CHAPTER XLVII.

How John Lenox tried to kill time during the following two months, and how time retaliated during the process, it is needless to set forth. It may not, however, be wholly irrelevant to note that his cough had gradually disappeared, and that his appetite had become good enough to carry him through the average table d'hôte dinner. On the morning after his arrival at Naples he found a cable dispatch at the office of Cook & Son, as follows: "Sixty cash, forty stock. Stock good. Harum."

"God bless the dear old boy!" said John fervently. The Pennsylvania property was sold at last; and if "stock good" was true, the dispatch informed him that he was, if not a rich man for modern days, still, as David would have put it, "wuth consid'able." No man, I take it, is very likely to receive such a piece of news without satisfaction; but if our friend's first sensation was one of gratification, the thought which followed had a drop of bitterness in it. "If I could only have had it before!" he said to himself; and indeed many of the disappointments of life, if not the greater part, come because events are unpunctual. They have a way of arriving sometimes too early, or worse, too late.

Another circumstance detracted from his satisfaction: a note he expected did not appear among the other communications waiting him at the bankers, and his mind was occupied for the while with various conjectures as to the reason, none of which was satisfactory. Perhaps she had changed her mind. Perhaps—a score of things! Well, there was nothing for it but to be as patient as possible and await events. He remembered that she had said she was to visit some friends by the name of Hartleigh, and she had told him the name of their villa, but for the moment he did not remember it. In any case he did not know the Hartleighs, and if she had changed her mind—as was possibly indicated by the omission to send him word—well——! He shrugged his shoulders, mechanically lighted a cigarette, and strolled down and out of the Piazza Martiri and across to the Largo della Vittoria. He had a half-formed idea of walking back through the Villa Nazionale, spending an hour at the Aquarium, and then to his hotel for luncheon. It occurred to him at the moment that there was a steamer from Genoa on the Monday following, that he was tired of wandering about aimlessly and alone, and that there was really no reason why he should not take the said steamer and go home. Occupied with these reflections, he absently observed, just opposite to him across the way, a pair of large bay horses in front of a handsome landau. A coachman in livery was on the box, and a small footman, very much coated and silk-hatted, was standing about; and, as he looked, two ladies came out of the arched entrance to the court of the building before which the equipage was halted, and the small footman sprang to the carriage door.

One of the ladies was a stranger to him, but the other was Mrs. William Ruggles; and John, seeing that he had been recognized, at once crossed over to the carriage; and presently, having accepted an invitation to breakfast, found himself sitting opposite them on his way to the Villa Violante. The conversation during the drive up to the Vomero need not be detailed. Mrs. Hartleigh arrived at the opinion that our friend was rather a dull person. Mrs. Ruggles, as he had found out, was usually rather taciturn. Neither is it necessary to say very much of the breakfast, nor of the people assembled.

It appeared that several guests had departed the previous day, and the people at table consisted only of Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles, Mary, Mr. and Mrs. Hartleigh and their two daughters, and John, whose conversation was mostly with his host, and was rather desultory. In fact, there was during the meal a perceptible air of something like disquietude. Mr. Ruggles in particular said almost nothing, and wore an appearance of what seemed like anxiety. Once he turned to his host: "When ought I to get an answer to that cable, Hartleigh? to-day, do you think?"

"Yes, I should say so without doubt," was the reply, "if it's answered promptly, and in fact there's plenty of time. Remember that we are about six hours earlier than New York by the clock, and it's only about seven in the morning over there."

Coffee was served on the balustraded platform of the flight of marble steps leading down to the grounds below.

"Mary," said Mrs. Hartleigh, when cigarettes had been offered, "don't you want to show Mr. Lenox something of La Violante?"

"I shall take you to my favorite place," she said, as they descended the steps together.

The southern front of the grounds of the Villa Violante is bounded and upheld by a wall of tufa fifty feet in height and some four hundred feet long. About midway of its length a semicircular bench of marble, with a rail, is built out over one of the buttresses. From this point is visible the whole bay and harbor of Naples, and about one third of the city lies in sight, five hundred feet below. To the left one sees Vesuvius and the Sant' Angelo chain, which the eye follows to Sorrento. Straight out in front stands Capri, and to the right the curve of the bay, ending at Posilipo. The two, John and his companion, halted near the bench, and leaned upon the parapet of the wall for a while in silence. From the streets below rose no rumble of traffic, no sound of hoof or wheel; but up through three thousand feet of distance came from here and there the voices of street-venders, the clang of a bell, and ever and anon the pathetic supplication of a donkey. Absolute quiet prevailed where they stood, save for these upcoming sounds. The April sun, deliciously warm, drew a smoky odor from the hedge of box with which the parapet walk was bordered, in and out of which darted small green lizards with the quickness of little fishes.

John drew a long breath.

"I don't believe there is another such view in the world," he said. "I do not wonder that this is your favorite spot."

"Yes," she said, "you should see the grounds —the whole place is superb—but this is the glory

of it all, and I have brought you straight here because I wanted to see it with you, and this may be the only opportunity."

"What do you mean?" he asked apprehensively.

"You heard Mr. Ruggles's question about the cable dispatch?" she said.

"Yes."

