The House of Dies Drear
based on the novel by Virginia Hamilton
Richard Wesley

CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Small</td>
<td>a thirteen-year-old boy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter Small</td>
<td>Thomas's father</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheila Small</td>
<td>Thomas's mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenneth Small</td>
<td>Thomas's brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great-grandmother Jeffers</td>
<td>Walter's grandmother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pluto Skinner</td>
<td>caretaker of the house</td>
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<tr>
<td>of Dies Drear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayhew Skinner</td>
<td>Pluto's son</td>
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<tr>
<td>River Lewis Darrow</td>
<td>head of the Darrow family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pesty</td>
<td>a twelve-year-old girl</td>
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<td>Mac Darrow</td>
<td>the youngest Darrow boy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilbur Darrow</td>
<td>thirty-eight</td>
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<tr>
<td>River Ross Darrow</td>
<td>thirty-seven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russell Darrow</td>
<td>late twenties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edgar Carr</td>
<td>handyman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastor, Two Young Pastors, Choir</td>
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TECHNICAL TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLACKOUT</td>
<td>End a scene by cutting and leaving the screen black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOSE-UP</td>
<td>Move the camera in close to focus on a detail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUT TO</td>
<td>Change directly from one scene to the next.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISSOLVE (also called “lap dissolve”)</td>
<td>Change scenes by fading in a new image while the existing one fades out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOLLY</td>
<td>Move the camera on a wheeled platform (a “dolly”) to change the view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXT</td>
<td>Exterior shot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FADE-IN</td>
<td>Begin a scene by bringing it into focus gradually.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FADE-OUT</td>
<td>End a scene by darkening the image until it disappears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FREEZE FRAME</td>
<td>Repeat a single frame of film many times so as to create the effect of a still photograph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Interior shot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONTAGE (mán tazh')</td>
<td>Create a sequence of alternating scenes or images.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OC</td>
<td>Off camera.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>Off screen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>POV</td>
<td>A character’s point of view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWO-SHOT</td>
<td>A medium-range camera shot of two persons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VO (voice-over)</td>
<td>Have a voice speaking or narrating off camera.</td>
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Act I

FADE IN TO INT: GREAT-GRANDMOTHER JEFFERS' KITCHEN—DAY

Tight close-up of an old woman's strong, wrinkled hands carefully putting pieces of chicory in a smoking pan; the pan is on an ancient, wood-burning cast-iron stove. We can hear the woman humming a tune and muttering as she goes about her task. Her hands, the pan, and the stove are lit by the flames from the fire; the smoke and surrounding darkness give the scene an eerie atmosphere.

THOMAS. (VO) Great-grandmother?

CUT TO INT: KITCHEN—ANOTHER ANGLE—DAY

THOMAS SMALL, thirteen years old, stands by the door in the flickering light from the stove. He moves closer to his ninety-one-year-old great-grandmother, fascinated by her actions.

THOMAS. What’re you doin’?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. Fixin' to roast some chicory. 'Spect I'll roast it all night and all day tomorrow.

THOMAS. But why're you gonna do that, Great-grandmother?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. Because, boy... because!

THOMAS. Because what, Great-grandmother?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. Because no tellin' what fool thought took hold of your Daddy to leave these hills an' go live in some craven house. Roastin' chicory's the best way to ward off calamity.

THOMAS. Calamity?

We hear the sound of a car horn.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. C'mon, boy, best we go on outside. Your folks is waitin’.

They start to move out of the kitchen.

CUT TO EXT: FARMHOUSE—DAY

The front gate of the home of GREAT-GRANDMOTHER JEFFERS, in North Carolina. The small house is fronted by a yard filled with freshly grown vegetables. The picket fence has a broken gate. A dog sleeps lazily on the front porch. We see a car, laden with suitcases and packages stuffed in its trunk and tied to its roof, parked in front of the house. WALTER SMALL, thirty-eight, his wife SHEILA, thirty-seven, and KENNETH, five, are waiting by the car. GREAT-GRANDMOTHER and THOMAS emerge from the house. As they walk through the gate, THOMAS stops.

THOMAS. Great-grandma, I was s'posed to fix your gate—and who gon' paint it each spring?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. You think you the only boy who can paint my gate?

THOMAS. I'm the only one who ever has.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. That's the truth for sure, right there.

WALTER. Grandma, I'll send him back in the spring during the Easter break. He can paint it then.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. (quietly, somewhat sadly) Spring. Hm. That's a long row to hoe, son. Don't see why you gotta go all the way to Ohio no way. Plenty-a colleges 'round here.

WALTER. Because they need a good history professor, Grandmother, an' they happen to think I fit the bill.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. Hear tell you bought yourself quite a house out there.
I didn't buy it, Grandmother. I'm just renting it. Besides, the place is very historic. Besides, it's as old as the hills.

SHEILA, who stares right him.

SHEILA looks at SHEILA, who stares right at him.

GRANDMOTHER. Seems to me if you visited an old house with some history you round plenty of them 'round here. Ain't right y'all takin' these two fine little far from they Great-grandmother now that she gettin' on in age. Come here, chirrun. *  p. dialect — Southern aunt

THOMAS and KENNETH move close to her.

THOMAS. Will you sing me that ol' song you always sang when I was sad?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. You wanna hear that ol' thing?

KENNETH. Me, too.

chirrun (chir' ran): Dialect term for "children."
THOMAS. [VO] Papa, tell me again about Dies Drear and how he used our new house for the Underground Railroad.2

WALTER. [VO: BY ROTE] Dies Drear was a wealthy *abolitionist, out of New England who moved to Ohio and . . . Thomas, I've told you all this before.

CUT TO EXT: THE OUTSKIRTS OF CINCINNATI—DAY

The SMALLS' car leaves Interstate 75 and makes the connection to Ohio Route 68.

THOMAS. [VO] Papa, is it true that Dies Drear used to give escaped slaves money to go back into slavery?

WALTER. [VO] Yea, that's right, son.

THOMAS. [VO] But why?

CUT TO EXT: HIGHWAY—DAY

The car passes through rolling hills and green fields. The sky is a clear blue.

WALTER. [VO] Because after they were caught and went back, they passed the hidden money on to other slaves, who would attempt to escape.

THOMAS. [VO] But why would slaves need money?

WALTER. [VO] Well, even a fleeing slave needs maneuvering money. He would need food and shelter and the best and safest way for him to get it was to buy it from free black people.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

2. Underground Railroad: A system set up by abolitionists, or opponents of slavery, before the Civil War to help slaves escape to free states and Canada. Dies Drear's house was used as an Underground Railroad "station."
SHEILA, half-asleep, stirs. KENNETH and THOMAS are dozing. WALTER looks tired.

SHEILA. How close are we?

WALTER. 'Bout another hour and a half, baby.

KENNETH begins to stir.

SHEILA. [comforting KENNETH] Whatsamatter, honey?

KENNETH. I'm scared.

THOMAS. Hey, look! That's what's botherin' Kenneth, I'll bet.

His parents look ahead.

CUT TO EXT: THE HIGHWAY—DAY

A huge rain-filled cloud, as dark as night, is approaching them head-on. The sky grows more and more ominous. The wind begins to howl, kicking up dust and buffeting the car. Traffic on the highway begins to slow as the storm rapidly approaches.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

KENNETH begins to cry.

CUT TO EXT: THE HIGHWAY—DAY

Wind and rain slam into the car, causing it to swerve violently.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

The family is shaken about and frightened.

CUT TO EXT: THE HIGHWAY—DAY

The car continues on through the storm and wind and driving rain. There is violent thunder and lightning.

DISSOLVE TO EXT: A TWO-LANE BLACKTOP—DAY

The storm continues unabated. We see the headlights of the SMALLS' car as it moves down the small road. The car turns on the road and proceeds down a dirt road.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

KENNETH is now curled up asleep in the back. THOMAS is crouched behind the seat, peering out through the front shield. WALTER is hunched over the wheel, squinting because the driving rain has reduced visibility to a near impossibility.

CUT TO EXT: DIRT ROAD—WALTER'S POV

The car's headlights illuminate the road in front of them. The thick storm clouds have made it seem as if it were night. The wind buffets the leaves and bushes violently. Rain splatters against the windshield.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

THOMAS. Papa, we aren't lost, are we?

WALTER. No . . . not yet, anyway.

THOMAS. [reassuringly] Don't worry, you'll get us through, Papa.

WALTER. [smiling] How can I fail when I got a big man like you on my side?

THOMAS begins to hum GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S "Ragman" song. There is only the humming for a while; then, suddenly:

SHEILA. Walter, look out!

WALTER quickly hits the brakes.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—WALTER'S POV OF THE ROAD—DUSK

As if out of nowhere, the figure of a man appears. He is RIVER LEWIS DARROW, a huge man, well over six feet tall and in excess of 200 pounds. He wears a black raincoat and a black rainhat.

CUT TO EXT: SIDE OF ROAD—DUSK
The man wears long black rubber boots. A snarling dog, rather large in size, stands drenched next to him. In one hand Darrow carries a large double-barreled rifle. In the other he holds the carcasses of several freshly killed rabbits. There is a scowl on the man's face as he glares at the car.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DUSK

The whole family stares at the man.

THOMAS. Papa, where'd he come from?

WALTER. I don't know, son. Guess he was standin' there all the time.

SHEILA. Maybe he knows how to get to the house. Ask him, Walter.

THOMAS. But, Mama, he got a gun.

SHEILA. Oh, Thomas, he was just out huntin'. You've seen men hunt before.

THOMAS. I ain't never seen no man like him before, Mama.

WALTER rolls down the window.

CUT TO EXT: CAR—DUSK

The man and the dog walk near. The dead rabbits are held in plain sight. Thomas and Kenneth spend equal amounts of time looking at the rabbits and the dog, while Sheila and Walter stare intently at the man.

WALTER. Excuse me, sir. I'm trying to find a house.

DARROW. [sullen] Plenty houses 'round here, mista. Which one you want?

WALTER. I'm lookin' for the house of Dies Drear.

DARROW's eyes flash for the briefest instant. His grip tightens on the gun.

DARROW. Why you want that house? Ain't nobody lived in there for nigh on sixty years.

WALTER. Well, some do, now. We're moving in. We leased it.

WALTER's smile disappears when he sees that DARROW's already hardened visage has turned to a countenance of sheer hatred.

DARROW. That so? Follow this road. It'll take you straight there. Not that it'll matter much. You won't be there long.

DARROW steps back from the car.

WALTER. Hey, what's that supposed to mean?

DARROW. [firmly] I'm tired of standin' in this rain.

WALTER rolls up the window and puts the car in gear. Kenneth crawls over the front seat and curls in his mother's arms. Thomas presses against the window and tries to get a better look at DARROW, the dog, and the dead rabbits. The dog snarls and barks vigorously as the car moves away. DARROW stands staring at them. There is a look of contempt and hatred etched on his face. He slings the rabbits over his shoulder and walks off into the rain and night, the dog at his side.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR

Thomas stares out of the back window at DARROW and the dog. He is both fascinated and frightened. He sits back down and holds out his hand. It is trembling. He tucks it into his lap and tries to force himself to relax, but he cannot.

SHEILA. He came out of nowhere! Frightened me to death.

WALTER. Well, relax. He's gone and we'll be there, soon.

3. visage (viz' ij) n.: The face and the expression on it.
CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DUSK

SHEILA holds KENNETH and glances over at WALTER, who concentrates on his driving. He is nervous but tries not to show it. THOMAS watches them both with growing apprehension.

CUT TO EXT: THE ROAD—DUSK

The car proceeds through the woods and suddenly the trees give way to a clearing. There is a loud, shattering clap of thunder; then a searing flash of lightning hits a tree and fells it near the car. WALTER swerves to avoid it. Another flash of lightning, and they see it. A huge, monstrous-looking house, made more ominous by the storm. It is Victorian[^4] in nature, yet seems formless and unnatural. It has a dark, isolated look about it. It stands on a hill.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DUSK

KENNETH looks at the house and begins to cry, burying his head against SHEILA's...
breast. THOMAS and SHEILA simply stare in quiet disbelief.

