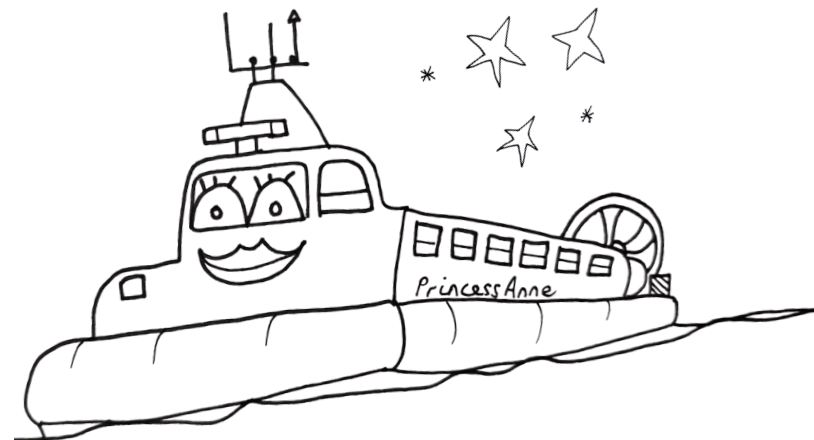


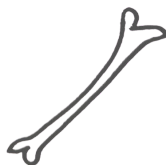
22 MIDNIGHT
22 MIDNIGHT



ONCE UPON A
GOSPORT



JESSIE THE RAT AND THE HOVERCRAFT'S SECRET PASSENGER





ONCE UPON A GOSPORT

Step into a magical world where Gosport's stories spring to life, where the past isn't something you read about, but something you meet. Here, heroes and heroines, sailors and scientists, inventors and dreamers transcend time, space, and history to share their adventures with you.

Every page is a doorway into Gosport's spirit of curiosity, courage, and imagination.

Once Upon a Gosport has been lovingly created by Annelies James of 22Midnight, bringing together local tales and timeless lessons for new generations to enjoy.

This enchanting project began as a project for Gosport Heritage Grant, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Hampshire Cultural Trust. This book was grant funded by the Gosport Borough Council Heritage Fund helping to ensure our heritage continues to inspire wonder for years to come.

With Thanks...

Special thanks to Richard Oakes the fantastic Gosport based artist and illustrator.

Big thanks to my people, Ian Richardson and Phyllis Sheldon.

Projects are only ever as good as their community and we have welcomed an amazing community of creatives, supporters and volunteers to make this project happen.

For more thanks and resources visit the website.



Long ago, and also today, there lived a small grey rat on a lonely patch of land between Gosport and Portsmouth.

The place was called Burrow Island. Most people called it Rat Island.

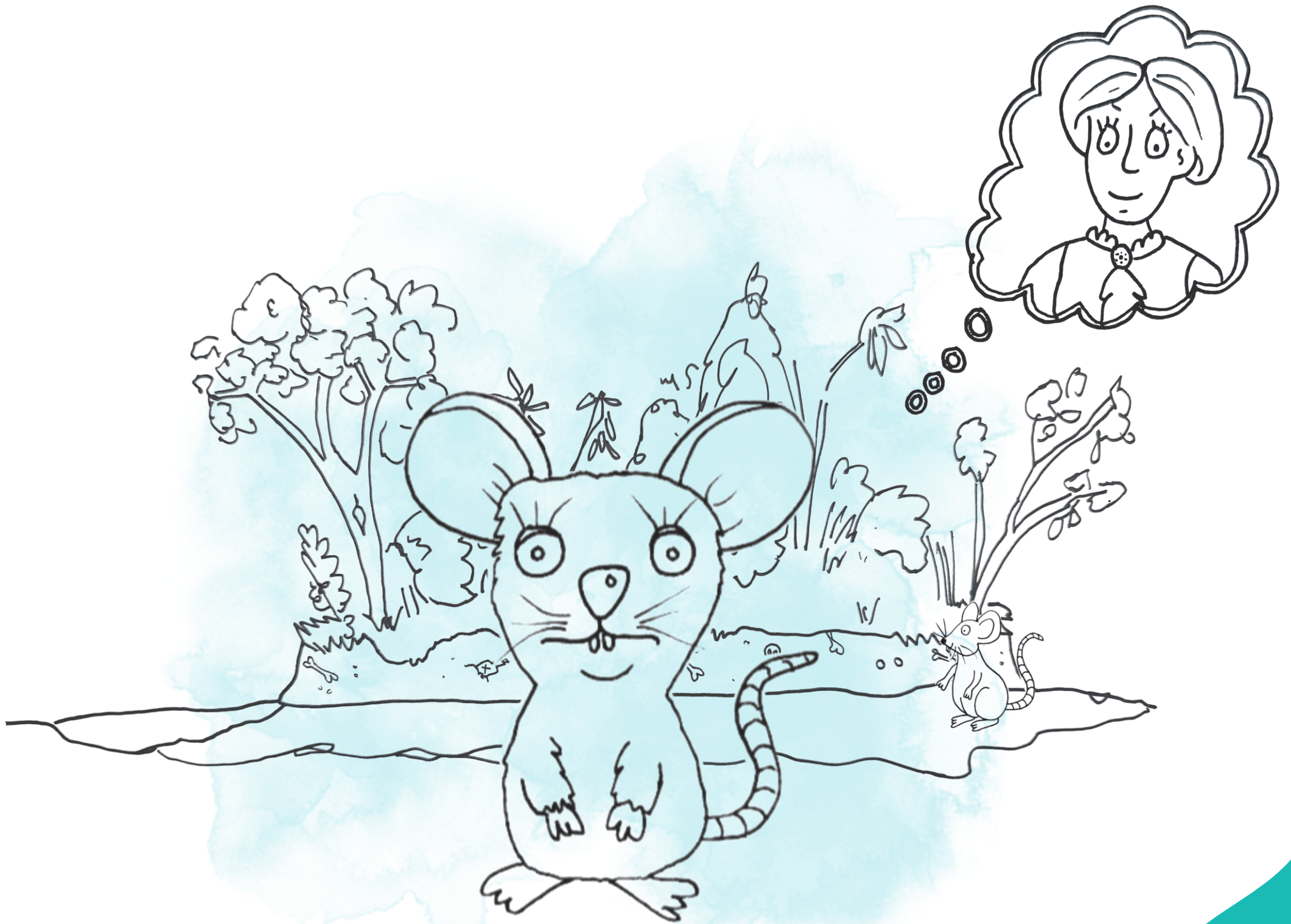
Among the reeds and old stones lived Jessie the rat.

