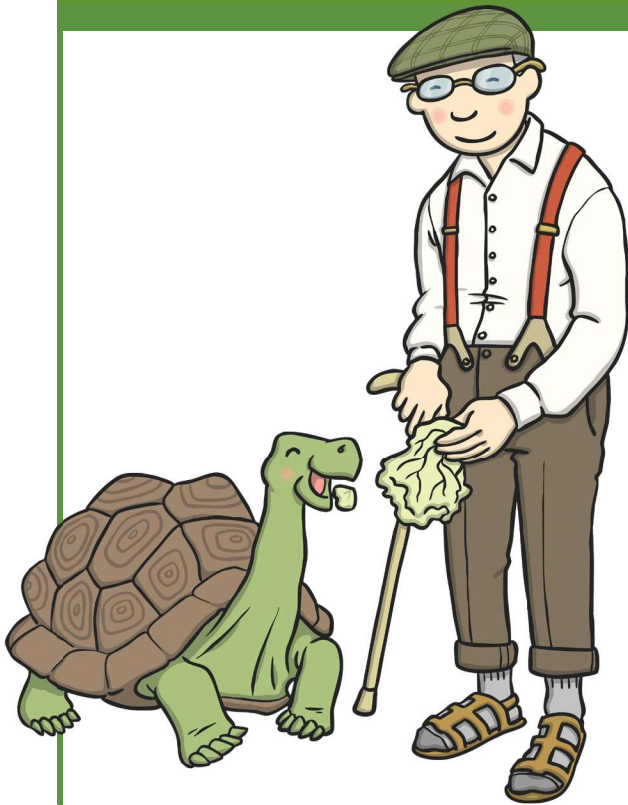


George the Giant Tortoise



George was a giant tortoise. He belonged to a lovely owner called Oliver, who looked after him very well, although before that he had belonged to Oliver's Grandpa Jack for many years. He was quite a rare type of tortoise and that made him very special.

Some people said George was spoilt but he didn't ask for much really. All he liked to eat was grass and hay, with a few dandelions now and then, or the occasional lettuce. He did have his own shed, that Grandpa Jack had made when he was alive, which even had its own heating! Most of the time, George lived in his shed but he loved to wander lazily around the garden sometimes when Oliver was playing on the lawn.

George thought that Oliver was the best owner any tortoise could wish for. Well, maybe joint-first in a best-tortoise-owner competition, as Grandpa Jack had been an extremely kind, caring owner too. In fact, George was very keen to show how grateful he was to his owner, and to prove that he was the best pet that Oliver could wish for.

As summer approached, the perfect opportunity came for George: the annual village fair would be holding the 'Perfect Pet Competition'. He was delighted. He would show everyone what a great pet he was and Oliver would be so proud. However, when Oliver read the leaflet aloud, George was devastated. 'Open to dogs, cats, rabbits and hamsters. No tortoises allowed'.

'Just furry creatures?' thought George. 'How unfair!' So he decided he wasn't going to let those rules stop him. With the village fair only a week away, the giant tortoise began to dig a hole behind his shed. Slowly, the hole became bigger and closer to the fence at the back of the garden. Eventually, the hole became a tunnel but each night, George would return to his shed before anyone noticed he was gone.

When the day of the fair arrived, the first competition entrant Harry the hamster had gone missing. Escaping from his ball, he was last seen behind the sofa and now couldn't be found. Only three more animals were left in the competition. Unfortunately, Rachel the rabbit had spotted the fruit and vegetable show and was taken home after eating her way through two record-breaking carrots, a large lettuce and Mrs Earnshaw's prize cucumber.

Oliver sat in the front row watching as the last two animals were brought onto the stage. Daisy the dog walked on with her owner from the right hand side. Colin the cat strolled in from the left. As soon as they saw each other, Colin clawed his way straight up the stage curtains. Daisy dashed below, barking madly at Colin. As each of their owners chased after their pets, Oliver laughed and thought how much better his own pet was.

At that precise moment, a small mound of muddy soil began to rise up from the ground in front of the stage. Everyone stopped in amazement to look, wondering what was beneath it. Slowly – of course, it had to be slowly – two small feet pushed their way out of the soil. Close behind came George's little round face, as he pulled himself up through the surface of the ground into full view.

Oliver leapt over to his pet with a smile as everyone burst into a round of applause. One of the judges stepped forward and placed a big blue rosette onto George's shell, with a gold Number 1 in the middle. Underneath it read: Perfect Pet Competition Winner!

Steve Johnson, 2015

