

*Allene Rasmussen Nichols lives in Arlington, Texas. She recently completed a Master of Arts in Humanities at the University of Texas, Dallas. Allene's poetry, plays, and creative non-fiction have been published in regional and national journals, including Illya's Honey, Fait Accomplit, Sojourn, Duck Soup, and Aries. Her plays have been performed in California, New York, and Dallas.*

## Mushroom dreams

Once upon a time, a colony of mushrooms lived in a cellar that was full of darkness, horse manure, and stale air. The mushrooms didn't have cute, story-book names, like Princess Diana or Prince Charming. In fact, the mushrooms didn't have names at all. Not a single mushroom had ever thought "I," so not a single mushroom knew that it existed. The mushrooms' only purpose was to eat nutrients from the horse manure and grow large. It is a little known botanical fact that, for mushrooms, shit-eating is a communal experience.

Not a single window illuminated the cellar. No light shone under the door. The mushrooms knew only shades of gray and black. Not a single mushroom had ever thought "you" so they didn't know where they began and the dark and the smell and stale air began.

If mushrooms dreamed at all, and later some would claim that they did, it was of horse manure and stale air and shades of gray and black. They dreamed of deep roots, though their roots were, in reality, very shallow. A single breeze could knock them over. They might have dreamed of flying, but what is flying to mushrooms? They were a practical lot, bathing in compost; growing modestly; never demanding more stale air or horse manure than was reasonable.

The mushrooms might have continued forever in this hellishly blissful state had not an amazing thing happened one day. Most of the mushrooms were sleeping and didn't notice anything at all. But some of the younger mushrooms, still learning to sleep standing on their insubstantial roots, were restive. In the blink of an eye, their world changed. The door opened a crack.

Fresh air flowed in. Color assaulted them. Then it was gone. But anyone who reads children's stories knows that such moments are never wasted. In that instant, the instant of light and air, the young mushrooms truly began to dream.



## Hunting mushrooms at dawn

Corn flake leaves crunch,  
thick with the incense  
of decay

White balloons bubble up  
like laughter

Our sweaters scrub  
fresh skin  
with kitchen warmth

Small voices  
delight in turtles  
crickets  
weeds  
bird song  
mother song

Her mother  
loved the woods  
left them too soon

My mother will not leave us

Today



## What kind of a person

I am the sum and the divisor of  
the last year people and twenty years ago people,  
the minute ago and tomorrow people,  
Who bind me with ropes  
That rot and swell.

My eyes are sewn into the fabric of the sky.  
My feet are sewn to a small brick house  
made of play-doh and badly aimed urine,  
photographs and abandoned toys.

I am tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and dust.