

Mushroom Magic



by Brian Wizard

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‘Way out in the wilderness lives a crafty woodsman. Crafty enough to be virtually self-sufficient, especially when it comes to his personal survival and entertainment. Sure, he goes to town to buy tools and supplies, staples, clothes, essential fuels and fluids, and to socialize. His jaunts into town usually make him laugh. The excursions are unpredictable, interactive episodes of a live situation comedy.

The woodsman is very content residing far away from other human beings, where he can be mentally, spiritually and physically immersed in the beauty and serenity of Mother Nature’s kingdom. When the woodsman is asked by the townspeople if he gets lonely living by himself, his standard answer is, “Between all the chatter of the critters living in the forest, I can barely get a word in edgewise.”

Spring is the woodsman’s favorite season. With its warmth and longer days it brings the beginning of the cycle to replenish winter stocks of food and supplies. The first gourmet delight to spring out of the ground is the morel mushroom. There are several different types of morels. First the tiny bright ones no bigger than the woodsman’s finger-tip pop up. As the season progresses, the mushrooms grow taller and wider, larger all around. Finally, at the end of the six-week season, the largest morels rise to the occasion. Some have heads as large as the woodsman’s fist, and stems as big around as his wrist.

The woodsman loves walking through the forest for hours on end gathering mushrooms. The long mushroom-gathering walks not only increase his own food supply, but the bounty from the forest can fetch a fair price at the market. A pound of dried morel mushrooms can fetch up to \$40 a pound, although it can take quite a few pounds of fresh mushrooms to make a pound of dried. The woodsman dries his own to preserve them, so dried is the way he goes with any he decides to sell.

This story is about the warm spring day when the woodsman takes a walk through the forest on his last morel mushroom hunt of the season. The last morels to rise are the big, dark ones. They aren’t the best eating, but they sure are impressive to look at.



Coming upon a patch of twenty spectacular specimens of the indigenous fungus, the woodsman sits on a cut stump of white fir to enjoy their beauty. He's been walking for over an hour and this is the only patch he has found, truly a sign that the season is over. It will be ten months before he'll once again see the gnarly fibrous structures that are actually the reproductive organs of the mycelium, which grows within the forest's top layer of organic compost.

Hearing a sound of rustling through the woods, the woodsman scans the forest for movement. His eyes catch sight of a black blur and his mind knows exactly what's coming his way. It's Momma Spring Bear. Behind her, two black spots follow, her cubs. All three black bears bound through the forest, then slow to a walk as momma bear senses the presence of a stranger. Stopping in place, her nose sticks straight up into the breeze.

The woodsman always carries a small set of binoculars with him. They allow him to witness the wild animals without having to get so close that his presence disturbs them. Through the binoculars he sees Momma Spring Bear's nostrils flare as she inhales the air for analysis. Slowly he lowers his binoculars and remains as still as a twig on a windless day.

Momma bear has only caught a passing fragrance of the one animal in the forest she fears: the two-legged beast that isn't as strong as she is physically, but which must have an intellect as huge as the night sky, for it is so cunning it can cause harm and death from far away. She turns a quick glance toward her cubs, both curiously watching her actions. They sense her alarm. There are lessons to be learned from her every action. Momma bear visually scans the forest. She detects no movement. She continues her trek to the water hole she has on her mind, with cubs in tow.

The woodsman remains very still as the three bears shuffle through the forest toward him. He predicts Momma Spring Bear won't notice him if he remains stationary. Even if she does spot him, as long as he poses no threat to her cubs, she'll do all she can to take them out of his sight. He hopes.

The early afternoon breeze directs his scent in the opposite direction of the bears. They continue to walk right toward him. The woodsman can't believe he chose to sit directly in the path of three bears. Perhaps they'll get so close before they spot him that momma bear will freak out. The cubs are so cute, though, he hates to chase them away.

Sure enough, the threesome is soon less than twenty feet away. The woodsman's heart accelerates with a rush of adrenaline. Instinct makes him whistle a quick, three-note chirp.



Momma bear stops in her tracks, as do the cubs. All three noses reach out in the woodsman's direction, sniffing for the source of the unfamiliar whistle. Momma bear's eyes widen when the breeze swirls around, bringing the pungent scent of her most feared enemy into her nostrils. She's so shocked to suddenly see the image of her enemy, the strangest of all forest dwellers, resting on a stump so very close to her, she immediately sucks in a loud snort of air. The air reverses direction and comes out as a loud ha-ruff directed at the creature.

