



# FEIGNING DEATH—PART ONE

by Gloria Goldberg

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*“A strange but true tale of mysterious magical mayhem from the illustrious pen of celebrated author Gloria Goldberg set in our very own Arkham!”*

**W**HAT YOU NEED TO KNOW about me is that I’m a writer from New York. I’ve written for money, and I’ve written for fame, but I don’t think any writer really knows why they write. The most honest answer I will offer is that I write because I must. I’m responding to something originating deep inside me. At least I think it’s inside me, call it my mind or even my

spirit. But perhaps inside is the wrong place to look. Could it be something beyond me that compels me to write the way I do and which directs the subjects I choose? In other words, do I really choose them? I don’t know. Maybe they are choosing me. In any case, the subject of inspiration has always fascinated me. Why am I suddenly struck with an idea for a novel? Where does it come from, this almost feverish desire to get the

words out of me and down on paper? This question also happens to be the one I most frequently hear from my readers, and from non-writers who find out how I spend days sitting in silence in front of my Corona No. 3 waiting for the magic to happen. Because there is more than a hint of magic to it. Inky dark magic. It mystifies me, too.

In my roundabout novelist's way, I'm finally getting to the point. Where does inspiration come from? What happens to a writer when the urge to create suddenly vanishes? The imaginative doldrums are nothing new. Writers have complained about losing their inspiration for as long as there have been writers. I was in a particularly bad writing slump when I decided to shake things up and take a trip. Perhaps a change of scenery would do me some good. I'm an independent woman who lives alone. I had no one to check my plans with except myself.

I packed my bags and bought a train ticket out of town.

Where did I go?

Arkham, Massachusetts. You may ask, "Why there?"

I have history in Arkham. I've visited before, connected to my literary life, and I had a friend who moved here and later died under tragic circumstances. But that's another story, as the saying goes. The reason I picked Arkham is because the city is charged with a special energy that I've found nowhere else. You can sense it, like a



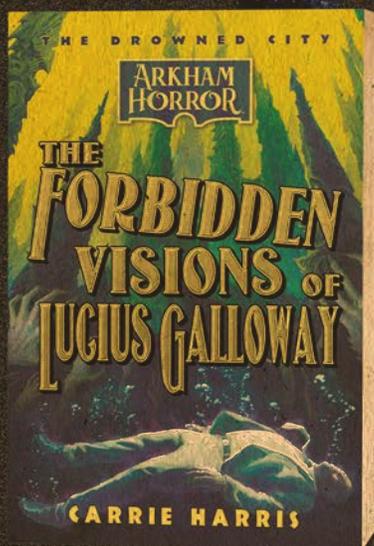
gentle buzzing in the air, an almost imperceptible tremor that suggests greater forces moving all around. Before you go off and judge me as cuckoo, I'll put all my cards on the table.

I believe in things I can't see. Big things. I think most people are the same way when you get down to it. For my purposes, let me say this much: the underpinnings of our world are largely hidden from us. Logic and reason provide, at best, limited answers to life's questions. We require other guidance and, strange as it may sound, we must open ourselves to the Mysterious.

I had this idea in mind when I arrived in the city famished and made a beeline for Velma's All-Nite Diner, a roadside railcar I'd



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visited before and remembered liking. After a plate of fried chicken liver and onions and a thick slice of cherry pie, I was refortified. A few short blocks away, I booked myself into a room at a tiny boarding house north of the river, run by a pair of charming, if slightly scruffy, elderly sisters. The next day I set up my temporary shop, clearing off my nightstand to make room for my typewriter, pencils, and a stack of paper.

I waited for the bolt of inspiration to strike.

Nothing happened. Not that morning, or even after lunch. No brilliant new stories floated down to me out of the swirling mists. Bupkis. I'm nothing if not stubborn. In the spirit of embracing the Mysterious, I embarked on an experiment with an occult technique I'd read about but had never attempted before, called automatic writing.

