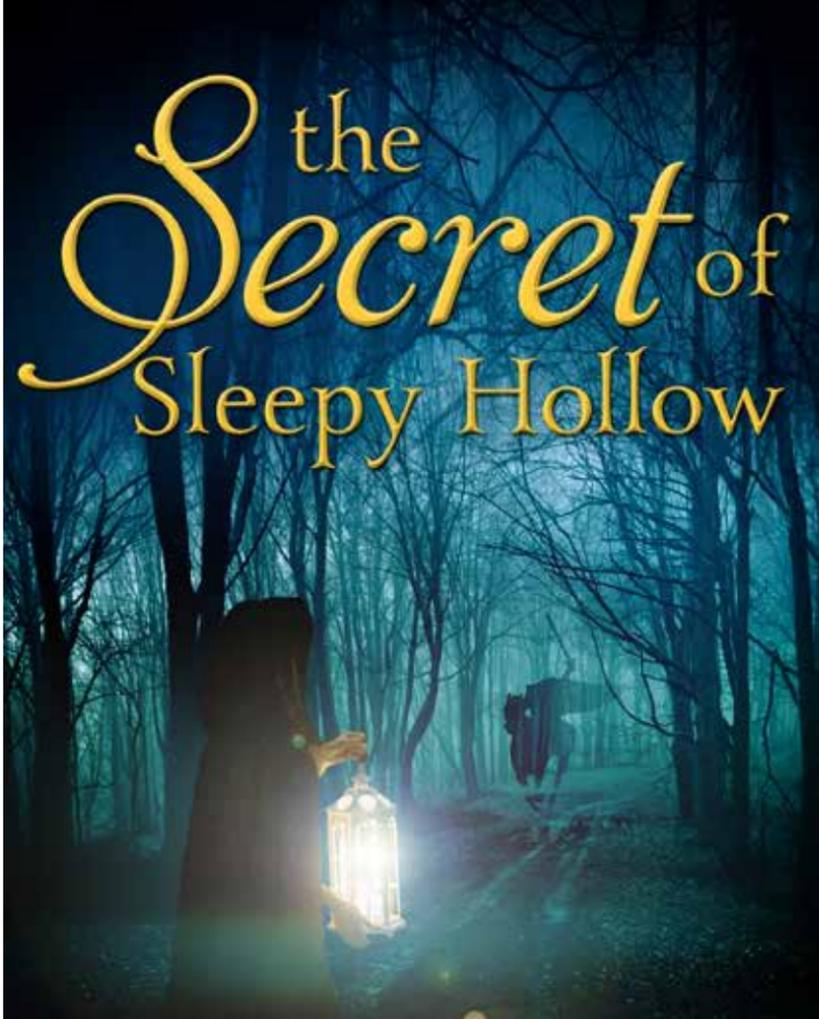


— TWICE TOLD TALES —



WITHIN LEGENDS THERE ARE ALWAYS SECRETS

the
Secret of
Sleepy Hollow



Andi Marquette

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tales

ABBY PARKED IN A SPACE practically in front of the Sleepy Hollow Historical Society, a one-story unremarkable brick building with a plain glass door. It blended well with the other structures, a mixture of brick and clapboard. The city fathers probably wanted to maintain a quaint, small-town charm in addition to the appeal of the village's historical significance, which included its paranormal allure.

Abby picked up the book from the passenger seat and opened it to the page she'd flagged with a Post-it note, to the story in this collection that teased her some days, haunted her others. How many times had she read this damn story, looking for clues to her own history? The title seemed to both mock and entice her. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Did Washington Irving have any idea, when this story was published in 1820, how it would wend its way into the American psyche? How the legend of the headless horseman in this corner of New York and the disappearance of Ichabod Crane would spawn first, speculation and later, movies?

She doubted it. No writer imagines that, even though Irving got a taste of it when he was alive, enjoying acclaim in the States and Europe. Abby flipped through the pages until she came to the first appearance of Katrina van Tassel,

daughter of Baltus, one of the wealthiest men in Sleepy Hollow in the late 18th century. The Van Tassels were one of the founding families here, and when Ichabod arrived in 1799, Katrina immediately caught his attention.

And then he disappeared one October night. Irving left this event open to speculation. Was it the headless horseman that haunted the area since the Revolutionary War who caused it? Or a cruel joke perpetrated by another of Katrina's suitors, Abraham van Brunt, known as Brom Bones? Regardless, Ichabod disappeared in Irving's story and from the historical record, leaving behind the legend of the headless horseman. And, Abby thought, lots and lots of questions.

