

On the Streets of
PARIS
A poetic tour of the city



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Clementine Beau
Seula Y

COVER
NOT FINAL



ENDPAPERS

Imprint

Title

About the Author/ illustrator

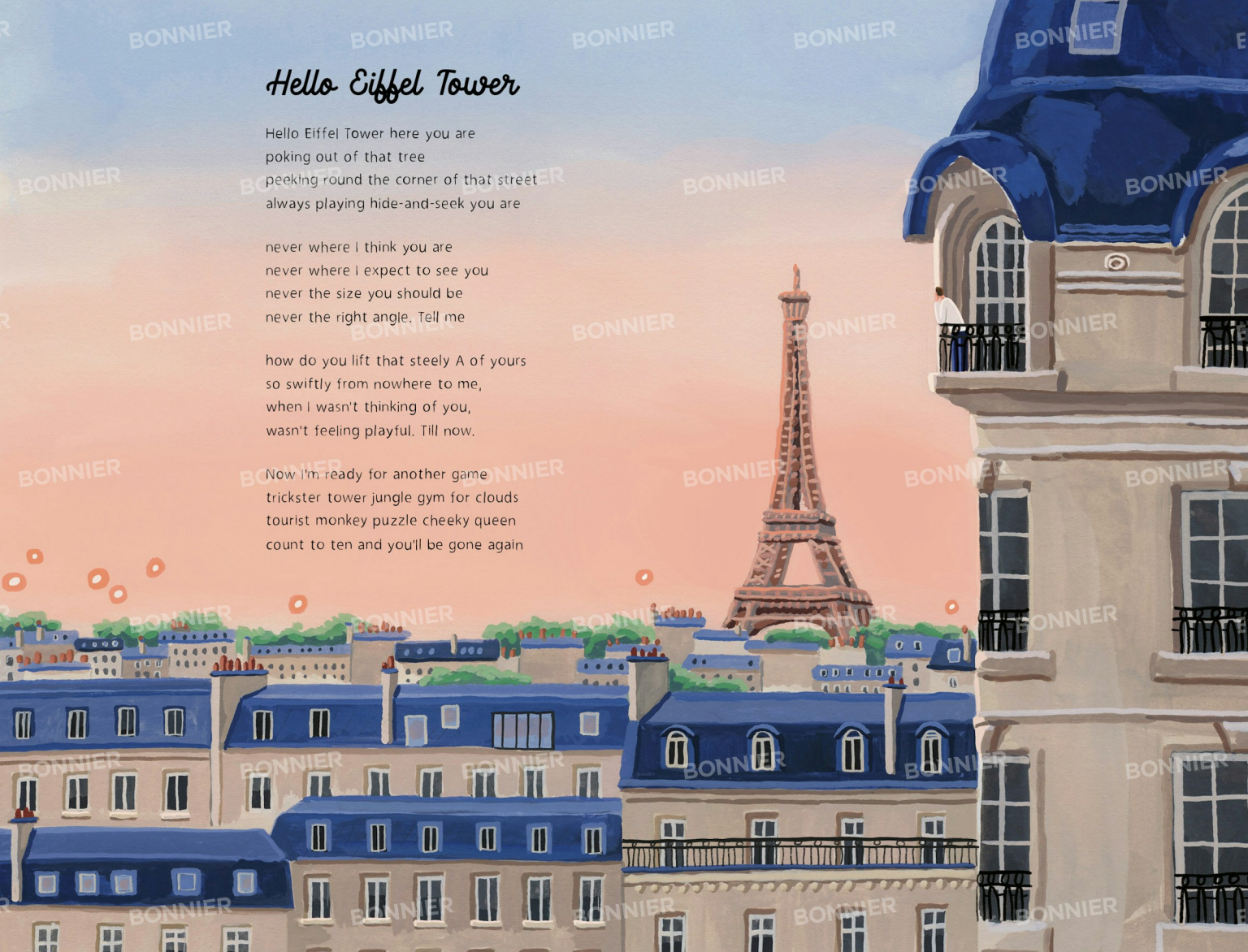
Hello Eiffel Tower

Hello Eiffel Tower here you are
peeking out of that tree
peeking round the corner of that street
always playing hide-and-seek you are

never where I think you are
never where I expect to see you
never the size you should be
never the right angle. Tell me

how do you lift that steely A of yours
so swiftly from nowhere to me,
when I wasn't thinking of you,
wasn't feeling playful. Till now.

Now I'm ready for another game
trickster tower jungle gym for clouds
tourist monkey puzzle cheeky queen
count to ten and you'll be gone again





Baguette: The Rules

If you buy the baguette
the rule is you get
to eat just a bit
just the tip
on the way home.

The rule is the baguette
will never make it home
with its head still on.
It would be wrong
very wrong.

The rule is you walk
out of the bakery
and whatever sticks out
of the warm paper sleeve
is yours to eat.

so break it,
and eat it,
it's yours,
you've earned it.

Gare du Nord

Thrumming with trains announcements whistles beeping
throng of tourists travellers loiterers barterers
public-piano players luggage luggers
speaking tongues fast among than the softly slowing trains.
Most people leave the station quick. Just transit.

