

Status

*Most of us think that history is the past. It's not. History is the stories we tell about the past.*  
- Thomas King

I'm waist-deep in Parson's Pond, my mother's parents  
in the water with me. Instead of dunking me under  
in Jesus' name my grandfather, Pentecost pastor, gently falls  
backward. A small kick from his legs, *sure, I can lead you  
beside quiet waters but why can't we just go for a swim?*  
Nan, all grace and sunglasses, floats by with a crossword,  
*six-letter word for social rank, starts and ends with s?*

My father's folks paddle past, the phrase *teach em to fish...*  
running the length of the canoe. They raise their mugs  
of tea with a wink as they tow the sun across the sky,  
their grins possess a knowing I can't quite place. I don't realize  
I'm floating on my back until the moon appears above me  
and the pond's gently in my ears, whispering *as above,  
so below* in the voices of both grandmothers at once.

My father's arms under me, says *heard you're feeling  
a little lost, nothin a few hours around the fire won't fix.*  
He stands full height, a few stars caught in his beard,  
carries me home in strides. His boots brushing black spruce  
like grass. From up here, we can see Sandy Point, can see  
St. Paul Island as he wades out the bay, *Elmastukwek*  
suddenly on my lips as we head to Cedar Cove.

He takes my wallet, with its government-issued cards,  
takes my Christian guilt and self-doubt, drops them into his  
parents' old coffee-can kettle. I ask *why can't I just burn it all?*  
He hands me some matches, nods behind me. My mother  
steps in from the surf on a wave of rolling capelin, *some things  
we shed, some we're steeped in.* She adds the rising tide,  
a few newspaper obituaries, the open throat of a pitcher plant.

Together we build a pyre of kindling and driftwood, filling  
it with birchbark, but I want to run. Instead, she hands me  
the kettle, gently kisses my cheek – *we know who you are,  
but we can't make you believe it.* Shaking, I strike a match  
to birch, watch the bark recoil, gift itself to fire. Not brave,  
just tired of telling the same story, I spit the phrase *not enough*  
into the can, break into heaves and sobs, let the kettle boil.

*\*Elmastukwek is the Mi'kmaq word for the Bay of Islands,*