

# **In Trust**

Edith Wharton

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IN the good days, just after we all left college, Ned Halidon and I used to listen, laughing and smoking, while Paul Ambrose set forth his plans.

They were immense, these plans, involving, as it sometimes seemed, the ultimate aesthetic redemption of the whole human race; and provisionally restoring the sense of beauty to those unhappy millions of our fellow country-men who, as Ambrose movingly pointed out, now live and die in surroundings of unperceived and unmitigated ugliness.

"I want to bring the poor starved wretches back to their lost inheritance, to the divine past they've thrown away I want to make 'em hate ugliness so that they'll smash nearly everything in sight," he would passionately exclaim, stretching his arms across the shabby black-walnut writing-table and shaking his thin consumptive fist in the fact of all the accumulated ugliness in the world.

"You might set the example by smashing that table," I once suggested with youthful brutality; and Paul, pulling himself up, cast a surprised glance at me, and then looked slowly about the parental library, in which we sat.

His parents were dead, and he had inherited the house in Seventeenth Street, where his grandfather Ambrose had lived in a setting of black walnut and pier glasses, giving Madeira dinners, and saying to his guests, as they rejoined the ladies across a florid waste of Aubusson carpet: "This, sir, is Dabney's first study for the Niagara the Grecian Slave in the bay window was executed for me in Rome twenty years ago by my old friend Ezra Stimpson " by token of which he passed for a Maecenas in the New York of the 'forties,' and a poem had once been published in the Keepsake or the Book of Beauty "On a picture in the possession of Jonathan Ambrose, Esqre."

Since then the house had remained unchanged. Paul's father, a frugal liver and hard-headed manipulator of investments, did not inherit old Jonathan's artistic sensibilities, and was content to live and die in the unmodified black walnut and red rep of his predecessor. It was only in Paul that the grandfather's aesthetic faculty revived, and Mrs. Ambrose used often to say to her husband, as they watched the little pale-browed boy poring over an old number of the Art Journal: "Paul will know how to appreciate your father's treasures."

In recognition of these transmitted gifts Paul, on leaving Harvard, was sent to Paris with a tutor, and established in a studio in which nothing was ever done. He could not paint, and recognized the fact early enough to save himself much wasted labor and his friends many painful efforts in dissimulation. But he brought back a touching enthusiasm for the forms of beauty which an old civilization had revealed to him and an apostolic ardour in the cause of their dissemination.

He had paused in his harangue to take in my ill-timed parenthesis, and the color mounted slowly to his thin cheek-bones.

"It is an ugly room," he owned, as though he had noticed the library for the first time.

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The desk was carved at the angles with the heads of helmeted knights with long black–walnut moustaches. The red cloth top was worn thread–bare, and patterned like a map with islands and peninsulas of ink; and in its centre throned a massive bronze inkstand representing a Syrian maiden slumbering by a well beneath a palm–tree.

"The fact is," I said, walking home that evening with Ned Halidon, "old Paul will never do anything, for the simple reason that he's too stingy."

Ned, who was an idealist, shook his handsome head. "It's not that, my dear fellow. He simply doesn't see things when they're too close to him. I'm glad you woke him up to that desk."

The next time I dined with Paul he said, when we entered the library, and I had gently rejected one of his cheap cigars in favour of a superior article of my own: "Look here, I've been looking round for a decent writing–table. I don't care, as a rule, to turn out old things, especially when they've done good service, but I see now that this is too monstrous "

"For an apostle of beauty to write his evangel on," I agreed, "it is a little inappropriate, except as an awful warning."

Paul colored. "Well, but, my dear fellow, I'd no idea how much a table of this kind costs. I find I can't get anything decent the plainest mahogany under a hundred and fifty." He hung his head, and pretended not to notice that I was taking out my own cigar.

"Well, what's a hundred and fifty to you?" I rejoined. "You talk as if you had to live on a book–keeper's salary, with a large family to support."

He smiled nervously and twirled the ring on his thin finger. "I know I know that's all very well. But for twenty tables that I don't buy I can send some fellow abroad and unseal his eyes."

