



FEIGNING DEATH—PART TWO

by Gloria Goldberg

The intriguing tale of eerie possession and vivid visions continues from the mysterious mind of the illustrious Gloria Goldberg!



I TOOK UP MY PENCIL again and waited. My eyes were closed. I'd left the lights off but had lit a votive candle. I grew somnolent. My travels had tired me, and my excitement, though palpable, had died to a less urgent glow. It was the sleepy part of the day when the sun dipped low, and I'm embarrassed now in my retelling to admit that I fell asleep in my chair, pencil in one

hand and my chin resting on the other. I woke to snoring, my own. Putting down my writing instrument, I blew out the candle and joined the sisters for dinner.

I was the only guest tonight. And although they were lovely, but peculiar, and their food homey, I'll admit I was distracted. I kept getting lost in their duets of yarn-spinning and impenetrable humor.

“Darby, wasn’t that the gentleman with no tongue?” the elder sister, Lacey, said, smiling.

“No, Lacey. You’re wrong there.” Darby rubbed her eyebrow. “Wait! It was him!”

“Before his unfortunate accident!” The sisters collapsed in laughter together.

The silver rattled as they pounded the table, gasping, wiping tears from their eyes.

I could not follow the conversation. But I wasn’t trying hard either. The matter of my automatic writing nagged me. “May I excuse myself?” I pushed away from the table.

“Are you unwell, sweetie?” Darby asked.

“Is it a headache?” Lacey said, then added, “I get those. Real skull-splitters.”

I caught them giggling and covering their mouths with their wrinkly, spotted hands.

“No. I’m just tired.”

“Well, rest is important,” Lacey said.

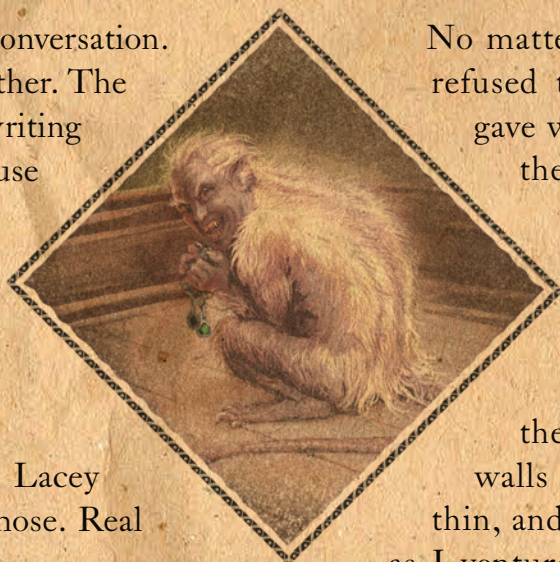
“I never feel like myself when I travel. It takes me three days to fully arrive,” Darby said.

I stood up. Lacey reached for me and

pressed something warm and round into my palm.

“Take this apple in case you get hungry later.”

Lacey’s eyes focused just over my right shoulder, and I realized that she was nearly blind. I glanced at the red apple, thanked the sisters for their generosity, and put it in the pocket of my cardigan as I headed back to my room.



No matter how I tried, the pencil refused to move. My impatience gave way to frustration. I heard the loud murmur of the sisters’ radio in the parlor, then their slipper-clad footsteps as they climbed the stairs and ambled their way to their bedroom upstairs. The walls of the old house were thin, and I did my best to be quiet as I ventured into the hallway. The air smelled of cloves and orange peels, which I suspected the sisters boiled in a pot in the kitchen to cover up the stink of their cigars. They were a funny pair, symbiotic and happy with each other.

My bedroom was at the end of the hall a few steps from the back door. I carefully opened the door and stepped out for some fresh air. The atmosphere near the river was not particularly rejuvenating unless one enjoyed the aroma of dead fish and factory runoff. But the wind had died down to

a light breeze, the moon shone like an ice chip, and the stars twinkled in the heavens. I leaned on the old wood railing and felt a thump against my hip. The apple! Feeling a bit peckish, I took a bite, only to discover the flesh was mealy and soft. I tossed it into the small yard.

Why wouldn't the spirit reconnect with me?

Perhaps I'm trying too hard, I thought. You mustn't want it so badly, Gloria.

You're frightening it, or you're too tense and the signal is bouncing away. I resolved to try again and not to get my hopes too high. I'd had beginner's luck, and maybe there was still some luck left over. I should've been encouraged rather than glum. As I was about to turn back inside, a thought flew through my head. What if the sisters found my discarded apple? Would they be offended and think I'd been ungrateful? The prospect of them finding it in the rather overgrown patch behind the house seemed unlikely, and Lacey would almost certainly not notice the piece of fruit unless she stepped on it, but still I fretted. I doubted I could spot the apple in the moonlight, but when I approached the railing a second time, I saw the most astonishing thing.

A creature lurched along the ground in the direction where I'd thrown the fruit.

