

The Healing Spores

by Abbie Miolée

“So you’re telling me mom got arrested when she was my age for hugging this tree so that it wouldn’t be cut down?” my teenage daughter, Anna, asked us with intrigue gleaming from her hazel eyes.

Her little brother, Kenny, was scoping the Tannery forest for undiscovered mushrooms, but listened for the answer, too.

My husband laughed at the memory. “I could pull up her mugshot if you don’t believe me.”

“It’s true! He was there to bail me out. There were over 70 people at that protest and they managed to put 23 of us in jail for civil disobedience.”

Anna gazed up at the grandmother oak tree whose branches reached 35 feet high with layers of fiery coloured leaves forming a dome above us.

“Most of these trees and wildlife wouldn’t be here without No Clearcuts Kingston opposing rich property developers only looking to get richer. Can you believe they called this place a lifeless wasteland?” I remarked.

“Yeah right, look at this!” Kenny shouted, waving us over. He pointed to a cluster of sage green mushrooms with ovate caps emerging from a rotting oak log.

“Good eye, little mycologist! You should work at the mycoremediation research lab with me,” I encouraged, only somewhat joking.

“Nah, when he’s old enough to work he’ll be my next employee at the restaurant. Isn’t that right, chef Kenny?” Deo asked.

“If I get to cook mushrooms, I’m down.” He reached to touch the caps before I blocked his hand.

“Hang on, we don’t know what species this is. It doesn’t look like any of the poisonous mushrooms I know of, but I’ve never seen one like it.”

I removed a pink and green foraging pouch from my backpack and picked out a pair of clippers and a glass container. Kenny watched closely as I extracted and concealed a small sample to bring to the lab.

Anna said, “Who knows, maybe he’s the first to discover that kind,” and the smile on her brother's face widened.

Deo nearly shivered as the wind carried an early autumn breeze. "Yeah, you never know."

"Can we head back home? I love it here but I have to work on my project for Indigenous science," Anna asked.

"Sure honey."

"The next electric bus comes in 15 minutes, so we should head to the bus stop now," Deo suggested.

I hugged the willow tree goodbye and we all took our final gazes at the forest and wetland, a colourful oasis of life sustained by an intelligent root network underground that communicates through mycelium.

On the bus ride home, we sat in the back row behind a dozen people, each distinct in their appearance and aura. I couldn't help but observe the strangers, wondering where they might be going and what they might be thinking about. Meanwhile, outside of the bus, we saw several bikers and a bike bus carrying happy, peddling children through the wide, smooth bike lane.

I turned to Deo, asking, "Don't you wish we had that as kids?"

"Yeah, but growing up in Cali, a lot of us would skateboard to get around."

I nodded. "Speaking of California, have you heard that the wave turbines installed there in 2021 are now along the coast of B.C. too?"

"No, I haven't, but I have heard that more water turbines are being installed on the St. Lawrence river as we speak."

"That's awesome. Maybe North America will finally reach carbon neutrality by 2050. We're very behind compared to Europe, but I have faith we'll catch up."

"Yeah, hopefully. Things should get better, especially if you keep doing what you're doing."

"Igualmente, mi amor," I replied in Spanish to reciprocate his support while laying my head on his shoulder.

The sun was descending as the bus drove through downtown, shining a golden spotlight on a city that has transformed and diversified since I first called it home. Kenny's eyes gravitated toward the large SmartFlowers as their metal petals

rotated inward. Anna's curly blonde hair was hued by the reflections of colourful cellulose solar panels on the windows of moss covered buildings.

We got dropped off at Rideau Street and walked two blocks home, passing the community food sovereignty garden on the way. As we entered the house, kinetic tiles beneath us channelled electricity to LED lights overhead and the living room was illuminated. Hanging plants and vines extended along the walls and ceilings made of mycelium blocks. Deo and I put our bags down and went to the kitchen to start making dinner. Meanwhile, Anna sat on the living room couch and opened her laptop.

"Can I see your hand?" I asked Kenny after noticing him scratch his palm several times.

He reached his left arm toward me, saying, "It's been itching since we left the forest."

"Looks like a poison oak rash, but don't worry," I reassured. "I'll go get some dandelion leaves to wrap around it and you can make yourself some calendula tea."

"Alright."

I couldn't tell Deo without Kenny hearing, but it concerned me how inflamed his skin had become in so little time. I put the foraging pouch on the dining room table and took out the glass container of mushrooms to reach the clippers. Kenny went to open the tea cabinet, and I walked to the backyard.

Stepping barefoot through the grass pathway between bushes of cedar and native wildflowers, I saw about a dozen dandelions extending from the fertile soil. Their yellow faces had begun hiding to protect their petals as the night sky gradually overcasted the sunset. I knelt down beside a large bloom with abundant leaves stemming from its centre and clipped 3 of them. I whispered a gratitude prayer to Mother Earth, thanking her for the medicine before returning to the kitchen.

Walking back inside, I immediately noticed the glass container had been slightly displaced. I looked at Kenny who averted his eyes and casually sipped his tea. I then looked at Deo who normally wouldn't rat out his mischievous son, but never would lie to me.

"Caught this lil' man trying to snatch those mushrooms," Deo told me while turning on the energy-efficient induction stove.

“Kenny, the mushrooms could be toxic! You know better.”

“Sorry mom, I just wanted to hold them. I found them, so they’re technically mine. Besides, it’s not like I was gonna eat one.”

