

CHAPTER XXII. THE DREAM BOOKS

The next day the Story Girl coaxed Uncle Roger to take her to Markdale, and there she bought our dream books. They were ten cents apiece, with ruled pages and mottled green covers. My own lies open beside me as I write, its yellowed pages inscribed with the visions that haunted my childish slumbers on those nights of long ago.

On the cover is pasted a lady's visiting card, on which is written, "The Dream Book of Beverley King." Cecily had a packet of visiting cards which she was hoarding against the day when she would be grown up and could put the calling etiquette of the Family Guide into practice; but she generously gave us all one apiece for the covers of our dream books.

As I turn the pages and glance over the naïve records, each one beginning, "Last night I dreamed," the past comes very vividly back to me. I see that bowery orchard, shining in memory with a soft glow of beauty--"the light that never was on land or sea,"--where we sat on those September evenings and wrote down our dreams, when the cares of the day were over and there was nothing to interfere with the pleasing throes of composition. Peter--Dan--Felix--Cecily--Felicity--Sara Ray--the Story Girl--they are all around me once more, in the sweet-scented, fading grasses, each with open dream books and pencil in hand,

now writing busily, now staring fixedly into space in search of some elusive word or phrase which might best describe the indescribable. I hear their laughing voices, I see their bright, unclouded eyes. In this little, old book, filled with cramped, boyish writing, there is a spell of white magic that sets the years at naught. Beverley King is a boy once more, writing down his dreams in the old King orchard on the homestead hill, blown over by musky winds.

Opposite to him sits the Story Girl, with her scarlet rosetted head, her beautiful bare feet crossed before her, one slender hand propping her high, white brow, on either side of which fall her glossy curls.

There, to the right, is sweet Cecily of the dear, brown eyes, with a little bloated dictionary beside her--for you dream of so many things you can't spell, or be expected to spell, when you are only eleven. Next to her sits Felicity, beautiful, and conscious that she is beautiful, with hair of spun sunshine, and sea-blue eyes, and all the roses of that vanished summer abloom in her cheeks.

Peter is beside her, of course, sprawled flat on his stomach among the grasses, one hand clutching his black curls, with his dream book on a small, round stone before him--for only so can Peter compose at all, and even then he finds it hard work. He

can handle a hoe more deftly than a pencil, and his spelling, even with all his frequent appeals to Cecily, is a fearful and wonderful thing. As for punctuation, he never attempts it, beyond an occasion period, jotted down whenever he happens to think of it, whether in the right place or not. The Story Girl goes over his dreams after he has written them out, and puts in the commas and semicolons, and straightens out the sentences.

Felix sits on the right of the Story Girl, fat and stodgy, grimly in earnest even over dreams. He writes with his knees stuck up to form a writing-desk, and he always frowns fiercely the whole time.

Dan, like Peter, writes lying down flat, but with his back towards us; and he has a dismal habit of groaning aloud, writhing his whole body, and digging his toes into the grass, when he cannot turn a sentence to suit him.

Sara Ray is at his left. There is seldom anything to be said of Sara except to tell where she is. Like Tennyson's Maud, in one respect at least, Sara is splendidly null.

Well, there we sit and write in our dream books, and Uncle Roger passes by and accuses us of being up to dev--to very bad mischief.

Each of us was very anxious to possess the most exciting record; but we were an honourable little crew, and I do not think anything was ever written down in those dream books which had not really been dreamed. We had expected that the Story Girl would eclipse us all in the matter of dreams; but, at least in the beginning, her dreams were no more remarkable than those of the rest of us. In dreamland we were all equal. Cecily, indeed, seemed to have the most decided talent for dramatic dreams. That meekest and mildest of girls was in the habit of dreaming truly terrible things. Almost every night battle, murder, or sudden death played some part in her visions. On the other hand, Dan, who was a somewhat truculent fellow, addicted to the perusal of lurid dime novels which he borrowed from the other boys in school, dreamed dreams of such a peaceful and pastoral character that he was quite disgusted with the resulting tame pages of his dream book.

