

Lorna Crozier

The Dead Twin

It's best not to know most of us
in utero are half a set of twins, the brother or sister
dead before the journey down the birth canal,
the lost one absorbed by the survivor
until there's nothing left but a thin-as-paper
glyph flickering in the cave of the womb; *Fetus*
papyraceous—its name takes us back to origins,
to the pith of papyrus that grows in water as we do,
starting out with gills and an eel's tail, less improbable
than the muscled root of our tongues. Inside my mother,
my small familiar curled beside me. I soaked it up.
My shape-shifting, monstrous growth pressed it
like a precious flower into the amnion.
Now I blindly carry it, personal water mark on skin,
shadow on the lining of my lung, my way of knowing
what is only mine to know. Is it the cause of loneliness?
The longing for another self?
After my mother and father, it was the first
to give me life and I took it fast. Coming out of sleep
I sometimes hear the soft underblows that fall
between my heartbeats like a pale, unformed finger
tapping from inside, *I am, I am, I am*, this little death
that won't lie still until I die.