# FLORENCE MONTGOMERY

## MISUNDERSTOOD

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*Misunderstood:*

# Содержание

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## PREFACE

The following is not a child's story. It is intended for those who are interested in children; for those who are willing to stoop to view life as it appears to a child, and to enter for half-an-hour into the manifold small interests, hopes, joys, and trials which make up its sum.

It has been thought that the lives of children, as known by themselves, from their own little point of view, are not always sufficiently realized; that they are sometimes overlooked or misunderstood; and to throw some light, however faint, upon the subject, is one of the objects of this little story.

So much of it has been gathered from observation and recollection, that the author cannot help hoping it may not entirely fail of its aim.

# PART I

## CHAPTER I

Ever since the nursery dinner has the rain come pouring down all over the fields and meadows, the lawns and gardens, the roofs and gables of old Wareham Abbey, in the county of Sussex.

Ever since the cloth was cleared away have two little curly heads been pressed close together at the nursery window, and two pair of eager eyes been watching the clouds and sky.

What a dreadful wet afternoon! It is so particularly tiresome, as their father is expected home to-day, and had promised the two little brothers that they should come and meet him at the station.

There would be no room for Virginie in the dog-cart, and so, if they promised to sit very still, and not stand on the wheel to get in, or jump out before the carriage had stopped, or do anything else equally extraordinary, they were to have been trusted to old Peter, the coachman, and what fun *that* would have been!

To get away from Virginie for so long was the height of human enjoyment. She seemed to them a being created on purpose to interfere with every plan of enjoyment, to foresee danger where they only saw fun, and so bring the shadow of her everlasting "Ne faites pas ceci, ne faites pas cela," across the sunny path of their

boyish schemes and pastimes.

Poor Virginie! if she had been brought to the bar of their young judgments, she would have been at once condemned without any reference to extenuating circumstances. And yet she was, in the main a good, well-meaning woman, but unfortunately gifted with "nerves;" and the responsibility of the entire charge of the children of a widower, who was a great deal away from home, made her life an anxious one, more especially as they were a pair of the most reckless creatures that ever were born—fearless of danger, heedless of consequences, and deaf to entreaty or remonstrance.

Little Miles, the youngest, as she often told their father, was well enough *alone*; she could manage him perfectly, for, being only four years old, he was amenable to authority; but "Monsieur Humphrey!"

Words always failed Virginie at this juncture. She could only throw up her hands, and raise her eyes to the ceiling, with a suppressed exclamation.

Sir Everard Duncombe was a member of Parliament, and during the session was almost entirely in London, so that beyond his Saturday to Monday at the Abbey, his children saw but little of him at this time of the year.

During these flying visits he was overwhelmed with complaints of all M. Humphrey had done during the past week: how he would climb impossible trees and jump from impossible heights; how he had gone into the stables right under the horses'

heels, or taken a seat in the kennel, with the blood-hound; how narrowly he had escaped tumbling over the ha-ha one day, and slipping into the pond the next; in fact there was no end to his misdemeanors.

But the point on which Virginie harped was, that he led his little brother into all sorts of mischief; for what Humphrey did, Miles would do too, and where Humphrey went, Miles was ready to follow.

It was quite another thing, as Virginie urged, for Miles. Humphrey was proof against colds, coughs, and accidents of all kinds; but little Miles was physically weaker, and had moreover a tendency to a delicate chest and to croup; so that cold winds, and wet feet, and over-exertion, could not be too carefully avoided.

Timid and gentle by nature, clinging and affectionate by disposition, he was just the child a father delights in, and to him Sir Everard's affections were almost wholly given.

Lady Duncombe had observed her husband's partiality for his younger boy for some time before her death, and had more than once taxed him with it.

"Miles is such a little coaxing thing," he answered, taking the child up in his arms, and stroking the little curly head which nestled at once so contentedly down on his shoulder. "If I took Humphrey up, he would struggle to get down, and be climbing over the tables and chairs."

"Humphrey is three years older," argued Lady Duncombe; "you could not expect him to sit so still as a baby not yet two: but

he is quite as affectionate as Miles, in a different way."

"It may be so," Sir Everard returned "but it is very engaging when a little creature clings to one in this way, and sits for hours in one's lap."

Lady Duncombe did not answer, but her eye wandered from the fair-haired baby and rested on her eldest boy, who for three years had been her only child. To her, at least, he was an object of pride and pleasure. She gloried in his manly ways, his untiring spirits and activity; and loved his rough caresses quite as well as the more coaxing ways of his baby brother.

How she delighted to see him come rushing headlong into the room, and make one bound into her lap, even if he *did* knock down a chair or so on his way, upset her work-box and its contents, and dirty the sofa with his muddy boots. What then! Did not his eager kisses rain upon her cheek? Were not his dear rough arms round her neck? Did she not *know* what a loving heart beat under his apparent heedlessness and forgetfulness? What if he forgot every injunction and every promise, if he did not forget *her*! What if he took heed of no one and nothing, if her look and her kiss were always sought and cared for!

Oh! it was a sad day for little Humphrey Duncombe when that mother was taken away from him: when the long, wasting illness ended in death: when the hollow eye, which to the last had rested on him, closed for ever on this world; and the thin, transparent hands were folded for the last time on the breast where he should never again hide his curly head, and sob out his confessions and

repentance.

Sir Everard, overwhelmed by the blow which had fallen on him, hardly saw his children during the early days of his bereavement.

When he did, he was surprised to find Humphrey much the same as ever; still noisy and heedless, still full of mischief, and apparently forgetful of what had happened.

"He has not much heart," was his inward comment, as he watched the little figure, in its deep mourning, chasing the young lambs in the meadow.

Sir Everard saw the boy to all appearance the same, because he saw him in his moments of forgetfulness, when nature and childhood had asserted their rights, and the buoyancy of the boy's disposition had enabled him to throw off the memory of his sorrow: but he did *not* see him when the sense of his loss was upon him; did not see the face change, when the recollection came over him; did not hear the familiar name half uttered, and then choked by a sob. He did not see the rush to the drawing-room, with some new treasure, some new plan to be unfolded —and the sudden stop at the door, as the thought swept over him that on the well-known sofa there is now no mother's smile awaiting him, no ever-ready ear to listen and sympathize, no loving kiss, no responsive voice: and the low sob of pain, the listless drop of the arms to the side, and the rush away into the open air, away and away, anywhere, to escape from the grief and the longing, and the blank sense of desolation.

