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BIG PICTURE PRESS

First published in the UK in 2025 by Big Picture Press an imprint of Bonnier Books UK 5th Floor, HYLO, 103-105 Bunhill Row, London, ECTY 8LZ Owned by Bonnier Books Sveavägen 56, Stockholm, Sweden www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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ISBN 978-1-80078-711-7

This book was typeset in Jungle Giant and Stupid Questions The illustrations were created in acrylic paint.

Edited by Charlie Wilson and Josephine Southon Designed by Jenny Hastings Production by Giulia Caparrelli

Printed in China



On the Streets of Of Streets of A poetic tour of the city



Clementine Beauvais Seula Yi



Take a walk with me

As a Parisian, could you write a few poems about Paris? It's a trickier question than it sounds. I'm a Parisian who isn't actually Parisian — I grew up there, but I left at eighteen to begin a new life in a new country: the UK.

My family is still in Paris, and I visit often — neither a tourist nor a Parisian, but somewhere in between. Luckily, in-between places are the perfect places for poetry.

Many of these poems stem from memories of my childhood and teenage years. When I was younger, I didn't always love Paris; it felt too crowded. I longed for holidays, yearning to see the countryside and the sea. But there were moments of grace that made the dull, grey school year suddenly brighter. Sometimes, it was just a glimpse of the Elffel Tower peeking out from behind a building, or walking along the Seine on warm summer nights — listening to music and feeling free, full of hope.

Paris, like most capital cities, has a rich history, filled with both joyful and difficult times. In this book, I wanted to show the city's many sides: the joyful moments as well as the places where the past has left its marks.

Whether you are reading this in a Paris café or simply dreaming of visiting one day, I hope this book takes you on a poetic journey through Paris.



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Gare du Nord

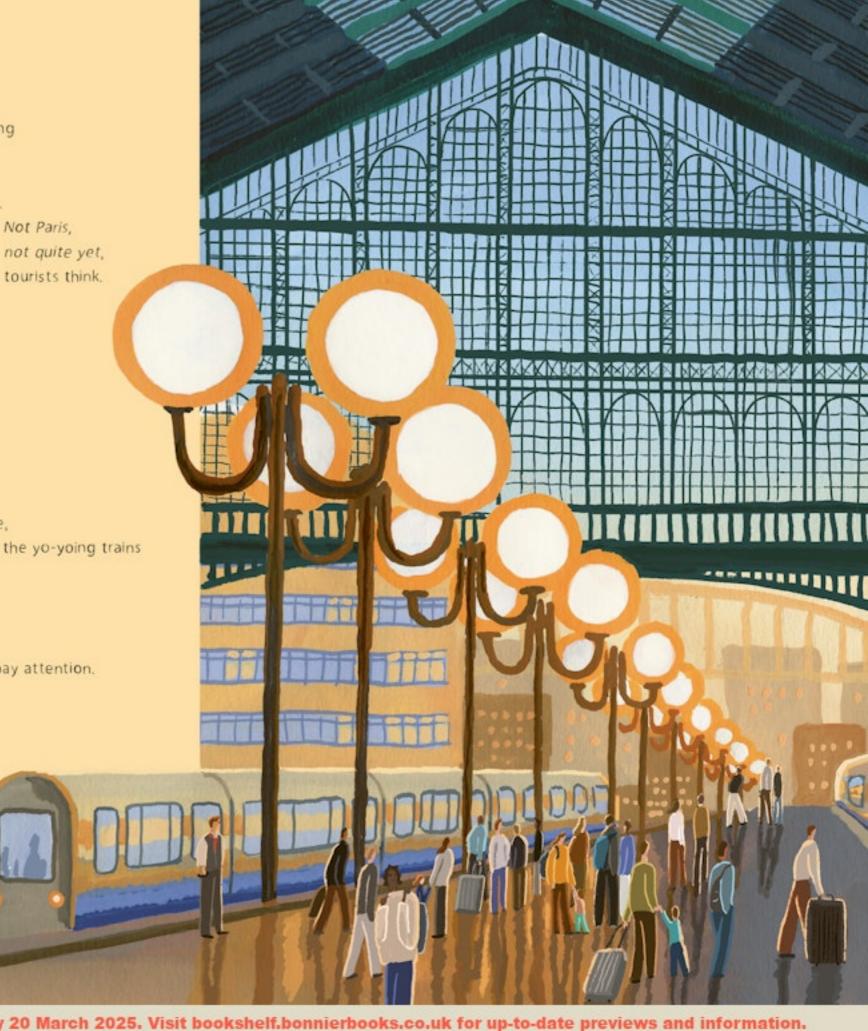
Thrumming with trains announcements whistles beeping throngs of tourists travellers loiterers barterers public piano players luggage luggers speaking tongues faster than the softly slowing trains. Most people leave the station quick, just transit. Not Paris, not quite yet,

But they are wrong: it is Paris; not the Paris of berets 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, what welcomed you so remember: 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, which the yo-yoing trains bring in and out each day so the city can run.

