Once there was and once there was not an ağa who had a keloğlan who served as his camel herder. This keloğlan had been taking care of the ağa's camels for some time when he said to his master one day, "O my ağa, why do we just sit around here and do nothing all the time? We have forty camels, why don't we use them? Everyone seems to be continually going to and returning from Yemen on some kind

1An ağa (English: agha) is a rural landowner in Turkey.

2The word keloğlan means bald boy. The baldness is the result of loss of hair from ringworm infection. In a large peasant family the youngest children may not be cared for very well, and their uncleanliness encourages ringworm infestation. This seems to be the case frequently enough so that any youngest child may be called keloğlan, whether or not he is bald, whether or not he has any trace of ringworm. Thus the keloğlan figure merges with the type known as the Unpromising Youngest Son (who usually succeeds by his ingenuity).

3Yemen, a small country at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is a relatively unimportant country today. In ancient times and throughout the Middle Ages it was a prosperous land; throughout the Renaissance it was a pawn of empire; its subsequent decline was the result of political and geological factors.
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of business. Why don't we also go to Yemen?"

"All right, Keloğlan. God willing, your words of advice may be auspicious."

The two of them set about preparing their forty camels for traveling such a great distance, and when all was ready, they set out on their journey. After traveling for seven days and seven nights, they came to a mountain pasture on a high plateau where they decided to camp for the night. Keloğlan climbed up on top of one of the camels to scan the area, and as he looked in every direction, he saw a short distance ahead of them a palace. He climbed down and walked to that palace, which he found to be entirely deserted. Entering the palace, he found inside forty rooms. He opened the doors of thirty-nine of these rooms and looked inside, but he did not open the fortieth door

Returning to his master, he said, "O my ağa, there is a deserted palace quite close to us containing all sorts of things, many of which I have never seen before. There are forty rooms in that palace. I opened the doors of the first thirty-nine rooms but not the door of the fortieth. What lies behind that fortieth door I do not know. If it is material riches of some sort, they are yours. If it is a living creature, it is mine."

They went together to the deserted palace and loaded
onto the forty camels all of the valuable goods that were in the first thirty-nine rooms. Then they went to the fortieth room and opened the door. Inside they found a baby boy sucking its thumb.

"Thank God for this!" said the ağa. "I have always wanted very much to have a son, and now God has given me

"But he is mine!" said Keloğlan.

"Keloğlan, I shall give you a camel with all the goods loaded on it for this baby boy."

"No!"

"I'll give you two camels."

"No!"

"I'll give you three or five."

"No, no!"

"Keloğlan, you may take twenty camels for this child, but let us keep this whole arrangement a secret. I don't any of the people of our village to know about this." "All right, then. It is agreed upon."

Instead of continuing on to Yemen, they turned back toward home with their camel. When they reached the edge of their village, they were met by a messenger announced, "Good news, ağa! Your wife gave birth to a daughter while you were away."
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"Thanks be to God," he said, "who first gave me a son and now a daughter." The ağası then recited a prayer.

They then proceeded to the ağası' garden, where they divided the forty camels loaded with goods. While they were doing this, the ağası's wife appeared and asked, "What has happened? Where did all of these goods come from?"

The ağası explained to his wife everything that had happened from the time they had left the village. "Such-and-such happened, and I told Keloğlan that I would give him twenty loaded camels in exchange for the baby boy. I accepted this proposal, and we are now dividing the camels and all these goods."

Keloğlan took his share of the camel caravan and left the village. The ağası was entirely satisfied with the bargain he had made with Keloğlan.

Years passed, and the boy and girl in the ağası's home grew up together happily. The girl was named Arzu, and the boy was named Kamber. When they were old enough, they entered school and went there every day together. One day when they were on their way to school, an old woman stopped them and said, "Why do you go to school every day? I know a nice quiet place where you could go and play instead of going to school. No one else ever goes there, and so you would not be noticed."
So the children went to that secret place and played that day instead of attending school. But the old woman went to their mother and said, "Where is your daughter? Where does she go all the time instead of going to school? I saw her today at so-and-so's straw rick, and the two of them were wrestling."

