

Choice Literature.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

BY FLORENCE MONTGOMERY.

CHAPTER X.

Humphrey slept late the next morning, and the sun was streaming on his face when he awoke.

He sprang out of bed with an exclamation of delight at seeing such a fine day, and then started back in surprise at finding himself in a strange room.

Recollections of last night were beginning to steal over him, when the door opened, and Jane came in.

"At last! Master Humphrey. Why, I thought you were never going to wake up! Master Miles has been asking for you for ever so long!"

"Then he's better, is he?" said Humphrey, eagerly.

"Better!" exclaimed Jane, in a sprightly tone; "why, bless you, he's quite well."

Jane had been the one to find Humphrey in the drawing room the night before, and had guessed by his tear-stained face how it had been.

She was not equivocating; Miles had taken a turn for the better in the night, and there was no further anxiety about him.

Humphrey's spirits rose immediately to their usual height; he dressed himself in a great hurry, and soon the two little brothers were together again.

Humphrey did not allude to his troubles of the evening before. Perhaps he had already forgotten them; or if they did recur to his memory, it was a dull, dead sense of pain which he had no wish to call into life again.

His was a nature that was only too glad to escape from such recollections. His buoyant spirits and volatile disposition helped him to throw off sad memories, and never had he been gay or wilder than on this morning, as he laughed and talked and played by his brother's bedside.

It was a glorious day, Miles was nearly well, his father was coming (in obedience to Virginia's letter), and life seemed to him one flood of sunshine.

Virginia, however, still shaky from her late anxiety, and with her head ominously tied up with flannel, looked grimly on his mirth. She did not understand the boy; how should she? She was feeling very sore with him for having caused all this trouble; she was, of course, ignorant of what he had suffered, and she looked upon his noisy merriment as only another proof of his usual heartlessness.

Humphrey was not in the room when his father arrived, having gone out for a run in the garden; so Virginia had to check in pouring out her complaint.

Sir Everard was startled at the effect the short illness had had upon Miles, and listened more patiently than usual.

The delicate child looked so much like his mother as he lay in bed, with his flushed cheeks and lustrous eyes, that the vague fear about him, that almost haunted the father, took a more definite shape.

Certainly Virginia's account of Humphrey's disobedience was not calculated to soften him toward the boy, and he really felt more angry with him than he had ever done before.

Little Miles was particularly engaging that day, so delighted to see his father, and so caressing in his ways, that Humphrey's want of heart seemed to stand out in sharper contrast. Sir Everard could not tear himself away from the little fellow for some time, and the more coaxing the child was, the more painfully came home to the father the thought of having so nearly lost him.

On descending from the nursery, Sir Everard went into the library, and, ringing the bell, desired that Master Duncombe should be sent to him immediately.

"I don't suppose I shall make any impression upon him," he said to himself while he waited, "but I must try." He expected much of Humphrey, but he was hardly prepared for the boisterous opening of the door, and the gay aspect of the boy as he bounded into the room.

Sir Everard was, as we have seen, always loath to scold or punish either of his motherless children, and when it must be done, he schooled himself to do it from a sense of duty. But the bold, and, as it seemed to him, defiant, way in which the boy presented himself fairly angered him, and it was in a tone of forced civility that he exclaimed, "What do you mean, sir, by coming into the room like that?"

Now Humphrey had been busy working in his garden when his father's message had reached him, in happy forgetfulness of his recent conduct and his brother's recent danger.

In the excitement of hearing of his father's arrival, he had overlooked the probability of his displeasure; and it was with unfeigned astonishment that he heard himself thus greeted. His wondering expression only irritated his father the more.

"Don't you stand there, looking as if you thought you had done nothing wrong," he exclaimed testily; "do you think you are to lead your poor little brother into danger, and make him ill, and then not be found fault with? Don't you know that you have disobeyed me, and broken your promise? Did I not forbid you to go near that pond? I tell you I won't have it, and you shall go to school if you can't behave better at home. Do you hear me, sir? What do you mean by behaving in this way?"

Humphrey understood now. His lips quivered, and his cheek flushed at hearing himself so scolded. Taken to, and he dared not attempt to answer, lest he should disgrace himself by tears.

Sir Everard's anger soon evaporated.

"You see, Humphrey," he went on more gently, "it is always the same thing. Day after day and week after week I have the same complaints of you. I should have thought you were old enough now to remember that Miles is very delicate, and that you would have taken care of him instead of leading him into mischief. Do you know," he

concluded, suddenly dropping his voice, "that we have nearly lost your little brother?"

