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The Canterville Ghost

by Oscar Wilde

(Adapted book. Elementary level)

Chapter 1. The Otis family comes to Canterville

When Hiram B. Otis, the American businessman, bought the house called Canterville Chase, people told him that he was doing a very dangerous thing. Everybody knew that there was a ghost in the house. Lord Canterville himself told Mr Otis all about it.

‘We don’t like to live in the house ourselves,’ he said. ‘Too many of my family have seen the ghost. My wife’s grandmother, the Duchess of Bolton, is one of them. One night, while she was dressing for dinner, two skeleton hands were put on her shoulders. She has been ill for years because of that. And my wife never got any sleep there, because of all the noises at night.’

‘Lord Canterville,’ answered Mr Otis, ‘I will buy both the house and the ghost. I come from a modern country, and we can buy nearly everything in America - but not ghosts. So, if there really is a ghost in the house, we can send it home to America, and people will pay to go and see it.’

‘I’m afraid that the house really does have a ghost,’ said Lord Canterville, smiling. ‘Perhaps there are no ghosts in your country, but our ghost has been in the house for three hundred years, and it always appears before the death of one of the family.’

‘Well, so does the family doctor, Lord Canterville. But there are no ghosts, sir, in any country - not even in famous old British families.’

‘Very well,’ said Lord Canterville. ‘If you’re happy to have a ghost in the house, that’s all right. But please remember that I did tell you about it.’

* * *

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And so Mr Hiram B. Otis bought the house, and a few weeks later he and his family went down to Canterville Chase on the train.

Mrs Otis was a very beautiful woman, and looked just as English as an Englishwoman. American people are really no different from English people - but they do, of course, speak a different language. Her eldest son, Washington, was a good-looking young man with a wonderful smile, who was famous at all the London parties for his fine dancing. Miss Virginia E. Otis was a sweet little girl of fifteen with big blue eyes. She loved to ride horses and could ride faster than a lot of men. One day the young Duke of Cheshire saw her on horseback, and immediately asked her to marry him - but his family sent him back to school the next day. After Virginia came the twins - two happy, noisy little boys, who were always laughing and playing tricks.

It was a lovely July evening when the family got off the train. The fields and trees looked beautiful in the golden sunshine. The birds were singing sweetly, and the sky was a bright blue. But when they arrived at Canterville Chase, storm clouds suddenly appeared in the sky. Then ten or twelve large black birds Hew down over their heads, and big drops of rain began to fall.

An old woman in a black dress was standing in the doorway of the house, waiting to meet them. This was Mrs Umney, the housekeeper.

‘Welcome to Canterville Chase,’ she said.

They followed her into the library - a long, dark room with a high window at one end. Here, tea was ready for them, so they took off their coats and sat down.

Suddenly Mrs Otis saw a dark red stain on the floor, near the fireplace.

‘Is that a stain on the floor there?’ she asked.

‘Yes, Mrs Otis,’ said Mrs Umney quietly. ‘It’s a bloodstain.’

‘Oh, that’s terrible!’ cried Mrs Otis. ‘I can’t have bloodstains on my floors. It must go.’

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The old woman smiled, and again answered in a quiet voice, it is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville,' she said, 'Her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, murdered her in 1575, while she was standing just there, in that place. He lived for another nine years after her death, but then he disappeared, very strangely and suddenly. Nobody ever found his body, but his ghost is still in the house, and will not rest. The bloodstain is famous - visitors come here specially to see it. People have tried to clean it, but it will not go away.'

'Of course it will!' cried Washington Otis. 'Pinkerton's Famous Stain Cleaner will clean it up in a second.'

And before the housekeeper could stop him, he was cleaning the floor with a small black stick.

A minute later, the bloodstain was gone!

'There you are!' he said, smiling at the others. 'Pinkerton can clean anything!'

But at these words the storm outside suddenly began. A terrible flash of lightning lit up the room, and a second later came a great crash of thunder. Everyone jumped up at the sound of the thunder ... and Mrs Umney fainted.

'What terrible weather this country has!' said Mr Otis. He sat down again and lit a cigarette.

