

THE CHIMES

A play by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

In 1980

NICHOLAS ROSS a ghostwriter, late fifties

GORDON MCALLISTER his friend, late fifties

In 1939

ERASMUS BARROW headmaster, sixties

LEONARD CARLYLE chair of literature, sixties

NICK ROSS a student, 17

MARCUS HALE a student, 17

VIVIAN PORTER a student, 17

BIRDIE MCALLISTER a student, 17

SETTING

Barrington School for Boys

Barrington, Massachusetts

1980 & 1939

ACT ONE

1980 - BARRINGTON GROUNDS (3:30 PM).
The distant song of a boy's choir
floats through the air - a haunting
melody from another time.

VOICES

Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?
Vita nostra brevis est brevi finietur.
Guardeamus igitur jevunes dum sumus.
In fraternitate veritas.
Post jucundum juventutem
Post molestam senectutem
Nos habebit humus.
Guardeamus igitur jevunes dum sumus.
In fraternitate veritas.
In fraternitate veritas.
In fraternitate veritas.

(The voices fade. NICHOLAS ROSS, late fifties,
enters. He takes in the grounds, lost in
thought. GORDON MCALLISTER, also late fifties,
enters. He casually notices NICHOLAS, but does
not look up from his clipboard.)

GORDON

Can I help you?

NICHOLAS

No. Thank you.

(GORDON stops in his tracks and looks at
NICHOLAS, who doesn't notice. GORDON breaks
into a grin, opens his mouth to speak, stops
himself and screws his face into a frown.)

GORDON

The grounds of Barrington are restricted to current students
and faculty.

NICHOLAS

I'm here for the Centennial.

GORDON

Centennial celebrations start tomorrow.

NICHOLAS

I was hoping to avoid a crowd.

GORDON

They are also restricted to visiting alumni.

NICHOLAS

I know.

GORDON

That means someone who graduated.

NICHOLAS

How the hell do you know whether or not I-?
(GORDON breaks into a grin.)
Birdie?

GORDON

Got you.

NICHOLAS

Birdie!

(NICHOLAS embraces GORDON.)

GORDON

Watch it now. No funny business.

NICHOLAS

My god, it's good to see you.

GORDON

(patting his belly)
No doubt more than you remember.

NICHOLAS

I wouldn't have wanted less.

GORDON

It's a good thing, then, you didn't see me in forty-two.

NICHOLAS

Oh?

GORDON

Pared down to a respectable 190, courtesy of the U.S. Army. It's true what they say. War is hell. I'd go to bed dreaming of all the food I was a million miles away from. Once in a dream I actually got to taste a tiramisu. I swear the next day my sheets needed laundering.

(NICHOLAS chuckles.)

How the Devil have you been?

NICHOLAS

Well.

GORDON

"Well?" "Well?" Forty goddamn years is "well" beyond the point of being "well." Where have you been?

What have you done with yourself? Why, in 1980, do you not have a telephone?

NICHOLAS

It's unlisted.

GORDON

I know it's not listed. If it had been listed I wouldn't have had to mail out fifty invitations to fifty different addresses belonging to the fifty different Nicholas Rosses in New England alone.

NICHOLAS

You sent the invitation?

GORDON

(bowing)

"Chair of the Barrington Alumni Association."

Nicholas

La-dee-da.

GORDON

It's lucky for you, Mr. No Forwarding Address, I got the position. Do you know you're not on one single roster for the entire time you were at Barrington? Not a single mention, not even in the disciplinary records. If I hadn't remembered you, you would have been clean forgotten.

NICHOLAS

Such is the fate of the disowned.

GORDON

None of that, none of that. Your name might not be etched on one of those obnoxious bronze plaques in the Grand Hall - mine's fourth column over, third row up - but you're as much a Barrington Boy as me or Viv or-

NICHOLAS

So, you were in the army?

GORDON

Hmm? Oh, yes.

NICHOLAS

My imagination might be underdeveloped but I have a hard time picturing you crawling through German trenches. Even at a respectable 190.

GORDON

My contribution to the War effort was historically minimal.

NICHOLAS

But you fought?

GORDON

Yes. Well, no. Not precisely.

NICHOLAS

I thought you said you'd enlist-

GORDON

Enlisted. I did. Signed up the spring of forty-two. The Army molded me for a good three months then shipped me over to Burgundy, where I sat around for six weeks practicing very bad French on, unfortunately, very good Burgundy girls. You know it's all a myth, don't you?

