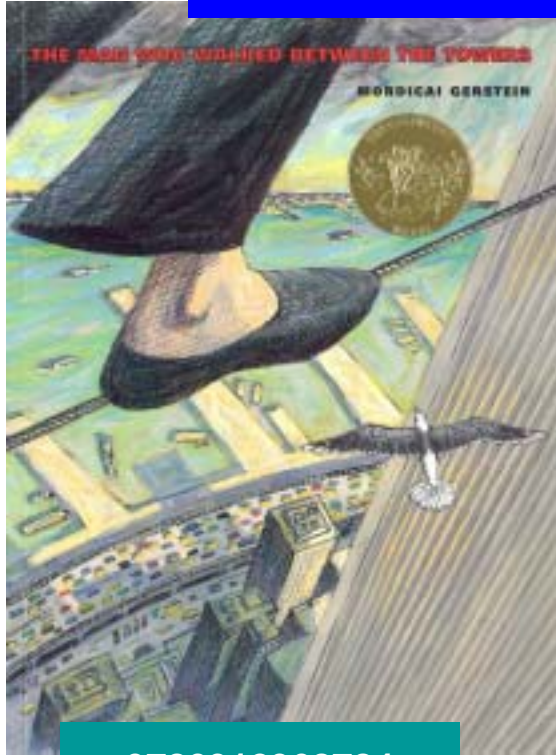


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THE MAN WHO WALKED BETWEEN THE TOWERS

by Mordicai Gerstein

website:<http://www.mordicaigerstein.com/bio.html>

Along with writing and illustrating books for children, Mordicai Gerstein is a painter, sculptor and prize-winning designer and illustrator of animated films. Mordicai Gerstein lives in Western Massachusetts with his wife Susan Yard Harris, who is also an author and illustrator and their daughter Risa.

“Once there were two towers side by side. They were each a quarter of a mile high...”

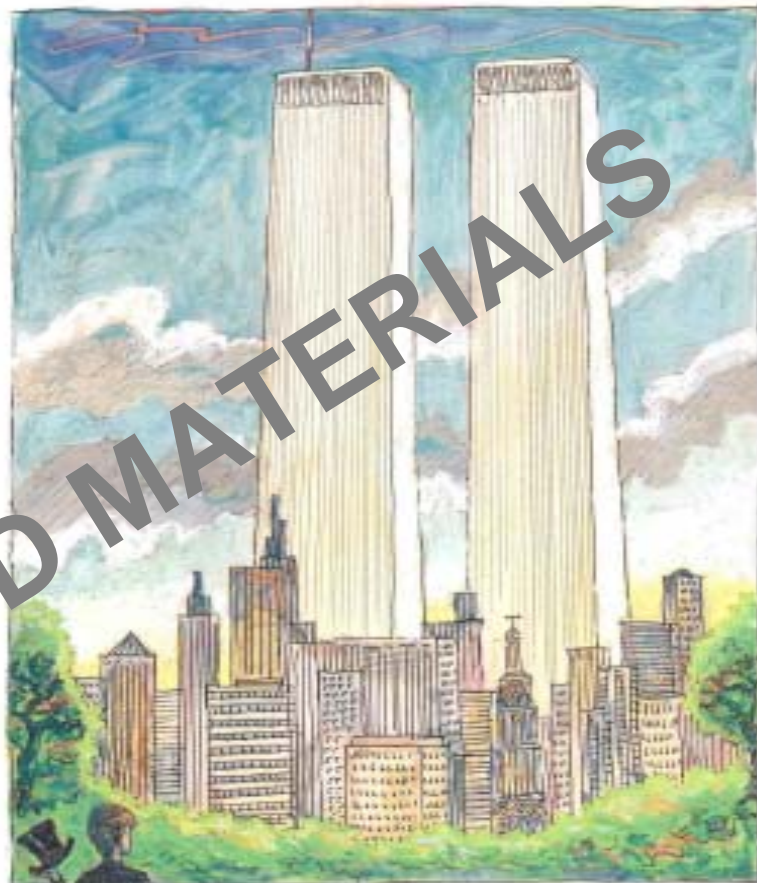
In 1974, as the World Trade Center was being completed, a young French aerialist, Philippe Petit, threw a tightrope between the towers and spent almost an hour walking, dancing, and performing tricks a quarter of a mile in the sky.

The towers are gone, but their memory, as well as the space between them, are celebrated in this award-winning masterpiece.



