

The Nazarene's Book

Book Chapter

Samantha Proctor

Delta First Assembly of God

1565

What if everything you were ever taught was a lie?

Ever since he can remember, Yusuf was taught that Allah is god. His parents believe it, his brother believes it, and his comrades believe it. But one thing bothers Yusuf.

*What if they are all wrong?*

With doubt in his heart and a forbidden book in his hands, Yusuf begins a treacherous journey to discover the truth. As Yusuf turns away from the god of the Muslims and starts to believe in the god of the Nazarenes, he begins secretly giving aid to persecuted Christians. As one of his fellow soldiers grows suspicious and another threatens to blow the whistle, Yusuf wonders if what he is doing is worth losing his family, friends, and life. Soon he must ask the question every Christian should ask themselves:

Can I live for God if it means dying for Him?

I was six years old when I learned how to behead a human. My military camp leader handed me a doll and instructed me on the best way to insert the knife so the head would be completely severed from the neck. As the head finally tore away from the cloth body, a question plagued my mind: “Will I be able to do this to a real person when the time comes?”

Today, that question will be answered.

I graduated from military camp and officially became an ISIS soldier when I turned fourteen. Now, two short weeks later, I stand in the blistering Syrian heat waiting for my first execution.

A group of Nazarenes, known by the Westerners as ‘Christians’, gather in front of my platoon’s lieutenant. “You know the law,” he hisses at them. “All non-Muslims must pay the jizya.”

“It’s been a tough year,” an elderly woman, her voice raspy with age, shouts from the crowd. “We cannot afford to pay the jizya.”

The lieutenant sneers. “Then your only two options are conversion or death.” When no one chooses to convert, a smile crosses the lieutenant’s sunbaked face. “You’ve made your choice,” he shouts.

He steps into the crowd, grabs the old woman who spoke, and drags her away from her family. A little girl, clinging to the old lady’s skirt, cries, “Grandma! Grandma!” The lieutenant hits the little girl with the butt of his rifle and she falls limply to the ground. Then he throws the old lady at Aasil’s feet.

Aasil, a soldier with a reputation for being cruel, grabs a fistful of the woman’s silver hair and pulls her to a kneeling position. Then, as the woman begs to be let go, Aasil pulls out his knife. The blade has been sharpened in anticipation. Aasil sadistically brushes it against the woman’s

cheek before carving an Arabic 'N' in her wrinkled forehead. The woman, blood pouring into her eyes, screams in agony, but Aasil only laughs.

“An 'N' for Nazarene!” he shouts, spitting the last word out like a curse.

A gurgling scream erupts from the woman's lips as Aasil plunges the knife into the fleshy edge of her neck. Aasil is careful to cut her where it won't kill her. Not yet, anyway.

I rest back on my heels knowing that Aasil will drag the beheading out as long as possible. My stomach twists with every excruciating stab of Aasil's knife, and I desperately want to look away. I force myself to keep staring coldly at the gruesome scene though, because looking away would be a punishable crime. Weakness is unacceptable in Allah's army.

The Nazarenes aren't allowed to look away, either. Soldiers surround the crowd, threatening to shoot them if they do not watch. Even the children, pale and trembling, are forced to witness the bloody execution.

As Aasil is close to finishing, my sixteen-year-old brother, Kaden, looks at me. “Ready, Yusuf?” he asks quietly. I thank Allah that I was put in the same platoon as my older brother. He warned me in advance that I will be expected to prove my ruthlessness today by performing an execution.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I nod. “Of course. This is my duty. Besides, how different can it be from the dolls?” I whisper back.

Kaden nods in agreement. “Yeah, just like the dolls.”

Aasil makes one more jagged cut and the old lady's body falls to the ground, but her head still dangles by the hair in Aasil's grasp. Laughing, Aasil drops the head and then kicks it. It rolls across the golden sand and stops at the feet of the old woman's granddaughter. The little girl screams and hides behind her mother.

The Nazarenes are panicking now. The men and women, their children crying in their arms, beg to be spared. They won't get any sympathy from the lieutenant, though.

"All you had to do was pay the tax," the lieutenant says as he shakes his head, feigning regret.

