

Story 896 (1964 Tape erased
on field trip
after contents
transcribed)

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Location: Çetme village,
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Date: July 1964

The Inevitable Bride

Once there was and once there was not a padişah who had a son. One day the two of them went ¹⁴⁻⁶² hunting together. On their way to the hunt, they saw an old, white-bearded man squatting on the ground beside the road. This old man was laying sticks on the ground--one here, two there, three somewhere else. "Selâmünaleyküm," they said to him.

"Aleykümselâm,"¹ he responded.

"What are you doing?" they asked.

"I am setting sticks. I am setting Ahmet's daughter with Mehmet, and Mehmet's daughter with Ahmet."²

The son of the padişah asked, "And whom are you going to set with me?"

"I am going to set with you the six- or nine-month-old daughter of a shepherd who lives nearby. That will be your

¹ ¹⁰¹⁻¹⁰³ Traditional greetings exchanged between Moslem strangers: Peace be unto you / And may peace be unto you too.

² This matching of sticks is a type of sympathetic magic. It is known in the vernacular as çop atmak. This white-bearded old man here could be a dervish, for dervishes are usually so pictured.

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kismet.³

The two hunters rode on, but the son of the padişah kept thinking, over and over, "I am the son of a padişah Why should I be matched with the six-month-old daughter of a shepherd?" He couldn't get over this idea, and he continued to think about it until morning, wondering what he should do about it.

He finally returned home, got a bagful of gold, and went in search of the old man he had seen laying sticks by the roadside. Unable to find him anywhere, he then asked everyone he met in that area for the whereabouts of a shepherd who had a six- or nine-month-old daughter. After asking many people, he finally found the home of this shepherd. Neither the shepherd nor his wife was there, for they had gone to the pasture to graze their cattle. The young man tied his horse in front of the house, entered the building, and went upstairs. There he found a girl baby of seven or eight months' age, sleeping in a cradle. Taking out his knife, he cut the baby's throat and left the bag of gold beneath its head.

When the parents of the child returned in the evening, they were horrified to find the cradle all smeared with blood

³ Fortune, fate, destiny.

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and the baby's throat cut. Fortunately, the baby was still alive, and after some little time, its throat healed. The girl then began to grow up, as all children do

In the meantime, her father had ceased being a shepherd. The bag of gold that had been left with the wounded baby had made him rich. He had bought a farm with some of the gold and was now known as a village ağa.⁴

The son of the padişah searched for a wife for several years, but he had been unable to find a suitable girl to marry. One day some gypsy women from the sieve-making branch of gypsies⁵ went to the palace to beg for alms. These gypsy women knew a great amount about the marriageable girls in the whole area, and while they were talking about possible brides for the young prince, they mentioned a very rich ağa in such-and-such a village who had a daughter whose beauty vied with that of the rising moon.⁶

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⁴ An ağa is a rural landowner, usually rich, often powerful.

⁵ There are four major groups of gypsies recognized in Turkey for their occupations: the sieve makers, the basket makers, the iron workers (blacksmiths), and the tin coaters (who put tin linings in copper eating and cooking vessels to prevent copper poisoning).

⁶ The literal Turkish here says, ". . . who was so beautiful that she was saying to the rising moon, 'I am also rising!'" In the Turkish tradition the moon symbolizes beauty.

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They found this girl, and when the "viewers"⁷ sent to observe her looked at her, they saw someone whose appearance seemed to say, "I am even more beautiful than the moon!" She was indeed very beautiful but also very polite and very refined. When they returned to the palace, they said to the prince, "She is the very girl for whom you have been searching." The father of the girl was then requested to give the hand of his daughter to the prince, and this request was granted

The wedding was prepared for, and in due time the ceremony took place. On the nuptial night when the bride was delivered to her husband's room, the prince noticed a scar on her throat. "What caused that scar?" he asked her

"I do not remember the incident that caused it. My mother told me that once when I had been left alone as an infant, a young man came to our home, cut my throat, and left a bag of gold beneath my head. I did not die, however, and my parents used the gold very shrewdly to become rich. I grew up and was given to you."

⁷ Most Turkish engagements were once made by matchmakers; in rural Turkey this remains the practice. Before the engagement is completed, representatives of the groom (all of them women) are sent to look over the prospective bride to see if she really qualifies in appearance and manner. These bridal inspectors are called, very literally, "viewers," or "lookers" (görücüler, in Turkish).

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"What a mistake I made! said her husband. "It was I who cut your throat. I hope that you will forgive me and that we shall live together until the end of our lives."

As a matter of fact, they have been living together ever since that time. They now have several children and are very happy. Let us hope that we shall all be as happy as they