The mother said to herself, "O God, who is this boy? Is he perhaps a gypsy or a Jew? We know nothing of his origin, of his mother, or of his ancestors. And now he is teaching bad things to my daughter." She went to so-and-so's straw rick and found the two children playing there. Very angry, she whipped the boy severely and took the girl home with her. Kamber, who was left alone, felt unfortunate and depressed.

A little while later Arzu was given a bracelet on which was inscribed a statement that she and Kamber were engaged. One day when Arzu went to the fountain to wash her hands and face, she took off the bracelet and laid it beside the fountain. When she was finished at the fountain, she forgot entirely about the bracelet and left it lying there. Shortly afterwards Kamber went to the fountain and found this bracelet, recognizing it as Arzu's from the inscription it bore. He put it into his pocket and went home.
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There Arzu said to him,

My bracelet you found at the fountain today,
Left there when I washed my hands and face;
Thus, Kamber, you served as my two eyes--
I know that you found it there today.

Kamber answered her lines:

I did not go to the fountain today,
Nor did I wash my hands and face;
Be not offended at this, Arzu,

I did not find your bracelet today.

trees grow in the garden now,
But the winter snow is lusterless.
To him who finds your bracelet, name
The reward that he may expect to get

Arzu answered:

Medlars grow in the garden too
But the winter snow is lusterless.
To him who finds my bracelet, know
My breasts will be the reward he'll get.

Then Kamber acknowledged that he had her bracelet and showed it to her. He said, "I shall take this bracelet and
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show its inscription to the muhtar\(^4\) and his Council of Elders. Then I shall request them to go to your father and, by the will of God and the consent of the Prophet,\(^5\) ask for your hand in marriage to me."

"Very well," said Arzu. "You may take the bracelet and keep it."

In time the muhtar and his Council of Elders did appear at the home of the ağa. Because the ağa was not there then they spoke instead to his wife: "We come by the will of Allah and with the consent of the Prophet to ask for the hand of Arzu in marriage to Kamber." But they were able to say no more, for the mother insulted them and drove them away. Greatly upset by this treatment, the Council of Elders went back to Kamber and said, "Oh, Kamber, we went there, we asked for the hand of Arzu, but the mother spoke very rudely to us and drove us away."

Kamber said only, "I understand. Thank you for attempting this." Inwardly, however, he was hurt and offended

\(^4\)The muhtar is the elected head of a village or a city mahalle (district). In rural areas he may be the only elected official with whom villagers have any direct contact, all other officials being appointees of federal departments or agencies.

\(^5\)All marriage proposals made to a girl's parents or guardian are done so "with the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet." This religious sanction is so traditional a part of engagement palaver that its absence alone would be sufficient reason for denying the proposal.
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by this.

The father, on the other hand, thought that such a marriage would be fitting, and he tried to persuade his wife of this: "My wife, it would be a good thing for us to go ahead and have these two children married."

"No," said his wife obstinately.

Upset and angered by his wife's refusal to listen to reason, the father said, "Wife, I have heard that Kamber's uncle was a padişah. If he learns of this affront to his kinsman, he may come here and kill us!"

But the wife's only answer was still "No!"

As it happened, Arzu overheard this discussion between her parents, and as soon as they stopped arguing, she went to see Kamber. "Kamber, I have heard that you have an uncle who is a padişah. He is called Sultan and his wife is named Fadık.⁶ They live several days' traveling distance away from us. If you could go and find them, they might be able to help us.

In the meantime, Arzu's hand had been requested by a rich man living in a neighboring village. Arzu's mother had accepted this proposal immediately. When her parents asked Arzu for her response to this proposal, she said, "I want forty days in which to consider this proposal."

⁶Like Fatma, Fadık is a dialect form of Fatima or Fatimah.
Afterwards she took seven loaves of bread to Kamber and said, "Here is some food for your travel in search of your padişah uncle. Take them with you."

