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CHAPTER I.

THE PREACHER.

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THE morning service was over, and the congregation gone home. The preacher was to dine with Captain Maynard, but there was an hour and more to dinner-time, and she had begged permission to stroll about for half an hour, promising to find her way to the comfortable white cottage, perched on a point of rock overlooking the little bay.

Now she was standing on the lower rocks, looking about her; a trim, quiet figure in a black gown, with a close straw bonnet set on her smooth brown hair. She “didn’t handsome much,” the people decided, but she had a taking way with her, and preached good, sound Advent doctrine. They were glad she had come, and would be sorry when the schooner should take her on her way the next day, to preach at other places along the coast.

The young woman seemed to be looking for some one, for she shaded her eyes with her hand, and gazed earnestly up and down the line of rocks. So absorbed was she, that she almost stumbled over a figure sitting on the rocks, which now rose and confronted her. A strange figure enough; so rough and gray and battered that it was hardly to be wondered at that she had not distinguished it from the rock itself. The face it turned upon her was red and brown in patches, as if the skin were moth-eaten; the mouth was huge and misshapen; only the blue eyes, bright and kindly,

redeemed, in some degree, the hideousness of the other features.

“Mornin’, preacher!” said this strange being. “You preached good this mornin’. Joe heard you; you might not have seen him, for he stood in the doorway, but Joe heard you, and it done him good.”

“I am glad to hear that!” said the preacher, smiling. “No, I did not see you. What is your other name, beside Joe? I could hardly call you by that, could I?”

“Brazybone; Joe Brazybone. Sculpin Joe, the boys call me. They don’t think Joe’s handsome, round here; but he’s got an uglier one to home, he tells ’em. Ma’am Brazybone, she beats Joe, preacher, I tell you.”

“Your—your wife?” asked the preacher, hardly knowing what to say.

“Brother’s wife,” said Joe. “Widder, I should say. Brother died ten year ago, effects of lookin’ at her too much. He was tender, Joe’s tough. I hope to wear her out fust, lookin’ at me, but ther’s no sayin’. There she is now, out searchin’ for me. Don’t you say a word, preacher, don’t you say a word! She can’t see none too well, and I ain’t goin’ in yet for a spell.”

He crouched down against the rock, and again seemed almost a part of it. The preacher, half amused, half embarrassed, stood still, as a woman came out of a tiny hut near by, and peered about her with angry, short-sighted eyes. Mrs. Brazybone was a vast woman, with a face like a comic nightmare, and a set of misfit features that might have been picked up at a rag and bottle shop. Her hair was untidy, her dress awry, and her little eyes gleamed with ill-

humour. "Decidedly," thought the preacher, "Joe is right, and she is the worse of the two."

"Joe Brazybone!" called the sister-in-law. "Joseph! you comin' in to dinner?"

There was no answer.

"Joe Brazybone, will you speak to me? I know you are there somewheres, if I can't see you. Now you come in, or you won't get no dinner this day. Skulkin' round those rocks, as if you was a seal! I wish 't you was!"

She went into the house and shut the door with a bang.

"Is this wise?" asked the preacher, looking down at Joe, who was shaking with silent laughter. "Why do you want to make her angry, Joseph? and you will be hungry presently, if you are not now."

"Joe cooks his own dinner, whenever he gets a chance, preacher. He's a good cook, Joe is, and Mother Brazybone ain't, you see. She'll go off a-visitin' pretty soon, and then Joe'll get him some dinner. What was you lookin' for, preacher, when you come out here on my rocks? You was lookin' for some one, and it wasn't Joe."

"You are right," said the preacher, "I saw a young girl in the hall,—or rather, she stood outside, leaning in at the window,—whose face interested me greatly. She disappeared before the service was over, and I wondered if I might see her somewhere. I—I hardly know why I came down here to look for her. She was a beautiful girl, about fourteen, I should think, with long hair of a strange colour, and very brilliant eyes."

She paused, for Joe Brazybone was nodding and blinking with every appearance of delight.

