THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

By William D. Fisher

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(Five men, five women)

WILLIAM D. FISHER

PERRIOT PRESTON ......................... A well-known author of mystery novels. He is handsome and suave with a quick, piercing mind. He has all of the attributes of a perfect detective. (248 lines)

GWEN TALBOT ......................... Perriot’s secretary. Young and pretty, she has a love for adventure which makes her work with Perriot a pleasure. (96 lines)

BRUISER BARNES ....................... Almost a former boxer champion. Perriot’s bodyguard, he is big, tough, and slow, physically as well as mentally. He is naïve, boisterous, and loud, but very likeable. (231 lines)

MRS. ALLERDYCE BEEMAN ........... A widow of fifty. Nervous, high-strung, flighty, she maintains a pomposity that is easily and readily deflated. She is overdressed, somewhat in bad taste, but holds a good front. (161 lines)

MAYBELLE BEEMAN ..................... Mrs. Beeman’s teenage daughter. The unfortunate result of a doting mother. Not particularly attractive or intelligent. (126 lines)

LOUISE THOMAS ......................... A pretty, plainly-dressed young woman. She is a typical administrative assistant. Her clothing is nice, but not expensive. Very average. (128 lines)

MRS. KITE ........................................ The housekeeper. She is severe in every respect. Her dress is black, as is her very aspect. Her hair is pulled straight back emphasizing her pale face. Her voice, like her appearance, is cold, hard, and unpleasant, almost monotonous. Her movements are quiet, at times stealthy. She seems to resent the guests. (67 lines)

WENTWORTH .............................. The butler. He is a distinguished, white-haired older man, courteous and unobtrusive. Dressed in a butler’s costume, he is the picture of a fine servant. But his fear is apparent. (12 lines)

THE PHANTOM ............................ Pale-faced, big, shifty-eyed, he is a sulky man of forty-five. He is lazy and feels that the world owes him something. (14 lines)

J. WINSTON GRAHAM ................. Elderly, distinguished lawyer of the case. He has a commanding appearance and a quick mind. He has been a life-long friend of the deceased. (85 lines)
SOUND EFFECTS

CYMBAL, off right
DOORBELL, off center
TELEPHONE, off left
HOWLING DOG, off right
GUN SHOT, off right
THUNDER, off center
WIND, off center

SPECIAL EFFECTS

LIGHTNING
Quickly flash a spotlight or flood light off and on in various intervals. It should be placed above the window up center. A medium red or red-yellow light will be most effective.

BLUE LIGHT AT THE FIREPLACE
A small flood light or well-directed blue electric bulb will give the desired effect. If a cycloroma is used, the director should make sure that the light does not strike the cyclorama in such a way that it is discernible from the audience. The light should seem to pour from the opening.

MOVABLE FIREPLACE
The fireplace should be placed upon metal domes to facilitate movement. It should then be hinged to an upright on the upstage side so that it will move evenly. The best arrangement would be that in which the fireplace is placed against a flat or other framework hinged on the upstage side so that the fireplace will fit flush against the opening of the flat. The movable fireplace, however, can be worked satisfactorily with a cyclorama. Above the hole there should be a screen against which the blue light may strike, to mask the off stage area from the audience.

PHANTOM HANDS
Paint a pair of gloves with phosphorescent paint.

SET PROPERTIES

Heavy sofa, center left
Easy chair, center right
Telephone stand, down left [telephone]
Library table, center left [cloth for table]
Table lamp
Bookcase, up right [books]
Table, up left [cloth for table]
Magazines
Fireplace, right
Pictures
Rug
Drapes for window, center
BRIEFCASE, Mr. Graham
ROBE, Phantom
GLASS OF WATER, Gwen
MAGAZINES, used as fans
WILL

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE: FRIDAY, MARCH 13TH, TEN O’CLOCK AT NIGHT.
ACT TWO: A FEW MINUTES LATER.
ACT THREE: A FEW MINUTES LATER.

PLACE
A first floor room of Castle Wentz, a lonely villa high atop a rocky ledge in the midst of the Allegheny Mountains. On this particular night, the fury of a March tempest seems especially strong as the wind howls outside the mansion.
THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

ACT ONE

At Rise:
The black interior of the first floor reception room of the old Castle Wentz is revealed. The entire room is in darkness. The only light is that coming from an intermittent and occasional flash of lightning which comes through the window in the back wall of the entryway, up center. By these eerie flashes one can vaguely pick out the arrangement of the old room. In the wall, left, is a door which leads into the nearby dining room and beyond to the servants’ quarters. Against the wall, right center, is a huge fireplace, with neither fire nor screen. Just right of center, opposite the fireplace is a large easy chair in dark leather or old upholstery. Opposite it, just left of center, is a large sofa to match. Above the sofa is an old, ugly library table with a dingy table lamp, aged books, and magazines. Right, beside the fireplace is a bookcase filled with dusty books. 

Up left is a table covered with a colorless tablecloth and more books or unpleasant knickknacks. There is a chair and telephone stand with an old telephone down left. Faded pictures decorate the walls; a dark rug covers the floor. This is a drab, dreary room in an old castle-like house. The entire mood of the room is gloomy. For some reason, it seems untenanted and dusty even though it has been less than a year since MASTER WENTZ died.

The atmosphere is cold and mysterious, the result of age and dim lights. The room seems especially cold on this March night. The wind howls across the rocky ledge upon which Castle Wentz is built. Occasionally, a mutter of thunder is heard. The lightning continues to flash, though no rain is falling. After a moment, the single, sustained sound of a huge cymbal is heard far off right as though echoing through countless corridors and subterranean passages. Slowly and steadily the fireplace swings open, as though hinged on the upstage side. As it opens, a blue light floods through the opening. Then a figure dressed in a long, flowing black robe and hood appears in the blue light. The phantom is completely dark—except its hands—which burn with a strange phosphorescent glow, as though they are hands of flame. The phantom stands right stage, in front of the blue-lighted opening. Unseen, another figure in black, a woman, has entered left, and stands across the room from the phantom. The two figures are lighted dimly by the blue of the fireplace and the lightening. Suddenly, the phantom, its arms folded, speaks in a deep, muffled voice:

THE PHANTOM: (In a strong voice.) You are ready? (There is no answer.) You are ready?
MRS. KITE: (Afraid and hesitantly.) I—I—am afraid.
THE PHANTOM: (With deep sarcasm.) You are afraid! A weak, sniveling woman! I should have known better than to trust a woman!
MRS. KITE: What happens if we are caught?
THE PHANTOM: You can speak of being caught when plans such as ours have been laid so well! We will not be caught!
MRS. KITE: (Her voice filled with fear.) But what if we are?
THE PHANTOM: The rewards we will receive are worth the risk.
MRS. KITE: Yes—if we ever get them.
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THE PHANTOM: (Losing patience.) We have finalized our plans. Soon, the fools will be here. Soon, they will walk into our trap. And now, with the fortune in our grasp, you weaken. (He spits out disgustedly.) Bah! I should have known.

MRS. KITE: (Afraid.) I—I want to go on. But the police, prison, perhaps even death!

THE PHANTOM: You seem to forget that our plans are laid well. Castle Wentz is far from any police. The telephone wire is easily cut! And the greedy fools will not want to leave, for there is too much here to keep them! When they have finally come to their senses, we will be gone. What can the police do?

MRS. KITE: But what happens if there is a slip?

THE PHANTOM: There will be no slip. (Impatiently.) Have we not planned for a year? What can go wrong? You're imagining things. That is bad, for it shows you are weak.

