

“Brown Face”

By David Campiche

*A mushroom ten inches high,
Hidden in clumps of saw grass.
Stem thick and fleshy as a child's forearm.
The top — flesh of another color.
A tawny shaman's face,
Craggy ancient skin.
Hard weather has cut them both.*

*Knife of surgeon's steel
Slices porcini stem, exposing
Tender flesh, white and pure.
Mind already coupling mushroom mustiness
With olive oil and brandy,
Basil from the garden,
Sea salt and cracked pepper.
Searing heat of sauté pan
Alters texture from firm to supple.
Salivating now.*

*From the deep green forest
Shaman face returns.
His ebony eyes are upon you,
Judging your every move.*

*Quickly,
Dig a hole in the dark and musty duff.
Lay the mushroom in the hole. Take care,
So that those who have been here before
Can return.
Cover flesh with needles and loam.*

*Wind pushes hard out of the north,
Cold on your face.
Turn deftly to the south.
Never look back.*

*Disappear
Into the green forest.
Go. Go.*

Wild is upon you.

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Sublime and mysterious

I find much mysterious about mushrooms, something that pulls the imagination like a well-crafted story. As fall approaches, a sort of anxiety overtakes me. I begin to take walks, some deep into forests, and some as close as the backyard. A week or two after the first heavy rain of the fall, one discovers revealing signs.

One of the first mushrooms to expose its cap is a small *Boletus* called a “slippery jack.” Though not a favorite mushroom, it is de-

cent when picked

dry (they turn slick and mushy when wet) and about the size of a quarter. Its underbelly is pale yellow and features more of a sponge-like belly than most varieties.

This Sponge Bob identity characterizes a Bolete. The favorite sought-after Bolete is the porcini or *Boletus edulus* (“King Bolete”). Life is always better when a couple of the fat-belly mushrooms rest on the chopping block.



PHOTO BY LAURIE ANDERSON

Harvest season would not be complete in these parts without a plentiful selection of local wild mushrooms.

The porcini

Thick as your wrist with a cap that can approach twelve inches, the *Boletus edulus* is beloved around the world, particularly in France and Italy. Its color is tan and the flesh intoxicating when sautéed slowly with olive oil or grilled with a swipe of that virgin oil and topped with Kosher salt and cracked black pepper. In this case, simple is good.

The porcini is superb over steaks, in stews or atop a sandwich with fresh tomato, and on my wife's sourdough rye. The meaty



PHOTO BY LAURIE ANDERSON
A porcini near a log



PHOTO BY DAVID CAMPICHE
A rich haul after mushroom hunting

mushroom loves spruce trees and moss, but sometimes it grows in sedge. It's a sneaky mushroom.

Exploring

One day, deep in a marsh, pockmarked with green moss-backed knolls, I happened upon a half-dozen perfect King Boletes. I lay on my belly trance-like, just staring at my lucky find, but a sixth sense told me I was being watched. I ran my eyes back and forth across the hummock, until, on the third pass, they stopped and focused on a four-point buck.

He watched me cautiously, standing plumb

straight without the slightest movement. I thought this a perfect moment. Hunting mushrooms, things happen, and they can be notable, if not magical.

And if you get caught in a rainstorm or submerged up to your waist in ditch or pond, remember: Back home, a great meal may materialize. Pour a glass of fine Washington Cabernet, and slice the butter-sautéed Porcini into bites that melt in your mouth. Indulge in the sublime.

Remember, we are grazing animals but the luckiest of hunters. **CW**

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