

## THE "AGER."

Once upon an evening bleary,  
While I sat my dreamy, dreary,  
In the sunshine thinking over  
Things that passed in days of yore;  
While I nodded, nearly sleeping,  
Gently came a something creeping  
Up my back like water leaping  
Leaping upward from the floor;  
"Tis a cooling breeze," I muttered,  
"From the turrets 'neath the floor—  
Only this and nothing more!"

Ah! distinctly I remember—  
It was in that wet September,  
When the earth and every member  
Of creation that it bore  
Had for days and weeks been soaking  
In the meanest, most provoking  
Foggy rains that, without joking,  
We had ever seen before;  
So I knew it must be very  
Cold and damp beneath the floor—  
Very cold beneath the floor!

So I sat me nearly napping  
In the sunshine, stretching, gaping,  
Craving water, but delighted  
With the breeze from 'neath the floor;  
Till I found me waiting colder,  
And the stretching growing bolder,  
And myself a feeling older—  
Older than I felt before!

Feeling that my joints were stiffer  
Than they were in days of yore—  
Stiffer than they'd been before!

All along my back the creeping  
Soon gave place to rushing, leaping,  
As if countless frozen demons  
Had concluded to explore  
All the cavities—"the varmints!"—  
"Twixt me and my nether garments,  
Up into my hair and downward  
Through my boots into the floor;  
Then I found myself a-shaking,  
Gently first, but more and more—  
Every moment more and more.

'Twas the "ager" I! And it shook me  
In my very clothes, and took me  
Shaking to the kitchen—every  
Place where there was warmth in  
store;  
Shaking till the dishes clattered,  
Shaking till the tea was spattered,  
Shaking and with all my warning  
Feeling colder than before;  
Shaking till it had exhausted  
All the powers to shake no more—  
Till it could not shake me more!

Then it rested till the morrow,  
Then resumed with all the horror  
That it had the face to borrow,  
Shaking, shaking as before  
And from that day in September—  
Day that I shall long remember—  
It has made diurnal visits,  
Shaking, shaking on so sore!  
Shaking off my boots, and shaking  
Me to bed, it nothing more—  
Fully this and nothing more!

And to-day the swallows flitting  
Round my cottage see me sitting  
Moody within the sunshine  
Just inside my silent door—  
Waiting for the "ager" seeming  
Like a man forever dreaming  
And the sunshine on me streaming  
Throws the shadow on the floor—  
For I am too thin and shallow  
To make shadows on the floor—  
Nary shadow any more!

## LILIA'S TO-MORROW.

Mrs. Rubens sat by the open window of her little sitting-room, with an unfinished piece of work in her hands; but her hands had dropped idly in her lap, the white weaver little fingers refused to take up the shining little needle. Tell-tale tears stood in her soft blue eyes; but she wiped them quickly away, as she heard Lilia open the door and come up stairs with light, quick steps.

Lilia—with the summer sunshine in her hair-like waves of gold—with her soft eyes shining like the tender blossoms half hidden under the green leaves of the violets—with the pink blushes kissed her cheeks into loveliness, and laughter waiting on her red lip. What wonder that the mother's tired eyes grew bright again as she watched her darling's bright young face.

"What has happened to you, my love? Your face is as glad as a rose."

"It ought to be glad since such good fortune has come!" she said smiling. "Poor mamma, you've grown tired waiting for it, I know."

"Tell me all about it, or I shall fear you have dreamed it," Mrs. Rubens replied softly.

Lilia quickly divested herself of bonnet and shawl, and drawing a low stool to her mother's side, sat down and leaned her head against her knee.

"I shouldn't wonder if you had forgotten that it is the first of May to-day," she began, looking up in her mother's face; "but I never forget it when it comes, for I think it is the sweetest day of the year! So when lessons were over, I took my box of colors and those bits of pink board that I painted white last week, and went up the hill to Fairies' hollow."

And Lilia stopped to take one long breath of delight, while her mother stooped to kiss her glowing cheek.

"Everything was beginning to brighten, mamma. The softest of south winds crept through the grass with murmuring carresses; the flowers were coming up in beautiful clusters all over the hollow; and overhead—in the elm trees—I do believe a hundred happy birds were singing. I shall paint it some day mamma."

