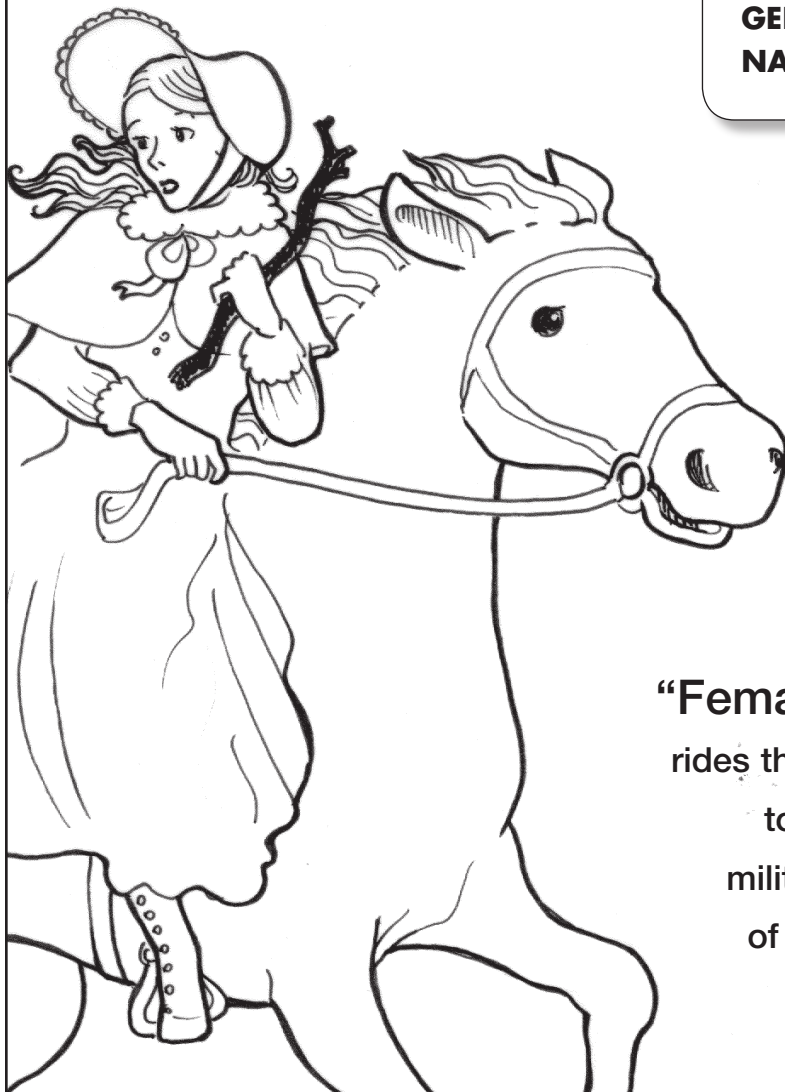


Knocks

in the Night

DON ABRAMSON



CHARACTERS

SYBIL LUDINGTON (16 YEARS)

ARCHIE LUDINGTON (10 YEARS)

HENRY LUDINGTON (8 YEARS)

REBECCA LUDINGTON (14 YEARS)

MARY LUDINGTON (12 YEARS)

COLONEL HENRY LUDINGTON

MRS. ABIGAIL LUDINGTON

ZACH

MR. HIRAM POTTER

MRS. EMILY POTTER

MR. NORDSTROM

MAN 1

MAN 2

SOLDIER 1

SOLDIER 2

GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON

NARRATORS 1-8

In 1777, the
“Female Paul Revere”
rides through a stormy night
to warn the local
militia of the advance
of the British army.

SCENE 1

SYBIL All right now, Archie, Henry. Stop your fussing and go to sleep. See, Derrick's asleep already.

ARCHIE Aw, he's just a baby, Sybil.

HENRY Yeah, we're older.

SYBIL It's still your bedtime.

NARRATOR 1 The time is April 26, 1777, during the middle of the American colonies' fight for independence.

