

Other books by Roald Dahl

THE ENORMOUS CROCODILE
FANTASTIC MR FOX
THE GIRAFFE AND THE PELLY AND ME
THE MAGIC FINGER
THE TWITS

For older readers

THE BFG
BOY TALES OF CHILDHOOD
BOY AND GOING SOLO
CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY
CHARLIE AND THE GREAT GLASS ELEVATOR
THE COMPLETE ADVENTURES OF CHARLIE AND MR WILLY WONKA
DANNY THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD
GEORGE'S MARVELLOUS MEDICINE
GOING SOLO
JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH
MATTILDA
THE WITCHES

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THE ENORMOUS CROCODILE (with Quentin Blake)
THE GIRAFFE AND THE PELLY AND ME (with Quentin Blake)
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RHYME STEW
SKIN AND OTHER STORIES
THE VICAR OF NIBBLESWICKE
THE WONDERFUL STORY OF HENRY SUGAR AND SIX MORE

ROALD DAHL

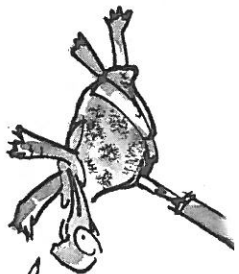
Esio Trot



Illustrated by Quentin Blake



PUFFIN BOOKS



Find out more about Roald Dahl
by visiting the web site at
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To Clover and Luke

PUFFIN BOOKS

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Author's Note

Some years ago, when my own children were small, we usually kept a tortoise or two in the garden. In those days, a pet tortoise was a common sight crawling about on the family lawn or in the back yard. You could buy them quite cheaply in any pet-shop and they were probably the least troublesome of all childhood pets, and quite harmless.

Tortoises used to be brought into England by the thousand, packed in crates, and they came mostly from North Africa. But not many years ago a law was passed that made it illegal to bring any tortoises into the country. This was not done to protect us. The little tortoise was not a danger to anybody. It was done purely out of kindness to the tortoise itself. You see, the traders who brought them in used to cram hundreds of them tightly into the packing-crates without food or water and in such horrible conditions that a great many of them always died on the sea-journey over. So rather than allow this cruelty to go on, the Government stopped the whole business.

The things you are going to read about in this story all happened in the days when anyone could go out and buy a nice little tortoise from a pet-shop.

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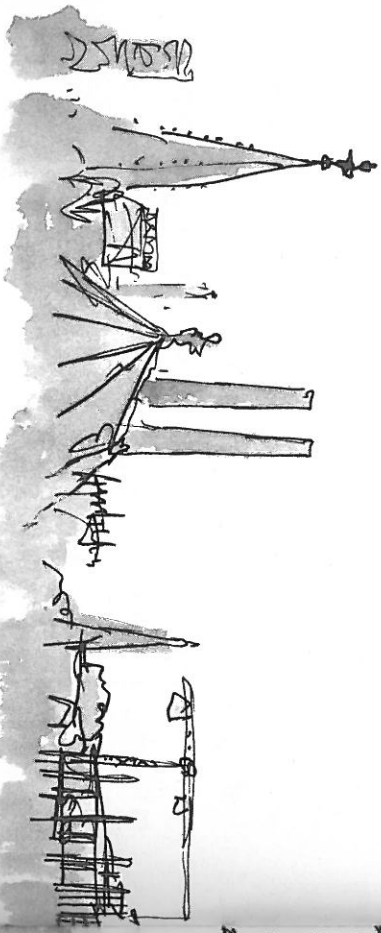
Mr Hoppy lived in a small flat high up in a tall concrete building. He lived alone. He had always been a lonely man and now that he was retired from work he was more lonely than ever.

There were two loves in Mr Hoppy's life. One was the flowers he grew on his balcony. They grew in pots and tubs and baskets, and in summer the little balcony became a riot of colour.

Mr Hoppy's second love was a secret he kept entirely to himself.

