

* * The Story Page. * *

The Story of Joe.

BY ANNIE MARIE BLISS.

"Twas a black, stormy night. The wind howled and beat the sleety rain against the windows with all the strength of its fury. Only a thin sheet of glass separated two pictures, impressive in their contrast. Without were war, suffering, agony of useless struggle, and defeat; within were peace, laughter, happiness, the glory of warmth, and a blaze of light. Five girls, care-free and joyful, were gathered in a room that was a consummation of artistic skill, and now sat around the open fire, with faces glowing from the warmth of the flames.

"Who would believe it was so wild outside, to look into our warm nest?" said Eleanor Golden. "I can't help thinking, though, that we don't appreciate it enough, we are so used to it."

"I do," chirped Patty Nason; "for I walked half a mile in the teeth of the storm to see our dear old Elizabeth, whose visits are like an angel's, infrequent and short."

Elizabeth Arnold was the bosom school friend of Eleanor Golden, to whose home she had come for a short visit, and, in her honor, this select and honored few were gathered to talk over old times.

She was a girl of commanding presence, with strength in her clear-cut features; her hair was of the color of the night, and her eyes as blue as the sky. She sat on a couch, half-reclining, in the midst of a pile of silken cushions, dreamily looking into space, as Clare Hope-well coaxed the sweet music from her violin, and now and then a voice took up the strain, growing in strength to a full chorus, as she played the song so loved by them all:

"There comes to my heart one sweet strain,
A glad and a joyous refrain;
I sing it again and again,—
Sweet peace, the gift of God's love.
Peace, peace, sweet peace,
Wonderful gift from above!
O wonderful wonderful peace;
Sweet peace, the gift of God's love."

A beautiful smile came to the face of Elizabeth, as she listened.

"I never hear that song," said she, "that I don't think of my Joe. He used to play it so that it seemed as if the very angels were singing. His life was so in harmony with it, it was no wonder that he exhaled an atmosphere of love."

"Oh, Elizabeth," said Eleanor, "you promised to tell me about him when you came. Do tell us now, for I know the girls are as anxious to hear as I am."

"Oh, do, do!" came the eager chorus.

"This is perhaps a good time to tell Joe's story," said Elizabeth, "for the storms of the world have beat upon him like the fury of the outer darkness of tonight, and his brave heart has kept singing, its hearth-fires have been forever burning, and the soul has looked out of its windows as unharmed as we who are sheltered from tonight's storm."

"My first glimpse of Joe," continued Elizabeth, as she settled herself more comfortably among her cushions, "was on my way to work, on one of the darkest streets or lanes of the city. My first situation as stenographer was in an office which was only reached by passing through this street. I was a trifle homesick, as I plodded along that first morning, when I took my place in the rank and file of the wage-earners. It was a rainy morning, too. Suddenly I raised my eyes to a little window cut in a large blank wall, which framed a picture of pathetic sweetness.

"It was the face of a man or a boy, one could hardly tell which, with a high, white forehead, over which lay wavy brown hair, and under which looked out eyes brown and deep. His face was smoothly shaven; his lips were finely curved. There were lines around his eyes and mouth, but the eyes were merry, and a happy smile kept perpetual holiday with him. Sadly at variance with the beautiful face was the crooked little body. He sat at a desk in a high chair, padded and cushioned to fit the humps in his poor back, and a robe was thrown across his lap to conceal the terribly misshapen limbs.

"I felt at once that he was a superior sort of person, and all that day my thoughts turned to him. I decided in my mind I would know him before long, and soon found the desired opportunity.

"My noon hour was too short to allow me to go down town to lunch, so I ate my scanty meal in the office. Strolling by the grocery one noon, I noticed my cripple eating his lunch in much the same way as I had done. He was alone. I immediately made an errand into the store, and purchased some trifling thing. A few cheery words were exchanged, and the ice was broken.

"After this, I received the brightest of smiles and nods every morning as I passed, and I noticed, with delight, how the eyes of the passers-by sought the little window. Rich men lifted their hats to him; boys swung their caps at him; little girls threw kisses to him; poor labor-

ers saluted him, and discouraged ones found inspiration in his smile. He was always cheery, often singing and whistling to himself, living a life of praise—and for what? I often thought.

