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**A Hazard of New Fortunes —
Volume 2**

William Dean Howells

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: William Dean Howells
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8424-5195-7

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A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

By

William Dean Howells

PART SECOND

I.

The evening when March closed with Mrs. Green's reduced offer, and decided to take her apartment, the widow whose lodgings he had rejected sat with her daughter in an upper room at the back of her house. In the shaded glow of the drop-light she was sewing, and the girl was drawing at the same table. From time to time, as they talked, the girl lifted her head and tilted it a little on one side so as to get some desired effect of her work.

"It's a mercy the cold weather holds off," said the mother. "We should have to light the furnace, unless we wanted to scare everybody away with a cold house; and I don't know who would take care of it, or what would become of us, every way."

"They seem to have been scared away from a house that wasn't cold," said the girl. "Perhaps they might like a cold one. But it's too early for cold yet. It's only just in the beginning of November."

"The Messenger says they've had a sprinkling of snow."

"Oh yes, at St. Barnaby! I don't know when they don't have sprinklings of snow there. I'm awfully glad we haven't got that winter before us."

The widow sighed as mothers do who feel the contrast their experience opposes to the hopeful recklessness of such talk as this. "We may have a worse winter here," she said, darkly.

"Then I couldn't stand it," said the girl, "and I should go in for lighting out to Florida double-quick."

"And how would you get to Florida?" demanded her mother, severely.

"Oh, by the usual conveyance Pullman vestibuled train, I suppose. What makes you so blue, mamma?" The girl was all the time

sketching away, rubbing out, lifting her head for the effect, and then bending it over her work again without looking at her mother.

"I am not blue, Alma. But I cannot endure this — this hopefulness of yours."

"Why? What harm does it do?"

"Harm?" echoed the mother.

Pending the effort she must make in saying, the girl cut in: "Yes, harm. You've kept your despair dusted off and ready for use at an instant's notice ever since we came, and what good has it done? I'm going to keep on hoping to the bitter end. That's what papa did."

It was what the Rev. Archibald Leighton had done with all the consumptive's buoyancy. The morning he died he told them that now he had turned the point and was really going to get well. The cheerfulness was not only in his disease, but in his temperament. Its excess was always a little against him in his church work, and Mrs. Leighton was right enough in feeling that if it had not been for the ballast of her instinctive despondency he would have made shipwreck of such small chances of prosperity as befell him in life. It was not from him that his daughter got her talent, though he had left her his temperament intact of his widow's legal thirds. He was one of those men of whom the country people say when he is gone that the woman gets along better without him. Mrs. Leighton had long eked out their income by taking a summer boarder or two, as a great favor, into her family; and when the greater need came, she frankly gave up her house to the summer-folks (as they call them in the country), and managed it for their comfort from the small quarter of it in which she shut herself up with her daughter.

The notion of shutting up is an exigency of the rounded period. The fact is, of course, that Alma Leighton was not shut up in any sense whatever. She was the pervading light, if not force, of the house. She was a good cook, and she managed the kitchen with the help of an Irish girl, while her mother looked after the rest of the housekeeping. But she was not systematic; she had inspiration but not discipline, and her mother mourned more over the days when Alma left the whole dinner to the Irish girl than she rejoiced in those when one of Alma's great thoughts took form in a chicken-pie of

incomparable savor or in a matchless pudding. The off-days came when her artistic nature was expressing itself in charcoal, for she drew to the admiration of all among the lady boarders who could not draw. The others had their reserves; they readily conceded that Alma had genius, but they were sure she needed instruction. On the other hand, they were not so radical as to agree with the old painter who came every summer to paint the elms of the St. Barnaby meadows. He contended that she needed to be a man in order to amount to anything; but in this theory he was opposed by an authority, of his own sex, whom the lady sketchers believed to speak with more impartiality in a matter concerning them as much as Alma Leighton. He said that instruction would do, and he was not only, younger and handsomer, but he was fresher from the schools than old Harrington, who, even the lady sketchers could see, painted in an obsolescent manner. His name was Beaton—Angus Beaton; but he was not Scotch, or not more Scotch than Mary Queen of Scots was. His father was a Scotchman, but Beaton was born in Syracuse, New York, and it had taken only three years in Paris to obliterate many traces of native and ancestral manner in him. He wore his black beard cut shorter than his mustache, and a little pointed; he stood with his shoulders well thrown back and with a lateral curve of his person when he talked about art, which would alone have carried conviction even if he had not had a thick, dark bang coming almost to the brows of his mobile gray eyes, and had not spoken English with quick, staccato impulses, so as to give it the effect of epigrammatic and sententious French. One of the ladies said that you always thought of him as having spoken French after it was over, and accused herself of wrong in not being able to feel afraid of him. None of the ladies was afraid of him, though they could not believe that he was really so deferential to their work as he seemed; and they knew, when he would not criticise Mr. Harrington's work, that he was just acting from principle.

