

**A LITTLE  
FOUNTAIN OF LIFE**

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A Little Fountain of Life by Marion Foster Washburne

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**MARION FOSTER WASHBURNE**

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# A LITTLE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

By  
*Marion (Foster) Washburne*



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*TO*  
*MY HUSBAND*

*A Little Fountain of Life*

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**Y**OUR father has at last consented, Marie, that we should call in Dr. Avery.

When I told him the doctor was young he wasn't any too well pleased, and I thought he'd refuse entirely when I let fall that he was fashionable. But when he found that your mind was set on it, he gave up. Your father is very fond of you, my dear. I really wish you'd get well, if only to please him."

"Why do you speak like that?" the girl asked, in a voice that trembled with irritation. "You speak as if I wanted to be sick—as if I made it all up. Don't you suppose I'd get out of this if I could? Do you think I enjoy myself lying here day after day with nothing to do but to think about how I feel?"

"How *do* you feel?" asked Mrs. Osgood, yielding again to the baffled curiosity that beset her. "Have you any aches? I



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can't make out that you have any fever. What is the matter with you, anyway?"

"As if I knew!" said Marie. She closed her eyes and seemed to search her inner consciousness for symptoms. "I don't ache—and yet I do. It isn't pain, exactly, but a kind of discomfort that is almost worse than pain. I am not easy anywhere. My head feels tired and dull. My hands, when I look at them, seem like some other person's hands, a long ways off. Little prickles go all over me; my heart doesn't beat right; and it's hard to breathe—oh, you know!" she broke off, panting a little. "I've told you a hundred times. I don't know what's the matter. I only know I wish I was dead." Tears wet her cheek. "But I shall be very glad to see Dr. Avery," she went on presently, with an effort at self-control piteously out of proportion to her strength. "I think he may help me. I have a feeling that way—a sort of intuition."

"I shall send a message asking him to call to-morrow," her mother said, rejoicing that for once the intuition was a pleasant one.

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"Yes," Marie assented. There was a moment's silence which she broke with, "Mother! How about that new wrapper? Will it be finished? I should like to look nice, if possible." She glanced swiftly into a little ornamental mirror that hung conveniently near her couch.

She was a pretty girl, with a beauty of feature merely. Her complexion lacked color, her expression force. There was no vividness or vitality about her. She looked like a person half asleep, dreaming unpleasantly.

Never very strong, she had been sinking into this invalid state ever since her return from boarding school two years before. Everybody had supposed that her graduation would be promptly followed by a great coming-out ball, but when the project was timidly broached to him, her father had objected. Marie coaxed a little, but to no purpose. Much as he had indulged her, she had always been a trifle afraid of him, self-assertive and successful as he was. And she could not prevail with him now.

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"What does my little girl want with a ball?" he had asked, in his loud voice, that could not moderate itself to the fit expression of any tenderness. "To catch a beau? Pooh, pooh! These eyes will do the work without the need of any ball, my dear. Besides, your old father is in no hurry to marry you off. He wants to keep you to himself for a while."

To his wife, in the brutal frankness of conjugal privacy, he said:

"No, Mary, I tell you I won't have it. You and I ain't up to it. We should look like two fools, and most likely act like 'em. Mamie can manage well enough without any party. I'll pay for all the clothes you want to buy her, and her face'll do the rest."

Marie did without her ball, therefore, as she did without other and simpler entertainments. Plan after plan, concocted in long night watches and laid before her father with trembling diplomacy, met with the same opposition. He saw plainly his own unfitness for the social world, and even to please his daughter, of whom he was undeniably fond, he could not be prevailed upon to parade his