

# Esio Trot

“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.

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“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,  
GROW UP, PUFF UP, SHOOT UP!  
SPRING UP, BLOW UP, SWELL UP!  
GORGE! GUZZLE! STUFF! GULP!  
PUT ON FAT, TORTOISE, PUT ON FAT!  
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 practice 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.

# Comprehension

1. Who teaches Mrs Silver how to make her tortoise grow faster?
2. What is the tortoise's name?
3. Why couldn't Mrs Silver understand the text on the first piece of paper sent by Mr Hoppy?
4. Find another word in the text for confused
5. How do you think Mrs Silver feels when she reads the first piece of paper?
6. Do you think the magic words would help Alfie grow?
7. What do you think happens next?

