

# GOOD WILL HUNTING (1997)

written by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck  
directed by Gus Van Sant  
running time: 124min

## BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

**PROTAGONIST:** Will Hunting, 20, a troubled, undiscovered genius

**CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR:** Violent tendencies; unable to trust others

**EXTERNAL GOAL:** To avoid jail time / To work in an “honorable” profession

**INTERNAL GOAL:** To find self-worth and achieve intimacy

**MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT:** Sean & Professor Lambeau

**THEME:** Your relationships are key in enhancing your self-worth.

**CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION:** Can Will get over his past, find self-worth and achieve intimacy with others?

**ENDING:** With Sean’s help, Will discovers he can move on from the past and drives to California to be with Skylar.

**ARC:** Will goes from a young man with no self-worth, to a man who is capable of intimacy and relationships that challenge him.

## STORY ENGINES

### ACT I

Will’s arrested for assaulting a police officer. Working as a janitor at MIT, he proves a complex math theorem and is noticed by Professor Lambeau. After being sentenced for the assault, Will accepts an offer from Lambeau to avoid jail by working on advanced mathematics with him.

### Act II-A

Per the judge’s orders, Will is forced to see a therapist. His therapist, a South Boston native and Vietnam veteran named Sean Maguire, challenges him like no one else has before. Will goes out on a date with Skylar, but does not call her back.

### Act II-B

Will gets further into therapy and develops trust in Sean. Lambeau sets up interview for jobs that Will does not find “honorable.” He gets into a relationship with Skylar, but is unable to truly be intimate with her and they break up. Will then quits working with Lambeau.

### Act III

Skylar moves to California to study medicine and Will stays behind. In therapy, he finally accepts that his past was not his fault and is able to move on. From one of Lambeau’s contacts, he accepts a job, but realizes in the end being with Skylar is more important and drives to California to be with her.

## FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

### ACT I

1 - **OPENING IMAGES:** Words, numbers...**WILL HUNTING** reads, absorbs.

4 - **CHUCKIE**, Will's best friend, picks Will up for work at his decrepit rent home.

5 - **PROFESSOR LAMBEAU**, MIT God, finalizes a lecture and informs students of an advanced Fourier system in the hall. The problem is so difficult Lambeau hopes someone can prove it by the end of the semester.

6 - Will, a janitor at MIT, notices Lambeau's advanced Fourier system on a hallway chalkboard.

7 - After hitting the bar with Chuckie, Will writes mathematical theorems on his mirror.

8 - At MIT, Will writes on the hallway blackboard with the advanced Fourier system, presumably solving it.

9 - Students interrupt Lambeau's class reunion: someone proved the theorem.

10 - Drinking with Chuckie and friends at a baseball game, Will notices an Carmine, a guy who used to kick his ass in kindergarden, with an attractive girl.

12 - **INCITING INCIDENT:** Will finds Carmine and beats him senseless. Police appear on the scene. Will assaults a cop and is arrested.

14 - Lambeau's surprised no one will take credit for the theorem. He informs the class he's posted a more complicated theorem:

LAMBEAU

Let this be said: the gauntlet has been thrown down,  
but the faculty have answered, and answered with  
vigor.

14 - Chuckie picks up Will from jail. Arraignment next week.

15 - **STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (external):** Lambeau finds Will writing on the hallway chalkboard. Pursuing Will, Lambeau attempts to reprimand him, but Will tells him to fuck himself and disappears. Lambeau's assistant, Tom, stands in front of the chalkboard, speechless. Lambeau inspects: Will proved the theorem.

16 - Will lies to his friends, telling them he got fired from his job.

20 - Hanging at a Harvard bar, Chuckie attempts to pick up **SKYLAR**, a random girl at the bar, but is thrown into an intellectual boxing match with a jealous boyfriend, Clark. Will steps in and defends his friend with strong wit and intelligence...

WILL

See, the sad thing about a guy like you is in fifty years you're gonna start doing some thinking on your own and you're gonna come up with the fact that there are two certainties in life. One, don't do that. And two, you dropped a hundred and fifty grand on a fucking education you coulda got for a dollar-fifty in late charges at the public library.

