

His listened carefully for a few moments – and heard the sound of footsteps. He immediately got out of bed, took a small bottle out of his case, and opened the bedroom door.

He saw a terrible old man facing him in the pale moonlight. The old man's eyes were as red as fire, and he had long grey hair which fell over his shoulders. His clothes were in the style of an earlier century, and they were dirty and full of holes. Heavy, rusty chains hung from his arms and legs.

'My dear sir,' said Mr Otis, 'you really must put some oil on those rusty chains. For that purpose I'm giving you a small bottle of Smith's Rising Sun Oil. According to the makers, you only have to use it once. It's quite famous in America. Everybody uses it, and you will see that there are letters from well-known Americans printed on the bottle.'

Mr Otis put the bottle down on a small table.

'I'll leave it here for you,' he said. 'I'll be happy to give you more if you need it.'

Then the Ambassador went back to his bed.

For a moment, the Canterville Ghost did not move. He was shocked and angry. Then he knocked the bottle of oil violently on to the floor and hurried away down the passage. A strange green light shone out from his body, and he screamed – a deep and terrible cry – into the night.

When he reached the top of the great stairs, a door opened. Two little figures in white appeared out of the darkness, and a large pillow flew past his head! The ghost quickly did the only thing that seemed safe. He disappeared into the wall.

When he reached his secret room in the western part of the house, the ghost sat down in the moonlight and tried to think. He could not believe what had just happened. He had never been so insulted in all his 300 years of excellent and famous haunting!

To make himself feel better, he remembered some of his finest performances.

'There was Lord Canterville's aunt,' he said to himself. 'I put my skeleton hands on her shoulders and almost frightened her to death! That was wonderful! And before that there were the four girl servants. They ran away screaming after they saw me smiling at them through the curtains of the small bedroom! And there was the man-servant. He shot himself after he saw a green hand knocking at the window. Then there was the beautiful Lady Stutfield. She had to wear a black cloth round her neck to hide the mark of five skeleton fingers burnt into her white skin.'

The Canterville Ghost smiled to himself, but his smile quickly disappeared.

'And now? Now some terrible modern Americans come and offer me Rising Sun Oil, and throw pillows at my head! Well, I'll make them sorry! Oh, yes, I will!'

For the rest of that night, the ghost sat there, thinking deeply.



The next morning, when the Otis family met at breakfast, they discussed the ghost for some time. The Ambassador was a little annoyed that his present had not been accepted.

'I don't wish to harm the ghost in any way,' he said. He looked at his young sons. 'And it is not polite to throw pillows at someone who has been in this house for so long.'

This was a very fair thing to say, but the twins shouted with laughter until Mr Otis looked coldly at them.

The Ambassador continued. 'But if the ghost refuses to use the Rising Sun Oil, we'll have to take his chains away from him. It's quite impossible to sleep with that noise outside the bedrooms every night.'

But for the rest of the week, the house was quiet. The only worrying thing was the bloodstain on the library floor. Each day Washington cleaned the floor with Pinkerton's Wonder Stain Cleaner, and each night Mr Otis locked the doors and windows.

But every morning the bloodstain was back again.

And, even stranger, it changed colour! Some mornings it was a dull red, then it was bright red, then a rich purple, and once a bright green. These changes amused the family, and every evening they tried to guess what colour it would be the next day.

Only little Virginia didn't seem to share the joke. For some reason she was upset at the sight of the bloodstain, and she very nearly cried on the morning when it was bright green.

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Not long after they had gone to bed, the family were suddenly frightened by a terrible crash in the hall. Rushing downstairs, they found that a large suit of old armour had fallen from its usual place on to the stone floor. The Canterville Ghost was sitting in a sixteenth-century chair. He was rubbing his knees, with a look of great pain on his face.

The twins had brought their pea-shooters with them and immediately began to shoot dried peas at him, while Mr Otis aimed his gun.

'Hold up your hands!' said the Ambassador.

The ghost jumped up with a wild and angry cry and flew straight through them like the wind. He put out Washington's candle as he passed, and suddenly they were left in complete darkness.

When the ghost reached the top of the stairs, he turned and gave his terrible ghostly laugh. This famous laugh had been very useful on more than one occasion, turning Lord Raker's hair white, and causing three servants to run away in terror.

But before the sound died away, a bedroom door opened and Mrs Otis came out. She was carrying a bottle in her hand.

