

The Egg Whisk

by Sari Cunningham

Two days after his bypass surgery she walked in on the nurse adjusting his catheter and dispensing dietary advice. “No more omelets,” and then a playful laugh, cut short by her entrance. She studied the nurse. Asian. Young. A plain oval face, opaque except for a birthmark streaking the right cheek like chicken shit. The name tag read ‘Tamako’ — ‘Precious child’. *Tamago*, she thought, *means egg in Japanese*. The difference of a letter. A bird outside the window cried out three times. Something cracked inside her. *A cuckoo*, she reflected, *lays its eggs in another bird's nest*. And then, bitterly, *and they say the Japanese have a sense of honor*.

He had a penchant for making extravagant 10-egg omelets for his lovers, which explained why his cholesterol had reached so high a level. He liked to experiment with different flavors, depending on the tastes of his paramours. That's how, 2 years ago, she had discovered he was warming his skillet with his Mexican secretary — the receipts for chili peppers and cartons of eggs, accompanied by the onset of an acute attack of gastric ulcers, had given him away. He was intolerant to spicy food. It had been pleasurable to watch him sweat.

To his credit, he'd always shaken his egg whisk outside of the home. Until last month, when she had returned from a weekend at her daughter's to be confronted by a glistening mountain of slimy eggshells in the garbage can. A half-spent tube of wasabi paste nestled triumphantly against the shattered remains. She knew what those shards meant. He had denied it, of course. *What a chicken*. At the same time, she had discovered the foreign egg whisk in the kitchen drawer — a cutesy, gimmicky, feminine looking article. “A gift,” he had said off-handedly, “from a friend.” She knew of the potential for behavioral changes post-surgery, even though he hadn't allowed her to accompany him to the hospital for his consultations. She had closed her eyes on that obscenity of eggshells and pictured

him on the surgeon's table, ribcage cracked open, the yolk of his heart revealed. *When he wakes up, he'll have a different one.*

She walked out of the hospital and went home to pack her bags. *You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs.* Which was as good a reason as any as to why she had stayed so long, but he was permanently scrambled, and no surgery could fix that. *All the king's horses and all the king's men...* On the way out of the house, she swiped the egg whisk. She had no use for it, but it gave her satisfaction knowing that he'd miss it. Later, when he left angry messages on her answering machine, she'd take it out and beat the air with it. The egg whisk always managed to take on Tamago's expression — properly surprised and somewhat frightened.

