

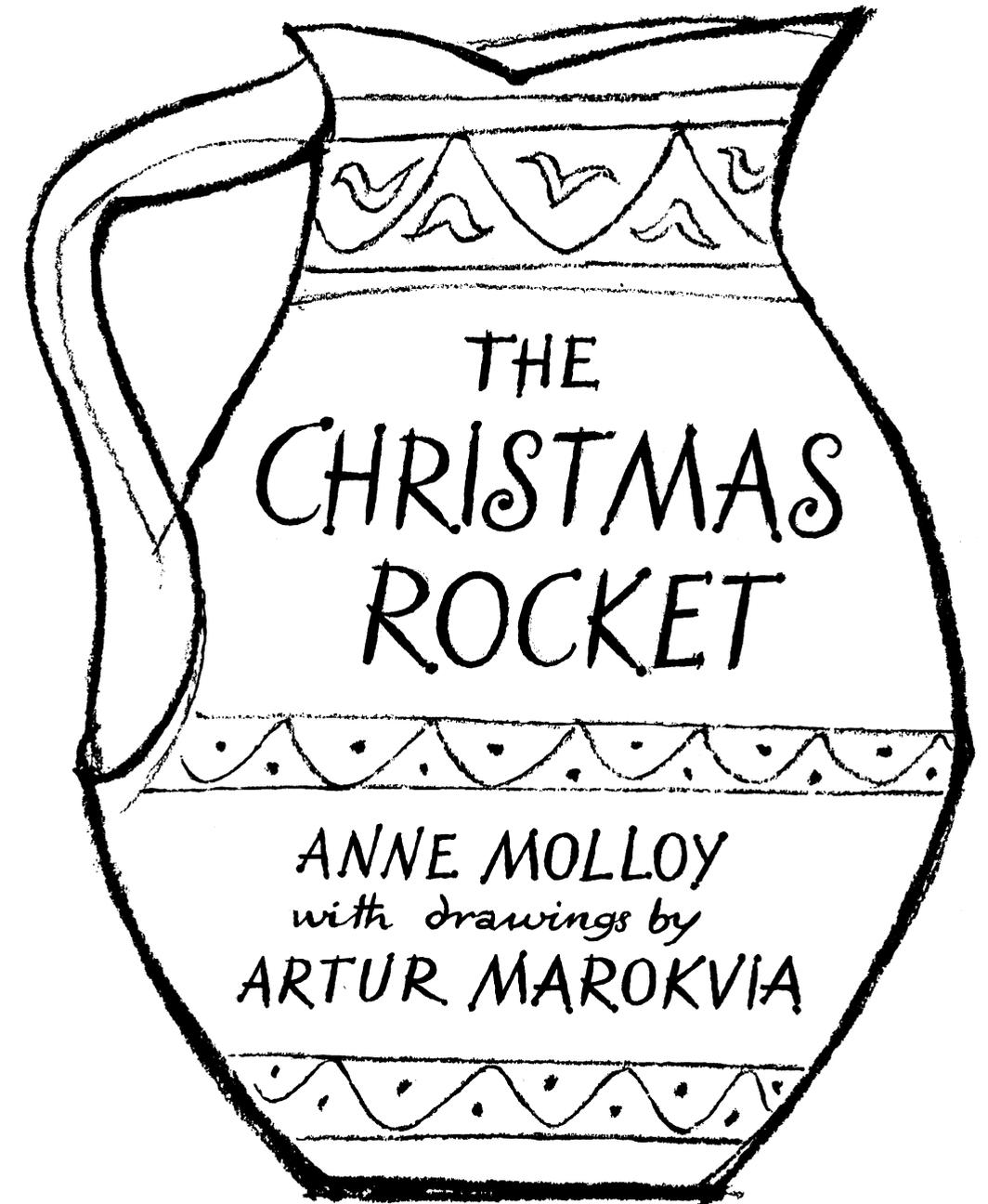
THE CHRISTMAS  
ROCKET

ANNE MOLLOY



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ANNE MOLLOY  
*with drawings by*  
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They took turns choosing.

There were three of them in the old pottery workshop, Dino, his father, and his grandfather. The two men were potters and someday Dino would be a potter, too. Once upon a time both the men had looked as Dino did now. Like him, they had been brown-eyed and dark-haired, thin and wiry. Now the grandfather was as shriveled as an old pea with a knitted cap upon his bald head. Papa's back was stooped from work.





