

Bull Street

By

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Cast of Characters

ASIMA	Early 20s
CASPER	Early 20s

DRAMATURGY:

IMPORTANCE OF OCTOBER 5th – In 2015, floods in South Carolina from a "1,000-year storm" resulted in 12 deaths and 9 dams to fail in and around Columbia, the home of the SC Sanitarium.

ABOUT CHARACTERS' NAMES

*The Name, **Asima**, comes from the name of the “he-goat” God of the Emathites, an ancient Middle Eastern city-state near Jordan & Israel. One of the "Evil Gods" mentioned in Exodus, of which Yahweh warned Moses not to emulate.

§ **Casper** is a name which reaches back to pre-literate antiquity [Urdu - *Gizpar*] - meaning "Keeper of the Treasury." Although spellings differ from era to era and language to language, the similarity is constant as is the meaning.

ABOUT BULL STREET:

According to Wikipedia:

The South Carolina Lunatic Asylum was authorized by state legislation in 1821, and was the second such state hospital (after Virginia's) to be authorized. Its original building, designed by Robert Mills and featuring the latest innovations in fire resistance and patient security, was built between 1822 and 1827. The hospital was at first only open to paying patients, with indigent patient costs billed to the government of the region from which they came. Admission was for the most part limited to whites, although some African-Americans (including slaves) were admitted before 1848, when their admission was formally authorized.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Carolina_State_Hospital. 20170106|1708.

Gwen Tenille wrote in *Only In South Carolina* website in 2015:

Growing up I would hear about “Bull Street.” It was never called the South Carolina Mental Hospital or any other name that might have been used, it was always just called “Bull Street”. It was always understood by me, at that time, that this is the place where people were sent if they were ‘crazy’. The older I got the

more I understood what went on there, and, I also learned that the place had a proper name along with an extensive history. And, it does have an extensive history, quite a few scary stories, more than a few ghost stories, and (just possibly) hope for the future. Here's the story of South Carolina's abandoned asylum.

In 1822, the cornerstone for the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum was laid. The building had been designed by the famous architect, Robert Mills. This made South Carolina the second state in the country at that time to put money aside for such a building for the care and treatment of the mentally ill. That one building quickly grew into a 'mini' city of its own accord and most of it still stands today.

Men and women were held in separate buildings. Slaves and servants had their own building. During the Civil War, the grounds were used as a prison camp for Union officers until 1865. After the war, things were on a teeter-totter at the asylum. Money was running short and supplies for the patients were hard to obtain. It's believed that the superintendent at that time used his own money to buy supplies.

In the 1950's it held over 5,000 patients! However, the population declined to a more manageable 3,000 by the 1970's. There was a theatre, greenhouse, pool room, gym, canteen, church, and ice cream parlor! But, then a medical trend came about stating that it was harmful to hold patients for long periods of time. It was the call for deinstitutionalization. South Carolina did this much more slowly than other places while trying to find homes and healthcare for the patients who needed it. This left the South Carolina State Hospital abandoned for the most part.

There were reportedly never any lobotomies or sterilizations performed at this hospital, however, I'm sure that over the 200 years that this hospital has stood that it has seen and heard its fair share of stories. Today, part of the hospital has been moved to private ownership. Demolition, excavation, and new construction will ensue immediately this year. *[The renovation never occurred!]*

<http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/south-carolina/sc-spookiest-old-asylum/> . 20170106||1720.

As a native of Columbia, Prof. Dick Anderson has personal knowledge that:

Governor George Bell Timmerman was the force behind reforming the State Mental Health "Settlement" on Bull Street. But it was also true that, in the 1940's & 1950's, like people in other states, Columbians avoided Bull Street like the plague of old because of its association with mental health disorders - a fear which was common at the time. The sounds of inmates screaming and demented laughter were common, even in the more enlightened era, and the resulting creation of Ghost stories are a logical result.

Personal story told to the writer 20170102.

SET: Bare stage representative conference room.

PLACE: South Carolina State Hospital on Bull Street

TIME: August 2016

SETTING: Bare stage of a conference room.

