

An Egg of Her Own

I. The Cleansing Process

The Offspring Warehouse is so clinical that if the government only applied such strict regulations to our food supply, we'd have no salmonella or staphylococcal food poisoning.

We begin with the Baptism, which is a steamy microdermabrasion shower meant to rid us of all skin-level germs and toxins. I feel downright post-spa-experience as I step into a steel chamber where I'm air buffed and machine-fitted with a white touring suit. My husband greets me on the other side of the privacy panel and we're ready to select our new egg!

II. Finding the Right Match

While we did discuss the possibility of choosing a brown egg during our work-up consultations with the Warehouse Manager last month, within the last week we've really justified our white egg pick. Brown and white eggs are being taken home equally now, praise the Maker, so there's really no need to "slot something in" to the family in the spirit of inclusion anymore. Confident and eager, we tell our Egg Guide that we're ready to tour the White Hatchery.

A conveyor belt takes us along to peer at the eggs below, which are nestled in white feathers in their little clear carts. Each has a unique bow so we can mark down the ones that seem promising. And though the anti-egg traditionalists see lunacy in this step since "an egg is an egg is an egg," subtle differences in size, shape, and general egg aura can make or break families. A well-trained eye and an intuitive mother will choose correctly. And as the last little cart appears below us, with an egg wrapped in

crushed red velvet, we know that's our child in there, waiting to hatch in our homes and into our hearts.

III. Paperwork and Instructions

I'm pleased that we filled out most of our paperwork at home, because it's certainly involved and thick in quantity. But all of this makes perfect sense, of course: you can't just walk off with an egg if you're not ready for an egg. They stop short of actually issuing you a parental license, but I think most couples would be alright with that level of regulation.

We paid our \$15,000 egg fee, had our at-home study proving that the egg is being transferred into a hospitable and nurturing environment, passed all of our background and psychoanalysis testing, and here we are, finally signing the release forms. There is a 10-day waiting period before the delivery, providing one last chance for couples to back-out if there's doubt, but then that heated truck will roll into our driveway and make the long-anticipated egg drop.

In a beige administration office, the Warehouse Manager clears his throat. "You folks will be exceptional parents. But I do want to go over the really critical components of egg care one last time, aloud, just to fully ensure understanding and compliance. As you know, our eggs are given an organic varnish coating for shell strength, but breakage can and does occur."

We lean forward and nod with grave seriousness, ready for anything, holding hands under the table.

“The less you touch the egg, the better,” he begins. “Do not pick up the egg. Do not rotate the egg. Do not tap upon the egg. Adding light adornments, such as soft fabrics to decorate for party circuits, is acceptable. Painting the egg is never acceptable.”

We nod again.

“I must make this point one more time: painting the egg is never acceptable. Not for Easter, not for any purpose or reason. There is simply no “safe paint,” despite what you might hear from other egg parents or read on Pinterest. Seepage can and does occur.”

He shudders for emphasis.

We sign the final release forms and leave his office, stepping out into the parking lot and into our 10-day wait. As we approach our car, I notice a couple comforting each other on a bench outside of the warehouse. The woman is dressed in red and white florals, probably in her late 30s, looking particularly delicate in the fading sunlight under a blooming poplar tree. There are rusty tears on her cheeks, taking eye makeup with as the tears crawl to the edge of her face. The man beside her looks chalky and pained, his gaze fixed on the spring grass below their feet.

I try not to stare, but glance back at them once more as I slide into my seat.

“What do you suppose happened?” I ask softly as my husband backs out of the lot.

“We can only guess,” he tells me as we drive away. “Maybe their application was denied. Maybe something bad happened at home or along the way.”

