

GHOST MALL

by

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Characters

Christine Montague, early forties.

Bill Armstrong, mid-thirties.

Bashir Hassan, early fifties.

Dan Bauer, mid-forties.

Bettie Wilson, nearing sixty.

Jamal Dabney, a teenager

Tiffany Waters, a teenager

Setting

Ghost Mall is set in a City Council conference room and at the South Hill Mall demolition site.

ACT ONE

Scene One

The Subcommittee on the Future of the South Hill Property is convening for the first time. A conference room. The room is set up with chairs and a table and a screen upon which South Hill, a '70's mall, is projected. The mall has a kind of ethereal, sculptural grandeur—the gleaming city on the hill—in the way the light hits the beige brick, casting a silvery pinkish glow. “South Hill” in large red lettering, is inscribed over the entrance visible in the projection. At the same time, viewed from another angle, South Hill appears hideous, a monstrosity and eyesore. Perhaps the mall shifts in color, brightness and tone throughout the scene, projecting a spiritual and emotional life of its own.

Subcommittee members, Bashir Hassan, Dan Bauer and Christine Montague sit together with the sub-committee chair, Bill Armstrong, along with invited guest-committee member, Bettie Wilson.

CHRISTINE

That mall was haunted.

BILL

Christine?

CHRISTINE

Or cursed.

BILL

That's a little dramatic. Could we—

CHRISTINE

Haunted or cursed.

BILL

If we could—

CHRISTINE

I don't know which is worse.

BILL

If we could please stick with—

CHRISTINE

Is it worse to be haunted? Or worse to be cursed?

BILL

--the *facts*?

CHRISTINE

South Hill—

BILL

--was built too fast, that's all.

CHRISTINE

There were evil forces there since opening day.

BILL

Christine.

CHRISTINE

Or some pretty angry ghosts.

(There is silence. Bill waits, defeated.)

BILL

(after a time) Go on.

CHRISTINE

That's all I have to say.

BILL

Okay. Thank you for your contribution. If we could move on—

CHRISTINE

It shook. The mall shook.

(a pause)

BASHIR

(apologetically) I'm afraid Christine is right. The crystal and the dinnerware came crashing off the showroom shelf. Every time a heavy truck went by. Making its way up I-275. The mall vibrated.

CHRISTINE

And the crack that opened up the length of the floor? At the end of the west corridor?

BASHIR

That was Wieboldt's. They covered it over. With steel plates.

CHRISTINE

How about the sewer? Inside Gordon Jewelers? The line broke under the diamond counter. Right before Christmas.

BASHIR

That was 1984.

CHRISTINE

The same year the tornado hit it. Blew the roof off of the north wing.

DAN

On a positive note—

(They all look at him.)

South Hill was one of the first malls to get its own exit ramp.

CHRISTINE

(unimpressed) That mall shook. And excuse my French, it stunk.

BASHIR

Due to the flooding . . .

CHRISTINE

I don't know, honey. I'll grant you it flooded after every major storm. But that odor. That was something special. South Hill smelled like a sewer.

BILL

Christine.

CHRISTINE

(shrugging) I'm only saying.

BILL

Can we agree that South Hill had been dying for years? And move on –

CHRISTINE

The three deer that panicked in the parking lot and crashed through Penny's window?

BASHIR

Miraculously, one did survive.

CHRISTINE

They ran through that mall, past all the screaming shoppers, bloodied and terrified.

DAN

I don't think you can blame *that* on South Hill.

BASHIR

It was a ghastly tragedy.

CHRISTINE

I think we should have taken it as some kind of sign.

DAN

The deer have nowhere left to go.

BILL

So they went shopping!

(No one laughs.)

CHRISTINE

The side-walks were a law-suit waiting to happen.

I wonder why nobody sued?

BASHIR

Perhaps South Hill had some angels, too.

BILL

(with finality) The developers cleared the land, put in fill and built South Hill. On the fill, too fast. That's all. The rapid settling of the structure—

BASHIR

--If I might? The sidewalk had dropped 18 inches at last measurement!

