

## 1775 ♦ The Midnight Ride

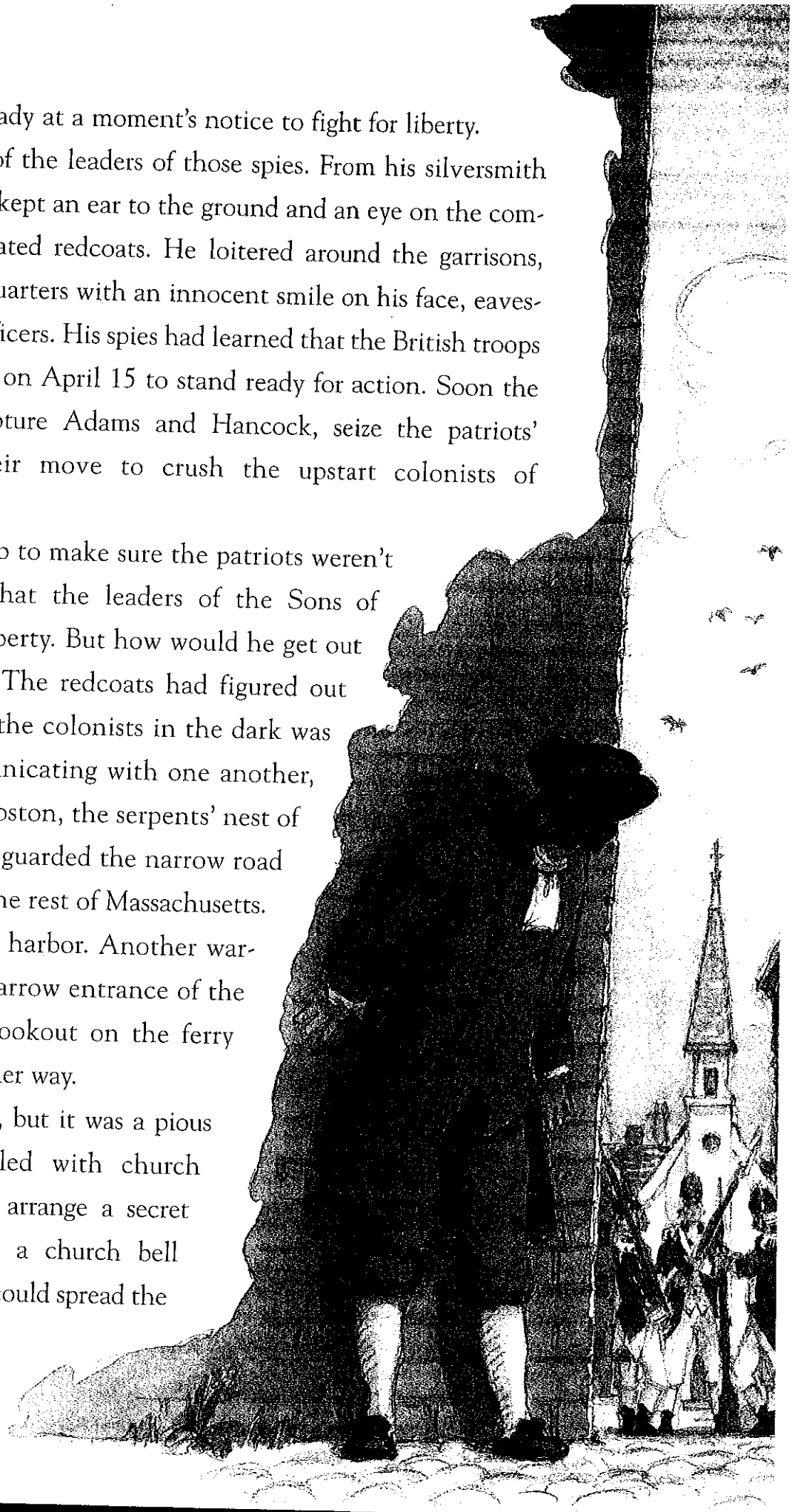
Boston had been simmering for years, like a kettle of water heating up to boil lobsters. The British were taxing Massachusetts and the other colonies to death. Taxes on newspapers and legal documents. Taxes on tea. Even taxes on dice! And what's more, the colonists weren't allowed to elect their own representatives to decide how those taxes should be spent. Oh, no. Britain was treating the colonies as though they were naughty children. But the colonies were all grown up, and they weren't going to take it anymore!

