

# The Doll That Didn't Die | Nilgoon Askari

In memory of Mona Heydari, Romina Ashrafi and all innocent women who are the victims of honor killings and child marriages in the world.

## Logline

*A 13-year-old Leila refuses forced marriage to confront a patriarchal community where powerless women are victims of honor killing and child marriages.*

FADE IN:

EXT. ADOBE VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

*A dead tree looms in the shadows of the desert. Many dolls hang from twisted branches. WIND HOWLS. Black dust blows in an ominous formation in the air.*

MAMA ANGIE (V.O.)

The Black wedding day has been in our tradition for generations. An evil wind that has plagued our girls causing sorrow, misery and death.

EXT. ADOBE, YARD - AFTERNOON

*A black cloud of dust hovers near the window. LEILA (13) petite doll-like figure stands by the glass. Brown skin. Brunette hair. Sad chestnut eyes gaze at the black dust.*

*On the ground is the ceremonial spread for a reception. White cloths. Rows of chairs. Circular tables. An oval display of eggs. A Pomegranates pyramid. Circle of Apples. Planters of wheatgrass. A fully cooked lamb on a silver platter.*

INT. LEILA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

*Leila opens the book. She stares at the photo of her PARENTS' marriage ceremony. JAMAL (40s) stands next to SOFIA (20s).*

*They are emotionless. Jamal has a mustache. Sun-burnt face.*

*Sofia has innocent baby face with sad eyes. Long black hair.*

EXT. ADOBE, YARD - AFTERNOON

*WOMAN MAKEUP ARTIST (30s) approaches with a pink wooden box in hand walks to the house.*

INT. LEILA'S ROOM- AFTERNOON

*FOOTSTEPS. CHATTER. LAUGHTER. SEVERAL WOMEN enter. Leila gets scared. She closes the book. Slides it between books on a shelf. She squeezes her doll.*

*MAMA ANGIE (60s) weathered old woman sits in the corner.*

*AUNT SARA (30s) average build. She carries a bridal dress.*

*Leila's little sister JASMINE (11) enters.*

*DRUMMER WOMAN (20s) average build. Plays a drum. She walks around the room.*

*WOMEN 1 (30s) is skinny. Mousy features.*

*Jasmine brings Leila to the middle of the room. The women circle around her. THEY SHOUT. CHEER. Dance. Leila holds her doll. She is immobile. Detached.*

*Woman 1 undresses Leila down to her undergarments. She's embarrassed. Covers her chest with one arm. Covers her lower half with*

*her hand. Sara puts the bridal dress on Leila. She fixes her veil. Makeup Artist pulls out a kit from the box.*

MAKEUP ARTIST

Sit down, sweetie, we'll make you a bride that shines tonight.

*Jasmine sits Leila down on a chair. Makeup Artist holds Leila's chin. She narrows her eyes. Twists her face. She gives Leila a mirror. Drummer Woman exits.*

MAKEUP ARTIST(CONT'D)

To happiness and joy. Congratulations sweetheart. May my blessings bring goodness for you.

*She attempts to apply eyeliner on the bride's eyes.*

MAKEUP ARTIST(CONT'D)

Close your eyes, my dear!

*Leila stares at the mirror. Tears wallow in her terrified eyes. Teardrop falls on the mirror. Blood splashes. LITTLE GIRLS CRY. SCREAMS IN TERROR.*

JAMAL (O.C.)

You piece of shit! I am not stupid, bitch! I know that you are having an affair.

SOFIA (O.S.)

Swear to God, I'm not! I'm faithful to you!

*(moans)*

I'm innocent.

*Leila trembles. Leila blinks. Tears flow. The Makeup Artist wipes Leila's tears with her fingertips.*

MAKEUP ARTIST

I can't do your makeup like this, girl! Are you scared?

*Leila's hands fall on her dress. The mirror slips from her hand on the carpet. The women surround Leila. Jasmine rubs her back. Woman 1 gives her a towel. Mama Angie stares at Leila with a pipe in her hand.*

MAMA ANGIE

I know you hate this situation, but every girl in this village will end up like this.

*She smokes the pipe.*

MAMA ANGIE(CONT'D)

Look at me, and you will see the past and future.

