

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Written by Leanne Guenther, based on the story by Washington Irving

Sleepy Hollow is a little valley near the village of Tarry Town, on the banks of the Hudson River in New York. It's a drowsy, dreamy sort of place and the people who live there love a good ghost story.

Ichabod Crane came from Connecticut to be the village schoolmaster. He was tall and very skinny, with huge ears, big green eyes and a long nose like a snipe's beak. From a distance, people said, he looked like a scarecrow that had escaped from a cornfield. The only thing Ichabod liked better than singing and eating was listening to spooky stories. He believed every ghost tale he heard, which made walking home after dark a very nervous business.

Ichabod had a crush on Katrina Van Tassel, the rosy-cheeked daughter of a farmer near town. He found every excuse he could to visit the Van Tassel farm, where Katrina's mother always seemed to have a pie cooling and Katrina always seemed to be nearby.

The trouble for Ichabod was Brom Van Brunt, known to everyone as Brom Bones. Brom was big and strong... a champion horseman and the village's favourite prankster, and Brom wanted to marry Katrina too.

One autumn evening the Van Tassels threw a harvest party. Ichabod borrowed an old, half-blind plough horse called Gunpowder and rode over in his best suit. He ate everything in sight and danced for hours. Late in the evening, the guests began telling ghost stories.

The favourite was the tale of the Headless Horseman. He was said to be the ghost of a soldier whose head had been knocked off by a cannonball in the Revolutionary War. Every Halloween night, as the tale went, the ghostly soldier rode out from the graveyard to search for his head.

"I've met him," Brom Bones announced, pulling his dark cloak close around him with an exaggerated shiver. "Raced him one night, all the way to the church bridge."

Ichabod's eyes grew even wider. "And what happened?"

"I'd have beaten him," said Brom, "but at the bridge he turned into a skeleton, tossed a jack-o-lantern at me and vanished in a clap of thunder." He grinned across the room. "Careful on the way home tonight, Ichabod."

After the other guests left, Ichabod stayed behind to talk to Katrina. Nobody knows exactly what she said, but he came out looking very glum and rode off into the dark.

It was close to midnight, and every ghost story he'd heard came flooding back. Near a lonely stretch of swamp, he noticed a huge rider on a black horse keeping pace beside him. Ichabod sped up. The stranger sped up. Ichabod slowed down. So did the stranger. Then the moonlight caught the rider, and Ichabod saw that instead of a head, inside the hood of the tall stranger's cloak sat a jack-o-lantern with glowing eyes!

Ichabod screamed and kicked poor, old Gunpowder into a gallop. The saddle slipped off and he clung on bareback, bouncing wildly, heading for the church bridge where Brom said the Horseman had disappeared. The Horseman rose in his stirrups and hurled the jack-o-lantern toward Ichabod.

The next morning Gunpowder turned up at his owner's gate with no saddle. Down by the brook, the villagers found Ichabod's hat and next to it a smashed pumpkin.

Ichabod was never seen in Sleepy Hollow again.

Not long after, Brom Bones married Katrina. Whenever the story of Ichabod came up, someone would ask, "Brom, what do you make of that pumpkin?" Brom never answered. He just looked very knowing and once in awhile burst out laughing. Years later, an old farmer brought news that Ichabod was alive and well in another part of the country.

But... the old women of Sleepy Hollow still insist Ichabod was carried off by the Headless Horseman on Halloween night.