"What is this?" I gasped. A closer inspection revealed the object of my attention. An

opossum. And a rather stout one. I had a rear view of it. The animal was the size of a small hassock. It was busy with something on the ground but soon it rotated around, and I caught sight of dark eyes and in its snout was the half-eaten remains of my apple! I'd never seen an opossum in Manhattan, but I'd encountered them in the forests of New Jersey with my family.

This one was thriving, it seemed to me, and I wondered what it consumed besides overripe apples. Knowing that opossums were not finicky eaters, I supposed the streets of Arkham would be well-stocked with possibilities. Convinced that my disposal of the apple would never be discovered by my hosts, I returned to my room, thinking no more of the matter and my chance encounter with the urban marsupial. Relighting the candle, I got back to work.



Sweet-tasting morsel, I crunch its core and swallow the mushy remains. This portends well for a night of foraging. How could I have missed the apple yesterday? Laziness again. Far away from camp always seems more promising. But that is a youngster's false belief. I tilt my nose to the air. The river smells chock-full of treats tonight, though the sailors give me problems. They love to pelt

Sweet-tasting morsel, I crunch its core and swallow.

me with pebbles or lumps of coal as I wander dockside. Their laughter chasing after me. I could venture farther along the banks away from all the hustle-bustle. But the woods come with their own set of dangers. What weapons do I have? Not many compared to my fellow creatures. A hiss, a flash of pointy teeth, and then my arsenal's one peculiar protection—mimicry of death.



I SET THE PENCIL DOWN. My hand trembled in the dark; the candle was out. How long had I been sitting there? The clock on the dresser told me more than an hour had passed. I collected the scattered pages from my lap and the floor, tidying them up, typing the passage you see above.

Was this me, writing in the character of an opossum? But I had no memory of scribbling down the words—and how would I have settled on this language for such a humble creature? As before, the handwriting was not mine. I pressed too hard and dulled the pencil. Then I sharpened it with my penknife. Was I disappointed in the source of my inspiration? Hardly.

Instead, I chose to be delighted. I crossed the species barrier and melded minds with an animal consciousness. Or so I concluded. I am no scientist. And I don't require a scientist's evidence or proof. I'm a writer tapping into occult realms to stimulate my imagination. Eureka!



**A SICKNESS HAUNTS
THE DREAMS
OF ARKHAM'S
CITIZENS. DEEP IN
THE DREAMLANDS,
SOMETHING IS
RISING...**



THE DROWNED CITY, BOOK TWO

The latest thrilling read from
Aconyte Books

The idea of throwing up roadblocks or questioning what had happened during my creative exercise did not occur to me. My greatest challenge was to keep the words flowing. I went down the hallway to the bathroom and washed my face, the mental effort having made me sweat, and I filled a pitcher with water to hydrate myself. As I prepared, I rummaged through my memory to unbox what, if anything, I knew about opossums. They were nocturnal and solitary. Having poor eyesight by day, the animal's vision improved at night. They navigated their world primarily with their nose, mapping out their environment, creating a geography of smells. Nearly everything appeared on their menu—omnivorous scavengers. They're like writers, I thought, using anything on hand to fuel themselves. I felt an immediate kinship with my source.

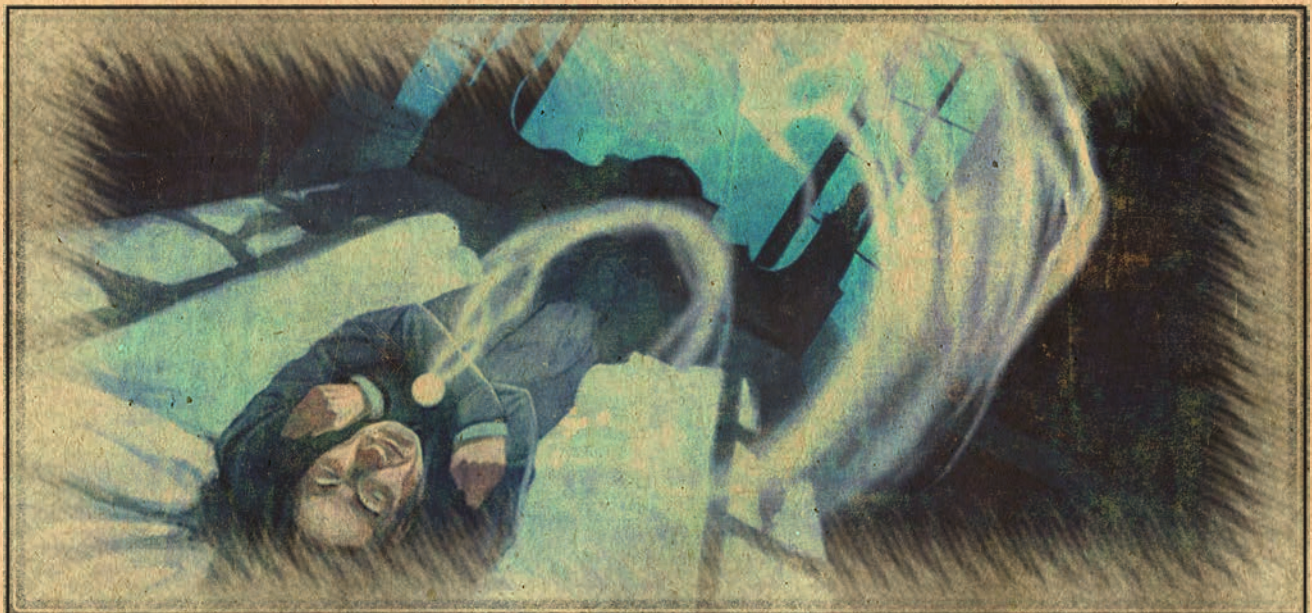
My source.