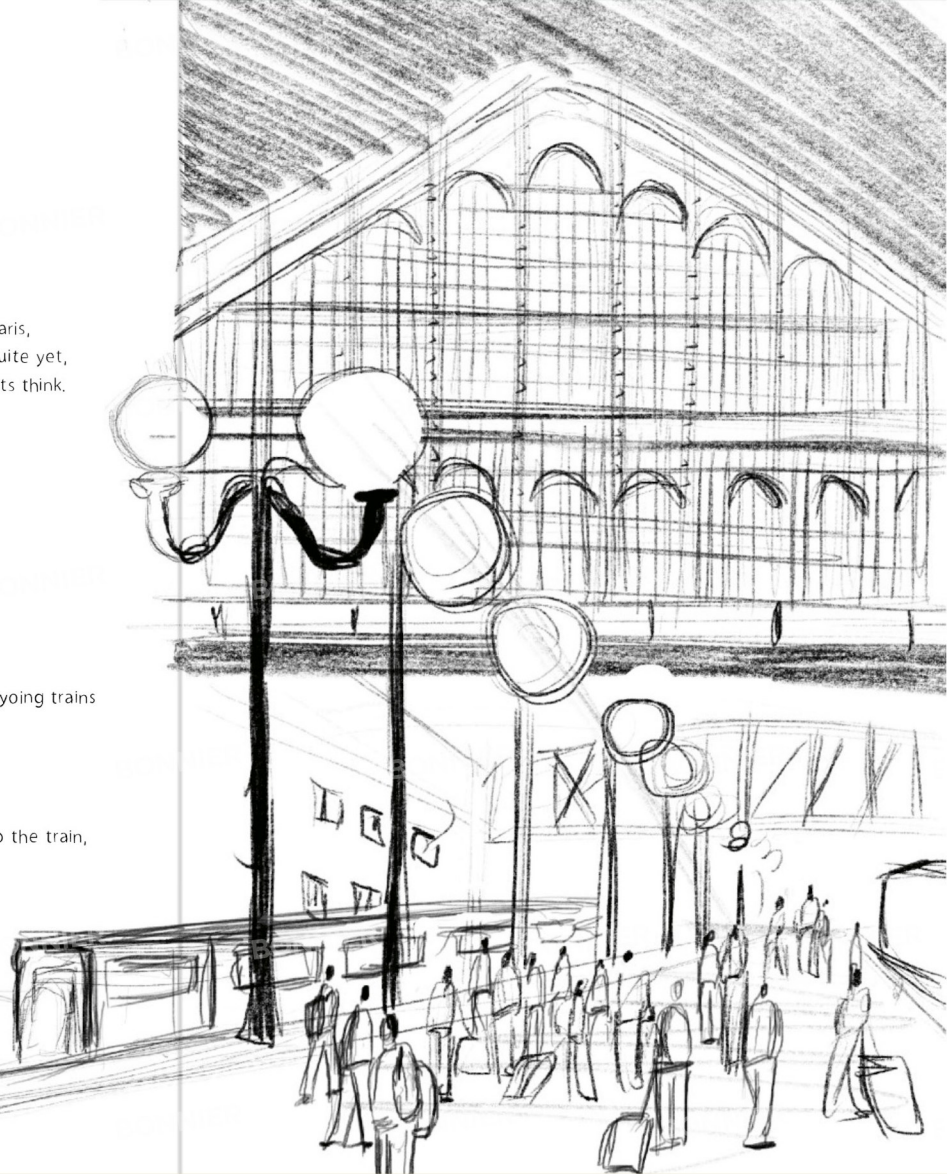
Not Paris,
not quite yet,
tourists think.

But they are wrong - it *is*
Paris, not the Paris of bérets and baguettes,
but the Paris that brings to its own body,
through tentacles of railway lines,
its life: the people from outside its walls,
people who live in cities not called Paris.
Your trip may well start here, may well end here,
so remember: what welcomed you
was not stacks of choux in bakers' windows.
What welcomed you was a city neither here nor there,
not quite sure what to do with its own history, that the yo-yoing trains
bring in and out each day so the city run can run

Goodbye, you are leaving, it is already time,
remember the screeching brakes, the laughter, the twang
of the public-piano player. Gare du Nord, as you walked onto the train,
the last word

that you heard

was probably not French.





Café life

Today I'm feeling extremely Parisian.
So I'd better show myself to the tourists.
I shall wear my chic things. And I shall take a book.
And I shall wear my nonchalant look.
I shall sip a small coffee at a café nearby,
en terrasse, with the wind in my face,
And I'll act like I'm part of the landscape.

Every detail must be right. The pigeons must coo.
The waiter must be rude and my cheeks must be rouged,
and I'll stare at the book, and I'll stare at the sky,
and sometimes I'll sigh,
and I won't notice you taking photos of me
or talking about me
or thinking about me
and I'll live on forever in your stories of Paris,
spiky with upspeak,
we saw this woman, she was like so chic?
she had like a book?
and a nonchalant look?
and she was sipping coffee?
at a café nearby?
Ah ! those Parisians, *un café, un livre,*
la joie de vivre.

It's tiring. It's a job. It's a duty. It's a mission,
that whole thing of being, sometimes, a Parisian.

Bouquinistes

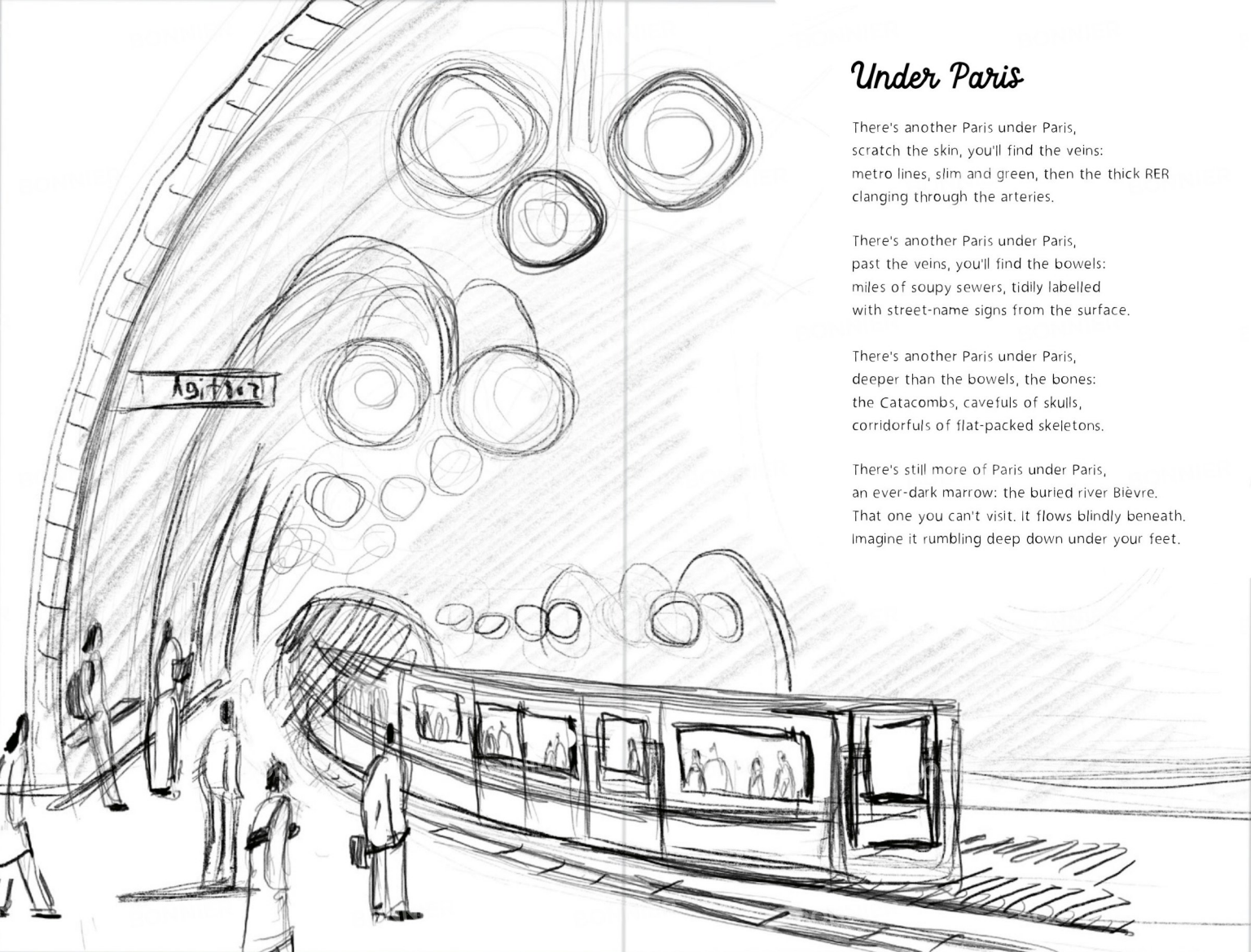
A bottle-green tortoise, treasure chest
kept by a windswept, street-sure bookseller,
propped against the parapet along the Seine;
its shell pops open at the first rays of sun.

