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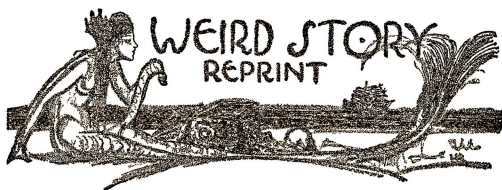
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



Jumbee*

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

MR. GRANVILLE LEE, a Virginian of Virginians, coming out of the World War with a lung wasted and scorched by mustard gas, was

recommended by his physician to spend a winter in the spice-and-balm climate of the Lesser Antilles—the lower islands of the West Indian archipelago. He chose one of the American islands, St. Croix,

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the old Santa Cruz—Island of the Holy Cross—named by Columbus himself on his second voyage; once famous for its rum.

It was to Jaffray Da Silva that Mr. Lee at last turned for definite information about the local magic; information which, after a two-months' residence, accompanied with marked improvement in his general health, he had come to regard as imperative, from the whetting glimpses he had received of its persistence on the island.

Contact with local customs, too, had sufficiently blunted his inherited sensibilities, to make him almost comfortable, as he sat with Mr. Da Silva on the cool gallery of that gentleman's beautiful house, in the shade of forty years' growth of bougainvillea, on a certain afternoon. It was the restful gossip period between 5 o'clock and dinnertime. A glass jug of foaming rum-swizzel stood on the table between them.

"But, tell me, Mr. Da Silva," he urged, as he absorbed his second glass of the cooling, mild drink, "have you ever, actually, been confronted with a 'Jumbee'?—ever really seen one? You say, quite frankly, that you believe in them!"

This was not the first question about Jumbees that Mr. Lee had asked. He had consulted planters; he had spoken of the matter of Jumbees with courteous, intelligent, colored storekeepers about the town, and even in Christiansted, St. Croix's other and larger town on the north side of the island. He had even mentioned the matter to one or two coal-black sugar-field laborers; for he had been on the island just long enough to begin to understand—a little—the weird jargon of speech which Lafcadio Hearn, when he visited St. Croix many years before, had not recognized as English!

There had been marked differences in what he had been told. The planters and

storekeepers had smiled, though with varying degrees of intensity, and had replied that the Danes had invented Jumbees, to keep their estate-laborers indoors after nightfall, thus ensuring a proper night's sleep for them, and minimizing the depredations upon growing crops. The laborers whom he had asked, had rolled their eyes somewhat, but, it being broad daylight at the time of the inquiries, they had broken their impassive gravity with smiles, and sought to impress Mr. Lee with their lofty contempt for the beliefs of their fellow blacks, and with queerly-phrased assurances that Jumbee is a figment of the imagination.

Nevertheless, Mr. Lee was not satisfied. There was something here that he seemed to be missing,—something extremely interesting, too, it appeared to him; something very different from "Bre'r Rabbit" and similar tales of his own remembered childhood in Virginia.

Once, too, he had been reading a book about Martinique and Guadeloupe, those ancient jewels of France's crown, and he had not read far before he met the word "Zombi." After that, he knew, at least, that the Danes had not "invented" the Jumbee. He heard, though vaguely, of the laborer's belief that Sven Garik, who had long ago gone back to his home in Sweden, and Garrity, one of the smaller planters now on the island, were "wolves!" Lycanthropy, animal-metamorphosis, it appeared, formed part of this strange texture of local belief.

Mr. Jaffray Da Silva was one-eighth African. He was, therefore, by island usage, "colored," which is as different from being "black" in the West Indies as anything that can be imagined. Mr. Da Silva had been educated in the continental European manner. In his every word and action, he reflected the faultless courtesy of his European forebears. By every right and custom of West Indian society, Mr.

Da Silva was a colored gentleman, whose social status was as clear-cut and definite as a cameo.

