

*Girls Run the Hollow*

By: Lady Jae

Ichabod Crane was the smartest but smallest boy in Sleepy Hollow. His square, black-framed glasses swallowed his face, and his ears poked out like an elf. When he spoke, his voice squeaked, and he tugged on his inhaler after every sentence. He was a hyper-cautious boy, and the biggest scaredy-cat you would ever meet. He was afraid of nature and everything that grew from it and lived in it. He was afraid of the dark and everything that went bump in the night. His timid ways made him a guarded child. Way too afraid to explore anything outside of his front yard.

His best friend Brom was his opposite. He was big and beefy and afraid of nothing. His sandy red hair grew wildly on his head and his beady green eyes almost disappeared behind his plump cheeks. His hands were always dirty with mud or some unknown substance from his many escapades in the woods by the creek.

Every day, Brom begged Ichabod to join him on an adventure. But every day, Ichabod would decline. Today was no different.

The echoes of children's chatter and laughter filled the air as they ran and played around a big jungle gym in the middle of the schoolyard. Ichabod sat on a shaded bench, secluded, with his nose stuck in a comic book.

“Yo, Ichie, you have to see what I found!”

Ichabod looked up and smiled weakly at his friend.

Brom wiped the sweat off his eager face and sat crossed leg on the ground in front of Ichabod.

“What is it this time?”

“A graveyard. It was so cool. The grass-covered the stones, but you can still see the names and everything!”

“There is no graveyard in Sleepy Hollow. It was probably some rocks.” Ichabod frowned at Brom.

“How would you even know? You don’t go nowhere!” Brom kicked his legs out and leaned back, resting his hands on the rough gravel.

“But I read, and I have read nothing about a graveyard in the hollow.”

Ichabod rolled his eyes and sucked on his inhaler.

“Because it was hidden, and I found it. Just come see, Ichie. We could be famous. Just imagine the headlines. Brave boys find a hidden graveyard. We could go viral, Ichie.”

Brom ranted and raved about all their possibilities, as Ichabod shook his head.

“So where is it at?” Ichabod said, cutting Brom’s rant off.

“It’s right by the creek bridge. By the high grass.

Ichabod’s eyes bulged. He pumped on his inhaler two times and stared at Brom. Brom bit his lip, hoping his friend wouldn’t chicken out as usual.

“Brom, you’re not supposed to go by the creek! It’s forbidden!”

“But they never tell us why. I know there is something down there. We can find it, Ichie.”

Brom leaned close to Ichabod’s small knees and pouted. Ichabod laughed at his large, extended lip and pushed him away.

“You know that never works. I’m not about to go with you on some crazy lost boy’s adventure. I like to stay where it’s safe.”

Ichabod opened his comic book and tried to get back into his story. Brom grabbed the book and held it out of his grasp. Ichabod jumped up and reached for it. They tussled on the ground, laughing, until Ichabod grabbed his inhaler and pulled in a deep breath. Brom released him and waited until his breathing calmed before handing him the book. He sat up and leaned against the ground as Ichabod took his seat back on the bench.

“When are you going to stop being a chicken? One of these days, I’m going to scare that fear right out of you, Ichie,” Brom said, shaking his chubby finger at him.

“Whatever, I’m not a chicken, I’m just smart. Exploring a place where we’re not supposed to be is not smart.” Ichabod took another pull from his inhaler and let out a deep breath.

“So, I’m dumb because I like to explore.” Brom looked at Ichabod in bewilderment.

“You’re not dumb, you’re just wild and crazy,” Ichabod said, “and I’m not exploring that creepy creek with you.”

“Aww Ichie, you’re no fun. I promise we won’t stay long. I just want you to see it,” Brom said, waving his arms frantically.

“See what?”

Ichabod and Brom looked up as a freckled face girl with long, black, unbraided pigtails walked up and stood between them, with her arms crossed. Her dark green eyes shifted back and forth as she waited for them to answer. Brom frowned and rolled his eyes. Ichabod looked away as he toked on his inhaler.

“See what, Brom?” She kicked Brom’s leg. Brom groaned and pulled his legs close to his chest, hugging them.

“Don’t you have some girl stuff to do? Like your hair or something else stupid.” Brom grumbled.

