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Following the stairs, sobbing as she went.

All that afternoon he remained in his chair by the window. It was six o'clock, supper time, when he entered the kitchen. Keziah, looking up from the ironing board, saw him. He was white and worn and grim, but he held out his hand to her.

"Mrs. Coffin," he said, "I'm not going away. You've shown me what devotion to duty really means. I shall stay here and go on with my work."

Her face lit up. "Will you?" she said. "I thought you would. I was sure you was that kind."

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—did 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—"

"Bash! here comes Nat. Be kind to him. He's suffering, 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 Elkannah 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 Elkannah was feelin' that Mr. Ellery wasn'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—"

"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 used 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 Elkannah expressed the opinion that the unexpected denouncement 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 fishbald 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. Poundberry 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 "Turnout" one day late in August. He was in a mood which was cold, 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's I'll see you again afore I sail."

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

"Yes, 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 calculate 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 was. And—just say that she ain't any—well, that her friend—just say that, will you?—her friend said 'twas all right. She'll understand; it's a—sort of joke between us."

"Very good, captain; I'll tell her. They shook hands and parted. Didama and her fellow news-vendors 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.

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.

"Well, Abishah," asked Ellery, on 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."

"She is? Alone?"

"So she says."

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

"Godfrey might! so be I. But she says she b'lieves she needs a change and there's church conference up here, you know, and she figgers that she ain't been to conference she don't 'now 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 Elkannah, 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 Ostabek 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 came 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 heads of the retired skippers were shaking dubiously. Something had happened to the Sea Mist, something serious.

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 see if you knew Mr. Prince was sick?"

"No, is she? I'm awfully sorry. Nothin' 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 of 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 sailin' from Didama Rogers. Didama said she was all but dyin', so I knew she probably had a little cold, or somethin'. If she was really very bad, I'd 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 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 callated, didn't they?"

"Well, they were—were doubtful, of course. There was the possibility that he hadn't been picked up, and that 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, 'Tou?"

"Oh, 'twouldn't be because I wanted to. But it seems almost as if there was a kind of fate hangin' over us 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 to her day."

"Yup, from—?"

"From that man?"

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But that wasn't the worst. The letter that had been waiting since he had been around and guessed he'd be comin' to the States pretty soon and huntin' me up. Said what was the use of havin' an able-bodied wife if she couldn't give her husband a home."

"The sounder!"

"Yes, I know what he is, maybe full as well as you do. That's why I spoke of leavin' you, sure as my death."

She hurried out of the room. Later, as the minister passed through the dining room on his way to the door, she spoke to him again.

"John," she said, "I didn't say what I meant to when I broke in on you just now. I meant to tell you about Grace. I knew you'd like to know and wouldn't ask. She's goin' away, Grace is."

"Go on, away?"

"Yup, she's goin' to stay with a relation of the Hammonds over in Connecticut for a spell. I coaxed her into it. Stayin' here at home with all this suspense and with Hannah Poundberry's tongue droppin' lamentations like kernels out of a corn sheller, is enough to kill a healthy batch of kittens with nine lives apiece."

Ellery took his hat from the peg and opened the door. His foot was on the step when Keziah spoke again.

"She—if it don't mean nothin' to you, except that she ain't so hard-hearted as maybe you might think—she's asked me about you most every time I've been there. She told me to take good care of you."

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walk and climbed into the chaise beside Captain Zeb. The white horses, stimulated into creaky trot by repeated clappings of the reins and roars to "Get under way!" and "Cast off!" moved along the sandy lane.

They found a group on the beach. A few fishermen, one or two lobstermen and wreckers, and the lightkeeper were gathered on the knoll by the lighthouse. They had a spyglass, and a good-sized dory was ready for launching.

"Where is she, Noah?" asked Captain Zeb of the lightkeeper.

"She's a brigantine, Zeb," observed the keeper, holding up the spyglass. "And fyin' the British colors. Look! if she might be one of them salt boxes from Turk's Islands. But what she's doin' out there, anchored, with canvas lowered and showin' distress signals in fair weather like this, is more'n any of us can make out. She wasn't there last evenin', though, and she's there now."

"She ain't the only funny thing along shore this mornin', nuther," answered Thoph.

"See anything, Mr. Ellery?" asked Thoph, looking over his shoulder.

"No, I don't see anything. But I thought—"

"He seemed to be listening. 'What did you think?'"

"Nothing, I—"

"Hold on! you ain't goin' down there, be you? I wouldn't. No tellin' what you might find. Well, all right, I ain't curious. I'll stay up here and you can report."

