

MOONDYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

BOOK THIRD

IV.

MR. HAGGETT

Sister Cecilia visited Alice Walmsley every day for several weeks, until the happy change in the latter's life had grown out of its strangeness. Their intercourse had become a close and silent communion.

For the first month or so, the kind and wise little nun had conversed on anything that chanced for a topic; but afterwards they developed the silent system—and it was the better of the two.

Sister Cecilia used to enter with a cheery smile, which Alice returned. Then Sister Cecilia would throw crumbs on the sill for the sparrows, Alice watching her, still smiling. Then the little Sister would seat herself on the pallet, and take out her rosary, and smilingly shake her finger at Alice, as if to say:

"Now, Alice, be a good girl, and don't disturb me."

And Alice, made happy by the sweet companionship, would settle to her sewing, hearing the birds twitter and chirp, and seeing the golden sunlight pour through the bars into her cell.

Sister Cecilia had a great many prayers to say every day, and she made a rule of saying the whole of them in Alice's cell.

The change in Alice's life became known to all the officials in the prison, and a general interest was awakened in the visits of the good Sister to her cell. From the governor down to the lowest female warder, the incident was a source of pleasure and a subject of every-day comment.

But there was one official who beheld all this with displeasure and daily increasing distrust. This was Mr. Haggett, the Scripture-reader of the prison.

Into the hands of Mr. Haggett had been given the spiritual welfare of all the convicts in Millbank, of every creed—Christian, Turk, and Jew.

It was a heavy responsibility; but Mr. Haggett felt himself equal to the task. It would be wrong to lay blame for the choice of such a teacher on any particular creed. He had been selected and appointed by Sir Joshua Hobb, whose special views of religious influence he was to carry out.

Mr. Haggett was a tall man, with a highly respectable air. He had side whiskers, brushed outward till they stood from his lank cheeks like paint-brushes; and he wore a long square-cut brown coat. He had an air of formal superiority. His voice was cavernous and sonorous. He had only said "Good-morning," he said it with a patronizing smile, as if conscious of a superior moral nature, and his voice sounded solemnly deep.

One would have known him in the street as a man of immense religious weight, and godly assumption by the very compression of his lips. These were his strong features, even more forcible than the rigid respectability of his whiskers, or the grave sanctity of his voice. His lips were not exactly coarse or thick; they were large even to bogginess. His mouth was wide, and his teeth were long; but there was enough lip to cover up the whole, and still more—enough left to fold afterwards into conscientiously pious lines around the mouth.

When Mr. Haggett was praying, he closed his eyes, and in a solemnly sonorous key began a personal interview with the Almighty. While he was informing God, with many deep "Thou knowests," his lips were in full play; every reef was shaken out, so to speak. But when Mr. Haggett was instructing a prisoner, he moved only the smallest portion of labial tissue that could serve to impress the unfortunate with his own worthiness and Mr. Haggett's exalted virtue and importance.

Mr. Haggett visited the cells for four hours every day, taking regular rounds, and prayed with and instructed the prisoners. He never sympathized with them, nor pretended to, and, of course, he never had their confidence—except the sham confidence and contrition of some second-timers, who wanted a recommendation for a pardon.

There was another official who made regular rounds, with about the same intervals of time as Mr. Haggett. This was the searcher and fumigator—a warder who searched the cells for concealed implements, and fumigated with some chemical the crevices and joints, to keep them wholesome clean. When a prisoner had a visit from the searcher and fumigator, he knew that Mr. Haggett would be around soon.

The sense of duty in the two officials was very much alike under the surface; and it would have saved expense and time had Mr. Haggett carried, besides his Bible, the little bellows and probe of the fumigator—if he had been, in fact, the searcher and fumigator of both cells and souls.

Mr. Haggett had observed, with horror, the visits of the Popsich nun to the cell of a prisoner whom he knew to be a Protestant. Though he never had anything to say to Numbers Four, and never had prayed with her for five years, he now deemed her one of those specially confided to his care. He was shocked to the centre when first he saw the white-capped nun sitting in the cell, with a rosary in her hands.

Mr. Haggett would have complained at once, but he did not like the governor. He had been insulted, he felt he had, by the governor, who

never met him but he asked the same impertinent question: "Well, Mr. Haggett, got your regular commission in the ministry yet?"

