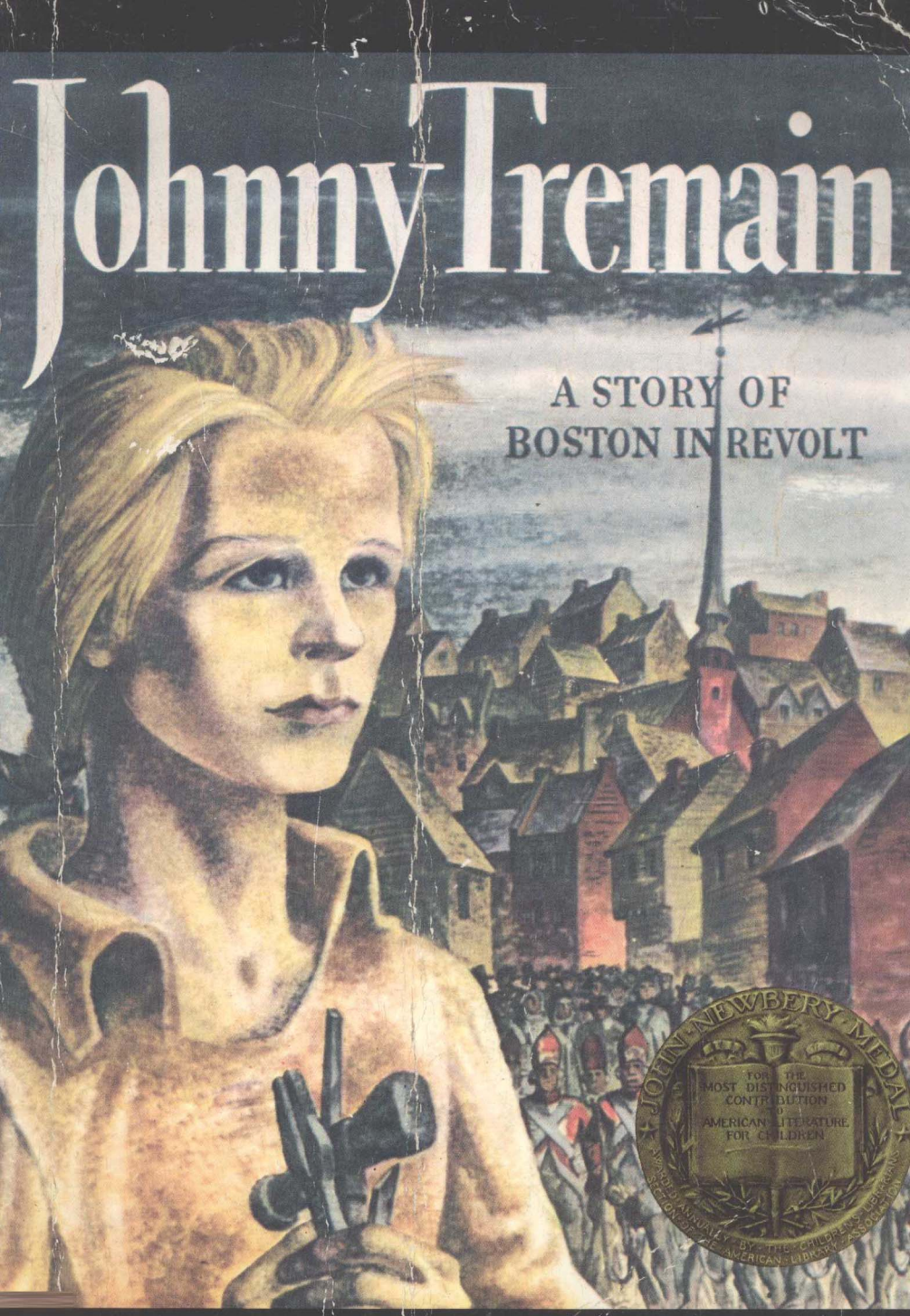
Johnny Tremain

A STORY OF
BOSTON IN REVOLT



BY Esther Forbes, AUTHOR OF
LITZER PRIZE WINNER "Paul Revere"

JOHNNY TREMAIN

awarded

the JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL

as

'The most distinguished contribution

to American literature for children'

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JOHNNY TREMAIN

A NOVEL FOR OLD & YOUNG

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON

Atlanta Dallas Geneva, Illinois
Palo Alto Princeton Toronto

Houghton Mifflin Edition, 1991

ISBN 0-395-06766-9

Printed in the United States of America

VB 45 44 43 42 41 40 39 38 37 36

BCDEFGHIJ-B-99876543210

Books by Esther Forbes

O GENTEEL LADY!

