Summary of Text 41: Attilio Gatti: Bapuka, the Goddess of Love

The book recounts the experiences of the Italian explorer, anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Attilio Gatti (1896–1969). Between 1922 and 1948, Gatti led thirteen extensive expeditions to Africa, where he was among the first Europeans to observe rare animals such as the okapi and the bongo and capture them for zoos. As a skeptical yet experienced observer, he documented the rituals, healing practices and magical traditions of indigenous peoples just before these cultures largely disappeared under Western influence.

1. The Rescue of Skaimunga and the Discovery of Bapuka

The central story begins in November 1928 aboard the paddle steamer *Kigoma* on the Congo River. Gatti hears how a cruel French ivory trader mercilessly whips an indigenous servant named Skaimunga. When the severely abused man, driven to despair, jumps into the river, Gatti saves him from approaching crocodiles. Skaimunga turns out to be of noble descent and bears mysterious tattoos on his body in honour of Bapuka, the goddess of love, source of life and giver of bliss. Deeply grateful, Skaimunga pledges his loyalty to his rescuer, Gatti.

Guided by Skaimunga and an intuitive premonition, Gatti's expedition heads towards the unexplored “Swamps of Mystery” in Barotseland, along the Lutembwe River. In the remote village of Semusha, following a vivid dream, Dr Cicogna discovers unique Bushman rock paintings dating back thousands of years.

When almost the entire expedition falls victim to deadly swamp fever, Skaimunga leads Gatti, following a message from Bapuka received in a dream, in a small canoe to a hidden island. There they meet the high priest of the Bapuka cult. The priest recognizes Skaimunga as his long-lost son Ingulu, who had been abducted by Arab slave traders twenty-five years earlier. The high priest heals the expedition using rare medicinal leaves and presents Gatti with a wooden replica statuette of the goddess Bapuka, measuring 35 cm in height. From that moment onwards, Bapuka becomes the faithful guardian goddess of Gatti and his future wife, Ellen.

2. African Mysteries, Telepathy and Rituals

The book describes numerous anthropological and paranormal phenomena that Gatti investigated throughout his career:

- Telepathy and “bush telegraphy” (ESP):

Gatti documents how indigenous peoples transmitted messages over great distances without telegraphs or drums. Examples include news of a gold prospector attacked by a leopard 320 km away, the leaking of secret convoy information in Freetown during the Second World War, and a young fisherman's daughter on Lake Victoria who, through clairvoyance, saw exactly how her wounded father was drifting on the water.

- The Curse of the White Rhinoceros:

The account of Atakufa Kesho ("he who dies tomorrow"), who was burdened by a curse imposed by a white rhinoceros (Kanga) that had haunted his family for generations. Through the psychological guidance and clever trapping techniques of a wise medicine man, he overcomes his paralysing fear and changes his name to Rasi Malamu ("the conqueror").

- The Tree of Life and Death (Fifero):

Among the secret N'Kunda society of the Bakumu-Walengola, Gatti discovers a concoction that induces a cataleptic state resembling death while also restoring vitality. This explained the mysterious disappearance of two deceased silicosis patients from a hermetically sealed mortuary in Johannesburg.

- Traditional Justice and Cult Practices:

Gatti describes the astute judicial methods of tribal chief Kuanakali, who used "divining stones", as well as ancient rain rituals and snake and python dances in Swaziland and Zululand, performed under the guidance of the priestess Twadekili.

3. The Ending and the Mystery of Bapuka's Demise

After Gatti marries Ellen in 1931, the statuette of Bapuka accompanies them on all their journeys around the world. They eventually settle in Lugano, Switzerland. In early September 1962, Ellen dies following a short illness. At the exact moment she breathes her last, the statuette of Bapuka-which had been firmly secured to a heavy wooden base-topples over by itself and breaks into pieces on the floor.

In the webmaster's afterword, this mystery is interpreted as the exhaustion of the subtle life force of nature spirits that fulfil their protective role on Earth.