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Lightning Rod

Bruce Fulton

*University of British Columbia*, bruce.fulton@ubc.ca

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I couldn’t believe my eyes. I’d had the same experience and survived, but seeing it happen to another person was something else. The forked bolt had definitely gone through him, so how could he get up and walk away like that just minutes later?

Lightning Rod

Kim Young-ha

Translated by Jane Lee

1

It’s hard to describe how I felt the first time I heard about the group. I wonder if it’d be like discovering the existence of an identical twin as an adult. I was delighted, but uneasy in a way. The very foundation of my existence seemed to crumble away.

Everyone has at least one life-changing experience. But there’s a problem when that experience is short and intense. All details fall out of focus and you reach a point where you doubt whether the incident in fact occurred. To hold onto the experience, it’s often turned into a story and shared with others, embellishments added along the way. It doesn’t easily fade away once it’s been turned into words.

My case though, was different. After that short, intense moment I felt an unwarranted guilt. It’s funny as I look back now, but whenever something went wrong I was like any other girl in blaming myself, probably because I was brought up to be the first to apologize, even for problems caused by other people’s mistakes.

Maybe that’s why I couldn’t tell my mom or my best friend about what happened. Time passed and as I got older it wasn’t so much embarrassment as my assumption that no one would believe me that made it so much harder to talk about. For starters, I began to question whether it even happened. Then there was high school, which passed by like a whirlwind. There were monthly exams, trivial relationships to navigate, and a family life that was not always peaceful. At some point I forgot that I’d had such an extraordinary experience.

Or maybe I didn’t forget so much as bury it, shroud it in the depth we call the subconscious. It was definitely a terrifying experience but not so severe as to
beget a mental disorder that had to be probed and treated. Like the day I had my first period, the memory of that experience slipped behind the curtain of childhood, leaving only a trace of its existence.

I first heard about the group from a friend whose job is to surf the Internet. She sits in front of a computer all day and compiles an array of information such as newspaper articles to pass on to clients. If she finishes early and has time to kill she browses websites or communication networks that look interesting.

“I came across something really weird when I was surfing the net today.”

“What was it?”

“A group called Adad. I clicked on it in thinking it was some kind of animation club, but it wasn’t.”

“What was it, then?”

My friend lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper, “It’s a group of people who’ve survived a lightning strike.”

At those words, an infinitesimal current of electricity rushed through the phone and into my veins. My body trembled and my eardrums throbbed with a hum I thought would never end. My body was remembering. Like a mummy released from an ancient spell, my body was brushing off the dust and recreating the phenomenon I’d experienced that day. Until that moment, I believed I’d forgotten. My head pounded as if it would burst, my hearing grew fuzzy, and my sight dim. Everything returned to normal in an instant, but I was left feeling like I’d just recovered from an illness: weak but rejuvenated.

I could hear my friend’s voice trailing from the receiver, which had somehow ended up on the floor. I picked it up and told her not to worry. “Must’ve been my anemia. Just got a bit dizzy.” She signed off after lecturing me to drink more milk. As I hung up, a faint shiver cascaded down my spine like an aftershock.

It seems a spell can’t be controlled once it’s been let loose. I started having reoccurring dreams that involved emotionally upsetting experiences. A blue flash would pierce the air and pass though me, causing pain and pleasure simultaneously, my body a receptacle for the confluence of darkness and light, air and earth.
One such night, I awoke from the dream and, like a sleepwalker, rose and went to my computer. I turned on the lamp and out of it poured a colorless light that didn’t smart my eyes. I logged in to a communication network, typed *adad*, and was greeted with the following: “In the beginning of the world there was darkness. He said, ‘Let there be light,’ and light was born and shone on the world. Let the light come.” I trawled through the site’s various forums and found that most were blocked to non-members. Those that were accessible contained general information on thunder and lightning. Some postings were technical and weren’t easy to understand.

