

**Mary Louise Solves a Mystery**

**By**

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## 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-niners" 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."