

# BAUM LYMAN FRANK

MARY LOUISE SOLVES A  
MYSTERY

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**Mary Louise Solves a Mystery**

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# L. Frank Baum

## Mary Louise Solves a Mystery

### CHAPTER I

### DOCTOR AND PATIENT

A little girl sat shivering in a corner of a reception room in the fashionable Hotel Voltaire. It was one of a suite of rooms occupied by Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones, widely known for her wealth and beauty, and this girl – a little thing of eleven – was the only child of Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones, and was named Alora.

It was not cold that made her shiver, for across the handsomely furnished room an open window gratefully admitted the summer sunshine and the summer breeze. Near the window, where the draught came coolest, a middle-aged woman in a sober dress sat reading. Alora did not look at this person but kept her gaze fixed anxiously upon the doorway that led to the corridor, and the spasmodic shudders that at times shook her little body seemed due to nervous fear.

The room was so still that every tick of the Dresden clock could be distinctly heard. When Miss Gorham, Alora's governess, turned a page of her book, the rustle was appallingly audible. And the clock ticked on, and Miss Gorham turned page after page, and still the child sat bowed upon her chair and eagerly eyed the passageway.

It seemed ages before the outer door of the suite finally opened and a man moved softly down the passage and paused at the entrance of the reception room. The man was white-haired, dignified and distinguished in appearance. Hat in hand, he stood as if undecided while Alora bounded from her seat and came to him, her eyes, big and pleading, reading his face with dramatic intentness.

"Well, well, my dear; what is it?" he said in a kindly voice.

"May I see my mamma now, Doctor?" she asked.

He shook his head, turning to the table to place his hat and gloves upon it.

"Not just yet, little one," he gently replied, and noting her quick-drawn breath of disappointment he added: "Why, I haven't seen her myself, this morning."

"Why do you keep me from her, Doctor Anstruther? Don't you know it's – it's wicked, and cruel?" – a sob in her voice.

The old physician looked down upon the child pityingly.

"Mamma is ill – very ill, you know – and to disturb her might – it might – well, it might make her worse," he explained lamely.

"I won't disturb her. There's a nurse in there, all the time. Why should I disturb my mamma more than a nurse?" asked Alora pleadingly.

He evaded the question. The big eyes disconcerted him.

"When I have seen your mother," said he, "I may let you go to her for a few minutes. But you must be very quiet, so as not to excite her. We must avoid anything of an exciting nature. You understand that, don't you, Lory?"

She studied his face gravely. When he held out a hand to her she clung to it desperately and a shudder again shook her from head to foot.

"Tell me, Doctor Anstruther," in low, passionate tones, "is my mother dying?"

He gave an involuntary start.

"Who put that notion into your head, Lory?"

"Miss Gorham."

He frowned and glanced reprovingly at the governess, who had lowered her book to her lap and was regarding the scene with stolid unconcern.

"You mustn't mind such idle gossip, my dear. I am the doctor, you know, and I am doing all that can be done to save your mother's life. Don't worry until I tell you to, Lory; and now let me go to see my patient."

He withdrew his hand from her clasp and turned into the passage again. The girl listened to his footsteps as he approached her mother's bedchamber, paused a moment, and then softly opened the door and entered. Silence again pervaded the reception room. The clock resumed its loud ticking. Miss Gorham raised her book. Alora went back to her chair, trembling.

The front bedchamber was bright and cheery, a big room fitted with every modern luxury. The doctor blinked his eyes as he entered from the dim passage, for here was sunlight and fresh air in plenty. Beside the bed stood a huge vase of roses, their delicate fragrance scenting the atmosphere. Upon the bed, beneath a costly lace coverlid, lay a woman thirty-five years of age, her beautiful face still fresh and unlined, the deep blue eyes turned calmly upon the physician.

"Welcome, Doctor Anstruther," she said. "Do you realize you have kept me waiting?"

"I am sorry, Mrs. Jones," he replied, approaching her. "There are so many demands upon my time that –"

"I know," a little impatiently; "but now that you are here please tell me how I am this morning."

"How do you feel?"

"I do not suffer, but it takes more morphine to quiet the pain. Janet has used the hypodermic four times since midnight," with a glance at the gray-robed nurse who stood silently by the table.

The doctor nodded, thoughtfully looking down her. There was small evidence of illness in her appearance, but he knew that her hours were numbered and that the dread disease that had fastened upon her was creeping on with ever increasing activity. She knew it, too, and smiled a grim little smile as she added: "How long can I last, at this rate?"

"Do not anticipate, my dear," he answered gravely. "Let us do all that may be done, and –"

"I must know!" she retorted. "I have certain important arrangements to make that must not be needlessly delayed."

"I can understand that, Mrs. Jones."

"Then tell me frankly, how long have I to live?"

"Perhaps a month; possibly less; but –"

"You are not honest with me, Doctor Anstruther! What I wish to know – what I *must* know – is how soon this disease will be able to kill me. If we manage to defer the end somewhat, all the better; but the fiend must not take me unaware, before I am ready to resign my life."

He seated himself beside the bed and reflected. This was his most interesting patient; he had attended her constantly for more than a year and in this time had learned to admire not only her beauty of person but her "gameness" and wholesome mentality. He knew something of her past life and history, too, as well from her own lips as from common gossip, for this was no ordinary woman and her achievements were familiar to many.

She was the daughter of Captain Bob Seaver, whose remarkable career was known to every man in the West. Captain Bob was one "forty-niner" and had made fortunes and lost them with marvelous regularity. He had a faculty for finding gold, but his speculations were invariably unwise, so his constant transitions from affluence to poverty, and vice versa, were the subject of many amusing tales, many no doubt grossly exaggerated. And the last venture of Captain Bob Seaver, before he died, was to buy the discredited "Ten-Spot" mine and start to develop it.

