

Story #522 (Tape # , 1974)

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Location: Kumbetli village
(Ladikars formerly),
Kars Province

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Behlül Dane Sells Advice

One day Harun Reşid and his grand vizier decided to walk about the streets in disguise. When they came to the outskirts of the city, they came upon Behlül Dane, who was playing there with some children. Behlül had piled before him a row of things, as children do when they play. There were also before him three piles of soil.

Harun Reşid watched for a while as his brother played, and then, turning to his vizier, he said, "Go now to the treasury and get some money. When you return with it, approach Behlül and ask him to make an oracular statement."

"Very well," said the vizier, and he left. When he returned with in his pocket, he greeted Behlül, "Good day, Behlül-u Divane.¹ Tell me what that mound of sand signifies?"

"Give me a piece of gold, and then I shall tell you." When he had received the gold, he explained: "The wisdom of that mound is this: Do not trust women."

"Oh, that is an old truth. I am already familiar with that."

"You may know it," said Behlül, " but take care that it never slips your mind."

"What is the significance of that second mound?" asked the vizier.

Behlül Dane responded, "The message of that mound is this: Do not trust relatives on your wife's side of the family."

¹ This is the formal rendition of the name.

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"Well, I know that too," the vizier said.

"Possibly," said Behlül, "but do not ever forget it."

what is the meaning of the third pile?"

Behlül replied: "You cannot make leather from a lion's skin or a friend out of the state." ²

The vizier responded again in the same way: "I swear that I have always known that."

"You probably have," answered Behlül, "but bear it in mind. Now you may go."

The vizier later decided to test the validity of Behlül's advice. He went home and said to his wife, a beautiful woman, "I feel like eating venison."

"Well, you could have that arranged," she said.

"How?"

"You can asked your skillful hunters to shoot one for you," she said.

But the vizier dismissed this suggestion, saying, "I shall have lost my appetite for it by the time they have hunted for a deer. I shall tell you what we can do, but let it be a secret between you and me. Harun Reşid keeps a deer in a cage. I shall have it stolen and slaughtered. Then you will cook it for me."

After the woman had agreed to this, the vizier called a porter and went to a butcher shop where he bought a whole deer. The butcher

² Translator's note: It is suggested here that one cannot depend upon the protection of the state. Post (hide or leather) and dost (friend) are often used in expressions that suggest the difficulty or futility of relying on specified persons or things. --Sema Kormali

the deer off the hook and placed it in a clean bag. The porter took the deer to the vizier's house and set it on the kitchen table. After paying the porter, the vizier said to his wife, "I have had it stolen and butchered in a secluded place. It has been cleaned nicely. Besides the meat itself, I have brought you the deer's head, feet, and hide. Now you should get ready to cook

"Do not worry," she said. "I shall cook it well."

The vizier then left, and the woman started cooking the venison. When the husband returned, he found the table already set, and so the two sat down to dinner. The meat was delicious, and it had been seasoned to suit the vizier's taste. But the vizier was determined to test his wife, and so he commented, "It needs salt, and besides, it is underdone." This was really just a pretext for starting an argument. The argument soon became a fight, and the vizier started beating his wife. She finally managed to free herself from him, and then she fled to the palace of Harun Reşid.

When she appeared before the ruler, he asked her, "What is the matter?"

"Your vizier, my husband," she panted, "stole your pet deer and killed it. He had me cook it for him. Then he started beating me, saying, 'The meat is not cooked well.' See what he has done to me." As she said this, she revealed her many bruises.

"Is this really so?" asked Harun Reşid.

"Yes, of course," she replied.

Harun Reşid called the vizier immediately and then summoned his executioners. The vizier was arrested, and Harun Reşid gave orders to have papers prepared for his execution.

The brother of the grand vizier's wife was the second vizier, and her cousin was the third vizier. These two were both pleased about Harun Reşid's

decision, because the execution of the grand vizier would mean promotions for them.

When the firman was written out, Harun Reşid said to the grand vizier, "We are now going to sign the papers. Do you have anything to say?"

I do," the grand vizier replied. "I have served you and your state all these years, and now you will have me killed because you hold an old friend's life of no more value than a deer's." --Incidentally [the narrator interpolated], I had forgotten to tell you that the vizier had actually stolen the deer and had hidden it, let us say, in Âşık Islâm's barn.--"Your majesty," the vizier continued, "send your men to Âşık Islâm's barn, where they will find your deer."

When the men had brought Harun Reşid's deer before him, the ruler was greatly surprised. "What does all of this mean?" he asked.

the vizier explained. "Do you remember that on a certain day you ordered me to ask Behlül Dane to make some oracular statements? Well, he made three such statements. The first thing he told me was, 'Do not trust women'; the second was, 'Do not trust relatives on your wife's side'; and the third 'You cannot make leather out of a lion's skin or a friend out of the state.' All that I wanted to do was to test the validity of those statements. This woman who has been my wife for more than thirty years will have me killed because I have beaten her. She will tolerate me only when I show her affection. These two are her brother and her cousin. See how pleased they look at the prospect of my execution. And you, my sovereign, whom I thought to be my friend, will have me killed for the sake of a measly deer."