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CLASSICS



# The Canterville Ghost

Oscar Wilde



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# About this Book

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When you see the orange dot you can check the word in the glossary

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### Level 5 Structures

Modal verb <i>would</i>	Non-defining relative clauses
<i>I'd love to ...</i>	Present perfect continuous
Future continuous	<i>Used to / would</i>
Future perfect	<i>Used to / used to doing</i>
Reported speech / verbs / questions	Second conditional
Past perfect	Expressing wishes and regrets
Defining relative clauses	

Structures from lower levels are also included

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## About the Author

**Oscar Wilde** was born in Dublin in 1854, the son of an eminent • surgeon and a poet-cum-literary hostess. After reading classics at Dublin, Wilde went to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he won a poetry prize and gathered a wide circle of admirers. His first book, *Poems*, was published in 1881. In 1884 he married Constance Lloyd and he wrote the charming fairy tales that became the highly successful *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* for their sons. Then, after two years of working as a journal editor, Wilde returned to the literary circles in which his sparkling wit • was better appreciated. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in 1890 but the low morals of its protagonist shocked the Victorian public. A year later, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* was published; it contained 'The Canterville Ghost'. Wilde became famous with his plays *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). They lampooned • the morals and taboos • of Victorian society, and exposed its hypocrisies, with a highly successful blend • of humour and sharp wit. However that same year, the Marquess of Queensberry, father of Wilde's close friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, publicly accused Wilde of seducing his son. Wilde sued Queensberry for libel •, but Queensberry won and Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison. Whilst in prison, he wrote *De Profundis*, published posthumously •, and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) portraying the horrors of prison. After his release, he became bankrupt and he fell ill, both physically and mentally. He moved abroad and died in Paris in 1900.

### Glossary

- **blend:** mix
- **eminent:** well-known and respected
- **lampooned:** made fun of
- **posthumously:** after he died
- **sued... for libel:** took legal action because of what someone said about you
- **taboos:** things people find wrong or embarrassing
- **wit:** clever humour

*The Canterville Ghost* appeared in book form in 1891, in a collection of stories for adults called *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. It contained six new stories, plus two of his most popular children's stories ('The Happy Prince', and 'The Devoted Friend'). The story is about the Otises – an American family who buy an old house from Lord Canterville, an English aristocrat. The house has been haunted by the ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville for 300 years. The Americans do not believe in the ghost at first, and when he appears they take an amused and pragmatic view of him, refusing to be scared. This depresses the ghost, who is frustrated at not being able to do his work properly. Eventually, the ghost is allowed to 'die' thanks to the kindness of Virginia Otis, the daughter of the family. Ghost stories were very popular in Victorian England, with many major writers producing them, including Dickens, Trollope and Collins. Wilde, however, uses the ghost-story format in an unconventional way. We feel sorry for the ghost instead of being afraid of him. Wilde also uses the story to make fun of both the British aristocracy and their traditions and conventions, and the Americans with their straightforward, no-nonsense view of the world, and their sense of superiority to the British. There are many amusing comments made on this topic. The story also illustrates Wilde's ideas on beauty. The story is very sensuous, and includes some lovely detailed descriptions, and it also reflects his belief that the power of beauty can make things better, with the beautiful Virginia triumphing over the evil of the ghost. The love story between Virginia and Lord Francis Stilton, Duke of Cheshire, is a typical piece of Victorian sentimental writing, and the plot could be described as being melodramatic; however the charm and humour of the central ghost-story theme, combined with Wilde's characteristic satire, transform this short story into a powerful and evocative tale.

- 
- **evocative:** that gives a clear idea of an event or period
  - **haunted:** when a ghost lives there
  - **pragmatic:** practical
  - **properly:** in the correct way
  - **straightforward:** simple and direct
  - **topic:** subject
  - **triumphing:** winning



# Before Reading

## Ghosts and the supernatural

- 1 What is a ghost? Write your own definition, then get into groups and share your ideas to write a group definition.
- 2 Do you believe in ghosts? Why/why not?
- 3 What sort of things are ghosts supposed to do? Look at the verbs in the box below and write sentences using these words to give examples of ghosts' behaviour. Use a dictionary to help you, if necessary.

appear	cry	groan	rattle	shriek
clank	frighten	haunt	scare	vanish

- 4 What do ghosts look like?
- 5 What stories have you read and what films have you seen with ghosts as the main characters? Choose the one you liked most or can remember best, and write a summary of the plot.



## The Americans and the British

**1** What differences do you think there are between the American and the British people? Make a list. Write words you associate with each nation.

.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

**2** How different is the English spoken in Britain to that spoken in America? Tick US or UK for the words below.

	US	UK
a) candy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) elevator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) gas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) handbag	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) lift	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) pants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) pavement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) petrol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


**3** How are some words spelt differently in British and American English? Rewrite the following words with a British English spelling. What are the rules for spelling?

- a) color .....  
.....
- b) center .....  
.....
- c) program .....  
.....
- d) traveling .....  
.....





# I

 When Mr Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase, everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted. Indeed, Lord Canterville himself, who was a man of absolute honour, had felt it his duty to mention the fact to Mr Otis, when they came to discuss terms.

‘We have not cared to live in the place ourselves,’ said Lord Canterville, ‘since my grand aunt, the Duchess of Bolton, was frightened into a fit from which she never really recovered, by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner; and I feel bound to tell you, Mr Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier. After the unfortunate accident to the Duchess, none of our younger servants would stay with us, and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night, because of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library.’

## Glossary

- **bound:** forced
- **cared:** (here) wanted
- **Chase:** large country house where you can hunt
- **fit:** condition of shock and hysterics
- **mention:** say
- **rector:** man of the church

'My Lord,' answered the Minister, 'I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I come from a modern country, where we have everything money can buy; and with all our young men painting Europe red, and carrying off your best actresses and prima-donnas, I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.'

'I fear that the ghost exists,' said Lord Canterville, smiling, 'though it may have resisted your enterprising impresarios. It has been well known for three centuries (since 1584, in fact), and always makes its appearance before the death of any member of our family.'

'Well, so does the family doctor for that matter, Lord Canterville. But there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost.'

'If you don't mind a ghost in the house, it is all right,' answered Lord Canterville. 'Only you must remember I warned you.'

## MR OTIS

Why do you think that Mr Otis doesn't believe in the ghost?

Do you believe in ghosts?

### Glossary

- **carrying off:** taking away with them
- **enterprising impresarios:** inventive businessmen
- **painting Europe red:** enjoying themselves in Europe
- **prima-donnas:** most important female singers
- **reckon:** guess

A few weeks after this, the purchase was completed, and the Minister and his family went down to Canterville Chase. Mrs Otis, who, as Miss Lucretia R. Tappan, of West 53rd Street, had been a celebrated New York belle<sup>•</sup>, was now a very handsome middle-aged woman, with fine eyes, and a superb profile. She was in very good health, and had a really wonderful amount of animal spirits<sup>•</sup>. Indeed, in many ways, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we really have everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language.

Her eldest son, christened<sup>•</sup> Washington by his parents in a moment of patriotism (which he never ceased to regret), was a fair-haired, rather good-looking young man, and in London was well known as an excellent dancer. Gardenias<sup>•</sup> and English nobility were his only weaknesses. Otherwise he was extremely sensible. Miss Virginia E. Otis was a little girl of fifteen, lithe<sup>•</sup> and lovely, and with a fine freedom in her large blue eyes. After Virginia came the twins, who were delightful boys.

As Canterville Chase is seven miles from Ascot, the nearest railway station, Mr Otis had telegraphed for a horse and carriage to meet them, and they started their drive in high spirits. It was a lovely July evening, and the air was delicate with the scent of pinewoods. Now and then they heard a wood pigeon or saw a pheasant. Little squirrels looked at them from the beech trees as they went by, and the rabbits ran away into the bushes with their white tails in the air.

