The Polar Tent

– after Pip Smith

Here on the ice we are face to face with blizzards,
pulsing our body heat within these layers
and almost not making the distance.
We’re only just holding it together
clinging to survival with gloved finger-tips,
not wanting to acknowledge that this lack of traction
might mean we’re not meant to be here.
So we sit in the tent, the glowing orange walls
giving us fake bottom-of-the-world tans
on skin that is wrinkling before our eyes,
the cold drawing years out of us, as if we really
are on some other planet that has taken decades to reach.
It feels this way; the distance from known world,
the religious faith in gadgets,
this feeling of utter skinlessness
under the onslaught of alien weather.
We channel pioneer spirit to each other
tent etiquette distilled to micro-expressions,
what is not said shouted in each other’s faces
when the wind-shriek pauses for breath.
We’re not saying anything new. Impatience
and fear held in the bones around our eyes.
Everything feels just too hard. A cup of water
demands chiselled ice and an hour on the Primus.
Not even sleep is simple when darkness
must be manufactured.
We pull beanies over our eyes and lie back
against the soft pretence that the Earth
has dipped its axis and is tilting us into night.
Loosening our white-knuckled grip
we slip our necks from fear’s noose
and finally plunge boot-first
into deep, courageous sleep.

Rachael Mead

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