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A New Monster
by Mark Rudolph

My mother can't rise up,
a deflated balloon of skin.
Her plastic tether sucks
oxygen from the air.
Goggled eyes. Ochre nails.
Frizzed hair.
She is nothing like herself
yet she fills the room with herself:
her hospital bed,
her toothless combs,
her wash basin, her hydrocodone.
Bleached and spittled,
remote control in her fist,
she giggles, and I wonder,
where will she land today?
as if today were a city
sliding across a map of the world
still greasy from her breakfast.

(It would be easy to lie to her,
easy to ignore her: to drop
the trapdoor and listen
for a scrape, a rattle, a shriek.)

Her thank-yous, her help-mes
her I-love-yous,
her you-hate-mes skitter
like rabid kittens at my ankles.
Doctor bills expecting a piece
of the host perch on the TV and

glare from their cellophane windows.

I feed them a pellicle of skin

thin as toilet tissue,

razored away, painless

as the drugs will allow.

I've become an expert

at tearing away the gauze

while holding back the urge

to prick the baby with the pin,

just to hear it scream.

(Skills like these are profitable.

Skills like these are marketable.

Skills like these are inhuman.)

I've been rebuilt

on the slabs of her pain

into something lead-shoed

and green-skinned

thundering through the house,

and now my howl can slice

through a villager's sleep

like a laser through steel

or a saw through bone.