



Out onto her balcony swept Mrs Silver.
"Alfie, my darling!" she cried out. "Mummy's back! Have you missed me?"

Mr Hoppy, peering over his railing, but well hidden between two huge potted plants, held his breath.

The new tortoise was still chomping away at the lettuce.

40

"My my, Alfie, you do seem hungry today," Mrs Silver was saying. "It must be Mr Hoppy's magic words I've been whispering to you."

Mr Hoppy watched as Mrs Silver picked the tortoise up and stroked his shell. Then she fished Mr Hoppy's piece of paper out of her pocket, and holding the tortoise very close to her face, she whispered, reading from the paper:

"ESIO TROT, ESIO TROT,
TEG REGGIB REGGIB!
EMOC NO, ESIO TROT,
WORG PU, FFUP PU, TOOHS PU!
GNIRPS PU, WOLB PU, LLEWS PU!
EGROG! ELZZUG! FFUTS! PLUG!
TUP NO TAF, ESIO TROT, TUP NO TAF!
TEG NO, TEG NO! ELBBOG DOOF!"



Mr Hoppy popped his head out of the foliage and called out, "Good evening, Mrs Silver. How is Alfie tonight?"

"Oh, he's lovely," Mrs Silver said, looking up and beaming. "And he's developing *such* an appetite! I've never seen him eat like this before! It must be the magic words."

"You never know," Mr Hoppy said darkly. "You never know."



Mr Hoppy waited seven whole days before he made his next move.

On the afternoon of the seventh day, when Mrs Silver was at work, he lifted Tortoise Number 2 from the balcony below and brought it into his living room. Number 2 had weighed exactly *fifteen* ounces. He must now find one that weighed exactly *seventeen* ounces, two ounces more.



From his enormous collection, he easily found a seventeen-ounce tortoise and once again he made sure the shells matched in colour. Then he lowered Tortoise Number 3 onto Mrs Silver's balcony.

As you will have guessed by now, Mr Hoppy's secret was a very simple one. If a creature grows slowly enough – I mean very very slowly indeed – then you'll never notice that it has grown at all, especially if you see it every day.

It's the same with children. They are actually growing taller every week, but their mothers never notice it until they grow out of their clothes.

Slowly does it, Mr Hoppy told himself. Don't hurry it.

43

So this is how things went over the next eight weeks.

In the beginning



ALFIE weight 13 ounces

End of first week



TORTOISE NO. 2 weight 15 ounces

End of second week



TORTOISE NO. 3 weight 17 ounces

44

End of third week



TORTOISE NO. 4 weight 19 ounces

End of fourth week



TORTOISE NO. 5 weight 21 ounces

End of fifth week



TORTOISE NO. 6 weight 23 ounces

45

End of sixth week



TORTOISE NO. 7 weight 25 ounces

End of seventh week



TORTOISE NO. 8 weight 27 ounces

Alfie's weight was thirteen ounces. Tortoise Number 8 was twenty-seven ounces. Very slowly, over seven weeks, Mrs Silver's pet had more than doubled in size and the good lady hadn't noticed a thing.

46



Even to Mr Hoppy, peering down over his railing, Tortoise Number 8 looked pretty big. It was amazing that Mrs Silver had hardly noticed anything at all during the great operation. Only once had she looked up and said, "You know, Mr Hoppy, I do believe he's getting a bit bigger. What do you think?"

"I can't see a lot of difference myself," Mr Hoppy had answered casually.



But now perhaps it was time to call a halt, and that evening Mr Hoppy was just about to go out and suggest to Mrs Silver that she ought to weigh Alfie when a startled cry from the balcony below brought him outside fast.

"Look!" Mrs Silver was shouting. "Alfie's too big to get through the door of his little house! He must have grown enormously!"

"Weigh him," Mr Hoppy ordered. "Take him in and weigh him quick."



