

THE ELEVENTH SUMMER OF THEO LOUDERMILK

by

Paul Foster

No. 1 Fade in on: a residential street, lined with trees. It is the quiet of an early summer morning. The houses are asleep. In the extreme distance, we see a figure moving toward us. Birds sing. As the figure gets closer, we see a stick thin boy with blond, combed hair and dirty white t-shirt riding a dated bicycle and moving at great speed. When he is ten yards away, he begins to slow. He comes toward camera, looking into the lens, until he is in close-up. Title appears across his face in a stylized font: *The Eleventh Summer of Theo Loudermilk*. There has been a correction made to the title such that a line is drawn through the word “Eleventh” and “11 1/2” has been written above it by a child. Black.

No. 2 Fade in on: an ancient stone and cement wall capped with thick shrubbery. Theo's bike is propped up against the wall and, through the gate, we can see that a cemetery lies within. We cannot see Theo himself, but every few moments, we can hear him spit. We move slowly into the bone yard, then dissolve to a close-up of Theo's mouth. He is eating cherries: putting them in his mouth first, then tugging off the stems. He works the pit free with his tongue and teeth, takes a deep breath, and launches it from his lips. Theo rests his back against a particularly aged stone—moss-covered and worn featureless. When we find one of pits he has scattered, we hold on this for a moment. The morning sun illuminates the blades of grass with gold. Black.

No. 3 Fade in on: a close shot of a black umbrella popping open. When it lifts from frame, we see Theo's face. We then cut to a wide shot revealing that Theo is standing on the lowest row of bleacher seats at an empty little league field. There is no sign of rain. He springs from the bench, the umbrella raised above his head, but lands harder than he'd anticipated. He moves to the next highest row of seats and tries the jump from there—the descent once again not meeting his expectations. He then climbs to the highest row and prepares for lift-off. He crouches and realizes he is a good six feet from the ground. Thinking better of the height, he steps down a row. He assesses the elevation, nods to himself, and jumps. He does, indeed, appear to float for a moment as we cut to: black.

No. 4 Fade in on: Theo standing on a broad lawn, drinking from a green garden hose. There is something abstract and isolated about the hose—no houses or gardens can be seen. When he has had his fill, Theo wipes his mouth with his wrist, drops the hose, and dashes out of frame. We hold on this a moment, then see his sneakers from his P.O.V. They are running on an asphalt path, but take just a few steps before they stop short. Still in Theo's P.O.V., we move in on the path—where a colony of ants is excavating the sand from beneath the tar. They have created a circular mound and are removing the grains from the hole in the center one-by-one. Theo reaches a finger into frame and causes a tiny avalanche. The ants scramble to correct the damage, then settle back into their routine. Black.

No. 5 Fade in on: a tight close-up of the kick-stand on Theo's bicycle. His right foot enters frame and kicks it down with a worn, canvas sneaker. Under the bike, in the distance, we can see a ball field. Cut to: another tight close-up of the kickstand—only this time, the bike enters frame and Theo swings his leg down before he has even come to a stop. Beyond the bike: the ocean. We then cut to a montage of kick-stand close-ups, each time featuring a new location in the background: a forest, a friend's house, the town square, etc. Black.

No. 6 Fade in on: the blurry image of a supermarket entrance. Theo's hand suddenly enters the foreground, fingers splayed, and activates the motion detector on the doors. Once inside, we stay on Theo's hands as he gathers items from the bakery. He swings open the plexi-glass doors and uses the plastic tongs to collect muffins, bagels, donuts—a strange assortment. He places each in a bulging plastic bag, then rests the bag on a low counter. Nearby, there is a tin bowl filled with plastic fasteners for the bags. Theo spins his bag as if ready to close it, then pauses. We see his eyes scan the room. He scoops several hand-fulls of the fasteners into his pockets, emptying the bowl, and leaves his bag of baked goods behind. We stay on the bag, then: black.

