

Twelve Days in a Diamond Mine

On the first day that we are trapped in the diamond mine, we don't know we are trapped. We think that we are "camping" in a diamond mine and feel excited by the rough gems that encrust the cave walls, throwing light and sound about in strange, unpredictable pulses.

On the second day that we are trapped in the diamond mine, we are frightened, and know we are trapped. Some manage to think of the shaft that has caved in, blocking our exit, as a kind of a closed door, knowing that God always opens windows, and that this cloud has a diamond-lining: After our rescue, this anecdote will be a thousand times more dazzling than all of our previous vacation anecdotes together, because vacations are always torture, but remembering is all we are.

On the third day, three or more of our party admit to longtime struggles with claustrophobia, begging the question, why spelunking? We play charades and practice whistling to pass the time.

On the fourth day the last flashlight gives out. The only light in the mine is produced by our eyes, reflecting diamonds. Rations grow slim. We play I Spy and begin to hallucinate.

On the fifth day my true love gives things to me. I sing about it. I sing to the point of exhaustion, but my voice is garbled, its sound distorted by the damned rocks that surround us.

On the sixth day, we run out of food.

On the seventh day, we eat Donna.

On the eighth day, we sit down and think long and hard about how to avoid being formulaic during our extended disaster.

On the ninth day, we develop Stockholm Syndrome, but no matter how available we make ourselves, the diamond mine just doesn't get that we're interested. We furiously try to make love to the mine by rubbing our genitals against the diamond clusters, but the mine refuses to reciprocate our affections, or respond to our sexual overtures. We are raw with frustrated desire.

On the tenth day, we discover an escape route. We don't take it of course, not now, not after all we have been through together, now that we have seen the diamond mine for who it truly is, now that all we want is to merge with its hard stone caverns, become acquainted with its sedimentary profile, its elemental composition. We hang out around the mouth of the tunnel, acting like we might just walk away any time. We are playing hard to get.

On the eleventh day, the diamond mine finally notices us.

On the twelfth day that we are trapped in the diamond mine, the rescuers arrive. We say, "Thank you very much," and politely show them the way out.

Finally the diamond mine speaks: "Are you sure you want to stay?" it asks, timorously. "This experience has been intense for both of us, and frankly, for my part, extremely exciting, sexually. But so sudden... is this just an infatuation for you? Do you see us working out down the line? I mean... I'm a lot older and I don't have much to offer, all I can give you to eat is cave moss and raw bat."

We sigh contentedly, knowing we will be with the diamond mine for the rest of our days.

Helen Hofling is a writer/editor by day and witch by night. She's a member of The Writer's Foundry MFA Program and co-chairs the poetry committee of the PEN Prison Writing Contest. She lives in Brooklyn, NY with a cute girl and two maniac cats.