At that time he was a widower with one motherless child – Antoinette – a girl of eighteen who had been reared partly in mining camps and partly at exclusive girls' schools in the East, according to her father's varying fortunes. "Tony" Seaver, as she was generally called in those days, combined culture and refinement with a thorough knowledge of mining, and when her father passed away and

left her absolute mistress of the tantalizing "Ten-Spot," she set to work to make the mine a success, directing her men in person and displaying such shrewd judgment and intelligence, coupled with kindly consideration for her assistants, that she became the idol of the miners, all of whom were proud to be known as employees of Tony Seaver's "Ten-Spot" would have died for their beautiful employer if need be.

And the "Ten-Spot" made good. In five years Tony had garnered a million or two of well-earned dollars, and then she sold out and retired from business. Also, to the chagrin of an army of suitors, she married an artist named Jason Jones, whose talent, it was said, was not so great as his luck. So far, his fame rested on his being "Tony Seaver's husband." But Tony's hobby was art, and she had recognized real worth, she claimed, in Jason Jones' creations. On her honeymoon she carried her artist husband to Europe and with him studied the works of the masters in all the art centers of the Continent. Then, enthusiastic and eager for Jason's advancement, she returned with him to New York and set him up in a splendid studio where he had every convenience and incentive to work.

So much the world at large knew. It also knew that within three years Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones separated from her husband and, with her baby girl, returned West to live. The elaborate Jones studio was abandoned and broken up and the "promising young artist" disappeared from the public eye. Mrs. Jones, a thorough business woman, had retained her fortune in her own control and personally attended to her investments. She became noted as a liberal patron of the arts and a generous donor to worthy charities. In spite of her youth, wealth, and beauty, she had no desire to shine in society and lived a somewhat secluded life in luxurious family hotels, attending with much solicitude to the training and education of her daughter Alora.

At first she had made Denver her home, but afterward migrated from one middle-west city to another until she came to Chicago, where she had now lived for nearly three years, occupying the most expensive suite of rooms at the very exclusive Hotel Voltaire.

Alora fairly worshipped her beautiful mother and although Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones was considered essentially cold and unemotional by those who knew her casually, there was no doubt she prized her child as her dearest possession and lavished all the tenderness and love of which she was capable upon her.

Retrospectively, Doctor Anstruther considered this historical revue of his fair patient as he sat facing her. It seemed a most unhappy fate that she should be cut off in the flower of her womanhood, but her case was positively hopeless, and she knew it and had accepted the harsh verdict without a murmur. Bravery had always been Tony Seaver's prime characteristic. To Doctor Anstruther it seemed that she might as well know the truth which she had demanded from his lips.

"This disease is one that accelerates toward the end," he said. "Within the past few days we have noted its more virulent tendency. All we can do now is to keep you from suffering until – the end."

"And that will be – when?" she demanded.

"I think I can safely give you a week but – "

"Then I must act at once," she said, as he hesitated. "I must, first of all, make provision for Alora's future, and in this I require your help."

"You know you may depend upon me," he said simply.

"Please telegraph at once to my husband Jason Jones, in New York."

The request startled him, for never before had she mentioned her husband's name in his presence. But he asked, calmly enough:

"What is his address?"

"Hand me that small memorandum-book," pointing to the stand beside him. He obeyed, and as she turned the leaves slowly she said:

"Doctor Anstruther, you have been my good and faithful friend, and you ought to know and to understand why I am now sending for my husband, from whom I have been estranged for many years. When I first met Jason Jones he was a true artist and I fell in love with his art rather than with

the man. I was ambitious that he should become a great painter, world-famous. He was very poor until he married me, and he had worked industriously to succeed, but as soon as I introduced him to a life of comfort – I might even add, of luxury – his ambition to work gradually deserted him. With his future provided for, as he thought, he failed to understand the necessity of devoting himself to his brush and palette, but preferred a life of ease – of laziness, if you will. So we quarreled. I tried to force him back to his work, but it was no use; my money had ruined his career. I therefore lost patience and decided to abandon him, hoping that when he was again thrown upon his own resources he would earnestly resume his profession and become a master, as I believed him competent to be. We were not divorced: we merely separated. Finding I had withdrawn his allowance he was glad to see me go, for my unmerciful scoldings had killed any love he may have had for me. But he loved Lory, and her loss was his hardest trial. I may have been as much to blame as he for our lack of harmony, but I have always acted on my impulses.

"I'll give Jason Jones the credit for not whimpering," she resumed thoughtfully, after a brief pause, "nor has he ever since appealed to me for money. I don't know how well he has succeeded, for we do not correspond, but I have never heard his name mentioned in the art circles I have frequented. He remained in New York, I believe, and so I chose to keep away from New York. A year or two ago, however, I met a man who had known Jason Jones and who gave me his address. Here it is: 1744 East Sixty-seventh street. Will you make a copy of it, Doctor?"

He nodded.

"What shall I say in the telegram?" he asked, writing the address in his notebook.

"Tell him I am dying and seek a reconciliation before I pass away. Beg him to come to me at once."

Dr. Anstruther jotted down the instructions underneath the address.

"You must understand," she continued, "that Jason Jones is an honorable man and in many ways a high-minded gentleman. I have lived with him as his wife and I know that he is well fitted to care for our child and to rear her properly. I have left my entire fortune to Alora, but I have made Jason my sole executor, and he is to have control, under certain restrictions, of all the income until Alora is eighteen. I think he will be glad to accept the responsibility, both on Alora's account and for the money."

"Doubtless, if he has not been a success as an artist since your separation," remarked the doctor, drily.