CLARK

Yeah, but I will have a degree, and you'll be serving my kids fries at a drive-thru on our way to a skiing trip.

WILL

Yeah, maybe, but at least I won't be unoriginal.

22 - ***ROMANTIC LINE INCITING INCIDENT***: Skylar approaches Will, calling him an idiot for not coming over and talking to her. Hoping he'll ask her out, she gives him her phone number and leaves.

24 - Lambeau approaches the head custodian for info on Will. He claims Will quit, but gives Lambeau Will's parole officer's contact info. Lambeau's shocked, to say the least.

26 - Will stands in front of the judge and defends himself, citing a legal precedent from 1789. The judge doesn't care: Will hit a cop -- he's going to jail.

27 - ***ROMANTIC LINE TURN***: Will calls Skylar from jail and asks her for a date. She accepts.

**28 - TURN / PLOT POINT #1**: Lambeau meets with Will in jail. The judge has agreed to release Will into his custody with two stipulations: one, Will works on advanced mathematics with Lambeau at MIT; two, Will meet regularly with a therapist. Will laughs at the idea of seeing a therapist.

*\*Note: The decision for the first plot point happens off camera. Act two begins with Lambeau and Will working together (i.e., Will accepted Lambeau's offer).*

## ACT II-A

29 - Lambeau bonds with Will, amazed with his abilities.

31 - Per the judge's orders, Will meets with a therapist. He calls the therapist a homosexual and the therapist quits.

33 - Will meets with a hypnotist and fakes hypnosis. Insulted, the hypnotist quits. Out of options, Lambeau knows of only one person he could turn to, his former college roommate...

35 - **SEAN MAGUIRE** lectures his community college class on trust in therapy as Lambeau walks into the classroom. Sean's shocked to see him. It's probably been a good amount of time since they've last seen each other.

SEAN

Ladies and gentlemen, we are in the presence of greatness. Professor Gerald Lambeau, Field's Medal winner for Combinatorial Mathematics. Anyone know what the Field's Medal is? It's a really big deal. It's like the Nobel Prize for math, except they only give it out once every four years.

37 - Lambeau begs Sean for his help with Will. Stressing the importance, Lambeau believes Will's genius parallels Ramanujan.

LAMBEAU

You ever heard of Ramanujan?

SEAN

Yeah... no.

LAMBEAU

It's a man. He lived over a hundred years ago. He was Indian. Dots, not feathers... he lived in this tiny hut somewhere in India. He had no formal education, no access to any scientific work. But he came across an old math book and from this simple text he was able to extrapolate theories that had baffled mathematicians for years.

39 - Sean meets with Will for the first time. To build trust, he has both Lambeau and Tom leave the room. Distant, Will lights up a cigarette and looks over Sean's office.

WILL

You fucking people baffle me. You spend all your money on these fucking fancy books, you surround yourself with them -- and they're the wrong fucking books.

**42 - FIRST TRIAL:** Will examines one of Sean's oil paintings.

WILL

You ever heard the saying, "any port in the storm?"

SEAN

Yeah.

WILL

Well, maybe that means you.

SEAN

Yeah, in what way?

WILL

Well, maybe your in the middle of a storm -- a big fucking storm. The sky's falling on your head, the waves are crashing over your little boat, the oars are about to snap. You're just pissin' your pants, you're crying for the harbor and maybe you do what you gotta do to get out. You know, maybe you became a psychologist.

SEAN

Bingo. That's it. Let me do my job now.

WILL

Maybe you married the wrong woman.

SEAN

Maybe you should watch your mouth. Watch it right there, chief. Alright?

WILL

That's it, isn't it? You married the wrong woman. What happened? What, she leave you? Was she banging some other guy?

**42 - FIRST CASUALTY:** Sean snaps, grabs Will by the throat and warns to never disrespect his wife again. Sean lets go and Will leaves.

43 - Lambeau comes in, apologizing immediately, but Sean's immersed in the painting. Once Sean speaks, Lambeau's surprised: he wants to meet with Will again.

44 - Restless, Sean sits at his kitchen table and drinks.

46 - **ROMANTIC LINE TRIAL:** Will takes Skylar out on a date. They kiss.

