



Washington Irving (1783–1859) was the first American author to win international fame. He was a lawyer who preferred to write. Today most people know his most famous stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." The setting of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is the Hudson River valley north of New York City.

- As you read the story, find examples of Irving's love for this region, its people, and its folklore.

Washington Irving

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, there lies a small market town, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarrytown. This name was given by the good housewives of the adjacent country, from the tendency of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days. Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley among high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides through it, with just murmur enough to lull one to repose, and the occasional whistle of a quail, or tapping of a woodpecker, is almost the only sound that ever breaks in upon the uniform tranquillity.¹ This glen has long been known by the name of Sleepy Hollow.

A drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang

over the land. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions. The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region is the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head. It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper² whose head had been carried away by a cannonball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War. His haunts are not confined to the valley, but extend at times to the adjacent roads, and especially to the vicinity of a church at no great distance. Certain historians of those parts claim that the body of the trooper having been buried in the churchyard, the ghost rides forth to the scene of battle in nightly quest of his head; and that the rushing speed with which he sometimes passes along the Hollow is owing to his being late, and in a

1. **tranquillity** [trang kwil'ə tē]: peace and quiet.

2. **Hessian** [hesh'ən] **trooper**: German soldier paid to fight for the British during the Revolutionary War.

hurry to get back to the churchyard before daybreak. The specter³ is known, at all the country firesides, by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

In this by-place of nature, there abode, some thirty years since,⁴ a worthy fellow of the name of Ichabod Crane, who sojourned in Sleepy Hollow for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity. The name of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the spirit of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.

His schoolhouse was a low building of one large room, rudely constructed of logs. From here the low murmur of his pupils' voices might be heard in a drowsy summer's day, like the hum of a beehive; interrupted now and then by the authoritative voice of the master, in the tone of menace or command; or, perhaps, by the appalling sound of the birch,⁵ as he urged some tardy loiterer along the flowery path of knowledge. Truth to say, he was a conscientious man, and ever bore in mind the golden maxim, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."—Ichabod Crane's scholars certainly were not spoiled.

The revenue arising from his school was small, and would have been scarcely sufficient to furnish him with daily bread, for he was a huge feeder. To help out his maintenance, he

was, according to country custom in those parts, boarded and lodged at the houses of the farmers whose children he instructed. With these he lived successively a week at a time, thus going the rounds of the neighborhood, with all his worldly effects tied up in a cotton handkerchief. In addition, he was the singing master of the neighborhood, and picked up many bright shillings⁶ by instructing the young folks in psalmody.⁷ Thus, by various little makeshifts, the worthy pedagogue⁸ got on tolerably enough, and was thought, by all who understood nothing of the labor of headwork, to have a wonderfully easy life of it.

The schoolmaster is generally a man of some importance in the female circle of a rural neighborhood, being considered of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains.⁹ Our man was esteemed by the women as a man of great learning, for he had read several books quite through, and was a perfect master of Cotton Mather's *History of New England Witchcraft*,¹⁰ in which, by the way, he most firmly believed. It was often his delight, after his school was dismissed in the afternoon, to stretch himself on the rich bed of clover bordering the little brook that whimpered by his schoolhouse, and there con over¹¹ old Mather's direful tales.

Another of his sources of fearful pleasure was to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives and listen to their marvelous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted

6. **shillings**: coins. A shilling is worth one twentieth of a pound, the basic unit of British money; for a while pounds and shillings were used in America.

7. **psalmody** [sǎ'mə dē]: singing the psalms.

8. **pedagogue** [ped'ə gog']: teacher.

9. **swains** [swānz]: young men.

10. **Cotton Mather's . . . Witchcraft**: imaginary book. Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was a preacher in colonial New England who wrote several books about witchcraft.

11. **con over**: study, memorize.

3. **specter**: ghost.

4. **abode . . . since**: lived thirty years ago; actually, around the beginning of the 1800s.

5. **birch**: rod from a birch tree, used to punish slow or disobedient students.

fields, and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses, and particularly of the Headless Horseman, or Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him. He would delight them equally by his anecdotes of witchcraft, and would frighten them woefully with speculations upon comets and shooting stars, and with the alarming fact that the world did absolutely turn round, and that they were half the time topsy-turvy!

