

# Weird Tales



NOVEMBER, 1951

Cover by Frank Kelly Freas

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 PIGEONS FROM HELL—Copyright 1923 by Popular Fiction Publishing Co.  
 WAS IT MURDER?—Copyright 1933 by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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 Vol. 44, No. 1

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. MCGILWRAITH, Editor

*And their bodies would die if they didn't go back to them by morning. . .*



# Fling the Dust Aside

BY SEABURY QUINN

**W**ADE BARLOE looked disgust-  
edly at the fog-swathed beach  
and drummed a devil's tattoo on  
the rail of the hotel veranda. Next to a  
night club at 10:30 in the morning there  
was no place quite so forlorn as a beach re-  
sort in foul weather, he reflected. Why the

cock-eyed devil hadn't he gone up to New  
York with Muriel when that telegram came  
from Aunt Matilda?

If anyone enjoyed poor health it was his  
wife's old aunt who could always be de-  
pendent on to stage a relapse of one of her  
many undefined maladies whenever her

favorite niece went for a holiday. That time they'd gone to Yellowstone . . . the old lady had been dying, judging by her telegram. Muriel had flown back to New York, and when he followed her reluctantly a week later he found the old girl chipper as a cricket on a warm hearth and vowing Muriel had hardly spent an hour with her. Now—he reached for a cigar, bit off its tip with more than necessary violence, and snapped his lighter.

Damn! Out of fluid again. He searched his pockets for a match and struck one. A little puff of sea breeze came from nowhere and extinguished the small flame as neatly as a snuffer puts a candle out. Somehow profanity seemed woefully inadequate just then, so with a sign of vexation he stepped into a dark angle of the hotel porch, hunched his shoulders to form a windshield and struck a second light.

"*Oh!*" The little cry, half-sob, half-terrified exclamation, startled him as an unexpected pin-prick might have done. As the blue of the first flame of the match changed to a clear yellow he saw two terrified eyes staring into his.

They were wide, startled and questioning, greenish-violet in shade, fringed with heavy lashes. Above them slim brows lifted like twin circumflexes in a mixture of surprise and fright. He supposed there was a nose beneath them and a mouth under that, but neither of these features was visible, for the owner of the eyes held a hand before her face as against a blow.

"What happened—what is it?" she gasped as the flame gathered strength. "Who—"

"Sorry!" Wade apologized as he backed away. "I didn't see you in the shadow."

The girl lowered her hand and her lips quivered as if she tried to smile. "I'm sorry, too," she told him. "I must have fallen asleep on the settee, and I was just having a bad dream—about a house afire, I think, and I was in it and couldn't get out . . ." She left the sentence hanging in midair.

HERE was an awkward situation. If he left her abruptly it would seem churlish; it would sound fatuous to repeat he

was sorry he had startled her; just standing there and saying nothing would seem inane, too. "Are you all right now?" he asked, not that he had any misgivings, but merely for the sake of filling in an awkward pause.

"Oh, yes!" she spoke with what seemed more than necessary emphasis. "You see, I'd been trying to get up courage to go and hear the Guru's lecture, but somehow I lacked the nerve, so I came out here . . ." she left another sentence uncompleted.

"Oh, you mean the Mahatma?" Barloe smiled tolerantly. "The Little Bad Man from India?"

"Is he a Mahatma?"

"I wouldn't know. Probably he's just a faker playing hookey from a Coney Island sideshow. Why were you afraid to go in and listen to him?"

"I'm not quite sure. Somehow, this Oriental mysticism frightens me. It seems so utterly . . ."

Wade smiled in the darkness. He was getting used to her truncated sentences and had already found she could make her meaning clear without the need for rounding out her periods. At first he had not recognized her, now he placed her; the little mousy girl whose room was three doors down the corridor from his. Not exactly pretty, but not quite homely. She might have been quite attractive if she'd been willing to let herself go cosmetically. Somebody's rather frumpish secretary, or a sales-girl in a quite unstylish shop, he thought, spending a whole year's hoarded savings on a two-week stay at the shore. To get a man? Her chances could not have been less if she'd attempted to go whale-fishing.

"Well," deliberately he blew the smoke away from her, "if it'll bolster your morale I'll go in with you." Just in time he kept himself from adding, "I've nothing else to do."

