The Hungry Gods Go to the Mushroom Summit

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KMS 2027 — Flying from YVR

I had wanted to go for three years.

The first year I heard about it a month after it happened. The second year it sold out while I was at my sister's in Kelowna with no signal. The third year I set an alarm, and I was at the kitchen table in Abbotsford with my card out on the placemat when the registration opened, and I was in by 6:04 in the morning, and Dale came down at seven and asked why I was crying into my oatmeal.

The Kauaʻi Mushroom Summit is four days in the cloud forest near Kōkeʻe State Park, at the top of the island, at the end of the road. They take twenty-odd people, all levels welcome, up the mountain to look for mushrooms in one of the least documented fungal places in Hawaiʻi, and then they sequence the DNA of what you find, there, on a table, that same weekend. You sleep in shared quarters. Breakfast is provided. Dinner is a potluck.

I have been a member of a small mushroom club in the Fraser Valley for twelve years, and I ran the front desk of a dental practice for thirty, and I can tell you that nothing in either of those has ever been sequenced on a table.

Dale said he would come for the summit.

He did not register for the summit. He booked a condo at Poʻipū, on the south shore, which is the sunny side, two hours' drive from the cloud forest, and he bought a snorkel. When I said that was not coming for the summit he said it was coming

for the summit, and that he would be at the summit in spirit and at Poʻipū in body, and that somebody had to be near a hospital.

Three weeks before we left, the organizers put the eight of us flying out of Vancouver into a group chat. I did not know any of the other seven, and by the end of the first evening I knew all of them better than I know my own brother-in-law.

The first to post was the All-Seeing.

He posted a list. The list was titled *What you will forget*, and it was:

Rain shell. Second pair of socks for the second day, not the first. A pencil, because pens do not write on wet paper. Sunscreen that is legal to buy there. A headlamp. Reading glasses for the sequencing table. The charger for the thing you brought to replace the charger.

Under the list he wrote, *You will not need an adapter.*

And under that he wrote, *There is no nonstop this winter. If you booked one, look again.*

Nobody answered him for about four minutes. Then five of the eight of us went and looked again.

I had booked the nonstop on WestJet in May. It had flown from Vancouver to Līhuʻe every winter for sixteen years, and that winter it did not, and nobody had told the confirmation in my email. I phoned. I was on hold for fifty-two minutes. I was rebooked through Seattle, on Alaska, leaving at seven in the morning, and there was a fee, and I got out a brown envelope and wrote SUMMIT on it in marker and put the receipt in it, because the trip was going to be a tax deduction. It was not

going to be a tax deduction. I knew that. But a receipt is a receipt, and I have never in my life known where to put one if there is not an envelope.

The Conscience-Keeper posted next.

He had already started the agriculture form. Hawai‘i has everyone arriving from the mainland declare plants and animals and soil, on your phone now, up to five days ahead of the flight. It was three weeks ahead of the flight. He wrote that he had started it so he would know what it asked, and would finish it five days out, when it let him.

He had packed a boot brush. He had packed, in his checked bag, a bottle of seventy percent isopropyl alcohol, and he explained to the group, without anyone asking, why it was in his checked bag and what the hundred-millilitre rule was. He had packed a printed copy of every permit the summit held, which the organizers had not sent, and which he had found. Then he posted photographs of the backs of four tubes of sunscreen, one after another, with the ingredients circled, and under the fourth one he wrote, *This one.*

The Hand posted one photograph.

It was a hard case, the black kind with the latches, standing on a bathroom scale. The scale said 49.6. Under the photograph he wrote, *Drying rack.*

Somebody asked him what kind of drying rack. He did not answer that night, and I have since come to understand that he had answered.

The Seeker posted a photograph of a book. It was *Mushrooms of Hawai‘i*, by Hemmes and Desjardin, from 2002, which is the

field guide, and there were so many sticky tabs in it, in so many colours, that it looked like a small bird. Under it he posted a reading list of twenty-three papers, in the order he recommended we read them. Then he posted a packing list of his own, which was a list of the papers again, with one line at the bottom.

Shoes: uncertain.

The Chaos-Weaver posted a photograph of a pair of flippers.

Somebody asked him about rain gear. Kōkeʻe gets around seventy inches of rain a year, most of it between October and May, and we were going in January.

He wrote, *It's Hawaiʻi.*

The Companion wrote, *Bringing the rice cooker.* She was not on our flight. She was going a day early and would see us at the top.

The Allfather did not post at all until the morning before we left. At 5:50 that morning he posted one word.

Packed.

Then a photograph of a garment bag, zipped, hanging on the back of a door.

That night I packed everything on the All-Seeing's list but the sunscreen, and a loupe and a roll of wax-paper bags, and I did not pack an adapter. I did not pack a swimsuit. I was not going to the beach. I was going to the cloud forest. I wrapped my mushroom knife in a cloth and put it in my carry-on, because it is the folding kind with the little brush on the end, and it was my mother's, and I was not going to let it go in the hold.

Dale packed two snorkels. One was for me.

Item surrendered at screening

We met at the check-in counter at Vancouver at 5:15 in the morning, in the dark, in the fog.

You meet people from a group chat the way you meet patients you've only known on the phone for thirty years. They are all exactly what they sounded like and none of them is the right height.

The Hand was there first. He was a broad, quiet man in a canvas jacket, and the hard case was on a cart beside him, and when it was his turn he lifted it onto the belt himself and the belt said 49.6 and the agent looked at the number and then at him. The tag went on: SEA, then LIH. The case went through the rubber flaps and that was the last time any of us knew where it was for four days.

The Allfather was in a long dark coat with the garment bag over his arm. When the agent printed his boarding pass she looked at it twice and said, "Oh, you've been upgraded," and he said, "Thank you," and did not ask why. She did not tell him why. She turned her screen a little, and looked, and then turned it back.

The Chaos-Weaver arrived at 5:40 in shorts. In Vancouver. In January. He had his flippers in a mesh bag over his shoulder like a man going to the community pool.

The Seeker had his book.

Then security. They were very kind. My mushroom knife came out of my carry-on in the X-ray tray in its cloth, and the

young woman unwrapped it, and opened it, and looked at the little brush on the end, and said, “Oh, that’s nice,” and then she said I could go back and check it or I could leave it with her. Going back meant missing the flight. I left it with her. She put it in a clear bin with some other things. There was a corkscrew in there and a pair of good scissors. I watched my mother’s knife go into the bin with a corkscrew.

The Conscience-Keeper, who had been behind me, said, “I’m sorry,” and I believe he was.

