

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 arranged to move from Trumet to Boston, following the death of her brother, for whom she had kept house. Kyan Pepper, widower, offers marriage, and is indignantly refused. Capt. Elikanah 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 Ebenezer 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 fog and storm. Ellery finds a hard one, but I don't run away from it. She stopped short; then covering her face with her apron, she ran from the room. John Ellery heard her descending the stairs, sobbing as she went.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"Never mind about the other man. He was handsome then, in a way, and he had money to spend, and he liked me. He wanted me to marry him. If I had written the one that went away, had thought of such a thing, but he didn't write. And, my pride being hurt, and all, I finally said yes to the second chap."

"Well, for the first year 'twas't so bad. Not happiness exactly, but not misery either. That come later. His people was well off and he'd never worked much of any. He did for a little while after we was married, but not for long. Then he begun to drink and carry on and lost his place. Pretty soon he begun to neglect me and at last went off to sea afore the mast. We was poor as poverty, but I could have stood that; I did stand it. I took in sewin' and kept up an appearance, somehow. Never told a soul. His folks come patronizin' around and offered me money, so's I needn't disgrace them. I sent 'em rightabout in a hurry. Once in a while he'd come home, get tipsy and abuse me. Still I said nothin'. Thank God, there was no children; that's the one thing I've been thankful for."

"You can't keep such things quiet always. People are bound to find out. They come to me and said, 'Why don't you leave him?' but I wouldn't. I could have divorced him easy enough, there was reasons plenty, but I wouldn't do that. Then word came that he was dead, drowned off in the East Indies somewheres. I come back here to keep house for Sol, my brother, and I kept house for him till he died and they offered me this place here at the parsonage. There! that's my story, part of it, more'n I ever told a livin' soul afore, except Sol."

She ceased speaking. The minister, who had sat silent by the window, apathetically listening or trying to listen, turned his head.

"I apologize, Mrs. Coffin," he said dully, "you have had trials, hard ones. But—"

"But they ain't as hard as yours, you think? Well, I haven't quite finished yet. After word come of my husband's death, the other man come and wanted me to marry him. And I wanted to—oh, how I wanted to! I cared as much for him as I ever did; more, I guess. But I wouldn't—I wouldn't, though it wrung my heart out to say no. I give him up—why? 'cause I thought I had a lady laid on me."

Ellery sighed. "I can see but one duty," he said. "That is the duty given us by God, to marry the one we love."

Keziah's agitation, which had grown as she told her story, suddenly flashed into flame.

"Is that as far as you can see?" she asked fiercely. "It's an easy duty, then—or looks easy now. I've got a harder one; it's to stand by the promise I gave and the man I married."

He looked at her as if he thought she had lost her wits.

"The man you married?" he replied. "Why, the man you married is dead."

"No, he ain't. You remember the letter you saw me readin' that night when you come back from Come-Outers' meetin'? Well, that letter was from him. He's alive. Yes, he's alive. Alive and knockin' round the world somewheres. Every little while he writes me for money and, if I have any, I send it to him. Why? 'cause I'm a coward, after all, I guess, and I'm scared he'll do what he says he will and come back. Perhaps you

secret. And, as Christians, we should forget and forgive."

Kyan Pepper was another whom the news of the engagement surprised greatly. When Lavinia told him of it, at the dinner table, he dropped the knife he was holding and the greasy section of fishball balanced upon it. Remembering what he had seen in the grove he could not understand; but he also remembered, even more vividly, what Keziah Coffin had promised to do if he ever breathed a word. And he vowed again that that word should not be breathed.

Keziah was the life of the gloomy parsonage. Without her the minister would have broken down. He called her "Aunt Keziah" at her request and she continued to call him "John." This was in private, of course; in public he was "Mr. Ellery" and she "Mrs. Coffin."

In his walks about town he saw nothing of Grace. She and Mrs. Ponderberry and Captain Nat were still at the old home and no one save themselves knew what their plans might be. Yet oddly enough, Ellery was the first outsider to learn these plans and that from Nat himself.

He met the captain at the corner of the "Turnoff" one day late in August. He tried to make his bow seem cordial, but was painfully aware that it was not. Nat, however, seemed not to notice, but crossed the road and held out his hand.

"Well, Mr. Ellery," said Captain Nat, "I won't keep you. I see you're in a hurry. Just thought I'd run alongside a minute and say good-by. Don't know 'll see you again afore I sail."

"Before you sail? You—you are going away?"