"The man I spoke of said Jason was living in quite modest circumstances. He said that although he had succeeded in selling a few paintings they had brought rather insignificant sums – which surprised me, as I know they must have possessed a degree of merit. However, I may be mistaken in thinking his talent exceptional. Anyhow, my experiment in leaving him to his own devices seems not to have resulted as I had hoped, and I now am willing he should handle Alora's income and live comfortably while he is educating her. She will probably provide for her father when she comes of age, but I have not included such a request in my will and I have endeavored, in case he proves inclined to neglect her, to require the court to appoint another guardian. That is, of course, merely a precaution, for I know his nature is gentle and kind, and he adores – or at least he used to adore children."

The doctor sat, notebook in hand, musing. The matter-of-fact, businesslike way in which she referred to her marital relations and her assumed unconcern over her own dreadful fate impressed the good man as extraordinary. But he was relieved to know that little Alora, of whom he had grown quite fond, was to have the guardianship of a parent, and glad that the character of Jason Jones was above reproach. The man's failure to succeed as an artist, while it might have been a source of chagrin to his art-loving wife, did not lower him to any extent in Dr. Anstruther's opinion.

"I suppose Alora does not remember her father?" he presently remarked.

"She was about two years old when we separated."

"And you say your will is already drawn?"

"Judge Bernsted, my lawyer, has attended to it. It is now in his possession, properly signed and witnessed."

"If Bernsted drew the will, it is doubtless legal and in accordance with your wishes. But who witnessed it?"

"My nurse, Janet."

He glanced at the motionless figure of the attendant, who had remained so inert at her post by the window that he had quite forgotten her presence. She was a young woman, perhaps thirty years of age, and not unprepossessing in appearance, in spite of her modest uniform.

Janet's one peculiarity was her downcast eyes. They were good eyes, bright and intelligent, but she kept them veiled by their long lashes and drooping lids. Dr. Anstruther attached no significance to this trait, doubtless a habit of modest reserve acquired in her profession. He had himself recommended the woman to Mrs. Jones, having frequently employed her on other cases and found her deft, skillful and thoroughly reliable. Janet Orme's signature to the will he regarded as satisfactory, since Judge Bernsted had accepted it.

A moan from his patient suddenly aroused the doctor. Her face was beginning to twitch spasmodically with pain. In an instant Janet was at her side, hypodermic needle in hand, and the opiate was soon administered.

"Send the telegram," muttered Mrs. Jones, still breathing hard; "and, as you go out, Doctor, send Alora to me. I shall have relief in a few moments."

"To be sure," he said, rising. "Lory has been begging to see you, and I'll attend to the telegram at once."

## CHAPTER II

### MOTHER AND CHILD

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."

## CHAPTER III

### ALORA'S FATHER

A man slouched into the lofty foyer of the Hotel Voltaire and paused uncertainly, as if awed by the splendor of the place. A boy in uniform hastened to relieve him of his hand baggage, which consisted of a "roll-me-up" or "carryall" of brown canvas, strapped around the middle, such as one often sees in traveling on the Continent. It seemed a much used and abused affair and painted upon the ends were the dimmed initials: "J. J."

This man was plainly dressed. His clothing was of the cheap, ready-made variety, worn nearly to shabbiness and matched by a gray flannel shirt with a flowing black tie, knotted at the throat, and a soft gray hat that was a bit weatherstained. His shoes were shabby and unshined. His whole appearance was out of keeping with the palatial hotel he had entered.

Without relinquishing his baggage to the boy he asked sharply:

"Is Dr. Anstruther here?"

But now Dr. Anstruther, who had been impatiently waiting, espied the arrival and after a glance at the initials on the traveling-roll said in hesitating tones:

"Mr. Jason Jones?"

"Yes. You must be the doctor who telegraphed me."

"I am Doctor Anstruther."

"All right. Where's my wife?"

There was no especial anxiety in his tones, which were slow and distinct and a trifle sharp. He seemed ill at ease and looked around the foyer again, as if fearing he had entered the wrong place.

"I will lead you to her presently," replied the physician gravely; "but first, sir, I must acquaint you with her condition, which is serious. I have engaged a room for you here and if you will please register we will go there together and talk undisturbed."

"All right," said Jason Jones. He registered at the desk and then turned and announced: "I'm ready. Go ahead."

Those present in the foyer cast curious glances at the stranger as he passed them and followed Dr. Anstruther to the elevator. The boy accompanied them, now carrying the roll of baggage. The grandeur of the room they entered, which was convenient to the suite of Mrs. Jones, seemed to astonish the artist, although it was as simply furnished as any the great hotel contained. However, he made no remark but removed his hat, seated himself, and looked inquiringly at the physician.

"Mrs. Jones," began Dr. Anstruther, "is really dying. I cannot say how long she may survive, but it is a matter of days – perhaps hours. Her greatest anxiety at present is to be reconciled with you, whom she has not seen or even communicated with for years."

"Did she say that?"

"Yes."

"And she wants to be reconciled?"

"She does."

"Rather a queer notion, that," remarked Mr. Jones, musingly.

"Very natural, I think, under the circumstances," stiffly replied the doctor. "She has every confidence in you and admires your character exceedingly, although it was her desire that you live apart."

The man's stolid countenance relaxed in a grin – a somewhat scornful and unbelieving expression – but he did not speak. He was not a very tall man; he was thin of figure and hardened of muscle; his head was bald in front, giving him the appearance of a high forehead, and the hair at the

back and around the ears was beginning to gray. His eyes were light blue; his nose was shapely and his jaws prominent and tightly set in repose. His age was about forty.

"Mrs. Jones," continued the doctor, "knows that you are due to arrive at this time and is eagerly counting the minutes; not that you are so dear to her," he asserted in retaliation for the sneer upon his hearer's lips, "but because she has important business matters to arrange with you before she passes away."

"Business matters?"

"So she has told me. I believe," he said, after a brief period of hesitation, during which he considered how best to handle this peculiar artist, "that I will allow you to see your wife at once, that you may learn her plans from her own lips."

