

## Chapter XVIII. The Accident

Bickley did return, having recovered his temper, since after all it was impossible for anyone to remain angry with the Lady Yva for long, and we spent a very happy time together. We instructed and she was the humble pupil.

How swift and nimble was her intelligence! In that one morning she learned all our alphabet and how to write our letters. It appeared that among her people, at any rate in their later periods, the only form of writing that was used was a highly concentrated shorthand which saved labour. They had no journals, since news which arrived telepathically or by some form of wireless was proclaimed to those who cared to listen, and on it all formed their own judgments. In the same way poems and even romances were repeated, as in Homer's day or in the time of the Norse sagas, by word of mouth. None of their secret knowledge was written down. Like the ritual of Freemasonry it was considered too sacred.

Moreover, when men lived for hundreds of years this was not so necessary, especially as their great fear was lest it should fall into the hands of the outside nations, whom they called Barbarians. For, be it remembered, these Sons of Wisdom were always a very small people who ruled by the weight of their intelligence and the strength of their accumulated lore. Indeed, they could scarcely be called a people; rather were they a few families, all of them more or less connected with the

original ruling Dynasty which considered itself half divine. These families were waited upon by a multitude of servants or slaves drawn from the subject nations, for the most part skilled in one art or another, or perhaps, remarkable for their personal beauty. Still they remained outside the pale.

The Sons of Wisdom did not intermarry with them or teach them their learning, or even allow them to drink of their Life-water. They ruled them as men rule dogs, treating them with kindness, but no more, and as many dogs run their course and die in the lifetime of one master, so did many of these slaves in that of one of the Sons of Wisdom. Therefore, the slaves came to regard their lords not as men, but gods. They lived but three score years and ten like the rest of us, and went their way, they, whose great-great-grandfathers had served the same master and whose great-great-great-grandchildren would still serve him. What should we think of a lord who we knew was already adult in the time of William the Conqueror, and who remained still vigorous and all-powerful in that of George V? One, moreover, who commanded almost infinite knowledge to which we were denied the key? We might tremble before him and look upon him as half-divine, but should we not long to kill him and possess his knowledge and thereby prolong our own existence to his wondrous measure?

Such, said Yva, was the case with their slaves and the peoples from whence these sprang. They grew mad with jealous hate, till at length came the end we knew.

Thus we talked on for hours till the time came for us to eat. As before Yva partook of fruit and we of such meats as we had at hand. These, we noticed, disgusted her, because, as she explained, the Children of Wisdom, unless driven thereto by necessity, touched no flesh, but lived on the fruits of the earth and wine alone. Only the slaves and the Barbarians ate flesh. In these views Bickley for once agreed with her, that is, except as regards the wine, for in theory, if not in practice--he was a vegetarian.

"I will bring you more of the Life-water," she said, "and then you will grow to hate these dead things, as I do. And now farewell. My father calls me. I hear him though you do not. To-morrow I cannot come, but the day after I will come and bring you the Life-water. Nay, accompany me not, but as I see he wishes it, let Tommy go with me. I will care for him, and he is a friend in all that lonely place."

So she went, and with her Tommy, rejoicing.

"Ungrateful little devil!" said Bickley. "Here we've fed and petted him from puppyhood, or at least you have, and yet he skips off with the first stranger. I never saw him behave like that to any woman, except your poor wife."

"I know," I answered. "I cannot understand it. Hullo! here comes Bastin."

Bastin it was, dishevelled and looking much the worse for wear, also minus his Bible in the native tongue.

"Well, how have you been getting on?" said Bickley.

"I should like some tea, also anything there is to eat."

