

The Other Side of This Life

by

Samuel Vary

Sam Vary
New York, NY
(207) 318-8217

FADE IN:

INT. HOME LIBRARY

A room with a large oak desk, office chair, and shelves filled with books from floor to ceiling. There is also a large cabinet, upon which there sits an old record player. A small child, ROGER, 11 years old, runs into the library and goes straight for the cabinet. He opens it to reveal a large collection of vintage LPs. He looks through for a moment, carefully considering them, and then selects one and places it on the turntable. "Freight Train Blues" by Bob Dylan crackles through the speakers. Roger runs out of the library, upstairs, and into a small bedroom down the hall. Toys are scattered about, and there are two beds in the room. Playing on the floor is Roger's young brother WILL, 8 years old. He is adding tracks to a toy train set.

ROGER

Come on, Will! Let's go outside!

WILL

But... I just set up the station...

ROGER

You can play trains later. I found some chairs and stuff that Dad said we can put in the treehouse. Come on!

Will reluctantly abandons his toys and they both run outside.

EXT. A LARGE FARMHOUSE - DAY

A white farmhouse stands on a hill with a large sprawling yard, and a lush vegetable garden nearby. Oak and birch trees dot the property, and there are various signs that children live here. A swing set, a treehouse, etc. Just beyond the garden is a small pond surrounded by cattails. A cool breeze temporarily alleviates the heat of the bright summer day, and the trees in the forest gently rustle their leaves. The boys come out of the house and run down the hill towards the forest.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Main titles roll over the music, and the brothers play in the forest behind their house.

INT. BARN - DAY

They go to a large aluminum barn, which lies in the distance down a narrow dirt path. Once inside they climb up into the rafters, and they walk along them high above the ground as if they were balance beams no more than three feet high. The sun begins to set. Fade music.

EXT. THE POND - LATER

The boys walk around the edge of the pond. Roger carries a small net, and Will points out frogs for Roger to try and catch.

Their father comes to the door of the house. He is clean shaven, wearing glasses - tall and skinny. He stands on the porch and watches his sons play with a look of deep fondness. He calls out to them.

DAD

Come on in boys, it's almost time to eat!

WILL

Just a minute dad, I see a really big bastard!

DAD

(mock angrily)

Will!! Do not use that word.

WILL

Sorry dad. Roger taught it to me.

ROGER

I did not!

DAD

All right, all right. Come inside!
I made us a nice Sunday dinner.

The boys hurry up the hill and into the house with their father.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A warmly lit dining room, with three places set at a large oak table. Family photos line the wall; among the photos there are pictures of the boys, their father, and also a woman, their mother.

The boys bring food to the table, and Roger makes sure Will is putting everything in the right place. They all sit down at the table, eager to begin the meal. Dad begins dishing out salad and the boys pick out hamburgers and hot dogs from the plate in the middle.

DAD

What did you two do today?

ROGER

Well, we did a bunch of work on the treehouse.

WILL

Yeah dad, we put the chairs up there and they look really great! Roger said we could bring a radio up there and listen to music.

ROGER

And we want a couch and a table... Maybe a bookshelf. Hey dad can we live up there?

DAD

Sure but I'm gonna rent out your rooms.

WILL

What?!

DAD

I'm kidding, I'm kidding. But I don't think you want to live out there. What happens when it rains?

WILL

Maybe you could help us with the roof or something?

ROGER

Yeah we could put on shingles and stuff and make it rainproof.

DAD

We'll see...so Roger, I noticed you've been listening to a lot of my records lately. Do you have a favorite album yet?

ROGER

I don't know.. I really like the Bob Dylan album, with the song about being followed by two white horses.

WILL

I don't like that one, Roger, it's scary.

The meal is finished, and Dad gets up to start clearing the dishes.

ROGER

(to Will)

What's the one you really like? The one with the old-fashioned picture on the front, the haystack...right?

WILL

John Barleycorn!

DAD

Wow, that one takes me back. I listened to that all the time in high school. You guys are way ahead of me.

ROGER

Who is he supposed to be?

Dad comes back to the table with three bowls of ice cream.

DAD

Well, the story of John Barleycorn goes way back in English folk tradition. As the legend goes, John was not a real person, but he became the personification of barley - do you know what that is?

The boys nod somewhat uncertainly.

DAD (CONT'D)

Well, barley was very important in English agriculture because it was used to make beer and whiskey... those are um, alcoholic drinks, you'll learn more about those when you're older.

The boys grin at each other.

DAD (CONT'D)

Anyway, the idea was that barley, the crop itself, was just like a person. It had to be raised properly, like any child, and taken care of as it got older. Above all, it needed to be respected. Otherwise, bad things could happen.

EXT. A BARLEY FIELD - DAY - FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

We are transported to a time long ago, the middle ages. English peasants work in the massive barley field with gleaming scythes. It is mid-Autumn, when Spring-planted Barley is harvested. They gather the crop in large bushels lashed to their backs.

INT. AN OLD MILL - DAY

We see the peasants grinding the barley with large millstones in an old barn.

DAD (V.O.)

He was viewed as a religious figure because when he dies, so to speak, his body is turned into bread, and the idea is that he suffered a lot before dying, which he did in order to help them.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

The boys are enchanted by the story, and listen intently to what else their father has to say.

DAD

The lesson of the story is that when someone sacrifices so much to help you, it's necessary to treat that person with the utmost respect. If you treated John Barleycorn poorly, you could end up on his bad side. Then your family could go hungry... or worse, sober!

The boys both snicker.

WILL

I like that story.

ROGER

Me too.

DAD

I'm glad it interests you so much.
Maybe there's some way you can
learn more about it, we ought to go
to the library tomorrow.

The table is cleared, and the boys look very sleepy.

DAD (CONT'D)

Well, it's getting late. You two
should get to bed, whaddya say?

They head upstairs, exhausted from the long day of playing.

DAD (CONT'D)

Roger, hold on, come here a second.

Roger comes back downstairs, and Will continues up to their room.

ROGER

Yeah, dad?

DAD

I have something I want to give you
but I didn't want Will to feel bad.

ROGER

What is it?

Dad takes a small pocketknife out of his pocket, which has a mottled wooden handle with two ducks carved on it. He hands it to Roger.

DAD

It's called a Barlow knife, and
this is the same one that I had as
a kid. It always came in handy for
me, and I think you're old enough
to have it now.

ROGER

Wow...thank you!

DAD

Of course. Just don't make Will
jealous!

ROGER

I won't. We'll carve our names in the treehouse with it, I'll share it with him.

DAD

Perfect. Just be careful with it, it's very sharp!

ROGER

I will dad. Thank you.

DAD

All right. You better get off to bed, then.

ROGER

Yes, dad.

He runs upstairs, visibly excited about his gift. Dad fondly watches him go.

DAD

I hope he keeps it safe.

INT. THE BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The light is off, and the two boys lie peacefully in their separate beds. Dad opens the door and peeks his head in.

DAD

Good night, boys, I love you.

WILL

I love you too dad.

ROGER

I love you too dad.

He leaves, and the two boys lie awake in the dark.

ROGER

Let's keep working on the treehouse tomorrow.

WILL

Yeah. Can I bring my trains up there?

ROGER

Sure. It can be our little hideaway.

WILL

Hey Roger?

ROGER

Yeah?

WILL

I was thinking... wouldn't it be neat if someday we met John Barleycorn?

ROGER

(yawning)

He's not real Will.

WILL

I bet he is real.

ROGER

Well, you still believe in the tooth fairy.

WILL

I do not, Roger, I know dad put the quarters under my pillow.

ROGER

Then why do you still keep them on the night stand?

WILL

Just cause dad was the one who put them there doesn't mean they aren't magic. I know they're good luck, at least.

ROGER

See what I mean? You believe everything. John Barleycorn is not real, Will.

WILL

I dunno. I just think it'd be neat is all. Roger?

ROGER

Yeah?

WILL

Do you miss mom?

ROGER

Yeah.

WILL

Me too. But I can't remember her
very well, is that bad?

ROGER

No Will, it's all right. Go to
sleep.

WILL

Good night Roger.

ROGER

Good night Will.

The boys fall asleep. Crickets and tree frogs create a
symphony of chirping outside in the hot summer night.

FADE IN.

INT. A DARK BEDROOM - NIGHT

It is a few hours after the boys have fallen asleep. Will
lies peacefully in his bed, but Roger tosses and turns in the
grips of a vivid dream.

SLOW ZOOM - ROGER

INT. A RUSTIC BEDROOM - DAY - ROGER'S DREAM

Roger is lying on a straw-filled mattress in a very old-
fashioned room, reminiscent of something you would find in a
Midwestern farmhouse during the 1930s. Everything seems to be
slightly out of focus. Morning light streams in through a
single window. A wooden chair stands in the corner. Suddenly,
a gritty, wizened old voice speaks to Roger from the doorway.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Wake up, Roger.

Roger wakes from his slumber (within the dream) with a start.
He sits up to see a man in his fifties standing in the
doorway. He is dressed in the garb of a farmer from the early
20th century: a brimmed hat, denim overalls and a dusty
cotton shirt. White stubble covers his face like freshly
fallen snow. It is JOHN BARLEYCORN, in human form.

JOHN BARLEYCORN

Come with me, I want to show you
something.

John leaves the room, and Roger silently gets up to follow. They go outside.

EXT. THE PRAIRIE - AN OLD FARMHOUSE - DAY

John leads Roger out of the house, which looks remarkably similar to the one he left behind in real life. However, the land is dry and barren. The pond out front has dried up, and the garden is nothing more than a patch of sunbaked dirt. Clouds of dust blow across a field in the distance. The same forest lies a little ways beyond, but the trees are parched and lifeless. John is already walking towards the trees, and he motions for Roger to follow.

INT. THE BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will wakes up, disturbed by the commotion of Roger getting out of bed. He looks over and immediately notices that he is missing. Fully awake now, he gets out of bed and looks out the window. The yard is bathed in moonlight, and it reflects eerily off the pond. Suddenly, Will notices the small figure of Roger just beyond. Out of the corner of his eye, he catches a glimpse of a tall, shadowy figure at the edge of the forest, but as quickly as he notices it, the man recedes from view. Instinctively, Will grabs a small toy train from his nightstand. It is his security object, a sacred good luck charm. Still wearing his pajamas, he dashes downstairs and outside to follow Roger.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Will treads softly a little ways off behind Roger, who sleepwalks ahead of him through the dark forest.

WILL
(hissed whisper)
Roger!

Roger turns around to face Will, but he does not wake up.

WILL (CONT'D)
Roger what are you doing, wake up!

Roger's slumber is far too deep for Will to shake him from it. John has put a sort of dream spell on him. He turns away from Will and continues deeper into the forest. Will moves after him, but suddenly the same tall, shadowy figure steps out next to Roger. Will gasps and ducks behind a tree, terrified.

EXT. THE PRAIRIE - DAY - ROGER'S DREAM

Roger turns away from the sound, back towards John who is walking a few steps ahead of him.

ROGER
(dreamily)
What was that?

JOHN BARLEYCORN
Pay no mind, my young friend, it
was nothing at all. Just the wind.
Come here, I want you to have a
look at this tree.

Roger hesitantly approaches a tree that John is motioning towards.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Will watches as the shadow man points at a tree, and his sleepwalking brother walks towards it. It is a large, dead oak tree, with a gaping hole in the side.

JOHN BARLEYCORN
Look inside.

Roger peers inside the tree trunk. He sees a swirling blue pool of light, glistening with kaleidoscope images. Glimpses of scenery flash by - a cat running along a fence, a pretty girl riding a bicycle, a bouquet of flowers being picked. He is enchanted, and leans in for a closer look.

ROGER
(talking in his sleep)
Wow... what is that?

JOHN BARLEYCORN
It is a doorway, Roger. It leads to
a land of opportunity, a land of
wonder. It's a place where you can
do anything you want.

Roger continues to stare, mystified.

JOHN BARLEYCORN (CONT'D)
Step through it with me and all
your wildest dreams will come
true...

Roger, hypnotized by the portal and completely under John's power, begins to climb through the hole and into the tree.

Will sees Roger climbing into the tree. He runs up to him and shakes his shoulders, pulling him back from the hole just in time.

WILL

Roger, wait, stop!

It is enough to shake Roger from his dream, and he steps back from the tree. He rubs his eyes and looks around in a daze.

ROGER

Will! What's going on?

WILL

You were sleepwalking, I followed you out here.

ROGER

(bewildered)

Oh..