SHEILA. [quietly, with apprehension] Walter...?

THOMAS. Papa, is that it?

WALTER. Yes, son... our new home. [softly] Our new home.

CUT TO EXT: THE HOUSE OF DIES DREAR—DUSK

Lightning continues to illuminate the house against the sky. The howling wind mixes with KENNETH’S crying to create an eerie sound that seems to emanate from the house itself.

The rainstorm continues as the small family gets out of the car and runs onto the veranda of the house. The house itself sits on an outcropping on the side of a hill. The face of the outcropping is rock, from which mineral springs gush. These springs empty into a small nearby stream. Running down the face of the ledge, these springs paint the rocks in their path with red and yellow rust. As he stands on the veranda waiting for WALTER to open the door, THOMAS watches these springs.

THOMAS. Hey, it looks just like the house is bleedin’. Like somebody cut this place open underneath and let all the blood run out.

KENNETH. Mama, I'm scared!

SHEILA. [VO] WALTER! WALTER, come here, quick!

WALTER heads for the sitting room. THOMAS lags behind his father just a bit. He passes by a grand, old, gilded mirror, on either side of which are two end tables. THOMAS catches his image in the mirror out of the side of his eye and is startled momentarily. He jumps and takes several steps back, sucking in his breath. When he realizes it is only a mirror, he relaxes, then notices the tables. He touches them, then heads inside the sitting room.

INT: THE SITTING ROOM—TWILIGHT

WALTER stands near SHEILA. KENNETH is holding onto his father’s leg very tightly and standing a bit behind him. THOMAS comes in and is surprised by what he sees: Two oversized easy chairs are placed side by side with a mahogany lamp between them. The chairs sit like soldiers on their guard. A couch is across the room...
from the chairs. Between two of the floor-to-ceiling windows stands the worktable from the kitchen in the SMALLS' old home. At the far end of the room is a massive fireplace. No fire has been lit, but wood is neatly piled nearby, and KENNETH's little rocking chair sits to one side of the hearth.

SHEILA. Walter, our furniture. But, who could have done this?

WALTER. Pluto.

THOMAS. Who?

WALTER. Pluto. He's the caretaker for this house. Has been for years. I think he was brought in by the foundation that owns this place.

THOMAS. Pluto? Where'd he get that name?

WALTER. That's not his real name, Thomas. Sort of a nickname he's come to be known by around here.

THOMAS. Papa, Pluto's another name for the Devil, right?

WALTER. Right.

THOMAS. Now, why on earth would somebody take a name like that?

SHEILA. Well, whoever this Mr. Pluto is, he sure knows how to decorate a home. This is just beautiful! How could he have known I was gonna want it like this?

SHEILA walks over to the worktable.

SHEILA. Look! My old worktable from the kitchen back home. He's sanded it and smoothed it over with linseed oil. Oh, it's just beautiful!

At either end of the table are plants of ivy in white china tureens.

WALTER. Pluto's a pretty old man. And he's got a bad leg. This must've been quite a chore for him. He could've hurt himself.

SHEILA. Well, I'm going to fix him the most delicious meal I can think of as a way of saying thanks.

THOMAS looks around, frowning, as he holds KENNETH's hand. KENNETH has stopped crying, but he still seems a little frightened. Something is bothering THOMAS.

THOMAS. Kenneth, go on with Mama a moment.

KENNETH is hesitant.

SHEILA. Look, Kenneth, there's your favorite little rockin' chair, right over here by the fireplace.

THOMAS pushes KENNETH gently toward SHEILA. KENNETH goes, reluctantly, at first, but then is pulled by the curiosity provoked by SHEILA's statement. THOMAS comes nearer to his father.

THOMAS. Papa, you notice somethin' about the way this furniture is set up?

WALTER. [looks around] No. Just arranged perfectly to fit this room. That's all I see.

THOMAS. That old Pluto, whoever he is, has arranged all the furniture in here so it's pointin' in one direction ... right at those two large windows, there.

THOMAS points toward the windows. When WALTER looks around the room again, he can see that THOMAS is right, but he hides his feelings behind an expressionless stare.

THOMAS. See. Papa. It's a sign—a warning. We'd better not stay here.

WALTER says nothing. SHEILA comes near them again.

SHEILA. I hope you two are whispering about dividing up the chores I have planned for you.

THOMAS frowns.
SHEILA. Thomas, what's wrong?

THOMAS. Who does this Mr. Pluto think he is? workin' out the cuts on Mama's table? He's sure taken a lot on himself. He's got no business in here! This is our house!

THOMAS's outburst surprises everyone. WALTER speaks, finally, as KENNETH now moves to THOMAS's side and stands behind him.

WALTER. You have no business talking like that, Thomas. It was very decent of him, puttin' the house in order. No one expected him to, and you don't speak ill of kindness.

THOMAS stares at his father a moment, but WALTER does not meet his gaze.

SHEILA. Uh, oh. Cranky people means everybody is tired. Let's go on upstairs and get ready for bed.

SHEILA starts out and WALTER follows. KENNETH takes THOMAS's hand.

THOMAS. You see the look on Papa's face when I said that? He didn't like all this any more than I did. I know he didn't.

KENNETH says nothing. He pulls THOMAS along in an attempt to catch up to their parents. As the boys exit the room, the camera swings back across the room and settles on the large windows. Outside the rain has stopped. Only water dripping from the eaves on the veranda and from the leaves in the nearby trees can be seen. A mist is quite visible outside. But, there is something else there . . . barely visible. An outline, or shadow, something—man-like, large and powerfully built, standing near a tree, motionless, dressed in black. We cannot get a good view of the shadow. It backs away into the darkness and is gone. From a distance we hear a mysterious sound: "Ahhhhhh. Ahhhhhhh. Ahhhhhhhhhhh."
KENNETH. I don't like that door!

THOMAS. Aw, c'mon, Kenneth. It's just a door. Look.

THOMAS moves closer to the door to get a better look, but can see nothing. He backs away and stands near the weathered front steps, painted white to match the rest of the house, then comes back toward the door. KENNETH says nothing—but starts to whimper.

THOMAS. What are you staring at?

Now, he sees something; the quatrefoils are shaped like petals. One has a tiny wooden button in the center. THOMAS cautiously waves his hand over the button—he can feel and we can hear a stream of cold air emanating from around it. His trembling finger presses the button, but nothing happens. THOMAS jerks it, pulls it, and presses it again. Suddenly, KENNETH screams and runs back into the house.

THOMAS. Hey, Kenneth, come back here! What's wrong with you?

KENNETH does not return. THOMAS stands puzzled for a moment. He looks around, turns and goes to the edge of the veranda. He looks down and is surprised to find that the steps have shifted over about four feet. And where they once were is a gaping black hole about three feet around. Quickly he looks back at the quatrefoil and realizes that the steps were moved by the button he pushed. He is about to go down the hole when a sound from around the side of the house draws his attention. He backs away from the hole and follows the veranda around the side to investigate. He can hardly believe what greets him.

CUT TO EXT: THE HOUSE AND ITS GROUNDS—DAY

Out of the trees on the right side of the house, a huge black horse appears. It is the largest horse THOMAS has ever seen. Astride its back is PESTY, a girl with jet black skin and flashing, almost dancing, eyes. Her head is wrapped in a white silk scarf that has lace at the edges and she wears red flannel pajamas with lace at the neck and sleeves. She is about twelve years old. She wears no shoes and sits well forward near the horse's shoulders. Her arms are folded across her chest and she is staring into the distance, serene and happy. She seems to take no notice of THOMAS on the veranda. Following behind, on foot, is MAC DARROW, a big fourteen-year-old black youth, rather husky and well-muscled for his age. He is clutching the big horse's tail. [These children and other locals will speak with an Ohio accent, similar to southern but not quite the same. It will be noticeably different from that of THOMAS and his family.]

MAC. Whoa, you mean old devil horse! Whoa, I said!

The horse continues to walk with PESTY astride its back. It's plain that PESTY is in control.

MAC. Pesty, get down off that horse and let's go! I got things I want to do!

PESTY only laughs and turns the horse with just her legs and toes. MAC throws the horse's tail aside in disgust.

MAC. Well, go 'head on, then. It's your behind that get whipped. Not mine.

PESTY laughs again and she and the horse seem to head right for THOMAS and the veranda. She seems not to notice him at all. MAC follows behind, walking casually, his hands thrust in the pockets of his jeans. He glances at THOMAS but says nothing.
THOMAS follows them both around the side of the house back to the front steps and the hole. There the horse comes to a halt. PESTY and MAC look down at the hole. THOMAS remains silent, however, as he moves near the button, his eyes on MAC and PESTY.

MAC. Pesty, tell that horse to hold it! You want to walk him clear down that hole, there, or you want to walk him right through the front door of this house?

PESTY says nothing. She laughs and peers down at the hole. Then she looks up at THOMAS for the first time and grins. Just as quickly she looks away and back down the hole. THOMAS is affected by the sweet smile and a faint smile crosses his lips before he catches sight of MAC moving close to the hole and peering down into it.

MAC. Ooowееее, Pesty. Anybody go foolin' around down there might get themselves lost forever. Lost in one of Dies Drear's old tunnels, never to be found again.

PESTY. Shoot, ain't true, atall.

MAC. Now, how do you know that?

PESTY. [evasive] 'Cause I know, that's how.

MAC. [finally turns to Thomas] Hey? You goin' down there?

THOMAS. Maybe.

THOMAS glares at MAC. He feels they are making fun of him.

MAC. [laughing] Good luck.

PESTY. You quit laughin' at him, you ol' laughin' high-eeна.
MAC. You got any smartmouth little people like this in your family?

THOMAS. I got a kid brother, but he ain't no smartmouth. My family been told that he might be psychic. He feels things before they happen.

PESTY. Psycho? Like in that old movie? Wow!

THOMAS. No . . . oh, never mind. Forget it.

MAC. Well, if you go down there, look out for the ghost of Dies Drear.

PESTY. Ain't no need to worry, though. Mr. Pluto is his earthly friend. An' if the ghost mess with you, you call Mr. Pluto. If Mr. Pluto takes a likin' to you he'll save you, if he don't, well . . . too bad for you.

PESTY laughs.

THOMAS. Pluto may scare you, but he don't scare me.

PESTY. That's cause you don't know him. Everybody 'round here knows he's a demon. You cross him, an' that's it. You could be walkin' down the street an' the next thing you know, both your arms can fall right off. An' you'll say, "Aaa, my arms." An' that's when you'll know ol' demon Pluto done gotcha.

PESTY looks at THOMAS and THOMAS looks back at her. Suddenly, she breaks out into a wide grin.

MAC. Girl, you better go 'head on, tellin' them stories.

PESTY. So? Daddy sho' nuff believes 'em. I heard him call Mr. Pluto a demon plenty of times.

MAC. Daddy just talkin', that's all.

MAC and PESTY laugh.

THOMAS. Adopted.

PESTY. Hey, whatchu doin' on Mr. Pluto's porch? He'll snatch you baldheaded if he finds you.

MAC. What's worse, he'll turn Pesty loose on you then you'll really be in a mess.

THOMAS. [angry] First off, Mr. Pluto just works here, cause this is my father's house now, and second off, y'all ain't got no business on private property.

MAC and PESTY convulse in derisive laughter. THOMAS jumps down off the veranda and lands near the hole. He peers down inside.

THOMAS. Y'all better go 'head on. Nobody wants to be bothered with you.

MAC. Where you think you goin'?

THOMAS. Part of the Underground Railroad must be down this hole. I aim to find it.

MAC and PESTY look at one another.

PESTY. Underground Railroad? Boy, ain't no railroad tracks down there.

THOMAS looks at her incredulously, then prepares to jump down into the hole.

