

The Dragon's Egg

2. The fox scampered on ahead of me.

"Come on!" barked the fox. "Come on! Do keep up! If we don't get there soon, we'll really be in the soup!"

"Well, I said. "I suppose that would be mushroom soup, to go with the creamy white tip of your tail."

"Don't joke about it!" barked the fox. "It's really not funny!"

"I suppose it isn't," I said, though I did think it was rather funny. "But I really can't go that fast. I've only got two legs."

"All right," barked the fox. "All right."

We came down into a hollow, and suddenly we were surrounded by a flock of ferocious looking sheep. I felt for the egg in my pocket. The egg felt heavier. The egg felt warmer.

"Where do you think you're going?" bleated the biggest sheep. "Stop right there this instants!"

"Come on Eric!" barked the fox. "This is no time for games!"

"Who are you calling Eric?" bleated the second biggest sheep. "I'm Eric. That's Emily! We don't all look the same, you know!"

"Sorry!" barked the fox. "But we've really got to keep going."

"What's the password, then?" bleated the third biggest sheep.

"What do you mean, what's the password?" barked the fox. "Come on! You know me!"

"We don't know him, though," bleated the fourth biggest sheep, nodding at me.

"But he's with me!" barked the fox. "You can trust me!"

"Trust you?" bleated the fifth biggest sheep. "That'll be the day."

The sheep looked at each other.

"All right," bleated the sixth sheep. ""We'll ask this human a riddle, and if he can guess the answer, we'll let you be on your way."

"I like riddles," I said. "Ask away."

The sheep looked at each other.

"You start," bleated the seventh biggest sheep to the eighth biggest sheep.

"No, you start," bleated the eighth biggest sheep to the seventh biggest sheep, "I always get it wrong."

"Oh, all right then," bleated the seventh biggest sheep, turning to face at me.

"My first is in sail but not in pail," bleated the seventh biggest sheep.

"My next is in ash but not in ask," bleated the eighth biggest sheep.

"My next is in pear but not in pair," bleated the ninth biggest sheep.

"My next is in plate but not in plant," bleated the tenth biggest sheep.

"And my last is in prod but not in door," bleated the eleventh biggest sheep.

I thought about it for a bit.

"Well?" barked the fox. "Well? What's the answer then?"

"That's a tough one," I said. "That's a tough one."

I took out my mobile phone, and called Nancy, and told her the riddle. Nancy laughed.

“That’s easy!” she said, “Just clock the flock.” and put the phone down.