

STAATSTHEATER
NÜRNBERG

THE LEGEND
OF SLEEPY
HOLLOW

by Philipp Löhle,
based on a story by Washington Irving

This synopsis is a summary of the content of the production. It serves to create a bridge of understanding for non-German-speaking audiences. It is not a complete translation of the play text, but is to be understood as a supplement to and in overall view of the production.

ACTORS

Ichabod Crane: Maximilian Pulst

Lady van Tassel / Katrina van Tassel / Coach passenger:
Elina Schkolnik

Reverend Steenwyk / Benjamin Steenwyk: Amadeus Köhli

Balt van Tassel: Pius Maria Cüppers

Hans van Ripper / Maitje van Ripper: Pola Jane O'Mara

Ickebin Niemand / Brom Bones / Coachman:
Sascha Tuxhorn

Statistry of the Nuremberg State Theater

The Hessians (Video): Officer: Stephan Schäfer /
Field Cook Heinz: Thomas Nunner / Hessi James: Justus Pfankuch /
Soldier Horsch: Sasha Weis / Soldier Günter: Joshua Kliefert /
Soldier Schmiddel: Luca Rosendahl

TEAM

Director: Christian Brey

Stage and Costume Design: Anette Hachmann

Sound Design: Thomas Esser

Dramaturgy: Brigitte Ostermann, Eva Bode

Light: Frank Laubenheimer

Animation: Johanna Kaiser

Video: Martin Fürbringer

Premiere: November 8th, 2024, Schauspielhaus Nuremberg

Duration: 2 h, 10 minutes, with one break

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PROLOGUE: HOW HESSI JAMES LOSES HIS HEAD

A troop of Hessian auxiliaries during the American Revolutionary War stops to rest. The soldier Hessi James reflects in his dialect on the structural power dynamics between the warring parties, annoying the officer to such an extent that he sends him to guard duty. When a cannonball signals an attack, another guard rushes in to report, horrified, that Hessi James has been decapitated by the shot. The deceased soldier is buried under a tulip tree—without his head. But Hessi James always liked to think!

HOW ICHABOD CRANE ARRIVES

Decades later, the schoolteacher Ichabod Crane travels to Sleepy Hollow to replace a missing colleague. The coachman warns him that the ghost of a headless soldier haunts the village, clouding the senses of anyone who lingers there. But Crane is a teacher, a rationalist, a well-educated man—and far too sophisticated to be troubled by such supposed superstitions.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE GETS TO KNOW THE INHABITANTS OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

Ichabod Crane arrives in Sleepy Hollow, only to discover, to his horror, a room filled with people who appear to be covered in blood. Panicked, he tries to administer first aid to one of them, only to realize that they are not injured at all. The whole scene is an elaborate act. Embarrassed, everyone reveals themselves to be alive. Apparently, the villagers were trying to scare him off—but why? Their plan has failed, and they introduce themselves, a small community of Dutch descendants: Lady van Tassel, Balt van Tassel, Reverend Steenwyk (innkeeper, doctor and reverend), Hans van Ripper (notary and horse lender):

Hans: *I'm a notary and have a horse rental business. I figured the few times you need a horse, you can hire*

one - not everyone has to have one on their doorstep that they never need. So if you ever need one: Van Ripper. Hans. He can do it. He can lend it to you. The horse. That's me. Not the horse. I'm Hans. Van Ripper.

...and Ickebin Nobody.

Crane: *Nobody. Like in the Odyssey?*

Balt: *Oddi-what??*

Crane: *The Odyssey. From Homer. With the Cyclops. Odysseus tells him his name is "Nobody" and then he stabs him in the eye with a stake and the Cyclops shouts, "Nobody stabbed me in the eye!" Haha! ... Oh, so you only have one... Oh...*

Hans: *That's disgusting.*

HOW ICHABOD CRANE MOVES INTO HIS ROOM

Reverend Steenwyk leads Ichabod Crane to his own room, explaining cryptically that Crane's predecessor, Rip van Winkle, also stayed there and mysteriously disappeared. He is not allowed to say anything about that. And there are corpses in the floor that breathe loudly at night. Crane, ever the rationalist, tries to convince him that there must be a factual explanation for everything, but the reverend warns him urgently: he must leave this place or the headless Hessian will come for him.

