

## **PHANTASMAGORIA**

### ***CANTO I--The Trysting***

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."