AT RISE: Before lights rise, we hear a thunder clap and a huge streak of lightning flash. Suddenly a downpour. Lights up on CASPER and ASIMA in a room. There's a table with chairs, as basic as it can be. A window stands in the middle and CASPER stares out at the rain. ASIMA sits and reads from a folder which is bound in blue. ASIMA keeps looking up from the folder and to CASPER and then back. He does not move from the window, as the rain continues to pour. Finally, she can't hold back.

ASIMA

Looks like it's not going to let up.

(CASPER only nods and continues to stare outside.)

ASIMA (continued)

Are you going to while away your entire break staring at the rain?

CASPER

Is that so wrong?

(ASIMA looks up at him and then back to her binder, trying to pick up where she left off reading, but then she can't do that and speaks again.)

ASIMA

It doesn't really help you in the long run. Not with . . . finishing the project.

CASPER

What's to finish?

ASIMA

Your quota for one. Or maybe it's just knowing you did a good job while you . . .

CASPER

Job well done. Right.

(CASPER turns from the window and sits down at the table, pulling across his binder that is also blue and he opens it.)

ASIMA

You could probably skip some of the pages to make up time.

CASPER

Maybe I'm fine with the fact that I've lost some time. Did you ever consider that?

ASIMA

Who would be OK with that? Time is the one thing that everyone doesn't want to lose.

CASPER

We've lost all time in here I'm afraid. Too late for that to be a worry. Be thankful that we are given what we're given. There is a man with blue eyes who seems to be watching us from out there.

ASIMA

How would you know that?

CASPER

Blue eyes and seems to be soaking wet from the storm outside.

ASIMA

Again, how do you know what color of eyes he has?

CASPER

I saw him. Through the window as he came in just now. He didn't have an umbrella or raincoat. Funny the things one sees while taking their breaks. Just think how advance the world would be if that's all we had to do. Take breaks.

ASIMA

How would we push those advances if everyone was taking breaks all the time?

CASPER

That's a small detail which I'm sure would be figured out early in the entire time of thought. A small army of robots perhaps, or automated machines which spin the world on its axis.

ASIMA

I'm sure it would be just little blue pills that make all the difference

CASPER

Blue seems to be the color of choice. That or white. I think they should be all sorts of colors really. I mean, why not jazz up the spectrum of all the medication we have to take.

ASIMA

That would be fun to see all of the medicine laid out on a beautiful white tray. Maybe just a touch of pepper to make them all palatable to the taste.

CASPER

Lucky you to still have a pallet.

ASIMA

Refinement is my middle name.

CASPER

I thought it Mildred.

ASIMA

Mildred? Why the hell did you ever think that?

CASPER

You mentioned it once.

ASIMA

Never in the context of my middle name. I'm not surprised you can't remember my middle name. It took you forever to remember my first.

CASPER

It's not about names really in the long run. Not the connection. We have a strong one. That's what counts in the end.

ASIMA

Just because we read from blue bound folders?

CASPER

Relationships have been built on far less and ripped to shreds for just as little.

ASIMA

I remember distinctly how I knew every day that you didn't say my name that you didn't know it. We would meet in the lunch area at the university and you would come up and say "Hello, how was your night?" and then I would answer and we would talk and talk, but you never said my name. I thought at first it was because you were artistic, and then I just realized it was your thing. Not knowing a name. and it was fine. I mean, there were so many things that I wasn't good at. But then one night, I had a dream where you came up to me and said "Hello Asima" and I just stared back at you thinking, that's so cool. You remembered my name and the very next day, you did just that! You came up to me where I was sitting at that table near the Roost and you said, "Hello Asima, how was your night?"

CASPER

Then it's more than little blue binders. Much more. It's dreams as well. Because I knew I couldn't remember your name and I said every day, I'm going to learn her name again and remember it and then every day, I would see you, and listen to others talk and no one ever seemed to say your name for some reason. As if they were all having dreams where they knew it and had no reason to learn or learned it like some weirdo at the very start of their friendships with you and had no need to say it again. But then one night I was dreaming where I ran into you on campus and I said, "Hello Asima" and you smiled and I said, by gosh, I will never forget your name ever again.

ASIMA

And so you haven't.

CASPER

See how valid and important dreams are? I really need to get my sleep schedule back to where I'm having them.

ASIMA

It's the medication I'm sure.

CASPER

One of them has to stimulate dreams. I mean, there's some twisted side effects to everything we eat, drink and poop. One of our pills must inspire dreams.

