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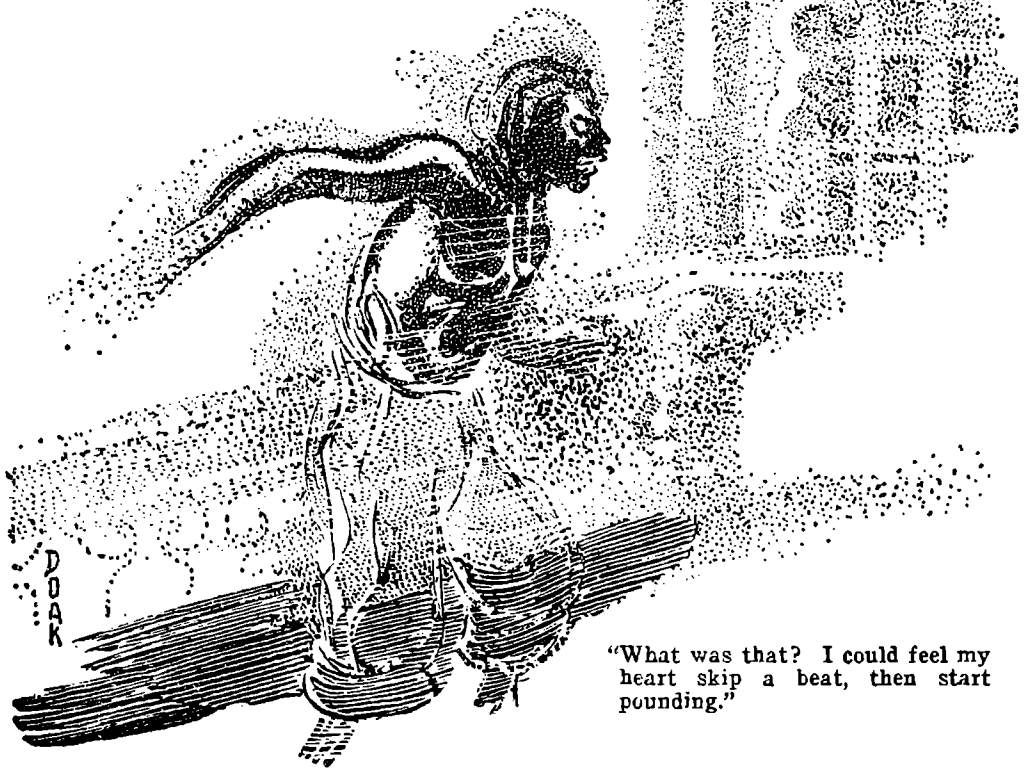
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BLACK-TANCRÈDE

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"What was that? I could feel my heart skip a beat, then start pounding."

IT IS true that Black Tancrede did not curse Hans De Groot as his mangled body collapsed on the rack, and that he did curse Gardelin. But, it must be remembered, Governor Gardelin went home, to Denmark, and so escaped—whatever it was that happened to Achilles Mendoza and Julius Mohrs: and Black Tancrede, who always kept his word, they said, had cursed three!

The Grand Hotel of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands glistens in the almost intolerable brilliance of the Caribbean sunlight, because that great edifice is whitewashed in every corner, every winter. Built somewhat more than a century ago, it is a noble example of that tropical architecture which depends, for its style, upon the

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structural necessity for resistance to summer hurricanes. Its massive walls of stone, brick, and heavy cement are thick and ponderous. The ceilings of its huge, square rooms are eighteen feet high. Despite its solidity, the 1916 hurricane took the top story off the main building and this has never been replaced. The fact that the hotel is now uniformly a two-story structure somewhat mars its original symmetry, but it is still as impressive as in the days when the Danish Colonial High Court sat in one of its sections; when its "slave-pens" were especially noted for their safety.

Built alongside the great courtyard which its bulk surrounds, and toward the harbor, once the crater of a volcano in that era when Atlantis and

its companion continent, Antillea, reared their proud civilizations in the central Atlantic, stand two houses, added, it is believed, some time after the construction of the original building. On this point the St. Thomas wiseacres continue to dispute. Nevertheless, under the house nearest to the hotel, and built with connecting steps leading to its great gallery, are those very slave-pens, converted nowadays into one enormous workroom where the hotel washing and ironing goes on, remorselessly, all the year round. During its early history, the hotel was called "Hotel du Commerce."

