For Radhe, Jini and Priya, with love – J.H.

For all grown-ups who still enjoy
reading picture books – B.F.

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TAKING THE LONG WAY HOME

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Normally, when school ends Daddy comes to collect us.
He likes to find shortcuts home . . .

Nipping through a passage here, crossing a road there.

Zarah hates walking home. None of Daddy's shortcuts are short enough for her, even though he is always in a hurry.

But today, Uncle Jerome has come to pick us up.
He waits at the school gates with his arms open wide.

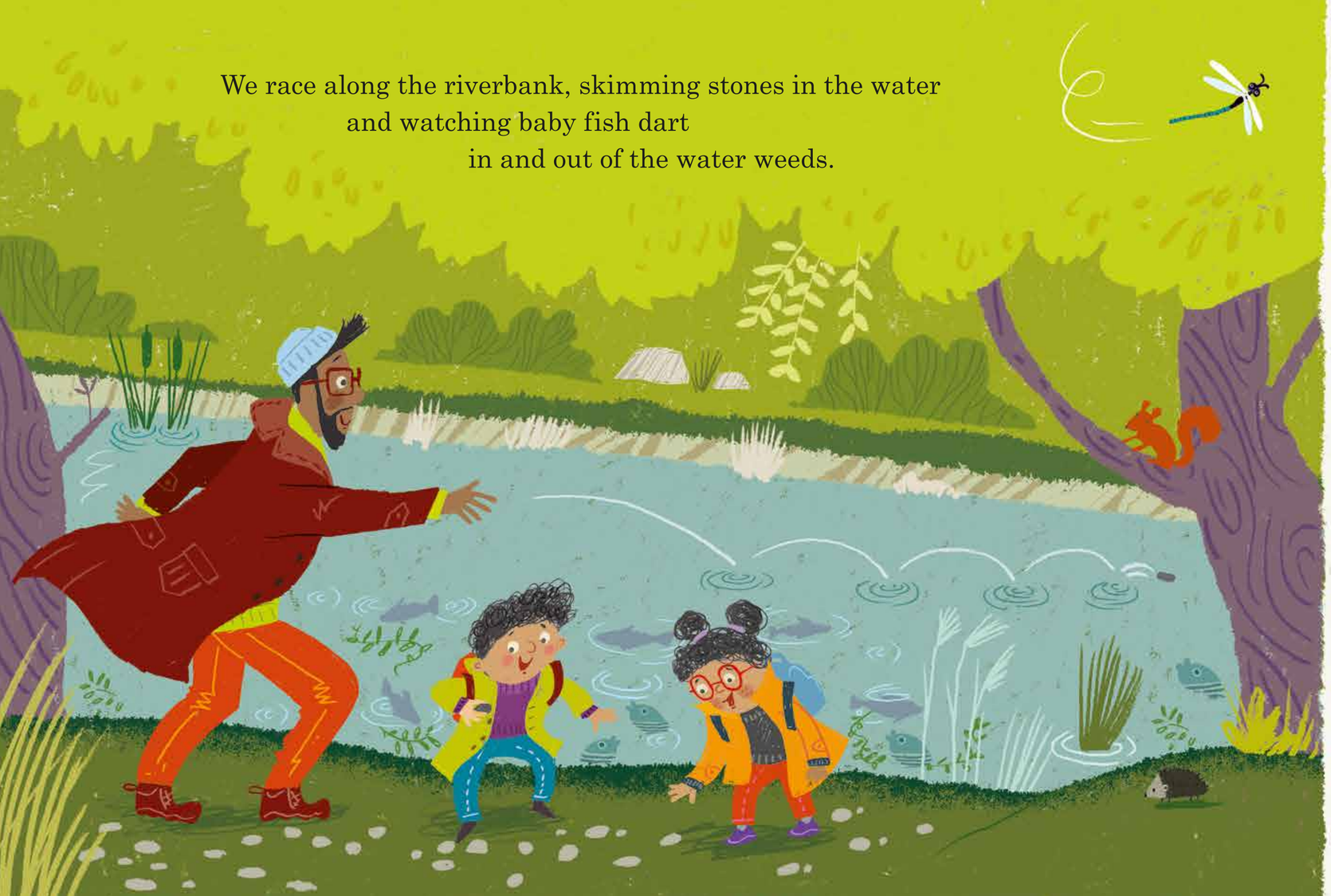
He asks, ‘Shall we take
the LONG way home?’

And Zarah groans.

Uncle Jerome walks us through the wild woods
and we plod along the pathways
hearing the crunch and scrunch
of leaves underfoot.
When we are deep in the dark of the woods,
we hear the crows caww-craawww.
‘Can’t we stop?’ Zarah asks,
dragging behind.
Uncle Jerome pauses.
‘Listen!’ he says.
‘What’s that noise?
I think it might be . . .

. . . PTERODACTYLS swooping
and soaring overhead.'
We all duck low, CREEPING through
the brambles and ivy.
Anything can happen
on the long way home.

We race along the riverbank, skimming stones in the water
and watching baby fish dart
in and out of the water weeds.



‘Are we nearly there yet?’ Zarah asks.

‘Look!’ Uncle Jerome pauses . . .

‘What’s that lurking in the water over there?
I think it might be . . .