

VANESSA LENT

Jade and Juniper Bay

I

The early morning slanting sun
is already hot on our skin. We
buy fresh fruit at the market
on the way to the beach and
bring the old flannel quilt.

The one grandma and her friends made
before marriage and kids and
each had made a patch—
embroidered her signature onto it.
The signatures are gone now
and only straggling threads remain.

We ride our bikes through severe hills, down
into the juniper trees. Shadow and light
blink
cause a blindness. We
race through the snaking road to the park,
backpacks full of

lemonade and sandwiches and
books and journals and old towels. We
latch our bikes to the wooden posts and
run the last half a kilometre to the beach—
mindful of rattlers on the trail.

We settle near an ancient tree and
move with its shadow through the day.

The hills fold tightly around us:
hands cupping a grasshopper.

II

Aunty Jude picks me up in her Tercel. We're
 on our way to swim and we always laugh
 tongues falling over
 Jade and Juniper Jude and Jupiter June and Jude and
 Jude has lupus and is allergic to the sun.
 As a child her brown body slipped through
 this water, these hills but
 now she waits until the wink
 of gold-to-mauve-to-navy dusk.

The grass is thick and deep
 emerald under the trees. We
 tiptoe over polished, rounded stones
 slimy and then
 dive and cool cool
 into the green, the see-through
 beer bottle world.

And if we crane our necks we see the
 gnarled trees looming high on the hill behind,
 the hill that is already deep in shadow.

Eyes peeled underwater
 we swim:
 clear and then murky
 the deeper we get. We
 see snakes but really branches.
 Sunken trees ripped from above are
 ground into the muddy lake bottom by
 the force of the fall.

I swim to shore on my
 back. I watch the stars peek out
 of the dusk. I swim back to Jude
 smiling on the beach.

We eat strawberries and blueberries,
 our fingers stained red and blue.
 Holding our hands up to the sky
 we are bruised.

III

And then once we swam past the farthest point of land
and found a third bay.

Not Jade with its sand or Juniper with its stones but
instead there was only land that reached right out
into the water and dropped.

And behind was a house
that looked like it was falling in on itself
in the slowest motion possible. Everything
pulled into the centre as if there was a knot there,
tightening.

The outside was painted that kind of yellow
you'd think should have faded with time but
instead the spidery trees that slumped over the house
had covered the paint in sap: made it look shiny
like skin swollen with fever.