Past the copious writing, there was an introduction to the gathering from the president. “For those who wish to join, please familiarize yourself with the following particulars before submitting an application. Eligibility for regular membership is restricted to those who attend at least three research meetings and have been baptized by lightning attack at least once. Those who have not been electrically baptized are limited to research membership. Research members may not participate in activities such as lightning-chasing excursions.”

I looked up “lightning attack” in the dictionary; it means “the falling of a thunderbolt.” I leaned back, staring blankly at the monitor, then jabbed the power button. I could have shut down properly, but I was too afraid to bother with any procedure. Who were these people? A cult of mystics? A bunch of crazies? What did they mean “at least one baptism by lightning attack?” Were there people who’d been hit two, three times? And if so, were “lightning-chasing excursions” trips where people tried to get hit by lightning? I was confused. A violent conflict was unfolding deep in my consciousness. I heard my twins calling and a part of me wanted to flee from them.

I closed my eyes and struggled to recall my memories of that day. It might’ve been around springtime. We had accompanied our fishing enthusiast dad to the South Han River, or was it the North Han? In any case we pitched our tent at the riverside, where the rocks were big. As night fell, my dad cooked *maeunt’ang* with the fish he’d caught that day and washed it down with *soju*. The next thing I knew, it was raining. I remember it hammering down on the roof of the tent and I remember how sticky it felt inside. I unzipped the tent flap – I think I had to go pee – and went out. I was going toward the river and I had a flashlight – but this is where things get fuzzy. I think someone else might’ve been there and that I hesitated for that reason. And I can’t remember if I peed before it happened, or after. What I do remember was an extremely odd feeling. Every hair on my body
stood on end, like when I watch a scary movie, and I felt something electric running up my forearms. At that exact moment, light entered me. I felt like I was inflating to gargantuan proportions. Tens of thousands of people were roaring inside me. And then something ripped through the sky and pummeled my eardrums like exploding cannonballs.

I was sure I'd died. Idiotically, I also felt a strong urge to pee. It never occurred to me that dead people don't have to pee. They say that when you die, your life and the faces of your family flash before your eyes like a kaleidoscope, but all I wanted was to pee. I think I was lying face down on the pebbles next to the river when I wet myself. I was so embarrassed that I felt relieved to have died right then. But as I watched the sky light up and heard claps of thunder strike my eardrums I finally understood: I'd been struck by lightning and I had survived.

The funny thing is, the first thing I did was check my watch. It was a Guess wristwatch that my dad had bought me on a trip to Hong Kong. But I couldn't see the dial. I groped around and staggered in the general direction of the tent. I hung my soaking raincoat on the tent line and ducked inside. A rumble shook the tent and I heard my dad rustling. I crawled in and curled up between him and my mom.

The Guess watch hasn't worked since. 10:32:24.

From time to time I take it out and look at it. Every time, I have to pee.

I met J at my third research meeting. He was speaking about a particular lightning phenomenon.

"Saint Elmo's fire is a kind of brush discharge. If there is a strong electric field in the vicinity of a thunderstorm, such as the mast of a ship or a lightning rod, electric energy is discharged. Picture a ship on a black sea caught in sheets of torrential rain, and waves lashing against the mast like the tongue of a monster. Imagine the needle of a compass spinning out of control and metal quivering up to the sky."

I saw Saint Elmo’s fire in his eyes as he spoke; cobalt fireworks seemed to dance between his eyes.

Everyone was listening intently when someone whispered in awe, “There's an electric erythema carved into his neck and down his back.” I'd learned that
electric erythema is a redness of the skin that’s shaped like a tree branch or a lightning bolt. It’s engraved on the body during an electric baptism, but it doesn’t appear on everyone. When thousands of amps of electric current course through the body, the capillaries in its path swell, leaving a trail on the skin. Those without an electric erythema seemed jealous of those who did, because of the shape.

