

ENGLAND WITH EGGS

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‘Exiles notoriously feed much on hopes, and are unlikely to stay in banishment unless they are obliged.’

– George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

‘What’s that? An egg?’

– Samuel Beckett, ‘Whoroscope’



PROLOGUE



I is small, and I wraps themselves around things that are also small.

They lay a small-boned object on a piece of newsprint paper, then draw a line around it in pencil, then on to the next thing. The same shape is traced over and over, and it's always an oval. To keep things here.

But the itchy-bitsy bodies are imaginary friends. Now they're not here, as though I covered a short candle with a glass and watched its flame die out. Only the oval outline is left. And, occasionally, I starts again after this happens.

I wraps themselves around things they now imagine a little larger so I'll eventually get stretched enough to accommodate an actual egg. Too much love killed the egg and the egg was what I loved and the truth is that there was never a story that I liked.

Again, only the oval outline is left, and I draws the same shape even larger and over and over, and it's always an oval. The paper ends up covered in these recurring incidents.

It's something like an alphabet.

I goes over the egg shapes with ink and brush, except this time around they leave short, perpendicular brushstrokes along the way. I executes them, discreet violations, at regular intervals more or less.

I collects the broken shells like an artwork by Broodthaers.



TRANSLATION



Operator: Long distance.

The landline rings. It's a sentence that never ends, like these empty chairs. Black rotary dial phone. That's what's here.

Here is I and the voice on the telephone that's not I. Time here is mostly spent on the telephone and/or on the floor. It's like one, one, one, one, one, one, etc. Not a progression: it's a sentence without doors. The same full note played on a drum indefinitely.

Other people in person were rare then, when there, and rarer now, when here. And that's all the fault, maybe, of long distances and long-distance calls, which are longer long-distance calls as of late.

Bare here; chairs are the only furniture I likes to look at, and if I doesn't like the look of something then why bear the sight of it, here of all places.

Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, etc.

The chairs - not sure how many are here but sometimes they're different shapes and wooden, and they have metal bits on occasion. Not a single one is upholstered. Clean, slick lines and a chair goes so well with the black rotary dial phone, like nothing else. Empty chairs, usually near occupied beds, and a telephone ringing in the distance also go together as a rule. Except here there are no proper beds to speak of.

There's a voice on the ringing's tail: the telephone's promise. The infancy of a word sets tongues wagging.

Ring. There it is again.

The telephone rings just the same and frustrates its vow of voice. It's about to be a broken promise if I doesn't answer as I, on the floor, thinks of doing.

One, one, one, one, one, one, etc.

Then hello is the end of a perfect sentence. I says, Hello, can you hear me now?

And I says, Hello, and hangs up the phone.

The landline rings again. First at irregular intervals. Then at regular intervals. Then at irregular intervals. Then it doesn't ring. Then it rings constantly. Then it doesn't ring.

Here is somewhere in England.

Goodnight.

Before, it was Brazil.

When you get hurt in Portuguese you say 'ai'. It's pronounced like 'I' in English. Or eye or aye or even more words stuck to the same stinging phoneme. (Could every alienated word be dissected into pain ejaculations from far-off places?)

There I would say: I, it hurts.

And if it was too much ache I would say: I, I, I, I, I, I.

I's mother tongue is patient and severe and here it hides behind certain sounds, behind their vocal folds as if peeping through an ugly curtain. It resonates faintly as an accent in the corners of sentences I can't fully master when they use I for someone speaking English.

Only someone who's been here from the start transubstantiates into a person when there's I.

Not I.

I is a transliteration. I borrows a first sound of pain to speak in a second language.

There's no one here no matter how many times I says it.

I, I, I, I, I, I.

I sleeps from dawn onwards and wakes up at English evenfall. Here night is the day of the voice back home. The voice on the telephone says, Who'd have thought you'd end up so far away? The voice falters.

Whereas the wretchedness of the where was wholehearted there, here it's weepy. Lately calls end up mostly in tears. I can't stop the voice from crying, even if I tries to keep the calls short and dry and that's just life, they say.

They repeat old bits, bits of sentences and sayings without knowing how else to halt the bawling. Apparently nothing works.

The voice says, I've learned not to keep things to myself anymore and I'm saying that I'm upset and unwell and I still wanted to speak with you and I've been trying for a long time and it just takes a few seconds and there are people on the other side who expect something too. Just think about it.