Only He, who dwelling in the highest heaven, yet vouchsafes to behold the lowest creature here upon earth, knew what was in the heart of the boy; as no one but He saw the pillow wet with tears, and heard the cry breaking forth in the dead of the night from the inmost recesses of the poor little orphaned heart. "Oh, mother! mother! what shall I do without you!"

All this had happened nearly two years before the day of which I am speaking, when the rain was acting its time-hackneyed part before the two little spectators at the window.

It had faded out of little Miles' mind as if it had never been; he could not even remember his mother; but in the mind of the elder boy her memory was still, at times, fresh and green.

Weeks and months might pass without his thoughts dwelling on her, but all of a sudden, a flower, a book, or some little thing that had belonged to her, would bring it all back, and then the little chest would heave, the curly head would droop, and the merry brown eyes be dimmed by a rush of tears.

There was a full-length picture in the now unused drawing-room of Lady Duncombe, with Humphrey in her arms; and at these times, or when he was in some trouble with Virginie, the boy would steal in there, and lie curled up on the floor in the darkened room; putting himself in the same attitude that he was in in the picture, and then try to fancy he felt her arms round him, and her shoulder against his head.

There were certain days when the room was scrubbed and dusted; when the heavy shutters were opened, and the daylight

streamed upon the picture. Then the two little brothers might be seen standing before it, while the elder detailed to the younger all he could remember about her.

Miles had the greatest respect and admiration for Humphrey. A boy of seven, who wears knickerbockers, is always an object of veneration to one of four, who is as yet limited to blouses: but Miles' imagination could not soar beyond the library and dining-room; and he could not remember the drawing-room otherwise than a closed room; so his respect grew and intensified as he listened to Humphrey's glowing description of the past glories of the house, when the drawing-room was one blaze of light, when there were muslin curtains in the windows, and chintz on all the chairs; and mother lay on the sofa, with her work-table by her side.

Dim and shadowy was the little fellow's idea of the "mother" of whom his brother always spoke in softened tones and with glistening eyes; but that she was something very fair and holy he was quite sure.

Deep was his sense of his inferiority to Humphrey in this respect; and a feeling akin to shame would steal over him when one of their long conversations would be abruptly put an end to by Humphrey's quick, contemptuous "It's no use trying to make you understand, because you don't remember her."

A very wistful look would come over the pretty little face on these occasions, and he would humbly admit his great degradation.

It was Miles' admiration for his brother that was the bane of Virginie's life. Timid by nature, Miles became bold when Humphrey led the way; obedient and submissive by himself, at Humphrey's bidding he would set Virginie at defiance, and for the time be as mischievous as he.

That "l'union fait la force," Virginie had long since discovered, to the ruin of her nerves and temper.

And now Virginie has several times suggested that if Humphrey will submit to a water-proof coat, and goloshes, he may go and meet his father at the station; and Humphrey has consented to come to terms if Miles may go too.

But here Virginie is firm. No amount of wrapping up would prevent Miles catching cold on so damp and rainy a day, as she knows well, by fatal experience; so the fiat has gone forth, either Humphrey will go alone, or both will stay at home.

"Don't go," pleaded little Miles, as they pressed their faces against the window; "it will be so dull all alone with Virginie."

"She's a cross old thing," muttered Humphrey; "but never mind, Miles, I won't go without you, and we'll count the raindrops on the window to make the time pass quick."

This interesting employment had the desired effect, and the next half-hour soon slipped by. Indeed, it was so engrossing, that the dog-cart came up the avenue, and was nearly at the hall door, before the little boys perceived it.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est donc!" exclaimed Virginie, startled by Humphrey's jump from the window-sill to the floor.

"C'est mon père," was all the information he vouchsafed her, as he rushed out of the room.

"M. votre père! Attendez done que je vous arrange un peu les cheveux."

She spoke to the winds: nothing was heard of Humphrey but sundry bumps and jumps in the distance, which told of his rapid descent down the stairs.

The more tardy Miles was caught and brushed, in spite of his struggles, and then he was off to join his brother.

He reached the hall door just as the carriage drove up, and the two little figures jumped and capered about, while a tall, dark gentleman divested himself of his mackintosh and umbrella, and then came up the steps into the house.

He stooped down to kiss the eager faces. "Well, my little fellows, and how are you both? No bones broken since last week? No new bruises and bumps, eh?"

They were so taken up with their father, that they did not perceive that he was not alone, but that another gentleman had got out of the dog-cart, till Sir Everard said—

"Now go and shake hands with that gentleman. I wonder if you know who he is?"

Humphrey looked up into the young man's face, and said, while his color deepened—

"I think you are my Uncle Charlie, who came to see us once a long time ago before you went to sea, and before–"

"Quite right," said Sir Everard, shortly; "I did not think you

would have remembered him. I daresay, Charlie, Humphrey has not altered very much; but this little fellow was quite a baby when you went away," he added, taking Miles up in his arms, and looking at his brother-in-law for admiration.

"What a likeness!" exclaimed Uncle Charlie.

Sir Everard put the child down with a sigh.

"Like in more ways than one, I am afraid. Look here," pointing to the delicate tracery of the blue veins on the forehead, and the flush on the fair cheek.

Humphrey had been listening intently to this conversation, and his father being once more occupied with kissing Miles, he advanced to his uncle, and put his hand confidingly in his.

"You are a nice little man," said Uncle Charlie, laying his other hand on the curly head; "we were always good friends, Humphrey. But," he added, half to himself, as he turned up the bright face to his, and gazed at it intently for a moment, "you are not a bit like your mother."

The dressing-gong now sounded, and the little boys proceeded to their father's room, to help or hinder him with his toilette.

Miles devoted himself to the carpet-bag, in expectation of some tempting paper parcel; while Humphrey's attentions were given to first one and then the other of the articles he was extracting from the pocket of the coat Sir Everard had just thrown off.

A suspicious click made the baronet turn round.

"What have you got hold of, Humphrey?"

An open pocket-knife dropped from the boy's hand he had just succeeded in opening the two blades, and was in the act of trying the edges on his thumb nail.

Failing in that experiment, his restless fingers strayed to the dressing-table, and an ominous silence ensued.

"Humphrey," shouted his father, "put my razor down."

