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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"Zombies! Corpses kept alive by hideous sorcery to work and toil without food or water or pay."

While Zombies Walked

By THORP McCLUSKY

*A tale of romance and stark horror, of dead men who worked in the fields,
and an apostate preacher who sought love through witchcraft*

THE Packard roadster had left the lowland and was climbing into the hills. It was rough going; this back road was hardly more than two deep grass-grown ruts—the car barely crawled.

Overhead the vivid greenery of the trees nearly met, shrouding, intensifying the heat.

Eileen's letter had brought Anthony Kent down the Atlantic seaboard, his heart

leaden, his thoughts troubled. There had been a strangeness in Eileen's brusque dismissal.

"Tony," the letter had read, "you must not come to see me this summer. You must not write to me any more. I do not want to see you or hear from you again."

It had not been like Eileen—that letter; Eileen would at least have been gentle. It was as though that letter had been dictated by a stranger, as though Eileen had been but a puppet, writing words which were not her own. . . .

"Back in the hills a ways," an emaciated, filthy white man, sitting on the steps of a dilapidated shack just off the through highway, had said sourly, in answer to Tony's inquiry. But Tony, glancing at his speedometer, saw that he had already come three and seven-tenths miles. Had the man deliberately misdirected him? After that first startled glance there had been a curious flat opacity in the man's eyes. . . .

Abruptly, rounding a sharp bend in the narrow road, the car came upon a small clearing, in the heart of which nestled a tiny cabin. But at a glance Tony saw that the cabin was deserted. No smoke curled from the rusty iron stovepipe, no dog lay panting in the deep shade, the windows stared bleakly down the road.

Yet a planting of cotton still struggled feebly against the lush weeds! This was the third successive shack on that miserable road that had been, for some strange reason, suddenly abandoned. The peculiarity of this circumstance escaped Tony. His thoughts, leaden, bewildered, full of the dread that Eileen no longer loved him, were turned too deeply inward upon themselves.

It had been absurd of Eileen—throwing up her job with the Lacey-Kent people to rush off down here the instant she heard of her great-uncle's stroke. Absurd, because she could have done more for the old fellow by remaining in New York.

And yet old Robert Perry had raised his dissolute nephew's little girl almost from babyhood, had put her through Brenau College; Tony realized that Eileen's gesture had been the only one compatible with her nature.

But why had she jilted him?

The weebegone shack had merged into the forest. The road, if anything, was growing worse; the car was climbing a gentle grade. Now, as it topped the rise, Tony saw outspread before his eyes a small valley, hemmed in by wooded hills. A rambling, pillared house, half hidden by mimosa and magnolias, flanked by barns, outbuildings, and a tobacco shed, squatted amid broad, level acres lush with cotton.

At first glance the place seemed peculiarly void of life. No person moved in the wide yard surrounding the house; no smoke curled from the fieldstone chimney. But as Tony's gaze swept the broad, undulating fields he saw men working, men who were clad in grimy, dirt-grayed garments that were an almost perfect camouflage. Only a hundred feet down the road a man moved slowly through the cotton.

Tony stopped the car opposite the man. "Is this the Perry place?" he called, his voice sharp and distinct through the afternoon's heat and stillness.

But the gray-clad toiler never lifted his gaze from the cotton beneath his eyes, never so much as turned his head or paused in his work to signify that he had heard.

Tony felt anger rising in him. His nerves were taut with worry, and he had driven many miles without rest. At least the fellow could leave off long enough to give him a civil answer!

But then, the man might be a little deaf. Tony shrugged, jumped from the car and plowed through the cotton.

"Is this the Perry place?" he bawled.

The man was not more than six feet from Tony, working toward him, with low-

ered head and shadowed face. But if he heard, he gave no sign.

Sudden, blind rage swept Tony. Had his nerves not been almost at the snapping-point he would never have done what he did; he would have let the man's amazing boorishness pass without a word, would have turned back to his car in disgust. But Tony, that day, was not himself.

"Why, you——" he choked. He took a sudden step forward, jerked the man roughly erect.

For an instant Tony glimpsed the man's eyes, gray, sunken, filmed, expressionless as though the man were either blind or an idiot. And then the man, as if nothing had occurred, was once more slumping over the cotton!

"God Almighty!" Tony breathed. And suddenly a chill like ice pressing against his spine swept him, sent his mind swirling and his knees weakly buckling.

The man wore a shapeless, broad-brimmed hat, fastened on his head by a band of elastic beneath his chin. But the savage shaking Tony had given him had jolted it awry.

Above the man's left temple, amid the gray-flecked hair, jagged splinters of bone gleamed through torn and discolored flesh! And a grayish ribbon of brain-stuff hung down beside the man's left ear!

That man was working in the cotton—with a fractured skull!

2

TONY'S thoughts were reeling, his mind dazed. How that man could continue to work with his brains seeping through a hole in his head was a question so unanswerable he did not even consider it. And yet, dimly, he remembered the almost miraculous stories that had come out of the war, stories of men who had lived with bullet-holes through their heads and with shell fragments imbedded inches

deep within their brain-cases. Something like that must have happened to this man. Some horrible accident must have numbed or destroyed every spark of intelligence in him, must have bizarrely left him with only the mechanical impulse to work.

He must be taken to the house at once, Tony knew. Gently Tony grasped his shoulders. And in the midafternoon's heat his nerves crawled.

The stooping body beneath the frayed cotton shirt was snake-cold!

"Lord—he's dying—standing on his feet!" Tony mumbled.

The man resisted Tony's efforts to direct him toward the car. As Tony pushed him gently, he resisted as gently, turning back toward the cotton. As Tony, gritting his teeth, grasped those cold shoulders and tugged with all his strength, the man hung back with a strange, weird tenaciousness.

Suddenly Tony released his grip. He was afraid to risk stunning the man with a blow, for a blow might mean death. Yet, strong as he was, he could not budge the man from the path he was chopping along the cotton.

There was only one thing to do. He must go to the house and get help.

Stumbling, his mind vague with horror, Tony made his way to the car, sent it hurtling the last half-mile down the narrow road to the house.

