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## **The Legend of Sleepy Hollow** by Washington Irving

### **The Headless Horseman:**

There once was a valley that was said to be the quietest place in the world. It was just off the eastern shore of the Hudson River in New York State. For as long as anyone could remember, it had been called Sleepy Hollow.



The folks who lived in Sleepy Hollow often heard mysterious voices and saw strange things. The valley was thought to be enchanted.

There were many ghost stories told about Sleepy Hollow. But the story most often told was about a man whose spirit rode through the valley at night on a huge black horse. The man did not have a head.

According to the story, the man had died long ago, and his body was buried in the churchyard. His head was not buried with him. It had been shot off during the American Revolutionary war.

Every night, the man's spirit would rise-up from the grave, jump on its horse, and go looking for its lost head. The people of Sleepy Hollow called this ghost the *Headless Horseman*.

### **The Schoolteacher:**

In the valley is a village called Tarry Town. It was settled many years ago by people from Holland. The village had a small school. And one teacher, named Ichabod Crane.

Ichabod Crane was a good name for the teacher, because he was tall and thin like a crane. He had big ears, large eyes, and a long nose. And his arms and legs seemed too long for his body. But when they saw him walking to school on windy days, his clothes fluttering and flapping around him, Ichabod's students thought he looked more like a scarecrow than a bird.

Ichabod did not earn much as a teacher. So, to make some extra money, he gave singing lessons on the weekends. One of his music students was a pretty young lady named Katrina Van Tassel. Katrina was quite lovely, and she was also the only daughter of a rich Dutch farmer. Ichabod very much wanted Katrina for his wife.

### **The Rival:**

But there were others who also wanted to marry Katrina. One was a strong, handsome, young man named Brom Van Brunt.

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Brom was a great favorite with all the ladies. He was nothing at all like Ichabod. His shoulders were big. His back was wide. His black hair was short and curly. And, while Ichabod was serious and shy, Brom was full of fun.

Brom was always joking around and always ready for a good clean fight. His fighting had earned him the nickname *Brom Bones* because of all the bones he'd cracked. He was also the best horseman in the valley. In fact, Brom was rarely seen without a horse. Every night, he and his friends would ride through town shouting and laughing and having a great time.

This, then, was the rival that Ichabod had to defeat if he wanted to win Katrina's heart.

### **The Invitation:**

One autumn afternoon, a messenger arrived at Ichabod's schoolhouse to give him an invitation for a party that evening at the Van Tassel home. Ichabod was a good dancer, and he saw this as a chance to impress Katrina.

He was so excited that he dismissed class an hour early so that he would have plenty of time to arrange his hair and change into his best clothes. He even borrowed a neighbor's old plow horse, for the evening. The horse's name was Gunpowder.

When he was finally satisfied with how he looked, Ichabod proudly mounted Gunpowder. It was a strange sight to see Ichabod riding the old horse. His knees stuck out like grasshoppers' legs. His arms flapped about like wings. As he rode, his black coat fluttered around him in the wind.

Still, in his mind, Ichabod saw himself as a valiant knight upon a noble steed. "Tonight," he told Gunpowder, "I will win Katrina's undying love."

### **The Party:**

Ichabod was feeling confident when he arrived at the Van Tassels'. But his spirits fell when Brom Bones galloped up on Daredevil, his favorite horse. Daredevil was full of mischief, just like his master. No one had ever been able to tame or to ride him except Brom.

For a while, Brom was the center of attention. But before long, music filled the rooms, and people began to dance and sing. Now was Ichabod's chance. He knew that Brom was no dancer. And Katrina loved to dance.

Soon Katrina and Ichabod were whirling across the floor. Katrina was enjoying herself and smiled happily, but Brom was anything but happy. He stood in a corner by himself, jealously watching Ichabod and brooding.

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When the dancing was over, Ichabod joined a group of people who were talking about the many ghosts and goblins of Sleepy Hallow. Soon they were telling tales of the Headless Horseman, who had been seen several times recently, roaming the countryside after dark.

### **The Ride Home:**

It was almost midnight when Ichabod left the Van Tassels' to begin his long journey home. It was dark in the wooded valley, and there was hardly a sound to be heard except for the chirp of the crickets. Ichabod began to feel nervous. His heart was beating loudly. He remembered all of the ghost stories he had heard at the party.

Ichabod had never felt so lonely. He began to whistle to keep his spirits up. Then, he thought he heard someone else whistling, but it was just the wind sweeping through the dry autumn branches.

Suddenly, Ichabod jumped in his saddle. Straight up ahead was something white hanging in the middle of a tree. At first, Ichabod thought it was a ghost. But it was only a patch of moonlight that had filtered through the leaves of the tree.

But now, Ichabod was almost at the very spot where the Headless Horseman had last been seen. Soon he began to hear a thumping noise. Ichabod turned his head towards the noise. In the black shadows behind him, he saw a huge figure. It looked like a gigantic monster ready to grab him.

"Who—who are you?" he stammered.

The figure didn't answer.

Ichabod repeated, "Who are y—you?"

Still no answer.

Ichabod turned his head to get a better look. To his horror, he saw that the figure was a large man riding a great black horse. Ichabod's teeth began to chatter. The rider's head was not on his body; it was in front of the rider, resting on his saddle.

"The Headless Horseman!" Ichabod gasped.

Ichabod kicked the old horse with all his might. "Fly, Gunpowder!" he urged.

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Away they rushed through bushes and trees across the valley of Sleepy Hollow. Up ahead was the old church bridge where the Headless Horseman was said to stop and return to his grave.

"If only I can get there first, I am safe," thought Ichabod. He kicked his horse again. The horse jumped on to the bridge and raced over it like the sound of thunder.

When Ichabod looked back to see if the headless rider had stopped, he saw the man pick up his head and throw it. Ichabod dodged—but it was too late. The head hit Ichabod right in the face and knocked him off his horse.

The Headless Horseman rode off into the night.

### **The Next Day:**

The next morning, they found Ichabod's horse peacefully eating grass outside his master's gate. But they could not find Ichabod.

They saw the foot marks of Ichabod's horse as it had raced through the valley. They even found Ichabod's old hat in the dust near the bridge. But they did not find Ichabod.

The only other thing they did find was lying near Ichabod's hat. It was the broken pieces of a round orange pumpkin.

The town people talked about Ichabod for weeks. They remembered the frightening stories of the valley. And many came to believe that Ichabod was carried off by the Headless Horseman.

Much later, an old farmer returned from a visit to New York City. He said he was sure he saw Ichabod there. But Ichabod never did return to Sleepy Hollow.

### **Epilogue:**

*Shortly, after Ichabod's disappearance, Brom Bones married Katrina. Whenever the story of Ichabod was told, Brom would smile and wink his eye. And he would always burst into laughter at the mention of the broken pumpkin found lying near the bridge. This led some people to suspect that Brom knew more than he chose to tell about the matter.*

*However, many of the country folk continue to believe that Ichabod was spirited away by the Headless Horseman.*

THE END.