

YOUNG WILL PERCY

William A. Percy III and Lewis A. Gannett

ACT I

EXT. LEVEE -- DAY

The Mississippi River, early evening, April. TRACKING SHOT of the LEVEE on the river's east side, a sloping fortification against the water's immense volume. A late-19th-century town comes into view. From the levee a pier juts into the river. A steamboat is docked at it. CAPTION:

GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI, 1894

EXT. PERCY STREET -- DAY

Early evening, April. A street sign reads: "Percy St." Beyond, a large house with imposing Greek-revival columns.

INT. PERCY HOUSE PARLOR -- DAY

Early evening. The furnishings are upper-class antebellum American Empire, heavy, a bit fusty. Oil paintings on the walls depict Percy ancestors. A large engraving of the Parthenon. CAMILLE and LEROY PERCY, a young, good-looking couple dressed to go out, look at LEROY's mother, MUR, a woman of stately bearing and dimensions. MUR sits with their adorable blond son, WILL, age 9. A younger son, LEROY JR., 3, sits playing with toys at MUR'S feet.

MUR thrusts a heavy iron fire poker into the blazing fireplace.

LEROY

Mother, what in the world will you do with that, if a burglar does break in?

MUR

Spear him like a chicken liver, honey!

LEROY and CAMILLE smile. WILL and LEROY JR. giggle with delight.

CAMILLE

Good night, boys. Don't forget to say

your prayers.

WILL waves a good-bye. LEROY, CAMILLE exit. MUR picks up a leather-bound copy of *Ivanhoe*.

WILL

Mur... What did you do during the War?

MUR

Why, I ran the plantation. No husband to keep the cotton coming, I had to do it. Defend the place, keep the slaves in line.

WILL IMAGINES:

EXT. COTTON FIELD -- DAY

ONE HUNDRED SLAVES PICK COTTON. YOUNG MUR sits in a rocking chair under a shade tree, fanning herself. The only WHITE PERSON in sight, she has a SHOTGUN across her knees.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

WILL

You must have been scared.

MUR

I had no time to be scared. We needed the cotton to feed the slaves. In the Delta, we didn't grow grains. So we had to buy it from other regions. That meant selling our cotton for cash.

MUR points at a portrait of a CONFEDERATE OFFICER.

MUR

Your grandfather. My dear, dear husband.

WILL

The Gray Eagle of the Delta.

WILL IMAGINES:

EXT. CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELD -- DAY

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COL. WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY dashingly leads a cavalry charge against a UNION LINE. YANKEES cringe, whimper, FLEE.

AGHAST UNION SOLDIER

God help us! It's the Gray Eagle!

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

WILL points at *Ivanhoe*.

WILL

Did Sir Walter Scott write about the Percys?

MUR

Shakespeare did. Hotspur! Your forebears were among the mightiest warriors of the land. Lords of the March!

WILL IMAGINES:

EXT. BORDERLANDS -- DAY

A PERCY EARL, on horseback and magnificently armored, leads a VAST ARMY through BLEAK BORDERLANDS. A CASTLE looms.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

WILL blinks, snapping out of it.

WILL

Percys like to fight.

(smiles)

And so did George Armstrong Custer.

MUR

My cousin, the Indian fighter. He had Armstrong blood--and thanks to me, so do you. Like my father, an Indian agent, George was nice to the good Indians, the ones they baptized and civilized. Of course, George did finally make a fatal miscalculation.

WILL IMAGINES:

EXT. WESTERN BATTLEFIELD -- DAY

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

INDIANS SLAUGHTER CUSTER, his TROOPS.

INT. PERCY PARLOR - DAY

MUR

Back in Scotland, the Armstrongs, I Believe, were sheep thieves and cattle rustlers. They would sneak into England, raid farms--the sorts the Percy earls were supposed to keep out.

(laughs)

But the Armstrongs have done very well in this country. My grandfather James "Trooper" Armstrong was a general in the War of 1812. He helped Jackson defend New Orleans. Will--do you want to be a soldier?

WILL

No, Mur. I want to be a writer.

MUR smiles.

WILL

Cousin Kate is a writer.

MUR

Oh! Don't think about that--that awful book Kate wrote!

WILL

Why is it so awful?

MUR

Never mind. You should read the novels by our other cousin, Sarah Dorsey. Now, she was a writer. After the War, when Sarah was a young, rich widow, she invited Jeff Davis to stay at Beauvoir, her summer place on the Gulf. There she helped him write his history of the Confederacy.

WILL

If Kate is so awful, why are Mother and Father at her party?

MUR

She's kin. We do not shun kin. Besides,
she and the General live right next door.

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- NIGHT

SOUNDS OF a lively party ECHO from beyond a brick wall.
WILL, walking through the garden, pauses to listen. He
frowns.

INT. FERGUSON HOUSE -- NIGHT

KATE FERGUSON, flush with drink, dances with a YOUNGER MAN.
Her husband the GENERAL chats up a YOUNGER WOMAN. CAMILLE
PERCY looks on disapprovingly.

CAMILLE

(to LEROY)

A lot of high living in this house.

Amused, LEROY sips a drink. He turns, catches sight of a
BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, eyes her. CAMILLE notices, looks away.

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- DAY

Late September, hot and humid. LEROY JR. plays with a pail
and trowel by a flower bed, digging worms for bait,
muddying himself. WILL approaches, dressed in his SUNDAY
BEST. He eyes LEROY JR. with distaste, walks off.

LEROY SR. sits at a garden table some distance away with a
DISTINGUISHED-LOOKING FRIEND (JOHN PARKER) about his age
(33). Both wear hunting boots, tweeds. Two shotguns lie on
the table. LEROY eyes WILL.

LEROY

A queer chicken, that one. I scarcely
can imagine where he came from.

FRIEND smiles, glances at LEROY JR. A BLACK BUTLER walks up
with frosted drinks on a tray. FRIEND takes one, sips.

FRIEND

Willis, you make the best juleps.

WILLIS

Thank you, Mr. Parker.

INT. PERCY FRONT HALL -- DAY

WILL approaches CAMILLE. She too is dressed for church.

WILL
Time to go.

CAMILLE nods, frowns. MUR enters.

WILL
Mur, won't you come to church with us?

MUR
I'm a devout Presbyterian, Will.
Incense does not enchant me, and
anyway, I've forgotten my Latin.

CAMILLE and MUR exchange combative glances.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH -- DAY

A PRIEST celebrates Mass. From a pew WILL avidly takes it all in. CAMILLE suppresses a yawn, glances at WILL. His devotion impresses her. Or perhaps alarms her.

INT. PERCY FRONT HALL -- NIGHT

LEROY and CAMILLE stand in the hall. Rain POUNDS the verandah's roof. LEROY kisses CAMILLE, goes out. WILL approaches.

WILL
Where is Father going?

CAMILLE
He has business to attend to.

CAMILLE heads upstairs. WILL goes into the parlor. MUR sits by the fire with *Ivanhoe*.

WILL
Father always goes out at night. Why
doesn't he stay at home with us?

MUR

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

Your father is a very busy man. Now
you sit down. Let's read more Ivanhoe.

INT. GENTLEMEN'S CLUB -- NIGHT

Rain pounds windows. Well-to-do WHITE MEN converse, play cards, fill plates at a SUMPTUOUS BUFFET. ELIZA, a regal high-yellow black woman, presides. Her THREE GORGEOUS GRANDAUGHTERS, beautifully dressed, flirt with WHITE MEN. The only other women present are TWO UNIFORMED BLACK MAIDS.

The doorbell rings. A MAID opens the door.

KATE FERGUSON stands on the porch wearing a raincoat and hat. MAID is utterly shocked.

MAID

Missas Fergesson!

KATE sweeps in, removes coat; she wears a low-cut dress. Stunned silence greets her entry. KATE advances on the buffet table, seats herself at the head.

KATE

Please bring me some Champagne.

MAID hurries off.

EXT. ELIZA'S CLUB, FRONT PORCH -- NIGHT

Rain. LEROY PERCY presses the doorbell. Wide-eyed MAID opens it.

LEROY

Something wrong?

LEROY enters. The atmosphere is subdued except for one voice: KATE's, chatting with an attractive YOUNG MAN.

KATE

Have you read my novel, Clicquot?

YOUNG MAN

I understand it's very--racy.

Kate laughs raucously.

KATE

Some people think so. The same bores
who think I don't belong in a place
like this!

KATE sees LEROY.

KATE

Hi, LeRoy.

LEROY

(masks his shock)

Well hello there, Cousin Kate.

(to MAID:)

A toddy, you know how I like it.

EXT. ELIZA'S CLUB, FRONT PORCH -- NIGHT

Rain. GENERAL FERGUSON rings the doorbell. MAID opens it.

MAID

Gennrall!

Silence once again sweeps the establishment. FERGUSON goes
in, sees KATE, nods to her, takes the situation completely
in stride. He turns to the flabbergasted but amused LEROY.

FERGUSON

Let's talk business for a minute.

FERGUSON glances at windows shuddering from the force of
rain.

FERGUSON

I'm worried about the levee. We're
getting so much water.

LEROY

We buttressed it just last month.

(sips drink, eyes Ferguson)

Remember? You signed the checks.

Ferguson nods vigorously. One of ELIZA'S GRANDAUGHTERS
catches his eye. In the background, KATE helps herself to
more Champagne.

KATE

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(to YOUNG MAN)

You really *must* read Clicquot.

INT. PERCY HOUSE, STAIRCASE -- NIGHT

Rain and wind rattle windows. WILL and MUR climb the stairs. They head down a corridor, pause outside a closed door.

Beyond it, SOUND OF: SOFT SOBS.

WILL wants to go in, MUR stops him with a finger to her mouth. They move on.

WILL

Father is wicked! Where is he, Mur--
it's almost midnight!

MUR clamps a hand over his mouth.

EXT. DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE -- DAY

Bright sun reflects from THREE FEET OF FLOODWATER. Elevated planks form makeshift sidewalks above the water.

Sign on a building: "Levee Board."

INT. LEVEE BOARD OFFICE -- DAY

LEROY, GENERAL FERGUSON, LEVEE BOARD MEMBERS sit at a table.

FERGUSON

There must have been more we could've done.

LEROY

There always is.

(lights a cigar)

But we know that from time to time...

(stabs the air with cigar)

It's been the same since my father built the first levees hereabouts. The river will always have her say.

EXT. FLOODED STREET -- DAY

A motorboat idles, tethered to a platform. LEROY crosses the platform to the boat, followed by butler WILLIS and WILL, who clutches *The Last of the Mohicans*. They get in the boat.

WILLIS

Where we going, Mr. Percy?

LEROY

The old Percy place. I want to show my boy some history.

(to WILL)

Mother kept the Yankees out, the hands working--but she couldn't stop floods. We'll inspect conditions. Is that OK with you, Son?

WILL nods, opens his book, starts reading.

EXT. FLOODED COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

The boat motors through a vast expanse of FLOODED COUNTRYSIDE. Sun reflects brightly from brown water. WILL sits in the bow, his nose poked in his book. LEROY regards him with exasperation.

LEROY

Your first flood! Behold what the Father of Waters has done to man and beast!

WILL squints at the water.

WILL

The glare is *terrible*! And it stinks!

The boat passes a tree. WILL stares at it. Something MOVES in a branch. WILL SHRIEKS, points:

WILL

Snakes!

A number of branches are ALIVE WITH SNAKES.

LEROY

Where do you expect them to go? Willis, take us closer.

WILLIS steers closer to the tree.

WILL

Don't! Watch out! They might fall in!

LEROY

That's the thing about floods, Will.
Livestock, dogs, snakes, people--every-
thing needs to escape the water. Only
the turtles and fish are safe.

WILL

Can we go home now? It's so humid!

WILL resumes reading. LEROY sighs.

INT. CHURCH CONFSSIONAL -- DAY

WILL faces the screen. A PRIEST sits on the other side.

PRIEST

You're the best boy in this parish.

(chuckles)

I think you make things up. You invent
excuses to come here all the time.

WILL

I must be pure, like you. And Mother.

PRIEST

Pure? You already are! And Will--

(pause)

Your father is our leading man, our
very finest. Don't you worry about him.
You come from a long line of great men.
You should be proud!

WILL ponders that idea.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

WILL and CAMILLE sit, facing each other.

WILL

I have made an important decision. I
want to become a priest.

CAMILLE

A priest!

(frowns)

Don't you want to have children?

Will shakes his head. MUR strides in.

MUR

A priest? What's this about a priest?

CAMILLE

(to WILL)

Percys must have sons! Mur and your father insist on it, to carry on the line!

WILL

Why can't little brother LeRoy carry it on?

MUR and CAMILLE look at each other, highly alarmed.

MUR

It's that school, Camille, which you've inflicted on this poor child. And that church! What's next? Will the boy want to become a merchant like your family? Making money, shirking honor?

CAMILLE

My family embodies the traditions of France! There are none more noble!

