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 New York to live with her daughter, Mrs. Fisher, when Captain Elkanah Dexter, who has been off the coast of Africa for many years, offers marriage. Mrs. Coffin declines, but Captain Elkanah, who is the leader of the Trumet Orpheus club, engages the choirmaster for the wedding, and all arrangements are made.

CHAPTER III.

In Which Keziah Assumes a Guardian.

Grace left the parsonage soon after the morning train. She crossed his identity. Her farewells were hurried and, for her, rather restrained. Mrs. Coffin's hob-hastened appeal to return to the "dear old home street" and have one more "good time" with her daughter before she was glad to meet Mr. Sidney. The young minister affected his delight in meeting her, though she disappeared in the study shortly wiped his perspiring face and, with a sniffle indicative of a handkerchief, a stiffly formal air, he resumed his task.

The minister smiled rather oneself.

"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 am afraid. But remember afternoon I was ready and, to tell the truth, I was eager to come and see my new parish and get at my work. So I started on and got at my work. So I started on the morning train. Then the stage I broke down and I began to think I was stranded at Harpsort. But I got a friendly lumberman to help me out, and he got me to Wellmouth—the kind-hearted chap from Wellmouth believe that's where he lived—had me speed to pull up to watch us, were ling with the smashed wheel, and when he found I was in a hurry to get to Trumet, offered to give me a ride. His name was—was Bird. No, Bird. His name was—was something that wasn't it, but—well, it was Bird, at any rate, and some kind of a bird."

"Bird!" repeated Keziah thoughtfully. "There's no Birds that I know of in Wellmouth. Hum! Hey? Wasn't Sparrow, was it?"

"That was it. Sparrow—Sparrow. Good bird! Emulous Sparrow. Run considerable to whiskers and tongue, didn't he?"

"Humph! I don't know. I never for long-distance. He was converse with him. Well, I declare! What's for dinner?"

"Why, I don't know. I didn't. He was so very anxious to find out, and was—well, I thought I'd believe I was going to visit Captain Isaiah's folks, and now they have seven or eight some here."

"No, not by their chins. This far as think as John-most puddin'. Nobody was ever."

"Why—why, with some hesitation, "the young lady who was here—you know, Miss Grace Van Horne. She's all right, I think. She didn't strike me as kind."

"Van Horne? That doesn't sound like a New England name to me."

"Then! Her folks come from Jersey somewhere. But she was adopted by old Cap'n Hammond, who lived in the tavern down on the hill before he the packet wharf, and she's lived in Hammond ever since she was a child. Her father was Tennie Van Horne, and he was mate of Cap'n Elkanah's fantastic schooner and was drowned off Hatteras. Then was saved just like Cap'n Elkanah of his teeth and got a broken hip while religious. It happened a little hitch before except that he some time; but he's religious. I suppose he's some feverish ever since. He's one of the head Cross-Cutters, and goes with their chapel with his own money. You mustn't think he's a sneakin' kind of religious, nor of Cap'n Elkanh, either. He's a darned narrowest kind of a man, but he is honest is just about Cross-Cutter. He's honest to the back as he is the chapel door, and that's as narrow as the way leads to heaven, by nation. It is the way, too, so the Cross-Cutters think."

"What are Cross-Cutters? Some new sect?"

"Shakes alive! Haven't you heard of Cross-Cutters? Cat's fast? 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 worldish, with organs and choir singin', and the road to paradise too easy. No need for me to tell you any more. You'll learn."

Mr. Sidney was interested. He had been in Trumet but once before, on the occasion when he preached his trial sermon, and of that memorable time remembered little except the old meeting house itself, the pews filled with capmen and their families, and the row of ship models, presumably of Captain Elkanah Dexter's, who had been born upon his native heath. To a young man, the transition from the romantic, if rival, estate, to a wealthy minister, and the possessor of a parish of his own, was both interesting and exhilarating. He looked forward to the future with over to private, fashionable teeth, and had already begun to feel himself a permanent fixture in the community. He returned to his room in the Goodspeed boarding house with the conviction that it was an utter failure. Captain Elkanah and the gracious Miss Ann Bet, his daughter, had been kind enough to express gratification, and their praise alone saved him from despair. Then, to his amazement, the rail had come. Of casual conversation at the church and about the Dexter table he could recall nothing. So there was another religious organization in the town, and that made the seceders from his own church the more surprising.

"Mrs. Ellis Miss Van Horne?" asked. She she a—a—relative?"

