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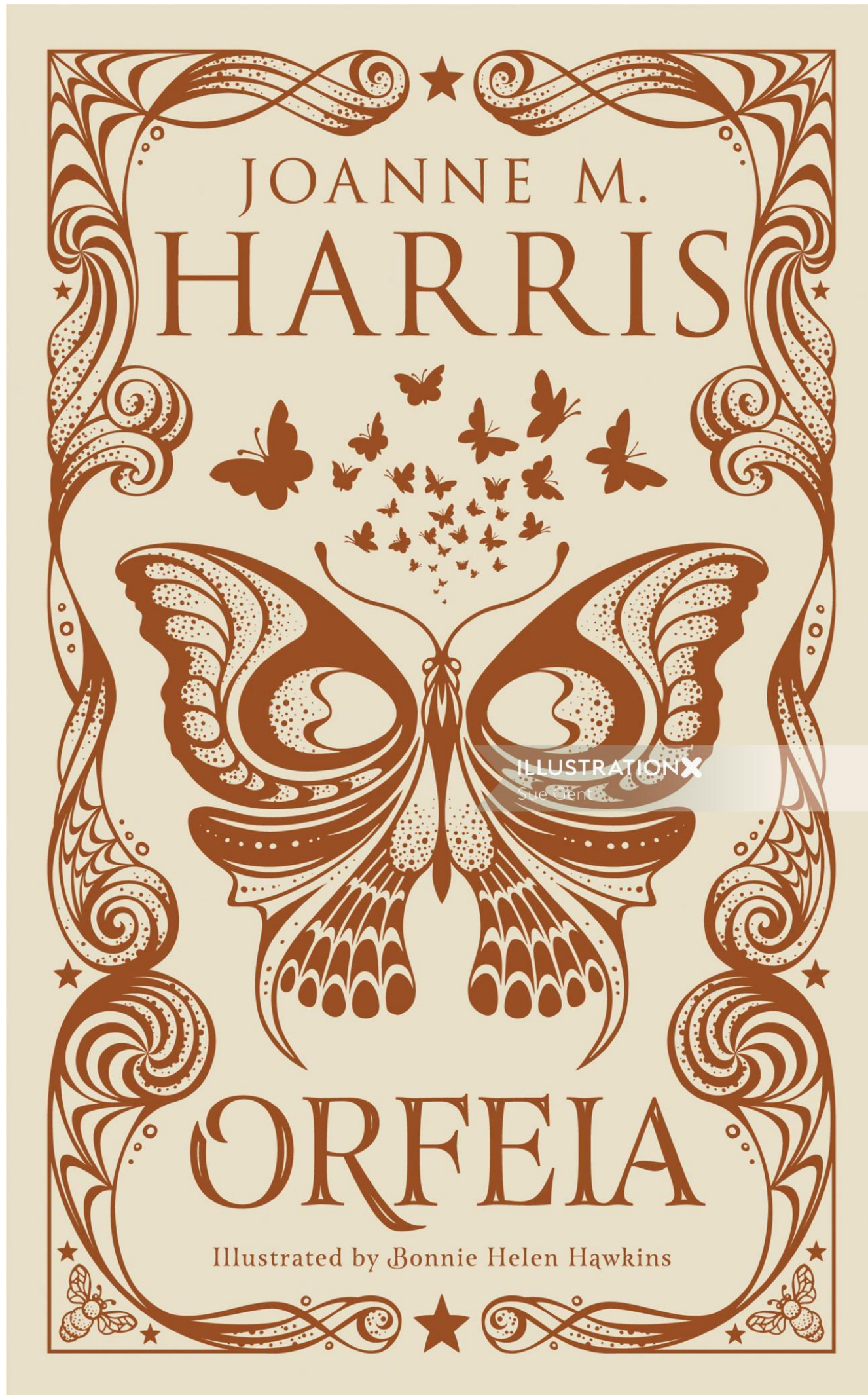
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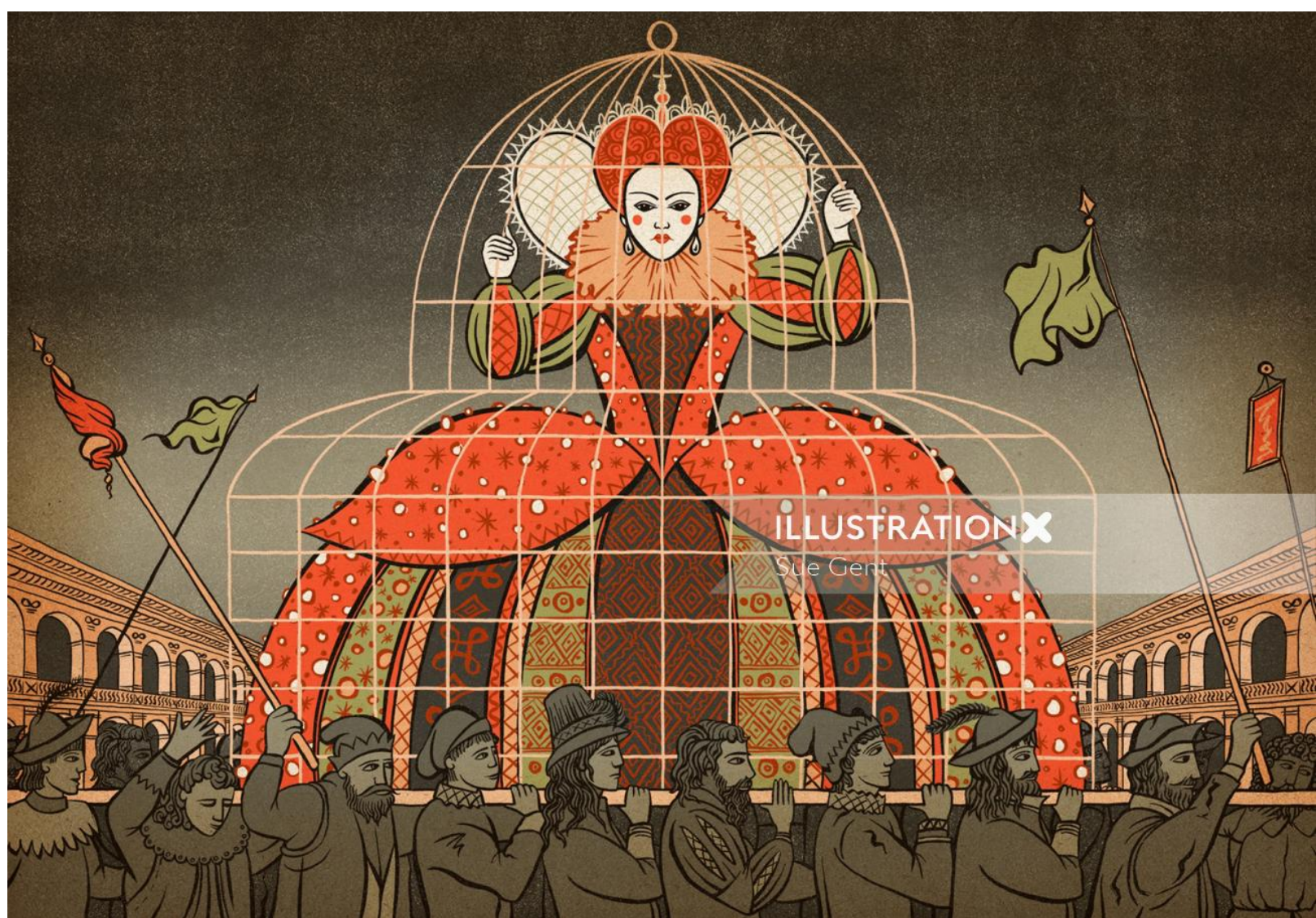
