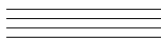


J U S T W H E N W E A R E S A F E S T



R O A L D H O F F M A N N

In this approximant to paradise
there are no forbidden trees

and after you grow accustomed
to the wonder of fairy rings

a hundred feet tall, and trails
softer than any carpet, to moss,

the small cones and ferns,
you walk, at peace, to the meter

of your breath. Until, following
a stone up a road cut, the shrub:

the beat, it stops, the wind
in the redwoods is not there.

Part stiff, vibrating in resist; part
supple, like a willow. A branch

going straight, then jigs a wild
angle turn that cuts sharp the air,

leaving (no leaves) a hard notion
of what curve might be. No bark

just what seems skin, charged
yet smooth – ochre to orange,

green rising, its sleek reaching
for your hand; there are scales

that brush off; you want to do it,
to see if the gloss can bear

a mark. And then, near sherry
smooth bark-skin goes matte

all light is sopped up, and
dry ranges of warm browns

darken to a threatening purplish
tinge, like the stone-beat

indigo fabrics of West Africa,
like the bronze of metal-

ammonia solutions – I touch it.
The manzanita is philosophy,

of virtue – of branching, and
the matte purple bark sublime.