

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
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Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whittman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
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# **The House in Town**

Susan Warner

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THE  
HOUSE IN TOWN.

A Sequel to "Opportunities."

BY

THE AUTHOR OF  
"THE WIDE WIDE WORLD."

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this  
life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." —  
2 TIM. ii. 4.

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# THE HOUSE IN TOWN.

## CHAPTER I.

"Oh Norton! Oh Norton! do you know what has happened?"

Matilda had left the study and rushed out into the dining-room to tell her news, if indeed it were news to Norton. She had heard his step. Norton seemed in a preoccupied state of mind.

"Yes!" he said. "I know that confounded shoemaker has left something in the heel of my boot which is killing me."

Matilda was not like some children. She could wait; and she waited, while Norton pulled off his boot, made examinations into the interior, and went stoutly to work with penknife and file. In the midst of it he looked up, and asked, —

"What has happened to *you*, Pink?"

"Then don't you know yet, Norton?"

"Of course not. I would fine all shoemakers who leave their work in such a slovenly state! If I didn't limp all the way from the bridge here, it was because I wouldn't, — not because I wouldn't like to."

"Why not limp, if it saved your foot?" inquired Matilda.

"*You* would, Pink, wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes; certainly I would."

"Well, you might," said Norton. "But did you ever read the story of the Spartan boy and the fox?"

"No."

"He stole a fox," said Norton, working away at the inside of his boot, which gave him some trouble.

"But you haven't stolen a fox."

"I should think not," said Norton. "The boy carried the fox home under his cloak; and it was not a tame fox, Pink, by any means, and did not like being carried, I suppose; and it cut and bit and tore at

the boy all the while, under his cloak; so that by the time he got the fox home, it had made an end of him."

"Why didn't he let the fox go?"

"Ah! why didn't he?" said Norton. "He was a boy, and he would have been ashamed."

"And you would have been ashamed to limp in the street, Norton?"

"For a nail in my boot. What is a man good for, that can't stand anything?"

"I should not have been ashamed at all."

"You're a girl," said Norton approvingly. "It is a different thing. What is your news, Pink?"

"But Norton, I don't see why it is a different thing. Why should not a woman be as brave as a man, and as strong,—in one way?"

"I suppose, because she is not as strong in the other way. She hasn't got it to do, Pink, that's all. But a man, or a boy, that can't bear anything without limping, is a muff; that's the whole of it."

"A muff's a nice thing," said Matilda laughing.

"Not if it's a boy," said Norton. "Go on with your news, Pink. What is it?"

"I wonder if you know. Oh Norton, do you know what your mother and Mr. Richmond have been talking about?"

"I wasn't there," said Norton. "If you were, you may tell me."

"I was not there. But Mr. Richmond has been talking to me about it. Norton,"—and Matilda's voice sank,— "do you know, they have been arranging, and your mother wishes it, that I should *stay* with her?"

Matilda spoke the last words very softly, in the manner of one who makes a communication of somewhat awful character; and in truth it had a kind of awe for her. Evidently not for Norton. He had almost finished his boot, and he kept on with his filing, as coolly as if what Matilda said had no particular interest or novelty. She would have been disappointed, but that she had caught one gleam

from Norton's eye which flashed like an electric spark. She just caught it, and then Norton went on calmly, —

"I think that is a very sensible arrangement, Pink. I must say, it is not the first time it has occurred to me."

"Then you knew it before?"

"I did not know they had settled it," said Norton, still coolly.

"But you knew it was talked about? O Norton! why didn't you tell me?"

Norton looked up, smiled, dropped his boot, and at once took his new little sister in his arms and clasped her right heartily.

"What for should I tell you, Pink?" he said, kissing Matilda's eyes, where the tears of that incipient disappointment had gathered.

"How could you *help* telling me?"

"Ah, that is another thing," said Norton. "You couldn't have helped it, could you?"

"But it is true now, Norton."

"Ay, it is true; and you belong to mamma and me now, Pink; and to nobody else in the wide world. Isn't that jolly?"

"And to Mr. Richmond," Matilda added.

"Not a bit to Mr. Richmond; not a fraction," said Norton. "He may be your guardian and your minister if you like; and I like him too; he's a brick; but you belong to nobody in the whole world but mamma and me."

