

1869

PHANTASMAGORIA

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. Phantasmagoria (1869) - A seven canto poem about a friendly ghost who expounds on "Hys Fyve Rules" for haunting. Opening lines: One winter night, at half-past nine, / Cold, tired, and cross, and muddy,...

CANTO I

The Trystyng

ONE winter night, at half-past nine, Cold, tired, and cross, and muddy, I had come home, too late to dine, And supper, with cigars and wine, Was waiting in the study.

There was a strangeness in the room, And Something white and wavy Was standing near me in the gloom I took it for the carpet-broom Left by that careless slavey.

But presently the Thing began To shiver and to sneeze:

On which I said "Come, come, my man!"

That's a most inconsiderate plan, Less noise there, if you please!"

"I've caught a cold", the Thing replies, "Out there upon the landing." I turned to look in some surprise, And there, before my very eyes, A little Ghost was standing!

He trembled when he caught my eye, And got behind a chair.

"How came you here," I said, "and why? I never saw a thing so shy.

Come out! Don't shiver there!"

He said "I'd gladly tell you how, And also tell you why; But" (here he gave a little bow) "You're in so bad a temper now, You'd think it all a lie.

“And as to being in a fright, Allow me to remark That Ghosts have just as good a right, In every way, to fear the light, As Men to fear the dark.”

“No plea”, said I, “can well excuse Such cowardice in you: For Ghosts can visit when they choose, Whereas we Humans ca’n’t refuse To grant the interview.”

He said “A flutter of alarm Is not unnatural, is it? I really feared you meant some harm: But, now I see that you are calm, Let me explain my visit.

“Houses are classed, I beg to state, According to the number Of Ghosts that they accommodate: (The Tenant merely counts as weight, With Coals and other lumber).

“This is a ‘one-ghost’ house, and you, When you arrived last summer, May have remarked a Spectre who Was doing all that Ghosts can do To welcome the new-comer.

“In Villas this is always done However cheaply rented: For, though of course there’s less of fun When there is only room for one, Ghosts have to be contented.

“That Spectre left you on the Third Since then you’ve not been haunted: For, as he never sent us word, ‘Twas quite by accident we heard That any one was wanted.

“A Spectre has first choice, by right, In filling up a vacancy;

Then Phantom, Goblin, Elf, and Sprite If all these fail them, they invite The nicest Ghoul that they can see.

“The Spectres said the place was low, And that you kept bad wine: So, as a Phantom had to go, And I was first, of course, you know, I couldn’t well decline.”

“No doubt”, said I, “they settled who Was fittest to be sent:

Yet still to choose a brat like you, To haunt a man of forty-two, Was no great compliment!”

“I’m not so young, Sir,” he replied, “As you might think. The fact is, In caverns by the water-side, And other places that I’ve tried, I’ve had a lot of practice:

“But I have never taken yet A strict domestic part, And in my flurry I forget The Five Good Rules of Etiquette We have to know by heart.”

My sympathies were warming fast Towards the little fellow:

He was so utterly aghast At having found a Man at last, And
looked so scared and yellow.

“At least”, I said, “I’m glad to find A Ghost is not a dumb thing!

***But pray sit down: you’ll feel inclined (If, like myself, you have
not dined) To take a snack of something: “Though, certainly, you
don’t appear A thing to offer food to!***

And then I shall be glad to hear If you will say them loud and clear
The Rules that you allude to.”

“Thanks! You shall hear them by and by.

This is a piece of luck!” “What may I offer you?” said I.

“Well, since you are so kind, I’ll try A little bit of duck.

“One slice! And may I ask you for Another drop of gravy?” I sat
and looked at him in awe, For certainly I never saw A thing so
white and wavy.

And still he seemed to grow more white, More vapoury, and
wavier Seen in the dim and flickering light, As he proceeded to
recite His “Maxims of Behaviour”.

CANTO II

Hys Fyve Rules

“MY First- but don’t suppose”, he said, “I’m setting you a riddle Is-
if your Victim be in bed, Don’t touch the curtains at his head, But
take them in the middle, “And wave them slowly in and out, While
drawing them asunder; And in a minute’s time, no doubt, He’ll
raise his head and look about With eyes of wrath and wonder.

“And here you must on no pretence Make the first observation.

Wait for the Victim to commence: No Ghost of any common sense
Begins a conversation.

“If he should say ‘How came you here?’ (The way that you began,
Sir), In such a case your course is clear ‘On the bat’s back, my little
dear!’ Is the appropriate answer.

“If after this he says no more, You’d best perhaps curtail your
Exertions- go and shake the door, And then, if he begins to snore,
You’ll know the thing’s a failure.

