

The British are Coming!

It was April 18. Winter still hung in the air, but the snows had melted. The inside of the cabin was warm, and the fire in the hearth made an orange glow. Mary and Jonah looked forward to evenings. This was the time of day that their parents sat and talked, while Mary and Jonah listened in.

“There’s more talk of war,” their father said. He went into town every Tuesday, all the way to Lexington, to bring in some of his carvings to sell. Even though he had given up life as a sailor and settled down to farm when he came to America, he still liked to carve things, as sailors do to pass the time. On a good week, he could earn a few **shillings**¹. Once he bought peppermint sweets at the general store.

Their mother, who was born in the **Colonies**², had mixed feelings about the war. Like many others whose parents and grandparents had been born in New England, she didn’t think of herself as British. But still, she didn’t like the idea of war. “People will be hurt. And, if we don’t win, things could get very bad for us. They hang traitors, you know.” Their father nodded. And even though he had been born in England and still sounded English, he was more inclined toward freedom. “What can a king thousands of miles away know about life here?” he asked.

As their parents talked, Mary and Jonah gathered up the wax that had fallen onto the table. They scraped wax from the **sconces**³ that were nailed to the wall. They would put these scraps into the ball of wax that their mother kept under the washbasin. In another week or so, they would melt it down again for new candles.

The fire in the fireplace turned to embers. The family trooped to bed. As she fell asleep, Mary had a feeling that something was about to happen that would change her life.

She was awakened a few hours later by the pounding of hoofbeats coming from the road. She heard her father jump from bed. She could hear him grab his gun from the place by the door. “It’s so late. Who could it be?” their mother asked. Soon the rider was upon them. “The British are coming! The British are coming!” the rider shouted. With that, their father rushed outside and unhitched his horse. Then he rode toward Lexington.

1 **shilling**: a former unit of British money

2 **Colonies**: British settlements in North America which became the United States of America after the Revolutionary War

3 **sconce**: a candlestick that is hung on a wall