

THE VULTURES was the winner of the 2018 Jewel Box Theatre Original Playwriting Award, Jewel Box Theatre, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Chuck Tweed, Producing Director

THE VULTURES received staged readings by Three Cat Productions (Chicago, IL), Khaos Company Theatre (Indianapolis, IN), and The Downeaster Theatre (Lansing, MI).

In 2018, THE VULTURES was produced by The Florentine Players, a community theatre company in Omaha, Nebraska, Derek Kowal, President

The first professional production of The Vultures occurred on May 24, 2019 by The Evolution Theatre Company in Columbus Ohio, with the following cast and crew:

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Talbot ..... \**Mark Phillips Schwamberger*  
Mr. Crosby ..... \**Tom Holliday*  
Harrison Blythe ..... \**Leland Leger*  
Mary Roberts ..... *Sonda Staley*  
Ashley Hopwood ..... *Carolyn Demanelis*  
Charles Willard ..... *William Darby IV*  
Paul Jones ..... *Davion T. Brown*  
Hunter West ..... *Scott Risner*  
Rinehart ..... *Mike Gwydion Ream*  
Dr. Avery ..... *David Johnson*

#### PRODUCTION CREW

Director ..... *David S. Harewood*  
Stage Manager /Light Board Operator ..... \*\**Lauren Wong*  
Scenic Designer ..... *Katherine Wexler*  
Lighting Designer ..... *Caroline Dittamo*  
Sound Designer / Sound Operator ..... *Riley Galvin*  
Costume Designer ..... *Dayton E. Willison*  
Set Construction ..... *Michael Bynes*  
Box Office / Intern ..... *Jarrod Turnbull*  
Assistant Stage Manager ..... *Isabel Bagley*  
Producer ..... *Lane Schlicher*  
Artistic Director, Evolution Theatre ..... \**Mark Phillips Schwamberger*

\*Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association

\*\*Denotes working under Actors' Equity contract.



# ***THE VULTURES***

Written by Mark A. Ridge

## ACT ONE

The stage is dark.

As the audience is being seated, the SOUND of a STORM can be heard. As the storm approaches, the SOUND grows LOUDER and LOUDER.

A HUGE CRASH of THUNDER sounds, startling the audience.

As the LIGHTNING continues to FLASH and the THUNDER continues to CRACK, we catch a few glimpses of the room. This is the library at Westmount Manor, a dark, foreboding house, and 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 couch, a desk, a portable bar, etc. A door to the left opens out into the entrance hall.

The room appears to be deserted, until FLASHES OF LIGHTNING illuminate a mysterious figure. 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.

This way, Mr. Crosby.

TALBOT

I hope this rain stops soon.

MR. CROSBY

It will not.

TALBOT

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

MR. CROSBY

It should. Nothing has been changed in twenty years.

TALBOT

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

MR. CROSBY

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 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

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 opens the safe and removes a stack of envelopes.

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 seals are broken. 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.

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 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.

As TALBOT exits, MR. CROSBY crosses upstage and starts examining the bookcases. When he hears TALBOT again, he returns to his original position.

TALBOT escorts HARRISON into the room.

HARRISON

*(Extending his hand)*

How are you Mr. Crosby? Oh, excuse my wet hand. It's pouring 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.

HARRISON

How many besides myself?

MR. CROSBY

Five. All the heirs.

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 stand there?

TALBOT glares at HARRISON and then exits.

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.

MR. CROSBY

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

HARRISON

Obviously, he was nuts.

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.

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.

The THUNDER CRACKS.

HARRISON

I don't know. That bridge was almost under water. If this keeps up, we may not get out tonight.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, it's been settled. You'll all be staying here at Westmount for the night.

TALBOT opens the door and leads ASHLEY and MARY into the room.

TALBOT

They are starting to arrive.

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 met.

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.

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.

ASHLEY

OMG, you're the Prosciutto Underwear Man!

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

Well, he has! Staci-Lynn 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 photo 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

*(Cutting her off)*

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

MARY

But, I . . .

HARRISON

*(Cutting her off)*

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

*(Cutting her off)*

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.

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.

MARY

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

TALBOT

The master liked dim lighting. It calmed his nerves.

MARY

Oh, 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

No one has ever been frightened to death.

MR. CROSBY

Oh, it has happened before and you know it. 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.

MR. CROSBY

Welcome to Westmount, Charles.

