

## Family Department.

### Over The Sea Wall.

#### CHAPTER II. [CONTINUED.]

But Maudie didn't say "Yes," she answered, with a discretion that seemed almost beyond her years.

"I'm afraid not, Guy; dear Brother Reginald will be home this summer; and you won't be as old as me for more than two years, and I'm not grown up yet. I don't think we can go away together before he comes back; but we can talk to him about the boat when he does, and see what he says."

"I don't want to talk to him. I want to have it now."

"But boats cost money, Guy. How could we buy one?"

There was a pause, and then Guy spoke fast and eagerly—the cross, impatient tone audible in his last words quite gone now.

"Oh, Maudie, I expect there's some money in the bank. Don't you remember mother was always putting it in or taking it out? I don't exactly know what bank, or where it was; but I expect there's some left. Perhaps Mrs. Marks knows where it is; and if she'll tell us we would get up some night and dig it out. It must be ours now, because mother told you she'd left us everything of hers. We've both got spades. It wouldn't take long, if only we knew where the bank was. That would do, Maudie, wouldn't it?"

"I don't think we could get it, Guy," answered the little girl, in a slightly puzzled tone. "Mother never went out digging. She used to write little bits of paper, and she told me that the people at the bank would give money for them. There's somebody taking care of the bank, I'm sure. I don't think they would let us go digging about as we like. Lots of other people have money in the bank, too. Mother said so."

"Well, they ought to let us have mother's, anyhow. It isn't theirs, and if they keep it away from us it'll be as bad as stealing; and I don't see the use of putting it in a bank at all if one can't have the fun of digging it out afterwards. Anyhow, I'll see what I can do. Girls aren't much good for that sort of thing. They're always frightened what people will say."

Maudie did not appear to resent this imputation upon her species. Her voice was just as gentle as before when she took up her rejoinder. I was disposed to fall foul of her for being too meek and reasonable. The little boy, with his quaint independence and original ideas, was much more entertaining.

"I don't think I'm old enough to be much good yet; but I'll try to be by-and-by, when I get bigger. And, Guy dear, I don't really think we can do anything except wait here till Brother Reginald comes. I know even Mrs. Marks can't get any money out of the bank now, because mother is dead, and all sorts of things have to be settled. That's what makes everything so difficult. She has to keep us herself out of her own money till Brother Reginald comes. It's very kind of her, I think, to take all that trouble, because we're only lodgers, you know—not relations. But she was so fond of mother, and promised to look after us until somebody else came."

"Well, but listen. Why should that somebody be Brother Reginald? I don't believe he is our brother. I don't see how he can be. Why, mother never even saw him in all her life. If he was our brother she'd have been his mother, and of course she'd have seen him some time; now, wouldn't she?"

"Yes, but he's not our brother like that. He doesn't belong to mother. He had another

mother of his own, but our father and his father were the same."

"I don't count fathers," remarked Guy, calmly. "I can't remember papa, and I don't believe you can either. I think only mothers ought to count, and so I don't call him a brother at all."

"But he is a sort of brother—a half-brother, mother said it was called. He was grown up, and had just gone out to India before she married papa, and so she never saw him; but she said he wrote her a nice letter sometimes, and she hoped he would be a kind brother to us. She asked him to be our guardian, Guy, and he said he would. So we shall have to do what he says."

"What is a guardian?"

"Somebody who takes care of other people when they're not big enough to take care of themselves; and they've got to do what he says, just as if he was their father."

"Oh, well then," remarked Guy, with an amusing air of finality, "I can just as well be your guardian as Brother Reginald, for I've taken care of you for ever so long, and he hasn't; and I'm every bit your brother, and he's only a half-and-half. So when he comes—if we should be here—I'll just tell him he needn't bother, and that I'll be your guardian [I don't want one myself, 'cause I'm going to be a man just directly]. And then you'll have to do everything I say, Maudie; and that will be a very good plan, and we shall have lots of fun."

I could not help laughing to myself as I heard this summing-up. It was the first time I had laughed for a long time, and I think it did me good. At any rate, it made me feel really interested in the little pair below me, whose confidences I was overhearing, and I suppose that was a good thing for me, since I had not had a thought to spare from myself and my own trouble for the last six weeks at least.

"Hush!" said Maudie, quickly. "Didn't you hear something, Guy?"

"Nothing but ourselves and the sea-gulls. What did you think you heard, Maudie?"

"I don't know. It sounded like a voice."