Mr. Haggett was in hopes of becoming, some day, a regular minister of the Established Church. He was "studying for it," he said; and his long experience in the prison would tell in his favor. But the years had flown, and he had not secured the reverend title he so ardently coveted. The Lords Bishops were not favorably impressed by Mr. Haggett's acquirements or qualities.

The daily presence of the nun in one of his cells goaded him to desperation. He stopped one day at the door of Number Four, and in his deepest chest-tones, with a smile that drew heavily on the labial reefs addressed the Sister:

"Is this prisoner a Rom—ah—one of your persuasion, madam?"

"No, sir," said the little Sister, with a kind smile at Alice; "I wish she were."

"Hah!—Why, madam, do you visit a prisoner who is not of your persuasion?"

"Because no one else visited her," said Sister Cecilia, looking at Mr. Haggett with rather a startled air; "and she needed some one."

"Madam, I wish to pray with this prisoner this morning, and ah—ah—I will thank you to leave this cell."

The work dropped from Alice's hands, and a wild look came into her eyes. First, she did not understand Alice's uninviting face, now flushed somewhat, and working as if the godly man were in a passion, she turned, with a mute appeal, to Sister Cecilia.

The nun had risen, startled, but not confused, at the unexpected harshness of the tone, rather than the words. She realized at once that Mr. Haggett, who had never before addressed her, nor noticed her presence, had power to expel her from Alice's cell, and forbid her entrance in future.

She determined on the moment to make an effort for Alice's sake. "This prisoner is to be my hospital assistant on the convict ship," said Sister Cecilia to Mr. Haggett.

"Madam!" said Mr. Haggett, harshly, and there was a movement of his foot as if he would have stamped his order; "I wish to pray with this prisoner!"

He motioned commandingly with his hand, ordering the nun from the cell. Sister Cecilia took a step toward the door, rather alarmed at the man's violence, but filled with keen sorrow for poor Alice.

The rude finger of the angry Scripture-reader still pointed from the cell. Sister Cecilia had taken one step toward her, when Alice Walmsley darted past her, and stood facing Mr. Haggett, her left hand reached behind her with spread fingers, as if forbidding the nun to depart.

"Begone!" she cried to Haggett; "how dare you come here? I do not want your prayers."

Mr. Haggett grew livid with passion at this insult from a prisoner. He had, perhaps, cherished a secret dislike of Alice for her old rebellion against his influence. He glared at her a moment in silent fury, while his great lips curved into their tightest reefs, showing the full line of his long teeth.

But he did not answer her. He looked over her, into the cell, where Sister Cecilia stood affrighted. He reached his long arm toward her, and still commanded her from the cell, with a hand trembling with wrath. He would settle with the recalcitrant convict when this strange ally and witness had departed.

"Come out!" motioned the lips of the wrathful Scripture-reader, while his long finger crooked, as if it were a hook to drag her forth.

At this moment a key rattled in the lock, and there entered the passage Sir Joshua Hobb, Mr. Wyville, and the governor, followed by the two warders of the pentagon. The gentlemen were evidently on a tour of inspection. When they had come to the cell of Number Four, they stood in astonishment at the scene.

Alice Walmsley, hitherto so submissive and silent, was aroused into feverish excitement. She stood facing Mr. Haggett, and, as the others approached, she turned to them wildly.

"How dare this man interfere with me?" she cried. "I will not allow him to come near me. I will not have his prayers!"

"Be calm, child!" said Mr. Wyville, whose she had never before seen. His impressive and kind face and tone instantly affected the prisoner. Her hands fell to her sides.

The warders approached Alice, who now stood in the door-way. She had turned her agonized face, as she felt Sister Cecilia's hand laid upon her shoulder, and her breast heaved convulsively.

As the warders seized her arms, she started with pitiful alarm, and shuddered.

"Stop!" cried a deep voice, resonant with command. Mr. Wyville had spoken.

"Release the prisoner!" Every eye was turned on him. Even Alice's excitement was subdued by the power of the strange interruption. The Scripture-reader was the first to come to words. He addressed the governor.

"Who is this, who countermands the order of the Chief Director?" Before the Governor could answer, Sir Joshua Hobb spoke.

"This is insolence, sir! My order shall be obeyed."

"It shall not!" said Mr. Wyville, calmly, and walking to the cell door.

