

## THE WARDIAN CASE

By JASON MORNINGSTAR

### HOOKER'S LETTER

October 17, 1844

Dear Mr. Gray,

The Wardian case to which this letter is attached contains a curious lichen for your scientific investigation.

Although the specimens of this plant brought from Cockburn Island, Graham's Land, near the Antarctic Peninsula are very perfect and well developed, they belong to so difficult a group of lichens as to have baffled me in my attempts to reduce it to any known species. I have forwarded a sample on to you with my compliments and the hope that you can definitively unravel this taxonomical mystery. I have named it in your honour with complete confidence in your ultimate triumph.

These specimens were collected with great difficulty from a wave-cut platform of early Pleistocene peecten conglomerate at a height of perhaps 800 feet.

I eagerly await your reply.

Yours truly,

Joseph Dalton Hooker

### THE WARDIAN CASE

The case is a portable greenhouse. Thick panes of glass form a canted roof, each piece carefully soldered in place and attached to a metal framework. Within lies a closed environmental loop of evaporation and photosynthesis, allowing plants to survive on journeys of months or even years.

Inside the case sent by Hooker is a thick mass of gun-metal grey lichen. It clings to, and is fused with, what appears to be volcanic tuff.

### WITNESS

*Jane Lathrop Loring* is an ardent natural historian. She is largely self-taught, with a *deep interest in lichen*. Her father persuaded Asa Gray to tutor her privately, and she soon far surpassed him in her narrow sub-field - as well as falling *in love* with the shy Harvard botanist.

### OTHER CHARACTERS

- ⊙ *Asa Gray* is a Harvard College Professor. Gray lives in Garden House on the grounds of the botanical garden. He is affianced to Jane Lothrop Loring, who is also his local lichen expert.
- ⊙ *Biddy Whelan* is Gray's housekeeper. A busy woman, she has been pleased to find a position with a gentleman who does not hate the Irish too openly.
- ⊙ *Isaac Sprague* illustrated Gray's magnum opus, *A Flora of North America*. Sprague is a friend of circus impresario Gardner Quincy Colton and a recreational nitrous oxide and ether user.

### LOCATION AND ERA

Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 1844. *Garden House* is attached to the plant conservatory, where the Wardian case sits on a bench surrounded by ferns and orchids.

### SPECIAL CARDS

- ⊙ A Bizarrerie
- ⊙ Specimen
- ⊙ Visions
- ⊙ Warped Bodies

*A sweeping dome, carved with the likeness of the primordial stars. The tunnel continues down - and we can feel warm air rising from it.*

*Stench of gasoline. What does it mean? Gedney?*

## THE WARDIAN CASE: SAMPLE CLUES

- ⊙ Minute cracks in the Wardian case solder, or glass, or both.
- ⊙ Joseph Dalton Hooker's earlier letter, intercepted and concealed.
- ⊙ A whispered dream, awakening with a strange compulsion.
- ⊙ The unnerving sense of being watched in the plant conservatory.
- ⊙ A cry muffled, as if from between clenched teeth.
- ⊙ The Wardian case moved to a new location unexpectedly.
- ⊙ A magnificent *Cyathea acanthophora* tree fern, dead overnight and already decayed.
- ⊙ A Colt caplock revolver, neatly arranged on a work bench with powder, bullets and caps.
- ⊙ Evidence of impossible behavior among the Wardian case's *Lecanora grayii*.
- ⊙ A productive cough with grey-flecked sputum.
- ⊙ A vicious, inexplicable, and entirely out of character assault.
- ⊙ The sour smell of fruiting bodies, like an iridescent *Diachea leucopodia* slime mold.
- ⊙ "His skin was grey, like coal ash. He left his calling card."
- ⊙ A musical sound, like crystallized exhalations on a very cold night.
- ⊙ *Lecanora grayii* clinging to the drain of a bathtub.
- ⊙ A seawater-damaged journal titled *Some Notes From the Journey of the Hero*, N.B. Palmer, 1821.

The distinctive smell whose  
identity is now so clear is  
pervasive down here, and  
the heat is rising.

The tunnel network is  
more complex here. Our  
trail is all that would  
prevent us becoming lost.