"Well, Norton," said Matilda, with a sigh of pleasure — "I'm glad."

"Glad!" said Norton. "Now come, — let us sit right down and see some of the things we'll do."

"Yes. But no, Norton; I must get Mr. Richmond's supper. I shall not have many times more to do that; Miss Redwood will be soon home, you know."

"And we too, I hope. I declare, Pink, I believe you like getting supper. Here goes! What is to do?"

"Nothing, for you, Norton."

"Kettle on?"

"On ages ago. You may see if it is boiling."

"How can an iron kettle boil? If you'll tell me that."

"Why, the water boils that is in it. The kettle is put for the water."

"And what right have you to put the kettle for the water? At that rate, one might do all sorts of things—Now Pink, how can I tell if the water boils? The steam is coming out of the nose."

"*That's* no sign, Norton. Does it sing?"

"Sing!" said Norton. "I never learned kettle music. No, I don't think it does. It bubbles; the water in it I mean."

Matilda came in laughing. "No," she said, "it has stopped singing; and now it boils. The steam is coming out from under the cover. *That's* a sign. Now, Norton, if you like, you may make a nice plate of toast, and I'll butter it. Mr. Richmond likes toast, and he is tired to-night, I know."

"I can't make a plate," said Norton; "but I'll try for the toast. Is it good for people that are tired?"

"Anything comfortable is, Norton."

"I wouldn't be a minister!" said Norton softly, as he carefully turned and toasted the bread,— "I would not be a minister, for as much as you could give me."

"Why, Norton? I think I would — if I was a man."

"He has no comfort of his life," said Norton. "This sort of a minister doesn't have. He is always going, going; and running to see people that want him, and stupid people too; he has to talk to them, all the same as if they were clever, and put up with them; and he's always working at his sermons and getting broken off. What comfort of his life does Mr. Richmond have now? except when you and I make toast for him?"

"O Norton, I think he has a great deal."

"I don't see it."

Matilda stood wondering, and then smiled; the comfort of *her* life was so much just then. The slices of toast were getting brown and

buttered, and made a savory smell all through the kitchen; and now Matilda made the tea, and the flowery fragrance of that added another item to what seemed the great stock of pleasure that afternoon. As Miss Redwood had once said, the minister knew a cup of good tea when he saw it; and it was one of the few luxuries he ever took pains to secure; and the sweetness of it now in the little parsonage kitchen was something very delicious. Then Matilda went and put her head in at the study door.

"Tea is ready, Mr. Richmond."

But the minister did not immediately obey the summons, and the two children stood behind their respective chairs, waiting. Matilda's face was towards the western windows.

"Are you very miserable, Pink?" said Norton, watching her.

"I am so happy, Norton!"

"I want to get home now," said Norton, drumming upon his chair. "I want you there. You belong to mamma and me, and to nobody else in the whole world, Pink; do you know that?"

Except Mr. Richmond — was again in Matilda's thoughts; but she did not say it this time. It was nothing against Norton's claim.

"Where *is* the minister?" Norton went on. "You called him."

"O he has got some stupid body with him, keeping him from tea."

"That is what I said," Norton repeated. "I wouldn't live such a life — not for money."

Mr. Richmond came however at this moment, looking not at all miserable; glanced at the two happy faces with a bright eye; then for an instant they were still, while the sweet willing words of prayer went up from lips and heart to bless the board.

"What is it that you would not do for money, Norton?" Mr. Richmond asked as he received his cup of tea.

Norton hesitated and coloured. Matilda spoke for him.

"Mr. Richmond, may we ask you something?"

"Certainly!" said the minister, with a quick look at the two faces.

"If you wouldn't think it wrong for us to ask.—Is the—I mean, do you think,—the life of a minister is a very hard one?"

"So that is the question, is it?" said Mr. Richmond smiling. "Is Norton thinking of taking the situation?"

"Norton thinks it cannot be a comfortable life, Mr. Richmond; and I thought he was mistaken."

"What do you suppose a minister's business is, Norton? that is the first consideration. You must know what a man has to do, before you can judge whether it is hard to do it."

"I thought I knew, sir."

"Yes, I suppose so; but it don't follow that you do."

