

Pip Van Winkle Does Not Dream

by [Robert Gear](#) (October 2020)



Sleeping Man, Carolus-Duran, 1861

Pip van Winkle lived in a cabin with his loving wife and three young children in a forested area of New England. The nearest settlement was two miles away down a lonely unpaved road. Well

before dusk, the shadows of the tall white pines and spruce formed a cocoon of dimness around this isolated track leading down to a paved road and the few outlying houses of the township. The family made the journey there and back once a week in an aging but still serviceable Chevrolet truck to pick up groceries and other essentials. Sometimes Pip would make the trip alone on foot. He enjoyed the solitary walk through the great conifers.

On Tuesday he set out, a briskness in his step and a rifle slung over his back. As he left the acreage, energetic chickens clucked around his feet, and a few hogs snorted and rolled in the mire of their pen. The family's dog, Conway, bounded after him, relishing an outing with his master. Pip's wife, Matilda, waved from the steps, and the children played by the pond over to one side of the house. They gestured too and shouted after Pip to bring them back a treat.

"Then be good while I'm gone. Look after your mother!" he shouted back jokingly.

Pip whistled tunelessly in the free air of the peaceful descent. The sound of birds tweeting and the rustle of small animals in the undergrowth followed his progress towards the town. Once or twice he spotted feral hogs searching the ground beneath the trees. Occasionally, Conway would disappear for a few moments following some scent or sound that only a dog could pick out from the immensity of impressions given off by the mass of the living forest.

The town boasted an unimpressive main street. It harbored a general store, a corner gas station and Jim's Bar and Burger joint, popular, for lack of alternative dining arrangements, with local residents and occasional itinerant bikers. A local newspaper office, long abandoned, its decaying brickwork and broken windows a poignant reminder of past industry, nestled now unheeded between a still-functioning but part-time US Post Office and a store selling

antiques on consignment.

The townspeople knew Pip and his family. Today he exchanged pleasantries with the check-out girl at the store. He purchased a few items which he had forgotten on the family's last outing. He also picked up a candy bar for each of his children and a box of ammunition for his new rifle.

"Having a good day, Mollie?" he enquired.

"Oh, so so. Have a great rest of your day, Pip," she smiled, her tattooed arms catching his attention.

"Was that a chicken jumping over a crescent moon on top of a black box?" he wondered to himself. He couldn't make out the wording below the orange and green shaded body-markings. It appeared not to be in a Latinate script.

He decided he was thirsty and stopped at Jim's, threading between the chrome Harleys angled against the curb. Conway obediently stayed on the sidewalk, panting, tongue out, lapping at a bowl of water.

A drink or two later and Pip and Conway started back up the road as the evening came on. The sun was now very red and touching the edge of the tree tops, forcing shadows across the track. About half way back to the cabin, they came to a clearing and Pip rested on a flat jutting rock, taking in the evening sounds while the dog chased after imaginary creatures in the tangle of grasses and weeds. They often stopped here on their return trip. The clearing provided a welcome break on the upward journey home. Dusk was settling now, but would give them enough light to arrive home before complete darkness came on.

A sudden sleepiness overtook Pip. He felt he needed to lie down and snooze for a while. And he did so.

You think you know the ending of this story. But read

on.

Pip awoke with a start. The sun was up and he listened to the forest noises. He must have passed the whole night on the rock. What would Matilda be thinking? He always came back on time. He'd better hurry back up the last mile and hope that she was not too upset.

"Here, Conway," he called to the dog. But answer came there none. He heard only the early morning twittering. A large raven croaked and flew up from a nearby patch of weeds.

"Conway," he called again, this time louder.

"I guess he must have gone home on his own," thought Pip. "Got fed up waiting for me."

He went to retrieve his belongings from where he had left them.

"Strange," he thought. He noticed his clothes had become ragged. His boots looked like they had been left out exposed to the elements for months. The rifle was there but appeared to have rusted in places. He checked the magazine. It was full. He discharged a round into the sky, the sound echoing back as birds lifted above the treetops in fright.

