

Story 187 (1996 Tape)

Narrator: Tayfun Demirtürk, 25

Location: Yeşilyuva [Yeşilova?]
village,
Acıpayamlı kaza,
Denizli Province

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A Laz¹ Outwits Some Kayseri² People

Although Temel³ was originally from Trabzon, he lived in Istanbul at the time of this incident. Having heard much about the city of Kayseri and its residents, he had for some time wished to visit that place. Finally he bought an air ticket for Kayseri. As he was waiting to

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

²As the Laz is stereotyped as the numskull of Turkey, the Kayseri resident is stereotyped as being very clever or shrewd. He almost always outwits other people. A Turkish proverb says, "He may not be able to read or write, but if he is from Kayseri, beware of him!" There are many anecdotes in which Kayserians outdo their opponents.

³In tales about the stereotyped Laz as dummer or fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz tale.

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board the plane, Temel asked each of the other passengers where he or she lived. It turned out that they were all Kayserians, and he was a stranger among them—and Laz, at that.

When the plane took off from the Istanbul airport, everything seemed quite normal, but ten minutes later the pilot announced that they were experiencing technical difficulties. He said that it would be necessary to reduce the weight of the plane's load. All of the passengers threw their luggage out of the plane, and for a time everything went well.

Awhile later, however, the pilot again announced technical problems that required a further reduction in the weight of the plane. He ordered the passengers to rip all the seats from the floor of the plane and throw them overboard. The passengers were now grumbling and praying to Allah for help.

But their troubles did not end there. Soon afterwards the pilot announced the necessity of reducing the weight of the plane even more. "Cut the bottom out of the plane, and let every passenger cling to one of the overhead rails at the sides of the aisle." The passengers were greatly alarmed by this announcement, but they followed the directions of the pilot. They did not know that even worse news was to come.

The pilot soon made a final announcement about the weight of the plane. He said, "The load of the plane has been reduced almost

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enough, but it still must be lowered by the weight of one adult. Let one passenger drop from the plane.”

After hearing that last announcement, Temel quickly thought of a way to save his life. He spoke to the other passengers about the seriousness of the situation. “You are all from Kayseri, and you are all relatives or friends of each other. If one of you had to drop out of the plane, all the rest of you would be stricken with grief. But I am from Trabzon, and I am not related to or acquainted with anyone here. If I drop from the plane, it would not cause any great sorrow among you. Therefore, I volunteer to be the person to leave.

When the Kayserian passengers heard this brave offer, they all let go of the overhead rail in order to clap for Temel’s generosity.⁴

⁴This tale presents a counter image of the Laz stereotype. While Lazes often tell tales that reinforce the numskull image of themselves, they also give accounts of Laz cleverness. Their effort to show the Laz as being intellectually superior reaches a pinnacle when it shows the Laz besting the Kayserian.