Welcome, get your fill of the noises, the voices, the screeching brakes, the laughter, the twang of the public piano player. As you step off the train, pay attention. Mind the gap

between our real Paris

and the Paris of your imagination.





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.

Bouquiristes

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.

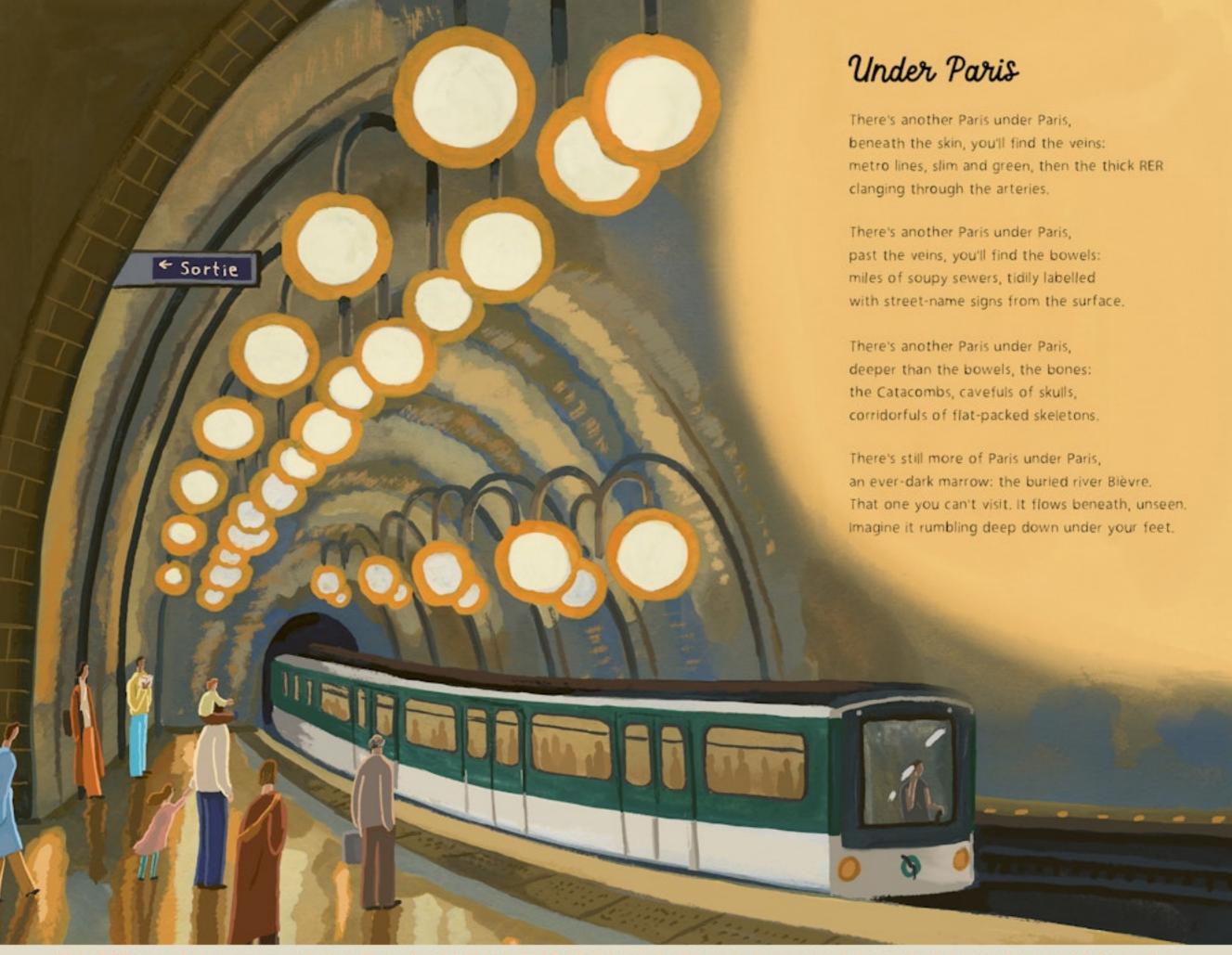
(Unofficial hypothesis. Don't quote me on it.)

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.