In that nearer, and slightly smaller of the two houses, I was installed for the winter. I took this house because I was accompanied that winter by Stephen de Lesseps, my young cousin, a boy of fourteen. Stephen's parents (his mother is my cousin Marie de Lesseps) had persuaded me to take him with me for the change of climate. Stephen is an agreeable young fellow. I gave him daily "lessons" and he read much himself, so that his education out of books was not neglected, and that major portion derived otherwise was enhanced. Stephen turned out on close association to be so manly, sensible, and generally companionable, that I congratulated myself upon yielding to my cousin Marie's suggestion.

In the middle of that winter, Marie and her sister Suzanne paid us a visit of a month. Mr. Joseph Reynolds, the American proprietor of the Grand Hotel, assigned them Room 4, a huge, double room, opening off the enormous hotel ballroom in which the major social functions of the Virgin Island capital are usually held. I am obliged to mention this background for the extraordinary story I have to tell. If I had not had Stephen along, I should not have remained in St. Thomas. I did so on his account. The capital, rather than my beloved island of Santa Cruz, was a better place for his education. Don Pablo Salazar, a fa-

mous teacher of Spanish, is resident there; the director of education lived in the neighboring house—there were many reasons.

And, if I had not had Stephen with me, Marie and Suzanne would not have made that visit, and so could not have spent a month in Number 4, and so this tale would never, perhaps, have been told.

THE ladies arrived early in January, after a sweeping tour of "the lower islands"—those historic sea-jewels where England and France fought out the supremacy of the seas a century ago. They were delighted with Number 4. They slept on vast mahogany four-posters; they were entertained by everybody; they patronized St. Thomas' alluring shops; they reveled in the midsummer warmth of midwinter in this climate of balm and spice; they exclaimed over Stephen's growth and rejoiced over the fine edge with which one of the world's politest communities had ornamented the boy's naturally excellent manners. In brief, my lady cousins enjoyed their month tremendously and went home enthusiastic over the quaint charm and magnificent hospitality of the capital of the Virgin Islands, our Uncle Sam's most recent colonial acquisition, once the historic Danish West Indies.

Only one fly, it appeared, had agitated the ointment of their enjoyment. Neither, they eventually reported, could get proper sleep in Number 4 in spite of its airiness, its splendid beds, and its conveniences. At night, one or the other, and, as I learned later, sometimes both simultaneously, would be awakened out of refreshing sleep at that most unpropitious of all night hours, 4 o'clock in the morning.

They said very little of this to me. I found out later that they were extremely chary of admitting that anything whatever had been interfering with their enjoyment of my hospitality. But later, after they were gone,

I did recall that Suzanne had mentioned, though lightly, how she had heard knocks at the double-doors of their big room, just at that hour. It had made little impression upon me at the time.

Long afterward, questioning them, I discovered that they had been awakened nearly every morning by the same thing! They had mentioned it to their room-maid, a black girl, who had appeared "stupid" about it; had only rolled her eyes, Marie said. They tried several explanations — brooms carelessly handled in the early morning; a permanent early "call" for some guest, perhaps an officer of marines who had to get to his duties very early. They rejected both those theories, and finally settled down to the explanation that some pious fellow-guest was accustomed to attend the earliest religious service of the day, which, in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in St. Thomas, is at 5 in the morning. They knew, because they had several times answered the knocks, that there was never anybody at the door when they opened it. They reconciled their ultimate explanation with the discrepancy that the knocks were on *their* door, by the supposition that there was involved some strange, auditory illusion.

As I have said, these ladies were fascinated with St. Thomas, and they did not allow one minor disturbing element to interfere with their enjoyment of its many strange sights; the weird speech of the blacks; the magnificent hospitality; the Old World furniture; the street lamps; the delightful little vistas; the Caribbean's incredible indigo; especially, I think, with the many strange tales which they heard more or less incidentally.

For St. Thomas, the very home and heart of old romance, is full of strange tales. Here, in September, 1824, the pirate Fawcett with his two mates was publicly hanged. To this very day, great steel doors guard most St.

Thomas stores, and particularly the funds of the Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank, from marauders, as anciently those same doors guarded them from the frequent raids of the buccaneers. St. Thomas' streets have more than once run red with human blood; for, like Panama, it is a town which has been sacked, though never burned like Frederiksted on the neighboring island of Santa Cruz.

