

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

by Washington Irving

adapted by J.Z. Roberts & S. Aviña

I

Not far from Tarrytown along the Hudson River, there is a little valley among the hills. It is one of the quietest places in the whole world. Because it is so peaceful and quiet, this lovely valley is called Sleepy Hollow. The people of Sleepy Hollow believe all kinds of things, and often hear music and voices in the air. According to many people, the valley is visited regularly by a ghost who rides a horse and has no head. Some people say it is the spirit of a Hessian soldier whose head had been carried away by a cannonball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War. They say the body of the soldier lies under the earth of a churchyard. As the story goes, the ghost rides away every night to hunt for its head and then rushes back like the wind to get to the churchyard before dawn. The ghost is known in all the country homes by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

Once in the early history of this region, a man named Ichabod Crane came to Sleepy Hollow as a teacher. The name Crane suited him. He was tall and thin with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, and big feet. His hands hung a mile out of his sleeves. His head was flat at the top, and he had a long pointed nose. On a windy day, he looked exactly like a scarecrow, some people said. His school stood alone in a rather pleasant place at the foot of a hill. It was a log cabin with one large room and a low roof. The broken windows were covered with pieces of old paper. Ichabod was not a cruel teacher. On the contrary, he punished his students as fairly as possible. After school hours, he was friendly with the children. The pay for teaching was small, and even though he was thin, Ichabod liked to eat. In that part of the country, the teacher lived in the homes of the children's parents. He went to all the farms in turn for a week at a time. He carried all his belongings from house to house in a handkerchief. Because he went from one farmhouse to another, Ichabod became a kind of traveling newspaper. People were glad to see him because he carried the news from house to house. The mothers thought well of Ichabod because he was gentle and kind with their children. He often sat with a child on his knee for hours at a time. The women also

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thought well of him because of his great knowledge. He had read several books completely. Cotton Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft," in which, by the way, he truly believed.

He also believed all the stories about the ghosts of Sleepy Hollow. He loved to sit in front of a fireplace with the old Dutch wives on long winter evenings and talk about ghosts, haunted houses, and the horseman, or the Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him. There was pleasure in all this, while he was in a warm lighted room among the company. No ghost dared to show its face there!

However, that pleasure was always followed by the fears of his walk home. He sometimes jumped in fear at the sight of a bush covered with snow. He often stopped at the sound of his own steps and was afraid to look over his shoulder.

Many young people came to Ichabod's singing class one evening each week. Among them, there was a pretty girl of eighteen named Katrina Van Tassel. She was the daughter and only child of a rich farmer. She was known far and wide not only for her beauty but also for the money which she would have some day. Katrina knew that she was pretty, and she liked to catch the boys' eyes. Her short skirt showed the prettiest feet in the whole valley. Old Balthus Van Tassel, her father, was a perfect picture of a happy, kind-hearted farmer. He enjoyed his wealth, but he made no great show of it. The Van Tassel farm was almost like a nest in a quiet green place along the Hudson River. The large barn near the house was as big as a church. There were birds on the roof, fat pigs in the pens, turkeys in the farmyard, a stately squadron of snowy geese and ducks in the fresh water of their stream. The farmhouse had plenty of room for everything. There were bags of wool in the corners, and the shelves were filled with Indian corn and apples.

In his hungry mind's eye, he pictured to himself every roasting-pig running about with a pudding in his belly, and an apple in his mouth; the pigeons snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie, and tucked in with a coverlet of crust; the geese swimming in their own

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gravy; and the ducks paired in dishes like snug married couples, with a fine onion sauce. In the porkers he saw carved bacon and juicy ham; he saw baked turkeys, and a necklace of savory sausages; and even bright a roasted chicken in a dish.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart toward food and girls. Naturally, Katrina's youthful beauty pleased him very much, especially after he had visited her father's farm. He rolled his large green eyes over the rich fields of wheat and the trees which were heavy with fruit, and his heart longed for the girl. When he entered the house, he wanted to become a member of the family more than ever. From then on, his peace of mind was at an end. How could he win Van Tassel's beautiful daughter?

II

At the time Ichabod became interested in Katrina, many young men were trying to win Katrina. They watched each other carefully, and they were ready to fight together against any new fellow. Among these, the most dangerous was a big, loud fellow named Abraham Van Brunt who was known universally by the nickname "Brom Bones." The countryside was full of stories of his strength. He had broad shoulders and curly black hair. His face was bold but pleasant. He was famous for his horsemanship. He was always ready for a fight, but he liked fun even more. Whenever any wild trick was played, everyone knew Brom was at the bottom of it. For some time, Brom had wanted to win Katrina. Whenever Brom's horse was outside Van Tassel's farmhouse, everyone else kept away. No one dared to go against Brom openly. Therefore, Ichabod went on in a quiet and gentle manner. As the singing teacher, he often visited the Van Tassel farmhouse, so he often had a chance to sit with Katrina or walk with her in the evening. Of course, bad feelings developed between Brom and the teacher, but Ichabod was too wise to quarrel openly with Brom.

