

MARGARET BLACK

A Christmas Party

THAT PREVENTED A SPLIT IN THE CHURCH

PART I



“GOODNESS,” EXCLAIMED MILLY BROWN. “All these things to move and dust, they’re a sight and if I had my way, I’d get rid of some of them. No single man needs all this trash around, especially a minister.”

“Always getting rid of something,” said Sara Simpson, “I declare you are the limit; perhaps you’ll want to be getting rid of your daughter Alice—now we are having a new minister and he a single man.”

“I guess you are the one who’ll be wanting the minister to marry them,” laughed Milly. But Sara Simpson did not see the joke, you see Sara was past thirty—and did not like it mentioned—had a lovely home in town and everybody knew she was sore at Mrs. Jake Todd because Jake preferred her when she was Margaret Clayton instead of Sara Simpson—whose father was the leading lawyer in town and who gave his wife and daughter anything they wanted.

Sara was a pretty girl but Margery was much prettier and had such a sweet disposition that everybody loved her, even if she did have to wear cheap cotton dresses—and her hats and coats two winters and couldn’t afford furs. But Sara snubbed poor Margery every chance she got and poor Milly Brown also—because she was Margery’s friend.

Mrs. Milly Brown was a widow with only one daughter who lived beyond the town a lonely way and made her living by doing plain sewing.

You see there was only one church in this very small town—you or I would call it a village—which would surely have insulted the small population of St. Michaels because they felt themselves very important people and more especially now—as they were able to support a minister by themselves.

No more circuit riding minister for them. Since attaining the dignity of supporting a minister and having a parsonage rent free—they had

organized a Mite Society for the grown people and a Helping Hand Society for the young folks and a Sunday afternoon Literary Society, hence the self-satisfied feeling among them.

Their last pastor had been a married man with a large family, a wife and six children, and the poor man had had so much trouble and such poor charges (which is the fate of a good many Methodist ministers) that he felt after he got to St. Michaels that he should take a rest, and he rested so well, and so long, that the people sent the Bishop word they did not want him back. So the good Bishop had now sent them not only a young man, but a single one, and St. Michaels folks were going out of their way to make things pleasant for the new minister.

He was very young and considered a genius, and as St. Michaels always gave the parsonage ready furnished and found the good parson coal and wood—it felt as this was a young man they could go a step farther and stock his pantry with all things needful and have him a good housekeeper, so they had installed old Aunt Eliza West as his housekeeper.

There had been a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society, and a Committee appointed to get things in readiness for the pastor's arrival.

The Board of Trustees and Board of Stewards had also held meetings, but the Ladies' Aid had taken things in their hands and the men were well content to step aside and let them do the work—as most of their wives belonged to the Aid Society and those whose wives did not, thought it good policy to not object.

So there was just lots of help—because as Mrs. Orion Tucker remarked, “Wherever they had a married minister all the women stayed at home except a few old stand-bys—who could always be depended on, but if he was a single man, every spinster and young girl and married woman in the town was in evidence to help, they had all they needed and more.”

So they scrubbed floors—cleaned paints and windows—and swept and dusted and polished dishes and silver until it seemed as tho the things would surely come to life and cry out—enough! oh, enough! or melt into nothing.

At last everything was in readiness and St. Michaels was in a state of expectancy.

Only Brother Tucker and Sister Marion Ford had attended the conference at Greenville and neither of them could give a very clear account of what he looked like.

Brother Tucker said “He was pretty pert and spry looking youngster,” and

Sister Marion Ford said "He was a handsome young chap—straight and tall as a young poplar and with the snappiest black eyes she'd ever seen—altogether quite 'stinguished looking."

"But" as Marie Phillips sarcastically remarked, "you can't depend on either one of these old folks, because everybody is 'pert and spry' to Brother Tucker, who walks and talks pretty slick and as for Sister Marion Ford—Oh pshaw! she can't see good anyway."