THE main parlor of the hotel was bright with women's evening dresses, orchid, salmon, blue and ice-green, to which the men's sports coats of Harris tweed and hound's-tooth checks were an incongruous contrast. The Pandit Vikrim Adjeet Singh was finishing his discourse as they tiptoed in and found seats by the door:

Your Christian Gospel speaks more truly than you know when it declares there is an earthly and a spiritual body. We of the East have known it for thousands of years. We know man has a physical body composed of solids, liquids and gases, and an etheric or astral body which is composed of the four subdivisions of the ether, a body formed of our desires which at the will of the Adept can leave the fleshly form and take the free, unfettered spirit to far places—a body which may live long after the decay of the gross flesh."

"Guru," a lady with a great many diamonds and wrinkles to match spoke from the rear of the hall, "how does one go about the process of—er—astralization, if that's the proper word?"

The smile the Guru bent on her was wise and secretly amused. "Dear lady, that is not for everyone to know. A little learning is a dangerous thing, as your poet has so aptly put it. Especially such learning as that. When the astral form is separated from the flesh the flesh lies dormant, to all appearances lifeless, and unless the astral form returns within a period of twenty-four hours what you call death ensues. Then the spirit wanders bodiless and homeless through the ether till the end of time."

"But, Guru," the dowager persisted, "what is the process—or is it formula?—by which the astral body is released?"

The Pandit's pointed eyebrows went up in acute angles, and his smiling mouth described a capital W. The sharp ends of his little black mustache curved upward like a pair of horns, the sharp black beard on his chin jutted forward. He looked like an amiable but nonetheless mischievous Mephistopheles. "The formula, dear lady, is a simple one. First of all, the Adept has to clear his mind of all thought. That is not so easy as it sounds. Few Easterners and practically no Westerners can do it. However, it is possible, as every Adept knows. When all worldly thoughts have been erased from the mind, so that it is a clear, unmarked page, the Adept slowly recites, 'Oom, oom, oom!' which is the word for the Ineffable. Time after time he repeats the mystic greeting to the Infinite, breathing slowly, so that the word comes from him

with all the vital principle of breath. At last the word ceases to have meaning, and gradually the world and all things mundane fade from his consciousness, then—the small, dark man's small, dark hands spread in an all-embracing gesture—"then the spirit takes its flight and scales the Akashic heights, free from the dross of flesh, free from all the binding ties of base, material existence."

"But is there any value—and practical value—in this power?" the old lady persisted.

The Pandit gave her a hurt look. "What is practicality?" he asked, much as Pilate once asked, "What is truth?" "Suppose you have a loved one. Between you and your beloved there stretch a thousand earthly miles. You wish to know where he is, what he does, how greatly he yearns for you. If you have learned the art of astralizing you can fix your thoughts on him and in a second—in the twinkling of an eye—be with him, though all the waters of the seas and all the mountains of the earth are set between you. You can, yourself invisible, behold him in the flesh, see what he does—"

"Good God, I wouldn't want my wife to have that power!" whispered a stout, gray-haired man to a slim redhead seated cuddlesomely beside him. "If she could see me now—"

"Boy, would you ever have the process servers on your trail!" the little redhead supplied with a giggle.

"Let's get out of this," Wade whispered to his companion. "The man's a driveling fake if ever I saw one."

The girl was gazing straight before her, eyes fixed in an almost hypnotic stare, lips parted, as if she contemplated some vision of beauty and eternal life.

He rose quietly and left her.

"Of all the balderdash I ever heard"—Barloe bent to untie his shoes—"of all the silly twaddle"—he slipped into the trousers of his pajamas—"telling a lot of silly women—" His muttering grew silent, and a grin formed at the corners of his mouth. "You wish to know how your beloved is," he seemed to hear the Pandit's silky voice. "You wish to know what she does, how much she yearns for you . . ." H'm'm.

He lay down on the bed and crossed his ankles, crossed his hands upon his chest as he had seen the hands of deceased friends disposed by the embalmer. For a long moment he lay there relaxed, mentally repeating, "Nothing—nothing—nothing!" till his brain seemed clear of thought as a freshly vacuumed rug is clear of dust. Then slowly, breathing out the syllable so softly that it sounded like a sigh, he pronounced "*Oom—oom—oom!*"

If you repeat a word often enough it loses its associative meaning and becomes just senseless sound. *Oom* hadn't meant much when he first pronounced it, after fifteen minutes' steady repetition it had no more meaning than a bird's chirp.