It's called a bouquiniste cos there are books in it.
(Unofficial hypothesis. Don't quote me on it)
And also prints, and Paris kit, and trinkets. It's a bit like magic
how it all fits in that box. There must be a trick.

My favourite thing there are the very old books
wrapped in squeaky plastic, the price in felt-tip on it, I find it,
somehow, touching, that care,
the care it took to wrap those books.

In fact the only good reason
ever to write a book
is that maybe one day it will end up at a bouquiniste.
Wrapped in plastic, with the price in felt-tip on it.





Under Paris

There's another Paris under Paris,
scratch the skin, you'll find the veins:
metro lines, slim and green, then the thick RER
clanging through the arteries.

There's another Paris under Paris,
past the veins, you'll find the bowels:
miles of soupy sewers, tidily labelled
with street-name signs from the surface.

There's another Paris under Paris,
deeper than the bowels, the bones:
the Catacombs, cavefuls of skulls,
corridorfuls of flat-packed skeletons.

There's still more of Paris under Paris,
an ever-dark marrow: the buried river Bièvre.
That one you can't visit. It flows blindly beneath.
Imagine it rumbling deep down under your feet.



Wallace fountains

Under the heavy lid of a hot summer day,
four iron ladies wait. You'll find them easily.
They are everywhere. Almost as slender
as the strip of water that glistens in their midst.
Stand on tiptoe. They are taller than you. But thirst,
and their four gracious smiles, will help.
Lean in. Grab on to their leaf-green,
ice-cold, pleasantly pleated dresses.
Open your mouth. It will be at an awkward angle.
Water will trip and trickle everywhere.
You'll have to wipe your chin onto your shirt, it will look wet,
but your shirt will already bear the wet n-dash
of their wet pedestal against your bellyful
of water. That water tastes like it was given you by somewhere else -
not the rusty pipes that run under Paris,
but the mountains, maybe. This water, I want to believe,
comes from glaciers directly.
Thank the ladies. Now your thirst is slaked,
your shirt is soaked, you are
ready to face the sun again.



Unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe

Lying there for us all, he stands for them all,
and he stands for the lies that were told
when they took all the boys from their toys,
from their homes, boys from here, boys from there,
and the boys from abroad in the sun-splattered lands,
just a quick war, they said, and they buried them fast,
in the earth of the north
where the grass
can't grow back.

All the cars spin and spin round his small sturdy flame,
his home is called Triumph, we will not know his name,
and I pass by his home with my own little boys,
who don't know, who don't care, and I think of those times
when they took all those boys from their toys, from their homes,
and they said it'd be fast. And I squeeze the small fists
of my sons in my hands. *You're hurting me mummy.*
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, that's what staring at Triumph

does to you sometimes.

He could be anyone,
he could be my grandfather, he could be my son,
the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe,
where the heart of the city pumps its cars round and round.

June 21st, Music Day

It's the shortest night of the year,

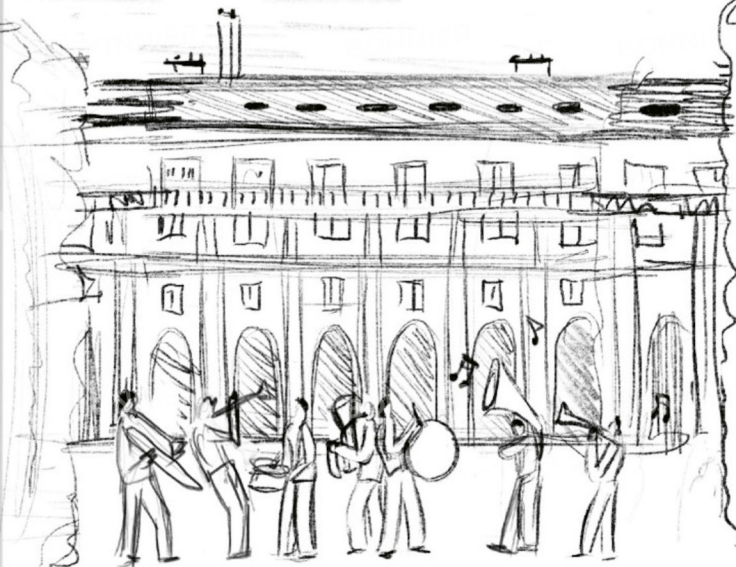
it's the longest night of the year:

June 21st, Music Day.

Anyone can come out and play music that night,
right there, on the street.

A recent tradition. Started with 1980s kids scratching
guitars, watching people around begin to dance
in the bright evening sun till the end of the night, and beyond,
well into June 22nd.

As children we love it. Walking out with parents later than is allowed.
Parents softer than usual, their gazes vague, their bodies swaying,
and the night is so long when the sun is still out, with you, playing.