Among these many tales was that of Black Tancredi. This negro, a Dahomeyan, so said tradition, had lived for a while in one of those very slave-pens under my house. He had been, strangely enough, a Haitian refugee, although a full-blooded black African. Many Caucasian refugees from Haiti had come to St. Thomas in the days of Dessalines, Toussaint l'Ouverture, and Henry Christophe, the black king of Northwestern Haiti, the bloody days of that wise despot whose marvelous citadel still towers incredibly on the hills behind Cap Haitien and who is chiefly remembered for his tyrannies, but who is probably the only person who ever made millions out of the "free" labor of his fellow blacks!

Tancredi had, so said tradition, incurred the enmity of Christophe, and that in the days of his power was a fearsome thing for any man. But, unlike other known unfortunates who had risked that terrible anger, Tancredi had escaped Christophe's executioner. That personage boasted that he had had so much practise with the broadsword that he could remove a head without soiling the victim's collar!

By some hook or crook, hidden probably in the stinking, rat-infested hold of some early Nineteenth Century sailing-vessel, perhaps buried under goat-hides or bales of *bacalhao*, Tancredi had shivered and sweated his way to the Danish refuge of St. Thomas. There he fell swiftly into inescapable debt, for he was a fighting-man from a warlike tribe, and no

bargainer. Therefore he had become the property of one Julius Mohrs, and because of that his connection with the old hotel had begun. Black Tancrede had been lodged, for safekeeping, in one of those same slave-pens under my house.

He had soon escaped from that servitude, for his strong, bitter soul could not brook it, and made his way to the neighboring Danish island of St. Jan. There he is next heard of as a "free laborer" on the sugar estates of Erasmus Espersen. In the "Rising" of 1833 he was prominent as a leader of those who revolted against the harsh laws of Governor Gardelin. Later, whether by the French troops from Martinique who came in to help the Danes put down their Slave War, or by the Spanish troops from Porto Rico, Black Tancrede had been captured alive, which was a grave error of judgment on his part, and brought back to St. Thomas in chains, there to be tortured to death.

That sentence was delivered in the Danish colonial high court, sitting in its own quarters in the hotel, by Governor Gardelin's judge.

First Black Tancrede's hands had been cut off, one a day. Then he suffered the crushing of his feet (after "three pinches with a hot iron instrument"), a punishment consummated with a heavy bar of iron in the hands of Achilles Mendoza, the executioner, himself a black slave. The iron sheared through his leg-bones, and he was "pinched," and his hands chopped off, because he had been so unfortunate as to be caught in insurrection, bearing weapons, and he was therefore to be made an example by a governor whose name is even now execrated among the black people.

With his last expiring breath Black Tancrede cursed his tormentors. He cursed Achilles Mendoza. He cursed Julius Mohrs. He cursed Governor Gardelin. They buried his shattered body in quicklime in the courtyard of the fort, and with it went his left

hand, which was clutched so firmly about the wooden crossbar of the rack that it could not be pried loose. Mendoza therefore broke off the crossbar with the hand attached, and threw it into the lime-pit. The other hand, chopped off the day before, had disappeared, and no effort was made to recover it. Such items in those "good old days" were not infrequently picked up and kept by onlookers as interesting souvenirs.

FOUR months after the execution, Julius Mohrs was found strangled in bed one morning. Even the lash failed to elicit any testimony from his household. No one has ever known who committed that murder. Mohrs, like Governor Gardelin, had the reputation of being harsh with slaves.

Achilles Mendoza died "of a fit" in the year 1835, in the open air. He was, in fact, crossing the courtyard of the hotel at the time and was not more than a few steps from the doors leading into the slave-pens. Many bystanders saw him fall, although it was at night, for the full moon of the Caribbee Islands—by whose light I have myself read print—was shining overhead. Indeed, so much light comes from the Caribbean moon that it illuminates these latitudes—degree seventeen runs through Santa Cruz, eighteen through St. Thomas—that on full moonlight nights in the "good old days," the capital itself saved the cost of street-lights; and that is the custom even today in the Santa Cruzian towns.

Some of the black people at first believed that Mendoza had strangled himself! This foolish idea was doubtless derived from the fact that both the executioner's hands had gone to his throat even before he fell, gasping and foaming at the mouth, and they were found clasped unbreakably together, the great muscles of his mighty arms rigid in death with the effort, when his now worthless body was unceremoniously gathered up and carted away for early morning burial.

