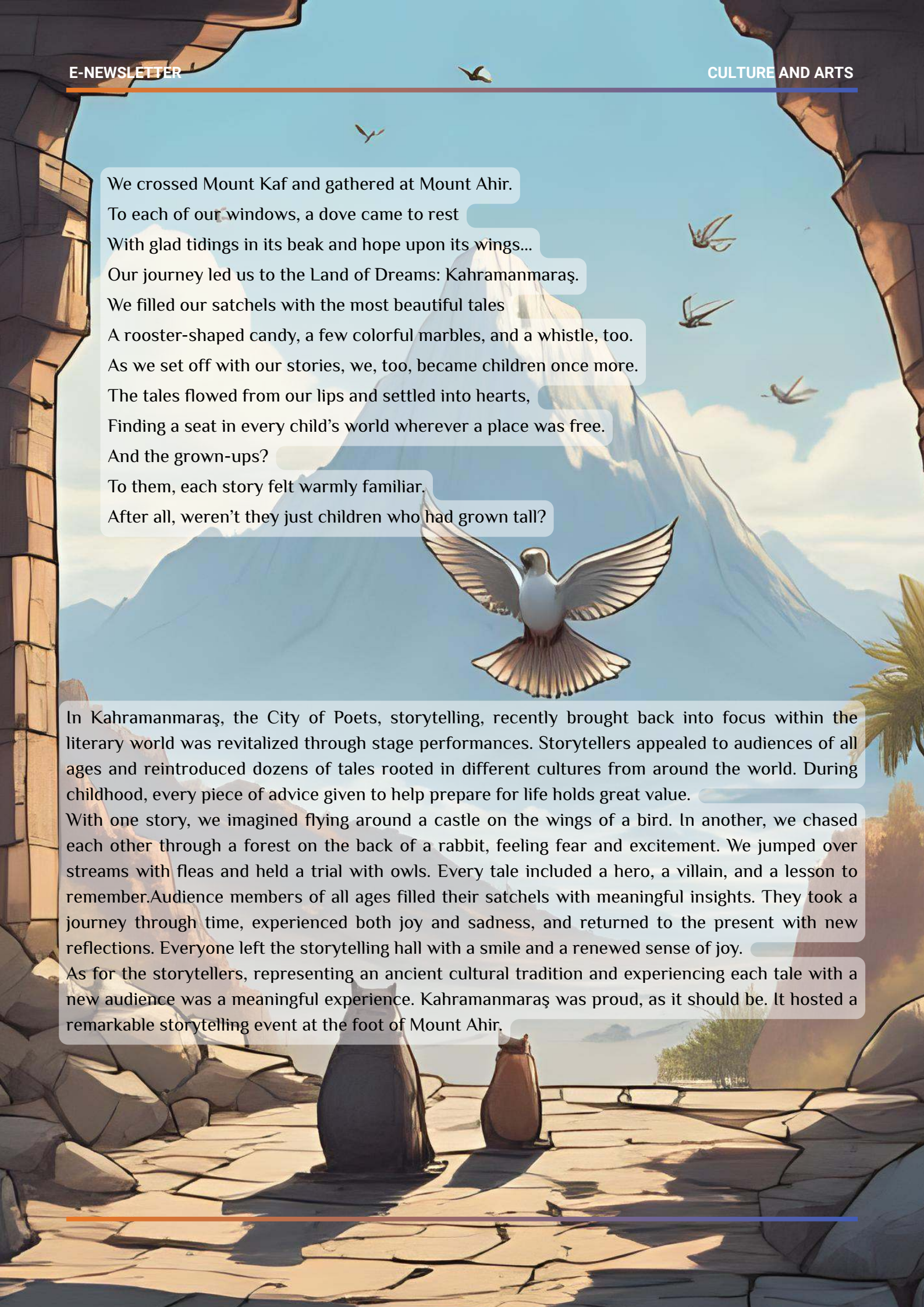


KAHRAMANMARAŞ
KÜLTÜR
SANAT
E-NEWSLETTER

WORLD STORYTELLERS FESTIVAL
DÜNYA ANLATICILAR ŞÖLENİ
Fairy Tales from the Mountain of Qaf



9-12 April 2025



We crossed Mount Kaf and gathered at Mount Ahir.
To each of our windows, a dove came to rest
With glad tidings in its beak and hope upon its wings...
Our journey led us to the Land of Dreams: Kahramanmaraş.
We filled our satchels with the most beautiful tales
A rooster-shaped candy, a few colorful marbles, and a whistle, too.
As we set off with our stories, we, too, became children once more.
The tales flowed from our lips and settled into hearts,
Finding a seat in every child's world wherever a place was free.
And the grown-ups?
To them, each story felt warmly familiar.
After all, weren't they just children who had grown tall?

