

On reaching the top of the stairs he recovered himself, and decided to give his famous demon's laughter. This he had on more than one occasion found extremely useful. It was said to have turned Lord Canterville's hair grey in a single night, and had certainly made three of Lady Canterville's French governesses leave before their month was up. He accordingly laughed his most horrible laugh, till the old room rang and rang again, but hardly had the terrible echo died away when a door opened, and Mrs Otis came out in a light blue dressing-gown.

'I am afraid you are far from well,' she said, 'and I have brought you a bottle of Dr Dobell's medicine. If it is of any use, you will find it an excellent remedy.' The ghost looked at her in fury, and began at once to make preparations for turning her into a large black dog, an accomplishment for which he was just famous, and to which the family doctor had always attributed the permanent madness of Lord Canterville's uncle. The sound of approaching footsteps, however, made him hesitate, so he contented himself with becoming faintly phosphorescent, and vanished with a deep churchyard groan, just as the twins had come upon him.

On reaching his room he entirely broke down, and became very upset. The vulgarity of the vulgar, and the materialism of Mrs Otis, were naturally extremely annoying, but what really upset him most was that he had been unable to wear the suit of armour. He had hoped that even modern Americans would be thrilled by the sight of a ghost in armour. But it was his own suit. He had worn it with success at the Kenilworth tournament, and had been highly complimented on it by no less a person than Queen Elizabeth herself. Yet when he had put

Glossary

- **accomplishment:** difficult thing one can do well
- **broke down:** cried
- **governesses:** women who look after and teach children
- **overpowered:** unable to control something
- **phosphorescent:** glowing with light
- **rang:** echoed with a sound
- **up:** (here) over

it on, he had been completely overpowered • by its weight, and had fallen heavily on the stone pavement, hurting both his knees seriously, and bruising his right hand.



For some days after this he was extremely ill, and hardly moved from his room at all, except to keep the blood-stain in good condition. However, by taking great care of himself, he recovered, and decided to make a third attempt to frighten the United States Minister and his family.

He selected Friday 17th August for his appearance, and spent most of that day looking through his costumes, finally choosing a large hat with a red feather, a shroud, and a rusty dagger. Towards evening a violent rainstorm started, and the wind was so strong that all the windows and doors in the old house shook and rattled. In fact, it was just the sort of weather he loved. His plan of action was to go quietly to Washington Otis's room, sit at the foot of the bed, and stab himself three times in the throat to the sound of wailing music.

He especially disliked Washington, because he knew that it was he who was in the habit of removing the famous Canterville blood-stain by means of Pinkerton's Paragon Beterger. Having caused a state of total terror in the young man, he was now removed to the room occupied by the United States Minister and his wife, and there place a cold, damp hand on Mrs Otis's forehead, and he whispered the awful secrets of the mortuary into her trembling husband's ear. With regard to little Virginia, he had not quite made up his mind. She had never insulted him in any way and was pretty and gentle. A few low groans from the wardrobe, he thought, would be more than sufficient, or, if that failed to wake her, he would roll at her bedcovers with twitching fingers.

Glossary

- **dagger:** knife with a handle
- **damp:** wet
- **foot:** (here) bottom
- **mortuary:** room where dead people are kept before they are buried
- **rattled:** made a loud noise
- **shroud:** cloth to cover a dead person
- **stab:** stick a knife in someone
- **twitching:** moving quickly and nervously

As for the twins, he was quite determined to teach them a lesson. The first thing to do was, of course, to sit on their chests, so as to reproduce the sensation of a nightmare. Then, as their beds were very close to each other, to stand between them in the form of a pale, ice-cold corpse until they became paralysed with fear, and finally to throw off the shroud, and crawl around the room, with white bleached bones and one rolling eyeball.

REVENGE

What do you think of the ghost's plans for revenge?
Have you ever decided to "teach someone a lesson"?
Why? What happened?

At half past ten he heard his family going to bed. For some time he was disturbed by wild shrieks of laughter from the twins, who, with the energy of schoolboys, were evidently amusing themselves before they went to sleep; but at a quarter past eleven all was quiet, and, as midnight sounded, he set out. The Otis family slept, unconscious of their doom, and high above the rain and storm he could hear the steady snoring of the Minister for the United States. He stepped quietly out of the room with an evil smile on his cruel, wrinkled mouth. On and on he went in the evil shadow, the very darkness seeming to hate him as he passed.

