

Fire Sickness

Nancy Holmes

after Eve Heller's "Heat"

It's like a fever but we're not hot yet.

We start fretting in early spring.

The fire may be behind our forehead
or in the screen.

Another town is burning down.

Spring combusts outcrops, spores,
trickles in the riverbeds.

We can no longer taste the sacred.

The forest is a grill, language
the BBQ sauce.

The air bursts into flames
in a loom of branches.

Is the line between life and death
burning up?

The umbilical cord a fuse,

soaked in gasoline

blowing back upon the placenta?

Inside the stink of incense

that streams to God's nostrils

are northern lights, pines, copper, feathers, robin eggs,

toxic mercury, veins, wool, clouds, snail shells, lichen,

eclipses, bones, barbed wire, lakes, nectar, plastic bottles of pills.

We take to our beds. Clutch

the sheets' black fringes.

Bumble bees sizzle in their nests.

Cobwebs float into the sky:

a million lanterns, all aflame.

Tangled Joy with Twig

Nancy Holmes

after Teresa Posyniak's "Lying in a Field I"

I was the longest wand
in the shrubbery.
I was green flesh
eating sparks, my feet
riding the white tornadoes.
I dreamt a fire
that patinaed grasses.
Embers dodged the tips.
Terror crawled right through me
and shot out as blistering pollen,
catching all the barbed things—
awns, combs, seedhead, snag, anther,
rust, spider filament, bee hair, sunlight.
What I mean is
the disorder, the spit,
the now-hollow desire,
then the withering.
The crackled berry
and the increasing
recklessness of wind.

Study

Nancy Holmes

the wild clematis blossom
rests its chin on the ground
its delicate mouth
open

it dropped headlong
onto the forest floor
when its many-jointed vine
collapsed

a green skeleton
unhooked from its
frame

it plummeted into
an understory

its path untraceable
its orderliness
askew

from earthbound root
to purple fang