



# Stories From Around the World

## A Story of Courage



## A Gujarati Tale

Harjit Singh sat on the bench by the carousel at the airport, waiting for his suitcase to arrive. He was tired and cold and wasn't used to this weather. In Amritsar, where he came from in India, it was thirty-seven degrees! In Paris, it was just fourteen degrees.

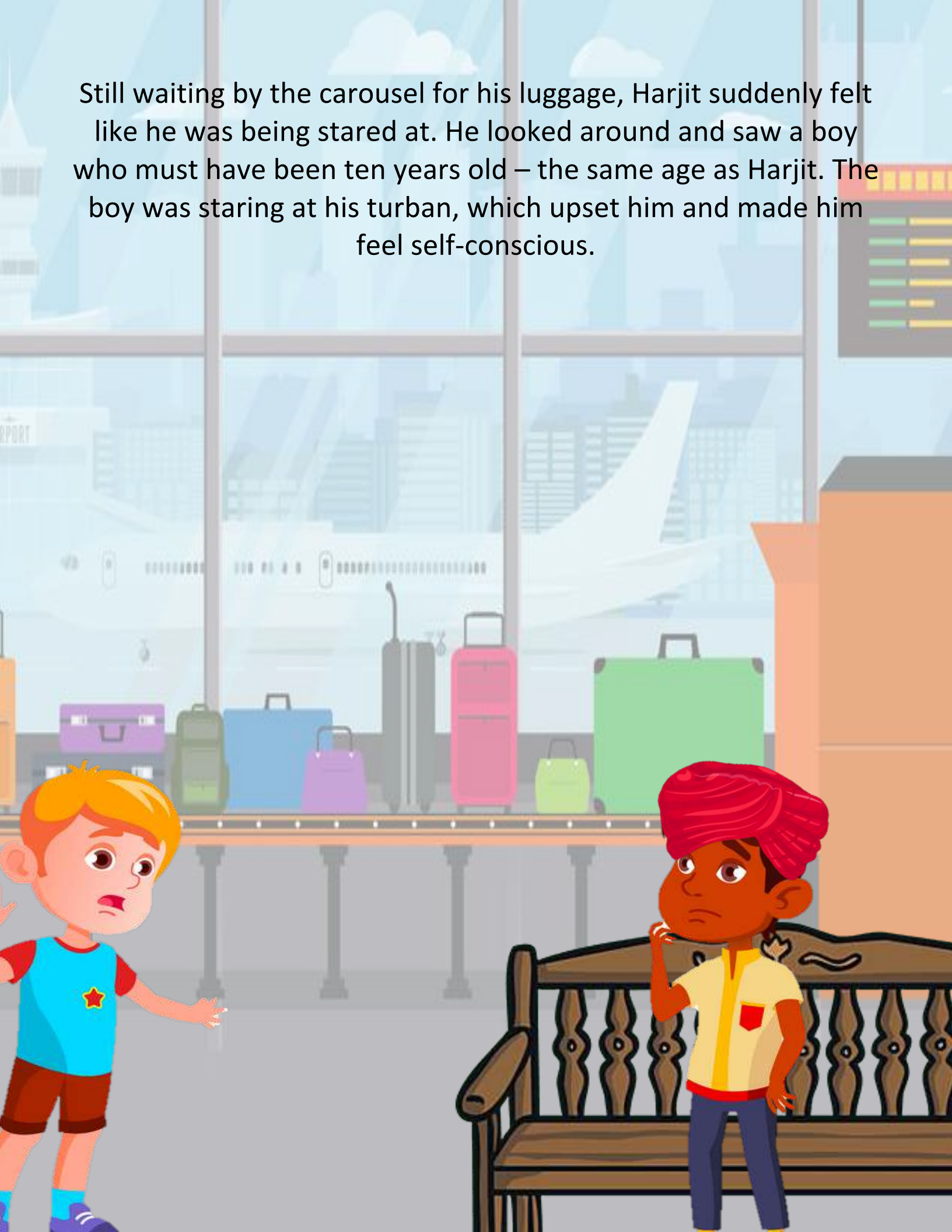


His father called out to him: 'Hurry up, Harjit! The driver can't wait for much longer just for you!'