At Vancouver you go through the American border before you get on the plane. It is called preclearance. You go up one at a time to a booth.

The Conscience-Keeper went up to the booth ahead of me and I was close enough to hear.

The officer asked him the purpose of his trip and he said a mushroom summit on Kauaʻi. The officer asked him if he was bringing any food, plants, seeds, soil, or animals, and he said he was declaring a boot brush.

The officer looked up.

“It’s clean,” the Conscience-Keeper said. “I cleaned it. But it has been in soil. So I’m declaring it.”

“Then why declare it?”

“Because it has been in soil.”

The officer considered this. Then he asked what the boot brush was for, and the Conscience-Keeper told him, in four sentences, about a fungus killing the ʻōhiʻa trees in Hawaiʻi, how it travels in mud on boots, how you brush them and spray them with seventy percent alcohol and wait fifteen seconds,

and that he was declaring the alcohol as well, for completeness. At the end of it the officer said, “Have a good trip,” and as the Conscience-Keeper walked away I saw the officer write something on a pad by his keyboard, not on the computer. I don’t know what it was. I would like to think it was *seventy percent*.

My turn. He asked if I was bringing any food, plants, seeds, soil or animals. I said no. He asked if I had anything to declare. I said they’d taken my knife.

He said, “That was the other guys.”

The Seeker went after me. The officer asked him the purpose of his trip and the Seeker gave him three citations.

At the gate, they announced de-icing.

The fog had become a freezing fog, and the de-icing trucks came out of the dark with their booms up, like long-necked animals, and sprayed the wings of our little jet with something orange and steaming. I was in 14A. The Allfather was in 1C. The Chaos-Weaver was beside me in 14C, with his flippers on his lap because the bag would not fit under the seat.

Our connection in Seattle was an hour and five minutes. We were forty minutes late already. I asked the All-Seeing, across the aisle, whether we were going to make it.

He was looking out the far window at the truck.

“Of people on this flight connecting to that one, on a January morning, at this airport,” he said, “most will.”

“Will we?”

“It depends which pad,” he said. “There are several de-icing pads.”

We went to the far one. The pilot came on and apologized for that.

We pushed back fifty minutes late. I worked out the connection on the back of my boarding pass with my pencil and did not share the result.

Alaska Lounge — Policies and rules

We missed it by eight minutes. We came up the jet bridge in Seattle at a fast walk and the board said the Līhuʻe flight was CLOSED, and then a minute later it said DEPARTED, and the seven of us stood there and watched it change.

The next flight to Līhuʻe was at 5:20 that evening. The agent rebooked each of us on it with a ten-dollar meal voucher, and then she got to the Allfather.

She typed. She stopped. She looked at the screen.

"You've been upgraded," she said.

"Thank you," said the Allfather.

"You don't have an account with us," she said. She was not complaining. She was telling him, the way you would tell somebody their shoe was untied. "There's no number. You don't have status. You're not on the list." She looked at the screen again. "You're in 2A."

"Thank you," said the Allfather.

The rest of us were in row 34.

We had eight hours and twenty minutes in Seattle.

I had never been in an airport lounge. I knew they existed the way I knew there were private boxes at the hockey. You walk past a frosted door with a desk and plants, and you do not go in, because you do not go in.

It turned out that between the six of them, the others had five different reasons to go through those doors, and none of the five worked for all of them, and the first to find this out was the Allfather.

He walked to the Alaska Lounge with his garment bag, and we followed, because he seemed to know where he was going. The woman at the desk scanned his boarding pass and read her screen.

She said, very kindly, that First Class got you in on a flight of two thousand miles or more, which ours was, but only if you had paid for it. He had been upgraded. Upgrades did not count. He could buy a single-entry pass for thirty-five dollars.

"No, thank you," said the Allfather.

He went and found his gate, and sat down at it, eight hours early, under the window, with the garment bag across his knees.

The All-Seeing was next. He had the top status, which is called Titanium, which I would not have guessed an airline could say with a straight face. The woman read her screen and said that status got you in only when you were flying to or from somewhere outside the United States, Canada and Mexico. We were going from Canada to the United States. Those were the two places that did not count.

"I know," said the All-Seeing.

"Then why—"

“To see the screen,” he said.

He went off to the American Express lounge, above the food court, which has a waiting list you join in an app. The app said *Almost full* and put him on the list.

“How long?” I said.

“On a Wednesday in January, at this hour, the average wait is around forty minutes.”

“So forty minutes.”

“Not for me,” he said. “For the average.”

The Chaos-Weaver paid sixty-five dollars at the desk for a day pass and went in. He came out eight minutes later holding a cookie. He said it was the best cookie he had ever tasted and he had now had it and he was done.

The Hand was a member. He had an actual card, worn white at the corners; he travelled for work, he said, and did not say what the work was. The woman smiled at him like an old customer and said that members could bring two guests at no charge.

Then she read from the screen, because she was required to read from the screen.

“All guests must be personally known by the member.”

There were five of us standing there. The Allfather was down at the gate. The All-Seeing was on a waiting list. The Chaos-Weaver had a cookie.

The Hand looked at us.

He looked at the Conscience-Keeper, and at the Seeker, and at the Chaos-Weaver, and at me. He took a long time about it. It was the look you see on a man choosing a two-by-four from

a stack at the lumber yard, turning each one over to see down its length.

“Him,” he said. “And him.” The Conscience-Keeper and the Seeker.

The woman asked whether they were personally known to him.

He said they were.

She asked how long he’d known them.

He said, “A while.”

They went in. The doors closed behind them with the frosted window and the plants.

So the Chaos-Weaver and I went to the food court with our ten-dollar vouchers.

I had clam chowder in a bread bowl, eighteen dollars and forty cents before the tip the screen asked for, and the receipt went in the envelope. The Chaos-Weaver had a second cookie, from a kiosk, which he said was nearly as good. He asked me why I liked mushrooms. I told him about my mother, and the knife, and a chanterelle patch above Cultus Lake she showed me when I was ten, and when I was done he said, “And the knife’s gone,” and I said yes, and he said, “Huh,” and finished his cookie.

At 10:55, the All-Seeing’s phone told him a seat had opened in the American Express lounge. He had been on the list for seventy-one minutes. He looked at the phone and said, “There,” and I am still not sure whether he meant he was right or he was wrong.

My own phone buzzed. It was Dale. He had flown through Honolulu the day before, because it was eighty dollars cheaper, and he was already on Kaua'i. The photo was of a rental car parking lot in the rain, with a chicken in the foreground, close to the lens. The chicken was looking at the camera.