But "all's well that ends well"—and Rev. Jonathan Steele had arrived and was quite all both Brother Tucker and Sister Ford had described and more some of them thought. In plain words—"he came, he saw, he conquered" and after several months with the town folks—he was still "The new preacher"—at least he was as new as seven months steady wear in a small town could leave him. You see new silver does not tarnish very quickly and Rev. Steele was still untarnished. Of course he made mistakes—and this Thursday night at the meeting of the Ladies' Aid they were discussing the fact that the Rev. Mr. Steele did not or could not seem to grasp the fact that Mrs. John Taylor was the leader of the Ladies' Aid and a shining light in the church, and that Mrs. Orion Tucker was to be church treasurer for life and that the Trustees and Stewards' Boards were composed of lifetime members and also that Mrs. St. Anthony was the head deaconness of the church and as her husband had donated the ground on which the church stood and donated five thousand dollars towards the building fund she must be consulted on all matters pertaining to the welfare of the church.

How was the Rev. Jonathan Steele, not a day over twenty-five and a young snipe just out of college, as Mrs. Tucker emphatically declared, to realize the importance of each separate man's and woman's work in his ever increasing congregation.

Altho after seven months—if he really had failed to grasp these many cited facts—it was no fault of the members of St. Michaels Church.

"Things seem to be moving along rather smoothly," remarked Mrs. Phillips—"I think the Reverend has commenced to appreciate his charge"—which remark was due to the fact that the Rev. Steele had lately congratulated Mrs. Phillips on her executive ability.

The ladies were lingering over the task of sorting out table linen and dishes after the yearly oyster supper for the benefit of the Stewards' Board.

"Yes," said Mrs. Phillips, "how our girls did work; they are coming into the church and working like soldiers, and are not near so thoughtless and silly as they used to be."

“Oh yes!” said Mrs. Tucker sarcastically. “It is really remarkable how they work. An unmarried minister can inspire so much enthusiasm among spinsters—and women with marriageable daughters.”

“Well, I’m not making any unkind remarks,” said Mrs. Phillips virtuously.

“Well,” replied Mrs. Tucker—“Neither am I, but I can’t help noticing things when they happen right under your nose. I have eyes to see with and altho we might not care to spread it broad cast, we can all see the difference between the treatment accorded Rev. Butler and that given Rev. Steele. You see Rev. Butler was an antiquated, married man, while Rev. Steele is a very live young man. With Rev. Butler we crawled along and the community hardly knew we existed, while now we are increasing by leaps and bounds—fairly flying.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Phillips, “it’s natural isn’t it. The young——”

“Of course it’s natural,” broke in Mrs. Tucker. “Life is just a succession of thrills anyway, and we all run after that we don’t have. Didn’t I run a little after my old man Orion, and didn’t you run after Nathan?”

“No, I didn’t,” snapped Mrs. Phillips, “I never took one step out of my way for Nathan Phillips.”

“Oh, well, you grabbed him mighty quick when he asked you—and that’s what I’m thinking about these girls and old maids—any one of them would grab Rev. Steele mighty quick if he asks them.”

A light laugh startled them and made them turn rather quickly—they had forgotten they were in church.

“I’m glad my girl lives such a distance from the church—that she can’t take part in everything. Until she does her school work and helps me a little she has no time to join church clubs and Ladies’ Aid Societies, and talk scandal,” said the irrepressible Milly Brown. “But I guess you’ll soon have a new member any way for your society—because Hannah Burke Starks has come home and is occupying the Powell place adjoining us. You remember her don’t you Mrs. Phillips.”

“Well, I should say,” replied Mrs. Phillips, “she married young Dr. Stark of Cleveland. So she’s home. Is her husband with her?”

“Oh no, she is a widow” said Milly “and I’m thinking a pretty wealthy one at that.”

“You don’t say,” said Mrs. Tucker. “How do you know.”

“Well by the style of her and the way she lives and the improvements she is making in the place. She has house servants, a gardener, and chauffeur and a man to tend the farm and she has had the house all done over, you

won't know the place when it is finished. And she has an immense touring car, and the dearest coupe she runs herself. Then she rides and has a beautiful thoroughbred horse and has just the finest of clothes."

"Well" said Mrs. Phillips "that don't sound like she'll be much of a church worker—but we'll wait and see. You never can tell."

"Alice says she's lovely"—replied Milly. "She's been very good to Alice."

