

KEZIAH COFFIN

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Cy Whittaker's Place
Cap'n Eli, Etc.

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gling into a garment. "I know this must seem strange. You see, I came on the coach as far as Bayport and then we lost a wheel in a rut. There was a—oh, dear, where is that? This is supreme! I believe I was saying there happened to be a man coming this way with a buggy and he offered to help me along. He was on his way to Wellmouth. So I left my trunk to come later and took my valise. It rained on the way and I was wet through. I stopped at Captain Daniels' house and the girl said he had gone with his daughter to the next town, but that they were to stop here at the parsonage on their way. So there I had to fight, at last—so I came, hoping to find them. The door was open and I came in. The captain and his daughter were not here, but as I was pretty wet, I thought I would seize the opportunity to change my clothes. I had some dry—er—things in my valise. I was just as they came, you see, and I assure you I—well, it was the most embarrassing—I'm coming now."

The door opened. The two in the sitting room huddled close together, Keziah holding the broom like a battle-ax, ready for whatever might develop. From the dimness of the tightly shuttered study stepped the owner of the voice, a stranger, a young man, his hair rumpled, his tie disarranged, and the buttons of his waistcoat filling the wrong buttonholes. Despite this evidence of the hasty toilet in semi-darkness, he was not unimpressive. Incidentally, he was blushing furiously. "I didn't speak," he said, "because you took me by surprise and I wasn't, as I explained—er—presentable. Besides, I was afraid of frightening you. I assure you I hurried as fast as I could, quietly, and when you began to talk—his expression changed and there was a twitch at the corner of his mouth—I tried to hurry still faster, hoping you might not hear me and I could make my appearance—or my escape—sooner. As for entering the house—well, I considered it, in a way my house; at least, I knew I should live in it for a time, and—"

"Live in it?" repeated Keziah. "Live in it? Why? mercy on us! you don't mean to say you're then you came, you must have been looking at her with an expression which, as it expressed so very much, is beyond ordinary powers of description.

"My name is Ellery," said the stranger. "I am the minister—the new minister of the Regular society."

Then even Keziah blushed.

CHAPTER III.

In Which Keziah Assumes a Guardian-ship.

Grace left the parsonage soon after the supposed tramp disclosed his identity. Her farewells were hurried and she firmly refused Mrs. Coffin's not-too-insistent appeal to return to the house "up street" and have supper. She said she was glad to meet Mr. Ellery. The young minister affirmed his delight in meeting her. Then she disappeared in the misty twilight and John Ellery surreptitiously wiped his perspiring forehead with his cuff, having in his late desire for the primal necessities forgotten such a trifling incident as a handkerchief. The minister smiled rather one-sidedly.

"It's been something of a day for me," he said. "I am ahead of time and I've made a lot of trouble, I'm afraid. But yesterday afternoon I was ready and, to tell the truth, I was eager to come and see my new home and get at my work." So I started on the morning train. Then the stage broke down and I began to think I was stranded at Bayport. But that kind-hearted chap from Wellmouth—I believe that's where he lived—happened to pull up to watch us wrestling with the smashed wheel, and when he found I was in a hurry to get to Trumet, offered to give me a lift. His name was—was Bird. No, that wasn't it, but it was something like Bird, or some kind of a bird."

"Bird?" repeated Keziah thoughtfully. "There's no Birds that I know of in Wellmouth. Hum! Hey? That's a Sparrow, was it?"

"That was it, Sparrow."

"Good land! Emulous Sparrow. Run considerable to whiskers and tongue, didn't he?"

"Why, yes; he did wear a beard. As for tongue—well, he was conversational if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean. If you rode twelve miles with me, you must have had an earache for the last six. Did he ask a question or two about your personal affairs, here and there between times?"

Mr. Ellery laughed. "Yes, one or two, between times," he admitted.

"I shan't die of surprise. Did you tell him who you was?"

"No-o, to be honest, I didn't. He was so very anxious to find out that—well, I dodged. I think he believed I was going to visit Captain Daniels."

Still, some one may have seen me come here."

"No, no, they didn't. This fog is as thick as injun-meal puddin'. Nobody saw you."