MAC. You really fixin' to go down that hole?

THOMAS simply looks at him without saying a word.

MAC. Want some company?

THOMAS. I don't need any help.

MAC. Yea, say that now. But 'spect you'll be needin' me later on.

PESTY begins to laugh, so does MAC.

PESTY. If you get scared, just holler!

MAC. Come on, girl. I know Mama must got breakfast ready by now. Come on!

They start off. MAC turns.

MAC. What's your name?

THOMAS. Thomas Small.

MAC. Reckon I'll be seein' you around. Come on, Pesty!

THOMAS watches as MAC walks away. PESTY looks down from her horse.

PESTY. Hey, Thomas Small, the new boy. How you like these new red night clothes? Ain't they pretty? I like red. Mr. Pluto said red was the best color.

MAC. It's the color of fire. Pluto keeps fire.

THOMAS. Like the Devil.

PESTY. What? You sure strange, new boy Thomas Small. Well, I'm Mr. Pluto's helper around here. You ever get in some trouble, you call me 'cause I can getchu outa it. Hear?

THOMAS does not answer. PESTY smiles her sweet smile.

PESTY. Bye. Gidap, hoss!

The horse trots away with the girl clutching its mane. They move past MAC, who saunters along leisurely, his hands thrust into his pockets. THOMAS watches them a moment, then turns his gaze toward the hole. He picks up a small stone and drops it to gauge the depth. The sound indicates that it is not too deep. He takes a deep breath, looks around, and jumps down into the hole.

CUT TO INT: THE HOLE UNDER THE HOUSE AND TUNNEL

The hole is almost pitch black. The only light showing emanates from above. The drop of five feet has momentarily stunned THOMAS and he has to wait to catch his breath. The ground is damp and smells like mildew. When he gets to his feet, THOMAS fumbles in his pocket and finds a small
pencil-thin flashlight, which he uses to light his way. He spies a steep stairway leading downward not too far from where he has fallen. He is surrounded on all sides by brick—a wall of some sort. The boy makes his way down the steps and into the darkness—down, down, down, deep inside the ground. He is below the foundation of the house. The pathway is cramped and tiny. As he presses more deeply into the passageway, he is aware that his feet are becoming wet. Some distance away he can hear the sound of one of the brooks. His sneakered feet are now in a few inches of water, which flows along the passageway floor. The place is strangely silent. His breathing is the only other sound he can hear now. For effect, he grunts aloud. The sound has a full resonance to it, the likes of which he has never heard before. It is almost as though he was speaking through a speaker system that had the bass turned up full blast. He continues until he comes to a place where the path widens. The walls are now four feet away on either side. Long slabs are along each wall.

THOMAS. [whispering] Places for the runaway slaves to sit.

THOMAS sits on the slab and touches it.

THOMAS. They musta been so scared. Alone. How could they see down here? How could they stand it?

THOMAS sits in silence for a brief second, then rises and continues on. The path narrows again. Somewhere in the distance, he hears the faint sound of movement. He shines the light ahead, but can see nothing. He continues on, but slips on the wet floor and drops the light. It rolls behind him into the darkness. We can barely see THOMAS, but we can hear his breathing and his voice.

THOMAS. The light's gotta be here somewhere. All I gotta do is get on my knees and feel . . .

He feels around, but without luck.

THOMAS. I couldn'a kicked it that far. Where is it? Where . . . ?

We hear his scrambling about, but we can tell now that it will get him nowhere.

THOMAS. All I gotta do is crawl along this path. It's leadin' up, now. I'll just follow it right on outa here.

He begins to whistle GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S song as he crawls along. Then:

THOMAS. What's that?

THOMAS is silent. We can hear his heavy breathing. We can also hear a strange sound—something forlorn and lost and cold.

We hear: AHHHHH, AHHHHH, AHHHHH.

We can hear THOMAS begin to scramble frightfully. The sound seems to be drawing nearer and nearer as THOMAS continues to scramble, feeling along the walls. We can hear his palms slapping and sliding along the rock and his feet slipping and splashing in the trickling water.

THOMAS. No! No! Keep it away!

Louder and louder, closer and closer, the sound comes.

THOMAS. Papa! Mama! Papa! Papa! Come get me, Papa!

Frantically he scrambles along as the sound seems to come closer and closer. Suddenly, the boy slams into a wall and falls to the ground, screaming and pounding his fists against the rocks. From somewhere, we hear a woman scream.

BLACKOUT
Act III

FADE IN TO INT: THE TUNNEL

THOMAS pounds on the wall, screaming for help. He hears SHEILA’s voice.

SHEILA. [VO] Thomas!

Suddenly, a wall slides up and THOMAS is face to face with SHEILA, who is standing in the kitchen, just as surprised as THOMAS. THOMAS, out of breath, stumbles out of the tunnel, frightened and trembling.

CUT TO INT: THE KITCHEN—DAY

SHEILA embraces THOMAS AS KENNETH COMES near, looking on with curiosity.

SHEILA. Thomas! Are you all right, chile?

THOMAS. [finally catching his breath] Somethin’s in there, Mama. It... It tried to kill me.

SHEILA embraces him again, soothing him and trying to calm him down. Finally THOMAS is calmed and SHEILA helps him to his feet. Regaining his breath, THOMAS begins to speak.

THOMAS. Mama, it kept comin’ at me. It was gonna jump up an’ kill me. I know it!


THOMAS. But—

SHEILA. It’s just an old passageway.

WALTER comes running into the kitchen.

WALTER. What happened? I heard shoutin’ down here.

WALTER looks toward the raised wall panel. He smiles slightly.

WALTER. Well, son, I see you found yourself a secret passage. Didn’t figure you’d find that front door button so soon.

THOMAS. [somewhat disappointed] You mean you knew?

WALTER. If any unexpected guests came to the front door, the slaves could hide in this tunnel till whoever it was had gone. Or, if someone searched the house the slaves could escape through here or by way of the front steps.

THOMAS. [defeated] You shoulda told me y’all knew about that tunnel, Papa.

SHEILA. [embraces THOMAS] Almost every room in this house has some kind of secret this or hidden that, Thomas.


SHEILA looks at THOMAS for a moment, then down into the dark of the passageway. The look in her eyes shows that she just might believe some of what her son has to say.

SHEILA. Walter, maybe you better take a look.

Walter goes to a cabinet and takes a flashlight from one of the drawers. He moves toward the passageway. THOMAS is about to follow.

WALTER. Stay here. I’ll be right back.

THOMAS. But—

WALTER. Oh, I’ll be all right. I just wanna see what it was in here that really frightened you. That’s all.

He checks the light to make sure it is working, then proceeds into the passageway. SHEILA, THOMAS, and KENNETH peer into it after him. The light from the kitchen spills a few feet into the passageway, then gives way to complete darkness. WALTER’s flashlight can be seen darting from here to there along the ceiling of the tunnel, then
disappearing. SHEILA holds the two boys close, all of them facing the tunnel opening.

KENNETH. [frightened] Can’t see nothin’, Mama. Can’t see nothin’.

SHEILA. Sssh, baby. It’ll be all right. Papa’s just fine.

THOMAS looks at KENNETH and SHEILA, then back into the tunnel. There is no sound and all is deathly silent for a few beats, when suddenly a door slams. SHEILA and the boys jump with fright. They spin around and see WALTER emerging from the hallway. His feet are muddy from the passageway and he tracks dirt all over the floor. Otherwise he is none the worse for wear. SHEILA looks displeased as she studies the muddy tracks on the floor.

WALTER. I put the stairs back in place.

SHEILA. Did you find anything?

WALTER shakes his head. SHEILA gets a mop. WALTER goes over to a control lever by the cabinet and pulls it. The tunnel door shuts.

WALTER. I’ll take this whole thing apart tonight. Seal that tunnel up once and for all. Fix the other entrance by the stairs, too.

THOMAS. There was some kids, too.

SHEILA. Kids? What kids? In the tunnel?

THOMAS. No, not in the tunnels, Mama. Out by the side of the house. Their names was Mac and Pesty, who is Mac’s sister but not his sister. See, it’s like this—

SHEILA. Look, you can tell me all about it while you and Kenneth help me clean all this mud up off this floor. C’mon, now.

THOMAS and KENNETH do as they are told. SHEILA turns and stares at the wall. She heaves a sigh and goes over to WALTER.

SHEILA. [quietly] Walter, just what is going on around here?

DISSOLVE TO EXT: THE HILLS IN BACK OF THE HOUSE—LATE AFTERNOON

THOMAS and his father are walking. In the distance we can see the town and the college.

WALTER. Those tunnels meander like a maze. A person could get lost forever if they don’t know the way they’re laid out.

THOMAS. Then how did the slaves know?

WALTER. Well, they must’ve had a code. A pause.

THOMAS. Papa?

WALTER. Yes, son?

THOMAS. You ever think that maybe that ol’ house down there is haunted?

WALTER laughs and hugs his son.

WALTER. No. There’s no such thing as hauntin’, boy. Everything has a logical explanation.

THOMAS. I keep rememberin’ what that foundation report said about that house. It said that three slaves who were escaping and had hid out with Dies Drear were captured. Two were killed by some bounty hunters, and then Dies Drear himself got killed that same week. Right there in our house. But what happened to that third slave?

WALTER. No one knows, son.

THOMAS. And it said that no one’s lived in that house since Dies Drear got killed, except for a caretaker or two.

WALTER. That’s all true, son. But that has very little to do with any ghosts.

THOMAS. But, what about that furniture business in the house, then that noise in the

1. bounty hunters: People who captured fugitive slaves for a reward of money, called “bounty.”
tunnel... and that man on the road when we first came. How come he didn't greet us friendly? What did Pesty mean when she said old Pluto would come up outa the ground an' grab you if you made him mad? What's all that?

WALTER. Boy, you so fulla questions, it's hard to know which one to answer first. But I will tell you this. Your mamma an' I love you very much. An' I'll shake heaven and earth before I let any harm come to one hair on top of your inquisitive little head. Okay?

WALTER extends his hand, and THOMAS takes it and shakes.

THOMAS. Okay.

THOMAS looks down the hill at the house once again.

THOMAS. Papa, can I stay up here just a little bit? I wanna see if I can tell by the shape of the house where the secret rooms are.

WALTER. I don't know, son. Dinner'll be ready soon.

THOMAS. Please, Papa...

WALTER. [thinks a moment] I guess it'll be all right. You just try to stay out of trouble. It gets dark pretty quick up here in Ohio—not like in the South. Okay?

THOMAS. Okay.

WALTER. See you at dinner time, son.

WALTER goes down the hill. THOMAS stands watching him. THOMAS walks over to a tree and seats himself in front of it. He stares up at the leaves blowing gently in the breeze, then looks west toward the sun lowering itself toward the horizon. He leans back against the tree and relaxes.

THOMAS. Papa, someone was chasin' me.

THOMAS sits relaxed and looks out over the valley.

Dissolve to ext: the hill—dusk

The sky darkens rapidly. THOMAS starts and awakes. He jumps to his feet. He is stiff and cold. A light wind blows, rustling the leaves. He looks down the hill and can see the lights on in his home. He begins walking home. As he is about to descend, he stops. He hears a noise, the same sound he heard in the tunnel. He turns and ascends the hill, moving in the direction of the sound.

Quick dissolve to ext: the hill—dusk

The eerie sound is almost hypnotic as it draws the boy to it. He ascends the hill, arriving at its summit. Now the sound seems to be coming from somewhere on the other side of the hill. He goes to investigate.

Quick dissolve to ext: the other side of the hill—dusk

THOMAS moves as quietly as possible on a bed of dead leaves, listening carefully as he descends the hill.

Quick dissolve to ext: the hill—dusk

THOMAS reaches a point near the bottom of the hill when he suddenly realizes he is no longer on a bed of leaves but what sounds and feels like a wooden platform. He gasps. Suddenly, the platform begins to rise. THOMAS quickly jumps to the ground, crouching down to see what is going on. He can see a bright light emanating from below the platform. The "aaaaahhhhhhh" sound continues. The bright light is an eerie orange and red, tinting the trees above.

