

**DONNELL  
ANNIE  
HAMILTON**

JUDITH LYNN: A STORY OF  
THE SEA

Annie Donnell

**Judith Lynn: A Story of the Sea**

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# Annie Hamilton Donnell

## Judith Lynn: A Story of the Sea

### Chapter I

In Tarpaulin and oilskins she did not look like a Judith. Easily she might have been a Joseph or a James. So it was not really to be wondered at that the little girl in the dainty clothes – the little girl from The Hotel – should say, “Why!”

“What is your name?” the Dainty One had asked.

“Judith Lynn,” had answered the boy-one in oilskins.

“Why!” Then, as if catching herself up at the impoliteness of such a little word in such a surprised tone – “I mean, please excuse me for thinking you were a boy,” the little Dainty One had added, in considerable embarrassment. And Judith had laughed – Judith’s laughs were rare, but the crisp, salty brightness of the sea was always in them. The sea was in everything about Judith.

“I don’t wonder!” laughed Judith. “Me, with these togs on! But I guess *you’d* be a boy when you went out to your traps – you can’t ’tend traps in skirts. Blossom calls me Judas with these on!”

It was strange how suddenly the rather big voice – a voice has to be big to compete with the voice of the sea – grew soft and tender at the name of Blossom.

In Judith Lynn’s rough, hard, salt-savored life Blossom was the one thing sweet and beautiful. Blossom was the little frail wisp of a child that Judith loved. This other child, here on the sand, watching her with friendly wonder, reminded her a little of Blossom. Anyway, they were both sweet and beautiful.

“Traps?” queried this other child. “I didn’t know there were mice in the ocean! – you were going out on the ocean, weren’t you?”

Again Judith’s rare, bright laugh. Children were such funny things! – Blossom was, too.

“Lobster-traps,” she explained, when the laugh had laughed itself out. “I’m going out to mine to get the lobsters. Out there where those little specks of white are bobbing ’round on the water – don’t you see?”

“I see some little specks – yes, they’re a-bobbing! Are those *traps*?”

“Mercy, no! The traps are sunk ’way down to the bottom o’ the sea! Those are nothing but the little wooden floats that tell me where the traps are. I couldn’t go hunting all over the bay, you know.”

“No – oh, no, you couldn’t go hunting all over the bay,” repeated the small, puzzled voice. The Dainty One was distinctly interested. “I s’pose, prob’ly, every one of those little white specks has got a fish line to it. I hope they’ve all got *bites*. Oh, my suz! Here comes Elise. Elise is always a-coming!” with a long sigh.

Elise was slender and tall, in cap and apron. She walked with the stride of authority. A frown of displeasure was getting visibler and visibler on her face, the child noticed with another sigh. Elise was ’most always a-frowning.

“Good-by. I – I guess I’d better go and meet her,” the Dainty One said hurriedly. “She isn’t quite as cross when you go and meet her. It helps.”

But the child came back again to Judith Lynn. She held out one little sun-browned, sea-browned hand.

“I’m happy to have seen you,” she said, with soft graciousness, as if Judith were a duchess in laces instead of a boy-girl in fisherman’s togs. “I’d be pleased to see you some more. I like you.”

“Oh!” stammered the boy-girl in fisherman’s togs, a flush of pleasure reddening her brown face. No one had even said “I’d be pleased to see you,” to her before, though Blossom, of course, *was* always pleased. No one but Blossom had ever said, “I like you,” and Blossom’s way was, “I love you.”

“I must go – she’s ’most here,” went on the child, rather anxiously. “But first I wish you’d tell me who Blossom is. You spoke about Blossom, didn’t you?”

“Yes. She’s my little sister. Her regular name is Janet. It’s only me calls her Blossom.”

“Oh, but that’s lots the prettiest name! *I’m* going to call her that, too. I’d be pleased to see Blossom. Is she about my tallness?”

Judith’s face had undergone one of its swift changes. It had grown defensive and a little fierce. She should not see Blossom! – this other child who could walk away over the sand to meet Elises, whoever Elises were. She should not see Blossom! Blossom should not see her!

“But, maybe – prob’ly she’s a baby – ”

“No, she’s six. She’d be about as tall as you are, if she was straightened – I mean if she could stand up beside o’ you. I guess you better go to that woman in the cap or she’ll scold, won’t she?”

