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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **THE CANTERVILLE GHOST**

**a full-length play  
by  
Darwin Reid Payne**

**from a short story  
by  
Oscar Wilde**



**The Dramatic Publishing Company**  
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(THE CANTERVILLE GHOST)

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# THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

A Play in One Act  
For Three Men and Five Women

## CHARACTERS

LORD CANTERVILLE ..... a British gentleman  
MR. HIRIAM OTIS ..... father of the Otis family  
MRS. OTIS ..... his wife  
MIRIUM & MARLYN ..... their twin daughters  
VIRGINIA ..... their older sister  
MRS. UMNEY ..... housekeeper of Canterville Manor  
SIR SIMON ..... the Canterville Ghost

TIME: About 1900.

PLACE: The Great Hall of Canterville Manor.

The play is continuous in action.

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## THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

**THE SCENE:** *A large room in the Tudor Style. Sunlight from a late afternoon sun floods through one of the casements casting long amber beams of light. The rest of the room stands in shadow. For a moment the room is empty. Suddenly a pretty GIRL of fifteen runs down the steps. She stops in the middle of the landing, the sunlight revealing her wondering face as she surveys the grand hall. For a moment she is still, then she runs into the room. She looks at one portrait for a long second, and then goes to the other. Presently LORD CANTERVILLE and MR. OTIS descend the stairs.*

**LORD CANTERVILLE.** And that is all of the top floor in this wing. It's a very large house, as you can see, Mr. Otis.

**MR. OTIS.** You're right there, Lord Canterville. There aren't many houses back in America this big. (*He turns to the GIRL.*) How do you like your new home, Virginia?

**VIRGINIA** (*awestruck*). Ohhh, it's all so beautiful! (*Then the practical side speaks.*) But so many windows to keep clean.

**LORD CANTERVILLE.** There are indeed, Miss Virginia. In those days, all the English country manors were this big or bigger.

**MR. OTIS.** You don't say!

LORD CANTERVILLE. I'm happy you like the house and if I may say so, it's a really good bargain. I feel sorry to have to sell it.

VIRGINIA. Lord Canterville, whose pictures are those? Those big ones there?

LORD CANTERVILLE. Those, Miss Virginia? (*He walks to the portrait of the lady.*) This is Lady Eleanora Canterville, the lady who was killed in this very room over 300 years ago by her husband.

VIRGINIA. Oh! What beautiful jewels she has on. Were they real?

LORD CANTERVILLE. Very real indeed, and worth a good fortune. They disappeared after the death of Sir Simon Canterville and no one to this day has seen the smallest trace of a single one. Heaven only knows where they are. At least none of my family have ever found them.

MR. OTIS. Well, then, our castle has a mystery about it too, eh? And who is that gentleman?

LORD CANTERVILLE. That? Well might you ask, sir! That, sir, is the whole cause of my trouble and the reason I must sell the house. That is Sir Simon Canterville, Lady Eleanora's husband.

MR. OTIS. The one who did the dirty deed?

LORD CANTERVILLE. The same, sir. His guilty ghost has haunted this house ever since his own death. That was in 1584.

VIRGINIA. A real ghost!? Here!?

MR. OTIS. 300 years! Now that's a long time if you ask me.

LORD CANTERVILLE. Too long. Although the house has been in my family for all of that time, I simply

cannot put up with that dratted ghost and his pranks a moment longer!

MR. OTIS. Caused you a little trouble, huh?

LORD CANTERVILLE. From that day to this. Although I'm sorry to see the house leave our family, I'm certain you will give it good care. Perhaps you will be able to do something about that naughty Sir Simon.

VIRGINIA. Is he really here—here in the house?

LORD CANTERVILLE. He's here all right. Perhaps listening to us this very moment, the nasty old thing! (*The light dims and a low rumble of thunder is heard followed by the sound of rising wind. Then, without visible aid, a large metal serving plate leaps from the wall and crashes to floor. ALL three jump. The lights dim up, and the wind fades into silence.*)

MR. OTIS (*a pause*). Was that Sir Simon?

