

Flinch enjoyed the excitement of the situation as he looked on the decanter of hot tea and watched the steaming liquid pour - good on the lady's lap



## Astral

by  
Bernie  
Kamins



## Rhythm

You've heard the old  
phrase about floating on  
air... well, Emory Flinch  
heard it — and then did it

by Bernie Kamins

EMORY FLINCH lay in bed and wondered why he was 30 years old and only making \$18.50 a week. He wondered why Lady Luck had passed him by, why he hadn't a rich uncle who could die and leave him a fortune, why Old Man Hirshberg, his boss, didn't tap him on the shoulder and says, "Flinch, you've been an office boy here for eight years now. You've done good work. I'm promoting you to general manager of the office and raising your pay to \$65.00 a week!" But Old Hirshberg would never do that.

Lying on his back in a furnished room, Emory stared at the white ceiling, lighted by the street-lamp on the busy street outside, and thought of his own childhood.

At the moment, childhood seemed unreal, like the shadows on the ceiling caused by the passing of automobiles in the street. Flinch remembered how he used to lie in bed, imagining he could fly. He saw the ceiling growing more distant and told himself he was falling asleep. As a dreamy youngster, he

often imagined just this—floating up, up, up to the ceiling facing him. The idea was, of course, absurd but so pleasant that Emory allowed his adult mind to be subdued. He succumbed to the wishful thinking, carried himself as stiff as a mummy around the upper regions of his room.

Emory discovered that he didn't have to keep his body tense and rigid while floating. He loosened his muscles and began to enjoy the experience.

He found he could will himself from one corner of the room to the other. For a while, he contented himself with floating at random. Then he eased himself toward the window and looked down upon the street scene. He felt like a being from another planet. An overpowering sense of superiority over the late stragglers filled him with a sort of awful gladness. As he lay in mid-air by the window, he wished he could retain the confident feeling for his waking moments. Because, of course, this was a dream...

Emory awoke to the ticking of the clock on his bureau. Eleven o'clock Sunday morning. That was two hours longer than usual for Emory to sleep and yet somehow he didn't feel refreshed at all. As a matter of fact, he told himself, he felt rather tired. Just as well he overslept, thought Emory, Sunday meant church. It was embarrassing to sit there and not make a small donation when the little box came by.

Making a donation meant no date. The thing was very simple. If he went to church, he'd have to donate and the money he'd donate would just allow him enough money left not to be able to take Virginia to the movies that night.

Remembering Virginia brought Emory to life. He shaved very carefully, took his time about choosing a tie from behind the closet door, and dressed inch by inch, reminding himself of a trapper making preparations for the big catch. As "catch" went through Flinch's mind he punned to himself, "There's always a catch. Virginia will never marry me on \$18.50 per."

The picture of "Big Boy" Miller presented itself as Emory combed his hair for his double's benefit in the mirror. Miller was the biggest "catch" of all. As Emory's rival, he made Emory's wooing of Virginia a simple thing, too, too simple. Miller laughed it off. Well-built, so that Emory not only looked but felt like a pee-wee next to him, "Big Boy" was a muscle-man addict. He worked as a draftsman in the same office as Emory but attended gym classes at the "Y" on Monday nights. On those nights, he left a clear field to Emory and Emory made the most of it.

**E**MORY thought of his strange dream the night before. If only he possessed some such odd power! If he were somehow as free as the wind, an unseen force, he'd show that big bulk of an excuse for a human being!

Sunday was a problem, though. Emory

wondered if Miller would be at Virginia's house. Why, Flinch asked himself, couldn't that fresh-air fiend, Miller, find some sort of exercise for Sunday nights? On this particular Sunday, Emory planned on spending an afternoon with Virginia, dine on whatever Virginia's mother might prepare at no cost to himself, and then take her to the movies.

A slow walk, without breakfast because of the meal he anticipated at Virginia's and telling himself he could save the few cents for ice-cream after the show, took Emory to his destination in an hour.

"Big Boy" was already there. His broken-down flivver betrayed him in front of the grey house. Bitterly, going up the stairs, Flinch wondered how Miller, who made only five dollars more than Emory did every week could afford the luxury. If you owned a car, you merely acted as a chauffeur to your friends, paying the bills, while your friends had a gay time at your expense. That was Emory's chief thought as he pulled at the knob, the bell-ringer.

