

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1946

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use
of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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BY

JACK

SNOW

THE potted plants on the window sill should have given me a clue, but they didn't. After all, they were innocent enough—hardy green vines that added a note of coolness and cheer to the spartanly furnished sanitorium room.

Perhaps I wouldn't have noticed the vines at all, but Myra herself called them to my attention. She had not spoken of them. It was only that occasionally when we were talking, her eyes would wander, almost as though against her will, to the plants. She would stare with peculiar intentness at the vines for a few seconds, and then turn away with an effort. Once I thought I detected a shudder as Myra seemed particularly engrossed in the vines. I meant to ask her if

the plants annoyed her and she wished them removed from the room, but at that moment she had started a train of conversation that had banished the odd little incident from my mind for the time. Upon recalling it later, I

*A doctor must first know the disease before he can prescribe treatment—
and where in the world was there an illness like this?*



decided that Myra's preoccupation with the window plants could have no possible relation to her illness, and if she wished the vines removed, she had only to speak to Nurse Wilkins.

I hadn't known Myra was returning to

this country until that evening in middle-May, when, upon entering my home, hot and weary after a stiflingly hot day filled with the round of calls that are the lot of a doctor in a small suburban town, my good housekeeper handed me a note. It was from Myra, stating simply that she had taken a suite of rooms in a fashionable rest sanatorium in the nearby city, and wished me to call on her that night.

Myra Bradshaw in a rest sanatorium! To say that I was surprised is putting it mildly. Anyone who has read either the Sunday magazine supplements or the scholarly journals of scientific societies will readily recall Myra Bradshaw—beautiful and world-renowned as the famous woman African explorer.

Her exploits were sensational enough to make her a natural subject for the big-circulation, luridly illustrated Sunday magazine sections, while her keenly intelligent monographs on archeology, anthropology and natural history had won her acclaim and respect in that comparatively small circle of men and women who subscribe to the reputable journals of geographic and scientific societies.

Myra Bradshaw was a woman of dynamic spirit and energy—a woman who had dared a thousand perils, faced a hundred jungle dangers and had exposed herself to a score of dread tropical diseases—and had never been ill a day in her life! This I had long marveled at from a professional standpoint; for it was my interest in archeology and the fact that our families had been friendly for many years that had drawn Myra and me together, not my profession. Indeed, Myra had more than once sniffed that she had as little faith in modern MD's as in African witch doctors!

Nevertheless, I concluded, Myra's latest African trek had proved too much even for her, and she had been forced to retire to the sanatorium for a rest. After a little reflection, I realized this was not too surprising. The years were taking their toll, that was all. Such adventures as Myra indulged in were for the young, and while Myra was by no means old, she was, I mentally calculated, closer to fifty than forty.

THE stars were gleaming with tropic brilliance, as I climbed into my car and drove the twenty miles to the city, after receiving Myra's message. In all my sixty odd years I can't recall a summer to equal the oppressive, unhealthy heat of that one which marked the reappearance of Myra Bradshaw in my life. The heat came early in May and remained with unslackened intensity late into September. Nor was it a summer of drought.

Most crops did unusually well for they were nourished with sunlight of furnace intensity and watered by frequent, sultry, torrential rains that soaked the steaming earth into a jungle-like morass. It was a season of rampant vegetable growth.

That night the heat was only slightly less than it had been at mid-day. In the reflected light of the moon, there seemed to be reflected something of the heat of the sun, from whose direct rays this little patch of earth had temporarily turned. The crickets, suffused with the abundance of heat and earthly moistures, filled the night with the din of their scraping. With a shudder I recalled reading somewhere that for every human being on the earth there are twelve million insects. Although the road was lonely, with almost no traffic, the night seemed suddenly crowded.

Nurse Wilkins, whom I knew from previous visits to the sanatorium, showed me the way to Myra's suite. I stopped short inside the doorway, finding it difficult to believe my eyes. Could this be Myra Bradshaw? The Myra Bradshaw I had known had been handsome and splendidly formed, radiating perfect health. The figure on the bed was that of a thin, gaunt woman, wasted and wan.

With an effort I endeavored to conceal the very real shock I had suffered. I moved toward the bed, stretching out my hand to clasp Myra's. Yes, it was Myra Bradshaw. Her eyes were unchanged, daring, inquisitive, beautiful, their deep hazel flecked with pure gold. They smiled at me now, and from the pale lips came an invitation to make myself comfortable in a chair near the bed.