"Oh, hang it, do both!" I exclaimed impatiently; but the writing–table was never bought. The library remained as it was, and so did the contention between Halidon and myself, as to whether this inconsistent acceptance of his surroundings was due, on our friend's part, to a congenital inability to put his hand in his pocket, or to a real unconsciousness of the ugliness that happened to fall inside his point of vision.

"But he owned that the table was ugly," I agreed.

"Yes, but not till you'd called his attention to the fact; and I'll wager he became unconscious of it again as soon as your back was turned."

"Not before he'd had time to look at a lot of others, and make up his mind that he couldn't afford to buy one."

"That was just his excuse. He'd rather be thought mean than insensible to ugliness. But the truth is that he doesn't mind the table and is used to it. He knows his way about the drawers."

"But he could get another with the same number of drawers."

"Too much trouble," argued Halidon.

"Too much money," I persisted.

"Oh, hang it, now, if he were mean would he have founded three travelling scholarships and be planning this big Academy of Arts?"

"Well, he's mean to himself, at any rate."

"Yes; and magnificently, royally generous to all the world besides!" Halidon exclaimed with one of his great flushes of enthusiasm.

But if, on the whole, the last word remained with Halidon, and Ambrose's personal chariness seemed a trifling foible compared to his altruistic breadth of intention, yet neither of us could help observing, as time went on, that the habit of thrift was beginning to impede the execution of his schemes of art-philanthropy. The three travelling scholarships had been founded in the first blaze of his ardour, and before the personal management of his property had awakened in him the sleeping instincts of parsimony. But as his capital accumulated, and problems of investment and considerations of interest began to encroach upon his visionary hours, we saw a gradual arrest in the practical development of his plan.

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"For every thousand dollars he talks of spending on his work, I believe he knocks off a cigar, or buys one less newspaper," Halidon grumbled affectionately; "but after all," he went on, with one of the quick revivals of optimism that gave a perpetual freshness to his spirit, "after all, it makes one admire him all the more when one sees such a nature condemned to be at war with the petty inherited instinct of greed."

Still, I could see it was a disappointment to Halidon that the great project of the Academy of Arts should languish on paper long after all its details had been discussed and settled to the satisfaction of the projector, and of the expert advisers he had called in council.

"He's quite right to do nothing in a hurry — to take advice and compare ideas and points of view — to collect and classify his material in advance," Halidon argued, in answer to a taunt of mine about Paul's perpetually reiterated plea that he was still waiting for So-and-so's report; "but now that the plan's mature — and such a plan! You'll grant it's magnificent? — I should think he'd burn to see it carried out, instead of pottering over it till his enthusiasm cools and the whole business turns stale on his hands."

That summer Ambrose went to Europe, and spent his holiday in a frugal walking-tour through Brittany. When he came back he seemed refreshed by his respite from business cares and from the interminable revision of his cherished scheme; while contact with the concrete manifestations of beauty had, as usual, renewed his flagging ardour.

"By Jove," he cried, "whenever I indulged my unworthy eyes in a long gaze at one of those big things — picture or church or statue — I kept saying to myself: 'You lucky devil, you, to be able to provide such a sight as that for eyes that can make some good use of it! Isn't it better to give fifty fellows a chance to paint or carve or build, than to be able to daub canvas or punch clay in a corner all by yourself?'"

"Well," I said, when he had worked off his first ebullition, "when is the foundation stone to be laid?"

His excitement dropped. "The foundation stone — ?"

"When are you going to touch the electric button that sets the thing going?"

Paul, with his hands in his sagging pockets, began to pace the library hearth-rug — I can see him now, setting his shabby red slippers between its ramified cabbages.

"My dear fellow, there are one or two points to be considered still — one or two new suggestions I picked up over there — "

I sat silent, and he paused before me, flushing to the roots of his thin hair. "You think I've had time enough —

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that I ought to have put the thing through before this? I suppose you're right; I can see that even Ned Halidon thinks so; and he has always understood my difficulties better than you have."

This insinuation exasperated me. "Ned would have put it through years ago!" I broke out.