MRS. KITE: (Fearfully.) I'm afraid.

THE PHANTOM: Nonsense! The old man is dead. His fortune is ours for the taking. Why should we not have it instead of those fools who will be coming here tonight with itching palms to see who can get the most! We can get it all!

MRS. KITE: (Hesitantly.) Couldn't we just get our share, and no more? Then we wouldn't have to go through all of this—this—horrible— (She stops, a sob in her throat.)

THE PHANTOM: (With hate in his voice.) I never expected you to lose your courage. We bargained, and you accepted the terms. Now you will take pennies when we could have dollars. I am losing my patience.

MRS. KITE: (Afraid of him.) I'm just afraid of what might happen.

THE PHANTOM: (Angrily.) You are a coward. And a fool, like the rest of them! But I won't let you stop me, just as I won't let anyone stop me. (He starts toward her, slowly and ominously, his shining hands outstretched.)

MRS. KITE: (Shrinking back, terror in her voice.) What are you going to do?

THE PHANTOM: (Advancing slowly.) I will not let anything or anyone ruin my plans.

MRS. KITE: (Shrinking back further, almost screaming.) No! No! Don't do it! Please don't do it!

THE PHANTOM: (Slowly.) No one can stand in my way!

MRS. KITE: (Screaming.) Don't! DON'T! I am your—

THE PHANTOM: (Stopping, breaking into her revelation.) Silence! (He pauses, letting his hands drop to his sides.) I have warned you never to reveal that fact. (Mrs. Kite is sobbing with fear.) No, because of that I cannot hurt you. But you cannot stop me. Things have gone too far now to turn back. You are guilty—as guilty as I—now. They have played into our hands. I expect you to do your part.

MRS. KITE: But can't we—

THE PHANTOM: (Sternly stopping her.) No more! If you weaken now your efforts will be useless, for if I fail, we both fail. I will go ahead with the plan. You are in too deep to stop. (He moves toward the fireplace.) They will be coming soon. You know what to do. (Sternly.) Do it well! (He disappears into the fireplace, and the opening slowly closes, blotting out the blue lights.)
The dejected figure of Mrs. Kite can be seen slowly exiting left. After she is
gone, the lights mysteriously grow brighter, until the room is dimly lighted with
yellow light, as though the bulbs are old. After a moment, the sound of a doorbell
is heard up center. Mrs. Kite enters, left, now the emotionless housekeeper,
goes up center through the entry. Then, the sound of Mr. Graham’s cheerful
voice is heard.

GRAHAM: Good evening, Mrs. Kite. A nasty bit of weather. How that wind
does cut through one! And it looks like a storm is brewing. (He enters,
carrying a briefcase.)

MRS. KITE: (As they enter.) Good evening, Mr. Graham.

GRAHAM: (Looking about the room.) Am I the first one here?

MRS. KITE: (Unemotionally.) You are the first.

GRAHAM: Maybe the storm held them up. (As he takes off his coat, laying it
and the hat on the sofa, left.) But they’ll be here all right. (He laughs.)
Nothing like a free million dollars to make people turn out, regardless of the
weather. (He looks at Mrs. Kite, expecting an answer. She does not give
one, but stands stiffly, looking into space.) Eh, Mrs. Kite?

MRS. KITE: (Starting, as her name is spoken.) I beg your pardon, Mr. Graham?

GRAHAM: I say, there’s nothing like it. I feel like I just hit the jackpot.

MRS. KITE: (Coldly.) Undoubtedly, sir.

GRAHAM: Well, I imagine they’ll all be here. (New thought.) But you know, that
was a strange request of August’s saying that only those persons present in
this room at midnight on the first Friday the thirteenth after his death should
receive an equal share of the estate. I was telling the men at the club about it
this noon. They all thought it was a bit farfetched. What do you think of it,
Mrs. Kite?

MRS. KITE: (Monotonously.) I have never questioned the master’s wishes.

GRAHAM: (Consolingly,) I know that. But he’s dead now. You can start
thinking for yourself for a change.

MRS. KITE: Perhaps, sir.

GRAHAM: And this room! (He looks around.) Dull, gloomy, old. Just like the
castle itself. Why couldn’t we have met closer to town?

MRS. KITE: (Sternly.) It was his favorite room, sir.

GRAHAM: Which doesn’t mean it should be ours. And on Friday the thirteenth!
Why the whole thing sounds like a mystery story. Dead man, will, heirs and
heiresses, midnight on Friday the thirteenth, a stormy night in a castle high on
a mountain top! (He laughs.) Say, I wish I could write, I’d make a fortune out
of this.

MRS. KITE: (Meaningfully.) Perhaps you will, sir.

GRAHAM: Me? (He laughs.) Oh, I’ll probably get my share. August always
had a soft spot in his heart for me. Let’s see, there are three heiresses and
three heirs. You, and a Mrs. Beeman, and a Miss Thomas. Then a Mr.
Preston, Wentworth, and myself. That’s about $165,000 apiece. A tidy sum,
eh, Mrs. Kite? (He laughs jokingly.)

MRS. KITE: (Coldly.) Mr. Wentz was very generous.

GRAHAM: (Taken down by her coldness.) Yes, wasn’t he? (A new thought.)
By they way, where is Wentworth? I expected him to be here to welcome the
guests.
MRS. KITE: (Without expression.) He’s gone.

GRAHAM: (Taken aback.) Gone? Gone where?

MRS. KITE: I don’t know. He left. It was none of my business.

GRAHAM: (Exasperated.) The caste system used by the servants is disgusting.

MRS. KITE: (Coldly.) I try to be a good servant, Mr. Graham. I have no right to be curious.

GRAHAM: (Cheerfully.) Well, after tonight you can be as curious as you’d like. With $165,000, you can stick your nose into everybody’s business. (A sudden thought.) Hmm. This is very strange.

MRS. KITE: (Quickly, and a bit fearfully.) Anything wrong, sir?

GRAHAM: (Thinking, he suddenly turns to her.) Wrong? (He purses his lips.) Wrong? (Slowly.) No—I don’t think so. I was just thinking about Wentworth. Isn’t it strange that he suddenly leaves tonight of all nights? If he isn’t here at midnight, his share of the fortune will be split amongst the rest of us. (Throwing the idea from him and laughing.) My imagination is running away with me. It must be this house, and the storm.

MRS. KITE: (Hopefully.) It must be, sir.

GRAHAM: (Cheerful again.) This would still make a good mystery story. We have the ideal setting and now one of the heirs is missing. (Sudden thought.) Say, that would make a good title!

MRS. KITE: What, sir?

GRAHAM: The missing heir. “The Case of the Missing Heir.” It’s the sort of title that would make people want to read the book. (New thought.) You know, young Preston, one of the heirs, is a novelist. I think I’ll give him my idea.

MRS. KITE: Have you thought of an ending for it, sir?

GRAHAM: Ending? (Laughing.) No, but maybe that’ll come to me before the night is over.

MRS. KITE: (Fearfully.) Perhaps, sir. But I hope not.

GRAHAM: (Looking at her oddly.) What do you mean?

MRS. KITE: Nothing, sir. It’s just that—your idea has me thinking.

GRAHAM: (Laughing.) Why, Mrs. Kite, I think you’re a romanticist. But don’t let my idea bother you. I’d hate to be responsible for any nightmares.

MRS. KITE: Yes, sir.

GRAHAM: (Taking his briefcase to the sofa.) Well, the others will be along shortly. I have a bit of work to finish up before they come. So, if you’ll leave me to myself for a time, Mrs. Kite?

MRS. KITE: If you want me, sir, I will be in the quarters.