They may or may not have known the deference with which he treated Alma's work; but the girl herself felt that his abrupt, impersonal comment recognized her as a real sister in art. He told her she ought to come to New York, and draw in the League, or get into some painter's private class; and it was the sense of duty thus appealed to which finally resulted in the hazardous experiment she

and her mother were now making. There were no logical breaks in the chain of their reasoning from past success with boarders in St. Barnaby to future success with boarders in New York. Of course the outlay was much greater. The rent of the furnished house they had taken was such that if they failed their experiment would be little less than ruinous.

But they were not going to fail; that was what Alma contended, with a hardy courage that her mother sometimes felt almost invited failure, if it did not deserve it. She was one of those people who believe that if you dread harm enough it is less likely to happen. She acted on this superstition as if it were a religion.

"If it had not been for my despair, as you call it, Alma," she answered,

"I don't know where we should have been now."

"I suppose we should have been in St. Barnaby," said the girl. "And if it's worse to be in New York, you see what your despair's done, mamma. But what's the use? You meant well, and I don't blame you. You can't expect even despair to come out always just the way you want it. Perhaps you've used too much of it." The girl laughed, and Mrs. Leighton laughed, too. Like every one else, she was not merely a prevailing mood, as people are apt to be in books, but was an irregularly spheroidal character, with surfaces that caught the different lights of circumstance and reflected them. Alma got up and took a pose before the mirror, which she then transferred to her sketch. The room was pinned about with other sketches, which showed with fantastic indistinctness in the shaded gas-light. Alma held up the drawing. "How do you like it?"

Mrs. Leighton bent forward over her sewing to look at it. "You've got the man's face rather weak."

"Yes, that's so. Either I see all the hidden weakness that's in men's natures, and bring it to the surface in their figures, or else I put my own weakness into them. Either way, it's a drawback to their presenting a truly manly appearance. As long as I have one of the miserable objects before me, I can draw him; but as soon as his back's turned I get to putting ladies into men's clothes. I should think you'd be scandalized, mamma, if you were a really feminine person.

It must be your despair that helps you to bear up. But what's the matter with the young lady in young lady's clothes? Any dust on her?"

"What expressions!" said Mrs. Leighton. "Really, Alma, for a refined girl you are the most unrefined!"

"Go on—about the girl in the picture!" said Alma, slightly knocking her mother on the shoulder, as she stood over her.

"I don't see anything to her. What's she doing?"

"Oh, just being made love to, I suppose."

"She's perfectly insipid!"

"You're awfully articulate, mamma! Now, if Mr. Wetmore were to criticise that picture he'd draw a circle round it in the air, and look at it through that, and tilt his head first on one side and then on the other, and then look at you, as if you were a figure in it, and then collapse awhile, and moan a little and gasp, 'Isn't your young lady a little too-too—' and then he'd try to get the word out of you, and groan and suffer some more; and you'd say, 'She is, rather,' and that would give him courage, and he'd say, 'I don't mean that she's so very—' 'Of course not.' 'You understand?' 'Perfectly. I see it myself, now.' 'Well, then'—and he'd take your pencil and begin to draw—I should give her a little more—Ah?' 'Yes, I see the difference.'—'You see the difference?' And he'd go off to some one else, and you'd know that you'd been doing the wishy-washiest thing in the world, though he hadn't spoken a word of criticism, and couldn't. But he wouldn't have noticed the expression at all; he'd have shown you where your drawing was bad. He doesn't care for what he calls the literature of a thing; he says that will take care of itself if the drawing's good. He doesn't like my doing these chic things; but I'm going to keep it up, for I think it's the nearest way to illustrating."

She took her sketch and pinned it up on the door.

