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CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1938

Number 4

Cover Design	M. Brundage
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Beyond the Phoenix"</i>	
The Horns of Elfland	opposite this page
<i>Pictorial interpretation by Virgil Finlay of a poem by Lord Tennyson</i>	
Beyond the Phoenix	Henry Kuttner 386
<i>A glamorous tale of eld, of an intrepid warrior hero, and the dark cults of Baal-Yagotb</i>	
Black Moon	Seabury Quinn 400
<i>A goose-flesh story of African voodoo transplanted in the United States</i>	
Death	William Shakespeare 424
<i>Verse, from "Measure for Measure"</i>	
The Isle of Abominations	Kadra Maysi 425
<i>A gripping story about a strange, carnivorous forest—a tale of many thrills</i>	
Jekal's Lesson	David Bernard 442
<i>The ghastly experience of a physician—a tale of stark horror</i>	
The Fire Princess (end)	Edmond Hamilton 455
<i>An intriguing story about a tremendous doom threatening the world from Central Asia</i>	
The Maze of Maal Dweh	Clark Ashton Smith 475
<i>What strange fate awaited the hunter and the girl in the fearsome labyrinth of the enchanter?</i>	
The Black Monk	G. G. Pendarves 484
<i>Dire woe waits for the luckless man who encounters the Black Monk of Chuard Island</i>	
The Other Gods	H. P. Lovecraft 489
<i>A posthumous weird fantasy by a late great master of bizarre fiction</i>	
Witches on the Heath	Leah Bodine Drake 492
<i>Verse</i>	
Up Under the Roof	Manly Wade Wellman 493
<i>A short tale of fear</i>	
Weird Story Reprint:	
The Oldest Story in the World	Murray Leinster 496
<i>An Oriental torture-tale, reprinted from an early issue of WEIRD TALES</i>	
The Eyrie	507
<i>The readers exchange opinions</i>	

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Jekal's Lesson

By DAVID BERNARD

A weird, creepy story about the living corpse that lay in its coffin, there on the floor of a deserted basement, and the ghostly experience of a physician

SEATED alone in his study, Harlow Barton, M. A., Ph. D., M. D., youthful president of Dean College, gave vent to his annoyance by noisily shaking the sheaf of papers he held before him on his desk.

"This is the last straw," he muttered to himself. "Complaint after complaint from parents. What could have happened to the supervision during my absence? 'Hypnotism' . . . 'spiritualism' . . . 'psychic vibrations and influences' . . . why, from these letters that fanatical fool, Jekal, must have been having a free hand. I might have known it would happen if I gave him control of a class. Spreading

superstitious and dangerous nonsense in the guise of a class in psychology!"

"I beg your pardon, Doctor Barton."

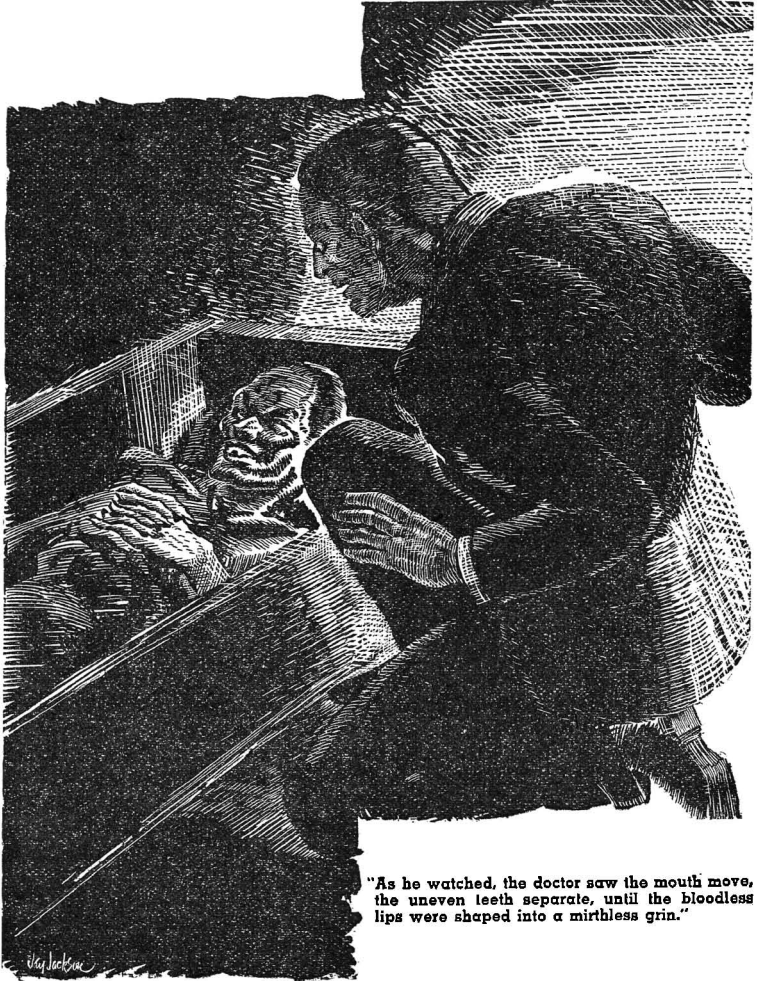
Startled, the doctor looked up. A slender, dark-complexioned oriental stood before the firmly closed door, staring at him. Thin lips curled into a supercilious smile, he seemed immensely pleased at the effect occasioned by his stealthy entry.