In the glass he had caught sight of a well-soaped face, and spoke just in time to stop the operation.

Punishment always follows sin, and Humphrey was dispatched to the nursery to have his face sponged and dried.

By taking a slide down the banisters, however, he made up for lost time, and arrived at the library-door at the same time as his father and brother.

Uncle Charlie was standing by the window, ready dressed; and the gong sounding at that moment, they all went in to dinner.

The two little brothers had a chair on each side of their father, and an occasional share in his food.

Dinner proceeded in silence. Uncle Charlie was enjoying his soup, and Sir Everard, dividing himself between his little boys and his meal.

"It's William's birthday to-day," said Humphrey, breaking silence.

The unfortunate individual in white silk stockings, thus suddenly brought into public notice, reddened to the roots of his hair; and in his confusion nearly dropped the dish he was in the act of putting down before his master.

"He's twenty-two years old to-day," continued Humphrey; "he told me so this morning."

Sir Everard tried to evince a proper amount of interest in so important an announcement.

"What o'clock were you born, William?" pursued Humphrey, addressing the shy young footman at the side-board, where he had retreated with the dish-cover, and from whence he was making all sorts of signs to his tormentor, in the vain hope of putting an end to the conversation.

Sir Everard hastily held out a bit of turbot on the end of his fork, and effectually stopped the boy's mouth for a few minutes; but no sooner had he swallowed it, than he broke out again.

"What are you going to give William for his birthday present, father?" he said, putting his arms on the table, and resting his chin upon them, that he might the more conveniently look up into his father's face, and await his answer.

Lower and lower bent Uncle Charlie's head over his plate, and his face became alarmingly suffused with color.

"I know what he'd like," finished Humphrey, "for he's told me!"

The unhappy footman snatched up a dish-cover, and began a retreat to the door; but the inexorable butler handed him the lobster sauce, and he was obliged to advance with it to his master's side.

"I said to him to-day," proceeded Humphrey, in all the conscious glory of being in William's confidence, "If father

were to give you a birthday present, what would you like? You remember, don't you, William? And then he told me, didn't you, William?"

The direct form of attack was more than flesh and blood could stand. William made a rush to the door with the half-filled tray and, in spite of furious glances from the butler, disappeared, just as Uncle Charlie gave it up as a bad job, and burst out laughing.

"You must not talk quite so much at dinner, my boy," said Sir Everard, when the door was shut; "your uncle and I have not been able to say a word. I assure you," he added in an under tone to his brother-in-law, "these children keep me in constant hot water; I never know what they will say next."

When the servants reappeared the gentlemen, to William's relief, were talking politics; and Humphrey was devoting his energies to digging graves in the salt, and burying therein imaginary corpses, represented by pills he was forming from his father's bread.

"Will you come and help me with my dinner, next week, Charlie?" said Sir Everard; "I am going to entertain the aborigines, and I shall want a little assistance. It is now more than two years since I paid my constituents any attention, and I feel the time has come."

"What long words," said Humphrey, *sotto voce*, as he patted down the last salt grave, and stuck a bit of parsley, that had dropped from the fish, on the top of the mound. "Father," he went on, "what are abo—abo—"

"Aborigines?" finished Uncle Charlie. "Wild men of the woods, Humphrey; half human beings, half animals."

"And is father going to have them to dinner?" exclaimed Humphrey, in great astonishment.

"Yes," said Uncle Charlie, enjoying the joke; "it will be fine fun for you and Miles, won't it?"

"Oh, won't it!" echoed Humphrey, jumping down from his chair, and capering about. "Oh, father! will you promise, before you even ask Virginie, that we may come down to dinner that night, and see them?"

"Well, I don't know about dinner," said Sir Everard; "little boys are rather in the way on these occasions, especially those who don't know how to hold their tongues when they ought; but you shall both come down in the library and see them arrive."

At this moment Virginie's unwelcome head appeared at the door, and her unwelcome voice proclaimed, "M. Humphrey, M. Miles, il faut venir vous coucher."

Very unwillingly did they obey, for the conversation had reached a most interesting point, and Humphrey had a hundred and one questions still to put about the aborigines.

They proceeded quietly upstairs, closely followed by Virginie, who always liked to see them well on in front of her, in case they should take it into their heads to do anything very extraordinary on their way.

To-night, however, they were much too full of the wild men of the woods they were to see on Friday to think of anything

else, and they arrived in the bed-room nursery, without giving any shocks to Virginie's nervous system.

Indeed, the subject lasted them till they were undressed, and washed, and tucked up in their little beds side by side.

Virginie shut the shutters, and with a sigh of relief retired to supper.

"I'm glad she's gone," said Humphrey, "because now we can have a good talk about the wild men."

"Oh, Humphie!" said little Miles beseechingly, "*please* don't let us talk of them any more now it's dark; or if you really *must*, give me your hand to hold, for it does frighten me so."

"Then we won't talk about them," said the elder boy in a soothing tone, as he drew close to the edge of the bed, and threw his arm protectingly round the little one. Miles nestled close up to him, and with their cheeks one against the other, and hands tightly clasped together, they fell asleep.

Poor little curly heads, o'er whom no fond mother shall bend to-night, murmuring soft words of love and blessing! Poor dimpled faces, on whom no lingering kiss shall fall!

Outside in the meadows, the young lambs lay by the ewe's side; up in the trees the wee birds nestled beneath the parent wing, but no light step, no softly rustling gown, no carefully shaded light, disturbed the dreamless slumber of the two little brothers.

# CHAPTER II

Sir Everard Duncombe did not make his appearance in the dining-room till nine o'clock, but long before that hour his movements were known to the whole household; for soon after eight, the two little boys were stationed outside his door, and failing to gain admittance, kept account of the progress of his toilette, in tones which were heard all over the house.

"Will you soon be out of your bath, father?… Are you just about soaping?… What are you doing now?… Are you sponging now?… What a splash father is having! He must be drying himself now, he is so very quiet."

Then sounded the unlocking of a door, and the scamper of little feet.

"I must congratulate you on the satisfactory way in which you performed your ablutions this morning," was Uncle Charlie's salutation to his brother-in-law, as he entered the breakfast room with a boy on each side of him.

Sir Everard laughed. "There are no secrets in this house, you see," he answered, as he shook hands. "What a lovely day!"

