

**TRADING: FINISHING THE  
STORY OF "THE HOUSE IN  
TOWN", &C., PP. 203-414**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649723065

Trading: Finishing the Story Of "The House in Town", &C., pp. 203-414 by Susan Bogert Warner

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Cover @ 2017

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**SUSAN BOGERT WARNER**

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"Mrs. Laval's maid came in to finish her toilette."

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# TRADING:

FINISHING

THE STORY OF "THE HOUSE IN TOWN," &c.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE WIDE WIDE WORLD," "THE OLD HELMET,"  
"WALKS FROM EDEN," ETC. ETC.

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods."



LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCLXXII.

250. q. 387.

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## TRADING.

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### CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS DAY was grey with clouds ; on the roofs of the city and in the streets the sun never shone all day. People called it cold. Sarah Staples found it so on her crossing. Inside Mrs Lloyd's front-door, however, it seemed to Matilda to be nothing but sunshine. She had not leisure to look at the grey sky, and to be sure the temperature was that of summer. Matilda had a great deal to do. Her various parcels were to be neatly tied up in white paper, with the names of the persons they were for nicely written thereon, and then committed to Mrs Bartholomew for arranging on the Christmas tree. Then the presents for Anna and Letitia were to be directed and sent ; Maria's basket packed and put in charge of the express-man ; and several little letters written, one to Mr Richmond. Till all these things were done, Matilda had no time to think of the weather ; then she found that the snow was beginning to fall and coming thick.

"Yes," said Norton, to whom she announced her discovery ; "and it's stinging, and coming on to blow. It will be a night ! I like it. That feels like Christmas."

"Then there'll be no party ?" said Matilda, rather more disappointed than she wanted to show.

"Party ?" said Norton, "what about the party ? it won't snow in *herz*, Pink. What are you thinking of ? The party'll be all the merrier. I tell you, it feels like Christmas."

"But will they come through all the storm!"

"They'd come, if the hailstones were as big as eggs," said Norton. "You never saw one of grandmother's Christmas trees, Pink; and *they* never did, anywhere else. No fear but they'll come, every one of them. You go along and get dressed."

Matilda ran up-stairs, glancing out of the hall window as she passed with a thrill of delight and mystery. The air was darkening already with the falling snow, and the wind swept it past the house in a white mass; by contrast the evening splendours seemed greater than ever. She dressed in a trembling excitement of pleasure, as far as her own part of the preparation went; then Mrs Laval's maid came in to finish her toilette, and Mrs Laval came to superintend it. Matilda had only to stand still and be curled and robed and sashed and slippers, till the work was done; the maid went, and Mrs Laval took the child in her arms and asked if she was happy?

"*Very* happy," Matilda said.

"It does not take much to make you happy, love."

"Why, mamma!" said Matilda, looking down at her white ruffles and then at her adopted mother, "I have so much that I don't know what to do!"

Mrs Laval smiled and sighed, and kissed her again.

"And yet Christmas night is only beginning," she said. But the wind and the hail dashed at the windows as if answering her that it had indeed begun outside. Mrs Laval went away to her own dressing, and Matilda stood a moment at the window listening. It was long after dark now; but she could hear the whistle of the sleet as the wind bore it past, and the rush of ice and snow against the window-panes, and even through the close-fitting sash she could feel a little gush of keen air. And for one moment Matilda's thoughts darted to Sarah, at her crossing and in her cellar home, all that day and night. The contrast was as sharp as that little gush of icy air. Was it right? Matilda thought. Was it right, that her dainty white dress should be so pretty on her, and the Christmas party so fine,



when Sarah and others like her were in cold and wet and rags? It was too disagreeable to think about, as Matilda could not help it; and she went down-stairs.

How the house was lighted up! it was a second daylight, only more splendid. What delicious warm air filled every room, and every staircase, and every lobby! How handsome looked the marble floor of the hall, with its luxurious mats at every door! But as her foot touched the marble, Matilda found something else to think of. Norton came out. He looked her up and down.

"What's the matter, Norton?" said Matilda, a little wanting to know his opinion.

"Nothing," said he, nodding. "You'll do."

"This will be a very funny dress for me to play proverbs in,—don't you think so? I don't look much like Judy's Satinalia."

