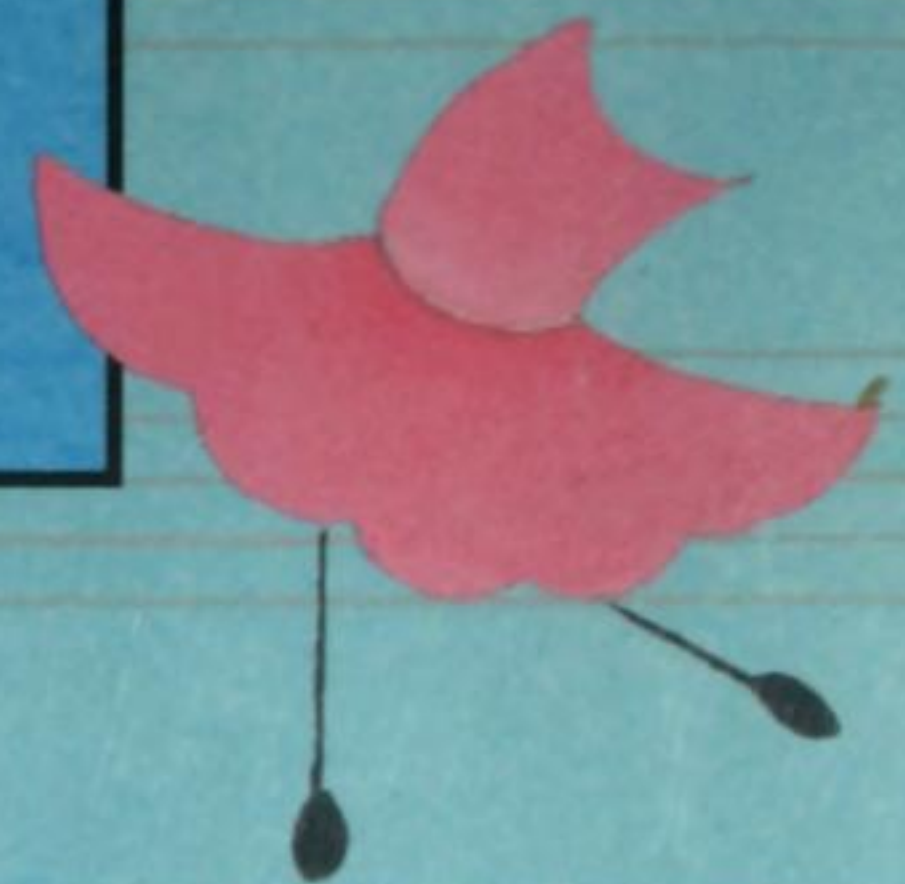


# Strange Mr. Satie



by **M. T. Anderson**

*illustrated by* **Petra Mathers**



\$16.99

\$25.50



**W**alking through the streets of Paris a hundred years ago, Erik Satie could not have looked more normal in his black bowler hat and tie. But behind his shy smile, Mr. Satie was dreaming of music no one had heard before—music like ancient chants and modern circus tunes rolled into one. A friend of poets, puppeteers, magicians, great painters like Picasso, and the Surrealists, Satie was at the center of a world where sense was nonsense, and the imagination ruled supreme.

Award-winning author M. T. Anderson recounts the story of the irreverent French composer in a biography that is witty, accessible, and endlessly surprising, while Petra Mathers's magical illustrations capture all the vibrancy that was Erik Satie's topsy-turvy world.

Ages 5 up

Reinforced binding

... must regulate his life.

... of my daily activities:

... ration.



... leave the table at 12:14.

... by ride on my horse around my estates.

... nspiration.

... ivities (sword-fighting, reflection, staying still, swimming, etc.).

... served beginning at 19:16 and ending at 19:20.

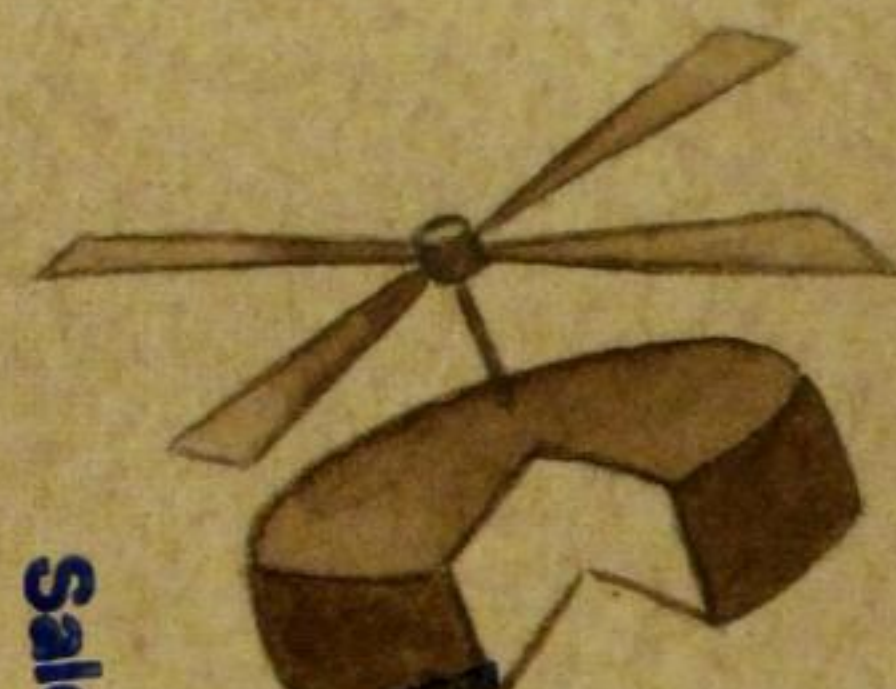
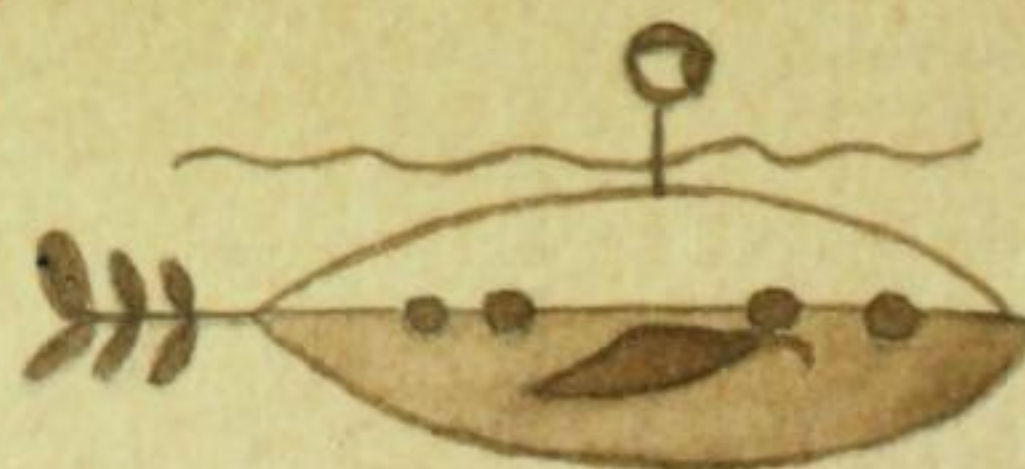
... mphonic lectures,

... 09 to 21:59.



... 37. Once a week, I wake up with

OCT 27 2004



**WITHDRAWN**  
 No longer the property of the  
 Boston Public Library.  
 Sale of this material benefits the Library.

Boston Public Library  
 Boston, MA 02116





I eat only white foods:

eggs, sugar, scraped bones, animal fat, veal, salt,  
coconuts, chicken boiled in white water, fruit with mold, rice, turnips,



EVERYTHING  
EXPLAINED



camphorized sausage, paste,  
cheese (white), cotton salad, and certain  
kinds of fish (without skin)....



I breathe carefully, a little at a time. I rarely dance. When walking, I hold my sides and keep my eyes fixed behind me.

I look very serious. If I laugh, it is not on purpose. Afterwards, I always excuse myself nicely.

I sleep with one eye open; my sleep is very deep. My bed is round, with a hole in the middle for my head....



**WITHDRAWN**

is no longer the property of the  
Boston Public Library.

Sale of this material benefits the Library.





*To my friends at Vermont College,  
with gratitude and affection.*

—M. T. A



*To E.S.*

—P. M.



# Strange Mr. Satie



*by*

**M. T. Anderson**

*illustrated by*

**Petra Mathers**



VIKING

OCT 27 2004



**E**rik Satie

was born by the sea  
in the village of Honfleur  
on the coast of France.  
It was 1866.

"I was born  
very young  
in a very old world,"  
said Satie once.  
And he never grew up  
but was always a child  
with an old man's smile.

