The Ghost of North Hall Library

(production version)

Andrew O. Clark
Cast of Characters

Sarah, the ghost of a young girl who died in 1908 by jumping seven stories to her death. She tends to be melodramatic, and she wears a long, white nightgown. The actress who plays her should be between the ages of 18 and 25.

Travis, a college student who likes to show-off and is known on campus for his crazy stories. He is more easy-going than Ben and is easily distracted. He wears a watch and carries a backpack.

Ben, also a college student and a friend of Travis. He is regularly shiftless and never wants to be where he is. Both friends wear jeans and t-shirts.

This play is set on the seventh floor of the North Hall Library at Mansfield University. The library is about to close. To the right of the stage is the banister, which surrounds the central atrium of the library; and to the left is a set of heavy doors, which remain closed. The time is 10:45 pm, on a dark night at the end of October.
AT RISE: The stage is empty. Then, BEN and TRAVIS enter. Travis sets his backpack against the banister, stage right. While they talk, they walk around, looking over the banister, examining the decorations, trying doorknobs, until they eventually sit against the wall, stage left.

Ben:

Hey, what time is it?

Travis:

Let me see – about 10:45.

Ben:

Gosh darn it! - another hour left. Man, why do we have to do this? She’s not even real.

Travis:

I think the Frat just likes to make fun of freshmen. That’s why they make it part of the initiation: You have to endure the humiliation before you can get in. But we only have to stay until twelve. Do you know when the library closes?

Ben:

Phsht – no! I’m never here this late, especially not on a Friday night!

(A momentary silence.)

Travis:

How drunk would you have to be to make up a story about a girl who died in a library and became a ghost – and then name her Sarah Klarinski?

Ben:

Yeah, the story they tell freshmen is pretty dumb. I don’t buy it.

Travis:

And, of course, like every ghost, she comes out only at midnight. But, they do say she plays a piano.
Ben:
I heard that, whenever she comes out, all she says is “Jacob, Jacob,” as if everyone she sees is her old boyfriend. One of the seniors said that on her left breast is a huge “M” from the seal where she landed.

Travis (laughing):
I wonder what she looks like. I bet she’s short, and maybe one of her arms is crooked.

Ben:
I bet her face is flat – you know, shattered like an egg shell.

Travis:
Dude, what if her brains ooze out through her nostrils!

Ben:
What if her head hangs off to the side – like I saw in a picture once – with part of a bone sticking up -

Travis:
No, no! I got it – What if she’s really ugly and man-like – with facial hair and fleshy arms, so that now she tires to rape guys in their sleep -

Ben:
Sick! You are screwed up.

Travis:
I’m only joking.

Ben:
Well, that ghost hunter was here a couple of weeks ago. He said there is no ghost. All I care is getting this over with, so I can get back to the party. I’m so ready for fall break.

Travis:
Me too.

(They sit against the doors, stage left.
Silence.)

Ben:
Hey, what time is it?

Travis:
I just told you.

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Ben:
But that was five minutes ago.

Travis:
No duh, dip wad. So that would make it 10:50.

Ben (whining):
I don’t want to stay here…. (then sarcastically) Twelve o’clock - midnight – that’s original.

Travis:
It’s a ghost story. It’s supposed to happen at midnight, you know, when the clock strikes twelve.

Ben:
I’m not joining a fraternity just so I can hide out in libraries waiting for ghosts. I don’t like books, and I certainly don’t believe in spirits, except the liquid kind. I think I might bail.

Travis:
You can’t bail. They’ll kick you out.

Voice (over the intercom):
May we have your attention. The library will close in ten minutes. Please return all reserves and laptop computers to the circulation desk now. The power will be shut off in ten minutes, and the doors will be locked at that time. The library will reopen in nine days as scheduled, following fall break. Thank you for using the North Hall Library.

Ben:
The library closes for nine days? I thought they stayed open for fall break…. And they close in ten minutes! We got to get out of here.

Travis:
We should wait ten minutes.

Ben:
Why?

Travis:
Maybe one of the guys will come get us. Maybe they forgot about the library closing so early, or just didn’t know. But if we leave too early, we lose our chances.

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Ben:
But if they forgot or didn’t know, they’re not going to come get us.
Travis:
What if they planned it this way?
Ben:
I don’t think they’d plan this.
Travis:
Alright, I tell you what: we’ll wait until the lights downstairs start to go off. Then we’ll head down.
Ben:
What difference does it make? She’s not going to show anyway.
(Silence. In the background, a piano begins to play faintly.)
Travis:
Do you hear that?
Ben:
It’s just somebody’s cell phone.
Travis:
No, no. Listen – it’s coming from this room.
Ben (blasé):
No, it’s got to be a prank.
Travis:
No, man, listen!
(He goes to the doors and peers through the crack into the room.)
I think I see her…. She’s playing a piano.
Ben:
It’s not even midnight yet.
(Looks at Travis.)
Are you serious?

