

FATE ETERNAL

BY

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Multi-colored leaves spindle to the ground as the wind twists through the trees carrying another long cold season with them. A middle-aged man with leathery skin and a toil withered face leads his oxen and carriage up a narrow ridge. A ten-year-old boy pokes his head through the front aperture "Are we there yet father?" The answer is written in his father's expression. His mother Johara, a humble and obedient wife pulls the boy back in. The man stabs his walking stick in the rocky ground and slogs on, but only a few more furlongs. He pulls his rig to a stop and warmly looks across the plateau at a small thatch hut that seems to have been abandoned for years. No sooner than could the wagon stop the young boy followed by his twin sister leap to the ground and run to their father's side. In overlapping unison, they cannot contain their enthusiasm "Is that it father?" It's a grand place." "Look at it, so much room to play." "C'mon Leila." "Yeah, let's go Habib" and off they scatter with the youthful pent up energy of a long and claustrophobic journey.

Nabil watches his children playfully chase each other around as he loads the last of their belongings into their new home. A dog emerges from the forest and joins in the fun with the kids. After a few treats and a game of fetch, they are suddenly all the best of friends. Running fast from her brother, Leila trips over a wooden flap that's embedded in the side of a protruding mound. "Hey Habib, look at this." "What is it?" "It looks like a doorway." "Yeah, but to where?" Just then, the dog growls and takes a guarding posture between them and the door.

The next morning, Dad's out hunting, Mom's cleaning and the dog is sleeping by the fire pit. Habib and Leila sneak out the back with one mission in mind.

"You open it Leila." "What, are you afraid?" "I'm not afraid of anything but who's going to protect you while I'm opening the door?" "In case something jumps out, you know." "Yeah right" she grabs the handle and tugs it open. They both look down the shallow hole with a tinge of fear. Curiosity prevails over fear and the stagnant smell that emerges, Habib lights the oil lantern, and they descend down a rope ladder that leads to a giant opening at the bottom.

After sifting through the rummage and playing around for a while, they come across a brass vase. Leila can't resist but to open it. As she does, a muscular wind whips around the cave knocking

them both to the ground. A swirling cloud surrounds each of them as their bodies tremble and convulse.

Habib wakes up first, gets his bearings, and grabs a sharp branch. Habib walks over to Leila, raises the spear over his head, and plunges it down. Leila rolls out of the way with no time to spare and sweeps his legs out from under him. They fight with tactics way beyond their years but Habib catches her with a lucky blow, knocking her to the ground. Quickly he starts up the ladder pulling it up with him as he goes. Leila's screaming voice muffles as Habib closes the hatch, sealing her fate and sealing her in.

Habib takes a deep breath as if he hadn't in a thousand years. His walk and mannerisms are clearly altered. A fiendish grin washes over his face as he heads toward the thatch hut.

Habib slams open the door, startling his mother. "Bukhari is on the table dear, you're just in time." He lurches over to the table and scoops with his hands like a starved beast. "Where's your sister?" she turns around and her eyes open wide "Habib, use your spoon, where did you pick up such manners?" Habib picks up his spoon and looks at it as though he never has before. He dives back in to his meal as his mother goes out in search of her daughter. "Leeiiiilaa..."

The dog sits out in the middle of the field behind the house, barking intermittently. Johara heads out toward the dog her face is furrowed with worry.

Nabil enters the house seeing only his son at the table. "Where's your mother and sister?" the boy silently looks over his father head to toe. "Don't hold your tongue boy, answer me" Nabil angrily walks over to his son "You had better watch your manners boy- "Just as he reaches the table Habib grabs his arm and as if struck by lightning they both stiffen momentarily and convulse to the ground.

The dog is whining and circling the entrance to the underground cavern as Johara approaches. Opening the door she calls to her daughter. "Yes I'm down here, drop the ladder and I will climb to you." Following her instructions, she waits for Leila to ascend. As she gets close to the top a hand is extended down to help her over the edge. Their hands lock and they also stiffen and convulse. Leila is barely able to hold on as she struggles for consciousness.

Nabil is walking fast with purpose to the girl and her mother. Upon reaching them, he kicks Johara in the ribs forcing her to flail and let go of the girl. Leila plummets to the bottom again, screaming all the way down until her cry is silenced with a thud.

The two parents, instead of concern for their daughter, step cautiously around each other in a combatant circle. Johara kicks his shin and slugs him hard on the jaw with strength greater than she could possibly possess. Soon they are in a duel to the death, beating each other bloody and releasing an inner rage pent up for generations. Nabil is atop Johara, beating her relentlessly as she gropes for his holster. She pulls his flintlock out and flips him off her with a commanding thrust. They stand again and circle, she's pointing the gun at him. "I never wanted to kill you Hakim," Johara says to Nabil in between gasps "I always wanted to kill you Jabbar" He lunges toward her as the gun goes off.

The dog leaps into the air between them and breaks apart into a million swirling particles disintegrating the musket meant for Hakim. The cyclone forms into a statuesque and massive Jinni standing between them with arms crossed and a disappointed scowl upon his face.

Immediately Nabil and Johara's bodies kneel in his presence. "Oh holy master of all Jinn, please have mercy on our souls" Hakim begs, "We have been trapped for a thousand years together beneath the earth" Jabbar pleads "Yes, we thought it would be for all eternity. We were mad with passion toward each other" "Please have mercy on us"

The master of all Jinn speaks with a thunderous voice "It was I who sentenced you to the fate you have endured." "You have been nothing but a disappointment to me and have wreaked havoc where ever your paths had taken you." "For this disgrace you will be punished... But, as you are my children, I will also have mercy on your souls." "I will not send you down to Hades for the rest of eternity." "I will merely condemn you to your previous fate for another thousand years." "At the end of such time you will have forgotten that I have put you there and you will, once again be tested as you were on this day." "If your souls have healed thy selves your future will be blessed." "But if not, your fate will repeat itself for all time to come." The great Jinni master holds out his arms ceremoniously looking to the heavens. Nabil and Johara's bodies go limp as the spirits of Hakim and Jabbar leave them. The spiritual energy of the battling souls entwines and eddies down the fissure from whence they came. The brass vase is sealed once again for another thousand years.

The next morning, the family awakens from the most realistic and disturbing dreams they had ever had...