47 - **COMBAT:** Sean meets Will again, choosing a park over his office for their session. Sean cuts Will down to size -- his intellect alone does not make him a man. Sean's perceptions are sharp and cut deep. Will's unable to say a thing.

SEAN

You're a tough kid. I ask you about war and you probably throw Shakespeare at me. "Once more into the breach, dear friends." But you never been near one. You never had your best friend's head in your lap, watch him gasp his last breath, looking to you for help. I ask you about love, you'd probably quote me a sonnet. But you've never looked at a woman and been totally vulnerable.

52 - Sean informs Will his wife died of cancer and let's him know he's there to help.

53 - Will calls Skylar. Unable to talk, he hangs up.

54 - Will sits in a session with Sean. Neither talk the entire session.

55 - Meeting with MIT math professors, Will offends their delicate sensibilities with his genius.

57 - **MIDPOINT:** Will finally engages in therapy. He talks about his date with Skylar, but hesitates at the thought of seeing her again.

WILL

This girl's, like, fucking perfect right now. I don't want to ruin that.

SEAN

Maybe you're perfect right now. Maybe you don't want to ruin that.

58 - Will asks Sean why he hasn't tried to find love since his wife's death, but Sean refuses to talk about it.

## ACT II-B

61 - *ROMANTIC LINE MIDPOINT*: Will shows up at Skylar's dorm and asks her out again, but she has homework to do. They set a date for the next day.

62 - An hour or two later, Will appears at Skylar's dorm again, with a breakdown of her homework on a napkin. He talks her into going out...

63 - At the race track, Skylar asks Will about his family. Will lies, claiming he has twelve brothers. He insists he lives with three of them.

66 - Sean tells Will the story of how he met his wife. It was game six of the World Series in 1975, where Carlton "Pudge" Fisk hit the winning home run for the Red Sox -- a historical night for Boston sports fans. After camping out all night, Sean gave away his ticket, telling his friends he needed to "see about a girl."

69 - Out with Skylar and Will, Chuckie nearly spills the beans about Will's living situation.

77 - Lambeau presses Sean for answers on why Will refuses to show interest in jobs suited for his intellect. Defending Will, Sean believes he needs time to figure out what he wants from life. Lambeau's curt with his words, claiming Sean's holding Will back from his true potential.

**79 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (external)**: Posing as Will, Chuckie attends an interview Lambeau setup and shakes down the interviewers for money.

**82 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (internal)**: After Skylar refuses to let Will help with her studies, she questions him about his intellect. Will finally opens up to her...

WILL

I look at a piano and I see a bunch of keys, three pedals and a box of wood. Beethoven, Mozart, they saw a it and they could just play. I couldn't paint you a picture, I probably can't hit the ball out of Fenway and I can't play the piano --

SKYLAR

But you can do my O-chem lab in under an hour.

WILL

When it came to stuff like that, I could always just play.

85 - ROMANTIC LINE TURN: Restless, Skylar wakes Will up in the night, asking him to move to California with her. Will hesitates and tells her he can't. The tension rises and Skylar questions whether he has twelve brothers.

WILL

What do you want to know... that I don't have twelve brothers? That I'm a fucking orphan? No, you don't want to hear that! You don't want to hear that I got cigarettes put out on me when I was a little kid. That this isn't fucking surgery, that the mother fucker stabbed me! You don't want to hear that shit, Skylar!

SKYLAR

I want to hear it so I can help you!

87 - ROMANTIC LINE DECISION: Will tells Skylar he doesn't love her and walks out.

**91 - TURN / PLOT POINT #2**: Turing in an assignment, Will meets with Lambeau. Lambeau attempts to ask questions, but Will's curt, assuring Lambeau the solutions are correct. As Will gets up to leave, Lambeau asks about Chuckie's appearance at the job interview. In turn, Will instructs him to setup no further interviews. Lambeau digs in a bit deeper and pushes Will over the edge.

**91 - DECISION**: Will grabs the assignment and sets it on fire, effectively quitting. Lambeau rushes to put out the fire...

LAMBEAU

You're right, Will. I can't do this proof. You can and when it comes to that, it's just a handful of people in the world who can tell the difference between you and me. But I'm one of them.

WILL

Sorry.

