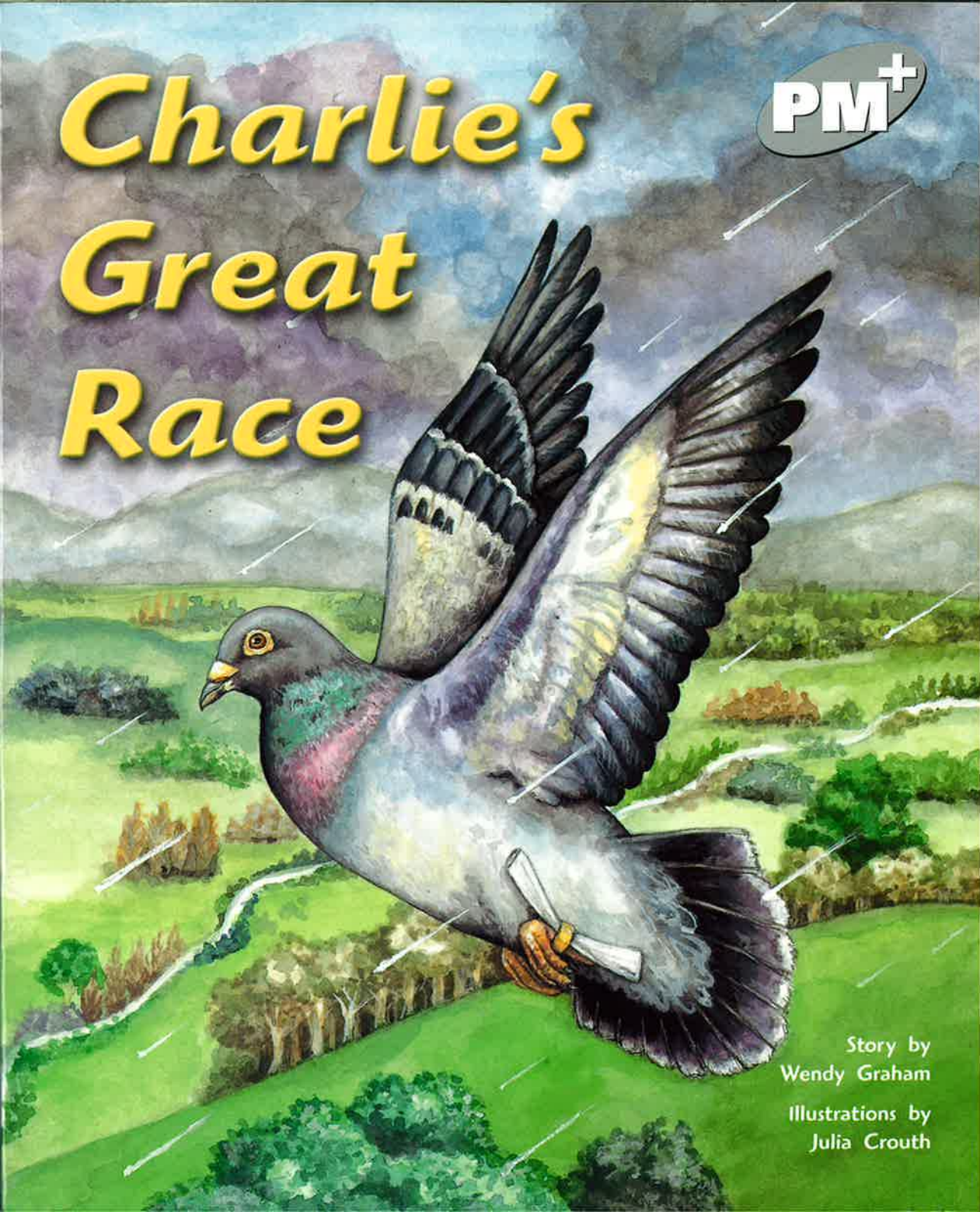
Charlie's Great Race

PM+



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Holly's dad kept homing pigeons in a loft in the back garden. Holly loved to help her father feed the pigeons, and she often put a bowl of water inside the loft for them to splash in. Her favourite pigeon was Charlie, because he would always let her hold him.

Dad belonged to a homing pigeon club, and he raced his pigeons against other pigeons. He thought that homing pigeons were special birds, because they could find their way home from long distances. Some of them could even fly faster than cars travel!

The homing pigeon club was about to hold its first race of the season, and all of Dad's birds were in training. Dad would take them out in his van, and then release them, so that they could fly back home. When they did, Holly would give them special food as a treat.

