MY BROTHER SAM IS DEAD

Tim was caught in the middle of war.

A NEWBERY HONOR BOOK

James Lincoln Collier
hooves dying out in the snowy road, and then I began
to laugh and cry all at once. My hands shook so hard I
dropped my stick and my knees were so weak I could
hardly walk. I felt terrific, because I’d fooled them; it
would be a great story to tell Sam. But everything else
was awful—Father being gone and me being alone in
the snow and dark and hours to go before I got home.

I climbed into the wagon and ate the biscuits and
beef and drank about half the bottle of wine. I guess I
was sort of drunk, because I just kept putting one foot
in front of the other and by midnight I was home.

HAVING FATHER GONE WAS STRANGE. THE TAVERN
seemed cold and empty, the way it is when you wake up
at night and realize that the fires have gone out.
Mother didn’t cry, except right at the beginning, the
night I told her what had happened. She went on be-
lieving that he was alive. “They had no reason to kill
him, Timothy. I believe they’re holding him some-
where. They’ll let him go by and by.” But the days passed and he didn’t come home, and soon she changed her story. “He’s in a prison ship somewhere,” she said. “As soon as this terrible war is over he’ll come home again.”

I didn’t know whether she was saying what she believed or was just trying to keep me from thinking that my father was dead. Now half the family was gone and our lives were really changed. Mother and I had all the work to do, which meant that there was hardly any time off for either of us. We even had to work on Sunday, which was a sin. “God will forgive us, Tim,” Mother said. “Don’t worry about it, I’m sure of that.” I didn’t tell her that I wasn’t worried.

But the work worried me all right. There was so much to do—old Pru and the chickens and sheep to take care of and the spring, planting the corn and greens we needed for the tavern, and the cleaning and the cooking. And of course somebody had to be at the tap all the time to draw beer and serve the meals to travelers and make up beds for people who came through needing a place to sleep. There were a lot of people going through, too—messengers going here and there and people moving to different towns and commissary officers and such. So business seemed good, but actually it wasn’t, because a lot of people—the ones on official business—paid in commissary notes which were just pieces of paper that wouldn’t be worth anything at all unless the Rebels won. You couldn’t buy very much with the commissary notes: a lot of people wouldn’t take them, unless they were strong Patriots and felt they ought to in order to show faith in George Washington and the Rebel government.

Business was good in the store, too. Food was in short supply and so was everything else, and we could sell anything we could get our hands on—cloth, farming tools, wheat, sugar, rum, anything at all. We even started dealing in used goods. Farmers were desperate for everything—shovels, plowshares, candle molds, churns, and all the rest of it. Sometimes Mother would hear of a widow whose husband had died or been killed in the war, and couldn’t manage the farm anymore. She’d be willing to sell us the old farming tools, and we could easily resell them at a good price.

But even that didn’t help much. Prices kept going up and up, and depreciation of the paper money took a lot of the profit out of it. You’d sell a bag of nails for a shilling, and when you went out to buy some more you’d find that the price had gone up to two shillings. So you came out behind. We’d raise the price of nails and then by the time we were able to get hold of anymore the price would have gone up again, and we’d still be behind. Of course you weren’t supposed to raise prices. The Connecticut General Assembly had made
laws about how much you could charge for things. But the laws weren't any use: if you had to pay two shillings for nails, you couldn't sell them for two shillings, no matter what the law said. What we did was get around the law by charging the legal two shillings for the nails, or whatever it was, and then charge a shilling more for the bag we sold them in. It wasn't really honest, but we didn't have any choice. The whole thing really made me feel pretty sick, working that hard from sunrise to sunset and never being able to get ahead. But there was nothing we could do about it except to pray every night that the war would end soon, and Father and Sam would come home again.

We spent a lot of time trying to get letters to Sam. Mother figured that once Sam realized that his own side had captured or maybe even killed his father he'd come home and help manage things. "He should be tired of playing soldier boy by now," Mother said. "I should think that glory would have worn off." She had a talk with Colonel Read about it. Colonel Read had been head of a whole regiment of militia, but he'd quit the job. He said it was because he was too old, but everybody knew that was just an excuse: he'd quit because he was against the war and didn't want to fight in it. He was a Patriot, but he didn't approve of the war.

He said to my mother, "Mrs. Meeker, even if you can persuade him to come home, they may not let him."

"That doesn't seem right."

"Of course Sam could claim it was a hardship case—the father gone and only the younger brother left at home. But the fact that Mr. Meeker is considered a Tory won't help."

Mother said, "If he's got the brains he was born with he won't tell them that, will he, Colonel Read?"

Colonel Read smiled. "I don't imagine he will, Mrs. Meeker."

But I wasn't so sure anybody was going to be able to change Sam's mind to begin with. He'd got himself set to win the war and throw the British out of the country so we could be free, and when Sam was determined he usually stuck to things. Pigheaded was what some people called him, but not me. Of course I still hadn't figured out what he was fighting for. It seemed to me that we'd been free all along. What had the English government ever done against me? I thought about that a lot, and I never could find any way they'd hurt me that had mattered very much. Naturally in church we had to pray for the King and Parliament and that was a nuisance because it made the prayers go on longer. As a matter of fact, we weren't supposed to pray for the King and Parliament anymore. The Assembly had declared that it was treason to pray for them. But Mr. Beach was pretty brave even though he was over seventy-five years old, and he went on praying for
them anyway. A couple of times Rebels had come into the church and pulled him down from the pulpit and pushed him around, but he didn’t care. He made us pray for the King and Parliament just the same.

Still, besides having extra prayers I couldn’t think of anything the King had made me do that I didn’t want to. But that wasn’t the way Sam felt about it, and I wasn’t exactly sure he’d come home even when he finally found out that Father was gone. There was only one way to find out, so we kept trying to get messages to him. We asked Betsy Read to tell him about Father if she got in touch with him, but she didn’t know where he was anymore than we did.

So there were a lot of changes in our lives, but the biggest was the one that was happening inside myself. Ever since I had got the wagon home by myself I hadn’t felt like a boy anymore. You don’t think that things really happen overnight, but this one did. Of course I was dead tired when I went to bed that night, and Mother let me sleep late in the morning. And when I woke up I was different. I noticed it first at breakfast. Usually I sat there over my porridge moaning to myself about the chores I had to do or having to go to school or something, and trying to think of some way to get out of whatever it was. Or when Mother turned her head I’d scoop up a fingeringful of molasses from the jar and stir it into my milk. Or I’d eat breakfast slowly so I could stall off going to work.

But that morning after the terrible trip home, right from the first moment we got finished saying grace, I began planning the things I had to do—which things had to be done first and what was the best way to get them done. It was funny: it didn’t even cross my mind to stall or try to get out of the work. I didn’t wait for Mother to tell me what to do: I brought the subject up myself. “I’ve got to get the wagon unloaded right away,” I told her. “Everything will get damp sitting out there in the barn. Maybe I can get Jerry Sanford to help me roll the barrels down.”

