

JUNE

Weird Tales

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

25c



THE CARNAL GOD

a compelling weird story about a golden image
that was instinct with evil life

By JOHN R. SPEER and CARLISLE SCHNITZER

PAUL ERNST • ROBERT BLOCH • HENRY KUTTNER • HAROLD WARD

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 29

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1937

Number 6

- Cover Design M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "The Carnal God"
- The Carnal God John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer 642
A strange story of a golden image that was instinct with evil life
- Ragnarok Henry Kuttner 667
Verse
- Clicking Red Heels Paul Ernst 668
The red heels of his murdered sweetheart tapped a march of death wherever he went
- The Black Kiss Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner 678
The story of the thing that swam in the black waters and called itself Morella Godotfo
- The Last Pharaoh (part 2) Thomas P. Kelley 691
The story of the weird doom that befell two lovers in a castle of gloom on the African coast
- Hymn to Beauty Charles P. Baudelaire 719
Verse, translated by Clark Ashton Smith from the French
- The Life-Eater Harold Ward 720
A terror-tale about a frightful wraith that brought death to a little town in the Louisiana swamplands
- Return to Earth Willis Knapp Jones 734
A curious weird-scientific story about the return of a man who flew to another planet
- Death is a Woman Felix Kowalewski 744
Verse
- Telegraphy and Telepathy Roy Temple House 745
A fact-article about weird happenings
- Murder Mask Edgar Daniel Kramer 748
A brief tale about the homicidal effect of wearing a medieval mask
- Weird Story Reprint:
- The Ocean Leech Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 753
An eldritch story of the sea from an old issue of WEIRD TALES
- The Eyrie 762
The readers express their opinions

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1937, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Carnal God

By JOHN R. SPEER and CARLISLE SCHNITZER

A strange and thrilling story about a golden image that was instinct with evil life, and the terrible weird fire that burned with the cold of outer space

1. The Dreadful Face

ON STARLESS nights when the moon was obscured by the earth's shadow, Pierre Soret walked alone down the darkest and most deserted streets in London. He did this to avoid the people who might look into his face. His face! He shuddered, his pinched shoulders wrenching sharply with a bitter shrug. Could anyone call this mask, this unearthly mass of bubbling flesh, boiling and seething in his own blood, a face?

Pierre knew what always happened when people looked into his torture-shattered eyes. The sight of their horror sickened him. His memory ached with the sharpness of pain he had felt on those few occasions when some luckless persons had inadvertently seen, and halted, frozen momentarily with the intense horror and nausea that overwhelmed them, their faces graven with revulsion; a moment later to totter rapidly past him down the street, the tension of their feeling released with an effort that ended in a sob of hysteria and fear.

The route Pierre took upon these nights was always the same. With his long black opera cape and moth-eaten topper, he stalked through the streets like some villain from an old Drury Lane melodrama. "A quaint old man who has refused to leave his yesterdays," people might remark, if they did not see his face. Pierre gave no heed to the few

people he passed, except to draw the cape quickly about his face if they approached him too near under the eery, fog-filtered glare of the street lamps.

At Nigh Street, Pierre's bent figure paused wearily before he started up the hill. A few yards from the corner, he paused again, staring at the yellow lines of light cutting the fog and issuing from the slit-like windows of the beautiful home of the Countess Donella Moonard. In the thick mists, the house, impressively large and of Egyptian architecture, resembled a temple of Black Magic veiled in oppressive incense. The yellow slits glowered steadily and ominously. What brilliance and exotic color lay within!

It was late, but not all of the Countess Moonard's guests had departed. This would be the first party of the new season; trust her to make it gay and unusual.

Pierre walked slowly forward, muttering to himself. His shoulders brushed the low, ivy-covered wall surrounding the estate. He was nearing the entrance to the garden. Above the gate in the wall, an ancient gas torch flickered, casting a ghastly light that might have come from the most ancient tombs along the Blue Nile.

"The fools!" he mumbled bitterly. "If I could only tell them what she really is!"

Within a few feet of the entrance, he paused again, resentfully. Was it his fault that the curse of many years before had made him an outcast from the very society that now applauded the brilliant

Countess Moonard? He thrust back his cape. How good this musty dampness felt! For weeks he had not been outside his home. His lungs cried out in rebellion, cried greedily for deeper and deeper drafts of the refreshing breath of night. The Countess Moonard! His hatred flamed higher. Her guests . . . fools! What would happen if he were to walk into that gay party scene, drop his cape from about his face, and tell them that——

SUDDENLY he paused; the pale, frightened face of a beautiful girl was confronting him in the dim flare of the gas torch. It was too late to draw the folds of his cape about his face. The girl had already seen the sickening sight, and a stifled cry rose from her lovely throat.

"Oh, Carl!" she stammered weakly, clutching the shoulder of the tall, handsome young man who stood beside her.

"Ruth! Dearest—what——?" The



"They threw him down in front of the throne."

young man was puzzled until he saw Pierre's face.

Usually when Pierre saw that he had frightened someone with the sight of his horrible features, he turned and ran away, rather than suffer the indignity of an apology—but something about this girl made him linger. It was a small diamond-studded pendant that hung from about her slim white throat. In that, Pierre saw the unmistakable sign of death and despair that always cast its shadow upon the throats of the Countess Moonard's victims. The girl was marked!

From the girl's face, Pierre turned to the young man. He looked into his eyes and saw there the familiar terror that always spread across the faces of those who looked upon him.

A long moment of silence passed. The girl turned from him, covering her face with her hands and clinging tightly to the young man, who now stared at Pierre with growing inquisitiveness.

"I'm sorry," Pierre finally said.

The young man tried to look pleasant. He was an intelligent young doctor, and although the sight of Pierre had upset him, he was quickly regaining his poise.

"Sorry? What for?" he asked.

"My face, if it frightened you. It usually does." Pierre tried to smile.

"Oh, yes, of course!" Carl spoke with more assurance now. The girl on his arm was still trembling. Neither Carl nor the girl wore wraps; they had been wandering through the gardens of the Countess Moonard's estate in preference to dancing.

"Ruth, dearest, don't allow this to affect you." He patted her shoulder gently. "I say, old man, you gave her an awful fright. I don't wish to be unkind, but you really are enough to frighten anyone."

Curiosity was fast overcoming Doctor

Carl Fielding's fear. He looked closer into Pierre's face.

"Are those boils or burns—or what? How long have you been afflicted this way?"

"Ten years."

"Indeed? It is rather difficult to see here in this poor light, but something should be done about your face. As a plastic surgeon, I would recommend that you——"

"Permit an operation?" Pierre interrupted. "Young man, modern surgery cannot do anything for my case."

"I disagree with you. Surely you would be willing to give me a chance? This must be horrible, going about frightening people. Or do you enjoy nearly scaring young women to death? My fiancée is still trembling!"

Carl removed a handkerchief from his pocket. "Here, Ruth, stop crying, and use this. The boogy man isn't going to get you. What am I going to marry anyway, a cry-baby?"

"I'm not crying!" she protested indignantly. "It was just the sudden shock of—well, you and I walking along, and then suddenly to——"

She turned to Pierre, but did not look directly into his face.

"Really I am sorry if I offended you."

"Oh, no, no; it is I who should apologize." Pierre's voice trembled with gratitude. "You are very kind—both of you. I was quite careless tonight. Usually I am more thoughtful of people. You see it is not pleasant to——"

He was looking at her throat. If this young man would listen! But no, it was impossible. No one would believe the story of the diamond pendant.

Pierre said stiffly: "I really thank you for your kindness, and I am sorry if I have spoiled your evening. Good night!"

He turned and started to hurry away.

"Oh, but wait a minute," Carl called

to him. "I really meant what I said about your face. I think I can do something for you. Won't you take my card and call at my office? At least you can tell me what caused this awful affliction."

Pierre quietly accepted the card that was handed to him. He thrust it quickly into the pocket of his vest. Doctor Fielding noticed that the man's hands were as hideous as his face.

"You think you would like to know what afflicted me?" Pierre said with a trace of bitterness. "I wonder if you would believe me if I told you."

"I would have to," Carl answered.

Pierre waited a moment before he said abruptly: "I see you have been to the Countess Moonard's party. Do you know her well?"

"As well as most people know the mysterious Countess Donella Moonard," Carl laughed. "Does anyone really know her? Surely you are not acquainted with the Countess?"

Pierre did not answer his question, but said directly: "Young man, I will accept the invitation to call at your office. I never go about in the daylight, but if you would be there sometime in the——"

"Make it tomorrow evening. I'll be there until midnight," Carl said quickly.

"Very well, but I do not come because I think that you can do anything for me."

He looked at Ruth again. Self-consciously she put her hands to her throat.

Pierre added significantly: "Perhaps I may be able to help *you*. If there are no stars or moonlight, I will call on you."

