

Story 1053 (Transcribed from Narrator: Gûlfiye Aydın  
 tape by Ahmet Ali Arslan; ATON does Location: Sarıyamaç village,  
 not have tape.) Ardahan kaza, Kars  
 Province

Date: 1975

Why Şıhoğlu Şah Abbas<sup>1</sup> Lifted the Siege of Van

Once in the past there was an Iranian padişah who asked his vizier if there was any other padişah anywhere in the world more powerful than he was. The vizier answered, "Where did you get this idea about yourself, my padişah? There are several Turkish padişahs who are more powerful than you are. The Padişah of Van<sup>2</sup> is one such ruler. Do you think that you could possibly capture his fortress at Van?"

"I shall take it," said the padişah.

The vizier said, "No, my padişah, that is impossible."

Marshalling all of the troops available in his land, the Padişah of Iran raised a mighty army in forty days. They then began to march toward Van. After a long march they arrived at Van and besieged the city. They made many attacks against the Turkish forces there, but they were unable to take the city.

<sup>1</sup>Shah Abbas the Great was one of the most prominent Persian rulers of the Safavid Dynasty, reigning from 1587 to 1628. Whether or not the details of the siege in this tale have any historicity, he did conquer extensive territory from the Turks.

<sup>2</sup>Van, in extreme eastern Turkey, is close to the Iranian border and a likely object of any Iranian attack.

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After some time the Iranian padişah decided to change his tactics. He made the following announcement to all of his troops: "Every soldier must plant a garden. Those within the city will not be able to do that, and so they will die of starvation

The siege was renewed, and it continued for seven years. By the end of that time, the defenders of the fortress were beginning to be in desperate condition. Because of this, the Padişah of Van called his people together and said, "I think that I shall have to surrender the city. What do you think about it?"

An old woman came out of the crowd and said, "Please do not surrender the city yet, Your Majesty. Let me first go and visit the Iranian padişah, and if I fail in my plan, then you will still have time to surrender.

That old woman had three ewes. She milked those sheep and made a pot of yoghurt<sup>30-31</sup> with the milk. Taking this yoghurt with her, she then went to see the Iranian padişah, Şihoğlu Şah Abbas. She said to him, "I am only an old woman, and so I cannot do very much, but I brought you some fresh yoghurt. You have not had any for seven years, and I thought that perhaps you had begun to miss it."

The Iranian leader was amazed to hear this. He

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thought, "I supposed that I was going to defeat these people by means of starvation. But even now, after all this time, they are able to make this (yoghurt) from either cow's milk or sheep's milk. I shall not be able to starve them out after all.

Just at that moment the people within the city dumped some lime dust down the front wall of the fortress. The Iranian padişah asked the old woman, "What are they pouring down that wall?"

"I can't see very well. I don't know," said the old woman.

"Whatever it is, it is something white

"Oh, that!" said the old woman. "Some of the Turkish soldiers' flour has bugs in it. I think that they must be throwing it out now."

After hearing that, the Padişah of Iran decided that he could not take the city of Van. Without any delay he lifted the siege and ordered a retreat to his own country.