

Story 1020 (1972 Tape 2) Narrator: Hasan Hüseyin Cilev

Location: Karacabey, kaza town
in Bursa Province

Date: 1972

Behlül Dane¹ and the Grape-Seller

A grape-seller had loaded his donkey with grapes and was traveling along selling them to any customer he could find. After a while he encountered Behlül Dane along the road. Behlül said to him, "Give me a bunch of grapes, and in exchange I shall give you a piece of valuable advice."

"All right," said the grape-seller, and he handed Behlül a bunch of grapes.

In return Behlül gave him this piece of advice: "Know where to sit at whatever place you are a guest."

"Is that all?" asked the grape-seller.

"Yes, that is all. Now if you will give me another bunch of grapes, I shall give you in return a second piece of valuable advice." After the man had handed over another bunch of grapes, Behlül said, "When you are at a social

¹Supposedly the half-mad half brother of Harun Reşit (greatest of the Abbassid Caliphs, a leader who flourished circa 800), Behlül Dane is a legendary character of dubious historicity. His usual role is that of berating and/or satirizing Harun Reşit for his high living and moral lapses, a dangerous role which he plays with impunity because of his "madness." Like Shakespeare's clowns, his madness is feigned to provide this security cover. In only a few tales is he the "do-gooder" that we see in this tale.

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gathering, do not bring forth any object that is not asked for."

"Is that all?" asked the grape-seller.

"Yes, that is all. Now if you will give me one more bunch of grapes, I shall give you a final piece of advice. When he had received that third bunch of grapes, Behlül Dane advised the man, "Don't you ever answer questions that you have not personally been asked.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

The man looked into his basket and saw that his supply of grapes had been considerably reduced by now. He could afford to give away any more. He therefore continued wandering along selling his grapes. After a while he entered a city and there he saw a large group of people waiting for a feast that was soon going to be served. The people there invited the grape-seller to join them, and inasmuch as they seemed very hospitable, he accepted their invitation

Entering the house where the feast was to be held, he and seated himself on a divan at the very best position.²

²In older Turkish circles the most honored seat at a social gathering is the center of the sofa which faces the main entrance from across the room. Since the person with most prestige and position is supposed to sit there, anyone of lesser rank occupying that space is immediately moved out to make room for his/her superior.

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Very soon, however, a vizier entered the house and asked the grape-seller to move over a little. Another important man entered and asked him to move along still farther. Then a prominent lady came in and requested him to move still farther from his original position. As this went on, the grape-seller finally found himself sitting behind the door.

The host now brought in the food and set it on the table, but he failed to bring in a knife with which to slice the bread. Seeing this, the grape-seller drew out his own knife and offered it for that purpose. The vizier looked at the knife and recognized it as a knife he had once owned. The vizier wondered aloud how that particular knife got there. The grape-seller made some humorous remark about this, which caused everyone to laugh and which called him to the attention of the vizier. The vizier now arose, claimed the knife as his own, and grabbed the grape-seller, declaring that he must be the man who had stolen it from him. "Where did you get this knife?" the vizier demanded of the grape-seller. Then, speaking to the other guests, he said, "This knife once belonged to me, and someone came to our home and stole it from us."

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"Well, I was not that somebody," protested the grape-seller, but nobody there would believe him. He was about

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to be taken to prison to await trial the following day, but Behlül Dane, who by some kind of coincidence was present at the same feast, came to his assistance.

Behlül Dane said, "Instead of putting him in jail, let him be my guest for tonight. I'll take him with me, have him stay at my house, and then I'll return him in the morning."

"No, no!" said the people there. "You will allow him to escape." But after Behlül Dane took an oath that he would return the grape-seller in the morning, they allowed him to take the man home with him.

Behlül Dane had two rooms in his small house. He placed the grape-seller in one room for the night, and he himself slept in the other. After a while Behlül knocked on the wall between the two rooms and shouted, "Hey! Listen! I want to tell you something!"

The grape-seller woke up and listened.

"For a bunch of grapes I advised you to know where to sit at a social gathering. You did not follow that advice, and you ended up sitting behind the door. I told you not to bring forth any object in a social group that was not asked for of you, but you paid no attention to that and produced your knife when no one asked you to do so. (There were plenty of knives in that house, and the fact that

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there was no knife laid out with the bread was deliberate.) Then I told you not to answer a question that was not rected to you, but you did not heed this advice either. You answered such a question, and when everyone laughed at your answer, you were identified as the person who had produced the knife. Now you are in danger of being prosecuted and punished."

At that point Behlül Dane paused. He knocked loudly on the wall again and shouted, "Now listen to me carefully and follow my advice this time!"

The grape-seller listened very intently to what Behlül Dane had to say to him now.

"Tomorrow when you go to court, say, 'Yes, I know about that knife. My father was a merchant. One day my father did not return home from one of his business trips, and after he was several hours overdue, we went out to search for him along the route we knew he had taken. found him dead in the forest, and this knife, all covered with blood, was lying on his body. Since then I have been searching for my father's murderer, and I have done so under the guise of being a grape-seller. Whenever I am with a group of people, I always take out that knife, hoping that someone will claim it and thereby reveal himself to be my father's murderer.'"

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The man listened very carefully to Behlül Dane's words, and then he fell asleep again. In the morning Behlül turned the man over to the authorities again, saying, "Here is my guest. Now do what you will with him

In the court proceedings, the vizier charged the grape-seller with having stolen the knife: "This knife is mine. I owned it for a long while, but one night someone entered our house and stole it from me."

When it was the grape-seller's turn to testify, he said, "Yes, I know about this knife, and it is true that it is not mine. My father was a merchant who sold his wares throughout the land. One day he did not return home on schedule, and after he was several hours overdue, I went out to search for him. I found his body in a nearby forest, and on his body I found this knife all covered with his blood. I now go about, disguised as a grape-seller, with this knife in my belt. Whenever I am in a crowd, I find some reason to take this knife out and display it so that everyone there will see it. I do this hoping to have someone claim the knife as his own, for the man who claims this knife will be my father's murderer. Inasmuch as the vizier makes such a strong claim to the ownership of the knife, he must be the man who killed my father." Saying this, he grabbed the vizier by the collar and requested that he be

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punished for his crime

After investigating the matter further, the judge concluded that the vizier was indeed the criminal and that grape-seller was an innocent and wronged man. In the the grape-seller was released, and the vizier was punished