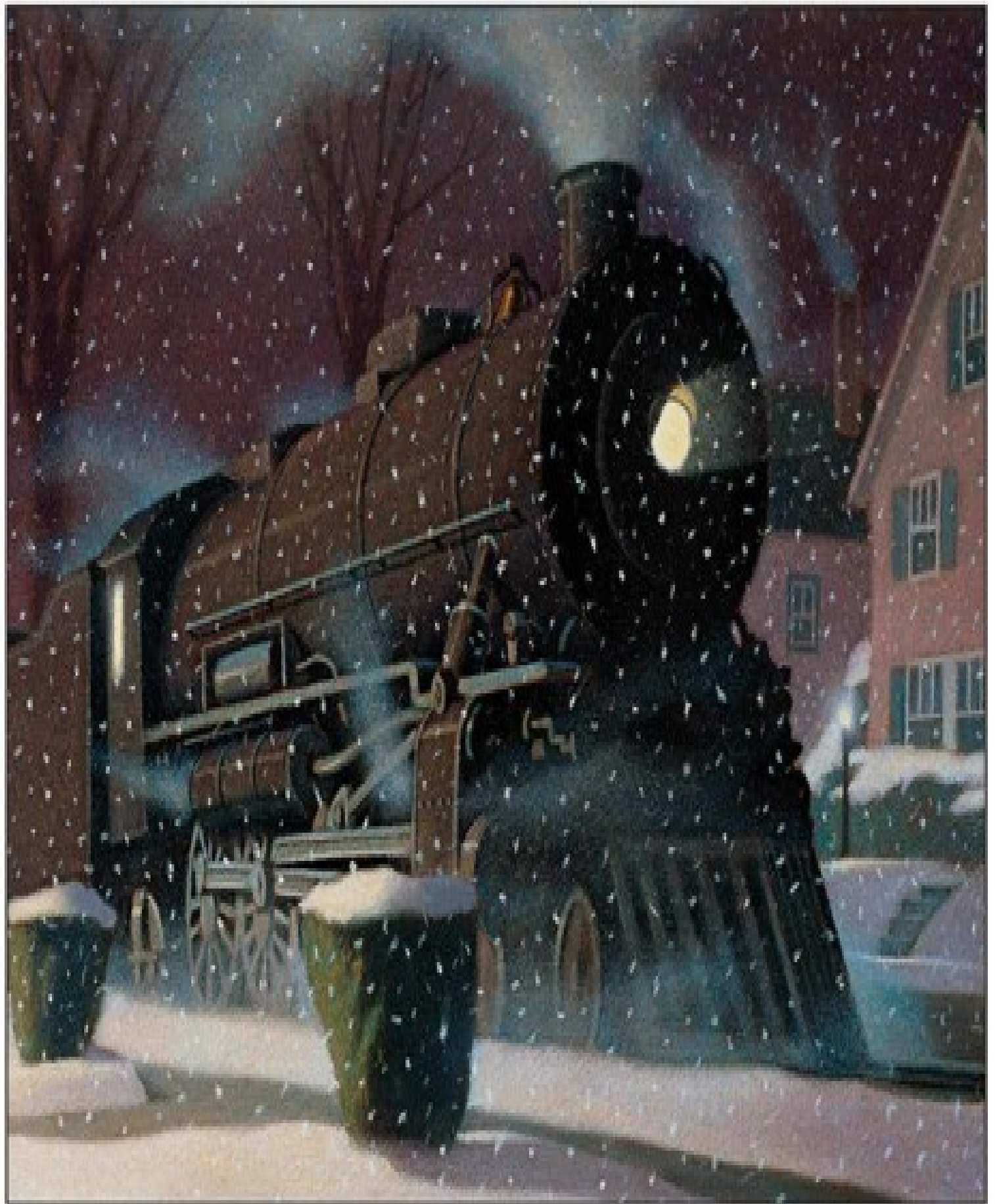
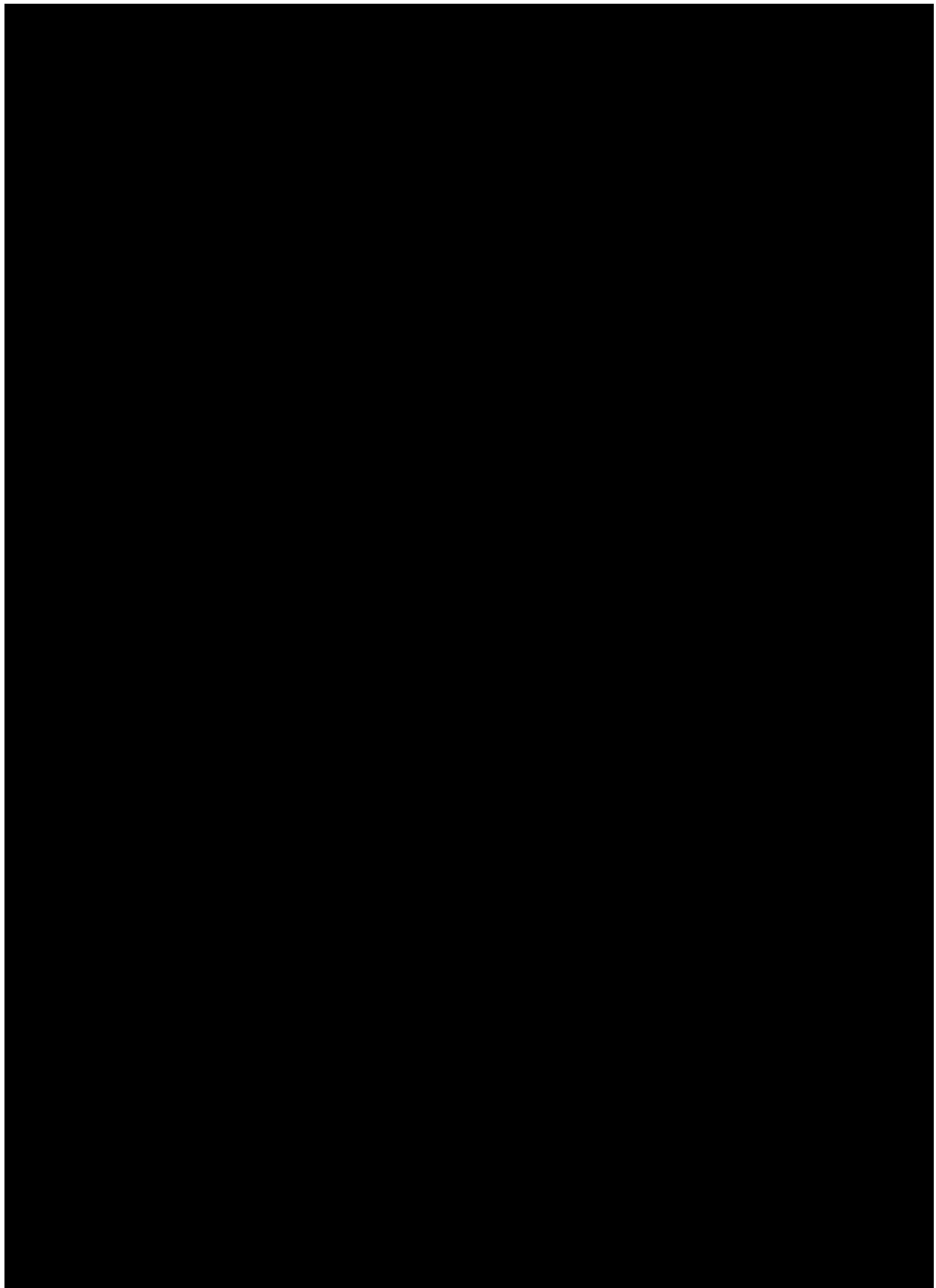


