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Two Poems by Jacqueline Henry

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.