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Vol. I

JANUARY, 1940

No. 4

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—The Editors.

—
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The February Issue Will Be On Sale January 3

An Astral Gentleman

By ROBERT WILBUR LULL and LILLIAN M. AINSWORTH

He lived two men's lives, one after the other,
and returned to court his wife all over again

I

"POOR James had a most uncomfortable habit the last years he lived of taking what he called astral journeys."

"How singular!"

"Yes, I often told him that some day he'd come back and not be able to get in—to his body, I mean. But he'd never listen; was so sure of himself, like all men. Poor James!"

My wife was softly rocking to and fro as she sat by a window in the comfortable living room of a friendly neighbor's home. As she rocked, she gazed sadly at a heap of ashes out yonder—all that remained of our home—hers and mine.

On a divan in a corner of the room sat myself, an uncanny guest, invisible to my wife and the neighbor to whom she was talking.

My wife had never been in sympathy with my occult investigations. The unfortunate occurrence that had deprived me of my physical body, when I had confidently expected to occupy it for many years to come, left her in the position of being able to have the last word unchallenged, audibly at least. No doubt, if she had been aware of my presence, she would have exulted, "I told you so!"

Being absent at the time of the incident referred to, I had not been able until now to learn the full particulars of it. I had been a deep student of occult science for years, and had startled and interested my scientific friends on many occasions by the nature of the phenomena I had been able to produce. I was a natural psychic, and, being deeply interested in these matters, had developed my powers to a remarkable extent. As

stated by my wife, I had become able to leave the body at will and journey to any place that I wished to go on the earth.

A short time previous to the opening of this tale I had been absent on a more extended trip than usual, when suddenly I felt the tiny cord, which connects the astral with the physical body, snap; and, realizing what it portended, started off swifter than the wings of light for home.

Too late! When I arrived our house was a mass of flames. My distracted wife stood by, wringing her hands, and my neighbors, whose attempts to remove my body from the burning house had proved so futile, now witnessed the scene in despair.

I was in a badly disturbed state of mind myself. I fully realized that without a physical body, I should no longer be able to manifest myself on the earth plane, and I was not yet prepared to enter higher spheres to remain. Indeed, I had no desire to.

As I saw my home crumble to ashes, and witnessed my neighbors, later, in their attempts to gather the charred fragments of bone that had so shortly before constituted my physical frame, I had ample opportunity to realize what a peculiar and unpleasant predicament I was in.

I was in the strange and inconsistent position of being a live dead man. My astral body, which had gone out for a little tour of investigation, was from now on to be a wayfarer in invisible realms, unless I could find some means of accomplishing a physical embodiment.

Now, a few days later, I was an unbidden and unobtrusive visitor in the home of the neighbor who had so kindly invited my wife to share her hospitality after the fire.

"Tell me just how it happened," this good lady was saying for the fifth time.

"Well, you see, James had gone to his attic room, where he was accustomed to making these experiments. It was late in the afternoon. The house was still as death. I thought as long as he was traveling around, the Lord knew where, in his astral body, I would just go over for a little call on Mrs. Lane. All at once my attention was arrested by the sight of smoke pouring out the upper windows of our house. We were nearly crazed with fright. I was, at least.

"Fire must have caught from the chimney and got pretty good headway before we saw it, for it was too late to save anything when we got help and reached the house. I screamed to the men that James was asleep upstairs—I was sensitive about his queer experiments—and they rushed in to try to save him, but it was no use.

"What I'd like to know," added my wife with a sigh, "is whether James sensed danger and got back before the body burned, or whether he is wandering around bodiless, wishing he had taken my advice."

The latter was so true that I jumped up to try to admit the fact. But I fell back disheartened. What was the use? I had tried repeatedly to make my wife understand I was present but my efforts were perfectly futile. She was utterly lacking in supersensitiveness that enables one to catch vibrations from the astral plane. I had always realized it. Now I understood it with keen and peculiar sorrow.

