

THE SHOULDERS OF ATLAS *By Wilkins Freeman*

SYNOPSIS
Henry Whitman and 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, Abraham White, Abraham'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 fifty acres of ground, and an annual income of \$6000 in stocks. Horace Allen, principal of the local school, who had boarded with the Whitmans in their days of poverty, remains with them in their prosperity.

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. 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 the 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 falls through. Because of the departure for Europe of the Wilton family, 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, whose morbid fancies have greatly disturbed her mother. Incidentally Horace and Henry are aroused in the minds of both. When Lucy offers Rose a box Horace snatches it away, and crumples it into his pocket. To add to Henry's distress he notices that there is something preying on his wife's mind.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS FARREL, teaching in her country school, had had visions of a girl riding a thoroughbred in Central park with a groom in attendance; whereas the reality was an old man, who served both as coachman and butler, in carefully kept livery, guiding two horses apt to stumble from extreme age through the snapping district and the pretty face of the girl looking out of the windows of an ancient coupe, which nevertheless had a coat of arms upon its door. Miss Farrel imagined Rose in a brilliant house party at Wiltmore, Mrs. Wilton's and Miss Pamela's country home; whereas in reality she was roaming about the fields and brooks with an old bull terrier for guard and companion. Rose generally carried a book on these expeditions, and generally not a modern book. Her governess had a terror of modern books, especially of novels. She had looked into a few and shuddered. Rose's taste in literature was almost Elizabethan. She was not allowed, of course, to glance at early English novels, which her governess classed with late English and American in point of morality, but no poetry except Byron was prohibited.

Rose loved to sit under a tree with the dog in a white coil beside her and hold her book open on her lap and read a word now and then and amuse herself with fancies the rest of the time. She grew in those days of her early girlhood to have firm belief in those things which she never saw or heard, and the belief never wholly deserted her. She never saw a wood nymph stretch out a white arm from a tree, but she believed in the possibility of it, and the belief gave her a curious delight. When she returned to the house for her scanty elegantly served dinner with the three elder ladies, her eyes would be misty with these fancies and her mouth would wear the inscrutable smile of a baby's at the charm of them.

When she first came to East Westland she was a profound mystery to Horace, who had only known well two distinct types of girl—the purely provincial and the reverse. Rose, with her mixture of the two, puzzled him. While she was not in the least shy, she had a reserve which caused her to remain a secret to him for some time. Rose's inner life was to her something sacred, not to be lightly revealed. At last, through occasional remarks and opinions, light began to shine through. He had begun to understand her the Sunday when he had followed her to Lucy Ayres'. He had also more than begun to love her. Horace Allen would not have loved her so soon had she been more visible as to her inner self. Things plainly on the surface, rarely interested him very much. He had not an easily aroused temperament, and a veil which stimulated his imagination and aroused his searching instinct was really essential if he were to fall in love. He had fallen in love before, he had supposed, although he had never asked one of the fair ones to marry him. Now he began to call up various faces and wonder if this were not the first time. All the faces seemed to dim before this present one. He realized something in her very dear and precious, and for the first time he felt as if he could not forego possession. Hitherto it had been easy enough to bear the slight wrench of leaving temptation and moving his tent. Here it was different. Still, the old objection remained. How could he marry upon his slight salary?

The high school in East Westland was an endowed institution. The principal received \$1,200 a year. People in the village considered that a prodigious income. Horace, of course, knew better. He did not think that sum sufficient for him to risk matrimony. Here, too, he was hampered by another consideration. It was intolerable for him to think of Rose's wealth and his paltry \$1,200 per year. An ambition which had always slumbered within his mind awoke to full strength and activity. He began to sit up late at night and write articles for the papers and magazines. He had got one accepted and received a check which to his inexperienced seemed promisingly large. In spite of all his anxiety he was exalted. He began to wonder if circumstances would not soon justify him in reaching out for the sweet he coveted. He made up his mind not to be precipitate, to wait until he was sure, but his impatience had waxed during the last few hours, ever since that



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delicious note of stilled, even cold praise and that check had arrived. When Rose had started to go up stairs he had not been able to avoid following her into the hall. The door of the north parlor stood open and the whole room was full of the soft shimmer of moonlight. It looked like a bower of romance. It seemed full of soft and holy and alluring mysteries. Horace looked down at Rose. Rose looked up at him. Her eyes fell; she trembled deliciously.

