

WAKING SLEEPY HOLLOW

By Jonathan Yukich

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AUDITION 1- 2 m, 2 w

In this scene, Ichabod learns the tale of “The Headless Horseman.”

(ICHABOD, OLD LADY, and REALLY OLD LADY appear with long prongs with apples on the end, holding them over a makeshift hearth. FX: It is a stormy night.)

OLD LADY: Mr. Crane, will you tell us again the story of “The Woman in White”?

ICHABOD: If you wish.

REALLY OLD LADY: It makes my hairs stand.

ICHABOD: Then be sure that your hairs take their seats.

(The OLD LADIES erupt in laughter.)

OLD LADY: Oh, Mr. Crane, you’re a hoot and a half!

ICHABOD: I’m most pleased to relate the story, but I wouldn’t want it to set off your heart murmur again.

OLD LADY: Oh, we can’t resist.

REALLY OLD LADY: Go on, Mr. Crane, tell the tale.

ICHABOD: Very late one night, many years ago, in my native Connecticut, a comet blazed in the night sky above a tiny hamlet. Many sensed something passing, but only one person was awake to eyewitness the incredible phenomenon: young Sarah Dibble, the preacher’s daughter. She’d had a strange dream, and was left wide awake counting the stars. After seeing the comet, she became endowed with the most astounding gift. Astounding, I tell you – too sensational to be believed! She suddenly had the powers of...a psychic!

REALLY OLD LADY: Oh Lord, I feel my murmur.

OLD LADY: Shut up about your murmur. Let him finish.

ICHABOD: Whatever lay ahead, good or bad, Young Sarah Dibble could foresee it. Everything from who was to die, to the bounty of the harvest to come. In the beginning, the town embraced her ability, hailed her talent as ordained from above. Many believed she was an angel, which is why she was always dressed in white. But not long after the town came into a rough patch. There was drought, famine, intolerable winters. Sarah foretold it all. Soon, the town began to accuse her of every bad thing. They were desperate to lay the blame somewhere. And so they found her guilty of...witchcraft!

OLD LADY: Oh my!

REALLY OLD LADY: Witches are no good.

ICHABOD: They took young Sarah Dibble to the main square and stoned her bloody.

REALLY OLD LADY: Stoning's the only surefire way to kill a witch.

OLD LADY: Aside from burning at the stake.

REALLY OLD LADY: But the stench—

OLD LADY: Oh golly, does it linger.

REALLY OLD LADY: They were wise to have her stoned.

ICHABOD: The next day, in the same square, the people of the little hamlet had a celebration, thinking they were free from the curse. But in the middle of the festivities, hovering in the sky above them all, there appeared the ghost of young Sarah Dibble, wearing her blood white dress. Legend has it that all who laid eyes on her that night never made it home. And she's haunted the area ever since. To this very day, if you're hapless enough to meet the Woman in White, death cannot be far behind.

REALLY OLD LADY: I think I just peed myself.

OLD LADY: You're old. You're obliged.

ICHABOD: Perhaps this should be my cue to say goodnight.

OLD LADY: But you haven't heard a story from us.

ICHABOD: I should be on my way before the storm gets worse. Besides, with all due respect, ladies, I think I've heard all of your stories before.

REALLY OLD LADY: There's one we've yet to tell.

OLD LADY: It's terribly terrifying.

REALLY OLD LADY: We thought we'd let you get settled in town before sharing it.

ICHABOD: I've likely heard tell of it already.

OLD LADY: You haven't heard this one.

REALLY OLD LADY: It's special to Sleepy Hollow.

ICHABOD: Then, by all means, what's it about?

LADIES TOGETHER: *(The LADIES look at each other, then at their visitor, ominously.)* "The Headless Horseman."

(SFX: A crack of lightning and a peel of thunder. ALL start with a fright.)

ICHABOD: Headless, you say?

REALLY OLD LADY: Indeed. A figure on horseback, without a head.

OLD LADY: It's quite a sight.

REALLY OLD LADY: He's very grumpy.

ICHABOD: You've seen him?

OLD LADY: Thankfully, no, but plenty have.

REALLY OLD LADY: Legend has it he was a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

OLD LADY: He had his head shot off by a cannonball.

REALLY OLD LADY: At night he appears in the church graveyard—

OLD LADY: And rides through the valley—

REALLY OLD LADY: Upon his horse, galloping at ferocious speeds—

OLD LADY: Ever in a rush.

ICHABOD: What, if I may ask, is his hurry?

REALLY OLD LADY: Why, to find his head by daybreak.

(SFX: Another peel of thunder. Pause, as ICHABOD contemplates the horror. He is nearly shivering.)

OLD LADY: *(Suddenly jovial.)* Well, have a good trip home, Mr. Crane!

REALLY OLD LADY: We do enjoy your visits.

OLD LADY: Here, take some apples.