NICK

What?

GORDON

Naughty French nurses. I didn't meet a single girl who wasn't as Catholic as the Pope. Anyway, on the day we got our marching papers, I was loading the trucks and I dropped a tank of nitrogen - bang - on my foot. Smashed "mon petit pied," as the fat Burgundy nurse called it, into a million Birdie bits. Thus ended my brief but illustrious war career as a United States soldier.

NICHOLAS

Six million Germans and a blitzkrieg, and Birdie McAllister succumbs to the dreaded force of butter fingers.

GORDON

I'm glad you think it's so funny. The Army wanted to court-martial me. Thought I'd smashed up my foot on purpose. My CO had to stand up at my hearing and testify that Private McAllister was not a traitor to his country, merely the most incompetent soldier to march in his ranks.

NICHOLAS

Poor, poor Birdie.

GORDON

Eh, you know, Nick, no one calls me "Birdie" anymore.

NICHOLAS

What do they call you?

GORDON

Gordon.

NICHOLAS

Why do they call you "Gordon?"

GORDON

It's my name.

NICHOLAS

No, it isn't. Is it?

(GORDON nods.)

Then why did we call you "Birdie?"

GORDON

Viv. Our first term he said I looked like an overstuffed Turkey Bird.

NICHOLAS

No, the professors called you Birdie. Headmaster Barrow called you Birdie.

GORDON

That stringy bastard got them all doing it.

NICHOLAS

Bird - Gordon - I'm sorry. I'd no idea. Is Viv coming to the Centennial?

GORDON

Er... No, Nick.

NICHOLAS

No?

(GORDON shakes his head.)

Oh.

GORDON

Lost him at Ardennes. Very quick. Very clean. So I'm told. His mother invited me to the funeral but I...

(NICHOLAS pales and closes his eyes.)

Nick?

NICHOLAS

I'm all right.

GORDON

You look a little-

NICHOLAS

I think I need to-

GORDON

Here, sit down.

NICHOLAS

Sometimes, very suddenly, your age catches up with you.

GORDON

You're trembling.

NICHOLAS

Stop fussing. I'm all right.

GORDON

There's a Nurse on duty in the infirmary. I could fetch her.

NICHOLAS

No, stay!

(NICHOLAS clutches GORDON'S arm. GORDON sits.)

I knew we wouldn't all be here. I could feel it in my gut. I wasn't going to ask about the others. Didn't see the point in knowing for certain if... You caught me with my guard down. Goddamn it...

(GORDON casts a glance around the campus and removes a flask.)

GORDON

Here.

NICHOLAS

What's this?

GORDON

Your restorative.

NICHOLAS

Is the Alumni Chair permitted to carry fine spirits on Barrington Grounds?

GORDON

Purely medicinal. Keeps the wolves at bay.

NICHOLAS

Wolves?

GORDON

Stop waving it around and drink. The new Headmaster - Admiral Puritan, I like to call him - caught me taking a sip in my office last week. Gave me an hour long lecture on the Virtues of Clean Living.

NICHOLAS

Burns.

GORDON

Does it? I've stopped noticing. My wife orders it from a distillery in London.

NICHOLAS

A Mrs. Birdie? Or does she also go by Gordon?

GORDON

Feeling better?

NICHOLAS

Like a ghost passed through. And took half of me with him.

GORDON

Barrington will do that to you. I'll be crossing the Common on my way to the gymnasium to see our boys against Exeter or St. Anthony's, and out of the corner of my eye, just for a second - half a second - I'll see Viv, strolling across the campus with that grin to greet the devil plastered over his smug little face. Then he gets closer and I see - I see it's not Viv - just some stringy new first-year. Probably a homo.

NichOLAS

Birdie.

GORDON

Not that Viv was. Or that I mind that sort of thing. But you have to admit he raised some eyebrows prancing about the way he did.

NICHOLAS

He was an original.

(Silence.)

GORDON

It does take a piece of you, though. Every time you forget they're gone. And then remember. I've never cried, though. I'm proud to say I don't believe in it. Viv wouldn't have wanted it. None of them would.

NICHOLAS

Seems grotesque, doesn't it?

GORDON

What?

NICHOLAS

That age should ravage us, but here nothing's changed.