Naturally, everybody who remembered Black Tancredi and his curses, and his character—that is, everybody who believed in black magic as well as in Black Tancredi—was certain that that malefactor, murderer, leader of revolt, had consummated a posthumous revenge. Perhaps Julius Mohrs, too—

The Danes pooh-poohed this solution of the two unaccountable deaths in the capital of their West Indian colony, but that did not affect black belief in the slightest degree. Black Quashee was in those days only a generation removed from Black Africa, where such matters are commonplace. Such beliefs, and the practises which accompany them, had come in through Cartagena and other routes, deviously and direct, into the West Indies from the Gold Coast, from Dahomey and Ashantee and the Bight of Benin—all the way, indeed, from Dakar to the Congo mouth regions—into the West Indies indeed, where Quashee's sheer fecundity, now that the "good old days" are no more, and Quashee is a Christian of one kind or another, and often a high school or even a college graduate, has caused him vastly to outnumber his erstwhile white masters. White people are now Quashee's masters no longer, though they still live beside him in the West Indies, in a constantly diminishing proportion, under that same bright moon, that same glowing sun, in the shade of the mighty tamarinds, beside the eye-scorching scarlet of the hibiscus, the glaring purple and magenta of the bougainvillea.

Governor Gardelin returned to Denmark very soon after the Slave War of 1833, where, so far as one may know from perusal of the old records, he died in his bed full of years and honors.

AS I HAVE mentioned, my cousins, Marie and Suzanne, returned to the continental United States. They left about the tenth of February, and

Stephen and I, regretting their departure, settled down for the rest of that winter, planning to return the middle of May.

One morning, a few weeks after their departure, Reynolds, the proprietor, asked me a question.

"Did you hear the uproar last night, or, rather, early this morning?"

"No," said I. "What was 'the uproar'? If it was out in the streets I might have heard it, but if it happened inside the hotel, my house is so detached that I should probably have heard nothing of it and gone right on sleeping."

"It was inside," said Reynolds, "so you probably wouldn't have noticed it. The servants are all chattering about it this morning, though. They believe it is another manifestation of the Jumbée in Number 4. By the way, Mr. Canevin, your cousins were in that room. Did they ever mention any disturbance to you?"

"Why, yes, now that you speak of it. My cousin Suzanne spoke of somebody knocking on their door; about 4 in the morning I believe it happened. I think it happened more than once. They imagined it was somebody being 'called' very early, and the servant knocking on the wrong door or something of that kind. They didn't say much about it to me. What is 'the Jumbée in Number 4?' That intrigues me. I never happened to hear that one!"

Now a "Jumbée" is, of course, a West Indian ghost. In the French islands the word is "Zombi". Jumbées have various characteristics, which I will not pause to enumerate, but one of these is that a Jumbée is always black. White persons, apparently, do not "walk" after death, although I have personally known three white gentlemen planters who were believed to be werewolves! Among the West Indian black population occurs every belief, every imaginable practise of the occult, which is inter-

woven closely into their lives and thoughts; everything from mere "charms" to active necromancy; from the use of the deadly *Vaudoux* to the "toot from a dead," which last renders a gambler lucky! Jumbee is a generic word. It means virtually any kind of a ghost, apparition, or *revenant*. I was not in the least surprised to learn that Number 4, Grand Hotel, had its other-worldly attendant. My sole ground for wonder was that I had not heard of it before now! Now that I recalled the matter, something *had* disturbed Marie and Suzanne in that room.

"Tell me about it, please, Mr. Reynolds," I requested.

Mr. Reynolds smiled. He is a man of education and he, too, knows his West Indies.

"In this case it is only a general belief," he answered. "The only specific information about 'the Jumbee in Number 4' is that it wakes occupants up early in the morning. There has, it seems, 'always been a Jumbee' connected with that room. I daresay the very frying-pans in the kitchen have their particular Jumbees, if they happen to be old enough! That rumpus this morning was only that we had a tourist, a Mr. Ledwith, staying overnight—came over from Porto Rico in the *Catherine* and left this morning for 'down the islands' on the *Dominica*. He came in pretty late last night from a party with friends in the town. He explained later that he couldn't sleep because of somebody knocking on his door. He called out several times, got no answer; the knocking went on, and then he lost his temper. He reached out of bed and picked up the earthenware water-jug. His aim was excellent, even though he may have had a drop too much at his party. He hit the door-handle, smashed the jug into fragments, and then, really aroused, got up, flung open the door, found nobody there, and took it into his head that somebody was having a joke on him.

