

OSCAR WILDE

The Canterville Ghost
and Other Stories

Retold by Stephen Colbourn

MACMILLAN

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A Note About the Author

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1854. He died in Paris in 1900. Many of the stories, plays and poems that Oscar Wilde wrote are still popular.

Stories: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Plays: *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Poems and Essays: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, *Ravenna*, *De Profundis*.

THE
CANTERVILLE
GHOST

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

Mr Hiram B. Otis was a rich American from New York. He had come to live and work in England, but he did not want to live in London. He did not want to live in the city. He wanted to live in the countryside outside London.

Canterville Chase was a large and very old house near London. Lord Canterville, the owner, wanted to sell it. So Mr Hiram B. Otis visited Lord Canterville.

'I do not live in Canterville Chase,' Lord Canterville said to Mr Otis. 'I do not want to live there. The house has a ghost - The Canterville Ghost.'

'I come from America,' said Mr Otis. 'America is a modern country. I don't believe in ghosts. Have you seen this Canterville Ghost?'

'No,' said Lord Canterville, 'but I have heard it at night.'

'I don't believe in ghosts,' Mr Otis said again. 'No one has found a ghost. No one has put a ghost in a museum. And you haven't seen this ghost either.'

'But several members of my family have seen it,' said Lord Canterville. 'My aunt saw the ghost. She was so frightened that she was ill for the rest of her life. Also, the servants have seen it so they will not stay in the house at night. Only the housekeeper, Mrs Umney, lives in Canterville Chase. Mrs Umney lives there alone.'

'I want to buy the house,' said Mr Otis. 'I'll buy the ghost as well. Will you sell Canterville Chase? Will you sell the ghost?'

'Yes, I will,' said Lord Canterville. 'But, please remember, I told you about the ghost before you bought the house.'

Mr Hiram B. Otis bought Canterville Chase. Then his family came to England from America. He had a wife called Lucretia, three sons and a daughter.

The eldest son, Washington, was almost twenty years old. He was good-looking and had fair hair. His two young brothers were twins. They were twelve years old. The daughter, Virginia, was fifteen years old. She had large blue eyes and a lovely face.

Mr Otis took his family to live at Canterville Chase. The old house was in the countryside west of London. Mr Otis and his family travelled from London by train. Then they rode to the house in a wagon pulled by two horses.

Canterville Chase was big and old. Trees grew all around the house. The Otis family wanted to stop and look at the outside of the house, but the sky darkened. A thunderstorm was coming. Rain started to fall, so the family went inside the house quickly.

Mrs Umney, the housekeeper, was waiting for them by the front door. She was an old woman and wore a black dress and white apron. She lived at Canterville Chase and looked after the house.

'Welcome to Canterville Chase,' said Mrs Umney. 'Would you like some tea?'

'Yes, please,' said Mrs Otis.

The Otis family followed Mrs Umney into the library. There was a big table in the centre of the room and many

chairs. Mrs Umney put teacups on the table, then she brought a pot of tea.

The Otises sat in the library and drank their tea. They looked out of a large window at the rain. The rain was falling heavily and the sky was black. They heard thunder and they saw lightning.

Mrs Otis looked around the room. There were many books on bookshelves. There were paintings on the walls. There was also a red stain on the floor. The red stain was by the fireplace.

'What is this red stain?' Mrs Otis asked Mrs Umney.

'It is blood,' answered the old housekeeper in a quiet voice.

'I don't want a blood-stain in my library,' said Mrs Otis. 'Please remove the stain. Please clean the floor immediately.'

The old woman smiled. 'It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville. She was murdered by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. The blood-stain has been here for over three hundred years. It cannot be removed.'

'Nonsense,' said Washington Otis. 'I have some Pinkerton's Stain Remover from America. It can remove any stain. Watch.'

Washington Otis took the stain remover from a bag. Pinkerton's Stain Remover looked like a small black stick. He rubbed the stick on the blood-stain. A minute later the floor was clean. The stick had removed the stain quickly and easily.

Mrs Umney looked at the floor. She was frightened. No one had removed the blood-stain for three hundred years. Mrs Umney was very frightened.