Paul pulled at his straggling moustache. "You mean he has more executive capacity? More — no, it's not that; he's not afraid to spend money, and I am!" he suddenly exclaimed.

He had never before alluded to this weakness to either of us, and I sat abashed, suffering from his evident distress. But he remained planted before me, his little legs wide apart, his eyes fixed on mine in an agony of voluntary self-exposure.

"That's my trouble, and I know it. Big sums frighten me — I can't look them in the face. By George, I wish Ned had the carrying out of this scheme — I wish he could spend my money for me!" His face was lit by the reflection of a passing thought. "Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if I dropped out of the running before either of you chaps, and in case I do I've half a mind to leave everything in trust to Halidon, and let him put the job through for me."

"Much better have your own fun with it," I retorted; but he shook his head, saying with a sigh as he turned away: "It's not fun to me — that's the worst of it."

Halidon, to whom I could not help repeating our talk, was amused and touched by his friend's thought.

"Heaven knows what will become of the scheme, if Paul doesn't live to carry it out. There are a lot of hungry Ambrose cousins who will make one gulp of his money, and never give a dollar to the work. Jove, it would be a fine thing to have the carrying out of such a plan — but he'll do it yet, you'll see he'll do it yet!" cried Ned, his old faith in his friend flaming up again through the wet blanket of fact.

PAUL AMBROSE did not die and leave his fortune to Halidon, but the following summer he did something far more unexpected. He went abroad again, and came back married. Now our busy fancy had never seen Paul married. Even Ned recognized the vague unlikelihood of such a metamorphosis.

"He'd stick at the parson's fee — not to mention the best man's scarf-pin. And I should hate," Ned added sentimentally, "to see 'the touch of a woman's hand' desecrate the sublime ugliness of the ancestral home. Think of such a house made 'cozy!'"

But when the news came he would own neither to surprise nor to disappointment.

"Goodbye, poor Academy!" I exclaimed, tossing over the bridegroom's eight-page rhapsody to Halidon, who had received its duplicate by the same post.

"Now, why the deuce do you say that?" he growled. "I never saw such a beast as you are for imputing mean motives."

To defend myself from this accusation I put out my hand and recovered Paul's letter.

"Here: listen to this. 'Studying art in Paris when I met her — "the vision and the faculty divine, but lacking the accomplishment," etc. . . . A little ethereal profile, like one of Piero della Francesca's angels . . . not rich, thank heaven, but not afraid of money, and already enamored of my project for fertilizing my sterile millions . . .'"

"Well, why the deuce — ?" Ned began again, as though I had convicted myself out of my friend's mouth; and I could only grumble obscurely: "It's all too pat."

He brushed aside my misgivings. "Thank heaven, she can't paint, any how. And now that I think of it, Paul's just the kind of chap who ought to have a dozen children."

"Ah, then indeed: goodbye, poor Academy!" I croaked.

The lady was lovely, of that there could be no doubt; and if Paul now for a time forgot the Academy, his doing so was but a vindication of his sex. Halidon had only a glimpse of the returning couple before he was himself snatched up in one of the chariots of adventure that seemed perpetually waiting at his door. This time he was going to the far East in the train of a "special mission," and his head was humming with new hopes and ardors; but he had time for a last word with me about Ambrose.

"You'll see — you'll see!" he summed up hopefully as we parted; and what I was to see was, of course, the crowning pinnacle of the Academy lifting itself against the horizon of the immediate future.

It was in the nature of things that I should, meanwhile, see less than formerly of the projector of that unrealized structure. Paul had a personal dread of society, but he wished to show his wife to the world, and I was not often a spectator on these occasions. Paul indeed, good fellow, tried to maintain the pretense of an unbroken intercourse, and to this end I was asked to dine now and then; but when I went I found guests of a new type, who,

after dinner, talked of sport and stocks, while their host blinked at them silently through the smoke of his cheap cigars.