"And has Mr. Beaton been about, yet?" asked her mother.

"No," said the girl, with her back still turned; and she added, "I believe he's in New York; Mr. Wetmore's seen him."

"It's a little strange he doesn't call."

"It would be if he were not an artist. But artists never do anything like other people. He was on his good behavior while he was with us, and he's a great deal more conventional than most of them; but even he can't keep it up. That's what makes me really think that women can never amount to anything in art. They keep all their appointments, and fulfil all their duties just as if they didn't know anything about art. Well, most of them don't. We've got that new model to-day."

"What new model?"

"The one Mr. Wetmore was telling us about the old German; he's splendid. He's got the most beautiful head; just like the old masters' things. He used to be Humphrey Williams's model for his Biblical-pieces; but since he's dead, the old man hardly gets anything to do. Mr. Wetmore says there isn't anybody in the Bible that Williams didn't paint him as. He's the Law and the Prophets in all his Old Testament pictures, and he's Joseph, Peter, Judas Iscariot, and the Scribes and Pharisees in the New."

"It's a good thing people don't know how artists work, or some of the most sacred pictures would have no influence," said Mrs. Leighton.

"Why, of course not!" cried the girl. "And the influence is the last thing a painter thinks of—or supposes he thinks of. What he knows he's anxious about is the drawing and the color. But people will never understand how simple artists are. When I reflect what a complex and sophisticated being I am, I'm afraid I can never come to anything in art. Or I should be if I hadn't genius."

"Do you think Mr. Beaton is very simple?" asked Mrs. Leighton.

"Mr. Wetmore doesn't think he's very much of an artist. He thinks he talks too well. They believe that if a man can express himself clearly he can't paint."

"And what do you believe?"

"Oh, I can express myself, too."

The mother seemed to be satisfied with this evasion. After a while she said, "I presume he will call when he gets settled."

The girl made no answer to this. "One of the girls says that old model is an educated man. He was in the war, and lost a hand. Doesn't it seem a pity for such a man to have to sit to a class of affected geese like us as a model? I declare it makes me sick. And we shall keep him a week, and pay him six or seven dollars for the use of his grand old head, and then what will he do? The last time he was regularly employed was when Mr. Mace was working at his Damascus Massacre. Then he wanted so many Arab sheiks and Christian elders that he kept old Mr. Lindau steadily employed for six months. Now he has to pick up odd jobs where he can."

"I suppose he has his pension," said Mrs. Leighton.

"No; one of the girls"—that was the way Alma always described her fellow-students—"says he has no pension. He didn't apply for it for a long time, and then there was a hitch about it, and it was somethinged—vetoed, I believe she said."

"Who vetoed it?" asked Mrs. Leighton, with some curiosity about the process, which she held in reserve.

"I don't know—whoever vetoes things. I wonder what Mr. Wetmore does think of us—his class. We must seem perfectly crazy. There isn't one of us really knows what she's doing it for, or what she expects to happen when she's done it. I suppose every one thinks she has genius. I know the Nebraska widow does, for she says that unless you have genius it isn't the least use. Everybody's puzzled to know what she does with her baby when she's at work—whether she gives it soothing syrup. I wonder how Mr. Wetmore can keep from laughing in our faces. I know he does behind our backs."

Mrs. Leighton's mind wandered back to another point. "Then if he says Mr.

Beaton can't paint, I presume he doesn't respect him very much."

"Oh, he never said he couldn't paint. But I know he thinks so. He says he's an excellent critic."

"Alma," her mother said, with the effect of breaking off, "what do you suppose is the reason he hasn't been near us?"

"Why, I don't know, mamma, except that it would have been natural for another person to come, and he's an artist at least, artist enough for that."

"That doesn't account for it altogether. He was very nice at St. Barnaby, and seemed so interested in you — your work."

"Plenty of people were nice at St. Barnaby. That rich Mrs. Horn couldn't contain her joy when she heard we were coming to New York, but she hasn't poured in upon us a great deal since we got here."

"But that's different. She's very fashionable, and she's taken up with her own set. But Mr. Beaton's one of our kind."

"Thank you. Papa wasn't quite a tombstone-cutter, mamma."

"That makes it all the harder to bear. He can't be ashamed of us. Perhaps he doesn't know where we are."