"We must call," said Mrs. Tucker, "it is so lonely out there."

"Yes, it's lonely with only Milly and her Alice for neighbors" retorted Mrs. Phillips. "But I'll have to study over it first. You see I knew Hannah before she was married, and she was always a mighty independent little piece and held her head very high."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Mrs. Tucker, "birds fly high too, but they always come down for water. So perhaps your Hannah was lonesome and home-sick for the sight of home and old faces, the reason she returned to St. Michaels."

"Well—we'll soon see," said Mrs. Phillips. And see they did in a way that didn't suit St. Michaels folks at all.

The following Thursday the Ladies' Aid met at Mrs. St. Anthony's. They always met at Mrs. St. Anthony's whenever they could—and that was nine times out of ten—because her home was just a few steps below the parsonage and they could see Rev. Steele whenever he came out or in or had visitors, and then being close—he sometimes dropped in and took tea with the ladies, only when he came they served cocoa and tea cakes because it was more fashionable.

But this Thursday they were doomed to disappointment because Rev. Steele came out his gate—and every girl and old maid's heart beat a little faster, and each one either took her little chamois and touched up her nose a little for fear it might be shiny or patted her hair a little smoother or tucked a hair pin a little tighter—but with a gasp of astonishment—instead of turning in at Mrs. St. Anthony's and sauntering slowly up the walk as usual—he walked briskly by without so much as a glance at the house.

The Ladies' Aiders sat as tho paralyzed—and little Marie Phillips, who thought he was on the eve of proposing to her, said "Well the nerve of him, I wonder where he can be going?"

"Well if you say so," said Lillian Tucker. "I'll run and ask him."

"Now girls," said Miss Sara Simpson "don't get excited, you know a pastor of a church like ours has so many important duties to attend to that he can't always attend our meetings."

“Don’t make excuses Sara,” retorted Mrs. Phillips—“there isn’t anything more important than our meetings.”

“Stung” laughed Lillian Tucker—“perhaps he has gone to see the great and beautiful widow Stark”—and as tho she had been a prophetess—the widow and the pastor came into view quietly talking and seemingly interested only in each other.

Everybody looked and if only the pastor could have known each one’s thought of him—who watched him so closely.

The young girls were mostly amused but the spinsters and married women were not so charitably inclined.

Mrs. Stark was dressed in a fashionable tailor made suit with hat, gloves and shoes to match and carried an armful of beautiful hot-house tea roses.

At his gate they stopped and she put out her hand and took his and put all the roses in them—and then stooped and buried her face in them as tho loath to part with them and when she raised her face he said something to her and buried his face in them as she had done.

“Look,” said Miss Sara Simpson with a look of disgust on her face—“he is kissing and caressing them because she did so—right out in the street isn’t it disgusting, and he seems to like her too and here last Sunday he took us to task about expensive cloths, and street walking and flirting and love-making in public and——”

“Do hush Sara” said Mrs. St. Anthony. “Look at the bunch of roses, it hasn’t cost a cent less than \$5. I imagine I can smell them here. I wonder if he really likes roses?”

Mrs. Tucker seemed genuinely amused at some unspoken thought and her quick light laugh—fell jarringly upon the members.

“Oh dear!” said one “do keep quiet.”

“I don’t see anything to laugh about,” said another.

“Well he likes roses well enough to keep those” said some one else.

“It seems so” said another.

The gate clicked shut and Mrs. Stark walked along up the street, unconscious of the storm she had stirred up.

“If she is so intimate with him, it’s a wonder she wouldn’t come to church and help with the church work or join the society and help to do something, and she wouldn’t have time to flirt with the minister” said Mrs. St. Anthony.

“Has anyone”—asked Mrs. Phillips—“asked Hannah Stark to join our society or one of our church clubs?”

No one had—

“I’ll do it now” said Mrs. Phillips.

“Hurry or she’ll be out of sight—” they urged. They followed Mrs. Phillips to the door.

Mrs. Stark had gone by—but she came back with a smile on her face, and not a little amused at being accosted thus. Mrs. Phillips stood on the top step and resolved to do what she thought was her duty.