"And I shall look at it and enjoy it," said the mother, "only you must paint yourself in it, Lilia."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lilia doubtfully; "but I think it would be nicer without me—"

But I am coming to the best part of all now—so listen, mamma. I had finished a hazy, blue sky, had sketched a distant hill-lying softly against it, and a little lake in the foreground, half-bordered with willows, when a shadow fell upon my picture, and looking up, I saw a funny little old man leaning on a stick and looking at my work. He laughed, and then sighed and said, just as if he had been talking to himself, 'I used to do this too, when I was young and foolish like you.' Now you know, mamma, dear, nobody likes to be called foolish, and I suppose I did look a little cross, for he sighed again, and said, so mournfully, 'I won't hurt your tender heart for the world, child!—But don't you see you have left out the shadows.' 'I don't see any shadows to put in,' I said. 'It's May-day, and shadows don't fall in

my world on May-day.' 'That's just it,' he said sighing again, as if he saw nothing but shadows. 'That's just it, my child. You are young and gay hearted, and all the world looks bright to you; but the brightness faded to me before you were born.' When I came to look at him he didn't look so very old, either, not more than forty years old; but he did look as if he had had some very great sorrow to bear."

"But who is he, Lilia? I hope you don't often have such adventures, or I shall be afraid to let you ramble about alone. He may have been crazy."

Lilia laughed joyously.

"No, no, mamma! He is as sane as I am! He is the gentleman who has bought the beautiful house on the hill, and he is an artist; and, when I am not giving lessons to those tiresome little Dollies, and Miriams, and Christables, he is to give me lessons; and says that he can sell my pictures for me—all that I can paint."

"But, Lilia, lessons from a great artist will cost something; and how much can you pay him?"

"O, that is the best of it. He don't want any pay until he has sold my pictures, and he says I shall be rich."

Mrs. Rubens hesitated a little while, but could not resist the pretty, pleading face lifted to her own; and so the next week found Lilia taking lessons of the stranger-artist, and making a rapid progress. Even her mother, who knew her enthusiastic temperament, was surprised to see what she accomplished.

The weeks went by more rapidly than they had ever gone by before; and Lilia had finished four pictures—charming little landscapes in summer and autumn colors. She had been at home a week, helping her mother, who had not been as well as usual, and had not touched her pencils, though she did look longingly up the bright hill-path almost every day—when one day a servant from the house on the hill came to the cottage with a letter for Miss Lilia Rubens.

Letters with Lilia were not every day occurrences; and she pulled open the envelope with sparkling eye and glowing cheek. The color did not fade in her beautiful cheek when four rustling bank-notes dropped out from the folds of thick satin paper.

Her mother picked them up in silent astonishment, while Lilia read the letter.

When she had finished the last line she tossed it into her mother's lap, with a little cry of delight.

"Twenty pounds, mamma, for my pictures! What happy to-morrows we shall have some day! We will have a home of our own sweet dignity and never be tired and careworn any more. And we will make little summer excursions out into the world and see the beautiful place that I have dreamed of. To-morrow won't be a dream then, mother, but a happy reality."

She did not tire yet of talking of her to-morrow, which already glimmered in the horizon with a rosy light until her mother kissed her and told her she must not sit up to see it.

"It will come all the same, darling, whether you wake or sleep; and you must be up early, so as to go and thank your artist friend. See, he does not sign his name," she continued, smoothing out the cream-hued paper; "and it is strange that nobody seems to know it."

"I'll ask to-morrow," said Lilia, laughing, "and your curiosity shall be satisfied."

But when Lilia, after thanking him in her own sweet fashion, for taking so much trouble to find a purchaser for her pictures, did ask him, he was mute, and a vexed frown crossed his features. Her own face was covered with crimson blushes in a moment, and at that sight he smiled again.

"I have been your friend more for your mother's sake than for your own, child; and you may tell her that I will call to-morrow, and see if she remembers Hugh Murray."

Lilia could scarcely wait till she reached home to find out the mystery, but she did not discover it then.

Perhaps Mrs. Rubens' dreams had been haunted by a pair of brown eyes that used to look lovingly into her own; perhaps she remembered a musical voice that used to ring in her ears in the careless days of her own girlhood. Be that as it may, when his name dropped from Lilia's lips she turned away without a word, and shut herself into her own room, where Lilia dared not follow.

She was away giving a lesson in drawing to Christable Golding, when Hugh Murray called at their little cottage, and so did not see the pink blush on her mother's face as the old lover took her hand; she missed seeing the tear that stole down the pink cheek as he told her over again the story he thought he had told so many years before.

"And you really wrote me that, Hugh? And you thought me heartless—when I never got your letter?"

Lilia heard that much as she passed under the sitting-room window; and she rushed back just in time to see Hugh Murray kiss her mother's cheek.

And the mystery was explained. It seemed queer at first, of course; but Lilia was a sensible child, and made the best of it; and to-day she is queen of Murray Hill. Spoiled, as her mother constantly asserts, by her artist friend, Lilia laughs and tosses her head, and then runs out into the garden to wander up and down the rose borders, and wonders when her romance will begin.

But her to-morrow will surely come.

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