

Chapter XVII. Yva Explains

When I reached the rock I was pleased to find Marama and about twenty of his people engaged in erecting the house that we had ordered them to build for our accommodation. Indeed, it was nearly finished, since house-building in Orofena is a simple business. The framework of poles let into palm trunks, since they could not be driven into the rock, had been put together on the further shore and towed over bodily by canoes. The overhanging rock formed one side of the house; the ends were of palm leaves tied to the poles, and the roof was of the same material. The other side was left open for the present, which in that equable and balmy clime was no disadvantage. The whole edifice was about thirty feet long by fifteen deep and divided into two portions, one for sleeping and one for living, by a palm leaf partition. Really, it was quite a comfortable abode, cool and rainproof, especially after Bastin had built his hut in which to cook.

Marama and his people were very humble in their demeanour and implored us to visit them on the main island. I answered that perhaps we would later on, as we wished to procure certain things from the wreck. Also, he requested Bastin to continue his ministrations as the latter greatly desired to do. But to this proposal I would not allow him to give any direct answer at the moment. Indeed, I dared not do so until I was sure of Oro's approval.

Towards evening they departed in their canoes, leaving behind them the usual ample store of provisions.

We cooked our meal as usual, only to discover that what Yva had said about the Life-water was quite true, since we had but little appetite for solid food, though this returned upon the following day. The same thing happened upon every occasion after drinking of that water which certainly was a most invigorating fluid. Never for years had any of us felt so well as it caused us to do.

So we lit our pipes and talked about our experiences though of these, indeed, we scarcely knew what to say. Bastin accepted them as something out of the common, of course, but as facts which admitted of no discussion. After all, he said, the Old Testament told much the same story of people called the Sons of God who lived very long lives and ran after the daughters of men whom they should have left alone, and thus became the progenitors of a remarkable race. Of this race, he presumed that Oro and his daughter were survivors, especially as they spoke of their family as "Heaven born." How they came to survive was more than he could understand and really scarcely worth bothering over, since there they were.

It was the same about the Deluge, continued Bastin, although naturally Oro spoke falsely, or, at any rate, grossly exaggerated, when he declared that he had caused this catastrophe, unless indeed he was talking about a totally different deluge, though even then he could not

have brought it about. It was curious, however, that the people drowned were said to have been wicked, and Oro had the same opinion about those whom he claimed to have drowned, though for the matter of that, he could not conceive anyone more wicked than Oro himself. On his own showing he was a most revengeful person and one who declined to agree to a quite suitable alliance, apparently desired by both parties, merely because it offended his family pride. No, on reflection he might be unjust to Oro in this particular, since he never told that story; it was only shown in some pictures which very likely were just made up to astonish us. Meanwhile, it was his business to preach to this old sinner down in that hole, and he confessed honestly that he did not like the job. Still, it must be done, so with our leave he would go apart and seek inspiration, which at present seemed to be quite lacking.

Thus declaimed Bastin and departed.

"Don't you tell your opinion about the Deluge or he may cause another just to show that you are wrong," called Bickley after him.

"I can't help that," answered Bastin. "Certainly I shall not hide the truth to save Oro's feelings, if he has got any. If he revenges himself upon us in any way, we must just put up with it like other martyrs."

"I haven't the slightest ambition to be a martyr," said Bickley.

"No," shouted Bastin from a little distance, "I am quite aware of that,

as you have often said so before. Therefore, if you become one, I am sorry to say that I do not see how you can expect any benefit. You would only be like a man who puts a sovereign into the offertory bag in mistake for a shilling. The extra nineteen shillings will do him no good at all, since in his heart he regrets the error and wishes that he could have them back."

Then he departed, leaving me laughing. But Bickley did not laugh.

"Arbuthnot," he said, "I have come to the conclusion that I have gone quite mad. I beg you if I should show signs of homicidal mania, which I feel developing in me where Bastin is concerned, or of other abnormal violence, that you will take whatever steps you consider necessary, even to putting me out of the way if that is imperative."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "You seem sane enough."

"Sane, when I believe that I have seen and experienced a great number of things which I know it to be quite impossible that I should have seen or experienced. The only explanation is that I am suffering from delusions."

"Then is Bastin suffering from delusions, too?"

"Certainly, but that is nothing new in his case."

