

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST, by Oscar Wilde

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

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

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

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

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

He was looking at the library window which was made of

coloured glass. There were words painted on the glass.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She turned to go, but the ghost spoke again.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

'Have you read the writing on the library window?'
'Yes,' said Virginia, 'but I do not understand it.'
'Look,' said the ghost. 'Read the lines on the window.'
Virginia looked at the window and read the lines of poetry:

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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