"By what authority do you dare interfere?" demanded Sir Joshua Hobb.

"By this," said Mr. Wyville, handing him a paper.

The enraged Chief Director took the document, and glanced at the signature.

"Bah!" he shouted. "This Ministry is dead. This is waste paper. Out of the way, sir!"

"Stay!" said Mr. Wyville, taking from his breast a small case, from which he drew a folded paper, like a piece of vellum, which he handed to the governor of the prison.

"This, then, is my authority!" The prompt old major took the paper, read it, and then, still holding it before him, raised his hat as if in military salute.

"Your authority is the first, sir," he said, decisively and respectfully, to Mr. Wyville.

"I demand to see that paper!" cried the Chief Director.

The governor handed it to him, and he read it through, his rage rapidly changing into a stare of blank amazement and dismay.

"I beg you to forgive me, sir," he said at length, in a low tone. "It would have been for the benefit of discipline, however, had I known of this before."

"That is true, sir," answered Mr. Wyville, "and had there been time for explanation you should have known my right before I had used it."

"You have shaken my official authority, sir," said Sir Joshua, still expostulatory.

"I am very sorry," answered Mr. Wyville; "but another moment's delay and this prisoner might have been driven to madness. Authority must not forget humanity."

"Authority is paramount, sir," humbly responded Sir Joshua, handing the potent paper to Mr. Wyville; "allow me to take my leave."

The humiliated Chief Director walked quickly from the corridor. Mr. Wyville turned to the cell, and met the brimming eyes of the prisoner, the eloquent gratitude of the look touching him to the heart. He smiled with ineffable kindness, and with an almost imperceptible motion of the hand requested Sister Cecilia to remain and give comfort.

Mr. Haggett still remained in the entry, hungrily watching the cell. Mr. Wyville passed in front of the door, and turning, looked straight in his face. The discomfited Scripture-reader started as if he had received an electric shock. He was dismayed at the power of this strange man.

"You have passed this door with your prayers for five years, sir," said Mr. Wyville; "you will please to continue your intention."

"The prisoner is not a Roman—" Haggett began, with shaken tones.

The hand of the soldierly old governor fell sharply, twice, on his shoulder. He looked round, straight down the passage, and his eyes sternly ordered Mr. Haggett in the same direction. He hitched the sacred volume under his arm, and without a sound followed the footsteps of Sir Joshua.

"Haggett," said Sir Joshua, after a pause, during which he had stared into the fire, "when does the convict ship sail?"

"In two weeks, sir."

"I want you to go to West Australia on that ship, Haggett."

"I, Sir Joshua? Leave London—I shall be ordained this year—I shall—"

"Fahaw! I want you, man. No one else will do. You can attend to private matters on your return. I shall personally assist you with my influence."

"Well, Sir Joshua?"

"No one else can do it, Haggett."

"What is to be done, sir?"

"I want to know all that is to be known in Western Australia about this Wyville."

"Do you suspect anything, sir?" asked Mr. Haggett.

"No; I have no reason either for suspicion or belief. I know absolutely nothing about the man, nor can I find any one who does."

"And yet that commission—"

"Yes—that was a disappointment. In one or two cases I have heard of the same high influence, given in the same secret manner."

"Were the other holders mysterious, too?" asked Haggett, reflectively, folding and unfolding his facial hangings.

"They were all cases in which phil anthropists might meet with opposition from officials; and this strange but unquestionable power was given as a kind of private commission."

"It strikes down all the rules, and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Sir Joshua, striking the coal with the tongs; "but there it is. It must be acknowledged without question."

"Have you no clew to the reason for which this special authority was given to him?" asked Haggett.

"I have not thought of it; but I am not surprised. This man, as you know, has reformed the Indian Penal System at the Andaman Islands, expending immense sums of his own money to carry out the change. Afterward, he was received by the French Emperor as an authority on the treatment of criminals, and had much to do with their new transportation scheme. A man with this record, accepted by the Prime Minister, was just the person to be specially commissioned by the Queen."

"He is young to be so very wealthy," mused Haggett.

"Yes; that is mysterious—no one knows the source of his wealth. This is your mission—find out all about him, and report to me by mail within six months."

"Then I am really to go to Australia?" said Haggett, with a doleful aspect.