'Pinkerton's can remove anything,' said Washington Otis. 'The blood-stain has gone.'

Lightning flashed and lit the library. Thunder crashed over the house. Mrs Umney fainted.

Mr and Mrs Otis ran across the library. They helped the old housekeeper who lay on the floor. Mrs Umney's eyes were closed and her face was pale.

'Mrs Umney! Mrs Umney!' cried Mrs Otis. 'Can you speak?'

Mrs Umney opened her eyes. 'Trouble will come to this house,' she said. 'I have seen the ghost. The ghost will come to you.'

All the Otises helped Mrs Umney to stand up. 'The ghost will come,' she said again. 'You must not remove the blood-stain. You must not clean the library floor. The ghost will be angry.'

Then Mrs Umney went upstairs to her room.

'Let's look for the ghost,' said the Otis boys. 'Let's look round the house.'

The Otises looked round the house together. But they did not see the Canterville Ghost.



That night the family went to bed early. The storm continued all night. Next morning they went into the library. The blood-stain had reappeared on the floor.

'I'll remove this blood-stain once more,' said Washington Otis. 'Mother doesn't want a blood-stain in the library. I'll clean the floor again.'

He removed the blood-stain with Pinkerton's Stain Remover. The library floor was clean. But the next morning the stain had come back again.

'This is very strange,' said Mr Otis. 'I'll lock the library

door at night. No one can come into the library. No one can put a stain on the floor.'

'I don't think Pinkerton's Stain Remover is bad,' said Washington Otis. 'I think there really is a ghost. The ghost is making the blood-stain. The ghost puts the stain on the floor at night.'

'We must find this ghost,' said Mr Hiram B. Otis. 'It must stop making these stains. Your mother does not like blood on the library floor.'

That day the family went out. They walked around the countryside near Canterville Chase. They went to the nearby village. They looked at the old village houses. Then they walked back to Canterville Chase through the woods. It was a summer evening and the weather was fine.

It was late when they got back to the house. The Otises were hungry and tired. After eating supper they went to bed. The bedrooms were upstairs. There was a long corridor upstairs. The bedroom doors were along this corridor.

Mr Otis woke up after midnight. There was a strange noise outside his room. The sound was like metal chains. The chains were rubbing together.

Mr Otis got out of bed and opened the bedroom door. He looked into the corridor.

He saw the Canterville Ghost in the corridor. The ghost was an old man with burning red eyes. He had long grey hair and wore very old-fashioned clothes. There were chains on his hands and feet. He was rubbing the chains together so they made a noise.

'My dear sir, your chains make a terrible noise,' Mr Otis said to the ghost. 'You must put some oil on those chains. Here is some Tammany Rising Sun Oil from the United States. Please put the oil on your chains.'

Mr Otis put a bottle of oil on a table in the corridor. Then he closed his bedroom door and went back to bed.

The Canterville Ghost was very surprised. He had lived in Canterville Chase for three hundred years. Everyone was frightened of him, because everyone was afraid of ghosts. But this American gentleman was not afraid.

The Canterville Ghost decided to work harder. He wanted to frighten the American. He made a terrible noise and shone a horrible green light in the corridor.

Another door opened at the end of the corridor. Mr Otis's youngest sons came out of their bedroom. The two young boys had the pillows from their beds in their hands. They threw the pillows at the ghost. They laughed at the ghost.

The ghost was amazed and upset. No one had laughed at him before. He was a ghost. Everyone is frightened of ghosts. No one had ever laughed at the Canterville Ghost before.

The Canterville Ghost did not know what to do. He disappeared through the wall and the house became quiet.

The ghost went to the secret room where he lived. He sat down on a chair. He thought about what had happened.

He had frightened people for three hundred years. He had looked through windows and frightened the servants. He had knocked on bedroom doors. He had frightened people in their beds. He had blown out candles in the night. He had turned green and made noises with his chains. Everyone had always been frightened. No one had given him Rising Sun Oil to put on his chains. No one had thrown pillows at him. He was a very unhappy ghost.

