MY BROTHER SAM IS DEAD
Tim was caught in the middle of war.

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MY BROTHER SAM IS DEAD

James Lincoln Collier
& Christopher Collier

SCHOLASTIC INC
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For Sally and Ned, who live there.

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It was April, and outside in the dark the rain whipped against the windows of our tavern, making a sound like muffled drums. We were concentrating on our dinner, and everybody jumped when the door slammed open and banged against the wall, making the plates rattle in their racks. My brother Sam was standing there, wearing a uniform. Oh my, he looked proud.
“Sam,” my mother said. We hadn’t seen him since Christmas.

“Shut the door,” Father said. “The rain is blowing in.” That’s the way Father was—do right first, and then be friendly.

But Sam was too excited to pay attention. “We’ve beaten the British in Massachusetts,” he shouted.

“Who has beaten the British?” Father said.

Sam shut the door. “We have,” he said, with his back to us as he slipped the latch in place. “The Minutemen. The damn Lobsterbacks marched out of Boston yesterday. They were looking for Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock and they marched up to Lexington. Some of the Massachusetts Minutemen tried to stop them there in the square, but there were too many British, and they got through and went on up to Concord looking for ammunitions stores. But the Patriots got the stores hidden mostly and they didn’t find much. And then when they turned around and went back, the Minutemen hid in the fields along the roads and massacred them all the way back to Boston.”

Nobody said anything. They were silent and shocked. I couldn’t take my eyes off him; he looked so brave. He was wearing a scarlet coat with silver buttons and a white vest and black leggings halfway up to his knees. Oh, I envied him. He knew everybody was staring, but he liked being the center of attention, and he pretended it was just an ordinary thing and he was used to it. “I’m starved,” he said, and sat down at the table. “I started out from Yale at six o’clock this morning and didn’t stop to eat all the way.”

There were seven of us at the table in the taproom. Mother and Father and me were there. Then there was the minister, Mr. Beach, who lived in Newtown but spent Saturday night here in Redding so he could preach in our church early Sunday morning. Then there was a couple of farmers from Redding Center I didn’t know, and, of course, Sam. But still they all sat silent. I guess they figured that it was up to Father to speak first, seeing as Sam was his son.

My mother got up, fetched a plate from the rack, and filled it with stew from the iron pot on the fire. Then she drew Sam a pot of beer from the tap and put it all down in front of him. He was hungry, and he bent over his plate and began shovin the food as fast as he could.

“Don’t eat like that,” Father snapped.

Sam looked embarrassed and sat up straight.

“All right, now,” Father said. “Tell us the news again in an orderly manner.” Father had a temper and I could see he was trying hard not to lose it.

Sam dug his spoon into the stew and started to fill his mouth, but suddenly he realized that if he began talking with his mouth full, Father would yell at him
again, so he put the spoonful of stew back on his plate. “Well it's hard to tell it orderly, Father. There were so many rumors around New Haven last night that—”
“I thought it might be like that,” Father said.
“No, no, it's true about the fighting,” Sam said.
“Captain Arnold told us himself.”
“Captain Arnold?”
“Captain Benedict Arnold. He's Captain of the Governor's Second Foot Guard.” He looked down at his stew. “That's my company.” He looked up and gave Father a quick sort of scared look.
“That explains the fancy dress, I imagine,” Father said.
“Captain Arnold designed the uniform—”
“Never mind, tell the story.”
“Well, the beginning was when the Lobsterbacks—”
“By that I suppose you mean the soldiers of your King,” Father said. He was still holding onto his temper.

Sam blushed. “All right, the British troops. From the garrison in Boston. They marched up to Lexington looking for Mr. Adams and the rest, but they'd got away. Somebody signalled them from some church steeple in Boston, so when the Lobst—British got up to Lexington there wasn't anybody there, except the Minutemen. Then the shooting started—”

Mr. Beach put his hand up to stop Sam. “Who shot first, Sam?”

Sam looked confused. “Well, I guess the British. I mean that's what they said in New Haven.”
“Who said?”
“Well, I'm not sure,” Sam said. “I guess it's hard to tell in a battle. But anyway—”
“Sam,” Father said. “Who do you think fired first?”
“I don't know, Father, I don't know. But anyway—”
“I should think it might matter to know, Sam,” Father said.

“Why does it matter?” Sam was beginning to lose his temper the way he did. “What right have the Lobsterbacks to be here anyway?” I thought it was pretty funny that he kept calling the British Lobsterbacks, when he was dressed in red, too.

“All right, all right,” Mr. Beach said. “Let's not argue the point. What happened then?”
“Yes, sir,” Sam said. “So anyway, some men were killed, I don't know how many, and then the British went on up to someplace called Concord looking for the ammunition stores there, but they didn't find very much and turned around and started back to Boston. That was when the Minutemen really peppered them; they chased them all the way back home.” Quickly Sam began to eat his stew before they had time to ask him more questions.

“Damn it, that's rebellion,” one of the farmers said. “They'll have us in war yet.”
Mr. Beach shook his head. “I think men of common sense will prevail. Nobody wants rebellion except fools and hotheads.”

“That’s not what they say in New Haven, sir,” Sam said. “They say that the whole colony of Massachusetts is ready to fight and if Massachusetts fights, Connecticut will fight, too.”

Finally my father lost his temper and slammed his hand down on the table, making the plates jump. “I will not have treason spoken in my house, Sam.”

“Father, that isn’t treason—”

Father raised his hand, and for a moment I thought he was going to reach across the table and hit Sam. But instead he slammed it down on the table again. “In my house I will decide what constitutes treason. What have they been teaching you at college?”

Mr. Beach liked peace. “I don’t think the people of Redding are anxious to fight, Sam,” he said.

Sam was nervous, but being Sam, he was bound to argue. “You get the wrong idea from Redding, sir. There’s a lot more Tories in this part of Connecticut than in the rest of the colonies. In New Haven there aren’t so many Loyalists and in some towns there aren’t any at all.”

