



Kira Jane Buxton

Author of Thurber Prize Finalist *Hollow Kingdom*

Tartufo

*Enhanced Reading
Group Guide*

Ciao, ragazzi!

Thirty years ago, my family and I visited a little Tuscan village and fell in love. My parents dreamed of retiring in this tucked-away treasure. And so they bought a hundred-year-old house and a barn with a terracotta-tiled pizza oven and a breathtaking view of the mountains. Over the years there have been many idyllic moments—sipping prosecco under the stars, fireflies strobing the night sky, magical memories, friends and the most magnificent food—buttery strands of pasta, pizza popped with wild mushrooms and *cornetti* plump with pistachio cream. And less idyllic ones—like when the house decided to relocate itself by starting to slide down the mountain, groups of *cinghiale* wild boar chowing down on my father's vegetable garden, surprise scorpions in shoes, a large snake tenant in the ceiling of our library (which suggests a literary sophistication in this serpent one has to admire), as well as a landslide that nearly killed my father.

Thirty years of memories and change in a tiny Tuscan village captured my imagination. I am also, unabashedly, a fan of fungi. There is a mischief to mushrooms that captivates me. I grew lion's mane and poplar mushrooms during the pandemic. And I am especially enamored by the truffle—that grotesque diamond who is pulled from the dirt, sold for a small fortune, and flown to the finest restaurants on earth. The rags-to-riches nature story of it fascinates me. I am charmed by the allegory—truffles are a transaction—a result of good relationships between fungi and trees. When snuffling out this story, I attended the Oregon Truffle Festival and learned how to truffle farm (a precarious enterprise). I went on my first truffle hunt where a smiling, curly-haired Lagotto Romagnolo dog named Dino bounded through a fern-laden forest, using his keen sense of smell to hunt tiny truffles hidden under the soil like treasure. I will never forget my first sniff of black truffle pulled straight from the soil. One inhale of its bawdy, earthen aroma and I was hooked. Which is exactly what the fungi wants.

I knew I had to write about a beautiful little village in Tuscany that is in debt and dire straits. About scent and memory, the scientific and the spiritual. About dogs who hunt truffles, cats being their capricious selves. About a truffle hunter who finds the biggest truffle the world has ever seen—a fortune that will rot in five days—and the pandemonium that ensues. A loving, literary caper set in the land of love and lemons.

So, here is TARTUFO—a book about vibrant connection, above and below the soil. It has been described as *Our Town* meets *Ratatouille*. And *Chef's Table* meets *Rat Race*. I hope you enjoy my funny, joyful paean to Tuscany, best enjoyed with an Aperol spritz and some *cicchetti* snacks. I am so excited to share it with you.

Buona lettura e grazie mille,

Kira Jane Buxton



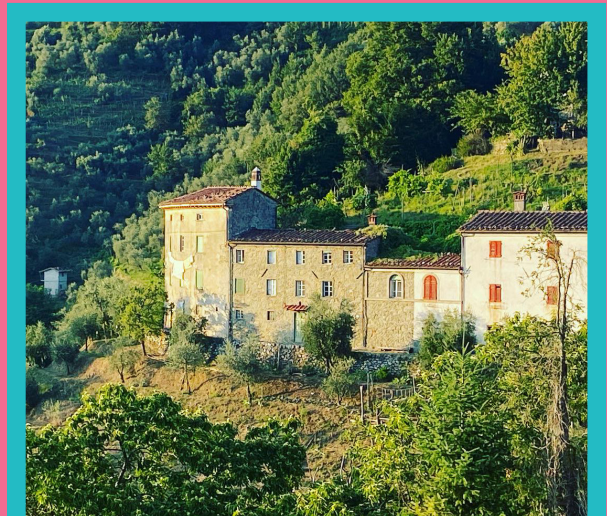
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Discussion Questions

1. The giant truffle at the center of *Tartufo* is described as “a tiny god.” Do you believe it was divine intervention that such a miracle came to Lazzarini Boscarino at its hour of need? Was there something miraculous and perhaps spiritual at play in the village?
2. Eating is often portrayed as a sensual experience in the novel, except when it comes to Umberto’s fine dining creations, which Giuseppina calls an extension of his ego. What makes Umberto’s food seem soulless compared to other depictions of communal meals?
3. The book jumps from different perspectives throughout, often giving insight into the various animals who populate the book. What do these interludes add and did you feel drawn to any character’s perspective in particular, human or otherwise?
4. The villagers of Lazzarini Boscarino have a strong sense of loyalty—to their town and to each other. Why do so many of them stay in a town that is literally starting to crumble around them?
5. *Tartufi* can be very divisive. Some people love them, others are put off by the strong aroma. Where do you stand? What are some other common love/hate foods among your book club?