Then Kamber set out on his journey. He went day after day, night after night, without eating anything at all. After seven days and seven nights of this, he came to a grassy plain where he saw a great many soldiers practicing the skills of warfare while their padişah observed their movements. As Kamber came along he was singing:

White colts, chestnut-colored colts,
Grazing together on the grassy plain;
But poor and lonely, I have lost
My love to a suitor of great wealth.

When the padişah on the plain heard this, he said, "Listen! Someone sings! Bring whoever that is to me."
The guards caught Kamber and took him into the presence of the padişah. The padişah said to Kamber, "If you can tell me my name and my wife's name, I shall give you your freedom, but if you cannot, I shall have the executioner behead you."

Then Kamber sang:

White colts, chestnut-colored colts,
Grazing together on the grassy plain;
But poor and lonely, I have lost
My love to a suitor of great wealth.
In one of my hands is Fadık, my aunt;
The other holds Kamber the minstrel.\(^7\)
Now one of my hands holds Kamber the minstrel,
And the other holds Sultan, my uncle.

In one of my hands is Kerem\(^8\) the minstrel;
The other holds Fadık, my aunt;
One of my hands holds a girl named Arzu,
But say if the other holds Sultan, my uncle.

Hearing this, the padişah exclaimed excitedly, "I have searched for you for years, and now I have found you!"
Saying this, the Padişah embraced Kamber, and the two of them were filled with joy over their discovery of each other. "How are you? What have you been doing? And who is Arzu?" asked the padişah.

"Arzu is my beloved, but they are taking her away from me. That is the reason I have come here. They are going to have her married to a rich man."

\(^7\)Minstrel is perhaps the best translation of ḏāṣık, the Turkish word used here by the narrator. ḏāṣık means lover poet literally, but the ḏāṣık almost always sings his lines as minstrels do.

\(^8\)Kerem is a traditional name for minstrels or lover-poets, so much so that Kerem has become a synonym for lover-poet.
The padişah uncle of Kamber said to one of his officers "Send 100 troops there right away! Order them to behead those people responsible for Kamber's unfair treatment and to bring the girl here alive if at all possible."

The soldiers set out at once for the village where Arzu lived, and Kamber remained with his padişah uncle. But he was not comfortable, for all the while he worried about how Arzu's parents would respond.

In Arzu's and Kamber's village the old woman (who had treated them treacherously while they were still children) learned about the approach of the padişah's soldiers and the reason for their coming. She hastened to Arzu's parents and said, "The soldiers of Sultan are on their way to get Arzu for Kamber. Do you know what they will do to all of us? They will destroy us. But I know a way to prevent this. Get me an earthenware jug of water and two yellow onions."

When she had received these things, she took them and went to a newly filled grave along the road the soldiers would pass along as they came to the village. As the troops came along, they saw her pouring water on the grave.  

9It is a Turkish custom to pour water on a new grave for several days after the burial. There is a mixed opinion as to whether this is done to maintain the purification of the body or to speed the traveler on his way. It is customary to pour water after one setting out on a journey.
Holding the onions to her eyes, she wept profusely, sat on the ground, and began to beat her knees.  

Seeing her in such pitiable condition, the commander of the troops went to her and said, "Oh, mother, what is wrong?"

"What else could it be? There was a girl here named Arzu who killed herself when she was deserted by her lover, Kamber. She could not live without him, and so she took her own life. I am weeping on her behalf and weeping at the thought of her bad fortune. If I did not weep for her, who would?"

The soldiers listened to the old woman's story; they observed her condition, and they believed her. But now what should they do? They could not decide whether to take the dead body back with them or leave it here. They knew that if they did not return with the girl's body, dead or alive, the padişah would execute them; but they also knew that it was forbidden in their faith to dig up a body from its grave. They finally decided that there was no way in which they could act correctly and survive. Their best course, therefore, was to take no action at all. "Let us all separate," they said, "and let each return quietly to his

10 Those in great grief often strike their knees with their open palms when they are in a sitting position. It is a gesture of despair.
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own village and never report to the padişah at all. In this way we may escape his wrath."