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Travis:
Do I look like I’m freakin’ joking? Come here.

(BEN goes to the doors as Travis steps back; he looks.)

Ben:
I’m telling you, it’s just a prank. It’s too dark. I can’t make anything out.

(BEN and TRAVIS switch places.)

Travis:
Where’d she go?

(They switch again.)

Ben:
I still don’t see her.

(Switch.)

Travis:
Wait! I see her.

Ben:
Are you sure it’s her?

Travis:
She’s moving.

Ben:
Why’d the music stop?

Travis:
She’s gone. I can’t see her.

Ben:
Let me –

(They both crowd one over the other in front of the door. Meanwhile, SARAH comes up behind them.)

Sarah (in a loud, shrill voice):
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE YOU HERE? Have you any clue who I am?

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Travis:
Sarah? Are you really… Sarah? The real, true Sarah Klarinski?
Sarah (considering it for a moment):
SARAH Klarinski! I like it! – Yes. I am Sarah Klarinski.
Ben:
What the hell? It’s just a prank!
Sarah (angrily):
You interrupted my music – an outrage worthy of retribution! - But tell me, tell me: Do you know how I died?
Travis:
You’re not really dead.
Sarah:
What do you mean? What am I?
Ben:
You’re not really a ghost.
Sarah:
A toast to ghosts! Here, drink this wine. It’s blood; it could be mine – or yours.
Travis (uncertain):
Well, we have heard -
Sarah:
It’s a wonderful story! Isn’t it? Romantic, yes, romantic.
Ben:
I think we should go.
Sarah:
No, no! You cannot go! You must listen to my story, tell me if it’s right.
Ben:
But if they lock the doors, we won’t get out. And the library will be closed for a week.
Sarah:
No, please. Very quick. You have time, don’t you? Didn’t you say –
Travis:
We have ten minutes; until the lights go out.

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Sarah:
Good, good. Listen – you will cry. I tell you, you will cry for me.

(She runs her hands through her hair while she thinks for a moment.)

Sarah (mumbling):
Longfellow is my favorite. Have you read “The Reaper and the Flowers?” Oh, I wish I could write like him. He’s a nice man, too. I’ve met him…. Alright, I have it. Chopin, begin!

(A piano plays in the background.)

For two times fifty years I’ve lived
    In this sequestered hall.
A ghost, I flit from room to room;
    I know them, each and all.

If I could weep, the world would drown
    In my unbroken sobs.
Since you have come, to you I’ll tell
    What death from lovers robs.

His name was Jacob, and he loved,
    And I loved in return,
But bodies quick to love ignite,
    And in their passions burn.

And so it was a love complete
    Until the winter came;
Then Jacob went to war to fight
    And soon forgot my name.
The weeks passed by and I would cry
And sing my sorry tunes.
Since then, my Jacob’s words have been
Mere shadows on the moon.

(Sarah becomes very emotional.)

Not once did my Jacob reply to my letters,
Not once did he answer my sorrowful cries,
And then on that night at the end of October,
When the moon was yellow and swollen with tears,
I knew in my heart that my Jacob would never
Return as my lover, I knew. Yes, I knew
That Jacob would be just a memory forever.

(Piano stops. She speaks hastily.)
The rest is unimportant –
All that you surely know:
This building caught on fire,
And I was trapped inside.
So frightened was I by the flames,
I jumped from here, and died.

Travis:
A fire?

Sarah:
Of course.

Travis:
But, this building never burned – that was the old Seminary Building, around 1857. They razed the old library – when was it? – then built this one.

Ben:
I think 1908.

Travis (to Sarah):
You jumped after that.
Sarah (suddenly on the verge of tears):
So, you don’t believe me? You don’t think it’s true? But… but it’s all poetry, Longfellow might have written it – why don’t you feel sorry for me?

Travis:
I think we’d better go.

(They turn to go.)

Sarah:
But… I never jumped. I was thrown!

Ben:
By whom?

Sarah:
Well, let me think… (then eagerly) No! I know. Listen, listen.

(They stay. Piano plays again, a different tune.)

My Jacob was a handsome man,
    Though often over-zealous.
He liked to taunt the girls in play,
    And tease and make them jealous.

