THE SHOULDERS of ATLAS

By Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

SYNOPSIS

Henry Whitman and his wife, Sylvia, a middle aged couple, poor and hard working, living in the New England village of East Westland, come unexpectedly into the property of Sylvia's cousin, Abrahama White. Abrahama's will cuts off her own sister's child, Rose Fletcher, an orphan, living with rich people in New York. The property consists of a big house, standing on 50 acres of ground, and an annual income of $600 in stocks. Just before the funeral Sylvia catches the undertaker's daughter, Flora Barnes, snipping a thin braid of silk out of the gown that drapes the corpse. She had been robbing the dead for years in order to accumulate material for a black silk dress for herself. Other characters introduced are Horace Allen, a school teacher, who had boarded with the Whitmans in their days of poverty and remains with them in their prosperity, and Albion Bennett, who presides at the little village wine store and doles out the drinks that cheer and likewise inebriate.

Lucinda Hart, a timid young woman, keeps the hotel. Miss Farrel dwells therein, an object of suspicion because of great beauty, despite her advanced years. She is a school teacher in East Westland. One morning Miss Farrel is found murdered in bed. Lucinda Hart is suspected of giving her poisoned candy and is arrested, together with Hannah Simmons, who is supposed to be her accomplice. Now, Miss Farrel, it turns out, was the person who took care of Rose Fletcher, having secretly settled her entire fortune on her, but given all the credit to New York people. Consequently Rose Fletcher is summoned to the funeral. On her arrival she captures the Whitman family, though they look with awe and misgiving upon her city clothes and city manners. The case against Lucinda Hart and Hannah Simmons was never pressed. Because of the departure for Europe of the people with whom she had been living Rose Fletcher decides to remain with the Whitmans. She makes friends with a morbid, hysterical girl named Lucy Ayres. Incidentally, Horace and Henry hear that Lucy is fond of making candy and uneasiness is aroused in the minds of both, the more so that Henry observes there is something greatly troubling his wife.

"LUCY'S EYES FASTENED THEMSELVES UPON HER, AND SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENED."

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CHAPTER XI

WHEN they were in the house again she resumed her book, reading every word carefully, and Henry took up the Sunday paper, which he had not finished. The thoughts of both, however, turned from time to time toward Horace. Sylvia did not know where he had gone. She did not suspect. Henry knew, but he did not know why. Horace had sprung suddenly to his feet and caught up his hat as the two men had been sitting under the trees. Henry had emitted a long puff of tobacco smoke and looked inquiringly at him through the filmy blue of it.

"I can't stand it another minute," said Horace, almost with violence. "I've got to know what is going on; I am going to the Ayres' myself. I don't care what they think. I don't care what she thinks. I don't care what anybody thinks." With that he was gone.

Henry took another puff at his pipe. It showed the difference between the masculine and the feminine point of view that Henry did not for the moment attach a sentimental reason to Horace's going. He realized Rose's attractions. The very probable supposition that she and Horace might fall in love with and marry each other had occurred to him, but this, he knew at once, had nothing whatever to do with that. He turned the whole over and over in his mind, with no result. He lacked enough premises to arrive at conclusions. He had started for the house and his Sunday paper when he met Sylvia, and had resolved to put it all out of his mind. But he was not quite able. There is a masculine curiosity as well as a feminine, and one is about as persistent as the other.

Meantime Horace was walking down the road toward the Ayres house. It was a pretty, much ornamented white cottage, with a carefully kept lawn and shade trees. At one side was an old fashioned garden with an arbor. In this arbor, as Horace drew near, he saw the sweep of feminine draperies. It seemed to him that the arbor was full of women. In reality there were only three—Lucy, her mother and Rose.

When Rose had rung the doorbell she had been surprised by what sounded like a mad rush to answer her ring. Mrs. Ayres opened the door. She looked white and perturbed, and behind her showed Lucy's face, flushed and angry.

"I knew it was Miss Fletcher. I told you so, mother," said Lucy, and her low, sweet voice rang out like an angry bird's with a sudden break for the high notes.

