

LAS MENINAS
[THE MAIDS OF HONOUR]
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*To Aurora Cano who inspired Infanta Margarita
and has inspired me many times before.*

CHARACTERS

VELÁZQUEZ:

Principal painter of the court of Philip IV of Spain

INFANTA MARGARITA:

Daughter of Philip IV's second marriage, a child.

MARIBÁRBOLA:

Dwarf/Jester in the court of Philip IV of Spain

MENINA 1/MAID OF HONOUR 1/Isabel:

A female attendant to the Infanta

(in the painting, the one on the right)

MENINA 2/MAID OF HONOUR 2/Maria Agustina:

A female attendant to the Infanta

(in the painting, the one on the left)

(She also impersonates the GHOST of the Conde Duque de Olivares/Count Duke of Olivares.)

SCENE ONE

In the sitting room/parlor shown in the painting of *Las Meninas*. It is empty except for the dwarf, MARIBÁRBOLA.

MARIBÁRBOLA:

Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist.

I'm so thrilled to begin with a German quote because the fact is that these walls, this palace, this duchy, this land, this region, this kingdom of Spain, this enormous empire, depends on the genetic vicissitudes of a family of Teutonic origin destined to disappear off the face of the Earth—because it believes that it alone was the pure and pristine ruler of the world.

That's what happens when a first cousin sticks it in his half-aunt.

Degeneration.

Sterility.

Extinction of the descendants.

The final pig tail line on the family tree of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Like Aureliano Buendía—only German—and with money.

The House of Austria.

That is to say,

The Hapsburgs.

That is to say,

The absolute absolutism,

Absolutism raised to the second power,

To the third power,

Absolutism

Raised,

Raised,

Raised to God.

God:

He who imposes his image and his likeness.

He who imposes his image on the World.

The world is all that is...the image.

Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist.

They'll tell me I can't distort a philosopher
like Wittgenstein in this manner.

And I'll tell them: Look at me.

From a distorted being—
only a distorted thought can escape.

What do you want me to do?

Image is everything in this shitty age I'm painted in—

Just like it is in the comfortable time you find yourselves in.

Here,

amid the stench that rises from the pious torture chambers,
between the caprices of a king with 100% power , 0% will.
among the ambitions of the Prime Minister Count Duke of Olivares.

From the obsessions and cruelties of the worst inquisition,

Here surfaced a remarkable image. Everlasting. A painting.

(Pause)

And just like God himself chose as a setting for the holy exploits of his son, the
driest place, full of the most ignorant people on this planet in the year zero—

Art chose—

Not Italy—not France—not Holland,

But Spain as the home of one of its finest painters.

A Spain still medieval.

Racist Spain.

Classist Spain.

A Spain at its peak before the fall...

Here is the crux of this case, the facts, the truth.

It is here we find the image.

To be venerated.

To be applauded.

To be protected.

To be, to be...

...but not today.

SCENE TWO

MENINA 1 & MENINA 2 speak furtively
about the Spanish Inquisition.

MENINA 1

Those from Logroño will have their throats slit and then they'll be burned.

MENINA 2

Isn't slitting their throats more than enough?

MENINA 1

To a demon a slit throat is like nothing.

MENINA 2

If somebody gets his throat cut and nothing happens to him, then there's no way
anything can ever happen to him.

MENINA 1

My father has seen demons resist up to three executions.

MENINA 2

Those from Logroño are going to be executed because they are Arabs.

MENINA 1

Arabs are demons.

MENINA 2

Demons don't exist.

MENINA 1

Sssch! Once in the air, it's everywhere. Speak like that and that is that.

MENINA 2

Did you bring the testimony?

(MENINA 1 refuses to answer.)

Did your father catch you?

(MENINA 1 nods her head "no.")

Did you lose your photographic memory?

MENINA 1

Photo—what?

MENINA 2

Maribárbola says that when someone learns things simply by reading them they have a photographic memory.

MENINA 1

You shouldn't get too close to that dwarf. She's definitely a witch.

MENINA 2

Don't worry. She doesn't look like an Arab.

MENINA 1

She's a witch, I tell you!

MENINA 2

Witches don't exist either. They're an invention of those in power.

MENINA 1

People in power know nothing about witches. But me, I do know how to spot a witch when I see one and that dwarf is a witch.

MENINA 2

(Using MENINA 1's words against her.)

Sssch! Once in the air, it's everywhere. Speak like that and that is that. So? What does the testimony say?

MENINA 1

I'm scared. If someone were to tell on me, they could remove my father from the court of the Inquisition.

MENINA 2

I won't tell a soul.

MENINA 1

Swear on the Blessed Virgin of Martyrs.

MENINA 2

I swear.

MENINA 1

On the Blessed Virgin of Martyrs.

MENINA 2

On the Blessed Virgin of Martyrs.

MENINA 1

Say it together. All of it.

MENINA 2

I swear on the Blessed Virgin of Martyrs never to tell anyone, no one, not a soul.

(MENINA 1 looks in all directions.)

