

What Strange Stars And Skies

by Avram Davidson

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The terrible affair of Dame Phillipa Garreck, which struck horror in all who knew of her noble life and mysterious disappearance, arose in large measure from inordinate confidence in her fellow-creatures-- particularly such of them as she might, from time to time, in those nocturnal wanderings which so alarmed her family and friends, encounter in circumstances more than commonly distressed. This great-hearted and misfortunate woman would be, we may be sure, the first to deplore any lessening of philanthropy, any diminution of charity or even of charitable feeling, resultant from her own dreadfully sudden and all but inexplicable fate; yet, one feels, such a result is inevitable. I am not aware that Dame Phillipa ever made use of any heraldic devices or mottoes, but, had she done so, "Do what is right, come what may," would have been eminently appropriate.

It is not any especial sense of competency on my part which has caused me to resolve that a record of the matter should and must be made. Miss Mothermer, Dame Phillipa's faithful secretary-companion, to say nothing of her cousin, Lord FitzMorris Banstock, would each-- under ordinary circumstances-- be far more capable than I of delineating the events in question. But the circumstances, of course, are as far from being "ordinary" as they can possibly be. Miss Mothermer has for the past six months, next Monday fortnight been in seclusion at Doctor Hardesty's establishment near Sutton Ho; and, whilst I can state quite certainly the falsehood of the rumour that her affairs have been placed in charge of the Master in Lunacy, nevertheless, Doctor Hardesty is adamant that the few visitors she is permitted to receive must make no reference whatsoever to the affair of last Guy Fawkes Day, the man with the false nose, or the unspeakably evil Eurasian, Motilal Smith. As for Lord FitzMorris Banstock, though I am aware that he has the heart of a lion and nerves of steel, his extreme shyness (in no small measure the result of his unfortunate physical condition) must advertise to all who know him the unlikelihood of his undertaking the task. It falls to me, therefore, and no one else, to proceed forthwith in setting down the chronicle of those untoward and unhappy events.

Visitors to Argyll Court, which abuts onto Primrose Alley (one of that maze of noisome passages off the Commercial Road which the zeal and conscience of the London County Council cannot much longer suffer to remain untouched), visitors to Argyll Court will have noticed the large sign board affixed to the left-hand door as one enters. Reading, "If The Lord Will, His Word Shall Be Preached Here Each Lord's Day At Seven O'Clock In The Evening. All Welcome," it gives notice of the Sabbath activities of Major Bohun, whose weekdays are devoted to his sacred labours with The Strict Antinomian Tram-Car and Omnibus Tract Society (the name of which appears on a small brass plate under the sign). Had the major been present that Fifth of November, a different story it would be which I have to tell; but he had gone to attend at an Anti-Papistical sermon and prayer-meeting holden to mark the day at the Putney Tabernacle.

The foetid reek of the Court, which has overwhelmed more than one less delicately bred than Dame Phillipa, bears-- besides the effluvia of unwashed beds and bodies emanating from the so-called Seaman's Lodging-House of Evan-bach Llewellyn, the rotting refuse of the back part of a cookshop of the lowest sort, bad drains, and the putrid doors of Sampson Stone's wool-pullery-- the tainted breath of the filthy Thames itself, whose clotted waters ebb and flow not far off.

On many an evening when the lowering sun burned dully in the dirty sky and the soiled swans squatted like pigs in the mud-banks of London River, the tall figure of Dame Phillipa would turn (for the time being) from the waterfront, and make her way towards the quickening traffic of the Commercial Road and Goodman Fields; proceeding through Salem Yard, Fenugreek Close, Primrose Alley, and Argyll Court. The fashionable and sweet-smelling ladies of the West End, as well as their wretched and garishly bedaubed fallen sisters, smelling of cheap "scent" and sweetened gin, just at this hour beginning those peregrinations of the East End's mean and squalid streets for which those less tender than Dame Phillipa might think them dead to all shame; were wearing, with fashion's licence, their skirts higher than they had ever been before: but Dame Phillipa (though she never criticised the choice of others) still wore hers long, and sometimes with one hand she would lift them an inch or two to avoid the foul pavements-- though she never drew back from contact, neither an inch nor an instant, with any human being however filthy or diseased.

Sometimes Miss Mothermer's bird-like little figure was with her friend and employer, perhaps assuming for the moment the burden of the famous Army kit-bag; sometimes-- and such times Dame Phillipa walked more slowly-- Lord FitzMorris Banstock accompanied her; but usually only quite late at night, and along the less-frequented thoroughfares, where such people whom they were likely to meet were too preoccupied with their own unhappy concerns, or too brutalised and too calloused, to stare at the muscular but misshapen peer for more than a second or two.