Mrs Umney lay on the floor, with her eyes closed. Mrs Otis looked at her. 'My dear Hiram,' she cried. 'What can we do with a woman who faints?'

'Toil her she has to pay some money.' said Mr Otis. 'If she breaks a cup or something, she has to pay for it. So tell her to pay if she faints. She won't faint after that.'

At this Mrs Umney immediately sat up, but she looked very unhappy. 'Be careful! Trouble is coming to this house!' she said, her voice shaking. 'I have seen things here which are too terrible to describe. For night after night, I have not closed my eyes in sleep.'

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Mr Otis gave her a warm smile. ‘My wife and I are not afraid of ghosts, Mrs Umncy.’

The old housekeeper got shakily to her feet. ‘You Americans are so strong!’ she said. ‘And so kind! You know, I have worked here for many, many years at the same pay, and ...’

‘OK, Mrs Umney. We’ll pay you more money,’ said Mr Otis, still smiling.

‘Oh, thank you, dear Mr Otis. And dear Mrs Otis. Thank you very much.’

Chapter 2. Sir Simon meets the Otis family

The storm went on all night, and the next morning, when the family came down to breakfast, the bloodstain was on the library floor again.

‘That’s strange,’ said Washington. ‘Pinkerton’s Famous Stain Cleaner usually cleans anything. It must be the ghost.’

He cleaned the floor again with the little black stick, but the next morning the stain appeared once more. That night, Mr Otis closed the windows and locked the library door. But in the morning the bloodstain was there again.

The family found this most interesting.

‘Is there a ghost, or isn’t there?’ they said to themselves. They could not decide.

But that night, they had the answer to their question.

After the family was in bed and asleep, a strange noise woke Mr Otis. It sounded like something metal moving slowly along the passage, and it was coming nearer to his bedroom door. He got out of bed and listened carefully. The strange noise went on, and he also heard the sound of footsteps. Then he put on his shoes, took a small bottle from his cupboard, and opened the door of his room.

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There, in the moonlight, was an old man with eyes as red as fire. His grey hair was long and dirty, his clothes were old and full of holes, and there were heavy metal chains round his arms and legs.

'My dear man,' said Mr Otis, 'you really must put some oil on those noisy chains! I've brought you a bottle of Tammany's Sun Oil, which is very good. Everybody in America uses it. I'll leave it here for you, and I'll be happy to give you some more when you need it.'

He put the bottle down on a small table, then went back inside his room and got into bed.

For a second or two the Canterville ghost stood still. He was so angry! Then he knocked the bottle of oil on to the floor and hurried away. A strange green light came from his body, and he gave a long and terrible cry that rang through the house. But when he got to the top of the stairs, a door opened, two little people appeared, and a large pillow went flying past his head!

This was too much for the ghost, so he quickly disappeared through the wall, and soon the house was quiet again.

When he got to his secret room, the Canterville ghost sat down in the moonlight and tried to think. He was both angry and unhappy.

'For three hundred years,' he said to himself, 'I have been the best and the most famous ghost in the country! Everybody - everybody - has been afraid of me. There was the Duchess of Bolton not long ago. I put my skeleton hands on her shoulders, and she nearly died of terror. She has been ill ever since. Before that, there were three - no, four - housekeepers, who ran away from the house, screaming. Then there was that wonderful night in 1752 when Lord Augustus shot himself in the library, because he saw a skeleton in the armchair by the fire. And there was the beautiful Lady Stutfield, who never spoke again after my cold fingers held her long white neck while she sat at dinner.'

The ghost sat there, remembering all those happy times in the past. But: he was not happy now. 'After all this,' he said, 'these terrible modern Americans come to the house and give me Tammany's Sun Oil

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for my chains, and throw pillow's at my head! It's too bad! They'll be sorry for this - oh, yes, they will!'

All night long, the ghost sat, and thought hard.

Chapter 3. Second ghost appears at Canterville

The next morning, when the Otis family met at breakfast, they talked about the ghost for some time. Mr Otis was a little cross to find the bottle of Tammany's Sun Oil lying on the floor of the passage.