EXT. CONVENT SCHOOL -- DAY

A warm September day. Sign on school building: "Sisters of Mercy School for Boys." CAMILLE and WILL enter the school, WILL in a blue jacket and tie with white knickers.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- DAY

PUPILS dressed like WILL mingle in the hallway. A tiny but vigorous NUN herds them through a classroom door.

CAMILLE

Sister Evangelist--

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SISTER EVANGELIST

Ah, Mrs. Percy. Will, get in to class.

WILL enters the classroom.

CAMILLE

May I have a word with you?

INT. CONVENT SCHOOL OFFICE -- DAY

SISTER EVANGELIST faces CAMILLE from behind a desk.

CAMILLE

I'm sure you've been a good influence.

SISTER EVANGELIST

(distressed)

Will he go to the public school?

CAMILLE

No, I don't think so, some of the boys--
the bullies. Will is so sensitive.

SISTER EVANGELIST

He is an angel!

CAMILLE nods, wearily.

INT. LEVEE BOARD OFFICE -- DAY

An overhead fan stirs sultry air. A SWEATING ACCOUNTANT goes through a thick ledger, checking figures. He shakes his head.

EXT. GREENVILLE NEWSSTAND -- DAY

Front page of Greenville's *Daily Democrat*: Headline:

LEVEE BOARD SHORT \$30,000
Questions for Gen. Ferguson

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- NIGHT

WILL sits very still, holding a book, listening to LOUD SOBS coming from the FERGUSON place next door.

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WILL looks at the book: *Clicquot* by Catherine Ferguson. He grimaces at it, clutches it tightly, opens it, slams it shut. With a cry he throws it to the ground.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Late summer. WILL carries a book and a bouquet of flowers to a plot marked PERCY, approaches a grave: Nannie Armstrong Percy, 1835-1897. He sits, opens *Rob Roy*, reads.

WILL REMEMBERS:

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

MUR and WILL cuddle before the fireplace with an iron poker thrust in it, MUR reading *Ivanhoe* to WILL.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

WILL
(to gravestone)
Mur! It's no fun anymore!

WILL closes *Rob Roy*, dejectedly walks away from the grave.

EXT. BALLPARK -- DAY

Early Autumn, 1899. In knickers, 14-year-old WILL sits on bleachers with his parents at a rustic baseball field. Though slight of build, he has bloomed into a BEAUTIFUL ADOLESCENT. As usual he's reading a book. His parents watch a game in progress.

At bat: LEROY JR., now eight, shirtless and barefoot, VIBRATING WITH ANIMAL MAGNETISM. A pitch: LEROY whacks the ball far beyond the boy in right field. LEROY SR. and CAMILLE jump to their feet, applauding and cheering.

WILL does not look up from his book.

INT. PERCY HOUSE, ATTIC GUN ROOM -- DAY

LEROYS SR. and JR. clean shotguns, SR. giving JR. tips. WILL looks in. Neither LEROY notices, so absorbed are they in the task at hand. WILL's face droops. He slips away.

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- DAY

Autumn. A garden party is in progress. GENTEEL LADIES wearing large hats, PROSPEROUS HUSBANDS with boaters and canes, a number of YOUNG PEOPLE. WILL converses with a SPINSTERISH LADY. He is charming, vivacious.

A PRETTY GIRL walks by, casts WILL a glance. WILL catches it but turns away, resumes talk with LADY. Downcast, GIRL walks away.

From a distance, LEROY and JOHN PARKER have observed the snub.

LEROY

What am I going to do with that boy? He won't hunt with me. He hates sports.

PARKER

(tactfully clears throat)

Who's the lady?

LEROY

His English tutor, Carrie Stern. A poet. Will goes over to her house, stays hours and hours on end... They recite Bryon, Shelley, Tennyson!

LEROY JR., shirtless, rides a pony bareback into the garden. He's sweaty and his eyes shine with excitement. LEROY SR. beams at him. CAMILLE approaches him.

CAMILLE

Where have you been?

LEROY JR. holds up a lidded pail.

LEROY JR.

Crawfish!

CAMILLE

Well get them right in to Cook. And take yourself a bath!

GUESTS laugh. JOHN PARKER leans toward LEROY.

PARKER

He's fine. A chip off the old block.

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LEROY nods, looks over for WILL. He and CARRIE have disappeared.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

A large Christmas tree is brightly decorated. LEROY, CAMILLE, and WILL sit before the blazing fireplace.

LEROY

How far will poetry get you, Will?

WILL shrugs.

LEROY

We have decided that your education should take a different course. You will attend Sewanee Military Academy next fall.

WILL is stunned. He IMAGINES:

EXT. SCHOOLYARD CORNER -- DAY

CADETS--brutal, leering--TORMENT WILL.

CAMILLE'S voice brings him back:

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM -- DAY

CAMILLE

There is another possibility.

LEROY

The Academy is affiliated with my alma mater, Sewanee. You're a bit young to be entering college. But with your Greek and Latin--you might get in.

INT. GREENVILLE TRAIN STATION -- DAY

A bright Fall day. LEROY and CAMILLE see WILL off.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

A taxi takes WILL up a mountain road and then through the gates of The University of the South at Sewanee. Set on the

Cumberland Plateau amid valley-cloven mountains, the location is idyllic.

INT. SEWANEE DINING HALL -- DAY

WILL mingles with fellow STUDENTS. Although he is not the only one wearing knickers under his black gown, he looks like he should be entering high school, not college. But he's game.

A dapper, good-looking YOUNG INSTRUCTOR approaches WILL.

YOUNG INSTRUCTOR

I'm Huger Jervey. I understand that you take an interest in literature?

WILL

(smiles)

Yes! How'd you know?

HUGER (pronounced "Hugger")

The Admissions Office tells us things like that. I teach romance languages and literature. Have you read Dante?

Intrigued, WILL shakes his head.

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

WILL walks through sunlight-dappled woods. He hears a VOICE, walks toward it. He comes to a glade. In it TWO STUDENTS lie on moss, flat on their backs. One is reading to the other:

STUDENT # 1

I will think in gold and dream in silver, imagine in marble and in bronze conceive...

STUDENT # 1 stops reading. He and the other STUDENT prop themselves on elbows, facing each other, eyes blazing with inspiration.

STUDENT # 1

Wrestle?

STUDENT # 2

Sure.

They wrestle on the moss, a FURIOUS, SUDDEN STRUGGLE. STUDENT # 1 pins # 2 on his back. They GLARE at each other. Then # 1 kisses # 2. They melt into an ARDENT EMBRACE.

WILL reaction: FASCINATED HORROR. He runs away.

INT. HUGER JERVEY'S OFFICE, DAY

WILL, agitated, sits in a chair. HUGER sits at his desk.

HUGER

I'm sure they were just fooling around.

WILL

Like--like *that*?

HUGER sighs, taps a fingernail on the desk.

WILL

Will. Please listen carefully. Sometimes--boys your age become very fond of special friends. It doesn't mean anything alarming.

WILL'S eyebrows shoot up. HUGER smiles.

HUGER

But it must not be discussed with anyone. People might get the wrong idea.

WILL

I can't even--can I talk about it with you?

HUGER

(with sudden gravity)

Some day, perhaps. Not now. And do not speak with anyone about what you saw.

INT. DORM HALLWAY -- DAY

WILL speaks into the communal dorm telephone:

WILL

It's wonderful here, Mother. I like my

teachers. And I'm making friends!

EXT. TENNIS COURT -- DAY

Autumn, WILL's second year at Sewanee. WILL watches STUDENT # 1 of the GLADE INCIDENT win a tennis match.

OFFICIAL

The trophy goes to Bixby Perkins!

WILL is deeply impressed.

INT. HUGER JERVEY'S CLASSROOM -- DAY

HUGER delivers a lecture, liberally sprinkled with Italian, about Michelangelo. WILL pays attention but keeps an eye on BIXBY PERKINS, who sits nearby. BIXBY glances over and catches WILL's stare.

After class, BIXBY approaches WILL.

BIXBY

Do you know the work of Addington Symonds? Jervey adores it!

WILL shakes his head.

BIXBY

Come with me. I'll introduce you.

WILL follows the ebullient BIXBY.

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

BIXBY, carrying a book, leads WILL through woods to the same mossy glade. WILL is jittery, sweating. They sit.

BIXBY

What's the matter?

His hands shaking, WILL undoes the top button of BIXBY's shirt.

BIXBY

Hey!

Both boys grin, BIXBY amazed, WILL in a fever.

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They CLUTCH each other, roll across moss.

INT. HUGER JERVEY'S OFFICE -- DAY

WILL sits in a chair, HUGER sits behind his desk.

WILL

I have something to tell you.

HUGER

Something important, I gather.

WILL

I have a special friend.

HUGER raises his eyebrows.

WILL

Bixby Perkins.

HUGER laughs. WILL grins. HUGER puts a finger to his lips:
"Be quiet about this." WILL nods.

WILL

Now I have ask you something. Can I--
can I have only one special friend?

HUGER

Well. Ah. Well, I suppose that-- Why
do you ask?

WILL

I think I'm in love with you.

WILL and HUGER stare at each other.

INT. PERCY HOUSE FRONT HALL -- DAY

Autumn. CAMILLE is on the phone. In the background, LEROY JR. comes down the stairs carrying luggage and a rifle. A FRIEND of LEROY'S, like LEROY a limber lad, follows with more luggage.

CAMILLE

(into phone)

Will, we're going to Hot Springs for a
week. Father, LeRoy Jr., his friend Tom,

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and me. Father and the boys will hunt, I will enjoy the spa and shop, I suppose.

WILL (OC)

Have a wonderful time.

INT. DORM HALLWAY -- DAY

Several days later. A still afternoon at WILL's dorm. CLOSE
On the phone: It RINGS. A STUDENT runs to answer it.

CAMILLE (OC)

I must speak with Will Percy.

INT. DORM HALLWAY -- DAY

A minute later. WILL comes to the phone.

WILL

Hello?

CAMILLE (OC)

(tremulous)

Your brother has been shot. An accident with Tom. I've got doctors here, they're probing for the bullet, it's in his stomach--they can't seem to find it.

WILL IMAGINES:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

LEROY JR. WRITHES WITH PAIN on a hospital bed, DOCTORS helplessly looking on, LEROY SR. and CAMILLE DISTRAUGHT.

EXT. PERCY GRAVEYARD PLOT -- DAY

Autumn. FAMILY and FRIENDS are gathered around an open grave. A PRIEST says words.

LEROY and Camille barely can stand. JOHN PARKER approaches to sympathize. LEROY waves him off.

PARKER turns, sees WILL standing a few feet away, a hand on MUR's gravestone. WILL is wretched, nauseous.

PARKER

(under his breath)
My God. It's come to this.

ACT II

INT. GREENVILLE TRAIN STATION -- DAY

May, 1905. CAMILLE and LEROY watch a train roll in.

WILL, AGE 20 and nattily dressed, gets off the train.

CAMILLE

There he is!

WILL approaches, kisses CAMILLE, shakes LEROY's hand.

LEROY

The world traveler.

A SWEATING BLACK PORTER wheels up steamship trunks, HEAVILY STAMPED: "FIRST CLASS"; various ports of destination: "LIVERPOOL," "PIRAEUS," "PALERMO," "CAIRO."

WILL

It wasn't my first tour, Father.

CAMILLE

The first on your own. Welcome home!

WILL smiles. He looks at dusty, torrid Greenville. His smile fades.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

A festive party. JOHN PARKER (LEROY'S friend), CARRIE STERN (WILL'S English tutor), various RELATIVES and FRIENDS.

PARKER and LEROY observe WILL talking with CARRIE STERN.

WILL

Luxor by moonlight--incomparable. Notre Dame in every light--just as Monet painted it, Carrie! And those dreamy Tuscan hill towns--Perugia is the finest, I found.

CARRIE

Did you versify?

PARKER
(to LEROY)

Dreamy hill towns. What's next for him?

LEROY

Law school, I reckon.

PARKER nods. He walks over to WILL.

PARKER

May I have a word with you?

WILL

(a little taken aback)

Sure.

INT. PERCY LIBRARY -- NIGHT

WILL and PARKER enter. PARKER closes the door.

PARKER

I'll be blunt. What are you going to do with your life?

WILL

I don't exactly know, Mr. Parker.

PARKER

Your father is building an empire. He's the richest man in the Delta, one of the strongest in the South. A senate seat is his for the asking but he has too much going on here. Plantations of 30,000 acres! He's expanding railroads, he rules the levees--Will, your family has a history in these parts. How will you add to that?

WILL

Mr. Parker, I am twenty years old. I do not know.

PARKER glowers at WILL.

WILL

I'll think of something.

EXT. GREENVILLE LEVEE -- DAY

Summer. WILL and CARRIE STERN walk the levee. On one side flows the huge river. On the other side, FORTY FEET BELOW, lackluster Greenville SIMMERS IN HEAT. WILL pauses, looks at the town.

WILL

Carrie, this place will kill me.

CARRIE

I've managed to survive it.

(laughs)

With the help of toddies and frequent trips to New Orleans! So tell me. What exactly did you do in Paris?