Myra and I chatted for the better part of a quarter of an hour, but all the while another part of my mind was busily conjecturing.

What had happened to my old friend? What had reduced her to her present pitifully weakened condition? Why had her hand been so icily cold when I had clasped it in greeting? Although the air of the room was constantly, though gently, circulated by several electric fans, and the three large windows were thrown open to the night, the room was stiflingly hot. Yet Myra's hand was cool—cool as—and I recall now with horror and loathing that the homely old simile ran through my mind—cool as a cucumber.

FINALLY, employing what I fondly believed to be clever conversational strategy, I steered our talk around to Myra and her sudden and wholly unexpected appearance in the sanatorium. Myra laughed, her eyes twinkling with some of their old merriment. "You old faker, you! I know you've been dying to ask me what I'm doing here, and what's wrong with me to put me in a state like this—flat on my back and weak as a cat!"

I admitted I was.

"Well," replied Myra more soberly, "I'm here as a last resort. But I don't want to tell you anything until you have made a complete physical examination. Can you do that in the morning?"

I assured her I could arrange my morning schedule to take care of the examination.

Great as my curiosity was, Myra remained firm in her determination to discuss her condition no further that night. After a few more minutes I realized that any attempt to extract additional information from her was futile, so with a sigh I bade her goodnight, promising to see her at ten the next morning.

As I drove home through the heat of the night, noting the forked prongs of light that darted above the black treetops on the distant horizon, I wondered with mingled curiosity if cooling rain would make sleep enjoyable that night, and what the physical examination of Myra Bradshaw would reveal in the morning. By the time I reached home, it was quite late and the stupor of the heat, combined with the monotony of the night sounds, and the fatigue of the long day, oppressed me with an utter weariness so that I soon sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

II

"I COULD'VE told you, Tom, that there is nothing organically wrong with me, but I knew you wouldn't be satisfied until you had made an examination."

It was shortly after noon the following day, and I had just completed my examination of Myra Bradshaw. Myra was right. I had to admit that my thorough check-up had revealed no trace of any disease, nor could I detect any serious organic impairment. I mopped the perspiration from my brow and sat down beside the bed.

"But Myra," I protested, "there must be something that brought you to your present state. Haven't you any idea—how did it start?"

The woman in the bed smiled at me. "Tom," she said, "if I told you what I suspect is wrong with me, you'd hurry me out of here into the nearest mental hospital. So I'm not going to tell you—not now. I will remain here under your care, and perhaps you will be able to help me. I may be wrong, you know, and I wouldn't want you poking fun at me for the rest of my life, if I told you my suspicions—and then disproved them by recovering!"

I didn't press Myra to tell me what was on her mind. I knew she would confide in me, if she believed her story would be of any aid in treating her. And too, I had some idea how full the jungle is of superstition, and I supposed that not even a woman of Myra's fine intelligence could entirely escape being touched by it after spending years in the African wilderness. So I forgot whatever jungle jargon Myra might be harboring in her mind, and concentrated on restoring her health by modern medical science.

The two weeks that followed were ones of continuing intense heat and increasing worry and frustration for me. Nothing that I did helped Myra in the slightest. I visited her daily, and was forced to watch her waste away visibly before my eyes. I consulted with the foremost specialists in America. I investigated, probed and experimented. I forced and ultimately discarded theory after theory. I spent long hours after midnight reading in the sultry, night heat of my library, hoping that in my books I would find some clue that would start me on the

right trail to solving the riddle of Myra's steadily weakening condition. As the days lengthened into weeks, I was forced to admit I was beaten. In despair I realized that a doctor must first have a disease, before he can prescribe a treatment. I couldn't find any disease. The only enemy I had to combat was Myra's extreme weakness, which increased progressively and was obviously induced by her apparent inability to derive nourishment from food. I prepared for her every known variety of energy extract, food concentrate and vitamin-mineral compound, but it was of no avail. My patient ate and drank regularly but for all the good the food did her she might have been on a starvation diet. I was forced to the unscientific conclusion that in some weird, inexplicable manner Myra Bradshaw was being robbed of blood as fast as her food was turned into the life-giving fluid.

The case baffled me completely. It was unreal and nightmarish, and combined with the relentless heat, it caused me to endure many sleepless nights, through which I tossed and turned, damp with perspiration and weary with conjecture. In the black of those heavy, sultry nights, my mind flew off on wild tangents, recalling legends of vampires and fantastic blood-sucking creatures of the jungle. This illustrates very well, I believe, just how thin the veneer of modern learning is, and how it can be rendered even more superficial by climate and temperature.

