This story takes place in a Dutch village in America in the 18th century. There lived a simple, happy man, named Rip Van Winkle. He was a kind neighbor and obedient husband. He tried to help the people in the village. He listened to the women who told him their problems and gossips, he played with the children and told them stories about ghosts, witches and Indians. He also helped the men build fences and repair their tools. He had a lot of things to do, but he had no time to work in his own house and on his own farm. So, it was the worst piece of land in the whole country. He also didn't earn much money, because he helped his neighbors all the time. His children wore ragged clothes, his house was old and in bad condition. His wife always told him to go to work to earn some money. And Rip always shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. He went out of the house with his dog Wolf, and sat on a bench outside a small inn with other similar men of the village and talked about village things and sleepy stories about nothing important.

Rip Van Winkle liked hunting, too. He liked going to the mountains to shoot squirrels. He also liked sitting in the mountains and watching the world below—the blue River Hudson, vast green woods, and white cliffs in the distance.

One day, he stayed in the mountains late. It was getting dark when he started walking down to the village. Then he heard a voice.

“Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!” Somebody was calling out his name. He looked in the direction and saw a strange figure with something on the back. Rip was surprised to see a human being in this deserted place, but he thought it could be somebody from the village. He went to the figure. It was a short old man with wild grey hair and grey beard. His clothes were old-fashioned. On his shoulder he had a big barrel full of liquor. Rip helped the man with the barrel. They went up the hill. On the way Rip heard some noise, something like thunder. Then they came to an opening in the woods. In the middle of the meadow there were some strange people playing a game of nine pins, sometimes called skittles. Their clothes were also old-fashioned. They all had beards of various shapes and colors. The whole group reminded Rip of the figures in an old Dutch painting. They poured the liquor into cups and continued playing. Rip was afraid. He didn't say a word and when the strangers didn't look, he also tried the liquor. It was a tasty old Dutch liquor. He tried another cup and another one, and finally he was drunk. He lay on the ground and fell asleep.

He woke up at the place where he met the strange man. It was a sunny morning. Rip thought that it was all a dream. He took his rifle, but it was old and rusty. His dog, Wolf, was not there.
“The old man stole my rifle,” thought Rip. He stood up and went down to the village. The way was very different. He sometimes felt lost and had difficulties to get back to the village.

When he got there, he saw that the people in the village were strange. He didn’t recognize them. It was difficult for him to find his own house. Finally, he got there. But the house was very old. The roof had holes in it, the windows were broken, the door open. There was an old dog, but it wasn’t his Wolf. Rip went inside the house. It was empty and dirty. He called his wife and children. Nobody was there. Rip went quickly to his favorite inn.

When he came there, it was not the old inn, but a big new building with nice windows and a sign above the door: "The Union Hotel". In front of the hotel there was a statue of George Washington.

Rip Van Winkle’s strange clothes and his rusty rifle attracted the attention of the people. Soon, they came closer to him. The mayor of the village came to Rip and asked him:

“Who are you? Do you want to riot in my village?”

“No!” cried Rip. “I am a poor quiet man. I come from this village. I am loyal to the king. God bless him!”

“A spy!” shouted the people. “Arrest him!”

“Who are you looking for?” asked the mayor.

“I am looking for my neighbor. Nicholas Vedder.”

Everybody was quiet. Nobody knew Nicholas Vedder. And then an old man said:

“Oh, yes! Nicholas Vedder. He died 18 years ago.”

“Where’s Brom Butcher?” asked Rip.

“He went to the war. Some people say he died in the battle of Stony Point in 1779.”

“And Van Bummel, the school master?”

“He went to the war, too. Now he is in Congress.”

“Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?” cried Rip desperately.

“Oh, Rip Van Winkle. There he is!” and an old man pointed to a man standing by a tree. Rip looked at him. He was very similar to him.

“And who are you?” asked the old man.

“I am... I am somebody else. I was myself yesterday, now I am somebody else. Yesterday I went to the mountains, the year was 1759. Today, I am back and don’t recognize anybody, my clothes are old, and my rifle is rusty.”

“1759? Oh, yes.” People looked at each other and tapped their foreheads. Then they started to be afraid that this fool could hurt somebody. A woman walked by with a child in her arms, and the child began to cry.
“Hush! The man won’t hurt anybody!”

The tone of her voice was familiar to Rip.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Judith Gardenier.”

“And your father’s name?”

“Ah, poor man, Rip Van Winkle was his name. But 20 years ago he left home and never returned. Nobody knows what happened to him. Maybe the Indians killed him. I was a little girl when he went away.”

“And where is your mother?”

“She is already dead.”

Now Rip couldn’t hold his tears.

“I am Rip Van Winkle. I am your father. Don’t you recognize me?”

Everybody looked amazed. Then a very old woman came closer and looked long at him.

“Yes, it is Rip Van Winkle. Where have you been so long?”

Rip Van Winkle told them his story. Then they called a historian and he said:

It is true that the Kaatskill Mountains are haunted by strange people. Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country with some men kept a watch there. And the legend says, they come back every 20 years.”

Rip Van Winkle went to live with his daughter. And again, he started to do the things that he did 20 years ago. He sat on the bench in front of an inn and talked to other old men of the village. He learned that now the country where he lives doesn’t belong to the English king George III, but he was now a free citizen of the United States.

Rip told his story to every traveller who stopped in the village. And even today, when people sometimes hear strange thunder over the Kaatskill Mountains, they say that Hendrick Hudson and his men are at their game of nine pins.