'I'm afraid you're not well,' she said to the Canterville Ghost. 'So I've brought you a bottle of Dr Dobell's Medicine. If you have stomach trouble, you will find that it's an excellent cure.'

The ghost stared angrily at her, and immediately began to make preparations to change himself into a large black dog. He



The twins had brought their pea-shooters with them . . .

was quite famous for this. But the sound of young footsteps coming up the stairs made him change his mind, and he disappeared with the deep cry of a dead man as the twins came near.

When he reached his room, the ghost became really unhappy. The twins' tricks were annoying, of course, but he was especially angry that he had not been able to wear the suit of armour. He hoped that even modern Americans would be excited at the sight of a Ghost in Armour.

It was his own suit. He had worn it with great success at Kenilworth in 1575, and Queen Elizabeth herself had said how handsome he looked. But when he had put it on for the Americans, the weight of the whole suit had been too great for him. He had fallen, hurting both his knees badly.

For some days after this, he was very ill. He only left his room to keep the bloodstain in good condition. But he took great care of himself, and he soon felt better. Then he decided to try, once again, to frighten the American Ambassador and his family.

He chose Friday, 17th August, for his appearance, and spent most of that day planning and preparing. He was going to wear a large hat, he decided, and the white burial sheet. And he would carry a rusty sword.

In the evening there was a violent storm. All the windows and doors in the old house shook noisily, and the rain crashed down on to the roof. It was perfect weather for haunting, and he loved it.

The ghost planned to start in Washington Otis's room. He was especially angry with that young man. He knew that Washington was the one who regularly used Pinkerton's Wonder Stain Cleaner to clean away the bloodstain. He intended to go quietly to Washington's room, make ghost noises at him, then cut his own throat to the sound of low music. This would fill the stupid young man with terror.

Next, he would go to the room of the Ambassador and

his wife. There he would place an ice-cold hand on Mrs Otis's face while he whispered the terrible secrets of death into her husband's ear.

He had not made a decision about little Virginia. She had never insulted him in any way, and she was pretty and gentle. Perhaps a few soft 'Aaaahs!' from behind the curtains, he thought. Or if that did not wake her, a feverish movement of the blanket with ghostly fingers. He would decide later.

He was certainly going to frighten the twins, there was no doubt about that. Their beds were quite close to each other, so he would stand between them and appear like a green, icy-cold dead body until they were too frightened to move. Then he would throw off the white sheet and move round the room in his famous 'Skeleton's Dance', which had put terror into the hearts of many people.

At half-past ten, he heard the family going to bed. For some time he could hear shouts of laughter from the twins' room. Clearly they were amusing themselves with the light-hearted cheerfulness of schoolboys. But at a quarter past eleven everything was quiet, and at midnight the ghost left his room.

Night birds flew against the windows or screamed from trees. The wind blew round the outside of the house, and there were the usual ghostly midnight sounds, but the Otis family slept peacefully. They did not know about the terrible things that the Canterville Ghost had planned for them.

High above the noise of the rain and the storm, the Canterville Ghost could hear the heavy breathing of the Ambassador.

He stepped out of the wall with a cruel smile on his face, and the moon hid behind a cloud as he went past the great hall window. He moved in silence – a ghostly shadow. The darkness itself seemed to hate him as he passed through it. Once he thought he heard a shout, and he stopped. But it was only a dog from the farm near the house.

At last he reached the corner of the passage that led to the room of the unfortunate Washington. For a moment or two, the Canterville Ghost stopped and listened. The wind blew through his long grey hair. Then the clock sounded a quarter past midnight, and he laughed cruelly and turned the corner.

With a scream of terror, he stepped back and covered his face with his long, bony hands. There, facing him, stood a large ghostly figure with a shining, hairless head!

It was like something from a madman's dream! Silent, ugly laughter held open its great mouth. From inside it, a red light burned like a fire. The body was covered, like the Canterville Ghost's, in a burial sheet. There was a notice on it – a list, no doubt, of terrible things done in the past. The Canterville Ghost did not wait to read it. He had never seen a ghost before. It frightened him!

He gave it another quick look, then turned and ran. He fell over his own white sheet, dropped his rusty sword into one of Hiram B. Otis's shoes (where it was found the next morning), and ran back to his room. There he fell down on to his bed and hid his face under the blanket.

After a time, he began to feel better, and he decided to go and speak to the other ghost when daylight came.