"Glorious! but it is going to be very hot. If I remember right, the walk to church is shady all the way. Do these little fellows go to church?"

"Not Miles, but I generally take Humphrey; and wonderful to say he is as quiet as possible. I really think church is the only

place in the world where he can sit still."

Humphrey was engaged during the whole of breakfast time in finding the places in his prayer-book, and was too much occupied to talk.

"There!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as he put in the last marker, and restrained himself with a violent effort as he was about to throw his prayer-book in the air, "now they are all found."

"And now you had better go and dress," said his father, "so as not to keep your uncle and me waiting."

Humphrey joined them in the hall at the last minute, having been detained by a skirmish with Virginie.

Their way to church lay through the flower-garden and down the avenue. They went out by the side-door, leaving Miles looking disconsolately after them, his pretty little face and slight figure framed in the old doorway.

They walked on together in silence for some time.

Sir Everard was enjoying the calm beauty of the summer day; Humphrey was in pursuit of a butterfly; and Uncle Charlie was looking round at the evidences of his dead sister's taste in the laying out of the flower-garden, and thinking of the last time he had walked through it to church, when she had been by his side.

"How hot that boy will make himself before we get to church," said Sir Everard, presently; "I really don't know what he is made of, to run on a day like this."

"He is a fine boy," said Uncle Charlie, as he watched the active

little figure skipping over the flower-beds, "and seems as strong and well as possible."

"Yes," said the baronet, "Humphrey has never had a day's illness in his life. He takes after my family, and is going to be as strong and as tall as they."

"He is very like some of the old family pictures I was looking at this morning; the same upright, well-built figure, and dark eyes. Now Miles is altogether different, so fair and slender."

"I fear Miles inherits his mother's constitution," answered the baronet, in a troubled tone. "He is very delicate, Charlie, and the least chill brings on croup, or a nasty little cough. I feel very anxious about him sometimes."

"I daresay he will grow out of it. I believe I had a delicate chest at his age, and I am never troubled with it now."

They were some way down the avenue, and Humphrey was nowhere to be seen.

"I never wait for him," said Sir Everard, as he opened the park gates; "he always turns up at last."

They were half-way across the churchyard when the boy overtook them, flushed and breathless.

Uncle Charlie inwardly groaned at the thoughts of so restless a mortal, as a next-door neighbor, during two hours' service on a hot summer's morning, and watched his movements with some anxiety.

Little Humphrey took off his hat in the porch, shook back his curly hair from his hot forehead, and walked quietly into church.

He led the way to the chancel, where was the old fashioned family pew.

Here he came to a dead stop, for the bolt of the door was high above his reach.

His uncle undid it for him, and was about to pass in, thinking that of course the child would sit by his father; but to his surprise, his little nephew pushed past him, went to the very end of the long pew, and clambered up the high-cushioned seat opposite a big prayer-book, which was surmounted with the monogram "Adelaide."

The rustic congregation had often wondered why the father and son sat at so great a distance from each other in the pew that so seldom had any occupants but themselves; and the old clergyman had at first with difficulty suppressed a smile at the view from the pulpit, of the broad shoulders and bearded face of the six foot man at one extremity, and the top of the small brown head at the other.

But in vain had Sir Everard invited the boy to sit nearer to him; he preferred his isolation. It had once occurred to the widower that it might be because it had been his wife's place; but he never gave Humphrey credit for much heart or sentiment, so he had settled it was a mere whim and never asked the boy any questions on the subject.

The child himself had never confided to anyone but Miles how he loved to feel he was looking at the very same bit of the painted window which his mother's eyes had fallen upon; that his feet

were on the very same footstool that her's had rested on; and though the big prayer-book was too heavy for him to open, he liked to put his own little morocco volume upon it, and to press his little fingers on the "Adelaide" that formed the monogram of her name.

He could not have explained what there was about the old church that brought back to him more than anything else the memory of his mother, but so it was: and the usually restless boy would sit quiet in his corner, and think of the first Sunday he had come to church, when he had read out of the same prayer-book with her, and listened to her sweet voice as she joined in the Psalms and Hymns.

The service began, and Humphrey struggled down from his seat.

The villagers had grown accustomed, when the congregation stood up, to see the baronet rise tall and broad from his seat, and the little brown head of his son disappear altogether; but Uncle Charlie was by no means prepared for so complete a collapse, and thought his nephew had fallen. However, there he was, standing on the ground, with his eyes fixed on his prayer-book, and the walls of the pew towering over him on every side.

"Why on earth does he not stand on a stool?" was the young man's inward reflection.

Truth to say, the temptation to gain three feet in height, and get a view of what was passing around, *had* at times assailed Humphrey, but he felt sure his mother had never stood on the

stool, and so he resisted the inclination.

And, indeed, if Lady Duncombe had mounted the very high structure which went by the name of a hassock, the effect would have been a trial to the gravity of the congregation.

Humphrey followed the service pretty well till the chanting began, and here he always got wrong. Do what he would he could not keep time with the rest, but always arrived at the end of the verse either too early or too late.

By slow degrees he had discovered that it did not do to sing straight through to the end, because there were some bits and words they sang over again; but *how* he was ever to discover which particular word or sentence they were going to repeat, was to him a perpetual puzzle.

He had a great admiration for the turns and shakes with which the old clerk varied the "Te Deum," and had once indulged in a mild imitation of the same; till he caught sight of his father frowning at him from the other end of the pew.

When the hymn was given out, Uncle Charlie saw Humphrey in great difficulties over finding his place, so he made a sign to him to come and share *his* hymn-book; but, with a most decided shake of the head, Humphrey produced his own, and, without moving from his place, held it out to have his place found.

As the young man returned it to his nephew, he saw on the fly-leaf the name "Adelaide Duncombe," in the well-known handwriting of his dead sister; and he did justice to the boy's motive.

When the old clergyman opened his sermon-book, Humphrey settled himself in his corner, in exact imitation of his father.

It always took him some time to copy the position, and sometimes, when he had just accomplished it, Sir Everard would uncross his leg, or move a hand, and then he was quite discomfited, and had to begin all over again.

To-day, however, his attitude was quite simple. Sir Everard folded his arms, crossed his legs, and turning his head to the pulpit, disposed himself to listen.

Humphrey did the same.