Only subconsciously, as he plunged up the uneven walk between fragrant, flowering shrubs, did he notice the strange discrepancy between the well-kept appearance of the fields and the dilapidation of the house. His mind was too full of the plodding horror he had seen. But the windows of the house were almost opaque with dirt, and at some of them dusty curtains hung limply while others stared nakedly blank. The screens on the long low porch were torn and rusted as though they had received no attention since spring; the lawn and the shrubbery were unkempt.

Three or four dust-gray wicker chairs stood along the porch. In one of those chairs sat a man.

He was old, and sparsely built. Had he been standing erect he would have measured well over six feet, but he lay back in his chair with his legs extending supinely before him. Tony knew instantly that this was Eileen's great-uncle, Robert Perry.

As he plunged up the dirt-encrusted steps Tony exclaimed hoarsely, "Mr. Perry? I'm Tony Kent. There's a man——"

The old man was leaning slightly forward in his chair. His blue eyes in his deeply lined face had suddenly flamed.

"Have you got a gun?" The words were taut and low.

"No." Tony shook his head impatiently. His mind was full of the horror he had seen working back there in the field. A gun! What did he want of a gun? Did old Robert Perry think he would be dangerous—the story-book rejected-lover type, perhaps? Nonsense. Urgent, staccato words tumbled from his lips as he ignored the question:

"Mr. Perry—there's a man back there with the whole top of his head split open. He's stark mad; he wouldn't speak to me or come with me. But—he'll die if he's left where he is! It's a wonder he isn't dead already."

There was a long silence before the old man answered. "Where did you see this man?"

"Back there—back in the cotton."

Old Robert Perry shook his head, spoke in a muttered whisper, as if to himself, "Die? He can't—die!"

Abruptly he paused. The screen door leading into the house had opened. Two Negroes and a white man had come out on the porch.

The two Negroes were nondescript enough—mere plantation blacks. But the white man! . . .

He was tall and wide as a door. He

was so huge that any person attempting to guess his weight would have considered himself lucky if he got the figure within a score of pounds of the truth; he was bigger than any man Tony had ever seen outside of a sideshow. And he was not a glandular freak; he was muscled like a jungle beast; his whole posture, the whole carriage of him, silently shrieked superhuman vitality. His gargantuan face, beneath the broad-brimmed, rusty black hat he wore, was pale as the belly of a dead fish, pale with the pallor of one who shuns the sunlight. His eyes were wide-set, coal-black, and staring; Tony had glimpsed that same intensity of gaze before in the eyes of religious and sociological fanatics. His nose was fleshy and well-muscled at the tip; his lips were thin and straight and tightly compressed. Garbed as he was in a knee-length, clerical coat of greenish, faded black, still wearing a frayed, filthy-white episcopal collar, he looked what he must have been, a pastor without a congregation, a prophet without honor, a renegade man of God.

He stood silently there on the porch and looked disapprovingly at Tony. His thin, weak, reformer's lips beneath that powerful, sensual nose tightened. Then, quietly, he spoke, not to Tony but to the paralytic old man:

"Who is this—person, Mr. Perry?"

TONY'S fists clenched at the man's insolence. His anger turned to astonishment as he heard the old man answer almost cringingly:

"This is Anthony Kent, Reverend Barnes—Anthony Kent, from New York City. Anthony—the Reverend Warren Barnes, who is stopping with us for a while. He has been very kind to us during my—illness."

Tony nodded coldly. The funereal-clad colossus stared for a long moment at this unexpected guest, and Tony could feel the

menace smoldering in him like banked fires. But when he spoke for the second time his words were innocuous enough.

"I'm temporarily in charge here." His voice was vibrant as a great hollow drum. "Mr. Perry's mind, since he suffered his most unfortunate stroke, has not always been entirely clear, and Miss Eileen—too, I am temporarily without a pastorate, and I am glad to help in any way that I can. You understand, I'm sure?" He smiled, the sickeningly pious smile of the chronic hypocrite, and ostentatiously clasped his hands.

Again Tony nodded. "Yes, I understand, Reverend," he said quickly, although some obscure sixth sense had already warned him that this man was as slimy and dangerous as a water-moccasin—and as treacherous. But—that man in the field, working in the cotton with the brain-stuff hanging down behind his ear! Hurriedly Tony went on, "I spoke to Mr. Perry when I came up the steps—something must be done at once—there's a man working out there in the field beside the road with something seriously wrong with his head. My God, I looked at him, and it looked to me as though his skull was fractured!"

With surprising swiftness the colossus turned upon Tony.

"What's that you say? It looked as though *what?*"

Brusky Tony rasped, "A man working in the field with a fractured skull, Reverend! His head looks staved in—bashed open—God knows how he can still work. He's got to be brought to the house."

The giant's too brilliant, too intense black eyes were suddenly crafty. He laughed, patronizingly, as though humoring a child or a drunkard.

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Kent; such things are impossible, you know. A trick of the light, or perhaps your weariness; you've driven a long distance, haven't you?—one's eyes play strange tricks upon one."

He peered at Tony, and suddenly the expression on his face changed. "But if you're worried, we'll convince you, put your mind at ease. You go and get Cullen, Mose and Job. Jump smart, niggers!" He pointed up the road. "Jump smart; bring Cullen back here; Mr. Kent's got to be shown." His thin lips curled scornfully.

The two Negroes "jumped smart." The Reverend Warren Barnes calmly seated himself in one of the wicker chairs near paralytic old Robert Perry and waved carelessly toward a vacant chair. Tony sat down — glanced inquiringly at Eileen's uncle. But the aged man remained silent, apathetic, indifferent. Obviously, Tony thought, his mind *was* enfeebled; in that, at least, the Reverend Barnes had been truthful.

Almost diffidently Tony addressed the white-haired old paralytic.

"I've come here to speak with Eileen, Mr. Perry. I can't believe that she meant—what she wrote in her last letter. Regardless of whether or not her feelings toward me have changed, I must speak to her. Where is she?"

When the old man spoke his voice was flat and hard.

"Eileen has written to tell you that she wished to terminate whatever—had been between you. Perhaps she has decided that she would prefer not to become too deeply involved with a Northerner. Perhaps she has other reasons. But in any case, Mr. Kent, you are not acting the gentleman in coming here and attempting to renew an acquaintanceship that has been quite definitely broken off."

