

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.