

## 789. Paul Revere's Ride

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

- 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. 5  
He said to his friend, 'If the British march
- 1 By land or sea from the town to-night,  
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch  
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—  
One, if by land, and two, if by sea; 10  
And I on the opposite shore will be,  
Ready to ride and spread the alarm  
Through every Middlesex village and farm,  
For the country folk to be up and to arm.'
- Then he said, 'Good-night!' and with muffled oar 15  
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,  
Just as the moon rose over the bay,  
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
- 2 The Somerset, British man-of-war;  
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar 20  
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, 25
- 3 Till in the silence around him he hears  
The muster of men at the barrack 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. 30

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  
 4 On the **sombre** rafters, that round him made 35  
 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, 40  
 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** tread, 45  
 The watchful night-wind, as it went  
 Creeping along from tent to tent,  
 And seeming to whisper, 'All is well!'

5 A moment only he feels the spell 50  
 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 55  
 On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,  
 Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride  
 On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.

6 Now he patted his horse's side, 60  
 Now gazed at the landscape far and near,  
 Then, **impetuous**, stamped the earth,  
 And turned and tightened his saddle-**girth**;  
 But mostly he watched with eager search

The belfry-tower of the Old North Church, 65  
 As it rose above the graves on the hill,  
 Lonely and **spectral** and sombre and still.

6 And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height  
 A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!  
 He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns, 70  
 But **lingers** and gazes, till full on his sight  
 A second lamp in the belfry burns!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,  
 A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,  
 And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark 75  
 Struck out by a **steed** flying fearless and **fleet**;

7 That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,  
 The fate of a nation was riding that night;  
 And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,  
**Kindled** the land into flame with its heat. 80

He has left the village and mounted the steep,  
 And beneath him, **tranquil** and broad and deep,  
 8 Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;  
 And under the **alders** that skirt its edge,  
 Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge, 85  
 Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

It was twelve by the village clock,  
 When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.

9 He heard the crowing of the cock,  
 And the barking of the farmer's dog, 90  
 And felt the damp of the river fog,  
 That rises after the sun goes down.

It was one by the village clock,  
 When he galloped into Lexington.

10 He saw the **gilded weathercock** 95  
 Swim in the moonlight as he passed,  
 And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,

10 Gaze at him with a spectral glare,  
As if they already stood **aghast**  
At the bloody work they would look upon. 100

It was two by the village clock,  
When he came to the bridge in Concord town.  
He heard the **bleating** of the flock,  
And the twitter of birds among the trees,  
11 And felt the breath of the morning breeze 105  
Blowing over the meadows brown.  
And one was safe and asleep in his bed.  
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,  
Who that day would be lying dead,  
Pierced by a British musket-ball. 110

You know the rest. In the books you have read,  
How the British Regulars fired and fled,—  
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,  
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall,  
12 Chasing the red-coats down the lane, 115  
Then crossing the fields to emerge again  
Under the trees at the turn of the road,  
And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;  
And so through the night went his cry of alarm 120  
To every Middlesex village and farm,—  
13 A cry of **defiance** and not of fear,  
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door  
And a word that shall echo forevermore!  
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past, 125  
Through all our history, to the last,  
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,  
The people will waken and listen to hear  
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,  
And the midnight message of Paul Revere. 130

