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## Muddy Trails

The crinkly leaves of October have turned to mush underfoot,  
slick as a clown's banana peel and camouflaged.

Hemlock and fir needles have woven into welcome mats  
that slide away at a footfall.

Northwest winters, we walk on mud:  
muddy trails, muddy lawns, muddy roadsides.  
Stone, brick, asphalt, concrete, and gravel support human intent,  
but mud upends us and sends us sprawling.

In Marquam Gulch, Hoyt Arboretum, Tryon Creek,  
Audubon sanctuaries, Forest Park, across the hills,  
winter rains turn the clay to goo,  
glistening the trails and clinging to shoes.

Yet mud of winter trails is rich and sensuous,  
as restorative as a pudding, a gravy, a soup, a salve.  
While bare maples and cascara clack their bony fingers overhead,  
mud invites us to enjoy a turn on its slip-and-slide.

Mud challenges us to a slalom run, trekking poles  
keeping us upright as we push off from one side of the trail  
and leap to a less-slippery patch on the other,  
bending knees and leaning into the slope.

Some trails call for a bowlegged walk, straddling the mud  
and twisting forward like a giant turkey wishbone,  
stepping on the strips of moss that border the trail  
like parallel green rails leading us forward.

Under somber Northwest skies we hike dark ravines  
where fogs spend the winter. Mud is the joker,  
pulling the rug out from under the gloom,  
bringing us back down to lively earth.