Absurd! The man was a total stranger to everybody in the hotel.

"He raged around the ballroom and woke up the Gilbertsons and Mrs. Peck—you know they have rooms on that side—and at last he awakened me and I got up and persuaded him to go back to bed. He said there were no more knocks after that. I was afraid it might have disturbed you and Stephen. I'm glad it didn't. Of course such a rumpus is very unusual in the hotel at any time."

"Hm," said I, "well, well!" I had been thinking while Mr. Reynolds made this long speech about the nocturnal activities of the unknown Mr. Ledwith. I could not talk with him. He had already sailed that morning.

I was really intrigued by now—that occurrence coupled with the experience of my cousins! Of course I knew very little about that, for they had said almost nothing. But it was enough to arouse my interest in "the Jumbee in Number 4."

That was the only time Mr. Reynolds and I spoke of the matter, and for some time, although I kept my ears open, I heard nothing further about Number 4. When the "trouble" did start up again, I was in Number 4 myself. That came about in this manner.

An American family named Barnes, permanent residents of St. Thomas—I believe Barnes was a minor official of the public works or the agricultural department of the Virgin Island government—let their house-lease expire and decided to move into the hotel at family-rates-by-the-month for the convenience. Mrs. Barnes had two young children, and was tired of household cares. She had employed, I think, some rather inferior servants, which always means a heavy burden in the West Indies. One of the two hotel houses would suit them exactly. The other was occupied, by the year, by the director of education and his family, delightful Americans.

It was the first of May, and as Ste-

phen and I were booked to sail on the twelfth for New York, I proposed to Mr. Reynolds that we give up our house to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, and he could put us into one of the huge double rooms for the remainder of our stay. Mr. Reynolds put us into Number 4, probably the best of all the rooms, and which was, fortunately, vacant at the moment.

It happened that on our first night in our new quarters, I was out very late. I had gone, with the colonel in command of the naval station marines and his wife, to meet an incoming ship on which a certain Major Upton was returning to St. Thomas from a month's leave. Two days before the arrival of the ship, a cable had informed the colonel of Mrs. Upton's sudden death in Virginia. We did not know whether or not Upton had learned of his unexpected bereavement by wireless aboard ship, and we rather thought he had not. The ship was reported due at 1 a. m. She came in a little after 2, and after meeting Upton—who had, fortunately, received a wireless—and making his arrival as pleasant as we could for him under the circumstances, I got back to the hotel about 3:30 in the morning.

I CAME in at the side door, which is always open, walked softly along the great length of the ballroom, and very quietly opened the door of Number 4. By the streaming moonlight which was pouring in through the open jalousies of the great room, I could see Stephen's outlines, dimly, through the cloud of mosquito-netting which covered his enormous four-poster. I undressed silently, so that I should not disturb my young cousin. I was just ready to turn in, my soiled drill clothes in the washbag, my white buckskin shoes neatly treed, my other things laid away where they belonged—for I am a rather fussy fellow about such matters—and it was within a minute or two to 4 o'clock in the morning; I know I was beastly tired;

when, just beside me, on the door leading in from the ballroom, came an abrupt, unmistakable rap-rap-rap!

There could be no possible doubt about it. I was standing within three feet of the door at the moment the raps were delivered. I, Gerald Canevin, am a teller of the truth. I admit that I felt the cold chills which are characteristic of sudden, almost uncontrollable, paralyzing fear, run swiftly up and down my spine; that acute prickling at the hair roots which is called one's "hair standing on end."

But, if Gerald Canevin is a trifle old-maidish about the arrangement of his personal belongings, and, even damagingly, truthful, he may boast, and justly, that no man living can call him a poltroon.

I took one firm step to that door and flung it open, and—so help me God!—as I turned the small, old-fashioned brass knob, the last of the raps—for the summons was repeated, just as the convivial Ledwith had alleged—sounded within three inches of my hand, on the other side of the door.

