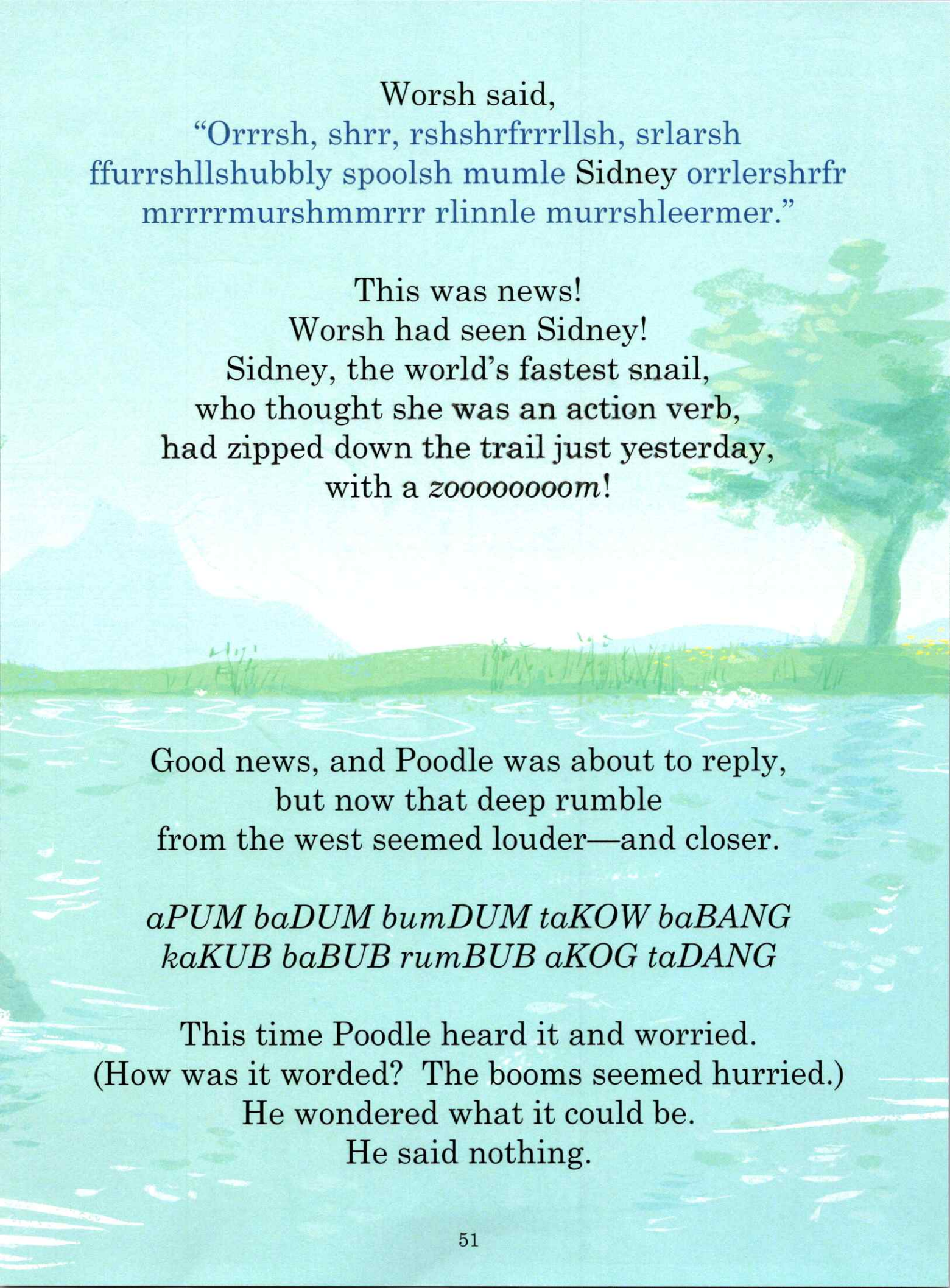




Worsh was an old river.  
He knew vowels and consonants.  
He knew himself. He liked being a river.  
He sang softly to himself:  
*Don't worry  
'bout a thing.*  
He was not in a hurry.  
He was whispery,  
with low vowels—a good fellow.  
His water-words were full  
of swirshy-swarshy consonants.

As Poodle and What? reached his bank,  
Worsh peeked up  
through his thousand bubbles,  
like the compound eye of an ant,  
and greeted them with trickly words  
as though they were old friends,  
and raised his soft, splurshy words  
to their ears—  
water-words, hypnotic,  
words like songs,  
and somehow Poodle heard.



Worsh said,  
“Orrrsh, shrr, rshshrfrrrllsh, srlarsh  
ffurrshllshubbly spoolsh mumle Sidney orrlershrfr  
mrrrrmurshmmrrr rlinne murrshleermer.”

This was news!  
Worsh had seen Sidney!  
Sidney, the world’s fastest snail,  
who thought she was an action verb,  
had zipped down the trail just yesterday,  
with a *zoouuuuuuum!*

Good news, and Poodle was about to reply,  
but now that deep rumble  
from the west seemed louder—and closer.

*aPUM baDUM bumDUM taKOW baBANG  
kaKUB baBUB rumBUB aKOG taDANG*

This time Poodle heard it and worried.  
(How was it worded? The booms seemed hurried.)  
He wondered what it could be.  
He said nothing.