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# **JOHNNY TREMAIN**

by  
**ESTHER FORBES**

**Dramatized**  
by  
**LOLA H. and COLEMAN A. JENNINGS**



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(JOHNNY TREMAIN)

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Lola H. & Coleman A. Jennings

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# JOHNNY TREMAIN

A Full Length Play  
For a Multiple Cast\*

## CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

JOHNNY	MR. LORNE
CILLA LAPHAM	SAMUEL ADAMS
MRS. LAPHAM	JOSEPH WARREN
JOHN HANCOCK	PAUL REVERE
MR. LAPHAM	BOY ONE AS "INDIAN"
DOVE	BOY TWO AS "INDIAN"
RAB	BOY THREE AS "INDIAN"
SEWALL	BRITISH ADMIRAL
MERCHANT LYTE	BRITISH OFFICER
SHERIFF	DESERTER

### Offstage Voices

MERCHANT  
INSTRUMENT MAKER  
CLOCK MAKER  
NIGHT WATCHMAN  
JUSTICE DANA

### Non-Speaking Roles

THREE "INDIANS"  
SIX TOWNSPEOPLE  
FOUR BRITISH SOLDIERS  
NINE MINUTEMEN

\*See Production Notes for the multiple casting plan in which all roles may be played by 2 women and 13 men.

Playing time: Approximately one hour, ten minutes.

## **Locations And Times**

The locations and times are listed to serve as a guide in planning rehearsals and designing a unit set. Scenes should not be divided by breaks to change set pieces. The action from one scene to the next is continuous.

1. Lapham's silversmith shop, Boston. Morning, early July, 1773.
2. Early evening, the next day.
3. Mid-afternoon, several days later.
4. Next morning, Sunday.
5. Afternoon, six weeks later, late August, 1773.
6. *The Boston Observer* newspaper and printing office, Boston. Late morning, late September, 1773.
7. Shops along the wharf, Boston. October, 1773.
8. Backstreet, Boston. Late night, October, 1773.
9. Merchant Lyte's counting house, Boston. Mid-morning, several weeks later, mid-October, 1773.
10. Jail cell, Boston. Morning, the next day.
11. Courtroom, Boston. Two days later.
12. *The Observer* office. Morning, two days after the trial.
13. Early morning, six weeks later, Sunday, November 28, 1773.
14. Room above *The Observer* office. That night.
15. *The Observer* office. Night, December 16, 1773.
16. Deck of ship. Later that same night.
17. Boston Common. Afternoon, about six months later, June 1, 1774.
18. Room above *The Observer* office. Night, five months later, November, 1774.
19. Street near stables. Afternoon, four months later, March, 1775.

20. *The Observer* office. Afternoon, late March, 1775.
21. Boston Common. Mid-day, one week later, early April, 1775.
22. Joseph Warren's office, Boston. Night, ten days later, April 14, 1775.
23. Room above *The Observer* office. Morning, two days later, April 16, 1775.
24. Lexington Green, Lexington, Massachusetts. Morning, April 19, 1775.
25. Room in Buckman's Tavern, Lexington. Same day.
26. Lexington Green. Moments later.

## **Establishing the World of the Play**

### **Directing Approach**

In staging there must be a continuous sweep of movement with the endings and beginnings of the scenes overlapping slightly; as a scene ends the characters of the next scene enter with the action beginning almost simultaneously. The effect should be that of modified Elizabethan staging which is similar to the cross-fade effect of motion picture films.

There are numerous time and location changes throughout the play. In this staging approach the characters and locations come to Johnny rather than his going to them. The dialogue, action and lighting, not realistic scenery, establish the locales and times. Properties are a mixture of the realistic and stylized.

Once the action begins it should continue without an intermission. The playing time, which is approximately one hour and ten minutes, is an appropriate length for theatre for youth audiences.

This play contains several important scenes of discussion. The staging of these scenes needs to be executed with as much physical action as possible; action that enhances and is motivated by the meaning of the lines. Resist the temptation to create static, seated conversations among characters.

See Production Notes for suggestions concerning Scenery, Properties, Lighting, Costumes, and Music/Sound.

## JOHNNY TREMAIN

*(As audience enters theatre, curtain is up, revealing unit set and some furniture pieces which will be used throughout production. Recorded period MUSIC sets mood of play in one-minute overture to action.)*

*Lapham's silversmith shop.  
Boston. Morning, early July, 1773.*

*(CILLA enters as JOHNNY is busy at silver work area.)*

CILLA. Johnny!