As a sense of the utter helplessness of my position grew upon me, a resolution, born of despair, arose within me. I would find some means of once more expressing myself on the physical plane, if it took years of study and effort to accomplish it.

Today I can look back with a fair degree of calmness upon the experiences I encountered before my purpose was finally achieved.

THE plan which I conceived and at last accomplished, was to hover near persons who were taking final leave of the physical and attempt to enter and make use of the shell they were quitting. As one can readily see, this was highly impractical, and after many futile attempts I began to believe it impossible, for in almost every case when the body is finally vacated, it is because it is utterly incapacitated, either by disease or accident, for further use.

Naturally, I was somewhat particular what sort of a body I found expression in, although, of course, one could not be *too* critical in a case of this sort. I finally got to the pass where I was willing to take up with almost anything. I didn't relish the idea of reincarnating in female form, for I was masculine to the core. Then, too, I still held a lingering hope that I might be reunited to my wife if I accomplished my purpose.

Hospitals became my favorite resorts. Especially did I haunt operating tables. I clung to them with the desperate hope that a drowning man clings to a plank thrown out to him amid waters that threaten to engulf him.

Several times when I had become, as I thought, securely ensconced in the frame of a man who had gone out while under the anesthetic, I found myself compelled in turn to vacate; the powers of life being too feeble to rally.

One instance I recall with especial vividness, and the pang with which I realized that I was again to be unsuccessful still hurts at times.

The victim was a man of about my own build, handsome, intelligent, and of a far more prepossessing appearance than myself.

I judged him to be maybe a professional man, and I thought, with a little thrill of pride, what a fine appearance I would make could I secure admission to this excellent specimen of humanity.

He was just undergoing an operation

for appendicitis when I arrived. I overheard one of the surgeons remark that, having been attacked so suddenly and while in such fine physical condition, there was practically no doubt regarding his surviving the operation splendidly.

I saw there was slim show for me, but having nothing especial in view, I hung around, shadowed the poor chap, until they had the incision closed and everything in shipshape condition.

All at once they discovered that the heart was not doing duty properly. I saw his astral body leaving before the surgeons realized that their patient was beyond their poor, human aid. I watched my chance cold-bloodedly, if such a term may be applied to one devoid of flesh and blood, but it was absolutely no use. There wasn't a ghost of a show for me in this instance.

I felt rather guilty, too, as a man might who was waiting to burglarize a house as soon as its owner was out of sight. As I turned to go there stood the man's astral body beside the operating table, and his reproachful look indicated that he read my selfish purpose. I extended my hand, we shook and then we parted.

After this experience I lost courage for a time, and I determined to abandon hospitals. I had discovered a fact that surprised me somewhat—namely, that when hospital surgeons make a corpse of a man's body, it is usually in no condition for further occupancy.

For a time I wandered about miserably, staying for the most part near my poor wife, who was ever lamenting my sad fate.

She had rented a little cottage near the site of our former one, and lived there alone. Her evident loneliness moved me to deep pity, and I bitterly upbraided myself for the needless misery I had caused her.

Existence became a curse. I was of no use in this world in my present condition, and was not yet ready to enter other realms.

III

I HAD been in this unhappy state of mind for several months, when unexpectedly a marvelous occurrence befell me. It was upon a wild, stormy evening in late autumn. The wind howled dismally, rising into shrieks and wails, dying away into moans that sent children shuddering under the bedclothes and brought to grown-ups visions of wrecks at sea, dead men, shrieks of the dying, and of lost souls. It was a night for ghosts to walk.

I wandered forth, fit companion for spooks, but no friendly specter greeted my forlorn gaze.

I had not traveled far when I espied an inanimate human form lying limp upon the wet earth, his thin, starved face turned to the pitiless heavens. A lamentable object he appeared, clothed in filthy rags, hair long and unkempt.

I discovered the body to be still warm, and found that life was just departing. My old desire for reincarnation gripped me mightily. But *this* revolting creature! I was sickened by its repulsiveness. Still, beggars shouldn't be choosers, and there was no time to lose. I must decide quickly.