Welcome committee, he wrote.

At four, I went down to the gate. The Allfather was there under the window, where we'd left him. I sat down beside him with my carry-on on my knees and we watched a plane being loaded. You could see the bags going up the belt. None of them was a hard black case.

"Eight hours," I said. "And you could have been in there for thirty-five dollars."

He thought about it.

"They build rooms for waiting in," he said. "Then they sell you a better one."

He went on watching the belt.

They boarded First Class first. He stood and put on his coat and went down the jet bridge with the garment bag held up so it did not touch the floor, and he did not look back.

The Hand's app said the case was *Loaded*.

Plants and Animals Declaration

Six hours is a long time over water.

About an hour out they announced the agriculture form, a code on the screen for our phones. Row 33 could not get it to scan. The Conscience-Keeper, who had finished his five days before, went back and knelt in the aisle with a family from Boise and showed them how to hold the phone further away, and then helped the man across from them, who had brought a small avocado and was not sure.

"Declare it," the Conscience-Keeper said.

"It's just an avocado."

"Then it will be quick."

We landed at Līhuʻe at 9:25 at night.

The Līhuʻe airport is open to the air. You come off the plane and down the stairs to a long walkway under a roof, and there are no walls at the sides, and the air comes in, and it is warm and wet and smells like plumeria and jet fuel and cut grass, all at once. Then you hear a rooster.

There were chickens at baggage claim. Not one or two. A hen and four chicks were going along the edge of the carousel area as if they had come to meet a flight, and a rooster stood on top of a bench by the rental-car signs with his tail lit up green and copper under the lights. Nobody paid them any attention. Nobody who lived there, I mean. Everybody from row 34 took a picture.

The carousel went round. Mine came, and the Seeker's, and the Conscience-Keeper's, and the Chaos-Weaver's, a duffel the size of a loaf of bread. Then the carousel came round empty, and went round again empty, and stopped.

The hard case was not there.

The Hand did not seem upset. I was upset for him. He walked to the baggage office, where a young woman in a lei and a fleece vest was finishing up with somebody's lost golf bag, and waited, and then described the case.

He gave it to her the way you'd give a part number. Black, polypropylene, two latches, one combination lock set to zeros, wheels on the short side, a strip of red tape on the left handle, forty-nine point six pounds at Vancouver, contents one drying rack, folding, with a fan.

She typed it. She looked at the screen for a long time.

"It's in Honolulu," she said.

"All right," said the Hand.

"I don't know how it's in Honolulu," she said. "It shouldn't be in Honolulu. It was going Seattle to here."

"All right."

"It'll come tomorrow, probably."

"All right," said the Hand.

I asked the All-Seeing, on the curb outside, how a bag that was going from Seattle to Līhuʻe could be in Honolulu. Not how in general. How this one.

He said that the airlines of the world had mishandled about four point nine bags for every thousand passengers in the last year anyone had finished counting, which was the lowest rate there had ever been, and that the largest share of those, close to forty percent, were bags that had to change planes. He said all of this looking at the rooster on the bench.

"So it's bad luck."

"It's a rate," he said. "Tonight it was his."

The Chaos-Weaver came back from the rental-car shuttle. He had got the last car on the lot. It was a convertible. It was red. It was raining. He looked very happy about all three.

Dale was in the cell-phone lot with a chicken. He drove me to the condo at Poʻipū, half an hour south, through a tunnel of trees in the dark with the windows down. The others went to a hotel by the airport, where the summit shuttle left at eight in the morning.

I did not see what happened at the hotel. The Seeker told me the next morning that the Hand, having no luggage, had asked at the front desk for a toothbrush, which they had, and then whether they had any broken pallets out the back, which they did, and the night man had taken him out to look at them with a flashlight.

Kōkeʻe State Park — Entrance fee, non-residents

Dale dropped me at the airport at ten to eight. He had a snorkel mask pushed up on his forehead already, as if he could not wait the half-hour back to Poʻipū to have it on. He said, “Have fun up there,” and I said I would, and he said, “Send pictures,” and I said I would, and he drove away with the mask on his head.

The summit shuttle was a white fifteen-passenger van with the organizer at the wheel. Her name was Mahina. She was a mycologist, born in Waimea, at the bottom of the road we were going up, and she had been running the forays at Kōkeʻe

for years. She checked us off a list. Six of us from Seattle, and some others from the mainland. The Chaos-Weaver was behind us in his convertible. The rest were coming up on their own.

We went west on the highway along the south coast. We passed the turn for Poʻipū at 8:25. I looked down it.

At Waimea we turned up the mountain.

The road up Waimea Canyon goes up in long bends through red dirt and dry scrub, and the canyon opens on your right like a cut in a cake, red and green and a mile across, and then the scrub turns into trees and the trees into forest and you drive into the cloud.

Into it. Not under it. The world went white. Mahina turned the headlights on. The trees came out of the white one at a time, close, and went back into it.

Behind us, the convertible had its roof up and its wipers on high.

At the park there was a sign. It said that Hawaiʻi residents entered free, with a Hawaiʻi driver's licence, and that non-residents paid five dollars a person to enter and ten dollars a car to park, and that commercial vans of eight to twenty-five passengers paid fifty. Mahina paid for the van and gave me a copy of the receipt when I asked, and I put it in the envelope. The Chaos-Weaver paid for himself and came up beside the van with his window down in the rain.

"Cheapest thing on the island," he said.

He was not wrong. I checked, later, against the envelope.

The CCC Camp is a group of low wooden buildings in a clearing in the forest, around a meadow so wet it was more

like a sponge. The Civilian Conservation Corps built it in 1935. Mahina told us this at orientation, in the main hall, with the rain going on the tin roof so hard she had to raise her voice. The young men who built it had needed lumber, and there was no proper dock at Port Allen, the harbour down on the coast, so the lumber was put in the sea and floated ashore. The salt water soaked into the boards. And the salt water, it turned out, has kept the termites out of them ever since. There were boards in this hall, she said, that had been in the sea before they were in the wall.

The Hand put up his hand. Mahina asked if he had a question.

"Can I see the joists?" he said.

She said after lunch.

She told us about the ʻōhiʻa.

The ʻōhiʻa is the main tree of the native wet forest, with red flowers like little brushes, and the forest up here is mostly it. There is a disease killing it, called Rapid ʻŌhiʻa Death. It is two fungi. When scientists described them, a few years ago, they gave them Hawaiian names, for the first time anyone had given a plant pathogen a Hawaiian name. One of them is called *lukuohia*, which means the destroyer of ʻōhiʻa. The other one is *huliohia*, which means the one that changes the natural state of ʻōhiʻa. The destroyer was found near here, on a ridge road, a few years back. It travels in mud. On boots, on tires, on the bottoms of tripods.

