walked to the window.

"And since that time?"

. most expensively furnished resid-

her way, too, this afternoon!

Reverend Thomas turned his car | 🐯

Who Shall Carry The Candle?

by Donald A. Byers

It was evident to Reverend Bertram Thomas, as he waited at the side of the tiny stage in the Church Hall, while mothers and children filled the cane-backed chairs before him, that the Christmas Concert was a social event of prime importance in Loganville.

"Even television," the pastor thought with relief, if not satisfaction, "has not the attraction of the Church's age-old custom." And he showed his approval by smiling warmly at those who had assembled for the audi-

reflection to one as sensitive as door.

Reverend Thomas. it the keen competition for leading Gerald sing." whose achievement had taken on trouble," her face was turned away. casual curiosity. undue importance in the minds of "We go now." some of the men and women of the Mrs. Thomas, who had followed Murray, when the parts are handvillage—was that the true motivat- her husband to the back of the ed out," he answered.

ion, a great feeling of responsibility | McMurray.

ie them dutifully on the piano, they more than usual decisiveness. come."

again."

centre of the stage holding a long you would come up on the stage, She hesitated, her hand on the pick up some things to bring home

for this was the climax, an excit- He had chosen 'Silent Night' and beautiful patchwork quilt of color. her plans for Catherine, she thought Was ing and dramatic one, of the entire as Mrs. Thomas played softly in the It was a gray, December dawn. | as she began dusting vigorously. | performance.

ly to the platform. confidently in centre stage, waiting they listened to now. Though the When the table was set she went others. Mrs .McMurray knew that. for Mrs. Thomas' piano introduct- words were in a language none but to his room and knocked quietly. And at least you could understand | 32/2 ion. But as she opened her mouth the boy's mother could understand, "Breakfast is ready, dear," she what she was singing! to sing, the door at the back of the there was no mistaking the ex- called. hall was noisily opened emitting a ceptional quality of the voice. "Coming, Milly." blast of icy air. Everyone turned To Reverend Thomas, the boy! He joined her at the table. and looked.

was tugging his mother behind him. to which they could never give "Oh Bert, I was hoping you'd de- He parked off to one side of the Mrs. McMurray turned to those adequate tongue.

with rage. they would dare intrude!" she said, magnificent!" loudly enough for all to hear.

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But here was another thought turning her insult with mute de- "Next Friday, sharp on seven, is heard. And it was an unpleasant ed and hustled him towards the parts!"

Reverend Thomas reached them you once again." "Was it really the spirit of the before she could turn the knob. He had raised his hand to give intense interest within Loganville's Mrs. McMurray didn't really mean Mrs. McMurray. population of 724 citizens? Or was what she said. We'd all like to hear 'Reverend Thomas, who will

The thought persisted. And, as the arm. he scanned the pattern of faces "You come and sit next to me un- the decision which he would be doing his homework.

for guidance. For the pastor, from The pastor returned to the stage, as far as the edge of the town. wonder if I'm really qualified." back porch of the house announced thirty years devotion to every soul his every movement followed by "We'll be looking for you on "Come and finish your breakfast, the arrival of Gerald's father. The in the village, had a deep affect- the sharp, bird-like eyes of Mrs. Friday," said the parson when they Bertram Thomas. And take a les- lad excused himself and ran into

for each member of his flock. "If you are ready, Catherine, say that in all the years I have mons: The best way to follow in ed. One by one the children squirm- we'll start right at the beginning," been pastor here, we have made it the Lord's footsteps is to love your Later as they sipped hot, strong ed their way to the stage. There, said the pastor's wife. And she a policy to welcome everyone into fellow man and have faith in your coffee, Mr. Krzerko, a lean but while the minister's wife accompan- struck the opening chord with our midst. Be assured—you are wel- God.' "