THE MAN WHO WALKED BETWEEN THE TOWERS

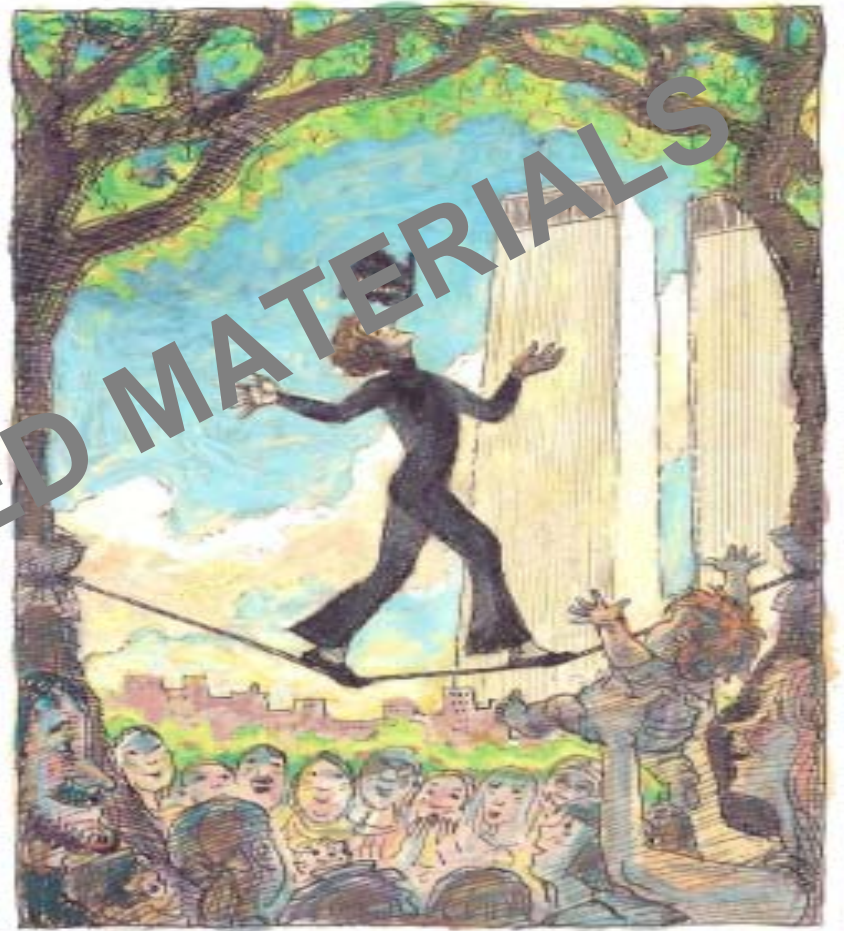
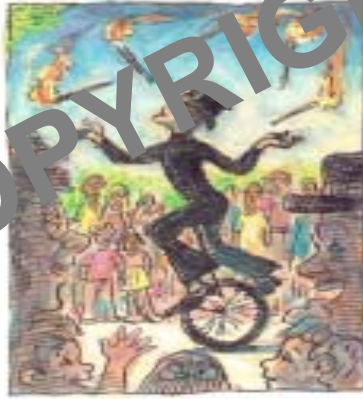
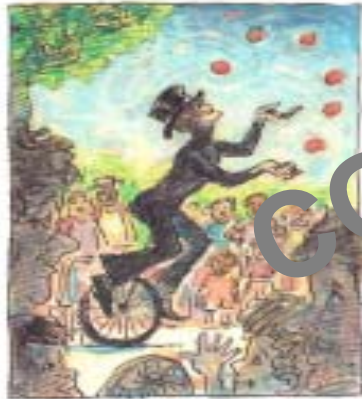
MORDECAI GERSTEIN



Once there were two towers side by side. They were each a quarter of a mile high; one thousand three hundred and forty feet. The tallest buildings in New York City.



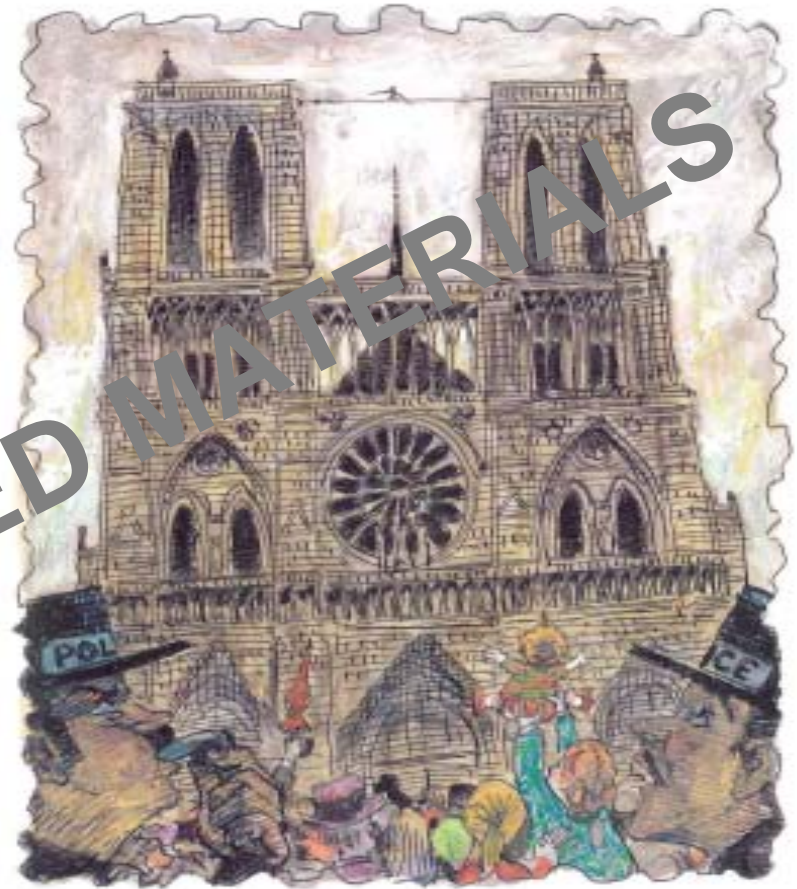
A young man saw them rise into the sky.
He was a street performer. He rode a unicycle.
He juggled balls and fiery torches.



But most of all he loved to walk and dance
on a rope he tied between two trees.



He looked not at the towers but at the space between them and thought, what a wonderful place to stretch a rope; a wire on which to walk. Once the idea came to him he knew he had to do it! If he saw three balls, he had to juggle. If he saw two towers, he had to walk! That's how he was



Hadn't he danced on a wire between the steeples of Notre Dame Cathedral above his amazed home city, Paris? Why not here, between these towers?

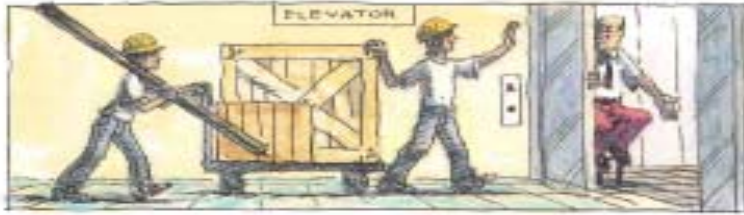


Of course he knew that, as in Paris, the police
and the owners of the towers would never allow it.
You must be crazy! they would say. You'd fall for sure!

