

The Cuckoo Child by Dick King-Smith

When he had gone some way away, the ranger began to throw the fruit and vegetables over the fence. Then, leaving the birds busily feeding, he hurried back, unlocked the gate, and, pushing in the wheelbarrow, reloaded it with the more outlying of the ostrich eggs.

Jack watched all this with mounting excitement. It might take a bird to hatch eggs, but a boy could hatch a *plan*! He unzipped the canvas backpack slung over his shoulder.

The ranger came out again and relocked the gate.

In the wheelbarrow were nine eggs.

He picked one up.

“Now,” he said, “where’s the young man who asked that question?”

And when Jack raised his hand, the ranger said, “Here, you can go first,” and handed him an ostrich egg.

Then, one after another, the ranger took the other spare eggs out of the wheelbarrow and gave them to various children to hold and examine.

“Let me!” “Let me!” “Give it here!” “Let me go first!” cried the boys and girls as they competed to hold an egg, and in the hubbub and confusion nobody noticed what Jack was doing or heard him zip his backpack shut.

“Now, now, children, that’s enough!” said the teacher. “Put all the eggs back in the wheelbarrow now.” She turned to the ranger and said, “What will you do with these?”

“Often we send some to other safari parks or zoos,” said the ranger, “but actually these will be fed to our big snakes. the pythons and the boa constrictors. Now then, have you all put your eggs back?”

“Yes!” chorused the children. Jack said nothing.

“Thank you for your trouble,” said the teacher.

“Bye-bye then,” said the ranger, and off he went. In the wheelbarrow were eight eggs.