These islands are largely populated by persons like Mr. Da Silva. Despite the difference in their status from what it would be in North America, in the islands it has its advantages,—among them that of logic. To the West Indian mind, a man whose heredity is seven-eighths derived from gentry, as like as not with authentic coats-of-arms, is entitled to be treated accordingly. That is why Mr. Da Silva's many clerks, and everybody else who knew him, treated him with deference, addressed him as "sir," and doffed their hats in continental fashion when meeting; salutes which, of course, Mr. Da Silva invariably returned, even to the humblest, which is one of the marks of a gentleman anywhere.

JAFFRAY DA SILVA shifted one thin leg, draped in spotless white drill, over the other, and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Even my friends smile at me, Mr. Lee," he replied, with a tolerant smile, which lightened for an instant his melancholy, ivory-white countenance. "They laugh at me more or less because I admit I believe in Jumbies. It is possible that everybody with even a small amount of African blood possesses that streak of belief in magic and the like. I seem, though, to have a peculiar aptitude for it. It is a matter of *experience* with me, sir, and my friends are free to smile at me if they wish. Most of them,—well, they do not admit their beliefs as freely as I, perhaps."

Mr. Lee took another sip of the cold swizzel. He had heard how difficult it was to get Jaffray Da Silva to speak of his "experiences," and he suspected that under his host's even courtesy lay that austere pride which resents anything like ridicule, despite that tolerant smile.

"Please proceed, sir," urged Mr. Lee,

and was quite unconscious that he had just used a word which, in his native South, is reserved for gentlemen of pure Caucasian blood.

"When I was a young man," began Mr. Da Silva, "about 1894, there was a friend of mine named Hilmar Iversen, a Dane, who lived here in the town, up near the Moravian Church on what the people call 'Foun'-Out Hill.' Iversen had a position under the Government, a clerk's job, and his office was in the Fort. On his way home he used to stop here almost every afternoon for a swizzel and a chat. We were great friends, close friends. He was then a man a little past fifty, a butter-tub of a fellow, very stout, and, like many of that build, he suffered from heart attacks.

"One night a boy came here for me. It was 11 o'clock, and I was just arranging the mosquito-net on my bed, ready to turn in. The servants had all gone home, so I went to the door myself, in shirt and trousers, and carrying a lamp, to see what was wanted,—or, rather, I knew perfectly well what it was,—a messenger to tell me Iversen was dead!"

Mr. Lee suddenly sat bolt-upright.

"How could you know that?" he inquired, his eyes wide.

Mr. Da Silva threw away the remains of his cigarette.

"I sometimes know things like that," he answered, slowly. "In this case, Iversen and I had been close friends for years. He and I had talked about magic and that sort of thing a great deal, occult powers, manifestations,—that sort of thing. It is a very general topic here, as you may have seen. You would hear more of it if you continued to live here and settled into the ways of the island. In fact, Mr. Lee, Iversen and I had made a compact together. The one of us who 'went out' first, was to try to warn the other of it. You see, Mr.

Lee, I had received Iversen's warning less than an hour before.

"I had been sitting out here on the gallery until 10 o'clock or so. I was in that very chair you are occupying. Iversen had been having a heart attack. I had been to see him that afternoon. He looked just as he always did when he was recovering from an attack. In fact he intended to return to his office the following morning. Neither of us, I am sure, had given a thought to the possibility of a sudden sinking spell. We had not even referred to our agreement.

"Well, it was about 10, as I've said, when all of a sudden I heard Iversen coming along through the yard below there, toward the house along that gravel path. He had, apparently, come through the gate from the Kongensgade—the King Street, as they call it nowadays—and I could hear his heavy step on the gravel very plainly. He had a slight limp. Heavy-crunch — light-crunch; heavy-crunch—light-crunch; plod-plod—plod-plod; old Iversen to the life; there was no mistaking his step. There was no moon that night. The half of a waning moon was due to show itself an hour and a half later, but just then it was virtually pitch-black down there in the garden.

"I got up out of my chair and walked over to the top of the steps. To tell you the truth, Mr. Lee, I rather suspected—I have a kind of aptitude for that sort of thing—that it was not Iversen himself; how shall I express it? I had the idea, from somewhere inside me, that it was Iversen trying to keep our agreement. My instinct assured me that he had just died. I can not tell you how I knew it, but such was the case, Mr. Lee.