MENINA 1

They say...that the daughter of Juan Guzmán de la Ribera confessed to seeing the devil many times, that Satan has had his way with her, and that she has experienced much pain in this carnal union because the devil has two penises instead of one, and with them he can satisfy at his leisure his tumescent cravings as much from above as from below...and in order to rest a while from this punishing endeavor of maintaining his massive erections—rigid like monsters of flesh—he used, in their place, his two fists—introducing them with great relish—to those aforementioned orifices so as to avoid their growing cold and tightening up, until he was ready to reintroduce his two-headed creature into her and continue his pounding punishment.

(Making the sign of the cross and swiping her hand across her forehead after each prayer.)

Sweet Jesus erase this. Sweet Jesus erase this. Sweet Jesus erase this.

MENINA 2

That one's from Brother Luis de Aliaga.

MENINA 1

How do you know?

MENINA 2

Remember the testimony given by those from Cadiz? It sounded the same and that was signed by him. Did you see who signed it?

MENINA 1

No. Does it matter?

MENINA 2

You are so naive.

MENINA 1

I can't even imagine it.

MENINA 2

It's Brother Luis de Aliaga.

MENINA 1

The double penetration.

MENINA 2

You imagine it perfectly.

MENINA 1

I can't imagine it, I can't imagine it, I can't imagine it. And the poop?

MENINA 2

If the devil smells like a devil then he can also give off the scent of "poop."

MENINA 1

How nauseating!

MENINA 2

Who knows how you are imagining it.

MENINA 1

And what if when I get married, my husband wants to do to me like the devil did to Juan Guzmán de la Ribera's daughter?

MENINA 2

That day eat lightly, and before doing it, go to the bathroom.

MENINA 1

Men are such pigs!

MENINA 2

Especially Brother Luis de Aliaga.

MENINA 1

Sssch! Once in the air, it's everywhere. Speak like that and that is that.

SCENE THREE

VELÁZQUEZ is performing one of his many court duties such as counting inventory, emptying chamberpots, etc. The INFANTA enters and watches him. The INFANTA stammers slightly, but only on words beginning with the letter “p.”

INFANTA

Want to pah-play?

VELÁZQUEZ

That’s what dwarves are for.

INFANTA

I’m scared of dwarves.

VELÁZQUEZ

They’re just clowns.

INFANTA

They’re monsters.

VELÁZQUEZ

Does the Princess know what a monster is?

INFANTA

A dwarf.

VELÁZQUEZ

A giant with just one eye is also a monster.

INFANTA

Alright then—a dwarf and a giant with just one eye.

VELÁZQUEZ

A leviathan is also a monster.

INFANTA

Alright then—a dwarf, a giant with just one eye, and a—What is a leviathan?

VELÁZQUEZ

An enormous sea monster as big as the town square.

INFANTA

As big as the town square?

VELÁZQUEZ

As big as the town square.

INFANTA

Not true. And neither is the thing about the one-eyed giant. Those things don't exist.

VELÁZQUEZ

Monsters don't exist.

INFANTA

So what are dwarves then?

VELÁZQUEZ

Court entertainment.

INFANTA

This court is full of monsters.

VELÁZQUEZ

The princess only imagines monsters perhaps?

INFANTA

Pah-pah-papá wants me to learn to pah-paint like you.

VELÁZQUEZ

Papá talks about me?

INFANTA

Only I can call Pah-Papá—Papá.

VELÁZQUEZ

Pardon me, Princess. His majesty speaks of me?

INFANTA

Speaks and speaks.

VELÁZQUEZ

Speaks well of me?

INFANTA

He says like he is the King of all Kings—you are the King of all pah-painters.

VELÁZQUEZ

Of all painters?

INFANTA

He also said that he allowed you to enter this court as a young man so that he could put the great painter that he is inside of you, so that when you paint, really it is my father painting.

VELÁZQUEZ

I'm surprised that your father thinks I am simply a painter.

INFANTA

Aren't you a painter?

VELÁZQUEZ

Me? No.

INFANTA

I thought you were a painter. That's what my father says:" There goes the painter" or "Summon the painter."

VELÁZQUEZ

His majesty is mistaken.

INFANTA

You dare contradict the King?!

VELÁZQUEZ

No. He himself named me Senior Usher to the Chambers.
Perhaps, Princess, you do not realize that this position is considered by many to be comparable to a Baron. Not just anyone can be named Senior Usher to the Palace.

INFANTA

It does not seem to me that carrying firewood and putting chamber pots under the beds is suitable for a “nobleman.”

VELÁZQUEZ

There is certain jurisprudence guaranteed by my position.

INFANTA

Shouldn't your position be holding a paintbrush in your hand?

VELÁZQUEZ

How is it possible that from such a pretty princess comes so much disdain?

INFANTA

And who told you I was such a pretty princess?

VELÁZQUEZ

If you want to play with someone, ask for a dwarf.

INFANTA

And who told you I find dwarves entertaining?

VELÁZQUEZ

Apparently the little princess only likes to entertain herself with me.

