

# *Johnny Tremain*

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Written by ESTHER FORBES

Illustrated by LYND WARD

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT  
Boston New York

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# *To Pamela, Emily, John and Molly Taylor*

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## *I. Up and About*



ON ROCKY ISLANDS gulls woke. Time to be about their business. Silently they floated in on the town, but when their icy eyes sighted the first dead fish, first bits of garbage about the ships and wharves, they began to scream and quarrel.

The cocks in Boston back yards had long before cried the coming of day. Now the hens were also awake, scratching, clucking, laying eggs.

Cats in malt houses, granaries, ship holds, mansions, and hovels caught a last mouse, settled down to wash their fur and sleep. Cats did not work by day.

In stables horses shook their halters and whinnied.

In barns cows lowed to be milked.

Boston slowly opened its eyes, stretched, and woke. The sun struck in horizontally from the east, flashing upon weathervanes—brass cocks and arrows, here a glass-eyed Indian, there a copper grasshopper—and the bells in the steeples cling-clanged, telling the people it was time to be up and about.

In hundreds of houses sleepy women woke sleepier children. Get up and to work. Ephraim, get to the pump, fetch Mother water. Ann, get to the barn, milk the cow and drive her to the Common. Start the fire, Silas. Put on a clean shirt, James. Dolly, if you aren't up before I count ten . . .

And so, in a crooked little house at the head of Hancock's Wharf on crowded Fish Street, Mrs. Lapham stood at the foot of a ladder

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leading to the attic where her father-in-law's apprentices slept. These boys were luckier than most apprentices. Their master was too feeble to climb ladders; the middle-aged mistress too stout. It was only her bellows that could penetrate to their quarters—not her heavy hands.

'Boys?'

No answer.

'Dove?'

'Coming, ma'am.' Dove turned over for one more snooze.

Frustrated, she shook the ladder she was too heavy to climb. She wished she could shake 'them limbs of Satan.'

'Dusty Miller—let me hear your voice.'

'Here it is,' piped Dusty pertly.

Her voice changed to pleading.

'Johnny—you get them two lazy lug-a-beds up. Get them down here. You pull that worthless Dove right out'er bed. You give Dusty a kick for me. I'm waiting for him to fetch fresh water so's I can get on with breakfast.'

Johnny Tremain was on his feet. He did not bother to answer his mistress. He turned to the fat, pale, almost white-haired boy still wallowing in bed.

'Hear that, Dove?'

'Oh—you . . . leave me lay, can't you?' Grumbling, he swung his legs out of the bed the three boys shared.

Johnny was already in his leather breeches, pulling on his coarse shirt, tucking in the tails. He was a rather skinny boy, neither large nor small for fourteen. He had a thin, sleep-flushed face, light eyes, a wry mouth, and fair, lank hair. Although two years younger than the swinish Dove, inches shorter, pounds lighter, he knew, and old Mr. Lapham knew, busy Mrs. Lapham and her four daughters and

Dove and Dusty also knew, that Johnny Tremain was boss of the attic, and almost of the house.

Dusty Miller was eleven. It was easy for Johnny to say, 'Look sharp, Dusty,' and little Dusty looked sharp. But Dove (his first name had long ago been forgotten) hated the way the younger apprentice lorded it over him, telling him when to go to bed, when to get up, criticizing his work in the silversmith's shop as though he were already a master smith. Hadn't he been working four years for Mr. Lapham and Johnny only two? Why did the boy have to be so infernally smart with his hands—and his tongue?

'Look here, Johnny, I'm not getting up 'cause you tell me to. I'm getting up 'cause Mrs. Lapham tells me to.'

'All right,' said Johnny blandly, 'just so you're up.'

There was only one window in the attic. Johnny always stood before it as he dressed. He liked this view down the length of Hancock's Wharf. Counting houses, shops, stores, sail lofts, and one great ship after another, home again after their voyaging, content as cows waiting to be milked. He watched the gulls, so fierce and beautiful, fighting and screaming among the ships. Beyond the wharf was the sea and the rocky islands where gulls nested.