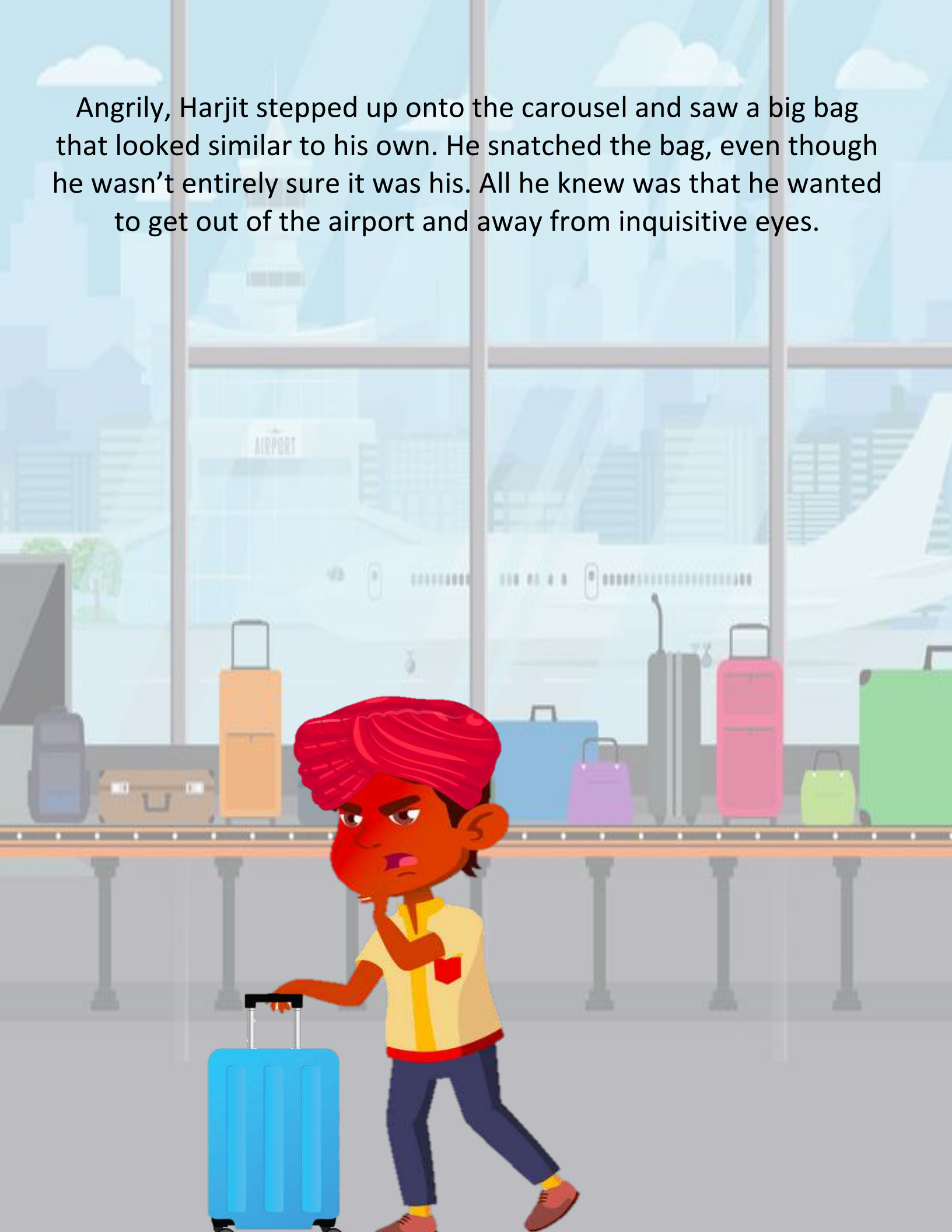
Harjit was a little upset. He didn't want to come to Paris. He wanted to stay in India with his friends, but because his father had received a job offer in France, they had to leave India and make a new start.



Still waiting by the carousel for his luggage, Harjit suddenly felt like he was being stared at. He looked around and saw a boy who must have been ten years old – the same age as Harjit. The boy was staring at his turban, which upset him and made him feel self-conscious.



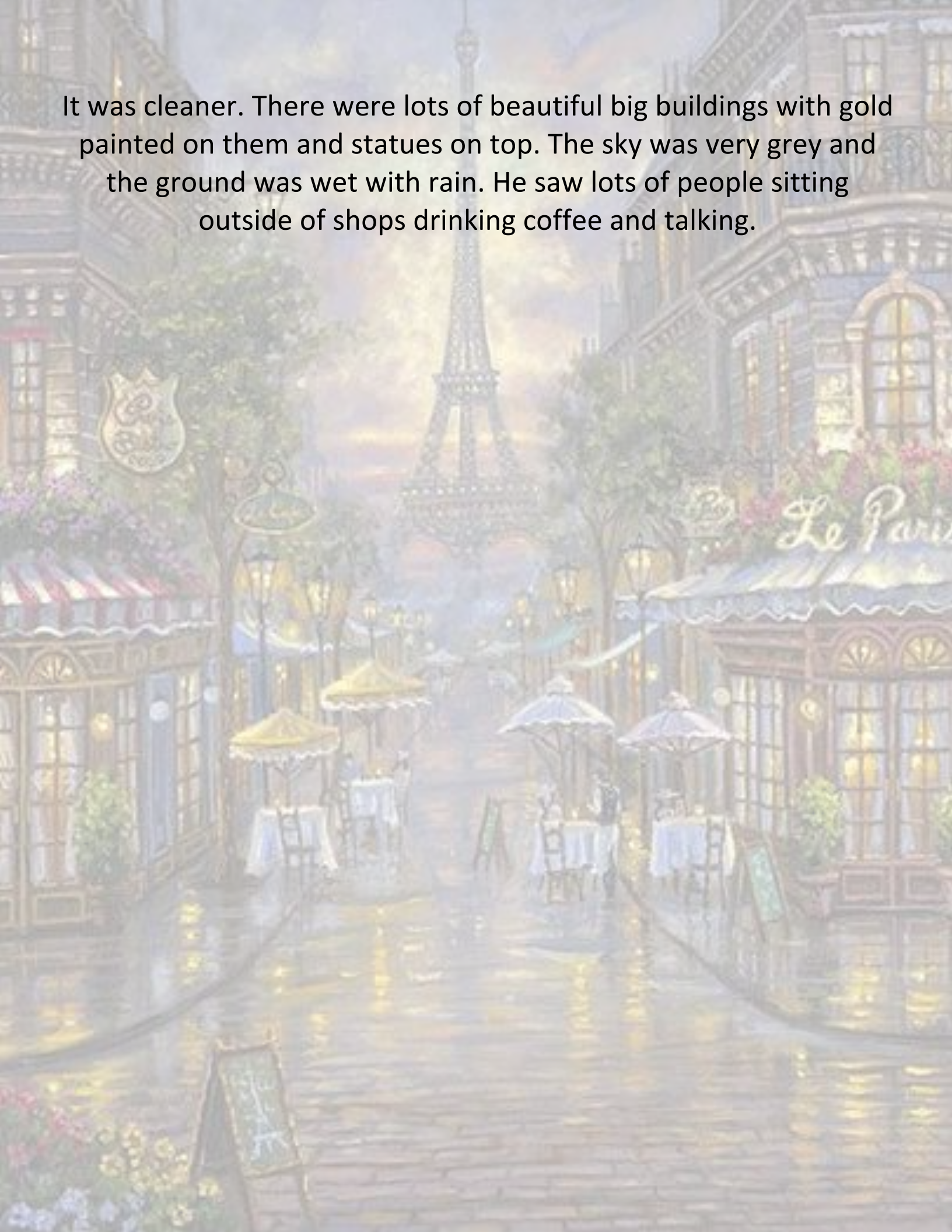
Angrily, Harjit stepped up onto the carousel and saw a big bag that looked similar to his own. He snatched the bag, even though he wasn't entirely sure it was his. All he knew was that he wanted to get out of the airport and away from inquisitive eyes.



