

## **An Eternal Bond by Mohammad Khan**

It was summer. I was working in a field under a deep blue sky with my humble home in a dead log a few yards behind me. The grass stretched far into the distance and a river snaked through this paradise. My hand would have brushed the grass as I walked if not for the grass avoiding my hand.

I carried a small notebook with me at the time. Then it was barely filled. I had just started noting the dying things around me, at first to bide my time, but later I recorded to remember the dead. I thought it was the least I could do. However, I could only take note of the dying things, never speak to them or prevent their death. I didn't know why things died, but I was always there when they died. I suppose I killed them.

Fall had set in and the leaves changed hue. The notebook grew, the pages filled, but book was never full. I flipped through the pages looking at the animals and the plants I had seen die. I kicked through the dead leaves cursing my situation and remembering where I once resided. Cursed to roam this place and bear witness the end of all things. There had to be a reason for their deaths. All these deaths, what was the point of it? There had to be a motivation to put me through this. Why was I to witness their end? I couldn't save them no matter how much I tried. I only caused death.

Winter arrived and its deathly whisper spoke to the land driving it to its deep slumber. I was the most occupied with my notebook. So much death. Much of it senseless. Suicide was a common thought. And each time I dismissed it because I did not want another soul to bare the burden I bare. I wasn't certain if my 'situation' would end or just carry on to the next poor soul. I always wore long clothing to hide the scars covering my body.

With the arrival of spring came the judging looks of the animals as they saw me. A mother deer guards her fawn from my presence. Other animals snarl as I walk by. Even the plants shuddered as I walked by.

I was running for shelter in a thunderstorm and found a cave hiding in a forest. The torrential rain and lightning continued outside the cave. Each lightning strike illuminated portions of the cave and revealed I was not alone.

A family of baboons was also taking shelter. I saw them in each lightning flash. In each flash, I saw their fear increase. And soon, they were gone. They left me in search of a different cave.

I could see them jumping through the forest looking for cover. I knew they didn't have long. They would've survived if they had stayed.

Enraged, I stood at the mouth of the cave and shouted into the distance.

"YOU THINK I WANTED THIS! YOU THINK I ENJOY DOING THIS!"

The rain picks up and some water starts falling into the cave. The wind blows into the cave pushing me back in. The rain continued for the rest of the night.

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The water glistened in the morning light. Small puddles lined the mouth of the cave and tiny droplets of water fell from the leaves above. The plants took no notice of me as they absorbed the nutrients from last night's downpour. The animals, on the contrary, kept their cautious and guarding demeanor when they saw me.

I reached the boundary of the forest. The river was larger yet flowed gently. I was alone at the boundary of the forest. I thought I was alone until I saw her in the distance.

Across the river was her. An ethereal beauty. She was tending to the plants around the river. Helping spread some of their seeds. The animals gravitated to her, even the plants leaned if they could in her direction.

I was amazed by her gentle aura and kind disposition emanating from her being.

She looked up from her plants.

We locked eyes and knew then. She would be mine. And I would be hers. We were complete opposites, but knew we were meant for each other.

She lived among nature. She slept in leaves and under trees.

I lived in the dying trees. It kept me safe and provided sturdy place in storms.

She couldn't bare to see the trees hurt, but understood that we needed a safe place. She looked away as I began tearing down the trees to build our new home. After the home was built, she quickly planted flowers and plants to make up for the loss.

The same day, she showed me a garden she had created.

"Where did all of this come from?" I asked.

"I made it. I made everything" she replied. She demonstrated with a seed. She placed the seed in the ground and watered. Soon a small sapling sprouted from the soil.

She showed the creatures in the dirt and the plants growing due to their assistance. The trees she replanted in the forest and the animals she birthed to house in the forest. She left a few spots empty.

"Aren't you going to plant in those empty spots?" I asked her.

She shrugged and waved off my question. She ushered me to follow her.

I walked through her garden of life and found a dying plant.

"What's wrong with this one?"

"I don't know and I can't save it" she spoke in a teary voice.

I placed my hand underneath the plants drooping stem. And it rested its body in my palm like a child lying their head in his father's hand for comfort. Never before had a plant leaned itself against my hand.

Instinctively my hand reached for my notebook in my pocket.

"What's that", she asked.

I stammered. I didn't know how to tell her, but she made the connections herself.

