

Story 1980 (1992 Tape 4)

Narrator: Leyla Özdemir, 25

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Lazes¹ Fail to Recognize Miracle

One day the teacher of a language class was trying to explain the meaning of the word miracle [mucize]. She said, “If a construction worker should fall from the seventh floor of a building but not sustain any injury, not even a nosebleed—what would you call that?”

Temel² arose and said, “Teacher, we would call that a coincidence.”

“Very well,” said the teacher, “but suppose that worker fell a second time from that height without suffering any injuries. What would you call that?”

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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This time another pupil, Ilyas, arose and said, “Teacher, we would call that just pure luck.”

By this time the teacher was becoming frustrated. She said, “Well, suppose that man fell from that height a third time without any injury whatsoever—not even a scratch. What would we say about that?”

Cemal, the bully of the class, stood up and said, “Teacher, we would say that falling was habitual with that man.”