

GET A CLUE

Interactive Mystery Play

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AFTER HOURS

Lights up. Rain can be heard lightly outside. The students enter in a loose group. They have clearly just been brought into the gallery and told to wait.

AVERY

Before everyone spreads out, the director asked us to stay in the main gallery. We can look around, but we are not supposed to touch anything unless it is clearly marked as interactive, and we are definitely not supposed to go through any staff doors.

CASEY is already looking toward the ARCHIVES hallway.

AVERY

Casey.

CASEY

I'm still in the gallery.

AVERY

Barely.

CASEY

I'm just looking. I've never been here after hours before.

SAM

What's back there?

CASEY

Archives, I think.

SAM

That actually sounds interesting.

QUINN

It is. They keep old photographs, records, and things that aren't currently on display back there.

CASEY

Have you been inside?

QUINN

No. Visitors can't go in.

DYLAN

I'm already getting the feeling that at some point tonight, Casey and Sam are going to go somewhere they shouldn't.

BROOKE

I thought this was supposed to be a really small preview.

RILEY

It is. A lot more people wanted to come.

BROOKE

How do you know?

RILEY

I heard Mrs. Jenkins talking about it yesterday. They had more names than spaces.

ALEX

That makes sense. They're unveiling something that hasn't been here in almost ninety years.

RILEY

You read about it?

ALEX

A little.

BROOKE

I thought you only liked mysteries.

ALEX

A key that disappears for almost a century and suddenly comes back is a mystery.

JOY and CAMERON look around the gallery.

JOY

This place feels completely different at night.

CAMERON

It's quieter.

JOY

And creepier

A low roll of THUNDER. SYDNEY looks toward the windows.

SYDNEY

Was that thunder?

MORGAN

Yeah.

SYDNEY

I didn't know it was supposed to storm.

MORGAN

It probably won't be bad.

SYDNEY

Probably?

MORGAN

I'm trying to be reassuring.

SYDNEY

Thanks

TAYLOR takes in the museum.

TAYLOR

An old museum. After closing. During a storm.

Sounds like a scary movie-

PARKER

It's just rain.

REESE enters carrying a museum program.

REESE

Did I miss anything?

AVERY

No. The director hasn't started yet.

REESE

Good.

ALEX

You printed the program?

REESE

They sent it for a reason.

ALEX

I read it.

REESE

All of it?

ALEX

The important part.

REESE

The Key.

ALEX

Exactly.

REESE

The unveiling is at seven fifteen. There's a short presentation first and then we get a closer look at the exhibit.

SCENE TWO

The students spread out slightly but remain in the main gallery.

DYLAN

How did everybody actually get picked for this?

AVERY

Teacher nominations, mostly. My history teacher nominated me because I'm doing my local history project on the museum.

JAMIE

Mr. Evans gave me the permission slip and said, "This might be good for you."

DYLAN

What does that mean?

JAMIE

I don't know, I just hope I get extra credit. I could use it.

QUINN

I volunteered. My grandma has a membership here, so we come a lot.

BROOKE

How often is a lot?

QUINN

Maybe twenty times.

CASEY

Seriously?

QUINN

I like museums.

CASEY

I mean, that's fair. I've just never been anywhere twenty times on purpose except school.

JOY

I got nominated because of the historical monologue I did at the assembly.

CAMERON

And I helped with the living-history project.

PARKER

You played Benjamin Franklin.

CAMERON

For an entire afternoon.

JOY

He stayed in character through lunch.

CAMERON

Yes- I had committed to the role.

SYDNEY

Morgan said she was coming, so I said yes too.

MORGAN

My mom thought it would be good for me to do something different.

SYDNEY

So our parents basically sent us.

MORGAN

Pretty much.

BROOKE

Riley and I got nominated through the school newspaper.

RILEY

Brooke writes the articles. I help find things out.

BROOKE

She's actually like really good at talking to people.

RILEY

People tell me stuff like all the time, so yeah...

TAYLOR

Mr. Jensen nominated me because I keep arguing with the textbook.

PARKER

How do you even do that? It's a textbook.

TAYLOR

Some of the things in there are oversimplified.

PARKER

Sometimes you also decide an explanation is wrong because it's boring.

SAM

I signed up because being inside the museum after closing sounded better than a normal field trip.

CASEY

Same.

DYLAN

Sam told me there would probably be food.

SAM

There still could be.

ALEX

I wanted to come because of the Key.

REESE

Same.

ALEX

It's interesting that something can belong to one person, disappear for decades, and then come back without anybody knowing what it was used for.

REESE

That would drive me crazy.

ALEX

Why?

REESE

Because there is an answer. Somebody knew it once.

ALEX

That's the interesting part.

REESE

It's the part I want to figure out.

Thunder rumbles again.

SCENE THREE

THE HAWTHORNE KEY

A museum chime sounds. The students quiet as the MUSEUM DIRECTOR speaks.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the Hawthorne Museum of History. Thank you for joining us for tonight's special student preview.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

In just a few minutes, you will be among the first visitors to see an artifact that has been absent from this museum for years.

The students look toward the covered display.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The Hawthorne Key belonged to Elias Hawthorne, founder of this museum. It disappeared from our collection in 1939 and was believed lost until earlier this year, when it was discovered among the belongings of one of Hawthorne's descendants.

BROOKE

Does it say which descendant?

AVERY

No. The program says the family asked to remain private.

RILEY

Weird.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Since its return, our historians have spent months studying the Key and trying to answer a surprisingly difficult question.

