

The Definition of a Place

Judith Bishop

Where the slow-pulsed creek grips a handful of ibis, and wattle trees feed at the periphery of yellow. Here we might have seen the iron girders of a bridge holding up the shallow arc a bomb of swallows pitched under. Or, later, air acquiring a rift white butterflies moved over in the early afternoon. There was something, yes: but not a rent apparent to the eye, not a cloud breaking, nor the way a cloud amassing shreds a tumbling skein of light.

A rusted carriage wheel half-jutted from the mud. The metal mattered in that place, a graph sown in the earth. Fertility, but of another order from the one that's often reckoned, the human and inhuman knitted in the summer heat. This is where we talked. You turned to me a troubled cheek, the air tore, it was done. The rift, which had no other work, became the thought of sex in us. Quickly we spoke, and as quickly, it was done.

A place has, I say, a face of infinite compassion. And yet: it is infinitely careless.