

**Phantasmagoria**

Episode 1  
"Dark Heart"

by  
Drew Castalia

Current Revision: 09/04/11  
drewc@hwstn.net  
4407747493925

INT. QUINZY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

QUINZY, a slight boy in his early teens, tosses and mutters to no one in his sleep.

His hands clench and unclench on his damp covers, twisting them out from where they've been folded under the mattress.

He releases the blanket with one hand to push, vague, at some illusion in front of him.

Meanwhile, a racing HEARTBEAT replaces the distant chirping of birds and the laughter of children from outside his window -- it's his heartbeat.

It's joined by a third pulse, a tribal rhythm that keeps time but pushes his heartbeat faster and faster.

As the drumming grows louder, Quinzy shakes his head. He's frightened.

He whimpers as it swells. He pants and kicks, racing through the rustling ferns and undergrowth of his dream jungle.

Racing behind him: the CACAPHONY of a thousand wild animals.

EXT. PLEASANT RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

The CACAPHONY continues. The hissing of a tropical amazon snake blends in with the fizz of a NEWSPAPER BOY's bicycle as he cruises past Quinzy's house and flings a wad of mail onto the lawn.

He ZIPS past.

EXT. RUN DOWN ALLEY - MORNING

The rumbling grunt of a jungle boar merges with an ANGRY MAN's shouting. Throughout, the jungle sounds continue:

The front door of a disintegrating shack-sized home BURSTS open and two meaty boys are pushed out of it onto the crumbling walkway outside. They turn around and face him miserably.

ANGRY MAN  
(shouting in the doorway)  
Who's got guts enough today? Come on!

He raises a paper bag, their lunch, over their heads.

ANGRY MAN (CONT'D)  
(shouting)  
Come on!  
(MORE)

ANGRY MAN (CONT'D)

If you think anyone is just going  
to give you what you want in this  
life, then you aren't sons of mine.  
Let's go, fagots!

One of the boys rushes him. The Man easily knocks him over.

ANGRY MAN (CONT'D)

Not bad.  
(to the second boy)  
How about you? How badly do you  
want lunch today?

He dangles the bag. The SECOND BOY jumps up and grabs the  
Man's arm, then the bag. The Man SMACKS him down, languidly.

He laughs to himself and shakes his head.

ANGRY MAN (CONT'D)

One day...

He tosses the paper bag after them. It lands, SPLAT, in a  
puddle by the walkway.

The boys scramble after it, doglike, to rescue it from the  
muddy water.

The SCREECHING and HOLLERING from Quinzy's dream reaches a  
crescendo. The Angry Man's expression becomes grim and  
foreboding.

ANGRY MAN (CONT'D)

It's a wild world out there.

He pulls back inside the shack and SLAMS the door.

The boys fight briefly over ownership of the paper bag, then,  
hands in pockets, trudge off down the alley.

EXT. FOOTBALL MATCH - MORNING

The CACAPHONY continues. It grows into a ROAR - hundreds of  
wild animals at least.

The overwhelming sound of it becomes the CHEERING of football  
spectators crowding around a field as one man, a FAMOUS  
FOOTBALLER, dribbles his ball towards the goal. The player  
grimaces with concentration and effort.

He feints around an opponent, pulls into range. He hangs in  
close and...

KICKS and...

SCORES!

The cheering swells, then abates, then swells like the doppler effect on an airplane flying overhead.

It evaporates slowly as the famous footballer clutches his knees and struggles for breath. His teammates go running past him gaily like a tide, while the roar evaporates, until nothing can be heard but the man's hoarse gasping for breath. He DOUBLES OVER onto all fours.

GASPING.

In the stands, the spectators CHEER - a writhing mass of thrashing sports signs in purple and white and rippling stained t-shirts.

One among them is quiet: a SERIOUS BOY with a head of brittle hair, the Famous Footballer's son, watches confused and concerned while:

His father is helped off the field by a teammate.

Now out of sight, the boy stands. He pushes his way through the oblivious crowd and dashes down the bleachers. TINK, TAP, TINK, TAP, ring his footsteps against the mute eruption of the football fans like living confetti behind him.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - MORNING

TINK, TAP, TINK, TAP; the 7 o'clock train runs through the station. Its progress is like the successive crash and click of dinner dishes and silverware against each other as they're placed in a drying rack.

Inside, the PASSENGERS, mostly asleep, sway back and forth to the rhythm. Somnolent dancers.

INT. QUINZY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Quinzy, still now, with his head cocked as if to listen to the sound, still:

TINK, TAP, TINK, TAP.

His eyes roll under his eyelids.

TINK, TAP, TINK, TAP. THUMP. The footsteps have stopped. Quinzy frowns in his sleep. The clamoring of the jungle appears again, faint, in the distance.

Then, the sound of a DOORKNOB being twisted back and forth with increasing desperation, then PANIC.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Quinzy struggles with the dream door in his bed. The JUNGLE is almost on him.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

A tear squeezes itself out of Quinzy's closed eye.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
(from behind the bedroom  
door)

It's time to get up, Quinzy dear!

Quinzy wakes with a GASP. He stares fearfully at the bedroom door.

Its doorknob turns back and forth in its socket, uselessly.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. The door shakes a little.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(behind the door)  
Quinzy can you hear me? If you're  
not up in ten I'm going to get the  
house key and a bucket of water.

Quinzy, now returned mostly to reality, stares at his wet sheets at first with terror, then with boredom.

QUINZY  
(groggy)  
Yeh, mom. I heard you fine. Just  
don't break the door down ok?

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
(behind the door)  
Good point. I don't know what I'll  
do if I have to talk to another  
insurance agent.

Quinzy smiles despite himself.

QUINZY  
I'll be right down.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
(behind the door)  
Ok.  
(beat)  
Don't forget your homework!

Quinzy rolls out of bed with a huff. He's in his underwear and socks, vaguely potbellied, with a head of brittle hair and a spot or two.

QUINZY  
I'll be right down!

Quinzy digs into an off-kilter dresser stationed along the side of his room for an acceptable wad of clothes.

Outside, leaves brush against his window with a rustling sound. A wild bird CROAKS beyond.

The noise tugs at Quinzy's now distant memory of his dream. He glances at the window and is stuck there for a second, swaying a little in the storm of dapples streaming through the glass.

The boy tears his attention away from the chimerical jungle, back to the dresser.

The bird CALLS again. He FLINCHES.

Quinzy's dressing routine gives the opportunity to look more closely at the other details of his room:

A good book's worth of paper is strewn about, some of it in neat stacks on his rickety desk, some of it intermingled with crisscrossing wires from his computer underneath it.

It's homework mostly, with inked-in multiple-choice bubbles and filled-in-the-blanks.

Amazingly for a child his age, there's a bookshelf and, even more amazingly, books. The majority are dogged paperbacks propped up on some artifact or another to fill the space.

This one is a pewter sculpture of a dragon, its leg cracked off and placed apologetically on the mound of its hoard.

This one is a bunch of desiccated flowers in a bunch, squashed in the middle by a small stack of magazines.

Here's a book actually split in two by a hatchet buried half an inch into the shelf underneath it.

Dressed now in his school uniform with blazer and slacks, Quinzy raids the bookshelf for a stack of textbooks from one of the rare shelves not caked in dust.

He tries, at first unsuccessfully, to haul the heap of them off all at once, but has to give up and do it in two goes.

He loads them onto his bed and from there into a large gunny backpack with a rubber foot.