Beat.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

What does it open? The Key has been compared with every known lock connected to Elias Hawthorne—his office doors, cabinets, furniture, trunks, and several pieces from his private collection. Nothing matches.

JOY

That's amazing.

REESE

That's frustrating.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The Key is also marked with three symbols: a tree, a star, and a feather. Those symbols have not yet been connected to any known inventory record, journal entry, or building plan. Hawthorne was known for

writing in code and keeping private records, which has led to plenty of theories over the years. But theories are not evidence.

PARKER glances toward TAYLOR.

TAYLOR

Mysterious-

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

For now, the Hawthorne Key remains exactly what it has been for decades—a mystery.

The covering is removed. The HAWTHORNE KEY is revealed inside a clear locked display case. The students fall genuinely quiet.

JOY

It's beautiful.

QUINN

I've only ever seen photographs of it.

MORGAN

The symbols are smaller than I thought.

ALEX

The teeth are strange too.

REESE

They don't look like a normal key.

QUINN

That's one reason they've had trouble identifying the lock.

SAM

Maybe it doesn't open a normal lock.

PARKER

Or whatever it opened doesn't exist anymore.

TAYLOR

Or they haven't found it.

PARKER

Also possible.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The Key is extremely important, so it will remain secured inside its case throughout tonight's preview. You are welcome to view it from all sides, but please do not touch the case or pedestal.

SCENE FOUR

ELIAS HAWTHORNE

The students move around the gallery. QUINN stops by Hawthorne's portrait.

QUINN

That's Elias Hawthorne.

JOY

He looks younger than I expected.

CAMERON

He also looks like he hated having his portrait painted.

QUINN

He was apparently pretty serious.

ALEX

What do we actually know about him?

QUINN

He made most of his money collecting historical objects. Eventually he built the museum because he thought private collections should be seen by the public.

AVERY

That part is nice.

QUINN

He was also extremely private. He kept coded journals, changed his will more than once, and sometimes stored things without putting them into the regular museum records.

TAYLOR

That seems important.

PARKER

Or disorganized.

TAYLOR

Also possible.

ALEX

Did he write about the Key?

QUINN

A few times. Nothing useful. Just references to “my Key” or “the Hawthorne Key.”

REESE

What about the symbols?

QUINN

Nothing anyone has been able to identify.

REESE

Tree, star, feather. They have to mean something.

REESE

It must be a code, or a riddle. It says he likes those things.

ALEX

You really want to solve this.

REESE

So do you.

ALEX

True.

SCENE FIVE

THE DINOSAUR

Nearby, JAMIE notices the dinosaur exhibit.

JAMIE

At least this one has a button.

QUINN

It plays the dinosaur sound.

JAMIE

Can I actually press it?

AVERY

If the sign says you can.

JAMIE presses the button. A cheesy recorded DINOSAUR ROAR plays. Jamie stares at the exhibit.

JAMIE

That’s it?

JOY

It sounds like somebody doing a dinosaur impression.

CAMERON

Not a very convincing one.

JAMIE presses it again. ROAR.

SYDNEY

Why did you do it again?

JAMIE

I wanted to see if it got better.

PARKER

Did it?

JAMIE

No.

Jamie presses it again. ROAR.

AVERY

Jamie, that’s enough.

JAMIE

I’m done.

The others move away. JAMIE hangs back. Jamie discreetly pulls a realistic fake spider from a pocket and looks toward a nearby brochure stand. Jamie places it so it will fall or be noticed when someone reaches for a brochure. Jamie rejoins the group.

SCENE SIX

BROOKE and RILEY watch the others.

RILEY

Alex and Reese are definitely competitive.

BROOKE

A little.

RILEY

They both want to figure out the Key.

BROOKE

So does Quinn.

RILEY

Quinn wants to understand it. She's into this history stuff. Reese just wants to be right.

BROOKE

That is true.

REESE is studying an exhibit placard.

REESE

Quinn?

QUINN

Yeah?

REESE

Was the Navigation Collection always in the east gallery?

QUINN

No. It used to be upstairs.

REESE

When did they move it?

QUINN

A few years ago, I think. Why?

REESE

I just noticed this didn't match the map online. I saw a cool photo of some of the navigation equipment on the website.

ALEX

You were really doing research.

REESE

I got interested. Sorry-

ALEX

Clearly.

REESE

You say that like it's weird.

SCENE SEVEN

THE NOTE

CASEY drifts toward the archive hallway.

CASEY

The director's out there.

SAM

Doing what?

CASEY

Reading something.

BROOKE

Can you see what?

CASEY

No. It looks like a note.

RILEY

Who gave it to them?

CASEY

I didn't see anyone.

CASEY watches.

CASEY

They look confused.

AVERY

Maybe something happened in the archive.

SAM

Oh- They're going in.

QUINN

Staff go in there all the time.

TAYLOR

The note is more interesting than the door.

PARKER

We don't know what the note says.

MORGAN

Did anyone see the note there before?

CASEY

I didn't.

ALEX

If it's important, the director will come back and tell us.

SCENE EIGHT

THE STORM

Rain grows louder. A flash of lightning.

RILEY

That was close.

MORGAN

Yeah- a little too close for comfort.

JOY

It does make the museum look amazing. Such a dramatic atmosphere .

SYDNEY

I'm glad somebody likes it.

CAMERON

Every good mystery story has a storm.

PARKER

And why is that?

CAMERON

Because it gives the right ambience!

Another louder THUNDERCLAP. The lights flicker.

AVERY

The building has backup power. That was in the safety information.

SYDNEY

You read the safety information?

AVERY

Yes.