Up from black and Theo is sitting in a vacant lot, methodically breaking one of the tabs off each fastener. He attaches one to the tip of his middle finger and flicks it. The fastener buzzes from his hand, arcs toward a rotting motor boat, and plinks against the windscreen. We watch Theo flick the fasteners—some finding their mark on the glass, others coming up short. Theo then eyes the treetops and, with gusto, sails a fastener over the boat and skyward. Black.

No. 7 Fade in on: Theo's best shoes. The leather shines. As we slowly lift from the floor, we see that he is sitting in a church pew and wearing a suit. In an echoing voice, the priest recites from 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13.

Priest: When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Rather than listening to these words, Theo is playing with a flipbook in his lap. We move in on this until it nearly fills the frame. In staccato movements, dictated by Theo's small fingers, we see a mustachioed man sneezing. Black.

No. 8 Fade in on: Theo is now kneeling in his driveway, unrolling a strip of paper caps. He stretches them out on the asphalt, struggling to keep them from rolling back up on him. He holds them down and scrapes along them with a rock. As the paper is broken, the gunpowder flares up for a split second. There isn't much of a pop. Theo then alters his technique, quickly striking each dot on the strip with his rock instead of scraping. This produces a much louder result and inspires Theo to explode the caps as rapidly as possible—imitating machine gun fire. When his arm grows tired, we cut to: a close shot of a much larger rock. Theo stands holding the rock in both hands. We leave the rock and move back to the asphalt—where we find an intact roll of caps, still wound tight. We hold on this a moment before the rock drops from above frame and crushes the roll—creating a painfully loud explosion. Theo's eyes wince, then go wide. He's had an idea.

We cut to the driveway and see that a full, sealed box of caps now rests in the blast zone. Somewhere on the box, we can read the words: "Five rolls." Back on the rock, we pause as Theo holds it above the target...then releases. The sound is frightening. Theo backs away quickly, plugging his ears too late.

The rock rests on the driveway. Nearby, Theo is bent over in pain, hands on knees. Black.

No. 9 Fade in on: a roofing shingle. Theo is bending it, considering its thickness and heft. He places it in the center of the street and we stay on the shingle as we hear him mount his bike and pedal away off-screen.

We cut to the opening shot of the film: Theo at a distance on a tree-lined, residential street. He kicks off and moves toward us at increasing speed. When he is ten yards away, rather than beginning to slow as he did in the open, he sights the shingle in the street. We see this shingle in close-up just as Theo's back tire makes contact with it. He jams on the coaster brake.

Back in the wide shot, Theo executes a high-speed skid right past us—at which point we cut to the back wheel locked on top of the shingle. We stay on it as it wavers and drifts. We hear the skid continue as we cut to: black.

No. 10 Fade in on: Theo walking down another street in his neighborhood, whittling a branch with his pocket-knife. We see this from above and watch as he works the end of the branch into a threatening point. We cut further down the street and see Theo coming toward us. He raises his eyes from the knife and looks forward, his face fierce and heroic.

We dissolve to a similar shot, with the same look in Theo's eye, but the background has changed from residential to an open field. When he has almost reached us, Theo stops. We hold on his face a moment, then cut to a wide from behind. He stands before a wall of dense forest, his spear held in his tense right hand. He plunges into the trees and disappears. Black.

No. 11 Fade in on: a disused rail-yard. The sun beats down on a few rusty box cars. Theo is sitting on a rail with his back to us. He is tiny next to the hulking cars and warehouses. We then see his hands: removing a square piece of candy from a colorful wrapper. He pops the candy into his mouth off-screen, then wraps the waxy paper around the tip of his index finger. He is meticulous about this: carefully measuring out the wrapper so that half of it extends beyond his finger. He then twists the excess, creating a sort of cone. He places this cone in the loose fist of his left hand, letting it rest in the curve of his first finger. Finally, he smacks his fist with his cupped right hand, forcing air into it. A popping sound is heard and the cone launches from his hand. We go back to the wide shot, Theo's back to us, and wait as he prepares another rocket. A moment later, we hear the pop again and we see the wrapper arc out above Theo's head. Black.