Mother nodded. I think she must have been surprised to hear me talk like that, but she didn’t let on. “You’ll need somebody bigger than Jerry. Perhaps you can hire Sam Smith’s Negro, Ned.”

We discussed it all, and about halfway through breakfast I began to realize that I had changed. I wasn’t acting my usual self, I was acting more like a grownup. You couldn’t say that I was really an adult, but I wasn’t a child anymore, that was certain. I thought about showing off in front of Sam when he came home. I’d say things like, “Well, Sam, we’ve decided not to put in oats this year, we’re going to use the space for corn.” Or, “We’re not keeping the kitchen fire going all the time—I haven’t got enough time for woodcutting as it is.” I would be the one who knew about things, not him.

But even though it was nice to feel more grown-up
and act that way, too, I missed Father. Especially toward the end of the day, when I was tired and cold and hungry and there was still wood to be brought up and the barn to be cleaned and Old Pru to be milked, I'd begin feeling sorry for myself and wishing that Father was back. I'd imagine that if I looked up I'd suddenly see him striding into the barnyard, and I'd look up, but he wouldn't be there. I'd stand there feeling disappointed, even though I'd really known he wouldn't be there, and I'd get angry with the Rebels for starting the war and angry with Sam for going to play soldier and have the glory while I had to do all the work at home. It wasn't fair. It would make me curse and I didn't care whether cursing was a sin.

Winter came and winter went, and the war went on in the same distant way. Oh, the effects of it were real—the rising prices, the shortage of everything, the news that so-and-so had been killed in some faraway battle. But all the things you think of as belonging to a war, the battles and cannons firing and marching troops and dead and wounded—we hadn't seen any of it, except for the messengers and commissary officers who came by.

It got to be the spring, 1777. The work went on, except that instead of cutting wood, cleaning the barn and pitching hay for the animals, I now spent my day digging and planting in our kitchen garden by the side of the house, so we'd have fresh vegetables for the tavern. And I was doing this one Saturday morning early toward the end of April—the 26th, to be exact—when I began hearing from a long way away a heavy muttering noise. It sounded a bit like thunder, but not exactly. It made me uneasy. I jammed the spade in the ground and went out front of the tavern to have a look up and down the road. The sound seemed to be coming from the southwest over behind the church somewhere, but there wasn't anything to be seen. And then I saw Ned, Samuel Smith's Negro, come running up the road. At the same moment Captain Betts popped out of his house next door. Captain Betts was in the Rebel militia. "What is it, Ned?" he shouted.

"British troops, Captain," Ned shouted. He ran on by.

Captain Betts turned back in the doorway. "Jerry," he shouted. "Quick, get Mr. Rogers here." Jerry Sanford dashed past him through the door and up the road toward the Rogers'. Captain Betts continued to stand there for a moment more, listening.

"What do you think they're doing, Captain Betts?" I called.

He looked grim. "It won't be anything good. There are a lot of them."

"Is the militia going to try to stop them?"

He scowled. "There aren't enough Patriots in Red-
ding to stop a pair of cows going through." Then he went back into the house.

I turned and went into the tavern. Mother was scouring some pots. "British troops coming," I told her. "What do you think they'll do?"

"Drink and not pay for it," she said. "That's the rule with soldiers. Take the good pewter out to the barn and hide it in the hay."

I did it, and then I ran back around to the front to watch the soldiers come. Now I could see a fine shading of dust in the air out behind the church, rising slowly and drifting away. The noise grew louder. I watched, and all at once through the hedgerows I caught a glimpse of movement and things flashing. In a moment the vanguard appeared around the bend. There was a drummer boy banging away in front, and a standard bearer, and then a couple of officers on horseback, and then the marching men. On down the road toward me they came. It was a frightening thing to see. They just kept coming on and on as if nothing in the world could stop them.

Now I could see cannons, each of them about twelve feet long and drawn by two horses. I figured they must be six-pounders, from what I'd read about it. Behind them were wagons full of boxes and bags—powder and balls and such, I figured. The dust rose up through everything, turning the red uniforms, the cannons, the wagons all a greyish brown. They marched past the tavern, pulled off onto the training ground, and broke formation. Mr. Rogers ran by with Jerry Sanford coming behind him as fast as they could. They dashed into Captain Betts' house. I hoped they weren't trying to get the trainband organized to fight the British. That was impossible: there were hundreds of Redcoats milling around on the training ground—maybe thousands, even.

Most of the people in the village were standing in their yards, watching. The children kept dashing up the road to the training ground to get a closer look, until their mothers saw them and dragged them back home again. In the training ground the soldiers were settling down to eat breakfast, dumping their packs on the ground, and stacking their muskets into neat little tepees, four or five together. I kept hoping that some officers would come into the tavern for rum or beer or something to eat. I wanted to see them close up and listen to them talk. Oh, those troops were impressive-looking with all those belts and buckles and powder horns and bayonets and so forth dangling about their red uniforms. How could people like Sam expect to beat them?

But the officers didn't come into the tavern; instead, three or four of them rode up to Mr. Heron's house. I saw Mr. Heron open the door to let them in and they
disappeared. I guessed that Mr. Heron had known in advance that they were coming. Probably he had set out a big breakfast for them. It gave me a funny feeling to realize that while Mr. Heron was giving the British officers rum and beef, Captain Betts and Mr. Rogers were sitting in the Betts’ house a hundred yards away trying to figure out a way to kill them.

I went on watching. Some of the bigger children had got away from their mothers and were standing at the edge of the training ground, looking at the soldiers. After a while the children began shouting questions at the men like had they ever killed anybody and weren’t they afraid of the Rebels and so forth. The soldiers joked back with the kids and after a while I walked over myself and listened.

“Where are you headed for?” I asked one of the Redcoats.

“If I knew I wouldn’t tell yer.” He had a funny accent.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“Where are you from, lad?”

“Right there.” I pointed to the tavern.

“Well I’m from old Dublin,” he said. “And I wisht I was back there roight naow, ’stead of marching through this bloomin’ place.”

“What’s Ireland like?”

“Oh, ’tis a lovely place, all green and cool like—if you don’t mind a spot of rain. How is it yer not afraid of us, you tykes?”

“We’re mostly Tories here.” Suddenly I realized that I was. Father’s capture had done that.

“Ah,” he said.

And I would have talked with him some more, but just then an officer came riding and shouted, “Get along you bloody Yankee scum. Back to your mothers.” He slapped his quirt on his leg and we all ran.

I stood in our yard, watching. The officer shouted something to the soldiers. There was a scurrying around and then eight of them snatched up their guns, formed up into twos, and marched out behind the officer. He wheeled his horse about and trotted toward me. I jumped back and plunged for the tavern doorway. He galloped across our yard into the Betts’ yard, pulled the horse up, and shouted some more orders. The soldiers charged for the Betts’ door, bashed it open with the butt ends of their rifles, and slammed into the house. Five minutes later they came out again, pushing in front of them Captain Betts, Mr. Rogers, and Jerry Sanford. Jerry was dead white. He was trying not to cry, but the tears were squeezing out of his eyes and he kept wiping his face with his sleeve. The soldiers pushed the three of them onto the road, tied their hands behind their backs, and marched them onto the training ground through the troops. I knew now what
the officers had gone up to Mr. Heron's for: it wasn't breakfast, it was to find out who the Rebel leaders were.