Will REMEMBERS:

EXT. LUXEMBOURG GARDENS -- DAY

Summer. VARIOUS VISITORS: CLINGING LOVERS, MOTHERS with CHILDREN, OLD MEN PLAYING CROQUET, SOLITARY STROLLING YOUNG MEN.

A HANDSOME STROLLING MAN sees something, stops. WILL, seated in a metal chair, looks up from a book: EYE CONTACT with MAN.

INT. NARROW STAIRWELL -- DAY

WILL and LUXEMBOURG GARDENS MAN rapidly ascend stairs.

INT. CRAMPED ATTIC APARTMENT -- DAY

WILL and MAN BARGE INTO the apartment.

WILL, MAN embrace, CRASH ONTO a narrow bed.

EXT. GREENVILLE LEVEE -- DAY

WILL

The Luxembourg Gardens. I sat there for hours and hours. It's the friendliest place I've ever been.

(pause)

I can hardly breathe here.

(pause)

Father mentioned law school.

CARRIE

Where?

WILL

His school, Virginia. But that's too--
rustic.

CARRIE

Mr. Jefferson's university is hardly
rustic.

WILL

For the likes of me, it is.

They look at each other. A moment of understanding.

EXT. IVY-COVERED BRICK BUILDING -- DAY

Autumn. Sign: "Winthrop Hall." WILL enters it.

INT. LECTURE HALL -- DAY

A STIFFLY DIGNIFIED PROFESSOR addresses a group of seated
STUDENTS, including WILL.

PROFESSOR

I am Professor Williston. Welcome to
Harvard Law School.

(steely smile)

As first-year students with the mis-
fortune of not having attended the
College, you...

EDGY LAUGHTER.

WILLISTON

You deserve a special welcome. Some of
you, I understand, have come here from
exotic locales. Very exotic indeed.
For example...

(gazes at WILL)

Mississippi.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

MORE LAUGHTER. WILL smiles politely.

EXT. BRATTLE STREET, CAMBRIDGE -- NIGHT

WILL and a COMPANION, dressed in black tie, walk down the street, eyeing large homes.

WILL

It's so funny, Gus. They think we're hicks.

GUS

(gestures at a house, Southern accent)

You could fit two of those in our Garden District place.

WILL checks the street number.

WILL

It's next door. Are you ready for this?

GUS

Of course. My Granddaddy killed dozens of the bastards.

WILL

Mine killed hundreds.

They walk to the front door. WILL rings the bell. A UNIFORMED WHITE BUTLER opens the door.

GUS

Howdy!

BUTLER stiffens.

INT. ELEGANT PARLOR -- NIGHT

PROFESSOR WILLISTON and his WIFE preside over conversation among eight GUESTS. Atmosphere: Yankee ULTRA-RECTITUDE.

PROF. WILLISTON

(to a GUEST)

Yes, Katherine, I saw that in the Transcript. A lovely old family, the Shaws.

KATHERINE

Neither as distinguished nor as old as
ours, of course...

BUTLER shows in WILL and GUS.

PROF. WILLISTON

Here you are, our two Southern gentle-
men, welcome. Mrs. Wells, I present to
you Mr. William Percy and Mr. Gustavus
Westfeldt, of the best old families, I
am reliably informed...

INT. WILLISTON DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

MALE GUESTS seat FEMALE GUESTS at a well-laid table. Silver
glimmers. With insouciant charm GUS seats MRS. WILLISTON at
the table's foot.

MRS. WILLISTON

You have fine manners, young man.

GUS bows gallantly, sits in the chair to her left. WILL
sits to the left of PROF. WILLISTON at the table's head.

PROF. WILLISTON

Chivalry, Mr. Westfeldt. A vanishing
virtue.

GUS

Not where I come from, Professor.

Behind PROF. WILLISTON, to WILL'S right, an ENORMOUS CANARY
CAGE looms. Numerous birds softly SING.

Large linen napkins, ELABORATELY FOLDED, adorn each plate.
WILL studies his napkin, pinches a corner. With great
vivacity:

WILL

Nothing is more important, of course,
than good breeding...

As if to illustrate his point WILL gracefully but sharply
flicks his napkin to his right, to undo the fold.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

From within the napkin a SMALL DINNER ROLL HURTLES TOWARD THE CANARY CAGE, bangs into it: RESOUNDING WIRY TWANGS.

BIRDS SCREECH, VIOLENTLY FLUTTER. TWANGS REVERBERATE.

A FROZEN MOMENT. TIME DILATION, WILL POV: NO ONE SO MUCH AS BATS AN EYELASH.

EXCEPT GUS: He finds a roll tucked in his own napkin, buries his face in the napkin, his shoulders heaving.

TWANGS, SCREECHES fade. MRS. WILLISTON looks at BUTLER. With serene hauteur:

MRS. WILLISTON

We will proceed with the soup course.

EXT. BRATTLE STREET -- NIGHT

Convulsing with laughter, arms around each others' shoulders, WILL and GUS weave down the street.

GUS

What is *wrong* with them?

WILL

That birdcage! Back home, folks would have had the decency--to applaud. Or at least, to laugh!

GUS halts, draws himself up. With somber seriousness:

GUS

It's why they won the War. They're not human. Cold as--as reptiles.

WILL

(sighs with resignation)

Yes. That's it.

EXT. WEINBERG BUILDING, DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE -- DAY

June. A SWEATING WORKER attaches a sign to the building: "PERCY & PERCY, Attorneys at Law."

INT. PERCY & PERCY LAW OFFICE - DAY

Overhead fans circle. LEROY sits at a desk cluttered with papers and mementos. WILL, AGE 23, sits at a table entirely bare except for a stack of folders. He picks up the top folder, opens it.

WILL

A train has killed a cow. We must defend the train.

LEROY

Better than defending the cow.

WILL grimaces at the folder.

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

WILLIS, older now, serves dinner to WILL, LEROY, CAMILLE.

CAMILLE

Have you thought about getting a pied-à-terre?

WILL

Plenty of room here, don't you think?

CAMILLE

Yes. And it has been lonely.

WILL IMAGINES:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

LEROY JR. writhes in pain on the bed, DOCTORS helplessly looking on, LEROY SR. and CAMILLE distraught.

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

LEROY

I hope you will stay here with us.

(pause)

At least until you marry.

CAMILLE nods. Then she looks at WILL. He studies his plate, not meeting her eyes.

INT. PERCY & PERCY LAW OFFICE - DAY

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

December, 1909. WILL sits at his desk, reading briefs. His phone rings. WILL answers.

WILL
Law office of Percy & Percy.

PHONE VOICE
May I speak with Mr. Percy?

WILL
Speaking.

PHONE VOICE
Mr. LeRoy Percy?

WILL
This is William Percy. Who is calling?

PHONE VOICE
Governor Noel's office. The Governor must speak with Mr. LeRoy Percy.

WILL straightens in his chair.

WILL
My father is in Arkansas. May I help you with something?

PHONE VOICE
Senator McLaurin died this morning. Unexpectedly, needless to say. The legislature will be convening to elect a successor. Governor Noel has urgent reasons to speak with your father.

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Elderly WILLIS serves dinner to WILL, LEROY, CAMILLE, and JOHN PARKER.

LEROY
I don't want it.

PARKER
Then Vardaman will get it. You want that?

WILLIS stumbles, almost dropping the platter he's carrying.
A silence: DINERS register his reaction.

LEROY

Of course not, Vardaman's the worst
sort of trash. He was a bad governor.
We do not need him in Washington.

PARKER

If you don't stop him, who will?

LEROY ponders the question. WILLIS exits.

PARKER

I've got thousands of acres lying
fallow for the lack of labor. The
coloreds are going north, to factory
jobs. If the likes of Vardaman take
over--LeRoy, we are in trouble.

LEROY

The legislature meets in two months!
How can I mount a campaign in time?

PARKER

The fact of the matter is, you could
have any office in this state, if you
set your mind to it.

WILL

He's right, Father.

PARKER is surprised to get support from WILL.

WILL

We'll put the law practice on hold.
We'll enlist Uncle Walker and Uncle
Willie. And, I don't know, rent a
hotel suite in Jackson. We'll do
whatever it takes.

PARKER

(to LEROY)

It's about time and I'm so glad to
hear it.

(to WILL)

Finally, you're talking like a Percy!

GRAPHIC: SILENT NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

NEWSREEL CAPTION: "JAMES VARDAMAN, LEADING CANDIDATE for the U.S. SENATE from MISSISSIPPI."

VARDAMAN, a charismatic figure with long hair, dressed in a white suit, wildly waves his arms at a rostrum. A LARGE AUDIENCE is seated before him. A CAPTION QUOTES VARDAMAN:

VARDAMAN

If it is necessary, every Negro in the state will be lynched--it will be done to maintain white supremacy!

AUDIENCE stands to give a frenzied ovation.

EXT. EDWARDS HOUSE HOTEL, JACKSON, MI -- DAY

WILL and LEROY get out of a cab in front of the hotel. A BELL HOP takes charge of their several suitcases.

INT. LOBBY, EDWARDS HOUSE HOTEL - DAY

Lobby is bustling with all manner of POLITICIANS, LOBBYISTS, HUCKSTERS, a number of VAGUELY SHADY WOMEN.

LEROY and WILL enter the lobby. Heads turn, a buzz of recognition. A SLICK POL rushes up to LEROY.

SLICK POL

Mr. Percy!

LEROY

There you are, Crump. How're we doing?

CRUMP

We can't talk down here. Too many spies.

INT. SUITE, EDWARDS HOUSE HOTEL -- DAY

WILL, LEROY, and CRUMP sit at a table in the luxurious suite's sitting room.

WILL

What are the chances, Mr. Crump?

CRUMP

Vardaman has the momentum and is seen as the likely winner. But the legislature is a circus, especially the democratic caucus. Governor Noel is promoting a bunch of minor candidates with no chance of winning, to give us time to build Percy support. It's going to be a bit of a brawl, gentlemen.

LEROY

We're in it to win. What do we need?

BRODIE

Cash. Girls. Liquor. Lots of liquor.

WILL

Isn't that--a little risky? The Vardaman people have already cast Father as a high-living Delta aristocrat.

BRODIE

Yes, but those rednecks secretly love the whole aristocrat thing. It's like a seduction, Will...

Two WELL-DRESSED GENTLEMEN enter.

LEROY

Walker! Willie!

LEROY rises, hugs them. WILLIE is grossly overweight.

LEROY

(to CRUMP)

You know my brothers, Walker and Willie.

CRUMP

A pleasure to see you! The leading legal lights of Birmingham and Memphis--with just the right connections to work that mob downstairs.

LEROY

(to WALKER and WILLIE)

My experienced campaign manager informs me that we need girls. And liquor.

CRUMP

And card games.

The THREE PERCY BROTHERS look at each other, grin.

WILLIE

That will not be a problem.

WILL stirs uneasily in his chair.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

WALKER PERCY pours three fingers of bourbon into a tumbler, takes it to a FLORID MAN seated at a card table with a number of POLITICAL HACKS. Cigar smoke tinges the air.

WALKER

There you are, Mr. Robinson.

ROBINSON

(sips)

Ahhh! Trust the Percys to serve only the best.

SOUND OF: A knock on the door. WALKER opens it. TWO VAGUELY SHADY-LOOKING WOMEN enter.

SHADY-LOOKING WOMAN #1

I am Mrs. Carrol Neil, and my friend here is Mrs. Ruby Hall.

WALKER

I'm Walker Percy. What may I--

ROBINSON

(calls out)

Ruby! What's happening at the Lemon Hotel?

(to WALKER)

Her husband manages it. Vardaman's crowd is staying there.

RUBY

Well, we thought you might have an

interest in that...

WALKER

Have a seat, ladies. Drink?

CARROL

(steely smile)

I'd love one.

WILL enters, does a double-take at CARROL and RUBY.

INT. EDWARDS HOUSE DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

WILL, LEROY, WALKER, WILLIE, and CRUMP dine.

WILL

(to WALKER)

Who were those two women in your room,
Uncle Walker?

WALKER

Ladies on the make. Looking to sell
gossip. And maybe more than that.

WILL

They sure seemed that way.

WALKER

I get the distinct impression that many
members of the caucus are for sale. And
that almost everybody else in this town
is as well.

CRUMP

Of course. That's politics.

WILL

Are you proposing that we do some
shopping?

CRUMP

I wouldn't put it quite that way. But
the Percy connections can do favors
that will get us votes. A lot of the
reps are small-town lawyers. Looking
for railroad work. Corporate clients.

WILLIE

We do indeed have those connections.

CRUMP

What we want to avoid, of course, is any suggestion of...

(lowers his voice)

Outright bribery.

WILL

Discreet bribery...?

CRUMP

Yes. But keep something in mind. This election is a contest in the state legislature to fill McLaurin's unexpired term. August after next there will be a statewide primary--a popular vote--to nominate a democrat to fill a full term. Since democrats always win in Mississippi these days, the primary winner will go to Washington.

(pause)

The point is this. Wheeling and dealing with state legislators is one thing. Favors, and so on. But winning votes from the general public is a different ball game. Vardaman as you know is a master demagogue. We can't give him reasons to charge that we bought this election.