To Sir Everard's surprise, Humphrey burst into a passion of tears. The words brought back to him the suffering of last night with a sharp pang, and his whole frame shook with sobbings.

Sir Everard was instantly melted. Like most men, the sight of tears had a magical effect upon him; and he took the child on his knee, and tried to comfort him.

"There, there," he said, soothingly, as he stroked the curly head, "that will do; I must not expect old heads on young shoulders; but you must try and remember what I tell you, and not disobey me any more. And now give me a kiss, and run out and have a game of cricket."

Humphrey lifted up his tear-stained face, and gladly received the kiss of forgiveness.

A few minutes after he was playing single wicket in the field with the footman, without a trace of sorrow on his countenance or a sad thought in his heart.

But Sir Everard remained in the library, perturbed and uneasy. Miles' fragile appearance had made him nervous, and he was thinking how easily any little chill might bring on inflammation again. He was well versed in all the sudden relapses and as sudden improvements of delicate lungs. Had he not watched them hour by hour? Did he not know every step? It was an attack like this that had preceded his wife's slow fading. Daily had he watched the flush deepen and the features sharpen on a face which was so like the little face upstairs, that, as he thought of them both, he could hardly separate the two.

Something must be done to prevent the recurrence of any risks for Miles. But what? It was clear that Humphrey was not to be trusted; and yet Sir Everard could not bear to spoil the children's fun by separating them, or by letting Virginia mount in too strict guard over them. She was a nervous woman, and too apt to think everything they did had danger in it.

"Boys must amuse themselves," he reflected; "and at Humphrey's age it is natural they should do extraordinary things. I don't want to make him a muff." Involuntarily he smiled at the idea of Humphrey being a muff. "How easily Miles might have fallen into that horrid pond! The slightest push from Humphrey, who never looks where he is going, would have sent him in. Would he ever have recovered the effects of a wholesale soaking? However," he concluded, half out loud, as he rose to return to the nursery, "the session is nearly over, and I shall be down here, and able to look after them myself. And, meanwhile, I shall remain on for a day or two, till Miles is quite well again."

CHAPTER XI.

It was a pleasant little holiday that Sir Everard spent with his children during the days that followed, and often in after years did he look back upon it with a tender regret.

Miles' health improved steadily, and in a little while he was allowed to be carried in the afternoon to his father's dressing room, where, nestled in a huge arm-chair, with his father and Humphrey sitting by, he passed some very happy hours. Sometimes they played games, or else Sir Everard would read out loud from a book of fairy tales he had brought from London. One evening he read a story which greatly delighted both little boys. It was about a wonderful mirror which had the power of showing to its owner what any of his absent friends might be doing at the moment he was looking into it.

"Oh, how I wish I could have such a mirror!" said Humphrey, very earnestly.

"How I wish I could!" echoed Miles.

"Do you?" said Sir Everard; "I wonder why."

Humphrey did not answer; he was gazing out of the window in deep thought.

"Who would you look for, my little man?" asked Sir Everard of Miles.

"I should look for you, dear Fardie."

"But I am here, darling."

"Not always," said Miles, laying his little hand caressingly on Sir Everard's. "When you are away in London I should like to look in, and see what you are doing."

It was by these encouraging little words and ways that Miles had wound himself so closely round his father's heart.

"So you would like to see me when I'm away," he said, stroking the child's hand, "do you miss me when I'm not with you?"

"So much, Fardie; I wish you would never go. Humphrey, don't we miss Fardie dreadfully when he's away, and wish he would never go?"

Sir Everard glanced at his elder boy, as if hoping to hear him confirm his little brother's words, but Humphrey was still looking thoughtfully up, out of the window and took no notice.

"What is he thinking about?" whispered Sir Everard to Miles.

"I don't know," said Miles, softly "perhaps he's wishing very hard for a mirror."

Whatever the boy was wishing for, it must have been something which he felt he could never have, for the brown eyes were full of tears as they gazed up into the blue sky.

"Wait a minute," breathed Miles, "he'll say how we miss you, when he's done thinking, often, when he's thinking, he doesn't answer me till he's quite done what he's thinking about."

With the tears still standing in them, the eyes suddenly sparkled with a new feeling, and Humphrey sprang to the window, exclaiming,—

"A hawk! I do declare; and he'll have the sparrow in a minute!"

Sir Everard looked disappointed, and drew Miles closer to him.

"He's not thinking about us, is he, darling?"

"Eh!" exclaimed Humphrey, starting, "were you speaking to me? What did you say, Miles?"

"It was about the glass, Humphrey; I said we should

like so much to see what Fardie is doing in London sometimes."