What kind of double-distilled assininity was this? This nonsense had gone far enough, he'd been the world's prize chump to pay attention to that faker—

**H**E OPENED his eyes, looked about him. How the devil had he gotten this far from the bed? He had no recollection of rising—good Lord! As peacefully as any corpse laid in its casket his body lay upon the bed, hands crossed upon its chest, eyes closed, lips parted. Of all outlandish things! He took a startled backward step and next instant found himself in the corridor. Although he had felt nothing he had passed through the locked door of his room as if it had not been there. How—what? Glancing downward he received another shock. Beneath him was the carpet of the hotel corridor, a rather worn broadloom figured in big off-pink roses on a mauve background. Right through his legs the roses of the carpet's pattern showed, not clearly, but as plainly as if viewed through a light drift of vapor. He held a foot up for inspection. The form was there, but not quite as he recalled it. Instead of being suntanned it was pale, not tallow-white, but lightly shaded, as if delicately technicalored, and somehow it seemed younger. The hardened, slightly bunching sinews of his calves were smooth and supple-seeming, like the pliant muscles of a lad.

A full-length mirror hung upon the wall some fifty feet away, and he stepped toward it briskly, then brought up with a

sharp exclamation. He had no more than thought, "I must get to that looking-glass"—and he was there. A dome light in the ceiling shed a diffused glow, and in the mirror he could see the pattern of the carpet and the wallpaper reflected. But no reflection of himself. Though he stood squarely before the looking-glass it gave back no more image than if he had not been there.

". . . and I told him, 'Well, if *that's* all you want with me you can just go—'" Sharp as tinkling silver came a girl's voice raised in acid narration as two young women stepped from the elevator and made toward him. Stark panic seized him by the throat. Although he had not made a complete inspection he knew that he was unclothed, for the momentary glance he'd cast on his legs showed that the pajama trousers which had been his sole garment had not astralized when he did.

For an instant he considered flight, but before he could propel himself to the safety of his room the girls had reached him. "Yeah, an' what'd he say then?" one of them asked as she stopped before the mirror to fluff out her short blond hair, then passed on unconcernedly. She had looked right at—right through—him as she primped before the looking-glass, and had taken no more notice of him in his complete nudity than she did of the circumambient atmosphere.

So? So-o-o-o. . . .

Long windows looked out from the fifth floor corridor toward the landward side of the hotel. He walked to one of them and put a foot upon the sill. "I'd like to be in New York now," he muttered. The wish was hardly a wish, scarcely more than the shadow of a thought, but in an instant he was out the window, passing through the fog-bound air so swiftly that when he glanced across his shoulder the lights of the hotel were just a blur in the mist.

Far below him, like a luminously-glowing worm, a B. & O. express train hurried toward Jersey City, but it was just a small trail of light glimpsed in the dark a moment before vanishing. The buzzing of propellers sounded like the droning of a monster hornet several hundred feet be-

neath, and a plane that sped toward Idlewild Airport showed for a moment. Then it too was left behind.

The fog was lifting now, and as he rushed northward the setting moon left the night dim beneath the high stars. Ahead of him, so far it seemed incalculably distant, glowed a net of scintillating points of light, the window-spangled bowl that was New York.

**O**RIENT HOUSE, the thirty-storied apartment house that stood fortress-like beside the East River, showed half a hundred dimly lighted windows in the darkness overlooking the black, oily tide, and he dropped toward a casement which he knew looked from Aunt Mattie's bedroom. He was not conscious of an attempt to lose altitude or speed, but naturally and unthinkingly as he would have slackened pace in walking, he slowed from his rushing, wind-swept flight to a slow, easy descent, soft as the downward wafting of a feather shed by a soaring bird. A moment he poised on the stone sill, leant against the heavy plate glass of the steel-framed casement—and was inside the house.

He stood in a big, ugly room with heavy Victorian furniture, hideous with oleographic copies of such *chefs-d'oeuvre* as Landsdeer's Stag at Bay, Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair and Millet's Angelus. A blue-globed night lamp cast sufficient light for him to see the low mound formed by Aunt Mattie's desiccated old body under the bedclothes, the linen nightcap tied under her chin with two strings, and "transformation" which rested on the dressing table. Aunt Mattie slept with her mouth open, a circumstance which revealed the serviceable teeth she used at meals were masterpieces of dental technology, and at the foot of her bed slumbered Hans, the overfed and shamelessly spoiled pug-dog which was the chief companion of her latter years.

