

The Canterville Ghost

by Oscar Wilde

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Level 2 – lower intermediate

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CHAPTER I

When the American, Mr Otis, bought Canterville Castle, everyone told him that this was very foolish, as the place was haunted. But Mr Otis answered, 'I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy. And if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we would have it at home in one of our museums.'

A few weeks later, on a lovely July evening, Mr Otis, his wife and their children, Washington, Virginia and the twins, went down to their new home. When they entered the avenue of Canterville Castle, the sky suddenly became dark and a spooky stillness was in the air.

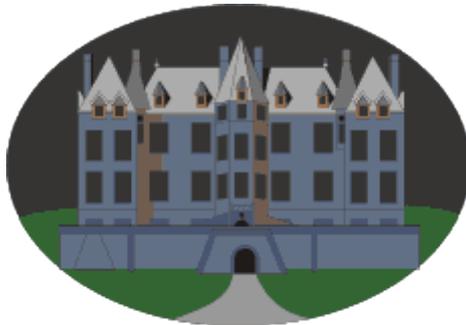
Mrs Umney, the housekeeper, led them into the library of the castle, where they sat down and began to look around. Suddenly, Mrs Otis saw a red stain on the floor just by the fireplace and said to Mrs Umney, 'I am afraid something has been spilt there.'

'Yes, madam,' said the old housekeeper in a low voice, 'blood has been spilt on that spot.'

'How terrible,' said Mrs Otis; 'I don't want any blood-stains in my sitting-room. It must be removed at once.'

The old woman smiled and answered, 'It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that spot by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared seven years later. His body has never been found, but his ghost still haunts the Castle. The blood-stain is a tourist attraction now and it cannot be removed.'

'That is all nonsense,' said Washington, the eldest son of the Otis family, 'stain remover will clean it up in no time,' and he took a bottle of stain remover out of his pocket and cleaned the spot. But as soon as the blood-stain had disappeared, a terrible flash of lightning lit up the room and a fearful peal of thunder made the whole building shake.



CHAPTER II

There was a horrible storm that night, but apart from that nothing scary happened. The next morning, however, when the family came down to breakfast, they found the terrible stain of blood once again on the floor. Washington cleaned it a second time, but the second morning it appeared again. The third morning it was there, too, although the library had been locked up at night by Mr Otis himself.

The following night, all doubts about the existence of the ghost were finally removed forever. At eleven o'clock the family went to bed and some time after, Mr Otis was awakened by a strange noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank of metal, and it came nearer every moment. Mr Otis got up and looked at the time. It was exactly one o'clock. So Mr Otis put on his slippers, went to the door and opened it. There, right in front of him, stood the ghost - his eyes were as red as burning coals; long grey hair fell over his shoulders and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy chains.

'My dear Sir,' said Mr Otis, 'you must oil those chains. It's impossible to sleep with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms. I have therefore brought you this bottle of lubricator, and I will be happy to supply you with more if you require it.' With these words Mr Otis laid the bottle down, closed his door and went back to bed.

Shocked, the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless for a moment, but then he growled angrily. Just at this moment, the twins appeared on the corridor and threw a large pillow at him! The ghost hastily escaped through the wall, and the house became quiet again.

When the ghost reached his small secret chamber, he took a deep breath. No ghosts in history had ever been treated in this manner!



CHAPTER III

The ghost did not appear for the rest of the week. The only strange thing that happened was the blood-stain, which they found on the library-floor every morning. It was also quite strange that the colour of the stain changed from time to time. Some mornings it was red, then brown or purple, or even green. These changes amused the family very much, and bets on the colour were made every evening. The only person who did not enter into the joke was Virginia. For some unexplained reason, she was rather annoyed at the sight of the blood-stain, and nearly cried the morning it was green.

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Shortly after the family had gone to bed they heard a fearful crash in the hall. A suit of armour had fallen on the floor and in a chair sat the Canterville ghost and rubbed his knees, which seemed to hurt. When the twins started shooting peas at him with their pea-shooters, the ghost stood up with an angry growl and passed through them like a mist. He also blew out the candle, leaving them all in total darkness. On top of the stairs the ghost turned around and, in order to frighten the Otis boys, laughed his most horrible laugh. Just then, a door opened and Mrs Otis came out of her bedroom. 'I am afraid you are not well,' she said, 'I have therefore brought you this bottle of medicine.' The ghost looked at her furiously, and then he disappeared.

When he reached his room, he was completely exhausted. This American family was extremely annoying. But what annoyed him most was, that he had not been able to wear the suit of armour. The weight of it had made him fall and hurt his knees.

For some days after this the ghost only left his room to renew the blood-stain. However, on Friday, the 17th of August, he tried to frighten the Otis family again. At half-past ten the family went to bed. For some time the ghost heard the twins laugh, but at a quarter past eleven all was still. So, at midnight he left his secret chamber and glided through the corridors, when suddenly, behind one corner, a horrible ghost stood right in front of him. As the Canterville ghost had never seen another ghost before, he was terribly frightened. He quickly hurried back to his room. But then he thought that he should go and speak to the other ghost. After all, two ghosts were better than one, and his new friend might help him to frighten the twins. However, when he came back to the spot, he found that this 'other ghost' was not real, but only a white sheet which the twins had hung there to play a trick on him. Very upset the Canterville ghost went back to his chamber.



CHAPTER IV

For five days, the ghost did not leave his room. He was very weak and tired and his nerves were completely shattered. He also gave up the point of the blood-stain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly did not deserve it. Whenever the Canterville ghost roamed the house now, he was careful to have oiled his chains and not to make a sound. However, the twins still played their tricks on him. They stretched strings across the corridor, over which he tripped in the dark, and once he slipped on a butter-slide, which the twins had constructed for him on the staircase. This so annoyed the ghost, that he decided to teach the twins a lesson and give them the fright of their lives.