- 
- **animal spirits:** a liquid doctors once thought was in your blood and which you needed to feel and move
  - **christened:** called
  - **gardenias:** type of flowers
  - **lithe:** slim and flexible
  - **belle:** beautiful young woman

As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, however, the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen. Standing on the steps to receive them was an old woman, neatly dressed in black silk, with a white cap and apron. This was Mrs Umney, the housekeeper. 'I bid you welcome to Canterville Chase,' she said in an old-fashioned way. Following her, they passed through the Tudor hall into the library, a long, low room, panelled in black oak, at the end of which was a large stained-glass window. Here they found tea laid out for them, and they sat down and began to look around while Mrs Umney waited on them.

Suddenly Mrs Otis caught sight of a dull red mark on the floor just by the fireplace and, quite unconscious of what it really meant, said to Mrs Umney, 'I'm afraid something has been spilt there.'

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

'How horrid,' cried Mrs Otis; 'I don't care for blood-stains in a sitting-room. It must be removed at once.'

The old woman smiled, and answered in a low, mysterious voice: 'It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1572. Sir Simon survived her by nine years, and disappeared suddenly in very mysterious circumstances. His body has never been discovered, but his guilty spirit still haunts the Chase. The blood-stain has been much admired by tourists and others, and cannot be removed.'

## Glossary

- **bid:** (old) wish
- **blood-stains:** marks left by blood
- **horrid:** horrible
- **laid out:** ready on the table
- **oak:** type of wood
- **overcast:** dark with clouds
- **stained-glass:** coloured glass
- **waited on:** served







‘That is all nonsense,’ cried Washington Otis; ‘Pinkerton’s Champion Stain • Remover and Paragon Detergent • will clean it up in no time,’ and before the terrified housekeeper could interfere he had fallen upon his knees, and was rapidly scouring • the floor with a small stick of what looked like a black cosmetic. In a few moments no trace • of the blood-stain could be seen.

‘I knew Pinkerton would do it,’ he exclaimed triumphantly, as he looked round at his admiring family; but no sooner had he said these words than a terrible flash of lightning lit up the dark room, a frightening clap of thunder made them all jump to their feet, and Mrs Umney fainted •.

‘What an awful climate!’ said the American Minister calmly, as he lit a long cigar. ‘I guess the old country is so overpopulated that they don’t have enough decent weather for everybody.’

‘My dear Hiram,’ cried Mrs Otis, ‘what can we do with a woman who faints?’

‘Make her pay every time she does it, as with anything she breaks,’ answered the Minister; ‘she won’t faint after that.’ In a few moments Mrs Umney came to •. There was no doubt, however, that she was extremely upset, and she warned Mr Otis to beware of some trouble coming to the house.

‘I have seen things with my own eyes, sir,’ she said, ‘that would make a Christian’s hair stand on end, and many and many a night I have not closed my eyes in sleep for the awful things that are done here.’

### Glossary


- **came to:** woke once more
- **detergent:** cleaning product
- **fainted:** lost consciousness and fell
- **scouring:** rubbing hard
- **stain:** mark
- **trace:** sign

Mr Otis, however, and his wife warmly assured the honest servant that they were not afraid of ghosts, and, after asking Providence<sup>o</sup> to bless her new master and mistress, and making arrangements for an increase in salary, the old housekeeper went off to her own room.

## ATMOSPHERE

What kind of atmosphere surrounds Canterville Chase?  
Does the weather usually affect the way you feel?

## II

 The storm raged<sup>o</sup> fiercely all that night, but nothing of particular note<sup>o</sup> happened. The next morning, however, when they came down to breakfast, they found the terrible stain of blood once again on the floor. 'I don't think it can be the fault of the Paragon Detergent,' said Washington, 'for I have tried it with everything. It must be the ghost.' He then rubbed out the stain a second time, but the second morning it appeared again. The third morning also it was there, though the library had been locked up at night by Mr Otis himself, and the key carried upstairs. The whole family were now quite interested; Mr Otis began to suspect that he had been too dogmatic<sup>o</sup> in his denial of the existence of ghosts, and Mrs Otis expressed her intention of joining a **Psychical<sup>o</sup>** Society. That night all doubts about the actual existence of phantoms were removed for ever.

- 
- **dogmatic:** arrogant in his opinion
  - **note:** (here) importance
  - **Providence:** (here) God

- **Psychical:** that is related to the mind
- **raged:** (here) blew hard

The day had been warm and sunny; and in the cool of the evening, the whole family went out for a drive. They did not return home till nine o'clock, when they had a light supper<sup>•</sup>. The conversation in no way included a discussion of ghosts, so there were not even the right conditions of receptive<sup>•</sup> expectation<sup>•</sup> which so often precede psychical phenomena.

No mention at all was made of the supernatural, nor was Sir Simon de Canterville mentioned in any way. At eleven o'clock the family went to bed and by half past eleven all the lights were out. Some time after, Mr Otis was awakened by a curious noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank<sup>•</sup> of metal, and seemed to be coming nearer every moment. He got up at once, struck a match, and looked at the time. It was exactly one o'clock. He was quite calm, and felt his pulse<sup>•</sup>, which was not at all feverish. The strange noise still continued, and with it he heard the distinct sound of footsteps. He put on his slippers, took a small glass bottle out of a drawer, and opened the door. Right in front of him he saw, in the pale moonlight, an old man of terrible appearance. His eyes were as red as burning coals; his long grey hair fell over his shoulders in greasy curls; his clothes, which were of an ancient style, were dirty and ragged<sup>•</sup>, and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy manacles<sup>•</sup> and rusty chains.

'My dear sir,' said Mr Otis, 'I really must insist on your oiling those chains, and have brought you for that purpose a small bottle of Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator<sup>•</sup>. They say it works at once. I shall leave it here for you by the bedroom candles, and will be happy to supply you with more should you require it.'

## Glossary

- **clank:** sound of metal banging
- **expectation:** when you expect or wait for something
- **lubricator:** liquid that adds oil
- **manacles:** chains that are tied around the hands
- **pulse:** point in your wrist where you can feel your heart beat
- **ragged:** torn
- **receptive:** open to new things
- **supper:** light evening meal



With these words the United States Minister laid the bottle down on a marble\* table, and, closing his door, went back to bed.

For a moment the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless in natural indignation\* ; then, knocking the bottle violently onto the polished\* floor, he ran down the corridor, groaning and giving out a ghastly\* green light. Just, however, as he reached the top of the great oak staircase, a door was thrown open\* , two little figures appeared, and a large pillow flew past his head! There was evidently no time to be lost, so, quickly using the Fourth Dimension of Space as a means of escape, he vanished through the wall, and the house became completely quiet.

## THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

What is Mr Otis's reaction to the ghost and how does the ghost feel about this?  
Who do you think the 'two little figures' are?  
How does the ghost escape?

On reaching a small secret chamber\* in the left wing\* of the house, he leaned up against a moonbeam\* to recover his breath, and began to try and understand his position. Never, in a brilliant career of three hundred years, had he been so badly insulted.

### Glossary

- \* **chamber:** room
- **ghastly:** terrible
- **indignation:** feeling of anger because something is unfair
- \* **marble:** type of stone
- **moonbeam:** ray of moonlight
- **polished:** cleaned until it shines
- **thrown open:** opened suddenly and wide
- **wing:** part of a large house


He thought of the Duchess, whom he had frightened into a fit as she stood before the mirror in her lace and diamonds; of the four housemaids, who had gone off into hysterics when he just grinned • at them through the curtains of one of the spare bedrooms •; of the priest whose candle he had blown out as he was coming late one night from the library, and who was still being treated for a nervous disorder; and of old Madame de Tremouillac, who, having wakened up one morning early and seen a skeleton seated in an arm-chair by the fire reading her diary, had been confined • to her bed for six weeks with an attack of brain fever. He remembered the terrible night when the wicked Lord Canterville was found choking • in his dressing-room with a card half-way down his throat, and confessed, just before he died, that he had cheated • Charles James Fox out of £50,000 while they were playing cards, and swore that the ghost had made him swallow it. All his great achievements came back to him again, from the manservant who had shot himself because he had seen a green hand knocking at the window, to the beautiful Lady Stutfield, who always wore a black velvet band round her throat to hide the mark of five fingers burnt upon her white skin, and who drowned • herself in the fish-pond in the garden. With the enthusiasm of a true artist, he went over his most celebrated performances. And after all this, some wretched • modern Americans had come and offered him the Rising Sun Lubricator, and thrown pillows at his head. It was quite unbearable! Besides, no ghosts in history had been treated in this way. So, he decided to have revenge •, and remained till daylight deep in thought.