Jessie had bright whiskers, sharp ears, and a restless heart.

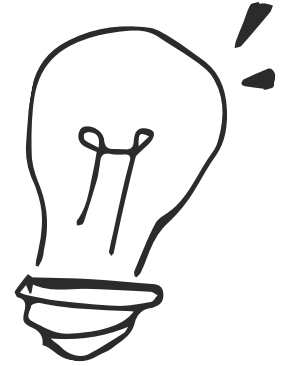


She had been named after Jessie Mario White, a woman from Gosport long ago who travelled across the world fighting for justice and campaigning for good!



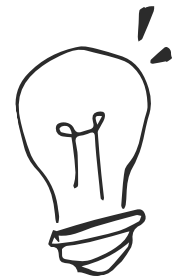


“Imagine that” Jessie often squeaked to herself.



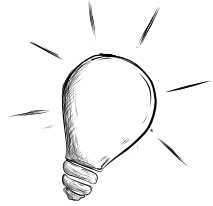
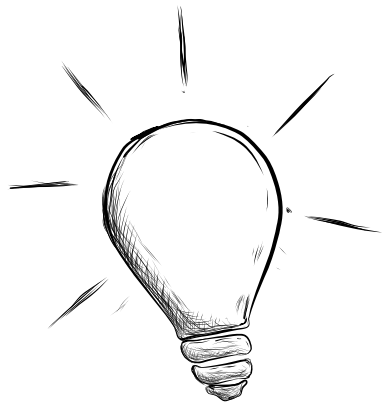
“A Gosport girl who became a hurricane!”

Jessie twitched her whiskers proudly.



“Perhaps I can be a hurricane too and make a positive change, like Jessie Mario White did.”

But Burrow Island was not the prettiest place.



The tide brought strange things.

Old bullets from long-ago wars.

Broken glass bottles that glowed like jewels in the mud.

Weathered crates left by smugglers.

And sometimes even bones from forgotten sailors and prisoners.

Jessie tiptoed past them each night.

“Every bone has a story,” she whispered.

But stories could feel lonely when you were the only one listening.







One misty morning Jessie made up her mind.

“Today,” she said firmly, “I will explore the world!”

She waited until the tide slipped away from the island.

Then she stepped carefully into the squelchy mud and crossed towards the Gosport shore.

Squish.

Squish.

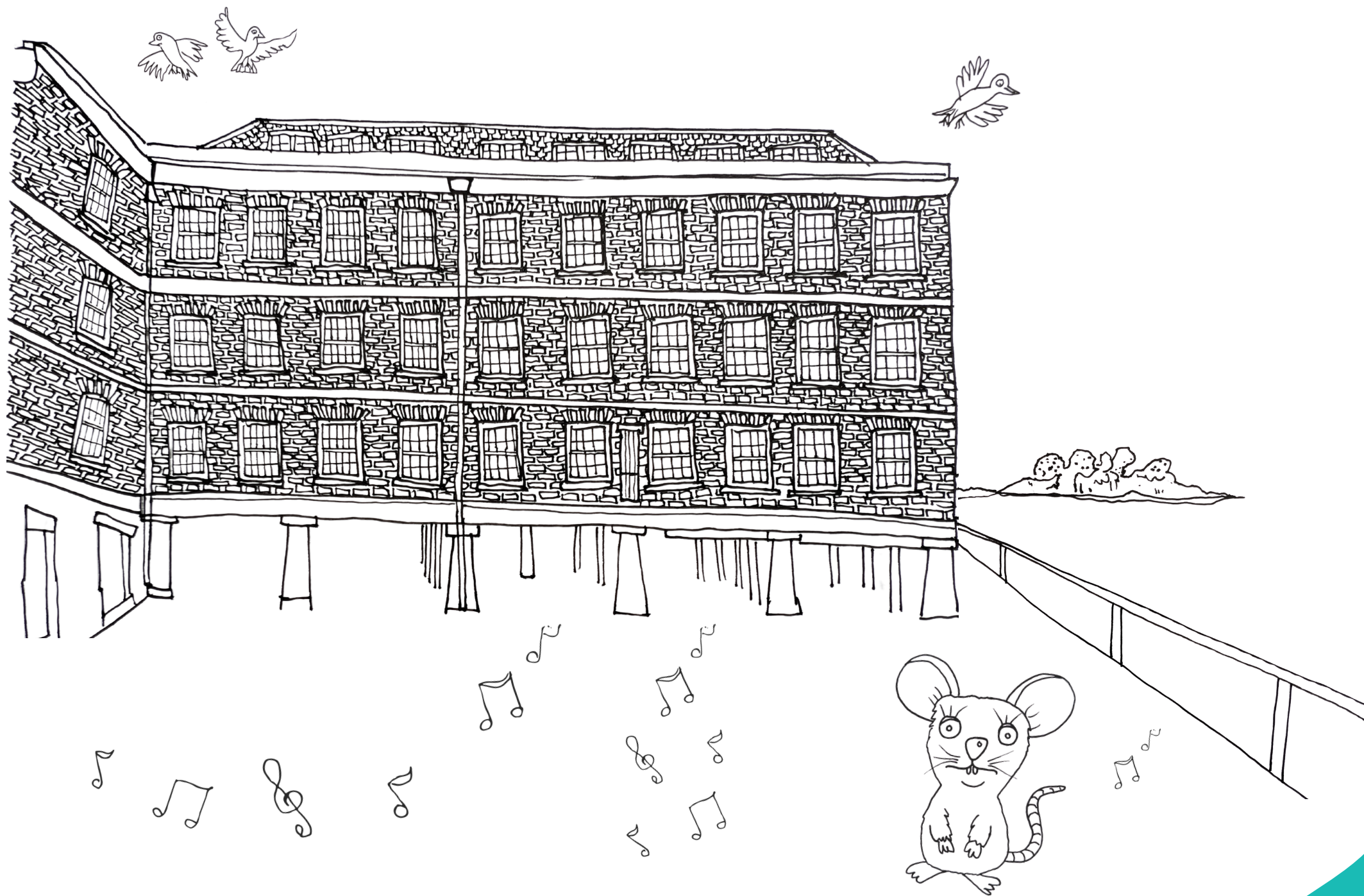
Squish.