"Well," she said, "our plans have been very much upset by some things he has heard from home. We came on from Algiers ten days earlier than we had intended, and if the reply to Mr. Ruggles's cable is unfavorable, we are likely to depart for Genoa to-morrow and take the steamer for home on Monday. The reason why I did not send a note to your bankers," she added, "was that we came on the same boat that I intended to write by; and Mr. Hartleigh's man has inquired for you every day at Cook's so that Mr. Hartleigh might know of your coming and call upon you."

John gave a little exclamation of dismay. Her face was very still as she gazed out over the sea with half-closed eyes. He caught the scent of the violets in the bosom of her white dress.

"Let us sit down," she said at last. "I have something I wish to say to you."

He made no rejoinder as they seated themselves, and during the moment or two of silence in which she seemed to be meditating how to begin, he sat bending forward, holding his stick with both hands between his knees, absently prodding holes in the gravel.

"I think," she began, "that if I did not believe the chances were for our going to-morrow, I would not say it to-day." John bit his lip and

gave the gravel a more vigorous punch. "But I have felt that I must say it to you some time before we saw the last of each other, whenever that time should be."

"Is it anything about what happened on board ship?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," she replied, "it concerns all that took place on board ship, or nearly all, and I have had many misgivings about it. I am afraid that I did wrong, and I am afraid, too, that in your secret heart you would admit it."

"No, never!" he exclaimed. "If there was any wrong done, it was wholly of my own doing. I was alone to blame. I ought to have remembered that you were married, and perhaps—yes, I did remember it in a way, but I could not realize it. I had never seen or heard of your husband, or heard of your marriage. He was a perfectly unreal person to me, and you—you seemed only the Mary Blake that I had known, and as I had known you. I said what I did that night upon an impulse which was as unpremeditated as it was sudden. I don't see how you were wrong. You couldn't have foreseen what took place—and——"

"Have you not been sorry for what took place?" she asked, with her eyes on the ground. "Have you not thought the less of me since?"

He turned and looked at her. There was a little smile upon her lips and on her downcast eyes.

"No, by Heaven!" he exclaimed desperately, "I have not, and I am not sorry. Whether I ought to have said what I did or not, it was true, and I wanted you to know——"

He broke off as she turned to him with a

smile and a blush. The smile was almost a laugh.

"But, John," she said, "I am not Mrs. Edward Ruggles. I am Mary Blake."

The parapet was fifty feet above the terrace. The hedge of box was an impervious screen.

Well, and then, after a little of that sort of thing, they both began hurriedly to admire the view again, for some one was coming. But it was only one of the gardeners, who did not understand English; and confidence being once more restored, they fell to discussing—everything.

"Do you think you could live in Homeville, dear?" asked John after a while.

"I suppose I shall have to, shall I not?" said Mary. "And are you, too, really happy, John?"

John instantly proved to her that he was. "But it almost makes me unhappy," he added, "to think how nearly we have missed each other. If I had only known in the beginning that you were not Mrs. Edward Ruggles!"

Mary laughed joyously. The mistake which a moment before had seemed almost tragic now appeared delightfully funny.

"The explanation is painfully simple," she answered. "Mrs. Edward Ruggles—the real one—did expect to come on the Vaterland, whereas I did not. But the day before the steamer sailed she was summoned to Andover by the serious illness of her only son, who is at school there. I took her ticket, got ready overnight—I like to start on these unpremeditated journeys—and here I am." John put his arm

about her to make sure of this, and kept it there—lest he should forget. "When we met on the steamer and I saw the error you had made I was tempted—and yielded—to let you go on uncorrected. But," she added, looking lovingly up into John's eyes, "I'm glad you found out your mistake at last."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FORTNIGHT later Mr. Harum sat at his desk in the office of Harum & Co. There were a number of letters for him, but the one he opened first bore a foreign stamp, and was postmarked "Napoli." That he was deeply interested in the contents of this epistle was manifest from the beginning, not only from the expression of his face, but from the frequent "wa'al, wa'als" which were elicited as he went on; but interest grew into excitement as he neared the close, and culminated as he read the last few lines.

"Scat my CATS!" he cried, and, grabbing his hat and the letter, he bolted out of the back door in the direction of the house, leaving the rest of his correspondence to be digested—any time.

EPILOGUE.

I MIGHT, in conclusion, tell how John's further life in Homeville was of comparatively short duration; how David died of injuries received in a runaway accident; how John found himself the sole executor of his late partner's estate, and, save for a life provision for Mrs. Bixbee, the only legatee, and rich enough (if indeed with his own and his wife's money he had not been so before) to live wherever he pleased. But as heretofore I have confined myself strictly to facts, I am, to be consistent, constrained to abide by them now. Indeed, I am too conscientious to do otherwise, notwithstanding the temptation to make what might be a more artistic ending to my story. David is not only living, but appears almost no older than when we first knew him, and is still just as likely to "git goin'" on occasion. Even "old Jinny" is still with us, though her master does most of his "joggin' 'round" behind a younger horse. Whatever Mr. Harum's testamentary intentions may be, or even whether he has made a will or not, nobody knows but himself and his attorney. Aunt Polly—well, there is a little more of her than when we first made her acquaintance, say twenty pounds.

John and his wife live in a house which they built on the shore of the lake. It is a settled