



# FEIGNING DEATH—PART THREE

by Gloria Goldberg

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*What fate awaits famed author Gloria Goldberg? Read the conclusion to the bewitching saga where Arkham is more than just a town, but instead a place of wonder!*



THOSE HORRIBLE, DRENCHED pictures lingered in front of my eyes. My bond with my source... my marsupial guide had strengthened, and I felt the panic still reverberating in me. My legs shook as I left the bed, my dry mouth tasted like dirt and leaves. I drank some water. Gathering my scattered papers from the blankets and quilts on the bed, I assembled and

ordered them, reading graphite jottings, the wild, looping words I'd recorded in haste as I channeled the consciousness of another being whose life was imperiled. This was new territory for me, and I was unsure where to go next. Should I remain here, pencil in hand, waiting for the next message? Or should I instead go to the river's edge and see if I might locate my opossum?

No, no, I thought. The Miskatonic River is long, and even though I knew my source was somewhere on the banks away from the business of the nighttime docks, the possibilities were too numerous. How would I find a thorny bramble in the dark woods, even if I knew to search for an encampment of men? It wasn't safe in the woods at night for women or opossums.

But I felt the need to do something and not merely watch from a (psychic) distance!

My source spoke to me when I entered a trancelike state. But was the line of communication two-way? I wondered. Could I send a message to my source? And if so, what would I say? Who am I to meddle in the natural business of opossums? To what end?

I concluded that for the moment I would attempt to reestablish our link, and to observe.



My mouth tastes of dirt and leaves. But the fox is gone. I don't blame him for his hunger, for I feel it, too. Gnawing at my belly, reminding me that the cold and snow are coming. Frostbite took the tip of my tail last winter. Finding food was hard. My thanatotic visions

grew worse all year. Ships ripped from their moorings. Houses lifted off their foundations. The land transformed into a new world.

I saw these things happening. Not now but in some future time. While I lay in my paralytic state, I visited fantastical underwater kingdoms. Bubbles, beasts, and huge things shifting around in the depths. I felt their influence. It was like weather.

Like the moon...

I spy the rock through dead black branches, mounted like a skull in the sky. This is bad. The earth is spoiling somehow. Contagion infects the land and sea. Not yet, but I feel it coming. So, I must prepare. I must eat...

The sharp smoke of the men's campfire thickens. I hear their voices. Angry barks spit at one another. Scuffling. Punches thrown. Wrestling in the dirt. I move closer. Evil emanations come from this place. I don't like it, but I go forward. The fox lies behind. I've hunted these woods before but always avoided the men and their trucks. Their machines and the barrels rolled on the ground. I smell them. Fear in their sweat. I feel them through my toes.





Nervous footsteps. Hairs raised and nerves frayed. A dangerous crackling in the air that only a few can sense. Ah, here's a good climbing tree. I go up it. Clumsy on the ground but stealthy among the branches I am. I climb despite my shortened tail. There's the campfire, the men hunched around it like toads—a toad would taste good right now! The pale hairless faces of the men twist, and their eyes grow big and worried with every twig snap, every gust of wind... they are afraid. More afraid than I am...

I go down and crawl through broken glass. The men have been shooting bottles off a fallen log during the day. They've posted sentinels. But men are not good at seeing things like me hiding in the trees, watching. Or sneaking past them low to the ground. I might be a stone or a

patch of mushrooms. If I were bigger and they were smaller... but no, nature has made us what we are.

I've never gone so far before. What's this, a cave? I wonder what's in there to eat. But no. Evil. I'll not step into the cave tonight, or ever. There are bones I smell... of all kinds... but other things lurk in that rancid darkness. If the men knew, if they could smell it, too, they'd leave. I hunt the semi-dark between the stacks of barrels at the cave's mouth. Mouth is a good word, because what's in this cave seeks to devour. It hungers. I find a bag with a few salted peanuts at the bottom. I eat as quietly as possible. Not quietly enough, because I hear one of the men get up. He creeps along and snatches something from the top of a barrel. A gun! I have made a mistake. He stands between me and the woods. The cave is at my back, but I won't go in there. Better to die.

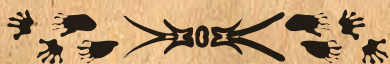


“GET OUT! HIDE! Find a place to hide! Go!”

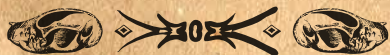
I nearly fell out of bed. The trance was broken. I tried to make contact again, but it was no use. The pencil didn't move, the pages remained blank. I went outside and stared at the moon. *You're being silly*, I told myself. *It's only an opossum. Why are you wringing your hands? Why are your eyes filling with tears?* Back in my room, I made a

final attempt. But nothing worked. In my frustration I gathered my paper and pencils and carried them out onto the porch and threw them into the yard. *Oh, what's the use?* I sat on the steps, leaning my shoulder against the railing.

