Everyone believed that the valley of Sleepy Hollow was haunted. But the one who believed it most was Ichabod Crane. Ichabod lived in Sleepy Hollow, and it was a good place for him, since he loved to read about goblins and witches and to tell frightening ghost stories.

Of course, Ichabod didn't spend all his time thinking about ghosts. He also thought about food. Even in school he thought about it. He would often lose his place in a book because his mind was on lunch instead of his work. This wouldn't have been so unusual, except Ichabod was the teacher!

One afternoon, Ichabod gave his class a problem in arithmetic. Smacking his lips, he asked, "If you have six cakes, three cakes and ten cakes, how many cakes do you have?" The class set to work to find the answer. Ichabod
walked around with a stick in his hand to “help along” any pupil who seemed lazy.

As the class was working, a young man rode up to the schoolhouse door. “There’s a party at the Van Tassel farm tonight,” he called to Ichabod. “And you’re invited. Supper is at eight o’clock.”

“Wonderful!” answered the schoolmaster. “Thank you for the news!” He watched with excitement as the young man rode off to invite the other guests. Then Ichabod turned to his class.

“My dear children,” he beamed. “Is your work finished?” He was so happy that he didn’t even whip the boy who gave the wrong answer to the problem. In fact, he gave the class the rest of the day off.

Ichabod rushed home to get ready for the big night ahead. He hummed as he took a steaming hot bath, shined his best shoes and carefully brushed his Sunday suit. He spent half an hour just combing his hair. And as he stood in front of the mirror, he thought about Katrina.

Beautiful Katrina! She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Van Tassel. How lovely she was, with her big brown eyes and shining curls. And how rich! If only she would marry him. Then they could sit at her parents’ wonderful dinner table every single day!

Ichabod took a last look in the mirror. “What a handsome fellow!” he said to the face in the glass. Then he went to borrow a horse from the farmer in whose house he lived.

Soon Ichabod was bouncing up the road on the sagging back of old Gunpowder, Farmer Brown’s gentlest horse. People smiled as the pair rode by. “Crane is certainly the right name for our good teacher,” one man chuckled. “He looks just like that bird.”

It was true. Ichabod had a long, skinny neck and long, skinny legs. His feet almost touched the ground as he rode. His pointed elbows stuck out on either side. They flapped up and down with Gunpowder’s every step. Even the tail of Ichabod’s coat fluttered behind him like a bird’s tail feathers!

In a short while, Ichabod reached the Van Tassel farm house. Mr. Van Tassel met him at the door. “Welcome, Master Crane,” said his host. “Come in and join the others.”

Ichabod hurried inside, but he paid little attention to the other guests. He simply couldn’t take his eyes off the food. Never had he seen such a table! When everyone sat down to dinner, he was the first to reach for the heaping bowls and platters. And each time his plate was empty, he was talked into having “just a bit more.”

As everyone was eating, a noise like rolling thunder was heard outside. No one was afraid, though. They knew it was only young Brom Bones and his friends racing up the road on their horses. Katrina ran to the door with a blush. She waved shyly as Brom leaped off his horse.

Brom led his laughing friends into the house. They were
jolly, handsome young men. Brom bowed to Mr. and Mrs. Van Tassel and winked at their pretty blond daughter. Then he went to shake hands with the guests.

In less than a minute, Brom was telling a funny story. It was about a trick he had played on a friend. The guests laughed until tears ran down their cheeks. They loved to hear Brom’s merry tales.

One guest, however, didn’t care for Brom’s tales at all. Ichabod Crane only turned up his long nose at the storyteller and yawned. He was sure Katrina didn’t like Brom Bones either. Certainly she had smiled at Brom just to be kind.

“After all,” thought Ichabod, “Brom is just a joker. But I am a teacher! I’ve read three books all the way through. And I can sing like a bird.” To prove it, he burst into song.

Ichabod’s voice rang through the room like a great bell—a great bell with a great crack in it! People’s eyes popped open in wonder at the noise. A few guests put their hands over their ears. But Ichabod thought they were only amazed at his wonderful talent.

Before long, someone began to play a fiddle. Ichabod didn’t waste a moment. He was sure that he could dance as well as he could sing. And how right he was! Ichabod led Katrina to the middle of the floor and began to dance. His body shook from head to toe. His arms waved like flapping fans. He jumped from side to side and rolled his eyes. Katrina laughed as she tried to keep up. But Brom Bones—

 wasn’t laughing.