And the voice says, How would you feel if you were on the other side?

I digs into the hole where they put their tongue to sleep.

And I says, I really don't know.

The voice has a pain that I doesn't like the sound of and the voice knows that. But pain is such a fine thing to talk about first thing on the telephone; it makes distances contract until teeny-weeny and there are organ piles alike here and there and sore.

When I hears pain, I feels pain - and I doesn't like that either. But it's usually what happens, even if the voice smuggles pain into the conversation in disguise: costumes of itchy throat, chatty costumes, high-pitched costumes, etc. They are always

at the voice's disposal, lined up for the next call with their unbreathing fabrics unwashed.

I says, Every time I pick up the phone I'm so scared I'll hear something bad.

And the voice says, But I always feel better after.

I says, I can hear you.

And the voice says, Yes.

And I says, I think.

And the voice says, Yes.

And I says, Are you feeling better yet?

And the voice says, I can.

And I says, Are you.

And the voice says, Do you.

And I says, I said.

And the voice says, No.

And I says, I can't.

And the voice says, I said.

And I says, It's difficult like this.

And the voice says, I can still.

And I says, Cutting off.

And the voice says, Better yes but.

And I says, I don't.

And the voice says, I can hear you.

And I says, I said.

And the voice says, Listen to me.

And I says, There's a delay.

And the voice says, Hello.

Talking often, and absentmindedly especially, is completely normal. People are ordinarily yappy, unwinding the habitual, pale sentences expected in particular places in a conversation. This is something I no longer knows much about.

It's odd that once, among other people, I would spit such phrases out with ease - to the point that I thought they sounded okay when they so clearly didn't. Now it's only to the voice on the telephone that I speaks them, uncomfortably, when I seldom speaks.

It's been too long since other kinds of conversation were had and it's the voice that's stayed all this time, and talking to a stranger would be a mad thing to do now anyway. (So much thinking then about how sentences are formed and what should be said and in what order.)

The telephone sits on a chair. I is sprawled on the floor, not far from its wooden legs.

I waits for the next call. Maybe this time when I hears the voice, whose sound is weirdly familiar, I can start saying things naturally, answer the voice without thinking. And the voice could function like a house that informs routines over time. And if you've lived in it for a really long time, you always know what to do, when, and where.

But here is not that kind of house.

Here is a stranger's place. It's where lying on the floor, for God knows how long, seems like the least-strange pursuit.

So much of I's body here has to do with the place where the body lies strange. It's how different corners, angles and chairs, and most often floorboards, accommodate this body's disposition to a few positions, all awkward. And equally how

sometimes they don't, which is when I's body curls up and suckles its own tail, in waiting.

This room is control. It's dark, sober, so it can curb passion or similar fits of giggling. Every object is calculated and appreciated as though laid before a volatile audience.

The telephone, for instance, is monotone and constant when it rings - the silent interval between two identical rings lasts the same amount of time, always - and that's reassuring.

Nonetheless, and even if inadvertently, the telephone brews an ill-defined impulse beneath the steady soundscape: the longer the telephone rings, the more the voice on the other side wants to speak. It's this yearning, wild at heart, that makes the telephone less predictable and not answering less appealing. The voice's longing needs to be kept from spreading uncontrollably like love weeds on I's small stage - even if it would be more comfortable not to raise their floppy arm, lift the receiver and bring it all the way down to the floor, to listen instead to the telephone's promise being broken over and over, which would give it a kind of realism.

As a compromise, I waits until the telephone rings six times before answering and so gives a more precise form, albeit fragile, to the voice's now-pruned desire.

Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, and I picks up the receiver and a weight is shortly lifted. Tucked between their ear and the floor, the receiver bears the weight of their whole head.

I mellows out, says, Hello, shyly - as I starts to unearth the tongue that spent sunlight without moving or being moved.

It's the voice's turn.

The voice says, Hello.

I need to say something now, I think, and I digs deeper and plunges their whole arm into the ground, so to speak. More of that something that speaks has to be exhumed.

But I doesn't tickle the tongue's dead body. I spends the whole night with fists instead of hands so as not to touch or be touched. Language mostly stays in its dangerous hole in the ground, where I watches it sleep, and I gurgles.

I fills the hole back up when they put the receiver back in its cradle. And that's also reassuring.

Goodbye.