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MOON'S PHASES.

AUGUST.

- ☾ Last Quarter, 5th day, 11h. 12m. even.
- ☾ New Moon, 13th day, 10h. 17m. even.
- ☽ First Quarter, 20th day, 10h. 1m. even.
- ☾ Full Moon, 27th day, 8h. 19m. even.

THE HALF SISTER.

A TALE OF LOVE AND VIRTUE.

CHAPTER V.

'You will not surely go to the hall, to-night, Sophie!' said Jane, as she entered her sister's apartment.

'And why not?' asked Sophie, coldly.

'You know that little Laurie is far from well; it seems scarcely safe to leave her.'

'Nonsense, Jane! you magnify the child's illness; she has nothing but a slight cold; and besides, you will be with her.'

'I am not her mother,' answered Jane, sadly; 'and besides this, dearest sister, you know your husband disapproves your connection in any way with Mrs. Farren, whom you acknowledge yourself is not irreproachable. He is absent; he may return to-night; and oh! if you still value that affection once so dear to you, let him not find you gone to such a place, and at such an hour.'

The young wife seemed touched by this appeal; she hesitated, but after a moment's pause, exclaimed, petulantly—

'No, I will go; if I stay at home, now, he will think I fear him. Cecil has many foolish notions; and his prejudice against Mrs. Farren is one of them. I will go, if it is only to prove that I am capable of judging for myself;' and she hastily rung the bell.

'But consider for one moment your husband's feelings!' pleaded Jane.

'You are very careful of Mr. Mordant's feelings,' interrupted Sophie, indignantly; 'and by what right I have yet to learn.'

The maid entered to dress her mistress, and Jane, knowing further opposition was vain, sadly quitted the room.

It was past midnight; the shaded lamp cast a dim light through the room of the sick child, and Jane bent anxiously over the little sufferer.

The child was restless; and, opening its eyes, begged to be taken up—Jane raised it in her arms, and wrapping it closely in the coverlet, seated herself by the fire, with the child in her lap. Scaubled by her caresses, the little girl nestled her head in her bosom, and seemed more quiet. As she sat by that lonely hearth, the mind of Jane reverted rapidly to the tears of the last few years. Six years had elapsed since her sister's

marriage, and since her step-mother's death, which occurred in less than a year after. Jane had resided in the family of Mr. Mordant; and each day made her feel more sensibly how vain was the sacrifice she had made. Sophie had loved Cecil with passionate ardor, but young, gay, and inexperienced, the duties of a wife and mother suited not her nature. And in proportion as her husband found enjoyment at home, did her desire for gayety increase. He thwarted her inclinations, and love subsided into indifference, and proud, yet self-willed as a child, she rebelled against him. Jane saw with deep and unavailing regret how false was the step she had taken, in thus sacrificing the happiness of Mordant with her own. Sophie, too, had never forgiven her husband's preference for Jane; and forgetful of her noble sacrifice, though ignorant of the circumstances which induced him to offer her his hand, she still felt a jealousy towards her sister, and resolutely refused all her advice, accusing her of still loving Cecil, and of endeavouring to win back his affection. Often was Jane tempted to return, and seek a home among her early friends; but her devotedness to her sister prevailed, and she determined still to watch over her, trusting to time, and the unerring instincts of her woman's heart, to recall her to a sense of her duties. Many and sad were the thoughts that chased each other through her mind in that hour of lonely watching, and the large tears were coursing each other silently down her cheek, when the child suddenly started from its sleep, a strange choking gasp in its throat, and it struggled as if for breath. Alarmed, Jane rose hastily to call for assistance, when the sound of wheels, dashing rapidly over the pavement, was heard, and immediately after, the well known step of Cecil Mordant ascended the stairs, and he entered the room. Forgetful of every thing in her alarm for the child, Jane exclaimed, as she saw him—

'Hasten, Mordant; summon the nurse; I fear little Laurie is dying.'

The father took the child in his arms; its face was contorted in its efforts to breathe; its little limbs were struggling in the agonies of death; and as he eagerly bent over it, the features suddenly relaxed, and all was still.

'She is dead!' he exclaimed wildly, 'and where is her mother?'

'I will bring her to you!' said Jane, quickly, dreading the effects of his discovery of her absence at such a time, and hoping to return with her ere the first step of his grief had passed.