In Kahramanmaraş, the City of Poets, storytelling, recently brought back into focus within the literary world was revitalized through stage performances. Storytellers appealed to audiences of all ages and reintroduced dozens of tales rooted in different cultures from around the world. During childhood, every piece of advice given to help prepare for life holds great value. With one story, we imagined flying around a castle on the wings of a bird. In another, we chased each other through a forest on the back of a rabbit, feeling fear and excitement. We jumped over streams with fleas and held a trial with owls. Every tale included a hero, a villain, and a lesson to remember. Audience members of all ages filled their satchels with meaningful insights. They took a journey through time, experienced both joy and sadness, and returned to the present with new reflections. Everyone left the storytelling hall with a smile and a renewed sense of joy. As for the storytellers, representing an ancient cultural tradition and experiencing each tale with a new audience was a meaningful experience. Kahramanmaraş was proud, as it should be. It hosted a remarkable storytelling event at the foot of Mount Ahir.



The World Storytellers Festival officially began with its opening program on Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at 10:30 a.m., held at the Necip Fazıl Cultural Center under the leadership of the Kahramanmaraş Metropolitan Municipality.

The festival, which brought together storytellers from various countries around the world and different cities across Türkiye, attracted significant interest in Kahramanmaraş, the proud host of this event. Following the opening remarks by protocol representatives, storyteller Zeynep Betül Akyıldız and her team captivated the audience with their performance. Akyıldız was joined on the musical storytelling stage by her companions: Ömer Çeşim on MIDI keyboard, Mervegül Altundağ on violin, and Seniha Yılmaz on percussion and vocals. The storytelling continued with children's songs, offering moments of joy and excitement for the young audience. The program, attended by primary school students aged 9 to 11, concluded with children leaving the event cheerful and satisfied.





Following the performance by Zeynep Betül Akyıldız and her team, the program continued in the afternoon. At 2:00 p.m., at the Children's Library of the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center, master storyteller Suse Weisse from Germany and Nazlı Çevik presented their performance for children aged 5 to 6. They performed in the "tandem storytelling" format and described it as follows:

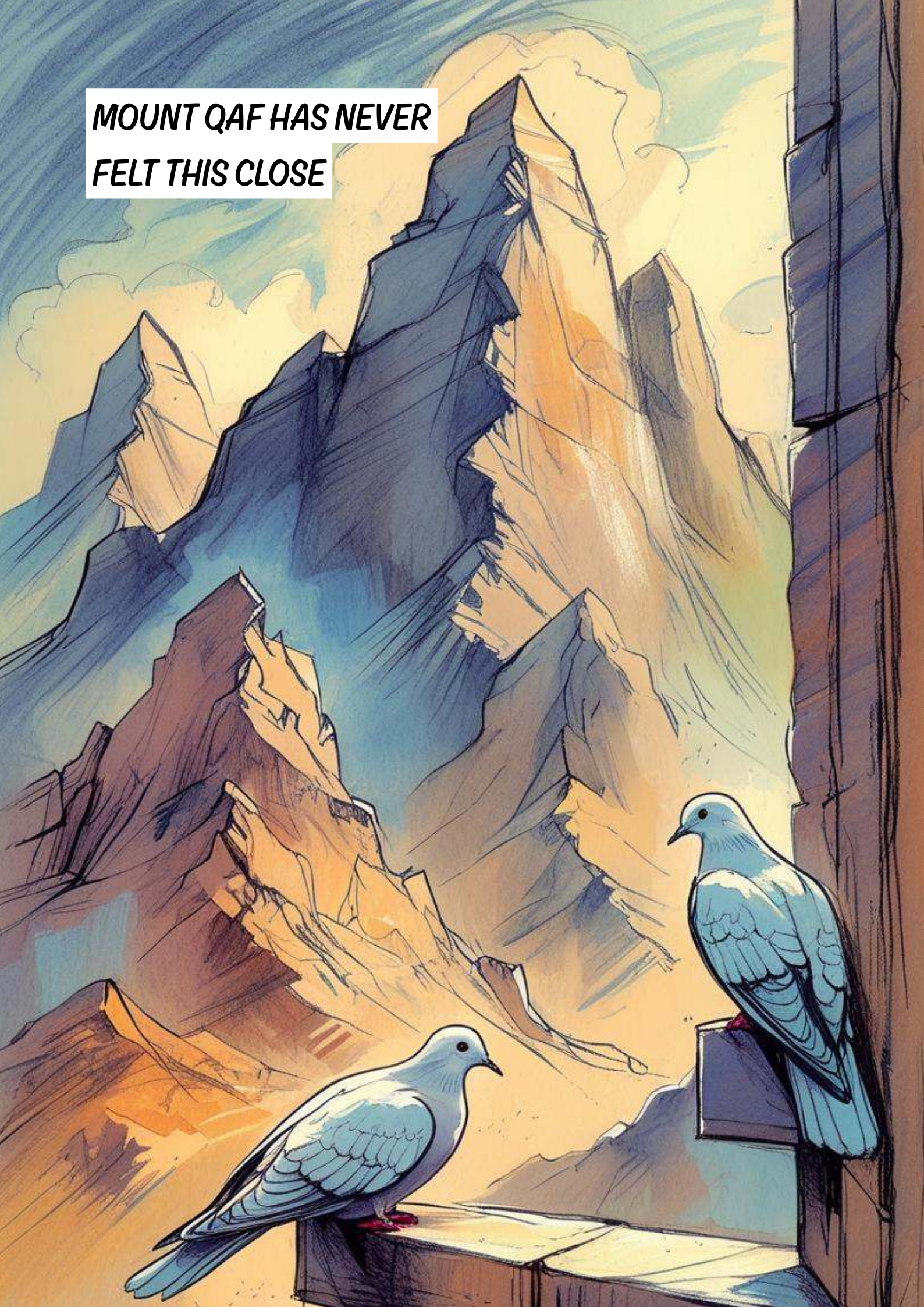
"In tandem storytelling, the languages do not translate each other; they complement one another. We told the story in German and Turkish. What's interesting is the sentence we often hear: 'I can understand this language, even though it's unfamiliar to me.' That's exactly what happened in this session. We were with an audience who claimed they understood German. In fact, they didn't know the language, but they filled in the gaps using body language, gestures, and facial expressions. We truly enjoyed it."



