MY BROTHER SAM IS DEAD

Tim was caught in the middle of war.

A NEWBERRY HONOR BOOK

James Lincoln Collier
I was so excited I could hardly stand it. I felt all sparkly inside—sort of scared and happy both at the same time. When lunchtime came I could hardly force myself to eat, although of course I did, so nobody would suspect anything. Being so excited worried me. A couple of times I almost blurted something out. You know how it is when you get really interested in something, you forget what you’re doing or even where you are. Well I was thinking so hard about going up to Tom Warrups’ and finally seeing Sam after all this time that I kept forgetting it was a secret. Once I started to say aloud, “I wonder if Sam really shot anybody,” and another time I began to say, “Maybe I ought to bring him up something to eat.” But both times I caught myself in time.

The big question was to find an excuse to get away. On a school day it would have been different, I would have just told the teacher I had to go home and help at the tavern, and gone up to Warrups’. But I didn’t want to wait until Monday; probably Sam would be gone by then anyway.

After lunch Father sent me out to the woodlot with the axe. Although it had warmed up some, the day was cloudy and the thin layer of snow was still on the ground. From the woodlot the whole country looked white, as if it had been painted to match the church and the houses around it. I began cutting wood, wondering if I dared to sneak away to Warrups’. I decided not to: after a while Father would notice that there weren’t any chopping sounds and come up to see what I was doing. I needed another excuse; and as I chopped I tried to think of one.

I was thinking like that when I first heard the horses. I straightened up, letting the axe dangle from my hand,
and listened. There were a lot of them coming up the Fairfield Road from the south and they were coming pretty fast. I stared down the road toward the bend. They would have passed right by me. At first all I could hear was the heavy drum roll sound of hooves; then I began to hear voices of men shouting and the jingling of harness. Then suddenly they came pouring around the bend of the road into sight. It was a party of maybe twenty people, and even at a distance I could see that some of them had on blue uniforms which meant that they were Continentals—the Rebel troops. I stood back among the trees and watched them come galloping by. It was a pretty unusual thing to see a party of horsemen in Redding. They came on, and then they were swirling by, an officer wearing a sword in the lead, followed by the ordinary soldiers. Most of them had Brown Besses like ours slung over their backs. I guess they were mostly from the Fairfield trainband. The horsemen pounded on, churning the snow on the road into mud. I kept down in the shadow of the trees, but they didn’t pay any attention to me anyway. In a moment they had swept past. I darted through the trees to the road, and looked after them. They pulled up at the tavern. The officer and three of the men dismounted, and then the rest galloped off.

I was scared, but I was curious. I figured the officer had gone into the tavern to drink a mug of beer. I hadn’t really seen many true soldiers, and I wondered what they were like. I wasn’t sure if it was safe, though. What would they do if they knew that Father was against the war? Still I didn’t want to be left out of the excitement. So I cut back through the woodlot and across the snowy fields so I could come up to the house from behind. I figured I would sneak in the kitchen door and listen to what was going on first. I was still carrying the axe. It was dangerous to run with an axe, because you might fall and cut yourself, but it made me feel safer to hold it in my hand. I went on running through the light snow, and then I came up behind the barn and eased myself around it into the barnyard. I could hear the horses stamping and jingling their harnesses in front of the tavern.

Somebody began to shout. The shouting was coming from inside the tavern. I darted across the barnyard and slipped into the kitchen. The door to the taproom was mostly closed, but there was a crack where it was hinged onto the wall. The shouting went on. I tiptoed to the door and put my eye to the crack.

Mother was standing up against the fireplace wall. There was a man in front of her, holding a rifle sideways to keep her from getting away. Two other soldiers had hold of Father from the back, twisting his arms behind him so that he couldn’t move. The officer in charge stood in front of him with a sword. “We know
you have a weapon, Meeker. Where is it?” he shouted. He jabbed the sword forward as if he was going to stick it into Father, and at the same time the men holding Father gave him a jerk. I began to shake and shiver, and I thought I would run someplace to get help, but then I realized there wasn’t any help. Probably the Patriots were trying to get the guns away from all the Tories.

“I don’t have it anymore,” Father shouted. “My loyal son Samuel stole it to go play soldier boy.”

The officer laughed. “Come now, I’m not going to believe that story. You’re all Tories here. We want your gun.” He jabbed the sword again at Father’s stomach.

“Believe it or not as you like,” Father said. “What do you intend to do, run me through with that sword and leave my wife and child to fend for themselves?”

“I will if you don’t give up your weapon.” He jabbed again with the sword. “We know you have one. We know where all the Tory weapons in Redding are. Not everybody is willing to play the dog to the King.”

My father spit. “There are traitors everywhere,” he shouted.

“Watch your tongue or I’ll slice it out.”

Oh, it scared me to hear Father yell at the Rebel officer. I wanted him just to be quiet and not make a fuss; to beg, even. It made me realize where Sam got his rebelliousness from, though. Father didn’t like anybody to tell him what to do anymore than Sam did. “Oh, Father,” I whispered to myself, “please don’t talk back.”