LEROY nods, exchanges glances with BROTHERS and WILL.

INT. STATE CAPITOL CHAMBER -- DAY

Two weeks later. In the packed chamber, a caucus vote is underway. LEROY stands near the rostrum. VARDAMAN paces, shaking his mane of hair.

CLERK

The final tally, 87 to 82, goes to LeRoy Percy, senator-elect!

Chamber ERUPTS with cheers, boos. VARDAMAN runs down rostrum steps, runs back up, waving arms, SHOUTING:

VARDAMAN

Black as the night that covers me!
Black as the night that covers me!

CLOSE UP: WILL and CRUMP watching from the floor: They're elated. But VARDAMAN'S mad tantrum rivets them.

WILL
He's out of his mind.

CRUMP
And all the more dangerous.

INT. PERCY FRONT HALL - NIGHT

WALKER and WILLIE PERCY admit guests, almost as if at a nightclub, from a HUGE THRONG of PERCY SUPPORTERS outside the house. LEROY and CAMILLE, both weary, greet GUESTS in the parlor. Jubilant FRIENDS drink, carouse.

BLACK SERVANTS, including a WINSOME TEENAGER, serve drinks.

In a corner of the parlor, WILL observes the goings on. JOHN PARKER approaches him.

PARKER
That was an impressive operation in Jackson. Congratulations.

WILL
Thank you, Mr. Parker.

PARKER
But Vardaman will be tough to beat, in a statewide vote. Are you ready?

WILL
It'll be ugly. But we're determined. Meantime--let's celebrate.

PARKER
Will you be lonely in this house, with your parents in Washington?

WILL makes eye contact with WINSOME TEENAGER, who sends him a fleeting grin.

WILL

No, Mr. Parker. I don't believe I will.

INT. PERCY & PERCY LAW OFFICE -- DAY

Early March, 1910. WILL sits at his desk. CRUMP enters.

CRUMP

Have you heard the news?

WILL

News?

CRUMP

State Senator Bilbo announced that a Percy supporter bribed him to vote for your father.

WILL

Bilbo? That Vardaman hack? Who's the supposed supporter?

CRUMP

Lorraine Dulaney. A man of means with a dubious reputation. He hates Vardaman but he's no friend of your father's. Perfect, in a way. Bilbo wants to get rid of both Dulaney and Percy. He faked the bribery to take down both.

WILL

That is ridiculous.

CRUMP takes a seat, throws up his arms.

CRUMP

It's a strange situation. But get this: Bilbo claims that none other than Ruby Hall and Carrol Neil approached him on Dulaney's behalf. To offer the money.

WILL

Those two wenches? Those *hookers*? Who will believe *them*?

CRUMP

Who knows? By the way, Bilbo says he took the money, \$645 in all, but put

it in a bank vault to preserve it as evidence. He says he has witnesses for all of this. Including our two lady friends.

WILL

Oh, God. The whole thing was a set-up. We should have known. Ruby's husband manages the Lemon Hotel--Vardaman headquarters.

CRUMP

I smell an investigation, Will. Let's get your father on the phone. The accusation that Carol and Ruby were Percy operators, giving out bribes-- we can't let it stand.

INT. STATE CAPITOL ANTEROOM -- DAY

CRUMP, WILL, and WILL'S UNCLE WILLIE sit in the anteroom. Beyond a closed door: SOUNDS OF official proceedings.

WILL

How'd it go testifying before the Senate, Uncle Willie?

WILLIE

The Vardaman goons got some decrepit senator to say that I offered him a consulship in Japan.

WILL

Well. Did you?

CRUMP` laughs: Maybe he did, maybe he didn't.

WILL'S UNCLE WALKER strides into the room carrying a briefcase.

WALKER

I've got it!

CRUMP

The affidavits?

WALKER

From the Chattanooga police. It seems Carrol Neil is well known there as an extortionist, flesh-peddler, and whore. A professional grifter.

WILL

How does that help us?

CRUMP

We show that Bilbo's witnesses are con artists. But you have a point.

WILL raises his eyebrows.

CRUMP

Even if the legislature believes that LeRoy did no wrong--the smear remains.

(grimaces)

The election is still well over a year away. But we've got to get the Senator out before the public. We could get killed by this.

INT. PERCY LIBRARY -- NIGHT

May, 1910. WILL, LEROY, WILLIE, WALKER, and CRUMP, seated with drinks, listen to a radio news report.

RADIO

Senator Percy has reason to celebrate the fact that both houses of the Mississippi Legislature have exonerated him of bribery charges. The revelation that the alleged bribery bills included some that had not been issued at the time of election, cemented the case. However, State Senator Bilbo continues to insist that his story is true, and there are signs that many believe him. Mr. Bilbo is drawing ever larger crowds across the state. His charge that Percy won his senate seat through a conspiracy hatched with fellow magnates over poker games and whiskey in houses of ill repute, seems to have captured the public's imagination.

LEROY turns off the radio.

LEROY

What can we do about that man?

WALKER

Shoot him.

The three BROTHERS laugh. WILL and CRUMP exchange glances.

CRUMP

It's interesting. Bilbo and Vardaman are changing tactics. It's less white supremacy now, more--

WILL

More?

CRUMP

Regular folks versus aristocrats. They are playing the class card.

LEROY

How do we fight that?

CRUMP

It's an image problem. People think you're--English nobility or something.

WILLIE

We are!

WALKER

The family genealogist speaks.

CRUMP

Speak less loudly, please. Vardaman can be genteel, but he does not advertise that fact. He wants the redneck vote and knows how to get it.

WILL

It was a terrible idea. Electing senators with the popular vote. The whole idea was to elect the best and most able. People like Father.

CRUMP

Welcome to the modern world.

WILL

I'm liking it less and less.

CRUMP

What you have to start liking is voters.

A low-key display of agitation among the PERCYS.

INT. PERCY CAMPAIGN CAR -- DAY

May, 1911. LEROY, WILL, and CRUMP sit in the back seat. Car is moving through hilly countryside. Drizzle falls.

WILL

What's the next stop, Mr. Crump?

CRUMP

A revival camp outside of Black Hawk.
A rough crowd, I'm afraid.

LEROY

Plenty of rough crowds in these hills.

CRUMP

Not to be alarming, but I heard that
somebody might try to rotten-egg you.

WILL pulls a pistol from his waistband. LEROY gives him a faint, pensive smile.

WILL

I'll use it. If I have to.

(pause)

You're looking at me the way you used
to look at Mur, when she shoved the
poker into the fire, in case of bur-
glars. You look amused. And doubtful.

LEROY stares through his window at drizzle.

EXT. REVIVAL CAMP - DAY

Two hundred roughly dressed REDNECKS mingle in a clearing in the woods before a crude wooden platform. WILL walks

through the CROWD attracting venomous stares. He comes across a pair of unattended wicker hampers. His nose wrinkles. WILL glances around, then opens a hamper lid: DIRTY EGGS. WILL closes the hamper, pulls his gun, crosses his arms across his chest, the pistol dangling from a hand. A BYSTANDER watches.

BYSTANDER

What's the problem, mister?

WILL

There is no problem.

LEROY mounts the stage. From the CROWD, a GUTTURAL HISS.

LEROY'S eyes glint. The CROWD quiets.

LEROY sees WILL standing with pistol by the hampers. They nod at each other.

INT. PRIVATE CARD ROOM, TENNESEE CLUB, MEMPHIS -- NIGHT

June, 1911. WILLIE plays poker with FOUR FELLOW TYCOONS.

TYCOON # 1

You'd think it was Bilbo running for the senate, not Vardaman. Bilbo's dominating Southern politics just running for lieutenant governor.

TYCOON # 2

I've never seen anything like it. It's mob rule. Almost like Socialism.

TYCOON # 1

A dangerous trend. You can feel it walking down the street. A new arrogance among the white trash. They think they're as good as we are!

TYCOONS snort, laugh.

WILLIE

It's intolerable.

(pause)

Especially because of what it's doing to my brother. Jeering him simply

because he's a gentleman.

TYCOON # 3

It affects us all. Bilbo is to blame.
(folds his hand of cards)
He must be killed.

A silence. TYCOONS exchange angry stares.

TYCOON # 3

Let's draw straws. To decide which one
of us will do it.

Grim nods around the table, with one dissenter, TYCOON # 4:
He shakes his head.

TYCOON # 3

We'll find out his travel plans, which
train he's on. When the train enters a
suitable county--where we run the
court--Bilbo will, ah, misbehave. And
one of us will shoot him.

TYCOON # 4

Gentlemen, with all due respect I must
bow out of this particular adventure.
I have five children, a frail wife,
and am moreover a terrible shot.

(smiles)

But I can help you out. I'll prepare
the straws.

INT. FRONT HALL OF A LARGE HOUSE -- NIGHT

The same night. WILLIE enters.

WILLIE

Caroline!

A beautiful, smartly dressed WOMAN, 20 years younger than
WILLIE with an athletic spring in her step, enters the
hall. WILLIE kisses her. A SMALL BOY, age six, enters.

WILLIE

Honey, we drew straws at the club to-
night. To decide who goes on a mission.

CAROLINE

A mission.

WILLIE

Yes. And guess who won?

(to BOY)

Daddy's going on a special train ride!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM -- DAY

Some days later. WILLIE polishes a pair of ornately engraved pistols. BOY enters, stares wide-eyed at the guns.

WILLIE

Don't worry, Junior. It's what we call a public service.

INT. WILLIE'S FRONT HALL -- DAY

Three days later. WILLIE enters. CAROLINE, JUNIOR rush in.

WILLIE

Some assassin I turned out to be. Bilbo didn't get on the train!

INT. SMALL-TOWN HOTEL LOBBY -- NIGHT

July, 1911. LEROY, WILL, WALKER, CRUMP, and a YOUNG MAN [WALKER'S son ROY, age 21] enter the lobby, their faces grim. A CLERK looks up at them.

CLERK

Welcome to Lauderdale Springs, gentlemen.

WALKER

We have rooms booked under Percy.

CLERK

I knew that the moment I saw you.

INT. LEROY'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The PERCYS and CRUMP confer in the cramped room.

WALKER

I'm still upset about this. Why are we

dignifying Bilbo with a debate?

CRUMP

Because Vardaman won't debate. And with Bilbo setting the agenda across the state, he has to be answered.

WALKER

He's still making corruption charges!

LEROY

Which is why I must lay him low. Boys--let's get some sleep.

INT. WILL'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

WILL lies on his bed, fully clothed, reading poetry.

A SHARP RAP on the door. WILL gets up, opens the door. WALKER barges in, seething.

WALKER

Willie's not here, which means I must talk with you.

WILL

Shoot.

WALKER laughs, a bit MANIACALLY.

WALKER

That's exactly it. We have to shoot Bilbo. Kill him.

WILL

You're serious.

WALKER

Oh, yes. Willie tried. He failed. So now it's our turn.

(pulls out a pistol)

Tomorrow morning. At breakfast. He's staying in this fleabag hotel.

WILL

All right. How--do we do it?

WALKER

The usual way. We make him reach for his gun.

WILL

And Father?

WALKER

He's the candidate so he stays out of it. It's you, me, and Roy.

INT. WILL'S ROOM -- NIGHT

WILL, alone, looks into the mirror of the room's armoire. With a lunging movement he grabs something from his waistband: a PISTOL: he trains it on himself in the mirror.

SOUND OF: A thwarted click.

WILL

Damn. The safety lock. The stupid safety lock!

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- DAY

Six o'clock in the morning. WILL and ROY pause outside of the door leading to the dining room.

WILL

Roy--isn't this is a little crazy?

ROY

It's our honor. Isn't it?

WILL

What if Bilbo kills all three of us?

ROY

Don't worry. I'll get him.

WILL

For the sake of the Percy line, you better.

INT. MODEST HOTEL DINING ROOM -- DAY

An undistinguished-looking MAN [BILBO] sits by himself, slurping oatmeal from a bowl. Only one other table is occupied, by a FAMILY of four.

WILL and ROY enter, stare at BILBO, sit a few yards away. BILBO glances at them, resumes slurping oatmeal.

WALKER swaggers into the dining room, his footfalls loud. He appraises the situation for a moment. WILL and ROY put hands near their waistbands. WALKER nods at them.

FATHER of the FAMILY having breakfast stares at WALKER, who exudes hostility and menace. A WAITER comes in, stares.

WALKER
(bellows)

Who is that coward I see sitting over there? I think I'll KILL HIM!

BILBO continues to slurp: As if nothing had happened.

FATHER hustles FAMILY out of the room. WAITER ducks out.

WALKER
Bilbo, you coward! Defend yourself!

BILBO continues to slurp.

WALKER'S bravado deflates. Disgusted, he beckons WILL and ROY. They exit.

INT. TRAIN SPEEDING THROUGH COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

Late July, 1911. LEROY, WILL, and CRUMP sit in a compartment. They look totally exhausted.

LEROY
We've done our best. Crisscrossed the state since March. God knows how many speeches, rallies. I've stared down killers with guns, seen sheriffs get stabbed by hecklers, I've even kissed babies... What more can I do?