Washington Otis removed the blood-stain in the library every day. Every morning the stain had reappeared. But the stain was no longer the colour of blood. One morning it was brown. Another morning it was purple. Then it became bright green.

The Otises laughed at the blood-stain. They looked for it every morning before breakfast.

'What colour is it today?' asked Washington Otis.

'It's green!' shouted the twins. 'It's green blood today.'

They laughed at the green blood-stain on the library floor.

Virginia Otis did not laugh. The young girl was silent at breakfast. The blood-stain made her feel sad and she almost cried when she saw the bright green stain. She was sure that the ghost put the stain on the floor. She felt sorry for the ghost.

'The stain has been here for three hundred years,' said Virginia. 'We have been here for three weeks. The poor ghost puts the stain on the floor every night. Can't you leave the stain there?'

But the others did not listen to Virginia.

The second appearance of the ghost was on a Sunday night. The Otises had all gone to bed. Suddenly they were woken up. They heard a terrible crashing noise downstairs.

The whole family ran out of their bedrooms. They ran downstairs. It was dark but Mr Otis and his eldest son carried candles. They heard another crashing noise in the hallway near the front door.

There was a suit of armour in the hallway. This suit of armour was more than three hundred years old. It had fallen over and made a loud noise. The Canterville Ghost was sitting on the floor next to the armour.

The ghost had tried to put on the suit of armour. He wanted to walk around the house and frighten the Otis family. But the metal suit was too heavy. The suit of armour had fallen onto the floor.

The Canterville Ghost was sitting beside the armour. He was rubbing his knee. He had hurt himself.

Mr Hiram B. Otis pointed a gun at the ghost. Washington Otis held his candle high in the air. The Otis twins laughed loudly. Virginia was afraid and stood beside her mother. They all looked at the Canterville Ghost.

The ghost was very angry. He stood up and gave a loud shout. He blew out the candle in Washington Otis's hand. There was no light in the hall. Then the ghost ran up the stairs in the darkness.

He stopped at the top of the stairs and laughed. He had a frightening laugh. Men's hair had turned grey when they heard him laugh. But the Otises were not afraid.

'Are you in pain?' asked Mrs Otis. 'I have a bottle of Dr Dobell's medicine. It is good for stomach-aches and headaches. Please take the medicine.'

The ghost looked at Mrs Otis angrily. Then he disappeared in a green cloud and went back to his secret room. He was very unhappy. He had tried to put on the suit of armour, but it was too heavy. The armour had fallen over and the ghost had hurt his leg.

The ghost stayed in his room during the day. He came out at night to visit the library. He repainted the blood-stain every night. And every morning, Washington Otis removed the blood-stain with Pinkerton's Stain Remover.

But the ghost had a problem. He had quickly finished all his red paint. Now his brown and purple paints were finished as well. So, sometimes he painted the blood-stain green, sometimes blue.

The ghost made plans. He wanted to frighten the Otis twins. He planned to visit the twins in the night. He planned to turn himself green and make a horrible noise. He planned to visit the twins in their bedroom. He planned to touch them with his ice-cold hands in the dark.

He left his secret room at midnight. The house was dark.

He climbed the stairs and walked along the corridor. The twins' bedroom was at the end of the corridor round a corner. He turned the corner. Suddenly he stopped.

In front of him was a round face with a terrible mouth and burning eyes. Fire shone out of the mouth and eyes of this horrible face. It was the face of a ghost!

The Canterville Ghost gave a shout and ran back to his secret room. He had never seen a ghost before and felt very frightened.

Before daylight came, the Canterville Ghost felt better. Were there two ghosts in the house? He must find out. He must meet the second ghost.

He went back upstairs and walked along the corridor towards the twins' room. The second ghost was still there, but its eyes were no longer burning. He went up to it. He touched it. The head of the second ghost fell onto the floor. It was not a ghost at all. It was a head made from a

large round vegetable called a pumpkin. The twins had put a candle inside it. There was a card on the floor.

THE OTIS GHOST THE ONLY TRUE CANTERVILLE GHOST
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The twins had put the head in the corridor to frighten him. This made the Canterville Ghost very angry. What could he do? He could think of nothing at that moment, so he went back to his room.