And I guess Father realized that he ought to be more quiet, because he got a grip on himself and said calmly, “I’m telling you the truth, my son ran off to join your army and took my gun. We have no weapons here but butcher knives.”

The officer looked at Father, considering. Finally he said, “I don’t believe you.” He raised the sword. I gasped and the officer whipped the flat side of the blade across Father’s face. My mother shrieked, Father cursed, and a thin line of blood appeared on his cheek and upper lip. I knew what I had to do. I ducked out of the kitchen, dashed across the barnyard and began to run through the pastures toward Colonel Read’s house. There was one person who knew what had happened to Father’s Brown Bess, and he was up at Tom Warrups’.

Oh, I was scared. The war had finally come to Redding, and it was terrible. I guessed pretty easily what was happening. Because Redding had such a reputation for being a Tory town, the Rebels had decided to disarm it—at least disarm the Tories. Partly it was to get guns for themselves—everybody knew that the Rebels didn’t have enough of anything, guns included. And part of the idea was to make sure that Redding Tories
I crept into the hut, leaving the blanket hanging over the door in case somebody should walk by, and knelt down by the bed. I was sorry to wake him up, knowing how tired he must be. I put my hand on the bed to shake it; and suddenly I realized I was touching something funny. I felt along the edge of the bed. There was something hard and long under the blanket. I put my hand under the blanket to feel it better, but already I knew it was the Brown Bess. I guess Sam had got into the habit of sleeping with it so nobody would steal it. He was lying with his arm across it, with the blanket over top of both.

Carefully I slid my hand down the barrel until I got to the stock, gripped it, and gave it a little pull. Sam snorted in his sleep and shook his head as if he were trying to shake a fly off his face. But he didn’t wake up. I gave the gun another little pull. This time he began to talk loudly, but the words came out nonsense, and I couldn’t make them out.

I let go of the gun and took my hand out from underneath the blanket, trying to think what to do next. Sam was pretty tired, and being a good sleeper, I figured I might be able to move his arm without waking him up. When we used to sleep together plenty of times he’d thrown his arm or his leg over me in his sleep, and I’d have to grunt and heave to get myself untangled from him, and he’d never wake up. I decided to take a chance. I flipped the blanket back a little.

wouldn’t be able to do to the Continentals what the Minutemen had done to the British at Concord and Lexington six months earlier. And I knew the Rebels weren’t just playing; they’d kill Father if they wanted to.

So I ran uphill and down, clambering over the stone and rail fences that divided the pastures. My lungs began to burn and even though it was cold, my face was soaked with sweat. But I didn’t dare stop to rest; all I could see in front of me was that Rebel officer pushing a sword through Father’s stomach. So I ran on, my breath roaring in my mouth and my legs getting so weak and trembly that a few times I almost stumbled.

Then I saw Tom Warrups’ shack and I stopped running. There was a tiny trickle of smoke drifting up from the chimney, which I could hardly see against the grey sky. I slipped quietly around to the door. The blanket was hanging across it. I pushed it a little aside and peered in. The fire in the circle of stones was practically out, but there was enough light so I could see that there was nobody in the hut but Sam. He was lying on Tom Warrups’ frame bed on his stomach, with a deerskin rug over him. I could hear him softly breathe and see his back go up and down. I guessed he must have walked a long way to get to Redding and was tired. He was a pretty good sleeper, anyway; I’d slept with him all my life and I knew that he was hard to wake up, even if you punched him.
until his arm and the Brown Bess were uncovered. Then I quickly bent his arm away so it wasn’t lying across the gun anymore. He snorted again, but he didn’t wake up. I picked up the gun, ducked through the door of the shack just pushing the blanket away with my head. When I got outside I began running across the snow-covered pastures as fast as I could go, praying that I’d get back before anything happened. Ahead of me, as far as I could see was a trail of my own footprints in the snow, drawn like a line across the fields and fences that divided them up.

I was so worried and scared that I didn’t even hear Sam coming until I was across Read’s pasture and climbing over a stone wall at the other side. As I slid over the wall, I first heard the heavy thump-thump of running feet. I looked back. Sam was down at the bottom of the pasture about a hundred yards away, charging up at me as fast as he could come. He saw me look at him, but he didn’t shout, for fear that somebody would hear him.

I leaped over the wall and began running on as fast as I could, but I knew it was hopeless. Sam was bigger and stronger and faster than me. I looked back again. Sam was coming up to the stone wall. He didn’t bother to climb it, he just cleared it in one jump and came running on. I turned and swung down to the left in the direction of the road. I didn’t think Sam would follow me there for fear of being seen. I tried to pray, but I couldn’t think of any right words and all I could do was whisper over my gasping breath, “Oh please, God, oh please, God.”

And then Sam was ten yards behind me. “Timmy,” he said in a whispery shout. “For God’s sake, Tim, give me that before you hurt yourself.”

I swiveled around to face him. He lunged at me, grabbing for the muzzle of the gun. He got a couple of fingers on it, but I jerked it out of his grip. He cursed, and stuck his fingers in his mouth, and I could see he’d got a little gash from the bayonet clip when I jerked it out of his fingers. I leveled the Brown Bess at his stomach and I said, “Don’t come any closer, Sam, or I’ll shoot you.”

