

KEZIAH COFFIN

by
Joseph C. Lincoln
Author of
Cy Whittaker's Place
Cap'n Eri, Etc.
Illustrations by
Ellsworth Young
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SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Keziah Coffin, supposed widow, is arranging to move from Trumet to Boston, following the death of her brother, for whom she had kept house. Ryan Pepper, widower, offers marriage, and is indignantly refused. Capt. Elkanah Daniels, leader of the Regular church offers Keziah a place as housekeeper for the new minister, and she decides to remain in Trumet. Keziah takes charge of Rev. John Ellery, the new minister, and gives him advice as to his conduct toward members of the parish. Ellery causes a sensation by attending a "Come-Outer" meeting. Ellery's presence is bitterly resented by Eben Hammond, leader of the meeting. Grace apologizes for her guardian and Ellery escorts her home in the rain. Capt. Nat Hammond, Eben's son, becomes a hero by bringing the packet into port safely through fox and storm. Ellery finds Keziah writing a letter to some one, inclosing money in response to a demand. She curiously started when informed of the arrival of Nat. Nat calls on Keziah, and it develops that they have been lovers since youth. Daniels remonstrates with Ellery for attending "Come-Outer" meetings. Ellery is caught by the tide and is rescued by Nat. They become friends. Ellery meets Grace while walking in the fields, and learns that she walks there every Sunday. The clergyman takes dinner Sundays with the Daniels. Anabel, the captain's daughter, is attracted to him, and makes an impression on him. She notices with vexation his desire to get away every Sunday at a certain time. She watches him through a spy glass. Nat again importunes Keziah to marry him. He says he has had a quarrel with his father, who wants him to marry Grace.

CHAPTER X.

In Which Captain Eben Receives a Caller.

At the edge of the bluff, just where the pines and the bayberry bushes were thickest, where the narrow, crooked little footpath dipped over the rise and down to the pasture land and the salt meadow, John Ellery and Grace had halted in their walk. The minister's face was pale, but set and determined, and he was speaking rapidly.

"I can't help it," he said. "I can't help it. I have made up my mind and nothing can change it, nothing but you. It rests with you. If you say yes, then nothing else matters. Will you say it?"

He was holding both her hands now, and though she tried to withdraw them, he would not let her.

"Will you?" he pleaded.

"I can't," she answered brokenly. "I can't. Think of your church and of your people. What would they say if—"

"I don't care what they say," she shook her head.

"Some of them might respect you," she said. "They would say you had been led into this by me and were not so much to blame. But I—"

"They shall respect my wife," he interrupted, snapping his teeth together, "or I'll know the reason why."

"I can't! I can't! My uncle—"

"Your uncle shall hear it from me. We'll go to him together. I'll tell him myself. He worships you."

"Yes, I know. He does worship me. That's why I am sure he had rather see me dead than married to you, a Regular, and a Regular minister. I know—I know he would never consent. His heart is set on something else. Nat—"

"Nat? Are you considering him, too? Is he to stand between us? What right has he to say—"

"Hush! hush! He hasn't said anything. But—but he and uncle have quarreled, just a little. I didn't tell you, but they have. And I think I know the reason. Nat is Uncle Eben's idol. If the quarrel should grow more serious, I believe it would break his heart. I couldn't bear to be the cause of that; I should never forgive myself."

"You the cause? How could you be the cause of a quarrel between those two? Grace, think of me."

"John," she said, "it is of you I am thinking. Everything else could—might be overcome, perhaps. But I must think of your future and your life. I must. That is why—"

He did not wait to hear more. He seized her in his arms and kissed her.

"Then you do care!" he cried joyfully. "You will marry me?"

For an instant she lay quiet in his embrace, receiving, if not responding to his caresses. Then she gently but firmly freed herself. He saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"I don't know," she sobbed. "Oh, I don't know! I must think—I must! Wait, please wait, John. Perhaps by to-morrow I can answer. I'll try—I'll try. Don't ask me again, now. Let me think. Oh, do!"