Then he pilfers the room for a variety of things: papers for school, pencils, pens; he seems to have the process all worked out despite the random order. Each object has its own special spot in the pack: a zippered pocket, a fold-over, a loop, vertical, horizontal, diagonal slits for his pocketbook.

He's ready.

He suits up and makes for the door, but stops just shy and double-takes back at the room. Something's nagging at him.

He returns to his bed, digs underneath it, and produces a dusty edition of Heart of Darkness jacketed with a bunch of roaring animals. He knocks the dust off against his knee.

Perhaps not quite sure why, he takes it with him out the door.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Quinzy's mother sits across from Quinzy's FATHER at a rickety dining table in the middle of this pedestrian suburban kitchen. Quinzy's father is dressed for work in a suit and tie. He sips from a mug of coffee and hides behind a broadsheet from the anxious glances of:

HIS WIFE, popping gum rapidly, glances back down at her watch.

It's so tense that the TICKING of the second hand is DEAFENING.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
(anxiously)  
He's almost out of time.

Quinzy's father lets out a little sigh from the other side of the paper.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(anxiously)  
This is it. This is the day. I'm going to mark it on the calendar.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
He's not late yet.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
I know, but I can *feel* it. His adolescence. He's going to start misbehaving and then my hair's going to go grey.

Quinzy's father chuckles a little to himself, behind the paper.

Quinzy's mother has the self-consciousness to smile a little.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(trying to sound sensible)  
Our Stanley was younger than this when *he* started smoking and staying out all night.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
But Quinzy's not Stanley.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
They're both boys. You know as  
well as I do what's to come.

Quinzy's father coughs a little to herald the arrival of  
Quinzy, briefly preceded by his footsteps down the staircase  
along the wall.

Quinzy's mother watches her son worriedly over the rim of her  
glasses for signs of adolescence.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(disappointed)  
You're *almost* late.

QUINZY  
Doesn't that mean I'm early, mom?

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
You're not being smart, are you?

QUINZY  
(confused)  
No?

Quinzy's father lowers his newspaper a little to grin at his  
kid.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
(critical)  
You're too modest, son.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
I suppose you'll be wanting to run  
out the door without any breakfast  
at all.

QUINZY  
Um, actually I thought I might make  
something nourishing today. I'm  
taking a practice test in English  
and I want to see if it makes a  
difference.

Quinzy's mother watches her son, perplexed. She bites her  
lip.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
I don't think so. It's cereal for  
you. You just want to be late for  
school.

Quinzy looks at his father, worried, but he's already raised  
his shield.

QUINZY  
Well... ok.



He opens a cupboard and begins pouring himself a bowl of frosted cereal.

Quinzy's mother watches him eat it suspiciously.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

(shy)

Have you thought any more about getting a cat? I want to call him Vinegar.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

(stern)

I told you, Quince. We're not getting a cat. A dog, maybe, but you *know* that your brother is allergic to cats.

QUINZY

But Stan's in the hospital.

Quinzy's mother's eyes widen. Just about the only thing that could anger her, has.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

And he's coming back soon! Don't you forget that.

Quinzy is quiet.

QUINZY

Ok.

Quinzy's mother takes a therapeutic breath.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

Besides, dear, people only get pets to control every aspect of another creature's life.

A thought comes to Quinzy.

QUINZY

Kind of like me, I guess?

Quinzy's mother doesn't know what to say at first; all she manages is an exclamation.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

Quinzy Jones! I *worry*...

Quinzy's father sets down his paper and interjects.

QUINZY'S FATHER

Alright, buddy. Your mother's right; you're going to be late for school, so scoot!

QUINZY

But it's only...

QUINZY'S FATHER

You've still got to walk to the bus  
so you'd better be on your way!

Quinzy puts down his spoon and, confused and a little hurt,  
picks up his backpack.

He heads for the door.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

You remembered your homework,  
didn't you?

QUINZY

(wearily)

Yeh.

He closes the door behind him.

EXT. OUTSIDE QUINCY'S HOUSE - MORNING

Quinzy walks all of ten steps across his lawn to the street.  
The bus stop (marked with a sign) is right there.

His house and the bus stop are so close they fit together in  
a single frame.

He WAITS.

With a CLICK and a WHIR, someone's camera captures the scene.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Quinzy's mother and Quinzy's father watch the closed door  
with anxiousness and despair, respectively.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

I worry that he's going to flunk  
out again. Then what'll we do?

Quinzy's father sighs and raises his newspaper.

QUINZY'S FATHER

It's a wild world.

The HEADLINE is about some war or another.

INT./EXT. LIMOUSINE - MORNING

The footballer's son from the match earlier in the morning  
watches cars stream by his window. His face is tear  
streaked.

Sitting on the other side of the seat is a plump woman with a businesslike but concerned expression that's fastened securely on the boy.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

Quinzy clomps up the first few steps. He nods in an adult way to the BUS DRIVER who, once he's turned away, smiles to himself and shakes his head.

Quinzy smiles to himself and shakes his head quite identically.

The smiles doesn't last too long as he looks down the aisle for a place to sit.

The FACES staring back at him are as dull but malevolent, like members of a firing squad (those that are awake anyway).

He passes down the aisle past THE BILLIARD boys, a couple of lanky late graduates with white hair and bits of moustache.

...past DELILAH, a toothless girl with pigtails licking a granola bar.

...and a few more until he comes to DARKSON and CLARKSON, tough guys hogging one of the benches. He averts his eyes as he walks past them.

DARKSON

(in a parrot's voice)

I hope you brought your homework  
with you today!

The pair chuckle, heads together.

CLARKSON

It is Monday you know!

Quinzy shoots them a frightened look.

He finds a place to sit next to the back doors of the bus.

He digs out Heart of Darkness from his backpack and begins to read.

As the bus begins to move, the bus driver narrates, documentary-style, and half to himself:

BUS DRIVER

(muttering)

You may be surprised to learn, boys  
and girls, that the Amazon is not  
always the lush paradise it may  
seem in adventure books. It is a  
dark and unpleasant jungle, full of  
the most inconvenient wildlife.

(MORE)

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

Men live there, it is true, but they are never children, being born fully grown and ready to fight, which they often will with their still-weak mothers in the moments after birth! One can hardly distinguish these men from the preying beasts of the river, for they are equally as savage. They are equally indiscriminate in their choice of meat, be it lizard, or leopard, or monkey, or man. Or child.

INT./EXT. LIMOUSINE - MORNING

The footballer's son takes a deep breath as the limo pulls up outside school.

The plump woman, his nurse, puts a hand on his shoulder.

NURSE

(worried)

Are you going to be ok for this?

The footballer's son, PHILIP, nods. He never makes eye contact.

NURSE (CONT'D)

It's not going to be easy.

PHILIP

Easier than staying at the hospital?

The nurse doesn't have an answer.

Philip opens the door, then CRAWLS out with his messenger bag of school stuff.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Philip promptly shuts the door of the limo. It drives away.

There's an open gate ahead that separates the parking lot from the school campus. He walks up to it and stops.

He takes a deep breath, then peeks around the gate:

A cluster of REPORTERS wait at the doors to the school.

Philip swallows heavily, then steps out.

EXT. OUTSIDE CAMPUS - MORNING

Philip is rushed head-on by the reporters. He ducks, overwhelmed by shouted questions about his father, SNAPPING cameras, and a wall of proffered MICROPHONES like pikes.

He tries and fails to push through them. He's being SWALLOWED by the crowd.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

Quinzy can't concentrate on his book. He's looking out the window as the bus pulls into the school parking lot.

