

*This is an extract from My Family and Other Animals by the naturalist Gerald Durrell. In this passage he describes Achilles, a tortoise that he kept as a pet when he was a child and he and his family were living on the Greek island of Corfu.*

The new arrival was christened Achilles, and turned out to be a most intelligent and lovable beast, possessed of an unusual sense of humour. At first he was tied up by a leg in the garden, but as he grew tamer we let him go where he pleased. He learnt his name in a very short time, and we had only to call out once or twice and then wait patiently for a while and he would appear, lumbering along the narrow stone paths on tip-toe, his head and neck stretched out eagerly. He loved being fed, and would squat regally in the sun while we held out bits of lettuce, dandelions, or grapes for him. He loved grapes as much as Roger our dog did, so there was always great rivalry. Achilles would sit mumbling the grapes in his mouth, the juice running down his chin, and Roger would lie nearby, watching him with agonised eyes, his mouth drooling saliva.

But the fruit that Achilles liked best were wild strawberries. He would become very excited at the mere sight of them, lumbering to and fro, craning his head to see if you were going to give him any, gazing at you pleadingly with his tiny boot-button eyes. The very small strawberries he could devour at a gulp, for they were only the size of a fat pea. But if you gave him a big one, say the size of a hazelnut, he behaved in a way unlike any other tortoise I have ever seen. He would grab the fruit and, holding it firmly in his mouth, would stumble off at top speed until he reached a safe and secluded spot among the flower-beds, where he would drop the fruit and then eat it at leisure, returning for another one when he had finished.

As well as developing a passion for strawberries, Achilles also developed a passion for human company. Let anyone come into the garden to sit and sun-bathe, to read or for any other reason and before long there would be a rustling among the grass, and Achilles's wrinkled face would be poked through. If you were sitting in a chair, he contented himself with getting as close to your feet as possible, and there he would sink into a deep and peaceful sleep, his head drooping out of his shell, his nose resting on the ground. If, however, you were lying on a rug, sun-bathing, Achilles would be convinced that you were lying on the ground simply in order to provide him with amusement.

He would surge down the path and onto the rug with an expression of bemused good humour on his face. He would pause, look at you thoughtfully, and then choose a portion of your anatomy on which to practise mountaineering. Suddenly to have the sharp claws of a determined tortoise embedded in your thigh as he tries to lever himself up onto your stomach is not conducive to relaxation. If you shook him off and moved the rug it would only give you temporary respite, for Achilles would circle the garden grimly until he found you again. This habit became so tiresome that, after many complaints and threats from the family, I had to lock him up whenever we lay in the garden.

Paragraph 2 begins 'But the fruit that Achilles...' and is about Achilles' response to strawberries. Paragraph 4 begins 'He would surge down the path...' and gives details about Achilles' interactions with the family members relaxing on the rug.

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery. Write about 200 to 300 words.