

Remarkable Creatures

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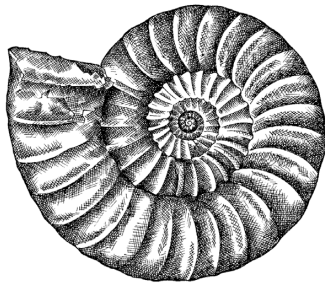
Extract

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I

*Different from all the
rocks on the beach*



Lightning has struck me all my life. Just once was it real. I shouldn't remember it, for I was little more than a baby. But I do remember. I was in a field, where there were horses and riders performing tricks. Then a storm blew in, and a woman – not Mam – picked me up and brought me under a tree. As she held me tight I looked up and saw the pattern of black leaves against a white sky.

Then there was a noise, like all the trees falling down round me, and a bright, bright light, which was like looking at the sun. A buzz run right through me. It was as if I'd touched a hot coal, and I could smell singed flesh and sense there was pain, yet it weren't painful. I felt like a stocking turned inside out.

Others begun pulling at me and calling, but I couldn't make a sound. I was carried somewhere, then there was warmth all round, not a blanket, but wet. It was water and I knew water – our house was close to the sea, I could see it from our windows. Then I opened my eyes, and it feels like they haven't been shut since.

The lightning killed the woman holding me, and two girls standing next to her, but I survived. They say I was a

quiet, sickly child before the storm, but after it I grew up lively and alert. I cannot say if they're right, but the memory of that lightning still runs through me like a shiver. It marks powerful moments of my life: seeing the first crocodile skull Joe found, and finding its body myself; discovering my other monsters on the beach; meeting Colonel Birch. Other times I'll feel the lightning strike and wonder why it's come. Sometimes I don't understand, but accept what the lightning tells me, for the lightning is me. It entered me when I was a baby and never left.

I feel an echo of the lightning each time I find a fossil, a little jolt that says, "Yes, Mary Anning, you are different from all the rocks on the beach." That is why I am a hunter: to feel that bolt of lightning, and that difference, every day.