As all of this was going on, Kamber grew more and more anxious about Arzu's destiny. Going to the padişah to secure his permission to leave, Kamber said, "My dear uncle, I am deeply distressed. I cannot remain here inactive any longer. Please give me permission to go and see what is the matter."

The padişah summoned his viziers and ordered, "I want you to bring here at once my great horse (Düldül), which I always keep stabled beneath the ground level." Quickly the viziers' servants brought Düldül and gave his reins to Kamber.

Mounting Düldül, Kamber said to the horse, "Take me at once to the cemetery of my home village." The magic horse flew there in just a matter of minutes. At the edge of the cemetery Kamber accosted a shepherd. "O shepherd, I have been seven days without a morsel of food. Please milk one of your sheep and give me the milk and a piece of bread."

11Turkish oral tradition is filled with legends of supernatural horses, among them Kirat, the horse of the outlaw hero Köroğlu, and the gray horse of Bamsi Beyrek, one of the Oghuz heroes in the Turkish national epic, The Book of Dede Korkut. Kirat was for a long time kept in a totally darkened stable until he reached his maximum maturity and strength. Other magic horses live on the bottoms of rivers or ponds--away from light. Mohammed was said to have ascended to heaven on his favorite white horse, Buraq. Düldül was the white mule of Mohammed who survived its master and was subsequently ridden in two battles by Ali.
The shepherd milked one of his sheep, as Kamber had requested, and gave Kamber the milk and a piece of bread. As he began to eat this, they heard the distant beating of a drum, "güm, güm, güm." 12

"What is that?" asked Kamber. "It sounds like a drum beat."

"Of course it is. They are celebrating the wedding of a girl named Arzu, and the wedding is almost over.

"May God grant you a blessed increase, shepherd. Here--quick--take these new clothes of mine and give me your old ones!"

"Are you trying to make a fool of me? No one would exchange fine clothes like yours for the rags that I wear." But when Kamber insisted, the shepherd finally agreed, and the two men exchanged their clothes.

Wearing the old clothes of the shepherd, Kamber went to the wedding. When Arzu saw him, she recognized him at once. Kamber went to where a large cauldron of rice was cooking and began to eat some of the rice. Arzu called to him:

O man who comes from the opposite way,
Where are the troops you were sent to bring?

12This is intended as onomatopoeia for a drum beat
I sent you away to your uncle's home
he no more men he can send to our aid?

Kamber replied:

It was I who came from the opposite way.
Can you still see, or have you gone blind?
O Arzu, it was for you that I came,
For you that I came from the opposite side

Arzu then asked,

what is it now that you have become?
Clad as you are, playing a role.
You look like a cook, perhaps the head chef.
That is the reason I stared at you so.

Kamber then spoke:

I am not the head chef or even a cook.
When you stared at my face, even I was in doubt
As to what I'd become, the role that I played.
But may God grant you fortune, improve your estate.

After saying this, Kamber went to the home of those he had thought of as his mother-in-law and father-in-law. That is to say, he went to the home of Arzu's parents.

When she saw Kamber approaching, Arzu's mother said, "Oh, welcome, son, welcome! Perhaps it is for the better that things have worked out the way they have. Perhaps even you will benefit in fortune from it, and so you should avoid
being upset about it." This is what she said to Kamber, but within her own group she said, "Let us try to detain him and keep him here until dinner time so that we will have an opportunity to kill him."

They slaughtered a lamb and poisoned its meat. Arzu saw them killing the animal and she was suspicious about why they had decided so suddenly to do this. When the meat was cooked, she took one look at it and frowned, for she realized at once that it had been poisoned. Arzu's parents invited Kamber to stay for dinner, and after he was seated, they served him some of the poisoned lamb. As they were doing so, Kamber spoke to Arzu:

I noticed your frown when you saw the meat;
I saw you frown as you saw the lamb
How did they manage to poison this lamb,
To poison this lamb and its tender meat?