Decide I did. Quick as thought I took possession of this house of clay that was already stiffening in the rigor of death. I am positive this attempt would have proved as useless as former ones had, if it had not been for the timely appearance on the scene of another specimen, uglier looking, if possible, than the one whose body I was occupying. He skulked along through the wind-tossed shrubbery near by, head down fighting the wind. Suddenly he halted.

"Hello, pal!" he exclaimed with a start, spying his erstwhile companion in hoboism prone before him. "What yer doin' here?"

He knelt down, and after a hasty examination produced from the recesses of his tatters a bottle from which he poured down the throat of his unresisting comrade some of the vilest whiskey it had ever been my lot to taste.

Its effect, however, was magical. Burning its way into the system, it soon set the vital machinery in motion. Slowly and spasmodically at first, but with increasing regularity, the heart resumed its beating; the lungs commenced once more their function. The numbness and rigidity of the limbs wore away by degrees. The body that I had so surreptitiously appropriated was going to live.

I was so elated I nearly shouted for joy.

The erstwhile owner of this disreputable-looking organism must have been well satisfied to dispense with it, for he didn't show up to dispute my claim, and henceforth I called it *my* body; and uncouth and repulsive as it was, I was mighty glad to have it to call my own.

With the aid of my companion I struggled unsteadily to my feet. My insides were still aflame with the rank potion I had swallowed, and I was weak and trembling from fatigue, hunger, and exposure.

My rescuer half dragged and half carried me to a rude shed near by in which hay had been stacked. Here, with rough tenderness, he made me a comfortable resting-place. Then he left me for a while, coming back later with a pocketful of fresh eggs and a pail of warm milk. He had stolen a pail and milked a cow in a neighboring farmyard, and robbed the nests in the farmer's hen-house, but I blessed him for it.

I had the lion's share of the spoils, and my comrade watched with evident satisfaction my returning strength. He was a taciturn fellow and not used to the little courtesies of life. I wanted to express my gratitude to him. But when I attempted to thank him in words that seemed fitted to be used to a man who had just saved my life, and done more for me than he could ever realize, he looked suspicious.

"Nutty?" he inquired sarcastically. "Can it, and go ter sleep."

Whereupon I meekly burrowed into the hay and pondered over the first difficulty

I had met with. This tramp's body was no place for an astral gentleman. That was sure. I must either adapt myself to the body, or adapt the body to my real self. I finally fell asleep, and slept soundly till morning.

As I awoke the strangeness of my situation slowly dawned upon me. I must plan a course of action before the man, who was snoring loudly by my side, awoke. I began to realize keenly the truth of a well-known and generally accepted fact—the influence bodily conditions exert upon the mentality.

My system was craving its morning grog and almost making me believe it really required it. Perhaps it did. The habits of years are not easily overcome.

I tried to decide what to do. Should I sneak out carefully, desert my companion, clean up, and straightway begin my new life? Or should I stay with him and hit the hoboes' trail for a few days?

My soliloquy was cut short by the appearance of a farmer and his hired man, who came with forks to carry hay to their stock near by. I followed a sudden impulse, and asked the farmer if I might work and earn my breakfast. He looked me over from head to feet.

"You're a pretty tough-looking specimen," he ejaculated; "but you're the first one of your kind that's offered to work for a meal of victuals in the last six months. Come on."

"What's chewin' yer?" inquired my indignant pal in a venomous stage-whisper. "Yer must be dippy for fair. I'll wait at the cross road, and don't be long comin'."

My partner was evidently in evil mood. His slumbers had been disturbed by the appearance of the farmer. Furthermore, something in my bearing and manner of speech seemed to fill him with astonishment not unmingled with disgust. I allowed him to go his way, while I followed the farmer.

