2021

Two Poems by Jacqueline Henry

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Jacqueline Henry

*Slippery*

Words slip out of my mouth without thought, sliding off the middle of my tongue without waiting for the breath, or the pause between, for some indication from reason that the words might taste bad, might even smell bad in this salty air we breathe.

I can’t stop them. They emerge eel-like. Bottom feeders. Slurping up morsels of pain and hurt that shine mosslike on the jetty, and shitting them out on the slimy rocks beneath our feet, syllables slithering blindly in this spot in the middle of the sea where it’s so easy to lose our footing.

The thing is, had I chewed on the feelings before they became living spoken words, I might have noticed the force of the wind, the spray in my face, and how my husband reaches out to steady me.
You Burned My Father’s Face

Red raised welts—
road rage where he tries to smile.
Pieces of hair on his favorite couch.
And who knows what chemical fires

you set under his skin in claim of a cure—
    like you have that power—
you and that errant marauder, that mighty
Pyromaniac you concocted in your lab

for a fee. Quack! Did Death bribe you?
He on his dark Guernica horse screeching
into that golden bullhorn:
    Burn it all! Burn it all down!

My father sips his beer and watches his golf.
And you know he’s just itching to crawl out of his
skin, and you know he’s trying to believe every single
glowing ember of the hope you give.

I can’t look at his face without biting my fist
and knowing this: I have to believe you, too.