Indeed, he had already decided that Jason Jones must have changed materially, and for the worse, since Antoinette Seaver had known him. Perhaps, when she had talked with the man, she would revise her opinion of him and make other disposition of her finances and the guardianship of her child. In that case it would not be well for him to give her husband any inkling of her present plans. Having reached this conclusion, Dr. Anstruther rose abruptly and said: "Come with me, please."

Jason Jones made no demur. Without remark he followed his conductor into the hallway and to the entrance to the suite occupied by his wife. The governess had been instructed to take Alora out for a ride; there was no one in the little reception room. Here, however, the doctor halted, and pointing to the door at the further end of the passage he said:

"That is your wife's sick chamber. Please enter quietly and remember the danger of exciting Mrs. Jones unduly. Be gentle, and – considerate."

Jason Jones nodded. A moment he regarded the door with curious intentness, savoring of reluctance. Then he slowly advanced, opened it and went in, closing the door softly behind him.

Dr. Anstruther seated himself in the reception room. The artist puzzled him greatly, although he prided himself – through long professional experience – on being able to read human nature with some accuracy. This summons to his dying-wife ought to seem the most natural thing in the world to Jason Jones, yet the man appeared dazed and even bewildered by the event, and while he had once lived in luxurious surroundings his later experiences must have been so wholly different that the splendor of his wife's mode of living quite embarrassed him. Yes, the contrast was sharp, it must be admitted; the man had formerly shared Tony Seaver's immense wealth; he had enjoyed the handsomest studio in New York; and then – back to poverty, to drudgery, to a struggle for mere food and clothing! Years of hardship were likely to have had a decided effect upon the character of a man who was doubtless weak in the beginning; it would make him hard, and bitter, and —

A shrill scream startled him. It came from the sick chamber and was echoed by another cry – hoarse and terrified – in a man's voice.

Dr. Anstruther sprang to his feet and hurried into the patient's bedchamber.

"The woman's dead, Doctor," cried Jason Jones, standing in the middle of the room. "She's dead!"

The physician hastened to the bedside, where Janet Orme, the nurse, was bending over the still form. Pushing her away, Dr. Anstruther made a hurried examination.

It was true; the woman was dead. At the very moment of reunion with the husband from whom she had so long been parted, she had passed on to another life, leaving reconciliation in abeyance.

Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones lay beneath her lace covered with features contorted, mouth half open and eyes staring wildly. A paroxysm of pain had carried her off, the good doctor well knew; the pain, and the excitement of the moment. Very tenderly he bent down and closed the eyes and pressed the lips together. He smoothed the lines from the cheeks, so that the face became more natural in appearance. Then, with a sigh – for he had become fond of this brave, beautiful patient – he turned away to find Jason Jones and the nurse Janet confronting one another in tense attitudes. The man

stared wonderingly into the nurse's face; Janet, her eyes now unveiled, returned the stare with an expression that Dr. Anstruther could not fathom.

They seemed to feel the doctor's observation, for Janet turned her back abruptly, while the man swung around and tiptoed hastily from the room.

Dr. Anstruther looked at the nurse reflectively.

"Who was it that screamed? Was it you, or Mrs. Jones?" he asked.

She hesitated a moment.

"It was I," she replied. "I saw her face and knew that – that the end had come."

It was a lie, and the nurse knew that the shrewd doctor recognized it as a lie. But he made no comment and with a last regretful look toward the bed he followed Jason Jones out.

## CHAPTER IV

### ALORA'S NEW LIFE

Time sears all heart wounds. The scars remain, perhaps, but as the clock ticks on the ache is stilled and the soreness finally passes away.

At first Alora was heart-broken over her mother's loss. She lived in a sort of stupor for weeks after the funeral. Her father's presence she accepted without comment or emotion, for it had been arranged by "Mamma Tone." She did not consider, in those first weeks, whether she cared for her newly found father or not. Her mother's statement that he was a "good man" and would love Alora dearly was taken by the child as a matter of fact, while her mother's injunction to love him and confide in him in her stead was for the present ignored.

Indeed, during those first weeks Lory had no fault to find with her new protector, for she saw little of him. Jason Jones retained his room at the hotel and allowed Alora and her governess to inhabit the handsome suite her mother had occupied, although they were much too small for the big apartments. However, Lory would have felt uncomfortable, just then, in any other place. Her mother's chamber was closed and the curtains drawn, but every night before she retired to her own little room the child would steal in, in the dark, and feel her way to the empty bed and kiss the pillow on which her dear mother's head had rested. Miss Gorham, the governess, was aware of these evening excursions, but offered no objection. Indeed, the woman objected to nothing that did not interfere with her own personal comfort and convenience. Under the eyes of Mrs. Jones she had been prim and dutiful, but there was no one to chide her now, however neglectful she chose to be, and it was true that during these days the little girl required no particular care. Alora resumed her morning studies with meekness a week after her mother had been laid away, and in the afternoons she rode or walked with Miss Gorham or received the callers who came to "console poor Antoinette Seaver Jones' child."

Despite her haughty reserve, Mrs. Antoinette Seaver Jones had accumulated a wide circle of acquaintances – if not friends – who sincerely mourned her untimely death and would have been glad to befriend her little girl were such services needed. But it was known that Alora's father had now appeared to guard her welfare and there was "so much money in the Jones family" that no financial aid was required; therefore, these acquaintances could only call to see Alora and profess their friendship.

The child listened gravely to their stilted praises of her mother and accepted their platitudes in good faith. It was indeed comforting to hear so many nice things said of her loved one.

Her father was never present on these occasions. He was by no means a sociable man. Sometimes he came in for a few minutes, in the morning, and sat down and stared at the girl in a way half curious and half speculative, and said little, and presently went away as quietly as he had come.

