

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Synopsis:

Sleepy Hollow, a village haunted by the legendary Headless Horseman, has a new schoolmaster—the somewhat hapless and extremely superstitious Ichabod Crane. When Ichabod tries to win the hand of the beautiful Katrina Van Tassel, he makes an enemy of her former suitor, the brawny Brom Bones. Brom vows revenge and, one dark and spooky night, Ichabod finds himself in for the ride of his life!

Cast size: Six (3 men, 3 women)

Ichabod Crane – a schoolteacher

Katrina Van Tassel – a maid in the village, a coquette

Headless Horseman – the ghost of a Hessian soldier

Baltus Van Tassel – Katrina's father, a rich farmer

Mrs. Van Tassel, Katrina's mother, a farm wife

Brom Bones – a country swain in love with Katrina

Maria Metternich – a maid in the village, flirts with Brom

Johanna Brinkerhoff – a maid in the village, likes to sing

Peter Ganesvoort – Brom's schoolmate and friend

Mrs. Van Ripper – Ichabod's landlady

The following roles are to be doubled (tripled)

Chorus #1, Mrs. Van Ripper, Maria Metternich, Headless Horseman #2

Chorus #2, Headless Horseman #1, Peter Ganesvoort, Baltus Van Tassel

Chorus #3, Johanna Brinkerhoff, Mrs. Van Tassel

Chorus #4, Major Andre, Brom Bones, Headless Horseman #3

Chorus #5, Katrina Van Tassel, Headless Horseman #4

SETTING: *Various locations in the village of Sleepy Hollow, a predominantly Dutch hamlet on the banks of the Hudson River in New York. The year is 1790. The locations include the interior of a schoolhouse, an old country road surrounded by woods, the great room of the Van Ripper cottage, the graveyard next to the Old Dutch Church, and the parlor of the Van Tassel home. The only set pieces are two simple wooden benches, which will be arranged to distinguish the various locales. Resting atop one of the benches is a small tree branch with clusters of dry, brown leaves. .*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. The glow of moonlight. The CHORUS enters, singing. The CHORUS consists of the five actors who play all the roles except that of Ichabod Crane.*

CHORUS

*Beware the dark and winding road
Where spirits haunt the night
Where ghosts and goblins walk the Earth
And Evil takes delight*

*A scary place, the very place
Good angels fear to tread
The foolish man who walks this path
Will leave without his head*

The foolish man who walks this path...

(ICHABOD CRANE enters, carrying a hobo-stick over his shoulder.)

Will leave without his head

(As ICHABOD looks about, clearly spooked by the woods, the CHORUS begins to vocalize the wind, taking the shape of the trees along the road. CHORUS #5 picks up the tree branch and rattles the leaves. ICHABOD looks about at the trees then starts down the road. CHORUS #5 rattles the tree branch at him.)

CHORUS #5

(Whispering)
Sleepy Hollow...

(ICHABOD whirls about in fear. CHORUS #5 hands the branch to CHORUS #4 who rattles it behind Ichabod's back.)

CHORUS #4

(Whispering)
Sleepy Hollow...

(Again, ICHABOD whirls about in fear. CHORUS #4 hands the branch to CHORUS #3 who rattles it behind Ichabod's back.)

CHORUS #3

(Whispering)
Sleepy Hollow...

(Once again, ICHABOD whirls about. CHORUS #3 hands the branch to CHORUS #2 who rattles it behind Ichabod's back.)

CHORUS #2

(Whispering)
Sleepy Hollow...

(ICHABOD whirls.)

CHORUS #2/CHORUS #3/CHORUS #4/CHORUS #5
(Surrounding him)
Sleepy Hollow!

(ICHABOD turns about clearly frightened, then burst thru the circle of trees and runs into MRS. VAN RIPPER. He shrieks in fear and starts to run off.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Wait!

(ICHABOD stops and turns.)

Are you Master Crane? Master Ichabod Crane?