THE next hour was as hard a one as I ever experienced. My physical body was weak and emaciated from lack

of proper nourishment and from irregular habits and dissipation. My astral body was ill fitted to such a garment. I was fighting these difficulties in an effort to earn a decent breakfast. After what seemed an interminable length of time the morning chores were finished and we went to the house, where I was given an appetizing and nourishing breakfast.

Imagine, if you can, what food tasted like to a man who had wandered about for weeks with no body with which to assimilate it! No doubt, when the spirit reaches the pure realm which is its final destination, the desire for creature comforts will vanish; but my case had been entirely different.

I had been living amid earthly scenes as truly as when clothed in flesh, but with no vehicles through which to partake of them. I had been an outcast from my own fireside, a silent spectator at my own table. I had been neither seen nor in any way recognized by those dearest to me, and had I been able to manifest myself to them, I should have only struck terror to their hearts.

Surely not an enviable predicament.

After breakfast I told my new friends that I had decided to turn over a new leaf, and implored their assistance. I proposed they help me to clean and respectable clothing and a bath, hair-cut, and shave. I entreated them so earnestly and promised so faithfully to repay them in labor that, after holding a family council, they consented.

The transformation in a personal appearance at the end of an hour was magical. I began to have more courage regarding my future. My gentlemanly bearing and evident zeal and determination to clean up and earn an honest living made a favorable impression, and wakened sympathy in the warm hearts of these good people whom I had been fortunate enough to find, and they did everything possible to help me. I stayed with them some time, working at hard, manual labor I was ill-accustomed to.

But I encountered struggles more severe

than I had expected. My body had been the home of a degenerate, idle, and besotted creature for years. The organs were deranged and weakened from ill nourishment and poor whiskey. Filth, slothfulness, and evil habits had placed their curse upon what had once been the fair temple of a human soul. I had never before realized how closely is the physical allied with the mental and spiritual.

With a courage born of despair I set about to overcome these difficulties, and prove that the real man can surmount almost any bodily condition if he makes a superhuman effort.

I was becoming fairly well accustomed to my new body, and found it serving my purposes admirably. While I could not hope to alter the physiognomy to any extent, yet one looking in my face might have said, "It is the same, yet not the same; it is illuminated from within by intelligence, purpose and ideals that are worth while. A different character shines through."

Certain physical changes had also been wrought. Thus does the astral find expression through the material. It is a truth that is little understood by the majority, that our physical characteristics are expressed in the astral before they become visible in the material.

I began to have an uncontrollable desire to visit my former home and renew my companionship with my wife. My astral wanderings on the night I had found the tramp's body had taken me a long distance from home. One can travel immeasurably longer distances when unencumbered by the physical body than when they are so hampered, and I now realized that I was once more subject to my former limitations.

Time and space are so differently sensed by astral dwellers than by those of the material plane that I found it difficult for a time to adjust myself again to earthly conditions. I had traveled long distances with almost the rapidity of thought, never considering the localities I passed through. Mental concentration

on the point I had wished to arrive at had been the prime requisite in reaching it. Now I must submit to the limitation of the flesh.

I was even dependent on an atlas to locate myself and learn the distance to my former home and the most direct route by which to reach it. I found it to be several hundred miles distant, and as I was short of cash, the means of covering the distance proved a genuine dilemma. I was determined, however, to let no obstacle deter me from my purpose; so obtaining a bicycle, I set out.

At the end of the first day's journey, tired, hungry, and covered with dust, I stopped at an inviting looking cottage on the outskirts of a village. It was here that I received one of the surprises of my life.

A man who was the physical counterpart of myself sat on the veranda, smoking. When he saw me, his pipe dropped, breaking in a dozen pieces, and with a bound he reached my side. I had barely dismounted from my wheel before he grabbed my hand.

"Why, Dave, old boy," he cried; "can it be you back home once more? Nellie!" he shouted to a woman standing in the doorway. "You remember Dave, my twin brother who ran away from home ten years ago?"

"Of course I do," she replied, hastening to my side and grasping one hand, while the man held the other in a viselike grip.