The kit-bag had been the gift of Piggott, batman to Dame Phillipa's brother, the late Lt. Colonel Sir Chiddiack Garreck, when she had sent him out to the Transvaal in hopes that that Province's warmer and dryer air would be kindlier to his gas-ruined lungs than the filthy fogs and sweats of England. The kit-bag usually contained, to my own knowledge, on an average evening, the following:

Five to ten pounds in coins, as well as several ten-shilling notes folded quite small. Two sets of singlets and drawers, two shirts, and two pair of stockings: none of them new, but all clean and mended. A dozen slices of bread and butter, wrapped in packets of three. Ten or twenty copies of a pamphlet-sized edition of the Gospel of St. John in various languages. A britania-metal pint flask of a good French brandy. A quantity of hard-cooked eggs and an equal supply of salt and pepper in small screws of paper. Four handkerchiefs. First aid equipment. Two reels of cotton, with needles. A packet of mixed toffees. The Book of Common Prayer. Fifteen packets of five Woodbine cigarettes, into each of which she had thrust six wooden matches. One pocket-mirror. A complete change of infant's clothing. Several small cakes of soap. Several pocket-combs. A pair of scissors.

And three picture-postcards of the Royal Family.

All this arranged with maximum efficiency in minimum space, but not packed so tightly that Dame Phillipa's fingers could not instantly produce the requisite article. It will be observed that she was prepared to deal with a wide variety of occasions.

Tragic, infinitely tragic though it is, not even a person of Dame Phillipa's great experience among what a late American author termed, not infelicitously, *The People of the Abyss*, could have been prepared either to expect or to deal on this occasion with such persons as the man wearing the false nose or the hideously-- the unspeakably evil Eurasian, Motilal Smith.

The countenance of Motilal Smith, once observed, is not one likely ever to be forgotten, and proves a singular and disturbing exception to the rule that Eurasians are generally of a comely appearance; it being broad and frog-like in its flatness, protuberance of the eyes (which are green and wet-looking), reverse U-shaped mouth, and its multiplicity of warts or wart-like swellings. Most striking of all, however, is the air of slyness, malevolence, of hostility both overt and covert, towards everything which is kindly and decent and, in a word, human.

Motilal Smith has since his first appearance in the United Kingdom been the subject of unremitting police attention, and for some time now has gained the sinister distinction of being mentioned more often in the Annual Report of the League of Nations Commission on the Traffic in Women and Children than any other resident of London. He has often been arrested and detained on suspicion, but the impossibility of bringing witnesses to testify against him has invariably resulted in his release. Evidences of his nefarious commerce have come from places so far distant as the Province of Santa Cruz in the Republic of Bolivia

and the Native Indian States of Patiala and Cooch Debar, as well as two of the Trucial Sheikhdoms, the Free City of Danzig, and Deaf Smith County in the Commonwealth of Texas; none of which, it must be regretted, is admissible in proceedings at the Old Bailey. As he is a British subject by birth, he cannot be neither deported nor denied admission on his return from frequent trips abroad. He is known to be always ready to purchase, he is entirely eclectic as to the nature of the merchandise, and he pays well and he pays in gold.

It is necessary only to add that, offered any obstacle, affront, or rebuff, he is unremitting in his hostility, which combines the industry of the West with the Patience of the East. Smith occupies both sides of the semi-detached villa in Maida Vale of which he owns the freehold; its interior is crammed with opulent furnishings from all round the world, and stinks of stale beer, spilt gin, incense, curry, raw fish, the foul breaths and bodies of those he deals with, and of chips fried in ghee.

His long, lank, and clotted hair is covered in scented grease, and on his fingers are rings of rubies, diamonds, pearls and other precious stones worth with their settings a prince's ransom. Add only the famous Negrohead opal worn in his stained silk four-in-hand (and for which Second Officer Smollett of the Cutty Sark is said to have strangled Mrs. Pigler), and there you have the creature Motilal Smith in all his repulsive essence.

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(The night of that Fifth of November found the unfortunates among whom this great lady pursued her noble work no more inclined than in other years to celebrate the delivery from Gunpowder Plot of King James VI and James I and his English Parliament. Here and there, to be sure, in the glare of the gin-palaces of the main thoroughfares, a group of grimy and tattered children had gotten up an even more unsavoury Guy; for them Dame Phillipa had provided herself with a large supply of pennies. But that night as on most other nights there was little enough evidence of innocent gayety.

There are multitudes, literally multitudes, in this vast labyrinth of London for whom the normal institutions of a human society seem barely to exist. There are physicians in the East End, hospitals, and dispensaries; yet numbers past counting will suffer injury and disease and creep off to die like brutes in their dim corners, or, if they are fortunate, by brute strength survive. There are public baths in every borough, and facilities for washing clothes, yet many never touch water to their skins, and wear their rags unchanged till they rot. Babes are born without benefit of any human witness to the event save their own wretched mothers, though a word to the great hospital in Whitechapel Road will bring midwife and physician without charge. And while eating-places abound, from quite decent restaurants down to the dirty holes-in-the-walls offering tuppenny cups of tea and sixpenny papers of breaded smelts and greasy chips, and while private and public charity arrangements guarantee that no one need quite die of hunger who will ask to be fed, no day goes by without its toll from famine of those who-- having their hoards of copper and silver-- are disabled by their madness from spending either tuppence or shilling; or who find it much, much easier to die like dogs in their secluded kennels than come forward and declare their needs.