'I don't want,' he said, 'to hurt the ghost in any way.' Here he looked at the boys. 'We must remember that he has lived in this house for a very long time, so I don't think it's very nice to throw pillows at him - no, don't laugh, boys, it's not funny. But if the ghost won't use the oil, we will have to take his chains away from him. We can't possibly sleep with that noise going on outside our bedrooms every night.'

But for the rest of the week all was quiet. The only interesting thing was the bloodstain. Every day Washington cleaned the floor with Pinkerton's Stain Cleaner, and every night Mr Otis carefully locked the windows and the library door. But the bloodstain was always there again the next morning.

It also changed colour a few times. On some days it was red, on other days it was purple, and once it was bright green. Most of the family thought these colour changes were very funny and they hurried downstairs each morning to find out the new colour. The only person who did not laugh was little Virginia, but she would not explain why. And on the morning the bloodstain was bright green, she nearly cried.

On Sunday night, soon after the family went to bed, the ghost made his next move. There was a three-hundred-year-old suit of armour downstairs. 'Now, a ghost in armour will surely frighten even modern Americans,' he thought. He began to put on the suit of armour, but it was too heavy for him, and he and some of the armour fell to the floor with a loud CRASH.

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All the men in the Otis family jumped out of bed and hurried downstairs at once. They found the unhappy ghost sitting there, holding his head and crying softly with pain. The twins had their pea-shooters with them and immediately began to shoot little balls of paper at him. Mr Otis brought out his handgun and, like the good Californian he was, called out to the ghost:

‘Hold up your hands!’

At this, the ghost jumped up with a wild and angry scream and flew through them. Washington Otis’s candle went out, and suddenly everything was dark. At the top of the stairs, the ghost turned to give his terrible ghostly laugh - the famous laugh which once turned Lord Raker’s hair white in a single night. It went on and on until the house was full of the sound.

A bedroom door opened and Mrs Otis appeared with a bottle in her hand. ‘I’m afraid you’re not feeling very well,’ she said to the ghost. ‘I’ve brought you some of Dr Dobell’s special stomach medicine. If you’re having trouble with your stomach, this will soon help you to feel better.’

The ghost looked at her angrily, and began to turn himself into a big black dog (one of his most famous tricks). But the sound of young footsteps coming up the stairs stopped him, and he quickly disappeared with a ghostly ‘Oooooooh!’ before the twins arrived at the top.

For some days after this he was very ill, and only went out to make the bloodstain again each night. But when he began to feel better, he decided to try for the third time to frighten Hiram B. Otis and his family.

He spent most of Friday, the 17th of August, trying to decide what to wear. At last he decided on a dead man’s shroud, a large black hat with a red feather in it, and a long knife.

That night the wind shook all the doors and windows, and the rain crashed down on to the roof of the house. The ghost made his plans carefully.

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‘I’ll go first to Washington Otis’s room,’ he said to himself. ‘He cleans away the famous Canterville blood-stain each morning, so I want to be sure that he’ll be really frightened. I’ll make ghostly noises to wake him up, then I’ll push my knife into my neck three times, to the sound of slow music.’

‘Then I’ll go to Mr Hiram B. Otis’s room. I’ll make a terrible noise in his ear, and at the same time pin my cold hand on Mrs Otis’s face. Now, what about Virginia? She’s never played any tricks on me and she’s sweet and pretty. Perhaps I’ll just make a soft ‘Ooooh!’ in her ear ... or move her bed sheets a little with my skeleton’s fingers.’

‘And then on to the twins! Those horrible boys are going to learn a lesson tonight! Pit stand between their beds, looking like a dead body - cold and green and smelling of death. They’ll be too frightened to move. Then I’ll throw off my shroud and do my famous skeleton dance all round the room.’

He heard the family go to bed at half-past ten. For some time he listened to the laughs and shouts of the twins, but by a quarter past eleven all was quiet.

At the sound of midnight, the ghost left his room. He came out of the wall with the knife in his hand and a smile on his face. It was not a nice smile, and when the moon saw it through a window, she hid behind a cloud.