- 
- **cheated:** got something in a dishonest way
  - **choking:** having difficulty breathing
  - **confined:** (here) had to stay
  - **drowned:** died under water

- **grinned:** smiled
- **have revenge:** return a bad action
- **spare bedrooms:** bedrooms that are not used
- **wretched:** annoying



### III

 The next morning when the Otis family met at breakfast, they discussed the ghost at some length. The United States Minister was naturally a little annoyed to find that his present had not been accepted. 'I have no wish,' he said, 'to do the ghost any personal injury, and I must say that, considering the length of time he has been in the house, I don't think it is at all polite to throw pillows at him' – a very fair remark, at which the twins burst into shouts of laughter. 'On the other hand,' he continued, 'if he really refuses to use the Rising Sun Lubricator, we shall have to take his chains from him. It will be quite impossible to sleep, with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms.'

For the rest of that week, however, they were undisturbed; the only thing that attracted any attention being the continual renewal of the blood-stain on the library floor. This certainly was very strange, as the door was always locked nightly by Mr Otis, and the windows kept closely barred. The changing colour of the stain also led to a lot of comment. Some mornings it was a dull red, then it would be vermilion, then a rich purple, and once when they came down for family prayers they found it a bright emerald-green. These kaleidoscopic changes naturally amused the family very much, and they made bets on the subject each evening. The only person who did not enter into the joke was little Virginia, who, for some unexplained reason, was always rather upset at the sight of the blood-stain, and very nearly cried the morning it was emerald-green.

#### Glossary

- **barred:** locked
- **made bets:** tried to guess the colour, with the winner getting a prize
- **quite:** completely
- **renewal:** act of making something new
- **vermilion:** dark red

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Shortly after they had gone to bed they were suddenly frightened by a terrible crash in the hall. Rushing downstairs, they found that a large suit of armour\* had become detached from its stand\*, and had fallen on the stone floor, while, seated in a high-backed chair, was the Canterville ghost, rubbing his knees with an expression of acute agony on his face. The twins, who had brought their peashooters\* with them, at once discharged\* two pellets\* at him, with that accuracy of aim\* which can only be got by long and careful practice on a teacher. The United States' Minister pointed his pistol at him, and called to him, in accordance with Californian etiquette\*, to hold up his hands! The ghost stared up with a wild shriek\* of rage, and rushed through them like a mist, putting out Washington Otis's candle as he passed, and so leaving them all in total darkness.

## FRUSTRATION

Why does the Canterville Ghost feel so angry and frustrated?

Think of a time when you felt frustrated.

What caused it? What did you do?

- 
- **aim:** when you can hit something accurately from a distance
  - **discharged:** (here) blew out
  - **etiquette:** code of good behaviour
  - **peashooters:** tubes where you place dried peas and blow them at someone
  - **pellets:** small hard objects you fire at people
  - **shriek:** shout
  - **stand:** support for decoration so it can stand
  - **suit of armour:** metal clothes that knights wore

On reaching the top of the stairs he recovered himself, and decided to give his famous demon's laughter. This he had on more than one occasion found extremely useful. It was said to have turned Lord Raker's hair grey in a single night, and had certainly made three of Lady Canterville's French governesses • leave before their month was up •. He accordingly laughed his most horrible laugh, till the old roof rang • and rang again, but hardly had the terrible echo died away when a door opened, and Mrs Otis came out in a light blue dressing-gown.

'I am afraid you are far from well,' she said, 'and so I have brought you a bottle of Dr Dobell's medicine. If it is indigestion, you will find it an excellent remedy.' The ghost looked at her in fury, and began at once to make preparations for turning himself into a large black dog, an accomplishment • for which he was justly famous, and to which the family doctor had always attributed the permanent madness of Lord Canterville's uncle. The sound of approaching footsteps, however, made him hesitate, so he contented himself with becoming faintly phosphorescent •, and vanished with a deep churchyard groan, just as the twins had come up to him.

On reaching his room he entirely broke down •, and became very upset. The vulgarity of the twins, and the materialism of Mrs Otis, were naturally extremely annoying, but what really upset him most was that he had been unable to wear the suit of armour. He had hoped that even modern Americans would be thrilled by the sight of a ghost in armour. Besides, it was his own suit. He had worn it with success at the Kenilworth tournament, and had been highly complimented on it by no less a person than Queen Elizabeth herself. Yet when he

## Glossary

- **accomplishment:** difficult thing one can do well
- **broke down:** cried
- **governesses:** women who look after and teach children
- **overpowered:** unable to control something
- **phosphorescent:** glowing with light
- **rang:** echoed with a sound
- **up:** (here) over

had put it on, he had been completely overpowered by its weight, and had fallen heavily on the stone pavement, hurting both his knees seriously, and bruising his right hand.



For some days after this he was extremely ill, and hardly moved from his room at all, except to keep the blood-stain in good condition. However, by taking great care of himself, he recovered, and decided to make a third attempt to frighten the United States Minister and his family.

He selected Friday 17th August for his appearance, and spent most of that day looking through his costumes, finally choosing a large hat with a red feather, a shroud<sup>•</sup>, and a rusty dagger<sup>•</sup>. Towards evening a violent rainstorm started, and the wind was so strong that all the windows and doors in the old house shook and rattled<sup>•</sup>. In fact, it was just the sort of weather he loved. His plan of action was to go quietly to Washington Otis's room, sit at the foot<sup>•</sup> of the bed, and stab<sup>•</sup> himself three times in the throat to the sound of slow music.

He especially disliked Washington, because he knew that it was he who was in the habit of removing the famous Canterville blood-stain by means of Pinkerton's Paragon Detergent. Having caused a state of total terror in the young man, he was then to move on to the room occupied by the United States Minister and his wife, and there place a cold, damp<sup>•</sup> hand on Mrs Otis's forehead, while he whispered the awful secrets of the mortuary<sup>•</sup> into her trembling husband's ear. With regard to little Virginia, he had not quite made up his mind. She had never insulted him in any way and was pretty and gentle. A few low groans from the wardrobe, he thought, would be more than sufficient, or, if that failed to wake her, he would pull at her bedcovers with twitching<sup>•</sup> fingers.

### Glossary

- **dagger:** knife with a handle
- **damp:** wet
- **foot:** (here) bottom
- **mortuary:** room where dead people are kept before they are buried
- **rattled:** made a loud noise
- **shroud:** cloth to cover a dead person
- **stab:** stick a knife in someone
- **twitching:** moving quickly and nervously

As for the twins, he was quite determined to teach them a lesson. The first thing to do was, of course, to sit on their chests, so as to reproduce the sensation of a nightmare. Then, as their beds were quite close to each other, to stand between them in the form of a green, icy-cold corpse • until they became paralysed with fear, and finally, to throw off the shroud, and crawl • around the room, with white bleached • bones and one rolling eyeball • .

## REVENGE

What do you think of the ghost's plans for revenge?

Have you ever decided to "teach someone a lesson"?

Why? What happened?

At half past ten he heard the family going to bed. For some time he was disturbed by wild shrieks of laughter from the twins, who, with the energy of schoolboys, were evidently amusing themselves before they went to sleep; but at a quarter past eleven all was quiet, and, as midnight sounded, he set off. The Otis family slept, unconscious of their doom • , and high above the rain and storm he could hear the steady snoring • of the Minister for the United States. He stepped quietly out of the wall, with an evil smile on his cruel, wrinkled • mouth. On and on he went, like an evil shadow, the very darkness seeming to hate him as he passed.

