

Story 2196 (1966 Tape 1

Narrator: Mine Erol; formerly Mrs. Sümer, she reverted to maiden name after her divorce.

Location: Çamlıca, section of İstanbul, capital of İstanbul Province

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Silk Crepe Lady¹

Once there was and once there wasn't,² time within time,³ when the sieve was in the straw,⁴ there was a snail

¹The female lead in this tale is a snail, apparently with the glossy skin some snails have. She is called in Turkish Bürüncük Hanım. Hanım clearly means lady. Bürüncük (a variant of bürüncük) means crepe made of raw silk (Redhouse Dictionary, 1983, p. 65).

²Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

³"Time within time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grown to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

⁴The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw

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named Silk Crepe Lady. She used to wear a dress made of onion skin. She was married to Süleyman Bey, a small dormouse.

One day Süleyman Bey decided to attend a wedding ceremony some distance from their home. As soon as Silk Crepe Lady heard of this, she said, "I too want to attend that wedding ceremony.

But Süleyman Bey disagreed with that idea. He answered, "No, you would surely be crushed under the feet of many large creatures and people at that event. That will not be a problem for me, for I am able to run very fast and stay out of the way of others. I can, I can, I can.

But his comments did not persuade his wife, who was determined to attend the wedding party. She began to cry, "I will go to the wedding. I will, I will, I will

But Süleyman Bey insisted that she not do that "Promise me that you will stay home, and I shall bring you rice and sweetmeats from the dining table." With these words he persuaded her not to attend the wedding. He added, through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So, the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

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"I'll fill one of my ears with rice for you and the other ear with sweetmeats."

By the time Süleyman Bey reached the wedding party, he found that the event was really very crowded. Everyone was taking food from the long tables, which were covered with rice dishes and desserts.

On the other hand, back home Silk Crepe Lady fretted and fretted until she could stand it no longer. She should not be left home alone, she thought, and so she set forth at once for the wedding. She went little, she went far. She passed through plains and over mountains.⁵ After awhile, however, she fell into a deep hole from which she was unable to escape. She tried and tried to get out of that hole, but all of her attempts to do so failed

She finally observed that above her head people were riding horses to the wedding. She called upward to them "Oh, horsemen! Oh, riders! If you see Süleyman Bey, please tell him that Silk Crepe Lady has fallen into a hole from which she cannot escape." Among her other efforts was an attempt to jump out of the hole. "Oh, riders golden-belted, tell Süleyman Bey of this."

⁵This two-sentence description of her travel is a common formulaic means of indicating quickly a lengthy or arduous journey.

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The riders looked about but saw no one. They wondered where the voice was coming from. They could hear her but not see her. Continuing their journey, they finally reached the place where the wedding was in progress. Entering the house, they began walking among the other guests and talking with them. Among them was Süleyman Bey, who was filling one ear with rice and the other ear with sweet foods to take home to his wife. As he listened to the conversation of the riders, he realized that they were talking about him. He quickly emptied his ears so that he could hear better what they were saying. The riders were saying, "On our way here we heard a female voice that seemed to be coming up from the road. We could not determine for sure where the strange voice was coming from. Here is what she seemed to be saying: 'Silk Crepe Lady has fallen into a hole in the road from which she cannot escape. tried both crawling and jumping, but neither means helped her. Oh, gold-belted riders, tell this to Süleyman Bey if you see him.

When Süleyman Bey heard that, he said, "O my Allah! It is my wife about whom they are talking I must go at once to save her." After locating the hole in which Silk

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Crepe Lady was sitting, he lowered his tail to her and said, "Come now. Grab my tail so that I can pull you out of there."

But Silk Crepe Lady was angry at her husband for not having taken her to the wedding celebration. She answered, "I shall not do that because I am angry at you!"

Süleyman Bey repeated his request with patience: "Come on. Let me pull you up from there."

Again she said, "I am angry at you!"

Süleyman Bey said, "Give me your hand so that I can pull you out."

But she said again, "No, because I am angry at you."

By this time Süleyman Bey had also become angry. He pulled his tail from the hole and began to kick his wife. As he did so, he kept saying, "I will kick you, I will kick you, I will kick you!" And thus both expressed their feelings.

Let us go now and climb into the wooden bedstead.⁶

⁶This is a terminal formula used by some storytellers.