“I am Mrs. Phillips—Mrs. Stark and remember you as Hannah Burke—we saw you talking to Rev. Steele”—she said by way of introduction—“We thought you might like to join our society or our young people’s Helping Hand Club.”

Mrs. Phillips was unaware how she spoke—her voice cut the air like a whip saw—and said plainly—we do not want you, but you should think it your duty—and an honor, that I, Mrs. Lawyer Phillips, should ask you to join.

Mrs. Stark’s eyes snapped—and her head went up a little higher—“Thank you”—she said—“I feel honored. Does your pastor belong to these clubs and is he a member of the Church Aid Society?”

“No,” exclaimed indignant Mrs. Phillips. —“Then I’m sorry to decline the honor, but I can’t possibly belong to anything of which he is not a member, and not under his direct supervision.”

She was gone—Mrs. Phillips had to be helped in the house to the couch—and Mrs. St. Anthony was so angry she was blue in the face. I thought she would explode, and poor Miss Sara Simpson fainted in fact everybody was out of commission but Mrs. Tucker, who got on everybody’s nerves by laughing and saying—

“I like that woman. She’s got spunk and brains enough to give you a dose of nicely sugar-coated pills that helps immensely.”

Before night all St. Michaels had heard the story of the roses and the invitation to join the club and it did not lose anything in the telling.

Unconsciously all St. Michaels formed a detective bureau to watch the pastor.

They played detective and they watched poor Rev. Steele’s every move and at last it had come to the conclusion that he was hopelessly in love with the widow.

Poor Mrs. Stark, did she know how St. Michaels regarded her, or what they thought of her? If she did—no one in St. Michaels was any the wiser.

Then one Sunday morning just a few weeks before Xmas, Mrs. Stark

appeared at church, and the Ladies' Aid members that were present, I'm afraid paid more attention to Mrs. Stark than they did to the sermon—in fact I'm afraid they could not have given the text if asked—but I'm sure they could have told you all about Mrs. Stark's costume.

At the Thursday afternoon meeting following—Mrs. Stark was the topic as usual.

"What's wrong with her now," said Mrs. Tucker. "At first she was just a butterfly and a flirt, then she was haughty and proud, then she did not attend church, she was a heathen, now she attends church, you are still faultfinding and she is a hypocrite—what is wrong with her now?" she challenged.

"Well she is not a member," said Mrs. Phillips, "and she just came to have the pastor walk her home."

"Well whose business is it if she does. Don't you think Rev. Steele is old enough to look after himself?" said Mrs. Tucker.

"Well what do you expect of us? You'd be suspicious yourself—after those roses—if you were not so in love with both her and the pastor, that it takes all your time to champion their cause and snub your neighbors, all on account of a city woman, who is supposed to have plenty of money and fine clothes. I think she's bewitched you" remarked Mrs. Phillips, "as you have gone clean daft about her."

"Well I'm satisfied"—retorted Mrs. Tucker. "My opinion of the matter is that we will lose all the ground we've gained—and waste our profits—if we don't stop this unseasonable unreasonable squabbling—come to our senses and adjust the differences which have suddenly sprung up between the pastor and this society all on account of his attention to a woman, and we are not sure that he is paying special attention to her. Because a man calls on a woman or walks home with her is no sign he wants to marry her."

"Quite a sermon Mrs. Tucker, have you taken the Rev. Steele's place? Who elected you his champion?"—sarcastically asked Mrs. St. Anthony. "Perhaps the members here are not to your liking and you wish to resign."

"I am not trying to take anyone's place," retorted Mrs. Tucker—"but three weeks from now is Xmas, and this is hold together time—not hold-up or split-up time. A similar opportunity to have a big Xmas fete in the church and to get and keep all the younger folks working may never occur again and I move we take time by the forelock and get busy."

"The pastor gave those roses to old Mother Carey," explained Mrs.

Tucker triumphantly—and I bet Mrs. Stark knew all about it—perhaps she sent them by him.”

“Humph!” said Miss Sara Simpson, “Jonathan Steele is a sly one—probably his pricking conscience told him the Ladies’ Aid was watching.”