Barloe advanced a step and Hans raised heavy eyelids, sniffed fretfully, then rose as agilely as anything so obese could and turned to face him, the short hairs on his neck and shoulders rising in a hackle, and his rheumy old eyes glazed with fear. The growl he gave was more like a whine, and

as he retreated a step the tremors of his back and flank muscles were visible.

"Hans!" Aunt Mattie roused and raised a high-veined old hand to pat the terrified dog. "What's the matter with my baby-boy?"

"Gr-r-r!" muttered Hans, slinking toward his mistress. "Gr-r-r-rf!" In an instant he had burrowed underneath the covers, but the smothered sounds of his growls came through the blankets.

Aunt Mattie pressed a switch and twilight fled from the room as the chandelier blazed suddenly into life. She looked around, looked squarely at Barloe, then patted the small agitated mound where Hans lay shivering. "Silly boy! He's had another bad dream. No more chicken livers for him at bedtime!"

"Aunt Mattie!" Barloe whispered, but the old lady, whose hearing was abnormally keen for her age, continued looking through him, patting her whimpering pet comfortingly. "Aunt Mattie!" He spoke sharply, almost desperately, now. "Where's Muriel, Aunt Mattie?" The old lady showed no sign of having heard him.

He turned away. It didn't seem quite decent to look at the old girl in her dishabille. Muriel must be in her own room, the big room with the twin beds that Aunt Mattie kept for visiting relatives and friends. He faded through the locked door of the old lady's bed chamber, wafted down the hall to the guest room.

The beds were primly made, percale sheets turned down above chenille coverlets, pillows covered with embroidered slips. No one slept in either of them. Plainly no one had slept in them for at least twelve hours. He crossed the room to the big wardrobe, seized its knob and pulled. Nothing happened. He was powerless to move the door. Then he remembered. Leaning forward, he went through the heavy oak of the panels as if they had neither solidity nor substance. The inside of the clothespress was as virginally empty as the beds. H'm. Aunt Mattie must have made a quicker recovery than usual. Muriel was probably on her way back to the shore, and— How could she be? The last train for Stratfordshire left Jersey City at five-thirty,

and should have arrived not later than eight. It had been after that when he had listened to the Pandit's lecture; now it was well after midnight.

He stepped back into the big empty guest room, stood at gaze a moment, then, "I want to be where she is," he murmured.

THE bell-like tinkle of ice cubes against glass sounded, and a woman's delicate, light laugh came to him. He stood upon the threshold of a small, luxurious room. Before him on the polished floor there spread a lustrous Shiraz carpet, the quiet textures of damask and needlepoint complemented the patina of old, rubbed mahogany. The glow from parchment-shaded lamps illuminated the deep sofa with its brocade upholstery, the long coffee table littered with the miscellany of small, frivolous objects—old silver cigarette boxes, cloisonné ash-trays, a bronze lighter fashioned like a Grecian lamp, ultra-modern magazines and a lacquered tray set with bottles, siphons and a crystal bowl of ice cubes.

Behind the coffee table on the lounge a woman sat, a small, slight wisp of womanhood in oyster-white lounging pajamas trimmed with white fur. In one hand she held a glass of amber liquid, and the nails of her slim fingers had been lacquered copper-red from quick to tip, without half-moons. She had kicked her cross-strapped satin sandals off, and as she curled her graceful legs up under her he saw the nails of her small, pink-soled feet were varnished to match those of her hands. She was, perhaps, in her late thirties, perhaps a year or so older, and certainly she was far more charming than she had ever been at any time before, for her features were as delicately cut as those of an intaglio, with a throat-line perfect in its purity. Her short, intensely black hair was shot through with gray which she seemed to display triumphantly because it called the more attention to her small, unlined, and classically beautiful face.

She swirled the fluid in her glass and the ice in it tinkled musically. "To us, my dear," she raised the glass and took a sip.

The man who stood before her shot a stream of seltzer into his tall glass and

raised it toward her. "And to you, Muriel—and Wade."

"Poor Wade," she gave a small contemptuous laugh. "He's such a stuffed shirt. Such a beastly bore. If it were not for these brief intervals I think I couldn't stand him. Why, d'ye know, I don't believe he ever was a boy—he must have cut his teeth on Blackstone and learned the Statute of Frauds instead of nursery-rhymes. I positively can't think why I ever married him!"