"Well I don't see how any voice could get up here; and if it did it couldn't hurt us. Don't be frightened, Maudie; I'll take care of you. I'm your guardian now. I'll not let anything hurt you. You see, you needn't be afraid of anything now. It's a great advantage to a girl to have a guardian; and, you see you haven't got to do anything, only just to obey him."

"Yes," responded Maudie, meekly; "I suppose that's what we shall have to do. I wonder what sort of a guardian Brother Reginald will make?"

"Maudie!" the name was spoken very sharply, with a ring of impatience and temper. I felt sure that if his legs had not been dangling over the ledge, as I knew they must be, the little boy would have stamped his foot on the ground. "I wish you would listen when I explain things! I wish girls weren't quite so slow! Didn't you hear what I said? I've got it all beautifully arranged. I'm going to be your guardian; not Brother Reginald at all. It's a much better plan, and everybody will like it. So don't you bother yourself any more—I forbid you to; and you've got to obey me now, you know. And there's one rule I should like to make straight away off, and this is, that you do listen rather more when I tell you things. I do get quite tired of saying them over and over again. You'll remember that rule, won't you, Maudie?"

"Yes, Guy dear, I'll try. And now I think we must be getting home. Mrs. Marks told us not to be late for tea, and we've been rather late several days this week."

"Yes, let's go. I want to hear all about this letter from India, and I'm thirsty besides. I should like to make a rule that the sea in the pools shouldn't be salt. It would be so nice to drink out of them when one was thirsty, and the old sea might just as well take all its salt

away when it went. Come along, Maudie; I'll help you down. Now, do listen, and don't move till you've got my hand. That's right. Oh, and just hold me fast. I'm on a slippery bit—and then I'll hold you. I want to tell Mrs. Marks about me being your guardian now. Do you think it will be a surprise?"

Maudie's answer was inaudible; but I could hear Guy's eager tones quite plainly as the small pair descended from their perch.

"I think she will, because she's a sensible sort of woman, as women go. Jim doesn't think any of them have got *very* much sense. He told me so himself. But she's got as much as anybody, I think. I'll teach you to have plenty of sense, Maudie, because I shall keep you with me always—anyway, until I go to a boy's school when I'm quite big—and so you'll have lots of time to learn. Perhaps they'll let you come to my school too, when they know I'm your guardian." And at that point I lost the sense of the words, for the little pair had reached the sands, and were walking away in the direction of St. Benedict's hand in hand.

I looked at them curiously as they went, the sunshine beaming full upon them, and lighting up the little girl's hair, and the profile of the younger boy, as it was eagerly turned towards his sister. I could fancy that he was still saying, "Listen!" in that imperious way of his, and laying down the law with regard to his newly assumed guardianship, as he plainly considered it his right to do. I actually rose to my feet and leaved over the wall, looking after them.

"I wonder who they are, and if I shall ever see them again?" I said, half aloud. "Poor little things! they are orphans like me—fatherless and motherless; and their mother only just dead. And they are nice children, too. They have been gently brought up; one could tell that in a moment from their voices. I wonder if I could find out anything about them? They are living with Mrs. Marks that is plain, and she lets lodging. I know Aunt Lois could find out everything from that. She knows the place and its ways; but I don't. And I have never been into St. Benedict's in my life. Well, I don't think I will ask her yet. Perhaps I shall change my mind; perhaps I shall not see them any more. It's a bore to get mixed up with strangers one doesn't know anything about. So often they turn out so disappointing."

I had not had much experience, though I spoke with confidence. The fact was, I was too proud to appeal to Aunt Lois in the matter, and did not know how to go about it alone. I knew that if she thought anything had come into my head which was likely to be "an interest," she would raise heaven and earth to get me to "take it up," and most likely make the whole thing insufferable in a short time. I had no intention of being forced on even in a path of my own choosing, by the energetic shoves Aunt Lois was certain to give me; and I knew that all the bloom would be taken off my little romance if once she were to know of the existence of a secret curiosity about little Guy and Maudie.

"I shan't tell her. I shall just watch for myself. If I can scrape acquaintance my own way, perhaps I will; but I don't intend to be bounded into anything by her."

However, I was better for the exertion I had made and for the fresh air I had breathed. I was a little less snappish that evening, and even condescended to play cribbage with Aunt Lois for an hour before going to bed; and when I got there I slept better than I had done before for many weeks. I was certainly getting better fast. I was aware of it next morning when I got up. Things looked brighter and altogether more cheerful, and there began to steal into my senses something which I cannot describe, but which was really a love of life. I decided that I would go out again in the afternoon and sit by the sea wall. Perhaps my