“Yup, I’m doing it right now with you,” said the quick-witted, slick-mouth girl, “now what are you trying to see?”

“None of your beeswax, Kat,” Brom said, poking his tongue out at her.

Kat rolled her eyes and looked at Ichabod, whose shoulders dropped under her gaze.

“What is it, Ichie?”

Ichabod looked at her with unease, then looked at Brom. He pulled on his inhaler and let out an exasperated breath.

“He found a so-called graveyard by the creek—”

“Ichie! Don’t tell her that, she’s a girl!” Brom exclaimed and looked at Ichabod in disappointment.

She scrunched her face at Brom and picked in her hair.

“Why not? It’s not a graveyard, it’s just rocks.” Ichabod shrugged.

“No, it is not!”

“He’s right,” Kat said and sat next to Ichabod. She brushed her hair back, slapping Ichabod’s arm with her curly tresses.

Ichabod slid over, and Brom looked at her with squinted eyes. She sat there with a smug expression and Brom waved his hand at her to continue. She dropped her hands on her knees and focused on Brom.

“Why should I tell you? I’m a girl, remember,” she said as she rolled her neck.

Brom waved her away and scoffed. “You know nothing anyway.”

“Yes, I do because Sean told me the real truth.”

“Real truth?” Brom and Ichabod said at the same time. They looked at her wide-eyed, eager for her to keep speaking. Sean was Kat’s wild-spirited older brother that just left town for college. Brom idolized everything he did and wanted to be just like him. So, if he said it, then it had to be true.

Kat smiled, enjoying their undivided attention. For once she knew something the boys didn’t, and she was going to milk the moment.

Brom, her first cousin, always treated her like she was dumb and stupid because she was a girl. But what they didn’t know was that she hated being a girl. She always had to be well kept

and pretty. She was always stuck to doing chores and wearing a dress or skirt everywhere she went. She hated it. She wanted to be wild and reckless, like her brother. They let him do whatever he wanted, and she wanted the same. No more frilly lace and colorful bows. She wanted to get messy and dirty, like the boys.

“I don’t know if I should tell you. I don’t want to scare Ichie,” she nudged Ichabod’s shoulder and laughed.

“Just spit it out, Kat, ugh!” Brom slapped his forehead and fell back against the ground.

“Okay! Sean told me that long ago a big massacre happened by the creek. It was during one of the wars we learned about in history class. Soldiers came and attacked the village. They took the goods, killed the women and children, and... cut off the heads of every man! They say the graveyard is haunted and on the anniversary of that day, they rise from the dead and the headless ghosts roam the woods looking for souls to devour,” Kat said as she dramatized each word and slapped her palms together.

Ichabod trembled and sucked on his inhaler. Massacres and beheaded men were not the truth he expected her to reveal. If what she said was true, there was no way he was going with Brom to see it.

“I knew it! Now you have to come and see Ichie,” Brom said, jumping up off the ground.

“No, I don’t. Take Kat, since she already knows about it.”

“No way! I’m not going to the creek with a girl. She is only going to get in the way.”

“No, I won’t. I’m stronger and braver than you think. I’m definitely braver than this chicken, that’s for sure,” Kat smirked and nudged her head at Ichabod.

“I’m not a chicken!” Ichabod scoffed. He looked at Brom to agree, but Brom looked away instead.

“Then prove it. Come with us to see the graveyard.” Kat said and glared at Ichabod.

“There is no us!” Brom pushed her away ruffly, causing her to fall off the bench to the ground. Kat jumped up and got into Brom’s chubby face. She held her fist up to hit him and sneered at him.

“What you gonna do? Cry?” Brom laughed as Kat stepped back and sat down.

“I’ll get you back, just wait,” she nodded slowly, “anyway, are you gonna' come and see, or are you going to be a chicken all your life and hide behind his stupid shadow?” She turned to Ichabod and took the comic book out of his hands.

“Don’t be a chicken, Ichie,” Kat said mockingly. She flapped her arms and squawked like a chicken.

Brom looked at Ichabod and pleaded with his eyes. Ichabod had to come now that Kat just invited herself into his adventure. He couldn’t share the glory with his cousin and not have his best friend on his side.

