

# Sheep

The night was not still;  
even at dusk none of us  
were easy; even in the moonlight  
no one was calm. It was nearly  
quiet. Instead, there was rustling.  
The sound of crowded  
air, of things just-above and just-  
beneath. Of waiting. And then

we heard the daybreak,  
noise like sunshine, gold  
as meadow flowers.

We shifted closer, wondering,  
and watched the dark sky light  
with sound. *Birds*,  
we whispered, but above us  
the trees too were watching.  
When the familiar night fell  
we breathed again, bent  
our heads to the grass,  
gulped the comfortable air.  
And yes, we are content

to graze, sleep, spend  
our deliberate hours,  
feel ourselves heavy with young.  
Still, some nights we look up  
without knowing why, hoping  
for a signal none of us can quite  
remember, a direction that has somehow  
escaped us, although there was a moment  
we understood it; a moment  
that held more than trees, grass, sky.

—Marilyn Nielson

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in the 2004 *BYU Studies* poetry contest.