"Perhaps his income had something to do with it," the man commented drily.

"Oh—money! Yes, he can make money, and when he's made it can't think what to do with it. When I come into my inheritance from Aunt Mattie—"

"Don't wish the old gal in her grave too fast, kitten. She's been quite useful to us."

The woman gave a throaty little giggle. "I'll say she has. She'd be surprised to know how often she's been gravely ill and needed her dear niece for company and comfort. Last year when Wade dragged me to Yellowstone I thought I'd just die of *ennui* while I waited for your wire. You do the *nicest* jobs of forging, Maitland. I don't know what we'd do without the telegraph—no signatures to verify, no handwriting to compare, just, 'Have had a relapse and need you: Come at once. Aunt Mattie.' It's as simple as that, isn't it?"

"H'm, yes; unless your ever-loving husband finds out."

"Oh, he'd never even suspect. He lives on such a high moral plane that he'd never think his little wife would two-time him. The poor innocent! Come and kiss me, honey-bug. I have to go back to my duty tomorrow or the day after. I daren't let Aunt Mattie be ill *too* long, you know."

Barloe felt a sudden giddiness, as if the world were spinning crazily on a loose axis. Muriel—and Maitland Hodges!

HE'D met Muriel seven years before when she had come to him for advice. She had been barely thirty then and he five years her senior. How it was with her he did not know, but with him it had been love at first sight. As she had said so flip-pantly, he had scarcely had a boyhood. Orphaned at eleven, he had been left to

exhaustion, and despite the heart-sickness that possessed him he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

**A** NAMELESS, formless sense of loss crowded his mind when he awakened. His life was broken into bits, and he could not reach down to pick up the pieces.

Somehow he went through the conventions of the morning, shaved, showered, dressed himself and went down to the dining room. The thought of food disgusted him, but he managed to get down a glass of orange juice and several cups of strong black coffee. Then he went into the library. Something incredible, something wholly out of his experience and beyond the bounds of possibility had happened to him last night. He didn't understand it, but he had to find out what he could about it.

He had no notion where to begin searching, but in the first volume of an encyclopedia he read:

**ASTRAL BODY**—A term used by Theosophists and Eastern mystics. According to their belief the soul has two bodies, one of solid matter, one of attenuated, perhaps gaseous substance, which is sometimes able to carry the spirit away from the physical body during sleep or trance and which may survive the death of the material body.

Under **ADEPT** he found:

An Adept, or Mahatma, who has acquired the power of astralization or separating his astral from his material body can sense the subtle material of the universe and can, by responding to the vibrations of Askashic records, see vividly the particular occurrence in the past to which he is attuned and also hear and to a degree feel, just as did the actors of the event which may be under consideration for review.

He shook his head bewilderedly. Dimly he sensed the import of the information he read, but just what did it really mean? Somewhere he had read that all events were photographed indelibly upon the ether, and remain a record *in perpetuum*, traveling

ever outward in the limitless space of the universe, so that if a man possessed a telescope of great enough power he might look through the illimitable darkness of intersellar distance to see Henry V fight at Agincourt or Charles Martel defeat the Turks at Tours. That was all a lot of fantastic nonsense, of course, and yet . . .

**H**E WENT back to his room and lay down on the bed. "Oom!" he pronounced softly while he strove to make his mind a blank. "Oom—oom—oom!"

This time it did not take so long, and as he looked back at his body laying on the bed he searched his mind for some scene in the past he might view. Rome? Persia? Babylon?

Babylon . . . The air seemed suddenly warmer, almost torrid, and his eyes were dazzled by a deluge of bright sunshine. The golden light shone on an immense granite staircase flanked right and left by terracotta figures of winged sphinxes. Down the stairs there marched a troop of men in scarlet knee-length tunics and high pointed caps, and each one blew a ram's-horn trumpet set with intricate gold inlay. The braying thunder of their music shook the atmosphere. Behind the trumpeters came a throng of women clad in fluttering veil-like draperies attached to them by gold rings in their ears and on their wrists and ankles, and after them a double rank of tall black men with jewels flashing in their purple turbans and ivory staves in their hands. Then came a company of stately, tall women with unloosed black hair falling to their feet and serving them in lieu of garments, then copper-colored girls who played on harps and little drums and dulcimers, and then a regiment of soldiers dressed in silver armor with gleaming silver shields on their left arms and long spears in their right hands.

