

The Fear of Taking Off the Mask · *John Drury*

The fear of taking off the mask
Paralyzes the burned boy, fitted in tights
With openings for eyes, ears, mouth
And charred fingertips. After taunting him
His classmates try to coax him:
Go on. It's OK. We won't laugh.
And if he peels it off,
No, they don't laugh, they are terrified.
Another child, unmarked, could feel
Just as afraid of being seen,
Of opening to a crowd, his face
As changeable as mercury.
It burns and shames him
Because he has no right to such pain,
Having never suffered, having never
Been touched, like the boy
Who dived for coins
In a swimming hole at the edge
Of Nagasaki, only to surface
With his friends gone and the whole world leveled.
Like that: but for no good reason.