

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Washington Irving

Many people believed that the region was haunted by a headless horseman. Now and then he was seen, in the gloom of night, racing along in search of his head.

1 **A**long the eastern shore of the Hudson River, at a spot the old Dutch sailors called the Tappan Zee, lies a small village. It is known by the name of Tarry Town. About two miles from this village, there is a little valley hidden among high hills. It is one of the quietest places in the world. A small brook glides through it, murmuring just enough to **lull** one to sleep. The occasional cry of a quail, or the tapping of a woodpecker, is almost the only sound that breaks the silence.

2 Because of the peaceful nature of the place, and the drowsy nature of its inhabitants, this little valley is known by the name of Sleepy Hollow. A dreamy atmosphere seems to hang over the land. Some say that the place

was put under a spell years ago, long before the area was discovered by Henry Hudson. Certainly the people there are given to all kinds of unusual beliefs. They frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighborhood is filled with tales of ghosts and haunted spots.

3 The chief spirit that haunts this region is a figure on horseback without a head. He is said to be the ghost of a **Hessian**¹ soldier whose head had been carried away by a cannonball during the Revolutionary War. Now and then he is seen by the village folk,

¹ *Hessian*: a German soldier hired by England to fight against the Americans during the Revolutionary War

3 -2 hurrying along in the gloom of night. He passes through, on the wings of the wind, they say, in search of his head. And this figure is known as The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

1 In this place there lived some years ago a man by the name of Ichabod Crane. He stayed in the village of Sleepy Hollow for the purpose of teaching the children of the area.

2 The name *Crane* was most appropriate to this person. He was tall, but extremely thin, with narrow shoulders, and long arms and legs. His hands dangled a mile out of his sleeves, and his feet might have served as shovels. His whole frame was hung together most loosely. He had huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long sharp nose. To see him striding along on a windy day, with his clothes flapping and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for some scarecrow escaped from a cornfield.

3 His log schoolhouse was a low building of one large room. It stood in a lonely but pleasant spot, just at the foot of a hill where a brook ran by. The soft murmur of his pupils' voices, repeating their lessons, might be heard, like the hum of bees, on a drowsy summer's day. Now and then the sharp voice of the master interrupted in a tone of **menace** or command. True to tell, he was a **conscientious** man who ever kept in mind the words: "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Ichabod's scholars were surely not spoiled!

4 When school hours were over, he was the companion and friend of the

4 older boys. And on holiday afternoons, he would accompany home some of the smaller boys—especially those who happened to have mothers known for their cooking. Indeed, he *had* to be on good terms with his pupils, for his pay was small, and, although he was thin, his appetite was enormous.

5 As was the custom in those parts, he lived for one week at a time at the houses of the farmers whose children he instructed. Thus, every week he made his **rounds** of the neighborhood with all his worldly goods tied up in a cotton handkerchief.

6 Ichabod was thought of as a man of learning, for he had read several books from beginning to end. He knew quite well Cotton Mather's *History of New England Witchcraft*, a work in which he most firmly believed. It was often his pleasure to stretch out near the little brook, after school was over, and read old Mather's fearful tales for hours. Then, as he made his way back to the farmhouse where he happened to be living, every sound terrified his excited imagination.

7 Another of his fearful pleasures was to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning wool by the fire. He would listen to their marvelous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses, and particularly of the Headless Horseman, or the Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him.

8 He would delight them, in turn, by his own tales of witchcraft and stories

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of comets and shooting stars. But later, as he walked homeward, what frightful shapes and shadows crossed his path! And often, as the wind roared and howled through the trees, he was thrown into terror by the thought that it was the Headless Horseman on one of his nightly rides.

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In addition to his other jobs, Ichabod was also the singing master of the neighborhood. Among those who assembled one evening each week to receive singing lessons was Katrina Van Tassel. She was the only child of a rich Dutch farmer. She was a **lass** of eighteen, rosy-cheeked, and famed for her beauty. She was also known as a bit of a flirt.

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Ichabod had a soft and foolish heart toward the ladies. No wonder it was that Katrina soon found favor in his eyes—especially after he had visited her in her magnificent mansion. Old Baltus Van Tassel was a thriving and successful farmer. Near his mansion was a huge barn which overflowed with every treasure of the farm.

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Ichabod's mouth watered as he thought about possible future meals. He pictured roasting pigs, each with an apple in its mouth. He thought about pigeons in pigeon pie, geese swimming in gravy, and dishes of delicious ducks. As he imagined all of this, he rolled his large green eyes over the fat meadow lands. He saw the rich fields of wheat, rye, and corn, and the orchards filled with ripe fruit. And his heart yearned for Katrina who was to inherit these lands.

