

think how miserable it must make him feel to be so titchy! Everyone wants to grow up.'

very small

'You really *would* love him to grow bigger, wouldn't you?' Mr Hoppy said, and even as he said it his mind suddenly went *click* and an amazing idea came rushing into his head.

'Of course I would!' Mrs Silver cried. 'I'd give *anything* to make it happen! Why, I've seen pictures of giant tortoises that are so huge people can ride on their backs! If Alfie were to see those he'd turn green with envy!'



Mr Hoppy's mind was *spinning* like a fly-wheel. Here, surely, was his big chance! *Grab it*, he told himself. *Grab it quick!*

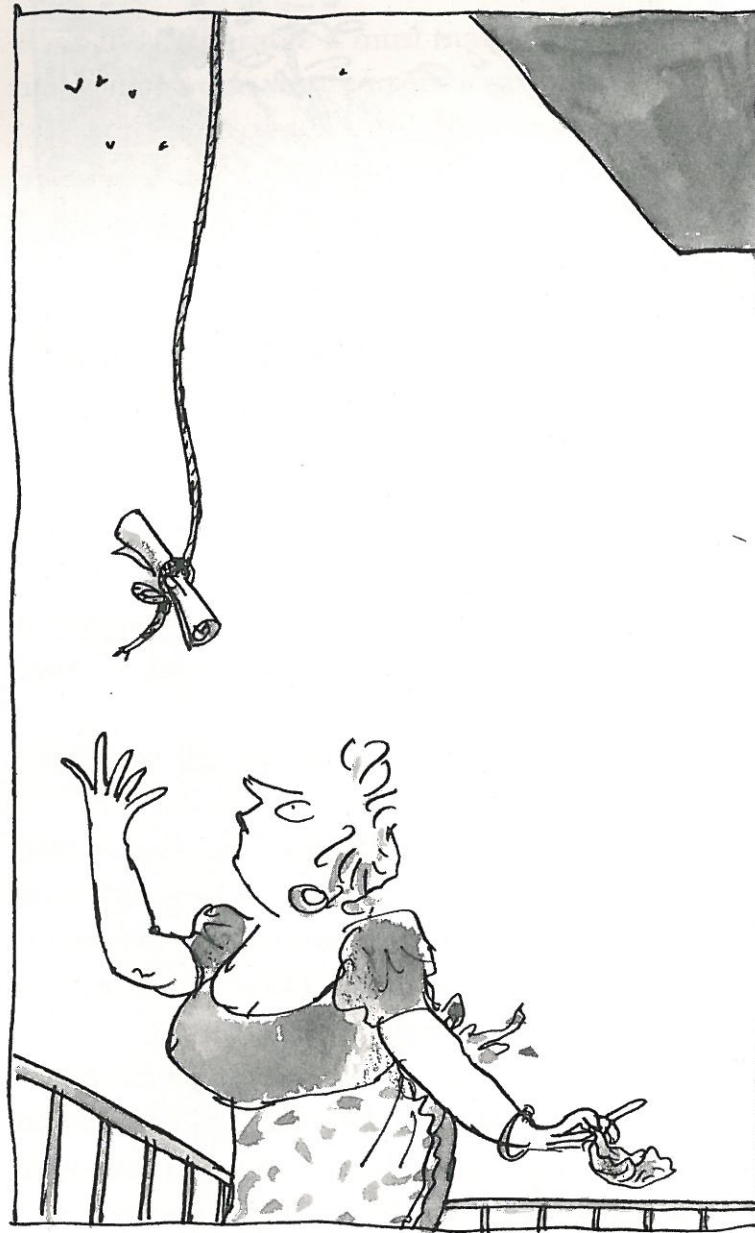
'Mrs Silver,' he said. 'I do actually happen to know how to make tortoises grow faster, if that's really what you want.'

'You do?' she cried. 'Oh, please tell me! Am I feeding him the wrong things?'

'I worked in North Africa once,' Mr Hoppy said. 'That's where all these tortoises in England come from, and a bedouin tribesman told me the secret.'

'Tell me!' cried Mrs Silver. 'I beg you to tell me, Mr Hoppy! I'll be your slave for life.'

When he heard the words *your slave for life*, a little shiver of excitement swept through Mr Hoppy. 'Wait there,' he said. 'I'll have to go in and write something down for you.'



In a couple of minutes Mr Hoppy was back on the balcony with a sheet of paper in his hand. 'I'm going to lower it to you on a bit of string,' he said, 'or it might blow away. Here it comes.'

Mrs Silver caught the paper and held it up in front of her. This is what she read:

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!



'What *does* it mean?' she asked. 'Is it another language?'

'It's tortoise language,' Mr Hoppy said.

'Tortoises are very backward creatures. Therefore they can only understand words that are written backwards. That's obvious, isn't it?'

'I suppose so,' Mrs Silver said, bewildered.

'Esio trot is simply tortoise spelled backwards,' Mr Hoppy said. 'Look at it.'

'So it is,' Mrs Silver said.

'The other words are spelled backwards, too,' Mr Hoppy said. 'If you turn them round into human language, they simply say:

TORTOISE, TORTOISE,

GET BIGGER BIGGER!

COME ON, TORTOISE,

*nafoelcuant &* GROW UP, PUFF UP, SHOOT UP!

*noble vouchecant* SPRING UP, BLOW UP, SWELL UP! *2 vobit u*

*hhat, hibel ob kelle* GORGE! GUZZLE! STUFF! GULP! *quafre zilturant*

PUT ON FAT, TORTOISE, PUT ON FAT!

*hhat* GET ON, GET ON! GOBBLE FOOD!



Mrs Silver examined the magic words on the paper more closely. 'I guess you're right,' she said. 'How clever. But there's an awful lot of poos in it. Are they something special?'

'Poo is a very strong word in any language,' Mr Hoppy said, 'especially with tortoises. Now what you have to do, Mrs Silver, is hold Alfie up to your face and whisper these words to him three times a day, morning, noon and night. Let me hear you practise them.'

Very slowly and stumbling a little over the strange words, Mrs Silver read the whole message out loud in tortoise language.

'Not bad,' Mr Hoppy said. 'But try to get a little more expression into it when you say it to Alfie. If you do it properly I'll bet you anything you like that in a few months' time he'll be twice as big as he is now.'

'I'll try it,' Mrs Silver said. 'I'll try anything. Of course I will. But I can't believe it'll work.'

'You wait and see,' Mr Hoppy said, smiling at her.



Back in his flat, Mr Hoppy was simply quivering all over with excitement. *Your slave for life*, he kept repeating to himself. What bliss!

But there was a lot of work to be done before that happened.



The only furniture in Mr Hoppy's small living-room was a table and two chairs. These he moved into his bedroom. Then he went out and bought a sheet of thick canvas and spread it over the entire living-room floor to protect his carpet.

Next, he got out the telephone-book and wrote down the address of every pet-shop in the city. There were fourteen of them altogether.