The great, ghostly still ballroom stood silent and empty. Not a sound, not a movement disturbed its early-morning, dead, serene emptiness. I raked the room with my scrutiny. Everything was visible because the vivid moonlight—the moon had been full two nights before—came flooding in from the gallery with its nine Moorish arches, overlooking the harbor.

There was nothing—absolutely, literally, nothing—to be seen or heard. I glanced back over my shoulder along the wall through which the door of Number 4 opens. What was that? I could feel my heart skip a beat, then start pounding. A dim something, the merest shadowy outline, it seemed, in the form of a gigantic negro was moving along the wall toward the passageway, curtained from the ballroom, which leads to the main entrance of the hotel below.

Even as I looked, the strange form seemed to melt and vanish, and there came a hard, dull thud from the direction where I imagined I had seen it slipping furtively along the wall.

I looked narrowly, my heart still pounding, and there, on the floor moving rapidly from me in the same direction I had imagined that sinister figure following, and with a queer, awkward movement suggestive of a crab's sidelong gait, but moving in utter silence, there ran along the bare floor something about the size of a baseball.

I was barefooted and in thin, China-silk pajamas, but I started, weaponless, after the thing. It was, I surmised, the biggest tarantula I had ever seen in or out of the West Indies. Certainly it was no crab, although its size and even its gait would suggest one of our boxlike, compact land-crabs. But a crab, running away like that, would make a distinctive, identifying, hard rattle with its shell-covered feet on that hard, wooden floor, and this thing ran silently, like velvet.

What I should do with, or to, the tarantula if I caught it, I did not stop to consider. I suppose it was a kind of instinct that sent me in pursuit. I gained on it, but it slipped past the curtains ahead of me and was lost to sight in the broad passageway on the other side at the stairs' head. As soon as I had passed the curtain I saw that any attempt to catch the thing would be an impossibility. There would be innumerable hiding-places; the main entrance doors were closed tight down below there, and the stair-well was as dark as the inside of Jonah's whale.

I turned back, perforce, and re-entered Number 4, shut the door quietly behind me, and turned in upon my own gigantic four-poster and tucked the mosquito-netting under the edge of the mattress. I slept at once and did not awaken until five and one-half hours later, at 9:30 in the morning. The excellent Stephen, realizing the

situation, had repaid my pussyfooting in his interest of the earlier morning by getting dressed in silence and ordering my breakfast sent in at this hour.

That was Saturday morning, and there were no lessons for Stephen. I took advantage of that fact to put in a very much occupied day at my typewriter, and I got such a start on what I was then engaged in writing that I determined, if possible, to finish it the next day in time for the New York mail which goes out through Porto Rico every week. A brief, unaccustomed siesta Saturday afternoon helped make up for some lack of sleep. I decided to get up and go to that horribly "early" service at 5 on Sunday morning. That would give me a reason for early rising—which I have always secretly abominated!—and a good day's start. Stephen and I retired that evening as soon as he returned from his moving-pictures at the naval station; that was, about 9:30.

I MUST have grown wearier than I had realized, sitting up for Major Upton's ship, and accompanying him to the colonel's quarters afterward; for I slept like the dead, and had my usual fight with myself to get up and shut off an insistent alarm-clock at 4:15. I got to church in time, and was back again a few minutes before 6. It was barely dawn when I came in at the side entrance and up the stairs.

As I walked along the still dim ballroom toward Number 4, the tarantula, or land-crab, or whatever the thing might prove to be, came sidling in that same awkward fashion which I had noted along the edge of the side-wall, toward me this time. It was as though the creature were returning from the hiding-place whither I had chased him Saturday morning.

I was carrying a tough, resilient walking-stick, of native black wattle, cut by myself on Estate Ham's Bay,

over on Santa Cruz, two years before. I stepped faster toward the oncoming thing, with this stick poised in my hand. I saw now in the rapidly brightening dawn what was wrong with the spider—it was obvious now that it was no land-crab. The thing was maimed. It had, apparently, lost several of its legs, and so proceeded in that odd, crablike fashion which I had noted before. A spider should have eight legs, as most people know. This one came hunching and sidling along on five or six.

The thing, moving rapidly despite its paucity of legs, was almost at the door to Number 4. I ran toward it, for the door stood slightly open, and I did not want that horrible creature to go into my room on account of Stephen. I struck at it, viciously, but it eluded my black wattle and slipped in under the conch-shell which served as a door-chock.