"Not much," said Norton. "You don't look much like Judy's anything. O Pink! do you know we are going to have a witch here to-night?"

"A witch?" said Matilda.

"A capital witch; it's a capital idea too, for it's a new thing, and it's so hard to get hold of something new. I expect this'll be the party of the season."

"What do you mean?" said Matilda.

"You'll see," said Norton. "Only don't be frightened. The witch won't hurt you."

And here came Judy, and took a good silent stare at Matilda. The two girls were dressed alike. Norton watched them with a sly glance. Without any remark or salutation, Judy passed them with a toss of her head, and went into one of the drawing-rooms.

"*She'll* do," said Norton, with a competent nod of his head in Judy's direction; "that is, she'll do the insolent, whenever she has a mind to. She is a case, is Judy Bartholomew. Well, come, we must get out of the way, Pink. Somebody'll be here soon."

So they strolled into the lighted drawing-rooms, where Judy and David were; and strolled about, consulting

arrangements for the play, till the doors opened, and other white dresses, and coloured sashes, and gallant white-trousered young gentlemen began to pour in and claimed their attention. And ladies accompanied them,—not a great many, but a few favoured mothers and aunts and elder sisters; and soon the drawing-rooms were all alive with motion and colour, and noise with the hum of many voices.

It was a wonderful scene to Matilda. She forgot that she had so little to do with it, and was so left out of it by the gay little throng. She did not at first think of that. To be sure she was a stranger; it was quite natural, as it seemed to her, that she should be left out. The pleasure was great enough, merely to look on. Everybody else was very busy talking and laughing and moving about the rooms,—all except herself. Matilda had never seen such a display of very young ladies and gentlemen; the variety of styles, the variety of dresses, the diversity of face and manner, were an extremely rich entertainment. She noticed airs and graces in some, which she thought sat very ill on them;—affectations of grown-up manner, tossings of curls, and flaunting of white gloves, and waving of fans, at which Matilda's simplicity was greatly astonished. Little gentlemen stood before little ladies, with hands behind their backs, and entertained them in conversation which appeared to be of the politest sort. And Judy's blue scarf flitted from end to end of the rooms, dipped to the floor as she curtsied to new comers, and fluttered with delight as she darted to speak to some favourite or other. The rooms grew very lively. The gas-lights shone upon all the colours of the rainbow, moving and changing as if Mrs Lloyd's house had been a kaleidoscope. David and Norton were not in the company. Suddenly Norton stood at Matilda's side.

"What are you doing here, Pink?"

"Nothing." Matilda looked and smiled at him. "Only looking at everything."

"But you ought to be *in it*, Pink."

"In what?"

"Why! in the work; in the talk. What are you sitting in a corner here for?"

"You know, Norton, I do not know anybody."

"Hasn't Judy introduced you?—Not to *any* one?" said Norton. "Left you here? Judy Bartholomew! if it wasn't Christmas night and an inconvenient time to make a row"—

"Hush, hush, Norton. I am having a very good time," said Matilda, looking, as she felt, like a very happy little girl.

"Well," said Norton, "there are two odd people here to-night. One of 'em's Judy Bartholomew, and the other—is somebody you don't know. Come! come here. Esther Francis!—this is my sister, my new sister Matilda. Hasn't Judy introduced you?"

Norton had caught by the arm, as she was passing, a girl of about Judy's age, whom he thus brought face to face with Matilda. She was sweet-faced and very handsomely dressed, and she had no sort of shyness about her. She took Matilda's hand and looked at her with a steady look.

"Take care of her, will you?" Norton went on.—"I have got to go and arrange things with David; and Judy has her head full. Tell Matilda who's who; she does not know the people yet."

The two girls stood a minute or two silently together; Esther giving, however, a side-glance now and then at her companion.

"You have not been long in town?" she said then, by way of beginning.

"Only three weeks."

"Of course, then, you are quite a stranger. It is very disagreeable, isn't it, to be among a whole set of people that you don't know?" Esther said it with a little turn of her pretty head that was—Matilda could not tell just what it was. It showed the young lady very much at her ease in society, and it was not quite natural; that was all she could make out. Matilda answered, that she did not find anything disagreeable. Esther opened her eyes a little wider.

"Do you know all about the arrangements to-night?" she whispered.