

MADGE MORRISON,

The Molalla Maid and Matron.

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"AMIE AND HENRY LEE," "THE HAPPY HOME," "ONE WOMAN'S SPIRIT,"  
ETC., ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

The soul of Mrs. Andrews had been so filled with dismal apprehensions during the absence of Jason and Madge, that she was afraid to meet them on their return, lest her fears would be realized, and the team and produce squandered in pandering to her husband's unfortunate appetite.

"I've so far conquered my repugnance to Jason since the baby came that I think I could endure him very well," she said to Alice, "if he would only quit his drinking and become a sober man, as I thought he was when I married him."

"Since Madge has taken him in charge, I think there is great hope for him," was the consoling reply.

"I don't know," sighed the wife. "There isn't much hope for a reformation when there isn't anything to speak of to build on."

"It passes my powers of comprehension to understand why you should have married that man at your time of life," said Alice.

"You are not more astonished than I," was the mother's humiliating confession. "I must have been crazy or dreaming, and I guess I was both. I guess I was both."

"And I guess you're right in that conclusion, mother dear. But let any man catch me napping over the matrimonial noose with my present knowledge of the world, the flesh, and the devil."

"Don't be irreverent, Alice," said her mother, reprovingly, as her daughter turned to the little mirror to fix some cheap ribbons in her hair, trilling the while a lighthearted ditty to an old-time tune, and dreaming, even then, of future coquettish possibilities.

Most single women are matrimonially insane, while two-thirds of the married ones are secretly sighing for the same circumstances. Don't berate us too severely for telling the sober truth, good reader. Unpleasant as it is, it must be spoken, simply because it's true.

"Youder they come now," said Mrs. Andrews, with a half-suppressed sigh, "and I do wonder if Jason's sober."

Madge alighted from the wagon, gave the cattle and the heavy whip into the charge of Sam and Harry, and assisted her trembling companion to the ground.

"Just as I expected," said the anxious wife.

"Just as you don't expect," cried Madge. "Your baby's father is as sober as a judge."

"I'm mighty sick, though," replied the head of the family, as he tottered toward the house.

"He needs liquor!" exclaimed the wife, in an undertone.

"Not another word!" said Madge, aside and authoritatively. "I've resolved that he shall never taste another drop. If he lives over this crisis, well, we'll do what we can to make as decent a man as possible of what there is of him. If he dies because he can't get whisky, the quicker he's gone the better."

"Madge!" exclaimed her mother, in astonishment, "how you shock me!"

"It's to be hoped the shock will do you good," was the quick rejoinder. "Jason's my patient, and if he dies I'll be my funeral. He's better off dead and sober, than living and a drunkard."

The women had lingered behind, and out of the hearing of the reforming man, who staggered up the walk alone and miserable.

"How I wish I was dead!" he wailed, as the agony of an intolerable longing for stimulants burned in his brain and stomach, while his palsied limbs almost refused to do their bidding.

"Are you not ready for death?"

The question seemed to come from the innermost depths of his shattered being.

In terror he looked around him, but no living mortal was near enough to be heard in such a voice except the little babe that lay in its rude cradle, breathing peacefully.

"Poor little creature! I'm so glad it's a girl!" he said, repeatedly, as he dropped into a chair and looked long and earnestly into its face.

"And why are you glad it's a girl, pray?" asked Madge, kindly, as she came into the room and placed her hand caressingly upon his uncovered head.

"Because it'll never drink whisky."

"What's to hinder it? Maybe it's inherited it's father's appetite. The sins of parents are often visited upon their children, you know."

"But women are a heap stronger-minded than men. A woman never falls into drunkenness till after she's kicked out of decent society."

"I must differ with you there, my good friend. Women would yield to evil habits, and, per consequence, become the prey of evil diseases just as often as men do, or, rather, men would not yield any oftener to evil habits than women do, only for the fact that women are generally powerless to dictate to them concerning their daily walk,

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How long do you think you'd live as the contented husband of Nancy Andrews if she should become a habitual drunkard?"