We supplied him with these necessaries, and after a while he said slowly and solemnly:

"I cannot help thinking of a childish story which Bickley told or invented one night at your house at home. I remember he had an argument with my wife, which he said put him in mind of it, I am sure I don't know why. It was about a monkey and a parrot that were left together under a sofa for a long while, where they were so quiet that everybody forgot them. Then the parrot came out with only one feather left in its tail and none at all on its body, saying, 'I've had no end of a time!' after which it dropped down and died. Do you know, I feel just like that parrot, only I don't mean to die, and I think I gave the monkey quite as good as he gave me!"

"What happened?" I asked, intensely interested.

"Oh! the Glittering Lady took me into that palace hall where Oro was sitting like a spider in a web, and left me there. I got to work at

once. He was much interested in the Old Testament stories and said there were points of truth about them, although they had evidently come down to the modern writer--he called him a modern writer--in a legendary form. I thought his remarks impertinent and with difficulty refrained from saying so. Leaving the story of the Deluge and all that, I spoke of other matters, telling him of eternal life and Heaven and Hell, of which the poor benighted man had never heard. I pointed out especially that unless he repented, his life, by all accounts, had been so wicked, that he was certainly destined to the latter place."

"What did he say to that?" I asked.

"Do you know, I think it frightened him, if one could imagine Oro being frightened. At any rate he remarked that the truth or falsity of what I said was an urgent matter for him, as he could not expect to live more than a few hundred years longer, though perhaps he might prolong the period by another spell of sleep. Then he asked me why I thought him so wicked. I replied because he himself said that he had drowned millions of people, which showed an evil heart and intention even if it were not a fact. He thought a long while and asked what could be done in the circumstances. I replied that repentance and reparation were the only courses open to him."

"Reparation!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, reparation was what I said, though I think I made a mistake there,

as you will see. As nearly as I can remember, he answered that he was beginning to repent, as from all he had learned from us, he gathered that the races which had arisen as a consequence of his action, were worse than those which he had destroyed. As regards reparation, what he had done once he could do again. He would think the matter over seriously, and see if it were possible and advisable to raise those parts of the world which had been sunk, and sink those which had been raised. If so, he thought that would make very handsome amends to the departed nations and set him quite right with any superior Power, if such a thing existed. What are you laughing at, Bickley? I don't think it a laughing matter, since such remarks do not seem to me to indicate any real change in Oro's heart, which is what I was trying to effect."

Bickley, who was convulsed with merriment, wiped his eyes and said:

"You dear old donkey, don't you see what you have done, or rather would have done if there were a word of truth in all this ridiculous story about a deluge? You would be in the way of making your precious pupil, who certainly is the most masterly old liar in the world, repeat his offence and send Europe to the bottom of the sea."

"That did occur to me, but it doesn't much matter as I am quite certain that such a thing would never be allowed. Of course there was a real deluge once, but Oro had no more to do with it than I had. Don't you agree, Arbuthnot?"

"I think so," I answered cautiously, "but really in this place I am beginning to lose count of what is or is not possible. Also, of course, there may have been many deluges; indeed the history of the world shows that this was so; it is written in its geological strata. What was the end of it?"

"The end was that he took the South Sea Bible and, after I had explained a little about our letters, seemed to be able to read it at once. I suppose he was acquainted with the art of printing in his youth. At any rate he said that he would study it, I don't know how, unless he can read, and that in two days' time he would let me know what he thought about the matter of my religion. Then he told me to go. I said that I did not know the way and was afraid of losing myself. Thereupon he waved his hand, and I really can't say what happened."

"Did you levitate up here," asked Bickley, "like the late lamented Mr. Home at the spiritualistic seances?"

"No, I did not exactly levitate, but something or someone seemed to get a hold of me, and I was just rushed along in a most tumultuous fashion. The next thing I knew was that I was standing at the door of that sepulchre, though I have no recollection of going up in the lift, or whatever it is. I believe those beastly caves are full of ghosts, or devils, and the worst of it is that they have kept my solar-tape, which I put on this morning forgetting that it would be useless there."

