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Chapter Two

Two Heads Are Better

Just as the past will catch up with us, the sun will eclipse the hill and thus fulfill, soon but not yet, the conjunction of sunrise and moonset. It will be a glorious dawn, giving me a vision symbolically drawn.

I was primed, after a half-hour of time, to make this moment sublime. In a hallucinogenic reverie, I had revved-up my memory, injecting a temporal sense into my current experience. The effect was to connect my memories into a new remembrance, a review of my life to construe its resemblance. As happens in a narrative, the past had become comparative, with separately remembered events telescoped and leveled into the present tense. Even more meaningful than my reinforced memory was the increase in intelligent energy. A thirty minute sit on the cliff had left its benefit. While my eyes had dilated, my mind had become highly elevated. By the size of my widening eyes, I could surmise the coming of sunrise.

The energizing high of the pot was not surprising. As Adam had foretold, I had smoked Mendocino Gold. No other pot, not even last year's crop, which had been the best of the lot, had gotten me so besotted. Most obvious was the quantum leap in consciousness, a steep surge verging on bottomless. The connections effecting my mental processes were the work of perfection, their variables observable in every direction. As they were transforming my thoughts into oratory, they were reflecting the text of a perfect story. In the thirty minutes since I took my first hit, the beginning of my book had become written in spirit, as I had imprinted every image in it. As easily as I could perceive these images, I could read beneath them an intricate system of tributaries and bridges; it was intrinsically linguistic and operatively symbolic, connecting the images into a voice that was hypnotic. All the story was there, somewhere, already developed in my mind and ready for rewind, its entirety to be divined. The verbalizations surfacing on this perfect day will return when I write their replay. Accordingly, the story of Mendocino Gold will be told and formally intoned as *The Philosopher's Stone*. It was this subliminal linguistic quality that Adam had wanted his marijuana to instill, and for me to fulfill. Having already proceeded, I was pleased that my friend, on his end, had succeeded.

The realization that my inner voice was writing a formalization of self-organization began to be grasped when, after I landed in the past, I was brought back to reality by a twenty year old bell that propelled me there incredibly

fast:

“Mendocino Gold,” it tolled.

The words emerged from my nervous system and instantly returned when I heard them. They were loud and bold, striding both sides of the fold.

No echoes came in the air: just connections to compare.

And where they went was evident, to Mendocino Gold and its metaphysical equivalent, its literal clone, the Philosopher’s Stone.

In this instance, it was their link in the following inference that got me to think:

If I could believe that Adam had succeeded in achieving Mendocino Gold, then the belief that the Philosopher’s Stone was now being composed also should hold. The goal of Mendocino Gold is to evoke the vocalization of the Philosopher’s Stone, the voice to arise as though on its own. Mendocino Gold, to be true to the mission, will transmute into an energy sensibly envisioned, represented in a text being written. And indeed, it seemed, at that very instant, that imprinting in my cognitive system, as if foreknown, was the Philosopher’s Stone. I could come to only one conclusion: the voice I was hearing was really appearing and not just an illusion.

Had I been fixating on nature, on the sounds of the wind, or surf, or anything else in the external world, I would have picked up the differences until their significance emerged. The gurgling sounds of the gently churning surf would have been listened to as a symphony in miniature, or as the chatter of characters in literature. I might have delighted in the sun’s dawning light, drawn by the slight, but continuous, changes in brightness I would have kept in sight. This slow-motion exposure would have depicted an itinerant picture of the sun’s signature. Or gazing at the moonset, I would have been amazed by the illumined face of the huge object. No matter where I would have stared at the world with any diligence, I would have evinced significance. I would have been finding enlightenment by identifying with the environment.

Rather, I had been turning to matters internal, to a humming that had become verbal.

First heard as a reverberation, the hum, once plumbed, had turned into

a voice you would hear in a personal conversation. Appearing along with the voice was a series of unclear images that, despite their surreal feel and fit, did not seem dreamlike but mnemonic, images that had become iconic. Although blurred, they apparently matched the words. These could be heard with perfect clarity, the match itself seeming like a self-similarity, a pattern that happens at fractal levels of reality. For instance, I could distinguish, albeit indistinctly, the image of Adam's visage winking at me. And linked to this image linguistically were the following three words that had surfaced realistically: *The Philosopher's Stone*, as though Adam had spoken them over the telephone.

Thus, as I wouldn't have done had I been drawn towards the sun, I took a look at the brilliancy that was confronting me one on one, coming from the book I had begun.

