

## Everything is a Fossil

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*Thomas Reynolds*

Exhausted,  
I work over the last of the fossil  
we gathered this afternoon,  
digging in ravines near the spillway.  
Lit by only a small lamp,  
the table is covered with tools of the collector:  
brushes, knives, labels, the solution of white glue  
diluted with water  
used to preserve broken fossils  
or to bring out  
the delicate quality of the dendrites,  
or the finger-like  
network of veins of angiosperms.  
Each specimen is placed, no matter how small,  
into its own carefully marked box or bag,  
or in the small green filing cabinet  
in the corner of the room.

My eyes blur.

As I bend over the last find,  
the desk becomes its own landscape,  
strewn with boulders, and the shells  
of dead lifeforms begin to move  
across the dark rocks.  
My hand is no longer my own,  
so still and rigid,  
as if it were the hand of someone else,  
or had turned to stone.

Cricket songs wake me up,  
so I turn on the light,  
searching at the rug's edge,  
behind the desk,  
until I find it among the rocks,  
resting on a shale piece,  
silent, nearly invisible.  
It had crawled there  
to get out of the cold.  
Its legs barely move when I tap it  
with my fingertips, the hard casing  
of its body nearly as firm as stone.  
It does not crawl away, hides  
under the shadows of the desk,  
so I turn out the light  
and hear nothing the rest of the night.

I find it in the morning,  
legs drawn up, stiff,  
and so attached to stone  
they break when I lift its fragile form,  
carry it downstairs,  
drop it into the mulch  
around the flowers.  
Its body will never survive,  
nor its imprint, nor ours,  
but the atoms will strike out,  
spinning in ever widening circles,  
and be drawn up into other bodies,  
through flowers, the dark stems,  
air's breath.