Slowly and silently the ghost moved through the house, while the Otis family went on happily sleeping. At the corner of the passage which went along to Washington’s room, the ghost stopped for a minute. A little wind came from nowhere, pulling his long white shroud this way and that, and showing the skeleton arms and neck of the walking dead. He heard the clock sound a quarter past midnight, gave a little laugh, and turned the corner ...

... And stopped - in terror! There, in front of him, was standing the most horrible ghost. It had a large head with no hair on it, and a fat round face with a deathly smile across its open mouth. A red light

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burned like fire inside its mouth and behind both of its eyes. Its great body was hidden under a long shroud, and it carried a large piece of paper with strange writing on it.

The Canterville ghost did not wait to read it. He was too frightened. When you see your first ghost, you don't stop to talk, you turn and run - so the Canterville ghost turned and ran. His long shroud got caught around his feet and he nearly fell over, but he ran as fast as he could, away from the horrible thing that was watching him with fire in its eyes. He turned the corner, dropped his knife into one of Hiram B. Otis's shoes, which were outside his bedroom door (Mr Otis found it there the next morning), and ran on to his room.

He threw himself onto his bed, and hid his head under his pillow. It was some time before he began to feel better. Then he told himself that he was a Canterville, and that Cantervillies were fighters to the end,

'When it gets light,' he thought, 'I'll go and speak to this other ghost. Perhaps we can be friends. After all, two ghosts are better than one, and if the two of us work together, perhaps we can frighten those terrible twins at last.'

Very early the next morning, while the family was still sleeping, he went back to the passage. The other ghost was still there, but now there was something wrong with it. There was no fire in its eyes, and it was resting against the wall like a sick man. The Canterville ghost moved forward quickly and put his arms round the other ghost - and its head fell off! Then the body fell to the floor, and the Canterville ghost saw that he was holding a white bed sheet. And there was a brush, and a turnip with holes in it, lying at his feet.

'What's happened?' he thought. 'Where has the ghost gone?'

Then he saw the piece of paper on the front of the sheet, and there, in the grey morning light, he read these terrible words:

The Otis Ghost

The only true and real ghost. All other are false.

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At once he understood everything. It was a trick - another horrible trick! He stood there, too angry to move, and tried to think of a plan to finish these terrible Americans once and for all. But he couldn't think of any plan, so after a while he went to find a quiet dark place to lie down in.

Chapter 4. Enemies everywhere

For the next five days the ghost stayed in his room. He was very' tired, and he didn't feel well. He decided to stop putting the bloodstain on the library floor.

'The Otis family don't want it,' he thought, 'so they're not going to have it!'

Ghostly appearances were different, of course. It was his job to appear in the passage once a week, and to 'Ooooooh!' and 'Aaaaagh!' from the great window on the stairs on the first and third Wednesday in every month.

So for the next three Saturdays, as usual, he walked along the passages between midnight and three o'clock. But he didn't want anybody to see or hear him. He took off his shoes and walked as quietly as he could. He wore a large black coat, and was careful to use Tammany's Sun Oil on his chains. At first he didn't want to, but one evening, while the family was at dinner, he went into Mr Otis's bedroom and took the bottle. After a time, he saw that the oil was really very useful.

But the twins still went on with their tricks. They put things in his way in dark corners, and he fell over them. They put butter on the top stair, and one night his feet went from under him and he went crashing down the stairs to the bottom. This made him very angry, and he decided to visit the boys the next night, as the famous 'Duke With No Head', and frighten them half to death.

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He spent three hours getting ready, and was very pleased with how he looked. At a quarter past one he walked through the wall and moved silently through the passages to the twins' bedroom.

The door was open a little way. Pushing it hard, the ghost walked into the room - and a heavy jug of water fell right down on him. At the same time, he heard the twins laughing in their beds.

The ghost - wet from top to bottom - turned and ran from the room. He did not stop until he was back in his room. The next day he was ill with a bad cold.

After this, the ghost stopped trying to frighten the American family. He walked silently round the passages in soft shoes, carrying an old gun, and tried to stay away from everyone.