At last she reached the High Street.

Suddenly - TOOT-TOOT-TA-TOOOOT!

A joyful trumpet sound floated through the air.

Jessie’s ears popped upright.



Following the music, she scurried into Nat Gonella Square, where a band was playing bright swinging jazz.

At the centre stood a smiling trumpeter.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” he called.

Jessie listened in wonder.

The musician was Nat Gonella, the famous jazz man who had once filled dance halls with music.

Jessie’s paws tapped along with the rhythm.

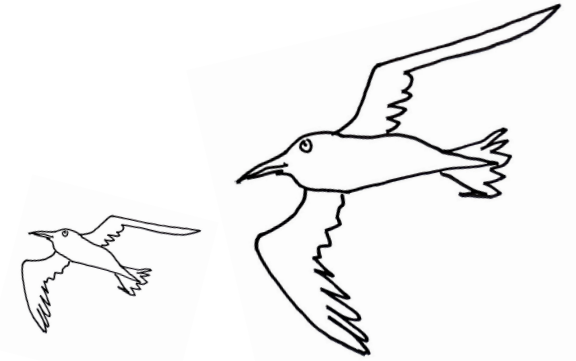
“Adventure sounds like jazz!” she squeaked happily.





But soon the sky turned orange with evening.

Jessie hurried back toward Burrow Island.



As she darted down the High Street, she nearly bumped into the Mayor of Gosport, out on her evening run.

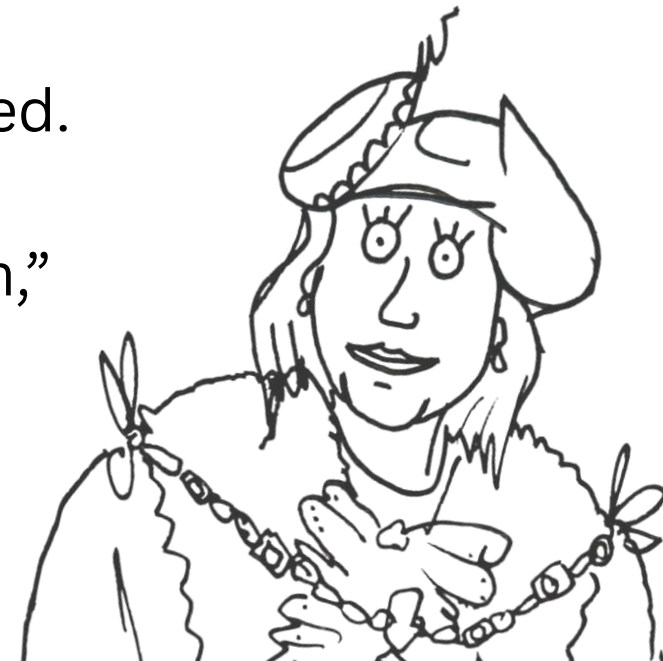
The Mayor slowed, jogging gently on the spot, and smiled. She was known for always making time for her community.

“Where are you heading in such a hurry?” she asked.

“Back to Burrow Island!” Jessie squeaked.

The Mayor’s eyes widened. “Then you’d better run,” she said kindly. “The tide is going out.”

“Oh dear,” Jessie gasped.





The tide was coming in but Jessie had to get home.
She launched into the water.

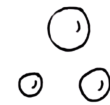


The tide was rushing in all around her.

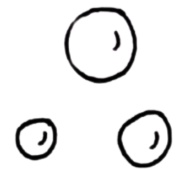
Water swirled around her paws.

Then her tail.

Then her whiskers!



“Oh no!” Jessie squeaked.



The current tugged her away from shore. She was
very frightened!







Just then -

A huge shape glided across the water.
Lights shimmered beneath it.

The sea hummed softly.

