

Altarpiece

I. Eve

It was easier
to sleep then,
before the wolf
in the pasture
had learned to howl
and only the river
sang at night
behind the fresh orchard
where she reclined
amid acres of stars.
So this was sleep,
to unloose the senses
like horses in the field
and dream herself
across that first day
of pruning and staking
the long rows of trees
whose tides of leaves
bobbed with fruits
only she and he
could name.

But tonight
in her sleep
one fruit named her,
its voice like
peeling a branch,
its flesh thick
with syllables
as if to say
that with one bite
her body might ripen,
her hair become
a crown of blossoms
whose scent could
worm its way into
some extravagant dawn,
maybe tomorrow,
indistinguishable
from yesterday,
except for
a thought.

II. Adam

Lately the fields
turned to hay.
The wind gusted
in his bones,
his skull blowing
with sentences:
The clothing would not last.
His children would outlive him.
It would be harder to sleep.
So this was death,
to walk all day
among frosted apples
and cakes of ice,
wondering how arms
once hard from raking
could soften like
yesterday's fruit,
how eyes once
sharp as branches
could cloud
in a blizzard of cells.

But even so,
when he walked with her,
flocks of melody
crowded his brain
and he felt a fresh
swarm of praise,
not the old kind,
but one ringing
in his whole body,
a hum of recognition
that the whole earth
forever after
would sing of him
and sing of her,
not with tunes alone,
but with metaphors
clanging in the wind
and the crazy blows
of word against word,
hammered out
on a page.

—Michael Hicks

Michael Hicks was one of two first-place winners in the BYU Studies Poetry Contest.