REALLY OLD LADY: You may want to stay close to the road.

(OLD LADY and REALLY OLD LADY exit. ICHABOD steps forward, seized with fear.)

MAYOR Z: From then on, hardly an hour passed that Ichabod did not pay some thought to the headless ghost. He pictured the ghastly abomination and its equally frightful horse! The vision of the two beasts – wicked and vile and bent on revenge – began to take hold in his head, a kind of phantom of the mind! The very thought nearly caused the schoolmaster to collapse in terror!

(FX: With this, a loud chord sounds and the image of the HEADLESS HORSEMAN upon his horse appears with lightning and thunder. We hear the Headless Horseman's amplified, booming cackle, both sneering and mocking. This is a product of Ichabod's mind. Still, the thought makes ICHABOD jump, drop his apples, and rush off in fear. The image of the Headless Horseman looms, still mounted in its all-powerful pose, lightning going off around it. Allow the image to really sink in. BLACKOUT.)

AUDITION 2- 4 m

In this scene, Ichabod runs from the Headless Horseman.

(SFX: Dog howling. ICHABOD starts at this; it stirs him from his sulking. He now realizes it's late, dark, and that he is alone. Things become gloomy, spooky.)

MAYOR Z: *(Cont'd.)* It was at this point that Ichabod remembered himself.

OLAF: He began to shudder with dread.

MAYOR Z: For the cemetery was straight ahead.

OLAF: And this was where the great chase would ensue.

MAYOR Z: Before we get to that, let us show you a map. Olaf, if you will.

(OLAF unfurls a large map. The map shows what the two describe. MAYOR Z uses a pointer. Throughout the chase,

Mayor Z indicates where they are on the map, helping the audience to follow the chase.)

OLAF: A visual aid.

MAYOR Z: *(As shown on the map.)* To help you get a lay of the land. This is the road leading to the cemetery, and Ichabod is right about here at present. All of this over here is the cemetery. And here is the little wooden bridge, where the Headless Horseman burst into flames. Just beyond the bridge, on a grassy knoll, stands our whitewashed church.

OLAF: Just as Brom Bones described in his story.

MAYOR Z: But we're getting ahead of ourselves. In summary, if you encounter the Headless Horseman at the cemetery, you must make it across the wooden bridge to escape him.

OLAF: Now back to Ichabod, who again—

MAYOR Z: *(Indicating with pointer.)* —was right about here.

OLAF: Ichabod recalled all of these details as he rode.

MAYOR Z: He was troubled by the absolute silence of the night. Listen.

(For a few moments ICHABOD, petrified, rides in silence.)

OLAF: Finally, he heard—

MAYOR Z: Or thought he heard—

OLAF: Distant ghostly chants that seemed to be saying—

GHOSTLY CHANTS: *(OS. Phony, Scooby-Doo-type ghost calls.)* I-I-I-cha-booood! I-I-I-cha-booood! I-I-I-cha-booood!

ICHABOD: *(Trying to reassure himself.)* Keep it together, Crane... It's just the wind...

GHOSTLY CHANTS: *(OS.)* No-o-o-o-o it's not! It's not just the wind! It's something much scarier!

ICHABOD: Still the wind...

GHOSTLY CHANTS: *(OS.)* Again, to clarify, it's not the wind! It's the spirits of Sleepy Hollow! Ooooo!

ICHABOD: The wind's playing tricks on me.

GHOSTLY CHANTS: *(OS.)* How many times do we have to say? It's not—

ICHABOD: *(With finality.)* Shut up, wind!

GHOSTLY CHANTS: *(OS. Still in Scooby-Doo ghost voices.)*
So ru-u-u-u-u-de!

(ICHABOD rides on, essentially riding in place on Gunpowder, listening for the voices. They seem to be gone. He relaxes a little. He tries to relax a little more by whistling. He whistles a couple of bars, but, from offstage, the whistling echoes. He whistles again, followed by the echo.)

ICHABOD: Hurry along now, Gunpowder. Pick up the pace.

MAYOR Z: It was here that Ichabod passed by the cemetery.

OLAF: He sensed he was being watched.

MAYOR Z: His heart began to thump.

OLAF: He gave Gunpowder a kick to the ribs.

MAYOR Z: Whatever eyes were on him, he could feel them gaining.

OLAF: Summoning his courage, he avoided passing out.

MAYOR Z: Ichabod jerked the horse's reins.

OLAF: He was nearly clear of the cemetery when—

MAYOR Z: Just at this moment, he beheld something huge, misshapen and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom, like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveler.

(SFX: A loud crash along with the ferocious neighing of a horse. FX: In a flash of lightning, the HEADLESS HORSEMAN appears.)

OLAF: It was he! The Headless Horseman!

ICHABOD: Wh..who are you?

MAYOR Z: Stammered Ichabod.

ICHABOD: Who are you, I say?