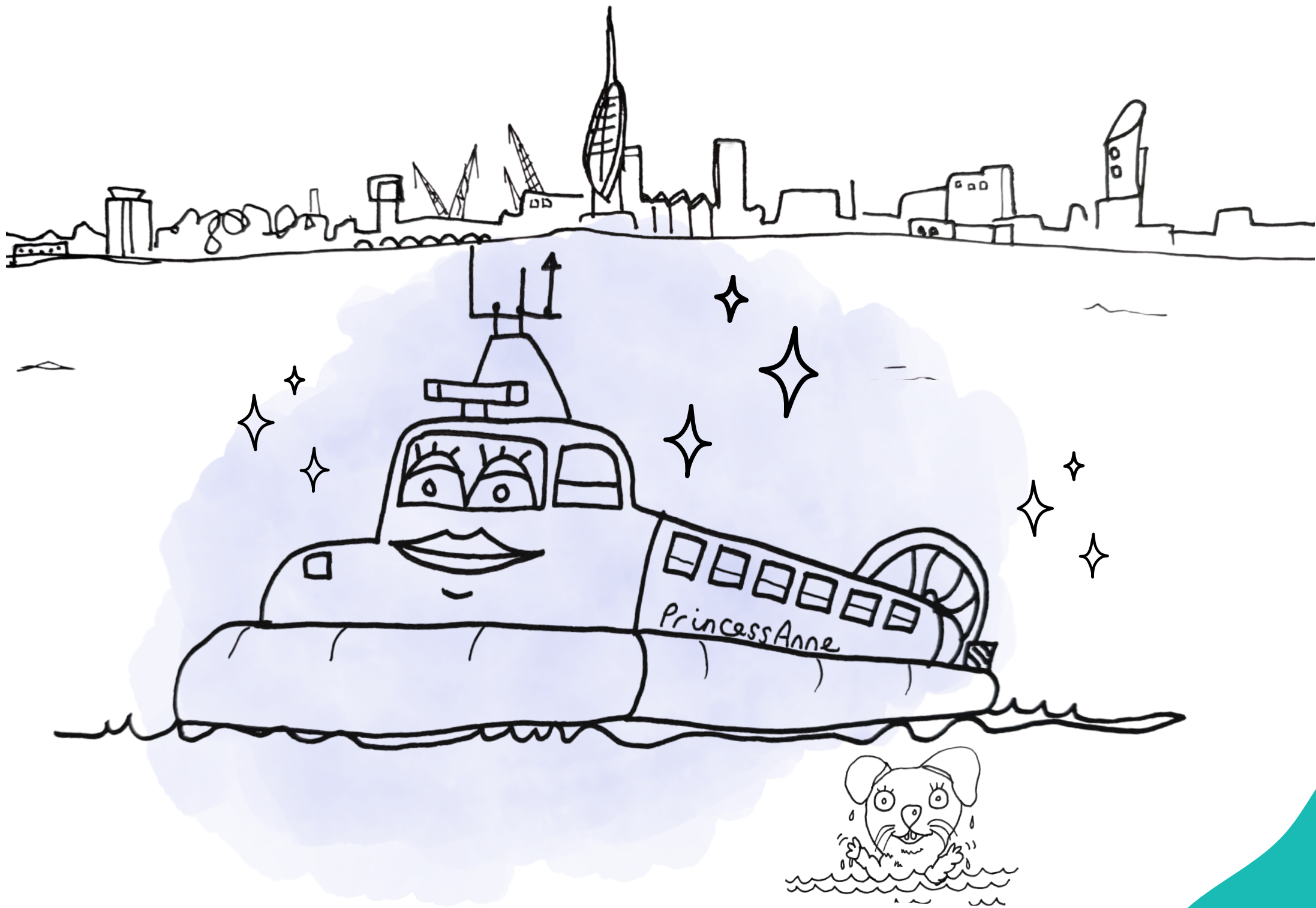
“Need a lift?” boomed a warm voice.

Jessie blinked.

Floating beside her was a magnificent hovercraft.

“I am Princess Anne,” said the craft proudly.

“The fastest hovercraft ever to cross the English Channel.”



Jessie scrambled aboard.

“My saviour!” she puffed.

“Who are you really?”

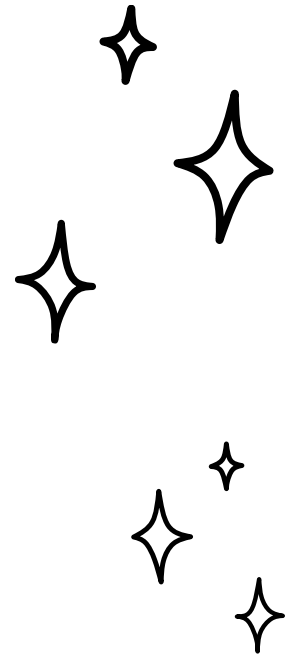
Princess Anne chuckled.

“I once carried hundreds of passengers and cars across the sea. But now I rest at the Hovercraft Museum in Lee-on-the-Solent.”

She winked a glowing light.

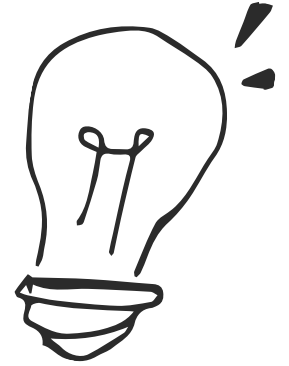
“Sometimes... I sneak out at night... and lucky for you I did tonight!”

Jessie’s whiskers twitched with excitement.





“Fancy a secret tour of Gosport?” asked Princess Anne.
Jessie squeaked with delight.



“Yes please!”

They glided across the harbour, floating on a cushion of air.

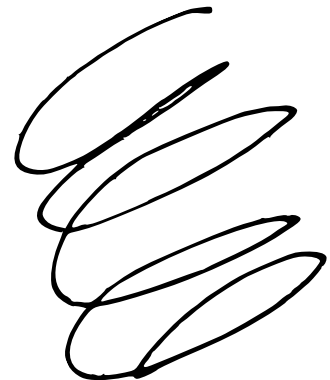
“Hovercraft travel on air instead of water,” explained Princess Anne proudly.

