A crack of lightning knocked out the lights in the old mansion, and ghastly shadows seemed to take over the room. Then a second flash sent a jolt of terror through the group that had assembled.

"It's him!" Laura cried, her voice quaking with fear.
She was pointing to a hazy figure near the door.
"Don't be crazy," Roger said.
He was trying to calm her. But he could barely get the words out himself.
"My God," Sonya added, "he's back!"
She had overcome her initial shock and was ready to pounce on the ghost before it made its move.
"It can't be," Roger shouted, looking around desperately for an exit in case he was wrong.

A third bolt of lightning only lit up the room for an instant. But that was all they needed. Suddenly, they could see the specter clearly standing in the doorway. Laura screamed. Roger backed up into one of the urns, knocking it over. Sonya grabbed a fancy walking stick and held it up, ready to duel. But no one moved. It was up to the ghost to make the next move, and it didn't budge. It stood there still, confronting them, sizing them up, waiting. After all, there was no rush. It had death on its side. Sooner or later they would all succumb.

"Here we go," Thomas Case said brightly. He entered the room just after the lights came on again. "It was just a blown fuse. Nothing to worry about."

The others naturally expected the ghost to have disappeared in the light, making them all look foolish. But this one didn’t. Not exactly. As their eyes adjusted, they could still see what the lightning had illuminated. It was no ghost, not the dead brought back to life; just an optical trick. An illusion caused by one of the old man's dusty suits still hanging on a hook near the closet. One of his hats was perched on a small shelf above it. And an old mirror on the wall in between the hat and the suit had been reflecting Roger's face.

There was a common sigh of relief and some nervous laughter. Then they all took their seats at the huge wooden table in the middle of the room and made jokes about it. But inwardly, no one felt amused. Anxious glances towards the hanging suit proved that although the ghost was gone, it was not forgotten.

Roger Wilford, Laura Dell, and Sonya Wilford were first cousins. The old man whose mansion they were sitting in, and whose ghost they expected, was their uncle, Amos Wilford. The cousins had gathered as soon as they heard news of his death. Not because Uncle Amos was either dear or beloved. In fact, Amos had been an eccentric old crank that no one could tolerate.

It was something more fundamental than love or devotion that brought them to the mansion. A bigger lure than kinship. It was money—pure and simple.

Thomas Case, who had solved the problem of the lights, now turned his attention to a briefcase full of papers. He was the lawyer in charge of handling the estate of the late Amos Wilford. He spread the documents out on the table, an ornately carved piece that might
have been lifted from a Hollywood set.

"Can't we get on with this?" Roger said impatiently, as he got up and walked around
the room. He was a blunt fellow, plain-talking and plain-looking, like an accountant who
can finesse numbers but not people. "I wouldn't mind getting out of here."

"Why, Roger?" Laura asked. "Aren't you happy to see us?"

The contempt in her voice could have withered a nail. Laura was thin and blonde, the
picture of sweet innocence. But there was also a calculating coldness to her manner.
"Yes," Sonya said. "How long has it been since we've seen each other? Twenty years?"
"Twenty-five," Roger answered, without a trace of nostalgia.
"You haven't seen each other in twenty-five years?" Case asked as he continued to
organize his papers. "So this is quite a reunion then."

But the warmth he tried to introduce died a chilly death.
"Spare me," Sonya said. "It's not a reunion. We're here under protest."

Sonya Wilford was tough and brash, with a husky voice. A traffic cop in a former life.
And she lit up a cigarette to enhance the effect.

"Protest?" Case asked.
"She's trying to be funny," Roger said.
"We spent exactly one summer together," Laura explained. "In this house. I was ten
years old then. I didn't want to come here. The place scared me."

"Neither did I," Roger said. "Our parents were going on vacation together and they
dumped us here. The three of us. All I remember is being terrified of that old crank."

"He wasn't that old then," Case reminded him.

"Doesn't matter. Amos Wilford was born an old crank."

