

The Great Cacophony

It was the day a great cacophony was raised unto the Lord. At least that was what Preacher Tweedle called it, and it sure sounded a whole lot better than what most everybody else called it.

It all started when Lendle Wiggs decided to take up smokin' and thought to start with an old cheroot butt he had swiped off his pa. Being unused to the endeavor, it wasn't long before the smoke from the seegar caused the contents of Lendle's stomach to consider taking up residence elsewhere. When his breakfast bacon convinced the eggs that the two of them ought to come forward for an encore, Lendle became a might careless about holding onto the cheroot.

The still glowing seegar butt landed in the mess of dried nettles that were plastered up the backside of the church nessesary. The dried nettles sparked right up, which lit the outhouse on fire. From there on it was pretty much all downhill. The outhouse went up in a blaze of glory, with an underlying aroma a tad more heady than the smell of burning pine and tar paper could account for. The cinders from the flaming privy ignited the back porch of the church and it wasn't but a short step from there to the whole consarn place burning like a young man on his first date.

Chauncy Erlbacher, headin' through the church to use the necessary, was the first to spot the conflagration and he commenced to hollerin' like a scalded hog, but, as usual, when Chauncy was excited, no one could understand a word he said, so it wasn't until Avery Bullock, following Chauncy after a polite wait raised the alarm, that anyone knew what was goin' on.

Preacher Tweedle had been on the front lawn glad-handin' the congregation as they left the church and talkin' to Lester Biggs, the head of the church finance committee about whether, or not the church could afford a new roof.

When Avery came bustin' out the front door yellin the church was on fire, Preacher Tweedle and Lester ran into what was left of the church to grab what each one thought was of paramount importance; which was the Bible and the account books, respectively. Avery grabbed a pail and headed for the yard pump but by then things had gone beyond anything a bucket brigade could hope to offer.

About that time the dry grass of the graveyard caught fire and those that had deserved it in life looked like they were going to be doomed to burn in death. Of course those that had not deserved it in life were equally doomed, and this exercised some folks no end.

Miss Abby J. Fornby dumped everything out of her big old handbag and scooped up a load of water out of the horse trough. Putting her chin in the air she galloped for the boneyard like a racehorse in the final furlough of the Derby. Skidden' on her haunches to a halt beside her mama's grave she dumped out the contents of the purse and when that didn't have much effect, she hiked up her skirts and commenced a jigging on the fire like she was dancing with the devil.

Albert Trumball and Cleese Burnbaum set a ladder up against the south wall of the church with the idea of laying out wet blankets on the roof, but as they both tried to climb the ladder at the same time they weren't too effectual. About then the volunteer fire department showed up but, decided pretty quick the church was a dead loss, so

there wasn't anything much left for them to do except rescue Albert and Cleese who were still battling it out on the ladder.

By that time Miss Abby J. Fornby's jig had slowed a mite and her skirts had started to smolder, giving the impression that the fire and brimstone the preacher was so big on might be a mite closer to home than previously supposed. After they had pulled Albert and Cleese off the side of the church, the volunteers turned their hose on Miss Abby J. Fornby and wet her down like a new convert on baptising day. You would have thought she would have been grateful for the cool down, but from the screech she set up when the water hit her, we didn't get the impression that she was overly enthusiastic about the project.

What little was left of the church continued to burn while the ladies "oh myed" and the men shook their heads and said words, that in other circumstances, Preacher Tweedle would not approved of, but now looked like he wanted to say himself. Some of the younger kids wanted to run get hotdogs and marshmallows but their folks told 'em to hush up and stop blaspheming, and Lester Briggs muttered something about Nero fiddling. The rest of us just stood there marvelin' at how fast everything had gone up in smoke. All except Lendle Wiggs, or course, who had lit out of there the moment he had stopped upchuckin all over the hydrangea bushes.

Albert and Cleese were still arguing over who'd had right of way on the ladder while Chauncy Erlbacher and Avery Bullock were gettin' a mite heated over who should get credit in the town paper for being the first to raise the alarm, and Miss Abby J. Fornby just stood there drippin' wet and hoppin' mad. It is a good thing she had no idea of Lendle's involvement or it is within the bounds of probability that she would have attempted to smite him hip and thigh with her purse, which even empty still weighed about ten pounds.

"Let us raise up our voices to the Lord, in a great cacophony of graditude for his preservation of the congregation," chimed out Preacher Tweedle raising his hands and the Bible to the sky.

"Let's raise up a claim to the insurance company," said Lester Briggs, but nobody heard him because they were following Preacher Tweedle's instructions and raising up a great cacophony to the Lord."