

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



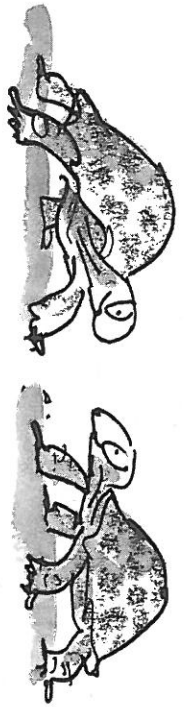
'Oh, he's lovely,' Mrs Silver said, looking up and
beaming. 'And he's developing *such* an appetite!
I've never seen him eat like this before! It must be
the magic words.'

'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 on to 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.

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

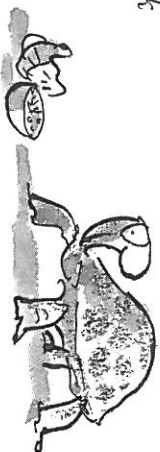
In the beginning



ALFIE

weight 13 ounces

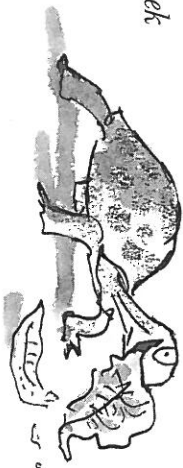
End of first week



TORTOISE NO. 2

weight 15 ounces

End of second week

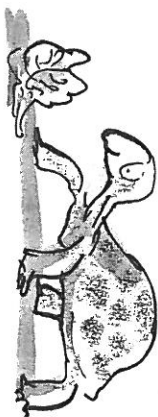


TORTOISE NO. 3

weight 17 ounces

38

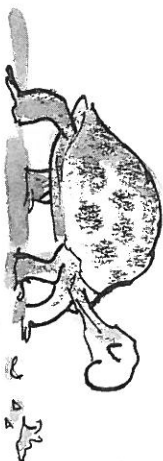
End of third week



TORTOISE NO. 4

weight 19 ounces

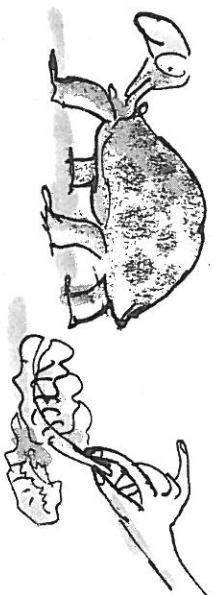
End of fourth week



TORTOISE NO. 5

