

Robin Eggs

by Kitty Boots

Rabun County, Georgia, 1960. We went from concrete to kudzu. Daddy put in long days at work. Mom was pregnant, busy with my younger brother and homesick.

The dingy white rent house in the town of Needy Creek was surrounded by hills and fields, mountains and streams. A red clay lane snaked up to the house. We had a washing machine, but no dryer. Unlike the other northern transplanted wives who followed their husbands south to the mill, my mother refused to hire "a girl" to do her housework and laundry.

I used to stand at the edge of the lane and wave at passing cars. There weren't many. I got tick fever from playing with stray puppies. I picked wild strawberries, ate crab apples and nipped the nectar from honeysuckle. I collected rocks and toads. Once I made a realistic looking mud pie, decorated it with dandelions and told my brother, Jimmy, it was chocolate. He ate some of it and I got in trouble. Forbidden to play in the small creek running by the house, I did it anyway.

Before dinner Daddy would hold me on his lap and feed me a tablespoon of moonshine. The sheriff's mother-in-law made the smoothest 'shine in the county. "Don't tell your mother," said my dad. He fished with the sheriff and his deputies. One time he came home with the trunk of our green Hudson Jet full of catfish. Someone gave him bear meat, too. It looked like an angry, red pot roast. He put it in a roasting pan and chucked in carrots, potatoes and onions. It simmered all afternoon. I don't remember eating it. I know Mom didn't. She spent most of that day in the bathroom, gagging and retching.

Mom would shoo us out of the house after dinner. I'd find a tree to

climb while Jimmy stood looking up at me, whimpering and wringing his hands. He was born serious. Reaching into the branches I found a nest containing three blue eggs. I had to touch them and when I did they broke. I climbed down and told Jimmy. He ran into the house and told Mom. She smacked me across the the face. "What made you do that?", she asked. "How do you think that mother bird is going to feel when she comes back to the nest and her eggs are broken?"

I tried to tell her it was an accident, but she had a way of driving the shame and guilt into you so deep it was never any use. I said my prayers before I went to bed and begged God to put the eggs back together so the mother bird wouldn't be sad and cried myself to sleep. I don't think God answered my prayers because all it takes is one whiff of that raw egg yolk smell and I feel like crying.