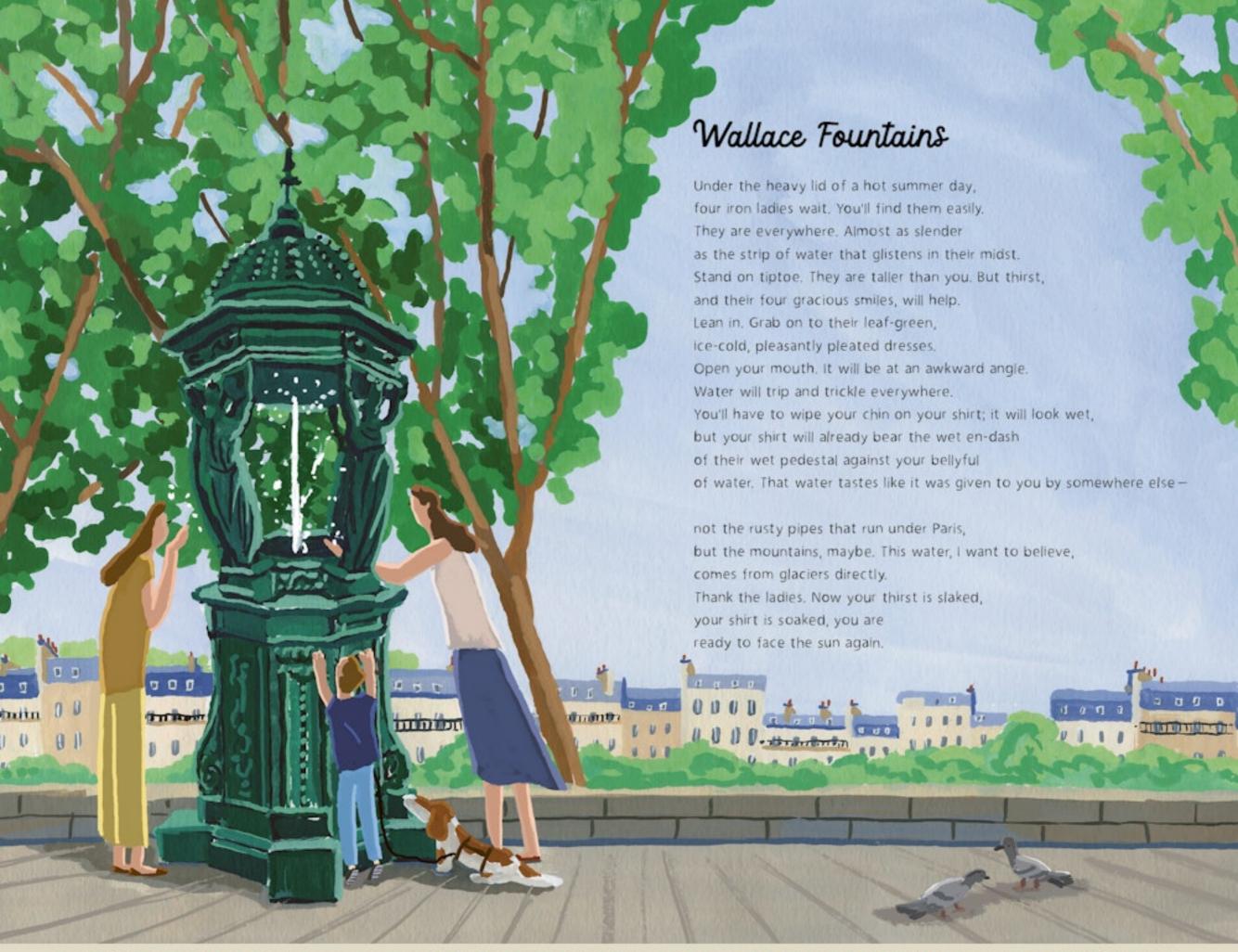
My favourite things here are the very old books wrapped in squeaky plastic, the price in felt-tip on it; I find it, somehow, touching, that care, the care it took to wrap those books.

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.





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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. 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.

