

Findings of a Mycologist

**By:
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Charlie (Any Pronouns): Mid-Late 20's, possibly early 30's. A new professor of Mycology at Aspen University. They have an immense work ethic and are always striving to be perfect. At first glance you would notice their glasses, always present hiking boots, and one of a kind backpack they carry.

Peyton (She/Her): Mid-Late 20's, possibly early 30's. Peyton is a long time employee of the local 7/11. Coming up is her 5 year anniversary of working there. Since she's always working we see her in a 7/11 vest along with her name tag. At first glance you would notice her constantly messed-up hair, antique accessory choices, and her very old shoes that she hasn't bothered to replace.

Notes

1. Breakdown of scientific words:
 - Omphalotus Olearius
 - Om-pha-lo-tus O-lear-e-us
 - Cortinarius Violaceus
 - Cort-i-nar-e-us Vi-o-las-e-us
 - Luciferase
 - Lu-ci-fer-ase
 - Definitions.net have really nice pronunciations of these words if needed
2. If there is a / then the character keeps talking over the other person in between the slashes
3. Please take time to sit in silence, the audience should feel the empty space just as much as the characters do in those moments of noted silence.

Setting

A small space big enough for a tiny campsite in the middle of the Appalachian woods, the trees are tall, the leaves are beautiful, the hilltops are seen from any direction. It's the end of winter, the leaves are making an attempt to open again. The flowers are trying to come back to life. There's a small mist that overlays the ground. The only sounds that are heard are of the wildlife rustling the nearby foliage.

Within the dark there's a faint purple/green glow in the shape of a mushroom coming from a hidden spot in the woods. The bioluminescent glow gets stronger until PEYTON and CHARLIE walk on stage. As soon as they walk into this section of the woods the glowing stops and they are faced with a wash of gray light coming from the sun behind the last remaining winter clouds. As they come on stage CHARLIE is dressed in what you would imagine a contemporary Indiana Jones would wear if he hunted mushrooms instead of buried treasure. They carry a backpack of many wonders that has their personality written all over it. This could include buttons, stickers, pins, embroidery, anything you could imagine for someone who loves nature over people. Behind them walks a much slower and less interested PEYTON wearing her 7/11 work vest, a pair of jeans, very old shoes, and a cozy jacket of some kind to stay warm. CHARLIE looks around and makes a decision to start unpacking their backpack, taking out two small sleeping bags and some flint and steel. Throughout this conversation CHARLIE is setting up camp which includes rolling out two sleeping bags and starting a fire with flint and steel. Throughout the process PEYTON watches

PEYTON

Um... What are you doing?

CHARLIE

Setting up camp for the night

PEYTON

I thought you said we'd only camp out in case of an emergency

CHARLIE

This is an emergency

PEYTON

And what could that be?

CHARLIE

I haven't found my mushroom yet

PEYTON

That's not an emergency, we can come back tomorrow

CHARLIE

But we're close

beat

I can feel it

PEYTON

How can you feel the mushroom

CHARLIE

I just can/

PEYTON

No you can't

CHARLIE

/It's like the time I found your ring in my car after our roadtrip to Florida

PEYTON

(twirling her rings)

Okay but you didn't *feel* it, you just knew I lost it in the Subaru so you looked under the seats and found it.

CHARLIE

Even if that was the case, finding anything in the Subi is like finding a needle in haystack if I didn't rely on my powers

PEYTON

Charlie. You don't have powers, you're just lucky

CHARLIE

Luck has nothing to do with it

PEYTON

If you say so...

(Silence passes over them for a moment, we start to notice that CHARLIE has been struggling to start the fire)

PEYTON

You alright over there?

CHARLIE

(you can hear the struggle in their voice in between the strikes of the flint and steel)

Yeah, I'm just having some *issues*

PEYTON

(Goes over and reaches for the flint and steel)

Here, let me try

CHARLIE

(Struggling even more)

No, I got it

PEYTON

Okay then...

(PEYTON takes a seat on a nearby log and watches as CHARLIE struggles a lot)

Are you sure you've done this before?

CHARLIE

(starting to get angry)

Yes, Peyton. I've started a fire before

PEYTON

Well, by the looks of it you haven't

(PEYTON takes out her lighter from one of her pockets and starts playing with it. CHARLIE doesn't notice because they're too invested with doing it via flint and steel)

I'm just saying I *could* help you

CHARLIE

(trying to stay calm through the struggle)

I got it!