Now my mother was standing in the doorway beside me. "The brutes," she said. "What do they want with that little one? Can they think he's dangerous?"

"What are they going to do with them, Mother?"

"God have mercy on them," she said. "God have mercy on William Heron."

"They wouldn't shoot Jerry, would they?"

"War turns men into beasts. It's cheaper to shoot a boy than to feed him."

"I don't think they would, Mother. I don't think they'd shoot Jerry." It seemed unbelievable, but it made me go cold all the same.

She shrugged. "Maybe not. Only the Lord knows about that. Come into the house before they take a fancy to you. Who knows what Mr. Heron's told them about your brother."

"I'm all right, Mother."

"Come into the house, Timothy. I've lost two, I'm not losing another."

I went in. I was full of all kinds of funny feelings. At first when the troops had arrived, swaggering around so bold and gay, I had really admired them. But seeing them take Jerry Sanford off like that gave me a sick feeling in my stomach. I didn't think they'd shoot him. I figured they'd taken him away just be-

cause he lived with Captain Betts and happened to be there when the soldiers had come. But still, maybe they would shoot him. Maybe they'd want to torture him for secrets or something—after all, he lived with one of the Rebel leaders and might know what their plans were or whether they had ammunition stored someplace.

I stood at the window watching. Mother told me to get away from the window and go about my work, but I didn't. I stayed there. Finally, about a half an hour later, the officers mounted their horses and began riding through the troops shouting orders. Within a couple of minutes the soldiers were formed up in the training ground ready to march. And just as they were about to start off there came the sound of a horse galloping. I dashed outside in time to see a horseman come over the rise of the road from the direction of Danbury. He was dressed in ordinary clothes, and I guessed that he was a Rebel messenger. Suddenly he spotted the British troops formed up on the training ground. He reined up and wheeled the horse around. Bending low, he kicked his heels into the horse and started to tear off back the way he'd come. There was a commotion in the British ranks, and a quick fusillade of shots. The man suddenly straightened up in the saddle and flung his arms out. His head jerked backwards, and he slid off the back of the horse and lay still in the
dusty road. A British officer shouted, and the troops marched out. The rider’s horse was cantering off in a field, bucking. The troops marched past the body. None of them turned to look at him. Finally the last of the wagons disappeared around the bend, and I started running down the road toward the body, scared of what I might see. Other people came running up, too.

The man was lying on his stomach with his face turned sideways. There was a tear in his shirt in the center of his back and blood was soaking through the cloth, but sweat was running off his pale face and he was breathing hard. “Pick him up and carry him to the tavern,” Mr. Read said. “Meeker, go up to Dr. Hobart’s house and tell him we’ve got a wounded man down here.”

It was over two miles up to Dr. Hobart’s. For a moment I thought about saddling up a horse, but the British troops were marching ahead of me in the direction of Dr. Hobart’s, and I was afraid that if I came galloping by on a horse, they’d take me for a messenger and shoot me, too. On foot I could cut through the fields if I had to.

I began running. Within five minutes I ran into a dusty haze kicked up by the troops, and I realized that they must be just ahead of me. I jumped to the side of the road, swung over the stone wall, and cut across the pasture to the next stone wall, which was bordered by a line of trees. I slid over this wall and began running along it, parallel to the road. I figured out I would run past the British troops and come out ahead of them before they reached Dr. Hobart’s house. It would take some running, though. The British column was a mile long.

I ran on, stumbling through the pasture stubble and furrows of the plowed fields. And I had covered almost two miles when I heard shots—at first only one or two, but then a fusillade. I dropped flat behind the stone wall and then raised my head to stare around. I couldn’t see anything but the empty field that lay between me and the road. I slid over the stone wall and began to run crouched over toward the stone wall at the other side of the field which bordered the road. When I got to the wall, I flung myself flat and listened. The shooting was going on down the road a way. I took a chance and raised my head to look over the wall.

The British column was disappearing around the bend, but a couple of dozen troops had stayed behind. They were kneeling on the road in a line firing at Captain Starr’s house across the road from them—on the other side from where I lay. From where I was hidden behind the stone wall I could look through the downstairs windows in the side of the house. There were Rebels in there, firing back at the Redcoats. The way I figured it, the Rebels had hidden there and begun
shooting at the British troops as they marched by. Through the windows I could see the Rebels moving around. I couldn’t recognize all of them, but I knew some. One was Captain Starr. Another was Samuel Smith’s Negro slave, Ned—the same one who’d first come running to report that the British were coming.

As I watched, one of the British pitched over flat on the road. The rest went on firing into the building, as if the bullets coming out at them didn’t matter. It was the way the British fought.

Suddenly an officer shouted an order. The British troops rose, their bayonets flashing at the ends of their muskets. The officer raised his sword and charged toward the house, and troops ran after him. When they reached the door the officer stood aside while the soldiers battered the door with their muskets. Suddenly it crashed open, and the troops charged in. I heard somebody shout, “There are some damned blacks in here, what shall we do with them?”

“Kill them,” the officer yelled. He charged through the door waving his sword. I could see Ned swivel away from the window where he crouched, attempting to swing his rifle around to get in a shot at the officer. But the officer was quicker. He slid his sword into Ned’s stomach, and then jerked it free. Ned staggered around, still raising his gun up for the shot. The sword flashed in a bright arc, the fastest thing I ever saw.

move. Ned’s head jumped off his body and popped into the air. I never saw it fall. I dropped down behind the stone wall and vomited all over myself. Then I got up and ran across the field and fell over the other stone wall. I lay there smelling my vomit and seeing Ned’s head jump into the air. It was a long time before I realized that I was soaked with cold sweat and crying. I knelt up and listened. The shooting had stopped. I remembered the man in the tavern. He was dying, too, and I didn’t want to have his death laid on me. I slipped along the hedgerow and when I was well past Starr’s house I came up the field and back onto the road. For a moment I looked. In the distance I could see the British troops milling around the house. They were carrying heavy objects into the house. I knew what they were, but I didn’t want to think about it. When the British had all the things in the house, they set the house on fire. I turned and ran down the road toward Dr. Hobart’s. I didn’t feel much like being a Tory anymore.
The wounded man was still alive. The ball had hit him high in his ribs and had stuck there without damaging him much. Dr. Hobart gave him a huge mug of rum, and when he’d drunk that down and it had had a chance to work, four men held the man down flat on a table while Dr. Hobart sliced open the wound and pulled the ball out with his forceps. “A couple of broken ribs,” he said, “but they’ll knit.” He bound the man tightly, and we propped him up with some comforters in front of the fire and gave him some more rum and something to eat. He was pretty drunk, but he told us his story.

“They’re after the munitions stored in Danbury,” he said. “I came up here to warn the militia. We thought somebody might stop them. But I was too late.”