"It soon got to be a habit of mine to drop in at the noon hour, sometimes to buy, oftener to chat. He was an educated man I knew by his speech, and he was an interested listener to my enthusiastic talks on my pet study of shorthand. I often wished he would talk of himself, but never a word about his past did he speak, and never a word of complaint that he was unfortunate. I almost forgot to pity him, he was so happy.

"One morning, as I looked up for my accustomed bow, Joe's chair was empty. The window looked desolate; the old street never seemed so dirty and dark, though the sun was shining as bright as ever. Hoping that I should find at noon that his absence was but a tardy arrival, I hurried down to ease my doubts. But Joe was not there.

"Where is our Joe?" I said to the proprietor, a home-sick-looking man, who was poring over the ledger.

"I expect he's sick, Miss Arnold, but I haven't had a chance to leave here this morning to find him. That poor back of his plays him bad tricks, though he hasn't had a bad spell for six months now. He's a plucky chap, is Joe; but it's precious little I really know about him."

"Where does he live?" I asked, hoping my talkative proprietor would tell me more of 'My Joe,' as I mentally called him.

"About a mile from here; lives with an old lady, his housekeeper. Guess he's an orphan—don't know. He's queer, though; has a crowd of sick and lame fellows 'round there evenings, and he reads and talks to them—sort of a club, I guess. He doesn't tell me that; our errand boy said one of the boys told him. Joe's a jolly boy, but somehow you can't question him. He's powerful good company, and I don't know how I'd get along without him."

"I understood perfectly why Mr. Stone couldn't question Joe. There was an air of gentle breeding and dignity that served as a barrier between himself and coarser natures, and they felt it.

"Do you think he would care if I called around to see him?" I asked.

"Care? No, indeed; or rather, he would care a good deal. He likes you; and, if I were you, I'd go; 'twill cheer him up a bit."

"So that evening I ate a lunch in the office, and afterward hunted up Joe's dwelling. It was in a block in a respectable street. An old lady of motherly appearance answered my ring, and cordially invited me upstairs. But I was not prepared for what awaited me.

"I was expecting to see an ordinary and plainly, if not poorly, furnished room, but, instead, I was led into a room that was a bright picture of home, and as cozy as a chimney-corner.

"There were scores of photographs littered around on walls and shelves in regular college fashion. There were easy chairs, with downy cushions and head-rests, book-cases, with treasures upon their shelves, a piano, on which lay a violin, and leaning in one corner was a be-ribboned guitar. On the couch, in the midst of a pile of cushions, lay Joe, in a loose, crimson jacket, as white as a lily, and eyes heavy with suffering, but still smiling a welcome for me.

"This is a pleasure as rare as it is unexpected, Miss Arnold. How good of you to come," he said, extending his hand towards me.

"I missed you and had to come," I answered; "but I am sorry to find you ill."

"So am I," he said, smiling; "so there's two sorry; but if you will undertake to fill the position of visiting nurse, the long days ahead will shorten up. These spells are usually no half-holiday—but there's an end to every lane, you know."

"And, indeed, it was several weeks before Joe could leave his room. I spent a good many hours there, and out of our long talks together grew a friendship true and lasting. The sweet nobility of his life was like fragrant incense, and he was a continual inspiration to me in his gladness.

"Bit by bit he told me of his early life; but he studiously avoided any mention of his deformity. He had been reared in a home of comfort, if not luxury, and, being an only child, received every opportunity for education. Trouble came when the father died, leaving a legacy of worthless speculations and unpaid notes, which when paid off, left the widow and her boy nearly stranded. This happened when Joe was a junior in college. A kind-hearted uncle insisted upon his finishing his college course, and assumed the support of the mother, his only sister; but she lived only a few months after her husband.

"Beyond this Joe never told me, until one evening towards the close of his convalescence. As was our wont after he was able to sit up, we always played together before my leaving—he upon his violin and I accompany-

ing him upon the piano. As I have told you, he was an artist. He played with his whole soul, speaking to other souls, bidding them reach up and take the infinite love to warm their hearts into loving all mankind. How he talked to me with his music!

"But on this special evening, as we played, I noticed Joe was trembling with emotion, and the tears fell and trickled down over his violin. How that violin sobbed, too!

"My dear boy," said I, "what is it that troubles you? Let me know. Oh, can't I help you? Is it the pain again?"

"I beg your pardon, Elizabeth," said he, "but that piece brings back the past like a flood, and it sweeps me along with it. I've never told you about my great affliction, because I can't bear to speak of it, even to dearest friends; but to-night I feel like telling you. I am a little childish and lonesome, and I guess I want a little comforting."

