips, hanging from a rope. Another AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN stands on a rickety ladder, cutting the rope.

SERIES OF SHOTS - (SUPER) CITY AND YEAR

Photographs of riots corresponding with each event.

Birmingham - 1963

Watts - 1965

Detroit - 1967

END OF SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. FRONT OF JACKSON'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

Morning. Three young AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIRLS play jacks in front of the store. An AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN and CHILD walk out the front door and past the girls as the gears grind on a fully loaded cotton truck as slowly drives down the street. At the loading dock, a skinny CAUCASIAN MALE in overalls loads bags of seed onto an old flatbed truck.

INT. COUNTER OF JACKSON'S GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

HENRY JACKSON, 27 year old African-American, confident, lean and strong with a serious expression as he reads a draft notice. Hold on Henry as he finishes reading the letter then shakes his head and tosses it on the counter in frustration. Small transistor radio plays Dionne Warwick's "Valley of the Dolls".

INT. FUSELAGE OF HELICOPTER / VIETNAM - DAY

(SUPER) - September 1968

CHOP CHOP CHOP of helicopter flying low over a canopy of palm trees, past a small village next to a river. Hold on Henry, as he stares out the open door of the helicopter, two other soldiers sit near him. A vast expanse of rice fields and palm trees; then out the left side in the distance, a large military camp. The helicopter banks left as they make their approach, then gingerly lands near a row of Quonset huts.

INT. TENT - LONG BINH / VIETNAM - DAY

JEROME, a large, militant African-American, mid 20's, talks passionately to a new African-American RECRUIT in their barracks, while packing a bag. The young recruit, barely 17, looks up meekly at the seasoned soldier.

JEROME

You think that white officer out there gives a shit about you? Make no mistake my man -- those honky's out there don't give a rats ass about us.

Henry slowly looks up as he unpacks his duffle bag. Jerome stares him down, then casually back at the recruit.

JEROME (CONT'D)

Tell me, how is honoring our treaty
with the fucking French gunna help
you and your family back home.

Recruit timidly shakes his head. Jerome slams a rolled up sweater into his duffle bag, sighs, then solemnly looks up at the recruit.

JEROME (CONT'D)

Just keep your head down, stick
close to the brothers -- and forget
about all that John Wayne shit they
taught you in basic.

Henry looks at the recruit, then at Jerome. Jerome finishes packing his duffle bag, slings it over his shoulder, nods at the young soldier and walks out of the tent.

END OF FLASHBACK

(SUPER) January 1971

EXT. AERIAL VIEW - EDGE OF SMALL TEXAS TOWN - DAY

Ranches, farms and barns dot the surrounding area. Steer and cattle in the fields. Early model trucks make their way down the long, flat, dusty roads. Heat coming up off the asphalt.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - DAY

A truck comes to a stop in the shade of the piney woods. Henry jumps out of the back, grabs his things and says something to the CAUCASIAN DRIVER. The driver holds his hand up, then slowly drives off.

Sign on the side of the road reads "Tyler Texas", Pop. 21,441.

EXT. MAIN STREET TYLER, TEXAS - DAY

Henry walks up the street past a Winn-Dixie supermarket, hardware and feed store, barber shop. Tips his hat to a COUPLE OLD TIMERS. One nods back. In the distance, the spire of a church.

EXT. MCCLELLAN HOUSE - DAY

Paint peeling from an old white clapboard house. Porch in disrepair and dried by the sun tilts forward.

Large red barn with a weather vane to the left and a wide expansive field with horses just beyond a large oak tree.

INT. PARLOR OF MCCLELLAN HOME - DAY

JUNE MCCLELLAN, mid 60's, tiny but resilient and strong in character, is the matriarch of the McClellan family. She stands near the entrance to the parlor staring towards the window, almost in a trance. The room is stark, with just a chair, sofa and coffee table. The windows are open and the drapes lightly blow in the breeze.

June's daughter, MOLLY O'HARE, 32, determined but fragile, is in the kitchen wearing a light blue apron and a melancholy smile, washes dishes and hums to Loretta Lynn on the radio.

HEATHER MCDONALD, a precocious 9 year old, plays with her best friend ANNIE O'HARE (8) in the next room.

