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Rocky Mountain High

The rock speaks. Its voice is low, coarse, like a rock. Its declarations are all that a rock would be expected to assert: simple, solid, foundational, agglomerative, unassailable. It describes little, but when inspired, its discourse encroaches on poetry, often monosyllabic, but charged with a quiet celebration, devoid of judgment or accusation. The rock offers no dialectic; it seeks no validation. It is what it is, and its pride in innate simplicity is never far from the surface of its monologue.

The rock's dithyrambs are slow by the reckoning of other forms of life. A tree moves ten thousand times for each minute gyration of a rock. One hundred times ten thousand. The grasses clump together, rise and swell, and shrivel to be pulverized and covered with snow, while a tree watches like a scientist.

At times, these beings are all speaking at once, and it would be nothing but hopeless cacophony but for their widely varying time-frames. Even so, with this many plants and insects, trees and boulders, rocks and pebbles, and the exuberant variation of the tiniest grains of soil, it's still hard to follow the conversations.

But this rock held my attention. It muttered and rumbled on and on in almost unbearably slow cadences until the images stole into long-atrophied corners of my brain, stirring up swirls of nameless impressions, eddies from the temporal stasis of dead ideas and forgotten lives. Eventually, I had to break the spell, and I jumped up with a cry, running toward the cliff edge where mountain birds wheeled and poised, looking down with telescopic eyes.

The rock was behind me (though its cousins and relations surrounded

and I stood upon bits of its most ancestral schist), and I heard it crack. I turned and saw the dust fly and the light streaming from its exposed interior. Had I done this? Just a diaphanous human wail, the snap of mere attention severed from the rock's bare physiognomy? Do people have such power?

Deep in the fissure strange fires seethed, sending out waves of stone commentary in a heatless mirage. I pulled back, mindful of the cliff at my back, and then bent closer, entranced by the interior nakedness of the rock. It pulled me in. Or its exposure engulfed my sight, leaving nothing else.

Inside the rock was nothing but sedimentary crystallizations, agglomerations of iron, titanium, silicon, and quartz, reduced from aeons of slowly cooling magma. Like pebbles among gems, granular effusions clustered all around the locus of my consciousness, bits of quartz gleaming amid the matrix, while multicolored grus and granitoids swirled around in nearly perfect motionlessness.

Then my attention was caught by rare intense beams of energy, which sparked first here, then there, then, rarely, in diaphanous coruscations all around, flared briefly and went dark again. In the inky interstices I realized there lurked tiny inclusions of uranium and radon, and as the rock spoke, or mulled its thoughts in prelude to an exclamation, the glow surrounding these radioactive microns would swell and spark faint beams of erudition which sped unimpeded into and through the surrounding stone.

These crumbled bits of dense-packed substance pulsed in the epoch-slow rhythm of the tor, one graceful beat per century, but within them stood a perfect lattice of igneous components arranged in rows and columns like a regiment of jugglers frozen in perfect equipoise, their appendages upraised, batons in mid-twirl, acrobatic cousins atop one another rank upon rank, sustaining the mineral identity.

Whole paragraphs of rocky eloquence folded upon themselves in unspoken future soliloquies, waiting for the march of magma to spawn their metamorphosis from mere notion into unforgettable expressions of eutectic intelligence.

I listened to their silent recitations while the inner structures pulled me into their arms, where super-massive spheres intertwined in a palette of inter-penetrating nuclei. A hazy aura caressed these near-fused entities, wafting afar and diving deep, knitting each one to the surrounding matrix.

And the low cogitation of the rock upheld the descant sung by these amorphous revelers.

A serene, high harmony emerged, where ever finer waves of silence lapped the shores of tangibility and gave rise to chords and intervals of texture so delicate that even consciousness could scarcely find a gap. Pure resonance rang from the center of the planet through all the octaves of interaction, energizing each layer while holding them all locked in the unity of organization.

The substance of all this was nothing. Knowledge rose in waves inside the rock, to annihilate emptiness, yet nothing changed. Information unmanifest has no mass; nor does knowledge, nor intelligence. And yet I look upon this substance and it all appears, from its origin in molten chaos to the tall sandstone slabs of the Divide.