# THE POLAR EXPRESS





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
BOSTON

# THE POLAR EXPRESS

To Karen

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The Polar Express.

Summary: A magical train ride on Christmas Eve takes a boy to the North Pole to receive a special gift from Santa Claus.

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On Christmas Eve, many years ago, I lay quietly in my bed.  
I did not rustle the sheets. I breathed slowly and silently. I was listening for a sound — a sound a friend  
had told me I'd never hear — the ringing bells of Santa's sleigh.  
“There is no Santa,” my friend had insisted, but I knew he was wrong.  
Late that night I did hear sounds, though not of ringing bells. From outside came the sounds of hissing steam  
and squeaking metal. I looked through my window and saw a train standing perfectly still in front of my house.



It was wrapped in an apron of steam. Snowflakes fell lightly around it. A conductor stood at the open door of one of the cars.  
He took  
a large pocket watch from his vest, then looked up at my window. I put on my slippers and robe. I tiptoed downstairs  
the door.

“All aboard,” the conductor cried out. I ran up to him.

“Well,” he said, “are you coming?”

“Where?” I asked.

“Why, to the North Pole of course,” was his answer. “This is the Polar Express.” I took his outstretched hand and hopped  
aboard.



The train was filled with other children, all in their pajamas and nightgowns.  
We sang Christmas carols and ate candies with nougat centers as white as snow.  
We drank hot cocoa as thick and rich as melted chocolate bars.  
Outside, the lights of towns and villages flickered in the distance  
as the Polar Express raced northward.



Soon there were no more lights to be seen.  
We traveled through cold, dark forests,  
where lean wolves roamed and white-tailed rabbits hid from our train  
as it thundered through the quiet wilderness.



We climbed mountains so high it seemed as if we would scrape the moon.  
But the Polar Express never slowed down.  
Faster and faster we ran along,  
rolling over peaks and through valleys like a car on a roller coaster.



The mountains turned into hills, the hills to snow-covered plains.  
We crossed a barren desert of ice — the Great Polar Ice Cap. Lights appeared in the distance.  
They looked like the lights of a strange ocean liner sailing on a frozen sea.  
“There,” said the conductor, “is the North Pole.”