JUNE
I'm going to town.

MOLLY (OS)
Whaa - what! Where you going?

JUNE
(louder)
To town --- I am going to town.

MOLLY (OS)
(irritated)
What for --- just went yesterday.
What do you need?

Barefoot Heather runs to June with Annie right behind her.

HEATHER
Can I come?

ANNIE
I wanna come too!

JUNE
Sure, hop in the truck.
(to Molly)
No, I've got a couple things I need
to do.

Molly stands in the foyer, wipes her hands on a towel, nods and looks at June closely.

MOLLY

Ok, pick up some toothpaste, we're almost out - you alright? You look kind of funny!

JUNE

Aww, I'm fine. Just day dreaming I guess. Toothpaste?

MOLLY

Yeah!

JUNE

Be back in an hour.

EXT. FRONT OF MCCLELLAN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

June jumps into an old Chevy truck. Girls bouncing on the front seat giggling. Truck coughs, sputters and starts on the third try, then slowly pulls away in a cloud of dust.

June's grandson GRAYSON MCCLELLAN, 14, quietly intelligent with an easy disposition, lives at the ranch with his Grandmother and Aunt. He narrates the story.

GRAYSON (VO)

In January of 1971 we were in the second year of a drought. My aunt was classified as clinically depressed by a doctor in town after my uncle was killed in Vietnam. Up to that point it was my grandmother who held us together.

June drives down a tree lined road. Girls hang out the passenger side window. They pass a lake that's almost dried out. The stark, flat Texas landscape out in front of them.

JUNE

Heather, I sure like that dress of yours. Your momma make that?

Annie smiles as she points at Heather's dress.

ANNIE

That's peanut butter and that's jelly.

Heather makes a mad face at Annie.

HEATHER

Shushh!
(casually to June)
(MORE)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

No - It's a hand me down -- My
cousin Katie's.

JUNE

Well, it's mighty pretty. I like
it!

June drives down the road. Downtown Tyler comes into view. Cars and trucks coming and going. Two rugged looking men in cowboy hats walk across the street. Three teenage kids talk near an old worn out GMC truck. Hold on June as she drives down the street.

EXT. OLD WHITE WASHED CHURCH - DAY

Henry walks towards the Church. PASTOR HICKS, 50, a bear of a man, standing 6'4" and as kind and understanding as they come, walks out the front door of his Church and up to the directorate, opens it and slowly puts up an announcement. He looks around, sees Henry walking towards him, closes the case and watches Henry as he approaches. Pastor Hicks greets Henry with a big smile and a hand shake. They talk for a minute. Pastor Hicks laughs then shakes his head as if to say no. They shake hands again and Henry starts to walk away.

MOMENTS LATER

June and the girl's pull up in front of the Church.

JUNE

You haven't fixed that old
directorate yet? - What do you do
all day?

PASTOR HICKS

My my -- there you are. How you
doing Juney? Missed you last
Sunday.

HEATHER

Howdy!

ANNIE

Howdy Pastor Hicks.

PASTOR HICKS

Well, howdy girls -- You being good
for Juney today?

GIRLS

(in chorus)

Yes -

PASTOR HICKS

Look at you! You're getting so big.
Makes me so happy to see y'all
today! What brings you to town?

JUNE

Ahh, I had a few things to pick up
at the store.

PASTOR HICKS

(nods, concerned look)
Say Heather, how's your momma?

HEATHER

She's been a bit under the weather.
Daddy says she's got a cold.

PASTOR HICKS

(glances at June)
Well, you tell her that I said
"hey" and that I'll be coming by
Thursday mornin' OK!

HEATHER

Ok, I will ---

The girls look at each other, giggle and start to play with a Barbie. Pastor Hicks with a concerned look, put's his hand on June's arm.

PASTOR HICKS

How you doing Juney?

JUNE

(frustrated)
Been better I suppose, just too
damn busy. That old ranch won't
take care of itself you know.

Pastor Hicks stops, looks right, squints as he holds his hand above his eyes. Then yells out --

PASTOR HICKS

Henry --- (louder) Henry -- could
you come here for a minute son!

Henry stops, watching Pastor Hicks and June with a serious look then slowly starts to walk towards them.

