Promise

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[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. There.
N: What is it?
B: Dried meat.
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 other?
N: Six hundred years of 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. 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 drowning.

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. The first day’s not yet over.
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.