"Not long."

"Then you see that your great weakness is caused in great part by the license you have had to do evil. You have dared to exercise the masculine prerogative because woman was powerless to make laws, either to prevent it or protect herself. But, by the time this baby is a woman, all women will be men's co-law-makers, and then, men will be held to just as strict account for all their misdeeds as they to-day hold women. There is no law now in existence to protect woman in this way; therefore, I, an outlaw as far as the legal codes of men are concerned, am resolved to be a law unto myself, and thereby protect my own womanhood."

"I only wish all the women in the world were like ye?" exclaimed the nervous sufferer, with a sob.

"If every woman would be true to herself she could easily compel all men to be true to themselves," was the decided reply.

"I'm awful sick!" said Jason, suddenly, "and I'll never be well any more."

"He ought to sober off by degrees," whispered Mrs. Andrews, coming in.

"Which he cannot do!" said Madge, as she assisted him to the clean, white bed, with its "clover leaf" spread of patch-work, which he had so often despoiled in days gone by with his drunken debaucheries.

"I clearly see," continued Madge, "that it's a case of kill or cure. If we give him liquor, and patch him up by easing his longing, it will only prolong his misery, for he will not be cured, but will be more than ever susceptible of temptation. Let him alone. He'll either get thoroughly well and die decently, in his bed, or rise from this illness so thoroughly controlled by the demon that we can no longer manage him, and then he'll die on the gallows or in the gutter. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. I have resolved to save Jason Andrews, but whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell. God knoweth."

"Madge! are you crazy?"

"I guess so. It seems to do you all a great deal of good to think I am, at any rate."

"But what do you mean by saving Jason whether in the body or out of it?"

"Just what I say."

"Well, do explain it. You frighten me."

"Mother, I see clearly, yet I cannot tell you how or why, for it is not lawful for me to utter all the truth that is revealed unto me, that when a poor drunkard dies with his spirit clouded with such a disease as is consuming Jason, the awful appetite will follow him into the other life, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That evil spirit must come out of Jason Andrews, and we must exercise it. If his body is rent by the ordeal, we shall have done our duty, and can afford to leave the result with God. If he shall survive the treatment, he shall come forth ransomed while yet in the body from one of the most burdensome and soul-destroying diseases ever yet endured or cured among men. If he goes out into the life of souls afflicted and in chains, his last state shall be worse than his first."

"Well, Madge, have things your own way. But I must say that, to my mind, your theology looks about as badly muddled as your system of hygiene."

"If you could feel truths in your bones, and see them with your eyes shut, you wouldn't talk that way!"

"I've dreamed dreams an' seen visions, an' somehow I know that what Madge tells me is true!" he would say. "I don't want to live unless I can conquer drunkenness by gettin' well. If I die fightin' it, I know I'll conquer, for I see the light ahead."

"The girl's bewitched him. I'd like to see the days of thumb-screws and racks come back again for all cases like Madge!" said the ex-parson, with the voice that naturally attuned itself on all solemn occasions to a rasping double bass. "This sorcery among women that rises and puts its own construction on Scripture, when Paul suffered not a woman to teach, is simply abominable."

"Which is the best judge of what a woman can and ought to do, do you think—God Almighty, or Paul?" cried Madge, her eyes flashing.

"There's more nonsense! You can never reason with a woman!"

"Try common sense for argument, and see!" and Madge turned away with a shrug of disgust.

Jason Andrews did not rally. For weeks and weeks he lingered, as helpless and exacting as a spoiled and petted

child. He would suffer no one except Madge to wait upon him, and her ordeal of servitude told fearfully upon her health.

Meanwhile, the trial of Morris Morrison for the alleged murder of George Hanson dragged its tardy length into a so-called court of justice.

After the usual preliminaries, (and men who wear their lives away in the arduous service of an ungrateful country are seldom in a hurry about preliminaries), a jury of twelve sovereign people was impaneled, whom, but for Mark Twain's inimitable take-off upon another jury of twelve conservators of law and life and destiny, which is yet fresh in the minds of our readers, we might occupy pages in describing each and severally, and the prisoner was placed inside the bar.

