

Aunt Hannah, please let John know I have paid in quite a lump of mutual benefits. I hope to keep it up, too."

"Why, Clarence, how is it you have so much all at once?"

"Just here, little lady. I tried my hand last week in a small stock speculation. I bought some stock on a margin, it went up, and I sold before it fell. I made—a penny or two."

Now, stock meant one thing to the old lady and another to Clarence. Her ideas of business were based on the sure, slow, old-time methods, all set to the tune of the copy-book dictum that honesty is the best policy. She was greatly pleased that Clarence was getting on in business. John heard of the matter through her, and listened in grim silence. He seldom had a chance now to talk to his brother; he was never home evenings, though he often told Aunt Hannah of his whereabouts at the theatre, opera, or some merry-making where he met his "Louise." He threw out hints that matters were approaching a crisis, and the parents would soon find their daughter had a will of her own.

"That is all very well, Clarrie," said the old lady, "but I hope you are not stirring her up to disobey her parents in any way. Remember that a wilful, disobedient daughter does not make a thoughtful, good wife."

"Oh, of course, but Louise must make a stand. She does not like the old money-bags they want her to marry, and she does want to marry me."

"But how could you support a wife accustomed to luxury—that is, for some time to come?"

"Old Grace, her father, is rolling in money. He is one of the firm of which I am a humble servant. He knows I have business talent and push; he could advance me and plunk down something liberal for Louise as easy as not. Probably he will if——"

"If you can gain his approval," said Aunt Hannah, nodding her lace-capped head with an air of great sagacity, adding: "To do that, shun anything dishonorable or underhanded, and remember you are a Welles, and so, I hope, a gentleman."

Clarence departed, smiling with a half audible joke about a "gentleman," and "another cut to the creature's make-up nowadays." Aunt Hannah's notions on this head were as primitive as her ideas of business.

It was a beautiful day in mid-

winter, with a keen, cold air, but a sky as blue as a turquoise. The streets were full of people, every one seeming to feel alert and vigorous. Aunt Hannah was tempted to walk a little way on Broadway, and came in "blooming," as John told her. He, too, had been enjoying the afternoon in a trip to Summer-wild. There the spotless snow covered the lawns and fields. Nature was very lovely, and every one had greeted him most cordially. He still held an old Greek book in his hand. He would never see its brown, discolored color without being transported to the Hogarth library, to Elizabeth's presence. It had been a perfect day.

They were getting warm in the Welles parlor, and John could scarcely see Aunt Hannah in the sombre room with its heavy curtains. Suddenly there was a sharp ring at the front door, and soon after the maid brought John a letter. He lighted the gas and exclaimed: "Why, it is Clarence's writing!"

"It must be to tell why he was not home this noon," said Aunt Hannah, forgetting he would naturally be there soon to explain this fact.

John opened the letter, read a few lines, and uttered an emphatic expression of disapproval.

"What is it, John? What has happened?"

"He is starting for Washington! Has married Hiram Grace's daughter—run away with her. He says she was more than ready, but I say it is scandalous! Mr. Grace did not want him for a son-in-law."

"But Miss Grace wanted him for a husband," stammered Aunt Hannah, after the first shock.

"She is a silly, romantic girl, and I am ashamed. Mr. Grace has been, for father's sake, very thoughtful and generous toward Clarence. He has trusted him in business to a degree that has troubled me, and this is a base return," stormed John, more excited than Aunt Hannah had ever seen him.

"Oh, dear; how could he do it!" she mourned; "but then they were much attached to one another, and you, John, don't understand about such things; and, oh dear, what will the Graces do? How angry your father will be!"

John calmed himself a little at that, replying: "We must keep it from father a day or two, until we see if there can be any amicable settlement. I know that Hiram Grace has the name of being very hard when he sees fit."