

Story #331 (Tape #1, 1972)

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Location: Korucuk Köy, kaza of
Hasankale, Province of
Erzurum

Date: Spring 1972

The Two Girls in the Locked Chest

Once upon a time there lived a padishah with his wife and only daughter. They had a happy life together. One day, as the padishah was having a pleasant conversation with his wife, she said, "If I happen to die before you do, I would like you to marry the woman whose foot can fit into my shoe." *Deceased woman*

"May God give you a long life," the padishah answered. "If you happen to die before I do, I'll marry the woman whom God has chosen for me

"Oh, no. You should marry the woman who can wear my shoes. After I die, go to every house in the country. Every woman should try my shoes on her feet whoever can wear my shoes should become your new wife," the wife insisted.

Several years passed after this conversation, and the padishah's wife died. The padishah fulfilled his wife's will; however, he could not find the woman who could wear his deceased wife's shoes. By then, his daughter had reached the age of fifteen and taken over her mother's duties. She kept house and cooked for her father.

His friends advised the padishah to remarry, and he agreed. His daughter also urged him to marry again, for she thought it desirable to share the work of such a large house as theirs with another woman. However, all his attempts to find the woman who could wear his wife's shoes failed him. One day he said

to his daughter in desperation, "Since I can't find the woman who can wear mother's shoes, you might as well wear them. I don't want to do anything them any longer."

Thus the girl wore the shoes, and they fitted her feet perfectly. One day her father looked at her feet and said, "You are the only woman who can wear my late wife's shoes; therefore, I will marry you."

The girl was alarmed and replied, "God bless you, father, but I'm afraid you don't know what you are saying. I am your own daughter, and you are my father. Our marriage would be ^{Incest} incestuous. It would be a sin."

The girl was so upset that she cried incessantly for several days, but she could not dissuade her father from his decision. Fortunately, she had a very good friend, by the name of Fatma, a girl about her age. She confided in Fatma and asked her friend to help her. Fatma thought it would be best for her friend to run away from her father's house. She advised the padishah's daughter, "Bring me a sackful of money from your father's treasury, and we'll find a way to escape."

The padishah's daughter did as she was told and secured the sackful of gold. Next she and Fatma paid a carpenter to build a chest which could hold two persons. They got in the chest and asked the carpenter, after he had taken the correct amount of gold for his work, to cover them with the rest of the gold. Then they begged the carpenter to shut the chest and place it in the river, which would carry it downstream. The carpenter followed the orders very carefully, for he took pity on these pretty girls who were so very anxious to run away from their home area.

The currents carried the chest downstream. After having floated through

many lands, it finally sank to the bottom of the river off the shores of a land where lived the son of a padishah.¹ The place where the chest sank was directly opposite from the banks of the river where the padishah's horses drank water every day. That day when the padishah's groom lead the horses to the water, all the horses, except one, drank the water. When the groom took the horses to their usual watering place the following days, the same horse again refused to drink. Concerned about the horse, the groom invited the padishah's son to come to the stable. The next day the padishah's son went to the stable and noticed that the horse which had been refusing to drink water was about to die. When he asked what the matter was with the animal, the groom explained that the horse had not had water for several days. Therefore, the padishah's son decided to accompany the groom when the latter took the horses to the watering place.

The next day the sick horse again refused to drink water. Thereupon, the padishah's son ordered divers to search the bottom of the river. After a while, one of the divers reported that they had found an object resembling a rock and that more men would be needed to pull it out. When the object was pulled to the surface of the water, the padishah's son saw that it was a gilded² chest. He ordered his men to put the chest in a cart and take it to his room in the palace. He later informed his mother and told her he wanted to keep the chest in his room.

¹Later in the tale, the narrator identifies him as the padishah himself.

²The narrator is not very consistent in the description of the chest. From the first description one gets the impression that the chest was not gilded but only filled with gold. In this part of the story, however, the narrator says that the chest was gilded and filled with gold.

The padishah's son was in the habit of having his meals in his room. One of his servants used to bring the food on a tray, and leave it in his room. Several days after the chest was placed in his room, the two girls who were by now tired, hungry, and out of breath, decided to get out of the chest and explore their surroundings. Hatice³ said to Fatma, "I can't stand this confinement any longer. Let's get out and see where we are. Then we'll get back in the chest." When they got out, they saw the food left over by the padishah's son. They ate the food and then got back into the chest. The following day, the girls again left the chest and ate the food that was left for the padishah's son by the servant.

When the padishah's son discovered that his food had already been eaten, he became suspicious and decided to stay in his room so that he might be able to find out who was eating his food. The next day, he stayed in his room and hid himself behind the door. Thinking that nobody was in the room the girls came out of the chest to eat. The young man took them by surprise. He inquired, "Who are you? Where do you come from? Why do you eat my food? Are you hungry?"