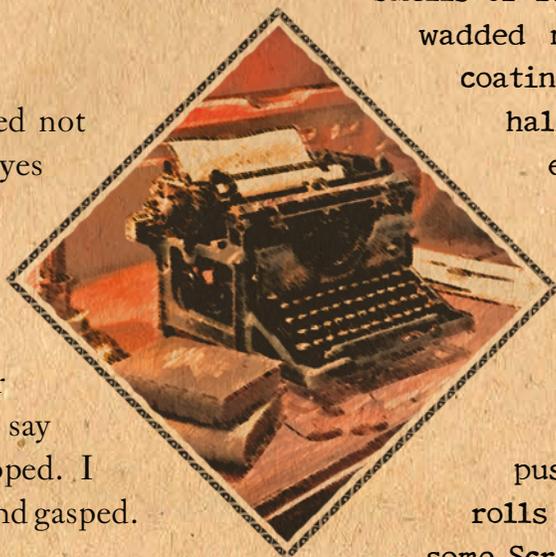
The process couldn't be simpler. You sit at a table with a pencil and paper, and you write down whatever comes. This next part is important—you do it without thinking. No filter. No conscious formation of words, sentences, and paragraphs. You become an instrument. Words flow through you. It's harder than it sounds, at first. The practice is old. Spiritualists like Arthur Conan Doyle believed in it, and going further back, you'll find John Dee. The Chinese call it *fuji*.

I, Gloria Goldberg, sat still one late afternoon and did my best to clear my mind. I picked up my pencil and pressed the freshly sharpened point to the top sheet of paper on a stack. I asked for nothing. I demanded

nothing. My expectations were low, and to be frank, I felt a little silly.

But then I got a shock.

My hand moved. I tried not to watch it. I closed my eyes because the temptation was too strong, and I didn't want to ruin whatever it was that might be happening. After some time, I really can't say how long, my hand stopped. I stared down at the paper and gasped.



The following is the passage that appeared—that I wrote!—without any conscious effort.

I did tidy it up, adding sentence breaks and punctuation, correcting spelling errors.

But here are the exact words I found written on the pages (to my own astonishment)!



I wake and peek between the boards—bright, too bright. Waddle back to the shadows and sniff the ground, the leaves, and the detritus from the street that's blown in through the gap. Three sides around me are closed off, but the fourth has an opening along the ground and a hole big enough where I can squeeze myself. The river is out that way. But I'm not exploring until later. After

sundown. I check my area to see if there's anything I might've missed.

Smells of fried fish grease on a wadded newspaper wrapper, a coating of yolk inside the half-shell of a chicken egg, an empty bottle with sweet, tangy liquid sloshing inside. I lick the glass and eat the paper and the shell. The bottle I push with my nose. It rolls away. Sniff more. Dig some. Scratching until I turn up something... curious. The scent of death is always worth deeper examination. Ah, here we go—a mouse skeleton. Not much meat but the bones are acceptable. I crack and chew them. Looking around, thinking how I've been acting lazy these days, I need to eat more. The damp is creeping in. Before you know it, winter will be upon us. Upon me, that is. I live alone. Always have since I left Mother Dear. The porch floor above me creaks. I freeze. Footsteps. A two-footer heading up the stairs. Then gone. When anything walks overhead, I pay attention. The rotting boards bend and bow but keep the worst of the weather out and are good for hiding





insects. Squinting, I search. A line of ants—I don't bother with them, but I spot a few pill bugs—crunch, crunch—hardly enough to call a meal, yet everything contributes, I say. Don't forget to look up. What's this now? A slug, fat and juicy gray, sticking to the underside of a grievously moldy plank—he's curled into the alcove of a knothole. I nip him out and—my, what a tasty treat!—gobble him down. Do you have any friends? If he does, I can't find them. I return to my corner, my sleeping

place for today. A cozy old burrow. It angles into the crumbly earth and doesn't go very deep underground, but it's nice, it belonged to a rabbit once. I still smell her. She left behind tufts of her soft fur, which is warm, mixed with leaves and straw-colored grass. The wind is blowing. I'll sleep for now. Feeling safe but safety is relative for one like me.



WHAT WAS THIS? Whose voice? Because I knew it was not my own. Even the handwriting proved unrecognizable. I was excited, shaky, and thrilled to have made contact! "What's next?"

I went down to the kitchen and brewed a cup of tea, bringing it back to my room. Rereading the pages, I looked for clues.

I had hoped to communicate with a spirit, perhaps a ghost or other discarnate entity of benign intent. Although I detected no threat from the life force that I had made a connection with, it appeared oblivious to me. It also seemed utterly alien. Eating insects? Living under a rotting porch? Was this an animal spirit? Had I pierced the veil only to find the ghost of a fox?

TO BE CONTINUED...



*S.A. Sidor*