"Well, with some hesitation, 'the young lady who was here with you—' 'Oh, Grace Van Hornel! She's all right. She won't tell. She ain't that kind.'"

"Van Hornel? That doesn't sound like a New England name."

"Tant! Her folks come from Jersey somewhere. But she was adopted by old Cap'n Hammond, who keeps the tavern down on the bay shore by the packer's wharf, and she lived in Trumet since she was six years old. Her father was Teunis Van Hornel, and he was mate on Cap'n Eben's coastin' schooner and was drowned off Hatteras. Eben was saved just by the skin of his teeth and got a broken hip and religion while it happened. His hip's better except that he's somewhat lame, but his religion's been more and more feverish ever since. He's one of the head Come-Outers, and built their chapel with his own money. You mustn't think I'm speakin' lightly of religion, nor of Cap'n Eben, either. He's a dear good soul as ever was, but he is the narrowest kind of Come-Outer. His creed is just about as wide as the chapel door, and that's as narrow as the way leadin' to salvation; it is the way, too, so the Come-Outers think."

"What are Come-Outers? Some new sect?"

"Sakes alive! Haven't you heard of Come-Outers? Cat's foot! Well, you'll hear of 'em often enough from now on. They're folks who used to go to our church, the Regular, but left because the services was too worldly, with organs and choir singing, and the road to paradise too easy. No need for me to tell you any more. You'll learn."

Mr. Ellery was interested. He had been in Trumet but once before, on the occasion when he preached his trial sermon, and of that memorable visit remembered little except the sermon itself, the pews filled with captives and their families, and the awe-inspiring personality of Captain Elkanah Daniels, who had been his host. To a young man, the ink upon his diploma from the theological school still fresh, a trial sermon is a weighty matter, and the preaching of it weightier still. He had rehearsed it over and over in private, had delivered it almost through clenched teeth, and had returned to his room in the Boston boarding house with the conviction that it was an utter failure. Captain Elkanah and the gracious Miss Annabel, his daughter, had been kind enough to express gratification, and their praise alone saved him from despair. Then, to his amazement, the call had come. Of casual conversation at the church and about the Daniels table he could recall nothing. So there was another religious organization in town and that made up of seceders from his own church. He was surprised.

"Er—this Miss Van Hornel?" he asked. "Is she a—Come-Outer?"

Mrs. Coffin nodded. "Yes," she said. "She's one Couldn't be anything else and live with her Uncle Eben, as she calls him."

"Has Captain Hammond no children of his own?" he asked.

Keziah's answer was short for her. "Yes," she said. "One."

"Ah! another daughter?"

"No, a son. Name's Nathaniel, and he's a sea captain. He's on his way back from Surinam to New York now. They expect him to make port most any time, I believe. Now, Mr. Ellery, I s'pose we've got to arrange for your supper and stayin' overnight; and with this house the way 'tis and all, I don't see—"

"I guess," she said, "that the best thing for you to do will be to go to Cap'n Elkanah's. They'll be real glad to see you, and you'll be in time for supper, for Elkanah and Annabel have been to Denbro and they'll be late home. They can keep you overnight, too, for it's a big house with lots of rooms. Then, after breakfast to-morrow you come right here. I'll have things somewhere near ship-shape by then, I guess, though the cleanliness'll have to be mainly a lick and a promise until I can really get at it. Your trunk'll be here on the coach, I s'pose, and that'll be through early in the afternoon. Get on your hat and coat and I'll go with you to Elkanah's."

The young man demurred a little at thrusting himself upon the hospitality of the Daniels' home, but Keziah assured him that his unexpected coming would cause no trouble. So he entered the now dark study and came out wearing his coat and carrying his hat and valise in his hand.

"I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged to you," he said. "And, as we are going to be more or less together, or at least I guess so much from what you say—would you mind if I suggest a mutual introduction. I'm John Ellery; you know that already. And you—"

Keziah stopped short on her way to the door.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "If that ain't the very worst! Fact is, you dropped in so ahead of time and in such a irregular sort of way, that I never once thought of introducin' anybody; and I'm sure Grace didn't. I'm Keziah Coffin, and Cap'n Elkanah and I signed articles, so to speak, this mornin', and I'm goin' to keep house for you."