Then rose the voice of the old clergyman "In the fourteenth chapter of the Book of the Revelation of St. John, and at the second verse, you will find the word of God thus written: 'And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, … and I heard the harpers harping with their harps.... And they sang as it were a new song, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.'" …

Humphrey did not often listen to the sermon, but to-day it was all about Heaven, and he liked to hear about that, because his mother was there.

Feeble must human language ever be to paint the glories of that far-off land; but when men touch upon subjects that so vitally concern all, they carry their hearers with them.

And so it was, that as the old preacher warmed and glowed with his theme, the hearts of the congregation warmed and

glowed too; and there was silence and deep attention in the old church that day.

Even the village school children fidgeted less than usual, and one or two smock-frocks who had settled themselves in their usual attitude, of arms crossed on the back of the bench in front of them, and heads cradled thereupon, shook off the drowsiness consequent on their long, hot walk to church, and sitting up, gave their attention to the sermon. For were not one and all bound to the land the preacher was describing? And was there one who could say, "What is this to me?"

Only twice was even Humphrey's attention distracted. The first time was when he saw his uncle take a pencil out of his pocket, and underline something in his Bible. This was altogether a novel proceeding; Humphrey had never seen it done before, and he felt it incumbent upon him to sidle along the pew-seat up to his uncle to investigate the matter.

Uncle Charlie gave him his Bible, and he saw that the text of the sermon was the passage marked.

He inwardly resolved, as he regained his corner by the shuffling process before mentioned, that *he* would in future bring a pencil to church and do likewise.

The next disturbance was of a more exciting character. A vagrant wasp, after disporting itself in different parts of the church, made an inroad into the family pew, and fixed upon Uncle Charlie as its victim. Humphrey, attracted by the buzzing, turned round, and saw his uncle engaged in desperate conflict.

Bobbing his head first to one side, and then to the other, now drawing himself suddenly back, and now as suddenly swerving forward, every now and then making a frantic grab in the air with the back of his hand, Uncle Charlie strove to escape from his assailant in vain.

Humphrey tried hard to keep his countenance as he watched the encounter, but it would not do. The merry smile broke out from every corner of his face, and, in great alarm, he crammed his hands into his mouth to stifle the laughter he felt would, in another moment, break out.

Uncle Charlie was already very angry at being disqualified from listening to a sermon he was enjoying by so paltry a cause as the attacks of a wasp, and now, when he saw his nephew's condition, he grew desperate.

Seizing a hymn-book, he made a plunge at his tormentor, and brought it to the ground, where he crushed it to atoms with his heel; and with a sensation of great relief saw Humphrey's countenance return to an expression of becoming composure, and found himself in a condition to take up the thread of the discourse.

Humphrey's attention was once more riveted on the sermon, and his little mind strove to follow the clergyman as he spoke of the white-robed thousands wandering by the jasper sea in the golden Jerusalem; that "great multitude which no man can number of all kindreds, and nations, and tongues;" uniting their songs in the same burst of glorious psalmody as the "voice of

many waters," and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

"'Eye hath not seen,'" concluded the preacher, as if in despair of finding words to express the inconceivable glory and beauty of the halls of Sion, "'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' To Him, who bought them for us with his own blood, be glory for ever, and to countless ages."

Then the organ broke forth, doors opened and shut, the school-boys clattered down from the organ loft, and the congregation streamed out of church; leaving the old clergyman standing in his pulpit, gazing thoughtfully at the retreating throng, and wondering how much of what he had endeavored to impress upon their hearts would take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards.

Sir Everard Duncombe remained sitting some time after the service was over, looking at Humphrey's earnest face, and wondering what the boy was thinking of. When the clergyman had retired to the vestry, he rose, and led the way out.

Softly blew the summer breezes on little Humphrey's face as he stepped out into the porch, and the calm beauty of the summer morning was in perfect harmony with the turn which the sermon had given to his thoughts. All around was the beautifully-wooded country, lying calm and still under the cloudless sky. Perhaps if his vague ideas could have taken shape, they would have formed themselves into some such expression as—"Can heaven be fairer than this?"

But Humphrey's was not a nature that could long remain absorbed in thought, and he was soon skipping along the road in front of his father and uncle, and kicking up clouds of dust with his best Sunday boots.

At the park gates they found Miles and Virginie. The latter joined the other servants in the road, and the two little brothers walked on together.

"Did the clergyman take any of my texts to-day for his sermon?" asked the younger one eagerly, as he took hold of Humphrey's hand. (Miles was learning the beatitudes, and asked the question regularly every Sunday.)

"No, not one of them. He got a text out of the very last bit of the whole Bible—'The Revelation.'"

"That must be the bit Virginie never will read to me. She says I should not understand it. Do you understand the Revelations, Humphie?"

"Yes," returned Humphrey, promptly.

"Virginie doesn't," said Miles rather puzzled, "and she says very few grown-up people do."

"Virginie is French," retorted Humphrey, "and the Revelations are written in English. Of course she can't understand them as well as I do. There goes a rabbit. Let's run after it."

And Miles, perfectly satisfied with the explanation, followed his brother, panting into the fern.

In the afternoon the gentlemen went again to church, and as

Virginie was at liberty to do the same, the children were left under the care of the housemaid.

Humphrey was learning a hymn, and, for once in his life, giving his whole attention to his task.

Miles, sitting on the housemaid's lap, was turning over the leaves of the "Peep of Day," and gleaning his ideas of sacred characters from the illustrations of that well-known work. He stopped in great amazement before the representation of Lazarus rising from the tomb, and demanded an explanation.

Jane, who had an idea that everything connected with death should be most carefully concealed from children, answered evasively that it was nothing, and tried to turn over the page, but boys are not so easily baulked.

Had Miles been a girl, he would probably have been satisfied to pass over the picture without further inquiry; girls' minds take a very superficial grasp of a subject; they are content to get at the shell of knowledge, and to leave the kernel untasted. Being a boy, Miles raised his large, grave eyes to Jane's face with an inquiring expression.

"Why don't you tell me?" he asked, laying a detaining hand on the leaf; "I want to know all about it. What is that great hole? and why is the man all sewed up in white?"

Jane, driven into a corner, admitted that the hole was a grave.

"But, lor! master Miles," added she, "you don't know nothing about them things, and if you want to know you must ask your pa!"