GRAHAM: Thank you, Mrs. Kite. (Laughing.) Remember now, no nightmares. And don’t forget to be here at midnight. One hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars isn’t to be sneezed at. And maybe $200,000, if Wentworth doesn’t show up.

MRS. KITE: He’s probably in his quarters. I will see if I can find him.

GRAHAM: (Laughing.) If you do, you’ll rob yourself of about $40,000.

MRS. KITE: (Not smiling.) Yes, sir. (She exits, left.)

Graham looks at the room, shudders, and sits on the sofa. He starts to open the briefcase, then pauses, a thoughtful expression on his face. He is thinking about Wentworth and this strange house. Consequently, he does not realize that the
lights in the room are slowly dimming out. As they dim quite low, there is the sound of the “phantom cymbal” far off right. Then the fireplace begins to open, shedding blue light onto the stage. Graham, noticing the lights, leaps to his feet and turns to the door, left. He does not see the figure of the phantom, who enters through the fireplace and starts toward him with shining hands outstretched.

Graham: (Calling.) Mrs. Kite! Mrs. Kite! The lights have—

In the darkness, his voice is suddenly cut off by a robe which the phantom throws over his head. As the lights go completely out the two figures can be seen struggling. Suddenly, the hand of the phantom lifts high and falls, striking Graham on the head with a heavy instrument. In the darkness, the phantom drags Graham’s body right and through the fireplace. Then the opening is closed, and the blue light is gone. The stage lights slowly dim up. The only things left on stage are Graham’s briefcase, hat, and coat. Mrs. Kite enters left, and without hesitation or emotion goes to the sofa, picks up Graham’s belongings and exits, left, with them. After a moment, the doorbell rings. It is insistent, quickly pushed by nervous fingers. Then, the voice of Mrs. Beeman comes from up center.

Mrs. Beeman: (Entering.) I will not stand outside on this cold night while some sleepy servant makes up his mind whether or not to answer the door.

Maybelle: (Entering after her.) But mother, it ain’t etiquette.

Mrs. Beeman: Don’t say “ain’t,” Maybelle, it ain’t—it isn’t genteel.

Maybelle: No, it ain’t—isn’t it? (She giggles.)

Mrs. Beeman: You aren’t very funny, daughter, especially for a cold March night up on top of a freezing cliff. Believe me, if conditions were any different, I wouldn’t stir outside on a night like this for love or money. Well, maybe love.

Maybelle: I see what you mean, Mother.

Mrs. Beeman: (Sternly.) I already told you, Maybelle, you’re not very funny.

Maybelle: I think I am! (She giggles.)

Mrs. Beeman: Then I shall have to ignore you. (She looks about the room, shuddering.) Ugh, this awful place. Cold and dirty. Why it even smells old.

Maybelle: It looks like Aunt Minnie’s house.

Mrs. Beeman: Nonsense, Minnie’s house is very attractive. I should know, I helped decorate it.

Maybelle: I wouldn’t share that information with anyone if I were you, Mother.

Mrs. Beeman: (Exasperated.) Hmph, I don’t know what’s getting into you anymore, Maybelle. Sometimes you act like a perfect nincompoop.

Maybelle: (Slyly.) All of your friends say I’m just like you.

Mrs. Beeman: Maybelle! (Trying to smooth it over.) That was some time ago. They haven’t seen you lately.

Maybelle: Not since your lovely ditty at the church benefit. (She giggles.)

Mrs. Beeman: (Loftily.) You needn’t giggle, Maybelle. I was told by the minister that I sang very well.

Maybelle: Was that before or after your donation to the church?
MRS. BEEMAN: It was before— (Quickly.) —but that’s beside the point.
Anyway, he wasn’t the only one who complimented me on my singing. Dear Mr. Smythe did, too.

MAYBELLE: Is he the one who asked you to sing, “Far, Far Away?”

MRS. BEEMAN: (Not getting the sarcasm.) Yes he is. And he said I did it very well. (Maybelle giggles.) It isn’t funny, daughter.

MAYBELLE: Maybe not, but Mr. Smythe is.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Singing deeply.) Dear Mr. Smythe. A perfect gentleman and so very interested in me. Why, he was thrilled to death when I told him about my inheritance.

MAYBELLE: And so was the minister, and Mr. Carson, and Mr. Blitz. Gee, just think, all of them are dear lonely bachelors—and so very poor. (She giggles.)

MRS. BEEMAN: Yes, nice men. They’re such dear friends!

MAYBELLE: (Dryly.) Especially now.

MRS. BEEMAN: Yes, as the old saying goes, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” (New thought.) Oh, this terrible old house. And not a soul around. Where is everybody? This place gives me the creeps.

MAYBELLE: The creeps?

MRS. BEEMAN: (Shuddering.) Yeah, this room is so depressing. And why didn’t anyone answer the door? I don’t like it at all.

MAYBELLE: It’s sort of like a movie I saw last week. It was called “The Death Knot.” It was about two women who were murdered in a haunted castle by a crazy man.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Shuddering.) Don’t say such things. I don’t like them. (She looks about, nervously.)

MAYBELLE: (Cheerfully.) It was great. All about a house just like this one.
And all the screaming, and blood, and gore.

MRS. BEEMAN: Maybelle, that’s enough! If that’s the sort of thing you see at the movies, remind me to never let you go again.

MAYBELLE: It was just a movie.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Nervously.) I know, but this is real and I’d rather be a live heiress than a dead widow.

MAYBELLE: Yes, but think how sad Mr. Smythe and Mr. Blitz would be. And the minister would preach a swell sermon for you.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Very much upset.) Daughter! Stop this instant! (Nervously.) Oh, why doesn’t someone come! Where are the servants? (She does not see Mrs. Kite, who enters left silently, and stands near the door.) What sort of place is this? Is everyone dead around here?

MRS. KITE: Yes, madam?

MRS. BEEMAN: (Startled.) Oh! (She turns quickly.) Who—who—who—?

MAYBELLE: Gee, Mother, you sound just like an owl! (She giggles.)

MRS. KITE: I am the housekeeper, madam.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Relieved.) Thank goodness. I am Mrs. Beeman and this is my daughter, Maybelle. We have come for the reading of the will.

MRS. KITE: (Monotonously.) Yes, we were expecting you.

MRS. BEEMAN: We?

MRS. KITE: Wentworth, the butler and I.
MRS. BEEMAN: Oh yes. Where is Wentworth? No one answered the door so we just came in.

MRS. KITE: I’m sorry I did not answer. But I was—busy. Wentworth couldn’t answer. He’s gone.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Nervously.) Gone? Gone where?

MRS. KITE: All I know is that he’s gone.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Half-heartedly.) I see. Uh—yes. Well, a—a—is no one else here?

MRS. KITE: (Without expression.) Mr. Graham, the lawyer was here. But he’s gone, too.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Swallowing, afraid.) He’s—he’s-gone, too?

MAYBELLE: (Excitedly.) Gee, this is great! It’s just like in “The Death Knot” when four men all die—

MRS. BEEMAN: (Frightened, but stern.) Daughter, can’t we keep the motion pictures out of this. I’m sure this is not just like “The Death Knot.” Or—or—I hope not! (To Mrs. Kite.) Well—a—a—where did he go?

MRS. KITE: I do not know, madam. It is not my place to question the actions of guests. He’s—just—gone!

MRS. BEEMAN: Yes—uh—thank you, Miss—a—Mrs.—?

MRS. KITE: Mrs. Kite.

MRS. BEEMAN: Mrs. Kite?