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A Truffle Hunt with Kira Jane Buxton

This year, I embarked on the extraordinary adventure of an Italian truffle hunt with Truffle In Tuscany. My family and I drove to the beautiful medieval town of San Miniato, where the biggest truffle on earth was found in 1954. Imagine my delight when I met Massimo Cucchiara, a third generation truffle hunter whose grandfather was one of the first truffle hunters in Tuscany.

We set off into the woods around San Miniato with his trained truffle hunting lagotto Romagnolo, Bice. Initially, little white Bice was busy enjoying the beautiful day—a whispering breeze, bellflower blue sky, and the symphony of scents in the woods. Then she focused on the hunt at hand and struck gold. She indicated a spot, where just under the dirt, Massimo gingerly freed a black summer truffle (*Tuber Aestivum*) from the soil. Bice then found three other black truffles and—eureka!—two of the coveted winter white truffles. I was intoxicated by the aroma of each truffle, but especially the whites (*Tuber Magnatum Pico*).

As Massimo says, “when you hold a white truffle, you keep lifting it to your nose because it makes you so happy.”

Massimo was endlessly generous with his vast knowledge of truffles and truffle culture, teaching the traditional and true ways of truffle hunting with a respect for all of nature and a passion to preserve the forests where they grow. He lavishly sang the praises of his devoted dog Bice, with whom he has a beautiful, tangible bond.

We took our little dirt diamonds to Massimo’s sister, Letizia, who is a masterful chef and who created an unforgettable four-course meal that we savored with sips of local San Miniato wine.

It was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had—a day of deep discussion, togetherness under the trees, the thrill of a hunt and an unparalleled titillation of the tastebuds. And I am so grateful I was able to share this earthy adventure with my family, each of whom have now been converted into a truffle pig, just like me.



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Tagliolini with Black Truffles

“Those who wish to remain virtuous should abstain from truffles.” -Old proverb

Indulge in this decadent recipe full of truffle flavor. Pair it with a Nebbiolo wine, the signature grape from the same region of Italy. Truffles can be sourced online via retailers including Urbani USA.

Ingredients

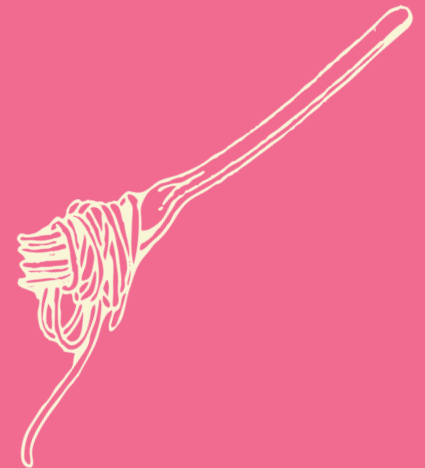
Fresh tagliolini pasta

1 whole black truffle, roughly 15-20 grams

5-6 tablespoons of high quality butter

4 tablespoons of freshly grated Parmigiana Reggiano

Salt & pepper



Instructions

- Ensure that the whole black truffle is clean. If you purchased the truffle at a store, it likely is already clean. If you brought it back from truffle hunting in Italy, you'll want to clean it (gently!) to remove any excess dirt. Do so by using a damp cloth to remove dirt (don't soak it in water).
- Melt the butter in a large pan over medium-low heat on the stove.
- While the butter melts, bring a pot of salted water to boil.
- Once the butter is fully melted, reduce the heat to low and add about 5 grams of shaved black truffle into the butter.
- Add the fresh tagliolini to the pot of boiling water and cook for about 2 minutes, or until it is just about al dente (or according to package instructions if using store-bought).
- Transfer the tagliolini to the pan with the butter using tongs. The excess pasta water will help create the sauce. Toss to coat.
- Add the grated Parmesan along with salt and fresh black pepper to taste, adding small amounts of pasta water as needed if things are looking dry or are sticking too much.
- Plate the pasta, drizzling any leftover butter sauce from the pan over top.
- Grate the remaining truffle using a truffle slicer (a potato peeler can work in a pinch liberally over the pasta and serve immediately!