Her cubs jump backward at their mother's harsh reaction. It can only mean one thing: danger. Peeking around her backside, they both sniff and look in the direction of their mother's attention. They see her body take up a stance that indicates her readiness to attack. Even they are scared by her guttural growl, her deep breathing, and her sudden bounding forward in three short bursts.

The woodsman gulps involuntarily at momma bear's threat. Luckily, he once saw a documentary on black bears. Momma bear's three bolts toward him are a signal warning him to sit still. If he were to suddenly get up to run, she'd surely attack him. Even with his fifteen foot lead he'd be no match for her speed and endurance. He remains calm, and very still, although they do make eye contact. Suddenly he can't remember if that's a good thing, or not. He can feel his eyes stretch wide open with excited anticipation. What to do? Nothing.

Momma bear belts out one last ha-ruff in the woodsman's direction, then turns and bounds away. The cubs follow in close pursuit.

"Whew!" the woodsman says out loud. "Don't want to freak out Momma Spring Bear." He sure likes seeing them, though. He remembers a basket of old fruit he has in storage. He'll put that out tonight in a place he'll be able to see from the safety of his cabin. If they do come to feed, he'll snap some photos of the occasion.

His attention is drawn back to his reason for being out in the forest in the first place: morel picking. Once again he scans the ground to survey the late season patch of mushrooms he has found.

The largest morel stands tall in the middle of the patch. The others are scattered haphazardly around a ten-foot-square area. Some are doubles, while one is very tall and slender. "You guys are fine specimens," he tells them, as if they could hear.

"Thank you," a voice says inside his head.



The woodsman immediately raises his hands to his head for support. When the words came to him it felt as if a great weight filled his head.

“Whoa. What was that?” he asks himself, without uttering the words.

“That was us,” the voice tells him. “Well, me perhaps,” it corrects.

“I’m going nuts. I’m hearing voices,” the woodsman proclaims out loud, as he quickly stands up and surveys the forest around him in search of other people. He sees none.

“We’re down here. Where you were looking,” the voice says to attract the woodsman’s attention. “The morels.”

“Wha . . . huh? Morels?” the woodsman stutters.

“Yes. We, or I, it’s hard to tell since we, or I, don’t know if you see us as individual mushrooms, or can comprehend the fact that we are communicating with you as one collective consciousness of the entire morel mushroom kingdom,” the voice tells the woodsman.

The woodsman tries hard to remember if he ate anything strange that could cause him to have audio-hallucinations. He puts his fingers in his ears and says without speaking, “Tell me again, who’s talking to me?”

“The collective consciousness of the morel mushroom,” the telepathic voice tells him.

With his fingers in his ears all the noise in the forest is blocked out, yet he hears the voice as clearly as if the speaker were leaning close and talking into one of his ears.

“Have I flipped out?” he asks.

“No,” the voice calmly assures him. “Flipped in, perhaps,” it then adds with a chuckle.

“Flipped in?”

“Sure. Why not? You’re inside our consciousness. The choice is ours. You should be flattered,” the collective consciousness tells its guest.

The woodsman sits back down on the white fir stump, staring at the twenty morel mushrooms sprouted out of the ground before him. Addressing them directly, since he can think of nothing else to do, he asks, “Why?”

“Season after season, we’ve been watching you. You’re rather unique among your kind.”



“How so?”

“Most . . .” and the voice pauses, unable to come up with the appropriate word to describe the woodsman’s kind.

The woodsman fills in with, “People?”

“People, yes. Most people who gather us come from afar, rapidly trudge through the forest gathering our physical extremities, and depart as quickly as they came. It’s so fast that we never get the chance to read them. You know? Study them to find out what they are all about. Once our extremities are plucked from our larger self, we lose contact with our severed parts. The further away from our greater whole our extremities are taken, the quicker our connection to them fades. By studying you, we’ve found that your intent is survival and enjoyment of our beauty, and taste. We appreciate that.”

“You don’t mind that I eat you?” the woodsman asks.

“No. Not at all. We have our fun. We enjoy sharing our beauty with any admirer and are glad to provide you with whatever enjoyment you can derive from our fleshy parts.”

“Great!” the woodsman tells the telepathic conversationalist.

“Since you don’t take us very far, we’ve been able to watch you perform many strange and wonderful acts of creation. People have such an innate ability to manipulate the world around them. It’s very impressive. The way people, especially you, can change the shape of one thing into another is most impressive. As matter of fact, that’s why we have decided to contact you.”