CRUMP
A few more days of campaigning. And then it's over.

LEROY

What are the chances?

WILL

There's no chance, Father.

CRUMP

Don't say that.

WILL

I'm often accused of living in an unreal world. Poetry, and so on. But this much I know: We are entering dark times. And that is the reality. The popularity of men like Vardaman and Bilbo could not be starker proof. Scoundrels are taking over. And why? Because our democracy allows it. A redneck's vote is as good as yours or mine.

(pause)

Unfortunately, we're outnumbered.

LEROY

Well. We tried. I thank both of you.

LEROY smiles at CRUMP, then at WILL.

WILL smiles back. He NOTICES SOMETHING:

CLOSE ON LEROY: A new gentleness in his eyes. Approval. Pride. Respect.

EXT. GREENVILLE NEWSTAND -- DAY

The *Greenville Democrat-Times* is selling briskly. PEOPLE stand around grimly reading it, their hands clenched to the paper. The headline wobbles in the various grips:

**VARDAMAN LANDSLIDE
BILBO GETS RECORD VOTE**

TWO ELDERLY REDNECKS gleefully shuffle by. A GENTLEMAN buying a paper glares at them.

GENTLEMAN

What's so funny?

ELDERLY REDNECK # 1 purses his lips, squirts tobacco juice to the pavement.

ELDERLY REDNECK # 1

Bottom rail's on top! And with Bilbo,
it's gwiner *stay that way*.

INT. WILLIE AND CAROLINE'S DINING ROOM -- DAY

Late April, 1912. WILLIE, CAROLINE, WILLIE JR., and TWO YOUNGER CHILDREN (WALKER and LADY) eat breakfast. WILLIE looks a little under the weather.

CAROLINE

Maybe you should cancel the trip.

WILLIE

It's an important case.

WILLIE JR.

Daddy, are you going to shoot the bad man again?

WILLIE

No, not this time. I should have done it the last time, Son.

CAROLINE

Let's not discuss it in front of the children.

WILLIE

They're Percys. They should know what that means.

(winces)

Something's wrong in my gut.

CAROLINE

Probably you just need to lose weight.

WILLIE

Probably.

INT. PERCY FRONT HALL, GREENVILLE -- DAY

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

May, 1912. The phone rings. CAMILLE walks in, answers.

CAMILLE

Hello? Why hello, Caroline.

CAROLINE (OC)

Willie's away on business and came down with something, we don't know what, but it's serious enough that he's in a hospital. I'm going up there today.

CAMILLE

Oh, dear.

CAROLINE (OC)

Don't worry, the doctors say it's not serious. They just don't know what it is yet. Willie probably just strained something because he's so overweight.

CAMILLE

(smiles)

Have a good trip. Give him our love.

INT. LEROY'S SENATE OFFICE -- DAY

May, 1912. A PRETTY SECRETARY sits in the reception area. Beyond an ajar door, a stately office, no one at the desk. The phone rings. SECRETARY answers.

SECRETARY

Senator Percy's office.

CAMILLE (OC)

Charlotte, it's Mrs. Percy. I must speak with him.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Percy, I'm sorry, he's on the floor debating...

CAMILLE (OC)

Send someone to get him, please. Immediately.

INT. WILL'S OFFICE AT PERCY & PERCY -- DAY

WILL is on the phone.

WILL

He *died*?

CAMILLE (OC)

The doctors were so confused. Caroline should have taken him back to Memphis.

WILL

Father? Have you told Father?

CAMILLE (OC)

Charlotte is getting him from the floor right now, no--he doesn't know. Will. Please call Walker.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF BIG-TIME LAW OFFICE -- DAY

A SECRETARY answers a phone.

SECRETARY

Walker Percy's office.

WILL (OC)

This is Will Percy. I must speak with my uncle.

SECRETARY

He's at home today, Mr. Percy. Do you have the number?

INT. ORNATE, GLOOMY STUDY -- DAY

On a desk, a phone rings. A PERSON lying on a couch stirs, groggily sits up. It's WALKER, unshaven, disheveled, wearing a dressing gown.

WALKER staggers to the phone, answers.

WALKER

Yes?

WILL (OC)

Walker? It's Will.

WALKER

Yes, what do you want?

WILL (OC)

Walker, are you all right?

WALKER

Yes--I'm--just... Actually, I'm having a rough day.

WILL (OC)

I'm sorry to hear that. Walker, I have bad news. Willie died.

WALKER

I don't understand.

WILL (OC)

Willie passed away suddenly while on a business trip.

WALKER

I see. He died.

WALKER clutches his hair, emits a semi-deranged HOWL.

INT. EPISCOPAL CHURCH -- DAY

Church is packed. PERCY FAMILY sit in the front row. A BISHOP conducts a funeral service.

INT. WILLIE AND CAROLINE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Reception rooms are thronged with mourners following the funeral. WALKER and LEROY sit next to each other in a corner of the living room.

WALKER

You remember when the three of us went up to the Mayo Clinic?

LEROY nods.

WALKER

I was going through that rough patch. My nerves. You and Willie took me up there to see the mind doctors.

(grins)

But neither of you exactly trusted the idea of a mind doctor. So you decided to test them. There we were, the three of us seated before the experts in that first interview. And Willie asked them: "Can you tell just by looking at us which one is having problems?"

LEROY

The doctors guessed that it was me.

LEROY and WALKER share an intimate laugh. WILL approaches.

LEROY

(to WILL)

We're remembering old times together.

WALKER

(quietly furious)

I blame Bilbo and Vardaman for this. It crippled Willie's health. Out of the blue, he gets this--this *peculiar disease*.

WILL

I guess that Bilbo is evil enough to cause kidney failure. It's as good an explanation as anything else.

WALKER stares blankly into space.

WILL

Where are the children?

LEROY

Upstairs.

INT. NURSERY -- DAY

A BLACK NURSE attends WILLIE JR. and his younger siblings WALKER and LADY. A knock. WILL enters. He nods at NURSE.

WILL

(to CHILDREN)

Hello.

CHILDREN

Hi.

WILL

Willie, let's talk a minute.

WILL leads WILLIE to the other side of the room, sits him down, seats himself.

WILL

Willie--what do you want to be when you grow up?

WILLIE JR.

(dazedly)

I don't know.

WILL

Well, that's fine. You have plenty of time to decide.

(smiles)

I'll tell you this, though. As a Percy, you have a responsibility.

WILLIE JR.

I do?

WILL

Yes, indeed. You must carry on the Percy line.

ACT III

INT. GREENVILLE TRAIN STATION -- DAY

June, 1914. WILL, AGE 29, and CARRIE STERN stand on the platform. A train HISSES.

CARRIE

You make your escape. How I envy you!

WILL

Dog-bite cases. Mule thievery. And Mother and Father. It's not escape. It's survival.

CARRIE

Send me a postcard from Taormina.

EXT. HORSE-DRAWN OPEN CARRIAGE -- DAY

Summer, 1914. WILL and an ENGLISH GENTLEMAN ride in the carriage up a winding dirt road on the outskirts of Taormina, Sicily.

WILL

Norman, what is he the Baron of?

NORMAN

A minor noble family, of Mecklenberg.
But plenty of cash.

The carriage passes through an ornate iron gateway. A large villa looms ahead.

INT. VILLA ENTRY -- DAY

WILL and NORMAN enter the villa. A party is in progress. Eccentric EUROPEAN GENTLEMEN of varying ages chat, drink, argue, laugh. NORMAN leads WILL to a STOUT MAN, about 60, who effusively greets NORMAN.

STOUT MAN

Ah! My dear Norman Douglas!

DOUGLAS

I present to you William Percy of Mississippi, a rather drab slab of the American South but not without its charms, which include remnants of antebellum grandeur, whence William hails--or at least he so claims. William, please meet Baron Wilhelm von Glöeden. Willy--meet Will!

WILL

Most pleased to meet you.

DOUGLAS

Will suggests that he descends from the Percys of Northumbria...

WILL

Family lore, from my Uncle Willie. I

must say, I just love your photographs.

GLÖEDEN

Well then. After we have supplied you
with drink, you must see the terrace.

GLÖEDEN waves at a row of open French doors, plucks two
glasses of Champagne from the tray of a HANDSOME YOUNG
WAITER.

Glasses in hand, WILL and DOUGLAS go out to an expansive
terrace. In the center a vine-bedecked rectangular
colonnade encloses a large swimming pool. Beyond the
colonnade the Mediterranean distantly sparkles. Mt. Etna
rears into the sky.

Between pillars, life-size classical statues of garlanded
nude youths decorate the colonnade. One of them MOVES
SLIGHTLY.

DOUGLAS

Better than the photos, eh, old boy?

WILL

Most charming. Fascinating!

DOUGLAS

Old Krupp would have loved this party.
A shame, that a Marxist journalist--
that von Harden creature--could drive
him to suicide. Time was, the masses
had no inkling of our ways. The upper
classes had nothing to fear.

WILL

(surveys party, grins)

This looks fairly fearless to me.

DOUGLAS

Here we're safe, mainly because the
boys and their families need the
money. No one complains. But in the
Protestant countries...

WILL

Everyone complains. The feminists, the
moral purity types, the socialists,

all the meddling do-gooders. I know. It started with the La Bouchere Amendment in England, I suppose, outlawing child prostitution. Dear old Oscar Wilde became the first victim.

DOUGLAS

And then George Woodberry got the boot from Columbia in New York. The best Uranian poet since Whitman. He fled here to Italy, of course.

(raises Champagne glass)

To George and Krupp!

WILL

(raises glass)

To Oscar!

They clink glasses, drink.

EXT. TERRACE -- NIGHT

Torches cast shadowy light across the terrace. Around the pool INEBRIATED GUESTS chat up GARLANDED YOUTHS, now released from statue duty. An ELDERLY GENTLEMAN chases a SHRIEKING BOY, who jumps in the pool. GENTLEMAN follows. Beyond the colonnade, on lawn, INDISTINCT BODIES fondle in murk. WILL and DOUGLAS watch.

WILL

This is a bit much.

DOUGLAS

Oh, come on!

WILL

Bear with me. I am not used to this sort of thing. Where I come from we call it rutting.

DOUGLAS

Rutting? How marvelous.

WILL stares at a SLENDER BOY sitting by the edge of the pool, his feet in the water. On either side TWO GUESTS vie for his attention. BOY is indifferent, sullen.

DOUGLAS

That's Vittorio. The beauty of the bunch and he knows it. He actually speaks some English. His grandfather died fighting for Garibaldi. The family, alas--fell on hard times.

WILL

Will you introduce me?

EXT. MARBLE BENCH -- NIGHT

WILL and VITTORIO sit on the bench savoring a view of the moonlit Mediterranean. The party distantly echoes.

WILL

The wine-dark sea.

VITTORIO

Ah. Homer.

WILL

(laughs)

What are you doing here?

VITTORIO

I am poor.

WILL

I'm climbing the mountain tomorrow.
Will you join me?

VITTORIO

No. But you can kiss me.

(pause)

For two dollars.

WILL plunges his face into his hands. VITTORIO stands.

VITTORIO

Good-bye Will Percy from Mississippi.

WILL watches VITTORIO strut back to the party, buttocks silvered in the moonlight.

EXT. DUSTY CAFÉ -- DAY

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILL sits at a table with NORMAN DOUGLAS, drinking coffee.
A horse-drawn carriage stands in the street.

DOUGLAS

The problem with you is, you want love.

WILL nods.

DOUGLAS

There is no love! Not for the likes of
us.

WILL

Von Glöeden has devotees.

DOUGLAS

Money! Can't you get that through your
head? It's *paid for*.

WILL

Must it be?

DOUGLAS

Well then, find a rich boy to love
you. Good luck.

WILL

I once loved a rich boy named Bixby.
But. He got married.

DOUGLAS

You see. That's what happens.

WILL broods.

WILL

You won't climb the mountain with me.

DOUGLAS

Are you mad? What is this quest you
have, with that ridiculous volcano?

WILL

The sunrise from the summit. Baedeker
gives it two stars.

DOUGLAS

What a dutiful tourist you are.

WILL goes to the carriage, gets in, waves sourly to DOUGLAS.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

Late September, 1914. WILL, LEROY and CAMILLE sip drinks.

WILL

All told, it was a wonderful trip.
(lights a cigarette)
But I had an eerie moment on Mt. Etna.

CAMILLE

Eerie?

WILL

On the way up the donkey-boys--mind you, age 60--got very drunk. I asked the guide why. He said they were scared because this was the first ascent since the most recent eruption. And then he said--who do you suppose had made last ascent *before* that eruption?

LEROY and CAMILLE raise eyebrows.

WILL

An Austrian grand duke, the guide said. Now, I wasn't all that interested in dukes. The goal was to see the famed sunrise, and the crater Empedocles tumbled into. But the guide added that this duke had just been assassinated. Two days before. In Sarajevo.

LEROY

Franz Ferdinand.

WILL

At the time I didn't know that it meant--war.

(pause)

I want to serve.

LEROY

Serve? We haven't declared war.

WILL

Not yet.