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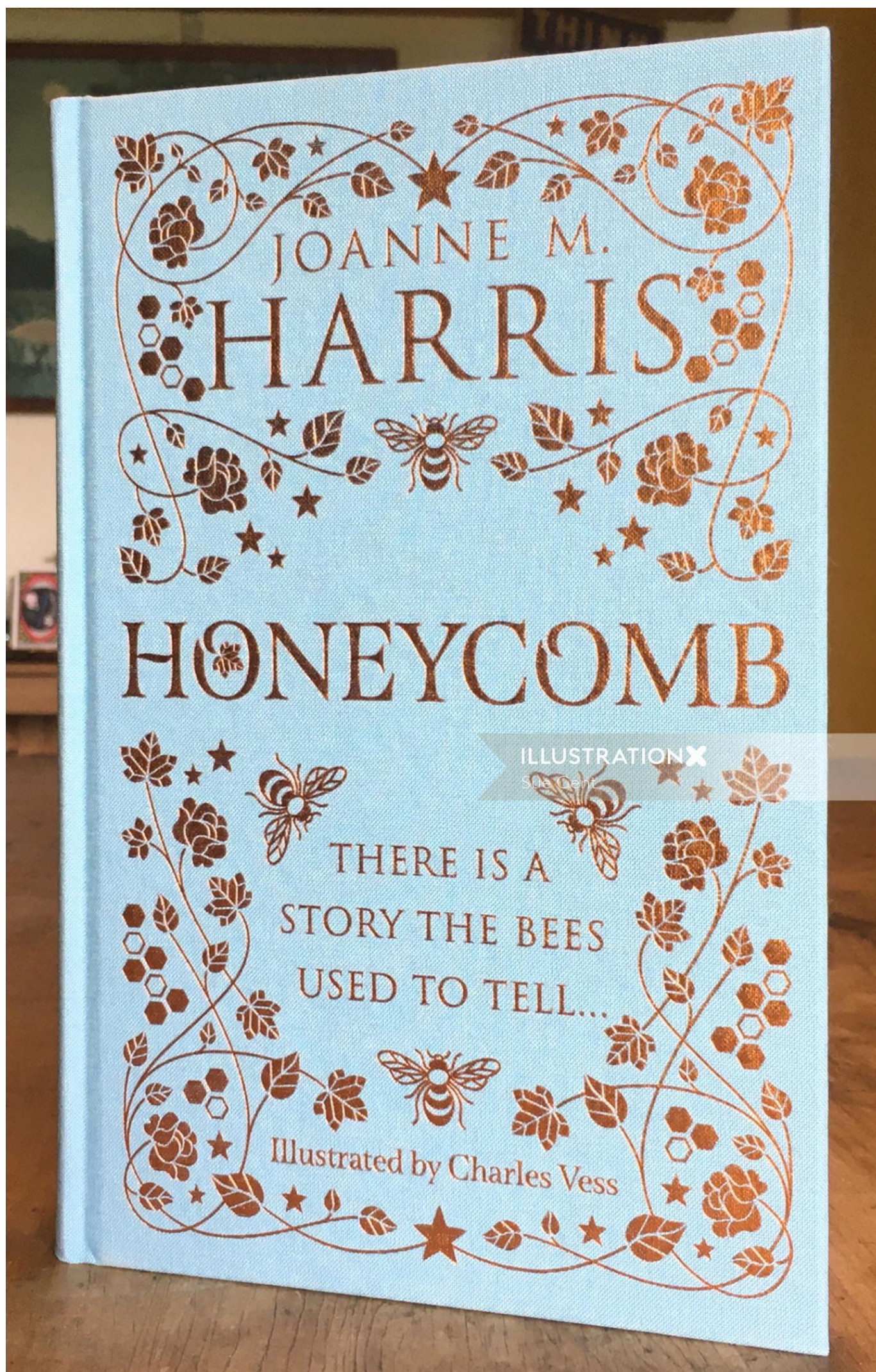
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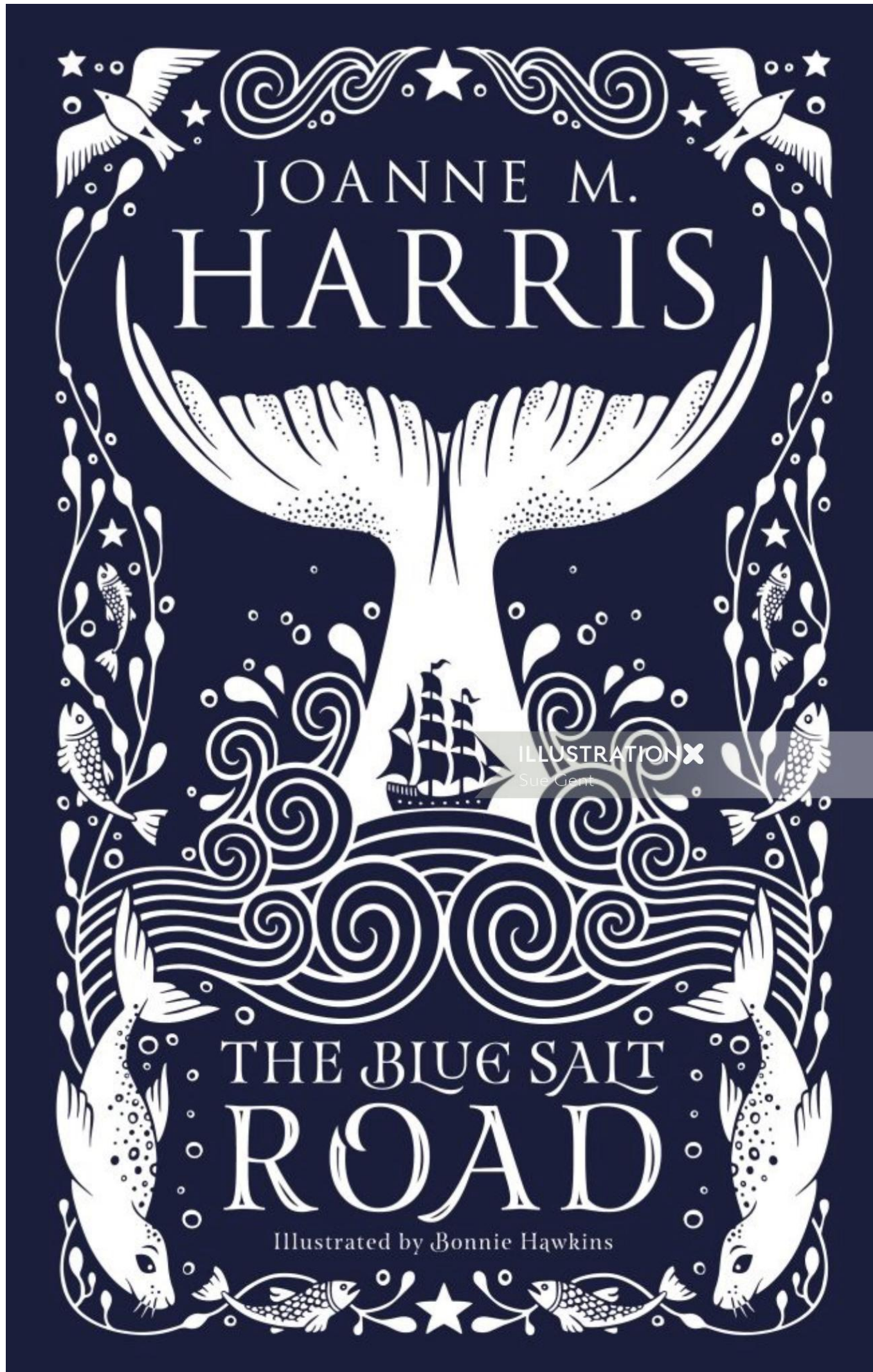