SYDNEY

I'm actually really glad you did.

QUINN

I've been here during an outage before. The emergency lights come on pretty quickly.

SAM

The director's been gone for a while.

CASEY

I was thinking that too.

DYLAN

How long?

CASEY

A few minutes.

AVERY

Whatever they're dealing with might just be taking longer than expected.

BROOKE

There should still be other staff here.

QUINN

There are usually several people working after closing.

TAYLOR

We haven't seen any.

PARKER

That doesn't mean they aren't here.

SCENE NINE

BLACKOUT

A huge flash of LIGHTNING.

SYDNEY

Maybe we should move away from the windows,

AVERY

Good idea. Everybody step in a little.

The students move. JAMIE suddenly looks toward the brochure stand. The fake spider is still there.

JAMIE

Oh.

DYLAN

What?

JAMIE

Nothing.

Another flash. A tremendous crack of THUNDER. BLACKOUT.

SYDNEY

I really don't like this.

JOY

I can't see anything.

CAMERON

Neither can I.

AVERY

Everybody stay where you are until the lights come back.

Jamie remembers the spider.

JAMIE

Oh no.

ALEX

What?

JAMIE

Nothing.

Jamie starts moving toward the brochure stand.

AVERY

Jamie, stop moving.

JAMIE

I just need to get something.

Jamie feels around in the darkness. In trying to reach the brochure stand, JAMIE backs into or catches the HAWTHORNE KEY PEDESTAL. The pedestal tips. The clear display case crashes hard to the floor. A sharp CRACK. Everyone reacts.

SYDNEY

What was that?!

CASEY

Something broke.

ALEX

Nobody move!

BROOKE

What is happening?

JAMIE

Sorry!

ALEX

Everybody stay still!

There is a moment of silence. Quick FOOTSTEPS move away from the broken display.

MORGAN

Someone's moving.

Another flash of lightning briefly illuminates the gallery. Then emergency lighting comes on.

SCENE TEN

THE KEY IS GONE

The students orient themselves. The Hawthorne display case is broken on the floor. The pedestal has

tipped over. The brochure stand is also partially knocked over.

AVERY

We are going to be in so much trouble!

QUINN

Be careful everybody.

DYLAN

Is everybody okay?

DYLAN

I think so.

SYDNEY

I'm okay.

JOY

Cameron?

CAMERON

I'm here.

JOY

Good.

CASEY

What happened to the display?

JAMIE

I think—

Jamie stops.

ALEX

What?

JAMIE

Nothing.

MORGAN looks toward the broken case.

MORGAN

Where's the Key?

Everyone looks. Silence.

AVERY

It might have fallen out.

SAM

Don't move. We should look before anyone steps on it.

Everyone carefully looks around without disturbing the area.

BROOKE

I don't see it.

RILEY

Maybe it rolled under something.

PARKER

That's not Possible.

TAYLOR

Or somebody picked it up.

The mood changes.

PARKER

We don't know that yet.

TAYLOR

It is possible!

SAM

We check first.

They look.

MORGAN

It's not near the pedestal.

QUINN

It couldn't have gone very far. It's heavy.

CASEY

What about the director?

SAM

Still in the archive.

SYDNEY

We need to go find them.

DYLAN

Agreed.

TAYLOR

The director gets a note and leaves. The lights go out.
The display breaks open. Then the Key disappears.

PARKER

But somebody was moving after the case broke.

DYLAN

You heard them?

MORGAN

I did.

DYLAN

Where?

MORGAN

Moving away from the display.

SCENE ELEVEN

*As the students prepare to move toward the archive,
MORGAN looks down near the broken display.*

MORGAN

Wait.

DYLAN

What?

MORGAN crouches carefully.

MORGAN

There's something here.

MORGAN picks up a small silver charm.

JOY

What is it?

MORGAN

A silver star

BROOKE

Let me see.

MORGAN shows it.

BROOKE

I recognize that.

RILEY

So do I.

BROOKE

From where?

RILEY thinks.

RILEY

It is kind of like the one on the key.

ALEX

We'll hold on to it. We don't know what it means yet.

SCENE TWELVE

THE ARCHIVE

*The students move together toward the ARCHIVES
door.*

CASEY

This is where the director went.

CASEY tries the door.

CASEY

Locked.

SAM

Hello?

No answer.

SAM

Hello?

A faint BANG from behind the door. SYDNEY jumps.

SYDNEY

Someone's in there.

DYLAN

Director?

Another BANG.

AVERY

We need to find a way to open it.

QUINN

Employees usually use a keycard.

AVERY

There also has to be some kind of emergency release. They can't have a room people can permanently get trapped inside.

CASEY

There's another service hallway around the corner.

AVERY

How do you know?

CASEY hesitates.

CASEY

I saw it earlier.

BROOKE

Earlier when?

CASEY

Before the program started.

AVERY

You left the gallery.

CASEY

For maybe a minute.

DYLAN

Where did you go?

CASEY

Just around the corner. There were some storage carts and an old sign. I didn't go through any doors.

BROOKE

Why didn't you tell us?

CASEY

Because it didn't matter.

PARKER

Until now.

DYLAN

Did you see anything else?

CASEY hesitates again.

CASEY

I found something.

CASEY pulls an old paper museum tag from a pocket.

AVERY

You took that?

CASEY

It was lying on the floor. It's just an old inventory tag.

PARKER

But it belongs to the museum.

CASEY

I know. I was going to give it back.

BROOKE

What does it say?

CASEY turns it over.

CASEY

"East Gallery. Navigation Collection. Drawer Four."