"I don't agree with you, Bickley--about Bastin, I mean. I am by no means certain that he is not the wisest of the three of us. He has a faith and he sticks to it, as millions have done before him, and that is better than making spiritual experiments, as I am sorry to say I do, or rejecting things because one cannot understand them, as you do, which is only a form of intellectual vanity."

"I won't argue the matter, Arbuthnot; it is of no use. I repeat that I am mad, and Bastin is mad."

"How about me? I also saw and experienced these things. Am I mad, too?"

"You ought to be, Arbuthnot. If it isn't enough to drive a man mad when he sees himself exactly reproduced in an utterly impossible moving-picture show exhibited by an utterly impossible young woman in an utterly impossible underground city, then I don't know what is."

"What do you mean?" I asked, starting.

"Mean? Well, if you didn't notice it, there's hope for you."

"Notice what?"

"All that envoy scene. There, as I thought, appeared Yva. Do you admit that?"

"Of course; there could be no mistake on that point."

"Very well. Then according to my version there came a man, still young, dressed in outlandish clothes, who made propositions of peace and wanted to marry Yva, who wanted to marry him. Is that right?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, and didn't you recognise the man?"

"No; I only noticed that he was a fine-looking fellow whose appearance reminded me of someone."

"I suppose it must be true," mused Bickley, "that we do not know ourselves."

"So the old Greek thought, since he urged that this should be our special study. 'Know thyself,' you remember."

"I meant physically, not intellectually. Arbuthnot, do you mean to tell me that you did not recognise your own double in that man? Shave off your beard and put on his clothes and no one could distinguish you apart."

I sprang up, dropping my pipe.

"Now you mention it," I said slowly, "I suppose there was a resemblance. I didn't look at him very much; I was studying the simulacrum of Yva. Also, you know it is some time since--I mean, there are no pier-glasses in Orofena."

"The man was you," went on Bickley with conviction. "If I were superstitious I should think it a queer sort of omen. But as I am not, I know that I must be mad."

"Why? After all, an ancient man and a modern man might resemble each other."

"There are degrees in resemblance," said Bickley with one of his contemptuous snorts. "It won't do, Humphrey, my boy," he added. "I can only think of one possible explanation--outside of the obvious one of madness."

"What is that?"

"The Glittering Lady produced what Bastin called that cinematograph show in some way or other, did she not? She said that in order to do this she loosed some hidden forces. I suggest that she did nothing of the sort."

"Then whence did the pictures come and why?"

"From her own brain, in order to impress us with a cock-and-bull,

fairy-book story. If this were so she would quite naturally fill the role of the lover of the piece with the last man who had happened to impress her. Hence the resemblance."

"You presuppose a great deal, Bickley, including supernatural cunning and unexampled hypnotic influence. I don't know, first, why she should be so anxious to add another impression to the many we have received in this place; and, secondly, if she was, how she managed to mesmerise three average but totally different men into seeing the same things. My explanation is that you were deceived as to the likeness, which, mind you, I did not recognise; nor, apparently, did Bastin."

"Bastin never recognises anything. But if you are in doubt, ask Yva herself. She ought to know. Now I'm off to try to analyse that confounded Life-water, which I suspect is of the ordinary spring variety, lightened up with natural carbonic acid gas and possibly not uninfluenced by radium. The trouble is that here I can only apply some very elementary tests."

So he went also, in an opposite direction to Bastin, and I was left alone with Tommy, who annoyed me much by attempting continually to wander off into the cave, whence I must recall him. I suppose that my experiences of the day, reviewed beneath the sweet influences of the wonderful tropical night, affected me. At any rate, that mystical side of my nature, to which I think I alluded at the beginning of this record, sprang into active and, in a sense, unholy life. The normal

vanished, the abnormal took possession, and that is unholy to most of us creatures of habit and tradition, at any rate, if we are British. I lost my footing on the world; my spirit began to wander in strange places; of course, always supposing that we have a spirit, which Bickley would deny.

I gave up reason; I surrendered myself to unreason; it is a not unpleasant process, occasionally. Supposing now that all we see and accept is but the merest fragment of the truth, or perhaps only a refraction thereof? Supposing that we do live again and again, and that our animating principle, whatever it might be, does inhabit various bodies, which, naturally enough, it would shape to its own taste and likeness? Would that taste and likeness vary so very much over, let us say, a million years or so, which, after all, is but an hour, or a minute, in the aeons of Eternity?