Then I experienced another vision...



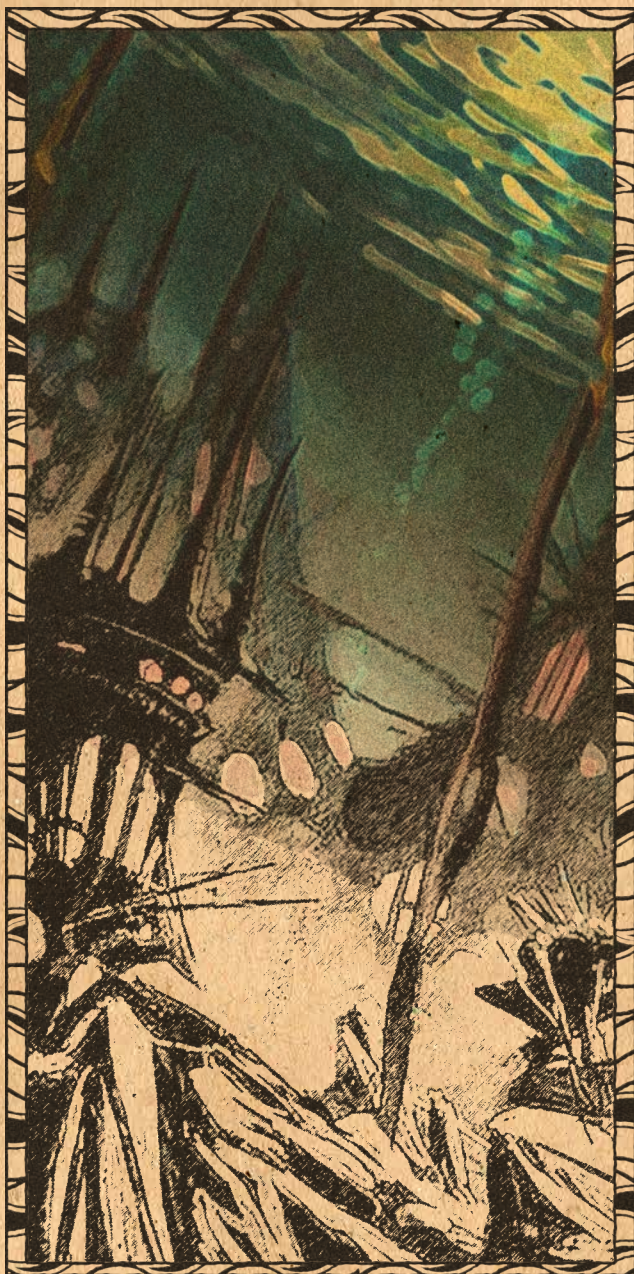
Submergence. A great rumble beneath me, surrounding me. There is a storm coming. It has arrived, and yet it is still coming, too. In the present dark, I gasp for air. My body is tossed, and my eyes are burning. I am entombed in fluid. A scientific specimen? No. No one has preserved me. I've preserved myself. Worlds are merging, ending, and being born once more. I inhabit an in-between space. Is this dying? Am I not alone? Who is with me here? Who are you? I sense one who is with me. Or are you me? Am I... I? Gloria? Who is Gloria? Are you a kindred spirit?



WHEN I NEXT EMERGED from my visionary slumber, it was still night. I was lying on the porch with my legs dangling off the edge of the steps. I felt chilled. For a few terrible disorienting moments, I did not know where I was. I looked around the scrubby back yard of the boarding house and did not recognize it. *Where am I?* I thought. *Who am I?*

*Gloria. You're Gloria,* I reminded myself.

I knew I hadn't been dreaming, not in an ordinary sense. Somehow, I'd shared a spontaneous vision with my opossum friend. I got up and dusted myself off. Gazing out into the yard, I saw the writing materials I'd flung there in exasperation. Embarrassed, I went to collect them the best I could,



quickly going back to my room to fetch my typewriter case to use as a basket. The breeze had strewn the papers, and most of my pencils were lost in the dark.

As I was bending to retrieve the mess I'd made, I spotted a truck crossing the bridge from Rivertown. It pulled into the dusty parking lot behind Hibb's Roadhouse down the block. The sisters had warned me about that place, advising me to avoid it, especially at night. But I was curious. And how can I explain this? Something was drawing me to the old carriage house, and to the truck idling near their back door. I tucked my case under my arm and crossed the street.

I heard the men before I saw them.

"Jeepers, Cal! You'd better find that thing before I upchuck!" a gruff voice said.

"I'm looking, ain't I? Get your lantern over here. One light's not enough."