GORDON

The perversity and persistence of places.

NICHOLAS

The pattern of the bricks, the ivy on the bell tower, the tulips in front of the Chapel...

GORDON

Oh, they've added new dormitories for the girls over by the pond. Had to after the lawsuit. Other than that you wouldn't know the world's been spinning these forty years.

NICHOLAS

Except we're not here.

GORDON

I'm here. Oh. You mean "Birdie." Not "Gordon."

NICHOLAS

I'm growing old. Or mad. Or both. The part of me that's old came here - came here looking for ghosts.

GORDON

And the part that's mad?

NICHOLAS

Thinks I'll find them.

GORDON

Oh, you'll find them. Or they'll find you. Wolves, Nick. Barrington is full of them. Stay here long enough, you'll feel them. Circling. They're nasty things - memories. If you're not careful, they'll eat you alive. Be glad you don't see them.

(He sips his flask. In the distance the Alma Mater plays.)

Damn. Er, Nick, I'm suppose to be over in the Concert Hall practicing with the Choir.

NICHOLAS

Of course. I'm sorry. You must have a lot to do for tomorrow.

GORDON

Damn the Choir. I was going to say, let's sneak back to my office and have a proper drink. You've got forty years of explaining to do and I've got a healthy supply of medicine.

NICHOLAS

I'd like that.

GORDON

Well, come on.

NICHOLAS

Could we - I'd like to stay for a minute. Until they finish.

GORDON

Always thought it was a pretty tune. Even if I never understood all the words.

NICHOLAS

"Where are they who were in the world before us? Our life is brief and will be finished soon. Let us rejoice that we are young. After a pleasant youth, after a troublesome old age, the earth will have us."

GORDON

In brotherhood lies truth.

NICHOLAS

In brotherhood lies truth.

GORDON

You're a Barrington Boy. Forty years doesn't change that.

NICHOLAS

But I wasn't, Birdie. You've seen the records. I never existed.

SEPT. 2, 1939 - HEADMASTER'S OFFICE.
NICK, 17, sits before HEADMASTER
BARROW, who prepares tea.

BARROW

Do you take sugar, Mr. Ross?

Nick

Yes, sir.

BARROW

Today you shall not.

(He hands NICK his tea.)

I have a small garden behind my house. When you next visit, I should be happy to walk you through. There with the aid of our own Mr. Hennessey I have managed to cultivate, if I may say, quite a substantial tea garden. It is difficult work, as I'm sure you may imagine.

NICK

Yes, I'm sure, sir.

BARROW

The tea leaf is not one that readily takes to the New England climate. With the winter frost, Mr. Hennessey and I can never be sure if we shall taste the fruits - or rather - the leaves of our labor. But every spring brings new miracles.

NICK

It's very fine tea, sir.

BARROW

I can't abide sugar. One might as well drink molasses. Of course, the state of tea in New England is abhorrent - what with those monstrous "instant tea bags" poisoning our country. Sugar, I suppose, is the only thing that makes them potable. And it's certainly better than turning to coffee. You, I trust, are not partial to coffee?

NICK

No, sir. My father doesn't permit it in the house.

BARROW

Your father could always be counted to go beyond the call of duty.

NICK

Thank you, sir.

BARROW

I imagine, Mr. Ross, you are not completely unaware of my reason for summoning you?

NICK

No, sir.

BARROW

When your father informed me three years ago that you would not be following him in the Barrington tradition, I was naturally disappointed. Of course, I understood that his advancement in Washington as well as, no doubt, your own intellectual faculties entitled you to advantages which Barrington could not provide as well as Exeter. But progress is our aim, and if Barrington must lose so that the world may gain, it is a sacrifice we humbly and willingly make.

(He sips his tea.)

I was, therefore, most surprised last May when I received your father's telegram requesting your transfer.

(He puts down his tea.)

I am aware, Mr. Ross, of what transpired at Exeter.

NICK

Sir, if I might explain-

BARROW

I have not requested an explanation.

(pause)

Your father has assured me on his word as a Barrington Boy that you were more an injured party than an instigator - a victim, let us say, of unfortunate circumstances. It is on this assurance that I have agreed to your transfer. It would be most unfortunate, both for yourself and for your father, if this assurance were proven false.

NICK

Yes, sir.

BARROW

Then as long as I have your word that you shall be on your utmost exemplary behavior, I see no reason why we should not forget the Exeter matter entirely.

