

# The LAST CHIMNEY of CHRISTMAS EVE

by Linda Oatman High



Illustrated by Kestutis Kasparavicius

*The* LAST CHIMNEY  
*of*  
CHRISTMAS EVE





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Boyd's Mills Press

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he returns to the rooftops to pass on the kindness he was given.  
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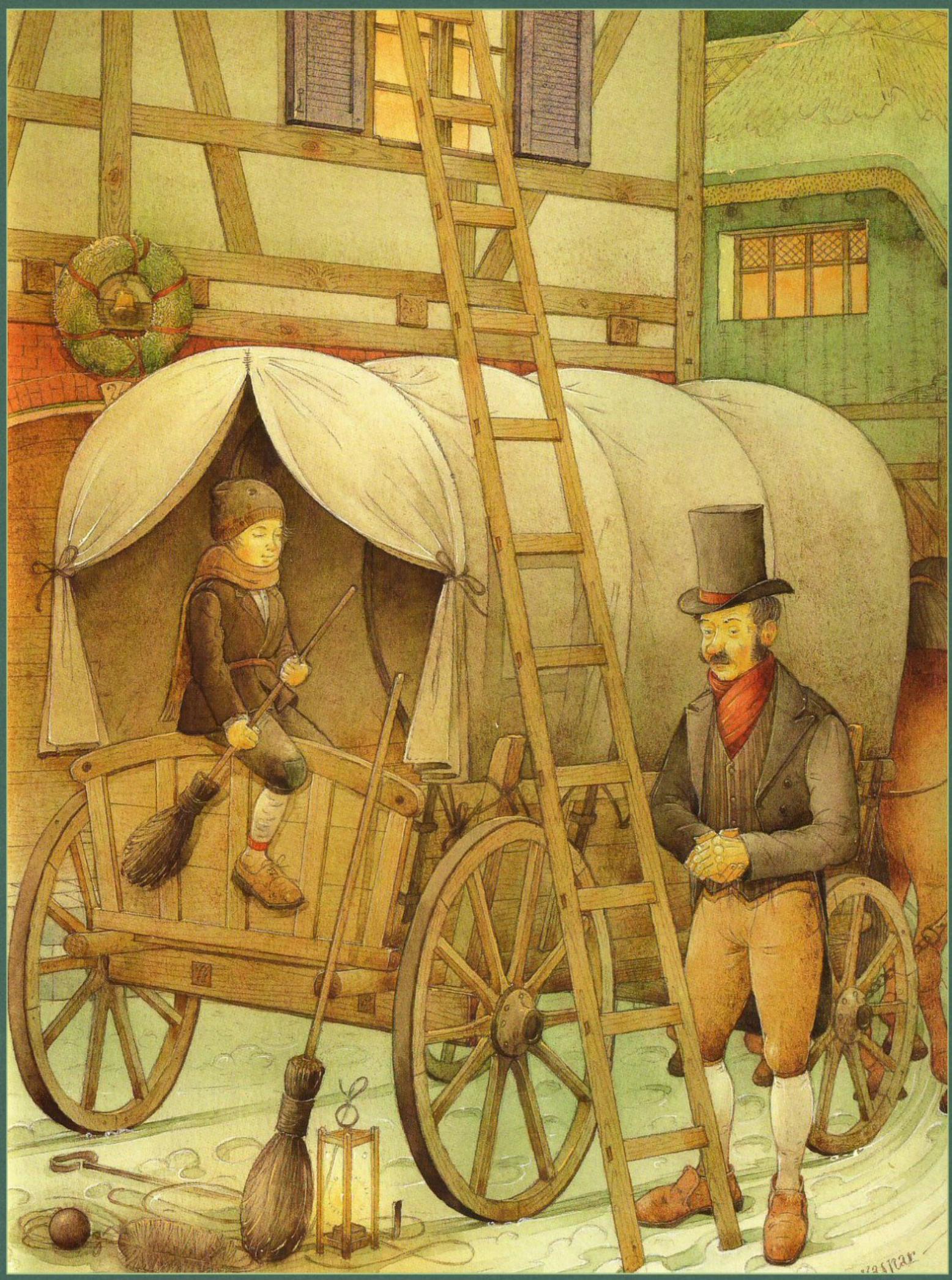
*For my Nana: Emma Millard*  
—L. O. H.