IV. Nesting

I guess I have New Parent Neurosis, but I created an egg registry despite the egg only needing the heating lamp it will arrive with. The incubating nursery, adorned with scenes from classic children's books and painted in modern soft purples and grays, has a forward-thinking storage system that nicely organizes light bulbs, fabric swatches, pre-made bows, extra bedding, non-toxic plastic cleaners for the egg's cart, and an assortment of countdown stickers to hang off the front of the cart to properly document our egg's journey. In a whimsical pastel bookshelf on the adjoining wall, I've stored the Egg Journal and mounted the Soft Soothing Sounds Station in case we encounter any road construction on our street or bothersome barking dogs during this delicate period of growth. And my girlfriends were kind enough to pool their money for the Egg Monitor 5.0, which is a lightweight blanket with a complex computer monitoring system inside the fibers to detect movements and shell thinning, complete with that blessed feature no new egg parent can be without: the alarm that triggers when hatching begins. (Yes, I already signed up to have this alarm ring our cell phones, too; it'd be a waste of money if I didn't.)

I look around the incubating nursery with satisfaction, anticipation. It's so beautiful and welcoming; just the place for a young egg to thrive. My husband glides up to my side, wrapping his arms around me as we stare at the empty spot that will house the egg cart.

"I can't wait until the hatching so we can finally have a big celebration shower with everyone," I tell him as I straighten the cheerful stuffed animals lining the windows.

"I know," he tells me gently. "But do enjoy this time. They're only an egg once."

V. The Delivery

I'm already a hot mess by six in the morning, re-dusting the incubating nursery for the third time in two days and monitoring atmospheric conditions in different corners with my handheld The Air is Fair box (probably the twentieth gift my parents, the excited grandparents-to-be, have sent over in the last week). I wake my husband to voice my concern about a window draft. "It's fine," he says. "It's all completely fine. Everything was approved during the in-home inspection, remember?"

Still, I have to power walk around the neighborhood and brew multiple cups of tea to keep from imploding with nerves and joy until the delivery truck arrives at ten.

Two men in crisp black suits ring our bell. Since they came directly from the Offspring Warehouse, I was expecting a blue-collar approach with husky men and unloading ramps, but I'm pleased that our \$15,000 at least provides well-groomed professionals at our doorstep for the installation. I am more pleased to discover our fee also includes a photographer to capture this moment on our behalf!

The truck's metal door opens and we see our first glimpse of the egg, tightly wrapped in bubble padding in its provided incubator and anchored into place with six leather cords for stability. Naturally, I burst into tears at the beauty of the scene.

"A day I'll never forget," I whisper as the men in suits roll the incubator into my home and down the hall. I trail behind at a distance, marveling, taking it all in, trying to deeply layer these memories into my brain so I can tell our future child about her arrival into her home. The photographer is behind me, his camera's shutter making pleasing soft clicks as he moves along.

The men are already locking the wheels into place when I enter the incubating nursery, then they begin the careful task of removing the bubble padding. "Remember,

only we are allowed to turn your egg like this,” they tell us, but still full of smiles and sunshine for the new parents. It’s all absolutely perfect and I am glowing, radiant, ready for our adventure ahead.

Minutes later they are back in their truck and we are alone with our egg, finally.

“So this is it. This is really happening,” I say.

My husband says nothing, instead gazing upon the egg with dewy eyes and a tender new-father smile.

VI. The Long Wait

I am in the egg’s room, again, watching the morning light puddle around the humming incubator. I have spent the better part of the last two months in this room, sitting on the glider rocker, thinking, standing to study the shell. I know the location of each tiny shell freckle, each itty-bitty shell dimple, each subtle vein crossing over the top and sides. It’s a map to my child, these physical clues, and I want to know everything.

The door clicks open and my husband comes in carrying an omelette. “For you,” he says, extracting a fork and napkin from his pocket.

“It looks runny for an omelette,” I tell him. “It isn’t undercooked, is it?”

He leaves to make a fresh plate.

VII. Our First Holiday

I have just put on my fancy church earrings and decide to make the announcement.

“I’m going to decorate the egg,” I say firmly. “I want our child looking radiant for our first holiday as a real family. I want this day to be special.”