But if there was a pleasure in all this, it was dearly purchased by the terrors of his walk homewards later. What fearful shapes and shadows beset his path amidst the dim and ghastly glare of a snowy night! And how often was he thrown into complete dismay by some rushing blast, howling among the trees, in the idea that it was the Galloping Hessian on one of his nightly scourings!¹²

Among the musical disciples who assembled, one evening in each week, to receive his instructions in psalmody was Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a prosperous Dutch farmer. She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge; ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches; and universally famed, not merely as a beauty, but as an heiress. She was a little of a coquette,¹³ as might be perceived even in her dress, which was a mixture of ancient and modern fashions, as most suited to set off her charms.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart, and it is not to be wondered at that so tempting a morsel soon found favor in his eyes, more especially after he had visited her in her paternal mansion. Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented farmer. His stronghold was situated on the

banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. Close by the farmhouse was a vast barn that might have served for a church, every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm.

The pedagogue's mouth watered as he looked upon this sumptuous promise of luxurious winter fare. In his devouring mind's eye he pictured to himself every roasting-pig running about him with a pudding in his belly, and an apple in his mouth. The pigeons were snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie, and tucked in with a coverlet of crust; the geese were swimming in their own gravy. Not a turkey but he beheld daintily trussed up, with its gizzard under its wing, and, perhaps, a necklace of savory sausages.

As the enraptured Ichabod fancied all this, and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadowlands, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains.

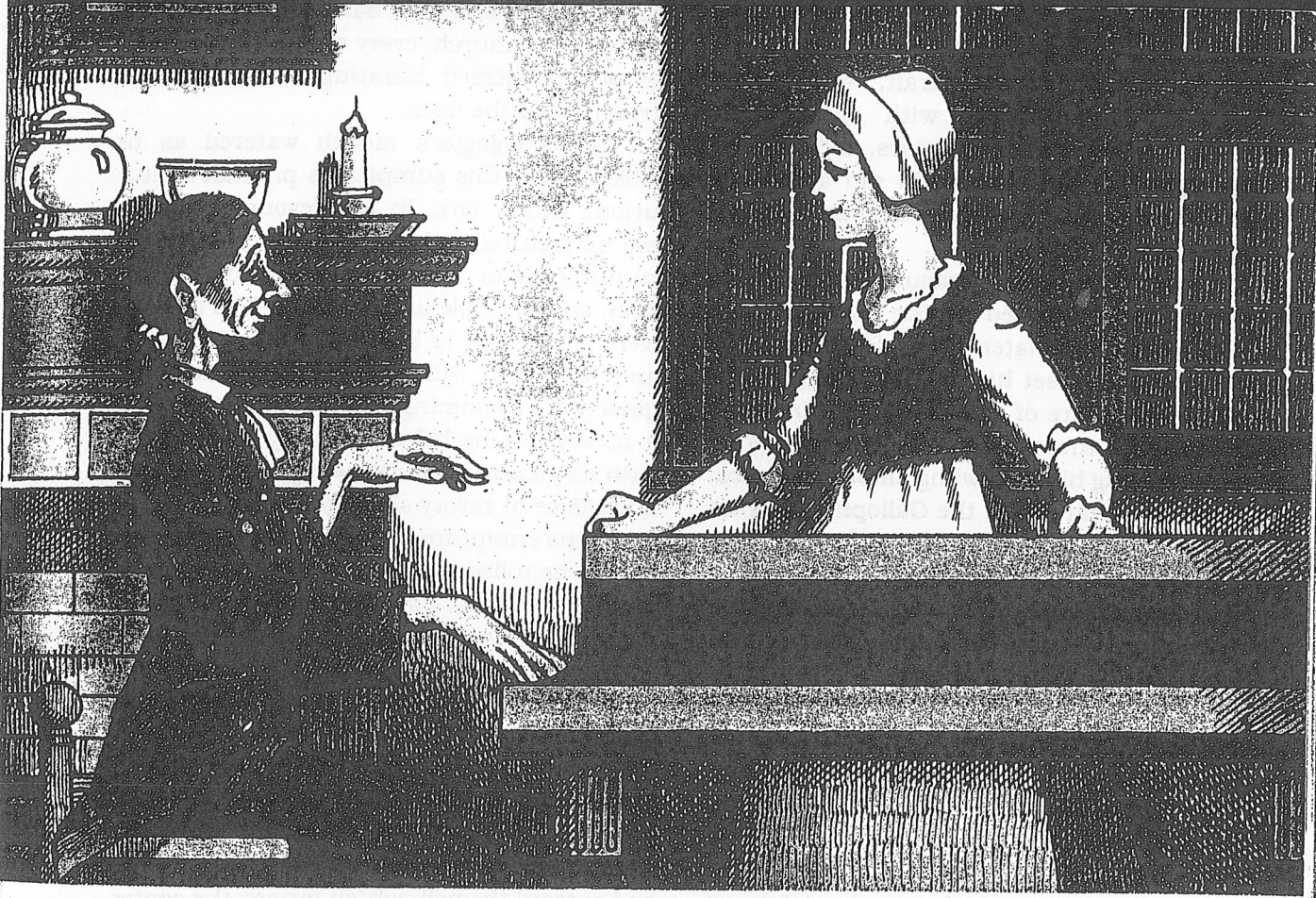
When he entered the house, the conquest of his heart was complete. It was one of those spacious farmhouses, with high-ridged but lowly sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers, the low, projecting eaves forming a piazza¹⁴ along the front. From this piazza the wondering Ichabod entered the hall, which formed the center of the mansion. Here rows of resplendent pewter¹⁵ ranged on a long dresser; a door left ajar gave him a peep into the best parlor, where the claw-footed chairs and dark mahogany tables shone like mirrors; and a corner cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china.