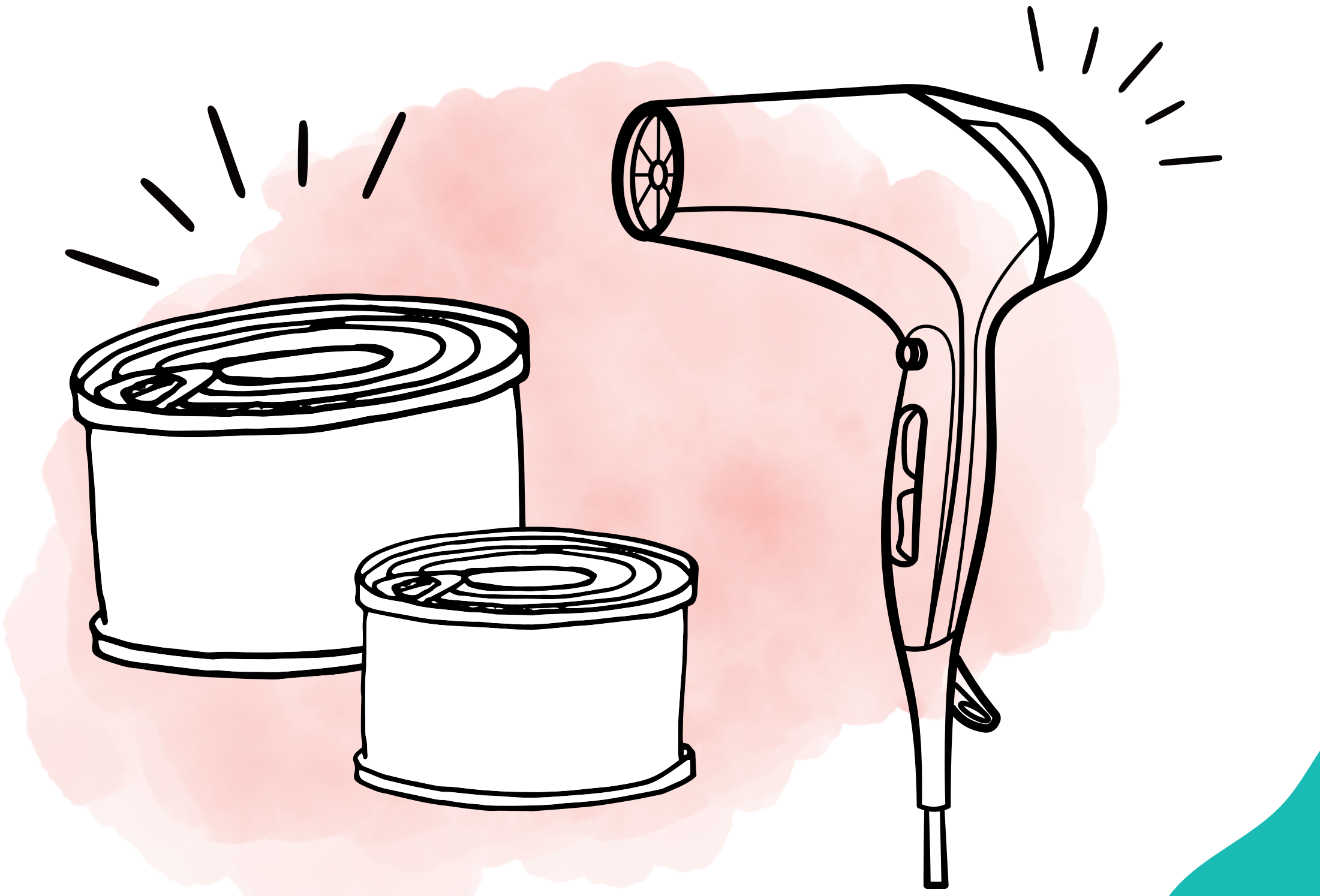
“A clever engineer named Sir Christopher Cockerell invented us by experimenting with tin cans and a hairdryer.”

Jessie stared in amazement.

“A hairdryer made a hovercraft?”

“Every invention begins with curiosity,” said Princess Anne.





Soon they drifted beside Hardway.

“This place helped change the world,” said the hovercraft gently.

During the Second World War, thousands of soldiers and vehicles gathered here before sailing to Normandy on D-Day.