His was a face to remember: high cheekbones, imparting to the already thin face a sunken, fleshless appearance; a sharp, aquiline nose; two emerald eyes that shone with cat-like brightness. A smooth face, haughty, shrewd, lit with intelligence—the intelligence of a lynx.

His carefully modulated voice, bearing the trace of an alien tongue, harmonized well with the feline air that surrounded him.

"Again, I beg your pardon, Doctor Barton. I understood you wish to see me."

"You understood correctly," Doctor Barton burst out warmly. "I've just read over these letters received from parents and relatives of our students. It seems they resent, quite reasonably I'd say, the unscientific claptrap you've been teaching



"As he watched, the doctor saw the mouth move, the uneven teeth separate, until the bloodless lips were shaped into a mirthless grin."

their children, to say nothing of the absurd and harmful experiments in hypnosis and God knows what else that you had them undertake."

Jekal stroked his smooth, hairless chin with long, taper fingers. "I'm sure," he purred, "I can satisfactorily answer the unjustifiably anxious parents, if you so kindly would permit me."

Doctor Barton banged his fist on the desk. "That is unnecessary. I've already given them their answer. I've written them that you are no longer connected with Dean College."

The sneering smile yielded slowly to a scowl. "You do not mean that—?"

"I do, quite emphatically. It was through no desire of mine that you were appointed here in the first place. You have no academic background of any worth. And from the so-called course in psychology you have been giving, it is obvious that your ignorance of that subject is abysmal."

"Ignorant?" The humorless smile crept back to Jekal's lips. "It is you, proud exponent of western materialism that blinds you to the facts of eastern psychology—the true science of the soul—you who are ignorant."

Doctor Barton cut in impatiently. "I have no intention of trying to alter your beliefs. But I do object—as do the men and women who have written to me—to your imposing those beliefs on our pupils."

"The blind lead the blind," Jekal retorted angrily. "Your eyes are closed to the realities of the invisible universe all about you; you are determined the eyes of the young seekers for knowledge shall not be opened."

"And their minds twisted by attempting to develop their 'inner' powers. I think we thrashed all that out more than a few times already."

Jekal's rejoinder was lost in a fit of

racking coughing that shook his slight body spasmodically for nearly a minute.

"And I repeat what I told you before," the doctor went on, "that when you will submit the teachings of your oriental high priests of magic—whose knowledge you claim to possess—to the laboratory methods of experimental science, then and then only will I pay serious attention to them."

Delicately sliding the end of a handkerchief across his wet lips, Jekal stood eyeing the speaker with mingled hatred and contempt. He coughed sharply once or twice. "Some day you will be shown the bottomless depths of your ignorance. And I trust I shall personally be able to do you that service."

Doctor Barton shrugged. "Well, in any event, we will give you a month's salary."

"You are serious?"

"Quite. You are no longer associated with this college."

"But the bequest of the Gadsby estate clearly stipulates that I am to carry on psychical investigation here at Dean."

"And you've done nothing of the kind. Not a job of investigation, in the scientific sense; no experimental testing of phenomena. You've used your position to hand out mystical dogmas, and the fruits of your own vivid imagination. And you've permitted and encouraged gullible young men to submit themselves to your hypnotic practises."

"The trustees of the college are backing me. And if the survivors of John Gadsby, who was so misguidedly impressed by your wisdom, object to what I am doing—which I'm sure they won't—Dean College will sacrifice their endowment rather than jeopardize the minds and health of our students. That is all—*Mister Jekal*."

Jekal stood immobile. "Very well, Doctor Barton. Very well. As you wish."

He turned, trod noiselessly to the door. He hesitated, then said over his shoulder, "One thing, Doctor Barton; you will give me a letter of recommendation?"

The doctor reflected for a moment. "Well—bluntly, Jekal, I will if you insist. But I hardly think you'd care to show the letter to a prospective employer."

The door slammed. The dark-skinned Jekal was gone.

2

IT WAS more than a decade later, in a different setting. Harlow Barton, seated at his desk, looked up, face creased with smiles, as Bill Masfield eased his tall, strapping frame through the doorway and strode toward him. He rose to grip the extended hand.

