

Zombie & Zombie, Attorneys at Law

by Con Chapman

"Are there really, truly zombies in Haiti?"

"Bien sur," Delzor said. He had even seen them: affectless men and women with a deathlike pallor, high nasal voices, and the characteristic drooping at the chin.

Into the Zombie Underworld, Mischa Berlinski, Men's Journal



It was getting late, and my eyes were tired. I leaned back in my executive swivel chair and wheeled it around to look out the window. I saw what I always see—other people driving home, or walking the streets of Boston on their way to have fun, while I stayed in the office poring over boring legal documents. With every set of by-laws I drafted, with every trust indenture I read, I died a little.

Into the reflection on my window moved the grey figure of Alison McDaniels, employment lawyer. I turned around to greet her.

"Hi Alison—how are you?"

"fine i guess," she said in her emotionless monotone that seemed somehow more monotonous than usual.

"You guess? Well if you don't know, who do I ask?" I said, trying to cheer her up a bit.

"i don't know," she said, with a distracted look in her eye as she stared out my window over my shoulder. "don't ask my husband we never see each other."

Can't say that's a bad thing, I thought to myself. What could possibly be worse than a two-lawyer couple? Maybe being dead in a ditch, but if that's your situation at least you're out in the fresh air. Here—or at her husband's firm—you spent the better part of your life under fluorescent lights, never seeing the sun.

"You taking any time off this summer?" I asked, lamely, hoping to get her mind off of whatever was troubling her.

"no can't. life-destroying case just came in the door. i'll be busy 'til the end of the year with this one."

Nobody ever accused Allison of not carrying her weight around the firm. She usually billed more hours than just about anyone else, which accounted for her deathlike pallor.

"Well, maybe just a day trip to the beach some weekend . . ."

"don't think so. i have very sensitive skin."

Excuse me for trying to cheer you up, I thought to myself. I gave her a little nod to show that I understood her predicament. Go ahead and be miserable if you want.

As I sat there like a bobble-head doll who should appear at my door but Norm Sternklein, tax lawyer extraordinary. Norm was one of these lawyers who they'd have to carry out feet first; he wasn't going to retire unless the executive committee made him.

"Hey, Norm," I said, glad to have someone to divert my attention from the Gloomy Gertie sitting in front of me.

"hi how are you," he said in the high nasal voice that always seemed so . . . strange coming out of the mouth of the 250-pound, round-shouldered dean of the Boston tax bar.



"Staying late tonight?" I asked.

"no later than usual," he replied. "like to stay abreast of recent developments. I've been buried alive just reading the new changes to the tax code." Yeah, right. Translation: "I have no life."

"You guys want to order some food?" I suggested. Maybe they had low blood sugar and needed a pick-me-up. "Pizza? Chinese?"

"there's a little haitian place down by quincy market," Alison said.

"yes they have good flesh—i mean fresh food," Norm added.

“Okay, looks like we have a consensus,” I said as I turned my phone towards Alison. “Give them a call.”

I was hoping they would just order salads. They were both starting to get that drooping chin so many middle-aged lawyers get from lack of exercise. You get in the car in the morning, sit at your desk all day, talking on the phone or tapping on your keyboard. It's no wonder so many members of the profession keeled over in their fifties and sixties, right on the verge of retirement, so they never really got a chance to live.

Alison dialed the number and we heard the number ringing over my speaker phone.

“Voodoo Kitchen,” a voice said when the call went through.

“i'd like to place a take-out order,” Alison said in her affectless tone of voice. “are you ready?”

“Just a second,” the man at the other end said. “Okay—go.”

“i'll have the creole basket,” she said.

“That comes with a choice of two sides—slaw, baked beans and fries.”

“just a diet coke and extra hot sauce on the creole, whoever he may be.”

“Okay—next?”

“i'll have the bucket o' chicken entrails,” Norm said. He seemed to have perked up a bit—the prospect of food was all it took sometimes.

“Anything to drink?”

"no," Norm said. "but could you leave the heads on the chickens?"

"Sure," the man said. "One bucket o' entrails, heads on. Anything else?"

I looked at my two partners, and they stared back at me. I took the menu from Alison—Haitian wasn't my cup of tea, but I wanted to be collegial.



"Let's see—the Toad and Mixed Green Salad. Does that have any nuts in it, because I'm allergic to them."

"No nuts, sir. It's made from free-range females," came the reply.

"Sounds good. And a root beer if you have it."

"Okay--that'll be \$27.50, not including tip."

I reached for my wallet and realized I had no cash. "Say, could one of you loan me a ten?" I asked.

"sure, you'll pay me back with interest, right?" Norm asked. It sounded like a joke, but he wasn't smiling.

"Oh, so you've got to get your pound of flesh, huh?" I replied with a nervous laugh.

"sure," Norm said, without expression. "if that's what you'd prefer."

