

# Winter Eggs

Sarah dreamt of winter. It was a blindingly clear morning so cold she was afraid her eyes would turn to balls of ice. Needles of air burned her lungs and froze her nostrils shut. Expanding frost wedged between her aching teeth and into her joints. Sarah trudged across the numb landscape, the loose deep snow crunching under her feet. The blank whiteness concealed any trace of a path ahead of her and the sharp wind immediately erased her wake.

But Sarah knew where she was going: to the chicken coop to water the chickens and collect their eggs. She suddenly became aware she was carrying a gallon jug of boiling water that the hens could drink longer before it froze. The jug steamed in the brittle chill and warmed the hand that held it. Sarah realized she was dreaming, that she had dreamed this dream many times before. But that was no consolation. Repetition only increased Sarah's conviction that, when she got to the coop, she would find the hens' eggs broken with cold. All of them were always broken: one by one she would extract the eggs from the straw only to find their shell-flecked embryo sacs exposed and frozen solid.

Even in her dream Sarah knew that broken eggs were nothing to get upset about. In real life she simply gathered the frost-ruptured eggs and let them thaw in a bowl on the kitchen table. They were still fine to cook with. But that was in her waking life, and Sarah understood that waking rules did not apply to dream existence. In the sleeping world of broken eggs, Sarah was oppressed by the certainty that something bigger than mere eggs was damaged beyond repair.

Approaching the coop with habitual dream dread, Sarah was surprised to see that the eggs appeared to be whole. She picked one up warily, suspecting a hopeful delusion. It was unbroken. And it was still warm.

Sarah woke up cupping her hand around the memory of the precious whole warm egg of her dream. The night held itself motionless, as if listening.

Sarah listened too, to her sick pillow-propped husband's labored liquid breathing. After a mixed half-century together, he still felt enormously pleasing to Sarah: familiar and warm and loving, even asleep. He instinctively cinched his arm around her shoulders, folding her to his side. Sarah fit her head to its best resting place at his armpit and drew comfort from her husband's body, a quiet joy mixed with wonder. She stared into the darkness and asked herself when he had started smelling like an old man.