But if the Story Girl could not dream anything more wonderful than the rest of us, she scored when it came to the telling. To hear her tell a dream was as good--or as bad--as dreaming it yourself.

As far as writing them down was concerned, I believe that I, Beverley King, carried off the palm. I was considered to possess a pretty knack of composition. But the Story Girl went me one better even there, because, having inherited something of her

father's talent for drawing, she illustrated her dreams with sketches that certainly caught the spirit of them, whatever might be said of their technical excellence. She had an especial knack for drawing monstrosities; and I vividly recall the picture of an enormous and hideous lizard, looking like a reptile of the pterodactyl period, which she had dreamed of seeing crawl across the roof of the house. On another occasion she had a frightful dream--at least, it seemed frightful while she told us and described the dreadful feeling it had given her--of being chased around the parlour by the ottoman, which made faces at her. She drew a picture of the grimacing ottoman on the margin of her dream book which so scared Sara Ray when she beheld it that she cried all the way home, and insisted on sleeping that night with Judy Pineau lest the furniture take to pursuing her also.

Sara Ray's own dreams never amounted to much. She was always in trouble of some sort--couldn't get her hair braided, or her shoes on the right feet. Consequently, her dream book was very monotonous. The only thing worth mentioning in the way of dreams that Sara Ray ever achieved was when she dreamed that she went up in a balloon and fell out.

"I expected to come down with an awful thud," she said shuddering, "but I lit as light as a feather and woke right up."

"If you hadn't woke up you'd have died," said Peter with a dark

significance. "If you dream of falling and DON'T wake you DO land with a thud and it kills you. That's what happens to people who die in their sleep."

"How do you know?" asked Dan skeptically. "Nobody who died in his sleep could ever tell it."

"My Aunt Jane told me so," said Peter.

"I suppose that settles it," said Felicity disagreeably.

"You always say something nasty when I mention my Aunt Jane," said Peter reproachfully.

"What did I say that was nasty?" cried Felicity. "I didn't say a single thing."

"Well, it sounded nasty," said Peter, who knew that it is the tone that makes the music.

"What did your Aunt Jane look like?" asked Cecily sympathetically. "Was she pretty?"

"No," conceded Peter reluctantly, "she wasn't pretty--but she looked like the woman in that picture the Story Girl's father sent her last week--the one with the shiny ring round her head

and the baby in her lap. I've seen Aunt Jane look at me just like that woman looks at her baby. Ma never looks so. Poor ma is too busy washing. I wish I could dream of my Aunt Jane. I never do."

"Dream of the dead, you'll hear of the living," quoted Felix oracularly.

"I dreamed last night that I threw a lighted match into that keg of gunpowder in Mr. Cook's store at Markdale," said Peter. "It blew up--and everything blew up--and they fished me out of the mess--but I woke up before I'd time to find out if I was killed or not."

"One is so apt to wake up just as things get interesting," remarked the Story Girl discontentedly.

"I dreamed last night that I had really truly curly hair," said Cecily mournfully. "And oh, I was so happy! It was dreadful to wake up and find it as straight as ever."

Felix, that sober, solid fellow, dreamed constantly of flying through the air. His descriptions of his aerial flights over the tree-tops of dreamland always filled us with envy. None of the rest of us could ever compass such a dream, not even the Story Girl, who might have been expected to dream of flying if anybody

did. Felix had a knack of dreaming anyhow, and his dream book, while suffering somewhat in comparison of literary style, was about the best of the lot when it came to subject matter.

Cecily's might be more dramatic, but Felix's was more amusing.

The dream which we all counted his masterpiece was the one in which a menagerie had camped in the orchard and the rhinoceros chased Aunt Janet around and around the Pulpit Stone, but turned into an inoffensive pig when it was on the point of catching her.