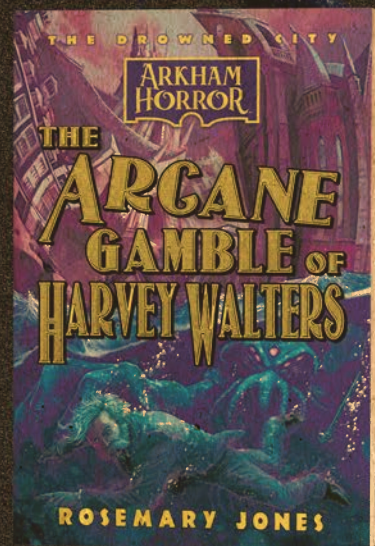
The men were inside the back of the truck. Its tailgate was open, and one of the men was waving his arms like he was sending smoke signals out the back. A small crowd had emerged from Hibb's, rubbernecking for a better look but not daring to come any closer. I had no such timidity. But I wasn't sure why I headed there or what I'd say if someone asked me. I just went.

"Is it some freeloader who got himself embalmed on the hooch?"

"There's nobody back here, I'm telling you."



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DESTRUCTION AS  
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RISE FROM  
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“Well, I can sure smell him. And if my nose is right, he’s popped his cork. Nobody living smells that bad. Find him, Cal!”



“Why don’t you come and look?”

The driver’s door opened, and a man climbed out of the cab, carrying a wooden bat. He was stocky and irritated, mumbling to himself. When he got to the rear of the truck he paused to tie a bandana around his lower face. I saw a pistol jammed in his pants at the small of his back.

“I swear I’m going to shoot him, Cal,” the man said.

“If you find him, I’ll shoot him,” the companion said.

I halted a few feet shy of the truck.

“Look in the barrels,” I said, raising my voice so both men could hear.

The bootlegger on the ground whirled and pulled his gun, pointing it at me. “Don’t be sneaking up on me, lady. I got enough problems without mistaking you for the O’Bannion boys.”

“Sorry,” I said. “But what you’re looking for is in one of those whiskey barrels.”

The man cocked his head. “How would you know what’s in these barrels?”

“Open them if you want to find your culprit.”

Cal was laughing as he continued to cough. “Why not do what she says?”

“There’s a crowbar hanging over there.” He pointed with his light past Cal.

The crowd from Hibb’s inched closer. People were hollering about the bad odor and pinching their noses, but their inquisitiveness outweighed their disgust. They waited in the jaundiced light from Hibb’s interior, trying to maneuver into position upwind of the truck.

The third barrel Cal opened contained the prize. Once he pried the lid off, the stench became unspeakable. His partner staggered back, swinging his bat. “Dump it, boy! Kick it over!”

Cal braced his boot against the side of the keg, tipping it over the tailgate, spilling out gallons of contraband whiskey, and one soaked, slightly inebriated opossum sloshed into the lot.

“Look at the size of that rat!” one of the Hibb’s group shouted. Someone gasped.

*A furious  
thumping told  
me my source  
had regained  
consciousness.*



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"That's no rat! It's a raccoon," another said.

The disagreement quickly escalated into a shoving match.

Before things got too out of hand, I rushed in and scooped the opossum into my typewriter case, wrinkling my papers. I latched it shut, retreating from the lot toward home. The crowd was awestruck.

"That dame's looney!"

"Is she going to eat it?"

"Stop her, Cal!"

"Why?"

"I don't know why. Just stop her."

"But she's taking the vile thing away. We ought to be paying her, not stopping her."

I left them to their squabbling and counted myself thankful that no one followed me back to the boarding house. In the yard, I set the case down on the grass and released the latches. The mix of whiskey fumes and an opossum feigning death was one I never hope to experience again.

"You're safe now," I said.

I feared that my source might've drowned in bootleg liquor, but it was alive. I gave the animal some room to breathe and went to sit on the porch. Pale milky light painted a

gauzy brushstroke on the horizon. In the middle distance, I watched as the excitement at Hibb's dissipated. Cal and his partner were busy unloading, and the crowd wandered back inside with a new story to tell.

A furious thumping informed me that my source had regained consciousness.

The opossum leaped onto the grass and sniffed the air, then began to lick itself.

"Easy there, I think you've had enough for one night," I said.

The opossum stopped and stared at me. I hoped my surprise wouldn't send the poor creature back into another thanatotic state. But it held my gaze courageously, unflinching.

"I'm Gloria," I said. "I think we've met before."

Two dark eyes twinkled.

*We've seen some things, haven't we?*

Of course, I didn't hear those words out loud. I might've even said them to myself. Except that I know I didn't. The opossum took a roundabout path, searching through the yard, sniffing and investigating, before it squeezed into a hole under the porch.

I never heard or saw it again during my visit. Returning to New York, I've continued my automatic writing experiments, finding

sporadic success, and while I've contacted other "voices," my first source has, to this date, remained utterly, ominously silent.

Opossums are nomadic. I don't know where mine has gone. But I think about its darkly twinkling eyes, and I can't help but wonder if it ever thinks of me.

THE END



S.A. Sidor