“Oh Sam,” Mr. Beach said, “I think you’ll find that loyalty is a virtue everywhere. We’ve had these things before—that vicious nonsense of those madmen dressing up like Indians and throwing tea into Boston Harbor, as if wetting a few hundredweight of tea would stop the mightiest army on the face of the earth. These agitators can always manage to stir up the passions of the people for a week or so, but it never lasts. A month later everybody’s forgotten it—except the wives and children of the men who’ve managed to get themselves killed.”

“Sir, it’s worth dying to be free.”

That made Father shout. “Free? Free to do what, Sam? Free to mock your King? To shoot your neighbor? To make a mess of thousands of lives? Where have you been getting these ideas?”

“You don’t understand, Father, you just don’t understand. If they won’t let us be free, we have to fight. Why should they get rich off our taxes back in England? They’re 3000 miles away, how can they make laws for us? They have no idea of how things are here.”

It made me nervous to listen to Sam argue with Father. I could see that Mr. Beach wanted to quiet him down, too, before he and Father got into a real fight the way they sometimes did. “God meant man to obey. He meant children to obey their fathers, he meant men to obey their kings. As a subject of the Lord Our God I don’t question His ways. As a subject of His Majesty, George the Third, should you
question his ways? Answer me this, Sam—do you really think you know better than the King and those learned men in Parliament?”

“Some of those men in Parliament agree with me, sir.”

“Not many, Sam.”

“Edmund Burke.”

Father lost his temper again. He banged his hand down on the table once more. “Sam. There’ll be no more talk on this tonight.”

He meant it, and Sam knew he meant it, too, so he shut up and the conversation turned to repairs Mr. Beach wanted to make to the church. I was glad, too. It scared me when Sam argued with the grownups like that. Of course Sam was that way, always shooting out whatever came into his mind and sometimes even getting hit by my father for it. Father hardly ever hit me, but he hit Sam dozens of times, mostly for arguing. Mother always said, “Sam isn’t really rebellious, just too quick with his tongue. If he’d only learn to stop and think before he spoke.” But Sam couldn’t seem to learn that. My mother hated it when Father hit Sam for speaking out, but there wasn’t anything she could do about it, and anyway, she believed that Father was right, children ought to keep a civil tongue in their heads. I guess he was right, children are supposed to keep quiet and not say anything, even when they know the grownups are wrong, but sometimes it’s hard. Sometimes I have trouble keeping quiet myself, although not near as much trouble as Sam.

Of course Sam was almost a grownup himself. He was sixteen; he’d been away at college for almost a year, so you couldn’t really call him a child anymore. I guess that was part of the trouble; he thought he was a grownup, and he didn’t want anybody to tell him what to do. Except, I could tell that he was still afraid of Father.

But to be honest, I wasn’t sure if Sam was right about the fighting anyway. It sounded right when he said it—that we should be free and not have to take orders from people who were so far away, and all that. But I figured there had to be more to it than Sam knew about. Father had never gone to college the way Sam had, but still I was pretty sure that he knew more than Sam. Father was a grownup and maybe Sam thought he was a grownup, too, but as far as I was concerned he was just my brother. He couldn’t scare you the way Father could.

Besides, it made me glad to have him come home, and I didn’t want him to get into a big fight with Father and spoil it. I just wanted him to shut up until dinner was over and we could go up to the loft where we slept, and I could lie in the dark snuggled up next to him to keep warm and let him tell me stories about
Yale and the pretty girls he knew in New Haven, and getting drunk with his friends and his triumphs in his debates. Sam was a triumphant sort of a person. He always had some victories to tell about whenever he came home from college. Mostly they were in debates where he scored a telling point over his enemy or whatever you call them. He would say, "And then I scored a telling point, Tim." He'd explain to me what the telling point was, which I never understood, and then he'd say, "Tim, it was a great triumph, afterwards everybody crowded around me saying, ‘That was a telling point, Meeker, a telling point.’" Sam couldn't boast about his triumphs to Father or Mother or Mr. Beach or anybody like that, because boasting was pride and pride was a sin, but he could boast to me about them, because I didn't care whether it was pride or not, they were interesting. And I guess most of his boasts were true: he was always bringing home some book in Latin or Greek with an inscription saying he had won it for some telling point he had scored. Of course the inscriptions were usually in Greek which I couldn't read, but I believed him.

So anyway, I didn't want Sam to get into a fight with Father. It would spoil the fun, and besides if it were a bad enough fight, Sam might run away. He'd done that a few times after a fight with Father. Usually he just ran away to Tom Warrups' hut up behind Colonel Read's house. Tom Warrups was the last Indian we had in Redding. He was the grandson of a famous chief named Chief Chicken which is a funny name for a chief. He didn't mind having people sleep in his hut. It made a convenient place for Sam to run away to, because it was close enough so that he could come home without any trouble after he'd stop running away.

But Sam stayed pretty quiet during supper. The grownups didn't pay any attention to him, but I kept looking at him to admire his uniform and I could see that he was thinking about something. It worried me that it was something else for him to get into a fight with Father about. But finally supper was over with and he'd stayed quiet, and I figured he was safe. The grownups got up. "Sam, are you going to help me with the milking?" I asked.

"I can't, my uniform will get dirty."

"Take it off, then."

I could see he didn't want to do that. "My other clothes are still at Yale."

"Borrow some from Father."

"All right, all right," he said. "Go on out to the barn. I'll come in a minute."

I knew he'd stall as long as he could, but I went out anyway so as not to get into a fight with him myself. The barn is out behind the house. Actually the house is
partly a store and partly a tavern, too. The main room is the taproom, with a huge stone fireplace, and barrels full of beer and whiskey and cider. There’s the big table in the middle with benches down the sides, and then at the end opposite the fireplace, more barrels and bins full of things we sell to the farmers around Redding Center, and Redding Ridge, which is our part of the town. We sell things like cloth and needles and thread, and nails, knives and spoons, salt and flour, pots and pans, and some tools, although mainly if anyone wants tools they have to go to Fairfield for them.