"I'm certainly glad to see you, Bill. Sit down, won't you?"

The two men sat studying each other closely. The doctor, temples now tinged with gray, broke the silence.

"Bill, you've scarcely changed. Still the same picture of rugged good health."

The former athletic coach at Dean College flexed his biceps. "Still doing a bit of wrestling," he grinned. "You, Harlow, private practise seems to have fattened you somewhat, and you're getting gray—but you're no old man by any means."

Reflecting, the doctor shook his head. "Twelve years—seems like yesterday. Is it that long since I left Dean?"

"Yes. You left soon after you returned from Pitfield."

The light of remembrance flared in the doctor's eyes.

"I had returned from the trial of Jekal—the poor, deluded fool. Ended up as I knew he would, only a year after I dis-

charged him—mind twisted, bent on spreading superstition in the world."

It was obvious that Jekal had left a deep, if bitter, impression.

"And I'm not sorry I testified as I did. Despite his defense, he unquestionably was aiming to execute some blood-thirsty voodooistic rite he had picked up in the orient when arrested with that young boy."

"Your testimony concerning his beliefs and behavior at Dean," Bill put in, "turned the balance against him. So the papers said."

"Yes, it probably did. Jekal certainly thought so. He pleaded, then threatened. But I considered it my duty. In trying to translate his bizarre beliefs into practise that man had become a menace to society. I'm not sorry I put him where he is."

"Why," Bill interposed, "haven't you heard? Jekal was released from jail—about a week ago."

The doctor's face fell. "Why, how is that?"

"I heard he was dying. T. B. An act of mercy."

Bill declined the cigarette offered him. Doctor Barton inhaled deeply, for the moment lost in thought.

"Well," he said at last, "he had all the symptoms when I last saw him. There's no doubt his peculiar exercises—that he was brazen enough to urge on the students at Dean—deep breathing, self-hypnosis and what not—by which he hoped to develop the so-called occult powers, made him prone to the disease."

"Well," Bill changed the subject, "I remember him, too, but for a different reason."

Doctor Barton laughed. "Oh yes. From what you used to tell me I gathered the only contribution our would-be psychologist made to Dean was in wrestling."

"You laugh. Seriously, wrestling is a science; and that amazing trick of his was no mean contribution. The Arm Twist we called it, for want of a better term. I'll never forget the day he walked into the gym. He seemed so out of place. And when he invited me to throw him, I thought he was joking. But skinny and small as he was he sent me to the mat no less than a half-dozen times in succession. And, mind you, in front of my admiring students!

"He did it again, too, many times after—but I never could learn how he did it. Whatever you think of the deep secrets he claimed to possess, that Arm Twist was a secret that neither I nor anyone else I knew could ever fathom. A curious chap, that Jekal. If he had applied himself he could have done better things in life."

"In wrestling?" Doctor Barton inquired sarcastically.

Bill shrugged. "Quarter to three," he observed, glancing down at his watch. "I have an appointment at the club here in town at three. Will you join me?" He stood up, stretching.

"Like to, but I also have an appointment. Thought I'd be free this afternoon, but Frances, my nurse, left a note for me." The doctor tapped his hand on a memorandum pad on his desk. "Three o'clock appointment, too. Marked 'important'—and when Frances says 'important' she means just that."

He arose, picked up his small black bag. "But I should be back in an hour. I'll join you then."

The two walked through the door, the doctor locking it after him, then down the stairs and out into the street. Entering his roadster, Doctor Barton, with a noisy shifting of gears, was soon driving slowly up the street. Bill drove his car off in the opposite direction.

Far at the other end of town Doctor Barton leaned out of his roadster to peer at the sign on the corner. "Front Street." Down the cobblestone road that wound its narrow way along the dirty, oily river he steered, alert for the address designated in his nurse's note.

Ramshackle buildings, uninhabited by municipal government order, vacant warehouses, coated with soot and filth, presented a drab picture on either side of the trafficless street. From the dark recesses of an empty dwelling an unkempt human derelict staggered forth here and there. No other human was in view. Cats seemed everywhere. Plump, large, mangy, baring needle teeth viciously as the doctor jolted by; they seemed to resent his intrusion on their domain. Years ago the commerce and shipping which had kept the section vibrant with activity had departed for the other end of town. And with its soul gone, Front Street was left but a corpse, doomed to decay.

The doctor's eye caught the address of a squat building that once had served the active neighborhood as a garage. So close to it that at first view they appeared joined was a narrow brick building. Neatly marked over the doorway was the address Doctor Barton sought.

Parking his car across the street, he walked to the door. It was boarded up securely. He glanced again at the address. He was sure he had not misread Frances' note. The three-story building was obviously uninhabited.