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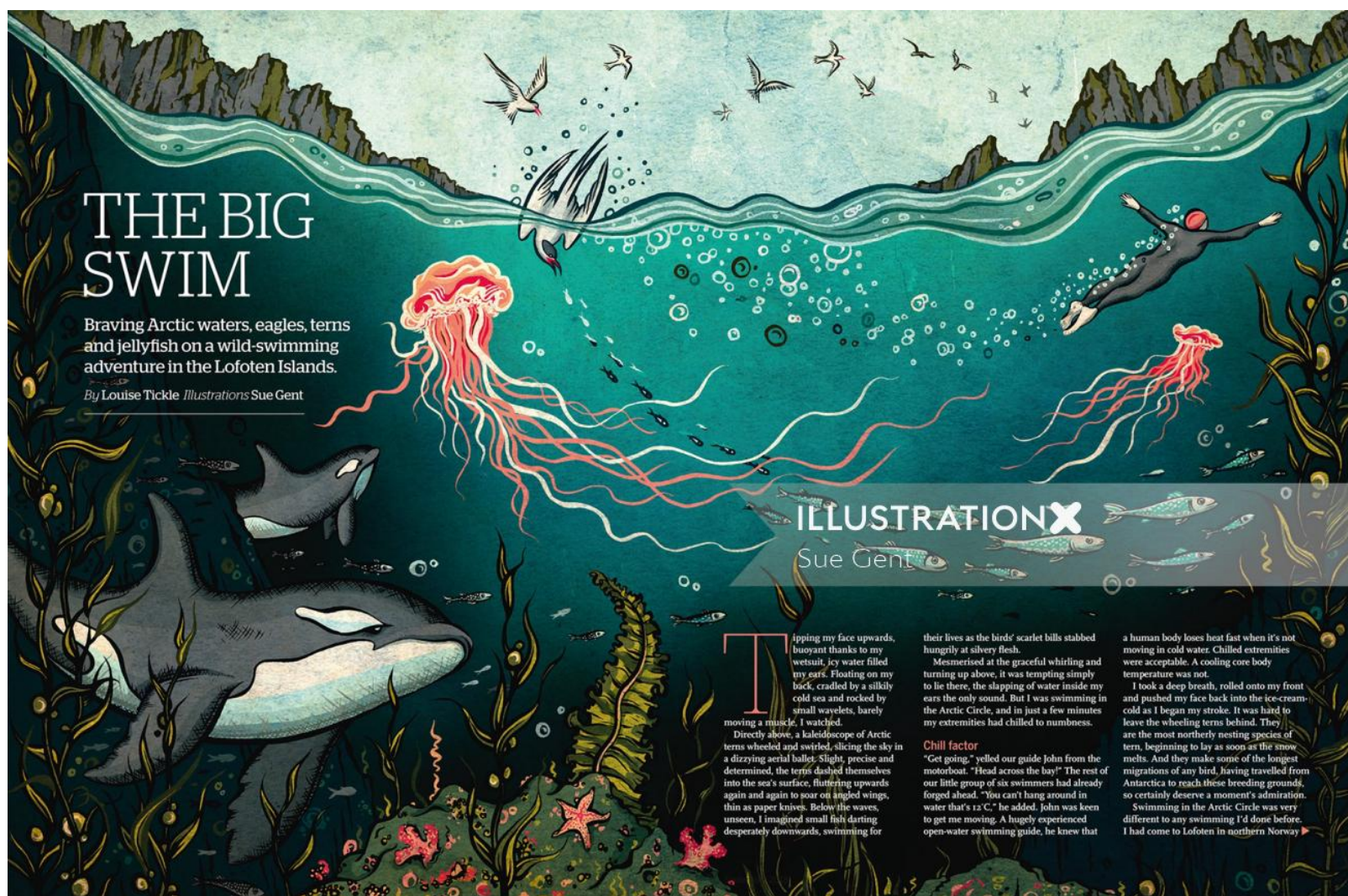
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THE BIG SWIM

