

The Rebel

By

James Gregory Maynard

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Ahmad crossed the courtyard of the prison in a hurry. He found his comrade, Rasheed, sitting on a bench in the shade. “Rasheed, a guard told me the council will be here tomorrow and we are to go before them.”

The tall, handsome Persian raised his eyes to meet his good friend’s. “Who is this guard that would give you this information?”

“He is my sister’s brother-in-law. I don’t know him well, but she says he will do his best to help us.”

“Go tell him to unlock the door then.”

Ahmad gave Rasheed a smirk. “He has a family and many children, and they cannot afford for him to lose his head just yet.”

A broad smile creased Rasheed’s face. “Ah, I suppose so. What else did he say?”

“The authorities want your head but they are afraid the people will rebel.”

“They want to cut off the head of the snake. I see.”

“Yes, my friend, but they are more afraid of you dead than alive. He said the council would decide our fate tomorrow. Mullah Rahim will petition their forbearance if we will repent for our rebellion and accept forty lashes in public.”

The smile evaporated as quickly as it had appeared, and a dark mood flashed in Rasheed’s eyes. “Mullah Rahim is a good man and has been our spiritual leader since we were children, but what he asks is not acceptable.”

“Rasheed, I fear, if we do not repent and accept the new order, they will behead us.”

“As a barbarian would. Would you expect anything less from these thieves and thugs, these uninvited guests to our valley? We did not ask them to come here, to bring their Shariah Law, to tell us how to dress, how to pray, how to educate our children. Who are these people who come to our valley and take away our freedom?”

“Rasheed, my friend, for the past six months we did our best to rid our valley of these tyrants only to be caught. We were the only hope for the valley, but the people were afraid to follow us. They are good people, Rasheed, but our neighbors are sheep. Now our fate is in the hands of the council and I am afraid of what will happen to us, to our families.” Despair blanketed Ahman’s face.

“Cheer up Ahman, my brother, sadness is not a good look for a brute like you.”

“Are you not afraid of the sword?”

“Ahman, you and I have been like brothers since birth, and for over thirty years we’ve lived here in this valley. Our life has been lived as free as the birds, making our own way, by our wits and strong backs. What kind of life will there be to live now under this iron yoke of the Shariah and its soldiers?”

“At least we’ll be alive.”

“Alive? Really? Hollow zombies mindlessly going about our assigned tasks. That is what you call alive? Ahman, a life half lived in freedom is better than a full life lived under this harsh regime. At least I’ve tasted the sweet fruit of freedom, which is more than can be said for those walking corpses that now tell us how to live our lives. Better to die with that being the last taste in my mouth than to live every day hereafter with the bitter bile of hatred behind the counterfeit smile of a bowed head.”

“What are you going to say to the council tomorrow, Rasheed? I am afraid for you.”

“We’ll see what tomorrow brings.”

“Are you awake, Rasheed?”

“Yes Ahman, I’ve been awake since the sun’s first light.” Rasheed sat on his bedroll with his legs crossed, staring down at his hands lying on his thighs.

“Have you decided what you’re going to say to the council?”

“Look at these hands, Ahman. Like yours, they are strong and able to do our work. For the first time in our lives, we have the blood of men on them. Why? It’s because these men came to our valley to take away our freedom, to suck the life from our bodies. We fought back to save our people from the terrible fate that has fallen upon the valley. These hands have taken much blood to spare our children from the Shariah lash. These hands that once made beautiful furniture, wiped away a child’s tear, held my wife’s breast and scribed stories of our lives, are now covered with their blood.”

“Here come the guards for us. Get up, Rasheed.”

The three Ayatollahs of the council sat behind a long table before the ten men standing single file in front of them. Guards were poised in a semicircle behind the inmates. Their

guns ready to quell any trouble. The large crowd ordered to the proceedings watched with apprehension, and worry about the fate of their protectors, their heroes.

The Ayatollah in the middle addressed the prisoners. “Which of you is Rasheed?”

“I am Rasheed.” A defiant glare targeted each of the panel.

“Mullah Rahim told us that you are a good man, but misguided by your passions and that you are worthy of our mercy. Are you willing to admit to your sin against the law of Allah and commit your allegiance to our cause?”

Rasheed stared at the speaker, silent in his thoughts, rolling his fingers into his palms, contempt for the oppressors growing. Then, he erupted. “Your brand of law is not the law of Allah, it is the law of tyrants intent on enslaving people to their personal will, not Allah’s will.”

There was a collective gasp from the crowd and the council members looked back and forth at each other, unsure what now to do. The captain of the guards steps up behind Rasheed, ready to stop him if he began to advance toward the council members.

Rasheed clinched his fingers into a fist and thrust it over his head as he turned toward the crowd, then looked to the skies and shouted, “Allah, free my people, Allah, free my people, Allah, free my people.”

The Captain unholstered his pistol, put it to Rasheed’s temple and fired one shot. Rasheed’s body crumpled before the crowd, and all fell stone silent. Mullah Rahim watched at the twitching body and the crimson halo form around the head of this noble man and wondered *will the people now rise up behind Rasheed.*