"Of course I know people die," said Miles, simply, "because my mamma's dead; so you're quite wrong, Jane, to say I don't understand those sort of things. I know all about it. When people die they are packed up in a box and put into the ground, and then if they've been good, God will come some day and unpack them."

Humphrey had joined the group just in time to hear the end of the explanation, and he met Jane's eye and smile with all the conscious superiority of his three years advance in religious knowledge.

"If mother were here, Miles," he whispered, "she would explain to you much better than that. There was something she used to tell me about our dead body being like a seed, that is, put into the ground, but will turn into a beautiful flower some day. Only I can't remember it quite like she said it," he added, sighing, "I wish I could."

"Oh, Humphie!" said little Miles eagerly, holding up the book, "*can* you remember what she used to say about this picture?"

But Humphrey taxed his memory in vain. It was all so dim, so confused, he could not remember sufficiently clearly to tell the story, so Jane was called upon to read it.

Now Jane left out her h's, and did not mind her stops, so the beautiful story of the raising of Lazarus must have lost much of its charm; but still the children listened with attention, for those who have nothing better must put up with what they have. Poor little opening minds, depending thus early on the instructions of

an ignorant housemaid! forced to forego, in the first budding of youth, those lessons in Divine truth that came so lovingly, and withal so forcibly, from the lips of a tender mother; those lessons which linger on the heart of the full-grown man long after the lips that pronounced them are silenced for ever.

Depend upon it, association has a great power, and those passages in the Bible which bring to children most clearly the image of their mother, are those which, in after life, are loved and valued most.

And surely those childish memories owe *something* of their charm to the recollection of the quiet, well-modulated reading, the clear, refined enunciation; the repose of the attitude in the sofa or chair, the white hand that held the book, with, it may be, the flashing of the diamond ring in the light, as the fingers turned over the pages!

Even as I write, I see rising from the darkness before me a vision of a mother and a child. I see the soft eyes meeting those of the little listener on the stool, at her knee. I see the earnestness pervading every line of the beautiful face. I almost hear the tones of the gentle voice, which, while reducing the mysteries of Divine truth to the level of the baby comprehension, carry with them the unmistakable impress of her own belief in the things of which she is telling: the certainty that the love and trust she is describing are no mere abstract truths to her, but that they are life of her life, and breath of her breath!

And I see the child's eyes glow and expand under her

earnestness, as the little mind catches a refraction of her enthusiasm. Is this a picture or is it a reality? Have I brought up to any one a dimly-remembered vision? Or is it purely idealistic and fanciful?

I do not know; and even as I gaze, the picture has melted into the darkness from which I conjured it, and I see it no more!

"Boys," sounded Sir Everard's voice at the bottom of the nursery stairs, "your uncle and I are going out for a walk. No one need come with us who would rather not."

There could be but one answer to such an appeal, and a rush and scamper ensued.

It was the usual Sunday afternoon routine, the stables and the farm, and then across the meadows to inspect the hayricks, and through the corn-fields to a certain gate that commanded the finest view on the estate.

"If only this weather lasts another fortnight," said Sir Everard, as his eyes wandered over golden fields, "I think we shall have a good harvest, eh, Charlie?"

"I am sure we shall," came from Humphrey, who always had an opinion on every subject, and never lost an opportunity of obtruding it on public attention; "we shall have such a lot of corn we shan't know what to do with it."

"Well, I have never found that to be the case yet," said his father; "but if the first part of your prediction prove true, we will have a Harvest Home and a dance, and you and Miles shall lead off, 'Up the middle and down again,' with the prettiest little girls

you can find in the village."

"I know who I shall dance with," said Humphrey, balancing himself on the top of the gate, "but she's not a little girl, she's quite old, nearly twenty I daresay, and she's not pretty either. I don't care to dance with little girls, its babyish."

"Who is the happy lady, Humphrey?" asked Uncle Charlie.

"She is not a lady at all," said Humphrey, indignantly, "she's Dolly, the laundry maid, and wears pattens and turned up sleeves, and her arms are as red as her cheeks. Dolly's not the least like a lady."

"Except on Sundays," put in little Miles, "because then she's got her sleeves down, and is very smart. I saw Dolly going to church this morning, with boots all covered with little white buttons."

"*That* does not make her a lady," said the elder boy contemptuously. "It is no use trying to explain to you, Miles, what a lady is because you never see any."

"Not Mrs. Jones, the steward's wife?" suggested Miles timidly, and feeling he was treading on dangerous ground.

"No," said Humphrey, "she's not a real lady, not what I call a lady. You see, Miles," he added, sinking his voice, and drawing nearer to his brother, so that he might not be overheard, "I shall never be able to make you understand, because you can't remember mother."

"No," said poor little Miles, meekly, "I suppose not."

This argument was, as he knew by experience, conclusive, and

he was always completely silenced by it.

"And who will my little Miles choose for a partner?" broke in Sir Everard; "it must be some very small girl, I think."

"I should like the little girl at the lodge, please, father, because she's the very only little girl I know who is smaller than me."

"Very well: then you are both provided. Charlie, you must come down to the Harvest Home, and see 'Up the middle and down again;' Humphrey struggling with his substantial partner, and Miles bringing up the rear with the 'very only little girl he knows who is smaller than him.'" The father's eye rested smiling on his two children as he pictured the sight to himself.

"And when may it be?" asked Humphrey. "Father, please settle a day for the harvest to begin."

"When the yellow corn is almost brown, you may settle a day for the harvest," answered his father. "I have a reaping-machine this year, and so it will soon be cut when once they begin."

"I shall come every day to these fields and see how it is getting on," said Miles.

"I know a much quicker way," said Humphrey, jumping down from the gate, and pulling up several ears of corn by the roots.

"I shall have them up in the nursery, and see them ripen every day."

"Why, you foolish boy," said his father, "you have picked them too soon, they will never ripen now."

Humphrey looked ruefully at his ears of corn. "I quite forgot," said he.

"They will never ripen now," repeated little Miles, sorrowfully.

"Never mind, Miles," said Humphrey, "I will plant them in the sunniest part of our own garden, where the soil is much better than here, and where, I daresay, they will grow much finer and better than if they had been left to ripen with the rest. Perhaps they will thank me some day for having pulled them up out of the rough field, and planted them in such a more beautiful place."

"Perhaps they will," breathed little Miles, clasping his hands with pleasure at the idea.