One of the girls answered, "We too are servants of God."⁴ We are two unfortunate girls."

The padishah's son liked the girls, and permitted them to continue living in the chest. He did not tell his mother or anybody else about the girls. He started ordering food for the girls also. After several days, Fatma said to him, "Let Hatice be your fiancée. Since I consider myself her sister, I will become a sisier to you, as well."

³The padishah's daughter is identified now as Hatice

⁴What Fatma says, "Biz de Allahın kuluyuz," may also be translated as "We too are children of God." This is the standard response in Turkish folktale to the query "Inmisin, cin misin?" meaning, "Are you a human being or a jinn (genie)?"

The padishah's son was actually engaged to another girl and was in the habit of visiting his fiancée every week. But when he saw Hatice, he in love with her. He thought, "I'll marry no other woman but Hatice."

Some time later, the padishah's son had to go on a trip. Before he left the girls, who had by now become very pretty and plump from eating well, he said they would be safe in his room: "I'll tell my mother to leave food in my room even while I am gone, so you will have plenty to eat." He said to his mother, "Order the servants to leave food in my room while I am gone. If the food is eaten, it means I am still alive. If the food remains untouched, it means I am dead."

The mother, anxious to find out the fate of her son, told the servants to leave food in her son's room at every meal time. The servants diligently prepared food for the padishah's son, and at every meal time left a tray full of delicious food in his room. For several days all the food they left in the room was eaten.

In the meantime, the fiancée of the padishah's son became worried because he had stopped paying his weekly visits to her home. Not knowing he was away on a trip, she decided to visit him instead.⁵ At the palace, she was received with due welcome. Then she asked her future mother-in-law⁶ to take her to her fiancé's room. Struck by the beauty and massiveness of the chest in the room, she asked what was inside it.

The sultana answered, "I don't know. It belongs to my son, and he seems to be very fond of it."

⁵This is an anachronism. Moslem youth did not, until recently, visit other in the manner of Western courtship.

⁶The narrator uses the nonstandard word "Ebe" for mother-in-law. In standard usage "ebe" means midwife or nurse.

"Then I shall take it to my house," the fiancée declared. "Whatever is his is also mine. I want to keep this chest until he returns from his

Thus the chest was taken to the fiancée's home. As soon as the girl had possession of the beautiful chest, she ordered her servants to build a fire outside the house and burn the chest. When the chest was put in the fire the gilt fell off, and the wooden part began to burn. At this moment an old woman happened to be passing by. She saved Fatma and Hatice from the burning chest and took them to her cottage. The fiancée of the padishah's son did not see the old woman free the girls from the flames. When she came out of her house, she saw to her satisfaction that the chest had burned to ashes.

The two girls lived with the old woman for some time. Since they had taken the gold bag out of the chest, they had money to buy food and other essentials. Money does not last long, however. When they had spent their last gold piece, Fatma said to the old woman, "Sell me at the slave market. This will provide you and Hatice with money to last some time longer. Do not worry about me. I shall be all right

The old woman did as she was told and took Fatma to the slave market the next day. Fatma was a very beautiful girl, and a woman paid a handsome sum for her. The woman who bought Fatma was not entirely sane. She lived in a large house all by herself. Every day a woman would come to the house and bake bread for her. The first day Fatma was at this strange household the baker woman came and made bread of very poor quality. After she had gone, Fatma heard a moaning sound coming from the direction of the cellar

took the keys which the baker woman had left hanging by the fireplace and went to the cellar. After having unlocked forty doors, she found in the last room

7 This woman is identified as an ekmekçi, literally, a baker.

Fatma's Room
Fatma

Mahmud
a young man lying on the floor. The man was the long-lost son of the mad woman. He had been left to die in that room by the baker woman when he had refused to marry her. Fatma freed the man from his prison and took him to the mad woman, who was very surprised to see her son whom she had thought to be dead.

When the mad woman recovered her son, she also recovered her senses. Her son took vengeance by killing the evil baker woman. Since they were rich, with proper care and diet the young man soon became strong and handsome.

His mother said to Fatma one day, "We are very grateful for what you have done for us. You are a good and beautiful girl. I wish you would marry my son."

However, Fatma answered, "I consider you my mother and your son my brother; therefore, I cannot possibly marry him. I will be very obliged to you if you give me my liberty and some money so that I can free my old mother from poverty."

Fatma was granted her wish, and taking leave of her benefactors with tearful eyes she returned to the cottage with a bagful of gold and jewels.⁸ When she reached the cottage, she asked the old lady what she and Hatice had been doing during her absence.