The nurse, Janet Orme, left on the day that Mrs. Jones died, and Alora had almost forgotten the young woman when one afternoon she came to see her. Janet no longer wore her nurse's uniform but was dressed in ultra-fashionable apparel and to the child's amusement affected the manners of a lady. She talked more with Miss Gorham than with the little girl and was keen to know what arrangements had been made for their future. Miss Gorham admitted that she had no idea of Mr. Jones' intentions. Of course they could not remain long in this elaborate suite; a smaller one would be more satisfactory in every way; but Mr. Jones had not as yet mentioned the subject.

A few days afterward, during one of their walks, Alora was surprised to see her father and nurse Janet riding past in a hired automobile. The two seemed engaged in earnest conversation and neither noticed Alora or her governess. Miss Gorham snorted rather disdainfully but without remark, and Lory was not especially interested in the matter.

Meantime, letters of administration had been issued to Jason Jones and the control of his wife's – now Alora's – property legally placed in his hands. Judge Bernsted attended to all the necessary

details and, while he did not admire the artist and secretly believed he was unfitted for the task of handling so much money, he loyally insisted that the dead woman's wishes be obeyed to the letter.

Dr. Anstruther had called on the attorney and had ventured to state his misgivings concerning Jason Jones, pleading that Alora was likely to suffer through the man's indifference and lack of culture, but Judge Bernsted declared it was not his duty to criticise character but to see that the wishes of his clients were obeyed. In this case doubtless the man's wife knew him more intimately than anyone else and if she trusted him, aware as she must be of his faults and virtues, it would be presumptuous for anyone to try to break her will or otherwise interfere with her carefully planned arrangements.

But Jason Jones was improving, in a way. He had bought new clothes and a supply of linen, and although he did not wear them with the ease of one accustomed to modish dress they certainly improved his appearance. He was quiet and unassuming; he made no friends and few acquaintances; he never mentioned himself or his personal history and never referred to his wife except when forced to do so by some of "her meddling friends" – well meaning people who sought his acquaintance to condole with him or perhaps to attempt to "cultivate" him for Antoinette Seaver Jones' sake. But these found him so unresponsive that they soon left him alone.

The legal business, even though it progressed smoothly, required time for consummation, so it was somewhat more than three months before all the details were complete. Alora, a sad-faced child with no especial interest in life, kept no track of time and plodded along in her morning-studies and took her afternoon drives or walks in a perfunctory manner that rendered Miss Gorham's duties light indeed. But all this ended suddenly, and Jason Jones ended it.

He came to the rooms one morning and said to the governess in his abrupt way: "Pack up."

"What do you mean, sir?" was the startled query.

"Just what I say. Get the child's things and your own ready to move out of this place by Saturday. Also pack the personal belongings of Mrs. Jones. Put them in separate trunks and boxes, so I can have them stored. Do you understand me?"

"I – I shall need assistance," gasped the bewildered Miss Gorham.

"Then get a maid – or a porter – or both – to help you."

Alora was present and listened with awakening interest. A change of any sort would be pleasant, she reflected.

"Where are we going?" she asked, as her father turned away.

It was the one question Miss Gorham wanted to ask, too, but Mr. Jones left the room without reply.

Three days was little enough time to gather up and pack the accumulation of years. The governess knew there were many big trunks in the storeroom of the hotel belonging to Mrs. Jones, and these she ordered brought up to the rooms. Then she procured two maids, told them what and how to pack, and composedly resumed her reading.

"I am no menial," she told Alora, with a lofty air of superiority; "these persons will do their work properly, I'm sure."

On Saturday morning Mr. Jones appeared again.

"Is everything ready?" he demanded.

"Ask Susan and Jane," replied Miss Gorham.

Susan and Jane declared everything was packed, even to the suit cases and traveling satchels.

"But where are we going?" inquired the governess.

"You are going wherever you please," said Jason Jones. "I do not require your services longer."

"You're going to discharge me?" she said, startled.

"You are already discharged."

"But who will look after poor Lory? Who will attend to her education, and to – to – her comforts?"

"I will. Here is your money. I have paid you a week in advance, in lieu of notice."

"A week? Pooh! I'm hired by the year," asserted the woman defiantly.

"Have you a written contract?"

"No; a verbal contract is just as good."

"It won't hold in law. Take your traps and go – at once."

The governess looked at him. He was absolutely calm and determined. Instinctively she knew that any protest would be unavailing.

Alora regarded the dismissal of her governess with as much unconcern as her father displayed. Miss Gorham had been her companion for years, but had never won the smallest corner of the girl's heart. Although she was not aware of the fact, the woman's constant presence and lack of interest in her had become oppressive. The child's first sensation, on realizing their future separation, was one of distinct relief.

When Miss Gorham had gone, seeming to begrudge the terse "good-bye" she gave her pupil, the girl's father quietly said: "Come, Alora," and walked away.

She followed him to a waiting taxicab, in which had been heaped her hand luggage and his own, and they drove away from the grand hotel where she had lived in luxury for so long, and where so many indelible memories had been impressed upon her childish mind, with as little ado as if they had been transient guests.

When the cab drew up at a railway station, Alora asked:

"Are we leaving town, then, father?"

"Yes," he replied; "I am returning to New York."

She felt a slight sinking of the heart, just then, but it was followed by a sense of elation. The old life, in which her adored mother had played so prominent a part, was being abandoned forever, and this troubled her, she knew not why.

But since Mamma Tone had gone away the old life had lost its charm and become dull and stupid. Lory was not sure she could be happier elsewhere, but her crushed and dispirited nature responded to the suggestion of change. It was interesting to have something different to look forward to.

The man beside her was no more congenial than Gorham had been, but he was her father; he was the guardian selected by her dead mother, and in obeying his wishes she might find her future life more grateful than had been the dreadful dreary months since Mamma Tone had left her.