CHARLES

*(Holding out his hand)*

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

TALBOT leaves.

MR. CROSBY

Right on time. 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.

HARRISON

Nice to meet you, Charlie. And you can call me Harry.

CHARLES

How about this weather? I wasn't sure I was even going to make it up the hill. Any chance a guy could get a drink, something to warm me up?

MR. CROSBY

Certainly, I'll ring for Talbot.

MARY

Must you?

MR. CROSBY pulls the cord, signaling TALBOT.

MR. CROSBY

She's really very nice. You'll grow to like her.

MARY

Highly doubtful.

TALBOT enters.

TALBOT

You rang?

MR. CROSBY

Yes, thank you, Talbot. Would you mind getting a few glasses for our guests?

TALBOT

Of course. Mr. West's wine cellar is still intact, just as he left it. And, there is brandy and whiskey in those decanters.

CHARLES

Anything will do.

HARRISON

You can say that again.

*(To Ashley)*

How about you?

ASHLEY

I'm easy.

MARY

Obviously.

HARRISON

And you? Something to take the edge off?

MARY

There's not enough liquor in the world.

TALBOT begins to remove glasses from the bar.

CHARLES

When are you going to read the will, Mr. Crosby?

MR. CROSBY

As soon as the other two arrive.

CHARLES

Oh, that reminds me, I think I left one of them downstairs. Guy by the name of Jones.

MR. CROSBY

What's he doing down there?

CHARLES

Trying to clean himself up a bit. I think his cab got stuck in the mud and he helped push it out.

TALBOT sets the glasses on the liquor cabinet.

TALBOT

I will just leave these here. You can serve yourselves.

CHARLES

Thank you.

TALBOT

If you require anything else, I shall be right outside the door.

TALBOT exits.

HARRISON

She really brightens a room, doesn't she?

CHARLES and HARRISON make drinks.

MR. CROSBY

She's very nice.

CHARLES

*(Handing her a drink)*

Here you go.

ASHLEY

Oh, that's strong.

HARRISON

Cousin Mary, would you care for some?

MARY

Perhaps, a little.

CHARLIE pours her a drink. Before he can return the bottle, MARY finishes it and motions for another.

The door opens and TALBOT motions PAUL into the room.

PAUL

So, this is where everyone is.

MR. CROSBY

Hello, Paul. Glad to see you. Come in and make yourself comfortable. I'm Roger Crosby. We talked on the phone.

CHARLES

And, I'm Charlie. We almost met downstairs. We must be related somehow. Would you care for a drink?

PAUL

No, no thanks. Nice to meet you.

MR. CROSBY

And, here are some distant cousins you should know, Mrs. Ashley Hopwood and Miss Mary Roberts.

MARY

So, you're cousin Paul.

PAUL

Yes.

ASHLEY

Another cute one.

MARY

He's an accountant.

HARRISON

Fascinating.

PAUL

It is! I've always loved math. There's something beautiful about the logic of numbers and the concise information on a balance sheet or income or loss statement, don't you think?

ASHLEY

I don't know what you're talkin' about.

PAUL

You just can't beat the thrill of a positive cash flow or the creation of a successful budget.

HARRISON

*(To Mr. Crosby)*

I told you, insanity runs in the family.

MR. CROSBY

And, this is Harrison Blythe, another cousin.

PAUL

Nice to meet you. You look familiar. Hey, you're the Pacchetto Underwear Man!

HARRISON

That I am.

PAUL

I can't believe I'm related to The Pacchetto Underwear Man. Would you mind if I took a quick picture?

HARRISON

Why not?

PAUL takes out his phone and snaps a selfie with HARRISON.



TALBOT

*(Shouting)*

Listen!

*(Mary, Ashley and Paul scream.)*

There is a car coming up the drive, the sixth heir.

TALBOT exits.

ASHLEY

OK, she gives me the willies.

CHARLES

I didn't hear any car.

MARY

She's psychic. She's psychic and this house is haunted.

MR. CROSBY

Nonsense. The next thing you know, you'll be seeing ghosts.

PAUL

Well, personally, I've never seen a ghost, but I've felt kind of queer ever since I came into this house.

HARRISON

And, not before then?

MR. CROSBY

Mr. Blythe!

PAUL

I just meant that this place makes me a little uncomfortable.

MARY

Me, too.

