

BROOD OF THE WITCH-QUEEN

BY SAX ROHMER

VII.—THE CORD

NOT the least of the trials which Robert Cairn experienced during the time that he and his father were warring with their supernaturally equipped opponent—Antony Ferrara—was that of preserving silence upon this matter which loomed so large in his mind, and which already had changed the course of his life.

Sometimes he met men who knew Ferrara, but who knew him only as a man about town of somewhat evil reputation. Yet even to these he dared not confide what he knew of the true Ferrara; undoubtedly they would have deemed him mad had he spoken of the knowledge and of the deeds of this uncanny, this fiendish being. How would they have listened to him had he sought to tell them of the den of spiders in Port Said; of the bats of Méydûm; of the secret incense and of how it was made; of the numberless murders and atrocities, wrought by means not human, which stood to the account of this adopted son of the late Sir Michael Ferrara.

So, excepting his father, he had no confidant; for above all it was necessary to keep the truth from Myra Duquesne—from Myra around whom his world circled, but who yet thought of the dreadful being who wielded the sorcery of forgotten ages, as a brother. Whilst Myra lay ill—not yet recovered from the ghastly attack made upon her life by the man whom she trusted—whilst, having plentiful

evidence of his presence in London, Dr. Cairn and himself vainly sought for Antony Ferrara; whilst any night might bring some unholy visitant to his rooms, obedient to the will of this modern wizard; whilst these fears, anxieties, doubts, and surmises danced, impish, through his brain, it was all but impossible to pursue with success his vocation of journalism. Yet for many reasons it was necessary that he should do so, and so he was employed upon a series of articles which were the outcome of his recent visit to Egypt—his editor having given him that work as being less exciting than that which properly falls to the lot of the Fleet Street copy-hunter.

He left his rooms about three o'clock in the afternoon, in order to seek, in the British Museum Library, a reference which he lacked. The day was an exceedingly warm one, and he derived some little satisfaction from the fact that, at his present work, he was not called upon to endure the armour of respectability. Pipe in mouth, he made his way across the Strand towards Bloomsbury.

As he walked up the steps, crossed the hallway, and passed in beneath the dome of the reading-room, he wondered if, amid these mountains of erudition surrounding him, there was any wisdom so strong as that of Antony Ferrara.

He soon found the information for which he was looking, and, having