

Marauders

Nancy Graham

They have stripped the hills bare and plundered
the winter barley, the turnips;
all the fields, our gardens too.

On the shorn slopes lately abandoned
slabs of basalt sprawl tomb-like
among the rusty bracken

where nothing stirs. The sheep
are long since brought in;
buzzards wait at the tree-line, uttering

plaintive calls. For ourselves, we hunker down:
a nip to keep our spirits up
while outside the beasts mill, a hundred

gaunt, reeking creatures: their crowned heads
a burden surely, heavy spikes
they will not lose

until the new year. Till then they cluster
by the roadside. At night
they startle at the glimmer of our cars;

we pass slowly, fearing the clatter of branches
on glass. To be caught
in the darkness still halfway from home.