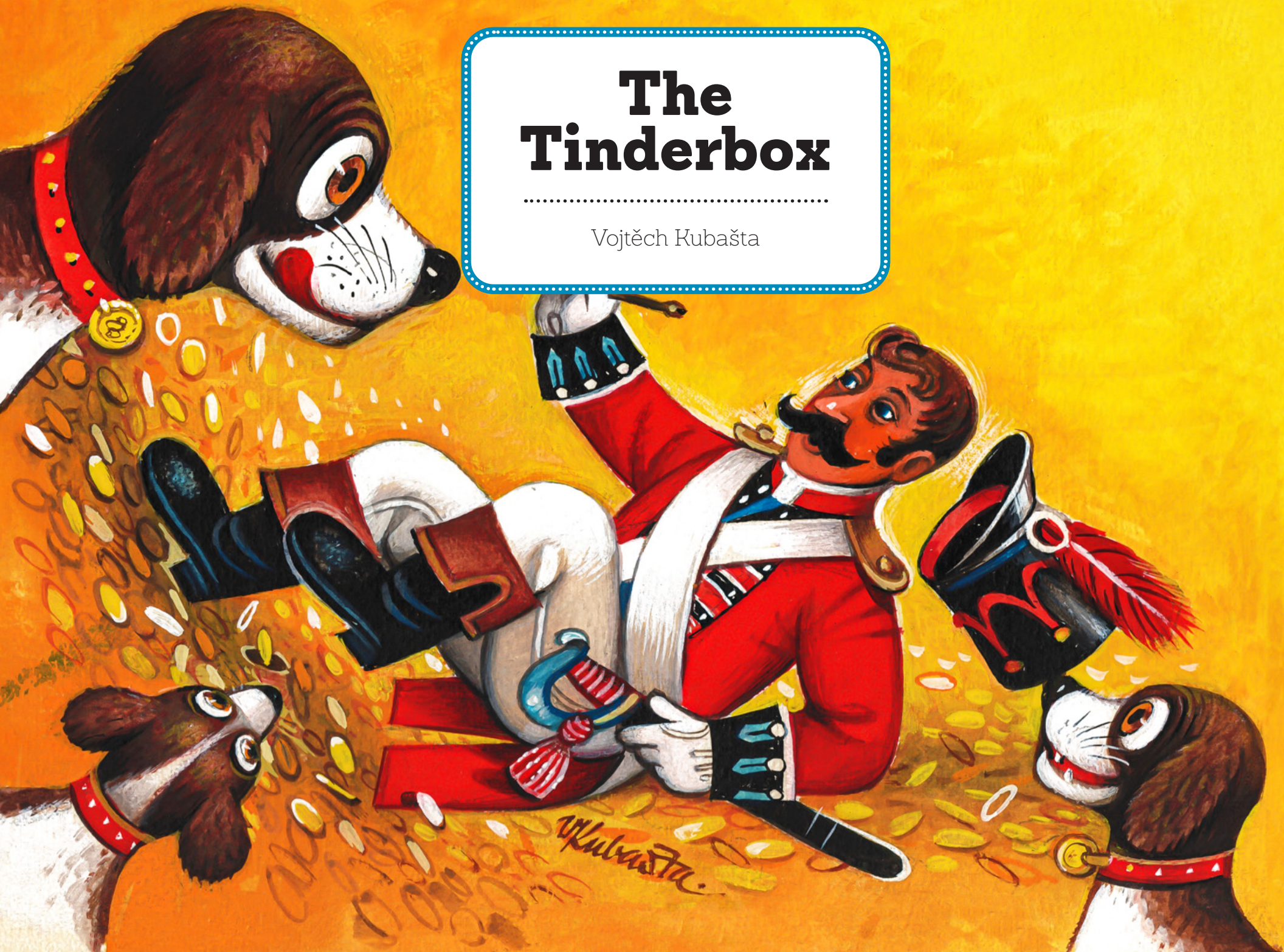


The Tinderbox

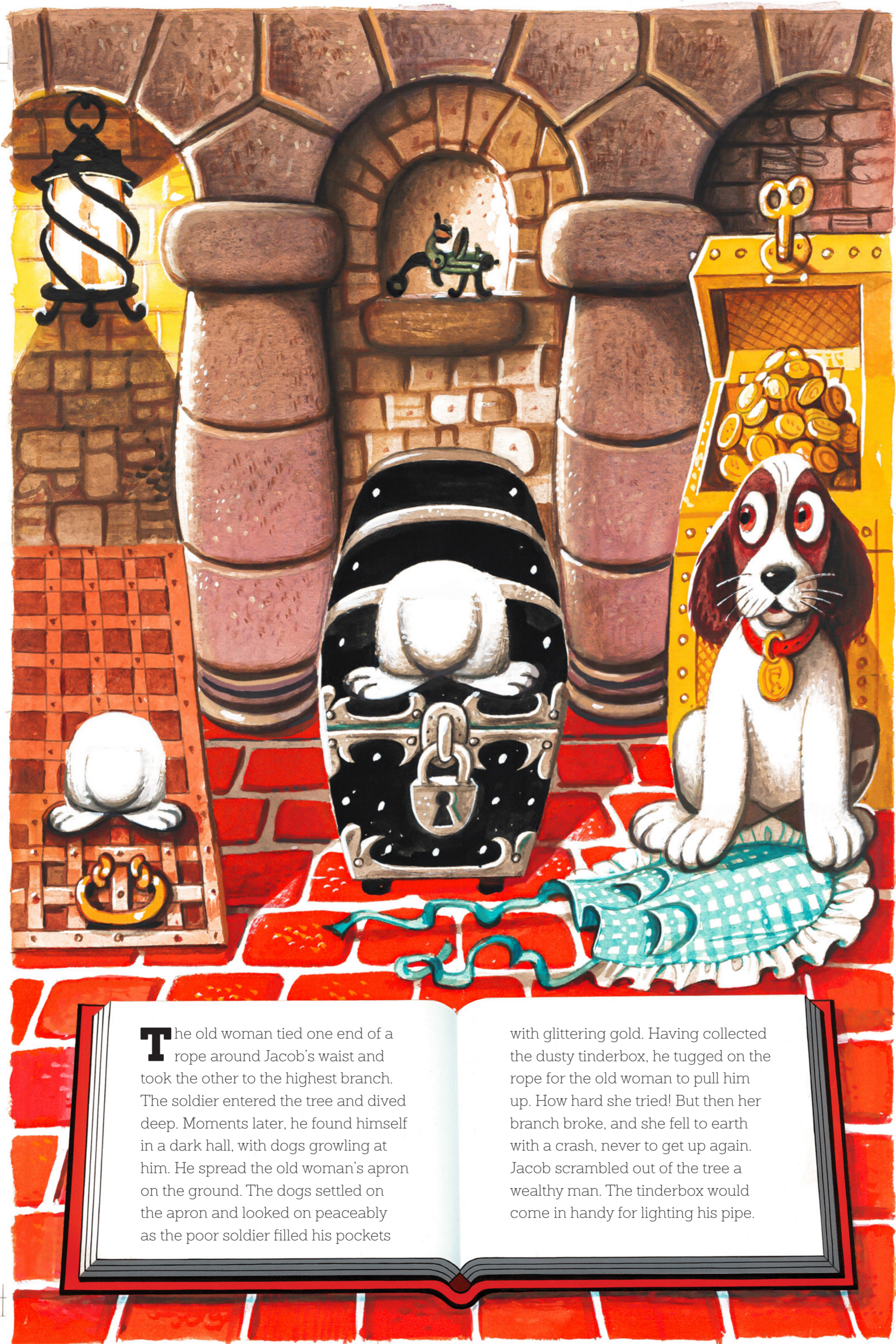
Vojtěch Kubašta





At war's end the soldiers scattered. Some returned to homes. Others, like Jacob, wandered aimlessly. He came to a mighty oak, wishing to rest in its shade. No sooner had his head sunk to his chest than a croaking voice spoke the words: "Help me, young man, and I will rid you of your poverty." Jacob looked up into the branches at a toothless old woman with a strange

glint in her eyes. What should he do? "Step into the oak's hollow and descend to its bottom. In a great hall, you will find three chests brimful of gold coins, each guarded by a dog. You shall have my apron. The dogs will sit on it and do you no harm. Take as many coins as you can. Bring me only an old tinderbox I left there three hundred years ago."



The old woman tied one end of a rope around Jacob's waist and took the other to the highest branch. The soldier entered the tree and dived deep. Moments later, he found himself in a dark hall, with dogs growling at him. He spread the old woman's apron on the ground. The dogs settled on the apron and looked on peaceably as the poor soldier filled his pockets

with glittering gold. Having collected the dusty tinderbox, he tugged on the rope for the old woman to pull him up. How hard she tried! But then her branch broke, and she fell to earth with a crash, never to get up again. Jacob scrambled out of the tree a wealthy man. The tinderbox would come in handy for lighting his pipe.



Jacob arrived in the royal city, where he rented the best quarters and lived like a lord. He feasted on crispy roasts and delicious pies, and he slept in a featherbed. An old fortune-teller prophesied that a princess who lived nearby would marry a handsome soldier. "Maybe she means me," thought Jacob, although he soon put the prophecy out of his mind. Before long, however, he had

spent his last gold coin and was poor again. "At least I have my pipe," he told himself, as he reached for the tinderbox. No sooner had a spark flown from the box than a dog from the oak appeared before him. "What does my master command?" the dog barked. "Bring me money," said Jacob with delight. The dog brought him a bag filled with ducats.

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Fickle Fortune is sometimes on our side, sometimes not, as a soldier called Jacob knows well. A chance meeting with a witch makes him fabulously rich. Later, when all that remains of his wealth is an old tinderbox, he discovers this to be magic, and so he becomes rich again. Then his love for a princess brings him before the executioner. Will this fairy tale by Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen end well? Read this book with original pop-up illustrations by celebrated artist Vojtěch Kubásta to find out!

The Tinderbox

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TALES