

MACMILLAN GUIDED READERS

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

WASHINGTON IRVING

The Legends of
Sleepy Hollow
and
Rip Van Winkle

Retold by Anne Collins



MACMILLAN

CLASSICS

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THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

1

The Ghost of the Soldier

On the eastern bank of the great Hudson River, in North America, there is a small town. Its name is Tarry Town. Once the town had a different name. Why did it change? This is the reason. Wives often sent their husbands to the market in the town to buy and sell things. "Come back quickly," the wives always said. But the husbands never returned home quickly. They stayed or "tarried" in the town and they drank beer at the inns there. So people started to call the place Tarry Town.

About two miles from Tarry Town is a little hollow—or valley—between some high hills. A small river runs through this valley. The valley is a very peaceful place. Everyone who goes there soon feels peaceful. They quickly forget their troubles. And everyone who lives there always feels sleepy. Because of this strange peaceful feeling, the valley is called "Sleepy Hollow".

Dutch settlers first came to Sleepy Hollow early in the seventeenth century. They made their homes there. But before the Dutch people came, Native Americans had lived there. These people believed in many different spirits. Perhaps these spirits made Sleepy Hollow a strange and mysterious place.

There was something very strange about the people who lived in Sleepy Hollow in the early years of the nineteenth century. They were as peaceful and as sleepy as the valley itself. They believed strongly in God. But they also believed very strongly in ghosts and spirits. They often saw strange things at night. They often heard music in the forest when nobody else was there.

There were many stories about ghosts and spirits in Sleepy Hollow and the area near it. The most famous of these stories was about the ghost of a man on a horse. Lots of people saw the man—that is what they said. He rode a huge black horse, as fast as the wind. He was always seen late at night. And there was something even more terrible about him. He had no head! So the people who lived in the area called him, “The Headless Horseman”.

Many people had seen the Headless Horseman late at night. He rode in Sleepy Hollow and he also traveled on the other roads in the area. He was often seen near a small church, a few miles from the valley.

Who was this Headless Horseman? Nobody really knew. But some people told a story about him.

“The Headless Horseman is the ghost of a soldier,” they said. “This soldier was killed in the war between Britain and the American colony. There was a terrible battle in this area. In this battle, the soldier’s head was shot off by a cannonball from a British gun.

“His body was taken to a little church near the battlefield,” these people continued. “It was buried in the graveyard next to the church. But his head still lies somewhere on the battlefield. Every night, the Horseman rides back to the battlefield to look for his head. But he never

finds it. And he always has to return to the graveyard before dawn. All ghosts have to go back to their graves before the daylight comes. And the Headless Horseman is always in a hurry because he's always late. That's why he rides so fast."

2

The Schoolmaster

The schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow was a man named Ichabod Crane. His name was a good one because he looked like the kind of bird which is called a crane. He was very tall and thin, with narrow shoulders and long arms and legs. His head was small, and very flat on the top. He had huge ears, large green eyes and a very long nose. He was not handsome at all.

Ichabod's clothes did not fit him well. They were loose, and they flapped in the wind. So when he walked, the schoolmaster looked very strange.

The school was a low building with one large room, and Ichabod was the only teacher there. This schoolhouse stood by itself at the bottom of the valley. The hills around it were covered with trees. A small river ran near the schoolhouse.

On summer days, the windows of the schoolhouse were always open. Anyone who passed could hear Ichabod's pupils saying their lessons in sleepy voices.

When lessons had finished for the day, Ichabod often went home with one of the children. Some boys and girls

had pretty older sisters. Ichabod liked young, pretty ladies. And some of his pupils had mothers who were good cooks. Ichabod liked to go home with these children most of all.

Ichabod was very thin, but he ate a huge amount of food. He loved talking about food and he loved thinking about food. Most of all, he loved eating it.

Ichabod loved food, but he loved singing too. He taught a group of young people to sing psalms—religious songs. Once a week, the group met for psalm-singing lessons. And every Sunday, Ichabod stood with his pupils in the church in the valley and sang psalms with them.

Ichabod had a good life. He did not earn very much money from teaching. He could not buy a house of his own. So he stayed at the houses of different farmers in the area. He stayed with each farmer for a week. Each week, a farmer gave the schoolmaster a bed to sleep in and food to eat. And Ichabod helped the farmers with the work on their farms. He mended fences. He took water to the horses. He cut wood for the farmers' fires. Sometimes he helped the farmers' wives to look after their children.

The farmers' wives were always happy to see Ichabod. They often invited him to tea. They made delicious cakes for him. The young women of the area liked Ichabod too. Sometimes he took walks with them, or read them funny stories. They smiled at him whenever they met him.

All the people of Sleepy Hollow respected Ichabod Crane because he was a schoolmaster. He was clever—he worked with his mind, not with his hands. “He’s a very intelligent man,” everyone said. Most of the people in the valley could not read or write. But Ichabod *could* read. So he was an important man in the area.

Ichabod Crane believed in God, but he also believed very strongly in ghosts and spirits. On summer evenings, after lessons had finished, he often lay on the grass beside the small river. He lay on the warm grass and read his favorite book. It was a book about ghosts.

Ichabod loved the stories in this book, but they frightened him. He believed everything that he read in them! He often read the book until the sky was dark. Then he could no longer see the pages, so he stopped reading. But then he had to walk back in the dark, to the farmhouse where he was staying.

A forest covered a large part of the area. Often, Ichabod had to walk through the forest to get to the farmhouse. These walks in the dark were terrible for him. He saw ghosts and spirits all around him. The branches of the trees looked like ghostly hands. And they were all trying to grab him.

