Necessary Light

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LIGHTNING SPREADS OUT ACROSS THE WATER

It was already too late
when the swimmers began
to wade through the heavy
water toward shore,
the cloud’s black greatcoat
flinging across the sun,
forked bolts blitzing
the blind ground,
splits and cracks
going their own easiest way,
and with them, the woman
in the purple tank suit,
the boy with the water-wings,
one body then another.
And this is nothing about God
but how Stone Pond turned
at the height of the day
to flashpoint and fire
stalking across the water,
climbing the beach
among the screams
and the odor of burned skin
until twelve of them
curled lifeless on sand
or floated on the tipped
white caps of the surface,
and twenty-two more
walked into the rest
of their lives
knowing what waits
in the clouds to claim them
is random—
that nothing can stop it,
that afterwards the pond
smooths to a stillness
that gives back,
as though nothing could move it,
the vacant imponderable sky.