

Haze In The East

The Haze in the East is not impenetrable. We have all stood at an indistinct distance from it (for distance to and from a drifting Earthbound cloudbank is difficult to measure) and watched as courageous, foolhardy members of our clan have, on rare occasions, purposefully marched into the haze, disappearing from our rapt gazes. Not a single soul has returned. Yet more go every year. The numbers are increasing, in fact. We are hard-pressed to explain their rise, or discourage it. The Haze is a vital part of our world experience, as is its mute exploration. I am next to venture into it, and so I comply with the ritual of writing a brief Heart-Relief, as we call such monologues. I am not a good writer. I was not chosen to explore the haze for my writing skills; nor am I able to extract myself from the adventure on any literary grounds.

My name is Yosher Clay. I am an ordinary man, as men go. I like to wake up in the morning and remember a good thing has happened in that I did wake up. Usually I spend the next part of the morning in quiet contemplation of not waking up. Or rather, I put myself back into a state of near-sleep by sitting perfectly still on a small mat called an Earth-rider. As my mind drifts back to the phantom space of sleep consciousness, I imagine my own death and the possible ephemeral experiences beyond it. Although I don't coerce it, the subject of this daily Earth-ride has been the same now for over five years, and slowly (for I am a slow man to the naked eye) I have reported this regularity to the Clan Elders, who without explanations speedily connected it to the Haze, and arranged my expedition.

The expedition will begin tomorrow as the sun rises. At that time the new morning infuses the Haze with an ethereal light, which, because it travels eastward through the Haze from the further recesses before emerging to the open air of our community, possesses a beckoning quality, as would a distant horseman drawing you closer with the gentle curling of a finger. On many occasions, as an early riser, I have

stood both alone and in company in the hallowed clearing before the tideline of the Haze and looked at that light, and I have seen impossible Truths and historical allusions result from it. At first these experiences were deeply personal. For example, my departed mother once momentarily swirled into being at the active forward lip of the Haze, so close to me on that occasion, it seemed, that her smile was enormous and charged with a communicative energy that stamped everlasting peace in my imagination. On later approaches, I saw intimidating vaporous dragons and galloping land creatures flying on the stolen, magnified wings of birds I never knew. Will I battle these beasts as a rite of my passage?

The truth is I have never confessed to their existence, despite my conviction (based on tenuous intuitive grounds at best) that everyone in the Clan privately interacts with these powerful symbols. I have been opposed to making any public disclosure of that conviction. My reasoning is very simple: the idea that we all interact with the symbols is so obvious it needs no vocal champion. That is, we are keeping it quiet for some reason we all tacitly conspire with and may not understand more clearly or need to. We honor the haziness of our service to the Haze. That parallel between the manner and object of our obedience is a compelling tautology for us, and validates our persistence through time.

Yet I am writing my Heart-Relief, the document that customarily signals a conscious permanent departure from the Clan. It was not long ago that no one wrote such farewells until advanced so far in age that only totally sedentary tasks remained viable. At that time, the mind is said to ignite with a feverish clarity simultaneously transparent and opaque. The resulting documents have become the sacred texts of our culture. Through the interpretive acumen of the Elders, the power and wisdom contained in those texts is woven back into the community as an agent of rejuvenation and inspiration. The results are incontestable and without the regular, active exegetical work of the Elders, it is certain the community would fundamentally lose its bearings and, as one fable

portrays, be swallowed forever by the Haze as it suddenly and uncharacteristically trespasses far beyond its usual tideline.

I believe in that fable now. As a preparatory exercise for my journey, two masked Elders dressed me in a traditional mask without eyes and guided me, each one holding one of my upper arms, into the Chamber of the Heart, deep within the hollowed root network of the mighty Chaserush tree, from the remote pinnacle of which all daily forecasts of the Haze descend through a series of a vocal relays to the responsible officials below, and from there to the community. We probably passed some of those uniformed public servants as we headed for our deeper destination, but I cannot confirm the encounter with my eyes, which were covered. It was my sense of smell that confirms their presence. They emitted a definite faint odor of fear, formality, and pride in relation to the Elders, I supposed. I was sure it was the history of my mask I was smelling, but the sensation arose and vanished too quickly for that source, and marked a sudden transition indoors.

