

a
triptych
from

THE DROWNED CITY

LUCIUS GALLOWAY has lived almost as many lives as your average fate-foiling feline. He's inhabited

the mundane but ultimately unstable existence of the alley cat, toiling as a teacher of whatever sundry subjects might be on offer to pay that week's bills. He's been the industrious barnyard tom, a workaday wordsmith writing pedestrian ad copy. And then there is his most recent incarnation as the beloved and pampered household purebred, a Howard Award-winning poet feted by New York City's literary elite. But regardless of the hat our clever cat is currently wearing, Galloway has always been, as his late mother Alice once wrote in her journal—an excerpt of which is shared for this piece with *Tales of*

Nevermore by the poet himself—"a bit fey, as much enamored of creation's strangeness as by its beauty. Perhaps more so."



And indeed, Galloway's work has always been peppered with odd, even unsettling images that more mainstream poets courting publication and acclaim tend to fastidiously eschew when penning their treatises on love and nature and other equally mundane—and often frankly boring—topics. But “mundane” and “boring” are not words anyone would ever use to describe Galloway's verses. Take,

for example, his first published poem, “When Trees Pray,” which the editors of *Tales from Nevermore* had the honor of printing in these pages several decades ago and reprint again here now, with the poet's permission.



WHEN TREES PRAY

I walk along a path forgotten
'Neath branches black and long unladen

Where no leaf buds and no bird sings
And shadows leer like alley thieves

A mighty forest once towered here
Till men came wielding fire and fear

Leaving behind unholy silence
Echoing with remembered violence

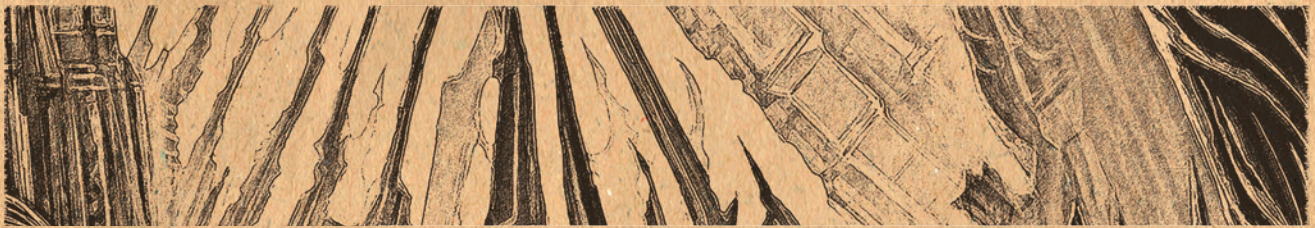
And barren limbs endlessly reaching
Toward stars unmoved by their beseeching

Do they still pray for their salvation
With wind-borne cries and supplications

Rising like smoke into the sky
To wreath an empty throne on high?

Or does their orison descend
With dark desires and darker ends?

Perhaps they pray for vengeance now
'Gainst we who brought flames 'mongst their boughs

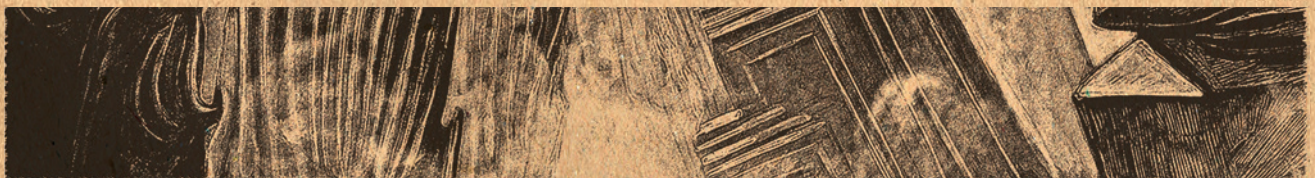


Here, Galloway does indeed begin with what seems to be a tired trope of man versus nature, detailing an encounter with a sinister natural world intent on revenge for mankind's many abuses. But the poet quickly turns reader expectations on their ear when he posits that perhaps the trees pray not to the heavens above for justice, but to more nefarious and nameless powers for the "darker end" of revenge.