"It is very early," he said, in a whispering voice, which would not have been known for his. It had in it the male cadences of wooing music.

Rose stood still.

"Let us go in there a little while," whispered Horace. Rose followed him into the room; he gave the door a little push. It did not quite close, but nearly. Horace placed a chair for Rose beside a window into which the moon was shining, then he drew up one beside it, but not very close. He neither dared, nor was sure that he desired. Alone with the girl in this moonlit room an awe crept over him. She looked away from him out of the window and he saw that this same awe was over her also. All their young impulses were thrilling, but this awe, which was of the spirit, held them in check. Rose, with the full white moonlight shining upon her face, gained an ethereal beauty which gave her an adorable aloofness. The young man seemed to see her through the vista of all his young dreams. She was the goddess before whom his soul knelt at a distance. He thought he had never seen anything half so lovely as she was in that white light, which seemed to crown her with a frosty radiance like a nimbus. Her very expression was changed. She was smiling, but there was something a little grave and stern about her smile. Her eyes, fixed upon the clear crystal of the moon sailing through the night blue, were full of vision. It did not seem possible to him that she could be thinking of him at all, this beautiful creature with her pure regard for the holy mystery of the nightly sky; but in reality Rose, being the more emotional of the two and also since she was not the one to advance, the more daring, began to tremble with impatience for his closer contact, for the touch of his hand upon hers.

She would have died before she had betrayed this yearning of hers, before she would have made the first advance, but it filled her as with secret fire. Finally a sort of anger possessed her; anger at herself and at Horace. She became horribly ashamed of herself, and angry at him because of the shame. She gazed out at the wonderful masses of shadows which the trees made and she gazed up again at the sky and that floating crystal, and it seemed impossible that it was within her as it was. Her clear face was as calm as marble, her expression as immovable, her gaze as direct, it seemed as if a man must be a part of the wonderful mystery

of the moonlit night to come within her scope of vision at all.

Rose chilled, when she did not mean to do so, by sheer maidenliness.

Horace, gazing at her calm face, felt in some way rebuked. He had led a decent sort of life, but after all he was a man, and what right had he to even think of a creature like that? He leaned back in his chair, removing himself further from her, and he also gazed at the moon. That mysterious thing of silver light and shadows, which had illumined all the ages of creation by their own reflected light, until it had come to be a mirror of creation itself, seemed to give him a sort of chill of the flesh. After all, what was everything in life but a repetition of that which had been, and a certainty of death? Rose looked like a ghost to his fancy. He seemed like a ghost to himself, and felt reproached for the hot ardor surging in his fleshy heart.

"That same moon lit the world for the builders of the pyramids," he said, tritely enough.

"Yes," murmured Rose in a faint voice.

The pyramids chilled her. So they were what he had been thinking about, and not herself.

Horace went on. "It shone upon all those ancient battle fields of the Old Testament, and the children of Israel in their exile," he said.

Rose looked at him. "It shone upon the garden of Eden, after Adam had so longed for Eve that she grew out of his longing and became something separate from himself, so that he could see her without seeing himself all the time; and it shone upon the garden in Solomon's song, and the roses of Sharon, and the lilies of the valley, and the land flowing with milk and honey," she said in a childish tone of levity, which had an undercurrent of earnestness in it. All her emotional nature and her pride arose against pyramids and Old Testament battle fields, when she had only been conscious that the moon shone upon Horace and herself. She was shamed and angry as she had never been shamed and angry before.

Horace leaned forward and gazed eagerly at her. After all, was he mistaken? He was shrewd enough, although he did not understand the moods of women very well, and it did seem to him that there was something distinctly encouraging in her tone. Just then the night wind came in strongly at the window beside which they were sitting. An ardent fragrance of dewy earth and plants smote them in the face.

"Do you feel the draught?" asked Howard.

"I like it."

"I am afraid you will catch cold."

"I don't catch cold easily at all."

"The wind is very damp," argued Horace with increasing confidence. He grew very bold. He seized upon one of her little white hands. "I won't believe it unless I can feel for myself that your hands are not cold," said he. He felt the little soft fingers curl around his hand with the involuntary pristine force of a baby's. His heart beat tumultuously.