NICK

Thank you, sir. That's very kind.

BARROW

Of course, your father and I are most anxious that this last year be as productive as possible. I have suggested, and he is in full accord, that your activities at Barrington be proscribed to purely the academic. The fewer social distractions, the more focused your time and energies will be on your studies. You shall, therefore, be ineligible to participate in any of Barrington's extracurricular activities: sports, dramatics, debate-

NICK

Sir, if I could explain-

(BARROW pierces NICK with a stare.)

Yes, sir.

BARROW

I know this constraint may seem severe at first. But I am certain that if you apply yourself to your studies, you will find a certain reward in those achievements - a reward that will equal the accolades that other boys receive on the playing field or in the gymnasium. Don't you agree?

NICK

Yes. Sir.

BARROW

Well, if you have finished your tea, I mustn't keep you. Professor Lunt will scold me for depriving you of a thorough education in physics. I'm told there's much we are learning about the world of the "atom." It all sounds quite fascinating in it's own "microscopic" way.

NICK

Thank you, sir.

(NICK starts to exit. He stops.)

BARROW

Is there something more you wish to discuss?

NICK

My roommate, sir.

BARROW

Yes, Mr. Ross?

NICK

I don't have one.

BARROW

I am aware.

NICK

It's only that, when I was waiting to see you, one of the professors asked me whom my roommate was-

BARROW

"Who" your roommate was.

NICK

Who my roommate was. And when I told him I didn't have one, he said... uh...

BARROW

He said?

NICK

He said, "I see you're not expected to make it."

BARROW

Did he?

NICK

Yes, sir.

BARROW

I think, Mr. Ross, it will be better for both of us if we do not believe everything we hear.

SEPT. 2, 1939 - NICK'S ROOM (NIGHT).
 There are two beds. One is empty. In
 the other lies NICK, reading a book.
 He yawns, closes his book, and shuts
 off the lamp. He sleeps. Silence.
 VIVIAN, 17, climbs through the window.
 He tiptoes towards the door. NICK
 hears him, sits up and turns on the
 light. VIVIAN has no pants.

VIVIAN

Don't scream.

NICK

Douglas!

(VIVIAN grabs NICK and covers his mouth.)

VIVIAN

Don't call that Pimple of a Watch Dog! Do you want to get us
 both expelled? Do you?

(NICK shakes his head.)

I go to Barrington. I live on the floor below. I got locked
 out. I'm not some crazed Soviet assassin. Understand?

(NICK nods. VIVIAN releases him.)

How do you do? Vivian Porter. Everyone calls me Viv. What's
 your name?

(NICK pushes VIVIAN off the bed and rushes to
 the door.)

NICK

Douglas!

VIVIAN

Don't open that door. It's a matter of life and death!

(NICK stops.)

NICK

Well?

VIVIAN

Well what?

NICK

You said it was a matter of life and death.

VIVIAN

Oh. You want an explanation? All right. Um...

NICK

I'm getting Douglas.

VIVIAN

No, wait. Look, be a pal, won't you? If Douglas catches me after curfew again he'll report me to Barrow. You wouldn't want to see your new best pal expelled his first day back?

NICK

My new best pal?

VIVIAN

You're the new boy, aren't you? Nathan or Nash or something? Consider me your welcoming committee!

NICK

You're not wearing any pants.

VIVIAN

No. No, I'm not. That's a keen sense of observation you've developed. You see, Norman, today being my first day back, I had to slip into town to make love to my girl. You know how that is. You've got a girl, haven't you?

NICK

Um... yes.

VIVIAN

Don't worry. First thing tomorrow we'll stroll into town and get you one. I'll warn you now, Nedly, it's slim pickings, and the boys here aren't particular. By the end of the week even the ugly girls will have steadies. And you don't want to spend the rest of the year with only your pillow to keep you company. Anyway, I knew my girl would be missing her Viv something fierce after a whole summer of separation. So after dinner I ducked out of Barrington and went down to the Rose Inn. Her father named the place after her. Lorelei Rose. Quite a name, don't you think? I mean, have you ever met a girl named Lorelei Rose?

NICK

I don't think so.