Suse Weisse also shared a meaningful excerpt from the tale The Bird Boy:

"Lena says: If you stay with me, I'll stay with you. The boy says: Lena, I will stay with you forever. And through the power of their love, they were transformed."

**MOUNT QAF HAS NEVER
FELT THIS CLOSE**



At the Children's Library of the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center, the doors to the world of fairy tales were wide open and the same was true at Kamu Külliyesi Preschool. This time, the storytellers who opened the gates to this magical world were Evrim Ölçer Özünel and Maral Perk. The stories they shared with children aged 5 to 6 served as a bridge between generations, connecting the past with the present. Each tale carried wisdom from the past and gently helped shape the future. Voices gave strength to words, and words made a quiet journey from ear to heart.



Evrim Ölçer Özünel, who played an important role in organizing the World Storytellers Festival, described the experience as follows:

"The stories weren't just told. They were lived and felt. Each of us was transformed, even just a little. Mount Qaf has never felt this close."

With UNESCO's vision of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, stories came back to life through the voices of storytellers, reviving our cultural tradition once again.



**GIVE EVERY CHILD A DREAM,
AND EMBROIDER HOPE INTO
EVERY DREAM**



On Thursday, April 10, the festival continued as storytellers shared some of the world's most beautiful tales with audiences across various venues.

At the storytelling session held at Akedaş Primary School, Hilal Koçyiğit began by singing a story-themed song together with the children. All the children clapped along to the rhythm and repeated the lyrics with enthusiasm. These joyful moments continued with a series of riddles presented by Hilal Koçyiğit. The storyteller's costume, accessories, and stage design were carefully prepared to match the theme of the tale. She then became the voice of an old Turkish folk tale. As she brought her story to a close, she concluded with these heartfelt words: "What use are the beauties of the world if I am without a soul?

You have given me healing, you have given me life."



At the storytelling session held at Tenzile Erdoğan Preschool, the storytellers were Suse Weisse, Nazlı Çevik, and Mehtap Kılıç. Meeting with children aged 5 to 6, Mehtap Kılıç shared a brief reflection on the tale she told, The Speckled Rooster:

"Do you know how much hope can be hidden in the heart of a speckled rooster?

What he seeks isn't gold; it's a bite of justice, a sip of fairness. Sometimes, the smallest and quietest among us speak with the voice of justice. A rooster cries out to the world: 'Justice must prevail!' Because justice doesn't vanish. It waits. It hides. And at the most unexpected moment, it returns carried in the beak of a rooster."



At Şevket Bulut Middle School, Zerrin Tüfekçi took the stage to share the tale "The Orphan and the Daughter of the Dragon King" with children aged 11 to 14. She left them with a powerful reminder:

"One must value what they have, for when it is lost, the sorrow can be great and reclaiming it may require paying a heavy price."

Throughout the program, hundreds of people were gifted with dozens of enchanting stories. The storytellers embraced a heartfelt mission, beautifully expressed in these words: "Give every child a dream and embroider hope into every dream."



