

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

by Paul Stebbings & Phil Smith,
based on the short story by Oscar Wilde.

Cast:

The Duke of Canterville
The Ghost of Sir Simon Canterville
The Ghost of Lady Eleanore de Canterville.
Virginia Otis
Washington Otis
Mom Otis
Crows.

The set consists of a stylised turret representing Canterville Castle - a fairy castle, but run down. There is a sign hanging from the castle - "Closed by order of the Tax Department".

The action begins with a storm at night. The Duke of Canterville enters banging on the door of the castle, demanding entrance, and is thrown to the ground by a supernatural, laughing force.

Daylight. The Duke is lying face down in the mud by the castle.

The Otis family from the USA enter in an early twentieth century motor car. Mom Otis, a widow, and her children – Virginia, almost a young woman, and her younger boy, Otis. They are excited to be in England, amused by its old-fashioned ways. The sing of their tourist exploits in London. Seeing the castle, they are delighted – for this is intended destination. But then they spot the Duke in the mud. They revive the Duke who awakes in considerable pain, tormented by his dreams of monsters and devils, mistaking the noisy Otis Family for ghosts.

Mom Otis intends to buy the castle, escaping from her past as a saloon bar dancer in the USA. The family introduces itself to the Duke, and Mom explains that she has come to buy the castle. But when Mom offers to top the highest offer for the castle, the Duke confesses that there have been no offers – for the castle is cursed with a ghost, who signals his presence with howls and lightning. The Otis family are not frightened – "the tornadoes in Kentucky are much bigger!" – besides they do not believe in ghosts. Even the Duke's warning that "it always appears before the death of a member of the resident family!" The Otis children casually kill one of the ravens, horrifying the Duke: "Do not hurt the Canterville ravens! For when the black birds depart from Canterville all England will fall into the sea!" The Otis's are not impressed by this claim, either. They celebrate their purchase with a dinner of Mom Otis's muffins and raise the American flag over the castle. Mom is so excited to meet the young Duke.

As night falls the American flag bursts into flame. Duke laughs at this mischief of the Ghost. But bemoans his fate, and is urged by a Chorus of Crows to hang on to the castle. But the Duke will not agree: "Tomorrow I will sell off Canterville. Let the black birds of Canterville die and England slip into the sea. If England taxes me to ruin, why should I care for England or you!" The Ghost strikes him down with a lightning bolt.

The Duke is woken by the Otis Family's noisy breakfast. The children's play is disrupted – because Virginia wants to play like an English lady.

The Duke wants to seal the sale of his castle before the Ghost gets him again. But he is stopped by the appearance of a huge blood stain on the castle. Mom tries to get it off with stain remover, but blood starts to appear from all over the castle.

Virginia, frustrated by her younger, crude brother, plays Robin Hood and Maid Marian with the Duke. The Duke begins to notice that Virginia is not a child, but a beautiful young woman. She runs off to begin a game of hide and seek, but the Ghost invisibly seizes the Duke, who argues with the Ghost to leave him alone, and that perhaps he can marry Virginia, and inherit the Otis Family's money, pay the tax bill and secure Canterville Castle for himself and the Ghost! All the Ghost has

to do is murder Washington.

Mom writes the cheque for the castle and celebrates her purchase in song.

The Ghost – Sir Simon repeatedly acts out the murder of his wife – Lady Eleanore. Virginia interrupts, asking them to be quiet. Then Mom interrupts them. Then the children ambush the Ghosts. Sir Simon is outraged.

The Duke appears in the audience, asking for advice on how to declare his love for Virginia.

Duke tries to get to Virginia's room. Meanwhile the Ghost is trying to terrify Washington without waking Mom. Washington and Virginia have created their own ghost to terrify Sir Simon. The Duke mistakes Virginia, in ghost-costume for Sir Simon, explaining that he loves Virginia. Virginia tries to embrace him, but the Duke thinks that this is just a hallucination created by the Ghost. Eventually the Duke realises that this was all a game and that this is the real Virginia. They romance each other by singing of their families' different (though rather similar) histories of conquest and profit. The Duke explains that he must, to be a gentleman, ask Mom's permission to marry Virginia.

The Duke who is ambushed by Mom, who thinks he is Sir Simon. Once this mistake is sorted out, the Duke explains that he must ask her for permission to marry. Mom thinks he means to her, but when he explains he is asking for Virginia's hand, Mom whips out a revolver and threatens the Duke, driving him away.

Virginia is sad, refusing to play games with Washington. Virginia witnesses Sir Simon the Ghost trying to kill himself, unsuccessfully. He wants to die, but a ghost can never die. Virginia winds Sir Simon's confidence by joining with him in ambushing Washington. Virginia wants to free from child's games – and Sir Simon realises that just as he has reached a turning point in his existence, the same is true of Virginia. The Ghost wants death, Virginia love. The Ghost calls on the curse of Canterville to be renounced! Virginia is surrounded by Crows who leave her with an ancient parchment. She recites the lines, of love and death mingled, and faints, the Ghost carrying her off into his own dark world.

The Duke appears disguised as an old statue. He assaults Washington. Mom appears – Virginia has disappeared! She rouses Washington to help her search for Virginia. The Duke reveals himself. Washington tells a lie – as a bid for attention he makes up a story that Virginia has been kidnapped by gypsies. Mom and Duke set off for the local gypsy camp intent on revenge. Washington is appalled at what he has done.

Duke and Mom attack the audience, as if they were the thieves who had stolen their child.

Virginia enters alone, now no longer a girl but a woman. The Ghost of Sir Simon enters. The two embrace and Crows surround and engulf them. The two disappear. In a dream world Virginia shoots with a child's bow and arrows her mother and brother and finally the Duke is shot through the heart (with love.) The Crows engulf the Ghost and Virginia once more, leaving only a pile of bones and Virginia's kimono. Then, a sudden burst of light and Virginia emerges from the castle, wrapped in a blanket, holding a casket of jewels, wreathed in flowers, smiling. Flowers begin to bloom all over the castle. Washington enters, looking for Virginia, worried about his lies.

Duke and Mom kidnap a member of the audience and 'torture' them for information about Virginia. Washington appears and tells that Virginia is safe. Mom and Duke are reunited at the castle with Virginia. Mom goes to embrace her but all spring back as if hit by electricity. Mom: "Why, darlin', you is different!" Virginia proposes marriage to the Duke standing over the bones of Sir Simon. He accepts and making their vows to each other opens a casket of treasure. They all sing a song of celebration. Finally, Virginia and the Duke confirming their love for each other, though Virginia will never reveal the secret about her and Sir Simon the Ghost.