Arzu answered:

I think I may frown if I wish--may I not?
But taste not the meat, Kamber; leave it alone!
Perhaps it was I who poisoned the lamb,
But don't taste the meat, Kamber; leave it alone!

"May God increase all of your blessings!" said Kamber. He carefully avoided all of the meat.

Arzu's mother was observing all of this. She said to
herself, "I shall make them brother and sister." Taking milk from her own breast, she mixed it with some plant juices and made a drink which would remedy the situation, she thought. But Arzu detected her mother's plan and said, The cook herself becomes the food,
And golden-headed he who eats. Touch not the drink, oh, sip it not!
Or brother/sister we'll become!

Again Kamber said, "May God increase all of your blessings!" He did not even touch the milk drink.

When the meal was finished, Arzu said, "Kamber, let us go into the rose garden. There let us walk together for the last time."

They entered the rose garden, where Kamber picked a rose and presented it to Arzu. She smelled the rose and gave it back again to Kamber.

13 The mother is trying to utilize an old and still common belief in rural Turkey known as a milk-sibling relationship. If a child, of whatever age, should suck the breast or drink the milk of a woman not its own mother, then that child becomes related to the woman, its "milk mother," and also to her children, its "milk brothers and sisters." Sometimes families build alliances because of this "milk kinship," mothers deliberately nursing each other's children briefly. Arzu's mother is here trying to establish a sibling relationship between Arzu and Kamber in order to prevent any amorous or sexual relationship; such a relationship would be incestuous between siblings.

14 We do not understand the implication of golden-headed. There is no question that the Turkish is golden-headed, but what does that mean in this context?
As they were walking in the garden, they were being watched by the evil old woman. She went to Arzu's mother and reported what she had seen. Very angry, the mother started toward the rose garden.

At that very moment Kamber was saying, "Arzu, if your mother should see us here together like this, she would become very angry. Then what should we do?"

"If she comes," said Arzu, "then let her come!" Even as she was saying this, her mother appeared in the garden shouting and gesturing. Ignoring her wrath, Arzu said this:

O dearest mother, hear me now,
Whom you did breast-feed long ago:
A thorn has wounded Kamber's hand.
Some medicine can you prepare?\(^{15}\)

Her mother said, "My daughter, don't you realize that people will know about this? They will kill you. They will place you in a close, dark prison with Kamber."

To this Arzu responded:

O Mother, let them know and let
Them hear that they may kill us both.

\(^{15}\)Although sarcasm and irony are uncommon in folktales, there can be little question about their presence here in this quatrain. Arzu is indirectly mocking her mother's failed attempt to separate the couple by the use of mother's milk.
let them place us in one grave
leave us there, Kamber and me

The black oak stick within my hand
Is struck against a rock, as you
Condemn the very thing in me
Which you yourself must once have done.

Arzu's mother said as she left the garden, "I am tired of contending with you. As far as I am concerned, from now on, you may do whatever you wish to do."

Arzu said to her lover, "Kamber, in the end they will by force give me away. Let us still hope for the best."

"O God, I pray that with the help of my great white horse I may prevent having this girl given away to someone else." He had left the horse with a friend.

Meanwhile, the man who was supposed to marry Arzu, a very wealthy man, said, "I have heard that there is a man at such-and-such a place in this village who has an exceptionally fine horse. I wonder if he would sell it to me?" He went to take a look at the horse, and Kamber placed a very high price on it.

When the man paid the 100 golden liras that he had quoted, Kamber said, "I cannot actually sell my horse to anyone before I have groomed it." Going to the white horse
then, he groomed it well and said to it, "O Düldül, do me a great service. When I give you a signal at the home of this man, where the wedding is held, bite off this man's head."

To transport Arzu to the home of the bridegroom, brought a horse to her parents' home. But somehow, horse's leg was broken. They then brought a cart to carry her in, but the wheel of the cart collapsed. Finally they decided to go and get the horse which they had just bought and have him carry the bride. They went to the stable, but that horse would not allow anyone to come near it. Those who observed this said, "How unfortunate this girl is!"