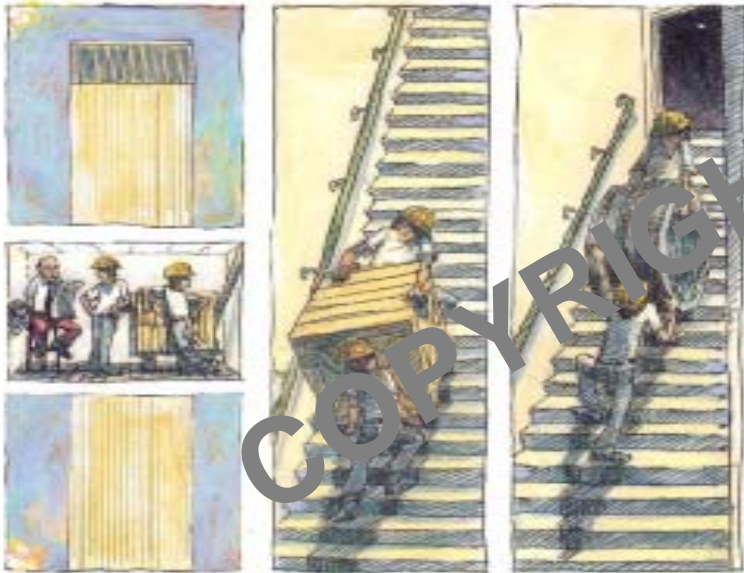


And so Philippe—that was the young man's name—
began a plan to do it secretly.
The buildings are not quite finished, he thought.
Maybe if I dressed as a construction worker. . .

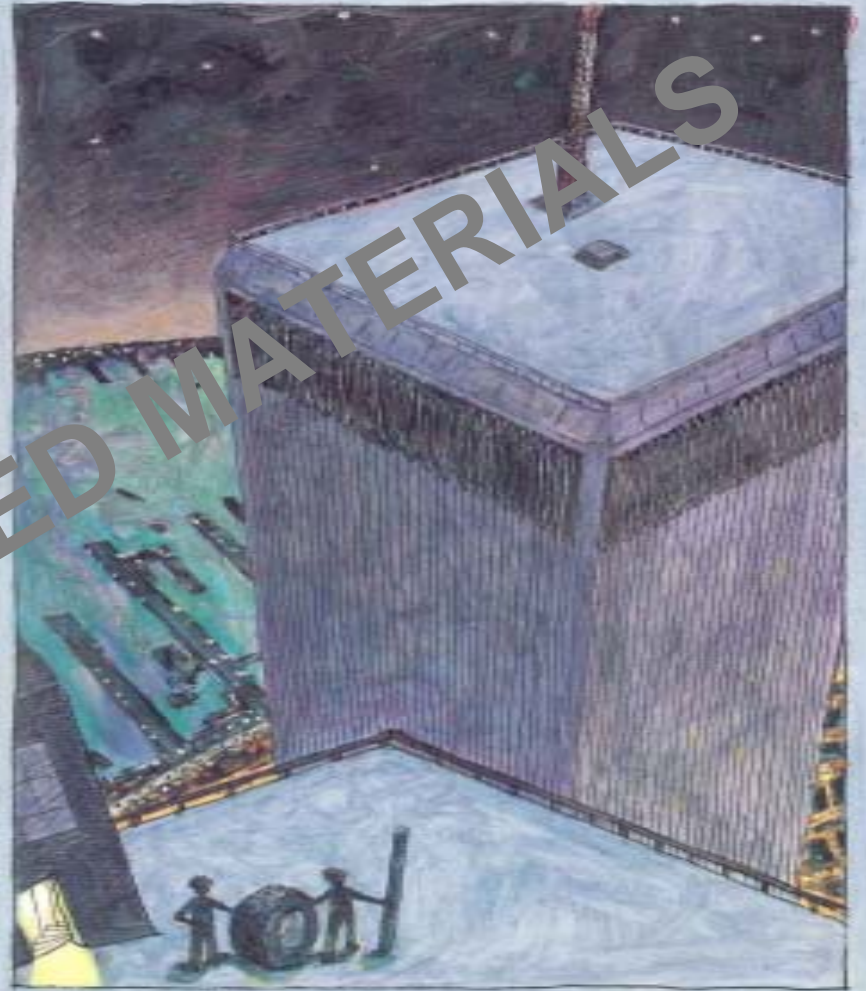
Early on an August evening he and a friend entered the south tower.



They got a four-hundred-and-forty-pound reel of cable and other equipment into the elevator, took it to the unfinished top ten floors, and waited till nightfall when everyone had gone.



Then they carried everything up one hundred and eighty stairs to the roof.





At midnight, on the other tower's roof, two more friends tied a thin, strong line to an arrow and shot it across to Philippe, one hundred and forty feet away.



It missed, and landed on a ledge fifteen feet below the roof. Bad luck! thought Philippe.



He crawled down to the ledge, over the sparkling city, and got the arrow.