"Oh! wouldn't it be fun!" said Humphrey, seating himself by his brother; "sometimes we should see him in his club, and sometimes in a hansom cab, and sometimes we should see you making a speech in the House of Parliament, shouldn't we, Fardie, with your arm out, and a great sheet all around you, like the statue of Mr. Pitt down stairs?"

Sir Everard laughed.

"Not very often, I think."

"How should we see you, Fardie?"

"I'm afraid, if you looked late in the evening, you would often see me so," he answered, folding his arms, and shutting his eyes.

"What, asleep!" exclaimed the children.

"Fast asleep," returned their father.

"Isn't the Queen very angry with you?" inquired Miles.

The Queen is generally asleep herself at such hours."

"What! in the House of Parliament?"

"No; but in one or other of her palaces."

"But she isn't always asleep at night," said Humphrey, in a superior tone; "sometimes she sits up very late, and has a ball. I know a picture of her giving a ball, in the old book of prints down-stairs."

The volume in question bore the date of 1710, and the engraving represented the court of Queen Anne, but it was all the same to Humphrey.

"Do you ever go to the Queen's ball, Fardie?" inquired Miles.

"Yes, dear, I have been, but not for a long time."

"Father's too old for balls now," observed Humphrey.

"Ain't you, father?"

"My dancing days are over, yes," said Sir Everard, absently. He was thinking how lovely his wife had looked at the last court ball he had been to.

"Do they dance 'up the middle and down again,' Fardie?"

"No," answered Sir Everard, smilingly, "quadrilles and valse mostly."

"I suppose when you were young and went to balls they used to dance the minuet?" said Humphrey. "Used you to wear a pig-tail, father?"

"Upon my word!" said Sir Everard, "why, how old do you think I am?"

The children had no idea, and amused themselves for the next ten minutes by trying to guess, their conjectures varying between sixty and ninety.

"Will you come for a run, father?" said Humphrey, presently.

"It's a little hot for running, isn't it?" answered Sir Everard; "but if you are tired of being indoors, you can go in the garden, and I will join you in about an hour."

"We might go to the village, mightn't we, and spend my pennies? Dyson's got his trumpet, so there's nothing to save for, and I should like to spend them."

"Very well; where shall I find you?"

"I shall be feeding my jackdaw, or working in my garden; or, perhaps," after a moment's reflection, "I might be sitting at the top of the apple tree, or running along the kitchen garden wall. But if you don't find me in any of those places, look in the hen-house. I might be getting an egg there for Miles' tea."

"But isn't the hen-house kept locked?"

"Oh, yes, but that doesn't matter a bit. I always squeeze myself through the hen's little trap-door."

"You don't expect me to do the same, I hope?"

Humphrey's sense of the ridiculous was tickled by the idea of his father's tall form struggling through the little hole of a few inches wide; and his merry laugh echoed through the room.

"What fun it would be!" he exclaimed, "you'd stick in the middle, and not be able to get in or out. How you would kick?"

Little Miles laughed till he coughed, and Sir Everard was obliged to dismiss Humphrey to the garden.

Humphrey was not engaged in any of the games he had mentioned when his father joined him an hour later. He was standing gazing thoughtfully at the lame jackdaw hopping about on his wooden leg.

"What a funny boy you are," said his father, laying a hand on his shoulder. "I do believe you care more for that ugly old jackdaw than for anything else that you have. He always seems to me the most uninteresting of creatures, and I'm sure he's very ungrateful, for the kinder you are to him the crosser he gets."

"Yes, he's very cross, poor old fellow," said Humphrey.

"Look!" holding out his hand, which bore unmistakable evidence of a bird's beak, "how he's pecked me. He always does whenever I feed him."

"I should almost be inclined not to feed him then."

"I couldn't let him starve, you know. Besides, I don't wonder he's cross. It's enough to make any one angry to be always hopping about in one little place, instead of having the whole world to fly about in. And if it wasn't for me," he added, half to himself, "he would be flying about now."

Sir Everard did not catch the last words, but the boy's face reminded him that he had touched on a painful subject, and he hastened to change it by proposing they should start for the village.

Humphrey brightened up directly, and was soon talking as gaily as usual. The painfulness of the subject consisted in this.

One day Humphrey and Miles were amusing themselves in their gardens, when the jackdaw, then young and active, came flying past.

Humphrey, without the slightest idea of touching it, flung a stone at it, exclaiming, "Get away, old fellow!"

But so unerring was his aim that the stone struck the bird on the wing, and brought it struggling and fluttering to the ground.

Dolly, the laundry-maid, was close at hand, and she never forgot Humphrey's burst of grief and remorse when, on picking up the jackdaw, they found both leg and wing