His rival opened the door for him. Miller was jovial. He saw a funny side to everything.

"See you're walking now, Flinch. Good exercise, walking."

The larger man continued his quipping as he strolled by Emory's side down a corridor, into the parlor.

"Walking'll keep you out in the air, sport," Miller agreed with himself, before Emory could bring himself to say more than a meek "Hello."

Emory sat in a soft chair, his hat in his lap, wondering if Virginia were back from church yet, while his rival seemed to go on and on. He was telling how he had changed his sleeping quarters from inside to outside.

Feeling compelled to offer something in the way of conversation before he asked bluntly, "Where is Virginia?" Emory emitted a surprised "Oh!"

Miller took this as a cue and described in detail to Emory how he slept on the porch, covered up warmly but receiving the fullest the winds could give because of the lack of windows and shutters on the sleeping porch. From that, Miller annoyed Emory with questions about his own habits, impelling Emory to remember that he, Miller, had almost enticed Emory to join the gym at one time.

At this point, Virginia entered and asked Emory to go for a ride with them in Miller's flivver, an invitation which the jolly fellow immediately seconded with a malicious glint in his eye. When Emory declined the pleasure politely, he thought, Miller joked Emory's unwillingness to take a chance in the old car.

Emory would fall apart. He wasn't used to exercise. Virginia laughed.

ALL the way through the park, Emory told himself that Virginia had laughed at him, that Miller had shamed him before her. He thought of what he could do to Miller had he the opportunity. In his mind's eye, he imagined Miller driving his car along with that silly grin on his face and a two-ton truck rushing headlong into the little flivver. And at 60 miles an hour! The thought was pleasant. He even pictured himself driving the attacking machine. That was still pleasanter, only Emory returned to practicality with the realization that he didn't have enough cash to hire a truck, and if he had the money, he had not the license.

How could he get even with that big stiff! Even now, he was probably dancing with the girl somewhere. Maybe Emory should have taken them up on the riding invitation.

But that would have cost Emory something. No telling, he might be stuck for payment of a check when they stopped for a mid-afternoon bite.

In the park, Emory picked up the

afternoon *Clarion*. Someone had left it on a bench.

In the jobs' column, he read only one likely job that would offer him a chance to make more money. It was a waiter's position, \$25 a week and tips. Such a salary seemed a fortune to Emory at the moment and such a salary would mean that he would be financially able to ask Virginia to be Mrs. Flinch.

The thought that Miller might be ahead of him clouded Emory's mind. For some time, perhaps an hour or two, Emory had no idea, he sat on the bench day-dreaming. In the end, he turned down the waiter's job. Too much work. There must be some easier way to make a living.

He proceeded to a drug store, on the corner near his apartment house, purchased a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk, and then started into the tenement.

His landlord nodded to him as Emory passed the old man. Swanson, limping around as usual, was sweeping the front entry. Some spoke of Swanson in whispers. Flinch recalled his neighbor across the hall, Jennie, who had a room almost as dark as his own, swore that Swanson kept his money in a sock, that the cripple was rich and a miser.

Jennie swore by all that was holy that she had seen Swanson counting a table full of coins one day when she went down to borrow a coathanger.

Some people have all the luck, thought the office boy. At 30 years of age, there was no apparent reason for Emory's poverty, he told himself. The world was just for those who were strong, those who helped themselves.

In bed that night, Emory once again watched the luminous shadows on the ceiling. He made an effort to rise to the whiteness far above him. At least, he could take solace in his childhood habit of dreaming his way into a floating, subconscious state, as he did the night before.

He thought of Miller. Miller, a helpless victim, tied hand and foot by a strong rope. And all the while, he, Emory Flinch, was marrying Virginia at the altar. With hate still in his heart, he returned his attention to the ceiling.

**I**T SEEMED hours that Emory lay thus. The sound of horns in the street below grew fainter and fainter. Breezes through the open window caressed his face. When the breezes turned into winds and became colder, Emory still remained in his trance. But he knew he was not asleep. He imagined himself rising, floating to the ceiling. Aware of a peculiar, indescribable rhythm in his ears, Flinch felt himself as light as a feather. Without looking around, or turning his head—he knew something else—he was fully awake.

