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Bonfire

Patricia Clark
Grand Valley State University

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Bonfire

PATRICIA CLARK

I

Soon the others will drift,
like moths, down from the house.
For now, it's only us two.
How many times has a couple stood,
as we do, on a warm January night
under stars? Hands grounded
in my pockets, I'm trying not
to touch him. Sparks whirl off
into the sky. It's that brief—
isn't it?—this moment we share.

II

I do not want to be good.
I've always waited to be
rewarded, to be given a gold star.
Now I'll live without that.
No one is watching. In the firelight,
I rub his neck and he moans.
We could lie down here, let
the light wake us when it rises
above the pasture, the trees and creek.
The fire crumbles into coals.

III

I'd like to learn to love without
expectation. Being human and mortal,
though, I keep wanting permanence.

Tonight, he holds my hands.
The table between us is solid;
everything else seems to be on fire.
I feast my eyes on him, nourished
by affection. Some kind of transformation
is underway—everything is becoming
beautiful. Both our faces glow.

IV

Mornings are always colder, the light
poured over the trees without passion.
Which reality do you choose
to remember—the tepid dawn,
frail and tentative, or the heated
afternoon when you stood near him,
both feeling like teenagers? This
agitation has no name in my new
vocabulary. Perhaps I'll call it
being alive, again, in the tenuous world.