She got out of the car, still holding the book, and stretched. Though the late afternoon sun was warm, she grabbed her sweatshirt out of the back seat and put it on. This late in October, Abby knew the evening would be cool. Her laptop bag was on the floor behind the driver's seat and she slipped the book into it then slung the bag over her shoulder and locked the car.

An elderly man strolled past with a tiny dog dressed in an equally tiny blue sweater. He nodded at her and she smiled back. The dog glanced once at her, but clearly wasn't interested in stopping for a pat from a stranger. It had other business to conduct, like sniffing a nearby tree, whose leaves were a blaze of fall colors.

Abby approached the historical society and hesitated at the front door, her attention caught by a poster hanging on it below the open sign. The poster advertised the Sleepy Hollow Halloween festival, which was this weekend. The graphics included a creepy bridge, jack o' lanterns, and a

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galloping horse whose rider had no head. She stared at it for a few moments and thought about Washington Irving, writing the story that would be the root of all of this hype, and the cause of her current fascination with American folklore. She wondered, if the horseman weren't tied up in her own family's history, would she care as much about Sleepy Hollow and its history? Probably not.

A soft tone like a doorbell sounded somewhere in the back when Abby entered, but it wasn't necessary because a woman stood at the counter, engaged with a stack of papers. She wore a faded denim shirt and her dark hair, streaked with gray, was pulled back from her face.

The woman looked up over the rims of her reading glasses and smiled. "Hi, there. How can I help you?" She took her glasses off and set them on the counter.

"Hi. I'm Abby Crane." Abby unfastened the clasp of her bag. "I made an appointment a month ago to do some research here and I confirmed with someone—I think it was Robert—on Monday." She pulled a business card out of her bag and handed it over.

"Of course. Ms. Crane." The woman picked up the card and glanced at it. "Tabitha." She looked back at Abby. "There's a name you don't see every day."

"It has yet to make a comeback," Abby said with a smile. She got a comment every time, when people realized her full name wasn't Abigail.

"It's a lovely name." She set the card on the counter. "You made the original appointment with me. I'm Luanne, but most everybody calls me Lu. How was your drive?"

"Fine. I just thought I'd come by before you closed to introduce myself." Abby re-fastened her bag.

“You didn’t have to do that, but I do appreciate it. Where are you staying?”

“The Maple Tree Inn.”

Lu smiled again. “Then you’ve already met Eleanor. She volunteers here. A font of information about local lore.” The phone rang. “One moment,” she said.

Abby nodded as Lu answered and used the time Lu was talking to have a look around. The interior of the building was sleek and modern, unlike its brick exterior. This was an older building, completely refurbished, and painted in a ubiquitous museum-style shade of white, but the track lighting created a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Several display cases decorated the adjoining room, some on the walls and larger ones in the middle of the room. All but one held historic artifacts, including tools, daily implements, and explanatory cards that provided provenance and significance in the community. Sleepy Hollow was closely linked to Tarrytown. North Tarrytown had actually renamed itself Sleepy Hollow in 1996 in honor of Washington Irving’s story. But the focus in this room was on the agricultural and manufacturing base of the city, made ideal because the Hudson River was so close. Plus, its natural beauty had drawn lots of people, including the elite. The Rockefellers had a house here.

The remaining display cases focused on prehistory, and included artifacts from the local Indian tribe that had occupied the area prior to white settlement. They’d done a good job setting it up, Abby thought. Someone had put a lot of thought into the choice of artifacts and how to display them, as well as what to write in the descriptions. It was better than some larger museums she’d been to.

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She was about to go into the second room when Lu joined her.

“We’ve tried to ensure that we don’t forget the people who were here in this area before us.” Lu motioned at the prehistory case. “We maintain relationships with current tribes, and they graciously send us people to give talks throughout the year. Always well-attended, I might add.” Lu slipped her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. “History is important in places like this. Many of the people currently living here can trace their roots back to the original settlement. And a few can trace to a tribe.” A smile twitched at the corner of Lu’s lips. “People are people,” she said. “They tend to mix and mingle no matter what the conventional wisdom suggests. Of course, it’s very different in some ways here now. We’re a bedroom community for people who commute into Manhattan, but we’re pleased that we’ve been able to maintain a small town sort of ethos.”