"I don't understand. What does the absence of stars and moonlight have to do with your calling on me?"

"I will explain that later. If I may offer a word of advice to the young lady, I am sure I might save both of you from——" Pierre faltered. So much to explain, so much that was unexplainable!

How could he hope that these two young people would believe him?

"You were about to say——?" Ruth looked interested.

"You have made a foolish bargain with someone. The price you will pay is too high. But it grows late, and I am sure there is little I can say to you just now. Perhaps I have said too much already. Until we meet again, I bid you good evening!" Pierre removed his hat, and bowed in a low sweeping movement.

RUTH could not restrain her gasp of horror as she saw the man's head. It was scarred and smelled strongly of burning hair. He had forgotten that he should not remove his hat. Mumbling an embarrassed apology, Pierre hurried into the darkness beyond the gate.

"Carl, did you see his hair? The man looked as if he had been horribly burned!" Ruth cried when he was gone.

"The most awful-looking man I have ever seen. All your fault too; you would insist on walking in the night air. Why did we have to walk all the way around the garden? The Countess' parties always do this to you, Ruth. They give you the craziest ideas."

"Then you do remember what she prophesied tonight!" Ruth exclaimed. "Really, isn't it uncanny? Tonight the Countess told me that I would take a new step in my life; something would happen that would change everything for me. She said it would begin with a horrible fright. And I was frightened, Carl. Do you suppose——"

"Suppose nothing!" Carl replied with some exasperation. "The Countess and her fake prophecies are without weight to me. You women are always falling for the ways of some old crone with a crystal or a deck of cards in her hand. Besides, she may have planted that old man in our path tonight just to make her

claims more convincing. How do we know but that all of that horrible appearance was not just so much clever make-up?"

"I know it wasn't."

"How do you know?"

"I just do, Carl." She smiled at him. "I believe everything the Countess has told me. But, come, dearest, we must be returning to the party."

She took his hand, and turned back to the garden. Carl followed reluctantly.

"Ruth, I wish you would give up your devotion to the Countess and her mad religion, or whatever it is. I don't like it. You've changed since you have taken her so seriously. First thing I know you'll be a convert to her—oh, what do you call it—moon worship?"

She stopped and turned to him; her voice was strange and final in its tone. "Carl, I am already a convert. The religion of Moonere has given me everything I want in life. Soon I will take the sacred vows of its followers."

"You can't. I won't have it, I tell you. Oh, Ruth, surely you can't believe in this preposterous, this unnatural faith? I don't know what hellish power the Countess may have over you; but I do know that it isn't natural for a normal girl, reared as you have been, suddenly to accept a faith that even a heathen would sneer at! And I'm going to——"

Carl was interrupted by the unheralded appearance of one of the Countess Moonard's swarthy-skinned Egyptian servants. The man, tall and sinisterly handsome, was dressed like all the Countess' menials; he wore the brief, exotic attire of a slave in an ancient court or temple. The servant bowed his head and made a peculiar sign which Ruth seemed to understand.

"The Countess desires to see you,

most lovely maiden of the Temple of Moonere," the servant said solemnly.

"Maiden of the temple of Moonere!" Carl could not restrain his disgust. "You tell your mistress I am taking Ruth home; and that if she wants to see anyone about her insane religion, she may consult me."

The servant did not answer him, but his eyes narrowed into slits of cruelty and hatred. His lips curled contemptuously.

"Nilathar, I will follow you to the priestess," Ruth said, ignoring Carl's threat to take her home.

"Ruth!" Carl pulled her to his side. "I'm not going to let you stay here alone. You've got to listen to me."

The servant broke Carl's grasp about Ruth's wrist, and pushed him from her.

"No one is to restrain a maiden of the temple when the priestess calls," he said, standing between Ruth and Carl.

"Why, you——" Carl lunged at the Egyptian, who quickly drew a knife. The blade pressed against Carl's vest, and seemed only too eager to press further. The servant smiled in mock courtesy.

"The guests are departing. The Countess sends you her regrets, for she is retiring with her faithful maidens," the servant said coldly. "Your coat and hat will be brought to you."

CARL was furious, but a length of glittering steel in obviously adept and determined hands is a deterrent to the most courageous, and will instill restraint and judgment in the most foolhardy. What perplexed Carl also left him with a feeling of helplessness—Ruth's apparent lack of consideration of his danger. This was not like the girl he had known since his early childhood; the girl who would have fought like a tigress anyone who might have threatened Carl. Now she ignored him entirely, as if it meant nothing to her that his encounter with the servant might have proved fatal

for him. He turned to make one final plea to Ruth. She was gone.

When his coat and hat were brought to him, he took them and said with an ironic smile, "Tell the Countess I am overwhelmed with her hospitality. She must call on me some day."

Beneath the surface of Carl's polite departure swirled an undercurrent of bewildered resentment. There was nothing natural about Ruth's acceptance of the faith of Moonerism, whatever that was. Carl's thoughts of the entire evening moved rapidly back to the hideous old man they had met at the garden entrance; he recalled his words of advice to Ruth: "You have made a foolish bargain with someone. The price you will pay is too high."

That old man must have sensed Ruth's intention to follow this strange religion; he knew more about the Countess Moonard than he pretended. But what? Nothing about the entire evening made sense. Ruth had become a stranger to him, a beautiful stranger. The characterization seemed significant, though in what way he could not fathom. Ruth had always been an attractive girl, but recently he had found her beauty violently compelling. And tonight, the strange new depths of her beauty had made him marvel; it was a beauty of coldness and austerity, and it frightened him. Ruth, the Ruth he knew, was and must be beautiful, but never cold, never cruelly elusive.

Something was happening to Ruth, something that was taking her away from him. And that was not permissible. Carl Fielding did not allow what he loved and wanted to be taken away from him. The Countess had something to do with it, and he would fight her; but he must learn something about her, the strange power she exercised over Ruth and the other converts.

Carl settled restlessly back into the in-

terior of his car, musing over the strange events of the evening. Who might know anything about the Countess Moonard, other than her converts, whose lips were always sealed with secrecy?

Although it was a slim hope, there was his old friend, Inspector Chadwick of Scotland Yard. Perhaps the eccentric detective would be able to assist him.

2. *A Weird Disappearance*

EARLY the next day, Inspector Chadwick looked up from his desk to behold the troubled features of Doctor Carl Fielding. Carl had not slept the night before, and his worry showed plainly on his face. Chadwick leaned back in his swivel-chair, and greeted him in a tone of mock seriousness.

"So you've come to confess? Well, turn over the jewels, and I'll see that they make it easy for you. I'll recommend hanging at the earliest possible date. How are you, Doc? Haven't seen you since last spring. Been intending to get around to your office for a little chat. Heard you were engaged to be married. And from the looks of that long face of yours, you must already be hitched. Sit down, put your feet on the desk, smoke my cigars, and I'll even go so far as to offer you a good drink of brandy just to show you my heart's in the right place."

This was Chadwick's manner of treating everyone. He ran a continuous flow of conversation, annoying his subject with the enforced silence; but from this silence Chadwick often learned more than if he had permitted him to talk. Inspector Chadwick could see that Carl had not come to him for just a friendly visit.

Carl sat down heavily, and looked at the smiling, round face of his friend. He scarcely heard any of Chadwick's rattling greeting.

"I thought I would—er——" Carl

started to break into the Inspector's incessant flow of chatter.

"Ask me to lend you five pounds?" Chadwick went right on talking. "There was a man in here the other day, had one glass eye, and one good eye. He offered to give me either one as security for a slight loan. You look like a sick canary. What have you been doing to yourself? I always said doctors were poor advertisements for their remedies. Try this brandy; it might put a little color into your face. Good idea there! I'll play doctor, and you be the inspector for a while. If this Crayton case keeps up any longer, I'm going to be a first-class medico anyway. You know, it's one of those very technical points; all about this and that. Practically have to understand medicine to get any sense out of the thing. Should be right up your alley. How do you like my American speech? Notice I talk more like an American than I do a loyal subject of the king? Need that effect. Been working on terms, tones, pronunciations. Oh, so much to change! How about having dinner with me?"

"See here, Chadwick, will you be quiet for a minute, and let me talk?" Carl finally blurted out.

Chadwick threw back his head and laughed, a hearty laugh that shook his broad shoulders and made his face redder than it already was. "Oh, so you want to talk? Well, well, fancy that! All right, Doc; you talk, and I'll listen. But if it's about me being best man at your wedding, that's off. I don't look right in formal dress. When is the wedding, by the way?"

"Unless I get some help, there may not be any wedding." Carl looked soberly at him.

"Help?" Chadwick laughed again. "What do you want me to do, persuade the girl to marry you? I thought you had already proposed."

"Chadwick, did you ever hear of a re-

ligious cult known as Moonerism?" Carl ignored his friend's attempt at humor.

Chadwick became serious almost immediately.

