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Brooke Horvath

THE *ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA* USES DOWN SYNDROME TO DEFINE "MONSTER"

humani nil a me alienum puto.

—Terence

I.

The encyclopedia's definition leaves my daughter holding hands with Grendel, the Cyclops, Frankenstein's monster, the mythic deformities of hell.

Chancing upon this definition leaves me face to face with the unspeakable.

II.

She is a monster who cries, recites with her sister the alphabet, has fallen in love with the boy at preschool who opens her yogurt for her.

She is a monster who meets with fear and stares outside and inside, holds the usual human emotions imprisoned by more than usual inarticulateness.

III.

My insurance company will not pay for her therapy. Therapy, a letter tells me, is covered only following an accident.

My insurance company does not believe in genetic accidents. My insurance company covers only human beings.

IV.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, with its assurance that truth is tidy and knowable and human-sized, can shove its learning up its human ass.

It is anything human that is alien to me.

V.

My monster's favorite shirt has four hearts across its front. I ask her why she likes this shirt so much, and she points to the hearts.

You like hearts? I ask. But she shakes her head no, pointing again to each heart in turn and saying carefully: mommy, daddy, sister, me.