"The Lady Yva's Fourth Dimension in action," I suggested, "only it wouldn't work on solar-topes."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Bastin, "but if my hat had to be left, why not my boots and other garments? Please stop your nonsense and pass the tea. Thank goodness I haven't got to go down there tomorrow, as he seems to have had enough of me for the present, so I vote we all pay a visit to the ship. It will be a very pleasant change. I couldn't stand two days running with that old fiend, and his ghosts or devils in the cave."

Next morning accordingly, fearing no harm from the Orofenans, we took the canoe and rowed to the main island. Marama had evidently seen us coming, for he and a number of his people met us with every demonstration of delight, and escorted us to the ship. Here we found things just as we had left them, for there had been no attempt at theft or other mischief.

While we were in the cabin a fit of moral weakness seemed to overcome Bickley, the first and I may add the last from which I ever saw him suffer.

"Do you know," he said, addressing us, "I think that we should do well to try to get out of this place. Eliminating a great deal of the marvelous with which we seem to have come in touch here, it is



still obvious that we find ourselves in very peculiar and unhealthy surroundings. I mean mentally unhealthy, indeed I think that if we stay here much longer we shall probably go off our heads. Now that boat on the deck remains sound and seaworthy. Why should not we provision her and take our chance? We know more or less which way to steer."

Bastin and I looked at each other. It was he who spoke first.

"Wouldn't it be rather a risky job in an open boat?" he asked. "However, that doesn't matter much because I don't take any account of risks, knowing that I am of more value than a sparrow and that the hairs of my head are all numbered."

"They might be numbered under water as well as above it," muttered Bickley, "and I feel sure that on your own showing, you would be as valuable dead as alive."

"What I seem to feel," went on Bastin, "is that I have work to my hand here. Also, the locum tenens at Fulcombe no doubt runs the parish as well as I could. Indeed I consider him a better man for the place than I am. That old Oro is a tough proposition, but I do not despair of him yet, and besides him there is the Glittering Lady, a most open-minded person, whom I have not yet had any real opportunity of approaching in a spiritual sense. Then there are all these natives who cannot learn without a teacher. So on the whole I think I would rather stay where I am until Providence points out some other path."

"I am of the same opinion, if for somewhat different reasons," I said.

"I do not suppose that it has often been the fortune of men to come in touch with such things as we have found upon this island. They may be illusions, but at least they are very interesting illusions. One might live ten lifetimes and find nothing else of the sort. Therefore I should like to see the end of the dream."

Bickley reflected a little, then said:

"On the whole I agree with you. Only my brain totters and I am terribly afraid of madness. I cannot believe what I seem to hear and see, and that way madness lies. It is better to die than to go mad."

"You'll do that anyway when your time comes, Bickley, I mean decease, of course," interrupted Bastin. "And who knows, perhaps all this is an opportunity given by Providence to open your eyes, which, I must say, are singularly blind. You think you know everything there is to learn, but the fact is that like the rest of us, you know nothing at all, and good man though you are, obstinately refuse to admit the truth and to seek support elsewhere. For my part I believe that you are afraid of falling in love with that Glittering Lady and of being convinced by her that you are wrong in your most unsatisfactory conclusions."

"I am out-voted anyway," said Bickley, "and for the rest, Bastin, look after yourself and leave me alone. I will add that on the whole I think

you are both right, and that it is wisest for us to stop where we are, for after all we can only die once."

"I am not so sure, Bickley. There is a thing called the second death, which is what is troubling that old scoundrel, Oro. Now I will go and look for those books."

So the idea of flight was abandoned, although I admit that even to myself it had attractions. For I felt that I was being wrapped in a net of mysteries from which I saw no escape. Yes, and of more than mysteries; I who had sworn that I would never look upon another woman, was learning to love this sweet and wondrous Yva, and of that what could be the end?

We collected all we had come to seek, and started homewards escorted by Marama and his people, including a number of young women who danced before us in a light array of flowers.