Suddenly, rising out of the light and smoke is a huge head with a large mane of hair tinted red and orange by the light of the fire below. The head is fully bearded and the eyes are piercing. The huge head sits atop massive shoulders and THOMAS
can see two huge thickly muscled arms. Thomas does not know it, but he is face to face with Pluto.

**PLUTO.** [bellowing] What demon walks on Pluto's house?

**THOMAS.** Aaaallllllllesooooo!!

*Thomas leaps to his feet and begins to run, with the huge man hot on his trail. As he breaks through the thick underbrush, the boy falls and Pluto is upon him, lifting him high into the air with one strong arm. As Thomas, held high in the air, struggles to break free, the huge man laughs with a snarl.*

**PLUTO.** You little kids think you can scare ol' Pluto out'a his wits with your sneakin' around, eh? Well, who's scared, now?!
Who's scared now?! You wanna see Pluto's hole in the ground? I'm gonna give you a real close look!

THOMAS. No! No! You the Devil! The Devil!

PLUTO laughs uproariously, which frightens THOMAS even more. PLUTO drapes a huge arm around the boy and holds him close as he attempts to carry him back. THOMAS quickly gives him an elbow to the solar plexus\(^2\)—when he hears the loud grunt and feels himself dropped to the ground, he scrambles to his feet and flees toward home. Behind him he can hear the loud breathing and heavy footsteps of PLUTO gaining on him. Half-screaming and half-crying, he runs as hard and as fast as he can, moving ever closer to his home.

CUT TO INT: THE KITCHEN—DUSK

SHEILA has just finished preparing dinner and KENNETH and WALTER are seating themselves at the table.

SHEILA. Walter, call that boy one more time, please. I don't want him missin' his meals.

WALTER. Relax, I'm sure he'll get here.

Just then, THOMAS crashes through the rear screen door, breaking the lock, trips over the threshold, slides across the linoleum on his stomach, and crashes into the kitchen table, knocking dishes to the floor and smashing them. He lies under the table, trying to get his breath. The entire family is momentarily shocked, but WALTER quickly pulls THOMAS to his feet and looks into the boy's face. THOMAS, breathing hard, says nothing, but looks wide-eyed toward the door. KENNETH begins crying. SHEILA runs to THOMAS.

PLUTO looks past MRS. SMALL to WALTER. Their eyes meet and hold.

PLUTO. Mr. Small.

WALTER. Mr. Pluto.

His eyes again fall on SHEILA, who extends her hand again.

SHEILA. I'm Sheila Small.

He shakes her hand, then retreats back to the threshold of the door, where there is the least light. SHEILA turns toward THOMAS.

SHEILA. . . . and this is Thomas, our son.

PLUTO lets his gaze fall on THOMAS, sending a shudder through the boy's entire body.

\(^2\) solar plexus (so' lər plex'əz) n.: The area of the belly just below the breastbone.
PLUTO. I'm sorry... Guess I mistook your boy.... Strangers always pokin' aroun', up to no good.... I thought your boy was one, so I gave chase.

WALTER moves to a different angle, trying to get a better look at PLUTO. PLUTO stares at him, but avoids SMALL'S gaze whenever it appears that they will make eye contact.

WALTER. I want to thank you for takin' care of things. Saved me a lot of time and energy fixin' the furniture and rooms the way you did.

SHEILA. Yes, it must've been a little difficult for a man your age alone.

PLUTO. I did just fine, Ma'am. The van came with the furniture at the start of the week, so I just took my time. Hope everything was all right.

SHEILA. Couldn'a been better. Thank you.

PLUTO smiles a thank you. WALTER moves a little closer to PLUTO. PLUTO steps further back into the darkness, so that he is almost outside the house. He stands in the doorway clenching and unclenching his gloved hands, nervously. Suddenly, WALTER changes the subject, catching PLUTO totally off guard.

WALTER. How're those horses of yours doin'? The black and the bay?

The question startles PLUTO. THOMAS and SHEILA are also surprised when they hear the question.

THOMAS. [thinking of PESTY and MAC and the black horse] Horses?

WALTER gives him a stare and THOMAS again falls silent.

PLUTO. Uh... er... they're fine. I'm workin' on their shoes.

WALTER takes a step toward PLUTO. PLUTO, a bit agitated, begins talking fast.

PLUTO. The bay's all right, but I had to hobble that black. He's got the chill, but he won't stay still. Tries to run all night to get away from it, so I got to hobble him; tie his feet to keep him from burstin' his heart wide open.

THOMAS listens much more closely now.

WALTER. That's kinda odd, isn't it, Mr. Pluto? I mean, the black horse havin' simple fever like that? That's a disease I thought peculiar only to horses with lighter coats, like grays or whites.

PLUTO tightens his jaw a little nervously.

PLUTO. [evasive] Yea, well....

Now he can see that the eyes of the entire SMALL family are on him and he shifts his weight nervously.

PLUTO. . . . see, if it was just a heat problem, say like the kinda heat they have in India, it wouldna hurt the black, but see, it wasn't the heat. It was nervous shock.

WALTER is incredulous. He succeeds in hiding it from everyone but THOMAS, who is watching him intently.

WALTER. Never knew nervousness could act on a horse's heat centers, Mr. Pluto.

PLUTO becomes quite agitated now.

PLUTO. Ain't nervousness. I said, "nervous shock." By haunted things no livin' thing oughta have the unhappiness to set eyes on.

THOMAS. [whispering] Papa, ghosts! He's talkin' 'bout ghosts!

A stern glare from WALTER silences THOMAS. When the boy looks toward PLUTO, he sees a faint trace of amusement cross the old man's face, then fade away. WALTER does not notice it.

WALTER. Thomas, here, told my wife 'bout meetin' two children, one of 'em a girl.
named Pesty, who was ridin' a black horse. Since she said she was your helper, I got the impression the horse belonged to you. And that horse had no limp. It was in good health.

There is a long silence as PLUTO studies the entire family and they, him. Everyone in the room is aware that WALTER is trying to trap PLUTO in a lie, but PLUTO maintains his composure, seeming not to even consider that MR. SMALL had raised the possibility he might be lying.

PLUTO. [fondly] Pesty . . . yes . . . she can do more with a wild animal than any child her age ought to be able to do with anything.

WALTER. [becoming angry] You mean to say a young girl like that could unhobble a horse—a full-grown quarter horse suffering from simple fever?

PLUTO studies him a moment.

PLUTO. No. I mean to say Pesty can ride that black anytime. Anytime at all, so long as it's day. But once it gets night, that horse gets the fever of nervous shock. So I haveta hobble him so he won't burst his heart with runnin'.

WALTER comes as close to PLUTO as he dares. PLUTO stands his ground, clenching and unclenching his fists. WALTER studies the man, seeming to look for something.

WALTER. What you say makes no sense at all!

PLUTO. [angrily] Sense?! [then, much more sadly] Sense . . . .

His eyes fall on SHEILA and the boys. A gentleness comes over his face, then that look of amusement. His eyes drift upward toward the ceiling, and he speaks in a kind of chant that sounds old and worn, like history.

PLUTO. When hoot owl screeching, Westward flies, Gauge the sun . . .

Look to Dies, And run . . .

MR. SMALL steps forward, but now the old man is backing out the door, away from the kitchen light and into the darkness outside. His footsteps are not heard on the veranda. The darkness seems to have engulfed him. He is gone. There is a pause before THOMAS speaks.

THOMAS. Papa, I couldn't even hear his footsteps. It's like he just disappeared. Poof! Just like that.

WALTER. Thomas, you know that's impossible. I taught you much better than that.

THOMAS. Yes, sir.

SHEILA. Well . . . he seems nice enough, but he's so strange.

WALTER. Yes, a little too strange. India! India! Now, whoever heard of anything so ridiculous! 3: quarter horse

SHEILA. I guess he didn't realize we come from farm country, too. Must've thought we were from the city.

WALTER. There's somethin' about that man that's not right. I just can't figure it, but somethin's not right.

SHEILA. Well, you try and figure it out while I get Kenneth ready for bed.

KENNETH. Aw, Mama, I'm not sleepy.

SHEILA. I don't want to hear it, Kenneth. Upstairs, right now, and Thomas, you hit the sack in one half hour. We have to get up early if we're going to get to church tomorrow. One half hour, young man.

3. quarter horse: A lightweight, muscular horse, usually of a dark color, known for its quick reactions.
THOMAS. Yes, Ma'am.

KENNETH whines a bit, but SHEILA ushers him out. WALTER begins repairing the broken door hinges made unserviceable when THOMAS crashed through the door.

WALTER. I'll just have to fix it so it'll hold till I can get into town and buy a new lock... hmph... maybe two or three locks, judgin' from the goin's on around here.

THOMAS. That sure was a scary little poem he recited. An' all that talk about his horse seein' things too awful to think about.

WALTER. An' that's all it was, too. Talk!

THOMAS. Him comin' up outa the ground the way he did, just the way Pesty said he would; an' talkin' the way he does, makes me a little scared of him, Papa.

WALTER. It's all right, Thomas. But keep in mind that he's just a quaint ol' man. He's no one to be scared of.

THOMAS. Papa, how come he kept his gloves on?

WALTER. I guess he did it 'cause he mighta burned his hand, or somethin' an' didn't want us to see the wound.

THOMAS. Back when we was ridin' in the car...

SHEILA enters the room.

SHEILA. [correcting] When we were riding in the car...

THOMAS. Yes, ma'am... well, anyway, Papa, you said he had a limp, and I didn't see him limping.

WALTER. To tell you the truth, I didn't even notice. Maybe his leg felt better, or somethin', I don't know. But I do know he has a limp.

SHEILA. He seemed a little sad... lonely, even.
illuminates Thomas's way. At the entrance to the parlor, just beyond the oak door, is a large and ornate mirror. Thomas poses in front of the mirror, studying his grave demeanor, and silently praising himself for his courageous bearing. He strikes a few brave poses. He moves from the mirror, through the oak door, and into the parlor.

CUT TO INT: THE PARLOR—NIGHT

Once inside, Thomas makes his way to the sofa. He makes his bed. As he stares through the large bay windows into the night, his eyes become heavy. He lies down, and soon is sound asleep. In the distance we can hear water dripping in the kitchen, but other than that there is no sound. The camera dollies from Thomas across the parlor to the entrance and through the door into the hall.

CUT TO INT: THE HALL—NIGHT

Camera moves from the oak door to the mirror. The mirror opens silently and a shrouded figure emerges. The mirror closes soundlessly behind it. The figure moves like a cat in the darkness and ascends the stairs.

CUT TO INT: TOP OF THE STAIRS—NIGHT
At the top of the stairs, the figure pauses and studies the hall and bedrooms that lie before it. Now it moves to the boys' bedroom and enters.

CUT TO INT: BOYS' BEDROOM—NIGHT

The shape moves to where Kenneth lies asleep. Light from the moon outside shines through the windows, and we can see that the shape holds some metallic things in its hand. Turning, it exits the room, still holding the sharp objects.

CUT TO INT: UPSTAIRS HALLWAY—NIGHT

The figure moves across the hallway, then turns again and heads silently back down the stairs.

CUT TO INT: THE PARLOR—NIGHT

The figure comes into the parlor and creeps up to Thomas. The boy turns in his sleep and the shadow moves away.

CUT TO INT: DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY—NIGHT

The figure comes back to the mirror, listens intently, opens the mirror, and disappears behind it. The mirror closes.

CUT TO INT: THE PARLOR—NIGHT

Suddenly, Thomas awakes with a start. He looks about, anxious and confused, but all he can hear is the water dripping in the kitchen, and all he can see outside is the misty darkness. He lies back down, his eyes wide and searching.

BLACKOUT

Act V

FADE INTO INT: THE PARLOR—DAY

The early morning sun breaks through the windows and falls on Thomas's face, forcing him to wake involuntarily.

