

Esther Forbes

JOHNNY TREMAIN



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 weather-vanes—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.

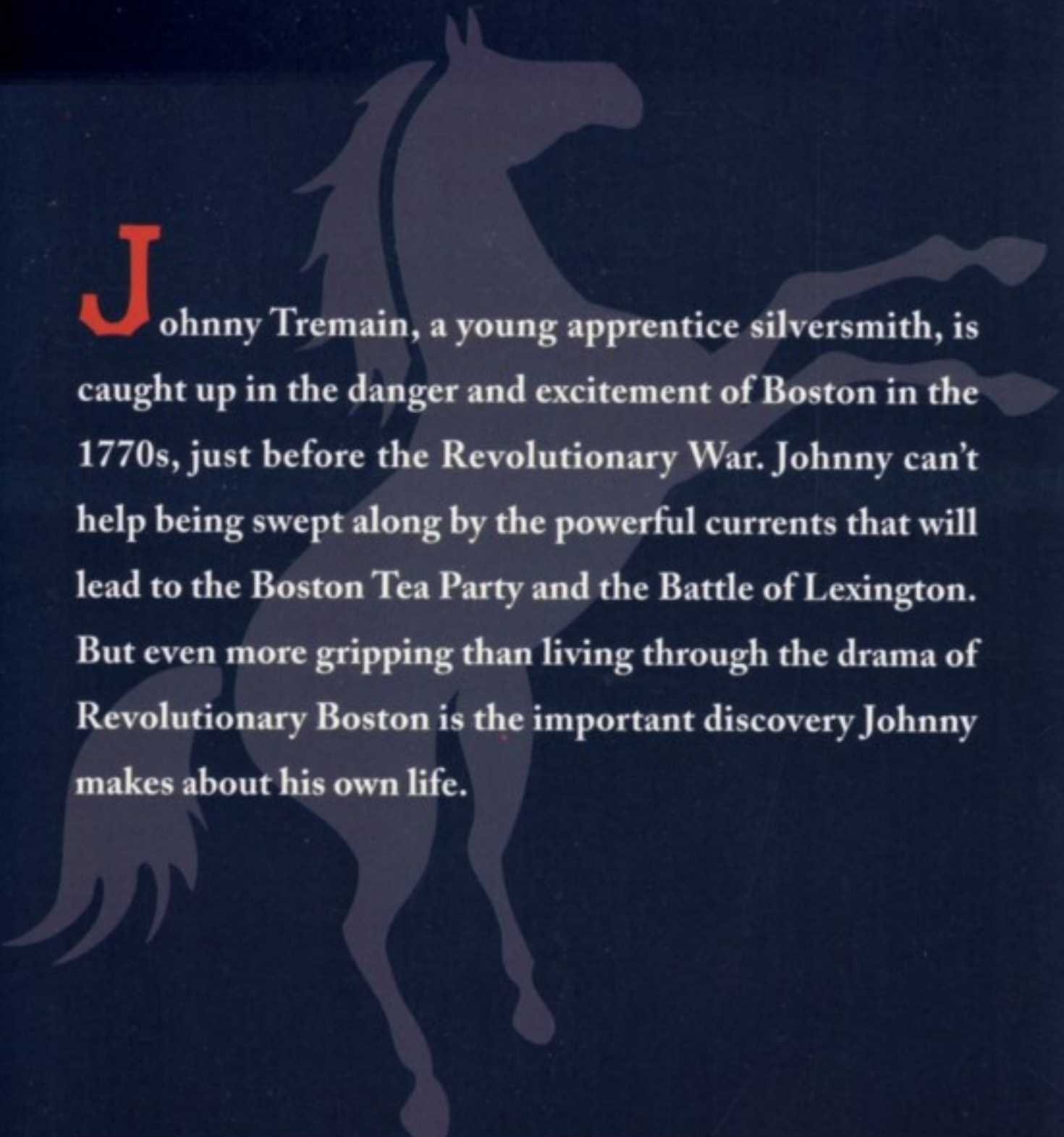
Johnny was already in his leather breeches, pulling on his coarse shirt, tucking in the tails. He was a rather skinny boy, neither large nor small for fourteen. He had a thin, sleep-flushed face, light eyes, a wry mouth, and fair, lank hair. Although two years younger than the swinish Dove, inches shorter,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



Johnny Tremain, a young apprentice silversmith, is caught up in the danger and excitement of Boston in the 1770s, just before the Revolutionary War. Johnny can't help being swept along by the powerful currents that will lead to the Boston Tea Party and the Battle of Lexington. But even more gripping than living through the drama of Revolutionary Boston is the important discovery Johnny makes about his own life.

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