BUS DRIVER

...do not be fooled by the Amazon's great diversity of life. It is known also for its great diversity of death. Most animals, in their natural state, may not object to decomposing at the bottom of a river, split in two by the overzealous constriction of a boa snake. No, most animals, in their ignorance of the soul, may not even object too vigorously at being divided into a thousand tiny bits by an endless school of piranha fish. But most animals we are not. Contained in our homes and our cars, our trains - our buses of imported metal and glass - we do not know the wakefulness of an Amazon rodent, whose lifespan is measured only by the intensity of its terror.

Darkson and Clarkson look at Quinzy evilly from their seats further up the aisle.

Beyond them, the bus driver leans over so his face is visible in the fish-eye rear view mirror. He monologues, toothily.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

(arch)

Were we to be released into such a world, only the quickest of wit and fleetest of foot would allow us to escape crocodilian digestion. Were our buses of imported Japanese metal to rupture...

Quinzy puts his book into his bag, braces himself.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)  
 (becoming even more arch)  
 ...the very personality of this  
 tame-ed world of ours would be  
 transformed from opportunity to  
 opportunism in the wink of a bus  
 driver's eye!

The driver's eyes widen. Then, dramatically, he WINKS.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)  
 (natural again)  
 Go, my children, to your fortune.  
 It's a wild world out there. Be  
 safe!

The bus shudders to a stop and the back doors swing open.  
 Quinzy LUNGES out, his voice trailing behind him.

QUINZY (O.S.)  
 (faint, polite)  
 Thank you, mister bus driver!

Darkson and Clarkson rush out before the rest of the crowd.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Quinzy, his view bouncing up and down, looks over his  
 shoulder and sees the two bullies hot on his tail.

He rushes through the gate to campus.

EXT. OUTSIDE CAMPUS - MORNING

Quinzy steers around the bend toward the school doors, but  
 stops. There's a huge crowd of reporters preying on someone,  
 and the whole group is blocking the way in.

An unkindness of students hovers nearby, trying to get a  
 glimpse of the action, or just waiting to get inside.

Quinzy starts left, then right, then left again along the  
 wall of the school. The bullies shoot out of the gate after  
 him, gaining.

Quinzy tries a service door along the wall - LOCKED.

He runs to another - LOCKED. The bullies are almost on him.

He corners himself in a

EXT. SUBTERRANEAN STAIRWELL - MORNING

Quinzy backs up against a third service door with a huge  
 archaic keyhole.

He's about ready to say his peace when he notices it's been left open just a crack.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY - DARK

Quinzy SLAMS the service door shut behind him with an echoing thump, and along with it goes all outside light.

The bullies reach the other side of the door but can't seem to get it open. Quinzy can hear them tugging at it's handle but it won't turn. They POUND on the other side, then eventually stop.

Quinzy breathes a sigh of relief.

LIGHT sneaking in from around the door lets his eyes adjust to some faint shapes, maybe pipes. It's not enough light to see the whole width of the room, despite being small, but there's another door some distance ahead.

Something is leaking. The sound of a DROP echoes briefly at uneven intervals.

Quinzy takes a few steps forward on the dusty ground: SHHHIP, SHHHIP, SHHHIP.

THUNK.

QUINZY

Ow!

A few more footsteps, then they stop.

Somewhere in the darkness, a pair of RED EYES, feline, flashes open. A GROWL.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

(terrified)

Uh...

The growl becomes louder, an unmistakably catlike sound that travels a whole octave. It's followed by a HISS.

Quinzy's footsteps start again, faster. They're accompanied by occasional thuds as Quinzy bumps into pipework and other metal things, but he doesn't slow.

The eyes glide after him, bobbing only slightly, and SILENTLY.

Finally he reaches the other side of the room.

He fiddles with the handle of the other door. It makes a useless clicking noise. It's locked.

Quinzy begins to cry. The eyes grow closer.

All seems lost until from the OTHER SIDE of the door, a key is heard TWISTING in the lock.

The door SWINGS open with a rectangle of blinding light. An arm emerges from the light and PULLS him out of the room.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - MORNING

The service door SLAMS shut behind Quinzy. A girl holds him by the front of his shirt.

She releases him and dusts her hands off on her overalls.

Quinzy smiles, relieved until his eyes adjust and he notices:

Darkson and Clarkson standing on either side of her, smugly expressed. His smile quickly disappears.

DARKSON

Aw look. He's sad.

CLARKSON

What could he possibly be sad about?

GIRL

Will you two stop being idiots and get on with it?

The bullies look abashed.

The girl rolls her eyes, then retires to the sidelines. The bullies move in.

QUINZY

Wait!

They don't.

Darkson HOLDS HIM DOWN while Clarkson strips his backpack off. Quinzy struggles but he's too small.

Clarkson zips open the backpack, then fishes around inside.

He tosses out Heart of Darkness, and several of the books and papers that Quinzy had put in it this morning.

GIRL

Hurry up, will you?

Darkson gives his twin a dark look.

Clarkson can't find what he's looking for.

CLARKSON

It's not here.



DARKSON  
 He always does his homework.  
 (to Quinzy)  
 I thought you were a good boy.

Darkson pins him a little harder.

GIRL  
 (impressed)  
 Apparently not.

Clarkson pulls a few bills out of an outer pocket.

CLARKSON  
 We could take his lunch money.  
 Clark and I could actually use it  
 today.

The girl shakes her head absently.

GIRL  
 No, we'll make do with mine today.  
 A few Bs won't hurt anyone.

Disappointed, Clarkson replaces the bills.

DARKSON  
 I'm allergic to bees.

GIRL  
 Great. You three can start a club.

She giggles, then walks away.

The twins release Quinzy. Each of them stares, confused,  
 after her.

Darkson grabs Quinzy by the hair.

DARKSON  
 You tell anyone about this, you're  
 dead.

Clarkson grins and nods.

INT. ENGLISH - MORNING

MS. CHADWICH, middle-aged yet impatient, lectures a full  
 class of STUDENTS.

Every once in a while, she turns to the chalkboard behind her  
 and writes out a seemingly random word from the lesson.

CHADWICH  
 The importance of the symbolic  
 relationship between predator and  
 prey...

(MORE)

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
 (she writes SYMBOLIC and  
 RELATIONSHIP)  
 ...diminishes in modern  
 literature...  
 (DIMINISHES and 21ST  
 CENTURY)  
 ...of the 20th and 21st century.  
 The decline of this specific  
 image...  
 (IMAGE)  
 ...correlates to the decline of the  
 popularity of hunting for food or  
 pleasure...  
 (PLEASURE)  
 ...and the...  
 (AND THE)  
 ...domestication and exploration of  
 the known world.  
 (AND, OF)

The door swings open and Philip skulks in. He looks for a spot to skulk to.

Ms. Chadwich looks unimpressed but also unsurprised by the interruption.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
 Pleased to make your acquaintance  
 Mr. Denman. Have a seat.

Philip heads toward a spot near the back. His classmates whisper to each other as he passes.

He avoids their looks.

With his back turned, Ms. Chadwich's expression shifts to sympathy.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
 Settle down, now. We only have a  
 few minutes left.

The door swings open again and Quinzy, looking the worse for wear, plods.

This time, Ms. Chadwich looks genuinely surprised.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
 (concerned)  
 Quinzy... have a seat.  
 (more firm)  
 And please see me after class. I  
 wanted to have a talk with you  
 anyway.

Quinzy, a little defeated, slumps down into a chair close to the front.