On this hypothesis, which is so wild that one begins to suspect that it may be true, was it impossible that I and that murdered man of the far past were in fact identical? If the woman were the same, preserved across the gulf in some unknown fashion, why should not her lover be the same? What did I say--her lover? Was I her lover? No, I was the lover of one who had died--my lost wife. Well, if I had died and lived again, why should not--why should not that Sleeper--have lived again during her long sleep? Through all those years the spirit must have had some home, and, if so, in what shapes did it live? There were points, similarities, which rushed in upon me--oh! it was ridiculous. Bickley was right. We

were all mad!

There was another thing. Oro had declared that we were at war with Germany. If this were so, how could he know it? Such knowledge would presume powers of telepathy or vision beyond those given to man. I could not believe that he possessed these; as Bickley said, it would be past experience. Yet it was most strange that he who was uninformed as to our national history and dangers, should have hit upon a country with which we might well have been plunged into sudden struggle. Here again I was bewildered and overcome. My brain rocked. I would seek sleep, and in it escape, or at any rate rest from all these mysteries.

On the following morning we despatched Bastin to keep his rendezvous in the sepulchre at the proper time. Had we not done so I felt sure that he would have forgotten it, for on this occasion he was for once an unwilling missionary. He tried to persuade one of us to come with him--even Bickley would have been welcome; but we both declared that we could not dream of interfering in such a professional matter; also that our presence was forbidden, and would certainly distract the attention of his pupil.

"What you mean," said the gloomy Bastin, "is that you intend to enjoy yourselves up here in the female companionship of the Glittering Lady whilst I sit thousands of feet underground attempting to lighten the darkness of a violent old sinner whom I suspect of being in league with

Satan."

"With whom you should be proud to break a lance," said Bickley.

"So I am, in the daylight. For instance, when he uses your mouth to advance his arguments. Bickley, but this is another matter. However, if I do not appear again you will know that I died in a good cause, and, I hope, try to recover my remains and give them decent burial. Also, you might inform the Bishop of how I came to my end, that is, if you ever get an opportunity, which is more than doubtful."

"Hurry up, Bastin, hurry up!" said the unfeeling Bickley, "or you will be late for your appointment and put your would-be neophyte into a bad temper."

Then Bastin went, carrying under his arm a large Bible printed in the language of the South Sea Islands.

A little while later Yva appeared, arrayed in her wondrous robes which, being a man, it is quite impossible for me to describe. She saw us looking at these, and, after greeting us both, also Tommy, who was enraptured at her coming, asked us how the ladies of our country attired themselves.

We tried to explain, with no striking success.

"You are as stupid about such matters as were the men of the Old World," she said, shaking her head and laughing. "I thought that you had with you pictures of ladies you have known which would show me."

Now, in fact, I had in a pocket-book a photograph of my wife in evening-dress, also a miniature of her head and bust painted on ivory, a beautiful piece of work done by a master hand, which I always wore. These, after a moment's hesitation, I produced and showed to her, Bickley having gone away for a little while to see about something connected with his attempted analysis of the Life-water. She examined them with great eagerness, and as she did so I noted that her face grew tender and troubled.

"This was your wife," she said as one who states what she knows to be a fact. I nodded, and she went on:

"She was sweet and beautiful as a flower, but not so tall as I am, I think."

"No," I answered, "she lacked height; given that she would have been a lovely woman."

"I am glad you think that women should be tall," she said, glancing at her shadow. "The eyes were such as mine, were they not--in colour, I mean?"

"Yes, very like yours, only yours are larger."

"That is a beautiful way of wearing the hair. Would you be angry if I tried it? I weary of this old fashion."

"Why should I be angry?" I asked.

At this moment Bickley reappeared and she began to talk of the details of the dress, saying that it showed more of the neck than had been the custom among the women of her people, but was very pretty.

"That is because we are still barbarians," said Bickley; "at least, our women are, and therefore rely upon primitive methods of attraction, like the savages yonder."

She smiled, and, after a last, long glance, gave me back the photograph and the miniature, saying as she delivered the latter:

"I rejoice to see that you are faithful, Humphrey, and wear this picture on your heart, as well as in it."

"Then you must be a very remarkable woman," said Bickley. "Never before did I hear one of your sex rejoice because a man was faithful to somebody else."

"Has Bickley been disappointed in his love-heart, that he is so angry

to us women?" asked Yva innocently of me. Then, without waiting for an answer, she inquired of him whether he had been successful in his analysis of the Life-water.

"How do you know what I was doing with the Life-water? Did Bastin tell you?" exclaimed Bickley.

