



THE
Canterville
Ghost

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY BY
OSCAR WILDE

CHARACTERS

HIRAM OTIS	AMERICAN MINISTER
LUCRETIA OTIS	HIS WIFE
VIRGINIA OTIS	THEIR DAUGHTER
WASHINGTON OTIS	THEIR SON
STARS	THE TWINS
STRIPES	
LORD CANTERVILLE	THE OWNER OF CANTERVILLE CHASE
REV DAMPIER	THE PARISH REV
MRS UMNEY	THE HOUSEKEEPER
SIR SIMON DE CANTERVILLE	THE GHOST

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

Based on the short story by **Oscar Wilde**

SCENE 1 – THE AGREEMENT

London 1890

Lights up on 3 men sitting around a table in the London club of the latest Lord Canterville. In the room are Lord Canterville, the Rev. Augustus Dampier and Mr Hiram Otis, the American Minister. The latter is studying an official document

L.CANTERVILLE: Before you sign Mr Otis I feel bound to tell you that we have never cared to live in Canterville Chase ourselves. My grandaunt, the Dowager 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. Mr. Otis, a ghost resides in that house that has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier. The reverend has kindly accompanied me here to act as a legal witness.

REV DAMPIER: I tell you it's the most fearful sight, Mr Otis. The very devil himself! He blew out my candle as I was coming down from the library and whispered such foul things in my ear, things which, as a good Christian, I cannot permit myself to repeat.

L.CANTERVILLE: You see Mr Otis, 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, due to the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library.

REV DAMPIER: In my days at Cambridge there were rumours that a phantasm could be seen wandering the quad at night but never, until Canterville Chase, had I seen such a thing.

HIRAM: My Lord, I will take the furniture and the ghost and anything else that comes with the property. I am from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; and I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it back at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.

L.CANTERVILLE: I've no doubt one of your countrymen would try Mr Otis. But this ghost has been well known for three centuries, since 1584 in fact, and its appearance is always followed with the death of a member of our family.

HIRAM: The same could often be said of the family doctor, Lord Canterville. But there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost, and I guess the laws of Nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy.

L.CANTERVILLE: Well if you've no objection to cohabiting with a prior occupant, Mr Otis, I suppose all that remains is for you to sign. Only you must remember I warned you.

Hiram signs and hands the pen the Lord C who adds his signature.

We swiftly move to a travelling sequence in which we are introduced to The Otis family on the move from London to Canterbury Chase, miming the train journey to Ascot station.

Announcement 1: *“Last call for Reading via Ascot. All aboard please, all aboard.”*

Mrs Otis and Virginia enter with luggage.

LUCRETIA: Quickly Virginia, hurry up or we shall miss the train.

VIRGINIA: Coming mother.

LUCRETIA: Hiram darling could you possibly help me with these?

HIRAM: Certainly my love. Washington. Washington?

WASHINGTON: Yes Father.

HIRAM: Do you still have that newspaper I gave you?

WASHINGTON: Here it is.

We hear a train whistle.

LUCRETIA: Oh no we're going to miss our train.

VIRGINIA: This is our carriage.

HIRAM: Quickly now, everyone jump on.

They sit in their seats arranging their luggage.

LUCRETIA: Oh my! The twins! Has anyone seen the twins?

WASHINGTON: They were right behind me.

HIRAM: Did you see them get on the train?

VIRGINIA: They must have boarded with us.

HIRAM: Knowing those two they're probably up to no good.

LUCRETIA: Be a dear and go find them would you.

VIRGINIA: Yes, mother

LUCRETIA: Washington, go help your sister.

WASHINGTON: But...

HIRAM: You heard your mother.

BOTH: Stars! Stripes! (*etc*)

LUCRETIA: (*calling after them*) Stars! Stripes! Get in here at once!

HIRAM: (*head buried in the evening paper*) Let them play dear. They can't go far.

Announcement 2: "Ascot next station, next station Ascot"

Sound of the train and whistle.

SCENE 2 – CANTERVILLE CHASE

The family are greeted on the steps of the front entrance by the only remaining member of household staff Mrs Umney, the housekeeper, whom Mrs. Otis, at Lady Canterville's earnest request, has consented to keep in her former position.

MRS UMNEY: I bid you welcome to Canterville Chase.

LUCRETIA: You must be Mrs Umney. How lovely to finally meet you.

MRS UMNEY: The pleasure is all mine Madam.

LUCRETIA: This is my husband Hiram and these are our children Washington, Virginia and the twins...oh my! Where are the twins?

VIRGINIA: I think they ran off to explore the garden mother.

LUCRETIA: Will those two ever listen?

HIRAM: Pleased to make your acquaintance Mrs Umney.

MRS UMNEY: Welcome Mr Minister. Please let me help you with those. Do follow me.

