

The Egg of Whitechapel.

By Elspeth Walker

An egg, cracked open on the floor. He sent it to me via WhatsApp. The bold, *please do not touch the artwork* sign still in the frame. I'm not sure what conversation it was supposed to spike. Was I to ridicule? Was it to prove he did like art as well, that this hadn't all been a lie? My mind wanted to question whether I was the egg, a shell that was cracked a long time ago, and now is inviting him within. Just a crisping shell, reminiscent of an innocence remembered, but not existing. Safety. That's what I'm attracted to now, that and a conversation about art. So maybe the egg represents vulnerability, and he is a cocoon to grow in. But people are never meant to be things. That's how trouble starts, and soon I shall be falling for eggshells rather than a man. I guess this is my London now. With cryptic shells, that a man dramatically zooms into as he flirts with me, who is on a fine line to being a stranger.

Before our first date I go into the gallery, to see the melted forms, empty shoes and spliced figures on swings, stumbling through digital frames and up a set of stairs to see this egg that we are supposed to be. One I can't tell him I went searching for before I let him see me. Everyone in my life has insisted I work on my intensity. Yet he seems to mirror mine, and in a swirl of things, when everything is an abstract to be unpicked and understood, like every work that enters a gallery, then doesn't it then become normal? Doesn't unpicking things become our constant, like the calcium frame that shelters a creature that's growing.

I've been eating eggs more lately, the insides not the shells, in an attempt to gain higher protein levels and lose weight. Be a little less my natural curves just in case he comes home with me. Yet, I can't seem to resist frying them, and so it is having an adverse effect. What happened to the inside of that egg? I need to find it and read the gallery interpretations, the descriptive text, as if it were leaves at the bottom of a cup, or a new horoscope for the day. But how does one crack an egg so perfectly and not shatter it before it has time to exist as just a shell? Is it done without thinking, or is there an angle that must be hit? Was it broken here or elsewhere – does location ever matter when ripping something open? These walls will not forget they housed an egg shell but not a whole egg. I will not forget my oracle: the egg shell of Whitechapel.

When I see the egg, it belongs to an ostrich. Somehow, I feel detached in a joyous way; for once I am not just that fertile thing. But the mask to breathe, and the mattress nearby, draws me back to thinking what if this is us? A pair that doesn't exist yet, but within this space I'm using the egg as an omen for what we might be. Which I think is saving each other from loneliness. Reminding each other not everything is supposed to be painful. Yet, the shell is cracked, and that bed is not made. There is an essence of incompleteness across this set up.

I want to linger on the egg. Actually, I want to bend down to ask it, to whisper into its frame, what my future will be. To hear my words echo off of its side like it was a temple, and some greater power would answer me. If that didn't work I would touch it gently, the smooth sides and then see what mystic replies come out. Yet, I am scared of strangers

judging eyes, and at this time I am not alone. And, most importantly, eggs in galleries are not eggs at home. I cannot touch this. An egg is always stolen. Then placed in a home and becomes something you touch freely. Then, when you place it in the gallery you eradicate this freedom. Something stolen, conquered, broken and then left to be without touch. Does it beg for fingers to break the rules or enjoy the boundary that no one else has afforded it? Do I crave to be heard, touched and be allowed to be left alone? I'm sick of going to houses and becoming some object they can poke freely.

This egg shell is becoming too much of a bad memory, when it was supposed only to be fresh, a plain surface to daydream on. I need to leave. I march through the stacks of history, trying to ignore my mind telling me of my own past. Then the room breaks and a hundred pigeons are on the floor, dead or dying. I pray they didn't come from my egg. But now I must leave and let life consume me. When the moment is over that night, I will think of the egg shell of Whitechapel. I will imagine cradling it so softly, hoping he will do the same to my skin.