CHRISTINE

The whole place was sinking!

(A pause. Bill has given up again, sits quietly.)

(a tinge of irony) The saddest day was when they turned the fountain off. And the rotating sculpture.

(pause)

You just knew it was over.

You knew.

But it kept going. It wouldn't die. It just wouldn't give up the ghost.

DAN

I maintain that South Hill was good for this city. In its time. And deserves, at least, that recognition.

BILL

Dan's right. A moment of silence for South Hill, Christine?

CHRISTINE

Very funny.

Name one good thing that mall did?

BILL

I'll name one. Jobs. I'll name two. Jobs. I'll name three—

CHRISTINE

Oh, there are plenty of jobs.

The best thing for it was getting sealed and shuttered. And we'll all be better off when the demolition's done.

BILL

(with satisfaction) The demolition has been completed.

BETTIE

(who has been following the discussion carefully, but silently, sits up) It has? Since when?

BILL

Ten o'clock this morning. South Hill Mall is gone.

BASHIR

Goodness.

CHRISTINE

Thank you, god.

(BETTIE, who has been listening with increasing agitation, stands up. She is shaking.)

BILL

Bettie, are you okay?

BETTIE

(no longer able to contain herself) South Hill. Was my life.

BILL

We know that, Bettie.

BETTIE

(with difficulty) That mall was my life.

BILL

(generously) That's why I asked you to come in and talk to us. Present your thoughts. Join the committee on the future of South Hill.--What was it you sold there?

BETTIE

Ladies underwear.

BILL

(taking this in) Right, right.

(continuing) --Join us as its unofficial representative. You *and* Bashir—

BASHIR

Please. Bettie worked there for over thirty years. I hardly—

BETTIE

You were there twenty-three, Bashir.

(a pause. She is trying not to cry.)

I'm sorry. I'm a little . . . emotional around this issue.

BILL

(to CHRISTINE) Pass Bettie a tissue.

(CHRISTINE does so. Bettie takes it.)

BETTIE

Thank you.

(She dries here eyes and wipes her nose. They wait. Bashir puts his hand on her arm.)

It's okay. I'm okay. Thanks, Bashir.

BILL

(again, gently, and proud of himself) I wanted you to have a say. Share your feelings. You, Bettie, are South Hill's history— from inception to demolition--*and* part of its future!

BETTIE

Should I sit or stand?

BILL

Whichever makes you feel more comfortable.

BETTIE

Well, I practised standing.

BILL

Good, then stand.

(BETTIE takes some notes out of her bag, but then does not look at them. She is clearly nervous, unused to the situation and her role. She pauses, hesitates, then blurts the following out, spontaneously.)

BETTIE

Where does Bettie end and the mall begin? Where does the mall end and Bettie begin?

They finished the demolition?

(BILL nods, in sympathy.)

That sure was quick.

(She clears her throat, looks down at her notes, but looks up, not quite ready to begin what she has prepared.)

I knew we were doomed. When the girls with the walkie talkie's showed up. You could cut the tension with a knife. It ran up and down the floors. From shoes, Bashir, right?

BASHIR

That's right. You could cut the tension with a knife. Like Bettie says.

BETTIE

On up. To lingerie.

BASHIR

Bettie knew. Before any of us. She could read the future.

(BETTIE is fighting tears again. She turns suddenly to CHRISTINE.)

BETTIE

What did you have against South Hill, Christine? Your husband's the mayor of this town. And we all know he developed *Hawthorn Center*.

CHRISTINE

That's got nothing to do with it.

BETTIE

Oh, no?

CHRISTINE

Hawthorn is beside the point.

BETTIE

Is it, Christine. Is it, really? You said "we'll all be better off". Who's we? Not *us*. We lost our--

BILL

(despairing) Bettie? I think we're all ready. Ready and eager to hear what you've prepared?