weight 21 ounces

End of fifth week

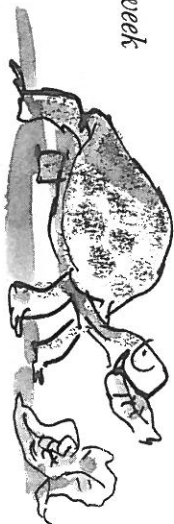


TORTOISE NO. 6

weight 23 ounces

39

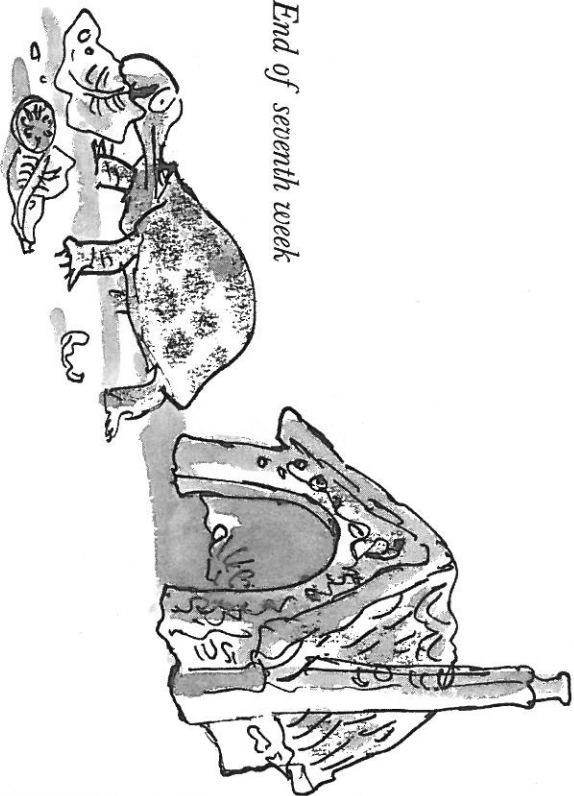
End of sixth week



TORTOISE NO. 7

weight 25 ounces

End of seventh week

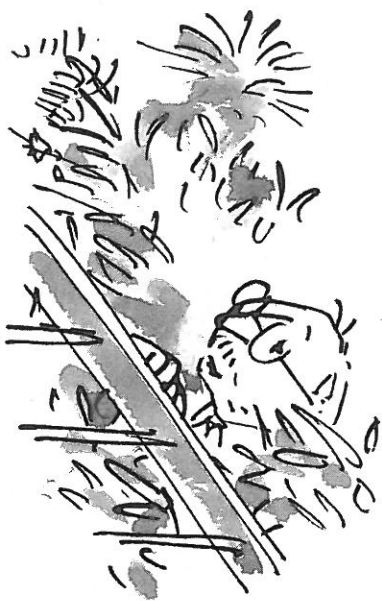


TORTOISE NO. 8

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.

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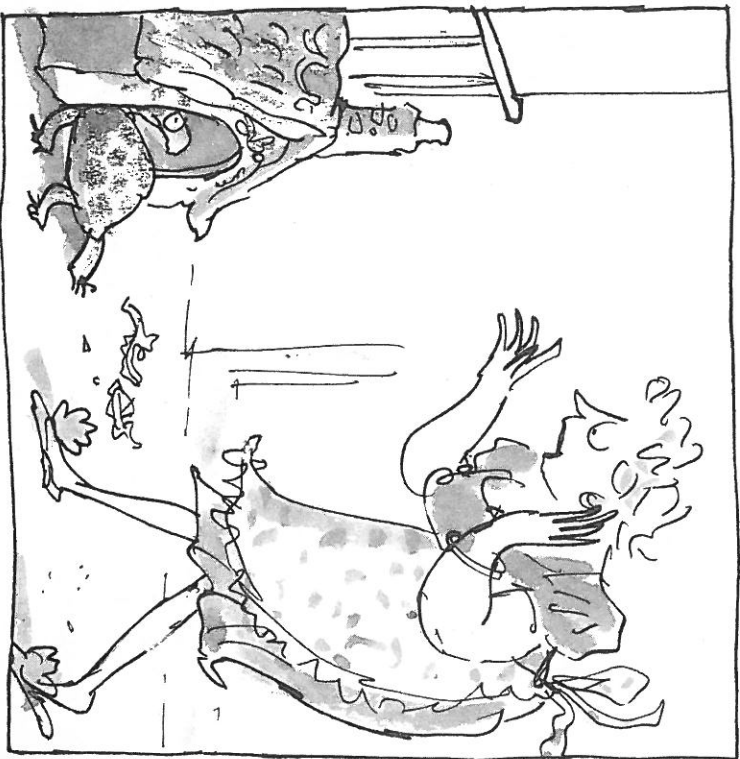
Even to Mr Hoppy, peering down over his railing, Tortoise Number 8 looked pretty big. It was amazing that Mrs Silver had hardly noticed anything at all during the great operation. Only once had she looked up and said, 'You know, Mr Hoppy, I do believe he's getting a bit bigger. What do you think?' 'I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

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 on to 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.'