"But I am not your brother," I protested. Whereupon they looked at one another wonderingly. Then, turning to me, they began to ply me with questions.

"Aren't you David Lawrence? Don't you remember me, your brother, John?"

"No, I am James Rogers, and I never saw you before."

"Oh, David, don't you remember father and mother? They were nearly heartbroken when you went away!"

"No. I guess you must have mistaken your man."

"Have you been ill? Have you lost your memory?"

"Not that I know of."

They looked at each other knowingly and at me pityingly. I realized my resemblance to the man before me, and it dawned upon me that he was probably a brother of the tramp whose body I was parading in. They evidently considered this a case of mental aberration, and, naturally I could not very well explain the situation. I decided that the best thing I could do was to let them think as they pleased.

I was invited into the house and my needs ministered to with the tenderness one naturally shows to loved ones suffering from illness or misfortune. I had planned to spend the night here and press on in the morning, but a conversation I overheard after retiring changed my plans.

"Poor Dave," the man was saying; "he has lost his memory entirely, hasn't he? He doesn't seem to recall a thing that occurred before he left home; and either doesn't remember or doesn't care to tell what he's been doing since. I'm afraid it's the latter, for he was pretty wild and dissipated before he went away."

"I've read of such cases," said the woman; "but sometimes they are cured if they have the right treatment."

"We must lose no time. Dr. Richards, the noted specialist on mental diseases, shall be consulted in the morning if we can get an appointment with him. I think we should send Dave to the doctor's private sanatorium, if we can arrange to do so."

And so they talked and planned until I began to think I had best make good my escape while I could.

Accordingly I dressed quietly, and slipping cautiously to the window, dropped to the ground, found my bicycle, and made a hasty exit from the town. Weary as I was, I put many miles between myself and my host before morning dawned. The remainder of my journey was uneventful.

IV

I CAN never voice the sensations that surged through me as I walked through the streets of my home town and saw the

familiar faces and friends and acquaintances, not one of whom gave me a glance of recognition or a word of greeting. Rip Van Winkle's plight was no more unhappy.

Before my departure on that fatal astral trip I had held an important clerical position with the leading business firm of the town. It was my desire to regain this, but naturally there were serious difficulties in the way. I could not present the required credentials, or prove that by education or experience I was fitted for it.

I learned that the place had never been satisfactorily filled since my going away, and I determined to use every power I possessed to regain it. After repeated efforts I succeeded in getting my former employer's consent to take the place on trial.

I took up the work with such surprising readiness and showed such a thorough knowledge of its details and requirements, that I proved a constant source of astonishment to all connected with the business. Many times they would remark: "I could almost believe it to be Jim back again!"

As weeks went by I found repeated opportunities to meet my wife. But, daughter of Eve that she was, she was interested in another man! Believing me dead, she had accepted his attentions, and their friendship had apparently ripened into love.

I was desperate. Was I to be thwarted in my aim to be reunited to my wife, after all the struggles I had made to attain that end? My efforts to win her attention, to say nothing about her affections, were unavailing. My rival was too firmly entrenched.

In sheer desperation I one day called at her home, forced my presence upon her, and attempted to relate my experiences from the day I left her. I believe I could have impressed her with the truth of my story if I had been left to myself. I intended to prove my identity by telling many of the little incidents of our life together which no one else knew about, but I was abruptly and unceremoniously interrupted by her lover, who appeared at an inopportune moment.

My wife had become so overwrought by my story and by my close resemblance in many ways to my old self, that she was nearly overcome with fright and emotion. This angered my rival to such an extent that he caused me to be arrested and examined to determine my sanity.

I tried to interest the alienists in my strange experience, but only defeated my own ends, as my story evidently convinced them that I was not in a proper mental condition to be at large.

I was, therefore, sent to an asylum, where I remained for some time before I could convince the medical board that I was sane.