A MIRROR FOR WITCHES

MISS MARVEL

PARADISE

THE GENERAL'S LADY

PAUL REVERE AND THE WORLD HE LIVED IN

JOHNNY TREMAIN

To Pamela, Emily, John
and Molly Taylor

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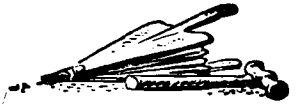

ON ROCKY ISLANDS gulls woke. Time to be about their business. Silently they floated in on the town, but when their icy eyes sighted the first dead fish, first bits of garbage about the ships and wharves, they began to scream and quarrel.

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 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.

'Johnny worth-his-weight-in-gold Tremain.'

'If you don't think he is wonderful — ask him, Isannah.'

'Oh, just how *wonderful* are you, Johnny?'

Johnny said nothing, stood there and grinned.

The two youngest Laphams were always insulting him, not only about how smart he was, but how smart he thought he was. He didn't care. Every now and then they would say something that irritated him and then together they would shout, 'Johnny's mad.'

As an apprentice he was little more than a slave until he had served his master seven years. He had no wages. The very clothes upon his back belonged to his master, but he did not, as he himself said, 'take much.'

There were only four real rooms in the Lapham house, the two bedrooms on the second floor, the kitchen and the workshop on the first. Johnny paused in the lower entry. In the kitchen he could see his formidable mistress bent double over the hearth. Madge, in time, would look like her mother, but at eighteen she was handsome in a coarse-grained, red-faced, thick-waisted way.

Dorcas was sixteen, built like Madge, but not so loud-voiced, nor as roughly good-natured. Poor Dorcas thirsted for elegance. She would rub flour on her face, trying to look pale, like the fashionable ladies she saw on the street. She wore her clothes so tight (hoping to look ethereal), she looked apoplectic. How they all had laughed when her stays burst in the middle of meeting with a loud pop! She did not call her mother 'Ma,' but 'Mother,' or 'Respected Mother'; and in her efforts to avoid the rough, easy speech of her associates on Hancock's Wharf she talked (when she remembered it) in a painfully prissy, proper way.

Johnny thought Madge pretty bad, and Dorcas even worse. But he was philosophical about them. He wouldn't mind having them for sisters. They certainly were good hard workers — except when Dorcas tried too hard to be elegant.

It had already been decided that when he grew up to be a really great silversmith (as Mr. Lapham said he would), he was to marry Cilla and together they would inherit Grandpa's silver business. Cilla was just his age. This idea seemed only mildly offensive to both of them. Johnny had no particular objections. Smart apprentices were always getting ahead by marrying into their masters' families. He had been flattered when Mrs. Lapham had told him that he might marry one of her girls. Of course, Madge and Dorcas (they were fine, big buxom girls) would make better wives. But didn't he think they were a little old for him? True, Cilla was just a mite spindly — but she was coming along fine. Isannah was so weakly it didn't seem worth making any plans for her maturity. So it was to be Cilla.

Johnny had often heard Mrs. Lapham say that Isannah was hardly worth the bother she was to raise. The little girl, her beautiful brown eyes wide with interest, never seemed to mind these remarks of her mother, but they made Cilla cry. Cilla loved Isannah. She was proud when people stopped her on the street and said, 'Is that little angel your sister?' She did not mind that there were so many things Isannah could not 'keep down' — like pork gravy, mince pies, new beer. If Isannah got wet, she had a cold — if a cold, a fever.

First Johnny, with a customary 'Look sharp,' got the sulky Dove and his buckets headed for North Square. Then he took the key to the shop out of his pocket as though he owned it. Dusty, good and quiet as a mouse, followed him.

'Look sharp, Dusty,' Johnny said. 'Get the annealing furnace going. Get to the coal house. Fetch in charcoal. You'll have to do it by yourself. I want to get this buckle mended before breakfast.'