VIVIAN

Everyone should meet a Lorelei Rose. She's got some sisters but I don't think any of them are named Lorelei, otherwise I'd introduce you. Anyway, Lor and I went up to one of the guest suites - where we were having quite a respectable time. I mean, look here, Norvald, I wouldn't want you to get the wrong impression about my gal. Her chastity is her highest virtue. That said, on this particular evening, having, as I said, been deprived of my affection for the last three months, my girl turned the matter over in her mind and found that inhospitality would be the greater sin. Unfortunately, Lorelei's Pa seems to possess an almost Arabian knack for sensing any danger to his daughter's chastity.

Long story short: there's a heck of a lot of pounding on the door, Lorelei chucks me out the window, along with half my clothes, and I make a semi-indecorous retreat back to Barrington. The thing is, I don't so much mind that Lorelei and I left things very much unfinished - un-started if you want to be absolutely technical - I don't mind that so much as those were my favorite trousers. I mean, really fine silk with a delicate pinstripe. Still, no pants were ever so nobly lost in the pursuit of love. Am I right, Nicodemus?

NICK

It's Nicholas. Nick.

(NICK offers his hand. They shake.)

VIVIAN

It's about time. I was beginning to think I'd lost my ability to charm at first sight.

(VIVIAN kisses NICK'S cheeks.)

NICK

Umm...

VIVIAN

Don't worry, I'm not a fairy. My "ma" just taught me it was polite manners to seal a bargain with a kiss.

NICK

What bargain?

VIVIAN

To be best friends! You do want a best friend, don't you? I mean, you haven't already got one?

NICK

Well, no, but...

VIVIAN

Then it's settled. We're best pals. Nick, right?

NICK

But you don't even know me.

VIVIAN

You're as tall a man as any in Illyria. Besides, friendship is wasted on folk who know each other. Once you know all about someone, what's the point? Have you got the time?

NICK

It's a little after midnight.

VIVIAN

Excellent. Douglas will be off patrol.

(VIVIAN stomps on the floor.)

NICK

What are you doing?

VIVIAN

I'm getting Birdie. He and I have got the room below.

(VIVIAN stomps.)

NICK

You're going to wake up the whole dorm.

VIVIAN

I need him to bring me some pants. I certainly can't go traipsing down the halls like this. What if someone saw me leaving your room without my britches? Not the kind of reputation you want your first night at a new school. Though you'd be pretty popular with a certain crowd. What's taking him so long? I swear he sleeps like a Cossack.

(VIVIAN stomps.)

Ah, I hear the Porridge Pot stirring. He'll be up in a sec.

NICK

If you need pants, I've got a pair you can borrow.

VIVIAN

Now that'd be too cruel. We'd have woken the Cabbage for nothing. But if you're really in the giving mood, I don't suppose you could lend me a dollar? Just until the week's out? See, my weekly allowance was in my pants, and I'm afraid I'll be a bit tight until I can ring my "ma" for more dough.

NICK

All right. Since we're best pals.

VIVIAN

Really? You're going to give it to me?

NICK

Don't you want it?

VIVIAN

I do, it's just - no one ever lends me money.

NICK

Why not?

VIVIAN

I never pay it back.

(There is a knock on the door.)

Come in.

(BIRDIE enters. He is ruddy faced and wears a robe and slippers.)

BIRDIE

Who's making all that noise up here?

VIVIAN

I was. Now go back downstairs and fetch me some pants.

BIRDIE

Haven't you got any pants, Viv?

VIVIAN

Would I be asking you to fetch them if I did?

BIRDIE

Are we having a meeting?

VIVIAN

Bird, stop babbling. Now: pants. Go!

(BIRDIE exits. VIVIAN removes a cigarette from his shirt pocket.)

And that highly perceptive specimen was Birdie. Loyal as a Golden Retriever but, unfortunately, not as bright. Or as housebroken. Do you have a match?

NICK

We shouldn't have woken him. And you're not supposed to smoke in the dorm.

VIVIAN

That's very decent of you. Very law-abiding, good Samaritan. I can't imagine why you got expelled.

(VIVIAN gets on his knees and searches the floor.)

NICK

What do you mean?

VIVIAN

You know, from wherever you came from? Where did you come from?

NICK

Exeter. How did you know I was expelled?

VIVIAN

No one transfers to Barrington in their last year - especially not from Exeter - unless they've been given the old Heave-Ho.

NICK

What are you doing? I don't have any matches.

VIVIAN

No, I'm sure there's one around here somewhere. So what did you do? To get the old Heave-Ho?