Behind the taproom is the kitchen. There’s an even bigger fireplace there; in fact it takes up one whole wall, and of course cupboards for storing food, and hams hanging from the ceiling and salted beef and salted fish in barrels, and honey in jars and wheat in sacks. And out through the kitchen door there’s the muddy barnyard and back of that the barn. We have a cow named Old Pru, and a horse named Grey, and some chickens, ducks and geese; and the old sow and six young pigs. Sam and I used to look after the animals, but after he went to college I had to do it all by myself. I hate doing it, it’s just a lot of work.

I went out. The barnyard was muddy from the April rain. I jogged across it, trying to find the least muddy spots, and went into the barn. Old Pru mooed at me; she was tired of waiting to be milked. I got down the wooden bucket from its hook and started to milk her. It’s a boring job, and your hands get tired. I kept hoping Sam would come out, so I could talk to him without the grownups around. But he didn’t come, so I began to daydream about being older and going to Yale with Sam and scoring some telling points myself and Sam being proud of me—even though I know that daydreams are sloth and sloth is a sin. And I got pretty far along in the daydream before Sam came in. He still had his uniform on.

“Are you going to help me with the animals?” I asked.

“I wasn’t going to, but Mother said that idle hands make the Devil’s work.”

“All right,” I said, “you can pitch down some hay.”

“I’ll get my uniform dusty,” he said. He picked up a straw and leaned against the wall picking his teeth.

“I thought you were going to change.”

“I couldn’t find anything else to wear,” he said.

“What a lot of swill. You just want to show off how famous you are.”

“Not at all, Tim, I’d have been pleased to help had I been able to find suitable clothes.”

I pointed Old Pru’s teat at him and gave him a squirt. Milk splashed on the knee of his trousers.

“Damn,” he said, jumping back. “You little brat.” He wiped off his trousers.
“Help, then,” I said.

“All right. I’ll collect the eggs. What on earth happened to this basket?”

I’d stepped on it once when I was mad. “It got broken,” I said.

“I can see that,” he said. “How did you manage to do that?”

“Old Pru stepped on it,” I said. “Just put some hay in the bottom.”

“God, can’t you do anything right, Tim?”

“Don’t curse,” I said. “It’s a sin.”

He picked up the basket. “How am I supposed to collect eggs with a hole in the basket?”

“Stop complaining,” I said. “I have to do this every night while you’re down at Yale scoring telling points and getting drunk with those girls.”

“You know I wouldn’t do anything like that, Tim. Drunkenness is a sin.”

I giggled. “So is—what’s that word for girls? Lasciviousness.”

“Lasciviousness, stupid, not lascivious. I have a new song about girls, but it’s too lascivious for you.”

“Please sing it to me,” I begged.

“No, you’re too young.”

“No I’m not. Besides, if you don’t sing it to me, I’ll tell Father how many times you got drunk.”

“Sssh, all right, I’ll sing it later,” he said. “This basket is hopeless. Isn’t there another one someplace?”

“There’s a new one hanging up over there, but we’re not supposed to use it.”

“Why not?” Sam said. “What can they do to me?”

I didn’t like it when he talked like that. It bothered me. “Listen, Sam, why do you always have to get into a fight with Father?”

“Why does he always have to get into a fight with me?” Sam said. He had got some hay in the basket and was hunting eggs under the hen roost.

“That isn’t fair. He pays for you to go to Yale and sends you money for books; you ought to be nicer to him. You knew he’d get into a rage when he saw you in that uniform.”

Sam stood there staring at me with the broken egg basket in his arms, and I knew he was trying to decide whether or not to tell me something. I had enough sense to keep still. Sam pretty usually blurs things out if you pretend you’re not interested and don’t beg to him to tell. I went on milking Old Pru.

Finally he said, “Suppose I told you I had to wear the uniform for a reason.”

That gave me a shiver. “I don’t believe it,” I said. I did believe it, but the best way to get him to tell was not to get all excited.

“It’s true, Tim. I’m going to fight the Lobsterbacks.”

That scared me, but it excited me, too. I wondered what it would be like to shoot somebody. Still I said, “I don’t believe you, Sam.”
“Oh you’ll believe it soon enough. Tomorrow I’m walking up to Wethersfield to meet my company. Then we’re going up to Massachusetts to fight the Lobsterbacks.”

I believed him all right. “Won’t you be scared?”

“Captain Arnold says it’s all right to be scared; the true brave man is always scared. At least that’s what the sergeant said he said.”

“You seem to be pretty proud of Captain Arnold.”

“Oh, he’s a marvelous horseman, and brave, and doesn’t take any nonsense from anybody. He’ll lead us through the Lobsterbacks like a hot knife through butter.” He started collecting eggs again.

“You’re really going to Massachusetts?” I asked. It seemed like a long way to me. “To Boston?”

“I don’t know exactly. I think we’re supposed to go to Lexington,” Sam said. An egg fell out through the bottom of the basket. “Damn it, Tim, why don’t you fix this thing?”

“I did fix it, but it broke again.” I didn’t say it was a month ago and I was too lazy to fix it again. Laziness was sloth and sloth was a sin. “Tell me about the war,” I said to change the subject.

“I told all I know at dinner.”

“Why did you come home?” I asked.

He stopped hunting for eggs, and stared at me again. Finally he said, “I can’t tell you.”

“Why not?”

“You’ll tell Father.”

“No I won’t, I swear I won’t.” I shut my mouth; with Sam it was the wrong thing to beg.

“Yes you will.”

“All right, don’t tell me then, I don’t care. I don’t believe any of it anyway,” I said. I had Old Pru nearly empty and began stripping her teats to get the last drops of milk out, as if I’d forgotten all about what Sam was saying.