She explained the reason upsetting the former arrangement by which Le-rana Phelps was to have had the position.

"At the Daniels' door Keziah turned her new charge over to Matilda Snow, the hired girl. It was an indication of the family's social position that they kept 'hired help.' This was unusual in Trumet in those days, even among the well-to-do."

"Good night," said the young man, extending his hand. "Good night, Miss—or is it Mrs.—Coffin?"

"Shen! Good night," explained Matilda. "Husband died, fore she come back here to live. Guess he didn't amount to much; she never mentions his name."

Keziah, in the midst of her labors found time to coach her employer and companion in Trumet ways, and particularly in the ways which Trumet expected its clergyman to travel. Of the morning following his first night in the parsonage, he expressed himself as feeling the need of exercise. He thought he should take a walk.

"Well," said his housekeeper from her station opposite him at the breakfast table, "if I was you, I wouldn't take too long a one. You'd better be back here by ten, anyhow. When was you thinkin' of goin'?"

Mr. Ellery had no particular destination in mind. He would like to see something of the village and, perhaps if she could give him the names of a few of his parishioners, he might make a few calls. Keziah shook her head.

"Gracious goodness!" she exclaimed. "I wouldn't advise you to do that. You ain't been here long enough to make forenoon calls. If you should catch some of the women in this town with aprons and calico on, they'd never forgive you in this world. Wait till you get your feet set, you then and they'll be rigged out in their best bibs and tuckers. S'pose you found Annabel Daniels with her hat done up in curl papers; what do you think would happen? Mornin's are no time for ministers' calls. Even old Mr. Langley never made calls in the forenoon—and he'd been here thirty odd years."

"All right, you know best. Much obliged for the advice. Then I'll simply take my walk and leave the call until later."

"I'd be back by ten, though. Folks'll begin callin' on you by that time."

When, promptly at ten o'clock, the minister returned from his walk, he found Mrs. Rogers waiting in the sitting room. It is a prime qualification of an alert reporter to be first on the scene of a sensation. Didama was seated on a bench. Mr. Ellery's catechism began. Before it was over Keziah opened the door to admit Miss Pepper and her brother. "Kyan" was nervous and embarrassed in the housekeeper's presence. Lavinia was a glacial, moving majestically and freezing as it moved. Keziah, however, was not even touched by the frost; she greeted the pair cordially, and begged them to "take of their things."

It was dinner time before the catechists departed. The catechists came to the table with an impaired appetite. He looked troubled.

"Don't let it worry you, Mr. Ellery," observed Keziah calmly. "I think I can satisfy you. Honest and true, I ain't half as bad as you might think."

The minister looked more troubled than before; also surprised.

"Why, Mrs. Coffin!" he cried. "Could you hear?"

"kipper of the Regular church in Trumet. Also, he began to realize that, as such a skipper, he was most inexperienced. And Captain Daniels spoke his highly-considered qualifications, and personality. So the agreement was ratified, with relief on his part."

The first Sunday came and with it the first sermon. He read that sermon to Keziah on Saturday evening and she approved of it as a whole, though she criticized some of its details.

The service began at eleven o'clock. Outside the spring breeze stirred the budding silver-leaves, the distant breakers grumbled, the crows in the pines near Captain Eben Hammond's tavern cawed rhapsodically to the screaming gulls perched along the top of the breakwater. And seated on one of the hard benches of the little Come-Outer chapel, Grace Van Hornel heard her Uncle Eben, who, as usual, was conducting the meeting, speak of "them who, in purple and fine linen, with organs and trumpets and vain shows, are gathered elsewhere in this community to hear a hired priest make a mockery of the gospel!" (Amen!)

But John Ellery, the "hired priest," knew nothing of this. He did know, however, that he was the center of a new congregation, and that the people among whom he had been called to labor. Their praise or criticism meant everything to him; therefore he preached for dear life.