"Do you wish to send him your card, mamma?" The girl flushed and towered in scorn of the idea.

"Why, no, Alma," returned her mother.

"Well, then," said Alma.

But Mrs. Leighton was not so easily quelled. She had got her mind on Mr. Beaton, and she could not detach it at once. Besides, she was one of those women (they are commoner than the same sort of men) whom it does not pain to take out their most intimate thoughts and examine them in the light of other people's opinions. "But I don't see how he can behave so. He must know that —"

"That what, mamma?" demanded the girl.

"That he influenced us a great deal in coming —"

"He didn't. If he dared to presume to think such a thing —"

"Now, Alma," said her mother, with the clinging persistence of such natures, "you know he did. And it's no use for you to pretend that we didn't count upon him in — in every way. You may not have noticed his attentions, and I don't say you did, but others certainly did; and I must say that I didn't expect he would drop us so."

"Drop us!" cried Alma, in a fury. "Oh!"

"Yes, drop us, Alma. He must know where we are. Of course, Mr. Wetmore's spoken to him about you, and it's a shame that he hasn't been near us. I should have thought common gratitude, common decency, would have brought him after—after all we did for him."

"We did nothing for him—nothing! He paid his board, and that ended it."

"No, it didn't, Alma. You know what he used to say—about its being like home, and all that; and I must say that after his attentions to you, and all the things you told me he said, I expected something very dif—"

A sharp peal of the door-bell thrilled through the house, and as if the pull of the bell-wire had twitched her to her feet, Mrs. Leighton sprang up and grappled with her daughter in their common terror.

They both glared at the clock and made sure that it was five minutes after nine. Then they abandoned themselves some moments to the unrestricted play of their apprehensions.

II.

"Why, Alma," whispered the mother, "who in the world can it be at this time of night? You don't suppose he —"

"Well, I'm not going to the door, anyhow, mother, I don't care who it is; and, of course, he wouldn't be such a goose as to come at this hour." She put on a look of miserable trepidation, and shrank back from the door, while the hum of the bell died away, in the hall.

"What shall we do?" asked Mrs. Leighton, helplessly.

"Let him go away — whoever they are," said Alma.

Another and more preemptory ring forbade them refuge in this simple expedient.

"Oh, dear! what shall we do? Perhaps it's a despatch."

The conjecture moved Alma to no more than a rigid stare. "I shall not go," she said. A third ring more insistent than the others followed, and she said: "You go ahead, mamma, and I'll come behind to scream if it's anybody. We can look through the side-lights at the door first."

Mrs. Leighton fearfully led the way from the back chamber where they had been sitting, and slowly descended the stairs. Alma came behind and turned up the hall gas-jet with a sudden flash that made them both jump a little. The gas inside rendered it more difficult to tell who was on the threshold, but Mrs. Leighton decided from a timorous peep through the scrim that it was a lady and gentleman. Something in this distribution of sex emboldened her; she took her life in her hand, and opened the door.

The lady spoke. "Does Mrs. Leighton live heah?" she said, in a rich, throaty voice; and she feigned a reference to the agent's permit she held in her hand.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leighton; she mechanically occupied the doorway, while

Alma already quivered behind her with impatience of her impolite-

ness.

"Oh," said the lady, who began to appear more and more a young lady, "Ah didn't know but Ah had mistaken the hoase. Ah suppose it's rather late to see the apawments, and Ah most ask you to paw-don us." She put this tentatively, with a delicately growing recognition of Mrs. Leighton as the lady of the house, and a humorous intelligence of the situation in the glance she threw Alma over her mother's shoulder. "Ah'm afraid we most have frightened you."

"Oh, not at all," said Alma; and at the same time her mother said, "Will you walk in, please?"

The gentleman promptly removed his hat and made the Leightons an inclusive bow. "You awe very kind, madam, and I am sorry for the trouble we awe giving you." He was tall and severe-looking, with a gray, trooperish mustache and iron-gray hair, and, as Alma decided, iron-gray eyes. His daughter was short, plump, and fresh-colored, with an effect of liveliness that did not all express itself in her broad-vowelled, rather formal speech, with its odd valuations of some of the auxiliary verbs, and its total elision of the canine letter.

"We awe from the Soath," she said, "and we arrived this mawning, but we got this cyahd from the brokah just befo' dinnah, and so we awe rathah late."

