Hürşit and Mahmeri

Once there was and once there was not a padişah who had a son and a daughter. One night the son had a dream in which he saw three dervishes. One of these dervishes said to him, "In your future there is a girl. If God wills, you will meet this girl in three or six months' time." Without even knowing this girl, the young man fell in love with her, and he soon began to grow pale and listless.

His padişah father observed this, and one day he said to some of his son's companions, "I believe my son must have fallen in love. Every day he grows paler and paler. Try to find out from him the cause of his condition and report anything that you discover to me."

In most love dreams the young person sees and talks with his/her destined lover. When one or more dervishes appear also in the dream, it is usually to add a religious dimension to what is, at that point, strictly a spiritual love relationship. The dervish may explain to them that they are destined for each other by means of some divine affinity. He may also have them pledge their commitment to each other by drinking sherbet together. This drama within the dream world is absent from this variant by Durali Karakaya.
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The young man's friends tried to find out from Hürşit what it was that was bothering him and affecting his health. They took him hunting, and during this adventure they tried to make him talk about his problem, but he would say nothing about it. They then had all of the beauties of the area pass before his window to see if he showed any emotion toward any of them, but he was perfectly indifferent to all of them. They finally decided, as a last resort, to get him drunk enough to be talkative so that they might discover his secret. They included him in a drinking party one evening where everyone was consuming large quantities of wine. After drinking three or five glasses of wine, Hürşit said, "Hey, I want to give a toast to the love of my Mahmeri!"

His friends then went to the padişah and said, "We bring good news, your majesty!" They reported to him what Hürşit had said about Mahmeri. For this information the padişah rewarded them with gifts.² Later the padişah said to Hürşit, "My son, the object of your love is not to be found

² Rulers used to reward messengers who brought good news. Often less important people did the same, though their rewards were smaller. Gifts then became an expectation of messengers. They sometimes became an imperative in a mild form of extortion: "I have good news for you but I shall not tell it to you unless you promise to pay me some small amount"; or, "... unless you give me a gift." Occasionally people still do this, but in a joking manner.
Accordingly, Hürşit requested permission of his father to leave in search of Mahmeri, and this permission was granted.

Setting out on his journey, Hürşit went little and went far until one day he saw a tent pitched at one side of the road. There was a girl in this tent. Hürşit said to this girl, "I hope that it is not disgraceful of me to ask you your name, but am I correct in supposing that it is Mahmeri?"

The girl answered, "I hope it is not disgraceful for me to ask your name, but am I correct in thinking that it must be Hürşit?"³

"Yes, I am Hürşit!"
"Yes, I am Mahmeri!"

They rushed into each other's arms and embraced each other several times. As they were showing this kind of affection, Mahmeri said, "I have seven brothers. If they should come back now and see us like this, they would kill both of us. You had better stay some distance from me."

Later Hürşit said to the girl, "This mountain pasture is ours. It is part of my father's domain, though it has been neglected and has had no care

The girl said, "My brothers are very fond of this

³Inasmuch as the principals know each other's names, it is clear that the original love dream was fuller and more informative than the narrator of this variant made it.
Hûrşit said, "If they are so very fond of this place, I may be able to help them in bargaining for it with my father. I can ask your brothers for your hand, and in return bargain with my father in order to get this pasture for them at a very cheap price.

After a while the seven brothers returned. When they saw from a distance that Hûrşit was near the tent, they called to their sister, asking, "Who is that fellow? is he doing here?"

The girl said, "My brothers, this young man is the owner of this mountain pasture. He tied up his horse here and came to us as a guest of God."

"If that is so," the oldest of them said, "we may be able to talk with him while he is here about buying this lot. If he is God's guest, then there would be nothing wrong about your going to him and inviting him to stay with us."

She went to Hûrşit and said, "Come and join us! There can be nothing improper about it now, for my brothers have invited you to do so."

Hûrşit went to the tent and talked briefly with the brothers, after having exchanged greetings with them. He said to them, "I came here just to take a look at this
"This property is yours—is it not?" they asked him.

