Microhabitat

A tree, fallen in the forest, turns to hair. What is the purpose of hair? To keep germs out of the nose. To keep grains of sand out of the eyes. To keep the head warm when the snow piles on, when the winter begins to think everything is dead and ready to be reinvested, recycled, reincarnated in the dirt. But not everything is dead on the hair. Dust mites, even on the dead, still clean the eyelashes. The nasal cilia cling to the inside of the nose. The roots of cold hair turn colder under snow.

The tree, though fallen, isn’t dead. I have seen, on the hairs of the decomposing tree, a banana slug the length of my arm scratching its underbelly against grain. In its slimy path, a microbe nestles. It is fed by the slime. It respires the hairs of the fallen the tree, turning the hair to humus, opening the chemical strand to let new carbon in. Deep inside the fallen tree, under the hair, the carbon cycles. It looks for its rhizome partner. The rhizome has been waiting for this little death for 223 years. Tickled by the carbon, the rhizome swells, breaks through stiff hair. The mushroom rises up, engorged. Its spores search for wind. The wind, carrying spores and oxygen to vie for space with all this decomposing carbon, brings its own reformation. It streams through the hairs, parting them, opening space for the seed from the pinecone to lodge. Inside its old tree, under the warmth of a tropical slug, beside a lascivious rhizome, surrounded by the microbe-pulsing humus, the seed of the Douglas Fir
stretches out its cilia in the skeleton of forest. Its sprout clings to a tendril of hair. The hair hoists the sprout. The sprout. The first hair. The next tree.