When he turned around I scanned the nape of his neck. He was wearing a loose T-shirt cut low in the back that exposed his red electric erythema. Seeing it with my own eyes extinguished any lingering doubts I had harbored about their identity and I became very afraid. I’d suspected them to be deadbeats who had nothing better to do than get into heated virtual showdowns over banalities. A part of me may have hoped that’s who they were, but it was becoming clear that wasn’t the case. I spotted a similar one imprinted on the cheek of the man who was sitting in front of me and asking J a question.

What the hell am I doing here? I asked myself for the first time. I wasn’t about to get struck by lightning again, so what was the point of joining this lot and studying things like the electric charge of thunder and lightning?

I brushed away my skepticism as the meeting and my first encounter with J came to a close. All I knew about him was that his eyes blazed with Saint Elmo’s fire and his skin bore an electric erythema. A proper meeting took place later. I was promoted to regular member status immediately following my third research meeting. The Guess watch was submitted as evidence of my baptism and the members handled it with exquisite care. They expressed such respect as they passed it hand to hand in examination that I thought it must be transforming into a relic of Christ himself. Everyone had an article that served as proof of his or her electric baptism, a crumpled coin, a pair of discoloured glasses.

Once the research members left, refreshments were served and the official initiation ceremony took place. The final stage called for a detailed account of my electric baptism. Others had been dismissed at this point after falsities in their stories were exposed. I stuttered and rambled through my testimony, leaving out the part about going pee. It was the first time I had talked about the incident; I was embarrassed and confused about what to say and in what order. I felt like how a rape victim must feel when testifying to a prosecutor. Still they were patient and courteous, offering the right words when I hesitated. At the end of my laborious and long-winded account, there was applause and everyone welcomed me to the group. Later at a pub people came up to me individually and, with voices saturated with moisture, shared their first experience.
I heard a total of seven cases that night, each unique. One person had woken up after several hours of being unconscious. Another only felt a jolt you’d get from a 200 volt plug. The only one not contributing to the hubbub was J. He was burrowed in a chair with his nose buried in a science book that was written in English. No one disturbed him.

4

When we got back from the fishing trip, my mom suffered from an extended illness. Three months later, she was dead; we never found out what killed her. I had just started my second year of middle school and thought that my mom died because I’d been struck by lightning. I’d cheated death and my mom had died in my place.

I don’t remember much about my mom. Her face was thin and pale and she was very timid, cowering or fainting whenever she saw a mouse. I don’t know if my parents had a good relationship, but my dad remarried straight away. Sometimes, I think that he might’ve been waiting for her to die. Every time she got sick, which happened often, my dad would get annoyed.

After my mom died, I became obsessed with drawing. When I got home from my first Adad meeting, I pulled out my high school sketchbook. The first drawing was of a grey lightning bolt cutting across blue air. There were at least ten similar drawings and I was in some of them, a young girl curled up and plugging her ears. She was drawn so small that she looked like a larva.

Try as I may, I couldn’t remember drawing them. Only pictures of Kyōngbok Palace or Inwang Mountain were on display in my recollection, pictures that had won first place at student exhibitions and could be found hanging proudly in the living room.

How could memories be so fleeting? I felt dizzy.

5

"Your story contains an omission."

I was thinking about the desert when J threw that curveball at me. I was thinking about how lightning can strike in the desert. The desert! I was working out what I’d learned about how it strikes barren ground, and how a similar albeit rare phenomenon can occur in dust, which also has an electric charge.
“Excuse me?”
“Something’s missing from your account. Of your electric baptism, I mean.”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”
“Everyone leaves that part out at first. Still don’t know what I’m talking about? Excretion. I’m talking about the excretion.”
“...” “It’s a precious experience. It marks the exit of the electric current from our bodies before fear. It’s what saved us. Understand? Without it, we’d be lumps of coal.” J spoke curtly as if he was pronouncing a verdict. I feared him more than lightning at that moment. “We’ve shared identical experiences. There are hundreds of people around the world like us. You can relax here and share things no one else would believe.”