Dr. Hobart shook his head. “A wasted errand,” he said. “The trainband is pretty thin here.”

“I know,” the wounded man said. “But we were expecting some Continental troops. You’ve heard of General Benedict Arnold, I expect? He and General Silliman and some others have been chasing the British up from Compo in Fairfield. They were hoping somebody would slow them down until they could catch up. Although I don’t know what good it would do, they haven’t got the men to take on that bunch of Lobsterbacks.”

I took a deep breath. Sam was with Benedict Ar-
nold's troops. Or at least he had been. "Sir, you mean
General Arnold's troops are coming through Red-
ding?"

"That was the plan. Of course you can't ever tell
what's going to happen in war. Things change a lot."

I knew it was foolish to believe that Sam might be
with General Arnold's troops, but when you want
something bad enough you can't stop yourself from
hoping. I wondered if Mother remembered that Sam
was with Arnold. I didn't think she would. She
wouldn't have paid any attention to something like
that.

I went to the window and looked out. It had clouded
over and was beginning to rain. A man was running
across the training ground. In a moment I saw that it
was Captain Betts. He came swiftly toward the tavern,
one and opened the door and came in.

"Stephen," somebody said. "You escaped?"

"They let some of us go," he said.

"How many?"

"Nine. They let most of us go. They only kept
three."

"Is Jerry Sanford all right, sir?"

He shook his head. "They kept him. Don't ask me
why they kept a boy."

"They kept Jerry? What will they do with him,
sir?"

"I don't know," he said gruffly. "What's happened
here?"

"They've gone off north toward Danbury," some-
body told him. "They burnt Starr's house and killed
some people there."

"Dan Starr? They killed Dan Starr?"

"Yes."

Captain Betts looked grim and hard. "The bastards.
We can still catch them. I'm going to get the trainband
out. We'll follow them through the fields and cut
them down from behind the walls. Tim, go over and
ring the church bell. Get cracking."

I didn't want to get into it, but I had to obey. I
started toward the door, but my mother grabbed my
collar. "No, no," she said. "Not my boy. You don't in-
volve anymore Meekers in this terrible war. Send your
own child out to play soldier if you want, Stephen
Betts, but no more of mine."

Betts stared at Mother. "Where's your patriotism,
woman?"

"Bah, patriotism. Your patriotism has got my hus-
band in prison and one of my children out there in the
rain and the muck shooting people and likely to be dead
any minute, and my business half ruined. Go sell your
patriotism elsewhere, I've had enough of it."

"They're killing your neighbors, Susannah," Cap-
tain Betts shouted. "They've killed Dan Starr."
“Then there’s enough dead already.”

“Tim—” he started.

Mother snatched up the poker from the fireplace. “Leave my boy alone, Stephen Betts,” she said. She raised the poker over her head, and I knew from the mad look in her eye that she would hit Captain Betts if she had to.

“Mother,” I said.

“The devil on you,” Betts said. “I can’t fool with you any longer.” Then he turned and strude out of the tavern, banging the door behind him. A few minutes later the church bell began to toll the alarm. The people in the tavern began to leave. Some of them, I knew, belonged to the trainband and were going off to get their weapons. A lot of the others just smelled trouble and wanted to get clear of it. Pretty soon there were only a couple of men left. The wounded man had fallen asleep by the fire. Outside, the wind had begun to blow the rain against the windows. Night was falling.

Mother sat down at the table and put her head in her hands. “Timothy, I want to pray. Come here and pray with me.” She took my hand and pulled me down on the bench beside her. I put my head down. “Oh Lord,” she said, “please take this war away from here. What have we done to endure this? Why must it go on so long? What have we done in Thy sight to deserve this evil?” She stopped: but there was no answer and after a moment she raised her eyes, got up, and began to slice some onions into the stew pot for supper.

And an hour later, as I was getting hungry and wondering when supper would be ready, we heard distant sounds again—the sounds of marching men and horses trotting and orders being shouted. I looked at Mother. The wounded man by the fire raised his eyes. “They’re coming back again,” he said.

“Maybe it’s the trainband,” I said. But my heart was pounding, and I knew who I hoped it was. I ran out into the yard. It was nearly full dark, and the rain spattered in squalls against my face. I looked down the Fairfield Road. It was hard to make out much, but indistinctly I could see a body of men coming toward us. I pulled back into the shadow of the house, and watched them come up. After a while I began to make out the shapes of the ones on horseback. I could tell by their hats that they weren’t Redcoats. I darted back into the tavern. “They’re Continentals,” I said.

“Thank God,” the wounded man said.

Mother and I went to the window. The troops marched by, then broke formation, and began to spread out through the village looking for shelter from the rain. A lot of them went into the church or Mr. Heron’s barn out behind. Then the tavern door banged open, and four or five men strode in. Leading them was a general, wearing the long blue Continental coat and cockaded hat with feathers in it. He said nothing to us, but dropped down at the table. The aides stood around
him. “Rum for General Wooster, boy,” one of the aides said. Then he looked at Mother. “You’re the taverner, m’am?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We’ll need some dinner.”

There went my stew. But I didn’t care. General David Wooster was head of the Connecticut militia. I’d never seen a general up close before, and as I brought the rum and water I looked him over. I was disappointed: he wasn’t very glorious-looking—just a tired old man who was worried and frowning. As I stared he yawned and rubbed his eyes. “Timothy,” Mother snapped. “Bring the gentlemen their dinners.”

Suddenly the wounded man began to struggle to his feet, and saluted.

“Who are you?” General Wooster said.

“Private Hodge, sir. I took a British ball this afternoon.”

“They were here, then?”

“Yes, sir. They’ve gone on toward Danbury about eight hours ago.”

General Wooster ran his hand across his eyes. “Eight hours,” he said softly. “Damn.” He took his hand off his eyes. “Sit down, sir,” he said. “Was there any attempt made to stop them?”

The wounded man struggled to the floor. “No, sir. Not that I could see, sir.”

I stepped forward. “Sir, some of the trainband fired on them from a house just down the road. The Redcoats killed them all and burned Starr’s house.” I remembered Ned’s head jumping off his shoulders.

“How many men in the house, son?”

“I don’t know, sir. Maybe five or six.”

Suddenly the door banged open again. Another Continental officer stood there, gazing around the room. Then he walked in, followed by his aides, and crossed the room to General Wooster. In a moment I saw the insignia on his shoulder. He was a general, too. He walked over to General Wooster, followed by his aides. General Wooster got up. “Ben,” he said. “It’s good to see you. Boy, a glass of rum for General Arnold.”

So General Arnold was in Redding. I brought the rum, and water and some bread, and we scraped out the bottom of the stew pot to feed General Arnold and his aides. As they ate, they talked, and I stood back ready to serve, and listened. They talked about routes and marching orders and other military things I didn’t understand. Twice they mentioned William Heron in a friendly way. I thought that was strange; but I didn’t worry about it much, because I couldn’t get it out of my mind that right at that moment Sam might be in Redding somewhere. But what was I going to do about it? Of course he didn’t know that Father was gone, and it worried me that he might be afraid to come home. Then there was the other side of it, which was that the chances were that Sam wasn’t in General Arnold’s
troops anymore and probably was a hundred miles from Redding anyway. I knew I was being foolish; but I couldn't help myself, and after a bit I said, "Mother, I'd better go out and see to the livestock."