LAMBEAU

Yeah, so am I. Most days I wish I never met you. Because then I could sleep at night and I didn't have to walk around with the knowledge there was someone like you out there...and I didn't have to watch you throw it all away.



## ACT III

94 - Will interviews with the NSA, discussing a job opportunity as a codebreaker. With his sharp wit, he turns down the job offer, insulting the interviewer.

96 - Will tells the NSA story to Sean. Sean asks if he feels alone, if there's someone who challenges him.

WILL  
Shakespeare, Neitzche, Frost, O'Connor,  
Chaucer, Pope, Kant --

SEAN  
That's great -- they're all dead.

98 - Sean challenges Will's desire to work jobs that are beneath his intellectual capacity. Will stands by his choices as "honorable."

SEAN  
I just have a little question here... you could be a janitor anywhere. Why did you work at the most prestigious technical college in the whole fucking world? Why did you sneak around at night and finish other people's formulas that only one or two people in the world could do, and then, lie about it? Because I don't see a lot of honor in that, Will.

99 - Sean kicks Will out for not taking therapy seriously.

100 - ROMANTIC LINE POINT OF NO RETURN: Will calls Skylar to wish her good luck in California. He insists he'll be more than a construction worker in life. She tells Will she loves him and he hangs up on her.

101 - Skylar boards the plane for San Francisco. Will watches planes take off from a park bench.

101 - Lambeau calls Sean from Sean's office. Both Will and Sean did not show up for their meeting.

104 - During a lunch break working construction, Will informs Chuckie about Skylar. He wants to live a simple life in Boston, but Chuckie lets him know he's a fool if he doesn't use the gifts he's got to get out.

CHUCKIE

Everyday I come by your house and I pick you up. And we go out and have a few drinks, and a few laughs, and it's great. You know what the best part of my day is? For about ten seconds, from when I pull up to the curb and when I get to your door. Cause I think maybe I'll get up there and I'll knock on the door and you won't be there. No goodbyes, no see you later, no nothing. You've just left.

(beat)

I don't know much, but I know that.

106 - Lambeau and Sean argue over the direction of Will's therapy. Sean defends Will's choices over Lambeau's insistence Will will lose the opportunities and become a failure in life.

108 - Will overhears the argument and walks into the room. Lambeau leaves Sean and Will alone.

**111 - POINT OF NO RETURN (internal):** Sean reviews Will's file. Will jokes about the claims of an attachment disorder and fear of abandonment, but Sean lets Will know the past abuse was not his fault. Fighting his emotions, Will breaks down and sheds the guilt that's prevented him from truly living his life.

**113 - POINT OF NO RETURN (external):** Will goes on an interview at McNeil.

115 - On their last session, Will informs Sean he took the job at McNeil. Sean lets Will know he'll be traveling and hopes they can keep in touch.

- Will's therapy has given Sean the ability to move on after his wife's death.

117 - Chuckie and crew give Will his birthday present: an old car.

118 - Lambeau apologizes to Sean and Sean forgives him. Sean lets him know he'll be traveling, but he'll see him at their next college class reunion.

120 - Will drops a note on Sean's door.

120 - Chuckie goes to pick up Will...

121 - Sean finds the note...

122 - Chuckie knocks on Will's door and finds he's moved.

**123 - CLIMAX:** Sean reads the note. Will decided to move to California to be with Skylar.

WILL (V.O.)

Sean, if the professor calls about that job, just  
tell him "sorry, I had to see about a girl. Will."

**124 - CLOSING IMAGE:** Will drives to California.

**124 - THE END.**

A note from the author:

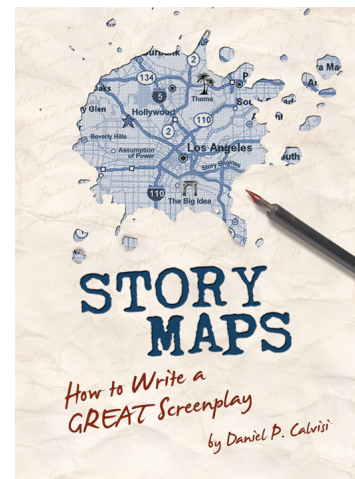
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