She takes some of the luggage. Following her, they pass through the fine Tudor hall into a sitting-room, a long, low room, panelled in black oak, at the end of which was a large stained glass window. Tea has been laid out for them and they sit down and begin to look round, while Mrs. Umney waits on them.

MRS UMNEY: I assumed you would be famished after your journey so I took the liberty of laying out some tea.

HIRAM: That is very kind of you Mrs Umney. What a delightful spread! I have a feeling we shall be spoilt here at Canterville chase!

- LUCRETIA:** *(catching sight of a dull red stain on the floor just by the fireplace)* Oh Mrs Umney, I am afraid something has been spilt there which you have neglected to clean up.
- MRS UMNEY:** Yes, madam. Blood has been spilt on that spot.
- HIRAM:** Excuse me?
- LUCRETIA:** Blood! How horrid! I don't at all care for blood-stains in a sitting-room. It must be removed at once.
- MRS UMNEY:** It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her own husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon survived her nine years, and disappeared suddenly under 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.
- WASHINGTON:** Nonsense. Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time *(he abruptly falls upon his knees, and starts to rapidly scour floor. In a few moments no trace of the blood stain is left.)* I knew Pinkerton would do it!

A terrible flash of lightning lights up the sombre room, a fearful peal of thunder makes them all start to their feet. They turn around to see that Mrs. Umney has fainted. In the flash we might catch a glimpse of the outline of Sir Simon by the window which only Mrs Umney sees.

- HIRAM:** What a monstrous climate! I guess it is so overpopulated that they haven't enough decent weather for everybody.
- LUCRETIA:** My dear Hiram, what can we do with a housekeeper who faints?
- HIRAM:** Charge it to her like breakages, she won't faint after that.
- MRS UMNEY:** *(coming to suddenly and grabbing hold of Hiram's hand)* I have seen things, sir, that would make any Christian's hair stand on end, and many a night I have not closed my eyes in sleep for the awful things that happen here.
- LUCRETIA:** If you don't mind me asking, Mrs Umney, why do you insist on staying here at Canterville Chase when you are so clearly terrified of these ghost stories?
- MRS UMNEY:** This house has stood here, intact for centuries. Passed down through generations of Cantervilles. Now they are no longer here, who will remain to uphold its traditions and history if not me?
- HIRAM:** Rest assured Mrs Umney we are not afraid of ghosts in this family. However, in light of your illness and current lack of sleep I will see to a small increase in your pay.

LUCRETIA: Come Mrs Umney, let me help you to your room, Washington will bring the rest of the luggage in, won't you Washington? And Virginia, tell the twins that it's time they were in bed.

WASHINGTON: But...

HIRAM: Washington...

VIRGINIA: Yes, mother.

Lucretia helps Mrs Umney off. Washington exits to see to the luggage. Virginia goes to find the twins. Hiram continues to enjoy the tea. Sounds of a fierce storm raging. Ghostly business. Blackout. We transition to morning.

SCENE 3 –THE STAIN

Following day. Enter Stars and Stripes playing with a ball. Enter Mrs Umney.

MRS UMNEY: *(In an imposing manner.)* Children! Children! One does NOT play with a ball indoors.

THEY stop for a minute, shocked that someone has spoken to them so harshly.

Miss Stars and Master Stripes I presume. Pleased to meet you both. My name is Mrs...

STRIPES: I want my ball back!!

MRS UMNEY: Please.

STRIPES: What?

MRS UMNEY: We say please when we ask for things!

STARS: We do?

STRIPES: I don't!!

MRS UMNEY: Well, young man, you do in this house. So, here's a lesson for you, the ball is mine now, for good.

STRIPES: Lesson? You don't get to teach me lessons, you mean old lady. You're not my Mother!

MRS UMNEY: Another thing for which I can be grateful.

STARS: Um, we're sorry?

STRIPES: *(Punches HER.)* No we're not!

Enter Lucretia and Hiram

LUCRETIA: Honestly you two? Just stop!

HIRAM: Come on, children, playing ball in the house! Mrs Umney will think you were raised by wild animals.

LUCRETIA: Now go and get washed and dressed and come back down here for breakfast. Quickly.

Exit Stars and Stripes.

HIRAM: I apologise Mrs Umney. They are just so excited to be here.

MRS UMNEY: Yes I'm sure they are sir. Please, breakfast is served.

LUCRETIA: Wonderful Mrs Umney.

MRS UMNEY: Tea?

LUCRETIA: Why not.

MRS UMNEY: One lump or two?

LUCRETIA: Errr... Two?

MRS UMNEY: Sir?

HIRAM: Is there any coffee?

MRS UMNEY: Not a problem sir.

She exits to get coffee – enter Virginia.

VIRGINIA: Good morning!

LUCRETIA: Good morning! How did you sleep?

VIRGINIA: Once the storm died down I actually slept quite well.

HIRAM: And your brother?

Enter Washington rubbing his eyes and yawning.