The first innovation that struck me was a sudden improvement in the quality of the cigars. Was this Daisy's doing? (Mrs. Ambrose was Daisy.) It was hard to tell — she produced her results so noiselessly. With her fair bent head and vague smile, she seemed to watch life flow by without, as yet, trusting anything of her own to its current. But she was watching, at any rate, and anything might come of that. Such modifications as she produced were as yet almost imperceptible to any but the trained observer. I saw that Paul wished her to be well dressed, but also that he suffered her to drive in a hired brougham, and to have her door opened by the raw-boned Celt who had bumped down the dishes on his bachelor table. The drawing-room curtains were renewed, but this change served only to accentuate the enormities of the carpet, and perhaps discouraged Mrs. Ambrose from farther experiments. At any rate, the desecrating touch that Halidon had affected to dread made no other inroads on the serried ugliness of the Ambrose interior.

In the early summer, when Ned returned, the Ambroses had flown to Europe again — and the Academy was still on paper.

"Well, what do you make of her?" the traveller asked, as we sat over our first dinner together.

"Too many things — and they don't hang together. Perhaps she's still in the chrysalis stage."

"Has Paul chucked the scheme altogether?"

"No. He sent for me and we had a talk about it just before he sailed."

"And what impression did you get?"

"That he had waited to send for me till just before he sailed."

"Oh, there you go again!" I offered no denial, and after a pause he asked: "Did she ever talk to you about it?"

"Yes. Once or twice — in snatches."

"Well — ?"

"She thinks it all too beautiful. She would like to see beauty put within the reach of everyone."

"And the practical side — ?"

"She says she doesn't understand business."

Halidon rose with a shrug. "Very likely you frightened her with your ugly sardonic grin."

"It's not my fault if my smile doesn't add to the sum-total of beauty."

"Well," he said, ignoring me, "next winter we shall see."

But the next winter did not bring Ambrose back. A brief line, written in November from the Italian lakes, told me that he had "a rotten cough," and that the doctors were packing him off to Egypt. Would I see the architects for him, and explain to the trustees? (The Academy already had trustees, and all the rest of its official hierarchy.) And would they all excuse his not writing more than a word? He was really too groggy — but a little warm weather would set him up again, and he would certainly come home in the spring.

He came home in the spring — in the hold of the ship, with his widow several decks above. The funeral services were attended by all the officers of the Academy, and by two of the young fellows who had won the travelling scholarships, and who shed tears of genuine grief when their benefactor was committed to the grave.

After that there was a pause of suspense — and then the newspapers announced that the late Paul Ambrose had left his entire estate to his widow. The board of the Academy dissolved like a summer cloud, and the secretary lighted his pipe for a year with the official paper of the still-born institution.

After a decent lapse of time I called at the house in Seventeenth Street, and found a man attaching a real-estate agent's sign to the window and a van-load of luggage backing away from the door. The care-taker told me that Mrs. Ambrose was sailing the next morning. Not long afterward I saw the library table with the helmeted knights standing before an auctioneer's door in University Place; and I looked with a pang at the familiar ink-stains, in which I had so often traced the geography of Paul's visionary world.

Halidon, who had picked up another job in the Orient, wrote me an elegiac letter on Paul's death, ending with — "And what about the Academy?" and for all answer I sent him a newspaper clipping recording the terms of the will, and another announcing the sale of the house and Mrs. Ambrose's departure for Europe.

Though Ned and I corresponded with tolerable regularity I received no direct answer to this communication till about eighteen months later, when he surprised me by a letter dated from Florence. It began: "Though she tells me you have never understood her — " and when I had reached that point I laid it down and stared out of my

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office window at the chimney-pots and the dirty snow on the roof.

"Ned Halidon and Paul's wife!" I murmured; and, incongruously enough, my next thought was: "I wish I'd bought the library table that day."

The letter went on with waxing eloquence: "I could not stand the money if it were not that, to her as well as to me, it represents the sacred opportunity of at last giving speech to his inarticulateness . . ."