"Oh," he began. Then he stopped suddenly, as Rose snatched her hand away and again gazed at the moon. "It is a beautiful night," she remarked, and the harmless deceit of woman, which is her natural weapon, was in her voice and manner.

Horace was more obtuse. He remained leaning eagerly toward the girl. He extended his hand again, but she repeated in her soft, deceitful voice, "Yes, a perfectly beautiful night."

Then he observed Sylvia Whitman standing beside them. "It's a nice night enough," said she, "but you'll both catch your deaths of cold at this open window. The wind is blowing right in on you."

She made a motion to close it, stepping between Rose and Horace, but the young man sprang to his feet. "Let me close it, Mrs. Whitman," said he, and did so.

"It ain't late enough in the season to set right beside an open window and let the wind blow in on you," said Sylvia severely. She drew up a rocking chair and sat down. She formed the stern apex of a triangle, of which Horace and Rose were the base. She leaned back and rocked.

"It's a pleasant night," said she, as if answering Rose's remark, "but to me there's always something sort of sad about moonlight nights. They make you think of times and people that's gone. I dresay it's different with you young folks. I guess I used to feel different about moonlight nights years ago. I remember when Mr. Whitman and I were first married, we used to like to sit out on the front doorstep and look at the moon and make plans."

"Don't you ever now?" asked Rose.

"Now we go to bed and sleep," replied Sylvia decisively.

There was a silence. "I guess it's pretty late," said Sylvia, in a meaning tone. "What time is it, Mr. Allen?"

Horace consulted his watch. "It is not very late," he said. It did not seem to him that Mrs. Whitman could stay.

"It can't be very late," said Rose.

"What time is it?" asked Sylvia relentlessly.

"About half past ten," replied Horace, with reluctance.

"I call that very late," said Sylvia. "It is late for Rose, anyway."

"I don't feel at all tired," said Rose.

"You must be," said Sylvia. "You can't always go by feelings."

She swayed pitilessly back and forth in her rocking chair. Horace and Rose waited in an agony of impatience for her to leave them, but she had no idea of doing so. She rocked. Now and then she made some maddening little remark which had nothing whatever to do with the situation. Then she rocked again. Finally she triumphed. Rose stood up. "I think it is getting rather late," she said.

"It is very late," agreed Sylvia, also rising. Horace rose. There was a slight pause. It seemed even then that Sylvia might take pity upon them, and leave them. But she stood like a rock. It was quite evident that she would settle again into her rocking chair at the slightest indication which the two young people made of a disposition to remain.

Rose gave a fluttering little sigh. She extended her hand to Horace.

"Good night," Mr. Allen, she said.

"Good night," returned Horace. "Good night, Mrs. Whitman."

"It is time you went to bed too," said Sylvia.

"I think I'll go in and have a smoke with Mr. Whitman first," said Horace.

"He's going to bed too," said Sylvia. "He's tired. Good night, Mr. Allen. If you open that window again you'll be sure and shut it down before you go up stairs, won't you?"

Horace promised that he would. Sylvia went with Rose into her room to unfasten her gown. A lamp was burning on the dressing table. Rose kept her back toward the light. Her pretty face was flushed, and she was almost in tears. Sylvia hung the girl's gown up carefully, then she looked at her lovingly. Unless Rose made the first advance, when Sylvia would submit with inward rapture but outward stiffness, there never were good night kisses exchanged between the two.

"You look all tired out," said Sylvia.

"I am not at all tired," said Rose. She was all quivering with impatience, but her voice was sweet and docile. She put up her face for Sylvia to kiss. "Good night, dear Aunt Sylvia," said she.

"Good night," said Sylvia. Rose felt merely a soft touch of thin, tightly closed lips. Sylvia did not know how to kiss, but she was glowing with delight.

When she joined Henry in their bedroom down stairs he looked at her in some disapproval. "I don't think you'd ought to have gone in there," he said.

"Why not?"

"Why, you must expect young folks to be young folks, and it was only natural for them to want to sit in there in the moonlight."

"They can sit in there in the moonlight if they want to," said Sylvia. "I didn't hinder them."

"I think they wanted to be alone."

"When they sit in the moonlight I'm going to sit too," said Sylvia.

She slipped her gown carefully over her head. When the head emerged Henry saw that it was carried high, with the same rigidity which had lately puzzled him, and that her face had that same expression of stern isolation.

