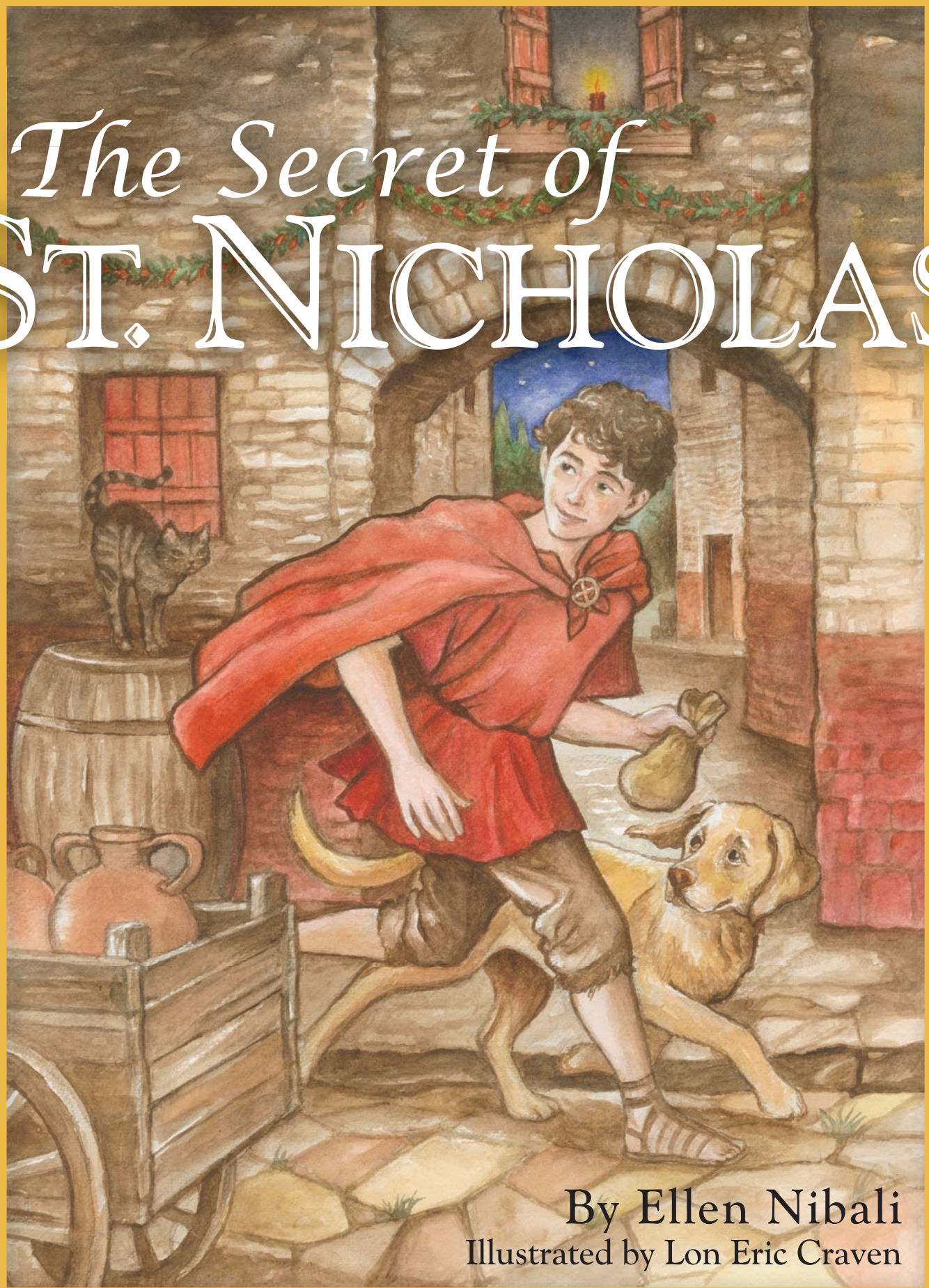


# *The Secret of* **ST. NICHOLAS**



By Ellen Nibali  
Illustrated by Lon Eric Craven

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Fairland Books  
West Friendship, MD



For Jennifer, Ben, and Vince  
— and their children

Note to parents and teachers:

St. Nicholas was bishop of Myra, Lycia (present day Turkey) in the fourth century. This story is inspired by an episode recorded by the biographer, Simeon Metaphrastes, in the tenth century, and by the message in the Gospel of Matthew 6:4 — Keep your deeds of mercy secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

The history of Santa Claus is many centuries long. It encompasses miracles and myths, cultures and politics, flights of fancy and commercial schemes, but it began with St. Nicholas. The author chose this episode because it is key to who St. Nicholas was. Of all the stories about St. Nicholas, scholars suspect this one is actually true.

For children's questions about Santa Claus, this story inspires with a real man and his heroic deeds. It also traces the connection between Jesus and Santa Claus traditions of today.