NARRATOR 2 The place is Fredericksburg, New York.

NARRATOR 3 The scene is one that gets repeated every night in every household on the farms and in the villages and cities of this new land.

NARRATOR 4 But tonight will not be like every other night. Tonight Sybil Ludington will become a hero.

ARCHIE Can't we stay up just a little longer?

HENRY We haven't seen Pa for months, he's been off fighting.

SYBIL Henry, you were dozing off already, sitting by the fire. Pa's home now. You'll see him tomorrow.

ARCHIE Wait—listen. There's a horse. Somebody's come!

SYBIL Well, I'll go down and see who it is. But you two stay in bed.

SCENE 2

NARRATOR 5 The kitchen is a scene of some activity. There is a stranger at the door, and he looks like a wild man!

COLONEL LUDINGTON Come inside, quickly.

ZACH Thank you. You're Colonel Ludington?

COLONEL LUDINGTON I am. Here, sit down at the table. Abigail?

MRS. LUDINGTON Yes, Henry. Rebecca, Mary, get our guest some hot tea and biscuits and some of that ham.

REBECCA Yes, Ma.

ZACH I shouldn't. I'm all wet and muddy. It's raining pretty hard out there.

MRS. LUDINGTON Never mind that, it'll clean up. Sit, sit, and the girls'll bring you some food. You look exhausted.

ZACH Thank you, Mrs. Ludington. I've ridden over from Danbury.

REBECCA That's more than seventeen miles!

MARY In this kind of weather! You must be brave!

ZACH No, ma'am. But I've a message for the Colonel.

COLONEL LUDINGTON I knew it was too good to be true. I've just come home. My men are all on leave so they can do their spring planting.

ZACH Yes, sir. But things are bad. British soldiers have taken over Danbury.

MRS. LUDINGTON Oh, no!

REBECCA Here's some ham for you, and some fresh biscuits. We just made them tonight.

MARY And some nice, hot tea—with sugar!

ZACH Much obliged, ladies.

(Rebecca and Mary giggle together.)

COLONEL LUDINGTON What's your name, son?

ZACH Zach, sir.

COLONEL LUDINGTON Tell me, Zach.

ZACH Yes, sir. They come into town yesterday. Anchored in Long Island Sound, we think, and marched up through Reddings Ridge. Looks to be about two thousand of them, and we've only got about a hundred-fifty militia. Things are just out of control. Colonel, they're burning Danbury to the ground!

MRS. LUDINGTON That's where the Continental Army is storing all its supplies and ammunition, isn't it, Henry?

ZACH Yes, ma'am. They spared the church, and they marked crosses on the houses of folks loyal to the king. Those they spare, but then they're burning everything else.

NARRATOR 6 The messenger goes on to elaborate details of what is burning.

NARRATOR 7 According to a later report, twenty-two stores and barns are destroyed this night, with all their contents.

NARRATOR 8 Nineteen private homes.

NARRATOR 1 And the Danbury Society Meeting House.

NARRATOR 2 Of the Continental Army supplies, four thousand barrels of beef and pork.

NARRATOR 3 One hundred barrels of biscuits.

NARRATOR 4 Eighty-nine barrels of rice.

NARRATOR 5 One hundred hogsheads of sugar and fifty of molasses.

NARRATOR 6 Twenty casks of coffee.

NARRATOR 7 Large stores of wheat, oats, and corn.

NARRATOR 8 Fifteen casks of medicines of all kinds.

NARRATOR 1 Over one thousand tents.

NARRATOR 2 Five thousand pairs of shoes and stockings.

NARRATOR 3 A large quantity of hospital bedding.

NARRATOR 4 Engineers' and carpenters' tools.

NARRATOR 5 And a complete printing press.

ZACH And I don't know how many guns and ammunition, taken or destroyed.

MRS. LUDINGTON But Zach, what about the people?