I couldn’t even hold the gun right. It was too long and too heavy for me to hold against my shoulder the way you’re supposed to. I had to hold it against my hip with one hand on the trigger and the other wrapped around the barrel. I knew that if I fired it I’d be knocked flat, but I didn’t care.

Sam stared at me. “Timmy.”

“Don’t move, Sam.”

“It isn’t loaded, Tim.”

“You’re a liar.”

He started to step toward me. “Stand back, Sam, or I’ll shoot you in the stomach.” Suddenly I began to
cry, not just little tears but big sobs all mixed up with trying to get my breath. I felt ashamed of crying in front of Sam, and embarrassed, but it was all so terrible I couldn’t stop.

“Timmy, don’t be crazy. It isn’t loaded. Now give it to me before it gets damaged.”

“Jesus, Sam, Jesus, they’re down there and they’re going to kill Father if he doesn’t give them the Brown Bess.”

“Who? Who’s down there?”

“Some Continentals, with some others from Fairfield.”

Then he lunged. I never knew whether I would have pulled the trigger because the next thing I was lying on the ground with Sam on top of me, and he’d got the gun. My fingers hurt, and when I looked at them I saw that they were bleeding, too, where they’d got ripped out of the trigger guard. Sam’s face was dead white. “You would have shot me, you little pig, wouldn’t you?” He got up off me, and I sat up. “Are you all right?” he said.

I jumped up. “I wouldn’t tell you if I wasn’t, you son of a bitch. By this time they’ve probably killed Father.”

“Timmy, I can’t go down there.”

“Why not? They’re supposed to be your friends.”

“I can’t, Timmy, I’m not supposed to be here.”

“What do you mean you’re not supposed to be here?”

“I’m supposed to be in Danbury buying cattle. They sent me down from Cambridge with Captain Champion, the commissary officer because I’m from around here.”

“Did you run away?”

“I didn’t desert, I just came home for a couple of days. Captain Champion had to go over to Waterbury for something so I decided to slip home for a day or so.”

“To see Betsy Read.”

“All right, so what?” Sam said.

“Won’t you get in trouble?”

“They won’t catch me,” Sam said. “People are always sneaking off home for a few days; the officers don’t know where half the men are a lot of the time. If they come around looking for you, one of your friends says you sprained your ankle and you’re coming along behind.”

“Sam, I’m scared about Father. Let’s not stand here talking.”

He looked sort of uneasy. “He’s probably all right. They’ve been disarming Tories in lots of places. It’s orders from the Connecticut General Assembly. You don’t think they’re going to let the Tories keep their guns, do you?”

“What’ll they do to Father?”
“Oh, probably just push him around a little. They don’t shoot people.”

“I saw him, Sam, he was going to stick his sword into Father. You have to go down, Sam, you have to.”

“I can’t, Tim. They might hang me for a deserter if they found out.”

“All right then, let me take the gun home and give it to them.”

“I can’t do that, Tim. If I go back to camp without my weapon, they’ll surely hang me.”

I thought about that. “Oh God, Sam, what did you have to fight for? Why didn’t you stay in college?”

“I couldn’t, Tim. How could I not go when all of my friends were going?”

I understood that, but I wasn’t going to give in. “Your family ought to be more important than your friends.”

He looked embarrassed, but he didn’t say anything. “I think you’re a coward,” I said. I didn’t really think that—anbody who joined the army to fight couldn’t be a coward, but I was still angry at him.

“No, I’m not,” he said.

To tell the truth, it was me who was being the coward. Now that I’d got calmed down a little, I was afraid of what I might find when I went home. Suppose I walked in and found Father lying on the floor with a hole in his stomach bleeding to death, and maybe Mother dead, too. “All right, Sam, if you’re not a coward, come home with me and see if everything is all right.”

He thought about it. “I’ll go as far as the barn with you.” Swiftly he loaded up the Brown Bess, with powder from the horn slung around his neck and pouch of shot he had dangling from his belt, and rammed it home with a ramrod.

It impressed me, the casual easy way he did it. “Did you ever kill anybody, Sam?”

He looked embarrassed again. “We haven’t done any fighting yet.”

We set off across the snow fields, uphill and down, the way I’d come. Sam set a pretty good pace. He was hard and strong and used to it, from all the marching he’d done, and I had a hard time keeping up; but I was glad to go fast because I was so worried about Father. In fifteen minutes we came to our road, crossed it, and circled around back of the house. We ducked into the barn and stared at the tavern. There was smoke coming out of the chimney, but that was all—no sounds, no sign of men, no horses.

“Nothing happening,” Sam said.

“Come on in with me and see,” I said.

“It’s risky, Tim.”

“There’s nobody around,” I said.

He stared at me. We both knew it was his job to go in because he was the older brother. “All right,” he said. “Let’s go.”

We darted across the barnyard and into the kitchen,
and all of a sudden there was Father standing there, the line of blood drying on his face. He and Sam stood five feet apart, staring at each other. Then Sam turned and ran. “Sam,” Father shouted. “Come back, Sam.”