“Goodness, yes! Elise always scolds. But I’d rather be scolded than not hear about that little Blossom girl – ”

“Mademoiselle!” called the woman in the cap sharply. She came up puffing with her hurry. “Mademoiselle has escape again – Mademoiselle is ba-ad!” she scolded.

“I didn’t ex-scape, either – I only walked. You don’t walk when you ex-scape. You sat and sat and sat, and I wanted to walk.”

The child’s voice was full of grievance. Sometimes she dreaded Elise – when she saw her coming down the beach – but she was never afraid of her “near to.”

“But it is not for Mademoiselle to walk so far – what is it the doctor say? Mademoiselle is ba-ad when she walk so far!”

With a sudden gesture of defiance the Dainty One sprang away across the sand, looking over her shoulder willfully. “But it’s so good to walk!” she cried. “You’d walk if you was me, Elise – you’d walk and walk and walk! Like this – see me! See me run – like this!”

The eyes of the woman in the white nurse’s cap met for an instant the eyes of the boy-girl in the oilskins, and Judith smiled. But Elise was gravely tender – Elise’s face could undergo swift changes, too.

“Yes, certainment I would,” muttered Elise, looking away to the naughty little figure. It was running back now.

“And then you’d be goody again – see me!” chanted the child. “And you’d go right straight back to Elise – that would be *me*, if you were I – and you’d put your arms round her, so, and say, “Scuse me,’ – hear me!”

Judith Lynn got into the old brown dory and rowed away to her lobster-traps. There was no laughter any more in her eyes; they were fierce with longing and envy. Not for herself – Judith was sixteen, but she had never been fierce or envious for herself. It had always been – it would always be – for Blossom, the frail little wisp of a girl she loved.

She was thinking intensely, What if that were Blossom, running down the beach? They were about of a “tallness” – why shouldn’t it be Blossom? Why shouldn’t Blossom run down the beach like that and call “See me!”

She would walk and walk and walk – it would feel so good to walk! Once she had said to Judith – the great oars stopped as Judith remembered – once Blossom had said, “Oh, Judy, if I ever walk, I shall walk right across the sea. You couldn’t stop me!”

But Blossom would never walk. Judith bent to the great oars again and toiled out into the bay. Her lips were set in the old familiar lines of pain. In the distance was just visible a fleck of white and a fleck of blue – Elise and the Dainty One on the sands.

“I never want to set eyes on them again – not on her, anyway!” thought Judith as she toiled. “What did she want to speak to me for, in her nice little mincing voice! She belongs to hotels and I belong to the – sea. Blossom and I – what has she got to do with Blossom!”

But the little mincing voice had said, “I’d be pleased to see you – I like you.” It had said, “I’d be pleased to see Blossom.”

“She sha’n’t! I won’t have her! I won’t have Blossom see her!” Judith stormed in her pain.

The picture of the little frail wisp of a child who would never walk was so distinct to her – and this other picture of the Dainty One who walked and laughed, “See me!” The two little pictures, side by side, were more than Judith could bear.

The traps were nearly empty. It was going to be a poor lobster season. To hotels like that one down the beach that would be a disappointment. To Judith, who stood for fisher-folk, it would mean serious loss. When the lobster season was a good one, more than one little comfort and luxury found its way into more than one humble fisher-home. And Blossom – Blossom would suffer if the lobster-traps were empty. For Judith and her mother had agreed to set apart enough of the lobster-money to get Blossom a wheel-chair. Judith had seen one once on a trip to the nearest town, and ever since she had dreamed about a little wheel-chair with Blossom in it. To wheel up and down the smooth, hard sand, with Blossom laughing and crying, “See me!”

“There’s got to be lobsters!” Judith stormed, jerking up her traps one after the other. “There *shall* be lobsters!”

But she rowed back with the old brown dory almost as empty as when she had rowed it toilsomely out to her traps.

There were but three Lynns in the small home upshore. Two years ago there had been six, but father and the boys, one day, had gone out of sight beyond the bay and had never come into sight again. It is the sad way with those “who go down to the sea in ships.”

