

THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

by Washington Irving Adapted by Vivian E. Jackson

FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF THE LATE DIEDRICH
KNICKERBOCKER.

A pleasing land of drowsy head it was, Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;

And of gay castles in the clouds that pass, Forever flushing round a summer sky.

CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

On the eastern shore of the Hudson River lies the small market town called Greensburgh that is also known as Tarrytown in the great State of New York. It is said that this name was given by the housewives that lived nearby because their husbands had the habit of hanging (tarrying) around the local village tavern on market days. Not far from this village is a small valley surrounded by hills, and with a lovely brook. This place is said to be so tranquil that on occasion you can only hear the sound of a woodpecker.

I remember my first experience squirrel hunting as a youngster. I wandered into a glen around noontime. It was the type of place where you could go “and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life.” There was no more of a serene place than this. The echoing roar of my gun was the only angry noise that broke the stillness of this place. The inhabitants of this place, which is known as Sleepy Hollow, are descendants of the first Dutch settlers. Their boys are called the Sleepy Hollow Boys.

It is rumored that this glen is haunted by a High German doctor who practiced sorcery. He is believed to have cast a spell on the little town of Sleepy Hollow. Others say that it is haunted by an old Indian chief who held his powwows there before Captain Henry Hudson discovered the place. It is certain that something has a spell on the people that live there. The whole place is filled with tales that are told all of the time. Sometimes, they say you can hear music and see strange sights.

The most powerful haunting in the glen is that of the headless horseman. Some say he is the ghost of a Hessian trooper, a British mercenary, whose head was shot off during the Revolutionary War. Anyone who has ever lived there has seen him riding at night, "as if on the wings of the wind." He travels through the glen, past the church, and down neighboring roads. He became known as the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

During a remote period in American History lived a teacher by the name of Ichabod Crane. Crane was a native of Connecticut. He was described as a tall, lanky man with long legs, a small head, huge ears, and a long nose. He gave the appearance of a homeless person because of his baggy clothes. Ichabod was an itinerant school teacher who came to Sleepy Hollow to fill the teaching vacancy.

Crane's schoolhouse was a one-room building made of logs. The windows were dull and they were "partly patched with leaves of old copybooks." The school was situated in a wooded area close to a brook. Children's voices could be heard as well as the authoritative voice of Crane who believed in the maxim "Spare the rod and spoil the child." He administered punishment with discrimination. His rod passed by the weak, but the tough-headed students got double portions of the rod. However, his punishments were always followed by the assurance that the young student would remember the punishment, and thank him in the long run. He made sure to keep on good terms with his students because he was frequently a visitor in their homes. Crane assisted the farmers with their chores and he would sit for hours with little ones on his knee.

Ichabod Crane was considered the master singer of the neighborhood. He added to his income by teaching music and on Sunday mornings he served as choir director. "His voice resounded far above all the rest of the congregation" and his education and accomplishments made him an important figure among the women. You would see him on Sundays, during and after church, in the company of the country damsels who admired his conversation. There were evenings he spent time, with the older Dutch wives, listening to all the tales of Sleepy Hollow. He shared stories of witches and witchcraft in Salem. In addition, Crane was prone to carry gossip from one house to another.

Ichabod Crane was well-read. He was quite knowledgeable of Cotton Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft." After school, he would often retire to the brook. He would lie there reading Mather's book until dusk. Then, he would make his way to his farmhouse as he traveled through the woods listening to the sounds of nature. His imagination began to take over and ideas of ghosts and evil spirits arose. They were the subjects of the tales the Dutch wives told. The only thing he could do to drown those thoughts was to sing his way home. Neighbors would hear him sing melodies that floated from the "distant hill." All the while, Ichabod walked towards home questioning every rustling shrub, sounds of howling from the trees, glares from distant windows, shadows and shapes, and the sounds of his own footsteps. "All these, however, were mere terrors of the night, phantoms of the mind that walk in darkness."

