



# *Twenty-five December Lane*

HELEN WARD

WAYNE ANDERSON



*For Matilda, with love - H. W.*

*For Cain - W. A.*

*A Templar Book*

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HELEN WARD

# *Twenty-five December Lane*

*Illustrated by* WAYNE ANDERSON

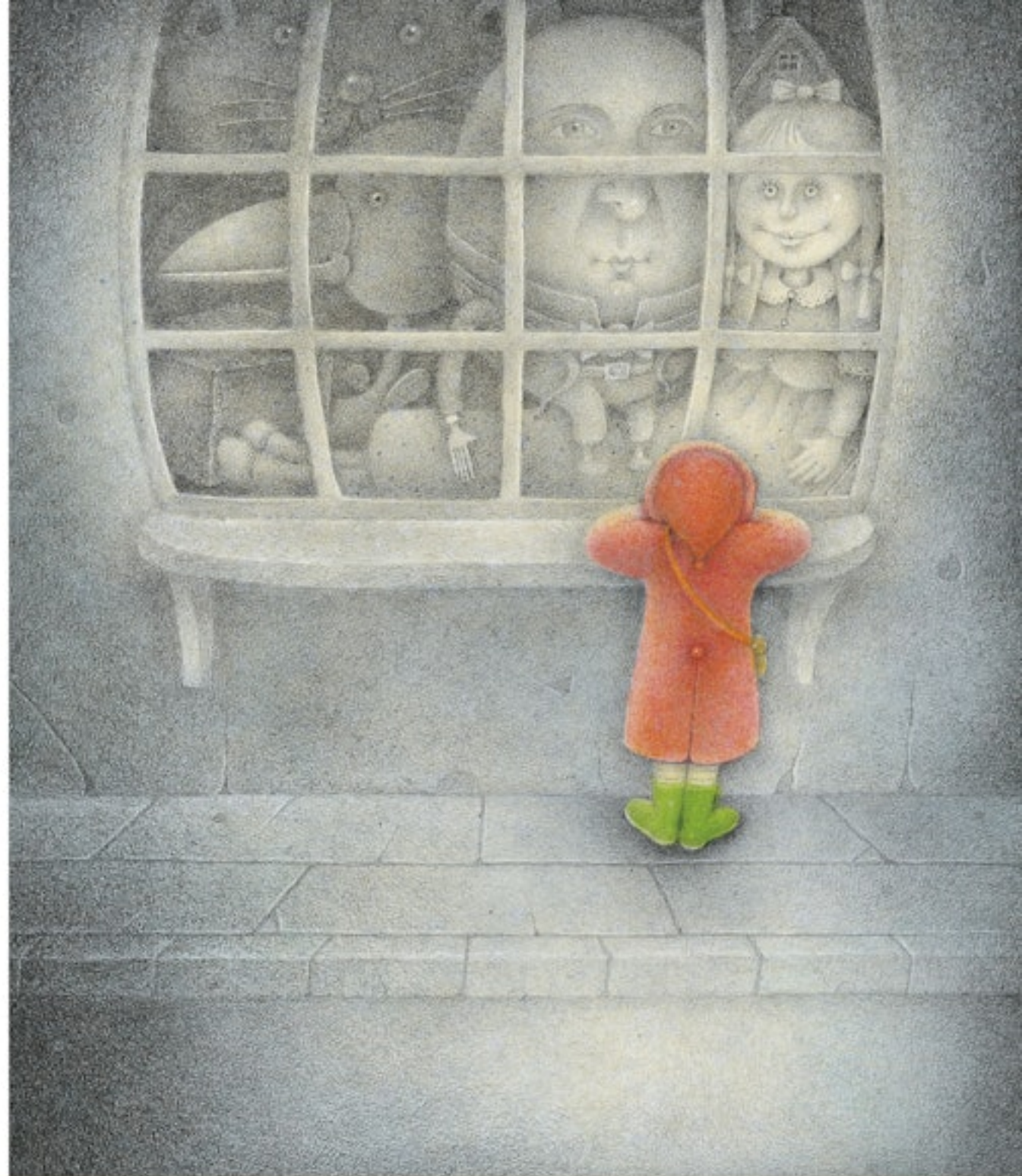


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*It* had been a long and dreary  
December. And here it was – Christmas Eve.  
For weeks one small shopper had been searching  
for the perfect present . . .  
to give to someone very special.