As the pigeons in Trafalgar Square have learned when and where the old man with the bag of breadcrumbs will appear, as the ownerless cats near Billingsgate can tell what time and in what place to scavenge for the scraps of fish the dustman misses, as the rats in the sewers beneath Smithfield Market know without error the manner in which "they seek their meat from G-d"; just so, from this stinking alley and from that crumbling tenement, here from underneath a dripping archway and there from a disused warehouse, slinking and creeping and peering fearfully and furtively and sidling with their ragged backs pressed against ragged walls, there appeared by one and by one the castoffs-- one must call them "humans", for what Other name is theirs?-- the Self-exiled, the utterly incapable, to take in their quick reptilian grasp the things Dame Phillipa had for them. She knew, knew by instinct and knew by practice, which ones would benefit by a shilling and which by half-a-crown; she knew those to whom money was of no more use than cowry-shells but who would relish the meat of a hard-cooked egg and the savour of the tiny scrap of seasoning which went with it; knew those who would be hopelessly baffled by the labour of cracking the shell but who could manage to rip the paper off a packet of bread and butter (huddled

and crouched in the rank, familiar darkness of their burrows, tearing the soft food with their toothless gums); knew those who would fight, squealing or wordlessly, fight like cornered stoats rather than surrender a single one of the unspeakably filthy rags into which their unspeakably filthy bodies were sewn; and those who would strip by some forgotten water-tap and wash themselves and put on clean things-- but only if provided them, having no longer in many cases the ability to procure either soap or singlets for themselves. She also knew who could be coaxed another foot or two up the path to self-respect by the tempting bait of mirror and comb, the subtle appeal such things made to the ravaged remnants of pride. And she knew when even a handful of toffee or a small picture of the charismatic King and Queen could brighten a dim corner or an eroded mind.

And often (though not always) with her on this humble and saintly mission went her faithful secretary-companion Miss Mothermer, though by herself Miss Mothermer would have died a thousand dreadful deaths in such places; and sometimes Dame Phillipa was accompanied by her unhappy and unfortunate cousin, Lord FitzMorris Banstock, though usually he shunned the company of any but his few, familiar servants.

* * *

On this particular night, Mawhinney, his chauffeur-footman, had been obliged by a Guy Fawkes bonfire and its attendant crowd to drive the heavily curtained Rolls motor car by a different and less familiar route; hence he arrived later at the usual place of rendezvous: Miss Mothermer and Dame Phillipa, tall figure and tiny one, picture hat and toque, had come by and, as was the unspoken understanding, had not tarried. So many considerations affected the Presence or absence of Lord FitzMorris Banstock: was he engaged in a conversation particularly interesting by means of his amateur wireless radio equipment, was he in more pain than a certain degree, was he in less pain than a certain degree, was the moon too bright-- for one or more of these reasons the star-curs't noble lord might not come despite his having said he might.

The obedient Mawhinney did not turn his head as his master slowly and awkwardly crept from the vehicle, inch by inch over the black silk upholstery. Nor, well-trained, did he suggest leaving the car in a garage and coming with his master. He waited a few moments after the door closed, then he drove straightaway back to Banstock House, where he stayed for precisely three hours, turning the Tarot cards over and over again with old Gules, the butler, and Mrs. Ox, the cook. On this Fifth of November night they observed that the Priestess, the Fool, and the Hanged Man turned up with more than their common frequency; and were much exercised to conjecture what, if anything, this might portend: and for whom.

And at the conclusion of three hours he put on his cap and coat and drove back to the place set.

Besides those nameless (and all but formless) figures from the silent world, of whom I had spoken above, there were others who awaited and welcomed Dame Phillipa's presence; and among them were women with names like Flossie and Jewel and Our Rose, Clarabel and Princess Mick and Jenny the Hen, Two-Bob Betty and Opaline and Queeny-Kate. She spoke to every one of them, gave them (if they required it, or thought they might: or if Dame Phillipa thought they might) the money needed to make up the sum demanded by their "friends" or "protectors"; money for rent or food or what it might be, if they had passed the stage where their earnings could possibly be enough to concern the swine who had earlier lived on them. She tended to the cuts and bruises the poor wretches received in the way of business, and which they were too ashamed to bring before the very proper nurses and the young, light-heartedly cruel, interns.

Sometimes she interceded for them with the police, and sometimes she summoned the police to their assistance; her manner of doing this was to direct Miss Mothermer to blow upon the police whistle she wore upon a lanyard, Dame Phillipa not liking the vibration this made upon her own lips.

Those to whom Dame Phillipa may have seemed but a tall, gaunt eccentric woman, given to wearing old-fashioned dresses, and hats which ill became her, would do well to recollect that she was among the very first to be honoured with the title of *dame*; and that His Majesty's Government did not take this step exclusively in recognition of her career prior to her retirement as an educationist, or of her work, through

entirely legal methods, on behalf of the Women's Suffrage Movement.

