

Story 1497 (1973 Tape 11

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Location: Senir village,
Silifke kaza,
İçel Province

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The Bride of Destiny

There was once a hoca¹ who kept writing things down on slips of paper and throwing them into a bowl of water. One day a young shepherd observed him doing this and asked, "Hoca, what is it that you keep writing?"

"I am writing marriage engagements

"Please write one for me, too," the shepherd said.

The hoca wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to the man. But the shepherd could not read, and so he asked, "Whom did you write down as my bride?"

"I wrote down Ahmet Ağa's² daughter."

"How old is she?" asked the shepherd

"She is in her cradle right now."

¹A preacher and religious leader. Obviously, however, the term here refers to someone far more powerful than any ordinary hoca. He is enunciating the decisions of Fate.

²An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

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"But, hoca, please!" said the shepherd. "A man of my age cannot marry a child in the cradle!"

"But I have already written it down and thrown it."³

After the shepherd had left the hoca, he began to think about what he should do. He thought, "That hoca's casting tied me to that baby. If I do not go and kill her, I shall never be able to marry anyone else.

The shepherd went to the home of Ahmet Ağa and sneaked inside when the parents were out of the house. He found the infant in her cradle, and twice he tried to cut her throat. Twice he had barely started to cut the skin when the child turned away from him. When he heard someone approaching, the shepherd fled. When the mother entered the room, she found the child on the floor bleeding but not seriously wounded.

Years passed, and one day the shepherd went to the village fountain. He was older now and had grown a beard. While he was there, a girl came to the fountain to fill her water jug.

shepherd asked one of the other men near the fountain, "Whose daughter is that?"

³The word throw has been used twice in connection with the shaping of the future, as if the hoca is literally casting lots. There may also here be a suggestion of casting remil, a practice by which one reads coded numbers and letters on dicelike cubes thrown on the ground.

The fact that the hoca throws the slips of paper into a bowl of water may also reflect another tradition among Alevi

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is Ahmet Ağa's daughter," the other person said.

To himself the shepherd said, "I wonder if she is younger or older than the daughter of Ahmet Ağa whom I killed?"

The girl looked at the shepherd with the beard and she fell in love with him. Sensing this, the shepherd went to her father to ask for her hand in marriage. Ahmet Ağa said, "See how you look! Would my daughter ever want to marry you?"

The girl was listening to their conversation from behind the door. She went to her mother and said, "Either my father will have me married to him or I shall run away!"

thus it was that the two were married. On the wedding night when the bride and groom were put into the nuptial chamber, the shepherd noticed two scars on the girl's neck. "What caused those two scars?" he asked

The girl said, "When I was still in my cradle, a bird found me unprotected and pecked two holes in my neck."

The shepherd thought, "Oh, what has been written cannot be changed!"⁴

people of southern Turkey. On Hıdırellez, the day sacred to Hızır (once a water deity and fertility god), slips of paper bearing the names of a young man and a young woman are thrown into the sea. There is great excitement as young men dive into the water and try to retrieve slips of paper bearing their respective names. The young women stand on the shore in joyful clamor watching the divers.

⁴Moslems often think of Fate or the Will of Allah as something that has been written. Even illiterate peasant narrators consider that which has been predetermined as something that has

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Until noontime of each day the hoca carefully matched good people with other good people. During the noon period he matched those who were so and so with people who were such and such. But during the late afternoon and evening he made so many engagements that they were done without thought. If yours was thrown into the water of forenoon, take off your hat.⁵ If yours was written and thrown into the water at noon, you can expect only whatever you get. If yours was written and thrown into the water toward evening, go away as far as you can and never look back. May Allah bring to maturity all those whose lot was written during the forenoon.⁶

been written--sometimes in the Book of Allah, sometimes upon the forehead of the person concerned. What may be written upon one's forehead can be seen only by one with special religious insight. Here, of course, the writing is clearly objectified on the hoca's slips of paper.

⁵This expression is somewhat cryptic in this context. It is a Moslem sign of respect to keep the head covered, not to bare it.

⁶The narrator's postscript to this internationally known tale is somewhat equivocal. Inasmuch as most people do not have the experience of witnessing the writing of their destinies, they can hardly know which of the three suggested responses to make.