There it was, from the first words to the last, a circular trip through the past. It was the history of a cannabis hit, the hallucinogenic depiction of a visit with my spirit. Consisting of a mix of recent and forgotten memories, it was being carried along by philosophical reveries. As for the specifics, it was fitted with metaphysics and skillfully infixed with sophisticated literary tricks. There was not a lot of plot to imagine, and it lacked action, but what it promised was passion. From the moment it started, it was cathartic. Its symbolic connections melted my defenses and got me to come to my senses. Such a thoughtful work offers more than the normal story; its transformational aims can be revelatory. Best of all, its subject matter was the quest for a transcendent metaphor, just what Adam had called for.

Probably not Adam's choice, however, was the narrator's voice. It was not just a copy of his own, but a caricature full-blown. Its phonetic aesthetic became known after I imagined he was calling me on the telephone. As I listened to the rhythms and rhymes transpiring inside my mind, I realized to my surprise that the voice talking wasn't mine, even though the author was not hard to find. Only Adam spoke so poetically, controlling his speech flow phonetically. Rhymed prose required that he be mindful of the words he chose.

Rhymed prose, he told me long ago, came from ancient Semitic soothsayers and seers, for revealing prophetic messages in a poetic rhetoric that appeals to everyone's ears. *Saj*, as it later became called, massaged and enthralled, stimulated the brains of its listeners as it lifted the spirits of its envisioners.

It's a simple technique, using similar sounds to determine which words you speak. Achieved is buttery speech, easy to listen to and an effective tool to use when you teach. At least, that was Adam's belief, and he employed it in his voice without relief. As natural as learning a language by practice and repetition, it was linked, I would think, to his dyslexic condition, a supposition I could envision only since being told of his affliction. The fact that I had adapted his mannerisms to fit my own imaginative vision was thrilling, but in some respects chilling. A confabulated voice can make you paranoid, especially when it comes from the void—from your dead friend, no less, and during his funeral address. The troubling question that kept getting mentioned but offered no choice was, how does an author avoid identifying with his writing voice?

The ventriloquistic dubbing was doubly troubling.

Since the distance between my imaginative vision and my existential position was being squeezed extremely thin, it seemed that nothing unspoken could get in. Even the external world was being observed through these internalized words. Their verbalizations reverberated fervidly in my fertile mind, as every perception was being concurrently defined. And the words were appearing in real time, in rhyme, a writing vitally alive, tirelessly arising from an unconscious drive. But what troubled me about this state of agape was my inability to escape. Identifying with my mind's contents had a self-possessive consequence, that of blinding me with my own spellbinding eloquence. Every thought, even this one, was being caught up in the vision, as if each had been perfectly wrought to fit into position. A thought wasn't occurring otherwise, certainly none that could be verbalized. The reason why, I had to remind myself, was because I was high, a valid point that even my hallucinating viewpoint could not deny. Like a psychotic, I was locked inside a mind entirely symbolic. It's a condition drug users endure, knowing that time is the cure. The trick is not to consider the condition schizophrenic; instead, it's to mirror the division by envisioning it through a reflective aesthetic. Picture it as the invagination of the imagination, an internal in-turning in which you return to reality by viewing it through your own narration.

In my current schizophrenic condition, I was observing the world through an hallucinative prism, from a subjectivity stuck in the internal/external schism. As you would surmise, when I applied the trick I had just

advised, an enlightened world began to arise, symbolizing itself in a brightening sunrise.

On one side, the sun was lighting up the hill line behind which it was rising, while on the other side, the moon was lying right above the horizon. Seeing it all cohere within my personal sphere, the world appeared perfectly clear. At the same time, every perception was being defined by the writing at the back of my mind. This linguistic mirroring was enriching my sense of vision, giving dimensionality to reality at a high degree of precision.

I had to admit that I was smitten, to the point where I thought the voice was being written. Just as an insightful writing obliges you, without choice, to identify with its voice, my inner speech was requiring I read its meanings as an inscription, as symbolic signs designed for transcription. Its intentionality evoked a personality, but its words were too predetermined to be spoken in reality. They fit too exactly the syntactic and semantic demands they were meant to convey, with not an extra word standing in the way. As for the author, I could not be sure: were these my words being heard, or Adam's conjured? Despite not recognizing the writing as mine, I could surmise that it was arising in my mind. I also saw that along with this understanding came an answer much grander, and more awesome, than the name of the author. I theorized that behind the writing, blind to my conscious mind, some kind of self-organizing design was authoring these lines. Never knowing what to expect, the effect was a compelling text, directed by the aesthetic that it self-reflect. This self-reflective aesthetic expressed an essential benefit, that being the transcendence of my spirit. Emboldened by Mendocino Gold, it was opening up the perfect word flow by which my soul could unfold.