"I know part," said Norton. "A minister has to preach sermons, and marry people, and baptize children, and read prayers at funerals and—"

"Go on," said Mr. Richmond.

"I was going to say, it seems to me, he has to talk to everybody that wants to talk to him."

"How do you get along with that difficulty?" said Mr. Richmond. "It attacks other people besides ministers."

"I dodge them," said Norton. "But a minister cannot,—can he, sir?"

Mr. Richmond laughed.

"Well, Norton," he said, "you have given a somewhat sketchy outline of a minister's life; but my question remains yet,—what is the business of his life. You would not say that planing and sawing are the business of a carpenter's life—would you?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"Building houses, and ships, and barns, and bridges."

"And a tailor's life is not cutting and snipping, but making clothes. So my commission is not to make sermons. What is it?"

Norton looked at a loss, and expectant; Matilda enjoying.

"The same that was given to the apostle Paul, and no worse. I am sent to people 'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified.'"

"But I do not understand, Mr. Richmond," said Norton, after a little pause.

"What?"

"If you will excuse me. I do not understand that. Can you open people's eyes?"

"He who sends me does that, by means of the message which I carry. 'How can they believe on him of whom they have not heard?'"

"I see —" said Norton very respectfully.

"You see, I am the King's messenger. And my business is, to carry the King's message. It is possible to make sermons, and not do that."

"I don't think I ever heard the message, or anything that sounded like a message, in our church," said Norton.

"Do you know what the message is?"

Norton looked up from his toast and seemed a little taken aback.

"You might have heard it without knowing it"

"Might I? What is the message, sir?"

"This is it. That God wants and calls for the love of every human heart; and that on his part he loves us so well, as to give his own Son to die for us, that we might be saved through him."

"Why to *die* for us?" inquired Norton.

"Because we all deserved to die, and he took our place. 'He tasted death for every man.' So for you and for me. What do we owe to one who gave his life to ransom ours?"

"I see," — said Norton again thoughtfully. "But Mr. Richmond, people do not always hear the message — do they?"

"You can tell," said Mr. Richmond, shortly.

"I see!" repeated Norton. "It isn't making sermons. I don't see, though, why it isn't a hard life."

"That requires another explanation, but it is not difficult. How would one naturally feel, Norton, towards another, who by his own suffering and death had saved him when he was bound to die?"

"You mean, who had done it on purpose?" said Norton.

"On purpose. Just because he loved the lost one."

"Why," said Norton, "if the man had any heart in him" —

"Well? What then?"

"Why, he wouldn't think that his *hand* was his own."

"He would belong to his redeemer?"

"Yes, sir."

"So I think, Norton. Then, tell me, do you think it would be hard work to do anything to please or serve such a friend? Would even hardships seem hard?"

"I can't think what *would* seem hard," said Norton eagerly.

But then a silence fell upon the little party. Matilda had opened all her ears to hear Norton speak in this manner; she was excited; she almost thought that he was about to enter into the life he seemed to understand so well; but Mr. Richmond went on with his tea quite composedly, and Norton was a little embarrassed. What was the matter? Matilda wished some one would speak again; but Mr. Richmond sent his cup to be filled, and stirred it, and took another piece of toast, and Norton never raised his eyes from his plate.

"That idea is new to you, my boy?" said Mr. Richmond at last, smiling.

"I never — well, yes; — I do not understand those things," said Norton.

"You understood *this*?"

"Your words; yes, sir."

"And the thing which my words meant?"

"I suppose — yes, I suppose I do," said Norton.

"Do you understand the bearing of it on all of us three at the table."

Norton looked up inquiringly.

"You comprehend how it touches me?"

"Yes, sir,"—Norton answered with profound respect in eye and voice.

"And Matilda?"

The boy's eye went quick and sharp to the little figure at the head of the table. What his look meant, Matilda could not tell; and he did not speak.

"You comprehend how it touches Matilda?" Mr. Richmond repeated.

"No, sir," was answered rather stoutly. It had very much the air of not wanting to know.

"You should understand, if you are to live in the same house together. The same Friend has done the same kindness for Matilda that he has done for me; he has given himself to death that she might live; and she has heard it and believed it, and obeyed his voice and become his servant. What sort of life ought she to live?"

