

THE CHEST GAZETTE

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Small Church



Main Church

Kayakoy - Levissi

“Kaya-köy” means “Rocky-village”. Its Rum name is “Levissi” (or Lebossos). Barbara and Ismail were living in that village like their families. They already had chosen the hillside for their own home.

Of course, the history writes the reasons. According to the Rums, it is Asia Minor disaster; according to the Turks, it is the cost of freedom. The hopes were dispersed from the lips with songs while walking softly, while leaving their shadows. Rums moved to Greece, Turks to Turkey. There is a sea in front of them, they sailed through the big and small islands, they had only the crumbs of stars in palms. Neither goods nor property. Surrender to fate, they looked beyond the sea, hoping the sun would rise again. Drama it is! But life was behind the Aegean now. All these years the moon still rises on the Kayakoy ridges, the stars fall onto the lap of Barbara. And the evening delights on both sides reflect in Ismail’s mirror.

The Balkan Wars ended in 1912, caused a large number of refugees. The Turks were forced to leave their home in Greece with a fear and panic, followed the defeated Ottoman Army. A similar tragedy happened after the independence war of Turks in Anatolia in 1922. This time, the Rums had to follow the defeated Greek Army. Fortunately Barbara and Ismail were not in danger because both communities were living in harmony. They were parts of the same nation, identified themselves as Ottomans. But that day came. After the Treaty of Lausanne signed between Turkey, Allied Countries and Greece in 1923, the exchange of populations started. Barbara held the hand of her younger brother sitting with mom in horsecar driven by dad. They went to Oludeniz Coast to board on a small boat. The destination was Thessaloniki. That was what they were told. Ismail was also with them. They promised each other that they would meet and touch again within the shortest time. After some months, the people speaking the same language arrived in Kayakoy. The neighbors of years had to leave, the refugees had to settle in the evacuated houses. But the new comers moved down to the plain area because they didn’t like the highland of that village. Kayakoy couldn’t get over the economic and cultural destruction brought on by the mass migration of 1923. Later in 1957, an earthquake gave the final knock to the village, damaging many of the buildings. The houses on the plain part down the village were repaired, but the houses on the hill were completely abandoned. Everything, the houses, schools, shops, churches, etc. were left for destruction of nature. The absence of people who once lived here was felt most intensely in the ruins of the church. The frescoes on its walls have faded, its vaulted ceiling and arched courtyard bore the ruthless traces of time and looters. The village was given the status of a museum to protect the area.

Today, this place, which has turned into a ghost village, has become a touching symbol that reminds of the good old days. In the shared shadows, we are neighbors to the storms, rains and hot Aegean days connecting us. We are partners actually. The colors of tears and longings are not different on both sides of the sea. As the waves hit the shores, we always sing the same song even though we don’t realise.

Last word: Where are Barbara and Ismail now? Maybe they are together, maybe their kids will meet in an Erasmus project.

Note: The Australian farmer Joshua Connor travels to Constantinople to discover the fate of his three sons. He sneaks in the land of the Battle of Gallipoli. He unfortunately recognizes two sons, buries them. Later he finds the third in Kayakoy and escapes from the armed men diving into the river flowing under a house. This is the film “The Water Diviner” of Russell Crowe, 2014.



Towards Main Church Gate



School



Village view from school



Oludeniz (Death Sea) coast

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