He didn’t say anything for a minute. Then he said, “Will you really swear you won’t tell?”

“I thought you said you weren’t going to tell me.”

“All right, I won’t,” he said.

“I swear,” I said.

“On your honor?”

“Yes.”

“This is serious, Tim.”

“I swear on my honor.”

He took a deep breath. “I came to get the Brown Bess.”

That shocked me more than him saying he was going to fight. The Brown Bess was the type of gun most everybody around Connecticut had. It was brown, and got its name from Queen Elizabeth, whose nickname was Bess, because they first used that type of gun a lot during her time. The gun was about as long as I was
tall, and had a bayonet around twenty inches long. Father kept the bayonet hanging over the mantelpiece. He used the Brown Bess for deer and sometimes when he went out with the other men to go after a wolf that was getting into the livestock. And he took it with him every fall when he went over to Verplanck's Point to sell cattle and buy supplies for the store. He'd never met up with any trouble going over to Verplanck's, but people he knew had sometimes been held up and robbed. So you can see that the gun was important to us. It was one thing for Sam to say he was going to fight the British; they were a long way from here. But to take Father's gun was pretty bad; Father was right here and he seemed a lot more real to me than the British did.

"Sam, you shouldn't do that," I said.

"I told you it was serious," Sam said.

Now I wished he hadn't told me. "You oughtened to do it, Sam. Father'll kill you."

"If I don't have the gun, some Lobsterback will kill me. Besides, it belongs to the family, doesn't it? I have as much right to it as anybody, don't I?"

I knew that was wrong and I shook my head. "It doesn't belong to the family; it belongs to Father."

Neither of us said anything for a minute. Then Sam said, "You swore, Timmy. You swore an oath."

I wished I hadn't. I was afraid to go back on my oath, but I was just as scared of Sam stealing the Brown Bess, too. "Let's finish up with the stock and go to bed."

I figured if we went to bed he'd fall right asleep because he'd walked thirty miles up from New Haven that day. In the morning we'd all have to go to church—it was the law to go to church on Sunday—and it would be hard for him to steal the gun with people milling around and coming over to the tavern the way they did after church.

I finished milking Old Pru. Sam took the eggs up to the house and came back, and we fed the stock and watered them. We didn't say much. I knew that Sam was sorry he'd told me, and I was thinking of ways to stop him from doing it. Finally we were through. "Let's go to bed," I said.

"All right," he said. "Go on up. I'll be up in a minute, I want to talk to Father."

"Please come right up, though."

"Don't worry, Tim. Just go on up to bed."

I didn't want to leave him; but I knew there wasn't any use in arguing, so I said goodnight to Father and Mother, said some prayers, and went upstairs. There are four bedrooms on the second floor of our house, where lodgers stay when we have them. We get a lot of people traveling through between Stratford and Danbury, and Litchfield and Norwalk, or even going over to New York, and they need places along the way to sleep. Above the second floor is the loft where Sam
and I sleep. There isn’t much in it—just a couple of beds. There are no stairs up to the loft—just a ladder. I climbed up, not bothering to take a light. I knew where everything was. Besides, there are cracks in the floor which let little pieces of light through, so you can see a little if you have to. I undressed, got into bed, and pulled the blankets over me. I was always pretty tired by the time I went to bed, with all the chores I had around the tavern every day, but I wanted to stay awake to wait for Sam, so he could tell me some stories about telling points. To keep from falling asleep I lay on my back staring up at the black and watching the dots shift around in front of my eyes. But my eyes kept closing. So I began reciting all the books of the Bible from first to last, and I got to somewhere around Obadiah before I fell asleep.

When I woke up somebody was shouting. I sat up in bed. It was Father. I couldn’t hear the words, but I could hear the sound—his heavy, hard voice going on and on. Then there was Sam’s voice and he was shouting, too, and then Father again. I got out of bed, climbed quietly down the ladder, and crouched by the top of the stairs.

“You are not having the gun,” Father shouted. “You are not going to Wethersfield and you are going to take off that uniform right now, if you have to go to church tomorrow naked.”

“Father—”

“I will not have subversion, I will not have treason in my house. We are Englishmen, we are subjects of the King, this rebellion is the talk of madmen.”

“Father I am not an Englishman, I am an American, and I am going to fight to keep my country free.”

“Oh God, Sam fight? Is it worth war to save a few pence in taxes?”

“It’s not the money, it’s the principle.”

“Principle, Sam? You may know principle, Sam, but I know war. Have you ever seen a dear friend lying in the grass with the top of his skull off and his brains sliding out of them like wet oats? Have you ever looked into the eyes of a man with his throat cut and the blood pouring out between his fingers, knowing that there was nothing he could do, in five minutes he would be dead, yet still trying to beg for grace and not being able because his windpipe was cut in two? Have you ever heard a man shriek when he felt a bayonet go through the middle of his back? I have, Sam, I have. I was at Louisbourg the year before you were born. Oh, it was a great victory. They celebrated it with bonfires all over the colonies. And I carried my best friend’s body back to his mother—sewed up in a sack. Do you want to come home that way? Do you think I want to hear a wagon draw up one summer’s morning and go out to find you stiff and bloody and your eyes staring blank at the sky? Sam, it isn’t worth it. Now take off that uniform and go back to your studies.”
“I won’t, Father.”
They were silent. It was terrible. My heart was
pounding and I could hardly breathe.
“Sam, I’m ordering you.”
“You can’t order me anymore, Father. I’m a man.”
“A man? You’re a boy, Sam, a boy dressed up in a
gaudy soldier’s suit.” Oh, he sounded bitter.
“Father—”
“Go, Sam. Go. Get out of my sight. I can’t bear to
look at you anymore in that vile costume. Get out. And
don’t come back until you come dressed as my son, not
as a stranger.”
“Father—”
“Go, Sam.”