The words were brutal, and not at all the sort of speech Tony would have expected, a moment ago, from a man whose mind had dimmed through age and shock. A sharp, involuntary retort surged to Tony's lips. Suddenly, then, the Reverend Barnes guffawed loudly.

"There, Mr. Kent!" he chuckled. It was

a sound utterly unministerial, utterly coarse and sardonic and evil. "There—coming down the road. Is that the man you saw working in the cotton—with the fractured skull?"

Walking into the yard between the two Negroes was the white man Tony had encountered earlier. He was plodding along steadily, almost rapidly, with no assistance from his colored companions. The straw hat was set tightly down upon his head, shading his face and covering his temples. There was no bit of greasy stuff hanging down beside his left ear.

THE three men halted before the porch. The Reverend Barnes, grinning broadly, showing great, yellowed, decaying teeth, stood up and put his hands on the porch rail. Abruptly he spoke to Tony.

"Is this the man, Mr. Kent?"

Tony, his mind numb with amazement, answered, "It's the man, all right."

The Reverend Barnes' grin deepened. "Are you all right, Cullen? Do you feel quite able to work? Not ill, or anything?"

There was a long, long pause before the man answered. And when at last he spoke, his voice was curiously cadenceless, as though speech were an art he seldom practised. But there was no doubt about what he said.

"Ahm all right, Reverend Barnes. Ah feels good."

The big man chuckled, as though in appreciation of some ghastly joke.

"You haven't any headache?" he persisted. "No dizziness from the sun, perhaps? You don't want to knock off for the rest of the day?"

After a moment the reply came.

"Ah ain' got no haidache. Ah kin work."

The Reverend Barnes smiled pontifically. "Very well, then, Cullen. You may go back to work."

"Wait!" Tony exclaimed. "Tell him to take off his hat."

The big man wheeled slowly; slowly his right hand lifted, like that of some mighty patriarch about to pronounce a benediction—or a damning curse. For an instant Tony glimpsed murder in his eyes. Then his hand fell, and he spoke smoothly, quietly, to Cullen.

"Take off your hat, Cullen."

With maddening, mechanical slowness the man lifted his hat, and Tony saw a mat of iron-gray hair, caked with dirt.

"Put your hat back on, Cullen. You may go back to work."

The man turned, was plodding slowly from the yard. And in that instant, striking vaguely against his dazed consciousness, the realization came to Tony that only the hair on the left side of the man's skull was matted with ground-in dust—the hair above his right ear was relatively clean! He opened his lips to speak. But the Reverend Barnes, as if anticipating him, was saying with amused, contemptuous finality:

"He's gone back to work. Dirty fellows, aren't they—these poor white trash?"

And Tony, wondering if his own reason were tottering, let the man go. . . .

The big man settled comfortably back in his chair.

"You thought you saw something you didn't," he said. His voice was soft now, soft and tolerant as silk. "Eye-strain, nervousness that's very close to hysteria. You must look after yourself."

For an instant Tony cradled his face in his hands. Yes, he must get hold of himself; his mind was overwrought.

He raised his head and looked at the old man.

"Eileen," he said doggedly. "I must see her."

Old Robert Perry opened his lips to speak. And suddenly the big man turned in his chair to stare deeply into the aged paralytic's eyes.

"You would like to see Miss Eileen?"

he asked Tony, then, with grave courtesy. "But certainly, Mr. Perry. He's come such a distance; it would be a pity——"

"Whatever you say."

The Reverend Barnes rose from his chair, smiled sorrowfully and pityingly toward Tony.

"Job, Mose," he said to the two Negroes, "stay here on the porch, in case Mr. Perry has one of his spells." He nodded significantly to Tony. "I'll call Miss Eileen. Such a lovely, sweet girl!"

Leisurely, moving on the balls of his feet like some magnificent jungle beast, he rose and stalked across the porch, opened the rusty screen door and disappeared within the house.

Mr. Perry did not speak; neither did Tony. There was something in the air that eluded him, Tony knew—some mystery that even Mr. Perry himself concealed, some mystery that seemed as elusive as the little winds stirring the magnolias.

FOOTSTEPS within the house, and Eileen Perry, small, slender, with the wistful beauty of a spring flower, came onto the porch. Behind her, as if carelessly, his face overspread with a pious smirk, lounged by Reverend Barnes.

Tony started up eagerly.

"Eileen!"

For a moment she did not speak. Only her splendid eyes looked at him hungrily, with ill-concealed terror rising in their depths.

"You shouldn't have come, Tony," she said then, simply.

The words were a rebuff. Yet Tony fancied that he had seen her hands lift toward him. He took a single step forward. But, as if to elude him, she stepped swiftly to the rail, stood with her back toward him.

"I had to come, Eileen," Tony said. His voice sounded oddly choked. "I love you. I had to know if you meant—those words

you wrote, or if it was some strange madness——"

"Madness?" She laughed, and there was sudden hysteria in her low contralto voice. "Madness? No. I've changed, Tony. You may think what you please about me; you may think that I'm fickle, or that I'm insane—whatever you will. But—above everything else in the world I did not want you to come here. Is that plain enough for you? I thought I tried to tell you that in my letter. And now—I wish that you would go."

As a man who dreams a nightmare, Tony heard his own voice, muttering, "But don't you *love me*, Eileen?"

For a moment he believed that she would speak, but she did not. She turned, and, without a backward look, walked into the house.

The giant, Reverend Barnes, was rubbing his big hands together—an incongruous, absurd gesture in a man of his physique. And then, after a moment, he laughed, a hoarse, obscene guffaw. But Tony, heartbroken, heard the insulting sound as no more than a disquieting rumble that had no meaning. His lips quivering, his eyes misty with the sudden tears he could not restrain, he walked slowly across the porch.

Then, as though the longing in them could bring her back to him, his tear-dimmed eyes gazed into the emptiness where Eileen had stood, looked unseeingly across the flowering mimosa, stared downward for a second at the porch rail.

A single word had been written on that rail, written in dust with a fingertip. Tony's mind did not register the significance of that word; it was transmitted only to his subconscious. But, as if mechanically, his lax lips moved.

The somberly clad giant suddenly tensed, took a step forward.

"What was that you said, Mr. Kent?"

Mechanically Tony repeated the word.

The big man's eyes swept the rail. The grin had abruptly gone from his face; his muscles knotted beneath his rusty black coat.