"So I waited, over there just behind you, at the top of the steps. The footfalls came along steadily. At the foot of the steps, out of the shadow of the hibiscus bushes, it was a trifle less black than far-

ther down the path. There was a faint illumination, too, from a lamp inside the house. I knew that if it were Iversen, himself, I should be able to see him when the footsteps passed out of the deep shadow of the bushes. I did not speak.

"The footfalls came along toward that point, and passed it. I strained my eyes through the gloom, and I could see nothing. Then I knew, Mr. Lee, that Iversen had died, and that he was keeping his agreement.

"I came back here and sat down in my chair, and waited. The footfalls began to come up the steps. They came along the floor of the gallery, straight toward me. They stopped here, Mr. Lee, just beside me. I could *feel* Iversen standing here, Mr. Lee." Mr. Da Silva pointed to the floor with his slim, rather elegant hand.

"Suddenly, in the dead quiet, I could feel my hair stand up all over my scalp, straight and stiff. The chills started to run down my back, and up again, Mr. Lee. I shock like a man with the ague, sitting here in my chair.

"I said: 'Iversen, I understand! Iversen, I'm afraid!' My teeth were chattering like castanets, Mr. Lee. I said: 'Iversen, please go! You have kept the agreement. I am sorry I am afraid, Iversen. The flesh is weak. I am not afraid of you, Iversen, old friend. But you will understand, man. It's not ordinary fear. My intellect is all right, Iversen, but I'm badly panic-stricken, so please go, my friend.'

"There had been silence, Mr. Lee, as I said, before I began to speak to Iversen, for the footsteps had stopped here beside me. But when I said that, and asked my friend to go, I could *feel* that he went at once, and I knew that he had understood how I meant it. It was, suddenly, Mr. Lee, as though there had never been any footsteps, if you see what I mean. It is

hard to put into words. I daresay, if I had been one of the laborers, I should have been half-way to Christiansted through the estates, Mr. Lee, but I was not so frightened that I could not stand my ground.

“AFTER I had recovered myself a little, and my scalp had ceased its prickling, and the chills were no longer running up and down my spine, I rose, and I felt extremely weary, Mr. Lee. It had been exhausting. I came into the house and drank a large tot of French brandy, and then I felt better, more like myself. I took my hurricane-lantern and lighted it, and stepped down the path toward the gate leading to the Kongensgade. There was one thing I wished to see down there at the end of the garden. I wanted to see if the gate was fastened, Mr. Lee. It was. That huge iron staple that you noticed was in place. It has been used to fasten that old gate since some time in the Eighteenth Century, I imagine. I had not supposed anyone had opened the gate, Mr. Lee, but now I knew. There were no footprints in the gravel, Mr. Lee. I looked, carefully. The marks of the bush-broom where the house-boy had swept the path on his way back from closing the gate were undisturbed, Mr. Lee.

“I was satisfied, and no longer, even a little, frightened. I came back here and sat down, and thought about my long friendship with old Iversen. I felt very sad to know that I should not see him again alive. He would never stop here again afternoons for a swizzel and a chat. About 11 o'clock I went inside the house and was preparing for bed when the rapping came at the front door. You see, Mr. Lee, I knew at once what it would mean.

“I went to the door, in shirt and trousers and stocking feet, carrying a lamp.

We did not have electric light in those days. At the door stood Iversen's house-boy, a young fellow about eighteen. He was half asleep, and very much upset. He 'cut his eyes' at me, and said nothing.

"What is it, mon?" I asked the boy.

"Mistress Iversen send ax yo' sir, please come to de house. Mr. Iversen die, sir."

"What time Mr. Iversen die, mon,—you hear?"

"I ain' able to say what o'clock, sir. Mistress Iversen come wake me where I sleep in a room in the yard, sir, an' sen' me please cahl you,—I t'ink he die aboht an hour ago, sir."