She started down the path. He hesitated, then ran after her.

"To-morrow," he questioned eagerly. "To-morrow, then, you'll say that you will?"

"Oh, perhaps, perhaps! I mustn't promise. Good night."

It was after seven when Grace reached the old tavern. The housekeeper, Mrs. Poundberry, was anxiously awaiting her. She wore her bonnet and Sunday gown and was evidently ready to go.

"Supper's on the table and the kettle's abillin'. You better eat in a hurry, 'cause it's meetin' time now. Your uncle, he started ten minutes ago. I'm agoin' right along, too, but I ain't goin' to meetin'; I'm agoin' up to Eben's to stay all night. She's

got a spine in her back, as the feller said, and ain't feelin' good, so I told her I'd come and stay a little spell. Your Uncle Eben's mighty feeble and peaked lately. He ain't long for this world, I'm afraid. You ought to be awful good to him, Grace."

"I know it," was the hurried reply. "Where's Nat?"

"I don't know. Can't keep track of him. Might's well try to put your finger on a flea. He's here to-day and gone yesterday, as the Scrip'tur says. He ate a little mite of supper, but not much, and then off he puts."

She reached the gate by this time, and Grace shut off the flow of conversation by closing the door. Then she took a candle from the row on the dining-room mantle, lighted it and went up to her own room. Standing before the old-fashioned bureau with its little oval mirror, she hastily arranged her hair. She did not wish to go to prayer meeting at the chapel, but she felt that she must. The Come-Outer gatherings, with their noisy singing and shouting, had grown more and more repugnant to her.

She blew out the candle and came out into the hall at the head of the stairs. She was about to descend when she heard voices. The door of the dining room opened and closed. She felt certain that Nat had returned and wondered who was with him. Then she heard her uncle's voice, speaking sharply and with unwonted sternness.

"I don't know what 'tis you want to see about," said Captain Eben. "You say it's important; well, it's got to be to keep me from my meetin'. I ought to be on the Lord's business this minute and nothin' worldly's goin' to keep me from servin' Him. So speak quick. What is it?"

The voice that answered was one that Grace recognized, though she had never before heard in it the note of agitation and undignified excitement. There were no ponderous pauses and "Hum-ha's" now.

"Don't be a fool, Hammond!" it said. "And don't stand there preaching. Lock that door! Get a lamp! Are you su'a there's nobody but us in the house?"

Captain Elkanah Daniels! Captain Elkanah visiting a Come-Outer! and the leader of the Come-Outers!! Grace caught her breath. What in the world— She started to descend and then a thought flashed to her mind. She stopped short.

"I ain't the fool, Elkanah," she heard her uncle retort sternly. "The fools are them who are deaf to the call from on high. My foot was on the threshold of His house when you led me astray. It's never halted there afore. I warn you—"

"Stop! Shut up! Eben Hammond, I tell you that your precious church—yes and mine, the Regular church of Trumet—will go to rack and ruin if you and me don't pull together this night."

"And I tell you, Elkanah Daniels, I'll have no blasphemy here. That little sanctuary up the road is founded on a rock and neither you nor any of your Phari'sein' priest-worshippin' crew can shake it. The Almighty'll protect His own. As for the Reg'lar church, that's no concern of mine."

"But I tell you 'tis your concern. Or if the church isn't, your own family is."

There was an instant of silence. Grace, crouching on the stairs, noticed the change in her uncle's voice as he answered.

"My own family?" he repeated slowly. "My own— And the Reg'lar church— What do you mean? Has Nat—"

"No, he ain't. But that cussed girl of yours—"

"Stop!" shouted Captain Hammond. "Elkanah Daniels, for your own sake now, be careful. If you don't to say a word, another word like that, I'll—"

"If I dat! The hussey! But there's no use talkin' to you. You're as crazy as a Bedlamite. Either that, or you're in the game with her. If you are, I warn you—"

"Stop! What game? What game do you mean? Gracie! My Gracie! What is it? For mercy sakes, Elkanah—"

"Humph! I wondered if I couldn't get some sense into you, finally. Lock that door!"