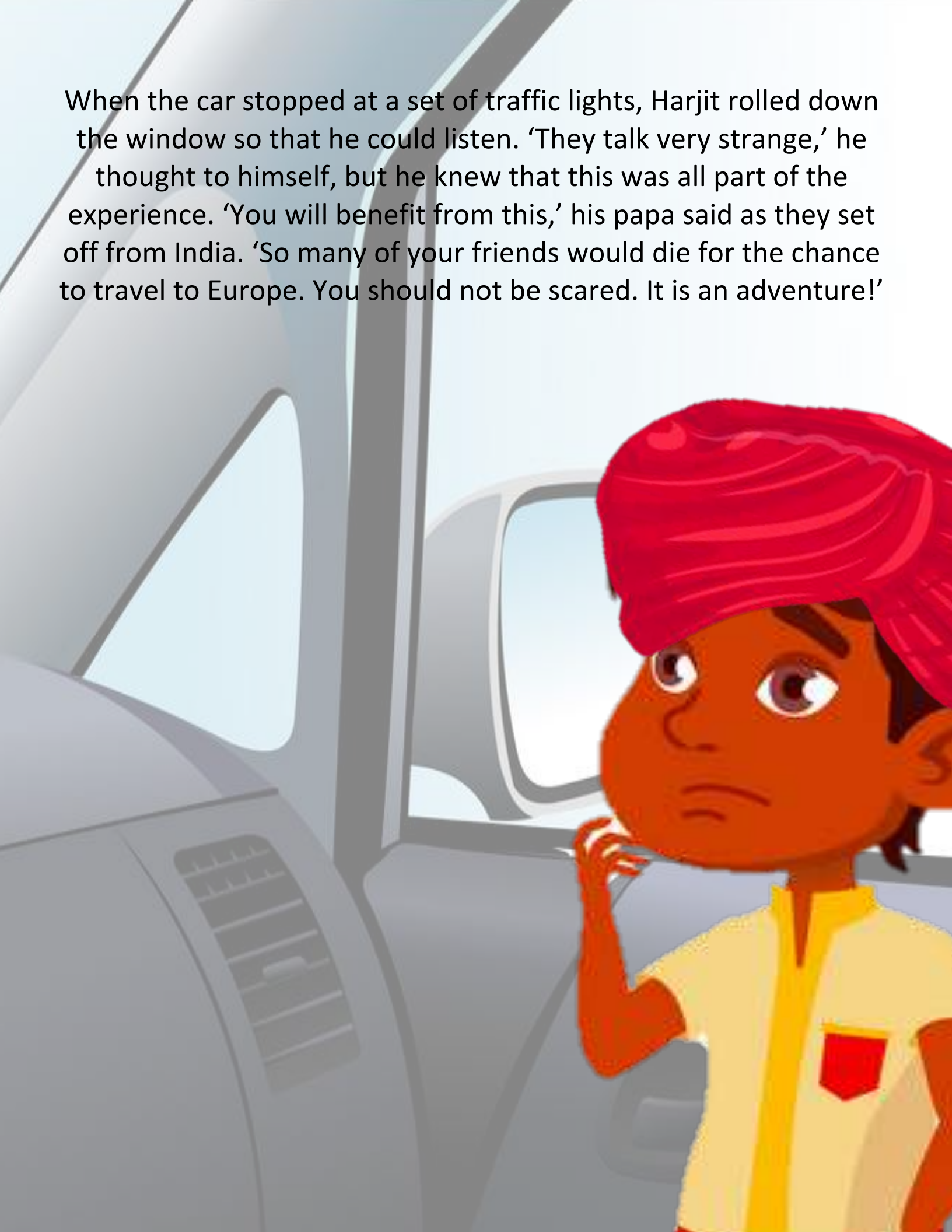
As they drove to their new apartment, Harjit glared out of the car window and took note of how different everything looked compared to back home.