CHARLES

If you're not comfortable here, what will you do if you inherit this place?

PAUL

I don't expect to inherit it. I never win anything. Of course, I do have a one in six chance. That would be about a 16.66666 percent chance, wouldn't it?

ASHLEY

I still have no idea what you are talkin' about.

TALBOT escorts HUNTER into the room.

HUNTER

Sorry, I'm late. It's really coming down out there. My car stalled out twice. I hope you weren't all waiting for me.

MARY

We had no choice.

MR. CROSBY

You made it, that's all that matters. Mrs. Ashley Hopwood, Miss Mary Roberts, this is Hunter West.

MARY

A hairstylist. I googled him, too.

ASHLEY

Nice to meet you.

HUNTER

It's nice to meet you.

MR. CROSBY

And, this is Charles Willard.

CHARLES

Hi, call me Charlie.

HARRISON

Can we speed this up a bit? I'm Harry Blythe. We're somehow related.

HUNTER

Hey, I recognize you. You're the Pacchetto Underwear Man!

HARRISON

Guilty.

HUNTER

I can't believe I'm related to the Pacchetto Underwear Man.

HARRISON

*(Standing up)*

I suppose you'd like a photo.

HUNTER

Why?

Embarrassed, HARRISON sits back down.

MR. CROSBY

And last, but not least . . .

HUNTER

*(Recognizing Paul)*

Paul. Paul Jones.

PAUL  
Hi, Hunter.

HUNTER  
Hi, Paul.

MR. CROSBY  
You two know each other?

HUNTER  
I wasn't sure he would remember. It was over ten years ago.

PAUL  
I remember.

HUNTER  
We met at a wedding.

PAUL  
*(Blushing)*  
I remember.

HUNTER  
I was hoping you would be here.

HARRISON  
Look, this is all very nice, but let's be honest. Even though we are related, after tonight, there's a pretty good chance we will never see each other again.

HUNTER  
*(To Paul)*  
I hope that's not true.

HARRISON  
We're gathered here tonight for one reason, and one reason only. Don't you think we should get on with it?

MR. CROSBY  
All right. If you'll all take a seat, we can begin.  
*(Everyone sits.)*

As you know, Simon Canby West died in this house, exactly twenty years ago tonight and he made me the executor of his estate. As you may not know, Mr. West was a very eccentric man and hated all of his living relatives.

HARRISON  
Lucky for us.

MR. CROSBY  
Not wishing any of them to enjoy the fortunes he amassed through his publishing company, Mr. West invested in Government bonds that matured in twenty years. At the end of that time, I was to assemble all his surviving relatives and read his will.

ASHLEY

'This is so excitin'!

MR. CROSBY

You six people are the last living descendants of Mr. Simon Canby West.

There is a huge FLASH of LIGHTNING and a large CRASH of THUNDER. The lights go out, leaving everyone in total darkness.

TALBOT

I was afraid this would happen.

MR. CROSBY

Don't anyone panic.

CHARLES

Why would we panic?

ASHLEY

It's dark in here. Why is it so dark?

MARY

Because the lights went out.

HUNTER

It's the storm, that's all.

HARRISON

Can someone pass me the vodka?

MR. CROSBY

Talbot, are there any candles?

TALBOT

Yes sir. I will find them.

HARRISON

Don't bother.

HARRISON takes out his phone and turns on the flashlight app. CHARLES, PAUL, HUNTER and ASHLEY do the same.

ASHLEY

Oh, this reminds me of sittin' around the campfire back home.

PAUL

I love camping.

ASHLEY

Me, too. Anyone know any ghost stories?

HARRISON

I'll bet Talbot does.

MR. CROSBY

Talbot, is there a generator in the house?

TALBOT

No.

MARY

Are we just going to sit here in the dark?

CHARLES

It looks like we have no choice.

TALBOT

The power will return shortly. It always does.

MARY

*(After a moment)*

Well, this is fun.

After a short silence, ASHLEY begins to sing.

ASHLEY

*(Singing)*

Ninety nine bottles of beer on the wall, ninety nine bottles of beer.

ASHLEY & PAUL

*(Singing)*

Take one down and pass it around . . .

MARY

Please!

PAUL stops singing.

ASHLEY

*(Singing)*

Ninety Nine Bottles of Beer on the wall.

*(After a moment of silence)*

Well, we can't just sit here doin' nothin'!