Ichabod held music classes one evening each week. One of his students was 18-year-old Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of a prominent Dutch family. He was drawn to the beautiful girl. He visited her home, which was the mansion of her father, Baltus Van Tassel who was a proud man that was not caught up in his wealth. He took care of his family on his vast property, which was situated on the banks of the Hudson River.

As he entered the mansion, Ichabod's mouth watered as he pictured himself living such a wealthy life and he desired Katrina even more. He knew that she would inherit all that his eyes beheld. Immediately, his imagination flourished with the

idea of how he could turn it all into cash, and move Katrina and their children to Kentucky, Tennessee or only God knows where.

Ichabod began to plot how to gain the affection of Katrina. There were difficulties to handle. Katrina had many admirers who were always watching each other. Abraham was his chief competitor because Katrina encouraged his advances. This suitor was a handsome horseman and he was the hero of the country. Ichabod described him as “Herculean.” Abraham was known throughout as Brom Bones. “The neighbors looked upon him with a mixture of awe, admiration, and good-will; and, when any madcap prank or rustic brawl occurred in the vicinity, always shook their heads, and warranted Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.” Such a formidable rival would discourage the average man, but not Ichabod Crane.

Ichabod’s advances were subtle. He used his music position as his cover, which gave him many opportunities to visit Katrina. As a result, a feud arose between Brom and Ichabod. “Ichabod became the object of whimsical persecution by Bones and his gang of rough riders.” They stopped up the chimney at the time he was having his music class. They broke into the schoolhouse at night and they vandalized it. Worst of all Brom Bones ridiculed Ichabod in front of Katrina. Brom even taught his dog to howl whenever Ichabod was teaching music. All of these antics went on for quite some time.

One fine autumn day, while his students were working in the schoolhouse, an African American man came to the school. He was riding on a half-broken colt. He brought Ichabod an invitation to Mynheer (Dutch for “Mr.”) Van Tassel's party. Ichabod dismissed class early without having the students put away the books or clean up. He devoted extra time to prepare himself for the party so that his appearance was stylish to his mistress. He borrowed an old broken-down horse from his neighbor. “Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed.” The horse’s name was Gunpowder, which suggests that he must have been fiery at one time.

As he rode to the house, he imagined the types of food that would be served to him by Katrina’s own hands. He filled his mind with wonderful thoughts of the evening to come, until he arrived at the Van Tassel’s mansion. In addition to the farmers in

the area, there was his rival. “Brom Bones was the hero of the scene, having come to the gathering on his favorite steed Daredevil, a creature, like himself, full of mettle and mischief, and which no one but himself could manage.”

As Ichabod entered the parlor, he gazed upon the delicacies of his imagination and he enjoyed them all as he contemplated owning all around him. No longer would he be in that old schoolhouse, he thought. Ichabod danced and sung to the music that drew him to the common room. “The musician was an old gray-headed negro, who had been the itinerant orchestra of the neighborhood for more than half a century. His instrument was as old and battered as himself.” Ichabod’s partner was Katrina who smiled in delight, while Brom Bones watched jealously from a corner in the room.

Once the dance was over, Ichabod was drawn to a gathering of old men who told stories of the war and former times. The most intriguing were the tales of ghosts and apparitions in the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. “Many dismal tales were told about funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighborhood.”

The favorite tale was that of the Headless Horseman who was said to roam the country, and to ride his horse through the churchyard cemetery. One witness was Old Brouwer who had been a disbeliever in the existence of ghosts. He saw the Horseman turn into a skeleton, and the Horseman threw Old Brouwer into the brook. Brom Bones told how he encountered the Horseman who challenged him to a race. Brom contended that he would have won if the Horseman had not “vanished in a flash of fire.” Ichabod described the fearful sights he had seen while walking at night, but he had not experienced sightings of the Headless Horseman.

