

ADRIFT: A STORY OF NIAGARA

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Adrift: A Story of Niagara by Julia Ditto Young

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JULIA DITTO YOUNG

**ADRIFT: A STORY
OF NIAGARA**

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ADRIFT:
WEBSTER • FREE • MIDDLEBURY

A STORY OF NIAGARA.

BY
JULIA DITTO YOUNG.

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1889.

ADRIFT:

A STORY OF NIAGARA.

CHAPTER I.

"And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
Still that horrible sense of the *dejà connu*."

OWEN MEREDITH.

ON a certain April evening a year or so ago the city of Buffalo had evidently incurred the displeasure of the powers who dispense the weather, and was suffering—shall we say as usual?—all the outrages which Boreas, Frey, and the other storm-creators could inflict. The wind howled and tore through the trees as if anxious to strip them of their early buds, and to a fanciful observer the incessant rain might have seemed like a cruel and heavy lash laid upon the few shrinking pedestrians.

There were doubtless numerous tenements in the city whose inmates were incommoded by the tempest, inasmuch as the chill breath of the wind through crevice and keyhole is not a welcome visitor, and as water has a disagreeable tendency to trickle through pervious roofs. But there were also many residences, on the contrary, whose internal comfort was only enhanced by the contrast between

the cold and damp without and the light, heat, and fragrance within. Among the latter was a small house in a fashionable street, owned and occupied by Mr. John Forrester, a gentleman who had been destined by his parents to adorn the legal profession, but who had after a few years' trial abandoned it for the more immediately lucrative occupation of banker and broker. The emoluments of his chosen calling had been considerable, and now, in his thirtieth year, he was able to live in a style which was the height of luxury compared with the manner of his existence a decade previous. It was very much to his gratification that this result had been obtained without intense application to books or any burning of the midnight oil except that consumed in social and convivial gatherings.

"The beauty of my business," he was wont to say, "is that it's not necessary to crowd the mind with unimportant facts. I'm not required to say at a moment's notice who it was that discovered the circulation of the blood, or in what year Martin Luther was born, or to air my ignorance of Magna Charta. No; I let the dead past slip by, and concern myself only with the things of this hour, or at most the things of this week or this month. I read the newspapers, of course,—in them we find the cream of all literature, ancient and modern, separated from the skim-milk of metaphor and poetry, and expressed in that terse American vernacular which beats all other languages for going straight to the point!"

• Such being Mr. Forrester's opinion, it was but natural that on this rainy April evening he should

be reading a newspaper. On the other hand, it would have been equally surprising to find him seated in a room so well supplied with books as almost to deserve the title of library, only that the partner of his home was a lady whose views on this as on most other subjects were diametrically opposed to her lord's, Mrs. Forrester being intensely, impartially devoted to French, German, and English literature.

The room was well furnished, and littered with works of art in various stages of progress. An Ariadne, lumpy and dropsical-looking, reclined on the mantel-shelf, incompletely evolved from the surrounding clay. A heap of bright silks lay on a table beside a piece of ruby plush, one incipient bud thereon alone revealing that, fortune favoring, its lustrous surface would some time be enriched by a spray of wild roses. On an easel in the corner was a half-finished crayon head of Dante; the unskilful draughtsman having been unable to reproduce the well-known melancholy droop of mouth and eyelids, the great Florentine's usual lugubrious expression was replaced by a sort of smirk which could not fail to make the judicious grieve. Besides these articles and the implements required in their execution, books, letters, pamphlets, and newspapers were strewn about in a careless confusion from which one might infer the presiding genius of the apartment to be a woman of versatile tastes and manifold intellectual resources, as well as a very untidy house-keeper.

Mr. Forrester brought to the perusal of his news-

paper the same habits which made him a successful business-man. He knew instinctively what items would appeal to his interest, and read those only; but read them, whether trivial or important, with a quick and thorough mental grasp which left in his memory not a series of shadowy impressions, but a distinct array of facts. Having thus mastered everything that was of value to him in the paper, he folded it neatly and put it down on the table, across which he looked in silence for some moments at his wife.

Presently she also laid aside her book,—a novel in French,—and remarked in that language that she was bored, weary, and sad. Mrs. Forrester rarely resorted to a foreign tongue to express her sentiments; never, indeed, unless with the express purpose of annoying her husband. On this occasion she was foiled in the endeavor, for he replied only by an amiable and interrogative smile, whereat she relented and observed in English,—

“Jack, I’m tired, I’m stupid, I’m unhappy! There’s no pleasure to be had out of books any more; they get duller every year.”

“That’s my own opinion precisely!” Mr. Forrester began, with emphasis; but he was promptly interrupted by his wife, who seldom let any statement pass unchallenged, even when it was in direct confirmation of her own views.

“John Forrester, I’m surprised at your temerity!” she said, severely. “You to say one word against books,—you, that never open one, except check-books and ledgers! When I say they get duller every year, I merely mean they seem so to me.”

"Perhaps, my dear, you read too much," suggested the gentleman, tentatively.

"Nonsense, Jack! I read comparatively little now. Two novels a day was my allowance a year ago; but they have lately palled upon me so that I can hardly read one a week through to the bitter end. Even in my best estate I could never bring myself to begin at the beginning."

"How would it do to read something solid,—some government reports or common council proceedings?" said Mr. Forrester, still tentatively.

This was acknowledged only by a derisive glance. "No," continued the lady; "I know perfectly well what is the matter with me,—I have not enough to do. My brain and hands are alike idle. These last few years, since my life has been devoid of real, useful occupation, I have not felt contented at all. I have actually been thinking, Jack, that I should like to dismiss the girls and do my own work again."

"*Again*, Bella? I was under the impression that when we formerly dispensed with servants the work simply wasn't done at all."

Mrs. Forrester, lost in a maze of agreeable memories, ignored this interpolation. "And you know, Jack," she went on, musingly, "that after our little dinners were over—"

"And *very* little dinners they used to be, too!" said Jack, with a retrospective groan. "You didn't do much cooking, Bella; I was a living—no, an almost dead proof of that. Though, to do you justice, I must say I never saw your equal at getting up a meal of tea and soda-crackers."

"Well, anyway, after dinner I would change my dress and sit down at my desk all alone, and go slowly through the French grammar."

"I highly approve of that portion of your project. I don't think you are nearly as proficient in French as you pretend to be, and it would certainly be beneficial to you to go through the grammar again."

"Of course I do not dream of doing that!" instantly rejoined the lady. "But I have lately felt profoundly interested in Dante, and I don't see why I should not read him in the original."

"Now, Bella, just stop right where you are!" said her husband, vainly endeavoring to impart an angry and authoritative ring to his pleasant voice. "Long self-discipline, long humbling of a naturally proud spirit, has at last enabled me to listen patiently to unintelligible remarks in French and German; but I draw the line at Italian!"

"Ah, well, that's not essential. I won't quarrel about a trifle——"

"No? Really, Bella, you are certainly not yourself if you do not seize upon any pretext whatever for quarrelling!"

"The main thing I am anxious about," explained Mrs. Forrester, with a good deal of earnestness, "is whether it would or would not be a good thing for me to do my own housework again. I often feel as if my mission in life was no higher than washing dishes."

"On the contrary, I am convinced that your genius does not at all find its fitting medium of expression in that homely employment," said Mr. For-