Conchs have many uses in the West Indies. In the Bahamas their contents serve as a food-staple. They occasionally yield "pearls," which have some value to jewelers. One sees the shells everywhere—bordering garden paths, outlining cemetery plots, built, with cement, into ornamental courses like shining pink bricks. In the Grand Hotel every door has a conch for a chock. The one at my door was a very old one, painted, in a dark brown color, to preserve it from disintegration due to the strong, salt air.

I approached the shell, now covering the huge tarantula, with some caution. The bite of our native tarantulas in St. Thomas is rarely or never fatal, but it can put the human victim into the hospital for several days, and this fellow, as I have said, was the largest I had ever seen, in or out of St. Thomas. I poked the end of my stick under the lip-edge of the shell, and turned it suddenly over. The spider had disappeared. Obviously it had crawled inside the shell. There is a lot of room inside

a good-sized conch. I decided to take a chance. I did not want that thing about the place, certainly.

Keeping my eye on the upturned shell, I stepped over to the center of the ballroom and picked up a week-old Sunday supplement rotogravure section of one of the New York newspapers, crumpled it, folded it into a kind of wad, and with this, very gingerly—for the tarantula is a fighter and no timid beast—effectually stopped up the long triangular entrance to the shell's inside. Then, picking it up, I carried it outside onto the stone-flagged gallery.

Here things were appreciably lighter. The dawn was brightening into the tropic day every instant, and I could now see everything clearly.

I raised the conch-shell and brought it down crashing on the tessellated floor.

As I had expected, the old shell smashed into many fragments, and I stood by, my black wattle raised and ready to strike at the tarantula as it attempted to run away. I had figured, not unnaturally, that the experience of having its rocklike refuge suddenly picked up, carried away, and then crashing to pieces about itself, would, from the tarantula's viewpoint, prove at least momentarily disconcerting, and I should have a chance to slay the loathsome thing at my leisure. But, to my surprize, nothing ran out of the shattered shell.

I bent and looked closer. The fragments were relatively both large and small, from powdery dust all the way to a few chunks as big as my two fists. I poked at one of these, of an extraordinary and arresting shape, a strangely suggestive shape, though colored a dirty pink like the rest of the conch's lining. I turned it over with the end of my stick.

It was the hand of a negro, which, lying palm upward, had at first seemed pink. The palm of the hand

of the blackest of black Africans is pink. So is the sole of the foot. But there was no mistaking the back of that sooty, clawlike thing. It was a severed hand, and it had originally grown upon an owner who had no admixture of any blood other than that of Africa. The name "Tan-crède" leapt to my mind. Had he not, even among his fellow slaves, been called "Black Tanerède?" He had, and my knowledge of that ancient tale and the sooty duskiness of this ancient relic conspired forthwith to cause me to leap to that outrageous, that incredible conclusion. The hand of Black Tanerède—this was a right hand, and so, said tradition, was the one which had first been severed and then disappeared—or, at least, the veritable hand of some intensely dark negro, lay there before me on the gallery floor, among the debris of an ancient conch-shell.

I drew a deep breath, for it was an unsettling experience, stooped, and picked the thing up. It was as dry and hard as so much conch-shell, and surprizingly heavy. I looked at it carefully, turning it about and examining it thoroughly; for I was alone on the gallery. Nobody was stirring in the hotel; even the kitchen was silent.

I slipped the hand into the pocket of my drill jacket, and returned to Number 4. I laid the hand down on the marble-topped table which stands in the room's center, and looked at it. Stephen, I had noted at once, was absent. He had got up, and was now, doubtless, in his shower-bath.

I had not been looking at it very long, before an explanation, too far-fetched to be dwelt upon or even to be seriously entertained, was invading my dazed mind. Something on five or six "legs" had run under that conch-shell. Nothing, save this, had been there when I smashed the shell. There were the surface facts,

and I was my own witness. There was no hearsay about it. This was no black Quashee tale of marvels and wonderment.

I heard a pad-pad outside, like slippered feet, and I had the thing in my pocket again when Stephen came in, glowing from his shower. I did not want to explain that hand to the boy.

"Good morning, Cousin Gerald," said Stephen. "You got off early, didn't you? I heard your alarm-clock but I turned over and went to sleep again."

"Yes," I answered. "You see, I have a lot of work to get through with today."