"Sylvia," said Henry.

"Well."

"Does anything worry you lately?"

Sylvia looked at him with sharp suspicion. "I'd like to know why you should think anything worries me," said she, "as comfortable as we are off now."

"Sylvia, have you anything on your mind?"

"I don't want to see young folks making fools of themselves," said Sylvia, shortly, and her voice had the same tone of deceit which Rose had used when she spoke of the beautiful night.

"That ain't it," said Henry, quietly.

"Well, if you want to know," said Sylvia; "she's been pestering me with wanting to pay board if she stays along here, and I've put my foot down; she shan't pay a cent."

"Of course, we can't let her," agreed Henry. Then he added: "This was all her own aunt's property, any way, and if there hadn't been a will it would have gone to her."

"There was a will," said Sylvia, fastening her cotton nightgown tightly around her skinny throat.

"Of course she's going to stay as long as she's con-

tented, and she ain't going to pay board," said Henry, quietly; "but that ain't the trouble. Have you got anything on your mind, Sylvia?"
"I hope so," replied Sylvia, sharply. "I hope I've got a little something on my mind. I ain't a fool."
Henry said no more. Neither he nor Sylvia went to sleep at once. The moon's pale influence lit their room and seemed disturbing in itself. Presently they both smoked cigar smoke.
"He's smoking," said Sylvia. "Well, nothing makes much difference to you men as long as you can smoke. I'd like to know what you'd do in my place."
"Have you got anything on your mind, Sylvia?"
"Didn't I say I hoped I had? Everybody has something on her mind unless she's a tarantula fool, and I ain't never set up for one."
Henry did not speak again.

CHAPTER XIV

THE next morning at breakfast Rose announced her intention of seeing if Lucy Ayres would not go to drive with her. "There's one very nice little horse at the livery stable," said she, "and I can drive. It is a beautiful morning and poor Lucy did not look very well yesterday, and I think it will do her good."

Horace turned white. Henry noticed it. Sylvia, who was serving something, did not. Henry had thought he had arrived at a knowledge of Horace's suspicions, which in themselves seemed to him perfectly groundless, and now that he had, as he supposed, proved them to be so, he was profoundly puzzled. He had gone to Horace's assistance before. Now he did not see his way clear to doing so, and saw no necessity for it. He ate his breakfast meditatively. Horace pushed away his plate and rose. "Why, what's the matter?" asked Sylvia. "Don't you feel well, Mr. Allen?"

"Perfectly well; never felt better."

"You haven't eaten enough to keep a sparrow alive." "I have eaten fast," said Horace. "I have to make an early start this morning. I have some work to do before school."

Rose apparently paid no attention. She went on with her plans for her drive.

"Are you sure you know how to manage a horse?" Sylvia said anxiously. "I used to drive, but I can't go with you because the washerwoman is coming."

"Of course I can drive," said Rose. "I love to drive. And I don't believe there's a horse in the stable that would get out of a walk anyway."

"You won't try to pass by any steam rollers and you'll look out for the automobiles, won't you?" said Sylvia.

Horace left them talking and set out hurriedly. When he reached the Ayres house he entered the gate, passed between the flowering shrubs which bordered the gravel walk and rang the bell with vigor. He was desperate. Lucy herself opened the door. When she saw Horace she turned red, then white. She was dressed neatly in a little blue cotton wrapper, and her pretty hair was arranged as usual with the exception of one tiny curl paper on her forehead. Lucy's hand went up nervously to this curl paper. "Oh, good morning," she said breathlessly, as if she had been running.

Horace returned her greeting gravely. "Can I see you a few moments, Miss Lucy?" he said.

A wild light came into the girl's eyes. Her cheeks flushed again. Again she spoke in her nervous, panting voice and asked him in. She led the way into the parlor and excused herself flutteringly. She was back in a few moments. Instead of the curl paper there was a little soft dark curly lock on her forehead. She also fastened the neck of her wrapper with a gold brooch. The wrapper sloped well from her shoulders and displayed a lovely V of white neck. She sat down opposite Horace, and the simple garment adjusted itself to her slim figure, revealing its tender outlines. Lucy looked at Horace and her expression was tragic, foolish and of almost revolting wistfulness. She was youth and womanhood in its most helpless and pathetic revelation. Poor Lucy could not help herself. She was as a thing always devoured and never consumed by a flame of nature.