"The Countess Donella Moonard?" he asked.

"Yes. Ruth, the girl I'm going to marry, has suddenly been seized with a desire to become one of her followers. Chadwick, there's something uncanny about the Countess and her religion. You probably know more about her activities than anyone else in London. So I——"

"I'm afraid I know very little." Chadwick rose from his chair, and walked restlessly about the office. The religion of Moonerism had been brought to the attention of Scotland Yard once before; however, investigation of the Countess Moonard had only revealed that she believed in a religion having to do with certain astral and planetary bodies. Those who gave themselves up to its teachings never revealed the secrets; and those who tried to learn more were either converted or by some strange manner suddenly and for ever frightened from attempting to obtain further knowledge.

"Surely there is something we could do about it." Carl began walking back and forth with his friend. "You know how I feel about Ruth's acceptance of such a strange faith. Besides, Chadwick, I have reason to believe that—well——"

The words stuck in his throat. He could not bring himself to believe that the Countess or anyone else really had supernatural powers; furthermore what he was beginning to suspect was beyond belief.

"Doc, there's really nothing we can do about this, except to try and persuade your fiancée to use better judgment. There are many strange religious cults in London. As long as they do not break any of our laws, we cannot stop them. No one has ever found out enough about the Countess and her beliefs to justify a thorough in-

vestigation. Her following is comparatively small, mostly beautiful women—very beautiful women."

"That's just it," Carl said excitedly. "All of them are beautiful and young in appearance. The Countess herself—she must be seventy if she's a day, but look at her. Her face is ageless. Chadwick, you know that I would be the last person in the world to waste time over foolish beliefs in the supernatural; yet—well, I've noticed that Ruth has become—different. I see it in her face, in her actions, in——"

"Of course you do. All those religions require a certain amount of fanatical devotion. Ruth is young and impressionable. Perhaps if you took her away for a while?"

"But that's just it! She seems to move as if controlled by another mind. Last night I was almost stabbed trying to keep her from staying with the Countess, and the affair left her entirely unimpressed with my danger."

"Stabbed?"

"Yes, by one of the Countess' servants. Look, Chadwick, you are clever at obtaining secrets. Why can't you work on this, and really find out what happens to those who take up Moonerism?"

"I know what happens. They follow it to their death. Apparently they lead normal lives outside of their activities within the temple. What can Scotland Yard do about that? Today people have a right to worship as they please, you know."

"Oh, you don't grasp what I mean. I think there is something beyond the ordinary enchantment of a strange religious faith. Call it what you will, the Countess Donella Moonard has a power over the few people she contacts; and that power is transforming Ruth from a lovely girl into——" Carl shuddered.

"Come, come, Doc. You're allowing this too much importance. I will admit

the acceptance of the religion is bad enough; but after all, I know of at least fifty prominent women, in good society, who believe in Moonerism. They are not faring so badly."

THE telephone on Inspector Chadwick's desk began ringing impatiently. He picked up the phone.

"This is Inspector Chadwick." He smiled at Carl. "You say you want to speak to Doctor Fielding? Why, of course. He's right here in my office."

"No one knew I was here. Who——" Carl took the phone with an expression of puzzled fear. "Ruth! Yes, dearest. At once. Of course. Please try to control yourself. I'll be there as quickly as I can."

He banged the receiver down, and turned to Chadwick. "Ruth calling me. She's talking strangely. Said someone put your phone number in her mind. She wants me at once. Come with me, Chadwick. Something's wrong."

"I'm on my way now!" Chadwick followed Carl out of the office.

Reaching Ruth's apartment in record time, Carl was startled by the look of fear in her eyes. She looked as if she had just been awakened from a horrible nightmare, as she stood before him in her negligee; her light brown hair, usually so well-brushed and sleek, was now a wild mass of disorder.

"Oh, Carl! Carl! What has happened to me? Where have I been?" She ran to his arms.

"Why, Ruth, don't you remember? I left you last night at the Countess Moonard's. You insisted upon staying."

"Yes, yes, I remember that. Then I went to sleep. The Countess said——"

Her eyes closed. She seemed about to faint.

"She said what?" Carl took her shoulders between his hands and shook her anxiously. "Ruth, what did she say?"

Ruth's eyes opened. The fear came into them again, and she began crying hysterically. "Oh, it can't be! Carl, I'm lost! Lost!" she sobbed.

"Ruth, you must get a grip on yourself and tell us what happened."

Carl led her to a chair, into which she dropped, limp and helpless. Suddenly she started talking again, her eyes staring widely.

"I don't know. I don't remember what happened after I fell asleep at the Countess'. I should remember. I want to remember what she said to me, and I'm afraid now. I awoke here in my room. I heard a voice calling to me. There was no one here, no one with a voice like the one that was calling me. It's calling now! It's warning me, Carl, warning me not to go on. Listen! I can hear it so plainly. It's a voice—a voice like that old man's. The old man with the horrible face, and eyes, and—oh, Carl, Carl, what did I do? Now there are two voices. The Countess is telling me to come back—to sleep, to sleep. And that old man is saying: 'Don't listen to her; listen to me. I am your master. Moonere will take your soul to a hell beyond hell!' "

Her voice broke with uncontrollable sobbing. She began babbling insanely.

"There's nothing I can do for her now, except to quiet her," Carl said finally. "She needs sleep. A sedative, and perhaps we can get her mind back to normal."

Under Carl's care, Ruth was soon asleep; although her body convulsed with sudden spasms of fear that came even through her slumber, as if she were defending herself from unseen demons who were dragging her away. Gently closing the door of her bedroom, he returned to talk with Chadwick.

While Carl had been inducing her to sleep, Chadwick had discovered a small necklace upon the carpet. It looked as if

it had been torn from someone's throat with great violence.

"Ever see this before?" Chadwick held the glittering pendant out to Carl.

"Why, yes. Ruth was wearing it last night. It is something new she picked up."

"No, nothing new about this." Chadwick shook his head. "This is the symbol of Moonerism. I've seen them before. Never this close, however. Notice the pendant?"

For the first time, Carl observed the pendant closely. It was oval, about two inches and a half long, about an inch and a half wide, and apparently of some onyx-like substance. It glowed with an unearthly, blue-black light, faint but perceptible. At the upper side, and a little to the right, a small glittering stone was set; a stone that glowed as if it were imbued with some cruel, radiant life. From this stone, a thin line of light traced downward to the lower center of the oval, where another and larger stone was set. When the thin line of light reached this second sphere, it grew brighter and engulfed it in a consuming glow.

"Feel this thing," Chadwick said, handing it to Carl.

"Why, it's cold as ice!" Carl gasped.

"Wonder what that design means?" Chadwick took the necklace back again. "You know, Doc, it looks to me as if the Countess Moonard is going to be thoroughly investigated this time. As soon as Ruth awakens, we must try to get more information from her. No doubt she was hypnotized. But this old man she speaks of——"

"I know who she means. I'll tell you about him; but first, I want to take another look at her. I think I had better get a nurse, and——"

Carl was moving to the bedroom as he spoke. When he opened the door, he let out a cry: "She's gone!"

"What!" Inspector Chadwick made his way to the door in two leaps.

A hasty search of the room and the adjoining bath revealed nothing. The open window with the curtains blowing lazily was their only clue.

"Kidnapped!" whistled Chadwick. "Now this *is* a case for Scotland Yard. Come on; we're going to pay a visit to the Countess."

They were hurrying for the door when the telephone in the hallway began ringing.

"Answer it." Chadwick turned upon his heels. "May be important."

The voice Carl heard over the telephone made his face suddenly pale. It was the voice of Pierre Soret, saying: "Doctor Fielding, you must trust the fate of your fiancée to me. She is being taken back to the Temple of Moonere, but do not permit any rash blunders by the police to interfere. Her life will pay the penalty. I am your friend. Wait until tonight, and I will come to your office, if the stars permit."

3. *The Cult of Moonere*

DOCTOR FIELDING looked from his watch to the window of his office, opening upon a black velvet night. He had encountered considerable difficulty in restraining Inspector Chadwick from going at once to the Countess Moonard's home in search of Ruth. Now he was further annoyed by the torture of doubt. Had he been foolish in obeying the voice—the voice of an old man he had seen only once before? Perhaps the telephone call had only been a trick to delay the rescue of Ruth. That could be, for it was very late, and there was no sign of the old man, although the sky was without a twinkle of starlight.

The telephone on his desk disturbed

his thoughts with its jangling ring. He answered impatiently; it would be Inspector Chadwick calling again to find out if the mysterious old man had made his appearance.

"I think I should take a look around the Countess' home," Chadwick was insisting.

"No! We've gone this far; we must hold out. There's someone at the door now. It's surely he. I'll call you when he's gone," Carl shouted into the telephone, crashed the receiver on the hook, and ran to the door.