There were sounds. I could hear Father breathing as
if he had climbed a mountain. Then the door slammed.
I was afraid Father would come up so I slipped away
from the top of the stairs and began to climb the ladder
up to the loft. But then I heard some more sounds,
some funny ones, sounds I’d never heard before. They
puzzled me. I slipped back to the stairs and softly be-
gan to ease myself down them a step at a time. About
five steps down I could see into the taproom. Father
had his head down on the table, and he was crying. I’d
never seen him cry before in my whole life; and I
knew there were bad times coming.

My father’s name was Eliphalet, but every-
body called him Life. My mother’s name was Susa-
nah. Father was born in Redding where we have our
tavern, but Mother was born over in New York. He
had cousins over there where she used to live. Their
names were Platt, which used to be Mother’s name.
I’d never met them, but when Father went over to
Verplancks Point every year to sell cattle and buy supplies he stayed with them and caught up on the news.

Redding wasn’t much of a town compared with places like New Haven—although actually I’d never been to New Haven. About the only big place I’d ever been was Fairfield, down on Long Island Sound, where I used to go sometimes with Father and Sam to pick up sugar or rum that came up from the Barbados in big ships. There were thousands of people in Fairfield, at least it seemed like that, but there were only a few hundred in Redding.

Redding was divided into two parts—Redding Center and Redding Ridge, which was where we lived. Our tavern was at a corner where the Danbury–Fairfield Road met Cross Highway. Across the Danbury–Fairfield Road from us was the church and the graveyard. Next to the church, on the other side of Cross Highway was an empty field where the trainband practiced drilling. Next door to us was the Betts’ house, and scattered around were a dozen more houses—the Sanford’s house and the Rogers’ house and Mr. Heron’s house and some others. Our tavern was finished with shingles, but some of the richer people, like Mr. Heron, had white clapboard siding on their houses.

Our church in Redding Ridge was the Anglican Church. “Anglican” meant English Church; in England everybody had to belong to it, or at least they were supposed to. In Connecticut we had freedom of religion so you could belong to any church you wanted, unless you were a Papist. But there were hardly any of them in Connecticut. Over at Redding Center there was a Presbyterian Church; naturally, if you were a Presbyterian, you built your house over there and if you were an Anglican, you built here on the Ridge, although of course there were lots of farmers all around who didn’t live near either church and just went to the one they wanted.

Because our church was the English Church, the people here on the Ridge seemed to be more on the Tory side and wanted to be loyal to the King. To tell the truth, I didn’t exactly understand what the argument was all about. Ever since I could remember, all my life in fact, there had been these discussions and arguments and debates about whether we ought to obey His Majesty’s government or whether we should rebel. What kept confusing me about it was that the argument didn’t have two sides the way an argument should, but about six sides. Some people said that the King was the King and that was that, and we ought to do what he said. Other people said that men were supposed to be free to govern themselves and we should rebel and drive the Lobsterbacks out altogether. Some others said, well, they were born Englishmen and they wanted to die Englishmen, but that the Colonies ought
to have more say in their own government, and that maybe we’d have to give the Lobsterbacks a taste of blood just to show the King that we meant business. Oh, people had all kinds of ideas—that we New Englanders ought to join together, or that all the Colonies ought to set up one big government or that—well I don’t know, I can’t even remember all the different sides there were to the argument. You can see how confusing it was when you realize that sometimes Sam’s side was called Patriots and sometimes they were called Rebels. I guess I’d been reading newspaper stories about it and hearing people shout over the whole thing for so long that I didn’t listen anymore—it just went in one ear and out the other.

But now it seemed like it wasn’t going to be just arguments anymore. Around fifty of the Minutemen and lots of British troops had been killed on Friday at Lexington or Concord, or wherever it was, although nobody seemed to know how many for sure. And Sam was going to fight.

Sunday morning was bright and sunny and warm. The rain had stopped during the night. Although the road was full of mud, the fields were drying and the birds were singing. I couldn’t enjoy it very much, though; the fight Sam had had with Father the night before still hung around me the way a bad dream does sometimes. Sam and Father had had fights before, and they always got over them in a day or two. But this one seemed worse than the others, and it worried me that maybe they wouldn’t fix it up.

I didn’t think Father would want to talk about it. Usually when something important happened he would just ignore it until he’d decided what to do. So I was surprised that he brought it up when we were getting ready to go to church.

“Tim, did Sam say anything to you about going to the war?”

I didn’t want to lie to Father, but I didn’t want to give Sam away, either. “Well, he said he was, but I thought he was probably just boasting.”

“He wasn’t boasting, Tim. He’s going over to Wethersfield. The fools are planning to march up to Massachusetts to meddle in something that isn’t their affair.”

“Is he really going to fight, Father?”

“I hope not,” he said. Then he frowned. “What do you think of all of this, Tim?”

“I don’t know, Father,” I said. “I can’t figure out exactly what it’s about.”

“I suppose Sam’s been preaching rebellion to you.” I tried to think of something that wouldn’t get Sam in any more trouble. “He said we ought to be free.”

“That’s just college-boy wind,” Father said. He sounded pretty scornful. “Who isn’t free? Aren’t we
free? The whole argument is over a few taxes that hardly amount to anything for most people. What's the use of principles if you have to be dead to keep them? We're Englishmen, Timmy. Of course there are injustices, there are always injustices, that's the way of God's world. But you never get rid of injustices by fighting. Look at Europe, they've had one war after another for hundreds of years, and show me where anything ever got any better for them. Well, let's go to church. It's a time for prayer."

I decided to forget about the whole thing; it was too worrying. We went out across the muddy road to church, and I climbed up into the balcony where the children, Indians and black people sat. Redding Ridge being a small place I knew everybody there—all the kids, and Tom Warrups and Ned, the Starr's black man. I sat down next to Jerry Sanford. Jerry was a couple of years younger than me, but he was the person closest to my age around and we did a lot of things together. And the first thing he said was, "We heard Sam ran away to fight."