Roger was ambling through the room as he said this, touching all the objects and
leaving fingerprints in the dust. The room, like the rest of the mansion, was filled with
stuff. Artifacts, to some people; junk, to others. It looked like a warehouse for old movie
props—lamps, boxes, chairs, clocks. Most of it ancient and broken. A thick layer of neglect
covered everything like a pall.

"Let's be honest," Sonya said. "We're not here out of reverence for the deceased."
"Or love for old Amos," Laura added.

"Not at all," Roger agreed. "Actually, we're here because of this."

He was pointing to a small ornate wooden frame hanging on the wall. Grime on the
glass obscured the object mounted inside the frame. With a fat thumb, Roger removed just
enough to reveal what it was—an old newspaper article, pressed and parched. It looked like
an antique etching that might either be worthless, or worth a fortune. And that, in a sense,
was exactly what it was.

"Times Dispatch," Roger said, reading from it, "November 1940. Horror Tale Brings
Big Bucks To Junkman."

"What's that?" Case asked. "The newspaper account?"

"Amos Wilford, a local collector of second hand goods," Roger continued, "and a
close friend..."

"Friend? Hah! He didn't have friends," Sonya interjected.
“They mean business associate,” Laura suggested.
“... and a close friend named Max Darwin,” Roger read on, “liked old things. In fact, you might say their interests amounted to nothing but a pile of junk. To be precise, the buying and selling of used merchandise. Not everyone’s cup of tea to be sure, and in these hard times, not usually a pathway to wealth either. After all, there is not much profit in trinkets. But all that changed two weeks ago...”
“Please,” Sonya said, with theatrical irritation, “don’t read the whole thing. We all know the story. It was The Great Depression. Everyone was selling off their used stuff.”
“Except of course for Uncle Amos, who was busy buying it all up,” Roger added.
“Thinking he could sell it for a profit later on, when folks had more money,” Laura said.
“But he hardly ever sold the stuff he collected.”
“Except once,” Roger said.
They were reciting the tale in a kind of sing-song, like a story they had heard too many times to take seriously. But as they got to the interesting part, their tone changed from mockery to admiration.
“And that was the time,” Roger said, “that old Amos Wilford found out one of the articles in his collection was worth a fortune of money.”
“An original first edition...”
“Of the classic novel Last Chill,” Laura said.
They paused for a moment of silence. Not for the deceased but for the book. It had been a famous horror novel in its day. A bestseller after the Civil War. But copies of the book mysteriously disappeared over the years. Collectors at the turn of the century opened their copies of Last Chill to find only a pile of crumbled paper.
Rumors circulated that the book itself, like the characters in the story, carried a curse. In fact, it was the poor quality of the paper used in printing that caused the pages to disintegrate.
Nonetheless, the rumors only added to the book’s allure. Plus the fact that only one copy, carefully preserved in a sealed box, was known to exist. This caused the price of the original to skyrocket.
Roger returned to the article and continued reading.
“Mr. Wilford and Mr. Darwin had the book in their possession for four years before realizing its value. Once they did, they wasted no time in trying to cash in on their treasure. Thus, the only known existing first edition of Last Chill was recently offered up for auction at Grimley’s. There it brought in an amazing half a million dollars, the largest sum ever paid for such an item.”
“Half a million,” Sonya muttered, savoring the amount on her tongue like a piece of chocolate. “That was a fortune in those days.”
“And these days,” Laura added.
“Is that all it says?” Case asked.
He had finished shuffling his documents and was ready to proceed with the formal reading of the will.
“Yup,” Roger said. “It stops right there. It doesn’t mention the good part.”

“The part where just before the money came through,” Sonya said, “Max Darwin was found murdered in a hotel room.”

“Not murdered,” Roger said, “he was found dead. Murder was suspected, but they could never prove it.”

“Come now, cousin,” Sonya said. “We all know that Amos killed him. It’s obvious. So he wouldn’t have to split the money with him.”

“Oh I know it,” Roger said. “I just said it was never proved.”

“No,” Laura said, practically stamping her foot. “I can’t imagine Uncle Amos murdering anyone. He wasn’t a killer.”

