**Ethel Carnie**

**Billy in Rainy Land**

**from The Lamp Girl and other stories**

“You will have to hurry. Billy, or you’ll never get to school,” Billy Dane heard his mother say.

“Take your father’s umbrella from the stand. Hurry up, now you can’t miss school for a drop of rain,” urged his mother and helped him on with his coat.

“It’s always raining,” grumbled Billy, feeling very tired and queer, somehow. “I hate the rain!

And it’s so far to school.” He stood and watched the raindrops coursing down the pane, and dripping from the golden privet hedge in the garden, and from the roses, which looked almost drowned, poor things.

“Billy!” He knew that his mother was looking at him in hurt surprise that he should talk back to her so, but he couldn’t help it. He felt tired and queer, and as if his boots would never get to the end of that wet, heavy road to school.

Then Billy saw his mother disappear into the sitting room and knew that she was dusting.

The fingers on the clock crept round so fast!

Though he had his back to them he knew that the vicious things were travelling fast, but he wouldn’t look at them.

When it was five minutes past nine Mrs Dane came and pushed him out, locking him out in the rain, so that he couldn’t either stay there or go to school. Billy was so surprised! He stared at the little wooden door that was snapped so tight, and then he got hold of the door-knocker (which was a lion’s head) and banged it so fiercely that he was sure the lion glared at him. He wondered in a dim way what was the matter with him that morning. He felt very hurt, too, at his mother’s behaviour, for she had ever been kind to him. And at last he worked himself up into a terrible rage, and set off at a run along the garden path, bashing at the roses with his school-bag, slamming the gate after him till the hinges shrieked, - and he was on the road to school.

Never had he seen the road so wet. The ditches were overflowing, and there was hardly space to walk between the puddles. He got crosser and crosser as the road became worse, and there was scarcely room for a cat to walk, never to speak of a fat English schoolboy.

“I don’t care if I’m splashed with mud up to my eyes,” he said, and began to splash into the puddles. He enjoyed it, and felt a fierce joy in thinking what a mess he was making of himself,

when all at once he got into a puddle that felt quite different from any other puddle.

He realized that it was another sort of puddle as soon as his shoes touched it, and tried to get out. Ah, that was quite a difficult matter, not half so easy as it was to get in. Poor Billy! He felt himself sinking and cried out, but there was no one to hear him but an old crow which was flying to its nest with a piece of bread and wouldn’t stop for anything. Down, down, down he felt himself sinking, past his leggings, past his waist-belt, button by button of his jacket, until it reached his chin, that queer-feeling water, and bubbled in his ears, and he seemed to see the door knocker glaring at him and growling, “It just serves you right.”

When he came to himself he was walking along a high road, as wet as a dolphin. It might even have been the old school road, but as he was pondering about it he saw a group of men working on the road, and knew that it couldn’t be, for roads weren’t repaired on the old school road in the rain; at least, not when it was raining so hard.

Wherever could he be? He noticed that the men were dressed rather queerly, having caps with very deep nebs, which carried the water down a funnel attached to the back of their coat collars. They were singing vey cheerfully, to Billy’s surprise, and as he walked towards them he caught the words of this song:

Rain, rain, ripens your corn;

Rain, rain, sweetens the morn;

Breaks on the hill-tops to make green the plain,

Rain, rain, good for the trade-

Mackintosh, weather- glass for thee are made;

Good umbrellas are worn out again

All through the patter and splash of the rain.

Rain, rain, those who are glad

Make their own sunshine and cannot be sad,

Trudge along bravely and never complain

Knowing the graces of rain, growing rain,

Rain, rain, oh, the white falls

Laughing and tumbling down steep rocky walls;

Filling the river’s dry bed once again,

Lakelet and brooklet, oh, beautiful rain,

Rain, rain, oh, the bright moss

There where waters their clear fountains toss

Washing the earth and the world of its stain,

Here comes the life-giving, wonderful rain.

“I say,” began Billy, going up to one of the men.

“Where am I?”

The man stopped hammering and looked at Billy.

“There’s a sign post,” he answered, pointing the hammer to it.

“Oh, thanks, I hadn’t seen it,” said Billy, reddening.

He walked up to the sign-post, quite an ordinary affair, and read the following cheerful notice:

Wateropolis,

In

County of Freshington,

Rainy Land

All

Grumblers and Weepers

Expelled.

Billy felt alarmed. Rainy Land: Why, he had never even seen such a country on the map of the world on the dusty schoolroom wall. He trembled so much that he could scarcely stand.