No. 12 Fade in on: a close shot of a spinning fan. It is plastic, two feet square—a house fan. Theo's head appears on the other side of this fan, his features blurred by the grill and spinning blades. He moves his mouth close to the grill and begins reciting the words from the church service—as he remembers them:

Theo: For we know only a part of the prophet's size. And when it is complete, it will not be partial any more. When I was a child, I spoke to children. I thought I was a child. The reason was: I was a child. When I am adult, I will not be a child. I will see a mirror and I will see me face to face. Fate and hope are alive. And love is alive. And love is the best.

Black.

No. 13 Fade in on: a brick apartment building. Dark clouds roll above a slate roof that looks to be made of Necco wafers. Thunder. Theo's bike leans against the side of the building and we may notice a real estate sign behind it. A second bike lies nearby on the pavement.

We cut to a penny spinning on a kitchen table. Theo's hands enter frame and stop it between his thumbs. He pauses, taking aim, then launches the penny across the table—where it bounces against another child's chest and falls into his cupped hands. The child pounds his fist against the table in frustration, then passes the coin across to Theo, who flicks it spinning once again.

Theo, in announcer's voice: Looks like another defeat for Joey Higgenbotham.

Black.

No. 14 Fade in on: Theo standing on a gray beach, launching rocks into the oncoming waves with a slingshot. There is a mist in the air and, as Theo wipes his eyes, it is unclear if the moisture on his face is from this mist or from something else.

No. 15 Fade in on: the back of Theo's head as he stands facing a decrepit Victorian house with fading pink paint. The roofline is obscured by trees, but we can clearly see an attic window. Theo raises a composition book into frame and begins to write. We move in on his words, recognizing the penmanship from the correction in the opening title:

To begin with, 530 Chadbourne street was pink. And sometimes, I would see him in the window.

Black.

No. 16 Fade in on: the deserted residential street. We begin to track forward. Slowly, Theo's bicycle enters frame. There are no hands on the handlebars. The bike moves ahead of us and we see that there is no one on it at all. We then see the bike from the side and it appears to be in complete control of itself. We stop and the bike coasts down the street alone, eventually wobbling, listing, and crashing when the front wheel smacks the curb.

We cut to Theo's hand on the back of his seat. He is running beside the bike, guiding the handlebars, building up speed. When he is running as fast as he can, he gives the bike a shove and watches it go. As before, it travels down the center of the street, eventually begins to sway and...we cut to a montage of dramatic slow-motion crashes. Black.

No. 17 Fade in on: a fire pit at night. Theo's face is lit with the orange flicker. He looks around himself at several adults seated in a semi-circle around the flames—smoking and drinking beer. A few smaller children can be seen passing through the shadows behind them, sparklers burning in their wake. Theo sits with the adults, listening intently to a conversation that we cannot hear. Black.

No. 18 Fade in on: the exterior of the apartment building. Theo's bike is once again out front. We cut to a mason jar of coins (and a few bills) just as Theo's hands enter frame and remove it from the atop a bureau. He kneels on his bedroom floor and dumps the contents into a canvas bag with a dollar sign drawn on it in black marker. He places this inside a duffel bag and leaves the empty jar behind him on the floor. He's in a hurry.

Outside, he bursts from the front door, slamming it behind him and causing the lion's head door-knocker to shudder. He swings a leg over his bike and pushes off—folding up the kickstand with his heel as he moves away. We cut to the tree-lined street from the open, but this time Theo enters frame from behind us. The duffel is heavy on his shoulder as he rides quickly up the street. Soon, he is a speck in the center of the screen. He turns down another street and we cut to: black.

End credits begin. They are formatted to appear as full-frame movie trading cards with an elaborate border, the title abbreviated as “Eleventh Summer” in a lower corner, and a still from the set in the center. The images correspond to the cast or crew member announced in the lower edge of the card. The last of these is another shot of Theo with “The End” declared across his face in the same, stylized font as the film's title. As the words appear, Theo states them in a matter-of-fact tone.

Theo: The end.

Fade out.

End.