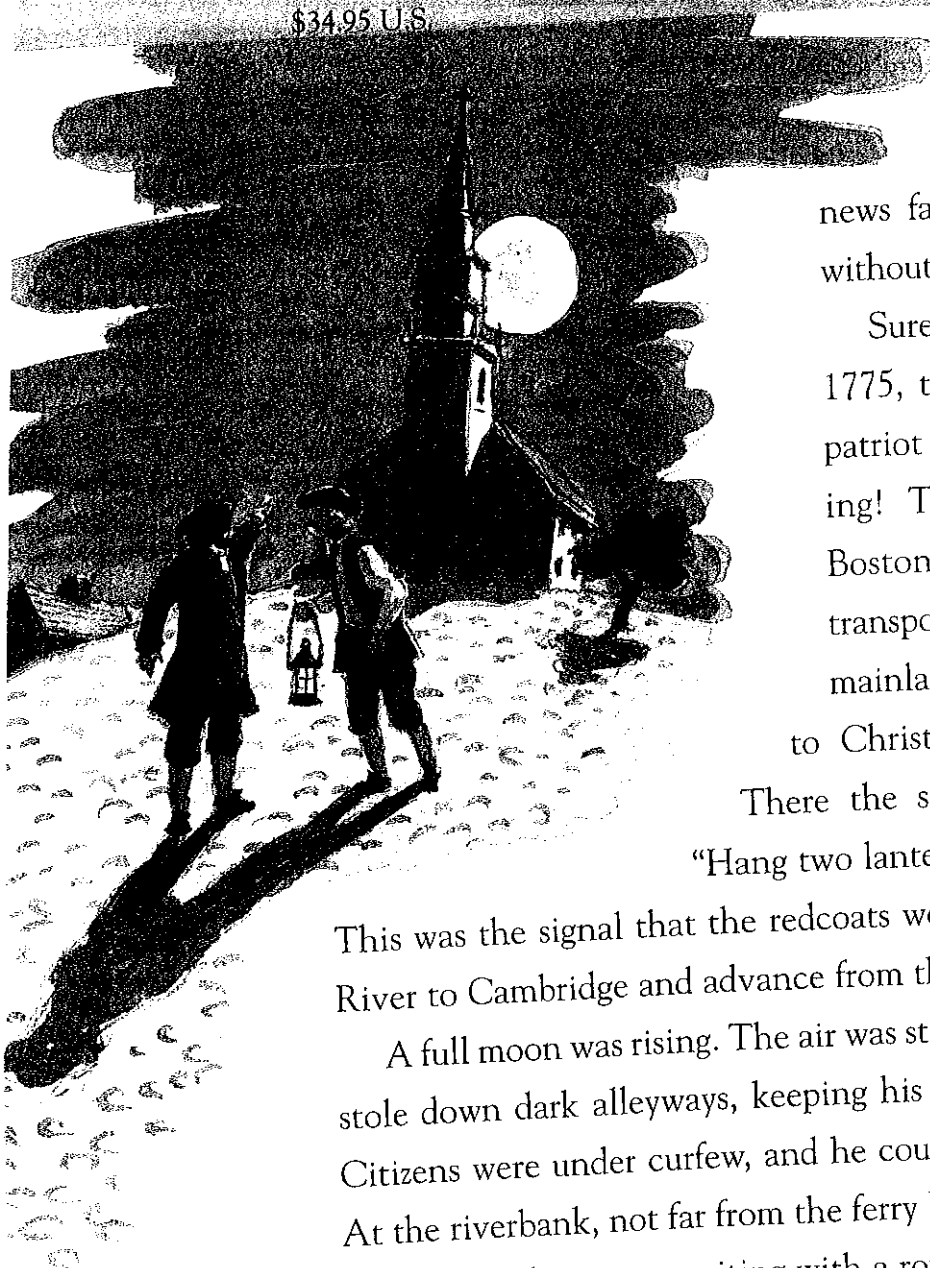
The Sons of Liberty had been meeting secretly for months in taverns such as the Green Dragon in Boston's North End. This rebel group was making dangerous plans—plotting against the king! This was treason! Now the rebel leaders, John Hancock and Samuel Adams, were in hiding in Lexington, just outside Boston. They were trying to keep out of jail and away from a hangman's noose. Their network of spies, the Committee of Safety, kept watch on the British troops garrisoned in Boston: watching, waiting, and stockpiling their muskets. In the countryside, every patriot not already in the militia was made part of the minuteman army—the rebel