The last of the tricks happened on the 19th of September. That night the ghost was wearing one of his favourite shrouds, and he decided to walk down to the library. He wanted to see what was left of the bloodstain. He was on his way there when two shapes jumped out of a dark corner of the passage and shouted 'BOO!' in his ear.

The ghost was very frightened, of course, and ran to the stairs. But Washington Otis was waiting for him there, with a big garden-syringe. There were enemies on all sides! 'Aaaagh!' the ghost cried, then turned quickly and disappeared into the fireplace, which, luckily for him, was not lit. When at last he got back to his room, he was terribly dirty, with black all over his favourite shroud, and very unhappy.

After this, nobody saw him again at night. The twins waited to play tricks on him three or four times. They put nutshells all along the passages, which made walking around difficult for everyone in the house, but the ghost did not appear.

'Oh dear, he's too unhappy to come out,' they said.

Mr Otis began work again on his book, Mrs Otis gave a number of big 'American parties' for the English people who lived near them. The boys played in the house and garden, and Virginia went horse-

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riding with the young Duke of Cheshire. He was staying at Canterville Chase for the last week of his holidays.

Mr Otis wrote a letter to Lord Canterville and said: 'We think that the ghost has gone away.'

And Lord Canterville wrote back: 'I am happy to hear it!'

But Mr Otis was wrong. The ghost was still in the house. It is true that he was ill, but he was not yet ready to stop his ghostly work. The young Duke of Cheshire was staying in the house, and the ghost knew the Duke's family well. He once appeared before the brother of the Duke's grandfather as the Horseman of Death. The poor man's hair turned white in one night, and for the rest of his life he could only say the words, 'Turn out the light, turn out the light.' Now the ghost warned to do the Horseman of Death for the young Duke too.

He got everything ready, but in the end he never left his room. He was too frightened of the twins to go out, and the young Duke slept happily in his bed, thinking of pretty Virginia.

Chapter 5. Poor, poor ghost!

A few days after this, Virginia and the young Duke went out horse-riding. They were riding through some woods when one of the trees caught Virginia's skirt and made a big hole in it. Later, when she got home, she went up the back stairs to her room. She wanted to change her skirt before anyone saw it.

On the way to her bedroom she went past a room which was not often used. The door was half open, and she stopped. 'Is someone in there?' she thought. She went to the door and looked in.

To her surprise, Virginia saw the Canterville ghost. He was sitting near the window, watching the first leaves of autumn dancing in the wind. His head was on his hand, and he looked very unhappy. At first, little Virginia wanted to run away and lock herself in her room, but then she began to feel sorry for him.

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She went quietly into the room, but he did not see her until she spoke. 'I am so sorry for you,' she said. 'But my brothers are going back to school tomorrow, and then nobody will hurt you if you don't try to frighten us.'

The ghost was also surprised to see Virginia. 'But I am a ghost,' he answered, 'I must walk about at night, shake my chains, and go "Ooooooh!" and "Aaaaagh!" through keyholes. That's my job. It's why I'm here.'

'It's not why at all,' said Virginia. 'And you have been very bad. Mrs Jmney told us that you killed your wife.'

'Well, that's true,' said the ghost.

'It is very wrong to kill anyone,' Virginia told him.

'Oh, that's very easy to say!' said the ghost. 'My wife was not beautiful like you. And she was a bad housekeeper, and knew nothing about cooking. Well, it doesn't matter now. It's all finished. But I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to kill me.'

'They killed you?' said Virginia.

'Well, they locked me in a room without food or water until I died,' said the ghost.

'No food? Oh, Mr Ghost, I mean, Sir Simon, are you hungry? I have a sandwich - would you like it?'

'No, thank you,' said the Canterville ghost, 'I never eat anything now. But it's very kind of you. You are much nicer than the rest of your horrible family.'

'Stop!' cried Virginia, angrily, 'It is you who are horrible. You took the paints out of my paint box to make that stupid bloodstain in the library. You took my best reds, so I can't make any more pictures of the sun going down in the evenings. Then you took the green and the yellow. What's left? Dark blue and white! What pictures can I make with those? Only moonlight pictures, which are not easy to do. I never said a word about it to the others, but I was very angry. And it was all very stupid. Green blood! I've never seen green blood.'