When the music stopped, Ichabod hurried to join some guests near the fire. They were telling ghost stories, and Ichabod dearly loved such tales.

“A strange woman in white appears in the graveyard just before each big storm,” the blacksmith was saying. “I tell you, I’ve seen her twice!”

Ichabod’s teeth began to chatter. Brom saw him and smiled. The mayor’s wife went on. “I’m more afraid of the Headless Horseman.”

“The Headless Horseman?” Ichabod asked in a weak voice. “What’s that?”

Brom spoke up. “The Headless Horseman is the ghost of a soldier whose head was shot from his shoulders. Even now, the ghost sometimes rides through the night in search of his lost head.”

Ichabod shook from head to foot. He believed every word of the story with all his heart.

Soon the party was over. Still shaking, Ichabod went to say good night to Katrina. However, she turned away, hardly noticing that he was there.

Poor Ichabod. Unhappily, he started his trip home on Gunpowder. But as he rode through the dark night, a strange feeling came over him. “How foolish,” he thought. “There are no ghosts out here. I know better than to believe in such things.” Still, unhappy as he was, he couldn’t get his mind off the tales he had heard—
especially the one about the Headless Horseman.

Suddenly Ichabod felt a chill up and down his back. Now he really began to shake. He had a strong feeling that he wasn’t alone. His heart pounding, he looked to the left and to the right. But he saw nothing unusual. Then he stared up the road in front of him. All he could see was the old church steeple, looking just the same as always. Still trembling, he rode on.

Ichabod came to a small wooden bridge. Gunpowder set one foot on it, then jerked to a sudden stop. Now Ichabod heard a step behind him. He sat up in his saddle. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. Slowly he turned his long neck to peek at the road behind him. Something big and black was standing in the darkness! It looked like a monster ready to spring!

Ichabod almost fainted. The monster was a huge horse and rider, not far behind. The teacher rubbed his eyes. Then he let out a wild scream!

“The Headless Horseman!” he cried. “The Headless Horseman is after me! Help! Somebody!” He dug his skinny heels into Gunpowder’s ribs. The old farm horse gave a leap and began to gallop wildly down the road.

“Faster! Faster!” cried Ichabod, his long legs kicking in the air. He looked back to see if the Horseman had been left behind. But no, the awful thing was even closer!

Ichabod shook as if he would fall apart. His teeth chattered louder than Gunpowder’s hoofs. He saw that the ghost did have a head—but it was carrying its head under its arm!

Now the Horseman started to swing its head around and around in the air. Higher and higher it swung it, faster and faster.

“No!” screamed Ichabod. “No! Don’t do it!” He dug his heels deeper into Gunpowder’s sweating sides.

The old horse did his best to pick up speed. Up steep hills and down deep valleys they raced. Sparks flew through the night as Gunpowder’s hoofs hit the stones.

“Help! It’s after me! It’s after me!” Ichabod howled. He looked back once more and gasped. The terrible thing was
only a few feet away!

Suddenly the Headless Horseman rushed forward. It swung its head high in the air. Then it let go! Ichabod tried to duck, but the head flew straight toward him! He screamed with all his might.

"Y-A-A-A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a" he howled, as the head hit him squarely in the back and broke into pieces. Ichabod threw up his long arms and fell off Gunpowder's back in a heap. Down the hill he tumbled, head over heels. Then he jumped up. Still howling, he raced through the night, his arms waving as he went. Faster and faster he ran, farther and farther, until he was only a speck in the road.

From that night on, Ichabod Crane was never seen in Sleepy Hollow again.

The next morning, a very tired old Gunpowder was found eating grass at his master's front gate. The farmer wondered where Ichabod could be. So did the children who stood by the schoolhouse door waiting for their teacher. Many people looked for Ichabod, but he was not to be found. What was found were the tracks of horses' hoofs along the road from the Van Tassel farm. And not far from the tracks was a broken pumpkin.

One of the men in the search party told Brom Bones about the broken pumpkin. Brom burst out laughing as if he had just heard the best joke of his life. And for years after, even when he had been married to Katrina for a very long time, Brom would laugh for hours if someone just mentioned the word "pumpkin," or the name of Ichabod Crane.