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The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Readers Theatre



SCENE 1: SLEEPY HOLLOW, 1790

NARRATOR 1: On the banks of the Hudson River in New York State lies a little village called Sleepy Hollow. It is known to be one of the quietest places in the world.

NARRATOR 2: It's said the Hollow is bewitched. The people there are given to all kinds of marvelous superstitions... including the Legend of the Headless Horseman.

NARRATOR 3: According to the legend, the headless horseman is the ghost of a soldier from the Revolutionary War whose head was shot off by a cannonball. And each night at midnight, he rides through the Hollow in search of his missing head.

NARRATOR 4: At the time of our story, the schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow was a man by the name of Ichabod Crane. He was very tall, with long arms and hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves. His small head had enormous ears and a long nose.

NARRATOR 5: Hurrying around town with his long limbs and baggy clothes, Ichabod looked a bit like a scarecrow that had escaped from a nearby cornfield.

NARRATOR 6: It was the custom in Sleepy Hollow for the townspeople take turns feeding and housing the schoolteacher as part of his pay. Each week Ichabod would stay with a different family. He had a lively imagination and would often startle at the sounds he heard traveling from one farmhouse to the next late at night.

NARRATOR 7: Of all of the farmhouses he visited, Ichabod was especially fond of one in particular. It belonged to a wealthy farmer who had a very beautiful daughter named Katrina Van Tassel. In order to spend more time with her, Ichabod offered to give her music lessons.

NARRATOR 8: Ichabod did his best to win the favor of the lovely Katrina. Naturally, He was very excited when he was invited to a party at the Van Tassel house.

NARRATOR 9: Ichabod spent a lot of time getting ready for the party and did all he could to look his best. He even borrowed a horse from a nearby farmer so he could ride to the party like a handsome prince.

NARRATOR 10: Unfortunately, Ichabod didn't look quite as princely as he hoped. The horse he borrowed was a broken-down plow horse. It was all skin and bones, and his tail was knotted with burrs. Still, it must have had some spark in its day, for it went by the name Gunpowder.

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SCENE 2: THE VAN TASSEL FARM

NARRATOR 1: It was nearly evening when Ichabod arrived at the Van Tassels'. Katrina Van Tassel was as rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches. From the moment Ichabod laid eyes upon her, his only thought was how to gain her affections.

KATRINA: Good evening, Master Crane. Welcome to our home.

ICHABOD: Why, thank you, Miss Katrina.

NARRATOR 2: But Ichabod wasn't the only one interested in Katrina. His rival was a burly, roaring hero of the countryside known as Brom Bones. Whenever a prank or brawl flustered the town, the simple folk of Sleepy Hollow always shook their heads and guessed that Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

BROM: Here I am, Katrina! Come for a ride on my horse, Daredevil!

KATRINA: Don't be silly, Brom. Put Daredevil in the barn and come on in the house. And don't act like such a brute!

BROM: Say, is that the schoolmaster's horse? What's he doing here? Come to give you singin' lessons?

KATRINA: The schoolmaster is an honored guest. It is wonderful to have such a scholar in our midst.

BROM: I don't know what you see in him. He's got dinner plates where his ears should be and shovels for feet.

KATRINA: You're just jealous.

BROM: Jealous of Ichabod Crane? Well, his name suits him anyway. Why, he looks like a crane with his long legs and small head.

NARRATOR 3: Poor Ichabod. He would have had a pleasant life, if only his path and Brom Bones had never crossed.

SCENE 3: THE PARTY

NARRATOR 4: The guests have gathered in the great parlor, and the music and dancing have begun. Now, is Ichabod's chance to shine.

ICHABOD: Dear Katrina, may I have this dance?

KATRINA: Why certainly, Master Crane.

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NARRATOR 5: Ichabod prided himself on his dancing. Not a limb of his loosely hung body was still. And as he went clattering about the room with the beautiful Katrina, he was unaware that Brom Bones sat brooding in the corner.

NARRATOR 6: When the dance was over, Ichabod made his way toward a group of older guests. They were sitting by the fire, telling chilling tales of ghosts and goblins.

GUEST 1: Many a ghost haunts the Hollow. There's the old Dutchman who walks the docks, shouting for a musket and a sword.

GUEST 2: And there's the woman in white who haunts the dark glen at Raven Rock. To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.

GUEST 3: In these parts, Mr. Crane, you must take care to live a decent life. Those who don't do so run the risk of being carried away in the dead of night!

NARRATOR 7: All these tales sank deep into the mind of Ichabod and also caught the attention of Brom Bones.

GUEST 1: But, my friend, nothing that we've told you rivals the Headless Horseman.

ICHABOD: The Headless Horseman?

GUEST 2: Yes, dear man. He is said to be the ghost of a soldier, whose head was carried away by a cannonball during the Revolutionary War. His ghost is often seen hurrying along in the darkness.

