Caved

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Future Fossils

It doesn't take long until our twenty-something-century civilisation
festers & falls through the fissures from multiple fallouts—
be it nuclear or climate or the crisis of convenience.

Whatever is left of water will wash over our ruination,
thick with the age of carbon dioxide, churning out Tufa—
the thankless work of spongy rocks that try with all might to keep

the air clean, resolved now to the hard-headed job of preservation—
& what will the post-human geologists find of our species
millions of years ahead (MYA) in Earth's layers?

What will this present-day palaeontology, in which we are all
sediment & skeleton, preserve? Plants—yes, some, because nature
    has a way
of persisting in chaos—over cattle bones, polystyrene, & lead-207.

While within these sick layers, at the end of time, will be our metal
-mangled bones, chipped & forged so that the future geologist
will be forced to figure out

What was man?
What was machine?

Haibun for Caves—Part 1

Land. Every grain that makes land. Land fracture. Area of weakness.
Or is it witness? A place for water to show its memory, the
    sentimentality
of change. Crevice & crack. Seepage. Trickle. Cascading into cavity.
Widening into cave. What must go here, but all of time,
all that shows a witness what the minute is made of?

The cave as Earth's pupil—
opening to sub-sight.
All the more below the surface.

The Allegory of the Rising Star Cave

She found the underland by following the eyes. It took a lifetime to figure out the way, but each set of black moon pupils in the bush was the promise of a portal to another time, and she knew she just had to find them, pair by pair, until she arrived at the place she was meant to be.

Heat from the sky bore down on her rough, hairy skin as she navigated the rocky grasslands of the place that didn't need a name, her entire universe. Each flat sole to sand an unsaid word in her mind, trekking low to avoid the hungry hunt of four-legged beasts. She knew true things, like what made her heart *doof-doof* and that food and shadow would keep her safe enough to see the yellow warm and blue cold cycle again and again. But something else nagged from an unnamed place deep inside her stomach, not hunger exactly, but an emptiness that needed filling. She let it direct

her every next move, knowing that it would guide her to what she was missing.

It had been days since she left her clan, arms especially dragging with tiredness from their jabbering on about who should hunt and who should gather, how they could recreate the bright orange spit they saw on extremely hot days, the kind that left everything it touched *crrnch-crrnch* black. When the ground was swallowed in night like that, she noticed her body double would vanish at her feet, which made her feel like she could lift off the ground like the *kwaa-kwaa* she saw in the sky. In these moments, she would fling her long arms up and down in an effort to be higher, disappearing instead in the ash that swirled around, and seeing how her darker self had been beside her all along.

Covered in the dust of dead things, utterly un-alone, she suddenly felt little regard for the bright orb in the sky, realising that it was unreachable, pointlessly so, and thus found fascination in the shadows; the darkness that seemed to wink at something beyond the seeable. Bright light put inside her a careful kind of fear, like the great snakes that skipped across the sky when the clouds were dark and loud, making her notice the power in dark things. Indeed, she was drawn to the dark, like a caterpillar to a cocoon, and would occasionally pick up a piece of burnt bone, push it up against a rock to make the shapes she knew: body, bush, beast, all with eyes filled in until they looked like holes. She stared through them and didn't think but knew that a black hole can be an open mouth.

She walked on, over a series of particularly bright days, when the heat rose like souls from the sand, creating a landscape of reflections and distortions. Although she could not understand it at the time, the passing mirages of heat and light created a vision of Earth's future. It was the Anthropocene, 200 million years in, when her family morphed into another—more upright and big-brained—and the land rose into shards of sharp metal and glass. If she were homo machina, she would have called the scene unimaginably hostile, confusing, and devilishly unnatural. But she saw and said

none of this, concentrating on the simple promise of every passing creature's eyes, blinking her a path onwards.

She was staring at a pair of especially dilated pupils up in a fever tree—branches so yellow it made the black of the eyes seem larger—when she suddenly slipped. Her feet slid into the ground, swallowing her naked and whole, as if her birth had just occurred in reverse. She let out a long, deep scream, a sound that would resonate right into the next geological age, as she fell deeper into the Earth. There was nothingness for a while, as if she had ceased to exist, and then there was just darkness. A darkness so easy and primordial that anything could be possible. On her hands and knees, she crawled about the space, seeking an explanation for where she had landed. She felt the grit of the walls and the cold of the smooth ground, sniffing for something familiar. All she found was more darkness, and remembering her shadow self, felt reassured that she was not alone. Then, she heard a voice.

The voice resonated from far off, yet close by, and made sounds she'd never heard before, although not completely strange. She listened deeply to the voice in the dark belly of the ground, and after a while, with nothing to see, it was only natural that she began to mimic it. As her tongue twisted in the cavity of her mouth, trying to forge the same sounds, a series of pictures emerged. It was not clear where they came from, whether it was happening inside her or outside, but it was as if she was communicating with the darkness. As this uncanny realm of pre-language rippled and raved, like a black blob writhing in and around itself, the slow drip of calcium carbonate from decades of rain began to seep through the cave walls, building stalactites and stalagmites outwards from the roof and floor. It went on like this for thousands and thousands of years—body and mind, stone and water, layer upon layer—until the two structures met in the middle to form columns. Finally, when the foundations of the cave were held in place by the strength of myriad pillars, the atoms of her being also filled in with light and shadow, creating a whole new being. She had so much to tell the others above ground.

It took a few years to peel herself from the bedrock, but when

she was ready, she stepped into the glaring light of day, everything appearing in white hot nothingness before taking shape again. She recognised the bushes and the beasts that flitted and flourished around her, but felt a renewed sense of oneness with them, knowing that everything they were all made of had come from the same dark cosmic womb. She was no longer afraid of anything and moved forward, which felt a lot like gliding, her shadow self keeping her nicely buoyed. Once she reached the old escarpment where her clan had lived, and saw everyone changed but still familiar, her pupils opened with the story of everything she now knew. Some of her species were throwing rocks, laughing at the sparks, when she shouted to gather everyone together and told them of her past and future lives. Stories of who they were, where they had come from and where they were headed drifted out of her like flowstone, attempting to build a column between her mind and theirs, except they didn't understand a single thing. One of them kept pointing at the sun, others bashed their hairy fists to the floor, while some just stared, unsure how to react. She tried again, all the effort of imparting her knowledge taking a whole lifetime. She was stiffening with age and knew it was time to go back to being bone, root, rock, darkness. The eyes didn't need to guide her this time, as she had, herself, become a part of the portal, and found the cosmic earth crack easily enough.

Sometimes it takes going back to realise what matters, to see that it is all made of the same stuff: sinew, sediment and secretion. Her species hadn't listened or understood when she had tried to tell them; they simply didn't have the scaffolding for such massive knowledge, but she had planted a seed, and that is all that matters. She had done what any soul is supposed to do with their one wild and precious lifetime: make something of the chaos and darkness. It wasn't long until she turned back into carbon, curled up in the foetal position, becoming a door to all possibilities for seekers in a faraway future. As she meditated on this planetary project, her flesh whittling to wood, and her eyes closing like the last wink of a rising star, she cast a knowing wish into the darkness that the next

generation of species would find her in the cave and embrace her message.

Haibun for Caves—Part 2

Rainwater brings down minerals through the pores of the bedrock, into the shadow of the cave. The difference in air precipitates a change. Forms take shape. Shapes begin to form. Minerals & chemicals build from above, into stalactite; from below,
into stalagmite; on the sides, into flowstone.

Deep in the dark zone,
a different knowing is settled;
death, birth, time—its power.