The old woman answered, "We have been living very frugally on what little money we have left."

Fatma noticed that Hatice was pale and unhappy. On the one hand, she was worried over the fact that the padishah's son had not come to see her and on the other hand over her father's strange decision, which was the root of her and Fatma's present suffering. Fatma's return and the money she brought

⁸ This paragraph is not a close translation of the original. We found it extremely difficult to follow the narrator at this point, and so we had to omit some minor details. Subsequent translators may understand the recording better.

alleviated her cares. Fatma gave the money and the jewels to the old woman and said, "we do not have to worry about money now. This will last us for some time."

However, the money did not last them very long. Life's needs consume any amount of money. When they had spent all of their money, Fatma said to the old woman, "Nine,⁹ sell me as a slave once more so that you will have some money to live on while I am gone."

So the old woman took Fatma to the slave market again. This time a man bought her and took her to his home. In that home Fatma saw pots of food cooking, and a large number of servants attending a young girl, feeding her continuously. She ate with increasing appetite. When she saw her father, she cried, "Oh, father, help me! No matter what I eat, how much I eat, I am still hungry. I am hungry! Help me!"

Her parents entrusted the girl to Fatma's care, which included feeding her. Several days later Fatma persuaded the girl's mother to go to the public bath. She said, "Mother, why don't you go to the bath today? In the meantime shall wash your clothes."

The woman was reluctant, however. "But I cannot leave my daughter alone," she replied

"Don't worry about her," Fatma said. "I shall take good care of her. Then Fatma gave her some clean clothes and sent her to the bath."

Next she built a fire and started heating some water. In the meantime she undressed the girl completely and suspended her on a pole by the heels with her head hanging down. Then she took a stick and began beating her with

⁹In Turkish nine means grandmother or great-grandmother. It is also used to address an old woman one knows intimately.

Story #331

it. The blows were so hard that the girl began to vomit. She vomited up all the food in her stomach. Fatma's blows finally forced out a snake which had been living in the girl's stomach.¹⁰ Fatma then let the girl rest. She bathed her and dressed her and put her to bed.

When the girl's mother returned from the bath, she reproached Fatma for having beaten her daughter. "What have you done to my dear daughter? have almost killed her," she roared.

"Your daughter is feeling better now," Fatma replied. "See it for yourself." She then took the mother to the room of the girl, who was by then sound asleep.

She slept for three days. When she finally woke up, her mother asked, "would you like something to eat?"

"No. I do not feel hungry any longer," the girl answered.

Then Fatma showed the girl's mother the snake that had fallen out of her mouth. The girl recovered from her physical weakness rapidly and with diet became strong and healthy.

The woman was so pleased with Fatma's service to her daughter that she no longer treated her as a servant. She was pampered and waited on. the woman said to Fatma, "The padishah of Iran is my son, and I want him to marry you."

¹⁰It is believed by the folk of many nations that a snake may enter a person's body, usually through his or her mouth while he or she is asleep. One method used to lure the snake out is to boil a large pot of milk and have the patient hold his open mouth over the pot in the steam. The snake is then tempted to come forth to drink the milk.

Since both tape worms and folklore's stomach snakes 1) cause the patient to have enormous appetites, and 2) are lured from the body by similar methods, one cannot help wondering if there is a relationship between the two phenomena.

Fatma replied, "If you really want to do me a favor, release me and give me some money to take to my blind mother."

The woman filled a bag with gold, and Fatma returned to the cottage where Hatice lived with the old woman. Having spent all of their money, they were and hungry. Hatice looked even more pale and unhappy than before. She complained, "After the faithlessness of the padishah's son and my father's cruelty, I wish nothing but to die."

Fatma consoled her by saying, "Don't say such things. Only Allah can decide when to end a person's life. We shall live together again as long as this gold lasts us. After that we shall think of something."

When they ran out of the gold, the old woman took Fatma to the slave market again. This time a young man came and asked, "Are you selling this girl as a slave?"

"Yes," the old woman answered

The young man bought Fatma and took her to his house. Fatma asked her new master, "Please tell me what kind of work you want me to do for you

^{EZAN}
"I shall tell you after the evening call to prayer."

After the evening call to prayer, the young man gave Fatma a tray on which were eight different kinds of food and said, "You are supposed to take this food to the tower over yonder. In the tower you will find a cave. Give the food to the person living in the cave."

Since it was getting dark, Fatma took a lantern to light her way to the tower and started out with the tray in one hand and the lantern in the other. She had a long way to go. She thought, "This trip may cost me my life;

be able to survive it, however." Just when she had reached the tower, the wind extinguished the lantern. Fatma started thinking what would be the

best thing to do: "If I continue my way without the lantern, what will people think of me? I may be scolded for having extinguished the lantern."