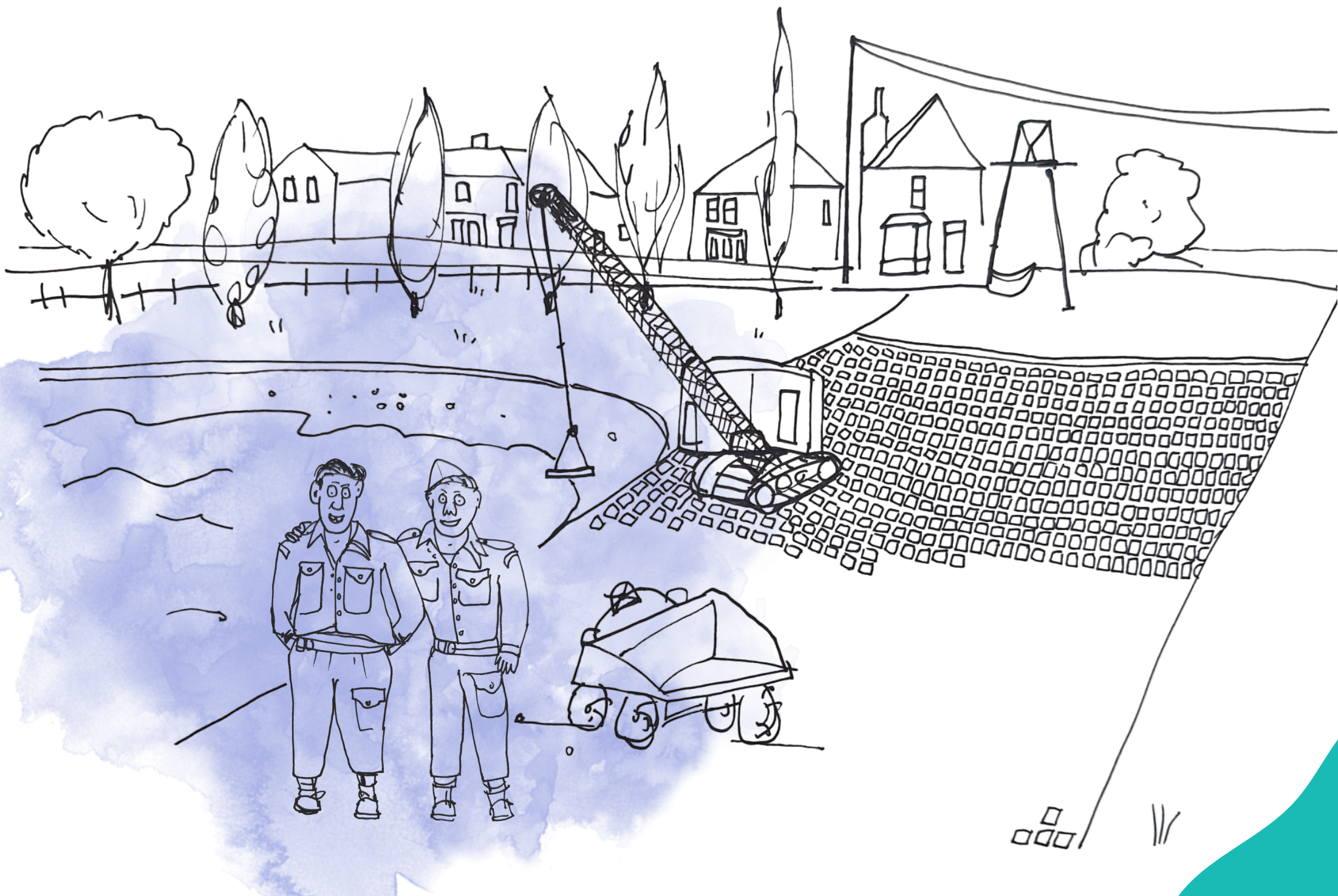
Jessie looked at the quiet shore.

“I never knew.”

Princess Anne nodded.

“Even peaceful places remember brave moments.”





Next they glided past the tall walls of Haslar.

“That enormous building was once one of the largest hospitals in the world,” said Princess Anne.

“A doctor named James Lind worked here.”

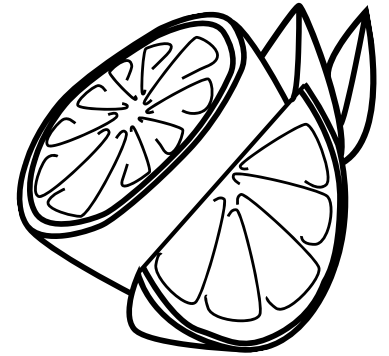
“What did he do?” Jessie asked.

“He discovered that sailors could be cured of scurvy by eating citrus fruits.”

Jessie’s eyes widened. “So lemons saved sailors?”

“Exactly.” “Science saves the day again.” Princess Anne said.

Jessie grinned.





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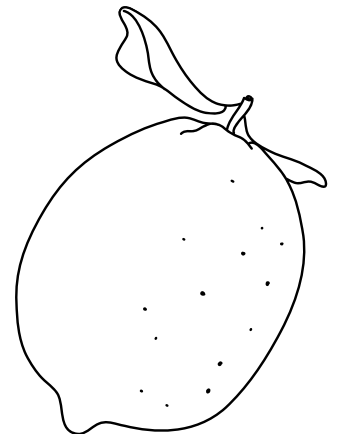
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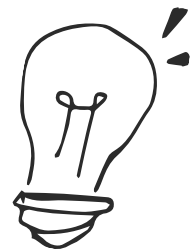
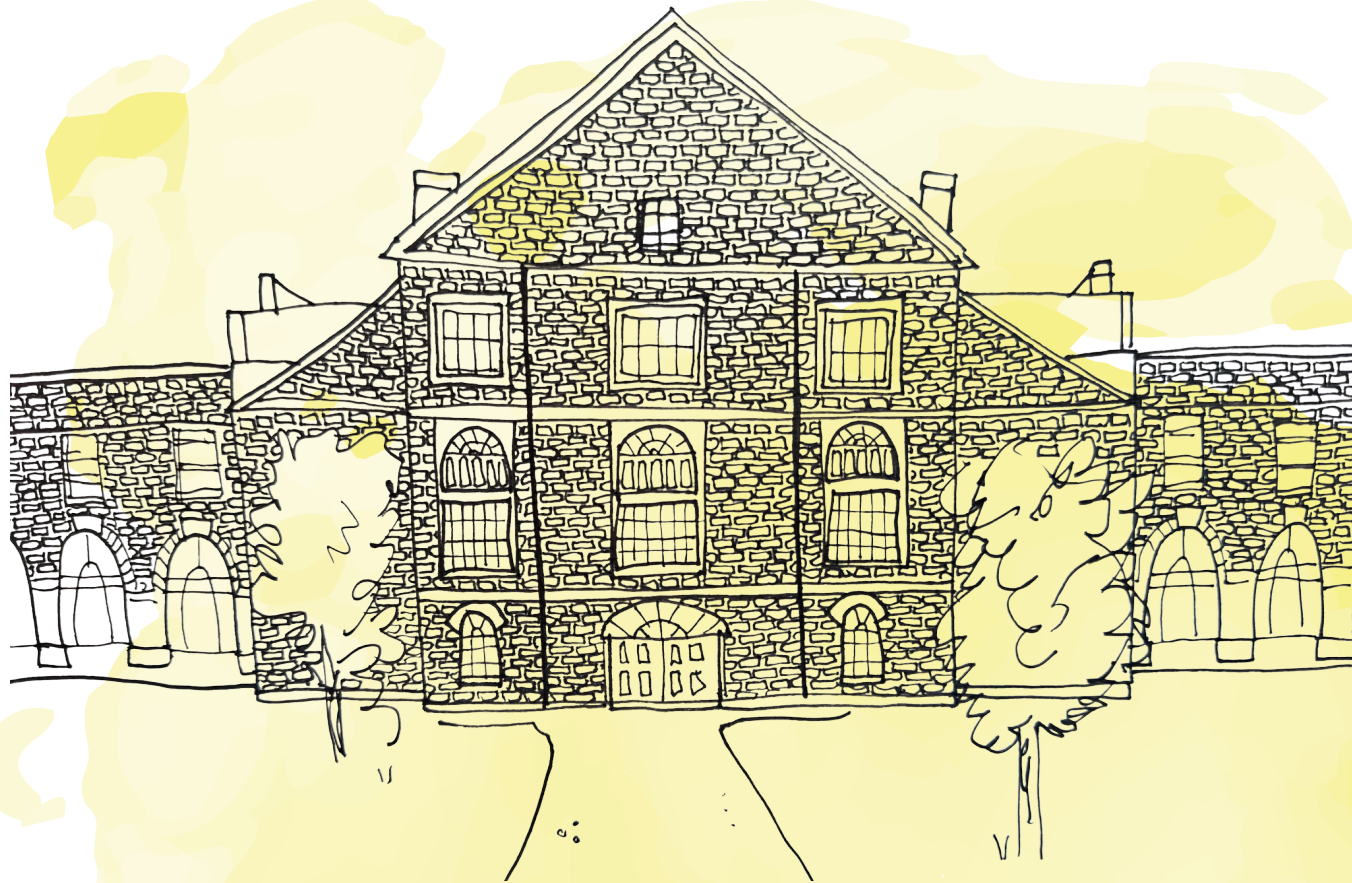
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Jessie gazed across the glowing shoreline.