Puzzled, he walked to the side, peered down the alley that separated the building from the garage. The odor of the river, with its smoky tugs and garbage scows, wafted to his nostrils. He stepped hesitantly forward between the narrow walls. The scrape of a footstep other than his own made him pull up abruptly.

ly, whirl about. There, blocking egress from the alley, stood a huge black man.

Doctor Barton's heart picked up several beats as the man walked deliberately toward him. Within a pace he halted, a ponderous, somber brute, well over six feet tall. His shiny body was bare above the waist, exposing a massive pair of shoulders, long, simian, muscle-knotted arms, a barrel chest. The one ear he possessed was shriveled into the semblance of a dried cauliflower segment; a livid scar writhed from temple to fleshy, protuberant lips.

Gulping with apprehension, Doctor Barton asked timidly, "Do you know a family named Isaacs? Children sick?"

The Negro grunted, coconut head bobbing. Shuffling sullenly forward, he motioned the doctor to lead.

"Where to?" the doctor asked, standing firm.

No reply, only a vigorous head-shaking and further motioning.

The doctor repeated his query. This time the negro bent his ugly face close to the doctor's. Parting his thick lips, he pointed a finger into his mouth. As Doctor Barton gazed, horrified, into that cavernous opening, it was clear why the man had not replied. Where once had been a tongue there remained nothing but a cruelly torn, stumpy crimson mass. Breathing deep, the doctor obeyed the silent command to walk on.

Down the alley they paced, until the doctor could see the tugs churning up and down the river, almost within hailing distance, and hear the water as it lapped against the piles which supported the concrete embankment at the alley's dead end. Suddenly the negro laid a heavy arm on the doctor, turning him aside, forcibly directing his attention to a small window that apparently led into the cellar of the building. Maintaining his grip, the black used his other arm to open the window.

Forced forward and downward, Doctor Barton tried to resist. But the superior weight and strength of his unwelcome guide left him no alternative but to leap blindly through the window.

The descent, no more than a couple of feet, did not deprive him of his balance. Holding his bag, he stood there, waiting in the darkness. Like a clumsy anthropoid descending from a tree-top, the brawny black bounded to his side. Flashlight in hand cutting a narrow swath through the gloom, he pushed the doctor on through the damp, musty basement. Past shadowy cases, ill-smelling walls . . . cobwebs brushed against Doctor Barton's face, clung disgustingly; the noise of scurrying vermin came to his ears. Now and again he would stumble over boxes or lumber strewn carelessly about; at times he would splash and trip through foul-smelling water that formed slimy, stagnant pools in the depressed areas of the cellar. But he never fell, for all the while the negro held him with a painful grip of steel.

At last the negro halted. His light slanted down, focussing upon what appeared to be a massive hatchway. The light went out.

In that inky blackness Doctor Barton could only guess what was taking place. He felt himself shoved roughly against a wall. Something whirred by his head. What must have been a large rodent rubbed its fat, wet body boldly against his leg until he finally gained sufficient control of his shaken nerves to kick out blindly. And then the noisy creaking and clanking of rusty hinges broke the silence. A grunt, the flash of a light in his eyes; the black was at his side.

This time he was led but a few steps forward. The light revealed the hatch to be standing on end, alongside a small, square opening that led down into God alone knew what black hole beneath the

basement floor. Shuddering, Doctor Barton tensed his muscles to resist the negro's pressure. The light died out. Two arms encircled him like metal bands. The struggle was hopelessly uneven. Like a child the doctor was lifted bodily, then carefully lowered down the hatchway.

Squirming feverishly as he hung with feet unsupported, he felt the negro's grip relax. Down he fell, striking the stone floor about ten feet below with a stunning crash. Reeling, he heard the noisy clanking of the hatch as it was pushed firmly into its snug-fitting frame.

4

BILL! Bill Masefield!" Stepping from the running-board of his car, which he had just parked around the corner from the club, Bill turned at mention of his name to face a smiling young woman.

"I remember you," he stammered, scrutinizing her, "but your name——"

"Why, Bill Masefield, how forgetful!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Frances! Oh, I'm so sorry. Why, how are you?"

"Fine, Bill. Married, you know. And you?"

She continued eagerly after his brief reply, but he cut her short, as politely as possible.

"I'm sorry, Fran; give me your address. I'll look you up. I'll be in town till tomorrow. You see, I have an appointment at three—in the club."

"Oh! Then you'll meet your old friend, Doctor Barton," she chattered, pressing her card into his hand. "You know, I'm working for him now."

"Why," Bill chuckled, "I recall now he did mention the name Frances, but I never associated it with——" He swallowed his words, a puzzled expression overspreading his face. "You say I'll meet the doctor in the club?"

"That's right. He's always there on Friday afternoons."