squeaked their way through the Little Catherine sang with mech- As man and wife turned back crept over the pastor's face. He "I am sorry, sir," he spoke slowcarols-all the while scowling at anical correctness. There was no along the narrow, broken sidewalk, looked steadily at Milly, smiled, ly, quietly, "but we don't want the doting mothers or staring solemnly question that she was better, tech- Reverend Thomas, averting his then sat down again and began to at the high-beamed ceiling. A few nically, than any of the other wife's questioning gaze, looked up eat. were unable to utter a sound and children. It was obvious that she at the sky where low clouds seem- In her home on the other side of stood, faces blanched, transfixed had been coached with exacting ed to drift just above the tree- Main St., Mrs. McMurray put down by fear, until the kindly pastor care. For the concert meant more tops. "We'll get our first snow to- the telephone and walked into the led them off the stage whispering: to Mrs. McMurray than to anyone night, Milly," he said. "Now, now—don't you worry about else in Loganville. His wife looked troubled. Her praised the furniture, the patterned

watch the others. Later, we'll try had finished and Mrs. McMurray distance when she said: smiled triumphantly as her daugh- "To be welcome . . Bert, is that not the largest but certainly the All the lesser roles filled, the ter strutted from the platform. ... the same as being wanted?"

portant phase—the selection of the were any other contestants. An dressed quickly and hurried down- She'd have to dust, she thought, child who would sing the final solo. awkward pause followed. None stairs. As she neared the closed door before the women arrived at 3.30 No Dressed in flowing white, this answered his request. of her husband's study, she could for tea. And, oh yes, she must the child would stand alone in the "Alright, Gerald," he said, "if hear him pacing up and down. phone Frank at the store—he could !!

white candle whose soft glow would I'm sure we'd like to hear you." | doorknob, then turned and went when he came for lunch. She knew | The be the only light in the darkened As the lad climbed the steps a directly to the kitchen. hall. The children's chorus, invis- low murmur swept through the Outside, driving snow swept ac- erything must be just so-as it alible to the audience, would sing room. He stood, legs apart, looking ross the garden covering the frost- ways was when she entertained. softly in the background. like a sturdy little tree topped with blackened dahlias that, only short But especially today.

Pretty, almost doll-like, she stood could match the thrilling music sing, could be his alone. was so much better than any of the

was revealing, in song, the pent-up "Milly, I've made up my mind," off the highway and churned his A chubby, ruddy-faced boy, emotions of thousands of children he said, unfolding his serviette way up the snow-filled Fitzgerald bundled up in strange, dark cloth- in the land from whence he had with a flourish, "the Krzerko boy farm lane to the small cottage that ing had burst into the room and come—the fears, hopes and doubts must sing the leading part!"

cide that. I prayed you would." lane and got out. near her, her large, full face livid "He's magnificent. Milly," the "How could I have chosen other- As he approached the house he pastor whispered to his wife as he wise . . . and have been true to the took note of a single line of foot-"Of all the nerve . . . to think leaned over the piano, "simply things I believe and preach?" he prints which led from the back A burst of applause followed tired face.

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ped. But it ended as quickly as it his study. Milly would know. had begun . . . stilled by stern maternal glances.

To avoid further embarrassment, Reverend Thomas once again took the centre of the stage. "I think that we have the mak-

ings of the finest concert ever," he said to them, "and I want to thank each and every one for such a splendid turn-out tonight.'

that tugged incessantly at the ear fiance, but his mother, her face our first rehearsal. I want you all kept to themselves in that cottage ed. "You like to wait? I fix nice of his mind, demanding to be hidden within a heavy shawl, turn- to be here so we may hand out the on Fitzgerald's farm . . . well, no cup of hot coffee."

Concert itself that created such "Please, Mrs. Krzerko, I'm sure the Benediction when up spoke with the voice of his own conscience his hands. And as he had hoped,

carry the candle this year?" roles in his musical pageant—roles "No trouble. We make no And the tone of her voice belied

"We'll see next Friday, Mrs. Mc- ter they arrived last year."

before him, he recalled the tense til it's Gerald's turn," she said, and called upon to make. atmosphere that preceded concerts led mother and son toward two The minister and his wife walk- ly, I sometimes wonder if I'm do- God's children . . . Surely in this of other years and asked silently empty chairs near the piano. ed with Mrs. Krzerko and Gerald ing much of a job as a minister. I day and age footsteps on the

> parted. "Do come . . . and let me som from one of your own ser- the kitchen. The Reverend follow-A confident, mature expression son's words:

living room. Her exploring eyes ap-

it. Go back and sit down and They clapped when Catherine voice seemed to come from a great wallpaper and expensive drapes How proud she was of her home -- | 28

audition now reached its most im- Reverend Thomas asked if there Next morning, Millicent Thomas ence in town.