It was close to midnight when the two ladies arrived in Primrose Alley and Dame Phillipa rapped lightly with her walking-stick upon the window of a woman in whose maternity she had interested herself: actually persuading the young woman, who was not over-bright, to accept medical attention, eat something resembling proper food, and have the child christened in the nearby and unfortunately ill-attended Church of St. Gustave Widdershins. She rapped a second time

-- loud enough (she hoped) to wake the mother, but not loud enough to wake the child. As it happened it was the father she woke, a young man who circulated among three or four women in a sort of tandem polygamy; and who informed the lady that the baby had been sent to its mother's people in Westham, and who begged her, not altogether disdainfully, for sweet Christ's sake to bugger off and let him get back to sleep again.

Dame Phillipa left him to his feculent slumbers in absolute but resigned certainty that this time next year she would again be called upon to swaddle, victual, and renounce by proxy the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, on behalf of another squalling token of his vigour-- unless the young woman should perhaps miscarry, as she had done twice before, or carry out her own suggestion of dropping the child in the river, by accident, like.

It was as she turned from the window, then, that Dame Phillipa first clearly observed the man wearing the false nose-- as she thought, because of the Guy Fawkes festivities; though it appears Miss Mothermer instantly suspected that he did so by way of disguise-- although she had been aware, without giving consideration to the matter, that there had been footsteps behind her. All inquiries as to this man's identity or motive have failed, but the singularity of his appearance is such that, unless he has been secretly conveyed out of the Kingdom, he cannot long continue to evade the vigilance of the police.

Thinking nothing further of the matter, as we may assume, Dame Phillipa and her companion continued their way into Argyll Court. The sound of voices, and the odour of hot gin and lemon, both proceeding from a bow window greatly resembling in carving and overhang the forecastle of an ancient sailing-ship, directed her attention to the gas-jet which burned redly in the close air, illuminating the sign of the seaman's lodging-house. In times gone bye, Evan-bach Llewellyn had been a notorious crimp. Board regulations, closely attended to, had almost put a stop to this, as far as vessels of British register were concerned. It was widely said, however, and widely believed, that the masters of foreign vessels putting into London with cargoes of coffee, copra, palm oil, fuel oil, hardwood and pulpwood; and finding members of their crew swallowed up by The Smoke, often appealed to the giant Silurian (he sang bass in the choir of Capel Cymrig) for replacements: and did not appeal in vain. Protests entered by surprised seamen, whose heads cleared of chloral in the Bay of Biscay, when they found themselves on board of strange vessels whose language they often did not recognise, let alone speak, would in the general course of things prove quite bootless.

As Dame Phillipa's attention was distracted to the window, two men, who must have been huddled silently at the other side of the court, came suddenly towards the two ladies, reeling and cursing, striking fiercely at one another, and giving off the fumes of that poisonous mixture of methylated spirits and cheap port wine commonly called *red biddy*. The ladies took a few steps in confusion, not knowing precisely what course to take, nor having much time to consider it: they could not go forward, because of the two men fighting, and it seemed that when they attempted to walk to the side, the bruisers were there, cutting off their way, too.

Dame Phillipa therefore turned quickly, leading Miss Mothermer in the same direction, but stopped short, as, out of Primrose Alley, whence they had just issued, darted the man who had been wearing the false nose. He made a curious sound as he did so; if he spoke words is not certain; what *is* certain is that he had plucked the false pasteboard from his face-- it was hideously pockmarked-- and that the flesh underneath was a mere convoluted hollow, like some gross navel, but nothing like a human nose.

Miss Mothermer gave a stifled cry, and drew back, but Dame Phillipa, though certainly no less startled, placed a reassuring hand on her companion's arm, and courteously awaited what this unfortunate might have to say or to ask. He beckoned, he gestured, he mewled and gibbered. Murmuring to Miss

Mothermer that he evidently stood in need of some assistance, and that they were bound to endeavour to find what it was, Dame Phillipa stepped forward to follow him. For an instant only Miss Mothermer hesitated-- but the two larrikins menaced from behind, and she was too fearful for herself and for Dame Phillipa to allow her to go on alone; perforce she followed. She followed into a door which stood open as if waiting.

If her testimony (and if one may give so succinct a name to confused and diffused ramblings noted down by Doctor Hardesty over a period of several months) may be relied on, the door lay but a few paces into Primrose Alley. The facts, however, are that no such door exists. The upper part of the Alley contains the tenements officially designated as Gubbinses' Buildings and called, commonly, "the Jakes": entrance is through a covered archway twenty feet long which divides into two shallow flights of steps from each of which a hallway leads to the individual apartments. It was in one of these, the window and not the door of which faced the Alley, that the young parents of Dame Phillipa Garreck's godchild were lodging. The lower part of the Alley on the same side is occupied by the blind bulk of the back of the old flour warehouse. The opposite side is lined with the infamous Archways, wherein there are no doors at all. There are, it is true, two doors of sorts in the warehouse itself, but one is bricked up and the other is both rusted shut and locked from the inside. A search of the premises via the main gate failed to show any signs that it had been opened in recent years-- or, indeed, that it could have been.

