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Sheep

Marilyn Nielson

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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

This poem won second place
in the 2004 *BYU Studies* poetry contest.