KEZIAH COFFIN

by Joseph C. Lincoln

Author of Cy Whittaker's Place, Capt'n Eri, Etc.

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Keziah Coffin, supposed widow, is arranged to move from Trumet to East Orleans by Joshua Rogers, Trumet undertaker, and Edward Bangs, real estate dealer. Keziah's grandson, Kenneth Ryder, without asking permission, has married Grace Harding, daughter of Deborah Crowell, a fisherman's widow, and a disinherited member of the board of selectmen. In a revengeful mood he will very likely tell you of the meeting of the parish committee called by his chairman, Elkanah Daniels, to oust Rev. John Emery from the pulpit of the Regular church.

"I'll never forget," says Mr. Higgins, "that parish committee meetin' we had a few thousand years. I and two or three other young charters was late in the little room off the vestry—the room where they put the dishes after used for church suppers—and we heard the whole business. Of course nobody knew that Nat was goin' to marry Keziah, but they did know that he was'n' goin' to marry Grace Van Horne, and had given her up to the minister of his own accord. So Deacon Daniels and Sam spilled it. He didn't have an chance at all. However, you'd never have guessed it from the way he stood up for Nat. He made as stiff and dignified as if he'd awaked in the middle of startin' a fight instead of bein' to order—was a fair one, for that matter, and the cook was there—and then got up to speak.

He opened fire right off. He asked Deacon Sam what did, if Nat, the son, he said, had disgraced the solid name of Ryder by marryin' a woman who should be here overboard immediate. Those or some such big words. Question and Vote. But Elkanah held up his hand.

"Gentlemen, says he, before I ask the question I want to say just one word. I've worshiped in this meetin' house ever since I was a child. I was christened in it, my father employed and supported me; I've presided over the meetin's of the body for four years and I'm sure you'll all agree with me that if you vote to kept that pulpit committee in your pulpit I shall resign from the committee and from the society. It'll be likes cuttin' off my right hand, but I shall do it. Now, gentlemen, I'm ready to vote." Those in favor of retaining the present minister of the parish will rise. Those opposed will remain seated."

Every person in the room stood up. Deacon Himself was the only one that didn't get right up.

"It is a vote," says he, white as a sheet, and his voice trembling. Gentlemen, I bid you good day."

He took up his hat and cane, give Deacon Daniels a look that if he'd never said good-by to it, and marched out. Deacon Sam was so surprised at anybody not bein' on his side that he didn't feel sorry for him then.

Nat and Grace got married and moved to Boston that summer. They never came back to Trumet to live. Of course Abishai remained single until after a man very much younger and poorer than he was remarried by an acquaintances of the parish and the deed was done. It was because Jess and Jess was married.

On a Sunday morning, a few weeks

Keziah, He Whispered, Give Comfort to Take You Home."

after the committee meeting the Rev. Mr. Emery preached his farewell sermon and left Trumet. Where he went nobody knew, for he didn't tell, and nobody asked him. Not publicly, that is. Privately, what I've been told, he was spoken to a stranger.

One day in June, Abishai asked Captain Nat privately:

"Nat, what's Mr. Hallett's job in his office on Tremont Street that what—that he ought to come home to?"

Captain Nat looked at him sharply.

"Why, he don't do nothin' much, I guess," he answered. "I've heard him say himself that he was a sort of figurehead. He's got a name that looks well on the letterhead, I cal'late, and that's about all."

Abishai looked relieved. "I'm glad to hear that," he said. "I was afraid he was needed at home. I'm sure I don't want to see him give up his position here. I'm glad he's doin' well."

When Keziah came up the stairs after the conference with Mrs. Rogers and Mr. Bangs, she found the door at the top closed. Then she opened it and found she was spoken to a stranger.

The latter, a handsome man,