Ichabod looked back and forth between them as he held his inhaler to his lips. He was used to flaking on Brom’s shenanigans, but he didn’t like Kat calling him a chicken, no matter how much he was deep down. She was a girl and boys were supposed to be braver than girls; even if

he didn't want to be in the graveyard or anywhere near it if the spirits rose from the dead.

Ichabod sat in silence as Kat continued to squawk and flap her arms.

“Ok, ok dang! I'll go if it shuts you up.” Ichabod pulled on his inhaler and looked at Brom.

Kat stopped flapping her arms and laughed. Brom shook his head back and forth.

“So, all I had to do was ack like a chicken and you would have come with me?” Brom crossed his arms and frowned.

“No, but she's being annoying, and I don't like being called a chicken by a girl just because I like to be safe. So, when are we going?” Ichabod snatched the book from Kat's hand and slapped it on the seat beside him.

Brom threw his hands up in defeat but smiled at Ichabod. “After school, we can all meet here and go.”

“I have singing lessons after school,” Kat groaned.

Brom gave her a side-eye and a devious smile, “I know, that's why I said it.”

“I hate you!” Kat shouted and collapsed onto the bench.

“I can't do it after school either. I have tutoring,” said Ichabod as he stood and pulled on his inhaler.

“You suck! I guess we'll go after you finish. You just better show up here when you're done,” Brom pointed at Ichabod, “if you don't, I'm going to make you wear chicken feathers for a week and squawk every time I see you.” Brom nudged Ichabod who laughed.



“Whoever doesn’t show up has to wear the chicken feathers for a week,” Kat interjected.

Brom looked at her and frowned again.

“You’re determined to come, aren’t you?”

“Yup, because I can do anything a dumb boy can do,” Kat smugly crossed her arms, “besides, I’m the one who told you the legend.”

“Just let her come. We are only going to look and once we see it, I’m going home.” Ichabod grabbed his book and the school bell sounded across the yard. “See y’all in class.”

Ichabod pulled on his inhaler as his tiny frame scurried across the blacktop. Brom followed, but Kat grabbed his arm.

“Just so you know, the anniversary of the legend is tonight. I didn’t want to tell Ichabod. But we have to be careful—”

“I thought you were brave and strong?” Brom peered at her and pulled his arm out of her grasp. He sucked his teeth and walked away. He stopped mid-stride and looked back at Kat.

“Just don’t mess up my search with your stupid, girlie ways.” He turned and kept walking.

Katrina growled at his back as she made her way inside. The boys were so dumb, and she was going to prove it. A sinister smile crossed her face as she thought of a perfect way to scare the pants off them both and get Brom back for some much-needed revenge. She was going to miss her singing lessons, but it would be worth it.

The sun was setting. Hues of orange and magenta streaked across the evening sky. Brom sat on the bench, snapping a twig in his hands as he waited for Ichabod. Deep down, he hoped his

cousin wouldn't show up. Although her antics were the reason behind Ichabod coming, he didn't want to share his fame with her. This was his discovery, and the only ones he felt worthy to investigate were Ichabod and himself. He didn't care about the ghost or the legend. He didn't believe in spirits or none of that supernatural stuff. Ghosts were only things seen on television and he was too brave to even fear something unreal.

The double doors swung open, and Ichabod walked out with his bookbag hung over his shoulder. He pulled on his inhaler as he approached Brom. Brom smiled as he looked past Ichabod and didn't see Kat. He clapped his hands excitedly and draped his arm over Ichabod's shoulders.

"Where's Kat?" Ichabod looked around.

"Doesn't matter. I only wanted you to see it, anyway."

Ichabod bit his lip and looked at the darkening sky. Brom followed his gaze and sighed.

"Don't worry, we'll be gone before it gets too dark."

Brom and Ichabod trudged across the schoolyard into the dark, dense forest. The wind stirred the trees as they walked through the path to the creek. Dry leaves and branches crunched under their feet with each step. Ichabod held his inhaler close to his face as his eyes scrambled around the darkness.

"Hey Brom," Ichabod's voice quivered, "do you think what Kat said is true? About the ghosts?"

Brom stopped walking and looked back at Ichabod and laughed.

“Oh, Ichie, don’t tell me you believed her. There is no such thing as ghosts or any of that foolishness you see on T.V. Now come on, it’s right up here.” Brom pushed a tree limb out of the way as they stepped into a clearing.