"All right," she said. "But don't be long, I may need you to help with the gentlemen here."

I went through the kitchen out to the barnyard, and then around to the front. It was full dark and the rain was spitting against me, soaking my face. Across the road some troops stood in the church doorway smoking pipes. I crossed over. A soldier barred my way. "I'm looking for Sam Meeker," I said. "Is he here?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm his brother," I said.

"You better get an order from an officer."

My heart jumped. "Is Sam here?"

"Better go find an officer," he insisted.

Another soldier turned to us. "Don't make such a fuss," he said. "Let him go."

"This is Tory country, I don't trust any of them."

"Oh come on, the boy's not lying. Sam's from around here somewhere, I know that."

"Go get him yourself then," the first soldier said. "I don't want any part of it."

"Wait here," the other one said, "I'll see if I can find Sam." He went in, leaving the church door open. I could see soldiers sprawled out in the pews and lying in the aisles, trying to sleep. Some of them were drinking from canteens, or chewing on hard loaves of bread. The ones who wanted to smoke had come to the door because it wasn't right to smoke in a church. They were a ragged-looking lot of men, their clothing dirty and torn and most of them not even having proper uniforms. They needed shaves and their hair was wild and uncombed.

I saw the soldier work his way through the crowd, looking around. I saw him bend down and touch somebody. And then Sam was coming up the aisle toward me. He looked older and raggedy too, and he hadn't shaved, either. He got to the door. For a moment we stared at each other. And then he put his arms around me and hugged me, and I hugged him back. "Timmy," he said. I couldn't say anything. It felt so good to hug him I began to cry. Then he began to cry, too, and we stood there in the church door hugging each other and crying all over ourselves. After a couple of minutes we started feeling foolish crying that way in front of the soldiers, and we stopped hugging.

"I wanted to come over to see you," he said, "but I didn't know if you all hated me."

"Hated you?"

"I thought you might."

"Sam, Father's—"

"I know," he said. "That's why I thought you might not want to see me. I didn't know what to do."

"How did you find out about Father?" I asked.
"The commissary officers found out that I know about dealing in cattle. I've been working with them a lot, looking for beef. And I met somebody from Salem who'd heard about what happened to Father. I think he got it from the Platts." He touched my shoulder.

"How's Mother?"

"She's not mad at you either. None of us are."

"Let's go over," he said. "I haven't been home for two years. Who's in the tavern?"

"The generals."

"Then I'll have to stay in the barn. I'm not supposed to leave my company. Wait, I'll tell somebody where I'm going just in case they want me."

He went into the church. In a moment he was back, and we ducked across the road through the rain and around behind the house to the barn.

I lit a lantern. "You've changed, Tim."

"I'm more of a grownup, now."

"I can see that. Has it been hard on you and Mother?"

"We even have to work on Sundays," I said. "Sam, what have they done with Father?"

He sucked in a mouthful of air. "I don't know. Put him in prison, probably."

"But why? He wasn't doing anything, he wasn't a real Tory, he was just against the war."

"He was selling beef to the British."

"No he wasn't, he was selling beef to Mr. Bogardus. He didn't care who bought it."

"What difference does it make? It was getting to the British. It comes down to the same thing. He was selling beef to the enemy."

"Are you against Father, Sam?"

"No, but Father's against me."

"You ran away," I said.

"He told me to leave. I didn't want to fight with him, but he threw me out."

"He cried when you left," I said.

"I know. You told me that before. Don't think I was happy about leaving. I felt terrible. I remember running down that road in the rain being mad and cursing him for what he did. But all the while I was cursing I kept remembering things like our trips over to Verplanks Point, and him taking me down to New Haven to get admitted to Yale, and buying me new clothes there, and everything else, and finally I stopped cursing and I just felt terrible and wished we hadn't fought. But it was too late. That's two years ago, Tim."

"Don't you feel bad about Father being in prison, Sam?"

"Yes." He didn't say anything for a minute. "As a matter of fact I thought I might be able to get him out. I even went to see General Arnold about it. But I couldn't even find out where he is. Nobody knows."
“Well maybe you can try again.”
“Tim, I don’t want to talk about it anymore, I’m too tired.”

He was tired all right. “Can’t you write somebody a letter?”
“Tim, I don’t want to argue about it anymore.”
“I’ll stop arguing if you promise to try to get Father out.”
“I can’t get him out. I tried.”
“But you can try again,” I said.
“For God’s sake, Tim.”

I shut up. I didn’t want to spoil it by having a fight. We stared at each other for a minute. Then he said,
“Can you get me something to eat?”
“I’ll tell Mother you’re here.”

I slipped across the barnyard, through the kitchen and into the tavern. The generals and their aides had finished eating, and were drinking rum and water, and talking over plans. Mother gave me a cross look.
“Where have you been?”
“There’s something wrong with Old Pru’s leg. I think you better come out and look at it.”
“It’ll have to wait,” she said.
“I think you ought to look at it now, Mother.”

It wasn’t like me to insist on anything that way and she got the idea. “All right, just a moment,” she said. “See if the gentlemen need more rum.” I filled the glasses and helped her clear the plates, and then we went out through the kitchen into the barnyard.
“What’s happened, Tim?”
“Sam’s in the barn.”

She stopped dead. “Sam’s here?”
“That’s where I’ve been—looking for him. I thought he might be here with General Arnold.”

She started to run, but then she thought better of it and walked steadily out there. When Sam saw her he came a little way out of the barn shadows. For a moment he and Mother stared at each other, and then they began to hug, and I came up and put my arms around both of them and hugged them together. Then Mother pushed back and stared at him. “I haven’t seen you for two years, Sam,” she said.

He grinned. “Do I look different?”
“Dirtier,” she said.

He laughed. “Is that all?”
“No, older,” she said. “You’ve gotten older.”
“Tim has too. I hardly recognized him.”
“He’s had to grow up fast,” Mother said. “He didn’t have much choice.”

“I thought you’d all be mad at me,” he said. “I didn’t know if you’d be speaking to me.”

“Oh we’re willing to speak to you all right,” she said. “We need you back home.”

“Hey, Tim, I thought you were going to bring me something to eat.” He was trying to change the subject.
“I forgot,” I said.
“Tim, get your brother some bread and a piece of that ham that’s hanging in the kitchen.”

I went back to the kitchen and got the food. I knew they were going to have an argument. When I got back to the barn Mother was saying, “Sam, we don’t even know if he’s alive. You have to come home now. We need you.”

That was the first time I’d ever heard her admit that Father might be dead. Sam winced. It hurt him.

“I don’t think he’s dead, Mother.”

I handed him the food.

“Oh lovely,” he said. “Thanks.” He tore off a piece of the ham with his teeth and then stuffed a hunk of bread into his mouth.