It was at shortly after one o'clock on the morning of the sixth of November that Lord FitzMorris Banstock, toiling painfully through Thirza Street in the direction of Devenport Passage, received (or perhaps I should say, became aware of) an impression that he should retrace his steps and then head north. There is no need to suggest telepathy and certainly none to mention the supranormal in conjunction with this impression: Miss Mothermer was most probably blowing the police-whistle, blowing it with lips which trembled in terror, and so weak and feeble was the sound produced that no police constable had heard it. On the conscious level of his mind Lord FitzMorris did not hear it, either. But there are sensual perceptions of which the normal senses are not aware, and it was these, which there can be no doubt that he (perhaps in compensation, perhaps sharpened by suffering; perhaps both) possesses to an unusual degree, which heard the sound and translated it. He obeyed the impulse, walking as fast as he could, and as he walked he was aware of the usual noises and movements in the darkness-- rustlings and shufflings and whispers, breathings and mutterings-- which betokened the presence of various of Dame Phillipa Garreck's charges. It seemed to him that they were of a different frequency as he put it to himself, accustomed to think in wireless radio terms, this night. That they were uncommonly uneasy. It seemed to him that he could sense their terror.

And as he turned the corner into Salem Yard he saw something glitter, he saw something flash, and he knew in that instant that it was the famous Negrohead opal, which he had seen that one time before when his lady cousin occasioned the assistance of the Metropolitan Police to rescue the girl Bessie Lovejoy, then in process of being purchased for the ill-famed Khowadja of Al-Khebur by the ineffably evil Motilal Smith.

It glittered and flashed in the cold and the darkness, and then it was gone.

Fenugreek Close is long and narrow and ill-lit, its western and longest extremity (where the Lascar, Bin-Ali, perished with the cold on the night of St. Sylvester) being a *cul-de-sac* inhabited-- when it is inhabited at all-- by Oriental seamen who club together and rent the premises whilst they await a ship. But there were none such that night. It was there, pressed against the blank and filthy wall, pressing feebly as if her wren-like little body might obtain entry and safety and sanctuary, sobbing in almost incoherent terror, that Lord FitzMorris Banstock found the crouching form of Miss Mothermer. The police-whistle was subsequently discovered by the infamous Archways, and Miss Mothermer has insisted that, although she would have sounded it, she did not, for (she says) she could not find it; although she remembers Dame Phillipa pressing it into her hand. On this point she is quite vehement, yet one is no more apt to credit it than her statement about the open door towards which they were led by the man without a nose: for if Miss Mothermer did not blow upon the whistle, who did?

The noble and misfortunate lord did not waste breath inquiring of his cousin's companion if she were all right, it being patent that she was not. He demanded, instead, what had become of Dame Phillipa; and

upon hearing the name Miss Mothermer became first quite hysterical and then unconscious. Lord FitzMorris lifted her up and carried her to the place of rendezvous where, exactly on time, Mawhinny, his chauffeur-footman, had just arrived with the Rolls motorcar. They drove immediately to Banstock House where she was given brandy and put to bed by Mrs. Ox, the cook, whilst Lord FitzMorris summoned the police.

An alarm had already been given, or, at any rate, an alarm of sorts. One of the wretchedly miserable folk to whose succour Dame Phillipa devoted so much of her time, having somehow learned that she was in danger, had informed Police-Sergeant L. Robinson to this effect. This man's name is not known. He is, or at any event was, called by the curious nickname of "Tea and Two Slices", these being the only words which he was usually heard to utter, and then only in a soft of whisper when ordering the only items he was known to buy. His age, background, residence, and present whereabouts are equally unknown. He had apparently an absolute horror of well-lighted and much-frequented places and an utter terror of policemen, one cannot tell why, and it may be hard to imagine what agonies and efforts it must have cost him to make his way to the police-station and inform Sergeant Robinson that he must go at once and "help the lady." Unfortunately and for unknown reasons, he chose to make his way to the police-station in Whitechapel instead of to the nearer one in Shadewell. His testimony would be of the utmost importance, but it cannot now be obtained, for, after giving the alarm, he scurried forth into the night again and has not been seen since.

The matter is otherwise with the testimony of the seaman, Greenbriar. It is available, it is copious, it fits in with that of Miss Mothermer, it is unfortunate that it is quite unbelievable. Unbelievable, that is, unless one is willing to cast aside every conceivable limit of credulity and to accept that on the night of Guy Fawkes Day in that year of our sovereign lord King George V the great and ancient city of London was the scene of a visitation more horrible than any in its previous history.

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Albert Edward Greenbriar, Able-Bodied Seaman, is thirty-one years of age, and except for two occasions on which he was fined, respectively, 2 and 2.10, for being drunk and disorderly, he has never been in any trouble with the authorities. On the first of November he landed at St. Katherine Docks aboard the merchant vessel Salem Tower, from the Straits Settlements with a cargo of rubber, copra, and tinned pine-apples. Neither the Salem Tower nor Greenbriar had been in the United Kingdom for the space of eleven months, and, consequently, when paid off, he was in possession of a considerable sum of money. In the course of one week he had, with the assistance of several women who are probably prostitutes, dissipated the entire sum. On discovering this the women, who share a communal flat in Poplar, asked him to leave.