It was only the charwoman, armed with buckets and mops for her nightly duties.

"Sorry, doctor," she said, pushing a stray wisp of grimy hair from her eyes, "but I thought if ye didn't mind; I would be cleanin' yer office. But then if I'll bother ye——"

"Yes, you will," Carl answered hastily. "Forget about my office for this one night. I am expecting a caller." He took some loose coins from his pocket and gave them to her. "Here, take these and buy yourself a midnight snack."

"Ah, thank ye, sir, and God bless ye, sir, and——"

Carl had to push her gently but firmly out of the door to shut off the flood of almost tearful gratitude the old woman was heaping upon him.

He closed the door, and turned again to search the sky for any trace of unwelcome stars when a scream echoed down the corridor of the offices. Throwing open the door, he saw the old man standing in the corridor, his black cape covering his face. The charwoman was hastening down the stairs, gesticulating and screaming with fright.

"She saw my face," the man in black said simply.

Carl ushered him into his office, and quickly locked the door. Pierre now kept

his cape wrapped about his face as he looked suspiciously about the office.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

"Yes. I've been waiting all evening for you. Now please tell me about Ruth. Is she all right? Oh, what does it all mean anyway?"

Carl hurried him to a chair in front of his desk, and then seated himself. Pierre sat down, but still remained covered.

"Doctor Fielding, I am glad that you trusted my telephone call this afternoon," Pierre began to speak. "When I told you last night that I would come to see you, it was because I wanted to help you. Your fiancée was in danger. I saw the sign of Moonere upon her throat."

"You mean this?" Carl displayed the necklace Chadwick had found that afternoon.

"Yes, that is the mark of the Countess Moonard—the beginning of what will eventually become this!" Pierre stood up, throwing the cape from his face.

For a moment Carl's senses reeled. He gripped the edge of his desk, and leaned unsteadily against the back of his chair. He felt the blood drain from his head; he had not felt this way since his first days in the dissecting-room at the medical school. His horror shamed him. After all, he was a doctor who was supposed to be able to stand the ghastly sight of blood and injury. But this was different! What he saw in Pierre's face was beyond ordinary gore!

The face seemed to be afire. It looked like flesh that was slowly being cooked. The eyes bulged and smoke seemed to swirl from them. And above it all there was the horrible stench of charred human skin.

For a long moment Pierre said nothing. Carl could not speak, although he fought bravely to gain control of his feelings.

"Not a very encouraging sight, is it, doctor?" Pierre broke the awful silence,

"I—I can't believe it. It's not possible—it—in God's name, man, what caused this?" Carl finally gasped.

"Moonere!" Pierre's pained eyes looked into Carl's.

"Moonere?"

"Perhaps you know her better by the name of the Countess Donella Moonard. The beautiful Countess Moonard and Moonere, the sorceress, daughter of the God of Sudre, are one. Your fiancée is marked for the sacrifice that for the last ten thousand years has offered up its beautiful captives to the greedy God of Sudre!"

"Sudre? Where is Sudre?" Carl stared at him incredulously.

"Sudre is another world, another planet, with another scheme of life—a scheme of life more complex than any dream of our existence, more terrible than all the horrors of history, beyond comprehension by any of our sciences or philosophies. It is all we are, refined and horribly exaggerated in some phases, until our most potent symbols of evil are only weak caricatures beside it. It is evil transcendent and all-powerful. It is the natural, purged of any goodness, and become supernatural and transcendent. A few men of ancient Egypt knew of its existence, knew of the All-Powerful One of Sudre, who has been playing his evil jest upon the helpless people of this earth for countless centuries."

CARL could only stare at Pierre, trying to realize meaning from the strange sounds he made. It was as if he listened to a man from another world.

"You do not understand, I know." Pierre sat down again, wearily. "But I will make you understand, if you will only hear me out. You must try to grasp what I tell you."

Pleadingly Pierre's scarred hand reached across the desk and touched Carl's fingers,

Hastily Pierre withdrew his hand as he saw the look of revulsion upon Carl's face. Carl felt himself sicken at the feeling of unearthly coldness of the man's skin. The feeling of coldness was not in keeping with the appearance. To look at him was to think of fire, all-consuming fire!

"The way my hand felt to you just then is the way my skin is all over my body," Pierre said. "Touch it, if you dare. You are a doctor. Examine me. These sores that look like boils and fire—feel them, and you will know the cold sensation of a billion miles of space."

Carl's hand moved slowly to Pierre's face. With dread reluctance, his fingertips traced over the pitted, irregular features. It was like feeling an iced corpse, only worse, for this flesh was alive. When he withdrew his hand, he beheld a trace of damp, bluish substance upon his fingers.

Pierre spoke again: "Last night when I told you of the stars, you wondered what they had to do with my going out. Now you see my hopeless state; you see the unspeakable ugliness of my face. You must believe that all of this is a part of the curse the stars have in store for those who defy Moonere. When the moon and the stars loom so brightly in the evening sky, my flesh boils; my blood steams and courses through my veins, sending poison, poison from Sudre—moon-poisoning throughout my body. It is not the heated fire of the sun or of a furnace, but a cold, blue fire that chills as it burns, yet burns more intensely than a thousand blasts from hell.

"I am slowly being destroyed, because I have defied Moonere and sought to drive her from the earth. Do you know what it is to be destroyed, to be conscious every minute of your slow journey to death? Look! I'll show you a picture."

Pierre took from his pocket a small photograph.

Carl looked from the photo to the man who stood before him. There was no resemblance. The picture was of an intelligent man in his late thirties. He was tall and straight, with a splendid, manly physique, and handsome face that was crowned with heavy black hair, graying at the temples.

"That is a picture of Professor Pierre Soret." Pierre stood up, pointing to the picture in Carl's hand. "You see the man was tall, a large man, an athlete in his college days. Now look at him!" He made a disdainful gesture to his present slight figure that was scarcely five feet in height. "I am the same man of that photograph taken over ten years ago. But there is no way I could prove it, because I am slowly being burned to a stony cinder."

"I can't believe it," Carl cried out against the madness of his thoughts. "How can you expect me to believe that this woman has been able to destroy you like this? What fiendish power, even of the supernatural, could do this to a man?"

"The crystal of Sudre in Moonere's temple. Like the light-collecting principle of our modern telescopes and reflectors, it draws together the beams of Sudre into one hellish and destructive fire.

"Sudre is a world, a satellite of the outermost planet of our solar system. Astronomers have not discovered this moon, Sudre, for it is not of sufficient size or density to enter into their calculations; and its discovery would disclose none of its power of evil, even if it were charted. Nor do they realize that upon it burns a fire that is controlled by the evil magic of the God of Sudre. Upon certain nights of the month, when it is on the side of that outer planet which is facing earth, the power of that fiery creation is directed upon me. Even when it is on the other side of that planet—and it revolves about

it once every twenty-seven of our days—those rays come down to earth with sufficient power to keep me living in the painful realization of my certain death.

"And there is life there; a life of eternal evil, like nothing science has ever yet discovered or ever will discover—life that would strike horror in the strongest hearts of the most coldly impersonal scientific explorer. The life of the undead, of which you have heard in your tales of earth horror, is nothing compared with its evilness."

THE old man's voice droned on. "I will not dwell upon a description of them, for it is this threat to your own fiancée's life that prompts me to even mention this to you. This evil beyond hell, which is the Countess Moonard's power—the crystal of Sudre——"

He broke off a short moment, then resumed: "You have seen the sun's powerful rays burning paper under a magnifying lens? Upon almost the same principle, yet using the crystal of Sudre instead of glass, Moonere burns her lovely offerings upon the altar of the God of Sudre. Few men are ever sacrificed to Sudre; it is almost always women, for the God of Sudre is a carnal fiend, delighting in despoiling chastity and ravishing virginity.

"Each convert to Moonerism is given a super-thrill in the discovery of how beautiful she can become. Ah, that is the way Moonere first enslaves her victims. They come to her seeking beauty. She promises them eternal loveliness, beyond even their dreams; and when they do as she decrees, they always receive this precious desire of every woman. That is why no one ever reveals the secret of Moonere. They do not dare, for she not only holds their lives in her hands, once they come to her, but she also holds woman's most priceless treasure — beauty. Every year, lovely women sink into the depths of despair

and torture because they seek the unnatural grant of beauty from the God of Sudre."

Carl cried out, suddenly remembering: "You're right! That was the way Ruth was trapped, I'm sure. I have seen the change in her."

"True, young man, although your fiancée is not yet fully enslaved. Tomorrow night, the full force of the rays of destruction from Sudre will fall upon earth. Moonere will hold her rites to the God of Sudre. Once the girl has danced within the temple of the maidens of Moonere, there will be no salvation for her. To leave Moonere, or to defy her, would mean the doom you now see in my face."

"But how were you trapped?" Carl asked.