"Yup. My owners have been after me for a good while, but I wouldn't leave home on account of dad's health. Now he's gone, I've got to be gettin' back to salt water again. My ship's been drydocked and overhauled and she's in New York now loadin' for Manila. It's a long voyage, even if I come back direct, which ain't likely. So I may not see the old town again for a couple of years. Take care of yourself, won't you? Good men, especially ministers, are scarce, and from what I hear about you I callyate Trumet needs you."

"When are you going?"

"Last of next week, most likely."

"Will you—shall you go alone? Are you to be—to be—"

"Married? No. Grace and I have talked it over and we've agreed it's best to wait till I come back. She'll stay in the old house with Hannah."

"Good-by, captain."

"Good-by. Er—I say, Mr. Ellery, how's things at the parsonage? Er—Keziah—Mrs. Coffin, your housekeeper—is she smart?"

"Yes, she's well."

"That's good. Say, you might tell her good-by for me, if you want to. Tell her I wished her all the luck there ain't any. And—just say that there ain't any—well, that her friend—say just that, will you?—her friend said 'twas all right. She'll understand; it's a—a sort of joke between us."

"Very good, captain; I'll tell her."

They shook hands and parted. Didama and her fellow news-venders distributed the tale of Captain Nat's sailing broadcast during the next few days. There was much wonderment at the delayed marriage, but the general verdict was that Captain Eben's recent death and the proper respect due to it furnished sufficient excuse. Hannah Poundberry, delighted at being so close to the center of interest, talked and talked, and thus Grace was spared the interviews which would have been a trouble to her. Nat left town via the packet, on the following Wednesday. Within another week came the news that his ship, the Sea Mist, had sailed from New York, bound for Manila.

one of these occasions, "how are you getting on at home? Has your sister locked you up again?"

"No, sir, she ain't," replied Kyan. "Lavinia, she's sort of different lately. She ain't nigh so—so down on a feller as she used to be. I can get out once in a while by myself nowadays, when she wants to write a letter or somethin'. Writes one about every once in a week. I don't know who they're to, nuther. She's talkin' of goin' up to Sandwich pretty soon."

"So she says."

"To leave you here? Why! well, I'm surprised."

"Godfrey's mighty! so be I. But she says she b'lieves she needs a change and there's church conference up there, you know, and she figgers that she ain't been to conference she don't know when. I s'pose you'll go, won't you, Mr. Ellery?"

"Probably."

Lavinia got herself elected a delegate and went, in company with Captain Elikanah, Mrs. Mayo, and others, to the conference. She was a faithful attendant at the meetings and seemed to be having a very good time. She introduced the minister to one Caleb Pratt, a resident of Sandwich, whom she said she had known ever since she was a girl.

"Mr. Pratt's a cousin of Thankful Payne over to home," volunteered Lavinia. "You know Thankful, Mr. Ellery?"

Lavinia confided to her pastor that Mr. Pratt made the best shoes in Ostable county. He could fit any kind of feet, she declared, and the minister ought to try him sometime. She added that he had money in the bank.

Spring come more; then summer. And now people were again speaking of Captain Nat Hammond. His ship was overdue, long overdue. Even in those days, when there were no cables and the telegraph was still something of a novelty, word of his arrival should have reached Trumet months before this. But it had not come, and did not. Before the summer was over, the wise heads of the retired skippers were shaking dubiously. Something had happened to the Sea Mist.

As the weeks and months went by without news of the missing vessel, this belief became almost a certainty. At the Come-Outer chapel, where Ezekiel Bassett now presided, prayers were offered for the son of their former leader.

One afternoon Keziah came into Ellery's study, where he was laboring with his next Sunday sermon, and sat down in the rocking-chair. She had been out and still wore her bonnet and shawl.

"John," she said, "I ask your pardon for disturbin' you. I wanted to ask if you knew Mrs. Prince was sick?"

"No, is she? I'm awfully sorry. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, I guess not. Only she's got a cold and is kind of under the weather. I thought p'raps you'd like to run up and see her. She thinks the world and all of you, 'cause you was so good when she was distressed about her son. Poor old thing! she's had a hard time of it. I just heard that she was aill' from Didama Rogers. Didama said she was all but dyin', so I knew she prob'ly had a little cold, or somethin'. If she was really very bad, Di would have had her buried by this time, so's to be sure her news was ahead of anybody else's. I ain't been up there, but I met her 'tother mornin'."

"Didama?"

"No; Mrs. Prince. She'd come down to see Grace."

"Oh."

"Yes. The old lady's been awful kind and sympathizin' since—since this new trouble. It reminds her of the loss of her own boy, I presume likely, and so she feels for Grace. John, what do they say around town about—about him?"

"Captain Hammond? Why, if you mean that they've all given up hope, I should hardly say that. Captain Mayo and Captain Daniels were speakin' of it in my hearing the other day and they agreed that there was still a chance."