Somehow, Jason Jones seemed uneasy in the presence of his daughter. During the journey to New York he rode most of the time in the smoking compartment, only appearing to take Alora to the diner for her meals. The child was equally uncomfortable in her father's society and was well pleased to be left so much alone.

So, with very little questioning or conversation on either side, father and daughter came to their destination and Alora found herself deposited in a small suite of rooms on the third floor of a grimy and dingy house in East Sixty-seventh Street – one of a long row of similar houses that were neither residences nor business establishments, but hovered between the two. There were several little tin signs nailed beside the entrance and Lory noticed that one of these read: "Jason Jones. Studio. 3rd Floor." It was an old sign, scarcely legible, while others beside it seemed bright and new, and when the girl had climbed laboriously up the three flights and the artist had unlocked the door at the head of the stairs, with a key which he took from his pocket, she found everything about the rooms she entered as old and faded as the sign on the door.

## CHAPTER V IN THE STUDIO

The fact that it was beginning to grow dark prevented Alora from observing all the tawdriness of her new home and what she saw inspired her more with curiosity than dismay. The little girl had been reared from babyhood in an atmosphere of luxury; through environment she had become an aristocrat from the top of her head to the tips of her toes; this introduction to shabbiness was unique, nor could she yet understand that such surroundings were familiar to many who battle for existence in a big city. The very fact that her father's humble flat was "different" made it far more interesting to the child than new apartments such as she had been accustomed to. Therefore she had no thought, at this time, of protest. Her own little room contained a small iron bed, one straight chair with a wooden bottom and a broken-legged dresser over which hung a cracked mirror. The small rag rug was worn threadbare.

While she stood in the doorway of this room, solemnly regarding it, her father said over her shoulder:

"You won't need both those big trunks here, I'm sure. I'll store them somewhere in the studio. Covered with drapes, they won't be noticed. I can't imagine what that woman packed them with."

"My dresses," replied Alora. "Even then, I left a lot at the Voltaire, for the maids to sell or give away. Mamma used to send them to the Salvation Army."

"Two trunks of dresses ought to last for a good many years," he remarked in a reflective tone.

"Oh, no indeed," said Lory. "Miss Gorham was about to engage a dressmaker for me when – when – you said we'd go away. I'm growing fast, you know, and I was to have a dozen or fifteen summer frocks made, and a lot of lingerie."

"Then we moved just in time to save that expense," he declared, setting his stern jaws together. "There's been a terrible waste of money through that woman Gorham. We're well rid of her."

He turned away to the studio and the child followed him there. He turned on the electric lights, which were not very bright, and Alora took a look at the workroom and thought it seemed more comfortable than the other rooms of the flat.

Her father began dusting and arranging half a dozen paintings of various sizes, mounted on stretchers. None was finished; some were scarcely begun. Lory tried to see what they represented. Perhaps she had inherited from her mother a bit of artistic instinct; if so, it was that which prompted her to shrug her small shoulders slightly and then turn away to the window.

In the dimly lighted street outside a man drove up with the baggage. Mr. Jones had purchased for himself in Chicago a new trunk – a small and inexpensive one – and there were two big trunks and a suitcase belonging to Alora. After these had been carried up and placed in the studio – the only room that would hold them – her father said:

"We will go out now and get some dinner. You won't need your coat, for the restaurant is just around the corner."

Alora marveled at the restaurant even more than at the studio furnishings. It looked a hundred years old and the atmosphere still retained the fumes of much ancient cookery. The linen was coarse, the plating worn from the forks and spoons through constant use, the dishes thick and clumsy and well nicked. Alora was hungry and she ate what her father ordered for her, although she decided it did not taste very nice.

When they sat down a man from behind the counter approached them and bending low said in a quiet tone:

"You know, Jones, it's to be a cash deal from now on."

"Of course," replied Alora's father, with a slight frown. "Also I'll pay you the old account, if you'll make out the bill."

The man smiled, patted Alora's head – a liberty she indignantly resented – and went back to his desk.

During the meal and, indeed, ever since their arrival in New York, Jason Jones cast frequent puzzled glances into the face of his little daughter, who until now had accepted her changed conditions with evident indifference. But as they ate together in silence her small features grew grave and thoughtful and her father shrank from meeting the inquiring glances of her big eyes. Yet even now she made no complaint. Neither did she ask questions. Her look was expectant, however, and that was what embarrassed him.

After the dinner they went back to the dingy studio, where the man lighted a pipe and sat opposite his small daughter, puffing uneasily. They were both reserved; there was an indefinable barrier between them which each was beginning to recognize. Presently Alora asked to go to bed and he sent her to her room with a nod of relief.

Next morning they had breakfast at the same stuffy little restaurant and afterward Alora unpacked some things from her trunks and put them in the drawers of the broken-legged dresser. It seemed odd to have no maid to wait upon her, but she was glad to have something to do. As she passed to and from the studio she noticed that her father had resumed work on a picture that represented two cows eating a broken pumpkin that lay in a cornfield. He worked slowly and never seemed satisfied with what he did, as if lacking confidence in his ability. Lory decided he couldn't be blamed for that.

The child plodded drearily along in her new life for a full week. Then she began to grow restless, for the place was hateful and repulsive to her. But now an incident occurred that gave her new cause for wonder.

One day the door opened and a woman walked into the studio. It was Janet Orme, her mother's former nurse, but what a new and astonishing Janet it was! Her silken gown was very "fashionable," somewhat too modish for good taste, for it was elaborately trimmed and embroidered. She wore considerable jewelry, including diamonds; her shoes were elegant and her hose daintily clocked; her hat must have been a French milliner's choicest creation. If good clothes could make Janet Orme a lady, there was no question of her social standing, yet even little Alora felt that Janet was out of her element – that she fell short, in some vague way, of being what she was ambitious to appear.