"Bastin told me nothing, except that he was afraid of the descent to Nyo; that he hated Nyo when he reached it, as indeed I do, and that he thought that my father, the Lord Oro, was a devil or evil spirit from some Under-world which he called hell."

"Bastin has an open heart and an open mouth," said Bickley, "for which I respect him. Follow his example if you will, Lady Yva, and tell us who and what is the Lord Oro, and who and what are you."

"Have we not done so already? If not, I will repeat. The Lord Oro and I are two who have lived on from the old time when the world was different, and yet, I think, the same. He is a man and not a god, and I am a woman. His powers are great because of his knowledge, which he has gathered from his forefathers and in a life of a thousand years before he went to sleep. He can do things you cannot do. Thus, he can pass through space and take others with him, and return again. He can learn what is happening in far-off parts of the world, as he did when he told you of the war in which your country is concerned. He has terrible powers; for instance, he can kill, as he killed those savages. Also, he

knows the secrets of the earth, and, if it pleases him, can change its turning so that earthquakes happen and sea becomes land, and land sea, and the places that were hot grow cold, and those that were cold grow hot."

"All of which things have happened many times in the history of the globe," said Bickley, "without the help of the Lord Oro."

"Others had knowledge before my father, and others doubtless will have knowledge after him. Even I, Yva, have some knowledge, and knowledge is strength."

"Yes," I interposed, "but such powers as you attribute to your father are not given to man."

"You mean to man as you know him, man like Bickley, who thinks that he has learned everything that was ever learned. But it is not so. Hundreds of thousands of years ago men knew more than it seems they do today, ten times more, as they lived ten times longer, or so you tell me."

"Men?" I said.

"Yes, men, not gods or spirits, as the uninstructed nations supposed them to be. My father is a man subject to the hopes and terrors of man. He desires power which is ambition, and when the world refused his rule, he destroyed that part of it which rebelled, which is revenge. Moreover,

above all things he dreads death, which is fear. That is why he suspended life in himself and me for two hundred and fifty thousand years, as his knowledge gave him strength to do, because death was near and he thought that sleep was better than death."

"Why should he dread to die," asked Bickley, "seeing that sleep and death are the same?"

"Because his knowledge tells him that Sleep and Death are not the same, as you, in your foolishness, believe, for there Bastin is wiser than you. Because for all his wisdom he remains ignorant of what happens to man when the Light of Life is blown out by the breath of Fate. That is why he fears to die and why he talks with Bastin the Preacher, who says he has the secret of the future."

"And do you fear to die?" I asked.

"No, Humphrey," she answered gently. "Because I think that there is no death, and, having done no wrong, I dread no evil. I had dreams while I was asleep, O Humphrey, and it seemed to me that--"

Here she ceased and glanced at where she knew the miniature was hanging upon my breast.

"Now," she continued, after a little pause, "tell me of your world, of its history, of its languages, of what happens there, for I long to

know."

So then and there, assisted by Bickley, I began the education of the Lady Yva. I do not suppose that there was ever a more apt pupil in the whole earth. To begin with, she was better acquainted with every subject on which I touched than I was myself; all she lacked was information as to its modern aspect. Her knowledge ended two hundred and fifty thousand years ago, at which date, however, it would seem that civilisation had already touched a higher water-mark than it has ever since attained. Thus, this vanished people understood astronomy, natural magnetism, the force of gravity, steam, also electricity to some subtle use of which, I gathered, the lighting of their underground city was to be attributed. They had mastered architecture and the arts, as their buildings and statues showed; they could fly through the air better than we have learned to do within the last few years.

More, they, or some of them, had learned the use of the Fourth Dimension, that is their most instructed individuals, could move through opposing things, as well as over them, up into them and across them. This power these possessed in a two-fold form. I mean, that they could either disintegrate their bodies at one spot and cause them to integrate again at another, or they could project what the old Egyptians called the Ka or Double, and modern Theosophists name the Astral Shape, to any distance. Moreover, this Double, or Astral Shape, while itself invisible, still, so to speak, had the use of its senses. It could see, it could hear, and it could remember, and, on returning to the body, it

could avail itself of the experience thus acquired.

Thus, at least, said Yva, while Bickley contemplated her with a cold and unbelieving eye. She even went further and alleged that in certain instances, individuals of her extinct race had been able to pass through the ether and to visit other worlds in the depths of space.