MRS. KITE: (She sways, hand to head.) Oh! Daughter, I think I’m going to faint.

MAYBELLE: (To Mrs. Kite.) Is there someplace she can lie down?

MRS. KITE: There is a bed made up in the right wing. But it’s cold up there—and lonely—and quiet.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Feeling much better.) No—no thank you. I feel much better. I—I think I’ll just stay here.

MRS. KITE: As you wish, madam.

MRS. BEEMAN: If we want you, we’ll call.

MAYBELLE: (To Mrs. Kite.) It’s sort of cold in here. Could we have a fire in the fireplace?

MRS. KITE: (Coldly.) It is against the master’s orders.

MRS. BEEMAN: The master?

MRS. KITE: Mr. Wentz, madam.

MRS. BEEMAN: But he’s dead!

MRS. KITE: (Vaguely.) Perhaps to you, madam. But not to me. (Very stiffly, almost in a trance, she exits, left.)

MAYBELLE: That’s funny. I wonder why he didn’t want a fire in the fireplace? Maybe there’s something wrong with it. (She starts toward the fireplace.)

MRS. BEEMAN: (Startled.) Daughter, get away from there! Don’t go near that old thing.

MAYBELLE: (Stopping.) Why not?

MRS. BEEMAN: Maybe Mr. Wentz’s ghost is in there or something.

MAYBELLE: (Leaping away from the fireplace.) Oh! (She giggles.) How silly! There ain’t any such thing as ghosts.

MRS. BEEMAN: Isn’t, Maybelle. And how do you know there aren’t ghosts? You’ve never seen one.

MAYBELLE: Well, that doesn’t prove there are.
MRS. BEEMAN: It certainly doesn’t prove there aren’t. And if there are, they would certainly haunt this house. I don’t like it. That cold woman, and a missing butler; and even the lawyer gone. Everyone seems to be missing but us.

The lights start to dim.

MAYBELLE: And we may be before midnight.

The lights continue dimming.

MRS. BEEMAN: Daughter, please don’t say such— (She stops. Her mouth pops open. Her eyes bulge out.) The—the—the lights!

MAYBELLE: (Unknowingly.) What about them?

MRS. BEEMAN: They—they—they’re going out!

The lights continue dimming.

MAYBELLE: (Frightened.) Yeah—they—they are, aren’t they? Maybe—maybe—we’ll be missing next!

MRS. BEEMAN: Oh daughter, I’m going to faint!

MAYBELLE: (Unknowingly.) What about them?

MRS. BEEMAN: They—they—they’re going out!

The lights continue dimming.

MAYBELLE: (Frightened.) Yeah—they—they are, aren’t they? Maybe—maybe—we’ll be missing next!

MRS. BEEMAN: Oh daughter, I’m going to faint!

MAYBELLE: (Swaying.) Yes I am! (She gives a half-hearted, weak gurgling scream, and starts to topple onto the sofa.)

Suddenly, the very loud doorbell breaks into the room, Mrs. Beeman stands erect, the lights flare up.

MRS. BEEMAN: It’s the doorbell!

MAYBELLE: And the lights are back! (She is jubilant.)

MAYBELLE: Maybe it was defective wiring! I hope!

MRS. BEEMAN: Answer the door, daughter, but hurry! Mrs. Kite probably didn’t hear it.

MAYBELLE: (Crossing to center.) Maybe she couldn’t hear it!

MRS. BEEMAN: (Startled.) What do you mean? (She calls after Maybelle, who exits center.) What do you mean, daughter? (Suddenly realizing.) Oh. Oh! OH! Do you think she’s missing, too? (She gazes fearfully around the room.) Oh. OH! (She starts rushing center and almost collides with Bruiser Barnes who, hat still on, looks her in the eye sternly. Startled, she runs back down stage, and stands left, looking at Barnes, eyes popping out.)

BRUISER: (Leaning toward the door, center.) It’s okay, chief. There’s no one here but an old dame, and she’s got something wrong with her.

PERRIOT: (Entering center with Gwen, Maybelle following.) Bruiser, how many times must I tell you that your duties end when we go calling? You must remember we’re guests. Sometime you’ll insult a hostess with your strong-arm stuff.

BRUISER: Gee, Boss, I’m your bodyguard, ain’t I?

PERRIOT: Never say “ain’t,” Bruiser. The correct word is “isn’t.”
THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

MRS. BEEMAN: Which is exactly what I tell my daughter. (Bruiser looks at Maybelle sheepishly, she giggles and they both grin.)

PERRIOT: (To Mrs. Beeman.) I must apologize for startling you, madam. Bruiser can’t seem to forget his duty for a moment. Perhaps I should introduce myself. I am Perriot Preston, this is my secretary Gwen Talbot, and my bodyguard, Bruiser Barnes, you have already met informally.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Impressed.) Perriot Preston? The novelist? (She is thrilled, as he nods.) Daughter, this is Perriot Preston who writes those thrilling detective stories.

MAYBELLE: Gee, he’s the one who wrote “The Death Knot.” It was swell!

MRS. BEEMAN: (Gushingly.) Oh yes, I was telling my daughter only a moment ago how glad I am that she should see such interesting stories. (Suddenly remembering.) But here! I forget myself. (To Perriot.) I am Mrs. Allerdycce Beeman and this is my daughter Maybelle.

PERRIOT: How do you do? (He bows slightly.)

GWEN: (Nodding.) How do you do?

BRUISER: (Taking off his hat.) Glad ta meet youse.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Gushing.) How glad we are to see you. Especially you men! (Maybelle giggles and the others smile. Mrs. Beeman is embarrassed, catching her mistake.) I mean—I mean because you’re strong, and we’ve been a little bit afraid of the house. It isn’t very pleasant!

GWEN: (Smiling.) We understand perfectly, Mrs. Beeman. And if it’s muscle you want, Bruiser has plenty of that.

BRUISER: (Grinning.) Yeah! Gee, t’anks, Miss Gwen.

PERRIOT: (Laughing.) Hey, how about me? I ought to have a muscle or two lying around somewhere.

GWEN: (Grinning at him.) Maybe one or two. But you do the mental work and leave the physical up to Bruiser.

BRUISER: Yeah, leave the physical up to me.

PERRIOT: All right. (To Mrs. Beeman and Maybelle.) You see, Gwen decided I needed a bodyguard . . . sometimes I step on the toes of so-called gangsters who might wish to retaliate. So, I have both a secretary and a bodyguard.

MAYBELLE: (Awe-struck.) Gee, could you use a wife?

PERRIOT: (Smiling at her.) Ask me again about ten years from now. In the meantime, I’ll think it over.

MRS. BEEMAN: Don’t mind Maybelle, Mr. Preston. Sometimes she doesn’t know what she’s saying.

MAYBELLE: (Firmly.) Oh yes I do! (She giggles shrilly.)

BRUISER: (Grinning.) Hey, how about me, Miss Maybelle? I was almost a champion once. If I hadn’t got knocked out, I might be middle-weight champion of the world!

MRS. BEEMAN: Really? How did you —uh—get—knocked out?

BRUISER: (Embarrassed.) Gee, it wasn’t so good. Glass jaw. (He shakes his head sadly.)

MRS. BEEMAN: (Pityingly.) A glass jaw? Oh, you poor man! Did it hurt much?

PERRIOT: (Smiling.) I fear you’ve misunderstood him, Mrs. Beeman. To say a person has a glass jaw means that he is easily knocked out when struck on the face.
WILLIAM D. FISHER

MRS. BEEMAN: Oh, I see. (Smiles, weakly) I never was very good at anatomy. (Maybelle giggles.)

