

til only a speck on the disk below the spider was visible.

Then that, too, vanished.

Silence—the perfume was stifling. A voice, seeming to come from a great distance, cried: “On your knees to the Book of Thoth! On your knees to the Wisdom Queen, who is deathless, being unborn, who is dead though living, whose beauty is for all men—that all men may die—”

A bell was ringing furiously. Its din grew louder and louder; it became insupportable. Cairn threw out his arms and staggered up like a man intoxicated. He grasped at the table-lamp only just in time to prevent it overturning.

The ringing was that of his telephone-bell. He had been unconscious, then—under some spell!

He unhooked the receiver, and heard his father's voice.

“That you, Rob?” asked the doctor anxiously.

“Yes, sir,” replied Cairn eagerly; and he opened the drawer and slid his hand in for the silken cord.

“There is something you have to tell me?”

Cairn, without preamble, plunged excitedly into an account of his meeting with Ferrara.

“The silk cord,” he concluded, “I have in my hand at the present moment, and—”

“Hold on a moment!” came Dr. Cairn's voice, rather grimly. Followed by a short interval. Then:

“Hallo, Rob! Listen to this, from to-night's paper. ‘A curious discovery was made by an attendant in one of the rooms of the Indian section of the British Museum late this evening. A case had been opened in some way, and, although it contained more valuable objects, the only item which the thief had abstracted was a Thug's strangling cord from Kundélee (district of Nursingpore).’”

“But, I don't understand—”

“Ferrara meant you to find that cord, boy! Remember, he is unac-

quainted with your chambers, and he requires a *focus* for his damnable forces! He knows well that you will have the thing somewhere near to you, and probably he knows something of its awful history! You are in danger! Keep a fast hold upon yourself. I shall be with you in less than half an hour!”

III.

As Robert Cairn hung up the receiver and found himself cut off again from the outer world, he realized, with terror beyond his control, how in this quiet backwater, so near to the main stream, he yet was far from human companionship.

He recalled a night when, amid such a silence at this which now prevailed about him, he had been made the subject of an uncanny demonstration; how his sanity, his life, had been attacked; how he had fled from the crowding horrors which had been massed against him by his supernaturally endowed enemy.

There was something very terrifying in the quietude of the court—a quietude which to others might have spelled peace, but which, to Robert Cairn, spelled menace. That Ferrara's device was aimed at his freedom, that his design was intended to lead to the detention of his enemy whilst he directed his activities in other directions, seemed plausible, if inadequate. The carefully planned incident at the Museum whereby the constable had become possessed of Cairn's card; the distinct possibility that a detective might knock upon his door at any moment—with the inevitable result of his detention pending inquiries—formed a chain which had seemed complete, save that Antony Ferrara was the schemer. For another to have compassed so much would have been a notable victory; for Ferrara, such a victory would be trivial.

What, then, did it mean? His father had told him, and the uncanny events of the evening stood evidence of Dr. Cairn's wisdom. The mysteri-