NICK

Nothing.

VIVIAN

Hey now, I'm your new best pal. You can tell me. I mean, I will tell the rest of the school, but I'm honest and I promise to report you faithfully.

NICK

They didn't throw me out. I withdrew. After they asked me to.

VIVIAN

You get more fascinating by the second. Did you kill a boy?

NICK

No!

VIVIAN

Well, don't tell me you were just lousy at chemistry. I've got enough pals lousy at chemistry.

NICK

Maybe I was caught with too many boys in my room without enough pants.

VIVIAN

I doubt it. Barrington's got a strict transfer policy. Only castaways with the most minor of sins are admitted. Ah! Here we are. Matches.

NICK

Where did those come from?

(VIVIAN smokes.)

VIVIAN

Funny, isn't it?

NICK

What?

VIVIAN

Have you ever noticed that second-string schools like Barrington tend to be more selective about who they let in, more so than schools like Exeter?

I figure it's because schools like Exeter already have the best families and money, so they'll take a risk on a "troubled" student, provided his parents can foot the bill. One rotten apple isn't going to ruin the barrel. But at Barrington our reputation is already a bit dodgy. We can't afford any bad apples.

NICK

Headmaster Barrow's convinced I'm going to be trouble. I overheard him talking to the Grounds Keeper-

VIVIAN

Hennessey?

NICK

About putting a lock on my door.

VIVIAN

Barrow hates transfers. Barrow hates everybody, but in particular he hates transfers.

NICK

Why?

VIVIAN

He wants us all to be Barrington Boys through and through. "In Fraternitate Veritas." You can sort of see his point. I mean, say some boy transfers to Barrington and does one semester. Then next year he blows up a factory or runs his wife over with a horse. What are the newspapers going to print? BARRINGTON BOY BLOWS UP WIFE AND HORSE. Barrow's got to keep strict watch on our reputation. Too many horse killers and we won't even be second-string for very long. So I guess my question is: Are you the bad apple that's going to ruin the bunch?

(VIVIAN extends the cigarette to NICK. He takes it and smokes. He chokes.)

That's the spirit! Together we'll blow up our wives and horses. But keep your explosives off my Lorelei.

(quoting)

Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love.

NICK

Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues;
Let every eye negotiate for itself
And trust no agent.

(NICK returns the cigarette.)

I got a prize in recitation. Before they kicked me out.

VIVIAN

Really?

(He looks NICK up and down and tries to stump him.)

The worst is not so long as we can say?

NICK

This is the worst.

VIVIAN

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods?

NICK

They kill us for their sport.

VIVIAN

What's in a name? That which we call a Lorelei rose?

NICK

By any other name would smell as sweet.

VIVIAN

This above all: to thine own self be true?

NICK

And it must follow, as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(BIRDIE enters.)

Birdie

I wasn't sure which pair you wanted, so I brought-

VIVIAN

Birdie, check this out. "Asses are made to bear and so are you?"

NICK

Women are made to bear and so are you.

VIVIAN

My salad days?

NICK

When I was green in thought.

VIVIAN

He that dies?

NICK

Pays all debts.

VIVIAN
What do you think?

BIRDIE
Are you a ghost?

NICK
No. I'm Nick.

BIRDIE
Then what are you doing in Peter's room?

NICK
Who's Peter?

VIVIAN
Bird, don't you have something for me?

BIRDIE
Oh, sorry. I wasn't sure what you wanted, so I brought your navy slacks and your summer formals.

VIVIAN
I'm going down the hall, Custard, not to a cotillion.

(VIVIAN dresses.)

BIRDIE
How should I know what you're up to? I mean, I didn't expect to be woken up in the middle of the night-

VIVIAN
You're a trooper beyond the call of duty.

BIRDIE
I don't know about that, but it's pretty unnerving to be sound asleep and then to have elephants stomping through the ceiling. I thought it was the ghost!

NICK
What ghost?

VIVIAN
Ignore him. He's hallucinating. You know, oxygen getting sucked into his stomach, none getting to his brain.

BIRDIE
If you're not a ghost, what are you doing in our room?

NICK
This is my room.

BIRDIE

Liar! This is our room! We've been using it for the last three years!

VIVIAN

Back off, Luggage. Nick's been assigned here.

BIRDIE

But Viv-!