ICHABOD

I am.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

The new schoolmaster?

ICHABOD

Yes.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

I was told to meet you under Major Andre's Tree.

ICHABOD

(Confused)
Major Andre's...?

(MRS. VAN RIPPER points to CHORUS #2-5, who have formed Major Andre's Tree)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

That tree – over there, next to the bridge.

(She looks him up and down, assessing him.)

ICHABOD

Oh, yes. Well...

MRS. VAN RIPPER

You look like a schoolmaster. Skinny – and a bit of a smart-aleck. I am Mrs. Van Ripper. You will be boarding with me. Welcome to Sleepy Hollow.

ICHABOD

Thank you, Mrs. Van Ripper, and allow me to apologize for shrieking so. This road is dark and spooky and for a moment I thought you were...

MRS. VAN RIPPER

A witch. I get that a lot.

ICHABOD

It's nothing personal, I assure you. I am fascinated with witchcraft and the supernatural...

MRS. VAN RIPPER

(Interrupting)
Where's your horse?

ICHABOD

I beg your pardon?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Your horse. Giddy-up. Where is it?

ICHABOD

I don't own one.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

You don't own a *horse*? Everyone owns a horse – even *I* own a horse. Granted, my Gunpowder ain't much of a horse, but still... Why don't you own a horse?

ICHABOD

I don't need one. I carry all my earthly possessions in here.

(He shows her the hobo-stick.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Very well. Follow me, then...

(She starts to walk down the road. ICHABOD hastens to follow.)

ICHABOD

Actually, these aren't *all* my earthly possessions. I also own these two books.

(He pulls two books out of his pocket and holds one up.)

ICHABOD

This one is called *The Adventures of Daniel Boone*.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Daniel who?

ICHABOD

Daniel Boone – the frontiersman who blazed the trail to Kentucky! My greatest ambition is to follow in his footsteps. I took this teaching position in order to save money for the journey.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

(Not impressed)

Huh.

ICHABOD

You may find this other book more to your liking.

(He holds up the other one.)

The History of New England Witchcraft. It's full of tales of witches and hauntings and evil spirits... wonderfully frightful stories! Perhaps you'd like to read it...?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

No.

ICHABOD

Don't you believe in witches and ghosts?

(MRS. VAN RIPPER stops and faces him.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

I don't read... This is my house.

(She gestures to center stage. The scene shifts to Van Ripper's House.)

Come in, then.

(She enters the house and rearranges the benches as they continue their conversation.)

ICHABOD

I could teach you.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Teach me what?

ICHABOD

How to read.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

I don't believe in education. I'm only boarding a schoolmaster because the town fathers are paying me to do it. Without that money, I couldn't eat. Keep your books to yourself.

ICHABOD

But wouldn't you like to learn about witches and ghosts and spirits?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

I don't need to read a book to know about ghosts and spirits. We have plenty of those around these parts already.

ICHABOD

You do?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

This is where you'll sleep.

(She points to one of the benches then exits off.)

ICHABOD

Thank you.

(He sits down on the bed, looks around a moment then calls off.)

You say you have ghosts in these parts?

(She enters carrying a kettle in one hand and a bowl and spoon in the other.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Ghosts, haunts – more than one, I'll wager. I made a stew. Would you like a bowl?

ICHABOD

Yes! Please!

(She sets the kettle down and spoons some stew into the bowl.)

What sort of haunts?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

The usual sort. That big tree, down the road, next to the bridge...

(CHORUS #2, CHORUS #3 and CHORUS #5 form Major Andre's Tree.)

ICHABOD

Where I met you?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

The very one. That's Major Andre's Tree.

ICHABOD

Major Andre?

(CHORUS #4 *steps forward as MAJOR ANDRE*)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

The British spy. He was captured under that tree and hung for his troubles.

(MAJOR ANDRE *stands on tip-toe, drops his head and twists back and forth as if hanging.*)

Many a dark night, mournful wails of a soul in torment can be heard coming from its branches.

