

FOSSILS AREN'T FOUND IN APPALACHIA

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Cut the bone, count the circles inside,
to learn how long a dinosaur lived.
That's what a paleontologist does,

who knows it's *fossil*, not *bone*,
works in a field where *extinct*
and *extant* splits everything.

But two letters' difference
does not provide space enough
between for the gradations

of *lost* and *lingering*. The feeling
of *too late* that fills the chests
of the living to bursting with ache.

Or the room-filling light
that animates a diamond ring,
every time it is lifted from the box

where it has long lain,
though the man is buried,
who gave it to me.

The soil of our region
doesn't preserve remains,
the scientist claims. Here,

what we have to study of history
are only fossils washed downstream,
saved in sand, and by the sea.

Bloat and float is the name
of this theory. I would rather
speak of a buoyant body

carrying, over hundreds of miles,
millions of years, a story. And turn
my attention to the young woman

in the lab *rearticulating*.
Putting back together
a skeleton is what that means.