“You need something changed?” the woodsman laughs.

“Yes. In fact, we would like you to change our image from organic to inorganic.”

“Why?”

“Here’s our dilemma, and our wish. As you know, our extremities rise to greet the sun. It’s fun to suck the water out of the soil to produce the fiber that creates our many different shapes and sizes. We love standing erect and proud for all other creature to see. We try hard to make ourselves worthy of admiration. Of all the creatures, people seem to appreciate us the most. But our time to be admired is so short,” the morels end with a hint of sadness. Rebounding with excitement, they continue with, “So, the idea is that a crafty person such as yourself might be willing to reproduce our



extremities in a material that would not be edible, and would withstand the harshness of the sun's increasing heat."

The woodsman rubs his face with both hands, squeezing it, moving his fingers into his hair, pulling it straight up, hoping to wake up from this dream. When this exercise fails, he opens his tightly-squinted eyes and stares at the twenty morel mushrooms. They all seem to be staring back at him.

"I'm sure we're upsetting you," the telepathic voice states apologetically, "barging in on your inner thoughts the way we have. We thought you were ready to communicate. Were we wrong?"

"No. Not really. I talk to the trees, the birds, the squirrels, and my pet cat on a regular basis. You've heard me thank you for the many times I've harvested you, right?"

"We have, and we appreciate it," the morels reply.

"It's not often that anything actually talks back, though." The woodsman pauses as he tries to assimilate everything the morels have said to him. "So, you want me to produce a fair representation of your image out of an inorganic material."

"That's right. Reproduce us in a material that will last forever."

The woodsman dwells on a mental list of potential media he could use: wood, ceramics, silver, gold, tin, bronze, glass.

The morel consciousness follows his line of thought. "Silver and gold sound good," the morels speak up.

"Silver and gold are expensive, but I don't suppose you understand the concept of money, right?"

"Money? No," the morels state.

"Well, in short, people produce an entity we call money. By itself it's pretty much worthless. It comes in hard metal coins, or paper, or is simply tallied on paper with ink. The more you have of it, the more you can give in trade for items or services that you want. Money's only purpose is to be spent. Understand?"

"No," the morels reply.

"Okay," the woodsman says, taking a moment to gather his thoughts. He shares this comparison about money with the collective consciousness of the morel mushroom. "It takes water to produce your extremities, right?"



“Yes. It falls out of the sky.”

“What if it didn’t fall unless you had something to exchange for it?”

“We wouldn’t exist,” the morels realize.

“Imagine that you had to come up with something to offer the sky for its water. Say, an odor. The odor has no purpose but to entice the sky to produce the rain that gives you the water to build your extremities. No odor, no rain. Get it?”

“Money is like the odor,” the morels figure. “It has no purpose but to make the sky give up its rain.”

“That’s it,” the woodsman says, happy at accomplishing this lesson. “Now, silver and gold cost a lot of money for very little material. Therefore, if I reproduce you in silver or gold I can only do a few, since I’m not rich in money,” the woodsman explains.

“Oh,” the morel consciousness says in a tone of understanding. “And the money is where?”

“Out there,” the woodsman says, pointing toward the valley. “Wherever people congregate money can be found.”

“You don’t go out there much. Hence, your lack of money,” the morels deduce.

“You got it.”

“What about the other stuff, like ceramics, whatever that may be?” the morels suggests.

“You want durability, right? Ceramics would be cheap, but fragile.”

“Wood?”

“Inexpensive, but too hard to mass produce.”

“Bronze. Is that durable?”

“Very durable,” the woodsman explains. “But the process to work it is expensive. My choice would be tin. One hundred percent certified tin. It’s inexpensive, will last forever, and is easy to work. Of course, it doesn’t look anything like you. I guess I could paint it, though. Do you have to be exactly the right color?”

“No. Not at all. As a matter of fact, feel free to dress us up a little,” the morels say in delight.



“To do you justice I’ll need some volunteers for models,” the woodsman explains.

“Take what you need, but leave a few of us. We’re the last of the season. Once we’ve reached the end of our reproductive cycle, we won’t be able to communicate until our extremities reappear,” the morels explain.

“Okay. I’ll take half. That should be enough. I’ll bring the finished product back for your approval.” The woodsman stands up, walks over to the morels, then kneels down among them. A thought races to the forefront of his mind just before he snips the first one from its roots. “What do I get in exchange for all this work?”