"Yes, Haggett; there's no other way. Inquiry into mysterious men's lives is always worth the trouble. You may learn nothing, but—it had better be done."

"Well, Sir Joshua, I want a favor from you in return."

"What is it? You shall have it, if it lie in my power."

"Send that prisoner, Number Four on the ship; but countermand the order for the Papist nun."

An overwatchful brakeman, it was with a sense of relief that he felt Dick had been more successful than himself. He was not thus to lose sight of Dick however. When the freight train passed on, Dick scrambled up from the opposite bank and joined him. They had no remark to make. Once in a while a sort of a grunt from Dick, Burns showed that he was not altogether pleased with the part of God's world—God's world as man has made it—in which they found themselves.

The Siding looked its reputation of being one of the worst little towns in Wyoming. It nestled on the side of the forlorn mountain pass, as lonely a collection of board shanties as one would care to see. Still, it had its attractions for those banished by the law and hunted by the authorities. Perhaps the most interesting fact in connection with Tie Siding was that it lay less than half a mile to the west of Dale Creek, spanned by the famous Dale Creek trestle.

It was likely that Derry Garrett had never heard of such a place before he was so quietly dropped off the day previous to what is still known to railroad men as the "big storm." Picturesque in its surroundings, the trestle was set in the midst of early frontier history and legendary lore. Dale Creek, usually an inoffensive streamlet, wended its way through Lone Tree Gulch, which is at the very summit of Sherman Pass, more than eight thousand feet above sea level. When it came to building a railroad, it was found impossible to fill that yawning chasm. So the Overland people threw up a trestle to span it, and there the trestle hung, suspended 'twixt sky and frightful depth.

Dick Burns and Derry Garrett found a small shanty among the others, and took immediate possession. Derry Garrett was disgusted to the point of silence. They had built a fire on the makeshift hearth and sat in front of it, smoking, saying nothing. In spite of his gloom, it was Derry, who found speech first.

"This is a—of a place. I'm going to get out of it as quick as I can."

Dick nodded. "So'm I," he said. And then they slept.

There was little food to be had, and none for the asking of it. A can of beans, and another of sardines that had troubled these knights of the road very little. The rain that set in during the afternoon did not revive Derry's drooping spirits.

"I guess we'll strike the freight that pulls in here about six," said Derry. "I think—I'm going back home." He lit his pipe again—it had gone out even as he sat puffing at it. "Yes, civilization for me for a while."

Dick Burns nodded.

"You'll lose the notion before you're half way back," he said. "It's just this dead joint that's got you rattled. It's the limit!"

Derry Garrett added a word or two that were scarcely polite, and knocked his pipe against the sole of his shoe. Putting his pipe in his pocket, his hand struck the letter. He took it out and looked at it. Burns eyed him with amusement.

"Who it is? My wife or my sweet-heart?" he asked, with a note of refined speech in the words that was, to say the least, unexpected.

"Neither," said Derry, briefly.

"Ah!" said Burns. Derry put the letter back. "Mine's dead," he added. "She was sick when I made my 'get-away,' and she died soon after. I got out for her sake. The others, the bunch of respectable ones, made it—well, you know how hot they can make it for the gentleman of the family."

He laughed, sneeringly. Derry did not answer. There was something the matter, he told himself, as he leaned forward, elbows on knees, and his head on his hands. Dick ambled on, telling of his first adventures—how he learned the trade, what fellow students he had first started suddenly and looking up as a town darkened the doorway. There were eagerness and relief on his face. He evidently found Derry little to his liking as a companion.

"Come in, stranger—come in, come in!" he vociferated heartily. "Welcome, no matter how you come! And if you've got a deck with you and—"

He stood up. The stranger shook his tall frame vigorously and then unbuttoned his overcoat.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Dick Burns, weakly.

"Pretty smart breeze outside," said the priest, in a cool tone. "Go ahead! Don't mind me. You won't refuse me shelter for a few moments, will you, my lads?"

"No Father—no—no!" stammered Burns. He looked at the door, even made a step toward it, but the priest barred the way.

"If you go out," he said, "I shall follow you. I don't want to disturb you. They call me Father Maurice hereabouts when they see me, and I am from New York. Somehow," he added shrewdly, looking from Dick's perturbed countenance to Derry's inquiring one. "I feel that both you chaps fall from the same quarter, or I'm much mistaken."