Judith was the only man left to ’tend the traps and fish in the safer waters of the bay. At fourteen one is young to begin toil like that. Even at sixteen one is not old. But Judith’s heart was as strong as her pair of brown, boy-muscled arms. She and the old dory were well acquainted with each other.

To-day Judith did not hurry homeward across the stretch of bright water. She let the old dory lag along almost at its own sweet will. For Judith dreaded to go home with her news of the poor little “haul” of lobsters. She knew so well how mother would sigh and how little Blossom would try to smile. Blossom always tried to smile when the news was bad. That was the *Blossomness* of her, Judith said fondly.

“That’s Lynn luck,” mother would sigh. Poor mother, who was too worn and sad to try to smile!

“Never mind, Judy,” Blossom’s little, brave smile would say. “Never mind – who cares!” But Judy knew who cared.

Strange fancies came sometimes to the fisherman-girl in the great dory, out there on the bay. Alone, with the sky above and the sea beneath, the girl let her thoughts have loose rein and built her frail castles in the salt, sweet air. Out there, she had been a beautiful princess in a fairy craft, going across seas to her kingdom; she had been a great explorer, traveling to unknown worlds; she had been a pirate – a millionaire in his yacht – a sailor in a man-of-war. She had always had a dream-Blossom with her, on her wonder-trips, and sometimes they were altogether Blossom-dreams. Like to-day – to-day it was a Blossom-dream, a wistful little one with not much heart in it. They seemed to be drifting home, away from something beautiful behind them that they had wanted very much. They had been sailing after it – in the dream – with their hands stretched out to reach it. And it had beckoned them on – and further on – with its golden fingers, till at last it had vanished into the sunset, down behind the sea, and left them empty-handed after all. They had had to turn back without it. And Blossom – the little dream-Blossom in the dream – had tried to smile.

“Never mind, Judy,” she had said. “Never mind – who cares!” But they had both cared so much!

Then quite suddenly Judith’s fancy had changed the dream from a sad one to a glad one. She had rested lazily on her great black oars and painted another picture on her canvas of sea and sky – this time of Blossom riding way over a beautiful glimmery sea-road in a little wheel-chair, soft-

cushioned and beautiful. She, Judith, followed in the old dory, and Blossom laughed with delight and called back over her shoulder, “See me! See me!”

A whiff of night-breeze warned Judith that it was growing late and the dream-fancies must stop. She leaned over the side of the dory and pretended to drop them, one at a time, into the sea. That was another of her odd little whimsies.

“Good-by, sad dream – good-by, glad dream,” she said. “You will never go ashore. You will always stay out here in the sea where I drop you – unless I decide to dream you over again some day. If I do, good-by till then.” For Judith never dreamed her day-dreams on land. They were a part of the sea and the sea-sky and the old black dory.

She must make her trip to the Hotel with her poor little haul of lobsters, for she had promised all she got to Mrs. Ben. But for a wonder Judith’s pride deserted her, and she decided to tramp away down the beach in her fisherman-clothes. When had she done that before! When *hadn’t* she walked the weary little distance inshore and back, to and from her home, for the sake of going down the beach in her own girl-things. But to-night – “Never mind, Judy – who cares!” she said to herself, with a shrug. Let Mrs. Ben laugh – let the fine people lounging about laugh – let everybody laugh! Who cared? To-night Judith was tired, and the stout little heart had gone out of her.

“Land!” laughed Mrs. Ben, in her kitchen door. But the sober face under the old tarpaulin checked her. Mrs. Ben’s heart was tender.

“I shouldn’t think I looked very landish,” Judith retorted. “And I guess you won’t say ‘land!’ when you see your lobsters. That’s every one I got to-day, Mrs. Ben!”

But Mrs. Ben said “Land!” again. Then, with an unexpected whirl of her big, comely person, she had her hands on the boy-girls’ shoulders and was gently pushing her toward a chair by the window.

“You poor dear, you! Never mind the lobsters. Just you set there in that chair and eat some o’ my tarts! You look clean tuckered out.”

“Not *clean* tuckered,” laughed Judith rather tremulously. It was good to be pushed about like that by big, kind hands. And how good the tarts were! She sank into the chair with a grateful sigh.

