Western Washington, *In Petto*

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Western Washington, In Petto

It happened that we came, tired, to a clearing, a campground somewhere in the woods, and the year escapes me, the name of the place maybe Tolmie Creek or Carbon River. Then I saw how it would be, summer after summer. World along the water, scrubbed earth where we pitched the green canvas tent, shook earwigs out of the folds of sleeping bags. When we woke, the shade of firs or mountain shadow touched the light and filtered sound.

How long had we slept? No one of us wore a watch. We couldn't tell whether we'd slept all night and come, reborn, to another day or whether we were still only halfway to dusk. We didn't know east from west, if it was moss or shade growing on the bark of tree trunks, couldn't tell whether the warmth radiated up from the ground or was the heat our bodies made lying upon it. Finally Father asked a man in the next campsite if he had a watch. It was the only time I felt the knot loosen between us and our place on the spinning earth, the ground dizzy, all of us floating on green, and though soon we'd laugh and say, “of course, it's six,” there were seconds and threads of long minutes when we fell into a gap, spirals of DNA, molecules and cells, hair follicles, teeth, cartilage and bone in an envelope beyond time, drifted loose in space, sweat on our faces, drool in the slit of each sleeper’s open mouth, our hearts like traps, our kidneys sieving impurities mote by mote, severed from mind and word, one primitive being, one group or lost tribe. And later we had no words, no time to speak of what had happened.

Patricia Clark is an associate professor in the English Department and associate dean of Arts and Humanities. She has new work forthcoming in Slate, Cortland Review, Poetry Miscellany, and Gulf Coast. She is the GVSU poet in residence.