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Rashid, The Brave Boy

In a remote village in Azerbaijan, there lived a boy called Rashid. His parents were very poor and illiterate. They worked hard but had little to eat. They felt sad as Rashid could not go to school. The family did not have enough money to send him to school. Rashid's father Yusuf and mother Firdaus worked for Kasim, the landlord of the village. Kasim was a cruel and wicked man. He was rich but never helped anyone. Rashid's parents were in heavy debt to Kasim. At the end of the year, when Kasim showed the accounts, they found their debts increasing. A sad Yusuf came home and said, "We still owe the landlord an enormous amount of money." With a heavy heart he called his son lovingly and said, "Rashid, my son, you have to help us in Kasim's apple orchard, otherwise we will not be able to repay our debts." The boy felt sad. He wanted to help his poor parents. "Yes, father, from tomorrow I will come to Kasim's apple orchard to help both of you."

Every morning, when Rashid went to work in Kasim's apple orchard, he saw other children going to the village school. "How happy the children look! I wish I could join them," Rashid quietly said to himself.

One day, he decided to follow them. He thought that he might be able to learn something by following them to school. He saw the children sitting in a big room. He dared not enter the room and stood near the window. He saw the teacher reading out from a book and writing on a blackboard. He could not understand anything. After sometime, the bell rang. Rashid was still standing near the window when the teacher came out of the room. He was surprised to see a poorly dressed boy standing near the window. He asked, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Rashid told his story. The teacher was moved and asked the boy if he was interested in learning. Rashid answered softly, "Yes sir, I am interested in learning. But I cannot. I have to help my parents in the landlord's apple orchard."

"Come to my house every day after work. I will teach you," said the teacher.

"Thank you, sir. Thank you so much. I will come every day," replied a delighted Rashid. He thought that he was dreaming.

Every day, after work, Rashid quietly disappeared and went to the teacher's house. He kept it a secret. He wanted to give his parents a real surprise. One day Firdaus told her husband, "I am worried about Rashid. Where does he go after work every evening?" "Don't worry. He is a boy. He needs to play. Since he works all day, he must be playing with his friends in the evening. He is growing up. We have to understand it," replied Yusuf.

Time passed and the year was coming to an end. Kasim, the landlord, was busy making his plans. He called his accountant and said, "Get Yusuf's papers ready. Tomorrow we will get his thumb impression. You know what to do." He quietly laughed and thought, "How good it is that these poor peasants are illiterate! They cannot read and write. If they are educated, we can never play these tricks on them."

"Sir, we may have a problem this time. When I passed by the school teacher's house yesterday, I saw him teaching Yusuf's son Rashid to read and write," replied the accountant.

An angry Kasim shouted, "This school teacher is spoiling the village. I have to do something. Rashid should not get home early tomorrow."

The school teacher lived in the neighbouring village. The following day when Rashid returned home in the evening, he found the village entrance shut. But it was still too early.

"Who has done this? How should I go home? I cannot climb the walls. They are too high and the stones are slippery," a worried Rashid thought deeply. He was brave and clever. He immediately thought of a plan to reach home:

"I will go to the back side where there is a small opening made by the boys while playing. But I will have to climb the mountains to reach there."

The mountain path was dangerous. The rocks were slippery. There were also a number of wild animals in the mountains. But Rashid decided to use the mountain path.

He always carried a matchbox when he returned home in the evenings.

In the meantime Kasim and his accountant reached Yusuf's house. Kasim smiled wickedly, "Yusuf, today is the day when you will have to put your thumb impression on the papers. As usual, I have prepared your accounts." Yusuf was tense. He did not want to put his thumb impression on the papers anymore. So he said, "My lord, please make yourself comfortable. My wife is preparing a bowl of soup for you. Please have it first." He was thinking of a way to avoid putting his thumb impression on the papers.

"I will have the soup. But hurry up, you have to finish putting your thumb impression. I have to go to other places also," replied Kasim.

Meanwhile, Rashid was making his way along the mountain path. It was dark. His heart pounded. The rocks were treacherous. But, another danger lurked nearby. He found that a pack of hungry wolves were following him. Soon, they surrounded him. Rashid thought frantically. He could not afford to remain like that. As the wolves prepared to attack, Rashid took his shirt off. Then he tied it to a stick and lighted it with a burning matchstick. Holding it like a torch, he cried loudly. As he swung the torch, the wolves retreated. Thus Rashid bravely drove the wolves away. Holding the burning shirt, he quickly made his way back home.

As Kasim finished gulping the soup he called Yusuf, "Now hurry up. Put your thumb impression on the papers. I have to leave." A helpless Yusuf reached out for the inkpot.



Suddenly, the door swung open. A breathless Rashid rushed in and shouted, "Wait, father, don't do it. Let me see the papers first." Kasim was shocked and surprised, "You little brat, how impudent you are! Don't waste my time. You are illiterate like your parents," he roared.

Yusuf spoke quietly, "Rashid, my dear boy, you will not understand what is written there. What is the use?"

Rashid took the papers from his father and started reading aloud. He spoke firmly, "Kasim, you are a crook. The paper says that my father owes you 2000 *Manat*. What is this? Come to the Commissar tomorrow. Bring all the earlier accounts. The school teacher will read it out in detail. He knows many things about you."



A delighted Yusuf and Firdaus hugged their son, “Dear son, we are so proud of you.”

Next day the fraud of Kasim was disclosed and the Commissar punished him by sending him to prison. Rashid’s family and several other peasants were freed from the tyrannical clutches of the evil landlord. Rashid became a hero in the village.

- An Azerbaijan story retold

GLOSSARY

illiterate	:	not able to read and write
debt	:	owing money
orchard	:	enclosed piece of land with fruit-trees
accountant	:	a person who keeps accounts
lurked	:	hidden

frantically	:	wildly excited, desperate
retreated	:	went back
Commissar	:	head of a government department

COMPREHENSION

I. Answer the following questions:

1. Why did Rashid's parents feel sad?
2. What did Yusuf say to his son?
3. What did Rashid see when he went to work in the morning?
4. What did he see in the school?
5. How did Rashid start learning?
6. Why was Kasim happy?
7. Why was Kasim angry with the school teacher?
8. Which path did Rashid take to reach home?
9. Narrate briefly how Rashid fought the wolves.
10. How was Kasim exposed?