‘I wish the farmer’s wife would stop giving my eggs to that hen to hatch,’ said Jemima Puddle-duck one day.

Her sister-in-law, Mrs Rebeccah Puddle-duck was very happy to leave the hatching to a hen. ‘I don’t have the patience to sit on a nest for twenty-eight days - and neither do you, Jemima. You never sit still for long. You’d let them go cold!’

‘Quack,’ said Jemima Puddle-duck, ‘I want to hatch my own eggs, thank you very much.’

She tried to hide her nest from the farmer’s wife but she always found it.

So Jemima decided to make a secret nest, far away from the farm. She set off one fine spring afternoon, wearing a shawl and straw bonnet.

There was a wood in the distance. ‘That looks like a safe spot to make a nest,’ she quacked. And she jumped off into the air.

She flew beautifully until she reached the wood. And, after a rather bumpy landing, she waddled about in search of a nice dry nesting-place.

Jemima Puddle-duck liked the look of a tree-stump among some tall fox-gloves. But she was surprised to see a smart gentleman sitting on top of it, reading a newspaper.

He had black ears and sandy-coloured whiskers. ‘Quack?’ said Jemima Puddle-duck, with her head and bonnet on one side, ‘Quack?’

The gentleman looked curiously at Jemima. ‘Madame, have you lost your way?’ he said. He had a long bushy tail which he was sitting on, as the stump was damp.

Jemima thought he looked very handsome and friendly, so she explained that she was trying to find a good place to make a nest. ‘The farmer’s wife keeps giving my eggs to a hen, but I can hatch them just as well as she can,’ Jemima told the gentleman.

‘I wish I could meet this hen you speak of. I would teach them to mind their own business!’ said the bushy long-tailed gentleman. ‘But, as for a nest – well, I have a sack full of feathers in my shed. You may sit there as long as you like.’

He led the way to a tumbled-down shed among the fox-gloves...then he opened the door and showed Jemima in. It was surprisingly full of feathers and was very soft and comfortable. Jemima made a nest without any trouble at all.

When it was time for her to go home for the night, the gentleman seemed rather sorry, ‘Do come back tomorrow,’ he said, ‘I adore eggs and ducklings. I will be proud to have a nest full in my shed.’

Jemima Puddle-duck went back every afternoon. She laid nine very large, greeny white eggs in the nest. The fox gentleman liked them very much. He turned them over and counted them when Jemima wasn’t there.
Then one day Jemima said, ‘I’ve finished laying my eggs. Tomorrow I’ll sit on them. I’ll bring some corn to eat, so that I won’t have to leave until they’re hatched,’ she quacked keenly. ‘I can’t let them go cold.’

Madame, there’s no need to bring corn. I have plenty of oats,’ said the generous gentleman with sandy whiskers. ‘But before your hard work begins,’ he added, ‘let’s have a dinner-party! Bring some herbs and onions from the farm-garden and I’ll cook us a tasty omelette.’

Jemima Puddle-duck was silly: she wasn’t a bit suspicious by this request. She went around the farm-garden, gathering different sorts of herbs that are used for stuffing roast duck. Then she fetched two onions from the kitchen.

‘Where are you going with those onions?’ asked Kep the collie-dog. ‘And where do you go every afternoon by yourself?’

Kep the collie was rather important in the farm-yard, so Jemima told him the whole story. The collie-dog listened, with his wise head on one side. He grinned when she described the polite gentleman with sandy whiskers. He asked Jemima exactly where to find the shed.

Then he trotted down to the village to look for two fox-hound puppies who were out for a walk with the butcher.

Jemima Puddle-duck went back to the shed one last time, carrying her heavy bag of herbs and onions. When she arrived the bushy long-tailed gentleman was sitting on a log. He glanced around nervously and jumped when Jemima appeared.

‘Hurry up and check your eggs,’ he barked. ‘Give me the herbs for the omelette. Be quick!’ He wasn’t as polite as usual. Jemima was rather surprised.

While she was inside the shed Jemima heard pattering feet outside. Someone with a black nose sniffed at the bottom of the door...and then quickly locked it. ‘Gracious me, what’s going on?’ she quacked.

A moment later there were the most awful noises – barking and baying and terrible squeals and groans. Then Kep the collie-dog opened the door and let Jemima Puddle-duck out. He had the two fox-hound puppies with him. Kep had a bite mark on his ear and both puppies were limping...and there was no sign of the foxy-whiskered gentleman.

Unfortunately the fox-hound puppies rushed into the shed and gobbled up all the eggs before Kep could stop them.

Jemima Puddle-duck went back to the farmyard feeling very upset about her eggs.

She laid some more in June and the farmer’s wife let her keep them; but only four of them hatched.

Jemima Puddle-duck said that it was because of her nerves; but she’s never been able to sit still for long...