Mrs Silver did just that, and in half a minute she was back holding the tortoise in both hands and waving it above her head and shouting, "Guess what, Mr Hoppy! Guess what! He weighs twenty-seven ounces! He's twice as big as he was before! Oh you darling!" she cried, stroking the tortoise. "Oh, you great big wonderful boy! Just look what clever Mr Hoppy has done for you!"

49

Mr Hoppy suddenly felt very brave. "Mrs Silver," he said. "Do you think I could pop down to your balcony and hold Alfie myself?"

"Why, of course you can!" Mrs Silver cried. "Come down at once."

Mr Hoppy rushed down the stairs and Mrs Silver opened the door to him. Together they went out onto the balcony. "Just look at him!" Mrs Silver said proudly. "Isn't he grand!"

"He's a big good-sized tortoise now," Mr Hoppy said.

"And you did it!" Mrs Silver cried. "You're a miracle man, you are indeed!"

"But what am I going to do about his house?" Mrs Silver said. "He must have a house to go into at night, but now he can't get through the door."

They were standing on the balcony looking at the tortoise who was trying to push his way into his house. But he was too big.

"I shall have to enlarge the door," Mrs Silver said.

"Don't do that," Mr Hoppy said. "You mustn't go chopping up such a pretty little house. After all, he only needs to be just a tiny bit smaller and he could get in easily."

"How can he possibly get smaller?" Mrs Silver asked.

"That's simple," Mr Hoppy said. "Change the



50



magic words. Instead of telling him to get bigger and bigger, tell him to get a bit smaller. But in tortoise language of course."

"Will that work?"

"Of course it'll work."

"Tell me exactly what I have to say, Mr Hoppy."

52

Mr Hoppy got out a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote:

ESIO TROT, ESIO TROT,
TEG A TIB RELLAMS, A TIB RELLAMS.

"That'll do it, Mrs Silver," he said, handing her the paper.

"I don't mind trying it," Mrs Silver said. "But look here, I wouldn't want him to get titchy small all over again, Mr Hoppy."

"He won't, dear lady, he won't," Mr Hoppy said. "Say it only tonight and tomorrow morning and then see what happens. We might be lucky."

"If it works," Mrs Silver said, touching him softly on the arm, "then you are the cleverest man alive."



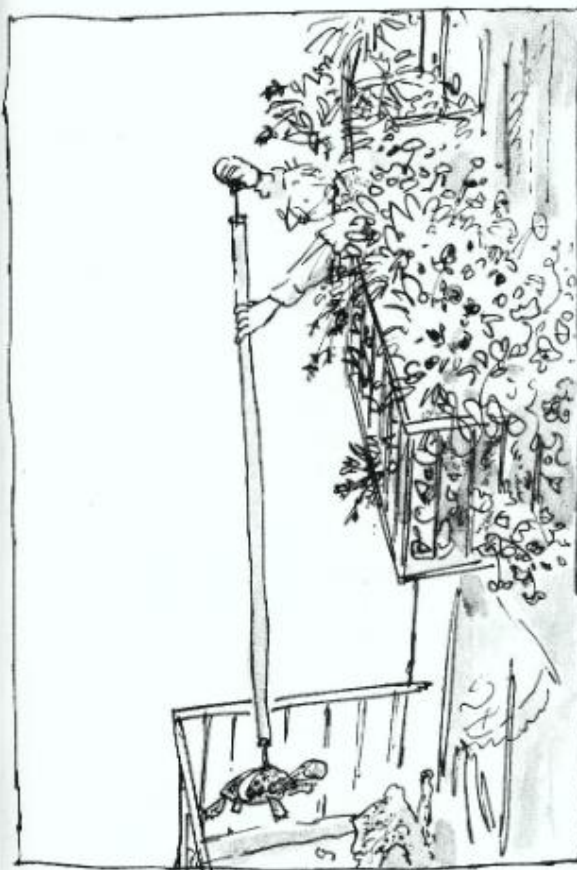
The next afternoon, as soon as Mrs Silver had gone to work, Mr Hoppy lifted the tortoise up from her balcony and carried it inside. All he had to do now was to find one that was a shade smaller, so that it would just go through the door of the little house



He chose one and lowered it down with his tortoise-catcher. Then, still gripping the tortoise, he tested it to see if it would go through the door. It wouldn't.

