IT'S AUGUST IN NEW ORLEANS
... not hellfire hot... just plain
to old FURNACE hot... Thank
goodness. Too, because
I'm on the phone with

REVEREND
LORITA
HONEYCUTT GAMBLE
My YOU DOU GODMOTHER.

IT'S ABOUT THE OLD OAK
COFFIN, THE WORKMEN
FROM THE NURSERY FOUND IN MY FRONT YARD
WHILE PLANTING
THE PALM TREE...

I was on the phone because they planted it
OVER THE ROUGH-Hewn LOG BOX.
Anyway... and now this ghost was giving us
PROBLEMS...

So she says, "You
AIN'T AFRAID
OF DEAD PEOPLE
ARE YOU, BABY?"

She says this in a pitying honeyed voice like she
always does when she needs to make a point...

Now she wants me to DIG it UP AND
OPEN THE COFFIN... MY EYES ARE ROLLING UPWARD...
OPEN IT...
Because she needs to come over and do a ceremony over it. Stop this ghost... This is bad... Reverend Gambel is a good friend of mine... Being initiated... When she says she's got to come over and de-spool the place, I believe her...

The next day, she and Juanika, her beautiful petite daughter drive up. They step out of her white Cadillac with voodoo objects and wearing ceremonial clothes... She says to me:

"Don't worry about the neighbors. I'll tell them I'm your new maid."

Her's coffin... she's angry... I tell her I couldn't open the box because they planted a tree on top of it.
But I had dug up near the corner of the concrete sidewalk and the palm all morning yesterday...Digging...where the suburban lawn meets Prehistoric Black Soupy Swamp...And there-exposed-was the Box...It was a corner of some old unadorned coffin...Definitely unopened...DiggIng it up just this far was a chore...

So now the Reverend is on the telephone Long Distance to a Cuban Santero in Miami—only it’s got to go through a translator because he doesn’t speak English—Cellular phone in one hand, coconut shells in the other: She’s working.

Apparently we have to Ask this spirit if he will cooperate...Shell tossing...Heads or Tails...
Reverend Gamble is singing... chanting in a low lovely voice, hauntingly beautiful.

... but the buried man would not give his name...

... eyes closed I can almost hear that coffin groan...

Buried in Has Tete after hooded Hou-Hou Head between rival plantations of Louisiana by Nicholas de Chavagne...

... Buried Here in the tangled swamp where nobody could find him... his soul had been sleeping for over 200 years until he was disturbed...

... Buried Here on land owned by Nicholas Chavagne de la Freniere...

... his soul had been sleeping for over 200 years until he was disturbed...
...The reverend was going to pick up a few things and come back tomorrow... I was relieved... then she mentions animal sacrifice of a rooster and I wince involuntarily...

"Baby," she says, "Don't give me that look: This is freedom of religion and this is my religion ain't no different than eating popeyes fried chicken... so don't get queezy on me...

Whose blood do you want to give anyway? "...All bug-eyed and laughing for emphasis...

O.K., I say... I wasn't disagreeing anyway...
We're going to sacrifice a rooster and move the dead man's ghost from the front yard to the back yard where he'd be content and leave us alone. That's the plan, anyway...

I just wanted it over...can't work with unruly spooks, especially one I don't know—walking thru the house...

An introduction would be nice...

Instead, light switches and radios.

Sunday morning...
The Reverend and her daughter come over again at dawn...new things for the continuation of the ceremony...now we have a new hole dug and seven kinds of beans...in a sunny sack I see the movement of the rooster....

She's singing again...then she goes in my house and rouses my wife Paula from her bed...everybody's got to join in....

"Don't turn around." she says, "whatever you do, don't turn around." And she begins to work her voodoo ritual....

A machete & lit candles...

...howling...

The rooster is pulled out of his bag, and he seems to know his doom is approaching because he lets out some ear-piercingly loud squalling...continuing the ruckus even after he lost his head too...

Surely the whole neighborhood is awake by now. But I don't care...the Reverend is laughing and pretty casual about the whole thing...I've seen stranger ceremonies of hers...she's smoking a cigar and spraying rum from a bottle...commanding the spook to jump in the shallow hole...I'm imagining Boris Karloff standing behind me...I feel the presence of a fifth person...a cold chill on my neck...
She's making him jump in the hole by giving him cigar smoke, rum, rooster blood and beans at the bottom...it works...WooOosh!
Paula, being a little sleepy, tries to turn around a little and Rev. Gamble screams "Noooooo, baby, no..." but it was over!

By nine o'clock we're all sitting on the back deck as the temperature climbs...A hundred in the shade...drinking chicory coffee and smoking the rest of the fine cigar...Ah...the peace and quiet...