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When he entered the house, his heart was completely won over. The furniture, of fine mahogany wood, shone like mirrors, and everywhere were displayed treasures of old silver and excellent china. From the moment Ichabod saw these delights, his only concern was how to win the affections of the daughter of Van Tassel. In this matter, however, he faced problems.

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One of the most serious was a rough and **burly** fellow by the name of Brom Van Brunt. He was the hero of the countryside because of his feats of strength and courage. He was broad-shouldered and sturdy, with short curly black hair, and a face full of fun and good humor. Because of his mighty frame and great powers of limb, he had received the nickname of BROM BONES. Brom was famous for his skill in horsemanship and was always ready for a fight—though he had more mischief than ill-will in his nature.

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Brom had three or four good friends who regarded him as their model. Sometimes, at midnight, his crew would be heard dashing along past the farmhouses, startling the neighbors out of their sleep. The villagers would listen a moment until the horses had clattered by. Then they would exclaim, "Ay, there goes Brom Bones and his gang." Such was the **formidable** rival with whom Ichabod had to deal.

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Under cover of his role as singing teacher, Ichabod made frequent visits to the Van Tassel mansion. Meanwhile, he became the object of a num-



7-4 ber of practical jokes by Brom Bones and his gang. They smoked out the singing school by stopping up the chimney. They broke into the schoolhouse at night and turned everything upside down so that the poor schoolmaster began to think that all the witches in the country held their meetings there. But what was most annoying, Brom took every occasion to make fun of him in the presence of Katrina. For example, he taught a dog to whine in the most ridiculous manner, then introduced it to Katrina as a

rival singing teacher. Matters went on in this way for some time.

On a fine autumn afternoon, Ichabod, in a thoughtful mood, sat on a high wooden stool overlooking his classroom. In his hand he held a ruler, a constant reminder to evil-doers. All his scholars were busily intent upon their books, or slyly whispering behind them, with one eye on the master. A kind of buzzing stillness reigned over the classroom. Suddenly it was interrupted by the appearance of a messenger. He came scrambling up to

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the school door with an invitation to Ichabod to attend a dance that very evening at the Van Tassel's home.

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All was now hustle and bustle in the late afternoon schoolroom. The scholars were quickly hurried through their lessons. Books were flung aside without being put away on the shelves. Inkstands were overturned, benches thrown down, and the whole school was let out an hour before the usual time.

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Ichabod now spent at least an extra half-hour brushing up his only suit of rusty black. He carefully arranged his hair, using a bit of broken looking glass that hung in the schoolhouse. He borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was lodged, an old Dutchman named Hans Van Ripper. Thus gallantly mounted, he rode forth like a knight of old in search of adventure.

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The animal he was given was a broken-down plow horse that had outlived almost everything but its viciousness. He was thin and shaggy with a long neck and a head like a hammer. One eye had lost its pupil and was glaring. But the other had the gleam of a real devil in it. He must have been fiery in his day, if we may judge from the name he was given, "Gunpowder."

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Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a horse. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the saddle. His sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers. As his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was like the flapping of a pair of

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wings. A small wool hat came down to the top of his nose. And the back of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horse's tail. Ichabod and his horse were a sight as is seldom ever seen in broad daylight.

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It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the Van Tassel's home. Farmers and their wives, sons and daughters, all dressed in their best, were present. Brom Bones, however, was the hero of the scene. He had come to the gathering on his favorite horse, Daredevil, a creature like himself, full of spirit and mischief.

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Ichabod entered and gazed lovingly upon the platters of delights that were served. There were cakes of every possible kind and description. And then there were pies—apple, berry, cherry, mince. There were slices of ham and smoked beef, and dishes of plums, and peaches and pears; not to mention broiled fish and roasted chickens. Ichabod could not help rolling his eyes around him as he ate. He chuckled with the thought that one day he might be lord of all this luxury and splendor.

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And now the sound of music from the hall summoned them to dance. Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing—as much as upon his singing. Not a limb of him was idle as he clattered noisily about the room, his loose frame flapping in full motion. And why should he not be happy, for the lady of his heart, Katrina, was his partner, while Brom Bones sat jealously brooding in the corner.

1 When the dance was at an end, Ichabod joined a group of folks, who, with old Van Tassel, told long stories about the war. This neighborhood, you see, was one of those historic places known for great men. The British and American line had run near it during the war.