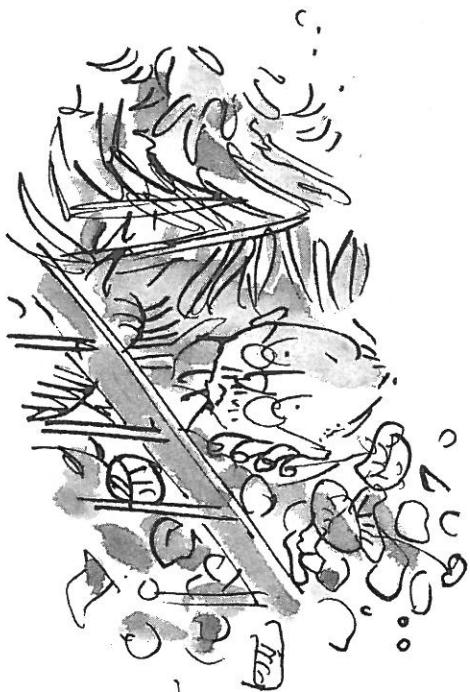
The balcony immediately below Mr Hoppy's jutted out a good bit further from the building than his own, so Mr Hoppy always had a fine view of what was going on down there. This balcony belonged to an attractive middle-aged lady called Mrs Silver. Mrs Silver was a widow who also lived alone. And although she didn't know it, it was she who was the object of Mr Hoppy's secret love. He had loved her from his balcony for many years, but he was a very shy man and he had never been able to bring himself to give her even the smallest hint of his love.

Every morning, Mr Hoppy and Mrs Silver exchanged polite conversation, the one looking down from above, the other looking up, but that was as far as it ever went. The distance between their balconies might not have been more than a few yards, but to Mr Hoppy it seemed like a million miles. He longed to invite Mrs Silver up for a cup of tea and a biscuit, but every time he was about to form the words on his lips, his courage failed him. As I said, he was a very very shy man.



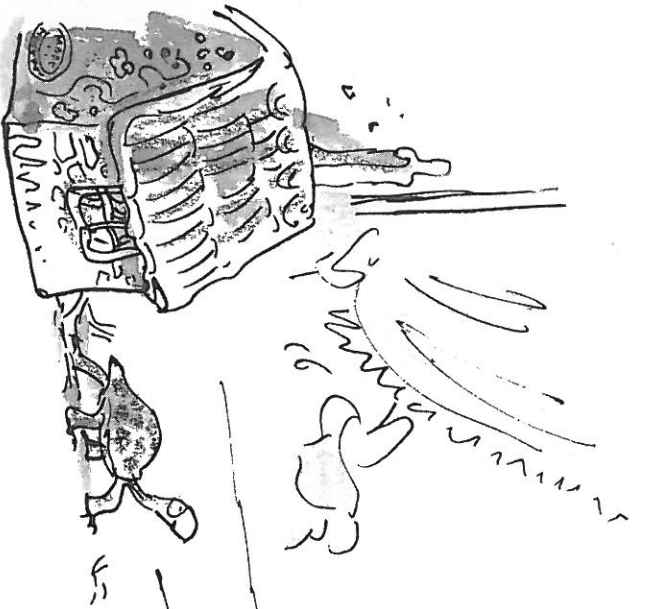


Oh, if only, he kept telling himself, if only he could do something tremendous like saving her life or rescuing her from a gang of armed thugs, if only he could perform some great feat that would make him a hero in her eyes. If only...



The trouble with Mrs Silver was that she gave all her love to somebody else, and that somebody was a small tortoise called Alfe. Every day, when Mr Hoppy looked over his balcony and saw Mrs Silver whispering endearments to Alfe and stroking his shell, he felt absurdly jealous. He wouldn't even have minded becoming a tortoise himself if it meant Mrs Silver stroking his shell each morning and whispering endearments to him.





Alfie had been with Mrs Silver for years and he lived on her balcony summer and winter. Planks had been placed around the sides of the balcony so that Alfie could walk about without toppling over the edge, and in one corner there was a little house into which Alfie would crawl every night to keep warm.

When the colder weather came along in November, Mrs Silver would fill Alfie's house with dry hay, and the tortoise would crawl in there and bury himself deep under the hay and go to sleep for months on end



without food or water. This is called hibernating.

In early spring, when Alfie felt the warmer weather through his shell, he would wake up and crawl very slowly out of his house on to the balcony. And Mrs Silver would clap her hands with joy and cry out, 'Welcome back, my darling one! Oh, how I have missed you!'