- 
- **bleached:** made white (usually with a chemical)
  - **corpse:** dead body
  - **crawl:** move on your hands and knees
  - **doom:** bad thing that is going to happen
  - **eyeball:** the round part of your eye
  - **snoring:** noise some people make when they are sleeping
  - **wrinkled:** lined because he is old



He muttered • strange sixteenth-century curses • as he went, and held up the rusty dagger in the midnight air. Finally he reached the corner of the passage that led to Washington's room. For a moment he paused there, then the clock struck the quarter, and he felt the time had come. He chuckled • to himself, and turned the corner. But as soon as he had done this, he fell back in terror, and hid his white face in his long, bony hands. Right in front of him was standing a horrible spectre •, still as a sculpture, and as dreadful as a madman's dream! Its head was bald • and shiny; its face round, fat and white; and hideous • laughter seemed to have changed its features into an eternal grin. Rays of scarlet • light shone from its eyes, the mouth was a wide well • of fire, and horrible white clothes, like his own, were wrapped around the enormous form. On its chest was a large card with strange antique writing, and with its right hand it held up a magnificent sword.

Because he hadn't seen a ghost before, he was, naturally, terribly frightened, and after a second quick look at the awful phantom, he ran back to his room. When he was in the privacy of his own apartment, he threw himself down on a small bed and hid his face under the clothes. After a time, however, the brave old Canterville spirit asserted itself •, and he decided to go and speak to the other ghost as soon as it was daylight.

## Glossary

- **asserted itself:** got courage
- **bald:** without hair
- **chuckled:** laughed in a cruel way
- **curses:** when you wish bad things for other people
- **hideous:** horrible
- **muttered:** said in a low voice
- **scarlet:** bright red
- **spectre:** ghost
- **well:** hole in the ground for water



So, just as the dawn was touching the hills with silver light, he returned towards the spot where he had first seen the terrible phantom, feeling that, after all, two ghosts were better than one, and that, with the help of his new friend, he might safely fight against the twins. On reaching the spot, however, a terrible sight met his eyes.

Something had evidently happened to the spectre, for the light had entirely faded from its hollow eyes, the magnificent sword had fallen from its hand, and it was leaning up against the wall in an uncomfortable way. He rushed forward and seized it in his arms, when, to his horror, the head fell off and rolled onto the floor. He suddenly found himself holding a body made from a white curtain, with a sweeping brush, a kitchen knife and a hollow pumpkin lying at his feet! Unable to understand this strange change, he looked at the card, and there in the grey morning light he read these fearful words:



### Glossary

- **faded:** became less bright
- **fakes:** false things; imitations
- **hollow:** with holes
- **learning:** standing against something in order to get support
- **seized:** took suddenly and violently

The whole thing became clear. He had been tricked, foiled • and outwitted •! The old Canterville look came into his eyes; he raised his withered • hands high above his head, and swore that when the cockerel • had crowed • twice, acts of blood would be done, and Murder would walk about with silent feet.

As soon as he had finished saying this a cock crowed in the distance. He laughed a long, low, bitter • laugh, and waited. Hour after hour he waited, but the cock, for some strange reason, did not crow a second time.

So finally, at half past seven, the arrival of the servants made him give up his wait, and he walked back to his room thinking of his destroyed hopes. There he read several old books, and found that on every occasion he had used this oath •, the cock had crowed twice.

He then got into a comfortable lead • coffin, and stayed there until evening.

### THE GHOST'S PROMISE

What does the ghost decide to do when he realises he has been tricked?  
Why doesn't he do anything in the end?

- 
- **bitter:** hard and angry
  - **cockerel:** male of the hen
  - **crowed:** sound a hen or cockerel makes
  - **foiled:** stopped from being successful
  - **lead:** a heavy metal
  - **oath:** solemn promise
  - **outwitted:** when someone is more clever than you
  - **withered:** old and dry

## IV

5 The next day the ghost was very weak and tired. The terrible excitement of the last four weeks was beginning to have its effect. For five days he stayed in his room, and at last he decided to give up on the bloodstain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly didn't deserve it. They were evidently people on a low, material level of existence, and completely incapable of appreciating the symbolic value of serious phenomena. It was his solemn duty to appear in the corridor once a week and make horrible noises from the large window on the first and third Wednesday of every month, and he didn't see how he could honourably escape from his obligations. It was true that his life had been very evil, but, on the other hand, as a ghost he was very conscientious in all things connected with the supernatural. So, for the next three Saturdays he walked along the corridor as usual between midnight and three o'clock, taking every possible precaution against being either heard or seen. He removed his boots, stepped as lightly as possible on the old wooden floor, wore a long black velvet cloak, and was careful to use Rising Sun Lubricator for oiling his chains. But, in spite of everything, he was still attacked. The twins continually stretched strings across the corridor, which he fell over in the dark. On one occasion he had a severe fall because of a butter slide which they had made at the top of the stairs. This last insult so enraged him, that he decided to assert his dignity, and planned to visit the boys the next night in his celebrated character of the Headless Earl.

### Glossary

- **butter slide:** when you put butter on the floor to make someone fall
- **conscientious:** careful and good at his work
- **deserve:** when you should have something
- **Earl:** nobleman
- **give up on:** forget about
- **in spite of:** when something happens that you do not expect
- **strings:** small ropes
- **weak:** opposite of strong







He had not appeared in this disguise for more than seventy years; it took him three full hours to make his preparations. At last everything was ready, and he was very pleased with his appearance. At a quarter past one he glided • out of the wall and crept • down the corridor. On reaching the room occupied by the twins he found the door slightly open. Wishing to make an effective entrance, he pushed it wide open, when a heavy jug • of water fell right down on him, wetting him to the skin, and just missing his left shoulder by a couple of inches. At the same moment he heard shrieks of laughter coming from the boys' beds. The shock was so great that he ran back to his room as fast as he could go, and the next day he was in bed with a severe cold. The only thing that made him feel a little better was the fact that he hadn't taken his head with him. If he had done, the consequences would have been very serious.

He now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family, and contented • himself with creeping about the passages in slippers, with a thick red scarf round his throat for fear of draughts •, and a small gun in case the twins attacked him. The final blow • occurred • on 19th September. He had gone downstairs to the great entrance-hall, feeling sure that he would not be attacked there. He was wearing a long shroud, had tied up his jaw • with a strip of yellow cloth, and carried a small lantern and a spade •. It was about a quarter past two in the morning, and, as far as he could judge, no-one was moving.

---

### Glossary

- **blow:** bad thing
- **crept:** moved quietly and slowly
- **draughts:** currents of cold air
- **glided:** moved gracefully without touching the ground
- **jaw:** part of face below the mouth
- **jug:** container for water, etc
- **occurred:** happened
- **spade:** tool for digging holes

As he was walking towards the library, however, to see if there were any traces left of the blood-stain, two figures suddenly leapt out on him from a dark corner and waved their arms wildly above their heads, and shrieked 'BOO!' in his ear. Seized • with panic, which, under the circumstances was only natural, he rushed for the staircase, but found Washington Otis waiting for him with the big garden water pump. To escape his enemies, he vanished into the large iron stove •, which, fortunately for him, was not lit, and had to make his way home through the pipes and chimneys, arriving at his own room in a terrible state of dirt, disorder and despair •.

After this, he was not seen again on any nocturnal expedition. The twins waited for him on several occasions, and covered the floor of the corridor with nutshells • every night to the great annoyance of their parents and the servants, but it was of no use. It was quite evident that his feelings were so hurt that he would not appear. They assumed that the ghost had gone away, and, in fact, Mrs Otis wrote a letter to that effect to Lord Canterville, who, in reply, expressed his great pleasure at the news, and sent his best congratulations to the Minister's wife.

### CHANGES

How do the ghost's feelings change throughout the story?

How does this affect what he does?

What are your feelings about the ghost?