ZACH Why, they're getting out, Mrs. Ludington, those that can. Hiding in the woods, a lot of them. Some folks taken prisoner.

REBECCA How awful for them!

ZACH Mostly they're just waiting and hoping for help to come.

MARY I hope those British don't come here!

COLONEL LUDINGTON Well, Mary, we'll just have to make sure they don't. (*To Zach.*) Who's in charge, do you know?

ZACH It's General Tyron.

COLONEL LUDINGTON William Tyron!

SYBIL You know him, don't you, Pa? Isn't he—?

COLONEL LUDINGTON He's the British-appointed Governor of New York. We served together. He's the one who appointed me captain in our colonial regiment before we formed the Continental Army to fight those British imperialists. It sickens me to think of him acting toward his own people like this.

ZACH Colonel Ludington, sir, your Seventh Regiment is the only colonial regiment between Danbury and Peekskill—

COLONEL LUDINGTON Yes, and we've got to get them back together. They won't be happy. They just got home. And it won't be easy. They're scattered all over the countryside.

MRS. LUDINGTON Henry, you got them together before, and you can do it again. You have to go rescue Danbury.

COLONEL LUDINGTON You're right. But how? I can't go. I've got to be here to get the men organized when they start to come in.

ZACH I'll go, sir. I'm feeling much better now I've had some food and a rest. Just you tell me where—Ahhh! (*He cries out in pain.*)

MRS. LUDINGTON Are you hurt?

ZACH No, ma'am. My horse shied at some branches and threw me, is all. It's nothing—

MRS. LUDINGTON Let me look at your ankle. Does that hurt?

ZACH Ahhh! No, ma'am, that doesn't hurt hardly at all.

COLONEL LUDINGTON Still, you're in no condition to get back on your horse for another long ride. But whom can I send?

ARCHIE We'll go, Pa! Me and Henry can ride together!

MRS. LUDINGTON Archie, Henry, what are you doing out of bed?

ARCHIE We heard that man ride up.

COLONEL LUDINGTON It's all right, Abigail. They deserve to know what's going on. But boys, you're just too young.

HENRY Awww, Pa!

SYBIL Pa, I can go. I'm sixteen now, and that's as old as a lot of boys gone for soldiers. And I can ride real well, you said so yourself. And Star knows me and likes me.

COLONEL LUDINGTON Yes, Sybil.

SYBIL After all, I practically raised her myself, and I've taken care of her—what?

COLONEL LUDINGTON I said yes. You are the one to go.

SYBIL Oh, thank you, Pa! I can do it, you'll see!

COLONEL LUDINGTON I'm sure you will. Archie, Henry, go out and saddle up Star for your sister.

ARCHIE All right, Pa.

COLONEL LUDINGTON And be sure you get that girth strap tight, you hear?

HENRY We will, Pa.

MRS. LUDINGTON Henry—

COLONEL LUDINGTON Abigail, I have no choice.

MRS. LUDINGTON You thought I was going to object to Sybil's going, but I'm not. You're right, she's the one to do it. Sybil, here—you'll need your warm wool cloak and your bonnet.

SYBIL Where do you want me to go, Pa?

COLONEL LUDINGTON Let's see. I think if you go south by the river, then along Hourse Pound Road to Mahopac [mah HOH pak] Pond. Then turn west and go to Red Mills, then north to Stormville. There'll be a lot of men scattered in farms off the road, but they'll start notifying each other. Tell them to muster here at dawn. And Sybil—

SYBIL Yes, Pa?

COLONEL LUDINGTON Be careful, my girl. Come back safe.

SYBIL I will, Pa.

SCENE 3

NARRATOR 6 As Sybil and her family leave the bright warmth of the kitchen for the chilly night darkness, they can see the sky glowing red.

REBECCA Look there, in the east. That's not lightning.

ZACH It's Danbury, burning.

MARY Oh, it must be an awful big fire!

ARCHIE Here's Star, Sybil. All saddled and ready for you.

SYBIL Thank you, Archie.