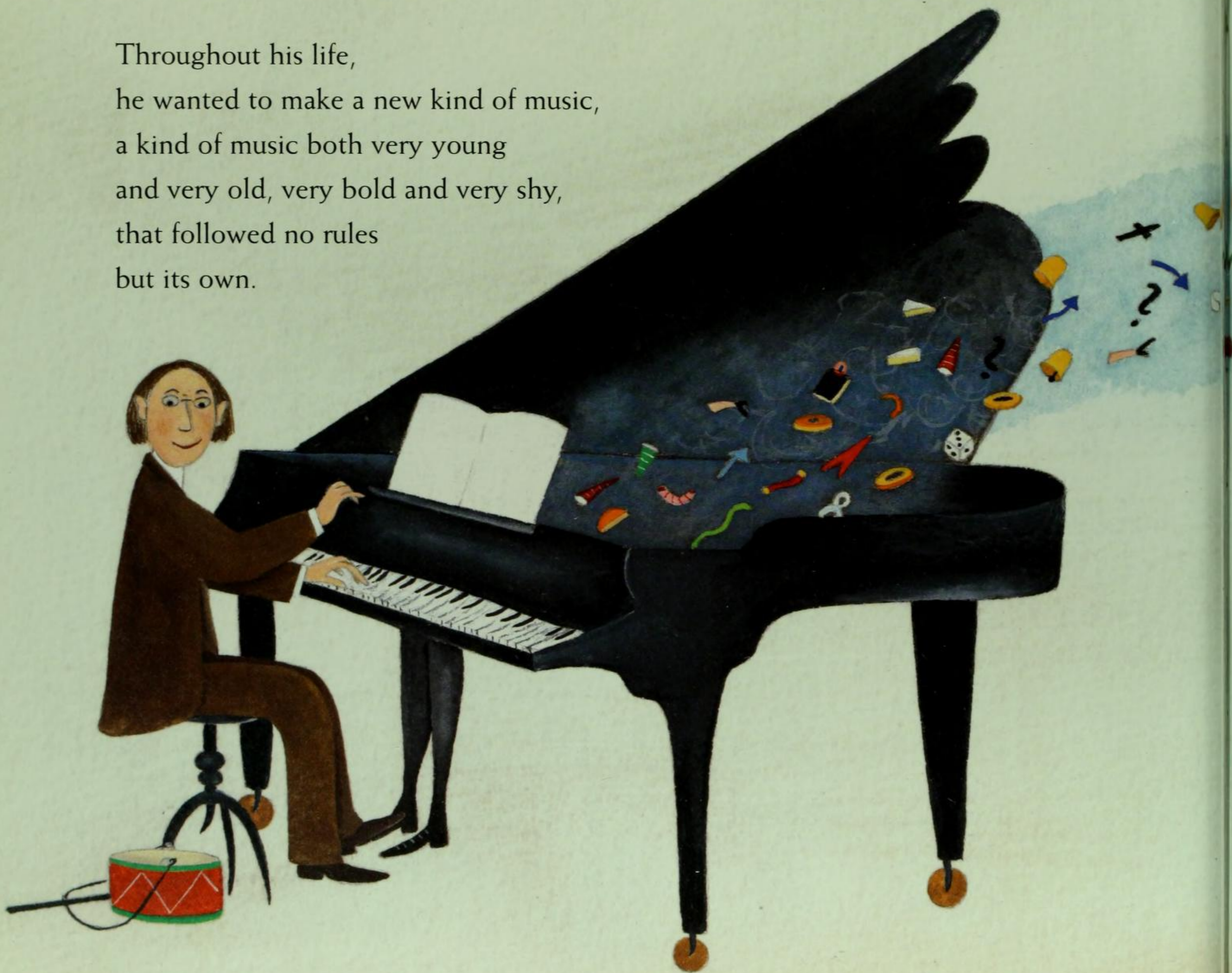




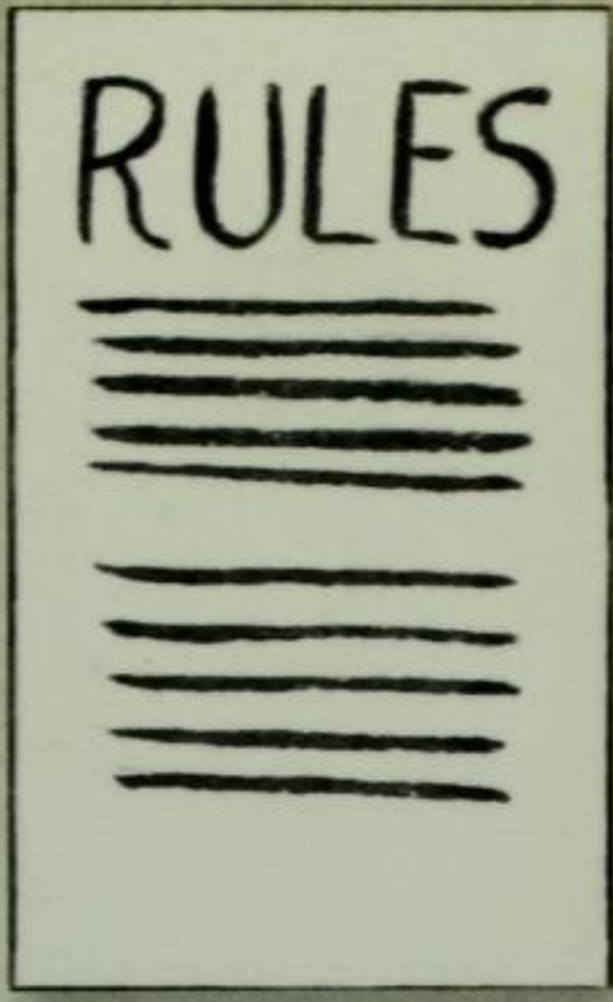


From his earliest years,  
he loved to play music.  
He went to a school  
to learn how to play and compose.

Throughout his life,  
he wanted to make a new kind of music,  
a kind of music both very young  
and very old, very bold and very shy,  
that followed no rules  
but its own.







Satie's music was like an old chant and wild tunes from kick lines or choruses, but mixed together. Many did not like it.



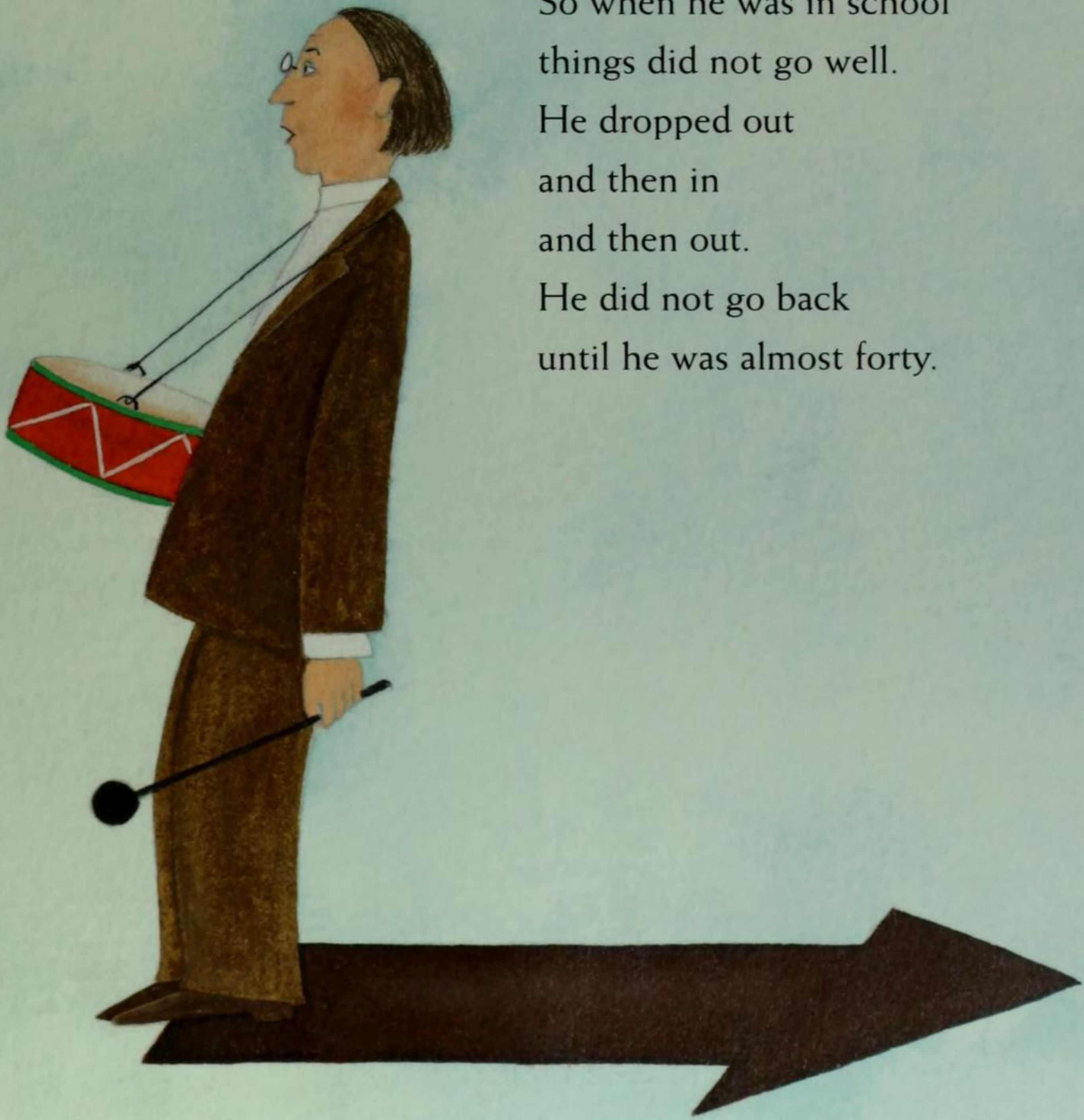






Around him was a world of black top hats  
and stiff, starched collars  
and gloves and bows and curtsies.  
It frightened and confused him.  
People thought he was mad,  
that his music was bad  
because it was strange.

So when he was in school  
things did not go well.  
He dropped out  
and then in  
and then out.  
He did not go back  
until he was almost forty.