Crane tries to sleep. Suddenly, an eerie figure comes into the house from outside and Crane is scared to death! -But it's only Ickebin, who wants to take shelter from the rain while chopping wood. He tells Crane the story of the house: a family father built the house from the wood of cursed trees, and it collapsed again and again. Only when he had buried himself and his family alive in the foundations did the house remain standing - and the breathing of the dead family can still be heard to this day. This was the curse of the headless Hessian. Ichabod doesn't believe it again.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE STARTS TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION IN SLEEPY HOLLOW

One sleepless night later, a girl with a violin suddenly appears in front of Crane's house. It turns out that it's the children of the village who have come to wake him up for school... because it's already 8 o'clock, all of a sudden. And his sleeping place is the classroom. All right - he starts. And almost despairs: the children have absolutely no brain power!

Crane: *That's enough now, young lady. You stand up. Properly. Back straight. And then you speak in full sentences. Come on! My name is Maitje...*

Maitje: *My name is Maitje.*

Crane: *What next?*

Maitje: *What next?*

Crane: *Well, I want to know the surname. The surname!*

Maitje: *Van Ripper.*

Crane: *Well: Good morning, sir, my name is Maitje van Ripper. Go now!*

Maitje: *Good morning, sir, my name is Maitje van Ripper. Go now!*

Crane: *Van Ripper, who lends the horses?*

Maitje: *That's my father.*

Crane: *Good. Sit down. Now you!*

(Benjamin stands up and shouts loud and clear)

Benjamin: *Good morning, sir, my name is Maitje van Ripper. Go now!*

Crane: *Are you serious?*

Benjamin: *Why?*

Crane only manages to find out the names of the children on this day of lessons. Apart from Maitje, they are Katrina van Tassel, the daughter of Balt and the Lady, Benjamin Steenwyk, the Reverend's son and, somewhat belatedly, Brom Bones, the son of Ickebin Niemand and boyfriend of Katrina, also arrives.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE SEARCHES FOR A LEADER

Ichabod Crane wants to get an overview of the structures in the village from the reverend and realises that the adults are also behaving like children. Isn't there someone who knows the ropes? Who is in charge here?

Lady: *Well, as I said, there are many... ghosts here and some are responsible for the harvest, some for the weather, some for pregnancies, others for finances etc. etc. etc. pp. And then there's the main ghost. A headless horseman. A soldier who had his head removed by a cannonball in some battle during the Revolutionary Wars.*

Balt: *Torn off.*

Lady: *Torn off, yes. And since then he's been riding through our valley at night and...*

Crane can't believe it. Ghosts? Rubbish!

HOW THE INHABITANTS OF SLEEPY HOLLOW PERFORM A SPELL

Suddenly, Lady van Tassel demonstrates supernatural abilities, remotely controlling those present and summoning the headless Hessian. Crane witnesses his pet bird vanish, seemingly carried away by the ghostly figure. But when he regains his composure, he is adamant that it was all a trick.

Furious, he storms out to search for his bird, only to faint as Lady van Tassel casts another spell on him.

Balt: *Did you really have to do that?*

Lady: *The only way to save him is to get rid of him.*

HOW ICHABOD CRANE EXPLAINS, WANTS TO EXPLAIN, THE LAWS OF NATURE

Crane awakens in the classroom, with the children standing silently. The adults are gone. Confused, he begins the lesson again, attempting to explain the most basic principles of the natural world.

Crane: *Two plus two equals four. And that's what I mean. That's a law of nature. It's the basis of all maths, physics, the universe, rain, crops, you name it. Do you understand?*

Katrina: *Nope.*

Benjamin: *Not a bit.*

Brom: *What rubbish!*

Katrina: *Besides, it might as well be five.*

Crane: *No.*

Katrina: *And why not?*

Crane: *Because I said so! And because that's the way it is!*

Katrina: *Like that? Then I'll say it now: Two plus two is five.*

Crane: *That's not possible.*

Katrina: *Why not? It's a law of nature.*

Crane: *That's not a law of nature.*

Katrina: *Says who?*

Crane: *Nature.*

Brom: *Ha!*

Maitje: *Nature? Does it speak to you or what?*

Katrina: *I don't know Mr Crane. Are you all right?
Do you hear voices?*

Brom: *Maybe we should get help.*

Crane is desperate. It can't be that the children don't understand the basics of the world! And really believe that a teacher just disappears like that!