“I don’t suppose you can be expected to bring lobsters when there ain’t any in the traps! All is, the folks ’ll have to eat tarts!” Mrs. Ben’s folks were the people who lounged about in gay summer clothes. Judith could see them out of the window as she ate her tarts.

Some ladies were sitting on the doorsteps very near by, and their voices drifted in to Judith with intervals of silence. She began to notice what the voices were saying. They were talking about a little figure in dainty white that was circling about not far away, and the little figure in white was Judith’s acquaintance of the beach.

One of the voices was a mother-voice – Judith was sure of that from the tenderness in it. The other voice was just a plain *voice*, Judith decided. It sounded interested and curious, and it began to ask strange questions about the dainty little figure. Judith grew interested, too – then, very interested indeed.

Suddenly Judith caught her breath in an inarticulate little cry. For she could hear what the mother-voice was answering.

## Chapter II

“It seems very wonderful,” the cool, interested voice said, a little more interested, if anything.

“It seems glorious!” broke in the mother-voice; and the throb in it beat upon Judith’s heart through the waves of air between them. Judith’s heart was throbbing, too.

“You can’t think how it ‘seems,’ – you don’t know anything about it!” the earnest, tremulous voice went on. “How can anyone know who never had a little daughter?”

“I had one once.” The other voice now was soft and earnest.

“But she walked. *Your* little daughter walked. How can anyone know whose little daughter always walk – ”

“She never walked.” It was very soft now, and the throb had crept into it that was in the mother-voice and in Judith’s heart. “I only had her a year.”

They were both mother-voices! Judith could not see, but she felt sure the two sat up a little nearer to each other and their hands touched.

“Oh! – then you can know,” the first voice said, after a tiny silence. “I will tell you all about it – there have only been a few I have wanted to tell. It has seemed almost too precious and – and – sacred.”

“I know,” the other said.

“But you must begin right at the beginning, with me – at the time when my little daughter was a year old, when the time came for her to learn to walk. That is where my story begins.”

“And mine ends. Go on.”

“Well, you can see how I must have watched and waited and planned.”

“Oh, yes, and planned —*I* planned.”

“You poor dear!” Another tiny silence-space, while hand crept to hand again, Judith was sure. Then the story went on.

“You say I ought to have known. Everybody says I ought to have. *They* knew, they say, and I was the baby’s mother. The baby’s mother ought to have known. But that was just why. I was her mother – I *wouldn’t* know. I kept putting it off. ‘Wait,’ I kept saying to myself. ‘She isn’t old enough to walk yet; when she is old enough, she will walk. Can’t you *wait*?’ And I waited. When they did not any of them know, I kept trying to stand her on her poor little legs – I wouldn’t stop trying. When she was fifteen months – sixteen months – seventeen, eighteen – when she was two years old, I tried. I would not let them talk to me. ‘Some children are so late in walking,’ I said. ‘Her legs are such little ones!’ I would catch her up from the floor and hug her fiercely. ‘They sha’n’t hurry you, my darling. You shall take all the time you want. Then, some day, you’ll surprise mother, won’t you? You’ll get up on your two little legs and walk! And we’ll take hold of hands and walk out there to all those bad people that try to say things to us. We’ll show them!’ But we never did. When she was two and a half I began to believe it – perhaps I had believed all along – and when she was three, I gave it up. ‘She will never walk,’ I told them, and they let me alone. There was no more need of talking then.”

Judith was leaning forward, straining her ears to hear. She had forgotten Mrs. Ben’s tarts – she had forgotten everything but the story that was going on out there, out of her sight. It was so much – oh, how much it was like Blossom’s story! When Blossom was three, Judith had given up, too. But not till then. She had kept on and on trying to teach the helpless little legs to walk. Father and mother and the boys had given up, but Judith had kept on. “She *shall* walk!” she had said.

Sometimes she had taken Blossom down to the beach, tugging her all the way in her own childish arms, and selected the hardest, smoothest stretch of sand. “Now we’ll walk!” she had laughed, and Blossom had laughed, too. “Stand up all nice and straight, darling, and walk all beautiful to Judith!” But Blossom had never stood up all nice and straight; she had never walked all beautiful to Judith. And when she was three, Judith had given up.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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