So before every hike, she said, and after every hike, you brush your boots at the station by the door, every bit of mud

off, and then you spray them with seventy percent alcohol, and then you wait fifteen seconds.

We went out to the station, all twenty-two of us, the late-comers included. It was a little wooden stand with a stiff brush bolted to it upside down and a spray bottle on a string, and a sign that said *Please brush your shoes before & after you hike.*

The Conscience-Keeper was already standing beside it.

I don't know when he had gone out. He had refilled the spray bottle from his own bottle, the one from his checked bag. As each of us came up, he watched us brush, and when we were done brushing he handed us the bottle, and when we had sprayed he looked at his watch.

"Thirteen," he'd say. "Fourteen. Fifteen. Thank you."

Twenty-one people. He said it twenty-one times. Nobody had asked him to. By the third person nobody questioned it. By the tenth, Mahina had stopped watching the station and gone back inside to the coffee urn, the way you leave a room when you see that someone competent has it.

At lunch, the All-Seeing counted us from the doorway of the main hall, with his tray in his hands, and wrote a number on the back of his name tag with my pencil, which he had borrowed and which I did not see again.

"Twenty-two," he said.

Everybody was here. I didn't know why that was worth writing down.

That afternoon we went out on the first foray, a short loop on a trail behind the camp, in the cloud. It was not rain, exactly. It was water in the air that didn't fall. You were wet without

anything happening. The trees were wrapped in moss so thick that you couldn't see where the bark started, and ferns grew out of the moss, and other ferns grew out of those ferns. Everything dripped. It smelled like the inside of a cedar chest that someone had left a wet towel in. I stood in it with my mouth open, and it went on dripping.

Twenty minutes in, I found an ear.

It was growing out of a fallen branch beside the trail, a brown rubbery ear, the size of my palm, translucent where the light came through it, with a fuzz on the outside like a peach. I knew what it was. We have its cousins at home. I crouched down to take it, and put my hand to my pocket for my knife, and my knife was in a plastic bin in Vancouver with a corkscrew.

Mahina came up behind me.

"*Pepeiao*," she said. "That's what they call it here. It means ear."

"It's an ear."

"It's an ear," she agreed. She told me it had been first described from O'ahu, two hundred years ago, by a German. Then she snapped it off the branch with her fingers, because it was the only way, and put it in my hand.

So I stood there in the cloud holding an ear.

When we got back to camp the red convertible was gone, and a retired schoolteacher from Colorado with it. The Chaos-Weaver had offered, at lunch, to run down to Waimea for gas. The convertible came back at six with gas, and with the schoolteacher, red across the nose and shoulders and carrying

a box of Portuguese doughnuts called malasadas. She did not look at any of us.

That night was the first potluck.

The Companion had been at the camp since before the shuttle came up, though nobody saw her arrive. When we came in with our wet boots, there was rice in the rice cooker on the counter of the camp kitchen, and a big pot of something on the stove, chicken and ginger and greens, and every offering that anybody had brought was out on the long table on plates, the malasadas included, and there were serving spoons in everything. She was at the sink. She was a small woman in an apron with her sleeves pushed up, and she turned around when we came in and said, "There's towels by the door," and there were.

I went up to her after dinner and asked if I could borrow a spoon. I didn't say what for. She opened a drawer and took out a teaspoon, an ordinary one, stainless, with a pattern of little leaves worn almost smooth on the handle, and gave it to me. She didn't ask what it was for.

I went to bed in a bunk in a cabin with five other women, with the rain on the roof and a teaspoon in the pocket of my rain shell.

My phone found one bar of signal, for a minute, around ten. Dale's photo came in. It was the sunset at Poʻipū, the sun going down orange into a flat sea, and a man's foot in the corner of the frame, which was his.

Before lights-out, the Hand said his case was still in Honolulu.

Friday foray — Pihea Trail to the Alakaʻi. Bring lunch.

———

At breakfast the All-Seeing counted us again from the doorway, and wrote on his name tag with my pencil.

"Nineteen," he said.

Three people were not at breakfast. Nobody had seen them go. Their bunks were made. One of them had left a note on the whiteboard by the coffee urn that said *Back by dinner!!* with two exclamation marks, which is how you know.

"Tomorrow," the All-Seeing said, to Mahina, not to the room, "fourteen."

Everybody in the hall looked at everybody else in the hall.

"Which fourteen?" said one of the men from Oregon.

"I don't know which," said the All-Seeing. "I know how many."

The man from Oregon put down his coffee and looked around the room, at each of us, the way you look around a lifeboat.

There were chickens in the meadow outside, in the wet grass. They were not the same chickens as at the airport. They were smaller and they were all one colour, a sort of red-brown with dark tails, and the roosters were very bright. The All-Seeing stood at the window with his coffee and watched them.

The chickens down on the coast, he said, are mixed. Farm birds and wild birds. In 1982 a hurricane called Iwa went across this island, and in 1992 another one called Iniki, and both times the coops blew down and the farm birds got out and

went wild and bred with the wild ones. Somebody did a study a few years ago on the DNA of the coastal chickens, and you can date it, the mixing. You can see when it happened from the genes. It comes out about 1981.

"Before the first hurricane?" I said.

"Give or take," he said. "It's a range. The middle of it is 1981. The range covers both storms."

But the chickens up here, he said, the ones in the meadow, the ones they call *moa*, are thought to be older. The red jungle-fowl that came on the canoes. Mountain birds. Less mixed.

"Is that one?" I said, and pointed at a rooster on the fence post.

"I don't know about that one," he said. "I know about the chickens."

We brushed our boots. The Conscience-Keeper counted fifteen for each of us. We went in two groups; mine was fourteen, with Mahina. We drove out to a lookout over the Kalalau Valley, which they say is one of the great views in the world, green cliffs falling four thousand feet to the sea, and stood at the railing and looked at it.

It was white. It was cloud, all the way across, all the way down. A tour bus pulled in behind us and twenty people got off and went to the railing and took pictures of the cloud and got back on.

Then the trail. The Pihea Trail goes along the top of the cliffs for a while, and then turns into the forest and goes down into the Alakaʻi, which is a swamp, a high wet forest on a plateau, one of the wettest places on earth. In places the trail

is a boardwalk. In other places the boardwalk has given up and the trail is mud, red mud, slick as soap, and you go down it on the sides of your boots, holding on to roots. I went down one stretch on my seat. So did the Seeker, more slowly, with his book held up over his head.