Ellery descended the almost perpendicular ladder gingerly, holding on with both hands. At the foot he stopped and tried to accustom his eyes to the darkness.

A room perhaps ten feet long, so much he could make out. The floor strewn, like that of the cabin, with heaps of clothing and odds and ends. More shapes of clothes hanging up and swaying with the roll of the brig. A little window high up at the end, black with dirt. And cavities, bunks in rows, along the walls. A horrible hole.

He took a step toward the center of the room, bending his head to avoid hitting the fo'castle lantern. Then in one of the bunks something stirred, something alive. He started violently, controlled himself with an effort, and stumbled toward the sound.

"What is it?" he whispered. "Who is it? Is anyone there?"

A groan answered him. Then a voice, weak and quavering, said: "Gimme a drink! Gimme a drink! Can't none of you God-forsaken devils give me a drink?"

He stopped over the bunk. A man was lying in it, crumpled into a dreadful heap. He stooped lower, looked, and saw the man's face.

There was a shout from the deck, or, rather, a yell. Then more yells and the sound of running feet.

"Mr. Ellery!" screamed Burgess, at the hatchway. "Mr. Ellery, for the Almighty's sake, come up here! Come out of that minute, quick!"

The minister knew what was coming, was sure of it as he stepped to the foot of the ladder, had known it the instant he saw that face.

"Mr. Ellery!" shrieked Burgess. "Mr. Ellery, are you there?"

"Come up!" called Burgess. "Hurry! It's the smallpox. The damned hooker's rotten with it. For God sakes, come quick!"

He ran to the rail, yelling orders to Bill and Thoph, who were frantically busy with the dory. Ellery began to climb the ladder. His head emerged into the clean, sweet air blowing across the deck. He drew a breath to the very bottom of his lungs.

Then from behind and below him came the voice again.

"Gimme a drink!" it wailed. "Gimme a drink of water. Ain't one of you cussed swabs got decency enough to fetch me a drink? I'm dyin' for a drink, I tell you. I'm dyin'!"

The minister stood still, his feet on the ladder. The three men by the rail were working like mad, their faces livid under the sunburn and their hands trembling. They pushed each other about and swore.

Thoph and Bill sprang over the rail into the boat. Burgess turned and beckoned to Ellery.

"Come on!" he called. "What are you waitin' for?"

The minister remained where he was.

"Are you sure—" he faltered.

"Sure! Blast it all! I found the log. It ain't been kept for a fortnight, but there's enough. It's smaller, I tell you. Two men died of it three weeks ago. The skipper died first afterwards. The mate—No wonder them that was left run away as soon as they sighted land. Come on! Do you want to die, too?"

From the poison pit at the foot of the ladder the man in the bunk called once more.

"Water!" he screamed. "Water! Are you goin' to leave me, you d—n cowards?"

"For Heaven sakes!" cried Burgess, clutching the rail, "what's that?"

Ellery answered him. "It's one of them," he said, and his voice sounded odd in his own ears. "It's one of the crew."

The minister turned. "Hush!" he called. In answer to the voice, "Hush!" he called, "I'll bring you water in a minute. Burgess," he added, "you and the rest go ashore. I shall stay."

"You'll stay? You'll stay? With that? You're crazy as a loon. Don't be a fool, man! Come on! We'll send the doctor and somebody else—some one that's had it, maybe, or ain't afraid, I am and I'm goin'. Don't be a fool!"

Thoph, from the dory, shouted to know what was the matter. Ellery climbed the ladder to the deck and walked over to the rail. As he approached, Burgess fell back a few feet.

"Thoph," said the minister, addressing the pair in the dory, "there is a sick man down in the forecastle. He has been alone there for hours. I suppose, certainly since his shipmates ran away. If he is left longer without help, he will surely die. Some one must stay with him. You and the rest row ashore and get the doctor and whoever else you can. I'll stay here till they come."

Thoph and his companions set up a storm of protest. It was foolish, it was crazy, the man would die anyhow, and so on. They begged the minister to come with them. But he was firm.

The oars dipped, bent, and the dory moved off. The sound of the creaking thole pins shot a chill through Ellery's veins. The water butts stood amidships, not far from the open door of the galley. Entering the latter he found an empty saucupan. This he filled from the cask, and then, with his hand turned toward the black hatchway. Here was the greatest test of his courage. To descend that ladder, approach that bunk, and touch the terrible creature in it, these were the tasks he had set himself to do, but could he?

The sick man was raving in delirium when he reached him, but the sound of the water lapping the sides of the saucupan brought him to himself. He seized Ellery by the arm and drank and drank. When at last he desisted, the pan was half empty.

The minister laid him gently back in the bunk and stepped to