Braving Arctic waters, eagles, terns and jellyfish on a wild-swimming adventure in the Lofoten Islands.

By Louise Tickle Illustrations Sue Gent

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Tipping my face upwards, buoyant thanks to my wetsuit, icy water filled my ears. Floating on my back, cradled by a silky cold sea and rocked by small wavelets, barely moving a muscle, I watched. Directly above, a kaleidoscope of Arctic terns wheeled and swirled, slicing the sky in a dizzying aerial ballet. Slight, precise and determined, the terns dashed themselves into the sea's surface, fluttering upwards again and again to soar on angled wings, thin as paper knives. Below the waves, unseen, I imagined small fish darting desperately downwards, swimming for

their lives as the birds' scarlet bills stabbed hungrily at silvery flesh. Mesmerised at the graceful whirling and turning up above, it was tempting simply to lie there, the slapping of water inside my ears the only sound. But I was swimming in the Arctic Circle, and in just a few minutes my extremities had chilled to numbness.

Chill factor
"Get going," yelled our guide John from the motorboat. "Head across the bay!" The rest of our little group of six swimmers had already forged ahead. "You can't hang around in water that's 12°C," he added. John was keen to get me moving. A hugely experienced open-water swimming guide, he knew that

a human body loses heat fast when it's not moving in cold water. Chilled extremities were acceptable. A cooling core body temperature was not.

I took a deep breath, rolled onto my front and pushed my face back into the ice-cream-cold as I began my stroke. It was hard to leave the wheeling terns behind. They are the most northerly nesting species of tern, beginning to lay as soon as the snow melts. And they make some of the longest migrations of any bird, having travelled from Antarctica to reach these breeding grounds, so certainly deserve a moment's admiration.

Swimming in the Arctic Circle was very different to any swimming I'd done before. I had come to Lofoten in northern Norway