It was Greenbriar's intention to obtain another ship, but in this endeavour he was unsuccessful. He managed to obtain a loan of half-a-crown from a casual acquaintance and spent the night at a bed-and-breakfast place in Ropemakers Fields, Limehouse. The following evening, footsore and hungry and, save for a single six-pence, penniless, he found himself in the Commercial Road, where he entered a cookshop whose signboard announced that good tea bread, smelts and chips, were obtainable for that sum. Obtainable they were, good they were not, but he was in no position to object. Having finished he inquired the way to the convenience and there retired. On emerging he observed that he was next to the back door which opened onto Argyll Court, although he did not know that was its name, and on looking out he espied a sign.

The sign is still there; in white calligraphy of a fine Spencerian sort upon a black background it reads, *Seamen's Lodging House / Good Beds/ E. Llewellyn, Prop.*

Albert Edward Greenbriar entered, rang the bell for the governor, and, upon the instant, saw a panel open in the wall, through which a face looked at him. It was the face of a gigantic cherub, white and dimpled and bland, surmounted by a pall of curly hair; in short, it was the face of Evan-bach Llewellyn. Greenbriar in a few words stated his situation and offered to give over his seaman's papers as a surety until such time as he might obtain a ship, in return for bed and board. The governor thrust forth a huge,

pale hand, took the documents, slid shut the panel, and presently appeared to beckon Greenbriar down a corridor, at the end of which was a dimly lit dormitory. He gave him a thin blanket which was all in all not quite so filthy as it might have been, informed him that gaming and novel-reading were not permitted on the premises, invited him to take any bed he chose, and forthwith withdrew.

Greenbriar found an empty palette, under the head of which he placed his shoes, not so much as a pillow as a precaution, drew the cover about him and fell instantly asleep. He was awakened several times by the entry of other men, some of whom appeared to have been flung rather than escorted into the room, and once he was awakened by the sound of the proprietor playing upon a small patent organ a hymn of his own composition on the subject of the Priesthood of Melchisedec. Greenbriar gazed at the tiny blue tip of the night-light as it burned tremulously in the twisted jet and on the odd and grotesque shadows cast upon the stained and damp-streaked walls by the tossings and turnings of the lodgers, and listened to the no less odd nor grotesque noises made by them. It was only by the start he gave upon being awakened that he realised that he had gone to sleep again.

Who awakened him he did not know, but, although the light was no brighter, there was a stir in the dormitory and men were getting to their feet and he heard the word "scoff" repeated several times. He dashed water on his face and moved with the others into what was evidently the main kitchen of the establishment. To his surprise he observed that the clock there read eleven o'clock. It was too dark to be morning. Evidently he had slept only a few hours or he had slept round the clock and a bit more. It seemed an odd hour for victuals but he was beginning to conceive the idea that this was an odd place.

Broiled bloaters, fried sausage, potatoes, cabbage and sprouts were being turned out of pots and pans and dumped higgledy-piggledy onto cracked and not over-clean plates; and tea was steaming in coarse crockery cups. No one ventured to eat or drink, however, until Evan-bach Llewellyn had pronounced a grace in the Cymric tongue and immediately after the Amen imparted a piece of information, *videlicet* that he had a ship for them. It was a good ship, too, he said; they would all be very pleased with it; it was not one of their dirty old English tubs but a fine modern vessel: he urged them all to eat hearty of the scoff, or victuals, so that no time need be lost in getting aboard, and he then produced a large bottle of gin and proceeded to pour a generous portion into each cup, with many assurances that it was free and would come out of his own commission.

No sooner had he given the signal, with a wave of his pale and dimpled paw, than the men fell to like so many ravening wolves, cramming the hot food into their mouths and gulping down the gin and lemon tea. Greenbriar concedes that the ailment was savoury, and, finding himself hungrier than he had thought, took but a hasty swallow of the drink before addressing himself at length to the solids. A furtive movement at his elbow caused him to cease, abruptly. The man to his right, a hulking fellow with red hair and an exceedingly dirty face, was emptying a mug and looking at him out of the corner of his eye. It took but a second to ascertain that the wretched fellow had all but drained his own supply and then switched cups and was now doing away with Greenbriar's, who contented himself with stealing a link of the man's sausage whilst the latter was elaborately gazing elsewhere. Steeling himself to meet this man's resentment, he was dumbfounded to observe the fellow fall upon his face into the mashed potatoes and sprouts on his plate.

Within a matter of seconds, almost as if it were one of the contagious seizures which takes hold at times of the unfortunate patients of an institution for the epileptic-- within a matter of seconds, then, all the others at the table sank down into unconsciousness, and Greenbriar, following suit, knew no more.

* * *

He awoke to a scene of more than Gothick horror.

