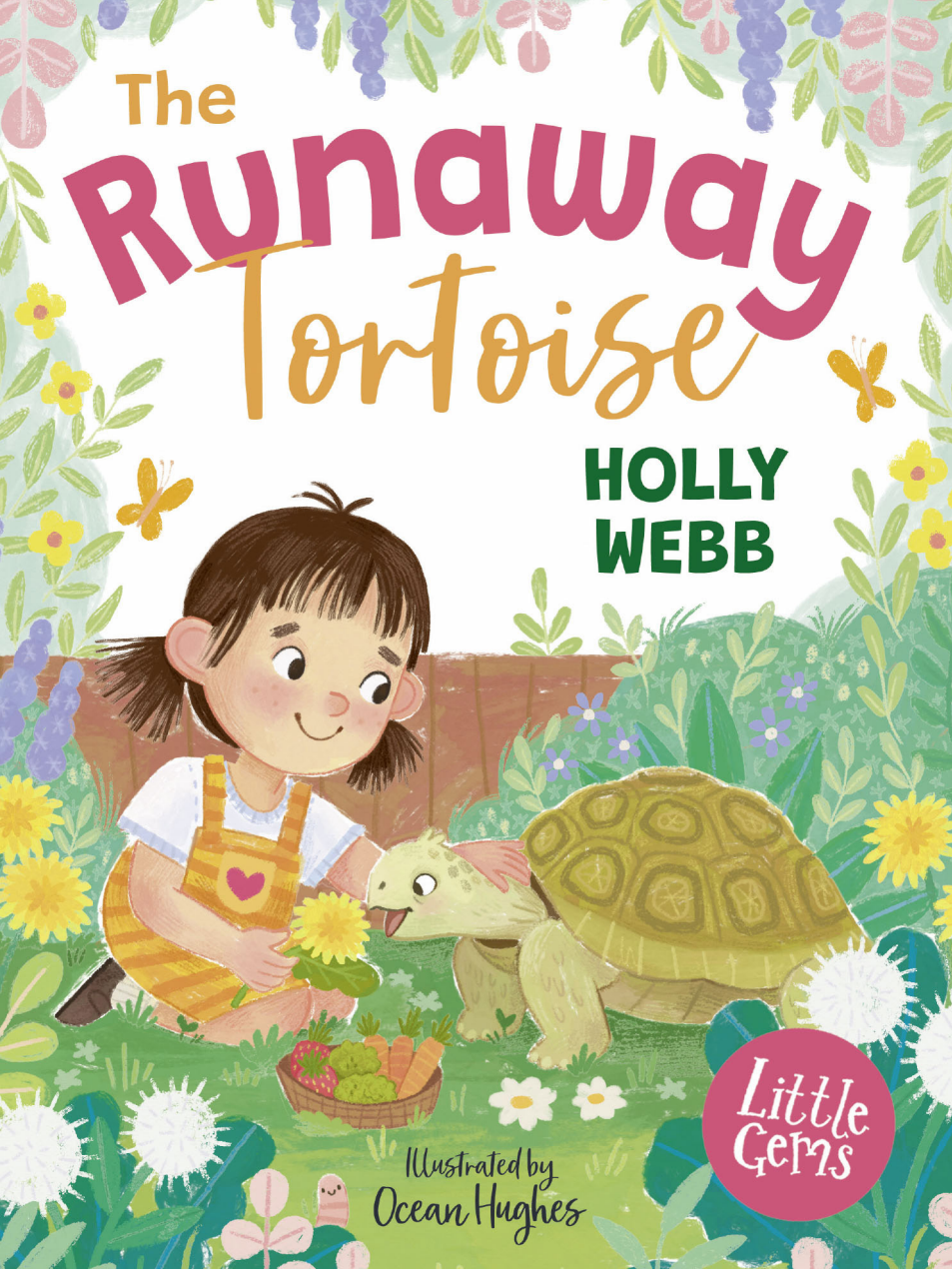
The Runaway Tortoise

HOLLY WEBB



Illustrated by Ocean Hughes

Little Gems

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This book is in a super-readable format for young readers beginning their independent reading journey

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For Clara

Contents

1	Albert the Tortoise	1
2	Boots	15
3	A Special Pet	32
4	Strawberry Time	44
5	The Great Escape	49
6	The Hunt	60
7	A Night Adventure	71
8	Tortoise on the Line	83

Chapter 1

Albert the Tortoise

"Sorry, Ava," Dad said. Dad and Ava were in the kitchen getting breakfast ready. Dad was chopping up the broccoli.