"I will tell you of that. You see the secret of Moonere has never been new to me. From my earliest youth I knew that my life was to be dedicated to the destruction of Moonere and the evil reign of the God of Sudre; just as my ancestors have fought and died in silence for this curse. In my family, throughout the centuries, the knowledge of Sudre and Moonere has existed. We dared not reveal it; and even if we had done so, none would have believed us. Yet all of it is true.

"From ancient cities, long since buried beneath the sands of the deserts, to modern London, Moonere has slipped inconspicuously through life, carrying the curse of the God of Sudre, while my family has silently borne the banner of humanity. Although I am only a few years past forty, my knowledge of science and the ancient arts is far advanced. Were it not for the fact that I have the jealously guarded secrets of all these generations behind me, I could never have attained the ability I now have.

"That ability will explain your fiancée's strange actions in the earlier part of the day. I have taken over her mind. Telep-

athy is one power that Moonere and I both have in common. She thinks that is the only weapon I have, but she is wrong. At last I have discovered a more powerful ray than the one that burns in the glass of Sudre. With it, I hope to destroy Moonere and free the world of the constant threat of her accursed power."

"But what will become of Ruth?" Carl asked anxiously.

"I may be able to save her, if you help me. Today Moonere knew that I had taken Ruth's mind from her powerful grasp. It was I who awakened her from the sleep Moonere sent her to last night. It was I who kept warning her to beware."

"Yes, I know. That was what frightened her—the sound of your voice."

"Of course, and she called for you. I gave her the telephone number of your friend. But when you arrived, you gave her a sedative, thus undoing much of my good work."

"But how did you know what I gave her? You were not there."

"I saw everything nevertheless. I will tell you how later. I saw the Countess' servants kidnap your fiancée while she slept. I saw them take her to the temple where she will be forcibly detained until the night of the sacrifice."

"And that will be——"

"Tomorrow night. The rays will be at their maximum intensity. If everything goes right, and it is the will of God that I defeat this devil-daughter from another world, your fiancée will be returned to you, unharmed; the many tortured souls who now follow Moonere will be freed; and the world will be rid of at least one black scourge of unholiness. The work of my family will be finished."

"But you still haven't told me why you were burned by the crystal," Carl interrupted.

"So I haven't. And you need that to convince you further that I am not a mad-

man spinning lies to lure you into lunacy, eh? Well, it was through my desire to test my ray with which I hope to destroy Moonere. That was ten years ago, shortly after the death of my father. I was so sure that with this ray nothing could prevent my success in exterminating Moonere that I went to her home. I knew just where to find the secret entrance that leads to the temple of the maidens. No one else could have found it. The home of the Countess Moonard was built sixty years ago; and in all of London, neither you nor Scotland Yard combined could find a trace of the architects who constructed it. It is so ingeniously arranged to mislead a curious snoop that one could spend the rest of his life wandering from one false corridor into another, never getting anywhere. No, only I could find the secret entrance that leads to the temple with its star-glass in the roof. The plan of the house is the same as was her first temple many centuries ago."

"**Y**OU mean the Countess is immortal?"

"Of course; that is, the lifetime of Moonere does not correspond with any human conception of a life-span. Moonere, or the Countess Moonard, as she has been known here in London, is from another planet, and has lived on this earth, serving the God of Sudre, for many ages. As long as she serves faithfully, she will live at his will. If she never offends her fiendish deity, she will live eternally. Even in my family, where the knowledge of her has existed for many centuries, there is no record of her beginning. You will find that hard to believe, because such things are beyond the comprehension of men. It will always be so with the mysteries of this world. Only a few learn the solemn secrets, and they find their knowledge a curse, their lips forever sealed by man's eternal skepticism.

"But as I started to tell you, when Moonere and I finally clashed, my ray proved a failure—a fault I have corrected. I was seized and dragged down into the center of the temple. My clothes were torn from me, and I was thrown upon the altar. The crystal burned; the poison crept into my body. I thought that my time had arrived, that this would mean death. But that was not her plan. I was exposed only for a few brief moments, much the same as the convert who takes the final vows. Then I was released. Mind you, I was set free. I could go to the police and Scotland Yard if I wanted to. I could tell them my story."

"Why didn't you?"

"Do you think they would believe such a story? Furthermore, even if I took them to the temple, to the very altar, what could I prove? Upon the surface, Moonere has nothing that would arouse any suspicion beyond ordinary curiosity."

"But your face—you were horribly disfigured after the exposure to the glass, were you not?"

"No. That is not the way the glass first interprets the ray of Sudre. Those exposed to it for only a brief moment upon the altar, find that their youth, their physical charm, is doubly enhanced. When I was thrown from the temple, I looked years younger; my hair, which was turning gray before I entered, became black and glossy again. I could not look into a mirror without realizing the wonderful appearance that had been given to me. But it was only temporary. That is the way Moonere holds her victims for ever, sealing their lips, and bending them to unending servitude. The beauty does not last. Only by constant bathing in the rays beneath the glass can one keep fresh. Deny yourself those rays and the aid of Moonere, and you find your entire body slowly being destroyed. One look into the

mirror, by a victim so denied, is enough to enslave the soul with fear.

"Any night when the heavens are filled with the diffused rays of its many bodies, and Sudre is between earth and the planet about which it revolves, the torture of slowly being burned to a cinder increases for me. That is why I remain inside my home, which I have succeeded in partially insulating from them. That is why I can walk about in the fresh air upon only those all too few dark nights. In my home, I work with my inventions, the findings of many years of research by my family. But each night, Moonere and the Thing of Sudre send their rays to me. It is their jest, a further extension of their joy in the torture of mere mortals. My body now has an attraction for those rays. Even behind the closed, insulated walls, I feel their burn. With my present ray-machine, I have been combating them. Every night, if you could only see with your normal eyes the battle of Moonere's ray of death and my own discovered ray, you would know what a strange, unbelievable life I lead."

Carl looked wan and weary. Just now it seemed to him that there was nothing real about anything. The man who stood before him with his horrible face, his story of Moonere—everything was like a mad plot and setting for a dream of horror. All he could do was trust and pray that, through this man who knew the secrets, Ruth would be saved from a life far worse than death.

"All this is so strange, so far removed from reality," Carl said. "There is nothing I can do but follow your directions. I will do anything to save Ruth from this life."

"Then you must come with me." Pierre stood up and threw his cape about his face. "I will take you to my home. There are many things I must teach you before tomorrow night, the night of the

sacrifice. I will have great need of your assistance in my laboratory. You will be protected with everything my knowledge can give you. Perhaps I should warn you that I believe tomorrow night Moonere will seek to destroy me entirely. If you are with me, you may suffer a similar fate. Shall we go?"

"We go!" Carl rose to his feet, and hurriedly put on his coat and hat.

Once outside, under the low-hanging canopy of the black night's sky, Pierre breathed heavily, as if the murky air of night was doubly precious to him.

"Young man, you are about to witness what no one outside my own family has ever seen. You will see the work of many past generations, and you will see strange inventions that are of the future. Science has been very slow in its progress, compared with what my family has achieved." Pierre laughed, a rather cracked and squeaky laugh, somewhat disturbing to Carl; it was the first time he had heard the man laugh. "Indeed, my boy, if you live through this, you will never forget it; yet you will never be able to tell another soul. Imagine it! How little the people on this world really know of what is going on about them! Here is busy, foggy, magnificent, dingy, dirty London with her many souls living their frustrated daily lives, their noses to the ground; and every night a drama they can never see is played up there in the sky. In their very midst two houses hold the powers and the secrets of ages beyond recall!"

4. *The Scene in the Bowl*

PIERRE's home was a decaying old town house of red brick, with bleak shuttered windows and a gray slate roof. Conservative and ancient, it stood like an unfriendly hermit, far back from the street.

Carl was impressed with the solid, substantial appearance of the old house. At

W. T.—2

one end of it, the north wing, was a glass-enclosed room, beginning at the second story and ending slightly above the regular roof-line of the building. The front door was of fortified steel. To the dull surface of the door was secured a substantial bronze tablet, covered with a rich patina of long exposure, on which were inscribed the words:

BRING NOT YOUR TALES OF THE WORLD
YOU KNOW, FOR BEHIND THIS DOOR
LIES A WORLD YOU WILL NEVER
ENTER.

"A most hospitable door," Carl said.

"Yes, a door without a latch-key," Pierre replied.

"Then how do you open it?"

His question was answered with the silent movement of the steel door, as if someone had opened it from the inside; although in the dim light of the reception hall, Carl could see no sign of another occupant.

"It opens by cutting off the beam of light that passes from the post at one side of the door to the post on the other," Pierre said, as he ushered Carl into the hallway.

Carl turned and watched the door close silently behind him.

"You have them in some of your modern office buildings," Pierre continued. "This door has opened that way for the past forty years. My father developed the principle. Come, we will go to my observatory."