JOHNNY *(arrogantly)*. What is it, Cilla?

CILLA. Ma sent me. Johnny, it's Mr. Hancock himself. He's coming here to order something. Stand by and listen or Grandpa will get it wrong.

*(MRS. LAPHAM enters, followed by DOVE.)*

MRS. LAPHAM. Johnny, straighten up! It's Mr. Hancock. He's ordering a sugar basin. Shake a leg. *(CILLA offers him her clean apron for towel to wipe charcoal off his hands.)*

*(MR. LAPHAM ushers JOHN HANCOCK into room and offers him armchair. DOVE stands nearby.)*

JOHNNY (*straightening work bench, he pushes DOVE out of way*). Get back, Dove. You're always in the way.

JOHN HANCOCK (*speaking, as he is ushered in by MR. LAPHAM*). And it is to be done next Monday—a week from today. I want it as a birthday present for my venerable aunt Lydia Hancock. (*Sits in armchair.*) This is the creamer of the set. (*Handing cream pitcher to MR. LAPHAM.*) Only this morning a clumsy maid melted the sugar bowl. I want you to make me a new one, about so high...so broad...(*Indicating size of sugar bowl with his hands. JOHNNY crosses to MR. LAPHAM, carefully eyeing beautiful basin.*)

JOHNNY. Is this the work of John Coney, sir?

JOHN HANCOCK. Look at the mark, boy. (*JOHNNY turns basin upside down to see smith's mark.*) Your master...(*Gesturing to MR. LAPHAM.*)...made that creamer...forty years ago. He made the entire set.

JOHNNY (*to MR. LAPHAM*). You made it!

MR. LAPHAM. I remember when your uncle, Mr. Thomas Hancock, sir, ordered that set. "Make it big, and make it handsome, bigger and handsomer than anything in Boston. As big and handsome as my Lady is. Make it as rich as I am."

JOHN HANCOCK (*laughing*). That is just the way my uncle used to talk. (*Standing up.*) But you have not as yet said whether you can make my sugar basin for me...and have it done by Monday next. (*Crossing to exit, stops, turns to MR. LAPHAM.*) Of course, I thought of you first because you made the original. But there are other silversmiths. (*MR. LAPHAM hesitates in his response.*) Perhaps you would rather not undertake...

MR. LAPHAM. I've got the time, materials, and the boys to help. I can get right at it, but honestly, sir...I don't

know. Perhaps I haven't got the skill anymore. I've not done anything so fine for thirty years. I am not what I used to be...*(MRS. LAPHAM nods to JOHNNY encouraging him to speak up.)*

JOHNNY *(rushing to HANCOCK)*. We can do it, Mr. Hancock.

JOHN HANCOCK. *Bless me. (Surprised.)* An apprentice speaking for his master?

JOHNNY. Yes, sir. And you shall have it delivered to your own house in one week. It's going to be just exactly right.

MR. LAPHAM *(looking at JOHNNY gratefully)*. Certainly, sir. I'm humbly grateful for your patronage. *(HANCOCK bows slightly, tossing silver coin to JOHNNY, another to DOVE.)*

JOHN HANCOCK. One for each of you boys. I hope you will be diligent at your work. *(MRS. LAPHAM curtsies as he exits.)*

MR. LAPHAM. He is hoping you two will vote for him when you are grown up and have enough property.

JOHNNY. Don't you ever vote for Mr. Hancock, sir?

MR. LAPHAM. No, I never do. I don't hold much with these fellows that are always trying to stir up trouble between us and England. Maybe English rule ain't always perfect, but it's good enough for me. Fellows like Mr. Hancock and Sam Adams, calling themselves patriots and talking too much. Not reading God's Word... like their parents did...which tells us to be humble. But he's my landlord and I don't say much. *(General stage illumination decreases to half except for spot on JOHNNY who silently studies cream pitcher in his hands as MR. LAPHAM, MRS. LAPHAM and CILLA exit.)*

*Early evening, the next day.*

*(As lighting returns to normal JOHNNY crosses to work area, puts cream pitcher away and starts working with piece of wax, trying to shape it into handle for silver bowl. CILLA enters with slate, designing silver-smith mark for JOHNNY.)*

CILLA. I'm designing you a beautiful mark so when you are man-grown and a master smith, you can stamp your silver with it.

