

Every Faberge egg has its own fascinating history. But the most entertaining and teachable Faberge egg story belongs to that of the third Imperial egg. The journey of this egg gives us an erudite lesson on the value of taking time to notice details.

Tsar Alexander III commissioned Faberge to make the third Imperial egg as a gift to his wife Maria Feodorovna for Easter 1886. In 1917, the Russian Revolution erupted, and many members of the royal family who owned the Faberge eggs were killed. Their eggs, including the third Imperial egg, were confiscated by authorities. During the ensuing chaos, this third Imperial egg completely disappeared from record. For the next eighty-seven years, no one knows what happened to it.

Then in 2004, a fancy little jeweled egg suddenly appeared at an antiques show in the Midwest United States. No one at the antiques fair, including the dealer hoping to sell it, had knowledge about the origin of this egg. A scraps metal dealer attending the show walked by and noticed the sparkling jeweled piece. He began to haggle over a price for it. The scraps metal dealer thought the egg was a lovely little thing. Sizing it up, he figured he could sell it for parts and get his money back, if necessary. He even thought he could melt down the gold from the egg and make a small profit if he had to. The two men quibbled away, neither having a clue what they were squabbling over.

The two men eventually agreed on a price. Satisfied, the scraps metal dealer took his new egg home where he set it on his kitchen counter. The more he looked at his purchase, the more he admired it. He decided not to disassemble the egg for parts or melt it down. Instead, he attempted to sell the egg to others. But no one was interested. For the next eight years the third Imperial Faberge Egg sat in this man's kitchen, where he stared at it each day while eating his breakfast.

The reason for what happened next is not exactly clear. What we do know is that one morning after many years, the man got the thought to examine his egg more closely. He rose up from his breakfast chair, walked across the kitchen, and picked the egg up off the counter. He opened it.

Inside was a watch. The man knew about the watch, of course. But on this day, for whatever reason, he decided to inspect the watch more closely. And for the very first time, he saw a small detail. On the watch was a tiny engraving. The name inscribed read Vacheron Constantin. The man sat down at his computer and typed into its search bar the words "Vacheron Constantin egg." An article describing the third Imperial Faberge egg appeared upon his screen. The feature included a picture of the egg and explained that Vacheron Constantin had been its watchmaker.

The man, carrying photos of his egg, soon boarded a plane to London. In England, Faberge experts examined the pictures. Then, they all flew back to America, eventually arriving at the man's humble kitchen. There, the Faberge experts inspected the egg. They informed the man that this small decorative item he possessed was valued at approximately thirty-three million dollars. Days later, the third Imperial Faberge egg was sold to a private collector for a very large, undisclosed amount.