Nobody was going to let me forget about it, that was sure. Mr. Beach made it the subject of his sermon. He really got wound up on it, too. He said that our first duty was to God but that our Lord Jesus Christ had said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" and that meant we were supposed to be loyal Englishmen. He said that hot-tempered young men who listened not to the voices of their elders would bring a wrathy God down on their own heads. He said that the Bible commanded youth to honor their fathers, which made me pretty nervous for Sam, because it was a sin to shout at your father the way he had done, and maybe God would punish him for it.

I didn't think that God would strike him down with a bolt of lightning or anything like that. I knew that God could shoot bolts of lightning if He wanted to, but I didn't believe that He ever did. What worried me was that maybe God would punish him by getting him bayoneted by a Lobsterback. I knew that God did things like that because I saw it happen once. A farmer from the Center came down here one Sunday very drunk and rode his horse through the burying ground, and when Mr. Beach told him to get out, he told Mr. Beach to go to hell and started to gallop his horse at Mr. Beach. But before the horse got more than two or three paces he tripped on a headstone and the farmer fell off and broke his neck and was dead a minute later. It's a true story; there were scores of witnesses.

So I knew that God could get Sam if He wanted to; and between worrying about that and being confused over which side was right I couldn't concentrate on church much. I just wanted to get out of there. But Mr. Beach always preached at least an hour and being fired
up about the Lexington battle he went on longer. Fortunately, he always had to get back to Newtown to conduct service there in the afternoons, so finally he had to stop; and we finished up the service, and I breathed a sigh of relief and got up and started to file toward the stairs. I was nearly there when somebody touched me on the arm, and I turned around.

It was Tom Warrups. Tom didn't look much like an Indian. He wore the same kind of brown shirt and trousers any farmer around Redding wore, and he spoke pretty good English. "Hello, Tom," I said.

He didn't say anything, but he clutched me by the arm and sort of held me back, while the others filed past us down the balcony steps. Then he said in a low voice, "If I tell you where Sam is, you don't tell nobody?" He looked at me hard, and squeezed my arm—not enough to hurt, but enough so I knew he could hurt me if he wanted.

"Is he up at your place, Tom?"

"You don't tell nobody, Timmy. You get Tom in trouble."

"I won't tell, Tom." I wouldn't either—Tom scared me.

He let go of my arm, turned and went down the stairs. I came along behind him. My parents were standing out in front of the church, talking to people. It was always the same. Church was practically the only

time we ever saw some of the farmers from farther out in the parish—places like Umpawawg. They wanted to keep up with the news, and Father always spent some time with them—it was good business, Father said, to be cordial with people. I knew they wanted me to stand around and be cordial too, so I did, but mostly Jerry Sanford and I threw little stones at each other, until Father caught us and made us stop. I was impatient to go see Sam, but of course I had to pretend I wasn't in any hurry to go anywhere, and the talk dragged on—all about the war and what might happen. Finally my parents got done talking, and we started to cross the street.

"Father," I said, "Jerry Sanford wants me to help him carry up a big log from the woodlot."

"That's breaking the Sabbath," he said.

"Well, it won't take very long."

He just shrugged. I guess he had too many other worries on his mind to get upset about that. So instead of going into the tavern I turned and went up the road to the Sanford's house. As soon as I got past it, nobody could see me from the tavern, I climbed over the stone wall into Sanford's pasture and began running across the fields towards Colonel Read's house. It was a couple of miles there going around by the roads, but by cutting across the fields I could make it in fifteen minutes. Better yet it brought me in from the rise be-
hind the house where Tom Warrups' shack was. If anyone from the Read's house saw me go up to Warrups' they'd want to know why. I jogged along quickly. I was pretty nervous—about lying to Father and about what Sam was doing—but it being such a beautiful day helped me to feel better. The sun was warm on my shoulders, birds twittered and there was that spring smell of mud and grass in the air. I just jogged along not thinking about anything very much; and fifteen minutes later I came upon Warrups' shack.

It was made in the Indian way of a circle of poles stuck in the ground with their tops bent together and tied. Covering the poles were hides and rags and in some places patches of straw thatch. There was a thin trail of smoke coming out of the top where the poles met. The door was just a hole in the side covered with a blanket flap, but the flap had been pulled aside to let light in. I ducked down and looked through the hole. Sam was sitting on the ground with Betsy Read, holding hands. They looked pretty serious.

"Hello Tim," Betsy said.

"Hello," I said, slipped inside and hunkered down by the fire. The fireplace was just a circle of stones in the middle of the floor. There was a bed made of a couple of deer hides stretched across a frame, a few pots and pans and not much else. "I can't stay very long, I told Father I was helping Jerry Sanford move a log."

"Oh, Father," he said. He sounded bitter.

"I heard your fight," I said.

"I'm too old for him to tell me what to do anymore," Sam said.

"This morning he said you were full of college-boy wind," I said.

"That's because I wouldn't obey him." He picked up a stone and began jiggling it from hand to hand. "I guess he's still mad at me."

"He cried last night after you left, Sam, maybe he knows something about wars that you don't."

Nobody said anything for a minute. I picked up a stick and began to push it into the fire to see it burn. Then Betsy Read said, "Timmy are you on your father's side or Sam's?"

I wished she hadn't asked me that question. I didn't want to answer it; in fact, I didn't know how to answer it. "I don't understand what it's all about," I said.

"It's simple," Sam said. "Either we're going to be free or we're not."

Betsy touched his arm. "It isn't that simple, Sam. There's more to it."

"What side is your family on, Betsy?" I asked.

"Oh, we're all Patriots. After all, my grandfather is head of the militia."

Her grandfather was Colonel Read. Her father was Colonel Read's son, Zalmon Read. They lived not far
from Colonel Read. “Is your grandfather going to fight the Lobsterbacks?”