"Oh, damn it, they're too glib!" I muttered, dashing the letter down; then, controlling my unreasoning resentment, I read on. "You remember, old man, those words of his that you repeated to me three or four years ago: 'I've half a mind to leave my money in trust to Ned'? Well, it has come to me in trust — as if in mysterious fulfillment of his thought; and, oh, dear chap — " I dashed the letter down again, and plunged into my work.

"WON'T you own yourself a beast, dear boy?" Halidon asked me gently, one afternoon of the following spring.

I had escaped for a six weeks' holiday, and was lying outstretched beside him in a willow chair on the terrace of their villa above Florence.

My eyes turned from the happy vale at our feet to the illuminated face beside me. A little way off, at the other end of the terrace, Mrs. Halidon was bending over a pot of carnations on the balustrade.

"Oh, cheerfully," I assented.

"You see," he continued, glowing, "living here costs us next to nothing, and it was quite her idea, our founding that fourth scholarship in memory of Paul."

I had already heard of the fourth scholarship, but I may have betrayed my surprise at the plural pronoun, for the blood rose under Ned's sensitive skin, and he said with an embarrassed laugh: "Ah, she so completely makes me forget that it's not mine too."

"Well, the great thing is that you both think of it chiefly as his."

"Oh, chiefly — altogether. I should be no more than a wretched parasite if I didn't live first of all for that!"

Mrs. Halidon had turned and was advancing toward us with the slow step of leisurely enjoyment. The bud of her beauty had at last unfolded: her vague enigmatical gaze had given way to the clear look of the woman whose hand is on the clue of life.

"She's not living for anything but her own happiness," I mused, "and why in heaven's name should she? But Ned — "

"My wife," Halidon continued, his eyes following mine, "my wife feels it too, even more strongly. You know a woman's sensitiveness. She's — there's nothing she wouldn't do for his memory — because — in other ways. . . . You understand," he added, lowering his tone as she drew nearer, "that as soon as the child is born we mean to go home for good, and take up his work — Paul's work."

Mrs. Halidon recovered slowly after the birth of her child: the return to America was deferred for six months, and then again for a whole year. I heard of the Halidons as established first at Biarritz, then in Rome. The second summer Ned wrote me a line from St. Moritz. He said the place agreed so well with his wife — who was still delicate — that they were "thinking of building a house there: a mere cleft in the rocks, to hide our happiness in when it becomes too exuberant" — and the rest of the letter, very properly, was filled with a rhapsody upon his little daughter. He spoke of her as Paula.

The following year the Halidons reappeared in New York, and I heard with surprise that they had taken the Brereton house for the winter.

"Well, why not?" I argued with myself. "After all, the money is hers: as far as I know the will didn't even hint at a restriction. Why should I expect a pretty woman with two children" (for now there was an heir) "to spend her fortune on a visionary scheme that its originator hadn't the heart to carry out?"

"Yes," cried the devil's advocate — "but Ned?"

My first impression of Halidon was that he had thickened — thickened all through. He was heavier, physically, with the ruddiness of good living rather than of hard training; he spoke more deliberately, and had less frequent bursts of subversive enthusiasm. Well, he was a father, a householder — yes, and a capitalist now. It was fitting that his manner should show a sense of these responsibilities. As for Mrs. Halidon, it was evident that the only responsibilities she was conscious of were those of the handsome woman and the accomplished hostess. She was handsomer than ever, with her two babies at her knee — perfect mother as she was perfect wife. Poor Paul! I wonder if he ever dreamed what a flower was hidden in the folded bud?



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Not long after their arrival, I dined alone with the Halidons, and lingered on to smoke with Ned while his wife went alone to the opera. He seemed dull and out of sorts, and complained of a twinge of gout.

"Fact is, I don't get enough exercise — I must look about for a horse."

He had gone afoot for a good many years, and kept his clear skin and quick eye on that homely regimen — but I had to remind myself that, after all, we were both older; and also that the Halidons had champagne every evening.

"How do you like these cigars? They're some I've just got out from London, but I'm not quite satisfied with them myself," he grumbled, pushing toward me the silver box and its attendant taper.

