

Joanna Pearson

THE MOTHER OF THE CONJOINED TWINS EXPLAINS

A mother knows when daughters are too close.
I felt it from the start, how their new limbs
folded too-tight—wet moth wings or paper fans.
I knew their milky foreheads pressed each other
as they floated there like prayerful fruit,
their seahorse-selves stretching my self to silk.
I heard their private whisperings,
not the normal deep-sea language of twins,
but something tense, high-pitched
like dolphins' cries against tuna nets.
Their fingers curled and uncurled, tiny
sea cabbages, always holding one another,
their salty lips blooming into a kiss,
perpetual, insistent. I felt their half-plum hearts
shushing each other, felt the flex
of their shared shelf of hip, the tide of each flip.
Their very wombsong was plaintive,
the wordless keen of kelp, a whelk's mourning.
I bore them like I bore an underwater urn
planted inside me, raining my own tears
onto the moonscape of my belly
for them to listen. The half-shells
of their lids stayed shut, blind to my plush reds.
And when finally the doctor wrenched
them out, sleek bluish fish, I saw
translucent brows furrow, how they cast
only one misshapen shadow, and I wanted them
unhinged, cast off, thrown back.
Years passed, and they were gone,
but even now I feel their weight
ripping me in two when I dare touch
that empty four-sleeved Sunday dress,
when my heartbeat double-mutters to itself,
or when the gibbous moon turns to watch me
with one of its pale faces.