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(Summary: The orphan boy Nicholas tries to save three girls from slavery.)

[1. Christmas—Fiction. 2. Saints—Fiction. 3. Slavery—Fiction.  
4. St. Nicholas—Fiction. 5. Middle East—Fiction.]

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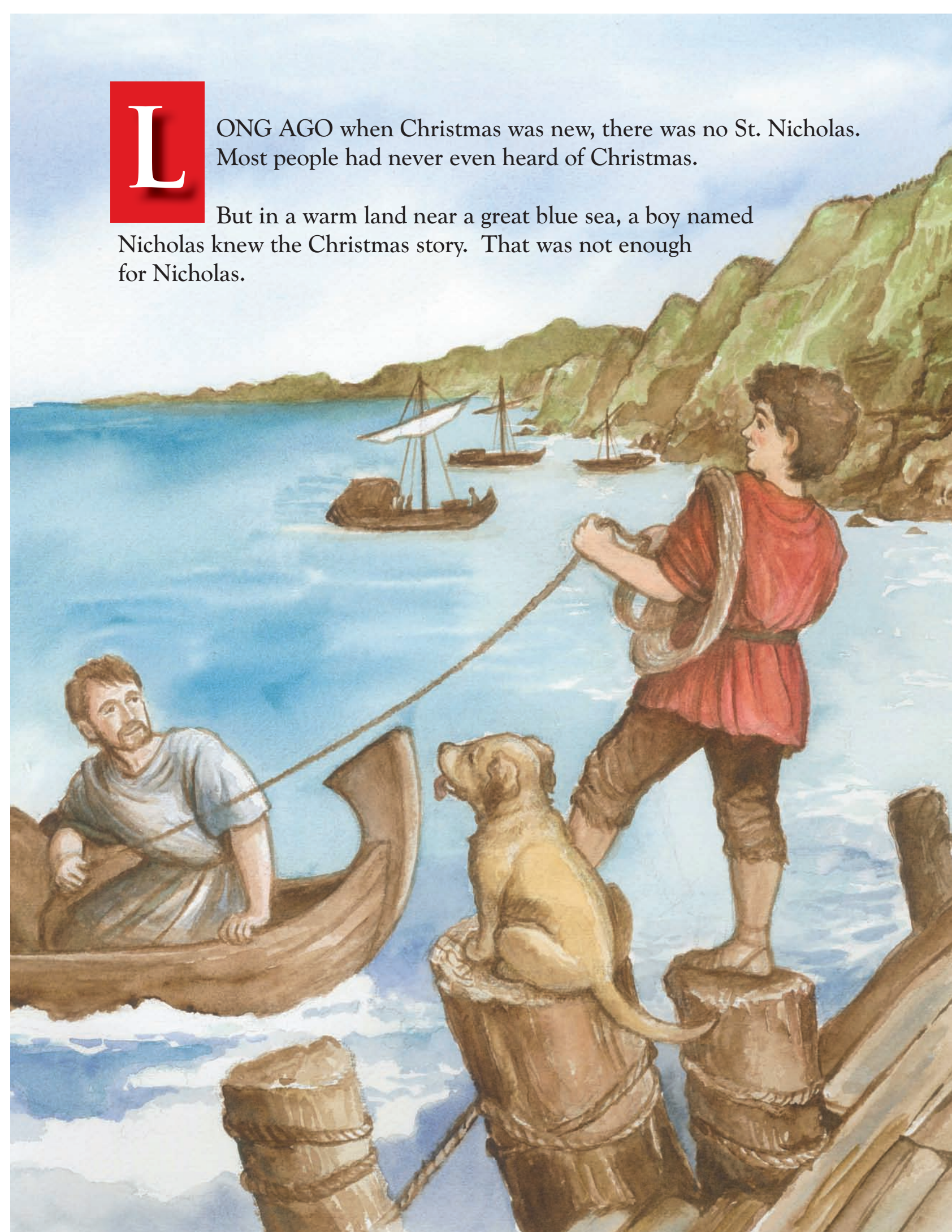
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**L**ONG AGO when Christmas was new, there was no St. Nicholas. Most people had never even heard of Christmas.

But in a warm land near a great blue sea, a boy named Nicholas knew the Christmas story. That was not enough for Nicholas.







“Tell me more about Christmas, the night of wonders,” Nicholas begged his father and mother.

They told how a star showed the way and angels appeared announcing the birth of Jesus. Shepherds hastened from their fields and wise men traveled from afar to worship the newborn king.

“But,” said his father, “instead of a royal palace, they found a stable full of animals. Instead of a rich prince on a throne, they found the holy babe sleeping in a manger.”

“In a feed trough?” Nicholas laughed. “God surprised everyone!” Nicholas decided that God liked surprises. When Jesus grew up, he never stopped surprising people. Jesus even said, “Do good deeds in secret.”





Now it happened that Nicholas' father and mother both died. They left Nicholas three bags of gold. Nicholas hid the gold for safekeeping.