Miles was leaning against the gate, looking up admiringly at his brother, and Humphrey was sitting on the topmost bar, with the ears of corn in his hand.

"Let us go," said Sir Everard, suddenly; "it is intensely hot here, and I am longing to get under those limes in the next field."

The little boys climbed over the gate, and ran on to the indicated spot, followed more leisurely by their elders.

Sir Everard and Uncle Charlie threw themselves down on the grass in the shade, and the children, seating themselves by their father, begged for a story.

"Sailors are the men for stories," was his answer; "you had better ask your uncle."

Uncle Charlie proved a charming story teller. He told them of sharks and crocodiles, of boar-hunting, and of wonderful adventures by land and sea.

The children hung on his every word.

The shadows grew long, and the sun began to sink over the cornfields, and still they were absorbed in listening, and their father in watching their sparkling eyes and varying countenances.

"Come," said Sir Everard at last, jumping up, "no more stories, or we shall be here all night. It is past six, and Virginie will be wondering what has become of us."

"Oh!" said Humphrey, drawing a long breath, as he descended from those heights of wonder to the trifling details of everyday life, recalled by the mention of Virginie, "how delicious it has been! I hope, father, you will let me be a sailor when I grow up?"

"Well, I don't think that will exactly be your vocation," answered Sir Everard; "but there is plenty of time before you."

"Me, too," said little Miles; "I want to be a sailor too."

"You, my darling," said Sir Everard, fondly; "no, not you; I couldn't spare you my sweet little fellow."

And he stooped, as he spoke, to kiss the little face that was uplifted so pleadingly to his, the lips that were always so ready to respond to his caresses.

Humphrey had turned away his head, and was gazing intently at his ears of corn.

"Is he jealous, I wonder?" thought Uncle Charlie, peering at the little face under the straw hat, and wondering whether it was a tear he saw shining among the long dark eyelashes.

But before he could make up his mind if it were so, the child's eyes were sparkling with excitement over a curious creature with a thousand legs, which had crawled out of the corn in his hand.

"And now jump up, boys, and come home." Sir Everard, as he spoke, picked up his cane, and taking his brother-in-law's arm, walked slowly on. "We shall have all these feats reproduced, Charlie, of that I am quite sure. Virginie has a nice time before her."

There was very little tea eaten that evening, the children were in such a hurry to get down again to the delectable anecdotes.

But Sir Everard took alarm at Miles's flushed cheeks and bright eyes, and would allow no more exciting stories so close upon bed-time.

"Will you finish about the crocodile to-morrow?" asked Humphrey, creeping up his uncle's leg, as he came to wish him good-night.

"To-morrow I go, my boy," he answered.

"Going to-morrow!" said Humphrey. "What a very short visit!"

"What a very short visit!" echoed Miles, who always thought it incumbent on him to say the same thing as his brother.

"I will pay you a longer visit next time," said Uncle Charlie, as he kissed the two little faces.

"But when will next time be?" persisted Humphrey.

"Yes! when will next time be?" repeated Miles.

"Ah! when indeed?" said Uncle Charlie.

# CHAPTER III

"I have got so many plans in my head, that I think I shall burst," said Humphrey to Miles the next morning, as they stood on the door-steps, watching the dog-cart vanishing in the distance, on its way to the station, with their father and uncle. "Some of the things Uncle Charlie was telling us about would be quite easy for us to do. You wouldn't be afraid, I suppose, to climb up the big tree overhanging the pond where the water-lilies are?"

"No," said Miles, rather doubtfully, "not if you went on first and gave me your hand: but that tree is a long way off—wouldn't one of the trees in the orchard do?"

"Oh, no! it wouldn't be half the fun. Don't you remember the man in the story crawled along the branch that stretched over the water? Well, this tree has a branch hanging right over the pond; and I want to crawl along it, like he did."

"Hadn't we better ask Virginie if we may go all that way alone?" suggested Miles, in the vain hope of putting off the evil moment.

Humphrey, however, did not see the force of this argument, and so they started off.

It was a very hot day, and after they had got out of the farm-yard there was no shade at all.

Humphrey skipped through the meadows and over the gates, and Miles followed him as quickly as he could, but the sun was

very hot on his head, and he soon got wearied and fell back.

Humphrey did not perceive how languidly his little brother was following him, till a faint cry from behind reached him.

"Humphie, *please* stop; I can't keep up to you."

Instantly he ran back.

"I'm *so* tired, Humphie, and *so* hot, shall we go home?"

"Go home! why we are close to the pond now. Look, Miles, it is only across that meadow, and the corn-field beyond."

Miles followed the direction of his brother's finger, and his eye rested ruefully on the expanse lying before him, where the sun was scorching up everything.

"I'll try, Humphie," he said, resignedly.

"I tell you what!" exclaimed Humphrey, "I'll *carry* you!"

Miles felt a little nervous at the prospect, but he did not like to object.

"Just get over the gate," continued Humphrey, "and then I'll carry you across the field, and we'll soon be by the pond, where it will be as cool as possible."

Over the gate they scrambled, and then the elder boy disposed himself to take his little brother in his arms. How shall I describe the intense discomfort of the circumstances under which Miles now found himself!

One of Humphrey's arms was so tightly round his neck, that he almost felt as if he were choking, and the hand of the other grasped one of his legs with a gripe which amounted almost to pain; and *still* there was a feeling of insecurity about his position

which, already very strong while Humphrey was standing still, did not diminish when he began to move.

Humphrey started with a run, but his speed soon slackened, and grave doubts began to arise even in his own mind as to the accomplishment of the task he had undertaken.

However, he staggered on. But when presently his long-suffering load began to show signs of slipping, Humphrey tightened his grasp to such a degree, that Miles, who till now had endured in silence, could endure no longer, and he uttered a faint cry for mercy.

At the same moment, Humphrey caught his foot in a rabbit hole, and both boys rolled over together. Peals of laughter from Humphrey followed the catastrophe, but Miles did not quite enter into the spirit of the joke. He was hot and tired, poor little fellow, and began to implore his brother to take him under the neighboring hedge to rest.

Humphrey readily consented, and led him out of the baking sun.

"Perhaps we had better give it up," said he, sighing, as he sat down by Miles in the shade, "and try again in the cool of the evening. You could do it, couldn't you, if it were not for the heat?"

