

THE DUELISTS

Lawrence Millman

Alex Pushkin and Mike Lermontov, two thirtysomething mycophiles, got into an increasingly heated argument over a specimen collected at one of their Club's forays.

"It's a *Mycena haematopus*," said Pushkin. "Look how it's bleeding."

"That's your blood, not the *Mycena*'s," remarked Lermontov. "You cut yourself while you were shaving, and then the blood got on the specimen, which by the way is a *Hygrocybe*..."

"I didn't cut myself while shaving, and it's a *M. haematopus*. The gills are too narrow for a *Hygrocybe*."

"Some *Hygrocybes* have narrow gills."

"But no *Hygrocybe* ever bleeds."

At this point, Lermontov flipped Pushkin the proverbial bird. "That's it," said Pushkin. "I'm going to unfriend you on Facebook."

"Well, I'm going to unfriend you in person," declared Lermontov, and he grabbed a *Russula* from the collection table and thrust it

into Pushkin's face. Whereupon Pushkin whipped out a wet handkerchief (he had a cold) and slapped each of Lermontov's cheeks with it—a time-honored challenge to a duel.

Both men immediately picked their seconds. Pushkin's was a fellow who once spent an entire weekend identifying an *Agrocybe* as a *Pholiota*; Lermontov's was a guy named Britt who called every fungus he couldn't identify "a mold."

The duel took place a short time later. Pushkin and Lermontov faced each other, turned around, and marched the requisite thirty paces. Since Pushkin had challenged Lermontov, his opponent had the first shot. Lermontov pulled out a handgun and took aim. Suddenly one of the other mycophiles shouted:

"Look! There's a patch of *Boletus edulis*!"

The duelists dropped their weapons and rushed over the site in question. The *B. edulis* turned out to be the Bitter Bolete, *Tylopilus felleus*. Both men laughed heartily

and began slapping each other on the back, harder and yet harder, until Lermontov keeled over in pain. Then he slowly got up and slapped Pushkin's cheeks with his handkerchief. Another duel.

This time Pushkin had the first shot. He took careful aim and shot Lermontov in the chest. I guess you won't be shoving any more *Russulas* into peoples' faces, chum, he muttered to the figure on the ground. Then he wandered back to the ID table and picked up the specimen that inspired the controversy. Hm-m-m, he said to himself, it is a *Hygrocybe*, after all. As a gesture of courtesy, he placed the specimen on the dead man's chest.

The good karma Pushkin created by this deed did not go unrewarded. For only a short distance from Lermontov's body was a large fruiting of black trumpets. †



CALIFORNIA MUSHROOMS

The Comprehensive Identification Guide

Dennis E. Desjardin · Michael G. Wood · Frederick A. Stevens

CALIFORNIA MUSHROOMS

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