***EVERY LIVING BEING ON EARTH HAS A
GUARDIAN STAR IN THE SKY.***

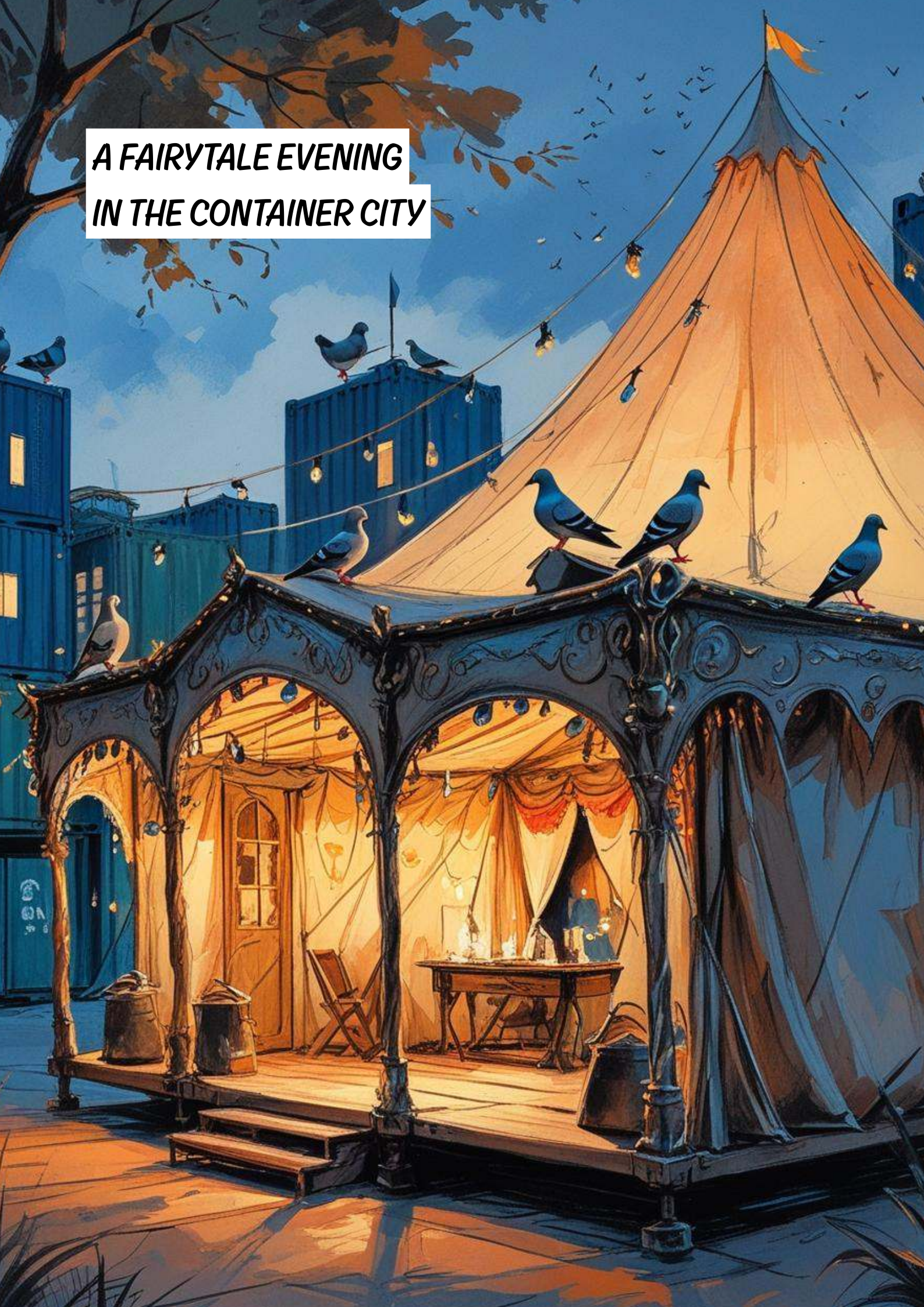


On the second day of the World Storytellers' Festival, Asiye Cengiz took the stage at 2:00 PM at the Kahramanmaraş Forest School. The event, attended by children aged 7–8, took place in a setting so deeply immersed in nature that it resembled a fairytale garden, spreading happiness to the little ones. Cengiz closed the door to the world of stories with the words: "Every living being on Earth has a guardian star in the sky." With sparkling eyes and cheerful applause, dozens of children bid farewell to the storyteller.



Nazlı Çevik was the guest at Süleyman Çelebi Library, where she met with children aged 11 to 14. She began with a question and answer session that gently led the audience on a peaceful journey through the world of fairy tales. Encouraging the children to think like storybook characters, she guided them in discovering how to find solutions to challenges encountered along the way. This interactive method emphasized the role of storytelling in developing children's problem-solving abilities and capacity for empathy. Through vivid examples on vocal use and tone, she demonstrated how the same word can carry different meanings depending on how it is spoken, helping the children understand that how something is said often matters more than what is said. Opening with a whimsical rhyme that instantly drew everyone's attention, Nazlı Çevik delivered a mesmerizing performance. Throughout the story, she brought each character to life by shifting her voice, enchanting her young audience from start to finish.

