

Story 1262 (1972 Tape 10)

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Behlül Dane Saves a Guest from Execution

One day Behlül Dane had a guest at his home. After the two had eaten dinner, a message arrived from Behlül Dane's brother,¹ Harun Reşit. The message said, "Behlül Brother, I am giving a feast, and I am inviting you to be among the guests." Even though they had already eaten a meager meal Behlül Dane and his guest went at once to the palace of the caliph

As they were walking along to the palace, Behlül said to his guest, "I have three valuable pieces of advice to give you. Whenever you are in a large social gathering, do not sit down in a place from which you are likely to have to move.² Do not answer any questions that have not been addressed to you. And, finally, do not interrupt or interfere with anybody

¹Legend has it that Behlül Dane was the mad half-brother of Harun Reşit. There is no historical verification for this legend, though there may have been a person named Behlül Dane in Baghdad and its environs at the time of the great Abbassid caliph. A tomb bearing the name of Behlül Dane had been seen in a nearby city as recently as two centuries ago.

²At social gatherings, especially in rural Turkey, it is traditional to seat the most prominent guest against the wall

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else's business."

Unfortunately, the man paid little attention to the good advice which he had received, for at the palace he made all of the mistakes against which Behlül Dane had warned him. During the feast a large watermelon was brought into the dining room, but the servant had failed to bring a knife with which to cut it. Seeing this, Behlül's guest drew out his own knife and handed it to the servant. This annoyed the caliph, who was disturbed that anyone would draw a knife in his presence. He said to his vizier, "O vizier, how can we punish this man for doing such an improper thing?"

The vizier answered, "My padişah, that question can be easily solved. We can claim that that knife had once been among the equipment stored in our treasury but that it been stolen by someone. We can say that his possession of the knife showed that he was the thief, and we can punish him for

directly opposite to the main entrance to the room. Should a late arrival have more status than the person occupying that seat, the occupant of that seat is asked to relinquish it and move aside to a slightly less prestigious position. There may be considerable shuffling of positions during an evening. An undistinguished guest who is modest and socially sensitive will take a seat well away from the position of honor--perhaps all the way around the room to a seat near the door. --See the ATON variant to this tale titled "Behlül Dane and the Grapeseller."

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that offense."

Because of his closeness to the caliph, Behlül Dane was present during this conversation, and he began at once to think, "How can I possibly save this man?" When the feast was concluded and the company was about to depart, the guest of Behlül Dane was detained and accused of a crime. Behlül Dane immediately came to his assistance, however, saying, "I have already arranged with this man to be my guest tonight. Let him stay at my home tonight, and I shall bring him back to you in the morning.

But the caliph and his vizier said, "No, no! If we permit him to spend the night at your home, you will probably advise him of a way to escape the charges against him

Behlül answered, "No, I shall not talk to him about this matter at all." Because Behlül Dane was known to be a very trustworthy man, they accepted his statement and allowed him to take the guest with him to his home.

Taking the guest to his home, Behlül placed the man in one room, and he himself slept in another room. The following morning Behlül took his guest to the stable, and there Behlül began to lecture very sternly to his donkey. Taking a stick, he struck the animal and said, "Oh, you donkey, didn't I advise you where to seat yourself at a social gathering?

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Didn't I tell you not to answer a question that you had not been asked? Didn't I tell you never to interfere with anybody else's business? Oh, you donkey, now they wish to execute you! I shall give you some more advice, and this time you had better follow it very carefully! This morning when they ask you where you got the knife you offered to the servant for cutting the watermelon, you will answer as I direct to answer. You will say, 'My father was robbed and killed by bandits. They took all of his money and left him lying in the road covered with blood. When I reached his body, all that I found on it was this knife, with which he had been stabbed. Since that time I have been searching for the murderer of my father. Whenever I am with a group of people, I find some reason to draw this knife, hoping that someone will claim it and thereby reveal himself to be the murderer.'"³

They proceeded to the palace, where Behlül Dane said, "Here is your man."

They answered, "We should order that he be executed for having stolen a valuable knife from the supplies in the treasury."

But the accused man protested. "Stop! I did not get this

³In a much better variant of this tale (ATON No. 245)

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knife from your treasury. I found this knife covered with blood on my father's dead body. Wherever I go, I draw this knife and make sure that everyone present sees it. I keep hoping that someone will claim it, for then I would know for certain who it was who robbed and murdered my father."

When they considered this testimony, the padişah and his council decided to dismiss the charge against this stranger. Thus, Behlül Dane's clever words to his donkey saved the guest.

Behlül Dane has made no commitment not to advise the guest what to say in court. He takes the guest to the stable, accuses him of being a donkey, and beats the guest himself with a stick as he harangues him and provides him with a convincing alibi. Here he uses the subterfuge of advising the literal donkey, but he does so in the presence of the accused man, of course, and thereby makes his advice available without having broken his promise not to speak to the accused on this subject.