

## From the Perspective of a Crinoid

Soft tissue coats my skeleton as I wave in the current. I look upwards and see the sun; I look around and see others like me, with their five arms fanned out above them, waving in the current of the ocean, filtering water through their feathery pinnules but keeping what can be eaten as food. We inhabit as deep as the current goes—once rooted in the sediment we cannot move, can only be stirred by the flowing water. Since choosing a place to root as a larva, I have been building my stalk, reaching upwards so that I might better access the nutrient-rich current. The water becomes imperceptibly heavier as I incorporate atoms into my porous calcite skeleton. I create ligaments to bind each piece of my body together, suturing the columna into a stalk, cementing the plates of my calyx that holds my digestive organs. We are colorful—vibrant reds, purples, and oranges light up the seafloor. Occasionally one of us falls prey to a sea urchin that consumes us, bones and all. But we persist, letting the current bring what it may.

Time passes, and I remain in my place on the seafloor. I am not alone, not even in my own body: small bugs have embedded themselves in my tissue and my bones. I feel them scraping, carving deeper into the surface of my skeleton. My tissue swells around these encroaching visitors, only creating a deeper pit for them to reside in. I continue growing nonetheless, everywhere but underneath these visitors. Eventually, my skeleton becomes ornamented with several pits, swollen at the edges. I simply allow the current to move me whichever way it chooses; I still have everything I need in this colorful field of lilies, and I persist.

More time passes, and I have another visitor, a larger one this time. A shelled creature attaches itself to my calyx. It drills into my tissue and my bone, creating a hole through which it can reach my partially digested food. Nonetheless, I let the current pass through my feathery arms, filtering and feeding as normal; but I grow weak. I grow weaker and weaker as this visitor seems to take and take, and it is still attached as I fall, my crown that once proudly waved in the water column gently coming to rest on the seafloor. The ligaments I made for my stalk can no longer support me, my body starved of nutrients by

this shelly creature. I lie there on the seafloor, the current still moving me whichever direction it wishes.

It only takes three cycles of light and dark for the soft parts I built to begin to decay. My brilliant colors fade as my flesh falls away. The tissues connecting my bones deteriorate—I am falling apart. My five arms are the first to completely detach from my calyx. My stalk follows, breaking into several, almost evenly-spaced segments of columna, the ossicles within each segment not yet having been severed from each other by decay. With each pass of light and dark I become less whole, more fragmented as I transform into my component parts. The current that once brought me nutrients now carries my body away, piece by piece, away from the place on the seafloor where I lived and where I died. It is peaceful, but the current is beginning to grow in strength. I recognize these currents: they tell me there is a storm up above. Now only a calyx with a small segment of my stalk, I am abruptly lifted off the sediment. I tumble through a sandy whirlwind and am struck hard by the seafloor when the turmoil subsides for a brief moment. I am looking around at this unfamiliar place when I am lifted again, and the sequence repeats. When I finally come to rest it is dark, and it is calm. I am only my calyx now, though my shelled visitor remains attached. I have never been this far away from home.

It is dark because I am covered in sediment. I can no longer feel the current, the life-giving current. Yet somehow, I persist, without the current, without my life. Somehow, I have become suspended in space and time: in this sediment I cannot tell which way is up, and without the light I cannot tell how much time passes. But I am not scared. Eventually, I begin to change. At first, minerals crystallize within the pores of my bones, saving me from being crushed. But then I feel warmth, it grows hotter, and my surroundings become tighter around me. The calcite I used for my skeleton begins to dissolve, and I lose even more of myself, ion by ion. But somehow, I am still here. I don't know how much time has passed when the warmth subsides. I have become bound to the sediment that holds me, not by roots that dig into the sand but by hard minerals that grew in the empty spaces between us. I lay here, and I persist, somewhere in space and time that I cannot know.

I am lying here, with the shelled visitor similarly dead yet both of us still somehow persisting, when something bright and familiar strikes what is left of me. It is light, the same light I knew during my life. But I am somewhere impossibly dry now, and I feel a current of a different kind. I am lifted by a humongous organism that transports me through a foreign world. Once more I come to rest, but this time it is not dark.

Time passes, and I understand now that I have been put in a glass display case. There is a card in front of that reads, "Ordovician crinoid calyx with platyceratid gastropod attached." I look around me and see others like me, others that have lost parts of themselves somewhere between death and now. I have lost my colors; I have lost my flesh; I have lost my roots, my stalk, my crown; but I have gained some semblance of infinity.

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