But Sam raced across the barnyard and then began pounding over the snowy field toward the woodlot, the Brown Bess under his arm. Father and I ran out into the barnyard and watched him go. Father knew he couldn’t catch Sam. We watched him until he got to the stone wall at the edge of our pasture. He jumped up on it and stood there looking back at us. Then suddenly he waved, jumped down from the wall, and disappeared into the woodlot.

**Up to that time the war hadn’t been very real.** I mean I knew it was going on because of stories in the *Connecticut Journal*, and from tales we heard in the tavern—stories travelers would tell us about somebody being killed or suddenly coming across some fresh bodies in a field. One man who stopped with us had been at the Battle of Lexington and had been wounded
in the knee there. He walked with a limp, and he had the ball that wounded him on a string around his neck. And of course Sam wasn't the only one from Redding who'd joined the militia; there were others, and every once in a while you'd hear about this one or that one having been in a battle and maybe having been killed or wounded.

But none of them were people I really knew and so the war had always seemed to me like a story—something that happened in some faraway place or faraway time, and didn't have anything to do with me. But after the search for weapons, I had a different feeling about it: it was real and it could come home to me, too.

Luckily, the troops hadn't really hurt anybody: a few of the men who'd put up a fuss like Father had got punched around a little, and Father had that cut which left a very thin scar you could hardly see. But even if nobody had got hurt, the people in Redding were good and angry about losing so many of their guns. Guns were valuable. It wasn't so much a matter of hunting—there wasn't too much game around, although some farmers occasionally got a deer or a muskrat for the pot. Mostly people wanted guns to go after the wolves that sometimes came down into the pastures after lambs, and for general protection.

The worst part of it was that food was already beginning to get short. Army commissary officers, like the one Sam was working for, were buying up a lot of the livestock to feed the troops. Sometimes soldiers would just take a couple of cows out of somebody's fields without paying for them, too. Both sides did it—the Patriots and the Tories. They weren't supposed to, they were always supposed to pay, but a lot of time at the end of a day's march they'd find that there wasn't anything for them to eat, and they'd just go out into a field, butcher a couple of cows, cut them up and carry them off to camp on their shoulders. It was a terrible thing to lose your milking cows because it meant no more milk or butter or cheese. There wasn't anything anyone could do about it, though. Oh, whenever it happened the people would get up a petition and complain, but it never did much good because the soldiers were gone and the beef was eaten.

By January of 1776 food was getting to be a real problem for us, too. It wasn't so much that we were going hungry, but that the meat and flour and rum and beer and everything else we needed to run the tavern and the store kept going up and up in price all the time. This forced us to raise our prices; then prices would go up again, and we'd have to raise them some more.

But still, the worst part of the war was missing Sam. Of course he'd been gone at college before, so I'd got used to the idea of having to do his share of the work and all that. But when he was at Yale I didn't have to
worry about him all the time—worry that he’d be shot
or get sick and die or something else. Although to tell
the truth, I envied him, too. I could picture him in my
mind standing on top of the stone wall by the woodlot,
the Brown Bess cradled under his arm, waving at us.

He seemed so brave and grown-up, and I wished
that I could be brave and grown-up like him, too. I
didn’t like the idea of being shot at or wounded or
killed very much, but it seemed to me that it must feel
wonderful to be able to load up a gun in the casual way
he did it. I knew that to a younger brother everything
your older brother does seems wonderful. I remember
being little and watching Sam milk Old Pru and ad-
miring him and thinking how clever he was. And then
it got to be my turn to learn how to milk Old Pru, and
I found out that there wasn’t any glory to it; it was
just hard work and made your hands ache. So I guess
that being a soldier probably didn’t have much glory to
it, either, that it was mostly just a lot of hard work.
But still, I envied Sam, and I wished I were old enough
to do something glorious, too.

So time passed and the war went on. Sometimes we’d
read about Patriot victories and other times about Tory
victories. It all seemed confused. It was hard to tell
who was really winning—partly because sometimes both
sides claimed to have won the same battle. Father said,
“The Rebels are damn fools, how can they expect to
beat the whole British army? They can win these skir-
mishes in the woods, but as soon as the British catch
them in pitched battle they’ll be done for, and no good
can come out of it but a lot of men dead.” Sometimes
Patriot militiamen would come through Redding, and
usually the officers would come into the tavern for a
mug of beer, but they never bothered anybody, they
just went away again. I’d stand at the door and watch
them go; and I wondered, if I went for a soldier, which
army would I join? The British had the best uniforms
and the shiny new guns, but there was something excit-
ing about the Patriots—being underdogs and fighting
off the mighty British army.

So it became spring; and one April morning in 1776
Mr. Heron came into the tavern with Tom Warrups.
There was a soft rain falling and a fire burning in the
fireplace. Father was rushing a chair seat, and I was
helping him. It all seemed warm and cozy.