I leaned to the flame, and our eyes met as I lit my cigar. Ned flushed and laughed uneasily. "Poor Paul! Were you thinking of those execrable weeds of his? — I wonder how I knew you were? Probably because I have been wanting to talk to you of our plan — I sent Daisy off alone so that we might have a quiet evening. Not that she isn't interested, only the technical details bore her."

I hesitated. "Are there many technical details left to settle?"

Halidon pushed his armchair back from the fire-light, and twirled his cigar between his fingers. "I didn't suppose there were till I began to look into things a little more closely. You know I never had much of a head for business, and it was chiefly with you that Paul used to go over the figures."

"The figures — ?"

"There it is, you see." He paused. "Have you any idea how much this thing is going to cost?"

"Approximately, yes."

"And have you any idea how much we — how much Daisy's fortune amounts to?"

"None whatever," I hastened to assert.

He looked relieved. "Well, we simply can't do it — and live."

"Live?"

"Paul didn't live," he said impatiently. "I can't ask a woman with two children to think of — hang it, she's under no actual obligation — " He rose and began to walk the floor. Presently he paused and halted in front of me, defensively, as Paul had once done years before. "It's not that I've lost the sense of my obligation — it grows keener with the growth of my happiness; but my position's a delicate one — "

"Ah, my dear fellow — "

"You do see it? I knew you would." (Yes, he was duller!) "That's the point. I can't strip my wife and children to carry out a plan — a plan so nebulous that even its inventor. . . . The long and short of it is that the whole scheme must be re-studied, reorganized. Paul lived in a world of dreams."

I rose and tossed my cigar into the fire. "There were some things he never dreamed of," I said.

Halidon rose too, facing me uneasily. "You mean — ?"

"That you would taunt him with not having spent that money."

He pulled himself up with darkening brows; then the muscles of his forehead relaxed, a flush suffused it, and he held out his hand in boyish penitence.

"I stand a good deal from you," he said.

He kept up his idea of going over the Academy question — threshing it out once for all, as he expressed it; but my suggestion that we should provisionally resuscitate the extinct board did not meet with his approval.

"Not till the whole business is settled. I shouldn't have the face — Wait till I can go to them and say: 'We're laying the foundation-stone on such a day.'"

We had one or two conferences, and Ned speedily lost himself in a maze of figures. His nimble fancy was recalcitrant to mental discipline, and he excused his inattention with the plea that he had no head for business.

"All I know is that it's a colossal undertaking, and that short of living on bread and water — " and then we turned anew to the hard problem of retrenchment.

At the close of the second conference we fixed a date for a third, when Ned's business adviser was to be called in; but before the day came, I learned casually that the Halidons had gone south. Some weeks later Ned wrote me from Florida, apologizing for his remissness. They had rushed off suddenly — his wife had a cough, he explained.

When they returned in the spring, I heard that they had bought the Brereton house, for what seemed to my inexperienced ears a very large sum. But Ned, whom I met one day at the club, explained to me convincingly that it was really the most economical thing they could do. "You don't understand about such things, dear boy, living

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in your Diogenes tub; but wait till there's a Mrs. Diogenes. I can assure you it's a lot cheaper than building, which is what Daisy would have preferred, and of course," he added, his color rising as our eyes met, "of course, once the Academy's going, I shall have to make my head-quarters here; and I suppose even you won't grudge me a roof over my head."

The Brereton roof was a vast one, with a marble balustrade about it; and I could quite understand, without Ned's halting explanation, that "under the circumstances" it would be necessary to defer what he called "our work — " "Of course, after we've rallied from this amputation, we shall grow fresh supplies — I mean my wife's investments will," he laughingly corrected, "and then we'll have no big outlays ahead and shall know exactly where we stand. After all, my dear fellow, charity begins at home!"

THE Halidons floated off to Europe for the summer. In due course their return was announced in the social chronicle, and walking up Fifth Avenue one afternoon I saw the back of the Brereton house sheathed in scaffolding, and realized that they were adding a wing.