'With the terrible twins,' he thought, 'two ghosts will be better than one!'

So, just as the early morning sun was touching the hills with silver light, he returned towards the place where he had first met the other ghost.

It was still there, but something had happened to it. The light had gone from its eyes, and it was resting against the wall like a sick man. The Canterville Ghost rushed forward and took it in his arms.

You can imagine his shock when the head fell off, and the body fell to pieces! He found himself holding a white curtain.

A sweeping brush and a round, hollow vegetable lay at his feet!

He couldn't understand it. He quickly took the piece of paper from the curtain and read:

THE OTIS GHOST
The only true and real ghost.
All others are false.

Suddenly the Canterville Ghost understood. He had been tricked!



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 stop putting the bloodstain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly did not deserve it.

Ghostly appearances were a different thing and not under his control. It was his duty to appear in the passages once a week, and to make frightening noises from the great hall window on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. He had to do it. It is true that his life had been very bad, but he had a strong sense of duty in connection with his haunting work.

So, for the next three Saturdays, the Canterville Ghost walked the passages of Canterville Chase between the hours of midnight and three o'clock. He made sure that no-one heard or saw him. He took off his boots, walked as quietly as possible on the old floors of the house, wore a big black coat, and used the Rising Sun Oil on his chains. It is true that he only forced himself to use the oil with great difficulty. But one night, while the family were at dinner, he went into Mr Otis's bedroom and took the bottle.

Although he was very careful, he was not allowed to haunt without interruption. Strings were stretched across the passages,



*Suddenly the Canterville Ghost understood.
He had been tricked!*

and he fell over them in the dark. And once he had a bad fall after stepping on some butter that the twins had put on the top of the stairs.

This last insult made him very angry, and he decided to visit the boys in his famous appearance as 'Rupert, the Headless Lord'.

He had not appeared as this for seventy years, not since he had frightened the pretty Lady Barbara Modish. It took him three hours to get ready, but at last he was very pleased with his appearance. The big leather riding boots that went with the clothes were just a little too large for him, and he could only find one of the two big guns, but he was quite satisfied. At a quarter past one he began his silent walk down the passage.

When he reached the twins' room, he saw that the door was not completely closed. The ghost pushed it open wide and walked in – and a heavy bucket of water fell from the top of the door, wetting him to the skin, and just missing his left shoulder! At the same time he heard shouts of laughter from the twins.

The great shock made him run back to his room as fast as he could go, and the next day he was ill with a bad cold.



The Canterville Ghost now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family. He moved round the passages wearing soft shoes, but only when he was sure that he would not meet anybody.

The last terrible experience was on 19th September. He went down to the entrance hall. The time was about a quarter past two in the morning, and he felt sure that he would be safe there. He was going towards the library to see if any of the bloodstain was left when suddenly two figures jumped out at him from a dark corner. They waved their arms wildly above their heads, and screamed out 'BOO!' in his ear.

The ghost was very frightened and rushed towards the stairs.

But Washington Otis was waiting for him there with a big bottle of Gardener's Grass Grower, ready to pour over him. With enemies on every side, the ghost had to disappear into the great fireplace to escape. (Fortunately the fire was not lit.) From there, he had to reach his room through the chimneys, and when he arrived back he was terribly dirty and untidy.

After that, nobody saw him again. The twins tried to catch him several times, but the tricks only annoyed their parents and the servants. It was soon clear that the ghost's feelings were very badly hurt and that he would not appear.

Mr Otis began work again, writing his book about American politics. Mrs Otis gave a number of parties of the American kind, and surprised everybody in that part of the country. The twins played in the house and gardens. And Virginia rode round the roads on her little horse with the young Duke of Cheshire, who had come to spend the last week of the school holidays at Canterville Chase.

Mr Otis wrote a letter to Lord Canterville, telling him that the ghost was gone. Lord Canterville replied, saying that he was happy to hear it.

But the ghost was still in the house. It is true that he felt very ill, but he was not ready to give up. When he heard that the young Duke of Cheshire was in the Chase, he made arrangements. He planned to make his most frightening appearance as the 'Ghost of the Moonlit Murderer'. He remembered how it had frightened old Lady Startup on New Year's Day in 1764. She had screamed and fainted, and had died three days later.

But at the last moment, his terror of the twins stopped the ghost leaving his room, and the little Duke of Cheshire slept in peace and dreamed of Virginia.