12. **scourings**: rides to look for something.

13. **coquette** (kō ket'): woman who flirts.

14. **projecting eaves . . . piazza** [pē az'ə]: The edges of the roof extend outward to form a porch.

15. **resplendent** [ri splen'dənt] **pewter** [pū'tər]: shiny utensils made from a silvery metal.



From the moment that Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight, the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel. In this enterprise, however, he had to encounter a host of fearful adversaries of real flesh and blood, the numerous admirers who beset every portal to her heart, keeping a watchful and angry eye upon each other, but ready to fly out in the common cause against any new competitor.

Among these the most formidable was a burly, roaring, roistering blade,¹⁶ of the name of Abraham, or, according to the Dutch abbreviation, Brom Van Brunt. He was broad-

shouldered and double-jointed, with short, curly black hair, and a bluff but not unpleasant countenance, having a mingled air of fun and arrogance. From his Herculean¹⁷ frame and great powers of limb, he had received the nickname of "Brom Bones," by which he was universally known. He was famed for great knowledge and skill in horsemanship. He was foremost at all races. He was always ready for either a fight or a frolic, but had more mischief than ill will in his composition; and, with all his overbearing roughness, there was a strong dash of waggish¹⁸ good humor at bottom. He had three or four boon compan-

16. **roistering** [rois'ter ing] **blade**: fun-loving, attractive young man.

17. **Herculean** (hur'kyə lē'on): large and powerful like Hercules, a hero in Greek mythology famous for his great strength.

18. **waggish**: playful.

ions,¹⁹ who regarded him as their model, and at the head of whom he scoured the country, attending every scene of feud or merriment for miles round.

This reckless hero had for some time singled out the blooming Katrina for the object of his gallantries, and it was whispered that she did not altogether discourage his hopes. Certain it is, his advances were signals for rival candidates to retire. When his horse was seen tied to Van Tassel's paling,²⁰ a sure sign that his master was courting within, all other suitors passed by in despair.

Such was the formidable rival with whom Ichabod Crane had to contend, and, considering all things, a stouter man than he would have shrunk from the competition, and a wiser man would have despaired. He had, however, a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance²¹ in his nature.

To have taken the field openly against his rivals would have been madness. Ichabod, therefore, made his advances in a quiet and gently insinuating²² manner. Under cover of his character of singing master, he made frequent visits at the farmhouse.

I profess not to know how women's hearts are wooed and won. To me they have always been matters of riddle and admiration. He who wins a thousand common hearts is entitled to some renown; but he who keeps undisputed sway over the heart of a coquette is indeed a hero. Certain it is, this was not the case with the redoubtable²³ Brom Bones. From the moment Ichabod Crane made his advances, the interests of the former evidently declined. His horse was no longer seen tied at

the palings on Sunday nights, and a deadly feud gradually arose between him and the schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow.