And then he leaped. And simultaneously leaped the two Negroes who had lingered, diffidently, down the porch.

Monstrous, spatulate, pasty-white hands clenched into Tony's throat. Abruptly fighting, not with his numbed brain, but with a primitive, involuntary instinct of the flesh for self-preservation, Tony sent his fists lashing into the pair of black faces before him. But the giant renegade minister was on his shoulders like an albino, shrouded leopard; the negroes were tearing at his arms. His knees were buckling.

Like a slender tree stricken by the woodsman's ax, he wavered and plunged headlong. There was a cascade of darting light as his head crashed against the dusty pine boards. Then came oblivion.

3

ANTHONY KENT awoke to swirling, throbbing pain. His skull beat and hammered; the dim walls of a small room, barren save for the straw-mattressed cot on which he lay, swooped and gyrated before his eyes.

Slowly he recalled what had occurred. The Reverend Barnes, that magnificent jackal, had struck him down as he stood on the porch. He was in some long-disused room, presumably a servant's bed-chamber, within the old Perry house.

A word was struggling upward from deep within his brain. What was that word? Almost he remembered it. It was the word Eileen had written in dust on the porch rail, a word repulsive and hideous.

Eileen had been trying to tell him something, trying to convey some message to him. Eileen, then, loved him!

What was the word?

There was a small, square window in the room, through which a feeble, yellowish light struck high up on the opposite wall. The sun was setting, then; he had been unconscious for hours. But it was not at the window that Tony glanced despairingly. It was at the two-by-six pine beams nailed closely together across that small square space!

Tony stumbled to his feet, reeled to the window and shook those wooden bars with all his strength. But they were solid white pine, and they had been spiked to the house with twenty-penny nails.

Through the narrow apertures between the beams Tony could see the broad, level fields, and the road, sloping gently upward to disappear within the encircling forest.

People were coming down that road now, gray, dusty people who plodded toward the house. They appeared almost doll-like, for the room in which Tony was imprisoned was on the side of the house, and long before the road swung in toward the yard they passed beyond his vision. But as Tony watched them his nerves crawled.

They walked so slowly, so listlessly, with dragging footsteps! And they stumbled frequently against one another, and against the stones in the road, as though they were almost blind. Almost they walked like soldiers suffering from shell-shock, but recently discharged from some hospital in hell.

For many were maimed. One walked with a deep, broken stoop, as though his chest had been crushed against his backbone. Another's leg was off below the knee, and in place of an artificial limb he wore a stick tied against the leg with rope, a stick that reached from twelve inches beyond the stump to the hip. A third had only one arm; a fourth was skeleton-thin.

In the Name of God whence had these maimed toilers come?

And then a soundless scream rattled in

Tony's throat; for, coming down the road alone, walking with the same dragging lifelessness as did the others, was another of the gray toilers. And, as the man turned the wide sweep in the road that would lead him to the house and beyond Tony's vision, Tony glimpsed, in the last yellow rays of the setting sun, the horror that had once been his face!

Had once been his face! For, from beneath the ridge of his nose downward, *the man had no face!* The vertebrate whiteness of his spine, naked save for ragged strings of desiccated flesh, extended with horrid starkness from the throat of his shirt to merge with the shattered base of a bony skull!

4

HIDEOUS minutes passed, minutes through which Tony fought to retain some semblance of sanity. At last he staggered weakly to the door, only one thought in his mind—to escape that mad place and take Eileen with him.

But the door, like the bars across the window, was made of heavy pine. From its resistance to his assault Tony knew that it was secured by bars slotted through iron sockets. It was impregnable.

Darkness was within that room now. Night had come quickly with the setting of the sun, velvety, semi-tropical night. The window was a purplish square through which a star gleamed brilliantly; the pine bars were invisible in the gloom. Tony was engulfed in blackness.

Yet, in a corner near the floor, there was a lessening of the darkness. Tony, crouching there, saw that the light came through a quarter-inch crack between the planks. Throwing himself prone, he glued his eyes to that crack.

He could see only a small portion of the room beneath him, a rectangle roughly three feet by twelve, yet that was enough to tell him that the room was the dining-

room of the old house. The middle of an oaken table, littered with dishes and scraps of food, bisected his field of vision.

At that table, his back toward Tony, sat the apostate Reverend Barnes. A little way down the table a black hand and arm appeared and disappeared with irregular frequency. The rumble of voices floated upward through the narrow slit.

"God!" Tony thought. "If only I had a gun!"

He remembered, then, that the old paralytic had asked him if he had a gun.

From the mutter of voices Tony guessed that there were three men seated about that table; the two Negroes were talking volubly yet with a low, curious tenseness; the Reverend Barnes interrupting only infrequently with monosyllabic grunts. All three seemed waiting.

Beside the big man's pallid white hand, on the naked oaken table, sprawling disjointedly amid soggy bits of bread and splashes of grease and chicken bones, lay an incongruous object, a little doll that had been wretchedly sewn together from dissimilar bits of cotton cloth. It possessed a face, crudely drawn with black grease or charcoal, and a tuft of kinky hair surmounted the shapeless little bag that represented its head. Obviously it caricatured a Negro.

From time to time, hunching over the table like a great gross idol, his shiny, worn clerical coat taut across his massive shoulders, the renegade minister would pick up the little rag doll, flop its lax arms and legs about, and put it down again.

Suddenly, then, a door, invisible to Tony, opened and closed. The conversation of the two Negroes abruptly ceased. Two black men shuffled slowly across the dining-room floor, came close to the table, opposite the colossus. Tony could see them both.

The face of one was rigid and grim, and he held his companion firmly by the arm.

The second Negro was swaying drunkenly. His lips were loose and his eyes bleared. Yet there was terror in him.

The Reverend Barnes hunched lower over the table. Tony could see the big muscles in his back ribbing beneath his rusty coat, and the big brass collar-button at the back of his pillar-like neck.

"You're here at last, nigger?" he asked softly. "You're late. What delayed you? They came from the cotton a long time ago, we have already eaten supper."

The drunken man mouthed some reply that was unintelligible, terror-ridden.

The giant's shoulders seemed to tighten into a ball of muscle.