OLAF: But there was no reply.

MAYOR Z: Then suddenly, the Headless Horseman put itself in motion, aiming straight for the schoolmaster.

ICHABOD: AHHH!!!

OLAF: And off they went.

MAYOR Z: A race for the wooden bridge.

(With regard to staging, it is best to keep the chase simple. It is advised that they do not literally chase each other about the stage. Rather, ICHABOD and the HORSEMAN, perched up their horses/riding sticks, should ride in place. The rising action of the chase can be created with composition, sound, lighting, Ichabod's panic, and the Horseman's intensity.)

OLAF: Downhill they plunged—

MAYOR Z: Now clear of the cemetery—

OLAF: And into a sandy hollow, shaded by trees—

MAYOR Z: Which formed a narrow road that led to the bridge.

OLAF: The goblin was hard on his haunches.

ICHABOD: Run, you dumb nag! Run! Can't you see the devil's behind us!

(SFX: The steady boom of the HEADLESS HORSEMAN'S amplified cackle.)

MAYOR Z: Ichabod felt the black steed panting behind him!

OLAF: He even fancied he felt his hot breath!

ICHABOD: If I can reach that bridge, I'm safe!

MAYOR Z: An opening in the trees showed the church bridge was at hand.

OLAF: Ichabod's heart soared with relief. He was going to make it.

MAYOR Z: Gunpowder sprang across the bridge—

OLAF: Thundering over the resounding planks.

MAYOR Z: Now on the opposite side, Ichabod cast a look behind—

OLAF: To see if his pursuer should vanish—

MAYOR Z: In a flash of fire and brimstone.

OLAF: It was only now that Ichabod had a vivid picture of his ghostly hunter.

MAYOR Z: The figure was gigantic in height.

OLAF: Ichabod was horror-struck on perceiving—

MAYOR Z: —you guessed it—

OLAF: —that it was headless!

MAYOR Z: But worst of all—

OLAF: As if things could be any worse for Ichabod—

MAYOR Z: Worst of all, he observed that the head, which should have rested on the Horseman's shoulders, was now tucked under one of his arms!

OLAF: Ichabod's terror rose to desperation—

MAYOR Z: As the Horseman gripped its head and hurled it at the helpless schoolmaster!

(Indeed, the HEADLESS HORSEMAN throws his head, which is only a pumpkin with a carved face. It falls before ICHABOD, splattering if possible. At this, Ichabod screams in absolute despair. He drops Gunpowder and rushes offstage, screaming the whole way. The Headless Horseman, triumphant, rears his horse Daredevil. His cackle amplifies louder than ever. After a moment, LIGHTS go out on him, and a softer, more peaceful light floods the stage. MAYOR Z and OLAF are now alone. Pause. Quiet settles in.)

OLAF: *(Picking up Gunpowder.)* The next morning the old horse was found, but no Ichabod.

MAYOR Z: The brook was searched for bodies, but no Ichabod.

OLAF: The children sat at their desks in the schoolhouse, but no Ichabod. It seemed he had vanished in the night.

MAYOR Z: The only clue was the shattered pumpkin.

OLAF: But no one knew what to make of it.

MAYOR Z: And so we here in Sleepy Hollow have come to the conclusion that Ichabod Crane was carried off by the galloping Hessian. Maybe the Horseman got the head he'd been coveting.

OLAF: We natives sure hope so.

MAYOR Z: Perhaps now he'll let us be. At any rate, things are mostly back to normal.

OLAF: We like normal.

MAYOR Z: The big news is that Brom and Katrina are engaged.

OLAF: They're to be wed later this year.

MAYOR Z: Old Van Tassel's throwing another feast in their honor.

OLAF: We're sure to attend, aren't we, Mayor Z?

MAYOR Z: Wouldn't miss it...though I'll probably leave before dark.

(THEY laugh.)

OLAF: I think we all will.

MAYOR Z: *(To the audience.)* Speaking of the dark, you'd better be getting home yourselves.

OLAF: We hope you've enjoyed our tale.

MAYOR Z: You'd be wise to keep a steady pace on your way out.

OLAF: Avoid the cemetery at all costs.

MAYOR Z: And, just to be safe, once in a while, you may want to glance over your shoulder.

OLAF: After all, in these parts, you never know what you'll find there.

MAYOR Z: Goodnight now!

OLAF: Goodnight from old Sleepy Hollow!

(MAYOR Z and OLAF wave and head off together. They can be heard chatting out of character.)

MAYOR Z: You up for Dunkin' Donuts?

OLAF: You read my mind.

MAYOR Z: Let's get out of these costumes first.

OLAF: Gladly. I've had a wedgie since scene one.

(THEY exit. Brief BLACKOUT.)

From: *Waking Sleepy Hollow* - By Jonathan Yukich

Published by: Eldridge Publishing Co.

<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2684>