I said, “Is that the way they eat in the army?” I knew it wasn’t going to do any good to argue with Sam; he wasn’t going to change his mind. I didn’t want Mother to have a fight with him.

He swallowed. “I guess we figure if we’re lucky enough to have anything to eat, we don’t care how we eat it.”

But Mother wouldn’t give up. “Sam, you have to come home. We need you. Your people have taken Father from us; they’ll have to give us you in return.”

“Mother, I can’t come home. That’s desertion, they hang people for that.”

“When is your enlistment up, Sam?”

He frowned. “In two months. But I’m going to re-enlist.”

“No, Sam. You have to come home.”

“Mother,” I said, “don’t argue with him. You can’t make him change his mind.”

“He’s just being stubborn,” she said.

“God, Mother,” he said, “I came to pay a visit and first Tim badgered me about Father and now you’re badgering me about coming home. I can’t come home until it’s over. It’s my duty to stay and fight.”

“You have a duty to your family, too.”

“My duty to my country comes first. Now please everybody stop arguing with me.”

“And get killed in the meantime,” she said.

“Maybe,” he said.

We were quiet for a moment. Then he said, “We’ve made a promise, a group of us, not to quit until the Redcoats are beaten. We’ve made a pledge to each other.”

“Oh Sam, that’s a foolish promise.”

I said, “Mother, stop arguing with him.”

“You’re both fools,” she said.

He was getting angry. “For God’s sake, Mother, people are out there dying for you.”

“Well they can stop dying,” Mother said. “I don’t need anybody’s death.”

“Let him alone, Mother,” I said. “He isn’t going to
change his mind."

We were silent, and I knew she was trying to accept it. "All right," she said finally. "All right."

We changed the subject. We talked about the crops, and about people, and he gave us a message to take to Betsy Read. "We'll probably be moving out soon," he said. "I don't know. Tell her I'll try to see her if I can." He paused for a minute. "I'd better go now before somebody misses me."

He hugged Mother and then he hugged me, and turned and slipped through the rain and the night out of the barnyard. We watched him go, knowing that we might never see him again. Then we went back into the tavern.

I had a funny feeling about seeing Sam. It wasn't just that he was more grown-up or that I was more grown-up. It was something else. For the first time in my life I knew that Sam was wrong about something; I knew that I understood something better than he did. Oh, I used to argue with him before, but that was mostly to show that I wasn't going to just agree with everything he said. But this time I knew he was wrong. He was staying in the army because he wanted to stay in the army, not because of duty or anything else. He liked the excitement of it. Oh, I guessed he was miserable a lot of the time when he was cold and hungry and maybe being shot at, but still, he was part of something big, he thought that what he was doing was important. It felt good to be part of it, and I knew that was the real reason why he didn't want to come home.

Knowing that about Sam gave me a funny feeling. I didn't feel like his little brother so much anymore, I felt more like his equal.
In June of that year, 1777, we found out that Father was dead. He'd been dead for a month. It had happened pretty much as we'd guessed it: he'd been sent to a prison ship in New York. There was one funny thing about it, though—it wasn't a Rebel prison ship, it was a British one. We never did figure out how that had happened. It had just come out of the confusion of the war somehow. It didn't much matter, in the end, though. Those prison ships were terrible places—filthy and baking hot in summer and freezing in winter and of course nothing but slop to eat. The worst part was disease: if anybody got sick with anything serious, everybody on the ship was liable to get it. That's what had happened to Father: they'd had an epidemic of cholera on the prison ship he'd been on. About forty or fifty people had died from it, and he'd been one of them. They'd buried him someplace on Long Island, but we weren't sure where. Mother said, "After the war we'll find where he lies and have a headstone made for him." But I don't think even she believed we'd be able to do that.

We found all this out from one of the men who'd been taken away during the raid on Redding that spring. He'd been put in the same ship, and he'd been with Father when he died. "Before he died he asked me to make sure you knew what had happened. He said, 'Tell them that I love them, and say that I forgive Sam, he's a brave boy but he's headstrong.' The last thing he said was, 'And now I go to enjoy the freedom war has brought me.'"

But Father wasn't the only one who died. Two days after we found out about Father, Betsy Read came down to the tavern. I gave her a pot of beer. "Did you hear about Jeremiah Sanford?" she said.
“No,” I said.
“He’s dead,” she said.
“Jerry? He’s dead?”

“Nobody understands it. They put him on a prison ship and he got sick and died in three weeks. It doesn’t make any sense. You can understand why they took Mr. Rogers or Captain Betts, but why imprison a ten-year-old boy?”

“What harm could he have done them? This war has turned men into animals,” Mother said.

“They sunk his body in Long Island Sound in a weighted sack,” Betsy said. “So his parents can’t even get him back. I don’t understand it, what did they want him for?”

“They’re animals now, they’re all beasts,” Mother said.

“I think they are,” Betsy said. “Sam should have come home.”

It was the first time I’d ever heard her say anything against Sam and his ideals. “I told him that,” I said. “He said he’d taken a pledge with some friends to stick it out until they won.”

“Does he still think they’re going to win?” Betsy said.

“Maybe they will,” I said.

Betsy shook her head. “Even Father says things are bad for the Patriots.”

I looked at her curiously. “Don’t you want them to win?”

“I don’t care who wins anymore. I just want it to be over.”

“Sam wouldn’t like you to talk like that.”

“I don’t care,” she said. “When I see him I’m going to tell him. For three years they’ve been fighting and all we’ve had is death and hunger. Your father is dead, Jeremiah Sanford is dead, Sam Barlow is dead, David Fairchild is dead, Stephen Fairchild was wounded, and more.”

My mother nodded. “Right at the beginning Life said it would be that way. He said, ‘In war the dead pay the debts for the living.’ But he didn’t think he would have to pay himself.”

So Father had forgiven Sam, and I think Mother did, although she never said so. But for myself I wasn’t sure. I knew I’d be glad to see him, and have him at home; but still I felt it was partly his fault that Father had died. Oh, he hadn’t captured Father or thrown him in prison or given him cholera or anything like that. But he was fighting on their side, and I couldn’t easily forget about that. Yet of course it was a British prison ship he’d died on. It seemed to me that everybody was to blame, and I decided that I wasn’t going to be on anybody’s side any more: neither one of them was right.
So summer passed and it became winter once more and people were suffering worse than ever from want. Luckily, there wasn’t any more fighting around Redding. Anyway, in the winter they didn’t fight much. Nobody liked to fight in the cold, and when there was snow on the ground it was hard to march and easy to get sick. The Continental Army was encamped at a place called Valley Forge out in Pennsylvania somewhere. We didn’t know whether Sam was there or not. From what we’d heard they were practically starving and hadn’t any clothes. I was just as glad; it made me hope that the Rebels were at the end of their rope and would have to give up pretty soon and end this terrible war. I didn’t even mind that Sam might be suffering with cold and hunger. It would serve him right; we were pretty hungry ourselves.