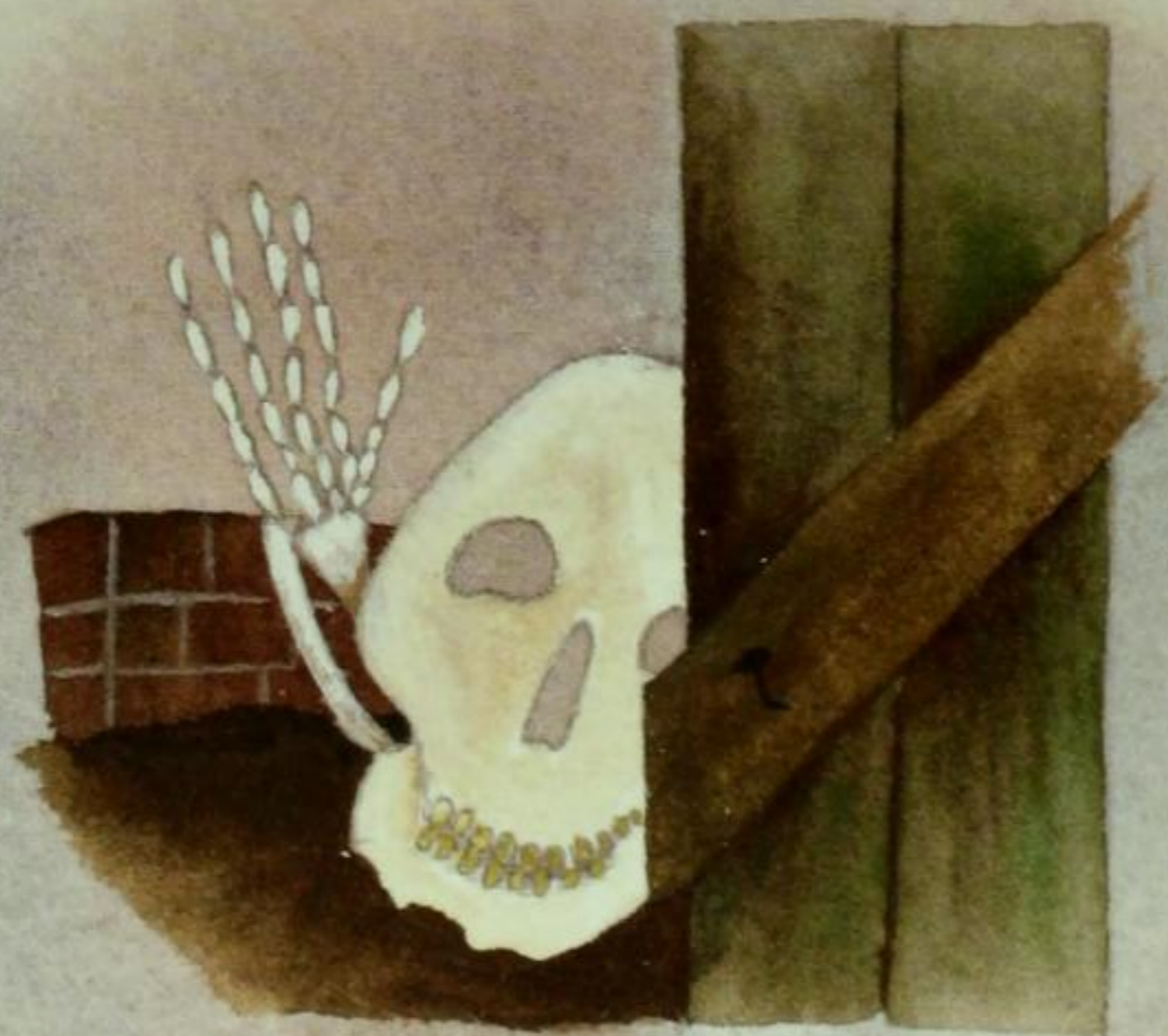




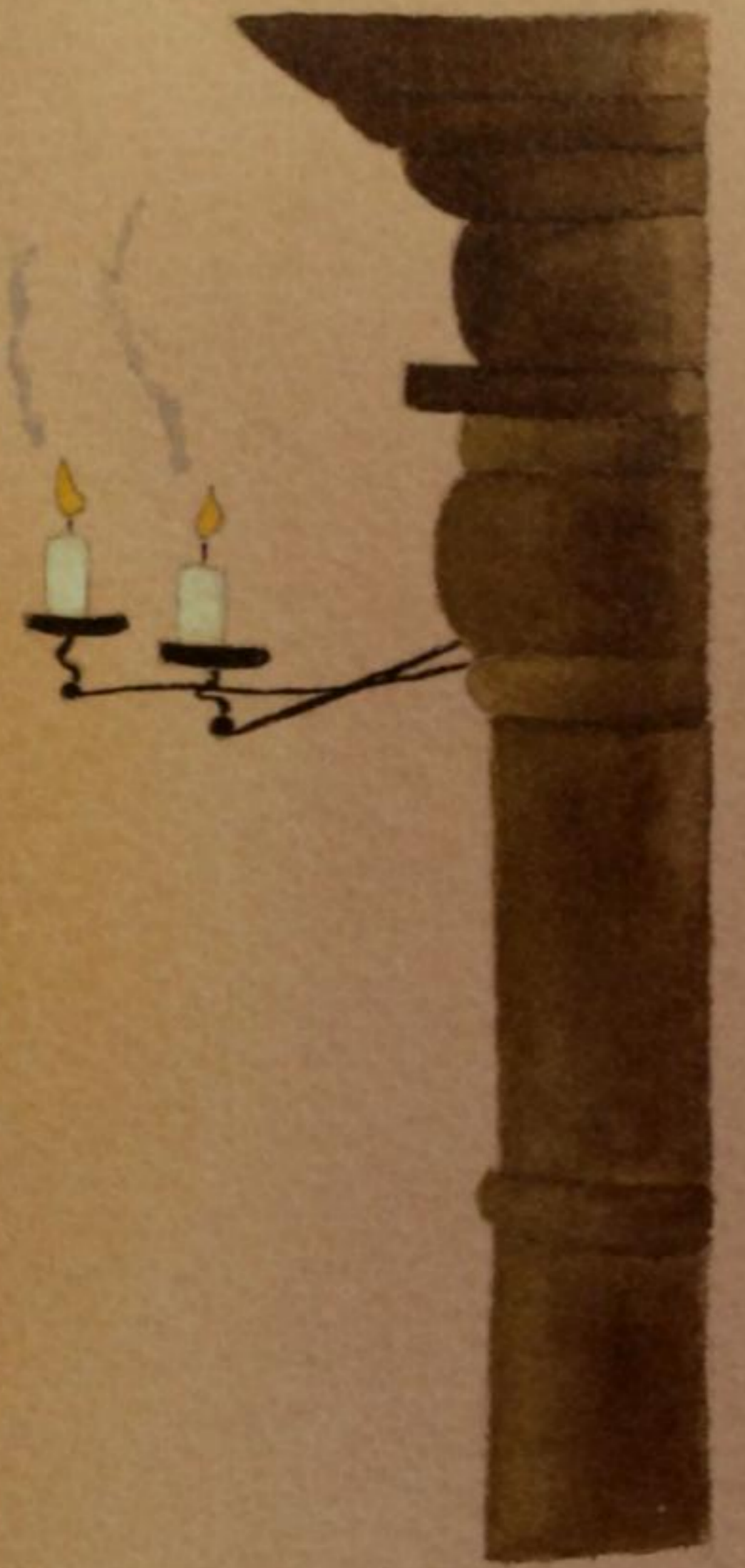
# LE CHAT NOIR



As a young man, he lived in Paris.  
He began to make friends.  
One was a poet who  
worked as a plumber  
in his spare time.  
He took Satie to a famous café,  
the Black Cat, Le Chat Noir,  
a café with grand sweeping staircases  
and dark wooden chairs  
and its very own cat named Maigriou—  
and the bones of a poet were hidden inside,  
and upstairs was a theater  
where people put on plays  
with shadow puppets  
made of  
zinc.









Le Chat Noir—  
where all of the poets, the painters,  
the actors and dancers,  
the wizards and wisecrackers would sit  
and sip and scribble ideas or talk about art.  
Some of these people were painters of clowns.  
Some were inventors of luminous hats,  
or schemes to cover the oceans with cork  
so they could travel  
from New York to France.

It was a good place to be.  
It was like a dream.  
It was the furthest thing possible  
from the world of rules  
and polite smiles  
and handshakes  
and spats  
and bowler hats.









Satie was asked to play the piano  
at the Black Cat.

Here was a chance  
to play his strange music,  
his music which sounded  
like kick line songs  
and ancient chants,  
but mixed together.





Here was a chance to have people listen.

At twenty-two

he wrote his most famous

pieces for piano,

the *Gymnopédies*,

which he played

at the Black Cat

while patrons stopped drinking

and stared at the smoke,

while the cat,

who was slinking

across the piano,

was still.







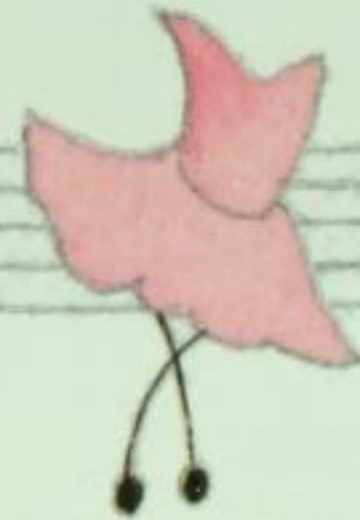
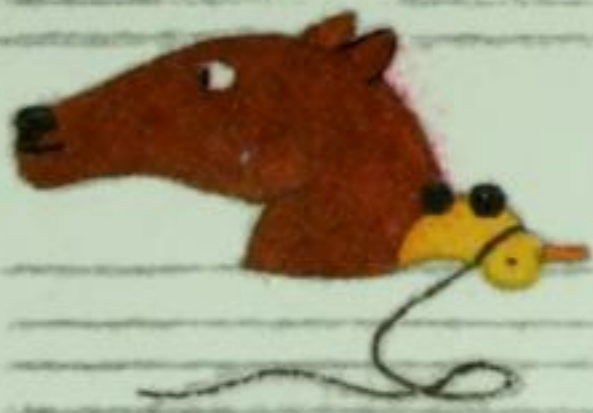
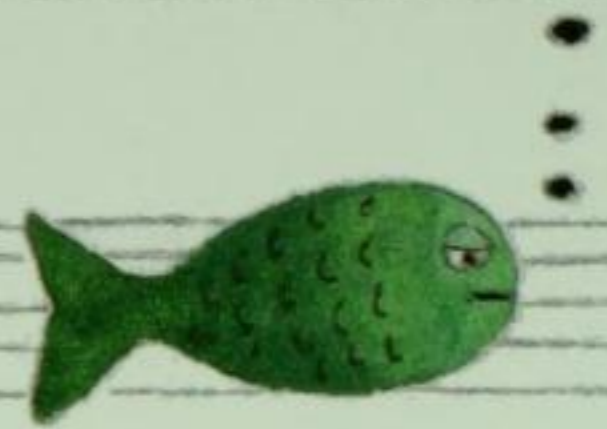
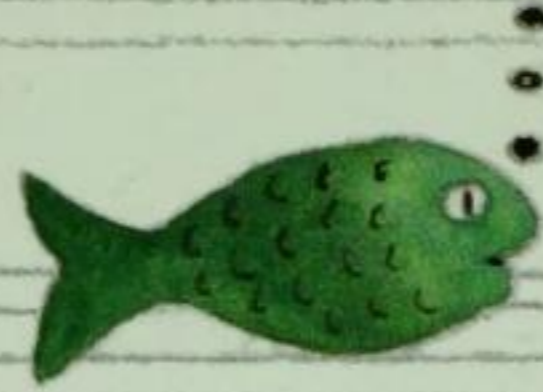
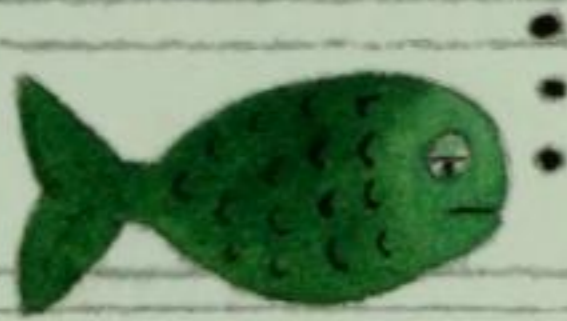
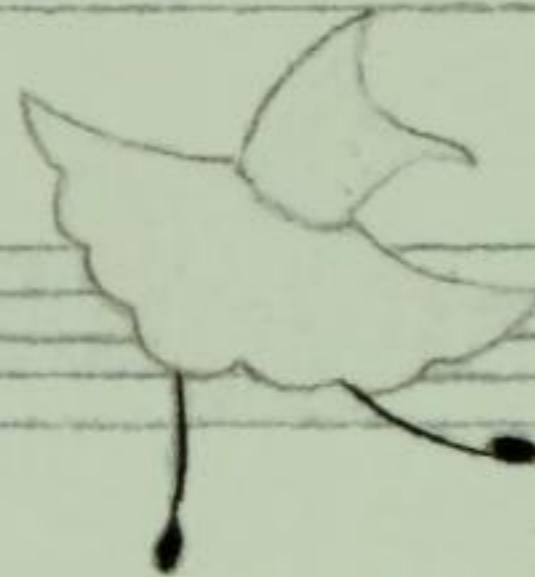
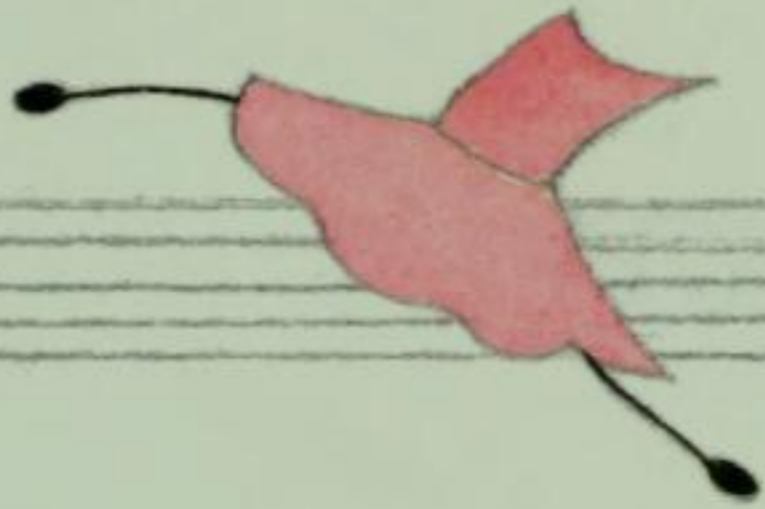
No one could tell  
as they heard this soft music  
if it was happy or sad,  
this music like messages  
from a child's dream world.  
They sat without moving  
at the Black Cat.