"So," said the nurse, glancing around the room with frank disdain, "this is where you hang out, Jason, is it?"

Alora's father confronted the woman with a menacing frown.

"What do you mean by coming here?" he demanded.

"I had two reasons," she answered carelessly, seating herself in the only easy chair the room contained. "In the first place, I wanted to see how a rich man lives."

"Well, you see, don't you?" a muttering growl.

"I certainly do, and I realize you are quite comfortable and ought to be happy here, Jason – you and the millionaire heiress, your daughter Alora."

As she spoke she turned to glance sharply at the child, who met her look with disconcerting gravity. Alora's eyes expressed wonder, tinged with a haughty tolerance of an inferior that struck home to Janet and made her flush angrily.

"Your sneers," said Jason Jones, still frowning but now speaking with composure, "must indicate that you have graduated from servitude. I cannot admit that my mode of living is any of your business, Janet. In these retired but respectable rooms I have worked and been contented for years, until – "

"Until you came into your money and found you didn't have to worry over your next meal," she interjected. "Well, that ought to make you still more content. And that reminds me of the second object of my visit. I want some money."

"So soon?"

"Don't try to crawfish; it was agreed you should give me a check whenever I asked for it. I want it now, and for the full amount – every single penny of it!"

He stared at her fixedly, seeming fearful and uncertain how to answer.

"I cannot spare it all today."

"Humbug!" she snapped. "You can and will spare it. I must have the money, or –"

Her significant pause caused him to wriggle in his seat.

"You're a miserly coward," she declared. "I'm not robbing you; you will have an abundance for your needs. Why do you quarrel with Dame Fortune? Don't you realize you can pay your rent now and eat three square meals a day, and not have to work and slave for them? You can smoke a good cigar after your dinner, instead of that eternal pipe, and go to a picture show whenever the mood strikes you. Why, man, you're independent for the first time in your life, and the finances are as sure as shooting for a good seven years to come."

He glanced uneasily at Alora.

"Owing to my dead wife's generosity," he muttered.

Janet laughed.

"Of course," said she; "and, if you play your cards skillfully, when Alora comes of age she will provide for you an income for the rest of your life. You're in luck. And why? Just because you are Jason Jones and long ago married Antoinette Seaver and her millions and are now reaping your reward! So, for decency's sake, don't grumble about writing me that check."

All this was frankly said in the presence of Alora Jones, the heiress, of whose person and fortune, her father, Jason Jones, was now sole guardian. It was not strange that the man seemed annoyed and ill at ease. His scowl grew darker and his eyes glinted in an ugly way as he replied, after a brief pause:

"You seem to have forgotten Alora's requirements and my duty to her."

"Pooh, a child! But we've allowed liberally for her keep, I'm sure. She can't keep servants and three dressmakers, it's true, but a simple life is best for her. She'll grow up a more sensible and competent woman by waiting on herself and living; as most girls do. At her age I didn't have shoes or stockings. Alora has been spoiled, and a bit of worldly experience will do her good."

"She's going to be very rich, when she comes into her fortune," said Alora's father, "and then –"

"And then she can do as she likes with her money. Just now her income is too big for her needs, and the best thing you can do for her is to teach her economy – a virtue you seem to possess, whether by nature or training, in a high degree. But I didn't come here to argue. Give me that check."

He walked over to his little desk, sat down and drew a check book from his pocket.

Alora, although she had listened intently to the astonishing conversation, did not quite comprehend what it meant. Janet's harsh statement bewildered her as much as did her father's subject subservience to the woman. All she realized was that Janet Orme, her dead mother's nurse, wanted money – Alora's money – and her father was reluctant to give it to her but dared not refuse. Money was an abstract quantity to the eleven year old child; she had never handled it personally and knew nothing of its value. If her father owed Janet some of her money, perhaps it was for wages, or services rendered her mother, and Alora was annoyed that he haggled about it, even though the woman evidently demanded more than was just. There was plenty of money, she believed, and it was undignified to argue with a servant.

Jason Jones wrote the check and, rising, handed it to Janet.

"There," said he, "that squares our account. It is what I agreed to give you, but I did not think you would demand it so soon. To pay it just now leaves me in an embarrassing position."

"I don't believe it," she rejoined. "You're cutting coupons every month or so, and you may thank your stars I don't demand a statement of your income. But I know you, Jason Jones, and you can't hoodwink me, try as you may. You hid yourself in this hole and thought I wouldn't know where to

find you, but you'll soon learn that you can't escape my eagle eye. So take your medicine like a man, and thank your lucky stars that you're no longer a struggling, starving, unrecognized artist. Good-bye until I call again."

"You're not to call again!" he objected.

"Well, we'll see. Just for the present I'm in no mood to quarrel with you, and you'd better not quarrel with *me*, Jason Jones. Good-bye."

She tucked the check into her purse and ambled out of the room after a supercilious nod to Alora, who failed to return the salutation. Jason Jones stood in his place, still frowning, until Janet's high-heeled shoes had clattered down the two flights of stairs. Alora went to the window and looking down saw that a handsome automobile stood before the house, with a chauffeur and footman in livery. Janet entered this automobile and was driven away.

Alora turned to look at her father. He was filing his pipe and scowling more darkly than ever.

## CHAPTER VI

### FLITTING

Once more they moved suddenly, and the second flitting came about in this way:

Alora stood beside the easel one morning, watching her father work on his picture. Not that she was especially interested in him or the picture, but there was nothing else for her to do. She stood with her slim legs apart, her hands clasped behind her, staring rather vacantly, when he looked up and noted her presence.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked rather sharply.

"Of the picture?" said Lory.

"Of course."

"I don't like it," she asserted, with childish frankness.