After the stories were shared, families departed for home. Ichabod stayed for a while to talk to Katrina. When he left the mansion, it was the witching hour. As he traveled home, he could hear the barking of a dog, the croaking of a bullfrog, and the crowing of a rooster. The sounds were so far away that they were like dreams to Ichabod. Visually, there were no signs of life. In his mind, he recalled the ghost

stories told by the elders. He was nearing the enormous tulip tree that was used to hang the British spy, Major John André. Ichabod thought he heard a whistle and a groan. Then, he thought he saw something white hanging in the tree. Finally, he passed the tree unharmed, but two hundred yards from the tree was a small brook and a rustic bridge made of logs. This was the exact place where André was captured and the stream was said to be haunted.

As Ichabod approached the stream in fear, he tried to get his horse to race across the bridge, but old Gunpowder ended up coming to a quick stop at the bridge. His stop was so quick that Ichabod almost flew over his head. Just then, Ichabod saw something huge in the shadows. It stood perfectly still as if it was preparing to attack. Ichabod was so scared that his hair stood up on his head. He mustered up enough courage to speak. "Who are you?" He got no answer. He began to sing, which is what he did in fear. Finally, he recognized the figure to be a horseman riding a powerful black horse.

Ichabod remembered Brom Bones' story of outriding the Horseman. Therefore, Ichabod thought he could do that. Whenever he speeded up, the stranger did the same. If Ichabod slowed down, the stranger did the same. Then, light gave him a clearer glimpse of the stranger. "Ichabod was horror-struck on perceiving that he was headless!" He saw the stranger's head hanging from his saddle. "His terror rose to desperation; he rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping by a sudden movement to give his companion the slip; but the spectre started full jump with him. Away, then, they dashed through thick and thin; stones flying and sparks flashing at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air, as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight."

When Ichabod reached the road to Sleepy Hollow, Gunpowder turned in the opposite direction towards a shady hollow leading to a whitewashed church. As Gunpowder sped through the hollow, Ichabod felt the saddle slip from under him. All he could do was to hold onto the neck of his horse. Eventually, he saw a clearing and the church was close by. Hopefully, the bridge was even closer. He

remembered that Brom said the Headless Horseman had disappeared at that point. “If I can but reach that bridge,” thought Ichabod, “I am safe.” So he kicked Gunpowder in his ribs and the horse flew across the bridge.

Ichabod knew he was not safely out of the range of the Headless Horseman. He looked back hoping to see him disappear. That was not the case. The Horseman reared up and he hurled his head at Ichabod. “It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash,—he was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider, passed by like a whirlwind.”

The next morning, Gunpowder showed up at his master’s gate without the saddle and there was no sign of Ichabod Crane. Ichabod never showed up for breakfast or work. The boys at the school searched, but there was no sign of Ichabod. Hans Van Ripper, Gunpowder’s owner, started his own search for Ichabod. He found his saddle on the road leading to the church. Then, he came upon Ichabod’s hat and a shattered pumpkin. They searched the brook for his body, but his body was not found.

Hans Van Ripper was the executor of Ichabod Crane’s estate. All of Ichabod’s property was contained in one large bundle. “They consisted of two shirts and a half; two stocks for the neck; a pair or two of worsted stockings; an old pair of corduroy small-clothes; a rusty razor; a book of psalm tunes full of dog’s-ears; and a broken pitch-pipe.” Dog’s-ears are the folded down corners of a book that lets you know where you left off reading. He also had a copy of Cotton Mather’s “History of New England Witchcraft,” a “New England Almanac,” and a book of dreams and fortune-telling. Ichabod’s last salary was the only money he had and it must have been on him when he disappeared.

The people of the town, who gathered at church that following Sunday, came to the conclusion that the Headless Horseman had taken Ichabod. No one sought any other reasons for his disappearance because he had no family there; and he had no debts. The school was moved to another part of the hollow and another teacher was hired.

Several years later, an old farmer came to town for a visit. He told the people that Ichabod Crane was alive. He said that Ichabod left out of fear of the ghosts, and because Katrina had rejected him. According to the farmer, Ichabod had moved far away, taught in a school, enrolled in school to study law, and had even been elected to public office. Nevertheless, the older Dutch wives believed that he had been taken away by supernatural means. Brom Bones, who married Katrina, “was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.”