REESE watches.

SAM

Keep it. We may need to know where it came from.

SCENE THIRTEEN

The group returns toward the central gallery.

ALEX

Before we go looking anywhere else, we need to know exactly what happened when the lights went out.

PARKER

Agreed.

ALEX

Let's start with where everyone was standing.

BROOKE

I was near the portrait.

RILEY

I was with Brooke.

BROOKE

A few feet away, but yes.

AVERY

I was near the center aisle.

DYLAN

Sydney and I were on the west side.

SYDNEY

Near the wall.

JOY

Cameron and I were closer to the east side.

CAMERON

I bumped into Joy almost immediately after the lights went out.

JOY

I remember that.

QUINN

I was near Hawthorne's portrait.

TAYLOR

I was close to Quinn.

PARKER

I was between Taylor and the center display.

SAM

I was near Casey.

CASEY

Archive side.

MORGAN

I was toward the back.

ALEX

I was near the center.

Everyone looks toward JAMIE.

JAMIE

I was by the dinosaur.

MORGAN

And then you moved.

Silence.

JAMIE

Yes.

DYLAN

Why?

Jamie hesitates.

JAMIE

Because I had done something stupid before the blackout.

AVERY

What?

JAMIE

It had nothing to do with the Key.

PARKER

That doesn't answer the question.

Jamie sighs and pulls out the fake spider.

JAMIE

I put this on the brochure stand.

SYDNEY

You were going to scare somebody?

JAMIE

It was supposed to be harmless.

SYDNEY

Was it supposed to be me?

JAMIE

Maybe.

Sydney stares.

JAMIE

I know. Bad idea.

ALEX

So when the lights went out—

JAMIE

I remembered it was still sitting there. I thought if somebody found it, I was going to get in trouble. So I tried to get it back.

MORGAN

And that's when the display fell.

JAMIE

I think so.

Everyone turns.

AVERY

You knocked over the Key display?

JAMIE

I couldn't see. I was reaching for the brochure stand and ran into something.

BROOKE

The something was a locked case containing a priceless artifact.

JAMIE

I know that now.

SAM

And the second noise?

JAMIE

The brochure stand. I hit that too.

PARKER

So you caused both crashes.

JAMIE

Yes.

TAYLOR

And broke open the only thing keeping the Key locked up.

JAMIE

Accidentally.

ALEX

Did you touch the Key?

JAMIE

No.

ALEX

Did you even see it after the case fell?

JAMIE

No. It was completely dark.

MORGAN

Jamie moved toward the brochure stand after the case fell.

ALEX

How do you know?

MORGAN

Because I heard the case break first. Then Jamie's voice moved toward the other side.

PARKER

Which means Jamie caused the opportunity.

TAYLOR

That doesn't mean Jamie took advantage of it.

JAMIE

Thank you.

TAYLOR

I didn't say you didn't.

JAMIE

Less helpful.

SCENE FOURTEEN

JOY

We should reconstruct it.

SYDNEY

Now- With the lights on.

JOY

That's a good idea, I will direct the scene. If we put everyone back where they were, we may be able to tell who could have reached the display. Okay. Everybody take your places.

The group recreates their positions.

JOY

The lights go out.

CAMERON

I move and bump into Joy.

MORGAN

Then Jamie starts moving.

JAMIE

Toward the brochure stand.

MORGAN

Jamie hits the pedestal.

JOY

The case falls.

CAMERON

Then Jamie keeps moving.

JAMIE

I was trying to find the spider.

MORGAN

Then the brochure stand falls.

SAM

And after that?

MORGAN

Footsteps moving away from the Key display.

SAM

So somebody else moved after the case broke.

MORGAN

That's what I heard.

PARKER

Could it have been Jamie? He loves attention. Seems like something he would do.

MORGAN

I don't think so. Jamie was farther toward the dinosaur by then.

SAM

Could you tell which direction the other person went?

MORGAN

Toward the east side.

Several people glance toward the Navigation Collection.

SCENE FIFTEEN

TAYLOR

We're spending a lot of time asking who could reach the Key. We still haven't talked about why anyone would want it.

PARKER

That's fair.

TAYLOR

The director said Hawthorne kept coded journals and private records. What if the Key is valuable because of what it opens, and someone here knows what that is?

RILEY

You think a group of kids are going to know what the key opens? That's a stretch!

QUINN

There are rumors about Hawthorne's private collection.

BROOKE

What rumors?

QUINN

Nothing proven. Supposedly some objects from his collection were never formally catalogued.

AVERY

Meaning they might not be in the museum records at all.

QUINN

Right. All I know is Alex loves a good mystery and seems to know a lot about this.

TAYLOR

Maybe Hawthorne hid them on purpose. Maybe it is cursed treasure or something.

PARKER

Or maybe someone did bad paperwork in 1932.

TAYLOR

Also possible.

JOY

Would the symbols connect to those missing objects?

QUINN

No one knows.

REESE

Maybe the symbols aren't describing objects.

ALEX

What do you mean?

ALEX

Maybe it's a code?

Beat.

BROOKE

You've thought about this a lot.

ALEX

I was just thinking out loud.

SCENE SIXTEEN

THE PHOTOGRAPH

BROOKE

What about the picture you mentioned earlier?

REESE

What picture?

BROOKE

The one online. And you asked Quinn where the Navigation Collection was?

REESE

Yes.

RILEY

And the tag that was found in the hallway-

CASEY

I think we need to go look at the records department and get more clues.

The group looks at one another.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

DRAWER FOUR

They move towards the drawers.