"No," said Derry, quietly, "never. But my mother—"

"Knew me?"

"No."

The priest looked questionably. "She did not know you, Father. She did not know you—very well, but some one dear to you—very well."

"Ah!" said the priest in a low voice, full of tenderness. "She knew some one dear to me! She knew my mother! My mother!" He said the words with love and longing in his tones. "Then I knew her, of course, I knew every one—every one—that knew my mother. Her name—ah, her name was Ellen Garrett! And you are her only child, Derry. You are like her very, very much like her. Will you shake hands with me?"

Derry put both hands behind him.

"I? Shake hands with you? I—I couldn't Father."

"Your mother would like it, Derry. Hesitatingly, painfully, Derry extended his hand.

"Your mother had you, my mother had me," he said.

"Look what you are, and what I am. And they both were good. It isn't my mother's fault." There was a note of defiance in his voice.

"No," said Father Maurice, gravely, "it isn't her fault; it's your own. But you'll come out all right." He laughed softly. "God seldom fails the mothers, Derry. Often we can't see it; often we don't know how or where their prayers are answered. Sometimes, according to our human knowledge, they're never answered. But that is not true."

Derry Garrett shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm a good-for-nothing, low-down, miserable, dirty tramp," he said, without any emotion. "There isn't any meanness I haven't stooped to, and that I won't stoop to again. I shall never reform—never! How can my mother's prayers be answered when I, of my own free will, choose to go against them?"

"When God has hold of a dying man He keeps him tight by the hair," quoted Father Maurice. "For all you know, He may be holding on to you in just that fashion, Derry?"

"I don't know, Father. I'm blowing out this afternoon, and it's the last you'll see of me. Tie Siding is the worst place I've ever struck, and I never want to come back to it."

"You'll not leave it as soon as you expect to," said Father Maurice, gently. "There's urgent work before me farther on in the mountains, but I daren't risk going out today."

"Why not?"

"Come out and see. It's worth looking at."

Derry followed him. The soft rain was now a steady downpour. To the south a miniature thunderstorm was raging; and even as the two men looked, still darker clouds gathered lower down, trying to envelop up on the mountain, trying to envelop up as in a pall. The first faint booming of thunder could be heard growing louder and louder until it seemed as if two mighty, contending, invisible armies warred above. The lightning flashed—terrific streaks of flame against the darkness, to be followed by a crash that was truly ear-splitting. It was a magnificent display and it created conflicting sentiments in poor Derry's mind.

The conversation with the priest had weakened him, and his heart was full of that feeling that comes once in a great while to men like him—comes and goes as quickly.

He turned back, almost blindly, toward the cabin. Dick Burns had made use of their withdrawal to disappear, and Derry and Father Maurice were alone. Both were silent. The priest, reading the man's face, knew that silence then was the better part.

"I wonder how I'd get along if I went back," said Derry at last—"just while she lived anyhow?"

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DERRY GARRETT--HERO

TO BE CONTINUED My Dearest Son: The day I saw your face for the first time, I thanked God. You've hurt me cruelly since then, but I am still thankful, for I love you. Never forget that you are dear to your mother. Some day you will do better—some day you will redeem yourself.

Derry Garrett had called at the little postoffice, and this one letter had been handed to him. He looked at the shabby, badly formed characters. His hands trembled. The week previous, some longing for a word from the one he had left years before had swept over him, and he sent his mother a brief postal, giving his whereabouts. In response to that postal had come his. No appeal, no knowledge of her necessities, no reproach, no pleading, no inquiry. Only this.

He read it once more. Then he strolled along the main street, past the outskirts of the town, to where his friend, Dick Burns, sat at the side of the broad highway, whittling a stick in leisurely, if somewhat cool, comfort; for it was late in autumn, and there was a chill in the air once the sun went down.

"You didn't hurry yourself any," said Dick, when he saw him. "Considering we've got to make our 'get-away' at 5:30. Special car or not," he added, grinning, "we can't keep it waiting."

Derry Garrett said nothing. He did not care much about Dick Burns; but he had been in decidedly hard luck when he met him the week before, and the honor of the road kept him tied to him until he found a legitimate excuse for passing on alone. So when, that night, he was quietly dropped out at Tie Siding by