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Inky Cap Mushroom

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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

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.