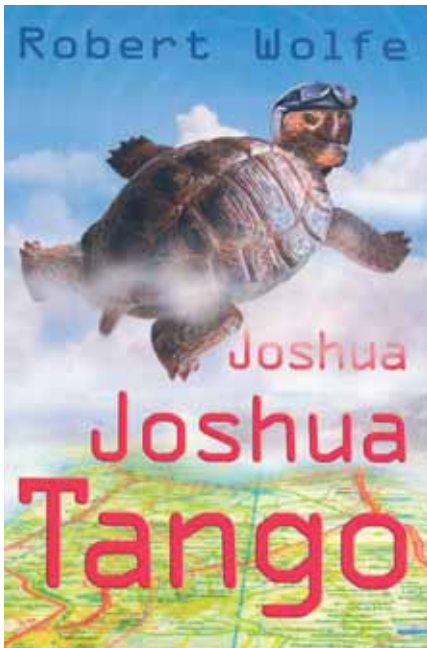


Classic from start to finish

Robert Wolfe

Joshua Joshua Tango



JOSHUA CAN TALK, he can fly and he's telepathically gifted. He's rather a decent singer too, and in spite of his age he can still tango with the best of them. But what really makes this so exceptional is the fact that Joshua is a Brazilian tortoise.

For years, scientists have been trying to prove that his species, *Geochelone elephantopus*, is at least as clever as people, but as yet without success. Professor Groen takes a tortoise home with him so that he can continue his research by day and night. Unfortunately for him, however, the animal will only reveal his talents to Marcel, the scientist's lonely son. Thanks to Joshua,

Marcel has the adventure of his life. And it's just as well, as his mother's away finding herself in India and he's being teased at school.

Joshua Joshua Tango is a modern realistic book about the problems of a shaky one-parent family. Wolfe however, also weaves a football adventure through the book, along with a dignified asylum seeker who doesn't want to return to his own country, a crazy next-door neighbour who is not as scary as he seems, and a kidnapping.

Wolfe's book contains so much glorious nonsense and familiar childhood sadness that it feels like a classic right from the first page. A little like Michael Ende's *The Never-ending Story*: one issue has not been settled before the next one crops up, and so on, as though this cycle will never come to an end. Anyone who reads *Joshua Joshua Tango* will dream of being able, like Marcel, to enter into the magical world of Joshua, where children can do anything.

The film rights for *Joshua Joshua Tango* were acquired by BrosBros in 2005. The film is scheduled for release in 2009.



Robert Wolfe (b. 1967) was born in Sydney and lived in Scotland and England for a number of years before coming to the Netherlands at the age of eight. He studied Business and International Relations and has travelled extensively and worked in the UK and Poland. He learned to fly in Australia. He returned to the Netherlands in 1999, where he now works as a drama teacher. *Joshua Joshua Tango* is his first children's book.

Joshua Joshua Tango really is a book that deserves to be one of this year's favourites. Roll on the film version!

PJOTR VAN LENTEREN, *DE VOLKSKRANT*

A wonderful feel-good book – and it's also the ideal book for boys who think that they don't like reading.

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Sample Translation

Joshua Joshua Tango

(Joshua Joshua Tango)

by Robert Wolfe

(Amsterdam: De Harmonie, 2005)

Translated by Robert Wolfe

Chapter 1

Friday

The day he met Joshua, Marcel Green had no idea it was a special day, that he would meet someone who would change his life forever. No, it seemed a day like any other...

‘Where am I? Who am I? I’m Professor Blue. No, I’m not. I’m Professor Green. What am I doing here? Is this a spaceship? Oh, no, it’s a school. What am I doing here? Picking up my son. Where is my son? Who is my son?’

The teacher, Mr Bellman, had just stepped out of the classroom and Geoffrey Simms was in front of the class impersonating Marcel’s father. The other children were laughing.

Marcel’s dad had done something like that in the playground once. Right in front of the entrance to their school, the Silverfield Primary School in Wheram. Not as bad as Geoffrey was making it out to be, but still pretty bad. Marcel’s dad often forgot what he was doing, because he’d start thinking about his work or other things Marcel didn’t even know about. Then he’d get all muddled up, as to where he was or what he was supposed to be doing. He had wild curly hair, like Marcel, which did make him look a bit like a mad professor. But he wasn’t mad, and he wasn’t even a professor, he was a scientific researcher specialized in the brains of mammals and reptiles.

‘He’s not a professor,’ Marcel cried out to Geoffrey.

‘Oh, what am I? A professor? I can’t remember.’ Geoffrey pretended he didn’t know how to walk properly and bumped into the blackboard and fell over.

The whole class laughed out loud. The whole class that is, except for Marcel, who couldn’t see properly through his tears and picked something up and threw it at Geoffrey.

‘Marcel Green!’ Mr Bellman’s voice thundered through the classroom and instantly everyone was dead silent. ‘I don’t know what’s going on, but throwing fountain pens at people is a complete and utter no-no.’ He stood at the door glaring at Marcel. Mr Bellman was a slender man, with shiny black hair that was always immaculately parted and a thin black moustache that now trembled on his upper lip. He was well and truly angry. You could tell. He often pretended to be, but this time it was for real.

Marcel had to stay in during the break and clean up the ink marks while Geoffrey was allowed to play outside. He was probably playing football right now. Not that Marcel would have been allowed to join in.

Mr Bellman wasn’t angry anymore. He ruffled Marcel’s curly hair and suggested Marcel choose something else to throw next time.

A hand grenade, Marcel thought. ‘A sponge?’ he said.

Mr Bellman smiled. ‘Yes, a sponge would be a good idea.’

After the schoolday ended, most of the boys gathered on the playground to play football, while some of the girls went to practise netball in the gym. They were practising for the All Schools Tournament. Marcel was not on the football team. He was hardly ever allowed to play with them anyway, only when they really had to make up the numbers.

‘It’s five against four, you need one more,’ shouted Andrew Bale, a tall boy with a shock of red hair. Marcel shuffled closer.

Geoffrey looked around the playground. He was wearing the red shirt of a famous football club with the collar up. His shiny silver necklace caught the sun. ‘I don’t see anyone, we’ll play with one less.’

Geoffrey was always the goalkeeper and captain of his team. He also took all the free kicks and penalties. Marcel hoped that his side would lose 100-0, he turned away and walked off: he’d play soccer all by himself.

‘Squeezes past two defenders, he shoots... and an unstoppable shot in the far corner!’ The squashed Coke can Marcel had just given a mighty kick actually sailed past the wrong side of the tree, but Marcel pretended that was what he had intended all along. Marcel liked walking home alone, much rather than have Dad pick him up, after that one time. It was only a five minute walk and he knew every little alley or side street between school and home. In his mind he saw himself doing important deeds, saving people or winning football matches and then the regional radio station, Clyde Radio, would come and interview him.

Mr Green, how could you, with a broken leg, still manage to score in the last minute of the match?

‘Well I had to, we were behind.’

Mr Green, what was it like to be the first person on the sun?

‘Hot mainly, but pretty bright too.’

Mr Green, do you know how incredibly marvellous everyone thinks you are for rescuing that girl from drowning.

‘Oh, surely you would have done the same?’

Now he was winning the All Schools Tournament single-handed. If he managed to hit that lantern-post there in just three kicks, he would have made it into the finals. First kick. The can shot along the pavement a considerable distance in the right direction. Marcel was a little surprised himself at how straight he had kicked. One more like that and he would be right next to the lantern-post. Second kick. No, the can tumbled sideways into the high grass. Now he could never make it.

Oh, well, repositioning allowed, so set it up straight, like a rugby conversion, careful aim, then big colossal swing of the leg and... Too high. Way too high. It went straight up in the air. But wait a minute. Kling. It actually hit the post at the top, at the narrowest part. Marcel can’t believe it. Scored! He cheers ecstatically as he runs to the audience. From an impossible position! He’s made it into the

finals. The audience charge the field, people try to throw their arms around him, he dodges them to enjoy the moment even more, but then they get hold of him and an arm goes around his neck and squeezes. Hard.

‘Here, you twonk!’

‘Yeah twonk, we haven’t had it out on you for a while.’

At the sound of those two voices Marcel felt his insides turn to ice. He knew these two only too well. They were the Gray brothers, Ed and Liam, two big bullies. With hair like barbed wire, oversized ears and nasty grins. They went to the other primary school in Wheram, the Grove Primary School, and if they ran into Marcel, they would usually stop and spend a little time with him, just to punch him on the shoulder in exactly the same spot over and over again or knee him or try out a special new judo technique that probably didn’t even exist. Once they had even thrown him in one of the local canals!

Usually Marcel managed to duck out of the way if he saw them coming. But he hadn’t been paying attention and now he was in trouble.

‘What do you think, does curly hair help against headaches?’ asked Ed, the older of the two. He then rapped his knuckles on Marcel’s head.

Marcel moaned and was released. He rubbed his head heavily and made it look like it hurt a great deal.

‘Yeah, does it help against headaches?’ Liam called out, whose face always seemed to be flushed and sweaty. He was a little shorter than his brother, but a lot more stupid and, what was worse, even meaner. He grabbed Marcel by the ears and pulled his head close. Marcel found himself staring into Liam’s bleak eyes. ‘Fizzhead!’ Liam shouted and gave him a head-butt.

Marcel didn’t really know why he did it, maybe because of the stupid insult, or because he was already having such a crap day, or because he saw that a door in a high fence up ahead was ajar, but whatever the reason he gave the hardest kick he could manage against Liam’s shin. Harder even than he had kicked the Coke can into the air. He kicked and ran.

First he clumsily banged into the fence, but the Gray brothers were apparently too stunned to chase him immediately. Marcel threw himself against the door and more or less fell inside. The door clicked shut behind him.

He was in someone's garden. Silently Marcel crawled further and went through a hedge to another garden. Before he knew it, he was hidden away behind a garden-shed listening to the brothers yell at one another.

'You are so thick!'

'No, you're thick.'

'Letting yourself be kicked.'

'No, you let yourself be kicked.'

'What are you blabbering about? He just kicked you, didn't he?'

'Oh, yeah. He kicked me.'

