

Ruffino, The Truffle Pig

A story by Stuart Baum with illustrations by Zoë Baum



For Camilla



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“I do so enjoy truffles,” says Ruffino, *“but I enjoy not being hit with sticks even more.”*

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 snuffled a small snuffle: *Snuff, Snuffle*. He turned his head a little to the right and snuffled another small snuffle: *Snuffle, Snuff*. Then he pointed his snout straight ahead and snuffled the large snuffle that would locate the exact spot of the truffles: *Snuffffffff, snuffle, snnuuuuuff!*

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."

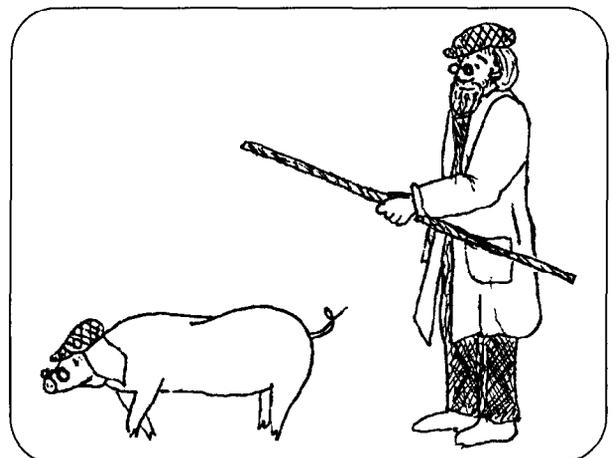
Max took Ruffino back to the pigpen. Max hated to waste such a good truffle-hunting day, so he leashed up another truffle pig, this one named Rostig.

"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 Rostig 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



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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 rain-storm, 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 snuffled a small snuffle: *Snuff, Snuffle*. He turned his head to the right and snuffled another small snuffle: *Snuffle, Snuff*. Then he pointed his snout straight up the hill and snuffled the largest snuffle ever: *Snuffffffff, snuffle, SNNnnuuuuu-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.

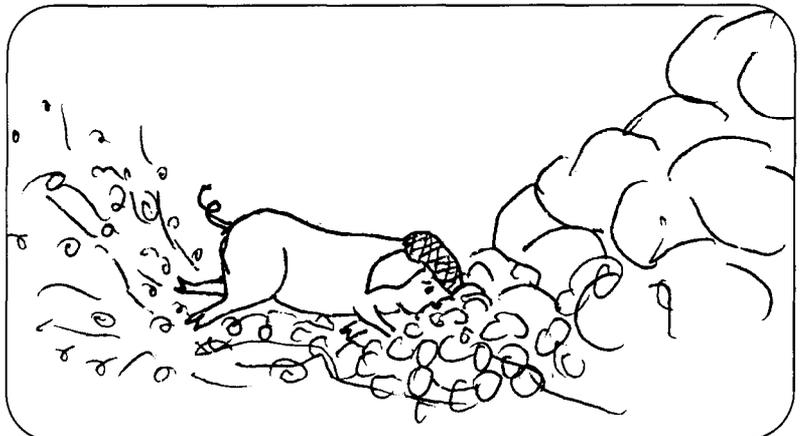
When they gave Ruffino a hug, he snuffled them: *Snuffle snuff. Snuff snuffle.* They both started laughing. Ruffino's snuffles tickled.

"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."



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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 snuffled a small snuffle: *Snuff, Snuffle*. He turned his head to the right and snuffled another small snuffle: *Snuffle, Snuff*. Then he pointed his snout straight ahead and snuffled a larger snuffle: *Snuffffffff, snuffle, Snnuuuuu-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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