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Prototype

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Prototype

Ben Hockenberry, 5/6/2021

Mom folded cloth, threaded elastic,
affixed a twist tie inside. Stitched
by machine, the end product
took minimal time: a prototype.

The fabric wasn't sexy, a pale greenish
-- maybe blueish, yellowish, brownish --
and the pocket shaped by the fold
sagged a bit, wrapping my beard
in a formlessness,
a muumuu for my face

but that prototype, that
sorta-shapeless sack
of facial hair and breath,
was crafted to fit me.
A filter could fill that fold.
A jaw, a voice, could stretch in that sag.
The twist tie hack could maintain a seal.

Mom folded more cloth, threaded more elastic,
affixed more twist ties.
I kept wearing that prototype
as months passed.

Masks multiplied around us,
anything to avoid the dread
distancing, the slow
unbalancing, the measured
breaths, the waver
of resolve, the lives
half-lived, the funerals
attended and missed, the horrid
politicking, the tightening
of chest and heart, the waiting
for the shoe to drop.

Grey wisps curl out from elastic and cloth,
new lines extend along skin. Flower stalks
poke from frown-furrowed soil
fresh with worry and opportunity.