He sits up, rubs his eyes, and yawns. He squints into the sun then stretches once more. He notices fresh underwear and his new Sunday suit lying across the foot of the couch. A note from his mother is pinned to the dress shirt. It reads, "You are to wear these clothes to church today." Thomas smiles, gathers up the shirt, suit, and his shoes, and wanders toward the stairs leading to the second floor.

CUT TO INT: THE STAIRS—DAY

As he looks up the stairs, he can see his family, dressed for church, at the top of the landing. They seem to be studying some things in Walter's hand very closely. From the bottom of the stairs, they appear to be metallic. Walter is sitting on the top step with Sheila next to him and Kenneth stands behind them. Thomas climbs the stairs.

THOMAS. Morning.

The family is so engrossed in what they are doing that they can only mumble a reply. Thomas finally joins them.

THOMAS. Say, what's those?

SHEILA. Oh, this chile's English is so bad. What are those?

WALTER. They're triangles, son.

WALTER places three metal triangles on the floor. Thomas's eyes grow wide with curiosity and amazement.

SHEILA. Each one exactly alike. See here, the two legs that make up the right angles on each of them are made of wood.

WALTER. A hard wood, like oak. The surface between the legs looks like tin.

SHEILA. What's it all mean?

WALTER. We'll find out in a minute.
WALTER begins to fit the triangles together, trying to see if he can find a pattern.

WALTER. If this is supposed to be a square, then there's one triangle missing. Why? Where is it?

SHEILA. Walter, look . . .

SHEILA traces her finger along the edges of a wooden area where the triangles are joined together.

SHEILA . . . see, it's a cross.

WALTER. A Greek cross4 . . . but, why?

SHEILA. One thing's certain, Walter. If there is to be a fourth triangle, it'll turn up . . . the same way as these three. But I hope it doesn't.

THOMAS. How'd these turn up, Mama?

SHEILA. We found them stuck in the door frames of our bedrooms when we got up this morning.

THOMAS. What? Then that means . . .

SHEILA. [tense] It means someone slipped in to this house last night while we were asleep.

THOMAS. But all the doors were locked, Mama.

WALTER. We know.

They all look at one another.

THOMAS. [quietly] Old Pluto's second warning. Furniture was fixed . . .

WALTER. Thomas . . .

THOMAS. Papa, doncha see? First was the way he fixed the furniture downstairs in the parlor, so it was all pointin' out toward those big bay windows. Telling us to go! To get out! Now this!

4. Greek cross: A cross with four equal arms at right angles.

THOMAS. The police—?!?

WALTER. Sssshh! You an' me gon' set up watch. Midnight to five A.M. I'll take three hours, and you take the two from midnight to two A.M.

THOMAS. I can stay awake the three hours, Papa. I'm strong. I can do it.

WALTER. If I can figure things out soon enough, we may not have to do anything at all.

SHEILA. [OC] Hey, you two ready for church?

WALTER gathers up the triangles and gets to his feet. He walks down the stairs as

The House of Dies Drear 273
THOMAS watches him. A shiver comes over THOMAS as he gazes about the house.

THOMAS. Old house, I won't let you or that old man scare us away. We'll beatcha. You can count on that.

DISSOLVE TO EXT: MT. CALVARY CHURCH—DAY

A white frame structure, one story tall and about one hundred years old. Parishioners, dressed in their Sunday finery, file inside as the SMALLS drive up in their car. The family gets out of the car and is walking toward the church when THOMAS spies something.

THOMAS. Papa, look!

The family looks in the direction THOMAS points. Coming up the road toward the church is a nineteenth-century vintage buggy drawn by two horses—one black and one bay. The black horse is the one on which PESTY rode earlier. PLUTO, wearing an old stovepipe hat⁵ and a huge, though worn, black cape, drives the horses. He also wears a white shirt and a black string tie. PESTY rides beside him, wearing a pink tulle⁶ dress and a blue polka-dot bonnet.

5. stovepipe hat: A man's tall silk hat.
6. tulle (tal) n.: A thin, fine netting of silk or other fabric.
Below pink stockings she wears white, high-button shoes. Unlike Pluto, who is an exact replica of a nineteenth-century man, Pesty has accented her attire with some concessions to twentieth-century tastes, so that her combined costume has a unique other-worldly look to it.

**Thomas.** Mama, Papa, those horses—

**Walter.** I know, son. I know . . .

Sheila draws Kenneth close to her as the buggy comes near. Pluto looks different. He is cheerful enough, but looks stooped and older.

**Walter.** [In a low voice] Where'd he put his shoes? I thought sure he had burned his hands.

**Sheila.** [to Walter] Those clothes! A bonnet, no less. Where'd she find that?

The buggy comes to a halt. The Small family approaches the buggy. They are tense. Pluto smiles broadly.

**Pluto.** Morning, folks!

The pleasant manner catches the Small family totally by surprise.

**Walter.** [quietly] Good mornin', Mr. Pluto.

**Pluto.** Nice to see you all out this fine Sunday.

**Sheila.** [pointedly] And we're glad to be here so you could see us, Mr. Pluto.

**Pluto.** That so? I hope you all slept well last night?

**Thomas.** Did he sneeze in?

Pluto studies the old man closely. There seems to be no sinister intent in his voice. The boy turns his gaze to his father to measure his reply.

**Walter.** Yep. Slept just fine.

**Pluto.** Well, y'all enjoy. Hear?

Pluto starts up the team. Pesty waves to Thomas.

**Pesty.** [teasingly] Hi, Thomas Small, the new boy. How ya like my new dress?

**Thomas.** It's nice. Where'd ya get it?

**Pesty.** Oh, I got it . . .

Her answer is drowned out in the sound of the buggy and horses hurrying off to park around the rear entrance of the church.

**Sheila.** Now, that has to be just about the most unusual sight that I've seen in a long time.

**Walter.** [half to himself] Like a vision straight out of the time of Dies Drear himself.

**Thomas.** Say what, Papa?

**Walter.** Oh . . . uh . . . nothin'. C'mon, let's get inside.

The Small family goes into the church.

LAP DISSOLVE TO INT: THE CHURCH—DAY

The pastor, flanked by two young pastors, sits on the church platform. In back of him is the choir. The lead singer is Pesty. She has a voice like an angel and is singing the gospel hymn "There Must Be a God Somewhere." Thomas is shocked to see Pesty singing, but even more surprised to see Mac playing the organ, and playing it well.

**Pesty.** [singing] "Over my head, I hear music in the air

Up above my head, I see trouble in the air

I know

There must be a God somewhere . . ."

As the hymn continues, Thomas begins to study the faces of the congregation. The faces seem gentle enough; average, just like in North Carolina. The boy stiffens. His eyes have fallen upon those of old Pluto.
CUT TO INT: THE CHURCH—DAY.
CLOSE-UP ON PLUTO
PLUTO sits staring at the SMALL family, then turns away.
CUT TO INT: THE CHURCH—DAY.
CLOSE-UP ON THOMAS
THOMAS swallows hard, then looks elsewhere as PESTY’s singing continues.
CUT TO INT: THE CHURCH—THOMAS’S POV. FOUR-SHOT—THE DARROWS—DAY
Four huge men with caramel-colored skin and scowls on their faces sit in a pew toward the rear. They stare with hatred in their eyes at THOMAS and his family. They are RIVER LEWIS, the father, in his early sixties; WILBUR, the eldest son, about the same age as WALTER SMALL; RIVER ROSS, about a year younger; and RUSSELL, in his late twenties.
CUT TO INT: THE CHURCH—DAY.
TWO-SHOT—THOMAS AND WALTER
WALTER. Thomas, turn around.
THOMAS. But, Papa . . .
WALTER. I know. I saw them.
THOMAS turns around. He can still see PLUTO staring and he can feel the eyes of the DARROWS.
PESTY. [singing]“I know there must be a God somewhere . . .”
DISSOLVE TO EXT: CHURCHYARD—DAY
The SMALLS walk toward their car.
THOMAS. One of them was that man on the road, Papa.
WALTER. Shhh. Their name’s Darrow. The pastor told me about them.
THOMAS. They’re Mac’s people?
SHEILA. It looks that way, Thomas.
THOMAS. Why were they starin’ at us so hard?
The SMALLS get into their car and ride away.
CUT TO EXT: THE CHURCHYARD—THOMAS’S POV—DAY
The car passes near a large tree in front of the church. The DARROWS, now including MAC, still in his choir robes, move around in front of the tree and watch the disappearing car.
RIVER LEWIS. So that’s them, huh?
MAC. Yes, Daddy. They’re nice folks, too.
RIVER LEWIS. I ain’t asked you that.
WILBUR. Whatcha think, Daddy?
RIVER LEWIS. They prob’ly in with that old fool. That’s prob’ly how they got that house.
RIVER ROSS. What we gon’ do?
RIVER LEWIS. Never you mind. I’m gonna handle that end of it personally. Mac, whatchu found out from Pesty ‘bout old Pluto?
MAC. Daddy, you know she won’t tell me a thing. Never has. She so closed-mouth about it all.
RIVER LEWIS. Well, you just keep your eye on her. Hear?
MAC. Daddy, I don’t like this spyin’ on my own sister, an’ besides, those folks down there seem nice enough. They even got a boy my age and—
RIVER LEWIS slaps him.
RIVER LEWIS. Just do like I tells ya, an’ stop runnin’ off at the mouth. As for that family there, I’ll make them sorry they ever set foot in the House of Dies Drear.
BLACKOUT
Act VI

FADE INTO EXT: THE COLLEGE CAMPUS—DAY

The main campus is a quadrangle about one quarter of a mile long, bordered on all sides by a combination of new and old buildings and oak trees. At the eastern end of the quadrangle is the oldest and tallest building on the campus, a six-story structure. It is characterized by six towers, each with a turret at the top. The small family's car enters the campus and comes to a halt in front of the main building. The family gets out.


WALTER. Hmm... yea... kind of. This is the main building. My office is in that left tower, right up there.

KENNETH shades his eyes from the sun and looks upward.

KENNETH. Oooo, that's way up there.

WALTER looks at THOMAS a moment. THOMAS has his head bowed and his hands thrust deeply into his pockets. WALTER puts his arm around his son.

CUT TO INT: THE OFFICE—DAY

Walter's office is a cramped circular space lit by an overhead fluorescent light. In the background are filing cabinets, a typewriter, a bookshelf crammed with books, and various papers scattered about. The office looks well used, even though WALTER has only been in it two days. WALTER opens the door with a key.

WALTER. This is a pretty cool place in the summer. The ivy covers up the windows, keeping the moisture close and the sunlight out. But come winter I expect I'll freeze.

THOMAS. Papa, you mean there's no heat?

WALTER. Not in these towers.

THOMAS. Shoot, these northern colleges are somethin'! No heat.

WALTER. Whatchu haveta understand, son, is that this buildin' is history. It's much the same as it was a hundred years ago. Nothin' much changes in places like these. They give a man time to think and study.

THOMAS. Aw, Papa, sometimes I wish history would just die! How come you always haveta have history clutter up everything?!! How is it you always know to go someplace where you don't ever haveta change?

THOMAS goes and slumps down into a chair. WALTER looks at him.

Sheila, looks like North Carolina A & T, back home, Walter.

WALTER. Okay. But I'll getcha up there soon.

SHEILA. Only when they got that elevator workin', honey.

THOMAS and WALTER walk to the entrance of the building. THOMAS has his head bowed, and his hands thrust deeply into his pockets. WALTER puts his arm around his son.

THOMAS. Papa, you mean there's no heat?

WALTER. Not in these towers.

THOMAS. Shoot, these northern colleges are somethin'! No heat.

WALTER. Whatchu haveta understand, son, is that this buildin' is history. It's much the same as it was a hundred years ago. Nothin' much changes in places like these. They give a man time to think and study.

