

Judith Chalmer

Even Ground

There's not much to a campsite,
a companionable ring of rocks,

navigably even ground, firm enough
to stake in a tent, too rocky for bare feet.

On a lucky day the trees around the rim
are company enough. So much bravery

depends on love. The birches are yellowing,
the maple tops turning even faster.

This morning – you'd left early
for work – I saw the sun dazzling through

the mist and lifted the warm cup
to my lips. The day was full

of slowness, hours after breakfast
on foot among ferns, a long time

listening. The yellow leaves dropping
into the dishes. A shuffling

on the forest floor. The broken bars
of the ripples building and re-building.

I rested in a fold-up chair
next to our fold-up shelter.

The dog left his bed to sleep
in the dry leaves. Checkered table cloth.

Red pot holder. Once again, I'm afraid.
I might not know gratitude without you.

Winter Cottage

Descending the dune, sand fine and deep
as snow. There is a comfort in being
unseen. There is so much sky.

We have this, walking, one foot above,
one below, two women weathered in
a crinkled love. There's the luck

of aging, a whole seashore empty
but for us. There is the plummet,
and wings bursting back out.

Last night, I watched your face
above the comforter, knitted cap
half on, half off, your cheek flushed

in firelight, your eyes tender
toward the page of a book.
There was a time, summer dusk,

when the children screamed,
scaring themselves again and again
until they were hushed

and the rituals of tooth and towel
began. There were the two of us,
summer and winter, padding

down the paths. In this sweep
of sand we sink with each step
and our lives, comfortingly small

cling, bundled in our shells,
like beetles to the side of a bowl.
What lives beneath the surface

the ocean waves won't tell. Not much
of what the diving birds know crawls out
to meet us. Perhaps a nervous shoreline

skitter, seaweed piled with small stones.
But there, not far into the waves, a nose.
Closer - whiskers and curious eyes.

At night the tips of our noses ride
the pillows. And our eyes, deep under,
search, search again and follow.

Radiology Calls Back

October - press one to listen –
First Admitting Specialist

pattering in the treetops
afternoon rain, the forest unfazed

each leaf with its knob, its small spot,
the ones still green, even more so

stepping stones shine
in the quickening brook, granite faces

wind in the corner shelter, wind
at our backs, the ridge rimmed with light

a wooly hat, slip on boots, a shelf
in the lean-to, great luck

your hair swept silver, your skin
a shelter whole to enter, fragrant and full

the skitter, the murmur in the brush,
night holds its secrets

late brandy and chocolate by the fire, a plan
for sandaled mornings, the dew rinsing our toes

Judith Chalmer lives in Burlington, Vermont. In 2018 her poems have or will appear in the anthology, *Birchsong: Poetry Centered in Vermont*; and in journals, *Leaping Clear*, *Third Wednesday*, *Stone Canoe*, and *Leveler*. She is the author of *Out of History's Junk Jar* (Time Being Books, St. Louis) 2005 and is co-translator with author, Michiko Oishi, of *Red Fish Alphabet* (Honami Syoten, Tokyo) 2008 and *Deepening Snow* (Plowboy Press, E. Burke, VT) 2012.