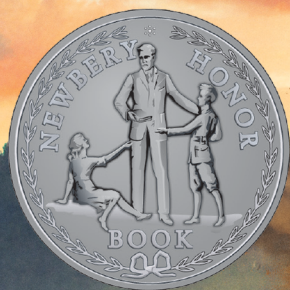


GOLD

My Brother Sam

The classic novel of
the Revolutionary War

Is Dead



James Lincoln Collier & Christopher Collier

 SCHOLASTIC



IT WAS APRIL, AND OUTSIDE IN THE DARK THE RAIN whipped against the windows of our tavern, making a sound like muffled drums. We were concentrating on our dinner, and everybody jumped when the door slammed open and banged against the wall, making the plates rattle in their racks. My brother Sam was standing there, wearing a uniform. Oh my, he looked proud.

"Sam," my mother said. We hadn't seen him since Christmas.

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

But Sam was too excited to pay attention. "We've beaten the British in Massachusetts," he shouted.

"*Who* has beaten the British?" Father said.

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

Nobody said anything. They were silent and shocked. I couldn't take my eyes off him; he looked so brave. He was wearing a scarlet coat with silver buttons and a white vest and black leggings halfway up to his knees. Oh, I envied him. He knew everybody was staring, but he liked being the center of attention, and he pretended

it was just an ordinary thing and he was used to it. "I'm starved," he said, and sat down at the table. "I started out from Yale at six o'clock this morning and didn't stop to eat all the way."

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

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

"Don't eat like that," Father snapped.

Sam looked embarrassed and sat up straight.

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

Sam dug his spoon into the stew and started to fill his mouth, but suddenly he realized that if he began talking with his mouth full, Father would yell at him

again, so he put the spoonful of stew back on his plate. "Well it's hard to tell it orderly, Father. There were so many rumors around New Haven last night that—"

"I thought it might be like that," Father said.

"No, no, it's true about the fighting," Sam said. "Captain Arnold told us himself."

"Captain Arnold?"

"Captain Benedict Arnold. He's Captain of the Governor's Second Foot Guard." He looked down at his stew. "That's my company." He looked up and gave Father a quick sort of scared look.

"That explains the fancy dress, I imagine," Father said.

"Captain Arnold designed the uniform—"

"Never mind, tell the story."

"Well, the beginning was when the Lobsterbacks—"

"By that I suppose you mean the soldiers of your King," Father said. He was still holding onto his temper.

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

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

Sam looked confused. "Well, I guess the British. I mean that's what they said in New Haven."

"Who said?"

"Well, I'm not sure," Sam said. "I guess it's hard to tell in a battle. But anyway—"

"Sam," Father said. "Who do you think fired first?"

"I don't know, Father, I don't know. But anyway—"

"I should think it might matter to know, Sam," Father said.

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

"All right, all right," Mr. Beach said. "Let's not argue the point. What happened then?"

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

"Damn it, that's rebellion," one of the farmers said. "They'll have us in war yet."

Mr. Beach shook his head. "I think men of common sense will prevail. Nobody wants rebellion except fools and hotheads."

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

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

"Father, that isn't treas—"

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

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

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

"Oh Sam," Mr. Beach said, "I think you'll find that loyalty is a virtue everywhere. We've had these things before—that vicious nonsense of those madmen dress-

ing up like Indians and throwing tea into Boston Harbor, as if wetting a few hundredweight of tea would stop the mightiest army on the face of the earth. These agitators can always manage to stir up the passions of the people for a week or so, but it never lasts. A month later everybody's forgotten it—except the wives and children of the men who've managed to get themselves killed.”

“Sir, it's worth dying to be free.”

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

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

It made me nervous to listen to Sam argue with Father. I could see that Mr. Beach wanted to quiet him down, too, before he and Father got into a real fight the way they sometimes did. “God meant man to obey. He meant children to obey their fathers, he meant men to obey their kings. As a subject of the Lord Our God I don't question His ways. As a subject of His Majesty, George the Third, should you

question his ways? Answer me this, Sam—do you really think you know better than the King and those learned men in Parliament?”