Abby smiled back. She liked Lu’s vibe. Professional but approachable. Abby guessed she, too, was serious about history. “Who did the displays here? They’re great.”

“All of us had a hand in them. Robert and Eleanor and a few other volunteers helped me with the artifacts. Robert’s better with turns of phrase, so he did most of the informational cards. I did the brunt of the arranging within the cases.”

Abby nodded. “They’re really excellent.”

“Good to know that graduate degree in museum studies I got paid off, eh?” Lu winked at her.

“So you’re saying there’s hope for me outside academia?”

Lu grinned. “You never know where life will take you. At any rate, the materials you’ve requested we keep in the

vault.” She laughed at Abby’s expression. “That’s what we call it. It’s our climate controlled storage area. We bring materials up to the reading room.”

“Wow. Could I see the storage area?”

“Certainly. Tomorrow morning. Go ahead and finish looking around. I have to do a few things before we close up. Let me know if you’d like a more in-depth explanation of anything.”

“Thanks.”

Lu returned to the counter and Abby walked slowly through the second room, which led to a small third room that was designed for showing films. Six long carpeted benches faced a blank screen. A sign explained that the movie—a documentary that provided an overview of the history of the area—showed every hour at the top of the hour and lasted twenty minutes. The last showing was at four each afternoon. Abby had arrived at four-thirty. Sometimes the short films at historical societies were informative. Other times, not so much. Maybe some day she’d do a documentary on Sleepy Hollow, and it would show here, too.

She moved to the display cases that she hadn’t seen. One held her attention. “Ghostly Legends,” the sign on this case said. A pen-and-ink drawing in the style of the eighteenth century depicted a man on a black horse. He was dressed in a uniform—presumably for war—and he held a long sword. The information card next to the drawing provided a short paragraph about him, and referred to him as “The Hessian.”

Abby knew the legend by heart. This particular Hessian soldier had come to the Sleepy Hollow area, where he fought for American forces against the British in the Revolutionary War. He died, the legend suggested, when his head was shot

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off by a cannon ball during a battle and he rode after death, the headless horseman of Sleepy Hollow. She studied the drawing, but there was no indication in the man's features that he was the type of guy to ride long after death looking for his missing head. She'd always wondered why he'd want it back after a cannon ball got through with it. Seemed like a wasted effort. But there was no accounting for the motivations of ghosts, or, more importantly, the development of a great story.

She took the book out of her bag and reread Irving's description of Ichabod's encounter with the horseman. Gigantic in height, Irving had written, and the horseman's head rested on the pommel of his saddle. That's what he had thrown at Ichabod, the story went, and it hit him and then... he was gone, from the legend and the historical record.

Abby put the book back into her bag. The other ghostly legends included references to the Hollow as a place brimming with paranormal activity since the Dutch settled it. Another suggested an Indian medicine man may have been responsible for imbuing the area with lots of otherworldly powers. Regardless, the information cards said, "rumors of spectral sightings and strange occurrences are woven into the fabric of Sleepy Hollow."

Which made for a fascinating community study for her dissertation – how certain places were shaped by beliefs in paranormal phenomena that had become part of the local and regional history. It helped, of course, that she had an ancestor who was part of one of those legends.

Abby returned to the counter. "Thanks," she said to Lu. "See you tomorrow." She turned to go.

"Do you have plans for dinner?"

Abby stopped and looked over in surprise. “No, not really.”

“Would you like to join me and Eleanor for a bite? You can get an earful of local lore. Some of it is true.” She smiled.

“Sure.”

“Wonderful. How about in an hour? You can walk to the restaurant with Eleanor. It’s only a couple blocks from the Maple Tree.”

“Sounds great. Thank you so much.” Abby started for the front door, guessing that Lu probably wanted to close up.

“We historian-types love to chat each other up. See you soon.” She closed the door behind Abby and flipped the sign to “Closed.”

Abby returned to her car, but she didn’t get in right away. Instead, she stood and admired the town. She looked back toward downtown, thinking that this could be a classic New England village postcard. A group of kids with backpacks had congregated outside what looked like a bakery across the street. Abby estimated them as junior-high age. Some of the trees that lined the street still retained their fall colors, rich reds and yellows trembling in the breeze. As Abby watched, a few let go of their moorings and fell to the sidewalks and street.

