

The Sufferer



ARIE, I am sick, very sick. I wish you would send for a lawyer."

And Marie, with the confidence born of long service and the triteness of mistresses, returns, "Mam'selle, a lawyer? Why not a physician? You look so very well! How can anyone be sick with such cheeks and eyes?"

Marie shakes dubiously her black and tousled head. She wonders why Mam'selle—for Marie is too much of a Parisienne to learn to say Miss, it would be as well to think that Michigan avenue were the Bois de Boulogne—Marie wonders why Mam'selle is so soon ill, and why she left her fine city house so suddenly to spend a fortnight at this tedious lake hotel. There is nothing here, no avenues, no drives, no opera, no excitement. Nothing. And how can she be truly ill? Invalids have no eyes that shine like that.

"Marie, do you hear?" says Stella, faintly. "I want Mr. Arnold to come. Mr. Arnold, you know, in the Temple. You go and have the people in the office telephone for him. Give my name and say that it is quite imperative."

Marie is off, still wondering. But she doesn't know that Mr. Arnold is Victor Arnold, that handsome man—that man of all men—and that is all Stella has been able to learn about him. Marie would not know a deep infatuation under this guise if she saw it. So she is puzzled.

Stella is to ill to eat. She sends away a delicious luncheon with loathing—and starves. She is hungry. She is a little angry. She is extremely nervous, and with excellent reasons.

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After two century-like hours a gentleman is announced. Victor Arnold, tall, muscular, dark, and patrician—a prince of the realm in Stella's eyes—stands by her bedside.

How very fortunate, thinks Marie, that the gentleman should chance to be so near, right here in the same hotel. He is a yachtsman, so they say.

Arnold is all calmness, courtliness. He waits for the sufferer to begin. Certainly he is a fine figure. And Stella, with her handsome head raised high on the pillows, seems like some fresh and rosy Hebe lost in dainty linens and filmy laces.

He ponders, "What can be the matter—Ah! yes, 'tis pulmonary. But that glorious color is not hectic! Well, what sad, strange things—" and Stella says, with trembling resolution, "I am very ill; a testament must be made."

Her voice is sweet, a woman's voice.

"I am alone, you see," she continues by way of another preface. Her fingers are making little creases up and down in the Japanese silk coverlet.

"Poor creature," whispers Arnold to himself. "If I could do something—so beautiful—'tis really tragic." He prepares to write.