His pack was lying where he had left it, but was discolored and shapeless. A disagreeable odor wafted up. He untied the cord and opened it. What remained of his purchases were discolored and ruined pieces of cardboard. He saw that among the dark contents were jumbled the bones of small rodent-like creatures. A scurrying of insects around the destroyed packages made him freeze and drop the pack in sudden horror.

"Am I dreaming?" Pip pinched himself. He called for his dog again, then, when it didn't appear he set off homeward, leaving the ruined bag and its contents in the

weeds.

The track appeared more overgrown than he remembered it, but he was able to make out the tire ruts through the tangle of bushes and weeds. "I must be dreaming," he thought again. But the vividness of the experience told him he was not.

By the time he was within sight of his cabin the sun had risen above the trees. He expected to see Matilda waiting anxiously on the porch, but saw no sign of life except for some creatures moving around in the distance.

He moved closer, now more cautiously, unsure of what to expect.

"Hey Matilda, hey kids! I'm back," he shouted, feeling a passing need to apologize for staying out overnight. He was now about two hundred feet from his home.

Then, from the great conifers on one side of the acreage a creature strutted out and barred his way. What was this? "No, please no. This cannot be," he exclaimed inwardly.

It was a giant rooster. The chicken, as tall as a man's belt clasp, with bright glistening wattles and a fierce eye, examined him.

He knew chickens could not speak; but this one did. "Who are you, where are you going, what is your intention?" it said.

Pip stood open mouthed and stuttered out his name. He wanted to say, "I am coming home to my wife and children," but this seemed absurd. He thought to himself, "It is not possible to discuss my intentions with a farmyard animal."

The rooster repeated, this time with a peremptory tone. "Why are you here? Don't you know that humankind was expelled several lifetimes ago?"

“What are you talking about? Let me pass. Surely you are joking.” He longed for Conway to be at his side. His faithful friend would scare off this giant fowl, which now was strutting back and forth, foiling Pip’s attempts at moving forward.

“Don’t block my way. This is my property. I want to see my wife.” Even as he said this, he knew somehow that this was a forlorn hope. And he knew too that this was not a dream.

“Your wife does not live here. We are now in charge. How can you not know that?” He paused, looking around carefully, and then added proudly, “We aid the razorback pigs.”

Just at that moment a loud screeching wail came from the direction of the cabin. The rooster stopped immediately and knelt on the soil and pecked vigorously as though at some invisible worm, head bobbing rhythmically. He ignored Pip who stood staring in disbelief at this strange performance. The noise continued and Pip used his chance to walk swiftly up towards his home.

He saw that the noise was blaring from a loudspeaker system rigged up on the roof. It sounded like a cacophony of farmyard animals.

On the porch he was met by a huge feral pig, larger and more dangerous looking than any he had glimpsed before. The pig grunted. “Get off, get off.”

It was wearing a pair of round spectacles, and a dirty tee shirt emblazoned with the arrogant features of a human killer beloved by the college children of his grandparent’s generation.

He jumped back in fright and stared open mouthed at this giant brute.

"I am Pip. I live here. Where is my wife? My kids?"

The pig looked at him solemnly, adjusting his spectacles. He ignored the question. Pip repeated in alarm, "Where are they?"

The pig spoke. "My name is Trotterski. I'm surprised you don't know who I am. I rule here, along with the other razorbacks. We are not ferals. We are true pigs. True pigs."

"My . . . my family! Wh . . .What have you d . . . done with them?" the panicked man stuttered, unable to believe what he was hearing.

"We have done nothing to them. I can assure you. If you are referring to the humans that lived in these parts generations ago . . . " he paused, "they were removed long ago, as were all those who stood in our way. Some perished on their way to the camps. I believe you may find evidence . . ."

Pip sensed something else staring at him, and looked into his house through the dirty window panes. A huge face stared out at him. The eyes were narrowed and menacing. It was another pig, even larger than Trotterski. It didn't speak. It seemed to gloat. Its eyes seemed to take in everything, looking through him into some distant landscape.

At that moment the wailing noise came to an abrupt halt.

Pip turned around and noticed that the giant rooster had stopped pecking and bobbing and was now strutting towards the house. Other chickens emerged from beneath the raised porch and from the back of the house. They were all about twice the height of regular farmyard chickens.