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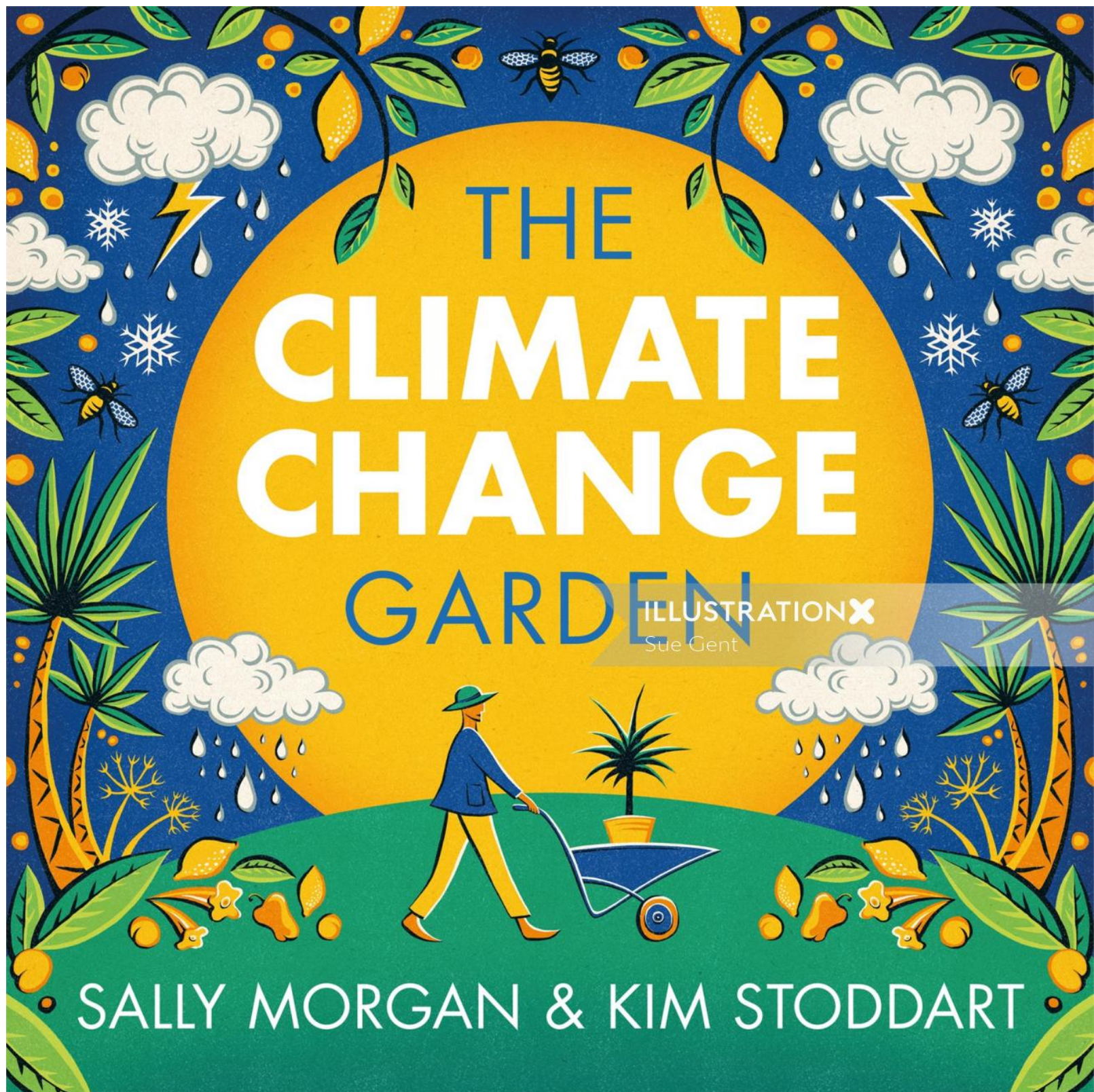
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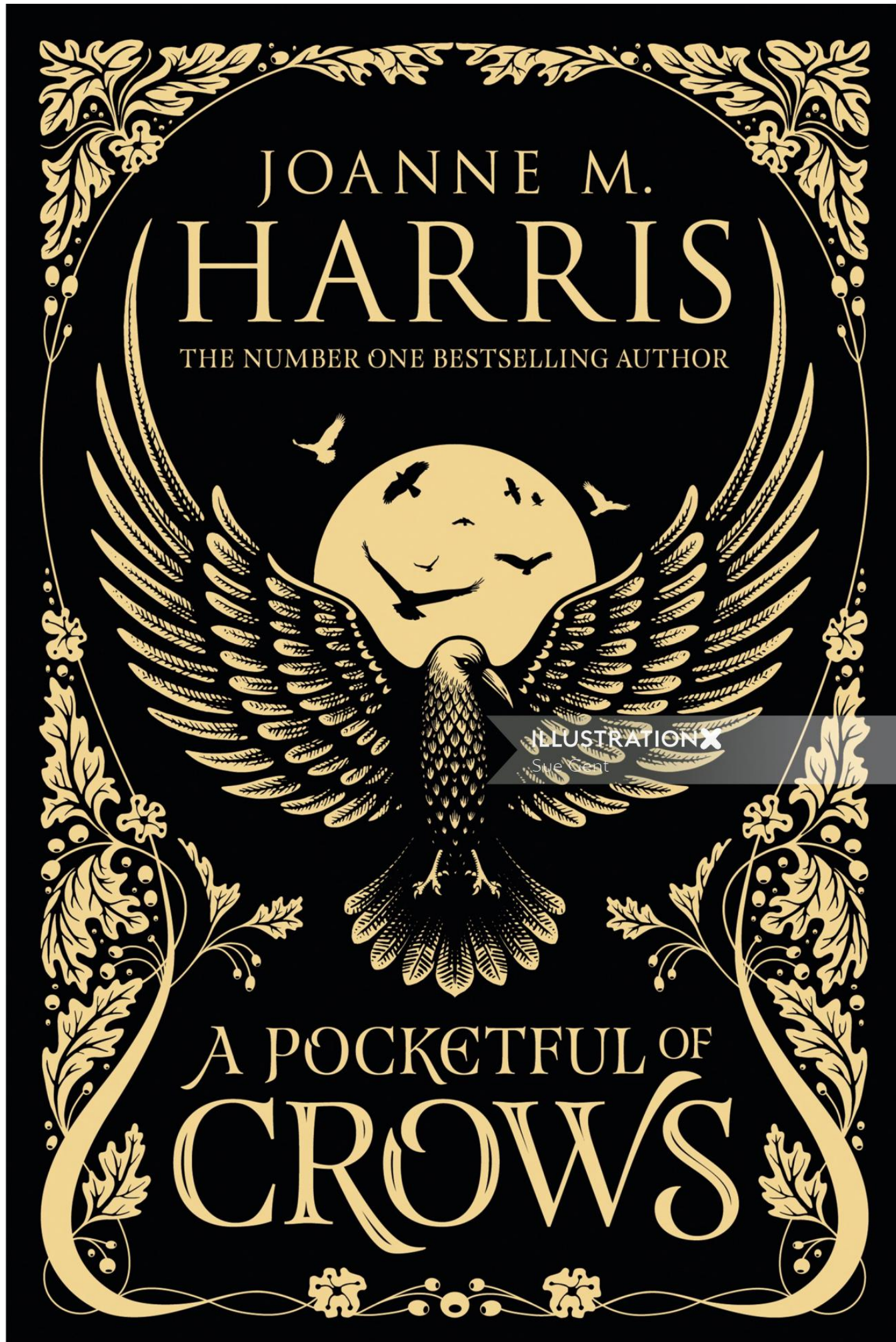
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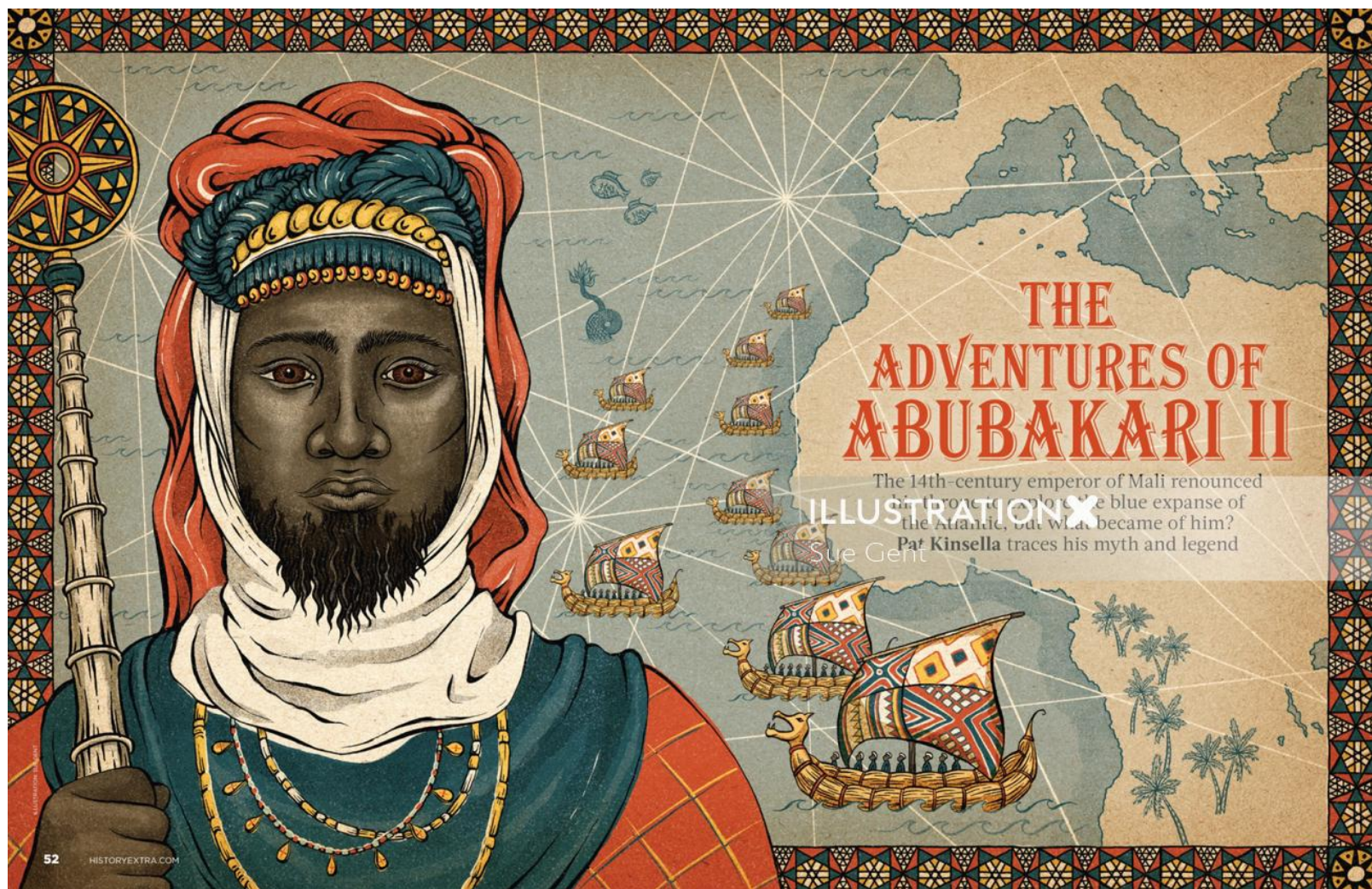
