

LAURA WATSON

## **SPELL FOR LEARNING HOW TO FLOAT**

You have no money to leave me, so this is my inheritance:  
one marmalade jar from Scotland, a couple of cookie tins,  
those two old teacups that no one else sees any value in,  
and a gaping void where others have a sense of direction.

Lost in my hometown on the walk home from school,  
a parade of misplaced landmarks and my mother out looking for me.  
How strange this miraculous map that others seem to carry  
with all its disparate bits fixed into place and interlaced,  
when we know that the pieces are shifting, their arrangement as arbitrary  
as droplets of water making up the surface of a lake.

You survived by finding a lakeside town so small that  
each inch could be given a name and committed to memory.  
Roads began to lead to the same place every time;  
routes wore into grooves; circuits connected like synapses;  
the ground started to give a convincing imitation of steady.  
For sixty years, you watched the water from your kitchen,  
spoke tenderly about the sounds of loons, but never learned to swim.  
Who needs it? You have quilts and banana muffins  
to bring into being. You have children and grandchildren  
and great grandchildren to raise. You are always busy.

After sixty years, however,  
there are sudden, subtle tectonic shifts below the scalp.  
Your kitchen, your stove, your favourite recipes,  
your grandchildren's faces, your well-worn routines  
become unfamiliar terrain. Lost again.

You have forgotten that you hate having your picture taken,  
so my cousin sends a photo of you baking in the kitchen  
of the seniors' home. You are getting assistance.  
Those directions of recipes once so steeped in your memory  
you could follow them instinctively—they have washed away.

But in the picture, you are smiling, an experienced drifter,  
untethered, unconcerned. You are floating in a lake.