WILL

Come on, we have to go back inside.

They go back in the house, and Roger gets in bed, where he immediately falls back asleep. Will lies awake though, and after a minute he quietly gets up and tiptoes back outside.

EXT. THE TREE - NIGHT

Will walks up to the tree, his toy train clutched firmly in hand. He looks into the hole, and see the same blue portal that Roger saw in his dream - it is real. Will looks deeply into it and is hypnotized. The voice of John Barleycorn seems to emanate directly from the depths of the pool of light.

JOHN BARLEYCORN (O.C.)

I can make all your wildest dreams
come true...

Will is completely entranced. As he stares in, his fingers loosen and the toy train drops to the ground - he does not notice. Barely even hesitating, he climbs into the hole and drops into the portal, vanishing without a trace. The only sign is his train, which lies forgotten at the foot of the tree.

EXT. THE BLUE VORTEX

Shouting with excitement, Will tumbles through the air as a mist of blue swirls all around him, gently buffeting him about like a leaf falling from a tree. As he falls, he reaches out with his fingers and makes trails in the cloud next to him. He giggles happily, and practices a few somersaults in mid air.

Looking down, he notices that the vortex is beginning to twist and curve, forming a sort of slide. He glides along on the mist, spinning all around and having the time of his life. Scenery below him starts to come into focus, and he gradually is able to make out fields, a dirt road, and a farmhouse. The blue mist thins out, and the ground rushes up to meet him. Will shouts, this time in fear, and closes his eyes. When he opens them however, he finds that he has landed gently on the ground. He blinks his eyes and looks around.

A little ways down the road, he can see the house bathed in sunshine. Off in the distance to the left, there is a grim-looking forest full of leafless trees. He begins to head down the road.

EXT. THE FARMHOUSE - DAY

Will climbs over the small fence that separates the house from the road, and circles around to the back. He notices a small window in the back of the house, hidden from view of the field by a brick chimney. He walks over to it, and cups his ear. Three men are in the kitchen having a conversation.

MAN #1

He was supposed to come through an hour ago. Where could he possibly go but here?

MAN #2

Something's wrong. He didn't make it through.

MAN #3

John said he would, and so we wait.

MAN #2

I don't like it.

MAN #1

Maybe there was some kind of delay.
He has to be careful, tread
lightly. It's a different world
over there.

Will notices an old wooden crate underneath the window, and he places it underneath as a step. He climbs up in order to get a better listening post.

MAN #2

And how long until we go and tell
him there is no boy?

MAN #3

Relax, Daniel. He's going to fall
right in our lap.

Will stands on his tiptoes to try and get even closer, but at that moment the crate gives way and he collapses in a heap beneath the window. He coughs and gets up to his knees, dusting himself off. A door slams. Steps approach. He begins to look up, and notices three ominously tall shadows suddenly taking position around him. He turns around with a start. The three men are standing over him with their arms crossed.

MAN #1

Well, hello there.

INT. THE BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Sun streams in through the window, and birds chirp outside. Roger wakes up and stretches, ready to start the day. However, his excitement quickly turns to confusion - he flips back the sheets, to reveal his bare feet caked with mud and dirt. He looks over to Will's bed - the covers are thrown back, and he is nowhere to be seen.

ROGER

Oh no...

He rushes downstairs, then walks through the different rooms of the house as he searches for his brother with increasing desperation.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Will, where are you? This isn't
funny...

Finding no sign of him anywhere downstairs, he goes outside.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Roger walks through the forest, desperately scanning for any sign. He recognizes the tree a little ways in the distance and dashes over. He kneels at the foot of the tree, looking for some sort of clue. After a moment, he spots something - Will's toy train, lying forgotten on the ground. Swallowing hard, he gets up slowly and peers over the edge of the hole. The portal is there, still as enchantingly beautiful as the night before. Nervously, he touches it with his fingertips, but recoils quickly. He examines his fingers with a strange look, as if they had just been separated from his body. He dashes back to the house.

INT. THE KITCHEN

Roger has changed out of his pajamas into slightly more adventurous attire, and he busies himself in the kitchen, throwing together some peanut butter sandwiches. He wraps them and stuffs them into a small knapsack. We see that it also contains a compass and binoculars. He checks to make sure that the Barlow knife is in his pocket. He slings the pack over his shoulder, and quietly walks upstairs to his father's room.

THE BOYS' ROOM

Roger grabs the two quarters that Will keeps on his night stand (for good luck, of course).

DAD'S BEDROOM

Roger opens the door just enough to look in on his dad, who is sleeping peacefully. He closes the door.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Roger troops back out to the tree, his backpack on his shoulder, the toy train gripped firmly in his hand. He looks back at the house, which appears peaceful and safe. With grim determination, he continues towards the tree, and climbs over the edge of the hole without a word. Roger plunges into the blue spiral, vanishing exactly as Will did. He tumbles through space and time with his eyes squeezed shut, but after a moment he is able to open them, and is astonished by the current of blue effervescence that swirls about his body. The ground rushes up at him, and he closes his eyes to await the impact. But again, like Will, he finds that he has landed safely on the ground.

EXT. A WINDSWEPT DIRT ROAD - DAY

The lifeless, brown prairies of a dustbowl. Dried out land stretches along an endless dirt road lined with barbed wire fencing. The landscape is dotted with dried up trees and bushes, and it is clear that life is scarce. Roger immediately notices the old farmhouse in the distance, and checks his compass. It shows east, and he turns around to face the horizon in the west, facing away from the house. The road stretches off into endlessness, where strange gray clouds hover above the horizon. He puts it back in his pocket and begins to head down the road to the farmhouse.

EXT. THE PORCH

Roger arrives at the front porch of the house, where rickety wooden stairs lead up to a screen door. He goes inside.

INT. THE HOUSE

He looks around apprehensively. He is standing in a small kitchen, and through an opening on the right a modest living room is visible. He looks upstairs and sees bedroom doors lining the second floor landing. In the kitchen there is a table with three chairs and three places set. Some baskets of vegetables sit in the corner near an old iron stove attached to the wall. Some rusty farm tools are leaning next to it.

ROGER
(nervously)
Hello? Is there anyone here?

He moves further into the kitchen, towards a small window that looks out onto a large field of barley behind the house. Through it, he can see three men working in the field with scythes. They wear brimmed hats, overalls, and ragged cotton shirts.

EXT. THE FIELD

Roger stands by the edge of the swaying barley.

ROGER
Um.. Hi!

The men instantly look up from their work with hawk-like quickness.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I need some help, I think I'm lost!
I... don't know where I am.

The men speak amongst themselves for a moment, and then stride purposefully towards Roger. It is NATHAN, ISAAC, and DANIEL, the same three men we last saw with Will. Nathan is tall, with a thick brown beard. He stands in the center, and appears clearly as the leader of the group. Isaac and Daniel stand slightly behind him, looking wary. They look Roger over with unusually keen interest.

NATHAN
What's your name, son?

ROGER
Roger.

NATHAN
I'm Nathan. These are my brothers
Isaac and Daniel.

ROGER
But... where am I?

NATHAN
This is our farm. Come inside,
maybe I can answer some of your
questions.

INT. THE KITCHEN

Nathan, Isaac, and Daniel are clearly exhausted from a hard day of work, and the scythes weigh heavily on their shoulders. They rest them on the wall and take their hats off, then take their seats at the table. Nathan drags an extra chair over to the table with his foot and motions for Roger to sit.

NATHAN
Have a seat, son.

Roger reluctantly does so.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Now, from the looks of you I'd say
you're a long way from home. Why
don't we start with how you got
here.

ROGER

Well, I guess it started with this dream I had. I found a tree with a big hole in it, and there was a pool of swirling light inside. I went out this morning and it was still there, so I climbed through and now... here I am. The thing is, my little brother, Will... he went through first, and now I don't know where he is. I have to find him, maybe you've seen him?

The men glance at each other, then back at Roger.

ISAAC

What does your brother look like?

ROGER

He's eight years old, with brown hair and blue eyes. I think he's wearing his pajamas, that's what he must have been wearing when he went through. They have trains on them. Have you seen him?

NATHAN

No, no.. we haven't seen anyone. Hardly anyone ever comes here. Just the three of us. Roger, how old are you?

ROGER

I'm eleven.

NATHAN

Strange...

ROGER

Can you help me find him?

DANIEL

Well, this is a big place. It's hard to say if he even could be found. We wouldn't know where to look.

ISAAC

Although, there is a train that runs by not far from here. Maybe he jumped on a boxcar, in which case he would be going east.

ROGER

(confused)

But, why would he do that? He's very little, and if the train isn't far from here, why wouldn't he have seen your farm and come looking for help?

NATHAN

(abruptly)

We have a room you can stay in upstairs, Roger. You must be exhausted, you should rest.

ROGER

Okay. But I have to find him...

Nathan leads him upstairs as Isaac and Daniel pack their pipes in the kitchen.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nathan leads Roger into a small bedroom, furnished only by a mirror, a wooden chair, and a bed with a straw-filled mattress. Thoroughly exhausted, Roger sits down on the bed. Nathan quietly leaves the room, shutting the door gently behind him. Roger looks out his window at the prairie, where long shadows are cast by the setting sun. He takes off his shoes and lays down on the bed, quickly falling asleep.

INT. A DUNGEON - NIGHT - ROGER'S DREAM

A dusty hallway with hay strewn about on the floor. The corridor is lined with prison cells. Roger sees himself walking down the hallway in slow motion. He gets to the last cell on the right, and turns to see a young boy behind the bars. His head is in his hands and we hear him sobbing quietly.

ROGER

Will?

The boy looks up, but his face is nothing but a swirling cloud of brown dust.

INT. ROGER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roger awakens with a gasp.

The room is completely dark except for the pale glow of the harvest moon, which casts its light through the single-pane window. Eerie shadows dance around the room. Muffled voices drift up through the floor, and he realizes he can hear the men talking. After a moment of trying to make out what they are saying, he quietly gets out of bed and steps onto the floor. He presses his ear to a small crack, and is able to hear their conversation quite clearly. The three of them are sitting in the kitchen, smoking pipes and pouring glasses of liquor from a bottle on the table.

INT. KITCHEN

DANIEL

I think we should bring him tonight. This could be the answer that we've been waiting for.

NATHAN

We've already brought him one boy, isn't that enough?

DANIEL

But think if we brought him two! The reward would be... substantial.

ISAAC

He's right. If we came to John a day later with another healthy boy, it would practically guarantee a full harvest this year.

DANIEL

It's an opportunity we can't afford to miss. After all, he just fell in our lap! They both did. Did you forget that John intended that to happen? The first one, at least.

ISAAC

Exactly. He'll be surprised by a second.

NATHAN

Well... all right. We'll take him in the morning. Let the poor boy get some rest tonight, he's going to need it.

INT. ROGER'S BEDROOM

Roger leaps up, his breath quick, near panic. He scurries back into bed as he hears the heavy sound of boot steps coming up the stairs. He pulls the covers over himself just in time. Nathan opens the door to check on him, but he succeeds in pretending to be asleep. Satisfied, Nathan leaves, and the men retire to their separate rooms. Complete silence settles over the house. Roger walks softly to the door, carrying his shoes so as not to make any noise. He listens at the door, then gently tries the handle. The door opens and he steps out into the hall. Being ever so careful to avoid any creaking, he makes his way downstairs, and opens the screen door which leads out onto the front porch.

He shuts the door slowly to prevent it from banging, and then he turns and slips on his shoes. He leaps off the porch, already running.

EXT. THE ROAD - NIGHT

He hits the ground running and takes off full-speed down the dusty moonlit road. The farmhouse is left behind, looming ominously in the night. We follow Roger on his run down the road, and he does not stop until the farmhouse is well out of sight. He stops a moment to catch his breath. As his breathing slows, he notices a slight rumble in the ground, gradually getting louder. He approaches a ridge a little ways ahead. The rumbling continues to gain volume, and he climbs to the top of the ridge. Below lie train tracks, and a train moving briskly along. All he can see are boxcars.

Roger runs down to where the ground meets the tracks and runs alongside the train. He catches up to the side of a boxcar, and tosses his knapsack onboard. A moment later he is able to grab on and pull himself up into the car.

INT. AN (ALMOST) EMPTY BOXCAR

Roger collapses on the dusty floor, quite out of breath. A man's voice comes out of the darkness.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
What's this? A boy? How strange!

Roger gasps and looks up. A large black crow steps out of the shadows. Roger is stunned, and tries to form words but nothing comes out. Before him stands PERCY, a talking crow.