HENRY And here's a stick, in case you have to beat off any British soldiers.

SYBIL And thank you, Henry.

REBECCA Ohhh—you will be careful, won't you Sybil? I'd just die if anything happened to you.

SYBIL I will, Rebecca.

MARY And when you come back, you'll tell us all about it—everything!

SYBIL I promise, Mary. Good-bye!

(The family members all ad lib their good-byes.)

MRS. LUDINGTON Henry, I know Sybil is a young woman now. She's sensible and responsible and all that, and I know she can do the job. But you won't think me awful if I worry about her—just a little bit?

COLONEL LUDINGTON Abigail, you can worry for both of us.

SCENE 4

NARRATOR 7 As Sybil Ludington starts off on her big night, the rain has let up a little bit, but there is more to come.

NARRATOR 8 The night is dark, except for that ominous red glow in the eastern sky, a constant reminder of the importance of her journey.

NARRATOR 1 And it is not an easy journey. There are many dangers.

NARRATOR 2 There are no paved roads. What roads there are are little more than wagon-wheel ruts.

NARRATOR 3 There are rocks to trip over, and holes to fall into.

NARRATOR 4 There are branches to duck.

NARRATOR 5 And mud—mud that makes it difficult for the horse, Star, to lift her feet.

NARRATOR 6 There are human dangers too. There are men called Cowboys, who are pro-British loyalists who steal for the British army. If they knew what she was doing, they'd try to stop her.

NARRATOR 7 And worse—the woods are full of men called Skinners, who are not really loyal to either the British or the American side but only to themselves, and who steal and kill at random.

NARRATOR 8 Sybil has lived here all her sixteen years, and she knows about all these dangers. Still, she faces them and rides on.

NARRATOR 1 Leaving her home, the mill that her father owns and runs in times of peace, she rides south by the river and on to the farmhouses along Horse Pound Road.

NARRATOR 2 They are all dark. It's a time all decent, hard-working people are in bed.

NARRATOR 3 But at least she knows the people who live there. Using the stick her brother Henry had given her, she pounds on the closed shutters.

SYBIL (*pounding with her stick*) Mr. Potter! Mr. Potter, wake up!

MRS. POTTER Hiram, listen. Somebody's knocking outside.

MR. POTTER What, at this time of night? Who is it? What do you want?

SYBIL It's me, Sybil Ludington, Mr. Potter. Pa sent me. The British are burning Danbury, and the Seventh Regiment has to muster at Ludington's Mill!

MRS. POTTER Merciful heavens! Hiram, you'd better get a-moving!

MR. POTTER I am, Emily, I am. You can get my gun down from over the fireplace—now, where are my pants?

NARRATOR 4 Sybil rides on. She repeats her message at farmhouse after farmhouse. On to Carmel, Mahopac, and Lake Mahopac. She doesn't know many people so far from home, but she can't afford to be shy.

SYBIL (*pounding with her stick*) The British are burning Danbury! All the Seventh Regiment muster at Ludington's Mill!

MR. NORDSTROM I'll be there. Tell me, did you see the Schuster brothers yet?

SYBIL No, I—I don't know them.

MR. NORDSTROM No, you wouldn't have. They live up that side road. You go on. I'll notify them.

SYBIL Thank you!

NARRATOR 5 On she rides, swinging west and then back north, heading for Stormville, north of Ludington's Mill.

NARRATOR 6 Somewhere along the road she hears rough voices in the dark. A curse and then a loud laugh.

NARRATOR 7 Are they soldiers? Or are they the dreaded Skinners, thieves and murders who live for themselves?

NARRATOR 8 Sybil takes no chances. She dismounts Star and leads her off the road where they stand under the trees as quietly as they can while two men pass in the other direction.

SYBIL (*whispering*) Easy, Star, shhh!

MAN 1 I told you there'd be nobody out tonight, not in this weather.

MAN 2 You can never tell. Maybe we'd get lucky.