“Unless you count killing off good taste,” Roger suggested, poking his fingers into an empty wicker bird cage. “Just look at all this crap he collected.”

“He just didn’t trust anyone,” Laura said. “And I don’t blame him.”

“Except his brothers. My dad and your father, Uncle Isaac,” Sonya said to Laura.

“And Uncle Wendell,” Laura added, nodding in Roger’s direction.

“Okay,” Case said as he adjusted his glasses to begin reading, “I’m ready.”

“Good,” Laura said, “let’s get on with it. This place is giving me the willies.”

“Yes,” Sonya hissed, like a snake settling down for lunch, “Let’s do it. I’ve got a plane to catch.”

“Where to?” Laura asked. “Transylvania?”

“Okay. Blah, blah, blah,” Case began, leafing through the legalisms at the beginning of the will.

“Do those ‘blahs’ leave anything to me,” Roger asked, sitting down at the edge of his seat.

“Quiet!” Laura snapped. “Let him read.”

“Here we are,” Case said. “‘I, Amos Wilford, being of sound mind . . .”

“Hah!” Roger said.

“Quiet!”

“And so on and so forth . . . the usual mumbo-jumbo . . . so notarized on this day. Okay. This is the part he filled in as his personal testament: ‘I can’t say as how I was too much a family man . . .”’

“Can’t say as how?” Laura interrupted. “What kind of writing is that?”

“Old crank writing,” Roger suggested. “Go on, Mr. Case.”

“. . . and Dora and me didn’t have no kids or nothing on account of I never could stand kids. But since Isaac, Wendell, and Samuel saw fit to be fruitful and multiply, I guess I gone and got me some heirs to my fortune. So it’s for them I write this last will and testament, mostly so the government don’t get its stinking hands on it.”

“This is worse than reading a tombstone,” Roger said. “Let’s skip all that crap. The man was a grouch and a nut. We all know that. What about the part that starts: ‘I hereby leave?’”

He leaned over Case to try to skip ahead but Case folded the paper into his chest.

“Please, Mr. Wilford, I’m supposed to read it. Will you kindly sit down?”
Roger sat down again with a growl.

"To Roger Wilford, my nephew, whose life was devoted to losing other people's money in one useless scheme after another, I hereby do bequeath something that will help him with his one talent: stringing people along. And to Laura Dell, my niece, who never done a decent day's work in her life, I bequeath an item that will help her stay chained to her responsibilities. Finally, to Sonya Wilford, my niece, who mooched off of every man she could lay her hands on, I do hereby bequeath a little gift so she can continue burning her candle at both ends. All the rest of this junk, and the house too, I leave to the charity folks."

There was about to be an outburst among the cousins. But another bolt of lightning intervened. The gust of wind accompanying it blasted open the French doors that led onto a lifeless garden. The wind slapped each of them in turn, then raced up the stairs to an organ on the second floor where it played a gothic note. A lace doily went flying through the air and landed on Roger's face like a spider.

"That's it?" he asked, pulling it off frantically. "That's what we came here for? For him to insult us?"

"But what about the money?" Sonya shouted. "Nothing about the money? There must be something about it!"

"Yes," Case said. "There is something else here."

"Well read it," Laura said, pleading more than threatening.

"Addendum," Case read. "Since all that's brung you three here on the occasion of my demise is the money, I might as well set the score straight on that. The money's safe and sound. I never spent a penny of it. Never needed to. And it's no use tearing the house up cause it ain't here. It's in a bank account, gathering interest. Ought to be worth a pretty penny by now. But if you want it, you got to know the three-digit code number of the account. My banker knows all about it and about this here will too. Tell him the number and it's yours. You get one chance to try for it, so it's no use guessing. Looks like you got to do a little work for a change. So here's my last offer. To claim your inheritances, you got to spend the night of the first full moon in the attic. That's all I got to say."

This time there was no reaction. Disbelief, bordering on apoplexy, filled the room. It was Roger who finally broke through the silence.

