

Streak of Lightning

by Kayla Guthrie

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At a distance lie three girls. Shades of pink gently radiate from one girl's towel onto her skin and mingle with the pink stripes of her bikini. She sits up and asks her friend a question, holding her arms across her folded knees for a few moments, then rotates to recline on her back.

It's well before noon, but a continuous House beat is heard emanating from the Bondi Icebergs swim club, a pastel cubic structure that's perched on high rocks above the beach.

Far from the water, an older couple is getting dressed. The man is already folding his beige hotel towel while the woman slips a black t-shirt over her brown bikini top and pulls a wide metallic belt across her middle. She is wearing a long cheetah patterned skirt in a neutral color and carries gold flats in one hand, hoisting a wicker basket over her shoulder with the other. They stand, then efficiently make their way up the concrete ramp to the boardwalk.

I've been reading a story about a man who experiences the death of his sick lover. He lived in a house with her while she died, and the weaker she got, the more he began feeling invaded by thoughts that he felt were hers. Foreign but familiar, they seemed to be attaching themselves to his mind. He described something escaping from her body as it died slowly, following him invisibly when he went for walks in the garden outside their house. A raw but dry attraction that makes me think the words: "blunt and scalding colors."

The man in the book said:

*Let me interrupt this narrative for a moment to describe a captivating image that just came to my mind, an image that encompasses an entire vision, an image at best of an ecstatic outburst, of an "angel", as far away and as imperceptible as the horizon, piercing through the cloudy thickness of the night but never appearing as more than a strangely interior glow. It appears like the unfathomable vacillations of a streak of lightning. The angel raises up before itself a lance of crystal that shatters in the silence.**

I stop reading, close my eyes, and hear: "No, but I know what you mean."
I see an image inside me: thin slide down the sandy center of the interior

body, moving in the dark, then a blank shore further down, and a series of whip lashes, in a line across from right to left: three, four, five rows, about a dozen whips across making little v shapes in the sand.

I open my eyes and notice a plane making its way into the distance above the Southern beach. Smoothly heading North, getting smaller, it slowly vanishes as if being sucked into the atmosphere. Below in the surf, a man with a thick middle is balancing on a surfboard. He slides into the shallow section and topples into the small waves breaking ashore.

A thirtyish guy with square Ray Bans and a narrow physique wears a pair of black bike shorts. He is carrying a camera and walking my way. For a moment he makes eye contact, looking as if he's just thought of something, then politely moves past me, hiking diagonally up the beach.

I get back the day after New Year's, feeling cautious and unfamiliar from traveling. Unable to sleep after the 21-hour journey, I sit down at my computer. After awhile I feel a rocking motion in my body, light sickly tipping inside. My skin is dry and my thoughts are nervous and distant. In my head I hear an Australian voice say: "Outside there was a full moon. There was no lingering eight."

*from Georges Bataille, *The Culprit*