It was during this period that I prepared a story of my strange experience, which I succeeded in getting published. It fell into my wife's hands and she became convinced of the truth of it. Then it was that, through her untiring efforts, I was liberated from the asylum and we were remarried. Not, however, until I had solemnly promised to try no more astral experiments.

This pledge I was willing enough to make, as my bitter experiences had convinced me that while one is occupying his earthly body and living his mundane life, his wisest course is to content himself with living it as normally as possible.

I believed that at last I had found peace, after my eventful and troublous experiences, and I proposed to settle down and enjoy life serenely. But I reckoned without my host. A complication of affairs I had never dreamed possible wound their entangling web around me, and I was caught in their snare.

One day as I was coming home from the office a fine appearing woman met me, and with astonishment written all over her face uttered one word: "David!"

Remembering my former experience, the word spoken so intently struck a chill to my heart, and a strange foreboding, a premonition of trouble, took hold of me.

"Who are you?" I inquired.

"You know very well who I am. It is hardly possible that you have forgotten

your wife Agnes, whom you left so suddenly ten years ago."

THEN she broke down and began weeping so bitterly that I was moved to pity.

"Oh, David," she said brokenly, "why did you desert me so? I have loved you all these years, and have been faithful to you."

"But I am not David," I protested, "and if I were, rest assured I would never desert so charming a woman as you are."

My gallantry had slight effect.

"Not David? Oh, but you *are* David! Why do you deny it? Why, there is the scar across your left cheek that you got the day we climbed Mount Pisgah together, a few weeks before we were married! Don't you remember falling and cutting that ugly gash, and how I dressed the wound, binding it with strips torn from my own clothing?"

Here was a dilemma, indeed! Evidently Tramp David had a wife, and she was about to claim me for her own. The idea would not have been so terrible had I not such binding claims in another quarter. I put on as bold a front as possible under the circumstances.

"Madam," I said sternly, "I regret to pain you, but this is evidently a case of mistaken identity. There are many such. It is not so unusual as you imagine. From your words and actions I gather that I bear a striking resemblance to your husband, who, you say, has deserted you. As for myself, I am James Rogers, an employe of the Jones & Matthews Company over there. My wife is waiting supper for me, so I must bid you good evening." I touched my hat and turned.

With all the anger and bitterness of years concentrated into one moment of time she turned to me.

"Scoundrel! Traitor!" she hissed. "You would add insult to years of bitter injury, would you? You *are* my husband, and you shall suffer a thousandfold what I have suffered through you!"

I was greatly disturbed, for I knew not

for what sins of Tramp Dave's I might be called upon to answer. Even now I was facing a queer mix-up.

I went home and told my wife what had happened, and together we conjectured as to the strange incident and its probable outcome. But our suspense was short, for I was soon in the hands of officers, arrested on a charge of bigamy.

I was taken back to the town where I had chanced to call at the home of the tramp's brother while on my journey home. There I was arraigned in court. The odds were all against me. Many people testified that I was David Lawrence, and the former life of the man in whose body I stood at the bar of justice was reviewed in all its black details. I blushed for shame at the record.

He had at last become a parasite on society, an outcast from among his fellow townsmen. He had not been heard from in ten years, but was probably making an effort to reach his old home when death overtook him. Surely if I could have known his dark history, I might have hesitated before appropriating his body to my own use! But here I was, and I must pay!

Even the brother's testimony, much as he would have liked to help me, proved damaging, for he identified me as his brother, and told of my visit at his home and of my sudden departure.

I was given a prison sentence for bigamy, and, of course, could not escape serving it. The woman who brought the final trouble upon me finally decided that I was utterly worthless, and, very sensibly and much to my satisfaction, secured a divorce. When at last I walked out of prison a free man, my long-suffering wife took me back once more.

I am broken in health and in spirit; a man old before my time. One word of caution I offer in closing this weird tale. To whoever may attempt to investigate the occult, let him not carry his researches beyond the border-line where the red sign of danger is flaunted, lest the fate overtake him unawares that befell myself—the Astral Gentleman.