Mrs. Ayres kept her self-possession of manner, although her face showed not only nervousness but something like terror. "Good afternoon, Miss Fletcher," she said. "Please walk in."

"She said for me to call her Rose," cried Lucy. "Please come in, Rose. I am so glad to see you."

In spite of the cordial words the girl's voice was strange. Rose stared from daughter to mother and back again. "If you were engaged," she said, rather coldly, "you would prefer that I came some other time."

"No, indeed," cried Lucy; "no other time—yes, every other time. What am I saying? But I want you now, too. Come right up in my room, Rose. I know you will excuse my wrapper and my bed's being tumbled. I have been lying down. Come right up."

Rose followed Lucy, and, to her astonishment, became aware that Lucy's mother was following her. Mrs. Ayres entered the room with the two girls. Lucy looked impatiently at her and spoke, as Rose wondered any daughter could speak. "Rose and I have some things to talk over, mother," she said.

"Nothing, I guess, that your mother cannot hear," returned Mrs. Ayres with forced pleasantry. She sat down, and Lucy flung herself petulantly upon the bed, where she had evidently been lying, but seemingly not reposing, for it was much rumpled, and the pillows gave evidence of the restless tossing of a weary head. Lucy herself had a curiously rumpled aspect, though not exactly untidy. Her soft white lace trimmed wrapper, carelessly tied with blue ribbons, was wrinkled, her little slippers were unbuttoned. Her mass of soft hair was half over her shoulders. There were red spots on the cheeks which had been so white in the morning, and her eyes shone. She kept tying and untying two blue ribbons at the neck of her wrapper as she lay on the bed and talked rapidly. "I look like a fright, I know," she said. "I was tired after church and slipped off my dress and lay down. My hair is all in a muss."

"It is such lovely hair that it looks pretty anyway," said Rose.

Lucy drew a strand of her hair violently over her shoulder. It almost seemed as if she meant to tear it out by the roots.

"Lucy!" said her mother.

"Oh, mother, do let me alone!" cried the girl. Then she said, looking angrily at her tress of hair, then at Rose, "it is not nearly as pretty as yours. You know it isn't. All men are simply crazy over hair your color. I hate my hair. I just hate it!"

"Lucy!" said her mother again, in the same startled but admonitory tone.

Lucy made an impatient face at her. She threw back the tress of hair. "I hate it," said she.

Rose began to feel awkward. She noticed Mrs. Ayres' anxious regard of her daughter, and she thought with disgust that Lucy Ayres was not as sweet a girl as she had seemed. However, she felt an odd kind of sympathy and pity for her. Lucy's pretty face and her white wrapper seemed alike awry with nervous suffering, which the other girl dimly understood, although it was the understanding of a normal character with regard to an abnormal one.

Rose resolved to change the subject.

"I did enjoy your singing so much this morning," she said.

"Thank you," replied Lucy, but a look of alarm instead of pleasure appeared upon her face, which Rose was astonished to see in the mother's likewise.

"I feel so sorry for that poor Miss Hart, because I cannot think for a moment that she was guilty of what they accused her," said Rose, "that I don't like to say anything about her singing. But I will say this much. I did enjoy yours."

"Thank you," said Lucy again. Her look of mortal terror deepened. From being aggressively nervous she looked on the verge of a collapse. Mrs. Ayres rose, went to Lucy's closet and returned with a bottle of wine and a glass. "Here," she said, as she poured out the red liquor, "you had better drink this, dear. You know Dr. Wallace said you must drink port wine, and you are all tired out with your singing this morning." Lucy seized the glass and drank the wine eagerly.

"It must be a nervous strain," said Rose, "to stand up there before such a crowded audience as there was this morning and sing."

"Yes, it is," agreed Mrs. Ayres in a harsh voice, "and especially when anybody isn't used to it. Lucy's not at all strong and she had to be out quite late at rehearsal last night, too."

"I hope it won't be too much for her," said Rose, "but it is such a delight to listen to her after—"

"Oh, I am tired and sick of hearing Miss Hart's name!" cried Lucy unpleasantly.

"Lucy!" said Mrs. Ayres.