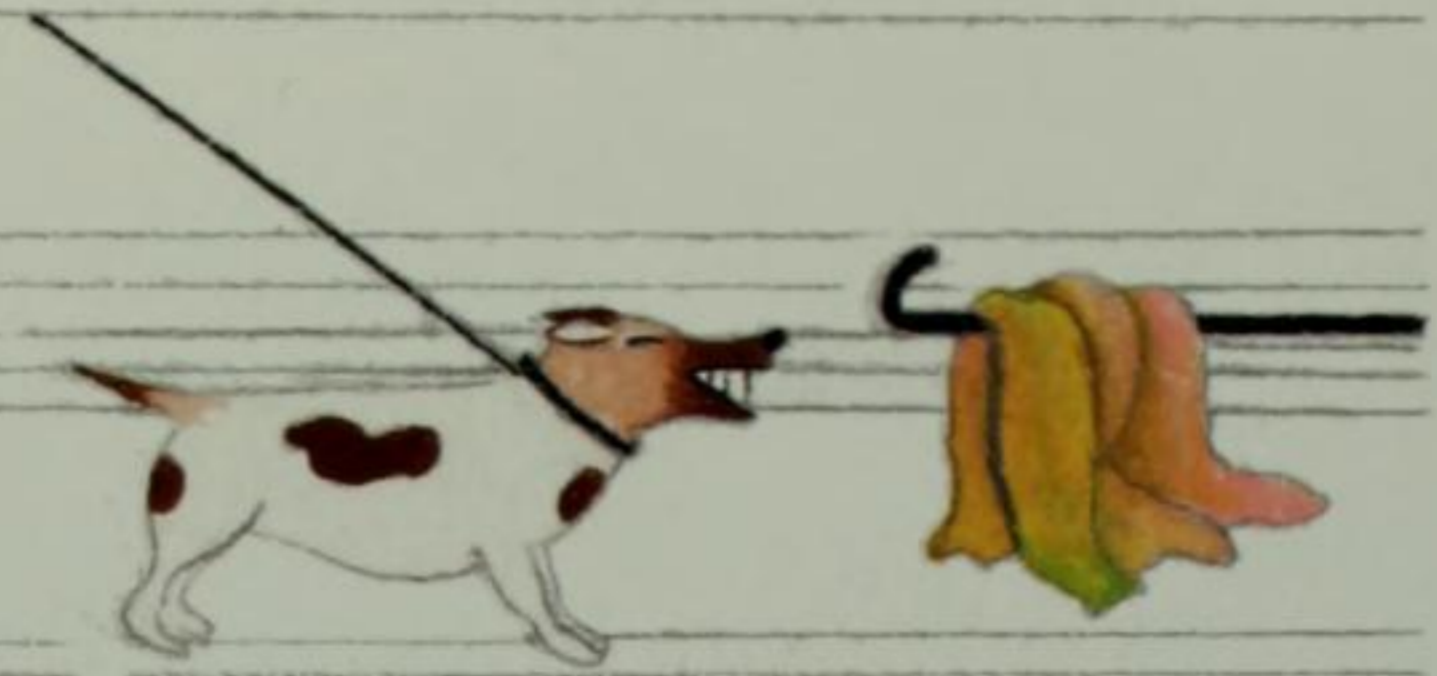
Finally  
Satie had found friends  
who would not laugh  
at his strange ways and tunes.  
He had found  
a home.







Satie wrote songs and composed music for puppet shows.  
He wrote ballets for parties and music for magical spells.  
Often he would name his pieces things like "The Dreamy Fish,"  
or maybe "In a Horse Costume,"



or sometimes "Sketches and Temptations of a Fat Man Made of Wood."  
He wrote several "Real Flabby Preludes (for a Dog),"  
and a set of seven pieces called "Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear."



Other composers wrote instructions in their music like  
"Fast" or  
"Loud" or  
"Slowly."  
Satie wrote, "From the end of the eyes,"  
"In the throat,"  
"On yellowing velvet,"  
and "I want a hat of solid mahogany."





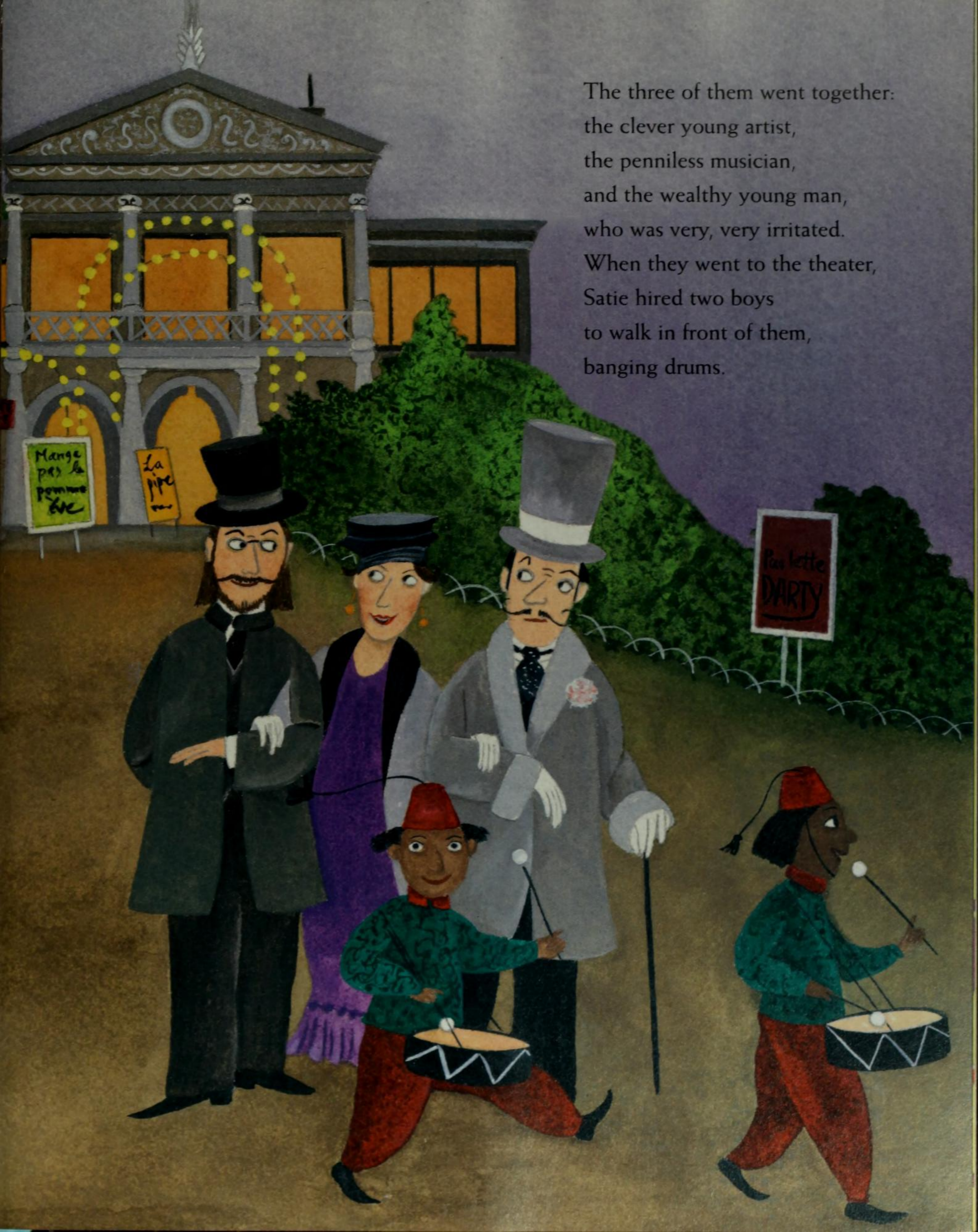


One day at the Black Cat,  
Satie met an artist and model named Suzanne Valadon,  
and fell in love with her.  
She already had a boyfriend  
who was a lawyer,  
a very rich man.  
Satie didn't mind.  
He invited himself along on their dates.





