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.