*For my sons Jonas and Gabrielius*  
—K. K.



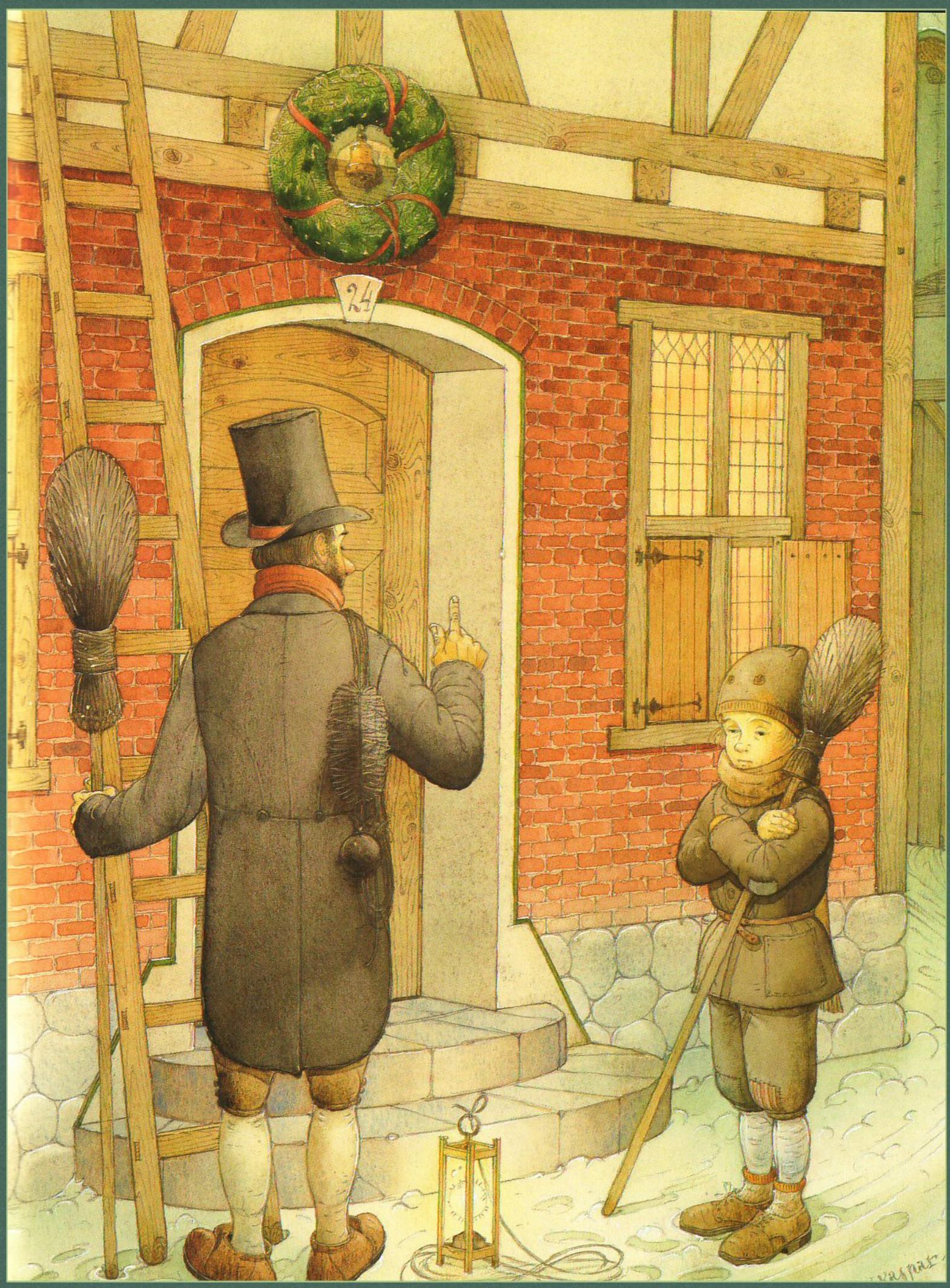
**I**t was Christmas Eve,  
and Nicholas had one last chimney to clean.  
He hitched the horse,  
then carried from the wagon  
a ladder and a broom,  
brushes and scrapers and rods—  
chimney sweeps' tools.