...who would be ready at a moment's notice to fight for liberty. Revere was one of the leaders of those spies. From his silversmith shop on North Street, he kept an ear to the ground and an eye on the comings and goings of the hated redcoats. He loitered around the garrisons, walking past the headquarters with an innocent smile on his face, eavesdropping on the British officers. His spies had learned that the British troops had been issued the order on April 15 to stand ready for action. Soon the soldiers would try to capture Adams and Hancock, seize the patriots' weapons, and make their move to crush the upstart colonists of Massachusetts.

It would be Revere's job to make sure the patriots weren't taken by surprise—and that the leaders of the Sons of Liberty didn't lose their liberty. But how would he get out of Boston to warn them? The redcoats had figured out that the best way to keep the colonists in the dark was to keep them from communicating with one another, and that meant isolating Boston, the serpents' nest of revolution. British soldiers guarded the narrow road that connected Boston to the rest of Massachusetts. British ships blockaded the harbor. Another warship was anchored in the narrow entrance of the Charles River, keeping a lookout on the ferry route. There had to be another way.

Boston wasn't a big town, but it was a pious one, and its skyline bristled with church steeples. If the rebels could arrange a secret code—one lantern hung in a church bell tower, or two lanterns—they could spread the





news far and near at a moment's notice without having to leave town.

Sure enough, on the night of April 18, 1775, the whisper sped from one Boston patriot to another: The British are moving! The redcoats were mustering on Boston Common and readying troop transport boats for a water crossing to the mainland. At ten o'clock, Revere hurried to Christ Church, high atop Copps Hill.

There the sexton was waiting for his orders.

"Hang two lanterns in the belfry," Revere told him.

This was the signal that the redcoats were going to row across the Charles River to Cambridge and advance from there toward Lexington.

A full moon was rising. The air was still damp from a spring rain as Revere stole down dark alleyways, keeping his ears open to the sound of a patrol. Citizens were under curfew, and he couldn't afford to be caught this night! At the riverbank, not far from the ferry landing, his friends Josh Bentley and Tom Richardson were waiting with a rowboat.

"I've got to get over the river and spread the warning! The redcoats are looking to arrest Adams and Hancock," he told them.