It was cleaner. There were lots of beautiful big buildings with gold painted on them and statues on top. The sky was very grey and the ground was wet with rain. He saw lots of people sitting outside of shops drinking coffee and talking.

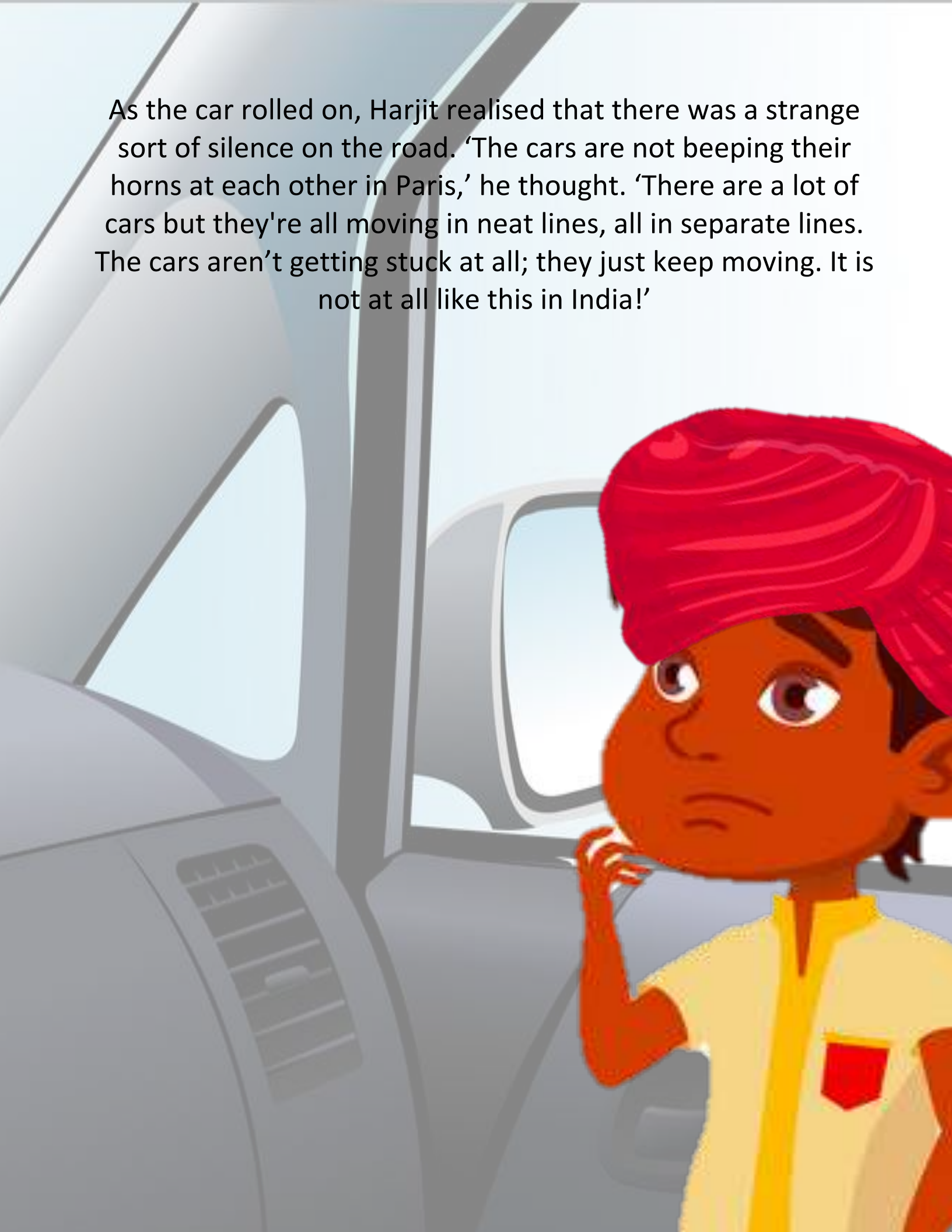


When the car stopped at a set of traffic lights, Harjit rolled down the window so that he could listen. 'They talk very strange,' he thought to himself, but he knew that this was all part of the experience. 'You will benefit from this,' his papa said as they set off from India. 'So many of your friends would die for the chance to travel to Europe. You should not be scared. It is an adventure!'