- 
- **despair:** feeling there is no hope of things getting better
  - **nutshells:** hard covering around nuts
  - **seized:** (here) taken
  - **stove:** old cooker

The Otises, however, were deceived, for the ghost was still in the house. But although he was now almost an invalid, he was by no means ready to let matters rest, particularly as he heard there were guests at the Chase. Among the guests was the young Duke of Cheshire, whose grand-uncle, Lord Francis Stilton, had once bet a hundred pounds with Colonel Carbury that he would play dice with the Canterville ghost. Lord Francis was found the next morning lying on the floor, and he never in his life said anything again except 'Double Sixes'. The ghost was naturally very anxious to show that he had not lost his influence over the Stiltons. So, he made arrangements for appearing to the Duke, Virginia's young admirer, in his celebrated impersonation of The Vampire Monk. At the last moment, however, his terror of the twins prevented him leaving his room, and the Duke slept in peace and dreamed of Virginia.



### Glossary

- **deceived:** thought something was true when it wasn't
- **dice:** cubes with numbers from 1 to 6 you use for playing games
- **impersonation:** when you pretend you are someone else
- **matters:** things

## V

6 A few days after this, Virginia and the young Lord went out riding, and she tore her clothes so badly getting through a hedge, that, on her return home, she decided to go up by the back staircase so as not to be seen. As she was running past the Tapestry Chamber, the door of which happened to be open, she thought she saw someone inside, and thinking it was her mother's maid, who sometimes worked there, she looked in to ask her to mend her clothes. To her immense surprise, however, it was the Canterville ghost himself! He was sitting by the window, watching the gold leaves of the yellow trees fly through the air, and the red leaves dance madly down the long avenue. His head was leaning on his hand, and his whole attitude was one of extreme depression. Indeed, he looked so sad and ill that little Virginia, whose first idea had been to run away and lock herself in her room, was filled with pity and decided to try and comfort him. So light was her footfall, and so deep his melancholy, that he did not notice her until she spoke to him.

'I am sorry for you,' she said, 'but my brothers are going back to school tomorrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no-one will annoy you.' 'It is absurd asking me to behave myself,' he answered, looking round in astonishment at the pretty little girl who had dared to address him, 'quite absurd. I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night, if that is what you mean. It is my only reason for existing.'

- 
- **dared:** had the courage
  - **footfall:** sound of her steps
  - **hedge:** row of bushes and plants along the edge of a field or garden
  - **melancholy:** sadness
  - **mend:** fix
  - **tapestry:** cloth with a picture sewn on it
  - **tore:** made a hole

'It is no reason for existing, and you know you have been very wicked. Mrs Umney told us, the first day we arrived here, that you had killed your wife.'

'Well, I admit it,' said the ghost, 'but it was a purely family matter and concerned • no-one else.'

'It is very wrong to kill anyone,' said Virginia.

'My wife wasn't pretty, never had my clothes properly • ironed, and knew nothing about cookery. However, it doesn't matter now, for it is over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death •, though I did kill her.'

'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, all the same, and you are much nicer than the rest of your horrid, rude, vulgar, dishonest family.'

'Stop!' cried Virginia, stamping her foot. 'It is you who are rude, and horrid, and vulgar; and as for dishonesty, I know that you stole the paints out of my box to try and restore • that silly blood-stain in the library. First you took all my reds, including vermilion, and I couldn't do any more sunsets, then you took the emerald green • and the chrome yellow •, and finally I had nothing left but indigo • and Chinese white, and could only do moonlight scenes, which are always depressing to look at, and not at all easy to paint. I never told on • you, though I was very annoyed, and it was really silly, the whole thing. Whoever heard of emerald-green blood?'

---

## Glossary

- **chrome yellow:** bright yellow
- **concerned:** involved
- **emerald green:** bright green
- **indigo:** deep blue
- **properly:** well
- **restore:** make new
- **starve me to death:** kill me by not giving me food
- **told on:** explained to the others what the ghost was doing





'Well, really,' said the ghost, 'what was I to do? It is very difficult to get real blood nowadays, and, as your brother began it all with his Paragon Detergent, I certainly saw no reason why I should not have your paints.'

'Good evening. I will go and ask father to arrange for the twins an extra week's holiday.'

'Please don't go, Miss Virginia,' he cried. 'I am so lonely and so unhappy, and I really don't know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot.'

'That's quite absurd. You only have to go to bed and blow out the candle. It is very difficult sometimes to keep awake, especially at church, but there is no difficulty at all about sleeping. Why even babies know how to do that, and they are not very clever.' 'I have not slept for three hundred years,' he said sadly, and Virginia's beautiful blue eyes opened in wonder •; 'for three hundred years I have not slept, and I am so tired.'

Virginia grew quite serious, and her lips trembled. She came towards him, and kneeling down at his side, looked up into his old, withered face. 'Poor, poor Ghost,' she murmured; 'have you no place where you can sleep?'

## SLEEP

What do you think the Ghost would like to do?

### Glossary

- **wonder:** (here) surprise

'Far away behind the woods,' he answered, in a low, dreamy voice, 'there is a little garden. There the grass grows long and deep, the nightingale • sings all night long, the cold crystal moon looks down and the yew • tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers.'

Virginia's eyes filled with tears, and she hid her face in her hands.

'You mean the Garden of Death,' she whispered.

'Yes, Death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open the doors of Death's house, for Love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is.'

Virginia trembled, and for a few moments there was silence. She felt as if she was in a terrible dream.

Then the ghost spoke again, and his voice sounded like the sighing • of the wind.

'Have you ever read the old prophecy • on the library window?'

'Oh, often,' cried the little girl, looking up. 'I know it quite well. It is painted in strange black letters, and it is difficult to read. There are only six lines:

When a golden girl can win  
Prayer from out the lips of sin •,  
When the barren • almond bears •,  
And a little child gives away its tears,  
Then shall all the house be still  
And peace come to Canterville.

But I don't know what they mean.'

- 
- **barren:** without fruit
  - **bears:** (here) has fruit
  - **nightingale:** bird that sings well
  - **prophecy:** statement of something what will happen in the future
  - **sighing:** deep breathing of people when they are sad
  - **sin:** bad act
  - **yew:** type of tree

'They mean,' he said sadly, 'that you must weep<sup>o</sup> for me for my sins, because I have no tears, and pray for my soul, because I have no faith; and then, if you have been sweet, and good, and gentle, the Angel of Death will have mercy<sup>o</sup> on me.'

Virginia made no answer, and the ghost was in despair as he looked down at her bowed<sup>o</sup> golden head. Suddenly she stood up, very pale, and with a strange light in her eyes. 'I am not afraid,' she said firmly, 'and I will ask the Angel to have mercy on you.' He rose from his seat with a low cry of joy, and, taking her hand, bent over with old-fashioned grace and kissed it. His fingers were cold as ice, and his lips burned like fire, but Virginia did not pull away as he led her across the darkening<sup>o</sup> room. When they reached the end of the room, he stopped, and muttered some words she could not understand. She opened her eyes, and saw the wall slowly fading away<sup>o</sup> like a mist, and a great black cavern in front of her. A bitter<sup>o</sup> cold wind swept<sup>o</sup> round them, and she felt something pulling at her dress.

'Quick, quick,' cried the ghost, 'or it will be too late,' and in a moment the wall had closed behind them and the Tapestry Chamber was empty.

## THE PROPHECY

What does the prophecy mean?

Where do you think Virginia and the ghost go?

### Glossary

- **bitter:** (here) very cold
- **bowed:** bent
- **darkening:** becoming dark
- **fading away:** disappearing
- **mercy:** when you help someone because you feel sorry for them
- **swept:** moved quickly
- **weep:** cry

## VI

7 About ten minutes later, the bell rang for tea, and, as Virginia did not come down, Mrs Otis sent up one of the servants to get her. After a little time he returned and said that he could not find Miss Virginia anywhere. As she was in the habit of going out to the garden every evening to get flowers for the dinner-table, Mrs Otis was not at all alarmed at first, but when six o'clock struck, and Virginia did not appear, she became very worried, and sent the boys to look for her, while she herself and Mr Otis searched every room in the house. At half-past six the boys came back and said that they could find no trace of their sister anywhere. They were all now in the greatest state of excitement, and did not know what to do. Mr Otis told Washington and two of the servants to search the district, then he sent telegrams to all the police inspectors in the county, telling them to look out for a little girl. He then ordered his horse to be fetched, and, after insisting that his wife and the three boys sit down to dinner, rode off down the Ascot road with a servant. He had hardly, however, gone a couple of miles when he heard somebody galloping after him, and, looking round, saw the little Duke of Cheshire coming up on his pony, with his face very red and no hat.

