Uroš Petrović

Fairy Tales

The Fifth Seven



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Laguna

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The One-Wish Well



Batu was a nomad, which meant he belonged to a tribe that was constantly moving from one place to another. They lived in yurts, spacious, round tents that could be transported by horse and quickly set up or taken down. That year they had gone far north to lands where they had never been before. They set up a camp in a clearing sheltered by the rocky slopes of the mountain.



Just before dusk, Batu noticed a small but very deep hole on the barren ground, its edges forming a cone.

"Look! What kind of a hole is this?! It looks like a little volcano! And you can't see the bottom!" the boy exclaimed excitedly, showing what he had found to one of the tribal elders.

"Hmm... That looks to me like an ancient one-wish well. You drop a coin, make a wish, and it will come true! The hole then closes, and of course, you must never, ever tell anyone what you wished for," said the elder.

Batu was enchanted! A one-wish well! The boy had only one silver coin that he had earned by doing the tribe's most demanding work. Still, without hesitation, he dropped it into the hole.

He thought then with his eyes closed. "I want to have as many silver coins as the wealthiest man in the tribe!"

When he opened his eyes, he could no longer find the hole. Batu was delighted.

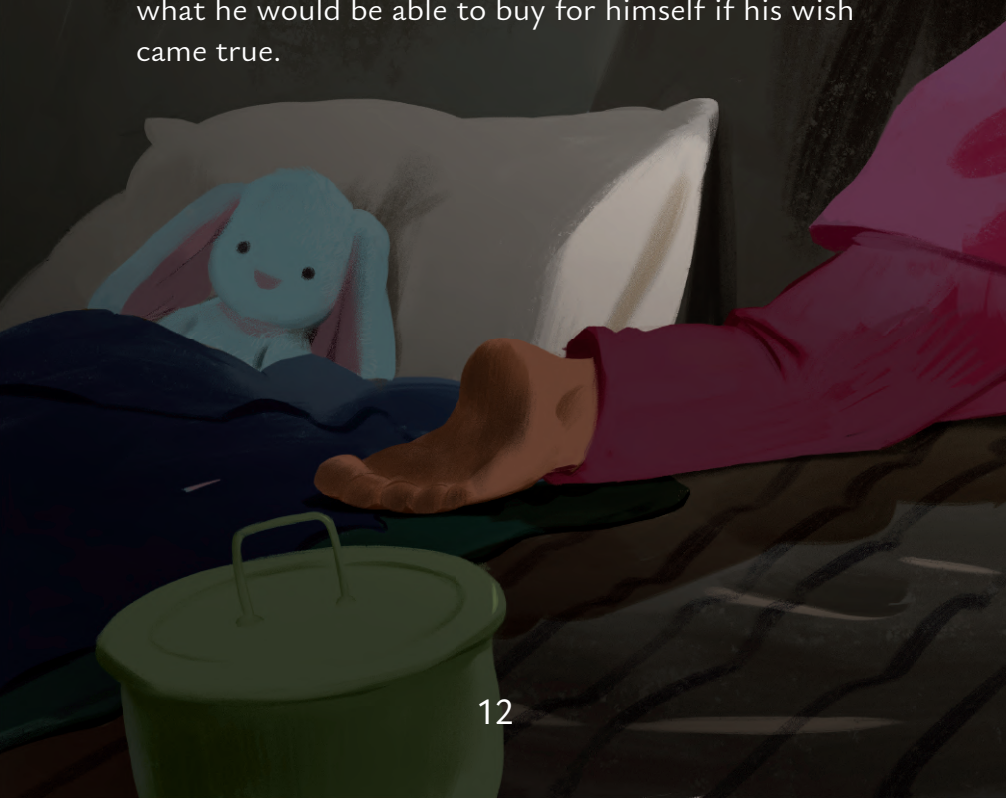
"It seems that it really was a well which granted just one wish! Will my wish come true for sure?" the delighted little boy asked the venerable elder.

"Ancient people firmly believed in those magic spells!" confirmed the elder.

"And where are those ancient peoples now? Why don't we ever meet them?" asked the curious Batu, who was absorbing everything the tribal elder said.

"Who knows? Maybe they perished in horde wars, maybe they were cut down by some kind of infectious disease. There was a lot of that in these parts," he muttered and shuffled off to rest in his yurt.

That night the boy fell asleep dreaming about what he would be able to buy for himself if his wish came true.

