The eastern shore of the Hudson River is a little valley known as Sleepy Hollow. A drowsy, dreamy atmosphere seems to hang over the land, as if it were under the sway of some witching power. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions, but the dominant spirit that haunts this region is the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head. It is said to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head was carried away by a cannon ball during the Revolutionary War. The ghost rides forth nightly to the scene of battle in search of his head, and he travels with great speed to get back to the churchyard before daybreak.

In this out-of-the-way place there lived a worthy fellow by the name of Ichabod Crane, who instructed the children of the vicinity. The name Crane was well suited to him. He was tall and exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, and hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves. He had huge ears, large green eyes, and a long nose. To see him striding along on a windy day, with his clothes fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for a scarecrow escaped from a cornfield.

From his schoolhouse could usually be heard the voices of his pupils, reciting their lessons, interrupted now and then by the voice of the master, or by the sound of his birch switch, as he urged some unfortunate along the path of knowledge.

According to custom, Ichabod Crane was boarded and lodged at the houses of the farmers whose children he instructed. With these he lived a week at a time, thus making the rounds of the neighborhood. His appearance at a home was apt to occasion a stir, for the ladies thought his taste and accomplishments vastly superior to those of the rough country farmers. He had read several books quite through, and was a perfect master of Cotton Mather’s *History of New England Witchcraft*, in which he most firmly believed. It was often his delight, after school was dismissed, to study old Mather’s direful tales until dusk. Then, as he wended his way home, every sound of nature fluttered his overexcited imagination: the moan of the whippoorwill, the cry of the tree toad, or the dreary hooting of the screech owl.

He loved to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives as they sat spinning by the fire, and listened with interest to their tales of ghosts and goblins—in particular, the legend of the headless horseman. But the pleasure in all this was dearly purchased by the terrors of his subsequent walk homeward. What
fearful shapes and shadows beset his path! How often did he dread to look over his shoulder, lest he should behold some uncouth being close behind him!

In addition to his other vocation, Ichabod Crane was the singing master of the neighborhood. Among his musical disciples was Katrina Van Tassel, the only child of a substantial Dutch farmer. She was a blooming lass of eighteen, ripe and rosy-cheeked as one of her father’s peaches. She soon found favor in Ichabod’s eyes, not merely for her beauty but for her vast inheritance. Old Van Tassel was a thriving, liberal-hearted farmer and a doting father. Every window and crevice of his vast barn was full to bursting with the treasures of the farm. Sleek porkers grunted in their pens, and regiments of turkeys went gobbling through the farmyard. The pedagogue’s mouth watered as he pictured every pig roasted, with an apple in his mouth and every turkey daintily trussed up, with a necklace of savory sausages. As he rolled his eyes over the fat meadowlands, and the orchards burdened with ruddy fruit, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit them, and he determined to gain her affections.

He was to encounter, however, a host of fearful adversaries: Katrina’s numerous rustic admirers. The most formidable of these was burly Brom Van Brunt, a local hero of some renown. His Herculean frame had earned him the nickname of Brom Bones. Brom Bones was famous for his horsemanship, and always ready for either a fight or a frolic, though he had more mischief than ill will in him. With all his roughness, there was a strong dash of good humor at bottom. Whenever a madcap prank occurred in the neighborhood, people whispered that Brom Bones must be at the bottom of it.

When Brom Bones began wooing Katrina, most other suitors gave up the chase, not wanting to cross the lion in his affections. But Ichabod Crane persevered in his quest. He was therefore delighted when, one fine autumnal morning, a farmhand came to the school door with an invitation for Ichabod to attend a merrymaking at Van Tassel’s. The young scholars were turned loose an hour before the usual time, yelping in joy. The gallant Ichabod then brushed up his only suit of rusty black and fussed over his appearance in front of a broken looking glass. That he might make his appearance in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse. Thus gallantly mounted, he issued forth, like a knight in quest of adventure. The horse was gaunt and sway-backed; his rusty mane and tail were knotted with burrs; one eye had lost its pupil and was glaring and spectral, but the other had the gleam of a devil in it. He must have had fire and mettle in his day, for he bore the name of Gunpowder. Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed; his elbows
stuck out like a grasshopper’s, and as he rode the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings.

The castle of Van Tassel was thronged with the flowering beauties of the adjacent country. It was not the charms of the buxom lasses that caught our hero’s gaze as he entered the parlor, however, but those of a Dutch country table piled high with autumn food. There was the doughy doughnut, the crisp cruller, and a whole family of cakes. And then there were apple and peach and pumpkin pies, besides ham and smoked beef, dishes of preserved plums, peaches, pears and quinces; not to mention roasted chickens; and bowls of milk and cream. As Ichabod sampled every dainty, he chuckled to think that he might one day be lord of all this splendor.

Ichabod danced proudly with the lady of his heart, his loosely hung frame clattering about the room, while Brom Bones sat brooding by himself in the corner. When the revel began to break up, Ichabod lingered behind to have a little talk with the heiress Katrina, fully convinced that he was now on the high road to success. Something, however, must have gone wrong at the interview, for he soon sallied forth from the mansion with an air quite desolate. He went straight to the stable, and with several hearty kicks roused his steed.

It was the witching time of night when Ichabod traveled homeward. All the ghost stories that he had heard over the years now came crowding upon his recollection. The night grew darker; the stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky. He had never felt so lonely. A splash by the side of a bridge caught his ear. In the dark shadow, he beheld something huge, misshapen, black and towering. The hair rose upon his head. He stammered, “Who are you?” He received no reply. The shadowy object put itself in motion, and bounded into the middle of the road. It appeared to be a horseman of large dimensions, mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. Ichabod quickened his steed, in hopes of leaving the mysterious horseman behind. The stranger, however, quickened to an equal pace. The odd silence of Ichabod’s companion was soon fearfully accounted for. For upon seeing his fellow-traveler in relief against the sky, gigantic in height, and muffled in a cloak, Ichabod was horror-struck to perceive that he was headless, and that he carried his head before him on his saddle. In desperation Ichabod rained kicks upon Gunpowder. The specter followed close behind. Away they dashed, stones flying.

An opening in the trees now cheered him with the hope that the church bridge was at hand, the place where, legend said, the horseman should stop. Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer would vanish. Instead, he saw the goblin
rising up in his stirrups, in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod tried to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash. He tumbled into the dust, and Gunpowder and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found quietly cropping grass at his master’s gate. The students were assembled at the schoolhouse, but no schoolmaster arrived. The tracks of horse’s hoofs dented in the road were traced to the bridge. On the bank was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.

There was much gossip and speculation about the disappearance of Ichabod Crane. Some said he had been carried off by the headless horseman; others reported that he had simply left town in humiliation at having been dismissed by Katrina. Shortly after his rival’s disappearance, Brom Bones conducted Katrina in triumph to the altar. Whenever the story of Ichabod was related, Bones looked exceedingly knowing and always burst into hearty laughter at the mention of the pumpkin. The old country wives, however, maintain to this day that Ichabod was spirited away, and it is said that one may still hear his voice, chanting a melancholy psalm tune among the solitudes of Sleepy Hollow.