"A pretty slim one, though, they call'ded, didn't they?"

"Well, they were—were doubtful, of course. There was the possibility that he had been wrecked somewhere and hadn't been picked up. They cited several such cases. The South Pacific is full of islands where vessels seldom touch, and he and his crew may be on one of these."

"John," she answered, with a sigh, "sometimes I think you'd better get another housekeeper."

"What? Are you going to leave me? You?"

"Oh, 'twouldn't be because I wanted to. But it seems almost as if there was a kind of fate hangin' over me and that," she smiled faintly, "as if 'twas sort of catchin', as you might say. Everybody I ever cared for has had somethin' happen to 'em. My brother died; my—the man I married went to the dogs; then you and Grace had to be miserable and I had to help make you so; I sent Nat away and he blamed me and—"

"No, no. He didn't blame you. He sent you word that he didn't. Aunt Keziah, you're my anchor to windward, as they say down here. If I lost you, goodness knows where I should drift. Don't you ever talk of leaving me again."

"Thank you, John. I'm glad you want me to stay. I won't leave yet awhile; never—unless I have to. John, I had another letter 'tother day."

"You did? From—from that man?"

"Yup, from—"

"For a moment it seemed as if she were about to pronounce her husband's name, something she had never done in his presence; but if she thought of it, she changed her mind.

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CHAPTER XIII.

In Which the Sea Mist Sails.

They buried Captain Eben in the little Come-Outer cemetery at the rear of the chapel. The Come-Outers were there, all of them, and some members of the Regular society, Captain Zeb Mayo, Dr. Parker, Keziah Coffin, Mrs. Higgins and Ike. The little company filed out of the cemetery, and Captain Eben Hammond was but a memory in Trumet.

Keziah lingered to speak a word with Grace. The girl, looking very white and worn, leaned on the arm of Captain Nat, whose big body acted as a buffer between her and oversympathetic Come-Outers. Mrs. Coffin silently held out both hands and Grace took them eagerly.

"Auntie," she whispered, "tell me: Did a letter—Did he—"

"Yes, it came. I gave it to him."

"Did—did he tell you? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know, deary."

"Did he—is he—"

"He's well, deary. He'll be all right. I'll look out for him."

"You will, won't you? You won't let him do anything—"

"Not a thing. Don't worry. We've had a long talk and he's going to stay right here and go on with his work. And nobody else'll ever know, Grace."

"O Aunt Keziah! If I could be one half as patient and brave and sweet as you are—"

"Ssh! here comes Nat. Be kind to him. He's sufferin', too; maybe more'n you imagine. Here she is, Nat. Take her back home and be good to her."

"I tell you," broke in the voice of Captain Zeb Mayo, "Keziah, I've been waitin' for you. Get in my shay and I'll drive you back to the parsonage."

Mrs. Coffin accepted the invitation and a seat in the chaise beside Captain Zeb. The captain spoke of the dead Come-Outer and of his respect for him in spite of the difference in creed. He also spoke of the Rev. John Ellery and of the affection he had come to feel for the young man.

"I'm glad to hear you say so. Of course Cap'n Elikanah is boss of the parish committee and—"

"What? No, he ain't nuther. He's head of it, but his vote counts just one and no more. What makes you say that?"

"Oh, nuthin'. Only I thought maybe, long as Elikanah was feelin' that Mr. Ellery wa'n't orthodox enough, he might be goin' to make a change. I didn't mean to stir you up, Zebedee. But from things Cap'n Daniels has said I gathered that he was runnin' the committee. And, as I'm a friend of Mr. Ellery, it—"

"Friend! Well, so'm I, ain't I? If you ever hear of Daniels tryin' any tricks against the minister, you send for me, that's all. I'll show him, Boss! Humph!"

The wily Keziah alighted at the parsonage gate with the feeling that she had sown seed in fertile ground. She was quite aware of Captain Zeb's jealousy of the great Daniels. And the time might come when her parson needed an influential friend on the committee and in the Regular society.

The news of the engagement between Captain Nat Hammond and Grace Van Horne, told by Dr. Parker to one or two of his patients, spread through Trumet like measles through a family of small children. Annabel Daniels and her father had not expected it. They were, however, greatly pleased. In their discussion, which lasted far into the night, Captain Elikanah expressed the opinion that the unexpected denouement was the result of his interview with Eben.

"I think, pa," she said, "that it's our duty, yours and mine, to treat him just as we always have. He doesn't know that we know, and we will keep the

secret. And, as Christians, we should forget and forgive."