2 But these stories were nothing compared to the tales of ghosts that followed. Most of them centered upon the famous Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow. It seems he had been heard, several times of late, patrolling the countryside. All this talk sank deep into the mind of Ichabod Crane.

3 The party now gradually broke up. The farmers gathered together their families in their wagons and headed homeward. Ichabod lingered to have a few words with Katrina. Something must have gone very wrong, however, for he suddenly left very quickly and quite unhappily.

4 It was the very witching time of night when Ichabod pursued his travels home. In the dead hush of midnight, he could hear the barking of the watchdog from the opposite side of the Hudson. There was no sign of life, only the occasional chirp of a cricket or the twang of a bullfrog.

5 All the stories of ghosts and goblins that he had heard now came rushing back to him. The night grew darker and darker. The stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky, and clouds occasionally hid them from sight. He had never felt so lonely and dismal. Moreover, he was approaching the place

5 where many of the scenes of the ghost stories had taken place.

6 In the center of the road stood an enormous tree. It towered like a giant above all the other trees in the neighborhood. Its limbs were huge and gnarled. As Ichabod approached this fearful tree, he began to whistle. He thought his whistle was answered! It was only a blast of wind sweeping sharply through the branches.

7 As he got a little nearer, he thought he saw something white hanging in the middle of the tree. He paused and stopped whistling. Looking more closely, he saw that it was a place where the tree had been struck by lightning so that the white wood was bare. Suddenly, he heard a groan. His teeth chattered and his knees banged against the saddle. But it was only the rubbing of one huge limb against another as they were swayed about by the breeze. He passed the tree in safety, but new perils lay before him.

8 About two hundred yards from the tree, a small brook crossed the road. A few rough logs, laid side by side, served as a bridge over this stream. To pass this bridge was the severest test. It had long been considered a haunted bridge, one frightful to cross alone after dark.

9 As Ichabod approached the bridge, his heart began to thump. He gave his horse several quick kicks in the ribs, and attempted to dash quickly across the bridge. But instead of moving forward, the animal ran sideways into some bushes. Just at this moment, a

9-7 loud noise by the side of the bridge caught Ichabod's ear. In the dark shadow, near the edge of the brook, he saw something huge, black and towering. It did not move, but seemed ready, like some gigantic monster, to spring upon the traveler.

1 The hair of the schoolmaster rose upon his head with terror. "Who—who are you?" he asked in a quivering voice. He received no reply. He repeated his demand in a still more frightened voice. Still there was no answer.

2 Just then the shadowy object began to move, and stood at once in the mid-

dle of the road. He appeared to be a large horseman, mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. He bounded along the side of the road, jogging next to old Gunpowder, who had got over his fright.

3 Ichabod now quickened his horse, in hopes of leaving the other behind. The stranger, however, quickened his pace. On top of a hill, the figure of his fellow traveler could now be clearly seen against the sky. Ichabod was horror struck on observing that the figure was—*headless!* His shock was increased on noting that the head,