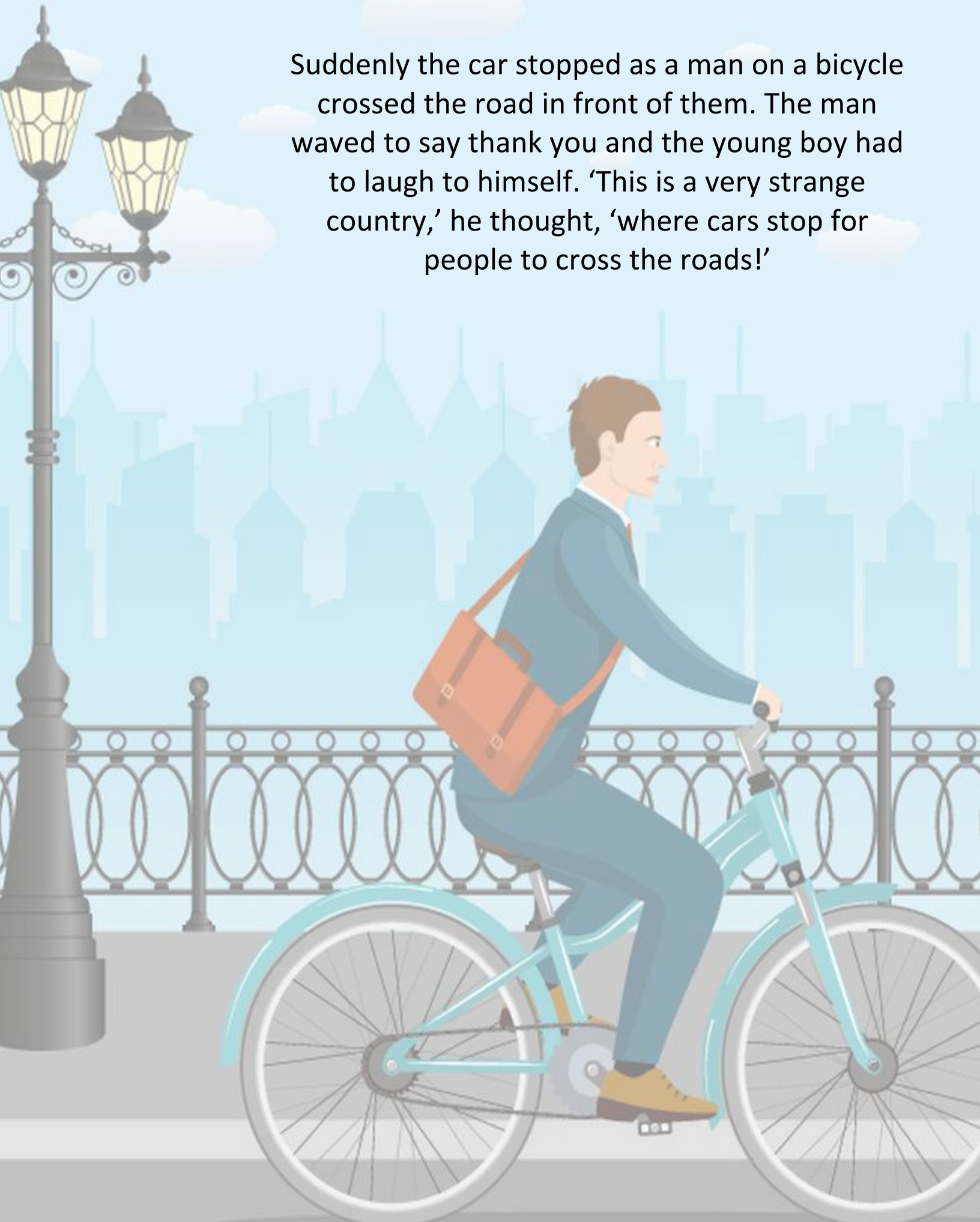
As the car rolled on, Harjit realised that there was a strange sort of silence on the road. 'The cars are not beeping their horns at each other in Paris,' he thought. 'There are a lot of cars but they're all moving in neat lines, all in separate lines. The cars aren't getting stuck at all; they just keep moving. It is not at all like this in India!'



They continued to drive through the city and soon they passed a strange, imposing metal building where lots of people were standing and taking photographs. 'I wonder what that is – maybe it's something like the Golden Temple or Taj Mahal, where people from all around the world come to take pictures.'



Suddenly the car stopped as a man on a bicycle crossed the road in front of them. The man waved to say thank you and the young boy had to laugh to himself. 'This is a very strange country,' he thought, 'where cars stop for people to cross the roads!'



The family soon arrived at their new apartment and Harjit's father told him that he must go to bed very soon as it was already late and he must enroll at school the next day.



Harjit sulked off into his new room and closed the door behind him. But as soon as he was inside, the young boy was once again amazed at his new surroundings. The room was extremely large with huge windows all along one wall. The ceiling was so high that not even Harjit and all of his friends piled one on top of the other would be able to reach up and touch it!



This thought also saddened the young boy because it made him miss his grandparents and his friends. Not knowing what else to do, he jumped onto the bed and sank his head into the pillows and cried.