LUCRETIA: Not so well it seems.

He continues to walk in rubbing his eyes and yawning. He stops right in front of the spot where the stain was yesterday. It has reappeared. He rubs his eyes again... Also enter Mrs Umney during this dialogue.

HIRAM: What's wrong son?

WASHINGTON: The stain. It's back...

HIRAM: Pardon me?

WASHINGTON: The blood stain by the fireplace ... It's back!

LUCRETIA: I'm sure there is a perfectly logical explanation as to why the stain has returned.

MRS UMNEY: I told you Madam...

WASHINGTON: I don't think it can be the fault of the Paragon Detergent, for I have tried it with everything... It must be the ghost.

HIRAM: There's no such thing Washington. Listen to your mother and come and sit down.

WASHINGTON: Yes, sir (*he reluctantly joins the rest of the family*).

VIRGINIA: (*reading*) 'When a golden girl can win
Prayer from out the lips of sin,
When the barren almond bears...

Mrs Umney. What's this?

MRS UMNEY: Oh that old thing dear. That's been here for centuries. Apparently after Lady Canterville's untimely death her brothers had it inscribed above the fireplace.

VIRGINIA: What does it mean?

MRS UMNEY: I have not got the foggiest! Now, is there anything else I can do for you dear?

VIRGINIA: Do you think we might have buckwheat cakes one afternoon for tea?

MRS UMNEY: I'm afraid buckwheat is very hard to come by here Miss but I can try to find something similar if you'd like?

HIRAM: You'll find a great deal of things are different here Virginia, but we must try to acclimate. The coffee for one is positively dreadful, no offence intended Mrs Umney. But, at least the weather has brightened up. What would you all say to a stroll in the countryside?

LUCRETIA: What a wonderful idea.

VIRGINIA: Yes father

WASHINGTON: (*wanting to stay in to get to the bottom of the mystery of the reappearing stain*) But...

HIRAM: And might I propose an experiment in the name of science? Washington do you still have that stick of Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent in your pocket?

WASHINGTON: Yes, sir.

HIRAM: Capital. Why don't you scrub out the stain as you did last night and when we leave I'll lock the door. That way we can be assured that no one will be able to enter the room once we're gone. Mrs Umney do you have a key to this room?

MRS UMNEY: Yes, sir *(she takes a key from a bunch in her pocket and hands it to Mr Otis)*

LUCRETIA: Virginia and I will fetch the twins.

They both exit. Mrs Umney clears a few things from the table as Washington scrubs the stain off the floor. She exits. Washington takes no time removing the stain and leaves, followed by Mr Otis who locks the door firmly after him. (Ghostly business) Lights fade

SCENE 4 – THE STAIN RETURNS

The same room later that day dressed exactly as they left it

Lights up on Washington, Virginia, Otis and Mrs Otis staring at the floor. The stain has reappeared, for a second time

HIRAM: How odd!

WASHINGTON: *(excitedly)* I knew it would reappear!

VIRGINIA: It seems to have changed colour?

WASHINGTON: I'm going to pen a letter right away, a long letter, to Messers Myers and Podmore on the subject of the Permanence of Sanguineous Stains when connected with Crime.

He exits

HIRAM: I'm sure there must be logical explanation...

LUCRETIA: I remember seeing a few old copies of the Journal of the Physical Society in the library. I'm certain we'll find some answers in there. Virginia, will you help me look?

VIRGINIA: Yes, mother.

They exit leaving Mr Otis standing by the fireplace staring at the floor

HIRAM: *(calling out)* Mrs Umney.

MRS UMNEY: *(entering)* Yes, sir.

HIRAM: Is this the only key to this room? From now on I will be keeping this door kept locked at night.

MRS UMNEY: Very good sir.

He exits, locking the door firmly behind him

Lights fade out

SCENE 5 – THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

Master bedroom later that evening. Mr & Mrs Otis are in bed. Mrs Otis is studying The Journal of the Physical Society. Mr Otis is reading the latest arts reviews in the evening paper.

HIRAM: You know dear, the way the Brits write about Sarah Bernhardt you'd think she was the finest actress the world has ever known. In my opinion she is not a scratch on the immense talent of Miss Fanny Devonport.

LUCRETIA: If you say so dear.

HIRAM: And what's more, the manner in which they speak here is odd. The London drawl for instance cannot compare with the sweetness of the New York accent.

LUCRETIA: You said yourself, dear that we must try to acclimate. I'm sure it will soon feel like home.

HIRAM: Quite right, dear. Shall I put out the light.

LUCRETIA: Thank you. Good night, dear

HIRAM: Good night.