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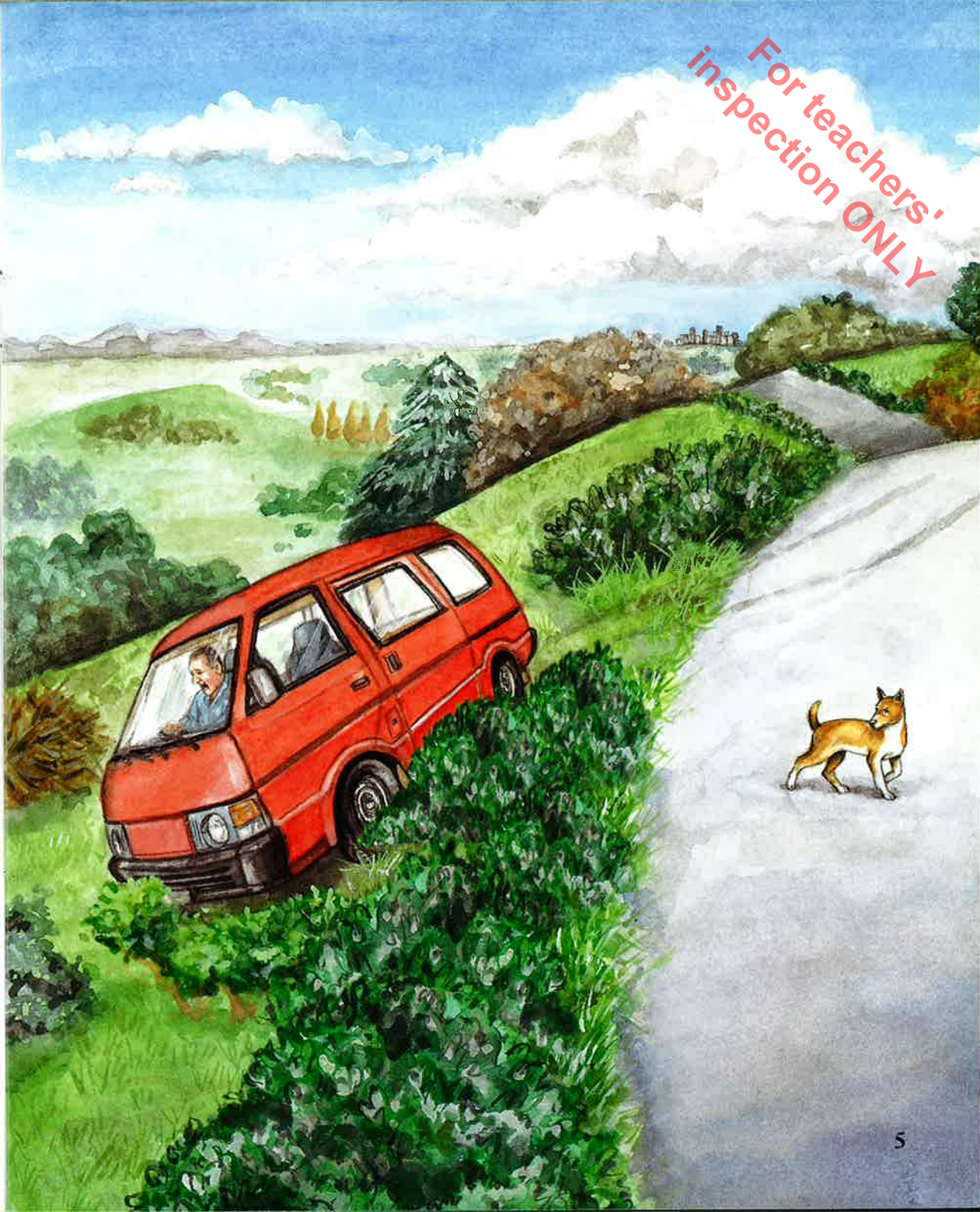
Each day, Dad released the pigeons a few kilometres further from home, so that they would get used to finding their way back.

On the day of the pigeon race, Dad left home early. He had to drive 100 kilometres to the starting point. The pigeons were in a travelling cage in the back of his van.

As Holly waved goodbye, she called, "Good luck, Charlie! I'll be waiting for you to come home." She hoped that Charlie would win the race.

Dad whistled as he drove along the winding road that led over the hills, and soon the city was far behind him. The pigeons were settled in their cage.

Suddenly, Dad slammed on the brakes. A dog had dashed out in front of the van! Dad swerved to miss it, but the van skidded across the road, and went over a grassy bank.



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Small trees and branches snapped like twigs as the van bumped down the slope. Dad could not control the van, and it ran into a large tree.

Dad tried to move, but his legs were wedged tightly under the dashboard. He was trapped inside the van! His right ankle was very painful, and he thought that it might be broken. He had to get help as soon as possible.

No one had seen the accident, and it might be hours before he was discovered. He felt around for his mobile phone, but it had been flung out of reach.

Dad managed to twist around to check that the pigeons hadn't been hurt. They were fluttering in their cage, but they seemed to be all right.

Then a great idea came to him. One of the pigeons could carry a message home to Mum and Holly!