PERCY

Don't worry, you have nothing to
fear from me, I'm just an old bird.
My name is Percy.

Roger pushes himself off the floor and sits back against the
wall. He stares in disbelief at the bird.

ROGER

You scared me.

PERCY

That's funny, I don't feel like a
scarecrow today.

ROGER

Do you live here?

PERCY

Oh, I just ride the train, watching
the prairie roll by. Sometimes I
run into fellow travelers, but they
are few and far between.

ROGER

Where does this go?

PERCY

To the East. There's an old woman
who lives out there that I need to
see. She's the only one who can
help me fly again.

ROGER

You can't fly?

PERCY

That's why I ride the train. I used
to be able to.

ROGER

What happened?

Percy wistfully looks off into the night.

PERCY

Well... I made a mistake. I had to
be taught a lesson.

EXT. A CATTLE PEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Two small calves lie curled up in the hay of their pen, sleeping soundly. Percy is perched on the corner of an aluminum shed attached to the side of the pen, and he watches over the two animals.

PERCY (V.O.)

A long time ago, I worked for a farmer who had just received two newborn calves as a gift. He received them as a reward for a season of hard work. They were beautiful creatures, both of them were pure white. I was responsible for watching them. Coyotes come out at night around here, and I was supposed to send up warning if any should come near.

A full moon shines brightly above the scene, and Percy looks about. Then, in a flutter of motion, he leaves his perch on and flies off into the night, leaving the calves unattended.

PERCY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I love...er, I loved to fly. I hated standing still, and it was such a beautiful night, with the full moon and everything. So I took off, just to stretch my wings a bit.

EXT. THE WILD PRAIRIE

Percy flies over the scenery, and he swoops low to weave through the trees. He closes his eyes with pleasure as he effortlessly glides through the air.

EXT. THE CATTLE PEN

Two menacing coyotes sneak up to the pen, and they manage to undo the latch on the gate. The calves sleep on, completely oblivious to their imminent demise. The coyotes snarl, and pounce on their unsuspecting prey.

PERCY (V.O.)

I was only gone for a few minutes, but when I got back they had come and...it was far too late.

EXT. AN OLD FARMHOUSE - DAY

Percy stands outside of a house on the front porch. We see the back of a man dressed in the same attire that John Barleycorn was wearing in Roger's dream, though we do not see his face. He towers over Percy, who trembles with fear in his shadow. The man bends over to pick him up, and holds him gently in his hands.

PERCY (V.O.)

Those calves were a gift from a very powerful man. He was greatly displeased that I allowed them to be destroyed. When I told him what happened, he decided that I didn't deserve to fly anymore.

The man runs a long, gnarled finger down Percy's spine as he lies helpless in his grasp. He touches each one of his wings, and then sets him down on the ground. Wind swirls across the fields, and Percy hops about, flapping his wings uselessly.

PERCY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That man's name was John Barleycorn.

We then see Barleycorn's face, the same face that Roger saw in his dream. He smiles slyly, and turns to go back inside. Percy hops down off the porch and up to the road, leaving the house behind.

INT. THE BOXCAR - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

ROGER

You mean... John Barleycorn is a real person?

PERCY

Oh, he's real. And like I said, he is very powerful. Where were you running from?

ROGER

These strange men...there were three men that I met. When I got here, I saw their house and I went to it looking for help.

PERCY

Far from home, are you?

He nods.

PERCY (CONT'D)

I could tell. Those men are probably the last people that I would go to for help.

ROGER

Well, I overheard them talking. I think they took my little brother, Will, to John Barleycorn. I don't know why though.

PERCY

Your little brother... are you positive?

ROGER

Yes, I'm sure it was him. That's why I ran away, they were going to take me too.

PERCY

Ah, this is very bad. Those three men, they work for John. I'm sure you're right, the question is, what does he want with your brother?

ROGER

I don't know, I just have to get him back.

PERCY

I think you need to come see a friend of mine, the old woman that I mentioned. Her name is Mother Florence, and I think she may be able to help you, too.

EXT. THE LINE OF BOXCARS

The cars chug along the track through the night, disappearing over the horizon. Roger and Percy sit by the opening on the side, looking out over the prairie.

EXT. THE FARM - DAY

NATHAN (O.C.)

He's gone.

INT. ROGER'S BEDROOM

Nathan stands in the doorway to Roger's bedroom. Isaac and Daniel crowd around the doorway behind him with looks of disbelief on their faces.

NATHAN
(grimly)
John will need to know about this.
Immediately.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - DAY

Nathan, Isaac, and Daniel approach the door, and Nathan knocks rather meekly. After a beat John Barleycorn himself opens the door. He looks at them with disdain, as if he already knows what they are going to tell him.

JOHN
Well, come in.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE

The inside of the house is sparsely decorated. There is a main dining hall, with a fireplace off to the side. The kitchen lies a little ways beyond.

DINING HALL

John sits at the head of the table, and he motions for the three other men to take a seat as well.

JOHN
(wearily)
Now, what is it you've come to see
me about?

NATHAN
Another boy came to our house. We
think it's the one you were after.
Originally.

JOHN
And you have him, I trust?

NATHAN
We...ah...we lost him. In the
middle of the night he ran off. He
must have heard us talking. We were
talking about his brother.

John stands up in anger, looking down wrathfully upon the three men. They cower under his gaze.

JOHN
You...lost...him?!

NATHAN
But we can find him again! We will find him and bring him here to you and... think about it John, let us find him.

JOHN
Forget it, I can't trust you idiots with anything.

John sits back down, his brow furrowed with worry.

JOHN (CONT'D)
He could be anywhere now, you know. You three would never be able to track him down. I'll need someone else to find him.

NATHAN
But John, we did bring you the younger one, doesn't that mean anything?

JOHN
You fools, I delivered him right to you, all you had to do was bring him here. Same with the other one, but you couldn't handle that. No, I need men who are slightly more competent.

Nathan looks deeply offended.

NATHAN
What are you going to do now?

JOHN
I'm calling my Rangers.

EXT. A WIDE EXPANSE OF PRAIRIE - DAY

Somewhere in the wilderness beyond John's farmhouse. Two men, LUTHER and MARTIN, are riding white horses at full gallop across the field. They race each other at breakneck speed, urging their horses faster and faster.

They are extremely large, as are their horses, and they look like they could pick someone up and toss them through the air. They are dressed in the uniform of workers for the Pony Express - trousers, cotton shirts, leather vests, bandanas, wide-brimmed cowboy hats, and six-shooters slung in hip holsters. They ride across the plain and John's farmhouse comes into view. They gallop towards it, whooping and shouting as they approach. Soon they arrive, where they find John waiting outside by the garden with Nathan.

JOHN

Good day, gentlemen.

LUTHER

Howdy, boss. It's a hot one out there today.

JOHN

Nathan, these are my Rangers.
Luther, and Martin.

Nathan squints up at them nervously. Their spurs glint in the hot sun.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well boys I'll get straight to the point. The imbecile you see standing beside me is responsible for the loss of a very important asset, which happens to belong to me.

The two Rangers look at Nathan as if he is a bug.

MARTIN

What'd he lose, boss?

JOHN

A boy.

LUTHER

A boy?

JOHN

I have his younger brother. I wouldn't have called on you two if this wasn't a matter of the utmost importance. But I need him brought to me. Unharmed.

Luther and Martin look at each other, considering the task at hand.

LUTHER
You got it, boss.

JOHN
Good. Now, Nathan here thinks he
hopped on board a train headed
east, towards Mother Florence's
camp. Sounds like a pretty good tip
to me.

MARTIN
What's he look like?

JOHN
He's eleven years old, a young boy
with brown hair. He's the only
other child in this place, I should
think he'd be pretty unmistakable.

MARTIN
We'll find him.

JOHN
You will be richly rewarded, of
course. Now go!

The two horsemen ride into the distance, off in pursuit of
Roger.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I suggest you gather your things
and go home before I lose my
temper. You have tried my patience
enough for one day.

Without a word, Nathan goes back inside and tells Isaac and
Daniel that it is time to go. They march along down the road
back in the direction of their house, hanging their heads
dejectedly. He glares after them from the front porch, and
turns to go back inside. He slams the screen door behind him.

EXT. THE TRAIN - DAY

The train continues to move steadily through the prairie, a
large plume of smoke coming out of the stack on the engine.

INT. BOXCAR

Roger looks out the side of the boxcar, watching the scenery
drift by.

He looks into the knapsack to see if there are any un-smushed sandwiches, but they are completely crushed beyond recognition. He sighs.

PERCY

Cheer up, Roger, we'll find your brother!

ROGER

I know, but...I'm really hungry.

PERCY

Well, you know, for a crow I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve. I managed to procure some breakfast for us. I knew you would be famished.

Roger looks over and sees that Percy has produced a large loaf of bread, which is sitting neatly on a cloth napkin beside him.

ROGER

(astonished)

Where did you get that?

PERCY

Being able to talk isn't my only unusual ability.

Roger hungrily digs into the bread, tearing off large hunks and chewing eagerly. Percy offers him a canteen of water, which he gulps down.

PERCY (CONT'D)

The person we're going to see, Mother Florence, is a very wise, kind old woman. She's going to help me fly again, and I'm sure she'll know what to do about your brother.

ROGER

Where does she live?

PERCY

There's a small campsite not far from here where she lives with her children. We'll be there soon I think.

EXT. TRAIN

It continues its journey through the wasted landscape, while Roger and Percy remain seated on the edge of the boxcar.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - LATER

The train tracks run through a gap in the fencing by the side of the road. It is the same place that Roger first saw the train after running away, and the two horsemen calmly trot up to inspect the area. Luther hops off his horse, and walks slowly up to a patch of earth where Roger's footprints are still visible in the dust. Martin pulls on his reigns, as his horse stamps about restlessly. Luther scoops up some of the dust and tosses it into the wind.

LUTHER

He was just here.

MARTIN

He must'a come straight here after he ran away. Lucky kid, he just happened to wind up at the tracks when the train was comin' by.

LUTHER

Yeah, well...maybe luck didn't have anything to do with it.

Luther looks off down the tracks, to the east.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

We'll never catch him if we stay on the tracks. We'll need to take a shortcut.

He gets up and deftly mounts his horse, spinning her around towards east.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Come on, let's ride!

The men gallop off down the road, away from the train tracks. They send up a great plume of dust behind them, and are gone.

INT. THE THREE BROTHERS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Nathan, Daniel, and Isaac return from their trip to John Barleycorn's and morosely troop inside to the kitchen.

They sit down heavily at the table, and Nathan immediately brings out a tobacco pouch and starts packing his pipe. Daniel takes a bottle of amber liquid from the center of the table and pours a glass for himself, and then two more for his brothers.

DANIEL

Well I don't think that could have gone any worse, do you?

NATHAN

Nope.

DANIEL

You know, every year we play the same game; we do what John wants and then he spits on us.

ISAAC

Ever since he brought us over.

DANIEL

That was a long time ago.

Daniel takes a long draught from his glass.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

And you know he's just going to do the same thing to those boys. Cut them off from their home, and keep them here forever.

ISAAC

Just like us.

NATHAN

And so what do you two revolutionaries propose we do?

DANIEL

What happens when John dies? All his indentured servants go free, forever...

ISAAC

...and we can live in peace.

DANIEL

Isn't it plain to see? We've known this for years Nathan. John Barleycorn must die.

Daniel takes another gulp of his drink.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
He is pretty old, after all.

NATHAN
Don't be foolish, it can't be done.

DANIEL
Well, we have to do something!

NATHAN
Those boys don't deserve to be kept here like us. No one deserves that.

ISAAC
It's true. We missed our chance to get home, but maybe we can prevent them from missing theirs.

NATHAN
So what must be done?

DANIEL
Once John opens a portal, it always closes at midnight on that day. If we leave now, we should be able to get there in plenty of time.

Nathan taps out his pipe and stands up, ready to go.

NATHAN
Well, what are we waiting for?
We've got a job to do.

DANIEL
Wait, there's just one other thing...

He gets up and goes over to the wall, where the scythes are leaning. He picks one up, hefting it easily in his weathered hands.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
We're bringing these.

INT. A DUNGEON - NIGHT

A short set of stairs leads into a dusty, hay-strewn corridor, lined with prison cells. The dungeon appears to have once been used as a horse barn, but the stalls have had their gates replaced by formidable iron bars. In a cell on the right we see Will, his tiny hands wrapped around the bars. He is quietly weeping.