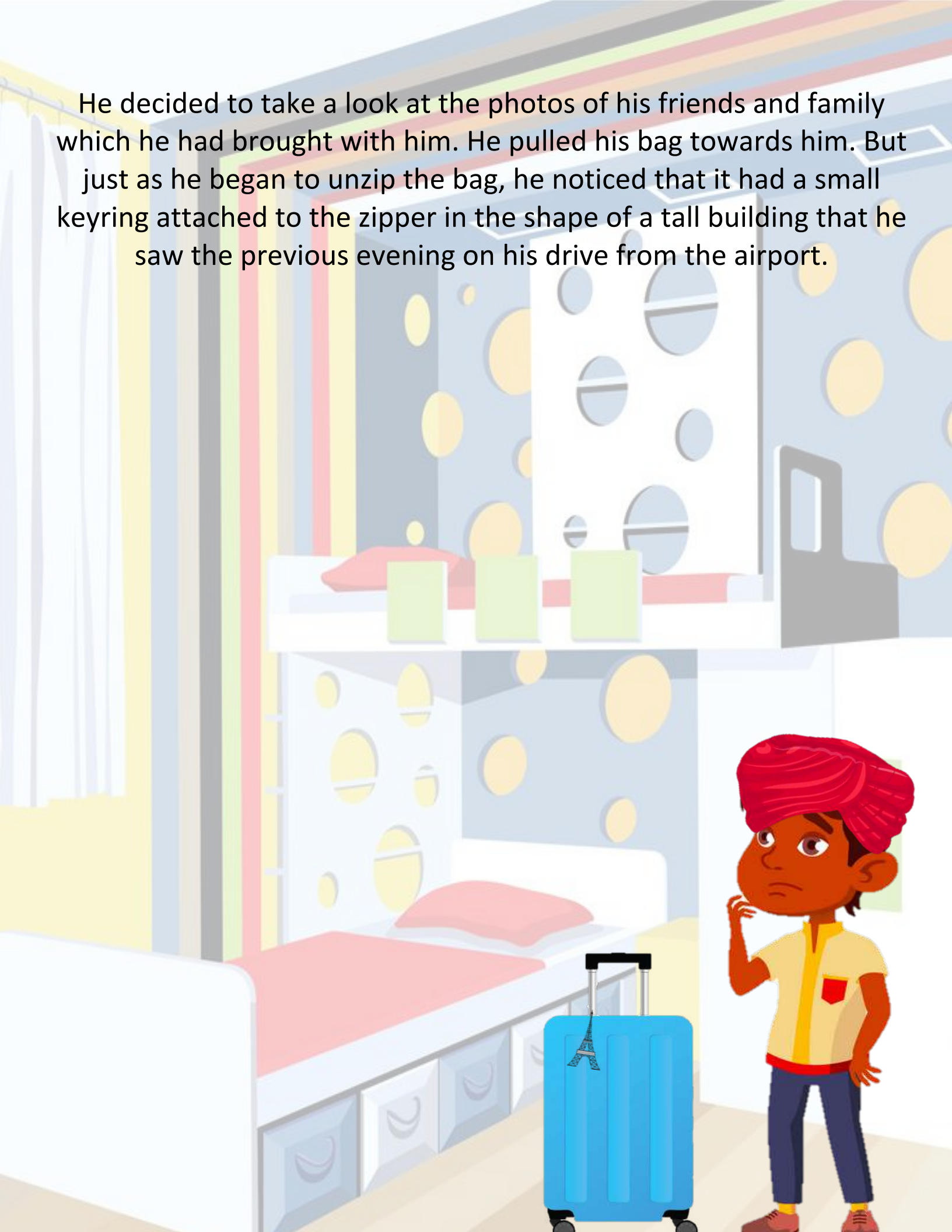


The following morning, just before dawn had fully broken, Harjit awoke and realised that it was not a bad dream at all: he really was in Paris. He crawled out of bed and looked out of the window at a few people. It was all so different from Amritsar.

He missed the constant noise from the Golden Temple: the people and cars and rickshaws. There was something very comforting about that noise, he was used to it and he missed it already.

