

"Overture"
from
Vanishing
Twins:
A Marriage
by Leah
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During my ballerina years, I danced mainly in the corps de ballet. This is the term for the group of dancers who are not soloists. The literal translation is the *body of the baller*, and as such, all the dancers in the corps move together, like synchronized swimmers. They are one body. But not even a body. They are a backdrop for the principal dancers. Just scenery.

In high school I was given the option of studying French or Spanish. I chose French because it was the language of ballet. *Pas de deux, rond de jambe, plié, jeté*. I'd been saying these phrases for years, but until I started taking French, they'd just been the names of steps. I didn't know what the individual words meant.

We all took pseudonyms, at the behest of our teacher. These were our French-class selves, the people we became when we spoke that language.

My best friend was also a dancer and renamed herself Giselle, after the main character in the ballet of the same name. Giselle goes mad after being cheated on by her lover and dies of a weak heart. In the afterlife, she is taken in by a group of female ghosts called the Wilis, who force the man who betrayed her to dance himself to death.

Because my best friend chose a ballet character, I did too. In school, as in dance, she was so self-assured, so effortless. I studied her movements, like learning choreography, and hoped that when I repeated them they would appear to be my own.

My French alter ego became Odile, a character from *Swan Lake*. Odile is the Black Swan, the villainous doppelgänger of the White Swan, Odette, who is really a princess turned into a swan by Odile's sorcerer father. In the ballet, both roles are danced by the same ballerina. I always dreamed that someday I'd get to play them both.

In *101 Stories of the Great Ballets*, George Balanchine calls *Giselle* the archetype of a romantic ballet. "To be romantic about something is to see what you are and to wish for something entirely different," he writes. In *Giselle*, the Wilis wear billows of white tulle, so they seem "part of the world and yet also above it." "The ghostly spirit, the sylph, was ballet's symbol for romantic love—"the girl who is so beautiful, so light, so pure that she is unattainable: touch her, and she vanishes."

One-eighth of all natural pregnancies begin as twins, the book said, but early in pregnancy, one twin becomes less viable and is compressed against the wall of the uterus or absorbed by the other twin.

Of course, I thought. I lost my twin.

This was after I'd read all the other books. The books about sexuality. The books about marriage. The books about love. None of them comforted me like this book did.

The story followed a pair of identical twins who were struggling to grow up without growing apart. My husband and I were struggling with that too.

I read it in one day, in every room of the house, on my stomach, on my back, on my bed, in the yard. I didn't worry about the ants scaling my thigh, or the black widows living under the outdoor furniture.

One-eighth. I tell people this statistic when I tell them I'm writing about my search for the twin I never had. The number makes me seem less crazy.

"Suspicion is a philosophy of hope," Adam Phillips says in *Mongamy*. "It makes us believe that there is something to know and something worth knowing. It makes us believe there is something rather than nothing." He's referring to the suspicion that one's partner is having an affair, but the same holds true for the existence of my twin.

I've always preferred being in the company of one other person to being in a group. I'd thought this meant I was antisocial, but maybe it's a desire to return to the relationship I had with another person in the womb. That pre-person—my little mirror ball of cells.