"You're drunk, nigger," he said, and his voice trembled with contemptuous loathing. "I smell corn liquor on your breath. It stifles me; how any man can so degrade himself—Look not upon the wine when it is red." He paused. "You fool; I told you not to drink. How can you stay down the road and watch for strangers if you're drunk? You can't be trusted to wave the sheet when you're drunk. You failed today. What have you to say for yourself?"

Words tumbled from the man's slobbering mouth.

"Ahm not drunk. Ah tuk de cawn foh toofache——"

The giant shrugged.

"A stranger came up the road today before we could hide them in the cotton. You're drunk, nigger. I have forgiven you twice. But this is the third time."

He picked up the little doll.

"This is you, nigger. This is made with your sweat and your hair——"

A scream burst from the man's throat. He had begun to shake, horribly.

"Hold him, niggers," the giant said imperturbably. "I want to study this; I want to watch it work."

Black hands grasped the writhing, shuddering man.

The Reverend Barnes picked up a fork. He was holding the little doll in his left hand, looking at it speculatively. And it seemed to Tony—although it may have been a trick of the light—that the lifeless doll writhed and moved of itself, in ghastly synchronization with the trembling and shuddering of the terror-maddened human it caricatured.

Carefully, the Reverend Barnes stuck a prong of the fork through a leg of the doll. There was a slight rending of cotton.

The shuddering wretch screamed—horribly! And the colossus nodded his head as if in satisfaction.

Again the fork probed into the doll. But this time the big man jabbed all four tines through the little doll's middle. And this time no scream, but only a gasping, rending moan came from the Negro so firmly held by the strong hands of his kind. And suddenly he was hanging limply there, like a slaughtered thing. . . .

The Reverend Barnes pulled the fork from the doll, tossed the torn doll carelessly on the floor.

"He's dead, niggers," he said then, calmly. "He's stone dead."

5

AS TONY lay sprawled on that rough pine flooring, peering down with horrified fascination into the room below, the incredible realization grew and grew in him that he had witnessed the exercise of powers so primitive, so elemental, so barbaric that descendants of the so-called higher civilizations utterly disbelieve them.

God! Was this voodoo? Perhaps, but the Reverend Barnes was a white man; how had he become an adept? Was it something akin to voodoo, but deeper, darker? Had that wretched Negro died through fright, or had there really been some horrible affinity between his living body and the lifeless doll?

What of the thing without a face, walking down the road ?

The word that Eileen had written in dust on the porch rail was hammering at Tony's consciousness. Almost he grasped it, yet it eluded him. An unfamiliar word, reeking of evil. . . .

For a long time there was only silence from the room below—silence and a thickening haze of bluish smoke. The Negroes, Tony guessed, were smoking, although the big man almost directly beneath his eyes was not. Abruptly, then, the Reverend Barnes rose to his feet. Tony heard him walk across the floor; there was the sound of a door opening, and then a deep, throaty chuckle.

"No need for you to do the dishes tonight, Miss Eileen. Just leave them where they are; we don't need them any more. Come with me; I'm going to take you back to your room."

Tony heard the man padding heavily yet softly across the floor, and Eileen's reluctant, lighter footsteps. The dining-room door opened and closed.

Tony stumbled to his feet, then, shook the door with a despair that was almost madness. Exhausted at last, he clung limply to the iron latch, panting.

Minutes passed—minutes that seemed hours.

Suddenly, from close to his ears, Tony heard muffled sounds of sobbing. Eileen, crying as though her heart was broken, was imprisoned in the next room!

"Eileen!"

Abruptly the sobbing ceased.

"Tony!" The girl's voice came almost clearly into the room, as though she had moved close to the wall. "You didn't—escape them, Tony?"

"They ganged me," Tony said grimly. "I think they were going to let me go, but that big two-faced rattlesnake saw what you wrote on the porch rail, and then they jumped me."

There was a gasp from beyond the wall, and then a long silence. At last Eileen said, softly and penitently, "I'm sorry, Tony. I thought that you would read it and—understand—and come back later with help. I'm sorry that I got you into—this, Tony. I tried to keep you out. But when you came here I—I loved you so, and I wanted so terribly to escape. I had a wild hope that when you got safe away, even though you didn't understand, you would ask someone who knew and could tell you what *zombies* meant—"

Zombies! That was the word she had written in dust on the porch rail! And instantly, with kaleidoscopic clarity, there flashed across Tony's brain a confusion of mental images he had acquired through the years—an illustration from a book on jungle rites—a paragraph from a voodoo thriller—scenes from one or two fantastic motion pictures he had witnessed. . . .

Zombies! Corpses kept alive by hideous sorcery to work and toil without food or water or pay—mindless, dead things that outraged Nature with every step they took! These were zombies, the books glibly said, grim products of Afro-Haitian superstition. . . .

The men who wrote those books had never suggested that zombies might be real—that the powers which controlled them might be an heritage of the blacks exactly as self-hypnotism is a highly developed faculty among the Hindoos. No, the books had been patronizingly written, with more than a hint of amused superiority evident in them; their authors had incredibly failed to understand that even savages could not practise elaborate rites unless there was efficacy in them. . . .

"*Zombies!*" Tony muttered dazedly. And then, eagerly, "But—you love me, Eileen? I knew it; I knew you couldn't mean those things you wrote—"

"*He made me write them,*" Eileen whispered. "*He—came here in the spring,*

Tony. Uncle thinks that they ran him away—from wherever he was—before. He brought four Negroes with him.

"Uncle was old, Tony, and he didn't keep much help here—only six or seven colored men. The place was run down, Tony; after Uncle had put me through college he didn't have much incentive for keeping it up; he's always told me that I could have it for a sort of country home—after he died.

"But then—this man who said he had been a minister came, and saw all these unworked acres and how isolated the place was.

He went to Uncle, and told Uncle that he would furnish extra help if Uncle would give him half the crop.

"It was after the—*help* came that Uncle's Negroes left. Some of them even moved out of their shacks—out of the county. And this man—this *Reverend* Barnes, had already made a little doll and told Uncle that it was supposed to represent him. He tied the little doll's legs together with Uncle's hair, and told Uncle that with stiff legs Uncle wouldn't be able to run away and get help. He told Uncle that any time he wanted to he could stick a pin through the little doll and Uncle would die.