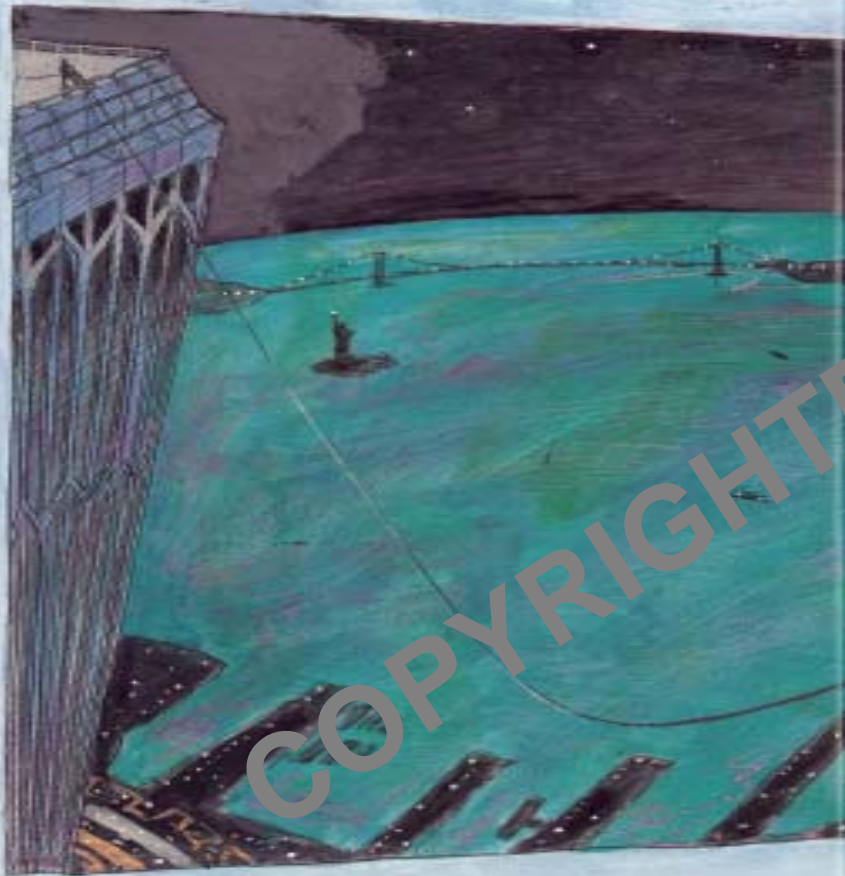
To its line he tied a stronger line, which his friends pulled back to their tower.



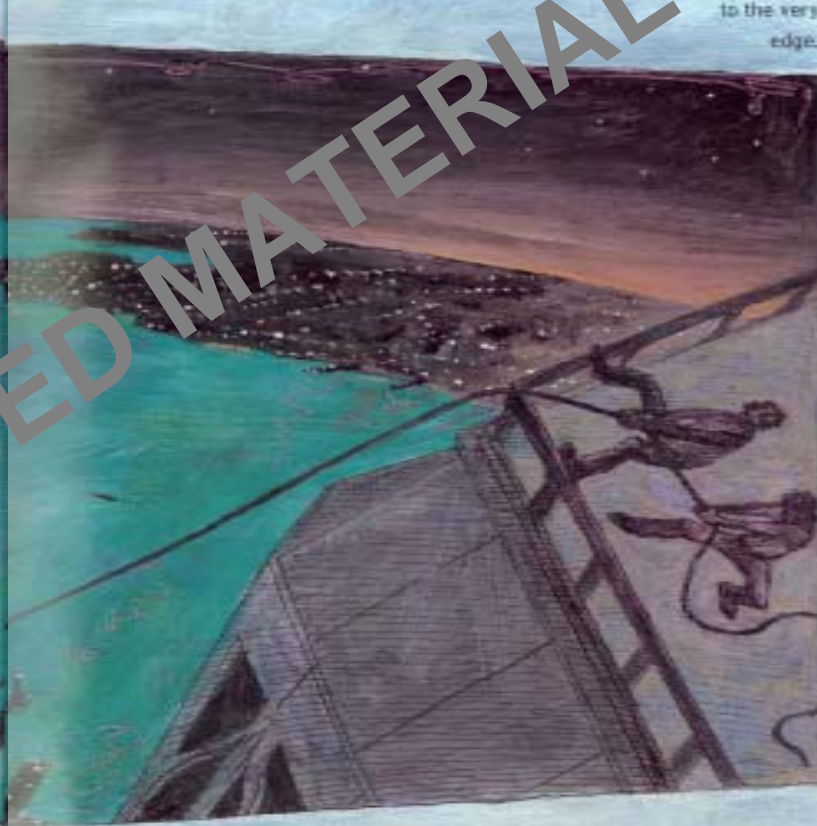
To his end of the stronger line, Philippe tied the cable on which he would walk. It was five-eighths of an inch thick.



His friends pulled the cable over to their tower
but it was so heavy that it slipped from Philippe's grip.
The cable's middle plummeted toward the street—



pulling the heads on the other tower
to the very
edge.



Philippe, just in time, secured his end.

It took three hours to pull the cable back up.

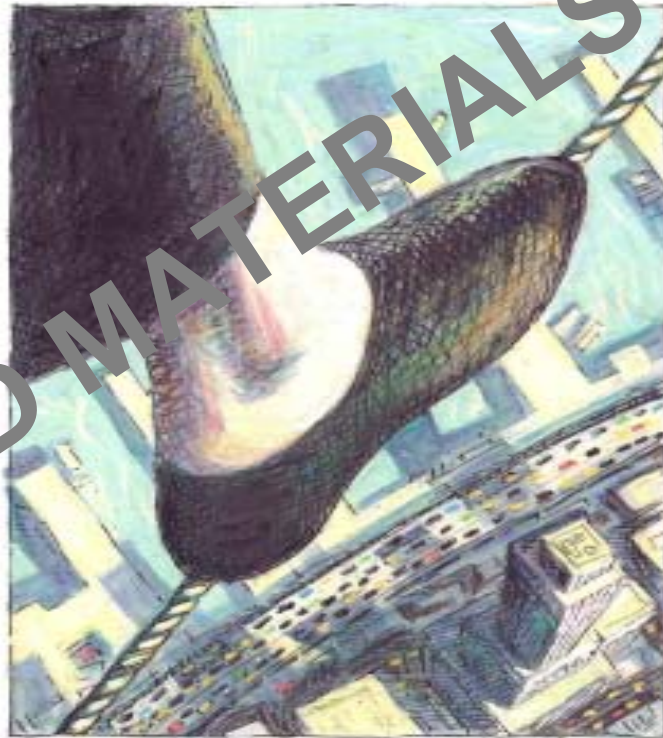
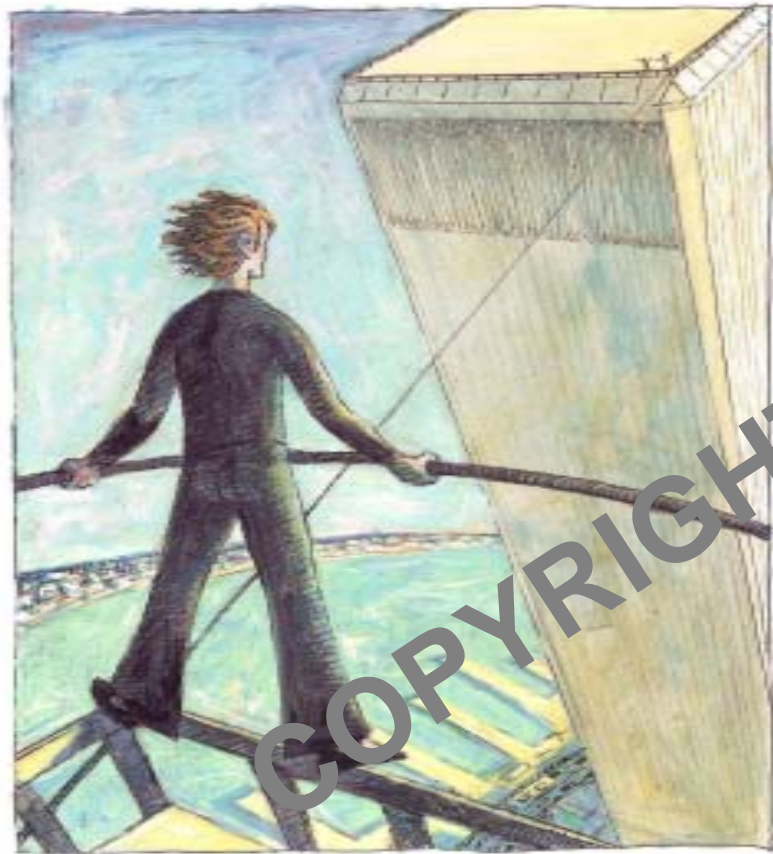


