

Story 898 1974, dictated) Narrator: Nermin Çileli, former dancer but owner of Bosphor East Restaurant, New York City, now

Location: Istanbul, Istanbul Province, but tale collected in New York City

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The Laz¹ Who Was Just Fooling Allah

There were once two Laz fishermen who went fishing for hamsis.² They rowed out on the sea in their boat and fished all day. Their luck was so good that by the end of the day their boat was completely full of fish.

In the late afternoon, however, a violent storm suddenly arose,³ and the sea became very rough. Alarmed by this dangerous situation, one of the Lazes began to pray:

¹ The Laz constitute the second largest ethnic minority (after the Kurds) in Turkey. Their native area is the Black Sea coast, especially the eastern end of that coast. There are, of course, some Laz people distributed thinly throughout Turkey.

² The hamsi is a small fish, six or eight inches in length, something like a sardine. They are an important source of food for the Laz people, who, it is said, have 1,000 different recipes for cooking hamsis.

³ Although the narrator does not mention the Black Sea, she does not need to, for both the Lazes and the hamsis indicate the location. The sudden storm in this tale is all too typical of the unpredictability of the Black Sea. Storms and squalls often arise on that body of water without any warning.

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"O Allah, if you will help us to reach the shore alive, we shall give all these fish to the poor as a thank-offering."

Hearing this, the second Laz exclaimed, "Man, what are you saying? Why should we spend the entire day catching these fish only to give them all away to the poor?"

"Sh-h-h!" said the first Laz. "I am only fooling Allah!"