His cell is not entirely unpleasant, however; a comfortable-looking cot stands off to one side, and a hand-carved wooden rocking chair sits in the other corner, next to a stack of books. In the far corner there is a small water pump, along with a basin.

Suddenly, a key turns in the door at the top of the stairs. With a loud metallic groan, it opens, and we hear the heavy boot steps of a man approaching. Will looks up hopefully and sees MANDRAKE, a guard employed by John Barleycorn. He is extremely tall and lithe, and wears a thick black moustache. He is dressed in the garb of a Union soldier, ca. 1863, and large cavalry pistol hangs in a holster on his belt. His boots click smartly as he turns to stand in front of Will's cell.

MANDRAKE

John would like you to come
upstairs for a bit. Would that be
all right with you, son?

Will sniffs and looks up at him.

WILL

I don't know, mister.. I just want
to go home.

MANDRAKE

This is home, my boy! John has big
plans for you. Come on up, he just
wants to chat. Some new living
quarters are to be arranged as
well.

Will moves back from the door and allows Mandrake to unlock and open it. He steps out into the yellow light of the corridor, and Mandrake claps a hand on his shoulder. They begin to walk down the hall towards the door.

MANDRAKE (CONT'D)

You have to understand, your
current room was just a precaution.

WILL

I miss my dad...

MANDRAKE

(ignoring the comment)
Wait until you see our dining hall!

They continue up the stairs through the door. It clangs shut behind them, and Mandrake turns the key in the lock with a loud crunch.

INT. ROGER AND PERCY'S BOXCAR - DAY

Roger is sleeping on the floor of the car, using his backpack as a pillow. A slight bump from the train jostles him awake, and he gets up, rubbing his eyes. He looks around for Percy, and realizes he is nowhere to be found. A look of panic flashes into his eyes, and he looks out from the boxcar, desperately scanning the landscape and the length of the train for some sign of his friend. Suddenly, a voice calls from above.

PERCY (O.S.)

Roger! Up here!

Roger looks up to see Percy peering over the side of the roof.

ROGER

What are you doing up there?!

PERCY

We have to go see the conductor!
He'll make sure we get dropped off
at Mother Florence's.

ROGER

Conductor?

PERCY

Well, of course. Did you think this
train was driving itself?

ROGER

No...I guess not.

PERCY

Come on, there's a ladder next to
the door. Watch your step!

Roger leans out and sees the rungs attached to the side of the train. He grabs on and begins climbing up. Percy helps him get onto the roof, and he stands up to admire the panoramic view. The train stretches out behind them in a seemingly endless line, but ahead of them the main cab is visible a few cars off.

ROGER

What else is on this train?

Percy begins making his way towards the front, and Roger follows.

PERCY
(nonchalant)
Oh, just about everything you could
possibly imagine. And a few things
that you couldn't.

The climb across to the next car, and continue marching forward to the next one, and the next one. They stop on the edge of a green fuel tanker, which has a ladder going down to a flatbed.

PERCY (CONT'D)
We'll have to climb down now, and
I'm going to take you through these
cars. Be sure to follow me closely,
you'd be surprised at how easy it
is to get lost in here.

ROGER
(nervously)
Okay...

They both climb down the ladder, and approach the door to the first car. It is strangely ornate, painted red.

PERCY
Now, Roger, I need you to give
three good knocks on that door.
Don't be shy!

Roger looks at him somewhat skeptically, but steps forward and does as he is asked. A moment after the third knock, the door cracks open, revealing a sliver of warm, glowing light.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Well, go on, open it!

Roger gently pushes the door open, and the light from inside spills out over the travelers. A look of wonder is plastered on Roger's face. He and Percy step forward into the light, and the door claps shut behind them.

EXT. A BEAUTIFUL PASTURE - DAY

Percy and Roger step out of the doorway into a wide open field of swaying grass. The only evidence of the train is the door frame behind them, which stands alone in the field, oddly out of place. The pasture slopes down a hill, and is lined on all sides by a wooden fence. Roger looks around in wonder and disbelief.

ROGER

Percy...where are we?

PERCY

Oh this is just car #17. Once we cross this pasture, we only have to get through 18 and 19 before we are able to see the conductor. He's in number twenty.

ROGER

What do you mean, 'get through'?

PERCY

Well, you can't exactly stroll through this place. Do you think the conductor makes special stops for just anybody? Just stay close to me and we'll be all right.

Roger swallows hard, and they proceed forward, wading through the grass. Percy hops about here and there, and he seems to be watching the ground quite closely. Roger wanders off to the side, looking at some exotic-looking flowers that have sprung up close to the fence.

ROGER

Hey, Percy, come look at this one!

Roger stops at a very bright, pink flower that sticks out of the grass, strangely isolated from any of the other flowers. He looks closer, and sees that a pistle extending from the center of the flower is waving about, appearing to taste the air. Percy hops over, a concerned look on his face.

PERCY

Roger, come along, you shouldn't go near that.

ROGER

But Percy look! It's like it's thinking or something.

PERCY

Roger we have to keep mov-...!

All of a sudden, the earth around the flower begins to crumble and rise as a massive creature heaves up from below. The entire field seems to shake, and clods of dirt fall away as a massive mole-like animal emerges, the strange pink flower firmly attached to its head. He snaps about blindly and viciously, searching for the intruders. Roger and Percy stand below, cowering in the shadow of the beast.

They are frozen in place. The creature picks up on their scent, and lets out an earth-shaking bellow. It lowers its rose-topped head and prepares to charge.

PERCY (CONT'D)
(panicking)
Roger, RUN!!!

They both snap out of their trance and turn to sprint across the field in the other direction. It takes off after them, furiously roaring and gnashing its teeth. Percy hops along at breakneck pace, and Roger runs quickly through the swaying grass. Moving along the fence, they look back and see that their pursuer is loping along at a frightening pace, and is quickly gaining ground on the terrified travelers. The pink flower on its head appears to be acting as its compass, swiveling to stay pointed at Roger and Percy even as they duck and weave through the grass.

Roger and Percy keep going forward, and a short distance ahead they see that the fence continues on a little further, leading straight to another door that looks much the same as the one they entered through. It stands out alone in the grass, apparently not leading anywhere.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Come on, we're almost there!

ROGER
I think it's getting closer!!

PERCY
Just keep running! Once we get to the exit, we'll be safe!

They continue to speed through the grass, and the door grows ever closer. The beast, however, has almost caught up to them. It nips at Roger's heels, and he pumps his young legs to muster a little extra speed and stay ahead.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Roger, look in your pockets, find something, anything to throw at him!

Roger is terrified, but he manages to reach into the breast pocket of his shirt and retrieve his pocketknife. He flips it open, just as the monster lunges forward to try and bite one of his legs off. Roger swings out with the knife, scoring a solid hit on the stem of the flower. The animal recoils with a loud roar of pain and confusion, and the wounded flower droops uselessly across its face. It gives Percy and Roger enough time to make it to the door.

Roger flings it open, and they collapse onto a platform between two ordinary looking train cars. The door slams shut behind them.

ROGER

What...was...that thing?

PERCY

That was something that was not meant to be trifled with, my young friend.

ROGER

But all I did was look at the flower!

PERCY

Exactly! I told you, it's easier to get lost - in more ways than one - than you think. We have to be careful from now on. This train can be dangerous.

ROGER

Percy, I don't think I like this game.

PERCY

It's no game, Roger. You do want to get your brother back, don't you?

ROGER

Of course!

PERCY

And you won't give up, no matter what?

ROGER

No matter what.

PERCY

Well, so, you know how I feel about getting my wings back. We can't do that unless we get to Mother Florence! Without her help, it would be impossible.

ROGER

I'm sorry, Percy, I didn't mean to cause so much trouble.

PERCY

Oh, well... we're both safe, aren't we?

ROGER

Yes.

PERCY

Right. So, chin up! We've got to keep moving.

Percy and Roger catch their breath, then stand to approach the next door.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Just like before, my friend. Three good knocks, if you please.

Roger does as he is asked, and once again the door mysteriously opens on its own.

EXT. A LARGE CAVE - NIGHT

Roger and Percy step out from the doorway onto a stony path in the middle of a very large cavern. Stalactites and stalagmites jut out from above and below, and the sound of dripping water resonates off the limestone walls. Torches line the wall alongside the path, and Roger boldly takes one out of its holder. Percy winces.

ROGER

Come on, let's go!

PERCY

Ah, I'm not sure you should take...never mind, let's go.

They proceed on down the path. Soon they are able to hear the sound of running water.

ROGER

What is that?

PERCY

It sounds like an underground river. I think we'll be able to see it around this corner.

Continuing forward, the duo round the corner and as predicted, a wide running river is flowing along through the cave.

The water is dark and churning, with white-capped waves appearing here and there. The path turns down and continues along a small ridge a few feet above the water.

ROGER

So, if we just follow this path,
it'll take us to the next door,
right?

PERCY

Yes, unless of course we happen
upon some sort of obstacle. For
example...

Percy's point is illustrated for him as they find the path opening up into a clearing by the river, surrounded by solid rock walls. Looking across, they can see that the path continues to wind through the cave a little ways up. The river is wide, and the water is black as ink. A small ferryboat rests on the shore, but does not appear to be attended.

ROGER

Come on! We can hop in this boat
and float right to the other shore.

PERCY

I don't think that's such a good
idea, Roger. The water is moving
too fast, we'd go sailing right
past it and end up who knows where.
Plus, if I remember correctly, that
boat belongs to...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Greetings.

Percy and Roger whirl around to see CHARON, the ferryman. He is dressed in a black robe tied around the waist, and his face is extremely pale and aged. He carries a very large staff, long enough to guide the boat through the water.

ROGER

Who are you?

CHARON

I am Charon, the ferryman. I can
take you across the river.

ROGER

Really? That's great! Come on
Percy, let's get in the boat.

CHARON

Wait. First, you must pay the fare.

ROGER

Fare?

Percy takes Roger aside.

PERCY

He needs coins, Roger. One for each of us. We may as well head back now, there's no other way to cross.

ROGER

But we have to! You said so yourself, if we don't see Mother Florence, I'll never get my brother back and you'll never be able to fly again!

PERCY

I know that Roger, but without the coins we aren't going anywhere.

ROGER

Hold on a minute...

Roger digs around in his pockets, searching for the quarters he took off the nightstand before he left. He finds them and holds them out to Percy.

ROGER (CONT'D)

One for each of us, right?

PERCY

(amazed)

Where did you get those?

ROGER

I borrowed them...from my brother. He says they're good luck. I didn't believe him but now... well, we can get across can't we?

PERCY

Yes, I think we can!

Roger gives one of the coins to Percy, and they confidently walk over to Charon.

ROGER

Two for the ferry, please, Mr. Charon, sir.

Without a word, he accepts the coins and walks over to the ferry, stepping in.

CHARON

Come along. I will take you across
now.

Roger and Percy get into the boat, and Charon uses his staff to push them all the way out into the water. The current quickly takes control of the boat, and they begin to move downstream towards the opposite shore. Charon stands at the bow, expertly guiding the boat with the pole. He turns it towards the opening of the path, and lands the boat on the shore with relative ease despite the speed of the river. It rests on the bank with a sandy crunch, and Percy and Roger immediately hop out.

ROGER

Thank you!

CHARON

Farewell.

He pushes the boat off shore and back out on the river. It rapidly carries him downstream, away from where they began.

ROGER

Where do you think he's going now?

PERCY

I have no idea. Let's get going,
this place gives me the creeps.

They continue up the path.

ROGER

Percy, look!

There is a wooden door in the stone wall, right where the path ends.

PERCY

Ah ha! We've made it.

They hurry down the rest of the path and pull open the door.

INT. JOHN'S DINING HALL - NIGHT

John Barleycorn is seated at the head of a very long dining table, where two candles burn brightly in their holders. A large fire roars in the fireplace off to the side.

On the mantle above, there is a large civil war saber mounted in its scabbard. John sits stroking his beard, looking relaxed. A door in the corner opens to reveal Mandrake, with Will standing behind him.

MANDRAKE

Your guest of honor is here, sir.

JOHN

Ah, wonderful! Bring him in.

Mandrake enters the room with Will trailing behind. He looks terrified, and his eyes dart nervously about the room. They approach the table, and Mandrake motions for Will to take a seat at the corner, next to John. He sits down obediently, but hangs his head, not looking at anyone. Mandrake stands off to the side at attention.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, how are you my boy? I must apologize for your current quarters, I didn't want you to run away. But you wouldn't do that, you're a good boy, aren't you?