It's Easter Sunday, and watching the kids in the park across the street finish their hunts and run into their parents' arms has me cracking. I want that. I want the table set for three with puffy dinner rolls warming in the oven. I want lemonade in a glass pitcher with real lemon slices and a ceramic rabbit centerpiece, too.

"You may not, under any circumstance, decorate our egg," my husband warns, suddenly sounding more like my father than my husband. "Get ahold of yourself. You've only got a few weeks to wait."

But I am persistent. "Cathy says you can buy these kits from the craft store that are widely used and no one has ever said anything bad happened and—"

"No," he finishes. "No."

VIII. Defiance

I wait until well past two in the morning to wheel the incubator out of the house, the now-unplugged cords wrapped around the handle so nothing drags behind me. It's too humid to sleep, and thus I feel perfectly fine about escaping for a little stroll around the block with my egg, which I know is warm enough to handle the temperature shift and strong enough to handle a few bumps on the sidewalk, too. Mother's intuition.

"We'll never tell your father about this," I say, feeling particularly alive and excited, surely the only one awake in my neighborhood. "I'll even fudge the First Walk in the Stroller entry in your journal. Our secret."

I am still in my church clothes, still wearing my fancy earrings. I think about how our lives have already changed so much these past few months, despite the only formal requirement being checking the egg once a day for any signs of cracking or disturbances. I just *feel* so different, like I'm really fulfilling my purpose, like I'm really on

my way to a deeper understanding of my role in the family and in the world at large. Everything's changing, and I couldn't be happier. And even though my aunt and second-cousin have been dead for twelve years now, I somehow feel closer to them, too. This egg has connected me to a past I never intimately knew, never bothered to process and understand. I will work harder on my current relationships.

The houses on my street are still, restful and quiet, except for the occasional front motion light that flicks on as I pass and one lone sprinkler head whirring in the dark. I am nearing the cul-de-sac turnaround point when I see a silhouette of a man bouncing a fussy baby behind a sheer curtain. My heart explodes into love-fireworks, and I lean down to softly kiss the egg's shell.

"Soon," I assure my egg. "Very soon."

IX. The Hatching

Tell your girlfriends it's money well spent: the fancy Egg Monitor 5.0 begins dutifully beeping and ringing our phones at the precise moment the egg starts to stir. (I know because I was perched in my usual spot beside the egg.) It's 8:23 on a Friday night, a wonderful time for this blessed event because there are no employers to notify on the weekend and traffic will be light for the elated well-wishers arriving tomorrow morning. Also, our delightful little egg is already six days overdue from the Estimated Hatching Date, and my lower back couldn't be in worse shape from all the sitting around and watching. And it's all nearly behind me now.

"IT'S TIME!" I yell down the hallway. "IT'S TIME RIGHT NOW!"

My husband tumbles into the room, nacho crumbs on his shirt and the video camera in his hands, just as I'd instructed him to bring when the hatching began. He is

visibly shaky and I place my palms on his shoulders, calmly massaging his neck. “You can do this,” I say. “We can both do this.”

We watch the egg, which is lightly tipping from side to side on its own. It’s the first time I’ve ever seen it move. I am suddenly very aware of my breathing, of my husband’s breathing, the way his hair falls across his forehead, the way we looked when we started this journey four years ago.

The egg shell makes a loud cracking noise, splitting in two.

I gasp with joy and lean down, ready to pull my newborn to my chest.

X. Afterglow

The first few months of parenthood went by quickly, just as everyone says they do. We noted the milestones, celebrated small victories, did three loads of laundry each day, took solace in all-nighters with Mexican food from the take-out place with late hours. The tears were sometimes endless from all sides, but I’d do it again.

I often think back on those days in the incubating nursery, which of course is now outfitted with a mahogany crib where the egg cart used to be. All that time spent waiting and watching. Some will never experience the wonder of what we did, even though infertility felt like a curse handed down upon learning our fate, one laced with shame and frustration instead of tied up with crushed red velvet.

My baby smiles at me, and I am renewed.