

## Yoke By Heart

by Lisa A. Trofymow

She'd answered all the questions and now she could doodle in her math scribbler. Everyone else worked, but she drew a peculiar face, a dog in coveralls, and a fat chicken wearing an apron—there was a broken egg between the bird's feet.

She thought; would she ever need to know, say, the square root of four when she grew up and shopped in the grocery store? All the math her mother did when she was at the supermarket was to count her money in an angry voice at the cash register, as if the sign had asked her mother for 5 million dollars. Her mother would scrunch down her mouth whenever she saw that cash register sign; then she would dig for her pocket calculator inside her purse—which took a long time, the way she had to hunt around—which made the cashier impatient.

When her mother finally found her calculator she would add up the numbers on the grocery tape at least twice. But the answer on her calculator always matched the cash register's. So she would scrunch down her mouth even more as she counted out her money. She would rub every bill with her fingers as she handed it to the cashier to make certain two bills hadn't stuck together. And the cashier would smile and say "Thank you ma'am, have a good day." But Amarantha knew that the cashier didn't mean it.

Her mother always drove straight home from the supermarket, otherwise the butter or the frozen orange juice or worst of all, the raspberry sherbert might melt all over the back seat of the car. Her mother would always fasten Amarantha's seatbelt even though she hated wearing it. Amarantha always held her grocery bag tightly.

But one time after grocery shopping, she was strapped to her seat, holding the bag with the eggs inside. She was looking through the car window. There was sun—kids in shorts—bicycles on the sidewalk and the road. Amarantha wished she was outside riding a bicycle, but they'd never let her ride one. But she liked riding in the car, and the radio was playing music. So she wasn't thinking about protecting the eggs—for just a minute. Suddenly she felt a huge tug and the bag with the eggs inside it wasn't on her lap. She heard her mother yelling out of her open window to a kid on a bicycle, who turned and gave her mother the dirty finger. Her mother was so mad that she jumped out of the car and tried to chase the kid, but of course he was faster since he had a bicycle.

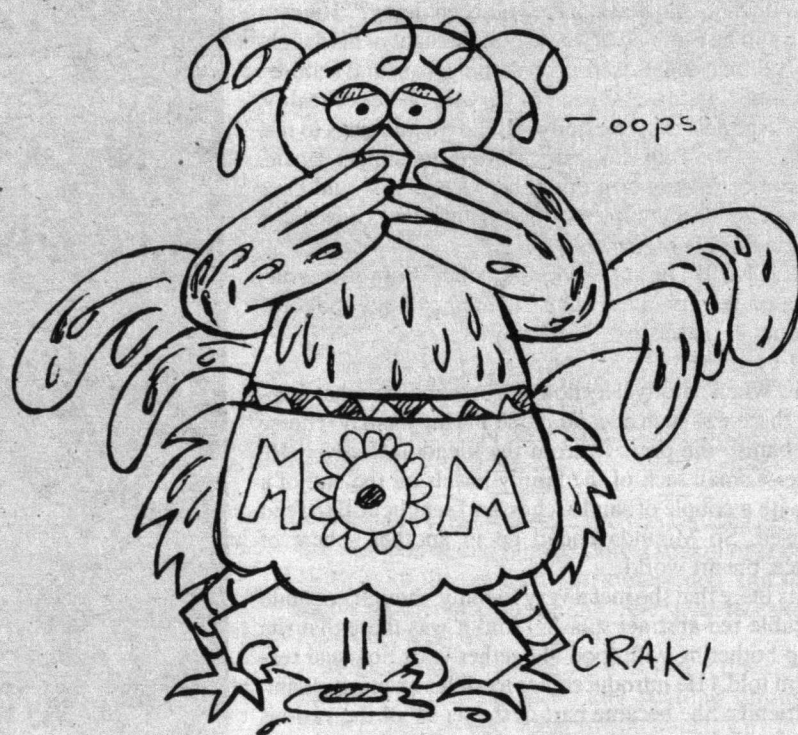
Amarantha was trying to put back all the things that had fallen out of the bag. One carton of eggs had broken and there were shells and white and yolk all over the floor of her mother's car. She tried to clean up but it was an impossible job. She opened her door and hid the broken carton of eggs underneath the car.

Her mother was breathing hard when she finally returned to the car. Her cheeks were red and her hair was wild. Amarantha sat very still, holding the bag. She stared straight ahead, hoping her mother wouldn't ask what had happened to the eggs. She had even refastened her seatbelt. Then an awful thing happened: her mother slowly, slowly walked around in front of the car and opened Amarantha's door. Amarantha decided she must tell about the eggs before her mother became too angry: "I'm sorry. I let the eggs fall when

we stopped. They broke." But her mother, with a peculiar look, took away the bag and released Amarantha's seatbelt, saying, "Oh, Amy." Then her mother laughed, but she was also crying and she hugged Amarantha so tightly she thought her mother would accidentally break a rib. Her mother didn't say a thing about the eggs but she did say "I'm sorry" over and over. "I'm okay, mom" Amarantha told her. She wished her mother would quit crying. She thought about the raspberry sherbert, which would probably be melted by the time they got home.

On the afternoon the eggs broke, her mother wanted to rest a while after they arrived home. She told Amarantha to play quietly in her room. But Amarantha never played loudly—she drew or read books like *Ann Can Fly* or *Through the Looking-Glass*. On the afternoon the eggs broke, she decided to draw. She sat at her big wooden desk and put down two clean sheets of paper. She looked out of her window. She liked warm—not hot—afternoons very much. On one sheet she drew 'mom'—the funny chicken in an apron—and then the go-go dancer, a bird who had laid an egg while dancing. On the other sheet of paper she drew "This is a hospital bedroom I am in it," but she tore up this one and threw it into the wastebasket. So she filled a third sheet with her favorite dog-people.

Then her mother was calling, "Amy! Supper!" Without thinking, Amarantha jumped up and opened the door and ran out of her room and ran down the stairs. But at the bottom of the stairs she suddenly felt quite peculiar. Then she just fell over for no reason. Her mother rushed to her yelling, "Oh my God! Oh my God!" Her mother was crying for the second time in one afternoon and she kept repeating "Remember not to run. Please don't run."



Amarantha didn't feel like eating supper. So her mother took her to her room, drew the curtains—she said the sun would bother Amy's sleep—and told her to take a nap. Then her mother kissed her and left her in her dark bedroom.

Amarantha woke when her big brother Darrin yelled "I'm home!" She heard him dump all his hockey stuff on the landing, then run up the three stairs into the kitchen. "We won, mom. The other team is ex, history—tenuhtwo!" Her brother laughed. She heard her mother open the oven door. "Great, Darrin. Oh—don't look for anything in the fridge. We're having a late supper."

"Where's Ranthy?"

"Upstairs, taking a nap. Could you please wake her and see if she wants any supper?"

"Yeah, yeah. Is she sick again?"

"Just tired, Go get her, please?"

"Okay, okay."

"And please set the table. After you wash your hands."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I can only do one thing at a time, y'know."

Amarantha closed her eyes and lay very still as she heard her brother run upstairs and open her door. He stood in the doorway and said "Ranthy—mom says to come eat supper."

She didn't answer.

Darrin yelled downstairs, "Hey mom! I think she's still sleeping!"

"Darrin! Keep your bellowing down a bit, will you?"

"Sorry!" he yelled back.

Amarantha opened her eyes: her brother was standing at