

HOLLOW BLOOD

The Hunt for the Foul Murderer of Ichabod Crane

Sleepy Hollow Horrors: Book One

AUSTIN DRAGON

Excerpt of Part One

Katrina Van Brunt returned hours before, had a bath, and changed into her dress for the evening. The servants were busy at work in every corner of the mansion. The walls were adorned with lustrous items of silver, ears of Indian corn, ornate strings of red and green peppers, and dried fruits such as peaches and apples. The ceiling had strings of colored birds eggs suspended from it, and the mantelpiece was decorated with large conch shells and other smaller seashells. Expensive china adorned nearly every table or desktop, awaiting the servants to set dishes of food, drink and sweets.

Mr. Van Brunt had the field staff preparing for the arrival of the party guests. He strolled down the stairs in his finest evening clothes, purple to match his wife's dress, tugging on each sleeve.

"Where's your father?" he asked as soon as his wife crossed his path, moving quickly with candelabras in her hands. "Let the servants do that."

"He's sitting on the porch," she answered, ignoring his last statement, and continued to the dining room.

Brom walked out on the porch and saw the man with his favorite evening pipe. He sat right next to him as Old Van Tassel exhaled a puff of smoke.

"It's going to be a fine party tonight, son."

"Yes sir, it will. They seem to get bigger every time we have one."

"Tarry Town will soon have to be called Tarry City with all the new people and families. Fifty years ago it was nothing but me and the Indians."

Brom had heard the story of the first days of Tarry Town and the Hollow from his father-in-law more times than he could count. The stories tended to go all night,

especially when he was sitting comfortable with his pipe in mouth – Brom glanced over – and his favorite cup of ale at his side.

The front door opened and Katrina popped out. “Abraham, and you, too, father, come on in and help us get ready. The first guests will be here any minute.”

“I thought I was the man of the house,” Brom said as he reluctantly stood up.

“I thought I was old,” Mr. Van Tassel said as he reluctantly followed.

Even the field hands were in their best dress as the carriages began to arrive. Two men were at the main gate, and there was a whole system in place to direct the carriage drivers, open doors for passengers, and lead guests to the main house.

Three carriages arrived together. The couples exited and immediately greeted one another.

“Have you heard about this stranger inquiring about the Horseman’s last victim?” one of the women asked.

“What was his name?” a man asked.

“Ichabod Crane. He was the schoolmaster. They closed it down when he disappeared,” another man answered.

“Who is this stranger?” another man asked.

“Wasn’t that seven years ago?” the man asked.

“He says he’s working for some estate in New York City, or it might be Connecticut, to find Ichabod Crane so as to settle an estate. There’s supposed to be some kind of compensation involved.”

“More like ten years ago,” a woman corrected.

“How much?”

“I haven’t heard what the total amount is, but it’s supposedly paid out whether they find him to be dead or alive.”

“How about whisked away to hell. Do they have a third category for that?”

“People need to be careful about bringing up any of the Horseman’s victims,” another woman warned. “Next the Horseman himself will return and poor people will start to disappear all over again.”

The warning ended the conversation as they walked to the front door.

Arriving guests were greeted by man-servants, coats and hats were taken, and they were directed inside to be attended to by more servants. Brom stood inside with his wife on one side and Old Man Van Tassel on the other. The trio greeted arrivals in unison. The Old Man was still considered the chief patriarch of the Hollow. His daughter, Mrs. Van Brunt, was known far and wide for her charm, grace, and charity. Mr. Van Brunt was popular for another reason, besides the family wealth – he brought along family and friends alike as he moved up the social ladder and he was at the center of the region’s new commercial growth. The children of the humble Dutch explorers that settled Sleepy Hollow long ago were now among the ‘who’s who’ of business in the state of New York – statehood had only been granted twelve years ago.

Brom chatted up the men and Katrina gossiped with the women. People remarked on the finely carved furniture, but especially the food! The best culinary displays of Dutch New England food were everywhere – duck and turkey, sausages and sauces, bacon

and hams, pies and cakes. Old Van Tassel made sure everyone had a hearty glass of wine or brandy, his ritual before he took a seat to smoke at one end of the piazza and gossip through the night of past times and old war stories.

Brom knew that any secrets of the stranger in town would soon dissipate. The chief female rumormongers of the town, a half dozen of them, had already cornered Katrina. He had his own contingent to deal with.

"Surely, Mr. Van Brunt, you have heard about this stranger," said one of two men with him, talking and sipping his drink.

The loud laughter of Old Man Van Tassel frequently dinned above the conversations of the crowd, over sixty couples, and even the music of the pianist, a German-born man from outside of Sing Sing. The men were in their best and most expensive coats and breeches, white stockings, and buckled shoes; the women in their most expensive hooped dresses or frocks.

"I heard," Brom answered the man. "It's a free country. He'll come and he'll go. I have more important things to concern myself with."

Something told Brom to glance at his wife. She shot him a look as she continued talking with the women, pretending to be hanging on their every word.

"Does anyone know where he's from?" Brom asked.

"Someone said upstate New York or maybe it was Connecticut?"

"Meaning, no one knows."

The front door opened and a manservant greeted him.

"Your hat and coat, sir?"

Julian handed them to him.

"Who may I say is here, sir?"

"No need, sir. I'm a surprise for the man of the house. Just show me the way to good ol' Brom."

The butler smiled. Only a true friend of Mr. Van Brunt would call him Brom.

"Yes, of course, sir."

Brom and Katrina had joined each other again with many other couples listening to the latest and hilarious stories from Mr. Peters. The man had become the center of the party, and Old Man Van Tassel, the usual honoree of that position, was as eager to hear as anyone else. What gathering at a home in the Hollow would be complete without a good ol' nighttime, essential ghost story?

"It was the Ghost of Raven Rock. A temptress that haunts that dark glen and can be heard shrieking on winter nights before a storm." Mr. Peters lifted both hands up, contorted his hands to make them seem like claws, and widened his eyes in fake horror. Everyone else drew near with smiles and laughter.

Brom barely noticed the man walk into the room, and he wouldn't have noticed him at all, if not for the cold stare. He had never seen the man before, but there he stood, looking directly at him.

"Who is that man?" Katrina asked. She had already noticed the man, too.

"I don't know. I shall find out."

Brom excused himself and set his drink on the corner table, which was promptly picked up by one of the servants. As Brom approached the man, he had an instant thought of as to who the stranger might be.

“Good evening, sir,” Brom said. “I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure of meeting you. Who might you be?”

“No, but our accounts have preceded us both.” The young man’s tone had a tangible anger to it.

“I don’t like to have my simple questions answered by riddles. Who are you?” Brom decided to match his rude tone.

The man continued. “Abraham Van Brunt. Known more commonly as Brom Bones—”

“Who are you? And why are you in my house? You are not an invited guest.”

Brom’s outburst brought every conversation in the mansion to an abrupt halt. This was another thing that he was known for – his volcanic temper whenever it was provoked. He was the embodiment of a bull ready to charge its prey, his face reddened, and his fists clenched.

The man yelled back, “My name is Julian Crane! And I’m here to hunt down the foul murderer of my uncle, the late Mr. Ichabod Crane! That foul murderer is you!” – Julian pointed a finger at him – “You, Brom Bones! The death blood of my uncle is on your hands! You, Brom Bones!”

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