

# Upon the Face of the Water

Lon Young

## I. Wormwood

*Then the third angel sounded: and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is wormwood. (Rev. 8:10-11)*

The chokecherry where we camped one June  
hung low over the water, sheltering  
brown shade beneath its branches  
so clear the water revealed crooks in our legs  
and the mushroom clouds toes make in the silt.  
I hid there from my brothers  
the last day until they forgot me, leaning  
back in the water, chest lifting slowly on elbows  
and falling,  
legs sprawled wide.  
Above my belly shadows of leaves tossed.  
The water thinned and lapped against the bank  
and a pot of beans puffed on the Coleman.  
I closed my eyes and sank into molten inches of mud.

I woke when something snaked past my throat:  
a sleek blackness greasing across the water,  
slinging ripples against my face. I left  
the water and my whole body shuddered.

## II. Jesus Bugs

*And it shall be said in days to come that none is able to go up to the land of Zion upon the waters, but he that is upright in heart. (D&C 61:16)*

You've seen them on the water, bodies tapered  
like canoes with two long pairs of oars,  
four smooth silver bowls under their feet,  
a pond's face dimpled.

My friend and I drifted down the Little Manistique in a canoe  
the summer we graduated and watched the water-striders  
scrambling across the river like hockey players.  
Striders don't actually float, he tells me.  
They simply resist sinking—something about surface tension.  
Then he says you can drown them with a drop of oil.  
Pour some oil on the water and it'll slick  
up the hairs on their legs and they'll drown.  
He laughs. It's true, he says.  
And I feel our canoe sway just a little.

### III. Learning to Float

*And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and began to sink. (Matt. 14:29-30)*

The body wants to sink.  
Only my arching chest contends  
against the pull of sludge and muck.

The spraddling legs, the toes, feet,  
groin, belly slump and fail,  
forget themselves in the dark silt.

So it's not walking on water,  
but then I'm no rock either, for all  
this dead weight. I might falter

but I won't take your hand.  
I'll turn my back on the devil  
and bare my breast to the wind.