

"A spellbinding mystery with edge-of-the-seat suspense." —*New York Times Book Review*

VIRGINIA HAMILTON

The House of Dies Drear



chapter 1

THOMAS dreamed he walked a familiar forest, following a time-worn path of the Tuscaroras. The trail seemed the same as he had known it all his life. The way he walked it, without making any sound, was true to the way ancient Indian braves had walked it. But now the once familiar evergreens on either side were gigantic. Their needles were as large as railroad spikes. He had no trouble accepting the great new height of the trees or the long, smooth size of the needles. It was the awful smell of resin and oil over everything that upset him. The odor nearly choked him; the trees gave it off, as though they were raining turpentine. He seemed to feel it on his hair and on his hands. His palms itched and his eyes burned. He tried to get the smell out of

his mind and stopped on the path to cut an enormous branch from a fallen pine.

He made tiny marks on the bark with one of his whittling tools, and he didn't find it unusual to be using so small an instrument for such hard work. He'd always used whittling tools to cut branches. He had started whistling to himself when a man swung down from a mile-high spruce.

"Stay back," the man said. He lifted the huge branch Thomas wanted and flung it away as if it were nothing.

Thomas stood still. He began to feel small. "Papa says you will do," he told the man, "but I don't say it. We are going anyway."

"Carolina is for you," the man said. "Stay back." He reached for Thomas with arms covered with curls of white hair. His eyes glowed red and then spewed fire.

Thomas leaped for a tall pair of stilts against a tree. Fastening them to his legs, he turned around on the path.

"I'm running," he said. But when he moved, the stilts sank into the bed of oversized pine needles covering the ground.

The man grabbed Thomas' ankles. Thomas fell slowly forward from a long way up. He could hear the wind whistling by his ears as he fell.

I'll never reach the end of the trail, he thought. And for the first time, he was afraid.

Thomas Small lurched out of this dream, waking his twin brothers at the same time. The boys leaned against him and looked at him with wide, senseless eyes. Thomas didn't dare move. His heart pounded as the dream fear moved up and down his back. He couldn't think where he was.

In a few minutes, the twins were sleeping again. Thomas could rearrange them and rest his arms.

That was a good dream. Good and scary, he thought. I was in the trees at home and the man was somebody I should know. I can't place him right now, but I do know him.

He glanced out of the car window and smiled. He knew where he was now and everything was fine. The day was a dismal Saturday; the month was March. All around were heavy patches of mist, and there was a steady rain. His papa's sedan with the red trailer attached was the lone automobile on the Blue Ridge Mountain Highway. Thomas was thirteen years old today and never in his life had he been so far from home.

Home, he thought. Well, I'm sorry.

He and his family were leaving an old house and folks who were mostly relatives. He had known the old house and the old people forever.

"Like Great-grandmother Jeffers," he said

THE HOUSE HELD SECRETS, Thomas knew, even before he first saw it looming gray and massive on its ledge of rock. It had a century-old legend—two fugitive slaves had been killed by bounty hunters after leaving its passageways, and Dies Drear himself, the abolitionist who had made the house into a station on the Underground Railroad, had been murdered there. The ghosts of the three were said to walk its rooms. . . .

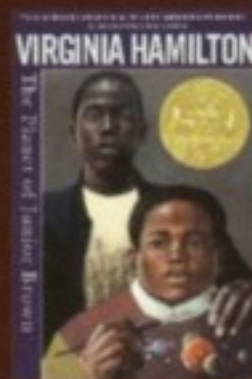
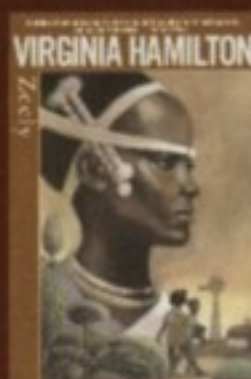
Includes Reading Group Guide

An ALA Notable Children's Book

Edgar Allan Poe Award

A School Library Journal Best Book

Also by Virginia Hamilton:



SIMON PULSE

Simon & Schuster, New York

Cover designed by Debra Sfetsios

Cover illustration copyright © 2005

by Leo and Diane Dillon

www.SimonSaysTEEN.com

US \$6.99 / \$8.99 CAN

ISBN-13: 978-0-02-043520-4

ISBN-10: 0-02-043520-7

EAN



50699

