

# More Dreams

BY STELLA BENSON

MY dreams now come to me more and more often in a traditional crystal-gazing form, and I suppose if they occurred to any one ready to believe that proof of anything is available, they would be held to prove that something or other exists—though exactly what, it would be hard to say. At any rate, these dreams of mine have every mark of authenticity—except the fact of being true. They do not, as far as I know, represent anything—indeed why should they? But they are extremely vivid and accurate—much more vivid and accurate than, say, my usual memory of yesterday. They are impersonal (there is no *me* in them)—and within their own limits they are consistent.

And, to me most curious of all, each dream is, literally, a clear moving picture framed in a circle, hazy at the edges like the field of view of a telescope—I imagine very much like the settling of a vision in a crystal.

Sometimes these dreams are so short and pointless as to constitute simply a glimpse, as one might see a completely unexplained though perhaps memorable grouping of persons on a road as one drove by. Such stories in real life or in dream can never be finished and are scarcely begun; the pictures they leave on the retina are



STELLA BENSON AND HER DOG, OSTAPENKO

A photograph taken at Miss Benson's home in China

scarcely problem pictures since no problem is stated. Whenever I see a dog leaning out of a rushing car, I imagine what a babel of half-perceived smells must be pouring into its nose—all unidentifiable—all unexplainable—all, by their very variety, frustrating the dog's natural instinct to follow things up—dig mice out—lick dirt—force birds to take to flight. . . . To the dog this torrent of unimpressed impressions must be significant in the same way as a half-senseless composite word like Lovechristmasstrawberrygloryperilousseasforlornholycholyprinceofwalesasparagustipsrapture—might seem to us significant—but the composite smell would be much more exciting than any word, since the dog's nose transmits a directer ecstasy, I am sure, to the dog's brain than our everyday perceptions do to ours. But my dreams are not everyday things, and they have just such an exquisite urgency as I remember a child's experiences had, and as I imagine a dog's have. They come out of nowhere and go into nowhere; they seem to matter most intensely—but they probably don't matter at all. Perhaps the dog in the car may smell just a flick of a smell that he never dreamed of before—a smell the suggestive mystery of which might bring tears to his eyes. He can never stop and go back, but he may think, "Oh, this quick life is but death—Oh, if I could only stop and follow and live for ever with that smell. . . ." But if he could have his wish, it might prove to be only "a rotting cactus or a kerosene-soaked rag or burning dung. . . ."

The ordinary every night dream quite frankly and shamelessly leads nowhere at all. It is an explosion of the fancy—a dazzle of inconsistencies, improbabilities, inconsequences, and oddities of emphasis. The inspiring spark is inevitably *oneself*—one's sensible or senseless self—and all the light on the scene of a common dream

shines—however crazily—from this self which circumstances too often dim or extinguish in waking life. But these other rarer dreams which visit me from time to time are, from the first blink of their opening, wholly and unmistakably different from common, erratic, personal dreams. Not only do circumstantial and perfectly homogeneous details abound—not only does the action seem oddly to outrun my own presence of mind, so that unexpected events take me by surprise, events which only afterwards are seen to be accountable and in logical sequence—but the air of these dreams is a remote and utterly different air from that wind that blows hot and cold through a common dream—the

light is an indirect and moon-clear light—the light of no-identity. And each time one of these dreams comes, I have the sense of re-acquiring by accident an inexplicable knack that I had temporarily lost. I remember a story by George Macdonald about a door in a great castle—a door to curious and consoling adventures. The princess can never find the door deliberately; only occasionally, by mistake she finds its familiar threshold before her feet, and, every time this happens, she marvels at the ease with which she has reached it, and tries to

commit to memory the trick of finding it at will. But she found—and I find—the hunting of visions an impossibly elusive sport. The necessary preliminary—the complete shedding of personality—cannot be carried out as a deliberate exercise, I believe. Yet to find such a door—such a dream—is a most intoxicating delight, however trivial and purposeless may be the adventure behind the door—behind the dream.