- **bleached:** made white (usually with a chemical)
- **corpse:** dead body
- **crawl:** move on your hands and knees
- **doom:** bad thing that is going to happen

- **eyeball:** the round part of your eye
- **snoring:** noise some people make when they are sleeping
- **wrinkled:** lined because he is old

He muttered • strange sixteenth-century curses • as he went, and held up the rusty dagger in the midnight air. Finally he reached the corner of the passage that led to Washington's room. For a moment he paused there, then the clock struck the quarter, and he felt the door had come. He chuckled • to himself, and turned the corner. But as soon as he had he done this, he fell back in terror, and hid his white face in his long, bony hands. Right in front of him was standing a horrible spectre •, still as a sculpture, and as dreadful as a madman's dream! Its head was bald • and shiny; its face round, fat and white and hideous •. Its laughter seemed to have changed its features into an evil grin. Rays of scarlet • light shone from its eyes, the mouth was a hole well • of fire, and horrible white clothes, like his own, were draped around the enormous form. On its chest was a large card with some antique writing, and with its right hand it held up a magnificent sword.

Because he hadn't seen a ghost before, he was, naturally, terribly frightened, and after a second quick look at the awful phantom, he ran back to his room. When he was in the privacy of his own apartment, he threw himself down on his small bed and hid his face under the clothes. After a time, however, the brave Canterville spirit asserted itself •, and he decided to go and speak to the other ghost as soon as it was daylight.

Glossary

- **asserted itself:** got courage
- **bald:** without hair
- **chuckled:** laughed in a cruel way
- **curses:** when you wish bad things for other people
- **hideous:** horrible
- **muttered:** said in a low voice
- **scarlet:** bright red
- **spectre:** ghost
- **well:** hole in the ground for water



So, just as the dawn was touching the hills with silver light, he returned towards the spot where he had first seen the terrible phantom, feeling that, after all, two ghosts were better than one, and that with the help of his new friend, he might safely fight against the twin. On reaching the spot, however, a terrible sight met his eyes.

Something had evidently happened to the spectre, for the light had entirely faded from its hollow eyes, the magnificent sword had fallen from its hand, and it was leaning against the wall in an uncomfortable way. He rushed forward and seized it in his arms, when, to his horror, the head fell off and rolled onto the floor. He suddenly found himself holding a body made from a white curtain, with a sweeping brush, a kitchen knife, and a hollow pumpkin lying at his feet! Unable to understand this strange change, he looked at the card, and there in the grey morning light he read these fearful words:



Glossary

- **faded:** became less bright
- **fakes:** false things; imitations
- **hollow:** with holes
- **learning:** standing against something in order to get support
- **seized:** took suddenly and violently

The whole thing became clear. He had been tricked, foiled and outwitted! The old Canterville look came into his eyes; he raised his withered hands high above his head, and swore that when the cockerel had crowed twice, acts of blood would be done, and the ghost would walk about with silent feet.

As soon as he had finished saying this a cock crowed in the distance. He laughed a long, low, bitter laugh, and waited. Four after hour he waited, but the cock, for some strange reason, did not crow a second time.

So finally, at half past seven, the arrival of the servants made him give up his wait, and he walked back to his room, thinking of his destroyed hopes. There he read several old books, and found that on every occasion he had used this oath, the cock had crowed twice.

He then got into a comfortable lead coffin, and stayed there until evening.

THE GHOST'S PROMISE

What does the ghost decide to do when he realises he has been tricked?
Why doesn't he do anything in the end?

- **bitter:** hard and angry
- **cockerel:** male of the hen
- **crowed:** sound a hen or cockerel makes (Jesus said that Peter was going to betray him after the cock crowed twice)
- **foiled:** stopped from being successful
- **lead:** a heavy metal
- **oath:** solemn promise
- **outwitted:** when someone is more clever than you
- **withered:** old and dry

After Reading

Characters

- 1 List the English characters who appear in the book and say who they are.
- 2 Complete the table describing the Otis family.

The Otis Family	Appearance and character
Hiram B.	

- 3 How does Wilde use the following things to show his view of Americans?
 - a) Pinkerton's Chamberlain Sun Remover and Paragon Detergent
 - b) Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator
 - c) Dr Dobell's medicine
- 4 Who says these things, or who do they refer to? And what do they show about the relationship between the British and the Americans?
 - a) "I come from a modern country, where we have everything money can buy... I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show."

- b) Indeed, in many ways, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we really have everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language.
- c) "I guess the old country is so overpopulated that they don't have enough decent weather for everybody."

5 What do the words in italics tell you about the Canterville Ghost and how is he different from traditional ghosts in other stories?

- a) the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless with *natural indignation*
- b) had he been so *badly insulted*
- c) he decided to *have revenge*
- d) with the *enthusiasm of true artists*, he went over his most celebrated performances
- e) he *entirely broke down*, and he was very upset
- f) he was, naturally, *terribly frightened*
- g) 'I am so *lonely* and so *unhappy*'

6 Sir Simon has a serious attitude of his duties as a ghost. Find quotations which show this attitude, and explain why he feels annoyed with his family.

7 Which characters in the story do you like most, and least, and why? Try to explain.

8 Imagine you are Mrs Umney. Describe what happens in the home after the Otis family arrives.



9 What questions would ask the ghost? Ask and answer in pairs.