**W**earing a tailcoat of silky black  
and a top hat to match,  
the master sweep lifted a brush  
bristled with whiskers  
as Nicholas shivered.  
He wore a ragged coat,  
and he was covered in soot.  
Nicholas knocked on the door.



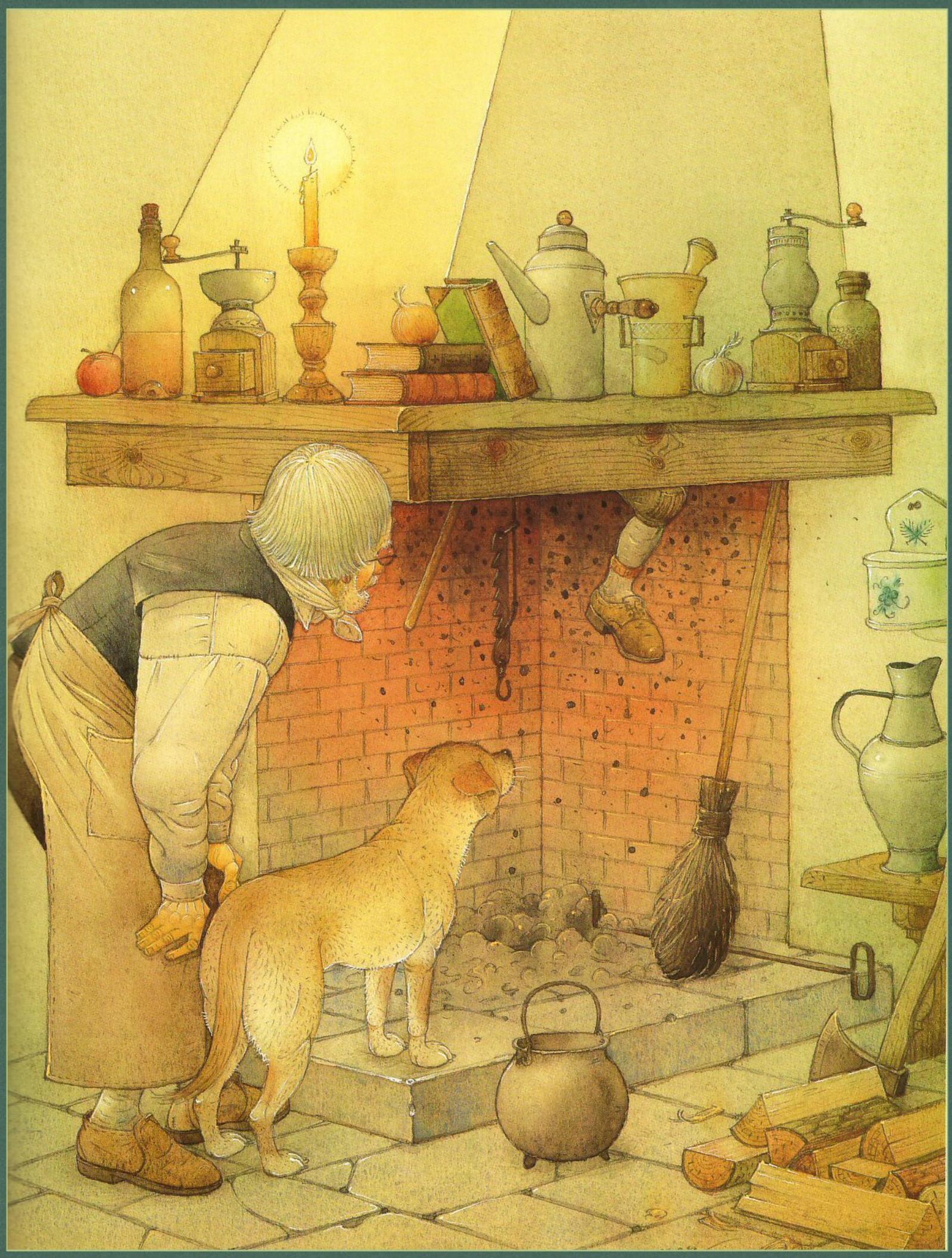
**I**t was answered by a man  
with a cup of hot cocoa in his hand.  
“For you,” said the man.  
Nicholas drank,  
grateful for the warmth.  
Then it was time for Nicholas to climb.