"All right," he said. "Good. Great. Now that's all over with. So let's get serious. You can take the will and all the rest of the crap in this house and shove it. Just tell us what the number of the account is."

"I don't know that," Case said. "I have no idea what it is. Only two people knew it. Amos and the banker."

"Then we'll go down and see the banker," Sonya said. It wasn't a suggestion, it was a command.

"It's no use," Case said. "Crazy as it all sounds, this is a legal document. Signed, notarized and recorded. Besides, if Amos instructed his banker to follow his instructions, that's exactly what he'll do."

"But it's ours," Laura said, pouting like a child. "It belongs to us."
“Not yet,” Case said.
“It’s rightfully ours,” Roger insisted. “We’re his heirs. No one else has any claim on it.”
“Yes,” Roger admitted. “That Darwin had a kid who’s always been after the money.”
“It may not be a rumor,” Case interjected. “My office has been contacted a number of times over the years. The name of the client was never divulged, but it was clearly someone trying to inquire into the status of the money. It might have been a relative of Max Darwin. Who knows? Naturally, pursuant to your uncle’s wishes, we never gave out any information.”
“Well, does this person have a claim on the money or not?”
“That’s very unclear, considering the unusual circumstances.”
“Good,” Roger said.
“Bad,” Sonya said. “People get desperate when things are unclear.”
“What are you saying?” Laura asked.
“Wise up, sweetie,” Sonya said. “We’re talking about a lot of money here. I’d do a lot of things for it. Wouldn’t you?”
“Forget it,” Roger said. “There’s nothing we can do about it. We haven’t even seen each other in twenty-five years. We can’t even swear to our own identities. Darwin’s heir could be pretending to be one of us. We wouldn’t know.”
He was able to get out precisely one guffaw before the gravity of that fact hit everyone. When it did, each of them slowly moved a few inches away from the others.
“You mean we actually have to play this insane game?”
“If you want a shot at your inheritances,” Case said, “I guess so.”
“Meaning what?”
“Meaning you’ll have to do what the will says. You’ll have to spend the night of the first full moon in the attic.”
“What about the money?”
“What can I say?” Case said. “I don’t know anything about it. Maybe the answer is upstairs in the attic. I don’t see that you have any other choice.”
“When is the first full moon?” Sonya asked.
“Tonight,” Case said.
“Fine,” Roger said. “At least he had the good sense to die at the right time of the month.”

The attic in Amos Wilford’s mansion wasn’t just any rooftop room. It was the classic attic. The garret of dreams on Halloween night. A musty, dusty loft where light dissolved into gray phantoms. Where insects dwelled. Creaks in the floorboards told a rotten tale of the past. And wolves and banshees howled in the guise of the passing wind.

They sat there—Roger, Laura, and Sonya—trying not to give in . . . . to the dank shadows taking on shape and form. To the fear of the dark. To the glowing night. Or to the creepy collection of debris that surrounded them.

An old manual vacuum cleaner threatened to suck them up. There was a toy fire
engine guilty, perhaps, of a past murder. The scarred covers of yellowed books gathered
dirt on a broken shelf. A dented cornet hadn’t tooted since the Jazz Age. One top hat,
missing from a tuxedoed corpse, sat in a corner near a pair of wooden skis—cracked, no
doubt, during a fatal accident. Not to mention the metal safe that could only have stored
remains.

It was almost too spooky to be real.

“I’ve had enough of this,” Roger said, getting up and bumping his head on the rafter.
“And I’ve had enough of you two, too. What are we sitting here for?”

“You’re right,” Sonya said. “There’s nothing here for us. The number could be hidden
anywhere up here. I’m certainly not going to stick my hand in every little crevice.”

“But you’d be so good at it,” Laura replied. “Anyway, maybe we should wait.
According to the will . . .”

“Wait for what?” Roger asked. “To go stark raving mad like Amos? Well I’m not
waiting.”