PASTOR HICKS (CONT'D)

Here me out now -- This young man
Henry is looking for a place to
stay for a couple days.

(MORE)

PASTOR HICKS (CONT'D)

He looks and sounds like a fine, fine young man. He's a carpenter, can fix an engine, says he's on his way to California? -- And you know how I feel bout carpenters! (winks at June, then seriously) Maybe you could help each other. In any event, I'd like you to meet him.

JUNE

Ok!

June looks towards Henry, Pastor Hicks, then at Henry again as Henry walks up. Pastor Hicks hand on Henry's shoulder.

PASTOR HICKS

Glad you didn't get too far! Henry, I'd like you to meet Mrs. June McClellan. She's got a place bout 5 miles from here off 31!

HENRY

(half smile, nods)

Afternoon Ms. McClellan. My name is Henry --- Henry Jackson.

June looks deeply into Henry's eyes as if looking for something.

JUNE

Henry, our porch is about to fall over and I hear you're pretty handy? We could sure use some help -- you think you could help us fix a few things?

Henry's speech is slow and confident.

HENRY

Well, I can fix most anything made of wood --- if you've got the tools I can probably bring it back.

JUNE

I've got a whole barn full of tools. My late husband Hank collected every tool you could possibly want. --- We're having stew for supper, you hungry?

June looks at Pastor Hicks, then back at Henry.

HENRY

Yes mam, can't tell ya how good
that sounds!

June winks at Pastor Hicks, then smiles at Henry.

JUNE

Well, we best get back before dark,
hop in Henry.

HENRY

Ok -

Henry shakes Pastor Hicks hand, puts his things in the back
of the truck and opens the passenger side door.

JUNE

Girls, move over. Give Henry a
little room - Annie, scoot closer.

PASTOR HICKS

Ok, I expect to see y'all on
Sunday! Don't make me come lookin'
for you now!

JUNE

Sunday Dinner?

PASTOR HICKS

I'll be there!

JUNE

I know, I know, okra and cornbread!

INT. CAB OF TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Driving down a shady section of road. Henry in front
passenger seat next to Heather. June casually looks over at
Henry and smiles.

JUNE

Where you from Henry?

HENRY

Mobile mam', born and raised.

JUNE

You don't have to call me mam' ..
You go a head and call me Juney
like everyone else honey. What you
gunna be doing out in California?
Oh my, I am .. I am sorry, that's
none of my business!

HENRY

That's alright, I'm headed to see my sister in San Diego. -- Never been west of Dallas.

ANNIE

How old is your sister? Is she pretty?

Henry looks down at Annie.

HENRY

She's about my age and yes, she's very pretty --- her hair's not quite as pretty as yours but she's very beautiful!

June / Annie smile. Annie nuzzles her head into June's side.

HEATHER

My name is Heather, do I have pretty hair?

HENRY

Why, I've never seen such pretty hair, and that bow -- umm mmmm. I do love the color yellow! I have a friend back home named Heather, only we called her Heather-Belle!

HEATHER

I like that! Will you call me Heather-Belle too?

ANNIE

(makes mad face)

Hey, I wanna pretty name too!

June looks at Henry and smiles approvingly. We see them from outside the truck talking as they head down the road.

EXT. FRONT OF MCCLELLAN HOUSE - LATER

They get out of the truck, girls run off. June holding a small bag of groceries.

JUNE

Can we help you with those things? My grandsons are running around here somewhere (under her breath) committing some crime.

HENRY

No mam', I've got it ---

June starts walking towards the porch.

JUNE

You can stay in Jack's room.

She looks back expecting Henry to follow.

JUNE (CONT'D)

-- that's my son, he works in the
oil fields just north of Houston.

June stops and looks back at Henry, questioning look why he
isn't following her into the house.

HENRY

Well, that's very kind of you but I
prefer to stay in the barn.

JUNE

(confused look)

Nonsense Henry! You don't have to
sleep in the barn. We've got plenty
of room inside.

HENRY

Ms. Juney, I appreciate that very
much, but I really would prefer it.

June looks at him for a few seconds, then nods.

JUNE

Suit yourself - supper'll be ready
in half an hour.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Molly eyeballs her mother and whispers.

MOLLY

Whose that?

JUNE

That's Henry!