It was mid-morning, and we were in the ʻōhiʻa, sitting on a boardwalk with coffee from thermoses, when Mahina stopped drinking.

She was looking at the ground beside the boardwalk, into the leaf litter under an ʻōhiʻa, about four feet away. She put her cup down on the boards. She got down off the boardwalk, onto her knees in the mud, very slowly, the way you'd get down beside a sleeping dog.

There was a mushroom there. It was small, the cap no bigger than a loonie, and it was pink. Not a little pink. Pink like the inside of a shell, pink like a pencil eraser, and slimy, so slimy it shone, and the stem was white.

"I think," Mahina said, and then stopped, and then went on very carefully. "I think it might be a waxcap called *Hygrocybe noelokelani*. It might not be. It's endangered. They know it from three places on the Big Island and one here on Kauaʻi. It only grows in this. In ʻōhiʻa forest. Wet ʻōhiʻa forest." She looked up at the ʻōhiʻa above us. "Which is the forest that's dying."

Nobody said anything.

The Conscience-Keeper said, "Photograph. Don't collect."

"Yes," Mahina said. "Thank you. Photograph. Nobody collect it."

So we photographed it.

You photograph a mushroom properly by getting down to it. You do not stand over it and point your phone. You get your face down where the mushroom's face is, and you get the gills, and the side of the stem, and where it comes out of the ground, and something in the frame for size. And so twelve grown adults in rain gear got down off a boardwalk in the Alakaʻi Swamp, one at a time, taking turns, and lay down on their stomachs in the red mud, with their elbows in it, with their phones, and took pictures of a pink thing the size of a coin. The Seeker held his tape measure beside it. The Hand held a branch out of the way so it didn't drip on the lens. I lay in the mud for my turn and got fourteen photographs and my front was red to the collarbone and I didn't care at all.

Then the Seeker wrote in his notebook. Date. Time. Location, from his phone, to five decimal places. Substrate: ʻōhiʻa litter. Tentative identification, and the name of the person making it, which was Mahina, and then he wrote *(tentative)* again, after her name, as well, so nobody could take it off the identification by mistake.

The All-Seeing had not lain down in the mud. He stood on the boardwalk and watched us do it, all twelve, one after another.

"Every one of you," he said.

"What?"

"You all lay down," he said. "Nobody stood."

I don't know if that was a joke.

On the way back up, on a fallen ʻōhiʻa branch beside the trail, I found a little brown mushroom. Mycologists call them LBMs. Little brown mushrooms. They are everywhere, in every forest, and they are all small and all brown and all very hard to tell apart, and most people walk past them, and some mycologists spend their careers on them and go slightly mad. This one had a cap like a tiny parasol, a thin stem, gills the colour of milky tea. There was nothing special about it. I don't know why I stopped. I took out the Companion's teaspoon and slid it under the base and lifted it out with a bit of the litter, the way you'd take a spoonful of pudding, and put it in a wax-paper bag, and wrote on the bag in pencil, with my second pencil, *Pihea/Alakaʻi, ʻōhiʻa litter, Friday, G.K.*, and put it in my pack, and forgot about it.

When we got back to camp before noon, the red convertible was gone again, with three more people. The note on the whiteboard said *Supplies!!!*

My phone found its one bar by the meadow. Dale's photo came in. A sea turtle, a big one, asleep on the sand at Poʻipū, with a rope around it on little stakes, and a sign.

Neighbour, he wrote.

At noon, Mahina came into the hall with her phone in her hand and said that the National Weather Service had put out a flood watch for the island, from the afternoon into Saturday morning, and that the afternoon walk to the stream was cancelled, because the stream would not be a stream, and that dinner was at six.

I stood by the window with my phone for a long time.

Then I texted Dale.

His answer came back in under a minute.

Waimea. 45 min.

Transient Accommodations Tax 11.000% · County TAT 3.000% · General Excise Tax 4.712%

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Dale came into the clearing at the camp fifty minutes later, with the wipers going and the windows fogged and a snorkel mask on the passenger seat, which he moved, and I got in, and we drove down.

Somewhere on the way down you come out of the cloud. One minute the windshield is white, and the next minute it isn't, and everything is underneath you at once, the red canyon, the dry hills, the coast, the ocean, which is a blue that is not a colour I had seen before, and the sun is on all of it. I put my hand up over my eyes like a woman coming out of a matinee.

Dale said, "Told you."

He had not told me. He had sent me photographs.

At Poʻipū, a little before three, the sun was hot on the parking lot. I had nothing to wear. I had packed for the cloud forest. I had a rain shell, two pairs of wool socks, and a teaspoon. So the first stop was the ABC Store, which sells everything a tourist could need, and I stood in front of the swimsuits for some time.

I bought a swimsuit. Black, one piece, forty-four dollars. It was the only one in my size that did not have a pineapple on it.

I bought sunscreen. The law in Hawai‘i is that you cannot sell sunscreen with oxybenzone or octinoxate, because they harm the coral, and the store had a wall of the other kind, the mineral kind, with zinc in it that goes on white and stays white. A small tube was twenty-two dollars. I thought of the Conscience-Keeper's circled ingredient lists and bought the one he had picked. It was there. It was twenty-six.

The receipt went in the envelope.

Dale had booked a late lunch at a place by the beach that he had read about. The poke bowl was thirty-one dollars. That is a cleaning and a fluoride treatment, at our old office, without the X-rays. It was very good poke. I ate it and put the receipt in the envelope and did not say the thing about the cleaning out loud.

On the way to the beach there was a desk in a hotel lobby with a sign that said *Activities*, and a young man behind it with very white teeth, which I notice. He offered us a free helicopter tour over the Nā Pali coast and the waterfall from the dinosaur movie. All we had to do was attend a presentation about a vacation ownership opportunity, the following morning, with breakfast, of about two hours.

Dale said, "Free?"

I took Dale by the elbow.

The beach at Po‘ipū is a curve of yellow sand between two rocky points, and in the middle there is a little sandbar that runs out to a rock, so there is a calm side and a rough side. On the calm side children were standing in water up to their knees, looking down. On the rough side young men were riding

small waves on boards and falling off. There were lifeguards in a tower. There were umbrellas. There were, at a guess, four hundred people, and every one of them was having a very good time.

On the sandbar, in the middle of all of it, inside a rope on little orange stakes, there was a monk seal.

It was asleep. It was the size of a small sofa, grey on top and pale underneath, lying on its side with its flipper on its belly like a man after Christmas dinner, and it had sand stuck to its face. It did not care about any of us. Outside the rope, in a folding chair, under a sun hat, sat a woman of about my age with a clipboard.