"Yes, it is, but I cannot say anything about it until I have first discussed it with my father. If I talk with first, I could probably get it for you very cheaply."

"Well, then, if that is the case, let us go and see him at once," they said

"No, no," said their sister. "You cannot just simply go to a padişah like that. You should go bearing some gifts for him. Padişahs like both the gifts and the respect shown by bringing them. Go and hunt some birds and rabbits, and then take these to him as your gifts."

After the brothers had gone hunting, Hürişit and Mahmeri again hugged and kissed each other. Then Hürişit said, "I do not want to be shamed by your brothers, and so I had better mount my horse and ride home

"May God keep you well," said the girl as she saw him

He went little, he went far, and then he was home again. Those who saw the young man approaching rushed to the palace to give the padişah the good news. When Hürişit arrived at the palace, he said, "Father, without your having to ask me about it, let me say that I found my beloved in a most
unusual way. Involved in this is some property. seven brothers are going to visit you soon in order to ask you about the possibility of buying our mountain pasture. Whatever bargain they may receive in this transaction depends upon you, of course."

"My son, if they really want it, I could even give it to them gratis, but we should be more discreet than that. We should first ask them for Mahmeri's hand in marriage to you. If they agree to that, I shouldn't ask for anything for the pasture."

Not long after that the seven brothers came to the palace. There they were welcomed in a formal ceremony and invited to dinner. At the feast the padişah said to them, "I want to say first in the name of God and then on my own behalf that whenever a person comes to visit me, I want him or her to know that whether he is hungry or thirsty, whether he is sleepless or has some other problem, I shall try to help in his difficulty. Is there any problem with which I can help you?"

"Yes, my padişah," said the oldest brother. "You have a mountain pasture at some distance from this place. To us
it would be as valuable as the city of Isfahan, and so we should like to buy it from you if possible. That is what we are here for.

"Yes, my children, that mountain pasture is mine, however, if you will give your sister's hand to my son, according to the will of God and the consent of the Prophet, I shall give that mountain pasture to you as a gift."

The seven brothers seemed very pleased with this offer, and they all answered together, "Yes, sir!" The next day the brothers had Mahmeri formally engaged to Hürsit, and as a token of their agreement, they gave Hürsit a ring as a gift. Thus, when the brothers set out for home, everyone seemed quite happy about the arrangement.

After they had left the city on their journey home, however, these brothers began to discuss and quarrel about the bargain they had made. One said, "Isn't this arrangement we have made a shameful bit of business on our part?"

Another said, "Does it not actually suggest that we

5 The capital of Persia (Iran) from the 16th into the 18th century.

6 Every Turkish marriage is supposedly carried out by the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet. When a matchmaker asks a girl's parents for her hand in marriage, he/she claims to have come "by the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet." These are the very first words that he or she utters.
came here not to buy a mountain pasture but to sell our sister?"

"Yes, it does!" said a third.

A fourth said, "Yes, but we have not carried out bargain yet, for we still have not had any wedding ceremony for our sister. As soon as we get back home, let us our tents, take our sister with us, and emigrate from this land, never permitting any of its men to marry her. We can go to the edge of Isfahan and settle there." All agreed to this, and all shouted in unison, "Yes, brothers!"

When they arrived back at the mountain pasture, pulled out their tent stakes, folded their tents, and moved to Isfahan. There they settled down and returned to their accustomed way of life. But before they left the mountain pasture, the girl wrote two letters to Hûrşit, giving one to a shepherd with instructions to deliver it to Hûrşit, and leaving the other beneath a stone in what had been their fireplace. In these letters she said that if Hûrşit were to look for her, he should know that she was in Isfahan and that she still loved him.

One day in Isfahan the ruler of that city was told that a remarkable girl had arrived there. People said, "That girl is so surpassingly beautiful that anyone who sees her automatically admires her and falls in love with
The ruler asked his viziers, "Does the girl about whom everyone speaks so highly have any relatives? If she does, go and find them and bring them here!"