I mustered up some courage. “Then why the heck does this group exist? Just to share experiences? Is it like a veterans’ meeting? A club for people that have cheated death to gather, reminisce, and hold annual parties?”
“No,” he said flatly. “We meet to receive lightning. That’s it. Nothing more, nothing less.”
“Isn’t that a bit dangerous?”
“That’s why preparation is needed; we are in the process of getting ready.”
“What do you mean preparation?”
“The preparation to face fear. We’ve been revived once already. One day, millions of amps of electric current descended upon you and you, unaware of your own fate, extracted it faster than fear. A trail has been cut through us so that when we are struck again, the current will follow that path and pass through.”
“I don’t believe you.”

“The probability of people dying when they’ve already escaped death once before is infinitesimal. Our friends have done the research. These are their findings.” He handed me a report he’d received from an online news group.
“There are historical precedents of course. In 1325, a woman from Toledo, Spain received two baptisms by lightning attack and survived. Ultimately, she was accused of witchcraft and burned at the stake. Who knows, she may have been a witch. Murayama Genchiro, a samurai in the Edo period of Japan’s feudal age, was struck on a mountain, twice in a field, and once on account of the sword he carried. He survived to become a high-ranking officer and died of natural causes at an old age. I myself have had four such experiences.”

His way of stressing “four” was somehow saturated with anxiety. Did he experience an urge to pee whenever he thought about it too?
“Fine. Then why do you do it? Just to transmit electricity again? Is it like a hobby for you, like bungee jumping? Do you get off on fear?”

His answer was cold and resolute. “I think you should ask yourself that question. Why are you here?” That’s exactly what I wanted to ask him. “Go on a lightning chase. Then you’ll understand why we’re crazy about our work.”

Fear. What is this thing we call fear? J’s words echoed in my mind long after the meeting. Why did he say that fear is abrupt? Fear had always been a part of me. It’s the sound of a man’s trailing footsteps closing in on a dark street; it’s his hand in my blouse, drawing my skirt aside and brushing up my legs; it’s my dad’s dead drunkenness and my new mother’s hysteria; it’s the children that pick gum off the bus. Fear is why I’m still a virgin, why I’ve incited the annoyance of ex-boyfriends, and the reason why I’m mildly neurotic. No major problems though.

I didn’t see why I should change, or trudge around a rainy field trying to get hit by lightning for that matter.

I stopped going to meetings. No one stopped me. Still, like a phantom, I secretly logged in to the forum. With their usual fervor, they wrote and wrote about atmospheric electric charges and shared their research on the formation and structure of thunderclouds. I noticed that each member had a different area of interest. One was fascinated by myths about thunder and lightning. He was serializing the lightning that appeared in Indian, North American, and Greek mythology. Another was compiling historical events. Benjamin Franklin’s monumental kite experiment in May 1752 was a given, but she was also gathering related materials from Medieval Europe and the Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty.

Another member had left for Sumatra, which is known around the world for the frequency of its lightning storms. He hadn’t been able to participate in any domestic lightning chases because of his office job. This time he’d taken a leave of absence and planned a tour of Sumatra and the Philippines. His timing was perfect as it was the rainy season, when squalls bluster and heat lightning strikes frequently. However, no one knows the path that lightning will take; whether he’d succeed was up in the air. Everyone had given him their wholehearted support and sent him off like pilgrim struck out for the Holy Land.
I continued dreaming. Rain was pouring down on a rocky river bank, where I was wedged in the crevice of a boulder, shaking with fear. A wet wind blew and the next instant the sky turned pitch black. I am alone. A towering, gnarled tree shoots up and glares down at me. In other dreams, a lightning rod stands in place of the tree. Sometimes lightning hurtles down and the earth trembles. Millions of sharp rocks pelt down like hail. Thunder reverberates all around and I have to pee. The urge to pee drives me crazy.

