

*AL FURQUAN

BY LLOYD MORRIS

“IT is written,” said Abid; “be, therefore, not sad, Lord.”
We were looking down at a dead elephant from which the ivory had been hewn. Two natives lay near: one, with a broad bladed spear driven through his back between the shoulder blades, was lying face downwards; his head slightly twisted and mouth filled with particles of earth ground up between his teeth, the other lay staring up to the sky, one leg stiffly extended and one knee drawn upwards; the outflung hands clenched round uptorn reeds whose serrated edges had lacerated the fingers as he had plucked in his convulsive act of death. The haft of a knife, with a slight shewing of its double edged blade, projected from his breast a little below and to the left of the breast bone.

The hunters had been hunted and the same hands had robbed them at once of their booty and their life.

The tawny vegetation for a little space was trampled flat. The air shimmered in the heat and silence of the tropic noon; and high, very high directly overhead, a speck poised patient and changelessly in the fierce blue African sky.

“Surely it is ordained that the slayer shall be slain, likewise he that slays; and that all things shall prey on each other.”

He gazed athwart the savage sunlight as he spoke; his dark face expressionless, his burnous thrown back, and one delicate hand resting lightly on the haft of the knife in his broad sash; the thin fingers of the other combing down the small beard curling darkly at the point of his chin.

“Does not the creeping weed climb up the stem and strangle

* Al Furquan—— Arabic: derived by Muhammad through the Jews from the Syriac and the Aethopic; where its meaning is Deliverance. In Koranic exegesis it is applied to express Insight, i. e. Deliverancé through Insight.

the flower of the forest; is not the voice of my lord the lion heard in the night calling unto Allah for meat; and from afar do the jackal and the vulture journey to the kill . . . these things be known. And the hawk strikes down the dove; and the monkey-people chatter foolishly as they pluck and eat the young corn . . . and women, do they not prey on men. Surely they are as a madness to men. . . . And this thing is true as my lord knowest; for to Lokimi who was as moonlight in the darkness of my heart, I brought death with my hand because of her lover . . . my friend, whom also I slew. And men because they are the greatest of all things they prey on all and on each other . . . this, also, knows my lord; who is my brother, also, since our blood mingled as we slew together, and together lay under the shadow of *Azrael* at the killing in the land beyond this country of low black people. And above men are devils and *afrects* which are a torment unto mankind, decoying them into solitary places there to slay them. And above the devils are there not the gods of the unbelievers: the devil gods of the black people, and the god-spirits of El Weslei and Katoliki and Petero the great cutter of ears all fighting together. . . . Nay, lord, why should we give burial to these dogs? Allah will provide their burial; for it is written, "unto all it is given to be hungry and seek meat." Shall we rob the jackal and the vulture? Moreover it were a great foolishness to toil with the matter of digging when the sun looks down so fiercely. Nevertheless, I will take the knife from the dead one; seeing it is surely a good blade. . . . *Bismillah!*"

In the country of the low black people Abid died long ago; betrayed by a woman to the spears of his enemies. His words remain. They came often to me in the wet, blood bespattered trenches of Flanders and on Eastern Fronts; as I participated in a killing great beyond his dreams, or any his fierce soul ever imagined. They come to me above the voice of the cities as I walk among men in their ways of peace.

Along cold blasted ways within the Arctic circle where the northern lights go wavering over the snow; by fever stricken swamp and tangled jungle within the tropics; storm tossed on icy and desperate seas off the once dreaded Horn; over heat smitten wastes of desert sand where the Simoon lurks behind the mirage—where these roads go down, in offices of duty I passed in earlier years with the heart of high adventure. And when despite eager

youth and its proud physical exultancy, some fateful and tragic happening struck me to sobriety and thoughts on the cruelty of men and things—yet would I bring comfort to myself with the thought that it was only in waste places of earth as yet untamed by civilization that men and things were cruel; and that beyond the wild in the cities and towns wherein man had fenced himself off from raw nature, there was a comity and security wherein something splendid in man labored upwards from the brute.

Now, after the *abbatoir* of Europe with its volume production of organized human butchery; and the *abbatoir* of Peace with its killing by *chicane* and jobbed politics; I look again wistfully back to the trails that I trod in youth, as to a sweet and easy pleasuring. And I take with me and hold fast to the sure knowledge that amid all the tumult of civilization there is a splendid striving after fineness; but knowing also, that whether in the brooding wild, or the capitals of the western world, the saying made to me by Abid in the country of the low black people is a thing of record and of substance; in that the slayer is slain, and likewise he that slays; and that all things prey on each other, since it is given unto all things to be hungry and seek meat—*Bismillah!*

But there is a killing that transcends the mere slaying of the body which rises in the morning and at evening is not.

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