Satisfied, Ms. Chadwich turns back to the chalkboard and frowns, perplexed by her own notes.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
Now, what was I saying?

INT. CHADWICH'S OFFICE - MORNING

Ms. Chadwich sits across from Quinzy in this cozy, but cramped office. The boy nurtures a mug of tea.

CHADWICH  
I'm going to get right to it. You know that your grade for this class is based mostly on independent work. You're going to have to turn something in soon. Like, in the next couple of weeks. If you don't, you'll be out by the end of the year, no matter how well you do on the tests.  
(beat)  
So, do you have today's assignment?

Quinzy looks away.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
I see.

Quinzy looks uncomfortable.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
I refuse to believe that you're just lazy. I know that you're a clever boy. You're far too smart for this.  
(pause)  
At least, that's what I thought.  
(deep breath)  
I'm willing to take some time to help you with whatever the problem is. Tell me all about it.

Quinzy, guiltily, doesn't.

Chadwich sighs.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)  
Well, I *do* have better things to do than pull your teeth. Let me know if you want a friendly ear. Otherwise, well, get out.

She gets up and opens to door for him.

INT. YEARBOOK ROOM - AFTERNOON

Five or six kids, the YEARBOOK STAFF, bring cuttings and photographs to and from a messy central table.

A TEACHER barely pays attention, his feet up behind a desk, hands busy with a newspaper (the one with the disaster on the front), but it's enough to maintain the pretense of civility:

One of them turns from his work and addresses Quinzy, who stands to one side.

YEARBOOK EDITOR

We need someone to write the opening spread. It should be something edgy, I think.

Quinzy's eyes light up. He's being offered an opportunity.

YEARBOOK EDITOR (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)  
By someone cool.

Quinzy gets that he's being made fun of. He looks away.

The EDITOR snickers, smug, then gets back to work.

QUINZY

Maybe I could write a piece about bullies. That's edgy.

The editor presses his lips together, annoyed, but not enough to look at him again. He keeps on sorting.

YEARBOOK EDITOR

I think we want something that applies to everyone, not just a...

The teacher at the desk looks up to make sure things are going smoothly.

The editor hesitates, changes what he was going to say:

YEARBOOK EDITOR (CONT'D)

...vocal minority.

The teacher looks back down at his newspaper.

One of the DESIGNERS at the table chimes in.

YEARBOOK DESIGNER

Besides, this is a yearbook, not a newspaper.

YEARBOOK EDITOR

Yeah. If you want to be Peter Parker why don't you bring this back with some pics of someone popular.

The editor holds aloft a cruddy DIGICAM.

YEARBOOK DESIGNER

(snide)

Just make sure you bring it back before the end of the year, ok?

Defiant, Quinzy takes the camera from the editor.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The girl and Philip whisper together in a shadowed spot of this dim passage. Doors to classrooms line either side.

Out of one of these emerges Quinzy. They're too involved in what they're saying to hear the door clap shut as it closes behind him.

Quinzy starts up the hallway, but stops when he sees them: he recognizes the girl from earlier.

He pulls to the side of the hallway, one of the more shadowed spots, and watches them talk.

He can't make out what they're saying, so he turns on the digicam and looks through it.

He zooms in on them and sees Philip hand the girl some money. Then she slips him some papers.

Zooming in further, they're today's English assignment.

Quinzy pulls the camera from his face. He's angry about this. He looks through the lens again.

CLICK.

Now Philip is flirting with her. ZOOMED IN, Quinzy sees them laugh together.

Then Philip raises a hand to touch her face. She pulls back.

Offended, Philip gestures largely. The girl shakes her head.

CLICK.

Philip's voice, unintelligible, echoes wildly down the hall.

Now she's CRYING.

CLICK.

Pissed off, he shakes his head then rushes down the hallway.

Then Philip sees him. Quinzy can see his magnified face through the camera viewfinder. He sees him get twice as angry.

Quinzy lowers the camera, frightened.

PHILIP

God damn it! I'm tired of you people with your fucking cameras getting into everything I do.

(voice rising)

You want me to take my clothes off so you can put me in the Sun? How about I do some *drugs*? Would you like that?

Frightened, Quinzy turns tail.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I can pose for you but you're going to have to bring the stuff because let me tell you, I'm just a fucking kid like you.

Quinzy's gone.

Philip turns around. So's the girl.

He shakes his head and mutters under his breath.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

An out-of-breath Quinzy hurries through the gate and into a waiting SCHOOL BUS.

After a moment, it pulls away.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - AFTERNOON

Quinzy watches Darkson and Clarkson from a couple seats behind. The josh each other but are harmless for the time being.

Next to him, Delilah applies a skin of marmalade to a piece of floppy bread. It's very difficult.

BUS DRIVER

In the jungle, more than any other ecosystem, things are not what they seem. It is a place of misdirection and accidents, where being misdirected or doing something accidentally might mean...

(MORE)

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)  
 I cannot say because the fate I  
 would describe is literally  
*unspeakable.*

The bus stops and the back doors swing open.

The two bullies get up and, with a threatening glance or two at Quinzy, exit through them.

Quinzy leans back in his seat, relieved to be done with them for another day.

QUINZY  
 (to himself)  
 I'm hopeless.

Next to him, Delilah licks the marmalade off her bread.

EXT. OUTSIDE QUINCY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Quinzy picks up a wad of mail.

He leafs through it. There's some junk mail, an envelope stamped "Your loan information is enclosed," and a MEDICAL BILL from Yoke Hospital.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Quincy's mother and father are here, almost as if they'd never left. His father is working at the table balancing the family check book. His mother is preparing food at the stovetop.

The door opens and Quinzy stomps in with the wad of mail.

His father turns from his work; his mother sets down a packet of frozen vegetables.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 (exasperated)  
 And how was *your* day?

Quinzy doesn't answer, he just tosses the mail onto the table and heads up the stairs.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 (after him)  
 Did you get your homework turned  
 in, honey?

Quinzy's door SLAMS shut behind him.

She gives his father a meaningful look. This is what she's been dreading!

He picks up the mail from the table and shows the medical bill to Quinzy's mother. He returns the look.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(embarrassed)  
Oh...

Quinzy's father sighs and attacks his check book again with renewed determination.

INT. QUINZY'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Moving rapidly, Quinzy flings his backpack onto his bed.

QUINZY  
(murmuring to himself)  
Homework...

He moves quickly through his room, turning out drawers, sifting through stacks of papers, emptying waste bins onto the floor. He's FRANTIC.

He comes up with nothing. A little flustered, his hair disordered on his head, he slumps down on his bed next to his backpack and GROANS.

A beat, then he turns to look at his backpack. He thinks.

He pulls it to him, then begins rummaging through the contents. Pencils, pens, books, all the objects he put in it this morning come tumbling out carelessly.

Exasperated, he DIVES head first into the largest pocket. Out over his shoulder fly ancient tissues, used gum redeposited in its wrapper, and a couple of orphan plastic army soldiers from years before.

Then, amidst this mania, he pauses. Something inside the backpack has attracted his attention.

He pushes himself further inside: his shoulders disappear into the backpack, then his torso, then, amazingly, his posterior is consumed by the burlap pocket.

He continues to crawl forward until he has DISAPPEARED COMPLETELY INSIDE his backpack!

The gap of the main pocket, falling closed now that it has nothing inside to prop it up, betrays nothing of this curiosity. It is just a black abyss that could be a foot deep or a thousand.

Peeking out of the folds: Heart of Darkness.



