

Judith Chalmer

Belief

Afternoon. A snarl and hiss
from the grassy hummock.

Mayflies on the columbine.
Funny, it is and is not as we expected.

Toes lifted, the willow waits,
up to its knees in water. But is,

of course, why we're here, lugging
and guying at site twenty-nine,

rinsing out our everyday senses.
It was important, though we delayed,

to leave home. Important as touch,
that lands here and somehow –at the same time-

blushes there. A sunbeam ripples up
the leaning tree. Dead stumps gather nearby,

gesturing. Stems collect in the current, here
a basket, here a line, lily blossom cupping

something clear. Before sense made sense,
there was only light, as when the fence blew down,

and the driveway out the kitchen window
unlearned its meaning. Who knows how

we got here. Neck first, then knobby legs,
last, the wings we hadn't known were there.

Meaning flirts from form to form. Evening
slips over the lily pads. Something eats.

At times, we're crushed. A dark crayon
draws water, olive and orange, the red ink

scrolling of the stems. By night, a shift,
the wind teasing the clouds, the clouds playing

late in front of the mirror. Our paddles tip, tangling
with the moon. Now a mist grows from the pond.

We settle in the dark, curled together in our tent.
Green leaves in their millions crying each, each.

Album

We wouldn't have been that quiet.
And, of course, you weren't with me.

It must have been night time.
Unless I'm confused.

I'm sure we were not quiet.
I know there were nights.

I remember we were caught once
a distance from the car and coyotes --

It must have been night time.
Charcoal and dun. Cream, of course,

snow everywhere. It must have been
you in technical colors. Reef coral.

or maybe lime twist. Maybe
it was day but definitely

it was winter. I'm not capturing
the quiet. I'm thinking

you were with me.
We wouldn't have been quiet.

But there it was, the kind of quiet—
is jumps out at you. *Is* hangs

like a ghost in front of you.
There were wonders.

I mean I didn't know you.
We were like children.

There was danger, the kind
that persuades you. Animal.

Mineral. Our lives shaken up
and pieced together again.

Is, that path before you
leading forward and back.

The sleepy boughs fill in
behind. Ahead, the slender

glittering web. Stunning,
the distance, the quiet.

Daylight, moonlight,
the way we were,

you and I, toes
touching across a couch.

The Shore

Today, trunks, tender and awkward,
lean over the path and the pond

a few steps below shivers green.
It's hot. It's cold. That's how it is.

Months go by. The stream one day
shocked white at the heart,

like a sweep of hair
when the woman you love turns

toward you. Next day, it seems,
blackberries, late in their season,

dangle between you. Emerald
and amber, fern over fern,

shades of mint, shades of lime,
notched lobes shifting, nodding

in the breeze. There was a dying
last year, sunny at the edge of the lake,

and great mounds of ice
flaked the shore, shattered

by change deep in the center.
There were handfuls. You could

reach in. They were delicate
and veined. The waves

were ample and slow
to tear it apart.