MEANWHILE, Myra's condition was growing steadily worse. I could not give up hope of saving her, but my dismay mounted as I was forced to watch her weakness increase. It was early in August when the sweltering heat had reached its peak, that Myra entered that most dangerous stage in which she lapsed into prolonged comas, regaining semi-consciousness only long enough to take a bit of food. With despair I realized that soon she would lapse into a coma from which there would be no rousing. Death would slip up on her quietly as she slept—and there was nothing I could do. Perhaps intravenous injections would sustain her for a time, but even so her life would soon hang on the hands of the clock.

At a few minutes after eleven o'clock, on the night of August fifteenth, I was in

my library studying a recently acquired treatise on rare diseases of the tropics, when my phone rang and Nurse Wilkins, speaking from the sanatorium, informed me that Myra had regained consciousness a few minutes before and was asking for me. Wilkins stated further that my patient seemed to have more strength than she had shown for weeks, and was asking for me with a strange persistency. I told Wilkins to remain with Myra and I would leave immediately for the sanatorium.

I will never forget that drive to the city. The night was black and velvety, and the air seemed to be composed of a heat that possessed actual substance and weight as it pressed down on the smothered earth. Any gleam of stars and moon was blotted from the skies by a black shroud of sultriness.

As I drove down the highway, few cars passed me, and except for the night cries of the insects, I was alone in the night. On either side of the road grew fields of corn and truck gardens of tomatoes, cabbages and other common table vegetables. Never had their been such luxuriant crops. The farmer's only problem was insects, which the heat and moisture favored impartially with the crops.

No doubt it was my own weariness, born of the lateness of the hour, the cumulative enervation of the long weeks of intense heat, and my constant worry over Myra that brought on the extravagant fancy as I drove through the deserted night that the world was intent only on vegetable germination and growth, and that for the time being everything else was of minor importance—swept aside, as it were, from the normal, natural course of life. It was almost as if I could hear the faint crenulation of the leaves as they unfolded, and the rustling and crackling of the stalks and ears as they grew. In the pall of the night there was something repellant, grotesque about the great swollen tomatoes that bulged on the creeping vines, filling the air with their unmistakable vegetable reek.

I shivered in spite of the heat, as my car carried me down the corridor of towering grain. I felt strangely lonely, like an alien being—an outsider in a world of vegetation, where the sole purpose of existence is to grow, grow and grow in the beaming rays

of the sun and the secret moistures of the sultry nights.

III

IT WAS a few minutes past midnight when I entered the lobby of the sanatorium and made my way to Myra's suite.

Wilkins, who had been sitting by the bed, arose and quietly greeted me as I entered. A green-shaded bed-lamp standing on a table was the room's only illumination. Gently moved by the electric fans, the sultry night air of the room stirred with an almost liquid motion.

The figure on the bed was pathetically wasted. There was almost no resemblance to the handsome Myra Bradshaw who had stirred the imagination of the world with her beauty, bravery and daring. As I gazed at the pale face, the eyes opened and on seeing me they lit up with an animation they had not shown in weeks.

"Come closer, Tom," the bloodless lips whispered. I seated myself on a chair at the side of the bed and bent my head over the still form.

"You sent for me, Myra?" I asked.

"Yes, Tom," replied the thin voice. "I want to tell you my story. It is now or never," she added with a suggestion of the grim, brash humor that had been so much a part of the old Myra Bradshaw's great charm.

"Plenty of time, Myra," I said, patting her emaciated wrist. "You are better now than you've been for days."

"You know that's not true, Tom," the woman replied. "This is only the final flash of light before the darkness. There is very little time left. Let us not waste it. You must hear my story."

"Very well, Myra," I assented. "I'll listen, only don't tire yourself."

"I haven't spoken until now," the woman began, "because I did not believe what must always have been the truth. Tom, you were right when you suspected that the jungle was responsible for my condition; but you were wrong in searching for a disease. It is no malady that afflicts me . . . at least no ordinary malady!" Myra paused briefly and then her pitifully weak voice continued:

"It began less than a year ago. I was in

Leopoldville, when I first heard rumors of a strange village of natives deep in the Belgian Congo, who worshipped a flower, periodically sacrificing the fairest maiden of the village to this *fleur de mal*. Theatrical as the story sounded, I knew Africa well enough to suspect that the rumor very probably had a foundation of truth. I determined to be the first white woman to penetrate to this little known village of the interior, as well as the first white woman to set eyes on this jungle flower of God. Well, it was the old story. The natives were suspicious of strangers; they had not seen more than half a dozen white men in their lives, and I was the first white woman they had ever seen. They resisted our visit, attacking our bearers. We were forced to wound a few natives to make them behave and to convince them of the effectiveness of our modern arms. Later, of course, we treated and healed their wounds, so really we did them no harm."