“In exchange for giving us life beyond our natural limits. . .” the morels say, but are cut off by the woodsman’s immediate interruption.

“I can’t say I’ll be giving you life beyond your natural limits.”

“Oh, we think you will,” the morels assert. “If you take these specimens and reproduce models from them, a part of our consciousness will be in every reproduction,” the morels explain.

“Really? So, you’ll be able to connect with the world at large in an extraordinary way.”

“Exactly,” the morels agree. “It will only be a sliver of our consciousness. Nothing more than a thread of connection. But, yes, we will see more of the world through this great act of yours.”

“Well, that must be worth a great deal to you. What can I expect?” the woodsman asks, ninety percent jokingly. What more than a steady crop of morels could he expect?

“How do you think we are communicating with you?” the morels ask.

“Nothing short of magic,” the woodsman states. “Pure magic.”

“Yes. Oh yes. We have the magic. Life is the magic, and we have life, and you are expanding our role in life. Therefore, we will share our magic with your people,” the morels offers.

“What kind of magic?” the woodsman asks, with his tongue involuntarily sticking out of his mouth and to one side. He does this as a nervous reaction to any intrigue.

“To tell you the truth, we don’t know,” the morels admit. “It will take time to study your people to see what magic they need. If they adore our



reproduction, put us on an altar, show us off, and let us become part of their intimate surroundings, we will come up with something.”

“That’s pretty vague,” the woodsman states. “I know a way your magic can help us both. Remember I told you money is the key to your mass production in a medium other than your organic self?”

“Yes.”

“Provide the magic that will bring me the money to buy the tools and supplies I need, and not only will I do your image in tin, I’ll be able to do you in bronze, silver and gold, too. I’ll even do you in ceramics!” the woodsman exclaims.

“I don’t think money is the magic most people, including yourself, need. Look for other forms of our magic. Like health, happiness, and . . .”

Again the woodsman butts in to add, “Luck. Luck will bring the money.”

“This money thing seems to be the greatest obstacle in the project. We’ll see what we can do, but first you have to show us what you can do,” the morels challenge.

The woodsman ends the conversation with, “Come here, you little darlings. Let’s get busy.”

EPILOGUE

Inspired by the strangest commission he’s ever had, the woodsman performs his task with high interest and energy. In three days he produces a finished product. Only nine of the ten mushrooms he took made it through the process. Nonetheless, he’s actually quite impressed by the end results. He can always make more next year. He hurries as fast as he can back to the mushroom patch to show off his wares. He finds the rest of the mushrooms he left behind showing signs of deterioration, as they fall prey to the sun’s increasing heat.

“Look! I did it,” the woodsman exclaims as he comes to a sliding stop alongside the mushroom patch.

“We know you did,” the morels tell him. “In a sense, we were right there with you. You did good.”

“But look at how good,” the woodsman brags as he places his nine reproductions onto the ground from whence they sprung.

“Oooooo,” the collective morel consciousness coos at the sight of the woodsman’s accomplishment. “They did come out well. They look real.”

“Not bad, if I do say so myself,” the woodsman adds in delight.

“You truly possess a magic of your own, my friend,” the morels tell him. “When do you think we will be mass produced and put into circulation among your people?”

“Well,” the woodsman’s excitement fades with the reality of his thoughts. “Again, it’s the money thing. Tin, inexpensive as it is, still costs enough to make mass production out of my reach. I have enough metal to produce maybe a hundred.”

“Not knowing numbers,” the morels state, “we don’t know if that’s good or not. By the sound of your voice, though, it doesn’t sound too impressive.”

“Not impressive, but it’s a start,” the woodsman states, his spirits rekindled. “Not a big start, but we’re on our way.”

“What would you consider a big start?” the morels ask.

“Sixty thousand would be a big start. A million would be a good medium. A hundred million would be a fantastic end result!” the woodsman enthusiastically proclaims. “If we can create a legend of magic that will compare to a four-leaf clover, or a lucky rabbit’s foot, the sky’s the limit. I’m sure word-of-mouth advertising will be the crux of a growing sales track record. Everyone needs a little more magic in their life.”

“Our magic will enhance the health, happiness and luck of your people!” the collective morel consciousness assures its new friend.

“To show you how much I believe in your magic I’m going to town to buy a lotto ticket!” the woodsman proclaims. “Let the mushroom magic begin!”



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