Sometime after, Mr. Otis is awakened by a curious noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounds like the clank of metal, and seems to be coming nearer every moment. He gets up at once, strikes a match, and looks at the time. It is exactly one o'clock. He is quite calm, feels his pulse, which is not at all feverish. The strange noise still continues, and with it he hears distinctly the sound of footsteps. He puts on his slippers, takes a small oblong phial out of his dressing-case, and opens the door. Right in front of him he sees in the wan moonlight, an old man of terrible aspect. His eyes are as red burning coals; long grey hair falls over his shoulders in matted coils; his garments, which are of antique cut, are soiled and ragged, and from his wrists and ankles hang heavy manacles and rusty gyves. This is the ghost of Sir Simon Canterville. He is about to raise his arms and let out one of his famous bone-chilling shrieks when

HIRAM: *(stepping toward the ghost)* My dear sir I really must insist on your oiling those chains. I have here a small bottle of the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator. It is said to be completely effective after one application. You can

have this one at no charge and I will be happy to supply you with more, should you require it. *(He hands the bottle to the ghost)*

For a moment the Canterville ghost stands motionless in natural indignation; then, dashing the bottle violently upon the polished floor, he flies down the corridor, off stage left, uttering hollow groans. Then, just as soon as he has left the stage, he comes shrieking back the other way followed by two little white-robed figures, Stars and Stripes, who are chasing him and throwing pillows at his head! Sir Simon vanishes off stage right.

HIRAM: *(exiting off stage right chasing the twins)* Stars! Stripes! Get back to bed...

Lights Fade

SCENE 6 – THE STAIN RETURNS AGAIN

The sitting room. The following morning. Lights up on Washington standing by the fireplace staring at the floor, again, the stain has reappeared.

The rest of the family are lounging in chairs. Mr Otis is not reading the newspaper this morning but instead he is studying the Journal of the Physical Society. Mrs Umney is pouring coffee. The sound of children running and playing can be heard from upstairs.

HIRAM: What colour is it now son?

WASHINGTON: Green! A bright, emerald-green! Yesterday it was yellow and the day before that, purple. It must be the ghost!

HIRAM: Oh yes, after meeting him I am resolved that it can be the only logical explanation.

VIRGINIA: Washington! Have you been in my paint box?

WASHINGTON: No! Why would I?

HIRAM: I have no wish 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 was at all polite for the twins to throw pillows at him. However, if he continues to decline the oil I gave him, we shall have to take his chains from him. It would be quite impossible to sleep, with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms.

MRS UMNEY: He doesn't always appear in chains

LUCRETIA: What do you mean?

MRS UMNEY: The people that come here say they see things. They have spotted the ghost in a number of guises; I mean there's Red Reuben, or the Strangled Babe, Guant Gideon and the Blood-sucker of Bexley Moor. His most terrifying guise

is the Headless Earl which has caused the most bravest of men to run for their lives. In fact in my long line of service here I have seen countless house guests and staff reside at Canterville Chase, yet every single one upon seeing the ghost has either fled or dropped dead in fright. He sent four housemaids into hysterics by merely grinning at them through the curtains in one of the spare bedrooms; His infamous laugh turned poor Lord Bakers wig grey in a single night and caused Lady Canterville's French governess' to hand in their notice before their first month was even up. Even the brave Old Madame de Tremouillac could not withstand his terror after awakening one morning to find him as a skeleton seated in her armchair reading extracts from her own private diary! But perhaps the worst of all was when Lord Canterville's most prized butler was said to have spotted a rotting green hand tapping at the window and was consequently later found lying in a pool of his own blood with nothing but a pistol in his hand. But I'm sure you will all be positively fine.

Mrs Umney continues to regale the family with Sir Simon's famous appearances as the lights fade out.

SCENE 7 – THE SECOND ATTEMPT

Main hallway. That night.

Sir Simon enters in very low light and slowly makes his way across the hall. He is waiting to see if the coast is clear heading for something behind an alcove. Just as he reaches it we hear the sound of a suit of armour crashing to the floor.

Mr Otis enters with a candle to find Sir Simon sitting on an antique chair rubbing his knees. Suspecting an intruder, he is also carrying a pistol which he has aimed at Sir Simon.

HIRAM: Put your hands where I can see them.

Sir Simon does not oblige and sweeps through them in a rage letting out one of his famous demonic laughs as he goes. No sooner does he reach the other side of the stage when Mrs Otis enters carrying a candle and a small bottle.

LUCRETIA: Oh my! You sound far from well. I have brought you a bottle of Doctor Dobell's tincture. If it is indigestion, you will find it a most excellent remedy.

At the insult Sir Simon sweeps through them all the other way, leaving the stage with a shriek. He is followed by Stars and Stripes who unkindly shoot spitballs at Sir Simon from their pea-shooters.

LUCRETIA: What an odd fellow

Lights fade out as Otis, Mrs Otis and the twins leave the stage

SCENE 8 – SIR SIMON

Sir Simon's room in the eaves of the house. The same night. He is frantically pacing, deeply annoyed by the response his attempts have been met with by the Otis family.