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

“Not many, Sam.”

“Edmund Burke.”

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

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

the grownups are wrong, but sometimes it's hard. Sometimes I have trouble keeping quiet myself, although not near as much trouble as Sam.

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

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

Besides, it made me glad to have him come home, and I didn't want him to get into a big fight with Father and spoil it. I just wanted him to shut up until dinner was over and we could go up to the loft where we slept, and I could lie in the dark snuggled up next to him to keep warm and let him tell me stories about

Yale and the pretty girls he knew in New Haven, and getting drunk with his friends and his triumphs in his debates. Sam was a triumphant sort of a person. He always had some victories to tell about whenever he came home from college. Mostly they were in debates where he scored a telling point over his enemy or whatever you call them. He would say, "And then I scored a telling point, Tim." He'd explain to me what the telling point was, which I never understood, and then he'd say, "Tim, it was a great triumph, afterwards everybody crowded around me saying, 'That was a telling point, Meeker, a telling point.'" Sam couldn't boast about his triumphs to Father or Mother or Mr. Beach or anybody like that, because boasting was pride and pride was a sin, but he could boast to me about them, because I didn't care whether it was pride or not, they were interesting. And I guess most of his boasts were true: he was always bringing home some book in Latin or Greek with an inscription saying he had won it for some telling point he had scored. Of course the inscriptions were usually in Greek which I couldn't read, but I believed him.

So anyway, I didn't want Sam to get into a fight with Father. It would spoil the fun, and besides if it were a bad enough fight, Sam might run away. He'd done that a few times after a fight with Father. Usually he just ran away to Tom Warrups' hut up behind

Colonel Read's house. Tom Warrups was the last Indian we had in Redding. He was the grandson of a famous chief named Chief Chicken which is a funny name for a chief. He didn't mind having people sleep in his hut. It made a convenient place for Sam to run away to, because it was close enough so that he could come home without any trouble after he'd stop running away.

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

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

"Take it off, then."

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

"Borrow some from Father."

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

I knew he'd stall as long as he could, but I went out anyway so as not to get into a fight with him myself. The barn is out behind the house. Actually the house is

partly a store and partly a tavern, too. The main room is the taproom, with a huge stone fireplace, and barrels full of beer and whiskey and cider. There's the big table in the middle with benches down the sides, and then at the end opposite the fireplace, more barrels and bins full of things we sell to the farmers around Redding Center, and Redding Ridge, which is our part of the town. We sell things like cloth and needles and thread, and nails, knives and spoons, salt and flour, pots and pans, and some tools, although mainly if anyone wants tools they have to go to Fairfield for them.

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

I went out. The barnyard was muddy from the April rain. I jogged across it, trying to find the least muddy spots, and went into the barn. Old Pru moored at me; she was tired of waiting to be milked. I got

down the wooden bucket from its hook and started to milk her. It's a boring job, and your hands get tired. I kept hoping Sam would come out, so I could talk to him without the grownups around. But he didn't come, so I began to daydream about being older and going to Yale with Sam and scoring some telling points myself and Sam being proud of me—even though I know that daydreams are sloth and sloth is a sin. And I got pretty far along in the daydream before Sam came in. He still had his uniform on.

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

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

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

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

“I thought you were going to change.”

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

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

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

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

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

"Help, then," I said.

"All right. I'll collect the eggs. What on earth happened to this basket?"

I'd stepped on it once when I was mad. "It got broken," I said.

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

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

"God, can't you do anything right, Tim?"

"Don't curse," I said. "It's a sin."

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

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

"You know I wouldn't do anything like that, Tim. Drunkenness is a sin."

I giggled. "So is—what's that word for girls? Lasciviousness."

"Lasciviousness, stupid, not lasciviousness. I have a new song about girls, but it's too *lasvicious* for you."

"Please sing it to me," I begged.

"No, you're too young."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That scared me, but it excited me, too. I wondered what it would be like to shoot somebody. Still I said, “I don’t believe you, Sam.”

