

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Today's story is called "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". It is about something strange that happened long ago in a valley called "Sleepy Hollow". It was written by Washington Irving. The story is told by Doug Johnson.

Narrator: The valley known as Sleepy Hollow hides from the world in the high hills of New York state. There are many stories told about the quiet valley. But the story that people believe most is about a man who rides a horse at night. The story says the man died many years ago during the American revolutionary war. His head was shot off. Every night he rises from his burial place, jumps on his horse and rides through the valley looking for his lost head.

Near Sleepy Hollow 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 him, because he looked like a tall bird, a crane. He was tall and thin like a crane. His shoulders were small, joined two long arms. His head was small, too, and flat on top. He had big ears, large glassy green eyes and a long nose.

Ichabod did not make much money as a teacher. And although he was tall and thin, he ate like a fat man. To help him pay for his food he earned extra money teaching young people to sing. Every Sunday after church Ichabod taught singing.

Among the ladies Ichabod taught was one Katrina Van Tassel. She was the only daughter of a rich Dutch farmer. She was a girl in bloom...much like a round red, rosy apple. Ichabod had a soft and foolish heart for the ladies, and soon found himself interested in Miss Van Tassel.

Ichabod's eyes opened wide when he saw the riches of Katrina's farm: the miles of apple trees and wheat fields, and hundreds of fat farm animals. He saw himself as master of the Van Tassel farm with Katrina as his wife.

But there were many problems blocking the road to Katrina's heart. One was a strong young man named Brom Van Brunt. Brom was a hero to all the young ladies. His shoulders were big. His back was wide. And his hair was short and curly. He always won the horse races in Tarry Town and earned many prizes. Brom was never seen without a horse.

Sometimes late at night Brom and his friends would rush through town shouting loudly from the backs of their horses. Tired old ladies would awaken from their sleep and say: "Why, there goes Brom Van Brunt leading his wild group again!"

Such was the enemy Ichabod had to defeat for Katrina's heart.

Stronger and wiser men would not have tried. But Ichabod had a plan. He could not fight his enemy in the open. So he did it silently and secretly. He made many visits to Katrina's farm and made her think he was helping her to sing better.

Time passed, and the town people thought Ichabod was winning. Broms horse was never seen at Katrinas house on Sunday nights anymore.

One day in autumn Ichabod was asked to come to a big party at the Van Tassel home. He dressed in his best clothes. A farmer loaned him an old horse for the long trip to the party.

The house was filled with farmers and their wives, red-faced daughters and clean, washed sons. The tables were filled with different things to eat. Wine filled many glasses.

Brom Van Brunt rode to the party on his fastest horse called Daredevil. All the young ladies smiled happily when they saw him. Soon music filled the rooms and everyone began to dance and sing.

Ichabod was happy dancing with Katrina as Brom looked at them with a jealous heart. The night passed. The music stopped, and the young people sat together to tell stories about the revolutionary war.

Soon stories about Sleepy Hollow were told. The most feared story was about the rider looking for his lost head. One farmer told how he raced the headless man on a horse. The farmer ran his horse faster and faster. The horseman followed over bush and stone until they came to the end of the valley. There the headless horseman suddenly stopped. Gone were his clothes and his skin. All that was left was a man with white bones shining in the moonlight.

The stories ended and time came to leave the party. Ichabod seemed very happy until he said goodnight to Katrina. Was she ending their romance? He left feeling very sad. Had Katrina been seeing Ichabod just to make Brom Van Brunt jealous so he would marry her?

Well, Ichabod began his long ride home on the hills that surround Tarry Town. He had never felt so lonely in his life. He began to whistle as he came close to the tree where a man had been killed years ago by rebels.

He thought he saw something white move in the tree. But no, it was only the moonlight shining and moving on the tree. Then he heard a noise. His body shook. He kicked his horse faster. The old horse tried to run, but almost fell in the river, instead. Ichabod hit the horse again. The horse ran fast and then suddenly stopped, almost throwing Ichabod forward to the ground.

There, in the dark woods on the side of the river where the bushes grow low, stood an ugly thing. Big and black. It did not move, but seemed ready to jump like a giant monster.

Ichabods hair stood straight up. It was too late to run, and in his fear, he did the only thing he could. His shaking voice broke the silent valley.

"Who are you?" The thing did not answer. Ichabod asked again. Still no answer. Ichabods old horse began to move forward. The black thing began to move along the side of Ichabods horse in the dark. Ichabod made his horse run faster. The black thing moved with them. Side by side they moved, slowly at first. And not a word was said.

Ichabod felt his heart sink. Up a hill they moved above the shadow of the trees. For a moment the moon shown down and to Ichabods horror he saw it was a horse. And it had a rider. But the riders head was not on his body. It was in front of the rider, resting on the horse.

Ichabod kicked and hit his old horse with all his power. Away they rushed through bushes and trees across the valley of Sleepy Hollow. Up ahead was the old church bridge where the headless horseman stops and returns to his burial place.

"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. Ichabod looked back to see if the headless man had stopped. He saw the man pick up his head and throw it with a powerful force. The head hit Ichabod in the face and knocked him off his horse to the dirt below.

They found Ichabod's horse the next day peacefully eating grass. They could not find Ichabod.

They walked all across the valley. 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 found was lying near Ichabod's hat.

It was the broken pieces of a round orange pumpkin.

The town people talked about Ichabod for many weeks. They remembered the frightening stories of the valley. And finally they came to believe that the headless horseman had carried Ichabod away.

Much later an old farmer returned from a visit to New York City. He said he was sure he saw Ichabod there. He thought Ichabod silently left Sleepy Hollow because he had lost Katrina.

As for Katrina, her mother and father gave her a big wedding when she married Brom Van Brunt. Many people who went to the wedding saw that Brom smiled whenever Ichabod's name was spoken. And they wondered why he laughed out loud when anyone talked about the broken orange pumpkin found lying near Ichabod's old dusty hat.

Announcer: You have heard "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" written by Washington Irving. It was first published in eighteen twenty. Listen next week to the Voice of America for another AMERICAN STORY in Special English