GUEST 3: With the Horseman about, one doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.

GUEST 1: His body is buried in the churchyard, and every night the ghost rides forth... in search of his head.

GUEST 2: He can't rest until he finds it. He rides at such a speed — like a midnight blast, it is — because he's in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before the light of day.

GUEST 3: He's been seen several times of late, patrolling the hills. I myself have seen his horse tethered among the graves in the churchyard.

GUEST 4: I didn't believe in the Horseman until one night last year. I met him on the road near the Old Tree. I suspect he was returning from his search, but I didn't know who he was. I called to him: "Show me your face, good man." He didn't answer, and when he turned, there was nothing there — just the stump of a neck.

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Before I could react, he grabbed me by the shoulder and forced me to get up behind him.

ICHABOD: Wh-what happened next?

GUEST 4: How we galloped! Over bush and brake, over hill and swamp... Then we reached the bridge. That's when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw me into the brook, and sprang away over the treetops with a clap of thunder!

ICHABOD: Oh my!

GUEST 4: Oh my, indeed. I will never forget it!

BROM: I'm not afraid of the Horseman. Aye, I too have seen him. I was returning one night from a neighboring village when he overtook me. Rather than give in to his terror, I offered to race him. And I would have won too, but just as we came to the old church bridge, the Horseman vanished in a flash of fire.

NARRATOR 8: The old church bridge was surrounded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom even in the daytime. It was the place the Headless Horseman was most frequently encountered, but it was also the place he could not pass.

BROM: If ever the Horseman comes after you, head for the bridge. If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.

SCENE 4: THE RIDE HOME

NARRATOR 9: Ichabod was the last to leave the party. It was midnight when he finally departed. And all those stories of ghosts and goblins now came crowding upon his thoughts.

NARRATOR 10: Ichabod trotted along on old Gunpowder, flinching at every sound and shape. A bullfrog croaking became the ghost of the Old Dutchman. The wind's howl became the woman in white.

TOWNSPERSON 1: *To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.*

NARRATOR 1: He remembered all too clearly the warnings of the townspeople.

TOWNSPERSON 2: *One doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.*

TOWNSPERSON 3: *Take care to live a decent life. Those who don't do so risk being carried away in the dead of night.*

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NARRATOR 2: Ichabod clutched tightly at Gunpowder's reins. To calm his nerves, he began to whistle.

NARRATOR 3: It was then that he saw it: In the shadows on the edge of the road, something huge and misshapen towered above them.

TOWNSPERSON 4: *Every night, the ghost rides forth in search of his head.*

NARRATOR 4: Every hair upon Ichabod's head stood on end.

ICHABOD: Wh-who-who... are you? I-I-I say there, wh-who are y-y-you?

NARRATOR 5: The shadowy creature put itself in motion and stood at once in the middle of the road.

ICHABOD: I s-s-say, sir, wh-wh-what is it you w-w-want with me?

NARRATOR 6: When there came, no reply, Ichabod rained a shower of kicks upon Gunpowder. The stranger whirled his horse to give chase.

ICHABOD: R-r-run, Gunpowder!

NARRATOR 7: As poor Ichabod glanced over his shoulder, he was horror-struck, for the man behind him was headless, and the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was hanging from the pommel of the saddle in the form of a fiery jack-o'-lantern!

ICHABOD: Fly, Gunpowder, fly!

NARRATOR 8: Away they dashed, stones flying and sparks flashing. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air as he stretched his long, lank body over his horse's head, and suddenly, he remembered what Brom Bones had said.

BROM: *If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.*

NARRATOR 9: Thundering forward, he heard the black steed close behind him.

ICHABOD: There it is, Gunpowder. The old church bridge!

NARRATOR 10: He cracked his whip wildly in the air, spurring his steed onward.

ICHABOD: Hyaw, hyaw! Come on, Gunpowder!

NARRATOR 1: Gunpowder's hooves pounded upon the planks of the bridge. Ichabod cast a look behind, expecting the goblin to vanish in a clap of thunder... but, instead, he saw it rise up and hurl its head... at him!

ICHABOD: Ahhhhhhhhhh!

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EPILOGUE:

NARRATOR 2: The next morning, Ichabod's old horse wandered home, but Ichabod himself did not return.

NARRATOR 3: A search led to the bridge. Along the bank of the brook, where the water ran dark and deep, Ichabod's hat was found, and close beside it, a shattered pumpkin.

NARRATOR 4: The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was nowhere to be found, leaving the good people of Sleepy Hollow to shake their heads in wonder.

NARRATOR 5: Some say it was Brom Bones who chased Ichabod away, disguised as the Headless Horseman. And visitors to Sleepy Hollow report having seen the schoolteacher alive and well in a nearby town.

NARRATOR 7: But there are still those who believe that the Ichabod Crane was carried off by the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

NARRATOR 8: What do you believe?