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Obermaier A Duck

Obermaier sits at his breakfast table and runs his hands over the dark wood. In front of him there is a boiled egg which he prepared for himself a few moments ago, and the egg is sitting whole, steaming, and unviolated in a delicate little white porcelain egg cup which he bought for himself from a market discovered on a lonely trip to Spain about seven years ago.

Obermaier is a quiet duck and he will take the time to enjoy simple moments of pleasure where he finds them. Now, it is early morning and the bright white light entering his cramped and bare kitchen through the window is catching the tiny wisps of steam rising from the egg, and he is watching them dance around and he is also feeling the grain of the wooden table under his fingers. It is, he thinks, lovely.

Next to the egg cup, resting on the table, there is a golden teaspoon that Obermaier is planning to use to break open the egg, and then to scoop out its innards and deliver them to his waiting beak. It is an ornate thing, this spoon, quite delicate also, and he enjoys it immensely. He has owned it for fourteen years, since it was given to him by his uncle who was dying. He uses it every morning for his egg.

It is a Sunday today, and on Sundays Obermaier makes sure not to do much, because he thinks it is nice to do not much on a Sunday. It is perfectly logical. Sunday is a day for treating oneself, and for indulging one's senses, thinks Obermaier. He spends an extra few seconds very consciously feeling the grain of that lovely dark wood underneath his fingers and he feels very present. Then he notices that the little wisps of steam are trembling away, and he thinks that he had better get on and eat that egg, and so he does.

The egg is good, and after he has finished eating it, Obermaier lays down the spoon (paying special attention that it sits neatly at right angles to the table's edges) and looks at the leftover egg shell. He thinks about how frail and beautiful the little Spanish egg cup is, and about how sad he was when he bought it. Happier now, thinks Obermaier. And what a good choice; somehow he was prescient - this walnut table is perfect, perfect, and all in this little white kitchen. It's humble but it must be beautiful. That is what Obermaier thinks.

For a few minutes, Obermaier sits still and the thoughts whirl around in his mind. There is a very, very soft stillness in the small, bright kitchen, and if Obermaier bothered to listen he would be able to hear the quiet rush of Sunday traffic far, far below. Then suddenly he catches himself, and tries to remember what he was thinking about. He wants another egg, and today is Sunday - a day for exceptions, allowances, treats - and so he decides to prepare one.

The silence is broken as Obermaier pushes back the low stool on which he has been sitting. Its feet scrape on the concrete floor. Obermaier picks up his egg cup and walks to the cupboard under the sink, wooden, painted white, and he opens the door. Inside is the bin, and the stink of abandoned scraps and cuttings escapes as Obermaier lifts the lid. The smell makes the air sticky viscous and Obermaier inhales deeply through his nares and is disgusted. Still, he savours the stench. He dumps the eggshell and rinses out the egg cup, and dries it with a tea towel and puts in on the table again to await the second egg.

Now Obermaier waddles out of the kitchen and into the small passage which doesn't have any windows. A little way down he opens a door and walks into the storage cupboard and flicks on the light. This room is Obermaier's least favourite one. It is very small, the ceiling is a little lower than in the other rooms, and there isn't a window - but it is always warm because the hot water heater is in here. Obermaier has made this room his chicken coop. He built a cage for his hen when he moved in, up against the back wall.

The hen is lying on the floor of the cage amongst the straw which Obermaier provided. She doesn't move, not even a tiny twitch, even though she knows Obermaier is there. Obermaier remembers from this morning that she has an extra egg or two under her.

Obermaier picks up the metal pole from against the wall and hits the cage, and it makes an awful clanging. "Move," he says sternly.

The hen jerks herself up, recoils from the noise and from Obermaier. She pushes her body against the back wall and she watches as the lid of the cage is lifted and Obermaier reaches in to pick up one of the warm eggs that had been beneath her. She watches his hand very carefully and she is thinking about what she might do to that hand, one day. Her very circular, black eyes look at the eggs and at Obermaier's hands. The cage rattles as the lid closes again and the hen's eyes watch Obermaier's webbed feet waddle away and then there is darkness and she thinks about that hand.

Back in the kitchen, Obermaier lights the stove and sets a little bronze pot of water to boil and thinks about how nice the bubbles will sound when they arrive.