

# The headless horseman

In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, Icabod saw something huge, misshapen, black and towering. It didn't stir but seemed to gather up in the gloom, like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveller.

The hair of the terrified teacher rose upon his head with terror. What was to be done? To turn and fly was now too late; and besides what chance was there of escaping ghost or goblin, if such it was, which could ride upon the wings of the wind? Summoning up, therefore, a show of courage, he demanded in stammering accents, 'Who are you?'

He received no reply.

Icabod repeated his demand in a still more agitated voice. Still there was no answer.

Once more he slapped the sides of his inflexible mount,

Gunpowder, and shutting his eyes, broke forth with an involuntary psalm tune.

Just then the shadowy object of his alarm moved and, with a scramble and a bound, stood at once in the middle of the road. Though the night was dark and dismal yet the form of the unknown might now in some degree be ascertained.

It appeared to be a horseman of large dimensions, mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. He made no offer of molestation or sociability, but kept aloof on one side of the road, jogging along on the blind side of Gunpowder, who had now got over his fright and waywardness.

Icabod, who had no relish for this strange midnight companion, quickened his steed, in hopes of leaving him behind. The stranger,

however, quickened his horse to an equal pace. Icabod pulled up and fell into a walk, thinking to lag behind—the other did the same.

There was something in the moody and dogged silence of this persistent companion that was mysterious and appalling. It was soon fearfully accounted for.

On mounting the rising ground, which brought the figure of the fellow-traveller into relief against the sky, gigantic in height and muffled in cloak, Icabod was horror-struck on perceiving he was headless. But his horror was more increased on observing that the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was carried before him on the pommel of the saddle.

Adapted from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving (1783–1859).

