

Hulda of Bohemia

Reference has been made to the cottage of Hulda, which was not far from the Spook Rock. Today nothing is left of that humble habitation but a few stones in the side of an alder-covered bank, and the trace of a path leading to a walled spring. But in the days of our nation's birth-throes he was a brave man who passed the cottage of the witch, even in the daytime. A hundred years ago the people took witches seriously.

Hulda was a Bohemian woman, who came without references or kin and Settled in the midst of conservative folks who were familiar with each other's grandparents. To be a stranger was to be open to suspicion; to be alone was not respectable. Acting upon a well-known principle, recognized in most rural communities, the newcomer is held to be guilty till he has proved himself to be innocent.

Hulda gathered herbs, "simples," in the mill woods; she knew where the boneset grew, and vervain, and mandrake, and calamus. Her cabin was full of the sweet odor of plants adrying; specifics for colds and fevers and the unsophisticated pains and aches of simple folk. She wove baskets, too, and was wise, as a woman ought not to be. Rumor, as busy in Sleepy Hollow in 1770 as she is in 1897, said that the witch had commerce with the Indians who came occasionally into this region from far up the State, and exchanged with them secrets of black art and "yarbs."

A tapu, as effectual as ever existed in the South Sea islands, cut this woman off from human intercourse, and when the war came she, alone, had no friend to discuss her



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hopes or tell her fears to. From first to last the neutral ground got the worst of the Revolution. Friends and foes struggled across it and fought or fled back again. Every crime in the calendar was committed in the names of King and Congress alike, till the harried remnant of the people sat among their denuded fields and depleted barns; and faced starvation and sickness with such stoicism as they could muster. Sometimes an undetected hand left dainties that were hard to procure, on the door-step or the windowsill of some house where want and pain had settled together; but the donor was invisible.

In those days, men patrolled the highways to intercept the cattle-thieves that ran off their stock, and as the population became smaller, the women sometimes took their places with flint-lock and powder-horn. Hulda, the witch, presented herself for this service, but no one wanted her companionship. At last one day a force of British landed from one of the transports that had sailed up the Hudson and commenced a march which was to bring them, by means of the King's highway, to the rear of Putnam's position, at Peekskill. As they marched in imposing array a volley greeted them from behind walls and tree-trunks. It was Lexington repeated in Westchester County. Not to be repulsed this time, Hulda fought with her neighbors, using her rifle with great effect, so that she was singled out for vengeance; and before the redcoats retreated to their boats they had, by means of a sortie, overtaken and killed the witch.

Animated by a new respect, those who had seen her fight avowed that, witch or no witch, she had earned a right to Christian burial. Reverently they carried her to her cabin, and while there discovered between the leaves of her Bible a paper informing them of a little store of gold that she desired to have distributed among the widows whose husbands had fallen for their country.

Hulda's grave, it is said, is close by the north wall of the old church, as though her neighbors, having done her what despite they could during her lifetime, were desirous to atone after her death by an exhibition of hearty respect.

Excerpt from “**Chronicles of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow**” Edgar Mayhew Bacon, 1897 (note copied as published)

Original graphics by: RangerSu

“Spook Rock” Legends



In the days before the railroad was built, the population of Tarrytown was small and the majority of the inhabitants were farmers; good, plain, practical people, not given to romancing and the inveterate foes of novelty. Some elder folk, whose memories take them back to the thirties, remember the story of the Spook Rock as it was transmitted to them from their parents and grandparents, which should satisfy any sceptic of its genuine antiquity.

Not far from the cottage of Hulda, the witch, it stood; but it was an ancient landmark before Sleepy Hollow mothers ever used Hulda' s name to frighten their babies into obedience. Tradition says that sachems and medicine men of the Lenni-Lenape built their council-fires about it when the world was young; for the Spook Rock was an Indian shrine.