Just then she saw a weak light shining from the direction of the tower. She groped her way in that direction. She saw an old witch woman sitting by a fire and busily stirring the water in a cauldron on the fire. The water

forming big bubbles as it boiled. "Nine, would you give me fire to light my lantern with? It went out," Fatma said

"No, I cannot," the old woman answered rudely. "Can't you see that I am busy? Besides, if I give you any of my fire, the water will stop boiling, and I shall not be able to realize my wish."

"Please give me some fire. I'll go away and not bother you any longer" Fatma pleaded.

Let me say something about this old witch. At one time she wanted a young man to marry her daughter, but he had refused by saying, "No, I will not marry your daughter. You are a wicked woman, and your daughter is no doubt as wicked as you." So the witch stole the young man's mind in retaliation.

What was boiling in the cauldron was the young man's mind.

The witch's rudeness made Fatma lose her temper. She took the woman by the arm and threw her into the cauldron. After the witch died in the boiling water, Fatma poured the water out of the cauldron, lighted her lantern with the fire, and went to the adjacent cave.

The young man was in that cave. He begged Fatma, "Please give me food and cut the rope binding my wrists."

"I am afraid to do so," Fatma said. "What if you eat me or kill me?"

"Please, I beg of you," the young man said once more

Fatma gave him the food on the tray and cut the rope on his wrists very cautiously. The rope was tied so tightly that it had cut into his flesh. After Fatma released the young man, the two ate the food together.

In the meantime, let us see what the young man who had bought Fatma was doing. He was the brother of the young man in the cave. When Fatma was gone for a long time, he and his mother began debating. "We had better go see what has happened to the girl," he said to his mother.

The two went to the tower and walked in the cave very carefully. Their surprise, they found their loved one released and eating with Fatma.

"What have you done, my daughter?" the mother asked.

"I did what God ordered me to do," Fatma replied.

The young man in the cave was the son of the padishah of Iran. His mother wanted Fatma to marry him. However, Fatma replied, "If you really want to do me a favor, give my liberty and some money to take to my poor mother." They gave her as much gold as she wanted, and she returned to the cottage.

She gave the gold to the old woman and asked, "Is there any news from the padishah's son?"

"Yes," the old woman answered. "He has returned from his trip, but I hear he is very sick."

During Fatma's absence the padishah's son had returned and directly gone to his room, before seeing his parents, to open the chest. He was alarmed to see that the chest was gone. When he asked his mother where it was, she answered, "Your fiancée took it to her house."

"How dare she!" the young man thundered and went to his fiancée's house.

right away. Without even greeting his fiancée he asked, "What did you do with my chest?"

"I burned it. Why?" she answered indifferently.

"Show me how you burned it," he demanded.

When a fire was built outside the girl's house, the padishah's son threw her into the fire and said, "If you burned my chest, then I shall burn you." Nobody could interfere to free the girl from the flames. After all, he was the padishah's son.

After his fiancée burned in the fire, he went to the palace and got into his bed. He said to his mother, "Cover me up, mother. I am very sick. I may not recover from this sickness."

Days passed. One day the padishah's son debated in his sick bed, "Hatice and Fatma are clever girls. If they are still alive, they will make it known to me. I shall ask the town crier to announce that I want every girl in the country to take her turn in making soup for me."

A different girl made soup for each meal. He would drink one spoonful and push the soup bowl back. Servants from the palace finally called on Fatma and Hatice. They asked the old woman at the cottage, "You have two daughters, don't you? We want them to make soup for the padishah's son."

"They would be glad to," the old woman answered. "But would it be worthy of him?"

"We'll do our best," the girls promised.

The girl cooked such a delicious soup that it was fit for any padishah's son. One spoonful of that soup would heal a man who had been sick for years. Hatice dropped into the soup bowl the ring that the padishah's son had given her before going on his journey, and she asked the old woman to take the soup to the palace.

Cure

The sick young man finished all of the soup and then noticed the ring at the bottom of the soup bowl. "I already feel better. This soup has healing power," he said to the old woman. "Please bring me soup every day.

Several days later he recovered completely from his sickness and said to the old woman, showing the ring he had found in the bowl, "Is the owner of this ring living with you?"

"Yes," the old woman answered. "I have two daughters." She did not know that the girl had put the ring in the soup bowl

"I want to see your daughters," the padishah's son said. "I am feeling much better; therefore, I can come with you

Finally, the lovers came together. Their wedding lasted for forty days and forty nights. The padishah's son asked Fatma to live with them at the palace. Shortly afterwards, Fatma was married to the son of the padishah's vizier. They lived happily ever after