Banners for the annual Halloween festival hung over the street, attached to the black Victorian-style lampposts on either side. The closest one included a black horse rearing up on its hind legs in the banner’s center, and its black-clothed rider held a leering jack-o’-lantern in his upraised hand. The rider had no head. A chill shot down her spine, a sense of expectation and something else she couldn’t name.

“Will you stay for the celebration?” Lu asked, and Abby tore her gaze away from the picture on the banner to look at

her. She had put on a jean jacket and had a backpack slung over one shoulder. She gripped the handles of a tote bag filled with books in one hand.

“I was planning on it, yes.”

“It’s quite a spectacle. Sort of a combined harvest festival and nod to Samhain, and we do have quite a frightening haunted house here in town. We have our own addition, of course.” Lu looked at the banner. “The rider begins his rounds usually around eight-thirty or nine, so the younger kids can get a look at him before they go to bed. Depending on who it is, he’ll ride for an hour or two, though a couple we’ve had in the past have gone a little longer than that.”

“You mean you actually have a headless horseman?” Abby glanced at the banner again.

“Of course. It’s Sleepy Hollow, after all. One of the locals volunteers every year.”

“Where does he ride?” That was something she wanted to see. It would be a great addition to her research. A legend kept alive by a town’s culture.

“All over. Mostly the outskirts, and through the real Sleepy Hollow glen. We’re named for that, which is where all manner of ghostly things are alleged to happen. As I’m sure you know.”

“Has anybody ever seen the real horseman?”

Lu gave her a mischievous smile. “Before or after he died?”

Abby grinned. “After.”

“Yes. People have been seeing him since the Revolutionary War.” Lu adjusted the backpack. “At least, they *claim* they’ve seen him. Others say they’ve heard his horse, galloping through the Hollow. They all lived to tell about it, clearly.”

“Not all,” Abby said and she looked up at the banner again. “According to legend.” She turned her gaze back to Lu.

“Well, yes. There was one who disappeared, according to legend.” Lu’s expression turned quizzical. “Tabitha Crane,” she said, as if testing the way it sounded. “I wondered when you first called to set up the appointment. What’s your relationship to Ichabod?”

“He was a brother of my father’s direct ancestor. A great-great-great-great uncle to me or something like that.”

“Doing a bit of family history, then, in addition to your community study?”

“I thought it might be interesting, to see if I could find anything along those lines.” She’d wondered, actually, most of her life what had happened to Ichabod.

“Well, you’re in luck. Eleanor has been through our collection of the Van Tassel papers dozens of times.”

“And the Van Brunt?”

Lu smiled. “We do have quite a bit of their papers, too. Eleanor helped catalogue them, but she’s more familiar with the Van Tassel collection. But even in terms of the Van Brunt papers, she can probably point you in any direction you’d like to go.”

“That would be great.”

“And she loves talking history. You’ll see for yourself. At any rate, I’ll see you at the restaurant. I have to run home and drop a few things off.” Lu lifted the tote bag just as an SUV drove past and its driver honked and waved at Lu, who waved back with her free hand. Abby caught a glimpse of the driver—female—and her dark hair and a flash of a smile.

Small towns, Abby thought. Everybody knew everybody else. “See you in a bit,” she said to Lu as she opened her car and put her bag on the floor behind the driver’s seat. She was looking forward to being able to walk most of the time

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while she was here, to get a real feel for the place. She slowly backed out of the space and headed down Main Street, toward downtown.

Dark and comfortable, the pub's walls were lined with booths, and several wooden tables in the center of the room provided other seating. About half the tables and booths were full, and Abby caught snippets of various conversations. She thought she heard "horseman" a couple of times.

A server walked past with someone's order, the smell of hot French fries lingering even after the food was delivered. The ceiling near the bar was plastered with coasters from a variety of beers and countries, many of which emphasized paranormal themes. A headless horseman appeared on a few.

"How much do you know about the local history of Sleepy Hollow?" Lu asked. She was seated across from Abby in this pub that was only a couple of blocks from the bed and breakfast.

"Not as much as I'd like to. There are the legends, of course, but the point of my research is to look behind those and see what might really have gone on, if anything. This is the first time I'm looking at the primary documents."

"Legends always have a grain of truth," Eleanor said. "But then people embellish. Like our dear friend Washington Irving." She smiled and took a buffalo wing from the plate in the center of the table. "He set his story around 1790, but the events of it happened around 1799. Creative license, of course."

