



Adirondack

A. Dudley Johnson, Jr.

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A charming and sensual exploration of the tension between social norms and personal freedom, *Adirondack* by A. Dudley Johnson, Jr., is a delightful, escapist read. The novel depicts a community of temporary summer residents who delight in one another's trials and tribulations.

Anna Tattersall is a young mother who expertly plays the part of a doting wife. Rumors abound when her husband, Will, leaves the family at their summer home for long stretches to focus on his work in the city. The central tension unfolds during this one brief summer season in 1897.

In Will's absence, Anna busies herself with hikes through the local foothills; rich, sensuous descriptions of the gorgeous natural world firmly root the story in its lush, mountainous setting. One of Anna's ventures results in a chance encounter with a Native American man named Ausable who defies the persistent stereotypes of the day, and to whom Anna feels insatiably attracted.

Anna and Ausable's affair is passionate and idyllic, but real life soon beckons. Anna must decide how to navigate the expectations of her community and of society at large, as well as how to balance them with what her body and soul truly desire. When Anna decides changes need to be made in her family's lives, there is no turning back, and the fast-paced narrative echoes her determined move forward.

Anna is a refreshingly complex protagonist whose lack of shame about her own sexuality and adventurousness sets her apart. She is never in doubt that she deserves happiness, nor does she seem to feel an overwhelming sense of duty to put anyone else's needs first. This is unusual for female characters, especially mothers, and her dogged pursuit of true fulfillment is a fascinating element of the story.

The supporting cast of characters makes the story truly entertaining. Aunt Lil is a dour elder who defies expectations with her adaptability. Anna's rival-turned-confidante Margaret keeps audiences guessing about her motives. Pastor Tom is a thrilling, nonjudgmental conspirator who keeps the community's secrets. And Anna's husband, Will, is a hypocritical yet sympathetic man trying hard to keep up appearances while ensuring that his own adventures don't become endangered.

Anachronisms in Ausable's characterization hit odd notes. He is Harvard-educated at a time when this would have been virtually impossible for an indigenous person, and he has few apparent ties to any community. He lives semi-nomadically in the woods and has a too-modern, self-deprecating sense of humor.

The fate of Anna and Ausable's relationship is inevitably clear, so the public reckoning over their exposed romance is unsurprising. This development, which forms the story's climax, still hits a poignant note, and the resolution of the central tension remains satisfyingly uncertain until the very last few pages.

Adirondack exists against a fun backdrop as it explores a family's struggle to reconcile their reputation with deeply conflicting individual desires.

SARAH STEWART (December 8, 2017)

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