He lay with his head against the silent form of another man, another one he could feel the weight of on his legs, and others lay like dead men all about. They were not dead, he knew, for he could hear them breathing. The room where they lay was walled and floored and roofed in stone and at regular intervals were carvings in bas-relief of a strange and totally unfamiliar sort. Paraffin lamps were set into niches here and there. There was a humming noise whose origin was not visible to him. Very slowly, so as not to

attract attention (for he could hear voices), Greenbriar turned his head. As he did so he felt that there was a rope tied round his neck, and a sudden and quite involuntary convulsive moment which he gave upon this discovery disclosed to him that his hands were similarly bound. Thus urged on to even greater caution, the man took a quite long time in shifting his position so as to obtain some intelligence of his surroundings. If what he had seen before was strange and uneasy enough, what he saw now was sufficient to deprive him for the moment of the use of his limbs altogether.

Off to one side, bound and linked arms to arms and necks to necks like a prostrate caffle of slaves, and to all appearance also unconscious, were the bodies of a number of women; how many, he could not say, but evidently less than the number of the men. This, however, and however shocking even to the sensibilities of a seafarer, this was nothing--

Directly in front of his gaze, which was at an angle, and seated upon a sort of altar, was a figure as it were out of eastern clime: red-bronze in colour, hideous of visage, and with six arms. Bowing low before it was a man, who addressed it in placatory tones and with many fawning gestures.

No other thought occurred to the British sailor at that moment but that he was in some sort of clandestine Hindoo temple and that he and all his other companions would presently be sacrificed before this idol; not being aware that such is not the nature of character of the Hindoo religion which contains, despite numerous errors and not a few gross importures, many sublime and lofty thoughts. But be that as it may; the red-bronze-coloured figure proceeded to move its limbs, the torso stirred, the entire body leaned forward. The figure spoke, and as it spoke, it seized the man with four of its limbs and struck him with the other two. Then it dropped him. As he scrambled to his feet his face was turned so that the sailor could see it, and he saw that it had no nose.

Greenbriar must once again have passed into unconsciousness. When again he awoke the altar was empty, and he could not see the "idol", but he could hear its voice. It was speaking in anger, and as one used to command. Another voice began when this one (deep, hollow, dreadful) had ceased; the new voice was a thin one, and it took a moment for him to realise that, despite its curious snuffling quality, it was speaking a sort of English. Two other voices replied to it, also in English; one was that of Evan-bach Llewellyn, the other one he did not know. By his description of both speech and speaker, for in a moment the latter moved into view, it is apparent that this was no other than the inhuman and unconscionable Eurasian, Motilal Smith.

Something, it seemed, was "not enough." There was an insufficiency of... something. This it was which occasioned the wrath of the person or creature with the six arms. And he was also in great concern because of a shortage of time. All four-- the creature with six arms, the man without a nose, Smith and Llewellyn-- kept moving about. Presently there was the scrape of wood and then a thud and then the wet and dirty odour of the River. The thought occurred to Greenbriar that they might be thrown into the Thames, which was then at high tide; he reflected that (in common with a great many seamen) he had never learned to swim; and then, for a third time, he fainted.

When he awoke he could hear someone singing the Doxology, and he thought-- so he says-- that he had died and was now in Heaven. One glance as he opened his eyes was enough to undeceive him. He lay where he had before and everything was as it was before, save that there were two people present who he is certain were not there before, and by his description of them they were clearly Dame Phillipa Garreck and her secretary-companion, Miss Mothermer.

Miss Mothermer was crouched down with her hands over her eyes, whether in prayer or terror or not inconceivably both, he could not say. Dame Phillipa, however, was otherwise engaged, for she moved from insensate figure to insensate figure and the light gleamed upon the scissors with which she was severing their bonds. She spoke to each, shook them, but was able to elicit no response. At this, Greenbriar regained his voice and entreated her help. She proceeded to cut the ropes which bound him and left off her singing of the Doxology to enquire of him if he had any knowledge as to why they were all of them being detained, and what was intended to be done with them. He was assuring her that he did not know, when a door opened and Miss Mothermer began to scream.

That a fight ensued is certain. Greenbriar was badly cut about and Miss Mothermer received bruises which were a long time in vanishing, though in this I refer only to bruises of the flesh; those of the spirit are

still, alas, with her. But he can provide us with few details of the conflict. Certain, it is, that he escaped; equally certain, so did Miss Mothermer. Dame Phillipa plainly did not. Greenbriar was discovered at about half-past one of the morning wandering in a daze in the vicinity of the Mile End Road by a very conscientious alien named Grebowski or Grebowsky, who summoned medical attention and the police. Little or no attention would or could have been paid to Greenbriar's account, had it not been for his description of the two ladies. His relation, dovetailing as it did with that of Miss Mothermer, left the police no choice but to cause a search to be made of the area of Argyll Court, in one corner of which a false nose was found.

