

# The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## Day 1

Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,  
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;  
Hardly a man is now alive  
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march  
By land or sea from the town to-night,  
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry<sup>1</sup> arch  
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—  
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;  
And I on the opposite shore will be,  
Ready to ride and spread the alarm  
Through every Middlesex<sup>2</sup> village and farm,  
For the country folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said, "Good night!" and with muffled oar  
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,  
Just as the moon rose over the bay,  
Where swinging wide at her moorings<sup>3</sup> lay  
The Somerset, British man-of-war;  
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar  
Across the moon like a prison bar,  
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified  
By its own reflection in the tide.

Meanwhile, his friend, through alley and street,  
Wanders and watches with eager ears,  
Till in the silence around him he hears  
The muster of men at the barrack<sup>4</sup> door,  
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,  
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,  
Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed the tower of the Old North Church,  
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,  
To the belfry-chamber overhead,  
And startled the pigeons from their perch  
On the sombre rafters, that round him made  
Masses and moving shapes of shade, —  
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,  
To the highest window in the wall,  
Where he paused to listen and look down  
A moment on the roofs of the town,  
And the moonlight flowing over all.  
Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,  
In their night-encampment on the hill,  
Wrapped in silence so deep and still  
That he could hear, like a sentinel's<sup>6</sup> tread,  
The watchful night-wind, as it went  
Creeping along from tent to tent,  
And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"  
A moment only he feels the spell  
Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread  
Of the lonely belfry and the dead;  
For suddenly all his thoughts are bent  
On a shadowy something far away,  
Where the river widens to meet the bay, —  
A line of black that bends and floats  
On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

1. Belfry - where the bell hangs in a tower
2. Middlesex - the county between Boston and Lexington where the action takes place
3. Where a ship is anchored
4. Barrack - where soldiers stay
5. Grenadier - soldier
6. Sentinel - watchman

A. The battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775 are considered the first of the American Revolution, even though they occurred before the war began. The poet begins his tale of the night before when Paul Revere and William Hawes warned the minutemen that the British were coming.

B. The colonists knew the British were going to march out of Boston and try to take the weapons they had hidden, but how would they go? Paul & his friend come up with a plan to hang the lanterns in the North Church belfry which could be seen across the bay.

C. Paul silently rows past the Somerset, the powerful British Man Of War, so he can watch Boston from the neighborhood of Charlestown and wait for his friend's signal.

D. His companion hangs out on the streets of Boston trying to unravel the British plan. Uh oh, they're on the march!

E. Imaginative detail is used to describe the climb up the church tower, looking over the town, then looking at the church cemetery and imagining the wind as a nightwatch going from grave to grave reassuring the dead that all is well. Then his eye catches what is important: the British are rowing across the bay in so many boats it looks like a bridge.