INFANTA

And who said I find you entertaining? You often bore me. I named you Senior Bore of the Palace. And don't get excited because you wouldn't even make an adequate maid-of-honour.

VELÁZQUEZ

You will never understand what it means to have to earn a living, princess.

INFANTA

Earn my sympathy. He who earns my sympathy earns a life. He who does not, earns death.

VELÁZQUEZ

I would like to earn the favor of the princess.

INFANTA

Then stop working like a dwarf.

VELÁZQUEZ

If the princess had been born in the bosom of a family from Seville fallen into disgrace she would have had to work like a dwarf too.

INFANTA

The little princess is a dwarf.

VELÁZQUEZ

The little princess will grow.

INFANTA

The little princess will never grow.

VELÁZQUEZ

She'll grow, she'll grow, she'll meet a handsome prince and she'll marry.

INFANTA

I will never get married!

VELÁZQUEZ

I hate to tell you this, princess, but you came into this world to marry.

(We go into VELÁZQUEZ'S head.)

INFANTA

Mania, melancholia, epilepsy and imbecility pursue me. My great-grandfather married his cousin and had a son who died insane and childless. Then he married another cousin who turned out to be sterile. Then he married his niece And all their children died, Except for my grandfather who, furthermore, turned out apathetic. And my mother is also my cousin!

MARIBÁRBOLA

(speaks while snacking on something tasty)

People who come out of the sex of other people who come out of the sex of other people who come out of the sex of other people. Who could have thought of such a thing?

INFANTA

One half-sister died 29 hours after birth.
Another only lived 30 days.
The third passed away at 20 months.
Carlos Baltasar at 17 years old.
My first sister was buried at the age of 2.
The second only lived 15 days.
Felipe Próspero left this world at 3 years of age.
And the infant Fernando Tomás expired before reaching 12 months.

MARABÁRBOLA

We're all going to die. It's hardly aristocratic but that's how it is.

INFANTA

I'm going to die early.

MARIBÁRBOLA

At 6 in the morning?

INFANTA

I'll die in vain.

MARIBÁRBOLA

I'll die a dwarf.

INFANTA

If nothing lasts, who was the naïve dreamer who said "forever?"
Who was the shrewd one who thought up eternity?
Everything is renovated death.
A trip toward extinction.
A trip toward the end.

MARIBÁRBOLA

The end justifies the living.

(MARIBÁRBOLA exits as VELÁZQUEZ is startled back to reality.)

VELÁZQUEZ

Princess, may I ask you a favor?

INFANTA

What do you want?

VELÁZQUEZ

Can you stay still?

SCENE FOUR

MENINA 1 & MENINA 2 discuss family
and a secret is revealed.

MENINA 1

They say that the ghost of Count Duke of Olivares walks these corridors.

MENINA 2

Sssch! Once in the air, it's everywhere. Speak like that and that is that.

MENINA 1

No, no, this is serious and worse than that. Do you know who says that the ghost of Count Duke of Olivares appears every night?

MENINA 2

Who?

MENINA 1

The king.

MENINA 2

The king?

MENINA 1

The king.

MENINA 2

Imagine that! It's just like my father always said, "The ghost of the Count Duke of Olivares will haunt the king his whole life."

MENINA 1

Your father knows about the ghost?

MENINA 2

No stupid. What he meant was that Count Duke of Olivares governed Spain so badly that even after they threw him out, his bad government would forever weigh heavily on the life of the king. Get it? And now it's really weighing on him.

MENINA 1

It was so ugly how the Count Duke of Olivares died. Poor thing.

MENINA 2

Poor thing?! He made himself a millionaire and made his entire family wealthy. And not to mention all the crimes he committed.

MENINA 1

A nobleman is a nobleman and the Count Duke did not deserve to die that way.

MENINA 2

Where do you get your ideas from?

MENINA 1

That's what was said in my house.

MENINA 2

Oh...and what else was said in your house?

MENINA 1

That the Count Duke did not deserve to be banished because he was a man who gave his entire life to the cause of Spain. That the Count Duke fell into a state of wretched anguish, of dishonor and of grief, all while experiencing severe epileptic attacks which left half his body paralyzed.

That this, his stations of the cross, may redeem all his faults. And that the Count Duke was my granduncle three times removed.

MENINA 2

Are you related to the Count Duke of Olivares?

MENINA 1

Ohhhh...if my father finds out what I told you he'll kill me, kill me.

(MENINA 1 begins to cry.)

MENINA 2

Are you related to the Count Duke of Olivares?

MENINA 1

(Crying)

He was a very distant relative. We never invited him to dinner. Like it was nothing. Granduncle three times removed, I don't even see my grandfather. And he's not removed at all.

MENINA 2

If there were no connection between you and him you never would have become a maid of honour.

MENINA 1

I am a maid of honour on my De Velasco side who were related to the Zaldívars; that's the thing, I have nothing whatsoever to do with that appalling Count Duke of Olivares, who furthermore found little boys for the king and then had them murdered.

MENINA 2

Sssch! Once in the air, it's everywhere. Speak like that and that is that.