SIR SIMON: How? How are they not shocked, bewildered, running for fear? I would have thought at the very least modern Americans might be thrilled by the sight of the ghost of an English aristocrat but I am met with nothing but rudeness. The vulgarity of the twins, the gross materialism of the Minister and his wife with their tinctures and lotions and lubricants. And as for the boy! That blood stain has remained in place in this house for the entirety of my haunting career. 300 years of uninterrupted terror and torment! Tourists the world over marvel at its permanence, and yet he has the audacity to continually clean it up with his American detergent. Was it not I, Sir Simon de Canterville who caused Lady Stuffield to drown herself in the carp-pond? And did I not once petrify an entire whole house full of guests by playing nine-pins on the lawn using my own skull as a bowling ball? I will not rest until I have driven them all quite mad.

I shall wait until the house is still again, then I shall begin their final torment. For the United States Minister and his wife, I'll appear over them as they sleep and place a clammy hand on Mrs. Otis's forehead, whilst hissing into her trembling husband's ear the awful secrets of the tomb. As for the twins, the first thing to be done, of course, will be to sit upon their chests, so as to produce the stifling sensation of nightmare. Then, as their beds are quite close to each other, I'll stand between them in the form of a green, icy-cold corpse, 'till they become paralyzed with fear. The boy I will visit last and for him I'll reserve my most gruesome visitation. I will gibber at him from the foot of his bed, and stab myself three times in the throat to the sound of low music.

SCENE 9 – THE NEW GHOST

The main landing. Later that night

Sir Simon steps stealthily out of the wainscoting and makes his way slowly, silently towards the master bedroom. Just as he is about to reach out for the door a horrible spectre, motionless as a carved image, and monstrous as a madman's dream. Its head bald and burnished; its face round, and fat, and white; and hideous laughter seems to have writhed its features into an eternal grin. From the eyes stream rays of scarlet light, and it is clothed in a hideous garment, like to his own. With a piteous wail of terror, Sir Simon falls back to the other end of the landing, hiding his blanched face in his hands. Never having seen a ghost before, he is naturally terribly frightened.

After a time, however, the brave old Canterville spirit decides to assert himself itself, and go and speak to the other ghost. He makes his way across the landing, this time with more confidence. On reaching the ghost he extends his right hand in formal greeting.

SIR SIMON: I don't believe I've had the honour of making your acquaintance. Sir Simon de Canterville, 2nd Earl of...

As he shakes the ghost's hand the whole arm comes off. Then the head slips off and rolls to the floor. He now finds himself standing in front of is a white bed-curtain, with a sweeping-brush for a body, and a hollow turnip for a head lying at his feet! Unable to understand this curious transformation, he clutches the placard with feverish haste.

“Ye Only True and Original Spook,
Beware of Imitations
All others are counterfeit.”

SIR SIMON: I've been tricked, foiled, out-witted by a couple of...

Stars and Stripes can be heard/seen giggling and running away

SIR SIMON: I swear on The Canterville honour that before the cock has sounded twice his merry horn, deeds of blood will be wrought, and murder will walk abroad with silent feet!

He exits

SCENE 10 - FAILED ATTEMPTS SEQUENCE

The main landing. The same night.

The action now moves more swiftly. We see Sir Simon's attempts at haunting the family thwarted in various ways by the twins. We perhaps see him changing guises in his room at one side of the stage:

On the first attempt he trips over the wire stretched between walls on the landing

Then crossing the stage again in chains - as he reaches the door an outstretched arm appears handing him the bottle of lubricant. He takes it, applies it, thanks the hand and shuffles quietly back the way he came

The final attempt is in his most gruesome guise. Just he reaches the opposite side of the stage two figures appear in white bed sheets making terrible ghostly sounds. Sir Simon shrieks and is chased off. He exits and we see that it is only the twins who break down in laughter, celebrating their victory.

SCENE 11 – AFTER CHURCH

Sunday Morning. Main Hallway. The family returning home from Church. Mrs Umney greets them.

MRS UMNEY: Welcome home. Allow me to take your coats and hats. I thought you might be in need of refreshment so I have set out some tea and biscuits in the front room.

LUCRETIA: It is a shame, Mrs Umney, that you couldn't join us at church this morning. The Reverend Dampier spoke so eloquently on charity, you would certainly have been moved to hear him speak. Last week he gave an equally touching sermon on community not only extending to those who are native to a place but all who have made it their home.

MRS UMNEY: The reverend does indeed have a splendid way with words. However, I have not felt welcome in his congregation for some time. I have been housekeeper at Canterville Chase for many years and I fear the Reverend in some way blames me for his encounter with the ghost.

HIRAM: I must say he does seem rather obsessed with the presence of Sir Simon in this house. He often enquires after Sunday mass of our encounters with the ghost and this morning I had to admit to not seeing him for some time.

MRS UMNEY: Yes it has been rather peaceful of late at night, a blessed relief I might add.