AVERY

These drawers are visitor research materials, right?

QUINN

Yes. They're reproductions. The originals are stored safely.

ALEX

Drawer Four. The Hawthorn Key-

They open it. Inside are old photographs and reproduced records.

BROOKE

There is a lot in here.

SAM

Spread them out.

They search.

MORGAN

Here.

MORGAN holds up an old photograph.

QUINN

That's Hawthorne.

JOY

And he's holding the Key.

Everyone gathers.

REESE

That's the photograph I saw.

BROOKE

What's next to him?

JOY

Some kind of cabinet.

CAMERON

Or display case.

MORGAN

There's a symbol painted on it.

JOY

A star, a feather and a tree!

QUINN

Maybe? It's kind of hard to see.

TAYLOR

Well there is definitely a star and that's one of the symbols on the Key.

PARKER

It certainly looks like it.

JOY

Star, feather, tree.

AVERY

Could those connect to different collections?

QUINN

Possibly. Hawthorne had several major private collections.

AVERY

Natural history could be the tree.

MORGAN

Navigation could be the star.

BROOKE

And literature could be the feather.

TAYLOR

What could they mean?

REESE

We just need to find that case.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

THE NOTE MATTERS

MORGAN

The director's note still bothers me.

ALEX

Why?

MORGAN

Because it happened before the blackout.

TAYLOR

Exactly.

PARKER

Meaning?

TAYLOR

The storm created the opportunity to take the Key. But somebody may have already wanted the director out of the gallery.

SAM

The blackout wasn't planned.

TAYLOR

I know. The note could have been.

ALEX

Casey, when did you first see it?

CASEY

A few minutes before the storm got bad.

ALEX

Was it there when we came in?

CASEY

I don't think so. I walked past that area earlier.

BROOKE

So somebody could have left it while we were all looking around.

RILEY

Which means somebody here could have written it.

PARKER

Or another museum employee.

RILEY

Right.

AVERY

Once we get the archive door open, the note may still be inside with the director.

ALEX

And then we can see what it says.

SCENE NINETEEN

SYDNEY

REMEMBERS

A distant BANG comes from behind the archive door.

SYDNEY

We really need to get them out.

AVERY

We will.

SYDNEY

I know.

Sydney hesitates.

SYDNEY

There's something else.

ALEX

What?

SYDNEY

From the blackout.

MORGAN

What did you hear?

SYDNEY

I didn't hear it. Somebody brushed past me.

DYLAN

I was on your other side.

SYDNEY

I know. This was on my right.

ALEX

Which direction were they going?

SYDNEY

Toward the key, I think.

MORGAN

That matches the footsteps.

SYDNEY

And something caught on my sleeve for a second.

BROOKE

What?

SYDNEY

Metal. Maybe.

MORGAN

Like a zipper? Or a watch?

RILEY

Can I say something?

BROOKE

You're going to anyway.

RILEY

I think Jamie looks the most guilty.

JAMIE

Thank you.

RILEY

Jamie broke the case.

JAMIE

Accidentally.

RILEY

And moved around during the blackout.

JAMIE

Also true.

RILEY

And had already hidden something in the museum.

JAMIE

A fake spider.

RILEY

Still hidden.

CASEY

I look pretty bad too.

BROOKE

You actually took museum property.

CASEY

A paper tag.

BROOKE

Still.

TAYLOR

Quinn knows the museum better than any of us.

QUINN

Knowing things is not suspicious.

PARKER

I know but-

TAYLOR

Reese researched the Key.

REESE

So did you.

TAYLOR

Also true.

BROOKE

Alex is carrying a detective notebook and seems oddly prepared for there to be a crime.

ALEX

I brought a notebook to a museum.

JAMIE

It does say "Case Files."

PARKER

The point is that several people look suspicious for completely different reasons.

ALEX

Which is why nobody gets accused until we have enough evidence.

RILEY

What if we missed something?

BROOKE

We probably did.

RILEY

That's encouraging.

BROOKE

There were sixteen of us trying to see in the dark.

JOY

Not just sixteen.

Joy looks out toward the audience.

CAMERON

They were here too.

The students gradually turn toward the audience.

PARKER

Technically, they've seen everything we have.

BROOKE

Maybe more. They weren't busy arguing.

ALEX

Then maybe they can help.

SYDNEY

How?

ALEX

Questions.

BROOKE

Ask us where we were.

CASEY

Ask what we were doing before the blackout.

MORGAN

Ask what we noticed.

TAYLOR

Ask what we think happened.

PARKER

And ask for evidence. Look through these photos and records.

JOY

Then decide who you believe.

REESE

Because one of us knows exactly what happened to the Hawthorne Key.

Alex looks around the group.

ALEX

And before this night is over , we're going to find out who.

BLACKOUT.

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

ALEX

We asked you to look at the evidence, ask questions, and decide who you think took the Hawthorne Key.

BROOKE

Some of you had very specific questions.

CASEY

A lot of them were for me.

JAMIE

Same.

PARKER

That probably means both of you looked suspicious.

JAMIE

I did accidentally break open the case. I understand the concern.

ALEX

According to the audience, the person with the most votes is...

ALEX announces whichever character actually received the most audience votes. Allow the cast to react naturally.

REESE

That still doesn't make them guilty.

PARKER

Correct. It just means that's who the audience suspects.

DYLAN

And there are still things we haven't explained.

MORGAN

The director.

AVERY

We should deal with that first.

SAM

Agreed.

QUINN

There's an emergency release near the archive door.

AVERY

I saw it when we were checking the lock earlier.

