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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Seeds From Outside

By EDMOND HAMILTON

*A strange and curious weird-scientific fantasy about two beings
that came to earth in a meteor*

STANDIFER found the seeds the morning after the meteor fell on the hill above his cottage. On that night he had been sitting in the scented darkness of his little garden when he had glimpsed the vertical flash of light and heard the whiz and crash of that falling visitor from outer space. And all that night he had lain awake, eager for morning and the chance to find and examine the meteor.

Standifer knew little of meteors, for he was not a scientist. He was a painter whose canvases hung in many impressive halls in great cities, and were appropriately admired and denounced and gabbled about by those who liked such things. Standifer had grown weary of such people and of their cities, and had come to this lonely little cottage in the hills to paint and dream.

For it was not cities or people that Standifer wished to paint, but the green

growing life of earth that he loved so deeply. There was no growing thing in wood or field that he did not know. The slim white sycamores that whispered together along the streams, and the sturdy little sumacs that were like small, jovial plant-gnomes, and the innocent wild roses that bloomed and swiftly died in their shady cover—he had toiled to transfix and preserve their subtle beauty for ever in his oils and colors and cloths.

The spring had murmured by in a drifting dream as Standifer had lived and worked alone. And now suddenly into the hushed quiet of his green, blossoming world had rudely crashed this visitant from distant realms. It strangely stirred Standifer's imagination, so that through the night he lay wondering, and gazing up through his casement at the white stars from which the meteor had come.

It was hardly dawn, and a chill and drenching dew silvered the grass and

bent the poplar leaves, when Standifer excitedly climbed the hill in search of the meteor. The thing was not hard to find. It had smashed savagely into the spring-green woods, and had torn a great raw gouge out of the earth as it had crashed and shattered.

For the meteor had shattered into chunks of jagged, dark metal that lay all about that new, gaping hole. Those ragged lumps were still faintly warm to the touch, and Standifer went from one to another, turning them over and examining them with marveling curiosity. It was when he was about to leave the place, that he glimpsed amid this meteoric debris the little square tan case.

It lay half imbedded still in one of the jagged metal chunks. The case was no more than two inches square, and was made of some kind of stiff tan fiber that was very tough and apparently impervious to heat. It was quite evident that the case had been inside the heart of the shattered meteor, and that it was the product of intelligence.

Standifer was vastly excited. He dug the tiny case out of the meteoric fragment, and then tried to tear it open. But neither his fingers nor sharp stones could make any impression on the tough fiber. So he hurried back down to his cottage with the case clutched in his hand, his head suddenly filled with ideas of messages sent from other worlds or stars.

But at the cottage, he was amazed to find that neither steel knives nor drills nor chisels could make the slightest impression upon this astounding material. It seemed to the eye to be just stiff tan fiber, yet he knew that it was a far different kind of material, as refractory as diamond and as flexibly tough as steel.

IT WAS several hours before he thought of pouring water upon the enigmatic little container. When he did so, the

fiber-like stuff instantly softened. It was evident that the material had been designed to withstand the tremendous heat and shock of alighting on another world, but to soften up and open when it fell upon a moist, warm world.

Standifer carefully cut open the softened case. Then he stared, puzzled, at its contents, a frown upon his sensitive face. There was nothing inside the case but two withered-looking brown seeds, each of them about an inch long.

He was disappointed, at first. He had expected writing of some kind, perhaps even a tiny model or machine. But after a while his interest rose again, for it occurred to him that these could be no ordinary seeds which the people of some far planet had tried to sow broadcast upon other worlds.

So he planted the two seeds in a carefully weeded corner of his flower garden, about ten feet apart. And in the days that followed, he scrupulously watered and watched them, and waited eagerly to see what kind of strange plants might spring from them.

His interest was so great, indeed, that he forgot all about his unfinished canvases, the work that had brought him to the seclusion of these quiet hills. Yet he did not tell anyone of his strange find, for he felt that if he did, excited scientists would come and take the seeds away to study and dissect, and he did not want that.

In two weeks he was vastly excited to see the first little shoots of dark green come up through the soil at the places where he had planted the two seeds. They were like stiff little green rods and they did not look very unusual to Standifer. Yet he continued to water them carefully, and to wait tensely for their development.

The two shoots came up fast, after

that. Within a month they had become green pillars almost six feet tall, each of them covered with a tight-wrapped sheath of green sepals. They were a little thicker at the middle than at the top or bottom, and one of them was a little slenderer than the other, and its color a lighter green. Altogether, they looked like no plants ever before seen on earth.