Passing our old house, we came to the grove where the idol Oro had stood and Bastin was so nearly sacrificed. There was another idol there now which he wished to examine, but in the end did not as the natives so obviously objected. Indeed Marama told me that notwithstanding the mysterious death of the sorcerers on the Rock of Offerings, there was still a strong party in the island who would be glad to do us a mischief

if any further affront were offered to their hereditary god.

He questioned us also tentatively about the apparition, for such he conceived it to be, which had appeared upon the rock and killed the sorcerers, and I answered him as I thought wisest, telling him that a terrible Power was afoot in the land, which he would do well to obey.

"Yes," he said; "the God of the Mountain of whom the tradition has come down to us from our forefathers. He is awake again; he sees, he hears and we are afraid. Plead with him for us, O Friend-from-the-Sea."

As he spoke we were passing through a little patch of thick bush.

Suddenly from out of this bush, I saw a lad appear. He wore a mask upon his face, but from his shape could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years of age. In his hand was a wooden club. He ran forward, stopped, and with a yell of hate hurled it, I think at Bastin, but it hit me. At any rate I felt a shock and remembered no more.

Dreams. Dreams. Endless dreams! What were they all about? I do not know. It seemed to me that through them continually I saw the stately figure of old Oro contemplating me gravely, as though he were making up his mind about something in which I must play a part. Then there was another figure, that of the gracious but imperial Yva, who from time to time, as I thought, leant over me and whispered in my ear words of rest and comfort. Nor was this all, since her shape had a way of changing suddenly into that of my lost wife who would speak with her voice. Or

perhaps my wife would speak with Yva's voice. To my disordered sense it was as though they were one personality, having two shapes, either of which could be assumed at will. It was most strange and yet to me most blessed, since in the living I seemed to have found the dead, and in the dead the living. More, I took journeys, or rather some unknown part of me seemed to do so. One of these I remember, for its majestic character stamped itself upon my mind in such a fashion that all the waters of delirium could not wash it out nor all its winds blow away that memory.

I was travelling through space with Yva a thousand times faster than light can flash. We passed sun after sun. They drew near, they grew into enormous, flaming Glories round which circled world upon world. They became small, dwindled to points of light and disappeared.

We found footing upon some far land and passed a marvelous white city wherein were buildings with domes of crystal and alabaster, in the latter of which were set windows made of great jewels; sapphires or rubies they seemed to me. We went on up a lovely valley. To the left were hills, down which tumbled waterfalls; to the right was a river broad and deep that seemed to overflow its banks as does the Nile. Behind were high mountains on the slopes of which grew forests of glorious trees, some of them aflame with bloom, while far away up their crests stood colossal golden statues set wide apart. They looked like guardian angels watching that city and that vale. The land was lit with a light such as that of the moon, only intensified and of many colours. Indeed looking up, I saw that above us floated three moons, each of them

bigger than our own at the full, and gathered that here it was night.

We came to a house set amid scented gardens and having in front of it terraces of flowers. It seemed not unlike my own house at home, but I took little note of it, because of a woman who sat upon the verandah, if I may call it so. She was clad in garments of white silk fastened about her middle with a jewelled girdle. On her neck also was a collar of jewels. I forget the colour; indeed this seemed to change continually as the light from the different moons struck when she moved, but I think its prevailing tinge was blue. In her arms this woman nursed a beautiful, sleeping child, singing happily as she rocked it to and fro. Yva went towards the woman who looked up at her step and uttered a little cry. Then for the first time I saw the woman's face. It was that of my dead wife!

As I followed in my dream, a little cloud of mist seemed to cover both my wife and Yva, and when I reached the place Yva was gone. Only my wife remained, she and the child. There she stood, solemn and sweet. While I drew near she laid down the child upon the cushioned seat from which she had risen. She stretched out her arms and flung them about me. She embraced me and I embraced her in a rapture of reunion. Then turning she lifted up the child, it was a girl, for me to kiss.