BREAK

HOW ICHABOD CRANE BLATANTLY GETS SOMETHING CRANE FINDS HIMSELF INEXPLICABLY WANDERING THE FOREST.

Everything feels surreal, and the villagers' behavior becomes increasingly bizarre. He encounters Ickebin Nobody and, soon after, Balt van Tassel.

Balt: *You must come to yourself, Mr Crane!
Get out of this dream!*

Crane: *I'm awake!*

Balt: *Oh, shit. One second.*

Crane: *Mr van Tassel! Now I'm all wet!*

Balt: *It's raining cats and dogs, too.*

Crane: *You threw a bucket of water in my face!*

Balt: *What bucket?*

Crane realises that he hasn't eaten or slept since he arrived - and van Tassel offers him his own head as a speciality! In the

next moment, it's Lady van Tassel, who steps up and reassures him. Or is it Katrina?

Crane: *There's a bunch of people!*

Katrina: *You're dreaming. These are your fears.
You have to face them.*

Crane tells the people the story of Rip van Winkle, his predecessor, who sleeps in the mountains and wakes up many years older. This leads him to a revelation.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE DIGS UP RIP VAN WINKLE.

The villagers try to stop Crane from digging and warn him. But he still doesn't believe in ghost stories. Eventually he finds what he was looking for.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE SOLVES A MURDER

One by one, Crane suspects all the villagers of having killed Rip van Winkle.

The villagers complain that Crane is putting such (from their point of view) absurd ideas into their children's heads, such as that the earth is a globe.

Balt: *You're confusing our children to a degree...
All five of them!*

Crane: *Four.*

Balt: *Five!*

Crane: *There are four children: Katrina, Benjamin,
Maitje and Brom.*

Balt: *Five!*

Crane: *Stop playing dumb.*

Crane pulls out the telegram that contains the time of his arrival. If nobody here can read, how did they know his arrival time?

Balt: *My wife saw it in the coffee grounds. The villagers continue to claim that the Headless Hessian murdered Rip van Winkle. But Crane doesn't believe in ghosts. Ghosts don't exist!*

Balt: *Don't you see?*

Hans: *The lady!*

Crane: *That's enough!*

Crane meets the young Brom.

Brom: *Are you going to stay here? I don't think Sleepy Hollow has much future for you.*

Crane: *Since I'm the only one here who can think for himself, I'm probably the only one with a future here.*

Brom: *If you're clever here in the village, you'll end up headless. All sorts of strange things are happening again...*

HOW ICHABOD CRANE USES HIMSELF AS BAIT

Crane gives the villagers an ultimatum: he will spend one night under the tulip tree where Rip van Winkle was supposedly killed. If the murderer does not come forward voluntarily, he will send a detailed telegram to the authorities with all his observations and suspicions.

Lady: This is the very tree where the headless Hessian cut off Rip van Winkle's head.

Balt: And this is where you want to spend the night?

Crane: Right here! And I'm going to prove that there's no such thing as a headless Hessian.

HOW ICHABOD CRANE SPENDS HIS LAST NIGHT IN SLEEPY HOLLOW

As Crane waits under the tulip tree, Lady van Tassel appears. He assumes she has come to confess but quickly realizes she is there to warn him one last time. She explains that the headless Hessian seeks a clever head to replace his own and preys on those who think too much. Crane doesn't believe her and the inevitable takes its course.

HOW THE STORY ENDS

Steenwyk: *What else are we supposed to do?*

Lady: *I have the feeling that the more we try to warn, the less people believe us.*

Hans: *It seems to be a fundamental problem with the truth. The more truth you claim, the less real it sounds.*

Balt: *Hey guys! Stop thinking such clever things.*

Hans: *Oh, God yes. Was that clever? Was it very clever? Now tell me.*

Ickebin: *Before you say something clever, I'll be struck by lightning.*

And suddenly...

Crane: *Excuse me, am I in the right place? In Sleepy Hollow?*

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