LORD CANTERVILLE. I'm afraid so. I thought he couldn't be far away. He is very inquisitive and forever playing tricks like that.

MR. OTIS. You don't say!

LORD CANTERVILLE. He has actually been seen by a great number of my family, from time to time, in various disguises and costumes.

VIRGINIA. A ghost that likes to dress up? That sounds like fun.

LORD CANTERVILLE. Oh yes! Why, not more than ten years ago we gave a fancy dress ball. And do you know, that blasted ghost came disguised as a guest. When the maid asked if he would like to leave his hat with her, he proceeded to remove his head along with it and gave her both.

MR. OTIS. No!

LORD CANTERVILLE. Yes! I think you'll find he is quite a ghost! He's played many a prank on me.

MR. OTIS. He sounds like a playful cuss. Well, if he really is here, I don't think I'd want to be in his shoes when the rest of my family get here. Say, Virginia, your mother and sisters should be here pretty soon, shouldn't they?

LORD CANTERVILLE. I believe I saw them coming in the front gate as we came down the stairs. My, you did have a lot of parcels and baggage.

VIRGINIA. I'll run and help. *(She exits.)*

MR. OTIS. We had so many bags I didn't think the boat from America would make it all the way to England. But when you've got three girls, and a wife, and a parrot, and a cat...

LORD CANTERVILLE. I understand. *(Looks off toward the front door.)* Ah, I believe they are here.

*(There is a babble of voices offstage and in a moment, the TWINS bound into the room.)*

MARLYN. Hello, Papa! Wowie! Look at the place, Mirium. A real castle!

MIRIUM. Papa! You didn't tell us our new house was made out of rocks! And so big!

MARLYN. Come on! Let's explore upstairs. *(LORD CANTERVILLE is plainly flustered by the whirlwind entrance of the TWINS. The Two GIRLS dash upstairs.)*

MR. OTIS. *(to the GIRLS)*. Take it easy up there! *(To LORD CANTERVILLE.)* That's the nosey and noisy part of the family.

MRS. OTIS *(off)*. Hiriam! Where are you?

MR. OTIS. I'm in here, my dear.



(MRS. OTIS flutters into the room followed by VIRGINIA. MRS. OTIS is carrying a hat box and covered bird cage. VIRGINIA carries a small paint box which she sets down on a side table. Turning to the unseen front door, MRS. OTIS addresses some BAGGAGE MEN.)

MRS. OTIS. Oh, dear me! Wait. Don't bring the trunks in here. Take all the bags and things to the back stairs. (To MR. OTIS.) There is a back stairway, isn't there?

MR. OTIS. Well, as a matter of fact there are three, so take your pick.

MRS. OTIS (disconcerted). Oh, dear! Three? (To the BAGGAGE MEN, off.) Well, pick out the widest staircase and take them up there. (She turns to MR. OTIS.) Well, Hiram, we're here, but I didn't think we'd make it at all. The baggage men kept telling me that I must have the wrong house, that this one was haunted and has been for hundreds of years.

MR. OTIS. That seems to be the case, my dear.

MRS. OTIS (her hand to her mouth). Oh!

MR. OTIS. Now don't get excited. Lord Canterville was just telling me that the ghost comes with the house along with the land and everything else.

MRS. OTIS. I do hope he isn't frightening?

MR. OTIS. Oh, you haven't met before, I believe.

LORD CANTERVILLE. No indeed. It is a pleasure to meet you, my dear Mrs. Otis. (Takes her hand and kisses it.)

MRS. OTIS (fluttering even more). Dear me...I mean, the pleasure is all mine, Lord Caterville...

MR. OTIS (quietly correcting her). Canterville, not Caterville.

MRS. OTIS. Ummm?

MR. OTIS. Lord *Canterville*.