But he was always sweet to me,
    And he made sure they knew.
And soon enough, they hated us,
    And gave us what was due.

They watched us from behind the doors
    And stalked us up the stairs,
And whispered murder in their sleep,
    And damned us in their prayers.
They bound my hands one rainy night,
   And like the Christ, who was betrayed,
They kissed their sister on the cheek,
   And tossed me o’er the balustrade.

   (Piano stops.)
   Ben (unconvinced):
Dude.

   Travis (to Ben):
She’s lying. I know it.
   - You’re lying to us.
   Sarah:
I am not!

   Travis:
You’re full of it. You’re not Sarah. You don’t even know who you are.
   Sarah:
I am too Sarah! Sarah… Johnson.

   Ben:
Sarah Johnson?
   Sarah:
Yes.

   Travis:
But your last name is supposed to be Klarinski.
   Sarah:
So?

   Travis:
What do you mean, “So?” Who are you?
   (BEN points to his wrist, nudges Travis.
   TRAVIS looks at his watch.)
   Sarah (faking despair):
I… I… I told you.
Travis:
Well, we have to go.

Sarah:

NO! YOU CAN’T LEAVE!

Ben:

Why not?

Sarah:

Because… because I have fangs that come out in a full moon, and I change into a hideous beast that devours your brains.

(They turn to go.)

No, no! Please! Listen. One more story – I’ll tell you the truth this time. You must feel sad for me. I need you to feel sorry for me.

(Ben shakes his head.)

Travis:

Alright. One more; but quick.

Sarah (frantic):

The truth…. Oh…oh….

(No piano.)

The girls were cloistered in their rooms,
Their blankets on their heads,
They shook with fear when lightning struck,
And thunder quaked their beds.

But I, the bravest of them all,
Became their fostering mother,
And with my voice, a hanging note,
I sang the alma mater.

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I sat upon the banister;
   Our hearts united strong,
But then, my footing slipped, and I
   Fell seven stories long.

My sisters rose and sang for me
   Above my sweet refrain,
But on the seal they quickly saw
   My body, blood, and brain.

   (She turns back to them. They stand mute.)

Sarah:
Why aren’t you affected? It’s the right story. Isn’t it the right story?
   Travis:
No, it’s not.
   Sarah:
But why? Why?
   Ben:
Come on, Travis, the library’s about to close.
   Travis (ignoring him):
Because it couldn’t have happened that way. Why would you sit on the railing?
   Ben:
Travis, the lights, they’re turning the lights off.
   Travis:
And because the alma mater – it wasn’t written until 1917, by William Butler.
   Sarah:
So?
   Travis:
You don’t even know who you are! That’s why you still haunt this place, because you can’t face it.
   Ben:
Travis! It’ll be black any minute!

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Sarah:

Face what?

Travis:

The truth – you are not Sarah.

Sarah:

How can you say such a thing? I am – I have to be. I must be. Who else could I be?

Travis:

How should we know?

Ben (sarcastically):

Maybe you’re Longfellow.

Sarah:

No, maybe, let me think… Yes, yes, I am Longfellow! Yes, I am! I always knew it! (her mood changes) But what does it matter? Now you are a part of my story. Now you will become the ghosts of North Hall. Yes! Yes! Sweet justice for my broken heart….

(She laughs shrilly.)

Ben:

We have to go!

Travis (jumps for the backpack):

The backpack!

(There is a bright flash as the lights go out. All is silence.)

Ben:

Travis, Travis?

Sarah (mysteriously):

He’s over here.

(TRAVERS is heard stumbling around on the stage.)

Travis:

I can’t see anything. Where is she?

Sarah:

I’m right here.

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Ben: Man, I told you!

Travis: What – you told me? Where are you?

Ben: I told you, we are trapped in the library.

Travis: But, we can still get out… can’t we?

Sarah: Never….

Travis: I can’t see anything.

Ben (growing quieter): We’re trapped. I know it. We’re so stupid!

Sarah: Never….

Travis (growing quieter): I can’t see anything.

Ben: We’re trapped. She tricked us.

Sarah: Never….

Travis: It’s so dark.

Ben: She tricked us. We’re trapped –

Sarah: Forever….

(A prolonged silence.)
Voice (a tour guide):
Alright, students, gather around the banister, please. Now, you’ve all probably heard the myth about the ghost of North Hall, but there’s another story that’s even more chilling, and it’s true. Not even ten years ago, two freshmen vanished in the library, leaving only a backpack behind…. (Fade out VOICE.)

(Draw curtain. End of play.)