I have had two of these dreams lately, on two consecutive nights. The first of these was a scene in some hotel "winter garden" or smoking room, a place of deep, leather-covered chairs, palms, solid, manly ashtrays, refined spittoons, and throaty, gentlemanly cries of *Waiter*. Facing the lens of my spyglass, as it were, was an innocent stout man like a Rotarian, bald, smoothfaced, complacent, cleansed of thought—the kind of man on whose lips the word *I* sounds an anomaly, because he is so conspicuously an *us*. This man was leaning forward from a very deep armchair. He was amused by a joke he was making. Some one my lens could not see was evidently amused too. The joke was not very funny—indeed it was only mildly giggeworthy, even to its maker. I have forgotten the kernel of it, but in general the monologue was to the effect that honesty really was the best policy—"I've tried both and I know"—and it contrasted his own rich, easy, tweedy, golfy, gin-and-bitters life—with the life of a certain doubtful character—"A millionaire, it's true,—but what I want to know is, What does he dream of at night?" There was little point in all this; only the giggle and the speaker's eagerness and cheerfulness gave it the status of a joke.

The speaker continued to talk about this unarrested criminal millionaire, and mentioned that "everything he does is on paper in a pigeonhole as soon as he's done it;—now look at me, I can start off in the

morning, walk half a mile, remember I've forgotten something and walk the whole way back and fetch it—and nobody interested enough to wonder what I think I'm doing—I can go and see a little lady I know, and nobody on God's earth knows where I am. And yesterday is as dead as a doornail to me—it'll never come to life again because it's nobody's business to look it up. But look at him, poor devil—if he forgot something and walked back the way he'd come—some sleuth would be on to it in a minute—why he did it—where he turned—what he saw that made him turn . . . whatever he does, somebody's taking notes, making guesses, noting the names of his girls and his tailor and the people he telegraphs to—fitting it all together like a jigsaw puzzle. Why he can't even get a haircut without making a little bit of history in somebody's notebook. Well, that's the way an honest man scores; what's done is done, with him. Why if I went and blew my nose fifteen times running on the steps of the National Gallery—nobody would mistake it for a criminal signal . . ." etc., etc.

While he spoke and laughed, he leaned further and further forward so that there was a wide space between his back and the back of the chair. Next to him, but facing the opposite way—that is, with its back to my lens—was another very deep chair. It had been impossible to see whether this chair were occupied or not until abruptly a man rose out of it and stood up. His arms and legs were very long, but his face was blurred so black against the bright window that my lens could not register his features. He leaned across the space between the talkative man's spine and the chair back, apparently to help himself to a box of matches on a little table just within a stretched reach. As this tall man—part of his body hidden from my spy-glass by the nearer leaning of the talker—grasped the box of matches and straightened himself, the talker's aspect underwent a sudden and frightful change. An appalled expression filled his naive face; his words and laughter died suddenly away; he bent tensely further and further forward—not eagerly now but with a cramped and crooked despair; his attention—so completely concentrated on his own wit but an instant before—was obviously quite remote now; no cry, no question could have reached it. The doors of his body had slammed upon him. His gradual canting-forward movement lasted such a long time that I, impersonally looking at the picture through my spyglass from another world, had time to think stupidly, "But what can have happened? Has he suddenly realized what a fool he is? What can have wiped out the joke so suddenly?"—before his slow collapse ended; his face came to rest upon his knees. And then I could see the knife sticking up to the hilt in his back. There was no sound or movement from the next chair; the tall man had disappeared. This climax was unexpected enough to wrench me into a rather sickened awakening. "Poor garulous old ass," I thought, feeling that I had travelled away leaving a silly but harmless passing acquaintance in trouble.

The second dream, which my spyglass focussed on the very next night, seemed to me more remote in its beginning and its ending. Set in my haze-encircled field of view, in this instance, was a scene in a wood. The trees, beeches and hazels, were of small size, though through openings—like Gothic windows—in the foliage one could see distant large trees—pines—on a red bracken slope. In the foreground of my picture lay a woman on the ground. She was covered by a sheet of silk material, the pattern of which is most firmly fixed in my memory. It was a rather sparse design; bright red and rather poisonous green on a very white ground; the design represented cherries and cherry leaves, but very primitively. The cherries were mere blobs of red—the leaves in thick, careless outline only, like croquet-hoops of green, yet the effect was certainly a cherry-tree effect—very vivid and clean looking. Waking, I have never seen this design as far as I know. The woman lay on her back with her head turned towards her left shoulder, and behind her head flowed in a thick, rippled stream her hair—bright yellow-brown hair. A yard or

two away from her right shoulder a man crouched or squatted on the ground, most assiduously brushing the woman's hair—obviously to soothe her, for she was ill. He brushed firmly and regularly, but his eyes strayed, and somehow I perceived his thought—"When she dies, all these woods are mine." As he thought this, the sun, which had been dimmed, suddenly came out, and the whole scene seemed to contract in a spasm of excitement.