PERRIOT: (Changing the subject.) Are any other of the—ah—“heirs” here?

MRS. BEEMAN: (Gushing.) Oh, no. We’re the first ones here. I am always on time.

MAYBELLE: Gee, yes. Usually before the time. Especially now—if you know what I mean? (She looks knowingly at the others.)

MRS. BEEMAN: (Trying to smile.) Maybelle is such a subtle little thing.

BRUISER: (Grinning.) Yeah, subtle like a train wreck! (Preston frowns at him, Bruiser looks sheepish.)

GWEN: (Trying to shift the conversation.) I don’t imagine it was much fun waiting in this gloomy old room alone, Mrs. Beeman.

MAYBELLE: Gosh, Miss Talbot, I was here.

MRS. BEEMAN: Daughter, Miss Talbot wasn’t speaking to you, but she was approximately right in saying I was alone, even if you were here.

PERRIOT: It is a mysterious old place. The sort of thing I should know well. I’ve certainly used it enough. Do we have any servants?

MRS. BEEMAN: Now that’s a funny thing, Mr. Preston. When we arrived, no one answered the door, so we just walked in. Soon a woman who said she was the housekeeper came in and told us the butler was gone. I asked her where he had gone, but she wouldn’t say. There’s an air of mystery about this place that I don’t like.

PERRIOT: (Pursing his lips.) I see. Hmmm. It is rather strange at that.

GWEN: Perhaps he was in another room.

MAYBELLE: But she said there is only one other room in the house open besides the servants’ quarters.

MRS. BEEMAN: Which made me all the more suspicious. I don’t like old houses. Especially closed ones.

BRUISER: Gee, me neither. I remember one time when I was fightin’ up at Poughkeepsie—at least I thought I was fightin’ up there—I went to the auditorium and it was closed up tight. They had had the fights the week before. Gee, I didn’t like it at all.

PERRIOT: (Smiling.) Very nicely said, Bruiser. Although I don’t see much mystery in a closed auditorium in Poughkeepsie.

BRUISER: Ya don’t? It sure did mystify me.

MAYBELLE: But that wasn’t all! Just before you came Mother and I were sitting down, just waiting for time to pass, and suddenly the lights grew dim. It was awful scary.

PERRIOT: Probably a bad connection. Or perhaps the influence of the wind on the wires.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Doubtfully.) Maybe so, but it wasn’t very pleasant. Two lone women in a mysterious house.

MAYBELLE: Gosh, I thought it was fun!

GWEN: Well, it’s all over now. The muscular Mr. Barnes and the brainy Mr. Preston will keep things well in hand.

BRUISER: (Proudly.) Sure. If any ghosts come around looking for a scrap, I’m just the guy that can give them one.

GWEN: And Mr. Preston can outwit them.

PERRIOT: And the beauteous Miss Talbot can vamp them.
THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

BRUISER: (Wholeheartedly.) I'll say she can!

GWEN: (Laughing.) Why Mr. Barnes, you flatter me!

MAYBELLE: Can't I do something? Maybe I could hold your feet.

PERRIOT: Unless he is a she, then you can hold her feet.

BRUISER: Gosh, I hope it isn't a woman ghost, on account of I couldn't hit a lady could I? (He is very serious.)

PERRIOT: (Laughing.) I really don't know whether that would be etiquette or not, Bruiser. We'll have to consult Emily Post.

MRS. BEEMAN: Well, personally, I don't want to have a thing to do with any ghosts, male or female.

MAYBELLE: Gee, every good mystery story has to have some screams in it. Mother can be the sound effects. (She giggles.) She started to faint when the lights went dim.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Slowly.) Maybelle!

MAYBELLE: You did too. And you would have if Mr. Preston hadn't rung the door bell.

MRS. BEEMAN: It wasn't that at all. I was just tired and started to sit down.

MAYBELLE: Gosh, I've never seen you try to sit down like that before.

BRUISER: (Still thinking things over.) Well, if any ghost starts to get fresh with you, just let me know. My name ain't—

PERRIOT: (Breaking in.) Bruiser!

BRUISER: (Sheepishly.) Sorry, chief. My name—(He is triumphant.) isn't Bruiser Barnes for nuthin'.

GWEN: Atta boy, Bruiser! A regular young Lochinvar.

BRUISER: (Looking at her blankly.) Huh?

GWEN: I said you're a regular young Lochinvar.

BRUISER: (Sadly.) Gee, Miss Gwen, don't you feel good? You remember me, don't ya? I'm Bruiser Barnes. Don't ya remember?

GWEN: (Thinking.) Bruiser Barnes? (Her face light up.) Oh yes, Bruiser Barnes. How do you do, Mr. Barnes? (She shakes hands with Bruiser.) Well, let's see if we can find some tea or a pot of coffee or something? Maybe it will warm the atmosphere up around here. (Bruiser and the others stand by, mouths open, startled by her actions.)

PERRIOT: (Who understands.) A noble suggestion, my dear Miss Malaprop. (To Bruiser, who is still standing by, mouth open.) Come, Sir Roland, let us search the castle out. Perhaps we may find a toasted porcupine nearby. (He starts left.)

BRUISER: (Coming back to earth.) Hey, what is this? Where you goin' boss?

PERRIOT: Never mind, my friend, just follow.

BRUISER: (Following him off, left.) Gosh, boss, I don't think Miss Gwen is feeling very well. (He stops at the door, looks back, shakes his head, then exits after Perriot.)

GWEN: (Laughing.) Poor old Bruiser. Maybe I shouldn't tease him, but he is such a lovable dummy and he's a great guy to have around when there's work to be done.

MRS. BEEMAN: You sure you feel all right, Miss Talbot?

GWEN: (Smiling.) Oh yes, Mrs. Beeman. You mustn't mind Perriot and me too much. We occasionally put on little acts like that for Bruiser's benefit. It mixes him up so completely.
MAYBELLE:  Gee, you had me whirling a little myself.  I hope they don’t stay away too long, though.  It’s sort of nice to have men around.

MRS. BEEMAN:  My sentiments exactly, daughter.

GWEN:  I understand completely.  I don’t know when I’ve ever seen a more completely unattractive house.  When we were driving up the mountain side, it looked so cold, and mysterious, and dead!

MRS. BEEMAN:  (Shuddering.)  Oh please, Miss Talbot.  That very word “dead” send shivers up and down my spine.

MAYBELLE:  And the housekeeper isn’t much better.  She looks kind of dead, too.

MRS. BEEMAN:  (Nervously.)  Daughter!

MAYBELLE:  Well, she does.  That black dress, and her straight hair, and pale face.  She looks just like a—a—a cadaver!

MRS. BEEMAN:  Daughter, don’t you ever use that horrid word again!

GWEN:  I shall look forward to meeting the housekeeper with a great deal of displeasure.  I have always wanted to strike up an acquaintance with a walking corpse.

MRS. BEEMAN:  (Gulping nervously.)  Ohhh!

MAYBELLE:  (Excitedly.)  And her name is Mrs. Kite!  She does sort of look like a vulture.

MRS. BEEMAN:  (Sinking onto the sofa.)  Ohhh!

MAYBELLE:  And I’ll bet she had something to do with the way the lights dimmed.

The lights start to dim.

MRS. BEEMAN:  Daughter, don’t say such things!  In another minute you’ll have us mixed up in a terrible murder mystery.

The lights dim down farther.

MAYBELLE:  I wouldn’t be surprised if that is exactly what this is.  A murder mystery!

The lights dim more.

GWEN:  Now Maybelle, aren’t you being a bit fantastic?