*No matter where she looked,  
she couldn't find it.*





*The main street was noisy  
and crowded with fast and furious people.*



*The girl was stepped on...*



*pushed and jostled...*

*and squeezed off the busy  
pavement...*







*...into the damp gloom of  
December Lane,  
which was as grey and as cold and as empty  
as winter without Christmas.*



*Wind-chased rubbish  
rattled around her feet as she shivered  
and peered into the shabby shop windows.*



*Windows full of spare parts and ancient electricals...  
huge hideous underwear (almost, but not quite, pink);  
windows that were empty but for uncollected post  
and dead insects.*



*On she went, when any ordinary shopper  
would have turned back.*



*Just as the girl was about to give up and go home,  
a glimmer from across the street caught her eye.*

*At Number Twenty-Five  
she found just what she was after.  
It was the strangest shop she had ever seen  
and she couldn't recall having seen it before.  
As she pushed open the narrow door,  
a bell on a spring rang.*

*A little breath of Christmas  
slipped past her, out into December Lane  
and up to the dark grey clouds.*

*She closed the door carefully behind her  
and stood staring in wonder.*











*Teddy bears and clockwork cars,  
teepees, castles, Noah's Arks,  
books and dolls and dinosaurs  
disappeared into the distance.*



*There was a kerfuffle at one of the counters.  
**Another** customer was being served.  
Shop assistants hustled past.  
"Excuse me," said the girl politely.  
"I'd like to buy a..."  
"I'll be with you shortly," came the answer.*





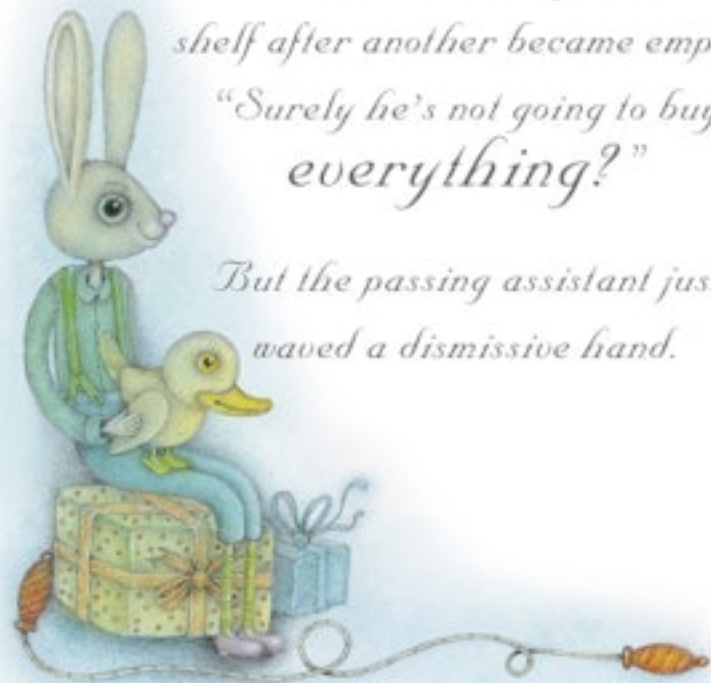


*Up and down the ladders the assistants flew  
as the Other Customer pointed and nodded  
at the things he wanted.*