He started for the door but something appeared in his path and blocked him. For a
moment it seemed like another visitation . . . a hazy presence that had materialized. It was
actually a shaft of moonlight coming through the window. Like an arrow, it was pointing
directly to an old trunk with leather straps placed in the middle of the floor.

“He must have put it there to catch the shaft of light,” Roger said. “That’s why he
wanted us here during the full moon!”

“Like a pot of gold,” Laura beamed.

But they approached it cautiously, not sure if it held a treasure, or something that
might bite. It was Sonya who finally reached out and lifted the lid. Not surprisingly, the
trunk contained more memorabilia.

None of it seemed valuable or even notable. Except for three items they each recog-
nized. They were objects from that summer long ago. Things each one of them had left in
the house. They were duly labeled with name tags, so each could reclaim them after all
these years.

“My old baseball,” Roger said. Not willing to thrust his hand into the trunk to take it,
he simply bent over and studied it closely. “It used to have autographs on it. I wonder if it’s
worth anything now.”

“You could probably clear ten bucks on it,” Laura said.

“Right,” Roger agreed. “Worth as much as that old book of yours.”

He was pointing to a dog-eared copy of Treasure Island with her name tag attached.
She picked it up, made sure that there were no million dollar bills hidden in the pages, then
put it back.

“I always hated that book,” Laura said. “And I hated that dog too. The one you named
after your father.”

She was referring to a dog collar with Sonya’s name attached.

“Good old Wes,” Sonya said, disgruntled. “I hated him too.”

But Roger was laughing at something else.

“What’s so funny?”
“Our inheritances,” he said.
At the top of the trunk there was a tray. Not a classy one, but a cafeteria tray from an old Automat. On it were the three items Amos Wilford had bequeathed to his heirs: one candle, two links from a chain, and a piece of string.
“What do you mean?” Sonya asked.
“Don’t you get it? It’s Amos’ last little joke. The candle is for you, because you always burned yours at both ends,” Roger observed.
“And a chain for me,” Laura said, catching on, “so I can stay chained to my responsibilities. The string is for Roger to string people along with.”
“Ha,” Roger said, without humor.
But as he stood there studying all the artifacts in the trunk, Roger’s expression changed. He suddenly realized what they were looking at. It wasn’t just another pile of useless junk. The solution to the mystery was hidden among the odds and ends. The key to the money, and to the fact that one of them was an impostor were right there before him.

Can you find it? Assemble the jigsaw puzzle and see if you can determine how Roger, Laura, and Sonya can get the money and which of them is the impostor.
THE SOLUTION:

Roger tried to talk, but nothing came out. Standing at the cold barrel of a gun tended
him speechless.

I then realized my mistake. "Sonia, Willard said, stepping to the far side of the trunk
"You mean you're not coming?" Lassie barked angrily.

"Of course not," Roger said, "She's your best friend." She said good old
We're going to be named after the real Orient. Our uncle, her father, was Samuel. Not
We're staying in the dog collar upside down.

"On a wild goose chase I seem to have grown to collect
her money. She's pausing to have a nice long trip.

"Now what?" Roger asked.

"Now you find some hope and make your moves for yourself. In the morning. I go down
Now you find some hope and make your moves for yourself. In the morning. I go down
to the bank and collect my money." Sonia said. "The money my father Max Darwin shoud
have gotten. If he was million dollars, unlucky man!"

"You know what account number?" Lassie asked.

"It's written. It's written. "Sonia said triumphantly. "The string, grain, and candle. They were's
black and red. On the first page, Amos placed four to show the place numbers of the account.
The string is the shape of a nine, the grain forms a number eight, and the candle is num-
per one. 081!"

"Should we try to stop her?" Lassie whispered to Roger, as they prepared to be tied up.
"Not at all." Roger whispered back. He was grinning. "I'll go to the bank and see
what happens."

WHY was Roger grinning?

THE SOLUTION, PART 2:

"She's won't want the number," Roger said, once Sonia was out of earshot. "She was
standing at the back of the trunk when she read it. Wells is the front, which Amos was
when we set it up. It's not 081. It's 181!"