

After Eden

Understand this, if nothing else: that she
had only known him darkly, fragmented
like shadow under leaves. That she was free.

That she had only seen his sleep unsaid
in flecks between his eyelids; dark as storm
between the lightning; thin and strong as thread.

*Perhaps at night the sighing owls swarm
eagerly round him; perhaps in his heat
the trees reshape their bodies to his form*

*and curl their fragile roots around his feet.
Perhaps he falls like hailstones through trees,
or crashes frightened through his dreams, the beat*

*and boil of blood rushing like rain to freeze
inside his head. Under his eyes there could
be crossings still subsiding as they breathe*

the breath of one man only.

Know this: good
felt natural to her. Some few things she knew:
his hands were cold as silver. When he stood

like moonlight in a clearing, he was blue
as angels, tall as gardens, faint as stones.
You must believe this: that her ribs still drew

their light from his. As if a mountain groaned
and rose beneath her in one morning, this
unusual, lifting sun inside her bones.

—Marilyn Nelson Nielson

This poem won second place in the *BYU Studies* 2001
poetry contest.