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## MY ASTRAL BODY

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"THERE'S no doubt at all about it," said the Rajah, relighting his cigar. "It's perfectly easy if you know how to do it. The scepticism of the west is nothing less than disgusting."

The Rajah had come to Oxford to complete his education and endue himself with the culture of Europe; and he sat in my rooms, in a frock-coat of perfect cut (he always wore a frock-coat), smoking one of my weeds and drinking a whiskey-and-soda. The Rajah took to European culture with avidity, and I have very little doubt that he learned many new things with which it might or might not be expedient to acquaint his fellow-countrymen and subjects when he returned to India. But all the intellectual interests of Oxford were not strong enough to wean him from his love of the ancient lore of his own country, and he was always ready to expound the hidden wisdom of the East to any inquiring spirit. As soon as I found this out, I cultivated his acquaintance sedulously; for, in common with all intelligent men of the present day, I took a keen interest in that strange learning which seemed to give its possessors such extraordinary powers.

"Can you do it?" I asked.

"I should hope so," said the Rajah contemptuously. "If I couldn't I'd turn Mohamedan."

"I wish you'd teach me."

The Rajah took a deep puff of smoke. "You're sure you could manage it?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, of course like anything else, an astral body must be treated with tact, or it gets out of hand."

"Does it?"

"Why, yes; you must be firm and yet kind. Don't let it take liberties, or you don't know where it will land you. I rather doubt if I ought to show you."

I implored him to do so. I was young, rash, self-confident, and I thought I could manage an astral body as easily as I did the Dean.

"Don't blame me if you find it too much for you, that's all," said the Rajah. "And of course you must promise not to tell anyone."

"Oh, must I?"

"Yes, you must; because it's quite irregular for me to show you like this. You ought, by rights, you know, to go to Thibet for seven years."

"That would be rather a bore."

"Beastly," said the Rajah; "but of course they insist on it, because they get the fees."

He swore me to secrecy by all manner of oaths, and lastly on my word as a gentleman; and then he showed me. I practiced all that evening, and was tolerably proficient by the time the Rajah knocked out his last pipe and went off to bed. I must not tell how it is done, as I promised not to; besides, if any one reads this narrative through, he will never want to know.

At first it was very convenient. I always used to project it to chapel instead of going myself. It did capitally there because it had only to behave itself and hold its tongue. At lectures it was a failure; it was such an inattentive beggar that its notes were worth nothing. And it was no sort of use in the Torpid; I was told that I should be turned out if I went on "sugaring" like that—there's no pluck or endurance in these Orientals. On the whole, however, I was very well satisfied with it, and came to rely upon it more and more for all the unpleasant duties of life.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked the Rajah one day in Quad.

"My dear fellow, it's splendid." I answered. "It's up in town, being measured for trousers, now. You can't think how much trouble it saves."

The Rajah smiled and shook his head.

"Be moderate," he said. "You mustn't use it too much, or it'll presume on it."

"Will it? What will it do?"

"Why, if it's always being projected, it's as likely as not it'll learn the trick of it, and take to projecting itself. Then you'll be left in the lurch."

"What shall I do then?"

"I don't see what you can do," said the Rajah, scratching his head. "Of course, I should merely report it at headquarters; but you can't because you've no business with it all."

"Well, I shan't grudge it a holiday now and then," I said magnanimously.

The Rajah was right. It did begin to take French leave. Several times when I wanted it I found it had, without a word of apology, projected itself off to Ifley or somewhere, and was not available. I spoke very severely to it. It said nothing, but listened with an unpleasant sort of smile. "We all have our duties," I remarked, "and yours is to be here"—and I pointed to my chest—"when you are wanted. You're as bad as a scout."

"I ought to have a little relaxation," it answered sulkily.

"I never heard of such a thing in connection with you. Isn't it enough for to meditate in four dimensions when you're not at work? That would satisfy most people."

"It's all very well in Thibet," it grumbled; "but a fellow doesn't come to Oxford to do that."

"One would think you had nothing to do with me. You seem to forget that you are simply a projection of mine."

We had some high words and parted—I mean, united—in very bad temper with one another. It was in the middle of a most impertinent and positively threatening speech, when I terminated the interview by resuming it. It was very unreasonable and irritating, and I made up my mind to ask

the Rajah to speak of it the next morning. I had an engagement that evening, or I would have done it then.

How I wish I had.

It then. How I wish I had!

At half-past nine I went to an "At Home" at Professor Drayton's. As a rule, "At Homes" are dull; but I had a reason for going to this one. The Professor had a very pretty daughter, and I was vain enough to think that my presence was welcome to her. In fact, we were great friends, and I had not been at the house a quarter of an hour before I had forgotten all my worries with my unruly Astral Body, and was sitting by Bessie in the small drawing-room, enjoying myself immensely. Suddenly—mysteriously—I felt something like a violent push. Bessie vanished; the drawing-room vanished; and I found myself in the High, standing in dripping rain, without hat or coat. I stood still in bewilderment; What had happened? A moment later the Proctor was upon me. I gave my name and college in a mechanic way, and he passed on, leaving me still standing in the rain. What happened? Then it flashed across my mind. I understood its threats. It had projected me!

I woke up next morning determined to have it out with it. I found, as I expected, that it had waited till I was asleep; then it slunk in and united without my knowing it. I went and paid my fine, and then, not waiting to breakfast, I proceeded to project it. It wouldn't move! I tried again and again. I had no more power over it than a child. I knew it was there; but I could not move it an inch. In wrath, I jumped up, seized my cap, and started for the Rajah's rooms. The rogue saw what I was up to. I give you my word I had not reached the door when it projected me most viciously, and I landed down in the Parks.

I was not to be beaten. I came back to college at a run, and made straight for the Rajah's rooms. It was on the lookout for me. As I ran by my oak, which I had to pass, it rushed on me, united, and projected me back again to Magdalen Bridge. This happened three times. Then I sat down in the Parks, just where I dropped, and acknowledged to myself that I was in a pretty fix.

I had a fearful week of it. Of course, wherever I was, it could unite at once by just thinking of me; and directly it had united, it used, I believe out of pure malice, to project me somewhere where I did not want to go. It was lucky for me that it was new to the business; its powers were as yet very undeveloped, and, consequently, it did not carry very far. If it could, I am sure it would have sent me to the Antipodes; but as it was, I never went further than the University boat-house—a pretty tidy step on a bad morning. Still, it was improving; and I felt that I must act at once if I did not want to be a permanent wanderer on the face of the earth.