“By day, if he should be alone At home or on a walk You merely
give a hollow groan, To indicate the kind of tone In which you
mean to talk.

“But if you find him with his friends, The thing is rather harder.

In such a case success depends On picking up some candle-ends,
Or butter, in the larder.

“With this you make a kind of slide (It answers best with suet), On
which you must contrive to glide, And swing yourself from side to
side One soon learns how to do it.

“The Second tells us what is right In ceremonious calls: ‘First burn a
blue or crimson light’ (A thing I quite forgot to-night), ‘Then
scratch the door or walls.’”

I said “You’ll visit here no more, If you attempt the Guy.

I’ll have no bonfires on my floor And, as for scratching at the door,
I’d like to see you try!”

“The Third was written to protect The interests of the Victim, And
tells us, as I recollect, To treat him with a grave respect, And not to
contradict him.”

“That’s plain”, said I, “as Tare and Tret, To any comprehension:

I only wish some Ghosts I’ve met Would not so constantly forget
The maxim that you mention!”

“Perhaps”, he said, “you first transgressed The laws of hospitality;
All Ghosts instinctively detest The Man that fails to treat his guest
With proper cordiality.

“If you address a Ghost as ‘Thing!’ Or strike him with a hatchet, He
is permitted by the King To drop all formal parleying And then
you’re sure to catch it!

“The Fourth prohibits trespassing Where other Ghosts are
quartered: And those convicted of the thing (Unless when
pardoned by the King) Must instantly be slaughtered.

“That simply means ‘be cut up small’:

Ghosts soon unite anew: The process scarcely hurts at all Not more
than when you’re what you call ‘Cut up’ by a Review.

“The Fifth is one you may prefer That I should quote entire: The
King must be addressed as ‘Sir’.

This, from a simple courtier, Is all the Laws require:

“But, should you wish to do the thing With out-and-out politeness, Accost him as ‘My Goblin King!’ And always use, in answering, The phrase ‘Your Royal Whiteness.....!’

“I’m getting rather hoarse, I fear, After so much reciting:

So if you don’t object, my dear, We’ll try a glass of bitter beerI think it looks inviting.”

CANTO III

Scarmoges

“AND did you really walk”, said I, “On such a wretched night? I always fancied Ghosts could flyIf not exactly in the sky, Yet at a fairish height.”

“It’s very well”, said he, “for Kings To soar above the earth:

But Phantoms often find that wingsLike many other pleasant thingsCost more than they are worth.

“Spectres of course are rich, and so Can buy them from the Elves:

But we prefer to keep belowThey’re stupid company, you know, For any but themselves: “For, though they claim to be exempt From pride, they treat a Phantom As something quite beneath contemptJust as no Turkey ever dreamt Of noticing a Bantam.”

“They seem too proud”, said I, “to go To houses such as mine.

Pray, how did they contrive to know So quickly that ‘the place was low’, And that I ‘kept bad wine’?”

“Inspector Kobold came to you-” The little Ghost began.

Here I broke in- “Inspector who? Inspecting Ghosts is something new!

Explain yourself, my man!”

“His name is Kobald,” said my guest:

“One of the Spectre order: You’ll very often see him dressed In a yellow gown, a crimson vest, And a night-cap with a border.

“He tried the Brocken business first, But caught a sort of chill; So came to England to be nursed, And here it took the form of thirst, Which he complains of still.

“Port-wine, he says, when rich and sound, Warms his old bones like nectar: And as the inns, where it is found, Are his especial hunting-ground, We call him the Inn-Spectre.”

I bore it- bore it like a man This agonizing witticism!

And nothing could be sweeter than My temper, till the Ghost
began Some most provoking criticism.

“Cooks need not be indulged in waste; Yet still you’d better teach
them Dishes should have some sort of taste.

Pray, why are all the cruets placed Where nobody can reach them?

“That man of yours will never earn His living as a waiter!

Is that queer thing supposed to burn? (It’s far too dismal a concern
To call a Moderator.)

“The duck was tender, but the peas Were very much too old:

And just remember, if you please, The next time you have toasted
cheese, Don’t let them send it cold.

“You’ll find the bread improved, I think, By getting better flour:

And have you anything to drink That looks a little less like ink,
And isn’t quite so sour?”

Then, peering round with curious eyes, He muttered “Goodness
gracious!” And so went on to criticize “Your room’s an
inconvenient size: It’s neither snug nor spacious.

“That narrow window, I expect, Serves but to let the dusk in-“ “But
please”, said I, “to recollect “Twas fashioned by an architect Who
pinned his faith on Ruskin!”