Or was he?

With a constant rhythm running through his whole being, a rhythm that he knew must always go on and on like a never-ending river, Emory felt himself free and powerful. Close to the ceiling now, so that he could touch it by a simple lifting of a foot, Emory wanted to prove to himself that he was awake. Nearing the window, he kicked the door-like frame shut with an effort. Then, he quickly lowered his thoughts to the bed. A slight turn of the head showed him that a body was lying beneath him, in his bed—his body!

Morning arrived and with it a headache for Emory. The room was stuffy. No air. Suddenly, he remembered his hallucination of the evening before and looked towards the window.

It was closed!

In the subway train, on the way to work, Emory said it over and over again to himself. The window was closed. He always left it open and today it was closed. Was his dream of floating not a dream? Of course, he explained without believing the explanation, the window could have been closed by the

landlord the day before; but then, Emory remembered the breezes of the night air.

Once at the office, Flinch sorted the mail, wondering who in the world would want to keep up a correspondence with Ellen Dodson, the office secretary. She received a green envelope almost without fail every Monday morning. He was curious about those green letters and he was more than a little jealous.

No one ever wrote to Emory Flinch.

After reading her letter, Dodson filled her vase with flowers. A terrible waste of money, thought Emory. He could live the whole day on the money she spent for silly, inanimate things! Then, very bossily, she assigned Emory his menial duties for the day, as would a teacher of a ten-year-old child. Every morning, Emory suffered this humiliation, never dreaming that Miss Dodson wondered to herself that he did, at his age.

But \$18.50 a week is \$18.50 a week, better than nothing.

As he ruled spaces and checked boxes on the sheet in accordance with Miss Dodson's own records in front of him, Emory thought about that \$18.50. If last night's event was not a part of his imagination, he might be able to do something definite about that measly \$18.50, and about Virginia, and about Miller.

And when a salesman entered the office selling ties, Miss Dodson informed the man that Emory hadn't any money to buy anything anyway. So Emory was humiliated again, and he added Dodson to his list. If only he had some power, any sort of power, he would get even with all of them!

**W**HY, Dodson's petty cash, the money she used for stamps, would be enough spending money for him for a week. With greedy eyes, he watched her separate the nickels from the dimes in the green box. She kept it in her upper left-hand drawer. Emory

had made a mental note of the fact years ago, but it had done him no good.

At five o'clock, Flinch was out of the office, making headway for the laundry before it closed. He spent forty-two cents for his weekly supply of shirts, thinking how poor he was that he had to skip dinner for his laundry. He passed Swanson in the hall without a word, threw off his coat and vest when he reached his own room, and took a chair by the window with a book, where he sat until it grew late.

Shortly after dark, nervous and a little tired, Emory switched on the light in the bathroom and deliberately swung the window-door wide. Then, he retired for the night.

For a time, he merely gazed at the half-lighted whiteness of the ceiling. Then the dreamy state came over Emory. Perhaps in childhood, this was part of his imagination. But now, he was certain, he had touched on the realm of the spiritual. In his whole life, Emory had not in the least been interested in the occult; yet he knew that he was delving in it at this moment. As soon as the rhythmic pounding in his ears commenced, he realized he was ascending aloft again. Like his performance of the evening before, his actions this flight were somnambulistic in nature.

Floating in the air, he turned his head to see his body on the bed below. He willed himself to the window and again kicked it shut. Gracefully, managing to duck his head beneath the transom, he guided himself like a fish in water to the bathroom, where he reached down and switched off the light.

He bumped his head as he re-entered his bedroom, forgetting to avoid the transom. Then, he let himself go...

The bump on Emory's forehead, the closed window, the bathroom light—all served to convince Flinch that he was bordering on a great discovery. For the time being, he intended to use it for his own purposes. These were Emory's thoughts as he hurriedly dressed the following morning. It

was Tuesday, bank day at the office.

It was the day that Emory was supposed to be sharp. This was the day that Emory kowtowed to stockholders all morning and afternoon. Meetings, phone calls, letters, errands for Miss Dodson—everything combined to make the next twelve hours the most bewildering of Flinch's entire career as an office boy.