Eleanor sat next to Lu, and Abby had guessed, when she checked in at the bed and breakfast earlier, that Eleanor was

probably in her mid to late sixties. Her hair was nearly all white, and she kept it short. She wore a maroon turtleneck under a tan sweater and dark brown corduroys. She looked like she was ready to take off on a hike. From her great complexion and down-to-earth vibe, Abby figured she did that quite a bit.

“I guess I do wonder what happened to Ichabod and why he disappeared from the historical record,” Abby said.

“Scandal,” Eleanor said with a smile before she wiped her mouth.

Lu laughed. “El and I have our theories. We think the legend is correct insofar as there was something between Ichabod and Katrina van Tassel—you are familiar with the Van Tassel name in this area? Not just that it’s a name on a collection of papers?”

Abby took another wing. “Dutch, one of the founding families, had money back in the day. Still a lot of Van Tassels around, and they’re integral to Ichabod’s story.”

“The Van Brunts were influential, as well. Brom’s—Abraham’s family, from the legend.” Lu sipped her iced tea. “At any rate, El and I think that Ichabod and Katrina were an item of sorts.”

“And then Ichabod disappeared,” Eleanor said, “and we’re not sure what happened to him, as legend has it his body was never found.”

“Not unusual,” Lu interjected. “After all, his body could’ve been dragged off by a bear or some such. Depending on where he last was.”

Abby moved her glass so the server could put her salad down. “I can’t find any record of Ichabod after he disappeared. Not even in my family history. He was there, and then he wasn’t.”

“History can be maddening,” Eleanor said as she picked up her Reuben. “That’s why we love it so. Keeps us occupied for years. Do you have anything in particular you’d like to see in the Van Tassel or Van Brunt papers?”

“I think I’d like to start with the Van Tassels, and get a sense of them. Correspondence, business papers. That sort of thing.”

“We have a wonderful collection of the correspondence, as I’m sure you know,” Eleanor said. “Katrina—Baltus’s daughter, from the legend—was a particularly lively writer. You’ll find mention of Ichabod in her letters. Perhaps you’ll see something that the rest of us haven’t. Lu and I like to think that Katrina lived passionately.”

Lu chuckled as she finished dressing her burger. “She did have a flare for the dramatic. But I don’t want to spoil it for you,” she said to Abby.

“So what’s the deal with the horseman?” Abby asked.

“Oh, my. He is a primary figure in the legend of Ichabod Crane, but he’s not the only story here.” Eleanor wiped her hands off and sipped her wine.

“How so?” Abby asked.

“Well, I think the real force behind Ichabod’s legend is the fact that he disappeared. Legend created a reason for that—a ghost horseman who was already established as part of the lore of this area. But the story behind Ichabod and Katrina is the one that I think drives the folklore. Something happened between them, and it culminated one night in 1799, at which point Ichabod was no longer part of the historical record. The blame for his disappearance fell on a ghost, which is always easy to do when perhaps you don’t want to look inward or involve locals in an investigation.”

“Are you suggesting he was murdered?” Abby set her fork down and reached for her iced tea. Irving had set that possibility up, and hinted that it might be Brom, but because the history was conjectural in that regard, so was the story.

“It’s a possibility, but as you go through Katrina’s correspondence in particular, I don’t think that’s what happened. But something did, and therein lies the mystery. The horseman is merely a vehicle for mysteries rather than a creator of them.”

“The horseman is definitely tied to Ichabod’s story in some way,” Lu said. “But like El says, there’s a much bigger story behind the horseman and Ichabod. What that is we aren’t sure, but the horseman eventually took precedence over whatever really happened that night. After all, a headless ghost riding around a haunted glen has more sex appeal than a story about political and romantic intrigue, which often takes longer to unravel.”

“So was there actually a Hessian soldier who could’ve been the source of the ghost horseman story?” Abby continued eating her salad.

“Yes,” Eleanor said. “His history is correct in that there were Hessian soldiers in this area during the Revolutionary War. Many undoubtedly died in battle. Some were properly buried, with tombstones, and there’s a record of them. Others, not so much. There was a mention of a Hessian soldier who suffered a terrible head injury in a battle near White Plains—”

“Sorry to interrupt, but where was this injury mentioned?” Abby asked.

“Well, let me think. Lu, do you remember?”

“One of the local manors in this area was used as a temporary medical facility, and one of the Van Brunts kept

an inventory. It's in that collection. I recall that the injury killed the soldier, but they didn't include a name." She ate a fry. "And from that, it seems, came the headless horseman. But we're not entirely sure how or why."