"But he has an appointment this afternoon; an important appointment, he said. You see, I just spoke to him less than fifteen minutes ago." He looked sharply at her. "Why—you left him instructions to that effect."

Frances' smile disappeared. "I did? You're talking riddles, Bill. I haven't even been in the office since eleven, when Doctor Barton left on his calls. I never go to the office on Friday afternoons. . . . Why, what *are* you doing, Bill?"

Bill was pulling her by the sleeve, his other hand reaching for the door of his car.

"Come," he said, "you're taking me to the doctor's office."

5

SPRAWLED on the cold stone floor, Senses awhirl, Doctor Barton attempted to take note of his surroundings. If anything, the darkness was greater than in the cellar. The atmosphere, too, was far worse. More chill, damp, the very floor seemed to exude sweat. It was certain that the pit lay somewhere below the river's level. But here the fetid air of the basement was aggravated by a rank stench that struck the nostrils, bringing to the doctor unpleasant memories of the deadhouse.

Fearfully feeling his bruised legs, he pulled himself to his feet, carefully testing his weight on them.

"At least no bones broken," he muttered grimly. "I can be thankful for that."

"Yes, quite true," a low, peculiarly resonant voice boomed out somewhere in the darkness—"thankful you may be, indeed, my good friend, Doctor Barton."

The doctor started violently. That oily, slow-spoken voice, despite its un-

familiar hollowness, struck a responsive chord in his memory.

"Jekal!" he cried.

"Ah!" returned the voice. "You remember!" It broke off into an insane, mocking laugh.

Gropingly Doctor Barton extended his hands. "Jekal! Where are you?"

"There is a lamp near the wall, behind you," came the reply. "Strike a match."

Fumbling inside his pocket, the doctor drew out a package of paper matches. The match flared up evenly, throwing its feeble rays about. The walls of the place appeared at most four yards apart. Finding a small oil lamp on the floor behind him, he touched the match to the wick. It burst into sputtering, smoky flame.

It was with difficulty that the doctor adjusted his vision to examine his surroundings. The room, a square concrete box, he perceived to be deserted save for him. Unfurnished, walls bare, the only visible entrance was the hatch above. He coughed. The wretched hole stunk suffocatingly. Lifting the lamp overhead, he cast its lurid light toward each wall in turn.

"Jekal," he called out, "where are you?"

The response was a deep-throated chuckle. "Here, over here on the floor. Look down. Ooh ha ha ha!"

Shuddering, the doctor did as directed. Guided by the lamplight he stepped cautiously toward the apparent source of the voice. A long, narrow box was close to the wall. He stooped down, bringing the lamp close. What met his eyes made his hair crackle: A lidless coffin, and in it, lying stiffly, serenely—the emaciated body of Jekal!

Timorously he put his unsteady fingers to the body. They touched ice. He recoiled. The source of the noisome odor became apparent. He was in the room with a corpse!

W. T.—5

What madman's hoax was being perpetrated? Every nerve aquiver, he sprang to his feet. And as once more that voice from a void boomed out, echoing weirdly from the close walls, a cold sweat drenched his body.

"You err in your diagnosis, Doctor Barton. To your limited vision I lie here dead. But you only prove what so long ago I told you. Your boasted science possesses knowledge merely of the superficial, least vital facts of life.

"Your schools never could learn what I, Jekal, *know*"—the voice inflected dramatically—"that the soul, the soul that you, proud scoffer, deny, lingers in the body for many hours after what you call death has taken place. When your ignorant authorities pronounce men dead—*they still live*. Just as I, notwithstanding your conclusion, I, Jekal, still live!"

Cursing, the doctor once more bent low, scrutinizing the immobile figure in the coffin. The eyes of the cadaverous face were shut. The skinny body, naked to the waist, was blue and deathly cold. Biting his lip, the doctor, filled with loathing, placed his ear to the frigid chest, for his stethoscope lay with his other instruments in his bag somewhere on the floor above. Neither respiration nor cardiac action was perceptible.

He ran his fingers along the body, palpating the bony appendages, then the thorax. The sensation was that of something soft, spongy dry, rotten dough. Bewildered, he sat back on his heels, breathing heavily. Unless his senses lied, as the vile odor made manifest, the disintegration succeeding *rigor mortis* had already set in. And as if to mock him there sounded out once more the unearthly voice, snickering harshly.

"Who are you?" he cried out.

"Jekal."

"Nonsense! Tell me who you are and what this outrage means!"

For fully a minute he had to endure that taunting laugh. Then the voice grew stern.

"Fool! You doubt—to the last you doubt! It is I, Jekal, who speaks. It is my body, the body of Jekal, that lies before you. Because the evidence of your senses, upon which you claim to depend, does not conform to your favorite theories, you deny it. Fool! Had you the power, as I have, to see beyond the gross outer sheath of matter, you could see that I still live; that though partly out of my almost completely dead body, I am still linked to it by the ethereal thread of the soul."