“I don’t think so,” Betsy said. “He’s too old. He said he would probably resign his commission to some younger man. Anyway he doesn’t think we ought to fight unless we really have to. He says there ought to be some way of working it out with the King and Parliament without having to fight.”

“There isn’t any way to work it out,” Sam said. “The British government is determined to keep us their slaves. We’re going to fight.”

“A lot of people aren’t going to fight,” I said.

“Around here they aren’t. This is Tory country. Father, Mr. Beach, the Lyons, the Couches—most of them in our church are Tories. And they think it’s the same everywhere, but it isn’t. Down in New Haven they’re ready to fight, and Windham’s already marched their militia to Boston.” He was being scornful. Sam always got scornful when other people disagreed with him, because he always thought he was right, although to be honest, a lot of the time he was right, because of being so smart. But still it was hard for me to think that Father was wrong.

“Sam, Father says for most people it isn’t being free, it’s only a few pence in taxes.”

“That’s Father for you, it’s the money that counts. There are principles involved, Tim. Either you live up to your principles or you don’t and maybe you have to take a chance on getting killed.”

“Who wants to get killed?”

“Nobody wants to get killed,” Sam said. “But you should be willing to die for your principles.”

“That’s right,” Betsy said.

“But Betsy, you don’t have to take a chance on getting killed,” I said.

“I’d fight if I could,” she said.

I hated arguing about it. “Well maybe the King will change his mind and get the Lobsterbacks out.”

Sam shook his head. “He won’t. He thinks he’s going to teach us a lesson. But we’re going to teach him one. We already taught him one at Lexington.”

“That’s what I mean,” I said. “Maybe he’ll give up now.”

Betsy shook her head. “He won’t. Not according to my father.”

Everybody was quiet for a minute. Then Sam said, “There’s going to be war. Which side are you going to be on?”

I couldn’t answer. Sam made it seem that he was right and Father was wrong; but I didn’t see how I could go against Father. I didn’t say anything.

“Tim, you could help us by keeping an ear out in the tavern. With all the Tories around Redding there’ll be lots of talk about what the Lobsterbacks are up to. You
could find out who the Tories are—who’s on our side and things like that.”

It made me nervous to think about it. “I won’t hear anything like that.”

“You could be a big help,” Sam said. “You could be a hero.”

I stood up. “I have to go. Father’ll get suspicious.”

Sam got up, too. “Well, think about it,” he said.

Betsy stood. “Tim, I’ll see you around the tavern, if you hear anything.”

But I wasn’t paying attention to what she said, because as she stood up the shadows shifted and the fire-light fell on the wall of the hut. There was a blanket lying there as if somebody had just thrown it down. But it hadn’t just been thrown down accidentally, because sticking out from one end of it was the stock of a gun.

“Sam,” I shouted, “you stole Father’s Brown Bess.”

He jerked around to look at it. “Damn,” he said, “I didn’t want you to see that.”

“Sam, you can’t take that. It’s not yours, it’s Father’s.”

“Sshh, don’t shout so loud. I have to have it, Tim; I need it to fight with.”

“Sam, you can’t take it, we need it at home. Father needs it.”

“You don’t expect me to fight without a gun, do you?” He gave me a sharp look. “Are you going to tell Father I’m still here?”

“Timmy,” Betsy said, “you don’t want your brother to get killed, do you?”

I stood there confused and mixed up inside. I didn’t say anything.

“Are you going to tell?” Sam said again.

“Sam, please don’t take it.” I knew I was about to cry. “Please, Sam.”

“I have to have it, Tim.”

“Timmy,” Betsy said. “You don’t want Sam to get killed, do you?”

“Please, Sam.”

“Are you going to tell?” Sam said.

Then I couldn’t hold back anymore and I began to cry. “No, I won’t tell,” I whispered. “Good-bye.”

And I turned and ran out of the hut and out across the field. About halfway home I got ashamed of myself for crying and stopped; and by the time I reached the tavern I’d got my eyes back to normal and nobody noticed.
It's a funny thing. You'd think that if there was a war going on in your own country, it would change everything, it would make your life different. You'd think that there'd be men marching and drilling and people hurrying back and forth and lots of talk about the fighting. But it wasn't that way at all; it wasn't any different from usual, it was just normal.

Of course there were battles. There was a battle at Bunker Hill where the Patriots massacred the British troops before they were driven off, and the Rebels also took Fort Ticonderoga without much of a fight. But these battles all seemed far away—they were just things we read about in the Connecticut Journal and the other newspapers. Sometimes Father brought home Rivington's Gazette from Verplanck's. It was a Tory paper and he wasn't supposed to have it; it was illegal, so he kept it hidden. It made me wonder how the war was going to make us freer if you couldn't read any paper you wanted any more. Oh, I don't mean that we ignored the war. There was always a lot of discussion about it around Redding, and sometimes people in the tavern would get into arguments over it when they'd drunk too much whiskey. Once Father actually threw a man out of the tavern. He was a stranger, and I guess he didn't realize that Redding was such a Tory town because he told somebody that the only good Lobsterback was a dead Lobsterback and that King George was a great hairy fool. My father said, "That's subversion and we don't permit subversion here."

The man smacked his beer mug down on the table. "I thought I was among free men, not slaveys."

He hardly got the words out before Father jumped over to the man, jerked him out of his chair and pushed him through the door into the mud of the street. The
man lay there on his back cursing Father, but Father slammed the door and the man left. I guess he suddenly realized that he was in Tory country.

But leaving out things like that, the war didn’t affect us much around Redding in that summer of 1775. Except for Sam. Sam was gone and nobody mentioned him—not Father, not Mother, not me. Father didn’t mention him because he’d kicked him out, and Mother and I didn’t mention him because of not wanting to get Father angry. For all we knew, Sam could be dead. But I didn’t want to think about that, so I didn’t.