Father stopped his work. “Good morning, Mr.
Heron,” he said. Father was always polite to Mr.
Heron. He’d been to Trinity College in Dublin, and he
was a surveyor. He’d been elected to the General As-
sembly in Hartford, but he’d been pushed out of it by
the Patriots for being a Tory. He was rich, too, al-
though nobody knew where he got his money from.
He owned a black man and he had other servants be-
sides.
“Good morning, Life,” he said to Father. Then he noticed me. “Good morning, Tim.”

“Good morning, sir,” I said.

“Life, you’ve got a smart boy there. Smart as Sam if he wanted to be. I hope he’s going on with school.”

My father shrugged. “I’d like him to, but I can’t spare him from here every day.”

Mr. Heron may have wanted me to go on with my schooling, but I wasn’t so sure of it myself. I figured I was as smart as Sam, but I didn’t have as much interest in school as he had. I liked ciphering all right, but I didn’t care much for spelling and studying the Bible and memorizing psalms.

“Oh Sam’s smarter than I am, sir,” I said, just to be modest.

“I like to see him in school when I can,” Father said, “but I need him here a good deal. I can’t run the tavern without him.”

“Still, it’s a shame to waste talent. I could make a surveyor out of him if he’d apply himself. Perhaps I might take him on as an apprentice in a year or two, once he’s learned to cipher.”

Being a surveyor was a good thing. You could make a lot of money. Father said that surveyors always knew about the good deals on land and could get rich speculating. So that part of it sounded good; but I wasn’t so sure about all that studying. “I don’t know if I’m smart enough,” I said, mostly to be modest again.

“Certainly you are, Tim.” He sat down at the long table. “Tim, how about getting me a pint of beer? And one for Tom, too.”

Tom Warrups did spare work for Mr. Heron; sometimes he ran messages for him, too. He didn’t sit because he was only an Indian, but stood leaning against the wall. I got mugs down from the shelf and filled them, and served them around, including one for Father. He sat down at the table, too, and I went back to rushing the chair.

“What do you hear from Sam?” Mr. Heron said.

“Nothing,” Father said. I knew he didn’t want to talk about Sam, but he couldn’t be rude to Mr. Heron.

“He never writes?”

“No.”

They weren’t paying any attention to me. I took a quick glance at Tom Warrups. He was standing there holding his mug of beer, his face blank. I couldn’t figure out which side he was on. He lived on Mr. Read’s land, and Mr. Read was a Patriot. But he ran messages for Mr. Heron, and Mr. Heron was a Tory.

“It’s a shame about Sam,” Mr. Heron said.

My father shrugged, but didn’t say anything.

Mr. Heron must have known that Father didn’t want to talk about Sam, but he said, “Perhaps there’d be a way of finding out where he is.”

“If he wants to see us he knows where we live.”

Mr. Heron nodded. “Actually I didn’t come to talk
about Sam. I want to talk about Tim. I have a little job I thought Tim might do for me. I need a boy to walk down to Fairfield for me."

I watched Father's face. His eyes got narrow and he stared straight ahead. "Why a boy, Mr. Heron? What's wrong with Tom?"

Heron shrugged. "Pretty hard for a strange Indian to walk down there without getting stopped every five miles. Nobody's going to bother a boy."

It was a scary idea, but exciting. It would be a real adventure. But of course I knew that I wasn't supposed to have any opinion in the matter so I kept my mouth shut.

"What's he going to be carrying?" Father said.

"Oh just some business letters," Mr. Heron said casually. "Nothing important."

Father said nothing, but stared down into his beer. Mr. Heron took a drink. Then he said, "There's no danger, Life, nobody's going to bother a boy."

"Business letters," Father said.

"Yes. Business letters."

I couldn't keep my mouth shut any longer. "I can do it, Father. I can walk down there tomorrow morning and be back by suppertime."

"Be quiet, Tim."

"I'd pay him a shilling."

My father stared into his beer again and then slowly he began to shake his head. "No, Mr. Heron," he said.

"No. I've got one mixed up in this bloody war already. I'm not going to let the other one go."

Mr. Heron paused before he spoke. "I said they were business letters, Life. Business letters."

Father stared at him. "No, Mr. Heron. No."

When Father said no he meant no. It disappointed me. It would have been a good adventure walking down to Fairfield on my own. It was on Long Island Sound. I'd only been there two or three times in my life, when I'd gone down with Father and Sam to buy rum. Carrying letters down to Fairfield would give me something to boast about to Sam. But Father had said no. That was that and Mr. Heron knew it.

Mr. Heron finished his beer, and stood up. "I had more faith in you than that, Life," he said. "I thought I could count on you. We're all making sacrifices these days."

My father was standing, too. "I've made a sacrifice, Mr. Heron, I've lost a son. You know I have no love for the Rebels, but this is one war I'm not going to fight."

Mr. Heron nodded, and he and Tom Warrups left. I picked up the beer mugs to clean them. "I wish you'd have let me go, Father. Nothing would have happened to me."

Father put his hand on my shoulder. "Those weren't business letters, Tim."

"What?" I was surprised.
“I don’t know what Heron’s game is. He talks like a Tory all right, but it doesn’t all quite make sense. Best thing is not to get involved with him. You can be sure any letters he’s sending around aren’t just about ordinary business. Now let’s forget that he ever came in here.”