ASIMA

I still dream. Well, I have more nightmares than anything. Those I won't talk about ever.

CASPER

Why on earth not?

ASIMA

They may come true.

CASPER

Why would you think that?

ASIMA

Because I had a nightmare once where I wound up in a room much like this being watched. And look at me. Where am I? So I will never ever utter any of my nightmares ever again.

CASPER

How about the mundane ones?

ASIMA

Those for sure. But not before breakfast.

CASPER

Why on earth not?

ASIMA

If you tell them before breakfast they will come true.

CASPER

Like your nightmares?

ASIMA

Well, those are different in general. Those I told after breakfast and they ended up happening.

CASPER

So your nightmares have a mind all their own, but your dreams are reliant on you eating or not?

ASIMA

Yes. Something like that.

CASPER

So what was your last dream that you remember?

ASIMA

It seemed that that it was so important when I woke up.

CASPER

All dreams seem that way don't they?

ASIMA

I suppose so.

CASPER

To your dreaming mind they are very important. But I know what you mean. I had a nightmare once that involved my dad and son and for the life of me when I screamed out, and my partner did say I screamed out, I couldn't remember why I had screamed. And perhaps that's a good thing. So what did you dream?

ASIMA

This place it seems.

CASPER

Then those who are watching will be very pleased.

ASIMA

It started with me observing these two weird guys.

CASPER

Thrilling!

ASIMA

Now, now, be kind.

CASPER

Sorry. Continue, please.

ASIMA

One guy had bright blue eyes.

CASPER

Like the guy who came in and is watching us right now.

ASIMA

I didn't see him, but they were a lot like these binders. The same kind of blue. Creepy really, because no eyes are that sort of blue. And these guys are following a girl, or young woman and she's trying to avoid them. Especially the one with the blue eyes, and then I realize I'm the young woman.

CASPER

Once a star, always a star.

ASIMA

Shut up.

CASPER

You know you have star quality.

ASIMA

And you the quality of an . . .

CASPER

Now, now, now. Remember you're being watched.

ASIMA

We're being watched.

CASPER

Quite right.

(CASPER turns and waves to those who watch.)

ASIMA

You're just agitating them.

CASPER

And I care because of why?

ASIMA

Do you want to hear my dream?

CASPER

Yes, please, please, by all means. Continue.

ASIMA

Thank you. The dream switches and I am in what looks like a conference room, or a large break room in a hotel. There are people there too, including the first girl.

CASPER

Who is you.

ASIMA

Right. Yes, who is me. I'm sitting at a table and you walk in and sit down. You're wet I think and tell me about coming from somewhere on a bus. In the rain. Then the guy in the suit comes in and starts talking to us saying he knows who we are, or something like that, that he knows we communicate four or five times a week and the really weird thing is that we do it through these binders that are bound in blue. Isn't that strange?

CASPER

Not when you consider that we see them every day, no, not so strange.

ASIMA

But you tell me you have to leave. To go and meet someone on October 5th. And why that date of all dates, I don't know. I never knew. I woke up as you were leaving, dressed in jeans. I remember telling you that you must be the spy who loves me because of your jeans.

CASPER

My jeans?

ASIMA

Yes. And you smile and then you're gone. Like that. Just the binders are there.

CASPER

And that was it?

ASIMA

Yes. Funny. It was so important when it occurred. What do you think it means?

CASPER

That you're deathly afraid of the Blue Man Group and love to read spy novels.

(ASIMA laughs.)

ASIMA

Just as good as I could get with any therapist.

CASPER

I knew I would be good for something this morning. Always important to feel that way when you get up.

ASIMA

True. I guess.

(Thunder is heard and lightning flashes.)

CASPER

That was a big pop!

ASIMA

Must be on top of us now.

(CASPER gets up from the table and goes and stands by the window again.)

ASIMA (continued)

Time for another break?

CASPER

And why not? I'm exhausted and my therapeutic skills tapped. I think I've earned one, don't you?

ASIMA

Yes, you have. You poor, poor soul.

CASPER

Poor soul indeed.

(Lights fade on CASPER leaving him in the dark as ASIMA turns back to her blue binder, picking it back up and reading as lights fade to black around her.)

THE END