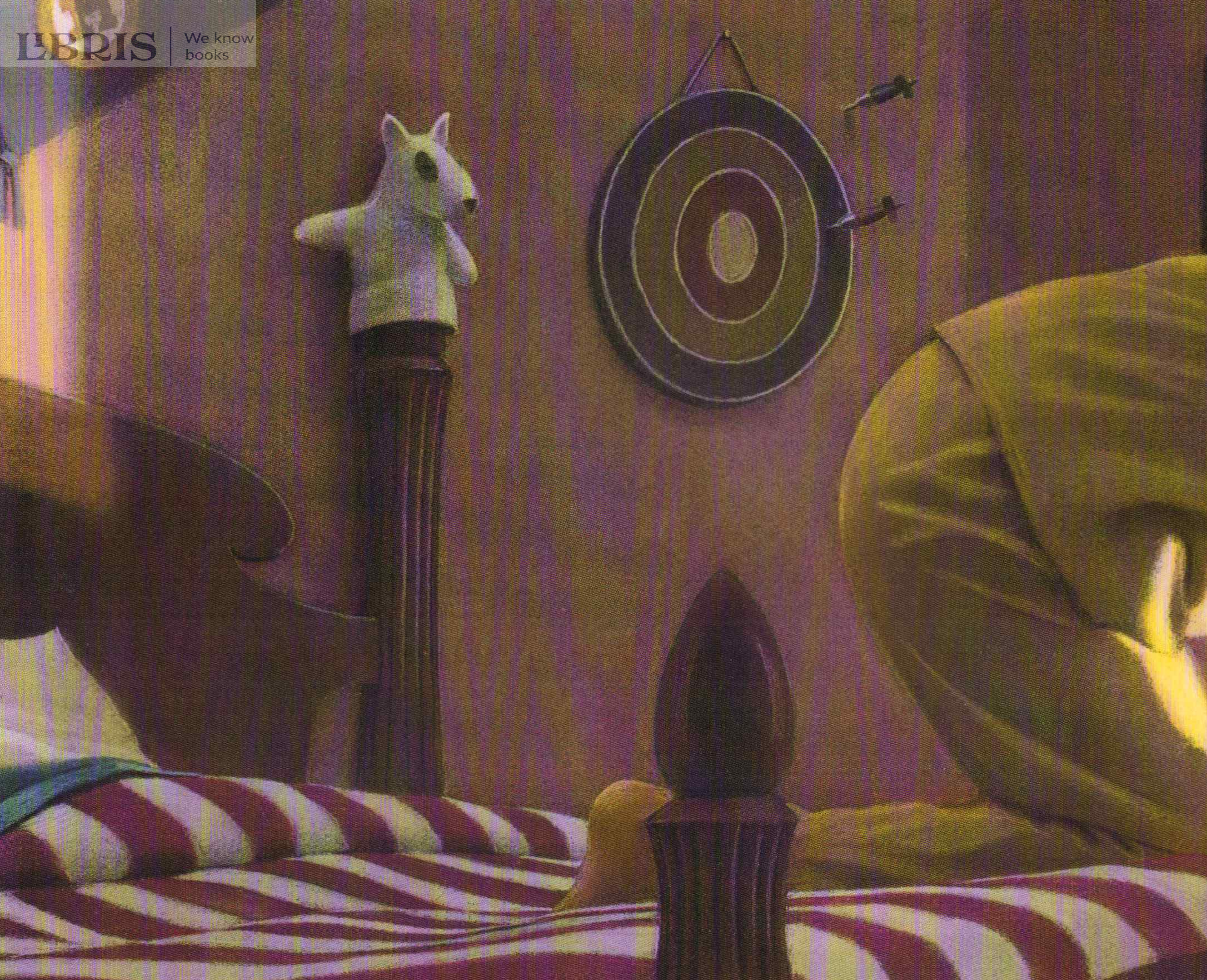


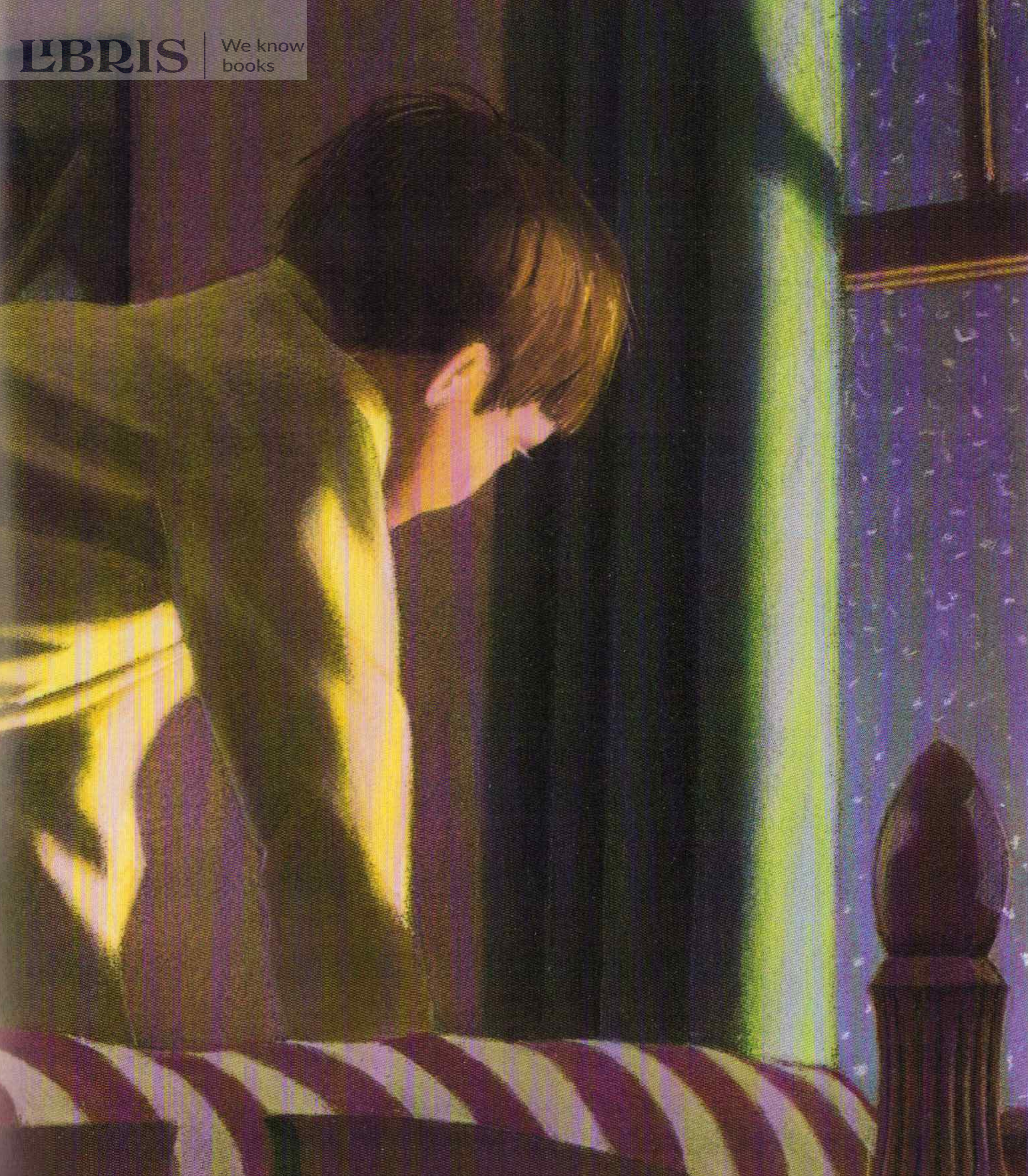
THE POLAR EXPRESS

Written and Illustrated by
CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG



ANDERSEN PRESS





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 and out 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 he pulled me aboard.





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