"I'd have gone with you," continued Stephen, half-way into his fresh clothes by now, "if you'd waked me up! I'm going to 6 o'clock church if I can make it."

He dressed rapidly, and with another pleasant, hasty word or two, the boy was off, running. The "English Church" is quite near by.

I got up, left Number 4 empty, crossed the ballroom diagonally, and entered Mr. Reynolds' sanctum at its western extremity. I had thought of something. I *must* do what I could to clear up, or put away forever, if possible, that explanation, the details of which were invading my excited mind, pressing into it remorselessly.

I went to the lowest shelf of one of his bookcases, and took out the three heavy, calf-bound, ancient registers of the Hotel du Commerce. I must find out, on the off-chance that the room numbers had not been changed since then, who had occupied Room 4 at the time of Black Tanerède's execution and cursings. That, for the moment, seemed to me absolutely the salient fact, the key to the whole situation. . . .

I could hardly believe my eyes when the faded entry, the ink brown, the handwriting oddly, curleycued, jumped out at me.

For all of the year 1832, 1833, and most of 1834 besides, Room 4, Hotel du Commerce, Raoul Patit, proprietor, had been occupied by one Hans de Groot. Hans de Groot had been Governor Gardelin's judge of the Danish Colonial high court. Hans de Groot had condemned Black Tancred to death, by amputation of hands, pinching, and breaking on the rack.

I had my explanation. . . .

IF ONLY this were a romance, I should proceed to tell how thereafter I had applied, in the traditional method for the laying of this kind of ghost—a ghost with an unfulfilled desire, promise, or curse—how I had applied for permission to restore the hand to the resting-place of Black Tancred. I should recite the examination of old records, the location of the lime-pit in the Fort yard; I might even have the horrible thing which lay in my jacket pocket “escape” to wreak devastation upon me after unavailing efforts on my part to avoid destruction; a final twist of luck, the destruction of the hand. . . .

But this is not romance, and I am not attempting to make “quite a tale” of these sober facts.

What I did was to proceed straight to the hotel kitchen, where fat Lucinda the cook was cutting breakfast bacon at a table, and two dusky assistants preparing grapefruit and orange-juice against the hour for breakfast.

“Good morning, Lucinda,” I began; “is your fire going?”

“Marnin’, Mars’ Canevin, sar,” returned Lucinda, “hot, good’n hot, sar. Is yo’ desirous to cook something?”

Both handmaidens giggled at this, and I smiled with them.

“I only have something I wish to burn,” said I, explaining my early-morning visit.

. I approached the glowing stove,

anticipating Lucinda, and waving her back to her bacon-cutting, lifted a lid, and dropped the horrible, mummified thing into the very heart of a bed of cherry-colored coals.

It twisted in the heat, as though alive and protesting. It gave off a faint, strange odor of burning, like very old leather. But within a few moments the dry and brittle skin and the calcined bones were only scraps of shapeless, glowing embers.

I replaced the stovetid. I was satisfied. I would now satisfy Lucinda, if not her very natural curiosity. I handed her with an engaging smile one of the small, brown, five-franc currency bills which are still issued by the Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank, and are legal tender in our Uncle Sam’s Virgin Islands.

“Many t’anks, sar; Gahd bless yo’, Mars’ Canevin, sar,” muttered the delighted Lucinda.

I nodded to them and walked out of the kitchen reasonably certain that the Jumbee of Number 4 would trouble guests no more at 4 o’clock in the morning, nor at any other hour; that eternity had now swallowed Black Tancred, who, tradition alleged, was a very persevering man and always kept his word. . . .

It is true, as I remarked at the beginning of this narrative, that Black Tancred did not curse Hans de Groot, but that Governor Gardelin went home to Denmark and so escaped—whatever it was that happened to Achilles Mendoza and Julius Mohrs. Perhaps the persevering shade of Black Tancred was limited, in the scope of its revengeful “projection” through that severed hand, to the island on which he died. I do not know, although there are almost fixed rules for these things; rules in which Quashee believes religiously.

But, since that morning, I, truthful Gerald Canevin, confess, I have never seen any large spider without at least an internal shudder. I can

understand, I think, what that strange mental aberration called "spider fear" is like. . . .

For I *saw* that thing which ran

along the floor of the Grand Hotel ballroom like a maimed spider—I saw it go under that conch-shell. And it did not come out as it went in. . . .