(A pause CHRISTINE and BETTIE stand off. And then, finding new energy and resolve, BETTIE checks her notes and begins.)

BETTIE

South Hill Mall was born in 1971. It was a stormy spring day when the ribbon was cut. April 7th—

CHRISTINE

The awning collapsed. At the north entrance.

BILL

Christine.

CHRISTINE

(shrugging) That's what I heard. Collapsed on some shoppers.

BETTIE

(ignoring her, determined) The winds were strong. But the sun was shining. All us employees got a glass of champagne. It was conveniently located. Just off of Interstate 275. For a short time, it was the largest mall in the county. And everybody said it was the best thing for the city.

The first twenty years were the glory days.

The two main anchors were Wieboldt's and JC Penney, with a malt shop inside and a nice eatery. Both were complete full-line stores, large in size.

Another major anchor was Carson Pirie Scott. And no other department store could touch it. Right, Bashir?

BASHIR

That's right. There was no place quite like Carson Pirie Scott.

BETTIE

We had a huge furniture area then, a clearance center, and a restaurant, The Heather Room. That was on the third floor. We celebrated everybody's birthdays there. Remember, Bashir?

BASHIR

I remember it well. It was a beautiful restaurant.

BETTIE

And the fourth anchor was Sears.

South Hill had first-rate shops in its first 25 years. About 120, altogether. There was

(As BETTIE launches into the following, the group are with her at first. Dan is busily taking notes. But they grow more and more helpless and glazed, as the list goes on. Only Bashir follows the story with feeling and interest—and when those dissipate, with politeness. With a sinking feeling, BILL realizes that BETTIE has misunderstood her assignment. BETTIE seems to be remembering each shop as if seeing it as it appears before her mind's eye.)

Casual Corner, Charles A. Stevens, Radio Shack, Thom McAn. Merle Norman Makeup, Things Remembered, Finish Line, Circus World. Bath and Body Works, Buckle, Best Travel. Gamestop, Just Pants, Sears Portrait Studio. Kinney Shoes, El-Bee Shoes, Payless Shoes, Shoe World. Eye World, Sock World. Underground Station, Whitehall, Lane's Optical. Osterman, Leonard and Gordon Jewellers, Claire's Accessories, Kay Bee Toys, Trade Secret, Camelot Music. Deb, Foxmore, Fines, Foot Locker. Champs Sport, Layne Bryant . . .

(A pause, the group sigh a quiet sigh of relief, but she goes on)

It had the Nuthouse . . .

Chess King, Ormond, Sweet William. Monarchs, Berman's, Motherhood Maternity. Aladdin's Castle, Hickory Farms, Tobacco Village, Thrift Drugs. Susie's Casuals, Sym's. Fashion Bug, Bon-Ton—

BILL

Uh, Bettie?

BETTIE

I'm almost done. There were local shops, too, of course, like Gift Tree, Bankhardt's Gifts, Things Engraved. And several nice eateries. Orange Julius, Fannie May, Good Sam Pretzels, Hot Sam's Corn Dogs. The exterior corridor housed a Marriott courtyard. There was Pier 1, La-z-Boy, Fun Harbor. Bank of South Hill, JoAnn Fabric, Ace Hardware, Red Lobster. There was JC Penny Auto.

"One stop shopping. What more could you ask for?" That was the motto.

Well everything went fine until 1976. When Mohawk Mills opened over in Clayborn. 15 to 20 minutes south/southwest. They had a Marshall Field's and a Lord and Taylor, more "high end" than South Hill. Most stores did stay on at South Hill, but now they had two locations. One in South Hill—

BILL

Right. Bettie--

BETTIE

One in Mohawk Mills. Not to mention it was twice the size. Stores they both had were Casual Corner, Radio Shack, Charles A. Stevens, Thom McAn—

BILL

Bettie!

BETTIE

Bill?

BILL

Could you possibly skip those?

BETTIE

All the shops?

BILL

Yeah, yeah. Please. Just, please, move on? . . .

