

## Tea and the weaver's art

September 30

They are many and multihued and they lay in high, folded stacks along three sides of the room. They hang, like supple stained glass, from the walls and rafters, they drape over chairs and chests, they spread in tangled heaps across the floor. Their patterns, geometric and intricate, dance across the plush surfaces and vibrate with an almost tangible warmth. They are handmade Turkish carpets, and like every traveler who has ever crossed the threshold of such a shop, we are enthralled. Crossing that threshold can have alarming repercussions though, and since this is our third trip to Turkey you'd think we would know better. Still, what better way to spend an evening in Antalya?

We've only stopped in for a moment though, to be polite; we're not buying. (We've told ourselves this very firmly.) The young salesman who helped us find our *pansiyon* works here, and we came to say thank you. Well, yes, of course we'll have tea.

This is a favorite tactic of Turkish salesmen, helping you out and then inviting you in for tea. But it's not totally self-serving. The Turks are genuinely helpful, and tea is just tea. One is never obliged to buy, and if one lacks will power when faced with hundreds of irresistible works of art, it's not the salesman's fault is it?

No. So here we are, surrounded by rippling color, seated on a long rug- and cushion-covered bench, sipping tea and talking about everything but carpets. The young Samaritan has introduced us to one of the shop's owners, a man only slightly older, clad in a black leather jacket and speaking English like a native. He's interesting and articulate, not pushy, and we sip tea and talk for 30 minutes before the subject of carpets is raised. This is part of the game. I'm surprised when Ray agrees to look at some, but since we've nothing but dinner planned for the evening, why not?

Shopping for carpets in Turkey should be a slow, almost languorous process, and as Westerners we're at a disadvantage. We don't appreciate the choreographed moves, the formalized courtesies, the give and take of a long negotiation. Nevertheless, I'm content to sit and drink tea and watch as rug after rug is pulled from the stacks, spread out to view, tossed carelessly to one side and replaced by another. Since looking was Ray's idea I'm keeping my mouth shut, but I begin to wonder how he will extricate himself from this mesmerizing display.

While he is pacing around the carpets that are now fanned out three deep in front of us, I watch a German family who have just entered. They are not in a languorous mood. They sit uncomfortably on the edge of the carpet-covered bench, like canaries perched for flight. The salesman, who has caught their mood, stands behind a folded pile of mediocre-looking kilims, briskly holding up one after another and stating the price while the woman, who's a bit cross, passes judgment on each. The rugs fall to one side or the other, into yea or nay piles. It's all business, and quick business at that. When the bottom of the stack is reached they start again on the yea pile. And then, as quickly as they arrived, they're gone. Did they buy? If so I missed it. All that's left is a tossed pile of kilims being refolded by a bored young assistant.

In the meantime Ray has gotten more and more drawn in, he's now looking at kilims too, his weakness. While I've been daydreaming he's narrowed his selection down to four or five, and we've entered the danger zone. I begin to think he's actually going to buy something, and decide to offer an out.

"Shall we go and have dinner?" I say. "We can come back later if you want."

He ignores my escape gambit and instead embarks on a long conversation about sales techniques. I get up and move over to the kilims. There are several that he likes but he's focused on an old one. The Samaritan, seeing me finally show some interest, starts telling me about it, a kilim made for a woman's dowry but never used. Since nearly every carpet and kilim and sumak is beautiful in my eyes he's wasting his time. I would buy them all if I could. Deciding to see if Ray is really serious, I offer a second opportunity for escape.

“You know Ray, we're going to be in town again next week. We could come back then, after we've had time to think about them.”

He ignores that too. Well, okay. I'm game. I guess we're buying.

By this time our wily salesman has us pegged. He knows what we like and he brings out another one. Now the negotiating begins.

One for this price, but two at this.

No, this one only, this price.

Well, this price, but see here, this is better, two for this price.

I am now on my third glass of tea, and we've been here nearly three hours. The offers fly back and forth, the merits of this kilim or that one fill the air, and at one point we break into giggles remembering that at present we haven't got a home to put any kilim in. At last, though, the deed is done. The kilims are wrapped, payment is made, and we, the knowing, determined, nonbuying buyers depart, leaving the knowing, determined seller smiling at his doorstep, inviting us to come back, anytime. We got the better of him though. We got an evening's entertainment and two wonderful pieces of the traditional weaver's art. He only got money.