Hastily wrapping a mantle around her, she left the house, and entering the carriage that Mordant had just

left, was driven rapidly to Mrs. Farren's. Without waiting for an announcement, she ascended the brilliantly lighted stairs, and was passing through an apparently deserted ante-room, when the tones of a voice, she could not mistake, arrested her steps; she paused and listened.

'Do not tempt me thus!' said an imploring female voice; 'much as I love you, I dare not fly; think of my husband and children!'

'I think rather of me, dearest!' answered the impassioned tones of a man. 'Think of my feelings, and of your own when separated; have you not avowed your love, and what am I without you? Be mine, dearest Sophie; fly with me now—this moment—mine own beloved, and years of happiness await you.'

A film came over the eyes of Jane;—could this perjured and guilty woman be her for whom she had sacrificed the love of a noble heart—the happiness of a lifetime? She had known her sister to be imprudent, but never believed her guilty; and a prayer of deep thankfulness arose in her heart that she could yet save her.—Again the low tones of endearment reached her ear, mingled with stilled sobs. The curtain that concealed the recess where they stood was withdrawn, and, hiding her face, the guilty woman stepped timidly forth. Suddenly a detaining hand was laid upon her arm, and a stifled shriek burst from her lips, as, turning, she beheld her sister. She strove to speak, but the words died on her tongue; she shuddered.

'Sophie!' said Jane, earnestly regarding the haughty looks of the balled lover, 'I have come to save you; your husband has returned—let us go to him.'

'Cecil has returned! save me from him; I dare not, cannot meet him! she cried, wildly throwing herself in her lover's arms, who, unheeding Jane, proceeded to support her from the room.

But nerved with desperate energy, Jane sprang forward, and clasping her sister's robe, fell at her feet exclaiming—

'My sister, hear me! see, I kneel to you, to beseech you, by the holies of wife and mother, to return by me. Your child is dead—its low wail of agony sounded in my ears whilst you were listening to the voice of the tempter. Sophie, do you remember the night when you confessed your first and purest love? Recall your feelings then, and the wild words you uttered, and then plunge if you will into the abyss before you. Your tempter promises you happiness; how can it dwell with the perjured wife and mother? Return with me, my sister, ere it is too late, and your husband shall know no more of this. Come to him—he awaits you with your child

in his arms. Come, receive his forgiveness for the past, and the future is bright before you.

She rose as she spoke, and withdrawing the fainting Sophie from the clasp of the lover, who, started by her vehemence, offered no resistance, fondly supported her trembling footsteps from the house, and entered the carriage.

Terrible was the emotion of the guilty woman when she found herself being conveyed rapidly home; by turns she reproached herself bitterly, and besought Jane not to take her to her husband; and then in words of heart-rending agony, prayed for death.—Jane endeavoured in vain to soothe her.

When they reached home, she was supported to her apartment, and Jane went to seek for Mordant; he was gone, but an almost illegible scrawl was left on the stand by the head of the dead child; it contained these words—'I know all; when Mrs. Mordant returns, request her to keep her room until after the funeral of my child; I will never see her more.—Regardless alike of the claims of wife and mother, she hath chosen her path alone, let her pursue it.'

But Cecil Mordant knew not the full extent of his wife's guilt; he had discovered that she had a lover, but of her projected flight he knew nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

The cold gray light of morning struggled feebly through the closed blinds of the sick-chamber, and again Jane Percival was a watcher by the bed of death. Mrs. Mordant had never left her room since that fatal night; for three weeks she had raved in wild delirium, and Jane was her constant and faithful nurse. The sufferer was calmly sleeping, and her sister anxiously watched her, for life and death hung upon her awaking, and the physicians gave but little hope. Jane had written, in the long watches of the night, to Mordant, telling him the crisis of his wife's disorder was at hand, and beseeching him to come to her, lest she should die without receiving his forgiveness. He came, and was even now waiting the summons to enter the room of death.

Gradually the pale dawn brightened, and one bright ray of sunlight fell upon the bed. Sophie Mordant opened her eyes, and fixed them fondly on her sister.

'Jane, my dear sister,' she said, in a low and feeble voice.

'They were the first words of reason she had uttered, and a bright hope sprang in Jane's heart; she bent over her, and kissing her fondly, whispered—

'Do not speak, dearest; you are still too weak, though much better.'

'I must speak while I have strength