GHOST DETECTIVE

By Billy St. John

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STORY OF THE PLAY

An international film star is found drowned in the swimming pool at his remote island estate and his houseguests make excellent suspects. But fog prevents the police from getting to the island to investigate the murder so, Jeff Burke, a young private investigator serving as a consultant on the star's latest film, takes over. But before Jeff gets very far he is shot and killed. As a spirit he is physically helpless, but he can communicate with one person, his girlfriend Jennifer, also a guest. Normally a sensitive, quiet woman, Jennifer deliberately sets herself up as a target to find Jeff's murderer and maybe even the star's killer as well. Suspects include the tough studio head, a gossip columnist, the star's widow, a young starlet, an aging actress, the mysterious handyman and others. A hauntingly beautiful play.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(6 M, 9 F)

SAM STONE: 50s, the head of Gemstone Studios, a tough businessman.
CARLA WILLIS: 30s, the studio's head publicist, efficient.
MONA MONTGOMERY: 45, popular gossip columnist, pushy.
ROSE STERLING: 25, the widow, strikingly beautiful.
ADAM WINTERS: 50s, the late star's business manager, timid.
DEBORAH DARE: Mid-to late 30s, an attractive movie star.
BELINDA POWELL: 22, a sexy starlet.
JEFF BURKE: 26, a private detective, boyish, good looking.
SALLY FLETCHER: 24, a writer, serious.
JENNIFER LANGE: 23, pretty, quiet, a medium.
MILTON GRANGER: Late 40s, a film director.
CAPT. PETE GERARD: 40s, a policeman.
LESTER HUDSON: 60s, the butler and handyman, a former film actor.
RHONDA HUDSON: 50s, the cook, Lester's wife, sturdily built.
PAULETTE: 20s, a college student who sometimes works as a maid.

Setting: The study of film star John Sterling's mansion on Storm Island, off the coast of California.

Time: The present.

ACT I:
Scene 1: A summer night, late.
Scene 2: Past midnight.
ACT II:
Scene 1: An hour later.

THE SETTING

The setting is John Sterling's study in his home on Storm Island off the coast of California. The Victorian house was built at the turn of the century.

This room has a door DR that opens out into a half-bath. A bar with three bar stools spans the UR corner, creating a triangular bar area. A set of double doors is UC. They are built to slide into the sides of their doorway. A portion of a hallway is visible beyond them. UL is a set of bookcases. USL is a set of French doors that open out onto a patio. Draw drapes are hung beside them. Beyond them is a patio.

A desk with a high-backed swivel desk chair is LC, its back to the L wall. A lamp with a low-wattage bulb, a phone, and an intercom unit are on the desk. A long sofa is CS, facing DS. A pair of matching chairs are DR and DL of the sofa, facing in. There is also another set of chairs, one in the DR corner, one in the DL corner.

SFX

Helicopter, thunder, rain, phone, somber music, gunshots, cup and glass breaking, woman's screams, crunching sounds.

See additional production notes at end of playbook.

ACT I
Scene 1

(When the cast enters, all but the servants and Capt. Gerard will be wearing dressy party clothes.)

(AT RISE: The stage is empty. The French doors are open; it is night; patio lights are on directly outside them. VOICES can be heard coming from beyond them, muted and indistinct. These conversations will continue until the main CAST enters. SAM STONE, the head of Gemstone Studios, and CARLA WILLIAMS, head publicist at the studio, enter through the French doors. Their mood is solemn.)

SAM: *(Going to the bar.)* I need a drink. Do you want one, Carla?

CARLA: No thank you, Mr. Stone.

SAM: I guess you'd better call Tom and have him prepare a news release.

CARLA: Yes, Mr. Stone. *(SHE goes to the phone on the desk, lifts the receiver, and dials a number from memory.)*

CARLA: Tom ... this is Carla. Sorry if I woke you ... yes, I'm still here on the island at John's ... Tom, I have some terrible news: John's dead. Mr. Stone is here too. He told me to have you get out a press release right away. Ready? *(Dictating the story:)* Film star John Sterling suffered a fatal accident tonight at his home on Storm Island. Following a party to celebrate the start of his newest film, "Dangerous Mission," Mr. Sterling apparently slipped at the edge of his swimming pool, struck his head on the diving board, and fell into the water where he drowned. *(The rest of CARLA'S phone call becomes background action to the main conversation. Continuing as MONA MONTGOMERY enters.)* Mr. Sterling had been a top star at Gemstone Pictures for 25 years. His most memorable films include ... pull the info from the files. Then go on to say that his widow, the renown beauty Rose Hamilton Sterling, is stricken with grief.

CARLA: *(Cont'd.)* That should cover it. I'll call you as soon as I fly over to the mainland ... good-bye. *(Hangs up.)*

(MONA MONTGOMERY, a famous gossip columnist, comes through the French doors during CARLA'S phone conversation, hearing part of it.)

MONA: You can't ... ! *(SHE rushes over to the bar.)* Sam, what is she doing!?! If you don't let me break this story, I'll never mention Gemstone Pictures in my column again!

SAM: Calm down, Mona. The moment John's body is taken to the morgue, the news will spread through Hollywood. Besides, you still have an exclusive; you were right here when he died.

MONA: It seems appropriate, somehow, doesn't it? I was there when he became a star, and I was there when he ... *(HER voice trails off.)* Whatever you're drinking, Sam, pour me a double.

SAM: Sure. *(HE pours HER a drink.)*

MONA: Do you know if there are other phones here to the mainland?

SAM: The one Carla's using was John's private line. There's a phone in the living room and extensions throughout the house. *(HE gives HER her drink.)*

MONA: I'd better call in my story.

(SHE exits through the UC doors, closing them behind her. The offstage VOICES grow as the CROWD off SL enters through the French doors, ad-libbing about the star's death. They are ROSE STERLING, his widow; ADAM WINTERS, his business manger; DEBORAH DARE, his co-star; BELINDA POWELL, a sexy starlet; SALLY FLETCHER, a writer; JEFF BURKE, a private detective; MILTON GRANGER, a film director; JENNIFER LANGE, a medium; and CAPT. PETE GERARD, a policeman.)

PETE: Will everyone find a seat, please?

End of Freeview

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