“I always thought Gosport was a bit... quiet.”

Princess Anne hummed kindly.

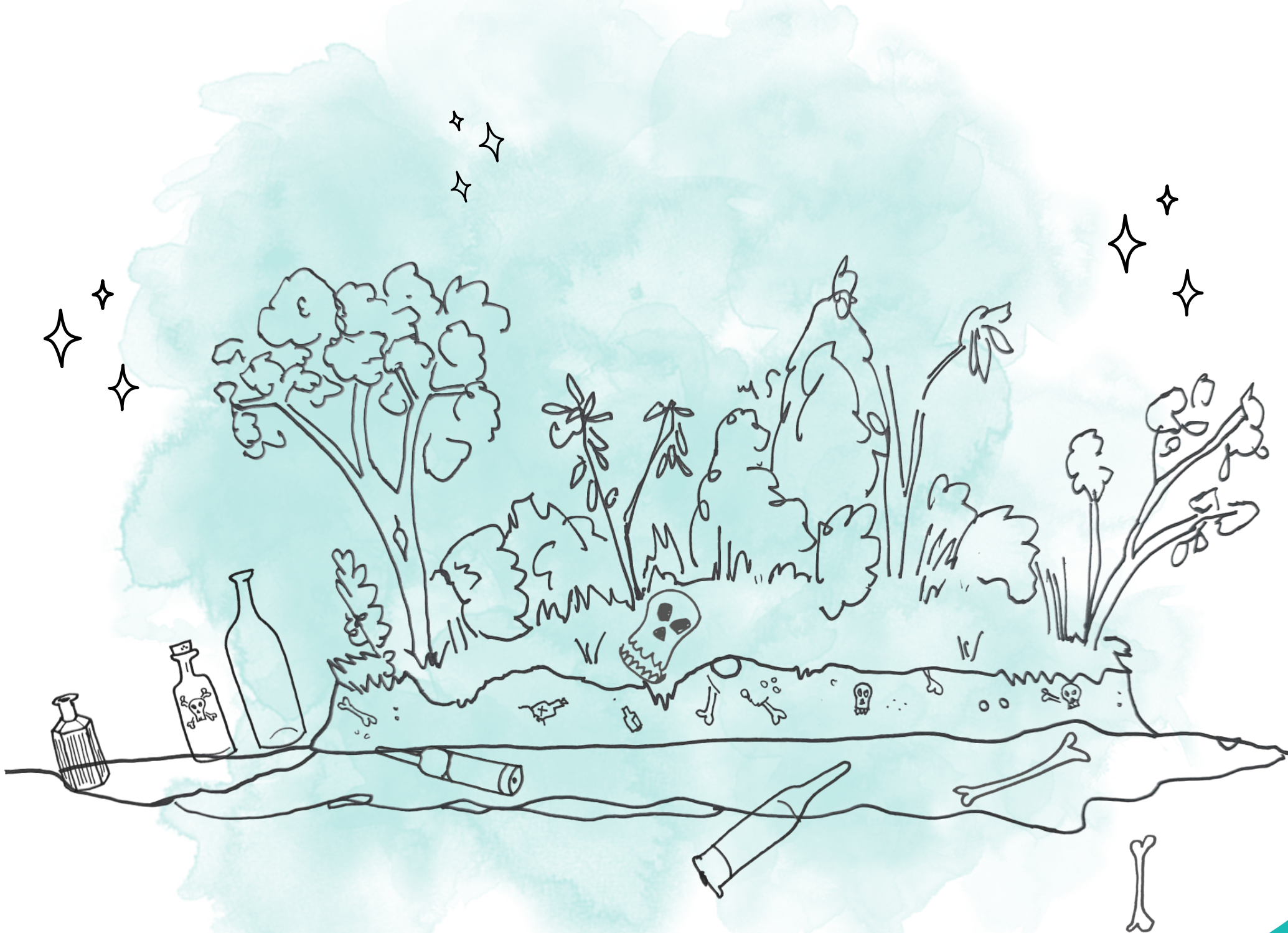
“Every bullet, bottle, and bone you saw on your island is part of history.”