MRS. OTIS. Oh, yes. Lord *Canterville*. (*She smiles.*) You have met Virginia?

LORD CANTERVILLE. We're old friends. I hope you will like our country, Mrs. Otis.

MRS. OTIS. Thank you, Lord *Canterville*. I do already, very much. And now, Hiriarn, how are we haunted?

MR. OTIS. By a ghost.

MRS. OTIS. Well, of course it's a ghost, but what kind? There are all sorts, you know. Oh, I do hope it's not a scary one. Is he horrible, Lord *Canterville*?

LORD CANTERVILLE. Actually he's not very scary at all. In fact he is rather humorous, if you care for that sort of humor, which I do not! That is his picture. (*Points to portrait.*)

VIRGINIA. He looks more frightened than frightening.

LORD CANTERVILLE. In any case, he has been a great nuisance to my family for many generations. What a mischief maker!

MR. OTIS. You know, Lord *Canterville*, I don't believe in ghosts until I see them with my own two eyes.

VIRGINIA. There are a lot of things we can't see with our eyes, Papa, but they are real just the same.

MR. OTIS (*with a smile*). I stand corrected.

MRS. OTIS. I don't care what you say, Hiriarn, I believe in ghosts and always have. Oh dear, I hope he likes us.

*(Just then the TWINS reappeared at the top of the stairs. On MIRIUM's head is an antique plumed helmet and in MARLYN's hand is a large broadsword. Also draped around her shoulders is a long velvet cape.)*

TWINS. Ghosts!

MIRIUM. Did you say ghosts?!

MARLYN. Where are they?? (*Wielding the sword which is much too big for her to handle.*) I'll take care of 'em!  
Bring 'em on! (*She swings the sword.*)

LORD CANTERVILLE (*ducks*). Good heavens!

MRS. OTIS. Children, come down here and behave yourselves. What will Lord Canterville think? And what on earth have you got on?

MARLYN. Just some play clothes. There are trunks full of them in the attic. You want to see? (*She starts to run back up the stairs.*)

MR. OTIS. Hold up there! You come back here.

MRS. OTIS. Lord Canterville, those things must belong to your family. Wouldn't you like to take them with you?

LORD CANTERVILLE. No, Mrs. Otis. When you bought the house, you also bought those. Besides, Sir Simon uses them to dress up in. I don't think he would like it if we took them away from the house.

MRS. OTIS. Sir Simon?

LORD CANTERVILLE. Yes, that was, er...is our ghost's name. Sir Simon Canterville. (*He indicates the picture.*)

MARLYN. Did he sell pies?

MIRIUM. Silly! That was *Simple* Simon. They prob'ly weren't even related.

MARLYN. Oh...

MR. OTIS. This is the other part of our family, Lord Canterville. (*Looking at ONE OF THE GIRLS.*) Which are you?

MIRIUM. Mirium. (*She curtsies.*)

MR. OTIS. So you must be Marlyn. (*She also curtsies.*)  
And that's the whole crew...except the parrot and the cat.

MIRIUM. The parrot's name is George...

MARLYN. And the cat's name is Cat.

LORD CANTERVILLE. I'm most pleased to meet you, ladies. That reminds me...You haven't met our Mrs. Umney, I believe.

MARLYN. Mrs. Yummy! *(The TWINS suppress a giggle.)*

MRS. OTIS. Shush! *(To LORD CANTERVILLE.)* She's the housekeeper you mentioned in your letters?

LORD CANTERVILLE. Yes. Mrs. Umney has been with my own family for many years. It seems that Sir Simon takes particular delight in sneaking up behind her when she has her hands full of dishes and saying "Boo" or some trifle such as ghosts use in their business. I would have thought she would have been here to meet us. *(At that moment there is a distant but terrific crash of crockery heard, followed by a "Lud, preserve us!")* That would be Mrs. Umney and Sir Simon too, if I'm not mistaken.

