

KATHERINE SMITH

Woman Alone on the Mountain

The leaves still cling to thin trees here
though across the valley below, the oaks
are crimson and gold near the James River.
If I walk fast, I'll get to the old schoolhouse

before sunset. I've come here often, my
mind full of the kind of trouble a woman
who's raised children on her own can feel,
to search the mountains for resoluteness.

The unpopulated Blue Ridge face me
without a scrap of self-pity, shadows
falling like hands into the lap of valleys
as if to say "we have worked hard;

now we will sit here quietly
forever." They look at me as the sun drops
behind Priest Mountain, where I breathe
with a little more dignity than I came with,

surrounded by what won't change or break—
no vein of ore, nothing men might obtain
by destruction—the only richness the wind
in wild wheat and the hawks circling above me.