THOMAS. Aw, Papa, sometimes I wish history would just die! How come you always haveta have history clutter up everything?! How is it you always know to go someplace where you don't ever haveta change?

THOMAS goes and slumps down into a chair. WALTER looks at him.

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WALTER. [watches him a moment] What is it, Thomas? What've I done that's made you so mad?

THOMAS. Papa, I want to go home to Great-grandmother!

WALTER. Oh, I see . . . you miss her a lot, don't you?

THOMAS. At least I knew I belonged there.

WALTER. I'm sorry she wouldn't come with us, Thomas. But . . . well, she has the right to end where she began.

THOMAS. Everything was warm and good with her. Here in this North, we ain't had but one bad time after another. That old man don't like us. Those Darrows hate us. We hardly see anybody or talk to anybody. Even that house hates us. I wanna go home! I wanna go back to Great-grandmother and North Carolina!

WALTER comes near and puts his arms around him.

WALTER. Thomas, listen to me. Trust me. There are good people here, an' we'll meet them. Just give the town time.

THOMAS. Yea, but will the town give me time?

THOMAS rises and moves toward the door. Something catches his eye. He moves to the bookcase and bends down to get a better look.

THOMAS. [softly] Papa? They got in here too.

THOMAS stands up and faces WALTER. He is holding another triangle in his hand. It is identical to the others that were found that morning.

CUT TO EXT: XENIA AVENUE IN YELLOW SPRINGS—DAY

The SMALL family sits in a car looking toward the locksmith's store. There is a "Closed on Sunday" sign visible. Next door is a drugstore. We can see WALTER inside talking to the druggist. He is pointing down the street. WALTER is nodding his head and looking in the direction the man is pointing. He smiles, says thank you, and rushes out. He jumps into the car.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DAY

The car speeds off. THOMAS and KENNETH are in the back seat. KENNETH is watching the scenery and THOMAS is listening to the conversation between WALTER and SHEILA.

WALTER. He said there's a fella named Carr, who owns a gas station out here on Highway 68, who's a kind of handyman, an' he might be able to help us out with some locks for that kitchen door.

SHEILA. Thank heavens. I'll sleep a lot better tonight knowin' that door has a lock on it.

THOMAS. Better make that two or three locks, Papa.

WALTER. You said it, son. This time we'll be ready for them.

CUT TO EXT: XENIA AVENUE AND HIGHWAY 68—DAY

The car comes to a halt at the Carr gas station. It is big, modern, and very clean. EDGAR CARR, a big, athletic-looking white man of about forty, approaches. He has a kind, soft face that breaks into an easy grin. His long hair is all over the place and he is starting to grow a beard, which he scratches with regularity. He wears overalls over a white T-shirt and a wristwatch.

WALTER. Afternoon. Walter Small's the name. We just moved up to the old Dies Drear place. I need some locks installed. The druggist told me you might be able to help.

CARR. I sure can. But I won't be able to put 'em in till Monday. Will Monday do?
The entire small family is dejected at this news.

WALTER. It'll haveta do, I guess.

CARR extends his hand.

CARR. By the way. The name's Edgar Carr.

WALTER shakes his hand. CARR looks into the car and waves to SHEILA and the boys. They smile a hello.

WALTER. Think you can make it early Monday morning?

CARR. [curious, intent] You have some trouble out there, or somethin'?

WALTER. No, nothin' like that. My son, here, had a little accident. That's all.

CARR. The old Dies Drear place, huh? Been years since anybody lived up that way, you know . . . I mean, except for old Pluto.

WALTER. [evasive] Well, I wanted a place with plenty of space for my boys, an' I thought I might do a little farmin'.

CARR. Real fertile land up there. I should know. My dad's farm is next to the same stream that runs on your place.

WALTER. [impatient to leave] Is that a fact?

CARR. [to THOMAS] Say, young fella, you like berries?

THOMAS. Sure.

CARR. In that case, come on out to my dad's anytime an' pick all you want. We get plenty of 'em.

WALTER looks to SHEILA, tries to start the engine to ease away.

CARR. Then there's the Darrow spread nearby.

WALTER shuts off the engine. THOMAS leans forward. Walter gets out of the car.

WALTER. Did you say Darrow?

CARR. Oh, you know them?

WALTER. Kind of.

CARR. Except for my dad's place, they own all the property that surrounds yours. Right mean bunch when they want to be. Keep botherin' that old Pluto somethin' awful.

WALTER. Pluto never said anythin' to me 'bout it.

CARR. Always been bad blood between old Pluto an' the Darrows. Goes back to the Darrows' grandaddy, River Swift, who died years ago. He an' old Pluto used to be friends, but they had a fallin' out. Over what, I don't know.

WALTER. Well, I don't expect I'll be seein' that much of the Darrows, anyway.

CARR. I reckon not. They can stay out on that farm of theirs for six, seven months at a time without folks seein' 'em. Always diggin' up trees an' puttin' 'em back.

WALTER. Trees?

CARR. Heck, an' that ain't all. When ol' River Swift Darrow was alive, he an' his kin moved their whole house a few feet to one side and spent a week lookin' under it for somethin', then moved it back to where it was in the first place.

EDGAR CARR chuckles at the thought and wipes the perspiration from his face.

WALTER. Thank you for the information.

CARR. You're welcome. Just watch yourself with them Darrows. They don't like folks hangin' around. The youngest boy, Mac, don't seem too much like 'em, though. He's about your boy's age. Maybe they're changin'.

WALTER has gotten back in the car and has
started up the engine. Carr kicks again and wipes away the sweat.

Carr. Still in all, watch 'em close. They got somethin' in for that old Plutx. You take care.

Carr backs away and Walter drives off. Thomas watches him from the back window, and smiles and waves. Carr waves back.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DAY

Sheila. I wonder what the Darrows were looking for with so much digging?

Thomas. They're prob'ly people who just like to tear stuff up just to be tearing it up.

Walter. I'm sure there's more to it than that, Thomas.

Sheila. There must be some kind of feud going on. Why else would those Darrows keep after that poor old man so much?

Thomas. And now they're after us.

Walter. Is that what you think, Thomas, or what you know?

Thomas. Papa, the only thing I know is that Mr. Carr is one of the best things that's happened since we got here.

Thomas looks out the rear window back at the quickly disappearing gas station and smiles.

CUT TO INT: THE KITCHEN—THE HOUSE OF DIES DREAM—DUSK

The entire family stands at the entrance of the kitchen agape at what they see. Sheila screams. Thomas goes to her. Kenneth takes hold of her dress. Sheila sways and leans against Thomas. Walter walks ahead to survey the kitchen in shambles. The large sack of flour Pluto brought them has been emptied all over the floor in an even layer.

Over the flour, water and apple juice have been poured. The whole mess has been mixed into a sticky brown paste that has been spread over the kitchen table, stove, chairs, and cabinets. The door of the refrigerator hangs open, and all of the food inside has been removed; some of it is dumped on the floor. All of the dishes have been smashed in the sink and covered with goo. Rotting food is visible everywhere. Thomas steps forward. Walter stops him.

Walter. No. [Sheila comes to his side.] They mean to make us run. That's why they did this.

Sheila. Oh, Walter—we could move into town, where it's safe...

Walter. Is that all we're made of? We won't be runnin'. We're better than that. This is our home... our life. No one is gonna scare us outa it, an' no one is gonna take it from us, either. I've had enough! [He turns to Thomas.] Thomas. I want you to come with me. Sheila, take Kenneth upstairs, turn on the lights, and lock yourself in with him. Stay here till we get back.

CUT TO EXT: THE HOUSE—DUSK

Walter and Thomas exit the house and begin walking up the hill in back of the house, armed with clubs and a flashlight.

CUT TO INT: THE BOYS' BEDROOM—DUSK

Close-up on Sheila as she sits still and determined, watching over the sleeping form of her son Kenneth. She stares out of the window at the flashlight that signals the progress of Walter and Thomas, with a baseball bat resting delicately in her lap.

CUT TO EXT: HILL BEHIND THE HOUSE OF DIES DREAM—NIGHT

The flashlight lighting their way, Walter and Thomas reach the base of the hill.
They move around the base of the hill from left to right. They move silently through the darkness, WALTER in front and THOMAS behind. Presently, they come to a point in the thick underbrush where a light can be discerned, glowing somewhere in the distance. It seems near. WALTER douses his flashlight and signals THOMAS to remain silent. They keep forward. THOMAS falls and rolls down a gully.³ WALTER helps him to his feet. THOMAS whispers that he is all right and they move forward toward the dim light. Finally, they come to a clearing where the pale glowing light shines brightest. They can see a bed of flat rock, rectangular in shape, at the end of which is a cave. The cave mouth has heavy plank doors with sconces on either side, which contain burning torches. These torches flare violently, sending smoke and a yellow glow up into the surrounding trees.

In the midst of it all, pacing back and forth, is PLUTO. He now seems younger, healthier than before. His gloves are on again, and he smokes a cigarette. He is not aware that they are watching him. THOMAS watches him intently with a mixture of fear and curiosity. Suddenly, his father bursts forward from the bush and approaches PLUTO.

WALTER. Hold it right there, Pluto!

PLUTO swings around and spies THOMAS and WALTER. His face is partially shadowed because the torches are directly above him. He backs toward the cave.

WALTER. Wait!

³ gully (gul' e) n.: A channel or hollow worn in the ground by running water.
With the torch lighting their way, they enter a dark tunnel, similar to the one in which Thomas became temporarily lost. As they move forward, Thomas catches up to his father, trying to get his attention.

THOMAS. He's got his gloves on again an' he was smokin' a cigarette.

WALTER. [a hard edge in his voice] I know, son. I saw . . . I saw, all right.
CUT TO INT: FURTHER IN THE CAVE—NIGHT

They keep moving forward. Thirty feet inside, they come to a room that is already lit. WALTER puts the torch aside and they move around in the room. A forge, where horseshoes are made, is visible. There is a bed, a radio, a hot stove, food in cans, and other amenities. Another tunnel entrance can be seen. The cave is some 25 feet wide, 30 feet long, and 15 feet high. A portion of the room is carpeted, with a large worn armchair and a kitchen set for eating. There are photographs on the wall nearest the table, and many yellowed calendars. A pair of slippers is placed neatly beside the bed, and a robe is flung across it. The light in the room comes from the forge, which has a fire burning. Bellows rest on a tree stump next to the forge. WALTER and THOMAS approach the bellows and forge. WALTER walks over to the bellows and operates them. THOMAS immediately recognizes the sound. He nods his head and a knowing smile comes across his face. It is the sound he heard before in the tunnel.

WALTER. [He looks to a wall, then upward.] See, look.

He points to a ladder that leads up a wall to the underside of a platform.

WALTER. That's the platform you stumbled on.

THOMAS. He came up through it and grabbed me. He's so strong for an old man.

WALTER. Yes . . . but where is he? He didn't come out the way we came in. He's gotta be in here someplace.

WALTER climbs the ladder and checks the platform. It is locked.

WALTER. Well, he didn't go through here, that's for sure.

THOMAS points to the other tunnel.

THOMAS. How 'bout through there?

THOMAS runs into the tunnel and disappears into the darkness.

CUT TO INT: THE SECOND TUNNEL

The area is pitch black, except for a small circle of light that emanates from the main cave. THOMAS feels his way into the tunnel, when suddenly the heads of two horses—the black and the bay—appear in the circle of light, their eyes wide with excitement at the presence of a stranger, their loud whinies echoing through the tunnel. THOMAS yells, turns, and runs.

CUT TO INT: PLUTO'S CAVE

THOMAS rushes out of the tunnel, catching his breath, smiling sheepishly, and shaking his head.

THOMAS. Just horses in there, so I figured I'd better hurry back out here. You shouldn't be alone.

WALTER. We'll wait for him. He's gotta come back sooner or later.

THOMAS. But, Mama . . .