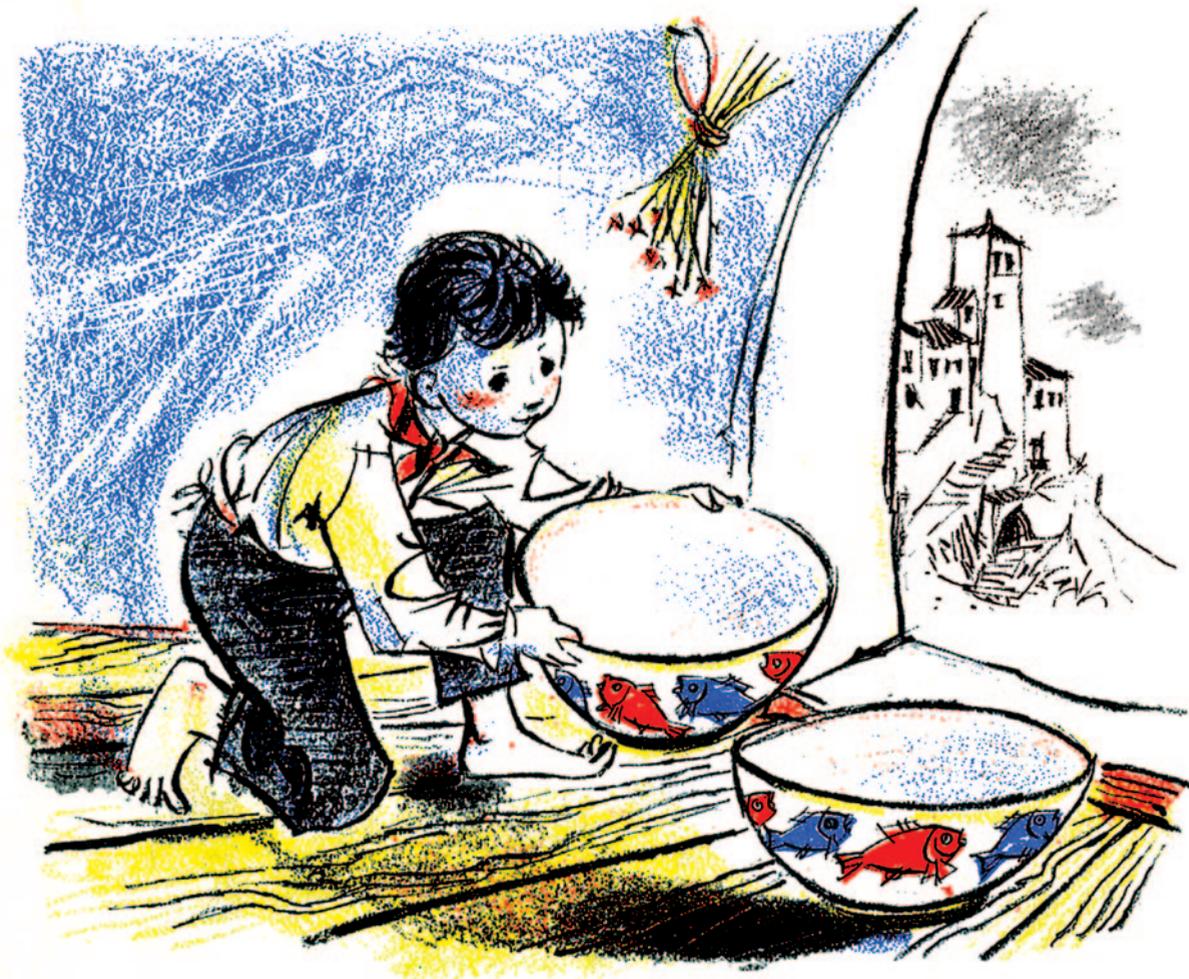
Today they were busy choosing the finest dishes from among the piles on the earthen floor. First Dino chose one, and then Papa. Sometimes the old grandfather left the wheel where he was shaping pots and picked one out, too.

Their choices were very important. Tomorrow was the day before Christmas. Dino and Papa were to carry their pots and plates, their cups and pitchers down the mountainside to sell them in the town. They must pick out dishes so beautiful that they would surely sell. And they would, Dino was sure. Papa was the finest pottery painter in all of Italy. Dino had heard that many times in his little village.

The boy felt very important as he helped. This would be his first trip with Papa. The old grandfather had always gone before but now his legs were good only for turning the potter's wheel. They could no longer carry him so far down the mountain and back again.

Until last year their old donkey, Maria-Luisa, had carried their wares in great baskets hung on her sleek sides. But she had died and there had been no money to buy another donkey. After that Papa and the old grandfather had to carry the pottery in baskets on their own backs. Tomorrow Dino would take the grandfather's place.





Dino picked up a bowl. He turned it slowly between his hands in the same direction as the red and blue painted fish were swimming around its sides. “This bowl,” he said, “this bowl will surely sell tomorrow. You *are* a good artist, Papa. And when we sell it, then surely we can buy some meat for our Christmas dinner. We’ve always had meat for dinner at Christmas.”

“Don’t depend on it this year,” Papa said. “Let me see. This pitcher now, we’ll take this. It is a good stout one and it pours well.”

“And if I do say so, I painted the fruit on it better than usual. Yes, we ought to charge a good price for it. We might even get a pair of shoes for you, Dino. Mama has been feeling sad all day. ‘Here is our son Dino,’ she keeps saying, ‘He is a great boy, almost ten, and chosen to carry a candle in our church procession on Christmas Eve. He will be the only one in it without shoes. All the others, they will make a good sound with their leather shoes and Dino won’t even make the horrid clump of those cheap wooden zoccoli.’”

“Ho, it will be quite dark near my feet,” said Dino. “I will hold my candle high. No one will see that *my* feet are the silent ones.”





He was searching for the platter that was his next choice. It was a big one, large enough for Papa's painting of the family working at their grape harvest. They were all there on the platter, even poor old Maria-Luisa, the donkey.

"Here, put this one in," he said when he found it. "I like it although you did paint me on it looking too silly. Somebody rich could buy this platter and fill it with food for the Christmas Birthday. Perhaps if they did buy it I could get one rocket to shoot off outside the church at midnight on Christmas Eve. My friend Mario has already bought three rockets."

He laid down the platter on the straw beside the other chosen dishes.



**This beautiful Christmas story, set in Italy during the 1950s, is about a potter's son who goes down the mountain with his father shortly before Christmas to sell pots, vases, and platters. They have high hopes of bringing home enough money for a nice Christmas dinner, perhaps enough for a pair of real shoes for Dino, and even a rocket for him to set off with the other boys on Christmas Eve.**

**The trip does not turn out as planned, it goes from bad to worse until Dino starts home in tears. As he trudges up the mountainside, something happens. Something which lights up Dino's heart and gives us a new view of the Christmas story.**

*Purple House Press*



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