- 
- **alarmed:** afraid that something bad has happened
  - **district:** area
  - **fetched:** brought to him
  - **galloping:** riding fast on a horse
  - **trace:** sign

'I'm awfully sorry, Mr Otis,' gasped out the boy, 'but I can't eat any dinner as long as Virginia is lost. Please don't be angry with me. You won't send me back, will you? I can't go! I won't go!'

The Minister could not help smiling at the handsome young man, and was touched by his devotion to Virginia, so leaning down from his horse, he patted him kindly on the shoulders, and said, 'Well, Cecil, if you won't go back, I suppose you must come with me - but I must get you a hat at Ascot.'

'Oh, bother my hat! I want Virginia!' cried the little Duke, laughing, and they galloped on to the railway station. There Mr Otis asked the station-master if anyone answering the description of Virginia had been seen on the platform, but could get no news of her.



The station-master, however, sent a telegram up and down the line<sup>•</sup>, and assured him that a strict watch<sup>•</sup> would be kept for her, and, after having bought a hat for the little Duke, Mr Otis rode off to Bexley, a village about four miles away. There they called on the rural policeman, but could get no information from him, and after riding around for a while, they turned their horses' heads homewards, and reached the Chase at about eleven o'clock, dead<sup>•</sup> tired and almost heartbroken.



### Glossary

- **awfully:** very
- **bother:** (here) I don't care
- **dead:** (here) very
- **gaped:** said quickly and without breath
- **leaning:** bending down
- **line:** (here) railway line
- **patted:** touched gently
- **strict watch:** check; control
- **touched:** become emotional because of someone's kindness



They found Washington and the twins waiting for them at the gate-house with lanterns, as the avenue was very dark. Not the slightest trace of Virginia had been discovered. The fish-pond had been dragged, and the whole Chase thoroughly searched, but without any result. It was evident that, for that night at least, Virginia was lost to them; and it was in a state of the deepest depression that Mr Otis and the boys walked up to the house, the servant following behind with the two horses and the pony. In the hall they found a group of frightened servants, and poor Mrs Otis was lying on a sofa in the library. She was almost out of her mind with terror and anxiety, and was having her forehead bathed with eau-de-cologne by the old housekeeper. Mr Otis at once insisted on her having something to eat, and ordered supper for the whole party. It was a melancholy meal, as hardly anyone spoke, and even the twins were worried and quiet, as they were very fond of their sister.

When they had finished, Mr Otis ordered them all to bed, saying nothing more could be done that night, and that he would telegraph in the morning to Scotland Yard for some detectives to be sent down immediately.

## VIRGINIA

Where do you think Virginia is?

Have you ever 'disappeared'?

How did people react?

### Glossary

- **bathed:** made wet
- **dragged:** searched the bottom of a river or lake
- **eau-de-cologne:** perfume
- **gate-house:** small house at the gates of a large one
- **slightest:** smallest
- **were fond of:** liked

Just as they were passing out of the dining-room, midnight began to strike from the clock tower, and when the last stroke sounded they heard a crash and a sudden shrill • cry and a dreadful clap • of thunder shook the house. Some notes of unearthly • music floated through the air, a panel at the top of the staircase opened with a loud noise, and Virginia stepped out onto the landing •, looking very pale and white, with a little casket • in her hand. In a moment they had all rushed up to her. Mrs Otis held her passionately in her arms, the Duke covered her with violent kisses, and the twins did a wild dance round the group.

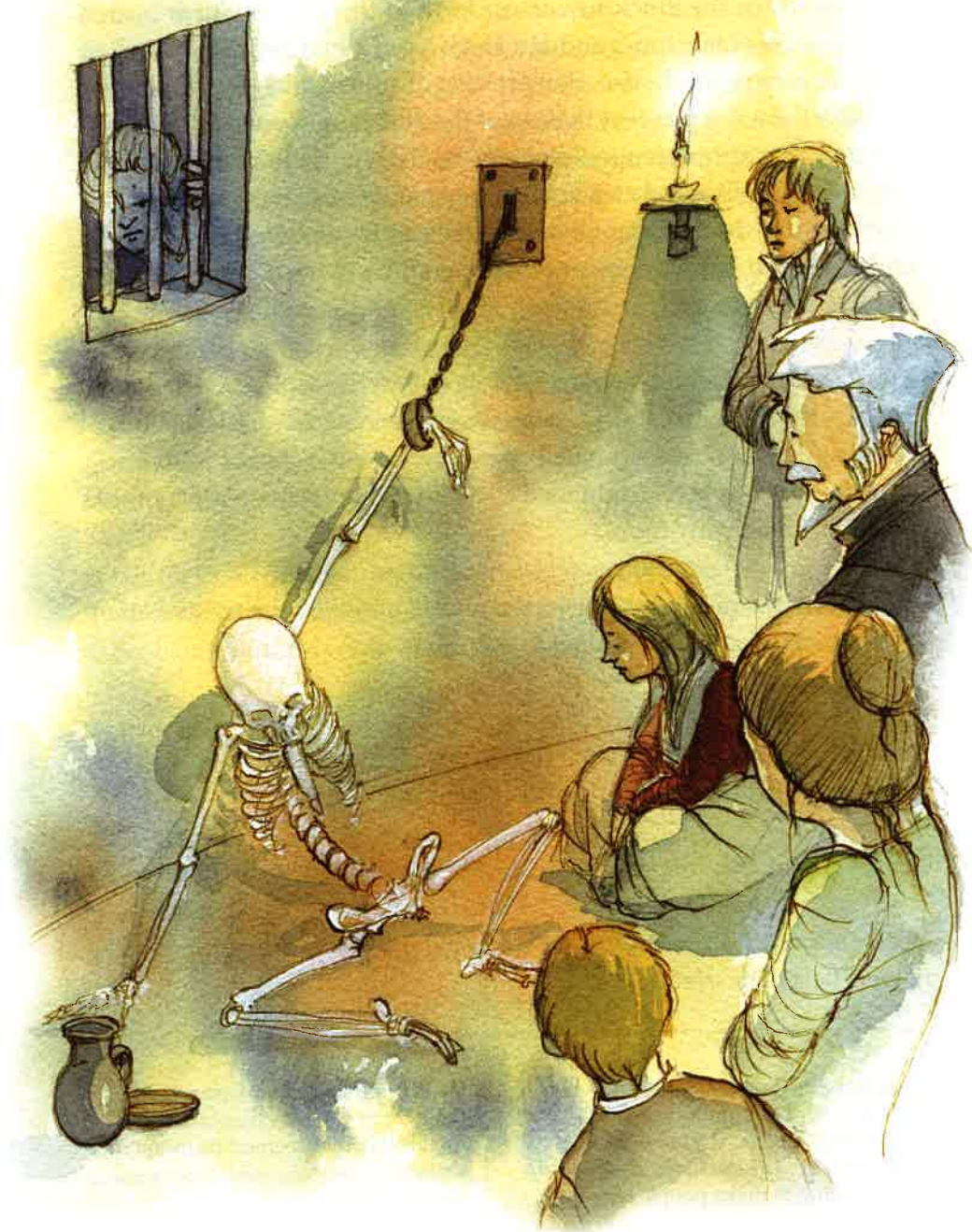
‘Good heavens! child, where have you been?’ said Mr Otis, rather angrily, thinking that she had been playing some foolish trick on them. ‘Cecil and I have been riding all over the country looking for you, and your mother has been frightened to death. You must never play these practical jokes • any more.’