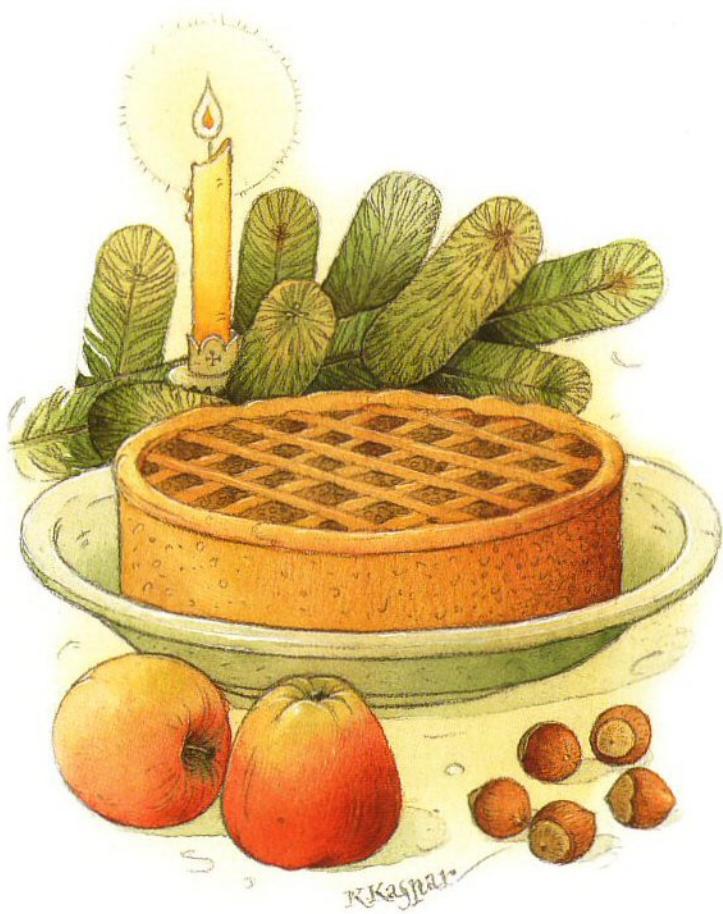




**H**e pulled down his knitted cap,  
with holes for his eyes,  
to keep the soot from his nose.  
Climbing up the narrow chimney,  
scraping his legs and arms on the bricks,  
Nicholas brushed soot,  
working hard and fast.







Climbing higher and higher,  
he sighed,  
relieved to see the nighttime sky.  
Heart beating hard as he rose into the stars,  
Nicholas took a deep breath,  
smelling warm mincemeat  
and chimney smoke and evergreen trees:  
the good smells of Christmas Eve.