Kyan Pepper was another whom the news of the engagement surprised greatly. When Lavinia told him of it, at the dinner table, he dropped the knife he was holding and the greasy section of fishball balanced upon it. Remembering what he had seen in the grove he could not understand; but he also remembered, even more vividly, what Keziah Coffin had promised to do if he ever breathed a word. And he vowed again that that word should not be breathed.

CHAPTER XIV.

In Which Trumet Talks of Captain Nat.

Summer was over, autumn came, passed, and it was winter—John Ellery's first winter in Trumet. Fish weirs were taken up, the bay filled with ice, the packet ceased to run, and the village settled down to hibernation until spring. The stage came through on its regular trips, except when snow or slush rendered the roads impassable, but passengers were very few. Twice there were wrecks, one of a fishing schooner, the crew of which were fortunate enough to escape by taking to the dories, and another, a British bark, which struck on the farthest bar and was beaten to pieces by the great waves, while the townspeople stood helplessly watching from the shore, for launching a boat in that surf was impossible. Mr. Pepper made no more calls at the parsonage, and when the minister met him at church or elsewhere, seemed anxious to avoid an interview.

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CHINA'S ADDRESS TO THE WORLD

Its Declaration of Independence Received Here.

FORMAL RECOGNITION SOON.

State Department Officials Assert That Document Reflects the Influence of Young Chinese Members.

Washington.—The Chinese declaration of independence, which took the form of an address to the world, was cabled here from Peking, and after being read in the Cabinet meeting was made public. State Department officials declared that it reflected the influence of the young Chinese members who have been educated in American colleges. The President and his Cabinet praised it enthusiastically, and formal recognition of the republic by the United States awaits only the actual organization of the constituent assembly.

The text of the address follows: "On this eighth day of the fourth month, in the second year of the republic of China, the date fixed for the first opening of our permanent national assembly, the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, having met in these halls to celebrate the event, now make this declaration of their sentiments.

Will of Heaven. "The will of heaven is manifested through the will of the people. That the hundreds of millions of the people possess the authority of the state is not proclaimed now for the first time. Monarchy, so long corrupt, proved unworthy of the grave responsibilities entrusted to it by the will of the people, but with the introduction of popular government the representatives of the people must share the likes and dislikes of the people. They are to give expression to the desires and voice the will of the people; they hold the reins in behalf of the nation to govern with severity or leniency, with parsimony or extravagance; they become the pivot upon which the prosperity of the state is made to turn. For the success or failure, safety or danger, adversity or good fortune, theirs is the merit or the blame.

"Can we be otherwise than anxious? Yet, through great tribulation, the spring comes to prosperity, and our very bad management and anxieties are a means to happiness. Now, therefore, we unite to form this assembly and presume to publish our aspirations. May ours be a just government. May our five races lay aside their prejudices. May rain and sunshine bring bounteous harvest and cause the husbandman to rejoice. May the scholar be happy in his home and the merchant conduct his trade in peace. May no duty of government be unfulfilled and unhidden wound go unexpressed. Thus may the glory be spread abroad, and these our words be echoed far and wide, that those in distant lands who hear may rejoice, our neighbors on every side give us praise, and may the new life of the old nation be lasting and unending. Who of us can dare to be neglected of his duties?"

WOMAN TO RUN COMMONS.

Will Be First Time in History Of Princeton—To Feed 800 Students.

Princeton, N. J.—For the first time in the history of Princeton University a woman will have charge of the feeding of more than 800 members of the two lower classes here next year, as a result of the appointment of Miss Florence Corbett, of New York city, as manager of the college dining rooms. Miss Corbett will have entire charge of the "commons" and will personally direct the buying, culinary and general executive departments. There has been dissatisfaction among university authorities with the present system, which consists of a man manager, working under the supervision of an undergraduate committee. As members of the undergraduate classes are required to eat at the university dining halls, 2,400 meals a day will be supplied under Miss Corbett's supervision.

DUEL WITH KNIVES.

A Woman and a Man Carve Each Other Up.

Fort William, Ont.—Mrs. M. Benjamin, aged 18, and Sam Jacobs, aged 29, fought with knives in the woman's home here. Both are in the hospital, the woman with a gash in the abdomen and the man with 13 wounds in his chest and stomach. There is little chance for either. Mrs. Benjamin claims that Jacobs attacked her.

KILLS WIFE; GIVES HIMSELF UP.

Husband Maddened By Sight Of Man Leaving Her Room.

Clarksburg, W. Va.—Maddened when he saw a man leaving his wife's apartment at the home of her mother here, Everett Davis seized a shotgun and shot the wife dead. He then walked to the police station and gave himself up.

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