

# Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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## *The Canterville Ghost*

Story by  
**Oscar Wilde**

Adapted for the Stage by  
**Marisha Chamberlain**

*The Canterville Ghost* was originally produced by the Children's Theatre Company in the 1991-92 season.

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**CHARACTERS :**

OSCAR WILDE

LORD CANTERVILLE, (former owner of Canterville Chase)

HIRAM B. OTIS, (the American Minister)

LUCRETIA TAPPAN OTIS, (wife of Hiram)

VIRGINIA OTIS, (daughter, age fifteen)

THE DUKE OF CHESHIRE, (Virginia's admirer, age sixteen)

CHIP AND CHARLIE OTIS, (sons, nine and ten years old)

MRS. UMNEY, (the housekeeper, long employed at the Chase)

THE GHOST

**SETTING:**

Canterville Chase and environs. The Chase is represented in two ways -- by an impressionistic jumble of staircases, halls and galleries on which the action of the play takes place and by a model of the Chase which comes to sit on a small table down of the action.

**TIME AND PLACE:**

Cheshire, England, around 1910.

## Act One. Prologue

Canterville chase in darkness. A spot of light illuminates a fabric on which we see the spooky outlines of a mansion amongst the bare branches of trees, under, an orange moon. The image ripples and as the spot enlarges we see it is a cape worn by a man whose back is to us. He turns to face us and gathers the cape about him.

**OSCAR WILDE:** Singular, isn't it. Good afternoon (*evening*). (*He drops the cape to reveal a double breasted topcoat, the front of which resembles a door.*) My name is Oscar Wilde. Writer. I wrote the little story you're about to see, "The Canterville Ghost". Now, I won't ask you if you believe in ghosts. That's a dull question. Of course you do -- it would be boring not to. Just think, after you die, to be able to float about all dressed up in fog and vapor! Clothing, I deeply, deeply believe is the single most immediate individual expression of truth, beauty, and power. In 1882 when I toured America, lecturing to the good and very, very practical American people on the subject of beauty, my dress caused a universal stir.

*(He takes off the topcoat, revealing a shirt with a ruff that resembles lilies sprouting out of stems represented by his suspenders, set upon a table marked by his beltline atop table legs marked by stripes on the creases of his trousers.)* What do you think of the suit? (*Lilies, stems, table, table legs, hmm?*) Well, why aren't you wearing something like it? At least something to compare. That flimsy thing -- you call that clothing? A "tee shirt"? Have you a cruel mother? Well, someone must be forcing you to wear that -- why on earth

would anyone choose to go about in broad daylight in underwear?

The boys appear up of the Canterville chase proper, and race as VIRGINIA dashes on chasing them. The DUKE OF CHESHIRE appears nearby and she stops at the sight of him and attempts to compose herself.

**DUKE OF CHESHIRE:** I say, are you American?

**VIRGINIA:** Yes, I am. And you're --

**DUKE OF CHESHIRE:** British, of course.

**VIRGINIA:** You don't say?

**DUKE OF CHESHIRE:** I do.

**VIRGINIA:** *(Gives a mocking courtesy)* Race you to t h e sign post!

She races off. He dashes after.

**OSCAR WILDE:** She'll beat him, of course. The American girl. She's dressed for it, I suppose. ... My story is called "The Canterville Ghost."

It takes place in jolly old England, but don't worry, you shan't be lonely; it's full of Americans. Takes place, as I say, in a jolly -- or shall we say spooky-- old English manor house called Canterville -- Canterville Chase. Somewhat crumbling, perhaps, but picturesque in its way. *(Lights up on the chase.)* Grand entrance, sitting room, divers bed chambers above, the kind with too many rooms and chambers and stairs to keep track off , with dark and heavy furniture, great libraries stuffed with books the mice have chewed upon, all that history. And legends of dark doings. Cries of terror behind locked doors -- the servants panicking, the servants fleeing the house -- great heavy doors locked with great brass keys, the brass gone all mossy with age. Misdeeds of the living, misdeeds of the dead -- of ghosts....