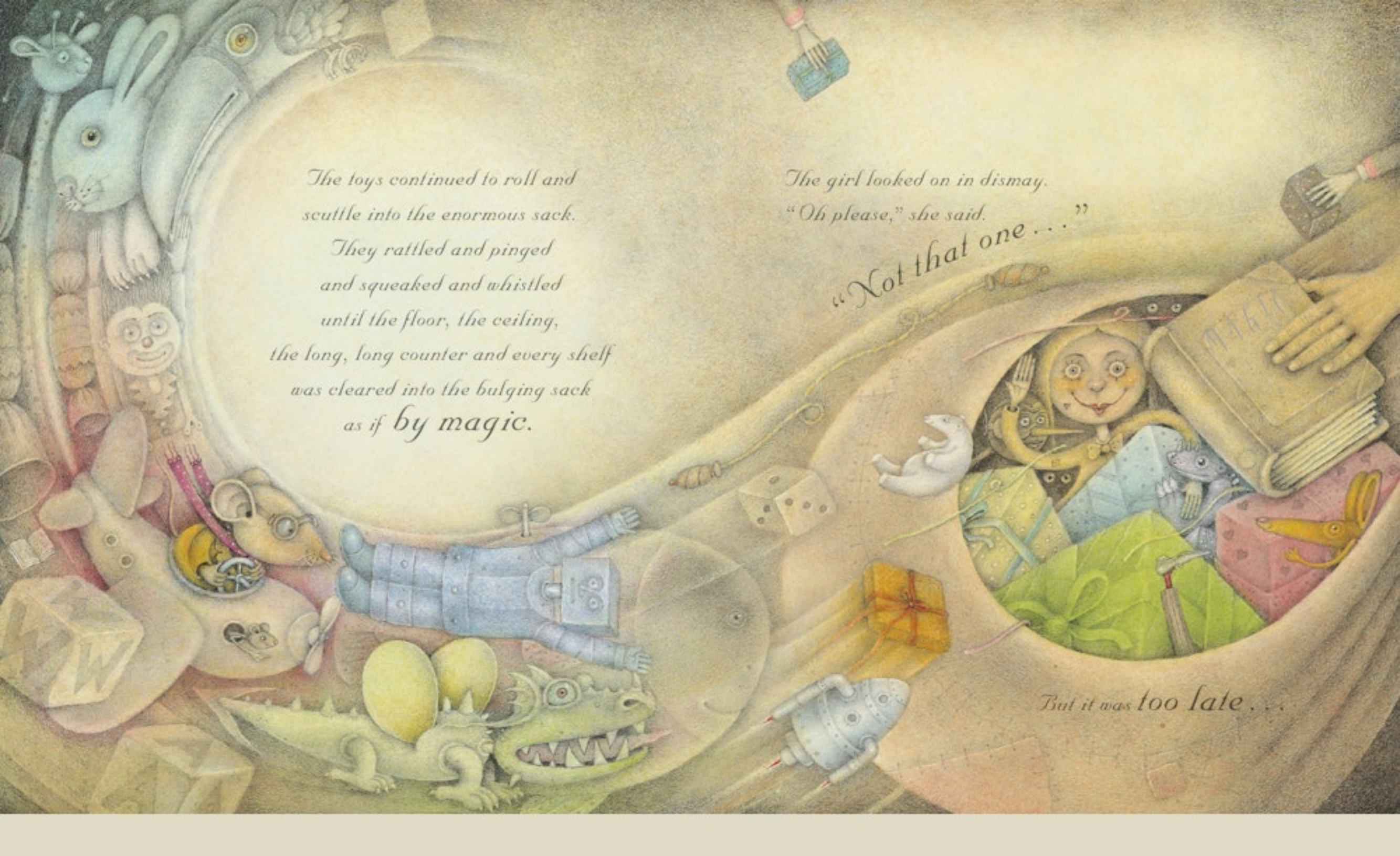
*"Oh dear," said the girl as one  
shelf after another became empty.*

*"Surely he's not going to buy  
everything?"*

*But the passing assistant just  
waved a dismissive hand.*







*The toys continued to roll and  
scuttle into the enormous sack.*

*They rattled and pinged  
and squeaked and whistled  
until the floor, the ceiling,  
the long, long counter and every shelf  
was cleared into the bulging sack  
as if by magic.*

*The girl looked on in dismay.*

*"Oh please," she said.*

*"Not that one . . ."*

*But it was too late . . .*





*The Other Customer was ready to leave.*

*He tied his great sack shut, slung it over his back  
and somehow squeezed through the narrow door,  
leaving just enough space for a loud*



*“Merry Christmas.”*





*As he hustled away, the girl  
thought she caught the wink of a kind and twinkly eye.  
Then the chief assistant finally turned to her and said*



*"I'm very sorry, Miss,  
but we have nothing left to sell."  
"Oh dear," said the girl, feeling her heart sink.  
She opened the door just enough, and slipped  
back out into December Lane.*



*Her feet stepped out onto sparkling new snow.  
She looked up into the darkness,  
now thick with swirling snowflakes, and smiled.  
How happy this first snow would make that  
special someone waiting for her at home.  
It wasn't a gift she had bought in a shop,  
but it was still something she could share.*

*Then out of the sky  
something tumbled toward her...*





*With a flurry and a gentle thud,  
a little breath of Christmas  
landed at her feet.*

*It was perfect!  
And it was **exactly** what she  
had been searching for!*

*A very special present indeed...*







*for someone very special.*