She was a volunteer. Her name was Barb. She was from Ohio originally and had lived on Kaua‘i for twenty years. Hawaiian monk seals are endangered, she told me. There aren’t many left. When one hauls out on a beach to sleep, a volunteer comes and puts a rope around it and sits beside it, sometimes all day, so nobody walks up and pokes it. You keep fifty feet back. The seal had a name and a number, and she knew both, and she knew its mother’s name and where it had been born and which beaches it liked and that it had a scar on its back from a shark when it was young. She had a little book with the seals in it, with drawings of the scars.

I stood at the rope and talked to Barb for half an hour about the seal.

Dale went snorkelling.

When he came back he gave me the other snorkel, and I went in, in my forty-four-dollar swimsuit and my twenty-six-dollar sunscreen, on the calm side, where the children were.

I put my face in the water and the water was warm and clear as gin and the bottom was sand and rocks, and the rocks had fish around them, yellow ones, and striped ones, and one ridiculous fish with a pig's snout and a face painted on like a clown's, which Dale told me afterward was the state fish, with a name so long they sell T-shirts of it. A turtle came by. It was the size of a car tire. It went past me close enough to touch, which you mustn't, looking at me with one old eye, rowing slowly with its flippers, not in any hurry at all, and went on into the blue.

It was very, very good. I didn't want it to be.

We went back to the condo as the sun went down. Dale had a lanai with two chairs and a view of the ocean and a little bowl on the table for his sunglasses. On the counter was the bill for the week, which he had left out, and which I read, because I read bills.

The room. A resort fee, which paid for the towels at the pool and the Wi-Fi, which were apparently not part of the room. A parking fee. And then the taxes, three lines of them, each with its own percentage, and I added them in my head the way I used to add the end-of-day: eighteen point seven one two percent. Part of the state's share was called the Green Fee, Dale said. It goes to the beaches and the forests and the reefs, the things the tourists come for, to keep them there for the tourists.

Out the window, on the lawn below the lanai, in the last of the light, in a ring on the grass, were mushrooms.

They were big, pale, scaly, with caps like parasols, a dozen of them in a half-circle, the way some of them grow, outward from the middle year after year. I went down the outside stairs in my swimsuit with my phone and got down on my stomach on the lawn of a resort condo and looked up under one of the caps, and the gills were going green. Green gills. On a white parasol on a lawn. I know that mushroom. It grows on lawns all over the warm parts of the world, and it poisons more people in the United States than any other mushroom, because it looks good to eat and it is not. I got the gills, and the side of the stem, and the ring on the stem, and my thumb for scale.

When I got up there were two people on the lanai next door with drinks, watching me.

Dale had his phone up on our lanai. He had a picture of me lying on the lawn in my swimsuit photographing a poisonous mushroom. He sent it to our daughter. I know because she phoned.

At seven I asked him if he would drive me back up.

He looked at me for a while. Then he said all right.

We went up the mountain in the dark, into the cloud, with the wipers going. It took an hour and forty minutes. At the camp, the windows of the main hall were lit, and the potluck was long over, and the dishes were done and put away. On the counter in the kitchen there was a plate under tinfoil. On the tinfoil there was a strip of masking tape, and on the masking tape somebody had written GWEN in black marker.

It was the chicken and ginger, and rice, and a malasada, and a pickle.

Dale said, “Who’s that from?”

I said I didn’t know.

I said that because I didn’t. I didn’t see who did it.

Dale drove back down the mountain that night, alone, to the condo with the bowl for his sunglasses. I ate the plate standing up.

From field to FASTA

“Fourteen,” said the All-Seeing at breakfast.

The man from Oregon put his hand up and counted the room with his finger, like a teacher on a field trip. Fourteen.

“Which fourteen,” the All-Seeing said, before he could ask. “These.”

The red convertible left before the dishes were done with three people in it, and a rental car followed it with two more. I watched them go from the window. They had towels. They did not pretend about the towels any more.

The flood watch was over, but the trails were running with water, so Saturday was the sequencing.

They had set it up in Building 16, at the end of the camp, which used to be the garage and workshop and still had an oil stain on the concrete in the shape of Australia. There were two folding tables pushed together under fluorescent lights. On the

tables: a laptop, a little centrifuge, racks of tiny tubes, boxes of pipette tips in colours, a machine the size of a toaster for the PCR, and a thing about the size of a stapler, plugged into the laptop with a cable, that is the sequencer. That's all it is. A stapler. When I joined the club, sequencing a mushroom meant mailing a dried piece of it to a university and waiting six months.

The person running it was Jun, a quiet young woman from the Big Island with a cap on backwards, who did this, Mahina said, for her doctorate. She explained it to us all. You take a scrap of each mushroom, a speck, the size of a grain of rice. You break it open and get the DNA out. Then you copy one particular stretch of it, a stretch that is different in different kinds of fungi, over and over, until there is enough to read. You put a different little tag on each mushroom's copies, so you can mix them all in one tube. Then the little machine reads them overnight, a letter at a time, and the laptop sorts out the tags, and in the morning it tells you, for each mushroom, what it is closest to, and how close. Or that it doesn't know.

"From field to FASTA," Jun said. FASTA is the name of the file the letters come out in.

Then she said she needed somebody to keep the queue.

The Seeker had already sat down at the end of the table with his book.

He was not running it. Jun was running it. But by ten o'clock every specimen that came to the table came to the Seeker first, and he wrote it into a spreadsheet on Jun's laptop and in his own notebook both, and he would not write anything he had

not seen. Where it was found. On what. By whom. When. Who said what it was, and whether they were sure. When somebody from Arizona brought him a bracket fungus and said she had found it on a koa log, he asked how she knew it was koa, and she said Mahina had said so, and he wrote *on koa (per Mahina)*, and then he went and asked Mahina, and came back and crossed out *per Mahina* and wrote *koa, confirmed, Mahina*. When it was my turn I gave him my little brown mushroom in its wax-paper bag with the pencil on it, and he copied my pencil exactly, *Pihea/Alakaʻi, ʻōhiʻa litter, Friday, G.K.*, and then he asked, "What time Friday?" and I didn't know. So he wrote *time unknown* and then *(collector uncertain)*.

He gave it a number. It was in the forties. It was an ordinary number.

It took all day. Jun and two volunteers stood at the tables with their pipettes for hours, and nobody was in a hurry, because the run would go overnight no matter what.