"Master, she has seven brothers

"Well, send our envoy to them and have them summoned here to the palace."

The viziers carried out these orders and had an envoy go to the seven brothers and summon them to the ruler's palace. When they were shown into his presence, he said, "Sons, I have been told that you have a sister named Mahmeri. Having heard much praise of her, I now ask you—with the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet—for her hand in marriage. If you say 'yes' to this marriage, I shall do whatever I can for you, for I am the ruler of this city, and nothing can be done here without my permission."

The brothers then responded, "It is your role to command, sir, and ours to obey. But first of all, we must consult our sister about this

Returning to their home, they talked with Mahmeri about this, asking her for her opinion about the marriage offer. They said, "He will give us all good jobs and show us ways of earning even more money. What do you say about this?"

Mahmeri answered, "I shall think about it, and I want
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forty days to do so. If he does not consent to my taking forty days for that purpose, I shall kill myself. Going to the palace to report to the ruler, the brothers said, "Sir, we accept your offer for our sister, but she has one condition to accepting the offer."

"What is that condition?"

"She wants your permission to take forty days to think about your proposal."

"That is quite all right. After all, forty days will not be the end of all time. I can wait!"

In this way the ruler and Mahmeri became engaged. people at the palace began to make preparations for the wedding ceremony

Let us leave them now and find out what is happening at the place where Hürşit lives. This prince was worrying about Mahmeri, and one day he said to his father, "Father, I have not heard anything from Mahmeri, and I am very upset by this. I do not feel at all well. What should we do?"

The padişah said, "Son, I had you introduced to all the girls living in this area, but you would have nothing to do with any of them. You still insisted on having Mahmeri. Now you are free to go wherever you wish and do whatever you wish."

Hearing this, Hürşit ordered his servants to saddle his
horse. Taking some gold coins and saying, "Deh!"7 to his horse, Hüřsit once again set out on a journey. When he reached the mountain pasture this time, however, he saw there was no longer a tent pitched there. Dismount he began examining the place to find whatever clues there might be to explain what had happened. Finally he found the letter left under the stone of the fireplace by Mahmeri. He read the letter and learned that she and her brothers had moved to Isfahan.

Hüřsit then left the mountain pasture as soon as he could. After he had gone but a short distance, a shepherd started calling his name, "Hüřsit! Hüřsit!"

Riding up to the shepherd, Hüřsit said, "Selâmunâleyküm!"8

"Aleykûmselâm," said the shepherd. Hüřsit asked, "Shepherd, what is the matter? Why are you calling me? And how do you know my name?"

"O friend, welcome. Mahmeri told me your name when she gave me a letter for you. But it has been a long time since left this place, and since then I have had no oppor
tunity to give it to you. Be my guest tonight and continue

7 Deh is the command to make a horse or donkey start moving, comparable to "Get up!" or "Giddap!" in English. The command to stop is Çüs (English: choosh).

8 Traditional exchange of greetings between Muslims who are strangers to each other: "Peace be unto you," and "Peace unto you also."
After spending the night with the shepherd, Hürsit mounted his horse again and rode rapidly toward Isfahan. After several days of hard riding he reached that city and stopped at a fountain there to water his horse. At that fountain there were also five girls drawing water for their houses. The most attractive of these girls saw Hürsit and liked him immediately. She said, "Young man, my father is very rich, and he gives me whatever I want. If you would ask him for my hand, I should tell him to accept your proposal."

"No, I cannot accept this offer, but you will be to me like a sister from now on. I have come here to look for my true love, Mahmeri. I intend to find her and marry her."

"I know Mahmeri. She is, in fact, one of my best friends. But she is about to be married to the padişah of this city. Why don't you stay with our family as a guest tonight? But you had better not tell Mahmeri of our conversation, or she might feel hurt.