The prosecuting attorney seemed especially blood-thirsty, so watchful was he of the rights and immunities of a sovereign people. The judge was an urbane, slow-speaking gentleman, phlegmatic and deliberate, but in all things inclined to be just according to the light that attorneys and witnesses were able to bestow.

The prisoner was pale and emaciated. Long confinement had told fearfully upon his constitution, and the coarse food, ill-cooked and indigestible, that had been regularly provided for him by the ex-parson's sad-eyed wife, had added little to his comfort.

"The prisoner will stand up!" said the learned judge.

The heavy manacles that clanked about him made the task a difficult one, but the prisoner stood up.

"Morris Morrison, you stand in the august presence of the judicial ermine, charged with the gravest of all crimes, the murder of one of your fellow beings. You are of sound mind and of mature years. You are yourself cognizant of your guilt or innocence. It is the wish of the Court that you provide yourself with a counsel. Have you done so?"

"No, sir."

"Are you unable to procure counsel?"

"No, sir."

"Then make your choice."

"Your Honor, I have the pleasure to introduce myself."

"You are not a lawyer, and you must run no risks. I appoint Esquire Lawmaker as your attorney in the name of the commonwealth. Of course you understand that you are to pay for his services in case you possess the funds. If not, the State will meet the expenses, for you must have a fair trial."

"Indeed, your Honor, the State is very kind, but I do not wish the services of Mr. Lawmaker. I prefer to plead my own case, unaided and unassisted."

"The Court regrets its inability to grant your request, sir. Human life is too sacred to be thus entrusted to an irregular proceeding. Esquire Lawmaker, take your seat beside the prisoner."

The Esquire obeyed with an alacrity that was possibly suggested by promptings of humanity, and possibly by prospective duanets. The opposing counsel took a seat upon the other side. Both attorneys looked to be, and indeed were, played-out politicians (excuse the slang) of the opposing schools. One was a thin, wiry, excitable and impotent looking individual, with a thin head, nearly bald, upon which a few sickly hairs were struggling to eke out a feeble existence, and the other was a broad, thick-set sovereign, with protruding stomach, and a round, eukleche head, surmounted by a pate as sleek and destitute of hirsute covering as a varnished watermelon.

The prisoner looked at both and shuddered.

"What say you? Guilty or not guilty?" said the urbane judge.

"I should be guilty of self-murder should I plead guilty," was the firm reply. "This, however, is the first time I have had opportunity to answer the official question. I am not only not guilty, but I know that the man of whose murder I stand accused is alive and well—or, rather, that he was alive and well at the time of my incarceration, as I could long ago have proven had my witnesses been considered legally competent to testify to the truth."

"This is a very irregular proceeding," said His Honor. "A prisoner is not usually allowed to make voluntary assertions. Be careful, lest you criminate yourself."

The prisoner smiled.

"Now, answer only such questions as are propounded. Do you plead guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

"Very well. The attorneys will now call the witnesses, and proceed at once with the trial."

So saying, the urbane judge leaned back in his official chair, by some inexpressible misnomer dubbed a bench, and began to read the morning paper.

Have patience, kindly reader. We shall not inflict upon you that intricate description of the trial which we know you are preparing to skip. A cloud of witnesses were brought forward and sworn, and there followed the usual questionings and cross-questionings, questions that bore not upon the question, and questions that were often a direct insult to the questioned, and still no positive information amounting to anything; but the most round-a-bout

circumstantial evidence could be, in common Western vernacular, made to stick.