WALTER. You're right—if anything happens to her or Kenneth because of—THOMAS has walked over to one of the walls. His attention has been drawn to a strange-looking rope. It is looped loosely around a clothes hook.

WALTER. What the heck . . . ?

WALTER gets the ladder and climbs to a point where his eye is level with the hook. Just above the hook is a small hole. The rope comes out of this hole. WALTER climbs down the ladder. He smiles confidently at THOMAS, secure that he has found a clue to PLUTO's mysterious disappearance. He puts

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the ladder back, then takes the rope and pulls it down like a bell rope. When he lets go of it, it returns to its original position. The wall begins to slide with a loud, grating sound, and in a moment, stops. Before them is a huge cavern with stalagmites and stalactites clearly visible from the light of the forge. They can see a slippery, wet ramp of chalk-white limestone leading downward. Camera closes on Walter and Thomas’s faces.

WALTER. My Lord in heaven! Look at it! Just look at it!

Act VII

FADE IN TO INT: THE CAVE—A RAMP LEADING TO A LARGE CAVERN—NIGHT

Walter and Thomas walk down a ramp to a huge chamber, lit by torches, where Pluto sits behind a huge desk, which is dark and elaborately veneered with fine woods. The desk is decorated with seventeenth-century ornamentation of a most superior quality. It is probably French Renaissance. Pluto sits behind the desk with his profile toward Walter and Thomas as they approach from the ramp. He has one elbow propped on the desk with his hand under his chin, index finger extended. A brown woolen cloak covers his shoulders. He seems to await Thomas and Walter’s arrival with a certain sense of dread. Pesty stands near the chair, more protective of the old man than anything else.

CUT TO INT: THE CAVE—WALTER AND THOMAS’S POV

The more Walter and Thomas survey the room, the more awestruck they become. Hanging on all sides of the enormous barrel-shaped cavern are tapestries and Persian carpets of all colors and designs. Between the rows of hanging carpets are 40-foot canoes and whole, richly painted and crafted totem poles. Here and there are Indian-crafted chests of wood, and piled atop them are blankets of similar design. There are barrels of silks and embroidered materials, some of which spill out onto the floor. There are shoes, jewelry, watches, and chains of gold. One section of one huge wall is covered with glassware. It is like a prism, ranging in colors from aqua to deep brown and black.

THOMAS. Papa, what is all this?

WALTER. The treasure of Dies Drear, son.

THOMAS. [bewildered] But everything looks so new.

WALTER. These chambers are so far underground that the temperature remains constant. There’s no such thing as dust and erosion down here. It’s as though time can stand still.

PESTY. That’s not always true, Mr. Small. Sometimes I have to go up there and do a little polishing up. Like this.

Pesty leaves Pluto’s side and goes to a ladder. She moves it to a place near the huge stacks of glass and begins to climb. Her reflection appears in the glass a thousand times over, creating an almost dream-like vision.

WALTER. Be careful!
PESTY moves deftly, smiles over her shoulder.

PESTY. No need to worry, Mr. Small. This is my job. I been doin’ this since I was six years old.

PLUTO turns to face THOMAS and WALTER directly. His hands are atop a set of yellowing books. WALTER notices these old ledgers. He looks reassuringly at PLUTO, then at PESTY, then removes one of the ledgers from beneath the old man’s hands. WALTER studies them.

PLUTO. An accountin’.

PLUTO seems old and tired now. He is not the spry man THOMAS and WALTER chased into the cave. THOMAS studies PLUTO, PESTY, and his father closely. His eyes move quickly from one to another.

PLUTO. The day-by-day sale of our people. They aren’t Mr. Drear’s. Don’t know how he come by them. But they tell a tale or two.

THOMAS. That’s about slavery, Papa?

WALTER. A list of slaves bought and sold.

PLUTO. Y’all found us out. I kinda figgered you would sooner or later when you first came over to the house . . . All these years no one. . . . And then Pesty. My Little Old Miss Bee.

PESTY looks at him and smiles and he smiles back.

PESTY. I followed him here one day. He didn’t know. I guess I musta been about five. He was scared I’d tell my stepfather, but I never did. He and my older brothers would’ve come here an’ cleaned Mr. Pluto out. I decid-ed this would be my little secret. Mr. Pluto’s always been kind to me.

PLUTO. [to THOMAS and WALTER] Had to trick you, at first. I thought you’d be like the Darrows an’ try an’ steal all this. . . .
false beard and Thomas's hands. Now the boy is totally stunned. He sits on the floor looking up at the second Pluto as he removes the rest of his stage makeup from his face.

Mayhew. [peeling away the mask] "We wear the mask that grins and lies, it hides our cheeks and shades our eyes... With torn and bleeding hearts we smile... We wear the mask!"

Thomas. You're not a devil.

Mayhew. [The younger Pluto] No. I'm Mayhew Skinner. I'm my father's only son.

Mayhew removes a half mask with the rest of the beard attached, then the white wig and a dyed, plastic substance that looks like skin.

Walter. Why? Why all this?

Pluto. Because of what you see in here. Me and that River Swift Darrow used to be real close, an' when we was young we hunted for this treasure in here together... [angrily] Funny how folks can turn on you.

Thomas. Turn, Mr. Pluto?

Pluto. Wasn't long before I come to realize that this here treasure was more than just a collection of riches; it was a legacy, boy. One I was bound to protect. A monument to the history of our people. All River Swift wanted was the money.

Thomas. Does he know where this treasure is?

Pluto. No. Once we split up, we searched for it separate. I found it, he didn't, but I never let on that I did. An' he got about as much chance of findin' it as a leopard got of changin' his spots.

Mayhew. That hasn't kept the Darrows from trying.

Pluto. Yea, slinkin' around like snakes, that's what they been doin'.

Thomas. But how did you keep them off this land for so long?

Walter. Thomas, stop askin' so many questions. [To Pluto] How did you?

Pluto. I figured if they could act like the devil, then I'd act the devil, for real. I snuck in an' outa these tunnels, makin' it seem like I could appear an' disappear. Had 'em fooled for years. Other folks, too. People got to callin' me a demon. Can you imagine that. Here I was protectin' our heritage, an' my own people callin' me a demon. How's that for gratitude. I had me a good time, though. That is, till I got sick back in January.

Walter. Why did you think we were your enemies?

Mayhew. People in this town have been treatin' my father bad for years. That's one of the reasons I left an' went East to work. Couldn't stand it. 'Specially after my mother passed on.

Thomas. But now you're back.

Mayhew. Thanks to Edgar Carr.

Walter. Yes, the man at the gas station.

Mayhew. And one of the few friends I had in this town when I was growin' up. He called me when my father's illness turned worse three weeks ago.

Pesty comes over to Thomas and stands beside him. She smiles. She says: "Walter. Then Carr knows about this cavern, too?"

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MAYHEW. No. No one does. Carr only knew that strangers were moving into the house, and that my father had been trying to keep something secret from the Darrows and if it was that important, it should probably be kept from you, too.

WALTER. He was afraid we'd be like the Darrows.

MAYHEW. So was I. I was the one who arranged your furniture.

PLUTO. Scaring innocent folks, like that. Ain't no need. I tell ye. Dies Drear lives. When he wants to be seen, he will be. No need to pretend he is. He is. Why, Dies Drear taught the slaves in this very room; how to read, how to follow the crosses, how to escape.

THOMAS. [to MAYHEW] Did you know about this cavern, too?

MAYHEW. Not until a week ago, when my father decided he was mortal, like all of us, and thought it time to tell me.

PLUTO. [sadly] Do you blame me, son?

MAYHEW. [quietly] We were so poor, Father. All those years, and there was all this wealth...

PLUTO. [interrupting] It wasn't mine to take! It wasn't mine!

MAYHEW. Dies Drear's been dead a hundred years. He had no family! You call this our heritage? The legacy of our people? Well, we couldn't eat heritage, Father. Legacy couldn't put clothes on our back. You and the memory of that dead abolitionist have become so close till sometimes you can't tell what's real and what's not.

There is a long pause. Then:

THOMAS. Papa, does that mean you're gonna tell the foundation about all this? Will you let them take it?

WALTER looks at THOMAS a moment, then at MAYHEW and PLUTO.

MAYHEW. Pesty, come on. It's gettin' late. Time you were home.

WALTER. Mayhew, we could talk about the answer to his question. That is, if you want to let me be a part of that decision.

MAYHEW nods his head.

MAYHEW. Pesty, you ready?

PESTY. [rises] I'm ready.

She goes to PLUTO and throws her arms around his neck and gives him a kiss.

PESTY. See you tomorrow, Mr. Pluto.

PLUTO. This still our secret. Right?

PESTY. I kept this place a secret six years and I'll keep it sixty if I have to. G'night.

PLUTO attempts to rise out of his seat, trembles, and nearly falls; MAYHEW rushes to his side, catching him.

MAYHEW. Father, you're sick! Quick, let's get him up to his bed.

WALTER and MAYHEW assist PLUTO up the ramp as PESTY and THOMAS follow.

CUT TO INT: PLUTO'S LIVING QUARTERS

They help PLUTO as he lies heavily upon his bed.

PLUTO. I'm tired, son, so tired...

MAYHEW. Father, I'll be back as soon as I can.

PLUTO. I'll be all right, son. I feel better, so much better; now that I know a man like Mr. Small is here. He understands what this place means. He's a keeper of history, just like me. He knows. He knows....
MAYHEW. If neither you nor your father ransacked our kitchen, do you think they did it?

PESTY. They sure did. They were scared because they thought you’d find the treasure before they did. Your bein’ a historical man, maybe.

WALTER. They’ll have to be dealt with, actin’ so stupid. Like a bunch of vandals on Halloween.

MAYHEW. They’ll have to be dealt with, actin’ so stupid. Like a bunch of vandals on Halloween.

WALTER. I’ll get the police to put an end to their games once and for all. After all, they’ve been trespassin’ on foundation property.

MAYHEW. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, but first I want to exact the revenge myself, and I know just the way. I told you I worked back East, didn’t I? Well, I’m an actor.

THOMAS. [holding up the fake mask he has butchered since being in the cave] You coulda fooled me.

Laughter.

MAYHEW. Let me see Pesty safely home. Then, Mr. Small, I’m gonna swing by your place tonight and fill you in on a little something I have in mind for the big, bad Darrow boys.

PESTY. What about me? I want to be in on it, too. I’m tired of them beatin’ up on Mac.

MAYHEW. Don’t worry, you’ll be in on it, too. Folks, we’re all about to become a company of actors!

PESTY is led off by MAYHEW, as THOMAS and WALTER stand and watch them a moment.

THOMAS. Papa, what on earth is he talkin’ about?

WALTER. I don’t know, son. But if I read Mayhew right, I wouldn’t want to be in the Darrows’ shoes for all the treasure stored in this cave.

THOMAS. Papa, we gotta get home! Mama and Kenneth still locked in there by themselves!

They quickly rush off into the night.

CUT TO INT: THE KITCHEN—NIGHT

Thomas is fighting to stay awake as he sits at the kitchen table with his parents and Mayhew. Kenneth is asleep in his mother's lap.

MAYHEW. What we’re about to do is going to involve deception, danger, and the utmost timing in order to be successful. But, once it works, we will have no more trouble from the Darrows.

SHEILA. Danger? We’re not going to break the law, are we?

MAYHEW. Not a chance. But we are going to break some spirits.

THOMAS sits up straight.

MAYHEW. Here’s a list of things I want you to buy at the store in town. . .

He hands WALTER the list. WALTER reads it as THOMAS peers over his shoulder.

MAYHEW. It’s absolutely imperative that the . . .

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Darrows get wind of the fact that my father is very ill and may be hospitalized.

THOMAS. Really?

MAYHEW. No, not really, but it's important that the Darrows believe what Pesty and you are going to tell them. And here's why.

The family leans forward to hear the plan.

THOMAS looks at his parents as the car continues on to town.

CUT TO EXT: A STREET IN TOWN—DAY

The SMALLS' car moves slowly down a main street in town.

