

W. Harrison Ainsworth (1805-82)

5 *Old Grindrod's Ghost*

I.

Old Grindrod was hanged on a gibbet high,
On the spot where the dark deed was done;
'Twas a desolate place, on the edge of a moor, —
A place for the timid to shun.

II.

Chains round his middle, and chains round his neck, 5
And chains round his ankles were hung:
And there in all weathers, in sunshine and rain,
Old Grindrod, the murderer, swung.

III.

Old Grindrod had long been the banquet of crows, 10
Who flocked on his carcase to batten;
And the unctuous morsels that fell from their feast
Served the rank weeds beneath him to fatten!

IV.

All that's now left of him is a skeleton grim,
The stoutest to strike with dismay;
So ghastly the sight, that no urchin, at night, 15
Who can help it, will pass by that way.

V.

All such as had dared, had sadly been scared,
And soon 'twas the general talk,
That the wretch in his chains, each night took the pains,
To come down from the gibbet — *and walk!* 20

VI.

The story was told to a Traveller bold,
At an inn, near the moor, by the Host;
He appeals to each guest, and its truth they attest,
But the Traveller laughs at the Ghost.

VII.

“Now, to show you,” quoth he, “how afraid I must be,
 A rump and a dozen I’ll lay;
 That before it strikes One, I will go forth alone,
 Old Grindrod a visit to pay. 25

VIII.

“To the gibbet I’ll go, and this I will do,
 As sure as I stand in my shoes;
 Some address I’ll devise, and if Grinny replies,
 My wager, of course, I shall lose.” 30

IX.

“Accepted the bet; but the night it is wet,”
 Quoth the Host. “Never mind!” says the Guest;
 “From darkness and rain, the adventure will gain,
 To my mind an additional zest.” 35

X.

Now midnight had toll’d, and the Traveller bold
 Set out from the inn, all alone;
 ’Twas a night black as ink, and our friend ’gan to think,
 That uncommonly cold it had grown. 40

XI.

But of nothing afraid, and by nothing delayed;
 Plunging onward through bog and through wood;
 Wind and rain in his face, he ne’er slackened his pace,
 Till under the gibbet he stood.

XII.

Though dark as could be, yet he thought he could see
 The skeleton hanging on high;
 The gibbet it creaked; and the rusty chains squeaked;
 And a screech-owl flew solemnly by. 45

XIII.

The heavy rain pattered, the hollow bones clattered,
 The Traveller’s teeth chattered — with cold —
 not with fright; 50

The wind it blew lustily, piercingly, gustily;
Certainly not an agreeable night!

XIV.

“Ho! Grindrod, old fellow!” thus loudly did bellow,
The Traveller mellow, — “How are ye, my blade?” —
“I’m cold and I’m dreary; I’m wet and I’m weary; 55
But soon I’ll be near ye!” the Skeleton said.

XV.

The grisly bones rattled, and with the chains battled,
The gibbet appallingly shook;
On the ground something stirr’d, but no more the man heard, —
To his heels, on the instant, he took. 60

XVI.

Over moorland he dashed, and through quagmire he plashed;
His pace never daring to slack;
Till the hostel he neared, for greatly he feared
Old Grindrod would leap on his back.

XVII.

His wager he lost, and a trifle it cost; 65
But that which annoyed him the most,
Was to find out too late, that certain as fate,
The Landlord had acted the Ghost.

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