He stared into my eyes and I stared back. “Yes, Father,” I said.

But I couldn’t forget about it. Mr. Heron had wanted me to carry some sort of war messages or spy reports or something, and that night as I lay in bed in the loft, I thought about it. Oh, it would scare me all right, walking down to Fairfield with spy messages, but I wanted to do it, because it would give me something to boast about to Sam. He’d been having all the adventures, he was going to come home with terrific stories about being in the army and fighting and all that, and I wanted to have something to tell, too. Why should he have all the glory? Why shouldn’t I have some, too? I wanted him to respect me and be proud of me and not think of me as just his little brother anymore. I couldn’t score telling points in debates the way he did, but I could be just as brave as he was and do daring things, too.

It made me angry with Father for not letting me go. It wasn’t right—not with what Sam was doing. Of course Father hadn’t let Sam go; Sam had run away.

But still it made me angry and thinking about it, I slammed the bed with my fist. If only I could find a way to sneak off for a day.

I thought about it some more the next morning when I was milking Old Pru and the more I thought about it the angrier I got. By the time I had got Pru milked and driven out to the pasture, and fed the chickens and collected the eggs, and hung the milk down the well to keep it cool, I was plain boiling. It wasn’t fair, that was all. And when I got back to the house I was angry enough to stand up to Father.

He was sitting at the taproom table drinking tea. I faced him and stood up as straight as I could. “Father, why can’t I carry messages for Mr. Heron? You’re on the Tory side, too.”

He glanced at me and then blew on his tea to cool it. “Because I said so.”

“That’s no reason,” I said. He stared at me. “If you don’t stop arguing with me, I’ll thrash you, Timmy.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “If we’re supposed to be Loyalists, we should help—”

He slammed his fist down on the table and then jerked his thumb toward his chest. “I’ll manage the politics in this family,” he said.

“Father—”

“Timothy, goddamn it I’m going to—” And then he
stopped, and I knew why. He'd shouted at Sam and Sam had run away. He was scared that if he shouted at me I'd run away, too. "Tim, please," he said calmly as he could. "It's dangerous. You think that because you're only a child they won't hurt you, but they will. They've been killing children in this war. They don't care. They'll throw you in a prison ship and let you rot. You know what happens to people on those prison ships? They don't last very long. Cholera gets them or consumption or something else, and they die. Tim, it isn't worth it."

I knew he was right, that it wasn't worth taking the chance. I wanted to do it anyway. But there wasn't any use in arguing about it with Father.

Two weeks later I figured out how to do it. I was out on the road in front of the tavern trying to clean the mud and dirt off the boards we laid down there in the spring, when Jerry Sanford came up the road.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"The shad are running," he said. He held out a coil of fishing line with hooks and weights attached.

"Father said I could try my hand at it."

"You're lucky. Look what I have to do."

"Ask your father if you can go."

"He won't let me. There's too much to do around the tavern."

"Ask him."

So I went inside to where he was holystoning the taproom table. "Father, Jerry Sanford is going after shad. Can I go?"

"You've got a lot of things to do here."

"If we caught a lot we could salt them down."

He thought about it. "All right, go. It would be a nice change to have some fish chowder."

So we went back to Jerry's house and got another line and some hooks, and then walked down to the millstream, which was really the Aspetuck River. There was a dam there for the mill, and below the dam a couple of hundred yards was a large pool. In the spring the shad ran upriver to breed, but they couldn't get past the milldam, and the pool was just swarming with them. We caught dozens. We had a terrific time. Father was pleased. He really enjoyed fish chowder. But best of all, I had my excuse to get away.
So I slung the keg of rum over my shoulder and followed Mr. Heron up the road to his house, which was only a couple of hundred yards away from the tavern. We went around to the back, and I carried the keg into the kitchen and set it up on the rack. He reached into his pocket and handed me a penny.

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"Have you thought anymore about studying surveying with me someday?"

"Well I haven’t, sir. But I was thinking though that I might like to earn some money at that job you mentioned before."

"Aha," he said. "Your father changed his mind, did he?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "He said it would be all right so long as he didn’t know anything about it. If I just went and didn’t tell him anything, he said he wouldn’t object."

Mr. Heron put his hand on my arm and gave me a little squeeze. "That’s a lie, isn’t it, Timothy?"

I got hot and blushed. "I guess so, sir."

He let go of my arm. "Your father doesn’t change his mind very often nor very easily."

I felt stupid and looked down at the ground. "Yes, sir," I said. "I’d still like to go, though. Aren’t we supposed to be loyal to the King?"

He stroked his chin. "Not everybody thinks so."

"I do, though." I didn’t—I mean I didn’t have any
opinion either way—but I thought it would help if he believed that I was a strong Loyalist.

He smiled a kind of funny smile. “You’ve got your brother’s spirit, haven’t you?”

Being compared with Sam made me feel good. “I’m as brave as he is,” I said.

“I believe it,” he said. “Suppose I did let you run some errands for me. What would you tell your father?”

“I’d tell him I was shad fishing.”

