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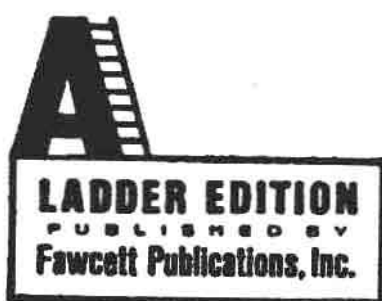
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SELECTIONS FROM *Washington Irving*

REAL AND GHOSTLY STORIES
BY A GREAT AMERICAN WRITER

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SELECTIONS FROM
**WASHINGTON
IRVING**

**A Ladder Edition
at the 2,000 word level
Adapted by Virginia French Allen**

Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut

SELECTIONS FROM WASHINGTON IRVING

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»»»»»»»»»»Introduction

WASHINGTON IRVING has been called North America's first professional writer. He was born in 1783, the year when the American Revolution ended; and he lived to become the first author from the United States to win international fame.

When Washington Irving was a child, there were still reminders of Indian life and Dutch colonization in his native city, New York. It is interesting to note that Irving's first work—perhaps his greatest work—was a humorous account of his native town. Irving called it "A History of New York," and credited it to a certain Dutch historian named Diedrich Knickerbocker.

This early work was a promising beginning for Washington Irving. It enabled the young author to visit Europe, which influenced him as it has influenced many later American writers, from Longfellow to Hemingway. There, under the guidance of such famous men of literature as Sir Walter Scott and W. M. Thackeray, Irving broadened his view of life. He became far more than the recorder of his local scene.

In Europe, Irving wrote about England and English ways; but he did not forget his Hudson River Valley years. He wrote such stories as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The *Legend* of Sleepy Hollow" while still on foreign soil.

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This visit to Europe was not to be Irving's last. On a later occasion, he went abroad and remained for *seventeen* years. Still later, after American experiences which he described in such accounts as "*A Tour on the Prairies*," he went to Europe again, as his government's Minister to Spain. "*The Rose of the Alhambra*," which appears in this book, represents the writings of Irving's Spanish years.

»»»»»Rip Van Winkle

Washington Irving's Note to the Reader: The following story was found among the papers of Diedrich Knickerbocker, an old gentleman of New York. During his lifetime, this gentleman was very curious about the Dutch history of that region. Although unable to find much information on this subject in books, he learned a great deal by listening to the old men of the town—and more especially their wives. Whenever, therefore, he found by chance some real Dutch family, living comfortably in some farmhouse with a low roof, under a fine big tree, he considered it as full of information as a history book, and he studied it eagerly.

The result of all this study was a history of the region during the time of the Dutch governors, which he published some years ago. There have been various opinions as to the artistic quality of his work, and, to tell the truth, it is not a bit better than it should be. Its chief virtue is that it truthfully reports the facts. It is therefore highly respected by students of history, and has been admitted into all historical collections.

The old gentleman died soon after his work was published. Now that he is dead and gone, it cannot do much harm to his memory to say that perhaps he should have spent his time on more important matters. He, however, preferred to follow his interests in his own way; and

though he sometimes troubled and angered some of his neighbors and friends, his deeds are now remembered "more in sorrow than in anger." Most people now think that he never intended to do any harm.

ANYONE who has made a voyage up the Hudson River surely remembers the Kaatskill mountains. They are part of the great family of mountains in the Eastern section of our country, called the Appalachians, though the Kaatskills are separated from the other members of the Appalachian group. The Kaatskill mountains rise on the west of the Hudson River, high above the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the colors and shapes of these mountains. By looking at the Kaatskills from time to time, the people of the region can guess what the weather is going to be. When the weather is fair and fine, the mountains are a deep blue, and the tops of the mountains can be clearly seen against the evening sky. But sometimes, when there are no clouds anywhere else, the mountains seem to wear a loose gray cap, which glows like a crown of glory in the light of the setting sun.

Just below these strange mountains, the voyager may have observed the thin smoke curling up from a village among the trees. It is a little village many years old; the Dutch settled there in the early years of the colony. Until recently, some of the houses of the original settlers were still there, built in the Dutch fashion, and with materials brought from Holland.

