



## The Wicked Girl

(A story from Turkey)

There was once a merchant who set out with his wife on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Their daughter, though, they left at home, with an Arab slave girl to keep her company. One evening quite late, the merchant's daughter and the Arab girl were singing and laughing and dancing about in the upstairs apartment. By accident, the Arab girl knocked over the oil lamp, leaving the young ladies in darkness.

"What should we do?" said the merchant's daughter. "It's too late to rouse the servants."

"I'll go out and find a light," said the Arab girl.

"But we're locked in!" said the merchant's daughter.

"The window's open," said the Arab girl.

So they knotted some bed sheets together and lowered them from the window. Then the Arab girl took a basket and climbed down. She walked down the street till she came to a restaurant still open. The customers had all gone, but a handsome young man was in the kitchen, cleaning up and preparing for the next day. On the table were dishes piled high with kebabs, dolma, pilaf, and baklava.

"May I come in?" said the Arab girl prettily.

The young man, who owned the restaurant, cast an eye on the lovely young lady. "Please sit down!" he said.


As the two of them chatted, the young man moved closer and closer to the Arab girl. She was almost in reach when she asked him, "What's in those huge crocks?"


"One has olive oil, one has clarified butter, and one has honey."

"Honey?" she said. "What's that?"

"Surely you've had honey before!"

"Never! Please give me a taste."





So the young man took off the lid and leaned into the crock to spoon some out. The Arab girl came up behind and lifted his feet, so he slid head first into the honey. Then she quickly loaded her basket with dishes of food, grabbed an oil lamp, and ran off.

The young man came out of the honey dripping and sputtering. "Ooh, that Arab girl! If I ever catch her, I'll drink her blood!"

The next night, the Arab girl was again dancing about with the merchant's daughter, but she was wondering about the restaurant owner. So she knocked over the lamp a second time. "I'll have to go out again," she said. They lowered the bed sheets, and the Arab girl climbed down with her basket.

When she reached the restaurant, she again found the young man alone. "How dare you come back!" he demanded. "Do you know what I'll do to you now?"

"Kiss me?" she asked.

"Well, well!" said the young man, with a smile. "What a fine idea!" He came close to embrace her.


"Not yet," she said. "First we must eat and drink."


So they ate and drank, and the Arab girl kept pouring him more and more wine, and he kept drinking it, till his head dropped down and rested on the table. She found some rope, tied him up, and gagged him. Then she took more dishes of food and a lamp and ran off.

His customers found him the next morning and set him free. "Ooh, that Arab girl! If I ever catch her, I'll drink her blood!"

Later that same day, the young man disguised himself as an old flower peddler, with ragged clothes and a long white beard. Then he walked up and down the streets, calling, "Roses for sale! Roses for sale!"

When he came by the merchant's house, he spotted the Arab girl looking out the upstairs window. "I have her now!" he muttered.





Meanwhile, the Arab girl was telling the merchant's daughter, "There's that handsome restaurant owner. I wonder what he's up to." She called down to him, "We would like some roses."

"Then please come to the door," said the young man, in an old man's voice. "We're locked in," she said. "But you can climb to the window."

She lowered the bed sheets, and the young man started up. He was just a few feet away when the Arab girl took a knife and sliced through the top sheet. Roses flew everywhere as the young man tumbled to the ground.

While a crowd gathered around him, the young man painfully struggled to his feet. "Ooh, that Arab girl! If I ever catch her, I'll drink her blood!"

Not long after that, the merchant returned with his wife from their pilgrimage. To thank the Arab slave girl for keeping his daughter good company, he asked, "What would you like as a gift?"

"A doll made of rubber," she told him. "It should be just my height and look just like me and wear clothes just like mine. And when you shake it, it should say, 'Yes, yes.'" So the merchant had the doll made and gave it to her.


A few days later, the merchant spoke again to the Arab girl. "I've received a note from a man who does not name himself. He wishes to buy you for an incredibly high price. But if you object, I'll refuse him."


"I don't mind," she said, smiling.

The next morning, a messenger came with a carriage and drove the Arab girl to a house a few streets away. She and her belongings were left alone in a room upstairs.

The Arab girl took her doll and stood it in the middle of the room. She poured red sherbet into its hollow centre, filling it with the sweet fruit drink. Then she hid in a closet.

Before long, the door flew open. There stood the young restaurant owner, a dagger in his hand. He glared at the doll. "You wicked girl! I've caught you at last!"





Gripping it by the shoulder, he demanded, "Do you remember how you pushed me into the honey?" He shook it back and forth.

"Yes, yes," said the doll.

"And do you remember how you tied me up and gagged me?"

"Yes, yes."

"And do you remember how you made me fall to the street?"

"Yes, yes."

"You admit everything! Then prepare to die, for now I will drink your blood!"

He plunged the dagger into the doll, and red liquid spurted out. As the doll fell over, he caught a few drops in his cupped hand, and raised them greedily to his lips.

"But what's this? Her blood is so sweet! And if her blood is this sweet, how much sweeter must be the rest of her! What have I done? I have killed the sweetest woman in the world! Oh, if only I could bring her back to life, I would free her and marry her! But it's too late. All I can do now is end my own life!"

He raised the dagger above his chest.

"Hey, dummy! I'm right here!"

The young man stared at the Arab girl.

"Darling!" he cried.

"Dearest!" she answered.

And they lived happily ever after.

