

Prescribed Burn

Below the trail, we see the white fuel tanks
through the cloud of smoke that makes
the flames they cast seem dull. The ranger,
in her white fire suit, looks Martian-esque
against this strange landscape of green

and char behind where she walks, waves
of flame spread and smolder the leaf litter
like breakers on a shoreline. A tame blaze
born out of the steady flow of gasoline
and a spark, disciplined by firebreaks

plowed into the darkening earth, the ranger
walks her sacred labyrinth in reverse,
a god birthing Phlegethon behind her
as she moves outward toward the perimeter
of tilled dirt, the tattoo of scorched ground

and handline spelling boundaries to veil
the illusion of management and control,
a remedy born out of its own poison,
her careful retreat from its advancing line
leaving the landscape charred and impotent,

fighting wildfire with restrained flame,
scorching the fuel, the saw palm becomes
an offering against the day when feral
flames might sweep wild as mad dogs
through protected taproot and loam.