"I will! I will! But Elkanah—"

"Lock it! Give me the key!"

The click of the lock sounded sharply.

"Where's the lamp?" demanded Daniels. "And the matches? Don't stand there shaking."

A smell of sulphur floated out into the hall. Then the sickly glow of the "fluid" lamp shone through the doorway.

"What ails you?" asked Elkanah. "Are you struck dumb? Now go and see if there's anybody else in the house."

"But—but there ain't. I know there ain't. Hannah's gone and Gracie's at meetin' by this time."

"She? Humph! Well, maybe she's at meetin' and maybe she isn't. Maybe she's over in Peters's pines, hugging and kissing that man she's met

there every Sunday for I don't know how long— Here! let go, you old fool! Let go, I tell you!"

"You liar!" snarled Captain Eben. "You low-lived liar! By the Almighty, Elkanah Daniels! I'll— You take that back or I'll choke the everlasting soul out of you. I will—"

"Let go, you lunatic! You'll kill yourself. Listen! I'm not lying. It's the truth. She's met a man, I tell you. Been meeting him for months, I guess. There! now will you listen?"

"His name's John Ellery, and he's minister of the Regular church in this town; that's who he is! Here! hold up! Good Lord! are you dyin'? Hold up!"

The girl on the stairs sprang to her feet. Her head was reeling and she could scarcely stand, but she blindly began the descent. She must go to her uncle. She must. But Captain Daniels's voice caused her to halt once more.

"There! there!" it said in a tone of relief. "That's better. Set still now. Be quiet, that's it. Shall I get some water?"

"No, no! let me be. Just let me be. I ain't what I used to be and this—I'm all right, I tell you. Grace! And—and— What was it you just said?—I—I don't b'lieve I heard it right."

"I said that daughter of yours, or niece, or whatever she is, this Grace Van Horne, has been meeting young Ellery, our minister, in Peters's grove. Been meeting him and walking with him, and kissing him. She's met him in those pines every Sunday afternoon for a long time. She was seen there with him this afternoon."

"Who—who saw her?"

"Never mind. The one that did'll never tell—unless it's necessary. They are fixin' to be married, and—"

"Married! She marry a Reg'lar minister! Oh—"

"Hush! Listen! They ain't married yet. We can stop 'em, you and I, if we get right to work. It isn't too late. Will you help?"

"Will I—I Go on! tell me more!"

"We can stop 'em. I know it would be a good catch for her, the sneaking, designing— Well, never mind. But it can't be. It shan't be. You've got to tell her so, Hammond. We folks of the Regular church have pride in our society; we won't have it disgraced. And we have been proud of our minister, the young, rattle-headed fool! We'll save him if we can. If we can't—the speaker's teeth grated—"then we'll send him to eternal smash or die trying."

"But I can't believe it's true. It's a mistake; some other girl and not Gracie. Why, she don't even know him. She wouldn't— But she has been out every Sunday afternoon for weeks. If it should be!"

The chair creaked. Evidently, Captain Eben was rising slowly to his feet.

"Well?" repeated Elkanah.

"Elkanah Daniels," said Eben slowly, his voice shaking from nervous exhaustion and weakness, but with a fine ring of determination in every word, "Elkanah Daniels, you listen to me. I've heard you through. If your yarn is true, then my heart is broke, and I wish I might have died afore I heard it. But I didn't die and I have heard it. Now listen to me. I love that girl of mine better'n the whole wide world and yet I'd rather see her dead afore me than married to a Reg'lar minister. Disgrace to him! Disgrace to your miserable church! What about the disgrace to mine? And the disgrace to her? Ruin to your minister! Ruin to my girl here and hereafter is what I'm thinkin' of; that and my people who worship God with me. I'll talk to Grace. I'll talk to her. But not of what'll happen to him or you—or any of your cantin', lip-servin' crew. I'll tell her to choose between him and me. And if she chooses him, I'll send her out of that door. I'll do my duty and read her out of my congregation. And I'll know she's gone to everlasting hell, and that's worse'n the poorhouse. That's all to-night, Elkanah. Now you better go."