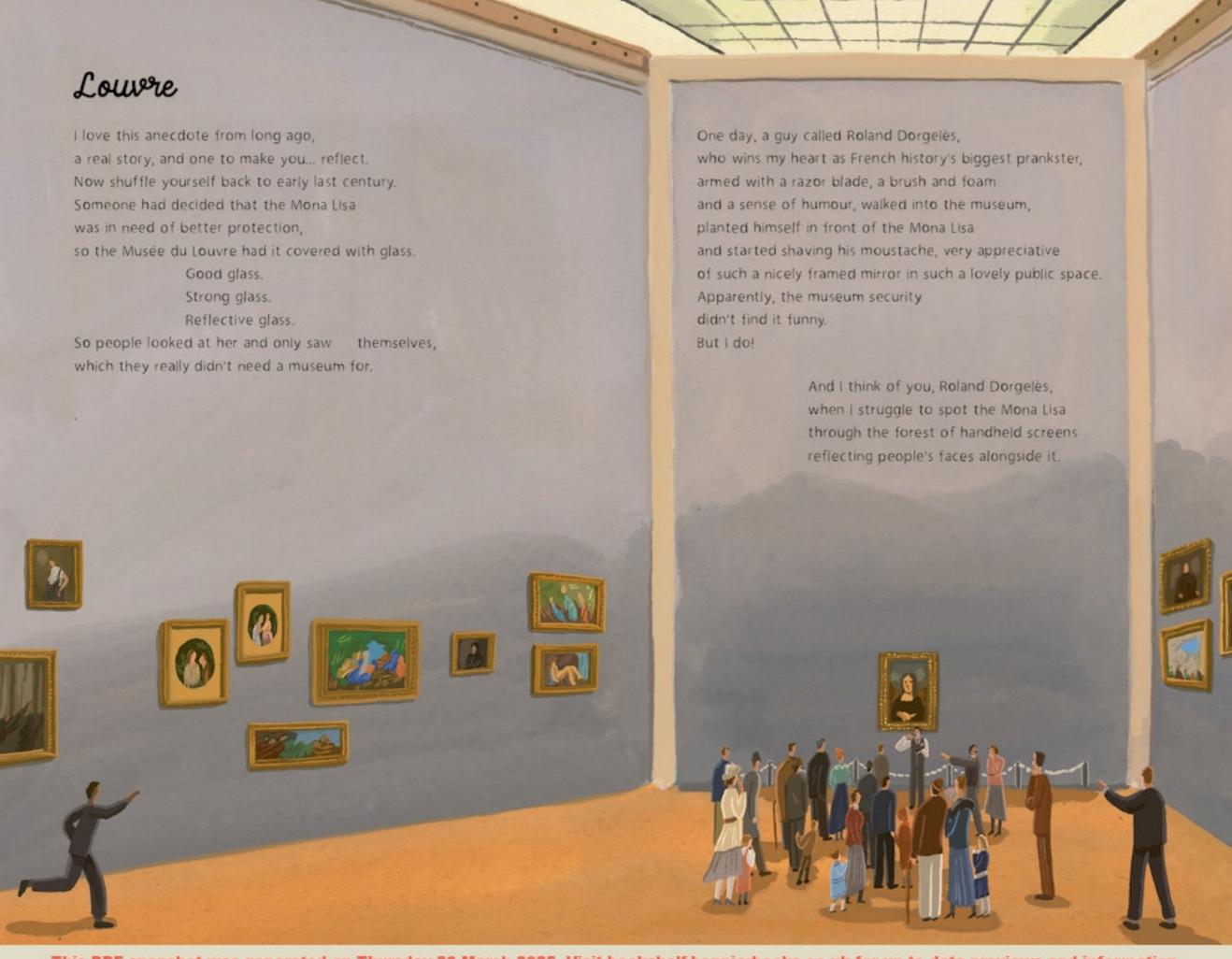
As children, we love it. Walking out with parents later than is allowed. Parents softer than usual, their gazes vague, their bodies swaying, and the night is so long when the sun is still out, with you, playing.



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 we know that the world is in no better shape, but there's someone there playing, all that matters is sound, is dance, is beat, and listening to the midnight sun on the concrete.





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Notre-Dame

Hail, Notre-Dame, full of flames,
hail of glass and stone, Notre-Dame, hallowed be thy name
that we whispered as we watched you with eyes made orange by fire,
black by smoke and white by terror.
The stone is so hot, they said on the radio,
that it could very well start melting.
And we were turned to stone,
as your own stone turned soft.
That night, we swapped skins.
We watched as the spindle rising from your spine
collapsed
into

you like our hearts into our bellies.