"I put on my shoes again, and the rest of my clothes, and picked up a St. Kitts supplejack—I'll get you one; it's one of those limber, grapevine walking-sticks, a handy thing on a dark night—and started with the boy for Iversen's house.

"When we had arrived almost at the Moravian Church, I saw something ahead, near the roadside. It was then about 11:15, and the streets were deserted. What I saw made me curious to test something. I paused, and told the boy to run on ahead and tell Mrs. Iversen I would be there shortly. The boy started to trot ahead. He was pure black, Mr. Lee, but he went past what I saw without noticing it. He swerved a little away from it, and I think, perhaps, he slightly quickened his pace just at that point, but that was all."

"What did you see?" asked Mr. Lee, interrupting. He spoke a trifle breathlessly. His left lung was, as yet, far from being healed.

"The 'Hanging Jumbec,'" replied Mr. Da Silva, in his usual tones.

"Yes! There at the side of the road were three Jumbecs. There's a reference to that in *The History of Stewart*

McCann. Perhaps you've run across that, eh?"

Mr. Lee nodded, and Mr. Da Silva quoted:

"There they hung, though no ladder's rung
Supported their dangling feet.

"And there's another line in *The History*," he continued, smiling, "which describes a typical group of Hanging Jumbec:

"Maiden, man-child, and shrew.

"Well, there were the usual three Jumbecs, apparently hanging in the air. It wasn't very light, but I could make out a boy of about twelve, a young girl, and a shriveled old woman,—what the author of *The History of Stewart McCann* meant by the word 'shrew.' He told me himself, by the way, Mr. Lee, that he had put feet on his Jumbecs mostly for the sake of a convenient rime,—poetic license! The Hanging Jumbecs have no feet. It is one of their peculiarities. Their legs stop at the ankles. They have abnormally long, thin legs—African legs. They are always black, you know. Their feet—if they have them—are always hidden in a kind of mist that lies along the ground wherever one sees them. They shift and 'weave,' as a full-blooded African does—standing on one foot and resting the other—you've noticed that, of course—or scratching the supporting ankle with the toes of the other foot. They do not swing in the sense that they seem to be swung on a rope,—that is not what it means; they do not twirl about. But they do—always—face the oncomer. . . .

"I walked on, slowly, and passed them; and they kept their faces to me as they always do. I'm used to that. . . .

"I went up the steps of the house to the front gallery, and found Mrs. Iversen waiting for me. Her sister was with her, too. I remained sitting with them for the

best part of an hour. Then two old black women who had been sent for, into the country, arrived. These were two old women who were accustomed to prepare the dead for burial. Then I persuaded the ladies to retire, and started to come home myself.

IT WAS a little past midnight, perhaps 12:15. I picked out my own hat from two or three of poor old Iversen's that were hanging on the rack, took my supplejack, and stepped out of the door onto the little stone gallery at the head of the steps.

"There are about twelve or thirteen steps from the gallery down to the street. As I started down them I noticed a third old black woman sitting, all huddled together, on the bottom step, with her back to me. I thought at once that this must be some old crone who lived with the other two,—the preparers of the dead. I imagined that she had been afraid to remain alone in their cabin, and so had accompanied them into the town,—they are like children, you know, in some ways,—and that, feeling too humble to come into the house, she had sat down to wait on the step and had fallen asleep. You've heard their proverbs, have you not? There's one that exactly fits this situation that I had imagined: "Cockroach no wear crockin' boot when he creep in fowl-house?" It means: 'Be very reserved when in the presence of your betters?' Quaint, rather! The poor souls!

"I started to walk down the steps toward the old woman. That scant half-moon had come up into the sky while I had been sitting with the ladies, and by its light everything was fairly sharply defined. I could see that old woman as plainly as I can see you now, Mr. Lee. In fact, I was looking directly at the poor old creature as I came down the steps, and fumbling in my pocket for a few cop-

pers for her—for tobacco and sugar, as they say. I was wondering, indeed, why she was not by this time on her feet and making one of their queer little bobbing bows—'cockroach bow to fowl,' as they might say! It seemed this old woman must have fallen into a very deep sleep, for she had not moved at all, although ordinarily she would have heard me, for the night was deathly still, and their hearing is extraordinarily acute, like a cat's, or a dog's. I remember that the fragrance from Mrs. Iversen's tuberose, in pots on the gallery railing, was pouring out in a stream that night, 'making a greeting for the moon!' It was almost overpowering.