So the summer went along and I lived my ordinary life, which was mostly chores all day long. Having a father who was a tavern-keeper was a lot better than being a farmer’s son, like most boys. Running a farm is terrible hard work—plowing and hoeing and milking cows and such and being out in the fields all by your- self with nobody to talk to all day long. Being around a tavern is a lot more fun. There are people coming and going, and a lot of them have been to the big towns like Hartford or New Haven or even New York or Boston, and they have stories to tell. But still, it isn’t as much fun as people like Jerry Sanford think. Mostly Jerry works on his uncle’s farm, and he thinks I have it lucky. He doesn’t realize that there’s an awful lot of wood to cut to keep the fireplaces going for cooking and a lot of water to come up from the well and if there isn’t any-

thing else to do, there’s scrubbing the floors and washing the windows and keeping everything clean generally. My mother’s strong on cleanliness. “Food tastes better in a clean house,” she always says. And of course there’s the livestock I have to care for, too. Besides, the woodlot is two fields down the Fairfield Road from the tavern and we have to cart it up.

So even if it was better than farming, it wasn’t all that much fun. Of course whenever I could I ducked out and did something with Jerry Sanford. If it was hot, we’d go for a swim in the mill stream, or climb the trees up in his woodlot. We played mumble-the-peg or spin tops or play duck on the rock, which I usually won because I could run faster. Sometimes, if it rained we’d go up to Tom Warrups and get him to tell us stories about the Indian wars and the brave things his grandfather, Chief Chicken, did. Or if nobody was watching me, I’d sneak up into the loft and look at the old almanacs Sam brought back from college sometimes. But mostly I worked.

I saw Betsy Read a lot. She came into the tavern pretty often to buy thread or cloth or something, and I noticed that when she did she’d linger around on some excuse and try to listen to what people were saying until my mother would say, “Betsy, I don’t think your mother intended for you to spend the day idling,” and she’d go. I didn’t see what difference it made, any-

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way: I never heard anyone say anything important.

Then one day in September she came down with a jug to buy beer. She sat down at the table, and when my mother had her back turned filling the jug, Betsy gave me a wink and jerked her head toward the door. I wrinkled up my forehead at her to explain what she meant, but she just nodded at the door again. Then Mother brought the beer jug back and put it down on the table. “Off with you, Betsy,” she said. “Idle hands make the Devil’s work.” Betsy got up, picked up the beer jug and walked to the door.

“I forgot to put away the pitchfork,” I said.

My mother gave me a funny look. “When were you using the pitchfork?”

“Did I say pitchfork?” I said. “I meant the water bucket, from when I watered the chickens this morning.” I went through the kitchen and outside and then ducked around the corner of the house. When Betsy came out of the front door I gave her a low whistle, and she slipped up to the side of the house beside me and gave me a serious look. She wasn’t much taller than I, but she was fifteen and of course she was smarter than I was. “Tim, I have to talk to you about something serious.”

It was a beautiful sunny day. The birds were twittering and the breeze was blowing and you could smell the hay in the field next to us waving in the heat. The wooden shingles of the tavern were warm. It was too nice a day to worry about things. I bent my head and touched my cheek to the warm shingles. “It’s about Sam.”

“Tim, if he came back to Redding, would you tell your father?”

“I wish Sam would give Father back the Brown Bess.”

“Tim, stop worrying about that; Sam needs the gun.”

“I wish he would, though.”

“Please stop worrying about it. Just tell me what you would do if Sam came back for a visit.”

“Why does Sam want to fight with Father?”

“Please, Tim,” Betsey said. “I have to go, just answer my question.”

I still hadn’t made up my mind which side I was on in the war, and I didn’t care whether Sam was a Patriot or a Tory or what. All I could think about was snuggling up to him and listening to him talk about scoring telling points. Knowing Sam I was pretty sure he was trying to score telling points from the other soldiers he was with. “I won’t tell,” I said.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

“You swear on the Bible, Tim?”

“I swear on the Bible,” I said. “When is he coming?”
“I don’t know exactly,” she said. “Soon. He sent me a letter.”

I was disappointed. “He didn’t even say when he could come?”

“No. I have to go, Tim. Remember, you promised.”

But he didn’t come soon. At first I thought he would come in a few days, but he didn’t. A week passed and another week and still he didn’t come. When I saw Betsy at the tavern or in church I would look at her in hopes that she would give me a sign or whisper to me that Sam was coming soon, but she never did. I guess she was scared of having the subject come up in front of grownups, especially Father or the other Tories. Once I actually managed to speak to her when she came into the tavern while Mother was in the kitchen getting some bread for some travelers who were eating lunch.

“When’s he coming, Betsy?” I whispered. “When?”

“Sshh, Tim,” she hissed. “Just shush about it.”

So I shut up about it, but I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I wanted to have Sam there and listen to him talk about the fighting and everything. I wanted to tell him about everything I’d done, too, all the things that would make him proud of me and respect me, like finally being able to throw a stone clear over the tavern, which we weren’t supposed to do, and about being best in school in arithmetic. I never used to be very good at anything in school, but for some reason I suddenly got good at arithmetic.

So September passed and then October. The geese flew south in long, wavering V’s. The leaves went red and orange and then brown and fell so that they crunched when Father and I walked around on them out in the woodlot, where we were getting up the winter’s wood. The sky went that low, November grey; the puddles grew coats of ice overnight, and one morning when I woke up the fields were white with snow. That morning Betsy came down to the tavern with the beer mug. Mother was out with the chickens, but Father was in the taproom sharpening the two-man saw, because we were going out to the woodlot.

“How’s your family?”

“In good health, sir,” she said.

“I’m glad to hear it. What can I do for you? Beer, is it? Well help yourself, you know where it is.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said. She crossed over to the barrel. Father bent over the saw, the file making the metal sing as he worked it over the teeth. “Tim, are you going to school this term?” Betsy asked.

“Yes,” I said. I looked at her. “We started last month.” Then I noticed that she was nodding her head slowly up and down. Sam was back.