And there the rock stood, though a millennium passed, ten thousand pounds attending where I watched, it remained waiting, its most accomplished suit. The granite textures touched my skin in quartz caress. "I have so many songs to sing," it said.



And so I sang, too. They said it was a diatribe. A filibuster against reason, to take refuge in a wall of words against the storm of impressions. Such nonsense, to think words protect against what has never been named! Such ignorance, to think thoughts themselves could circumnavigate a soul, or a cerebellum, or the pronotum of a dung-beetle.

My thoughts were beetles in those days, but not for any reason related to the diatribe, this flail of phonemes that so pitifully characterized my attempts at penetration. [No, not *preservation*, not at all; there is no way to *preserve* any of it. It is all lost, whether the story is true or not, and even if it is not lost, we are lost to it, and the result is the same.]

This sounds like someone else, doesn't it? This is not even myself speaking—only sorry voices of the tiny id, the erect pullet of flesh that prods the massive lethargy of intellect now and then, with unbidden aftereffects, and seldom a touch of truth.

The whole assembly of concepts is falling apart, and nothing holds itself to anything else. The boundaries are a blur, and the thread which links moment to moment has been pulled taut, and suddenly released in

a tangle of loose chaos. Notions with no rightful proximity are pressed up against one another in blatant contradiction. It recalls past visits from Mescalito on hilltops against the fusion of June's wet seasons, railing against the oncoming summer blast.

But, oh damnation and cacophony, this is not anyone else, damned be them all. They hide when they are most needed. They are the ones hiding, leafing through pages of verbal armor while I stand at the fore, bearing all the weather and erosion.

I don't even know what I am, but here it is that I take my stand, wonderingly, while the seasons compress my visions into thin strata of undifferentiable greys, like a sand-painting by a color-blind Hopi with nothing to say. Like a metaphor stretched as thin as the stratum it tries to describe. Like recursion committing its eternal incest. Praise be to sand paintings.

I have stood here on the cliff for weeks, staring out over the great valleys, watching clouds roil overhead, materializing from the blue as if by magic, winds rising and falling, hissing and roaring through the rock outcroppings.

I remember the struggle up the hills, across moraines where the scrub pine gave up, and into these cloud-cropped alpine meadows, blood pounding in my eyes and in my lungs.

Half the air is below me here, more than half, but there is no resistance to breathing and that is a relief I can't describe. At sea level the air is thick and moist and soaked with salt and a thousand spores and beings whose husks infest our trachea and fill our lungs with their residue. There the air slogs reluctantly through the nostrils as if condemned to cower in the wet spongy darkness, sentenced to one breath of hard labor, and it is almost impossible to exhale without opening the mouth. This may account for much of the excess verbalization at sea level.

The higher up you go, the easier it is to shut up. That's partly due to oxygen starvation, which makes the lungs scream out for more, but this reaffirms the simple bond between breath and death which we forget along the urban shores. We need to remember. We might remember, if the weather is kind.

But here at 14,000 feet, no Himalaya admittedly, we breathe without effort—the air slips in through the orifices at the front of my skull as if it

wanted to be inside, away from the caustic dehydration of the sun and sky, bleached here in the mid-ground between the blue creating clouds and the crunch underfoot where lichens hug to the rock like dried stains.

The air sings into the alvioli and gives up its oxygen for a clamor of escaped carbon dioxides, who fly ecstatically back out without even a suggestion of velocity. The nasal passages slowly dessicate and become brittle, after a lot of this breathing at altitude, but we can make that trade for the cool silver flow of tangible *prana* in and out, into and out of, effortless and insubstantial like the sky.

But here I stand, united with nothing, with the cliff and the not-cliff beyond it, with clouds and rocks like a monumental model of my personal catastrophe. Weeks of staring out over the immediate into the haze of distance has made no difference at all.

The dysthymia still suffuses each hillock below me, still strokes my neck with a warm hand, forcing me down until the crushed lichens are all I can see.

And I jerk my head up, trying to remember where the distant bird was sailing, which valley he was surveying, which stream-bed he could smell through the perforations in his beak, where soft and bloody prey await his fall to feed.