

1984

Freedom

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Freedom

Abstract

The almost naked man is running through the surf, in a summer warm and weightless as the blood now in his veins.

man. This was the kind of fear she could not get up and run away from. It was the kind of fear no-one could rescue her from. And the cabin remained totally dark. She was afraid to speak to the man and she feared their silence. Without thinking, she prayed.

When the train stopped it was beginning to grow light. The man slipped out of the cabin without either of them saying a word to each other. Not a single aspect of him as a person remained with her. She refused to question the man's motive or his awareness (or lack of it) that she would have been frightened. But, whatever the direction she had been growing towards in her understanding of South Africa, the experience re-directed.

Stephen Watson

FREEDOM

The almost naked man is running through the surf,
in a summer warm and weightless as the blood
now in his veins.

He's running in the sun, in the daylight newly come,
racing the green breakers along a glassy morning shore,
veering to the sea that's skating white and beige,
half-floundering through thick water, through swirls
of cold like smoke...

He is alive again, the light evaporating round his body,
his every stride igniting the metal, mineral brine
sluicing down his chest and legs and rinsing out
his clotted mouth.

In the distance the dunes are white as salt-mounds;
the pine-mountains cones of green.

In the distance, two women, young like him, stark-naked,
lie facing the land, face down upon the hot, packed sand.
They don't see him approach and pass, don't see him seeing
them

and increase his speed, the down-drive of his arms,
and fix his eyes to five more miles of waves that pucker,
heave, and skid across the flats of water-hardened strand.
They don't see him, that he's almost sprinting now,
puncturing the skin of water, fracturing its skin of light —
running in the only freedom he knows, the freedom of the body
when it's alone;

in this lovely suppleness of lungs, flex of tendons, muscle,
reliving the light, thin limbs, the boy that he once was,
reliving the time before he became this body half-disembodied
by its need of another body.

But now the women are behind; now there's no desire.
Here, in this vertigo of light, there's no need of any other.

With the beach disintegrating beneath a backwash,
in the glaze of water on his thighs and breasts,
with this coral roar of waves landsliding in his ears,
he wants only to run, to run on like this forever,
through the summer,

in the water made sun, the light made water, the water
salt as blood

with his own sweat no different from the sea's,
his mind no different from those scoured shells the tide
shovels back and forth like grain.

He wants only to run, faster, far beyond his own exhaustion —
always deeper in this freedom whose futility he'll know
long before the summer's over.