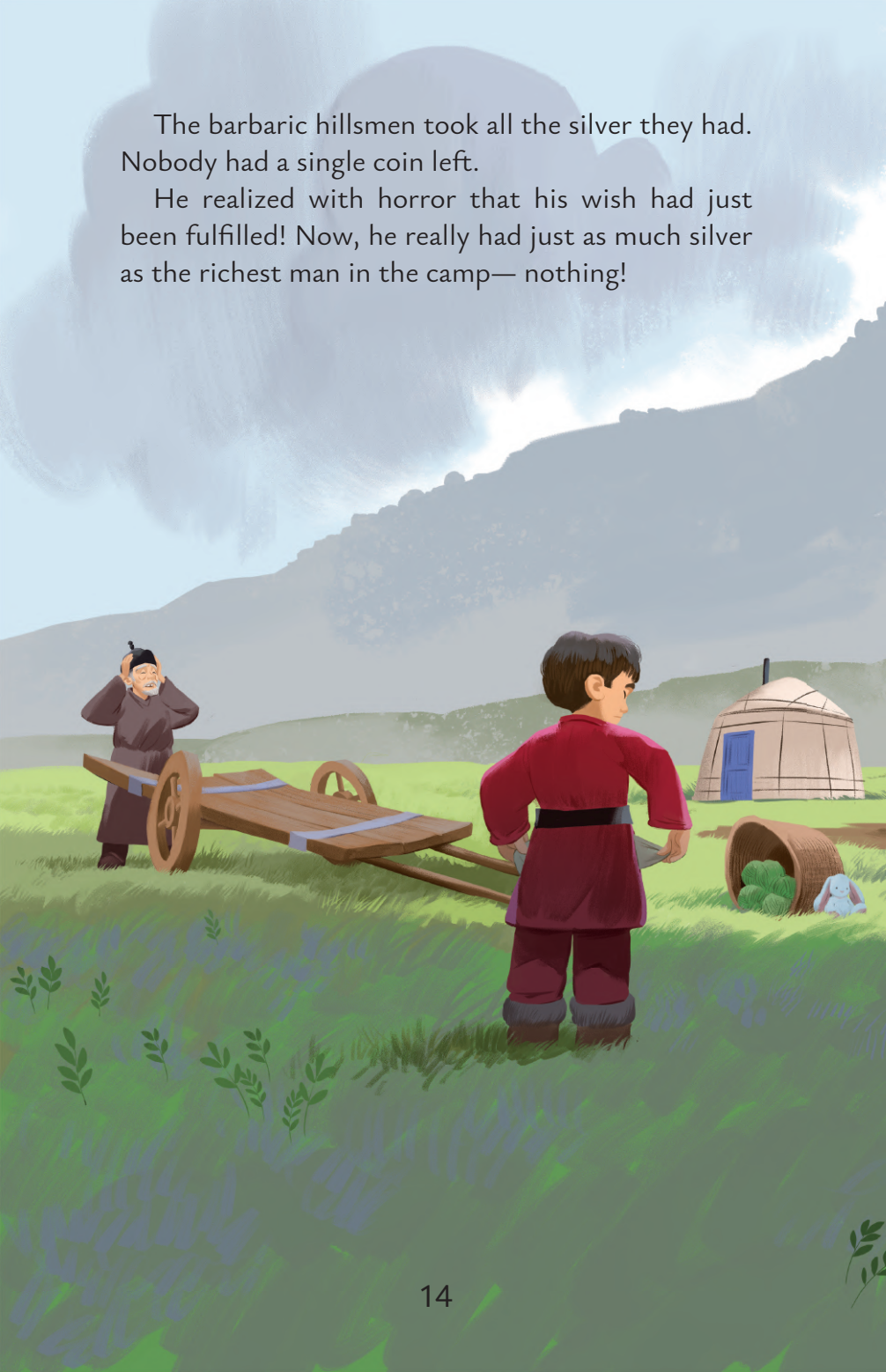




Before dawn, he was awakened by noises and screams. Their camp was under attack! Barbaric hillsmen had descended from the mountains and quickly plundered them.

The barbaric hillsmen took all the silver they had. Nobody had a single coin left.

He realized with horror that his wish had just been fulfilled! Now, he really had just as much silver as the richest man in the camp— nothing!



When he realized what he had done, Batu became desperate. His conscience tormented him.

"Damned wishing well! Damned silver! Damned greedy me!" the boy lamented to himself.



He was so torn up inside that he sneaked out of the camp as soon as dawn broke and headed for the mountain after the robbers, completely bare-handed.

"I don't even care about this kind of life! If I don't redeem myself, I don't deserve to come back from this mountain alive!" he repeated as he stumbled along the mountain slopes.

He didn't give up even when he got tangled in a thick cobweb, nor even when vultures flew at him, nor when he clearly heard the howling of wolves all around. He walked until dark, as long as he could see the bandits' tracks. He slept on the cold, red earth, exhausted, desperate, and alone.





He woke up early, shivering. He quickly found the tracks again and continued to follow them. Thus he reached the mountain robbers' hidden camp, set up in the middle of an abandoned red clay mine. He cautiously approached them and hid behind some bushes. They were gathered around a fire, noisily celebrating their successful plundering.