Will looks up at him and nods his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Of course. I knew you were. We're going to put you in a much more comfortable room tonight. But I'm being rude; do you know what my name is?

Will shakes his head, no.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's all right, I'll tell you. My name is John Barleycorn, and this whole place...belongs to me. The fields, the trees, the sky. Everything, really.

WILL

(confused)

You can't own the sky.

JOHN

Oh, but I can. I own it like you own a small toy train, for example. It's just another one of my playthings. Incidentally, I also own a real train, but it's still just a toy.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

It could all be yours Will, that's why I've brought you here, you see? You'll live with me, and have a brand new room, and you'll be able to do anything you want.

WILL

I like it in my own room, with Roger. I just want to go home.

JOHN

With Roger, did you say?

WILL

He's my brother, I know he's coming to find me.

JOHN

Hm.. That very well may be. But wouldn't you like it, Will, if Roger could live here with you, too? Then you'd never have to go home.

WILL

No! I don't like it here.

JOHN

Come now, son, it's not all bad. I think you'll come to love it, in fact.

Will hangs his head again, defeated.

WILL

Why are you keeping me here?

JOHN

Keeping you? I wouldn't put it that way but...it will take some explaining.

John gets up from the table and heads to another door, behind the head of the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Come here, I want to show you something.

Will stands up and shuffles over to the door. John claps a hand on his shoulder and they disappear into the room.

INT. THE CHAMBER OF THE CRYSTAL BALL - NIGHT

Will and John are standing in a dimly lit chamber, in the middle of which stands a large glowing orb. They move closer, and see that milky clouds are swirling about in a frenzy, emitting small white flashes of light. Will stares in amazement.

WILL

What is that?

JOHN

It is what I use to see around this place. I can't be everywhere at once, you know. Look closer, tell me what you see.

Will does as he is told, and the clouds appear to separate. The plains come into view, and then the train itself, rumbling along through the landscape. He looks closer. The ball shows him a much more detailed view of the train, and then even closer on the platform between two cars positioned close to the front. Will can now make out his brother and Percy, now sitting up and talking animatedly. He gasps.

WILL

Roger!

John quickly comes around to where Will is standing, and looks closely.

JOHN

What, what is it? Do you see your brother?

WILL

Yes! And he's talking to...a bird!

JOHN

(muttering)

Then it's just as I suspected.
They're going to Mother Florence's.

WILL

They're getting up! I think they're going into that traincar.

JOHN

Yes, yes, of course, they have to.
You'll have to excuse me son, I have to go attend to something.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Wait right here, I won't be a minute.

Will hardly even hears him. John leaves the room, while he continues to stare at the crystal ball which only shows the train rolling along the tracks. Roger and Percy have disappeared into the second car, and Will waits for some sign of them on the other side.

INT. A PRIVATE ROOM IN JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John sits in a large, old-fashioned easy chair in a small, private smoking room. A lamp stands by his side, and a pipe and ashtray are on a small table below it. He is wearing a pair of reading glasses, and writes quickly but carefully with a fountain pen on a piece of parchment.

INSERT - THE NOTE, which reads:

"The boy and Percy are headed for Mother Florence. They MUST NOT make contact with her. Intercept the travelers, or take care of Flo - I leave it in your hands. It is IMPERATIVE that you do not fail!"

John signs the letter with his first name, and carefully rolls up the piece of parchment. He then ties it with a thin piece of string, and places it on the table next to him. John stands up from his chair, and walks out of frame towards the camera. We hear the metallic sound of a cage being opened, and a clamorous rustling of wings. John walks back to his chair with a beautiful peregrine falcon perched on his arm. This is John's beloved pet, XERXES. He takes the rolled up note and ties it carefully to one of the falcon's legs.

JOHN

I need this delivered right away,
Xerxes, do you hear me?

Amazingly, the bird nods its head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Good. You know who to bring it to.

John quickly walks outside through the screen door on his porch, and with a wave of his arm Xerxes is launched into the air, beating his wings and twisting off into the night sky. After he has flown off, John turns to go back inside the house.

INT. THE CHAMBER OF THE CRYSTAL BALL - NIGHT

John enters the room to find Will still staring perplexedly at the ball.

JOHN
I'm back, son. What do you see now?

WILL
I don't know, they went inside and
I haven't seen them since.

JOHN
Let me show you something else,
then.

John waves a hand over the ball, and clouds and lights swirl about, obscuring the image of the train. After a moment the ball clears, revealing a new image. It is a massive field of wheat, with peasants dotted about, working hard under the sun.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You see all those people?

WILL
Yes.

JOHN
At this very moment, those people
and hundreds more just like them,
are working for me.

WILL
What do you mean?

JOHN
These fields, this land...it's all
mine, Will. If those people out
there do a good job, I make sure
they get fed. But I can't do it by
myself.

WILL
Why not?

JOHN
I'm getting old, I can't keep track
of things like I used to. My
kingdom is rather large, you see.

WILL

Oh..

JOHN

But once you get to know the place,
it doesn't feel so big. When you've
lived here as long as I have, it
can seem kind of small in a way. Do
you see what I mean?

WILL

Yeah, I guess so..

JOHN

It's getting late, I think it's
time I showed you to your new room.

Will yawns and rubs his eyes sleepily.

WILL

Okay.

They leave the chamber of the crystal ball, passing again
through the dining room, and John takes Will up a winding set
of stairs to the top of the building. He shows him into his
room, which is by no means extravagant, but certainly very
comfortable. In fact, it looks exactly the same as the room
that Roger awoke from in his dream.

JOHN

I trust you'll be comfortable in
here?

WILL

Yes...

JOHN

Good. Get some sleep, and I'll see
you in the morning. We have a big
day ahead of us.

Will walks over to his bed and starts taking off his shoes.
John closes the door and heads back downstairs.

EXT. THE TRAINCAR PLATFORM - DAY

Roger and Percy are sitting on the platform. The sun has
begun to set, and it casts long shadows on the prairie as the
train rolls along.

ROGER

All right. So what do we have to do next?

PERCY

What we have to do next, is go through that door and speak to an old acquaintance of mine. Please be careful, all right? We're almost there.

ROGER

I'll be careful, I promise.

They both get up, and move towards the door. Roger opens it, and they step through. Like the ones before, it bangs shut behind them, seemingly on its own.

EXT. A WIDE OPEN PLAIN - NIGHT

The two riders tear across the prairie at full gallop, their horses panting with exertion. The plain rumbles beneath them as their hooves beat the earth. Suddenly, from above, Xerxes swoops down and glides between them, screeching loudly to alert them of his presence. Luther turns back just in time, and he sticks out his arm for the bird to land upon. It does, and the two Rangers bring their horses to an abrupt halt.

LUTHER

What brings you here, friend?

MARTIN

Unwrap his leg.

Luther looks closer and sees that a note is indeed wrapped around Xerxes' leg. He gently takes it off and unfurls it.

LUTHER

I can't read it, come here and give me a light.

Martin guides his horse over and lights a match, by which they are able to make out what John has written.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

(reading the note)

Trying to get to Mother
Florence's...must not make
contact...

They read a moment longer.

MARTIN

Seems pretty straight-forward to me.

Luther pockets the note and looks up at Martin.

LUTHER

Well, look, we know what John wants done, he doesn't care how we do it. I say we head straight for Flo's.

MARTIN

Fine by me.

They whip the horses into motion and gallop off on a slightly altered course. Xerxes takes off back in the direction of John's house.

INT. A DIMLY LIT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Percy and Roger stand in front of the door inside a large, well-furnished living room. Bookshelves line the walls, filled to the ceiling with volumes, and a large fire roars in the fireplace. A ornately-carved rotating wooden armchair stands in the middle of the room with its back to the travelers. A puff of pipe smoke floats into the air, and the chair swivels about to reveal a very old man, NICK. He is extremely small and fragile looking, and the chair seems to all but swallow him up whole. He wears bifocals and a weathered tweed jacket, and he considers Roger and Percy carefully while smoking a long-stemmed pipe.

PERCY

Hello, Nick.

NICK

Why, hello, Percy!

His voices wheezes with mustiness, and the weight of his years seems to be present in each word.

NICK (CONT'D)

And what sort of guest did you bring with you this evening?

PERCY

This is my friend, Roger. We're both in a bit of a predicament you see...it's a long story, I won't bore you, but ah.. Well, we simply must see the conductor...please?

There is a note of desperation in Percy's voice.

NICK

Roger, come over here for a moment.
My eyes aren't so good, let me have
a look at you.

Roger does as he is asked, and Nick looks him over with
beady, staring eyes.

NICK (CONT'D)

Have you ever played checkers,
Roger?

ROGER

Sure, all the time. My brother and
I play..used to play all the time.

NICK

Good, that's good. If there is one
thing I love, it's a good game of
checkers against a worthy opponent.
Would you like to play a game?

Roger looks over at Percy, unsure.

ROGER

I guess so...but Percy isn't lying,
we really need to see the
conductor.

Nick laughs, but it ends in sharp coughing.

NICK

You're a well-spoken boy, Roger. I
know he isn't lying. I tell you
what...

Nick reaches down beside his chair and pulls out a
checkerboard, along with a small bag of checkers. He places
them on an end table, and motions for Roger to sit on the
divan that is nearby. Roger moves it over next to the table
and takes a seat, still looking very apprehensive.

NICK (CONT'D)

You and I will play a game. Just
one game. If you win, I'll let you
and Percy go through, but if you
lose, it's back the way you came.

Roger gulps and looks at Percy again. Percy shrugs his
shoulders, adding a look that says 'we have no choice.'

ROGER

Okay. I'll play. But you have to promise to let us through if I win.

NICK

I promise. But there's a catch. For every piece you jump, I will ask you something. A riddle. Answer it incorrectly, and you lose your piece instead. But get it right, and you take an extra one of mine.

ROGER

(indignant)

What about when you jump one of my pieces?

Nick laughs.

NICK

Well, then, you've just lost a piece!

PERCY

If I may interject, Nick, that hardly seems fair!

Nick answers coolly, but his tone rises slightly in anger.

NICK

Now, Percy, it hardly seems appropriate for you to dictate the rules of MY favorite game, to ME, in MY living room. Does it?

PERCY

No..

NICK

I'm glad we agree. Then let us play on, my boy. Unless of course, you'd rather go back...

PERCY

No! Absolutely not. He'll play. Right, Roger?

Roger nods, and dutifully turns towards the board, where Nick is already setting up the pieces. They are beautiful: small ornate discs carved by hand out of ivory and ebony. They snap sharply against the wooden board as Nick expertly lays them down.

NICK

All right, Roger, you go first.

Roger makes his move, and Nick makes his almost immediately after, without any hesitation at all. Roger considers the board carefully, then slowly makes his second move. Nick comes back with another instantaneous placement. Roger does not seem intimidated. Percy does, however, and he paces about the room nervously. Roger loses a couple of pieces, but then he makes a clever double jump to threaten two of Nick's checkers.

NICK (CONT'D)

Well, well, that's a good move!
Now, I believe that's two riddles I
owe you..

ROGER

Now hold on a minute! That's not
right. If I had jumped two pieces
on different turns, sure, you would
ask me two riddles. But I double-
jumped. That means you ask me one,
and if I get it right, I've
captured two more.

Nick looks a little astonished at this display of boldness.

NICK

Ah..hm.. I like your tenacity,
Roger. You're my kind of player!
One question for four of my pieces
then, eh? Naturally I'll have to
think of something
rather...perplexing. Don't forget,
I'm asking you alone, Roger. No
help from your fine-feathered
friend over there.

Nick pauses and puffs his pipe, thinking carefully about which riddle to select. After a moment, he looks up. He's got it.

NICK (CONT'D)

The life I lead is all too short;
and all the while I am consumed.
I'm fast when thin, and slow when
fat, and my only enemy is the wind.
What am I?

Roger's face goes blank.

ROGER
I...I don't know.

Percy looks terrified.

PERCY
Come on, Roger, think!

NICK
Quiet, Percy.

Roger gets over his initial befuddlement and frowns, thinking hard.

ROGER
(to himself)
Consumed all my life...only enemy
is the wind. Something that burns!
So...fast when thin, slow when
fat...a life all too short...

He looks up at Nick and smiles.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I've got it! You're a candle.

NICK
(taken aback)
Ah..Well done my boy! But of course
that was an exceedingly easy one.
Next time it won't be so...self-
explanatory.