The young woods, which had seemed rather trivial and sad, glittered with the most exact life; there were patterns and tracteries of little leaves that I could draw accurately at this moment; the twigs with the bright light behind them were piped with blinding silver, those on which the sun shone direct were grained and coiled like agate necklaces; some of the leaves were so glittering that nothing could be seen but blurred spangles, others drew color from the peacock-colored shade. The beech tree trunks, lately wet, seemed washed in an opal and jade bath. Between the near boughs, the distant bracken slope glowed ruddy as a well-baked cake, and the pines had a sheen and a toss like a cock's tail feathers. The man, still tirelessly brushing the woman's hair, looked at this transformation with great joy. But presently he looked down at the hair and saw that it did not share this general quickening of color; it absorbed none of the sunlight. It was a tawny sword sheathed in a shadow. If it had been a flower one would have thought it killed suddenly by a finger of frost, though not yet faded. By this, without looking at the woman's face, the man knew that she was dead.

Both these dreams, I believe, could be made into stories. But it seemed to me worth while to record them as they came to me—unfinished, unbegun, fragments of nothing projected on to nothingness. They had no importance, but they had to me the intense significance of insignificant things seen in childhood. Never again, waking, shall we accept so single-heartedly the common or rare images that in our childhood were printed on the sunlight before our unquestioning eyes. Such images are things in themselves; they call for no explanation. And I believe my impersonal middle-aged bones build up these dreams to protect themselves from the endless weariness of identity and personal experience.

## Stella Benson

"THE endless weariness of identity"—with those strange words closes the last essay Stella Benson will send us with her own hand. Dispatches tell us that she died of pneumonia in Hongan, China, on December 6, aged 41. At first sight those words seem unexpected from one who entered into the passion and excitement of living with such manifold zest. Yet they were very characteristic. Frail and shy as she was, no one ever showed a more various indomitable curiosity about all phases of being. The physical restrictions of one human personality could not possibly enclose or satisfy such enormous vitality. Her glittering speculation did not stop with men and their pathetic absurdities. She saw with extraordinary intuition the feelings and gestures of animals, trees, flowers, landscapes; even automobiles and buildings.

Lazy and contented people will never read Stella's exquisite books. Some of us, now for fifteen years, have looked to her as we did to only three or four others, for the cobweb strictures of perfection. There was great happiness in finding that *The Far-Away Bride*, that extraordinary humoresque of Manchurian life, had really reached something of a larger public. But, to be sure of a wide audience, she would have had to write for a world of unspoiled intelligence. A reading public of dogs or of old rowdies like the Count de Savine (in her *Pull Devil, Pull Baker*)—readers of fortune—people with pure ecstatic nostrils and lungs capable of screaming laughter—would have been just right for her. Her infinitely observant humor, self-and-everything-mocking, and reaching deep into dream and sorrow, was one of the purest faculties that dipped ink in these years.

C. M.



# The BOWLING GREEN

## Assay, 1933

JUST as I was feeling elegiac and fin d'année I received a circular about Gold:—

The price of fine Gold has advanced to \$34 an ounce . . . practically everyone has old gold, teeth and bridgework, rings, watches, antiques . . . of no practical value . . . ready cash. You can bring the Gold to our Receiving Department . . . it will be assayed in your presence. . . . Now is the time.

And I thought, in spite of indolence, error and absurdity, evil communication and corrupted manners, loss and grievance of many sorts, there was much gold to be assayed out of 1933. I even found myself growing almost cheerful as I recalled flashes of it—of no practical value, perhaps, but entirely my own. I'll set down a few of the shiners that passed through my sieve. Perhaps some of them are only mica—but I had to examine them to be sure. . . . As someone has said, "I don't mind long skirts, I've got a good memory."—

Skating, for the first time in ages, at an indoor rink; ashamed to be so clumsy, but thinking "At least there's no one here who'll criticize me." Coming with a scramble to the rinkside; found George Ennis standing there with another man; George said, "I want you to meet Irving Brokaw"—and I remembered that Mr. Brokaw was America's champion skater.

