

Story 2085 (Dictated)

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Kerem and Aslı

In Anatolia¹ a boy named Kerem once fell in love with a Christian girl named Aslı. Although they wished to be married, they were prevented from doing so by Aslı's father. He did not want his daughter to marry outside the Christian community. To be sure that such a marriage did not occur, he packed up his belongings and departed with his family.

Kerem pursued them day after day, month after month. Traveling alone and without needed supplies, he suffered greatly. At times he despaired of life. This is indicated by a song that he addressed to Mount Ağrı Ararat when he was passing through eastern Anatolia.

They call you Ağrı² Mountain.

¹Anatolia is what once was referred to as Asia Minor. It constitutes more than 90 percent of modern Turkey--all land east of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

²Mt. Ağrı (Ararat) in extreme eastern Turkey is that country's highest peak (16,946 feet).

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How dangerous is your peak!
 None see you change with seasons;
 Your winter lives without an end.

 You have become the friend of winds,
 And comforter of those in woe:
 You stand out as the highest mount,
 With Erciyes³ alone your peer

 The snow is ever on your slopes,
 Where clouds chase one another round.
 When sun rays shine upon you first,
 Your stones, like gems, all glitter bright.

 Says Kerem: "I shall come and go.
 What can we do in our brief lives?
 I asked this of a holy man,
 But no one knows our mortal lot."

Kerem finally overtook Aslı and her family in Aleppo.⁴
 He and Aslı were again reunited, and the two of them planned
 to elope and be secretly married. When Aslı's father learned

³Erciyes (Erciyas), located in central Turkey (Kayseri Province), is the second-highest (12,848 feet) peak in the country.

⁴A major city of the Ottoman Empire, Aleppo is now part of Syria.

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that Kerem was in Aleppo, he suspected the intentions of the young couple. In an effort to keep the two apart, he hired a witch to destroy Kerem. That evil woman put such a strong spell on Kerem that he burst into flames and was consumed in the fire.⁵ Trying to save him, Aslı was also burned to death. They could meet again only in heaven.⁶

⁵In most versions of this tale, Kerem is ignited from within by the consuming heat of love. Aslı dies in the flames, too.

⁶This is a brief summary of Kerem and Aslı, a long cante fable filled with sung dialogue between the lovers.