"Well, I am," said Lucy defiantly. "It has been nothing but Miss Hart, Miss Hart from morning until night lately. Nobody thinks she poisoned Miss Farrel, of course. It was perfect nonsense to accuse her of it, and when that is said I think myself that is enough. I see no need of this eternal harping upon it. I have heard nothing except 'Poor Miss Hart' until I am nearly wild. Come, Rose, I'll get dressed and we'll go out in the arbor. It is too pleasant to stay in doors. This room is awfully close."

"I think, perhaps, I had better not stay," Rose replied doubtfully. It seemed to her that she was having a strange call, and she began to be indignant, as well as astonished.

"Of course you are going to stay," Lucy said, and her voice was sweet again. "We'll let Miss Hart alone, and I'll get dressed and we'll go in the arbor. It is lovely out there today."

With that Lucy sprang from the bed and let her wrapper slip from her shoulders. She stood before her old fashioned black walnut bureau and began brushing her hair. Her white arms and shoulders gleamed through it as she brushed with what seemed a cruel violence.

Rose laughed in a forced way. "Why, dear, you brush your hair as if it had offended you," she said.

"Don't brush so hard, Lucy," said Mrs. Ayres.

"I just hate my old hair anyway," said Lucy, with a vicious stroke of the brush. She bent her head over and swept the whole dark mass downward until it concealed her face and nearly touched her knees. Then she gave it a deft twist, righted herself and pinned the coil in place.

"How beautifully you do up your hair!" said Rose.

Lucy cast an appreciative look at herself in the glass. The wine had deepened the glow on her cheeks; her eyes were more brilliant. She pulled her hair a little over one temple and looked at herself with entire satisfaction. Lucy had a beautiful neck and arms, unexpectedly plump for a girl so apparently slender. Her skin was full of rosy color, too. She gazed at the superb curve of her shoulders rising above the dainty lace of her corset cover and smile undisguisedly.

"I wish my neck was as plump as yours," said Rose.

"Yes, she has a nice plump neck," said Mrs. Ayres. While the words showed maternal pride the tone never relaxed from its nervous anxiety.

Lucy's smile vanished suddenly. "Well, what if it is plump?" she said. "What is the use of it? A girl living here in East Westland can never wear a dress to show her neck. People would think she had gone out of her mind."

Rose laughed. "I have some low necked gowns," said she, "but I can't wear them either. Maybe that is fortunate for me; my neck is so thin."

"You will wear them in other places," said Lucy. "You won't stay here all your days. You will have plenty of chances to wear your low neck gowns." She spoke again in her unnaturally high voice. She turned toward her closet to get her dress.

"Lucy!" said Mrs. Ayres.

"Well, it is the truth," said Lucy. "Don't preach, mother. If you were a girl and somebody told you your neck was pretty, and you knew other girls had chances to wear low necked dresses you wouldn't be above feeling it a little.

"My neck was as pretty as yours when I was a girl, and I never wore a low neck dress in my life," said Mrs. Ayres.

"Oh, well, you got married when you were 18," said Lucy. There was something almost coarse in her remark. Rose felt herself flush. She was sophisticated and had seen the world, although she had been closely if not lovingly guarded; but she shrank from some things as though she had never come from under a country mother's wing in her life.

Lucy got a pale blue muslin gown from the closet and slipped it over her shoulders. Then she stood for her mother to fasten it in the back. Lucy was lovely in this cloud of blue, with edgings of lace on the ruffles and knots of black velvet. She fastened her black velvet girdle and turned herself sidewise, with a charming feminine motion, to get the effect of her slender waist between the curves of her small hips and bust. Again she looked pleased. "You are dear in that blue gown," said Rose. Lucy smiled. Then she scowled as suddenly. She could see Rose over her shoulders in the glass. "It is awful countrified," said she. "Look at the sleeves and look at yours. Where was yours made?"

"My dress maker in New York," faltered Rose. She felt guilty, because her gown was undeniably in better style.

"There's no use trying to have anything in East Westland," said Lucy. While she was fastening a little gold brooch at her throat Rose again tried to change the subject. "That candy of yours looked perfectly delicious," said she. "You must teach me how you make it."