Emory's temples pounded. He found himself clumsy. He couldn't think straight. Finally, he settled down at the end of a busy afternoon with a job of licking stamps and envelopes. The job was mechanical and Flinch took the time to think over the events of the past two nights. Should he visit the doctor on the first floor of the building, he asked himself? What if the medical man discovered that he was mentally unwell? Then, again, supposing he had unwittingly stumbled on a scientific novelty? It seemed to him that he had read somewhere of split personalities.

**F**LINCH was anxious to leave the office, to get away from people. At one and the same time, he dreaded and excitedly looked forward to the moment when he could once more project himself from his body.

He was very, very weary in the subway. He caught himself nodding twice. Reaching his quarters, he put dinner out of his mind completely, sipped a half-glassful of wine, and read a magazine in bed until darkness fell.

There could be no mistake about it. Emory floated upwards from his body. The only characteristic feeling was a rhythmic movement of his whole frame caused by he knew not what in the air. Keeping the motion intact, he practiced sitting up, moving over on his stomach very slowly, raising and lowering his feet. Emory's sixth sense warned him against interrupting the rhythm that beat as a reflection in his ears. He floated around the ceiling, first on one side, then on another.

Always, he kept the balance by keeping the rhythm. Now and then, he glanced towards his body 15 feet below.

At noon, Wednesday, Emory phoned Virginia at her office and asked her to accompany him to the movies that evening. But "Big Boy" Miller had already been before him. Virginia very courteously refused the date, but invited him over the following Sunday.

A devilish plot began to form in Emory's brain. Once and for all, he would settle this business of Miller's intrusion. First, however, he would master his new power.

That night was one of experiment for Emory. He floated through the air, squirming through his own transom into the hallway and down the stairs and then out into the night, also through the downstairs-door's transom.

Transoms seemed to be the perfect entrances and exits for him. Keeping his rhythmic movement intact, not unlike a bird making infinitesimal flutterings of its wings in regular motion, Emory hovered by a firebox, pulled the lever and watched the engines fly by two minutes later. He pulled the blue hat of a policeman outside the drugstore way down over the officer's eyes. He yanked a store-keeper's ear.

In a nearby restaurant, Emory, sight unseen, grabbed a fork and pricked the bare back of a lady in an evening gown. She screamed. Flinch enjoyed the excitement of the running proprietor, the frightened customers and the lady's frantic escort who tried to stem the trickle of blood with his napkin. To add a finishing touch, Emory leaned down from his floating position, and tipped a decanter of hot tea on the lady's lap.

He was exhausted by the time he reached his body and was glad to be in the softness of the bed again.

Emory Flinch awoke at dawn and couldn't fall asleep again. Although more tired than he had ever been, and stiff in his muscle-

joints, he was jubilant, nervously excited. In the subway train, he offered his seat to an old lady. He bought himself a breakfast for the first time in months. He bought the *Clarion* and perused the advertisements, examining a page of men's suits that were on sale.

AT THE office, he startled Miss Dobson with a cheerful "Good morning." He tore Wednesday off the office calendar before Dodson could remind him to do so. When he insisted upon standing on a chair and prying open the transom over the door for the sanitary safety of Miss Dodson, that personage felt she knew the answer—Emory must be in love. She told him as much. Emory merely laughed, coyly.

He was in love all right, he told himself, but not without some hope. The odds were on his side now. He was sure of it. Now that he had the power, he experienced the feeling of a successful man for the first time in his life. Even Old Hirschberg noticed the change and wondered at it. He told Emory as much when the two of them were alone at five o'clock. Flinch accompanied his boss to the elevator, purposely forgetting to close the transom over the office door.

Riding in the air in a subway train was a novel experience. It was Thursday evening and Flinch was headed back to the office again. He floated up the stairs. The elevator boy was sleeping in the cellar in his own furnished apartment. No sense waking him up, thought Emory, when floating was so easy.

After passing through the transom, Emory had the impulse to laugh. It was all so easy. His new technique of getting places was so simple and delightful. He had only to keep the rhythm of the pounding in his eardrums. By this time, he was able to make his frame flexible enough for almost anything.