'Get your bike, we'll get him later.'

Marcel waited for what felt like a very long time and then decided to stay in people's gardens as much as he could on the way home. It was a bit scary, but not compared to running into the brothers again. Once someone tapped on a window, Marcel pretended he hadn't heard and quickly went on to the next garden.

When Marcel finally reached McCloud Drive, where he lived at number 17, he started walking on the street again. He would have to be extra careful about the brothers from now on.

Behind him he heard a cyclist and with a swift dive Marcel was in the bushes again. It was the lady from number five with her two-year-old daughter. False alarm. Carefully Marcel stuck his head out and peeped up and down the street. There they were! Marcel crept back and tried not to breathe. The Gray brothers cycled right by him, went past his house and stopped at the end of the street.

What could he do? He always had to go round the back of their house, they hardly ever used the front door. This meant that he had to walk to the end of the street and there take the road that ran behind the houses of McCloud Drive. But now the Gray brothers were waiting for him. How could he get round the back?

Did he dare go through the Colonel's garden? Their neighbour's house, 19 McCloud Drive, was the only one where the front and back gardens were connected. So he could get round to the back very quick if he snuck through that garden. But Marcel had never dared take this route because of the stories that were told about their neighbour, the Colonel. Dad said it was all gossip and fantasy, but what did he know? The Colonel was called the Colonel, because he always wore some kind of reddish brown uniform. People said that he had once shot at children in his garden, with a real gun! But right now, Marcel had to choose between the brothers and the Colonel, and after that mighty kick against Liam's shin, he chose the Colonel.

Marcel climbed over the low fence. The Colonel's garden looked a little like a jungle. The grass was high, there were weeds everywhere and the bushes seemed to be growing in all directions. It was a shame really that it had to be the Colonel who had the largest garden. But for now, Marcel was grateful for the wilderness. He could crawl along the ground without anyone seeing him, safe from the Gray brothers, but also from the Colonel if he happened to be waiting with his rifle. Then Marcel thought he saw movement behind the window. He lay flat on the ground and forced himself to count to a hundred before crawling further on his belly.

That's how he arrived at the back of the house. The garden was fenced all round, with a high wooden fence. The door to the road behind was locked. What now? Marcel crawled to the part of the fence between his own house and the Colonel's. He hid behind a bush and looked up. The fence was too high for him. Had he made the wrong choice? He was safe from the brothers, but stuck in the Colonel's garden where he could get shot any minute. Marcel felt his stomach turn into ice again. He stumbled and fell backwards, knocking his head on something hard. Ouch. How clumsy can you get? He couldn't do anything right! Marcel rubbed the back of his head. The Colonel might do a better job of cleaning his back yard! There was a long wooden plank lying in the grass. Marcel stopped rubbing. He had an idea.

He was ready for action. Marcel had shored the plank up against the fence, the bottom jammed against the roots of the bush. He was too scared to look at the window any more, he had to go now! His feet found the plank and with a few quick steps he grasped the top of the fence with his fingers. He tried to get his legs up. He couldn't make it. Panic gave him strength, he pulled himself up, scampered up the fence and with a desperate swing got one leg up. A twist, the other one up, over and he let go. He landed safely in his own garden. His ankle hurt and a yellow splinter was stuck in his thumb – but he was home.

'Just look at yourself!'

Oh, no! It was Friday. Crammsday.

After Marcel's mother had left for India, Mrs Cramms had come to talk. She was some kind of social worker. Now she still came over, but more as a 'friend of the family' to help a 'man alone'. Then she'd put on the yellow apron with flowers (the one his mother had detested and never worn) and proceeded to busy herself with the housekeeping. She was always asking Marcel questions, whether he was all right, whether he was getting on at school, and eyeing him suspiciously as if she didn't believe him no matter what he said. Marcel didn't like her. Especially after that one time when he heard her telling dad that if things didn't improve with Marcel, a boarding school may be necessary.

'Soccer,' Marcel said.

Cramms gave him the I-don't-believe-you look.

'Made the finals and scored the winning goal.'

Cramms was standing in the hallway with her arms full of clean sheets.

'Shoes off,' she said. 'How was school?'

'What are you doing with those sheets? Is someone coming to stay?' Marcel asked.

Cramms gave him her best effort at a smile. 'Yes, dear. Your father called...' She glanced into the hallway mirror and adjusted her hair. 'He asked me to clear

the spare room; I've put the folding bed in your bedroom for the time being, because, yes indeed, someone is coming to stay.'

Marcel ignored her calling him dear, which he absolutely hated. 'Who is it?'

'Oh, I'm not allowed to tell you, it's supposed to be a surprise.'

Marcel could tell by her voice that something wasn't right. This made him even more curious. 'But why did you take the bed out, if someone's coming to stay? That doesn't make sense.'

'Yes, smart Alec. I wanted to ask that myself.'

Then Marcel realised that she didn't know – and that pleased him. 'I'm going to my room,' he said.

'Not with those filthy...' he heard behind him as he raced up the stairs.

...

Marcel had his own computer. Dad had given him his old one when he bought the newest model. Marcel was sure Mum would not have approved, she didn't like computers, but by then she had already left.

'Ladies and gentlemen, the finals of the world championships,' the voice of a young commentator rang out in his bedroom. Marcel usually turned off the sound of the computer and commented the matches he played himself. 'England versus Germany!'

Cramms's head appeared in the door opening. 'Do you have to shout?'

Marcel didn't even answer her and put extra effort into his commentating. 'And England try a shot at goal straight from the kick-off and unbelievable!' His voice sounded like he really couldn't believe it. 'Through the goalie's hands and England have scored within the first minute! The players themselves can hardly believe it.' Marcel glanced at the door, but Cramms had disappeared again. He had wanted to show her the replay; you don't score a goal straight from kick-off every day.

Germany, however, came back into the game, and with two minutes left the score was 2-2. The match was so tense that Marcel at times forgot to commentate on it. The rustling sound of a plastic apron in motion came from the door.

‘You’re father’s here.’

‘I’ll be right there,’ Marcel said.

‘He asked if you could help him carry our guest in from the car,’ Cramms said.

‘No!’ Marcel shouted because he gave away a penalty with twenty seconds on the clock.

‘What do you mean, no?’ Cramms said.

‘Oh, nothing.’ Marcel slid off his chair and switched the computer off. ‘A small tap against his shin, and he gets a penalty. What a wuss!’ Only then did he realise what Cramms had said. ‘Carry in? Don’t tell me it’s a baby that’s coming to stay!’ and he dashed out of his room and down the stairs.

Dad always parked his white Volvo station car at the back of the house. This time the car was filled with a large white plastic container that had air holes in it. A yellow train rattled by, the rail track ran over a high dike on the other side of the canal behind their house. Marcel didn’t even look at the trains anymore, they came by every half hour.

‘Hi, Dad, what’s that?’

‘Hi there, big lad, that is the surprise that is coming to stay with us for a while.’ There was a sparkle in Marcel’s father’s eyes that Marcel hadn’t seen for some time. He pulled the white container forward so that they could reach it from both ends.

‘Shall we carry him in together?’

‘Him?’ Marcel asked. ‘Is there a him in there?’ Marcel was just about to look through one of the air holes when Mrs Cramms joined them.

‘Here, I’ll help. Isn’t he a bit too small for that?’ she said.

‘Mrs Cramms, you know how much we need you around the house, but this is a real men’s job, isn’t it, Marcel?’

Marcel nodded and quickly took his position at one side of the container.

The hardest part was going up the stairs. Although for once it actually was an advantage that Marcel was small. ‘Three more and we’re at the top,’ Dad said, ‘then we’ll take a rest.’

They made it.

‘Phew, not half heavy, eh?’ Dad asked after they had lowered the container on to the floor.

‘Not too bad,’ Marcel said a little out of breath. ‘Though I could do with a rest,’ he quickly added.

Dad smiled. ‘I thought as much. Let’s take a breather.’

‘But what’s in there?’ Marcel asked getting down on his knees. ‘I thought I saw something move...’ He put his eye right up against one of the air holes.

Cramms came running, for Marcel was screaming his head off at the top of the stairs. It was scarier even than that horror movie that had made him wet his bed, it was the scariest thing he had ever seen... the moment he had looked through the hole, another eye had looked out, a monstrous inhuman eye!

Marcel was lying on his bed. He was angry. Angry with the world at large, but especially with Cramms. She had called out rather surprised, ‘But really, it’s only a tortoise! How can you be scared of that?’ Dad had just opened up the container to reveal a tortoise – a rather large one, over a metre in length perhaps, but still not really frightening. At first Marcel was too much in shock to feel stupid, but thanks to Cramms, he soon started feeling pretty stupid indeed. So he had run to his room.

Someone knocked on the door. He didn’t say a word. The door slowly opened and Dad’s messy curls showed in the opening. ‘Can I come in?’

Marcel turned his head to the wall and stayed silent. After a while he felt someone sit on his bed.

‘That was a bit of a fright, wasn’t it?’ Dad said with a soft voice. ‘Yes, he’s a big fella. I thought it would be fun not to tell you. But that was a mistake, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes!’ Marcel said more angrily than he actually felt. ‘What’s he doing here anyway?’

‘He’s from my work, from one of our more experimental research projects. This is an unknown subspecies of the *Geochelone elephantopus*, one of the giant tortoises.’ Dad started speaking more rapidly. ‘Someone at the university of Northern Brazil has made a brain scan and an alpha profile of this animal that indicates superior articulateness and high degrees of intelligence. But we...’

‘What does that mean?’ Marcel asked.

‘A professor in Brazil thinks that this tortoise is just as smart as people, or even smarter and that’s what we’re trying to research, or at least, I am.’

‘But why does he have to come to our house?’ Marcel didn’t sound angry anymore.

‘Well, we’ve had trouble finding anything really in the last six months and I want to observe him day and night. But also the commissioner is visiting our lab to see if we can get more funding, and the director thought it might be better if he didn’t know about Henry,’ dad said a bit meekly.

‘About who?’

‘Henry. We’ve named the tortoise Henry at work, but he doesn’t really answer to it, I’m afraid. Shall we go and have a look?’