The sermon was a success. On Monday afternoon the minister made a new list. Keziah, hiding out of the platform, followed the order of chart of the main channel, she called it, with the safe ports marked and the shoals and rocky places labeled dangerous.

"You see," she said, "Trumet ain't a course you can navigate with your eyes shut. We divide ourselves into about four sets—aristocrats, poor relations, town folks, and seamen. The aristocrats are the big bugs like Cap'n Elkanah and the other well-off sea captains afloat and ashore. They're most all gone to the Regular church and the parish committee's steered by 'em. The poor relations are mainly widows and such whose husbands died or were lost at sea. Most of these are Regulars. The town folks are those that stay ashore and keep their own little shops or something. And then there's a set of men who do jobs or fishin'. So, if you really want to be safe, you must call on the aristocrats, first, so that on the poor relations, and so on after that. You won't be bothered with seamen much; they're mainly Come-Outers."

Ellery took the list from her hand and looked it over.

"Hum!" he said mustily. "Am I supposed to recognize these—er—Keziah?" he commanded. "Hum—hal Keziah, come in here a minute."

Keziah came in response to the call, her sewing in her hand. The renovation of the parsonage had so far progressed that she could now find time for a little sewing, after the dinner dishes were done.

"Keziah," said the captain pompously, "I expect you to look out for Mr. Ellery in every respect. The parish committee expects that—yes."

"I'll try," said Mrs. Coffin shortly. "Yes, well, that's all. You can go. We must be going, too, Mr. Ellery. Please consider our house at your disposal any time. Be neighborly—hum—hal—be neighborly."

"Yes," purred Annabel. "Do come and see us often. Congenial society is very scarce in Trumet, for me especially. We can read together. Are you fond of Moore, Mr. Ellery? I just dote on him."

The last "hum—ha" was partially drowned by the click of the gate. Keziah closed the dining-room door.

"Mrs. Coffin," said the minister, "I shan't trouble the parish committee. Be sure of that. I'm perfectly satisfied."

Keziah sat down in the rocker and her needle moved very briskly for a moment. Then she said, without looking up:

"That's good. I own up I like to hear you say it. And I am glad there are some things I do like about this new place of mine. Because—well, because there's likely to be others that I shan't like at all."

On Friday evening the minister conducted his first prayer meeting. Before it and afterwards, he heard a good deal concerning the Come-Outers. He learned that Captain Eben Hammond had preached against him in the chapel on Sunday. Most of his own parishioners seemed to think it a good joke.

The sun of the following Thursday morning rose behind a curtain of fog as dense as that of the day upon which Ellery arrived. A fat calm in the forenoon, the wind changed about three o'clock, and, beginning with a sharp and sudden squall from the north-west, blew hard and steady. Yet the fog still cloaked everything and refused to be blown away.

"Goin' out in this, Mr. Ellery!" exclaimed Keziah in amazement, as the minister put on his hat and coat about seven that evening. "Sakes alive! You won't be able to see the way to the gate. It's as dark as a nigger's pocket and thicker than young ones in a poor man's family, as my father used to say. You'll be wet through. Where in the world are you bound for this night?"

The minister equivocated. He said he had been in the house all day and felt like a walk.

"Well, take an umbrella, then," was the housekeeper's advice. "You'll need it before you get back, I callate. It was dark enough and thick enough, in all conscience. The main road was a black wet void, through which gleams from lighted windows were his, vague, yellow blotches. The umbrella was useful in the same way

"The Come-Outers are so vexed with us," muttered Miss Annabel, "that they won't even hold prayer meetings on the same night as ours. They have theirs on Thursday nights and it's as good as a play to hear them shout and sing and carry on. You'll enjoy the Come-Outers, Mr. Ellery. They're a perfect delight."

And as they rose to go Captain Elkanah asked:

"Is there anything you'd like done about the parsonage, Mr. Ellery? If so, it shall be done immediately. How are you satisfied with your house-keeper?"

"Very well, indeed, Captain Daniels," was the prompt reply.

