

The human egg

It's a delicate process. And it's especially hard now that Pop and Lisa went back to Saturn and we have to do it on our own for the first time. But the baby's crying and we're hungry so we can't wait.

Mary rotates the subject, a woman called Johanna, in the quip-dimension so that her egg balances on the scale, the topside up of course.

"Watch out for those veins," I say as he maneuvers the hammer through the thick forrest of tissue towards the egg shell.

"I know, I know," he whispers, sweating.

They say humans have the thickest shells in the universe and that that's why we're here. *Twice the shellthickness is twice the food*, the saying goes. But I don't know about that. You see, when you have a really thick shell, you can only take the top part away or the subject will die with fear. And the last thing we want is to kill anyone. Also the chance of phlegm-contamination is really large if you have a thick shell, for you have to use more brute force.

Pop says he once had a banker whose shell was more than one centimeter thick. When Pop had removed the shell and put him back on earth, the man ended up in an institution from which he never recovered. When you pick a subject, you have to be really careful not to take any financial workers or housewives(who are even worse than bankers).

"Don't even know why they grow these shells," Mary grumbles, "they don't seem to need'em anyway."

"Their baby's don't have them," I say, "you can see it in their smile, which is so open and well... naked."

Mary smiles. "Yeah," he says, handling the hammer and taking the cigarette out of his mouth, "you ready?"

"Yes, just be careful."

When the shell cracks, the woman opens her eyes really wide. They always do so when the first light comes in. I asked Pop why we don't operate in the dark, but he said things get worse afterwards.

The woman gasps on the operation table. She doesn't know what she sees yet, she's just staring into the light like a rabbit.

"No phlegm-leakage?" Mary asks.

I scan the white cloth under the egg for the darkblue fluid. "I don't think so," I say. We have to be really careful for phlegm-contamination, this is what makes the process so delicate. If the phlegm-sack breaks, you can just throw away the whole egg and the subject's life down on earth will be unbearably miserable. If we could, we would, but we are not able to restore those things because the phlegm and its containment-membrane(which is the phlegm-sack) are just too ephemeral for our tentacles.

"Ok, hand me the pincers now," Mary says.

I give him the pincers and he starts removing the first piece of egg-shell. "Thickness two or three tenths," he says, "beautiful, just beautiful."

The woman doesn't cry, which is a good sign. They usually cry when we remove the first piece and they start seeing the shallow truths: loved ones, sins, desires. We have to start at the top where the easy truths are, because if you start at the bottom... Well, the subject will turn plain crazy. I've heard of species, some rude type of extragalactical lizards, who just crack open the shell anywhere they like, not caring about how the subject feels. This is really condemnable I think.

"Such a beautiful shell, just two or three thick," Mary whispers.

"Maybe she's a buddist or something," I say. We once had a man who had almost no shell. He was a buddist monk we captured when he was sitting on the icy planes of Kathmandu. We were so amazed about this.

"Hand me the salt and pepper," Mary says as he retreats the piece of shell from the tissue.

"But Mary, the baby cries."

"Listen, I'm trembling with hunger, I cannot operate when I trembe like this."

"Ok than," I say. While he eats, I look at the subject. She's just staring transfixed at the ceiling. "Oh Vincent, Vincent, I'm so sorry," she whispers and I wonder if Vincent is some old darling of her, or maybe a lost child. I slowly stroke her hair, to comfort her a little.

"Ok, I'm ready for the rest now," Mary says.

When we're done operating, I take the subject back to the pod where she can rest. She's trembling and she's crying now, but the phlegm-sack is still intact.

We were able to remove almost half of her egg-shell, almost to the point where she would be able to see the purpose of her life and her place in the universe. We didn't dare to go further, but it's a good harvest we got from her and the shell is both light and fresh, just two or three tenths thick, which is very good for the baby.

She looks at me with that strange mix of enlightenment and fear they always have after an operation.

"You rest now," I say as I close the pod-door.

"Dinner's served!" Mary shouts from the other side of the ship.

** Written after the NY-times-article "The Humane Egg." Which title I misinterpreted :)