"And—*Uncle can't move his legs!* It's true, Tony, every word he said. That man; that—devil, can do anything he says.

"He read all my letters to Uncle, and all of Uncle's letters to me, too, before he sent them down to the postoffice. He tried to keep me from coming here.

"And when I did come he made another doll, Tony, to represent me. It's stuffed with my hair, Tony; they held me while he cut my hair. He's got little dolls that represent everyone here; he keeps them in a bag inside his shirt.

"*He can kill us all, Tony, whenever he pleases!*"

Hysteria had begun to creep into her

voice. She paused for a moment. When she went on, her voice was calmer.

"He keeps one of his colored men as a lookout in a tree at the top of the hill. The man can see way down to the main road. When he sees anyone turn up this way he opens out a big sheet and they hide the—*help*—"

Tony chuckled grimly.

"He didn't open out the sheet today," he muttered. "He was drunk." He tried to make his voice sound confident. "Eileen, sweetheart—we'll have to get out of this. It shouldn't be impossible, if we can only keep calm and try and think."

There was a silence. Then Eileen's words came back with quiet, hopeless finality.

"We can't break out of these rooms, Tony. The house is too strongly built. And—I think that tonight he's going to do something dreadful to us. I think that he's afraid to stay here any longer. But before he leaves this place he's going to—Tony, I know that man! He's ruthless, and he's—mad. Sometimes I think that he was, really, a minister. But not now, not now. He's pure devil now!"

6

HOW long Tony and Eileen, with the terrible earnestness of despair, talked to each other through the wall that night, neither ever knew. But it must have been for hours, for they talked of many things, yet never of the horror that menaced them. And they spoke calmly, quietly, with gentle tenderness. . . .

Why should the doomed speak of that which they cannot evade?

Both knew that they were utterly in the giant madman's hands, to do with, save for a miracle, as he pleased. Both knew that the apostate minister was merciless. . . .

There was no moon. But it must have been close to midnight when Tony heard the footsteps of several men on the stairs,

the grating of the locks on Eileen's door, the sound of a brief, futile struggle, and then Eileen's despairing cry, "Good-bye, Tony, sweet—"

Frothing like a rabid beast, he hurled himself at the door, at the barred window, at the walls, beating at them with his naked fists until his knuckles were raw and numb and sweat poured in rivulets from his body.

Grim minutes passed. And then the footsteps returned. There was the sound of pine bars being withdrawn. Tony waited, crouching.

When they entered he leaped. But there was no strength in him—only a terrible, hopeless fury. Quickly they seized his arms, bound his hands firmly behind him with rope, dragged him, struggling impotently, down a steep flight of stairs, through the ground floor hall, and down a second flight of stairs, musty and noisome.

Here they paused for a moment while they fumbled with the latch of a door. At last the door swung open, and they dragged Tony forward into an immense, dimly illuminated chamber. The door swung shut; the old-fashioned iron latch clicked.

This was the cellar of the plantation-house, an enormous, cavernous place, extending beneath the whole rambling structure. Once designed for the storage of everything necessary to the subsistence of the householders living on the floors above, its vast spaces were broken by immense, moldy bins. An eight-foot cistern loomed gigantically in a dark corner; wine shelves extended along one entire wall. The whole monstrous place had been dug half from the clayey soil and half from the solid rock; the floor underfoot, rough and uneven, was seamed and stratified rock.

Two oil lanterns, hanging from beams in the covey ceiling, lighted no more than the merest fraction of that great vault; the farther recesses were shrouded in blackness.

The three Negroes—Mose, Job, and the man who had brought in the drunken look-out—waited expectantly, their black hands strong on Tony's arms. And suddenly Tony was a raging fury, tearing madly at those restraining hands. . . .

There in the center of the old cellar, kneeling over a small, fragile form lying still and motionless on the moldy rock, was the gigantic, black-clad Reverend Barnes!

That still, fragile form was Eileen!

At the sound of Tony's struggles the giant looked up, stood erect. Great beads of perspiration bedewed his unnaturally pallid forehead—yet there was a pearly, significant grin on his face.

"Hard work, this, Mr. Kent," he said genially. "Much harder work than you would think."

"What are you doing to her!"

There was exultant triumph in the booming reply.

"I am binding her with a spell, so that she will always do what I say. This is powerful oobah, Mr. Kent. I never dreamed—" He paused, while a swift dark shadow overspread his huge face, so strong and yet so weak. But the shadow passed as swiftly as it had come, and once again his eyes blazed with evil. "Within a few moments I shall put the same spell on you, also, so that you too will always do what I say."

Chuckling, he spoke to Tony's guards.

"Tie his feet securely and pitch him there by the wine-bin. I'll not want him until later."

With both his hands and feet tightly bound, the three Negroes dumped Tony down on the jagged rock beside the wine-bin. Tony's face was turned toward where the fallen minister squatted beneath the lanterns, a monstrous, Luciferian image.

"Sit down on the floor, niggers," he said slowly. "Relax and rest; there's no need to stand." The deep, resonant voice throbbled with kindness. "I must think."

Obediently the three squatted in a row on their haunches, sat looking with silent expectation at this white conjur-man who was their master. . . .

THE frock-coated figure shook its head slowly, as though its brain were cobwebby. Then, slowly, it opened the front of its filthy linen shirt, baring the gray-white of its chest—the chest of a powerful and sedentary man, who yet had always shunned the healthful sunlight—the chest of a physical animal whose warped brain had, perhaps through most of its years, abhorred the physical as immoral and unclean. A bag hung there at the figure's chest, suspended by a cord around its neck. Two big hands dipped into that gaping pouch. . . .

Tony was struggling, struggling, rolling his body back and forth in straining jerks, trying to loosen the ropes that bound his feet and hands.

That bag of cotton dolls! One of those dolls represented Eileen.

Tony's shoulder crashed against the beams beneath the wine-bins, leaped with pain as an exposed nail tore the flesh. But the ropes held. . . .

The big man's forearms, beneath the shiny black coat, were suddenly bulging—and in that instant the three Negroes who had been squatting on their haunches were rolling and writhing on the floor, their hands clawing at their throats, their bodies jerking and twisting, their faces purpling, their eyes bulging!

Slow minutes passed. And still the giant, renegade minister crouched there, motionless, his big forearms knotted, his face drawn into a sardonic grimace.

