

Story 1575 (1987 Tape 3) Narrator: Hüseyin Gümüştas, 54;
carpenter

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Devrek kaza,
Zonguldak Province

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A Laz¹ Criminal Stalls for Time

One year recently a Laz had a very good crop of hazelnuts. His wife said to him, "Efendi,² take your crop to İstanbul and sell it there, for you will be able to get a much higher price for it there than you would here."

Laz answered, "No, I shall not take my crop to İstanbul! I shall not do that because I do not do anything that a woman tells me to do." Three or five³ days later, however, he said to his wife, "Hanım,⁴ I am going to İstanbul to sell my crop of hazelnuts." He had his hazelnut crop loaded on a ship that was ready to sail to İstanbul. During the voyage,

¹The Laz people constitute one of the larger ethnic minorities in Turkey. Their exact origins are not definitely known. The largest concentrations of Lazes are in extreme northeastern Turkey along the Black Sea coast. Reputedly stupid, they are made fun of in numerous folk anecdotes about fools. The frequent success of Lazes who move to İstanbul belies the folk image.

²A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devaluated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for servants and children.

³In colloquial Turkish three or five is used for a few or a handful.

⁴A term of respect for adult females, equivalent to lady.

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a great storm arose suddenly on the Black Sea,⁵ and it was only with the greatest efforts that he was able to save both his life and his crop. But he finally reached İstanbul where he sold his hazelnuts for a very good price.

As he walked about the city enjoying himself and thinking of the great profit he had made on his hazelnut crop, he fell into a conversation with a resident of the city. Unfortunately, they soon began quarreling, and then it was not long before they were fighting. In this fight the Laz became so angry that he killed his opponent.

The police came and took the Laz before a judge. judge asked the Laz, "What is your name?"

The Laz began to tell the story of his life. "When I was born, my mother wanted to name me this, but my father wanted to call me that. I had an older brother who wanted to name me something else

Becoming quite impatient, the judge shouted, "Don't tell me all that! Just tell me your name!"

At last the Laz said, "My name is Riza."

Then the judge asked him another question: "All right, Riza. How old are you?"

⁵The Black Sea is known for sudden squalls and unpredictable storms or turbulence.

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Riza answered, "Oh-h-h, I was born at the time that hamsis⁶ were washed upon the shore for the first time

The judge said sternly, "I am asking you about your age, not about the hamsis having been washed ashore. Tell me age!" Still trying to stall for time, Riza again began to tell his story.

But the judge stopped him. "No, no! Not that I demand to know what your age is now!" After he had finally forced Riza to tell his age, the judge asked, "Son, when did you do your military duty?"⁷

Riza answered, "Oh-h-h, your honor, I did my military service at the time when the hamsis were washed ashore for the second time."

By this time the judge was becoming quite annoyed. He said, "Hey, son, just tell me the dates for your military service and not anything about the hamsis!" After Riza had told

⁶Anchovies--small (5-8 inches) fish resembling herring found in the Mediterranean Seas. Those in the Black Sea constitute a staple of the diet of Turks (especially those of Laz extraction) living along the Black Sea coast. Hamsis are, however, more than just food to Black Sea coast residents; they have cultural dimensions observable in the folklore of the area.

⁷All physically able Turkish men are required to complete a period of military service. The period varies according to the country's actual military needs and according to the educational level of the person. In no case is the period onerously long, often now from 2-18 months' duration.

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the beginning and ending dates of his military service, the judge continued to interrogate him. "Now, Riza, tell me you happened to commit this crime?"

Riza began giving an account of how he became involved in a fight which ended in the death of an Istanbul resident, but he started the story with his harvest of a very good crop of hazelnuts. He said, "This year our crop of hazelnuts was very good. My wife told me that I should--

The judge could not stand any more of this. He said, "I do not want to hear your life-story. I simply want to know about the crime you committed in Istanbul. Come to Istanbul!"

Riza answered, "Ah-h-h, your honor. If I come to Istanbul, you will hang me on the gallows tree