MYRA paused in her recital, a far-away look in her eyes as she relived for the moment that last weird adventure. Gaining strength to continue, she picked up the thread of her strange story.

"We had no difficulty in locating the temple of the Flower God. It was a bower of unearthly beauty, teeming with such riotous colors and growth as only the jungle can generate. It was nature's own Gothic cathedral with towering walls of infinitely foliated leaves, climbing vines, massive pillars of trees and a green filigree of creepers. Its stained-glass windows were woven of thousands of exotically hued petals.

"I had come, bearing in mind the stories of human sacrifices, fully expecting nothing less than a monster, carnivorous plant—a fly-catcher plant on a giant scale. But I was wrong. There was no such plant. Instead, on an altar-like dais of the cathedral blossomed one, small, red flower. At first sight, I was disappointed. It might have been any one of a thousand jungle flowers. But upon approaching it more closely, I perceived that it did not grow from the soil. What it did grow from sent a chill of horror through me. That blossom was supported by a stem that reared from the gaping mouth of a long-dead native girl. Stifling my revulsion, I saw that natural decomposition of the

girl's body had never taken place. Her skin hung about her frame like a loose, brown sack that was beginning to fall to shreds. But inside the shell of her skeleton, Tom, I glimpsed the real evil of this devil flower."

Myra paused momentarily, and in her expressive eyes was reflected something of the horror she was recalling.

"That skeleton was filled with an interweaving and inter-lacing network of tiny green feelers and roots that perfectly and completely duplicated what had once been the arteries, veins and capillaries of the unfortunate girl's body.

"The high priest of this jungle temple sullenly explained to me that the flower blossomed only once each year, producing but one small seed. This seed, when fully ripened, was given in food to the carefully selected sacrifice. A short time later, the victim began to weaken and waste away as the seed germinated, and spread its tiny tentacles, roots and feelers through her circulatory system; each of the thread-like feelers drinking of the victim's life blood, until at last the sacrifice died, and the flower blossomed miraculously from the mouth of the dead girl.

"The priest informed me further that the flower I was observing was about to go to seed, as the plant had absorbed all the blood of the girl's corpse.

"Horrible as the priest's story was, it fascinated me. I determined then and there to carry that fabulous seed back to civilization and put the tale to test by attempting to germinate the seed in a solution of animal blood.

"But the priest was cleverer than I," Myra continued. "During the night, he or one of his servitors must have removed the flower and its seed capsule. I was disappointed, of course, but I wanted no more trouble with these natives, whose enmity I had already earned by violating their sacred flower temple, and the whole idea of the flower and plant was so alien and repellent, that I thereupon dismissed the seed from my thoughts, and decided to head back to the coast immediately.

"We remained only one more day in the village, making observations and gathering additional data on the customs and beliefs of these remote savages. It was that one day,

I am now convinced, that cost me my life," Myra concluded solemnly.

"Only one thing could have happened, Tom," she went on, beckoning me to silence, as I started to speak. "There just is no other explanation. That native priest, lusting for vengeance for the violation of his temple, managed in some manner to place the seed in my food. As a result, I am about to die—a modern sacrifice to a primitive jungle Flower God thousands of miles away."

"Nonsense, Myra!" I exclaimed. "Your mind is overwrought with your illness. This is certainly a strange story you have told, but you know as well as I that what you suggest is incredible."

"Is it, Tom?" Myra seemed to have spent her pitifully small store of strength in her narration, and now that she had finished her words were tired whispers. "Is it incredible, Tom? I wonder. You do not know the jungle as I do."

Myra's eyes closed and she slipped gently into sleep. I took her pulse and found it alarmingly weak. Nurse Wilkins, who had been a fascinated witness to Myra's story, was at my side. "Is there anything I can do, Doctor?"

"No," I replied with a sigh. "There's nothing either of us can do beyond waiting and watching. I think we should both be here, so I will remain for an hour or two."

Wilkins nodded, and with that knack that is a part of a nurse's training, made herself comfortable in a chair, although I knew she had been on duty far beyond the normal span of hours. I settled back into the chair at the side of Myra's bed. Through the open windows drifted the perpetual clamor of the crickets. The window curtains stirred dully in the hot night air.