The struggles of the three were becoming feebler. Their arms and legs were beating spasmodically, as though consciousness had gone from them. And at last even that spasmodic twitching ceased and they lay still.

Yet the Reverend Barnes did not stir.

But then, after it seemed to Tony that an eternity had passed, he withdrew his hands from the bag. In his left hand he held by the throat two little cotton dolls, in his right hand, one. With a careless gesture he tossed them to the floor, rose to his feet, and stood slowly flexing and unflexing his fingers. At last he stooped over the three motionless Negroes and grunted with satisfaction.

"Fools, to think that I would ever keep you after your work was done!" He was swaying slightly. Seemingly he had forgotten Tony.

But Tony was stealthily, warily sawing his bound hands back and forth, back and forth across the bit of nail that jutted from the base of the wine-bin. Strand by strand he was breaking the half-inch hemp.

The Reverend Barnes had returned to his position beside Eileen, was once more squatting beside her. She had not moved. But she lay unbound; the colossus was very sure of his sorcery!

For long minutes he sat motionless, his shoulders drooped, his muscles flaccid. At last, with a deep sigh, he raised his head and looked at Eileen.

"Beautiful, beautiful womanhood!" he whispered softly. "All my life I've wanted a woman like you—"

He reached out a big, splayed and unhealthy colorless hand, touched Eileen's body. Beneath his gentle touch she stirred and moaned.

And suddenly Tony was cursing him wildly.

"Damn you; you hound of hell in priest's clothing!"

The Reverend Barnes' huge hand paused in its caressing.

"You feel jealousy, Mr. Kent?"

Tony could not see the expression on the man's face; he was a black-robed bulk against the lantern-light. But there was a terrible gentleness in his voice.

"You filthy——" Tony choked. Words would no longer come to him; his rage was beyond words.

"Mr. Kent," the big man said softly, and Tony sensed that a slow, utterly evil smile was stealing across his face, "in a little while—such a little while—you'll no longer care what I do with her. You'll be beyond caring."

He swung about to face Tony.

"But—before I—dispose of you," he continued, with startling unexpectedness, "I'm going to tell you the—truth about myself. Why? Perhaps because I want to explain myself, to justify myself to myself. I don't know. Perhaps, in this moment, I have a sudden clear premonition of God's inevitable vengeance—for I am damned, Kent; I know full well that I am damned.

"I have been a preacher for twenty years, Kent. Not the soft-spoken, politically-minded type that ultimately lands the rich city churches; sin was too real to me for that; I fought the Devil tooth and claw.

"Perhaps that was the trouble. My ecclesiastical superiors were never certain of me. They thought of me as a sort of volcano that might explode at any time; I was unpredictable. And they suspected, too, I think, the devil in me—the physical lustiness and the desire for material things I fought so hard to stifle. They gave me only the poorest, back-country churches, they starved me; I was hungry for a mate and I could not even afford a wife. I think they hoped that I would fall into sin, so that they might thus be circumspectly rid of me.

"My last church was a pine shack twenty miles deep in a swamp. My parishioners were almost all Negroes—Negroes and a few whites so poverty-stricken that not one had ever seen a railway train or worn factory-made shoes. And inbreeding, in that disease-ridden country, was the rule, not the exception; you have no idea. . . .

"I worked, there in that earthly hell, like a madman. There was something there, something tangible, for me to fight—and I have always been a literal man. It was a shaman—what you would call a medicine-man or witch-doctor. He was, of course, a colored man.

"It may sound incredible, but I *competed* against that man for almost a year. We were exactly like rival salesmen. I sold faith, and enforced my sales with threats of hell-fire and damnation; he manufactured charms and love-potions, prophesied the future and healed the sick.

"Of course I went after him hammer and tongs. I blasted him in church; I ridiculed him; I told those poor ignorant people that his salves and his potions and his prophecies were no good. Eight months after I arrived there I began to feel that I was winning. . . .

"After about a year had passed he came to see me. We knew each other, of course; I will describe him—a very gentle old man, very tall, very thin and gray. He told me that he wanted me to go away. I think that he knew my weakness, the bitterness in me, better than I knew it myself.

"He raised no religious arguments; in fact, I don't think there were ever any really fundamental differences between us. You know that Holy Writ speaks of witches and warlocks and demons, and my chief objection to this man lay in my private conviction that he was a faker, a mumbo-jumbo expert pulling the wool over the eyes of fools. And, even though I am a fundamentalist, still, this is the Twentieth Century. The upshot of it was that I laughed at him and listened.

"He merely told me that if I would go away he would teach me his power. What power? I said. I should have known that he was trying to trap me—to strike a bargain. He looked at me. 'Among other things, to raise the dead, that they may do your bidding,' he said, very slowly and seri-

ously, 'although I have never myself done this obeah, because there has never been the need.'

"I laughed at him very loudly then, and for a long time.

"'Well,' I told him, after I got my breath back, 'I am a pretty poor preacher—if the caliber of my parish offers any criterion whatever. Perhaps I am not destined for the life of a minister, after all. Certainly my superiors don't think so. Therefore, if you will teach me these things of which you speak, and if they work, I will never preach another word as long as I live. But, if they do not work, you will come to church on Sunday, and proclaim yourself a faker before the entire congregation.'

"I felt very sure of myself, then, and I expected him to attempt to avoid the show-down. But he only answered me, quietly and gravely, 'I am the seventh son of a seventh son. I will teach you the obeah my father taught me, and if it works you will go away.'

"So—and I will tell you that I kept my tongue in my cheek all the while—I learned the rituals he taught me, learned them word for word, and wrote them down, phonetically, on paper to his dictation.

"But—he had not lied!"

The black-clad giant paused, and Topy saw that he was trembling. Presently the trembling passed, and, in a quiet, colorless monotone, the apostate minister added, "I knew, then, that I was eternally damned."

Tony shook his head. "No. Give up this—madness. No man has ever had the power to—condemn his own soul!"

The colossus shook its head; Tony could see a sneer hardening on its lips.