(CHARLIE burns themselves, they fall to the ground. CHARLIE lays with their back on the ground staring up to the sky.)

PEYTON

Well, from my angle, it looks like you just burned yourself

CHARLIE

(accepts their fate and stays on the ground, looking up to the sky)

No shit Sherlock

(PEYTON gets up and starts to inspect the campfire, CHARLIE stays sprawled out. PEYTON takes a moment to really understand what's going on with this campfire)

PEYTON

(she says while she's getting up)

I see your problem here Dr. Watson/

(picks up the flint)

CHARLIE

Don't call me that

PEYTON

(CHARLIE sighs)

/The problem is that you're trying to start a fire with this

(throws the flint onto CHARLIE. CHARLIE makes no attempt to catch it, they just let the flint land on them while they stare at the clouds. Maybe they start to play with the flint during the following lines)

CHARLIE

And?

PEYTON

It's prehistoric

CHARLIE

And what's wrong with that?

PEYTON

Nothing, it's just stupid

CHARLIE

Then what would you do Einstein?

(PEYTON bends down and lights the campfire with her lighter, CHARLIE doesn't notice her because they're too distracted with the flint and clouds)

PEYTON

(While she's lighting the fire)

This

CHARLIE

(sits up in shock of the fire)

How'd you do that so easily

PEYTON

(showing off her lighter)

With a lighter you dumbass

CHARLIE

Oh...

PEYTON
(going back to her log)

You're welcome

CHARLIE

Thanks

(Silence. CHARLIE starts to get lost in the fire while PEYTON continues to play with her lighter)

PEYTON

Charlie.

CHARLIE

What's up?

PEYTON

Why mushrooms?

CHARLIE

Because I like them

PEYTON

Okay... I like lighters but I didn't dedicate my life to studying them

CHARLIE

But you could've

PEYTON

And how is that?

CHARLIE

By going to college and getting a degree in something fire related

PEYTON

And how would I do that?

CHARLIE

Well, you apply to somewhere and then you go there and take classes-

PEYTON

-I know how school works Charlie, I mean with what money?

CHARLIE

I don't know, with scholarships

PEYTON

Not everyone can get a scholarship

CHARLIE

You never know

PEYTON

Well, I do

CHARLIE

How?

PEYTON

'Cause I tried and I got rejected.

CHARLIE

Oh, I didn't know.

Beat

I would've helped you if you just asked

PEYTON

Says the person who hasn't texted me in years and then randomly comes back home to find a mushroom and asks if I could go with them because you "aren't supposed to hike alone"

CHARLIE

Well, you're not. It's a safety hazard to hike alone

Beat

And I thought it'd be nice to catch up

PEYTON

Over mushroom hunting?

CHARLIE

Yeah, why not

PEYTON

It's a little weird Charlie

CHARLIE

I guess...

(silence)

PEYTON

You never answered my question... Why mushrooms?

CHARLIE

Because they were a way out

PEYTON

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

When I was in undergrad I started doing research in the mycology lab because no one else wanted me. And then I didn't hate the work so I kept doing it until I graduated and then went to grad school with all my mushroom data and continued working on it. Then I got my PhD in the only thing I ever studied and now here we are trying to find a mushroom in the woods so I can keep my job.

Beat

It's not like I'm in love with mushrooms, it's just that I knew if I kept studying the thing no one else wanted to study I'd keep working and never have to live-

PEYTON

-I get it.

Beat

So what exactly are we looking for?

CHARLIE

We're looking for a cross between the *Omphalotus Olearius* and the *Cortinarius Violaccus*

PEYTON

(stops playing with her lighter and looks intently at CHARLIE)

I'm sorry, what?

CHARLIE

The mushroom is a cross between the jack-o-lantern and the violet webcap

PEYTON

Okay...

CHARLIE

I've been doing some research and it turns out that the jack-o-lantern mushroom glows because of something called luciferase which is an enzyme that makes things like jellyfish glow in the dark. I've also been watching recent mycology maps and it turns out the violet webcap, which is a purple mushroom, has been spreading north into the Appalachian region where jack-o-lanterns live. And if I'm right then the two should've mixed creating a glowing purple mushroom.

PEYTON

And what exactly is important about a glowing purple mushroom?

CHARLIE

Because the purple bioluminescent glow would allow for better observations within genetic engineering when it comes to potatoes.

PEYTON

(shocked)

Potatoes... we're in the woods for a glowing purple mushroom to help people look at potatoes.