‘I’ve already had a look and it wasn’t much fun,’ Marcel said.

‘I know.’ Dad stood up. ‘So why don’t we try from a safer distance this time.’

‘Henry, come on now.’ Dad had been on his haunches calling for at least five minutes, but Henry would not come out of his shell. Which meant that Marcel had all the time in the world to admire the animal’s shell and be surprised at how many different colours it had. Green and brown, with here and there a dash of yellow and even a few light-blue dots. It was quite beautiful.

‘Oh, well,’ Dad said, ‘we’ll just have to try later.’

Marcel wanted to have a go. ‘Henry... Are you there, Henry?’ he said taking a small step backwards.

And yes, something moved inside the shell. From the opening at the front a bald head appeared.

‘There you go. He listens to you, you see,’ Dad said.

Marcel said nothing but stared at the animal. It looked more funny than scary. And it was just as if the tortoise stared back at Marcel. And then it did something with its mouth – if you didn’t know better, you would have said that it smiled, even its eyes shone.

‘Hello, Henry, how are you then?’ Dad said.

Henry’s head moved from side to side and disappeared slowly back into his shell. He must have been mistaken, but Marcel could have sworn that the animal that had scared him so much in the hallway, now, just as it was disappearing, gave him a friendly nod. But he didn’t mention it to Dad, it was of course impossible...

That night Marcel had a vivid dream. Henry showed up in it. He entertained Marcel’s classmates by doing all kinds of crazy things, singing Brazilian songs and dancing funny dances. Everyone loved it. Marcel’s mother was also there and she gave Marcel a proud hug. Even Geoffrey Simms looked at him admiringly. Later Henry came into his bedroom and, standing on his rear legs, tapped Marcel on the shoulder. The tortoise moved its eye close to Marcel’s and started to talk. ‘Zorry, me zorry me frighten yoo. Me iz zorry. Marcel slept uncomfortably because of it and when he woke up, that sentence was still playing in his mind. ‘Zorry, me iz zorry...’

Chapter 2

Saturday

On Saturday mornings Marcel usually watched television until dad got out of bed, which was never really early as he had often worked till late on his computer.

Marcel enjoyed all the programmes until *Mutant Ninja Turtles* came on, which for some reason he didn't feel like watching. He got dressed and went outside.

Marcel looked around the garden for something to play with. Their garden was reasonably large for a terraced house. There was the wooden fence on the Colonel's side with bushes in front of it, at the back were some high trees which were quite full in the late summer, and on the side of the other neighbours was a high hedge. No-one could see you, so you could play anything you liked, except Marcel didn't know what. He kicked his football into the bushes a couple of times, sat on the old swing that was getting to be too small for him now and eventually decided to dig a tunnel underneath the Colonel's fence so he wouldn't have to climb over it in emergencies anymore. That turned out to be much harder than he thought, but he did come across some worms that he could start collecting and try to teach tricks.

Marcel had a light feeling in his stomach that made him feel a bit faint. What was that? Then he realized what it was. Hunger. He grinned at himself. He was hungry and didn't even know it. That's how focussed he had been working on his worm collection. Well, he did have quite a few now, and some really big ones too. Could you eat worms? At once his hunger disappeared and he felt sick. Yuck. No way. Who would eat worms? Tortoises? Marcel looked up at the first floor of their house. The spare room was right above him. He looked at the worms that were trying to move in all directions on his dirt-smeared hand. Would it be allowed? He stopped thinking, closed his hand and stood up.

Marcel kicked off his shoes. This way dad wouldn't hear him, but he also wouldn't be able to tell by his muddy tracks that he'd been in to see Henry. Quietly he snuck up the stairs and went into the spare room.

The shell was there, but apart from that Henry was not to be seen. Marcel stopped in the middle of the room and hardly noticed two worms crawling through his fingers. Was it a good idea after all? Because of the dream of a dancing, singing tortoise, Henry had become a lot friendlier in Marcel's mind, but now he was standing here, he started having second thoughts. What had appeared a good idea in the garden, felt different now. Then Marcel looked at his fist and saw the two escaping worms.

'Ha ha, a race to escape,' he said and held his fist above the white container. Quietly he turned on his commentating voice. 'And on the left, ladies and gentlemen, it's Willy the Worm, with his famous wiggling technique. And on the right in second place Billy Bait is creeping out to the finish line. It's going to be a tight finish, ladies and gentlemen. It's all going to come down to the final stretch. And yes, ladies and gentlemen.' Flop. Flop. The two worms fell almost simultaneously into the white container. 'This will have to be a photo finish, ladies and gentlemen. What an excitement. Will Willy the Worm retain the title or is this Billy Bait's year. Oh, no! The public has broken through the gates and is pouncing on the players. This has never been seen before. Willy the Worm is being eaten alive and by default Billy Bait is champion, but no, now it's his turn and in two big bites he's gone too.'

Marcel fell silent and stared in astonishment at the tortoise. The tortoise however gazed with considerable interest at Marcel's closed hand.

'And now the other players come over the finish line,' Marcel said opening his fist above the plastic container. The tortoise started munching away at the other worms while Marcel rubbed his hand on his trousers and stepped backwards.

'There you go,' he mumbled turning around.

His hand stopped with the doorknob half turned and he felt the hairs on his upper arm standing upright. Had he heard something? He couldn't have. He absolutely couldn't have. But he had heard something. Just after he said 'There you go' he heard 'Thankyoomuch'.

He stared at the white door in front of him without seeing a thing; he was all ears. He heard something else. This sounded like laughing. Marcel spun around.

The tortoise was standing at the edge of the container, its head was moving from side to side, its mouth was half open – it was laughing out loud!

If Marcel was already in shock, it was nothing compared to how he felt next, for the animal looked straight at him, opened its mouth and started to speak.

'Zorry for laughing, iz not yoo, iz me self. Joshua can't help it, must make trouble.' The animal shook its head.

Marcel stood riveted to the door. This is a joke. This is some kind of joke, with a microphone.

'Ha,' the tortoise said, 'iz no electrics.'

Marcel pressed his lips together. He hadn't spoken out loud, had he?

'But,' the tortoise laughed tragically, 'me iz not allowed to let anyone know. Joshua been good, iz quiet for two years and now all of a sudden Joshua must speak! Iz floppysock!'

'Poppy,' Marcel said automatically, 'and cock.'

'Yoo offer more food?' the tortoise said surprised.

'No, it's not floppysock, but poppycock.' Marcel said through clenched teeth. What was he doing?

'Ah. Poppyclock. Me agree. Iz long time, therefore poppyclock.'

No-one will believe me, a talking tortoise! Marcel felt his stomach turn to jelly.

'Aiai, no yoo no telling anyone. Iz terriblemente. Me only talk to yoo cause yoo daddy forget my food and now yoo iz bring my favourite. Worms!' The tortoise looked at him happily. 'And me iz zorry for scaring yoo yesterday. That why me speak but no smart. No, Joshua no iz smart.' The tortoise shook his head

this time without laughing. ‘No-one must know that Joshua can speak. Marcel Green, yoo won’t tell anyone, iz yoo?’

Marcel didn’t know what was happening to him. He was being had, that was the only answer. In a minute Dad and Cramms would burst through the door laughing. He heard something in the hallway and jerked open the door.

‘I know what’s going on!’ he shouted. He looked straight at his father, who had just stepped out of the bathroom and now looked back in astonishment.

‘Why, what’s happening? What’s up?’ Dad asked.

‘Aren’t you playing tricks on me?’ Marcel asked feeling tears prick behind his eyes.

‘No, of course not. Why? What’s happened?’

‘I thought, I thought, you and Cramms...’ Marcel looked for a way out and rushed up to his Dad and pressed himself against him.

‘Does Henry still scare you a little?’ Dad asked nodding towards the spare room.

‘A little,’ Marcel mumbled, ‘I wanted to give him breakfast.’

‘Good idea. I actually forgot his special food at my work. What do you say we go into Clyde and buy some for him?’

Marcel pressed himself against his father again. Anything was fine by him.

Chapter 3

Sunday

Downstairs he heard the sounds of the visitors. Loud voices, cups on saucers, father walking to the kitchen but still taking part in the conversation, people agreeing with each other loudly. Marcel concentrated on the screen in front of him again.

‘Beckham puts one in the box and with a subtle header Marcel Green scores yet again.’ Marcel was 7-3 up against the computer but it sounded like the commentator was finding it hard to keep his thoughts on the game.

He slipped off his chair and went out onto the landing. The white door of the spare room was right in front of him. He hardly heard the noises from downstairs anymore, opened the door and went in.

Henry (if that was his name) had eaten all the new food they had given him. His feeding tray was empty. Apart from that, only his shell was visible.

Marcel took a few steps and bent forward. ‘..enry,’ he croaked. He coughed a few times to clear his throat. ‘Henry,’ he now whispered clearly. The shell remained motionless. ‘Henry,’ he said a little louder. Nothing.

‘Henry,’ he said in a normal voice.

Still nothing.

You see! I’m making a fool of myself. Talking animals only exist in movies and here I am, dimwit, thinking it happens in real life. Marcel stood up. He felt himself becoming very small and the world very large. ‘I am a twonk!’ he said and turned around fighting back tears. He grabbed the doorknob. ‘Poppycock,’ he said to himself and stopped. He looked over his shoulder. ‘Joshua?’ he said in a shaky voice.

‘At last! Me iz think yoo never say it.’ The legs and head of the tortoise appeared.

‘How hard yoo make it for yooself. Zorry, but me like me own name. Me no call yoo Charlie Brown, Marcel Green, iz it?’

The tortoise looked at him as if it had cracked a joke and now expected applause, or at least laughter. Marcel did laugh, but that was because he didn’t really know what to do about the whole situation: how stupid he had felt; that somehow he had already known that the name was Joshua; that he still didn’t know if he could believe what was happening and the funny manner of this tortoise with its happy gleaming eyes. All this made him laugh and the tears he had been fighting started running through his laughter as well.

Joshua gave him a friendly look. ‘Me explain everything.’ The animal gestured for Marcel to come closer. Joshua leaned with his front legs against the side of the container. He looked at Marcel. ‘Where me start? Yoo iz know why they capture me, why your daddy make research?’