"Oh, yes," said Miles, eagerly. With a respite in view, he was ready to agree to anything.

"Very well," said Humphrey, "then we'll give it up and come again this evening after tea. I declare," he added, suddenly breaking off, "there's a mushroom out there!"

He was off in a moment, and returned in triumph. "Isn't it a lovely one, Miles? How fresh it smells and how beautiful it peels. If father were at home, we'd have had it cooked for his dinner, he *is* so fond of mushrooms."

"It wouldn't keep good till Friday, I suppose, for the wild men's dinner party?" enquired Miles.

"One would be no use," answered Humphrey, "but we might come here some morning and get a lot if we brought a basket. I'll tell you what, we'll get up *quite, quite* early to-morrow, and come and have a regular mushroom hunt. Won't it be fun!"

"I'm afraid Virginie would not be awake to dress me," observed Miles.

"Oh, never mind Virginie!" said Humphrey, "I'll dress you, Miles; I don't think Virginie would care to get up so early, and it would be a pity to wake her, poor thing! She goes to bed late, and is *so* tired in the morning."

"So she is, poor thing!" said Miles.

"And besides, you know," continued Humphrey, "she always thinks something dreadful will happen if she doesn't come with us, and it would be a pity to frighten her for nothing."

"So it would; a great pity," repeated Miles. "But what's that noise, Humphie? Is it a cock crowing or a bull roaring?"

Both children listened.

There was many a sound to be heard round about on that summer morning; the buzzing of bees as they flitted about among the clover, the chirrup of the grasshoppers in the long grass, the

crowing of a cock from the farm, and the lowing of cattle in the distance, but that which had attracted Miles' attention was none of all these. It was the gradually approaching sound of a female voice, which, as its owner neared the meadow, assumed to the two little listeners the familiar tones of the French language.

"M. Humphrey! M. Miles! M. Humphrey! où êtes-vous donc?"

"It's Virginie!" they both exclaimed, jumping up.

Virginie it was; and great was the horror she expressed at their having strayed so far from home, at the state of heat in which she found Miles, and at his having been taken such a long walk.

Many were the reproaches she heaped upon Humphrey as they walked back to the house for having caused *her* such a hunt in the heat of the sun, and her nerves such a shock as they had experienced when she had not found him and his brother in their usual haunts.

Lastly she brought him up with the inquiry, "Et vos leçons! Savez vous qu'il est midi passé?"

Humphrey's ideas of time were always of the vaguest order, and when anything of so exciting a nature as this morning's expedition came in the way, hours *were* not in his calculations.

He did not mend matters much by saying he should have thought it had been about half-past nine.

Virginie maintained a dignified silence after this explanation, till they reached the hall door; and it now being too near dinner time to make it worth while for Humphrey to get out his books,

she informed him that he would have to do all his lessons in the afternoon.

This was perhaps more of a punishment to Miles than to Humphrey.

Lessons were no trouble to Humphrey when once his attention was fixed on them; and if it were not for the penance of having to sit still in a chair, he did not really dislike them. But to Miles, his brother's lesson hours were times of dreary probation. He was not allowed to speak to him, or distract his attention in any way; and had to sit turning over the leaves of a picture book, or building a solitary castle of bricks, in some part of the room where Humphrey could not see him without regularly turning his head round.

Humphrey made a faint attempt after dinner to persuade Virginie to let him do his lessons in the garden, under the big tree on the lawn; but it was instantly negatived. In the nursery, with his back turned to Miles, she did sometimes succeed in concentrating his attention on his reading; but she knew too much of the all-powerful attractions out of doors to comply with his proposal. Not to mention the chance of Carlo suddenly jumping upon the book, or the tempting vicinity of the gardeners with the mowing machine, there was always risk to his powers of attention in chance butterflies and humble bees, the dropping of a blossom from the tree above, or the sudden advent of a stray water-wagtail.

Humphrey did not press the question, and opened his book

with a slight sigh, for which Virginie could not account.

Was there a memory floating in the child's mind of a time when the same request had never been made in vain?—of summer afternoons, dimly remembered, when, sitting by his mother's side under the same old tree, he had learnt to read words of one syllable out of the baby primer on her knee?—and when, if his attention *had* sometimes wandered to the summer sights and sounds around him, her gentle "Now, my darling try and attend to your reading," would instantly recall it. And then the quick shutting up of the book when the specified stage had been reached, the fond kiss of dismissal, and the joyous "Now run away, my child, and play to your heart's content!" as if she rejoiced as much as he did that he should be released from his temporary bondage, and disport himself in the sunshine once more!

Great stillness now reigned in the nursery for more than an hour. It was only broken by the monotonous drone of Humphrey's reading, and Virginie's occasional "Tenez-vous bien. Otez donc les bras de la table Ne donnez pas des coups de pied à la chaise"—varied by the fall of Miles's bricks, as he knocked down one completed castle after another, in despair at not being able to call upon his brother to admire them.

As the time at which Humphrey's release was due approached, and there were no signs of moving on Virginie's part, Miles gave vent, at intervals, to deep-drawn sighs.

It came at last; Virginie shut up the book, and put a mark in it,

and Humphrey, with a loud "Hurrah," dashed his chair suddenly back, and turned head over heels on the floor.

Miles threw himself upon him, and the two rolled over and over each other, in the "abandon" of perfect enjoyment.

"We'll start for the pond directly after tea," whispered Humphrey.

But Virginie had other plans in view, and to the children's disgust they were taken for a walk with her, to visit the wife of one of the farmers.

The long confinement in the farmer's kitchen, while Virginie and the farmer's wife talked about bonnets and trimmings, was very wearisome to the two boys. Miles found some compensation in the discovery of a tiny kitten on the hearth; and Humphrey, mounting on a chair, played with the trigger of the farmer's gun which hung over the mantelpiece, "just to see whether it was loaded or not."

They did not get home till Miles's bed-time.

Humphrey established himself on the edge of the bath, and watched Virginie carefully as she undressed his little brother, that he might learn how Miles's vestments succeeded each other; for he felt a little doubtful of his own powers as a valet.

His face lengthened considerably when he saw how many strings there would be to tie.

He drew nearer, in his eagerness, as Virginie untied them one after the other; and began considering how to do the untying process backwards, and wondering whether it would produce the

desired result.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he called out, in his excitement, as she pulled out the last tie, "I didn't half see."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.