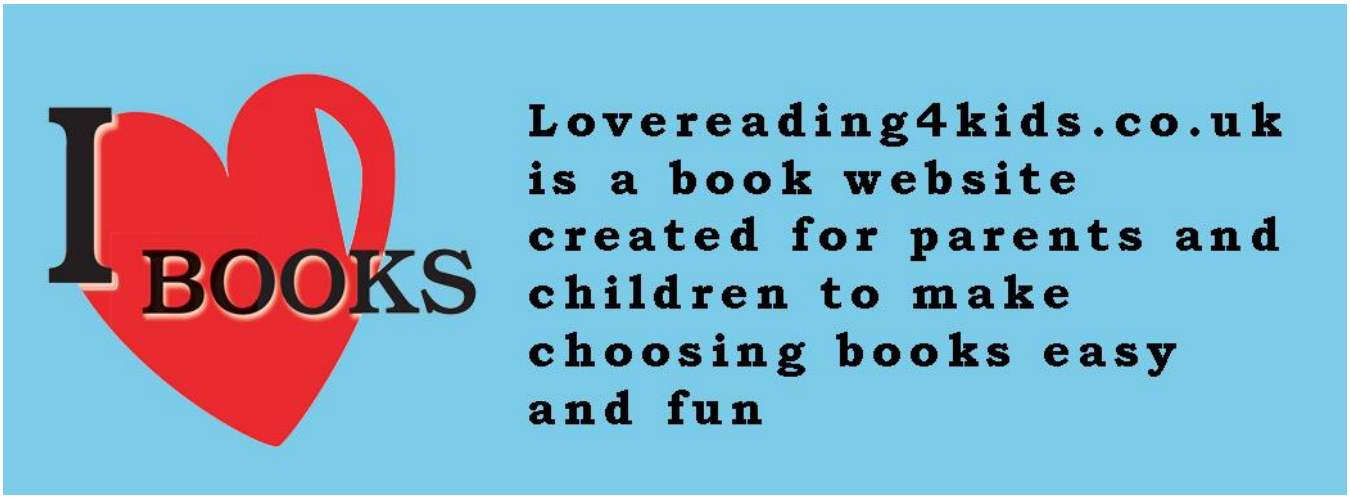


an extract from

Unicorn in New York: Louie in a Spin

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To Alex McNabb, Annabel Kantaria
and Wayne Jordan, who help me
believe in unicorns. With a big shout
out to Jodie and Dylan, who are
so perfect they poop rainbows.




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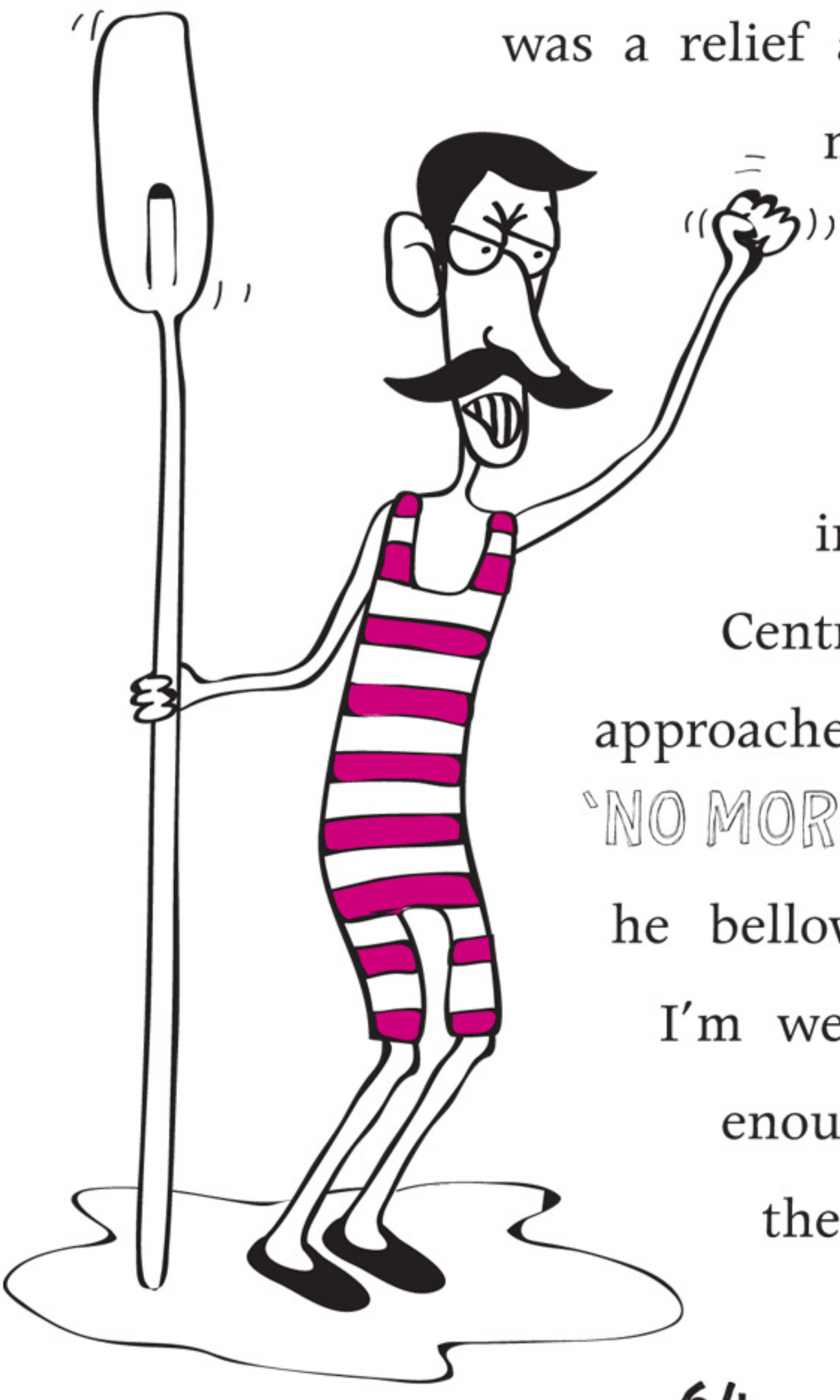