‘No, not really,’ Marcel mumbled.

‘Cause people hear me talk in my country. Sing even. Sing very well in fact,’ Joshua said and he stood upright and stuck out his breastplate – for a second it looked like he was going to burst out in song, but then the tortoise seemed to remember where he was and settled down again. ‘Si and then they iz capture me. Me had found place near bend in river with high cliff, and there my voice sound so good, acoustics so perfect, that me have to go back and sing there, again and again. Going back to same place iz not smart, me know, but just had to – sounded so good! Then researchers of university come,’ Joshua looked offended, ‘if had been people of opera, then me iz now maybe...’ His breastplate stuck out again and he raised his front leg into the air dramatically. ‘But no. Researchers capture me. They iz not allowed to find out me can sing or speak, otherwise they hunt down all my family and take them away, or worse, make them perform for tourists.’ Joshua looked at the ground.

‘So me iz play stupid and university of Brazil find nothing. Then they think special machine in Europe can find something. So they put me in crate – yoo imagine me in crate! – and fly me here. In plane me iz sing – all the way – no

people in compartment, only dogs in crate next to me. They barking so much. When we arrive people think they iz become airsick. Ha!’ Joshua sniffed as if insulted. ‘Dogs have no taste in music.’

Marcel grinned. Joshua looked at him happily, as if Marcel had agreed. The tortoise continued. ‘So, now me have to act stupid for your father’s machine. Hopefully they quickly find me iz stupid and send me back to my family.’

‘But hasn’t my dad found anything yet? I mean he’s got a special machine and he’s really clever,’ Marcel asked.

‘True,’ the tortoise said with some pride. ‘But yoo know, tortoises learn when they iz young to empty head of all thoughts. So when yoo father put machine on me, me make head empty and clear and he find nothing.’ Joshua chuckled softly.

‘Wow,’ Marcel said, ‘isn’t that terribly boring, not being allowed to think of anything?’

‘Me used to think that too, before me learned it, but no, iz really good feeling.’

‘No way,’ Marcel said, ‘that can’t be true, it must be boring.’

The tortoise nodded its head. ‘Iz true, iz almost best feeling exist.’

‘No way,’ Marcel said. ‘Better than an ice-cream on a hot summer day?’

Joshua’s eyes started gleaming again. ‘That’s close, but iz still better.’

‘Better than a freshly made banana milkshake?’ Marcel shot back.

‘Sounds impossible, me know, but iz still better,’ Joshua replied.

‘Or,’ Marcel said, ‘if you’re at the beach and you’ve buried your feet in wet sand and you can only just get your toes out and it makes a plopping noise?’

Joshua looked like he was going all warm on the inside. ‘No, not as good as that.’

‘Or, or...’ Marcel said, trying to think of something else.

‘Or when echo come back off cliff when yoo sing aria,’ Joshua said with a dreamy look in his eye.

Marcel raised his eyebrows. He wasn’t so sure about this.

‘Or yoo feel yoo blood iz pumping when yoo dance tango.’ Joshua started to stamp around in the plastic container.

Laughing Marcel said: ‘Or when you score the winning goal in the very last minute.’

‘Or when you iz make bellylanding on wet grass. Yankeedoodle that’s the best,’ Joshua said.

‘What was that?’ Marcel said.

‘Then yoo iz fly too high on approach, make extra speed on descent and then land on wet grass. Yoo make flabbertastic slippery slide. Yoo simply must try it one day!’

‘I don’t understand,’ Marcel said, ‘tortoises can’t fly.’

‘Normally no, but they can learn,’ Joshua said and he pointed over his shoulder. ‘Look, airpilot third class, second class and first class – got all licenses.’ Marcel saw that he pointed at the blue dots on his shell. ‘Me iz already start with dreampilot licence,’ Joshua said and he had a proud look in his eye, ‘Me maybe youngest dreampilot ever!’ The look in his eye changed. ‘If me ever get home again.’

‘But you can’t. You don’t even have wings!’ Marcel cried out.

‘Me iz wing. Me explain everything. Only now someone iz come upstairs and better me become stupid again. Can yoo keep everything secret?’ Joshua gave Marcel a serious look.

‘Can you come and say goodbye,’ Marcel heard his father call out from the staircase.

‘Coming Dad,’ Marcel shouted.

‘Me iz explain it all. Me can even show yoo. But Marcel, yoo not say anything?’ Joshua pleaded quietly.

‘Don’t worry Joshua. Your secret is safe with me,’ Marcel whispered back.

Chapter 4

Wednesday

The bell rang and soon afterwards children started pouring out of the school entrance. It was Wednesday afternoon and there was a little something extra in their step, skip and jump. They had the entire afternoon off.

Marcel too had something happy in his stride. Cramms never came round on Wednesdays, so there would be no grownups at home. He could spend the whole afternoon with Joshua, who had promised to show him that he could actually fly. Now that was something Marcel wanted to see!

It seemed like he already knew Joshua a long time. They had talked quite a bit the last couple of days. The tortoise joked around a lot or sang these silly songs. In the songs he would make fun of himself or even of Marcel. But Joshua's eyes would have that friendly gleam while he sang, so that Marcel couldn't help but laugh at himself too.

Of course he hadn't told anyone about Joshua. Who could he tell? His mother wasn't here and who would believe him? A talking tortoise! But he also didn't want to get Joshua into trouble. And besides Joshua was his friend and Marcel didn't want to share him with anyone. Joshua was private.

Marcel turned into McCloud Drive and was so caught up in his thoughts that he didn't see two boys with spiky hair hiding themselves in the bushes in front of his house. Would Joshua really be able to fly, or was it just another of his stories? You never could tell with him. Marcel started running with his arms spread out like wings. Just before his house he came to a standstill. How about going through the Colonels garden again, just for kicks? But then he'd have to go over that fence again. No, best just go round the back. There were two bicycles lying on the ground. Strange. He walked on, and was soon to regret it.

Marcel felt it first before he heard it. Two boys jumped on him from out of the bushes and pushed him to the ground. There was yelling and shouting. Before he knew it he was lying with his head on the pavement staring up into Liam Gray's flushed face.

'Right you little squirt,' Ed growled, already on his feet again. 'Now you are in for it.'

'Yeah, in for it. In for it!' Liam screamed. He got up pulling Marcel up with him.

'Don't...' Marcel started, but Liam wasted no time. As hard as he could he kicked Marcel against his shin.

Marcel hadn't known anything could hurt this much. The last thing he wanted to do was cry, but couldn't help himself. He sank to the ground only to be dragged up again.

'More! More!' Liam was beside himself with enthusiasm. Ed stopped him. 'I've got an idea, so we don't get the blame. Isn't that the garden of the Colonel who shoots at children?'

Despite the pain Marcel heard it and smelled a chance. 'No don't,' he cried out trying to break loose. 'Anything but that!'

The brothers dragged him across to the fence and dumped him into the high grass on the other side. 'Don't let him out,' Ed Gray shouted taking a few steps backwards.

'Yeah, don't let him out.' Liam gave expectant glances to the windows on the first floor. 'That Colonel is in, isn't he?' he asked a bit worried. 'Nothing's happening.'

Meanwhile Marcel crawled further into the garden and stopped behind the tree. Out of sight from the house, he sat up and started rubbing his shin. It still hurt.

The brothers kept looking from the windows to him and back again. Marcel couldn't help it, he stuck his tongue out. And that he shouldn't have done. Liam's

face turned even redder and he jumped over the fence into the garden. ‘The Colonel’s not there. We’re letting squirt get away!’

‘Watch it. He’s always home,’ Ed said.

With one eye on the windows Liam walked towards Marcel.

Marcel grabbed hold of a low branch to pull himself up. With a sharp crack it broke off and Marcel fell back to the ground. ‘Shit.’ Marcel was about to throw the branch at Liam when he had an even better idea.

With a loud smack the branch hit the large window on the first floor.

The brothers froze. Almost immediately the window swung open and the barrel of a rifle came out.

‘Mummy!’ Liam cried and he ran for it, almost tripping as he jumped over the fence. Within seconds the two brothers were on their bicycles and out of sight. Marcel stayed behind the tree, motionless. He forced himself to count to a hundred, before taking a quick peep. The window was shut again.

Then he took off as well. Marcel half ran, half crawled to the backyard fence, scurried onto the plank, swung his feet up, held on an extra second to save his ankles and he was over. On the other side he lay on the ground panting. He had made it.

Marcel looked at their house. The sun was reflected in the spare room window. Of course... Joshua was waiting! Immediately Marcel had forgotten all about the Gray brothers and though he was still out of breath he jumped to his feet.

When Marcel pulled the backdoor shut he heard something. A strange clattering noise and a weird booming voice. O, no, what was this? No-one was meant to be home on Wednesdays. Had Joshua been found out? Or – Marcel stiffened – did he have other friends visiting? As Marcel walked to the bottom of the staircase, the sounds grew stronger, the voice and the clattering.

He crept up the stairs. The door to the spare room was wide open. It was empty! The sounds came from the bathroom. Marcel moved over to the door and

slowly inched it open, immediately the noise became louder. Marcel peeped through the opening and immediately broke out laughing.

It was Joshua. He had moved the big white container under the shower to create a bathtub. With the shower on full, the tortoise was now floating on his back in the tub and scrubbing his breastplate with dad's bath brush. At the same time he was bellowing some kind of opera. Marcel opened the door fully.

'Ah, there iz yoo,' said Joshua when he noticed Marcel. With the bath brush he switched off the shower and the clattering ceased immediately. 'Yoo have shampoo that iz tested on humans?' Joshua now used the brush to paddle in circles and his eyes took on that funny gleam. Marcel had to laugh.

'How did you get that container here?' Marcel asked knowing how heavy it was.

'Never underestimate power of unclean tortoise,' Joshua replied and stopped paddling. 'Yoo have towel maybe?'

Marcel went to get one and when he returned Joshua stood dripping next to the container. 'Thank you, Gracias mister Green,' Joshua said gracefully and stepped into the large yellow towel Marcel was holding out for him.

'You are most welcome,' Marcel said making a bow.