AUNT SARA

What else is there besides being a good wife and mother to your man?

*Leila is angry.*

WOMEN 1

*(whispers to Leila)*

After the vow, you will love him and he will conquer your heart.

LEILA

*(trembles)*

My mother said that these promises are all lies. I don't want him. I don't want this marriage. I will be killed like my mother.

The Makeup Artist ignores Leila. CROWD VOICES APPROACH from outside. MUSIC RISES. Jasmine looks out the window.

JASMINE

The groom is here!

*Sara approaches the window. Leila turns with a worried look.*

EXT. YARD - AFTERNOON

*THE GROOM (40s) enters the yard. Grey-black hair. Grim facial expression. A grey gown. Loose pants. Black vest aligned with rubies. Head scarf. Pointed black sandals. He carries a tray with a brown wooden box.*

*Jamal greets the groom. Shakes his hand. The groom kisses Jamal's shoulder. Takes a box from the tray. He opens to reveal the gold coins. Jamal smiles.*

INT. LEILA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

*Leila is distressed.*

LEILA

*(shrill voice)*

This man is as old as my father! I could be his daughter. I don't want to marry him.

MAMA ANGIE

You can't deny our traditions.

AUNT SARA

Don't be like your mother!

MAMA ANGIE

A rebellious woman will never survive here.

JASMIN

So what if she says no?

MAKEUP ARTIST

Shut up! Let me finish my work.

LEILA

*(angry)*

I don't want to be like you all.

WOMAN 1

Did you really think you could fight this?

LEILA

I want to see the white wind that my mother always told me about it.

JASMIN

One day, a white wind will blow and purify the darkness of this oppressive force that stains this beautiful world with bloodshed.

*Women stare at Leila with fear. Their faces contort. SHIVERS.*

EXT. YARD - SUNSET

*Leila stands by the window. Guests enter the yard with a*

*MASTER OF CEREMONIES (70s). He goes to the altar. MUSIC PLAYS. The guests congratulate Jamal. Some shake hands with the groom. Both men go to the altar to wait for the bride.*

GROOM

Why doesn't she come?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

*(to Jamal)*

Tell the bride to come so we can start the ceremony.

*Jamal looks at the window. Leila stares at Jamal. Shakes head. Runs from the window. GUEST CHATTER. Jamal moves towards the*

*house angry.*

INT. LEILA'S ROOM - SUNSET

*Leila sees the red-black wind dust on the horizon. Clusters circulate towards the village. Leila smiles.*

INT. HALLWAY - SUNSET

*Jamal KNOCKS on the door. Sara comes out.*

JAMAL

I don't want to hear anything. Just get her to come out.

*Mama Angie comes to the front door.*

MAMA ANGIE

You go! I'll bring her.

EXT. YARD - SUNSET

*Leila enters with her doll in hand. The women walk behind her. The guests HOOT. PLAY INSTRUMENTS.*

*Leila looks at the crowd. She pauses. Jamal stands next to the Groom.*

*Leila pulls the veil from her head. Flings it to the ground. CROWD GASPS.*

*BLACK-RED DUST WINDS CONJURE. The guests are bewildered. They cover their eyes. Stand crouched over.*

*Mama Angie smiles. Sara grins. Close their eyes. CHATTER.*

*Leila drops her doll. A split down the doll's chest. A WHITE DUST GUSHES OUT. BLACK-RED WINDS MORPH INTO WHITE DUST.*

*The men at the altar are angry. All women circle around Leila. THE WOMEN STOMP.*

WOMEN

(chant)

Woman, Life, Freedom...Woman, Life, Freedom...Woman,  
life, freedom....

EXT. OUTSIDE OF A VILLAGE - SUNSET

A distant view of a village. A live tree. The dolls drop from the branches. WHITE WIND HOWLS. Leila's doll stands upright.

FADE TO BLACK:

CAPTION: Honor killings and child marriages occur in many parts of the world but are only widely reported in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America. Historically, honor killings were common in Southern Europe, Canada, and the United States. In 2020, an estimated 47,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. This film is dedicated to the victims of honor killings and child marriages to broadcast the universal message of discrimination, abuse, and mistreatment of women that has been covered up with silence.