Should he never, never again see his dear mother, his kind father, the garden with the golden privet and the red, red roses he had slashed at with his schoolbag?

“Whatever must I do?” he asked one of the men. “Oh dear; this morning I was going to school, in my own country, and I fell through a puddle and found myself here. I want to go back. How shall I get back?”

“Stop,” shouted the man quite fiercely. “No one weeps here, or the water-line would be higher than our heads. It’s a law we enforce for mutual protection. There is a terrible penalty for its being broken. The last time a man wept we had such a flood! The town hall was carried away, and taxes went up enormously.”

“But how shall I get back?” asked Billy piteously.

A young boy with nice, blue eyes, and a beaming smile came to Billy, with his chisel in his hand, and his curls all wet with rain.

“There is no way back,” he said. “Try to be happy with us. Oh, it must be horrid to fall through a puddle and leave your own dear country. I should just hate it. But if you stay here and are cheerful you will make sweet friends and find many, many new joys. And if you are melancholy you cannot get back and the Mayor will make an example of you. Cheer up! There are odd days here when it does not rain more than seven hours, and then we have galas, and, oh, how we enjoy the sunshine! Besides, look at the work we do through the weather being wet! There are more books written in Rainy Land than anywhere, because, you see, the public libraries get floated away, and we have to have a new lot of books every few years.”

“Then you never have any classics?” said Billy, astonished.

“What are those?” asked Biff, for that was the name of Billy’s friend.

“Oh, old, tested books that have been written a long time and become part of the national life,”

Explained Billy. “Sometimes, you see, an author is unknown for a hundred years after he is dead and then his book gets known and it is a classic, and everybody reads it.”

“How funny!” and he laughed heartily.

“All our books are read and appreciated as soon as they are printed, for fear they should be floated away. You’ve no idea how keen the competition is to get a new book. And authors, well, they are the best paid people in Rainy Land, for when we have no work to do and it is nightfall, we love to read so. But don’t think that all our books are lost, because they are floated away. What is really fine we read so often that we get it into our hearts, and surely that is better than even having it on our printed pages in the library that is never floated away.”

A bell now began to ring, with a silvery chime. The men flung their tools down, and so did Biff, Billy’s friend.

“Come along,” said Biff, Billy’s friend. “And don’t be a bit shy. Everybody will be glad to see you.”

They went in the direction of the great bell which was swinging and swinging, getting louder and louder every minute.

They reached a glass palace, standing on a high hill. It was over this palace that the silver bell swung. Such a mighty bell it was, and had to be of silver so that it would not rust if the water reached it.

“Oh, his is not the very highest of our buildings,” said Biff, noticing Billy’s awe. “When the rains really become dangerous we go up on the mountain-tops where we have our strongest buildings. Our weather-glasses are so made that they give us plenty of warning.”

They now passed through the gateway and into the glass hall, from the roof of which hung the most beautiful ferns and creepers. The table was stood upon a raised platform in the centre of the hall.

“Come along,” said Biff, and seated Billy between himself and a man with very dreamy eyes who didn’t talk and didn’t eat excepting when someone reminded him that he really must.

“What a stupid old chap!” said Billy to Biff. Biff was shocked.

“Oh dear, no” he answered, “Why, he is the man who invented the weather-glass which gives us a week’s notice before the rains get dangerous, and so has saved the lives of many generations yet to come. Besides, he is thinking out a new sort of boat whose oars will play merry tunes as they touch the water. I have heard also that he has invented a lamp which will burn through water. He is a very great man!”

“Oh,” said Billy, uncomfortably, “I thought he looked stupid.”

“Yes.” Said Biff smiling, “It is very difficult sometimes to tell which are the stupid ones and which are great ones, for they both look half asleep, only one is thinking under the sleep seeing things, and the other is asleep like a dormouse in the winter. But it behoves us to be rather careful, for these stupid people often have a way of surprising us.”

Billy felt hungry by this.

The food was in covered dishes so that water could not spoil it, and the dishes were clear glass so that one could see what they contained. Billy had golden-brown fish served on large green leaves, and was waited upon by ladies in white mackintoshes and silver gaiters, who smiled very sweetly on him. The bread was made from pine-cones, as the pine was the principle tree in Rainy Land, after which came the willow.

Seven fiddlers sat up in the gallery and played the jolliest music all the time the meal lasted. People laughed and told stories, or listened to the music, just as they cared to, and Billy almost forgot that the rain was trickling down the glass roof, because everything was so jolly.