"The animals spoke of you. Someone who takes note when they die." She said in surprised but fearful voice. "You killed them."

"I don't know." I spoke shamefully.

I hand her my notebook. "This notebook notes everything that has died since I began. I didn't choose to do this. I never wanted this. I'm -"

"You were the one screaming", she spoke in a soft voice.

"What?"

"The night of the storm. The animals and I heard a voice being carried in the winds. I've never heard or felt such a hurt and confused soul. I searched during the storm but I couldn't find the source."

I didn't respond.

She put her hand on my shoulder and embraced me.

"I wanted to know who was hurt so I could hug them and let them know it'll be ok. And that everything happens for a reason. Everything has beauty. You just need to find it."

I was afraid her hand would feel the scars on my body. I felt her hand touch a scar on my back, but she didn't quiver and her embrace only tightened. Never before had I felt wanted. For as long as I could remember, I was separate from the world. In this moment, I felt loved. In this moment, I felt bliss. In this moment, I felt I was with the world. But I still felt conflicted. Even with her, I'll still witness the end.

However, her words echoed in my mind. 'Everything has beauty'. And I am determined to find it.

Months passed and she created new plants, new forests, and new animals to roam the fields through the paradise. We didn't speak of our dichotomy much, but I wondered who had it worse. Her who knew her children would die by me. Or me, knowing I'd be the one watch every beautiful thing she creates die.

Time continues. As we grew older, her creations became binary. Nothing was created without a pair. An eternal bond, she called it.

We're standing in the garden watching the animals in the forest. She pointed to two deer eating the grass near the forest.

"One being split in half. So there's perfect pair for everyone."

"How would they find each other", I asked.

"Just like we did. So that everyone will have a partner." She walked back to the house.

I noticed that one of the trees I previously cut down had a hole in its trunk. As I walked closer, the hole now housed an a parliament of owls.

"The dead tree provided a home", I whispered to myself.

I turned to call to her, but I saw her already watching me. Smiling.  
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We sat on the hillside to watch the sunset. Every sunset reminded me of the end. The ephemeral quality of life and I couldn't stand watching the end of everything. Knowing I watched everything turn to soot.

"Do you think I could ever create?" I asked her quietly. "Not like you. But through dying plants and animals?"

She didn't answer. The sun continued to fall and night was emerging behind us.

"Do you think I could ever kill?" Her tone was quiet as if she had been plagued by a similar question in her mind.

We sat in silence for a while never making eye contact.

She continued. "Remember when you asked why I didn't plant in those empty spots?"

"Yes."

"I used to plant everywhere, but sometimes I see plants dying. They're not actually dying, but I see them dying. In the future maybe. That's why I stopped."

Her gaze stayed upon the lying sun on the horizon. I looked towards her. She continued.

"Look", she said gesturing to the great expanse before us. A palate of reds and oranges emanating from the single sun in the distance as the dark sheet quickly follow. "The beauty of calmness and remaining still. You are here. I feel your comforting presence."

I didn't respond.

"Millions of lives full of potential. Millions die everyday and you bare witness to each and everyone one of them..... Then you would see my end as well", she continued.

I hadn't considered that. I can't see her die. I couldn't bare it.

She turned towards me. Her eyes locked with mine. And we stayed like this for a while. Gazing, analyzing in each other's eyes.

"But I can't lose you to." The words escaped my mouth with such ease that I didn't even realize I spoke.

She put her hand on my cheek. I tilted my head to rest slightly in her palm.

"You won't lose me", she spoke softly. "We'll be together forever.....One being split in half."

"An Eternal Bond."

"This is it. And it's ephemeral. And that's what makes it beautiful."

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## Epilogue

Now I wander the earth alone. I've seen many places, visited many people. Many who could not see the beauty. My notebook stays with me with its pages being continuously filled. The beauty of simplicity often eluded me until now. The flap of a butterfly's wings and the flight of a bumblebee. Knowing that everything comes to an end is what makes it valuable.

Everything has beauty and I could finally see.

All the lives I see end, and I will be blamed for each and every one of them. I am a powerless being being forced to witness to the doom of reality.

Sometimes I catch glimpses of her in the crowd. The whisper of her voice in the wind or her laughter in the crowd. Though I may not see her, I feel her presence with me everywhere.

We have an eternal bond that spans time and space.

A bond between Life and Death.