INT. BLACK VOID - DARK

Quinzy, partially shadowed, crawls to, and then fro, in an emptiness with black borders.

QUINZY  
(frightened)  
Hello? Where is this...?

He changes direction again.

QUINZY (CONT'D)  
Where am I?

He bumps into something, invisible in the blackness.

QUINZY (CONT'D)  
Ow!

Still on his hands and knees, he changes direction yet again.

QUINZY (CONT'D)  
Is there anyone -- ?

Just then, on cue, a pair of RED EYES, feline, just like the ones from the dark service room at the school, FLASH OPEN.

A long, portamento growl slides from high whine to deep warning.

Quinzy's eyes widen; he can't figure out which way to run.

He discovers he can STAND UP, but that hardly helps him. He starts in one direction, then bumps into another invisible object. It winds him.

The eyes creep closer.

Quinzy tries another direction. It seems to be clear. He starts to RUN.

Whatever it is, it prowls after him, its claws clicking against the floor.

INT. COMFORTABLE SITTING ROOM - UNKNOWN

Quinzy stumbles into this cozy chamber from a vertical black opening along the side of the room. He doesn't have time to take stock of the surroundings, which are warm and include a ROARING FIREPLACE, numerous BOOKSHELVES with little on them, OVERSTUFFED CHAIRS and an ART DECO table with a chess set on top.

He's too busy worrying about whatever's chasing him. It's still onto him: it GROWLS from the black entrance.

Quinzy STAGGERS backwards, crushing underfoot several tiny plastic army soldiers, a Lego model of a space ship, and - 'lo and behold - his HOMEWORK assignment!

He slips on it, FLINGING it into the air, and tumbles down in its place.

The homework floats, jauntily, down on top of him.

He gets a good look at it - sure enough, it's: "HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT FEB 11-18". Amazing.

He doesn't have too much time to admire it. He hears the GROWL again, louder, and JOLTS back to attention.

The red eyes reappear and glide forward until they're almost in the light.

THEN, they FLASH shut.

Out of the shadows, in place of whatever sabre-toothed monster Quinzy was expecting, trots a KITTEN with a little collar.

It stares at Quinzy, still on the floor, and mews pitifully.

He gets up, confusion gradually replacing terror.

A couple of hesitant steps back and he

BUMPS against a door on the side of the room opposite where he arrived.

He spins around. It's HUGE and made of boiler plate, and has a heavy padlock the size of his head dangling by chains that cascade from the door's monstrous handle.

The keyhole in the padlock might be familiar as being the same archaic shape as the one on the service door he escaped through earlier that day.

He tugs at the padlock, then looks down at the kitten, now quite close.

QUINZY

Let's just hope you really are as  
cute as you look.

The kitten rubs against his leg then finds a place to sit next to the fire. Quinzy is fascinated by it.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

I always wanted a cute little  
kitten I could talk to.

He names it:

## QUINZY (CONT'D)

...Vinegar.

He smiles.

The kitten looks up at him, then curls up. It's asleep in seconds.

Now things are quiet again, save the snapping and cracking of the fire. Quinzy has a chance to look around.

He folds his homework up and puts it in his pocket then starts, counterclockwise, around the room.

First, he comes to the magnificent bookcase. It's got scrollwork along many of the surfaces, and glitters in the light of the fire.

The books on it are spare, however. Quinzy picks up a few of them, then more as he gradually realizes that they're all redundant copies of

Heart of Darkness.

Puzzled, he leaves the bookcase to examine the fire itself. It casts quick, flickering shadows across a throw rug on the wooden floor and the kitten on top of it.

When Quinzy looks at the shadows more closely, he sees them take shape, coming to life as

a tableau of WILD ANIMALS in the jungle, swaying in the way shadows from a fire would, but also like leaves and branches and beasts might actually do.

Quinzy tears his eyes away, past the exit into blackness, and comes upon the table with the chess set.

A game is in progress, with each piece a painted figurine of Quinzy himself: the pawns represent him as a cowering child, and the king as a tall man but distracted, as if by the ridiculousness of the other pieces:

The knight: him as a blushing lad.

The bishop: him as a thin skeleton of a boy, but with a rich robe.

The rook: as a pig-like and corpulent lord.

The only piece not an eerie little facsimile of himself is the queen, modeled after the girl who helped the bullies take his homework.

She's the tallest piece, standing straight, with a smirk in the king's direction and a key dangling from a chain in her hand.

The black and white pieces are the same, but for differences in color. White appears to have the upper hand, as the black queen is nowhere to be found.

Quinzy is a little disturbed by the display. As he pores over it, he catches a sound he hadn't noticed before:

A THROBBING, like a heartbeat mixed with a steam engine. A MECHANICAL HEARTBEAT.

The sound draws him from the board back to the locked door.

The cat raises its head and watches him carefully while he PRESSES his ear up against it.

again the CAT as he

TUGS at the lock on the door. The throbbing grows LOUDER. It's joined by a third rhythm, like a tribal drum syncopating against the heartbeat.

Quinzy pulls at the handle of the door. It beats FASTER.

The shapes cast by the fireplace begin to dance more quickly: there's a TIGER licking its lips and a SNAKE with huge fangs.

All around: the CACAPHONY of a thousand wild animals.

Quinzy steps back from the door and sees

A NOTE, slipped underneath the door from the other side.

He picks it up, it says, simply, "SAVE YOURSELF."

Another NOTE slides under the door.

"RUN."

The sounds of the jungle reaches CRESCENDO as Quinzy

BARRELS out of the room into the BLACKNESS beyond.

INT. QUINZY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The TRIBAL RHYTHM carries on. It blends into the sound of someone KNOCKING at the bedroom door as

Quinzy slides, head first, out of the backpack onto the floor. THUMP.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
 Quinzy! I'm not going to ask  
 again! I know you're in there.

Quinzy is discombobulated.

QUINZY

Um... mom?

QUINZY'S MOTHER (O.S.)

You haven't been *napping* have you?  
(to someone else behind  
the door)

I think he's going through a phase  
right now.

QUINZY

Just a second.

Quinzy nurses the bump developing where he fell out of his  
backpack.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

You have a *guest*, dear!

QUINZY

Ok, ok.

He gets up, then opens the door.

INT. OUTSIDE QUINZY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

His mother stands beyond, hands on her hips. Just behind her  
stands the mysterious girl from earlier, in a similar pose.  
Quinzy bites his lip when he sees her.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

This is Cleo, a nice girl from down  
the street. Cleo, meet Quinzy.

CLEO extends her hand.

QUINZY

I don't want to see her.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

Quinzy Cooper! That's exactly the  
sort of thing a rude adolescent  
would say!

QUINZY

She helped some boys beat me up  
this morning.

His mother sniffs.

QUINZY'S MOTHER

Oh, Quinzy. Violence is a sign of  
attraction in *pre-teens*.  
(she drives home the  
'pre')  
(MORE)

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 Besides, she seems nice enough to  
 me.

Cleo and his mother share a smile.

QUINZY  
 (not seeing another  
 option)  
 Ok. But if two boys show up with  
 baseball bats, you'll tell them I'm  
 not home ok?

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 (sighs)  
 Oh, Quince. Let's not be  
 antisocial, shall we?

QUINZY  
 (defeated)  
 No, mom.

Cleo pushes past Quinzy into his room and sits on his bed.  
 Grimly, Quinzy follows after.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 Just holler, Cleo dear, if he makes  
 any *advances*. He's going through  
*puberty*, you know.

Quinzy blushes.