WASHINGTON: I think he's scared of the twins. Stars and Stripes have now laid traps in every corridor and patrol the upper floors with their pop guns before bedtime. I'd be cautious too if I were him.

MRS UMNEY: Yes, unfortunately, I am growing quite familiar with their inventive traps myself. Mr Otis I must ask you to have them remove them, the other morning I nearly shattered the family china tripping over a device which had been laid across the pantry door.

WASHINGTON: Yes I'm certain he must be scared as the stain has not returned for days and it always comes back without fail, in one colour or another.

LUCRETIA: *(noticing that Virginia has not removed her coat or hat)* Virginia, dear, please remove your hat inside the house.

VIRGINIA: I think I should like to go out riding before lunch. May I papa?

LUCRETIA: On your own, darling?

VIRGINIA: Yes mother, why not?

HIRAM: Yes, indeed, why not? As long as you're careful and back in time to wash and change for dinner. You must promise to stay away from the upper field though.

LUCRETIA: Why the upper field, dear?

HIRAM: Well now, a few days ago a group of travelling Gypsies approached me by the south gate asking permission to camp on our land. Having been moved as you were by the Reverend's sermon last week on community, and being somewhat of an immigrant myself, I could hardly deny them. So I offered them the upper field for a short while.

VIRGINIA: I promise, father, that I will stay away from there, and to be home in time for dinner. May I go?

LUCRETIA: Yes dear, you may.

VIRGINIA: Thank you, papa.

She exits kissing her father on the cheek as she goes

LUCRETIA: *(calling after her)* And don't ride too fast. And take care not to tear your dress, I've repaired it twice already.

HIRAM: She'll be fine, dear. Now, Mrs Umney, did you say there was tea?

They all exit towards the front room

SCENE 12 – VIRGINIA MEETS SIR SIMON

Main landing. Later that day. Virginia, returning from her ride.

VIRGINIA: *(Calling out)* Mrs Umney! Mother!

As she moves through the house she discovers Sir Simon on the upper landing sitting mournfully, leaning his head on his hand, staring out of the window. He has been staring at the "old tree" for hours. An almond tree at the bottom of the garden which hasn't blossomed for centuries but still stands.

VIRGINIA: Oh it's you!

Sir Simon does not respond but remains as he was – staring out of the window at the tree

VIRGINIA: What are you staring at?

Sir Simon still does not respond

VIRGINIA: Well if you are going to continue to be discourteous I shall leave you alone.

She turns to leave but something tops her

SIR SIMON: Ruined gold!

VIRGINIA: I beg your pardon?

SIR SIMON: The colour of the leaves which fall. Ruined gold.

VIRGINIA: I am so sorry for you, Mr Ghost. You do not seem happy. I am sorry that my brother and sister terrorise you so. But my they are going back to Eton tomorrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no one will annoy you.

SIR SIMON: It is absurd. Asking me to behave myself, quite absurd. Do you not understand? I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night. It is my only reason for existing.

VIRGINIA: It is no reason at all for existing. I know that you have been very wicked. Mrs. Umney told us, the first day we arrived here, that you had killed your wife."

SIR SIMON: I did. I admit it. But it was a purely family matter, and no one else's concern.

VIRGINIA: It is very wrong to kill anyone.

SIR SIMON: Yes, but you didn't know her. My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery. However, it is no matter now, for it is all over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, even though I did kill her.

VIRGINIA: 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?

SIR SIMON: No, I am a ghost. I cannot eat anything now; but it is very kind of you, all the same. You are much nicer than the rest of your rude, vulgar, dishonest family.

VIRGINIA: *(In anger)* It is you who are rude, and horrid, and vulgar, and as for dishonesty, you know you stole the paints out of my box to replace that ridiculous blood-stain in the dining room. First you took all my reds, including the 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. And it was quite ridiculous for you to use them all for who ever heard of emerald-green blood?

SIR SIMON: Well, really. What was I to do? It is a very difficult thing 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. As for colour, that is always a matter of taste: the Canterville's have blue blood, for instance, the very bluest in England. But I suppose an American wouldn't understand such things.

VIRGINIA: You know nothing about Americans, and the best thing you can do is to emigrate and improve your mind. My father will be only too happy to give you a free passage. Once in New York, you are sure to be a great success. I know lots of people there who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather, and much more than that to have a family ghost.

SIR SIMON: I don't think I should like America.

VIRGINIA: I suppose because we have no ruins and no curiosities. We may not have aristocrats moping around in decrepit country houses, but if the rest of them are only half as rude as you we are better off without them. Good evening, sir. *(She gives a sarcastic curtsy)* I will go and ask papa to request an extra weeks' holiday for the twins.

SIR SIMON: Please don't go, Miss Virginia. 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.

VIRGINIA: That's quite absurd! You have merely 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.