Hanging Cruikshank's famous engraving, *The Worship of Bacchus* (it belongs jointly to W. S. H. and me) in the kitchen at a favorite eating place on 45th Street. Seeing George Matthew Adams's collection of George Gissing's books—and especially the little notebook Gissing kept when he was in the U. S. I was to meet, at a dinner, an old friend from England who had been knighted since I knew him; and schooled myself to address him and his wife as Sir F. and Lady —. Met them unexpectedly beforehand at a street corner and of course came out with "Mr. and Mrs." Saw the moon and two planets in a straight line above 79th Street one brilliant winter night, as though the moon were a pendulum suspended from the two bright stars—or did I imagine this? The lights of Los Angeles seen from a car climbing that dangerous trail up Mount Wilson in the dusk, and beautifully scared. "Billy," I said in anguish, "if we ever get down there again, let's get good and plastered." To my horror he cackled so with laughter he had to halt the car. The grief of a gracious lady who brought a bottle of fine old rye down to the depot in Omaha to give to a passenger going through on the Overland Limited. . . . She dropped it at the door of the station . . . she took me out to show me the puddle. Talking with Felix Riesenbergs on the deserted deck of S.S. *Malolo* docked at San Pedro (Los Angeles) on March 4 . . . a distant radio was narrating the events of F. D. R.'s Inauguration, but we palavered on and on, examining our own doubtfulness.

Goonies, big ragged-looking albatross birds that follow Pacific ships. . . . The Southern Cross . . . first glimpse of the crumpled volcanic strata of The Islands. An airplane to the island of Maui, my first flight . . . thinking, as she sped smoothly across the field, they must have a mound or hill of some sort for the take-off . . . and looking out saw with amazement we were far off the ground. First remark of my hostess who met me at the lonely landing field in Maui: "Have you any weapon on you? There's a mad Filipino loose in the cane." My armory was a fountain pen and a broken penknife. The three huge loud-speakers in the dining-hall of the University Club, Los Angeles. "The biggest women's club in the world," the Ebell Club of L. A.—with

more members, more speakers, more committees and more announcements than any other. The ladies in blue smocks at Dawson's bookstore in Los Angeles. Finding a MS of my own in the great Huntington Library at San Marino . . . and the cautious curator's reluctance to let me touch it. The power and rapid sequence of the cocktails at the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. A spring morning on the Skyline Highway running above the sea, south of San Francisco . . . and first glimpse of a canyon of redwood trees. Going through the Hoover War Library with Mr. Hoover himself. I reproduce here, as contribution to history, a very rare document—a Prohibition era prescription for *spiritus frumenti*—unfilled.

Reading the galleys of Romain's *Men of Good Will* on a transcontinental train . . . dropping off a batch of them at each stop . . . wondering what the finders would make of them . . . the marvellous passage in that book where the little boy trundles his hoop round Paris until the hoop itself seems to take on life and go spinning round and round, a symbol of the universe itself. The pleasing drip of water in a fountain at the back of the patio of St. George Court, an apartment-cloister in Hollywood . . . the open-air markets of California and men spraying a hose on the fruit and vegetables . . . the brown hills of Salinas Valley like the haunches of pumas. The lawn sleeves of a Bishop confirming children at the Cathedral. The bankruptcy sale of Brentano's in a big room downtown . . . a red pamphlet (text of the Bankruptcy Act) flashing on the referee's desk. Summer sunsets among the high buildings of Manhattan; one especially, seen from a publisher's office on Madison Avenue where "The Boys" keep a jug of applejack in a locker. First amazed glimpse of the Radio City Music Hall, and the remark attributed to old Mr. Rockefeller: "It's a nice room, isn't it?"—the impression, from an upper balcony, that the stage show was a midget act. The excitement of an Italian speakeasy proprietor when he learned that a casual guest was wearing the same suit in which he had called on Mussolini a few weeks before. In the same speakeasy the host was performing, by request, one of his greatly admired feats of strength—flattening a bottle-cap with his fingers . . . and a delicate Southern lady who chanced to be there said, "Let me try"—and did it herself.