The lock turned; the door opened and closed. Grace, clinging to the balusters, heard Captain Hammond cross the room, slowly and feebly. She heard him enter the sitting room. By and by, pale, but more composed, and with her mind made up, she came down into the hall. Drawing a long breath, she turned into the sitting room to face her uncle. By the light shining through the dining-room door she saw him on his knees by the hair-cloth sofa. She spoke his name. He did not answer nor look up. At her touch his arm slid from the couch and he fell gently over upon his side on the carpet.

CHAPTER XI.

In Which Captain Eben Makes Port.

Half past eight. In the vestry of the Regular church John Ellery was conducting his prayer meeting. The attendance was as large as usual. Three seats, however, were vacant, and along the settees people were wondering where Captain Elkanah Daniels and his daughter might be. They had not missed a service for many a day. And where was Keziah Coffin?

At the Come-Outer chapel the testifying and singing were in full blast. But Ezekiel Bassett was leading, for Captain Eben Hammond had not made his appearance. Neither had Grace Van Horne, for that matter, but Captain Eben's absence was the most astonishing.

In the Regular parsonage Keziah sat alone by the sitting-room table. Prayer meeting and supper had forgotten entirely. The minister had not come home for his evening meal, and food was furthest from the housekeeper's thoughts. What should she do? What ought she to do? How could she avert the disaster so certain to overwhelm those two young people

the moment their secret became known?

She rose and again donned her bonnet and shawl. She was about to blow out the lamp when she heard rapid footsteps, the sound of some one running along the sidewalk in front of the house. As she listened, the footsteps sounded on the path. Whoever the runner was he was coming to the parsonage. She stepped to the door and opened it.

The runner was a boy, Maria Higgins' boy Isaac, whose widowed mother lived down by the shore. He did the chores at the Hammond tavern. His freckled face was dripping with perspiration and he puffed and blew like a stranded whale.

"Have ye—have ye," panted like, "have ye—seen the doctor anywheres, Mis' Coffin?"

"Who? Dr. Parker? Have I seen— what in the world are you comin' here after the doctor for?"

"Cause—cause I didn't know where else to come. I been to his house and he ain't to home. Nobody ain't to home. His wife, Mis' Parker, she's gone up to Boston y'es-day on the coach, and—and it's all dark and the house door's open and the shay's gone, so—"

"Who's sick? Who wants him?"

"And—and—all the rest of the houses round here was shut up 'cause everybody's to meetin'. I peeked in at the meetin' house and he ain't there, and I see your light and—"

"Who's sick? Tell me that, won't you?"

"Cap'n Eben. He's awful sick. I callate he's goin' to die, and Gracie she—"

"Cap'n Eben? Eben Hammond! Dyin'? What are you talkin' about?"

"Hub! hub!" puffed the messenger impatiently. "Didn't I tell ye? Cap'n Eben's dyin'. I seen him. All white and still and—and awful. And Gracie, she's all alone and—"

"Hold on! Stop! I'll tell you where the doctor is most likely. Up to Mrs. Prince's. She's been poorly and he's prob'ly been called there. Run! run fast as ever you can and get him and I'll go to Grace this minute. The poor thing! Don't tell anybody. Not a soul but the doctor. Half this town'll be runnin' to find out if you do, and that poor girl must be distracted already. I'll go to her. You get Dr. Parker and tell him to hurry."

"I'll tell him; don't you fret."

He was gone, running faster than ever. A moment later Keziah followed him, running also.

As she ran on, a rattle of wheels and the thud of hoofs came from behind her. Then a rocking chaise, drawn by a galloping horse, shot by. Dr. Parker's carriage, she was sure. Dr. Higgins' boy must have met the doctor and delivered his message.