"I puffed up his cushions, then sat down on the rug by the side of the couch, where I loved to sit during our long talks, and with the eagerness of a child listened to his story.

"Tisn't a long story to tell, he began. 'It happened when I was a junior in college. Then I was a tall, straight-limbed boy; for I loved athletic sports, and where there was fun to be had I was at the front. I sang and played in the glee club, too, and in that club there was a senior to whom I looked up and loved as my life—yes, dearer than life. We used to play together, he upon the piano and I my violin. We walked together and almost lived together; he was my Jonathan. One night there was a concert down in the village; but Philip was ill in bed, so could not go. I was returning at a late hour, and when half-way to the college the college bell began ringing wildly. It was the fire-alarm. I rushed across the campus, thinking of Phil in bed and hoping he was not in danger. But as I turned the corner and came upon the college dormitory, my heart froze, for the smoke was pouring from the wing where Phil's room was. A crowd of frightened boys ran back and forth half dazed. I flew to the main entrance and up the stairs; but the corridor was full of blinding smoke. Back I went, shouting to the boys that Phil was in his room and must be gotten out, and that we must get a ladder from the tool-house and reach him from outside. How we worked! I would let no one go up that ladder before me, and I climbed it like a sailor. It took strength to break that heavy glass, but I crashed through it like a fiend. The rest is like a dream and surrounded with mist. I remember crawling along the floor, reaching the bed, and dragging him off and lifting him out of the window; then a crash and a fall through hot air, a long dream of agony and struggle, and awaking in a bed with my uncle sitting by. Then or after I was strong enough to bear it, I was told that we fell together from the window, missing the top round of the ladder. I struck upon my back was picked up for dead, and for weeks I lay unconscious. I was taken to our home, 200 miles away, on a bed, for there were no skilled surgeons at the college town. Then followed two years of such suffering as I cannot tell you of; for this crooked, twisted body tells it only too well. Then my uncle died, and with his death came the knowledge I was a poor man, for my sickness had eaten up his scanty store. Slowly I took up the threads of life. I began by copying for lawyers; then, as I grew stronger, took up bookkeeping. Now you know it all."

"No, not all," I said; "for you haven't told me what became of Philip."

"Oh, Elizabeth!" he cried, as if I had struck him, and his eyes filled. "My poor Philip, I know not whether he is alive or not. When I asked for him, my uncle said he left him ill in the college hospital, raving with fever. We wrote to the college president for news of him, but he said (Philip), like myself, was taken to the far western home, and he knew nothing further—whether he was alive or not. All efforts of mine to find him amounted to nothing; so I mourn him as dead. If I but knew he was alive, then this wreck of a body would be a consolation it was to save his life I did it."

"My heart was stirred to its depths, and my soul bowed in reverence before his simple grandeur. This story became a bond which united us closer than ever. After he was able to sit up long enough I planned a little visit for him to our house. My cousin Brooks was spending a few days with us during a business trip to the east in his manufacturing interests. He was a musician himself, and I wanted to give him a surprise and treat by the way of hearing Joe play.

"I arranged for a day's vacation for myself, and sent a carriage for Joe. He was as merry as a child over his outing. After he had rested awhile, we began to practice the music which we were to play for Brooks, and were progressing finely when the door opened and

Brooks came
rose from the
other, when
white and bi
arms as if gr
crying: "Phil
stared at Joe
his breast, w
is it you—gl
he said, this
was getting
boys, boys
lowed the
talked and
my tears.

"And no
Brooks), "m
at rest. "C
man lay do
life or rathe
will be for
and, please
"Joe's vi
was bereft,
ern home,
counting-r
used to loo
went to wo
a song, and
again."

Then Cl
and every
"S

Our life
There is
most for h
Sin is th
It was th
and apart
there is a
can never
The gos
that by kn
No man
with him.
This is
him the w
When C
pauses to
he has cre
Life pos
when man
with God
then is th
ideal.

Rev. W
B. Y. P.
Missions
those soc
a good w

Note.—
pencil, a
note boo
C. C. C.

How is
thing he
when we
ought to
scriptur
of India
most of
of strugg
than the
Jacob,—
and the
"I cried
for my
woman,
table eat
of Barti
mercy o
Lord, o
no easi