THE torpor of the heat must have caused me to drop off to sleep, for it was more than an hour later when I was aroused by an exclamation from Wilkins. Instinctively I glanced at Myra. She was dead. She had died so gently and quietly as she slept that neither Wilkins nor I had been aware of her passing. Her eyes were rolled back in her head, her mouth slightly opened.

"Ah, well," I commiserated with a pang of real sorrow and regret, "at least she has

gone without pain." For that slight consolation, I could be grateful.

I was about to phone to have the body removed, when my attention was drawn by a strange gurgling or rustling sound that issued from the throat of the dead woman. Wilkins heard it, too, for she was staring as fixedly as I.

And then it happened. I shall state it simply with as few words as possible, describing merely what both Nurse Wilkins and I witnessed with no attempt to theorize or elaborate. For when one is describing the impossible—the incredible

As Nurse Wilkins and I stared, petrified, a red abomination that I at first thought was blood, caused perhaps by an internal hemorrhage, spread from the mouth of the dead woman. Then, even while my senses revolted, I was forced to see it for what it really was. It was not blood, but a blood red blossom, unfolding its petals before our very eyes as it reared upward on a pale green stem. In a few short seconds the nightmare flower had completed its deathly growth and was about four inches in width, while the stem supporting it emerged some six inches from the mouth of the corpse. Had my very life depended upon it, I don't believe I would have been able to stir a muscle during those seconds that seemed an eternity. I was as transfixed as any serpent charmed by a Hindu's piping. In that brief blink-of-time all my years of scientific training and learning were blasted to nothingness by the impact of the impossible taking place before my eyes.

It was a noise that broke the spell—the noise caused by steely-nerved Nurse Wilkins collapsing in a heap on the floor. She had fainted dead away. Instantly my mind snapped back into action like a spring suddenly released from tension. Thoughts flew through my head at a furious pace: I knew exactly what must be done. Removing a small pen-knife from my pocket, and fighting down an overwhelming revulsion, I stepped to the bed and forced myself to slip the blade of the knife between the lips of the dead woman, while I severed the stem of the flower in her throat. Then I thrust the clammy blossom into my coat pocket, and gently and tenderly closed the eyes and mouth of what had once been Myra Brad-

shaw. When I finished, the body appeared a normal corpse.

Nurse Wilkins' eyes were fluttering open. In a moment more I had her resting in a chair, staring blankly at me, and muttering, "What happened, Doctor? I—I must have fainted." A few sips of water refreshed her further, and in a few minutes she was her old self, if a trifle shaken. But she remembered nothing beyond the fact that she had dozed, then had awakened to find Myra Bradshaw dead. All memory of the hideous episode of the flower was wiped from her mind. The defense mechanism of Nurse Wilkins' mind was functioning in a manner that would have delighted an amateur psychoanalyst. The mind of this practical, hard-headed nurse simply couldn't accept what it had been forced to record. So, it had resorted to the mechanism of a fainting spell to reject and blot out the incident. Nurse Wilkins remembered nothing beyond awakening to find Myra Bradshaw had died. Then she had fainted—because of the heat and the long months of overwork and extra hours, she stoutly asserted. At any rate, the very next day Nurse Wilkins departed bag and baggage from the sanatorium, grimly determined on a long-delayed and long-needed holiday:

To my relief I discovered later that Myra Bradshaw had left specific instructions that her body was not to be embalmed. Instead, it was to be consigned, whole and untouched, to the heat of the crematorium. I shuddered to think of the green horror of tiny filaments and delicate lacements the mortician would have found growing through the blood vessels of the corpse.

For by this time I had come to accept Myra Bradshaw's deathbed story in its entirety. Once the incredible had been demonstrated as factual, I found my inborn scientific curiosity re-asserting itself. I wanted to know more about this weird flower—this *fleur de mal*, as Myra herself had so rightfully termed it. After reporting and recording Myra's death, I hurried through the cloying, humid air of the early morning to my home, my mind busily working all the while, revolving about that curious abomination that lay concealed in my coat pocket.

I had determined to carry out an experiment that would prove to me once and for

all time, beyond the shadow of the slightest doubt, the final truth or falsity of Myra Bradshaw's story.

IV

AS SOON as I reached home, early as it was in the morning, I went to my laboratory and there carefully prepared a solution of animal blood in a beaker. In it I placed the flower, depositing the beaker in an incubator that would keep the beaker and its contents at blood heat.