CASEY

Then let's use it.

SYDNEY

Together.

SAM

Together.

SCENE TWO

THE DIRECTOR

They approach the archive door.

AVERY

There.

AVERY points to the emergency release.

CASEY

Can I press it?

AVERY

This time, yes.

CASEY presses it. A click. SAM opens the door.

SAM

Director?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

(offstage)

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Thank goodness.

The students visibly relax.

SYDNEY

Are you okay?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I'm fine. When the power failed, the electronic lock reset and I couldn't open the door from inside.

The director notices the broken display.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

What happened out here?

Everyone looks toward Jamie.

JAMIE

That part is mostly me.

ALEX

Jamie accidentally hit the pedestal during the blackout. The case broke open.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

And the Key?

Silence.

ALEX

Missing.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Missing?

ALEX

We think someone took it after the case broke.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

No one leaves the gallery until it's found.

AVERY

We also wanted to ask about the note you received.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The note?

CASEY

Before you went into the archive.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Oh. That was from our collections assistant. She left it before heading downstairs. She wanted me to check an accession number in the Hawthorne files before the preview ended.

Beat.

TAYLOR

So nobody lured you in there.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

No.

PARKER

That eliminates one theory.

TAYLOR

Fine.

ALEX

And the blackout was just the storm.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Yes.

MORGAN

So whoever took the Key didn't know the lights were going to go out.

PARKER

Which means the theft probably wasn't planned that way.

ALEX

Someone saw the opportunity after the case broke.

Reese looks down.

SCENE THREE

STARTING OVER

SAM

Then we start again from the moment Jamie hit the pedestal.

JOY

The lights were already out.

CAMERON

Jamie moved toward the brochure stand.

JAMIE

And backed into the Key pedestal.

MORGAN

The case fell.

SYDNEY

Then somebody moved past me.

MORGAN

Toward the east side.

BROOKE

The same side as the Navigation Collection.

REESE

That doesn't prove anything.

PARKER

No. But it gives us somewhere to search.

SAM

Then let's search.

SCENE FOUR

THE KEY

The students spread out carefully through the east side of the gallery.

AVERY

Don't move anything unless we have to.

CASEY

You really do make everything sound like instructions.

AVERY

Right now, that's useful.

DYLAN

Nothing under the bench.

JOY

Nothing behind this case.

CAMERON

Same here.

BROOKE

Riley, what are you doing?

RILEY

I saw something shiny.

BROOKE

That is part of the display.

RILEY

Okay.

MORGAN

Wait.

Everyone stops.

MORGAN

Behind the Navigation Collection.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Don't touch it.

*The director carefully retrieves the HAWTHORNE KEY.
Reaction.*

QUINN

You found it.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

It doesn't appear damaged.

DYLAN

It was hidden.

PARKER

Which means somebody carried it from the broken display to this side of the gallery.

TAYLOR

And hid it beside the exact collection Reese had been researching.

Eyes shift toward Reese.

REESE

That could have been done to make me look guilty.

BROOKE

It could have.

RILEY

It could?

BROOKE

Yes.

RILEY

I don't like how many things could be things.

SCENE FIVE

THE STAR CHARM

MORGAN

There's still the charm.

MORGAN produces the small silver star charm.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

May I see that?

Morgan hands it over. The director studies it closely.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Where did you get this?

BROOKE

It was found beside the broken Key display.

RILEY

We think it belongs to Reese.

Reese looks uncomfortable.

REESE

Allegedly.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Reese... where did you get it?

REESE

Fine- My grandmother gave it to me.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

What was her name?

Beat.

REESE

Margaret Thompson.

The director looks at Reese.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Margaret Thompson was part of the Hawthorne family.

Silence.

BROOKE

What?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Her family is the one that returned the Hawthorne Key to the museum.

RILEY

Reese is related to Elias Hawthorne?

REESE

Yes.

BROOKE

That seems like fairly important information.

REESE

I know.

SCENE SIX

THE FAMILY CONNECTION

ALEX

Why didn't you tell us?

REESE

Because my family didn't want our name involved.

My grandmother died last year. When my mom and aunt were cleaning out her house, they found the Key inside an old family box.

QUINN

That's where it had been?

REESE

As far as we know.

DYLAN

How did your family end up with it?

REESE

Elias Hawthorne had a daughter named Clara.

QUINN

Clara Hawthorne.

REESE

She was my great-great-grandmother.

REESE

After Elias died, some of his personal things stayed with Clara instead of going to the museum. The Key was one of them.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The museum records from that period are incomplete, so for decades it was assumed the Key had disappeared from the collection.

AVERY

But it may never have been in the museum's possession after Hawthorne died.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Exactly.

BROOKE

And the star?

Reese looks toward the charm.

REESE

That was Clara's too.

JOY

The same star that's on the Key.

REESE

Yes.

ALEX

You knew they were connected.

REESE

I knew my grandmother thought they were.

SCENE SEVEN

"THE STAR BELONGS WITH THE KEY"

TAYLOR

What did your grandmother tell you?

REESE

Mostly family stories. She used to say Clara told her children that Elias left behind something no one ever found.

QUINN

The missing collection.

REESE

Maybe.

REESE

And whenever she showed me the charm, she always said the same thing. "The star belongs with the Key."

BROOKE

That sounds pretty specific.

REESE

I thought she meant they belonged together because they were both family things.

MORGAN

Maybe she meant it literally.

Everyone looks at Morgan.

ALEX

What do you mean?

Morgan takes the Key and star charm into view without touching them together yet.