Mrs. Ayres went dead white in a moment. She looked at Lucy with a look of horror, which the girl did not meet. She went on fastening her brooch. "Did you like it?" she asked carelessly.

"An accident happened to it, I am sorry to say," explained Rose.

"Mr. Allen and I were out in the grove, and somehow he jostled me, and the candy got scattered on the ground, and he stepped on it."

"Were you and he alone out there?" asked Lucy in a very quiet voice.

Rose looked at her amazedly. "Why, no; not when that happened," she replied. "Aunt Sylvia was there, too." She spoke a little resentfully. "What if Mr. Allen and I had been alone—what is that to her?" she thought.

"There is some more candy," said Lucy calmly. "I will get it and then we will go out in the arbor. I will teach you to make the candy any day. It is very simple. Come, Rose, dear. Mother, we are going out in the arbor."

Mrs. Ayres rose immediately. She preceded the two girls downstairs and came through the sitting room door with a dish of candy in her hand just as they reached it. "Here is the candy, dear," she said to Lucy, and there was something commanding in her voice.

Lucy took the dish, a pretty little decorated affair, with what seemed to Rose an air of suspicion and a grudging. "Thank you, mother." "Come, Rose," she said. She led the way and Rose followed. Mrs. Ayres returned to the sitting room. The girls went through the old fashioned garden, with its flower beds outlined with box, in which the earlier flowers were at their prime, to the arbor. It was a pretty old structure, covered with the shaggy arms of an old grapevine, whose gold green leaves were just uncurling. Lucy placed the bowl of candy on an end of the bench which ran around the interior, and, to Rose's surprise, seated herself at a distance from it and motioned to Rose to sit beside her, without offering her any candy. Lucy leaned against Rose and looked up at her. She looked young and piteous and confiding. Rose felt again that she was sweet and that she loved her. She put her arm around Lucy.

"You are a dear," said she.

Lucy nestled closer. "I know you must have thought me perfectly horrid to speak as I did to mother," said she, "but you don't understand."

Lucy hesitated. Rose waited.

"You see, the trouble is," Lucy went on, "I love mother dearly, of course. She is the best mother that ever a girl had, but she is always so anxious about me, and she follows me about so, and I get nervous, and I know I don't always speak as I should. I am often ashamed of myself. You see—"

Lucy hesitated again for a longer period. Rose waited.

"Mother has times of being very nervous," Lucy said in a whisper. "I sometimes think, when she follows me about so, that she is not for the time being quite herself."

Rose started, and looked at the other girl in horror. "Why don't you have a doctor?" said she.

"Oh, I don't mean that she—I don't mean that there is anything serious, only she has always been overanxious about me, and at times I fancy she is nervous, and then the anxiety grows beyond limit. She always gets over it. I don't mean that—"

"Oh, I don't know," said Rose.

"I never mean to be impatient," Lucy went on, "but today I was very tired, and I wanted to see you especially. I wanted to ask you something."

"What?"

Lucy looked away from Rose. She seemed to shrink within herself.

The color faded from her face. "I heard something," she said faintly, "but I said I wouldn't believe it until I asked you."

"What is it?"

"I heard that you were engaged to marry Mr. Allen."

Rose flushed and moved away a little from Lucy. "You can contradict the rumor whenever you hear it again," she said.

"Then it isn't true?"

"No, it isn't."

Lucy nestled against Rose in spite of a sudden coldness which had come over the other girl. "You are so dear," said she.

Rose looked straight ahead and sat stiffly. "I am thoroughly angry at such rumors, merely because a girl happens to be living in the same house with a marriageable man," said she.

"Yes, that is so," said Lucy. She remained quiet for a few moments, leaning against Rose, her blue clad shoulder pressing lovingly the black clad one. Then she moved away a little and reared her pretty back with a curious snakelike motion. Rose watched her. Lucy's eyes fastened themselves upon her, and something strange happened. Either Lucy Ayres was a born actress or she had become actually so imbued through abnormal emotion and love, with the very spirit of the man, that she was capable of projecting his own emotions and feelings into her own soul, and thence upon her face. At all events, she looked at Rose and slowly Rose became bewildered. It seemed to her that Horace Allen was looking at her through the eyes of this girl, with a look which she had often seen since their very first meeting. She felt herself glowing from head to foot. She was conscious of a deep crimson stealing all over her face and neck. Her eyes fell before the other girl's. Then suddenly it was all over. Lucy rose with a little laugh. "You sweet, funny creature," she said. "I can make you blush looking at you as if I were a man. Well, maybe I love you as well as one."