MRS. BEEMAN:  She certainly is—I HOPE!

MAYBELLE:  (Noticing the lights, which are now very dim.)  I—I—look at th-th-the I-I-lights!  They’re going out!

The three women stand as though spellbound.  The lights are almost out.  Far off in the distance, right stage, is the deep sound of the cymbal.  Mrs. Beeman starts to say something, then emits a half-hearted scream, more like a squawk, and falls in a faint onto the sofa.  The two rush to her.

PERRIOT:  (Calling from off left.)  Hello!  What is it?

The lights flare to their original brightness.
THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

BRUISER: (Rushing on from left, his fists doubled, as he shadow-boxes into and around the room, looking for an enemy.) Lemme at 'em! Where are they? Lemme slug 'em! I'll mow 'em down!
PERRIOT: (Following him on.) Atta boy, Bruiser! (To the others.) What seems to be the— (He sees that Mrs. Beeman is lying on the sofa.) What's the trouble here? (He crosses to the sofa.)

GWEN: Mrs. Beeman fainted.

BRUISER: Who done it? (He looks about, savagely.) I'll lay 'em in the daisies!
PERRIOT: (Moving to Mrs. Beeman's side.) Let me see what I can do. (Gwen and Maybelle move to the ends of the sofa.) What happened?

GWEN: It was very strange. Shortly after you left the lights started to dim down so slowly that we didn't notice them until they were quite low. Then we heard the sound of a deep gong—as though it were a long ways off—and then Mrs. Beeman fainted, you called, and the lights came up, suddenly.

MAYBELLE: That's exactly the way it happened before you folks came.
PERRIOT: (Working over Mrs. Beeman.) I can understand the dimming of the lights all right, but what's this about a gong?

GWEN: I'm not sure. It sounded like the striking of a huge cymbal far off in a passageway, so that the sound echoed and re-echoed for a long distance.

MAYBELLE: It was really strange.
PERRIOT: (To Maybelle.) Did you hear it the first time the lights dimmed?

MAYBELLE: (Thinking.) I—I don't think so. But I was so scared I can't remember very well.
PERRIOT: (With decision.) Well, we mustn't let our nerves get shattered by something that probably is harmless. It may have been a clock somewhere in the house.

GWEN: But it only struck once, Perry.
PERRIOT: (Thinking.) That's true, but in an old, unused house the clocks might be several hours off.

MAYBELLE: (Doubtfully.) Maybe so, but I think there's something fishy going on around here.
PERRIOT: (Grinning at her.) Perhaps you've been reading too many of Perriot Preston's mystery novels.

GWEN: (Back to her old self again.) Why, Mr. Preston! Is it possible to read too many of your novels?
PERRIOT: (Grinning.) I really don't know, Miss Talbot, I never read them myself. (Mrs. Beeman stirs.) She's coming to. She'll be all right now.

BRUISER: (Who has been looking under the furniture, out the doors, and about the room. He is disappointed.) Hey boss, ain't there gonna be no fighting?
PERRIOT: I'm afraid there AIN'T, Bruiser.

BRUISER: Well, I meant isn't. But ain't there?
PERRIOT: (Laughing.) Not unless you shadow box.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Suddenly sitting up, groggily, and throwing her arms about Perriot, who is still beside the sofa.) MY HERO!
PERRIOT: (Embarrassed, tries to untangle her arms, as the others stand back laughing.) WHAT? Now, Mrs. Beeman, stop! Gwen, help me!

GWEN: (Laughing.) Call on Bruiser, he's your bodyguard!

BRUISER: (Looking at the two.) Gee, boss, you don't need any help.
Mrs. Beeman: (Opening her eyes.) Oh! (She quickly withdraws her arms.)
Oh, Mr. Preston. Thank you, thank you! You have saved me! (She throws her arms around him again.)

Perriot: (Withdrawing her arms from his neck.) Saved you, Mrs. Beeman?
I—I don’t understand.

Mrs. Beeman: You saved me from that horrible monster.

Maybelle: (Sarcastically.) Aw, mother, there wasn’t any monster.

Mrs. Beeman: (Loftily.) Don’t tell me, daughter, I saw it with my own eyes.
And then Mr. Preston killed it.

Bruiser, perplexed, stands looking on, scratching his head.

Gwen: I think you were having hallucinations, Mrs. Beeman.

Bruiser: (Not understanding.) Gee, that sounds awful. Will it kill her? (No one pays any attention to him.)

Mrs. Beeman: I would almost swear I saw a monster ready to grab me.

Maybelle: Maybe it was Mr. Smythe! (She giggles shrilly.)

Mrs. Beeman: Don’t try to be humorous, daughter. You failed miserably.

Perriot: Well, Mrs. Beeman, the danger is over now. What do you say we go brew some tea? Bruiser and I found some in the pantry.

Gwen: Excellent! I imagine Mrs. Beeman could use some stimulation. And I know I could.

Maybelle: Me too.

Bruiser: Yeah, and me too. All of this has kinda put my nerves on edge. And I could use some sandwiches, too. When I get nervous, I always get hungry.

Perriot: Fine! But you’d better stay here, Bruiser. Just in case that monster shows up again.

Bruiser: Aw, boss, I’m hungry.

Perriot: If you stay, there may be a fight in it for you.

Bruiser: Yeah? (He is delighted.) Then I’ll be here if you need me. (To himself.) Gosh, a fight! (To the others.) But save me something to eat. Fighting makes me hungry.

Gwen: I’ll see if I can find something for sandwiches. (To Perriot.) Did you see anything of the housekeeper?

Perriot: Strangely enough, we did not. But she must be around the house somewhere.

Mrs. Beeman: I don’t know about that woman. It wouldn’t surprise me if she has something to do with all the mystery around here.

Perriot: I can’t understand why all of you insist on making a mystery out of this? Why, everything that has happened can be logically explained.

Mrs. Beeman: Perhaps, Mr. Preston. (Nodding wisely.) But I have a feeling!

Perriot: (Laughing.) Very well. If it’s mystery you want, mystery we’ll have.
Well, how about that tea? (The women exit left. To Bruiser.) If anyone else comes, let them in. If Mr. Graham, the lawyer, arrives, call us. And if the monster shows up again, punch him in the nose. He’s making too much trouble.

Bruiser: (Doubling up his fist.) How about a nice right hook? A Bruiser special. I almost knocked a fellow out with it once.

Perriot: (Crossing left, to exit.) Then that ought to take care of the monster.
BRUISER: Okay, boss. *(Perriot exits left. Bruiser looks about the room, does a bit of shadow boxing, flexes his muscles, and starts around, looking under the furniture. Just as he is bending over, looking under the chair right, the doorbell sounds. Bruiser whirls about, and goes into boxing gyrations with an imaginary enemy. The doorbell sounds again, and he stops, embarrassed, realizing that it is the doorbell, not a fight gong. He moves to the opening center, exits, and goes to the front door.)*

LOUISE: *(Off stage, center.)* Good evening.

BRUISER: Gee, hello, Miss. Won'tcha come in?

LOUISE: *(Entering through the entryway.)* Thank you. I imagine that you are Wentworth, the butler about whom I've heard so much.

BRUISER: Me, Miss? Naw, I ain’t— *(He catches himself.)—I isn’t— *(He realizes that is wrong.)* I mean—I—I’m not the butler.

LOUISE: Really? Then you must be one of the other heirs.

BRUISER: Naw, I—a—I’m not that neither.

LOUISE: Then—then who are you?

BRUISER: Gosh, Miss, I’m BRUISER BARNES! *(He waits for her to be impressed.)*

LOUISE: *(Unimpressed.)* That’s very nice.