“Oh you’ll believe it soon enough. Tomorrow I’m walking up to Wethersfield to meet my company. Then we’re going up to Massachusetts to fight the Lobsterbacks.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I told all I know at dinner.”

“Why did you come home?” I asked.

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

“Why not?”

“You’ll tell Father.”

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

“Yes you will.”

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

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

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

“All right, I won’t,” he said.

“I swear,” I said.

“On your honor?”

“Yes.”

“This is serious, Tim.”

“I swear on my honor.”

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

That shocked me more than him saying he was going to fight. The Brown Bess was the type of gun most everybody around Connecticut had. It was brown, and got its name from Queen Elizabeth, whose nickname was Bess, because they first used that type of gun a lot during her time. The gun was about as long as I was

tall, and had a bayonet around twenty inches long. Father kept the bayonet hanging over the mantelpiece. He used the Brown Bess for deer and sometimes when he went out with the other men to go after a wolf that was getting into the livestock. And he took it with him every fall when he went over to Verplancks Point to sell cattle and buy supplies for the store. He'd never met up with any trouble going over to Verplancks, but people he knew had sometimes been held up and robbed. So you can see that the gun was important to us. It was one thing for Sam to say he was going to fight the British; they were a long way from here. But to take Father's gun was pretty bad; Father was right here and he seemed a lot more real to me than the British did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I wished I hadn't. I was afraid to go back on my oath, but I was just as scared of Sam stealing the Brown

Bess, too. "Let's finish up with the stock and go to bed."

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

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

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

"Please come right up, though."

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

I didn't want to leave him; but I knew there wasn't any use in arguing, so I said goodnight to Father and Mother, said some prayers, and went upstairs. There are four bedrooms on the second floor of our house, where lodgers stay when we have them. We get a lot of people traveling through between Stratford and Danbury, and Litchfield and Norwalk, or even going over to New York, and they need places along the way to sleep. Above the second floor is the loft where Sam

and I sleep. There isn't much in it—just a couple of beds. There are no stairs up to the loft—just a ladder. I climbed up, not bothering to take a light. I knew where everything was. Besides, there are cracks in the floor which let little pieces of light through, so you can see a little if you have to. I undressed, got into bed, and pulled the blankets over me. I was always pretty tired by the time I went to bed, with all the chores I had around the tavern every day, but I wanted to stay awake to wait for Sam, so he could tell me some stories about telling points. To keep from falling asleep I lay on my back staring up at the black and watching the dots shift around in front of my eyes. But my eyes kept closing. So I began reciting all the books of the Bible from first to last, and I got to somewhere around Obadiah before I fell asleep.

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

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

“Father—”

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

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

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

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

“Principle, Sam? You may know principle, Sam, but I know war. Have you ever seen a dear friend lying in the grass with the top of his skull off and his brains sliding out of them like wet oats? Have you ever looked into the eyes of a man with his throat cut and the blood pouring out between his fingers, knowing that there was nothing he could do, in five minutes he would be dead, yet still trying to beg for grace and not being able because his windpipe was cut in two? Have you ever heard a man shriek when he felt a bayonet go through the middle of his back? I have, Sam, I have. I was at Louisbourg the year before you were born. Oh, it was a great victory. They celebrated it with bonfires all over the colonies. And I carried my best friend’s body back to his mother—sewed up in a sack. Do you want to come home that way? Do you think I want to hear a wagon draw up one summer’s morning and go out to find you stiff and bloody and your eyes staring blank at the sky? Sam, it isn’t worth it. Now take off that uniform and go back to your studies.”

“I won’t, Father.”

They were silent. It was terrible. My heart was pounding and I could hardly breathe.

“Sam, I’m ordering you.”

“You can’t order me anymore, Father. I’m a man.”

“A man? You’re a boy, Sam, a boy dressed up in a gaudy soldier’s suit.” Oh, he sounded bitter.

“Father—”

“Go, Sam. Go. Get out of my sight. I can’t bear to look at you anymore in that vile costume. Get out. And don’t come back until you come dressed as my son, not as a stranger.”

“Father—”

“Go, Sam.”

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

For Sally and Ned, who live there.

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