

# A Complete Story

## A MESSAGE OF GOOD CHEER

The room was hushed, candles burned there day and night, the odor of roses filled the air; and the face that slept in the casket was that of a girl, young and beautiful.

It was early morning and few visitors had come as yet when a car stopped before the door and an elegant old lady alighted. In the hall she was met and greeted by a young woman in black, a cousin to the dead Marjorie.

A few well-chosen words of sympathy were spoken, then the old lady passed into the room and gazed long and lovingly at the face in the coffin.

"How strangely joyful the child looks," she whispered reverently as she turned away.

"Yes," assented the cousin, "but you know Marjorie always looked like that. I do not think any of us ever saw her when she was not ready with a laugh or smile, and she was the same at the end."

"Has Herbert been here?" Mrs. Moore asked a trifle wistfully, when they stood once more in the hall.

"Yes, he is here now. Shall I tell him you have come?"

"He would not wish to see me," Herbert's aunt replied, sorrowfully. "He blames me for not sending him word of Marjorie's illness. But how could I know he cared? He was attentive to her when he visited me three years ago, but he never mentioned her afterward, yet when he accidentally learned that she was dying, he came a thousand miles to hear a last word from her, and he came too late."

"There must have been something between them," the girl returned, thoughtfully. "He is inconsolable now."

The old lady had paused at the foot of the stairs. "I would like to go up to see Marjorie's mother," she said gently.

"Yes, do," was the cordial response. "And you will not mind if I do not go up with you? I see some more people coming."

Readily excusing her, Mrs. Moore ascended the steps, while the girl turned to greet a priest just entering the door. "Do you wish to do something very kind?" she questioned hastily, for in a moment others would claim her attention.

"Most certainly," he responded at once. He had known the family many years, the dead Marjorie all her life.

"Herbert Norton is in the dining room," the girl explained, "inconsolable over Marjorie's death, and because he did not see her before she died. He was too late even for that poor comfort. Perhaps you will know how to console him. I'd stay with him myself, but I have these people to attend to."

"I did not know he had come," said the priest thoughtfully. "I believe I have something that will help him." Passing down the hall he opened the dining room door.

At the table, his head bowed upon it, sat a young man, his whole figure expressing despondency and grief. "My boy," said Father Grey gently.

The young young man lifted his head, and looked into eyes steadfast as his own were hopeless. Something of sadness, but much of serenity was in the priest's face. He had studied deeply of the book called "Human Nature," and had grown wise and very gentle.

Now, he waited, silent, yet his sympathy, a gracious obvious thing; and presently as he expected, Herbert's grief found words. "Three years ago, I met her, and loved her. Who would not? She was the gladdest, happiest girl I ever knew. But she wouldn't listen to my love; she turned it aside. I left her offended, but I intended to return some day, and win her—but—I was too late."

Infinite regret rang in those last words, and the boy rose to pace the room in restless agitation. The calm voice of the priest was as oil on troubled waters.

"You are not aware that, just three years ago, the doctors told Marjorie that she had only a short time to live. An incurable disease has developed rapidly and unexpectedly. She kept up indeed longer than was thought possible, but her's was always a hopeless case."

The young man was gazing at the priest in startled awe. "I did not know. Oh, I wish she had told me all, and had trusted herself to my love."

"What could you have done for her?" questioned the priest gravely.

"I would have stayed with her at any cost," Herbert answered, and his voice grew very gentle at thought of all he might have done. "I would have taken her to some other country, where her life could have been prolonged, perhaps saved. And if it were God's will that she should die, my love would have been her rest in death, and in life, and I would not now be desolate, for the memory of so much as one tender word from her."

Again there was silence, broken at length by Father Grey. "Could you have done all that? Was there no duty to claim you. Your mother—isn't she dependent on you? Could you have supported her and an invalid wife also?"

"I could have done it, somehow," the young man answered, doggedly.

"Marjorie would hardly have permitted you to give up so much for her," the priest returned impressively. "Things being as they were, it was her unselfish hope that you would forget her, but in case you proved faithful, I was to give you this—though she did not dream your love would bring you here." And the priest laid a sealed envelope on the table.

Herbert caught it up, and tore it open. But as he saw the dear handwriting, his eyes grew misty. It was a moment before he could read that message from the dead:

"My dear Herbert,

"You will understand now, I trust, why I sent you from me. I wished you to forget me, as love and marriage were things that

should not come into my life. Sometimes, in these last days, I have thought of sending for you, but my wish above all things is for your comfort, and if you have ceased to care for me such a request would only be an annoyance to you. Father Grey will be in your city soon (by which time my earthly sufferings will be over) and when there, will see you and tell you of my death. If you are much grieved, and this is possible only because you are most faithful and most true—you shall have this letter, which asks a favor of you.

"The world has much of grief and horror and suffering in it, what I plead for now is that you let your love for me bring none of these things into your life. We have need of joy—not sorrow. Understand me—not for a moment do I question the ennobling powers of grief; but I feel that joy, which has a foundation in sorrow, no sorrow can overthrow. Sometimes we meet people who have suffered great calamities, and they are pointed out as holding in their hearts a lifelong sorrow. Did it ever occur to you how strong and helpful such lives might have been if they had practised joy instead of sorrow?"

"Your life, I know, will be a wider one than mine has been, or could be; it is my hope and trust that you will use it as a power of good; and that it will be a happy goodness. Go among the poor and suffering and oppressed, as much as you can or will, but go with a message of good cheer. Never turn aside from sorrow or distress, no matter how you shrink from their contact, but always let your comfort take the form of cheerfulness. Practise it in word, in thought, in deed, and never doubt but your life will be a *Sursum Corda*, to the hearts of those about you; it may perhaps be your privilege to lift them even unto God."

"Dear Herbert, is it too much I ask of you, in this unselfish love—this opening wide your heart to the sufferings and sorrows of others, to give back joy instead? I know it is not, if your love has stood this three years' test, and if you have loved me in life, you will be mindful of me in death. My plea is that you remember me as I wish to be remembered. In no merit of my own do I place my trust that you will even heed this message; but to your great affection (perhaps too wide and deep and tender to have been lavished upon one poor girl) do I address this prayer and bid you arise above every selfish consideration of grief, to make of your love for me, no lifelong sorrow, but a lifelong joy.

"Marjorie."

That was all. So much of him—so little of herself. Had there been no struggle? Herbert wondered—no desire for life, to take the love and happiness she could have had? Was her sweet unvarying cheerfulness a natural characteristic, or one acquired at cost of heartache and self-sacrifice?

The priest had been standing at the window. He turned now at a movement from the young man.

"I wonder," Herbert said, wistfully, "if you could tell me a few things about Marjorie's every-day life? I know so very little of her to treasure in remembrance."

Father Grey seated himself and talked of Marjorie and many trifles connected with her life, to which the lover listened hun-