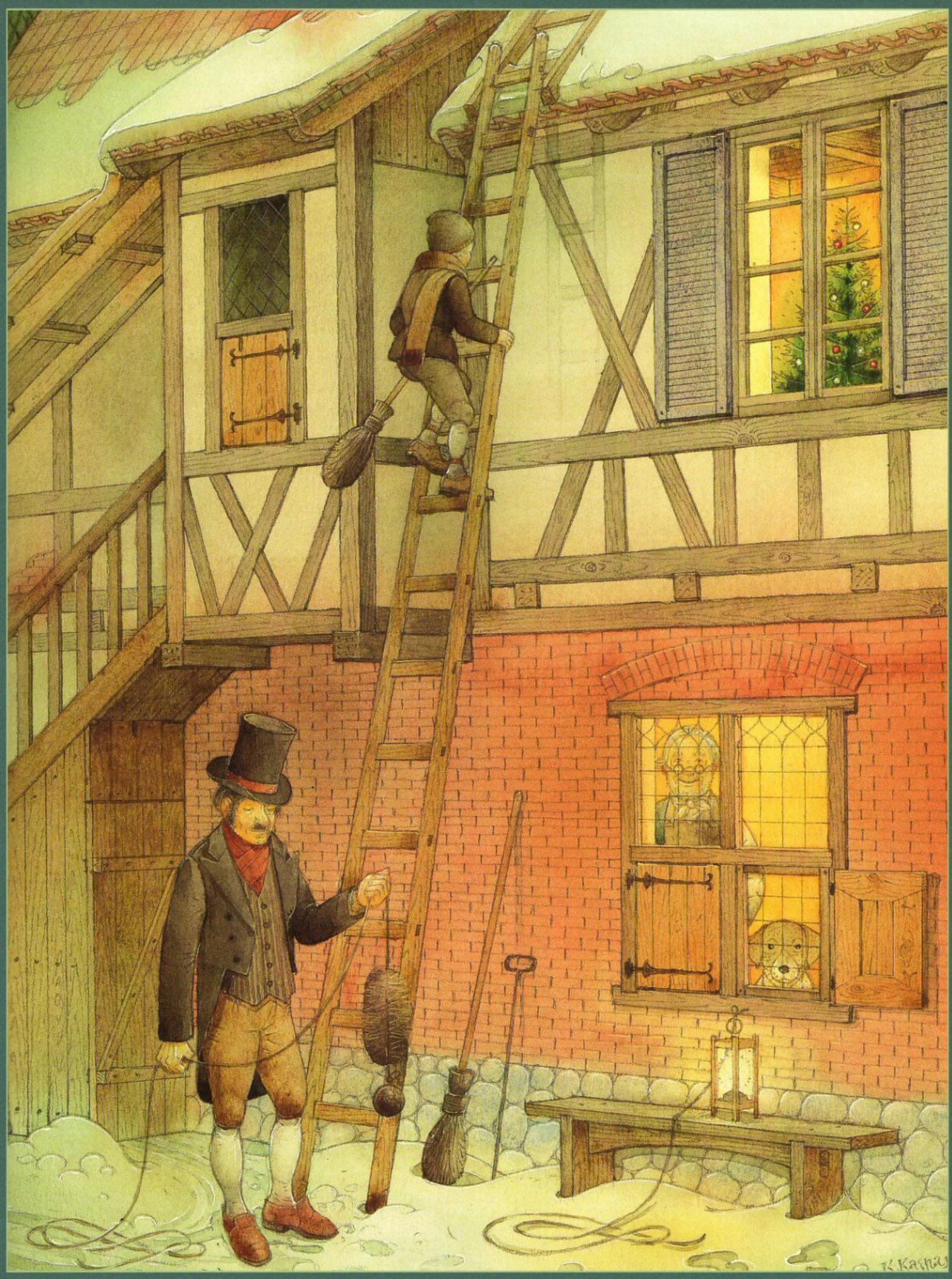




Church bells chimed  
and lanterns glowed cozily in the homes below,  
bringing a lump to Nicholas's throat.  
“Someday,” he thought,  
“Christmas Eve will be joyful for me, the way it’s meant to be.”  
For as long as he could remember,  
Nicholas had been an orphan  
and a climbing boy.

**T**he master sweep poked Nicholas with a chimney brush,  
nudging him toward the edge of the roof.  
“Stop dreaming,” he said. “Get the broom.”  
Nicholas went down the ladder  
and into the house to sweep.







**F**or you to keep," said the man,  
handing Nicholas a furry red coat.  
"Have a merry Christmas."  
Nicholas's eyes widened.  
No one had ever given him a gift.



**A**nd this," said the man,  
"is for you to pass on  
when you have a child of your own."  
The man gave Nicholas a heavy globe of glass.  
"A snow shaky," gasped Nicholas,  
quivering as he shook the globe  
and watched the delicate snow.  
"I've always wished for one."





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**T**he man waved as Nicholas walked away, wearing his red coat and holding the snow globe next to his heart.