**A FAIRYTALE EVENING
IN THE CONTAINER CITY**

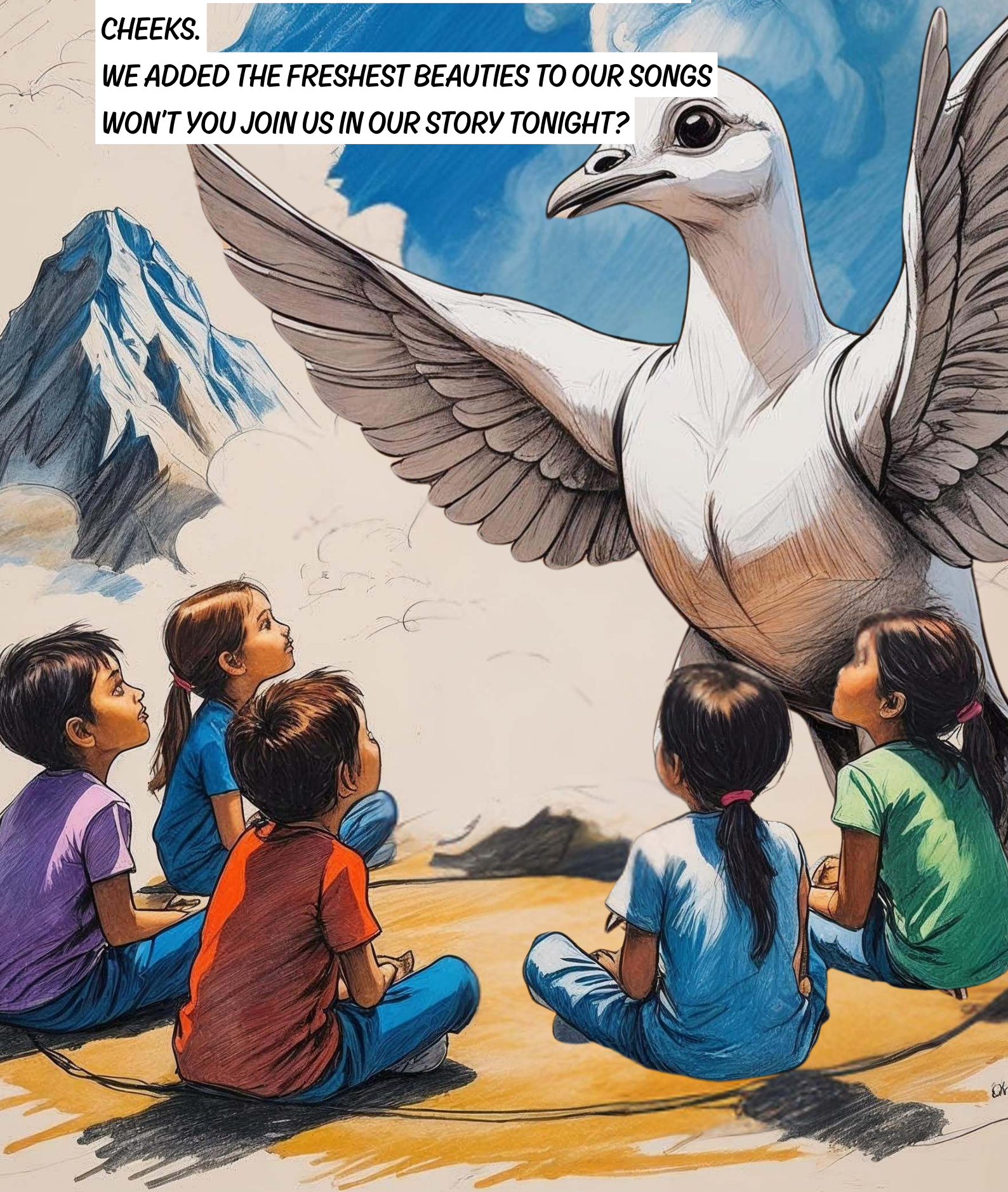




At the foot of Mount Ahir lies a city that has hosted countless tales, where ladybugs roam in Uludaz, deer wander in Başkonuş, and the call to prayer rises from the Ulu Mosque. Even under occupation, it wrote its own epic and earned the honorable title of “Heroic.” It rose again. And then, many years later, it fell once more: February 6, 2023. Struck by an earthquake that shook all of Turkey to its core, this heroic city suffered immense damage. But with the support of the entire nation, Kahramanmaraş began to heal. Container cities were established for those whose homes had been destroyed. And within those containers, there were children, children who were not forgotten. In a storytelling festival organized by Kahramanmaraş Metropolitan Municipality, storytellers brought dreams and wonder to children living in container cities. At Galatasaray Container City, a special program was held for children aged 6 to 9 by Lamiri Montasar and İlhan Öztürk. The story “The Golden Dove,” rooted in Tunisian culture, was performed in two languages and met with great joy from the children. Lamiri Montasar shared: “I told a tale that gives a warning: the greed for wealth and fame can lead us to lose those we love. In this city struck by disaster two years ago, the joy I saw in the children’s eyes their happiness when we met was truly priceless. A story is always more than just a tale. It is a social breath, and it always stands in service of humanity.”

WE PLUCKED HOPES FROM THE HEART OF TALES
AND WORE THEM LIKE CROWNS UPON OUR HEADS.
TONGUE-TWISTERS TURNED INTO SMILES ON OUR
CHEEKS.

WE ADDED THE FRESHEST BEAUTIES TO OUR SONGS
WON'T YOU JOIN US IN OUR STORY TONIGHT?





The master storytellers of our ancient culture, Anne Wang and Cem Alfar, met with the audience at the Kahramanmaraş EXPO Fairground. Anne Wang, one of the storytellers who brightened the evening of April 10, said: "Together with Cem, we told four short stories: 'The Tale of the Little Woman' from the Republic of San Marino.