He knew to the fraction of a moment how long it would take the two other boys to get into their clothes. Swinging about, he leaped for the head of the ladder, hardly looking where he went. One of Dove's big feet got there first. Johnny stumbled, caught himself, and swung silently about at Dove.

'Gosh, Johnny. I'm sorry,' snickered Dove.

'Sorry, eh? . . . you're going to be a lot sorrier . . .'

'I just didn't notice . . .'

'You do that again and I'll beat you up again. You overgrown pig-of-a-louse. You . . .'

He went on from there. Mr. Lapham was

strict about his boys swearing, but Johnny could get along very well without. Whatever a 'pig-of-a-louse' was, it did describe the whitish, flaccid, parasitic Dove.

Little Dusty froze as the older boys quarreled. He knew Johnny could beat up Dove any time he chose. He worshiped Johnny and did not like Dove, but he and Dove were bound together by their common servitude to Johnny's autocratic rule. Half of Dusty sympathized with one boy, half of him with the other, in this quarrel. It seemed to him that everybody liked Johnny. Old Mr. Lapham because he was so clever at his work. Mrs. Lapham because he was reliable. The four Lapham girls because he sassed them so—and then grinned. Most of the boys in the other shops around Hancock's Wharf liked Johnny, although some of them fought him on sight. Only Dove hated him. Sometimes he would get Dusty in a corner, tell him in a hoarse whisper how he was going to get a pair of scissors and cut out Johnny Tremain's heart. But he never dared do more than trip him—and then whine out of it.

'Someday,' said Johnny, his good nature restored, 'I'll kill you, Dove. In the meantime, you have your uses. You get out the buckets and run to North Square and fetch back drinking water.'

The Laphams were on the edge of the sea. Their well was brackish.

'Look here—Mrs. Lapham said Dusty was to go and . . .'

'Get along with you. Don't you go arguing with me.'

Fetching water, sweeping, helping in the kitchen, tending the annealing furnace in the shop were the unskilled work the boys did. Already Johnny was so useful at his bench he could never be spared for such labor. It was over a year since he had carried charcoal or a bucket of water, touched a broom or helped Mrs. Lapham brew ale. His ability made him semi-sacred. He knew his power and reveled

in it. He could have easily made friends with stupid Dove, for Dove was lonely and admired Johnny as well as envied him. Johnny preferred to bully him.

Johnny, followed by his subdued slaves, slipped down the ladder with an easy flop. To his left was Mr. Lapham's bedroom. The door was closed. Old master did not go to work these days until after breakfast. Starting the boys off, getting things going, he left to his bustling daughter-in-law. Johnny knew the old man (whom he liked) was already up and dressed. He took this time every day to read the Bible.

To his right, the only other bedroom was open. It was here Mrs. Lapham slept with her four 'poor fatherless girls,' as she called them. The two biggest and most capable were already in the kitchen helping their mother.

Cilla was sitting on the edge of one of the unmade beds, brushing Isannah's hair. It was wonderful hair, seemingly spun out of gold. It was the most wonderful thing in the whole house. Gently Cilla brushed and brushed, her little oddly shaped face turned away, pretending she did not know that Johnny was there. He knew neither Cilla nor Isannah would politely wish him the conventional 'good morning.' He was lingering for his morning insult.

Cilla never lifted her eyes as she put down her brush and very deliberately picked up a hair ribbon (the Laphams couldn't afford such luxuries, but somehow Cilla always managed to keep her little sister in hair ribbons). Very carefully she began to tie the child's halo of pale curls. She spoke to Isannah in so low a voice it was almost a whisper.

'There goes that *wonderful* Johnny Tremain.'

Isannah took her cue, already so excited she was jumping up and down.