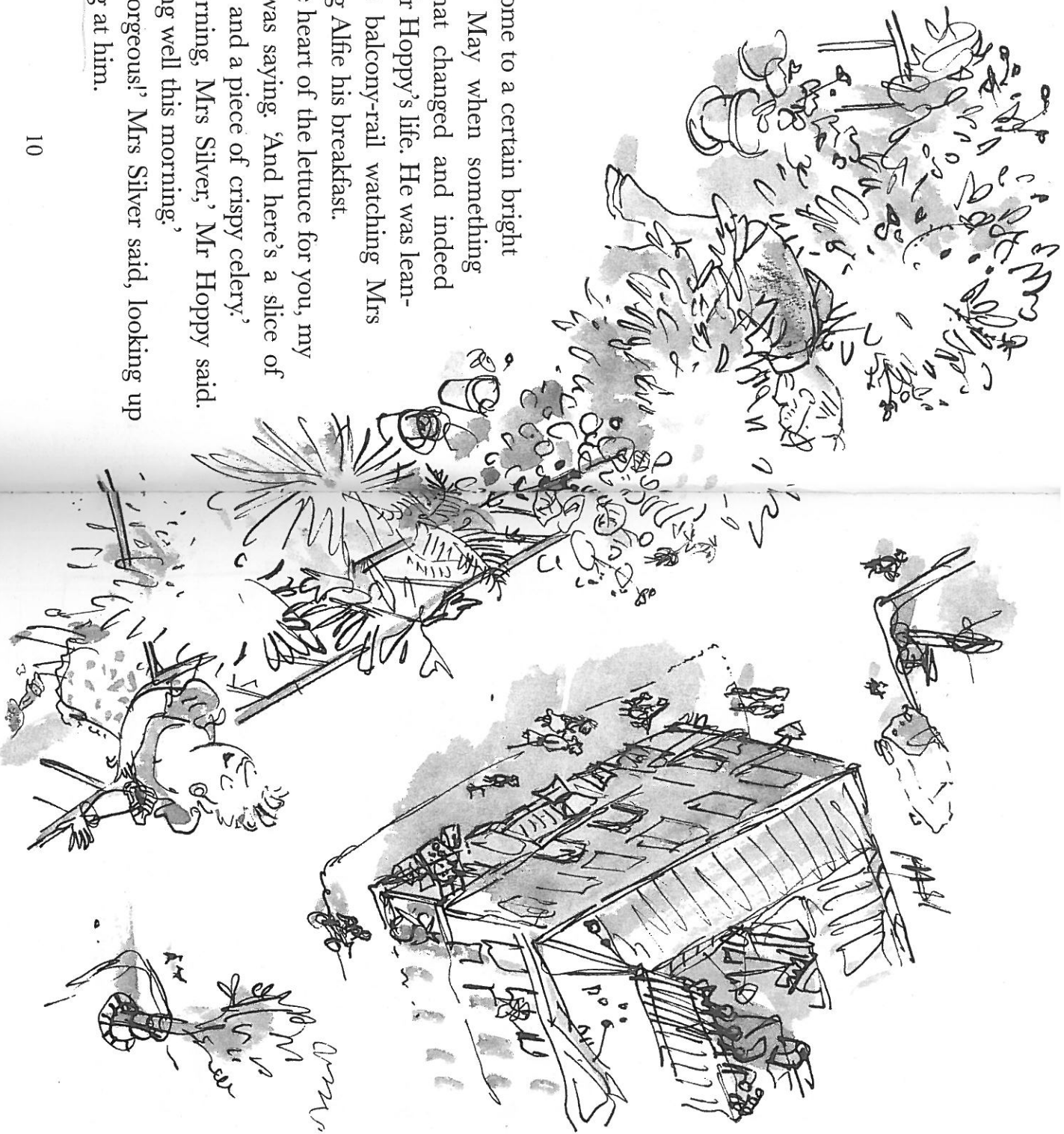
It was at times like these that Mr Hoppy wished more than ever that he could change places with Alfie and become a tortoise.

Now we come to a certain bright morning in May when something happened that changed and indeed electrified Mr Hoppy's life. He was leaning over his balcony-rail watching Mrs Silver serving Alfie his breakfast.

