

ACT ONE

The stage is dark. Outside a storm is raging.

As the LIGHTNING FLASHES and the THUNDER CRACKS, we catch a few glimpses of the room. This is the library at Westmount Manor, a dark, foreboding house, the type they don't build anymore.

The library is a large, old-fashioned room, full of dark corners and shadows. The back wall is covered by built-in bookcases. A large portrait of SIMON WEST hangs on the wall. The room contains the usual furniture, chairs, a desk, a couch, etc. A door to the left opens out into the entry foyer.

The room appears to be deserted, until FLASHES OF LIGHTNING illuminate a mysterious, androgynous figure, standing alone in the room. This is TALBOT.

An, OMINOUS DOOR CHIME SOUNDS. When the lightning flashes again, TALBOT is gone.

After a moment, TALBOT re-enters the room and begins to turn on the lamps. She is escorting MR. CROSBY.

TALBOT

This way, Mr. Crosby.

MR. CROSBY

I hope this rain stops soon.

TALBOT

It will not.

MR. CROSBY

Well, this old place looks just the same as I remember it.

TALBOT

It should. Nothing has been changed in twenty years.

MR. CROSBY

You've done your job well. I don't know how you've managed living here, all alone.

TALBOT

I have had my friends to keep me company, my friends from the shadow world.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, you believe in ghosts, do you?

TALBOT

I do not believe. I know. There are spirits all around us. Some are good. Some are evil.

MR. CROSBY

Nonsense. It's just your nerves getting the best of you, spending all these years here, alone.

TALBOT

It is not nerves. It is the gift. My mother had it. My grandmother had it. All the females in my family have it, dating back to the time of Bridget Bishop. She was burned alive in Salem.

The LIGHTNING FLASHES and THE THUNDER CRACKS.

MR. CROSBY

Well, never mind. In a few minutes, the house will be full of people and all the spooks will vanish.

TALBOT

How many heirs are coming?

MR. CROSBY opens a safe, hidden behind a painting.

MR. CROSBY

Six. All the surviving relatives. That reminds me, your job as guardian of this house will be up tonight. What are you going to do?

TALBOT

That depends. If I like the new Master, I will stay.

MR. CROSBY removes a stack of envelopes from the safe.

MR. CROSBY

Well, here it is . . . the will. All three envelopes. They've been locked in that safe, undisturbed for the last twenty years, just as Mr. West sealed and marked them.

(Examining the envelopes.)

Wait. These envelopes have been opened, all of them. The wax seals have been cut away and glued back together again. Someone has opened that safe and read the will.

TALBOT

How could they? Nobody knows how to open that safe, but you.

MR. CROSBY

Well, I didn't do it.

TALBOT

Why would someone go to all that trouble?

MR. CROSBY

There's a lot of money at stake.

TALBOT

What do you think they were trying to do, change the will?

MR. CROSBY

I don't know. Money can have a strange effect on people.

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TALBOT

You do not have to tell me. I have seen it happen before. The night he died, those relatives came scurrying out of the woodwork, like rats in search of sustenance. And now, a whole new batch is swooping in here, like a wake of vultures, ready to pick the carcass clean.

The LIGHTNING FLASHES and the THUNDER CRACKS.

MR. CROSBY

Well, if the will has been changed, it won't do any good. There's a duplicate one, per Mr. West's instructions. It's locked in the vault of the Empire Trust Company, and if this one has been tampered with, I'll know it, and I'll know who did it.

(The DOORBELL CHIMES.)

See who that is. And, don't say a word about this.

TALBOT exits.

MR. CROSBY crosses upstage and starts examining the bookcases. As he hears TALBOT returning, he resumes his original position.

TALBOT enters and escorts HARRISON into the room.

HARRISON

(Extending his hand)

How are you Mr. Crosby? Oh, excuse my wet hand. It's raining cats and dogs out there.

MR. CROSBY

Hello, Harrison. Did you come up on the train?

HARRISON

No, I drove. Lucky, I left when I did. Parts of the road are starting to flood out. Am I the first of the pack?