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‘Well, what could I do?’ said the ghost, ‘It’s very difficult to get real blood these days. And your brother started it all with his Pinkerton’s Famous Stain Cleaner, so I used your paint. What’s wrong with that? You Americans don’t understand anything.’

‘You know nothing about Americans or America,’ said Virginia. ‘Why don’t you go there? Father will be very happy to pay for your ticket. There are people in America who are ready to pay a hundred thousand dollars to get a family ghost.’

‘No, thank you,’ said the ghost. ‘I don’t think I would like America.’

‘Why? Because it doesn’t have any old buildings that are falling down? Because everything is new and modern? Or because the people don’t speak nicely?’ Virginia was angry. ‘Excuse me, but I must go and ask my father to give the twins another week’s holiday!’

‘Please don’t go, Miss Virginia,’ cried the ghost. ‘I am so lonely and so unhappy, and I don’t know what to do. I want to go to sleep, but I cannot.’

‘That’s stupid! You just go to bed and put out your candle. It’s very easy to sleep. Even babies can do it, and they’re not very clever.’

‘I have not slept for three hundred years,’ he said unhappily, and Virginia’s beautiful blue eyes got bigger and bigger with surprise. ‘Three hundred years!’ he said again. ‘And I’m so tired.’

She began to feel sorry for him once more. Her little mouth trembled like the leaves of a flower, and she looked at him kindly. ‘Poor, poor ghost,’ she said quietly, and moved nearer to him. ‘Isn’t there anywhere that you can sleep?’

‘On the other side of the woods there is a garden,’ he answered, with a far-away look in his eyes. ‘The grass is long and deep, there are beautiful white flowers, and a bird sings sweetly all night long. The moon looks down, and the big old tree puts out its arms over the sleepers.’

‘You - you mean the Garden of Death,’ Virginia said softly.

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‘Yes, Death. Death could be so beautiful. To lie quietly under the ground, with the grass above moving slowly in the wind, and everything silent... To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to have peace, and to be still for ever.’ He looked at her. ‘You can open the door to Death for me, for Love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is.’

Virginia suddenly felt cold, and she began to tremble. Then the ghost spoke again, and his voice was like a soft wind through the trees. ‘Have you ever read the old words on the library window?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes, often,’ cried the little girl, ‘I know them well.’

They are painted in strange black letters, and are difficult to read. There are only four lines:

When a golden girl has prayed for you,

And a little child has cried for you,

The house will then be quiet and still,

And peace will come, to Canterville.

But I don't know what they mean.’

‘They mean this,’ said the ghost. ‘You can pray for me, because I am bad and cannot pray. You can cry for me, and for all the bad things I have done, because I cannot cry. And if you have been sweet and good and kind, Death will be kind to me. Horrible shapes will come to frighten you in the darkness, and you’ll hear terrible voices in your ear, but they cannot hurt you. They cannot win the fight against the goodness of a little child.’ Virginia did not answer, and the ghost watched her unhappily. Suddenly she stood up. Her face was very white, and there was a strange light in her eyes. ‘I’m not afraid,’ she said. ‘I’ll pray for you to die, and for you to have peace.’

With a small but happy cry, the ghost stood up, took her hand, and kissed it. His fingers were as cold as snow, and his lips burned like fire. Virginia went with him across the dark room. Suddenly the wall opened and there was a great black hole in front of her. A cold wind came out of the darkness, and she could feel something pulling at her dress.

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‘Come quickly, quickly!’ cried the ghost. ‘Or it will be too late.’

And in a second the wall closed behind them, and the room was empty.

Chapter 6. A skeleton find rest at last

Ten minutes later, it was time for tea, but Virginia did not come down for it. At first, Mrs Otis did not worry. She knew that Virginia liked to go out into the garden every evening to get flowers for the dinner-table. But at six o’clock she sent the boys out to look for their sister, while she and Mr Otis looked in every room of the house.

