Sheep

Marilyn Nielson
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.