

# JUDITH ARCANA

## *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.