Matters went on this way for some time. Then, on a fine fall afternoon, Ichabod was sitting on the tall chair where he usually watched over his school. All the boys and girls were busy with

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their books or were whispering behind them with one eye on the schoolmaster. Suddenly, a boy rode up on the back of a wild little horse. He ran into the schoolhouse loudly and asked Ichabod to attend a party at the Van Tassel farm that evening. Then the boy left in a hurry. In a moment, everything became alive in the classroom. The children raced through their lessons. The whole school was let out an hour before the proper time.

Ichabod took at least a half hour to get ready for the party. He brushed up his best and only suit and combed his hair in front of a piece of mirror on the schoolhouse wall. Of course, he wanted to look his best for Katrina, so he borrowed a horse from an old Dutchman named Hans Van Ripper. When he left, the afternoon sky was clear, and nature was dressed in rich gold colors. Wild ducks flew high in the air, the sound of squirrels in the trees.

Ichabod and the horse, Gunpowder, were quite a pair. Ichabod's stirrups were so short that his knees were bent up to the pommel of the saddle; his pointy elbows stuck out like grasshoppers'; he carried his whip like a king would hold a scepter, and as his horse jogged on, his arms flapped like wings. A small wool hat rested on the top of his nose, for so his forehead was so small, and the bottom of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horse's tail.

The schoolmaster arrived at the Van Tassel home toward evening. People from all over the country were there, and naturally, so was Brom. He had come on a big horse named Daredevil. The old farmers wore homemade suits, blue stockings, and big shoes with shining buckles. Their wives wore tight caps and long dresses. The young girls were dressed like their mothers. Plenty of food waited for the guests. There were cakes of all kinds, peach and pumpkin pies, ham, roast beef, chicken, and bowls of fresh milk and cream.

Ichabod was not in a hurry. He took time to eat all that he could hold. His heart warmed with thanks as he filled himself with food. He smiled at the thought of owning all this someday. Old Balthus Van Tassel moved about among the company, his face spread with joy and as round as the full moon. Then the musicians began to

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play. Ichabod was almost as proud of his dancing as of his singing. The lady of his heart danced with him and smiled in reply to all his smiles. Brom sat by himself in one corner jealously.

When the dance was at an end, Ichabod joined some of the older people. They told stories about ghosts and the strange things people had seen and heard. Many people had heard terrible cries near the tree by the church where Major Andre had been captured. Most of the stories were about the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow. Several people had seen this ghost lately. Old Brouwer, who did not believe in ghosts, said he had met the Horseman on his ride into Sleepy Hollow. Then Brom said that he had met the Horseman, too. Brom had offered to race with him, and had almost won the race. But the Horseman had rushed on at the bridge by the church and disappeared in a flash of fire. These stories were told in front of the fire in a low voice. Ichabod listened to everything, then told tales from his book about witches.

At last the party began to break up. The old farmers gathered their families in their wagons. Some of the girls sat on horses behind their young men. The sound of their laughter soon died away in the distance. At last, everything was quiet at the Van Tassel farm. Ichabod stayed behind for a moment to speak to Katrina, sure that he was going to win her. But apparently something went wrong. After a while, he walked away sadly, and without looking around to notice Van Tassel's rich lands, went straight to his horse.

III

When Ichabod left the Van Tassel farm, it was the exact time of night for witches. As he rode along the sides of the hills above Tarrytown, he could hear the sound of a dog on one side of the river. There was no sign of life near him except from some little animal in the woods. All the stories of ghosts and strange things came back to Ichabod's mind. As he came near Major Andre's tree, he began to whistle. In the center of the road stood an enormous tree, towering like a giant above all the others. Its limbs were gnarled and fantastic, large enough to be trunks for ordinary trees,

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twisting down almost to the earth, and rising again into the air. It was connected with the tragic story of the unfortunate André, who had been taken prisoner. Ichabod thought his whistle was answered, but it was the wind in the dry leaves. Suddenly he heard a groan. He began to shake, and his knees hit against the saddle. But it was only a large branch rubbing against another in the wind.

