Eight

Awake and asleep or both or between I traveled in my bed, voyaging grey waves and storm foam under black skies ripped by fierce winds, or

The bed bobbed and eddied in slow breaking circles of sunlight on flat green water; or rocked on smooth blue pools, riding slow swells easily.

And every time, great sharks swam round my bed: I saw their strict fins, saw they were not orcas marked like magpies, mimes and clowns. Not dolphins.

I would lie rigid under the sheet: to stay alive I must not move, not stand up against the headboard, brace muscles for action,

Raise the sheet into a sail; I must not sit up when they swim alongside, toothed skin raking the mattress, gill slashes red above the water line.

From the smallest corners of my eyes I'd see them thrust their thick torpedo snouts from the water; they rose with gaping gullets, baring mythic teeth.

But the bed did not grow sodden, capsize, slip below the surface and slide me paralyzed under water to the circling sharks’ open throats.

In the darkened theater of childhood, I turned away from the screen, from the shadow of danger. Closing my eyes, I learned nothing of death, only of fear.

Judith Arcana’s writing has appeared recently or is forthcoming in Poetica, Triplopia, Bridges, Nimrod, NW Women’s Journal and two anthologies: Women’s Lives and Fresh Water. Among her prose books is Grace Paley’s Life Stories: A Literary Biography; and her new book is a poetry collection, What if your mother (Chicory Blue Press, 2005). A native of the Great Lakes region of the United States, she now lives in the American Pacific Northwest.