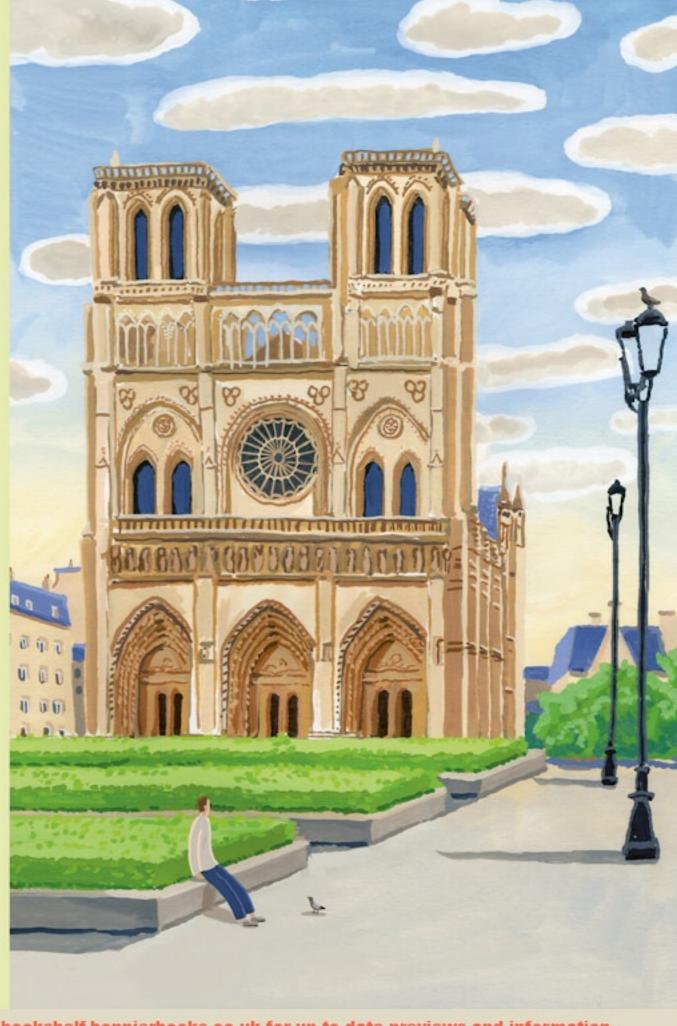
Hail, Mary, full of bells.

We were there when they set up that friendly yellow crane, as they fixed your tortoise shell at tortoise speed.

You did get fixed, and in the end it felt like it was quick.

We were there, a crowd of smiles, when for the very first time, we heard your bell again. The beating of your heart, slotted right back where it belonged.

Though ever since the fire, the peal of your bell has been ringing, let's say, orange, just a tinge, just as if, deep inside you, one stone were still burning.





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La Galerie des Glaces

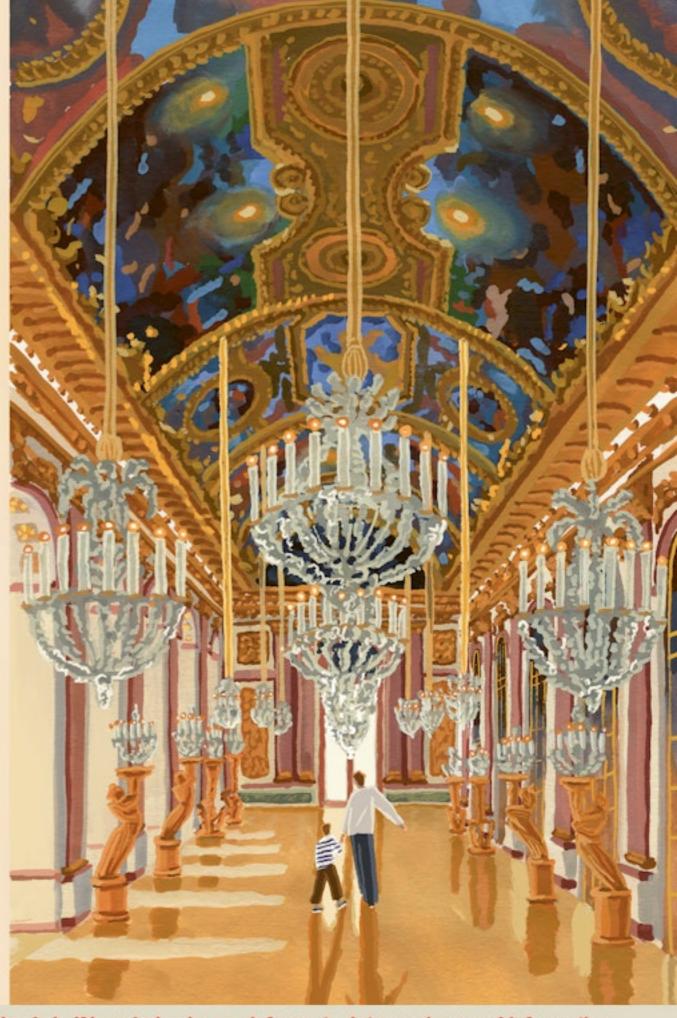
So in French, 'glace' means mirror and also ice cream, and in Versailles, the palace of former kings and queens, there is a hall of mirrors.