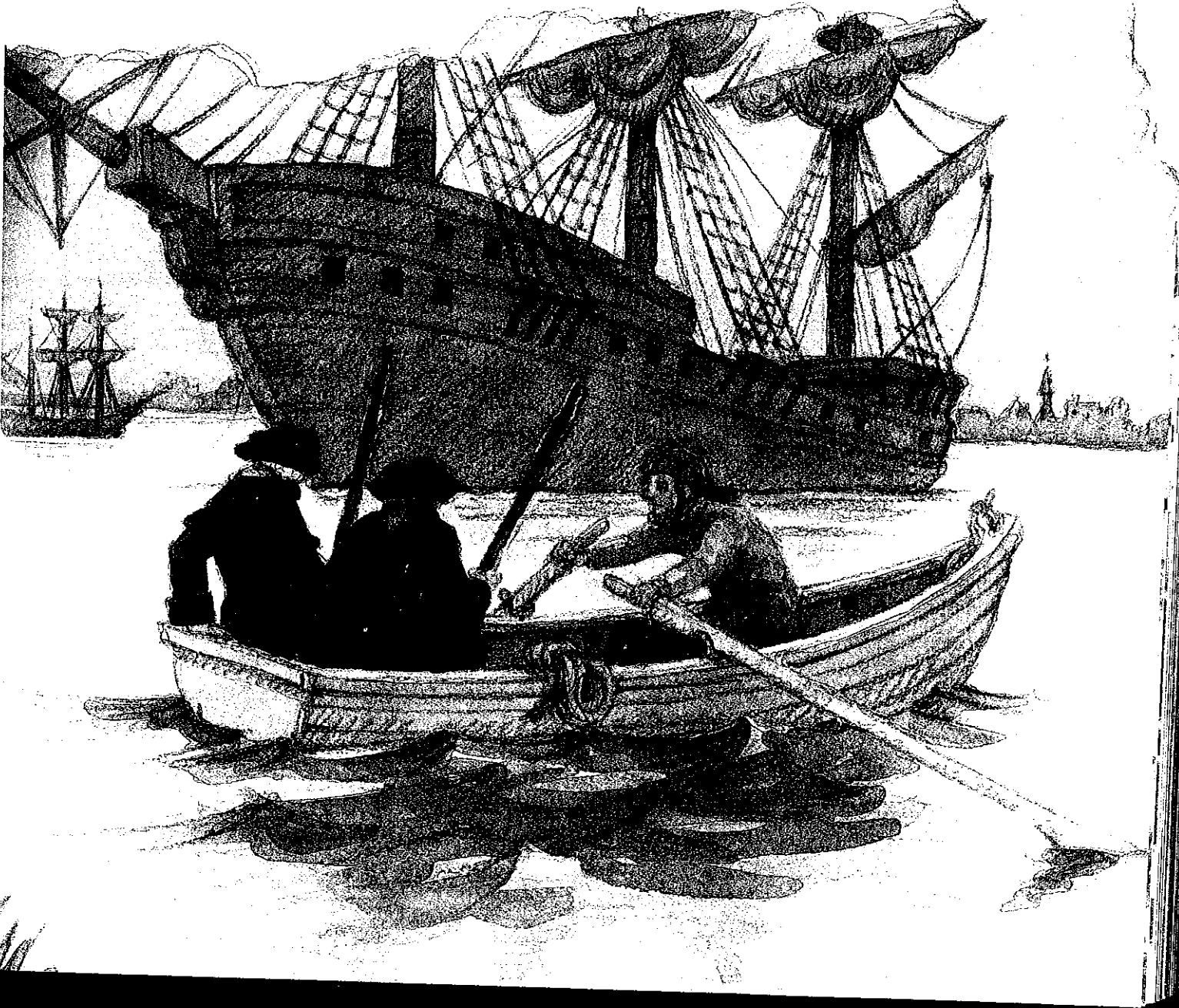
Out on the river, the warship HMS *Somerset* was silhouetted against the moon. The rowers slipped past with muffled oars—dip and pull, right through the shadow of the enemy ship to Charlestown. Already patriots on the opposite shore were preparing for battle: they had seen Revere's signal lights in the church steeple. A Charlestown merchant loyal to the cause loaned Revere a horse, and the silversmith set out on one of the most famous nighttime rides