Pierre led Carl to a narrow stairway leading upward to the north wing. Up one flight they moved silently. A dim blue light illuminated the landing, and shed its ghostly rays down another hall. Up another flight, leading in the same general direction, they walked. Carl felt as if he were climbing slowly through a mad dream.

Passing through a heavy, rivet-studded door, they entered the laboratory. The

room was vast, covering the entire top floor of the house. The glass enclosure which he had seen from outside served only one end and corner of this amazing room. The walls were of a peculiar gray, glowing softly as if phosphorescent. Throughout the entire expanse of the room there was arranged an incalculable assortment of instruments, switch-boards, control-panels, glass and polished chromium, copper and brass. To Carl it was like suddenly entering a room fitted with all the strange instruments of the alchemists, and yet it was like looking ahead, fifty, a hundred or even two hundred years into the future.

Pierre led the astounded Carl over beneath the glass dome. Here seemed to be the major control position for all the complex horde of machines that filled the room. In the center of this circular space stood a small insulated platform. Upon it, supported by gleaming glass rods, stood a huge, hollow hemisphere, from which emanated an eerie blue light. Coming closer and looking downward into it, Carl was thrilled to see moving objects, familiar outlines of buildings he knew belonged to that part of London called Piccadilly Circus.

"This will explain the question you asked me earlier in the evening. The inventors of modern television would be envious if they knew of this creation. I need no transmitting station to bring into my home any scene I may desire."

Pierre quickly removed his cape, and began tinkering with an assortment of strange knobs upon a large panel back of the bowl. The Piccadilly Circus scene disappeared, and into its place came a picture of Ruth's deserted apartment.

Again Pierre turned the knobs, and the scene in the bowl became a moving panorama of London streets. Swiftly they passed, until the estate of the Countess Moonard appeared in the strange vessel.

"It is astounding. How—how——?" Carl gasped.

"To explain its operation would take all of our time, my boy. I have many other things to show you, the work of my ancestors and myself. This magnetic bowl has been most helpful. Through it I have been able to follow the unholy activities of the Countess Moonard. That night after I left you, I hurried back here and drew the light-rays of the Countess Moonard's home into the bowl. I saw her anointing your fiancée with the oils in preparation for the sacrifice to come; saw her filling the mind of the girl with the evil suggestions of the God of Sudre. When Ruth was sent back to her apartment, still in the trance of Moonerism, I then took over her mind. I had to be cautious, as I did not want her to confuse my suggestions with the thoughts of Moonere. When you found Ruth this morning, the Countess and I were both battling for control of the girl's mind."

"Can you see where they have Ruth?" Carl asked anxiously.

"Certainly!" Pierre turned the knobs again.

THE little dials that traced the locations he wanted shivered onto the desired points, and Carl beheld a thrilling sight. In the bowl there was appearing a picture that resembled nothing of modern London. He saw a temple of ancient Egypt. The towering pillars along the side of the temple were adorned with strange hieroglyphics of forgotten beliefs. The vision moved slowly, like a motion-picture camera shot traveling to a close-up scene that ended at an altar where a mysterious fire was burning. The picture remained steady for only a moment, then moved on to a room filled with many pillows. Upon a richly draped couch, Carl saw his fiancée lying as if in deep slumber. Negro slaves were anointing her

slim, white body with precious oils. The chamber of a princess in some forgotten age this could have been—but the girl was Ruth!

"What are they doing to her?" Carl cried out, his fingers reaching into the bowl as if he hoped to pluck her from the couch.

"They are making ready for the night of the sacrifice. Every woman who takes the vows of Moonere relinquishes her charms to the God of Sudre."

"You mean——?" Carl's fists tightened.

"It is the price each one pays for her beauty. Poor deluded fools! They come to the Countess, seeking beauty and charm with which to win and hold the man they love; instead, they give up their most priceless virtue. The God of Sudre takes their charms onto himself."

"How? You say this God is not of this world?" Carl asked.

"Look!" Pierre changed the scene in the globe.

Slowly the picture moved down the magnificent room. It approached a bronze platform, and paused. There upon the bronze dais, standing erect, was the golden image of a man, or demigod. The image was about seven feet tall. The details were perfectly wrought, and every muscle and fiber of that magnificent nude statue was the embodiment of the perfect development of masculinity. Yet it was a sensual development, eliminating all that might be good, and emphasizing all that is base and carnal. The face was cruel beyond any conception of men. The features were sharply brutal. Silent and motionless it stood, but the eyes were alive; and from them burned a dull, blue-black light that chilled Carl's blood as he watched.

"That is the image of the God of Sudre," explained Pierre. "Tonight, when the rays from Sudre become most intense,

Sudre's spirit will enter it, and it will become imbued with life, the evil life of Sudre. Tonight it will indulge in an orgy of lust at which even the most dissolute of ancient Romans would have shuddered. Your bride-to-be is to give herself for ever to Sudre, and for ever she will be lost to you. No mortal man will ever possess her."

"No! No!" Carl cried out in tortured frustration.

"You will see on the night of the sacrifice," Pierre said calmly.

"But what are you going to do to save her? You haven't told me yet how this monster can be stopped."

"Everything I have and know, I will use. If I fail"—Pierre's shoulders shrugged—"there is no one to carry out my work. If I win, Moonere will be destroyed; the tortured souls, who have given all for beauty, will at last be free. We have only a few hours more. As we have talked, this night has passed. Another day is upon us; with its end comes the night when the evil rays will be fully focussed. Moonere will again send the hellish light that I have fought. Tonight I will use everything to combat her—telepathy, advanced knowledge of science, and secrets that will die with me."

"But what shall I be doing?"

"You will be helping me. Within these all too short hours, you will be learning the operation of the many machines. Follow me."

Pierre led him to another corner of the room, where an instrument, not unlike a telescope, was placed. He handed Carl a pair of glasses with very thick, colored lenses.

"Look through these. Look into the instrument, and tell me what you see."

"It looks like a beam of light, but it seems to stop in the sky; it is like a highway of white marble that ends abruptly," Carl said.

"You see the ray from the fire on Sudre, traveling at a faster speed than light, bringing with it the secret of beauty and death that only the star-glass of Moonere can transmute to potency. Now watch this!"

Pierre moved to a high stand that supported a cone-shaped searchlight reflector. He made several deft adjustments, and then pushed in a switch on the long panel that ran the length of the room. Carl, with the aid of the glasses, could see a light beam shoot into the heavens and travel in the direction of the beam that seemed suspended in the sky.

"This is my latest invention. Everything depends upon it. Tonight you will see a spectacular sight. Everything we do will be controlled from here. You and I, working with science, destroying that which is beyond this planet."

Carl looked about him. He reached out his hand and touched a metal laboratory bench; its solidity reassured his slipping sense of the reality of it all. Dazed, he wandered again to the bowl. What he saw made him start as if he had been shot with electricity. Inspector Chadwick was struggling with two brawny servants in the temple.

"It's Chadwick!" Carl cried. "They've captured him."

PIERRE hurried to the glass.

"The fool!" he rasped. "Why did he go there? I thought you had warned that detective friend of yours to keep out of this. Now they will make him a prisoner. They may not wait until tonight for the sacrifice to destroy him."

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Nothing, unless they hold him for the dance of the maidens in the temple. One thing certain, he will be burned as I was, or even destroyed upon the altar. Watch closely, and you will see why no

one has ever betrayed the secret of Moonere."

Breathlessly Carl watched them drag Chadwick into a small throneroom where the Countess Moonard, clothed in the robes of an ancient priestess, sat in serene majesty.

They threw him down in front of the throne. He rose and shook his fist threateningly at the Countess. She smiled; her long, deeply beautiful eyes looked into his face. His trembling arms stopped shaking and dropped limply to his side. He stood in hypnotized rigidity. She pointed to a door that slowly opened. Chadwick walked meekly through it. The slaves bowed before the Countess and followed him through the door.

"He's going into the dungeon. They are saving him for a later sacrifice," Pierre said, almost relieved. "That means we have time; we may save him."

"Chadwick wouldn't have gone to the Countess' unless he suspected something more than he let me know. He must have been well protected. He's no fool. A man can't just disappear—not an Inspector from Scotland Yard. Chadwick would have his men following him. They will get him out of that dungeon," Carl spoke with growing determination.

"You are mistaken." Pierre turned the knobs again.

The bowl showed Chadwick's men rushing into the reception hall of the Countess' home. Twisting the knob again, the bowl revealed the Countess smiling innocently. A servant brought in three of Chadwick's men. They began talking angrily to the Countess. Then the door where Chadwick had gone down into the dungeon opened. He came out, and began talking to his men.

"They're leaving!" Carl cried.

"Yes, he has instructed them to go. He has told them there is nothing wrong. Your friend's mind no longer belongs to

him; his every thought, his words are the words and thoughts of Moonere. She has told him to send the men away, assuring them that nothing is wrong. You see they are gone. And now Chadwick returns to the dungeon."

