

W. Harrison Ainsworth (1805-82)

1 *The Barber of Ripon and the Ghostly Basin*

A Tale of the Charnel House

I.

Since Ghost-Stories you want, there is one I can tell
Of a wonderful thing that Bat Pigeon befel:
A Barber, at Ripon, in Yorkshire was he,
And as keen in his craft as his best blade could be.

II.

Now Bat had a fancy, — a strange one, you'll own, — 5
Instead of a brass bowl to have one of bone:
To the Charnel-house 'neath the old Minster he'd been,
And there, 'mongst the relics, a treasure had seen.

III.

'Mid the pile of dry bones that encumber'd the ground,
One pumpkin-like skull with a mazard he found; 10
If home that enormous old sconce he could take,
What a capital basin for shaving 'twould make!

IV.

Well! he got it, at last, from the Sexton, his friend,
Little dreaming how queerly the business would end:
Next, he saw'd off the cranium close to the eyes; 15
And behold then! a basin capacious in size.

V.

As the big bowl is balanced 'twixt finger and thumb,
Bat's customers all with amazement are dumb;
At the strange yellow object they blink and they stare,
But what it can be not a soul is aware! 20

VI.

Bat Pigeon, as usual to rest went that night:
But he soon started up in a terrible fright:
Lo! giving the curtains and bedclothes a pull,

A Ghost he beheld — *wanting half of its skull!*

VII.

“Unmannerly barber!” the Spectre exclaimed; 25
“To desecrate bonehouses art not ashamed?
Thy crown into shivers, base varlet, I’ll crack,
Unless, on the instant, my own I get back!”

VIII.

“There it lies on the table!” Bat quakingly said;
“Sure a skull cannot matter when once one is dead.” — 30
“Such a skull as thine may not, thou addlepatte fool!
But a shaver of clowns for a Knight is no rule!”

IX.

With this, the wroth Spectre its brainpan clapp’d on,
And holding it fast, in a twinkling was gone;
But ere through the keyhole the Phantom could rush, 35
Bat perceived it had taken the soap and the brush.

X.

When the Sexton next morn went the Charnel-house round,
The great Yellow Skull in its old place he found:
And ’twixt its lank jaws, while they grinningly ope,
As in mockery stuck, are the Brush and the Soap! 40

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