"See your daughter," she said, "and behold all that I am making ready for you where we shall dwell in a day to come."

I grew confused.

"Yva," I said. "Where is Yva who brought me here? Did she go into the house?"

"Yes," she answered happily. "Yva went into the house. Look again!"

I looked and it was Yva's face that was pressed against my own, and Yva's eyes that gazed into mine. Only she was garbed as my wife had been, and on her bosom hung the changeful necklace.

"You may not stay," she whispered, and lo! it was my wife that spoke, not Yva.

"Tell me what it means?" I implored.

"I cannot," she answered. "There are mysteries that you may not know as yet. Love Yva if you will and I shall not be jealous, for in loving Yva you love me. You cannot understand? Then know this, that the spirit has many shapes, and yet is the same spirit--sometimes. Now I who am far, yet near, bid you farewell a while."

Then all passed in a flash and the dream ended.

Such was the only one of those visions which I can recall.

I seemed to wake up as from a long and tumultuous sleep. The first thing I saw was the palm roof of our house upon the rock. I knew it was our house, for just above me was a palm leaf of which I had myself tied the stalk to the framework with a bit of coloured ribbon that I had chanced to find in my pocket. It came originally from the programme card of a dance that I had attended at Honolulu and I had kept it because I thought it might be useful. Finally I used it to secure that loose leaf. I stared at the ribbon which brought back a flood of memories, and as I was thus engaged I heard voices talking, and listened--Bickley's voice, and the Lady Yva's.

"Yes," Bickley was saying, "he will do well now, but he went near, very near."

"I knew he would not die," she answered, "because my father said so."

"There are two sorts of deaths," replied Bickley, "that of the body and that of the mind. I was afraid that even if he lived, his reason would go, but from certain indications I do not think that will happen now. He will get quite well again--though--" and he stopped.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," chimed in Bastin. "For weeks I thought that I should have to read the Burial Service over poor Arbuthnot. Indeed I was much puzzled as to the best place to bury him. Finally I found a very suitable spot round the corner there, where it



isn't rock, in which one can't dig and the soil is not liable to be flooded. In fact I went so far as to clear away the bush and to mark out the grave with its foot to the east. In this climate one can't delay, you know."

Weak as I was, I smiled. This practical proceeding was so exactly like Bastin.

"Well, you wasted your labour," exclaimed Bickley.

"Yes, I am glad to say I did. But I don't think it was your operations and the rest that cured him, Bickley, although you take all the credit. I believe it was the Life-water that the Lady Yva made him drink and the stuff that Oro sent which we gave him when you weren't looking."

"Then I hope that in the future you will not interfere with my cases," said the indignant Bickley, and either the voices passed away or I went to sleep.

When I woke up again it was to find the Lady Yva seated at my side watching me.

"Forgive me, Humphrey, because I here; others gone out walking," she said slowly in English.

"Who taught you my language?" I asked, astonished. "Bastin and Bickley,

while you ill, they teach; they teach me much. Man just same now as he was hundred thousand years ago," she added enigmatically. "All think one woman beautiful when no other woman there."

"Indeed," I replied, wondering to what proceedings on the part of Bastin and Bickley she alluded. Could that self-centred pair--oh! it was impossible.

"How long have I been ill?" I asked to escape the subject which I felt to be uncomfortable.

She lifted her beautiful eyes in search of words and began to count upon her fingers.

"Two moon, one half moon, yes, ten week, counting Sabbath," she answered triumphantly.

"Ten weeks!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Humphrey, ten whole weeks and three days you first bad, then mad. Oh!" she went on, breaking into the Orofenan tongue which she spoke so perfectly, although it was not her own. That language of hers I never learned, but I know she thought in it and only translated into Orofenan, because of the great difficulty which she had in rendering her high and refined ideas into its simpler metaphor, and the strange words which often she introduced. "Oh! you have been very ill, friend of my heart.