The three of them went together:  
the clever young artist,  
the penniless musician,  
and the wealthy young man,  
who was very, very irritated.  
When they went to the theater,  
Satie hired two boys  
to walk in front of them,  
banging drums.





But Satie had a temper,  
a terrible temper,  
and he would often have tantrums  
and yell at his friends  
for making fun of his music  
or liking his music  
or breaking his umbrella,  
and sometimes he would never speak to them again.

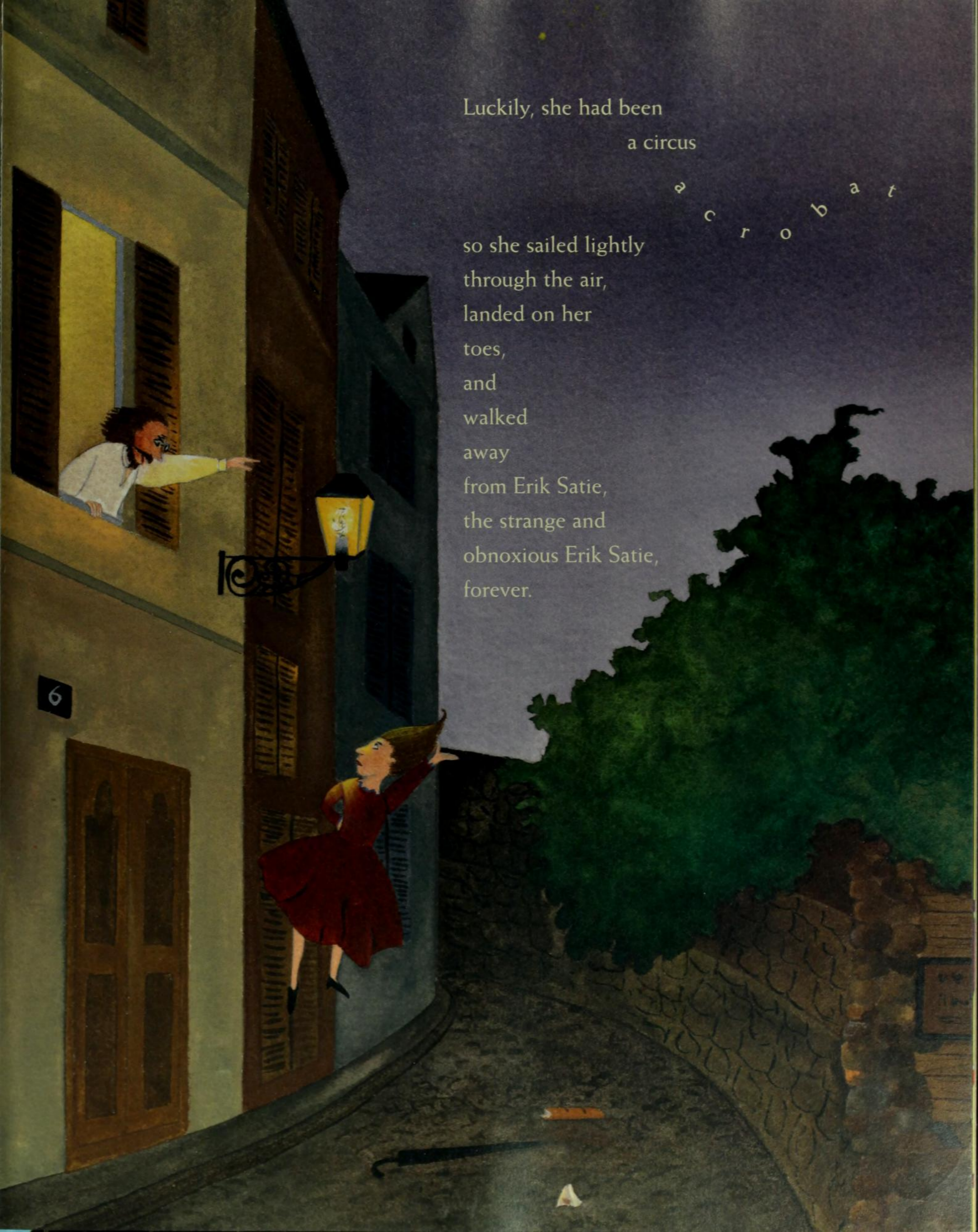
He and Suzanne  
argued and argued  
one night in his apartment  
until finally  
he threw her right out the window.



Luckily, she had been  
a circus

a  
c  
r  
o  
b  
a  
t

so she sailed lightly  
through the air,  
landed on her  
toes,  
and  
walked  
away  
from Erik Satie,  
the strange and  
obnoxious Erik Satie,  
forever.

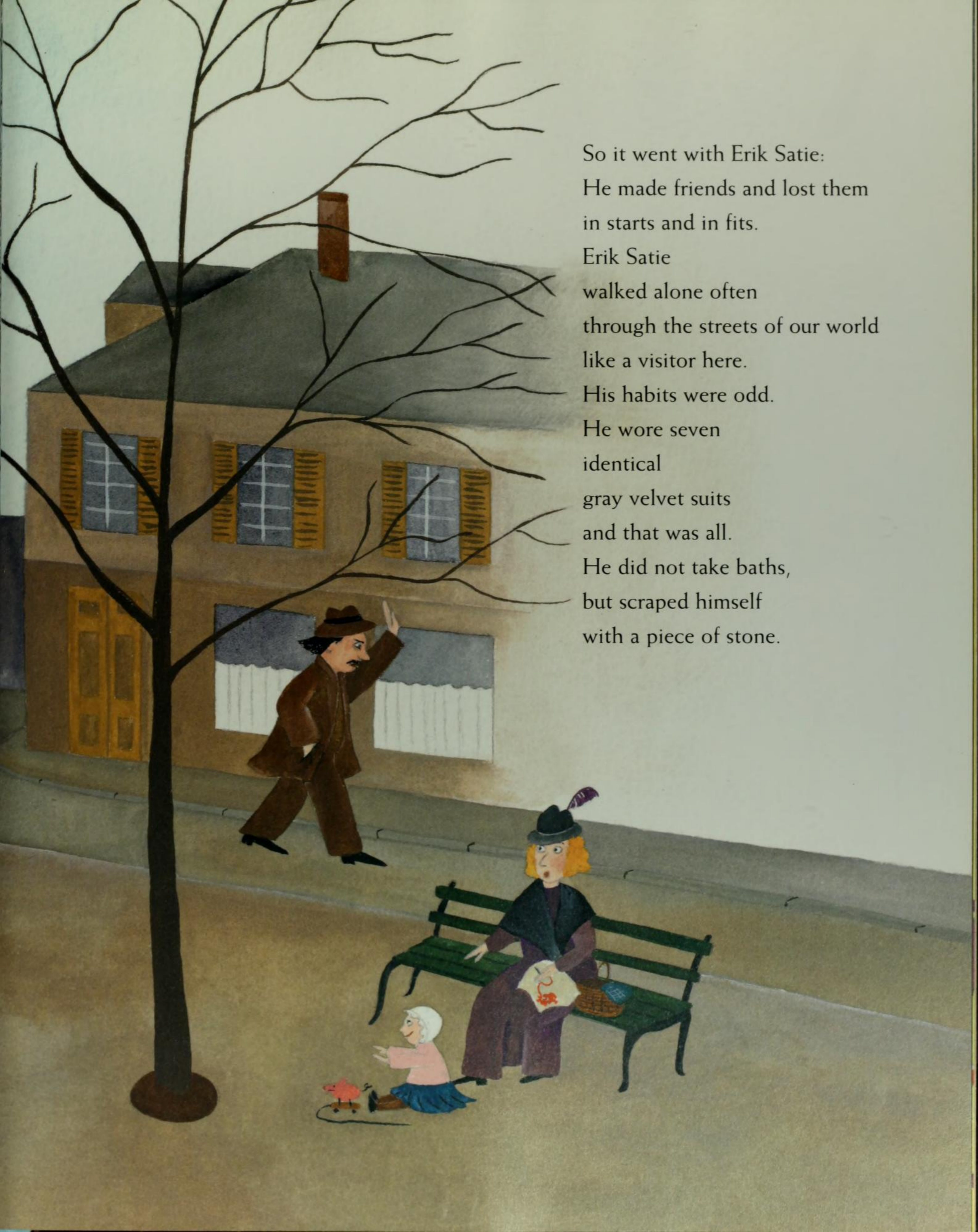








So it went with Erik Satie:  
He made friends and lost them  
in starts and in fits.  
Erik Satie  
walked alone often  
through the streets of our world  
like a visitor here.  
His habits were odd.  
He wore seven  
identical  
gray velvet suits  
and that was all.  
He did not take baths,  
but scraped himself  
with a piece of stone.





Satie was very poor.

He had to move into a room so small  
that to get through the door,  
he had to climb onto his bed.

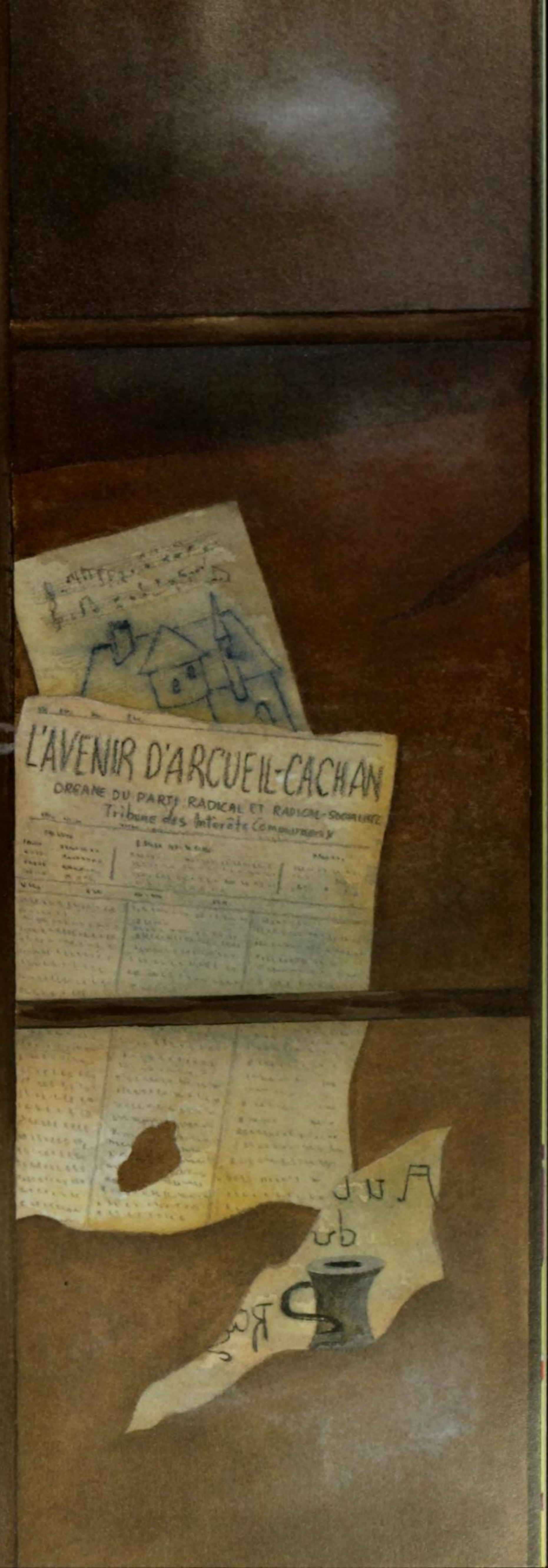
When he got even poorer  
they kicked him out of even this tiny, cold room.

