

THE KILLING OF A NOBODY

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY

KARM ARGER

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PREVIEW

This book is divided into three main sections comprising five stories. The first two are set within the background of a vicious global conflict, which lasted over six years, and is known as the Second World War. Gripping, and fast moving, they are an appreciation of the irrepressible spirit that burns within every human breast and in dedication to its endurance.

The third is a conglomeration of further stories, as diverse and varied as the reader may ever find but each has its own surprise ending. It is hoped that people with an open mind would read and enjoy their true worth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE KILLING OF A NOBODY

*'Tis all a chequerboard of nights and days
Where Destiny with men for pieces plays
Hither and thither moves and mates and slays
And one by one back in the closet lays*

(Rubiyat of Omar Khayam)

By
Edward Fitzgerald

Chapter One

Yesterday was a Saturday. It had dawned the same as any other. There was no hint, suggestion, or indication, nor had I any premonition that it was

going to be anything else other than a particularly ordinary day. How was I to know then before the sun had set that day it would have become one, which was going to be unforgettable, marking forever a milestone in my life!

The long midday sun had borne down mercilessly baking white the powdery sand covering the entire ground. In this intense copper-red heat no sensible animal would have stirred - certainly not any bird or beast - except, maybe, man. The first two of these, that is bird and beast though difficult to discern with the naked eye, were undoubtedly out there resting either on the dappled ground or upon the branches of trees; any place in fact where they were afforded safe and peaceful enjoyment. They rested, waiting instinctively, for the fiery orb to sink lower in the sky. If one had looked searchingly and painstakingly, of course, one could have found them. But as for me, I knew they were there and I

had no intention of ever harming them. I am sure they, too, were aware of my innocent presence because they made no attempt to avoid me.

It was the raucous barking of our two dogs that jolted me into full consciousness. Rising slowly to my feet, I shuffled along towards the end of the long straight veranda whence I could look out over the spacious grounds surrounding our home. My peering, probing, eyes noticed nothing out of the ordinary save that by now I was able to tell by the barking of the animals they had moved round to the other side of the house. It was with scant interest that I ventured out of the confines of the cool veranda into the stifling enervating heat, to explore. Slowly, and lethargically, I treaded my weary way down from the portico to the steps, from the steps to the solid ground, my feet by now well insulated by thick rubber-soled shoes. What I saw both thrilled and frightened me.

In truth, it took my breath away and left me gasping for air for confronting the dogs was a hissing snake about twelve or thirteen feet long. With hooded head raised high, darting forked-tongue sensing the air, it struck out repeatedly at the elusive hounds, missing every time. Again and again, the flattened head speared towards them but exercising an uncanny judgement the dogs managed to keep just out of reach. The hounds were obviously nervous. Were they afraid? I could not tell but if they were they still held their ground all the same. For the snake, its only escape route and safety - which remained barred - lay past the bared canine teeth of the snarling animals. To flee in the opposite direction meant slithering across some thirty feet of open ground, over the white burning sand. I am certain the snake had realised this meant immediate death. I watched the battle continue helplessly, and fearful of my safety, keeping a long distance away from the combatants.

Already, the sound of their nervous, querulous barking, which had first awoken me, had changed to a vicious, violent and irrepressible anger. Only this time the dogs had probably sensed they had by now gained the advantage over their legless quarry. With salivating mouths, hairs bristling right up to their necks like a ruff, they lunged at it from every direction, snapping, snarling, growling, each seeking to deliver the final, mortal blow. One savage bite from those razor sharp teeth would have instantly ripped apart and broken the snake's back. Seemingly, the deadly snake must have become alerted to this impending danger because suddenly - and with such incredible speed that I could not remember seeing anything more than a blurred movement - the reptile lowered its head, whipped round like a top and then like a loosed quarrel streaked right across the scorching sands in an attempt to escape from its tormentors which were following close behind. I don't think it managed to

cover even fifteen feet before it slowed to a stop. Frizzling in the noonday sun, its body spiralled and shrivelled and then, in a moment, all movement ceased. It was undoubtedly dead and had died almost instantly. This life or death struggle, so often found in nature's domain, was now finally over. Death having intervened, the dogs quickly lost all interest in their quarry. They headed first to our open-air pond to slake their thirst and after that trotted off to settle down in the large shade provided by a leafy tree. They preened, licked themselves clean and then satisfied yawned widely before fully stretching out their bodies. Their hind legs splayed apart, heads lowered comfortably between their paws, they rested together in amity.

By this time my irrepressible curiosity had been aroused. The earlier torpor had vanished and I was wide-awake. Searching about, I found a long piece of dried bamboo with which I picked up the dead

snake. Snakes should never be manhandled - even the dead ones - so much had been drilled piously into me. I intended to heave it as far away as my strength would allow. Pivoting on my heels, I swung back and forth to get into a rhythm. Swivelling as I did so, I saw not too far in the distance, but well beyond the boundary fence of our property, a group of five men emerge through the rear gate of the fortified military establishment nearby. They were marching towards an open piece of ground. Four of them wore military uniforms and three were armed with tall rifles but the fifth, walking a few feet in front of the group, looked like an unarmed civilian. In his right hand he carried a shovel. I could see him clearly as I could, indeed, all five of them. As he walked this man's head rolled peculiarly from side to side, keeping time as it were, with his footsteps. His shoulders appeared asymmetrical, one end drooping, the other standing much higher. There being no regularity in his steps

his disjointed movements tended to give him a *hoppity* gait as he went along. Stopping suddenly in mid-swing, I stepped forward to watch, walking to the very edge of our land until I was standing up against the barbed wire fence. From where I stood nearly the whole of his face was visible. It was a face that was totally devoid of any cheer.

* * *

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The author is a Lawyer. He was born in Malaya and received his early education in schools in Malaya and Singapore.

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