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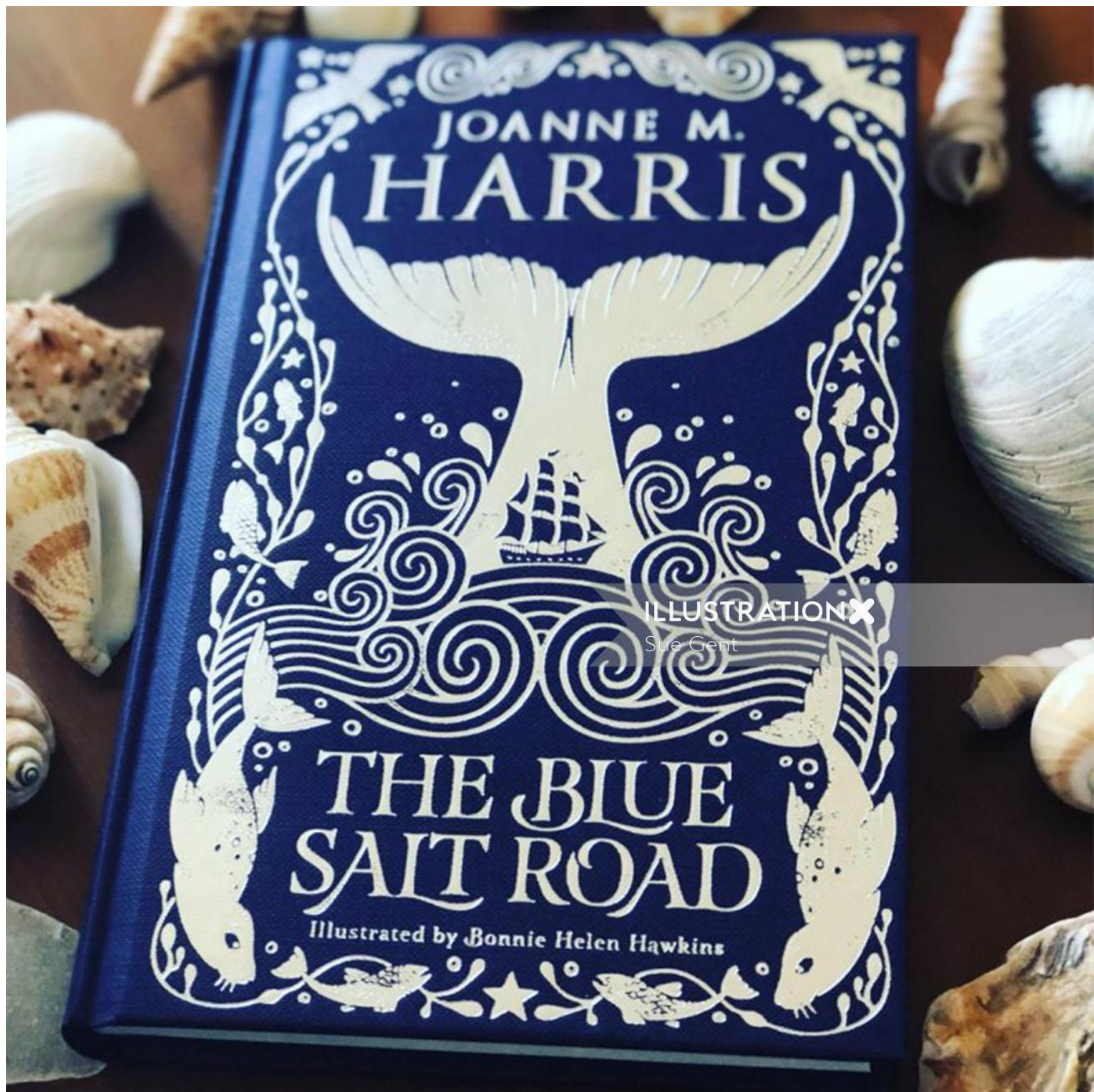
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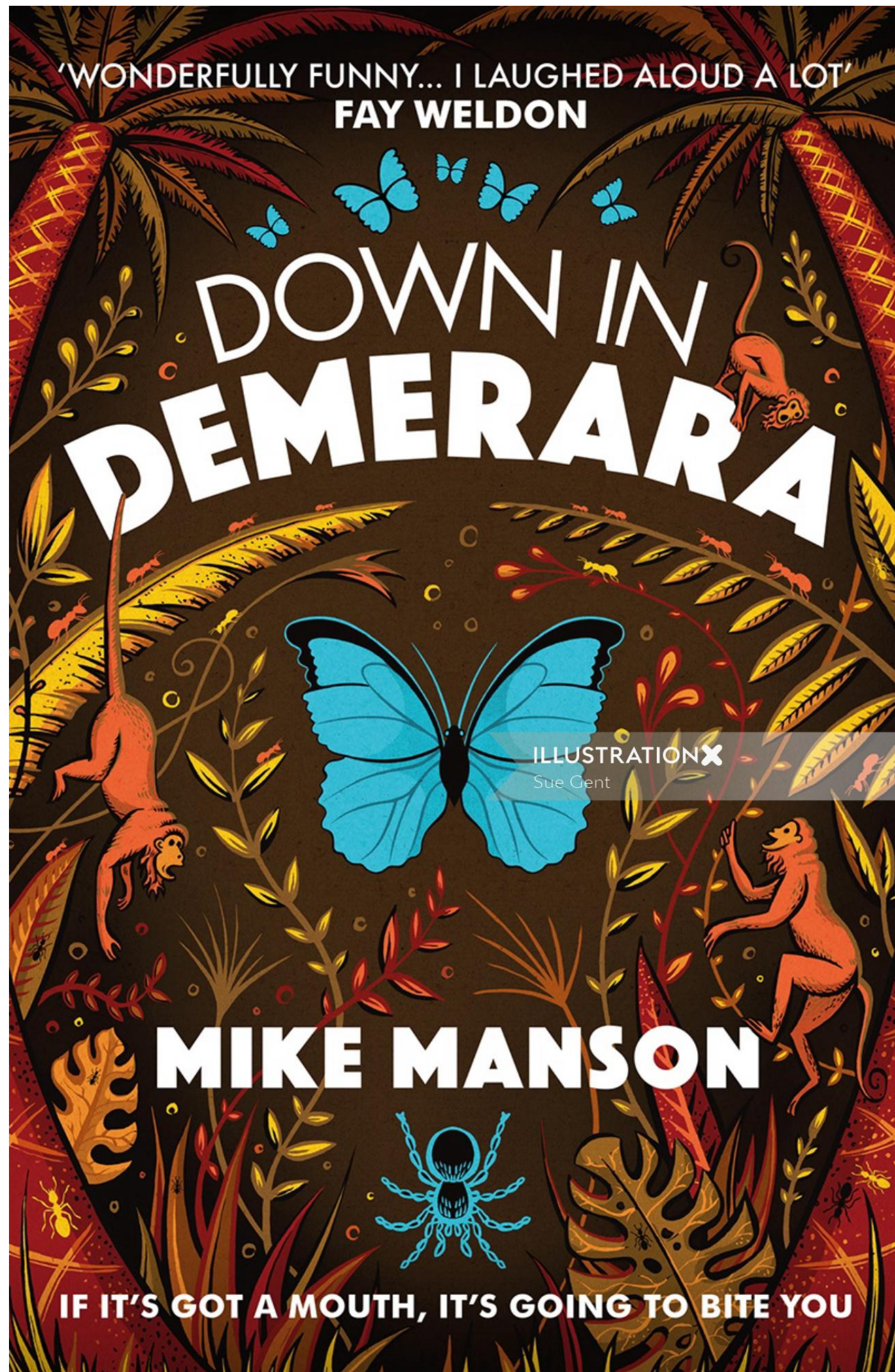
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Advertisement Feature **AUSTRALIA**

