



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Phantasmagoria

Lewis Carroll

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.

Phantasmagoria 2

"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.

Phantasmagoria 3

“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.

Phantasmagoria 4

"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 beer—
I think it looks inviting."

CANTO III - Scarmoges

"And did you really walk," said I,
"On such a wretched night?
I always fancied Ghosts could fly—
If 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 wings—
Like many other pleasant things—
Cost more than they are worth.

"Spectres of course are rich, and so
Can buy them from the Elves:
But we prefer to keep below—
They'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 contempt—
Just as no Turkey ever dreamt
Of noticing a Bantam."

Phantasmagoria 5

"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 Kobold," 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'd 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 criticise—
"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 burned—
The fire was getting low—

Through 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 Nourytüre

“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.”

Phantasmagoria 6

“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 ways—
One 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, e-
ven if you practised night and day,
Unless you have a turn that way,
And natural ingenuity.

“Shakspeare 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.

Phantasmagoria 7

“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 hire—
The fitting on the robe—
And testing all the coloured fire—
The 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 to—
For 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 - Byckermant

“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 child—
There’d be no end to it!”

“Of course you can’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 pay—
Folk 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 you—
I 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 know—
It'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 argument—
Of course you're only joking?"

Phantasmagoria 8

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 - Dyscomfyture

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 plain—

So 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!"

Phantasmagoria 9

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!

p. 56Nay 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;
p. 57Yet still they echo in my head,
Those parting words, so kindly said,
“Old Turnip-top, good-night!”

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why riri.ro offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share riri.ro and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: [@riri_ro_reading](https://www.instagram.com/riri_ro_reading) · Pinterest: [pinterest.com/ririocom](https://www.pinterest.com/ririocom)