

## The Barrenness of Sarah

“Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:  
 ...when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This  
 is his wife: And they will kill me...Say, I pray thee, thou art  
 my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake.”  
 --Genesis 12: 11-13

Pharaoh took me to his house.  
 A danger to be thought so fair.  
 Old women their fathers sold  
 when they were young, bathed me  
 in water heated by the sun,  
 soothed my breasts and thighs  
 with petals bruised for beauty--  
 lotus, asphodel, pomegranate.  
 How gentle these women  
 with my skin, how dark their fingers.

Smaller than Abraham  
 and sad-eyed, Pharaoh lay  
 so light upon me I seemed  
 to rise, what stayed below,  
 a shadow, moving. In his cries  
 I heard the howl of plagues  
 let loose like heaven's hounds,  
 then their rattling on locust wings  
 across the city. His people dying  
 one by one, Pharaoh called to Abraham,  
*What hast thou done?*  
*Why didst thou call her sister?*

My body riven, Abraham rode me  
 south to Bethel, he rich with Pharaoh's  
 gold for his one god, the fattest cattle,  
 she-asses and camels about to birth.  
 In my womb I felt a quickening, Egypt  
 craving life. Each day I took a poison  
 as the women of my tribe for centuries  
 have done to kill the little fish inside.

Within a week what finned and flickered  
 died. I had to drag myself from darkness,  
 wipe the venom from my mouth.  
 Others did not survive--my aunt,

my younger sister, my mother's friend  
buried at the river's bend, unborn babies  
curled beneath their hearts.

Abraham denied me one more time.  
It was written Abimelech, King of Gerar,  
did not touch me. Three nights  
he drew aside the curtains of my bed.  
I knew I'd die from poison.  
Instead I bit on leather, pounded  
my belly with a sack of stones  
until the blood swam out of me.  
We left his land with sheep and oxen,  
my husband's pouches heavy with  
a thousand silver pieces, pitiless price.

I was ninety when the Lord  
told Abraham I would conceive.  
Scolded for my laugh I laughed again  
when the angels visited my tent,  
Isaac's seed a spark that flashed  
from them to me, my womb  
burned new as any girl's  
as if it did not hold those old deaths  
sharp as hooks, bent and carved  
from the smallest bones.

*Lorna Crozier*