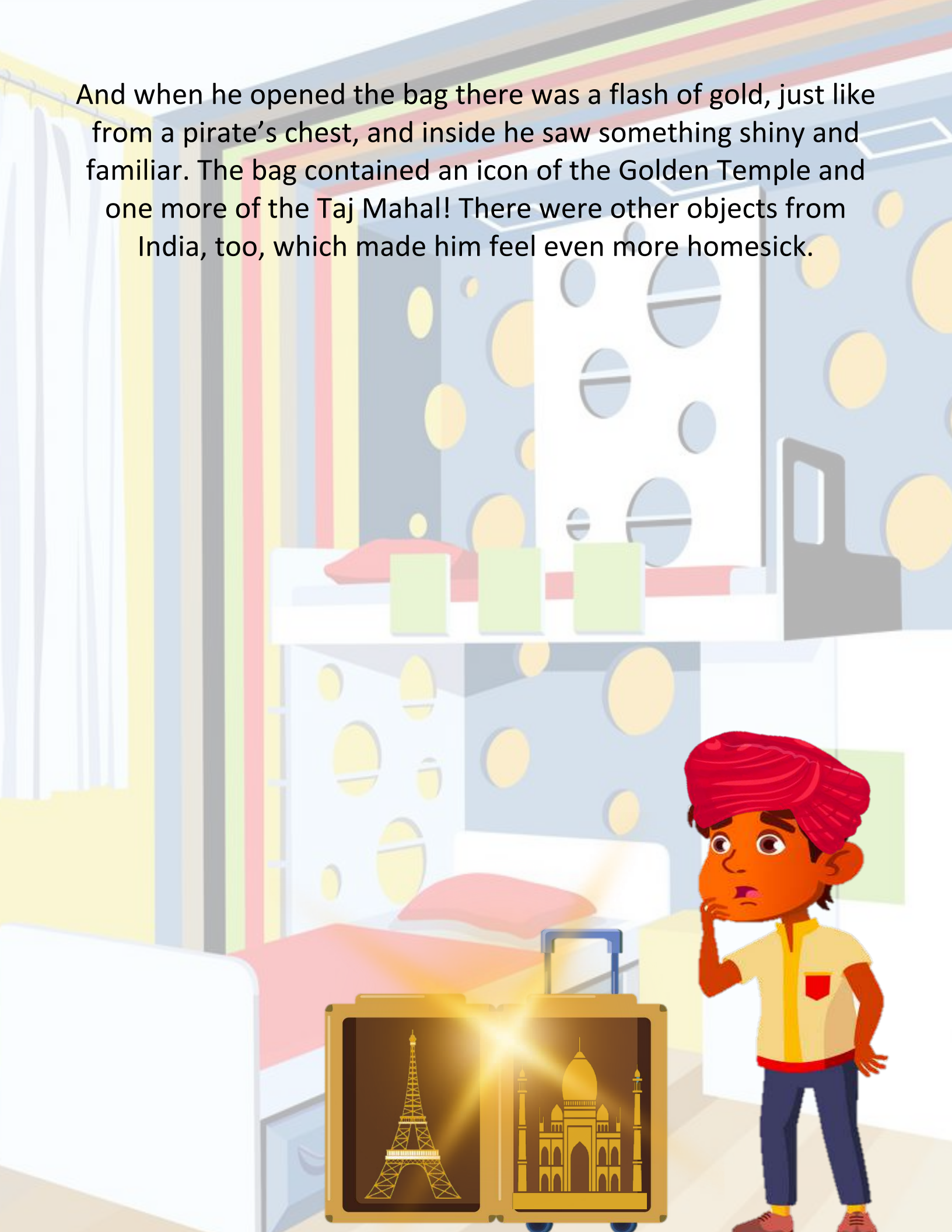


He decided to take a look at the photos of his friends and family which he had brought with him. He pulled his bag towards him. But just as he began to unzip the bag, he noticed that it had a small keyring attached to the zipper in the shape of a tall building that he saw the previous evening on his drive from the airport.

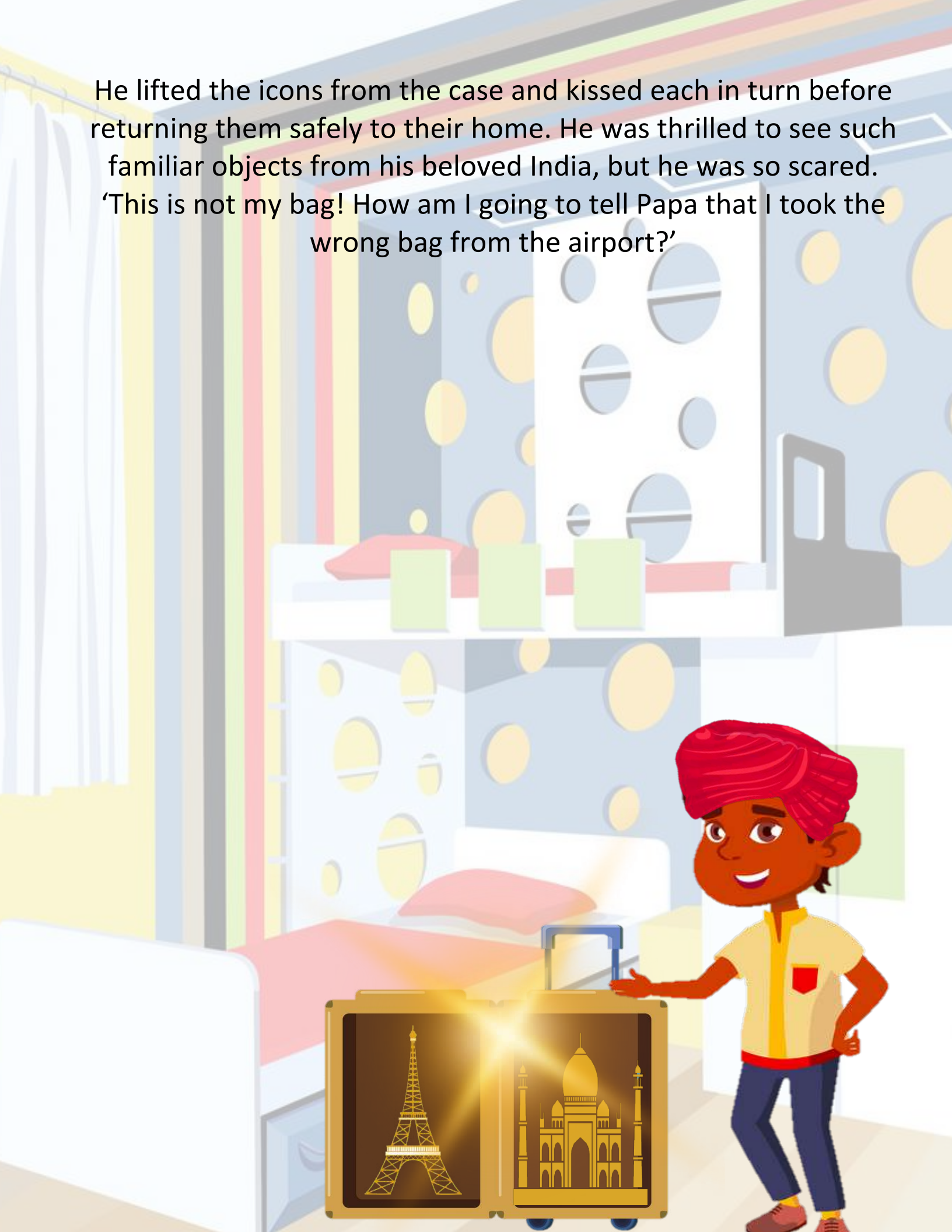




And when he opened the bag there was a flash of gold, just like from a pirate's chest, and inside he saw something shiny and familiar. The bag contained an icon of the Golden Temple and one more of the Taj Mahal! There were other objects from India, too, which made him feel even more homesick.



