

## **DECENDING INTO THE CAVE.**

Process text for "Pulling the Earth Strings" by Sidsel Christensen, 2023

I stand at the entrance of the cave, where I am to enter and meet the big fire beast at the depth of the mountain core. But first, before I go in, there are two things to do. I have to leave everything behind. So, I strip of my clothes, underwear, socks and shoes. I leave my mobile phone inside the little heap of clothes on the ground. Then I take out my earrings, as that is the only jewellery I have on. I also have to bring a gift to the fire - creature. I want to give the most precious thing I have. And that I carry with me, inside my body.

So, I continue ahead, into the darkness of the cave. It turns pitch black, as my eyes have not yet adjusted to the light difference. A strong sent of humid, cold musk surrounds me. Immediately I feel disheartened. There is a chill, meeting my unprotected body and my feet step on hard rock and stony edges. There is suddenly no will in me to continue, and I turn and look out into the landscape behind me.

How I had been filled with hope and drive on my climb up to the cave. It had been a process of years to even get to a stage where I would consider something like this. My daily life did not warrant it. I did not think of it. In some way I did feel that my life was in a slow-motion crash. I did need another direction, but all I had the ability to do was to let myself drift in the endless maelstrom of self-constructed work assignments and Netflix streaming dreaming. I needed something else; I just did not know what. And then as it dried up more and more inside, it got increasingly obvious that there was a considerable, painful lack, and slowly the sense of the fire beast materialised in my core. After a while it got more and more clear and concrete, until one day where I looked at an article of the caves of the Sleipner mountain, I suddenly knew where to go, to travel to the mountain in Hellefjord. And I did it. I just went to the car and drove off. Days later I parked at the beginning of the tourist trails and started the long ascent to the cave. Luckily it does not get entirely dark at this time of the year, and I could walk through the night and the next day, eventually arriving at one of the cave openings the evening after.

Now I stand here and just feel like a fraud. I am freezing, I am inflated, what was I thinking? I feel my own pulse inside of my clenched jaws. The sense of my body, warm flesh and bones, up against the hard cold rock, is suddenly jarringly clear. – I have left water and food outside - protection, light – it feels like I am not made for this without protection and help from my things. It is human to cover up, to shield, to protect and extend oneself. It is just at the level of romantic ideas that this is viable as anything other than a suicide mission. And it was not suicide I was after. Or was it? It was a certain kind of threshold I was after. A certain kind of drastic change. But how radical could I be, or just plain insane? How insane am I?

NO. It is fear. What I am feeling now is a piercing, primal fear. How had I not noticed that before? Has the dull sense of surrender just taken over, even the expectations of what I am capable of feeling? Then again. fear is better than deflation. Fear has energy to it.

I stand there listening to my heart racing in my body. Piercing sensations of being crushed and cut attack my senses.

I take a deep breath sucking the humid, darkness into my body, trying to connect to something. Something else than this onslaught of pain. Deep underneath there is an inkling of curiosity. I could at least go a few meters in, just to sense how it is.

I take a step further, trying to breathe with uncomfortable pain. Then another step, and another ahead into the dark, slowly, leaning against one of the walls for support, another step, then another. The walls are damp and ice-hard under my touch. I can see a little more now, a slight curve in the tunnel ahead. From in there it would be impossible to look back, maybe that is better. I follow my hand that reaches for the hard chilling rock surface, fingers turning into eyes as all visibility slowly fades.

I still have a distinct experience of the size of the tunnel. How? Is it because of hearing, the way the sounds of my footsteps and breathing reverberates around me? I listen more intently as I walk forward. Then, slowly, a muffled fade out, no sound of steps as I feel something softer, like soil under my feet. I bow down and take some of it in my hand, lifting it up to my nose. Yes, it smells like earth, feels like earth. As I move forward my feet are sinking a few centimetres into it. This makes it easier to walk.

I put another foot forward, then a hand on the wall, then another foot, then a hand, then a foot, then a hand then a foot then a hand then a foot then a hand then a foot then a hand then a foot then a handthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafootthenahandthenafo otthenahandthenafootthenahand – the rhythm moves me forward, not any sense of courage or purpose. The sensation of toughing hard rock, and touching soft soil, hard rock and soft soil,. That is getting drier and deeper to step into, reaching my ankles, and the rock wall is also drier. The body sensations are different, slightly looser and wider. It is quiet, I cannot hear my heartbeat anymore, nor my breathing.

“oh”- I say out loud. Well, there is sound. “OOH”. I turn my face and let the sound out in different directions. The space seems bigger, but still encloses me. The walls are still there on my right side, and I can feel a slight gush of air coming from the blackness in front of me. I envision a tunnel, even though who knows, it might not be a tunnel. A sting of fear shoots through me, and I grab the wall with both hands. This surface is my lifeline. I sooth myself by telling myself that this wall can lead me out just as it has led me in. It is my marker of progress and orientation.

I continue sideways with both hands on the wall, letting my fingers and feet be the guiding senses that orient me onwards. I am starting to freeze, and I wonder how long I have been moving onwards now. It would take the same time for me to get out again. Has it been 10 minutes? Half an hour? The strange thing is that I am cold, and still felt week. But I am not unbearably cold. I also somehow feel cloaked by the darkness and the earth and the rock folding around me. The familiar smell of soil and stone, and the inner sense of my body

moving. It keeps me surprisingly clam. Almost still. As if even though I move on I am also still. Totally still, and it is the vast mountain that is rotating around me, moving through me.

