



Fortune's Rocks: A Novel

By Anita Shreve

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Everywhere hailed for its emotional intensity and unflagging narrative momentum, this magnificent novel transports us to the turn of the twentieth century, to the world of a prominent Boston family summering on the New Hampshire coast, and to the social orbit of a spirited young woman who falls into a passionate, illicit affair with an older man, with cataclysmic results.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Hester Prynne never had it so good! The year is 1899, and Olympia Biddeford, the headstrong daughter of a Boston Brahmin family, has decided to test the limits of her cloistered world. Spending the summer at her father's New Hampshire estate, the teenage heroine of *Fortune's Rocks* is entranced with the visiting salon of artists, writers, and lawyers. She's especially captivated, however, by John Haskell, a charismatic physician who ministers to the blue-collar community in the nearby mill towns. This middle-aged Good Samaritan hires Olympia to assist him as a nurse, and their collaboration soon evolves into a fiery love affair. Alas, it's only a matter of weeks before this passionate exercise in managed care is exposed--with disastrous consequences for the young, impregnated heroine. Even her adoring father now considers her "an overplump sixteen-year-old girl whose judgment can no longer be trusted," and insists that she break off her relationship:

"There is nothing more to be said on this subject," he says. She bites her lip to keep from crying out further. She holds the arms of her chair so tightly she later will have cramps in her fingers. She will refuse to obey him, she thinks. She will accept his implied challenge and set off on her own. But in the next moment, she asks herself: How will she be able to do that? Without her father's support, she cannot hope to survive. And if she herself does not survive, then a child cannot live."

In the end, Anita Shreve's seventh novel is a polished, supremely entertaining variation on *Wuthering Heights*, with Olympia and Haskell sitting in for Catherine and Heathcliff. The author did some meticulous research for her New England background, which gives this study of one particular wayward woman some extra historical heft. Some readers may find the plot twists a bit pat. And despite Olympia's efforts to be an independent woman, she overcomes her trials largely as a result of her family's wealth and station, which takes the edge off Shreve's feminist message. Still, *Fortune's Rocks* is a romance in the classic sense of the word, and should be enjoyed as such, unless the reader is absolutely allergic to happy endings. --*Ted Leventhal*

From Publishers Weekly

The time is the turn of the last century, the setting a rocky New Hampshire coastline resort area nicknamed "Fortune's Rocks." Olympia Biddeford, age 15, is walking the beach, feeling the first stirrings of her womanhood. The strong-willed daughter of an upstanding Boston couple, she soon "learns of desire" as she begins a passionate affair with a married writer, John Haskell, three times her age. From the moment they meet (he is a visiting friend of her father's), they experience a sexual spark. Olympia feels "liquid" in his presence. Soon, they fall into sinful trysting. Shreve (*The Pilot's Wife*) serves up these opening events with breathless immediacy. Once the plot gets a chance to develop, Olympia gets pregnant, gives up child, fights to get child back. It settles down considerably, turning into a modernized *The Scarlet Letter*, a tale of a woman attaining feminist independence by living outside her period's societal mores. Reading, Brown (of TV's *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*) clearly has the most fun at the beginning, where the story's real heat and flushed excitement pours out. Listeners, too, may grow colder as the plot loses its torrid, forbidden edge. Based on the 1999 Little, Brown hardcover. (Dec.)

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From Library Journal

Since Shreve's last book (*The Pilot's Wife*) was an Oprah pick, she's sure to have a winner with this one. But

even without Oprah's help, this book is not to be missed. Fortune's Rocks takes Shreve back to her forte. A literary novel set in a historical framework. It worked beautifully in *The Weight of Water*, and it does here as well. As the year 1899 moves toward 1900, Olympia Biddesford is a 15-year-old on the cusp of womanhood. Spending the summer with her family at Fortune's Rocks, a New Hampshire coastal community, she meets John Haskell, an esteemed friend of her father. Though John has a wife and four children, he and Olympia are instant soulmates. Their intense affair creates complete havoc in both of their lives. A few weeks of joy turn into years of pain and redemption, culminating in a tense, page-turning trial at the end of the book. Shreve's writing is just complex and meaty enough to portray the time period perfectly, and it's a beautifully told story. Order multiple copies, and put yourself on the holds list! This will fly off the shelves.

-ABeth Gibbs, P.L. of Charlotte & Mecklenburg Cty., NC

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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