"I shall not discuss this with anyone, but I cannot stay at your home tonight, either," said Hürsit, and he began walking about the streets of the city. After a while he met an old woman whom he asked, "Mother, could you take me into your home as a guest tonight?"
"Yes, my child, I can," said this old woman. When Hürşit gave her some gold coins, she said, "If you give me a few more, I shall accept your horse, too."

While the old woman started preparing dinner at her house, Hürşit bedded down his horse in the garden. Before long the three sons of the old woman came home, and she said to them, "My sons, this young man has become like a son to me, and I hope that you will, therefore, accept him as a brother."

"Yes, Mother, we accept him as our brother.

"Then you should ask him if he has any problems, and if so, what they are."

"O brother of ours," they said, "do you have any difficulties with which we might help you?"

"Yes, brothers, I face some difficulty in this city. I have come here to be reunited with my true love. She is a girl whom I first met in a dream and later found in the real world. I was engaged to her before she left our part of the country with her seven brothers. But before she departed, she wrote a letter to me saying that her brothers were moving to Isfahan and asking me for help. Well, I am here, but I have learned that she is to be married to the padişah of the place. Furthermore, of the forty days that she was given to consider the padişah's proposal, only two
The three sons of the old woman said, "O our brother, we are committed to assist you. We happen to be three of the viziers of the padişah, and though we shall continue to work for him in all other ways, we shall help you in the special difficulty which you face."

then all ate their dinner together. The following day while the three brothers were in the presence of the padişah, one of them said to him, "Your majesty, yesterday a minstrel arrived in our city. He plays the saz and sings very well. Would you care to listen to his music?"

"Yes, bring him here and have him play in my presence," said the padişah.

Hürşit went to the palace where both the padişah and Mahmeri were waiting to hear him. When he started playing the saz, Mahmeri began to cry, but the padişah did not notice this, for he had already begun to drink wine. He continued to drink heavily all the while that Hürşit was performing, and before long he became helplessly drunk. After he had reached that state, the three brothers ordered that Hürşit's horse and another good horse be brought to the palace door. They said to Hürşit, "Brother, we have done our duty to you

9The Turkish term for such a performer is aşık, which means, literally, lover or lover poet. The term used here has a dimension of dramatic irony.
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This much we have done, but the rest must be done by you. Go your way with God's blessing."

Thanking the three brothers for their help, Hûrşit and Mahmeri said farewell and departed. They went little, they went far. Some time after their departure from the palace, the padişah roused himself from his drunken sleep and saw at once that both the minstrel and Mahmeri were missing. He grew furious at this and said to his viziers, "Send 100 soldiers after them, and tell these soldiers not to return without the minstrel and Mahmeri, dead or alive!"

By the time that these troops were ready to leave, the padişah had decided to lead them himself, and so they rode forth behind their ruler. After riding for some time, the pursuers began to overtake Hûrşit and Mahmeri. When Mahmeri saw so many troops following them, she began to cry. Unable to comfort her otherwise, Hûrşit sang to her:

Cry not, my Mahmeri; cry not!
A hundred brave men follow me.
What can one plucky person do
But pray to God, our only help?

Having finished his song, Hûrşit wielded his sword at the onrushing padişah at the head of his troops, but he was unable to strike a lethal blow against him. As the two struggled to kill each other, however, the padişah's horse
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lost its footing and fell. As it did so, it caused the padişah's sword, aimed at Hürşit, to turn back against owner, killing him. Seeing their commander dead, the troops themselves now rushed at Hürşit. The bloody fighting was halted, however, by order of the viziers. One of them dressed the troops, saying, "Our leader, the padişah, is dead, killed by accident by his own hand. There is meaning in this. It means that his cause was not a just one us take warning from this and cease fighting." Accepting this decision, the troops turned about and returned to Isfahan.

Hürşit and Mahmeri also left that place and rode away in the direction of their homeland. They went little, they went far, and one night as they came to a mountain, they saw a light glowing in the distance. Walking toward that light, they discovered it to be a campfire around which sat forty bandits.