CAMILLE

You mean--you want to fight?

WILL

(nods)

I can't fight until we declare. But Herbert Hoover needs volunteers for his food-relief program. That would give me a good look at the situation. And then, when we declare, I'll return for officer's training.

LEROY

(frowns)

You don't weigh enough to qualify, Will.

WILL

Not now. But I'll fix that!

LEROY and CAMILLE exchange puzzled glances.

INT. HERBERT HOOVER'S BELGIAN HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

February, 1917. WILL sits at a desk in an office, speaking into a phone. The office is crowded with fellow food-relief volunteers at desks.

WILL

Non, monsieur, vous ne comprenez pas, je suis Americain, pas Allemagne, et notre office, de Herbert Hoover, nous avons des alimentations divers pour les pauvres...

A MESSENGER BOY rushes to WILL'S desk with an envelope.

WILL

(into phone)

Pardonnez moi.

WILL takes the envelope. It's a sealed telegram. He tears it open, STARES. An adjacent OFFICEMATE looks on.

OFFICEMATE

Bad news?

WILL

My Uncle Walker... He died.

(into phone)

Nous parlerons demain. Merci.

WILL hangs up.

OFFICEMATE

Sorry to hear it. Well, you'll be going home soon.

WILL

(dazedly)

How do you figure that?

OFFICEMATE

When we declare war. In a month or two. You'll have to go home to enlist. Officers school--right?

WILL

Right. Right.

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- DAY

May, 1917. WILL and LEROY sit at the garden table.

WILL

Why did he do it?

LEROY

What's the medical term? Melancholia? Depression?

WILL

I don't think that quite explains...

LEROY

Why a man in the prime of life takes a shotgun to himself?

(pause)

Your mother thinks that Willie's death depressed him. And that the election

loss depressed him. The truth of the matter is that Walker had a long history of depression. You know the Mayo Clinic story?

WILL nods.

LEROY

It runs in the family, Will. Madness. Mania. Suicide. The "crouching beast," we call it. It's almost like a curse.

(smiles faintly)

Think of Cousin Kate. She had a mania. My uncle LeRoy Pope went crazy. My great-grand-father went crazy. Hopped in that creek for no good reason. An iron kettle tied to his chest, to sink him. And he did sink.

WILL

This conversation is taking a--

LEROY

Morbid turn? I'm trying to explain why your mother and I want grandchildren. It's a question of--well, of beating the odds, I suppose you could say.

WILL

We have Willie's two boys, and Walker's son Roy, who has two baby boys. How's Roy doing?

LEROY

I believe that he and Mattie Sue are holding up pretty well.

(sighs)

You know why I bring all of this up.

WILL

You think I'm unsuited to go to war.

LEROY

Camille and I don't want to lose you. We've already lost so much.

WILL

I think you're just jealous.

They stare at each other.

LEROY

Right. I never got to fight in a war.
And so I'm jealous.

(lights a cigar)

To get into officers school you have
to pass a physical exam. To pass the
exam you have to meet a minimum weight.
To be frank about it, Son, you're too
skinny.

WILL

I have a secret plan. It involves
quarts of cream and seven meals a day.

LEROY smiles.

WILL

I might be crazy, just as crazy as all
the Percy nutcases, but I intend to
fight in this war. And I will.

EXT. WOODED FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE -- NIGHT

Late September, 1918. SOUNDS OF: EXPLOSIONS, BOTH DISTANT
AND NEARBY.

In lieutenant's uniform, WILL, age 33, walks alone down a
narrow road, passing assorted AMERICAN SOLDIERS, war
matériel.

ARTILLERY SHELLS EXPLODE ALONG THE ROAD. SOLDIERS FALL,
SPEWING GORE.

WILL continues walking: EERILY UNFAZED.

WILL comes to an open area devoid of shelter.

Ahead, the CREST OF A HILLTOP.

AMERICAN SOLDIERS suddenly SWARM FROM HILLTOP, in retreat.
A COLONEL tries to reorganize them.

WILL rushes forward, oblivious to ENEMY FIRE WHIZZING BY.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILL

(to SOLDIERS)

We must hold this hill! Get down and
fire!

WILL and SOLDIERS drop to stomachs, RETURN FIRE.

From a distance, COLONEL admiringly observes.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

GRAPHIC: Society Page of the *Greenville Democrat-Times*:

HEADLINE:

Gala Fetes Greenville Sons
War Heroes Honored

PHOTO: WILL in captain's uniform bedecked with medals.

PHOTO CAPTION: "France awarded Capt. William A. Percy two medals, the *Croix de Guerre* with Gold and Silver Stars, and *L'Ordre du Corps d'Armée*. Belgium awarded him *Le Médaille du Roi Albert*."

A FLASH indicates the TAKING OF THE PHOTO. IMAGE becomes:

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM -- NIGHT

Early December, 1918. Amid a FESTIVE CROWD sprinkled with MEN IN UNIFORM, WILL chats with a FELLOW VETERAN, who sports the Distinguished Service Cross. A coterie of attractive YOUNG WOMEN ogle them from fifteen feet away.

FELLOW VETERAN

When I left this town, people thought
I was a good-for-nothing drunk. Now I'm
a he-man hunk.

WILL

(laughs)

Wish I could say the same, Gervys.

GERVYS

Hell, you've got those medals. You walked through enemy fire like it was harmless as--as confetti!

WILL

I just pretended that it wasn't real.

GERVYS

That's a nice trick, pretending that bullets and blood and guts aren't real.

(smiles)

It is true that a lot of folks don't know what to think of you.

WILL

What do you mean?

GERVYS

Usually it's the artist types that don't make it. You know. Poets die--nobly.

WILL

Oh, so I'm a disappointment. I let down the town!

They laugh. LEROY approaches, his eyes twinkling.

LEROY

You boys have some admirers.

GERVYS grins at the YOUNG WOMEN, who flirtatiously smile back. GERVYS walks over to them.

LEROY

You're a hero, Son. Go for it.

WILL

Those girls aren't good enough, Father. They don't come close to Mother, or to Mur. You know that.

The twinkle dies in LEROY's eyes.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

Early December, 1920. LEROY, CAMILLE, WILL, JOHN PARKER, and PARKER'S WIFE take glasses of Champagne from a BUTLER'S tray. LEROY raises his glass to PARKER.

LEROY

To the governor-elect of Louisiana!

All toast PARKER.

PARKER

Thank you, thank you. I must confess, I'm a little surprised.

LEROY

Surprised? Why?

PARKER

The same element that took away your senate seat almost defeated me. Call it the Bilbo vote.

WILL and LEROY flinch slightly.

LEROY

Almost, maybe. But you prevailed.

PARKER

Yes, and naturally I'm proud of it. But I tell you, LeRoy--there's something new in politics these days. We saw the beginnings of it back in 1911 when you faced Vardaman with Bilbo as his pit bull. As I campaigned last summer and through the fall I really began to feel it.

(pause)

Camille, tell me something--do you sense a growing animosity toward Catholics?

CAMILLE

My goodness, John. What makes you ask?

(to PARKER'S WIFE)

Cecille--what on earth could your dear husband mean?

CECILLE

Perhaps now is not the time to...

LEROY

Well of course now is the time. You and Camille were both raised Catholic, Cecille. If John can pose that question to Camille, then surely it must be of concern to you--and to all of us. Are people muttering about the pope down in New Orleans?

PARKER

In Atlanta, LeRoy. And it is spreading across the South.

LEROY

You don't mean that bastard thing that calls itself the Klan?

(stares at PARKER)

That is what you mean.

(sips Champagne)

Camille, if I may reply to John on your behalf. The answer is no. Here in Greenville, in Washington County, there is not a trace of the Ku Klux Klan and not a trace of bigotry against the Catholic Church. And there never will be. My father kept the Klan away from these parts after the War--and that was the real Klan, not impostors in Atlanta. We certainly won't allow them to make any trouble now.

PARKER

But you do see how the Klan is attractive to the Bilbo element. And you can't deny that that element is a force.

LEROY

At the moment I just want to savor the fact that my friend from boyhood will soon be taking charge of the great state of Louisiana.

(to BUTLER)

More Champagne!

INT. STYLISH APARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY -- NIGHT

Late December, 1920. The Manhattan skyline shimmers beyond windows. WILL sits with HUGER JERVEY. They sip martinis. A phonograph plays opera.

HUGER

Do you anticipate the new year?

WILL

I suppose. As long as I can get away from Greenville on a regular basis.

HUGER

You've never had any problem with that.

(pause)

I'm worried, Will. There's an ugly new mood in the country. I'm afraid it will do harm to our kind.

WILL

We've never been entirely safe.

HUGER

Yes. But there is this new--it's almost like a masculinity crisis.

WILL laughs.

HUGER

I'm serious. You see it in all the talk about immigrants from the backwaters of Europe. They're "effeminate, womanish." They corrode Anglo-Saxon virility. Even quite well-educated people bemoan what they see as the extinction of colonial bloodlines. "Race suicide," all that, with the influx of barbarian blood.

WILL

But what does it have to do with us?

HUGER

Fear of degeneracy is on the rise. If upper-class intellectuals like Madison Grant and those Brahmins up in Boston are practically having nervous breakdowns over the state of American manhood, what do they think of queers?

WILL
(nods)

Not much. Roosevelt ordered the crack-down on the queens that were picking up sailors in Newport. That kind of thing hadn't happened before.

HUGER

They arrested an Episcopal priest, three *patres familias*, and two blokes from Bailey's Beach. Of course, the cops had to call it off after the trials exposed their methods--using teenage boys to entrap the victims. But not in time to stop it from spreading to Harvard. Lowell expelled two kids. The one whose father is a congressman committed suicide!

WILL

Maybe it's the increased visibility. All the veterans home from the war, bringing with them a taste for taboo sex, newly aware that there are thousands of others like them.

(pause)

Yes, I agree. The hunt for so-called degenerates is on. It's one reason the new Ku Klux Klan has grown so fast. Father isn't concerned about Greenville. But I wonder.

INT. PERCY LAW OFFICE -- DAY

February, 1922. WILL sits at his desk, working. A MAN enters.

WILL

Hello, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Have you ever heard of someone named Colonel Joe Camp?

WILL

No.

JIMMY

He recruits for the Ku Klux Klan.

WILL

A Klan colonel. So he's not a real colonel. Why would I ever have heard of him?

JIMMY

He's coming here in two weeks, and he's booked the courthouse.

WILL leaps to his feet.

WILL

What?

JIMMY nods. He hands WILL a flier.

JIMMY

Fliers went up today, all over town.

WILL charges out of his office and into LEROY'S. JIMMY follows. LEROY looks up.

WILL

The Klan is coming to town. Jimmy says that they have booked the courthouse.

LEROY

(incredulous)

That's not possible.

JIMMY hands LEROY a flier.

JIMMY

It says it right there. March 1, at the courthouse. Colonel Camp will welcome new recruits to the Klan. Ten bucks buys a membership.

LEROY

(to WILL)

Who the hell authorized the courthouse?

WILL shrugs.

LEROY

My God, it's somebody we know! Somebody we know in county government is working for the Klan! Who could it be?

LEROY picks up his phone.

LEROY

I'm going to stop this right now.

WILL

Wait.

LEROY hangs up the phone.

WILL

Let's find out more. We don't know how organized they are.

JIMMY

It's the "invisible" empire. Secret. The town could be riddled with the bastards.

LEROY glares into space.

LEROY

I guess I owe John Parker an apology.
(he thinks)
You're right. We have to flush them out, see who they are. And then go after them with everything we've got.

INT. GREENVILLE COURTHOUSE -- NIGHT

March 1, 1922. The courtroom is packed with TENSE WHITE MEN, many of them conspicuously armed. A TALL MAN wearing a white Stetson hat talks to a knot of SURLY REDNECKS just below the dais. A BUZZ of many heated conversations fills the large room.

LEROY enters with WILL and the county SHERIFF. The BUZZ quiets somewhat. LEROY and SHERIFF mount the dais.

LEROY

I propose that Sheriff Nicholson chair

this meeting. Are there any objections?

The CROWD RUMBLES. SHERIFF takes that as an endorsement. He sits in the judge's chair. LEROY remains standing by the dais. WILL finds a seat further back.

SHERIFF

Colonel Camp has come to address the citizens of Washington County. Colonel, you may proceed.

TALL MAN with Stetson mounts the dais.

CAMP

(booming voice)

Countrymen, I come bearing terrible news. There is a conspiracy afoot in the highest places to deny you your God-given liberties and rights. It is a conspiracy that originates in Rome and penetrates all corridors of power, in Washington, D.C., in New Orleans, in Memphis, and right here, I tell you, in the fine community of Greenville!

CLOSE ON: WILL. His lips curl.

CAMP

Let me remind you of certain facts, deadly facts! Who killed President Garfield? An agent of Rome, a Catholic! Who killed President McKinley? Another Papist assassin! Are you aware that his Satanic majesty the Pope recently purchased large parcels of land from which to attack West Point and Washington? If you did not know that, you now do. Are you aware that nuns in convents sell their flesh to damn the weak to hell? They do!