Lucy took the bowl of candy from the bench and extended it to Rose. "Do have some candy," said she.

"Thank you," said Rose. She looked bewildered and felt so. She took a sugared almond and began nibbling at it. "Aren't you going to eat any candy yourself?" said she.

"I have eaten so much already that it has made my head ache," replied Lucy. "Is it good?"

"Simply delicious. You must teach me how to make such candy."

"Lucy will be glad to teach you any day," said Mrs. Ayres' voice. She had come swiftly upon them and entered the arbor with a religious newspaper in her hand. Lucy no longer seemed annoyed by her mother's following her. She only set the candy behind her with a quick movement, which puzzled Rose. "Aren't you going to offer your mother some?" she asked, laughing.

"Mother can't eat candy. Dr. Wallace has forbidden it," Lucy said quickly.

"Yes, that is quite true," assented Mrs. Ayres. She began reading her paper. Lucy offered the bowl again to Rose, who took a bonbon. She was just swallowing it when Horace Allen appeared. He made a motion which did not escape Mrs. Ayres. She rose and confronted him with perfect calmness and dignity. "Good afternoon, Mr. Allen," she said.

Lucy sprang up quickly. She was very white. Horace said good afternoon perfunctorily and looked at Rose.

Mrs. Ayres caught up the bowl of candy. "Let me offer you some, Mr. Allen," she said. "It is homemade candy and quite harmless, I assure you." Her fair, elderly face confronted him smilingly; her voice was calm.

"Thank you," said Horace, and took a sugared almond.

Lucy made a movement as if to stop him, but her mother laid her hand with gentle firmness on her arm. "Sit down, Lucy," she said, and Lucy sat down.

CHAPTER XII

HENRY WHITMAN and his wife Sylvia remained, the one reading his Sunday paper, the other her book, while Horace and Rose were away. Henry's paper rustled, Sylvia turned pages gently. Occasionally she smiled, the self-satisfied smile of the reader who thinks she understands the author, to her own credit. Henry scowled over his paper, the scowl of one who reads to disapprove, to his own credit.

Both were quite engrossed. Sylvia had reached an extremely interesting portion of her book, and Henry was reading a section of his paper which made him fairly warlike. However, the clock striking 4 aroused both of them. "I think it is very funny that they have not come home," said Sylvia.

"I dare say they will be along pretty soon," said Henry.

Sylvia looked keenly at him. "Henry Whitman, did he go to the Ayres'?" said she.

Henry, cornered, told the truth. "Well, I shouldn't wonder," he admitted.

"I think it's pretty work," said Sylvia, angry red spots coming in her cheeks. Henry said nothing.

"The idea that a young man can't be in the house with a girl any longer than this without his fairly chasing her," said Sylvia.

"Who knows that he is?"

"Do you think he is interested in the Ayres girl?"

"No, I don't."

"Then it is Rose," said Sylvia. "Pretty work I call it. Here she is with her own folks in this nice home, with everything she needs!"

Henry looked at Sylvia with astonishment. "Why," he said, "girls get married. You got married yourself."

"I know I did," said Sylvia, "but that hasn't got anything to do with it. Of course he has to chase her the minute she comes within gunshot."

"Still, there's one thing certain, if she doesn't want him he can take it out in chasing, if he is chasing, and I don't think he is," said Henry. "Nobody is going to make Rose marry any man."

"She don't act a mite in love with him," said Sylvia ruminatingly. "She seemed real mad with him this noon about that candy. Henry, that was a funny thing for him to do."

"What?" asked Henry, who had so far only got Rose's rather vague account of the candy episode.

