The Forest

Seed spore egg,
a curl of lichen or moss,
a feather, a fallen twig,
a pebble. Summer drought.
Water drips from a decaying log laden with nitrogen.

Winter floods: boulders
crash down Lookout Creek.
A four hundred year fir falls,
blocks the channel. Gravel bars
shift stone by stone.
A single alder leaf turns in an eddy.

Roads wind up Lookout Mountain.
Locked gates, flags, tags,
and stakes mark research plots,
the gathering of information:
carbon dynamics
disturbance patterns
habitat structure
nutrient cycling
log decomposition
debris flow.

Only in the mind can there be
one red-backed vole, one owl, one Douglas fir.
Only in the mind can there be
fir without fungus, owl without fir,
fungus without vole.
Study the wind, listen to what it says
about the shape of the land,
the shape of a stone,
the shape of the needles that sieve it,
the open place in the canopy
where a tree fell in the last storm.

Study the taste of creek water in September
before the first winter rain,
the taste in May when the snow melts.

Study smell, study texture,
take the petals of a violet,
the leaves of miner’s lettuce between the teeth.
Let the tongue explore,
the body learn the forest inside itself.
Study love and the way love tangles
with fear. Study desire and the light
that makes the coralroot glow.
Study the wind. Listen
to what it says about you.

Learn about time
from lichen and moss,
from the thick mats of mycorrhizal fungi
spreading underground,
from the Western red cedar,
roots gripping the shifting hillside
as the wedge of light
widens, travels up the trunk—
learn from a cedar splitting its own heart
with its own strength.
Heavy with age, forest silence shimmers, might be measured as particle instead of wave. Here, moss and bark, fern and rotting wood hold centuries of bird calls, animal cries, human voices, weaving them into the shhh of wind, the blursh blursh blursh of the creek, the crash of a tree falling, a branch snapping, a cone sprinkling seeds on the forest floor. Here, silence has weight and texture, can be tasted and touched, taken into the body like the gold drops of sap dripping from a branch, like the sweet of violet leaves.

Here, silence lets the heart question: How does moss, dry for a season, revive in rainwater? An orchid sprout from a seed, blossom without leaves or roots? How does a wren shape its nest, a kinglet know when to migrate, a bear when to sleep? How does a body learn to want change—the slow evolution of new life forms—and then accept its own dying, say yes to the single cell that mutates, multiplies, metastasizes?
Cosymbionts


Like science, poetry is an art of dissection—it is the tiniest part the poet wants—fern spore, leaf pore, bud scar, the veins of an insect wing catching the sun, the barbs and rachis of a swallow’s feather in flight.

Like science, like poetry, love for a place is an art of dissection. The fingertip strokes the smooth pockets of *Lobaria oregana*. The eye sinks into the calypso orchid’s silks. And at dusk, the last note of a thrush trembles in the ear.

Forest debris, from the French *debriser*: to break into pieces— a creek stone a curl of moss a thread of lichen a spotted owl a coralroot log jam earth flow a cedar splitting in half as the crack under its roots widens— analysis of a circle can begin anywhere:
with the fir fallen after a storm
and the slow decay of bark and heart—
habitat for fungi, nurse log for new saplings,
sHELTER FOR VOLES;

with the red-backed vole
gathering fir seeds, digging truffles,
leaving droppings rich in fungal spores;

with the fir seed sprouting, root hairs reaching
through rotting wood, meeting mycelium,
tapping the mycorrhizal mat;

with the fungal hypha wrapping the fir’s roots,
exchanging water and nutrients
for carbohydrates.

Fallen log, red-backed vole,
truffles, mycorrhizae—
how else, except by breaking down,
can a researcher understand a biosystem?
How else, except by keeping whole
through breaking down can a forest grow?
Threads

Light gatherer, shade tolerant climax tree, the Western hemlock spreads needles flat to the canopy. Underneath, a coralroot’s orange stalk draws light-manufactured sugars from the hemlock, opens to a spray of red and purple striped orchids.

Creek music: thunk thunk thunk deeper than the heartbeat of stones, a baseline thrums under the splash and cymbal crash of water splintered on rock.

Firs weave now into seed and cone, root and hypha, needle and branch, layer then thick as duff on the forest floor.

Seamless, water opens, slides over rock, closes again. The flung drops scatter white, catch sun, foam, vanish downstream.

Moss hangs like mist, drops scrims from maple and yew,
hemlock and fir, filters sun,
filters time. Silent and old
as the trees they grow on,
moss tapestries began
as single spores caught
in a sapling’s leaf-scar.

Roots grow deep, not open
in light and air, but lapped, cramped, crowded,
jammed and crossed, rigid, ingrown;
arthritic fingers clutch earth, seek water, cradle stones.

Gravel bar: without the bead lily’s hexagram
or the fir cone’s logarithmic spiral—
without the sonnet’s symmetry
or the haiku’s clipped syllabics,
winter floods pack cobble in patterns.

Under the paper thin skin,
the yew’s inner bark burns red—
black coals broken open, glowing.

Vine maple winds through the forest,
turns hands flat to the sun.
Light pools in the palm
the way water pools
in the lungwort’s lobes.