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## Inky Cap Mushroom

Max Stephan

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## Inky Cap Mushroom

As if each hooded thumb had known  
how brief, how brusque its breath of time would be  
free from the sleepy, subterranean world  
of worm and grub, root and slumberous seed —

what springs above the platform  
of silky moss and lichen on loam  
wastes no time — well prepared for its swift retreat,  
willing to leave nothing

but the remnants of autodigestion:  
a weak and stained stalk, soon subsiding;  
its pale cap—stale, dissolving,  
withering down to an oily, shapeless smudge.

The beauty each toadstool gains with fervor  
will quickly slip and drain away;  
its blotted shape curtailed, drawn back  
to the patient, passive, tomb-like womb of life.

*Max Stephan*

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MAX STEPHAN'S work has appeared in numerous journals, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Cimarron Review*, *Louisiana Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Blueline*, and *Slipstream*. Stephan is an assistant professor, teaching poetry and creative writing at Niagara University.