One night a young Indian returning late from a hunt and passing near the council rock, was surprised to see lights moving in that direction, while at the same time his ears were assailed by the sound of musical voices. Not being ignorant of the sacred character of the place and the miraculous things that had occurred there, his curiosity was at once aroused and he crept cautiously from tree to tree till he came upon a sight of extraordinary interest. A dozen girls, beautiful beyond anything that the young man had ever imagined, were dancing on the surface



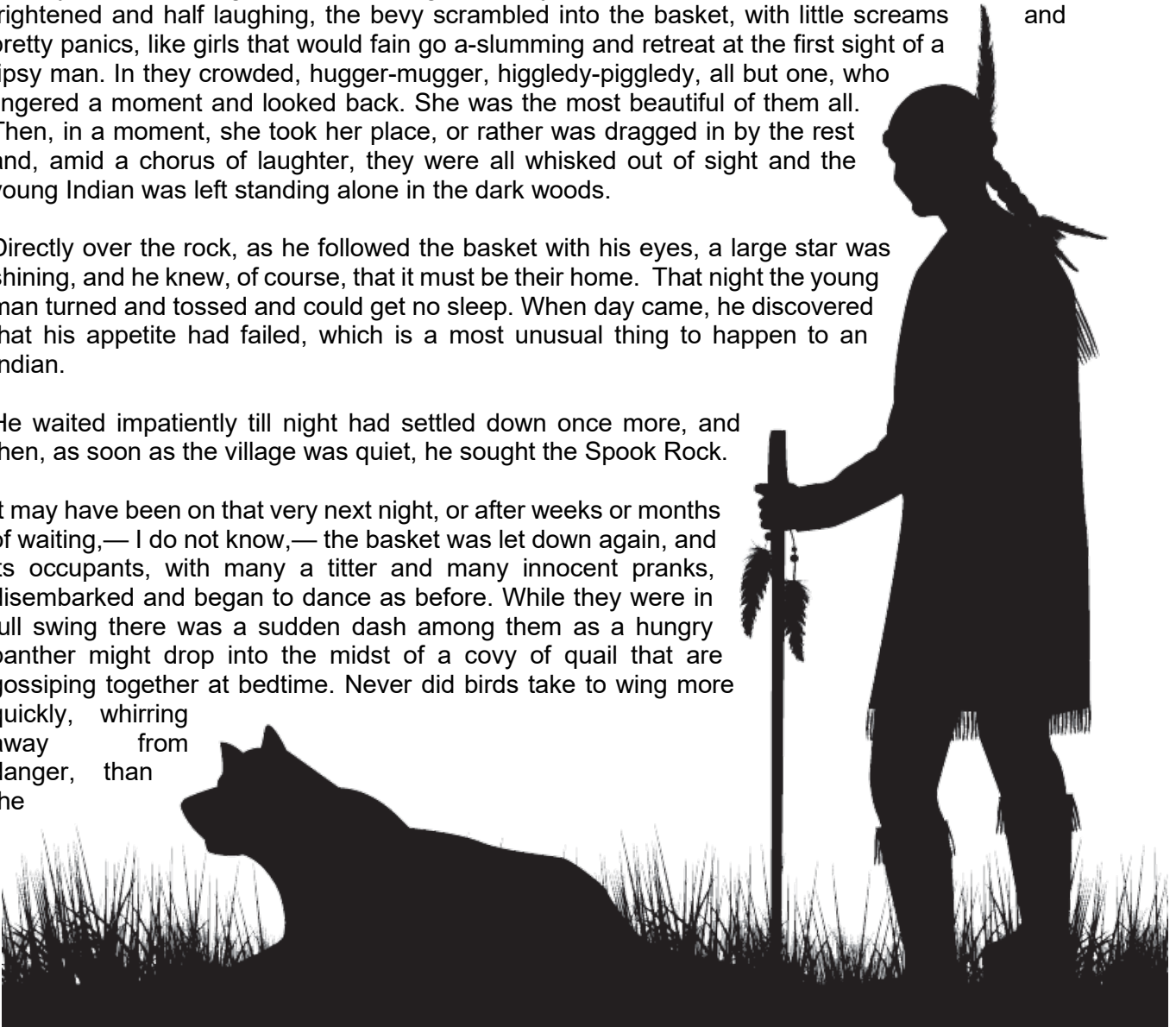
of the rock. Linking hands, and leaning far outward in the rapid figure, they seemed to tread on the very edge of the stone, if indeed they touched anything more solid than the air at all. To the bewildered and delighted watcher, they were like a ring of forest leaves that have been caught up and whirled around by the wind. Their voices were as sweet as their bodies were beautiful and graceful, and no one could have mistaken them for anything less than celestial, even if there had not been, in the centre of the circle around which they danced, a great basket, which, as everyone knows, is the approved vehicle when heavenly maids pay a visit earthward.