When Kamber glanced at Arzu, he noticed how bright red her eyes were now. "O God," he said, "it is not her fault. He spoke out of pity for her. Then to the great white horse he said,

O Düldül, the time has come to arise.

My Arzu, the very light of my life,

16The very last event in a village wedding is the transporting of the bride to the home of the bridegroom. She is placed upon the back of a horse, and the horse is led in ceremonious fashion. But the transporting of the bride is functional as well as ritualistic, for many rural Turks are exogamous, and this means that the bride will have to be borne not just a distance but all the way to another village.
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Is going away to become a bride
0 Düldül, bend down to receive her now.

Hearing this, the horse first rose to its feet and then stooped down to permit the girl to mount. They placed the bride on the horse's back.

Kamber then sang out:

The sparks will fly, oh, the sparks will fly!
Let aunties come now and follow the bride.17
My Arzu now places her feet in the stirrups--
0 stirrups, be gentle; squeeze not her feet!
The sparks will fly, oh, the sparks will fly!
Let the aunties come after and follow me.
But let the stirrups break the feet,
The feet which now may not be yours.

Those who heard this realized now that the young man must be Kamber. Not liking this, they caught the young man, beat him badly, and then cast him aside. Dejected by all that was happening, Kamber sang:

The thickets along the banks of streams
Shelter the partridges which sing.

17When the bride is transported to the home of the bridegroom, she is accompanied by women of her own family, as well as by women of the groom's family. These women assist the bride and attend to the dowry which is moved to the bridegroom's home.
My Arzu is borne away as bride;
Her burden of life has been prepared
Again the bystanders heard this. "Hey!" they said, "this is Kamber. He is still here." And again they beat him.
Injured and angry, Kamber said to those who thus abused him, "A curse upon you. I leave the girl to you."
Saying this, Kamber took a different path, a shortcut to the same destination. Farther on, the two paths rejoined, and Kamber reached that point first. He saw there three or five ravens circling about above a dead goat. As he waited for the others to reach that intersection, he decided to call to Arzu as she passed and talk with her again. To himself he said, "This may be the last time that I can do so. Possibly she does not want me any more." Then he sang:

The ravens that come at the end are here;
Circling the carcass, the ravens come.
May her hands not feel the pinch of the reins,
The reins held by my Arzu's hands.

As she came along on the horse, Arzu heard this and responded to it:

Oh the ravens that always come at the end,
Circling about as they fly in the sky.
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Let the reins, if they wish, now break the hands,
The hands which now can never be yours

She then continued, saying, "Oh, Kamber, this evil old woman was the one who would not allow us to be reunited.

You should curse her

Kamber sang in response:

O woman, stab your hand yourself,
And bite your fingers, one by one.
May your five sons now die at once,
And loud as stallion may you neigh!

This old woman did have five sons, and when Kamber cursed them in this way, they all dropped dead.

When this happened, the muhtar and the imam could no longer remain silent. They said, "Did you suppose it your duty to prevent the marriage of these two young people? You have paid for your error with the lives of your five sons."

Arzu said, "Kamber, I have one more thing I must say."

"Very well, then, say it

She then sang these lines:

The thickets along the banks of streams
Shelter the partridges which sing.

\footnote{An \textit{imam} is the Muslim priest who conducts the prayer services in the mosque.}
May the man who now is marrying me
Never reach home with the dowry I bring.

Almost as soon as she had finished this statement, messengers arrived to announce the sudden death of the bridegroom.

When this news arrived, the groom's family lamented saying, "Oh, we have spent so much money on this wedding! We shall wait now for three or five days, but then we shall return and take the bride to our home."

Kamber started to speak but said only "Oh!" when flame burst forth from his mouth and completely consumed him. Nothing of him remained but a heap of ashes.

Shocked at the sight of this, Arzu quickly dismounted from the horse. Taking a broom, she began to sweep together his ashes. But then she stopped, saying, "Kamber sacrificed himself for me. This broom is not good enough to touch him. I shall sweep up his ashes with my own hair." While she was doing this, her hair caught fire, and she too was consumed in flames.