Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

Notes : The Canterville Ghost

1. Who was Mr Hiram B Otis? Which property did he buy ? What did everyone say when he bought the property?

Ans: Mr Hiram B Otis was an American Minister. He bought Canterville Chase. When he bought the property everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing as the place was haunted.

1. Who was the owner of Canterville Chase? What kind of a person was he?

Ans: Lord Canterville was the owner of Canterville Chase. He was a man of punctilious honour.

1. What did Lord Canterville tell Mr Otis? What evidence did he give about what he said?

Ans: Lord Canterville too told Mr Otis that Canterville Chase was haunted. He said that they too had not lived in that place since his grand-aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Bolton was frightened into fit , from which she never really recovered , by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner . Further he also told him that the ghost had been seen by several living members of his family as well as by the rector of the parish.

1. Why did Lord Canterville reveal the fact that Canterville Chase was haunted inspite of the fact that he was selling it out?

Ans: Lord Canterville was a very punctilious person and therefore did not want to hide anything about the property he was selling. Thus he felt bound to tell Mr Otis about it.

1. How had the presence of the ghost affected Lord Canterville?

Ans: The death of Lord Canterville’s grand-aunt due to the mysterious presence of the ghost had scared everyone living at Canterville Chase. None of the younger servants would stay with the family at the place and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night as a result of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library. As a result he wanted to sell of the property.

1. How did Mr Otis react when Lord Canterville warned him?

Ans: Mr Otis reacted by mocking the whole idea of the existence of a ghost. He told Lord Canterville that he would take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. He further told him that he came from a modern country where they have everything that money can buy. He said that if at all there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe , they would have it at home in a very short time in one of their public museums.

1. According to Lord Canterville , when would the ghost in Canterville Chase make an appearance? What did Mr Otis say to that? Finally what did Lord Canterville tell Mr Otis?

Ans: According to Lord Canterville the ghost always made an appearance before the death of any of his family members. Mr Otis was amused and said that even the family doctor does the same and that there is no such thing as a ghost. Finally, Lord Canterville told him that if he didn’t mind a ghost in the house , it was alright but later he should not say that he ( the Lord) had not warned him( Mr Otis).

1. Describe the family of Mr Otis.

Mr Otis was an American Minister. His wife was a very handsome , middle-aged woman with fine eyes and a superb profile. Their eldest son , Washington was a fair-haired , rather good-looking young man. Miss Virginia E, the daughter was a little girl of fifteen. She was lithe and lovely as a fawn and with a fine freedom in her large blue eyes. Finally there were the twins –called ‘the Stars and Stripes’; as they were always getting swished but were delightful boys.

1. When and how did the Otis family reach Canterville/ Give an account of the journey of the Otis family to Canterville Chase.

Ans: The Otis family took a waggonette from Ascot , the nearest railway station, to go to Canterville. It was a lovely July evening. They started their drive in high spirits. The air was delicate with the scent of the pinewoods. Occasionally they heard a wood pigeon or saw the pheasant bird. Little squirrels peered at them from the beech trees as they went by and the rabbits scudded away through the brushwood.

1. What change in atmosphere did the Otis family encounter as they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase?

As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, the atmosphere seemed to be curiously still. A great flight of rooks passed silently over their heads and before they reached the house it started raining .

1. Who greeted the Otis family at Canterville Chase? Write a few lines about her.

Ans: Mrs Umney , the housekeeper of Canterville Chase greeted the Otis family She was an old lady , neatly dressed in black silk, with a white cap and apron.

1. What did Mrs Umney do when the Otis family reached the house?

Ans: When the Otis family reached the house , Mrs Umney made a low courtesy bow to each member of the Otis family as they alighted and to Canterville Chase in a quaint old – fashioned manner. She had also laid the tea for them and when they sat down and began to look around , she waited on them.

1. What did Mrs Otis notice on the floor ? What did Mrs Umney say about it?

Ans: Mrs Otis noticed a dull red stain on the floor by the fireplace and thought something had been spilt on that spot. Mrs Umney told them that it was blood . She then elaborated by saying that it was the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville , who was murdered on that very spot by her husband Sir Simon de Canterville in 1575( three centuries ago). She also said that the blood stain couldn’t be removed.

1. Who was Sir Simon and where was he?

Ans: Sir Simon was the husband of Lady Eleanore de Canterville. He had murdered his wife in 1575 . After the death of his wife, Sir Simon survived her nine uears and disappeared suddenly under very mysterious circumstances. His body had never been discovered but his guilty spirit still haunted the Chase for almost three centuries.

1. What was Washington’s view about the blood stain ? What did he do?

Ans: Washington thought the idea of a ghost completely nonsensical. He said that whatever stain it was, could easily be cleaned with Pinkerton’s Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent. He fell upon his knees and started scouring the floor with a small stick of black cosmetic. In a few moments the blood stain vanished.