Standifer saw that the sheathing sepals were now beginning to unfold, to curl back from the tops of the plants. He waited almost breathlessly for their further development, and every night before he retired he looked last at the plants, and every morning when he awoke they were his first thought.

Then early one June morning he found that the sepals had curled back enough from the tips to let him see the tops of the true plants inside. And he stood for many minutes there, staring in strange wonder at that which the unfolding of the sepals was beginning to reveal.

For where they had curled back at the tips, they disclosed what looked strangely like the tops of two human heads. It was as though two people were enclosed in those sheathing sepals, two people the hair of whose heads was becoming visible as masses of fine green threads, more animal than plant in appearance.

One looked very much like the top of a girl's head, a mass of fluffy, light-green hair only the upper part of which was visible. The other head was of shorter, coarser and darker green hair, as though it was that of a man.

STANDIFER went through that day in a stupefied daze. He was almost tempted to unfold the sepals further by force, so intense was his curiosity, but he restrained himself and waited. And the next few days brought him further confirmation of his astounding suspicion.

The sepals of both plants had by then unfolded almost completely. And inside one was a green man-plant—and in the other a girl! Their bodies were strangely human in shape, living, breathing bodies of weird, soft, green plant-flesh, with tendril-like arms and tendril limbs too that were still rooted and hidden down in the calyxes. Their heads and faces were very human indeed, with green-pupiled eyes through which they could see.

Standifer stared and stared at the plant girl, for she was beautiful beyond the artist's dreams, her slim green body rising proudly straight from the cup of her calyx. Her shining, green-pupiled eyes saw him as he stood by her, and she raised a tendril-like arm and softly touched him. And her tendrils stirred with a soft rustling that was like a voice speaking to him.

Then Standifer heard a deeper, angry rustling behind him, and turned. It was the man-plant, his big tendril arms reaching furiously to grasp the artist, jealousy and rage in his eyes. Hastily the painter stepped away from him.

In the days that followed, Standifer was like one living in a dream. For he had fallen in love with the shining slim plant girl, and he spent almost all his waking hours sitting in his garden looking into her eyes, listening to the strange rustling that was her speech.

It seemed to his artist's soul that the beauty of no animal-descended earth woman could match the slender grace of this plant girl. He would stand beside her and wish passionately that he could understand her rustling whisper, as her tendrils softly touched and caressed him.

The man-plant hated him, he knew, and would try to strike at him. And the man hated the girl too, in time. He would reach raging tendrils out toward her to clutch her, but was too far separated from her ever to reach her.

Standifer saw that these two strange creatures were still developing, and that their feet would soon come free of their roots. He knew that these were beings of a kind of life utterly unlike anything terrestrial, that they began their life-cycle as seeds and rooted plants, and that they developed then into free and moving plant-people such as were unknown on this world.

He knew too that on whatever far world was their home, creatures like these must have reached a great degree of civilization and science, to send out broadcast into space the seeds that would sow their race upon other planets. But of their distant origin he thought little, as he waited impatiently for the day when his shining plant-girl would be free of her roots.

He felt that that day was very near, and he did not like to leave the garden even for a minute, now. But on one morning Standifer had to leave, to go to the village for necessary supplies; since for two days there had been no food in the cottage and he felt himself growing weak with hunger.

It hurt him to part from the plant girl even for those few hours, and he stood for minutes caressing her fluffy green hair and listening to her happy rustling before he took himself off.

When he returned, he heard as soon as he entered his garden a sound that chilled the blood in his veins. It was the plant

girl's voice—a mere agonized whisper that spoke dreadful things. He rushed wildly into the garden and stood a moment aghast at what he saw.

The final development had taken place in his absence. Both creatures had come free of their roots—and the man-plant had in his jealousy and hate broken and torn the shining green body of the girl. She lay, her tendrils stirring feebly, while the other looked down at her in satisfied hate.

Standifer madly seized a scythe and ran across the garden. In two terrific strokes, he cut down the man-plant into a dead thing oozing dark green blood. Then he dropped the weapon and wildly stooped over his dying plant girl.

She looked up at him through pain-filled, wide eyes as her life oozed away. A green tendril arm lifted slowly to touch his face, and he heard a last rustling whisper from this creature whom he had loved and who had loved him across the vast gulf of world-differing species. Then he knew that she was dead.

THAT was long ago, and the garden by the little cottage is weed-grown now and holds no memory of those two strange creatures from the great outside who grew and lived and died there. Standifer does not dwell there any more, but lives far away in the burning, barren Arizona desert. For never, since then, can he bear the sight of green growing things.