MORGAN

Look at the teeth.

QUINN

There are gaps.

AVERY

Three of them.

PARKER

Those aren't chips.

MORGAN

No.

Morgan holds the charm beside one of the gaps.

MORGAN

That one is shaped like the star.

Silence.

SAM

Let me try.

Sam carefully places the STAR CHARM into the matching gap in the Key's teeth. CLICK. It fits perfectly.

REESE

Oh my gosh.

QUINN

It's part of the Key.

AVERY

Not decoration.

PARKER

A missing tooth.

ALEX

Which means the Key never worked because it wasn't complete.

SCENE EIGHT

TREE. STAR. FEATHER.

JOY

There are two spaces left.

CAMERON

Tree and feather.

TAYLOR

Three symbols. Three pieces.

AVERY

And earlier we connected them to three of Hawthorne's collections.

SAM

Tree was Natural History.

MORGAN

Star was Navigation.

BROOKE

Feather was Correspondence.

QUINN

There are small Hawthorne objects in all three collections.

SAM

Then we look.

SAM

Carefully.

CASEY

Yes, we know.

AVERY

You especially.

The group splits into nearby exhibit areas.

SCENE NINE

THE TREE

QUINN and AVERY search through information near the Natural History collection.

QUINN

There's an object I've seen here before.

AVERY

What kind?

QUINN

A little carved wooden tree. Nobody knows what it was used for.

SAM

Where?

QUINN

This case.

They locate a tiny tree-shaped metal or wooden piece.

SAM

That's catalogued as a Hawthorne family token.

JOY

Does the back look like the star?

The director examines it.

SAM

It does.

AVERY

Try it.

The TREE PIECE is placed into another gap. CLICK.

JOY

Two.

SCENE TEN

THE FEATHER

BROOKE

Then the feather should be in Correspondence.

RILEY

Letters.

QUINN

Hawthorne's writing case.

CASEY

Where is that?

QUINN

Over here.

They move.

CAMERON

There's a feather on the case.

MORGAN

Not on it.

Beat.

MORGAN

Attached to it.

The director carefully examines a tiny feather-shaped piece that had long been treated as ornamentation.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

This has been catalogued as part of the writing case for decades.

PARKER

But it comes off.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Apparently.

The FEATHER PIECE is removed carefully and fitted into the final opening in the Key. CLICK. The Key is now complete.

QUINN

Look at the teeth.

AVERY

Now they make a full pattern.

ALEX

That's why none of the locks worked.

PARKER

They were trying an incomplete Key.

SCENE ELEVEN

BROOKE

There's still the other mystery.

Reese knows what Brooke means.

REESE

I know.

ALEX

The missing Key.

PARKER

Being related to Hawthorne doesn't prove Reese took it.

ALEX

No.

MORGAN

But the bracelet does more than we thought.

Morgan gestures toward Reese's wrist.

MORGAN

The ring where the star charm was attached is bent open.

SYDNEY

And something caught on my sleeve when somebody ran past me.

Sydney shows the small snag in the sleeve.

MORGAN

The charm was found beside the broken display.

ALEX

Reese was standing near the case when it fell.

BROOKE

Then someone ran toward the east gallery.

SYDNEY

Past me.

ALEX

The bracelet caught on Sydney's sleeve.

MORGAN

And the Key was hidden beside the Navigation Collection.

ALEX

The same place Reese had researched before tonight.

PARKER

That's no longer just one suspicious thing.

Reese says nothing.

ALEX

I don't think you planned the storm.

REESE

I didn't.

Silence. Reese realizes what she has admitted.

BROOKE

You didn't?

Reese looks at the group.

SCENE TWELVE

THE TRUTH

REESE

No.

Beat.

REESE

I took it.

Reaction.

SYDNEY

You actually did?

REESE

Jamie hit the pedestal. The case broke. The Key fell almost right in front of me.

REESE

I had been thinking about it all night.

REESE

About the photograph. About the star. About what my grandmother used to say.

REESE

And suddenly the Key was just lying there.

ALEX

So you grabbed it.

REESE

Yes.

REESE

I thought if I could get to the Navigation Collection, maybe I could finally figure out what the star meant.

REESE

Then the emergency lights came on.

MORGAN

So you hid it.

REESE

Behind the exhibit.

REESE

I thought I could come back for it later.

PARKER

But everybody started investigating.

REESE

Immediately.

Reese looks at Alex.

REESE

Very immediately.

ALEX

That part I'm not apologizing for.

REESE

Fair.

AVERY

Why didn't you just tell the museum about the charm?

REESE

Because I wanted to be the one who figured it out.

Beat.

REESE

My whole life, that story belonged to my family. Then we returned the Key, and suddenly everyone else was studying it.

REESE

I kept thinking that maybe my grandmother had already given me the answer and nobody else knew it.

REESE

I wanted to prove she was right.

BROOKE

And get there first.

REESE

Yes.

REESE

That too.

SCENE THIRTEEN

WHAT DOES THE COMPLETE KEY OPEN?

The MUSEUM DIRECTOR holds the completed Key.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

We now know why the Key never worked.

SAM

We still don't know what it opens.

TAYLOR

Tree. Star. Feather.

JOY

Three collections.

CAMERON

Maybe they weren't only telling us where to find the pieces.

MORGAN

Maybe they also tell us where the lock is.

SAM

What connects all three collections?

Everyone thinks.

QUINN

Hawthorne.

AVERY

His portrait.

*They look toward the large portrait of ELIAS
HAWTHORNE that has been visible the entire show.*

CASEY

Why the portrait?