"She's a character, isn't she?" giggled Annabel. "She was born here in Trumet, but went away to New Bedford when she was young and grew up there. Her maiden name was Hall, but while she was away she married a man named Annabel Coffin. They didn't live together very long and weren't happy, I guess. I don't know whose fault it was, nobody knows much of anything about it, for that's the one thing she won't talk about. Anyhow, the Coffin man was lost at sea, and after a while she came back to keep house for her brother Solomon. She's an awful odd stick, but she's a good cook, I believe, though I'm afraid you won't get the meals people such as ourselves, who've been so much in the city, are used to."

Ellery thought of the meals at his city boarding house and shuddered. He was an orphan and had boarded for years. Incidentally, he had worked

that a blind man's cane is useful, in feeling the way. Two or three startled lanterns who met the minister carried through the mist till he reached the "Corner" where the store was located and the roads forked. There, he turned to the right, into the way called locally "Hammond's Turn-off." A short distance down the "Turn-off" stood a small, brown-shingled building, its windows aghast. Opposite its door, on either side of the road, grew a spreading hornbeam tree surrounded by a cluster of swamp blackberry bushes. In the black shadow of the hornbeam Mr. Ellery stood still. He was debating in his mind a question: should he or should he not enter that building?

As he stood there, groups of people emerged from the fog and darkness and passed in at the door. "Some of them he had seen during his fortnight in Trumet. Others were strangers to him. A lantern danced and wobbled up the "Turn-off" from the direction of the bay shore, the great wheel. It drew near, and he saw that it was carried by an old man with long, white hair and chin beard, who walked with a slight limp. Beside him was a thin woman wearing a black poke bonnet and a shawl. In the rear of the pair came another woman, a young woman, judging by the way she was dressed and her lively, vigorous step. The trio halted on the platform of the building. The old man blew out the lantern. Then he threw the door open and a stream of yellow light poured over the group.

The young woman was Grace Van Hornel. The minister recognized her at once. Undoubtedly, the old man with the limp was her guardian, Captain Eben Hammond, who, by common report, had spoken of him, Ellery, as a "hired priest."

The door closed. A few moments thereafter the sound of a squeaky melodeon came from within the building. It wailed and quavered and groaned. Then, with a suddenness that was startling, came the first verse of a hymn, sung with tremendous enthusiasm:

"Oh, who shall answer when the Lord shall call His ransomed sinners home?"

The hallelujah chorus was still ringing when the watcher across the street stepped out from the shadow of the hornbeam. Without a pause he strode over to the platform. Another moment and the door had shut behind him.

The minister of the Trumet Regular church had entered the Come-Outer chapel to attend a Come-Outer prayer-meeting!

CHAPTER IV.

In Which the Parson Cruises in Strange Waters.

The Come-Outer chapel was as bare inside, almost as it was without. Bare wooden walls, a beamed ceiling, a raised platform at one end with a table and chairs and the melodeon upon it, rows of wooden settees for the congregation—that was all. As the minister entered, the worshippers were standing up to sing. Three or four sputtering oil lamps but dimly illumined the place and made recognition uncertain.

The second verse of the hymn was just beginning as Ellery came in. Most of the forty or more grown people in the chapel were too busy wrestling with the tune to turn and look at him. A child here and there in the back row twisted a curious neck but twisted back again as parental fingers tugged at his ear. The minister tipped to a dark corner and took his stand in front of a vacant settee.

The man whom Ellery had decided must be Captain Eben Hammond was standing on the low platform beside the table. A quaint figure, patriarchal with its flowing white hair and beard, puritanical with its set, smooth-shaven lips and tufted brows. Captain Eben held an open hymn book back in one hand and beat time with the other. He wore brass-bowed spectacles well down toward the tip of his nose. Swinging a heavy, stubby finger and singing in a high, quavering voice of no particular register, he led off the third verse:

"Oh, who shall weep when the roll is called And who shall weep for joy?"

The singing over, the worshippers sat down. Captain Eben took a figured handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. The thin, near-sighted young woman who had been humped over the keyboard of the melodeon, straightened up. The worshippers relaxed a little and began to look about.

Then the captain adjusted his spectacles and opened a Bible, which he took from the table beside him. Clearing his throat, he announced that he would read from the Word, tenth chapter of Jeremiah:

"Thus saith the Lord. Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them."