He pulled the desk-drawer open in Dodson's corner, switched the lights on and rummaged inside for the green letters, giving

vent to a longtime curiosity. They were love letters from an American soldier. Stationed at a far-off corner of the Globe, he spoke of the burning affection he had for his darling "Honey." Emory memorized one or two phrases like "each day is a million years until I see you." His next act was to bring out the petty cash.

It was all so easy.

Friday was revenge day for the office boy. Emory sang "each day is a million years" under his breath. Dodson heard it and blushed, embarrassed to tears. She suspected Flinch immediately when she discovered the money gone from her petty cash. Especially in view of his knowledge of her intimate letters. But she was afraid to do anything about her suspicions, Emory could see that and he enjoyed it. She feared lest he expose her romantic leanings and replenished the kitty with her own money to the extent of some \$11.00.

He was particularly nice to everybody, even to Miller, that day. That individual's eyes stared in amazement when Emory paid the luncheon check at noon. The incident was without comparison in eight years.

**N**O LONGER afraid to spend money, Flinch was a changed man. He knew he could easily get more. He not only knew, he proceeded to prove to himself that he knew. His floating took him from one store to another, where he could fit into the transoms that were open. Some cash registers rang up \$00.00 but contained a few dollars. Others had nothing. These he avenged himself upon by breaking nearby showcases and counters and show-windows. In one instance, he started a blaze to make up for an empty till. He stood outside the burning storefront and watched the firemen, disturbed from their rest by the call, fight the conflagration. It was a good show, lasting an hour. Emory promised himself he'd repeat the event another time. When he

returned from his astral travels, he was a tired man.

In the morning, Saturday, he remained to count his previous evening's loot. \$400.00! Almost six months' salary at the office! Old Hirshberg reduced Emory's cockiness an hour later by chastising him for being late. He informed the bookkeeper in the presence of all that Flinch's pay would be partially "docked this week."

Without a word, Emory walked out of the office and went to a movie.

He was nice to Swanson. He spent five minutes chatting with the old man, who expressed his hopes of having an operation on his leg soon that would make him as good as any man. Emory wished the landlord good luck and went upstairs to bed and his sinister work.

For a full two hours, Emory tossed, finding it difficult to get himself into the proper state of mind for the task of projection. He assumed he was too anxious because of the assignment he had set for himself. Finally, the ceiling seemed to retreat farther and farther into the distance. Emory floated upwards, through his own transom and downstairs.

Swanson was talking to his wife in the parlor. On the reading table was a pile of wrinkled bills, which probably had been thumbed and fingered over a thousand times that year, so Emory thought to himself. The swagger was Swanson's savings and was the subject of his cackling at that moment.

Hovering over him, Emory stooped for a minute to hear him mutter something about the operation that was coming up and the money that had taken so long to save as payment. Then, the man who was once a meek office assistant scooped the greenbacks up and held them tightly while Swanson began to look high and low for the vanishing money. Emory relished the old man's tears and moans, joined with those of his wife, as much as he had the fire the night before.

Sunday was to be the biggest day of Flinch's life. Accordingly, he dressed up in his best suit of clothes. He rode in a taxi to a candy store, where he purchased an expensive present for his lady love. He told the taxi-driver to wait in front of the grey house while he stepped lively up the stairs.

Miller drove up in his newly-polished flivver as Emory came down the steps again, with Virginia on his arm. He blithely announced to "Big Boy" that he was taking her "out to lunch" and also "out to dinner." He kept to the letter of this announcement. After lunch, Virginia enjoyed a ride in the swan boat at the park. She herself was surprised at Emory's loosening of the purse-strings but wisely surmised that he had something up his sleeve. She brought the subject around to it after the movies, while a taxi headed for her house.

**I**T WAS then that Emory asked her to marry him. He was about to engage in a brand new business. He expected to do well. Tonight was a sample of the good times that they would have together.

Virginia was thoughtful. She took a long time to shape her reply. But Emory waited with the air of a conqueror. Her words made the fire in his heart blaze with hate.

Virginia could not make up her mind between "Big Boy" or Emory, now the new man.