'Yoo alone thiz afternoon?' Joshua asked from underneath the towel.

'No,' Marcel said.

'Oh.' The tortoise sounded disappointed.

'I'm with you, aren't I?' Marcel laughed.

'Yankeedoodle,' Joshua said and his head came up from under the towel, 'Then iz time we start enjoy good things in life.' He disappeared for a few seconds in his shell and came out wearing a pair of dark sunglasses. 'We start with sunbathing.'

'Are you sure about this?' Marcel called up.

They had spent an hour or so lying on an old blue blanket in the sun. Joshua loved being outside again and feeling the warmth of the sun. Marcel had made

banana milkshakes and finally Joshua had said that he would show Marcel how tortoises fly. He disappeared in his shell, came back out with a leather flying helmet and said, ‘Me iz warmed up and thermal conditions favourable. Yoo stay here. Me give demonstration.’

Now Joshua stood in the open window on the first floor and Marcel was wondering what on earth he would tell his dad if it all went wrong.

Joshua Joshua Tango, ready for take off, Marcel heard and before his eyes the tortoise leapt from the window.

Something miraculous happened. The tortoise fell like a stone for only a few feet. It then half pulled in its head and legs, stuck its tail all the way out and started spinning it round very fast. Immediately all you could see of the tail was a flashing circle. And Joshua flew! A few feet above the ground he soared through the garden. Marcel was so astonished he forgot to jump to the side and it is a good thing Joshua managed to pull up and fly a little higher or Marcel’s head would have been in a mess.

Joshua circled the garden, just missing the high trees at the back and turned round. *Joshua Joshua Tango, coming in for the landing*. The tortoise flew straight at the patch of grass. Much too fast, Marcel thought. But just before touching the grass, Joshua changed the angle of his shell and veered up. This made him slow down, but also miss the grass. He flew straight through the bushes and with a loud bang into the Colonel’s fence.

When Marcel dared to breath again, the twirling leaves and twigs had settled. The bushes now had a gaping hole in them, a pair of sunglasses hung from a branch and a plank in the fence was loose.

‘Nossa Senhora! Yankeemedoodle!’ Joshua said angrily, while he reappeared out of his shell and looked around. ‘Markings are all wrong and fence on runway, me ask yoo!’

‘Are you hurt?’ Marcel asked running towards him.

‘No,’ Joshua said, ‘why do yoo think me have helmet? But...’ he looked inside his shell in horror. ‘Everything fallen down. It took years to store it neatly and now yoo look. Iz horrortastic, iz flabberghastly, iz total poppyclock, iz...’

Astonished Marcel gaped at the tortoise and then, relieved, he burst out laughing. Joshua tried to give him an offended look, but soon was laughing as well.

‘Yoo sure about this?’ Joshua offered Marcel his milkshake for the third time.

‘Very very sure,’ Marcel replied with a look of disgust.

‘Yoo not know what yoo missing.’ The tortoise leant back on the blanket and with obvious pleasure took a sip.

At first Marcel had refused to use the blender in the kitchen. But Joshua could be quite persistent in his way and finally Marcel had given in. As long as dad didn’t find out, or Cramms. How horrified they would be. A wormshake! Marcel felt his stomach cringe. And Joshua? He had given Marcel precise instruction as to how to cut the worms, what herbs to add and how long to leave the blender on. Much too long Marcel thought because of the black smoke that came out of it, but the tortoise had insisted it was necessary. Then finally a brown creamy but bubbly drink was poured into a tall glass.

‘Iz work of art,’ Joshua said with a sigh. ‘Should be in museum, milkshakemuseum.’

Marcel didn’t want to talk about the drink anymore. ‘The kitchen needs to be cleaned up,’ he said.

‘Me know. But iz good not to hurry.’ Joshua took another sip and closed his eyes.

Marcel took a look around – they were on the blanket in the sun. It was a good thing they had such a big garden with trees around it. And how unbelievable was what had happened! And yet it had happened. The broken fence and ripped apart bushes were proof, the tortoise had flown! He would have to think of something to tell dad. And then there was the kitchen. Marcel had never seen the kitchen in

such a mess, not even when mum had just left and dad started to cook. Even dad would notice. Wow, would he ever be angry. Even without knowing there had been worms in the blender. Marcel started to shift restlessly on the blanket. He wouldn't be allowed on the computer for a week. Or be allowed to watch telly. And even worse, if Cramms found out, he'd be sent away to boarding school. Marcel could feel his eyes start to sting. He'd have to confess the truth and no-one would believe him, they would all laugh at him.

'Hey yoo.'

Marcel looked up.

'Hey yoo,' the tortoise said with a smile, 'goes quick eh?'

'What?' Marcel asked, already close to tears.

'Well, one minute yoo in sun, enjoy life, next minute yoo think about punishment yoo not even going to get and so quickly yoo feel unhappy – while yoo still in sun.'

'What the... How do you know what I'm thinking?'

'Well,' Joshua said, 'one look at your face tells me yoo not thinking nice things.'

'Hmmm.' Marcel was silent for a moment. 'But how did you know I was thinking of punishment though. Can you read my mind or something?'

'Course not. Yoo iz no book! No, me can hear yoo thoughts if me tune in.'

'No way. That's not possible.'

'Iz possible and also true,' said the tortoise who took another sip of his drink.

Marcel gave the tortoise a straight look. 'Okay what am I thinking of now then?'

'Yoo think, Joshua iz talking poo of cow.'

'Argh. You could of guessed that. Alright how about now? What fruit am I thinking of?'

Joshua waited just a few seconds and said 'Strawberry.'

'Jeez, that's amazing!'

‘Me not use much. Yoo own thoughts often not interesting, let alone those of others. But sometimes me listen to radiostations for music. And necessary for flying.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Tortoises eyesight not very good. With radio yoo can know position, also helps avoid crashing in to other tortoises, or...’ Joshua paused, ‘fences.’

It was unbelievable, but then so much was already unbelievable about this animal.

‘Do you mean that with Joshua Joshua Tango?’ Marcel asked.

‘Exactly,’ Joshua said, ‘Now me surprised – how yoo know that?’

‘That’s what you shouted when you were flying, Joshua Joshua Tango coming in to land or something like that.’

‘Yankeedoodle,’ Joshua said with a thoughtful look, ‘me know for sure me send that over radio and didn’t say out loud.’

‘You must have, I heard it, didn’t I?’

‘Maybe me was still tuned in to yoo, and yoo heard me sending it,’ Joshua said slowly.

Marcel gave Joshua a puzzled look.

‘We try,’ The tortoise leant forward.

Joshua Joshua Tango, best wormshake maker ever. Marcel heard it clearly. It was Joshua’s voice, but the tortoise hadn’t moved its mouth. It was a little bit frightening.

‘Me see yoo heard something, what was it?’ Joshua asked eagerly.

Marcel looked him straight in the eye. ‘Joshua Joshua Tango dirtiest milkshake maker ever.’

Joshua laughed. ‘Yoo receive, but wrong station.’

Joshua Joshua Tango, coming in to land. Marcel heard it loud and clear in his head. Joshua was heading straight for the patch of grass, pulled up sharply just before he crashed into it and slid on his belly where Marcel had thrown a couple

of buckets of water. ‘Nossa Senhora! Yippiedoodle! Always land where grass is greenest.’

Joshua Joshua Tango, cleared landing area, Marcel heard and he ran to the tortoise. ‘Why are you called Joshua Joshua Tango?’

Joshua took off his flying helmet. ‘Iz callsign. Every pilot tortoise has one. Iz name, favourite singer and hobby, so for me name: Joshua,’ the tortoise stuck his breastplate forward, ‘favourite singer, again Joshua of course,’ he made a bow as if receiving applause, ‘and hobby is tango.’ Joshua made a couple of dance steps whilst turning his head from one side to another. ‘Yoo see? Joshua Joshua Tango.’

‘Wow. Can that work for me too?’

‘Yoo receive radio, so yoo need callsign. Who iz yoo favourite singer?’

Marcel couldn’t think of anyone so he said ‘Elvis,’ because his mum had always liked him.

‘Ah, yoo wait till yoo hear me give concert. And hobby? Joshua asked.

‘Eh football,’ Marcel said. Though I only really do that on the computer, he thought.

‘So what iz, football or computer?’

‘No, no football,’ Marcel said quickly.

‘Then from this moment on, yoo callsign iz Marcel Elvis Football,’ Joshua said stately.

Marcel heard a cracking sound in his head, like static and then: *Marcel Elvis Football, iz Joshua Joshua Tango, yoo receive me?*

‘Ehm this is Marcel Elvis Football. I receive you loud and clear Joshua Joshua Tango,’ Marcel said out loud.

‘Good answer,’ Joshua said. ‘Now try without talking.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Only think message – me will hear.’

It was a little weird, but Marcel did it anyway.

Joshua Joshua Tango, do you receive me? This is Marcel Elvis Football, he thought.

It was quiet for just a moment and then the response came. *Marcel Elvis Football, here Joshua Joshua Tango, receive yoo loud and clear – what yoo think of second landing, better than first?*

Marcel laughed, but he couldn't laugh and think at the same time. That's why it took him a few seconds before he could send back. *Here Marcel Elvis Football, thought first landing was interesting too. Maybe do it again?*

'Thank yoo doodle much.' The tortoise said out loud. 'Me do that, there no fence left.'

The fence looked bad enough as it was. He would have think of some story to tell dad. Though dad wouldn't be the problem, it was Cramms...

'Yoo need story for Cramms?' Joshua said.

'Yeah, or she'll see it as evidence that I am disturbed and need help badly.'

'Yoo give what she wants to hear, what she wants?'

'What do you mean?' Marcel asked with a puzzled look.

'What she always say to yoo? What she want yoo to do?'

'I dunno... Wait. That's it! She's always on about me going outside to play.' Marcel put on a funny high voice and said: 'Why don't you play football outside instead of behind that thing?'

'Yoo sound even worse than Cramms,' Joshua said.

'Well, that's what she'll get. How about I kicked my ball against the fence all afternoon and now it's broke?'

