

Eared grebes

You were the one told me, though you called them *ducks*,
Of the eared grebes, fifteen hundred of them,
Found stunned and dying on the solid ground
They thought was water. You saw their bodies,
Heaped like feather pillows, in your sleep.
The sky, you said, was what confused them—
Something about the clouds, the storm-light—
That, and their own certainty as they hurtled
Toward what they thought was only temporary
Rest.

Next time we stand under the sky,
Hands linked, marveling at the synchronicity
Of flight, you will remind me that it doesn't always
End well, that breathtaking consensus. And I will
Say, the way I always say, that miracles are rooted
In the trivial, that there is always risk in plunging
Toward the unseen, that after those birds fell
They were carried, one by one and trembling,
To the real water by a hundred clumsy human hands.

—Marilyn Nielson

This poem won second place in the BYU Studies 2014 poetry contest.