As teenagers we love it. Parents are out with the younger siblings.
And we, in the warm sunlight of evening, might be doing anything,
like kissing, maybe, and eating kebabs
to the drum of a reggae band between four blocks.

As adults we love it. It is oddly melancholy,
there is something in it that still smells like 1980s spirit,
and the world may well be ending for real, this time,
but there's someone there playing,
all that matters is sound, is dance, is beat,
and listening to the midnight sun on the concrete.

Louvre

I love this anecdote from long ago,
a real story, and one to make you... reflect.
Now shuffle yourself back to early last century.
Someone had decided that the Mona Lisa
was in need of better protection
so the Musée du Louvre had it covered with glass.

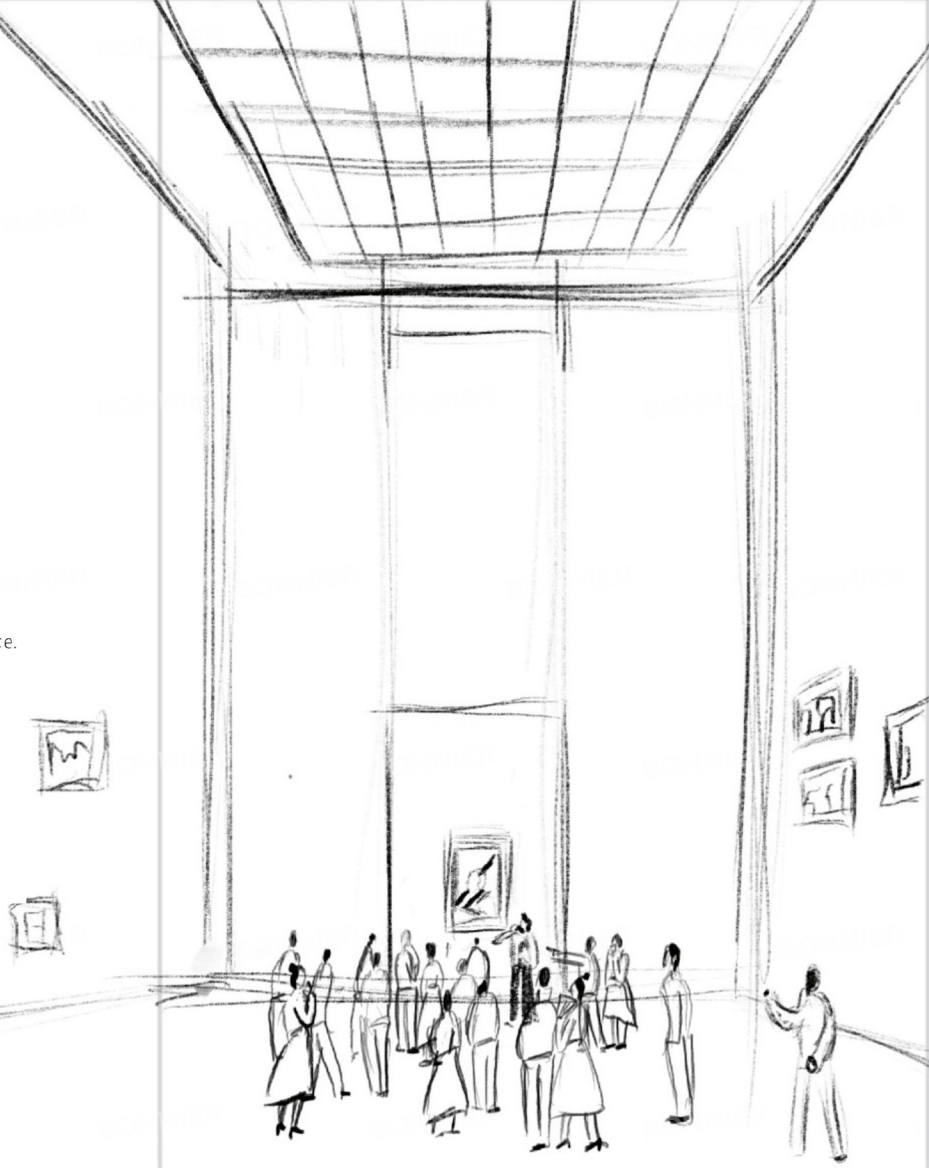
Good glass.

Strong glass.

Reflective glass.

So people looked at her and only saw themselves,
which they really didn't need a museum for.
One day, a guy called Roland Dorgelès,
who wins my heart as French history's biggest troll
armed with a razor blade, a brush, and foam,
and a sense of humour, walked into the museum,
planted himself in front of the Mona Lisa
and started shaving his moustache, very appreciative
of such a nicely-framed mirror in such a lovely public space.
Apparently the museum security
didn't find it funny.
But I do!

And I think of you, Roland Dorgelès,
when I struggle to spot the Mona Lisa
through the forest of handheld screens
reflecting people's faces alongside it.



Montparnasse cemetery

I used to do some of my homework there,
on a bench not too far from where Baudelaire is buried,
the great poet,