“I believe we shall have to sail home,” said Biff, as they rose from their seats. Then Billy saw that the upper end of the hall was stored with light birch canoes, so graceful and strong that it made Billy long to be seated in one. This soon happened, and Billy could not have dreamed how nice it was to be on the water when no one was afraid of it, even though the rain came down faster and faster.

Biff paddled the canoe along until they reached a house on a little hill. Every house was built on a hill.

“I see they have left the window open for us,” was his astonishing remark, and the next moment they sailed lightly into the room where Biff’s father, mother and sister were enjoying themselves.

“This is a friend of ours from a strange country where there are flowers like the sun himself growing as tall as a man,” said Biff and Billy could not be sure, but he thought that he heard a startled exclamation from Biff’s sister. His attention was then drawn to the fact that Biff’s parents and sister were seated in cork chairs, which they had chained to the walls of the kitchen to keep them from floating about. Biff’s sister however, unchained her chair, and floated in it gracefully, and bent down to shake hands with Billy as he sat in the canoe.

“Welcome to Rainy Land,” she said, kindly.

“I will take you tomorrow to see all our lovely plants, herbs, and flowers, but we have no flowers like the sun himself growing as tall as a man. You must tell me about your country.”

True to her promise Fee-Fee took Billy next day to see the beauties of Rainy Land.

AS they set out Billy remarked, “One thing puzzles me, Fee-Fee. How is it that your houses don’t smell through the wet?”

“Ah, we let out the water through pulling up the plug in the bottom floor,” she explained.

“Then we dry the walls with a leaf that grows here in plenty. Every country, I suppose, has its own remedies for its own evils if it only knew where to find them. We have found ours.”

“I did think your way of having the house lit up with coloured lights pretty,” said Billy.

“In our country we only do it when we have a party, once or twice in a lifetime. It is such a pretty idea to have them every evening.”

“Well,” said Fee-Fee, joyously cutting the water with her oar, “when it is always raining we try to make everything look bright by other methods. We light coloured lamps, and stand flowers on the little wall-shelves, and sing songs, and play games, so that we never see the rain or get cross and uncomfortable.”

“Yes,” Billy, thoughtfully, “I remember that.”

Then they entered a wood, still floating in their canoe. Its beauty made Billy think that he really must be dreaming.

“Do you think I am dreaming, Fee-Fee?” he asked once.

“Why should you be dreaming?” she asked, going a trifle pale. “You must not think you are dreaming, or-“

Billy seemed to see the door-knocker glaring at him again, and to feel his boots very heavy on his feet, and to get the queer feeling that it was a long, long way to school, and it was so nasty that he promised Fee-Fee that he wouldn’t think he was dreaming any more. After that everything seemed to grow more splendid. Silver and golden fish swam through the water, which was as clear as dew. Everywhere the eye turned were green and amber-coloured mosses, some as red as rubies, and ferns and creepers, and white flowering willows everywhere. Lily-beds as large as Billy’s garden at home were coming in sight every few minutes, until the wonder of it all made Billy think it must surely be a dream again.

Then something happened which completely drove this thought into Bill’s head.

A large monster, reminding him in a way of the lion on the door-knocker, came floundering after them, and Fee-Fee gave a shriek of terror.

“The lake-lion, the lake-lion!” she cried.

Fortunately the animal caught his foot in some trailing boughs under the water, and they escaped, but for a long time they could see him spouting foam and roaring at them in impotent wrath.

In ten minutes, however, Fee-Fee was quite jolly again.

“In Rainy Land we live in the present,” she said. “Aren’t those blue flowers on the opposite bank pretty?”

And all this time it rained. Yes, the rain ran down Billy’s face, and Fee-Fee’s, too. She rubbed the wet from her eyes sometimes with her pretty, delicate fingers, laughing as she did so, and Bill felt ashamed to remember that he has been afraid to go to school when it was just drizzling.

Two weeks later Billy got employment, learning the trade of weather-glass making with Fee-Fee’s father.

When he had thoroughly learnt his trade a ball was given in the town hall in his honour. The Mayor, Mayoress, and their daughter, presided. Biff, Fee-Fee, and her parents, with Billy, sailed in a glass boat with musical paddles to the town hall.

“What a jolly affair,” said Billy.

“Yes,” answered Biff, laughing. “This boat is the invention of that stupid man who sat next to you when you ate your first meal in Rainy Land.”

The Mayor and Mayoress received Billy heartily. He was introduced to their daughter, Amber a maiden of great beauty, and a perfect dancer, and she asked him to dance with her.