Frantically, as the stars faded, they tightened it between the towers.



It was past dawn before they were ready.

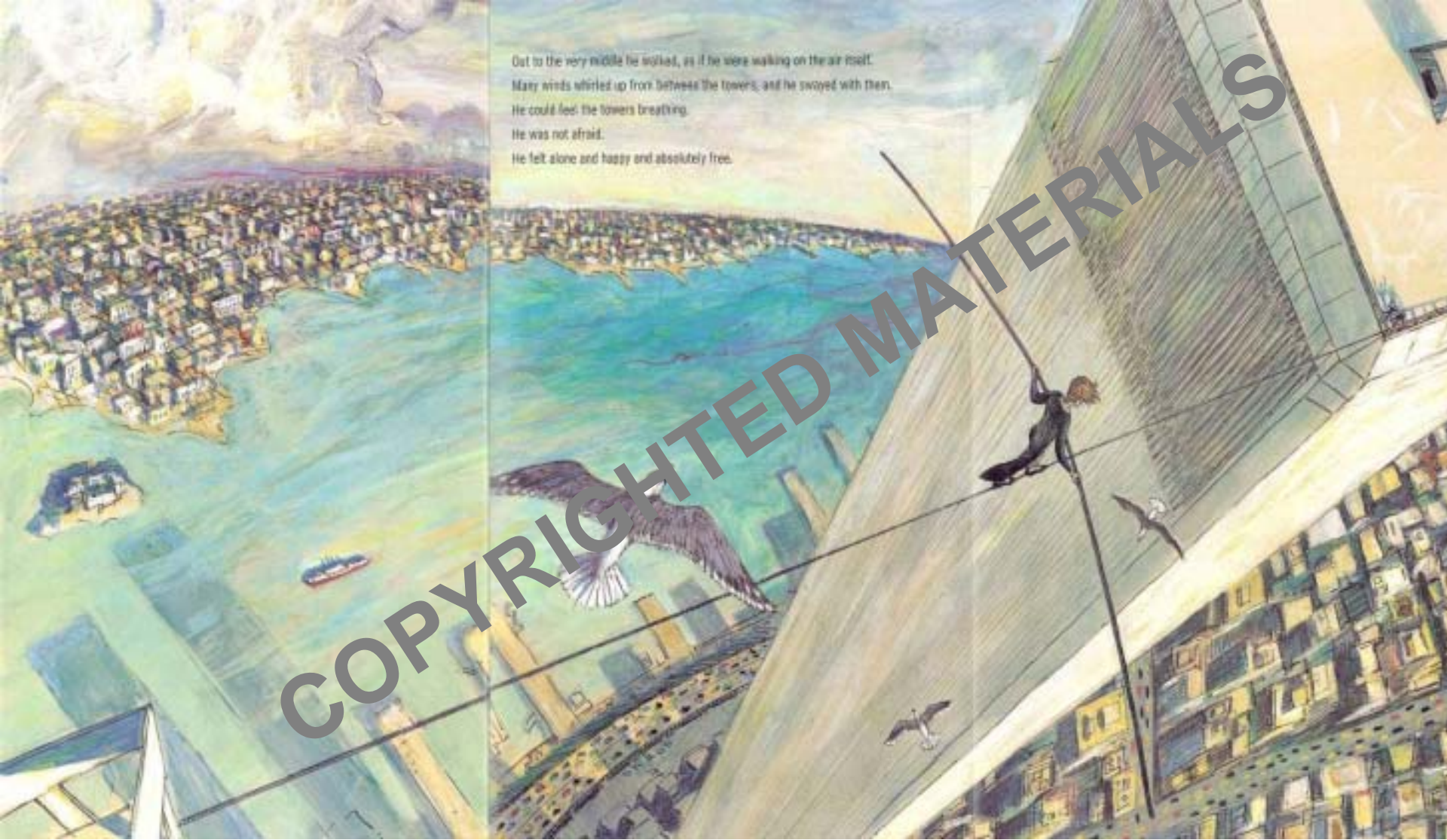
Philippe put on his black shirt and tights.
He picked up his twenty-eight-foot balancing pole.
All his life he had worked to be here; to do this.



As the rising sun lit up the towers, out he stepped onto the wire.