SIR SIMON: I have not slept for three hundred years. For three hundred years I have not slept, and I am so tired. You see that tree down there at the end of the garden.

VIRGINIA: You mean the dead one with no leaves?

SIR SIMON: It is not dead, but yes that one. You asked me what I was staring at before, well that was it. That almond tree has stood in the garden as long as I can recall but for over 300 hundred years now it has not blossomed. I have never once slept in all that time.

VIRGINIA: You poor man. Have you no place where you can sleep?

SIR SIMON: There is a place. A little garden, far away beyond the pine-woods. There the grass grows long and deep, there are the great white stars of the hemlock flower, there the nightingale sings all night long. All night long he sings, and the cold crystal moon looks down, and the yew-tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers.

VIRGINIA: You are talking of the Garden of Death.

SIR SIMON: 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 to-morrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open for me the portals of death's house, for love is always with you, and love is stronger than death is. Have you ever read the old prophecy over the fireplace?

VIRGINIA: Oh, often. I know it quite well. It is painted in curious black letters on a tapestry hanging in the library and 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 it means.

SIR SIMON: It means that you must weep with me for my sins, because I have no tears, and pray with me for my soul, because I have no faith, and then, if you have always been sweet, and good, and gentle, the angel of death will have mercy on me. This is how you can help me find peace, but you must come with me to a hidden place. You will see fearful shapes in darkness, and wicked voices

will whisper in your ear, but they will not harm you, for against the purity of a little child the powers of Hell cannot prevail.

VIRGINIA: I am not afraid and I will ask the angel to have mercy on you.

At this Sir Simon rises from his seat takes her hand with old-fashioned grace and kisses it. He begins to lead her across the room to his room - revealed to us now by a secret door hidden behind a tapestry. As she crosses the space we hear monstrous voices whispering "Go back! little Virginia," - "go back!" - "Beware! little Virginia, beware! we may never see you again," but Virginia does not listen.

SIR SIMON: *(Leaving through the door behind the tapestry)* Quick, quick. Follow me or it will be too late.

Virginia follows him through the tapestry/door which closes of its own accord behind them

SCENE 13 – THE SEARCH FOR VIRGINIA

The dining room. That evening,

Hiram, Lucretia and Washington are sitting at the table with plates of food in front of them. There is an empty space. They are waiting for Virginia who, uncharacteristically, has not come down for dinner.

WASHINGTON: May I begin father? I'm starving!

HIRAM: No you may not, son. We will wait for your sister. I'm sure she won't be long

LUCRETIA: It is very unlike her to be late for anything. What can have gotten into her?

Hiram rings a small bell which is placed in the middle of the table. Mrs Umney appears

MRS UMNEY: Yes, sir?

HIRAM: Would you be so kind as to call Virginia for dinner?

MRS UMNEY: I have called her once already, sir

HIRAM: In which case please go into her room and drag her down here if you have to. She made a promise that she would be washed and ready in good time for dinner and I won't have my children going back on their word.

MRS UMNEY: Certainly, sir

Mrs Umney exits. The family wait for her in silence

LUCRETIA: This really is most unlike her.

HIRAM: You are sure she returned from her ride?

LUCRETIA: Yes, I'm I heard her calling for Mrs Umney.

HIRAM: And have you seen her since?

LUCRETIA: Well, no, I haven't actually seen her. I assumed she has gone to her room for a rest

Mrs Umney enters

MRS UMNEY: Miss Virginia's room is empty, sir. The bedclothes undisturbed. I fear she has not been in there since this morning.

HIRAM: *(getting up from the table)* Right. No need to panic just yet. Washington?

WASHINGTON: Yes, father?

HIRAM: Head out to the stables. See if Virginia's horse is there.

WASHINGTON: Yes, sir.

HIRAM: Lucretia, you and Mrs Umney search every room

LUCRETIA: Where will you look, dear?

HIRAM: I intend to pay the Gypsies a visit in the upper field. If she hasn't returned from her ride, they may have seen which way she went.

They all exit to their various tasks. Multiple calls can be heard - "Virginia!" "Virginia, dearest!" "Miss Virginia" etc.

SCENE 14 – VIRGINIA IS FOUND

The family return from their various searches. Washington, Lucretia and Mrs Umney return first.

WASHINGTON: Have you found her, mother?

LUCRETIA: No, she was nowhere to be seen

MRS UMNEY: There is not a room left to search. She is not in the house.

Hiram enters. Lucretia rushes over to him

HIRAM: Did you find her?

LUCRETIA: I'm sorry dear, no. What did the Gypsies say?

HIRAM: When I got to the upper field there was no trace of them. They have moved on. Perhaps I should have allowed them to stay indefinitely. They might have seen her.

LUCRETIA: What do we do?

HIRAM: Washington?

WASHINGTON: Yes, father?

HIRAM: *(moving to the sideboard to write a note)* I want you to take this message to the local police station. Tell them who I am and have them send a telegram to Scotland Yard as a matter of urgency. You think you can do that for me?