"Why can't you take over his mind as you did Ruth's? You said you could do it. Why can't you free him from Moonere's grasp?"

"I can," Pierre answered calmly, "but to do that would place your fiancée in danger. Every minute I have concentrated upon her. Within her mind is the continual conflict of two powers struggling for supremacy. For the present, it is best that I whisper, 'Peace and quiet,' to the girl. You see how she slumbers, so still and unmoving; that aids my plan.

"When the time comes for the sacrifice, they will discover that their lovely maiden is not to join their dance of passion."

Pierre began laughing at the thoughts that were damning Carl.

"You need not fear, my friend; she will sleep, sleep; and nothing Moonere can do will make her gratify the desires of the evil God of Sudre. Tonight you will see a disappointed God!"

5. *The Golden Image*

THROUGHOUT the hours, Carl crammed the many secrets of Pierre Soret's strange machines. It seemed to him that he had forced the learning of all the world into his brain.

Midnight found him staring with weary eyes into the sky. The night was clear; and above the dimly haze-rimmed horizon Carl could see the metallic glitter of the stars. Looking through the telescope with his specially designed glasses, he found the light-beam again. This time it hovered very closely to the center of the heavens.

Pierre moved from one machine to another, tightening little adjustments, testing each minute detail.

When the beam reached its zenith, he said: "Now we will see the beginning of war."

In the globe, Carl could see the temple. The fire upon the altar was blazing brightly. Along the walls sat many slaves, playing strange musical instruments. The light in the temple was blue, the silvery, all-pervading blue of moonlight.

"Tonight they will begin the dance of invitation to the God of Sudre." Pierre peered over Carl's shoulder into the bowl. "Before his golden image, they will perform the subtle dance of seduction, inviting him to come and take them in his arms, and embrace them. You see the beam of light. From Sudre it has traveled the miles of space, and hurried with its concentrated rays into the star-glass. See how the flames upon the altar blaze tonight. The dance begins with Moonere's entrance. She will give her signal. Watch!"

The Countess Moonard entered the temple from a small door at one end, walked slowly through the throng, each worshipper bowing as she passed, and came before the image of Sudre. Standing there, she was both terrifying and beautiful. Her body became slowly rigid. She flung back her head, and her long, black hair fell down behind her. Her body glowed with sensuous intensity. She raised her arms slowly, in supplication and desire, and then let them fall to her side.

The musicians increased the tempo of their playing. Onto the floor of the temple came the dancing forms of many beautiful women, clad only in their long hair that waved like misty light about their supple bodies. Arms outstretched, they danced rhythmically before the idol. In the pale blue light of the temple, their

forms were like white marble statues suddenly breathing life. Around and around before the God they danced, their passionate movements growing more and more intense.

Carl watched, revolted and yet fascinated by the obscene gyrations of these beautiful nude dancers who threw their charms in rhythmic supplication toward the golden image.

Shadows darted about the temple walls, shadows of arms raised high and lowered quickly across sculptured white curves, shadows of bodies thrusting and withdrawing with compelling seductiveness. Beautiful faces, swelling breasts, and eyes that cried for love—the love of an inhuman idol of gold!

"It's moving!" Pierre cried. "The God of Sudre returns."

Carl could not speak; he could only stare into the glowing sphere. The golden image was moving! Slowly the sinewy muscles of its arms moved downward; strong golden fingers felt along its thighs; its chest expanded as it drew in the scented breath of the temple. Carl saw the arm of the God reach down and bring up a lovely white form. He saw her swoon with pleasure in the embrace of this golden image that now lived. He saw the God release the white form of the girl, saw her fair body writhe with tormented desire, her hands clutching eagerly for him. On he walked to the throne beside the altar. As he walked, the maidens bent down before him, their lips caressed his feet, slender fingers sought to touch him as he moved majestically above that sea of adoring flesh. Moonere bowed before him. He touched her shoulder, and raised her up to meet his lips in the lingering kiss. Then he sat down upon the scarlet throne.

Food and wine were brought to him by the maidens, each seeking to outdo

the others in her attentions. They fairly groveled at his throne.

"Now they will bring him the new sacrifice," Pierre said tensely. "I will let her walk slowly so that Moonere will fail to see that my mind controls her. But he will never possess her!"

"Oh, God, I pray not!" cried Carl.

RUTH entered the temple, her eyes staring glassily in front of her. From her shoulders trailed a flimsy white cloth, her slender form gleaming through it in the pale blue light. Two of the maidens led her to the Golden God. In torment, Carl watched him feast his eyes upon Ruth's beauty. Unable to stand the sight, Carl turned from the globe.

He looked beseechingly to Pierre. The man's lips moved in formless speech. Pierre was talking to Ruth, he knew. He looked again to see if it had worked. Carl gasped as he saw Ruth fall in a crumpled faint before the throne. Moonere rushed to her. The maidens began laboring over Ruth's lifeless form. The Golden Image frowned. Carl watched the look of surprise fade from Moonere's face; slowly, gradually it became a smiling mask of cruelty. Pierre was now laughing.

"Ah, they do not enjoy that! Moonere is puzzled. Moonere and the Golden God of Sudre are disappointed for once!" his voice rasped. He shook his fist into the globe. "Now what will you do, Moonere? What will you do to me?"

As Pierre spoke, Carl saw Moonere dart to the altar and pull quickly upon some heavy chains that hung in front of the blazing fire. Slowly a shining disk of platinum appeared. Moonere swung it rapidly until it caught the light of the hellish fire that burned upon the altar. Its glistening surface began to glow. Suddenly a blinding flash of light engulfed the globe before the two figures concentrated in front of it. Pierre's vast room

filled with a strange purple and blue-green light.

"Quick! Turn on the ray-machine!" Pierre cried, pushing Carl out of his way as he hurried to the panel. "Your glasses, don't forget them. Don't forget to turn Z-4. And when I tell you, let me have R-9." Pierre was shouting now.

All through the room the strange light shattered into millions of little stars. The ray from Pierre's machine shot upward through the sky. Carl saw it cross the ray that was coming from Sudre. The sky in the vicinity of the rays, that could only be seen through Pierre's glasses, was filled with a mighty conflict of fire.

"More phosphorous liquid. Hurry! Hurry!" Pierre was almost screaming now. Carl pulled the lever, and the liquid poured into a tank beside the ray-machine. He worked feverishly, following Pierre's orders. Everything he had previously rehearsed, he now performed rapidly and automatically. He turned knobs, pulled switches, poured mysterious liquids into tanks, watched a pageantry of light and small sparkling stars leap about the room, dancing from corner to corner.

The room grew hotter. Perspiration dripped from Carl's face as he struggled to follow the orders issued by Pierre. Although he knew what to do when Pierre commanded, he did not know what each separate action meant. It was enough that he could recognize the orders and could do what must have been the simplest of things in this maze of wizardry and science Pierre had developed.

As Carl worked over a boiling vat that contained a thick mixture of evil-smelling chemicals, he felt a severe burning sensation at the back of his neck. Turning his head slightly, he saw two yellow flames shoot toward him from the switch-board panel.

"Take that other tube and place it in the switch-box. Tube X! Tube X!" Pierre's tone was frantic.

Carl whirled around in his excitement, and as he did so, a bottle fell with an explosive crash. Smoke and fire leaped up from the floor. Pierre quenched it quickly with an extinguisher. The heat of the room was beginning to show upon Carl, and he sensed that in a moment he would pass into unconsciousness.

The tube placed in the box as Pierre had directed, Carl staggered blindly back to his duties between the tank and the switch-board panel.

"Something's wrong! Something's wrong!" he heard Pierre say in a croaking voice. The fear that gripped him made it impossible for Carl to ask what was wrong.

Pierre turned from the ray-machine. Carl saw him, and for the moment went insane! Pierre's face was gone! There was only a blue light shining from the open gap that had once been the face of Pierre Soret. Somewhere in that horrible sight were two white pin-points that retained a semblance of the man's eyes. Bluish smoke was issuing from his entire body.

"We must work fast; perhaps you can finish what I have started," Pierre's broken voice came from the awful vision that represented him. "My ray-machine is not powerful enough; I cannot concentrate the rays on the temple with sufficient intensity to effect my purpose. You must take my concentration mirror, which is similar to the one you saw Moonere use. I must release your fiancée from my mind. You must submit yourself to me. I will send you to the temple, if I last that long. Your fiancée will be at their mercy until you arrive."

Sensing the danger, Carl hurried to the globe. Ruth was stretched upon a couch in front of the throne. The maidens were

working desperately to revive her, while the Golden Image of Sudre glowered down upon her. Carl realized that once Pierre released his grip upon her mind, Moonere would send her into the greedy clutches of Sudre. Ruth would be lost to him.

