

The Power of the Dog

Written by Jane Campion

From the novel by Thomas Savage

Sequence 1

Montana, 1925.

Peter's voiceover: "When my father passed, I wanted nothing more than my mother's happiness – for what kind of man would I be if I did not help my mother, if I did not save her."

Phil and George Burbank have owned a ranch together for the past twenty-five years.

Phil, who doesn't bathe very often, and plays the banjo, does most of the dirty work. The brothers share a bedroom.

"If there's a dead cow," Phil tells George, "keep our cattle away."

"What happened?"

"Anthrax. Don't touch."

Phil suggests they go camping in the mountains – "Like Bronco Henry taught us."

Peter makes paper flowers. Rose, his mother, cleans the restaurant. She will be cooking that evening.

Peter visits the grave of his father, who was a doctor.

In the brothel, Phil clashes with his brother. "Twenty-five years ago, where were you, Georgie boy, hmm? I'll tell you. Chubby know-nothing, too dumb to get through college. People helped you, Fatso – one person in particular. Taught you and me ranching so we damned well succeeded."

"Bronco Henry."

The crew drinks, then goes next door for dinner. There is a table full of noisy diners. Phil notices the paper flowers on the table. "I wonder what little lady made these." Peter says that he made them. Phil talks about Bronco Henry. He burns the paper flowers in a candle, is rude to Peter, and shouts at the noisy diners.

Phil and the crew leave. George stays to pay the bill. He talks to Rose, who is crying.

Phil watches his crew have fun in the brothel. He leaves and goes home. George is not there. Phil looks for him. He goes into a room in the house and sees a rope.

Phil is asleep when George arrives.

"What you said about her boy tonight, Phil, made her cry," says George.

Sequence 2

Phil and the crew stare up into the mountains.

“What is it you see up there Phil? Has anyone else seen what you’ve seen, Phil? George?”

“Nah. Not him.”

“C’mon Phil. What is it? There is something there, right?”

“Not if you can’t see it there ain’t.”

George goes to see Rose. He helps her in the kitchen.

At home, Phil and George talk. “If it’s a piece of ass you’re after, Fatso, I’m damn sure you can get it without a license,” says Phil.

Phil’s crew lay out hides.

Phil writes a letter: “George has got himself tangled with a suicide widow. And her half-cooked son.”

George asks Phil if he wrote to the Old Lady. “We were married Sunday,” George tells Phil.

Phil beats a horse. “You little bitch!”

Sequence 3

George and Rose take Peter to college.

“I’ve been thinking we should have some sort of dinner party to introduce you to my parents,” George says to Rose. “And perhaps we could invite the governor and his wife too.” George asks Rose to play the piano for their guests.

George brings Rose home. “We had such a nice trip,” she tells Phil.

“I’m not your brother. You’re a cheap schemer.”

Phil hears George and Rose making love. Disgusted, he goes outside and cleans Bronco Henry’s saddle.

Phil cleans himself in a stream.

The crew bring a piano into the house.

Rose practises the piano. Phil, upstairs, plays the banjo, and so intimidates Rose.

George asks Phil to clean himself up before their parents and the governor arrive for dinner.

The governor remarks that Phil was a student at Yale. “Classics,” says George.

George goes to find Phil. “I’m not coming,” says Phil.

Rose is unable to play the piano for their guests.

Phil appears and berates Rose for not playing. “You didn’t play? Sure did practice a terrible lot. She wouldn’t think there’s much difference between a cinema pit and a dinner party.”

Sequence 4

Rose and Peter drive into town and shop. Peter tells Rose about a new friend.

“Why don’t you invite your friend to the ranch?” asks Rose.

“No. I don’t want him to meet a certain person.”

Peter is back from college, living at the ranch. Phil calls him “Little Lord Fauntleroy.”

Rose is drinking behind George’s back.

Peter explores the land. He brings back a rabbit for Rose.

Peter dissects the rabbit.

Peter and Rose play tennis.

From the house, Phil hears Rose outside, drinking.

The crew go swimming. Phil watches from his horse. Later, he drapes himself in the cloth he used to clean Bronco Henry’s saddle.

Peter discovers Phil’s secret hiding place. He finds a box of magazines, then watches as Phil bathes. Phil chases him off.

Sequence 5

Phil befriends Peter and shows him how to braid a rope. “Peter, we kinda got off on the wrong foot... I’m going to finish this rope and give it to you and teach you how to use it.”

Rose is concerned about the growing friendship between Phil and Peter.

“You got any boots?” Phil asks Peter.

“Yes.”

“Then you should wear them. Don’t let your mom make a sissy out of you.”

Phil continues work on the rope. He suggests that he and Peter go up into the hills and explore.

“Do many of the calves die from wolves?” asks Peter.

“There’s always a few that get tore up or hamstrung, or die of Anthrax.”

“Did Bronco Henry teach you to ride, Phil?”

“Yup. He taught me to use my eyes, ways that other people can’t. Take that hill over there. Most people look at it, just see a hill. Where Bronco looked at it, what do you suppose he saw?”

“A barking dog.”

“What the hell? You just saw that now?”

Peter studies a book of anatomy.

Phil teaches Peter to ride a horse.

Peter rides up into the mountains, puts plastic gloves on, and cuts open a dead cow.

Rose is upset that Phil and Peter are spending so much time together. They ride off, away from the ranch.

“He’s helping him,” says George. “He taught him how to ride.”

“You know who started riding as late as you?” Phil asks Peter.

“Who?”

“Bronco Henry. Hadn’t done any of it until he was about your age now.”

Phil watches as Peter kills a rabbit. They talk about Rose’s drinking, and how Peter’s father hung himself.

Back at the ranch, Rose gives the hides to local Indians. She collapses and is carried by George into the house. Phil returns and is furious that the hides have been given away. He and George argue.

“I’ve got a rawhide to finish the rope,” Peter tells Phil, as he walks towards him, holding the hide, wearing gloves.

“You got it? What were you doing with the rawhide?”

“I cut some up. I wanted to be like you. Please take what I’ve got.”

“It’s damned kind of you, Pete. I’ll tell you something. Everything’s going to be plain sailing for you from now on in. You know what? I’m going to work. Finish up that rope tonight. You watch me do it.”

Peter watches as Phil works on the rope. They talk about Bronco Henry.

“How old were you when you met Bronco Henry?”

“About the age you are now.”

“Was he your best friend?”

“Yeah. He was. But more than that. Once he saved my life. We were way off up in the hills, shooting out and the weather turned mean. Bronco kept me alive by lying body against body in a bedroll. Fell off to sleep that way.”

“Naked?” asks Peter.

Phil is dying. He picks up the rope.

Phil dies. Anthrax is suspected.

Peter reads: “Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.”