CUT TO INT: THE CAR—DAY

THOMAS. Hey, there it is!

CUT TO EXT: STREET—DAY

The smalls' car moves slowly down a main street in town.

DISSOLVE TO: CUT TO EXT: THEATER SUPPLY STORE—DAY

The SMALL family exits with armloads of shopping bags. Walter opens the trunk of the car and places them inside. They also place a pair of gossamer wings in the trunk. Walter closes the trunk.

THOMAS. [looking down the street] Papa!

THOMAS nods in the direction he is looking and we see the adult DARROW men approaching them. The looks on their faces connote curiosity, anger, and hatred. The SMALL family freezes in place.

WALTER. [quietly] Just remain calm. Don't let on to anything.

RIVER LEWIS. You be Mr. Small?

WALTER. That's right. Don't believe I know your name.

RIVER LEWIS. That's right.
He notices the cans of paint and the paint brushes that are sitting in the back seat of the car.

**River Lewis.** Gettin' ready for some paintin', huh?

**Thomas.** [broad grin] Yes sir, the whole house.

**Walter** glares at him and **Thomas** demurely steps back. **WALTER** - SHUSH!

**River Ross.** Hear tell you folks had a little excitement over there in that house of yours? [trash kitchen]... be did!

**River Lewis** gives his young son a sharp look, but it is too late, for the statement has given **Walter** just the opening he needs.

**Walter.** Oh, you mean old Pluto.

**River Lewis.** Old Pluto?

**Walter.** Yea. He took real sick last night. We brought him here to the hospital.

**River Lewis.** How sick is he?

**Walter.** Can't say. They don't allow visitors. He's gettin' a thorough examination, though, and I expect he'll be comin' back home tomorrow.

**Walter** looks away, **River Lewis** suspects he is hiding something.

**Wilbur.** [eyeing **Walter**] That all?

**River Lewis** go to the hospital checkin' on our story?

**Walter.** Mayhew called Edgar Carr, and Carr took care of the alibi. The family gets into the car and drives away, as the Darnows stand watching them.

**Walter** tells the story.

**River Lewis.** True or not, I'm still gonna whup her butt good for runnin' away from her chores.

**Russell.** Daddy, this is as good a chance as we're gonna get to search that old man's place.

**River Lewis.** I know that. Whatchu think, I'm some kinda fool?

**River Ross.** Then we go tonight? It's the only chance we got.

**River Lewis.** It'll be tonight. We gon' find that treasure, if it's the last thing we do.

**Walter and his family bid them good day.**

**Thomas** lies quietly in the grass. We can barely see the rough clothes he wears. His eyes dart everywhere. He's frightened and breathes heavily, He hears footsteps.

**Sheila.** [at the car] Walter, what if the Darnows go to the hospital checkin' on our story?

**Walter.** Mayhew called Edgar Carr, and Carr took care of the alibi. The family gets into the car and drives away, as the Darnows stand watching them.

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**River Lewis.** It'll be tonight. We gon' find that treasure, if it's the last thing we do.

**CUT TO EXT: STREET—DAY**

**Wilbur.** I guess that note about Pesty runnin' over here to find ol' Pluto was the truth, Daddy.

**River Lewis.** Truth or not, I'm still gonna whup her butt good for runnin' away from her chores.

**Russell.** Daddy, this is as good a chance as we're gonna get to search that old man's place.

**River Lewis.** I know that. Whatchu think, I'm some kinda fool?

**River Ross.** Then we go tonight? It's the only chance we got.

**River Lewis.** It'll be tonight. We gon' find that treasure, if it's the last thing we do.

**CUT TO EXT: WOODS NEAR THE CAVE—NIGHT. CLOSE-UP ON THOMAS**

**Thomas** lies quietly in the grass. We can barely see the rough clothes he wears. His eyes dart everywhere. He's frightened and breathes heavily, He hears footsteps.

**CUT TO EXT: THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE—THOMAS'S POV—NIGHT**

The torches out front are not lit. The entire area is quiet, dark, and eerie.

**CUT TO EXT: THE WOODS—NIGHT**

The Darnows, flashlights in hand, make their way through the woods to the cave.
passing dangerously close to Thomas. When they come to the clearing in front of the cave they stop.

WILBUR. I don't like it—why ain't his torches burnin' on the cave?

RIVER LEWIS. 'Cause he's gone, like they said, an' he ain't here to light them, fool!

RIVER ROSS. Well, let's quit arguin' an' get on in there before somebody comes.

CUT TO EXT: THE CAVE—NIGHT
The DARROWS move stealthily across the clearing and creep inside the cave entrance. RUSSELL takes one of the torches and lights it. All of the DARROWS are now inside. We hear a gasp, or scream, and the torch goes out.

CUT TO INT: THE CAVE—NIGHT

The DARROWS are covered near the entrance and a flashlight is shining upward toward the most grotesque and chilling sight they could imagine. PLUTO has covered his entire body, save his head, with a giant cape that makes him look like a winged bat.

PLUTO. Oooooohhhhh! Come, my winged bird! My Glory! Nighthird! Come, allll ye demonnnnnnssssssss!!! Aaaaalileeee! Come all ye demons three who walk with me forever. Come parade awhile with Pluto, who has missed you so.

RIVER LEWIS. [stunned] What the—?

The sight is so unexpected that he drops his flashlight and it breaks. The four men begin to back away from the seeming apparition, when another spectacle in the trees above the cave catches their sight.

CUT TO EXT: CAVE—NIGHT

On a ledge above the cave entrance PESTY is astride the bay horse, hidden from view behind a black canvas. She drops the canvas and creates the following vision: A huge white horse with glowing wings suddenly appears in the night. This scene is even more chilling than the last. The DARROWS tremble with fear at the sight of the winged creature. WILBUR sinks down to one knee as one of his brothers tries to hold onto him. They do not know that PESTY is crouched behind the wings and flapping them, for the wings hide her perfectly.

WILBUR. Oooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhh.

CUT TO EXT: Ledge Above Cave—Night

PESTY is flapping the glowing wings with all she’s got.

CUT TO EXT: CAVE—Another Angle—Night

A rustling sound directly behind the DARROWS causes them to turn and face the edge of the clearing, where they come face to face with the spirits of Dies Drear and the three escaped slaves of legend, arms reaching out to them, chains clanking.

MAYHEW. [as Dies Drear] Defilers! Come! Come to Dies Drear and meet your fate!

RIVER LEWIS. Oh, no! It’s Dies Drear and the dead slaves!

The DARROWS let go of WILBUR.

RIVER ROSS. The legend’s true! Aaaaalileeee!!

The specter of Dies Drear begins to laugh hideously and stretches out its hands as the three slaves clank their chains and moan and groan. PLUTO screams from inside the cave and the glowing demon horse continues to flap its gossamer wings. The DARROWS are completely surrounded, confused, and frightened to death.

MAYHEW. Defilers! Come! Come to Dies Drear! Come to Drear and die! Puh!

RUSSELL. That old Pluto wasn’t kiddin’. He is a demon. Dies Drear is alive! Aaaa!!!

The DARROWS nearly fall over each other trying to get away.

WILBUR. Don’t let ‘em get us! No! No!

CUT TO EXT: THE CAVE—Night

WILBUR scrambles to his feet and leads the rest of the DARROWS in beating a hasty retreat through the woods.
The howling and moaning ghosts begin to laugh in their own natural voices once the arrows have disappeared. Pesty sits up from her crouched position behind the gossamer wings and laughs.

Cut to Int: The Cave

Pluto unhitches himself from the harness that held him suspended from the platform doors in the ceiling and comes down the ladder, laughing.

Cut to Ext: The Cave

Walter, Thomas, and Sheila begin peeling off their makeup, laughing, as well. And Mayhew, as Dies Drear, begins to peel away his false face amid more laughter.

Mayhew. They'll figure it out sooner or later. The point is that for a good half a minute, we scared them half to death.

Pluto. Serves 'em right—them fool Darrows'll never live it down.

Mayhew. And tomorrow they'll hear from the police!

Walter. Well, Thomas, how do you feel now?

Thomas. [serious] I was lyin' on that cold ground so long, I began to think we were slaves, for real. Like to 've scared me to death!

There is a moment when everyone looks at Thomas with mixed emotions.

Thomas. I sure learned one thing. I never wanna be an actor, no sir, not a day in my life!

Everyone laughs.

Cut to Int: The Cavern—Following Day—Day

Pluto, Mayhew, Walter, Sheila, Thomas, and Pesty are viewing the treasure of Dies Drear. Whose kennt?

Sheila. Mr. Skinner, how long did you look for this place?

Pluto. Twenty years, but I always knew it was here.

Thomas. Shucks, they gonna start talkin' about history in another minute.

Pesty. Let's go outside. You know how borin' grownups can get.

Thomas. Good idea.

They creep out as the conversation continues. Pindal the family.

Mayhew. You see, Father's great-great-grandfather was that third slave in the legend. Who's was escaped slave?

Walter. The one who got away from the bounty hunters?

Mayhew. That's right. And he passed the story of the treasure down.

Walter. I knew when I first read that foundation report that the house of Dies Drear was a wellspring of important history, but I didn't realize how much.

Pluto. [sadly] Now it's all gonna be taken away. Why?

Walter. [smiling] Tell me, did Dies Drear ever catalog all of this property here?

Pluto. No, sir.

Walter. That would have to be done before it could be turned over to the foundation.

Pluto. [smiling] Yes . . . that's a big job. Could take as long as the rest of an old man's life.

Walter. [smiling] You don't say?

The Mouse of Dies Drear

Lord he drew
WALTER and PLUTO laugh.

MAYHEW. Say, where's Thomas and Pesty?

CUT TO EXT: THE HILL—DAY

PESTY and THOMAS are together on the hill overlooking the House of Dies Drear.

PESTY. So, Thomas Small, the new boy, you gonna stop bein' so snooty like you was when we first met you the other day?

PESTY laughs.

THOMAS. Tell ya what. I won't be snooty if you stop callin' me "new boy." Okay?

PESTY. Okay.

They shake hands on it.

PESTY. Do you think we'll ever have as much excitement in our lives again?

THOMAS. I dunno. . . . Life is such a long time. . . . But I do know I've had enough adventure to last me the rest of my life.

BOTH. AAAAAAAAAA-men!

RESPONDING TO THE SELECTION

Your Response

1. Do you think that Pluto was right to preserve the Dies Drear treasure intact, or should he, a poor man, have used some of it to help raise his family? Explain your answer.

2. Is the outcome of events in this screenplay satisfying? Explain.

Recalling

3. Explain the solutions to the following mysteries: the sounds Thomas heard in the tunnel, the ransacking of the Smalls' kitchen, and the meaning of the triangles.

4. What is going to happen to the treasure of Dies Drear?

The kids laugh together as the camera pulls away; then we hear a sudden, ominous, rustling noise behind PESTY and THOMAS as they laugh. The children turn toward the camera and, frightened, they scream.

CUT TO EXT: HILLSIDE, PESTY AND THOMAS'S POV—DAY

A monster, covered head to toe with leaves, looms over the kids. The "Leaf Monster" begins to crumble toward the ground, revealing MAC, holding KENNETH on his shoulders. From under the pile of branches and leaves crawl MAC and KENNETH, both giggling and laughing. Angry at first, PESTY and THOMAS soon chase and catch them. All four youngsters wrap their arms around each other and tumble to the ground, laughing.

FREEZE FRAME

FADE OUT

Interpreting

5. What is the central conflict, or struggle, in this screenplay? How are the various characters involved in this struggle?

6. How is Pluto's interest in the Dies Drear treasure different from River Swift Darrow's? What is similar about Pluto's and Walter's attitudes toward the treasure?

7. Do you think the "punishment" given to the Darrows was equal to the wrongs they committed? Explain your answer.

Applying

8. Walter calls the house of Dies Drear "a well-spring of important history." What does this screenplay suggest about the relationship between history and mystery?