“Alas,” said Billy, “I cannot dance,” and to his surprise Amber clapped her hands with a glad little cry.

“You are he!” she said.

“I am who?” asked Billy, very bewildered.

Then Amber said, quite away from the subject as it was, “It is quite true that you come from a country where flowers like the sun grow as tall as a man?”

“It is quite true,” answered Billy. “Everybody seems startled when they hear that. How is it?”

Then Amber made all the things that had puzzled Billy plain. Amber’s sister Beora had been carried away by a magician who had his palace under the water of a lake twenty-two miles long. Fishermen sailing over the lake had sometimes caught a gleam of a yellow necklace Amber had given her which was on her neck when the magician carried her off.

“Have no attempts to rescue her been made?” asked Billy, quickly.

“No man of Rainy Land may rescue her,” announced Amber. “For so prophesied our wizard. He told us that the rescue would be made by one who came from a far country where flowers like the sun grew as tall as a man, and that his youth would be afraid of water and braving it would make him a hero, and Beora could be rescued by a hero. He also said that this youth would not be able to dance, and all our youths can dance from being children. So you must be he! Oh, tell me, you will rescue my poor Beora?”

“I’m awfully afraid of water,” said Billy, candidly. “I was once afraid to go to school and all because it was raining,” and as he thought about the little door snapped to with the door knocker looking furious, he felt his boots drag again, and Amber’s face seemed moving away, and she looked sad.

At last he agreed to make the attempt.

He set forth the next day in a swift canoe girded with silver, accompanied to the edge of the lake by his good friends. All day he sailed up and down the lake, but it was sunset when he saw the sparkle of a yellow necklace right away down in the clear water, oh, half a mile away surely.

He stayed his canoe, and watched to see what would happen. As he gazed intently he beheld the towers and domes of a palace, built of milk-coloured glass. There were fifty-two doors, twelve chimney-pots, and three hundred and sixty-five windows.

“Why,” thought Billy, “that is queer, for there are fifty-two weeks in a year, twelve months, and three hundred and sixty-five days. It is like the palace of the year. I will say over the months, and see if anything will happen. January—“

A cold wind sucked him down through the water, down through the first chimney, and he found himself in a chamber where sat a fair maiden.

“Who are you?” inquired Billy, timidly, thinking she was perhaps Beora.

“I am January,” She answered coldly. “Do not talk to me. You interrupt my work. Do you not see that I am busy growing snow-drops? I shall bite your fingers if you are not good.”

Billy then noticed that she was leaning out of the window and scattering seeds.

“What is the good of growing snow-drops at the bottom of a lake?” inquired Billy, thirsting for knowledge.

“Will you be quiet?” she cried, “I am growing them up in a thousand little gardens in the world, and in the fields.”

Bill saw that she had on a pretty diadem of snowflakes, but in her belt were a few green leaves. She was silent to all his inquiries about Beora, so he stole into the next room.

February was very cross, and wouldn’t tell him anything, so he went in and out, in and out, until he came to the chamber where June was waking up. Her room was piled with roses, hills of them, yellow white and red, and she turned to Billy laughing.

“Well, little boy, what are you after?” she said. “Don’t speak so loud or you’ll wake up the magician.”

Billy whispered into her ear.

“Creep round until you come to the tenth room,” she advised him. “There you will find the yellow necklace, guarded by a water-lion. Tell the lion you come from a country where great honour is paid to such as he and he will not harm you, for he is very vain. While he is dreaming of high honours snatch the necklace. Cry ‘Ivani’ three times if he tries to hurt you, and he will fall asleep. After that I know no more. You will have to find where Beora is.”

Billy then went to find the tenth room. He reached the door and crept in. The water-lion was asleep guarding the yellow necklace. Billy tried to draw it away, but the lion awoke and was beginning to roar.

“I come as an ambassador from a strange land,”

Said Billy, bowing, “where water-lions of your degree are highly honoured.”

The roar of the lion died away. His great ears flapped softly. His great eyes blinked, and he actually smiled.

“I knew – I knew my day would come!” he said, and then he began to weep for joy. Whilst he was blinded by his tears of vanity Billy seized the necklace.

But the water-lion soon saw him. With a rumble and a grumble he pounced on poor Billy and would have torn him to bits very soon, but Billy remembered the cry “Ivani” just in time, and the lion fell down asleep.

Going out from his room Billy saw a very wise looking frog coming along, in spectacles, reading a book as he came.

“Dear, dear, this is very strange – very interesting. Dear, dear, yes,” staring at the page.

