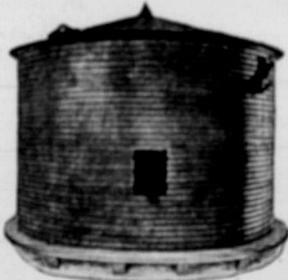


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Cupid—And a Call

By EDITH MORGAN WILLETT

The Rector of All Souls glanced in the hall to remove his clerical hat and smooth the ruffled ashen 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 pattered 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," 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 socket.

"I wish I could help you with that 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 searching 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 Wyld, who could not see it at all.

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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.

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