Within, the Elders slid a new piece into my mask in exchange for the original solid slat where the eyes were supposed to go. As a result, I could see in a limited, magnified fashion, although everything I beheld beyond the closest proximity to my mask was completely out of focus and incomprehensible to me, as though I were staring into the Haze. There were smears of color and gyrating lights all around me. I began to have blurry visual effects in my eyes whenever other sensations took place, such as sound and gentle physical contact by the Elders. Eventually they sat me in a chair that felt so regal I saw it in my mind as a throne growing naturally within the Chaserush tree's enormous roots with dry, sturdy, pliant mushrooms over its interior as pillows. Through my mask I was fed a portion of this covering by the Elders as an initiation ritual and my physical experience suddenly condensed into a single point of light, within which surfaced and subsided the endless chain of Heart-Relief passages I had come for. I did not so much read them as internalize them into the very center of my being. They found

their way there immediately and without any help from or resistance by me. My own heartbeat was their rhythm. My own bloodstream was their course. My own imagination was their eternity and they opened it within me like an unexpected flower. There was no time in that encounter, as I suspect there will not be any in the deeper reaches of the Haze. When the elders came to return me to the outside world, they responded to my eventual, stammering questions about how long I had been reading by addressing me in the mode reserved for young males expressing a first formal reverence to their father.

So what then do I or don't I say in my own Heart-Relief? I could easily tell the story of the Clan's origin from the Haze, how it shaped us into existence and animated us with life only to assume a secondary relationship to us, as if we are somehow more primary than it is and our fascination with it is scientific as well as spiritual. I could, for example, chant the fragments of the rain into the winding bend of a river that fills the sea that forms the people. The story is the architectural lattice of my skeleton; it is a blueprint that appears in the exhalation of one's lungs and we all know it and recognize it while breathing attentively. However, I leave these mysteries to the Elders, who will know how and where to find them even as I neglect them out of honor.

What I need to tell is rather the story of a young girl as she enters my workshop in a state of mounting panic because she cannot find her mother. I am not the girl's mother. I am building a tall vase on my sculpting wheel and the additional moist earth in my hands is sticking nicely to the vessel, giving it round, sumptuous hips. "It will be all right, dear," I say to the girl in the doorway of my workshop, but also simultaneously to the girl on my sculpting wheel, who spins continuously, but seems always to face me as I form her. "You will not be alone long," I say, and the girl in the doorway bursts into tears, hunching over her knees suddenly. "I'm lost," she sobs. Yet I respond as if to the sculpture, consoling it that we all begin lost and eventually return to our homes. "In fact," I instruct her, "the initial feeling of being lost is one's first step from home, but therefore also one's first step of return to it. If you follow my reasoning," I defer to her

gently. "You made my mother!" the girl in the doorway exclaims, pointing excitedly. She hops up from her crouching position and approaches me without the slightest suggestion of her former despondency or pain. "Only the face is wrong," the girl says as she gets close enough to decide. "You need to add to the lips and the forehead." I agree to these suggestions amiably and apply more earth to the spinning mouth of the vase. The result is a more ornate container than I usually fashion, but the girl and I are very happy with it and decide to adorn it right away with a flower, which she selects with great deliberation from a nearby vase in my usual style. "Mommy likes Cleemas most," she decides. For that reason I commend the girl's choice and ask her where her mother is. "With the thread," the girl says promptly, surprising herself with the knowledge, which arises within her as a sudden vision not informed by conscious thought. I see very clearly that the girl is seeing the vision and wait for it to let go of her slightly before tilting my head forward as a gesture of encouragement and gently exclaiming, "Go!" To my surprise the girl turns to me first and kisses me appreciatively on the cheek, throwing her arms around me and hugging me tightly. When she lets go, I see an ageless wisdom in her eyes that glints once brightly and then recedes as the girl turns away from me and runs from my workshop to the place where her mother must be. Although it is cut, the Cleema flower in that vase does not wither or change. I am taking it with me into the Haze as my greatest offering and memory.