BETTIE

(a little thrown by the interruption) Oh. Okay, then. Moving right along. In 1988, Wieboldt's declared bankruptcy. And in a heartbeat, it moved Montgomery Wards. One problem this caused was. All the anchors at that time were on two levels. But not Montgomery Wards.

(The group are variously attending to other things-- surreptitiously, at first, and then more and more openly. BETTIE is oblivious to this. She takes this story very seriously. It is very close to her heart, and she is determined to tell it factually—and fully.)

Well, it was around this time that JC Penny closed its restaurant and Carson Pirie Scott closed up its third floor. Except for the rest rooms. And gift wrap. The Heather Room was closed for good. That was sad, right, Bashir?

BASHIR

It was very sad, indeed.

BETTIE

Meanwhile, Mohawk Mills got a renovation. Including a food court expansion. It got bigger and brighter. We never had a food court at South Hill. They had

(BILL's mouth drops, but he has lost the will to act.)

TK Noodle, Whataburger, Dippin' Donuts, Dunkin' Donuts, Nathan's Famous, Panda Express, 1 Potato 2, Au Bon Pain, Big Apple Bagels, Bimplie, Bojangles, Biscuitville. There was a Hogi Yogi, Harvey's, Green Burrito, Hu Hot Mongolian Grill. A Great Steak and Potato, Pizza Hut, Planet Sub, Sweet Tomatoes, Wings to Go, Gold Star Chili. Juice Stop, Jack in the box, Roly Poly, Salad Works. Burgerville, Chi-Chis, Cinnabon and Big Bowl.

They had Extreme Pita.

(A pause. BILL acknowledges this with a weak shake of the head.)

Of course, this hurt South Hill.

But even still. It seemed to be having a new lease on life. There was DINOMATION—where they brought in robotic dinosaurs. It worked to some extent. And Carson's started the talking Christmas Tree.

But at the same time, this was 1989, the mall was changing hands. The Leonard Group took over. And the mall had never had a facelift, not even a renovation, but the new management just let it deteriorate further.

(darkly, directly to CHRISTINE)

And then came *Hawthorn Center*.

(CHRISTINE sits up, defensively. A tension flickers.)

Hawthorn Center opened in 1989. It became the largest outlet mall in the county at that time. Instead of making dual locations like they did with Mohawk Mills, almost everyone fled South Hill for Hawthorn. It had hundreds of stores. All the major anchors. Plus they had

(BILL gets up and goes to the window. He sticks his head out, perhaps contemplating whether to jump. This makes BETTIE unsure, but she decides to continue.)

Victoria's Secret. Hallmark, Petco, Claire's Boutique. Clarks, Collections, Coldstone Creamery. Accessorize and Circuit City. They had Perfumania.

Among others.

(BILL pops his head back in with the tentative hope that the list is finished.)

In conclusion

(They hold their collective breath. Bill returns to the table.)

South Hill Mall's vacancy started to rise. While shopper traffic continued to sag. Hawthorn Center had pretty near killed it. By the time 1992 rolled around, there were about a dozen stores left. In 1997, JC Penny pulled out. Well, they had opened that new location over at Hawthorn. Not even two months later, Montgomery Ward closed up shop. And well, I guess not too many people want to jump on a sinking ship.

Dollar Tree did come on board. And Burlington Coat Factory.

There were so many plans for the mall just then. Right after Pennys and Wards moved out. County College did hold a couple classes there.

We stayed open until March of 2004. Meanwhile, we came under new management again: The Pauley Group, as you know, Bill, since your company's the chief partner. And even until the day we closed, we never did receive a remodelling. Just a new carpet. The merchandise changed. We got the clearance items. Things other Carson's couldn't sell. Turned into a low volume bargain store, little by little.

Where did you start, Bill, with the demolition?

BILL

(somewhat guiltily) JC Pennys.

BETTIE

All that's left is memories.

(She sits heavily.)

