

Sybil Ludington's Ride

By Berton Braley*

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of a lovely feminine Paul Revere
Who rode an equally famous ride
Through a different part of the countryside,
Where Sybil Ludington's name recalls
A ride as daring as that of Paul's.

In April, Seventeen Seventy-Seven,
A smoky glow in the eastern heaven
(A fiery herald of war and slaughter)
Came to the eyes of the Colonel's daughter.
"Danbury's burning," she cried aloud.
The Colonel answered, "'Tis but a cloud,
A cloud reflecting the campfires red,
So hush you, Sybil, and go to bed."

"I bear the sound of the cannon drumming"
" 'Tis only the wind in the treetops humming!
So go to bed, as a young lass ought,
And give the matter no further thought."
Young Sybil sighed as she turned to go,
"Still, Danbury's burning—that I know."

* This imitation of Longfellow's well-known ballad first appeared in *The Sunday Star: This Week's Magazine*, Washington, D. C., April 14, 1940. It is reprinted in *Sybil Ludington: A Call to Arms* by V. T. Dacquino which is reviewed in this issue of HVRR.

Sound of a horseman riding hard
Clatter of hoofs in the manor yard
Feet on the steps and a knock resounding
As a fist struck wood with a mighty pounding.
The doors flung open, a voice is heard,
“Danbury’s burning—I rode with word;
Fully half of the town’s gone
And the British—the British are coming on.
Send a messenger, get our men!”
His message finished the horseman then
Staggered wearily to a chair
And fell exhausted in slumber there.

The Colonel muttered, “And who, my friend,
Is the messenger I can send?
Your strength is spent and you cannot ride
And then, you know not the countryside;
I cannot go for my duty’s clear;
When my men come in they must find me here;
There’s devil a man on the place tonight
To warn my troopers to come—and fight.
Then, who is my messenger to be?”
Said Sybil Ludington, “You have me.”

“You!” said the Colonel, and grimly smiles,
“You! My daughter, you’re just a child.”
“Child!” cried Sybil. “Why I’m sixteen!
My mind’s alert and my senses keen,
I know where the trails and the roadways are
And I can gallop as fast and far
As any masculine rider can.
You want a messenger? I’m your Man!”

The Colonel’s heart was aglow with pride.
“Spoke like a soldier. Ride, girl, ride
Ride like the devil; ride like sin;
Summon my slumbering troopers in.
I know when duty is to be done
That I can depend on a Ludington!”

So over the trails to the towns and farms
Sybil delivered the call to arms.
Riding swiftly without a stop
Except to rap with a riding crop
On the soldiers’ doors, with a sharp tattoo
And a high-pitched feminine halloo.
“Up! Up there, soldier. You’re needed, come!
The British are marching!” and then the drum
Of her horse’s feet as she rode apace
To bring more men to the meeting place.

Sybil grew weary and faint and drowsing,
Her limbs were aching, but still she rode
Until she finished her task of rousing
Each sleeping soldier from his abode,
Showing her father, by work well done,
That he could depend on a Ludington.

Dawn in the skies with its tints of pearl
And the lass who rode in a soldier's stead
Turned home, only a tired girl
Thinking of breakfast and then to bed
With never a dream that her ride would be
A glorious legend of history;
Nor that posterity's hand would mark
Each trail she rode through the inky dark,
Each path to figure in song and story
As a splendid, glamorous path of glory—
To prove, as long as the ages run,
That "you can depend on a Ludington."

Such is the legend of Sybil's ride
To summon the men from the countryside
A true tale, making her title clear
As a lovely feminine Paul Revere!