The horse and chaise were standing by the front gate of the tavern as she pantingly drew near it. The side door of the house was ajar and she opened it softly and entered. The dining room was empty. There was a light on the sitting-room table and low voices came from the little bedroom adjoining. Then, from the bedroom, emerged Dr. Parker and Grace Van Horne. The girl was white and there were dark circles under her eyes. The doctor was very grave.

Keziah stepped forward and held out both hands. Grace looked, recognized her, and with a cry ran toward her, running also.

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SNAPSHOTS AT STATE NEWS

All Pennsylvania Gleaned for Items of Interest.

REPORTS ABOUT CROPS GOOD

Farmers Busy in Every Locality— Churches Raising Funds for Many Worthy Objects—Items of Business and Pleasure that interest.

Scranton ice dealers have doubled prices.

Cigars and tobacco cannot be bought in Bellefonte on Sunday.

Four deaths have resulted in the past week from measles at Berwick.

Eugene Lentz, a hotelkeeper at Ralston, committed suicide by hanging in a barn.

Stock and machinery worth \$200,000 were bought by Centre county farmers this spring.

Centre county timber owners of 150,000 acres have organized to be able to fight forest fires.

There are about 20 applicants for the job of janitorship of the new Municipal Building at West Chester.

Harry K. Reidenouer, of Reading, pleaded guilty to selling colored oleomargarine and was fined \$100.

The supervisors of Oley township, Berks county, have purchased a stone-crusher to macadamize roads.

Berville Grange members have agreed to co-operate to the extent of indorsing each other's notes when the machinery season is on.

While trying to get out of bed Mrs. D. F. Gerges, of Spring City, who is recovering from a long illness, fell and fractured her right arm.

To save \$1,800 a year, Lock Haven Council decided to discontinue the hauling away of ashes from the central part of the city.

Roy Cash, of Chester, tripped on a brick and fell so heavily on the sidewalk that he dislocated his shoulder-blade.

Eugene Arnold of Bethlehem, a brakeman of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, suffered the loss of a leg when struck by a train.

Wilson Sloyer, of South Bethlehem, while taking a bath was nearly asphyxiated by gas, which escaped from a patent water-heating device.

The old German Catholic Church of East Mauch Chunk has been razed, preparatory to the erection of a \$60,000 parochial school on its site.

The National Park Commission has increased to \$500 its reward for detection of the Gettysburg monument vandals.

An engine tender struck and injured Michael J. Mullen, of Mount Carbon, giving him his fourth close call to death.

A half-million dollars' worth of stock and machinery have been bought by Adams county farmers at public sales in six weeks.

A "Save-the-Baby" Show, the opening feature of the Lycoming County Rural Progress Conference, started in Williamsport.

Andrew and Richard Mellon, millionaire bankers at Pittsburgh, have given nearly a quarter-million, establishing an industrial research laboratory.

Emaus' pioneer industry, the Keystone Silk Mill, which has been in the hands of receivers, will soon start up again and give employment to 500 hands.

Over 1,200 persons attended the anniversary sale of George F. Frey, driver, at Yellow House, Berks county, and over \$6,000 worth of live stock was sold.

The Schwartzwald Reformed Church has elected the Rev. J. Lucien Rousch, of Sunnyside, as its pastor, to succeed the Rev. James R. Brown, of Esterly, who resigned after serving 30 years.

Among the Pennsylvanians on the honor list of Wellesley College are Miss Esther Balderston, of Ridgway; Miss Katharine Mayo, of Smethport, and Miss Nellie Beach of Ridgway.

When the runaway team of Andrew Piko, of Limekiln, dashed down a street in Pottstown, with a little child as the only occupant of the carriage, George St. Clair and Edward Troutman ran from the sidewalk and at the risk of their lives stopped the horse.

J. H. Isett has in the cellar at his home at Ashcom two apples which were placed there during the fall of 1911. Mr. Isett says the apples are in a perfect state of preservation, and when asked what variety they were, he said, "Just apples."

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