At one point I was sitting by the Seeker while he waited for the next specimen, and I said that it was a shame about the people who'd gone to the beach. That they'd miss this.

He took off his reading glasses.

He said that the field guide, the one in front of him with all the tabs, existed because of a honeymoon. One of the two authors was a mycologist from California, and he came to Hawaiʻi on his honeymoon, years ago, and after a few days of lying on the beaches he got bored, and he went up to the forests. And that was how it started. He had come back many times. He had found many of the mushrooms in this book. The

Seeker turned the book so I could see the authors' names on the cover.

"It's in a review of the book," he said. "From 2002. I have the citation."

"What did his wife do?"

"The review doesn't say," said the Seeker.

I thought about Dale, at Poʻipū, with the bowl for his sunglasses. I did not say anything.

The Hand had been out in the meadow most of the morning, and in the afternoon he came into Building 16 carrying a drying rack.

He had built it out of offcuts from behind the camp workshop, and two broken pallets from the hotel by the airport, which had come up the mountain in the back of the convertible without anyone knowing, and some screen-door mesh Mahina found for him, and the box fan from his cabin. It had eight shelves that slid in and out, and the fan pulled the air up through them, not down, so the spores didn't blow around. It was better than the one in his case, he said, because it was the right size for this room. The specimens went on it as Jun finished with them, each with its number, to dry into vouchers, which are the dried mushrooms that stay behind so that anyone in the future can check what the sequence was taken from.

His case was in Kahului, on Maui, according to his app. Then, at four, it was in Kona.

"Kona's on the Big Island," I said.

"Yes," said the Hand.

At five the red convertible came back up the road through a gap in the cloud with its three. The Chaos-Weaver got out of it and walked straight into Building 16 with a piece of driftwood, grey and smooth and salty, the size of a loaf of bread, with a bracket fungus on it, a little shelf of brown and cream.

"It was on the beach," he said.

The Conscience-Keeper stood up.

He took the driftwood out of the Chaos-Weaver's hands, by the ends, and carried it out the door to the boot station, and we all went to the door to watch. He brushed the sand off it. He picked up the spray bottle. Jun went out after him and said, quickly, "Not the fungus," and he turned the log so the bracket faced the ground and sprayed only the bark, all the way round, and looked at his watch.

"Thirteen," he said. "Fourteen. Fifteen."

The Chaos-Weaver watched with his hands in his pockets. "It's from the beach," he said. "It hasn't been near a forest in years."

"It's been in your car," said the Conscience-Keeper, and handed it back.

Mahina said it was a specimen. Jun said there was room in the run.

The Seeker wrote it down. *Poʻipū Beach, on driftwood, above the tide line. Collector: Chaos-Weaver. Brushed and sprayed (C-K), fungus excepted.* Then he asked the Chaos-Weaver how far above the tide line, and the Chaos-Weaver said about this far, and held his hands apart, and the Seeker wrote that down too, in inches.

Jun put the run in the machine at 7:40 that night. We all stood around and watched the laptop screen start counting reads. There was not much to see.

My one bar came on by the meadow. Dale's photo: sunset at Poʻipū, the same as Thursday. Same angle. Same foot.

It was better than Thursday's, though. The sun was going down into a gap in a cloud.

Saturday Talk Night — sign-up sheet on the door

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The talk on Saturday night was supposed to be given by a professor from Hilo, who was going to tell us about the history of mushroom collecting in the islands. His flight from Hilo to Līhuʻe had been cancelled that morning. He'd tried to get a different one. There wasn't one. There was no signal on the mountain for him to call in on, and the camp's internet was a dish on the roof that worked when the cloud was not in the way, and the cloud was in the way. Mahina read his email out at dinner. He sent his apologies and a reading list. The Seeker already had the reading list.

Then Mahina went to look at the sign-up sheet on the door of the main hall, which was for people who wanted to give five-minute talks after the main talk. She had put it up on Thursday. Nobody had signed it.

She came back and said, "Someone's signed it."

She held it up. In the first box, in large, neat letters, it said:

Allfather — Rot.

Nobody had seen him write it. He was sitting at the end of the long table with his plate.

“Rot?” said Mahina.

“Yes,” said the Allfather.

“How long?”

He considered it. “Seven minutes.”

The rental car came up the road at 6:20, just in time, and stopped in the meadow, and the last two got out. They were brown, or red, depending. They had towels around their necks and sand on their ankles and they were carrying, between them, a sheet cake from Costco, white, with blue icing roses, for the potluck. They had gone down specially to get it. They said they had felt bad. Nobody had asked them whether they felt bad.

“Fourteen,” said the All-Seeing, from the doorway.

The Companion took the cake from them at the kitchen door. She did not say anything about it. She cut it into squares and set it out on the long table beside the rice and the chicken and ginger and somebody’s macaroni salad, and it went on the potluck the same as everything else. One of the five, the schoolteacher from Colorado, tried to help her, and the Companion gave her a dish towel.

After dinner we pushed the tables back and put the chairs in rows, and the Allfather stood up at the front.

He did not have slides. He did not have notes. He stood in his dark sweater in front of the woodstove with his hands at his sides, and talked.

He said that this building was standing because it had been in the sea.

He said that the men who built it, in 1935, had floated the boards ashore at Port Allen because there was no other way to land them, and that the salt had gone into the wood, and that because of the salt the termites couldn't eat it. He said that was why the building was still here. Not because anybody built it well, though they had. Because the things that wanted to eat it couldn't.

He said that everything else in the forest out there that fell down was eaten. The ʻōhiʻa that fell, the ferns, the moss, the birds, the leaves, everything. He said the forest was mostly something being eaten and something doing the eating, and that the mushrooms we'd been picking all week were the part of the eating that comes up where you can see it. He said that if it ever stopped, it would not be a forest. It would be a pile.

Then he said, "That's rot," and sat down.

It was six minutes and fifty seconds. The All-Seeing had the time.

Nobody clapped for a moment. Then the man from Oregon did, and then everybody did, a little uncertainly, the way you clap at the end of a sermon in a church where you don't know if they clap.

One of the five from the beach put her hand up. She asked whether the beach was rotting too. The sand. She'd read that the sand was made of something.

The Allfather said, "Some of it is parrotfish."

She said, "What?"

He said that a good part of the white sand on these beaches had gone through a parrotfish. They eat the coral, for the algae on it, and grind it up, and the rest comes out the other end. He said she had been lying on it all afternoon.

She said, “Oh,” and then, “Oh,” and then she laughed, and everybody laughed, and that was the end of the question time.

Then the five-minute talks. Now that somebody had signed the sheet, others had.