"We'll pay!" most of the Nazarenes cry. They might starve to death without money for food, but anything is better than watching their loved ones be decapitated.

"Yes, you will. But first, there is a late fee." The lieutenant scans the crowd with his eyes, keeping the Nazarenes in suspense. "One more of you must die." The crowd gasps. Mothers hide their children behind them, husbands put their arms around their wives, and those without family try to blend into the crowd.

"From this day on, you will remember who you bow to first," the lieutenant continues. "Does anyone volunteer to be the late fee?" he taunts.

All the Nazarenes shrink away from the lieutenant. All but one, that is. One Nazarene, a girl about my age, stands her ground. She throws her shoulders back and holds her chin high. There is not a trace of fear in her rich brown eyes.

I am not the only one whose attention she has drawn. The lieutenant reaches out and grabs her arm. He jerks her forward until she is inches from his face. "Is this Nazarene dog not afraid?"

The girl doesn't cringe. She looks the lieutenant straight in the eyes and says, "I fear no man, for my god is greater. With Yeshua in my heart, what do I have to fear?"

The veins in the lieutenant's neck bulge. "We'll see how brave you are as you face death," he growls.

"I do not fear death," the girl replies calmly. "I know where I am going."

The lieutenant's eyes light up with anger. He throws the girl at my feet. "You are going to Hell, Nazarene," he says as he spits on her.

The girl willingly rises to her knees. She does not shake, beg for her life, or cry. She looks so peaceful that it scares me. What is it about this girl that makes her executioner fear her?

I unsheathe my knife and press it against her neck. My heart pounds in my chest. This is the moment I have been wondering about since I was six. Will I be able to do it? Now, with the girl looking unblinkingly into my eyes, it is even harder than I imagined. How can she not be afraid as she faces an agonizing death? My god is the great Allah, and even I would cower in fear at the prospect of being beheaded.

I mentally prepare myself to make the first cut. Just before I dig the blade into the girl's neck, she stops me cold with three words that hit me like scalding water.

"I forgive you," she says boldly, her eyes reflecting sincerity. Then, with a serene expression, she tilts her chin up to give me better access to her neck.

The words almost knock me over. How can she forgive me? This girl has something that I do not.

I cannot kill her.

I am resolved to die rather than slit her throat until I catch a glint of light out of the corner of my eye. It is the sun reflecting off Aasil's blood coated knife as he twirls it in his fingers. If I do not kill this girl, the other soldiers will kill me. Unlike this girl, I am very much afraid of death. With a heavy heart, I plunge the knife into the soft, vulnerable skin of her throat. She twitches but does not fight back as I quickly rip the blade through her neck. Blood gushes from her arteries, soaking the cuffs of my sleeves with thick, dark liquid.

This is nothing like the dolls.

When I am finished beheading her, I look at my hands. Dripping with blood, they tremble uncontrollably. I pray that Aasil does not notice. If he does, he will make me sorry for my weakness. Yet, he too must have once been a boy who did not take pleasure in hurting others. My heart is filled with grief as I wonder how long it will take for me to enjoy killing children and elderly women. When does someone transition from child to monster?

The lieutenant, still boiling with anger, turns to the crowd. "I will not accept insolence from your children. One more must die because of this girl's disrespect!"

The lieutenant grabs a young, pregnant woman by the arm, but he chooses poorly. The woman's husband grabs a dagger from his belt and jams it into the lieutenant's shoulder. Soldiers begin firing their weapons and the crowd erupts in pandemonium. The Nazarenes run in every direction, screaming and tripping over each other.

In the chaos, I look down at the body of the girl and notice a black book peaking from the pocket of her dress. The words 'The Bible' are printed on it in gold lettering. This is the forbidden book of the Nazarenes, the one that leads to destruction. Yet, if this was the book the girl lived by, and she had forgiveness and peace, perhaps there is something more to this book. Impulsively, I reach down, pick the book up, and stuff it into my desert camo shirt. No one will notice in all the confusion, I think to myself.

But the realization of what I have done hits me in the gut as I look up and see my brother, loyal follower of Allah and dedicated ISIS soldier, watching me.