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THE ANDREWS FOREST QUARTET

by Alison Hawthorne Deming

FOREST TIME

Forest Road 1510  
rises up the flank  
of Buck Mountain  
into the zone of mist  
road canted like a shelf  
fungus though no roots  
hold it in place. Mountain  
works at softening its sides—  
windthrow, cutslope slide,  
hillslope slide, slump,  
gully and earthflow  
its tools, workday  
ten million years long.

## DEGREES OF DAMAGE IN BLUE RIVER

Sometimes a giant tree  
will crack vertically  
opening like a clothespin  
from the torque  
of a slow landslide  
that splits it clean  
as cordwood though  
not with an axblow

runnel barked fir  
striated red cedar  
drapery making hemlock  
others unrecognizable  
as trees so disguised  
in veils and sleeves  
of lichen and moss--

trees travel, their speed  
not perceivable except  
after five or six centuries  
they stand several feet from  
the spot where they sprouted.  
How gradual is the increase  
in pressure, the tight grain  
holding fast against

the strain of slipping ground  
until one day some ligature  
pops, then the trunk splinters  
tears and cracks, the tree  
thunders to ground  
beginning its death,  
two centuries more of Devil's club  
(*Oplonanax horridum*)

caning over the deadwood, fungi  
lacing sugary threads  
through the rot, moss  
carpeting the living room  
where beetles build galleries,  
voles tunnel nests and decay  
grows boisterous giving  
its offspring their names.

## SPECIMENS COLLECTED AT THE CLEAR CUT

1. Wild currant twig flowering with cluster of rosy micro-goblets.
2. Wild iris, its three landing platforms, purple bleeding to white then yellow in the honey hollows, purple veins showing the direction to the sweet spot.
3. Dogwood? Not what I know from the northeast woods, the white four-petalled blossom marked with four rusty holes that make its shape a mnemonic for Christ hanging on the cross. This one, six-petalled, larger, whiter, domed seedhouse in the center, no holes on the edges, shameless heathen of the northwest forest that flaunts its status as keynote speaker for today.
4. Empty tortilla chip bag.
5. Empty Rolling Rock can. Empty Mountain Dew bottle. Empty shotgun shell. Beer bottle busted by shotgun shell, blasted target hanging on alder sapling.
6. One large bruise four inches below right knee inflicted by old growth stump of western red cedar, ascent attempted though the relic was taller and wider than me, debris field skirting a meter high at its base, wet and punky, nonetheless, I made my try, eyes on a block of sodden wood, reddened by rain, as fragrant as a cedar closet here in the open air, the block of my interest wormed through (pecked through?) with tunnels the diameter of a pencil. How many decades, how many centuries, of damage and invasion the tree had survived! But the relic felled me, left me with its stake on my claim, and even this was jubilation, knowing that nothing was mine of this ruin, mine only was the lesson that the forest has one rule: start over making use of what remains.
7. One hunk of Doug fir gray as driftwood, length of my forearm, width of my hand, depth of my wrist's width, woodgrain deformed into swirls, eddies, backflows, and cresting waves, a measure of time, disturbances that interrupted linear growth to make a form as beautiful and liquid as streamflow.
8. Lettuce lung (*Lobaria pulmonaria*), lichen raising its green skin to light, its tan skin to dark, forest mediator, alligator leather attached to a twig that fell, rubbing in its story about the skyride epiphytes catch for free.
9. Four metaphors for the forest. Plantation trees: herringbone tweed. Old growth trees: medieval brocade. Clear cut: the broken loom. Clear cut five years later: patches on the torn knees of jeans.
10. Skat. Pellets the size of Atomic Fireballs, hot candy I loved as a child. This, more oval. Less round. Not red. But brown. Specimen dropped by a Roosevelt elk savoring the clear cut's menu of mixed baby greens. One pellet broken open reveals golden particles. Light that traveled from sun to grass to gut to ground to mind. Forest time makes everything round, everything broken a story of the whole.

## THE WEB

Is it possible there is a certain  
kind of beauty as large as the trees  
that survive the five-hundred-year fire  
the fifty-year flood, trees we can't  
comprehend even standing  
beside them with outstretched arms  
to gauge their span,  
a certain kind of beauty  
so strong, so deeply concealed  
in relationship—black truffle  
to red-backed vole to spotted owl  
to Douglas fir, bats and gnats,  
beetles and moss, flying squirrel  
and the highrise of a snag,  
each needing and feeding the other—  
a conversation so quiet  
the human world can vanish into it.  
A beauty moves in such a place  
like snowmelt sieving through  
the fungal mats that underlie and  
interlace the giant firs, tunneling  
under streamsides where fry of  
cutthroat trout live a meter deep  
in gravel, fluming downstream  
over rocks that have a hold on place  
lasting longer than most nations,  
sluicing under deadfall spanners  
that rise and float to let floodwaters pass,  
a beauty that fills the space of the forest  
with music that can erupt as  
varied thrush or warbler, calypso  
orchid or stream violet, forest  
a conversation not an argument,  
a beauty gathering such clarity and force  
it breaks the mind's fearful hold on its  
little moment steeping it *in a more dense  
intelligibility, within which centuries  
and distances answer each other  
and speak at last with one and the same voice.*

--lines from Claude Levi-Strauss