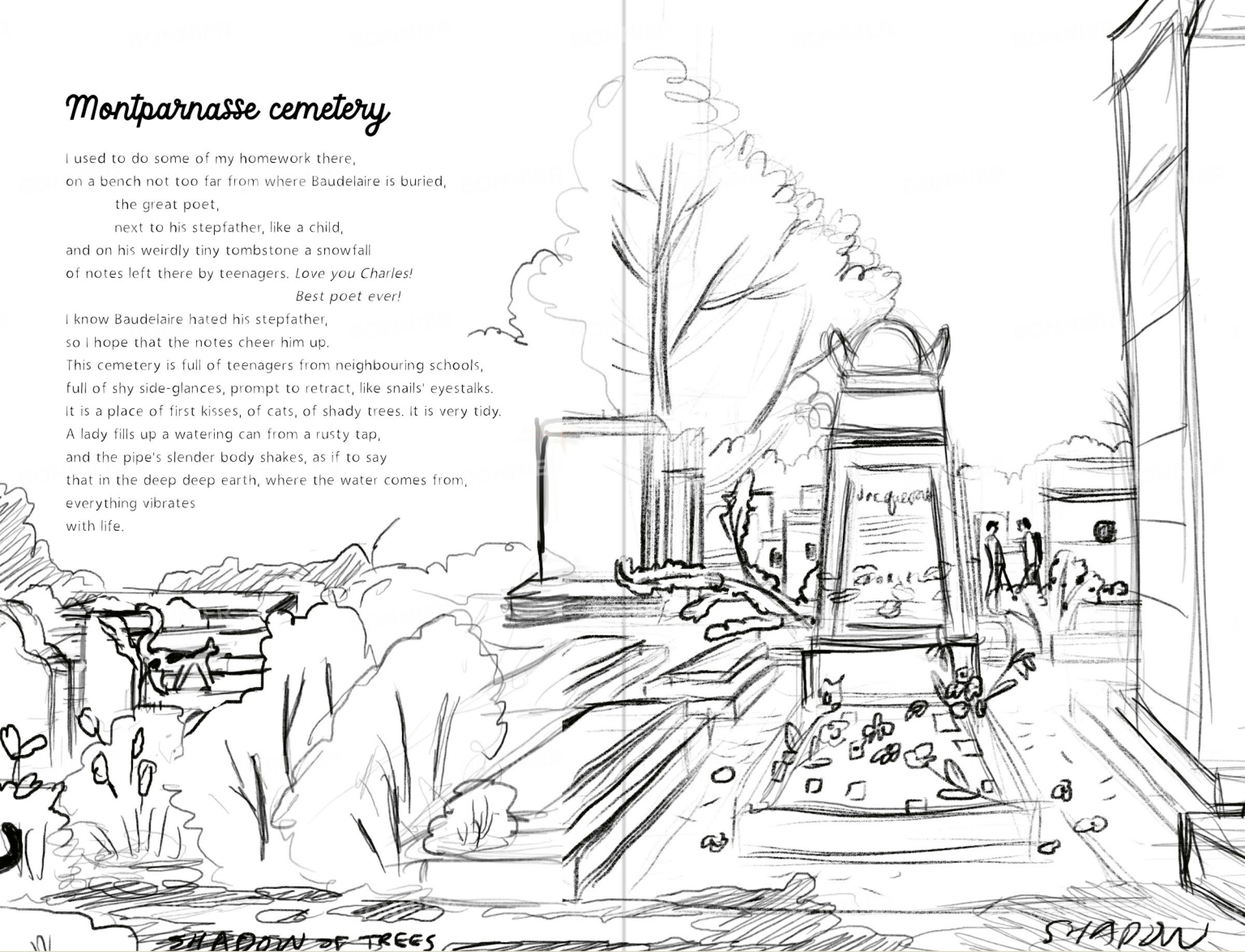
next to his stepfather, like a child,
and on his weirdly tiny tombstone a snowfall
of notes left there by teenagers. *Love you Charles!*

Best poet ever!

I know Baudelaire hated his stepfather,
so I hope that the notes cheer him up.

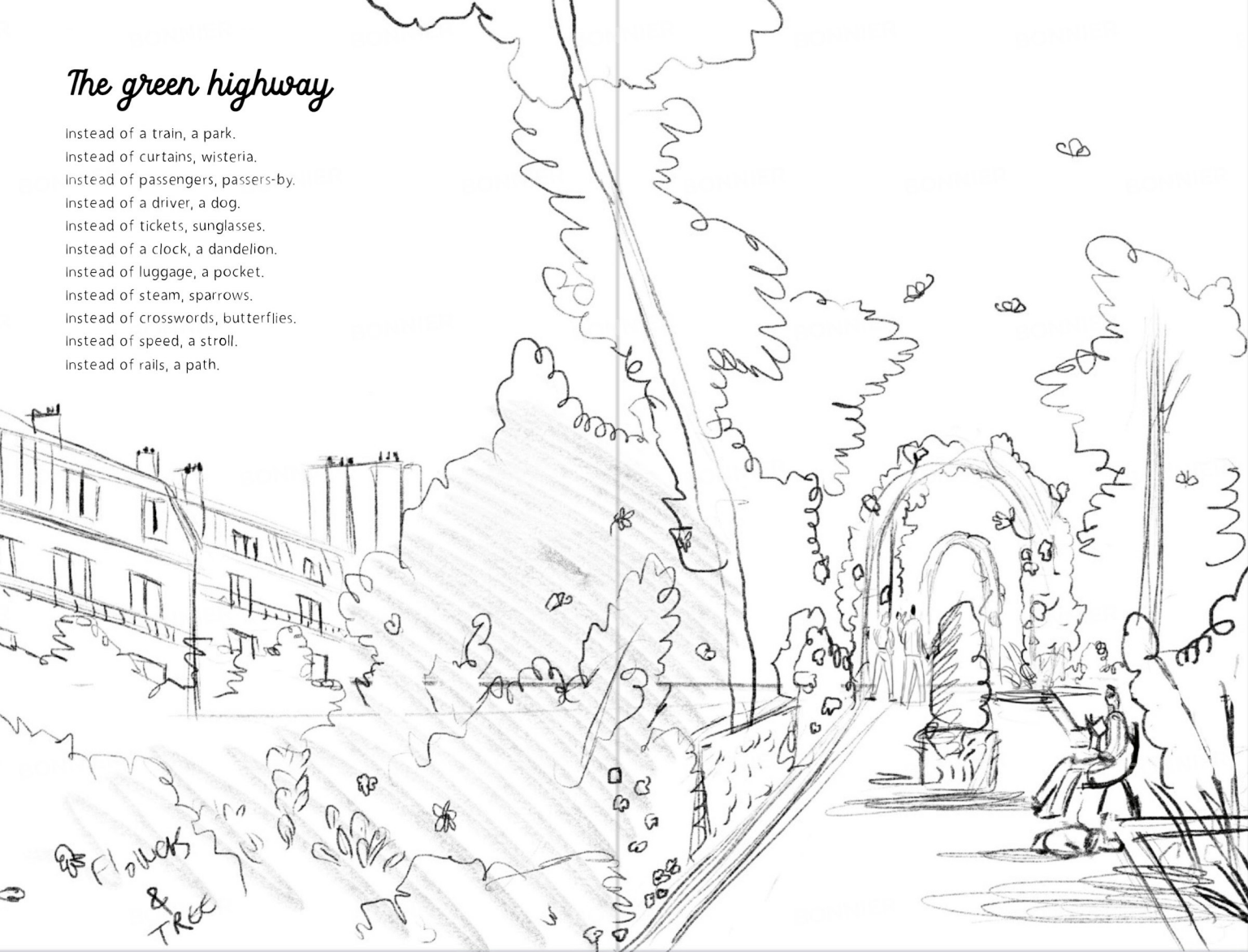
This cemetery is full of teenagers from neighbouring schools,
full of shy side-glances, prompt to retract, like snails' eyestalks.
It is a place of first kisses, of cats, of shady trees. It is very tidy.