All day long the ghost had prepared this grand event and at a quarter past one at night he finally glided out of his room and crept down the corridor. When he reached the twins' bedroom, he found the door slightly open. In order to frighten the boys enormously, he flung the door wide open, when a heavy jug of water fell right down on him, wetting him to the skin. The twins burst out in shrieks of laughter and the ghost fled.

He now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family and, as he was very afraid of the twins, from now on he crept around the house as quietly as possible. One night, it was on the 19th of September, he went downstairs to see if there were any traces left of the blood-stain. It was about a quarter past two in the morning, and he thought that everyone was fast asleep, when suddenly from a dark corner two figures came running at him who waved their arms wildly above their heads and shouted 'BOO!' in his ear. Full of panic, which under the circumstances was only natural, the ghost hurried back to his room.

After this he was not seen again at night. His feelings were so wounded that he just did not appear anymore.



CHAPTER V

One day, Virginia was walking along the corridor, when she saw a person in one of the rooms and went in. To her surprise, it was the Canterville ghost himself and he looked really sad.

'I am so sorry for you,' she said, 'but my brothers are going back to Eton tomorrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no one will annoy you.'

'It is absurd asking me to behave myself,' the ghost answered, 'I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night. It is my only reason for existing.'

'It is no reason at all for existing, and you know you have been very nasty. Mrs Umney told us that you had killed your wife.'

'Well, I quite admit it,' said the ghost, 'but my wife was not very nice, you know, and she knew nothing about cookery. However, it is all over now, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death.'

'Starve you to death? Oh, Mr Ghost, I mean Sir Simon, are you hungry? I have a sandwich in my case. Would you like it?'

'No, thank you, I never eat anything now; but it is very kind of you. You are much nicer than the rest of your rude, dishonest family.'

'Stop!' cried Virginia, stamping her foot, 'it is you who are rude, and as for dishonesty, you stole the paints out of my box to renew that ridiculous blood-stain in the library. First you took all my reds and I couldn't do any more sunsets, then you took the green and the yellow. Finally I had nothing left but blue and white, and I could only do moonlight scenes, which are not at all easy to paint.'

Having said this, Virginia turned around to leave the room.

'Please don't go, Miss Virginia,' the ghost cried; 'I am so unhappy and I really don't know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot. I have not slept for three hundred years, and I am so tired.'

'Poor, poor Ghost,' she murmured; 'have you no place where you can sleep?'

'Well, I know a place where I could sleep – it's the Garden of Death, the churchyard. But only if you weep for me and my sins and pray with me for my soul, the Angel of Death will have mercy on me.'

When Virginia promised to help the ghost and pray for him, he rose from his seat, took her hand and kissed it thankfully. Then he led her across the room. Virginia saw the wall slowly fading away like a mist, and a bitter cold wind was around them. 'Quick, quick,' cried the ghost, 'or it will be too late.' Then the wall closed behind them, and the chamber was empty.



CHAPTER VI

About ten minutes later, the bell rang for dinner, and, as Virginia did not come down, Mrs Otis sent up one of the servants. After a little time he returned and said that he could not find Miss Virginia anywhere. So, the whole family started looking for her.

The hours passed, but they could find no trace of Virginia. So, after dinner, Mr Otis ordered them all to bed, saying that nothing more could be done that night, and that he would contact Scotland Yard in the morning. Just when everybody was about to leave the dining-room, the clock struck midnight, and when the last stroke sounded, a secret door opened in the wall and in that door stood Virginia with a little box in her hand. Everybody ran up to her.

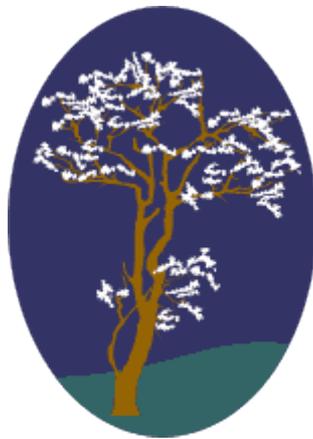
'Good heavens! child, where have you been?' said Mr Otis, rather angrily, as he thought she had been playing a trick on them.

'Papa,' said Virginia quietly, 'I have been with the ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He had been very nasty, but he was really sorry for all that he had done, and he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died.'

Then she led the others down a narrow secret corridor to a little low room. There the family found the skeleton of Sir Simon, who had been starved to death by his wife's brothers. Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton, and, folding her little hands together, began to pray silently.

Meanwhile, one of the twins was looking out of the window in the little room and suddenly said, 'Look! The old almond-tree has blossoms.'

'Then God has forgiven him,' said Virginia and stood up.



CHAPTER VII

Four days later, a funeral started from Canterville Castle. In a quiet corner of the churchyard, Sir Simon's skeleton was buried. When the ceremony was over, Virginia stepped forward and laid a large cross made of white and pink almond-blossoms on the coffin.

The next morning, Mr Otis talked to Sir Simon's descendant, Sir Canterville, about the jewels the ghost had given to Virginia. Their value was so great that Mr Otis had scruples about allowing his daughter to keep them. But Sir Canterville shook his hand and said, 'My dear Sir, your charming little daughter saved my ancestor's soul. The jewels are hers.'

The jewels were admired by everyone when, in the spring of 1890, Virginia married the Duke of Cheshire. After their honeymoon, Virginia and her husband went down to Canterville Castle and on the day after their arrival they walked over to the churchyard. Virginia had brought some lovely roses, which she strewed upon the grave, and after they had stood by it for some time her husband took her hand.

'You have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost.'

'Please don't ask me, I cannot tell you,' she said, 'but I owe Sir Simon a great deal. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both.'