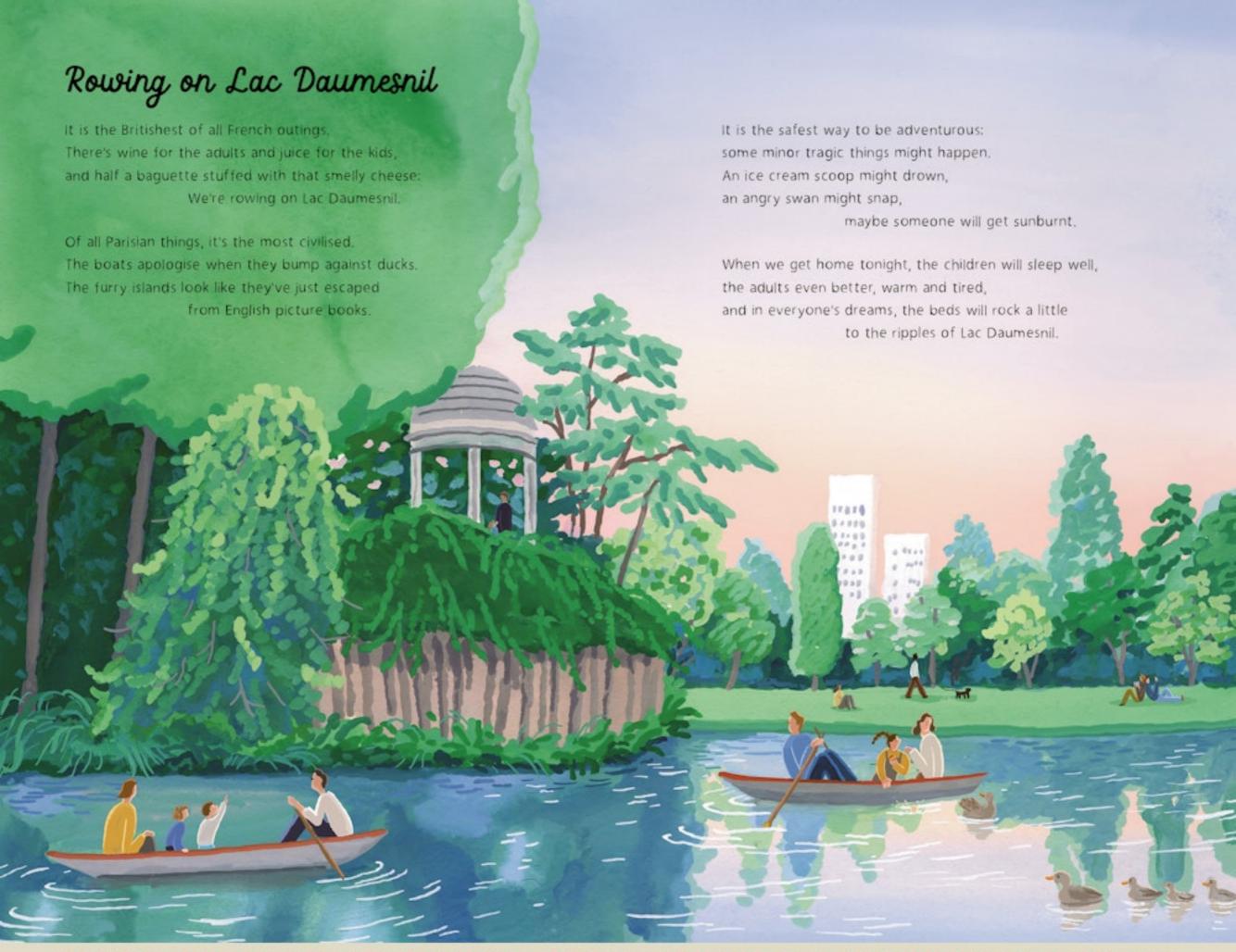
Guess what it's called.

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 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 preciousest 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, and when at long last 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."





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Montmartre

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

Too hilly! A hill once haunted by penniless painters, writers, 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, 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.
The history of fights for freedom,
of the workers and artists who stared at the city
unrolling at their feet like a golden carpet.
It must have felt good to look down, for once,
at the rich neighbours below them.