HUNTER

What do you suggest?

ASHLEY

Anyone want to play charades?

No. MARY

I will. PAUL

I am in hell. MARY

I'll go first. ASHLEY

It's a movie . . . PAUL  
*(Referring to Ashley's gestures)*

OK, pass me that bottle. CHARLES

It's one word. Face. PAUL  
*(Playing charades)*

Check. HUNTER

The LIGHTS come on again.

Oh, thank god. MARY

Maybe we should get back to business, in case we lose the lights again. HARRISON

Yes, let's all take our seats. MR. CROSBY

What about charades? ASHLEY

You won. MARY

Mr. Crosby, you can continue. CHARLES

The answer was JAWS. ASHLEY  
*(To Paul)*

MR. CROSBY

Here is the will in these three envelopes. I will now read the instructions on the envelope marked number one.

TALBOT

*(Yelling)*

Wait!

MARY, PAUL and ASHLEY scream.

MR. CROSBY

What is it?

TALBOT

Silence! Listen.

A strange GONG SOUNDS somewhere in the house.  
They all listen as the GONG STRIKES SEVEN TOLLS.

HUNTER

That was weird.

TALBOT

*(Yelling)*

Wait!

PAUL, MARY and ASHLEY scream.

HARRISON

*(To Paul)*

You've got to quit doing that.

PAUL

She's got to quit doing that.

ASHLEY

She scared me.

HARRISON

You scream like a girl.

ASHLEY

I am a girl.

HARRISON

Not you.

PAUL

Hey!

TALBOT begins to gurgle, moan and sway, as if in a trance.

CHARLES

*(To Talbot)*

Are you all right?

TALBOT

*(Speaking in a strange voice)*

Yes. Yes. I understand. Tell me.

MR. CROSBY

Talbot! Talbot, are you OK?

CHARLES

I think she's in some kind of trance.

TALBOT

*(In a trance)*

Yes, I hear you.

PAUL

OK, now she's staring to freak me out.

MARY

This house is haunted. I knew it. I just knew it.

TALBOT

*(In a trance)*

What are you trying to tell me?

ASHLEY

Is she possessed, like in that movie?

PAUL

I don't know.

TALBOT

*(In a trance)*

Tell me the name!

CHARLES

*(Waving his hands in front of her)*

Miss Talbot? Miss Talbot?

PAUL

If her head starts spinning around, I'm out of here.

ASHLEY

Is she gonna throw up?



TALBOT

*(Coming out of the trance)*

What? What is it?

MR. CROSBY

Are you all right? You appeared to be in some kind of . . .

TALBOT

It was the spirits. They use my body as a vessel.

ASHLEY

Oh, I hate that.

HUNTER

But, what was that noise?

TALBOT

That was a warning. That gong foretells death. The master heard it just before he died.

PAUL

OK. I've been thinking that there really isn't any use of my staying around here.

*(Taking out his phone)*

Maybe it's not too late to get a ride back.

HUNTER

No, you can't go.

PAUL

I can't seem to get a signal.

HUNTER

You don't believe in ghosts do you?

PAUL

No! No! Of course not! Do you?

MARY

I do.

ASHLEY

I'm startin' to.

HARRISON

Well, I don't.

PAUL

But, what about that gong?

MR. CROSBY

It's nothing. Probably an old grandfather's clock running somewhere in the house.

TALBOT

There is no clock running in this house.

MARY

I knew it. This place is haunted.

CHARLES

Nonsense.

TALBOT

The toll says seven may live.

PAUL

But, there are eight people in this room.

TALBOT

One must die before morning.

MARY

Oh, I feel faint.

PAUL

Me, too.

CHARLES

Pull yourself together.

PAUL

But, it's so hot in here. I need some air.

HARRISON

Quit your kidding and sit down.

HUNTER

Hey, don't touch him.

CHARLES

Mr. Crosby, can you please just go on with the will? We've had enough interruptions.

MR. CROSBY

Yes, we should. Everyone, please take a seat.

*(Reading)*

On, September 27, you will open this envelope and read its contents to such of my relatives as are assembled in my library at Westmount Manor. First, let my executor ask the prospective heirs assembled this night if they are willing to take what fortune offers them, and not question my judgment in the manner in which I shall dispose of my fortune. Is that clear? Any objections?

MARY

No, that's all right.