

Story 2038 (Dictated in
Turkish via E-Mail)

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A Laz¹ as Ambivalent Sandwich Man

There were once three men working closely together on the construction of a skyscraper. One of these men was Italian; one was American; and the third was a Laz. As the building rose higher and higher, these three workers found it increasingly difficult to climb down all the way to the ground level for lunch and then afterwards climb back up again to their jobs. To overcome this problem, they decided to carry their lunches with them and eat them at the place where they were working.

This solved one problem, but after they had carried their lunches up to their work for several days, another problem developed. One day the Italian worker opened his lunch packet and exclaimed, "Spaghetti again! Every day it

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.

Story 2038

is spaghetti! If she gives me spaghetti once more, I shall throw myself down to the ground!"

When the American opened his lunch packet, he found a large hamburger. He shouted, "I am tired of having hamburgers every day! I cannot stand this any longer! If I find hamburgers in my lunch again tomorrow, I shall jump off this girder into the street below!"

Then the Laz opened his lunch bag and took from it a sandwich. He shouted in anger, "Look at this thing! It is a sandwich! It is always a sandwich for lunch!"

At noon on the following day the three men again stopped work for lunch. The Italian opened his lunch packet and saw that it contained spaghetti again. He immediately threw himself from that height to the ground below. When the American discovered that his lunch was once again a hamburger, he too jumped off the skyscraper. The Laz found inside his lunch bag another sandwich. He shouted, "O Allah!" and then he also jumped.

All of the other workers climbed down from the building, and the foreman of construction called there the wives of the three dead men. The women, all crying thought that their husbands had been killed accidentally,

Story 2038

but the other workers told them what had actually happened

The wife of the Italian spoke to her dead husband, "Did you dislike spaghetti that much? If you had told me that, I should have given you something else--boo hoo!"²

The wife of the American said, "I thought that were very fond of hamburgers. That was why I gave them to you--boo hoo!"

Then Temel's³ wife spoke up. She said, "I don't understand why he did this to himself. Every morning he arose early, before the rest of us, in order to prepare sandwiches for the family--boo hoo!"

²In Turkish the onomatopoeia for the sound of audible weeping is rendered as huu huu!

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 is introduced by a storyteller, the Turkish audience knows at once that a Laz anecdote will follow.