Sam began writing us letters every once in a while—every two or three months especially after he heard that Father was dead. He didn’t tell us where he was in his letters. Mostly they’d be about places he’d been. Sometimes Betsy Read would get a letter from him, too, and she’d come down to tell us about it. So time passed. The year 1777 ended and 1778 began. Spring came, then summer and fall, and we harvested. Oh how I hated the war. All of life was like running on a treadmill. I was fourteen, I should have been going to school all this while and learning something. Maybe by this time I would have begun to think about going to New Haven to study at Yale. I wasn’t much interested in Latin or Greek, but in the last couple of years I’d learned a lot about buying and selling and the tavern business, and I wanted to study calculating and surveying and the agricultural sciences: I thought I might have a career in business. I might apprentice myself to a merchant in New Haven or New York, or even London, to learn the art of trade. Sam owed it to me to come home and help Mother run the tavern for a couple of years while I started to make my way in the world.

But until the war ended there was nothing for me to do but tread water. Prices kept on spiraling upward, merchandise grew shorter and shorter in supply, and everybody seemed to be in debt. You couldn’t refuse a hungry widow who’d lost her husband in the war some cloth or molasses on credit, but then how could we pay for new merchandise ourselves?

We couldn’t get over to Verplanck’s Point that fall. The Rebels were holding all of northern Westchester County—Peekskill, Verplancks, Crompond, all of it. There was no way for us to get any cattle through. There wasn’t much cattle around, anyway. Bit by bit people had been slaughtering their stock for food. However, Mother and I had been able to get hold of eight scrawny cows, mainly from people who owed us a
lot of money. There wasn't much to them, but with food in such short supply I figured we could get a pretty good price for them if we could get them to a British commissary somewhere. Not that I cared which side we sold them to, but the British were the ones who had money—they had the whole English exchequer behind them. The Continentals were paying off in commissary scrip, which would be totally worthless if they lost. I'd heard that there was a British commissary in White Plains, which was about twenty-five miles southwest across the New York State line. I figured I might be able to drive the cattle down there through the woods. It would be very risky, but better than going hungry. And we needed some money to buy goods to keep the tavern and the store going. If the business died, we'd really be out of luck.

Hunger is a pretty terrible thing. It's like going around all day with a nail in your shoe. You try to put it out of your mind, but you never really quite forget it, and when something reminds you of it, like reading about a big meal in a story or seeing a stack of bread, it really hurts—I mean it just plain hurts. It makes you feel weak, and you get sick easily, too. That winter everybody had colds and went around sniffing most of the time. Some people got really sick, and then their families would have to scrape up extra food to feed them with. Oh, I don't mean that people were dying from hunger. Nobody was actually starving to death, but most were hungry a lot of the time.

All through November I tried to find out about the British commissary—whether it really existed or not, and where it actually was. But I couldn't find out anything I really trusted. It was all rumors—the commissary was at White Plains. No, it wasn't at White Plains, it was at Horseneck. Yes, it was at White Plains after all, but the Rebels had it under siege. And so forth. I didn't want to go until I was sure: if I ran into Rebels I'd lose the cattle and probably be put in prison myself. It was only worth the risk if I were sure where the commissary was: otherwise we might just as well eat the cattle ourselves.

So that was the situation on December 3, 1778, when Sam came back to Redding. That morning he walked into the tavern. He looked thin and tired. There were black circles under his eyes and his uniform was torn in about six places. He'd lost his belt and was wearing a piece of rope around his waist, and his hat wasn't an army hat but just an ordinary fur cap. But he was glad to be home, and grinning. "Hello, everybody," he said.

Mother was out in the kitchen and I'd been stoking up the fire. "Sam," I shouted. "Mother, Sam's here."

She burst into the tavern and began to hug him, and I hugged him, too, and then he crouched down in front of the fire and ate a bowl of porridge with honey that
Mother brought him. "This is the first time I've been warm for a week," he said.

So we asked him all the natural questions: where he'd been and where he was going and so forth. "I'm going to be in Redding for a while," he said. "General Putnam is bringing a couple of regiments here for winter encampment. We're going up to Lontown and hole up until spring."

"What's the idea of that?"

"The rumor is that we're supposed to be situated to move either west to the Hudson or south to Long Island Sound in case of a British attack either place. Some say we're mainly here to watch over the magazines at Middletown. I don't know—those are the rumors. But we're building huts so I guess we'll be here for a while."

"How did you get off?"

"I've had a bit of luck. Colonel Parsons—Samuel Holden Parsons, that is—has moved into the Betts' house. An adjutant came around and asked if any of us were from this area and I said I was, and Colonel Parsons brought me into town this morning to show him around." Sam grinned. "To the ladies, mostly. I told him that there weren't any ladies in Redding except my mother and my girl. He said they would do, so Mother you'd better put on your best dress."

Mother smiled, but I don't think she thought it was very funny. "You're so thin, Sam," she said. "Are the troops all starving?"

"Everybody in the country is hungry," he said. "It's going to be worse this winter, too. Have you got any cattle, Tim?"

I was proud that he asked me instead of Mother. "Eight," I said. "They're not much to look at."

"Butcher them and hide the meat. Or sell it. You can get a good price for the hides from the troops. Sell what you can. I promise you, the stock will be stolen."

Mother frowned. "You mean your troops are stealing from your own people?"

"A starving man will steal food from babies." He shook his head. "There's a lot you don't understand. All of us have seen good friends killed. I had a friend bayonetted, and it took him six hours to die, screaming all the while. All we could do was hold his hand and wait. I saw a captain I loved blown in half by a cannon ball. He was the best officer we ever had, he worried about his men, he put them first. He never ate before we were fed, and I've seen him go without to give his portion to a sick man. The redcoats blew him in half, right into two pieces with his guts dangling out of both parts." He shivered. "After a few things like that you don't give a damn for anybody but your friends anymore. You kill Redcoats the way you butcher pigs. The troops know that Redding is a Tory town. As far as
they're concerned taking cattle from Tories is getting revenge. Sure, lots of them would steal from anybody, whether they were Tories or Patriots or anything else. Some are unscrupulous when they're hungry and some are unscrupulous by nature and they'll take whatever they think they can get away with. Of course the majority of men are honest and won't steal, but if they decide you're Tories, they'll have no compunction about taking your beef. And let me tell you, it's pretty easy to decide somebody's a Tory when you haven't eaten anything but hard tack and pork fat for weeks. I've done it myself."

"Sam."

"I won't apologize."

"War turns men into animals," Mother said.

"I was ashamed of it afterwards," Sam said, "but not very and my belly was full." He nodded slowly. "Tim, butcher the cattle. Let the meat freeze and hide it in the loft under the hay until you need it." He glanced out the window toward the Betts' house. "I better go. Colonel Parsons may be waiting for me."

"Don't go yet, Sam," Mother said. "We've just seen you."

"I'll be around all winter, Mother. Maybe I can get attached to Colonel Parson's staff. I'll try to get a pass if I can. Anyway, I can always slip out at night. It's risky. Colonel Parson's is not harsh, but General Put-

nam is in charge. He's a great patriot, but he's rough and tough on men who shirk their duty. A hundred lashes for desertion and if there's too much of it, I know he'll hang some people as an example. That's the kind of man he is. But I'll be back to visit again one way or another."