I did not know its name or if it even had

one. What I did know positively was that the opossum in the yard munching my old apple was the same one I was in contact with. I knew it in my soul. Now was not the time to examine the higher meaning of this connection. What I needed to do was maintain the bridge between us, to observe and to learn, to uncoil the mind cord and see where it might lead. With that goal, I transferred my writing materials from the nightstand to the bed and draped a scarf over the bedside lamp to dim the room. I fluffed my pillows and climbed into bed, pulling the blankets up to my waist. Using my typewriter case as a lap desk, I settled back into a comfortable position.

"Hello, friend," I said. "My name is Gloria, and I mean you no harm. I don't know if you're aware of me, but I only ask you to let me tag along. Take me on your adventure tonight."

I took a last sip of water. My eyes closed.



I grabbed my pencil.

In the darkness I spotted a tunnel. I followed the low, white shape walking ahead of me, its pink, splayed toes poking holes along the muddy banks of a sluggish river, reflecting the star-spattered sky. A smell of campfires burning, of wet earth. The gurgling of water. Shadows ahead.



Bump of a rowboat anchored to the shore. I follow the rope. Climb aboard. Cracker crumbs and an opened can of sardines. I lick the salty oil pooling there. Fishing line and rusted hooks, a strong smell of man, though he isn't here now. He's left little behind. I retreat to the shore again. Voices of other men. Sailors. At my back, I swivel for a look at them but they're only blurs at this distance. Tobacco smoke. Coughing as they laugh. Talking in their scratchy squawks. I'm in no mood for them tonight. I go the opposite way, following the water away from the city lights. The darker it gets, the safer I feel. But never safe. Never truly safe. Foxes, owls, coyotes. What I fear most is men. Hunters with their rifles and dogs. I am no runner like the deer and rabbits. What I hate is the element of surprise. To be searching for a meal then suddenly ambushed, chased, mauled. No, thank you. Best to avoid when possible. But I am a hunter, too. I understand the law of the woods. Survival. Oh! A

The Lady's
Sanctuary

Kingsport
South Shore



frog! You leap too late. I make quick work of you, no suffering...

Firelights. Shadows of men, distorted and twisting. They are so very, very loud. Smell of cooking... of trucks and their oil, gasoline fumes... of cooking, yes, sausages and peppers. There is an opportunity here if I am cautious. Men waste. I do not waste. I finish what they leave. I break away from the river to traverse the woods. Better to approach through the underbrush. I have not eaten sausage in a long time. My mouth waters. Not too far now. Not far at—

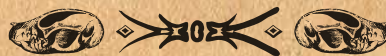
A fox! No! I dart into a thorny tangle but the fox dashes to the other side, anticipating my escape route. I reverse. It finds a gap in the branches! I am trapped—

Drowning. I am drowning. No. The world is. A great flood. Too big for only a river. I am caught up in the waves. They carry me through the city. I ride them through the streets, keeping my head above the water, seeing the city,

then a wave, then under for a bit of drowning, then up again...

I've been here before. I know what this is. A thanatotic vision. How I know this peculiar word I cannot imagine, yet it springs into my head, and it somehow feels correct. The gist is this: when I die, I don't die, you see. I merely appear dead. It is a horrible feeling not to be in control, and I have no control over this. I simply keel over, paralyzed. I'm not that good of an actor. In this state, I grow rigid, my mouth falls open and out comes the tongue, saliva everywhere. I discharge all my fluids. My eyes remain open despite the embarrassment and terror. I'm there

but not there. I have a special gland that smells of death. It's all quite unpleasant, but it does the job in most cases. This fox, like the foxes who've attacked me before him, does not want to eat me when I'm like this. The worst part is the waiting. I can't measure how long it lasts. I can't stop it either. It's a terrible show to watch, wondering if you're about to be devoured by a monstrous predator but being unable to do anything about it. I try not to think how it would feel if something decided to take a bite. What a nightmare! But it's my life. I lay in the bramble, stinking and stiff, an awful mess.



The rush of words finished. I collapsed against the pillows and wiped the sweat from my brow with the corner of my bedsheet. This latest message had come to me not blankly as the others had but with a visual accompaniment. I, too, experienced the city as though it was inundated with a great flood. I bobbed through the Merchant District among bodies face-down in the water, fish swimming past the windows of shops, and a live lobster perched on the hood of a Model T, spinning in the current before it jammed against a lamppost. We shared that vision.

TO BE CONTINUED...



S.A. Sidor