There was only one thing to do. This was the last straw.

It was close to midnight when Emory entered the tenement. A policeman was talking to Swanson on the front steps. Everyone in the neighborhood had heard of Swanson's misfortune. No one sympathized. That was life for you, Flinch remarked to himself, and laughed when he found himself alone in his room.

He sipped the last drop of wine from the bottle, undressed and threw himself into

bed. A few minutes later, he sailed through the large transom of the front door. Officer Flynn was still there.

Neither Flynn nor Swanson batted an eyelash as Emory left them. Swanson had no doubt asked the police force for protection, the floater said to himself. That was like locking the barn after the horse was stolen.

It took Flinch 45 minutes to reach Miller's house. Maintaining his astral rhythm, Emory elevated himself to the upper porch, where he knew "Big Boy" slept. The bed was empty.

Angrily, he lowered himself again and set off for Virginia's house. The clock in the city tower struck two o'clock in the morning. The flivver was parked in front of the grey house, which rose up gloomily in the night. But the lights in the parlor were lit. Emory peered into the window like a wild creature. He saw Virginia and his rival talking seriously across a table. A third party was in the room. Miller arose and walked towards the window, then he returned and Emory saw Virginia's father stand and offer his outstretched hand to the young man.

The beam of happiness in both the faces of "Big Boy" and Virginia betrayed the event—Emory realized that his rival had won out.

While Miller drove his car home, Emory floated above it. It sapped a great deal of energy to speed his motion up, but Emory had only one single thought in his mind.

"Big Boy" garaged his flivver. Emory floated to the outside porch where "Big Boy" now entered and began to throw his clothes, humming softly as he did so. The unseen figure waited for several minutes after the large, muscular bulk of a man slid beneath his covers. Then, he tugged at Miller's pillow with both hands. Sleepily, Miller groped out for it in the darkness.

**W**ITH a downward sweep, Emory cast the pillow over Miller's face. At once,



he grasped under the pillow until his two hands seized his hated rival by the throat. Then Emory squeezed, while the body of Miller writhed with pain. Muffled, gurgling sounds crept pantingly from under the pillow.

The arms which on an ordinary occasion could have overcome four times the strength of Emory Flinch now waved helplessly through the air, fists punching out at nothing.

“Big Boy” put up a terrific fight against the unseen murderer and finally surrendered to his fate. Vengeance had bestowed strength on Emory’s arms and the supernatural had warded off any possible injury to Flinch.

It was too late when a frantic father came rushing in to answer the awful, muffled screams for help. The murderer stood—or floated—by while all attempts to revive Miller failed. Emory remained until the doctor arrived to pronounce his rival dead.

By this time, the rain was drizzling down. Emory, wishing he were already home, floated a little faster. He arrived at the door of the apartment house at 3:15. Old Swanson, remembering the robbery, had nailed the transom over the outer door. He was taking no chances.

Tired, the incessant beating in his ears becoming weaker, Emory floated slowly around the house. All the lower windows had been closed tightly by the cautious landlord. The rain began to come down in torrents now. Emory found it difficult to elevate himself up high to his own window. He found each inch

an ordeal, until at length he could look through the panes. His own body lay in bed. If only he could get in before the pounding in his ears, now irregular, stopped.

With his slowly draining strength, Emory pushed as hard as he could against the window panes. There was a shattering of glass as he broke through— The rhythmic drone became weaker now. Still, there was a wire screen to combat. As the dawn began to break on the most miserable of all mornings for Emory, he pushed with all his might. But Old Swanson always nailed his screens in.

The half human, half astral being scratched at the checkered veil that remained the only obstacle between life and something the Wise men had never written about. The drone was hardly more than a murmur now. The screen was too tough. He felt himself suddenly heavier than before, then he was falling, falling . . .

The *Clarion* carried a story the following afternoon:

#### FRESH-AIR ENTHUSIAST DIES AS RESULT OF SMOTHERING

Guinn Miller, 29-year-old athlete, died early this morning as the result of the smothering effect of a pillow, according to the statement of Doctor..... A strange coincidence was the death of one Emory Flinch by heart failure, the coroner stated. He was employed by the same firm as Miller and died in his sleep the same morning.