

The House on the Green

Betty S. Hilton

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A young couple experiences years of separation in the historical novel The House on the Green.

In Betty S. Hilton's historical novel *The House on the Green*, a young woman contends with love and loss around the time of World War I.

The Thompsons lead a quiet life in rural England. Though she's spent most of her life living in the moment, their eldest daughter, Penny, leaves for London, hoping to find work as a maid. She winds up with kind employers, receiving decent pay—and meets Will, the family's sweet-natured driver.

When Penny and Will learn about the horrid living conditions of the poor, they decide to delay getting married and starting a family until they have solid finances. When Will's brother shows up, discussing the possibility of finding gold in Canada, Will hopes it will be an opportunity to secure his and Penny's future. In the meantime, Penny is left in England, on her own.

The book focuses on Penny's development from a flighty child into a capable woman. While working as a maid, she's quick to take over the household responsibilities; subsequent jobs offer her additional means of self-improvement. Beside her, Will's ambition blinds him to stark realities, including the harsh Canadian environments he's set to enter. His time in Canada occurs outside of the main narrative; compared to Penny, his growth is limited.

The period prose is realistic: Penny's rural accent contrasts with the polished language of those she works for, highlighting their differences. Scenes are also detailed in a way that highlights the differences between the classes: the vast mansions of the rich contrast with the squalid tenements of the poor. When Penny and other maids take a break in a park, they witness an extreme display of such disparity; the maids prove eager to take fashion cues from the wealthy ladies they see.

Covering decades in Penny's life with speed, the book limits uneventful periods to a few sentences; impactful moments are better developed. Penny's hardships lead her to stumble, but she overcomes her obstacles in a rewarding manner. Her reunion with Will is more condensed and less satisfying; after years of waiting, it's limited to the endearing sense that both have changed during their time apart, and to its emphasis on patience.

A young couple experiences years of separation, but maintains their faith in one another, in the historical novel *The House on the Green*.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 22, 2021)

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