

ROLAND PETERSEN

The Engagement Party Picnic, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 54 x 47 in



COURTESY THE STUDIO SHOP

VARDA FISZBEIN

The Transparent Scarf

—translated from the Spanish by Andrea G. Labinger

Señora Emilia began going to the park “to get a little fresh air” when her routine at home was suddenly disrupted.

The two reasons for the changes in her small domestic world, changes whose consequences disturbed her so greatly, arose from alterations in the working life of certain members of her family.

One reason was that her husband, Esteban, who for the thirty-two years of their marriage had spent ten to twelve hours away from home every weekday, and six or seven hours on Saturday, had taken early retirement. The other was that Iris, her younger daughter, who for five years had lived with her own family in a distant province up north, returned to the city because Emilia’s son-in-law’s employer had transferred him there.

While Iris was searching for a house, she and her family moved in with her mother. And so, while in the past Emilia had seen her at Christmas or welcomed her grandchildren’s visit during Holy Week or for a few days’ vacation, she now found herself constantly bumping into all of them, including her daughter’s protruding belly, swollen with its third pregnancy.

“After all, Mama, Junior’s room and mine are empty, so we can stay here and keep you company,” Iris rationalized.

As if that wasn’t enough, Emilia’s husband hovered around her all day long, and she began to realize how much that off-key whistling of his annoyed her as he breezed through the house, energetically and cheerfully tackling the painting and an endless array of other tasks, which, though they had gone neglected for years, she hadn’t noticed in the slightest because she was used to them and liked things the way they were: Old like me, she would say to herself, regarding them with affection.

Her son-in-law’s ridiculous habit of having orange juice and tea for breakfast instead of *café con leche* and toast like everybody else struck her as very odd. Their teenage daughter, whom she had so dearly loved and spoiled as a baby, now seemed insufferable, with those earphones plugged into her head all day long. And yet Emilia had to confess that it was a relief, because whenever the girl listened to music directly from the device, the din was horrendous. Not to mention the disdain she openly expressed for Emilia’s beloved piano and her repertory of sheet music, waltzes, and popular tunes that she eventually gave up playing. And,