



At the Bottom
Crabtree Falls, Western North Carolina
Photo by Dan Hardison

Rough Country

By Dana Gioia

Give me a landscape made of obstacles,
of steep hills and jutting glacial rock,
where the low-running streams are quick to flood
the grassy fields and bottomlands.

A place
no engineers can master—where the roads
must twist like tendrils up the mountainside
on narrow cliffs where boulders block the way.
Where tall black trunks of lightning-scalded pine
push through the tangled woods to make a roost
for hawks and swarming crows.

And sharp inclines
where twisting through the thorn-thick underbrush,
scratched and exhausted, one turns suddenly
to find an unexpected waterfall,
not half a mile from the nearest road,
a spot so hard to reach that no one comes—
a hiding place, a shrine for dragonflies
and nesting jays, a sign that there is still
one piece of property that won't be owned.