JOHNNY. I've five more years to work under your grandpa. I'm just an apprentice who earns no wages. No matter how good my work may be, I have to stamp it with your grandpa's mark.

CILLA. Look. I've got your "J" and "T" sort of entwined.

JOHNNY. Too hard to read. Then, too, when I'm a master smith I'm going to use all three of my initials.

CILLA. *All three?*

JOHNNY. J. L. T.

CILLA (*almost respectfully*). You're not making it up? I've heard tell of folk with three names, but I never saw one before.

JOHNNY (*walking away from her*). Look at me, my girl.

CILLA. Wait, Johnny. What is that middle name? It begins with "L."

JOHNNY (*not sure whether or not to tell her*). As far as you are concerned, it ends with "L," too.

CILLA. I'll bet it's something so awful you are ashamed of it, like "Ladybug" or "Leapfrog." I'll bet it's "Lamentable." (*JOHNNY grins.*) What is your middle name, Johnny?

JOHNNY (*after long pause*). My middle name is Lyte.

CILLA. So you are really John Lyte Tremain?

JOHNNY. No. My baptized Bible name is Jonathan. I've always been called Johnny. That's the way my papers were made out to your grandpa. But I am really Jonathan Lyte Tremain.

CILLA. Why, that's just like the rich Merchant Lyte.

JOHNNY. Just like. My mother told me.

CILLA. You don't suppose you are related?

JOHNNY. I *do* suppose. But I don't know. Lyte's not a common name. And we are both Jonathan.

CILLA. You never speak of your mother, Johnny. She hadn't been dead more'n a few weeks when you first came here. You never talked about her. Was that because you liked her so much? Or not at all.

JOHNNY (*long pause*). Liked her so much. We had been living in Maine. She earned enough for us both by sewing. But when she knew she had to die, she wanted me taught skilled work, and all I wanted was to be a silversmith. That's why we came to Boston, so's to get me a proper master. She could still sew, but she coughed all the time. Even when she was so weak she could hardly hold a needle, she kept on and on, teaching me reading and writing and all that. She was determined I shouldn't grow up untaught. She wanted me to be something.

CILLA. That's why you work so hard?

JOHNNY. That's why. Mrs. Lapham promised her that your grandpa would take me on just as soon as she was buried. She died...and he did. That's all.

CILLA. What was her name? And how come she...a poor sewing woman...was so well learned?

JOHNNY. Roundabout here she called herself just Mrs. Tremain, but she was born Lavinia Lyte. She came of gentlefolk.

CILLA. Johnny, didn't she ever go to her rich relatives and say, "Here I am"?

JOHNNY. No, and she told me not to...ever. Unless... only, if I'd got to the end of everything. Then I should go to Merchant Lyte, show him my cup and tell him my mother told me before she died that I was kin to him. In pity, he might help me.

CILLA. Your cup?

JOHNNY. She said I wasn't to sell it...ever. I was to go hungry and cold first.

CILLA. Where is your cup?

JOHNNY. In my chest. That's why I keep it locked.

CILLA. Will you show me?

JOHNNY. If you swear by your hope of Heaven and your fear of Hell, never, never to mention any of this to anyone. Never tell my true name, nor that I have a cup. *(Very serious, CILLA nods in agreement and follows him to chest. JOHNNY carefully takes cup from chest and hands it to her.)*

CILLA *(looking at it in wonder)*. The same markings as Merchant Lyte.

JOHNNY. And the same motto. Look.

CILLA *(reading in halting manner)*. "Let there be Lyte."

JOHNNY *(whispering)*. Just like the sun coming up yonder out of the sea, pushing rays of light ahead of it.

CILLA *(in sour manner, thinking JOHNNY is getting beyond himself)*. Might it not just as well be a setting sun?

JOHNNY. No, no. My mother said it is a rising sun. But I was to keep whist and mum about it...unless even God has turned away His face. And Cilla...you promised.

**CILLA.** By my hope of Heaven and my fear of Hell. (*As general stage illumination changes to half, JOHNNY is left in spotlight. CILLA exits.*)

**JOHNNY** (*thinking aloud, slowly to himself*). Yes, you swore never to mention any of this...to anyone by your hope of Heaven and your fear of Hell.