The ghost felt very weak and tired. He stayed in his room for five days. He did not repaint the blood-stain in the library. There had been a blood-stain on the library floor for three hundred years. Now the library floor was clean.

After a week the ghost felt better. He decided to try once more to frighten the Otis twins. He planned to make his face look as horrible as possible. He waited until the middle of the night.

Slowly and silently he walked to the twins' bedroom. It was one o'clock in the morning. The house was quiet. The door of the twins' room was slightly open.

The ghost took off his head and carried it under his arm. It is terrifying to see a headless ghost. He wanted to terrify the twins.

He pushed open the door of the twins' bedroom. The door banged against the wall.

He had planned to shout and hold his head in his hands. But a heavy jug of water fell from the top of the door.

The wins had played a trick on him. He was soaked with water. The twins shouted and laughed.

The ghost ran back down the corridor. He could not frighten the twins. He could not frighten anyone in the Otis family.

Washington Otis came out of his bedroom. The ghost stopped running. Behind him, the twins ran down the corridor. They shouted - 'Boo!' - in his ears and waved their arms. Washington Otis laughed at him.

The ghost did not know what to do. He ran through the nearest door, went back to the secret room and lay down. He could not frighten anyone. He was a very unhappy ghost.



The Otises did not see the Canterville ghost at night again. The twins waited for him when it was dark. They put a rope across the corridor. They tied metal tins to the rope. But the ghost did not walk into the tins. Only Mr Otis came along the corridor. He fell over the rope and was very angry.

Virginia Otis was also angry with the twins. 'Can't you leave the poor ghost alone?' she said. 'Why do you want to hurt him? Why do you want to play tricks on him? He has lived here for a very long time. Leave him alone.'

The twins did not listen, but the ghost heard Virginia's words. The words gave him hope.

One afternoon, Virginia went to the library. The library door was slightly open. She pushed the door wide open and quietly walked into the room.

There was somebody sitting by the window. It was the Canterville Ghost!

He was looking at the library window which was made of coloured glass. There were words painted on the glass.

He was wearing his best clothes and had combed his long grey hair.

'I feel very sorry for you,' said Virginia quietly. 'I'm sorry that my brothers were not very kind to you. But you did try to frighten them.'

'Yes I did,' said the ghost. 'It is my job to frighten everyone who comes to Canterville Chase.'

'You are very wicked, I know,' said Virginia, 'Mrs Umney, the housekeeper, told us that you killed your wife.'

'Yes I did,' replied the ghost. 'But she wasn't very kind. And it wasn't very kind of her brothers to starve me to death.'

'Starve you to death?' said Virginia. 'Oh, poor ghost, are you hungry? Would you like a sandwich?'

'No thank you,' he replied. 'I never eat anything. But you are very kind. You are much kinder than the rest of your family. They are rude, nasty and unkind.'

'Stop!' cried Virginia. 'You are nasty and unkind too. You stole my paint box. You used my paints to make the blood-stain in the library. I never told anyone about it. But now I'm going to fetch my father.'

She turned to go, but the ghost spoke again.

'Please do not go, Miss Virginia,' said the ghost. 'I am so lonely and so unhappy. I do not know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot.'

'It's easy to sleep,' said Virginia. 'You go to bed and close your eyes.'

'I have not slept for three hundred years,' said the ghost. 'I have not slept since I was murdered by my wife's brothers.'

Virginia walked across the library and looked at the old face of the ghost. It was a sad face.

'Poor ghost,' said Virginia, 'how can I help you to sleep?'

'Far away in the woods,' said the ghost, 'there is a little garden. In the little garden the grass grows long and thick. There are many flowers and trees. A nightingale sings all night long. The bird's sweet song is beautiful and sad. The white stars and the pale moon look down on this little garden. It is very peaceful.'

Virginia's eyes were full of tears. She put her hands over her face.

'You mean it is the Garden of Death,' she said quietly.

'Yes, the Garden of Sleep,' said the ghost. 'It is very beautiful. There is peace and silence. There is no yesterday and no tomorrow. But only Love can open the door to the garden. For Love is stronger than Death.'

