

Tarantula

It is a well-known fact, among other myths, that missionaries are fearless. People given to phobias need not apply. Not that I am confessing to a phobia, mind you. I have none. A loathing, yes. Profound detestation, of course. We may even describe my personal trauma as an abstract theological problem formulated like this:

Why did God bother to create *tarantulas*?

God is supposed to be a *good* God. The problem of universal suffering poses a difficulty to the faith of some. Not me. That difficulty pales beside the grand mystery of the necessity for tarantulas.

The matter is purely theoretical as long as none are present. But an occasion occurred in the jungle when the issue abruptly lost its abstract nature.

While living in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, we took some vacation and visited missionary friends at the Wycliffe jungle base. It happened, one evening, that I was lounging serenely in my cabin. These wooden duplexes had a corridor leading past the restroom to the adjoining room. A young ecologist, recently arrived, was living next door.

My wife was in the adjoining room while I was seated on what was designated sarcastically, ‘the throne,’ since this comfortable apparatus was superior to any seen in most parts of the Amazon. This white-porcelain device had been recently installed and inaugurated and is known in civilized society as the ‘commode.’

I recall being in a thoughtful pose, somewhat like that Greek statue, The Thinker, and similarly clad. I happened to look to my left, and something caught the extreme corner of my eye. I twisted around to look behind and found myself staring inches from a huge black tarantula, perched on the wall, directly above my shoulder. It was square in front of my face.

I know that I did not panic because I would have remembered doing so. Since I remember nothing between the time I spotted the monster and the moment I found myself shuffling down the corridor, it is clear that I had the situation well in hand. It was only my drawers I did not have in hand. They were tangled around my ankles.

Fortunately, no one was in the corridor at the time. Not that it mattered. Survival takes precedence over propriety, according to the mission manuals.

After getting ahold of myself, as well as my drawers, my wife asked about the commotion. I explained briefly and then outlined calmly what must be done to dispose of the intruder. However, she insisted quite unfairly that it was my job.

Sadly, this left only one recourse. Commit the usage of that room to the tarantula and find other avenues to exercise our necessities. But again, my wife did not consider this a viable option. Some women can be unreasonable under pressure.

We needed a weapon. That’s when I spotted the broom leaning against the doorjamb. Jungle made, it consisted of straws and thin sticks bound tightly and cut off at the bottom. I reasoned that if I could somehow impale the spider on it, this would solve our problem. I grabbed the broom and approached the door stealthily.

Why *stealthily*, I do not know. Stealth seemed the appropriate demeanor at the moment. I pushed open the door of the bathroom with the broom, concerned that the creature may be lurking above the jam ready to pounce on my head as I entered. My wife doubted if the tarantula had such designs, but I proceeded with caution. After all, what do women know about tarantula psychology?

I peered cautiously into the room. There he was, right where I left him. I approached, the broom held ready. The lid of the commode had fallen down on the seat. Carefully, I lifted the lid with the broom. Then pulling back the broom to about three feet in front the arachnid, I plunged it upon him with all my might.

It worked. In one touché, he was dispatched down the toilet. I notified Dianne of the outcome with a firm tone of triumph.

While standing there reveling in my victory, a profound sense of satisfaction swept over me and I lapsed into a philosophical mood. If beauty is skin deep, doesn't it follow that the right to existence is mitigated by hideousness?

This insightful motif was interrupted by a loud knock on the adjoining door. It was the ecologist next door. "What's the commotion about? Is something wrong?"

I was certainly not ashamed of what I had done. I had met the enemy squarely and vanquished him. So, I explained with a flourish, my ingenious method of dispatching the intruder.

"What?!" he exclaimed, "How could you *possibly* do such a thing? It was harmless! You should have picked it up in your hands and put it outside in its natural environment!" This was the mild beginning of a tirade that lasted at least a minute. I was "cruel and insensitive." I did not respect "the natural order." The act was "entirely unnecessary," etc.

Many reasonable men, from time to time, have felt the desire to whollup a tree-hugger. This passion began to overcome me, but my muscles refused to respond. For some inexplicable reason, they were still trembling when he left. This was providential for both of us.

I hoped he would repeat himself the next morning at breakfast, because I had the perfect reply. Baptism by oatmeal. Egg benedict á la face.

But he was silent.