

The Dragon's Egg

4. "4 18 1 7 15 14 19 - 5 7 7," I said to the rabbit. "Dragon's egg."

Then I started to walk towards the cave entrance.

"19 20 15 16!" squealed the rabbit.

"Stop!" barked the fox. "Stop! You can't go in there. That's her home!"

"19 15 18 18 25!" I said. "Sorry! Which way do we go?"

"This way," barked the fox, bounding ahead.

I sighed and looked at the dragon's egg. Out of the top of the egg popped a hand at the end of an arm. The hand waved at me, pointed towards the fox, and popped back in again.

I put the egg into my pocket. Then I followed the fox round the hill, until we came to a loch beneath a cliff. Swimming on the loch were five ducks.

"Oh no!" barked the fox. "Oh no! If they hold us up anymore, we'll really be in the soup."

"Well, I said, "I suppose that would be black bean soup, to go with your shiny nose."

"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.

The ducks swam across the loch and hauled themselves up out of the water.

"Hello fox!" quacked the ducks, flapping their wings in unison. "Who's the human?"

"Hello Jilly! Hello Milly! Hello Tilly! Hello Billy! Hello Lilly!" barked the fox. "He's with me. Can we come past you please?"

"What's the hurry?" quacked Lilly. "We haven't had a good chat for ages."

"I'm afraid that we don't have time," barked the fox. "We've got to get the dragon's egg back to the nest before it hatches."

"Right," quacked Billy. "But first the human has to answer our question."

"Not again!" I said. "Oh well, ask away,"

"Tell us, human," quacked Tilly. "How old are we?"

"Maybe you're all the same age," I said, "if you came out of the same brood of eggs?"

"Do we look the same age?" quacked Milly. "Of course we're not! I'm older than most of the others."

"So you're the oldest?" I said.

"No," quacked Milly.

"And I'm younger than most of the others," quacked Jilly.

"And I'm not the youngest," quacked Lilly.

"And I'm not the oldest," quacked Billy.

"And I'm older than Billy and younger than Lilly," quacked Tilly.

"So what's the order of our ages?" quacked Milly.

I thought for a bit.

"That's another hard one," I said.

"It is, isn't it," barked the fox.

I took out my phone and called Nancy.

“Draw the ducks,” said Nancy, “with Tilly in the right place to begin with.” And put the phone down.