Roger looks back at Percy with a smile. He collects his two jumped pieces, and then moves to select two more from Nick's side.

NICK (CONT'D)
Now, now, just a moment. I think
I'll pick those extra two.

He strategically takes two of his pieces, which create perfect open lanes to capture Roger's men.

NICK (CONT'D)
There you go!

He hands the pieces to Roger, who accepts them with a grimace.

PERCY
Well that's helpful.

ROGER

Don't worry, Percy, I'm really good
at this game. You'll see.

NICK

(mockingly)

Yes, you'll see. My turn, I
believe?

Nick quickly makes a double jump on Roger, on two pieces that
were poised to attack him. Roger groans.

NICK (CONT'D)

(smugly)

Your move.

Roger carefully considers the board. He sees his move, and
jumps one of Nick's pieces.

NICK (CONT'D)

Well, another good move, my young
friend. But you know the rules. Now
let's see...

Roger looks back at Percy, unsure that he will be able to
solve the next riddle.

NICK (CONT'D)

Mhmm, mhmm. Okay, I've got it. This
one should stump you.

He pauses for a moment, remembering how it goes.

NICK (CONT'D)

The poor have me; the rich need me.
I am greater than John Barleycorn,
and more evil than the Famine. If
you eat me, you will die. What am
I?

ROGER

More evil than the Famine?

NICK

Of course, the Famine. She's the
most evil force ever to appear in
this land.

ROGER

You must be...nothing.

Nick curses under his breath.

NICK
I don't believe it. Confound it
all, that was my best riddle!

He picks up the captured checker and an extra one from the other side. In his frustration, he does not realize that he has exposed himself to the perfect triple jump. Roger's eyes light up, but Nick does not notice.

NICK (CONT'D)
(crossly)
Well, never mind. It's my turn.

He makes a rather hasty move, only taking one of Roger's pieces, but setting himself on the back row to be kinged.

NICK (CONT'D)
You know what to do, eh?

Roger nods and takes one of Nick's captured men and places it on top.

NICK (CONT'D)
In trouble now, I think. Go ahead.

Roger picks up his piece and jumps three of Nick's remaining six pieces, slowly and deliberately. Nick gasps.

NICK (CONT'D)
What?! Oh no...

PERCY
Ha! I suggest you think of a good one Nick. If he gets this one right, you're finished!

Nick knits his brow, ignoring Percy.

NICK
(to himself)
Hm...must come up with a good one.
One he's sure not to know.
No...no...no...something different.
Yes! I've got it.

Nick looks up with a sinister grin.

NICK (CONT'D)
You'll never get this one. But
first...

He produces an ordinary-looking brass key, and lays it down on the table next to the checkerboard.

NICK (CONT'D)

You probably want to see what
you're playing for. This key will
take you through the door behind
me, and then you're home free.

Percy has hopped up onto the mantle of the fireplace, a few
feet above the players' heads. He looks down at their table,
eyeing the key eagerly. Nick notices the look.

NICK (CONT'D)

Don't get any of your clever ideas,
Percy! This key won't work unless I
tell it to. Now then, are you
ready, Roger?

He nods his head.

NICK (CONT'D)

Then here it is. I am large as a
mountain, but I look small as a
pea. I float on forever in a
waterless sea. What am I?

EXT. THE ROOF OF WILL AND ROGER'S TREEHOUSE - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK

Roger and Will lie on the roof of their treehouse, looking up
at the glittering sky above.

ROGER

Will, look, a shooting star!

He traces its path across the sky with one finger while Will
looks on in fascination.

WILL

Wow...that's amazing. How do stars
stay up in the sky, Roger?

ROGER

I don't know...I guess they just
float there.

WILL

(laughing)
Like beach balls in the ocean!

ROGER

Yeah, I guess so. But there isn't
any water in space, Will.

WILL

Yeah, I know. How big do you think they really are?

ROGER

How big do I think what really are?

WILL

The stars, Roger!

ROGER

Oh. Hm. Well, imagine somebody reached down and ripped Mount Katahdin off the face of Maine, and tossed it into space.

WILL

It'd get burnt up in the atmosphere.

ROGER

No, no, it just gets tossed into space. Like a beach ball in the ocean, right?

WILL

Yeah...

ROGER

That's how big stars are.

WILL

Wow! Really?

ROGER

Yep. They're big as mountains, they just look tiny from here.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Roger looks up with a triumphant smile on his face. Nick is confused.

NICK

What, what is it? What am I?

ROGER

That's easy, you're a star.

NICK

What?! That's impossible! How did you know?

ROGER

I just remembered something that my brother said once.

NICK

This is ridiculous. Forget it, you cheated!

As the words leave his lips, Percy jumps down from his perch and scoops the key up in his beak, right before Nick can grab it.

NICK (CONT'D)

Hey, that's mine!

PERCY

You promised us we would get through if he beat you. It was fair and square!

NICK

I'll show you fair and square!

He makes a move to stand up, but he suddenly erupts into a coughing fit, and immediately sits back down. After a moment, he breathes easy again, though he seems greatly subdued.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm...sorry. I shouldn't have accused you of cheating. You're a worthy opponent Roger, quite cunning.

PERCY

Tell the key to work, Nick. Please.

NICK

'This key shall turn that lock'.
There, that's all it is. It will work now. Go on, I must rest.

Roger takes the key from Percy, and the bolt turns smoothly as he unlocks the door.

EXT. THE TRAINCAR PLATFORM - NIGHT

Percy and Roger emerge into the night air on the final platform before the main car.

PERCY

Roger, that was amazing! How did you solve those riddles?

ROGER

I don't know, they just came to me.

PERCY

Well, you've saved our shot at seeing the conductor yet again. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Roger. You are a true companion!

ROGER

Thanks, Percy. Don't mention it.

PERCY

All right, we're almost there. I must tell you, it's very important that we're polite to the conductor. Otherwise, he might not help us. Do you understand?

ROGER

Yes.

PERCY

Good. Then let's go.

They open the door and step inside.

INT. THE CONDUCTOR'S CAB

A dimly lit figure stands at the front of the train, his hands on the controls and his eyes on the tracks ahead. It is THE CONDUCTOR, and he wears a blue visored railway hat, along with blue overalls. He does not appear to notice the entrance of Roger and Percy. The pair walks closer.

CONDUCTOR

Hold it. Names.

They stop.

PERCY

(clearing his throat)

Ah, it's Percy, sir, and this is my friend Roger.

CONDUCTOR

Roger, eh? You handled Nick pretty well back there.

ROGER

Um.. Thank you. How did you know?

CONDUCTOR

Oh, I know pretty much everything
that goes on this in this train.
Gotta keep an eye on things, you
know.

ROGER

Yes..of course.

CONDUCTOR

Naturally, I know where you fellas
want to go. I can drop you off at
the next station, and it's maybe a
half hour walk from there. We
should we arriving shortly.

Percy and Roger exchange looks of relief.

EXT. THE TRAIN

The black cab of the locomotive lumbers along into the night.

EXT. THE TRAIN STATION - LATER

Rolling gently along, the train arrives at the station and
makes a full stop alongside a platform. Roger and Percy
emerge from the door in the cab, looking around. The building
attached to the platform is quite decrepit and seems to be
abandoned, and lights from the train cause eerie shadows to
leap around the broken shards of windowpane. They look back
at the conductor still in the cab, and he waves goodbye to
them. The train begins to start up, and soon rolls away from
the station.

The travelers depart from the platform and begin their
journey, headed away from the train.

PERCY

Come on, I know the way. It's not
far from here.

They hike along into the distance, with wind blowing clouds
of dust across the sweeping plain.

EXT. THE OPEN PLAINS - NIGHT

Martin and Luther trot along on their steeds, approaching
what appears to be a campfire a little ways in the distance.

MARTIN

All right. So are we clear on the plan?

LUTHER

Absolutely.

EXT. A SMALL CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A campfire roars in the center of three tents, pitched around in a circle, their entrances facing in. Seated on a small wooden chair is MOTHER FLORENCE, a middle-aged, dark skinned woman wearing a handkerchief on her head and a dusty cotton dress. She looks pensively at the fire. A small boy emerges from the tent by her side. It is her son CALVIN, 6 years old.

CALVIN

Mama, why are you still awake?

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh, I can't sleep, honey, that's all.

CALVIN

Why not? What's wrong?

MOTHER FLORENCE

I just have a bad feeling. Something isn't right.

CALVIN

I don't know, mama, everything seems all right.

She smiles and strokes his hair affectionately.

MOTHER FLORENCE

You're probably right child. Nothing to worry about.

CALVIN

I'm gonna go back to sleep, I'm tired again.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Okay. Sweet dreams, dear.

CALVIN

Good night, mama.

He retreats back into his tent, laying down on a soft spread of furs.

He rests his head on the pillow and quickly falls asleep again. Mother Florence does not bother sleeping, despite her son's attempt to soothe her. She stares at the fire a moment longer.

Suddenly, she pricks up her ears. Faintly, in the distance, she can hear the sound of hoof beats. The riders are galloping full-tilt towards Mother Florence's campsite.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTHER FLORENCE'S CAMPSITE

She stands up in terror, and looks out into the night trying to make out the horses.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE CAMPSITE

Martin and Luther close in, firing their guns in the air as they bear down on the tents.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE

Mother Florence now sees the white horses and their riders emerge out of the darkness. She screams in terror, and hurries to wake her children up. Calvin and his little sister MAISY are clearly distressed at having been disturbed from their slumber.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Wake up, wake up, wake up! We have
to go, now!!

The children drowsily raise themselves out of bed, but suddenly gunshots go off extremely close to their tents. Fear shakes them fully awake, and they immediately begin to cry, reaching out for their mother. They leave the tent to hear the thunderous sound of hooves bearing down on them, fast.

Mother Florence turns to run away from the campsite with her children, but from out of the darkness come the two Rangers, like white angels of death. The massive horses easily trample the tents and campfire, flaring their nostrils with exhilaration. Martin and Luther look about, and easily spot Mother Florence and the children trying to escape into the night.

LUTHER

There!

They rally the horses and gallop towards the trio. Each ranger reaches out with brawny arms, and plucks up a member of the group, right off the ground. Martin snatches Calvin, and Luther picks up Mother Florence herself. Maisy stands alone on the prairie, crying hysterically.

MAISY

Mama, come back, come back!

Instead of her Mother, however, it is Martin coming back. He has Calvin gripped under one arm, kicking and struggling, and while still controlling the horse and the boy he manages to scoop up Maisy as well. He spins his horse back around and rides off into the darkness to follow Luther back to John's.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John leaves Will's room, shutting the door gently behind him. He walks down the long hallway, down the stairs, and enters the dining hall.

INT. THE DINING HALL

Mandrake stands at attention by the far wall. He stares at the fire, still roaring by the table. John takes a seat at the table.

JOHN

He's asleep. Shouldn't be too long now.

MANDRAKE

Yes sir. One hour left until midnight.

JOHN

He'll learn to like it here, Mandrake.

MANDRAKE

After the portal closes forever, he'll have to, sir.

JOHN

Right as usual. Only, his brother and Percy are still out there, wandering around.

MANDRAKE

With Mother Florence in our care,
sir, they may very well end up lost
on the plains forever.

JOHN

You're right again, Mandrake. Well,
let them wander. I already have one
boy who can be a good son. If Percy
and Roger are lost forever, it's of
no particular concern to me. Kill
two birds with one stone, I say.

MANDRAKE

I believe you mean one bird and one
boy, sir.

They share an evil laugh.

INT. THE DOOR TO THE DINING HALL

Will stands in the hallway with his ear pressed to the door. Understandably, he was having some trouble getting to sleep. Realizing that their conversation is about him, he turns to run down the hallway. His eyes dart about like a frightened animal, and he runs for the door at the other end of the hall. He finds himself in the kitchen. He sees the exit at the other end of the hall and sprints for it, then opens the screen door and dashes down the porch steps. His flight is brought to an abrupt halt, however, as he runs straight into the outstretched arms of Luther, who is standing guard with Martin. Will screams in terror and struggles to get free, but Luther handles him easily.

LUTHER

Whoa! Where do you think you're
goin', cowboy?

WILL

Put me down!!

MARTIN

These kids...why you think they're
always tryin' to run away, Luther?

LUTHER

I don't know, but I can make damn
sure it doesn't happen again.

They walk inside the house, striding purposefully towards the dining room with Will still kicking and struggling under Luther's arm. They burst the door open and walk in to very surprised looks from John and Mandrake.