Secrets whispered of but kept in the family, kept proudly, as this kind of house is always kept in the family. And yet -- can it be possible? Canterville Chase is up for sale! (*Lights up in the chase propor on LORD CANTERVILLE in the library, bill of sale in hand.*) Lord Canterville. Not badly turned out, is he? You can see he doesn't need money. And the house has been in his family for over five hundred years. Yet the house is for sale, and even more astonishing -- has been for some weeks with no English buyer interested. However, the house has to be sold to someone-- (HIRAM OTIS appears next to the LORD CANTERVILLE in the library WILDE regards OTIS.) -- any one -- because, you see, Lord Canterville is at his wits end . . .

## Scene One: Bill of Sale

*WILDE closes the little house and as he steps back from it, lights come up inside it. He pretends to be startled. Laughing, he exits through the big house, sneaking past HIRAM and CANTERVILLE, unnoticed.*

**HIRAM:** I'll take it. Looks just grand. Haul out the papers, why don't you? Where do I sign?

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** But, Professor, what I've been saying... I'm trying to warn you. The point is, I'm selling the dear old house because of the ghost.

**HIRAM:** Got that. Wonder what it is -- this rumor of a ghost? What sort of scientific phenomenon?

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Not a rumor! Sightings! Encounters! Whatever you want to call him -- ghost, phenomenon, whatever -- I can't cope with him. *(To himself)* And no Englishman has stepped forward to buy, which doesn't surprise me in the least.

**HIRAM:** You don't want to sell to me because I'm an American?

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** What? No, I would be delighted to sell to you were you a striped zebra. We can no longer keep servants, even. After the sighting by the Countess whose hair turned white in a single night, and she a mere girl in her twenties, all of the servants fled. Except Mrs. Umney --

**HIRAM:** Mrs. Umney.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** --the solitary housekeeper. And as you can see, she can barely keep up the place.

**HIRAM:** Oh, we can pitch in, I'd imagine. I know how to clean house.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** But you say you want quiet. You did say "quiet", didn't you?

**HIRAM:** Mmm-hmm -- reading and writing to do and fiddling with experiments. Far away from everything, isn't this?

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Oh, yes.

**HIRAM:** Quiet enough for me.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Quiet by day, perhaps, but I feel constrained to tell you that by night ... well, Lady Canterville can no longer sleep here in consequence of nightly noises that come from the corridor and the library--

**HIRAM:** Noises.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** -- a clanking and ... well, howling. (*Faint. Faraway clank of chains, faint howling.*) Hear anything?

**HIRAM:** Hmm. Maybe so.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** You see?

**HIRAM:** ... Very well, you may add a hundred pounds to the purchase price.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Yes, yes, adjust the price. What? Add to it? No. No, sir -- you mean subtract. Dear me, you are supposed to bargain me down. Have you never bought a house before?

**HIRAM:** Several. A half dozen. I come from a modern country where we have everything that money can buy.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** And you bargain up? You must have a very great deal of money.

**HIRAM:** Inventions, you know. Patent royalties. That sort of thing.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Do I understand that you insist on paying more than the asking price, on paying more?

**HIRAM:** Not usually, but in this case I do.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Whatever for?

**HIRAM:** Why, to purchase the ghost. So you will know I'm going into this with my eyes wide open, I insist on paying extra for the ghost. An English ghost -- why not. No home is complete without one! *(Indicated bill of sale)* Add a line here, sir, specifying that I have bought and paid for the Canterville Ghos and you can't possibly be accused of tricking a naive American.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** You are buying the ghost?

**HIRAM:** I am. Put it in writing.

**LORD CANTERVILLE:** Despite my warnings? Of course, if you don't mind a ghost in the house, I won't try to stop you. But you must remember I warned you. *(Signs and hands over the bill of sale)*

**HIRAM:** *(Reads)* Deed for purchase of Canterville Chase and Ghost!  
*(Signs with flourish)*