Norton stared at Mr. Richmond, not in the least rudely, but like one very much discomfited. He looked as if he were puzzling to find his way out of a trap. But Matilda clapped her hands together, exclaiming,

"I am so glad Norton understands that! I never could make him understand it."

"Why you never tried," said Norton.

"O yes, I did, Norton; in different ways. I suppose I never said it so that you could understand it."

"I don't understand it now," said Norton.

"O Mr. Richmond! don't he?" said Matilda.

"Tell him," said the minister. "Perhaps you put it too cautiously. Tell him in words that he cannot mistake, what sort of life you mean to lead."

The little girl hesitated and looked at Norton. Norton, like one acting under protest, looked at her. They waited, questioning each other's faces.

"It is that, Norton," Matilda said at last very gently, and with a sort of tenderness in tone and manner which spoke for her. "It is just that you said. I do not think that my *hand* is my own."

Norton looked at the little hand unconsciously extended to point her words, as if he would have liked to confiscate it; he made no reply, but turned to his supper again. The conversation had taken a turn he did not welcome.

"We have not done with the subject," Mr. Richmond went on. "You see how it touches me now, and how it touches Matilda. You know by your own shewing, what sort of life she ought to lead; and so you will know how you ought to help her and not hinder her in it. But Norton, — how does it touch you?"

The boy was not ready with an answer. Then he said, —

"I don't see that it touches me any way, sir."

"On honour?" said Mr. Richmond gently. "That same Friend has done the same kindness for you."

Norton looked as if he wished it were not true; and as if very unwilling to admit anything.

"I wish you could hear what I hear," said Mr. Richmond. "So many voices! —"

"What, sir?" asked both the children at once.

"So many voices!" repeated Mr. Richmond. "I hear the voice of love now, from the skies, speaking that soft, sweet 'Come!' in the heart. I hear my own voice giving the message. I hear the promise to them who seek for glory, honour, and immortality. And I hear the sound of the harps of those who have a new song to sing, which none can learn but the hundred and forty and four thousand which have been redeemed from the earth. And I hear the rejoicing in heaven of those who will say, 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.' And then there is a throne and a

judgment seat, and I hear a voice that says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' —"

Mr. Richmond's voice had fallen a little; his eyes were cast down. Norton's eyes were downcast too, and his face; it did not respond, as Matilda's face did; and when the party rose from table a minute or two afterwards, Norton made use of his liberty to quit the room and the house. Matilda brought her tub of water to wash up the cups and plates. Mr. Richmond had gone off to his study.

The little girl touched the china with soft delicate fingers; lifted each piece and set it down with gentle noiselessness; the little clink of the china keeping measure, perhaps, with the thoughts which moved and touched, so gently, in her heart. Presently Mr. Richmond came out again. He walked up and down the little room several times; it was a small walk, for a very few of his steps took him from one corner to the other; then he came and stood beside the table where Matilda was at work. The child stopped and looked up at him wistfully. Their eyes met; and a smile of much love and confidence was exchanged between the two.

"Mr. Richmond," — said Matilda, "isn't it difficult, sometimes, to *keep* hearing those voices?"

You could see the light spring into the young man's eyes; but he answered very quietly, "Why, Matilda?"

"I think it is difficult," the child repeated.

"You find it so?"

"I think, sometimes, Mr. Richmond, I don't hear them at all."

"It is not necessary to be always thinking about them."

"No, I know that; but sometimes I seem to get out of the sound of them."

"How comes that?"

"I don't know. I think it must be because I am hearing other voices so much."

"You are right." Mr. Richmond began his pacing up and down again. Matilda stood with a cup in her hands which she had been washing, the water dripping from her fingers and it into the tub.

"How can I help it, Mr. Richmond?"

Mr. Richmond was thinking perhaps of Fenelon's words: "O how rare is it, to find a soul still enough to hear God speak!"—but he did not quote them to the child. He stood still again.

"Tilly, when one gets out of hearing of those voices, the enemy has a good chance to whisper to us; and he never loses a chance. That was what happened to Eve in the garden of Eden."

"How can I do, Mr. Richmond?"

"I should say, dear, don't get out of hearing of them."