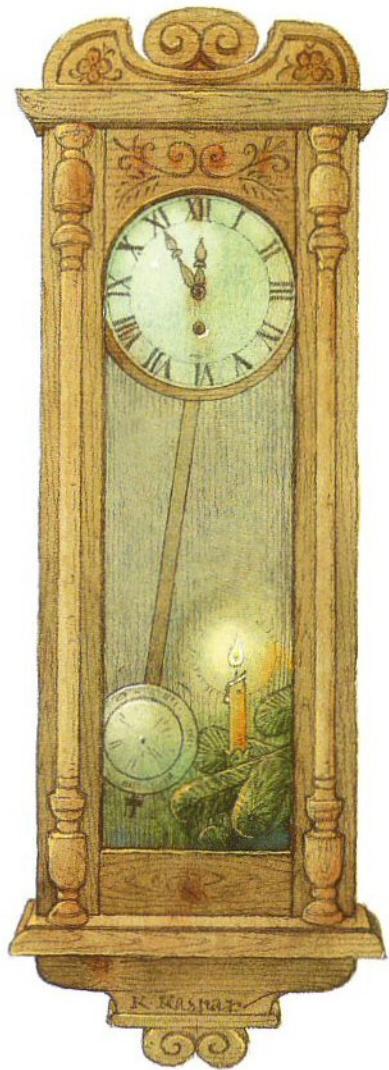
“Thank you for your kindness,” called Nicholas, loading the tools.

“Pass it on,” answered the man.

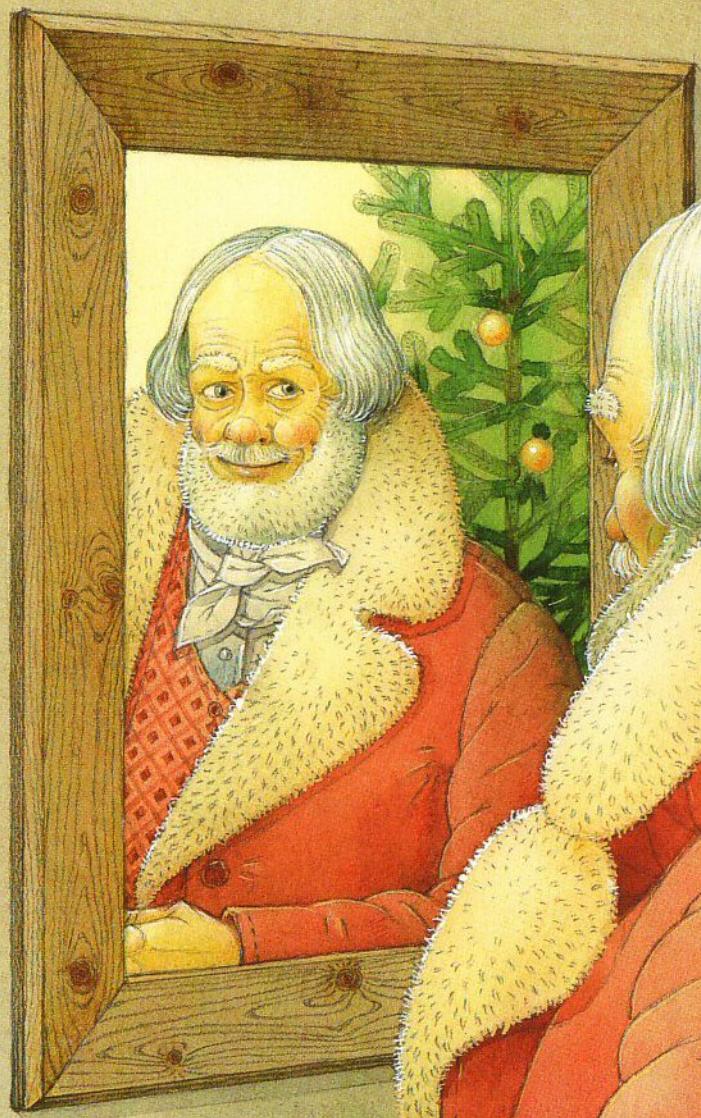
“Get in the wagon,” said the master sweep.







The years passed  
and Nicholas became a man.  
One year, when December grew bitterly cold,  
Nicholas tried on the old coat,  
and, having no child of his own,  
gently shook the snow globe.



Nicholas remembered his days as a chimney sweep,  
and he decided to return to the rooftops.  
Passing on the kindness he so long ago received,  
Nicholas still works all through Christmas Eve,  
climbing and sliding through chimneys,  
sometimes leaving a snippet of furry  
red wool snagged on the bricks  
for a young chimney sweep to find.





Each year, as church bells chime  
and lights glow cozily in the homes below,  
the old man Nicholas gets a lump in his throat.  
“This,” he thinks, “is what Christmas is meant to be.”  
Then, heart beating hard as he rises into the stars,  
Nicholas leaves behind the last chimney of Christmas Eve.