PART II

“The marriageable women of our church are nice and would be a plus for any man. They are as pretty and dutiful as he’ll find elsewhere, but he won’t marry one of them. He can’t see the pot over the sill of the window for the rain,” said Mrs. Phillips. “If there was another church here we would leave, my husband says.”

“And I would follow you,” said Mrs. St. Anthony and Mrs. Ford in chorus—and then the trouble started.

Rev. Steele called a meeting of the Mite Society—and Ladies’ Aid Society—and organized a Young People’s Get-together for Wednesday evening at 7 o’clock. Although the three organizations consisted of seventy-five or more members among them, only five young folks and three older ones turned out—Milly Brown, Mrs. Tucker and Mrs. Ford. Rev. Steele made no comment on the presence or the absence of the members.

“Well,” said he, “this will be my first meeting with you, and as you have all been faithful the past seven months, I thought with your help—we will have a Xmas this year that will leave a sweet memory to every person at St. Michaels as long as life itself. Are you willing to help?”

“We certainly are,” exclaimed Mrs. Tucker, and the rest acquiesced.

Several committees were appointed and those that were absent were notified of their appointments and the jobs they were expected to do.

Some agreed half-heartedly and some refused point blank to not only serve on the committees, but to attend church—and a split in the church of St. Michaels loomed large on the horizon.

Sunday morning two weeks before Xmas, Rev. Steele preached his second formal sermon in St. Michaels Church on “Gossip” and truly St. Michaels was in an up-heaval.

No one knew if he was aware of the feelings of his congregation or not. He had chosen “Gossip” for his subject, but in the middle of his sermon he told his congregation that no matter what happened—even if he was to render his resignation within the next twelve hours—he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had been a p-a-s-t-o-r and not a figure head.

He got everyone to thinking and Mrs. St. Anthony wondered if “he could rightly know what had been said about him by the Ladies’ Aid.”

“It makes no difference if he does” said Mrs. Phillips. “It would do him not to know what I think of him.”

“Humph”—said Mrs. Tucker, “much he cares for your opinion or any one of the rest of us, I’m thinking. He believed Rev. Butler to be led by the nose wheresoever a set of crazy men and women chose to lead him.”

When Frank Coombs resigned as superintendent of the Sunday School they thought he’d be coaxed to remain, but when no one coaxed, only a few old heads—and Harry Young was asked to fill his place—it was like stirring up a hornet’s nest. “Mrs. Coombs and her sister, Mrs. Cook, do come to church—but I declare they would be better at home,” said Mrs. Ford.

“Mrs. Cook told me” said Mrs. Phillips, “she’d looked at the pipes of the organ so long and so hard that she could tell every move on them and where, with her eyes shut, and it was no wonder they had not fallen down on her before this.

“Old Mrs. Lake sits with the book up-side down—and pretends to read, when we all know she can’t tell A from B if they were a yard high. Even the members of the Trustees’ and Stewards’ Boards are at logger heads, because he appointed some young men, who have lately joined church, on the boards and asked for the resignation of some of the old men on the board—they had been on the board so long they were moss-covered.”

“Well I can’t see”—said Mrs. St. Anthony, “why he wanted to change things around.”

“I can tell you” said Mrs. Tucker “he thinks if you want to keep young people in the church after they join—you should put them to work and make them feel they are wanted. You see it’s useless to try to hold young folks anywhere now-a-days unless they have something to do. There is too much of this wanting to be boss all the time and a few old fogies wanting the church to stay in a rut and keeping things like they were fifty years ago. Times are changing and you’ve simply got to change with them or get out of the running. A piece of antique china is admired for its age—but it is put upon the shelf for safekeeping and admired for what it was and is not for its present use. So it is with us—we must either help the younger folks along or stand to be put on the shelf. I say live and let live.

“The whole thing in a nut-shell is he hasn’t paid the attention to our marriageable daughters we thought he should” said Mrs. Tucker. “He goes among us—loves us—and thinks for our interest—which should make him

loved by all—but it seems there must always be a few discontented ones among the flock.”

“What’s the use of jangling” said Mrs. Todd. “Let us get busy. What will you give towards the Xmas fete, Mrs. Hunter?”

“I—oh, I don’t know” said Mrs. Hunter—“I guess 2 quarts of cream and a chocolate cake.”