He and a friend  
put all of his belongings  
in a wheelbarrow  
and wheeled them through the streets of Paris  
to another apartment  
in a different part of town  
where he stayed  
for the rest of his life.

He had to cover the windows with paper  
because the neighbors were always peeking in  
to see the strange man,  
the man like a child,  
who lived next door.

He lived there alone  
amidst trash and stacks of paper  
and a tuneless and tinny piano.







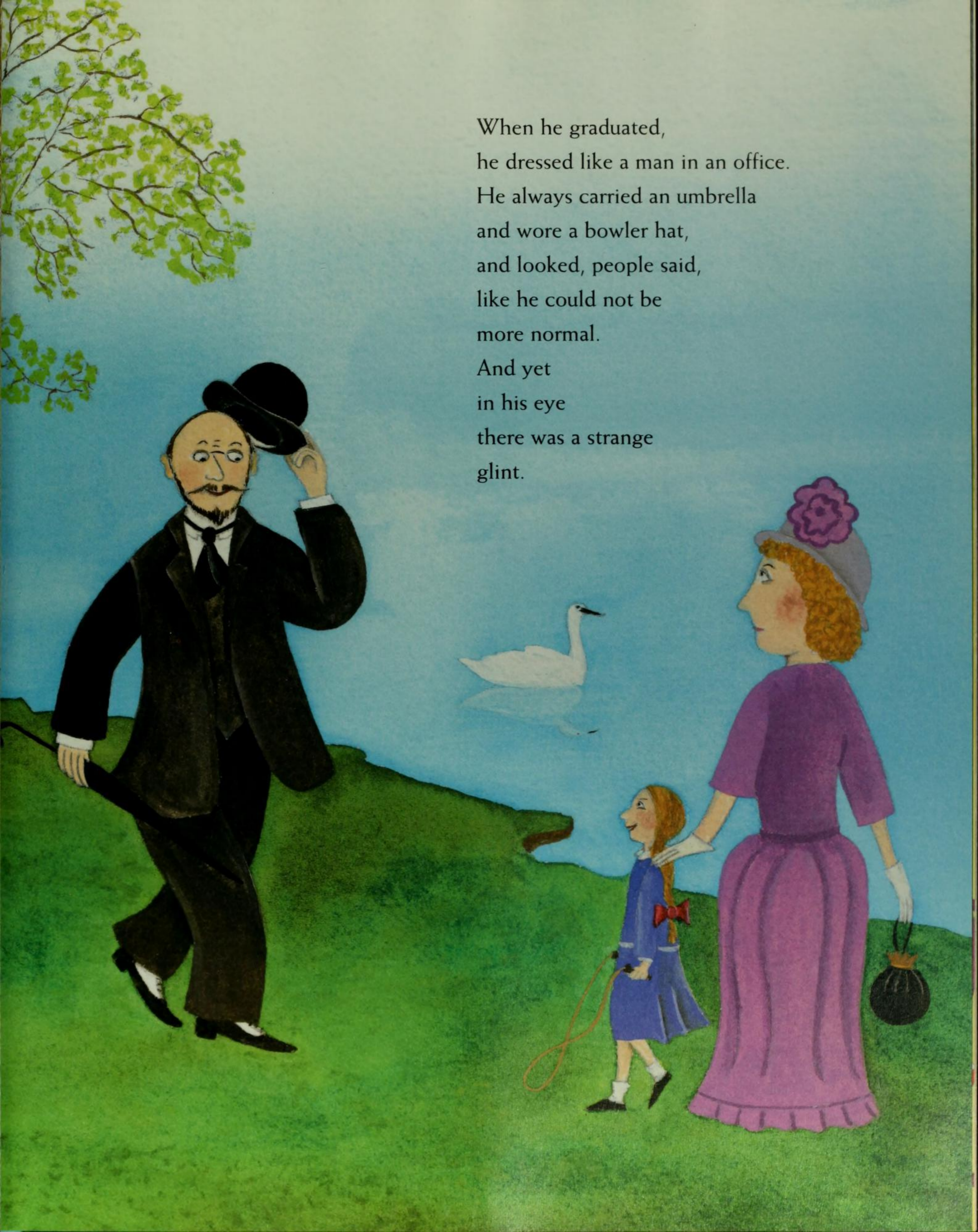


Satie was poor  
because many people  
did not like his music.  
He had dropped out of school,  
so they said he had not learned  
the rules  
of how to compose.  
He realized he had made a mistake.  
He needed to know rules  
so he could break them.

In 1905,  
when he was thirty-nine,  
Satie went back to school  
to learn music.  
He did not complain.  
He sat at his desk.  
He patiently did homework  
and sat with the others,  
those half his age.  
And he got his degree.



When he graduated,  
he dressed like a man in an office.  
He always carried an umbrella  
and wore a bowler hat,  
and looked, people said,  
like he could not be  
more normal.  
And yet  
in his eye  
there was a strange  
glint.





# PARADE

In 1917, Erik Satie and his friends put on a ballet called *Parade*.

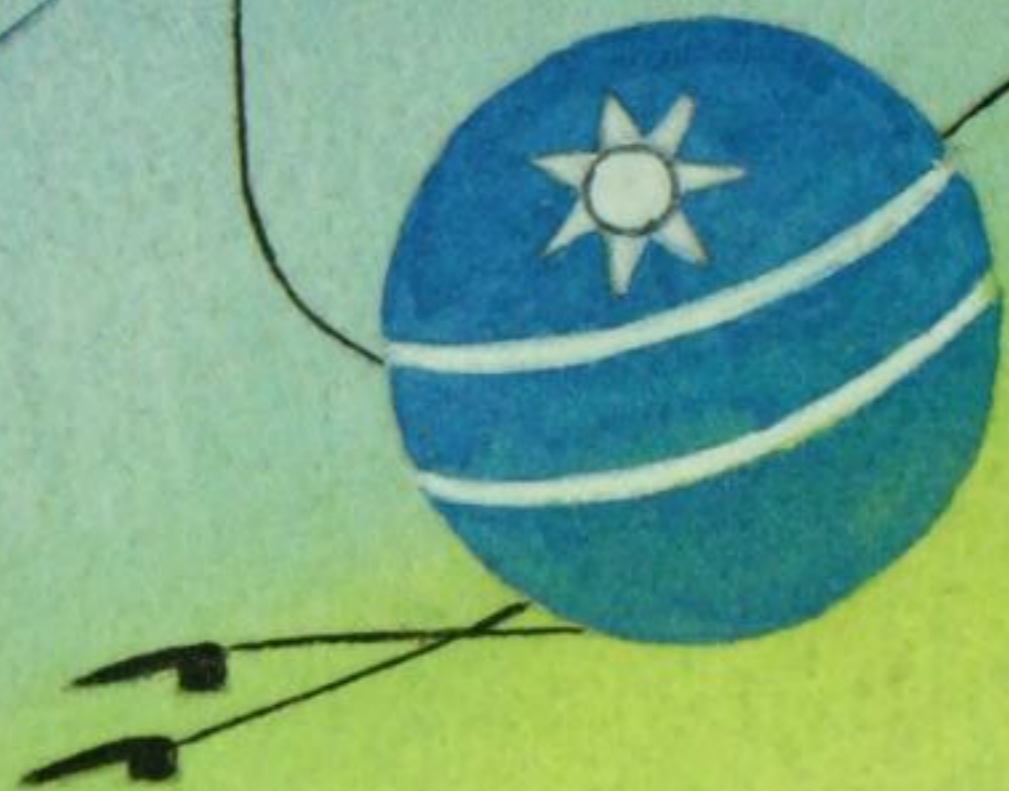
Satie wrote the music.

The sets and the costumes were built and painted by an artist named Pablo Picasso.

The ballet's story was gripping: a circus—a thief—and a girl, a plucky girl with a gun on a bicycle, shooting—all these and more, dancing like a film sped up in a dream.

People were used to ballet being very polite, very graceful and dainty.

This was not that.





The music for *Parade* was funny  
and mechanical.  
It sounded like jazz  
played on xylophones, typewriters, and sirens.  
Some of the dancers had to wear  
tall  
buildings.





The audience didn't like *Parade* at all.  
They thought it was a joke on them.  
Maybe it was.  
They started to yell and to fight.  
The man who had planned the ballet  
was attacked  
by a woman with a hat pin.





One critic gave it  
a very bad review.  
Satie was upset.  
He had a fit.  
He sent the critic a postcard  
which said:

Sir, dear friend.  
You are not only  
a butt,  
but a butt  
without music.



This was not a good idea.  
The critic took Satie to court.  
Outside the courtroom,  
Satie's friends got in a fight with the police.  
Satie came very close  
to going to jail.







Though Satie got older he always seemed young. He wrote other ballets, each one an experiment in what music and dancers could do. In 1924, he wrote *Cancelled*, a ballet with a movie that began with Satie and the painter Picabia, Francis Picabia, shooting a cannon at the audience, and included a funeral led by a camel.

On the music was printed: "When will people get out of the habit of explaining everything?"





Garage  
for rent



The hardest thing about making *Cancelled*, the ballet with a movie, was finding a garage where they could keep the camel.

On opening night the lead dancer was so worried he got sick. He thought people would hate the ballet and think it was strange. He said that he couldn't dance that night. The crowds waited eagerly to get in and see this odd new ballet. But it did not open that night. Traffic was jammed up for blocks. Luckily, the posters already said *Cancelled*.