FAIN'T and dizzy, Doctor Barton lapsed into a kneeling position, grunting disapproval. Yet, fight as he might to deny it and its harrowing implications, that voice, despite its unearthly timbre, was, as he vividly recalled it, Jekal's; while the identity of the corpse in the casket he knew beyond question.

As the voice faded out he centered attention on his increasing difficulty of breathing. Gasping, he ripped collar and tie from his throat, then stood up unsteadily. From wall to wall he lurched, hammering, knocking, testing. They were firm, unyielding, so solid they must have been built against the natural clay deposits of the waterfront. He was helplessly imprisoned.

Fuming, he cupped hands to mouth and called out: "Jekal—or whoever you are!"

"What is it, my good friend?"

"It's suffocating down here. I can't breathe."

"Quite true," came the silky response.

"So I perceive."

The heartless assurance of those words sent the doctor into a frenzy. He stamped wildly, pounded on the walls until at last, hands lacerated and bloody, he fell

in exhaustion. His outburst only emphasized his impotence.

"What is the meaning of this? Why—am I here—Jekal—if Jekal you are?"

After a long interval of silence the voice droned a reply.

"I could cite many reasons, my dear Doctor Barton. But I shall pass over those pertaining to such simple, human reasons as lead a wronged man to inflict retribution upon his persecutor. I prefer to say that you are here in answer to your own request. You were ever hungry for proof. 'Laboratory demonstration' I think you called it. Proof of the occult wisdom which I, Jekal, have studied and possess. Thus you are here, *in my laboratory*, for a practical demonstration, a lesson in the wisdom of Jekal!"

As the voice paused to emit that croaking laugh, Doctor Barton moved the lamp quickly to the face of the corpse. Not a trace of movement was detectable.

"Fool!" grated the voice. "The voice-producing organs you have studied so minutely are needed for speech only on the physical plane of existence. Those possessing control of the inner, astral organs—as I, Jekal, have, after long training—can speak as I now do, and be heard, so long as contact is retained with the plane of matter."

Growing progressively weaker, the doctor prostrated himself on the floor. Mind battling to hold its grip on sanity, he cast about desperately for hypotheses to account for the nightmare experience he was passing through. Anything—hypnotism, ventriloquism, hallucination, telepathy—anything within the realm of plausibility.

"Hm!" boomed the voice, weirdly divining his thoughts. "Still doubting! Skeptical fool! Bend low—by my face."

In the fitful glare of the lamp the face appeared withered, ghastly, yellow. And as in silence he watched, the doctor saw

the mouth move, the uneven teeth separate, until the bloodless lips of the expressionless skull were shaped into a hideous, mirthless grin. And then the teeth clicked sharply together, and there remained nothing but memory of the uncanny occurrence.

OVERWHELMED with horror, with fear of the inexplicable electrifying his nerves, Doctor Barton shrank back, as once more that blood-chilling laugh swirled up out of hell.

"Let me out of this hole," he gasped weakly.

"Impoliteness—such impoliteness!"

"I—I'm—ch-choking." He pounded on the floor.

"A physician should know better than to increase his respiration by unneeded exertion."

"I can't live—much longer—in this," the doctor wheezed, noting with just alarm his already seriously advanced symptoms of asphyxia.

"This time, for once, Doctor Barton, your observation is quite correct. But by calming yourself you can easily survive for several more minutes—ample time for your lesson."

Swearing bitterly, coughing and wheezing, the doctor wormed his way to the flickering lamp. The thought of losing even such dim comfort in the gloomy chamber appalled him; yet its flame, feeble though it was, was too great a tax upon what little oxygen yet remained. He hesitated, then abruptly extinguished the flame. Pressing close to the floor, where the air was least vitiated, he prayed for the unconsciousness that would spare him the agony of slow asphyxiation. But the voice allowed him no peace.

"Lie still. That is wise. You can better hear what I say. Your lesson, my good pupil, must be grasped.

"I am about to give you the supreme

demonstration of the power and control over nature that I have achieved. You shall see how far the learning of Jekal—at which you stupidly scoffed—soars beyond your elementary and false concepts of man and nature.

"You were not far wrong when you thought me dead. My body, plagued with a disease that my cursed parents handed on to me, has long given me trouble. And now, now as it is about to be cast off completely—it is already beyond resurrection—I am well pleased. Long has it hindered me. Hm! Except at night, when it slept, and I would glide forth into the unseen astral world. But what can that mean to you—ignorant fool!—locked in your gross body from birth to death, glorying in your childish learning!

"By nerve-racking exercise and training, day after day, year after year, I developed the power—the power to leave this cursed body behind me—when I chose. At will! At will! Do you hear me?" the voice thundered.