A lady fills up a watering can from a rusty tap,
and the pipe's slender body shakes, as if to say
that in the deep deep earth, where the water comes from,
everything vibrates
with life.



The green highway

Instead of a train, a park.
Instead of curtains, wisteria.
Instead of passengers, passers-by.
Instead of a driver, a dog.
Instead of tickets, sunglasses.
Instead of a clock, a dandelion.
Instead of luggage, a pocket.
Instead of steam, sparrows.
Instead of crosswords, butterflies.
Instead of speed, a stroll.
Instead of rails, a path.



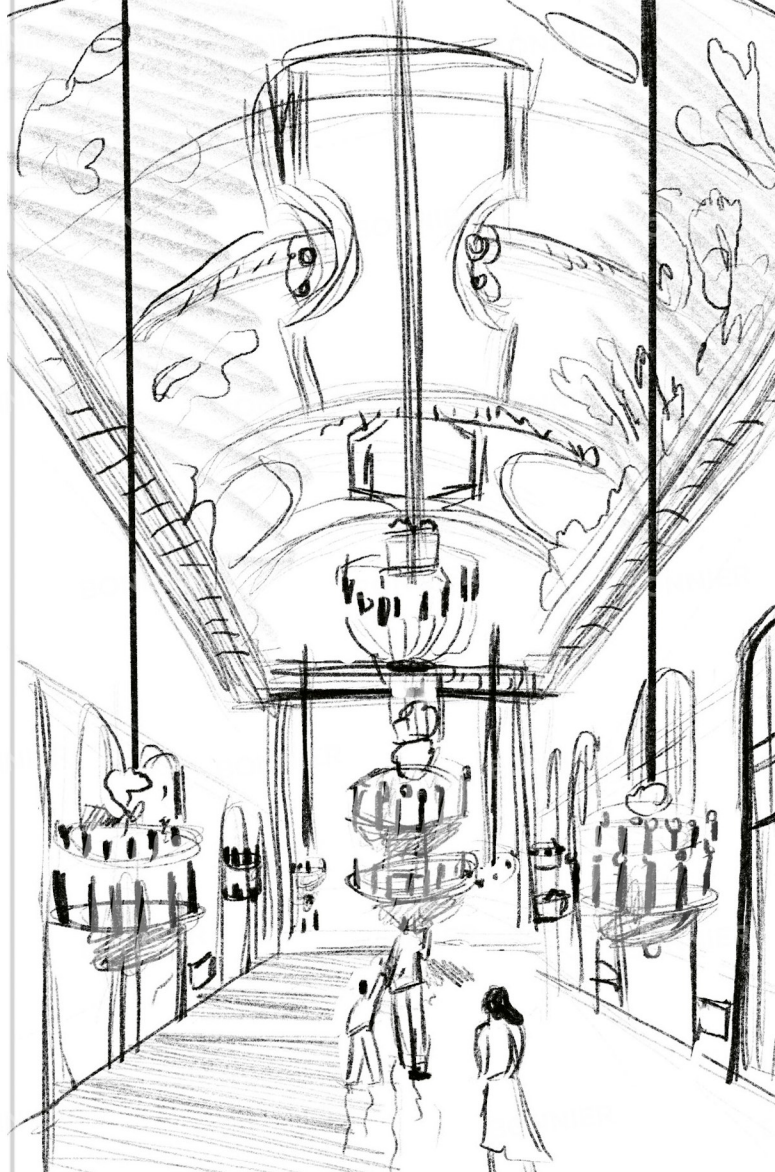
Flowers
&
TREE

La Galerie des Glaces

So in French 'glace' means *mirror* and also *ice cream*,
and in Versailles, the palace of former kings and queens,
there is a hall of mirrors. Guess what it's called.

Now guess what all French kids think it's about
as their parents wake them up one Saturday morning
when they'd rather sleep in
and say 'We're going to Versailles, the home of the Sun King,
blah blah blah history, blah blah France's past glory,
the flowerbeds so close-clipped they don't dare shed a petal,
the salons so golden your eyelashes will tingle,
the chapel that's carved in the preciouslest stones,
And then, the final thing,
at the end, the best thing: *La Galerie des Glaces.*

So of course we tagged along, all the little French children,
we glanced at the fountains, the salons, the gardens,
and when at long last
we reached the final thing, *La Galerie des Glaces*
we saw that it was just a hall of mirrors.
It's the largest hall of mirrors in the entire world.
It is full of French children with the most puzzled air,
desperately searching around for the ice-cream parlour,
then screaming *it's unfair*, and rolling on the floor,
and when we were told that some centuries ago,
they chopped off the head of the King who lived there,
we all said *serves him right for being such a liar.*



Rowing on Lac Daumesnil

It is the Britishest of all French outings.

There's wine for the adults and juice for the kids,

And half a baguette stuffed with that smelly cheese:
we're rowing on Lac Daumesnil.

Of all Parisian things, it's the most civilised.

The boats apologise when they bump against ducks.

The furry islands look like they've just escaped
from English picturebooks.

It is the safest way to be adventurous:

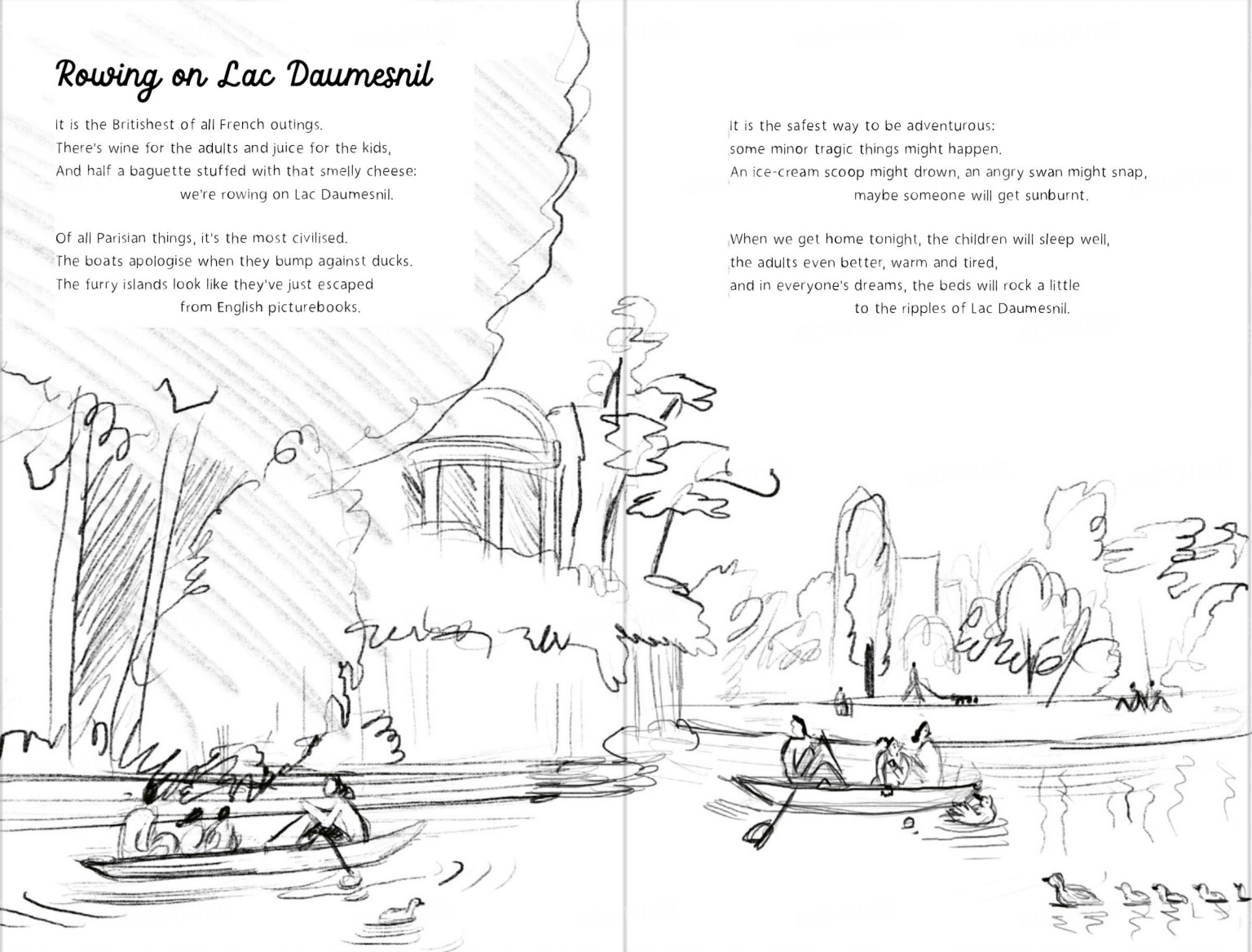
some minor tragic things might happen.

An ice-cream scoop might drown, an angry swan might snap,
maybe someone will get sunburnt.

When we get home tonight, the children will sleep well,

the adults even better, warm and tired,

and in everyone's dreams, the beds will rock a little
to the ripples of Lac Daumesnil.



Montmartre

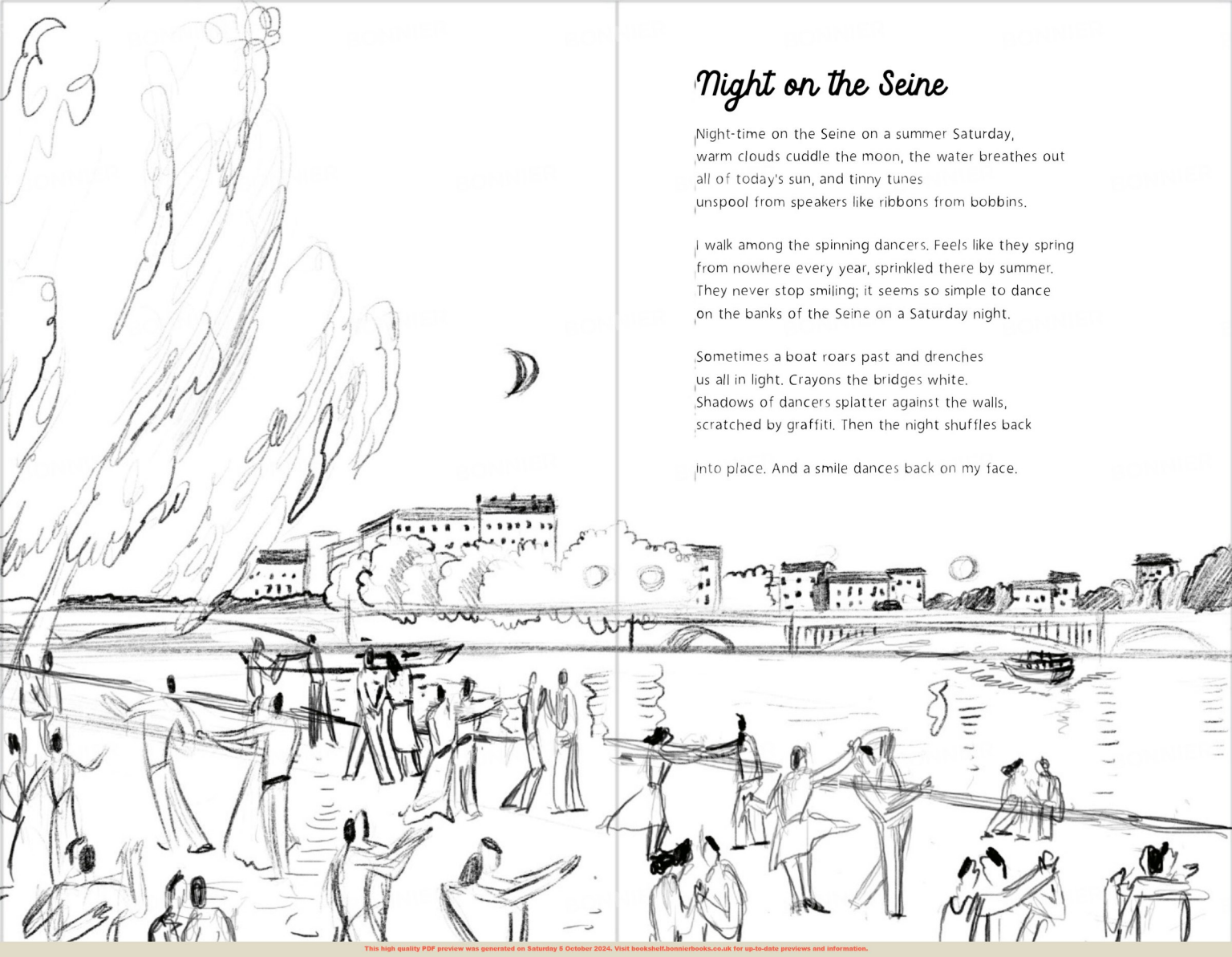
It's our Everest! Look at the icing-sugar basilisk
that tops it, most excellent nineteenth-century taste,
it hurts your teeth
just to stare at it, as you walk up
or take the cable-car. This is no place for bikes.