Horace felt all this perfectly in an analytical way. He sympathized in an analytical way, but in other respects he felt that curious resentment and outrage of which a man is capable, and which is fiercer than outraged maidenliness. For a man to be beloved when his own heart does not respond is not pleasant. He cannot defend himself, nor even recognize the fact without being lowered in his own self-esteem. Horace had done as far as he could judge, absolutely nothing whatever to cause this state of mind in Lucy. He was self-exonerated as to that, but the miserable reason for it all, in his mere existence as a male of his species, filled him with shame for himself and her, and also with anger.

He strove to hold to duty, but anger got the better of him. Anger coupled with shame make a balky team. Now the man was really at a loss what to say. Lucy sat before him, draped in her little blue cotton robe, and looked at him with her expression of pitiable self-revelation and waited, and Horace sat speechless. Now he was there he wondered what he had been such an ass as to come for. He wondered what he had ever thought he could say—would say.

Then Rose's face shone out before his eyes, and his impulse of protection made him firm. He spoke abruptly. "Miss Lucy," he began. Lucy cast her eyes down and waited. Her whole attitude was that of utter passiveness and yielding.

"Good Lord! She thinks I have come here at 8 o'clock in the morning to propose," Horace thought with a sort of fury. He did not speak again. He actually did not know how to begin, what to say. He did not finally say anything. He arose. It seemed to him that he must prevent Rose from going to drive with Lucy, but he saw no way of doing so.

When he got up it was as if Lucy's face of foolish anticipation was overlaid. "You are not going so soon," she stammered.

"I have to get to school early this morning," Horace said in a harsh voice. He moved toward the door. Lucy also had risen. She now looked altogether tragic. The foolish wistfulness had gone. Instead claws seemed to bristle all over her tender surface. Suddenly Horace realized that her slender, wiry body was pressed against his own. He felt her soft cheek against his. He felt at once in the grip of a tiger and a woman, and horribly helpless, more helpless than he had ever been in his whole life. What could he say or do? Then suddenly the parlor door opened and Mrs. Ayres, Lucy's mother, stood there. She saw with her stern, melancholy gaze the whole situation. "Lucy" she said.

Lucy started away from Horace, and gazed in a sort of fear and wrath at her mother.

"Lucy," said Mrs. Ayres, "go up to your own room."

Lucy obeyed. She slunk out of the door and crept weakly upstairs.

Horace and Mrs. Ayres looked at each other. There was an expression of doubt in the woman's face. For the first time she was not altogether sure. Perhaps Lucy had been wrong after all in her surmises. Why had Horace called?

"What did you come for, Mr. Allen?" Suddenly Horace thought of the obvious thing to say, the explanation to give. "Miss Fletcher is thinking of coming later to take Miss Lucy for a drive," said he.

"And you called to tell her," said Mrs. Ayres. Horace looked at her. Mrs. Ayres understood.

"Miss Fletcher must come with a double seated carriage, so that I can go," said she. "My daughter is very nervous about horses. I never allow her to go to drive without me."

She observed with a sort of bitter sympathy the look of relief overspread Horace's face.

"I will send a telephone message from Mrs. Simms, next door, to the livery stable, so there will be no mistake," she said.

To Be Continued Next Week.

THE NEW YORK HERALD-SAN FRANCISCO CALL ANGLO-AMERICAN COMPETITION
Max Pemberton, England, vs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, America.
Referee—The Public

The NEW YORK HERALD and THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL have purchased the exclusive rights to two novels, simultaneous publication of which began January 26, to continue, in weekly installments, for about 18 weeks, announcement of the closing date to be made hereafter. One novel is by a distinguished Englishman, Mr. Max Pemberton; the other by an equally distinguished American woman, Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. In order to supplement the purely artistic incentive to high endeavor the NEW YORK HERALD and THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL will award a large prize to the author of the better novel of the two. In event of a tie the prize money will be divided equally.

Believing that the public is a more competent judge than a self-styled "critic," the NEW YORK HERALD and THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL invite their readers to express their individual opinions of the weekly installments by filling out the subjoined ballot and sending it to the Anglo-American Competition Committee, care of THE CALL, San Francisco.

I consider this week's installment of (name of novel) better than that of (name of novel)

(Signed)

(Address)