“I don’t care who he was, Sir, or On whom he pinned his faith!

Constructed by whatever law, So poor a job I never saw, As I’m a
living Wraith!

“What a re-markable cigar!

How much are they a dozen?” I growled “No matter what they
are!

You’re getting as familiar As if you were my cousin!

“Now that’s a thing I will not stand, And so I tell you flat.” “Aha,”
said he, “we’re getting grand!” (Taking a bottle in his hand) “I’ll
soon arrange for that!”

And here he took a careful aim, And gaily cried “Here goes!” I
tried to dodge it as it came, But somehow caught it, all the same,
Exactly on my nose.

And I remember nothing more That I can clearly fix, Till I was
sitting on the floor, Repeating "Two and five are four,
But five and two are six."

What really passed I never learned, Nor guessed: I only know
That, when at last my sense returned, The lamp, neglected, dimly
burnedThe fire was getting lowThrough driving mists I seemed to
see A Thing that smirked and smiled: And found that he was
giving me A lesson in Biography, As if I were a child.

CANTO IV

Hys Nourytur

"OH, when I was a little Ghost, A merry time had we!
Each seated on his favourite post, We chumped and chawed the
buttered toast They gave us for our tea."
"That story is in print!" I cried "Don't say it's not, because It's
known as well as Bradshaw's Guide!" (The Ghost uneasily replied
He hardly thought it was.)

"It's not in Nursery Rhymes? And yet I almost think it is"Three
little Ghosteses' were set 'On posteses', you know, and ate Their
'buttered toasteses'.

"I have the book; so if you doubt it-" I turned to search the shelf.

"Don't stir!" he cried. "We'll do without it I now remember all
about it; I wrote the thing myself.

"It came out in a 'Monthly', or At least my agent said it did:

Some literary swell, who saw It, thought it seemed adapted for The
Magazine he edited.

"My father was a Brownie, Sir; My mother was a Fairy.

The notion had occurred to her, The children would be happier, If
they were taught to vary.

"The notion soon became a craze; And, when it once began, she
Brought us all out in different waysOne was a Pixy, two were Fays,
Another was a Banshee; "The Fetch and Kelpie went to school And
gave a lot of trouble; Next came a Poltergeist and Ghoul, And then
two Trolls (which broke the rule), A Goblin, and a Double"(If that's
a snuff-box on the shelf," He added with a yawn, "I'll take a
pinch)- next came an Elf, And then a Phantom (that's myself), And
last, a Leprechaun.

“One day, some Spectres chanced to call, Dressed in the usual white: I stood and watched them in the hall, And couldn’t make them out at all, They seemed so strange a sight.

“I wondered what on earth they were, That looked all head and sack; But Mother told me not to stare, And then she twitched me by the hair, And punched me in the back.

“Since then I’ve often wished that I Had been a Spectre born.

But what’s the use?” (He heaved a sigh.) “They are the ghost-nobility, And look on us with scorn.

“My phantom-life was soon begun: When I was barely six, I went out with an older one And just at first I thought it fun, And learned a lot of tricks.

“I’ve haunted dungeons, castles, towers Wherever I was sent:

I’ve often sat and howled for hours, Drenched to the skin with driving showers, Upon a battlement.

“It’s quite old-fashioned now to groan When you begin to speak:

This is the newest thing in tone-“ And here (it chilled me to the bone) He gave an awful squeak.

“Perhaps”, he added, “to your ear That sounds an easy thing? Try it yourself, my little dear!

It took me something like a year, With constant practising.

“And when you’ve learned to squeak, my man, And caught the double sob, You’re pretty much where you began: Just try and gibber if you can!

That’s something like a job! “I’ve tried it, and can only say I’m sure you couldn’t do it, even if you practised night and day, Unless you have a turn that way, And natural ingenuity.

“Shakespeare I think it is who treats Of Ghosts, in days of old, Who ‘gibbered in the Roman streets’, Dressed, if you recollect, in sheets They must- have found it cold.

“I’ve often spent ten pounds on stuff, In dressing as a Double; But, though it answers as a puff, It never has effect enough To make it worth the trouble.

“Long bills soon quenched the little thirst I had for being funny.

The setting-up is always worst: Such heaps of things you want at first, One must be made of money!

“For instance, take a Haunted Tower, With skull, cross-bones, and sheet; Blue lights to burn (say) two an hour, Condensing lens of

extra power, And set of chains complete: “What with the things
you have to hireThe fitting on the robeAnd testing all the coloured
fireThe outfit of itself would tire The patience of a Job!

“And then they’re so fastidious, The Haunted-House Committee:
I’ve often known them make a fuss Because a Ghost was French, or
Russ, Or even from the City!

