

Story 1965 (1992 Tape 4)

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

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The Laz¹ and the Overnight Bridge

During one period in his life Temel² worked as a guide for a large travel agency in Istanbul. One day he was selected to be the guide for an American tourist, and his supervisor ordered him, "Take this American to every historical and cultural site in Istanbul."

As he did on most of the tours that he conducted, Temel drove the American first to the Galata Tower. After examining the tower, the American asked, "How long did it take to construct this structure?"

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.

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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Temel answered, “The Genoese built this tower over a period of ten years.”³

The American responded arrogantly, “In America we could construct such a tower in one year.”

Temel nodded his head in agreement and then drove to the huge Sultan Ahmet mosque.⁴ Here the American also asked how long it had taken to construct the building. “It took four years,” said Temel.

Again the American answered with arrogance. He said, “In America we could have done it in about six months.”

Temel grumbled a little to himself, but he continued to remain polite to the tourist. He next took the American to the Topkapı Palace,⁵ where they spent quite a bit of time examining halls full of treasure, the throne room, and the harem section of that palace. As he had done before, the American asked how much time it had taken to build the structure. By now Temel was bored by the American’s asking this same question, and he was annoyed by the American’s arrogance.

³Actually, the Genoese rebuilt it in the medieval period. The tower had ancient origins.

⁴The Sultan Ahmet mosque, better known today as “The Blue Mosque,” was built over a period of seven years (1609-1616).

⁵This was the first palace of the Ottoman sultans, begun shortly after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. It is not a single building but rather a complex of buildings. It took years to complete the construction.

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He answered, “By using the whole imperial army as a labor force, it took only a year to build this palace.”

With his lip curled, the American tourist said, “Had it been done in America, it could easily have been completed in a month.” Temel pretended to pay no attention to this remark, ignoring the way the American had underestimated all the labor that had been used to construct the Topkapı Palace.

Following his usual schedule, Temel next drove his client through the Ortaköy section of the city to Tarabi Hotel for lunch. As they were riding along, the American tourist pointed out the car window and asked, “How long did it take to build that bridge?”

“Which bridge are you inquiring about?” asked Temel.

“I am asking about this huge bridge which is abreast of us right now.”

Temel’s eyes opened very wide, and he pretended to be surprised by what he was looking at. He said, “Sir, this is amazing to me! When I drove through this area late last evening, there was no such bridge here. It must have been built after midnight!”