THE EGG

All that remains.

BY S.B. DIVYA

In the corner of the night-darkened room, tucked next to the sofa, the Egg rested on its pedestal like a modern sculpture. Its quiet hum was the only sound in the apartment; its green indicator the only light. The screen on the front of the ovoid was dark, not revealing the partially formed creature incubating within.

That wasn't right. The screen had never once been off, not while *she* had been here. She was gone now. She had slipped away quietly, without fuss, much as she'd lived.

"Promise," she had demanded, her voice raspy, as the smells of disinfectant and rot permeated his pores. "Promise that you'll keep it going."

"I promise," he'd lied. "Don't worry." He clutched the pills in his pocket with one hand.

In the end, she had been reduced to skin and bones. Her hand, clasping his, was a papery claw. She had always been scrawny. He'd called her chicken legs when they first met, and she'd retorted with "stupid head". Insults had never been her strong point. They were six years old. Love came years later, and the cancer not long after that.

She was cured the first time. A designer molecule flooded her system, keeping the traitorous cells at bay.

"Let's have a baby," she said when hope was allowed back into their house.

"Let's have two," he responded, and they both grinned like fools and got started.

They found out not long afterwards that the molecule that kept her alive was poison to any fetus. They spent the remainder of his inheritance on the Egg — and the hormones and extractions and fertilizations.

"It will be every bit your baby," promised the specialists.

She let them record her heartbeat and intestinal sounds for playback. The two of them used the microphone daily to stimulate budding ear drums. She sang her favourite songs in her off-key shower voice. He played his guitar and read cooking magazines aloud. They stared at the screen in fascination, watching it transform from a tadpole to an alien. The sofa seat nearest the Egg turned into a sinkhole.

The second cancer snuck in, quiet and efficient, while they were busy looking the other way. She needed another designer molecule, but she was too far down the queue. The money that would have bought her way higher was gone, so the doctors tried the old fashioned poisons. She lost her strength, the contents of her stomach and every hair on her body, but she didn't miss a day singing to the Egg.

Watching her reclining against the cylindrical pedestal, forehead resting on the warm ovoid above, he loved her even more.

"You're beautiful," he said.

She grinned, all teeth in a skeletal face. "You've never lied to me before."

"And I'm not lying now."

The second cancer took her swiftly. The apartment looked just as it had when they'd left for the hospital two days ago, but nothing was the same. The faint glow of city lights bled around the curtain edges, painting the room in a monochromatic palette. The Egg glinted,

beckoning him. He shuffled towards it slowly like an old man and tripped on the edge of the rug — the rug that they'd chosen together to cushion tender baby feet and dimpled knees.

With a trembling hand he reached out and turned on the screen. It almost looked human now, although the head was too large and the body too skinny, sort of like she had looked in those last days of life. His hand moved of its own accord, navigating the menu screens, delving deep to find that buried option that came with every Egg. His fingers hovered over the number pad.

"I'm sorry, little one," he whispered. "This isn't how the road was supposed to go. I wish — if only —" He sighed. "I can't do this alone, and there's no one left for you but me, a poor excuse for a father." He drew his hand back. "Wait. Let's go together. I can do that much for you."

He stood and walked to the kitchen. His steps felt lighter now that the decision was made. He filled a glass with water, just enough to swallow a few pills. As he walked the scant distance back to the Egg, he reached into his pocket and retrieved the tablets. Their small white forms gleamed like pearls in his palm.

He reclined against the Egg, as she had, and closed his eyes. *You've never lied to me before.* Her words rattled like marbles in his skull. An involuntary tear traced its way down the contours of his face. It was the pinhole in the dam, and he felt all his grief push against it and then break through.

The sobs crashed over him in great waves, and he wrapped his arms around the warm Egg, clinging to it like a buoy in a storm. The glass and pills fell from his hands, forgotten in the tempest. An eternity passed before he went limp from exhaustion and fell asleep, his body curled around the Egg's pedestal. The menu system quietly and automatically exited to the start, and the screen went black. ■

S. B. Divya holds degrees in computational neuroscience and signal processing. She is an engineer, the family calendar keeper and an author of short fiction. She also blogs at www.eff-words.com. This story is dedicated to the memory of her friend, Kevin Kanai Griffith (24 March–17 October 2014).

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