It is the same, the same again and again. Feet stepping, hands touching. And then a slight change as if it has crept up on me from behind. I am actually knee high in soil now, dry and fluffy soil, that is soft to the touch as I sink my feet into it. It has a certain comfort. Is it also getting warmer? It almost feels like it is close to body temperature now. The stone is not so piercing to the touch anymore, as if the inside and outside of me is aligning. Or yes, it is getting hotter, now it feels hotter. The slight breeze that still flows to me from the space ahead is also feeling hotter. Strange. Like stepping out of the airplane on a holiday destination. The air also smells different, it has an acidic tinge to it. Am I being poisoned by a gas? I am feeling slightly delirious.

Right now, might be a very good time to turn around and head out. I have done it. I have braced the darkness and faced my fear. I have experienced a change of mood through it, maybe a bigger change, and while I still have my wits about me, I should turn around. While I still can make rational decisions to keep myself safe. While there is still a narrowing difference between the inner and outer world. I might just walk a bit more carefully now and then I will turn around.

It feels warmer, actually perfectly pleasant. I am progressing nicely. It might be this fast to go all the way out. I would not face a wall of unknowns, so it would be quicker. I might be surprised at how fast I can get out. Disappointed even. Maybe I should continue a bit more, as now I have the conditions to do it. A little longer.

It is getting hotter. I can feel how the pores of my skin opens and moistens. I felt thirsty. The soil under me is deep now, dry and deep, and my body is working to advance, feet lifting high to step into another soft hole of earth. I have returned to one hand on wall, just lightly touching it with my fingers, as to keep the orientation. The rock surface is actually pretty hot now too, not so pleasant to fully lean on. My eyes are closed, when did that happen? It does not matter.

It feels boiling. I stop to take my bearings and can hear my own dry breath again into the dense stillness, or, it does not feel still, it feels like everything is highly charged, the air quivering, but I cannot hear anything else. "OH", I turn my head away from the wall and uttered again "OOH!". "sssSSSSRRRRrrrrhhhhhh". A strange rumbling vibration comes from far away and all around, as if I am in a large cave. I can feel it shaking the ground and the wall all the way to the inside of my bones. Instinctively I crouch down, burrow my hands deep into the warm soil and grasp my knees. I sit totally still. Listening. Then a desperate sting of fear moves me to grab more earth around in the darkness and shuffle it towards myself, making little swish, swish, swish sounds. A rich smell of rot and old forest attacks my nostrils and then another "sssSSSSSSRRRRRRRRRRrrrrhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh" sound. It's coming from everywhere, everything is vibrating. A hot acidic wind blows through the space, and I shoot my arm out towards the wall, but it is gone. Only soil in all directions. "ccccCOMe HERERRrrrrhhhhhhhh". The rumbling, shaking shoots heat up through the earth, as my body vibrates down towards it into the soil. Or is it rising around me. I am

shaking deeper and deeper into the heating soil, while trying to raise my body to keep my head above it. Slowly I feel all solid ground disappear as the soil tightens around me, over me, and in a last desperate gesture I stretch my hands in swimming gestures to stay afloat, but am soon totally swallowed up in the sinking mass, and returning to a protective wrapped position as I felt my material surroundings move in around me. The mass is still fluffy and porous, with hot air channelling through it. The soil is in all the cracks and crannies of my body, but I can still breathe, slowly, through my nose, and with effort I can move my limbs as if paddling in a thick grainy sea. I am afraid to open my mouth or eyes. Not that it will help me in any way in this situation. And then, I can suddenly feel a red light intensifying outside my closed eyelids, as if the everything is diffused with a red pulsating warmth.

“sssSSSSSSRRRRRRRRRRrrrrhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhH**HERE**HHHHhhhhh**HERE**hhhhhrrrrrrrrr  
hhhhh**WELCOME**hhhhh**HERE**hhhhhrrrrrrhhhh**LITTLE ONE**hhhhh” the vibration pulses through me inside and outside, as the warm red hue intensifies and dips with the sound. Did I hear a voice in the vibration? It sounded like someone saying “hello” and “here” and “little”. I cannot open my mouth, “mmmMMMmmmMMMmmmMMMMMMmmMmMm” I say as I think “Help! Can someone help me!!”.

“sssSSSS**FEAR**hhhhh**IS**sssss**THAT**hhhhh**FEAR**hhhhh**NO**hhhhhsss**SOMETHING ELSE**hhhhh” The heat and light intensify as the vibrating roaring voice penetrates, and I have to get my bearings just to make out what I hear and how to respond. I think I understand it now, the voice was asking if it heard fear, and then it decided against that and approved. So, I better not be so desperate then. But this must be the definition of a desperate situation! I am stripped, I am buried alive and I am boiling up.

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All beings are cyclical. Sleep at night and wake in the morning, eat, pee and shit, again and again, day after day. Breathe in and breath out, again and again, while hearts blasts out rhythmical bursts of electricity.

In this larger body there is none of this, except for one. Yet there is life. How can that be?

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