exactly what she would need. Ev-It was the greatest honor of all, a cloud of dark, curly hair. | weeks ago, had been part of a No foreign riff-raff would spoil

background, he began to sing. Several times as she prepared She would have a standing in Log-Reverend Thomas called the name | The clear, plaintive notes were breakfast she wanted to go to him anville—and not have to wait long, | We of the first contestant. And little vividly familiar to everyone in -to ask if she could help. But she dreary years, as her mother had, We Catherine McMurray walked quick- that room. But none in Loganville realized that the decision of whe- for nice things. And it would behad ever listened to singing that ther Gerald or Catherine would gin at the concert. Catherine's voice

The other mothers would see it

said. And a smile brightened his door and up the lane in the direct-

ion of the Fitzgerald house. The boy stood his ground, re- Gerald's singing as tiny hands clap- "And the others . . " she asked, The minister reached the door

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unable to hide her concern, "the | and knocked. It was opened immed-McMurray's, I mean?" iately by Gerald who was dressed "I'll just tell them . . ." he be- to go outside. gan. But he knew better than to "Good morning, my boy. Is your

try to bluff Milly-not after twenty mother at home?" years of marriage. He couldn't min- "Oh yes, sir, please come in. Mo-imize a problem with which he had ther! It's Mr Thomas—right here 'wrestled half the night alone in in our house."

Mrs. Krzerko appeared from the He got up from the table and kitchen wiping her hands on her apron. And the pastor saw the "It's not going to be easy. The same expression of fear on her thin people here in Loganville are not face that he had detected last night the mean sort. It's just that the at the audition.

concert has always been a big ev- "Good morning, Mrs. Krzerko. I ent for them. And Kzerkos . . . noticed as I came in that your huswell, they're different. I guess they band has gone to the Fitzgeralds. are the first D.P.'s-I mean New | Do you expect him back soon? I'd Canadians— that we've had here in like to have a visit with you both." that time. And the way they've "He not long away," she answer-

one seems to know anything about | Without waiting for a reply, Mrs. | "Now, until then, may I thank them; except, of course, what you Krzerko returned to the witchen. Reverend Thomas sat down. For Milly's voice was in harmony a moment he studied the palms of

> when she said, "Bert, do you know the boy spoke first. "My father and mother say I can't go into the concert," Gerald "Of course, I visited them to exsaid. "They say it would cause tend the hand of welcome just af-

trouble." "Trouble? What kind of trouble?" "My father says we're different He turned, looked down at her than other people in the village. ing factor behind it all?"

room, took the woman gently by And for the first time Reverend and grinned like a little boy ad- He says we would not be wanted Thomas realized the magnitude of monished by the teacher for not at the concert and that going would

only cause trouble." "I'll go today—this morning. Mil- | "But that's not true. We are all |

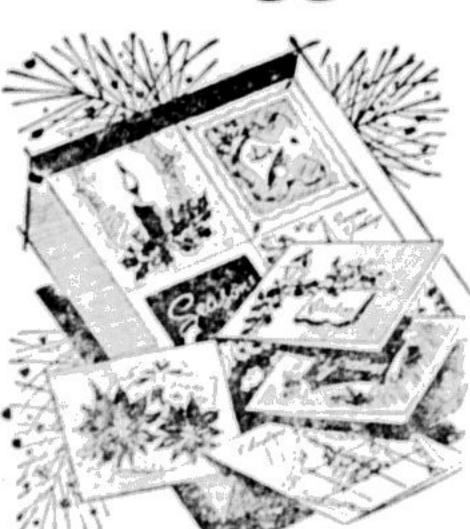
powerfully built man, repeated his

(Continued on Page Five)





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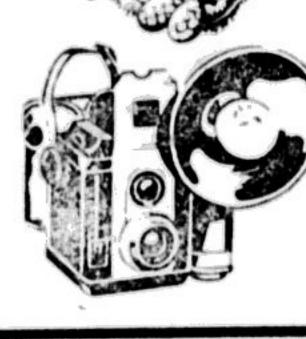
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