

Yalda Night





On a cold winter evening, Khaleh Shaheen opens her door to her nieces, Lili and Lola, and their parents. “Happy Yalda!” everyone says. Lili is excited: she gets to stay up all night with the grown-ups. Lola wants to stay up too. Maman agrees, but only if Lili is in charge.

The girls help set the Korsi, the Yalda table, with a mirror, candles, nuts, oranges, watermelon, and pomegranates. Once the Korsi is ready, the family gathers for the longest night of the year.





To prove she's mature, Lili offers to bring the adults cups of hot chai. But Lola cannot sit still. She zooms after her sister and almost trips. Lili warns her: "If you do that again, you'll have to go to bed."



Lili carefully carries the tray of Persian tea to the living room. But Lola is already bored. She does a handstand and wobbles into the sugar bowl. Lili grabs her with a scowl and helps her down.

Soon, it's time to read poetry for Yalda. Lili picks up the big poetry book and stands at one end of the Korsi to read her poem by Rumi. Her mother and aunt swoon: look how grown up she is!





As Lili begins, Lola cannot sit still. She runs around making faces, and puts a breakable bowl on her head. Lili lunges just in time to catch it before it crashes: “Enough, Lola!”



Lili steers Lola toward the bedroom. Lola protests: “I was just trying to make it fun!”
In the bedroom, Lili tucks Lola and her stuffie, Maymoon, into bed. Lola protests again, but Lili is firm.
If Lola acted more mature, maybe she’d get to stay up too.

In the living room, Lili's mother holds up the poetry book and laughs. When Lili was a teething baby, she chewed on it! Lili can hardly believe it, so her mom shows her the bite marks. Lili may be mature now, but like all babies, she used to cry and chew on everything.





Lili says, “I guess that Yalda wasn’t very fun if I was crying and wrecking everything.” But her mom replies that it was wonderful, because the whole family was together. Even as a fussy baby, Lili was their small bright light, shining into the long, dark night. Her Aunt Shaheen adds, “The love of family, this is what Yalda’s all about.”

Suddenly, Lili realizes: even if she's can't sit still, Lola is still part of the family. She goes to check on her little sister and asks her to come back out. "We would love to hear your poem, Lola."

Lola pads back to the living room and proudly recites:

*Maman and Lili are awesome
Papa is funny and snores
Kensington's fuzzy and crabby
They're family - I love them all.*



Lili sits on a cushion by the Korsi and lets Lola curl up on her lap so they can read Rumi's poem together. She tells Lola she wasn't always mature either and shows her the chewed-up poetry book. Lola says she doesn't know what any of the poem means, and Lili admits that she doesn't either. She thinks it's about how important it is to be together, and to spend time with family.





In the open kitchen, Sisi and Khaleh Shaheen hug each other as they watch the girls. They swoon: We're so lucky!