BILL

(taking his chance) Thank you, Bettie, for that heartfelt presentation. Of course you're bound to feel a lot of emotion.

We all do. Thank you.

(He claps, the others join in, politely.)

For years South Hill was known as the ghost mall. But that's not exactly accurate. You have to die first, don't you, to be a ghost? And that place was dying for years. But it wasn't a dead mall. Until the wrecking ball. And *now, finally*, it'll be the ghost mall. The ghost mall of South Hill.

(he laughs at his own wit and the profundity of it)

What more is there to say? We all have our favourite memories. Growing up. One of mine was that talking Christmas Tree. Another was taking the Pepsi Challenge. And now we have a new challenge before us. The future. And more precisely, the future of the South Hill property.

And let's not kid ourselves. It won't be easy. In this economy? We've got two wars on. Gas has skyrocketed. Meaning higher transportation costs, diesel, rates on rails and barges. We've got the worst drought in almost twenty years. Tsunamis, floods and hurricanes, and here we are praying for rain.

The truth is. When it comes to South Hill. We can't give it away.

We need some new ideas.

BASHIR

Could the land not be re-farmed?

BILL

Are you kidding me? That earth's poison. Dead.

BASHIR

Dead?

DAN

I'd have to jump in, Bill, and disagree. Earth doesn't die. Even inorganic matter has life, actually.

BILL

That land was a hog farm, Dan.

DAN

I'm aware of that—

BILL

It was poison.

BETTIE

They built South Hill on poisonous land?

BILL

Well, Bettie.

DAN

It's the nitrogen run-off. From pig manure.

CHRISTINE

The odor! The odor I was talking about!

DAN

A hog excretes roughly 3 gallons a day. Renquist's operation had 4,000 pigs. You have to store it somewhere. So, you build manure storage lagoons. Like the ones on South Hill.

Storage lagoons leak into the surrounding soil . . .

CHRISTINE

I won't say I told you so.

BETTIE

I worked there 33 years. And you, Bashir.

(she seems unable to fathom something)

I...

DAN

Bettie? Are you all right? What's wrong?

BETTIE

It's nothing, Dan. I'm fine

It's the past.

BILL

That's the spirit. We'll keep this hog farm business to ourselves.

BASHIR

(troubled) What is the land safe for?

BILL

It's safe for everything! I was just saying. It won't *grow* anything, that's all. Not wheat. Not corn. And it's a damn shame, too. We can't even cash in on ethanol.

CHRISTINE

So what are the options, Bill, in real terms?

BILL

We've had nibbles from a Big Box Super Center.

BASHIR

I believe we have a Big Box ordinance. To keep heavy traffic out of the area.

BILL

Where there's a will, there's a way, Bashir. Ordinances come and go. That's not our problem. The problem is. We get some interest--

(He gets up, pacing through his frustration)

The Donald Group deal looked all but clenched. Made in heaven. Beautiful. Ten-acre mixed-use lifestyle center. Curves, Crunch, Hollywood Tan.

Had a call from Assemblies of God. To build another Mega Church. But when it comes down to it. We're left in the lurch. They all back out.

CHRISTINE

The curse I was talking about.

BILL

Rumors like that only make things worse.

(a pause)

Bettie, you're okay?

BETTIE

I'm okay. I'm fine.

BILL

Ready, Dan?

BETTIE

I'm okay. . .

BILL

Bettie, sorry? What did you say?

BETTIE

Nothing, nothing.

BILL

Okay, then. Okay! I've asked Dan to address a topic he is pretty familiar with as a historian--

DAN

--amateur

BILL

--And that's the past. Don't they say you can't go forward without looking back?

DAN

Firstly, fellow council members, Bettie. I was happy to join this subcommittee. You see, I have a kind of vested interest. And it's not monetary. As a historian--and Bill, I am only an amateur--it's a hobby. As a historian, but also for personal reasons. I worked at South Hill, Bettie, Bashir.

BASHIR

You don't say!

BETTIE

Where?