CROWD stirs. A number of MUFFLED OATHS.

CAMP

Now let me point out more facts. Who is organized in this country? Catholics! And the Jews! Even the niggers

are organized! So let me then ask, who is not organized? I'll tell you. Real Americans, true Americans, are not organized! And I am here to change that sad state of affairs! Before it's too late! Before the Pope attacks!

A smattering of applause. LEROY frowns.

EXT. COURTHOUSE -- NIGHT

A DEPUTY SHERIFF stands guard on the steps, listening to echoes of CAMP'S tirade. He reaches into his open collar, extracts a crucifix on a chain. He kisses it.

INT. COURTHOUSE -- NIGHT

Half an hour later. CAMP winds up his address.

CAMP

I close with an observation, my friends. The sacred order to which I belong, and which I hope and expect many of you will join, is a watchful order. We are everywhere, and we watch, and we take note. And what do we see? We see sin! We see drinking, gambling, whoring! Sinners beware! We know your wicked ways!

(pause)

Thank you.

Light applause.

MAN IN CROWD

Percy! Percy!

SEVERAL MEN IN CROWD

Percy! Percy!

Calls for LEROY to speak become a LOUD CHANT.

LEROY mounts the dais.

LEROY
(to CAMP)

I will answer your.

CAMP

There's no need for that.

CROWD

PERCY! PERCY!

SHERIFF bangs a gavel.

SHERIFF

The Senator will speak.

LEROY

After the War, in a time of great distress, the Ku Klux Klan served an honorable purpose in parts of the South. This new Klan--this so-called Klan--what purpose does it serve? I understand that to join, one pays ten dollars for that dubious privelege. And I understand that upon joining, members are expected to purchase all manner of robes, trinkets, toys. Into whose pockets does this money go? We hear of a feud between factions in Atlanta over that money. What is their real purpose? They are swindlers who want your money!

CROWD stirs.

LEROY

And now these swindlers propose to grace the streets of Greenville with hooded, robed parades. What is their purpose? To strike fear into our hearts! Who will be most afraid? Our Negroes, our Catholics, our Jews. Why should these fine people be afraid?

(pause)

Protestant, Catholic and Jewish taxpayers paid for this fine courthouse in which we meet. Is this building therefore tainted? I have a Jewish business partner, lending money at six percent. Should we fear so generous a rate? The police force of this town includes a Catholic officer. Is the Pope creeping up on us?

LAUGHTER.

LEROY

I believe I heard the Colonel--he calls himself a colonel, of what army I know not--say that the Klan protects Southern womanhood. Since when has Southern womanhood needed protection from men in masks?

LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE. CAMP winces.

LEROY

Do we want Greenville to waste away for the lack of labor in our fields, as colored folks flee to escape the robes?

CROWD HISSES.

LEROY

My fellow citizens, this colonel here, this fraud, he warns us that his people have secret spies watching our daily lives, prying into our private affairs. In the United States of America do we want snoops to tell us how to behave?

PEOPLE IN CROWD

No! No!

CROWD IGNITES WITH ANGER. CAMP takes a step backward.

LEROY

Do we want crooks in Atlanta dictating our future?

CROWD SURGES TOWARD DAIS, fists in the air. CAMP pales. SHERIFF bangs gavel.

CAMP

(to SHERIFF)

I believe-- I believe I'll return to my hotel.

SHERIFF

That's fine with me.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

CAMP

And I will need protection.

SHERIFF

(shouts)

Get Boots! He's out front!

DEPUTY SHERIFF BOOTS wades through the crowd.

SHERIFF

(to CAMP, loudly)

Deputy Boots will escort you. But be aware--Boots is an agent of Rome!

WILD, VIOLENT LAUGHTER.

LEROY surveys the scene with grim satisfaction.

WILL stands.

WILL

I propose a resolution denouncing the
Ku Klux Klan!

SHERIFF

Is it the sense of this meeting that
we denounce the Klan?

CROWD

YES!

SHERIFF

The Klan is hereby denounced!

BOOTS leads away a cringing CAMP.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

Later that night. LEROY, WILL, CAMILLE drink coffee.

WILL

Father, I predict that your speech
will come to be seen as historic.

LEROY

Somebody had to say those things. I
guess I'm glad it was me.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

(smiles at CAMILLE)

I must defend my petite Papiste.

INT. PERCY LAW OFFICE -- DAY

Several days later. WILL works at his desk. His phone rings. He answers.

WILL

Percy and Percy.

WILL listens.

WILL

Yes, sir. Please hold the line.

WILL walks into LEROY'S office.

WILL

The editor of the Atlantic Monthly is on the phone. He wants to publish your speech!

LEROY picks up his phone.

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Some days later. LEROY, CAMILLE, WILL dine.

CAMILLE

Cecille Parker telephoned today. She said that John is impressed, LeRoy. The speech is "the talk of the South."

WILL

I wonder if the Governor has gotten to the bottom of those disappearances in Morehouse Parish. I've been hearing rumors the Klan did it. Maybe in reaction to the speech.

LEROY

The boys who disappeared are from good families, openly contemptuous of the Klan. I'm sure it's connected.

WILL

I wonder if we should be worried.

LEROY

No. We're safe in Greenville.

EXT. PERCY HOUSE -- NIGHT

Several days later. It's pouring rain. A BURLY MAN wearing a soft-brim black hat knocks on the front door.

WILL opens the door, studies MAN: unshaven, shifty eyes.

WILL

Yes?

MAN

My name's Rick Keith, I'm from Arcola.

LEROY comes to the door.

LEROY

What can we do for you?

KEITH

I ran out of gas a few miles out of town, and had to leave my sister in the car. I'm looking for an open service station. Can you help me?

LEROY

Of course. But you'll have to drive my car. I don't know how.

KEITH

Sure, I'll drive it.

LEROY

Let me get my coat.

WILL eyes KEITH with suspicion.

THREE GENTLEMEN approach the house.

WILL

(to KEITH)

My father's bridge partners.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

KEITH averts his eyes. One of the BRIDGE PARTNERS is SHERIFF NICHOLSON. He walks up, eyes KEITH.

WILL

Hello, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

Hey there, Will. What's up?

WILL

Mr. Keith from Arcola ran out of gas.

SHERIFF

Mr. Keith? I don't know any Keiths in Arcola.

KEITH

Excuse me.

KEITH strides off into the night.

SHERIFF

Hey! Hey, you! You come back here!

KEITH breaks into a run, disappears.

SHERIFF

I'll be damned.

WILL

Thank God you showed up. Father was about to drive off with him.

SHERIFF

Ever the good Samaritan. Well, he'll have to be more careful.

WILL

You got that right.

INT. GREENVILLE TRAIN STATION -- DAY

September, 1923. A sweltering afternoon. WILL stands on the platform, watching a train come in.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILLIE JR., age 16 (UNCLE WILLIE'S eldest child), steps off the train with suitcases. He's handsome, lithe, self-confident, with a certain hunger in his eyes.

WILL

Hey there, Willie!

WILLIE gives his first cousin a dazzling smile.

WILL

How was the trip?

WILLIE

Smashing, especially going over the Rockies.

(laughs)

The scenery got tamer after that.

They walk out to the waiting Percy car. WILLIE nods at the BLACK CHAUFFEUR. He and WILL get in. Car moves off.

INT. PERCY CAR -- DAY

WILL

The Peabody's the same as ever?

WILLIE

Just the same, with ducks waddling from the elevator to the fountain. The roof deck got cool by ten and the band was great. The waiters all remembered Fa Fa and Munnie, and Willis got me the very best bourbon. I didn't take the high-yellow girl he showed me. But she was a knockout.

WILL

What about Alonzo?

WILLIE

Well, he's so much older and so dignified and stately. As headwaiter he doesn't have time for teenagers like me. But he obviously taught Willis how to serve a Percy.

Car pulls into the Percy drive. WILL and WILLIE get out.

WILLIE

(to CHAUFFEUR)

You drive well enough to get around
L.A.'s crazy traffic.

CHAUFFEUR

(delighted)

Thanks, Mista Willie. I ain't got out
there yet but Mista Will says weeze
gwoin West one of these days. One time
I drove the Senatah to Washington and
New York. All the time to Memphis and
New Orleans, a course. You been there?

WILLIE

No, but I can't wait.

CHAUFFEUR

Mista Will and the Senatah--they'll
show you the sights.

INT. PERCY LIBRARY - DAY

Same day, minutes later. WILLIE enters, WILL follows. LEROY
rises to shake WILLIE'S hand.

LEROY

Last time I saw you, you were still
in knickers.

WILLIE

Yes, that was in 1916 when Munnie was
taking us to California. We stopped in
Memphis so that you could become our
guardian.

LEROY

Well, you've certainly grown up and I
guess that Lady and Walker have too.
You're all three just two years apart.

WILLIE

Lady has become a flapper! You know that
Munnie and Aunt Wilma took her all over
Europe. She celebrated her fourteenth
birthday at Lake Como. Then she totaled

the Pierce Arrow Munnie gave her for her fifteenth birthday. So they sent her to study at a kind of prison run by nuns, Marymount, just outside of Paris. They are determined to get her straightened out and suitably married.

WILL

I hope she enjoys Paris as much as I did.

WILLIE

(laughs)

In L.A., J. Paul Getty used to stop by the country club across the street from our house, to pick up fourteen-year-old girls. Lady ignored him. She's never yet had a boyfriend, cuts her hair short, and swims like a fish!

LEROY

What are your plans, Willie?

WILLIE

Stanford. I got to know it when I was Prepping at Menlo Park last year. You know it recruits many of the older professors from Harvard who at the the peaks of their careers get sick of the long, cold New England winters.

WILL

Well do I remember them, and how cold and formal the Yankees themselves are.

INT. PERCY DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The same day. A BLACK BUTLER serves dinner to LEROY, WILL, CAMILLE, and WILLIE.

CAMILLE

(to WILLIE)

Your mother certainly took the three of you on a grand journey after your father died. Virginia Beach, St. Augustine. And Riverside Drive in New York.

LEROY

I'm glad that she's finally settled down in Los Angeles. It's a wonderful place to make a new start. People are so much less judgmental. A far cry from Memphis, of course.

WILLIE

We were in different schools every year. I got pretty tired of that.

(pause)

I guess that Munnie--it was like she was running away from something.

(bats eyelashes)

What was it?

ELDER PERCYS exchange glances. WILL coughs.

LEROY

You have a right to ask that question.

(clears his throat)

Some people in Memphis--didn't approve of your mother. For silly reasons, of course.

WILLIE

"Silly"?

CAMILLE

Well, you see, Caroline was so much younger than your father.

WILLIE

Oh. That must be it.

LEROY

(expansively)

The important thing is that she has found a home. And that you are here to finish up high school--and get to know your kin. I know your mother feels that that's part of your education.

(smiles paternalistically)

You were only six when Willie died. We have some catching up to do. You are, after all, a Percy.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILLIE looks at WILL.

WILLIE

After Daddy's funeral, you sat me down
and told me some things.

WILL

That's right. I did.

WILLIE

You told me that as a Percy, I have a
duty to continue the family line.

A moment of silence. WILL dabs his mouth with his napkin.

WILL

Yes. Yes, I did say that.

LEROY and CAMILLE shift in their chairs.

WILLIE

I just want to say, I've never forgot-
ten it. And for that very reason, I am
so grateful to be here.

WILLIE smiles angelically.

LEROY

Well!

(gulps wine)

I think you'll find that Greenville
High is fairly different from the Menlo
Park school. Greenville is still just
a river port, not like L.A., but if
you can survive the heat and humidity,
the school here is very good. There's
splendid hunting and fishing. And of
course, plenty of Southern belles!

CAMILLE and LEROY chuckle. WILL gives WILLIE an appraising
gaze.

EXT. GREENVILLE COUNTRY CLUB POOL -- DAY

The next day. WILL and WILLIE lie on chaises longues,
wearing swimsuits. WILL looks at WILLIE. He quickly looks

away, wincing slightly. He cannot allow himself to stare at WILLIE'S superbly fit late-adolescent physique.

WILLIE

We have another cousin. I think his name is Roy?

WILL

Yes. Of the Gray Eagle's scions, in our generation it's you, me, and Roy.

WILLIE

And my brother Walker.

WILL

Oh! Yes, of course.

WILLIE

Roy's father killed himself.

WILL watches YOUNG PEOPLE frolic in the pool.

WILL

Yes, he did. A tragedy.

WILLIE

Why did he do it?

WILL rubs his face with both palms.

WILL

Who knows?

(turns to look WILLIE in the eye)
You've heard about the curse?

WILLIE

The "curse"! I like that!
(laughs)
There isn't really a curse.
(pause)
Anyway, how is Roy doing?

WILL tears his gaze away from WILLIE.

WILL

Well, you'll meet him soon enough, he and Father love to hunt together, and

Roy is a ferocious golfer. He went to Lawrenceville, Princeton, Harvard Law. He's quite the Percy princeling. In Birmingham Roy has a law practice that rivals his father's.

WILLIE

He has children?

