Ruffino, The Truffle Pig

A story by Stuart Baum with illustrations by Zoë Baum
For Camilla
**Ruffino is a truffle pig.**

*Truffles* are mushrooms that grow underground and a truffle *pig* finds them. It’s more complicated than that, but not much. Not really.

Ruffino can smell truffles from far away, even during a rainstorm. Ruffino’s owner Max likes Ruffino because, together, they are usually the first to find the truffles. Truffles are worth a great deal of money so Max is very happy when they come home with a bag full of truffles.

It’s all due to Ruffino’s nose.

**"I have a nose for truffles," says Ruffino.**

While it’s true that *all* truffle pigs, and some trained dogs, have noses for truffles, no one can smell truffles from further way than Ruffino can.

Here’s how he does it: He looks to see where he thinks there might be truffles. Usually it’s where other mushrooms – on-top-of-the-ground mushrooms – grow. Then he lifts his head up just slightly. Then he points his nose towards where he thinks there might be truffles. Then he moves his head a little to one side and snuffles a small snuffle, like this: *sniff, snuffle*. Then he moves his head just a little bit to the other side and snuffles another small snuffle: *Snuffle, sniff*. Finally, he points his nose right to where he thinks there might be truffles and he snuffles a very large and long snuffle, like this: *Snnnnnnnnnufuuuuuuuuuuuuuufuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu*,

*Snnnnnnnnnufuuuuuuuuuuuuufuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu*,

*Snnnnnnnnnufuuuuuuuuuuuuufuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu*!

If there are any truffles nearby, Ruffino’s nose can usually find them. Even if they’re very far way.
“As I said, I have a nose for truffles,” explains Ruffino.

Ruffino can smell many things from far away: People. Dogs. Cows. Most of them smell very stinky to Ruffino. Especially cows. Ruffino thinks that cows are the stinkiest of them all.

“I do not like stinky cows;” says Ruffino. “Their smell upsets the delicate balance of my nose, you know.”

One day, on top of the hills surrounding the forest, Ruffino and Max came upon a cow. The cow was standing next to some on-top-of-the-ground mushrooms, underneath which, Ruffino thought, there were truffles. Max shooed away the cow, but Ruffino still had trouble snuffling the truffles.

“Well after cows depart, their pungent aroma continues to linger,” explains Ruffino. “It upsets the delicate balance of my nose, you know.”

But soon enough, Ruffino was able to smell normally again and – snuff, snuff, snuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu – he smelled truffles. Big black ones. Big, delicious smelling, yummy, juicy black ones. So delicious Ruffino had to take a bite. Ruffino, the truffle pig, is supposed to find truffles, not eat them. But sometimes, he just cannot stop himself.

Ruffino used his hooves to dig up the truffles and took an ever-so-small bite, just to see how they tasted. Wham! Ouch! Ruffino’s owner Max hit Ruffino with a stick. It’s not a big stick and the hit was more like a gentle tap, but it was enough to take the taste of truffles out of Ruffino’s mouth.
Max was happy that he and Ruffino had found such valuable truffles, but he was sad that he had to hit Ruffino with a stick, even if it were so gently.

That night Max gave Ruffino an extra helping of bread and applesauce mixed with some on-top-of-the-ground mushrooms and Ruffino was happy again.

The next day started as a beautiful day and then, all of a sudden, the sky opened up and it started pouring. It rained all day, all night, and well into the following day. The rain came down in thick, fat strings, causing mudslides on the hills surrounding the forest and coating the entire valley in deep, black mud.

The people in the town started brushing the mud off their walkways and shaking their head at the mess the rain made of the forest. Max and Ruffino hurried outside. It was the perfect day for truffle hunting.

Ruffino had no trouble climbing the muddy hill and making it to the top, though Max slipped and slid, relying on Ruffino to drag him up through the muddier areas.

There were on-top-of-the-ground mushrooms growing everywhere they looked. Max was sure this would be the biggest truffle-hunting day ever. He wished he had brought a bigger bag.

"Mud means mushrooms," says Ruffino. "And mushrooms oftentimes mean truffles."

Ruffino pointed his nose at large group of mushrooms. He turned his head a little to the left and sniffled a small sniffle: Snuff, Snuffle. He turned his head a little to the right and sniffled another small sniffle: Snuffle, Snuff. Then he pointed his snout straight ahead and sniffled the large sniffle that would locate the exact spot of the truffles: Snufffffffff, sniffle, snnuuuuuuuff!
Then a curious thing happened. Instead of walking straight ahead and digging into the ground, Ruffino ran quite a distance away, Max chasing behind, and started digging at a spot near the edge of the hill.

Max watched as Ruffino dug and dug. Max expected that Ruffino would uncover a large collection of truffles, maybe even some Black Diamonds, the rarest of them all. But Ruffino continued digging well past where any truffles might be.

“That’s too deep,” Max said to Ruffino. But Ruffino continued to dig and dig.

“Stop,” Max said to Ruffino nicely and then, more urgently, “Stop!” But Ruffino kept digging. “You must stop, Ruffino,” explained Max. “There are no truffles that far down.”

Ruffino wouldn’t stop. Max had no choice. Thwak! Max hit Ruffino gently with the stick. Still Ruffino kept digging.