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For what felt like the millionth time, I did my run-up and launched myself into the air. Madame Swirler was right about the water. There was definitely less bruising, which was a relief as I didn't have many bruise-free areas left. In fact, it was all going very well indeed, until the Central Park boatman approached.



'NO MORE SPLASHING!' he bellowed. 'I'm tired, I'm wet, and I've had enough. I've spent the last half an hour

apologizing to the people you've drenched with water. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. Time to go home.'

Frank, Danny and Miranda all BOO-ed him from their dry, grassy spot beneath a nearby tree, but part of me sympathized with him. I knew what it felt like to be very, very wet.

Madame Swirler stepped forward and got all grumpy-fairy in his face. 'Leave this unicorn alone,' she snapped. 'He's trying his best.'

Wow! Madame Swirler was sticking up for me! I took a step backward in surprise.

'*This unicorn* has been terrorizing the Central Park boating community,' the boatman snapped back.

'Hardly!' Madame Swirler's wings twitched in rage. 'Louie has done an excellent job today, despite being scared and useless.'

I considered being offended by 'useless', but decided to focus on how nice it felt to be defended by Madame Swirler. HUGS! I touched my heart with my hoof and took another backwards step.

'Look at him!' Madame Swirler pointed at me and I gave an awkward wave in response. 'He might look like a soggy mess, but Louie is a unicorn with the heart of a lion. We'll make a ballet dancer of him yet!'

She liked my heart! She thought I'd make a wonderful ballet dancer! Overwhelmed,

I stepped back again. But this time I ran out of grass.

I hit the lake and suddenly it was all

SPLASH! GLUG! 'HELP!'

Water flew over the nearest rowers, and the wave I'd accidentally created overturned their boat, sending the three teenagers inside hurtling into the water.

'GRRRRR!' The boatman leapt into the lake to help.

'It's OK,' I called to reassure him as my hoof touched ground. 'I'm fine.'

He growled more loudly, and after helping the teenagers to shore, he pulled a fish from his armpit and started half-wading, half-swimming towards me, muttering threats about de-horning unicorns.


I ♥ NY


MARY

Yikes! Run away!

Without thinking, I took up the position for the Leaping Champion as the boatman approached. Testing the ground and trying not to think too hard about the squelchy thing beneath my feet, I sprang from the lake into an energetic star jump, with enough power and energy to launch a perfectly executed forward somersault.

I DID IT!

I couldn't believe it.

I DID IT!

I got a standing ovation from my friends beneath the tree.

Even Madame Swirler clapped. 'Oh, Louie, that was a perfect Leaping Champion!' She grabbed my foreleg as the

boatman reached for my tail. 'We'll celebrate later. Right now, we should probably run.'

As we raced through the park, with Danny and Frank lolloping along behind us, carrying Miranda and her tank, I could have sworn I heard Madame Swirler giggle. But that was even more impossible than completing a Leaping Champion jump.