AVERY

It's the only thing in this gallery representing
Hawthorne himself instead of one of his collections.

MORGAN

And look at the frame.

*They approach. At the bottom of the portrait is a
decorative brass plate.*

JOY

That doesn't look like a keyhole.

MORGAN

Not from here.

JOY

Wait.

The director examines it.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

There is an opening behind the center ornament.

QUINN

That has always been there.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Apparently none of us knew what it was.

PARKER

Try the Key.

*The director inserts the completed Hawthorne Key. It
fits. A heavy CLICK. The portrait shifts slightly away
from the wall. The students react.*

SAM

Okay.

TAYLOR

That was worth waiting for.

SCENE FOURTEEN

HAWTHORNE'S LAST COLLECTION

*Behind the portrait is a hidden compartment. Inside is
a beautiful old wooden box.*

JOY

There's something in there.

JOY

A box.

*The director carefully removes it and places it where
everyone can see.*

REESE

Is that the collection?

QUINN

Open it.

*The director opens the box. Inside are not jewels or
gold. There are photographs. Small notes. A ribbon. A
pressed flower. A tiny toy. A child's drawing. A theatre
ticket. A birthday card. A family photograph. The
students grow quiet.*

BROOKE

What is all that?

JOY

Personal things.

QUINN

They belonged to Clara.

Reese steps closer.

REESE

Clara?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I think so.

The director carefully lifts a small drawing.

JOY

This says, "For Papa."

Reese smiles faintly.

JOY

He kept all of it.

MORGAN

Every little thing.

REESE

My grandmother used to keep things like that.

BROOKE

Mine does too.

DYLAN

Everybody's family probably has a box like this somewhere.

PARKER

Just usually not hidden behind a museum portrait.

SCENE FIFTEEN

THE LETTER

The director finds a sealed envelope inside.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

There's a letter.

REESE

To who?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Clara.

The group becomes still.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

May I?

Reese nods. The director opens it.

JOY

"My dear Clara, People will remember this museum for the things inside its cases. They will measure their worth by age, rarity, and history. But these are the things I could never place behind glass. A flower you picked for me. The first picture you drew of our house. The ribbon you wore to your first dance. A ticket from the afternoon we saw your favorite play twice because you insisted we had missed the best part."

Small smiles around the group.

JOY

"They may seem ordinary to anyone else. To me, they are my most valuable collection."

Reese looks at the objects.

JOY

"One day, people may forget why these little things mattered. That is the danger with history. We remember the important dates and important names, and forget that a life is mostly made of smaller moments."

The room is quiet.

JOY

"Keep the things that remind you who you loved, where you came from, and the people who helped make you who you are. Those are the pieces worth saving."

The director lowers the letter.

SCENE SIXTEEN

THE REAL TREASURE

Reese looks into the box.

REESE

All this time I thought he was hiding something valuable.

MORGAN

He was.

Reese looks at Morgan. Then back at the box.

REESE

Yeah.

ALEX

Just not the kind we expected.

QUINN

The whole museum is full of things Hawthorne collected.

AVERY

But this is the collection he kept for himself.

JOY

The one that mattered to him.

PARKER

That actually explains why he made the Key so complicated.

SAM

He didn't want just anybody opening it.

TAYLOR

He wanted the pieces to stay with the things they represented.

ALEX

And one stayed with his family.

Everyone looks toward Reese.

REESE

The star.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

THE STAR GOES HOME

The director carefully removes the Tree, Star, and Feather pieces from the Key. The TREE and FEATHER are set with the museum objects. The director holds the STAR CHARM.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Reese.

Reese steps forward.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The Tree belongs to the Hawthorne collection.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The Feather belongs with his writing case.

The director holds out the star.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

But this was given to Clara.

REESE

Don't you need it for the Key?

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

We know what the Key opens now.

Beat.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The star belongs with your family.

Reese accepts it.

REESE

Thank you.

Reese carefully attaches or holds the charm against the bracelet.

BROOKE

Maybe use a stronger clasp this time.

Reese looks at her.

REESE

Definitely.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

CASE CLOSED

ALEX

So.

ALEX opens the notebook.

ALEX

The storm caused the blackout.

JAMIE

I tried to retrieve a fake spider and accidentally knocked over the Key display.

CASEY

Which broke the case open.

MORGAN

Reese took the Key.

SYDNEY

Then passed me going toward the east gallery.

BROOKE

The bracelet caught on Sydney's sleeve.

MORGAN

The star charm came off beside the display.

QUINN

And Reese hid the Key

REESE

Correct.

PARKER

The note had nothing to do with the theft.

TAYLOR

I was wrong about that.

Everyone looks at Taylor.

TAYLOR

It happens occasionally.

AVERY

The museum couldn't use the Key because three pieces of its teeth were missing.

SAM

Tree, Star, Feather.

JOY

And when all three pieces came together—

CAMERON

—we found Hawthorne's last collection.

DYLAN

Which was a box of family stuff.

JOY

You make that sound less exciting than it was.

DYLAN

I mean it in a good way.

JOY

Sometimes the simplest objects tell the best stories.

ALEX

And after almost ninety years, the Hawthorne Key mystery is finally solved.

QUINN

Not bad for a student preview.

SYDNEY

I would still prefer the next one to have fewer blackouts.

JAMIE

And spiders.

ALEX

Case closed.

Beat. The cheesy DINOSAUR ROAR plays. Everyone slowly looks toward JAMIE.

JAMIE

I didn't touch it.

ROAR.

JAMIE

Seriously.

BLACKOUT.

END