"You saw her, did you?" he said. "Yes! yes! anybody would notice Isly. She'd be queen of this hull island, if folks had their rights, and if other folks knowed a queen when they saw her. Not governor, I don't mean, nor yet anything of that sort, but a real queen, with a crown on her head, and all the folks down on their marrer-bones every time she set her foot out-o'-doors."

"I don't understand you," said the preacher. "Do you mean that the island belongs by right to that young girl?"

Joe nodded like a mandarin.

"It does, by the rights of it. Every step and foot of land belongs to the Herons, and she's the only Heron left alive, save and except the boy, as he don't count, bein' deaf-dummy. But Isly Heron she's the born queen, and you may believe what Joseph says about that, preacher. I knowed Herons all my life. Herons was master folks over on the main, before ever they come here. When they come over, they brought Brazybones with 'em, to clean their fish and wash out their boats. Long ago thet was, way back among the gret-grets, and 't hes been so ever since, till it come down to Giles and Joe. Joe done it, too, as long as Giles would let him. Old Joe would ha' done it to the last, but Giles sent him away. He was sick and sufferin', Giles was, and he didn't want old Joe to know it, but Joe did know. Joe would have died when Giles did, preacher, if it hadn't ha' been for Isly and the boy."

The strange creature was brushing his ragged gray sleeve across his eyes, and his voice quavered curiously.

"You never saw Giles?" he said, looking up presently.

“Giles was Isly’s father, but he’s dead now. You might never have seen him formerly, when he was over on the main some time?”

The preacher shook her head.

“He was another!” Joe went on, half to himself. “Like a king, Giles was, for all his smilin’, pleasant ways. Most folks didn’t know it, but Joe knowed it. Many’s the time I’ve hid down against the rock, after Giles wouldn’t see me no more, and waited so I could touch him when he went by. It done me good to touch his coat; I felt good come out to me, every time I done it.”

He stared at the preacher, and she stared back at him, thinking him out of his wits. Probably he was, or, more likely still, he had never had his full share of intelligence. Yet, if the preacher had been a seer—if she had had powers of vision that could pierce the veil of past as of future years—she might have called up scenes and figures that from century to century should seem to justify some of Joe Brazybone’s ideas, fantastic as they were. She might see, in generation after generation, two figures side by side, one masterful, dominant, the other crouching, serving, loving, coming to heel when called, like a dog, springing like a man to action at the master’s word. One might almost, even now, fancy a dim scene, half hidden by rolling clouds of dust and smoke. A battle-field. Gilles Tête d’Airain, the fair-haired Norman, stands wiping his bloody sword, and calls back his men from the pursuit, for the enemy is scattered beyond redemption. The half-savage soldiers come trooping back with wild gestures, with great shouts of triumph. Among them the chief singles out one, an ugly fellow of enormous

strength, who twice, since the bloody morning, has stood between his master and death. He kneels, a serf, bound for life and for death; he is bidden to rise a free man, with henceforth a name and a station of his own.

"Brave et bon tu t'es montré; Brave-et-Bon sera ton nom, d'ici à jamais!"

The clouds roll forward, the vision is gone. But was this true? and has Tête d'Airain sunk to mere Heron, and has Brave-et-Bon, good and brave, drawled itself away into Brazybone? If this were so, it might account for poor Joe's attitude, at which all the villagers laugh.

"You'd like to see Isly, preacher? You was meanin' to speak to her?"

"I—yes, if you think she would like to see me. Her face interested me greatly; I should like to see her nearer, and make her acquaintance."

"This way, preacher! this way! you're the right sort; a lady yourself, and knowin' a lady when you see one. Mother Brazybone, she would have taken Isly home, when her mother died; but I wouldn't hear to it. I know'd how 'twould be. She'd ha' set her to work, and tried to make a servant of her; Isly Heron doin' Mother Brazybone's work! Guess the solid rocks would ha' come down to do the cookin' fust, 'fore they allowed any such doin's. These rocks know Herons, I tell you, most as well as old Joe does. They laid soft under Giles, that day he was up yonder." He nodded upward, toward a huge mass of rock that towered across the narrow bay, the younger sister of the Island of the Wild Rocks.

The preacher, more and more puzzled, followed her strange guide, as he led the way toward a point of rock not