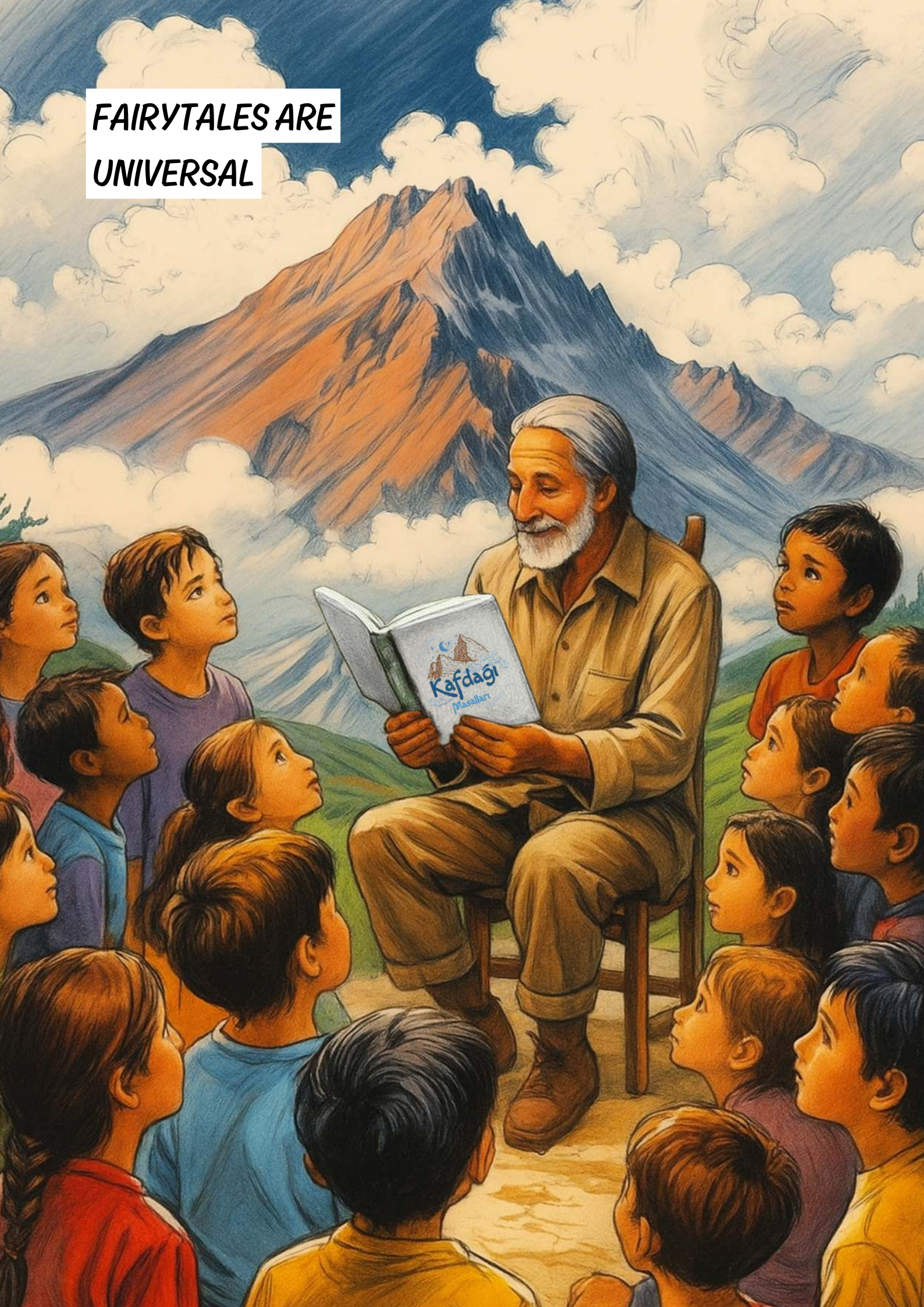
The issue that emerges in this tale is justice. In the story where a clever farmer defeats the devil, we witness the power of intelligence; 'The Farmer and the Devil' is woven with the wisdom spoken through words. Then, the tale 'Rutabaga' gently whispers: We always need someone smaller than ourselves. And at the end of the journey, 'The Little Black Hen' appears before us; taking its place as a story that silently tells the value of labor, patience, and sharing.

Together with Cem and Cem's puppet, we renamed it 'The Little White Rooster' to witness the great joy of the children. What I love in this story are the two ringing chimes that come back again:

The first: 'King Pansu, King Ventrü, give me back my beautiful shield.'

The second: 'A new and fair distribution of wealth.'

**FAIRYTALES ARE
UNIVERSAL**



On the morning of Friday, April 11, the day's first program began at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University's Cahit Zarifoğlu Conference Hall. The moderator of the program titled "In the Footsteps of Fairy Tales: Culture, Art, and Literature" was Prof. Dr. Evrim Ölçer Özünel. The speakers were experts in their fields. The session, featuring Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Gültekin, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuna Yıldız, Prof. Dr. Pınar Fedakâr, and Prof. Dr. Selim Somuncu, was received with appreciation.