"Eh? You don't like it? Why not, girl?"

"Well," she replied, her eyes narrowing critically, "that cow's horn isn't on straight – the red cow's left horn. And it's the same size, all the way up."

He laid down his palette and brush and gazed at his picture for a long time. The scowl came on his face again. Usually his face was stolid and expressionless, but Alora had begun to observe that whenever anything irritated or disturbed him he scowled, and the measure of the scowl indicated to what extent he was annoyed. When he scowled at his own unfinished picture Lory decided he was honest enough to agree with her criticism of it.

Finally the artist took a claspknife from his pocket, opened the blade and deliberately slashed the picture from top to bottom, this way and that, until it was a mere mass of shreds. Then he kicked the stretcher into a corner and brought out another picture, which he placed on the easel.

"Well, how about that?" he asked, looking hard at it himself.

Alora was somewhat frightened at having caused the destruction of the cow picture. So she hesitated before replying: "I – I'd rather not say."

"How funny!" he said musingly, "but until now I never realized how stiff and unreal the daub is. Shall I finish it, Alora?"

"I think so, sir," she answered.

Again the knife slashed through the canvas and the remains joined the scrap-heap in the corner.

Jason Jones was not scowling any more. Instead, there was a hint of a humorous expression on his usually dull features. Only pausing to light his pipe, he brought out one after another of his canvases and after a critical look destroyed each and every one.

Lory was perplexed at the mad act, for although her judgment told her they were not worth keeping, she realized that her father must have passed many laborious hours on them. But now that it had dawned on him how utterly inartistic his work was, in humiliation and disgust he had wiped it out of existence. With this thought in mind, the girl was honestly sorry him.

But Jason Jones did not seem sorry. When the last ruined canvas had been contemptuously flung into the corner he turned to the child and said to her in a voice so cheerful that it positively startled her:

"Get your hat and let's take a walk. An artist's studio is no place for us, Lory. Doesn't it seem deadly dull in here? And outside the sun is shining!"

The rest of the day he behaved much like a human being. He took the girl to the park to see the zoo, and bought her popcorn and peanuts – a wild extravagance, for him. Later in the day they went to a picture show and finally entered a down-town restaurant, quite different from and altogether better than the one where they had always before eaten, and enjoyed a really good dinner. When they left the restaurant he was still in the restless and reckless mood that had dominated him and said:

"Suppose we go to a theatre? Won't you like that better than you would returning to our poky rooms?"

"Yes, indeed," responded Alora.

They had seats in the gallery, but could see very well. Just before the curtain rose Alora noticed a party being seated in one of the boxes. The lady nearest the rail, dressed in an elaborate evening gown, was Janet Orme. There was another lady with her, conspicuous for blonde hair and much jewelry, and the two gentlemen who accompanied them kept in the background, as if not too proud of their company.

Alora glanced at her father's face and saw the scowl there, for he, too, had noted the box-party. But neither of the two made any remark and soon the child was fully absorbed in the play.

As they left the theatre Janet's party was entering an automobile, laughing and chatting gaily. Both father and daughter silently watched them depart, and then they took a street car and went home.

"Get to bed, girl," said Jason Jones, when they had mounted the stairs. "I'll smoke another pipe, I guess."

When she came out of her room next morning she heard her father stirring in the studio. She went to him and was surprised to find him packing his trunk, which he had drawn into the middle of the room.

"Now that you're up," said he in quite a cheerful tone, "we'll go to breakfast, and then I'll help you pack your own duds. Only one trunk, though, girl, for the other must go into storage and you may see it again, some time, and you may not."

"Are we going away?" she inquired, hoping it might be true.

"We are. We're going a long way, my girl. Do you care?"

"Of course," said she, amazed at the question, for he had never considered her in the least. "I'm glad. I don't like your studio."

He laughed, and the laugh shocked her. She could not remember ever to have heard Jason Jones laugh before.

"I don't like the place, either, girl, and that's why I'm leaving it. For good, this time. I was a fool to return here. In trying to economise, I proved extravagant."

Alora did not reply to that. She was eager to begin packing and hurried through her breakfast. All the things she might need on a journey she put into one trunk. She was not quite sure what she ought to take, and her father was still more ignorant concerning a little girl's wardrobe, but finally both trunks were packed and locked and then Mr. Jones called a wagon and carted away the extra trunk of Alora's and several boxes of his own to be deposited in a storage warehouse.

She sat in the bare studio and waited for his return. The monotony of the past weeks, which had grown oppressive, was about to end and for this she was very grateful. For from a life of luxury the child had been dumped into a gloomy studio in the heart of a big, bustling city that was all unknown to her and where she had not a single friend or acquaintance. Her only companion had been a strange man who happened to be her father but displayed no affection for her, no spark of interest in her happiness or even comforts. For the first time in her life she lacked a maid to dress her and keep her clothes in order; there was no one to attend to her education, no one to amuse her, no one with whom to counsel in any difficulty. She had been somewhat afraid of her peculiar father and her natural reserve, derived from her mother, had deepened in his society. Yesterday and this morning he had seemed more human, more companionable, yet Alora felt that it was due to a selfish elation and recognized a gulf between them that might never be bridged. Her father differed utterly from her mother in breeding, in intelligence, in sympathy. He was not of the same world; even the child could realize that. And yet, he was her father – all she had left to depend upon, to cling to. She wondered if he really possessed the good qualities her mother had attributed to him. If so, when she knew him better, she might learn to like him.

He was gone a long time, it seemed, but as soon as he returned the remaining baggage was loaded on the wagon and sent away and then they left the flat and boarded a street car for down town. On lower Broadway Mr. Jones entered a bank and seemed to transact considerable business. Lory saw him receive several papers and a lot of money. Then they went to a steamship office near by, where her father purchased tickets.

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