"I'll—pay! Because I have, now, what I have always wanted—power! Power over other men—and women! Shall I tell you what I am presently going to do with you? I'm going to make you so that you

will forget everything; you will walk and talk only when I tell you to; you will do only what I say. You have money; I will make you take your car, and drive Miss Eileen and me to New York. There you will go to the bank, or wherever it is you keep your money, and draw everything out for me. Then, once again, you will get in your car and drive, but this time you will be alone, and while you are driving I will stick a pin into a little doll. 'Heart-failure,' the doctors will say."

FOR a moment Tony did not speak. Then, with a strange steadiness, he asked: "But—Eileen?"

The big man chuckled. "You ask that question of a man who has denied himself women through all his life? Eileen will belong to me."

Abruptly, ignoring the bound, suddenly raging man on the floor beside the wine-bin, he turned away. But now, when again he squatted close to Eileen, he did not remain motionless. From somewhere about his clothing he produced a needle and thread, and bits of cloth, and he was sewing. And as he sewed he muttered strange words to himself, in a tongue Tony had never heard before, muttered those words in a cadenceless monotone, as though he himself did not understand them, but was repeating them by rote, as perhaps, they had been taught to him by some aged colored wizard. . . .

Tony's bound wrists rubbed back and forth, back and forth across the nail. Suddenly the strands binding his hands loosed.

Slowly, inch by inch, Tony hunched along the wine-bin, drawing up his feet. Warily he watched the big, crouching man; at any moment the Reverend Barnes might notice. . . .

But, seemingly, the colossus was too pre-occupied.

In furtive, small strokes, Tony's ankles sawed across the nail.

Suddenly the apostate minister stood up. He was looking at his handiwork, a grotesque little thing of odds and ends, crudely sewn yet unmistakably, with its limp, flopping appendages, a doll. And then he grunted approvingly, came toward Tony with the doll in his left hand.

"I'll have to take a few strands of your hair," he said grimly. His right hand reached downward toward Tony's scalp.

And then Tony's hands lashed from behind his back, clutched the pillar-like legs, strained. Abruptly the colossus sprawled his length on the uneven rock, his hands outplayed. The little doll slid unheeded across the cold stone.

Jackknifing his bound feet beneath him, Tony hurled himself across the floor. And with that tremendous effort the frayed ropes about his ankles ripped away.

Instantly he was atop the big man, his fingers sunk deep into the pasty white throat, his legs locked about giant hips.

But his antagonist's strength seemed superhuman. Only a half-hour before those spatulate hands, as surely as though they had been about black throats, had simultaneously strangled three men. Rope-like torso muscles tautened; powerful hands tore at Tony's forearms.

The powerful hands lifted, tightened about Tony's throat. And as those huge talons flexed, a roaring began in Tony's ears, red spots danced madly before his eyes, the dim cellar swirled and heaved.

The colossus, hands still locked about Tony's throat, surged slowly to his feet. Contemptuously he looked into Tony's bloodshot, staring eyes, hurled him reeling across the rock-gouged vault.

And in that instant something hard and sharp split the base of his skull like an intolerable lightning. Bright sparks spun crazily before his eyes—flickered out in utter blackness. He felt himself falling, falling into eternity. . . .

Old Robert Perry, his eyes blazing with

inhuman hate, stood above the Reverend Barnes's sprawling corpse, watching the red blood dim the luster of the ax-blade he had sunk inches deep into the giant's skull!

"That hellish paralysis!" he was babbling, inanely. "That hellish paralysis—gone—just in time!"

7

OLD Robert Perry wheeled. In the feeble yellow light beneath the lantern he saw Eileen, awake now, huddled on the floor, pointing—her eyes pools of horror. And, following with his gaze her outstretched hand, he saw them, coming from the dark bins, the dead things the fallen minister had torn from their graves to toil in the cotton! They came pouring from those great bins with dreadful haste, their faces no longer stony and still, but writhing and tortured. And from the mouths of those that yet possessed mouths poured wild wailings.

Old Robert Perry was trembling—trembling.

"God!" he mumbled. "Their master's—dead, and now they seek their graves!"

Dimly, as one who dreams in fever, he saw them passing him, no longer with stumbling, hopeless footsteps, but hurriedly, eagerly, crowding one another aside in their haste to escape into the night and return to their graves. And the flesh on his back crawled, and loosed, and crawled again. . . .

The zombies, dead things no longer beneath the fallen giant's unholy spell, twisted, broken, rotted by the diseases that had killed them, seeking the graves from which they had been torn!

"God!"

And then they were gone, gone in the night, and the sound of their wailing was a diminishing, scattering thinness in the distance. . . .

Old Robert Perry stared dazedly about,

at Eileen, huddled on the floor, sobbing with little, half-mad cries that wrung his heart—at Tony, staggering drunkenly to his feet, stumbling blindly toward his beloved.

"Eileen!"

The name reached out from Tony's heart like the caress of strong arms. Reeling, he followed that cry across the floor to her, dropped to the rock beside her, gathered her in his arms.

8

DAWN was near when at last old Robert Perry and young Anthony Kent trudged wearily through the purple night toward the plantation house.

The belated moon, preceding the sun by only a few hours, glimmered in the east, a golden, enchanted shield; the woods were still.

The two men did not speak. Their thoughts were full of the horror that had been, of the great pit they had dug in the night and filled with the bodies of the giant renegade and his followers.

Yet, as they drew closer and closer to the rambling old house that nestled, moon-bathed and serene, in the valley beneath them, words came at last.

"Anthony Kent," the old planter said earnestly, "I have lived on this land

through near four generations. I have heard the Negroes talk—of things like this. But I would never have believed—unless the truth had been thrust in my face."

Tony Kent shifted his spade to his left shoulder before he replied.

"Perhaps it's better," he said slowly, "that men are inclined to skepticism. Perhaps, as time goes on, these evil, black arts will die out. It may all be part of some divine plan."

Their footsteps made little crunching sounds in the road.

"Thank God that that fiend and his niggers were strangers hereabouts!" the old man said fervently. "They won't be missed. Nobody, of course, would ever believe—what really happened."

"No," Tony said. "But it's all over, now. Those dead things have gone—back to their graves."

They were close to the house. On the long walk, before the low screened porch, a small white-clad figure waited. And then it was running swiftly, cagerly toward them.

"Eileen!"

The name was a pulsing song. And then she was locked in Tony's arms, and he was kissing her upturned, tremulous lips.