JOHN

What...what's going on?

LUTHER

Your boy, boss, he was tryin' to get away.

JOHN

Is that so?

MARTIN

Yes sir, Luther nabbed him just as he was jumping off your porch. Looked like he was runnin' from the Devil himself.

WILL

Put me down, NOW!

JOHN

Oh you'll be put down, my young friend, in your original quarters. I thought you were a good boy, Will, I guess I was wrong. Luther? Take him down to the cells, please.

LUTHER

You got it, boss.

The Rangers turn to go, taking Will with them.

MANDRAKE

He'll get used to it, sir.

JOHN

Oh I know, it takes time just like anything else. I have very high hopes for this one.

INT. THE DUNGEON - NIGHT

The Rangers emerge from the heavy metal door to the dungeon and walk down the few steps to the main row of cells. Luther still carries Will, but he has stopped struggling and merely weeps quietly. Martin takes a ring of keys from a hook on the wall, and opens the cell down the hall on the left.

Luther sets him down inside the cell on his cot. Will immediately turns over on his side, and stares at the wall. Martin and Luther exit, and Martin locks the door shut, then returns the ring of keys to its hook. They leave, clanging the hall door behind them.

MOTHER FLORENCE (O.S.)

Hey! Hey over there!

Will gets up and looks across to the opposite cell. Inside are Mother Florence and her children, who lie sleeping on their cots.

WILL

Who are you?

MOTHER FLORENCE

My name is Mother Florence, child, what's your name?

WILL

I'm Will.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Are you the little boy that was coming to see me, with Percy?

WILL

Huh? No. Who's Percy?

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh you know, Percy, the talking crow, he was coming with you!

WILL

No, I never met any talking crows.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Hmm..Wait a minute, it was your brother! You've got a brother, haven't you, Will?

WILL

Yeah! My older brother, Roger. He's coming to get us, I saw him!

MOTHER FLORENCE

Of course, of course, it all makes sense now. Except, how did you see him?

WILL

John Barleycorn showed me, with his crystal ball. They were on the train and I saw them go inside one of the cars.

MOTHER FLORENCE

That's right, they're on the train. They were coming to see me, for help in getting you back, child.

WILL

I knew it! But, how do you know about them?

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh, the conductor told me a couple days ago, said he's expecting to drop off some passengers by my station and to keep my eyes out.

WILL

Oh..

MOTHER FLORENCE

Well, it's all right, I'm sure you're brother is on his way right now. Don't worry a bit.

WILL

Yeah, I think you're right. I hope he gets here soon!

INT. THE DINING HALL

John sits at the head of the table, with Mandrake, Martin, and Luther seated around him.

JOHN

Now look, gentlemen, we all know the portal closes for good at midnight. We've lost one boy on the plains, and the other one almost got away once tonight. I do not want it to happen again. There has been too much laziness, and stupidity, and inactivity around here lately, and frankly, I'm getting very tired of it.

The three men exchange looks of confusion.

MARTIN

Boss...we haven't done anything wrong.

JOHN

I don't care! The boy must not escape. Do you think you can handle that?

MARTIN

Yes, boss.

LUTHER

Yes, boss.

MANDRAKE

Yes, sir.

JOHN

Just make sure things go smoothly, for once.

MARTIN

The boy is locked up tight, along with Mother Florence and her kids. They're not going anywhere, boss.

JOHN

Good. Well, all that's left to do is wait.

MANDRAKE

Half an hour until midnight, sir.

EXT. MOTHER FLORENCE'S CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Roger and Percy arrive at the campsite to find it completely ransacked. The tents have been crushed, and the campfire is a smoldering mess. Broken tent poles stick out of the ground like broken bones. A lonely trail of smoke curls through the air.

ROGER

(shocked)

What happened?

PERCY

Oh no, no, no, this is terrible!
How can this be?

They quickly look through the wreckage of the campsite, and determine that no one is there.

ROGER
They're gone, Percy. Somebody took them.

PERCY
I know who.

ROGER
You do?

PERCY
Who else could have done this? It has to be the work of those two ogres, Martin and Luther.

ROGER
Who are they?

PERCY
Men who work for John Barleycorn. He likes to call them his Rangers.

ROGER
Oh..what do we do?

PERCY
We have to go there. To John's.

ROGER
But how? Do you know the way?

PERCY
No, but I know how to get there.

Percy makes a wide gesture at the ground. Roger looks down and sees a flurry of hoof prints in the dust, which make a few loops and then form two sets running off into the darkness. Roger looks up at Percy in understanding.

ROGER
Let's go!

PERCY
Lead the way, my friend.

The duo runs off to follow the hoof prints.

EXT. JOHN'S FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Roger and Percy pull up in front of the house, gasping for breath. They look up at the house, which looms ominously before them, shrouded in shadows.

Beyond the house, a gloomy-looking forest rises up into the sky like black, skeletal fingers.

PERCY

This is it. From here on, things could get dangerous. We must be extremely careful.

The house appears dark and silent. No activity is detectable from outside.

ROGER

Once we get inside, let's split up to find Will.

PERCY

How will you get around?

ROGER

Something tells me I've been here before. I'll be all right.

PERCY

Okay. Let's go.

They proceed into the house.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE

Percy and Roger cautiously open the screen door and step inside. They listen carefully, but hear nothing. Candles flicker in holders on the wall, dimly lighting the interior.

PERCY

(whispering)

I'll go this way. You check in the basement.

Roger gives him the thumbs up. Percy proceeds down the hallway, treading ever so softly. Roger heads for the door to the basement, and begins his descent down the steps.

INT. THE DUNGEON

Will and Mother Florence sit in their separate cells. Maisy and Calvin have woken up, and they sit on the floor passing a ball back and forth. They look over and see Will, alone, hanging his head.

CALVIN

Hey, you want to play?

Will looks up eagerly.

WILL

Yeah!

CALVIN

Okay. I'll pass you the ball, and you have to bounce it back through the bars. Think you can do it?

WILL

Yes, I think so.

CALVIN

Good! Every time you get it back through, it's ten points.

Will gets up and stands ready by the bars. Calvin bounces it across, straight into Will's outstretched hands. Aiming carefully, he sends it back across the corridor, through the bars to Calvin.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Good one! Now it's my turn.

Will steps back, and Calvin lobs the ball to him.

WILL

Ten points!

MAISY

I want to try!

CALVIN

All right, catch this one and then throw it back.

MAISY

Okay.

Will tosses the ball, and Maisy catches it.

MAISY (CONT'D)

I did it!

CALVIN

Good going, Maisy. Now toss it back!

She lines the ball up with the bars on Will's cell, preparing to throw.

MOTHER FLORENCE

I don't know about this game,
children, you're going to lose that
ball. Then what will you play with?

CALVIN

We won't lose it, mama.

Maisy chucks the ball, but it bounces off one of the bars and rolls down the hallway. It stops against the steps at the end of the hall.

MAISY

Oh no...

CALVIN

Maisy! Why did you do that?!

MAISY

I'm sorry, Calvin, I missed!

MOTHER FLORENCE

Children, don't fight!

Suddenly the metal door above the steps begin to creak open.

CALVIN

Now look what you've done! We've
had it, Maisy.

She starts to cry. The door opens all the way to reveal a triumphant Roger.

WILL

Roger!!

He dashes down the corridor to Will, who is overjoyed to see him. They embrace through the bars.

ROGER

Will! How did you get here?

WILL

That man upstairs, John Barleycorn,
he put me here. I think he wants us
to stay here forever. This poor
lady told me John wrecked her home,
too.

Roger turns around to see Mother Florence and the children in their cell.

ROGER

Are you...Mother Florence?

MOTHER FLORENCE

Yes I am. You must be Roger. It's a pleasure to finally meet you.

ROGER

Percy and I...we saw your camp. I'm so sorry.

Mother Florence waves her hand dismissively.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh, that. What's important is that we're all safe and sound, for now. I think we really should get going, though.

ROGER

All right, I'm getting you all out of here.

WILL

Quick, the keys are on that hook over there!

Roger dashes over and grabs the keys. He quickly finds the one for Will's cell, and lets his brother out first. Then he opens the door for Mother Florence, and they all move down the hallway and out the door.

WILL (CONT'D)

Roger, who's Percy?

ROGER

Huh?

WILL

You said, 'Percy and I saw your camp' when you were talking to Mother Florence. Who is he?

ROGER

Oh...he's a talking crow I met on the train.

WILL

A talking crow?! What...well, where is he now?

ROGER

We split up to look for you. He
should be upstairs, we'll find him
and then get out of here.

They open the door at the top of the stairs and emerge into
the entrance hall of the house.

ROGER (CONT'D)

He should be around here
somewhere...

PERCY (O.C.)

Help! Somebody help me!

They suddenly hear Percy's distress call, coming from
somewhere inside the house. Roger's face turns white.

ROGER

That's him! I have to go save him.

WILL

I'm not leaving you again, Roger.

Roger appears conflicted, but puts his hand on Will's
shoulder to acknowledge the gesture of loyalty.

ROGER

Okay.. Mother Florence, you should
take your children and get out of
here. This might be dangerous.

MOTHER FLORENCE

All right, child. We'll try to find
some way to help. Good luck to you
both!

CALVIN

Bye, Will!

WILL

Bye!

Mother Florence, Maisy, and Calvin all silently leave through
the screen door. She hurries them along once they get
outside. Roger and Will bravely continue on towards the sound
of Percy's cries for help. They turn the corner to go down
another hallway, and find a door that seems to be very close
to the sounds of distress.

WILL (CONT'D)

This is the dining room. I don't think we should go in there, Roger, we can just leave right now.

ROGER

We can't just leave, Will, Percy's in there! I would never have gotten this far if it weren't for him, we have to try and save him.

WILL

But Roger, I'm really scared! I think he wants us to stay here forever, I don't want that, I want to play in our treehouse, I want to see dad again!

Will begins to cry, and he sits down against the wall in defeat. Roger sits down next to him and puts an arm around his shoulder.

ROGER

Come on Will, don't worry, we're going to be fine! Here, I've got something for you.

Roger takes the Barlow knife out of his pocket and puts it in Will's hand.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Here. Dad gave me this. It'll help you be brave.

Will picks his head up. He opens the knife and looks at it in the dim candlelight of the hallway.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Now, are you ready?

Will stands up.

WILL

Yes!

ROGER

All right. Now, on the count of three. One..two..three!

They throw the door open and step into the main dining hall, to see Mandrake, Luther, Martin, and John, all standing around the fire place. They turn around, and the boys see that Percy is being held tightly in John's hands.

JOHN

Well! If it isn't our favorite
little Houdini impersonators!
Somehow I am not surprised.

ROGER

You! I dreamed about you.

JOHN

That's right, Roger. And now you're
here. I couldn't be more pleased.

ROGER

Put down my friend.

JOHN

Oh, I don't think so. Xerxes heard
him going upstairs and let me know
there was an intruder. And that's
just what you are, Percy. An
intruder.

PERCY

Put me down, John!

JOHN

I keep hearing that today.. Well,
as you wish.

John begins to lower Percy towards the roaring fire. He
struggles valiantly, but to no avail. John holds him firmly
and moves him closer to the blaze.

ROGER

No!!

Roger charges at John, but is intercepted by Luther, who
picks him up with one hand and pins him to the wall.

LUTHER

I am sick of you little kids
runnin' around all over the place!

Will bravely runs over and starts pounding on Luther's tree-
trunk sized leg. Luther gives him a swift kick, and Will
falls down in a daze against one of the benches at the table.
Percy appears to be done for. Suddenly, the doors burst open.
In walk Daniel, Nathan, and Isaac. They are wielding very
large scythes.

NATHAN

Hello, John.

JOHN

Nathan! What a pleasant surprise.

He stops himself from moving Percy any closer to the fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Isaac, Daniel, nice to see you too.
Now, what can I do for you
gentlemen at this hour?

NATHAN

We're getting these boys out of
here. They need to go home, John.

JOHN

Why, here is home now, don't you
see?

He gestures towards Roger and Will.

JOHN (CONT'D)

These boys...they're going to love
living here.

NATHAN

I don't think so John. Now put down
the bird, he's coming with us too.

JOHN

Now, Nathan, don't make me laugh!

NATHAN

I'll ask you one last time. Put the
bird down, John.

JOHN

Enough of this ridiculous chit-
chat. Martin, Luther, please take
care of these guests. I think
they've worn out their welcome.