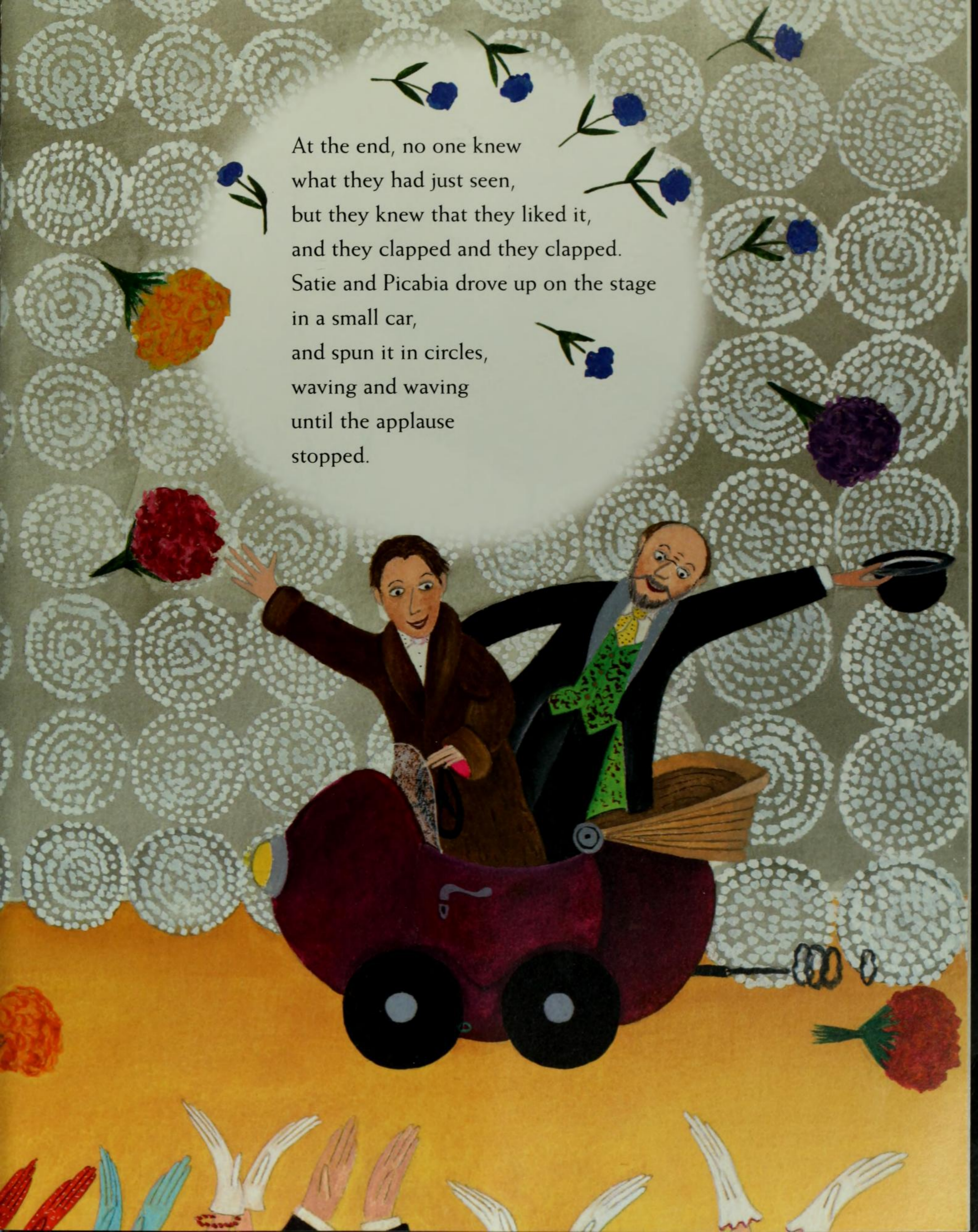


It was not cancelled long.  
It opened a few days later.  
It had a huge audience.  
Its sets were made of metal discs.  
They showed the movie  
of Satie and Picabia  
shooting the cannon.  
A fireman stood with two buckets of water  
while dancers around him spun and twirled.





At the end, no one knew  
what they had just seen,  
but they knew that they liked it,  
and they clapped and they clapped.  
Satie and Picabia drove up on the stage  
in a small car,  
and spun it in circles,  
waving and waving  
until the applause  
stopped.







Shortly afterward, Satie got sick.  
He could not stay at home  
with no one to take care of him.  
So he lay in bed in a hotel room  
and the door was attached to him  
with string.  
His friends came.  
Sometimes he yelled at them.  
Sometimes he was sorry for things he had done.



He was taken to the hospital,  
where the nuns came and went.  
On the first of July,  
he died.



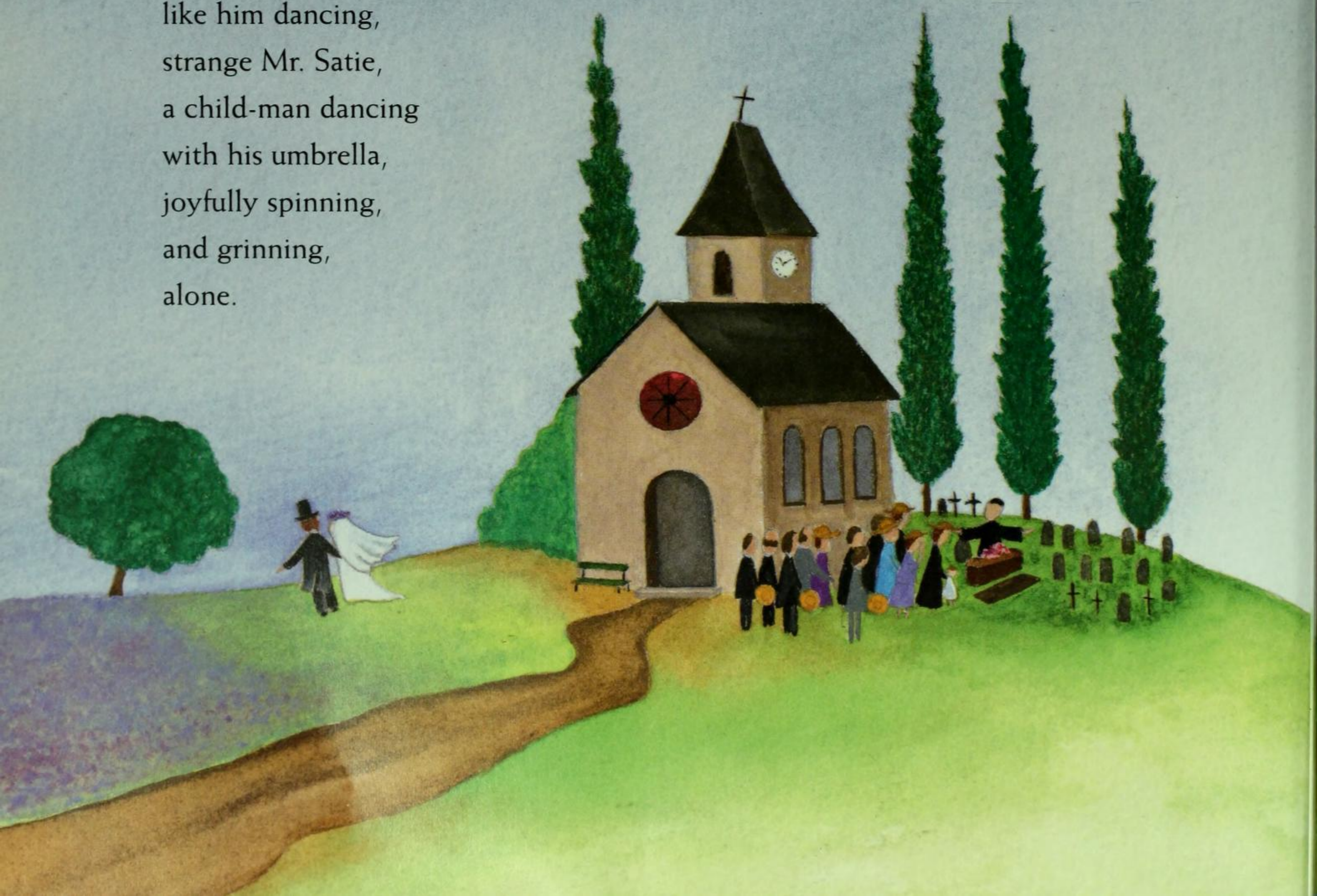


The day of his funeral  
poets, musicians, and artists all came  
to the church near his home  
to bid him good-bye.

In the chapel a wedding went on  
while the body was buried.

Like his music  
it was happy and sad  
at the same moment,  
not one or the other.

That's the way with his pieces:  
Sometimes they can sound  
like night falling, and darkness;  
sometimes they can sound  
like him dancing,  
strange Mr. Satie,  
a child-man dancing  
with his umbrella,  
joyfully spinning,  
and grinning,  
alone.









## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The story of Erik Satie may be strange, but it is true.

Satie's childhood was probably not easy. In 1872, his mother died, and he and his brother were sent to live with his grandparents. He studied music off and on as a teenager, but it didn't go well. He eventually left to join the military, but that didn't work out either. He disliked it so much that he sat outside in the cold night air until he developed bronchitis and was discharged. At this point he moved to Paris and met the poets, musicians, and painters who would become so important to him.

Most of Satie's music was written for piano, such as the *Gymnopédies* (1888), the *Gnossiennes* (1889–1897), and the *Sonatine bureaucratique* (1917). There are some important exceptions, however. One of his most famous pieces is an opera with no action called *Socrate* (1919). And he was the first composer to create Muzak, writing chamber pieces that were supposed to be repeated again and again as "musical wallpaper."

Later in his life, he also wrote several famous scores for ballets—*Parade* (1917), *Les Aventures de Mercure* (1924), and *Relâche* ("Cancelled"; 1924). One critic described the bizarre music and costumes for *Parade* as "sur-real"—more than real. Now, whenever we want to say that something is strange to the point of being dreamlike, we call it *surreal*.

In 1925, shortly after the success of these final ballets, Satie got sick and died, most likely of liver problems. His final words were, "Ah! The cows ..." No one except Satie had been inside his apartment for almost thirty years. When his friends went in, they found the floor littered with stacks of dirty paper and little cards that advertised magic castles for rent and airships of metal.