I did not look up Halidon, nor did I hear from him till the middle of the winter. Once or twice, meanwhile, I had seen him in the back of his wife's opera box; but Mrs. Halidon had grown so resplendent that she reduced her handsome husband to a supernumerary. In January the papers began to talk of the Halidon ball; and in due course I received a card for it. I was not a frequenter of balls, and had no intention of going to this one; but when the day came some obscure impulse moved me to set aside my rule, and toward midnight I presented myself at Ned's illuminated portals.

I shall never forget his look when I accosted him on the threshold of the big new ballroom. With celibate egoism I had rather fancied he would be gratified by my departure from custom; but one glance showed me my mistake. He smiled warmly, indeed, and threw into his hand-clasp an artificial energy of welcome — "You of all people — my dear fellow! Have you seen Daisy?" — but the look behind the smile made me feel cold in the crowded room.

Nor was Mrs. Halidon's greeting calculated to restore my circulation. "Have you come to spy on us?" her frosty smile seemed to say; and I crept home early, wondering if she had not found me out.

It was the following week that Halidon turned up one day in my office. He looked pale and thinner, and for the first time I noticed a dash of gray in his hair. I was startled at the change in him, but I reflected that it was nearly a year since we had looked at each other by daylight, and that my shaving-glass had doubtless a similar tale to tell.

He fidgeted about the office, told me a funny story about his little boy, and then dropped into a chair.

"Look here," he said, "I want to go into business."

"Business?" I stared.

"Well, why not? I suppose men have gone to work, even at my age, and not made a complete failure of it. The fact is, I want to make some money." He paused, and added: "I've heard of an opportunity to pick up for next to nothing a site for the Academy, and if I could lay my hands on a little cash — "

"Do you want to speculate?" I interposed.

"Heaven forbid! But don't you see that, if I had a fixed job — so much a quarter — I could borrow the money and pay it off gradually?"

I meditated upon this astounding proposition. "Do you really think it's wise to buy a site before — "

"Before what?"

"Well — seeing ahead a little?"

His face fell for a moment, but he rejoined cheerfully: "It's an exceptional chance, and after all, I shall see ahead if I can get regular work. I can put by a little every month, and by and bye, when our living expenses diminish, my wife means to come forward — her idea would be to give the building — "

He broke off and drummed on the table, waiting nervously for me to speak. He did not say on what grounds he still counted on a diminution of his household expenses, and I had not the cruelty to press this point; but I murmured, after a moment: "I think you're right — I should try to buy the land."

We discussed his potentialities for work, which were obviously still an unknown quantity, and the conference ended in my sending him to a firm of real-estate brokers who were looking out for a partner with a little money to invest. Halidon had a few thousands of his own, which he decided to embark in the venture; and thereafter, for the remaining months of the winter, he appeared punctually at a desk in the brokers' office, and sketched plans of the

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Academy on the back of their business paper. The site for the future building had meanwhile been bought, and I rather deplored the publicity which Ned gave to the fact; but, after all, since this publicity served to commit him more deeply, to pledge him conspicuously to the completion of his task, it was perhaps a wise instinct of self-coercion that had prompted him.

It was a dull winter in realty, and toward spring, when the market began to revive, one of the Halidon children showed symptoms of a delicate throat, and the fashionable doctor who humoured the family ailments counselled — nay, commanded — a prompt flight to the Mediterranean.

"He says a New York spring would be simply criminal — and as for those ghastly southern places, my wife won't hear of them; so we're off. But I shall be back in July, and I mean to stick to the office all summer."

He was true to his word, and reappeared just as all his friends were deserting town. For two torrid months he sat at his desk, drawing fresh plans of the Academy, and waiting for the wind-fall of a "big deal"; but in September he broke down from the effect of the unwonted confinement, and his indignant wife swept him off to the mountains.

"Why Ned should work when we have the money — I wish he would sell that wretched piece of land!" And sell it he did one day: I chanced on a record of the transaction in the realty column of the morning paper. He afterward explained the sale to me at length. Owing to some spasmodic effort at municipal improvement, there had been an unforeseen rise in the adjoining property, and it would have been foolish — yes, I agreed that it would have been foolish. He had made \$10,000 on the sale, and that would go toward paying off what he had borrowed for the original purchase. Meanwhile he could be looking about for another site.