CLEO  
 Thank you, Mrs. Cooper. It was a  
 pleasure meeting you.

With a prim nod, Quinzy's mother turns away.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 (to Quinzy)  
 What a bitch.

Quinzy doesn't want to indulge her. He shrugs.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 I mean, she doesn't have to treat  
 you like a baby. What's she afraid  
 of?

Quinzy looks at his shoes.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 Everybody knows you're smarter than  
 that.

He watches her suspiciously as she gets up and begins to  
 rifle through his drawers.

QUINZY  
What are you doing?

CLEO  
Everybody wants to be your friend,  
you know.

QUINZY  
Yeah? Like who?

CLEO  
Darkson and Clarkson for one.

Quinzy scowls.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
Don't mind their attitude. They  
don't know how to express  
themselves very precisely.  
(beat)  
And then there's me.

Quinzy watches her like she's a hawk and he's a mouse.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
We should do something some time.  
You could come over. Sleep over.

He's still terrified, but he thinks he gets it:

QUINZY  
Should I bring over my homework  
too?

CLEO  
(pretending it doesn't  
matter either way)  
If you like. Sure.

QUINZY  
(angry)  
Then you copy it and sell it to the  
highest bidders, right?

She's still searching through his stuff.

CLEO  
We could have a partnership. Split  
it 50/50.

Quinzy smirks.

He pulls the homework from his pocket and holds it aloft.

QUINZY  
Looking for this?

Cleo sighs, then sits down on his bed.

CLEO  
 Think of it this way: who's going  
 to pay for your brother's American  
 hospital bills?

QUINZY  
 (getting angry)  
 What are you talking about?

CLEO  
 Or what happens if you flunk out of  
 school? Again?

She's got him flustered.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 So many things would be better if  
 we just joined forces, you know?

He hesitates.

QUINZY  
 No way.

Cleo shrugs.

CLEO  
 Ok. The thing is -- it's not  
 really up to you is it?  
 (beat)  
 I'll be seeing you around.

She grins at him, then walks out.

INT. COMFORTABLE SITTING ROOM - UNKNOWN

Quinzy stands before the heavy door at the end of the room.  
 Everything else is as he left it, including the kitten on the  
 rug, excepting the chess board.

White seems to have gained a few more of black's pieces.

He takes hold of the padlock. Thoughtfully, he slips a  
 finger into the keyhole...

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

Another morning. Quinzy dozes, camera looped around his  
 neck, his face mashed against a window near the back of the  
 bus, when

CLEO sits down in the empty seat beside him, jolting him  
 awake.

It takes a second for him to become coherent:



QUINZY

Ah, um, you, why...?

CLEO

Good, now we can move on to consonants.

QUINZY

What are you doing here? I mean, you don't take the bus.

CLEO

Hermann... the bus driver to you... is a friend of mine. We have a relationship.

QUINZY

What do you sell him?

CLEO

Buses.

Quinzy looks alarmed, then betrayed when Cleo laughs at her own joke.

CLEO (CONT'D)

Come on. Do I need a reason to be friends with someone?

QUINZY

Me, apparently.

CLEO

But you're special.

She winks at him. Quinzy doesn't know how to take this, except with fear.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Philip skulks through the gate onto campus, covered up by a hoodie and shades. He shoots a disparaging glance at

the crowd of reporters once again gathered outside of the school doors.

He ducks back into the parking lot with a grunt and sees

the school bus pull up at the other end of the parking lot.

From the back doors emerges Quinzy, followed by Cleo, who clutches his arm and giggles.

Philip removes his shades to get a better look, and glares at the pair.

He starts in their direction.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Outside the school bus, Quinzy tries to shake Cleo but can't.

QUINZY  
Get off!

CLEO  
(wry)  
Naughty!

QUINZY  
Won't you leave me alone?

She wriggles a hand into one of his pockets.

QUINZY (CONT'D)  
Aren't there other people you can  
pick on?

CLEO  
Sure. But you're the easiest.

Philip marches up to them.

When Cleo recognizes him, she pulls away from Quinzy and  
adopts a cynical smirk.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
Well, well, my best customer.

PHILIP  
Is that what you call all your  
boyfriends?

CLEO  
(to Quinzy)  
He's not my boyfriend.  
(Philip)  
What are you doing here, Philip?

PHILIP  
What are you doing here? What is  
he doing here? You know his kind  
are trouble for both of us.

CLEO  
Don't be stupid Philip. He's not  
from a newspaper.

PHILIP  
Oh yeah? Then why's he got that  
camera wrapped around his neck like  
a stupid tourist?

Cleo looks at Quinzy curiously.

QUINZY

I -- I'm supposed to take pictures  
of cool people for the yearbook.

Philip nods at Cleo, I-told-you-so.

PHILIP

And spy on them, too. You forgot  
that part.

Quinzy looks at his feet.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

There's a whole crowd of your kind  
in front of the school right now,  
waiting to mob me because my stupid  
dad's in hospital.

CLEO

(concerned)

Is he doing any better?

PHILIP

If I wanted someone to talk to, I'd  
have a hundred better options than  
you!

He scowls at the pavement.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Sorry. It's just such a pain. I  
wish there was another way around.

Quinzy looks up at him, then. There is.

EXT. SUBTERRANEAN STAIRWELL - MORNING

Quinzy, Philip, and Cleo march down the damp, trash-strewn  
stairs, kicking cans and wrappers out of their way.

PHILIP

You said you've done this before?

QUINZY

Yeah, it goes straight through to  
the courtyard.

Philip watches him, still suspiciously, as the trio arrive  
at, and flank, the heavy service door.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

Here goes...

He tugs at the handle, it's locked.

Philip snickers.

PHILIP

So much for that bit of irony.  
Maybe you want to get my photograph  
by the door? It could be like a  
trophy shot, except for failure.

Quinzy sighs, embarrassed.

CLEO

Hold on...

She fishes for something in a pocket in her overalls, then  
pulls out a thick, archaic key.

Smirking, she inserts the key into the keyhole and twists.  
Sure enough, it pops open.

She holds it up.

CLEO (CONT'D)

...skeleton key. It'll open any  
door in the school.

She leans back and blows a kiss at Philip.

CLEO (CONT'D)

For you, babe.

Quinzy, thoughtfully, watches

THE SKELETON KEY while

Cleo reinserts it in her pocket.

CLEO (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there gawking. I  
know it's impressive. Come on!

They follow her into

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY - MORNING

Illuminated by the open door, this room is less intimidating  
than it was the previous day. Brass pipes run across the  
ceiling to a boiler in the corner, and nozzles and meters  
with dials adorn mysterious machinery along the other walls.

Cleo ducks under and steps over some of these to get to the  
other side, where the other door looms.

Philip reaches out a hand and grabs Quinzy by the shoulder  
when he starts to follow her.

PHILIP

(whispering)  
What's your name?

QUINZY

Quinzy.

PHILIP

Quinzy... listen... Cleo's mine,  
okay? We broke up a while ago, but  
I want her back.

Quinzy nods enthusiastically.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Just keep your distance, ok?

QUINZY

I'll try; it's just --

CLEO

Are you guys coming or what?

She's opened the door.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - MORNING

Cleo closes the door behind them.

PHILIP

(to Quinzy)

Thanks, man. You helped me out.  
Maybe I was wrong about you.

He shrugs.

QUINZY

Maybe we can hang out some time.

PHILIP

(doubtful)

Maybe...

CLEO

Well, go on. I need to talk to  
Quinzy.

