



Great **American** Short Stories

Editor
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| | | | |
|-----|--|------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 — | Rip Van Winkle | 4 | Washington Irving (1783-1859) |
| 2 — | The Birthmark | 42 | Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) |
| 3 — | The Cask of Amontillado | 72 | Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) |
| 4 — | The Lightning-Rod Man | 88 | Herman Melville (1819-1891) |
| 5 — | The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County | 102 | Mark Twain (1835-1910) |
| 6 — | Roman Fever | 116 | Edith Wharton (1862-1937) |

| | | | |
|------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| 7 — | A Service of Love | 138 | O. Henry (1862-1910) |
| 8 — | The Men in the Storm | 150 | Stephen Crane (1871-1900) |
| 9 — | Love of Life | 164 | Jack London (1876-1916) |
| 10 — | Eeldrop and Appleplex | 196 | T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) |
| 11 — | Babylon Revisited | 210 | F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) |
| 12 — | The Killers | 242 | Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) |

1

Rip Van Winkle



Washington Irving

1783-1859

Named after the first president of the United States, Washington Irving was a successful essayist, biographer, short story writer, editor and diplomat. He is credited with being the first American to be internationally acclaimed. His writing has inspired modern culture, artists and filmmakers and has provided readers with captivating, imaginative tales for centuries.

As a biographer, Irving covered the life of George Washington, Oliver Goldsmith (poet and playwright), and explorer, Christopher Columbus. Critics of Irving's fiction complained that his writing emulated the style of popular European writers of the time. Regardless of this critique, his work was hugely successful amongst the American masses. It has been thought that this was perhaps because Americans, who had recently severed ties with Europe, sought comfort in his familiar style. As a writer on the forefront of the American Romantic Movement, he was praised for his use of visual imagery, personae and stylized prose.

Irving's legacy lives on through his influence on modern culture. *Rip Van Winkle* has been adapted into plays, operas and even cartoons. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* was turned into a Hollywood film starring Johnny Depp as Ichabod Crane. American painter John Quidor also used these short stories as inspiration for his paintings. There are numerous memorials and parks dedicated in Irving's honour throughout the United States and he continues to be regarded as the father of the American short story. Irving died at the age of 76.

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson[†] must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains; and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers.

When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

At the foot of these fairy mountains, the voyager may have descried the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle-roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape.

It is a little village of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists, in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant[†], (may he rest in peace!), and there were some of the houses of the original settlers standing within a few years, built of small yellow bricks brought from Holland, having latticed windows and gable fronts, surmounted with weathercocks.

In that same village, and in one of these very houses, (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather-beaten), there lived, many years since, while the country was



yet a province of Great Britain, a simple, good-natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle. He was a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina.

He inherited, however, but little of the martial character of his ancestors. I have observed that he was a simple, good-natured man; he was, moreover, a kind neighbor, and an obedient henpecked husband. Indeed, to the latter circumstance might be owing that meekness of spirit which gained him such universal popularity; for those men are most apt to be obsequious and conciliating abroad, who are under the discipline of shrews at home.

- † Hudson (River): a New York river; flows southward into New York Bay
- † Peter Stuyvesant (c.1592-1672): the last Dutch colonial administrator of New Netherland; in 1664 he was forced to surrender the colony to England



Their tempers, doubtless, are rendered pliant and malleable in the fiery furnace of domestic tribulation, and a curtain-lecture is worth all the sermons in the world for teaching the virtues of patience and long-suffering. A termagant wife may, therefore, in some respects, be considered a tolerable blessing; and if so, Rip Van Winkle was thrice blessed.

Certain it is, that he was a great favorite among all the good wives of the village, who, as usual with the amiable sex, took his part in all family squabbles; and never failed, whenever they talked those matters over in their evening gossipings, to lay all the blame on Dame Van Winkle.

The children of the village, too, would shout with joy whenever he approached. He assisted at their sports, made their playthings, taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles, and told them long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians. Whenever he went dodging about the village, he was surrounded by a troop of them, hanging on his skirts,

clambering on his back, and playing a thousand tricks on him with impunity; and not a dog would bark at him throughout the neighborhood.

The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor. It could not be from the want of assiduity or perseverance; for he would sit on a wet rock, with a rod as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance, and fish all day without a murmur, even though he should not be encouraged by a single nibble. He would carry a fowling-piece on his shoulder, for hours together, trudging through woods and swamps, and up hill and down dale, to shoot a few squirrels or wild pigeons.

He would never refuse to assist a neighbor even in the roughest toil, and was a foremost man at all country frolics for husking Indian corn, or building stone-fences; the women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands, and to do such little odd jobs as their less obliging husbands would not do for them.

In a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible.

In fact, he declared it was of no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country; everything about it went wrong, and would go wrong, in spite of him. His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow would either go astray, or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his fields than anywhere else; the rain always made a point of setting in just as he had some out-door work to do; so that though his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre, until there was little more left than a mere patch of Indian