"Weird, how that happens." Abby poked at a tomato. Somehow, a story grew from some unknown soldier's death into a driving force behind a ghostly legend that had repercussions in several families and in the history of a town.

"It is," Eleanor said. "Fascinating, isn't it? But I've always been curious about the love triangle between Katrina, Brom Bones, and Ichabod. I personally think Ichabod was her first choice, and when he disappeared, I think it may have devastated her. I always wonder what might have happened if Ichabod hadn't disappeared. Guess that's the romantic in me." She smiled at Abby.

"Regardless, if you decide to go through Katrina's correspondence, you may come to some conclusions about Ichabod," Lu said. "That's one of the things I enjoy about history so much, seeing the people I'm studying as human, with pain and love and joy and sorrow. That's what makes history come alive for me. So many things can change in terms of technology and politics and the like, but ultimately, we're all human."

Abby nodded. That was one of her favorite things about history, too. And she wondered, sometimes, about Ichabod and what happened to him. Maybe he was able to hook up with Katrina. Abby hoped he did, and that they were happy, if only for a while. Maybe she was a romantic, too, in spite of her completely unsuccessful dating experiences over the past year.

They finished the meal and Abby handed cash to Lu, who was going through the bill. "Thanks for inviting me."

“A pleasure,” Lu said. “And rather interesting, having a Crane back in Sleepy Hollow.”

“Yes. You’re part of the legend, now,” Eleanor said.

“What do you mean?” Abby stopped sliding out of the booth.

“Well, I don’t believe I’ve ever met a Crane. At least not one who had a direct connection to Ichabod. It changes things.”

“What things?” Abby remained in the booth, puzzled but also a little creeped out, though she wasn’t sure why.

Eleanor smiled, which blunted the creepy factor. “There’s just such a mystery surrounding Ichabod’s disappearance. Katrina, I think, loved him passionately but when he disappeared, it left a gap in the historical record as well as in her life. Legends develop to fill those gaps, but I always wondered if perhaps Katrina never rested, and she’s still out there, looking for him. Like Lu says, it’s interesting, that a Crane shows up who happens to be a historian. Perhaps it’s time for the mystery to be solved.”

“That’s a lot of responsibility when I’m just here to look at documents,” Abby said. Eleanor might have spent way too much time with the legend, she decided.

“You never know what you’re going to find. After all, you’re a Crane who came looking. So now there are two Cranes in our local lore.”

“Yeah, I guess so. Maybe history does repeat itself in some ways.” Abby stood and put on her fleece jacket.

Eleanor got out of the booth and stepped aside so Lu could get out, too. “I’ll meet you outside,” Eleanor said. “Lu and I see someone over there we have to talk to.”

Abby nodded and made her way between the tables toward the front door. The pub was by no means raucous,

but it was busy for a Wednesday. Must be a favorite local hang-out, she guessed. She reached to push the front door open and someone on the other side pulled it at the same time. Abby stumbled a little across the threshold to the sidewalk beyond.

“Oh, sorry,” said a woman outside, still holding the door open.

“It’s okay.” Abby straightened and looked at her. She had her dark hair pulled back in a ponytail and she wore jeans and a sweatshirt under a barn jacket. Abby stared, knowing it might be rude of her to do so, but unable to stop.

“My fault. I get a little too exuberant sometimes when I open doors.” The stranger smiled and Abby kept staring because the smile was warm and welcoming and almost familiar, though Abby knew they’d never met.

“Hey, c’mon, K,” said a guy behind the stranger. “Starving.” He nodded at Abby and she nodded back as he brushed past her into the pub.

“He’s starving,” Abby said with a smile. “Better not let him into the kitchen unsupervised.”

“Brothers,” the stranger said with a laugh. “Have a great evening.”

“You, too.” Abby moved so the woman could go inside but she didn’t and instead they stared at each other for a few more moments before the stranger broke the contact.

“Later,” she said, with another little smile as she went inside.

Abby continued staring, this time at the door. Was there such a thing as an instantaneous crush? Because that’s what it felt like.

Both Eleanor and Lu joined Abby outside. They said their good nights and Lu went the opposite direction from

them. Two blocks later, Abby thanked Eleanor and went up to her room, tired from the drive and the day. She fell asleep soon after her head hit the pillow, thinking about the woman at the pub.

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THE SECRET OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

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