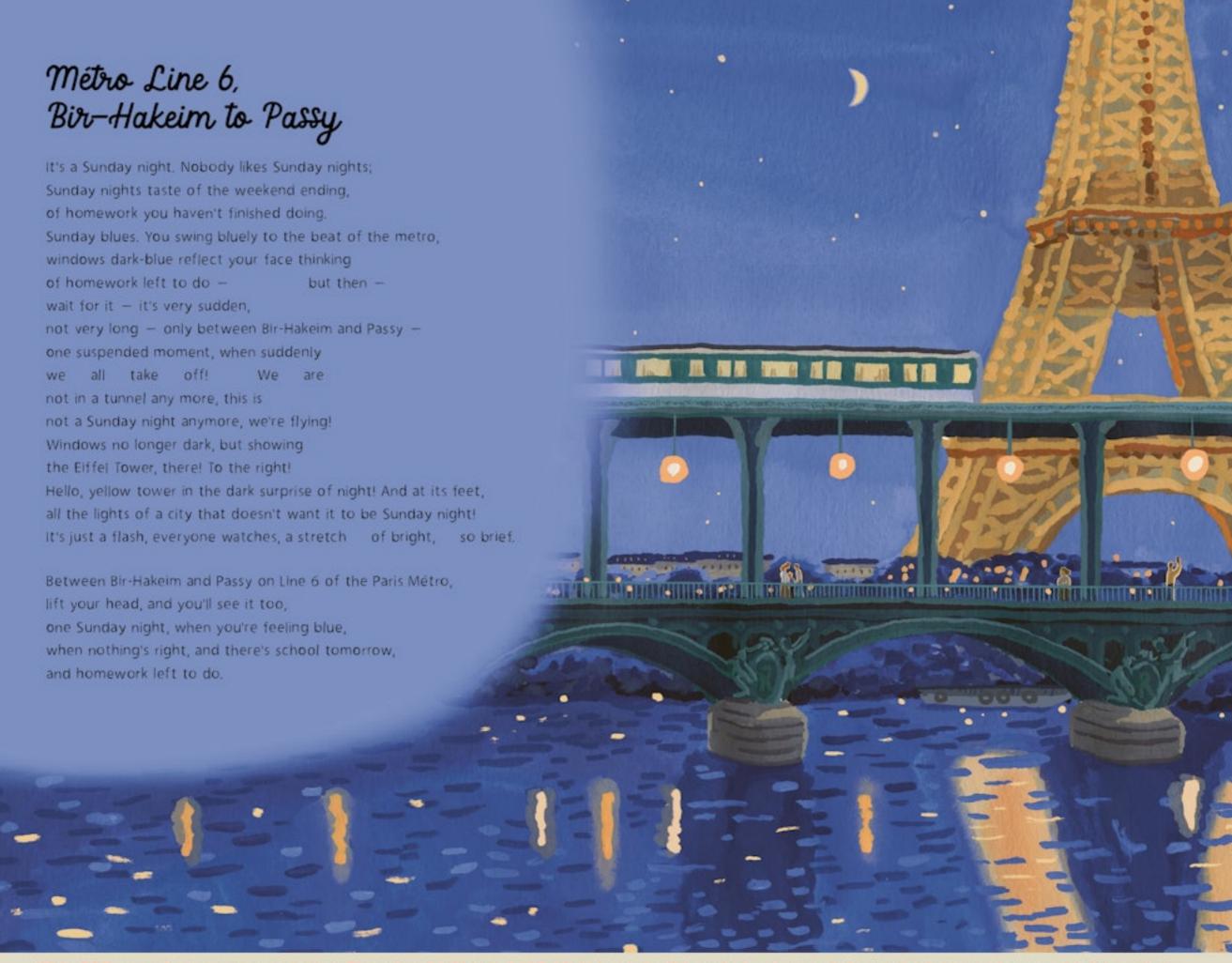
And if your legs hurt to climb it, breathe deeply -

see? Somehow, the air feels freer here.





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Paris Snapshots

The bustling streets of Paris are known all over the world for their rich history, art and culture. In fact, Paris boasts over 6,000 streets (known as 'rues'). From tree-lined boulevards and historic coffee houses to iconic art galleries and night-time viewpoints, there's always something new to discover on the streets of the City of Light. So, the next time you visit or dream about Paris, remember that every corner holds a piece of history waiting to be uncovered!



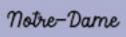


The Eiffel Tower

With its dazzling light shows and iconic silhouette, the Eiffel Tower welcomes thousands of visitors every day.

Fun Fact: Gustave Eiffel, one of the engineers, built an apartment at the top of the tower where he hosted famous guests like Thomas Edison.

Old you know? The Eiffel Tower was originally supposed to be temporary — it was built for the 1889 World's Fair and it was planned to be taken down 20 years later. Over time it became an iconic symbol of Paris so it was never demolished.



Notre-Dame is a medieval Gothic cathedral with a towering spire, stone carvings and beautiful stained-glass windows.

Fun Fact: Victor Hugo's novel The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, published in 1831, was so popular that it saved the building from demolition.

Dld you know? The main bell in Notre-Dame is called Emmanuel and it weighs over 13,000 kilograms - that's heavier than 30 grand pianos.



Centuries ago, famous artists, writers and philosophers used to gather in paris cafés to share their ideas with each other.

Fun Fact: There are around 1,600 cafés in Paris; the first to call itself a café was Le Procope, founded in 1686.

Did you know? The first film with moving pictures ever screened took place in the Grand Café in Paris. The screening, made by the French brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière, featured 10 films, each lasting about 50 seconds.



Paris Cafés



The River Seine

Paris started out as a small island on the Seine. Since then, the river has seen thousands of years of life and history.

Fun Fact: in the nineteenth century, people took their dogs to the banks of the Seine to be bathed and groomed.