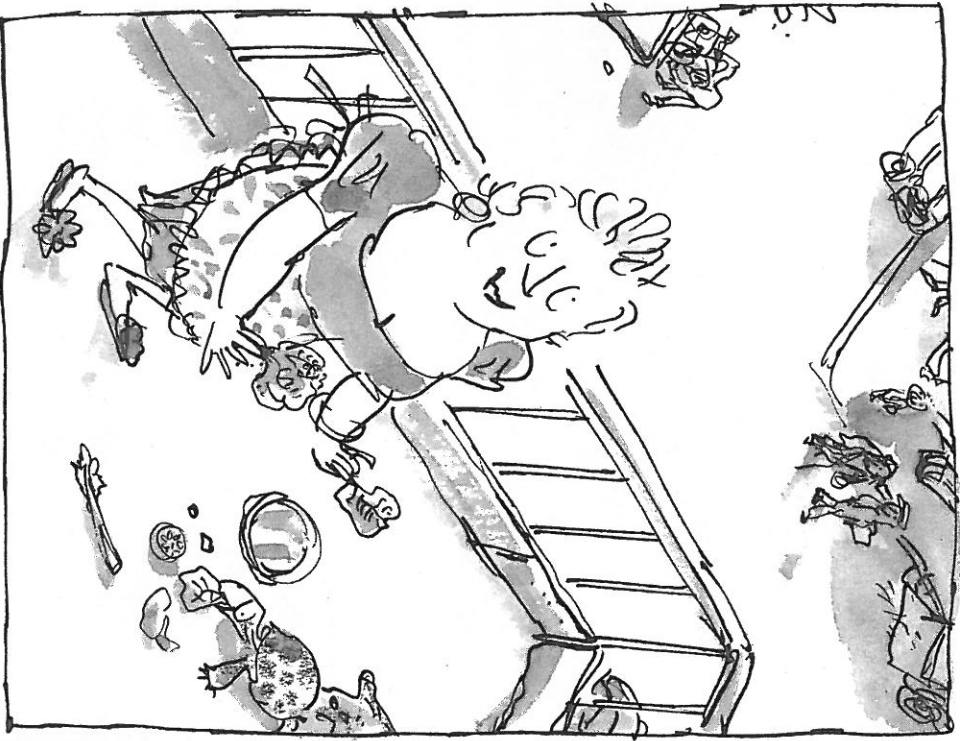
'Here's the heart of the lettuce for you, my lovely,' she was saying. 'And here's a slice of fresh tomato and a piece of crispy celery.'

'Good morning, Mrs Silver,' Mr Hoppy said. 'Alfie's looking well this morning.'

'Isn't he gorgeous!' Mrs Silver said, looking up and beaming at him.



'Absolutely gorgeous,' Mr Hoppy said, not meaning it. And now, as he looked down at Mrs Silver's smiling face gazing up into his own, he thought for the thousandth time how pretty she was, how sweet and gentle and full of kindness, and his heart ached with love.



'I do so wish he would *grow* a little faster,' Mrs Silver was saying. 'Every spring, when he wakes up from his winter sleep, I weigh him on the kitchen scales. And do you know that in all the eleven years I've had him he's not gained more than *three ounces*! That's almost *nothing*!'

'What does he weigh now?' Mr Hoppy asked her. 'Just thirteen ounces,' Mrs Silver answered. 'About as much as a grapefruit.'

'Yes, well, tortoises are very slow growers,' Mr Hoppy said solemnly. 'But they can live for a hundred years.'

'I know that,' Mrs Silver said. 'But I do so wish he would grow just a little bit bigger. He's such a tiny wee fellow.'

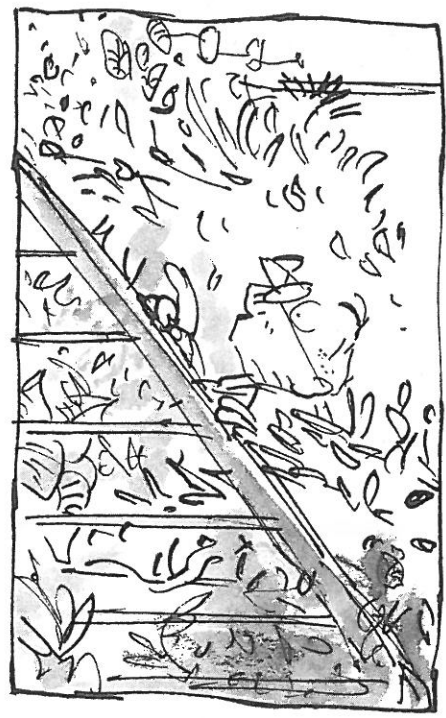
'He seems just fine as he is,' Mr Hoppy said. 'No, he's *not* just fine!' Mrs Silver cried. 'Try to

NOT
SWAN

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

'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.'