

Promise

C. Scott Ananian

May 5, 1997

[A bleak expanse. Caked salt. N and B sit on a rise, looking out. N is old. B is young.]

N: Do you see the green?

B: No.

[A pause.]

N: Over there. At the horizon.

B: No.

N: I see it.

[Pause.]

B: Are you hungry?

N: I might be.

B: I brought food.

N: From where?

B: Where I came from. Over there.

N: What is it?

B: Dried meat. An animal I killed.

N: No. None of that.

B: You must eat something.

N: My stomach isn't well.

B: I've got... an apple?

N: Ah. Yes.

B: Why not the meat?

N: Six hundred years of vegetables make a habit.

B: There wasn't?

N: No. Only vegetables.

B: Oh.

[A pause.]

B: How long...

N: Until it rains.

B: But why?

N: I've told you. Shhh... be patient.

[A pause.]

B: I think I see the green.

N: Where?

B: Over there.

[N peers hard into the distance.]

N: No. Not there.

B: Are you sure?

N: Your eyes are playing tricks.

B: But...

N: No, not yet.

B: What do you think will happen?

N: Assurance.

B: No, I mean how?

N: That's not for me to decide.

[A pause.]

B: Have people changed?

N: Some.

B: I mean, are we better than we were before?

N: Not so much.

B: Then why did it happen?

N: I'm not the one to ask.

B: You've got ideas, though. Don't you?

N: There are fewer of us.

B: What does that mean?

N: The darkness is more... spread out.

B: Tell me how it was.

N: No.

B: Why not?

N: My father died in a muckheap. I don't want to recall it.

B: But we're just repeating, aren't we? It's not improving.

N: It will.

B: How can you say that? Look around you! There's nothing. Death.

N: I see green.

B: Even so! What are you waiting for?

N: Hope.

B: What kind of hope? Another promise that we won't perish? The reassurance that we'll be able to destroy and kill on a salt-parched desert for the rest of our days?

N: An answer.

B: To what?

N: It's true. People haven't changed. Their groupings? They've changed. The black clusters are no longer so dark. They've been [*A faint grin.*] watered down.

B: But what does that fix? We're going in circles, waiting for another destruction to cleanse.

N: The circle's been broken.

B: No it hasn't. The promise is only that it will be different next time.

N: The circle was broken. There's another answer.

B: What?

N: Sit. Wait.

B: Every year we do this. Over and over. Sitting until we can't.

N: Waiting for renewal. One day, the answer.

B: You seem so certain.

N: Is that why you return?

B: Yes. I can't help it.

N: You believe it.

B: Yes. Why? How can you be so certain things will change?

N: I've been there. I watched the waters come. I watched man, boy, woman, child, try to save themselves. I floated above them.

B: I've heard the story before.

N: You can't save yourself. Not then, not now. The answer will come.

B: Another rescue.

N: Another vessel.

[Pause. B scans the horizon.]

B: Is that the green you saw?

N: There?

B: Yes.

N: Yes.

[Pause.]

B: It gets bigger every year. I normally can't see it until the second day.

N: Your eyes are getting brighter.

B: Yours seem to grow dim. How much longer?

N: Whatever's given me. My grandfather lived to hear the promise.

B: And you wish the same.

N: Yes.

B: Yes.

[A pause.]

B: Do you see the clouds?

N: It will rain.

B: Yes. It will.