He chose another. Again he tested it. This one went through nicely. Good. He placed the tortoise in the middle of the balcony beside a nice piece of lettuce and went inside to await Mrs Silver's homecoming.

54



That evening, Mr Hoppy was watering his plants on the balcony when suddenly he heard Mrs Silver's shouts from below, shrill with excitement.

"Mr Hoppy! Mr Hoppy! Where are you?" she was shouting. "Just look at this!"

Mr Hoppy popped his head over the railing and said, "What's up?"

"Oh, Mr Hoppy, it's worked!" she was crying. "Your magic words have worked again on Alfie! He can now get through the door of his little house! It's a miracle!"

"Can I come down and look?" Mr Hoppy shouted back.

"Come down at once, my dear man!" Mrs Silver answered. "Come down and see the wonders you have worked upon my darling Alfie!"



Mr

Hoppy

turned and

ran from the

balcony into the

living room, jumping

on tip toe like a ballet-

dancer between the sea of

tortoises that covered the floor.

He flung open his front door and

flew down the stairs two at a time with

the love songs of a thousand cupids ringing

in his ears. *This is it!* he whispered to himself

under his breath. *The greatest moment of my life is*

coming up now! I mustn't bish it. I mustn't bosh it! I

must keep very calm! When he was three-quarters

way down the stairs he caught sight of Mrs

Silver already standing at the open door waiting

to welcome him with a huge smile on her face.

She flung her arms around him and cried out,

"You really are the most wonderful man I've ever

met! You can do anything! Come in at once and

let me make you a cup of tea. That's the very

least you deserve!"

Seated in a comfortable armchair in Mrs

Silver's parlour, sipping his tea, Mr Hoppy was

all of a twitter. He looked at the lovely lady

sitting opposite him and smiled at her. She

smiled right back at him.

57

That smile of hers, so warm and friendly, suddenly gave him the courage he needed, and he said, "Mrs Silver, please will you marry me?"