“And come home with no fish?”

“I’d tell him they weren’t running or something. You can’t always expect to catch something.”

He rubbed his forehead, thinking. “All right. If you come up early tomorrow morning, I’ll have something for you to do to earn a shilling or so.”

So that night I asked Father if I could go fishing again. And he said yes. I felt sort of bad about it; it was lying, and lying was a sin, and so was going against your father. And even if it hadn’t been a sin I would have felt badly about it, because Father trusted me and I was being dishonorable. But I wanted some glory too much to be honorable, so Wednesday morning I got up way before the sun, when it was just beginning to get light, took my fishing line and hooks to make my excuse hold up, and walked down to Mr. Heron’s house.

I was lucky. It was a good day. That time of year it could easily have been pouring rain, and cold. But as the sun came up there were only streaks of clouds in the sky. The birds were singing and the wild flowers along the roadside were bright and gay. I felt excited in a good way, and as I walked along to Mr. Heron’s I began to whistle “Yankee Doodle” before I remembered that I ought to keep quiet so people wouldn’t notice where I was going.

When I got to Mr. Heron’s house I went around back to the kitchen door, and started to knock, but I had hardly got my fist up when the door jerked open, and Mr. Heron grabbed me by the arm and pulled me in. We walked down a hall and into his study. It seemed awfully rich to me. There was a little stove there with a few coals glowing and a desk piled high with papers and a carpet on the floor, and some chests of drawers. He sat down at the desk, wrote something out on a piece of paper, and sealed it up. “Timothy, you’ll have to move quickly. This message has to go to Fairfield. It will take you at least five hours to walk down there and five to walk back, and you’ll have to be home before dark in order not to raise suspicions. Have you ever been to Fairfield?”

“A couple of times,” I said. “With Father and Sam to get rum.”

“Then you know where the dock is. Now listen carefully. Just before you get to the dock there’s a road off
to the left. Down the road about a mile there’s a house
with white siding and green trim. Knock there. Ask for
Mr. Burr. And give him this letter. He’ll give you a
shilling. Right? Now repeat it back.”

I did so; then I tucked the letter down inside my
shirt and left, slipping out the back way and through
his pasture before I cut back onto the road. The sun
was now up and was rising over the meadowland to the
east. I judged it to be about seven o’clock. The sun
wouldn’t go down again until around seven at night,
which gave me twelve hours—plenty of time if I
walked along swiftly. In fact, if everything went well,
I could easily be back by the middle of the afternoon,
which might even give me time to catch a few shad to
show Father. I hid the fishing tackle behind a stone
wall just in case.

I moved at a brisk pace. Despite the sun, the air was
morning cool and fresh. It was nice weather for walk-
ing and I felt excited, not scared. I was worried about
dropping the letter, though, and I kept touching it to
make sure that it hadn’t fallen out of my shirt. After a
while I came to the place where the road from the Cen-
ter runs into the Fairfield Road. I stopped for a minute
to rest and to see if I couldn’t find a better way to stow
the letter so it would be safe. I was trying to find a way
to hitch it under my belt when I heard somebody shout.
I looked up. Betsy Read was coming down the road
from the Center.

“Hello, Tim,” she said.

“Hello.”

She came up to me. “What’re you doing here?
What’s that?”

Hastily I shoved the letter back into my shirt.
“Nothing,” I said.

“Well it isn’t nothing,” she said. “It’s a letter.” She
smiled. “You’ve got a girlfriend.”

“No,” I said. “I have to go. I’m kind of in a hurry.”

“I’ll walk with you,” she said. “Where are you go-
ing?”

It made me nervous having her walk along with me.
She wasn’t suspicious of anything, and I didn’t think
she would go down to the tavern and tell Father she’d
seen me; but if she should happen accidentally to bump
into him, she might say something. “I’m going fish-
ing,” I said.

“Fishing? On the Fairfield Road?”

“There are shad in the millstream.”

“Well you’re going in the wrong direction,” she said.

“Oh. Well I know that, I was up there already, but
there weren’t any shad so I’m going someplace else
now.” I was blushing from telling so many lies. Lying
is a sin.

“Don’t you want to know where I’m going?” she
said.

“Sure,” I said.

“I’m going down to Horseneck. Guess what doing.”
It was better to have her talk than me, because it saved me lying.

“I don’t know. Shopping for cloth?”
“Guess again.”

Horseneck was down on Long Island Sound, too, but much further south than Fairfield. I couldn’t figure out what she might be doing there. “Visiting your cousins?”
“I don’t have any cousins down there.”
“What then?”
“Seeing Sam,” she said.
I stopped dead in the road. “Sam? Is he in Horseneck?”
“I shouldn’t tell you that. You’re a Tory. Anyway he’s not there anymore, they’ve gone someplace else.”

We weren’t walking along anymore, but facing each other. I was all excited. “How do you know Sam’s there?”

“Mr. Heron told me.”

“Mr. Heron? How does he know, he’s a Tory?”

She frowned. “Well I know that, but he said that Sam was there with a commissary officer, scouting for beef.”