And what do you know? The Philosopher's Stone shone at that very moment, resplendently showing its ennoblement. So overpoweringly bright was the light of enlightenment I had to shut my eyes tight. But running through me was a tremendous rush of consciousness, enough to suggest I was being blessed. In bold letters, I was letting it roll, the unfolding of my soul.

Except, seconds later, as I was beholding the Stone, an energy came that was even greater...

Suddenly the sun hit, its tip eclipsing the distant hill like a match being lit!

It was an exquisitely timed coincidence, this instancing of the two events, and none too soon, since it alerted me to turn to the moon and to see it sink, in a blink, into the misty lagoon.

As had happened with Adam years before, the coincidence appeared once more.

The moon and sun were in perfect equilibrium: the former was submerging as the latter was emerging, causing me to swing repeatedly back and forth like a pendulum. Apparently, for my sake, nature had balanced itself dramatically, creating an ideal take on reality. Meantime, my mind was being shined on by this vision so sublime. Excited by this find, I decided that the trilateral arrival of the signs was divine, that the world was being defined by a higher design.

Given the view from where I stood, this decision would be understood.

I was observing the curve of the earth from my cliffside perch, perfectly immersed in the universe. For certain, my circuits were turned to full burn. The rhythms and melodies, as well as the scenic amenities, were among the rush of incoming energies. In my self-reflective state, they were tracing a self-similar space, replacing familiar representations with sensations that conveyed nature's grace. As a result of my conscious synthesis of them, they were mixing-in with everything else in my cognitive system. The upshot of the process was a connected consciousness, a nexus of networked energy that emerges from the recursiveness of the universal plenary. Being a spiraling whorl, it was a nexus ultimately encircled by the rest of the world.

To prove the truth of this theoretical proposition, I did a deliberate pirouette in a risky position, turning full circle on the spit of the cliff, while being perfectly determined not to trip. Thus, it was done in slow motion, starting from the view of the ocean, a total evocation in a three-sixty rotation.

The Pacific was as placid as it was capacious, and it lay under a gaze that was just as spacious. Only the line of the horizon defined its ends, my perspective being viewed through a subjective lens. I could not deny, however, that the sky went on forever. So consumed I was by this thought that I almost lost myself in the vacuum. Returning to earth, I turned my perspective south at first, to observe the continuous line of surf. The thin white line distinguished the bottom of the cliff along all of the shoreline. It was not hard to

see the scene as a postcard, so frozen in place it seemed. As I kept turning leftward, the headlands southern end emerged. Then, turning a little further and squinting now on account of the sun's rising, I could see the coastal hills spilling toward the eastern horizon. These were tree covered, thus green colored, and were seen from my expansive vantage as a handful of gentle steps heading upward. Facing also the Big River basin, I was amazed at how far I could gaze in. Then, shifting again, my perspective settled on Mendocino, the picturesque village that fills up the middle of the peninsular plateau. Its historic buildings stood shoulder to shoulder along the narrow lanes and roads, their vibrant colors coming into focus as the sun rose. Closer was the peninsula's tip, a large part of it, an open landscape of golden grasses and meandering paths that make up the headlands, the panoramic area where I was standing and where the continent abruptly ends. Being positioned on the Pacific rim, there was one certainty I could determine. In Mendocino at that hour, I was the only soul who was scouring reality for its transformative power.

Noticed next, as I continued to turn left, was the view north, the coastline once more, a stretch of ten miles of rugged shore. Now within sight was the distant lighthouse. Compared to the vastness of the Pacific, it was just a matchstick sticking up on top of a cliff. Licking the bottom of the cliff was the same white line of surf observed to the south, visible until the coastline curves beyond the lighthouse. Out at sea, far from me, but still relatively close to the coast, I could see a small fleet of fishing boats. Motes on the open ocean, they floated without motion. Now that I had come around almost in toto, with a short way to go, it had become clear that the atmosphere in the northwestern sphere was cast in pale shadow. On this first day of Fall, the sun was lighting the sky less the more it spread boreal, casting a graduated shading across it all. Because I was returning to the side of the sky that was brightening, the reflective effect was enlightening. When I reached due west again, my pirouette ended: I had completed a three-sixty sweep on the heels of my feet, feasting on a view eighteen miles wide at least.