1. What happened as soon as the blood stain had been cleaned? Did it disappear forever ?

Ans: As soon as the blood stain had been cleaned , a terrible flash of lightning lit up the somber room and a fearful peal of thunder struck the skies and they all were startled. However the blood stain reappeared the next morning.

1. Give an account of the first encounter of the Otis family with the ghost.

Ans: One day after a pleasant drive the family returned after nine o’clock and had a light supper. They spoke for some time and eleven o’clock the family tired to bed. After all the lights were switched off, Mr Otis was awakened by a curious noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank of metal and seemed to be coming nearer every moment and the footsteps could also be clearly heard. When Mr Otis went out to check who it was . He took an oblong phial out of his dressing case with him. He saw an old , terrible looking man. Mr Otis calmly told the presence that his chains needed oiling and showed him the bottle of the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator. He further told the ghost that he was leaving it near the bedroom candles and would supply more if required. With those words the minister kept the bottle and returned to his bedroom.

1. Describe the ghost of Sir Simon.

Ans: The ghost was an old, terrible figure. His eyes were as red burning coals ;his long grey hair fell over his shoulders in matted coils ;his garments , which were very antique , were soiled and ragged and his hands and legs were bound in heavy manacles and rusty gyves.

1. What was the reaction of the ghost on meeting Mr Otis?

Ans: For a moment , the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless dashing the bottle violently upon the floor. Then he fled down the corridor , uttering hollow groans and emitting a ghastly green light.

1. Whom did the ghost of Sir Simon meet as it was running?

Ans: As the ghost reached the top of the oak staircase, a door was flung open and the twins in white robes appeared and a large pillow whizzed past the ghost’s head. Without wasting any more time, the ghost just fled and vanished through the wainscoting.

1. What does ‘career’ refer to? How long had Sir Simon pursued this career?

Ans: Here the word ‘career’ refers to that of a ghost which had been pursued by Sri Simon for three hundred years.

1. Had Sir Simon been successful in his career? Substantiate your answer.

Ans: Yes Sir Simon had been successful in his career of a ghost. He says so because he had successfully frightened many a people to death by his presence. He had frightened Dowager Duchess into a fit while she was dressing up for a party. Four of the housemaids had gone off into hysterics when he merely grinned at them through the curtains of a bedroom. Old Madame de Tremouillac had wakened up one morning early and seen a skeleton seated in an armchair by the fire reading her diary and had been confined to her bed for six weeks due to brain fever. A butler had shot himself in the pantry because he had seen a green hand tapping at the window pane. The beautiful Lady Stutfield was always obliged to wear a black velvet band around her throat as she had a mark of five fingers burnt upon her white skin.

1. Why was the ghost agitated?

Ans: The ghost had a brilliant career spanning across three centuries in which he had been successful in frightening to death so many people at Canterville. But some wretched Americans were offering him some oil and throwing pillows at his head inspite of getting frightened. No ghost had ever been treated like that. Thus the ghost was agitated.

1. What was the only thing that disturbed the Otis family? Why?

Ans: The only thing that disturbed the Otis family was the continuous reappearance of the blood stain on the library floor. They found it very strange as the door was always locked at night by Mr Otis and the windows kept closely barred. The blood stain would change colours like a chameleon. Some mornings it was a dull red, then it would be vermilion, then a rich purple and once they found it a bright emerald green.

1. Describe the second appearance of the ghost.

Ans: The second appearance of the ghost was on a Sunday night. Shortly after retiring to bed, the family was woken up by a fearful crash in the hall. They all rushed down and saw the ghost seated in a chair rubbing his knees with pain on his face. Apparently, a suit of an armour had fallen on his knees. The twins discharged pellets on him with their pea shooters. The Minister raised his revolver and asked the ghost to hold his hands up. The ghost just got up and disappeared like thin mist.

1. How did the ghost plan to take revenge on each member of the Otis family?

Ans: The ghost had decided it would take revenge on the Otis family. He selected Friday, the 17th of August for this. He selected his outfit and set out for revenge. He was to first go quietly to Washington Otis’ room and gibber at him from the foot of the bed ad stab himself thrice to the sound of slow music. He hated Washington for he would keep removing the famous blood stain. He would then proceed to the room occupied by Mr Otis and his wife. There he would place a clammy hand on Mrs Otis’ forehead while he hissed into her husband’s ear the awful secrets of the charnel house. He was not angry with Virginia as she had done no harm to his reputation. He would scare her a little by making some groaning sounds. He was very angry with the twins and wanted to teach them a lesson. He wanted to sit upon their chests to create a stifling sensation of nightmare. Then he would stand between them in the form of a green , icy-cold corpse they were paralysed with fear and finally throw off his jacket and crawl round the room showing his white , bleached bones and one rolling eyeball in the character of ‘Dumb Daniel’ or the ‘Suicide’s Skeleton’.