Snuggling to the floor, sucking in the air with feeble gasps, the doctor made no reply. Again the dismal voice. And then a terrifying chill—a chill that made the cold stone of the floor seem warm by contrast—swept noiselessly over him. Whatever its source, it froze him to the marrow, bringing enervating fear as its attendant. Like one in the grip of a spastic disease the weakened doctor shook. At the verge of screaming, he knew well that fear alone could not account for his quivering.

As abruptly as it had descended upon him, the icy presence departed, leaving Doctor Barton in silence broken only by his pounding heart and irregular, rasping breath. Hoarsely he answered in the affirmative as the voice boomed, "Do you hear?" And monotonously, as if never interrupted, it droned on.

"Since attaining that power, I have

looked forward eagerly to the day when I might lay aside my body and enter into another, more desirable earthly tenement. Hm! Another superstition, according to the empty-headed authorities to whom you give reverence. But you shall soon learn otherwise!

"There are men in the wise orient who have lived centuries, even millennia, on earth. . . . Going from body to body, leaving their own when outworn. . . . Entering others, weakened bodies, whose owners cannot resist. . . . Hm! Yet you believe—and teach—that soul and body are one and inseparable!

"But I must not digress. Time grows short. Experimental proof—so all-important to you—shall now be yours. For very soon, when my body is completely cast off, I, my good Doctor Barton, shall enter into yours. You, Doctor Barton, you shall be the first stepping-stone to unbroken, conscious immortality—here on earth—for Jekal!"

Had he wanted to reply to those diabolical words, the doctor possessed neither strength nor breath to do so. Over and over the moaning, maddening laugh sounded out.

"Your thanks for the lesson are not forthcoming, but no matter. The pleasure I have derived from teaching you—to say nothing of the use of your handsome, healthy body—is to me quite ample payment. Ooh ha ha ha ha!"

As if from a great distance the doctor heard the voice add:

"Already I see your ethereal body oozing forth. A body trapped in an oxygenless pit affords it poor nourishment. But do not despair. Soon your distressed lungs shall feast upon good fresh air. My faithful slave, Moro, shall bring forth the weakened body. And once revived, following his strange experience, Doctor Barton shall return home, a quite changed man; changed in temperament and, I

dare say, knowledge. Behind him he will leave the dead Jekal—the poor Jekal, dead of consumption, the fools will say."

But at that point the light of consciousness grew dim, and as the doctor heard the maniacal cackle sound out once more, a merciful unconsciousness descended upon him.

6

WITH a screeching of brakes, Bill Masefield pulled his car up behind Doctor Barton's roadster. Incredulity, when Frances had denied authorship of the note, despite its similarity to her writing, had given way to suspicion that had sent him speeding to the address mentioned. As he had progressed into the deserted, desolate waterfront, suspicion yielded to ominous foreboding.

Finding the door boarded up, he stepped cautiously down the alley. He peered in through the open window. A beam of light was cutting through the blackness. Toward him it came, then swerved abruptly and was gone. Soon there appeared the scattered rays of a steady source of light shining at the far side of the basement.

Bill eased his body through the window. He tiptoed toward the light. Outside the half-closed door of a room he halted. Seated by a table, atop which burned a watchman's lamp, sat the huge black.

Hurling caution to the winds, Bill pushed through the door.

"Where is Doctor Barton?" he rapped at the startled giant.

The response was a sudden rush at him by the latter, chair poised overhead. Reacting instantly, Bill stooped low, meeting the attack with a charging shoulder-butt that caught the negro heavily in the thighs. The chair fell to the floor as he fell back, pained and aston-

ished. Grimacing with rage, he shuffled clumsily forward, reaching for the shrewdly retreating Bill. Within reach, he clutched for Bill's swaying head.

With skill born of a lifetime of training the latter weaved in close, turned unexpectedly about, reached up to lock his hands about the negro's bull-like neck. Down he bent, jerking his arms. The black sailed over his head in a somersault, crashing into the wall. He shook his head, then, with incredible vitality, pulled himself up. Again unprotected, he waddled to the attack, once more playing into his skilled antagonist's hands.

This time the flying mare was repeated, with even more force. Headlong into the stone floor the big man smashed. He writhed convulsively for a few seconds, then lay motionless, mouth agape, eyes staring glassily into space. Grasping the lamp, Bill ran out into the basement, using it to guide him through the gloom.

No entrance to the building above—not a trace of the one he sought—no one could he find. Despairing, as for the second time he completely traversed the cellar, his foot tripped over something. His heart leaped. It was the doctor's bag! Close by was the trap-door.

Every ounce of his strength was required to lift that massive hatch from its frame. The graveolent stench that swirled up forced him back. Hand clapped to nose, he lowered the lamp through the opening, and strode quickly to the nearby wall, heart racing with fear and excitement. He had deduced correctly: there was a ladder close to the wall. Lamp in hand he was soon descending, not daring to breathe, into the hole.