Felix had a sick spell soon after we began our dream books, and Aunt Janet essayed to cure him by administering a dose of liver pills which Elder Frewen had assured her were a cure-all for every disease the flesh is heir to. But Felix flatly refused to take liver pills; Mexican Tea he would drink, but liver pills he would not take, in spite of his own suffering and Aunt Janet's commands and entreaties. I could not understand his antipathy to the insignificant little white pellets, which were so easy to swallow; but he explained the matter to us in the orchard when he had recovered his usual health and spirits.

"I was afraid to take the liver pills for fear they'd prevent me from dreaming," he said. "Don't you remember old Miss Baxter in Toronto, Bev? And how she told Mrs. McLaren that she was subject to terrible dreams, and finally she took two liver pills and never had any more dreams after that. I'd rather have died than risk it," concluded Felix solemnly.

"I'd an exciting dream last night for once," said Dan triumphantly. "I dreamt old Peg Bowen chased me. I thought I was up to her house and she took after me. You bet I scooted. And she caught me--yes, sir! I felt her skinny hand reach out and clutch my shoulder. I let out a screech--and woke up."

"I should think you did screech," said Felicity. "We heard you clean over into our room."

"I hate to dream of being chased because I can never run," said Sara Ray with a shiver. "I just stand rooted to the ground--and see it coming--and can't stir. It don't sound much written out, but it's awful to go through. I'm sure I hope I'll never dream Peg Bowen chases me. I'll die if I do."

"I wonder what Peg Bowen would really do to a fellow if she caught him," speculated Dan.

"Peg Bowen doesn't need to catch you to do things to you," said Peter ominously. "She can put ill-luck on you just by looking at you--and she will if you offend her."

"I don't believe that," said the Story Girl airily.

"Don't you? All right, then! Last summer she called at Lem

Hill's in Markdale, and he told her to clear out or he'd set the dog on her. Peg cleared out, and she went across his pasture, muttering to herself and throwing her arms round. And next day his very best cow took sick and died. How do you account for that?"

"It might have happened anyhow," said the Story Girl--somewhat less assuredly, though.

"It might. But I'd just as soon Peg Bowen didn't look at MY cows," said Peter.

"As if you had any cows!" giggled Felicity.

"I'm going to have cows some day," said Peter, flushing. "I don't mean to be a hired boy all my life. I'll have a farm of my own and cows and everything. You'll see if I won't."

"I dreamed last night that we opened the blue chest," said the Story Girl, "and all the things were there--the blue china candlestick--only it was brass in the dream--and the fruit basket with the apple on it, and the wedding dress, and the embroidered petticoat. And we were laughing, and trying the things on, and having such fun. And Rachel Ward herself came and looked at us--so sad and reproachful--and we all felt ashamed, and I began to cry, and woke up crying."

"I dreamed last night that Felix was thin," said Peter, laughing. "He did look so queer. His clothes just hung loose, and he was going round trying to hold them on."

Everybody thought this was funny, except Felix. He would not speak to Peter for two days because of it. Felicity also got into trouble because of her dreams. One night she woke up, having just had a very exciting dream; but she went to sleep again, and in the morning she could not remember the dream at all. Felicity determined she would never let another dream get away from her in such a fashion; and the next time she wakened in the night--having dreamed that she was dead and buried--she promptly arose, lighted a candle, and proceeded to write the dream down then and there. While so employed she contrived to upset the candle and set fire to her nightgown--a brand-new one, trimmed with any quantity of crocheted lace. A huge hole was burned in it, and when Aunt Janet discovered it she lifted up her voice with no uncertain sound. Felicity had never received a sharper scolding. But she took it very philosophically. She was used to her mother's bitter tongue, and she was not unduly sensitive.

"Anyhow, I saved my dream," she said placidly.

And that, of course, was all that really mattered. Grown people

were so strangely oblivious to the truly important things of life. Material for new garments, of night or day, could be bought in any shop for a trifling sum and made up out of hand. But if a dream escape you, in what market-place the wide world over can you hope to regain it? What coin of earthly minting will ever buy back for you that lost and lovely vision?