As a further tribute to my experience with the young girl, I also intend to bring the loose end of a ball of woven yarn identical to the kind I believe her mother must have been purchasing when the girl became magically aware of her mother's whereabouts. As I disappear into the Haze, I will pull that loose end of yarn from its source, which will reside in the hands of the young girl's mother. I have made the arrangements and she has agreed to participate in the ritual. In fact, the woman has insisted upon supplying the yarn herself. She claims to have intact the original spool from the day I met her daughter, and says she has kept it over the years for no reason she could name until now. It is the

component piece of a special fabric intended only for us. I have bid her to tie the end I do not take with me to her wrist to insure its safekeeping on the familiar side of the Haze. She has consented, but not without candid remarks that she will follow far behind me into the Haze if that action is necessary to preserve the yarn's integrity rather than letting it stretch to the point of snapping. Thus, I may have to sever it myself to spare the good woman.

Yet she seems accepting of the journey as an appropriate possibility for her life at this time, and in that openness to the mysterious influences of a higher power that she does not resist, the woman displays a keenness of perception that inspires me to meet my own daunting challenge. I feel lighter of heart and, as I write, the relief of the words becomes more and more apparent to me.

The woman's name is Nazah. She is obviously gifted with senses far surpassing the ordinary physical plane. Yet the obviousness of those senses is a paradox insofar as it arises from Nazah's total detachment from claiming credit for herself. She is inevitably herself, not intentionally herself. Or so she makes apparent to you as you interact with her and she talks about other things entirely. I have spent several days with her since the public injunction by the Elders that I go into the Haze, and never has she failed to alight on subjects of mutual interest to us without really trying to or caring terribly if she does. On one occasion after exploring my small workshop Nazah complimented my pottery for both its outer form and the resulting inner spaces. In that way she touched a passionate interest of mine I have never thought, or known how, to share apart from the pottery: the idea that its true significance resides in what is not the material, but the material's counterpart, its spatial shadow.

The idea remains resistant of language. That which we build is not built for its corporeal reality, but for the utility that results when shape is woven around nothingness. It is the liberated nothingness that we strive for, the kindled significance where before significance was absent. To get meaning from the void, to nurture and host the void in

such a way as to generate and best accommodate life within it—those are the purposes behind our creations. Those are the living voids in our actions. They are why the room is hospitable only after you carve out its windows, why the earthen vessel is itself on account of its emptiness. We too function on this principle, but we resist it very strongly as well. Taken to its limit, it is an incantation for destruction.

In my opinion it is also liberation. So the question becomes who is ready for liberation, and who judges who is ready? Accountability slides elusively up the hierarchy to the Elders and finally vanishes into the Haze itself, as fits our culture. On a first level, I am responsible for my imminent departure because I chose to meditate and disclose the persistent results. On a second, the Elders are responsible because they connected my disclosure to the mysteries of the Haze. Then at last the Haze is responsible too, for existing in such a way as to influence so many events. It is like the Haze as an entity is seeking to bring part of itself back into itself and so experience a fathomless form of self-awareness. To the degree that I am certain of that suggestion I am also its living proof. I am very certain at this time. And the grounds of my certainty are as porous and teeming with indistinct haze as currently is every supposedly solid object I attempt to snare with my undivided attention.

As I write this section, I marvel at the artistic hollowness of the alphabet and all the landscapes of haze between and upon the words. I no longer see them as I used to. I no longer see anything as I used to. The morning arrives out of the hollow folds of the night, and glistens with luminous promise. I am already in the Haze. I have crossed into it before I knew what was happening. I have never been apart from it.

There is a tideline in our village. It marks the periphery of the Haze. Like any line of boundary, it is an illusion sustaining life. Cross it before reaching it and sustain life's meaning too.