Already the day's bustle had begun up and down the wharf: A man was crying fish. Sailors were heave-hoing at their ropes. A woman was yelling that her son had fallen into the water. A parrot said distinctly, 'King Hancock.'

Johnny could smell hemp and spices, tar and salt water, the sun drying fish. He liked his wharf. He sat at his own bench, before him the innumerable tools of his trade. The tools fitted into his strong, thin hands: his hands fitted the tools. Mr. Lapham was always telling him to give God thanks who had seen fit to make him so good an artisan — not to take it out in lording it over the other boys. That was one of the things Johnny 'did not let bother him much.'

Dove came back, his thick lower lip thrust out. The water had slopped over his breeches, down his legs.

'Mrs. Lapham does not want you in the kitchen?' — Johnny did not even look up from his buckle.

'Naw.'

'Well, then, this spoon you finished yesterday afternoon has to be melted down — made over. You beat it to the wrong gauge.'

'Did Mr. Lapham say 'twas wrong?'

'No, but it is. It is supposed to match this spoon. Look at it.'

Dove looked. There was no argument.

'So get out a crucible. 'Soon as Dusty's got the furnace going, you melt it down and try again.'

I'd like to get *you* in a crucible, thought Dove, and melt you down. I'd beat you to the proper gauge . . . Two years younger than me and look at him!

It was Isannah who ran in to tell them that Grandpa was in his

chair and breakfast was on the table. The soft brown eyes combined oddly with the flying fair hair. She *did* look rather like a little angel, Johnny thought — just as people were always telling Cilla on the street — and so graceful. She seemed to float about rather than run.

No one, to see her, would ever guess the number of things she couldn't keep down.

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Mr. Lapham, as befitted his venerable years and his dignity as master of the house, sat in an armchair at the head of the table. He was a peaceful, kind, remote old man. Although his daughter-in-law was always nagging him to collect bills, finish work when promised, and discipline his apprentices, nothing she said seemed to touch him. He did not even bother to listen.

His dull, groping eyes lingered kindly over his boys as they trooped in for breakfast.

'Good morning, Dove, Dusty. Good morning, Johnny.'

'Good morning, sir.'

He took his time blessing the meal. He was a deacon at the Cockerel Church and very pious.

Breakfast was good, although no more than a poor artisan could afford — milk and ale, gruel, sausages, and corn bread. Everything was plentiful and well cooked. The kitchen was as clean or cleaner than many of those in the great houses. Every member of the household had a clean shirt or petticoat. Mrs. Lapham was a great manager, but she cared nothing for genteel manners and was the first to laugh at Dorcas's 'If it please you, Mother — just a touch more maple syrup for me.' 'Gimme that there syrup pitcher' was good enough for her.

When the meal was over, Mr. Lapham told Madge to hand him the family Bible.

'Johnny, I'm going to ask you to read to us today.'

Of the three boys, only Johnny read easily and well. His mother had lived long enough to see to that. Dove stumbled shamefully. Dusty usually had the first chapter of Genesis, so that by reading the same thing over and over he might eventually learn.

Madge and Dorcas never cared even to try to read. Mrs. Lapham could not so much as write her name. 'Book larning,' she declared, 'scalded no pigs.' Cilla was so anxious to learn (and teach Isannah) that whenever Johnny read she leaned over the book and shaped the words to herself as he said them. They sat beside each other at table. To help her Johnny always kept a finger on the lines as he read.

Johnny now opened the book, keeping it between himself and Cilla.

'Where, sir, shall I read?'

Mr. Lapham's selections for his boys were sometimes designed to point out some fault in a member of his household, especially in the reader. Dove was always being asked to read about sluggards and going to ants.

Johnny was told where to begin in Leviticus.

'*Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image . . .*' (What was old master driving at? Couldn't a silversmith put a dragon's snout on a chocolate pot?)

Soon the surging roll of the words, the pleasure of the sound of his voice coming so clearly out of his mouth, made him stop looking for possible object lessons in the text. Cilla was leaning over him, breathing hard in her efforts to keep up. Mrs. Lapham sat agape. Soon she'd be saying it was just like having a preacher live with them to hear Johnny Tremain read Holy Writ.

'Finish with the nineteenth verse.'

'*. . . And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass.*'

'Turn to Proverbs eleven, second verse.'

'*When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*'

'Proverbs sixteen, eighteenth.'

'*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*'