

ROALD HOFFMANN

THEORETICAL CHEMISTRY

I would sit just there, in the quiet shade
of the live oaks. It was a scholar's dream,
but I, intent to find the way across
the ravine, wasn't there to write poetry.
You see, that thick lush growth stopped progress

here, but I could spot a road gathering
on the other side. That's where we had to go.
I brought my field glasses, a topographic
map. From above, the gully looked much like
a low-growing jungle hugging the land;

the cows had gotten across, I saw tracks
in and tried to follow them. But it didn't
work, bushes closed in, there was poison oak,
vines with rows of sharp red thorns. I came back
day after day, trying, tracing paths back

from the other side. For I knew a pattern,
the right way, had to be there. In the end
I found one, but what's bothered me since
is that I didn't follow the paths that
are hidden there, the way I should have, but

I hacked a rough piece of a new one through.
The other day I met a friend who's run
into the same wild terrain. Starting out
from a hill nearby, he found a different
way. But I told you there was only one.

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