That night was five weeks ago. In that time I have replenished the blood in the beaker, keeping the flower supplied with the life-giving fluid it required to remain fresh and blooming. I have made several deductions regarding the blossom. It appears to be an ordinary flower, not unlike the common garden variety of poppy. It possesses no special attributes of motion or action. Unlike the carnivorous fly-trap plants of Africa, it cannot move when excited by foreign stimuli, nor does it sustain itself on flesh. It appears to be an ordinary plant, except that it grows out of a bath of blood, instead of a bed of soil. Also, unlike the fly-trap plant, it is not a tuber, but is a seed-bearing plant. The seed capsule was well formed and had almost reached maturity last week. It was then I noted that the blossom first showed signs of beginning to fade and wilt. This morning, when I examined the flower, I found it almost entirely wilted and apparently lifeless. I determined that tonight I would examine the seed.

Today I could think of little else than the seed, as I went through my routine calls and duties. The late September sun shone with all the heat of August, to which was added the brief fury that accompanies the harvest and brings the final climax of growth to the plant world.

When the day was finally finished, and I had partaken of a light dinner, I retired to my laboratory and flung wide the windows to admit whatever stray breeze there might be. The sun had already set and the horizon was alive with wriggling serpents of heat-lightning, accompanied by a continuous cannonade of thunder, the faint rumble sounding like the approach of a ghostly artillery. Would the coming storm succeed in break-

ing the relentless grip of the summer's heat? I hoped so fervently. As a doctor, I knew full well the toll this unusual summer had taken in my own small community. Heat prostrations, heart attacks, sunstrokes—all had been far higher than average during these past four months. But now it was late September and the magnitude of the storm that threatened promised real relief from the ghastly heat.

Then I forgot all about the approaching storm, as I turned to the wilted, lifeless flower and the dry seed pod that seemed somehow to epitomize and concentrate in itself all the miserable heat and sultriness of that long summer of torrid sunshine and misty rains. Perhaps it was my subconsciousness linking the origin of the blossom with the jungle-like heat we had endured throughout this strange summer.

Turning from the window, I removed the beaker of blood and the flower from the incubator. The wilted petals dropped away as my hand touched them. The firm, rounded seed capsule was easily detached from the stem. There it lay in the palm of my hand—a small, brownish-red ovule, not more than three-quarters of an inch in length. I cracked the protective shell that enclosed the seed. The fibrous husk fell apart and I discarded it. In my hand lay the seed. Moving to the lamp, I adjusted my spectacles and peered closely at the object in my palm. And then I gasped with shock and amazement. Could I believe my eyes? Did I really see it?—a palely greenish-white image, a miniature human shape, not more than half-an-inch in length, and as delicately and exquisitely formed as a bit of Chinese jade!

The window draperies suddenly whipped aside as a blast of hot air swept into the room. There was a terrific crack of thunder and a brilliant dagger of lightning stabbed its way through the inky black heavens. Dur-

ing the next few minutes the elements stormed their most eloquently. The fury burst with a violence that seemed to shake the very earth. The wind mounted steadily, moaning eerily as it veered around the corners of the house. Great drops of rain were hurled noisily to the earth. It was the prelude of what proved to be an autumnal tempest. But not even the dramatic raging of the storm could distract my attention from the object I held cradled in my palm.

Hastily I shut the windows to close out the ravening wind and the pelting rain. Then I seized a powerful magnifying glass and brought it to focus on the faintly-chill and clammy bit of vegetable growth in my hand.

It was then that I saw the ultimate, yet horribly logical terror that finally and completely verified Myra Bradshaw's story. As I trained the powerful lens on the seed, there came a blinding flash of lightning, accompanied by an ear-splitting roar of thunder that seemed to explode in the garden just outside my laboratory. My electric lamp went dark, plunging the room in complete blackness. Then came another, more prolonged flash of lightning, and while I stared I saw in that glaring light, more vivid than any noon-day sun, that the tiny figure in the palm of my hand was a perfect likeness in every minute detail, to every last delineation of feature—a miniature replica of Myra Bradshaw herself!

While I stared in that weird intensity of illumination, just before the chamber was once more shrouded in blackness, the half inch seed effigy stared back at me, peering up through the thick glass of the lens with blank and soulless eyes that flashed suddenly open revealing hazel depths flecked with gold, while the beautifully formed limbs of the figurine squirmed and thrashed about in mindless motion.

