Excerpt from

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

by Washington Irving

His fear made him reckless. He showered kicks and blows on Gunpowder, his horse. He moved suddenly. He hoped that in this way he could get away. But the ghost moved right with him. Away, then, they dashed! They charged through thick and thin. Stones flew! Sparks flashed at every jump. Ichabod's thin clothes waved in the air. He stretched his long thin body over his horse's head. In all ways he was trying to get away.

They had now reached the road that turns off to Sleepy Hollow. But Gunpowder seemed captured by a demon. He would not go on that road. Instead he turned away. They plunged head-first downhill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow. It is shaded by trees for a quarter of a mile. There it crosses a bridge. This is the same one made famous in the goblin story. Just past that bridge raises a green hill. On the hill is the white church.

The horse's panic had been helpful. His unskilled rider got a boost in the chase. But then he got half way through the hollow. Then the straps of the saddle gave way! He felt it slipping from under him. He grabbed at it. He tried to hold the saddle on. But it did not work. He just had time to save himself. He held old Gunpowder round the neck. The saddle fell off. He heard it run over by his chaser. For a moment, he thought of Hans Van Ripper. He would be so angry! It was his Sunday saddle. But this was no time for little fears. The goblin was just behind him! And it was hard just to stay on the horse. He had no skill with riding at all! Sometimes he was slipping on one side. Sometimes he slid to another. And sometimes he was thumped against his horse's backbone. This was violent. It hurt. He was afraid it would split him in two.

He saw an opening in the trees! This cheered him. He hoped that the church bridge was close. He could see a ruffled image in the brook. It was a silver star! This told him that he was not mistaken. He saw the walls of the church. They were dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He remembered the place in the story. It was where Brom Bones's ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black horse. It was panting and blowing close behind him. He imagined that he felt its hot breath. He gave his horse a jerking kick. Old Gunpowder sprang onto the bridge. He thundered over the loud planks. He reached the far side! And now Ichabod looked behind him. He remembered the rule in the stories. He wanted to see if his chaser would disappear. Would there be a flash of fire and anger? Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups. It was throwing its head at him. Ichabod tried to dodge the horrible missile! But it was too late. It hit his skull with a tremendous crash. He tumbled head first into the dust. And Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found. But, he did not have his saddle. The bridle was under his feet. He ate the grass at his master's gate. Ichabod did not come to breakfast. Dinner-hour came, but no Ichabod. The boys gathered at the schoolhouse. They walked about the banks of the brook. But there was no schoolmaster. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel nervous. He worried about the fate of poor Ichabod, and his saddle. He sent a messenger on foot. After careful investigation, they found his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle. It had been trampled in the dirt. The tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented the road. They could see that these tracks had been made at a great speed. The tracks were traced to the bridge. Past that they came to the bank of a wide part of the brook. It was where the water ran deep and black. There was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod. Close beside it was a shattered pumpkin.

Element Focus: Plot

How does the author make the story more tense as it builds toward the climax?

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His terror made him desperate. He rained a shower of kicks and blows on Gunpowder, his horse. He hoped that if he moved suddenly, he could give his companion the slip. But the ghost moved right with him. Away, then, they dashed! They charged through thick and thin. Stones flew! Sparks flashed at every leap. Ichabod's flimsy clothes fluttered in the air. He stretched his long thin body over his horse's head, trying to get away.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow. But Gunpowder seemed possessed with a demon. Instead of going on that road, he made an opposite turn. They plunged headlong downhill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow. It was shaded by trees for about a quarter of a mile. There it crosses a bridge. It was the same bridge made famous in the goblin story. Just past that rises the green hill with the white church.

So far the horse's panic had given his unskillful rider an advantage in the chase. But just as he got half way through the hollow, the straps of the saddle gave way! He felt it slipping from under him. He grabbed the pommel. He tried to hold the saddle on. But it did not work. He had just time to save himself. He held old Gunpowder round the neck. The saddle fell to the earth. He heard it trampled under foot by his pursuer. For a moment, the terror of Hans Van Ripper's anger passed across his mind. It was his Sunday saddle. But this was no time for small fears. The goblin was just behind him! And (poor rider that he was!) it was hard just to stay on the horse. Sometimes he was slipping on one side. Sometimes he slid to another. And sometimes he was jolted on the high ridge of his horse's backbone. This was so violent that he truly feared it would split him in two.