In that same village, and in one of those houses, Rip Van Winkle lived. He lived there many years ago, while our country still belonged to England. Rip Van Winkle was a simple, good-natured fellow, whose *ancestors* had fought bravely in the days of the Dutch governor, Peter

Stuyvesant. Rip, however, had little of his ancestors' military character. I have said that he was a simple, good-natured man. He was, in addition, a kind neighbor, and a husband who humbly obeyed his wife. Being firmly controlled by his wife at home, he seemed to have formed the habit of being agreeable to all. As a result, he was thought highly of by everyone except his wife.

Certainly he was a great *favorite* among all the good wives of the village. Whenever they discussed the Van Winkle family's quarrels, they always decided that Rip was right, and that *Dame* Van Winkle was wrong. The children of the village, too, always shouted with joy when Rip Van Winkle approached. He watched them at their sports, made playthings for them, taught them how to play various games, and told them long stories of the most exciting kind. Wherever he went, he was usually surrounded by a crowd of children; and no dog in the village ever *barked* at him.

Rip Van Winkle had one great fault: he disliked—indeed, he hated—any kind of profitable labor. It is hard to understand just why he did not like to work, for he had plenty of patience and the ability to continue one form of activity for a long time. Often, for example, he sat on a wet rock, with a heavy fishing pole, and fished all day without a murmur, even though he might not succeed in catching a single fish. He was willing to carry a hunting gun on his shoulder, hour after hour, up and down hills, just to shoot a few rabbits and birds. He never refused to help a neighbor, even with the roughest sort of work, such as helping people build stone walls. The women of the village, too, often used him to carry messages for them, or to do small jobs that their husbands were not willing to do. In other words, Rip was ready to take care of anybody's business except his own.

As for his family duties, and for keeping his farm in order, he found such work impossible.

In fact, he declared it was of no use to work on his farm; it was the worst little piece of ground in the whole country; everything about it was wrong. His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow was always getting lost or else eating up the vegetables in the garden. Nothing ever grew well in his fields; and the rain always started just as soon as he had begun to do some work outside. As a result, although he had lost much of his family's land during years of bad management until very little remained, yet his small farm was in worse condition than any neighboring farm.

His children, too, went about looking as poor as his farm. His son Rip, who was very much like him, ran around wearing a pair of his father's old trousers, which he had to hold up with one hand in order to prevent them from falling.

Rip Van Winkle, however, was one of those fortunate people, with foolish, well-oiled natures, who take the world easy and cheerfully, eat fine food or poor, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble. If permitted, he would have sat whistling his life away in perfect contentment; but his wife kept continually reminding him about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family. Morning, noon, and night, her tongue was ceaselessly going. Everything he said or did was sure to produce more angry talk.

Rip had just one way of replying to his wife's talk; by frequent use it had become a habit. He merely put his head back on his shoulders, looked up toward heaven, and said nothing. This, however, always produced a fresh burst of anger from his wife. There was nothing for Rip to do then except to leave the house.

Rip's only friend in the Van Winkle home was his

dog, whose name was Wolf. Wolf was often the object of Dame Van Winkle's displeasure, for she considered the two of them companions in idleness; indeed, she sometimes even blamed the dog for Rip's wandering ways. True, in the woods Wolf was as brave as an honorable dog should be; but what dog is ever brave enough to stand firm against the terrors of a woman's tongue? As soon as Wolf entered the house, his head bent low, his tail lay on the ground or curled between his legs. He went around the house with a guilty look, watching Dame Van Winkle out of the corner of his eye, ready to run from the room at the slightest sign of her displeasure.

Rip Van Winkle's troubles increased as the years of his marriage passed. A hard woman never becomes softer with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that cuts better with *constant* use. For a long while he used to comfort himself by sitting with other idle men, when Dame Van Winkle's talk had forced him out of the house. He and these other idle persons used to sit in front of the village *inn*, a small hotel whose name was suggested by a picture of *His Majesty* George the Third. Here they often sat in the shade through a long summer day, telling endless sleepy stories about nothing. Sometimes, by chance, one of the men found an old newspaper which had been left behind by some passing traveler. Then how seriously they would listen to the contents, as the newspaper was read aloud by Derrick Van Bummel, the schoolteacher, a man of great learning, who was not afraid of the longest word in the dictionary. And how wisely they would discuss the public events which had occurred several months before.