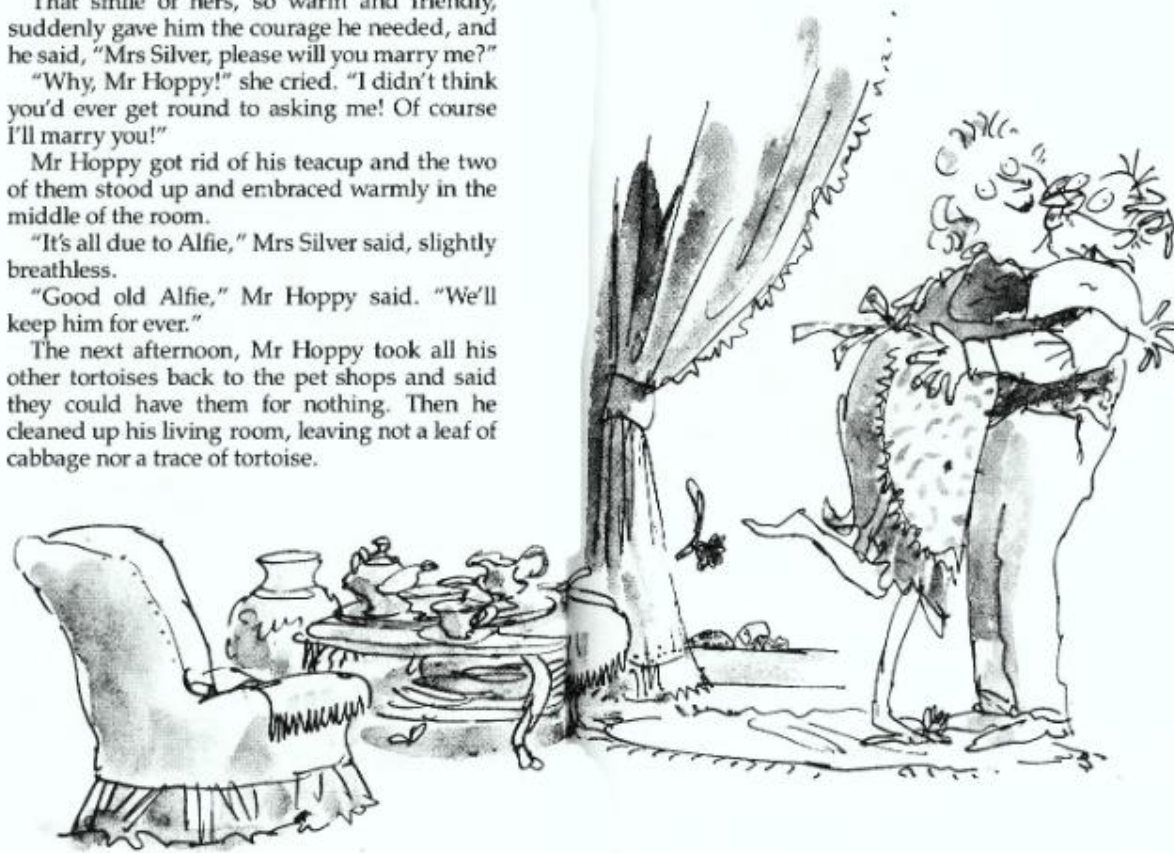
"Why, Mr Hoppy!" she cried. "I didn't think you'd ever get round to asking me! Of course I'll marry you!"

Mr Hoppy got rid of his teacup and the two of them stood up and embraced warmly in the middle of the room.

"It's all due to Alfie," Mrs Silver said, slightly breathless.

"Good old Alfie," Mr Hoppy said. "We'll keep him for ever."

The next afternoon, Mr Hoppy took all his other tortoises back to the pet shops and said they could have them for nothing. Then he cleaned up his living room, leaving not a leaf of cabbage nor a trace of tortoise.





A few weeks later, Mrs Silver became Mrs Hoppy and the two of them lived very happily ever after.

60

61

P.S. I expect you are wondering what happened to little Alfie, the first of them all. Well, he was bought a week later from one of the pet shops by a small girl called Roberta Squibb, and he settled down in Roberta's garden. Every day she fed him lettuce and tomato slices and crispy celery, and in the winters he hibernated in a box of dried leaves in the tool shed.

That was a long time ago. Roberta has grown up and is now married and has two children of her own. She lives in another house, but Alfie is still with her, still the much-loved family pet, and Roberta reckons that by now he must be about thirty years old. It has taken him all that time to grow to twice the size he was when Mrs Silver had him. But he made it in the end.



62

Esio Trot part 3: Comprehension questions

Skim and scan the text we have read this week to help you answer these questions. They are roughly in order! Answer each question with a sentence.

- 1) As he watched Mrs Silver, what did Mr Hoppy use to hide himself?
- 2) On p.43, Mr Hoppy says to himself, "Slowly does it." What is it that he needs to do slowly?
- 3) How much did tortoise number 6 weigh?
- 4) What finally makes Mrs Silver realise her tortoise is getting bigger?
- 5) Mr Hoppy is a shy man, but on p.50 he feels brave. What does he do that shows how brave he is feeling?
- 6) Make up a spell of your own to shrink a tortoise.
- 7) On p.57, Roald Dahl describes the way Mr Hoppy moves with a simile. What is the simile?
- 8) Write a simile of your own to describe the way Alfie moves.
- 9) In the new home he found with Roberta Squibb, where did Alfie hibernate?
- 10) Draw a map of Alfie's new home.