DAN

Sears. Making keys. On acid, occasionally.

(The group look at each other, laugh, DAN nods, shrugs)

So you can imagine. The job only lasted a couple of weeks. You wouldn't have reason to remember me.

BETTIE

Now you say it, I think I do.

DAN

I was hidden under a lot of hair. And, personally, I have very little memory of being there. Sorry.

BASHIR

Bettie is South Hill's memory.

DAN

Still, South Hill was a part of my life, too, so to speak. It supported me at the start of my teaching degree. And so—

CHRISTINE

(to Bettie) Dan's a history teacher.

BETTIE

(impressed) Oh.

DAN

8th Grade social studies, actually.

(a pause, while he ponders his fate)

And so, I find South Hill to be pretty interesting. Well to someone like me. Not that it isn't like thousands of other properties.

We all know the mall went up in '71.

Ah, 1971. *Stairway to Heaven. Riders on the storm. Shaft. Me and You and a Dog Named Boo.*

BETTIE

Joy to the World. Chick-a-boom.

DAN

(half-singing these titles) *Sooner or Later. Here Comes that Rainy Day Feeling Again.*

(The group join in for a short chorus of *Rainy Day Feeling.*)

BETTIE

A major theme that year was the belted sweater. And the dog collar. In suede leather. And the four piece wardrobe sets. In Orlon acrylic knit. All machine-washable. You could use the same pieces to form several different outfits. Blouse and skirt. Blouse and pants. Blouse, vest and skirt. Blouse, vest and pants. That's four right there.

DAN

Easy-care Dacron. The war raging in Vietnam.

(At mention of the latter, BASHIR places his hand gently on BETTIE's arm. She looks at him with gratitude.)

BETTIE

It's okay. I'm fine, Bashir.

DAN

Bettie?

BETTIE

I'm fine, Dan. Go on.

DAN

(resuming his place, on a roll) Yes, the year the mall opened was a special one. Apollo 14! Disney World! Ray Tomlinson sends out the very first email! The Weather Underground bomb the White House men's room.! And for the twenty years previous to that, South Hill, as we heard, was Tod Renquist's hog farm. Before that, the land was in the Carlson family. For generations. The Swedes had come in droves, hungry and poor, starving, even. Built their homesteads, grew corn. Nothing but corn for miles around. Until the industrial corn giants closed them out.

BASHIR

And before that?

DAN

That's exactly where I was heading, Bashir. Before that. Well, it was Indian. And from what I gather, from the records I've looked at. The South Hill property was sacred land.

CHRISTINE

(with interest) Sacred?

BILL

(incredulously) Sacred?

DAN

That's how they classified it. In the law suit they filed to get the land back from the government.

BILL

Sounds like something a lawyer'd cook up.

DAN

Well, actually, Bill. “Sacred” often referred to a burial site. Or a place where sacred ceremonies were held. Or both, for that matter. They were pretty common.

(he is getting animated)

It’s actually quite an extraordinary story. It seems the Indians surrendered forever their ancient rights to land legally confirmed as theirs by three successive foreign nations –forgoing all compensation for its pre-emption-- in exchange for undisputed possession of a small hillside they called their “church”.

BETTIE

South Hill?

DAN

That’s right.

South Hill was where the sacred ceremonies were held.

CHRISTINE

(charged with mystery) *Sacred ceremonies . . .*

DAN

The surrounding area was forest and stream. But at South Hill there appears to have been a clearing, for at least a thousand years.

BILL

That’s a lot of years.

DAN

And they grew corn on it.

BILL

That’s a damn lot of corn.

DAN

The sad irony is. They taught the Swedes how to farm it.

I guess you played cowboys and Indians, Bill? Or are you too young? What American kid of my generation, didn't? And all the Westerns.

BASHIR

The white man always won.

DAN

That's right. The Indians lost out every time. And South Hill was no exception.

BETTIE

They had a deal!

DAN

The government betrayed them. Herded them off to a reservation.