(she waits)

Alone.

Philip gives Quinzy his most threatening warning glance.

Then, with an obedient nod to Cleo, he saunters off.

Cleo turns to Quinzy intensely.

QUINZY

(hopefully)

I don't think he wants us to see  
much of each other.

CLEO  
 (derisive)  
 I don't care what he wants. He's  
 an idiot.

QUINZY  
 (discouraged)  
 Well, whatever. See you, I guess.

He turns to leave. Cleo puts out a hand and grabs him by the shoulder for the second time this has happened in minutes.

CLEO  
 Aren't you forgetting something?

Quinzy turns, exasperated, back to her, and is startled to see her holding his homework in the air by a pair of fingers.

His hands rush immediately to his pockets. He pats them down then searches them.

She WINKS.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 Oops...

QUINZY  
 You stole it.

CLEO  
 I just wanted to show you that I  
 can get what I need one way or  
 another. I'd much rather we worked  
 together, though.

She offers the homework back to him.

He's confused, but takes it.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 Come over tonight and we'll talk  
 about it. My address is written  
 there.

She nods at the homework in his hands.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 Think about it.

Smug, she walks off.

INT. CHADWICH'S OFFICE - MORNING

Quinzy nervously takes a seat in front of Chadwick's desk. Chadwick notes him from behind her glasses, finishes up the mark she's giving on a paper, then puts down her pen and raises her eyebrows at the boy.

CHADWICH

(impatient)

Ah, Quinzy. Is there something you want? You did very well on your homework but you'll have to wait to get it back until tomorrow so no one copies your answers, you understand --

QUINZY

Yes... I mean no -- that's not why I'm here.

Chadwick's eyebrows go up a little farther.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

You were right. I *do* have a problem, and I'm ready to tell you about it.

Pleased, Chadwick leans back in her chair.

CHADWICH

Go on. I'm happy to give advice.

QUINZY

Well. I'm not too lazy to do my homework. I do it every week, very carefully.

CHADWICH

You just have a hungry dog, huh?

Quinzy isn't sure whether she's being cynical or making a joke. Watching her uncomfortably, he proceeds:

QUINZY

I bring it with me to school, but there's these bullies...

CHADWICH

There 'are' these bullies.

QUINZY

They beat me up and take it from me so they can sell it to other students.

This gets Chadwick's attention. She sits up straight in her chair.

CHADWICH

Who are these bullies?

Quinzy looks uncomfortable.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)

These are very serious accusations, Quinzy. I need to know who you're talking about so I can investigate the issue.

QUINZY

(hesitant)

It's Darkson, Clarkson, and Cleo, Missus Chadwick.

Chadwick looks up at the ceiling and purses her lips. She sighs.

Quinzy guiltily recedes into his chair.

After a moment, he gets the gumption to speak. Chadwick watches him uncomfortably.

QUINZY (CONT'D)

So what should I do?

CHADWICH

Nothing. You've done the right thing coming to me but I'm afraid there's nothing I can do either.

She sighs again.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)

Darkson and Clarkson are very special cases and Cleo, well...

She looks down at her desk, embarrassed.

QUINZY

(a little panicked)

I thought you said this was very serious?

Chadwick looks at him very seriously, just then.

CHADWICH

Just be glad your problems aren't as serious as some.

She looks away again.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)

There's a test coming up in about a week. Do well on that and I'll make sure you get a good mark this term, even without the homework.

QUINZY

What about the bullies?



CHADWICH

I'm afraid you're going to have to live with them. We all have problems, you know.

QUINZY

Couldn't I just email it or...

CHADWICH

No email.

Chadwick blindsides him by definitively returning to the paper she was marking.

CHADWICH (CONT'D)

Good day.

Looking betrayed, Quinzy gets up and slouches out of the room.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Quinzy trots up to the DOOR of the yearbook room, the digicam looped around his neck. He's about to go in when Philip whistles at him from down the hallway.

Philip hurries within speaking distance.

PHILIP

Hey dude. Listen, I'm sorry for being such a dick earlier today. About that reporter stuff.

QUINZY

Oh. It's ok.

PHILIP

You really helped me out today getting past those paparazzi.

QUINZY

Yeah. No problem!

PHILIP

I thought I could do something to help you out -- you know -- return the favor.

QUINZY

Oh..

PHILIP

Gimme that camera.

Quinzy unloops it and hands it over.

Unexpectedly, Philip pulls Quinzy next to him and puts his arm over his shoulder. Philip holds out the camera in front of them to take their picture. Quinzy flinches.

PHILIP (CONT'D)  
Come on, smile.

Quinzy does.

CLICK!

PHILIP (CONT'D)  
There. Show that to those  
assholes.

He nods to the Yearbook door.

Philip grins, pats Quinzy on the back, then walks off down the hallway, whistling.

Quinzy smiles after him, grateful.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - AFTERNOON

Quinzy rests his forehead against the window of his seat and watches the houses of a RUN DOWN NEIGHBORHOOD swim by.

BUS DRIVER  
(droning on)  
The plants and animals of the jungle are never what they seem. A pretty flower might beckon a young man's nose to its sweet smell, only to bite it off. But just as characteristic, a spiny, razorbacked beast of the river might have such a withdrawing personality that he would be at home in the most genteel of your living rooms. It is a land strange even unto itself, being filled as you may have heard with hoots and hollers and shrieks, less bestial than you might think. They are from animals constantly surprised by the strangeness of each other and their surroundings.

The bus pulls to the side of the road.

Clarkson and Darkson, now not particularly aggressive but still braggadoccio, descend out of the back doors.

Instead of pulling out again, the bus driver boards the steps leading down to the front door of the bus. He pulls a cigarette out of his front pocket.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Four minute break.

Through the hazy pane of his window, Quinzy watches the bus driver light up by the front door. He sighs.

His eyes wander across to Darkson and Clarkson, who are waiting at the front door of one of the neighborhood's RAMSHACKLE BUILDINGS.

The door opens and a portly man, their father, takes its place. Their father looks at his watch, then SEIZES the two boys by the shirt and pulls them toward him.

He's SHOUTING, but Quinzy can't hear what he's saying. The boys struggle, but uselessly.

Their father releases them, only to BEAT THEM over the head with the flat of his hand.

COWERING, the two bullies are bullied inside the door and the door slams shut.

Quinzy's attention returns to the front of the bus.

The bus driver has boarded again. He wets himself with a phlegmatic cough.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Where was I?

The bus twitches to life.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Most of the other kids on the bus have been dropped off. The scape of seats and the aisle is emptier -- lonely.

Quinzy is still here, Heart of Darkness folded closed around one finger to hold his place.

He daydreams out the window as the bus driver drones on and on, his voice assuming the character of a dream voice or hallucination.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)  
Many innocent little creatures live in the jungle, and they are preyed on. Those that have the respect of their predators have earned it by evolving potent defenses that make them unpalatable, or not worth the risk of hunting. Some become predators themselves, or parasites.  
(MORE)

BUS DRIVER (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Variants of the normally absurd tree frog, for example, numerous in the Amazon basin, excrete a poisonous oil from their pores that is quite deadly. In this manner they are able to survive in the open, until their predators evolve in turn. In many ways, predator and prey are hardly distinguishable in the long term.

The bus pulls over alongside Quinzy's house. Quinzy doesn't move.

The bus driver glances at Quinzy in his mirror.

The boy shakes his head.

The driver SHRUGS and the bus continues on.

