

Story 1207 (1990 Tape 12)

Narrator: Beyhan Kavasoğulları  
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One Cannot Read Even a <sup>all</sup>(Firman)<sup>1</sup> at Dusk in Cloudy Weather

Once there was and once there was not, a very long time ago, there was a farmer who made a good income from the fruit of his vineyard. In that same neighborhood, however, there was a cunning fox who liked grapes very much, and he would frequently steal many bunches of grapes from this vineyard

After a while the farmer grew very annoyed at losing so many grapes, and so he decided to put a stop to this theft. Loading his rifle, he went to the vineyard with it every evening and spent the night there.

When the fox observed this, he thought, "This farmer apparently wishes to kill me. The best way I can protect myself against him will be for me to take others to the vineyard with me. Then, instead of shooting only at me, he will have several other targets to aim at. I shall not then stand out so clearly." Going to the rabbit, he said, "There is a fine vineyard right close by which has better grapes than any other vineyard in the entire neighborhood. Come along with me and eat some of those

<sup>1</sup> A firman was an imperial decree issued by a sultan. Inasmuch as the sultan was an absolute ruler, his decrees were the supreme laws of the land. Many firmans were beautiful examples of engraved calligraphy in the Arabic script, often

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grapes."

"No!" said the rabbit. "Those grapes belong to the farmer, and that farmer has a rifle in his hands every evening. He will shoot us!"

"No, no!" said the fox. "The padişah has already decreed that vineyard as mine. He issued a firman saying that. I have that large firman in my possession, and so the farmer cannot do anything harmful to us.

The rabbit was very impressed with this news about the fox's firman from the padişah, and a few evenings later he agreed to go to the vineyard and eat some grapes. They went only to the outer edge of the vineyard, and there they were far enough away from where the farmer kept watch so that he could not see them. The fox boasted, "Didn't I tell you it would be perfectly safe for us to eat grapes here? This land is mine, and the farmer has no control over it. The padişah sent me a firman in which he said, 'Brother Fox, from now on, this vineyard belongs to you.'"

"Yes, I see," said the rabbit, believing the words of the fox.

When the fox and the rabbit went to the vineyard another time, they had to go farther into the interior of the vineyard

with gold-illuminated letters. Just as the decoration is very ornate, the rhetoric of the message is often very lofty and exaggerated. Two firmans bearing all of these characteristics hang in the ATON offices.

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to get grapes, for they had already eaten those on the outer edges. With each trip they made to the vineyard, they penetrated, bit by bit, to the center of the vineyard. By that time the farmer had discovered that animals were stealing grapes. He therefore stationed himself, with his rifle, near the place the animals had reached in their penetration of vineyard. When he saw the fox and the rabbit approaching, he fired his rifle at them, narrowly missing both animals. Both the fox and the rabbit fled in terror

While he had been sitting in the vineyard on guard against thieves, the farmer had been eating helva.<sup>2</sup> The sticky piece of paper containing the helva had fallen to the ground, and it stuck to the face of the fox as that animal was running away. The rabbit, who was running alongside of him, called out, "Brother fox! Brother fox! What is that on your head?"

Pulling off the helva paper, the fox answered, "It is the padişah's firman giving me this vineyard.

"Oh-h-h Exactly what is written upon that firman, Brother Fox? Read it to me!"

"Aman!"<sup>3</sup> exclaimed the fox. "How can one read a firman

<sup>2</sup>A candy made with sesame oil, honey, and any number of other possible ingredients. It is much richer and sweeter than the other very popular Turkish candy, lokum--referred to (for tourists) as Turkish Delight.

<sup>3</sup>Aman is a common exclamation in Turkish. It may (negatively) mean alas or oh, dear! More positively, it may suggest, oh, my goodness or the equivalent of wow! or golly!

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at dusk in such cloudy weather?"

This expression was repeated so frequently by others that it was converted into a popular proverb: "One cannot read even a firman at dusk in cloudy weather."<sup>4</sup>

How

<sup>4</sup>If this is indeed a folk proverb, it is most unlikely that it was established as such in this manner.