The pageant was breath-taking in its splendor, erotic as a hashish-smoker's dream, sense-stealing as the vision of an opium-addict. Babylon the Mighty, Babylon the Glorious and Glamorous. A thousand scholars had described it from hearsay, but he had seen it; he was watching it as he might watch a parade down Fifth Avenue.



shift for himself, living unloved and unwelcomed with first one relative, then another. He worked his way through evening high school acting as a bus boy in a lunch room for his meals and a minuscule salary. At college he had waited on the students' table, been agent for a laundry, turned his hand to anything that came along. He lectured on sightseeing buses while he studied law and graduated near the head of his class. Then came a clerkship in Moran & Morgan's office, a junior partnership, finally full membership in the firm. He'd had small chance for amusement while he grew up, no time—or money—for the amusements his classmates indulged in. It had been all work and little play till he was nearly thirty-five—then Muriel.

He had always stood a little in awe of her, for she was a gentlewoman born and reared. Her broad *a* was as natural and as unaffected as her breathing, French was a second mother-tongue to her, for she had lived in Paris till her thirteenth year. Everything she said or did was said or done with the assurance of one to the manner born, she looked like something right out of the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* or *Town & Country*.

Such social graces as he had Wade had acquired by observing others, his *savoir faire* was the result of a long trial-and-error process; even yet he felt embarrassed before the place setting of a fashionable dinner table.

She had not been slow to exploit her advantage, and though she married him and took his name and spent his money her attitude toward him had been more that of a mistress toward a faithful but slightly uncouth servant than of a wife toward her husband.

Barloe had known Maitland Hodges since school days. Hodges was a rich man's son who lived on the gold coast of Fraternity Row, wore good clothes, knew the right people, did the right things. Tall, blond, always immaculately groomed, his love affairs had been as numerous as they were deplorably thorough. Twice he had been named as correspondent in divorce suits. There had been "talk" of his and Muriel's friendship—or perhaps something more—

before she married Barloe. But Wade had shut his ears and mind against the scandal. "She never would have married me if she had cared for him," he told himself.

Blind anger, poisonous and suppurating, flooded through him as he looked at them. A "lady," was she, a gentlewoman *sans reproche*? She wasn't even faithful to her plighted troth, or to the obligation of her food and clothes and shelter. A cur-dog taken in and fed would have shown more loyalty!

He sprang at her furiously, struck the tall whiskey-soda in her hand. The liquid bubbling in the tumbler did not even tremble. His blow had been as powerless, as ineffectual, as an exhaled breath. "Muriel!" he choked, his voice gritty with rage. He heard himself cry her name, but neither she nor Hodges took the slightest notice.

"Damn you, you can't do this to me!" he dashed at Hodges, striking with both fists. He might have been a shadow beating at the solid substance of the man he hated. For something like a minute he continued his assault, then, knowing it was useless, gave up the effort. An astral body, it seemed, was powerless against material things.

The lights of the hotel were dim against the thinning fog as he descended from the upper sky and came to rest upon the window sill outside the fifth floor corridor. He passed through the plate glass pane, dropped to the carpet of the corridor and made his way toward his room. As he paused momentarily before his door, forgetting that he needed no key for admission, he saw, or thought he saw, the fleeting flicker of a pale, slim shape before the door three rooms away from his, one of those half-perceived but not quite seen images we sometimes have the impression of discerning just before we turn our heads to find that there is really nothing there.

He had some trouble getting into his body; it seemed cold, stiff, rigid with the rigor of the newly dead, and when at last he felt he had achieved re-entry he was numbed and chilled to the marrow. There was a feeling of profound lassitude, too, as if he had been exercising to the point of

A little dancing woman flitted by, nude save for bracelets, anklets and armlets, black hair crowned with roses and floating in the breeze of her own movements, the metal bands upon her wrists and arms and ankles chiming sweetly. She cast a wanton, provocative glance at him, her red lips smiled an invitation, laughing black eyes signaled a summons . . . where had he seen such eyes, such bidding, luring lips?

He turned his back on the small, sweetly made strumpet, Muriel . . . Muriel and Maitland Hodges. There was unfinished business to be attended to.