Max thought that the mud and rain had somehow disturbed Ruffino’s sense of smell. He knew something was wrong, but he did not know what.

“Ruffino! You must stop digging!” declared Max. Ruffino did not stop, so Max hit him just a little harder with the stick. Max did not want to hurt Ruffino, but he couldn’t let such a good truffle hunting day get away from them. Thwakk! Ouch!

Ruffino stopped digging. He looked up at Max, his face and most of his body completely covered with mud.

“Come one, Ruffino,” said Max. “We are going to try another spot.” Max pulled at Ruffino, but Ruffino
dug in his hooves and refused to move. Max pulled harder and harder and, finally, was able to drag Ruffino away from the muddy hole and down the hill.

When they got to the bottom of the hill, Max loosened Ruffino’s leash. Ruffino immediately starting going back up the hill.

“No,” said Max, pulling Ruffino back. “There are no truffles where you were digging. We must try a new place.” But every time Max let Ruffino loose, Ruffino tried to go back up the hill.

“It’s no use,” said Max to himself. “I think Ruffino must have gotten some mud up his nose or something.”

Max took Ruffino back to the pigpen. Max hated to waste such a good truffle-hunting day, so he leashed up another truffle pig, this one named Rostig.

“Sorry, Ruffino,” said Max. “But until you get your nose back, I must go hunting with Rostig.” Ruffino sat by the edge of the pigpen, staring out into the forest. Sadly, Max led Rosting out to hunt for truffles.

“I do not like other truffle pigs,” says Ruffino. “They nose into my territory.”

Max and Rostig returned just before dark, with a bag half full of truffles. Max showed the bag to Ruffino and said, “If you had your nose, this bag would have been completely full.”

Max was sad, but not so much about the lost truffles. He was worried about
Ruffino. "It's okay," he told Ruffino. "You'll get your nose back and soon we'll be hunting truffles again." He gave Ruffino a hug, but Ruffino just sat there staring back towards the forest.

That night, Max went into town to have his dinner. When the woman was serving him his food, she said, "Two children got lost in the woods during the storm, Max. Keep your eyes open when you're out hunting for truffles." Max said he would.

On the walk home, Max got to wondering. If I were out in the woods in a rainstorm, I would go into one of the caves. With all that rain, I bet the cave mouths were covered up and those two children are trapped in a cave.

Max started talking to himself. "The woman told me to keep your eyes open, but maybe eyes are not what are needed here." Max smiled, knowing that the mystery was solved. "Perhaps a nose is what's needed."

Max turned around and went back into town. He walked over to the police station and told the policeman that he believed he knew where the children were.

"Did you see them?" asked the policeman.

"No," said Max. "I think my pig smelled them."

The policeman and a few other people in the village, all carrying shovels, followed Max back to his home. They put Ruffino on the leash and, even though it was still night, let Ruffino out of his pen.

Ruffino headed out into the woods, dragging Max, the policeman and the villagers behind him. He stopped at the edge of the hill.

Ruffino pointed his nose up the hill. He turned his head a little to the left and sniffed a small snuffle: Snuff, Snuffle. He turned his head to the right and sniffed another small snuffle: Snuffle, Snuff. Then he pointed his snout straight up the hill and sniffed the largest snuffle ever: Snufffffffff, snuffle, SNNnnnnuuuu-UUUUuff!
Then Ruffino ran right up the side of the hill, found the same place he was earlier that day, and started digging. Max and the policeman and the villagers all joined in and soon they had made a hole into the top of the cave.

The policeman yelled down into the hole, “Hello?!?”

They heard a small voice yell back, “Hello! We’re trapped.”

“Get underneath the hole,” said the policeman. Using Ruffino’s leash, they raised the boy and girl out of the hole and to safety. Everyone cheered.

“Thanks for saving us,” said the boy.

“Thank the truffle pig,” said the policeman.

When they gave Ruffino a hug, he snuffled them: Snuffle snuff. Snuff snuffle. They both started laughing. Ruffino’s snuffles tickled.

“The mud actually made them smell better,” says Ruffino.

The next day, they held a parade in Ruffino’s honor. Everyone in town came out to cheer and throw flowers. Ruffino didn’t much care for the smell of all the people, but he liked the smell of the flowers.

At the end of the parade, the mayor greeted Ruffino.

He said, “Ruffino, your nose has found many truffles for Max, but yesterday it helped us find something far more precious: two lost children. For this we thank you.”
The mayor presented Ruffino with a golden medal shaped like a pig's snout. Max put the medal around Ruffino's neck and gave him a hug.

"I should never have doubted your nose," Max said to Ruffino. "And I never will again, I promise."

Halfway home, Ruffino stopped suddenly. Ruffino turned his head a little to the left and sniffled a small sniffle: Snuff, Snuffle. He turned his head to the right and sniffled another small sniffle: Snuffle, Snuff. Then he pointed his snout straight ahead and sniffled a larger sniffle: Snuffffffffff, snuffle, Snnuuuuuu-uff! Finally Ruffino dug in the dirt with his hooves until he dug up some large, black truffles. Max picked them up and smiled. He hugged Ruffino and said, "Ruffino, you are the greatest truffle pig ever."

"I have a nose for truffles," says Ruffino.

The End.
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