

## The Dragon's Egg

5. "Youngest to oldest is Billy, Jilly, Tilly, Milly and Lilly," I said.  
"Jolly good!" quacked Lilly. "Be seeing you then!"

The ducks waddled back into the water. I felt the egg moving in my pocket.

"Which way now?" I said.

"Follow me," barked the fox, setting off round the loch. "Hurry up! Hurry up! We need to get there before sunset!"

On the far side of the loch, we stopped at the base of the cliff.

"Here we are," barked the fox. "Now I just need to find the keys."

"What do we need keys for?" I said. "I can't see a door."

"Use the egg!" said the fox.

"How do I use the egg?" I said. "I don't understand."

"Hold it up to the rock, of course!" said the fox.

I took the egg out and placed it against the stone. The egg glowed the colour of night, and, in front of us, a large rectangular outline appeared, with a keyhole in each corner.

The fox rummaged in his briefcase. Then he turned the briefcase upside down and shook the contents onto the grass.

"Curses!" barked the fox. "Curses! I've lost the keys! Now we're really in the soup!"

"Well, I said. "I suppose that would be cauliflower soup, to go with your wiggling white whiskers."

"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. "So what do we do now? Can't we just leave the egg here?"

I put the egg down on the ground in front of the door. Out of the egg popped two legs and two arms. The egg jumped onto my boots, climbed up my trousers, and leapt into my shirt pocket.

"You just won't listen, will you!" barked the fox, "Come on! We need to go to the maze to get the spare keys."

"The maze?" I said. "There isn't a maze on Arthurs' Seat."

"Of course there's a maze!" barked the fox. "This way!"

The fox trotted up the path that ran up the cliff face. I did my best to keep up. At the top was a broad grassy area, with a view beyond to the Firth of Forth.

"So why are the keys in a maze?" I said.

"Security!" barked the fox. "You know what dragons are like."

"So where's this maze, then?" I said, looking round.

"Right here!" barked the fox. "Use the egg!"

As I held out the egg, a long, high wall of prickly yellow gorse sprang up from the grass. And, through a break in the middle of the wall, out hopped a large frog.

"Not you again!" croaked the frog. "Well I'm not letting you back in."

"That's not fair!" barked the fox. "That's not fair! What about the human?"

The frog looked me up and down.

"Oh, very well then," croaked the frog. "Have you explained it all to him?"

"No," barked the fox. "No, I haven't had time."

"I'd better, then," croaked the frog. "Listen human. Inside the maze, there are four clearings. They're all connected to each other. And there's a key in each clearing."

"That sounds easy," I said.

"Oh no," barked the fox. "The connections aren't all the same length. Tell him today's distances."

"You mean they change?" I said.

"Oh yes," croaked the frog. "It depends on how much it's rained. Anyway, from the entrance clearing, it's 2 minutes to the square clearing, 6 minutes to the round clearing and 5 minutes to the triangular clearing. From the square clearing, it's 6 minutes to the round clearing and 7 minutes to the triangular clearing. And, from the round clearing, it's 6 minutes to the triangular clearing."

"You need to finish up back here," barked the fox.

The fox looked at his watch.

"There's 20 minutes until sunset," barked the fox. "You better get going. Now!"

"But what's the fastest route?" I asked. "Can I use the egg?"

"No!" barked the fox. "No!"

I sighed, and took out my mobile phone, and called Nancy.

"Draw a map," said Nancy. And put the phone down.