The opinions of this group were completely controlled by Nicholas Vedder, the oldest man in the village, who owned the inn. He sat at the door of the

inn from morning till night, moving just enough to avoid the sun and keep in the shade of a large tree. It is true that he almost never spoke, but smoked his pipe continually. His admirers, however, understood him perfectly, and knew how to get his opinions on any subject. When anything that was read or told displeased him, he smoked his pipe angrily; but when he was pleased, he smoked slowly and calmly. Sometimes, taking the pipe from his mouth, he let the smoke curl about his nose and moved his head up and down as a sign of agreement with what was being said.

But even the comforting companionship of this group was finally taken from the unlucky Rip. His wife suddenly broke in upon the pleasant discussion-club and gave its members her opinion of their worthlessness. Not even the great Nicholas Vedder himself was safe from the tongue of this daring woman, who blamed him directly for much of her husband's idleness.

Poor Rip was thus driven almost to despair. His only remaining means of escape was to take his gun and walk away into the woods. Here he would sometimes seat himself at the foot of a tree with his faithful dog and fellow-sufferer, Wolf. "Poor Wolf," he would say. "Your life is hard and sad indeed, but never fear. While I live there will always be one friend to stand beside you!" Wolf would *wag* his tail and look sadly into his master's face. If dogs can feel pity, I truly believe he pitied Rip with all his heart.

After a long, wandering walk of this kind on a certain autumn day, Rip found that he had climbed to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains. He was engaged in his favorite sport of hunting, and the *lonely* stillness of the woods had often been broken by the sound of his gun. Tired and breathless, he threw himself, late in the afternoon, on a little green hill at the

highest point of land. From an opening between the trees he could see all the lower country for many miles of rich woodland. He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson River, far, far below.

On the other side he looked down into a deep valley, wild, lonely, and covered with trees. The bottom was filled with pieces of broken rock from the stony mountain side. For some time Rip lay observing this scene. Evening had almost come; the mountains began to throw their long blue shadows over the valleys; he saw that it would be dark long before he could reach the village, and he sighed deeply when he thought of Dame Van Winkle's angry face.

Just as he was about to do down the mountain, he heard a voice from the distance calling, "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!" He looked around, but could see nothing except a large bird winging its lonely flight across the mountain. He decided he had merely imagined the voice, and had turned again to climb down, when he heard the same cry ring through the quiet evening air: "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!" At the same time, the hairs on his dog's back stood up straight, and the dog moved to his master's side, looking fearfully into the valley. Rip now felt the same fear within him, and he looked anxiously in the same direction. There he saw a strange figure slowly climbing up the rocks, bending under the weight of something he carried on his back. Rip was surprised to see any human being in this lonely place. But supposing it was some neighbor in need of help, he hurried down to give it.

As he approached more closely, he was still more surprised at the oddness of the stranger's appearance. He was a short old fellow, built quite square, with thick bushy hair and a grayish *beard*! His clothes were in the old Dutch fashion—a short cloth jacket with a belt, and

several pairs of trousers. The outer trousers were wide and loose, with rows of buttons down the sides. On his shoulder he carried a wooden *keg* which seemed full of liquor; and he motioned to Rip to approach and help him with his load.

Though not entirely trusting this odd-looking stranger, Rip advanced to aid him. They carried the keg together up a narrow cut in the mountain side which might once have been made there by a mountain stream. As they climbed, Rip began to notice some unusual sounds. They were somewhat like the sounds of distant thunder, and they seemed to rise out of a deep and narrow valley among the towering rocks toward which their rough path led.

He paused for an instant to listen, but decided there must be a passing thunderstorm not far away. Satisfied with this explanation of the noises, he proceeded. Passing through the cut in the mountain, they came to a small hollow, like one of the theaters cut into the earth in ancient Greece. During this whole time, Rip and his companion had labored on in silence; for though Rip wondered why anyone should carry a keg of liquor up this wild mountain, he lacked the courage to question his strange new friend.

When they entered the hollow, new objects of wonder could be seen. On a level spot in the center, a group of odd-looking persons were playing *ninepins*. The players were dressed in a most unusual fashion. Some had knives in their belts, and most of them had long, loose trousers similar to those worn by Rip's guide. Their faces, too, were odd. The face of one seemed to consist entirely of a nose, topped by a large white hat. They all had beards, of various shapes and colors. There was one who seemed to be the leader of the group. He was a thick-bodied old gentleman, wearing a broad belt, a tall hat with a feather,