My eyes were on the horizon, on the precise spot where the moon had dropped when the sun was rising. Missing was the ethereal mist, the dividing line now reappearing as if it really exists. As for the residual glow, the growing dawn had incorporated it so it didn't show. From my perspective as demiurge, it appeared that the moon had disappeared, had sunk until fully submerged. Empirically, my perspective had been spun; but as I searched the horizon, I

came upon a different one. It was a vision of the otherworld, and it hit me like a thunderbolt hurled. If not rich in images, it did trigger shivers.

Consisting of a single image mystically realized, the vision symbolized a divine sign that could not be visualized. The image was of Adam's spirit, depicted as being nonphysical and infinite. In pictorial terms, it was not something corporeal I could discern: only a glowing shadow that did not burn. It was a fitting image of Adam's spirit, building a symbolic bridge to it. That everything had his ring indicated that his spirit was still existing. It was thrilling to see the physical world filled with his spirit. Yet, as ecstatic as that feeling happened to be, it also brought back reality, so the fantasy was abandoned unhappily. Relief had returned to grief, overturning the certainty of belief.

Such a quick transition of emotions resulted in unconscious physical motions and a shifting of positions to compensate for the commotion. This would not have been a problem if I wasn't standing on top of a little spit that sticks out from the cliff. It was precarious enough just to stand up straight and tall without exacerbating the chances for a fall. This wisdom hit me like a fist once I had gotten through a couple of perilous shifts. My immediate reaction to the alarm was to retract my outstretched arms and to make sure my feet had traction. A long, drawn in breath then settled the threat of death. Next, in a tight little twist, I pivoted away from the precipice until I was facing, once again, the safety of the headlands, yet still standing inches from the abyss. In deliberate, little steps, I crept tentatively from the threat, intent on heading to a less intense prospect. Picking up the box from the rocks as I did this, along with Adam in it, and then, sticking to the thin path that skirts the cliff, I distanced myself from the spit in less than a minute.

But the path is slanted and demands physical agility to keep your stability. Considering the risk, attentiveness is the essential requisite. Its dips and curves mean uncertainty at every turn — perhaps a hazardous diversion or a run-in with another person. Just a couple of feet wide, the path is defined on its non-cliff side by the tall grass alongside. A hundred and fifty years of sightseers have chiseled the path distinctly enough until its rocky bottom now appears. It has been additionally delineated by the erosion of the ground, the result of rain and wind, which, over the long haul, has gradually worn it down. For all who walk it, whether adventurous spirits or unsure tourists, the trail brings a perilous thrill: facing the danger of being injured or killed.

This is especially so when it dips below the top of the cliff to cling alongside it. The drop may not be sheer, but it will instill fear. Rather than the dramatic drop at other headlands spots, the drop here consists of graduated terraces of rocks, their separations creating steep stumbling blocks. If you got knocked off the path, you would probably end up dead, landing twelve feet down on your head. Aggravating the danger is the inclination to take in the scenic nature, a survey that may give you inspiration but will not make you safer.

At its low point, the path is joined by an outflow of rock that opens onto a natural ramp that slants down to the terraces and the ocean below, the safest way to go but no place for vertigo. Over the years, we had climbed down the terraces many times to test our fears, Adam energetically descending and myself tentatively treading at his rear. My concerns were not only focused on the difficult footwork imposed by the slippery surface, but that we'd get too close to the surf, a circumstance that would make me nervous. In the twenty year spell, seven people fell in, or were swept away by "sleeper" waves, and only one was ever saved. Therefore, we almost always stayed at levels above the fray, where we'd only get sprayed. Gazing down, we would locate the place where we would have drowned, on a small rock with a tall wave breaking all around. Even so, sometimes we would come close to getting a dose. We would climb down to the intertidal zone, to terrorize the sea life in their wave-swept home. But one time the circumstances were reversed and Adam almost got submersed. He was on his knees, reaching for a creature, when a "sleeper" wave breached the rock he was kneeling on just as he was making the seizure. If not for his quick skip to another rock, this obit of him would have been long written. However, now that his life was indeed over, there was no reason to go lower. So I kept to our regular terrace, just a couple of levels below the headlands itself, upon a flat and narrow lithic shelf.