The depositions of Jason Andrews (he could not come to the court because of his illness), relative to the missing man, the threats he had overheard, the meeting he had almost witnessed between the supposed deceased and the accused, the cast-off clothing found in the Molalla, which had been exhibited till every man, woman, and child in the community could swear clearly as to its quality without again seeing it, all failed to elicit anything new; but the suspicion of the prisoner's guilt had wrought conviction in the minds of the multitude, who were eager for the shedding of human blood; and there seemed to be scarcely a ray of hope for his acquittal. Madge had stolen the little time wherein she dared to leave her patient at the farm to attend the trial as a spectator, resolved to volunteer nothing herself unless it were found necessary to thus attempt to save her friend. Closely, though furtively, she watched the eyes of the jurors, and could read nothing but decisive condemnation there. The last witness had endured the inquisitorial torture of divers cross-questionings, and then, with all eyes upon her, Madge walked through the aisle, leading Sara Perkins by the hand. A few words were whispered in the ear of the opponent of Esquire Lawmaker, which gave that dignitary a new idea that he acted upon at once.

Sara Perkins was sworn. With her testimony the reader is already acquainted. She had met George Hanson and talked with him two weeks after the time of the alleged murder. Her statement was given in an unwavering, modest way that charmed the judge and jury. Then came the cross-questioning. The witness took her turn upon the rack.

"You are a married lady, I believe?"

"No, sir."

Sara blushed scarlet.

"Pardon me, I hear that you are a mother."

Alas, the wronged mother of a man's child had no manly protector to appeal to. So she only blushed in silence.

"I learn also that there were tender relations at one time between you, madam, and the prisoner at the bar. Am I right?"

"We can't escape that, madam. It followed the young girl across the green fields where she walked, magnifying her sun-bonnet into an unsightly thing, and lengthening her slight figure into exceedingly lank proportions."

"Which way, Miss Rachel? Are you running away from your shadow?"

asked a young man, stepping out from an oak tree that stood midway in the field.

Rachel Moffatt gave a side-long glance at her shadow, and said, with an effort: "We can't escape that, madam. It followed the young girl across the green fields where she walked, magnifying her sun-bonnet into an unsightly thing, and lengthening her slight figure into exceedingly lank proportions."

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Rachel Moffatt's Shadow.

Reuben Moffatt and Kezia, his wife, received a triplet of white wedding cards from the hands of their daughter Rachel, and fell into serious chat over the bits of card-board. George Reynolds, who, as usual, was dressed with positive knowledge gained by acquaintance with him from boyhood. Kate Maurice, the bride, was discussed with the speculative knowledge that characterizes remarks concerning stranger bridals.

"Rachel Moffatt had left the room while George Reynolds was under discussion, and her mother's careful eye had observed that there was surprise, anger, almost tears in the girl's face."

"I say, Reuben," began the good man's wife, after Rachel had gone. "Yes," assented Reuben Moffatt, signifying his readiness to hear what his wife had to say.

"I want to call your attention to our Rachel."

"You needn't call very loud," was Reuben Moffatt's answer. "My attention goes a good deal that way naturally."

"To be sure," answered Kezia Moffatt. "How could it be otherwise, and you the father of such a girl as our Rachel? I am sure I wonder that a young man like George Reynolds should look for her from such a trim, handsome girl as Rachel is, and he knows all about her house-keeping, too."

"Look farther and fare worse! is an old proverb, you know," rejoined Reuben Moffatt.

"And it's my opinion he's done worse, and deserves to do worse," said Kezia Moffatt, with anger in her eyes and tones. "I am sure I hope Rachel will get over it and go to the party."

"Get over it?" repeated Reuben Moffatt. "You don't mean to say that Rachel—"

The old man paused and surveyed his wife critically.

"Kezia Moffatt nodded her head affirmatively.

"Oh, nonsense, Kezia!" exclaimed the old man. "You feel unpleasant like because George Reynolds should prefer any other woman to our Rachel. It's my opinion that Rachel hadn't a thought of George Reynolds, except—"

A shadow fell on the porch, and the old man suddenly changed the subject of his remarks.

The shadow that had fallen on the porch was Rachel Moffatt's. It followed the young girl across the green fields where she walked, magnifying her sun-bonnet into an unsightly thing, and lengthening her slight figure into exceedingly lank proportions.

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ever was caught. It's my opinion the man who gets our Rachel will find there is better fish than George Reynolds has caught, and I'm sure Rachel will find better fish than George Reynolds, if he does think himself the biggest toad in the puddle."

