In the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid. GEORGE, an old, round man with thick, equally round glasses, and his wife, LILIAN, argue in front of Velazquez’s 1623–26 “Philip IV of Spain.” Other paintings surround, including Velazquez’s 1620 “La Venerable Madre Jerónima de la Fuente”, his 1622 “Portrait of Francisco Pacheco”, and his 1628–1629 “The Triumph of Bacchus.”

LILIAN. (groaning) Forty-seven years of this. I can’t stand it anymore.

She storms off, leaving her husband looking at the plaque mounted beside “Philip IV of Spain.” Just before GEORGE is about to move on to the next painting on the wall, PHILIP begins to speak aloud with irritated urgency:

PHILIP. (in a thick Spanish accent; think Antonio Banderas) I cannot stand it anymore.

Behind the lenses of his glasses, GEORGE’s eyes widen in bewilderment to such huge size that he seems transformed into a lemur. He gawks at PHILIP.

PHILIP. That is right. You heard me.

GEORGE. (in an awestruck and aggressive whisper) Did you just speak?

PHILIP. Of course I spoke. What do you think I am—a doormat?

GEORGE. But, in English you spoke??

PHILIP. I have ‘picked it up’, as you foreigners like to say. You all adore to, uh, cómo se dice, ‘talk behind my back’ in English.
George begins to cough as if he has begun to choke on his dentures.

George. (to himself) This isn’t real. This isn’t real. This isn’t real.

Philip. (ignoring the man’s obvious disorientation) I am forced to stand here from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon, six days a week, and all you people do is look at me for five seconds. Excuse me; your wife looked at me for seven.

George. (sadly) That’s longer than she can bear to look upon me…

Philip. Face it. If I had not spoken to you, you would have finished reading that little plaque, taken a last quick glance, and moved on. Or you would have taken a—eh, cómo se dice, a selfie?—a picture of yourself with me, looked at your picture for longer than you looked at my painting, and then moved on. This is what most do. Oh, I especially hate those people that come in big groups and look at the tour guide for longer than they look at me. I am the work of art here, people, not Valentina.

Lillian approaches.

Lillian. George! Would you stop looking so mesmerized? It looks like you’ve just seen your mother’s ghost, for God’s sake. Oh, this painting. Poor boy. He’s got quite an unfortunately-sized head, no?

Philip. If I hear another one of you say that my head is too small and my legs too thin, juro por dios, I will…

Lillian. (shrieking) Agghh! George!

Philip. You are not going mad, Lilian. You are hearing me correctly. Look, I am just tired of not being paid any attention. I was just telling your husband…
LILIAN. (still shrieking) Geooorge!

GEORGE. (aside to his wife) Shh, Lilian, please. I know. I know it’s strange. But, look, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! This is the kind of thing you see in the movies. And it’s happening here, now—to us! Nothing ever happens to us.

*LILIAN is not unaffected by this last statement of her husband, yet is still cross. This is as usual.*

LILIAN. (crossing her arms) Fine. But let’s make this quick. The bullfight starts at seven and I’m not going to be late.

Meanwhile, PHILIP has continued talking aloud, if only to himself.

PHILIP. … in the last decade people have truly become less interested in me.
And not only me. Francisco Pacheco, Jerónima, and los borrachos all agree.
*(indicating *the drunks* depicted in a painting hanging on the opposite wall, “The Triumph of Bacchus”)*

Francisco is lucky; last week someone sat and sketched him for an hour.
Bah! One hardly sees that anymore. It seems like you are all more interested in your mobiles—that is how you say it, yes? ‘Mobiles’?

LILIAN. Well, we call them cellphones in the U.S., but I know what you mean, Philip. May I call you that?

PHILIP. Of course, I never liked the title anyway. Far too royal.

LILIAN. My granddaughter is glued to the thing. She even brings it to the dinner table, like it’ll help her digest.

PHILIP. Ha! You know, I once helped a woman digest. About ten years ago,
there was a woman who would come to visit me three or four times a week, during her lunch hour. No clicking away at her ‘cellphone’, no taking pictures. Just her. Some days she fidgeted, others she sat still. Some days her eyes smiled, some days they visited dark corners of her past. Over time, she looked at me differently. I could feel myself evolving in her eyes, changing along with her ever-changing self. She does not come by anymore. I like to think that she moved away. Spain did not treat her well.

LILIAN. Do you think about her often?

PHILIP. I do think about her. I wish her well. But, of course, she was a special case. Not many of us ever have the fortune to experience that with a human. Yet I believe that we are all intended to be appreciated for long periods of time by at least one.

[Beat.]

Only then do we shed our superficial function of decorating a room or acting as publicity for a noble. Only then does our greater meaning arise.

LILIAN. How do you mean?

PHILIP. Well, I know that when I am looked at quickly, I appear as a lanky prince, with tiny head, skinny legs, pale hands, an ill-fitted outfit. I have heard it thousands of times. Or, I am not given even a glance, and instead reduced to the description in that plaque next to me. What does it say, anyway?

LILIAN dons her glasses, pushing GEORGE aside to peer at the plaque.