Sylvia explained. "He actually knocked that candy out of her hand and made her spill the whole box, and then trampled on it. I saw him."

Henry stared at Sylvia. "It must have been an accident," said he.

"It looked like an accident on purpose," said Sylvia. "Well, I guess I'll go out and make some of that salad they like so much for supper."

After Sylvia had gone Henry sat for a while reflecting, then he went noiselessly out of the front door and around to the grove. He found the scattered pieces of candy and the broken box quickly enough. He cast a wary glance around and gathered the whole mass up and thrust it into the pocket of his Sunday coat. Then he stole back to the house and got his hat and went out again. He was hurrying along the road when he met Horace and Rose returning.

Rose was talking seemingly with a cold earnestness to her companion. Horace seemed to be listening passively. Henry thought he looked pale and anxious. When he saw Henry he smiled. "I have an errand, a business errand," explained Henry. "Please tell Mrs. Whitman I shall be home in time for supper. I don't think she knew when I went out. She was in the kitchen."

"All right," replied Horace. After he had passed them Henry caught the words, "I think you owe me an explanation," in Rose's voice.

"It is about this blamed candy," thought Henry, feeling the crumpled mass in his pocket.

"Sylvia is keeping something to herself that is worrying her to death, in spite of her being so tickled to have the girl with us, and now here is this candy," he said to himself. He understood that for some reason Horace had not wanted Rose to eat the candy, that he had resorted to fairly desperate measures to prevent it, but he could not imagine why. He had no imagination for sensation or melodrama, and the candy affair was touching that line. He had been calmly prosaic with regrd to Eliza Farrel's death. "They can talk all they want to about murder and suicide," he said to Sylvia. "I don't believe a word of it."

Now Henry was forced to admit that he himself was confronted by something mysterious. Why had Horace fairly flung that candy on the ground and trampled on it, unless he had suddenly gone mad, or—. There Henry brought himself up with a jolt. He absolutely refused to suspect. "I'd jest as soon eat all that's left of the truck myself," he thought, "only I couldn't bear candy since I was a child, and I ain't going to eat it for anybody."

Henry had to pass the Ayres house. Just as he came abreast of it he heard a hysterical sob, then another from behind the open windows of a room on the second floor whose blinds were closed.

To Be Continued Next Sunday

SIR RICHARD ESCOMBE

Continued From Preceding Page

improbable—but of that he did not whisper a syllable to old Mrs. Dulcimore.

"I don't believe a word of it, Mrs. Dulcimore," he said laughing; "Kitty has just gone away in a huff, and, for all you know, is back in the house again by this time. She's too clever to give you cause for any real anxiety. Take my advice and send some one up to her bedroom—as like as not you'll find her there all the time."

"The very thing I said to me Anthony—but five minutes ago. She'll be upstairs all the time, I said—And what must the ijiot be doing but setting off for Shoreham after her. Oh, sorrow the day that I was married to an elephant, sorry the—but wait till he comes home and I'll know his reasons—ay, Mr. Willoughby, and with justice!"

Willoughby laughed in his sleeve at this—and, having drunk a glass of wine and eaten a mouthful of food, he returned to the chaise in which he had traveled down from London—and there, with his very foot upon the step, he came face to face with Kitty, as we have told, and was instantly put in possession of her story.

"Cousin Willoughby—oh, can it be Cousin Willoughby?"

"Now, Mistress Kitty, could be any other? What, you are in trouble—crying—oh, Kitty, Kitty—"

"I met my lord upon the cliff, and he insulted me—I cannot return to his house, Cousin Willoughby—neither my father nor mother understands—they are simple people and know no better. Cousin—I must go away—I must leave this place—will you take me, cousin?"

But, Kitty, think, what will they—"

"I care not though all the country cries upon me. Is it not enough that I have been in this man's house for weeks together? Cousin Willoughby, I am going to my kinswoman at Marlow. If you will not help me to get there I will walk the whole way—and I have not a shilling in my pocket nor a cloak for my neck. Now, cousin—"

He stared at her amazed. His pulse beat furiously, his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth because of the excitement of his thoughts.