1 Canberra
The Australian War Memorial
 This magnificent war memorial is a beautifully designed shrine to those Australians who have died in war, as well as a fascinating museum and war archive, all housed in a stunning Art Deco building. Don't miss the very moving Last Post ceremony held at 4.55pm daily.

2 Uluru
The Sounds of Silence Dinner
 Gaze around the vastness of the Red Centre as you watch darkness fall over Uluru (Ayers Rock), to the haunting echo of a didgeridoo. You'll dine alfresco, with Uluru as a backdrop, under a sky ablaze with dazzling stars.

3 Victoria
The Great Ocean Road
 Take a road trip from Melbourne along the majestic sweep of the Great Ocean Road, passing dramatic rock stacks, wild surfing beaches, buzzing resorts and the Great Otway National Park, where you'll see rainforest and koalas hanging from eucalyptus trees.

4 Sydney
A night at the opera
 The Sydney Opera House has to be one of the world's most iconic buildings, with its sail-shaped roof and jaw-dropping views across beautiful Sydney Harbour. Bag opera tickets for a glittering night out – or take in a talk, a ballet, a film or a concert.

5 Queensland
Cruise the Great Barrier Reef
 Marvel at the world's largest coral-reef system, from above or below. The 3,000 separate reefs create a kaleidoscope of colour, where you can snorkel over sea stars and giant fan coral, spot turtles and clownfish, or even swim among whales and wild dolphins.

6 South Australia
Wine-tasting in Coonawarra
 Sample the wares of the Coonawarra wineries, producing some of South Australia's finest vintages from grapes grown under big blue skies in the distinctive, rust-coloured terra rossa soil.

7 Perth
Sunset drinks on Cottesloe Beach
 Watching the sunset from Perth's Cottesloe Beach is a treasured local ritual, as the shimmering Indian Ocean turns a deep gold. Take a ringside seat at a beach cafe, order a seafood platter and a chilled white from the Margaret River and enjoy the spectacle.

8 Northern Territory
Cruise the Katherine Gorge
 Wander at ancient Aboriginal rock art. Listen to dreaming stories and gaze up at the sheer red sandstone rock faces as you cruise slowly through the dramatic gorges in the Nitmiluk National Park that have been sculpted over the millennia by the Katherine River.

HIGHLIGHTS OF AUSTRALIA WITH TITAN
 Discover Australia's amazing diversity on this 19-day tour with Titan Travel, from the seasonal southern states of New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia to tropical Queensland and the Northern Territory's Red Centre – the vast open space of the Outback. In one holiday, you'll see Australia's most famous man-made and natural icons, from the Sydney Opera House to the Great Barrier Reef and the dazzling desert monolith of Uluru. From £4,099; for further details, visit titantour.co.uk/australia or call 0800 988 5914.

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Advertisement feature **Canada**

1 Yukon
Fly over the ice
See the Northern Lights dance across the sky, pan for gold, see a grizzly – or take an amazing road, boat, train or ‘flightseeing’ trip to see ice fields and glaciers. It’s all in the vast and beautiful wilderness of the Yukon.