Trotterski looked up at the great pig in the house. Pip thought that he looked somehow anxious. Then it turned back

and spoke harshly to the rooster, making a show of his dominance. "Mo, show this human the burial site. Do it now."

Mo, for that seemed to be the rooster's name, hesitated. "Do as I say!" the pig repeated in a threatening tone.

Mo led the way, reluctantly it seemed. Pip followed along a path through the forest into a clearing. Small mounds indicated where he remembered having buried some of the family's pets. Some had wooden boards giving the names and dates. He recognized the first one. It read "Rusty, a trusted friend. R I P, April 23, 2024." And there was the grave of a much loved cat. "Whiskers, he kept the mice out, valiantly, 2021, December 7th."

They walked through the weeds further. Mo spoke disdainfully. "I think this is what you are looking for." He lifted a wing and indicated a more substantial upright wooden panel half obscured by weeds and brambles.

Pip pushed back the undergrowth. Some words had been crudely carved into the wood. They read:

"Matilda and three teenage children. They fought bravely. Erected in haste by a grieving neighbor, September 22, 2034."

"This cannot be. I left them here yesterday. It was Tuesday. I went into town. The year is 2027." He wanted to weep.

Mo said, "Perhaps in your way of counting years. We have our own system. The pigs have yet another way. This burial place is for your kind, human. We are not permitted to bury our dead. We are exposed on the hillside until our feathers, our sinews and bones are scavenged by the pigs and vultures. We helped to pave the way, but now they use us for lower level duties."

Pip, suddenly overcome with a feeling of horror, raised his rifle butt and smacked hard. The head jerked to one side and the thing collapsed, its beak mouthing imprecations in an unknown tongue. He hit the thing again and again until the body stopped moving.

In grief and confusion, he fled the scene, leaving the dead rooster on its side, its legs still jerking.

He ran back through the forest until he reached the cabin. He was astounded to see two large roosters kicking and pecking at Trotterski, who was on his back, blood pouring from a deep gash in his head. His trotters were waving uselessly and his whole massive body was quivering in death throes.

The front door opened. Out strode the huge razorback, standing upright but somehow incongruously nimble on his tiny feet. Pip noticed that this pig was dressed in a pair of striking red pants with a white shirt open at the neck. On his head was a cap set at a jaunty angle. A small badge in the shape of a red star was affixed to the front.

The giant glared through narrowed eyes. "You see what happens to traitors. Let that be a lesson to all followers of Trotterski."

Pip stood tensely, unsure of what to do next.

The pig looked at him as though examining a centipede. "You must have survived The Great Riddance. How is that possible? There have been no free humans in these parts for generations. You must be taken to a camp." The voice of this tyrant filled him with dread.

He called out, "Ashir and Bashir, remove the human."

Before Pip could speak, the two giant cockerels, now having finished with Trotterski, strutted toward him. Their beaks were bloody. Sharp steel points were attached to their

claws.

Suddenly, he remembered that his rifle contained an almost full magazine. He quickly leveled the gun at the heavy plumage, and shot them, one after the other. They fell with hardly a squawk.

The pig on the porch stared, snout quivering, apparently unable to move. Pip then took careful aim at this beast dressed as a human and fired off several shots in quick succession. The massive beast tottered forward, with a surprised look, and slowly collapsed noisily in a heap next to Trotterski. The floorboards of the porch sagged under the heavy weight. A small cloud of dust rose up.

A few frightened looking chickens scurried back under the shelter of the house. Pip heard voices and looked around.

Coming up the track were Matilda and his three children. Conway was bounding in front.

"What were you shooting at? What's wrong," said his wife alarmed. "Why didn't you come back last night?" But Pip sat down on the ground and folded his head in his arms. He could not speak. The rifle dropped to his side.

"Look at his clothes, Mama," exclaimed the oldest child. "They look like he has been wearing them for years and years. Look at all those holes, and they are all torn. They are ruined. He only put them on yesterday."

Matilda, sat down next to her husband, and rubbed his brow. He opened his eyes and half smiled, as the dog licked his face.

"Are you ok, Pip? You must be exhausted staying out all night." She looked at the rifle, and stared in disbelief at the time-gathered rust.

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