

as he stepped just within it upon his return. But in the hall he saw something which caused him a swift shiver of uneasiness. Two little tearful, black-robed figures sat sadly upon the lower steps of the great staircase, and a big trunk stood near the door.

"Oh, guardy!" sobbed the Misses Hetherington, rushing to greet him. "Mrs. Latimer is going away! The carriage will be here for her in a minute! Don't let her go! Please don't!"

"Mrs. Latimer going away? Where is she?" demanded Jonas Everard, excitedly.

"In the sitting-room. Oh, go and tell her she must stay!"

"I will," promised Jonas, obediently, and he strode away and gave one swift tap at Mr. Latimer's door and then entered her presence.

At sight of him she sprang up with flaming cheeks and hastily gathered from the table some sheets of paper upon which she had been writing.

"Mrs. Latimer, the children tell me you are going away. It is absurd, impossible! You must not go! What will they do without you? What shall I do without you?"

And having thus irretrievably committed himself, Jonas Everard leaned across the table and pleaded his suit with the vehemence of a converted woman-hater and his 45 years.

"It is impossible that you should marry your housekeeper," dissented Mrs. Latimer, with drooping eyes, when he hesitated for her to speak.

"Not impossible at all! I will never marry any one else!" maintained Jonas, stoutly.

"But it is impossible that you should marry me! You know nothing about me! You don't even know who I am!"

"I know all that I want to know—that I love you?" declared Jonas.

"Ah, no! That is not enough. When you learn the truth about me you will, perhaps, want to retract much that you have said. At all events, I will not listen further to you until you acquaint yourself with all my history," said Mrs. Latimer, decisively. "Take these papers and go away again for a few days. I will stay with the children. A week from to-day you shall telegraph me whether I, too, am to go, or whether you wish me to stay."

Jonas accepted the conditions, took the finely-written sheets the lady extended to him, wrung her hand passionately, and went into exile.

But not for a week. He had only been gone four days when he burst into the old house, stamped the dust from his boots, and made straight for Mrs. Latimer's sitting-room, taking that lady in his arms in the most summary fashion.

"I want you, my dear, for my very own!" he exclaimed, as he held his housekeeper

against his breast. "Will you give yourself to me? Can you love me? Owen Hetherington gave me his children, and now I want his wife!"

At which rather peculiar speech the lady smiled happily up into Jonas Everard's face.

"Yes," she answered, "I will give myself to you, for I had learned my heart's secret before you returned from New York. And I shall again—just think!—you and my children! But what are we to tell them?"

"O guardy! Dear guardy!"

"By Jupiter!" Jonas commenced, but thought himself of the enormity of the ejaculation in the Misses Hetherington's eyes in time to check it before fully exploding. For there they both were, having heard of his arrival.

"Come here, Rose," he commenced again, more collectedly this time, and took Daisy on his knee and drew two chairs before the open fire for himself and Mrs. Latimer. "I want to tell you a story. You may not quite understand it all now, but you will as you grow older. There was once a young lady who loved a nice man and was to marry him, but she heard he was dead. Then, though very sorrowful, she let her friends persuade her into marrying another nice man, but a man with a jealous nature and a fiery temper. She was a good wife and had two little baby girls of whom she was exceedingly fond. But while the younger was yet a tiny infant, the man whom she was to have married, but believed dead, came to call upon her. They had a sad interview and parted, never to meet again on earth, as they never have, for he has been really dead for some time. But the lady's husband heard about this call and flew into such a rage and said such cruel things to his wife that she felt that she could not live with him again. She went to her old home and led a quiet life there, mourning for her dear little girls whom she could not see, until her husband died and sent the girls as a legacy to a friend of his. Then the lady, hearing of it, left her pretty home to live in that gentleman's house as a housekeeper and governess that she might be near her children."

"Guardy," said Rose, stopping him here, "I don't want to hear any more unless you mean Daisy and me, and that Mrs. Latimer is our mother."

"I do," nodded Jonas, brightly.

Both children flew at Mrs. Latimer and nearly smothered her with kisses.

"And to think we've got a mamma, when we always believed she was dead," said Rose, complacently. "How lovely it is!"

"And shall we call you mamma and keep you for good?" inquired Daisy.

"Yes, you're to keep her for good, and to call her mamma, and to call me papa—if you don't object," added Jonas, with a little uncertainty. "For your mamma has promised