

Story 1957 (1992 Tape 4)

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Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province (a Black Sea or Laz province)

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A Laz¹ Supersalesman

There were once two salesmen, Temel,² from the Black Sea coast, and Ziya, from Kayseri. One day they were arguing with each other about which of them was the better salesman. Ziya, a very proud man, said, "I am the best salesman in the world. No one can exceed me

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. Although some Lazes may resent the stereotype, others rise above it and, in a sense, stereotype the stereotype by telling some of the funniest Laz anecdotes. Still others counter the stereotype by telling tales in which the Laz is very clever. In this tale and many others the Laz outwits the traditionally shrewd and brilliant Turkish folk type, the person from Kayseri (central Turkey). Visitors to Turkey are sometimes warned, "He may not be able to read or write, but if he is from Kayseri, beware of him!"

²In 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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in selling. The other day I sold 50,000 candles to a factory that makes lightbulbs.”

Temel laughed and said, “That’s nothing compared with a sale I made last week. I sold a pair of male şalvar³ to a woman who wanted to buy white cotton fabric to make her husband his shroud.”⁴

³Şalvar are male baggy trousers, traditional Turkish pants. They are made from cloth of dark color—black, gray, or brown. They are usually made of woolen cloth.

⁴Traditionally Muslims have not been buried in their earthly clothes. They are placed in a white, cotton wrap which serves as a shroud (kefen).