He lifted the icons from the case and kissed each in turn before returning them safely to their home. He was thrilled to see such familiar objects from his beloved India, but he was so scared. 'This is not my bag! How am I going to tell Papa that I took the wrong bag from the airport?'



Suddenly a voice called out from the hallway. It was Harjit's papa!

'Harjit, wake up, my son, it's time to get ready for school. I hope you are excited about making new friends, learning a new language and trying new food. There is so much for you to experience!'

Harjit's father appeared in the doorway with a big smile on his face. 'Do you remember how we talked about this?' He asked his son. 'This is very exciting for you!'



Harjit looked up at his father with sad eyes. 'But, Papa, yesterday the boy at the airport was staring at my turban. What if I have to cut my hair? People here don't smile very much and everyone talks but I don't understand what they are saying. They do not even speak much English, which I might understand better because I learnt that at school. I just want to go home. I don't even have my own clothes because I took the wrong bag from the airport!'



With his last confession, Harjit ran towards his father and began to cry in his arms.

‘Don’t worry, son. You wait and see: today will be fine. You must be brave and have confidence and believe in yourself. Now come down and have some breakfast with your mother and I. I shall ring the airport and we shall soon have your bag, too. You will see.’



When breakfast was finished, Harjit was in a much better mood. He kissed his mother and dashed out of the door into the car so that his father could drive him to school.



When they finally arrived, Harjit noticed lots of children standing outside of the school gates. They were all dressed in smart uniform, all spoke French, and not one of them was wearing a turban. The young boy suddenly felt very nervous again.



When his father noticed this change of mood, he held out his hand to his only son and said:

‘Come on, let’s go inside and take a look around. We have nothing to lose in just looking.’ And he smiled as he said this, like it was all a big adventure. This made young Harjit feel much better.





As they walked down a long corridor, Harjit noticed lots of pictures of the big metal building pinned to the walls all around. He thought about the little keyring on the bag and all the people taking pictures with their cameras the previous evening as they drove past from the airport. 'This building must be very important here,' Harjit thought to himself. 'I wonder what it's called.'



Whilst they were sitting in a large reception room, waiting for the headmaster to come out and see them, Harjit noticed a boy sobbing all alone in the corridor. 'That is the same boy that I saw at the airport yesterday!' Thought Harjit, barely able to contain his surprise. 'That is the boy who was staring at my turban!'



Harjit pulled on his father's sleeve. 'Papa, look, look! That is the boy, the one who was staring at me yesterday!'

'Then why don't you go and say hello?' His father suggested. 'Some people are just curious. They don't mean any harm.'



Harjit decided to be brave and so he walked up to the boy and smiled. The boy stared at Harjit and looked a little bit embarrassed that he'd been caught crying.

'Hello, my name is Harjit. I arrived from India yesterday. Do you speak any English?'

The boy hesitated for a moment and then he said: 'I do speak a little English. I am Pierre.'



‘Why are you sad, Pierre?’ Harjit asked.

It was then that Pierre went on to explain how he had just arrived from India after his family holidays. ‘I am supposed to give a presentation to my class tomorrow so that I can tell everybody about what I saw in India and show them all of the things I collected along the way, but I lost my bag at the airport and now I don’t know what to do.’



‘I don’t believe it!’ Exclaimed Harjit. ‘I think I have your bag at home. I took it from the carousel by mistake.’

‘You are the boy from the carousel?’

‘That’s me,’ said Harjit, pointing both his thumbs at his chest.

Using their broken English as best they could, they both managed to have quite a conversation. After a while they both cheered up considerably. Pierre was relieved to have found the missing bag and Harjit dashed over to his father to tell him everything.



That day, Pierre made sure that Harjit knew all about what to expect from his new school, and he introduced him to lots of new friends. During lunch break, Harjit asked about the imposing metal building he had seen the previous evening and in all of those pictures at school.



‘That is the Eiffel Tower,’ Pierre said, barely disguising the pride in his voice. ‘It was originally built for the World Exhibition to celebrate the French Revolution, but these days it is an amazing tourist attraction, and my mama says that it is one of the most romantic settings in all over the world.’





At the end of the day, Harjit arrived home to tell his parents of his wonderful experience and all the things he'd learnt and shared. 'Papa, I didn't think that anyone would be interested in what I have to say or where I come from, but I was wrong and you were right. It is an adventure!'



That night, as he listened to the gentle rumble of cars in the street below, Harjit was almost too excited to sleep. Pierre had asked him to stand up in the class the next day and help explain all about India.



He had met so many new friends and he looked forward to learning about life in France and speaking a new language. He still missed home, but he had begun to understand how a little courage, a little understanding and an open mind could help him grow as a person. This was indeed the start of a whole new adventure!





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