All day he wandered restlessly, like a caged beast counting its bars. A dozen schemes for vengeance he considered and discarded. His legally trained mind rejected commonplace homicide as a means of requital. He had seen too many wronged husbands go to imprisonment or the chair to think he could plead the "unwritten law" successfully. But there *must* be some way . . . some way. . . .

The answer came to him like an inspiration. His astral body was invisible, inaudible, to people in the flesh, but—Aunt Mattie's dog had flinched and cringed from him when he had astralized, had been in terror of him. And Muriel loved the old carriages in Central Park. He chuckled grimly. It was worth a trial.

**T**HE Park was lovely in the twilight. The sky was gray as pewter and the sleepy birds made small noises in the branches. Here and there new stars peeped out and signaled one another as though messaging in code. Southward the light-jeweled towers of Manhattan thrust against the gathering dusk. The cab horse ambled lazily, head hanging down, heavy hooves almost shuffling on the smooth asphalt. Perched on the high seat of the hansom the driver dozed in somnolent content. The gent and lady down there would be his last fares today. They seemed to be that way about each other, ought to be good for a generous tip. Then he'd go down to MacSweeney's for a mug o' Guinness, maybe two, before he put old Gus in the stable and went home.

"Dear, I can't stand it," Muriel burrowed her sleek head into Maitland's tweed

shoulder "When I think of going back to that *gauche*, poker-faced Puritan I feel like banging my head and screaming. If he wouldn't always be so humble, so considerate, so—so dam' good to me . . ."

"Take it easy, kitten," Maitland drew

her closer in the bend of his left elbow. "Your Aunt Matilda can't live much longer, and when you get your money—'Reno, here I come!'"

"But I can't stand him, I tell you. He sickens, nauseates me. If—*oh!*"

Something like a man's form, something palely tinted like a dim reflection of a watercolor in a steamy mirror, had come down to the asphalt of the Park Drive. The cabman didn't see it, nor did Muriel or Maitland, but the cab horse did. He checked his drowsy amble as if the reins had been jerked, reared on his hind legs and gave a high, frightened whinny—reared and plunged and beat the air with iron-shod hooves.

"Gus! What t'ell?" the cabman shouted, dragging at the reins with all his strength. "Gus, you crazy fool—" He plummeted from his high seat as the cab careened crazily, fell head-first to the soft grass at the roadside, and looked wonderingly after racing horse and wildly swaying vehicle. "Wot in bloody hell?" he asked the unresponsive atmosphere.

The woman clung to the man in an oestrus of terror. The pounding hooves, the madly swaying vehicle, the flapping, unheld reins that beat the frightened horse to fresh exertion . . . the helpless, hopeless feeling of confinement behind the latched doors of the hansom . . . ! "Maitland—Maitland, *do* something!"

Almost miraculously the cab escaped annihilation. Bicyclists dodged to left and right, motorists blew horns and swore and swerved aside, a policeman set spurs to his horse and galloped after it. At last, exhausted by his sudden spurt—for he was an old horse and hadn't run a hundred feet in fifteen years—Gus slackened speed, slowed from a frenzied run to a gallop, then to a sedate trot, and finally to a walk. Two minutes later he was standing by the edge of the drive, head down, sides heaving, lather drooling from his mouth.

Disappointment that was almost rage possessed Barloe. He'd counted on the frightened horse's flight to bring disaster, possibly disfigurement or death, to Muriel and Maitland. Here was anticlimax. He could frighten the cab horse again—all

animals seemed terrified by astral shapes—but could he make it run away? It seemed far too exhausted. . . .

"Don't Wade, please don't!" the eager, soft voice sounded just behind him.

He whirled about. "What—?"

She stood there, nude as Praxiteles' statue of Phryne, unclothed and unashamed as Eve before she tasted of the fruit of knowledge. He looked at her, lovely in her nudity. Even her hands and feet were right, narrow, sweetly shaped, with long, tapering fingers and high, arched insteps and slim toes, the kind of hands and feet that Alessandro Botticelli loved to paint. "Why—why," he stammered, "you're—"

"Sarah Lee, the girl you took to hear the Guru lecture."

"But you're pretty—lovely—"

"Of course," she smiled almost tolerantly. "Don't you know your thoughts can shape your astral body? I've always been so colorless, so mousy, and I've always wanted to be pretty, so . . ."

