

Story 1011 (1984 Tape 1) Narrator: Hasan Tekiř, 35,
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Afyon Province

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Behlül Dane¹ Beats Harun Reřit
and Şeyhülislam² at Their Own Game

Behlül Dane was the brother of Harun Reřit. This blessed person used to speak very sternly to his brother and this came in time to annoy Harun Reřit greatly.³

One day Harun Reřit said to the Şeyhülislam, "You must discover some means of finding Behlül Dane so guilty

1

Behlül Dane was supposedly the half-mad brother of Harun Reřit (Haroun Al-Raschid), the greatest of the Abbasid Caliphs who flourished around 800. Although there may have been a real person named Behlül Dane, there is very little evidence that he was related to the Caliph. The whole corpus of tales involving this relationship is apparently a product of the folk imagination.

2

The Şeyhülislam was the highest authority on Moslem religious law in the Ottoman Empire when the sultans assumed the caliphate themselves. Whether there was such a title at the time of Harun Reřit, there is no question that the supreme authority on religious law then was the Caliph himself.

3

Not really mad but, like Shakespeare's fools, adopting an antic disposition as a cover for his satire and criticism against the mighty, Behlül Dane repeatedly admonished Harun Reřit for his worldliness, his high living, and his moral lapses. Inasmuch as the Caliph was the Commander of the Faithful, Harun Reřit would quite understandably resent such criticism.

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of religious offense that you can rule him deserving of execution. Then you can execute my brother!"

"How can I possibly do that?" asked the Şeyhülislam.

"I do not know, but you must find some way to justify executing him."

"Well, then, let us do it this way," said the Şeyhülislam. "I'll say to him, 'Behlül Dane, you never invite us to your home.' Upon hearing that, he will then of course invite us to his home. Being very poor, however, he will not have much food to offer us. He will undoubtedly say, 'Sirs, if I had more food, I would serve it to you, but this poor fare is all I have. What else can I do?' I can then convict him of ingratitude for speaking that way." 32-32

Accordingly, the Şeyhülislam went to Behlül Dane and said, "Behlül Dane, you never invite us to your house.

"Well, then, please come to my house for lunch today," said Behlül Dane.

At noon the Şeyhülislam and Harun Reşit went to Behlül's house. For lunch they were served a small piece of bread, a little salt, and some water. The Şeyhülislam said, "Oh, Behlül Dane, you are poor. You would, of course, serve us better things to eat if you had them."

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Behlül Dane grew very angry at this remark and said, "You shameless fellows! Can't you be grateful for what have without wanting more?"

He had convicted his guests of the very offense they had plotted to charge him with having committed. There no way now in which they could execute him for ingratitude.

Behlül Dane was a man who had attained a high spiritual level. Among his special talents was the ability to read the minds of people and thus anticipate their behav-

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⁴Some tales involve minor miracles performed by Behlül. Others cite his association with the Forty, a group of humans with such great spiritual insight that (in mystic mythology) they control certain areas of mortal life.