"Kitty," he stammered—you know there is nothing I would not do—and if your mind is really set upon it—"

"Oh, cousin, cousin," cries Kitty, "if I were your sister, would you leave me here for men to scorn me or would you take me to a house of safety?"

"God knows, I would give my life for you," says the lad—and immediately opening the door he bade her enter the chaise.

Such, then, was the beginning of that pretty flight—an escapade of which the town would make much in the days to some, as we shall presently discover. And yet, as we know, it was never even a boy and girl affair; never so much as a hoyden comedy playing among the wheat sheaves innocently or set up for an example in the pastorals beloved of the King's theater.

Kitty fled from Brighton because she believed it were an infamy to stay longer there—the young soldier accompanied her because she asked him to and for no other reason under God's sky.

It is true that Master Willoughby's heart beat quick, that the blood throbbed in his veins and that every impulse of his young manhood was quickened when he found himself side by side with Kitty in the chaise; but this was a natural sequence enough.

How he had loved the child; how often in his dreams had he pictured her as the new day discovered her—eyes half closed, upon a white pillow; the golden threads of her pretty hair tousled upon a snow white forehead; her breath faint as one who sleeps a child's sleep; the little hands clasped upon her lap—Kitty become the nomad, Kitty fleeing from riches to the cot—and by her side a man who named her for his divinity! None the less, young Willoughby would sooner have cut off his strong right hand than have betrayed a word of the truth at such an hour. Indeed, we find that he labored for her comfort in a way that no man of the world could have bettered; rousing the inns at her coming; urging the post boys to dispatch; asking her at every turn how she did—and expressing his love by no other overt act than that of the homage his eyes could not conceal. And thus, at last, he brought her to St. James—and there he left her at a hostelry he knew until leave could be obtained and he might conduct her to Marlow to her kinswoman's house.

Of this second stage of the journey we shall have but little to say. It had been a happier day for Ensign Willoughby, perhaps, had he chosen another for her escort—for what must happen but that, when they approached the village of Slough, whence Windsor is clearly to be discerned, the lad suddenly recollected Sir Richard's presence at the castle and made mention of it.

"The king, they say, is very pleased with him, Kitty," he remarked, in a generous impulse not to be restrained.

To this Kitty replied by the first earnest word she had spoken since they quitted Brighton.

"Then Sir Richard has been to London again, cousin?"

"Not once since you were there. They tell the oddest things of him—were Medmenham a monkery in fact as well as name, Sir Dick would be the very man for a habit in the place."

Kitty thought upon this for a little while and presently she said:

"Why do you speak to me of Sir Richard, cousin; why does every one speak to me of him?"

"Because we all thought that you loved him, Kitty."

"And you, cousin—did you believe it?"

"Could I help it, Kitty? If it had not been so, if I had not thought it so, would not I have told you long ago what I have always been afraid to tell you, Kitty?"

Here was a declaration if you like; and what would have followed upon it but for Kitty's discretion God only knows. Young Willoughby, a great hope returning to him, had no other desire than to catch Kitty in his arms and, holding her close, to take an oath that no day of his life should separate them again—which folly, perchance, he would have committed had not he surprised her pretty eyes regarding the distant castle so wistfully that all her secret was to be read in an instant and his own supreme desire frozen at his heart. Kitty, however, wished still to deceive him; and speaking very kindly, she said:

"I shall never learn to love, cousin; it is a lesson no one can teach me."

"Ah, Kitty, if I could believe that. Look in my eyes and tell me it is the truth."

"No, no," she cried, "the sun is setting and it blinds me, cousin; look, all the west is aflame. I cannot speak of it. And now the castle is far behind us; oh, do not let us talk of it any more, cousin."

He obeyed her without a word. This knowledge that whatever her lips might say her heart was another man's came to him as a sad echo of the declining day and an omen of that night through which it seemed all who loved Kitty Dulcimore must live.

"She will marry Richard Escombe or she will never marry at all," said Ensign Willoughby, and then with an instinctive dread of that which had been done he asked himself, "What will he say, what will London say of last night's work?"

But this was a question the future alone could answer—and how it answered it we shall presently tell.

To Be Continued Next Sunday.