Despite himself he smiled. An uncompleted sentence again, and one that needed no completing to be clear. "What was it you asked me?"

"Don't persecute them any more. They're not worth it. If you *really* want revenge, why don't you leave them to each other?"

"You know about my—trouble?"

She nodded. "Yes, Wade. The other night when we came from the Guru's lecture I lay down on my bed and tried to astralize. At first I couldn't do it, but finally I succeeded, just in time to see you stepping from the window."

"You followed me?"

She nodded again, diffidently, almost guiltily. "Of course. Haven't you been my ideal since the first moment I saw you? You were so occupied with your thoughts you never looked behind you, and I kept almost at your elbow all the way. I saw you go into the old lady's room and frighten her fat dog out of its silly wits. I saw you go to Maitland Hodges' place and find your wife with him, and saw you try to strike them."

"But why. . . ?"

Her luminously greenish-violet eyes were steadfast in the lovely pallor of her face. "Because I love you, Wade Barloe." Before

he realized what she did she leant toward him and put her lips to his.

Their touch was lighter than the weight of a poised butterfly, but he felt it, and as naturally, as instinctively as a bird goes to its nest, he gathered her into his arms.

He could barely feel the pressure of her form on his, there was no warmth in it, and very little substance, hardly more than the light pressure of a breath, and yet . . . she seemed to melt into him, to become an integral part of him, blending her light, etheric substance with his, coalescing, commingling as one cloud does with another.

He had no words to describe the ecstatic sensation he felt. A man born blind who suddenly received his sight would have no words with which to describe his sensations at his first view of a sunrise, nor did Wade Barloe have words for the rapturous ecstasy that flooded him. He knew only that this was what he'd wanted, longed for since the hour of his birth, yet could no more envision than an earthworm could conceive the glory of the midday sun.

GENTLY, reluctantly, he put her from him, and it seemed that he was tearing out his heart as he did so. "Sarah Lee," he gasped brokenly. "Oh, little Sarah Lee, if only I had met you sooner!"

"You have met me, my dear."

"But I'm old enough to be your father—"

"Look at yourself."

"Look at myself? How can I? No mirror will reflect—"

"Look in my eyes, dear heart; and tell me what you see reflected there."

He looked into the greenish-violet irises, and saw the image they gave back; himself as he had been twenty years earlier, a young man, vigorous with youth, with muscles that moved easily and smoothly underneath smooth, pliant skin, eyes not yet dulled from reading legal texts, or cynical from watching fellowmen's frailties.

"You see?" she asked. "Your thoughts have shaped your astral form. You'll never change unless, of course, you wish to."

Her fingertips touched his face lightly as the breeze from a moth's wings. They crept up his cheeks like the searching fingers of a

blind girl. "If we don't go back to our bodies within twenty-four hours they'll die. Shall we leave them where they are—never go back?"

He laughed. The first time he had laughed naturally in years, it seemed to him.

"*Why, if the soul can fling the dust aside,  
And naked on the air of heaven ride,  
Were't not a shame, were't not a  
shame for him*

*In this clay carcass crippled to abide?"* he quoted.

"Who said that?" she asked.

"A man named Omar Khayyám."

"Omar Khayyám?" she repeated. Plainly, the name meant nothing to her.

"Yes, my dear, one of the greatest astronomers, poets and philosophers the world has ever seen. One of the greatest drunkards, too."

Her wide eyes dwelt on him in violet-green abstraction a moment. "I think that he had more sense drunk than most men do when sober," she pronounced.

"You're not the first one to say that."

She nodded thoughtfully. "No, I suppose not." Then, "Shall we leave our bodies—our 'clay carcasses'—where they are? They'll die if we don't go back to them before morning, you know."

The suggestion shocked him. It was almost like an invitation to suicide, yet—She was speaking again:

"We can leave Muriel and Maitland to each other. That's about the worst thing we can do to them . . . and we'll have each other till the end of time . . ."

He felt a sudden glow of enthusiasm. "And we'll have the whole of history to explore together," he broke in joyously. "We'll see Athens under Pericles and Rome under Augustus—the Glory that was Greece, the Grandeur that was Rome—"

She was laughing at him now. "The Glory that was Greece, the Grandeur that was Rome!" she mimicked. "Who cares about them when we have this?"

Once more she laid her mouth to his, and he felt tenderness and love and rapture such as he had never known flow from her body into his.