'Good,' Joshua said and looked inside his shell, 'Maybe me find paintbrush to make goal for yoo, but can be anywhere in this mess.'

'No need – we've got chalk.' Marcel ran inside.

The cleaning of the kitchen resulted in a very painful moment. In the pantry Joshua discovered two cans of turtlesoup. Marcel had not seen Joshua so sad and angry.

In the end they decided to give the cans a proper funeral in the garden. While Marcel dug a hole in the ground with a spade, Joshua looked for a black tie in his shell.

‘Yoo need one too,’ the tortoise said when he had finally found it.

‘But I don’t have any black ties,’ Marcel said.

‘We look in yoo father’s room.’

‘Joshua, I’m not allowed to open my dad’s wardrobe!’

‘Iz emergency.’

They went upstairs and looked in the wardrobe. Joshua gave a surprised whistle. ‘All suits are same. How come?’

‘Cramms bought them for him. So he doesn’t have to think about which one he wears. He went to work in his pyjama’s once.’

‘Yoo find black tie and get in front of mirror. I teach yoo turtlefuneralknot.’

Marcel did exactly as he said, but still when he was finished, what he had hanging around his neck hardly resembled a tie anymore.

‘Now yoo need jacket.’

‘No way, Joshua, if dad finds out!’

But Joshua already pointed out a jacket. ‘Yoo wear.’ It came to Marcel knees.

Joshua sang. Marcel didn’t understand a word but it sounded sad.

They stood next to the grave and Marcel struck matches and tossed them one by one on top of the soup cans. What if someone came home now? Wearing his dad’s clothes, playing with matches... he would be in huge trouble. When the last match had burned out, the song finished too. Marcel started putting earth on top.

Chapter 5

Thursday

The next day at school Marcel had trouble paying attention. He kept thinking about Joshua, the flying, the radiocallsign and the wormshake.

‘Marcel Green, maybe you’d like to tell the rest of the class exactly what is so funny,’ Mr Bellman’s voice cut through his thoughts. Nevertheless it took Marcel a while to realise that the teacher was actually addressing him.

He felt his face go warm. ‘Eh, sorry, don’t know. Nothing,’ he stammered while he cast his eyes down. The whole class laughed and Marcel felt his face become even hotter.

Mr Bellman gave him a stern look. ‘Pay attention. The Roman Empire can be very interesting.’

‘Eh, sorry, don’t know. Nothing.’ Someone mockingly whispered from the corner where Geoffrey sat and suppressed laughter followed.

Mr Bell immediately turned around. ‘Right Geoffrey Simms, then maybe you can tell us what the Romans thought most important in a man.’

It was quiet for a moment. ‘Eh, sorry, don’t know. Nothing,’ Geoffrey said innocently and the whole class burst out laughing. Even Mr Bellman couldn’t suppress a smile. ‘Well, I want to hear something from you anyway,’ he said and walked up to Geoffrey. Who started to stammer something about men having to be strong and brave and the lesson continued.

Marcel fiddled with his eraser that was lying on top of his history book. What did they know! They didn’t have a clue. They didn’t know that he had a friend who had a callsign and could fly and that Marcel had a callsign himself and that the two of them could talk on the radio and that.... Would the radio work from here? It was worth a try...

Joshua Joshua Tango, this is Marcel Elvis Football, do you receive me?

Marcel thought as loud as he could. He made sure he kept looking straight at Mr Bellman.

It was silent for a moment and then he heard: *Marcel Elvis Football, here Joshua Joshua Tango, receive yoo loud and clear. What iz yoo position?*

Marcel struggled not to show his excitement. Their radioconnection worked all the way from school! *I'm in class, we've got history and you?* Marcel thought.

At yoo home of course. History...what period?

The Romans.

Ah me know about Romans, Aunt Constance was emperor Nero's favourite pet. Was shame for family of course, but she loved the steambaths in palace too much.

'And you, Marcel?'

Mr Bellman was looking at him. He had obviously asked a question.

'Eh sorry?' Marcel said.

The class sniggered.

Marcel sat up straight. 'Sorry, could you repeat the question?'

Mr Bellman hesitated a second but then said: 'We've just read that Romans valued courage most in a man. Now I'm asking for examples. What do you think courage is?'

Marcel didn't know what to say. *What is courage?* he thought.

'Anyone else?' Mr Bellman turned away from Marcel.

'That you're not afraid of anything,' Geoffrey said.

Real courage iz when yoo iz afraid, but still do it, Marcel heard Joshua's voice.

'No, it's when you *are* afraid!'

The class went silent. 'He'll never get it,' Geoffrey whispered to Ian Sharpe sitting next to him.

Mr Bellman turned back to Marcel. 'Can you explain what you mean?'

‘Well, if you’re not afraid you don’t need courage. It’s when you are afraid of something but still go ahead that you’re brave, so to have courage you first need to be afraid.’

Mr Bellman nodded slowly.

‘If you’re not afraid then it’s easy... it’s not courage. Only the scared can be brave,’ Marcel added.

Mr Bellman’s nodding speeded up. ‘I see what you mean. I never looked at it that way. What an original thought, I’m impressed.’

The bell rang. It was playtime. ‘Fresh air for everyone outside,’ Mr Bellman said.

As Marcel walked to the classroom door, he felt someone tug at his arm. He turned around and looked straight into the green eyes of Mascha, the girl whose long blonde hair always gleamed as if it were silver and gold. ‘What a great answer,’ she said and smiled.

That was the only thing Marcel could think of for the rest of the day.

Joshua Joshua Tango I’m coming home, what is your position?

No answer. Maybe his friend had fallen! Joshua had offered to fly out on to the roof to be a lookout for Marcel. But now Marcel had lost contact.

Joshua Joshua Tango, can you hear me?

Marcel Elvis Football, loud and clear. Was looking for binoculars, now near highest point of roof.

Marcel started walking away from the school. *Well done Joshua. What do you see?*

Big mess, Marcel Elvis Football, can’t find anything. One minute.

Okay, but hurry Joshua Joshua Tango.

Marcel looked around him to see if there was any spiky hair sticking out behind a car or something.

Nossa Senhora, at last.

Have you got it, Joshua Joshua Tango?

*No, but found tailbrush, me looking for it for ages. O, there. Now me have it.
Marcel Elvis Football, me in position. Can see lots from roo. Three whole streets.*

Can you see anyone?

See girls on bicycles. With bare legs.

*They are from my school, they just rode past here. The brother's school is in
the opposite direction.*

*Wait, Marcel Elvis Football, see two boys on bicycle. Hair iz sticking up. Like
barbed wire. These Barbey brothers?*

Marcel was jumping on the spot with excitement. 'Yes,' he shouted out loud.
A child from one of the lower classes walked by and gave him a strange look.

What are they doing, Joshua Joshua Tango?

*They coming here. Getting off bicycle and now hiding in bushes in front of
house. You copy Marcel Elvis Football?*

Marcel clenched his fist. Exactly the same spot. He wasn't going to fall for
that again.

I copy Joshua Joshua Tango. I'll come home via another street.

On a trot he went via the Columbo Drive and McEwan street. It was a longer
route, but this way he reached the street behind McCloud Drive without crossing
in front of their house. Happily Marcel waved at a passing train.

'Joshua, can't you take me with you, flying?' There, he had asked it.

Joshua looked up from the game of chess they were playing in Marcel's room.
'Yoo sit on my shell?' he asked while lifting a knight over a black pawn. 'Not
possible with airflying.' The tortoise set the knight in a new position. 'There, that
will stop yoo plan to give me check.'

Marcel looked at the chessboard. 'You read my thoughts well, but...' He took
the black knight with his white bishop. 'I can do this instead.'

'Nossadoodle senora! Yoo not planned this.'

'No,' Marcel laughed, 'I only saw it just now.' He put the knight beside the
board. 'But I don't understand what you just said.'

‘What? Nossadoodle senora?’

‘No, why I can’t fly with you.’

‘O, airflying.’ Joshua moved his king one space sideways. ‘So, now yoo still can’t give me check.’

‘No, but I can...’ Marcel took the black queen with his bishop.

Joshua groaned. ‘Me give up, yoo win.’ He pushed the chessboard to the side. ‘Me explain about airflying.’

Marcel put the queen back on the board and looked at Joshua.

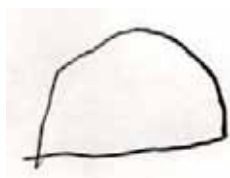
‘Yoo remember what me say about wing? Me iz wing, shell iz wingshape.’ Joshua pointed to his shell. ‘When yoo sit on me, wing no longer work and me can’t fly. Iz simple, yoo see?’

Marcel shook his head.

‘We make drawing,’ Joshua said. ‘Yoo have paper?’

Marcel fetched his drawing pad from his desk.

‘Yoo draw. First curve line... yes, then straight here.’



‘What iz this?’

Marcel looked at what he had drawn. What was it? ‘A cookie?’ he asked.

Joshua stared at him in disbelief. ‘Yoo taking the pee!’ he said offended. ‘Iz shell! Every baby tortoise can see.’ Shaking his head Joshua kept pointing at the drawing whilst muttering something about Marcel being an enormous cookie. He finally continued. ‘When shell go through air, wind go over shell and under, yoo see?’ Joshua eyed Marcel suspiciously to see if he would dare say something about cookies again.

Marcel however nodded. ‘Sure, like wind in your face.’

‘Then yoo draw wind over and under.’



‘Wind over shell goes longer distance than under because of shape. Yoo see?’

Marcel nodded, that was obvious.

‘This iz wingshape. When pilot hold wing in right way, air above go faster, because of longer distance. And then wing go up. Iz because of racing air on upside.’

Joshua saw the puzzled look on Marcel’s face. ‘Iz true. Iz how yoo airplanes fly. Wing has shape of shell. They go fast so that air above wing very fast and then pushed up.’

‘Really?’ Marcel asked.

Joshua nodded. ‘Yoo stick hand out of car when going fast and make hand into shell shape. You feel push up.’

‘And I’ll lose my hand,’ Marcel said.

‘Then yoo just have to believe me,’ Joshua said.

‘Okay, but why can’t I fly with you?’

‘Well, we put yoo on top of shell.’