VIVIAN

I know.

BIRDIE

But the tree-!

(VIVIAN twists BIRDIE'S ear to silence him.)

Oww!

VIVIAN

I know. Now go get Marcus and we'll work something out.

BIRDIE

It's after midnight.

VIVIAN

Which means Douglas is passed out in that Cro-Magnon stupor of his.

BIRDIE

All right, but tell what's-his-name this is our room. You'd better start packing or Marcus will throw you out the window.

VIVIAN

Cabbage, stop boiling yourself and start marching.

BIRDIE

I think your Shakespeare is lousy.

(BIRDIE exits.)

VIVIAN

Sorry about that. He's fat but he's fierce.

NICK

Why am I going to be thrown out a window?

VIVIAN

You see, best pal of mine, normally this room is unoccupied. It's a spare in case another room leaks or a student transfers. So a few of us fourth-years use it as a sort of base of operations. We're quite a merry band of pranksters, and the tree outside makes breaking curfew almost too easy.

So as you can imagine, you living in our home base kind of makes our stockings cross-gartered. But, have no fear, if Marcus likes you then there's no problem.

NICK

Who's Marcus?

VIVIAN

Oh, Marcus is Marcus. A little serious. A lot serious, actually. But there's no one else worth knowing on campus. Aside from me.

NICK

What happens if he doesn't like me?

VIVIAN

Well, of course we'll still be best pals - we made a pact - but I might have to be more of a best pal in spirit than actual presence. Also he'll chuck you out of our room.

NICK

It's my room.

VIVIAN

Good, hold on to that belief and you'll be all set. Though you might consider wearing something a bit less "snuggable." Here, you can wear my pants.

(VIVIAN gets his extra pair of pants. He lifts NICK'S feet and attempts to put the pants over NICK'S pajama bottoms.)

NICK

Look, I don't understand what's going on. I really think I should go to bed and we can work this out tomorrow.

VIVIAN

It'll be fine! Have you got a shirt?

(VIVIAN pulls off NICK'S pajama top.)

NICK

Viv - Viv - Vivian, stop!

(VIVIAN backs off.)

If you're doing all this so you and your friends can use my window to sneak off campus then just use it and leave me alone. I don't need to join your secret society or whatever it is. You don't have to pretend you're my friend.

VIVIAN

Be not afraid of greatness.

NICK

Stop it.

VIVIAN

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some?

NICK

Viv...

VIVIAN

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some?

NICK

Have greatness thrust upon 'em.

VIVIAN

See? You're one of us. Just not officially. Now look, we need the room. I don't deny that a microscopic five to fifteen percent of my wooing was directed towards that end. But even though I've only known you a good ten minutes, "you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master." Come on, you're not going to let your best pal down his first day back?

NICK

I guess not on his first day. Not after he's lost his favorite trousers.

VIVIAN

You're a rare Indian pearl, Nick.

(BIRDIE enters and barricades the door.)

BIRDIE

Marcus is not happy.

VIVIAN

What'd you do?

BIRDIE

I didn't do anything. He was sleeping!

VIVIAN

You didn't barge into his room and wake him, did you?

BIRDIE

You told me to!

VIVIAN

Well, I didn't think he'd be asleep. It's only - What time is it?

NICK

Almost 12:30.

VIVIAN

What? Why didn't someone tell me that?

BIRDIE

I did!

VIVIAN

Yes, well, not a problem. You'll just have to be extra charming. And maybe put on a shirt.

BIRDIE

Marcus is going to throw us out the window.

VIVIAN

Marcus hasn't done that since our first term.

NICK

He threw someone out a window?

VIVIAN

He didn't throw the boy. He dangled him. And the boy deserved it. His *Othello* was rotten.

NICK

I don't know *Othello*.

VIVIAN

What do you mean you don't know *Othello*?

BIRDIE

We're going to be dangled.

(There is a knock at the door. BIRDIE runs to the opposite side of the room.)

VIVIAN

You know the rest of the tragedies, don't you?

NICK

Which ones?

VIVIAN

All of them.

BIRDIE

And the comedies and the histories.

NICK

Nobody knows all of Shakespeare.

BIRDIE

We do!

(More knocking.)

VIVIAN

Well, this is going to be more difficult. You'd better open the door.

NICK

Me?

VIVIAN

It's your room.

NICK

He's your friend.