He left. We walked out into the yard with him, and he crossed over to the Betts' house and went in. "He's so thin," Mother said. "I worry that he'll get sick. I couldn't bear to lose another, Tim." All at once she began to sob. It only lasted ten seconds. Then she turned and went into the house, and when I went in a minute later she was calmly scrubbing some beets.

After December 3rd we began to get used to the sight of soldiers constantly around town. There were always messengers going by and trains of supply wagons crunching over the snow and sometimes groups of soldiers on work parties would appear at the tavern for beer. Having the troops around was good for business. Some of the officers lodged in houses around about. Often in the evening they came up to the tavern to play cards and drink or smoke. Business was good—or rather it would have been good if we had had anything to sell, and people had had anything to pay for it with besides commissary scrip.

The biggest demand was for liquor. Life at the encampment was cold and miserable and the only relief
for them was drinking. They didn’t care what it was—rum, whiskey, cider, anything we could get. Whiskey was pretty hard to get. The General Assembly had made it illegal to distill whiskey because it was made from grain, and grain was needed for food. Rum was easier to get and we could usually get cider, because every farmer made it. I spent a lot of time riding around among the farmers buying whatever they had. They’d often have rum they’d taken in trade for livestock. I could offer them good prices for liquor because we could get good prices for it: the officers didn’t care how much they paid for liquor. As they said when they were drinking, “A short life but a merry one.” Which of them knew when he was going to die?

Of course the ordinary soldiers didn’t have much fun. For one thing, there was always the snow. It came down in a great blizzard about a week after the troops had started to build the encampment. Their huts were not finished and they were forced to work in bitter cold and storm. The cold was a problem. The huts were really just tiny log cabins with big stone fireplaces making the whole rear wall. In cold weather they had a lot of trouble getting the mortar to set. Because of this the chimneys leaked so badly that half the smoke blew back into the room. The snow made hewing wood difficult, too. Sam told us that they were having an awful time getting the huts finished. Even when they were done they weren’t much to live in—twelve soldiers jammed into a 14 by 16 room, breathing more smoke than air and having to stumble over people whenever they wanted to move around. And the snow never stopped falling. By January it covered the countryside three feet deep, so that the stone walls disappeared. You could drive a sled over the snow anywhere you wanted without paying attention to where the roads were.

Sam was able to get into town every week or ten days. Colonel Parsons used him as a messenger a lot because he knew his way around Redding. Sometimes he would come in with a commissary officer looking for lime or nails or leather or all the hundreds of things armies need. The idea was that Sam might know who had things. Often he’d come into the tavern and ask me if I knew who had hay or sleds or something else to sell.

To be honest, I felt uneasy about telling him such things. The commissary people always paid for whatever they bought, but it was usually in scrip, and on top of it, the farmer didn’t have much choice about selling or not. But I couldn’t bring myself to lie to Sam. It was something I’d never done.

All the time Sam was after us to butcher the cattle. I didn’t know what to do. The idea of selling them to the British was gone. With all the Rebel troops around
it was too risky trying to move cattle anywhere. Besides, it would have been next to impossible in that deep snow. Still, I kept hoping that I could find someone who’d offer me a good deal for them. But Sam was pressing me. “I’m warning you, Tim, sooner or later somebody’s going to get them.”

“I thought General Putnam gave strict orders against stealing.”

“Oh he did, and knowing General Putnam he’ll hang any soldier he catches stealing. He’s tough as nails but he’s honest. Besides, he wants the people to come around to our side, and if he lets the troops forage, he’ll lose all sympathy with the populace. Oh, I know him. He’s had a lot of men flogged already for disobeying orders, and I’m sure he’s just itching to catch somebody stealing so he can make an example of him.”

“Then what’s the worry?”

“Don’t be stupid, Tim. A lot of men will take a chance anyway, especially when they’re drunk. You wait; sooner or later they’ll get into your beef if you don’t watch it.”

Mother and I kept churning it around between us. She figured Sam was right. “You know what happened to Sally Myles’ heifer.” Mrs. Myles was a widow who lived alone in a tiny hovel in Redding. She had a few tough chickens and one scrawny cow. She kept going mostly by selling milk and eggs to the people around.

A few days earlier a half dozen drunken soldiers had noticed her cow in her barn, butchered it right there, and carried the slabs of beef back to the encampment in the dark.

“I know,” I said. “But the thing we need most is rum and the only way to pay for it is with cattle.”

That was the beginning of January. We decided to stick it out through the month. There was a rumor going around that the British were forming up in New York City and were going to raid towns on Long Island. What that meant nobody knew, but some believed that the men from the encampment would be called down there to fight. I just couldn’t make up my mind.

The weeks went by. There was nothing anybody wanted but to get through this terrible winter. It didn’t seem that the war could really go on much longer. Even Sam thought it would have to end soon. We talked about it one evening when he was there for a short visit. We were sitting in front of the taproom fire one night in late January. “I think something decisive will happen in the spring,” he said. “The English government realizes by now that they’re not going to beat us easily.”

“Maybe they figured you’re too starved and tired to fight much longer.”

He shook his head seriously. “They might be right,”
he said. "The other day some of the men were actually talking mutiny. A lot of them have no blankets, they're short of food, and the pay hasn't come through. A bunch of them decided to march to Hartford and demand their pay. They were about to start out when General Putnam rode up and talked them out of it. Then he had a couple of the ringleaders shot right there. He shows no mercy when he thinks he's right."

Suddenly he stopped talking. "What was that?" I'd heard it, too—a kind of a thump and then a cow bawling. We listened. There were noises coming from outside somewhere.

"Sounds like something's bothering the cattle," I said.

"There are people out there," Sam shouted. "Let's go."

We ran out through the kitchen toward the barn. It was dark, but there was nearly a full moon reflected on the snow and plenty enough light to see what had happened. The barn doors were open. Two cows were standing in front of the barn blinking, and we could see two more behind. We dashed into the barn. Four of the cows were gone. "Jesus damn," I shouted.

"Pen 'em up," Sam shouted. "They'll be butchering the others somewhere near. There's no chance of driving them very far in this snow."

He darted around the house toward the road, his eyes following the hoof prints in the snow. I snatched up a shovel and drove the remaining four cattle back into the barn with the handle. They were balky, and it took me a few minutes to get them inside and the door shut and latched. Then I raced across the snow around the house to the road. There I stopped and swung my eyes across the horizon. I saw nothing, but distantly I heard the noise of shouting, off toward the far end of the training ground. I ran in the direction of the sounds, and then suddenly I saw three men walking toward me through the moonlight, side by side. I stopped and waited. They came up. The one in the middle was Sam. His nose was bleeding and there was a cut in his chin. His hands were tied behind his back.

I stood in the open white snow field, surrounded by shadowy trees. "Sam," I shouted.

"Timmy, get Colonel Parsons," he cried. "They're taking me in as a cattle thief." I went cold. Then I turned and ran.