

'That was the first year of the Civil War. In a desperate mood, but still, I trust, with some motive of patriotism, I enlisted and went to the front with a Michigan regiment.'

'If I had left a loving bride at home, weeping away the sight of her pretty eyes because I had to go, no doubt I would have been killed in the first battle. But despite the fact that I was a poor devil who had no one to love or to pray for him—'

'Now, Phil, I have told you that I prayed for you every day,' interposed the old lady sweetly.

'In spite of the fact that I had no right to expect any one to love or pray for me,' continued Mr. Brendin correcting himself—'I fought through the war unscathed, except for a shot through the shoulder, where the bullet yet is.'

'I came home to find my sweetheart (this lady), but friends told me that another suitor and a rich one had gained her favor.'

'I had made up my mind to surrender on her terms, but this news sent me up into the northern peninsula, among the pine woods. The soldier boys who came home were all looked upon as heroes, as well as those who gave their lives for our country, and I was made something of, because my wound meant that I had saved the colors of our company in a sharp skirmish. But no word of congratulation on the gaining of my laurels came to me from Marie, and so disappointed was I that I did not wait to see her.'

Here the visitors, led by Hackett, reached the license office; but the clerk being engaged, they seated themselves on a bench by the wall and, having found in Tom a willing listener, the chatly old gentleman proceeded with his story.

'With a few hundred dollars that came to me as a legacy I bought a piece of timber land,' he said, 'and that was the beginning. Up there in the solitudes I prospered, boy; true, I saw few people except the rough men of the lumber camps, but the years were golden ones to me. It was there I knew your father; he was of a different stamp to many of the men. For a long time I was too engrossed with my work and business plans to think of taking a wife, but I supposed Marie had married her other suitor, who was of her religion, and possessed a fine farm on the river.'

'I did not come to Detroit for years; my business took me to Chicago instead. After a while I began to tell myself that I might as well marry, instead of knocking around the world alone. But I couldn't find anyone like Marie, and no one else seemed to suit me.'

At this point Mr. Brendin paused to glance at the lady, who laughed in a dignified way, shook her fan at him in mild protest, and rising, devoted her attention to the study of a portrait of one of the former judges of probate, that hung above her head.

'And how did you make it all up in the end, sir?' inquired Tom. Young lover and old had met on the equal ground of romance, that fascinating 'field of the cloth of gold.'

Notwithstanding his gentle companion's appealing glance, warning him to be less communicative. Mr. Brendin talked on with the loquacity of one launched on the all-absorbing theme of the love that has influenced his life.

'Well, it did come about in a strange manner,' he admitted. 'It is years since I left the woods, and I've lived in Chicago and on a ranch in California; but I still own timber in the northern part of this State. Last summer I went up to look after it and spent Sunday at camp. It happened that the night before a Catholic priest travelling through the region, asked hospitality of the men. He said he was preaching around in the neighborhood, looking out to see if any of his people were up there. Now, on Sunday in a lumber camp, there is nothing doing but drinking and gambling, unless the men get into a quarrel, when things are lively enough. There were no Catholics in our camp; but, for the sake of the novelty, the men asked the priest to stay and preach to them.'

'This he did, and I went to hear him with the rest. He gathered in a clearing; the men sat on logs or tree-stumps or on the ground, and he stood on the platform they had built for a dance a while before. My word, but he spoke to the point; no shilly-shallying, not too much fire and brimstone, but it seemed as if he flashed a searchlight into every man's heart! Didn't reveal him to his fellows, you understand, but just showed every man his own conscience as it was.'

The next day the priest and I travelled on together for some hours, and before we separated I promised to call on him in Chicago. I did go more than once, and soon I began to see many things in a different

light, and found that upon some matters I had been wrong-headed all my life. The upshot of it was, my boy, that I became a Catholic.'

Young Hackett had listened with ever-increasing interest. 'I too am a convert,' he here interjected.

'Then you know all about it,' said Mr. Brendin beamingly. 'Well, some time after I had joined the Church the thought came to me that I would like Marie to know. The husband whom she has loved and made happy all these years will surely not grudge me the opportunity to tell her of my conversion,' I said to myself. 'And she, in her gentle charity, will be glad for my sake.'

'So I came to Detroit, made inquiries among former acquaintances, and found to my astonishment and happiness that Marie had not married at all. Then I went down to Monroe by the next train. She was living in her old home still, and the place seemed little changed, except that the trees about the house are taller and cast a deeper shade, and the vines about the gallery are thicker than in the evenings when we used to linger there, oblivious to the hum of mosquitoes.'

Marie received me cordially, but when I turned the conversation to old times she showed a coldness that discomfited me. Beginning at the wrong end of my story, and without telling her of my conversion, I blurted out:

'Marie, like a worthless penny I have come back to you, after all these years. I thought you had married long ago; to my joy I find you free. I love you far more dearly than I did when we were both young, although I gave you all my heart then. No other woman has ever had my love. In the years since we last met I have had much time to think. I have come back to you to say that if you marry me now I shall be more than willing to be married by the old cure here, or any one whom you may select.'

'Of course I was far too presumptuous,' pursued Mr. Brendin with a side glance at the lady, who pretended to be deaf to what her old lover was saying, since she could not check the exuberance of his spirits.

'So confident was I that the one obstacle to our union was removed that I expected her to say "yes" without demur,' he acknowledged. 'But, bless my heart, no matter how well a man thinks he knows a woman, she will surprise him after all.'

'Instead of answering demurely that she was willing to become my wife, that she had waited for me all these years, as I know she did (here his eyes twinkled with sly humor)—instead of this, Marie flared up.'

'During the years that have gone by I too have had time to think, Philip Brendin,' she said. 'And if you want to know the result of my reflections, here it is. You have taken almost a lifetime to make up your mind to be married in the Catholic Church, and you have yielded at last only because you could not win me in any other way.'

'Marie, you are mistaken; I thought you were married,' I interrupted; but she would not hear me.

'What kind of a life would I have with a man as bigoted and prejudiced as you are,' she went on earnestly. 'No, no, I shall pray for you as I have always done; but (and here her voice broke a little) I have lived to thank God, Philip, that He has saved me from the trials and dangers of a marriage with one not of my faith. And so, if you please, we will remain only friends—but, I hope, we shall be good friends always.'

'What if I told you that now, even to win the one woman who is all the world to me, I would not be married by anyone but a priest?' I said, looking into her sweet eyes that, bright with unshed tears, told me her heart was still mine. 'What if I told you that now, thank God, we are both of the same faith?'

For a moment Marie looked at me in dazed amazement. Presently, as those tears fell in a glistening rain, she smiled, and in that smile I read the answer she could not then speak.

'And what happened next?' queried Hackett, good-humoredly twitting the old gentleman.

'Well,' answered Mr. Brendin, pulling himself together, 'I did what you, my boy, or any young fellow would have done under similar circumstances. I went over and sat beside her and kissed it. Then, as I took her hand in mine, there upon her finger I saw the very ring I had given her, when we were young. I had refused to take it back when we parted. How women treasure the keepsakes and the memories of their early love!'

To make a long story short, in the end this lady, Mademoiselle Roy, and I are to be married this afternoon, though I must admit we have chosen a mighty hot