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Oscar Wilde

The Canterville Ghost

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This story is recorded in full.

n. track

end



These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the passages linked to the listening activities.



PART ONE

The Stain

Mr Hiram B. Otis was American. He was rich and very important. He wanted to live in an old house in England, so he decided to buy Canterville Chase, the home of Lord Canterville. Everyone told him that he was very foolish. 'Canterville Chase is haunted,' they said.

Lord Canterville himself told Mr Otis why he preferred not to live in the house. 'Many members of my family have seen the Ghost. My grandaunt, the Duchess, was dressing for dinner one night when, suddenly, the hands of a skeleton touched her on the shoulders. She never recovered¹ from the shock. My wife, Lady Canterville, cannot sleep at night because of the mysterious noises in the house.'

'My Lord,' said Mr Otis, 'I'll take the house with the furniture and the Ghost. I come from a modern country where we have



track 02

1. **recovered** : became well again.



everything that money can buy. If ghosts really existed in Europe, I'm sure that an American would take one back home. He would put it in a museum or a show for everyone to see.'

Lord Canterville smiled. 'The Ghost really exists. People have seen it many times in the last three hundred years, since 1584 in fact. It always appears before the death of any member of my family.'

'Well, sir, in *my* home the *doctor* appears before the death of any member of my family,' laughed Mr Otis.

'But I'm an American,' he continued, 'and Americans don't believe in ghosts. They're an old-fashioned European idea.'

'If you don't mind a ghost in the house, that's all right. But please remember that I have told you.'

A few weeks later Lord Canterville sold Canterville Chase to the Americans.

There were six people in the Otis family. Mr Otis himself was a minister of the United States government. His wife, Mrs Lucretia Otis, was a beautiful lady. As a young woman in New York, she had been famous for her beauty. She was full of energy and very healthy.

They had called their oldest son Washington¹ in a moment of patriotism. He was tall, blond and good-looking. He liked dancing very much and his only fault was that he enjoyed the company of the British aristocracy. His sister, Virginia, was fifteen years old with large blue eyes; she was lovely. She loved riding her pony in the country. A young English lord, Cecil, Duke of Cheshire, was in

1. **Washington** : George Washington became the first president of the United States in 1789.



love with her. The youngest children were twins. ¹ They were often naughty but everybody liked them.

When the family came to live at the house, they drove from the station in a carriage. It was a lovely July evening. The sun was low in the sky and the birds were singing. But as they came near Canterville Chase, the weather changed. Dark clouds appeared. Some large black birds flew over their heads. It began to rain. In the garden near the house, they saw an old black tree with no leaves or flowers on it.

An old woman dressed in black with a white apron was waiting for them on the steps of the house. This was Mrs Umney, the housekeeper. ²

1. **twins** : two babies born at the same time.

2. **housekeeper** : person who looks after the house.



'Welcome to Canterville Chase,' she said. They followed her through the dark wooden hall into the library. Tea¹ was ready for them.

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

'What's that mark?' she asked.

'It's blood,' replied the old housekeeper.

'How horrible!' said Mrs Otis. 'I don't like bloodstains in the sitting room. Please remove it.'

Mrs Umney smiled.

'It's the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville. Her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, murdered her in that exact place in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared nine years later and nobody has ever found his body. But his guilty spirit still haunts Canterville Chase. And nobody can remove the stain.'

'Nonsense!' cried Washington in a loud voice. "'Pinkerton's Champion Cleaner" will clean it away. It's the latest American stain remover.'²

He knelt down and rubbed³ the floor with the 'Champion Cleaner'. In a few moments, the blood had disappeared.

'I knew "Pinkerton's" would do it,' he said triumphantly.

At that moment, there was a great flash of lightning and a boom of thunder.⁴ They jumped to their feet, and Mrs Umney fainted.

'What a terrible climate,' said Mr Otis calmly, lighting a cigar. 'I'm not surprised that people want to emigrate.'

1. **tea** : (here) a small afternoon meal: cold meat, salad, cakes and cups of tea.