MOLLY

I don't understand --- you go to
the store for toothpaste and cheese
and come back with a black man?

JUNE

I didn't get any cheese?
 (whispering now) He's not a black man. That's Henry -- from Mobile! Denny (Pastor Hicks) said he could help us round the place for a few days. Fix a few things round here. What's wrong with that? (agitated) And why am I whispering?

June puts things away. Molly and June at the kitchen window watching Henry just inside the barn door. Henry takes things out of his duffle bag, then casually looks up at the house. Molly and June duck to the side.

MOMENTS LATER

Molly watches Heather and Annie standing in front of the huge barn doors talking to Henry. Henry nods, looks around then grabs two mason jars and hands them to the girls. They run off laughing and giggling. Molly watches Henry closely.

MOLLY

Are you sure momma?

JUNE

I just told you -- he seems like a real nice young man. He's on his way to visit his sister somewhere. He's a mechanic and a carpenter - can fix practically anything and maybe - just maybe we'll get a couple things done around here! Besides, it'll be nice to have someone new round here for a change. -- Don't forget to tell GRADY -- you know how he gets!

GRADY HARPER, age 50, salty, overseer at the ranch. June puts her apron on and starts to cut vegetables.

FLASHBACK

INT. MESS TENT - VIETNAM - DAY

SUPER "December 1969"

SOLDIERS, mostly white, a few African American sit at a table eating and laughing. Henry stands nearby in the chow line. Racist, arrogant SOLDIER with two buddies walks up to table. In the middle of the table is CPL JOHN O'HARE, 31, a tough Irishman from Texas with a sense of justice, an easy smile and a great sense of humor. Arrogant soldier stands there.

ARROGANT SOLDIER

If we clean things up a bit, git these niggers outta the mess tent, we should be alright!

JOHN

(looks up - unsmiling)

Just so you know, you dim-witted fuck, this guy here -- this nigger, saved my life last month. Now, it's no crime to be stupid, ain't nothin' I can do about that. But, I don't have to eat with you, smell you and especially listen to your backwoods fucking bullshit. So, grab your plate and your buddies and get the fuck on outta here.

ARROGANT SOLDIER

And who the fuck are you --

John and three other white SOLDIERS sitting at the table stand up. Big soldier next to John.

BIG SOLDIER

(shaking his head)

You don't want none of this --

Racist soldier looks at them, nods, and slowly starts to back away only to bump into Henry. Henry stands his ground, eye balling him then looks at the other two men. Henry then sits down at the end of John's table with his tray, making eye contact with John. John nods in an approving way.

EXT. SOLDIERS THROWING FOOTBALL - DAY

John playing catch with two white soldiers and one African American soldier near barracks. They're all talking but we can't hear them. Henry watches them play from 100 feet away.

INT. TENT - DAY

Henry sits, listening to a YOUNG, SKINNY NCO, 23, pimply faced and new to this station, talk strategy at a chalk board on an upcoming sortie into NVA territory.

YOUNG NCO

--- then come around their flank like this, positioning ourselves here to the south. This should seriously reduce maneuverability.

Henry, indifferent look on his face, stares forward. A hand appears on his shoulder. He turns around and sees John.

JOHN

(quietly)

This is a bunch of horseshit --
guys been here three days and no
ones told him about the five
hundred thousand NVA up the road.

Henry looks at John in the eyes with concern. Slow, cautious nod and a half smile from Henry.

HENRY

I was thinkin' the same thing!

JOHN

Grab a beer after this?

HENRY

(slowly nods)

Yeah, sure ..

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. MCCLELLAN HOUSE FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Knocking. June walks across the foyer and answers the door.

JUNE

I was wondering where you'd gone?
Henry, come on in! I want you to
meet my daughter Molly. She thinks
you might be nutty or something ---
You're not nutty are you?

MOLLY

(screams - embarrassed)

Momma! -- Hi Henry, I am Molly, my
mother has lost her mind! It's sad,
but we still love her -- It's very
nice to meet you.

June walks back toward the kitchen mumbling something about vegetables. Half grin from Henry, looks Molly in the eyes.

HENRY

It's nice to meet you Molly. I'll
do my best to help you and your
mother take care of a few of things
while I am here.

(MORE)

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