The dreams are similar. When I wake up my bladder feels like it’s going to burst, but only a trickle comes out when I go to the washroom. Some days I wet my pants, just like that night. I wonder why I keep having these dreams. I’m changing out of my underwear when I look at my reflection in the mirror. It’s then that I see it. Starting at my breasts and cutting down past my belly button is an electric erythema.

I met with J.

"Do you dream too?"

J nodded. "That experience left a stronger impression on our bodies than you think. You can try to forget but it arouses eventually. The body does not forget that it passed through faster than fear."

"What do I have to do then?"

"Unite fear and electricity. When you do, you become the electric charge and discharge into the sky and the earth. You become the master of the atmosphere, the earth and your body."

I didn’t understand him, but something had already been coursing through me. Whatever it was, it was calling the electric charge in the earth and the sky. My sleep-deprived body told me so, and the bodily fluids that excreted freely were whispering the same.

"Do you know how Dionysus was born?" J asked.

"No."

"Of all the myths and legends about lightning, my favorite is the story of his birth. There once was a beautiful woman named Semele and Zeus revealed himself to her. They shared a brilliant love affair and soon she was pregnant with his child. But Zeus’ wife, Hera caught wind of the affair and as the goddess of jealousy she had no choice but to exact revenge. Hera provoked Semele, taunting, “Zeus doesn’t love you. Why else do you think he doesn’t show you his true self?”
Blinded by envy, Semele confronted Zeus, who had promised to satisfy all her requests. And so Zeus was obliged to ride into Semele's room on his chariot encircled with lightning and thunder. Semele, who was a mortal, was engulfed by the lightning's flames and died. Zeus extracted the six-month-old fetus from Semele's womb and planted it in his thigh. Once its term was complete, the baby tore out of his father's thigh and entered the world. He is the God of wine, pleasure, and reproduction. He is Dionysus.”

Dionysus' story was depressing. There were two women and one man; a man who was too strong, jealousy, and there was lightning.

“It's a sad story. I'd like to draw it sometime.” J also seemed to have a past that he was avoiding. Why, of all myths, did he like that one? Did he also have a child that he'd had to grow in his thigh? “Why do you want to be hit by lightning?”

J didn't answer. Those who take on the charismatic role of a group are usually tacit and he was no different. After a moment of silence he asked, “Why does the artist draw? Why does the car racer race, and why does the writer write? They could lead ordinary lives. Why do they throw themselves into such unrewarding work? Why do they devote their lives to endeavors that return one, at most two instants of joy?”

“But their jobs aren't dangerous like yours. They work constantly and wait for that certain opportunity to fall in their lap. They're different.”

“No. We're the same. You've seen that we're constantly preparing for the moment our existence will change. We search tirelessly for the electric current and prepare thoroughly for it, but we cannot be baptized until He visits us. I will accede that there are certain aspects that are unique to what we do. One day He will come looking for me and at that moment, for that second, I will catch a glimpse of another realm, another me; I will become master of my body, the atmosphere, and the earth. We are -- I am alone in my search. Until I achieve perfection, until I transcend the point where my ego accords fear and electricity, I will chase thunder clouds.”

One day, out of the blue, a lightning chase was announced. Excursions can't be scheduled more than a day in advance because lightning strikes when there's a precipitous change in atmospheric layers. Only then do cumulonimbus clouds
form and cool downward winds collide with warm upward winds. This mainly occurs during the Spring Equinox when warm air from the south is pushed north by cold air. The day before we left, the weather forecast projected an unstable atmosphere and ensuing thunder and lightning accompanied by guerilla rains. I was nervous as we went over the details of the excursion, but everyone encouraged me warmly, “There’s really nothing to worry about; not everyone who goes gets hit. You don’t have to hold any equipment if you don’t feel comfortable. You’d be hard pressed to get hit once in ten lightning chases anyways. We’ve gone out a bunch of times where the thunderclouds weren’t even formed.”