Later in the winter he told me it was a bad time to look. His position in the real-estate business enabled him to follow the trend of the market, and that trend was obstinately upward. But of course there would be a reaction — and he was keeping his eyes open.

As the resuscitated Academy scheme once more fell into abeyance, I saw Halidon less and less frequently; and we had not met for several months, when one day of June, my morning paper startled me with the announcement that the President had appointed Edward Halidon of New York to be Civil Commissioner of our newly acquired Eastern possession, the Manana Islands. "The unhealthy climate of the islands, and the defective sanitation of the towns, make it necessary that vigorous measures should be taken to protect the health of the American citizens established there, and it is believed that Mr. Halidon's large experience of Eastern life and well-known energy of character — " I read the paragraph twice; then I dropped the paper, and projected myself through the subway to Halidon's office. But he was not there; he had not been there for a month. One of the clerks believed he was in Washington.

"It's true, then!" I said to myself. "But Mrs. Halidon in the Mananas — ?"

A day or two later Ned appeared in my office. He looked better than when we had last met, and there was a determined line about his lips.

"My wife? Heaven forbid! You don't suppose I should think of taking her? But the job is a tremendously interesting one, and it's the kind of work I believe I can do — the only kind," he added, smiling rather ruefully.

"But my dear Ned — "

He faced me with a look of quiet resolution. "I think I've been through all the butts. It's an infernal climate, of course, but then I am used to the East — I know what precautions to take. And it would be a big thing to clean up that Augean stable."

"But consider your wife and children — "

He met this with deliberation. "I have considered my children — that's the point. I don't want them to be able to say, when they look back: 'He was content to go on living on that money — '"

"My dear Ned — "

"That's the one thing they shan't say of me," he pressed on vehemently. "I've tried other ways — but I'm no good at business. I see now that I shall never make money enough to carry out the scheme myself; but at least I can clear out, and not go on being his pensioner — seeing his dreams turned into horses and carpets and clothes — "

He broke off, and leaning on my desk hid his face in his hands. When he looked up again his flush of wrath had subsided.

"Just understand me — it's not her fault. Don't fancy I'm trying for an instant to shift the blame. A woman

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with children simply obeys the instinct of her sex; she puts them first — and I wouldn't have it otherwise. As far as she's concerned there were no conditions attached — there's no reason why she should make any sacrifice." He paused, and added painfully: "The trouble is, I can't make her see that I am differently situated."

"But, Ned, the climate — what are you going to gain by chucking yourself away?"

He lifted his brows. "That's a queer argument from you. And, besides, I'm up to the tricks of all those ague-holes. And I've got to live, you see: I've got something to put through." He saw my look of enquiry, and added with a shy, poignant laugh — how I hear it still! — : "I don't mean only the job in hand, though that's enough in itself; but Paul's work — you understand. — It won't come in my day, of course — I've got to accept that — but my boy's a splendid chap" (the boy was three), "and I tell you what it is, old man, I believe when he grows up he'll put it through."

Halidon went to the Mananas, and for two years the journals brought me incidental reports of the work he was accomplishing. He certainly had found a job to his hand: official words of commendation rang through the country, and there were lengthy newspaper leaders on the efficiency with which our representative was prosecuting his task in that lost corner of our colonies. Then one day a brief paragraph announced his death — "one of the last victims of the pestilence he had so successfully combated."

That evening, at my club, I heard men talking of him. One said: "What's the use of a fellow wasting himself on a lot of savages?" and another wiseacre opined: "Oh, he went off because there was friction at home. A fellow like that, who knew the East, would have got through all right if he'd taken the proper precautions. I saw him before he left, and I never saw a man look less as if he wanted to live."

I turned on the last speaker, and my voice made him drop his lighted cigar on his complacent knuckles.

"I never knew a man," I exclaimed, "who had better reasons for wanting to live!"

A handsome youth mused: "Yes, his wife is very beautiful — but it doesn't follow — "

And then some one nudged him, for they knew I was Halidon's friend.