MAN 1 Yeah, somebody with a purseful of gold, riding at night along this road!

MAN 2 Well—Oh blast! It's starting to rain again.

MAN 1 I tell you, I'm not staying out any longer. I'm heading home.

MAN 2 Yeah, me too.

NARRATOR 1 As they ride on by in the blackness of the rainy night, Sybil breathes a huge sigh of relief. Then she climbs back up into the saddle again and urges Star onward.

NARRATOR 2 On she rides, now to Red Mills and Mahopac Mines. Knocking on doors throughout the night.

SYBIL (*pounding with her stick*) The British! Danbury's burning!

NARRATOR 3 On she rides, to Kent Cliffs and Redding Corners.

SYBIL (*pounding*) All the men of the Seventh Regiment!

NARRATOR 4 On she rides, to Pecksville and up to Stormville.

SYBIL (*pounding*) Muster at Ludington's Mill!

SCENE 5

NARRATOR 5 When she finally nears her home again, it is nearly dawn.

NARRATOR 6 She has ridden in a big loop, some forty miles altogether.

NARRATOR 7 She is exhausted and filthy with mud, and her hand aches terribly from pounding with her stick on doors and shutters of every farmhouse and cabin she could find.

SYBIL Just a few more miles, Star. We're almost home now. You've been such a good, brave horse!

NARRATOR 8 And as she turns in the yard of Ludington's Mill—

SOLDIER 1 There she is—there's Sybil!

SOLDIER 2 Sybil! Well done, lass! There's a girl with real courage!

NARRATOR 1 There they are, some four hundred soldiers who have heeded her call and gathered together to reform their regiment.

NARRATOR 2 Four hundred soldiers grin at her in the dim, milky light just before dawn.

SOLDIER 1 Let's hear it for Sybil! (*The soldiers all cheer her.*)

SYBIL Hello, Pa.

COLONEL LUDINGTON There's my girl! You did it, Sybil! Look at the men, and more arriving every minute. We'll be ready to march on Danbury within the hour.

MRS. LUDINGTON Sybil, I'm so proud of you!

SYBIL Thanks, Ma.

ARCHIE Hey, good going, sis!

HENRY I told you she'd do the job. Just like a real soldier!

ARCHIE Well, I never said she wouldn't!

REBECCA Sybil, I am so glad you're home safe. Here, have some hot tea.

SYBIL Oh, thank you, Rebecca, I can use that!

REBECCA The soldiers are calling you a hero.

SYBIL I don't know about that.

REBECCA Well, that's what they say.

MARY Sybil, you promised to tell me everything that happened.

SYBIL Oh, and I will, Mary—but not right now. Right now what I need most is to go to bed.

MARY All right, but will you tell me one thing?

SYBIL Yes, if I can.

MARY Weren't you scared at all?

SYBIL Mary, there were moments—when I was terrified!

SCENE 6

NARRATOR 3 But Sybil's story doesn't end there.

NARRATOR 4 Some time later, after the fighting has run its course, and the British are gone from American shores, she has a visitor.

COLONEL LUDINGTON Sybil, there's somebody here who wants to meet you. He's ridden here from Philadelphia just to see you.

SYBIL Who is it, Pa?

COLONEL LUDINGTON May I present—General George Washington.

SYBIL Ohhh! General Washington!

GENERAL WASHINGTON How do you do, Miss Ludington. I've been hearing a great deal about you.

SYBIL Thank you, sir.

GENERAL WASHINGTON And I want to thank you in person, and to tell you something.

SYBIL Yes, sir?

GENERAL WASHINGTON Now that we've won the war, it's time to start building a new nation. We don't know how to do that, exactly. Nobody's ever done that before. But I do know one thing. A country with citizens like yourself—loyal patriots who put the welfare of others before their own comforts—such a country will be a great country!

NARRATOR 5 And that's the story of Sybil Ludington, the "female Paul Revere," who has proved that anyone, no matter how young, can do the right thing and make a difference.