We left the Family Reunion Plaza in two cars and got on the Seoul-Pusan Expressway heading for Ch’ungju. The other members said the best spots in Korea were the Han River, Nakdong River, Kųmgang River, and the Yōngsan River Valley. They informed me that this was because the fast moving atmosphere above the rivers collides with the slow moving atmosphere above the mountains.

We settled upstream of the Namhan River near Ch’ungju and unpacked our gear. Everyone put on a metal safety hat and hiking boots that had an electrode fixed to the sole to conduct electricity. Everyone also carried a metal rod that was at least twelve millimeters in diameter and plated with copper or fused zinc. The sky teemed with clouds that threatened to unleash a downpour at any minute, and the wind kept changing directions. I was scared.

“Smell that. I’ve never smelled anything like it before,” J remarked, sniffing the air. “The rate at which the wind is changing direction is also highly unusual. Abnormally high temperatures must be causing the warm air to materialize prematurely. Look.” He pointed towards the riverbank, where a mountain range hugged a cliff. Clouds were layering themselves on top of one another and a mass of black clouds was forming above the river. “In dozens of lightning chasing excursions, this kind of weather is a first. I saw similar weather four years ago in Guam, but it was not this extreme. Collisions of this intensity don’t occur there because the freezing in the tops of cumulonimbus clouds is not adequate. This is the ideal weather for electric baptisms. The most spectacular show of your life is about to unfold. Prepare to be blown away.”

The members had been listening to J as they prepared their equipment, and their faces were flushing a deeper and deeper red. The veterans, including J, who had been baptized at least four times, were assigning positions. They favored
open areas clear of tall trees or electric poles. The ideal spot was next to a protruding rock. Everyone fell silent once the operation commenced, and something like heroism emanated from each member.

The beginners learned as they worked alongside the veterans. I helped J, whose gear was more worn than anyone else’s. He said it was due to his multiple baptisms, since each electrocution causes considerable corrosion.

I was scrambling about when I stopped in my tracks and took in my surroundings: people were scattered ten meters apart, holding antennas and trembling weakly as they stared fretfully up into darkness; people looked like they were trying to communicate with aliens.

"The air is changing" said J.

"How?"

"Can’t you smell the bleach?"

"A little. I think. Smells like Clorox."

"When an electric current is discharged, the oxygen in the air turns into ozone. It should start anytime now.” J picked up his flashlight and gave the signal. At that moment, someone hunched over the river. I shone my flashlight over to see a man vomiting. “Don’t worry. It happens all the time. Nerves.” J’s words were punctuated by a roar as the sky split open. I inched away from him. The smell of bleach was getting stronger. “Don’t go too far if you don’t want to get baptized. I am the lightning rod. It’s safest to stay within a three meter radius of me.”

Lightning rod. It’s used to avert lightning, but from the rod’s perspective its purpose is to be struck by lightning. J calling himself a lightning rod saddened me. I was surrounded by darkness, impending clouds, fire burning in people’s eyes, and the swiftly flowing river. Then there was me and J, who was awaiting his fifth electric baptism. I looked into his eyes and saw my fifteen-year-old self crawling in between my dad and mom. An intense burst of light flashed within a cloud. It was an intracloud discharge.

“It’s on its way.” The number of vomiting people grew to two. This time it was a woman in her early thirties who worked as a nurse at a general hospital. It occurred to me to go and help her, but I stayed put knowing that everyone was helpless here.

It was then the first genuine bolt of lightning struck. It wasn’t an intracloud discharge, but an electric discharge between a thundercloud and the earth. Low
grumbling erupted all around. It looked like no one had been hit yet. Intermittent drops of rain had turned into drizzle when, with a whoosh, it began pouring in buckets. Brilliant, white-blue lightning danced all around, piercing the ground. Through the downpour, I could make out the outline of a figure knelt over in the sand.

"Hey! Do you know how lightning strikes?" he shouted.
"I'm not too sure."