*Mid-afternoon, several days later.*

(*DOVE enters slowly as lighting returns to normal. He is carrying basket filled with worst looking charcoal JOHNNY has ever seen.*)

**DOVE.** Johnny, I got the charcoal.

**JOHNNY** (*annoyed, looking around*). Where have you been? I sent you to get charcoal hours ago. (*Crosses to DOVE to examine charcoal.*) This isn't what we silversmiths use. This is fourth-rate stuff...fit for iron... maybe. You know that, Dove.

**DOVE.** Naw. Not me. I don't know anything. (*Crossing away from JOHNNY.*) You're always telling me that. You always like to take charge of things 'round here.

**JOHNNY.** I want willow charcoal.

**DOVE.** You never said so.

**JOHNNY.** I'll go myself, but this delay means we'll be working in lamplight and up to midnight. (*Crossing to DOVE.*) You are the stupidest animal God ever made. Why your mother didn't drown you when you were a pup, I can't imagine.

(*MR. LAPHAM enters.*)

**MR. LAPHAM** (*mildly*). Boys, you quarrel all the time.

JOHNNY (*furious*). He is a lazy, good-for-nothing pig of a louse.

MR. LAPHAM (*seeking to calm JOHNNY*). Johnny. (*Then to DOVE.*) Dove, I want to speak to Johnny alone. (*DOVE, giving JOHNNY a triumphant look, exits.*) Johnny, I don't want you to be riding him so hard. Dove tries, but he's stupid. If God had wanted him bright He would have made him that way. We're all poor worms. You're getting above yourself. God is going to send you a dire punishment for your pride.

JOHNNY. Yes, sir.

MR. LAPHAM. One trouble with you is you haven't been up against any boys as good as yourself...or better. Because you're the best young one on this wharf, you think you're the best one in the world. (*Anxious to be on with his work, JOHNNY hardly listens.*) And boy, don't you go get all fretted up over what's after all nothing but an order for silver. It's sinful to let yourself go on over worldly things. Work's over for the day.

JOHNNY. *What?*

MR. LAPHAM. Yep. It always was the old-fashioned way to start Lord's Day at sunset on Saturday, and I've decided to re-establish the habit in my house.

JOHNNY. Mr. Lapham, we've got to work this evening. We've promised Mr. Hancock.

MR. LAPHAM. I doubt God cares even a little bit whether Mr. Hancock has any silver. It's better to break faith with him, isn't it, than with the Lord? (*MR. LAPHAM exits as JOHNNY disobediently returns to his work.*)

(*Having overheard previous conversation MRS. LAPHAM enters from opposite side of stage.*)

MRS. LAPHAM. Sabbath or no Sabbath, that sugar basin is going to be done on time. Johnny, how many more work-hours will you need?

JOHNNY. Seven...maybe. I can get two Monday morning.

MRS. LAPHAM. You shall have them. I'm not letting any old-fashioned, fussy notions upset the best order we've had for ten years. And if Mr. Hancock is pleased, he may come again and again. Tomorrow, Papa is to be at church all day. That's where you get them five hours, Johnny...tomorrow afternoon. (*Urgently.*) Darest to, Johnny?

JOHNNY (*hesitating only slightly*). I darest. (*To himself as lighting changes to his spotlight.*) But working on the Sabbath is against the law as well as the Bible. I might very well go to the stocks or to Hell for it!

*Next morning. Sunday.*

(*CILLA rushes into shop as lights return to normal.*)

CILLA. Ma, there's a man looking at our chimney.

MRS. LAPHAM (*frightened*). How's he dressed?

CILLA. Seafaring man.

MRS. LAPHAM. No seafaring man ever objected to a little Sabbath-breaking. (*Then, firmly.*) But mind if you see any deacons or constables. (*CILLA quickly exits to return to her guard post. MRS. LAPHAM goes to work station. JOHNNY is busy with his two wax models for handles as he stands by piping hot furnace. MRS. LAPHAM is trying to help.*)

(*DOVE enters and stands at distance watching them.*)

JOHNNY (*in commanding manner*). Not the draft yet, Mrs. Lapham...now get to work with the bellows. (*JOHNNY embeds his wax models in wet sand and checks fire, as she pumps bellows.*) Look sharp, Mrs. Lapham!

MRS. LAPHAM. Yes, Johnny.

JOHNNY. Now fetch me the crucible.