‘Yoo see. Air on top no go fast anymore. That mean we fly no better than brick.’

‘Jeez,’ Marcel said. And before he could say another word he heard footsteps on the landing, there was a single knock on the door and it was opened immediately. A yellow apron with flowers. It was Cramms!

But, she’s not supposed to be here on Thursdays! It startled Marcel. Luckily Cramms was rather shocked herself. ‘Oh, you’re here! My god, I didn’t know you were in!’ She was carrying some of Marcel’s clothes. Why hadn’t he heard her coming?

‘Why is that animal in here?’ It didn’t take her long to find her accusing tone. ‘And what are you doing to it?’

Marcel looked at Joshua. His eyes had changed – as if all he ever thought about was which leaf of lettuce to chew next. However he was still sitting next to a chessboard with a drawing in front of him.

Marcel Elvis Football, yoo make up something!

Marcel jumped up. ‘Oh yes, we need to make a drawing for school of an animal doing something human, so I’m drawing him as if he can play chess. Pretty good eh?’

‘Pretty criminal, if you ask me. Animal torture, that’s what it is. We’ll see what your dad has to say, when he gets home.’ Cramms walked into the room and tried to lay the pile of clothes on Marcel’s bed. The chessboard and Joshua were in the way and in stepping over them, she lost her balance and accidentally kicked Joshua’s shell.

Joshua disappeared inside immediately and Marcel cried out: ‘Hey, watch it woman! You’re the one torturing here!’

‘I beg your pardon?’ Cramms said astonished.

‘Get out of here. You don’t belong here. Leave us alone!’ Marcel screamed.

‘Well, I think we need to do something about your language. This won’t do. There are places for children who speak like that you know!’

‘Get out! I never gave you permission to come into my room!’

Cramms went to the door. ‘Your father will be here, any minute, I think we need to have a serious talk about this.’ With that she left.

Joshua's head reappeared and he looked around carefully. 'Me thought grown-ups already learned walking!'

Marcel was furious. He fell onto his bed. 'If my mother hadn't left, we'd never have met Cramms!' he shouted.

Joshua came over to the side of bed. 'Yoo father still here,' he said.

'Dad's too busy with work. He doesn't see anything. Especially not how mean Cramms is.'

Joshua remained silent and Marcel could no longer fight back the tears.

'Yoo know...' the tortoise said after a while.

Marcel didn't react.

Joshua waited patiently.

'What?' Marcel asked turning towards him.

'Yoo can't come airflying – but maybe with dreamflying,' Joshua said carefully.

'What do you mean?'

'Iz two ways of flying, one with fast air flowing over wing; airflying. Other iz on dreampower, called dreamflying. Then yoo no need flowing air.'

Marcel blinked. 'But what's dreampower? I've never heard of it.'

'Iz power that comes free when yoo start making dreams real. If yoo know how, yoo can fly on it.'

'I don't understand what dreams?'

'Dreams of people, animals, plants, everything alive, but especially people.'

'But I still don't get it. Where does this dreampower come from?' Marcel asked and sat up straight on his bed.

'When people busy with what they really want, if they working on their dream, then dreampower comes. Tortoise can feel dreampower and can learn to turn dreampower into flying power, iz like hot air inside shell. Iz exams and licences for this.' Joshua nodded. 'Only me...'

'So that means I can fly on top of you!' Marcel cried out.

'Yes,' Joshua said slowly, 'Only me...'

‘That’s fantastic!’ Marcel started jumping up and down on his bed. ‘When can we start?’

‘Yoo wait. Iz problem. Me not allowed dreamfly yet. Have no licence.’ All of a sudden the tortoise sounded insecure. ‘Must do exam first.’

‘No way!’ Marcel stopped jumping. ‘But what if we only fly a little bit?’

The tortoise shook its head. ‘They very strict. Because yoo come near people. Only in absolute emergency or with licence.’

Marcel sat down again on his bed. ‘And I guess you have to be in Brazil for the exam.’

Joshua was silent for a few seconds before answering. ‘Can be anywhere. Exam iz fly long distance over land and then return in dark – solo – all alone. But me will be discovered! Flying iz already difficult, finding dreampower along way. But also navigating... me certain to be caught! Me not know this land, not know where iz people with dreampower, me have bad eyes, certain to get lost. No tortoise can help. Iz impossibly Marcel. In Brazil maybe, but here...? Yoo must understand, if me caught me never see family again. Zorry Marcel. Risk iz too much. Me should not have said. Iz impossibly!’

Marcel felt abandoned. He had just been so uplifted by the idea of Joshua and he flying together, like they were a team and setting out to do great things. But now that was gone, apparently there was no team, were no great things.

‘But Joshua, I can help. Together we can do this.’

‘No Marcel. Can go wrong. Iz too much risk.’

Marcel stared at the tortoise. All of a sudden he seemed a stranger. It was the same tortoise, but he was different, like someone you didn’t know.

The noise of footsteps coming up the stairs warned them someone was coming, Marcel could tell by the rhythm it was dad.

Marcel Elvis Football, yoo me forgive – iz too much.

Marcel didn’t know what to reply.

The door opened.

‘Marcel?’ dad entered.

‘Yes,’ Marcel said in a flat voice.

‘What’s Henry doing here? He’s not here for children to play with, he’s here for serious scientific research!’

Marcel just stared at the floor.

‘I’ve brought the neuromatascanner with me, to examine him at home.’

‘The what?’ Marcel looked up.

Our special machine to detect his thoughts. I’ll install it in the spare room, so actually it’s a good thing he’s out of his room for a moment.’ Dad walked back to the door. ‘Can you come and help me set it up?’

Marcel looked at the tortoise.

Joshua Joshua Tango, will you be okay with that machine?

Me must make head empty of thoughts and also no send on radio. Yoo think machine iz on all time, Marcel Elvis Football?

‘Are you coming?’ dad called from the landing.

Oh no, can’t be. Certainly not all the time, Joshua Joshua Tango.

Marcel gave a quick stroke over the tortoise’s shell and followed his dad out.

‘Here, this is the last receptor to set up.’ Dad placed a funny looking stick on the floor. ‘If you hold it, I’ll connect the wire.’

Marcel did as he was asked.

‘This will make the whole room receptor-area,’ dad said as he plugged a wire into the base of the stick. ‘So that wherever Henry goes, this box,’ he tapped the black box with a little green screen that was attached to the other end of the wire, ‘can register his thoughts.’ Dad’s eyes had a fanatic sparkle to them.

‘But what if I come in, will it read my thoughts too?’ Marcel was a bit worried.

‘No, well it could, but the receptors don’t cover that high.’ Dad pulled out a pencil and drew a line on the wall. ‘Under this line all thoughts will be read, but the neuromatascanner can’t reach above the line, so you will be okay.’

Dad started pressing buttons on the black box. ‘I’ll be working from home most days now. Once I’ve got proof of his thoughts, when I can show the world that this is an animal with complex thought patterns – then success will come. Anyone can say it’s a special tortoise, but I will be able to prove it, cause seeing is believing. Scientific evidence is the only thing that counts. And then we’ll be famous. The minister will come to our home. We’ll take Henry on a tour of the world, to the universities of America and Japan. Maybe even a Nobel prize. Why not? Darwin, one of the greatest scientists ever, learned his evolution theory from tortoises didn’t he? So why shouldn’t I go one step further?’ It sounded like dad was talking to himself now and had already forgotten Marcel was in the room.

Marcel thought it sounded perfectly horrid. But of course he couldn’t let dad notice. ‘Can he still come out of his room?’ he asked carefully.

Dad looked up, almost surprised. ‘Eh no, he has to stay in 24 hours a day. I’ve set an alarm so that if he goes through the door we’ll know immediately. We’ll know if he tries something! You and I can pass normally.’

‘But that’s cruel!’

Now dad was truly surprised. ‘What? Cruel? Certainly not! It’s science, and besides you can’t get anywhere without a bit of suffering, now can you?’

‘That’s easy to say when you’re not the one suffering!’ Marcel cried out and stalked out of the room.

‘You sound just like your mother,’ dad called after him.

That pleased Marcel even though he stayed angry. He went to his room.

Joshua Joshua Tango, it doesn’t look good.

Me heard, Marcel Elvis Football.

The tortoise stood in the middle of the room and gave Marcel a sad look.

‘It’s ready, Henry can go in now,’ dad said from the landing.

But that means I can’t talk with you anymore. Two tears ran down Marcel’s nose. The door opened and dad came into the room.

We think of something, yoo careful of Barbey brothers.

With a major effort dad lifted Joshua up and staggered with him out to the landing.

Marcel felt tears flow over his face, he sat down on the floor. First he heard: *Marcel Elvis Football, remember dreampower, what yoo really want...* and then it was silent. Marcel couldn't hear a thing in his head. Only the soft pulsating sound that misery makes.

Chapter 6

Friday

The last hour at school Marcel kept wondering how he was to get home without running into the Barbey brothers. The more he thought about how unfair everything was, the worse Marcel started feeling. It was their free reading hour, so he had ample opportunity to think of things that made him sad. He had to try one more time.

Joshua Joshua Tango, do you receive me?

Nothing. The whole day there had been no answer.

And what would the tortoise have said, anyway? Yoo not think yooself sad, or something like that. Yeah, well easy for him to say! Well, maybe not really.

Joshua was the one locked into the spare room where his secret could be discovered any moment and he might never see his family again. Joshua was perhaps the one with more reasons to feel sad. But he never seemed down, even though he had been in captivity for over two years now. How come he never felt sorry for himself while he had all the reason to do so? It didn't make sense. Marcel would ask Joshua, he understood these things. Except, would Marcel ever be able to talk to him again? Marcel started to feel even worse.

Oh well, better not think about it for now.

The bell rang. The whole class rushed to put their books back in the cupboard. Marcel stood at the back. He wasn't in a hurry.

'Good book?'

Marcel looked up, saw long blond hair and froze. He hadn't noticed that Mascha stood next to him. And now she'd asked him something!

'It's aw... aw... alright,' he stammered. His cheeks immediately rising in temperature. He looked down at the book he was holding: *The Knights of the Round Table* and then at the book in her hands. 'Charlie,' he said, 'Now that is a good book!'