Though Satie lived most of his life in poverty and obscurity, his music profoundly affected many famous classical composers—Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, John Cage—and also many composers of jazz. Today, his music is famous, heard in movies and as backgrounds for advertisements. One of his pieces, "Vexations," which is supposed to be repeated eight hundred and forty times, takes over eighteen hours to perform, and appears in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Satie was a genius and a crank, a magician and a child, a fool and a visionary, a gentle man with a violent temper, a medieval composer on the cutting edge of modernity.

Satie, most of all, was Satie.



### Further reading and listening:

There are several excellent biographies of Erik Satie for adults, but perhaps the best and most interesting sources are the writings of Satie himself and those who knew him: Ornella Volta's *Satie Seen through His Letters* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2000); Robert Orledge's *Satie Remembered* (Portland: Timber Press, 1995); and Ornella Volta's *A Mammal's Notebook: Collected Writings of Erik Satie* (London: Atlas Press, 1996).

Those who wish to listen to Satie's music should perhaps start with some of his most famous piano pieces; the *Gymnopédies*, the *Gnossiennes*, and *Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*.



VIKING

Published by Penguin Group

Penguin Young Readers Group, 345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

First published in 2003 by Viking, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © M. T. Anderson, 2003

Illustrations copyright © Petra Mathers, 2003

All rights reserved

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Anderson, M. T.

Strange Mr. Satie / by M.T. Anderson ; illustrated by Petra Mathers.

p. cm.

Summary: Introduces the life of the French composer, Erik Satie, who spent his entire career challenging established conventions in music.

ISBN 0-670-03637-4 (hardcover)

1. Satie, Erik, 1866-1925. 2. Composers—Biography—Juvenile literature.

[1. Satie, Erik, 1866-1925. 2. Composers.] I. Mathers, Petra, ill. II. Title.

ML3930.S28A63 2003 780'.92—dc21 2003000949

Printed in the U.S.A.

Set in Weiss

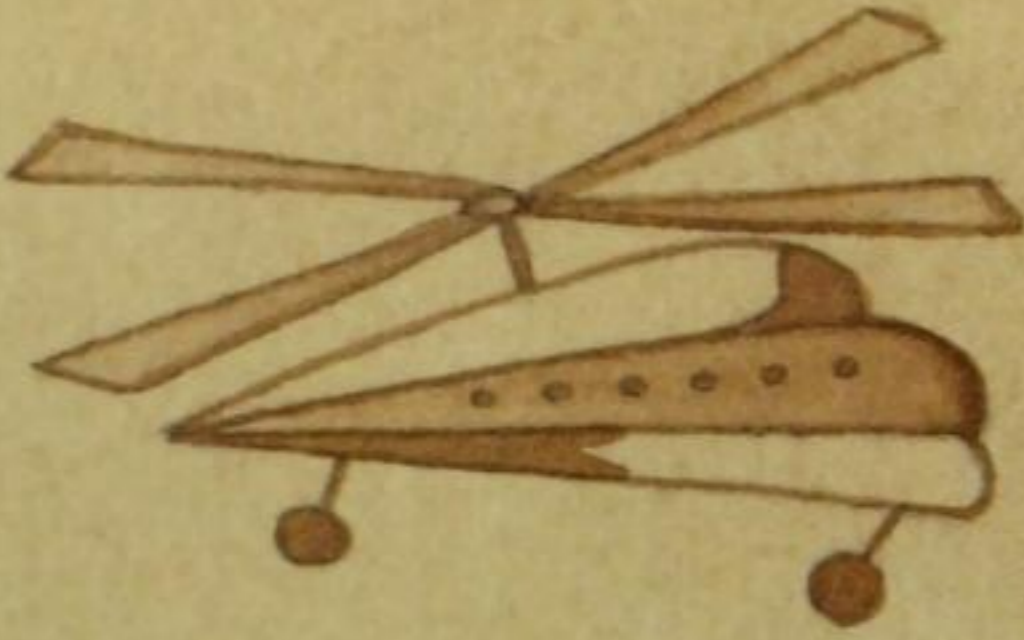
Endpaper text adapted from Erik Satie's *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*



EG

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
3 9999 04762 713 6

Egleston Square Branch Library  
2044 Columbus Avenue  
Roxbury, MA 02119



The artist must regulate his life.

Branch Library  
2044 Columbus Avenue  
Roxbury, MA 02119



Here is a precise schedule of my daily activities:

7:18 a.m.: I get up:

10:23 to 11:47 a.m.: Inspiration.



I start lunch at 12:11 and leave the table at 12:14.

13:19 to 14:53 p.m.: A healthy ride on my horse around my estates.

15:12 to 16:07 p.m.: More inspiration.

16:27 to 18:47: Various activities (sword-fighting, reflection, staying still, visits, thinking hard, dexterity, swimming, etc.).

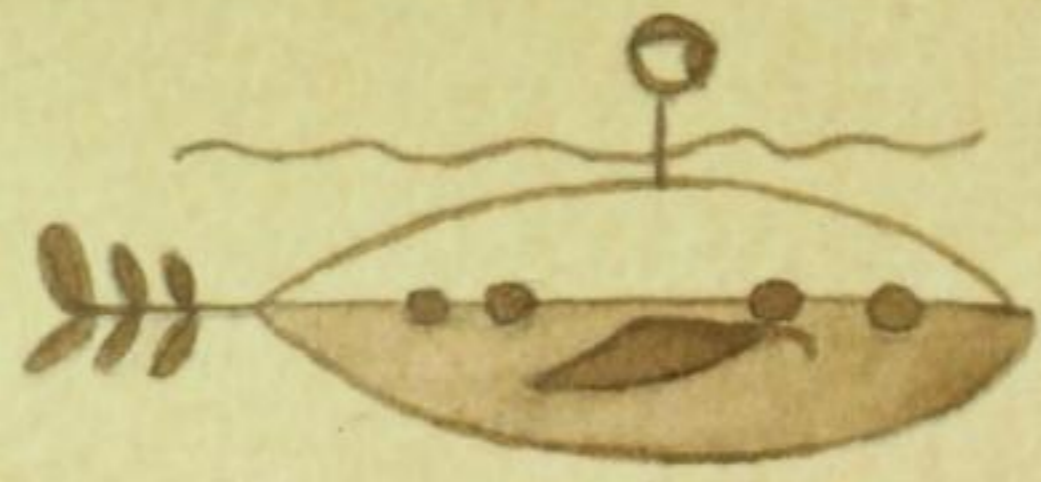
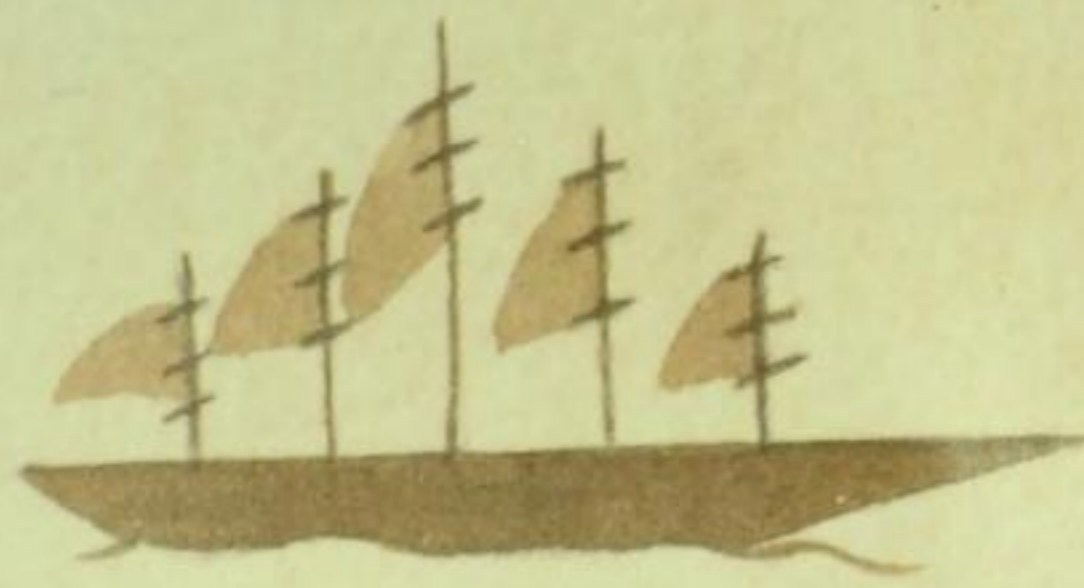


Dinner is served beginning at 19:16 and ending at 19:20.

Then come the symphonic lectures, in a loud voice: 20:09 to 21:59.



I go to bed regularly at 22:37. Once a week, I wake up with a start at 3:19. That's on Tuesday.







*Eat only white foods:*

*eggs, sugar, scraped bones, animal fat, veal, salt  
coconuts, chicken boiled in white water, fruit w*

EVERYTHING  
EXPLAINED



*cheese  
kinds*

**Boston Public Library**

**EGLESTON SQUARE  
BRANCH LIBRARY**

**The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.  
Please do not remove cards from this pocket.**

## M. T. Anderson



says, "When I was a child, I loved Satie's music—so I was delighted, when I grew up, to discover that he had been so childlike throughout his life. I wrote this book as a way to sing back to him all the things he had sung to me." Mr. Anderson's books include *Feed* (a National Book Award finalist), and a picture book biography of the composer Handel (a *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* honor book). An instructor in the Children's MFA program at Vermont College, he lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

## Petra Mathers



says, "Erik Satie lived in my studio for over a year. I felt like a schoolgirl with a crush. I admire him most for always going his own way in life and his music. Even though he walked everywhere he went, Satie was never a pedestrian; he was always a little aloft." Petra Mathers has written and illustrated many books for children, including her beloved *Lottie's World* series. She lives in Astoria, Oregon.

*Jacket illustrations copyright © Petra Mathers, 2003*



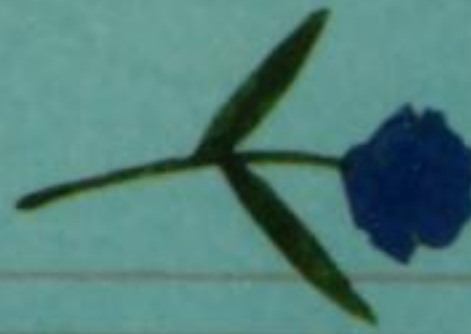
**VIKING**

A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group  
345 Hudson Street  
New York, New York 10014

Visit us at [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com)

Printed





ISBN 0-670-03637-4  
5 1699>  
9 780670 036370