About two hundred yards from the tree, a small stream, the Tappan Zee, crossed the road and entered the woods. A few logs side by side formed a crude bridge over the stream. Passing this bridge was the hardest part of Ichabod's journey. His heart began to jump, but he tried to be brave. He gave his old horse a few kicks and tried to rush across the bridge. But it was no use. His horse took a step forward and then jumped into the bushes along the side of the road.

Just at this moment, Ichabod heard a step by the side of the bridge. In the darkness beside the stream, he saw a peculiar black shape. The poor schoolmaster's hair rose on his head in fear. What could he do? It was too late to turn around and go back. "Who are you?" Ichabod called. Then he asked the question again in a shaking voice. There was still no answer!

Once more, he beat the sides of the old horse. At the same time, he started to sing a church song. Just then, the black object moved to the side of the road. Ichabod could see its form. It was a large horseman on a black horse. The horseman kept off to one side of the road and moved at the same speed as Ichabod. He remembered Brom's meeting with the Headless Horseman—the Galloping Hessian! Although Ichabod's horse moved a little faster, the other came on just as fast. Ichabod's heart stood still. He tried to sing again, but his tongue was dry. Finally, Ichabod could see the horseman clearly against the open sky. He was headless! Then the teacher's horror was increased. The horseman carried his head in front of him on the saddle!

Ichabod suddenly kicked his heels, and his old horse began to run. The horseman started right behind him. The two horses galloped

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down the road madly. Stones flew, sparks flashed at every step. Ichabod's loose clothes flew in the wind. They reached the road to Sleepy Hollow, but Ichabod's horse made the wrong turn down the hill to the left. This road crossed a bridge close beside the church. By the bridge, his saddle started to slip. Ichabod threw his arms around the neck of his horse, and the saddle fell to the ground.

Then the schoolmaster saw the walls of the church under the trees. This gave him hope. The ghost usually disappeared by the church bridge. "I am safe if I can reach the bridge," Ichabod thought.

At that moment, he heard the black horse behind him. Ichabod's horse rushed over the boards of the bridge. Then Ichabod looked behind himself. The Headless Horseman rose in his stirrups and threw his head at Ichabod! The poor schoolmaster tried to dodge, but the awful thing hit him with a great noise. Ichabod fell into the dust, and the two horses and the ghost passed by like the wind.

IV

The next morning, the old horse was found without his saddle at his master's gate. Ichabod did not appear at breakfast. The boys came to school, but there was no schoolmaster. The neighbors started to hunt for Ichabod. After a while, they found the marks of his horse's shoes. The saddle was found on the road by the church. Ichabod's hat was found by the stream, and next to it was a broken pumpkin. The neighbors hunted in the stream, but the schoolmaster's body was not discovered. Hans Van Ripper looked after Ichabod's things. There were a few clothes and a book of church songs. Van Ripper also found Ichabod's book about witches, a "New England Almanac," a book of dreams and fortune-telling, and a paper with several lines in honor of Katrina Van Tassel. Hans Van Ripper burned these books, and the paper, and decided not to send his children to school anymore. He said that nothing good ever came from reading and writing. And whatever money the schoolmaster possessed, and he had received his quarter's pay but a day or two before, he must have had about his person at the time of his disappearance.

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V

The event was talked of at church on the following Sunday. People gathered in the churchyard at the bridge and shook their heads. They came to the conclusion that Ichabod had been carried off by the Galloping Hessian. He was unmarried and not in debt, so nobody worried any more about him; the school was moved to a different place, and another schoolmaster was hired.

It is true that an old farmer, who had been down to New York on a visit several years later, and from whom this story was originally heard, came home with the news that Ichabod Crane was still alive; that he had left the neighborhood partly through fear of the goblin and Hans Van Ripper, and partly out of embarrassment at having been suddenly dismissed by Katrina. Ichabod had supposedly moved to live in a distant part of the country; had taught school and studied law at the same time; had become a lawyer; turned politician; ran for election; written for the newspapers; and finally had been made a justice of the Ten Pound Court.

Soon after Ichabod disappeared, Brom Van Brunt married the beautiful Katrina. He always laughed loudly when people spoke of Ichabod and the pumpkin. Some people even thought that Brom knew a great deal about the matter.

However, the old country wives are the best judges of these things. To this day, they say that Ichabod was taken away by some strange means. The story is often told by neighbors in front of the fire on cold winter evenings.

The bridge over the Tappan Zee also became an object of superstitious awe; and that may be the reason why the road has been changed in the past few years, so that it approaches the church by the border of the millpond. The deserted schoolhouse soon fell to decay, and was reported to be haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate teacher. And many a young boy walking homeward on a summer evening has often heard Ichabod's voice in the distance, chanting a melancholy psalm or whistling a tune in the quiet hills of Sleepy Hollow.