LILIAN. It says that Velázquez was commissioned by your family to draw portraits of you, your family members, and the dwarves in the household. It says that you were the eldest son and that you married a thirteen-year-old
when you were yourself only ten. (Oh, my! And I thought marrying George at seventeen was early.) Then it says that before ascending to the throne of Spain you studied painting and drawing under the guidance of a Dominican friar, Juan Bautista Maíno. And you’re made of oil on canvas.

PHILIP. Haha! Maíno! I miss that guy! Truly a genius, that man. Just the other day I spoke with two of his angels in his “Adoration of the Shepherds.” They are up on the third floor so we do not see each other much, but when we do it is a party.

GEORGE. You guys party?

PHILIP. Of course! Why do you think museums close so early? We need release. But we are digressing. Do you see what I mean about the plaque? It says nothing about the painting or myself, except, of course, what I am made of. It is just a big distraction with little to say.

GEORGE. What do you think it should say?

PHILIP. It should not say anything. It should not even be there. That way people will have no choice but to actually pause before me and study this image that I work so hard to maintain. Do you think it is easy, standing in one place for eight hours on end? Thanks to God the museum hires massage therapists for after hours. I do not know how I could do it otherwise.

Meanwhile, LILIAN has taken PHILIP’s advice, and is engaging with different aspects of the painting.

LILIAN. Philip, if you don’t mind my asking, what is that paper you’re holding in your hand?

PHILIP. Ha! That’s it! Que maravilla! Keep going!
LILIAN laughs. She is enjoying this after all. She thinks for a bit before asking her next question.

LILIAN. How did you feel about ascending to the throne at such a young age? Do you show it in your face at all?

PHILIP. Haha! That is it! You have got it!

LILIAN. Why does it seem like you’re looking down at the viewer? Maybe it was a deliberate choice by Velázquez?

PHILIP. Si, finalmente!

The feel of the conversation has grown akin to that of a game show, one that LILIAN is competing on and coming close to winning millions of dollars.

LILIAN. Oh, I know! The paper is for your wife! You’re telling her about your time away from court learning how to paint with Maíno. Oh no, no, no… Maybe you don’t even like your wife. You were forced to be with her. Oh I don’t know. But you must like someone…

[Beat.]

George, what do you think?

PHILIP. Yes, Jorge, what do you think?

GEORGE. I think he loves his wife. (looking intently at LILIAN)

The atmosphere changes. GEORGE is no longer mesmerized by PHILIP. He’s moved on to something better.

LILIAN. Oh, George. (laughs timidly) You think so?
GEORGE. I know so. I’ve known for forty-seven years.

LILIAN and GEORGE look at each other the way they did on the first night of their honeymoon in Spain years ago.

LILIAN. (coyly) All of a sudden I’m not so interested in the bullfight.

GEORGE. Oh, Lilian, how I’ve missed you.

He offers his hand to LILIAN. She places her hand in his, and he lifts it for a kiss.

GEORGE. I think I’ll take it from here, Philip.

PHILIP. I knew you would, hermano. You just needed a little help from the Spaniard, you know? The Spanish touch.

They laugh, nodding knowingly at each other like old comrades. GEORGE and LILIAN head out. Another museum-goer, JOSE ANTONIO, acknowledges them with a friendly gesture as they pass. He indicates the painting, and speaks to them with a heavy Spanish accent:

JOSÉ. Ai, but that Felipe is a good one. If it not were for him, I never would have confessed my love to Yolanda. And we have been together fifteen years, you know. I need Felipe’s help because the in-laws are in town—you know how that goes. And maybe I will even introduce them to Felipe—those two torture each other like it is the inquisicion.

PHILIP. ¡José Antonio! ¡Hombre, cuánto tiempo! (“It’s been so long, my friend!”)

JOSÉ. ¡Felipe! ¡Mi querido! (“My dear friend!”)

PHILIP. ¿Qué tal, hermano? (“What’s up, brother?”)
José. *Ab, lo de siempre.* (“Oh, nothing much.”)

Philip. ¿Y Yolanda, como está? (“And Yolanda, how is she doing?”)

*They carry on in conversation as George and Lilian walk out of the exhibition hall, hand in hand.*

End.

**ANALECTS OF THE CORE**

Emily Dickinson: *It was a quiet way - / He asked if I was his - / I made no answer of the tongue / But answer of the eyes - / And then He bore me on / Before this mortal noise / With swiftness, as of Chariots / and distance, as of Wheels. / This World did drop away / As acres from the feet / of one that leaneth from Balloon / Upon an Ether Street. / The Gulf behind was not, / The Continents were new - / Eternity was due. / No Seasons were to us - / It was not Night nor Morn - / But Sunrise stopped upon the place / And Fastened in Dawn.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson: Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.

Jorge Luis Borges: Subsequent events have so distorted the memory of our first days that they are impossible to put straight.

The Conference of the Birds: Where is the loved one to relieve my pain? / Where is the guide to help me turn again? / Where is the strength to utter my complaint? / Where is the mind to counsel calm restraint?