WASHINGTON: Of course, father

Just as Washington turns to leave, Virginia appears in the doorway. She looks lost in thought as in a dream or trance. She is holding a small antique jewellery box. Her parents rush to her letting out expletives of joy/relief "Oh, thank God!" "My darling!" "Virginia!" etc. But before they can reach her she stops them by speaking

VIRGINIA: He's dead

HIRAM: Who's dead?

VIRGINIA: Sir Simon.

LUCRETIA: Of course he's dead, dear. He's a ghost!

VIRGINIA: No, no, he's finally dead. At peace.

WASHINGTON: What are you talking about Virginia?

HIRAM: Where have you been?

VIRGINIA: I've been with him this whole time. He has led very wicked existence, in life and as a ghost, but he was really sorry for all that he had done. So I stayed with him and listened to his story and prayed for God to forgive him. With that he was finally able to be at peace, to sleep in the garden of death. Look, he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died.

MRS UMNEY: *(Recognising the jewel box)* It can't be! These have been lost to The Canterville family for generations. Only talked about in stories, never seen by a single living member of the family. He must have had them in his possession all this time.

HIRAM: Then it's true you have been with him. But your mother and Mrs Umney searched the whole house. How was it they were unable to find you?

VIRGINIA: He has a secret room, in the eaves. The only way in is through a door hidden behind a tapestry. You must come and see for yourself if you don't believe me.

WASHINGTON: Hey look! The old withered tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers quite plainly in the moonlight.

VIRGINIA: He has been forgiven he can finally rest..

HIRAM: What did you say, dear?

VIRGINIA: Don't you see? The old almond tree. Before he died Sir Simon told me that the tree had not blossomed or borne any fruit in 300 years. The whole time he has been haunting this house it has been barren and now it is starting to blossom. It cannot be a coincidence. It cannot. He is finally at peace.

Lights fade to blackout.

SCENE 15 – THE FUNERAL

The family – Hiram, Lucretia, Washington & Virginia are gathered by the Old Almond Tree for the funeral service. Lord Canterville has returned from London for the service. Rev Dampier is finishing his sermon after the burial has taken place

REV DAMPIER: “...for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Today we lay to rest Sir Simon de Canterville. A man who, in his extended life, affected us all in some way, for better or for worse. And now Mrs Moira Umney would like to say a few words.

Lord Canterville clears his throat, signalling to the Reverend to get on with the ceremony

MRS UMNEY: *(taking out a small bible)* “Corinthians, chapter 15 teaches us much about death. *(reading)* When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. So it is written that we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

SCENE 16 – AFTER THE FUNERAL

The family and Lord Canterville stroll around the grounds. Hiram is carrying with him the box of jewels that Sir Simon gave to Virginia

HIRAM: My Lord Canterville, Mrs. Otis, who, I may say, is quite an authority on Art, informs me that these gems are of great monetary worth, and if offered for sale would fetch a tall price.

L.CANTERVILLE: My dear sir, your charming little daughter rendered my unlucky ancestor, Sir Simon, a very important service, and I and my family are much indebted to her for her marvellous courage and pluck.

HIRAM: But under these circumstances, Lord Canterville, I feel sure that you will recognise how impossible it would be for me to allow them to remain in the possession of any member of my family. However, Virginia is very anxious

that you should allow her to retain the box, as a memento of your unfortunate but misguided ancestor. As it is extremely old, and consequently a good deal out of repair, you may perhaps think fit to comply with her request.

L.CANTERVILLE: In light of this I cannot accept the jewels, they are clearly hers, and when Miss Virginia grows up, I dare say she will be pleased to have pretty things to wear. Also, I fear that if I were heartless enough to take them from her, the wicked old fellow would be out of his grave in a fortnight, leading me the devil of a life. As for their being heirlooms, nothing is an heirloom that is not so mentioned in a will or legal document, and the existence of these jewels has been quite unknown. Whatever activity Sir Simon may have shown in the corridor at night, in point of law he was really dead, and, as I recall, you agreed to take whatever came with the property, furniture, ghost and all.

Lord Canterville takes the box from Hiram and hands it to Virginia. They continue to stroll ahead – exiting.

LUCRETIA: My dear you have never told us what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost.

VIRGINIA: Please don't ask me, Mother, for I cannot tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I owe him a great deal.

Washington sniggers at this

VIRGINIA: Yes, don't laugh, Washington, I really do. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both. If it's alright I should like to stay here a short while.

LUCRETIA: Yes, alright dear. But don't stay too long or your Father will send out the search party, again.

VIRGINIA: Yes, mother.

Virginia waits for Lucretia and Washington to exit then slowly makes her way to the tree, under which is Sir Simon's grave. She kneels down and places the jewel box by his gravestone

VIRGINIA: '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.'

BLACKOUT

THE END