Acting on the information received and under authority of a warrant, Superintendent Sneath, together with a police-sergeant and a number of constables, entered Llewellyn's premises, which they found completely deserted. Soundings of the walls and floors indicated the presence of passageways and rooms which could have had no place in a properly-conducted establishment licensed under the Common Lodging-houses Act, and these were broken into. A cap belonging to Greenbriar was found in one of these corridors, as was part of the lanyard of Dame Phillipa's police-whistle. There was a perfect maze of rabbit-warren of them, and, on the lowest level, there was discovered that chamber, the existence of which was previously publicly unknown, and which Professor Singleton of the University of London has pronounced to be a genuine Mitharium of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, or perhaps, Nerva; and which was used by the unscrupulous Llewellyn for the illicit portion of his professional activity. It would have been here that the captives were assembled, if Greenbriar's account is to be believed. What is, as a first premise, obvious, is that it cannot possibly be believed.

That Lord FitzMorris Banstock has chosen to believe it is, I am constrained to say, a greater testimony to the powers of his imagination than to any inherently credible elements in the story. The man Greenbriar now forms part of the staff of Banstock House; this is entirely the affair of Lord FitzMorris himself, and requires no comment on my own part, nor shall it obtain any. It may, however, be just as well to include some opinions and observations which are the fruits of Lord FitzMorris's very understandingly deep concern in this tragic and intensely puzzling affair.

He has collected a number of reports of some sort of aquatic disturbance moving downstream from London River early in the morning of the sixth November just about the time of the turning of the tide. To this he compares a report of the Astronomer Royal's concerning an arc of light which appeared off the Nore immediately subsequent. These have led him to the opinion that a craft of unknown origin and nature moved underwater from London to the sea and then rose not only above the surface of the water but into the air itself. This craft or vessel was captained by the creature with the six arms, and the man without a nose would have been an inferior officer aboard of her. Somehow this vessel became short of personnel and applied to Evan-bach Llewellyn to make up the shortage by crimping or shanghaiing the requisite Number. For reasons which cannot be known and concerning which I, for one, would rather not speculate, several women were also required (Lord FitzMorris is of the opinion that they were required only for such duties as members of their sex commonly fulfil in the mercantile navies of various foreign nations, such as service in the steward's branch). This being out of Llewellyn's line of business, an appeal was made by him to the notorious and wicked Eurasian, Motilal Smith, who is known to have left his headquarters in the semi-detached villa in Maida Vale on the Fifth of November, whither he never returned.

Lord FitzMorris suggests two possible provenances for this curious and hypothetical vessel. Suppose, he suggests, the being with the six arms to have been the original of the many East Indian and Buddhist myths depicting such creatures. It is likely, then, that the ship or submarine-aëroplane emanated from the vast and unexplored regions in the mountains which ring round the northern plateau of Thibet, the inhabitants of which have for centuries been rumoured to possess knowledge far surpassing ours, and which they jealously guard from the mundane world. The other possibility is even less likely, and is reminiscent, I fear, far more of the romances associated with the pen of Mr. Herbert G. Wells, a journalist of radical tendencies, than with proper scientific attitudes. Do not the discoveries of Professor Schiaparelli, establishing that there are canals upon the planet Mars demonstrate that the inhabitants thereof must be given to agricultural pursuits? In which case, how unlikely that they should engage

themselves in filibustering or black birding expeditions to, of all conceivable places, the civilised capital city of the British Empire!

Lord FitzMorris thinks that this theoretical craft of his must have carried off the unscrupulous Evan Llewellyn in order to make up the tally of captives; how much more likely it is that this wicked man has merely fled to escape detection, prosecution, and punishment-- perhaps to the mountains of wild Wales, where the King's Writ runs scarcely more than it does in the mountains of Thibet.

Concerning the present whereabouts of Motilal Smith, we are on firmer ground. That he intended to devise harm to Dame Phillipa, who had on far more than one occasion interfered with him in his nefarious traffickings, we need not doubt. The close search of Superintendent Sneath of the premises on and about Argyll Court, Primrose Alley, Fenugreek Close and Salem Yard uncovered a sodden mass of human clay lying part in and part out of a pool of muck far under the notorious Archways. It was the drowned body of Motilal Smith himself; both from the evidence of his own powerful physique and the presence of many footprints thereabouts, it is clear that a number of persons were required to force him into that fatal submersion. The friends-- silent though they are to the world, dumb by virtue of their affliction and suffering-- the friends of Dame Phillipa Garreck, the so-called and by no means ill-named People of the Abyss, whom she so constantly and so assiduously attended upon, had avenged their one friend and sole protector. It must now, one fears, go ill with them. The body of this unspeakably evil man, as well as his entire and vast estate (except the famous Negrohead opal, which was never found), was at once claimed by his half-brother, Mr. Krishna Bannerjee. The body was removed to Benares, and there subjected to that incomplete process of combustion at the burning ghauts peculiar to the Hindoo persuasion; and has long since become the prey of the wandering crocodiles which scavenge perpetually up and down the sacred waters of the River Gunga.

As I commence my last words for the present on the subject of this entire tragic affair I must confess myself baffled. Unacceptable as Lord FitzMorris's theories are, there are really no others that I can offer in their place. All is uncertainty. All that is, save my conviction that Dame Phillipa's noble and humanitarian labours still continue, no matter under what strange stars and skies.

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