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Hiking Near Paradise

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Hiking Near Paradise

Near Paradise Pass, where the icy solitary stream sent up vapors, I rounded a bend and my heart thumped a beat to find him down, prone in the road, his head pillowed on one arm where he lay smoking. It was the only time I went off alone with him, overnight, the firs sighing overhead as we trudged along an old logging road. His eyes opened, when I got close, and he simply said, "Reach into my pocket." I never felt as shy with him as I did then, fumbling at my father's jacket, its lint-lined plaid pocket. A gray-brown whiskered fieldmouse hid there, trembling and squeaking like a bedspring. When I asked he said, "No, you can't bring it home." Two gentle natures, the mouse's and his, how I still think of them napping heart-to-heart a few minutes there before I came along. I released it away from the stream, the road, far from any dangers I could imagine, near a half-rotted nurse-log carpeted by moss. It disappeared so fast that my hands never seemed to have cupped or held it, never reached into his pocket that long-ago day, the deserted road impossible to find now, overgrown and gone.

A Stranger Joins Our Class

A poem "Manhole Covers"
by Karl Shapiro is first up on the worksheet,
classroom quiet deepens as students look
desk-by-desk to see who the author is.
Eventually, and that's not long, they rule out the
few males here, all names known,
glancing up at me now. "Just who is
he?" Not intending a trick at all,
I stand flat-footed with the slack
jaw of surprise. Of course, why would they
know who Karl Shapiro is, born
long ago in 1914—"that's ancient history,
man!" (They don't say "man"
now either.) Earlier I'd found his obituary
on-line at the *New York Times*. Shapiro
passed away last year at eighty-six, his
quarrels with life over, at a hospice in
raucous New York City. Why should I be
surprised? A man lives eighty-six years,
the octogenarian title grasped in his hand, and
until I tell them about his books—and even then—
very few of these kids are impressed.
What I'm calculating now is where I'll be, what
xeric future landscape I'll face, and who will care—
youths born in 2019 will be here then,
zealous for anything other than poems, and bored.

Patricia Clark is GVSU's poet-in-residence and is also an associate professor in the Writing Department. Recent poetry appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2002) and in *Slate*. In winter 2003, she'll be on sabbatical writing new poems.