‘Except on the ghost! Except on the ghost!’ shrieked the twins as they danced about.

‘My own darling, thank God we have found you; you must never leave my side again,’ murmured Mrs Otis, as she kissed the trembling child, and smoothed the tangled • gold of her hair.

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

- 
- **casket:** small pretty box
  - **clap:** sound of thunder
  - **landing:** space at the top of stairs
  - **practical jokes:** when you do something to make people laugh
  - **shrill:** high unpleasant sound
  - **tangled:** in a mess
  - **unearthly:** that seemed from another world



The whole family gazed • at her in silent amazement, but she was quite serious; and, turning round, she led them through the opening in the wall down a narrow secret corridor, Washington following with a lighted candle, which he had taken from the table. Finally, they came to a great oak door. When Virginia touched it, it swung • back and they found themselves in a little low room with one tiny window. In the wall was a huge iron ring and chained to it was a skeleton that was stretched out at full length on the stone floor. It seemed to be trying to reach a jug that had once held water, and a plate where there had been food, which were just out of its reach •. Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton, and, folding her hands together, began to pray silently. The rest of the party looked on in wonder at the terrible tragedy whose secret they now understood.

'Hello •!' suddenly exclaimed one of the twins, who had been looking out of the window to try and discover in what wing of the house the room was situated. 'Hello! The old almond-tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers quite plainly • in the moonlight.'

'God has forgiven him,' said Virginia seriously, as she got to her feet, and a beautiful light seemed to illuminate her face.

'What an angel you are!' cried the young Duke, and he put his arm round her neck and kissed her.

---

### Glossary

- **gazed:** looked
- **hello:** (here) expression of surprise
- **out of reach:** that he could not reach
- **quite plainly:** very well
- **swung:** opened wide

## VII

8 Four days after these strange events a funeral started from • Canterville Chase at about eleven o'clock at night. The hearse • was pulled by eight black horses, and the lead coffin was covered by a rich purple cloth, on which the Canterville coat-of-arms • was embroidered • in gold. By the side of the hearse walked the servants with lighted torches, and the whole procession was wonderfully impressive. Lord Canterville was the chief mourner •, and sat in the first carriage along with Virginia. Then came the United States Minister and his wife, then Washington and the three boys, and in the last carriage was Mrs Umney. They felt that as she had been frightened by the ghost for more than fifty years of her life, she had the right to see the last • of him. They had dug a deep grave • in the corner of the churchyard, just under the old yew tree, and the service was read in the most impressive manner by the Rev. Augustus Dampier. When the ceremony was over, the servants, according to an old custom kept by the Canterville family, extinguished • their torches, and, as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, Virginia stepped forward and laid on it a large cross made out of white and pink almond blossoms.

### Glossary

- **coat-of-arms:** symbol of a noble family
- **embroidered:** sewn
- **extinguished:** put out
- **grave:** hole in the ground for a dead person
- **hearse:** carriage or car to transport a dead person
- **mourner:** relative or friend of a dead person
- **started from:** left
- **the last:** the end; last moments

As she did so, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and flooded the little churchyard with its silent silver, and from a distant wood a nightingale began to sing. She thought of the ghost's description of the Garden of Death, her eyes filled with tears, and she hardly spoke a word during the drive home.

### THE FUNERAL

How does Virginia feel at the funeral?

What is the atmosphere like?

How does the atmosphere change throughout the book?

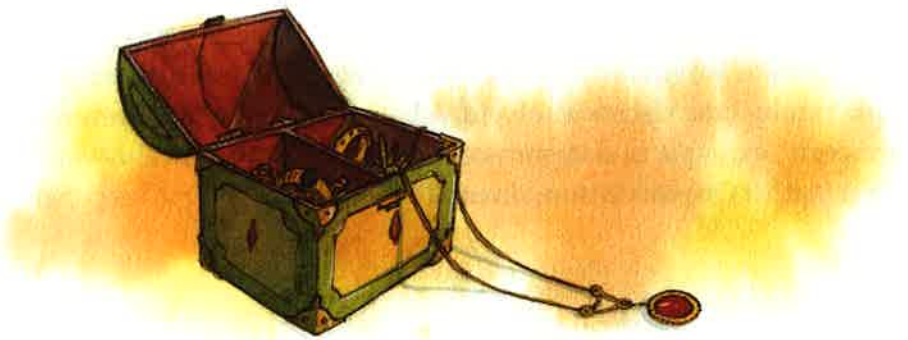
The next morning, before Lord Canterville went back to London, Mr Otis had a meeting with him on the subject of the jewels the ghost had given to Virginia. They were perfectly magnificent, especially a certain ruby necklace with an old Venetian setting. The jewels were a superb example of sixteenth-century work, and their value was so great that Mr Otis was unsure about allowing his daughter to keep them.

- 
- **flooded:** filled
  - **ruby:** precious red stone
  - **superb:** very good

- **Venetian setting:** made in a style that comes from Venice



'My Lord,' he said, 'I know the laws of this country and it is quite clear to me that these jewels are, or should be, heirlooms<sup>o</sup> in your family. I would therefore ask you to take them to London with you, and to regard<sup>o</sup> them simply as a part of your property which has been restored<sup>o</sup> to you under strange conditions. As for my daughter, she is only a child, and doesn't yet have, I am glad to say, much interest in such things. Mrs Otis has also told me that these jewels are very valuable and if offered for sale would fetch<sup>o</sup> a very good price. Under these circumstances, Lord Canterville, I feel sure that you will understand how impossible it would be for me to allow them to remain in the possession of any member of my family. Perhaps I should mention that Virginia is very anxious that you should allow her to keep the box as a memento<sup>o</sup> of your unfortunate but misguided<sup>o</sup> ancestor. As it is extremely old, and consequently not in a very good state, you may perhaps be able to agree to her request.'



### Glossary

- **fetch:** get
- **heirlooms:** precious things that belong to a family for many generations
- **memento:** something that makes you think of a person
- **misguided:** with wrong ideas
- **regard:** consider; think of
- **restored:** (here) given back

Lord Canterville listened very carefully to the worthy Minister's words, and when Mr Otis had ended, he shook him cordially by the hand, and said, 'My dear sir, your charming little daughter did a great service to my unlucky ancestor. Sir Simon, and I and my family are indebted to her for her marvellous courage. The jewels are clearly hers, and I believe that if I were heartless enough to take them from her, the wicked old fellow would be out of his grave in a fortnight, making my life a misery. As for them being heirlooms, nothing is an heirloom that is not mentioned in a will or legal document, and the existence of these jewels has been quite unknown. I assure you I have no more claim on them than your servants, and when Miss Virginia grows up I am sure she will be pleased to have pretty things to wear, Besides, you forget, Mr Otis, you bought the furniture and the ghost when you bought Canterville Chase, and anything that belonged to the ghost passed at once into your possession.'

### THE JEWELS

Do you think Mr Otis was right to offer the jewels to Lord Canterville? Why/ why not?

Why did Lord Canterville refuse them?

- **claim:** (here) right to have
- **cordially:** in a friendly way
- **indebted:** when you feel you must give something to someone for a kind act they have done
- **service:** (here) kindness; help
- **wicked old fellow:** (here) the Canterville Ghost
- **will:** document that says who will get a person's possessions when they die
- **worthy:** good and honest

Mr Otis was distressed • at Lord Canterville's refusal, and asked him to reconsider his decision. But he was quite firm •, and finally convinced the Minister to allow his daughter to keep the present the ghost had given her. When, in the spring of 1890, the young Duchess of Cheshire was presented to the Queen on the occasion of her marriage, her jewels were the universal topic • of admiration. For Virginia was married to her fiancé • as soon as he came of age •. They were both so charming, and they loved each other so much, that everyone was delighted by the marriage.

