



THE VULTURES

WRITTEN BY

MARK A. RIDGE

BASED ON PUBLIC DOMAIN WORKS BY

JOHN WILLARD, MARY ROBERTS RINEHART AND AVERY HOPWOOD.



RIDGEPLAYS.COM

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

TALBOT (M/F) (146 Total Dialogues)
A dark, severe, androgynous being, who dresses in black and wears dark spectacles. Age unknown, probably somewhere between fifty and eighty.

MR. CROSBY (M) (115 Total Dialogues)
A friendly lawyer in his fifties or sixties.

HARRISON BLYTHE (M) (161 Total Dialogues)
A tall, handsome male model with an amazing body. He is in his mid thirties to early forties.

MARY ROBERTS (F) (170 Total Dialogues)
A stately, well dressed, bitter old woman, who appears to dislike everyone and everything. She is somewhere between fifty and seventy.

ASHLEY HOPWOOD (F) (109 Total Dialogues)
A young, perky, nail technician from the South in her twenties. She is a little loud, a little tacky and not too bright.

CHARLES WILLARD (M) (118 Total Dialogues)
A charming, mild mannered realtor in his thirties or forties.

PAUL JONES (M) (272 Total Dialogues)
A sweet, gentle accountant in his late twenties or early thirties.

HUNTER WEST (M) (375 Total Dialogues)
A friendly, charming male hairdresser in his late twenties or early thirties

RINEHART (M) (36 Total Dialogues)
A hospital guard in his thirties or forties. He is big and can be brutal.

DR. AVERY (M) (34 Total Dialogues)
A friendly, small town doctor in his sixties or seventies.

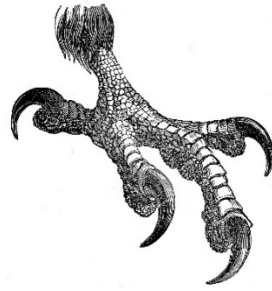
The action of *The Vultures* occurs over the course of a dark and stormy night in September, on the secluded estate of Simon West.

TIME: *The present*

ACT ONE
The library

ACT TWO
The master bedroom

ACT THREE
The library



PRODUCTION NOTES

For companies concerned about the marijuana usage in the play, alternate pages are included at the back of the script.

To avoid any confusion amongst the audience, double casting is not recommended.

The role of Talbot may be played by a male or female actor; however the character is a female and must be played as such. The role should not become a “man in drag” performance, one in which the audience is anxiously awaiting the moment he removes his wig and is revealed as a man. Talbot is a person of mystery. Ideally, the audience should leave the theatre never really knowing the sex of the actor, even if this requires the curtain call to be taken in character, or an ambiguous listing in the program.

*Sound can play a very important part in creating the atmosphere of *The Vultures*, especially with the rain and thunder effects. In addition, when Talbot is under her trances, dark, ominous music will add to the haunting effect.*

If desired, Talbot can be on stage for the preshow or a portion of it. Throughout the storm and before the start of the actual show, she can be standing stationary in a trance and communing with the spirit world.

*If technical issues necessitate, the end of Act One may be altered slightly. Instead of “The Hand” appearing above the back of the armchair, lightning may illuminate the standing, dark figure of the intruder, or the bookcase can open slightly and *The Hand* can be seen as it reaches out.*

THE VULTURES was the winner of the 2018 Original Playwrighting Competition at the 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 October of 2018, *THE VULTURES* was produced by The Florentine Players, a community theatre 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 *Jarrold Turnbull*
Assistant Stage Manager *Isabel Bagley*
Producer *Lane Schlicher*
Artistic Director **Mark Phillips Schwamberger*

*Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association or working under 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.}

{The room appears to be deserted, until FLASHES OF LIGHTNING illuminate a mysterious figure. This is TALBOT.}

{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.}

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

TALBOT: This way, Mr. Crosby.

{After a moment, TALBOT re-enters the room and begins to turn on the lamps. She is escorting 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 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 get stuck up here..

MR. CROSBY: Oh, it's already 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?

MARY: No.

PAUL: I will.

MARY: I am in hell.

ASHLEY: I'll go first.

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

CHARLES: OK, pass me that bottle.

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

HUNTER: Cheek.

{The LIGHTS come on again.}

MARY: Oh, thank god.

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

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

ASHLEY: What about charades?

MARY: You won.

CHARLES: Mr. Crosby, you can continue.

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

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 low, demonic 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: *(Cutting him off)* 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.

CHARLES: Go ahead.

MR. CROSBY: (*Reading*) If they are willing . . .

PAUL: Just a minute. I don't know about that. Maybe his judgment wasn't so good.

MR. CROSBY: Are you satisfied, or not?

HARRISON: He is. Go on.

MR. CROSBY: Are you?

PAUL: I guess.

HUNTER: (*To Paul*) It's fine.

MR. CROSBY: (*To Ashley*) Do you agree?

ASHLEY: Usually.

MARY: Ignore her. She has a hard time keeping up.