The Hand gave two minutes on the drying rack. He brought it into the hall and showed us how the shelves slid and the fan pulled up, and said you could build one anywhere out of anything if you had a box fan, and that he’d leave this one. That was all.

The Conscience-Keeper gave the boot station figures. He gave us the number of times the station had been used since Thursday, and the number of those times the full fifteen seconds had been observed, and the rate. The rate was very high. He did not give any names. He did not look at the five from the beach. He didn’t have to. They had been at the station when they got out of the cars, every one of them, and he had counted them in.

The All-Seeing stood up for under a minute.

“Tomorrow,” he said, “twenty-two.”

The man from Oregon said, “All of us?”

“All of you.”

“How do you know?”

“There’s a group photo,” said the All-Seeing, and sat down.

My one bar came in when I went outside to the outhouse in the dark. Dale's photo: a mai tai. On the lanai. With a little umbrella in it. The ocean behind, black. He had written nothing.

In the bunkhouse, with my headlamp, I wrote the first sentence of my report for the club newsletter. The first sentence was *The 2027 Kauaʻi Mushroom Summit was held in the cloud forest at Kōkeʻe from Thursday to Sunday.* I looked at it for a while and crossed it out.

Run complete. 1 sample: no match above threshold.

At breakfast on Sunday the All-Seeing counted us from the doorway.

"Twenty-two."

Everybody had come back for the photo. The eight who had still been missing on Saturday night came up the mountain at seven in a row of rental cars, in every shade of sunburn. One of them was wearing a lei.

At ten past eight, a courier van drove into the meadow.

The driver got out and opened the back and took out a hard black case with two latches and a strip of red tape on the left handle and set it down on the wet grass. There were tags on the handle. I read them while the Hand signed. HNL. OGG. KOA. HNL. LIH. Honolulu, Kahului, Kona, Honolulu, Līhuʻe.

Under them was the original one, from Vancouver, SEA LIH, which was right.

The driver said, “It’s been around.”

The Hand thanked him.

He opened the case on the grass. Inside it was a drying rack, folding, with a fan, exactly as he had described it to the woman at the baggage office. It was intact. Nothing had shifted. He looked at it for a moment, and then closed it, and latched it, and carried it into Building 16 and put it beside the one he’d built, and said to Mahina that the camp could have that one too.

We took the photo in the meadow, all twenty-two of us, with Mahina and Jun in the middle, and the Allfather at the back because he was the tallest, in his long coat, with the garment bag over his arm. Somebody’s phone on a rock with a timer. It took four tries. The second one has a chicken in it.

Then the summit was over. The shuttle was going down to the airport at noon. Most people’s flights were that night.

Mine was that night too. I had told Dale to come and get me at noon so we’d have the afternoon. I had texted him to confirm on Saturday night with my one bar, and on Sunday morning I couldn’t get a bar at all, not by the meadow, not by the outhouse, not on the roof of the van, where the Seeker said the signal sometimes was, and where I stood for a minute holding the phone up while Jun watched me from Building 16.

At 11:30 the Chaos-Weaver came over with his car keys.

“Beach?” he said.

I said Dale was coming.

He said, “Is he?”

I didn’t know. That was the trouble.

He put the roof down. It was the first time I’d seen it down in the meadow. The cloud had a hole in it, right overhead, blue. I put my pack in the back with his flippers and got in.

We went down the mountain with the roof down and the cloud breaking open around us, white and then not white, and the canyon came up on the left this time, red and enormous, and the wind was in my hair, and I held on to the door.

About halfway down, a silver rental car came round a bend going up. I saw a man driving it. I saw a snorkel mask on the dashboard. It was past before I could be sure. I turned around in my seat and watched it go up into the trees.

“Was that him?” said the Chaos-Weaver.

I said I thought it was silver.

He didn’t stop. I didn’t ask him to.

He dropped me at Poʻipū at 1:15. He parked the convertible, and took his flippers out of the back, and walked down onto the sand in his shorts and his shirt, and kept walking, into the water, still in his shirt, and swam out past the sandbar. That was the last I saw of him that day.

There was no seal. The rope was gone. Barb’s chair was gone. The sand where the seal had been was smooth.

I sat down on the sand in my rain shell. I took it off. I had my black swimsuit on under my clothes, because I had put it on that morning at the camp, in the bunkhouse, before the group photo, and I had not told anyone.

At two o'clock my phone buzzed, and kept buzzing. Everything that had been waiting up on the mountain came in at once.

The first was an email from the Seeker. It had gone to all of us. It was the run results. It was a spreadsheet, with every specimen from the week in it, by number, each with its place and its substrate and its collector and the time, and beside each, what the sequence matched.

Most of them matched something. Most of them were what Mahina had said they were. The *pepeiao* was *pepeiao*. The Arizona woman's bracket was a bracket. The Chaos-Weaver's driftwood fungus matched a common one, a kind that grows on dead wood everywhere, and the Seeker had written beside it, in the notes column, *Locality confirmed by collector, in inches.*

Mine was number forty-something. *Pihea/Alakaʻi, ʻōhiʻa litter, Friday, time unknown (collector uncertain), G.K.*

Beside it, it said *No match.*

Under the spreadsheet the Seeker had written a paragraph about that line. "No match" meant nothing in the public databases was close enough to put a name on it. It could be a bad read. It could be something known but never sequenced, which happens a great deal in Hawaiʻi. Or it could be something nobody had described; an estimated four hundred and fifty kinds of mushrooms in these islands never have been. If so, it would need the voucher drying in Building 16, a description under a microscope, someone to do the work, a herbarium, a paper, and years. The voucher would stay in Hawaiʻi. Nobody should assume anything yet.

He wrote, *Collector's teaspoon noted.*

I read it twice.

Then the photos from Dale came in. There were three of them. They had all been taken in the last hour and a half and sent with no signal and had been waiting somewhere in the air to arrive.

The first was the CCC Camp, the meadow, the main hall, from the parking area, with a chicken on the fence post. *Where are you??* it said.

The second was the boot-brush station. Dale's own boot, his good walking shoe, his new one from Costco, on the brush, and in the corner of the frame, a hand holding a spray bottle, and a wrist with a watch on it. *They made me brush my shoes,* he had written. *A man is timing me.*

The third came in a minute later.

It was taken very close, from down low, down where its face was. There was ʻōhiʻa litter in it, the little leaves, wet, and a bit of fallen branch. There was a thumb in the frame, for scale. Dale's thumb. And there was a mushroom, small, brown, with a cap like a tiny parasol, and gills the colour of milky tea.

Is this one? he wrote.