After the honeymoon • was over, the Duke and Duchess went down to Canterville Chase. On the day after they arrived they walked over in the afternoon to the lonely churchyard by the pinewoods. There had been a great deal of difficulty at first about the inscription • for Sir Simon's tombstone •, but finally they decided to engrave • it simply with the initials of the old gentleman's name, and the verse from the library window. The Duchess had brought with her some lovely roses, which she put on the grave, and after they had stood by it for some time they walked into the ruined old abbey.

## Glossary

- **came of age:** was 18
- **distressed:** upset
- **engrave:** cut words in stone
- **fiancé:** boy she has promised to marry
- **honeymoon:** holiday after you are married
- **inscription:** writing cut in stone
- **quite firm:** very sure
- **tombstone:** stone beside a grave
- **topic:** subject

Suddenly, the Duke took hold of her hand and said to her, 'Virginia, a wife should have no secrets from her husband.'

'Dear Cecil! I have no secrets from you.'

'Yes, you have,' he answered, smiling, 'you have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost.'

'I have never told anyone, Cecil,' said Virginia seriously.

'I know that, but you might tell me.'

'Please don't ask me, Cecil. I cannot tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I owe him a great deal. Yes, don't laugh, Cecil. I really do. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies •, and why Love is stronger than both.'

### VIRGINIA'S SECRET

Why do you think Virginia wants to keep her time with the ghost a secret?

What do you think happened when she went off with the Ghost?

What things do you keep secret?

---

• **signifies:** means

The Duke stood up and kissed his wife lovingly.  
'You can have your secret as long as I have your heart,' he murmured.  
'You have always had that, Cecil.'  
'And you will tell our children some day, won't you?'  
Virginia blushed •




**Glossary**

- **blushed:** her cheeks became red because she was embarrassed

# After Reading

## Personal Response

- 1 What did you think of the story? Did you find it interesting and exciting or boring and predictable? Write a paragraph describing your reaction to the story.
- 2 Write a 150-word summary of the story.
- 3 Which character did you like best, and which least? Why?
-  4 Which of the ghost's appearances would have frightened you most if you'd been at Canterville Chase? Share with a partner.
- 5 'The Canterville Ghost is not a typical ghost story.' Write a composition discussing this statement.



# After Reading

## Comprehension

- Copy and complete this table describing the ghost's five meetings with the Otis family and the reactions of the family members each time.

The Canterville Ghost	The Otis family's reactions
a) <i>An old man with clanking chains</i>	1 Mr Otis offers him some Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator 2 The twins .....
b) .....	1 Mr Otis ..... 2 The twin ..... 3 Mrs Otis .....
c) .....	1 The twins .....
d) .....	1 The twins .....
e) .....	1 The twins ..... 2 Washington .....

- Read the poem in the stained-glass window in the library (page 41), and explain in your own words how it refers to Virginia and Sir Simon de Canterville.
- 'The Canterville Ghost is a humorous story.' Find examples of comedy in the story.
- At the start of the story Mrs Umney says that Sir Simon de Canterville "disappeared suddenly in very mysterious circumstances. His body has never been discovered." What do we find out about his death?

- 5 Mr Otis doesn't want Virginia to have Sir Simon's jewels, and Lord Canterville does. Explain their reasons. What happens in the end? When does she wear them?
- 6 The ghost uses 'the Fourth Dimension of Space' as a way of escaping from the twins. If space is the fourth dimension, what are the other three dimensions?
- 7 The author uses three other synonyms for the word ghost. What are they? Do you know any other synonyms? Make a list.
- 8 Look at these phrases describing things to do with the ghost:

*ghastly* green light  
*demon's* laughter  
*withered* hands

deep *churchyard* groan  
green *ice-cold* corpse  
*cruel, wrinkled* mouth

What is the effect of the adjectives in italics, and how are they connected?

- 9 In Chapter 3 Sir Simon meets the 'Otis Ghost'. How does he react, and what is the irony of his reaction?
- 10 'The story has a happy ending for everyone.' Explain why this is true.
- 11 What did the ghost teach Virginia about life and death?

# After Reading

## Characters

- 1 List the English characters who appear in the book, and say who they are.
- 2 Complete the table describing the Otis family.

The Otis Family	Appearance and character
Hiram B.	

- 3 How does Wilde use the following things to show his view of Americans?
  - a) Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent
  - b) Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator
  - c) Dr Dobell's medicine
- 4 Who says these things, or who do they refer to? And what do they show about the relationship between the British and the Americans?
  - a) I come from a modern country, where we have everything money can buy... I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.

- b) Indeed, in many ways, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we really have everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language.
- c) I guess the old country is so overpopulated that they don't have enough decent weather for everybody.


**5 What do the words in italics tell you about the Canterville Ghost and how is he different from traditional ghosts in other stories?**

- a) the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless in *natural indignation*
- b) had he been so *badly insulted*
- c) he decided to *have revenge*
- d) with the *enthusiasm of true artist*, he went over his most celebrated performances
- e) he *entirely broke down*, and became very upset
- f) he was, naturally, *terribly frightened*
- g) 'I am so *lonely* and so *unhappy*'.

**6 Sir Simon has a serious sense of his duties as a ghost. Find quotations which show this attitude, and explain why he feels annoyed with the Otis family.**

**7 Which characters in the story do you like most, and least, and why? Tell a partner.**

**8 Imagine you are Mrs Umney. Describe what happens in the house after the Otis family arrives.**

 **9 What questions would ask the ghost? Ask and answer in pairs.**

# After Reading

## Plot and theme

- 1 Who is the narrator in 'The Canterville Ghost'? What effect does this have on the story?
- 2 What style of plot does the story have? Tick below.
  - a)  Flashback (i.e. the story is built up by a narrator looking back at events in the past whilst living in the present)
  - b)  Linear (i.e. a direct movement from beginning to end)
  - c)  Cyclical (i.e. it moves around a central event, always returning to that point).
- 3 Do you think the choice of plot works well? Why/why not?
- 4 How would a different ending change the way the story is told?
- 5 'Wilde takes every opportunity to describe things sensuously.' Find quotations from the story to back this up.
- 6 What do you suppose happens when Virginia is alone with the ghost? Imagine you are Virginia and write a diary entry describing what happened.

- 7 Put the events that happened during Virginia's disappearance in the correct order.**
- a)  Mr Otis and the Duke rode back to Canterville Chase by 11 o'clock.
  - b)  The twins searched the garden and Mr and Mrs Otis searched the house.
  - c)  Mr Otis and the Duke rode to the railway station.
  - d)  Mr Otis told Washington and 2 servants to search the district.
  - e)  Mr Otis and the Duke rode to the village of Bexley.
  - f)  The tea bell rang, but Virginia didn't appear.
  - g)  Mr Otis ordered everyone to bed.
  - h)  Mrs Otis and the twins and the Duke sat down to dinner.
  - i)  The whole family sat down for a melancholy supper.
  - j)  The Duke rode after Mr Otis on his pony.
- 8 How does Wilde keep up the excitement of the hunt for Virginia?**
- 9 'The Canterville Ghost is a story of Good triumphing over Evil.' Write a composition to explain this statement, and illustrate your points with suitable quotations.**
- 10 Do you think that the humour took away from the serious points being made in the story? Give reasons why/why not.**



## After Reading

### Project

### *The epigrams of Oscar Wilde*

- 1 An epigram is a short saying which expresses an idea in a clever and funny way. Do you know any famous epigrams?
- 2 Oscar Wilde was famous for his epigrams. We have collected his most popular ones below. Complete the sentences with the words below, then discuss the meaning of these remarks.

never price best mistakes love worse stars  
resist way feel

- 1 I can ..... everything except temptation.
- 2 [A cynic] is man who knows the ..... of everything and the value of nothing.
- 3 The truth is rarely pure and ..... simple.
- 4 There is only one thing in the world ..... than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.
- 5 We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the .....
- 6 The only ..... to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.
- 7 Experience is the name everyone gives to their .....
- 8 To ..... oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance.
- 9 When people agree with me, I always ..... that I must be wrong.
- 10 I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the .....

- 3 Which is your favourite epigram? Look for more in the library or on the Internet.