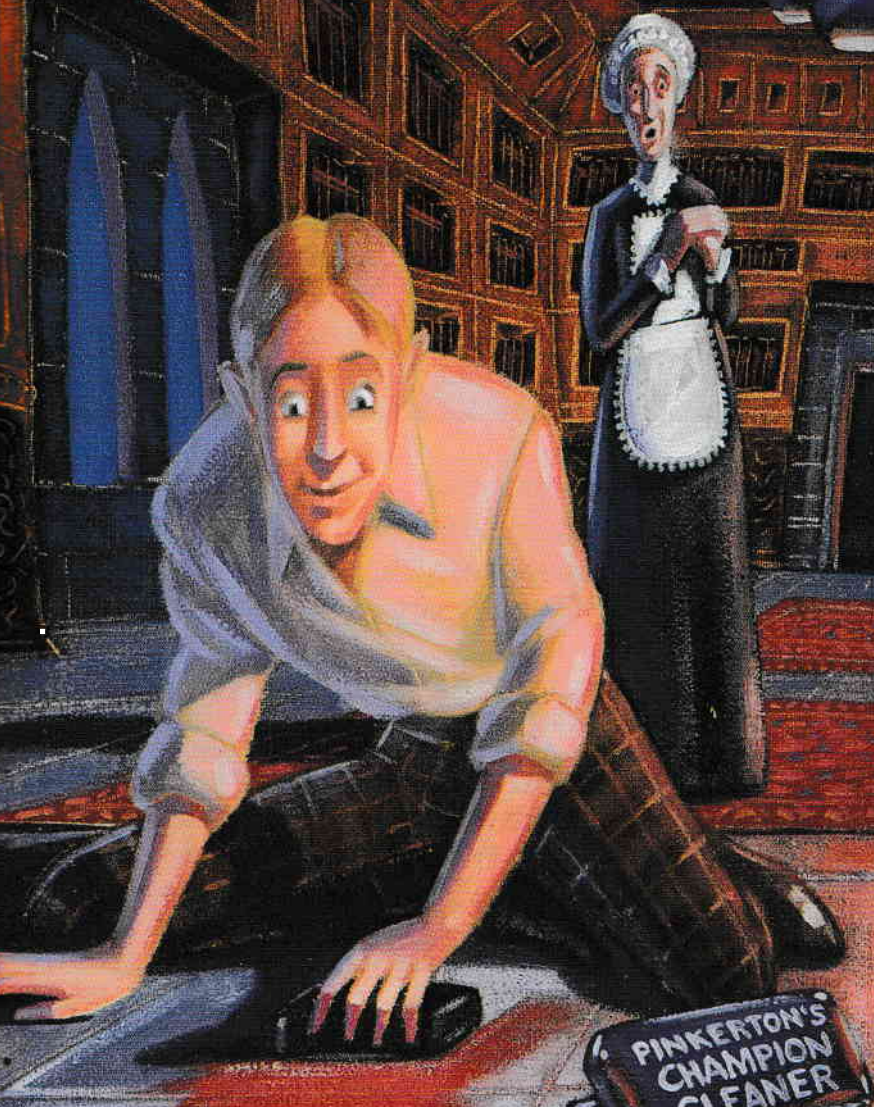
2. **stain remover** : a liquid which takes away marks.

3. **rubbed** : cleaned by moving the cleaner back and forward (see picture on page 17).

4. **thunder** : loud noise in the sky during a storm.

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PET 1 Comprehension check

Look at the sentences below about the events and characters in Part One. Reread Part One to decide if each sentence is correct or incorrect. If it is correct, tick (✓) A as your answer. If it is not correct, tick (✓) B.

	A	B
1 Lord Canterville did not believe in the Ghost.	☐	☐
2 Mr Otis thought that ghosts were an un-American idea.	☐	☐
3 The weather improved as they approached the house.	☐	☐
4 The tree in the garden seemed to be dead.	☐	☐
5 Mrs Umney was the person who guarded the house.	☐	☐
6 Mrs Umney believed the stain was the blood of a murdered woman.	☐	☐
7 Washington did not agree with Mrs Umney's ideas.	☐	☐
8 Everyone was afraid when they heard the thunder and lightning.	☐	☐
9 Mr and Mrs Otis reduced Mrs Umney's wages.	☐	☐
10 The Otis family thought that the Ghost was dangerous.	☐	☐

2 Humour

'Humour' is the quality in something that makes you laugh or smile. If you laugh or smile at something you think that it is 'humorous' or 'funny'.

- A** A lot of the humour in this story comes from what the Americans say or do when they meet English traditions – for example, the Ghost! The first moment is when Lord Canterville says that the Ghost always appears before someone in the family dies, and Mr Otis says that in his family the doctor always appears. Find a couple of other moments like this. Do you think these moments are humorous?
- B** Why does Mrs Umney recover after she has fainted? Do you think this is a humorous moment?