The sight that met his eyes convulsed him with horror. The putrescent corpse of Jekal, in the coffin; the prostrate Doctor Barton. Lungs threatening to burst,

he lifted the doctor's inert form upon his back, carrying him in a fireman's hold up the ladder.

INTO the open air of the alley he staggered at last. There was not a second to spare. He carefully laid the doctor face down on the ground and knelt to his rear. He was soon administering artificial respiration to his unbreathing, blue-faced friend.

Tenaciously, unmindful of the fleeting minutes, he continued, rhythmically forcing the precious air in and out of the doctor's lungs. At long last he was rewarded by hearing a feeble resumption of breathing. Slowly this gained strength.

Doctor Barton opened his eyes. A sickly grin crossed his lips as he met the anxious eyes of his friend. He had been dreaming, a soul-racking nightmare, in which he had been struggling—for what, against what, he could not recall, except that, somehow, his very life depended on the outcome of the struggle. And then, like some appalling weight, there descended upon him the terribly real events of the afternoon.

As if compelled to unburden himself, he jerked forth the incredible details of it all to the astounded Bill.

"But, Bill," he concluded hoarsely, "Bill, he—he's dead. You know that, Bill. You saw him."

Silently, grimly, Bill assented. A look of relief spread over the doctor's haggard face.

He knew—he *must know*, he told himself—the rational explanation of it all. He shook his head slowly. "No—it couldn't be—*it couldn't*," he muttered over and over.

Bill, looking quizzically at him, attributed it to his shaken condition.

Then, abruptly, the doctor gasped:

"Look!" seizing Bill by the sleeve, turning him about.

There, emerging stealthily from the open window, some dozen paces down the alley, was the ponderous form of the black.

Ugly features barely discernible in the half-light, he glanced at them, wheeled and lumbered off toward the alley's blind end.

"Hold up, you!" cried Bill, sprinting after him.

Pulling himself up weakly, Doctor Barton followed on unsteady feet.

Just as the black scrambled onto the five-foot embankment, Bill, with a reckless leap, grabbed him from behind. The big man twisted about, pressing his opponent against the concrete. Bill, seasoned wrestler that he was, immediately shifted his hold to the front. Fighting desperately to free himself, the black brought his knee chestward, breaking Bill's grasp and jolting him backward. As the latter sprawled on the ground, the negro, off balance, was forced to jump down from the embankment.

In a flash Bill was up, interposed between the black and his obvious avenue of escape. Without hesitating, the man shuffled forward, grunting viciously. Hands extended, feet well spread, Bill confidently awaited his untutored opponent. As one heavily muscled black arm reached out, he fainted cleverly and lunged to the attack.

As if from nowhere the negro's hand darted out, gripping Bill's wrist. Half pulling, half twisting, he drew Bill's arm peculiarly across his chest. With incredible speed he ducked low, and as Bill tilted forward, grasped him at the crotch. As though all in one movement, Bill was lifted high overhead, whirled dizzily about, sent hurtling through the air to land with a sickening jar near where Doctor Barton stood, dumb-struck.

The negro clambered quickly to the top of the embankment. Pausing to draw breath, he turned his head deliberately. Over his shoulder his eyes, glinting strangely, fixed upon the open-mouthed Doctor Barton. Fleishy lips parted, and as several deep-throated raspy sounds came forth, the scarred face twisted into a hideous grimace of hate. He snarled brutishly, turned and leaped, striking the water with a loud splash.

Running anxiously to the embankment, Doctor Barton saw the kinky head bob to the surface a stone's throw away. Heavy arms thrashing clumsily, the glistening body moved steadily, obliquely upshore. Not until the churning figure was swallowed up in the haze, somewhere near the deserted wharf a hundred yards up the shore, did Doctor Barton turn to his badly stunned friend.

Eyes popping, face white, Bill's lips twitched spasmodically—for all the world, the doctor couldn't help thinking as he knelt beside him, like a neurotic woman on the verge of hysteria.

"Har-Harlow," he stammered, "Harlow—there was only one—one man—who could do that. That was the Arm Twist—the Arm Twist. . . ." His voice cracked into a wheeze, more a sob.

"The Arm Twist," whispered Doctor Barton dully. He forced a laugh. "Why, of course not, Bill. You're mistaken, Bill."

But the very words called up with unnerving vividness the picture of a black face, a savage face with incongruously luminous eyes that glared with a mad hate. And as the moist, odorous breeze blew softly down the alley, bringing, or seeming to bring, a guttural, inhuman voice to his ears above the lapping of the tide and the rhythmic pounding of the tugs, Doctor Barton knew that he had lied.