“What will you give Mrs. Phillips?”

“Not one single thing”—she replied “count me out of it. Mr. Phillips says we’ll not take any part in the affair.”

“What will you give Mrs. Tucker?”

“A cake, a chicken, 2 lbs of coffee and help to do whatever I can.”

“And you Mrs. Ford?”

“Oh—Mr. Ford says we’ll not take any part in it.”

“Look here ladies, before I go any further” said Mrs. Todd “let me ask you that won’t help—please do not hinder.”

“Goodness gracious—Margery Todd put that list up—and don’t use the Ladies’ Aid’s time for such foolishness,” said Mrs. Phillips.

“Alright,” said Mrs. Todd—“but I’ll call on every one of you tomorrow.”

“I can’t get over that sermon” said Mrs. St. Anthony—hopping back to the old subject.

“Neither can I” said Mrs. Phillips.

“There goes the Reverend and the widow now!” said Marie Phillips.

“Well that caps the climax,” said old Mrs. Ford bitterly, as the Reverend and the widow passed out of sight.

But she was mistaken. Something happened a few days later that threw the community into a tizzy. The whole community began to talk to each other through back doors, across to their neighbors, or talked across fences—back and front by the hour. They even called special meetings to discuss it, in fact everybody you met was talking about it and everybody held a square white envelope which contained a beautifully printed square white card which was drawn out and compared with other cards just like it, and soon St. Michaels awoke to the fact that every member and non-member of St. Michaels—men—women and young people—was invited to an elaborate Xmas party.

In the words of Mrs. Tucker—“Mrs. Stark was giving a big Xmas blow out.”

After the first surprise was over, everybody was wondering why he or she had been invited and one and all came to the conclusion, to get in with St.

Michaels folks—except the Ladies' Aid—who said she was taking this way to show she was sorry for the way she had acted.

Tho—Mrs. Tucker says—“What she had to be sorry for was beyond her.”

Then came the getting ready for the party. The boy that blowed the organ thought his checkered pants and blue coat with his new tan shoes was just the thing. The sexton's wife bought a pretty white dimity dress—much too tight and which seemed to make her look twice as broad. But the leaders of the church—the Ladies' Aid—such a flurry—such a bustling.

Of course Mrs. St. Anthony, Mrs. Phillips—the lawyer's wife, and the doctor's wife, Mrs. Jameson—and Miss Simpson and Mrs. White, and their daughters could and did go to the city to get their outfit, and as Marie Phillips told Mrs. Tucker the dresses will be real creations of art.

But the rest of St. Michaels had to be content to buy in St. Michaels, and to trust to Milly Brown, Violet Cunningham and old Mrs. Thomas to make them.

Said Mrs. Tucker—“I'm mighty glad I'm invited—and I'm satisfied with any old plum-colored silk, because it's no use to go to that party trying to outdress Mrs. Stark, because she knows how to dress, and as Mr. Tucker says, she could put on my old plum-colored silk and look like an angel in it, with that mop of hair as black as a raven's wing and eyes as black as a coal and a complexion like a rose leaf—she looks like a big doll anyway. I'll dress to suit Mrs. Tucker who is short and inclined to stoutness and past forty-five and not like Hannah”—with which common sense remarks—”

Mrs. Tucker took her ancient plum-colored silk and sewed some real lace in the sleeves and fixed a dainty white fichu around the neck which would tend to make her look decidedly sweet and motherly and altogether lovely.

The wonderful night rolled around all too quickly, they went in conveyances of all kinds—wagons, ancient carriages, buggies, daytons, and autos, all carried their quota of guests.

But Mrs. Tucker and Mrs. Todd said the street cars were good enough for them so accompanied by Mr. Tucker and Mr. Todd, they wended their way there.

Everybody went—not one invitation was refused or ignored—they were there to eat, to listen, to enjoy, and above all to see how Rev. Steele and Mrs. Stark would act before the people of St. Michaels.

When they arrived, they were more than surprised at the display that met their gaze, and they were awed into silence—and as they gazed, they, one and all thought how beautiful.