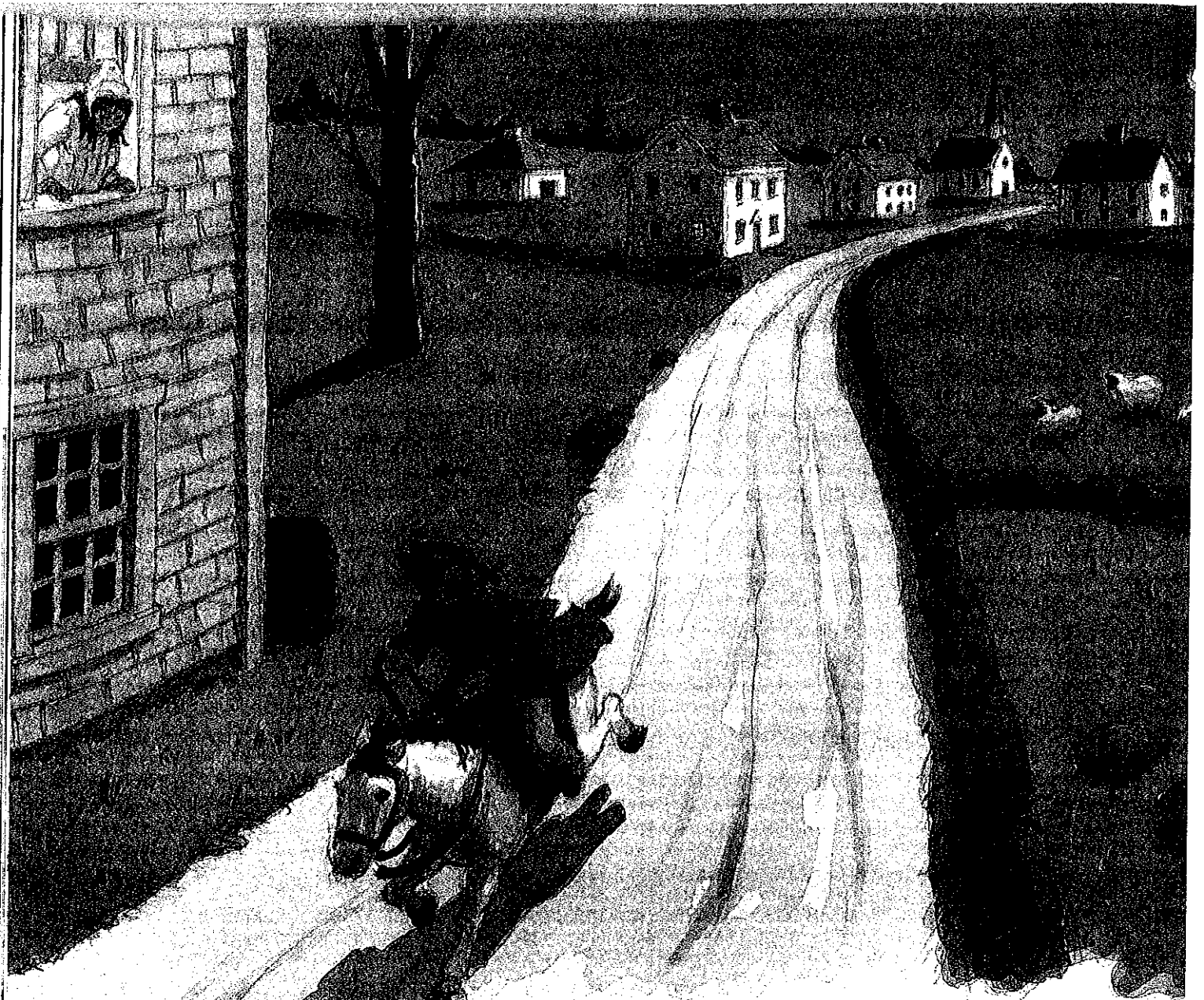
American history. The British were not far behind him, crossing the Charles River in troop boats.

From Charlestown to Lexington rode Revere, pounding on farmhouse doors all along the way. "The British are coming! Arm yourselves, minutemen!" he shouted.

From haylofts and root cellars, from underneath featherbeds and inside empty butter churns—out came the muskets. The minutemen were ready for war.

"Adams and Hancock! Rouse yourselves, the troops are coming for you!" Revere warned the rebel leaders and spurred his horse on for Concord. "The British are coming!"





By the time Revere's midnight ride was over, there wasn't a patriot in the countryside who wasn't prepared to face the British from behind a musket. When the sun rose on the morning of the 19th of April, British troops marched into Lexington and found a force of armed rebels waiting for them. With the firing of the first shots, the American Revolution had begun.

*Note:* Two years earlier, Revere, Sam Adams, and the Sons of Liberty dressed up as Mohawk Indians and raided ships of the British East India Company in Boston Harbor, throwing the cargo overboard to protest high taxes on tea. The episode is known to history as the Boston Tea Party. For other protests, see 1846, 1900, 1955, and 2000.