In the panel "In the Footsteps of Fairy Tales: Culture, Art, and Literature," the role, importance, and characteristics of fairy tales in literature were discussed. Prof. Dr. Pınar Fedakâr emphasized the contrast between reality and the essence of the fairy tale genre, noting that the intended message is not delivered directly but conveyed through suggestion to the reader or listener. She underlined that this method encourages the audience to think, contributes to the development of problem-solving skills, and helps individuals overcome difficulties by offering alternative paths to resolving real-life challenges. She argued that the growth of creative individuals, one's ability to discover themselves, others, and nature, and the process of making sense of life, are only possible by expanding one's capacity for imagination. According to her, fairy tales play an undeniable role in this.

Prof. Dr. Selim Somuncu addressed the use of symbols in fairy tales, stating that the same symbols often carry the same meanings across different countries: "In Anatolian tales, Keloğlan's baldness emphasizes his intelligence. There are many examples in German tales where proverbs from the Turkish language are used in the exact same expressions. Because fairy tales convey messages through values, they preserve their universality."

Reinforcing the guiding nature of fairy tales, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Gültekin said: "We tell and listen to fairy tales to understand what to do in life. Even though the conditions and heroes change in fairy tales, the essence of justice and truth does not. In fairy tales, our traditions come to the forefront, because tradition is the truth itself. Tradition is composed of centuries of experience; it is essence, it is our essence."

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuna Yıldız, another speaker, approached the topic from a different perspective. He stated that there is a communication network built through traditions, and that in every part of the world, remarkable elements of cultures are used across various fields. He also said: “Fairy tales warn us, even in the opening rhymes they remind us that the story is a product of imagination. We cannot think of fairy tales separately from industry and economy. They carry the characteristics of one culture into another and blend. In this way, one culture’s element becomes recognized by another. This intercultural transmission is also reflected in the economy. For example, a foreign coffee brand may increase its sales by placing a word from our culture on its product. Cultures are vast industrial mills, and fairy tales are among their most essential building blocks. They travel from tongue to tongue, from ear to ear. Everything that spreads easily turns the wheel of this mill. Today, fairy tales are being adapted into visual forms and presented on digital platforms. With the advancement of technology, this intercultural interaction has accelerated. This shows that fairy tales, whether watched or listened to, have become part of this cultural mill.”

The closing words of the program were delivered by Prof. Dr. Evrim Ölçer Özünel, who also served as moderator: “Cultures are being completely homogenized and ground down. That’s why we’re trying to promote Anatolian tales, almost as a kind of manifesto. Or, we want each tale to be recognized by the name of the country to which it belongs. For example: Senegalese tales, Tunisian tales, Indian tales...” thus sharing the aim of the program with the participants.





FAIRYTALES ARE EVERYWHERE



At the storytelling event held at İstiklal Primary School, students aged 8–11 met with Cem Alfar. While the storyteller captured attention with his rhyming phrases, he also surprised the children with his body language. Alfar's playful demeanor increased the interest in the stories being told. During the performance, storyteller Cem Alfar invited children from the audience onto the stage and reenacted part of the tale with them. Each child on stage transformed into a character from the story, and their excited behavior drew attention.

At the same time, İlhan Öztürk told the story "The Star of the Apple" to children aged 8–11 at Dereli Şehit Bilal Akgün Primary School. İlhan Öztürk ended his tale by saying: "Our hearts may be home to the stars that will shine. There is no need to search far away. Things we believe to be out of reach may sometimes be unexpectedly close." With these words, he planted seeds of hope in every child's heart.



At the Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Yurt (Otağ), storytellers Sema Yaylı and musician Eda Şalcı held a musical storytelling event. The addition of music to the tales gave unforgettable moments to children aged 11–12.



The fact that the World Storytellers' Festival is being held in the City of Poets, Kahramanmaraş, was received with pride and interest by university students. Storytellers Sef Townsed and Roza Erdem told stories to university students aged 18–25 at the Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Pavilion. With his costume and posture, Sef Townsed highlighted the features of his own culture and offered the audience a true feast with the songs he added to the tales. Roza Erdem's gentle storytelling style also gave the audience peaceful moments. The event, which brought young people closer to the art of storytelling that arouses curiosity, ended with applause.