MRS. LAPHAM (*crossly, to DOVE*). Don't just stand there. You know which crucible he needs, boy?

DOVE. I'll get her down. (*Goes to crucibles, choosing one after looking to see if JOHNNY is watching. Takes it to JOHNNY, who puts silver ingots in it and sets it on top of furnace so silver can melt.*)

JOHNNY (*to MRS. LAPHAM*). Look sharp. Hold the master's old watch where I can see it. (*MRS. LAPHAM holds chain so JOHNNY can see watch.*) The silver will soon be ready. (*Watching JOHNNY, DOVE is snickering to himself out of way of action.*)

MRS. LAPHAM (*watching silver*). Johnny, isn't it time to pour? Look, the silver is melted and begun to wink. (*His right hand outstretched, JOHNNY moves toward crucible. Just as he touches it, crucible breaks apart and silver spills over furnace like milk. As JOHNNY instinctively reaches toward it, his hand comes down into molten silver on furnace. Jumping back, screaming and holding his stiffened right arm, he faints on shop floor. MRS. LAPHAM kneels next to JOHNNY and pats his cheeks.*) Johnny, Johnny! Can you hear me?

(*Having heard screams, CILLA rushes in and stops horror-stricken by what she sees.*)

**MRS. LAPHAM.** Quick, get a pan of flour from the barrel. (*CILLA numbly, but quickly obeys, scooping out flour into nearby pan. DOVE's snickering has turned to cowering fear. CILLA takes pan to JOHNNY's right side, and MRS. LAPHAM plunges his burned hand into it. To CILLA.*) Get him some brandy. (*CILLA runs to jug of brandy, quickly fills cup and rushes back to JOHNNY's side. MRS. LAPHAM grabs the cup from her and lifts his head to pour down draught.*)

**CILLA.** Ma, (*Terrified.*) shall I run for Dr. Warren?

**MRS. LAPHAM.** No...no...oh, wait, I've got to think. I don't want any of them doctors to know we was breaking the Sabbath Day. And we don't need no doctor for just a burn. Cilla, you run along the wharf and you fetch that old midwife, Gran' Hopper. These old women know better than any doctor how to cure things like this. Johnny, how you feel? (*DOVE watches in silence.*)

**JOHNNY.** All right.

**MRS. LAPHAM.** Hurt yet?

**JOHNNY.** Not yet.

**MRS. LAPHAM.** It will...Johnny...it will...later. (*JOHNNY looks away from her. As general lighting changes to half, CILLA is left in single spotlight.*)

**CILLA** (*to herself, full front*). Oh, Johnny, I'm sorrier than I was ever sorry before.

*Afternoon, six weeks later, late August, 1773.*

*(As lighting slowly returns to normal, MRS. LAPHAM and DOVE exit, MR. LAPHAM enters. JOHNNY, whose burned hand has now grown together, rises and crosses to MR. LAPHAM as he is called. JOHNNY's thumb*

*crosses his palm, with forefingers bent over thumb in a loose fist, forming a hook. His hand must remain in this position throughout play.)*

MR. LAPHAM (*calling*). JOHNNY! Come boy, over here. Sit down. (*Sits.*) Soon it will be September. Summer is over. I promised your mother to feed and clothe you, keep you in good discipline, and as far as your ability permitted to teach you the silversmith's arts and mysteries...I...I never had a boy so quick to teach, but now...I can't keep my contract with you. I can't teach a cripple-handed boy to be a silversmith. (*JOHNNY quickly puts his right hand behind his back or in his pocket.*) You're a bright boy, Johnny. Maybe a ropemaker or a butcher could teach you his craft. That hand of yours will soon be strong enough.

JOHNNY. But I want to be a craftsman who makes *beautiful* things.

MR. LAPHAM. Don't you see, Johnny? With that hand sort of doubled in on itself, it's not possible. You must be content to find a respectable trade where a bad hand won't matter too much. You've got to learn a way to support yourself. (*JOHNNY starts to look at his hand, but quickly thrusts it into his pocket.*)

JOHNNY. You're right. I have to find something I can do.

MR. LAPHAM. I don't want you to feel hurried about leaving us, Johnny. You're just about earning your keep here by the odd jobs you do. You look about you quietly and find a trade to your fancy and a master you think you'd like. (*Stands, starts to exit.*) And one more thing I have on my mind.

JOHNNY. Yes, sir.