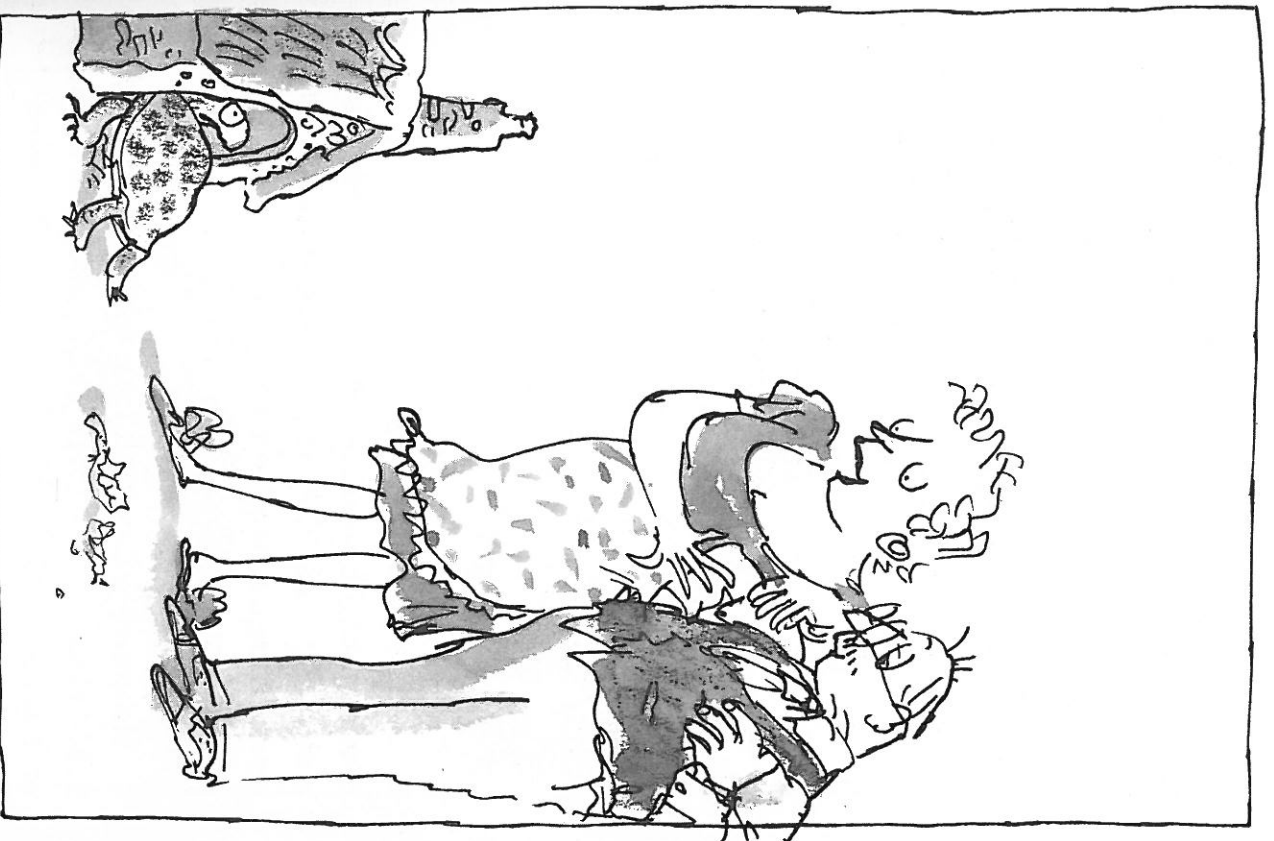
They were standing on the balcony looking at the tortoise, who was trying to push his way into his house. But he was too big.

'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



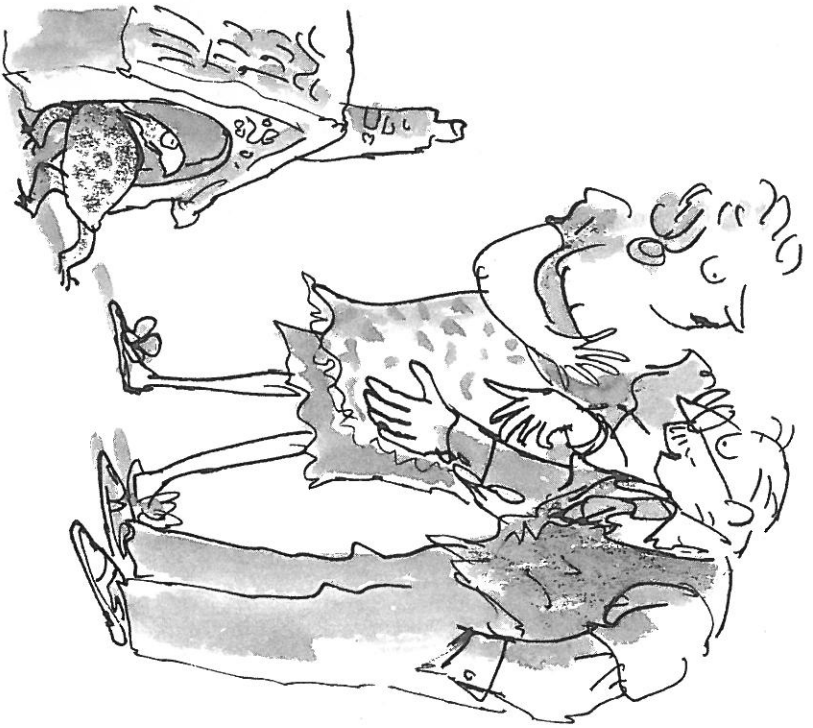
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TEG A TIB RELLAMS, A TIB RELLAMS.