Too hilly! A hill once haunted by penniless painters,
beggars, musicians, cold, sick, and passionate, the story goes.
This is the hill of all excesses. Wine grows on one of its faces.
Under a red windmill, myriad of young legs lift
whipped-cream-like petticoats to the tune of cancan.
This is a hill so rich, so poor. So touristy,

and yet so Paris-that-tourists-don't-want-to-see.
That hill remembers blood. The blood of St Denis,
of rebel communards, of sick workers, that soaked it,
and if your legs hurt to climb it, breathe deeply -

see? Somehow,
the air feels freer here.





Night on the Seine

Night-time on the Seine on a summer Saturday,
warm clouds cuddle the moon, the water breathes out
all of today's sun, and tinny tunes
unspool from speakers like ribbons from bobbins.

I walk among the spinning dancers. Feels like they spring
from nowhere every year, sprinkled there by summer.
They never stop smiling; it seems so simple to dance
on the banks of the Seine on a Saturday night.

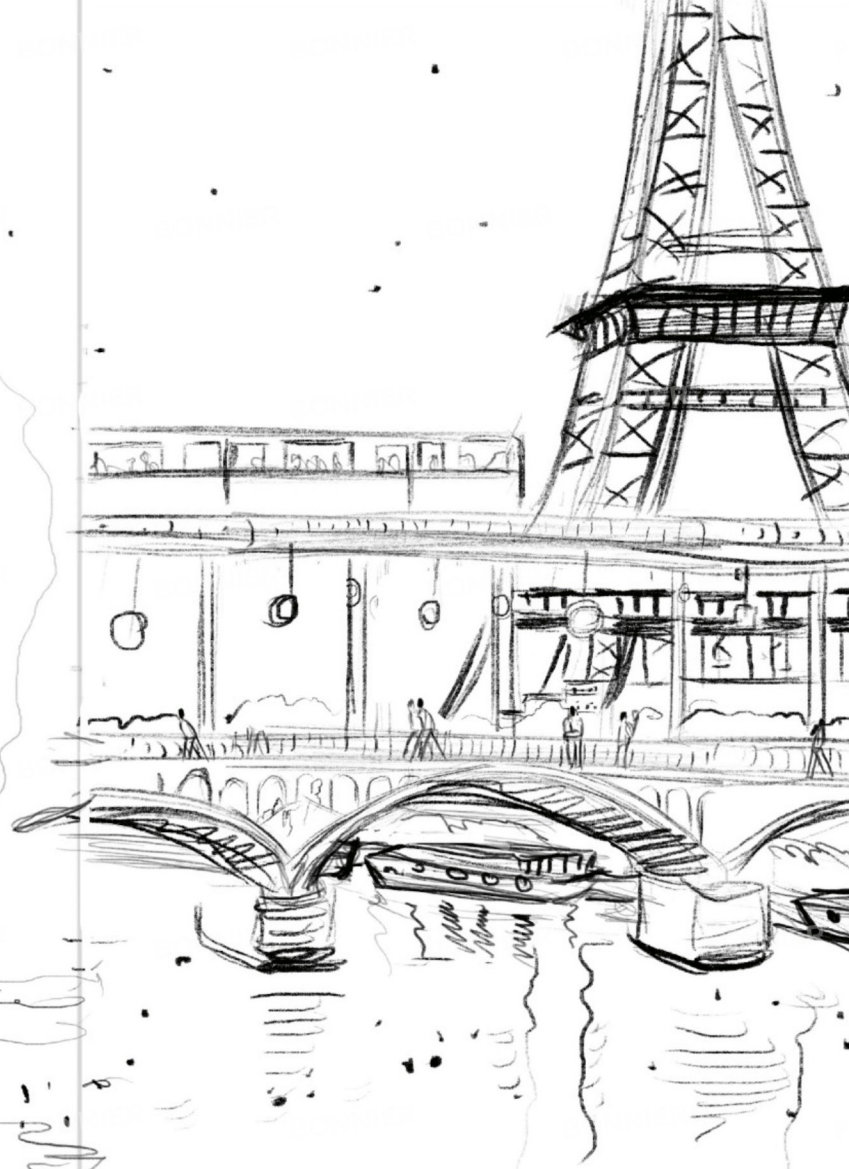
Sometimes a boat roars past and drenches
us all in light. Crayons the bridges white.
Shadows of dancers splatter against the walls,
scratched by graffiti. Then the night shuffles back

into place. And a smile dances back on my face.

Métro line 6, Bir-Hakeim to Passy

It's a Sunday night. Nobody likes Sunday nights,
Sunday nights taste of the weekend ending,
of homework you haven't finished doing.
Sunday blues. You swing bluely to the beat of the métro,
windows dark blue reflect your face thinking
of homework left to do - but then -
wait for it - it's very sudden,
not very long - only between Bir-Hakeim and Passy -
one suspended moment, when suddenly
we all take off! we are
not in a tunnel any more, this is
not a Sunday night anymore, we're flying!
windows no longer dark, but showing
the Eiffel Tower, there! To the right!
Hello yellow tower in the dark surprise of night! and at its feet,
all the lights of a city that doesn't want it to be Sunday night!
It's just a flash, everyone watches, a stretch of bright, so brief.

Between Bir-Hakeim and Passy on line 6 of the Paris Métro,
lift your head, and you'll see it too,
one Sunday night, when you're feeling blue,
when nothing's right, and there's school tomorrow,
and homework left to do.



Non- Fiction

ENDPAPERS