“I hear you, but considering you’ve tried to before, you can’t blame me for being cautious. And neither of us own them; They belong to the land just like we do.” I rinsed the dandelion leaves in the sink. “Once I test them in the lab tomorrow and we know they’re safe, you can hold them all you want.”

“Okay, fine.”

I told him to clean his hands as I laid out the leaves to dry. Then, I picked up the glass container off the table, not bothering to count the mushrooms. I hid it in the fridge behind the tofu and almond milk while Kenny was distracted by his stinging skin under the running water.

“I’m gonna go play keyboard now,” he announced after drying his hands.

“Alright, I’ll wrap your hand before dinner.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he replied, already halfway up the stairs.

I resumed cooking with Deo, then asked Anna what her project was on.

“The effect of moon cycles on plant growth. It’s really interesting and beautiful actually.”

“Ooh, it sounds like it. I’ve always wondered if the two were connected,” I replied while chopping lettuce grown from our backyard garden.

“If Indigenous Science has taught me anything so far, it’s that everything is.”

“I’m relieved that relational science has finally made its way into the school curriculum. It’s long overdue that humans stop acting like they’re on the top of a pyramid when life is really an elaborate circle.”

Half listening to me, Anna zoomed into a telescopic picture of the full moon, studying it as if she were counting each of its infinite points of curvature.

“Yeah, turns out there are deep connections between the life cycle of plants and their rhythmic exposure to moonlight. During the new moon and second quarter phases, the plant focuses its energy on the shoot system and then after the full moon, it channels energy to the root system.”

“Wow, that really is beautiful.” I paused to reflect on the correspondence.

Deo reached past me to grab the Sazón Goya seasoning that lies on the bamboo countertop next to the Spirulina algae smoothie mix.

“What’s beautiful is these veggie burgers I’m making for y’all tonight,” he chimed in. “Plantiful has the best recipe in the city, I’m tellin’ you.”

Plantiful, one of Kingston’s most beloved vegan and zero waste restaurants, opened in the spring of 2025. The year before, the Green Party won the municipal election and began incentivizing more environmental initiatives in the community. Around this time, corporate and fast food restaurants began gradually disappearing as more customers started supporting local, sustainable businesses instead. After graduating from La Salle Secondary 25 years ago, I took a semester of grade 13 to do work based learning in a mycoremediation research lab, and spent the other semester making and performing music with Deo. When I started post-secondary school, he began working on his second album, but wanted to also pursue his career in culinary arts. So, when I saw the “For Sale” sign at A&W on Brock Street, I reimagined the space, envisioning a plant based oasis with organic ingredients grown in the restaurant's own interactive greenhouse. Customers could learn about the biology, nutritional values, and spiritual significance of the plants they ate, and see directly how their scraps were recycled to fertilize the soil. And of course there’d be a stage to give local artists a platform to share their music on. With this vision, I proposed a partnership between 350 Kingston and the Loving Spoonful to integrate food sovereignty and ecological awareness into the hospitality business, knowing my husband would be an excellent manager. Half of our music tour money was donated to climate refugee charities, but between the other half, 350 members’ contribution, and a grant from the government, there was enough to invest in what became a prosperous restaurant.

“You don’t have to convince me; I helped design it.”

“Yeah, I can tell from the portobello mushrooms you added.” He smirked.

When the veggie burgers and salad were ready, we called the kids to the kitchen and Anna started setting the table. Kenny sat down next to me after I waved him over.

I’ve treated his bee stings with dandelion leaves before and they always healed well, so he willingly gave his hand to be wrapped. I stacked the three leaves,

each about 8 inches long, and looped them twice around his 10 year old light brown hand, then concealed them with hemp string.

“There, now Mother Nature will heal you with time and antioxidants. Don’t forget to tell her thank you.”

“Gracias, Madre Tierra,” Kenny said, scratching his skin through the leaves.

The next morning, I went to Kenny’s room to wake him up for school after doing a morning yoga practice with Anna.

“Buenos días, querido!” I opened his curtains to invite the bright starlight.

“Why is your dandelion wrap on the floor?”

“It was itchy so I took it off after dinner,” he confessed.

I bent down to pick it up and, out of the corner of my eye, saw him move something from the nightstand’s surface to its drawer.

“I saw that!”

“Okay, mom, I’m up now, you can go make your morning tea and I’ll get ready for school,” he said anxiously as I walked toward his nightstand.

I opened the drawer, revealing a shrivelled sage green ovate cap mushroom.

“Kenny! What did I say about touching mushrooms we haven’t identified?”

“I know, I know, but look!” He showed me his left palm. “It’s stopped itching since I held the mushroom last night!”

I examined his palm, undeniably amazed at the significant reduction of redness and swelling.

“You should be proud. I discovered a magic mushroom!”

I laughed, knowing he’s too young to understand the connotation of that phrase.

“I’m always proud of you. I just want you to be safe. You got lucky this time, but don’t do it again,” I warned. “I suppose its spores have anti-inflammatory properties... I’ll find out more when I run some tests today.”

I went downstairs to help Deo make breakfast, and Kenny followed after getting dressed. Deo opened the fridge to get cage free organic eggs and I asked him to hand me the glass container behind the tofu.

“It looks like some of the sample is missing,” he said while handing it to me.

We turned to look at Kenny who had already snuck out the door to catch the bike bus.