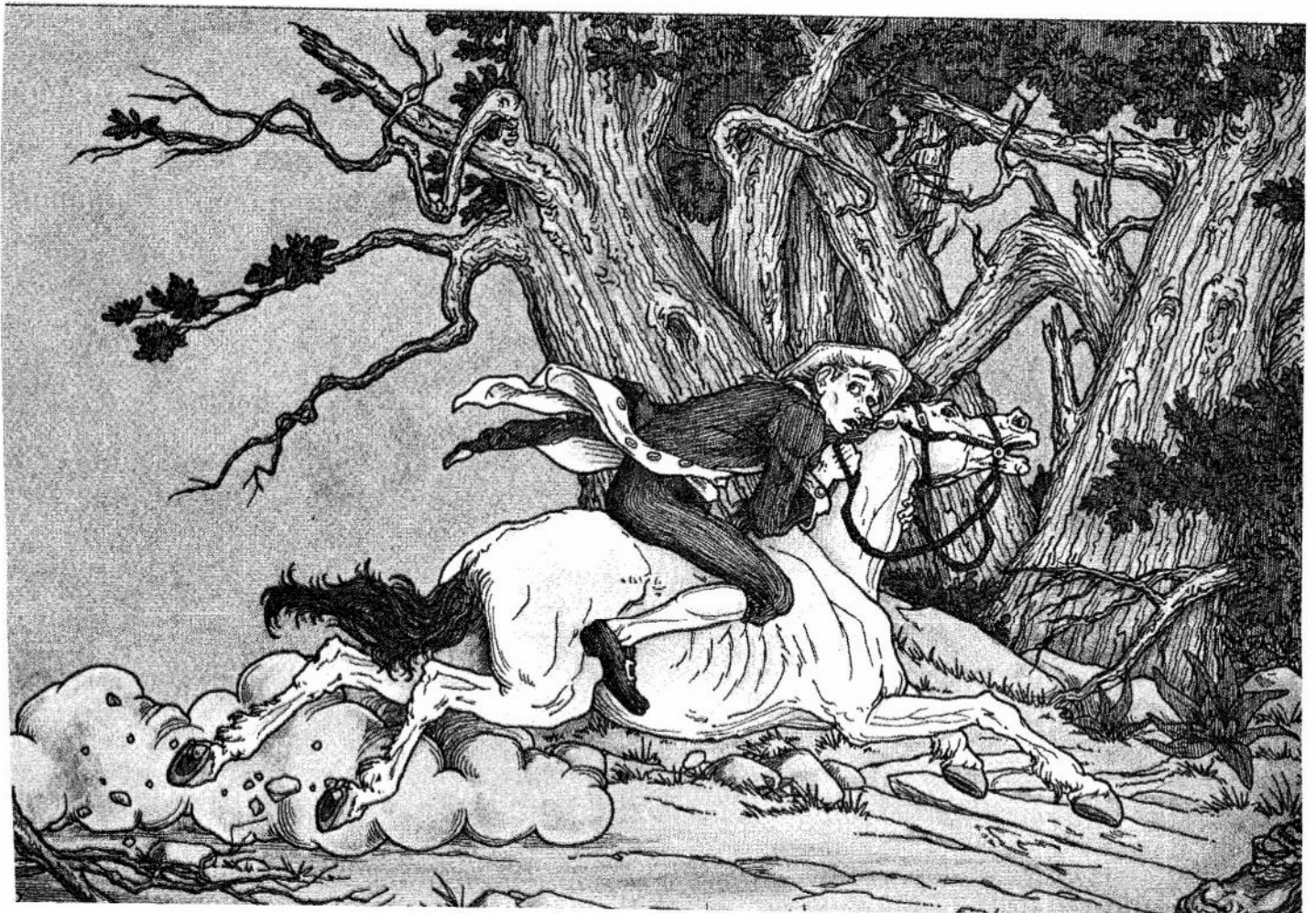
3-8 which should have rested on his shoulder, was carried before him on the edge of the saddle.

1 Ichabod's terror rose to desperation. He rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping to give his companion the slip. But the ghost galloped along with him. Away then they dashed, stones flying everywhere like sparks.

2 An opening in the trees cheered Ichabod with the hope that the church bridge was ahead. "If I can just reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe."

Just then he heard the black horse closing in behind him. He even thought that he felt his hot breath. Now Ichabod cast a look behind him. Now he saw the ghost rising in his saddle. He saw him raise his arm and hurl his head at him. Ichabod tried to dodge the horrible missile—too late! It smacked into his head with a terrible crash. He tumbled headlong into the dust. The black horse and the ghost rider passed by him like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle. Ichabod did



4 -9 not make his appearance at breakfast. Dinner hour came, but no Ichabod. The children waited at the schoolhouse, and strolled idly about the banks of the brook, but no schoolmaster.

1 Hans Van Ripper now began to feel uneasy about the fate of poor Ichabod and his saddle. An investigation was begun, and they found some traces. In one part of the road was found the saddle trampled in the dirt. The tracks of the horses' hoofs were traced to the bridge. On the bank of the brook was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod. And close beside it was a shattered pumpkin.

2 The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was not to be discovered. An old farmer on a visit years later brought back news that

Ichabod Crane was still alive; that he had left the neighborhood in fear of the goblin, and because he had been dismissed by Katrina.

3 Brom Bones, who married Katrina shortly after, always looked very knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was told. He would always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin. This led some people to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.

4 The people of the neighborhood, however, are the best judges of these matters. They maintain to this day that Ichabod was carried away by ghostly means. It is a favorite story often told around winter evening fires in the peaceful valley of Sleepy Hollow.

About the Author

Washington Irving is often called the "Father of American Literature." He was the first American short-story writer to gain fame in Europe, and the first American to earn a living by writing.

Irving was born in New York City, the youngest of eleven children. As a child, he met George Washington, after whom he was named. The president shook his hand and wished the boy well, an incident Irving never forgot.

Washington Irving (1783-1859) _____

The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Irving's most famous work, appeared in 1819–1820. It is a collection of essays and tales. In it were "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle," Irving's two best-known stories.

Irving spent the last years of his life at Sunnyside, an estate on the banks of the Hudson River. It is located near the very quiet village of Sleepy Hollow.