MR. CROSBY

Yes. The others should be here shortly.

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HARRISON

How many besides myself?

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MR. CROSBY

Five. All the heirs.

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HARRISON

So, this is the old man's library?

MR. CROSBY

Yes. Haven't you been here before?

HARRISON

No, why do you ask?

MR. CROSBY
(Glancing at the will in his hands)

Well, someone has.

HARRISON

I'm not sure what you mean.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, nothing.

HARRISON
(Noticing Talbot)

I don't mean to be rude, but is she just going to just stand there?

TALBOT glares at HARRISON and then leaves the room.

MR. CROSBY

You've offended her. Don't you know who she is?

HARRISON

I don't know what she is.

MR. CROSBY

She's Mr. West's oldest and most trusted servant. He's kept her on the payroll for the past twenty years. He relied on her for all matters, business, personal and spiritual.

HARRISON

Well, if I have any say, she won't be here much longer. Is that the will?

MR. CROSBY

Yes, but it can't be read until all the heirs are assembled.

HARRISON

If you ask me, this is all just a little too melodramatic.

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MR. CROSBY

Mr. West was very specific. Everyone must be present.

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HARRISON

Obviously, he was nuts.

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MR. CROSBY

Have you no respect for a dead relative?

HARRISON

Not unless he has made me the sole heir. Come on Mr. Crosby, you have to admit that this is all a bit strange.

MR. CROSBY

He was a little eccentric.

HARRISON

Eccentric? He was crazy! Why did he want a twenty year old will read to his heirs, at midnight, in this room? Why not in the daytime in your office? Why not save us all a lot of time and handle it with a conference call or Skype? Why drag us all out here in the middle of nowhere, to a place that looks like something out of an Agatha Christie novel?

MR. CROSBY

Mr. West stipulated that this will should be read, in this room, at the very hour of his death. One of his whims.

HARRISON

Whims. Hell, everyone knows that insanity runs in this family.

MR. CROSBY

That remains to be seen.

The THUNDER CRACKS.

HARRISON

It's really coming down out there. What happens if I'm the only one that shows? Does that mean that I inherit-

MR. CROSBY

(Cutting him off)

They'll be here.

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The THUNDER CRACKS.

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HARRISON

If this keeps up, I may not get out of here tonight.

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MR. CROSBY

Oh, it's all been settled. You'll all be staying here at Westmount for the night. Talbot will see that you are comfortable.

TALBOT opens the door.

TALBOT

They are starting to arrive.

TALBOT leads ASHLEY and MARY into the room.

MR. CROSBY

Come in, Come in. How do you do, Miss. Roberts?

MARY

It's late and I'm wet.

MR. CROSBY

I'm sorry. And, you must be Ashley. I'm Mr. Crosby.

ASHLEY

Oh, nice to meet ya' You don't look at all like I had pictured. From your voice on the phone, I thought you'd be much younger.

MR. CROSBY

Well, you're just as I imagined.

(To Mary)

I didn't realize you two were traveling together.

MARY

We weren't. We met at the train station.

ASHLEY

Can you believe it? Two days in a bus and eight hours on the train and we both ended up on same platform at the same time. Lucky, I overheard her tryin' to get a cab.

MARY

Of course there was none to be found. Only Simon West would be idiot enough to drag people out at this hour, in this weather to this godforsaken town.

ASHLEY

Jack gave us a ride.

MR. CROSBY

Jack? Who's Jack.

MARY

A complete stranger. We got in the car with a complete stranger.

ASHLEY

He was our Uber driver. He's a cutie. He's gonna be a vegetarian.

MARY

A veterinarian.

ASHLEY

Same thing.

MARY

We were lucky we weren't killed.

ASHLEY

(Seeing Harrison)

Hi. I don't think we've been introduced.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, I'm sorry. Let me introduce you. Mr. Harrison Blythe, this is Mrs. Ashley Hopwood and Miss Mary Roberts.

MARY

So, you are Harrison Blythe.

HARRISON

Guilty.

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ASHLEY

I feel like we've met before. You ever been to Galesburg?

HARRISON

No.

