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Cupid—And a Call

By EDITH MORGAN WILLETT

The Rector of All Souls paused in the hall to remove his clerical hat and smooth the ruffled auburn hair beneath it. Then he pushed back the portiere briskly and entered Mrs. Minturn's luxurious drawing-room.

Half-past ten o'clock.

He glanced dubiously at the gilt time-piece opposite. A trifle early for a morning visit, but he couldn't help that. There was no time to lose. This matter must be settled without delay, and his letter written to the Bishop and off by the 3.30 train.

Dropping with satisfaction into a deep, cool Morris chair—Mr. Marble congratulated himself resolutely on the step he was about to take.

It had been a serious problem and hard to decide, especially (as he acknowledged), for a man of his whimsical, over-fastidious tastes. Even now he realized keenly that there **were** other women in the world—girls even, good-looking ones too (a reminiscent blush overspread his carefully shorn face)—but for charm, position and well—**general attractiveness** (here his eye strained appreciatively out of the window towards conservatories and well-kept lawns where many gardeners pottered about) there was no one in Wheatly better fitted than Lydia Minturn to adorn——

At this point, with some embarrassment he rose to greet her.

"I was especially anxious to see you this morning," Mr. Marble told his hostess baldly after a tactful prologue of banalities. "There is something exceedingly important I desire to communicate to you."

"To me," echoed Mrs. Minturn.

She looked at him with innocent blue eyes and fingered her rings pensively. "What can it be, I wonder. Has that wretched vestry been bothering you again, or is it the poor throat?—Do you know you're looking very badly?" She leaned towards him with pretty earnestness. "What you want, my dear, is rest—a complete rest and change."

Want it. Of course he did, but the Rector of All Souls, being a subtle student of the other sex, "walked delicately"—like Agag.

"Not much rest for me," he ejaculated with a tired smile. "The Bishop is seriously urging me to accept a call to Shooting Rock, Arkansas."

And at her cry of dismay—

"Yes, it's a good way off," he said grimly—"a lonely spot seventy miles from a railway track. A mission of a thousand miners who have never felt a civilizing or refining touch, pretty desperate characters, some of them, I understand, but, of course, it's a splendid field."

He paused as Mrs. Minturn laid a white restraining hand on his arm.

"Don't say another word," she begged. "It's too awful. How can you ever talk of going to that dreadful place. You might **think** of us." There was a touching catch in her voice. "What would I—we—do without you at Wheatly? Oh, Mr. Marble, say that you won't go."

"There is only one consideration that would induce me to remain," said the Rev. Ronald with decision.

His moment had come and he seized it with characteristic promptness; also her unresisting hand. How soft it was and how her rings sparkled.

"Lydia," he cried, putting the time-honored question with striking originality, "will you be mine?" Will you make me the happiest of men?"

Twelve o'clock struck, and Mr. Marble rose, somewhat flushed and dishevelled, from a kneeling posture.

Then it's irrevocable, and you won't have me," he queried blankly.

The fact even now seemed preposterous, incredible.

Mrs. Minturn nodded and dabbed her eyes with a few square inches of real lace.

"It's not that I wouldn't have you," she explained lucidly. "It's Jack. Don't you see—**can't** you understand that my poor husband wouldn't have liked it if he'd been alive, and isn't it just the same now that he's dead and gone, even more so?"

Mr. Marble sighed impatiently. This was the sort of wearing female logic to which he had been treated for the last hour and a half, in spite of all his arguments. Yes, he had done his best, pleaded with her as a lover, friend and pastor; copiously from sacred writ, secular poetry nd modern novels, but all to no purpose.

He asked himself wistfully, if all women would have been so unreasonable—Janet Noble, for instance.

A sudden inspiration dawned on Mr. Marble. A light shone in his blue eyes.

"Then I understand you've definitely refused me," he said facing his hostess reproachfully.

Mrs. Minturn raised her eyebrows. "How dreadfully downright you men are," she remonstrated.

"At all events, you said you couldn't marry me," he reminded her with bitterness, as he made determinedly for the door.

Mrs. Minturn put her hand out. "We can be friends, at least, can't we?" she pleaded. "And you won't go away?"

The Rev. Ronald Marble turned the knob. "If I do," he said sternly, "it is because **you** have made it impossible for me to remain. Good morning."

And the portiere swung behind him.

* * * *

The Rector of All Souls followed Janet Noble into her cosy sitting-room.

He was somewhat breathless and spent, having hastened here at top speed from the Minturn mansion, so as to lose no time. Indeed, there was none to lose, as his letter must be written and off to the bishop by the 3.30 train.

"I wanted especially to see you this morning," he said with real emotion, coming to a standstill by the fireplace. "I have just received an important call, and **you** ought to be the first to know it."

"A call," repeated Janet Noble interestedly, as she took up some plain sewing.

She was president of the Woman's Auxiliary, secretary of the Parish Aid Society and soprano of the church choir, besides being a tall, handsome girl with bright eyes and a vivid color.

"Yes," Mr. Marble returned with enthusiasm, "I am called to Shooting Rock, Arkansas—a beautiful lonely spot seventy miles from a railway track. It is a great field—a splendid opportunity. A thousand miners who have never felt a civilizing or refining touch. Think of the good that might be done among them." (His eyes soared ecstatically ceilingward). "Think of the service, the Sunday Schools, the——"

"Oh, it would be glorious," she interrupted him eagerly.

Her hands were clasped tightly together and her kindling eyes made his pulses throb exultantly. "Of course, you must take up this great work. We shall miss you here undoubtedly"—there was the faintest tremble in her voice—"but one mustn't think of oneself. Those poor people need you. It is your duty to go."

How beautiful she looked with the sunlight on her hair, the inspiration in her eyes!

"There is only one consideration that would induce me to go," said the Rev. Ronald with decision.

His moment had come. Mr. Marble felt convinced this time that it was the supreme moment of his life, and he seized it manfully, though her hands eluded him.

"Janet," he cried, "will you be mine? Will you make me the happiest of men?"

The words pouring from his lips had a strangely familiar sound; and, alas, it was with a strangely familiar pang that Mr. Marble listened to her answer.

When it was over and he had dejectedly picked up his hat for the second time that morning, Janet walked with him to the gate which he had opened so hopefully a half hour ago.

"I'm so sorry," she faltered, as he lingered in spite of himself at the wicket. "I wish I could help you with this great work." There was a ring of genuine missionary regret in her voice. "You must see for yourself how impossible it is."

Poor Mr. Marble looking at her, could not see it at all.

"Then there's no hope for me," he asked gloomily.

"I'm afraid not, as far as I'm concerned," she responded, "but there's always hope. Mightn't there be someone else, Mr. Marble—some other woman better fitted for you?"

The Rector of All Souls only gave her a scorchingly reproachful glance and turned away without a word.

As he bent his lonely steps towards his boarding house, Mr. Marble became aware of other steps, feminine ones, approaching behind, and a furtive glance around showed him Miss Cornelia Wylde,

Continued on Page 19

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