*(Into the room flutters the quaint little HOUSEKEEPER in black uniform with white lace cuffs and collar. She is surprised to see the family.)*

MRS. UMNEY. O, Lud, sir. I did not know you 'ad all arrived, so to speak. I'm very sorry, to be sure, not to 'ave been 'ere, but do you know...*(Points off.)*

LORD CANTERVILLE. We heard. Sir Simon?

MRS. UMNEY. Who else but 'im, the blaggard! And me thinkin' 'e was a cookie jar all the time.

MRS. OTIS. A cookie jar?!

MIRIUM. Full of cookies?!

MRS. UMNEY. Oh, yes, mum, that mean old ghost can change 'imself to whatever 'e's a mind to, and does it

too. Yesterday I swept up 'alf the kitchen before the broom, or what methought was a broom, said in a big voice, "Madam, 'ave the decency to 'old me right and I might sweep a lot cleaner," then 'e laughed fit to bust and disappeared up the chimney pipe.

MR. OTIS. Now, Mrs. Umney...!

MRS. OTIS (*to MR. OTIS*). Shhh, Hiriam, don't be rude. (*To MRS. UMNEY.*) We are very happy to meet you, Mrs. Umney. I'm Mrs. Otis.

MR. OTIS. And I'm Mr. Otis.

MRS. OTIS. And these are our daughters, Marlyn (*MIRIUM corrects her.*)

MIRIUM. I'm Mirium, Mama. (*She curtsies.*) Very pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'm.

MRS. OTIS. And *this* is Marlyn.

MARLYN (*curtsies*). Very pleased, ma'm.

MRS. UMNEY. 'ow nice. And you're Miss Virginia?

VIRGINIA. Yes, ma'm.

LORD CANTERVILLE (*taking out his pocket watch*). I really must be getting back to the village. It will be dark before I get there as it is. Here, Mr. Otis, is the deed to the house, the lands—and Sir Simon. (*Hands him a large old leather-bound book and some papers.*) Also, here is the complete history of Canterville Manor.

MR. OTIS. Thank you, sir. A pleasure to do business with you. (*Shaking hands with LORD CANTERVILLE.*) I'm sure we're going to be very happy here, all seven of us.

LORD CANTERVILLE. All seven? But there are only six of you.

MR. OTIS. Well, as Sir Simon lives here, or rather haunts here, I sort of think it only fitting to include him in our little family. A ghost by adoption, you might say. Come, I'll see you to the door.

LORD CANTERVILLE. Good night, all.

ALL. Good night, Lord Canterville. (*MR. OTIS and LORD CANTERVILLE exit to the front. MRS. OTIS removes hat pins from her hat and then removes hat.*)

MRS. UMNEY. Oh, mum. I thought you might be wantin' somethin' to eat after your trip and all, so I've made tea and a number of little cakes what as the little ones might like.

TWINS. Goody!

MRS. OTIS. That's most kind and I'm sure all of us would welcome it. (*MRS. UMNEY exits. MRS. OTIS, uncertainly....*) I'm going to take my hat up to...to wherever I'm to have my bedroom.

MARLYN. C'mon, we know where everything is.

MIRIUM. All over, we know.

TWINS. C'mon.

MRS. OTIS. Girls, do be careful now. Oh, and girls, if you see Sir Simon any place, make sure to curtsy nicely. Remember he is over three hundred years old.

*(MRS. OTIS retrieves the parrot cage and follows MARLYN and MIRIUM up the stairs and out of sight. MRS. UMNEY enters with tray of dishes.)*

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Umney, when is Sir Simon's birthday? We might have a little party for him now that he's one of the family. Maybe a nice angel food cake.

MRS. UMNEY. Not angel food for that old devil! If 'e was where 'e ought to be they wouldn't be feedin' 'im no angel food cake...(*MRS. UMNEY lets out with a loud whoop as if someone had pinched her. She jumps high into the air.*)