BRUISER: *(Disappointed.)* Gee, haven’t you never heard of me?

LOUISE: *(Smiling.)* Sorry, but I never have.

BRUISER: *(Sighing.)* I was afraid of that. Not very many people have. *(Hopefully.) But I was almost middleweight champion of the world once. I woulda been, too, if I hadn’t got knocked out.

LOUISE: *(Pseudo-impressed.)* Really? That’s too bad. *(Catching herself quickly.)* I—I mean about your getting knocked out.

BRUISER: *(Sadly.)* Yeah. *(Explaining.)* A glass jaw.

LOUISE: *(Not understanding.)* Oh, I’m so sorry.

BRUISER: *(Sadly.)* Yeah, me too. *(Brightening up.)* But I don’t care. I got a good job being Mr. Preston’s bodyguard. Only I don’t get to fight enough.

LOUISE: Mr. Preston?

BRUISER: Yeah, Mr. Perriot Preston. He writes mystery books.

LOUISE: Oh, yes. I’ve read some of them. They’re very good.

BRUISER: *(Basking in reflected glory.)* Gee, thanks.

LOUISE: *(Smiling.)* You’re welcome. Then he must be one of the heirs, too.

BRUISER: Yeah, I guess that’s what you call them. Anyway, he’s supposed to inherit some money tonight. If the monster doesn’t get him.

LOUISE: *(Taken aback.)* Monster?

BRUISER: Yeah, there’s a monster around here someplace. Mr. Preston told me to watch out for him, and if I see him, to knock his block off.

LOUISE: *(Doubtfully.)* Surely you’re fooling.

BRUISER: *(Not sure.)* Mebbe so, but that’s what Mr. Preston said, so I’m looking for him.

LOUISE: *(Not very cheerfully.)* Well, good luck. I hate to think there is a monster on the loose, even if it is a joke. But it wouldn’t surprise me, in this house.

BRUISER: Yeah, it could be a lot better, I guess. I’m used to almost anything, so it doesn’t bother me. But it’s probably different to women—especially pretty women, like you.
LOUISE: (Curtsying to him.) Thank you, kind sir.

BRUISER: (Embarrassed.) Aw, that’s okay, Miss—Miss—(He falters, realizing he does not know her name.)

LOUISE: Louise Thomas.

BRUISER: Gee, that’s a pretty name.

LOUISE: Thank you again, kind sir. But it isn’t. It’s like a thousand others.

BRUISER: Gosh, I don’t think so. I think it’s pretty—like you.

LOUISE: Why Mr. Barnes. I think you’re a flatterer.

BRUISER: (Embarrassed.) Aw, gosh, that’s what Miss Gwen says. But I’m really not. I’m not smart enough to flatter people.

LOUISE: Maybe you’re just honest.

BRUISER: Maybe that’s it! Do you think?

LOUISE: Could be.

BRUISER: I hope so. Do you mind if I tell Miss Gwen—she’s Mr. Preston’s secretary—what you said?

LOUISE: Not at all, if Miss Gwen doesn’t?

BRUISER: Naw, she’ll like it. You know what’s funny about her and Mr. Preston. She’s his secretary, but I think they’re in love, and I’ll betcha they get married one of these days.

LOUISE: Really? I’d be careful what I say, Mr. Barnes. Love is a mighty serious accusation to make against a person.

BRUISER: (Sighing.) Gee, I don’t think so. I think it’s swell!

LOUISE: (Smiling.) For a prize fighter, Mr. Barnes, I’d say you are quite a romanticist.

BRUISER: And that’s good, huh?

LOUISE: (Pursing her lips.) It’s usually quite harmless, I understand.

BRUISER: Then do you mind if I tell Miss Gwen that too? I don’t know, but I think she kids me sometimes and I like to learn things I can say back at her. If I tell her I’m a romanticist, it’ll floor her.

LOUISE: Something like a right hook, eh?

BRUISER: (Grinning, happily.) Say, do you know what a right hook is?

LOUISE: I’ve used a few of them in my day. I was raised in the part of town where an occasional right hook came in handy.

BRUISER: Gee, that’s swell. You’re not only pretty, you’re smart, too. Gosh, do you mind if I call you Louise?

LOUISE: Not at all. And I think I’ll call you Bruiser.

BRUISER: Gee, I wish you would. All my friends do.

LOUISE: Then we’ll be friends. (She puts out her hand.)

BRUISER: (Taking her hand.) That’s swell! And I wish I had been there when you were raised. You wouldn’t have had to use any right hooks. I’d of taken care of that.

LOUISE: (Smiling at him.) I think you would have, at that. (New thought.) But where are the others? Are they all here yet?

BRUISER: I think so. There’s a Mrs. Beeman and her daughter, and Mr. Preston and Miss Gwen. Only Mr. Graham, the lawyer, hasn’t come yet, and Mrs. Kite, the housekeeper, and the butler, Wentworth, are missing.

LOUISE: Missing?

BRUISER: Yeah. I don’t know much about it, but they don’t seem to be around.

LOUISE: That’s strange.
THE PHANTOM STRIKES AGAIN

BRUISER: That’s what Mr. Preston says. And—and I think so, too.
LOUISE: Where is Mr. Preston?
BRUISER: He and the others are out getting some tea. *(With a sudden thought.)* Say, did you come up here alone?
LOUISE: Why, yes.
BRUISER: *(Shaking his head.)* You shouldn’t do that. It’s terribly stormy and cold. What if you had had car trouble?
LOUISE: I have a new car. I—I bought it because I knew I could pay for it after tonight. I really wasn’t afraid. But I am chilled from the wind.
BRUISER: Then why don’t we get some tea, and maybe a sandwich? Talking like this always makes me hungry.
LOUISE: Wonderful.

*Bruiser starts to help her off with her coat, as Gwen, followed by Perriot, enters.*

GWEN: *(To Perriot.)* From the way she’s eating, I shouldn’t say Mrs. Beeman felt too badly.
PERRIOT: *(Seeing Louise and Bruiser.)* Well, Bruiser, this is a very attractive monster you found.
BRUISER: *(Seriously.)* This ain’t—isn’t—no monster, Mr. Preston. This is Louise—ah—Miss Thomas. She’s one of the hair—hair—one of the people who’ll get some money tonight.
PERRIOT: *(Bowing slightly.)* How do you do, Miss Thomas? And this is Miss Talbot.
LOUISE: *(Pleased.)* Oh, how do you do, Miss Talbot?
GWEN: How do you do, Miss Thomas?
PERRIOT: Now wait a minute. This’ll never do. *(He mimics.)* How do you do, Miss Talbot? How do you do, Miss Thomas? How do you do, Mr. Preston? How do you do, Mr. Barnes?
BRUISER: *(Grandiloquently.)* Aw, just call me “Bruiser.”
PERRIOT: That’s what I mean.
BRUISER: *(Dumbfounded.)* Huh?
PERRIOT: All of this formality. Four people in the same boat. Why not be Gwen, Louise, Bruiser and Perry?
GWEN: Perfect!
LOUISE: It suits me.
PERRIOT: *(To Bruiser, who has said nothing.)* How about you, Bruiser.
BRUISER: *(Embarrassed.)* I don’t know, Mr. Preston. It’s okay, all except for you. If you don’t mind, I’d like to call you “boss,” or “chief.” It makes me feel better.
GWEN: Why not take Louise out for some tea, Bruiser? She’s probably cold from her drive. We’ll have plenty of time to talk later. It’s going to be a long evening.
BRUISER: Yeah, that’s a good idea. Why didn’t I think of that?
LOUISE: *(As she goes left with Bruiser.)* We’ll see you later, then.
GWEN: *(Laughing.)* Well, I certainly hope so.
BRUISER: *(Stopping at the door left.* Say, boss, if that monster shows up, just call me. I’ll clip his coupon for him.)