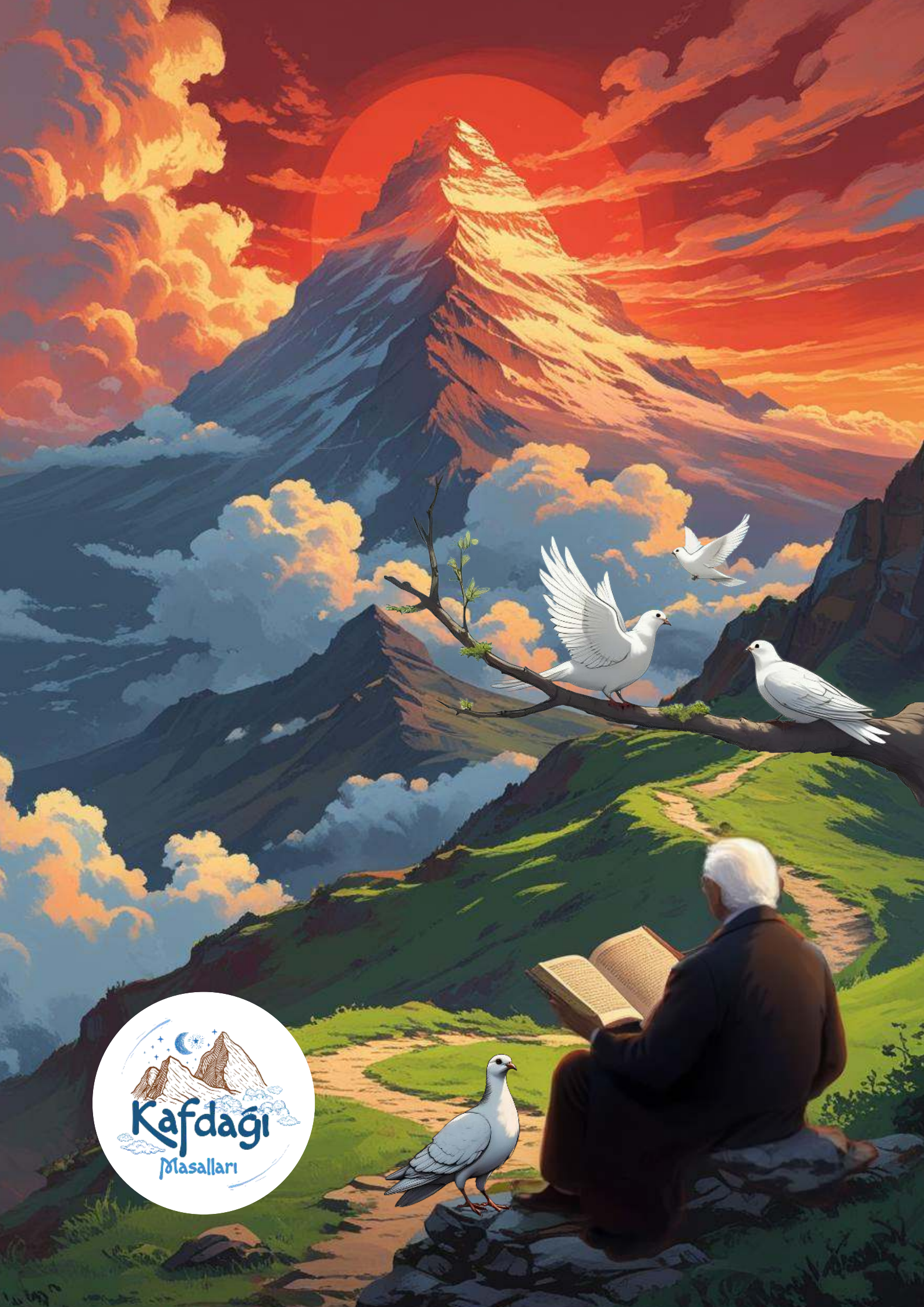
The last day of the World Storytellers' Festival, Saturday, April 12, began in the storytelling tent located at the Kahramanmaraş Children's Art Center. Children aged 6–11, who listened with excitement to the tales told by Roza Erdem in the tent's ethnic atmosphere, repeated scenes from the story: buzz like a fly, flap your wings like a bird, sit like a sultan... Most elements of the story had been etched into their fresh young minds. While the most important part of storytelling is devoted to feeling and making others feel, the children seemed to have received their share of these values. At the end of the tale, they spent some more time in the world of the story by asking Roza Erdem questions.

At Hartlap Primary School, the day began with stories. Cem Alfar shared the tales in his bag with an eager crowd once again. With his embroidered vest and sash around his waist, he prompted comments like: "He looked like a hero from within the tale." By using puppets during the performance, he also made the audience feel as if they were inside the story.



On the last day of the festival, a storytelling stage was set up for children aged 5–6 at the Kahramanmaraş Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center's Children's Library. Amid colorful books and tiny chairs, children joyfully welcomed storyteller Mehtap İnan and had great fun repeating the rhymes she recited. This time, the key to the story's door was an authentic, hand-sized key that passed from hand to hand. Seeing a key of that size for the first time, the children could not hide their astonishment. After the magical key touched their tiny fingers, it turned into a bird tale in the storyteller's hands. Swept up in the magic of the story, the children blew their dreams into a balloon and sent them soaring into the sky along with "The Bird That Eats Mistakes."

For three days, the air of Kahramanmaraş was filled with the scent of fairy tales. Every child took home the story they had heard. Every home welcomed a tale. And each tale brought joy to that home. The storytellers, too, were very happy. Well then... they lived happily ever after, and we climbed up to the bridal chamber. Three apples fell from the sky: one for those who told these tales, one for those who listened, and one for this beautiful city, the cradle of literature and art.



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