Out to the very middle he walked, as if he were walking on the air itself.
Many winds whirled up from between the towers, and he swayed with them.
He could feel the towers breathing.
He was not afraid.
He felt alone and happy and absolutely free.

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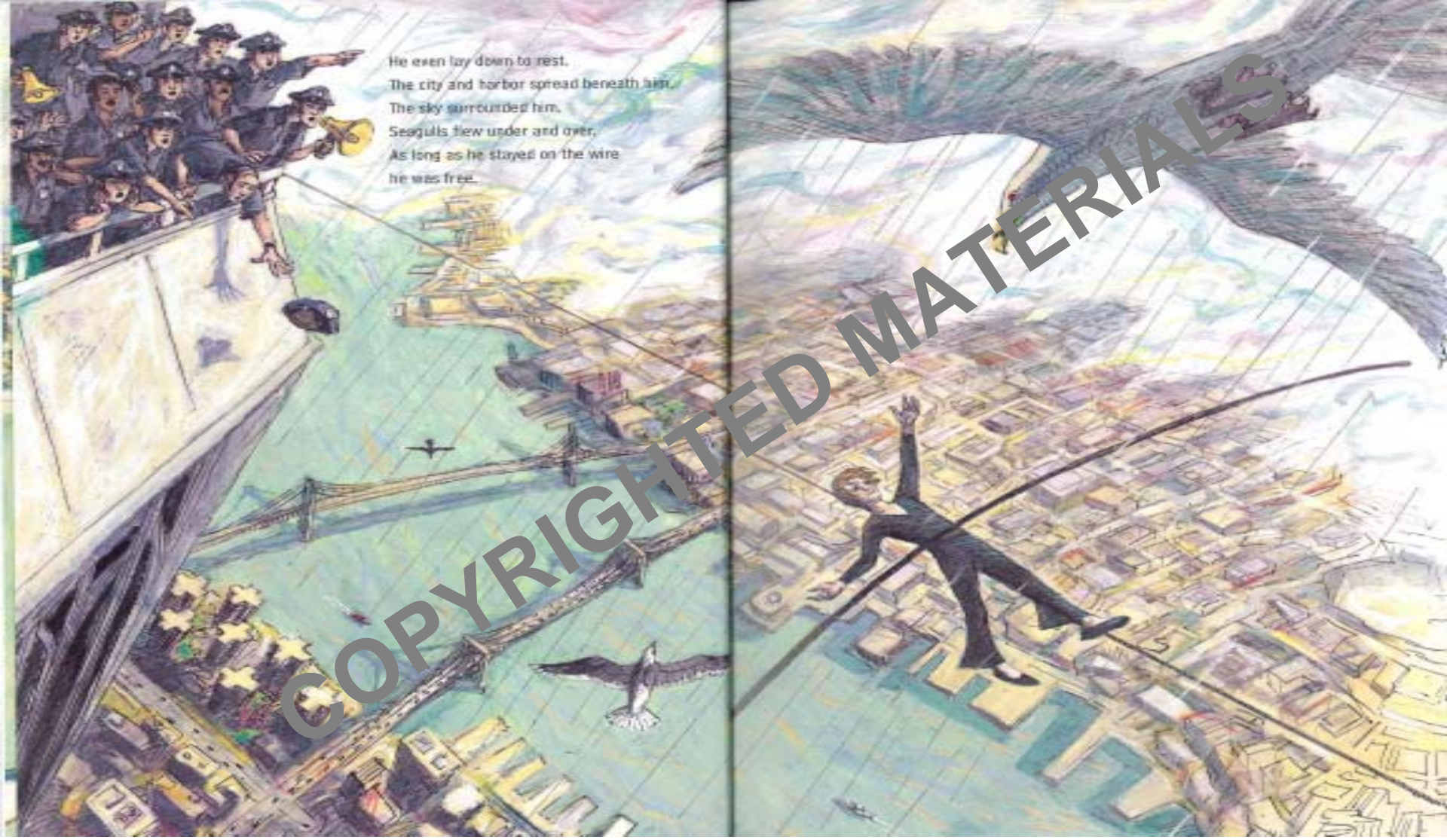
Officers rushed to the roofs of the towers.
"You're under arrest!" they shouted through bullhorns.
Philippe turned and walked the other way.



Who would come and get him?



For almost an hour, back and forth,
he walked, danced, ran, and knelt in a salute upon the wire.

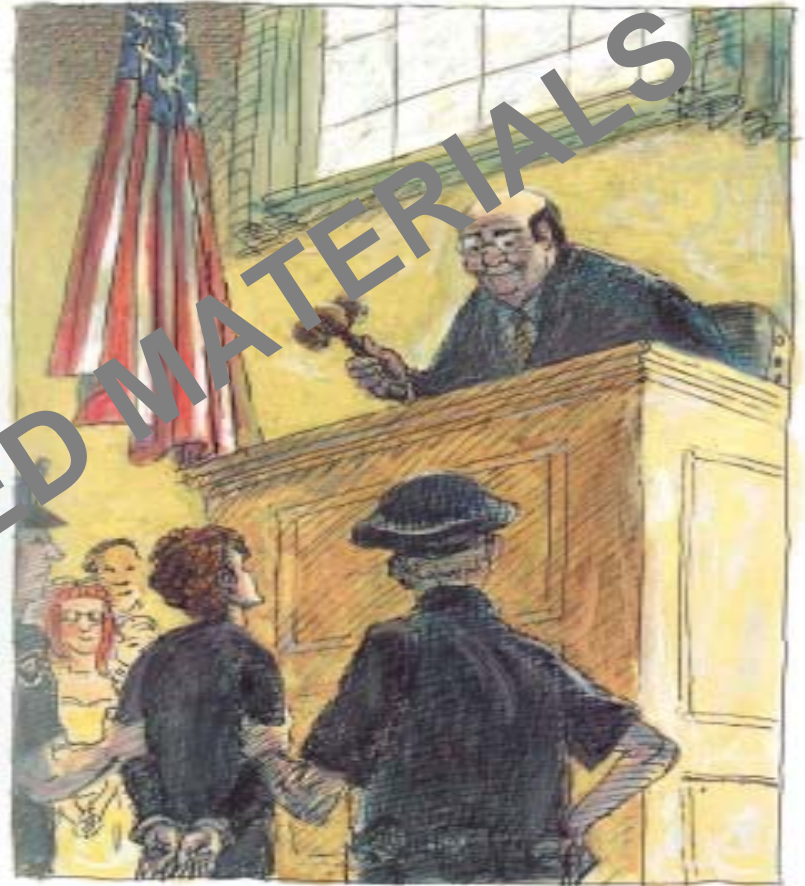
An illustration of a man in a dark suit walking a tightrope high above a city. On the left, a crowd of people in dark uniforms and hats watches from a ledge. The city below is a dense grid of buildings, with a bridge and a harbor visible. The sky is filled with seagulls and a large, dark, winged figure. The overall style is painterly and dramatic.