"Not at all; it's only nine o'clock," said Mrs. Leighton. She looked up from the card the young lady had given her, and explained, "We haven't got in our servants yet, and we had to answer the bell ourselves, and—"

"You were frightened, of coase," said the young lady, caressingly.

The gentleman said they ought not to have come so late, and he offered some formal apologies.

"We should have been just as much scared any time after five o'clock,"

Alma said to the sympathetic intelligence in the girl's face.

She laughed out. "Of coase! Ah would have my hawt in my moath all day long, too, if Ah was living in a big hoase alone."

A moment of stiffness followed; Mrs. Leighton would have liked to withdraw from the intimacy of the situation, but she did not know how. It was very well for these people to assume to be what they pretended; but, she reflected too late, she had no proof of it except the agent's permit. They were all standing in the hall together, and she prolonged the awkward pause while she examined the permit. "You are Mr. Woodburn?" she asked, in a way that Alma felt implied he might not be.

"Yes, madam; from Charlottesboag, Virginia," he answered, with the slight umbrage a man shows when the strange cashier turns his check over and questions him before cashing it.

Alma writhed internally, but outwardly remained subordinate; she examined the other girl's dress, and decided in a superficial consciousness that she had made her own bonnet.

"I shall be glad to show you my rooms," said Mrs. Leighton, with an irrelevant sigh. "You must excuse their being not just as I should wish them. We're hardly settled yet."

"Don't speak of it, madam," said the gentleman, "if you can overlook the trouble we awe giving you at such an unseasonable houah."

"Ah'm a hoasekeepah mahself," Miss Woodburn joined in, "and Ah know ho' to accyoant fo' everything."

Mrs. Leighton led the way up-stairs, and the young lady decided upon the large front room and small side room on the third story. She said she could take the small one, and the other was so large that her father could both sleep and work in it. She seemed not ashamed to ask if Mrs. Leighton's price was inflexible, but gave way laughing when her father refused to have any bargaining, with a haughty self-respect which he softened to deference for Mrs. Leighton. His impulsiveness opened the way for some confidence from her, and before the affair was arranged she was enjoying in her quality of clerical widow the balm of the Virginians' reverent sympathy. They said they were church people themselves.

"Ah don't know what yo' mothah means by yo' hoase not being in oddah," the young lady said to Alma as they went down-stairs to-

gether. "Ah'm a great hoasekeepah mahself, and Ah mean what Ah say."

They had all turned mechanically into the room where the Leightons were sitting when the Woodburns rang: Mr. Woodburn consented to sit down, and he remained listening to Mrs. Leighton while his daughter bustled up to the sketches pinned round the room and questioned Alma about them.

"Ah suppose you awe going to be a great awtust?" she said, in friendly banter, when Alma owned to having done the things. "Ah've a great notion to take a few lessons mahself. Who's yo' teachah?"

Alma said she was drawing in Mr. Wetmore's class, and Miss Woodburn said: "Well, it's just beautiful, Miss Leighton; it's grand. Ah suppose it's raght expensive, now? Mah goodness! we have to cyoant the coast so much nowadays; it seems to me we do nothing but cyoant it. Ah'd like to hah something once without askin' the price."

"Well, if you didn't ask it," said Alma, "I don't believe Mr. Wetmore would ever know what the price of his lessons was. He has to think, when you ask him."

"Why, he most be chomming," said Miss Woodburn. "Perhaps Ah maght get the lessons for nothing from him. Well, Ah believe in my soul Ah'll trah. Now ho' did you begin? and ho' do you expect to get anything oat of it?" She turned on Alma eyes brimming with a shrewd mixture of fun and earnest, and Alma made note of the fact that she had an early nineteenth-century face, round, arch, a little coquettish, but extremely sensible and unspoiled-looking, such as used to be painted a good deal in miniature at that period; a tendency of her brown hair to twine and twist at the temples helped the effect; a high comb would have completed it, Alma felt, if she had her bonnet off. It was almost a Yankee country-girl type; but perhaps it appeared so to Alma because it was, like that, pure Anglo-Saxon. Alma herself, with her dull, dark skin, slender in figure, slow in speech, with aristocratic forms in her long hands, and the oval of her fine face pointed to a long chin, felt herself much more Southern in style than this blooming, bubbling, bustling Virginian.