MAJOR ANDRE

(*Wailing*)
Aaaaaaaaaaagggggghhhh...

ICHABOD

(*Frightened*)
Oh my!

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Here.

(*She hands him a bowl of stew and a spoon. The CHORUS breaks its pose and resumes its "normal" position.*)

ICHABOD

Thank you!

(*He proceeds to eat voraciously, not even pausing to breathe, making lots of noise. He scrapes the bowl clean with his spoon then licks it for good measure. MRS. VAN RIPPER watches him in awe. He hands the bowl back to her. Beat.*)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

More?

ICHABOD

Yes! Please!

(*She turns back to the kettle and stirs it.*)

ICHABOD (cont.)

Is Major Andre the only ghost that haunts that road?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

There are a few others – but none as famous as the Headless Horseman.

ICHABOD

Headless Horseman?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Another soldier – one of those Hessians who fought alongside the British. Got his head blown off by a cannonball.

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #4/CHORUS #5

(Imitating a cannon)

Boom!

ICHABOD

(Frightened)

Oh my!

MRS. VAN RIPPER

They buried him in the graveyard at the Old Dutch Church...

(CHORUS #3, CHORUS #4, and CHORUS #5 kneel down with their arms at their sides to form The Tombstones of the Old Dutch Graveyard.)

And they say that on the darkest of nights, his spirit rises from the grave...

(CHORUS #2 stands up from behind them, a black cape draped over his head and shoulders, giving the appearance of a missing head. He is HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1. He crosses to the bench opposite ICHABOD and steps on it as if it were his horse.)

And rides forth to the scene of battle in search of his head...

(HEADLESS HOREMAN #1 whips his “horse”.)

HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1

Ya!

(CHORUS #3, CHORUS #4, and CHORUS #5 make galloping sounds with their hands on the floor as the HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1 rides the horse.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

He rides like the wind, for he must get back to the churchyard before the break of day...

(The galloping sounds come faster as the HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1 goes even faster.)

HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1

Ya! Ya!

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Or else his soul will be doomed to wander the earth forever.

HEADLESS HORSEMAN #1

Yaaaaaaaaaaaa!

(The galloping sounds crescendo with one loud “smack” on the floor then silence. Beat.)

ICHABOD

(Terrified)

Oh my!

(The CHORUS resumes its normal position.)

MRS. VAN RIPPER

Here.

(She hands ICHABOD another bowl of stew. He downs this one as quickly and as noisily as the first. Again, she watches in awe. ICHABOD licks the bowl clean.)

Where does a skinny smart-aleck like you put all that food?

(He holds the bowl out to her.)

There’s no more to be had – you emptied the kettle.

ICHABOD

Perhaps tomorrow you’ll use a bigger kettle.

(She takes the bowl.)

ICHABOD (cont.)

That Headless Horseman fellow sounds terrifying.

MRS. VAN RIPPER

He's not the scariest doings going on around here.

ICHABOD

What could be scarier than a Headless Horseman?

MRS. VAN RIPPER

The students at that school of yours. And the scariest of all is Brom Bones...

(CHORUS #4 assumes the role of BROM BONES, flexing his biceps.)

Beware that Brom Bones, Master Crane. He's trouble, he is...

(CHORUS #2 rings a school bell and the scene changes to the interior of the schoolhouse. ICHABOD rearranges the benches accordingly. MRS. VAN RIPPER carries off the kettle and bowl. CHORUS #5 exits opposite. CHORUS #2 is now PETER GANESVOORT and CHORUS #3 is now JOHANNA BRINKERHOFF.)

JOHANNA

(Singing)

Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do...

PETER

Good morning, Johanna.

(JOHANNA, annoyed, turns her back on PETER and continues warming up her voice.)

JOHANNA

(Singing softly)

La-la-la-la-la-la-la...

BROM

Peter, let's arm wrestle!

PETER

I would rather not...