When the bandits saw them coming, they were delighted. "Welcome! Welcome!" they said. "We hunted for prey today, but now God has sent it right to us! Capture this man quickly!"

After both of them had been caught, the bandit leader asked Hürşit, "What is your name?"

"Hürşit
his hands behind his back," the leader ordered. Another of the bandits said to the leader, "Get him out of here and cut off his head!"

"Very well," said the leader, "but that is my responsibility. This girl, however, should be spared, for she can serve us (wine) and food and entertain us."

Then the bandit leader took Hürşit to a deep gully at some distance from the fire. When they got there, Hürşit said, "Bandit chief, may I have a few words with you?"

"Since it will be in response to your last request, I give you freedom to say whatever you wish."

"We were on our way home, and we were headed for those opposite mountains, though we were unable to reach them at the time that we saw your fire on this mountain." Then Hürşit continued in song:

I shall find you a girl if you pity me--
Spare me, O Arab, for love of your God--
My own fiancée is true as the rose
Spare me, O Arab, for love of your God
A padişah father awaits my return--
Spare me, O Arab, for love of your God--

The bandit leader may well be an Arab. The word Arab is sometimes used for one whose real name is not known, though in many places in Turkey today, Arab when applied to a non-Arabian person has a pejorative quality. It may even be used as a slur.
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My loved one will never consent to be yours,
But I'll find you a wife who resembles the moon.\(^{11}\)
A person is dead who kills without reason;
He looks at the world with eyes that are blind.
Should I die, my beloved would never accept you;
Let your heart become soft; don't turn it to stone.
Pity me, Arab. Don't murder me thus,
Murder me thus while my arms are both tied.
Think nobly instead of my own noble line;
A padişah father awaits my return.

The bandit leader was moved by Hürşit's lines and exclaimed, "O Hürşit, I am setting me free. If I should go to the presence of your father, would he be willing to give me a position of some rank in his army?"

"Yes, he would. Furthermore, if you spare my life, should even be willing to ask for the hand of my only sister for you."

The bandit leader then nicked his own leg with his sword and soaked Hürşit's shirt in that blood.\(^{12}\) Returning to the

\(^{11}\)The moon is so admired in Turkey (as well as in some other Muslim lands) that it becomes a criterion of beauty.

\(^{12}\)In Turkish folktales the most frequently used piece of evidence required as proof of someone's execution is a piece of his/her clothing soaked in his/her blood. The bloodied garment almost always turns out to be deceptive evidence, however, for the executioner, pitying the condemned, frees the condemned after dipping his/her garment in blood other than the blood of the condemned.
other bandits, he sat down among them, placing Hürşit's bloody shirt in the midst of their circle.

When Mahmeri saw Hürşit's blood-covered shirt, she began to sob bitterly.

    O bandit, you think that this mountain is yours;
    You behead any traveler who passes across it.
    I pray that your man-killing arms may meet death!
    What have you done with the corpse of my lover?

But the bandit leader whispered to her, "O Mahmeri, I did not kill him but set him free. Now serve these other men much to drink but little to me. If God so wills, I shall then take you both to the palace of his padişah father."

When all of the other thirty-nine bandits had become dead drunk, their leader called Hürşit to him, and the two of them killed all thirty-nine of them, and took for themselves those goods which were heavy in value but light in weight.\(^{13}\)

After that, the three of them rode to the palace of Hürşit's padişah father. The padişah was almost overwhelmed with joy at the discovery that his son was still alive. When

\(^{13}\)"Take what is heavy in value but light in weight" is a proverbial piece of advice in Turkey.
he asked his son what the bandit was doing in their com-
pany, Hürşit kept his promise to that man.

"My father, this man that you see here saved my life. I was so indebted to him that I promised him a position of rank in your army and my recommendation that he also be given the hand of my sister in marriage."

The padişah said, "If my son has thus pardoned you, I do the same." He then issued orders to have preparations made for a wedding ceremony for these two couples which would last for forty days and forty nights. To the couples themselves he said, "And may God give you happiness for all the rest of your lives."