It didn’t make any sense. Mr. Heron was supposed to be a Tory; he wasn’t supposed to know where American commissary officers were. Suddenly I realized I was wasting time. “Where is he now?”

“I won’t tell you. You’re a Tory.”
“That’s not fair, Betsy. He’s my brother.”
“God, Tim, you tried to shoot him.”
I blushed. “Is Sam all right?”
“Yes, he was in battle—I guess I better not tell you about it.”

“You can tell me if it already happened, can’t you?”
“I better not,” she said.
“Listen,” I said, “I better get going.”
We started walking. “Where are you off to in such a rush?” she said.

“If you won’t tell me anything, I won’t tell you, either.” I thought that was a pretty smart answer; it was like one of Sam’s telling points.

“All right, sulk,” she said. “Besides, I know you’re carrying a love letter for somebody.”

“You’ve just got love on your mind because of Sam,” I said. Something was puzzling me. “Betsy, how come Mr. Heron didn’t tell me about Sam this morning?”

“Because you’re a Tory.”
“But so is he,” I said.
She stopped. “What were you seeing Mr. Heron about this morning?”

I realized I’d made a bad mistake. “Oh I just happened to go by his house this morning and he was there.”
“There? Where?”
“He was standing in the yard.”
“Doing what?” she asked.
“How do I know what he was doing?”
“He wouldn’t have been standing . . . the letter.
Tim, you’re lying. The letter. He gave you the letter
to carry. Tim, where are you going with that letter?”
She was pretty excited and kind of bouncing around
in front of me. “I have to go, Betsy.”
She jumped in my way. “Oh no you don’t, not until
you tell me about the letter.”
She was bigger than me, but not by much, and I
figured that since I was a boy I could break away from
her and run if she tried to stop me. “That’s a private
letter,” I said. “I can’t tell you about it.”
“Oh no, Tim,” she shouted. “Give me that letter.”
“No,” I said. I tried to duck past her, but she
jumped in front of me again.
“Tim,” she screamed. “You know what’s in that
letter? A spy report on Sam.”
That shocked me. “It can’t be. Why would Mr.
Heron make a spy report on Sam?”
“Not on just Sam. Can’t you see? He found out about
Sam and the commissary officer buying beef, and now
he’s sending news to the Lobsterbacks so they’ll know
where to find them and kill them and steal the cows.
Give me that letter.”

She snatched at my shirt, but I ducked back. “Don’t,
Betsy. It’s Mr. Heron’s.”
“Tim, you’re going to get Sam killed. They’ll set up
an ambush for them and kill them all.”
“No, no,” I said.
“It’s true, Tim, figure it out. You can’t deliver that
letter.”
“I have to,” I said.
She stood in front of me, kind of begging. “Tim,
let’s open it and see. If there’s nothing important in it,
then you can deliver it.”
“I can’t break the seal, Betsy. It’s Mr. Heron’s letter.
I could be put in jail for that.”
“Tim, it’s your brother they’re going to kill. Just
throw the letter away and say you lost it.”
I didn’t know what to do. I felt awful—sick and
scared. I didn’t say anything.
“Tim, give me that letter.”
“Betsy—”
Then she jumped me. She caught me completely by
surprise. She just leaped onto me and I fell down back-
wards and she was lying on top of me, trying to wrestle
her hands down inside of my shirt. “Goddamn you,
Betsy,” I shouted. I grabbed her by her hair and tried to
pull her head back, but she jerked it away from me. I
began kicking around with my feet trying to catch her
someplace where it would hurt, but she kept wriggling
from side to side on top of me and I couldn't get in a
good kick. I hit her on the back but in that position I
couldn't get much force. "Get off me, Betsy."

"Not until I get that letter," she said. She jerked at
my shirt, trying to pull it up. I grabbed at her hands
and twisted my body underneath her to turn over so I
would be on top, but she pushed her whole weight
down on me, grunting. So I slammed her as hard as I
could on the side of her head.

"You little bastard," she shouted. She let go of my
shirt with one hand and slapped me as hard as she
could across my face. My nose went numb and my eyes
stung and tears began to come.

"Damn you," I shouted. I let go of her hand where
she was clutching my shirt and grabbed her by the
shoulders, trying to push her off me. She jerked my
shirt up, grabbed the letter and jumped to her feet.
Without rising I kicked out with my feet at her ankles.
I got in a good one; she stumbled, but she didn't fall.
By the time I got up she was running down the Fair-
field Road as hard as she could, opening the letter as
she went. I started to run after her, and then she flung
the letter over her shoulder onto the road and disap-
peared out of sight around the next bend. I ran up to
the letter and picked it up. It was rumpled and dirty.
All it said was, "If this message is received, we will
know that the messenger is reliable."

THE SUMMER OF 1776 CAME AND WENT. I TRIED TO
keep away from Mr. Heron. If I saw him coming into
the tavern, I'd go out to clean the barn or down to the
woodlot to do some chopping. But a few times he took
me by surprise before I could get away. He never said
anything about the letter at all. He'd just say, "Hello,
Timothy," or "It's a fine day, isn't it, Timothy?" and