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Patricia Clark

Grand Valley State University

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DARK SACRED NIGHT

Patricia Clark

I. A handful of flung stones, the way
years ago we stood on a beach north of
Bellingham and pitched them in,
to light up the noctiluca. So the dippers
hang over Yellow Springs, lit up, empty,
but poised to collect the night's dark dregs.
And exiled to smoke, outside, I mull
night sounds and treeshapes, the boys
reaching into the catalpa earlier in the day
for the long pods to use as bait.
If they'd asked, I would have gone along,
I think, content to sit on the bank
and watch--"They're the best bait ever!"
Catalpa, catfish, green slender pods
pulled out of a tree and dangled, dipped
into a muddy slow-moving stream.

II. Music in a stream, then the stage gone
black after the song concludes, guitars
handed around, traded for others.
Spotlights then, two, and a twirling
flair of color--green, red, yellow, blue--
as the Indigo Girls belt out a tune
for the century's end, the crowd bobbing
along. Two high school girls, one blond,
one dark, stood up and danced
in their seats in front of us, until one
grew braver and moved into the aisle
to find more freedom. They were friends
with identical haircuts, and high school
returned to me with a rush, the strange
longings flooding a body in motion,
how it seemed, at times, that skin
would burst. They danced on the threshold
of their lives, and I thought I could see
how they worried over what others thought.
A sudden wish, then, washed over me
with the notes, and I wanted them to find

boys to love who would cherish them,
work equal to their dreams, a way to move
beyond constraint of aisles, seats, and stares.

III. Highway song, the road smooth as milk
under stars. Barefoot, walking the white line
years ago, I found it less rough
than the road, though wasn't it fraught
with danger? Walking the middle, eyes
closed, listening for oncoming cars.
Driving now, and music driving me along,
I sing with Louis Armstrong and we're
beautiful together. At first, in the turn
to I-96 north of Ann Arbor and on toward
home, there's only dark in the rearview glass,
no other cars, but then twin lights
appear, and then more and more,
a golden stream of lives exceeding
the speed limit. When someone passes,
I see another dark shape like mine
bent over a wheel and glowing dashboard,
and I keep close for a time, slip-
streaming at 75, a little convoy
of music blended with hope, heading
west into the remaining light.