"But, sometimes"—Matilda paused in difficulty. "Sometimes I am thinking of so many other things, and my head gets full; and then I do not know where I am."

Mr. Richmond smiled. "You could not have given a better description of the case," he said. "But Matilda, when you find that you do not know where you are, run away, shut yourself up, and find out. It isn't safe to get out of hearing of the Lord's voice."

"O Mr. Richmond!" said the child. "I want to be where I can hear it all the time."

"There is one way. Don't you know it?"

"No, sir; I don't think I do."

"My dear child, it is very simple. Only obey his voice when you hear it, and it will always be with you. Obedience is the little key that unlocks the whole mystery,—the whole mystery," said Mr. Richmond, beginning to walk up and down again. "When you hear ever so soft a whisper in your heart, saying, '*This is the way,*' follow there; and so the Lord will lead you always."

Mr. Richmond went off to his study, but paused again to say, "Study the twenty third verse of the fourteenth chapter of John, Matilda; and take that for your rule."

Matilda went about softly, putting the china in the pantry, making the table clean, hanging up her towel and putting away her tub. Just as she had finished, Mr. Richmond opened the door. He had his hat and great coat on.

"Tilly, look after my fire, will you?" he said. "I shall be gone some time probably."

## CHAPTER II.

Matilda went to the study. It was in winter trim now. The red curtains fell over the windows; a carpet had replaced or covered the summer mat; the lamp was lighted, but burned low; and a fire of nut wood sticks blazed and crackled softly in the chimney. The whole room was sweet with the smell of it. Matilda sat down on the rug in front of the blaze; but she was hardly there when she heard the front door open and Norton come in. So she called him to the study.

"Is the dominie gone out?" said Norton, as he entered Mr. Richmond's sanctum.

"Gone out for a good while, he said. You and I have got to take care of the fire." And Matilda threw herself down on the rug again.

"This is jolly," said Norton.

"Isn't it?" said Matilda. "It is so nice here. And do you smell, Norton, how sweet it is with the hickory wood?"

"That isn't hickory," said Norton. "It's oak."

"Part of it is hickory, Norton, I know. But I suppose oak is sweet."

"I think everything is sweet to you," said Norton.

"I do think it is," said Matilda. "Everything is to-night, I am sure. Everything. Isn't this just as pleasant as it can be?"

"It's jolly," said Norton. "Let's have on another stick. Now we can think and talk what we will do."

"What we will *do*, Norton?" Matilda repeated.

"Yes. We've got no end of things to do. Why, now we can do what we like, Pink. You aren't going away any more; and we can just lay our plans in comfort."

"I didn't know we had any plans to lay," said Matilda. She looked as if the present was good enough. The firelight shone on a little figure and face of most utter contentment, there down on the rug; a soft little head, a very gentle face, but alive with pleasant thoughts.

"We want to get home now," continued Norton.

"But it is pleasant here, too. O Norton!" Matilda broke out suddenly, "you don't know how pleasant! Now I can take the good of it. I did before, in a way; but then I was always thinking it would maybe stop to-morrow. Now it will never stop; I am so glad!"

"What will never stop?"

"O I don't know. It seems to me my happiness will never stop. You don't know anything about it, Norton. To think I am not to go back to that old life again—I was afraid of it every day; and now to-night at tea, and *now*, I am as happy as I can be. I can't think of it enough."

"Of what, Pink?"

"Of that. That I am not to go back to aunt Candy any more."

"What do you think of where you *are* going?" asked Norton a little jealously. But his face cleared the next instant.

"Norton," said Matilda, "I *can't* think of it,—not yet. It is too good to think of all at once. I have to take part at a time. If I did think of it, I don't know but it would seem too good to be true."

"Well it isn't," said Norton. "Now Pink, we'll fix those hyacinth and tulip beds all right. You haven't chosen your bulbs yet. And then, when we have planted our bulbs—I hope it is not too late yet, but I declare I don't know!—perhaps we'll leave the winter to take care of them, and we'll go off to New York till spring. How would you like that?"

"I don't care where I go," said Matilda,— "with you and Mrs. Laval."

"You never saw New York, did you?"

"No, never. Is it pleasanter than Briery Bank, Norton?"