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. Nameless critter, and he's a—a—he's on his way from Surinam to New York now. They expect him to make port most any time, I believe. Now, Mr. Sidney, I know we've got to arrange for your supper and stayin' overnight, and we'll stay with the house the way 'tis and all. I don't see—

"I guess," ruminatively, "that the best thing for you to do will be to go to Cap'n Elkanah's. They'll be tickled to see you, I know, and you'll be glad to see your folks, and you'll be in time for supper, for Elkanah and Annabel have been to Denboro and they'll be late home. They can keep you overnight, too. Then, after breakfast with lots of room. Come right here to-morrow you come right here and I'll have things somewhere near ship shape by then, I guess, though the cleanin'll have to be mainly a job and a promise until we can really get at it. Your trunk'll be here on the coach, I expect, and that'll be through early in the afternoon. Get on your best bib and coat and I'll go with you to Elkanah's."

The young man demurred a little at turning himself upon the hospitality of the Dexter household, but Keziah assured him that the unexpected coming would cause no trouble. So he ing, and, after brushing the dew dark dusty and came down to the coach ing and carrying his trunk to the door.

"I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mrs. Coffin," he said. "And, as we go along do be more or less specific from what I've heard. I guess we shall from what you say—would you mind if I suggest normal investigation?"

"Hey? Oh, I see what you think! Well, I'll do my best, I cal'late."

Keziah stopped short on her way to the door.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, "I don't know's I've told you. I'm real sorry. I'm very sorry indeed." And she dropped in an shend of time and in such a irregular sort of way, that it never once thought of introducing herself. Just what you'd have done if you'd been left on a desert island with Obadiah Coffin, and Cap'n Elkanah and I signed articles as cook, I'm sure I'm goin' to keep bosun and I'm goin' to keep bosun for you."

Keziah adopted the reason for upsetting the former arrangement by Miss Hall and Miss Fiedlys was to have the position.

"Now, if you'll excuse Keziah turned to her new charge to Matilda Fiske, her new charge over to Matilda Fiske, I'll be tickled glad. I'm sure Grace didn't mind the family's social position; they're kept Annie Dexter's company, and was unusual in Trumet in those days, even among the best folks."

"Oh, no, they didn't. This far as I think as John-most puddin'. Nobody was ever."

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"Good night," said the young man, when Keziah had finished. "Good night, Miss—er—er—er in it Mrs.—Coffin?"

"Mrs.," she answered.

"Mrs.," a widow," explained Matilda. "Husband's been dead—"

"Husband's been dead for ever so many years. Guess he didn't amount to much; he was a terrible shiftless critter."

Keziah, in the midst of her labors, began to coach her employer and companion in "proper ways which Trumet expected its clergymen to travel. Which

"There's Your Chart."

the morning following his first night in the parsonage, he expressed himself as feeling the need of exercise. He thought he would take a walk.

"I'm glad you said so," said Matilda Fiske. "Mother's always telling me to her state optimism him at the breakfast table, and I was you I wouldn't take too long a walk, anyhow. Where are you thinkin' of goin'?"

The minister had no particular destination in mind, but he would like to see more of the village and, perhaps, the shore.

"Then you'd better have supper ready for us by six o'clock, Matilda," said Mrs. Coffin. "Six o'clock, sharp, remember."

Her grimness disappeared and she smiled sweetly.

"I'll have your supper ready for you by six o'clock, Mr. Sidney," she said.

As a matter of fact, the minister's walk was in the nature of a compromise, although of a pleasant character. He dropped in on Zebedee Mayo, owner of the big house on the slope of the hill. Captain Zeb took him up to that which he called his "cupolo," to the observatory on the top of the house, and showed him Trumet spread out like a map. Then Sidney called that he should see Captain Zeb, although it was evident that the old whaler had decided opinions of his own which he judged that he Mayos were of the so-called arti-

Captain Elkanah Dexter and His Daughter Make Their First Formal Call.

on good sea-g... and Cap'n Elkanah Dexter, of the Cross-Cutters, Mr. Sidney. Then? Oh, I'll be ready."

And so they rose to go Captain Elkanah's prompt reply.

"Very well, indeed, Captain Dexter," he said. "Then I'll see you at the Trumet Inn at—at—"

"Why, I'll be ready at eight o'clock, sharp," said the captain. "Eight o'clock, sharp, Mr. Sidney. Then I'll be ready."