'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.'



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.'

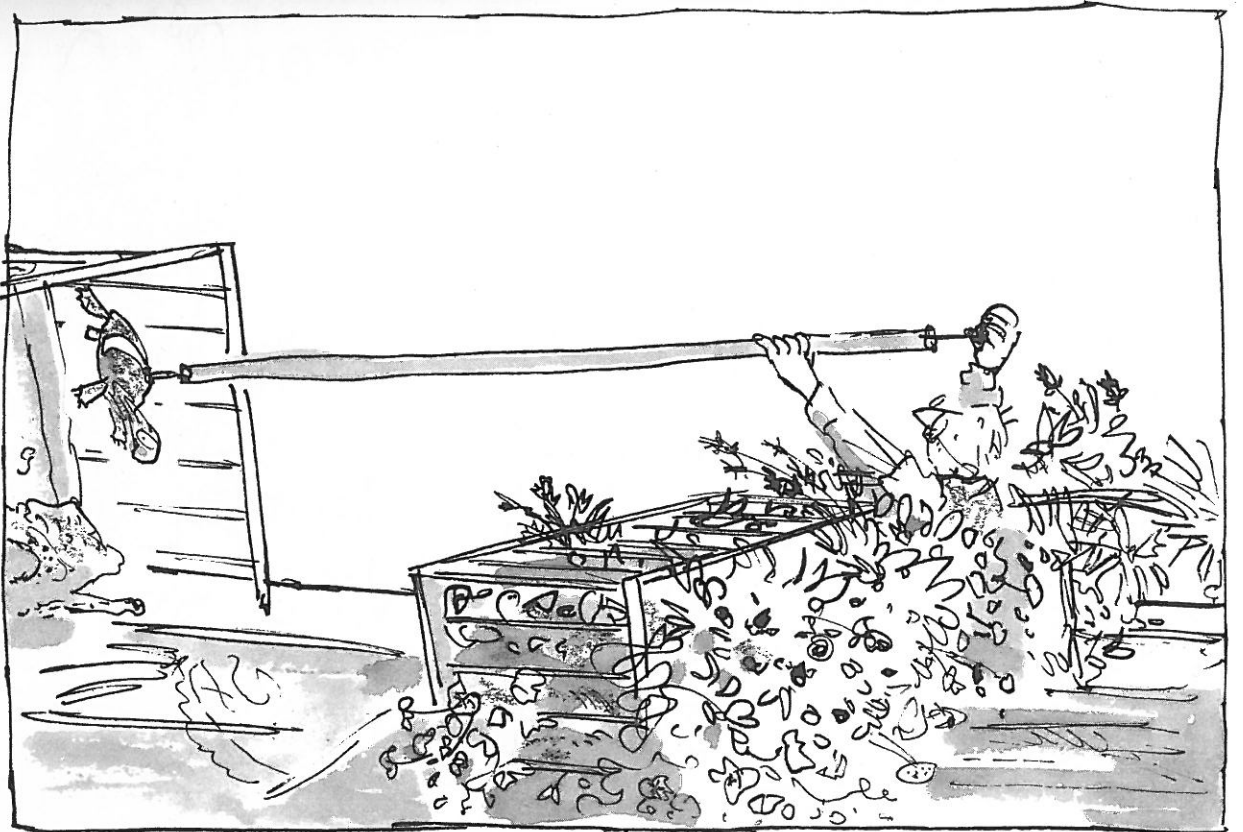
Mr Hoppy got out a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote:

The next afternoon, as soon as Mrs Silver had gone to work, Mr Hoppo 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 home-coming.



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.



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 Alffe,' Mrs Silver said, slightly breathless.

'Good old Alffe,' 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 Hoppo and the two of them lived very happily ever after.