A few days after this, Virginia and her young admirer went out riding in the fields. But a tree tore her riding skirt very badly, and when they got home she went up the back stairs to mend it. She was running past the half-open door of one of the rooms when she saw someone inside. It was, she thought, her mother's servant, who sometimes took her needlework there. So she went to the door to ask the girl to mend her skirt.

But to her great surprise, it was the Canterville Ghost himself! He was sitting by the window, watching the first leaves of autumn falling from the trees. His head was on his hand, and he looked terribly unhappy. Little Virginia's first idea was to run away and lock herself in her room, but then she began to feel sorry for him.

He didn't know she was there until she spoke to him.

'I'm so 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.'

The ghost looked round in surprise at the pretty little girl who was daring to speak to him. 'It's silly to ask me to behave myself,' he answered. 'Very silly.'

'Why?' she said.

'Because I have to make noises with my chains, and cry through keyholes, and walk about at night,' said the Canterville Ghost. 'It's my only reason for being alive.'

'That's no reason for being alive, and you know you've been very bad,' said Virginia.

The ghost said nothing.

'Mrs Umney told us, when we arrived here, that you killed your wife,' Virginia continued.

'Well, yes, that's true,' said the ghost, sounding rather annoyed.



His head was on his hand, and he looked terribly unhappy.

'But it was a family matter, and nobody else's business.'

'It's very wrong to kill someone,' said Virginia.

'Oh, it's easy for people to blame me when they don't understand!' replied the Canterville Ghost. 'My wife was plain – even ugly – and she was a bad housekeeper. She knew nothing about cooking. But it doesn't matter now; it was a long time ago. But I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to make me die of hunger, even if I did kill her.'

'Die of hunger?' said Virginia. 'Oh, Mr Ghost – I mean Sir Simon – are you hungry? I have a sandwich in my case. Would you like it?'

'No, thank you,' said the ghost. 'I never eat anything now. But it's very kind of you. You're much nicer than the rest of your nasty, rude, dishonest family.'

'Stop!' cried Virginia angrily. 'You're the one who's rude and nasty. And if we're talking about dishonesty, you know you stole the paints out of my box to make that silly bloodstain in the library.'

The ghost was silent.

'First you took all my red colours, and I couldn't paint any more pictures of the sun going down in the evenings,' Virginia continued. 'Then you took the green and the yellow. In the end I only had dark blue and white, so I could only paint moonlight scenes, which are very difficult. I never told the others about it, although it was very annoying and silly. Who has ever heard of bright green blood?'

'Well, really,' said the ghost, rather ashamed, 'what could I do? It's very difficult to get real blood these days. And because your brother started the fight with his Wonder Stain Cleaner, it seemed all right to take your paints. What's wrong with that? You Americans don't understand anything.'

'You don't know anything about Americans or America,' said Virginia. 'Why don't you go there? Father will be happy to pay for

your ticket to travel on a ship. There are people in America who would pay a hundred thousand dollars to have a family ghost.'

'No, thank you,' said the ghost. 'I don't think I'd like America.'

'Why? Because it doesn't have any terrible old houses?' said Virginia. 'Because everything's new and modern?' She was angry now. 'Excuse me. I'll go and ask my father to give the twins another week's holiday!'

'Please don't go, Miss Virginia,' cried the ghost. 'I'm so lonely and unhappy, and I really don't know what to do. I want to go to sleep, but I can't.'

'That's silly!' she said. 'You just go to bed and blow out the candle. There's no difficulty about sleeping. Even babies know how to do that, and they aren't very clever.'

'I haven't slept for 300 years,' the ghost said sadly.

Virginia's beautiful blue eyes got bigger and bigger with surprise. 'Three hundred years!' she said.

'Yes,' said the ghost. 'And I'm so tired.'

Virginia's little lips began to shake like the leaves of a flower, and she came towards him. She looked into his old, tired face.

'Poor, poor Ghost,' she said quietly. 'Isn't there a place where you can sleep?'

'Far away beyond the woods,' he answered in a low dreamy voice, 'there's a little garden by an old empty church. There the grass grows long and deep, and there are the white stars of wild flowers. A little bird sings all night, and the cold moon looks down, and the big old tree stretches out its arms over the sleepers.'

Virginia's eyes filled with tears, and she hid her face in her hands. 'You – you mean the Garden of Death,' she whispered.