VIVIAN

More like "acquaintances flung together by a mutual disdain for humanity, stemming from our own sense of intellectual superiority."

(There is another knock on the door.)

Oh well. We die but once. Come in, Marcus.

(The door opens. MARCUS HALE enters. Though well-built and handsome, he is hardly intimidating. He reads a book. VIVIAN, BIRDIE & NICK fall silent. MARCUS sits on the bed, absorbed in his reading. He finishes a chapter, marks his place and looks up. VIVIAN pushes NICK forward.)

NICK

Hi - uh - hello. My name is Nicholas. Nick.

(NICK offers his hand. MARCUS ignores it.)

BIRDIE

Don't throw me out the window, Marcus, they made me wake you.

VIVIAN

Shut it, Mousetrap. Now look here, Marc, I know after that last disaster you said no new members, but Nick's been quite a pal to me tonight. And he knows his Shakespeare better than anyone else I've met in the last half hour. So you stop being so serious and give him a fighting chance.

(Silence.)

Well, go on, Nick. Show him what you've got.

NICK

Show him what? What should I do?

VIVIAN

Something.

MARCUS

Alack, why am I sent for to a king,
Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
Wherewith I reign'd?

Nick

I'm sorry?

VIVIAN

Come on, Nick. That's an easy one.

MARCUS

I hardly yet have learn'd
To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my limbs:
Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
To this submission.

NICK

It's one of the history plays. Can you give me the title?

VIVIAN

I thought you knew Shakespeare?

NICK

I know epigrams. I don't know entire passages.

VIVIAN

Give him something shorter, Marcus. Just to start.

MARCUS

I stay too long by thee, I weary thee.
Dost thou so hunger for mine empty throne
That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours
Before thy hour be ripe? O foolish youth!
Thou seek'st the greatness that will o'erwhelm thee.

VIVIAN

Oh, come on, Marcus. I don't even know that.

NICK

I think that's *Henry IV, Part Two*. But I don't know what
comes next. If you give me something from *Henry V*, I could
recite that.

MARCUS

Of fighting men they have full three score thousand.
O that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England
That do no work today.

NICK

You're not serious? You want me to do the whole speech?

MARCUS

He's wasting our time.

(MARCUS heads for the door. BIRDIE and VIVIAN follow.)

VIVIAN

I say, Nick, way to blow it.

(NICK searches his memory. He calls out.)

NICK

What's he that wishes so?

(The boys stop.)

If we are mark'd to die, we are enough
 To do our country loss. And if to live,
 The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
 No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England:
 God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
 As one man more, methinks, would share from me
 For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
 Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
 That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
 Let him depart; his passport shall be made
 And coffers for convoy put into his purse:
 We would not die in that man's company
 That fears his fellowship to die with us.

VIVIAN

I knew he knew his Shakespeare. You can always tell a boy who knows his Shakespeare.

(MARCUS sits on NICK'S bed, takes up his book, and reads as if unimpressed. NICK redoubles his efforts.)

NICK

This day is called the feast of Crispian:
 He that shall live this day, and see old age,
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors,
 And say "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian:"
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
 And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."
 Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
 But he'll remember with advantages
 What feats he did that day: then shall our names
 Familiar in his mouth as household words
 Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.

BIRDIE

He's really good, Marcus.

VIVIAN

Almost there, Nick.

(NICK works himself into a frenzy.)

NICK

This story shall the good man teach his son;
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
 From this day to the ending of the world,
 But we in it shall be remember'd;
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he today that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England now a-bed
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day!

(VIVIAN and BIRDIE stare in amazement. NICK is
 breathless.)

I was in Exeter's production of *Henry V*. Before they kicked
 me out.

(The boys look to MARCUS.)

Marcus

Henry only evokes God's name once. You did it twice. The
 second evocation should have been to Jove, indicating the
 King's pagan as well as Christian tendencies. You substituted
 the word "coffers" for "crowns" in the line about passports,
 which violates the meter. You also pronounced "Salisbury" Sal-
 is-bury, again violating meter. And while the St. Crispin's
 Day speech consists of fifty lines, your edited version came
 in at a grand total of thirty-nine.

(Silence.)

Welcome to the Chimes.

(VIVIAN smiles and pats NICK'S back. He
 faints.)

[END OF SAMPLE. CONTACT AUTHOR FOR THE COMPLETE SCRIPT.]