Over Rachel Moffatt's sad face flitted a smile that was almost merry. To think of comparing Medbury society to a puddle, and George Reynolds to the biggest toad! Then her thoughts wandered to herself. Did her father and mother suspect her liking for George Reynolds? And Walter Gibbs—had he face so tattled to him of secrets that she said would have kept? Henceforth she would wear a mask and hide her secrets in her heart.

She went into the house and sat down by the lamp-light. Her mask was on, and she wondered if Mrs. Reynolds had made the fruit-cake for the reception, or whether they had bought it of the baker at Medbury.

Mrs. Moffatt thought that Mrs. Reynolds would make it, she was such a hater to have everything done up in her kitchen.

"Maybe," she added, "Mrs. Reynolds would like your help in making lady-cake or something. You're such a master hand at lady-cake, you know, Rachel. Supposing she should express herself that way, what should I say to her?"

Rachel's mask threatened to fall. To go into George Reynolds' home and help prepare for the reception of his wife was a blow from childhood, and we used to tatter our mask with it. Only a moment, and the tottering mask was up again.

"Certainly, if Mrs. Reynolds should ask my help, I would go," Rachel answered. "I would be glad to go, if she were giving me a final securities touch."

And so Rachel Moffatt found herself beating eggs and stirring butter and sugar in Mrs. Reynolds' kitchen, listening to the woman's garrulous chat.

"Lady-cake it will be, I expect," she said, pausing in the midst of her culinary operations to watch the whites of eggs rising in a foam under Rachel Moffatt's dextrous manipulations. "And I expect she's a very fine lady, we're asking it for; but it's a matter that I would like to know more about. It's between us two, that I'd been satisfied if George had picked out a wife nearer home. I'm sure I wouldn't!"

She was so thoroughly amiable and lovely. "Who is the lady in white with the pink flowers in her hair?" asked the bride of the bridegroom, the evening of their reception, as Rachel Moffatt entered the room, somewhat late. "She looks very lovely, but I shouldn't think she would like to wear flowers of the June tree. Don't you know?" she asked, answering the inquiring looks of her husband. "That is the name of the tree that bears those pink flowers. I am a great botanist—don't you know that, my darling?"

"The darling?" concurred, seeing Rachel Moffatt and the pink flowers, and remembering certain words uttered beneath the shadows of the pink branches.

Rachel Moffatt was a study to another man at George Reynolds' reception. Walter Gibbs' eyes followed her wherever she moved, and he went home thinking of the mystery of womanhood as it revealed itself in Rachel Moffatt and pink flowers.

The Judas tree had never bloomed but once when George Reynolds and his wife came to Medbury, and he called, and observed that postage was very high; in which sentiment I concurred, and promised to labor to reduce it. He then remarked that I would have the franking privilege; to which I assented, and promised to labor to abolish it. But all this did not seem to interest the young man, and I was perplexed to know the drift of his conversation. Finally, with great embarrassment, he observed that he was engaged to a young lady at the East, and wanted to know if I could not frank his letters. I explained that there was but one way to avoid the responsibilities of the law, and that was for him to write his letters to me, and then I could write a letter to her, calling her attention to his, and she could have the same privilege. The correspondence took this form until the Congressman from her district asked me if, at the close of the session, I was going home by the way of his district. I did not comprehend him until he stated that he was going to labor to abolish it. I explained that I was corresponding with the Congressman from her district, and that I was going to be married before the next session, it would be pleasant for us to board at the same house! This put a new phase upon the matter, and I wrote to my constituent that he must bring his courtship to a close, and he did so. Four letters from him and three from her covered the transaction, and I stand indebted to this day to the "conscience" of the Post Office Department for \$1.75. But this was a very insignificant sum to pay for the securing of a good Yankee girl to the West in those days. Besides, there are seven in the family now, and one went to the bank; and when I was on a visit of congratulation to the lower left hand corner "oong," represents a farwell call, and the lower right hand corner "condolee," expresses