Then out he went to earn his own way in the world.

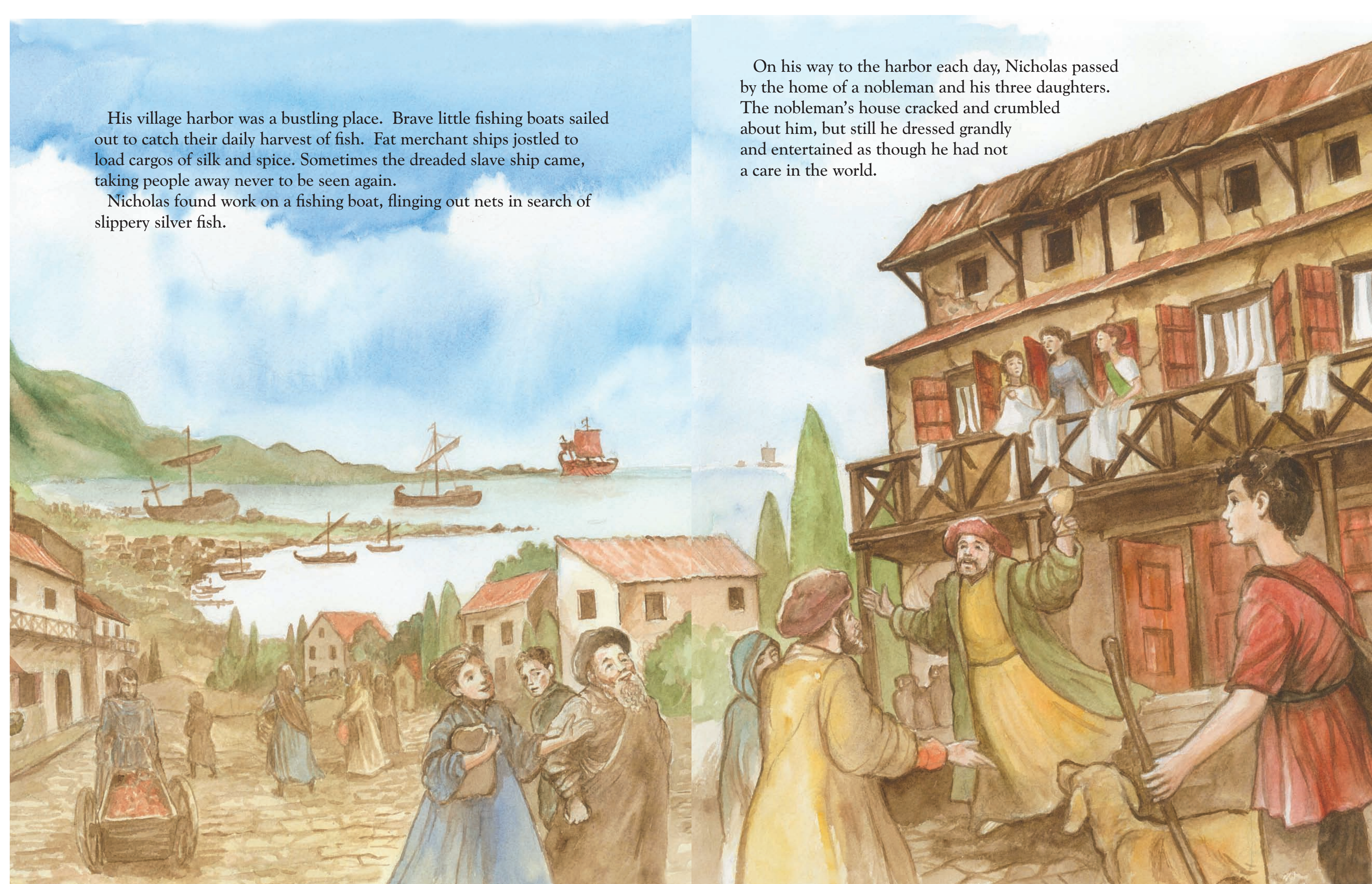




His village harbor was a bustling place. Brave little fishing boats sailed out to catch their daily harvest of fish. Fat merchant ships jostled to load cargos of silk and spice. Sometimes the dreaded slave ship came, taking people away never to be seen again.

Nicholas found work on a fishing boat, flinging out nets in search of slippery silver fish.

On his way to the harbor each day, Nicholas passed by the home of a nobleman and his three daughters. The nobleman's house cracked and crumbled about him, but still he dressed grandly and entertained as though he had not a care in the world.







One morning the nobleman's youngest daughter was hanging her wash to dry at the window. Big tears rolled down her cheeks and plopped onto her freshly washed stockings.

"Your stockings will never dry that way," said Nicholas.

"Oh, Nicholas," the daughter cried. "Our last gold coin is spent. Tomorrow Father takes my oldest sister to the slave ship to sell her for gold, or else we shall all starve."