He looked up at Ava and shook his head.

"I don't think we can look after a dog. I know I'm at home all day, but I'm in meetings a lot. Dogs need lots of walks, and they need someone to fuss over them and play with them. Anyway, we've already got a pet – we don't need another one!"

Ava frowned. She knew they had a pet already – Albert! But Albert wasn't a proper pet. They couldn't take him for walks, and they couldn't cuddle him. Albert didn't even like hugs or pats.

He was a terrible pet.

Ava hadn't chosen Albert. Dad hadn't either. He had first belonged to Ava's grandad. When Grandad died, Albert came to live with them.

Albert was 45 years old – even older than Ava's dad. And he'd probably live for years and years more.

Albert was a special kind of tortoise called a Sulcata. They grew very, very big and could live to be 150 years old.

Albert might live longer than Ava! And one of these days, when Dad was too old to look after him, he would be Ava's tortoise.

Ava wasn't looking forward to it very much. She wished that Grandad had left them a cuddly, easy sort of pet – like a hamster.

It was hard work looking after Albert. He ate mostly grass and hay, but he needed fresh vegetables too. Dad had to cut up vegetables for him to eat every day. That took ages.

Ava didn't mind it when Dad cut up broccoli for Albert because then there was less of it left for her.

"Are you coming out to feed Albert with me?" Dad asked Ava as she finished her breakfast.

"I suppose," Ava said in a grumpy sort of way.

She did love Albert, a bit. She loved him because Dad loved him and because he had belonged to her grandad.

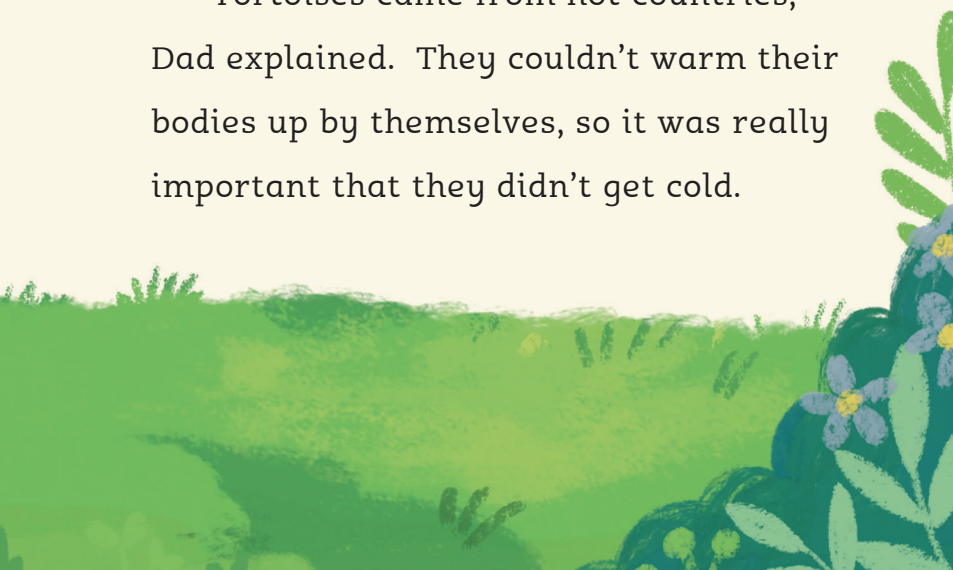
They went out into the garden to Albert's hut.

Before they got Albert, the hut had been a greenhouse. Dad had turned it into a luxury tortoise home when Albert came to live with them.

That was when Ava was two, when Grandad had died.

Dad had put wooden panels around the walls to keep the hut warm and added special lights for Albert.

Tortoises came from hot countries, Dad explained. They couldn't warm their bodies up by themselves, so it was really important that they didn't get cold.



It was a sunny morning, and Albert was waiting for them, looking hopeful. He mostly ate grass from the garden, or hay and leafy plants. The vegetables were an extra treat, and he definitely liked them best.

He put his nose into the dish as soon as Dad put it down and picked out the broccoli – that was his favourite bit.

Ava gave a sigh.

Albert was definitely not as exciting as a dog.