Luther lowers Roger to the ground, and the Rangers advance menacingly upon the three men. Martin and Luther have a distinct size advantage, and even though the men are armed with scythes it seems like an unfair match.

NATHAN

Whoa, now hold on a minute! Those
wouldn't be your horses out there
right now, would they?

Martin and Luther look out the window, just in time to see their white horses riding helter skelter out into the darkness, away from the house.

MARTIN
What the...

LUTHER
Perseus!

MARTIN
We gotta go, boss, I'm real sorry.

They dash out of the dining room and outside, chasing their horses off into the night, running as fast as they can.

LUTHER
(fading away)
Perseus, baby, wait!

John looks at Mandrake expectantly.

JOHN
Well? Take care of them, Mandrake!

MANDRAKE
Ah, sir, I don't think I can do that.

JOHN
What do you mean? Throw them out!!

MANDRAKE
I...I'm sorry.

Without another word, Mandrake turns his back and walks out of the room. John turns back to Nathan with a look of fury.

JOHN
Well, this is just perfect.

He violently hurls Percy against the opposite wall, and he crumples to the floor in a shower of feathers.

ROGER
Percy!

He runs over to help him. The three men advance on John.

JOHN
So it has come to this. Well, then, on with it!

In a flash, John reaches for the saber that is mounted on the mantle. He whips it out of the scabbard and stands to confront Nathan, Isaac, and Daniel. The three men charge. John's saber clashes against scythe, and a tremendous battle ensues. John skillfully parries away each blow from the three men, and despite being heavily outnumbered, John seems to be gaining the upper hand. He lashes out at Isaac, and manages to clip his arm, drawing blood. Shouting in pain, he drops his scythe with a loud clatter and staggers back. Daniel and Nathan are left to fight John. He forces them back, and Nathan and Daniel are rapidly running out of space. They trade blows back and forth with John, who is standing under a very large, very heavy-looking wooden chandelier covered in candles.

NATHAN

Will, do something!

JOHN

Give it up, Nathan, this doesn't concern you!

NATHAN

You're wrong John, these boys don't belong here. They must be sent back through the portal!

JOHN

It's almost midnight. Soon the portal will close forever, and William shall be my heir.

NATHAN

Heir? I think you mean slave. I can't allow that, John, you have no right! Just like you had no right to keep me and my brothers here, all those years ago.

JOHN

I'm sorry Nathan, it's far too late for you to change anything.

Will sees that the chandelier is connected to a thin rope on the far wall, and he dashes over to where it is tied off. He struggles for a moment with the knot, then remembers the knife in his pocket. He brings it out and begins to saw through the rope. Nathan charges.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The boy...stays!!

John locks his saber with Nathan's scythe, and with a monumental amount of strength he hurls him back against the wall. Daniel stands back, alone, unsure what to do. John stands, breathing hard, preparing himself for the last attack. Suddenly, however, Will cuts through the rope, and the chandelier comes plummeting down. John looks up, but too late - the heavy wood crashes down on him, pinning him to the floor. Daniel lowers his scythe, relieved. Nathan recovers himself and gets up.

NATHAN

Thank you.

John struggles under the crushing weight of the chandelier.

JOHN

(gasping)

Help me...get this off me, please!

NATHAN

I don't think so, John. Not yet.
Isaac, Daniel, you stay here and
watch him. Boys, come with me, we
have no time to lose!

The grandfather clock ticks steadily along, showing five minutes to midnight. Roger gathers Percy up, and he and Will leave the house with Nathan in the lead.

EXT. JOHN'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

The three figures emerge out of the house, and are greeted by Mother Florence and her children. Calvin and Maisy cling to her dress.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh thank goodness! I heard such
noise in there, I was sure
something terrible had happened.

NATHAN

Everything's all right now, ma'am,
I just need to get these two home
right away.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Yes, of course.

WILL

We'll be okay, Mother Florence!

MOTHER FLORENCE

I know you will, child. Have a safe trip, now.

ROGER

But where will you stay?

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh, we'll put things back together in the morning. No shame in sleeping out in the open air for a night.

NATHAN

Nonsense! There's a spare room in our farmhouse, you can stay with us.

MOTHER FLORENCE

Oh! Why, that's very kind of you. Thank you.

NATHAN

Inside, talk to my brothers, Daniel and Isaac. They will help you. Ah, but we really must be going. Farewell!

MOTHER FLORENCE

Goodbye!

She hurries inside with the children, and Nathan leads Roger and Will around to the back of the house. The forest looms eerily just beyond.

NATHAN

Come on! We have to run.

They take off across the small clearing behind the house, and enter the forest. Nathan leads them to a very familiar-looking oak tree standing proudly in a clearing, away from the other trees. The hole in the trunk shimmers with blue light. They approach the tree.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Here, just like the first time. You'll be home again soon. Are you ready?

ROGER

Yes...but why did you decide to help us?

NATHAN

Well...it's a long story, but I didn't always live in this place. John brought me and my brothers here too, like you boys. But it was through a different portal, and that was a long time ago. We never got a chance to go home. I couldn't let it happen to you too, it just wasn't right. I'm sorry I let it get this far, it was my fault..

ROGER

It's all right. Thank you.

NATHAN

Ah..you're welcome. But enough! You have to go through now!

WILL

Goodbye!

NATHAN

Goodbye, children.

Will climbs up through the portal first, and drops through to the brilliant blue depths below. Roger goes right behind him with Percy cradled in his arms, and they disappear from the land of John Barleycorn forever. Nathan watches a moment longer, and the pool begins to waver and fade. Then, it crackles out entirely. Nathan is left staring into the black depths of an ordinary tree. He sighs and turns to go back to the house.

INT. JOHN'S DINING HALL - NIGHT

Nathan enters the room to find his brothers sitting on a bench by the table, looking utterly exhausted. John is still lying on the floor underneath the chandelier, unmoving. They look up as Nathan enters.

ISAAC

Nathan, right after you left...

NATHAN

What, what happened?

DANIEL

John Barleycorn is dead.

EXT. THE BOYS' GARDEN - DAY

The boys land on the ground at the edge of the garden, and they look around, seeing the house and everything else exactly as they left it. The dew is still wet on the grass, and it appears to be early morning. The sun rises to the east, and they see their house up the hill past the garden, just as it always was.

ROGER

We did it, Will! We did it.

The boys joyfully embrace, and Roger momentarily forgets all about Percy, bumping him roughly.

PERCY

Hey! Be careful!

ROGER

Percy, you're awake! Are you all right?

PERCY

Yes, just a little banged up. No worse for the wear, though.

ROGER

Let's go inside, we'll get you fixed up.

The boys hurry across the garden and up the hill to the house in the early morning sunshine.

INT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Will sits with Percy at the dining room counter, while Roger bustles about trying to find things that will help Percy. He finds tape, popsicle sticks, and rubber bands, placing them on the counter next to the injured bird. Percy, however, is able to stand up and move around on his own, surprisingly.

ROGER

Wait, don't get up yet! You'll hurt yourself.

PERCY

No, I don't think I will, I feel amazing!

ROGER

Wait...really?

PERCY

Yes, I don't feel hurt at all. In fact...I feel something more than that, too.

Percy looks at Roger with a gleam in his eye.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Roger, let's go outside, quickly!

ROGER

Okay, if you say so.

Roger abandons his search for first aid, and all three characters rush outside with Percy in the lead.

EXT. THE GARDEN EDGE - DAY

The sun is now up, and the boys stand by the side of the garden, looking at Percy quizzically.

ROGER

Well, what's the big fuss?

PERCY

My wings...they feel light again.

ROGER

Wait, are you saying...?

Not hesitating another moment, Percy leaps into the air and beats his wings rapidly. Amazingly, he catches an updraft and majestically soars upwards through the crisp morning air. Roger and Will cheer excitedly and race along past the garden as Percy swoops and dives, laughing with joy. He gets lower, so they are within conversational range.

ROGER (CONT'D)

What happened? How can this be??

PERCY

I don't know, there is only one way for this to happen and I can't imagine...

ROGER

What, what's the only way for it to happen?

Percy swoops low and lands at their feet.

PERCY

Well, if he won't voluntarily give me my wings back...John Barleycorn must die for it to happen. Then all the spells he ever put on the innocent people and creatures will vanish. But John Barleycorn can't be dead, this doesn't make sense...

ROGER

But don't you remember? Will sent that wooden thing crashing down on his head. He must have died.

WILL

It looked awful heavy...I don't think he survived.

PERCY

Tragic, I suppose. But you know he wanted to keep you boys there forever, right?

WILL

Yes..

PERCY

I was unconscious that whole time. John really knocked me out by throwing me against that wall. That's the last thing I remember - then I came to when your hugging bent my leg backwards!

ROGER

Oh yeah...sorry about that.

PERCY

Well thank goodness you made it back through. How did you know the portal was behind John's house?

WILL

We didn't...Nathan, the man with the scythe..

ROGER

He showed us how to get home.

PERCY

Ah yes, I do seem to remember them showing up as our unlikely rescuers.

WILL

But Percy, now the portal's gone forever, how will you ever get home?

PERCY

(laughing)

Oh don't worry, my only home was on that train, and I think I was getting pretty tired of it, anyway. I could get used to it here. It's quite a bit greener, isn't it?

WILL

Yeah.

PERCY

Well boys, it's been a magnificent adventure. I have some flying to do though, it's been a long time.

ROGER

Come back and visit us! We'll meet in the treehouse, just over there.

PERCY

By all means, my young friend.
Until then - farewell!

Turning around, the crow flaps his wings and takes off into the air, sailing on a perfect gust of wind. He cruises higher and higher, gaining altitude until the boys can just barely see him. They turn to head back inside.

WILL

Roger, won't dad be upset that we were gone for so long?

ROGER

I don't know. Maybe...

INT. THE KITCHEN

The boys go inside, and Roger busies himself with putting away the things he had taken out for Percy. Will goes over to look at the tear-away calendar sitting on the counter. It shows Sunday, June 15th - the same day they left.

WILL

Roger, look! The calendar is the same.

ROGER
How can that be?

WILL
I'm not sure.

ROGER
Come on, let's go check on dad.

They dash upstairs, and peek their heads into dad's bedroom.
He is just getting up, rising sleepily from the covers.

DAD
Boys! Hi. You're up kind of early,
aren't you?

ROGER
Um..yeah! We wanted to see if you
would make us breakfast.

DAD
Sure, sure. Just give me a minute.

The boys go back downstairs.

WILL
He didn't know we were missing at
all, Roger.

ROGER
I know...it's strange. I guess
somehow time stopped while we were
both on the other side.

WILL
Time...stopped?

Dad comes down into the kitchen, wearing his bathrobe.

DAD
All right, what are we making,
pancakes, waffles, eggs?

ROGER
Dad, what day is it?

DAD
What day is it? It's Monday morning
Roger, did you forget or something?

ROGER
No, just wanted to check.

DAD
All right. Let's see, I feel like
waffles today.

The boys nod their heads in agreement. They go to sit down at the counter.

ROGER
Sounds good, dad.

Dad bustles around the kitchen, getting out the waffle maker and ingredients.

DAD
So, what are you guys planning for
today. More work on the treehouse?

They do not respond. He looks up from mixing the batter to see that they have both fallen asleep at the counter, using their arms as pillows.

DAD (CONT'D)
Hm. I guess you guys were up a
little too early, huh.

He comes over and picks up Will in one arm, who rests his head comfortably against dad's shoulder. He nudges Roger awake, who flutters his eyes sleepily.

DAD (CONT'D)
Come on, let's go back to bed, you
can sleep a little longer.

ROGER
(yawning)
Okay.

DAD
Why are you guys so exhausted,
anyway?

ROGER
Oh we just..stayed up
late...reading.

DAD
Huh.

Carrying Will and leading Roger by the hand, dad takes the two boys back up to their bedroom. He tucks Will in while Roger gets under his covers and snuggles up to the pillow.

DAD (CONT'D)
All right, sleep as long as you
want, we'll make the waffles when
you get up.

ROGER
(already almost asleep)
Okay, dad. I missed you.

DAD
(confused)
Missed me? I was just in my room
the whole night.

ROGER
Yeah, I know.

Dad smiles and tousles Roger's hair.

DAD
All right, I'll see you when you
get up.

The boys are fast asleep. Dad draws the curtains and leaves
the room, shutting the door gently.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABOVE THE FOREST - DAY

Percy soars high above the trees, swooping this way and that
to catch the wind. He flies by the house, and then flaps hard
and goes sailing off in the distance to explore his new home.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END