The scene was lit by unearthly flambeaux that flared among the trees like Will-o'-the-wisps. The singing and the dancing grew wilder and madder and more fascinating every moment, till the solitary spectator forgot himself and gave a cry of admiration. In a moment, half frightened and half laughing, the bevy scrambled into the basket, with little screams and pretty panics, like girls that would fain go a-slumming and retreat at the first sight of a tipsy man. In they crowded, hugger-mugger, higgledy-piggledy, all but one, who lingered a moment and looked back. She was the most beautiful of them all. Then, in a moment, she took her place, or rather was dragged in by the rest and, amid a chorus of laughter, they were all whisked out of sight and the young Indian was left standing alone in the dark woods.

Directly over the rock, as he followed the basket with his eyes, a large star was shining, and he knew, of course, that it must be their home. That night the young man turned and tossed and could get no sleep. When day came, he discovered that his appetite had failed, which is a most unusual thing to happen to an Indian.

He waited impatiently till night had settled down once more, and then, as soon as the village was quiet, he sought the Spook Rock.

It may have been on that very next night, or after weeks or months of waiting,— I do not know,— the basket was let down again, and its occupants, with many a titter and many innocent pranks, disembarked and began to dance as before. While they were in full swing there was a sudden dash among them as a hungry panther might drop into the midst of a covey of quail that are gossiping together at bedtime. Never did birds take to wing more quickly, whirring away from danger, than the



maidens; but one of them, the most beautiful of all, was held by the young hunter, who took her home, triumphantly, to his empty lodge. The quail may be tamed, but be careful that on some

spring morning it does not hear the piping of its mates. The star girl made a good and loving wife, and when a baby was born to her she forgot any longing she may have had for her old companions. Three years passed, and one night, when the air was peculiarly still, a sound of distant singing came to the hunter's lodge, and his star wife grew restless, and her eyes burned like coals. She murmured in her sleep and sang little snatches of strange songs. The following night she was missing.

The little babe in the lodge cried and refused such food as the hunter had to give it and finally, when it was dead, he hollowed a grave for it by the Pocantico and sat down alone once more. After a while he took his bow and arrows and went hunting, but never returned and the lodge fell to ruin, so that when the snow came it drifted between the bare poles. When three years more had gone, and the smell of the spring was in the air again, the star wife came back. A few hours of absence, she thought, and probably her husband had not even missed her. A few hours of pleasure — how the time had flown.

She found the empty lodge sticks with astonishment. Even the grass was growing rank where she had lain by the side of her husband and baby only a few hours before. Something must be wrong. She had mistaken the place and would search for her home.

Up and down the Pocantico woods — you may meet her any spring night, for doubtless she is looking there still for the lost lodge.

Within the present generation the lights have been seen moving at night in the neighborhood of the Spook Rock, and if any adventurous youth will run the risk, he may find the dancers still tripping and singing on spring nights.

Excerpt from "Chronicles of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow" Edgar Mayhew Bacon, 1897
Original graphics by: RangerSu

Raven's Rock Legends

Nowhere in this part of the country are the ravens to be found, though it is thought that they may have been plentiful a century or more ago. The crows, who are known to be inveterate neighbors of their larger cousins, perhaps drove them out. Upon their exodus these birds of ill-omen left their names in more than one lonely spot, to couple with dark associations.

Raven Rock is a detached portion of the steep, rocky, eastern side of Buttermilk Hill, which a deep fissure has long separated from the mass, and the fragment, becoming independent territory, set up a mythology of its own. Not content with one legend, it has two, at least, to boast.

A woman, so we have read, wandered out of the path in a blinding snowstorm and sought shelter from the blast of the wind in the ravine behind Raven Rock. The snow drifted in upon her and she went to sleep never to waken again. Ever since, that cleft has been a melancholy place of refuge, for it is said that the spirit of the poor wayfarer meets the belated wanderer with cries that sound like the screaming of the wind, and gestures that remind one of the sweep of snowdrifts, warning others away from the spot that she found so fatal.

There are, in all the land, many legends of many ghosts, but none I think of so kindly and Christian a complexion as this poor spectre of Raven Rock.

But the wraith of the white woman is not the only one that the rock boasts. An Indian girl, who perished of a jealous lover, has an older claim; and the ravens used to tell of still a third, a Colonial Dame, who fled from the dreadful attentions of a too amorous Tory raider in the dark days of "The Old War."

Nebulous legends they are, everyone, and in these hard days of unbelief there are people who, not knowing the stories in detail, have even expressed a doubt concerning the ghosts themselves.

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