

Story 1920 (1992 Tape 3)

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Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province

Date: May 1992

The Laz<sup>1</sup> Champion Parachute Jumper

At a Turkish Air Force base near the Black Sea, a parachute-jumping contest was about to begin. The parachuting instructor explained the rules of the contest to all the participants. He said, "Whoever comes closest to the ground before he pulls the rip cord of his parachute will be the winner of the contest. Each of you will have an altimeter so that you can determine how close to the earth you are as you are falling."

Soon after that a large airplane carried the participants aloft. The parachutists then jumped out of the plane one by one. When Temel's<sup>2</sup> turn came, he jumped

<sup>1</sup>The 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.

<sup>2</sup>Temel (like Dursun) is a name given to so many Laz males that it automatically signals Laz to most Turkish audiences. Because Lazes are stereotyped as numskulls,

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clear of the plane and kept his eyes on his altimeter. He noticed that he was at an altitude of 800 meters, 700 meters, 600 meters, and 300 meters. When Temel's altimeter read 100 meters, he still had not pulled the rip cord. He thought, "I am now very close to the ground--so close that it seems useless to open the parachute now."

After the contest was finished, an announcement was made that Temel had won first place. Later on, the first-place medal was presented to Temel's wife.

the name Temel may, by extension, be applied to any stupid person, whether or not he happens to be Laz.

<sup>3</sup>Anecdotes about Laz parachutists are numerous. There are several of these grim anecdotes in the Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative