Apuleius inserts the unhappy romance of ‘Charite and Tlepolemus’ before and after the doubly inserted, superficially happier romance of ‘Cupid and Psyche.’ The latter half of the tale provides a Latin unromantic romance—sometimes tragic, sometimes comic (cf. 10.2)—not, in any case, an ‘ideal’ Greek romance. All three principals meet untimely deaths: one murder, one vengeful and dire mutilation, and two suicides. This paper examines the mythical and literary (but not visual-art) antecedents of the spectral return of the anxious, dead spouse, Tlepolemus. It considers Apuleius’ Greek and Latin predecessors who feature marriages spoiled early and consequent spectral spousal visits. It analyzes the purposes of those earlier ‘ghosts’ return. It compares this apparition to Apuleius’ other spousal phantoms. Finally, the tragic, comic, and unexpected turns that this couple’s post-marital story takes illuminates how Apuleius values the experience of mundane marriage. Thus, this paper will argue that the newly invented segment of the tale functions as yet another condemnation of earthly attachments, although one still sympathetic (like ‘Cupid and Psyche’) to the possibility of briefly enjoyed amor coniugalis.

The unexpected arrival home of living husbands provides a comic motif in many bawdy ‘young wives’ tales. In ancient literatures, the tale-type develops in the Roman adultery mime and in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses. Cuckolded husbands unexpectedly return in several

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1 Penwill (1998) 175 ably argues that the Olympian happy ending constitutes another Isiac parody of pagan divinities’ gratification of sexual appetites—serviles voluptates—not a Platonic or other allegory. Psyche remains “nothing more than the sex-object” that she originally was (181 n.67).

2 I think that we now realize that this genus of ‘ideal romance’ perhaps contains no fully conforming examples or species, but the paradigm constructed by Rohde, Reardon, and others from themes, incidents, and other bits found in the ‘Big 5’ still remains a useful and recognizable type.

‘inserted’ Apuleian tales: the wife who ‘sells’ the pauper’s clay storage-jar, the wife who hides her lover in the fuller’s sulfurous cage, and her friend the wife who hides Philesitherus under the miller’s wooden tub. These sexual escapades, one successful and two discovered, produce entrapment and claustrophobic climaxes for simple novellae (9.5, 23, 24). Barbarus’ unexpected return, while his wife Arete and Philesitherus are adulterously occupied (9.20), provides another, differently unsuccessful tale of female sexual infidelity.

Apuleius’ ‘Charite complex,’ however, repeatedly revises, inverts (male/ female, violator/ victim), and perverts the jolly (lepida, 9.4) themes of marital infidelity as found in Milesian (1.1, 4.32) and Petronian instances. This story’s dead and repeatedly departed husband and its mythic antecedents (especially Protesilaus and Laodameia) provide complicated tragicomedy. Charite’s many ‘suitors’ emphasize the destructive power of her beauty and their lust and greed. Her tale realizes the Greek Romances’ often expressed, although never therein consummated, tragic preference for death before dishonor. Xenophon’s Anthia and Heliodorus’ Charicleia, for instance, exhibit similar suicidal devotion but avoid the need to pursue the sincere intention.

The unmarried virgo Charite is abducted (extracta, raptum uxoris) from her house during the marital rites. The robbers’ rape-abduction (4.26) interrupts a phase of the legal wedding to her cousin, escorting to the husband’s house (domum deductio: see Papaioannou [1998]). The noble couple’s marriage faces further threats: the desirable (concupiscendam) bride reasonably fears sexual violation (cf. Lateiner [1997/2000] 410-16). The bandits’ reassurance, that they want only ransom, fails to persuade their booty (praeda), the trafficked female (4.23-4, mancipium effecta). Her napping dream, in which a bandit 7 murders her groom with a missile, drives her to hopes of sui-