Virginia did not know what to say. She listened as the ghost spoke again.

'Have you read the writing on the library window?'

'Yes,' said Virginia, 'but I do not understand it.'

'Look,' said the ghost. 'Read the lines on the window.'

Virginia looked at the window and read the lines of poetry:

*When a golden girl shall weep
For the ghost that cannot sleep,
Then the dead at last shall die
And in restful earth may lie.*

'The words mean you must weep for me,' said the unhappy ghost. 'Then the Angel of Death will let me rest.'

Will you help?'

'What do I have to do?' asked Virginia.

'You must come with me into the darkness. You will see strange things. You will hear strange voices, hut nothing will hurt you. You are good and kind. The dark cannot hurt you.'

Virginia did not answer and the ghost waited. He had waited for three hundred years. This was the longest minute of all that time.

'I am not afraid,' said Virginia at last. 'I will come with you into the dark.'

The ghost kissed her hand. His lips were cold like ice, hut they burned like fire. The ghost held her hand and they walked to the wall of the library. The wall opened. There was darkness beyond the wall and a cold wind. Voices spoke out of the wind. 'Go back, Virginia. Go back before it is too late.'

Virginia walked into the darkness with the ghost. Virginia and the ghost disappeared through the library wall.



Virginia did not come downstairs for supper. Mr Otis sent one of the servants to her room. The servant could not find Virginia so everybody searched the house. They looked everywhere but they could not find her. Mr and Mrs Otis were very worried.

It was a summer evening and the sun had not set, so the family and the servants searched the gardens before it was dark. In the garden there were many trees and a deep pond. They looked in the pond. They looked in the trees. Then they asked people at the railway station. But no one

had seen Virginia. Mr Otis went to tell the village policeman that Virginia had disappeared. But, by that time, it was dark and no one could search any more that night.

None of the family wanted to eat or sleep. They sat in the library and waited. They hoped Virginia would return safely. They planned to search for Virginia again in the morning.

It was midnight when the family decided to go to bed. They left the library and started to walk up the stairs together. Suddenly all the clocks in the house struck twelve and they heard a terrible noise. Thunder crashed outside the house and the Otises heard a dreadful cry. Strange music sounded inside the house and a door opened at the top of the stairs.

Virginia stood in the doorway. She looked down the stairs at them. Her face was very pale and she carried a small box in her hand.

'Where have you been?' Mr Otis asked angrily. 'Your mother has been very worried. You have frightened us all. You must never play a trick like this again.'

'Except on the ghost,' said the twins. 'You can play tricks on the ghost!'

'Father,' Virginia said quietly, 'I have been with the ghost. He is dead and now he can rest. He gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died.'

She showed her father the small box. Inside was a necklace made of red stones.

'Where did you get this?' asked her father. 'Where have you been?'

Mr Otis forgot to be angry. He was so pleased to see that Virginia was safe.

'Come. I'll show you,' said Virginia.

She turned back to the door at the top of the stairs. All of the family followed her. Washington Otis carried a lighted candle.

Virginia led them along a secret corridor. They came to an old wooden door which was open. Beyond the door was a little room with a low ceiling. There was an iron ring in the wall and two chains. At the end of the chains was a body. Only bones remained. It was a skeleton.

'This is the body of Sir Simon de Canterville,' said Virginia. 'He murdered his wife in 1575. Then his wife's brothers shut him in this room. He was given no food. Sir Simon starved to death. His ghost was in this house for three hundred years. But now he has found peace.'

The Otis family looked around the little room and did not know what to say. Virginia knelt on the floor beside the skeleton and began to pray.

There was a funeral four nights later. The Otises buried the body of Sir Simon de Canterville in a grave among the trees.

The Otises, Mrs Umney the housekeeper, and all the servants from Canterville Chase stood near the grave. Behind them were people from the nearby village. Many people had come to the funeral.

Virginia carried white flowers. She looked up at the stars and the pale moon and the dark trees. She remembered what the ghost had said about the Garden of Death. A nightingale began to sing. The bird's sweet song was beautiful and sad.

Virginia smiled. 'God has forgiven him for murdering his wife,' she said.