"Amen!"

The shout came from the second bench from the front, where Ezekiel Bassett, claim digger and fervent abolitionist, was always to be found on meeting nights. Ezekiel was the father of Susannah B. Bassett, "Sukey B." for short, who played the melodeon. He had been, by successive seizures, a Seventh Day Baptist, a Regular Adventist, a Millerite, a Regular Come-Outer. Later he was to become a Spiritualist and preside at table-tipping seances.

Ezekiel's amen was so sudden and emphatic that it startled the reader into looking up. Instead of the faces of his congregation, he found himself

treating to a view of their back hair. Nearly every head was turned toward the rear burner of the room, there was a buzz of whispering and, in front, many men and women were standing up to look.

Ezekiel Bassett stepped forward and whispered in his ear. The captain's expression of righteous indignation changed to one of blank astonishment. He, too, gazed at the dark corner. Then his lips tightened and he rapped smartly on the table.

"My friends," he said, "let us bow in prayer!"

John Ellery could have repeated that prayer, almost word for word, years after that night. The captain prayed for the few here gathered together. Let them be steadfast. Let them be constant in the way. The path they were treading might be narrow and beset with thorns, but it was the path leading to glory.

"Scuffers may sneer," he declared, his voice rising; "they may make mock of us, they may even come into thy presence to laugh at us, but theirs is the laugh that turns to groaning."

And so on, his remarks becoming more personal and ever pointing like a compass needle to the occupant of that seat in the corner.

"O Lord," prayed Captain Hammond, the perspiration in beads on his forehead, "thou hast said that the just shall become brutish and have not sense, and that they shan't prosper. Help us tonight to labor with this one that he may see his error and repent in sackcloth and ashes."

They sang once more, a hymn that prophesied woes to the unbeliever. Then Ezekiel Bassett rose to testify. The testimony was mainly to the effect that he was happy because he had fled to the ark of safety while there was yet time.

Captain Eben called for more testimony. But the testifiers were, to use the old minister's joke, backward in coming forward that evening. At an ordinary meeting, by this time, the shouts and enthusiasms would have been at their height and half a dozen Come-Outers on their feet at once, relating their experiences and proclaiming their happiness. But tonight there was a damper; the presence of the leader of the opposition cast a shadow over the gathering. Only the bravest attempted speech. The others sat silent, showing their resentment and contempt by frowning glances over their shoulders and half a dozen nods one to the other.

The captain looked over the meeting. "I'm ashamed," he said, "ashamed of the behavior of some of us. We have kept still when we should have justified our faith, and allowed the presence of a stranger to interfere with our duty to the Almighty. And I will say," he rose to his feet, "that I am trembling with indignation, to him who came here uninvited and broke up this meeting."

in, that it would be well for him to remember the words of Scripture, 'Woe unto ye, false prophets and workers of iniquity.' Let him remember what the divine wisdom put into my head to test tonight. The pastors have become brutish and have not sought the Lord; therefore they shall not prosper."

"Amen!" "Amen!" "Amen!" "So be it!" The cries came from all parts of the little room. They ceased abruptly, for John Ellery was on his feet.

"Captain Hammond," he said, "I realize that I have no right to speak in this building, but I must say one word. My coming here to-night may have been a mistake; I'm inclined to think it was. But I came not, as you seem to infer, to sneer and scoff; certainly I had no wish to disturb your service. I came because I had heard repeatedly, since my arrival in this town; of this society and its meetings. I had heard, too, that there seemed to be a feeling of antagonism, almost hatred, against me among you here. I couldn't see why. Most of you have I believe, been at one time members of the church where I preach. I wished to find out for myself how much of truth there was in the stories I had heard and to see if a better feeling between the two societies

might not be brought about. Those were my reasons for coming here to-night. As for my being a false prophet and a worker of iniquity," he smiled—"well, there is another verse of Scripture I would call to your attention: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

He sat down. There was silence for a moment and then a buzz of whispering. Captain Eben, who had heard him with a face of iron hardness, rapped the table.

"I'm Not Crying," She Gaspeth.

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