Our habitual stopping spot on the terrace was on top of a large rock that has a particular oddity: it's a sofa-like boulder naturally molded to fit two bodies. We'd each grab a seat, lean back, and comfortably relax with our feet sticking out in the air, as if we were sharing a lounge chair. The view was truly amazing wherever our gazes would go, whether down to the rocks below, swept with foam, or over the endless ocean, always in motion, or across the heavenly dome. But now, without Adam to share the view, there would be only open air to stare into.

Having arrived at the rock, I gently rested the box on the side of the chair where Adam invariably would plop, and then nestled myself into the passenger's seat, stretching my feet completely until they dangled over the twelve foot drop. Adam's legs would extend out from the rock a lot more, but how far I never wanted to explore. Of course, I'd be sitting up in the chair to make myself taller, while he'd be slumping down trying to be smaller. Today, I was sitting up as always, still matching his gaze.

For sure, the absence of Adam was a sensible thing, and it affected everything. Like being high, nothing got by. It was all informed with his spirit. Even the scene I presently was seeing reflected his essence and energy: a serene sea, but underneath, unseen complexity.

Closer was the ocean's ebb and flow, just a couple of terraces below. The coming-and-going motion depicted so fittingly the intermittency of our twenty-year devotion. I watched as the swells washed the tops of the rocks with the constancy of a clock. Probably not less than twenty times I was reminded of our times together, and every time my eyes became wetter and my understanding better. By the time my eyes went elsewhere, I realized that, like two birds of a feather, we had climbed to enlightenment together.

I might have stayed with the waves, enlightening myself while I was climbing, but I could not shake the strange sensation that, by my side, someone was smiling. Instinctively, I shifted my eyes, gripped by surprise. My concern turned out to be not another person, but the front panel of the box, where a familiar figure had been picked out among a profusion of loops and knots. Delineated amidst a labyrinth of cannabis, in incisions of perfect precision, was Adam's visage grinning at me in a realistic depiction. I quickly picked up the box and discovered that the same composition, his face hidden in the cannabis yet sufficiently distinguishable for recognition, had been chiseled into all four sides, an image visible from every position to guarantee he would be memorialized.

I had not seen these incisions previously, being too busy seeing everything grievously. My instinct was not to think about the box, but to put up mental blocks. To read the note on top would not be easy, and the contents inside made me queasy. Kept an arm's length away, the etchings had not been detected in my dismay. Upon closer inspection, though, they showed remarkable artistic control and invention. The box's polished surface was burnt-red

in color and contained a grain of swirling whorls, the signature pattern of redwood burl. Burl is a small, dome shaped growth, especially dense, that the tree grows on its trunk to promote its defense. Its solidity is perfect consistency for chiseling images that are limned with intricacies.

Judging the results of this industry in bright sunlight, I was able to pick out a detail that was barely perceptible and probably not observable except in direct light. Above each eyelid, a conspicuous ridge was sticking out, as if the burl itself was beginning to sprout, which depicted a thick, unmanicured brow that caricatured Adam's, no doubt. Suspecting the subserving purpose of this bumpy surface, I jiggled the box a bit until I got the perspective perfect. If you give it a delicate tinkering, you will think that Adam is winking. His eyes open and close according to the falling of the shadows. So taken was I by this flickering light trick that I became quickly mistaken as to its victim, thinking it was not me who was jiggling his lids, but him. Winning this issue was his grin, which triggered a similar grin in his twin. Then, too terrific to withhold, the following words were heard in a single burst after letting myself explode:

“Mendocino Gold!”

I had visited with Adam's spirit with just some jiggles, instating a transference effect and its liberating giggles. Adam was animated, made alive, by my identifying with his blinking eyes! I relished this trick, since it was giving me a considerable kick. I could visit with Adam's spirit simply by willing it. It was a thrilling, if not a fulfilling, ability, built on principles of imitability.

But this mirroring trick didn't make me a mystic. So, how would I know which one of us had spoken? How could I tell whether my sense of self was broken? A shout, “Mendocino Gold!” had jumped out of my mouth uncontrolled as though it had been unconsciously cajoled. Coming up from some subterranean level, its author may have been Adam, haunting my thoughts like the devil. I was presented once again with this schizophrenic question: were the words that were surfacing being determined by unconscious choice, or was Adam the author of my voice?

As if I was grasping Adam himself, I placed the box upon the rock as I would upon a glass shelf.

The mention of Mendocino Gold presented a suggestion already sold.