“Some dialects are objected toFor one, the Irish brogue is: And
then, for all you have to do, One pound a week they offer you, And
find yourself in Bogies!”

CANTO V

Byckermert

“DON’T they consult the ‘Victims’, though?” I said. “They should,
by rights, Give them a chance- because, you know, The tastes of
people differ so, Especially in Sprites.”

The Phantom shook his head and smiled.

“Consult them? Not a bit!

‘Twould be a job to drive one wild, To satisfy one single
childThere’d be no end to it!”

“Of course you ca’n’t leave children free”, Said I, “to pick and
choose:But, in the case of men like me, I think ‘Mine Host’ might
fairly be Allowed to state his views.”

He said “It really wouldn’t payFolk are so full of fancies.

We visit for a single day, And whether then we go, or stay,
Depends on circumstances.

“And, though we don’t consult ‘Mine Host’ Before the thing’s
arranged, Still, if he often quits his post, Or is not a well-mannered
Ghost, Then you can have him changed.

“But if the host’s a man like youI mean a man of sense; And if the
house is not too new-“ “Why, what has that”, said I, “to do With
Ghost’s convenience?”

“A new house does not suit, you knowIt’s such a job to trim it: But,
after twenty years or so, The wainscotings begin to go, So twenty is
the limit.”

“To trim” was not a phrase I could Remember having heard:

“Perhaps”, I said, “you’ll be so good As tell me what is understood
Exactly by that word?”

“It means the loosening all the doors,” The Ghost replied, and laughed: “It means the drilling holes by scores In all the skirting-boards and floors, To make a thorough draught.

“You’ll sometimes find that one or two Are all you really need To let the wind come whistling through But here there’ll be a lot to do!” I faintly gasped “Indeed!

“If I’d been rather later, I’ll Be bound,” I added, trying (Most unsuccessfully) to smile, “You’d have been busy all this while, Trimming and beautifying?”

“Why, no,” said he; “perhaps I should Have stayed another minute But still no Ghost, that’s any good, Without an introduction would Have ventured to begin it.

“The proper thing, as you were late, Was certainly to go:

But, with the roads in such a state, I got the Knight-Mayor’s leave to wait For half an hour or so.”

“Who’s the Knight-Mayor?” I cried. Instead Of answering my question, “Well, if you don’t know that,” he said, “Either you never go to bed, Or you’ve a grand digestion!

“He goes about and sits on folk That eat too much at night:

His duties are to pinch, and poke, And squeeze them till they nearly choke.” (I said “It serves them right!”)

“And folk who sup on things like these-” He muttered, “eggs and bacon Lobster- and duck- and toasted cheese If they don’t get an awful squeeze, I’m very much mistaken!

“He is immensely fat, and so Well suits the occupation:

In point of fact, if you must know, We used to call him years ago, The Mayor and Corporation!

“The day he was elected Mayor I know that every Sprite meant To vote for me, but did not dare He was so frantic with despair And furious with excitement.

“When it was over, for a whim, He ran to tell the King; And being the reverse of slim, A two-mile trot was not for him A very easy thing.

“So, to reward him for his run (As it was baking hot, And he was over twenty stone), The King proceeded, half in fun, To knight him on the spot.”

“’Twas a great liberty to take!” (I fired up like a rocket.) “He did it just for punning’s sake:

‘The man’, says Johnson, ‘that would make
A pun, would pick a pocket!’”

“A man” said he, “is not a King.” I argued for a while, And did my best to prove the thing
The Phantom merely listening With a contemptuous smile.

At last, when, breath and patience spent, I had recourse to smoking
“Your aim”, he said, “is excellent:

But- when you call it argumentOf course you’re only joking?”

Stung by his cold and snaky eye, I roused myself at length To say,
“At least I do defy The veriest sceptic to deny That union is strength!”

“That’s true enough,” said he, “yet stay-” I listened in all meekness-
“Union is strength, I’m bound to say; In fact, the thing’s as clear as day;
But onions are a weakness.”

CANTO VI

Discomfyture

AS one who strives a hill to climb, Who never climbed before:

Who finds it, in a little time, Grow every moment less sublime,
And votes the thing a bore: Yet, having once begun to try, Dares not desert his quest,
But, climbing, ever keeps his eye On one small hut against the sky
Wherein he hopes to rest: Who climbs till nerve and force are spent,
With many a puff and pant: Who still, as rises the ascent,
In language grows more violent, Although in breath more scant:
Who, climbing, gains at length the place That crowns the upward track:
And, entering with unsteady pace, Receives a buffet in the face
That lands him on his back:

And feels himself, like one in sleep, Glide swiftly down again, A helpless weight,
from steep to steep, Till, with a headlong giddy sweep,
He drops upon the plainSo I, that had resolved to bring Conviction to a ghost,
And found it quite a different thing From any human arguing,
Yet dared not quit my post.