'Yes, Death,' said the ghost. 'Death must be so beautiful. Lying in the soft brown earth, with the grass waving above your head, and listening to silence. I'd love to have no yesterday, and no tomorrow – to be at peace!' He looked at her. 'Have you ever read the old words on the library window?'

'Oh, often,' cried the little girl. 'I know them quite well. They're painted in old black letters that are hard to read. There are only four lines:

*When a golden girl prays for you,
When a small child cries, too,
Then the whole house will be still
And peace will come to Canterville.*

But I don't know what they mean.'

'They mean this,' the Canterville Ghost said sadly. 'You can cry for me, and for everything that I've done wrong, because I have no tears. You can pray with me, because I'm bad and can't pray. And then, if you've always been sweet and good and gentle, Death will be kind to me. You'll see terrible shapes in the darkness, and ghostly voices will whisper in your ear, but they won't harm you. They can't win the fight against the innocence and goodness of a child.'

Virginia did not answer, and the ghost looked down unhappily at her golden head.

Suddenly she stood up, very pale, and with a strange light in her eyes.

'I'm not afraid,' she said clearly. 'I'll pray for you to die, and for you to have peace.'

He stood up with a faint cry of happiness. Taking her hand, he bent over it and kissed it. His fingers were as cold as ice and his lips burned like fire, but Virginia went with him as he led her across the room.

At the end of the room, he stopped. He said some words that she could not understand. She saw the wall slowly open, and there was a great black hole in front of her. A bitter cold wind pulled at them, and in a moment the wall had closed behind them and the room was empty.

◆

About ten minutes later, the bell rang for tea, but Virginia did not come down from her room. Mrs Otis sent a servant to fetch her, but after a little time he came back.

'I can't find Miss Virginia anywhere,' he said.

At first, Mrs Otis did not worry. She knew that Virginia liked to go out into the garden in the evenings to get flowers for the dinner-table. But at six o'clock she sent the twins out to look for their sister while she and Mr Otis searched every room in the house.

At half-past six the boys came back.

'We can't find Virginia anywhere,' they said.

Everyone was now very anxious. They searched the house again, and then the gardens and the park. Next they searched the woods and fields round Canterville Chase, but they still could not find Virginia.

Mr Otis, Washington and two male servants went into the village.

'Have you seen Virginia?' they asked people.

But nobody could help.

When it was almost midnight, they went back to the house. They were very worried, but they could do nothing more until the morning.

Everyone was in the hall when the clock sounded midnight. Suddenly they heard a loud noise, followed by a terrible cry. A crash of thunder shook the house, and the sound of ghostly music filled their ears.

A secret door in the wall at the top of the stairs opened . . . and Virginia stepped out. She looked very pale, and there was a little jewel box in her hand.

They all rushed to her. Mrs Otis took her in her arms; the Duke of Cheshire could not stop kissing her; the twins went into a wild war dance round the group.

'Where have you been?' said Mr Otis. 'We looked everywhere for you! Your mother's been frightened to death. You must never play these tricks again!'

'Except on the ghost! Except on the ghost!' shouted the twins, laughing and dancing about.

'My dear little girl, thank God you're safe,' said Mrs Otis. 'You must never leave my side again, Virginia.' And she kissed the shaking child and put a hand in the golden hair.

'Father,' said Virginia quietly, 'I've been with the Ghost. He's dead, and you must come and see him. He was very bad, but he was also really sorry for everything that he did. He gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died.'

They stared at her in surprise, but she led them through the opening in the wall and down a narrow secret passage. It was lit by a candle that Washington was holding in his hand. Finally they came to a great black door. Virginia touched it, and it moved back heavily. They stepped into a little low room with a stone ceiling and one very small window.

There was a large iron ring in the wall, and they saw a skeleton chained to it. The skeleton was lying on the stone floor. It seemed to be reaching for a wooden plate and a water pot which had been placed just too far away from it.

Virginia put her hands together and began to pray silently. The others looked down at the skeleton of Sir Simon de Canterville.

'God has forgiven him,' said Virginia, and a beautiful light seemed to appear around her face.

'What a wonderful person you are!' cried the young Duke of Cheshire, and he kissed her.

◆

Four days later, at about eleven o'clock at night, they put Sir Simon de Canterville into the ground under the old tree, in the Garden of Death, where he wanted to be. Lord Canterville came