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PERRIOT: (Laughing.) Okay, Bruiser. But run along to Mrs. Beeman. She’ll probably welcome you with open arms.

BRUISER: (Disgustedly exiting.) Oh, gosh!

PERRIOT: (Turning to Gwen.) You know, honey, there is something funny about this whole set up. I can’t quite understand it.

GWEN: But you were trying so hard to talk us out of the idea. What made you change your mind?

PERRIOT: I haven’t changed my mind. I just didn’t want Mrs. Beeman to get hysterical. Frankly, I’ve had an odd feeling about this house since we arrived.

GWEN: That’s exactly how I feel. It’s nothing tangible—just a sort of sensation that things aren’t as they should be.

PERRIOT: I wish I could put my finger on it. First, the disappearance of Wentworth.

GWEN: And the absence of Mrs. Kite, the housekeeper. Why are both of them gone tonight of all nights.

PERRIOT: Perhaps that’s why they are gone.

GWEN: I don’t understand what you mean.

PERRIOT: I don’t really, myself. It doesn’t make any sense. They must be here at midnight to inherit their share of the estate.

GWEN: (With a sudden thought.) Perry! You don’t think that someone could have kidnapped them or killed them to inherit their share of the property?

PERRIOT: (Frowning.) I just don’t know. I don’t know who could do it. All of the other heiresses are accounted for. I doubt that Mrs. Beeman could be accused of kidnapping a man and a woman. Certainly her fear wasn’t feigned, and that was a real faint if I ever saw one. And as for Miss Thomas, I think there can be little doubt.

GWEN: Unless one of them hired someone to do it for them.

PERRIOT: Which is always a dangerous thing to do. (Shaking his head.) No, I think they are both in the clear. Which leaves only the three heirs: Wentworth, who is gone, Graham, who, as the lawyer in the case should be above suspicion, and myself, who, to the best of my knowledge hasn’t kidnapped anyone this evening.

GWEN: But why is Lawyer Graham above suspicion? As the one handling probate of the will he should know more about its terms than anyone else. Perhaps it has a clause that we know nothing about. Perhaps he needed to get Mrs. Kite and Wentworth out of the way.

PERRIOT: Possible, but not probable. Graham has a fine law practice and a fortune that undoubtedly exceeds that left by Mr. Wentz. To hold him guilty would be illogical.

GWEN: (Doubtfully.) Well, I think he’s guilty.

PERRIOT: (Laughing.) Wait a minute! We’re letting our imaginations run away with us. We’re prosecuting people without a crime.

GWEN: (Definitely.) I’m sure.

PERRIOT: Now don’t be stubborn! (She makes a face at him.) Anyway, let’s go a bit farther. There are two other things that bother me. One is the dimming of the lights and the other is the gong that was heard.

GWEN: But you said the lights might have dimmed because of the storm and the gong might have been a clock.
PERRIOT: Yes, I know I did, but only to give Mrs. Beeman heart. If the lights had dimmed only once, I should have called it mere coincidence. But twice, both times when women were alone in the room, mind you, is above coincidence. As for the clock, if the house has been closed for nearly a year, every clock in the east wing of the house would have run down long since. So the clock idea is out.

GWEN: Then—then—what is it?

PERRIOT: The strange stipulation in Mr. Wentz’s will that each heir must be present in this room at midnight tonight if he is to receive his share makes me think it’s a simple case of terrorism in an effort to drive some of us from the house.

GWEN: So that the terrorist can inherit at least part of the other’s shares!

PERRIOT: Exactly. So, it may be simple terrorism—unless it’s murder.

GWEN: Oh, Perry, not that!

PERRIOT: Please don’t get upset, Gwen. We may be having illusions and when it’s all over, we’ll have a good laugh at our own expense. But if it is something as bad as murder, we won’t know—we may never know—unless the bodies are found.

GWEN: But what can we do?

PERRIOT: (Smiling grimly.) There’s nothing we can do. Certainly I won’t leave on the bare chance that a hunch is correct. I can use that money however much or little it may be. But perhaps I had better have Bruiser run you back to town.

GWEN: And leave you here, the only man? Oh no, Mr. Preston. If things are as bad as they may be, you’ll need Bruiser’s physical support—and my moral support.

PERRIOT: (Smiling.) Fair enough. I didn’t think you’d go anyway. Afraid to leave me here alone with all these women. (Wisely.) I know.

GWEN: (Saucily.) Silly!

PERRIOT: Anyway, be ready for anything, for if Wentworth and Mrs. Kite are really gone, we can’t tell who may be next!

GWEN: (Nervously.) I wish Mr. Graham were here, and it were midnight. Then we could leave this awful place.

PERRIOT: Yes, if he hasn’t already come.

GWEN: You mean that—

Far off in the distance the howl of a dog can be heard, weirdly echoing among the crags of the mountainside. The lights in the room dim noticeably.

PERRIOT: Listen!

The howl of the dog is heard again. As it dies, all is as quiet as death. The two on stage stand stiffly, listening. Suddenly, Gwen screams as the lights dim more.

GWEN: Perry! The lights! The lights are going out!

PERRIOT: (Loudly.) Stay close to me, Gwen. (Calling loudly.) Bruiser! Bruiser! Quick! In here!
The heavy pounding of Bruiser's feet is heard off left, accompanied by the wild talk of the three women.

BRUISER: (Wildly bursting on stage.) What is it, boss? What's the matter?

The women follow him on, talking in loud, high-pitched voices, ad-libbing questions.

PERRIOT: (Talking very fast.) Something is about to happen! Everyone stand close together and don't move! Bruiser, if you feel anyone come near, strike and strike hard.

The lights go out. Far in the distance right stage is heard the sound of the gong echoing through the house. On the sound of the gong, Mrs. Beeman starts to scream and laugh hysterically. In the darkness, Maybelle begins to cry, and Bruiser tries to quiet and comfort them. The fireplace opens, the blue light shines for a moment, a large figure is seen in the opening with glowing hands. Then, the fireplace closes. Suddenly all is very quiet. Only the deep-breathed sobbing of the women is heard. Then with a glare the lights flash on. On the floor, right stage, in front of the chair, is seen the body of Wentworth in a crumpled heap. Unseen by the others on stage, Mrs. Kite, expressionless, is standing just inside the door, up left.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Seeing the body first, she points to it, and tries to speak. No words will come. She points frantically.) Oh! Oh! OH!

GWEN: It's—it's—a body! (Wentworth moans, and moves, writhingly.)

PERRIOT: (Rushing to Wentworth.) Quick! He's hurt! (He kneels over Wentworth, and starts to open his collar.)

LOUISE: But—but—who is it?

MRS. KITE: (Without emotion.) It is Wentworth.

MRS. BEEMAN: (Who has moved in front of the sofa, better to see. She whirs to see who is speaking. All are startled by the voice of Mrs. Kite.) It's—it's Mrs. Kite! Ohhh! (She drops into a dead faint onto the sofa.)

BRUISER: (Scratching his head, perplexed.) Gosh, she's done it again!

Maybelle and Louise stand by, eyes popping out, Gwen is with Perriot right stage over Wentworth, Bruiser is center, scratching his head, Mrs. Beeman is sprawled on the sofa. QUICK CURTAIN.