

## CHAPTER II MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

The child crept softly to her mother's bedside, but once there she impulsively threw her arms about "Mamma Tone's" neck and embraced her so tightly that the sick woman was obliged to tear the little arms away. She did this tenderly, though, and holding the trembling hands in her own kissed both of Lory's cheeks before she said:

"I've news for you, dear."

"Are you better, mamma?" asked Lory.

"Of course not," was the calm reply. "You mustn't expect mamma ever to get well, my darling. But that shouldn't worry you--not too much, you know. One of the queer things about life is that it has an end, sooner or later, and in mamma's case it comes to an end a little sooner than you and I might wish it to."

"Oh, Mamma Tone!" An agonized cry, with the small hands clasped tightly over her throbbing heart. But Tony Seaver did not flinch.

"The news I have will surprise you, Lory dear. Your father, who loved you devotedly when you were a baby, but whom you have never known till now, is coming here to see us."

Alora's eyes grew big with wonder, but other thoughts drove even this strange news from her mind.

"I can't let you go, Mamma Tone," she wailed, sobbing; "I can't let you die and leave me all alone!"

The woman's breast heaved. She was silent a moment and then said quietly:

"Even kings and queens, sweetheart, have no command over life and death. When it is too late to help it, we realize we have been born; when it is too late to help it, we realize we must die. But why complain, when it is the fate of all humanity? To be true to our Creator, who directs all things, we must bow to His will without protest. You will love your father, Lory, because he will love you; and he is a good man, and kindly, so I believe he will make your life as happy as I could have done."

"I don't want him; I want you, Mamma--I want you!"

The mother sighed wearily and the alert nurse advanced and said to the child in grave, cold tones:

"You must control yourself, Miss Alora, if you wish to remain."

The threat quieted the little girl at once.

"I'll be good, Mamma Tone," she whispered softly. "Talk to me, and tell me what I must do."

So the dying woman talked to her, not of herself, but of Alora's father, and of how she would like her child to conduct herself while she grew in womanhood. She spoke of her will, and told Lory what it meant to her and how she had safe-guarded her interests as well as she was able. To this Lory listened intently and, although she still trembled at times, she had Tony Seaver's blood in her veins and could be brave in spite of the terrors that faced her. Dimly she realized that her mother was suffering through the knowledge of their inevitable parting, even as Alora was suffering, and felt she could comfort that beloved mother more by controlling her grief bravely than by giving way to it in her mother's presence.

Meantime, Dr. Anstruther had returned to his office and had written and dispatched the following telegram:

"Jason Jones, 1744 East 67th St., New York City.

"Your wife is dying at the Hotel Voltaire and wishes reconciliation before she passes away. Come quickly, as any delay may prove dangerous. Notify me by wire when to expect you. Edward Anstruther, M. D."

He left orders that the answer be delivered to him at his office or residence, as soon as received, but the day and the night passed without a word from Jason Jones. Dr. Anstruther telephoned the telegraph office and was assured his message had been delivered to the party in New York, as otherwise they would be notified to that effect.

Knowing Mrs. Jones' dangerous condition, the good doctor was worried, but the following morning brought the delayed answer:

"If necessary for me to come, you must send money for expenses."

It was signed "Jason Jones" and its tone and its demand annoyed Dr. Anstruther exceedingly.

"Confound the fellow!" he exclaimed. "Any decent man would have borrowed the money, or even pawned his watch and jewelry, to get to a dying wife who calls for him. Either Mrs. Jones is mistaken in her husband's kindly character or--well, he may have changed since last she knew him."

He did not hesitate, however, to go to the office and send money by telegraph to Jason Jones, furnishing the required sum from his own pocket rather than allow Antoinette to see her husband's telegram. He even sent more than was necessary, muttering to himself: "The poor devil may have some bills to settle before he can get away, and in any event she must not be disappointed because her impecunious husband lacks a few dollars. I fancy the poor artist will be amazed to find himself suddenly raised from poverty to affluence, for little Lory's income will be enormous and he will have seven years, at least, to enjoy it unrestrained. I hope," he added thoughtfully, as he drove back to his office, "that Mrs. Jones has made no error in her judgment of this man, for it is considerable power to place in anyone's hands and Alora is such a dear that I want her properly taken care of."

When he made his next visit to his patient he said in answer to her questioning look:

"Mr. Jones will be here to-morrow, I think. He will notify me of his arrival and I will be here to meet him. I believe it will be advisable for me to see him first, you know, in order to--eh--eh--to post him a bit," he added, meaningly.

"Yes," she replied, "I fear it will be something of a shock to Jason. Even though we have practically been strangers for years, he is sure to be grieved and sympathetic. But do not bore him with particulars, Doctor. Send him to me as soon as you have prepared him for the interview."