At half-past six the boys came back. They could not find Virginia. Then Mr Otis, Washington, and the Duke of Cheshire got their horses and rode out into the woods and fields around Canterville Chase. They looked everywhere, and asked everybody, ‘Have you seen Virginia?’ But nobody could help them.

Just before midnight, they went back to the house. They were very worried, but Mr Otis told everybody to get some sleep. ‘We’ll begin again in the morning,’ he said, ‘and I’ll send for some detectives from London.’

They were all standing at the bottom of the stairs when the clock sounded midnight. Suddenly there was a crash, followed by a loud and terrible cry. Thunder shook the house, and the sound of ghostly music came to their ears.

Then a secret door opened in the wall at the top of the stairs - and out walked Virginia! She was very white, and she had a little box in her hands.

Everyone ran up the stairs. Mrs Otis threw her arms round her, the Duke of Cheshire kissed her again and again, and the twins laughed and danced around her.

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‘Where have you been?’ said Mr Otis. ‘We’ve looked everywhere for you, and your mother has been so frightened for you. You must never play these tricks again.’

‘Only on the ghost!’ shouted the twins, laughing.

‘You must never leave my side again, my dearest Virginia,’ said Mrs Otis, and she kissed the trembling child.

‘Father,’ said Virginia, ‘I have been with the ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He was a bad man, but he was really sorry for everything that he did. And look, he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died.’

All the family looked at her and the box, and they were too surprised to say a word. Virginia then took them through the secret door in the wall, and down a narrow passage, lit by a candle that Washington was carrying. At last they came to a heavy wooden door. When Virginia touched it, it opened slowly.

They found themselves in a little room with one small window in it. A skeleton lay on the floor, chained to the wall. A plate and a water jug were also on the floor, but they were too far away for the skeleton’s fingers to get hold of them.

Virginia put her hands together and began to pray silently. The others looked down at the skeleton of Sir Simon de Canterville. Now they knew the terrible secret of his death.

‘He is peaceful now,’ said Virginia. ‘I prayed to God .to give him peace.’

And suddenly the others were sure that they could see a beautiful light around Virginia’s face.

‘You are wonderful!’ cried the young Duke, and he put his arm round her neck, and kissed her.

* * *

Four days later, at about eleven o’clock at night, they took Sir Simon de Canterville to the ‘Garden of Death’, where he wanted to be.

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Lord Canterville came specially from Wales to be there with the Otis family.

They put Sir Simon into the ground, and Virginia put a cross made of beautiful white flowers on the ground next to him. When she did this, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and the little night bird began to sing its sweet, high song.

Virginia was very quiet during the drive home.

The next morning, before Lord Canterville left, Mr Otis spoke to him about the box of jewels.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘these jewels belong to you, or to your family. Virginia asks for only one thing - the box. Can she keep it?’

‘My dear sir,’ replied Lord Canterville, ‘your daughter has been a wonderful friend to one of my family. We shall always thank her for that. And remember, you bought the house and everything in it - the ghost, too! Anything that belonged to him is now yours. No, Mr Otis, your daughter must keep the jewels. When she is a woman, she will be happy to have pretty things to wear.’ So Virginia kept the jewels. And she wore them in the spring of 1890, when she married the young Duke of Cheshire; and everyone said, ‘How beautiful!’

Some time later, she and her husband went down to Canterville Chase. One afternoon, they walked through the woods to the Garden of Death, and to the old tree.

‘Virginia,’ said the Duke. ‘Tell me something. What happened when you were locked up with the ghost?’

‘Please don’t ask me, Cecil, I cannot tell you,’ she said. ‘Poor Sir Simon! I have much to thank him for. Yes, don’t laugh, Cecil, I do. He helped me to understand about Life and Death, and that Love is stronger than both.’

The Duke kissed his wife lovingly. ‘My dear, you can keep your secret. The only thing I want is your love,’ he said.

‘You have always had that, Cecil,’ she said.

‘And you will tell our children some day?’

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Virginia did not answer, but her face went prettily red.

- THE END -

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