

# SOIL

by Ursula Andkjær Olsen

## **PART ONE—TALE OF THE BROKEN RING**

I fell asleep one night  
That night I had a dream, I'm telling you,  
it was so vivid, it was so real, it was, without a doubt:  
I saw a circle cut in two,  
the essence was pouring out.

And I woke up, and I was scared,  
then,  
I fell asleep again.

I fell asleep again that night,  
I had a second dream.  
I saw the earth cut up in two:  
The human world and something else,  
and something else – what does it mean?  
I couldn't know what I saw.

The human world, the roots cut off, was floating in thin air.  
It had no roots, it had a drain  
but nothing else below.

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## SONG OF THE BROKEN RING

1

I had a dream, I'm telling you,  
so vivid, without a doubt,  
I saw a circle cut in two;  
the essence was pouring out  
out—into the golden morning.

2

In this dream, I'm telling you,  
so vivid, so full of death,  
a broken ring, earth cut in halves  
all living things holding their breath  
out—into the golden morning.

3

In my dream the world was big,  
and then I understood:  
My dream was whole, my day was half,  
it needed soil and root -  
out—into the golden morning.

4

I woke up, I knew by then,  
I felt the common chord:  
bind the halves with silver string,  
the circle of life restored!  
Out—into the golden morning

## PART TWO—THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

As I told you:  
I woke up, and I was scared.

As I told you:  
I woke up and I saw this: two half-circles,

I mean, I woke up, and I saw an orb cut in halves, a broken marble.  
It was the world, and there was a child,  
a small child in a grand, vast world with millions of chambers,  
shining walls,  
and I fell asleep again ...

Once upon a time there was a child, it grew up in a grand, vast world with millions of chambers.

Once upon a time ... where do I begin?

Once upon a time, imagine:

A child was born and grew up in a palace, a wide, wondrous realm.  
In this palace, the ceilings were studded with lights pouring brilliance in every direction: The palace was a dream of light!

It had shiny tiles on the floors—possibly marble, perhaps granite, or both.

It had walls of colored glass, opaque walls, and many, many doors, different types of openings,  
and each time the child went through one of the countless openings, they came to a new land of opportunities.

Behind one of the openings, the child had its own dwelling place, a living unit.

To this child, the Palace was the world: its ever-shining bright lights a sky without limits.

The smallest units of the palace, however, were commodities.

They sat on shelves, in display cases, cabinets, counters, in their mother-of-pearl-glistening fetal membranes:

slightly iridescent plastic, crackling paper, all of which showed how newborn each commodity was.

And connecting the enormous palace and its smallest parts—the palace system and the newborn commodities—the child saw stock prices, algorithms, net incomes, and the undulating graphs of the price mechanisms, visible on every screen.

The child thought each individual commodity was born out of nothing—

like a shadow that forms instantly on the wall or floor when a bright light hits something massive from behind.

And the child believed that discarding used things was just as easy:

simply sending them out of its living unit again via drains, sewers and garbage chutes—  
and they were gone.

As easily as a shadow disappears when the object casting it is gone.

At the speed of light.

The child felt that the chains and the streams, the webs of supply and demand, the possibilities & limitations of the price mechanisms, were the world.

Perhaps it intuitively sensed—but without thinking about it—that just outside the mighty palace,  
—just below its own living unit, contained in the palace,  
—right next to its own body,  
there was a great empty space from which everything came,  
and to which everything slipped back again?

A great empty space that constantly gave birth to new  
commodities and that continually absorbed everything the  
child was no longer interested in

into its soft embrace.

Perhaps the child would fall asleep;  
perhaps it would see something in its dreams: a pearly, shiny  
surface.

It would remind it of the newborn commodities, of their  
newborn-ness, but in the dream there would be something  
more,  
an inaudible sound,  
that the smooth and bright palace, that it was not ... possible?

The child would not understand it.  
An inaudible sound of  
crushed cells,  
of a blackout inside.

A blackout  
inside.

The sound of

the heavens getting redder,  
the sea becoming green.

The heavens getting redder.

The sea becoming green.

### PART THREE—THE GARDEN OF COMMUNICATIONS

One morning  
I woke up and found myself in a  
living field of wheat, oat, rye,  
a living field of dirt, soil,  
civilizations  
of bacteria, highly developed glorious cultures  
of fungi,  
I woke up, and  
they were all communicating by passing active substances  
from  
one to another.

Like, sending sand, shit, silt, rare metals into circulation.

Sand, shit, silt, rare metals,  
precious microbiomes,  
bacterial high culture,

and all along, I saw  
the soil kissing the air, kissing the rain, kissing the sun,  
and being kissed in return.

Groundwater thinking deep in its bedrock riverbed.

As I said,  
I woke up,  
and ...  
I wake up and I find myself in a garden,

I'm wandering through this glorious garden of peas, beans,  
potatoes,  
suddenly receiving this poem  
inside me.

I'm all about this garden,  
you know,  
shit, soil, sand,  
and pumpkins and cabbage,  
blooming trees of apple, pear, and plum,  
rotten fruit,

and a lot of crap lying around,  
suddenly receiving this poem  
inside me:  
like a list,  
a list that establishes a direct connection between things and  
words:  
plants and words,  
microbes, substances, senses,  
all six senses, the whole world!

It seems that for each word we find the corresponding  
living organism—from the garden—  
we find the corresponding artefact, the  
flowers, plants, insects,  
traces, feces,  
and a pair of socks & a pair of underpants,  
a chair and a table,  
a house and living animals,  
everything!

It seems that for each word we collect the corresponding  
object—from the garden—  
flowers, plants, chairs, & underpants.

A direct link between word and world, a correspondence like  
the one between DNA and RNA molecules,  
things expressing words and vice versa, the way one amino  
acid in the RNA expresses the other in the DNA.

Like a circle,  
like an unbroken ring.



Each word instantly telling the whole story of the processes  
leading to each manifestation.

Each thing instantly telling the story of  
my life.

Because everything—words and things, living organisms—  
were made according to the same laws.

The feeling was: It was quiet enough to be real.  
You know what they say—  
that the feeling attached to the dream is important,  
and the feeling was: this is the world.

I woke up  
and the world was so beautiful, I could have died.

The feeling was, the feeling is  
I wake up  
and the world is so beautiful and alive.

So full of change that it must be real.