An opening in the trees now cheered him! He had hopes that the church bridge was at hand. The wavering reflection of a silver star in the brook told him that he was not wrong. He saw the walls of the church. They were dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He recollected the place where Brom Bones's ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black horse panting and blowing close behind him. He imagined that he felt his hot breath. Another jerking kick in the ribs, and old Gunpowder sprang onto the bridge. He thundered over the loud planks. He reached the far side! And now Ichabod looked behind him. He remembered the rule in the stories. He wanted to see if his pursuer should vanish in a flash of fire and brimstone. Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups. It was in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod tried to dodge the horrible missile! But it was too late. It hit his cranium with a tremendous crash. He was tumbled headlong into the dust. And Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle. The bridle was under his feet. He quietly ate the grass at his master's gate. Ichabod did not make his appearance at breakfast. Dinner hour came, but no Ichabod. The boys assembled at the schoolhouse. They strolled idly about the banks of the brook. But there was no schoolmaster. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel some uneasiness about the fate of poor Ichabod, and his saddle. An inquiry was set on foot. After diligent investigation they came upon his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt. The tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented the road. It was evident they had been made at a furious speed. The tracks were traced to the bridge. Beyond that, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, where the water ran deep and black, was found the hat of the unlucky Ichabod. Close beside it was a shattered pumpkin.

Element Focus: Plot

What sequel might follow this story?

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His terror rose to desperation. He rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, his horse. His hope was by a sudden movement to give his companion the slip. But the specter started full jump with him. Away, then, they dashed through thick and thin. Stones flew and sparks flashed at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air. He stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow. But Gunpowder, who seemed possessed with a demon, instead of keeping up it, made an opposite turn. They plunged headlong downhill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow shaded by trees for about a quarter of a mile. There it crosses the bridge famous in the goblin story. Just beyond that swells the green knoll on which stands the whitewashed church.

As yet the panic of the steed had given his unskilful rider an apparent advantage in the chase. But just as he had got half way through the hollow, the girths of the saddle gave way! He felt the saddle slipping from under him. He seized it by the pommel and tried to hold it firm. But this was in vain. He had just time to save himself by clasping old Gunpowder round the neck. The saddle fell to the earth, and he heard it trampled under foot by his pursuer. For a moment, the terror of Hans Van Ripper's wrath passed across his mind. It was his Sunday saddle. But this was no time for petty fears. The goblin was hard on his haunches! And (unskillful rider that he was!) he had much ado to maintain his seat. Sometimes he was slipping on one side, sometimes on another. And sometimes he was jolted on the high ridge of his horse's backbone, with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder.

An opening in the trees now cheered him with the hopes that the church bridge was at hand. The wavering reflection of a silver star in the bosom of the brook told him that he was not mistaken. He saw the walls of the church dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He recollected the place where Brom Bones's ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black steed panting and blowing close behind him. He even fancied that he felt his hot breath. Another convulsive kick in the ribs, and old Gunpowder sprang upon the bridge. He thundered over the resounding planks. He gained the opposite side! And now Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer should vanish, according to rule, in a flash of fire and brimstone. Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, and in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod endeavored to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash—he was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle, and with the bridle under his feet, soberly cropping the grass at his master's gate. Ichabod did not make his appearance at breakfast. Dinner hour came, but no Ichabod. The boys assembled at the schoolhouse, and strolled idly about the banks of the brook. But there was no schoolmaster. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel some uneasiness about the fate of poor Ichabod, and his saddle. An inquiry was set on foot. After diligent investigation, they came upon his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt. The tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented in the road and evidently at furious speed, were traced to the bridge. Beyond that, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, where the water ran deep and black, was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod. Close beside it was a shattered pumpkin.

Element Focus: Plot

In what ways does the author build tension for the climax of the story? At what point do you believe the tension is the highest?

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His terror rose to desperation; he rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping by a sudden movement to give his companion the slip; but the specter started full jump with him. Away, then, they dashed through thick and thin; stones flying and sparks flashing at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air, as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow; but Gunpowder, who seemed possessed with a demon, instead of keeping up it, made an opposite turn, and plunged headlong downhill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow shaded by trees for about a quarter of a mile, where it crosses the bridge famous in goblin story; and just beyond swells the green knoll on which stands the whitewashed church.

As yet the panic of the steed had given his unskillful rider an apparent advantage in the chase, but just as he had got half way through the hollow, the girths of the saddle gave way, and he felt it slipping from under him. He seized it by the pommel, and endeavored to hold it firm, but in vain; and had just time to save himself by clasping old Gunpowder round the neck, when the saddle fell to the earth, and he heard it trampled under foot by his pursuer. For a moment the terror of Hans Van Ripper's wrath passed across his mind,—for it was his Sunday saddle; but this was no time for petty fears; the goblin was hard on his haunches; and (unskillful rider that he was!) he had much ado to maintain his seat; sometimes slipping on one side, sometimes on another, and sometimes jolted on the high ridge of his horse's backbone, with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder.

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Element Focus: Plot

Describe the ways that the tension in the story builds, resolves as the climax is reached, and then moves toward the conclusion.

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