Arriving home after 2 months absence and being told that I had 3 evenings

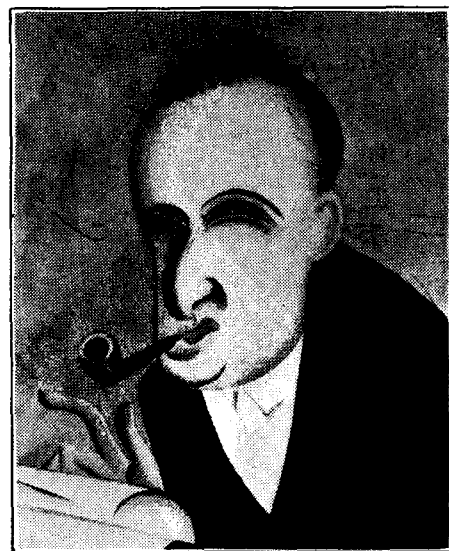
in which to read galleys of *Anthony Adverse* before the Book of the Month Club meeting . . . and doing it. The engine of the *Royal Scot* encountered unexpectedly at Grand Central. First view of the White Mountains after many years . . . driving with the family across the border into Canada . . . coming into Concord, Mass., in a clear summer evening after all day rain . . . the Jewish hot-dog stands along the road from Lexington to Concord; and our irreverent children exclaiming, in memory of Paul Revere, "The Yiddish are coming." A maroon-colored impromptu cocktail mixed by R. K. L. one afternoon at "C's place" when a group of us found ourselves alone there, the staff of the café all absent . . . its after-effects, a perfect and universal nescience . . . and R. K. L. himself going off wearing Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach's new hat. Lunches, in hot weather, in the back yard of the little Gotham Book Mart, and Jack, the waiter in the adjoining cafeteria, looking out hopefully through an iron-barred window. Swimming from a motorboat in the middle of Long Island Sound. The 10:30 p.m. (or thereabouts) train at Locust Valley that always used to puff by behind Marjorie Marquis's Red Barn Theatre just at the climax of the show. Titania and I meeting a large brown daughter at the Hoboken terminal when she came back from camp.

Sawing logs in the country . . . and the whimper of the steel as it oscillates. The children in the stage production of *Thunder on the Left* . . . a note written by one of those children to another during rehearsals: "I'm going to use an old cigar-box for my make-up box.—If you have a dandy box they think it's your first show."

The campus of Haverford College on one of October's perfect days; the feeling of a college classroom at 8:30 on a bright autumn morning; the smell of chalk. The blaze of sun on the desert at Palm Springs, California; and the quiet green room hired by Ted Slocum at the Desert Inn so we could have a secret refreshment. Shopping for a plush clockwork mouse; vain attempt to find one; finally in a novelty shop downtown the proprietor said, "Well, I have one, but it won't do you any good; it won't go."—His surprise when one said, "That's just what I want; one that won't go."—Symbolic, perhaps, of the play for which it was needed. The house manager's secret sanctum in the cellar of the Maxine Elliott Theatre. The revolving bar in the Pompeian Room of the old Congress Hotel, Chicago—and the always startling perfume when one enters the front door of that hotel. Roller skaters in Central Park; and the place at the head of the Mall where, on Sunday afternoons, they circle in an endless dizzying rotation . . . like dancing mice or the thoughts of men . . . and always, among them (the skaters) at least one of incredible grace and insouciance. Champagne at Ike Mendoza's 40th anniversary celebration of his Ann Street bookshop. Mr. O'Malley,

good bookseller on Columbus Avenue, introducing me to *Hardscrabble* by "Christopher Corkscrew," a little book of humorous and despairing verses written (1894) by W. I. Whiting of Beaver Street—a bookseller who actually starved to death. The news, just now, that *Trivia* (by Pearsall Smith) is to come back in print—in a little book *All Trivia*, early in 1934. Those porcelain fragments will be hard to kill. The impossibility, as I now realize, of listing in a catalogue like this the bright granules of one's incredulity. And a recollection of Elinor Wylie's humorous formula for Better Writing—"One should use a colon where other people use a semi-colon, and a semi-colon where other people use a comma." And, as I set down these chances of memory, the sudden pang in reading of Stella Benson's death—one of the most beautifully humorous (*humorous* in the Elizabethan sense) writers of our time. The ingenuity of the new-fangled ink-bottles sold at Woolworth's, with very wide necks—so that the ink evaporates fast.—Perhaps it's just as well. . . .