Even Mrs. St. Anthony and Mrs. Phillips and Miss Simpson who were used to such things—had never seen anything quite as elaborate as this. Whatever else they may think, there was only one thing that could be said of her in regards to this Xmas party—it was gotten together on an elaborate scale and it was well done.

When they entered they were turned over to the maid who took them upstairs and ushered them into a room, where wraps were removed and checked and a chance to pin back a stray strand of hair or adjust a ribbon if they so wished, then when returning down stairs were announced by the butler—who was none other than young Bill Winston, hired and dressed up for the occasion, and who walked so straight and held his head so high that they wondered he could see the folks he announced.—They entered timidly and in nervous little groups—following each other sheep-fashion, to the place where the hostess stood to receive them—not knowing, the most of them, whether to shake hands or simply bow, nor what to do with themselves afterwards.

But once the hostess greeted them they forgot their self-consciousness and their nervousness in looking at the vision of loveliness that had greeted them. She wore a lovely dress—“a most wonderful gown” Mrs. Tucker said—“of some sort of white stuff—that looked soft, billowy clouds of fleece—dotted here and there with stones that shone like hundreds of stars and sparkled like thousands of diamonds under the blazing electric light;” and as old Mrs. Ford said “she made everybody feel so homey and comfortable.”

“Well I declare” said Mrs. Phillips, “a bridal costume as I live”—as she gazed at the little spray of orange blossoms that nestled so lovingly in Mrs. Stark’s abundant dark hair.

“Do you know,” said Sara Simpson, “I believe she has invited us all to her wedding.”

Some one whispered “Isn’t she glorious?” And it floated from one to the other around the room, there was a gentle hum as of bees in the distance, everybody seemed happy.

“I wonder where the Reverend is?” said old Mrs. St. Anthony.

Time passed and the older folks commenced to get restless—the younger ones were in dream-land and as the orchestral music was wafted so softly and temptingly on the air the younger folks looked longingly at the waxed floor glistening in the distance and wished the pastor would not show up so they could dance.

“Oh!” said Marie Phillips, “just for one turn on that floor”—and the rest echoed her wish.

People commenced to move nervously about, and to stand and talk in excited little groups. There was a hint of something in the air that no one could tell what it was—where was Rev. Steele? Why didn’t the wedding take place? Who was going to marry them?

Even Mrs. Stark was getting restless, her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes fairly glistened and kept roaming toward the side entrance. Her hands played nervously with her fan, [] the young folks were almost tempted to ask could they dance.

The time seemed to pass so slowly and a wave of restlessness hard to control was fast gaining possession of the guests.

Everybody took to cautiously watching Mrs. Stark, who was walking aimlessly here and there around the rooms and talking nervously to first one guest and then another, but it was noticed that her glance wandered continually toward the side entrance, the music itself seemed to accelerate the restlessness of the crowd.

Suddenly the music changed—as the strains of Lohengrin’s Wedding March pealed joyously forth—the side door was thrown wide and the footman announced in a stentorian voice—“Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Steele.”

Everybody turned to look, and there standing framed in the doorway, smilingly stood the Rev. Jonathan Steele—and standing by his side—clinging to his arm stood his bride—timid little Alice Brown—in a simple white dress—looking for all the world like a happy Brown Thrush.

Of course everybody in the room could have told you, that they knew it was Alice Brown the pastor had been coming out into the lonely end of town to see.

And all the girls and spinsters who had held high hopes of becoming the pastor’s wife, will tell you that Rev. Steele is a passably good-looking man, but he is a long way from being a handsome one.

“Sour grapes”—says Mrs. Tucker. But the Ladies’ Aid and the Helping Hand ladies just looked at Milly Brown and wondered to themselves how she ever kept it to herself.

But it did not matter, only to a few like Miss Sara Simpson—whose chances of a husband were getting fewer each year and to Mrs. Phillips—who was anxious to see Marie safely settled, and to Mrs. St. Anthony, who could not now meddle so easily in the pastor’s household affairs. To the majority—he had married a St. Michaels girl and that was the main thing, so the church was decorated, good things donated and the Xmas fete was

a royal reception to the pastor and his bride. And to this day St. Michaels folks love to tell of the Xmas party and how it prevented a split in the church.