But, keeping still the end in view To which I hoped to come, I strove to prove the matter true
By putting everything I knew

Into an axiom: Commencing every single phrase
With "therefore" or "because", I blindly reeled, a hundred ways,
About the syllogistic maze, Unconscious where I was.

Quoth he "That's regular clap-trap: Don't bluster any more.
Now do be cool and take a nap!

Such a ridiculous old chap Was never seen before!

"You're like a man I used to meet, Who got one day so furious
In arguing, the simple heat Scorched both his slippers off his feet!" I
said "That's very curious!"

"Well, it is curious, I agree, And sounds perhaps like fibs:

But still it's true as true can be As sure as your name's Tibbs," said
he.

I said "My name's not Tibbs."

"Not Tibbs!" he cried- his tone became A shade or two less
hearty "Why, no," said I. "My proper name Is Tibbets- " "Tibbets?"
"Aye, the same." "Why, then YOU'RE NOT THE PARTY!"

With that he struck the board a blow That shivered half the glasses.

"Why couldn't you have told me so Three quarters of an hour ago,
You prince of all the asses?

"To walk four miles through mud and rain, To spend the night in
smoking, And then to find that it's in vain And I've to do it all
again It's really too provoking!

"Don't talk!" he cried, as I began To mutter some excuse.

"Who can have patience with a man That's got no more discretion
than An idiotic goose?

"To keep me waiting here, instead Of telling me at once That this
was not the house!" he said.

"There, that'll do- be off to bed!

Don't gape like that, you dunce!"

"It's very fine to throw the blame On me in such a fashion!

Why didn't you enquire my name The very minute that you
came?" I answered in a passion.

"Of course it worries you a bit To come so far on foot But how was I
to blame for it?" "Well, well!" said he. "I must admit

That isn't badly put.

"And certainly you've given me The best of wine and
victual Excuse my violence," said he, "But accidents like this, you
see, They put one out a little.

“’Twas my fault after all, I find
Shake hands, old Turnip-top!” The
name was hardly to my mind, But, as no doubt he meant it kind, I
let the matter drop.

“Good-night, old Turnip-top, good-night!”

When I am gone, perhaps They’ll send you some inferior Sprite,
Who’ll keep you in a constant fright And spoil your soundest naps.

“Tell him you’ll stand no sort of trick; Then, if he leers and
chuckles, You just be handy with a stick (Mind that it’s pretty hard
and thick) And rap him on the knuckles!

“Then carelessly remark ‘Old coon!’

Perhaps you’re not aware That if you don’t behave, you’ll soon Be
chuckling to another tune And so you’d best take care!

“That’s the right way to cure a Sprite Of such-like goings-on But
gracious me! It’s getting light!

Good-night, old Turnip-top, good-night!” A nod, and he was gone.

CANTO VII

Sad Souvenaunce

“WHAT’S this?” I pondered. “Have I slept? Or can I have been
drinking?” But soon a gentler feeling crept Upon me, and I sat and
wept An hour or so, like winking.

“No need for Bones to hurry so!” I sobbed. “In fact, I doubt If it
was worth his while to go And who is Tibbs, I’d like to know, To
make such work about?

“If Tibbs is anything like me, It’s possible”, I said, “He won’t be
over-pleased to be Dropped in upon at half-past three, After he’s
snug in bed.

“And if Bones plagues him anyhow Squeaking and all the rest of it,
As he was doing here just now I prophesy there’ll be a row, And
Tibbs will have the best of it!”

Then, as my tears could never bring The friendly Phantom back, It
seemed to me the proper thing To mix another glass, and sing The
following Coronach.

“And art thou gone, beloved Ghost? Best of Familiars!

Nay, then, farewell, my duckling roast, Farewell, farewell, my tea and toast, My meerschaum and cigars!

The hues of life are dull and gray, The sweets of life insipid, When thou, my charmer, art away Old Brick, or rather, let me say, Old Parallelepiped!”

Instead of singing Verse the Third, I ceased- abruptly, rather:

But, after such a splendid word I felt that it would be absurd To try it any farther.

So with a yawn I went my way To seek the welcome downy, And slept, and dreamed till break of day Of Poltergeist and Fetch and Fay And Leprechaun and Brownie!

For years I've not been visited By any kind of Sprite; Yet still they echo in my head, Those parting words, so kindly said, “Old Turnip-top, good-night!”

THE END