Did you know? Every year in the summer, roads along the riverbanks are covered in sand and palm trees, turning them into temporary beaches, called Paris-Plages.



The Louvre is Paris's national museum and art gallery, and is home to over 380,000 extraordinary paintings from around the world.

Fun Fact: The Louvre is the world's largest museum - at 73,000 square metres, it's larger than 10 football pitches!

Did you know? The Mona Lisa, painted by Leonardo da Vinci, is located at the Louvre, it is the world's most famous painting. Around 10 million people visit the museum every year; 80% of them are only there to see the Mona Lisa.

The Louvre

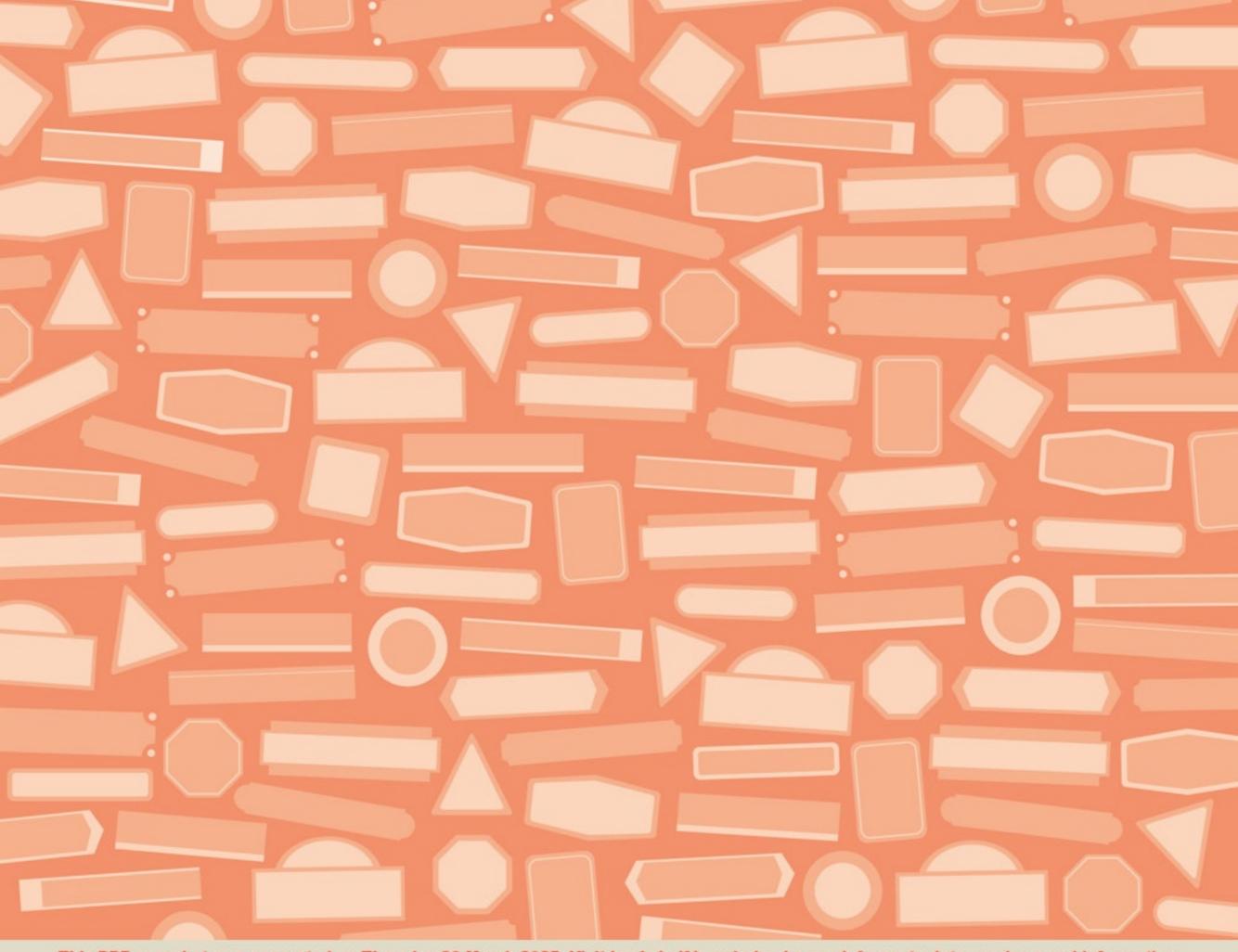
Once the home to French kings, the Palace of Versailles attracts visitors today for its impressive art and architecture.

Fun Fact: The palace is so large that King Louis XV often ate his meals cold, as the kitchen was so far from the dining room!

Did you know? Every year, the Palace of Versailles hosts a masquerade ball where guests dress and dance in Baroque costumes.



Palace of Versailles



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