"Have you ever done that?" asked Bickley.

"Once or twice I dreamed that I did," she replied quietly.

"We can all dream," he answered.

As it was my lot to make acquaintance with this strange and uncanny power at a later date, I will say no more of it now.

Telepathy, she declared, was also a developed gift among the Sons of Wisdom; indeed, they seem to have used it as we use wireless messages. Only, in their case, the sending and receiving stations were skilled and susceptible human beings who went on duty for so many hours at a time. Thus intelligence was transmitted with accuracy and despatch. Those who had this faculty were, she said, also very apt at reading the minds of others and therefore not easy to deceive.

"Is that how you know that I had been trying to analyse your Life-water?" asked Bickley.

"Yes," she answered, with her unvarying smile. "At the moment I spoke thereof you were wondering whether my father would be angry if he knew that you had taken the water in a little flask." She studied him for a moment, then added: "Now you are wondering, first, whether I did not see you take the water from the fountain and guess the purpose, and, secondly, whether perhaps Bastin did not tell me what you were doing with it when we met in the sepulchre."

"Look here," said the exasperated Bickley, "I admit that telepathy and thought-reading are possible to a certain limited extent. But supposing that you possess those powers, as I think in English, and you do not know English, how can you interpret what is passing in my mind?"

"Perhaps you have been teaching me English all this while without knowing it, Bickley. In any case, it matters little, seeing that what I read is the thought, not the language with which it is clothed. The thought comes from your mind to mine--that is, if I wish it, which is not often--and I interpret it in my own or other tongues."

"I am glad to hear it is not often, Lady Yva, since thoughts are generally considered private."

"Yes, and therefore I will read yours no more. Why should I, when they are so full of disbelief of all I tell you, and sometimes of other things about myself which I do not seek to know?"

"No wonder that, according to the story in the pictures, those Nations, whom you named Barbarians, made an end of your people, Lady Yva."

"You are mistaken, Bickley; the Lord Oro made an end of the Nations, though against my prayer," she added with a sigh.

Then Bickley departed in a rage, and did not appear again for an hour.

"He is angry," she said, looking after him; "nor do I wonder. It is hard for the very clever like Bickley, who think that they have mastered all things, to find that after all they are quite ignorant. I am sorry for him, and I like him very much."

"Then you would be sorry for me also, Lady Yva?"

"Why?" she asked with a dazzling smile, "when your heart is athirst for knowledge, gaping for it like a fledgling's mouth for food, and, as it chances, though I am not very wise, I can satisfy something of your soul-hunger."

"Not very wise!" I repeated.

"No, Humphrey. I think that Bastin, who in many ways is so stupid, has more true wisdom than I have, because he can believe and accept without question. After all, the wisdom of my people is all of the universe

and its wonders. What you think magic is not magic; it is only gathered knowledge and the finding out of secrets. Bickley will tell you the same, although as yet he does not believe that the mind of man can stretch so far."

"You mean that your wisdom has in it nothing of the spirit?"

"Yes, Humphrey, that is what I mean. I do not even know if there is such a thing as spirit. Our god was Fate; Bastin's god is a spirit, and I think yours also."

"Yes."

"Therefore, I wish you and Bastin to teach me of your god, as does Oro, my father. I want--oh! so much, Humphrey, to learn whether we live after death."

"You!" I exclaimed. "You who, according to the story, have slept for two hundred and fifty thousand years! You, who have, unless I mistake, hinted that during that sleep you may have lived in other shapes! Do you doubt whether we can live after death?"

"Yes. Sleep induced by secret arts is not death, and during that sleep the I within might wander and inhabit other shapes, because it is forbidden to be idle. Moreover, what seems to be death may not be death, only another form of sleep from which the I awakes again upon the world.

But at last comes the real death, when the I is extinguished to the world. That much I know, because my people learned it."

"You mean, you know that men and women may live again and again upon the world?"

"Yes, Humphrey, I do. For in the world there is only a certain store of life which in many forms travels on and on, till the lot of each I is fulfilled. Then comes the real death, and after that--what, oh!--what?"

"You must ask Bastin," I said humbly. "I cannot dare to teach of such matters."

"No, but you can and do believe, and that helps me, Humphrey, who am in tune with you. Yes, it helps me much more than do Bastin and his new religion, because such is woman's way. Now, I think Bickley will soon return, so let us talk of other matters. Tell me of the history of your people, Humphrey, that my father says are now at war."