

# Visions of the Night

By Robert H. Benson

*Libera me a terrore nocturno a negotio  
Perambulante in tenebris . . . custodi  
animam meam O Domine visitans me  
visitatione sanctorum revela mihi animum  
in visionibus noctis*

Ere yet I slept, the summer night  
Lay vague and mellow in the gloom  
Beyond the steady candlelight.  
The moth came tapping on the pane,  
Intent on doom.  
Then sank into the night again.

Then, as I lie, the darkened walls  
Grow dim; the sheets are turned to air,  
As fold on fold the slumber falls.  
The ticking clock grows dumb with sleep  
And everywhere  
About the soul slow pauses creep.

The sense contracts from form and space—  
Shrinks to a speck within the brain—  
Then opens on a wider place  
That knows no law, no harmony;  
Till once again  
A newer world is born for me.

My spirit moves in dark dismay  
About a house of misty halls:  
I hear the shuddering branches sway  
At gable-corners; on the floor  
And on the walls  
The firelight glimmers through the door.

I sit and talk beside the bed,  
Grasp hands, and meet the living eyes,  
Of one whom I had fancied dead  
Some ten years back "How strange," I say  
In glad surprise,

“That we should meet again to-day!”  
He smiles for answer sudden then  
I understand the mystery  
Of dying, for the sons of men  
And wonder where the sadness lay  
To see him die  
Last year—or was it yesterday?

All passes;— down long corridors,  
That lead about this wilderness,  
Fall footsteps tramping on the floors,  
That come from nowhere and are gone  
Yet none the less  
I run in panting terror on.

Here is a lawn with beds and grass;  
The birds sing shrilly in the air,  
While multitudes pass and re-pass,  
Who fill me with unknown distress,  
That holds me there  
To mark their swift unweariedness.

And so with eyes that ache to close,  
And feet that fly and flag in turn,  
About, about, my spirit goes.  
In wondrous wise from deep to deep,  
Before me burn  
The crumbling pageantries of sleep.

O Lord of Light, who gav’st me breath,  
And set’st my spirit ill at ease  
Within the body of this death,  
What means this dreaming rush and rout —  
These phantasies  
Born from within and seen without?

Since ghost and devil, foe and friend  
Throng — shadows on this shadow-stage —  
Move from no source and seek no end —  
Since all the passions born of fear  
Terror and rage,  
As in a looking-glass appear;

Why com'st Thou not Thyself, O Lord,  
To still the tossing of the brain,  
And calm with one imperious word  
This storm of fancy under Thee,  
And yet again  
Bid peace, as once in Galilee?

Come, Lord; and if through toilsome days  
I pray in dumb perplexity,  
And strive to lift my wearied praise,—  
Yet let me rest when night is deep,  
And look on Thee  
The Lord of waking and of sleep.