"No! I can't permit it. You must save her!" he cried. "But how? Man, you are gone! You do not live, you can't exist as you are! In heaven's name, how could you hope to save anyone, how can you even speak? How? How?"

"This is the only way. Do not doubt me. The rays are destroying me. Everything is going fast. You must go, and I will direct you," Pierre said sternly.

Already Carl could feel the electric touch of Pierre's intellect usurping his. Even his voice sounded weak as he cried out: "No! Save Ruth! Save Ruth! Keep her asleep. Keep her—aslee—"

The blue fire that was Pierre became larger; nothing but blue, blue light filled his eyes; and Pierre, the mind of the great but tortured scientist, filled Carl's brain.

"You will take your car and speed to the Countess Moonard's. Make all haste. Nothing can stop you. You *must* get there!" Carl heard Pierre's voice as a whisper.

At first he moved stiffly, as if each step needed the command of the man who now controlled his brain. Gradually the feeling decreased. Carl Fielding became Pierre Soret!

Into Carl's pocket Pierre thrust a round, silver disk.

THROUGH the streets that led to the Countess Moonard's star-haunted residence, Carl's roadster sped like a silver bullet upon an errand of mercy. Twice he would have met certain death had it not been for the super-intellect that made quick thinking snap his move-

ments with the deft skill of a racing driver.

"Go faster! There is little time to lose. Go faster! Do not be afraid," the voice of the professor rasped. The wind whipped past Carl's face.

Carl froze as he heard the next words of the man who gripped his brain. "Do not be afraid; nothing can harm you now, for you are not guided by the normal destiny of a human. Something stronger leads me on, and I in turn send you upon this errand which may mean death for you. Some Greater Power of Good now seems to be working against the Evil Thing of Sudre.

"I am slowly being burned to some strange form, I know not what, but my mind is keen and clear. It is the work of destiny, the destiny of good perhaps. You are at the command of my brain."

Carl could not stop now, and even the mighty fear that shook him hurled him forward. On he drove, knowing that every turn he made was being watched by Pierre in the globe—but there was nothing he could do; he was driven by a force far stronger than himself.

"Stop at the servant's entrance," Pierre said, as Carl turned his car into the driveway that led to the Countess' home.

Carl brought his car to a quick stop and leapt from it onto the little walk that led to a narrow doorway in the side of the house.

"Go through that hallway. Run!" the voice commanded.

Carl followed the directions, turning and twisting through a series of doors and porticos, opening secret panels in the walls, and hurrying through a confusing catacomb of corridors until at last he was within the temple where no one else had ever gone without being brought before the Inner Circle of Sudre. Now he was there.

They were dragging Inspector Chadwick to the altar. Huge black slaves were preparing to toss him into the flames. The pealing laughter of the Golden Image rang through the temple. The maidens were dancing; and in the very center of their circle was Ruth, now wild-eyed with passion, her face livid with the same desire Carl had seen upon the faces of the others. She was moving to the Golden Image to give herself to the God of Sudre.

"Reach into your left pocket!"

Carl's frustration ceased as he heard Pierre snap this command. The dancing ceased. An awed hush fell upon the scene of the orgy. A demoniacal scream arose from a chorus of horrified throats as Carl whipped from his pocket the silver disk. Through the glasses he was wearing, Carl saw a reflected ray of glaring intensity flash out from the disk.

He flashed it over the heads of the screaming dancers. Forked tongues of fire leapt in all directions, and licked out against the naked bodies that fled beneath its swiftly darting flames.

The Golden Image roared in anger and plunged forward to strangle Carl. He flashed the ray across the face of the thing, and to his astonishment, the Golden Image seemed no longer alive. It stood still as if it had returned to its former immobile self. Then it began to melt!

"Strike Moonere! Strike Moonere!" came Pierre's staccato command.

Carl lashed the serpentine beam full across the Countess Moonard's face. She cursed him, and screamed a horrible oath. He lashed her again. Retreating before the flailing whip of fire from the disk, the Countess ran and threw herself upon the altar. The flames leapt up, as she disappeared in a flash of blue smoke.

"My work is almost over," Carl heard the faint voice of Pierre Soret, coming

like a sigh. "Throw the disk into the flames upon the altar. Hurry, for the altar of Sudre will soon be cool, and only the ashes of its evil reign will smolder in remembrance of the Fire of Sudre."

CARL hurled the disk into the now dwindling flames upon the altar. It twisted and curled with the flames that wrapped about it. Finally the flames sank and vanished, as a silvery snake-like wisp of smoke coiled upward, and then sank gradually into obscurity.

"Now my work is finished," Carl heard Pierre's voice, this time coming to him in the tones of whispered weariness. "Young man, do you know, strange as all my life has been, strange as all the stories of my family's struggle against the evil God of Sudre, I have never been really frightened until now—now I find myself upon the brink of another world.

"The house was burned. The flames consumed me; even as you raced to the temple, the flames were destroying me, yet I did not die. I was so afraid that I would die, and leave you in the temple with the evil I knew was there; but I lived, even after I knew that everything in my house was destroyed by fire. My inventions, my years of work—all were destroyed.

"There is nothing but dreary coldness here; and in the darkness, gray-lined specters hover all about me. Surely this is the realm between the known and the unknown. It is strange to me, like a vast sea of doubt surrounding my soul—yet in the distance I see a light, a light of infinite brightness.

"My fear? Perhaps Sudre's evil ray has tainted my soul; and yet it cannot be, for now, even here, I feel that same moving faith, the magnetic power of good, drawing me on to some better destination. It must be so. Even though I no longer live on earth, and I wander in a

land of dreadful strangeness, surely I have conquered evil.

"You are listening, my friend? You hear me speak to you from beyond the border of this life. Shall I always do this? Will you be frightened, young man, when you hear my voice?"

"I am watching over you, guarding you from harm. Go to your sweetheart. Lead her quickly from this temple of doom, for it is soon to fall. Lead the ones who are returned to the reality of this earth out of the temple of another world. Lead them into life as we knew it; at least as *you* knew it. Hurry! There is little time. I will guide you safely out as I guided you into this secret domain."

Carl heard the rumble of falling stones, and saw huge cracks appear in the scrolled walls. Picking Ruth up gently in his arms, he carried her through the portal that would lead them to the outside. He beckoned to the bewildered souls who had witnessed the end of their unholy service to another god. They followed like innocent sheep. Only a few of the black slaves and servants of Moonere remained, silent, stone-like images that seemed no longer alive.

Like the thundering roll of a kettle-drum in some great symphony, Carl heard the sound of the temple falling behind him. Every step of the way that led through the intricate passages out of the Temple of Sudre seemed to crumble as his followers fled close upon his footsteps.

Soon they found themselves in the reception room of the Countess Moonard; a strange company of unclad women, looking for some answer to their question of where they had spent their lives. Slowly, gradually, they seemed to sense that a terrible past lay behind them: something that was to fade, even as the unnatural beauty of youth faded to conform with their respective ages. Young

faces on aged women were growing old as they should have done long ago. With reality came their sense of propriety, and they eagerly sought clothing with which to cover themselves.

Pierre spoke again, commanding Carl to hurry them from the house. Outside, in the clear light of the stars, they turned to see the home of the Countess Moonard sink into the earth. The quick crackle of fire popped in their ears, and the sky became illuminated with a great conflagration.

Inspector Chadwick said little; Carl also remained silent. Tonight was not the time to talk. Secretly Carl hoped that Chadwick would forget, that everyone would forget the Countess Donella Moonard.

LONDON newspapers in their morning editions carried the story of two fires: the destruction of a three-story house, occupied by an eccentric Professor Pierre Soret, who had presumably compounded some dreadful chemical which had destroyed him and his house; the other, an account of a disaster, either an explosion or fire of unknown origin, that completely demolished the home of the Countess Donella Moonard, killing her and her staff of servants.

Beyond this there was no thought of any connection between the two houses so far apart from each other. Carl smiled somewhat as he read:

"Although the Countess Moonard has been known to certain London socialites, her ancestry was never certified; nor was the claim of Countess hers by any English right. It is generally believed that the Countess originally came from France. She was a woman of mystery and rare beauty; her age was unknown. She was a follower of some strange religious belief, probably of Egyptian origin."

THERE are women with snow-white hair and failing eyes, hobbling about their homes; women who were once glamorous beauties, noted for their coldness to all men, women whose beauty could have made them beloved. Old and lonely now, they shun the world, living within their homes, wondering when and what will be the end of their existence.

Doctor Carl Fielding has not heard

the voice of Pierre Soret for nearly a year now. Sometimes he thinks he hears the echo of that spirit who so strangely left this life. For a while there were moments when Carl felt an awful sense of fear, because the thoughts that were in his brain that night were the thoughts of the man who lived within the fire, but his wife's devotion has dispelled this gloomy fear and led him on to hope.