At times I thought that you were going to die, and wept and wept. Bickley thinks that he saved you and he is very clever. But he could not have saved you; that wanted more knowledge than any of your people have; only I pray you, do not tell him so because it would hurt his pride."

"What was the matter with me then, Yva?"

"All was the matter. First, the weapon which that youth threw--he was the son of the sorcerer whom my father destroyed--crushed in the bone of your head. He is dead for his crime and may he be accursed for ever," she added in the only outbreak of rage and vindictiveness in which I ever saw her indulge.

"One must make excuses for him; his father had been killed," I said.

"Yes, that is what Bastin tells me, and it is true. Still, for that young man I can make no excuse; it was cowardly and wicked. Well, Bickley performed what he calls operation, and the Lord Oro, he came up from his house and helped him, because Bastin is no good in such things. Then he can only turn away his head and pray. I, too, helped, holding hot water and linen and jar of the stuff that made you feel like nothing, although the sight made me feel more sick than anything since I saw one I loved killed, oh, long, long ago."

"Was the operation successful?" I asked, for I did not dare to begin to thank her.

"Yes, that clever man, Bickley, lifted the bone which had been crushed in. Only then something broke in your head and you began to bleed here," and she touched what I believe is called the temporal artery. "The vein had been crushed by the blow, and gave way. Bickley worked and worked, and just in time he tied it up before you died. Oh! then I felt as though I loved Bickley, though afterwards Bastin said that I ought to have loved him, since it was not Bickley who stopped the bleeding, but his prayer."

"Perhaps it was both," I suggested.

"Perhaps, Humphrey, at least you were saved. Then came another trouble. You took fever. Bickley said that it was because a certain gnat had bitten you when you went down to the ship, and my father, the Lord Oro, told me that this was right. At the least you grew very weak and lost your mind, and it seemed as though you must die. Then, Humphrey, I went to the Lord Oro and kneeled before him and prayed for your life, for I knew that he could cure you if he would, though Bickley's skill was at an end.

"'Daughter,' he said to me, 'not once but again and again you have set up your will against mine in the past. Why then should I trouble myself to grant this desire of yours in the present, and save a man who is nothing to me?'

"I rose to my feet and answered, 'I do not know, my Father, yet I am certain that for your own sake it will be well to do so. I am sure that of everything even you must give an account at last, great though you be, and who knows, perhaps one life which you have saved may turn the balance in your favour.'

"Surely the priest Bastin has been talking to you,' he said.

"He has,' I answered, 'and not he alone. Many voices have been talking to me.'"

"What did you mean by that?" I asked.

"It matters nothing what I meant, Humphrey. Be still and listen to my story. My father thought a while and answered:

"I am jealous of this stranger. What is he but a short-lived half-barbarian such as we knew in the old days? And yet already you think more of him than you do of me, your father, the divine Oro who has lived a thousand years. At first I helped that physician to save him, but now I think I wish him dead.'

"If you let this man die, my Father,' I answered, 'then we part.

Remember that I also have of the wisdom of our people, and can use it if I will.'

"Then save him yourself,' he said.

"Perhaps I shall, my Father,' I answered, 'but if so it will not be here. I say that if so we part and you shall be left to rule in your majesty alone.'

"Now this frightened the Lord Oro, for he has the weakness that he hates to be alone.

"If I do what you will, do you swear never to leave me, Yva?' he asked. 'Know that if you will not swear, the man dies.'

"I swear,' I answered--for your sake, Humphrey--though I did not love the oath.

"Then he gave me a certain medicine to mix with the Life-water, and when you were almost gone that medicine cured you, though Bickley does not know it, as nothing else could have done. Now I have told you the truth, for your own ear only, Humphrey."

"Yva," I asked, "why did you do all this for me?"

"Humphrey, I do not know," she answered, "but I think because I must. Now sleep a while."