INT. CLEO'S HOUSE - FOYER - EVENING

Folded in Quinzy's hand is no longer Heart of Darkness, but a torn corner of paper with Cleo's address written on it.

INT. CLEO'S HOUSE - FOYER - EVENING

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Cleo, in a nice dress and with a ribbon in her hair, hurries down a flight of stairs to the front door.

She opens it to Quinzy, who looks down at his feet.

CLEO  
 (genuinely glad)  
 Oh, I'm so pleased you came!

Quinzy scuffs his foot. He's not at all comfortable, but he's going to try and be friendly.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
 Come up.

Quinzy looks around.

QUINZY  
 Where are your parents?

CLEO  
 Oh they're gone.

This makes Quinzy even less comfortable. Stiffly, he mounts the stairs.

INT. CLEO'S HOUSE - CLEO'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Evidently someone recently cleaned in here, but only by taking the copious amounts of stuff -- magazines, a couple of posters, a landfill's worth of cds -- and jamming it into whatever shelves or containers were close by.

Drawers bulge with the stuff, but at least the floor is clean.

CLEO

Well, we meet at last.

She smiles and sits down on her relatively simple bed, but the weight of her on top of it

SQUEEZES out a googol of objects from underneath: stuffed animals, some old dolls, makeup paraphernalia, etc. Girl stuff she'd evidently wanted hidden.

She does her best to pretend it doesn't exist. She plows on, businesslike:

CLEO (CONT'D)

What did you have in mind?

QUINZY

What did *I* have in mind? You invited me here.

CLEO

I thought I should ascertain your expectations -- before mercilessly dashing them to pieces.

She watches Quinzy and laughs at his frown.

CLEO (CONT'D)

You must really think I'm a horrible person.

QUINZY

No... well... the thought had crossed my mind.

CLEO

(amused)

So there you go. You answered my original question.

QUINZY

...which was what again?

CLEO

"What did you *have in mind*?"

QUINZY

I see.

She laughs. Running circles around people is a favorite pastime for her.

She pats the bed next to her and beckons him to sit down. Quinzy, nervously, obliges.

CLEO  
I'm really sorry about all that homework business.

He laughs. She looks at him seriously -- stern, even.

QUINZY  
Business... oh, I thought were making another pun!

She smiles falsely as it dawns on her.

CLEO  
Of course; I was.

She recomposes herself.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
I just wanted to say sorry. I know better than anyone how it feels to have something stolen from you and to be just powerless.

Quinzy hangs his head a little.

CLEO (CONT'D)  
That's why I wanted us to work together... we could get to know each other better in the process.

QUINZY  
Yes, of course.

Cleo smiles brilliantly.

CLEO  
Great! So we can be friends?

Quinzy bobs his head.

QUINZY  
Ok.

CLEO  
Ok! How about I get us some tea and we can finally stop apologizing to each other and get down to business.

Quinzy looks confused -- not sure what she means by business this time.

She doesn't clarify. She gets up and skips out of the room, cheerful.

Quinzy smiles shyly after, but his expression becomes more like guilt once she's disappeared from view.

He gets up from her bed and approaches her desk, innocuously.

He picks up a looking glass, blinks at himself in the mirror.

He puts it down, picks up a postcard from Ipanema. He turns it over: "With all our love, Roy and Judy." He puts it down again in a hurry.

Then, a deep breath, and he's rifling through her drawers at top speed. He pulls out a diary, and discards it. A bit of jewelry -- and discards it.

Then, near a collection of colored pencils and pens, he finds it: the KEY.

The ARCHAIC SKELETON KEY that she used to open the service door at school, and that was hanging from the queen chess piece's hand in his backpack.

Guiltily, he pockets it and, with a look to and fro, and a panicked breath, sneaks out of her room.

EXT. CLEO'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Philip strolls up the rise to Cleo's house. He cradles a bunch of wrapped flowers in his arms.

He's half way there. Then he sees her front door edge open.

A sly grin on his face, he ducks into a hedge beside their driveway. He watches as

Quinzy slips out of the front door into twilight. Hunched over, he turns around and closes it quietly.

Philip's grin slips.

Quinzy creeps away from the house then, with a worried glance behind him, down the street.

Philip glares after him. His expression: BETRAYED.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Quinzy's father reads a paperback at his usual spot at the table. He rocks back in his chair just slightly.

Quinzy's mother hurries behind him and plants the chair back on the floor on her way to the sink which is full of soapy dishes.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 (clucking)  
 Harold, you'll hurt yourself.

Quinzy's father puts down his book with a sigh. He crosses his hands behind his head.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Will you relax, *Jacqueline*?

She's scrubbing dishes with vigor.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 He's out having sex, I know it.

Quinzy's father laughs.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 It's only nine. He's probably been invited to dinner somewhere. Maybe he's finally making some friends.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 Girlfriends.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Well, that wouldn't be so bad would it?

She's silent for a moment.

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 No, I suppose not.

Quinzy's father goes to the sink and wraps his arms around her.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Quinzy's a very nice boy. He's much more level headed than his brother ever was --

QUINZY'S MOTHER  
*Is.*

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Yes... My point is he's got good sense and manners, that one. You shouldn't worry so much... especially if you're worried about your hair going grey!

She laughs, despite herself.

Just then, the door BURSTS OPEN and Quinzy STOMPS in, startling them from their pose.



QUINZY'S MOTHER  
 (as tolerant as she can)  
 Quince, honey, where have you been?

Quinzy heads for the stairs.

QUINZY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 Quinzy!

QUINZY  
 I don't want to talk to you!

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Will you come down here for a  
 second and tell us what you've been  
 up to?

Quinzy stops on the stairs, visibly struggling with his father's request. Then, very calm, he stares his father in the eye.

QUINZY  
 (mean)  
 No.

Quinzy dashes up the remaining steps. Somewhere above, a door slams.

Quinzy's father looks at his mother, dreadfully. Maybe he was wrong...

INT. QUINZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The front door shakes a little to:

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

QUINZY'S FATHER  
 Quinzy, we just want to know if  
 everything's ok. We want to help  
 if we can. Come on and just open  
 up.

His knocking blends in with a JUNGLE BEAT, sifting in through the window where branches scrape against the glass and an owl, beyond, hoots its lonely call.

Moonlight from the window casts thin, wan shadows in the shape of WILD ANIMALS from the study objects on his desk. His computer is AN ELEPHANT, its cords BRANCHES and one (it moves -- slithers -- among them) -- the shadow of a SNAKE!

It HISSES.

The moonlight falls hardest on Quinzy's backpack, lying in the middle of the bed, and the sneakered foot, Quinzy's foot, that slips into it.

INT. COMFORTABLE SITTING ROOM - UNKNOWN

The shadows from Quinzy's room -- the elephant and the snake, the hooting owl, all settle together on the throw where the light from the modest fire flickers, fades, and flares again.

Their cries grow silent, as if watching...

The chess pieces are turned to him, as if watching...

as Quinzy approaches the boiler plate door, ARCHAIC KEY in hand.

He's scared, a HEART BEAT, curiously mechanical like the press and pull of a piston, fills his ears.

Quinzy lifts the stolen key and places it against the chain padlock on the door. It fits! ...The padlock falls away.

Quinzy HEAVES at the door's handle and the door SWINGS OPEN.

From the portal, a blast of HOT AIR scatters Quinzy's hair and makes him blink.

Reflected in Quinzy's EYES: something bright and pulsing, and huge, synchronized exactly to his HEART BEAT.

He shields his eyes, then doesn't.

He walks forward, into the inferno.