Enter his much-lauded collection, *The Drowned City*. Coworkers from the advertising firm where Galloway lived his previous life opine

that it is a metaphor for New York City and its denizens, all drowning in the emptiness of their meaningless existences. The literary critics are less sure about the work's specificity, with many believing it could be a statement on life in any modern city, while others draw parallels to Thoreau's *Walden* and its mass of men wallowing in their quiet desperation. But all those readers ignore the elements of oddity rife in every poem in Galloway's collection that point to a different interpretation entirely.

Take, for instance, the unassumingly titled, "Heart of the City".





HEART OF THE CITY

Every city has
Its own life
Its own personality
Its own heartbeat

Some hear it as a thunderous sound
A deafening roar
That rushes in the ears like blood
Drowning out desires and dreams
Leaving animated husks

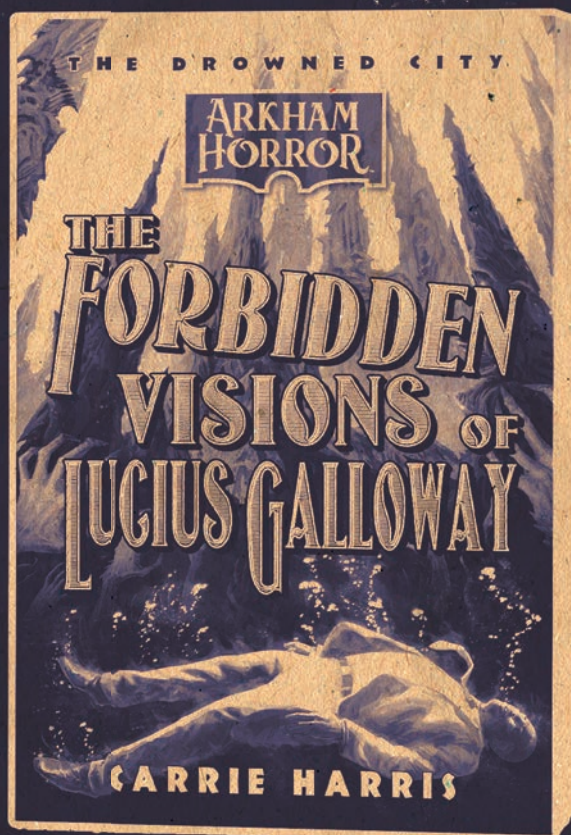
Some hear it as a primal throb
A siren song
That lures them in with promises
Desires fulfilled, dreams come true
Then takes everything from them
Leaving them broken, bereft

And some few, some happy few
Hear but a whisper on the wind
Tugging at unravelling threads
Dreams half-forgotten, desires unspent
And leaves them ever wondering
Are they truly the happy ones
Or simply those damned to be haunted?



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Galloway claims that he wrote *The Drowned City* over the course of three sleep-deprived days in a "paroxysm of poetry" that had been preceded by weeks of vivid dreams and nightmares. Is it too much, then, to consider that perhaps his manic muse was trying to channel some deeper message from a place too weird for the waking world to comfortably entertain?

Perhaps the best answer to that question is given by Galloway himself, in the form of the first new work the poet has published since the debut of his acclaimed collection, a piece he has tellingly titled, "Those Not Fortunate Enough to Drown".

The page is framed by a decorative border consisting of two large, stylized, wavy lines that curve inward from the top and bottom edges, creating a central space for the text. The wavy lines are dark green and black, set against a light brown background.

THOSE NOT FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO DROWN

When the city drowns
 Its people sleep
Oblivious to their rising doom
And the glowing, grey-green waves
 Lapping at the windows, doors
 That can never keep them safe
 Lapping
 Lapping
 Lapping

When the city drowns
 Its people dream
Of inhuman angles and rusted skies
 Plateaus of stone that never end
Running from the skittering steps
 Always just one breath behind
 Running
 Running
 Running

When the city drowns
 Its people change
Growing gills and beetles' bodies
Their webbed hands waving adulation
Screaming, fish-mouths gaping wide
 In terror, madness, ecstasy
 Screaming
 Screaming
 Screaming



With all due deference to the dearly departed Mrs. Galloway, it seems clear enough to these editors that Lucius Galloway's infatuation with mere earthly beauty has long since dulled, and his love affair with the strange has erupted forth in vibrant, disturbing bloom. And as admirers of his more boundary-pushing work, we could not be happier to see it.



Marsheila Rockwell

From the
Howard Award-Winning
New York Post

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