

## CHAPTER XVI ALORA WINS HER WAY

Mary Louise decided that Alora Jones improved on acquaintance. There were many admirable traits in her character that had lain dormant until developed by association with two girls of her own age who were themselves gentle and considerate. It is true that Alora at times was still headstrong and willful and unable to bridle her tongue when irritated, but neither Mary Louise nor Irene ever reproved her by word or look, so that she grew ashamed of her outbursts and when at home her father aroused her to anger she fled to her girl friends and sought in their companionship the antidote to her vexation. The two friends had decided it was unwise to comment on Alora's unhappy family relations and soon she discovered this and refrained from burdening them with her home quarrels.

No one could witness Irene's patient resignation to misfortune without admiring her character and being touched by her bravery and gentleness, and association with this crippled girl was softening Alora's hard and defiant nature wonderfully. Had the association continued it might have redeemed the prospective heiress from many of the faults she had acquired through years of neglect and rebellion against fate, but the close triumvirate of girl friends was suddenly dissolved, early in July, by no less a person than Will Morrison--a wealthy and kindly natured gentleman who was a friend of both the Conants and Colonel Hathaway.

Will Morrison had purchased a yacht; it was anchored in the breakwater near the Chicago Yacht Club, and its owner intended making a summer trip through the Great Lakes and cordially invited the Conants and Irene, and Mary Louise and Colonel Hathaway to accompany his party.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Conant at that time was ill. She had contracted a lingering but mild form of spring fever that would keep her in bed for weeks, and Irene, who was devoted to her aunt, would not leave her to the mercies of a nurse. Mary Louise wanted to go, though, for the Morrisons were delightful people and any yacht they purchased would be sure to be safe and comfortable.

Since the Conants could not go, Mary Louise suggested to her grandfather that they ask Will Morrison to invite Alora Jones, and the Colonel approved the idea because he thought it would do Alora much

good to mingle with refined people such as were sure to form the yacht party. So, when he answered Mr. Morrison's letter, he told him something of Alora and asked permission to fetch her along.

"I'm not at all sure," he said to Mary Louise, "that Mr. Jones will permit Alora to go with us."

"Nor am I," the girl replied; "but perhaps Alora can coax him to consent. It might be a good idea for you to ask him, too, Gran'pa Jim."

"My dear!" he remonstrated, "do you think I ought to hazard that man's sneers and insults, even to favor your friend Alora?"

"No; I do not, Gran'pa Jim," she laughingly rejoined. "That was a foolish suggestion, and I withdraw it. If Alora fails, I'll speak to him myself. I'm not afraid of Jason Jones, and he doesn't growl at me as he does at poor Lory."

They did not mention the proposal to Alora until the Colonel had received a telegram from Will Morrison saying: "By all means invite Miss Jones to join us. Knew her mother, once, and will be glad to have her with us."

Alora was delighted at the prospect of a yachting trip and decided at once that she would go, especially as Colonel Hathaway said she would be Mary Louise's guest on the trip to Chicago and no money would be needed for expenses. So she attacked her father in a somewhat original manner.

Mr. Jones had conceived a passion for flying and had just purchased an aeroplane. He was to begin his lessons at once and was so thoroughly immersed in his strange fancy that he paid little heed to anything else. His books were neglected. His former quiet life--amounting almost to physical inertion--had given place to a nervous and all-consuming desire to master the rather strenuous art of aviation. Alora was quite unaware of this transformation, for as usual Jason Jones kept his own counsel and followed his inclinations without conference with anyone. The girl knew that her father haunted the aviation field, but anything that kept him amused away from home was gratefully approved by her.

Usually the two breakfasted together in silence. Lately Mr. Jones had hurried through with the meal so as to get away, and he did not return for lunch. So on this important morning Alora said casually:

"I'm going away for three or four weeks."

"Where to?" he asked sharply, suddenly rousing from his abstraction.

"I'm going on a yachting trip with Mary Louise and Colonel Hathaway. We're to be the guests of a Mr. Morrison and his wife, who own the yacht."

"Morrison? Morrison?" he repeated suspiciously. Then, as if relieved: "I don't know any Morrisons."

"Nor do I. They are old friends of the Hathaways and the Conants, however."

"Well, you can't go. It's nonsense."

"Why?"

"Yachts are dangerous. I don't want you drowned."

"I'd be as safe on a yacht as I would be in this house," she declared. "Do you think I intend to take any chances with my life? Please remember that when I'm eighteen I shall have a fortune and be able to lead an independent life--a pleasant life--a life in sharp contrast to this one. Therefore, I'm going to live to enjoy my money."

He gave her a shrewd look of approval. The argument seemed to appeal to him. It quieted, to an extent, his fears for her safety.

"Anyhow," said Alora bluntly, "I'm going, and I dare you to stop me."

He was silent a while, considering the proposition. Just now he would be busy at the aviation field and in Colonel Hathaway's charge the girl was likely to be quite safe. He was inclined to relax his vigilance over his precious daughter, on this occasion.

"How long do the Hathaways expect to be away?" he inquired.

"Mary Louise says we will surely be home three weeks from the day we leave."

"Surely?"

"Without fail."

"H-m-m. It's a risk. Something might delay you. Do you know what would happen if you left me for sixty days or more?"

"Of course I do. That will of my mother's states that if at any time my devoted father develops any neglect of me, or lack of interest in his darling daughter, such as allowing me to become separated from him for longer than sixty days at one time, the court has the privilege, at its option, of deposing him as administrator of my estate and appointing another guardian. The other guardian, however, is to be paid a salary and the income, in that case, is to accrue to the benefit of my estate."

"How did you learn all that?" he demanded.

"You left a copy of the will lying around, and I read it and made a copy of it for myself. I now know my mother's will by heart. She suggests that if we must live together, 'in loving companionship,' you will probably have me educated by tutors, at home, and her objection to girls' schools--I wonder why?--was the principal reason she inserted the clause that we must never be separated. It would prevent you from sending me away to school. But as for the tutors, I haven't yet made their acquaintance."

"Tutors cost money," he said in a surly tone.

"I realize that; and while there is an abundance of money, the will states that it is to be entirely in your control. But we've quarreled on that subject too many times already, without your loosening your grip on the dollars. To get back to our subject, I assure you I shall not be gone longer than twenty-one days, and the trip won't cost you a single penny."

"When did you propose going?"

"We take the noon train on Monday for Chicago."

He got his hat and left the house without another word, leaving Alora exultant. She hurried over to tell Mary Louise the good news.

"Did he really consent?" asked Mary Louise.

"Well, he didn't forbid it," said the girl, "and that's the same thing."