“Now I wonder if it is true. Can there really be other countries outside the lake where flowers like the sun grow as tall as a man? There may be, but it is really hard to think so.”

“Pardon me,” said Billy, bowing in front of the frog. “It is really true. That the country you read of is my country.”

“Tell me about it,” said the frog. “Dear, dear, this is very wonderful. And to think that it should happen to me. But then I have always sought knowledge, and I am the magician’s chancellor.”

“I will tell you about it if you tell me where the imprisoned maiden is kept,” answered Billy. The frog would not at first, but at last agreed, providing Billy would not tell who had given him his information. This Billy promised not to do. The Billy told the frog a good deal about England.

“Thanks, oh, thank you!” Said the frog. “Dear, dear, how very interesting. It quite makes one want to travel. Now, if you will turn to your right when you leave this room and then to your left, you will come to a blue wall with a pane of pearl. Slide this back, then climb fifty steps and you will come into a room where the unhappy maiden is kept. For my part I shall be glad when she is gone, for she has made the magician so cross with her pets and her tempers that it has been dreadfully hard for me. She is guarded by a water-porcupine. Tell the porcupine that Lamoya has sent you to relieve him and that he may sleep, and he will gladly go to sleep, for he is the laziest creature. If he should, however, try to pierce you with his spines, cry ‘Lavani’ three times, and he cannot harm you.”

All turned out as the frog had said.

But, alas, Billy forgot the exact words he had to cry, and instead of crying Lavani when the angry porcupine sprang upon him he cried Ivani, which was no use of course.

He was sorely wounded by the porcupine’s attack but seized the maiden, and ran on with her.

The porcupine roused the whole of the palace, and brought the magician (a dreadful creature) upon Billy’s track.

Just as Billy thought he must be overtaken a little spotted trout swam up to him. The trout had been slighted by the magician, and now saw a chance for revenge.

“Shout Owani three times and they will all fall down.” He said to Billy, and Billy did so, and they

all fell down.

Oh, how cross they were!

“Cry it four times and you will be above the water,” said the trout.

Whilst they were scolding each other and picking themselves up Billy cried it again four times and was in his canoe, and was soon sailing away with Beora.

You may imagine the jubilation in Rainy Land when the Mayor’s long lost daughter came home. Billy was knighted, Amber tapping him on the shoulder with a glass sword, and everybody shouted, for Sir Billy Dane. I.L.O., which stands, of course, for Ivani, Lavani, and Owani. He felt so very proud that he made his weather-glasses all wrong for a week, but as he was so great they forgave him that.

At the end of the week Billy got horribly home-sick and didn’t want to be Sir Billy but just Billy at home, going to school on the rainy road and hunting round for his mother’s pies on his return.

So he went to see the Mayor, and they had a long conversation. The Mayor was very hurt that Billy should want to go away just when they had knighted him, and half the people hadn’t seen him, he said, and would be so disappointed.

“Then I can get home?” asked Billy, eagerly. “Yes,” answered the Mayor, “but it’s rather a rough sort of journey, though not impossible.

Oh yes, it can be arranged.”

Billy bade Biff and Fee-Fee and his kind master and mistress a sorrowful farewell.

Biff went with him to the glass coach which shone all the colours of the rainbow. On the box sat a queer coachman, who looked a little like the door-knocker at home, and gave Billy that queer feeling once more, as if things weren’t quite real.

“Well, good-bye,” said everybody, kissing their hands, and off went the coach. It rumbled and dashed and banged and jerked, but the more Billy told the coachman to stop the faster he went, until Billy just gave himself up to be jerked into little bits, and hoped some of the bits would reach home, anyhow.

Crash!

The coach had banged into a stone wall, and was dashed into a million pieces, the coachman becoming invisible, and with a shriek Billy found himself – in bed.

“Get up Billy, boy,” said his mother’s voice, as she wound up the blind. “It’s raining; my dear, but you can take your father’s umbrella from the stand.”

Billy rubbed his eyes.

“Didn’t you lock me out?” He mumbled.

“Fee-Fee – water-porcupine – Sir Billy – “

His mother began to laugh,

“My dear you have been dreaming,” she said”

“Perhaps I have,” responded Billy, and he leaped out of bed and began to put on his stockings.

He looked at the door-knocker as he shut the door behind him, and it was so like the door-knocker of his dream that Billy could not help thinking it was very strange. He expected to go to Rainy Land again, but though he hoped and hoped, it never happened, and he got to know at last that it is only once in a life-time that these things happen, and sometimes, where people are very clever, never at all!

The end