WILL

Why, yes. Three sons. Walker, LeRoy, and Phinizy.

WILLIE

So many Walkers. So many LeRoys. And Williams.

WILL

It almost sounds like you're sizing up the competition, Willie.

WILLIE

Really? I'm just trying to catch up. Not size up.

WILLIE turns on his side to face WILL, a hand propping his head. WILL cannot avoid a glimpse of WILLIE'S crotch.

WILLIE

So what is this about a curse?

WILL

It seems that just about every generation, a Percy male goes crazy and kills himself. And any number of Percy women have also lost their minds.

(smiles tightly)

What do you think about that, Willie?

WILLIE

Well. In our generation, which will it be? Roy, you, my brother--or me?

WILL

You're awfully nonchalant about our family curse.

WILLIE

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

Maybe because I've got more important things to be excited about.

WILL

Such as?

WILLIE

I think girls are much more important. Don't you?

A silence.

WILL

My. You are precocious.

WILLIE gives WILL a delighted smile.

EXT. PERCY GARDEN -- DAY

Later, the same day. A HANDSOME BLACK YOUTH weeds a flower bed. WILLIE strolls through the garden.

WILLIE

Hello there!

BLACK YOUTH

Hello, Mistah Willie.

WILLIE

Gosh, you know my name. What's yours?

BLACK YOUTH

Ernest!

WILLIE looks ERNEST over.

WILLIE

Nice to meet you, Ernest.

ERNEST

Thanks, Mistah Willie.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM -- NIGHT

A few days later. The gym, decorated for a dance, is full of festively mingling STUDENTS. Several TEACHERS chaperone.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILLIE, sharply dressed in jacket and tie, sits on a bleacher sipping a soda. An ATTRACTIVE GIRL approaches him.

GIRL

You must be Willie Percy.

WILLIE laughs.

WILLIE

How come everybody knows who I am?

GIRL

News travels fast in Greenville. Especially when it concerns the Percys.

(smiles)

I'm Phoebe Paxton.

WILLIE

A pleasure to meet you, Phoebe.

PHOEBE

What's it like to be the new kid in town?

PHOEBE sits next to WILLIE.

WILLIE

I'm used to it. Believe me. Except that here, I don't have to introduce myself. Which is--interesting.

PHOEBE

How do you like it here?

WILLIE

It's a little less--how to put it?--cosmopolitan than Los Angeles.

PHOEBE

Ooooh! You lived in Los Angeles?

WILLIE

Yep. Movies stars and everything. Hey, I have an idea. You want to go outside and have some fun?

(whispers seductively)

I've got a flask. And a joint.

EXT. GYM -- NIGHT

WILLIE and PHOEBE sit on a bench behind a copse of trees, PHOEBE helpless with laughter.

PHOEBE

That's the funniest thing I ever heard!

WILLIE

L.A. can be a pretty strange place.

WILLIE takes a swig from a flask, offers flask to PHOEBE. She shakes her head.

PHOEBE

You're not at all like your cousin Will.

WILLIE

Why should I be?

PHOEBE

Well, you're a Percy--and so smart. But Will--he's never really dated a girl.

WILLIE

Some guys don't. You'd be surprised.

PHOEBE

Surprised by what?

WILLIE

How many faggots there are. L.A. is crawling with them.

PHOEBE

Do they--make moves on you?

WILLIE

(laughs)

All the time!

PHOEBE

Does that bother you?

WILLIE

Not really. It gets me free drinks.

PHOEBE

I see. Well, you must know about Will.

WILLIE

He's hopeless. As queer as they get.

PHOEBE

Are you kissing cousins?

WILLIE

Hell, no.

(grins)

How do you know about him?

PHOEBE

Rumors. People say he likes boys.

(lowers her voice)

Even black boys.

WILLIE

No kidding.

PHOEBE

But Will's what the Jews call a--
I think it's *mensch*. He's got guts.
He does the right thing. He fought
very bravely in the war. And just
last year, he helped his father get
rid of the Klan. Don't underestimate
him, Willie. Many people respect him
despite the poetry and the--boys.

WILLIE

Tell me about the black boys.

PHOEBE

(hesitates)

There's a gardener named Ernest?

WILLIE

My God. Of course. I met him.

(thoughtfully)

He's certainly cute enough.

PHOEBE

That's an odd thing to say.

WILLIE

Phoebe, my dear, I am a voluptuary
from L.A. Now then. May I have the
honor of a kiss?

Wide-eyed, PHOEBE nods. WILLIE suavely kisses her. He
gropes her breasts. PHOEBE shivers. She throws her arms
around WILLIE'S neck.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- DAY

A week later. WILLIE sits on a sofa, reading. WILL enters,
takes a seat. WILLIE looks up. WILL gestures at paintings
on the walls.

WILL

Aunt Lady has a wonderful painting of
the three Armstrong sisters. You know
who they were?

WILLIE

Connected to General George Armstrong
Custer?

WILL

That's right.

WILLIE

(smiles)

If the Percys have a suicide curse, the
addition of Armstrong-Custer blood must
have given it an extra wallop!

WILL

I'd never thought of that. I suppose
it's true.

(pause)

Your mother has three very fine Percy
portraits. Are they out in L.A.?

WILLIE

Of course. Why do you ask?

WILL

Oh. It seems a--well, an incongruous place for them to be.

WILLIE

How so?

WILL

It's so far from the ancestral lands. And so... Modern.

WILLIE

Are you suggesting that they would be better off here?

WILL

I don't know how much your mother values them. Is she attached to them?

WILLIE

Jesus! Of course she loves them! She talks about the Percys all the time. It fascinates her friends!

WILL

Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to...

WILLIE

Suggest that she's not a real Percy? Because her people worked a country tobacco farm in Kentucky?

WILL

No, no, no...

WILLIE

Come on. Admit it. The Percys never thought that Munnie was good enough to marry one of them. And a lot of other people thought the same. That's why she's been on the run all these years. After Daddy died, she was helpless in Memphis. Society scorned her!

WILL

Oh, dear. I am so sorry.

WILLIE

You can be sure that having those portraits in L.A. is a great comfort and asset to Munnie.

WILL

Please don't be angry.

WILLIE

Angry? I've been angry my entire life! The condescension you all have shown!

WILL

Now you listen to me, young man. Your father took great pains to educate your mother. He saw to it that she became a refined, cultivated woman.

WILLIE

Which of course means that when he met her, she was no-account trash. And I'm sure you've never forgotten that he started seeing her when she was just fifteen.

WILL

You are being far too touchy.

WILLIE

Tell me something, Will. How does your father feel about the fact that you are a homosexual?

WILL gasps, stands, leaves the room.

INT. PERCY LIBRARY -- NIGHT

The same day. WILL and LEROY are having a private chat.

WILL

I don't like him.

LEROY

What's the problem?

WILL

He's a cold, manipulative, greedy little bastard with a façade of charm.

LEROY

He's awfully bright. And apparently, Caroline brought him up well.

WILL

That's why you invited him here. To see what kind of job she did.

LEROY

Give him a chance! As you yourself pointed out to him--he has a responsibility to continue the line.

To that, WILL has no reply.

INT. PERCY PARLOR -- NIGHT

ERNEST (handsome young gardener) serves drinks to LEROY, CAMILLE, WILL, and WILLIE.

CAMILLE

He's late. It's almost dinnertime.

LEROY

Roy's rarely late. Especially the eve of a shoot.

WILLIE

I'm looking forward to meeting him. And to the shoot. Quail--I just love it!

SOUND OF: The front door opening, slamming shut. ROY PERCY enters the parlor, weaving a bit.

LEROY

There you are. Have you had a couple?

ROY

The bartender on the train was very persuasive.

(to ERNEST)

Bourbon, please. Neat.

(to WILLIE)

So you're the long-lost cousin!

WILLIE stands to shake hands with ROY.

WILLIE

Very glad to meet you. I hear you're
a savagely good shot.

LEROY and ROY grin.

LEROY

You'll see tomorrow.

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

LEROY and ROY walk through woods with shotguns.

ROY

Where's the boy?

LEROY

He'll catch up. So, how've you been?

ROY

Not too well. I drink too much. It
worries Mattie Sue.

Hidden from their view behind a thicket, WILLIE squats,
listening.

LEROY

The crouching beast?

ROY nods.

LEROY

Have you thought about that clinic? The
Phipps outfit at Johns Hopkins?

ROY

Yes, I've thought about it. It might be
necessary.

LEROY stops walking.

LEROY

Let's wait for Willie.

(pause)

I'm worried, Roy. This is serious. You
must take care of yourself.

ROY

(nods)

What do you think of Willie?

LEROY

A sturdy, brash lad. He'll make a fine lawyer. But let's talk about you.

They move on. After a moment, WILLIE runs after them.

INT. GREENVILLE TRAIN STATION -- DAY

Late spring, 1924. WILL stands with WILLIE on the platform. WILLIE has suitcases. A train hisses.

WILL

I'm glad that we managed to become friends. At the start, things were a bit rocky.

WILLIE

Yes. I let my temper get the better of me. And I'm sorry about that.

WILL

You did very well in school. Father was impressed when you won first prize in the State Latin contest.

WILLIE

I am grateful for the entire experience. Including the Southern belles.

WILL

(smiles faintly)

God knows how many wenches in Washington County are pregnant with Percy bastards.

WILLIE

(smirks)

One has--ah--certain responsibilities. Will, what is the "crouching beast"?

WILL

What brings that up?

WILLIE

Last fall, when I went hunting with your father and Roy, your father mentioned it. I was taking a pee behind a tree when they walked by. They didn't know I could hear.

WILL

It's family lingo for depression.

WILLIE

So that means--?

WILL

Yes. Roy's in trouble.

They both ponder the idea, eyeing each other.

WILL

I know what you're thinking. And I'll say this: You do have a good shot at becoming the leading Percy. You've got the brains, the charm, the drive. And boy, you sure do have the looks.

WILLIE

Gee. Thanks.

WILL

Don't screw it up.

WILLIE
(indignant)

I won't!

WILL

Don't be so sure. Watch out for the beast, Willie! Don't let it get you.

WILLIE gapes at WILL.

WILL

So long, then. Have a great time at Stanford.

WILL extends his hand. WILLIE shakes it, speechless. For once, he cannot think of anything at all to say.

INT. HUGER JERVEY'S APARTMENT, NYC -- NIGHT

Summer, 1924. HUGER and WILL sit with a fastidiously dressed MAN about WILL'S age.

MAN

(to WILL)

I don't get it. What on *earth* is the matter with your *family*?

HUGER

Believe me, Lindley, the longer one knows Will Percy, the more mysterious it all becomes.

LINDLEY

I mean, compared to them, you seem-- perfectly *normal*.

All three laugh.

WILL

But compared to others, I'm abnormal?

LINDLEY

Put it this way, girlfriend. You have eccentricities.

WILL

Thank God, I suppose. Thank goodness for our eccentricities. What would we be without them?

HUGER

A horrifying thought.

LINDLEY

Horrifying.

They giggle.

LINDLEY

I must say, however, that your father seems reasonably sane.

WILL thinks about it.

WILL

I revere Father beyond words but there are times when I cannot stand him. Maybe that's because he does so effortlessly what I cannot do. But which, as his heir, I'm *expected* to do.
(twirls a hand)

Huger will tell you: I've been very resolute. From my first breath I've defied all expectations. Since birth my queer streak has been a mile wide.

LINDLEY

And you've gotten away with it. How?

WILL

I really don't know!

LINDLEY

Impressive.

(looks at HUGER)

This is very abnormal.

HUGER

In Mississippi it is. Not so much here.

LINDLEY

Can you begin to imagine? *Mississippi*.
(sips a martini)

I want to know more about the beast.

WILL

Here's the thing. Father is the patriarch, I'm the designated heir. But only provisionally. If Father saw another Percy coming along to fill his shoes, he would no doubt help him do it--just as he tried to do it with cousin Roy, who's now going over the deep end. Like his father Walker did.

LINDLEY

OK. The beast has devoured your rival. And so your father is stuck with you. But what about that hot little cousin in California?

WILL

I don't think he'll make it.

LINDLEY

Why?

WILL

He's amoral.

LINDLEY

Because he has a lot of sex?

WILL

No. Because he lies.

HUGER

Everyone lies. For survival. The three of us, for example.

Will

Willie lies in a different way. He cheats. There *is* a difference.

(looks away)

I'm quite sure the beast will get him.

LINDLEY

So that leaves you. Amazing.

WILL

It's incredible. I will become the patriarch.

HUGER

You should abdicate.

WILL

Because somebody might shoot me? For being a fag?

(examines his immaculate fingernails)

No. It's in my blood. I'm going through with it.

LINDLEY

I don't see how you can possibly do that. Will--your poetry alone. It's full of boys. Boys, boys, boys.

YOUNG WILL PERCY. WAP & LG. 8/08/07

WILL

We're living in the age of *Corydon*. Of
Marcel Proust! *A La Recherche...*

(smiles)

In some ways things are improving.

HUGER and LINDLEY stare at WILL.

WILL

Somehow, even in Greenville, I will
survive.

THE END