“Even me,” she added proudly.

“I exist because people dared to invent something new.”

Jessie thought about Burrow Island. About the strange treasures in the mud.

Perhaps they were not scary after all. Perhaps they were stories waiting to be told.





Princess Anne slowed beside the island.

“Here we are,” she said softly.

Jessie hopped back onto the muddy shore. Then she paused.

“Could I come with you again?” she asked.

Princess Anne’s lights sparkled. “Of course.”

“You can be my secret passenger.”

Jessie’s whiskers quivered with joy. “And I’ll bring my brothers and sisters!”





Soon dozens of little rats were riding aboard the hovercraft, squeaking with excitement.

That night they zoomed along the Gosport shoreline, listening to stories of inventors, musicians, sailors, and explorers.

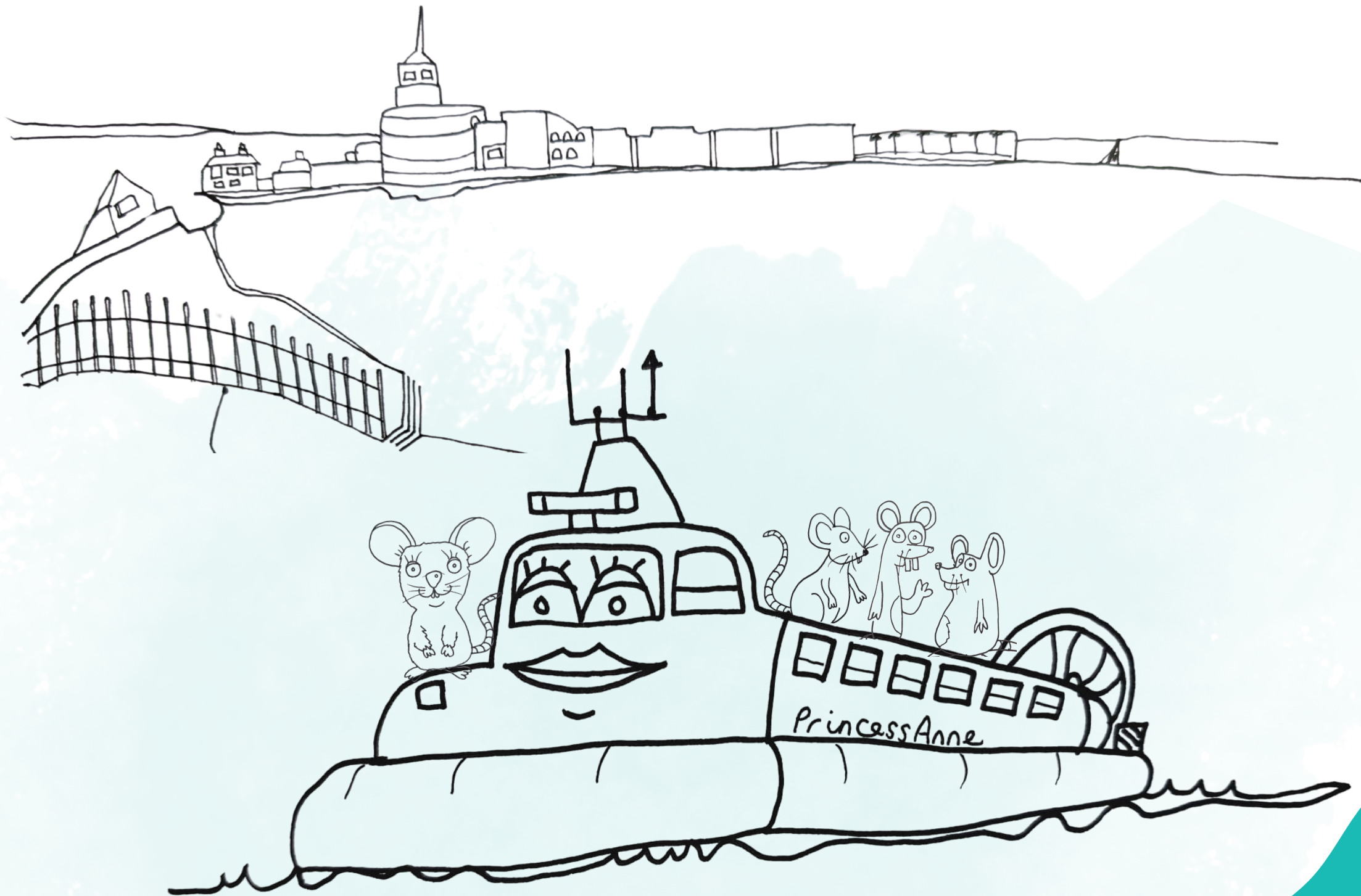
Jessie stood proudly at the front.

She might never travel the whole world. But she didn't need to.

Because she had discovered something wonderful.

Adventure was already waiting right here at home.

And Jessie the rat, named after a hurricane, had become a little hurricane of curiosity in her own town.





Visit the website for all the resources and to book
the Once Upon a Gosport Heritage Crate...

www.OnceUponAGosport.com