

## BETWEEN THE COVERS

BY JOAN BAUM



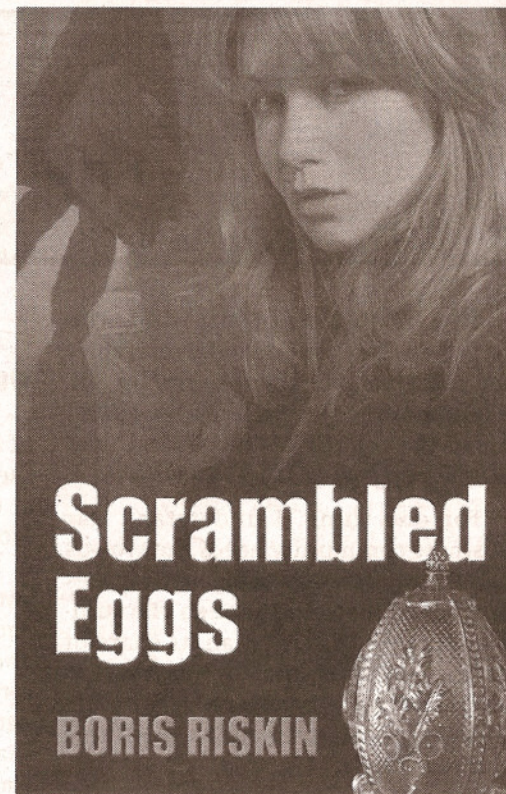
Clearly Boris Riskin had a lot of fun dishing up *Scrambled Eggs* and working with Marijane Meaker's Ashawagh Hall Writers Group, though one suspects that the humor of this Brooklyn-born Sag Harbor resident needed no edit from the kitchen cabinet. A short story writer, Riskin shows in his first novel that he appreciates the different demands of longer fiction: he wastes no time setting up a two-level plot. Hero Jake Wanderman, telling his story in the first person, describes how he let his best friend, Dr. Morty Adler, who "threw one of the best parties of the Hamptons' season," talk him into going to one. There

he meets, as Morty has planned, a rich widow who beseeches Jake to help her retrieve valuable stolen goods. The second plot line involves Jake's confusion and hurt that his lovely wife, Rosalind, has just walked out on him after 25 years (he hasn't a clue). Of the resolution of both these problematic situations, there can be no doubt. Jake is too likeable not to be successful. A retired English teacher, happily addicted to quoting Shakespeare, he feels it is destiny that Rosalind shares her name with arguably — or, as you like it — Shakespeare's most attractive heroine.

Of course, Our Hero will rise to all occasions with dispatch and honor, putting his smart mouth to the service of love and friendship and not incidentally show off, in a charming, adolescent way, his intellectual and physical prowess in order to impress Rosalind. He agrees to help the widow get back her Faberge eggs. But, this being a zany chase caper, Jake will soon find himself involved beyond his wildest expectations with the Russian mafia in Brighton Beach, post-

Stalinist goons in Moscow, the KGB, the FBI and, on another level, with his father who has fallen in love (again), this time with the young daughter of one a Brighton Beach's most notorious criminals, but, hey, it's all in the family.

Riskin, who went to the University of Michigan, where he studied creative writing, lists a variety of jobs as well as travel as part of his rich and rewarding life, though now he seems more than content living in Sag Harbor with his beloved wife, Kiki, a sculptor. Odd, then, that *Scrambled Eggs* scrambles some East End place names while keeping others as they are: Ocean, instead of Dune Road, Hay, instead of Bay Street Theatre, but when Jake comments on a room trashed by hoods, he compares it to "T.J. Maxx after a fifty-percent markdown." Though Sam's Paper gets knocked as "the celebrity gossip rag . . . distributed free and in such quantities that it flowed across the land like toxic waste," and The East Hampton Star gets a mention as the paper to which Alec Baldwin repeatedly pitches issue-oriented letters, The Independent, though not named, is alluded to as the "astute" investment by "Jerry the columnist" who bought himself an outlet for his articles. Analogies can overreach (cigarette smoke



in a seedy bar in Moscow is said to be "as thick as an East Hampton fog"), but it's nice to see Riskin acknowledges local scenes along with references to Russian manners (practically none) and mores (not so different from America's). He has done his homework — on Faberge eggs, the new Russia, the old Soviet Union, and the Russian community in Brighton Beach. The antic plot may turn on coincidence and accident rather than on the realpolitik intrigues that define most contemporary political thrillers, but Riskin might reply, that's just fine, that's exactly what I intended. *Scrambled Eggs* — a light and enjoyable repast.

*Scrambled Eggs* by B. Riskin, Five Star, 277 pp., \$25.95