

In the novel All the Light We Cannot See, Marie-Laure is a young girl who lost her sight at a young age and lives with her father in Paris, France, during the 1930s. Her father works as the master locksmith for the Museum of Natural History, where Marie-Laure spends much of her time. In their apartment is a miniature model of their neighborhood, which her father built for her. Read the excerpt from the novel and answer the questions that follow.

from **ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE**
by Anthony Doerr

- 1 Sixteen paces to the water fountain, sixteen back. Forty-two to the stairwell, forty-two back. Marie-Laure draws maps in her head, unreels a hundred yards of imaginary twine, and then turns and reels it back in. Botany smells like glue and blotter paper and pressed flowers. Paleontology smells like rock dust, bone dust. Biology smells like formalin and old fruit; it is loaded with heavy cool jars in which float things she has only had described for her: the pale coiled ropes of rattlesnakes, the severed hands of gorillas. Entomology smells like mothballs and oil: a preservative that, Dr. Geffard explains, is called naphthalene. Offices smell of carbon paper, or cigar smoke, or brandy, or perfume. Or all four.
- 2 She follows cables and pipes, railings and ropes, hedges and sidewalks. She startles people. She never knows if the lights are on.
- 3 The children she meets brim with questions: Does it hurt? Do you shut your eyes to sleep? How do you know what time it is?
- 4 It doesn't hurt, she explains. And there is no darkness, not the kind they imagine. Everything is composed of webs and lattices and upheavals of sound and texture. She walks a circle around the Grand Gallery, navigating between squeaking floorboards; she hears feet tramp up and down museum staircases, a toddler squeal, the groan of a weary grandmother lowering herself onto a bench.
- 5 Color—that's another thing people don't expect. In her imagination, in her dreams, everything has color. The museum buildings are beige, chestnut, hazel. Its scientists are lilac and lemon yellow and fox brown. Piano chords loll in the speaker of the wireless in the guard station, projecting rich blacks and complicated blues down the hall toward the key pound.¹ Church bells send arcs of bronze careening off the windows. Bees are silver; pigeons are ginger and auburn and occasionally golden. The huge cypress trees she and her father pass on their morning walk are shimmering kaleidoscopes, each needle a polygon of light.

¹ *key pound* — a place for storing keys

- 6 She has no memories of her mother but imagines her as white, a soundless brilliance. Her father radiates a thousand colors, opal, strawberry red, deep russet, wild green; a smell like oil and metal, the feel of a lock tumbler sliding home, the sound of his key rings chiming as he walks. He is an olive green when he talks to a department head, an escalating series of oranges when he speaks to Mademoiselle Fleury from the greenhouses, a bright red when he tries to cook. He glows sapphire when he sits over his workbench in the evenings, humming almost inaudibly as he works, the tip of his cigarette gleaming a prismatic blue.
- 7 She gets lost. Secretaries or botanists, and once the director's assistant, bring her back to the key pound. She is curious; she wants to know the difference between an alga and a lichen, a *Diplodon charruanus* and a *Diplodon delodontus*.² Famous men take her by the elbow and escort her through the gardens or guide her up stairwells. "I have a daughter too," they'll say. Or "I found her among the hummingbirds."
- 8 "Toutes mes excuses,"³ her father says. He lights a cigarette; he plucks key after key out of her pockets. "What," he whispers, "am I going to do with you?"
- 9 On her ninth birthday, when she wakes, she finds two gifts. The first is a wooden box with no opening she can detect. She turns it this way and that. It takes her a little while to realize one side is spring-loaded; she presses it and the box flips open. Inside waits a single cube of creamy Camembert that she pops directly into her mouth.
- 10 "Too easy!" her father says, laughing.
- 11 The second gift is heavy, wrapped in paper and twine. Inside is a massive spiral-bound book. In Braille.
- 12 "They said it's for boys. Or very adventurous girls." She can hear him smiling.
- 13 She slides her fingertips across the embossed title page. *Around. The. World. In. Eighty. Days*.⁴ "Papa, it's too expensive."
- 14 "That's for me to worry about."
- 15 That morning Marie-Laure crawls beneath the counter of the key pound and lies on her stomach and sets all ten fingertips in a line on a page. The French feels old-fashioned, the dots printed much closer together than she is used to. But after a week, it becomes easy. She finds the ribbon she uses as a bookmark, opens the book, and the museum falls away.
- 16 Mysterious Mr. Fogg lives his life like a machine. Jean Passepartout⁵ becomes his obedient valet. When, after two months, she reaches the novel's last line, she flips back to the first page and starts again. At night she runs her fingertips over her father's model: the bell tower, the display windows. She imagines Jules Verne's characters walking along the streets, chatting in shops; a half-inch-tall baker slides speck-sized

² *Diplodon charruanus* and *Diplodon delodontus* — types of mussels

³ *Toutes mes excuses* — French for "my apologies"

⁴ *Around the World in Eighty Days* — an adventure novel by the French author Jules Verne

⁵ *Mr. Fogg . . . Jean Passepartout* — characters in the novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*

loaves in and out of his ovens; three minuscule burglars hatch plans as they drive slowly past the jeweler's; little grumbling cars throng the rue de Mirbel, wipers sliding back and forth. Behind a fourth-floor window on the rue des Patriarches, a miniature version of her father sits at a miniature workbench in their miniature apartment, just as he does in real life, sanding away at some infinitesimal piece of wood; across the room is a miniature girl, skinny, quick-witted, an open book in her lap; inside her chest pulses something huge, something full of longing, something unafraid.

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