

laughed, but somehow Guy's little pet-phrase seemed to help me on just then, and the laugh drew us together. Please think it over, and see if you do not think it really the best plan just for these two years that you must go back to India. We will not talk of any thing beyond that. At the end of two years you will come back to England for some considerable time in any case, and then you will have leisure to make more permanent plans. Guy will be nine, and will have had two years drilling at school; and Maudie will have learned what life is like without him, and will have got over the deep blow her mother's death was to her. Then it may be time to think of something else. But just for these two years, won't you let me go on being the children's guardianess? It would be doing me such a kindness if you would; and I will really try to do well by them. Aunt Lois will not leave me till I have a really capable and thoroughly competent person to share the care of them with me; and I feel if I lost Maudie just now that I should be almost as heart-broken as she will be if she is taken away from Guy.

I looked full at him then to see how he would take my appeal, and saw the kindest light shining in his eyes, though his lips were grave, and he was a little while in replying

"Miss Raleigh," he said, "I think you have the kindest heart of any woman I have ever met. Your plan, so far as the children are concerned, is the very best and happiest that could be hit upon. I do not know what I ought to say, as a man of the world, to such an offer from one who, in the world's parlance, is a stranger to me and mine; and I know as well as you must that the thing is strange and unconventional. But I do you the justice and the honor to be perfectly certain you know your own mind, and that you really wish to confer this favor, and that it ought to be met in the spirit it is offered. Miss Raleigh, I leave the decision in your hands and that of your aunt. If you really wish this two years' charge, I will most gladly, thankfully and gratefully give it up to you. I know it will be for the children's welfare and happiness, and it relieves me of a burden of responsibility and anxiety that was pressing heavily upon me. For the rest, I can only say that there no person living to whom I would so soon be under such heavy obligations as I would to you."

He took my hand and held it fast in his. My heart was brimming over with happiness. I could scarcely believe that I had achieved so easy and complete a victory; and beside that victory, what else came over me as I stood there, filling my heart with a new and wonderful joy which I had never before experienced?

But the spell—if it was one—was broken by Guy, who came careering up at this moment with an eager shout—

"Miss Sea Gull! Miss Sea-Gull!" He had been learning of late to call me Cousin Olivia, but the old name was always the readier in moments of excitement. "I just want you to

settle with Brother Reginald about being our guardianess. Listen Miss Sea-Gull! You know he's going away to-morrow, and I should like to have it nicely arranged before he goes. You are going to be our guardianess now, aren't you?"

He took my hand and laid his cheek against it, whilst I stooped down and gathered both him and Maudie in my arms.

"Yes, darling, Brother Reginald and I have been talking about it, and I am going to be your guardianess for two years, till he comes back again; and then after that—"

"After that," said Brother Reginald's voice above us, with an accent that made my heart beat fast and furiously—"after that, little people, *we shall see.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

At the end of two years Brother Reginald came home and married me, so that I have never been called upon to relinquish my office of "guardianess" to the two little children in whom I first became interested through hearing them talk and watching them OVER THE SEA WALL.

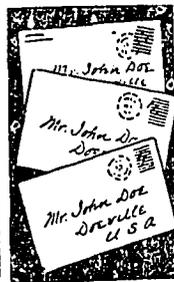
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