

Story 841 (1974 Tape 19)

Narrator: Hüseyin Köycü

Location: Tercan, kaza town of
Erzincan Province

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Suitor Task to Win the Hand of Mama Hatun¹

This is a story that I heard when I was still quite small. It is about a bridge not far from Tercan which is called Kötür Bridge.²

Dr. Ahmet Uysal: Is it between Tercan and Mercan?³

Narrator: Yes, it is just before you come to Mercan--about two kilometers away. I do not know just when it was built, but a woman named Mama Hatun had it built.⁴

¹ Mama Hatun was a Seljuk princess who lived near the end of the thirteenth century or possibly the beginning of the fourteenth century. The fact that she is sometimes called Kuma Hatun suggests that she was at some time married and that she was a second wife in a polygamous family. That is the meaning of Kuma. Hatun means Lady; it is synonymous with today's Hanım, and it is possibly a variant of Hanım.

² Although the narrator clearly says Kötür Bridge, it is possible that he means Kötü, meaning worthless. The bridge has long been out of use and is pretty much a ruin now.

³ Tercan is a kaza town. Nearby Mercan is but a village.

⁴ The present narrator is less aware of the historical background of the area. Other narrators at Tercan have known well that the town's great era of the past was the Seljuk period and the immediately succeeding years of the Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu dynasties.

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One day Mama Hatun called a master builder to her presence and ordered that bridge built. In her directions to him, she said, "You are to determine ahead of time exactly how much of each material you will need. I shall provide that material and have it transported to the bridge site. But after that, you will not have any additional supplies. If you can build the bridge under those conditions, I shall marry you. If you cannot do it, then you will receive nothing for your work."

The master builder thought about this proposal for a few minutes, and then he said, "All right, I shall accept this arrangement." He began at once to calculate the amount of all the different materials that he would need for the construction. After he had drawn up lists of his needs, he took these things from Mama Hatun's supplies and set his men to work on the construction of the bridge

Mama Hatun observed the progress of the construction every day. When it was close to completion, she sensed that she was in danger of losing her wager with the master builder. She threw one of the building blocks into the water

the bridge was being finished, the master builder discovered that there was one building block missing. He was convinced that there was some trick being used against him, for he was certain that there had originally been the correct

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number of stone blocks to complete the work. He went to Mama Hatun and asked, "What did you do with the stone block which you took from my supplies? One block is missing, but I know very well that I had enough when I began work.

woman said, "No, you failed to make a correct estimate of your needs. You have lost your wager."

"No, I estimated correctly. There were exactly enough stone blocks, but one of them has been removed!"

woman finally agreed: "Yes, it is true," she said "You won the wager, but I wish to die a virgin. That is the reason I do not want to marry you."

"Yes, but you and I made an agreement on this matter! You promised to marry me if I completed the bridge according to the terms you set. I did so, and now we are going to get married!"

pleaded with him to change his mind on this matter, but the master builder refused to do so. She then asked him, "Why is it that you wish to marry me? Is it because you like me, or because you love me, or because you wish to win the wager?"

He answered, "You and I agreed upon a wager. We both committed ourselves to that wager. Now I am going to marry you. Why have you changed your mind?"

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"It is because I want to die as a virgin." When the refused to accept that as an answer, she said, "Look here! women are alike. You don't have any reason for wishing to marry me instead of some other woman."

The builder asked her, "How can you prove that?"

"I shall do so presently," she said. She went into the kitchen and got two eggs. Taking them to the builder, she held out one of them and asked, "What is this?"

"It is an egg."

Holding up the second egg, she asked, "And what is this?"

"That too is an egg."

"Those two eggs are exactly alike. Women are like eggs. They too are exactly alike. If you marry any one of them, it is exactly the same as if you had married another. so there is no particular reason for your marrying me."

The man thought about this, and then he said, "All right, then, pay me my fee for building the bridge, and I shall not insist upon marrying you."

The story ends here, and it shows how smart the master builder really was ⁵

⁵ It is a moot point as to whether the builder or the woman was the smarter.