2 Banff
Lake Louise
An implausible shade of turquoise, Lake Louise shimmers against an amphitheatre of towering, snowy peaks in Banff National Park. Hike the trails, cycle, kayak, ride a horse or simply soak up the views from the luxury of the chateau hotel.

3 British Columbia
Wine and whales
Nature is the main attraction in beautiful BC, from whale- and sea otter-spotting off Vancouver Island to the lush vineyards on the slopes of the sunny Okanagan Valley.

4 Rocky Mountains
Natural High
Much of the jagged spine of the Rocky Mountains is National Park, where you can explore towering waterfalls, glassy lakes, dense forest (keep an eye out for bears) and deep canyons. Take it all in from the comfort of the famous Rocky Mountaineer train.

5 Ontario
Cosmopolitan Toronto
On Lake Ontario, Canada’s largest city has a buzzing food and cultural scene. Browse the mouthwatering produce in St Lawrence Market, tour the craft breweries and, for the best views, ride the glass elevators up the awesome CN Tower.

6 Niagara
The Niagara Falls
Vast plumes of mist billow skywards as the Niagara River plunges 167 feet over three towering waterfalls. Admire the spectacle from a helicopter or don a waterproof poncho for a drenching experience on the Journey Behind the Falls observation decks.

7 Québec City
The Old Town
Wander the cobbled streets of the atmospheric, 17th-century Old Town, packed with gourmet stores selling anything from local cheeses to French patisserie, the whole scene presided over by the majestic Chateau Frontenac.

8 Atlantic Canada
Lobster for lunch
Miles of pristine coastline means abundant seafood in Canada’s Atlantic provinces, while swathes of deciduous forest rivals New England for its fiery autumn colours.

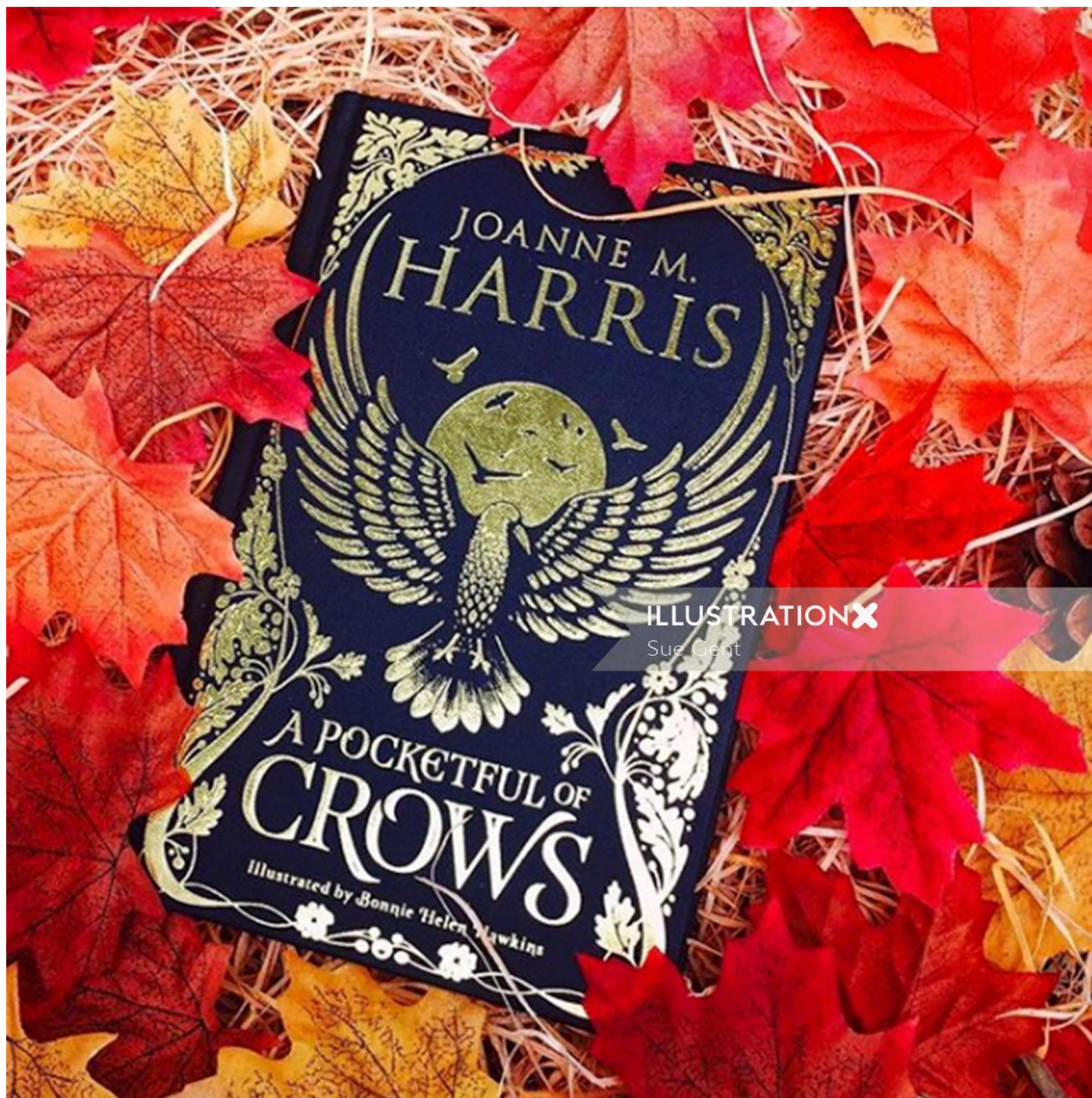
The Great Canadian Train Journey
Travel overland from the Atlantic to the Pacific, crossing five provinces in 18 nights and taking in Canada’s vast landscapes, from Montréal to Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Jasper and Vancouver. Four nights of this epic journey are spent on the Canadian, a sleeper train that will take you from the drama of Niagara Falls, across the prairies and the snow-capped Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. Flights with Air Canada. From £6,399; for details, visit travel.saga.co.uk or call 0800 092 4677.

Incredible moments
Wherever your travels take you in Canada, here are the eight sensational highlights every visitor should experience

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