A small, old bridge stood over a slow-moving creek that looked more like a dying pond. Past the water, large white stones poked through the blades of the overextended grass.

“See. It’s right over there.” Brom pointed his meaty finger at the graveyard in the distance. Ichabod strained his small neck and gasped when he saw the stones. Sucking his inhaler, he stepped back, preparing to turn around.

“Okay, I saw it. Now let’s go.” Ichabod pulled Brom’s shirt, but Brom didn’t budge. He wanted to go closer and examine each stone.

“Not yet. We at least need to see the names on the stones. Come on.”

Brom pulled Ichabod into the clearing before he could protest. Ichabod shook like a leaf as they crossed the worn bridge and stood in the high grass at the edge of the graveyard. Brom knelt in front of the first stone and pulled off the twigs and weeds that clung to it. He frowned at the blank stone and stood. Ichabod watched him, clutching his inhaler so tight his knuckles whitened.

“What is it?”

“There’s nothing on the stone. No names at all.”

“See, I told you they were just rocks.”

Brom kicked the stone and cried out in pain as he hopped one foot. Ichabod chuckled nervously at Brom and looked up into the sky. An enormous cloud moved from in front of the moon, allowing the moonlight to shimmer against each stone. A fog appeared over the water, circling the ground around their feet. An owl hooted, and a tree branch snapped in the distance.

“What was that?” Ichabod spun around and searched for the source. The fog got thicker and rose, blocking his view. “I don’t like this Brom. We need to go!”

Brom glanced at the moon, then back at Ichabod.

“Relax, man, we’re leaving now. I know how you are.”

Brom grabbed and shook Ichabod’s shoulder as they headed back to the bridge. Another twig snapped in the darkness. Brom looked down at the ground in search of a branch but saw nothing. He gulped hard and tried to maintain his composure; not wanting to scare Ichabod any more than he was. He didn’t believe in ghosts, but Kat’s story replayed in his head.

*The anniversary of the legend is tonight.*

“Let’s hurry and get out of here.” Brom pushed Ichabod in front of him and looked back at the fog-covered graveyard. His hand slightly trembled as he kept pushing Ichabod forward.

“You’re shaking, Brom. What is it? What did you see?” Ichabod tried to look back, but Brom kept pushing him.

“Nothing, but if what Kat said is really true, I don’t think we should be out here right now.”

“Kat said the ghosts only come out on the anniversary.”

Another branch broke behind them, and they froze. They stared into the darkness and waited for movement. Brom held Ichabod's arm as he huffed and puffed on his inhaler.

"Tonight, is the anniversary, Ichie," Brom said through his gritted teeth.

Ichabod turned pale and looked at Brom. He tried to pump his inhaler again, but it was empty.

An eerie wail cried out from the darkness. A large, shadowed figure stepped out of the trees behind the graveyard. The figure's hand reached into the empty spot between its shoulders and let out another wail. Ichabod let out a high-pitched scream and passed out, slumping to the ground.

Brom stood frozen, unable to move. Everything in his head screamed run, but his legs remained planted. He looked down at Ichabod, then back at the figure. The hairs on his neck tingled as the shadowed figure slowly stepped towards him. Brom shook Ichabod to wake up, never once taking his eyes off the figure, but Ichabod didn't move.

"Wake up, Ichie!" Brom shouted, as the figure got closer. The headless figure let out another wail that shook Brom to his core. He screamed, scooped Ichabod's small body up in his arms, and started running to the bridge. He didn't even bother to look back as he ran over the bridge and back through the forest. The wail echoed behind him. Limbs and branches scratched and clawed at him as he ran for his life. Holding Ichabod over his shoulder, he cried and ran until he found the safety of his front porch.

Standing by the bridge, Kat removed the borrowed Frankenstein costume from last year's school play and fell out laughing. She laughed until her stomach hurt and she could barely

breathe. She finally got Brom. It took a lot, but she finally scared her fearless cousin. She couldn't wait to post the video. They were about to go viral. She could already see the headline. Brave girl scares the pants off her overgrown boy cousin and his chicken friend. She was going to be famous. Pushing save on her phone, she saved the video and cut off the recorded wails. She pulled the waterproof fog maker out of the dirty creek water and drug the costume behind her as she headed home, laughing.