CHARLIE

Exactly

PEYTON

And why do people need help looking at potatoes? It's just a potato

CHARLIE

Well, people would be able to engineer the potato to have leaves that glow purple if they needed water, which would help the farmers know exactly when and how much water to give them.

PEYTON

Shouldn't they know when to water them... they're *farmers*.

CHARLIE

Well, it's not that simp-

PEYTON

Charlie. This is crazy

CHARLIE

No it's not

PEYTON

(raising her voice)

Yes it is!

CHARLIE

Why are you raising your voice at me?

PEYTON

(getting louder)

Because this is insane Charlie! We're in the middle of nowhere to find a purple glowing mushroom so fancy scientists can make potato leaves glow purple which would then tell farmers how much water they need because for some reason they can't figure that out on their own!

CHARLIE

I mean, it's not that they can't figure it out it's-

PEYTON

I don't care about fucking farmers Charlie! I care that we're unprepared in the middle of nowhere during winter! When you told me to come on a mushroom hunt with you, you said it wouldn't take more than a couple of hours but here we are. Some people have work Charlie. Some people have jobs and a real life that doesn't revolve around silly little mushrooms.

CHARLIE

(raising their voice)

They're not silly

PEYTON

Yes they are!

CHARLIE

(arguing back)

No! What's silly is the fact that you're about to celebrate your 5 year anniversary at 7/11! What's silly is that you just gave up after one college rejected you.

beat

I seriously don't understand how you just gave up on yourself.

PEYTON

So that's how you see it

(Starts to leave)

CHARLIE

Where are you going?

PEYTON

Home

CHARLIE

You can't just leave me in the woods

PEYTON

And why can't I?

CHARLIE

Because-

PEYTON

Because why Charlie? Give me one good reason why I can't leave you in the woods

CHARLIE

Because we're friends!

PEYTON

We used to be friends

CHARLIE

How could you say that?

PEYTON

Because you broke our promise

CHARLIE

What?

PEYTON

You said you'd come back, you promised me we'd move somewhere together after you graduated and I saved up some money. So I waited for you but you never called. You just left.

beat

Why did you never call me?

CHARLIE

Because people grow up and move on from their childhood best friends and get different dreams than living with them. I just thought you did the same.

PEYTON

I would never forget about us. I just don't understand how you did

CHARLIE

I didn't forget, I just grew up.

PEYTON

What does that mean?

CHARLIE

It means that I'm not the same person I was when we were in elementary school Peyton

PEYTON

Yeah but this wasn't something we talked about in elementary school, this is something we talked about in high school

CHARLIE

It's more than that though

PEYTON

Then tell me!

CHARLIE

Fine!

beat

When we were growing up I let things between us get under my skin and fester. Whenever we bickered about something it upset me more than I let on but back then, but, I couldn't risk losing you so I never said anything.

beat

You were the only person here keeping me afloat among the insanity that is this place. Without you here I genuinely don't know how I would've made it out because you were the only one who saw me for who I was. You loved me unconditionally and that's something I'll forever be thankful for.

beat

But, after I left I learned how to handle conflict better and set boundaries I didn't know I could before, and before I realized it I started to resent our old friendship and stopped trying to solve the problems between us. When you would text me I only thought of the fights we had and how we built an environment that was unhealthy and how I didn't feel like I could talk to you about any of it. I didn't know how to fix it so I just kept you at a distance. When you finally stopped texting me after I graduated I just thought you hated me and moved on. It felt like we both silently decided to move on without each other. I thought the farther I pushed you away the easier it would be but I was wrong. The more time passed the more I thought of you and how guilty I felt about leaving you. So, when I found out my research was bringing me here I thought we could fix things.

beat

I'm sorry, I never told you this earlier I-I just never knew how

PEYTON

(takes a moment to find a response)

So you never called me because you stopped needing me... But now, because you feel guilty, you wanted to see me and "fix things".

CHARLIE

It's not that I stopped needing you, I just didn't want to hate you, so I left.

(Silence)

PEYTON

I never stopped needing you.

(Silence)

Do you still want to be in my life?

CHARLIE

I don't know

Beat

Do you?

PEYTON

I don't know...

(The sun has been setting over the last couple of minutes and it finally goes dark. All we see on stage is the dim glow from the campfire. We sit in the darkness for a moment to catch our breath and then we see the same faint purple/green glow from the start of the show. The light grows and grows until it becomes overbearing)

Lights out.

End.