Brom, who had a degree of rough chivalry in his nature, would have carried matters to open warfare, and have settled their pretensions²⁴ to the lady according to the mode of the knights-errant of yore—by single combat; but Ichabod was too conscious of the superior might of his adversary to enter the lists²⁵ against him. He had overheard a boast of Bones, that he would "double the schoolmaster up, and lay him on a shelf of his own schoolhouse"; and he was too wary to give him an opportunity. There was something extremely provoking²⁶ in this obstinately pacific²⁷ system; it left Brom no alternative but to play boorish practical jokes upon his rival. Ichabod became the object of whimsical persecution to Bones and his gang of rough-riders. They harried his hitherto peaceful domains; smoked out his singing school, by stopping up the chimney; broke into the schoolhouse at night and turned everything topsy-turvy; so that the poor schoolmaster began to think all the witches in the country held their meetings there.

In this way matters went on for some time, without producing any material effect on the relative situation of the rivals. On a fine autumn afternoon, Ichabod, in pensive mood, sat enthroned on the lofty stool whence he usually watched all the concerns of his little literary realm. His scholars were all busily intent upon their books, or slyly whispering behind them with one eye kept upon the master; and a kind of buzzing stillness reigned throughout the schoolroom. It was suddenly

19. **boon companions**: close friends.

20. **paling**: fence.

21. **pliability** (plī'ə bil'ə tē) and **perseverance** (pur'sə vēr'əns): ability both to give in under pressure and to keep trying.

22. **insinuating** (in sin'ū āt'ing): gradual and indirect.

23. **redoubtable** (ri dou'tə bəl): causing fear.

24. **pretensions**: claims.

25. **enter the lists**: agree to fight. Knights entered the field of battle to show their willingness to fight.

26. **provoking** (prə vōk'ing): causing anger.

27. **obstinately pacific**: stubbornly peaceful.

interrupted by the appearance of a man who came clattering up to the school door with an invitation to Ichabod to attend a merrymaking, or "quilting frolic," to be held that evening at Mynheer²⁸ Van Tassel's.

All was now bustle and hubbub in the late quiet schoolroom. The scholars were hurried through their lessons; books were flung aside without being put away on the shelves; inkstands were overturned, benches thrown down; and the whole school was turned loose an hour before the usual time.

The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half-hour brushing up his best and indeed only suit of rusty black, and arranging his locks by a bit of broken looking glass that hung up in the schoolhouse. That he might make his appearance before his mistress in the true style of a cavalier,²⁹ he borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was living and issued forth, like a knight-errant in quest of adventures. But it is proper that I should, in the true spirit of romantic story, give some account of the looks and equipment of my hero and his steed. The animal he bestrode was a broken-down plow horse that had outlived almost everything but his viciousness. He was gaunt and shaggy, with a thin neck and a head like a hammer; his rusty mane and tail were tangled and knotted with burrs. Still, he must have had fire in his day, if we may judge from the name he bore of Gunpowder.

Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers'. He carried his whip perpendicularly in his hand, and, as his horse jogged

on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings.

It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the castle of the Heer Van Tassel, which he found thronged with the pride and flower of the adjacent country. Brom Bones, however, was a hero of the scene, having come to the gathering on his favorite steed, Daredevil, a creature, like himself, full of mettle³⁰ and mischief, which no one but himself could manage.

I pause to dwell upon the world of charms that burst upon the enraptured gaze of my hero as he entered the state parlor of Van Tassel's mansion. Not those of the lasses, but the ample charms of a genuine Dutch country tea table. There was the doughty doughnut, the tenderer olykoek,³¹ and the crisp and crumbling cruller; sweet cakes and short-cakes, ginger cakes and honey cakes, and the whole family of cakes. And then there were apple pies and peach pies and pumpkin pies, besides slices of ham and smoked beef; not to mention broiled shad and roasted chickens.

I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves, and am too eager to get on with my story. Happily, Ichabod Crane was not in so great a hurry as his historian, but did ample justice to every dainty.

He could not help, too, rolling his large eyes round him as he ate, and chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable luxury and splendor. Then, he thought, how soon he'd turn his back upon the old schoolhouse and kick any itinerant pedagogue out-of-doors that should dare to call him comrade!

And now the sound of the music from the common room, or hall, summoned to the dance. How could the flogger of urchins be

28. **Mynheer** [mīn hār']: Dutch for "Mister" or "Sir."

29. **cavalier** [kav'ə lēr']: brave and courteous gentleman devoted to a lady.

30. **mettle**: spirit.

31. **olykoek** [āl'ə kook']: kind of doughnut.