She smiled at him. ‘Yes, don’t you just wish that all that chocolate was real?’

‘You mean it isn’t?’ Marcel asked.

Mascha was just putting the book back in the cupboard. She gave him a surprised look. ‘You thought it was real?’

‘If you can make it up, it’s real,’ Marcel stammered. He tried to put his book back and knocked another off the shelf. When he had picked it up and stood straight again, she was gone. He didn’t know if she had heard his answer.

‘The school is closing.’ Headmaster Gerrard sent everyone outside. Marcel had hung around as long as he could, now he had to go home. Damned Spike Brothers. Where would they be waiting for him this time? Marcel dragged his feet over the schoolyard. First he had to see how he could get home in one piece, and then even if he did, he couldn’t talk or play with Joshua. What was the use?

At the beginning of McCloud Drive he stopped. Yesterday Joshua had told him where they were hiding, but now Marcel had to do without help. He felt pretty awful, his stomach was clenched tight like a fist and his legs shook. Wait a minute! Was there someone behind that parked car? Marcel started running and then he saw that it was a branch moving in the wind.

He had made it up. But it had seemed real enough for a moment. ‘If you can make it up, it’s real,’ he heard in his head. It was his own voice. That’s what he had said to Mascha. He didn’t know what she had thought of it. He didn’t know himself if it was dumb or not. But just now he had made up that the brothers were behind that car and it had been real for his stomach and legs, even though it was only made up. Mascha had liked his other answer, about how you first needed to be scared to be brave.

Well he was scared now! So he had all the chance in the world to be brave. Marcel looked up and down the street. He was also fed up with the whole situation. He didn’t really feel brave, but then he would just have to fake it. Where were those brothers? With big strides Marcel marched down the street.

Where were they? He reached the bushes where they had hidden last time, nothing happened.

Marcel kicked the bushes. ‘Come on then,’ he said in a shrill voice. Nothing happened. Marcel didn’t know whether to be relieved or disappointed, so he kept on kicking. ‘Where are you, you barbed wire idiots? You barbeys? There and there and there.’

Someone knocked on a window. Marcel looked up, was it the Colonel? But it wasn’t the Colonel. It was Cramms who stood at the window in their living room and shook her fist in the air. Well Marcel certainly wasn’t scared of her! He gave the bushes another kick.

‘First you’re torturing animals and now plants!’ Cramms stood with her hands on her hips in the hallway.

‘Yeah, I’m practicing for on people,’ Marcel said and walked straight past her towards the stairs. That did her. She couldn’t even think of something to say back.

Marcel looked in on Joshua. There he stood between the receptors of the neuromatascanner. Peacefully the animal gazed at Marcel. And slowly Marcel felt himself calm down. That’s because I’m with Joshua. Marcel looked for the pencil mark on the wall. ‘I have to stay above that mark, or dad will register my thoughts about you,’ he said. Then he told the tortoise everything that had happened that day (the only thing he didn’t mention was the encounter with Mascha). The tortoise of course couldn’t say a word in return.

‘Jeez, if only you were also higher than the mark, why don’t you just fly above it?’ Marcel said jokingly.

He felt his hairs stand on end. He had just thought or said something good, something important. But what? All of a sudden, he couldn’t remember a thing. What had he been thinking? O yeah, what if Joshua just flew above the pencil mark. But that was just a joke, it was impossible. How would you ever get enough fast flowing air in here? Airflying was out of the question. But hang on.

That was it. Of course! Marcel looked at the tortoise. He knew he had a good idea. He just didn't know what to do about it. But he realised he couldn't expect help from Joshua.

He ran down the stairs. Cramms was hanging up laundry out the back. Marcel started pacing up and down in their living room. Dreampower. He had to develop dreampower. Then Joshua would feel it and be able to fly above the pencil mark. But what was dreampower? He looked it up in the dictionary. *Dreamplace*, *Dreamvista*. Dreampower wasn't even in there! Didn't people know about dreampower? What had Joshua said again? 'Power that comes free, when yoo start making dreams real. When yoo busy doing what yoo really really want.'

Didn't sound too hard . You only needed to know what you really really wanted and then to do something about it. How hard could that be? But what did he really want? Outside Cramms turned around with an empty laundrybasket under her arm. Well, at least he knew what he didn't want! Marcel went up the stairs to his room.

Exactly, he knew what he didn't want. He didn't want to be chased by the Barbey Brothers, or teased by Geoffrey. But what could he do about it? Would he have to take karate lessons? Without anyone knowing about it, he could become a ninja and easily beat the brothers with a few flying kicks. And Geoffrey? Him he'd throw right out the class window. That would teach him! Ha! And huh! Marcel practiced a few karate chops in the air. It was just that because he was a bit clumsy it would probably take him ages to become a ninja. And of course dad wouldn't allow it.

Marcel lay down on his bed and stared at the ceiling. *Remember what yoo really really want...* Joshua's voice echoed. That was the last thing the tortoise had said. But Marcel had already been thinking about that, he didn't want to be teased... *Think of what yoo do want...* But he already had, he didn't want... *what yoo do want...* What was the difference? Thinking about what you do want and don't want are the same aren't they? What was the tortoise going on about? Immediately Marcel realised that that wasn't true. He himself was the one going

on about it. He sighed, stood up and switched on the computer. A game of football was what he really wanted.

England didn't do too well at the world cup this time. They didn't even get past the group phase. Disgusted Marcel switched the computer off again. That was almost as bad as he was in real life.

He kept staring at the blank screen. Was that what he really wanted? To be able to play football? To be asked to join the other boys after school? To be part of the school team for the All Schools Tournament? To score the winning goal in the final and to be interviewed by the radio? Marcel shook his head as if he wanted to throw that last thought out. He didn't care if he scored the winning goal as long as he was part of the team. Win or lose.

Marcel stood up. He knew what he wanted. To be in the school team. But what could he do about it? Where did he start? He walked out onto the landing. It was simple really... he'd have to get better at football. Marcel went into the spare room. 'Joshua, I have a plan. Don't you worry!'

Marcel was in the garden, placed the ball in front of him and took a shot. Goal. The ball bounced back from the fence. Right this is the penalty-spot, he decided, placing the ball on a bald spot. Ten goals later, for which he had to kick fourteen times, he ran back upstairs. That must have produced some dreampower. But no, Joshua hadn't moved – not upwards, not sideways – nothing. The tortoise just stood there.

Maybe ten goals isn't enough. Marcel ran back down again. For the rest of the afternoon he practiced kicking the ball against the fence where he and Joshua had drawn a goal. Then the ball went over the fence into the Colonels garden. First Marcel thought that would have to be the end of it. But eventually he decided to be brave and got the kitchen ladder out to climb over the fence. There was no movement behind the Colonels windows and with a wildly beating heart Marcel made it back with the ball. He'd better specialise in low penalties or all he'd learn was how to climb fences.

‘Wash your hands,’ Cramms showed in the doorway wearing the ugly apron. ‘Your father will be here any minute. Dinner’s almost ready.’

‘Right. I’ll go upstairs.’ Marcel wanted to see if he had produced any dreampower before dad got home.

Still panting Marcel stood before the tortoise. He wasn’t used to running and kicking that much. His right foot even felt a bit swollen. Joshua still just stood there. Nothing happened. At first Marcel felt disappointed. But wait, don’t give up that easily. Think of football, think of kicking the ball. Marcel tried to keep his mind on his right foot with which he must have kicked the ball over a hundred times. But soon his mind starting wandering and he saw himself in the All Schools Tournament. He wore their school colours and his team was playing against the Grove Primary School, against Ed and Liam Gray. Marcel sat on the bench, he was substitute, but Ed Gray fouled Andrew Bale terribly and Andrew couldn’t continue. The audience cheered as Marcel ran on to the pitch. Mascha stood next to Mr Bellman waving madly. Immediately Marcel got the ball and played Ed between his legs. The audience roared. Marcel rushed forward. Liam Gray was the goalie and was standing a little forward from his goal. Marcel pulled back his right foot for a shot. In the spare room something remarkable was happening. Marcel noticed something move in front of him, but he was too caught up in his shooting at goal to pay it any attention. He wanted to see if his shot would go in. He kicked the ball and with a lovely lob it sailed through the air, over Liam Gray’s outstretched fingertips, and... The audience cried ‘ahhh’ as the ball hit the crossbar and sprung back high in the air. Marcel rushed forward. The ball was going to come down between him and the keeper. Liam had seen it too now. Marcel was closer. The keeper rushed out of his goal, but Marcel was already there and the ball was coming down. He could volley it directly at goal with a seething shot. He pulled back his leg and... what was that!? The ball stopped in midair. It hung suspended waist high above the ground. Marcel blinked. Angry that this was preventing him from scoring and then he saw it.

Joshua was floating in the air. Smiling happily the tortoise hung suspended two feet above the floor. Unbelievable! Joshua flew. Marcel had created dreampower. Marcel glanced at the pencil mark on the wall. He wasn't that far yet, he was barely half way. But they had a beginning!

There were footsteps on the stairs. Dad!

Quickly Marcel turned around and went through the door, he almost bumped into his father on the landing.

'Hi fella, how is our tortoise?' dad asked.

'Hi dad,' because he was so excited Marcel's voice sounded higher than normal.

'Let's see if we have registered any tortoise thoughts yet,' dad said and stepped towards the spare room.

Marcel panicked. Dad would see Joshua floating in the air. He threw himself up against his father.

'Hey, what's this?' dad asked looking down.

'You used to always hug me when you got home, dad. How come we never do that anymore?'

Dad was silent. After a moment he put his arms around Marcel and hugged him.

When they walked into the spare room the tortoise was back on the floor. Dad immediately started pressing buttons on the neuromatascanner.

'Jeez, there is change but it seems like he has even fewer thoughts than before.'

Marcel felt immensely relieved and at the same time full of energy. 'Dad shall we play a game of chess later on, we haven't done that for ages.'

'Dinner's ready,' Cramm's voice came from downstairs.

Dad looked at him. And Marcel knew for certain, in that moment dad was also thinking of how things used to be.