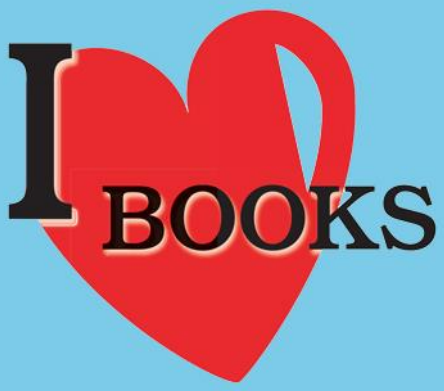


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For Eva and Phoebe

With huge thanks to Annie –
we must go back to Paris!



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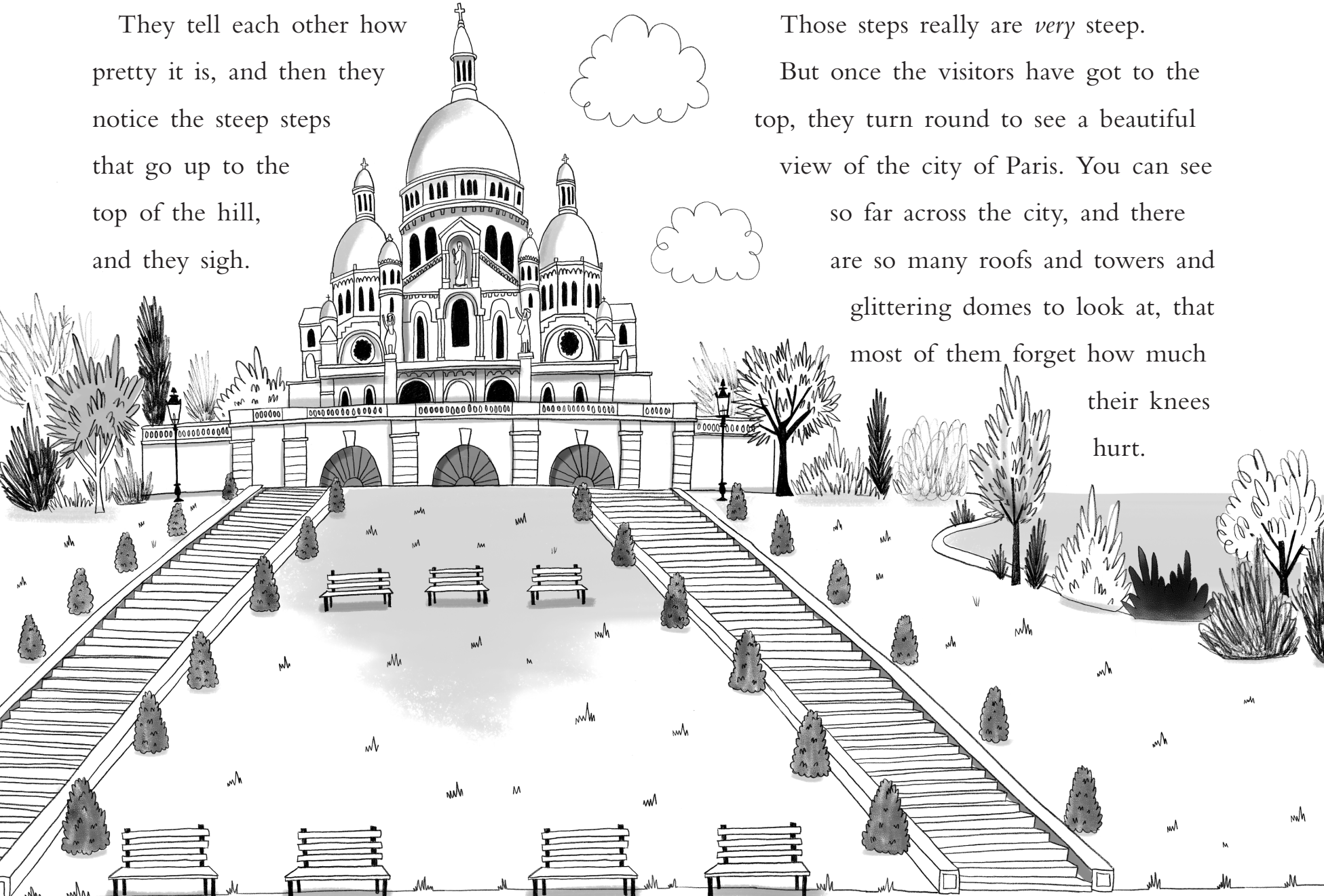
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In a great big city, in the middle of France, is a church that stands on a hill.

The church is white, with a dome on the top, and it looks like a wedding cake. It's a very old church, and very famous, so every day lots of people come to visit.

They tell each other how pretty it is, and then they notice the steep steps that go up to the top of the hill, and they sigh.



Those steps really are *very* steep.

But once the visitors have got to the top, they turn round to see a beautiful view of the city of Paris. You can see so far across the city, and there are so many roofs and towers and glittering domes to look at, that most of them forget how much their knees hurt.

The view is so beautiful that hardly any of the visitors look back at the steep grass slope, and the steps they've climbed. They never think about what's underneath.

Or who...

Only a very few people ever find out, and this is *their* story.



Chapter One

Sophie peered out over the view, watching the sunlight sparkle on the windows, and wondering who lived there, under the roofs. She couldn't see her own house from here, or she didn't think she could, anyway. She hadn't lived in Paris for long enough to know.



The city *was* very beautiful, but it still didn't feel like home. Sophie sighed, and rested her chin on her hands. She missed her old house, and her old bedroom, and her cat, Oscar. Grandma was looking

after him while they lived in Paris, but Sophie was sure that Oscar missed her, almost as much as she missed him.

"What are you looking at?" Dan squashed up next to her, leaning over the stone balcony.

"Just things," Sophie said vaguely. "The view."

"Boring," Dan muttered. "This is taking ages. And I'm hungry." He turned round, holding his tummy in both hands and made a starving face at Sophie. His nose scrunched up like a rabbit's, and Sophie smirked. She crossed her eyes and poked her tongue out at the corner of her mouth to make Dan laugh. After all,

even a wonderful view can be boring when you've been looking at it for a *VERY LONG TIME*.

All the people who live in Paris love their city so much, and many of them walk up the steep steps to the church on their wedding days to have their photographs taken next to the wonderful view. But it can take an awful long time to get the photographs right, especially when it's windy and your auntie's wedding dress won't stay still properly.

"Sophie and Dan! Stop making faces like that! You're making Dad giggle, and he's supposed to be taking romantic photos!" Mum glared at them, but Dad

rolled his eyes, and stuck his tongue out at Dan. Sophie thought Dad might be a bit bored with the photos as well.

This church was one of Sophie's favourite places in Paris. It was so pretty, and there was the fountain to look at, and all the people. She even liked its name, *Sacré Coeur*, which meant Sacred Heart. Sophie thought it was very special to have a whole church that was all about love. Auntie Lou's wedding had been beautiful too, but Sophie had got up early for Mum to curl her hair and fuss over her dress, and she was tired of having to stand still and smile.

"Go and play," Auntie Lou suggested.