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.



GILBERT W. GABRIEL

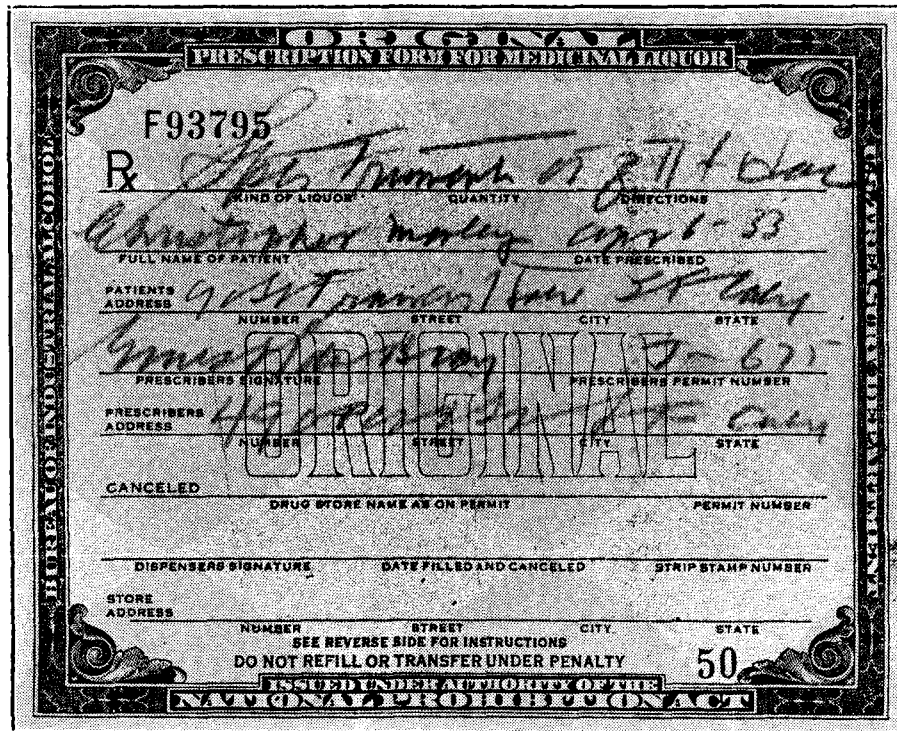
From a caricature by Covarrubias.

## A Pyrotechnic Novel

*GREAT FORTUNE.* By Gilbert W. Gabriel. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

M. R. GABRIEL has written a novel of a young couple caught up by the boom and thrown down by the depression. There was a playwright who knew this young couple, and was indeed secretly in love with the wife; who watched anxiously as her husband was taken up by her great relations in finance and the arts, was tormented when wealth seemed to be forcing them apart, and worse tormented when poverty seemed to be forcing them farther apart still; and who thought he could make a play of their story and their friends' by compressing and heightening it to fit the high pressure of the theatre. This playwright outlines his play, as he conceives it, to a Broadway producer. The story is told sometimes with the full analysis of the novel, and sometimes in dialogue, in the historical present, with all the forced-perspective climaxes and curtains of the stage. Even this is not all, for we see this narration not only as the narrator sees it, but also as it appears to the producer.

To see this story thus unfold itself is like reading the newspapers of the years just before and just after the crash. We find ourselves always interested but never touched. But if the book has less than it might otherwise have of human interest, it has, as has been indicated, more of interest of every other kind. It is written as a pyrotechnic display of technique, and as that it must be judged. Of its kind it is first rate; but its kind of innovation is that of the stunt rather than the experiment. That is, it is not something which other writers will seize as an advance in expression; it is a piece of ingenuity like Columbus's trick with the egg, which there would be no point in repeating. But for sheer entertainment, it keeps going more rings in its circus than any novel for several seasons.



RARE HISTORICAL DOCUMENT OF THE VOLSTEAD ERA