He even lay down to rest.
The city and harbor spread beneath him,
The sky surrounded him,
Seagulls flew under and over,
As long as he stayed on the wire
he was free.

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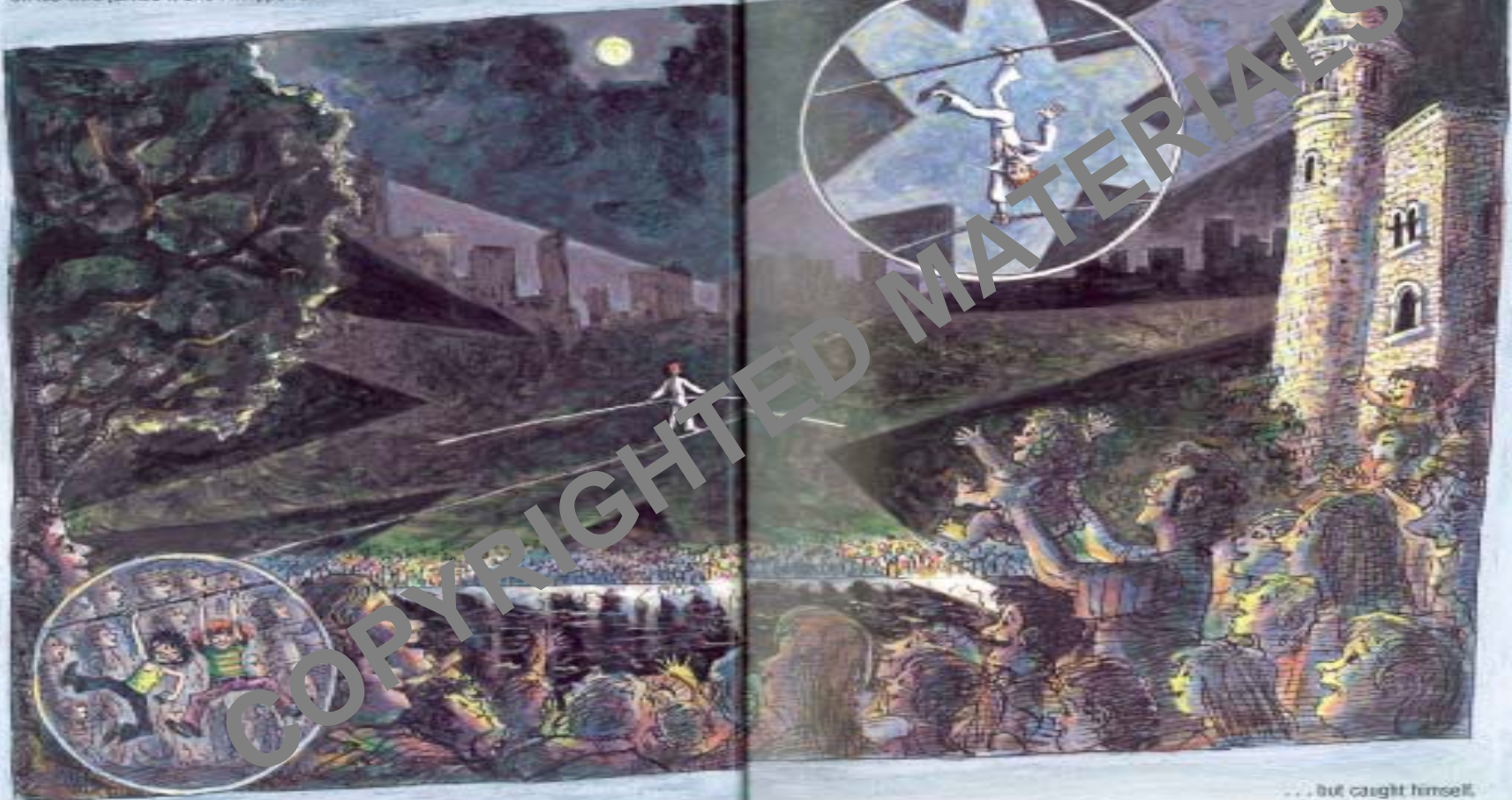


When he felt completely satisfied, he walked back to the roof and held out his wrists for the handcuffs.