"Just as I was putting my foot on the fifth step, there came a tiny little puff of fresh breeze from somewhere in the hills behind Iversen's house. It rustled the dry fronds of a palm-tree that was growing beside the steps. I turned my head in that direction for an instant.

"Mr. Lee, when I looked back, down the steps, after what must have been a fifth of a second's inattention, that little old black woman who had been huddled up there on the lowest step, apparently sound asleep, was gone. She had vanished utterly—and, Mr. Lee, a little white dog, about the size of a French poodle, was bounding up the steps toward me. With every bound, a step at a leap, the dog increased in size. It seemed to swell out there before my very eyes.

"Then I was, really, frightened—thoroughly, utterly frightened. I knew if that 'animal' so much as touched me, it meant death, Mr. Lee—absolute, certain death. The little old woman was a 'sheen,'—*chien*, of course. You know of lycanthropy,—wolf-change,—of course. Well, this was one of our varieties of it. I do not know what it would be called, I'm sure. 'Canicanthropy,' perhaps. I don't know, but something—something first-

cousin-once-removed from lycanthropy, and on the downward scale, Mr. Lee. The old woman was a were-dog!

"Of course, I had no time to think, only to use my instinct." I swung my supplejack with all my might and brought it down squarely on that beast's head. It was only a step below me, then, and I could see the faint moonlight sparkle on the slaver about its mouth. It was then, it seemed to me, about the size of a medium-sized dog,—nearly wolf-size, Mr. Lee, and a kind of deathly white. I was desperate, and the force with which I struck caused me to lose my balance. I did not fall, but it required a moment or two for me to regain my equilibrium. When I felt my feet firm under me again, I looked about, frantically, on all sides, for the 'dog.' But it, too, Mr. Lee, like the old woman, had quite disappeared. I looked all about, you may well imagine, after that experience, in the clear, thin moonlight. For yards about the foot of the steps, there was no place—not even a small nook—where either the 'dog' or the old woman could have been concealed. Neither was on the gallery, which was only a few feet square, a mere landing.

"But there came to my ears, sharpened by that night's experiences, from far out among the plantations at the rear of Iversen's house, the pad-pad of naked feet. Someone—something—was running, desperately, off in the direction of the center of the island, back into the hills, into the deep 'bush.'

"Then, behind me, out of the house onto the gallery rushed the two old women who had been preparing Iversen's body for its burial. They were enormously excited, and they shouted at me unintelligibly. I will have to render their words for you.

"'O, de Good Gahd protec' you,

Marster Jaffray, sir,—de Joombie, de Joombie! De 'Sheen,' Marster Jaffray! He go, sir?

"I reassured the poor old souls, and went back home."

MR. DA SILVA fell abruptly silent. He slowly shifted his position in his chair, and reached for, and lighted, a fresh cigarette.

Mr. Lee was absolutely silent. He did not move. Mr. Da Silva resumed, deliberately, after obtaining a light.

"You see, Mr. Lee, the West Indies are different from any other place in the world, I verily believe, sir. I've said so, anyhow, many a time, although I have never been out of the islands except when I was a young man, to Copenhagen. I've told you, exactly, what happened that particular night."

Mr. Lee heaved a sigh.

"Thank you, Mr. Da Silva, very much indeed, sir," said he, thoughtfully, and made as though to rise. His service wrist-watch indicated 6 o'clock.

"Let us have a fresh swizzel, at least, before you go," suggested Mr. Da Silva. "We have a saying here in the island, that 'a man can't travel on one leg!' Perhaps you've heard it already."

"I have," said Mr. Lee.

"Knud, Knud! You hear, mon? Knud, —tell Charlotte to mash up another bal' of ice,—you hear? Quickly now," commanded Mr. Da Silva.