BILL

(suddenly, inspired) Let's bring them back.

DAN

Bill . . . ?

BILL

The Indians! Bring some in. --For one of those sacred ceremonies!

DAN

From where? There aren't any Indians around here anymore. The corn survived. But not the Indian. In fact, corn is who we have become. If we are what we eat, we're corn. Corn syrup, corn starch, corn oil, corn feed. We conquered the Indians, but their corn is killing us. You won't find any Indians here.

BILL

We'll put an ad out. We'll google til we damn well find some. We'll welcome the Indians back.

BASHIR

To stay?

BILL

Well, yeah. For a day!

BASHIR

Ah, Symbolically.

BILL

It'll be symbolic. Yeah. And maybe it'll bring South Hill some luck. A sacred Indian ceremony up at South Hill! Can you imagine the publicity? What do you think, Dan?

DAN

The idea of some kind of ceremony is intriguing. I'm open.

BILL

And if we can't find any Indians, we'll make some up. Dan?

DAN

As long as I don't have to play one.

(They laugh.)

BILL

We've got Bashir. He's Indian.

BETTIE

Bashir's from India, Bill.

BILL

I know that.

BASHIR

Well, Pakistan, actually.

BETTIE

Sorry, sorry.

BASHIR

Karachi, in fact.

BETTIE

Karachi. I knew that. It's just, I'm always getting those two mixed up. India, Pakistan.

BILL

Karache, Apache.

(He laughs at his own joke. The others look to see how BASHIR is responding. BASHIR turns to face the audience. The others watch him in a kind of suspended animation until his monologue is finished, and then the scene resumes where it left off.)

BASHIR

Karachi is Pakistan's largest city. The capital of the province of Sindh. The financial and commercial capital of Pakistan, it is located in the south of the country on the Arabian Sea. With over 15 million inhabitants it is one of the earth's most populous places. Thus, Karachi faces a rather serious problem with excessive traffic, making driving considerably dangerous. A native Karachi is known as a Karachiite. Two rivers, the Malie and the Liyari pass through it. While the sea forms a lovely chain of warm water beaches, providing stunning views from the harbour and bay.

After 9-11, my family in Karachi. --They're all in Karachi.-- Called me.

(he imitates the voice of his mother) "Get right home, Bashir. It's not good for you there. It's not safe." I'm fifty-two. But to my mother, I'm still a baby.

Time passes, I get a call: "Bashir, we have a wife for you. She is twenty-one. A beautiful girl. She's studying at the university. Chemistry.

Her name is Amal. A good sign. A girl named hope. Because you know how we are hoping. You'll come home. To your family. Your way of life. Your world. She comes from a very good family. We visited them in Frere Street. A Victorian house, Bashir, three stories! They made us such a feast. All we could talk about was

our son, the manager, in America."

Last year, the phone rings "And now the mall is closed. They'll send you somewhere far away. A strange place.

This America. The big success story! Look what misery they're causing. You'll have to start all over again. You're all alone.

Only tell us when you are coming. So we can expect you."

(finding strength, as if stopping her)

Maa.

I have a home. A little house. A garden. I am, for better or worse, an American citizen. And. (he struggles) I have my own beautiful one. His name is Ben Logan, Ford Township car dealer. I can't leave him.

(a pause, it is out)

If I had my own city. It would be nothing like this place. Or Karachi. I'd plant fruit trees along every street and highway. And open fields of corn. For the picking.

You say I am not safe here, maa. After 9-11? And you may be right. But if I did come home? What then? I'd be thrown in a dungeon. Or stoned to death. Or live hidden, like some kind of criminal.

Where is it better for me, maa? You tell me. In my own city, hate of any kind would be unimaginable.

(He turns back to the group. They continue as if without a break.)

BILL

We'll get some Indians in—to christen the property! And then put it back on the market!

TO READ THE WHOLE PLAY AND FOR ANY OTHER INQUIRES,
PLEASE CONTACT info@lydiastryk.com