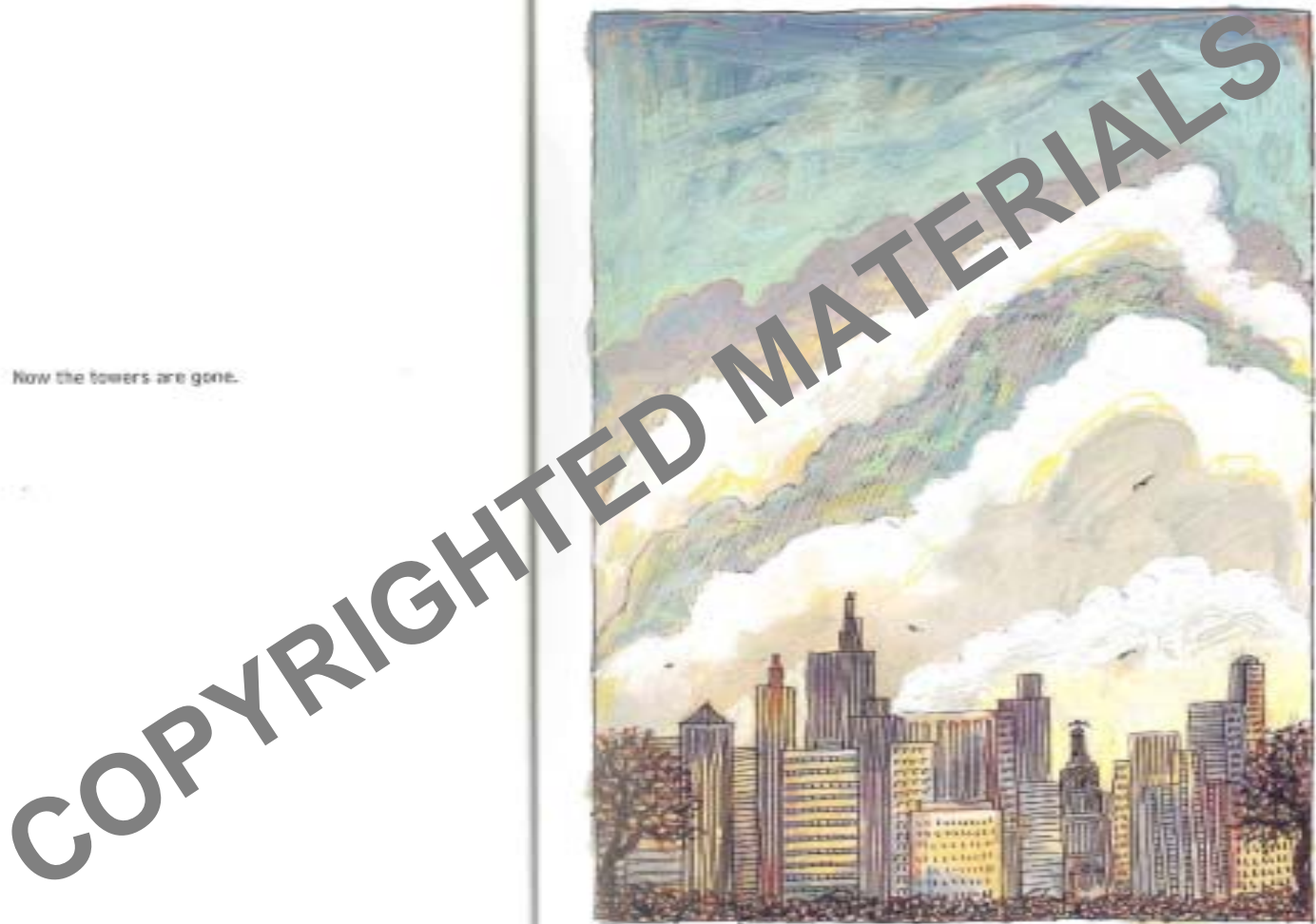
They brought him to court. The judge sentenced him to perform in the park for the children of the city.

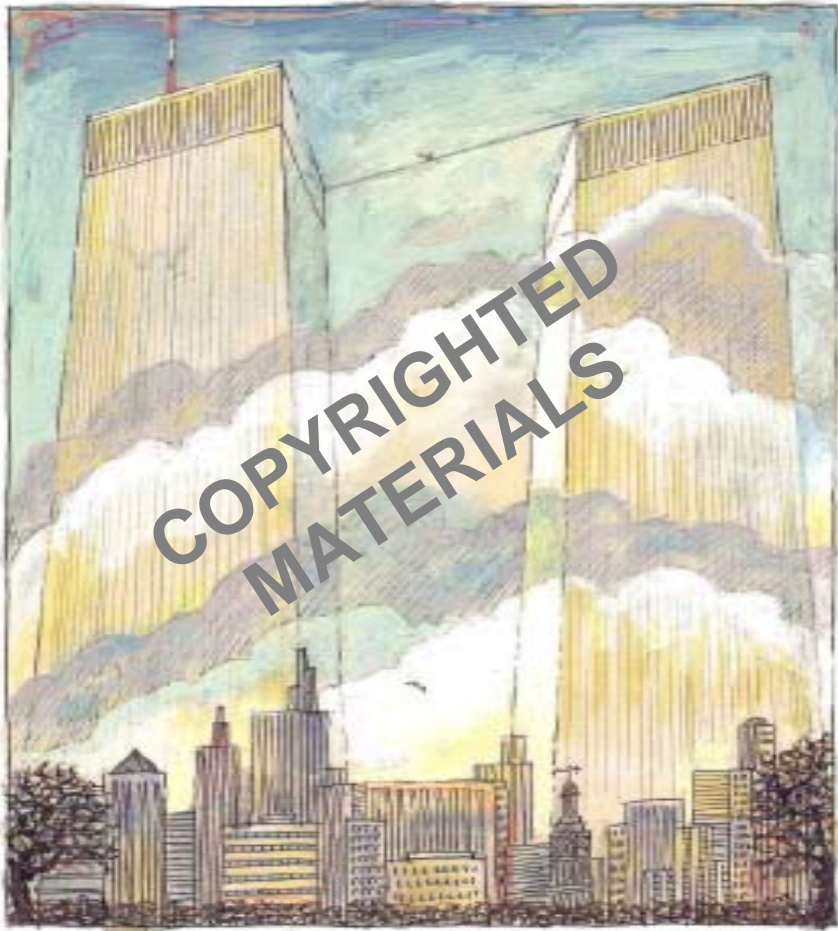
This he did happily. . . though during his performance some boys playing on his wire jerked it and Philippe fell



... but caught himself.

Now the towers are gone.





But in memory, as if imprinted on the sky, the towers are still there.
And part of that memory is the joyful morning, August 7, 1974,
when Philippe Petit walked between them in the air.

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