He pointed at the sky and continued to bellow. "First, that thunder cloud discharges a leader streamer. When the streamer contacts the earth, a return stroke ascends to the cloud. It happens so quickly though, that to the naked eye it appears as a single strike."
"Even I know that."
"Doesn't that blow your mind? The fact that the cloud and the atmosphere discharge an electric current simultaneously to rip the air apart?"
"But it's scary."
"Fear is natural. Think of maximizing your fear and using your strength exclusively to amass electric charges."

His speech became more and more excited, but it was hard to make sense of the little I could make out through the rain and thunder. The earth was getting pummeled by lightning; I could've been watching a fantastic fireworks show. A lightning bolt hurtled down in a single stream when, no more than a few hundred meters from the ground, it split into a thousand prongs that struck a dozen spots at the same time. I couldn't help thinking about how lightning changes the earth’s composition. When a massive electric current pierces the ground, it awakens the earth. What was the identity of this great power that was shaking the earth beneath my feet and the sky above my head? Was it merely electric discharge? Amid the fireworks, I could understand those that worshipped thunder and lightning.

I looked at J. His antenna was quivering. The fact that he, who had been baptized four times, was shaking comforted me. Light flashed to my right and I felt a surge of electricity enter one ear and pass out the other. Soon after, the thunderous sound of an ax cleaving through a door shook my entire body. I fell to my knees and plugged my ears. When the wave of deafening crashes subsided, I looked around. The first person in the group to ever talk to me was splayed on his side. I ran to him.

"There's no need. That's his third time." J shouted, but I didn't stop.
He was unconscious. Traces of a smile lingered on his lips and his hand was squeez ed tightly around an antenna. I tapped his cheek, trying to wake him. The nurse who had vomited earlier rushed over. She checked his pulse and said that it was a bit weak, but that he was otherwise fine. I didn’t believe her. I shouted his name over and over through the pouring rain. Moments later he regained consciousness and staggered towards the car. Everyone watched him walk away with eyes that were mixed with equal parts fear and envy. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I’d had the same experience and survived, but seeing it happen to another person was something else. The forked bolt had definitely gone through him, so how could he get up and walk away like that just minutes later?

I turned around and walked back towards J. The raindrops were getting smaller and it looked like it would end soon. As I approached, I saw J’s antenna shuddering violently. And then, some powerful force seemed to rush into the back of his head as his whole body pulsated with light, like headlights switched to high beam.

I saw his body shudder and crumple sluggishly. As I watched, fluids sloshed around every nook and crevice of my body. My legs gave out and I squatted and peed in the spot where I collapsed. The muggy air was drenched with the smell of Clorox and I could feel my mind being bleached white.

I sat there blankly for a long time. The rain was dying down and the wind was blustering, pushing black cumulonimbus clouds over the mountain. Intracloud discharges persisted as yellow lights flickered between clouds like lamps atop buildings. I dragged myself towards J, my clothes still in disorder. He was twitching like an insect.

I covered his body with mine. He was hot like a plate just removed from the microwave. I groped his body with the familiarity of a wife. Warm water was gushing from his lower body.

I was overwhelmed with affection for his body, which had been penetrated by tens of thousands of amps of electricity. I looked up at the sky where the clouds were leaving the scene as if nothing had happened. I lifted my head and gazed down at J. Thick clouds of steam were billowing from his body. I stared at him for some time and then I kissed his burning lips. The iota of electricity remaining in his body flowed into mine. It caused a small spasm in my tongue and, like the switch of a circuit breaker, it turned me on.
A heady wind scattered the clouds and the rain stopped. The rush of the flowing river reached my muffled ears, and the black shadows strewn along the riverbank erected their bodies like soldiers on a battlefield at the end of an artillery attack. They lumbered towards the river embankment, offering each other a hand and comforting those lightening had side-stepped. It was like viewing a Millet.

And so my first lightning chase ended. I long for that outing as I sit here at home, the smell of bleach, the humid electric charge, the erect lightning rods. I’m painting with acrylic and I have a feeling it’s going to turn out brilliant.