

Tom Holmes

The Museum of Dreams

The Smartest Person in the World

They say her hairs are antennas. She's always receiving and quiet. When she's near, I don't know if I'm talking to you or if she is speaking through us. They say when she dies, she travels back in time and invents language. She's died many times. I don't know what I'm saying.

Cathedral

The forest sways with 50-foot high toothbrushes. Each morning, the sky bleeds. The bristles drip long beady strings all day. At night, the dryness arrives with fallen-egg-stenched winds shredding through bristles like songs through cracked ceramic teeth.

Judgment Day and the Undermining

The cave is filled with cops. They are freeing their prosthetic hats and batons. They are mixing tickets with melted coins. They are smearing it across the walls and floors. They are alchemizing stone and dirt to lava and flesh. They are discharging.

Turning Around

I walk so fast through the apocalypse, skyscrapers
wake in front of me. One bows so low, I grab its antennae
and sing into it. It hurls me like a catapult to the world's
edge.

There's only salt here and a pile of blisters. There is no end
or horizon to the beyond, but for a pair of shoulders.

Moving Image

The long hall is lined with television sets –
from spirals of apertures to detached picture tubes
to extended plasma screens with remotes – at the end, a
father is buried

in a large maple veneer tv cabinet.

I feel almost nothing except for disinterestedness.

Medium Fairy Tale

I've been here before when there were more mountains.
I would pluck and stitch them to my chin. When the moon was
full, I'd cut them loose. They're now an asteroid belt.
The moon is not anymore a mirror, but, when full,
a palimpsest of my face inscribed with hardened lava pools.

Atlas of Pleasure

In the first act, she lowers her eyes. In the second,
she's deep in the woods. She bites her nails and spits

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them every hundred paces. In the third act, she
whispers help,
a word she learned for God. In the fourth and fifth, when
she's lost,
her fingers stray and she forgets her lines.

Troubadour and Toreador

She unzips her long red dress, steps from it, kicks the dress
up to a cape and taunts the bull. The bull charges. She leaps
and twists over its head and stabs it in the back with her
stiletto
heels and breaks the neck with its horns. High in the corner
of the stadium, a poet with a stubby pencil takes notes.

City of Trams

A thousand naked ladies pace the Parthenon
with silk twisted through their hair. A cable car pulls up.
A man in a three-piece suit steps off, drops iron pennies
in the fountain, extends his paint brush, and approaches.
Women seated on the balconies fan themselves with shackles.

Untitled (Snail with Turtle)

At the garden's edge, a snail slides a sticky trail.
A turtle makes wakes through long grass. It will take days
before one yields their path and begs a pardon.
Meanwhile, the snail rolls a pair of dice for fate
to engender its sex, and the turtle turns inward.

Backyard Help

The neighborhood pond is blue as a tailed monster's eye.
When I strip, the houses turn away. My penis
is a rudder as I swim in circles, then drift
to the waterfall's pool, walled in with polished off rocks.
The pond fills with cattails and gathers spies on all sides.

In Mud Time

I'm naked, again, of course, but I am not running away –
there's rain and no one sees me or I them. I can stand
in the waterfall's pond and spit and sing until it dries
into this lunar field. There's the shack, where I write and hide,
rising a little more each time it rains. It's only half under.

Ringing

After the apocalypse, it snows. Survivors wear wool coats
and walk dogs. Gray buildings congregate and language fractures
over crackling radios. The lunch lines are long. I remember
my high school locker combination, and my first girlfriend
is here. She says yes, but I can't stop thinking last bell.

Last Call

As she tells me how her husband's mother insists she's not
to leave the bedroom after dark, she lifts her left leg
along the barroom table, I stroke her green sock and listen,
she points it out, I drop my hand, I apologize.
We're in the parking lot after hours walking away.

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Black Hole with Red and White Checkered Table Cloth

I light my pipe. She serves a plate of potatoes.
She's laid out a bowl of milk, a cup of coffee, a basket
of tangerines, a platter with a donut. A tangerine pops
into its hole, another, a stream of coffee, milk, potatoes,
the smoke, then me
falling. My farewell stare – she's folding closed the table cloth.

Hallway

At the end of the hallway is a crack.
With this step past the stairs, the crack is a door
blossoming into orange poppy. When I reach to pluck
a petal, the end of the hallway is a mirror
with someone tugging my hand from behind.

Night Tremor (after Alexander Long)

I'm reading back cover book blurbs when rain arrives.
When lightning and thunder fall, I lock the front door.
I re-cover my books. The dry morning wakes me.
I open the door. Thunder is tangled in a tree.
Lightning encourages it to jump into the light.

Turned Back

It's my last day of tinkering with clocks
and the angle of my car's rearview mirror. It's the last day
I'll untie my shoes and count the steps to my bedroom.

It is the last time I'll measure my life – my compass
having drawn the full arc from the day I arrived.

Empty Suit (for Sophie)

This CEO reminds me of my daughter doodling
(though less responsible and loopy), but he won't spin
his chair.

His office phone rings and delivers urgent information
as her play phone, though less charming and meaningful.

I miss her.

Only a graveyard is filled with the irreplaceable.

Untitled (Hallway with Binding)

The hallway curves into a vanishing point.

On one side, the carved wooden rail. On the other,
the wall and bookshelf with the book that anticipates me.

It's soft and drapes in my hands. Each page reads
to a story's end. Every morning begins like this.