ASHLEY

You sure? I'm pretty good at faces.

HARRISON

I'm sure.

ASHLEY

You look so familiar.

MARY

You probably don't recognize him with his clothes on. He's an underwear model.

HARRISON

Among other things.

MARY

(To Mr. Crosby)

I have internet.

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ASHLEY

OMG, you're the Prosciutto Underwear Man!

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HARRISON

Pacchetto.

ASHLEY

Same thing. Your picture is hangin' in the lunchroom at Nails and Tails. That's where I work. It's a combination nail salon and pet groomers. My boss Staci-Lynn is in love with you.

HARRISON

I'm flattered.

ASHLEY

Well, why wouldn't she be? You've got an amazing . . .

MARY

(Cutting her off)

Ashley!

ASHLEY

She will never believe this. I tell you, she's gonna flip her fanny. Can I get a picture with you?

HARRISON

Sure.

ASHLEY takes out her phone and snaps a selfie with
HARRISON.

ASHLEY

Thanks. This will throw her over the edge.

MARY

I couldn't quite figure out how we are connected, Mr. Blythe. Did you know my Great Aunt Eleanor?

HARRISON

No, Miss Roberts. I didn't know your Great Aunt Eleanor.

ASHLEY

Me, neither.

MARY

Well, she's . . .

HARRISON

I'm sure this is very fascinating, but why delve into ancient history?

MARY

But, I . . .

HARRISON

Aunt Eleanor and I are somehow related, correct?

MARY

Correct.

HARRISON

So, let's let it go at that.

MARY

Mr. Blythe, just because God has graced you with a handsome face . . .

ASHLEY

And, body.

MARY

That doesn't give you the right to be rude.

MR. CROSBY

Don't pay any attention to him. I'm sure he didn't mean anything.

HARRISON

I'm sorry. It's just late and I'm hungry and tired. Forgive me?

ASHLEY

Of course.

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HARRISON

(To Mary)

What do you say, "Friends?"

MARY

"Relatives." You know, ever since we came in here, I have had the strangest feeling, like someone is peering at me. Look at that painting. I think the eyes have moved.

MR. CROSBY

Nonsense. That's Mr. West.

ASHLEY

He was a handsome man.

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MARY

He was an idiot. Why is it so dark in here?

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TALBOT

The master liked dim lighting. It calmed his nerves.

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MARY

This house is haunted, I just know it. I can feel it in my bones.

TALBOT

Ah ha! You also have the gift. I sensed it when you came in the door.

MARY

What?

TALBOT

There are spirits all around you. That feeling means that someone in the other world is trying to tell you something.

MR. CROSBY

What are you trying to do, Talbot? Frighten her to death?

HARRISON

Nonsense, no one has ever been frightened to death.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, it has happened. Lots of people have lost their minds, sometimes their lives, through fright.

TALBOT

Hillcrest is full of such cases.

MR. CROSBY

That's the hospital on the other end of the ravine.

TALBOT

It is an asylum.

HARRISON

Well, I don't believe it.

The DOORBELL CHIMES and TALBOT exits.

MARY

Oh, I wish I hadn't come. You heard what she said about those spirits. I want to go home.

HARRISON

Oh, don't worry. Come and sit down.

ASHLEY

You'll protect us, won't you Harry?

HARRISON

Of course I will.

ASHLEY

See, Cousin Mary? He's strong and handsome. Sit down.

MARY

I don't want to sit down.

As MARY sits, TALBOT opens the door and admits CHARLES.

CHARLES

(Holding out his hand)

Hello. You must be Mr. Crosby. I'm Charlie. I hope I'm not late.

TALBOT leaves.

MR. CROSBY

Hello, Charlie. Miss Mary Roberts and Mrs. Ashley Hopwood, this is Charles Willard.

ASHLEY

I didn't know I had such handsome relatives.

CHARLES

And, I didn't know I had such charming ones.

MARY

We'll see if you still feel the same way after that will is read.

MR. CROSBY

And, this is Harrison Blythe.

HARRISON

Nice to meet you, Charles.

CHARLES

Call me Charlie.

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