

Les misérables of Athens

***To my children,
Spyros and Matilda***

***Dedicated to those children who, also, have a right to live.
Because above all, we are human.***

It's getting dark and the lights turn on in various parts of the city. Cars speed on the streets. Some people are waiting at the bus stops patiently and others are running down the subway stairs, trying not to lose their train. In a few moments most of them will be at their houses, resting after a long, tiring day.

A family's sitting in front of their TV. The two small children are eating toast, laughing with the TV show, while their parents are watching them, with smiles on their faces. The younger one gets up, sits on his mother's lap, and embraces her tenderly.

A fifteen years old girl is lying on her bed, doing her homework, with the earphones of her CD player on. She is shaking her legs to the rhythm of the music, whispering the song's lyrics. Her brother is playing with his computer and in the same time talking to his cellphone.

Their mother is cooking. She moves to and front in her kitchen, full of energy. She is in a hurry to get their dinner ready.

A kid is playing with his puppet. They're running from one room to the other. They're chasing each other, the kid's yelling with excitement and the dog's barking loudly. They're making too much noise.

After a while it gets dark and the city lights turn on, illuminating every part of it.



Three little beggars, Albanians, are sitting on the pavement, counting the money they've collected from their day's 'work'. They're badly dressed, dirty and tired. One of them seems to be the leader. He's very concentrated as he's counting their money.

TOULAND

- Eh guys, we've got only 18,50 Euros today! Fuck it. All day we've collected only that. They're going to fuck us.

ARBEN

- Oh... we're not going to eat well tonight. Go ahead, split it and let's go.

He stretches his hand to the "leader". Touland splits the money. Dritan takes it and stares at it. It doesn't seem right. He counts it slowly because he doesn't know Euros well enough yet.

DRITAN

- Why am I taking so little? You've given me only 4 Euros.

TOULAND

- Because you're new, you're still learning. You take less. We accepted you in our gang boy and that should be enough for you.

He raises his voice. His words are like a fist in Dritan's stomach, which is empty for days, so he doesn't react. He accepts it silently. He puts his meager earnings in his shabby wallet and tucks the wallet into his pocket.

"Never mind, that's better than nothing", he tells to himself.

Touland, the "leader", takes off his pocket a crumpled cigarette, lights it, inhales it deeply and takes off the smoke gaudily. Then he passes it to Arben, so that he, too, can smoke. Arben smokes without passing the cigarette over to his "colleague".

TOULAND

- Eh, take it easy, I only have this one, I don't have another. Don't puff on it again.

ARBEN

- What kind is it?

TOULAND

- How should I know? I've found it. Don't you like it you fool?

DRITAN

(Whispering, in a frighten voice)

- Its mark is written on it.

ARBEN

- Well, well, he's being clever on us. Boy, I know more, much more, than you do. Do you understand that? Let's go now, I'm sleepy. And he pulls him by his sleeve.

DRITAN

- Are we going to walk again? I'm so tired...

TOULAND

- What do you want? To have your driver take you home? You came here very spoiled, the "leader" replies harshly.

ARBEN

- He's right! Let's take the bus today. We never take it.

TOULAND

- We're going back on feet.

ARBEN

- You're always giving the orders. Who are you anyway?

More imperatively now without accepting any objections.

TOULAND

- I took you in this business and you should do whatever I say. I'm your boss, and don't you forget that.

ARBEN

- No, we're going back by bus

TOULAND

- We're going back on feet. I'm not going to say that again.

Then Arben gets angry and pushes him hard.

Touland grabs him by his blouse and threatens him, very angry now.

TOULAND

(Screaming)

- If you push me again, you're going to starve, you dwarf!

ARBEN

- What are you talking about? I'm not going to starve. I'll go to another joint and I'll earn more money.

TOULAND

- Why don't you go now, you stupid! Do you think they're going to accept you like I did?

ARBEN

(He insists)

- I'm very good in this work. They'll take me.

TOULAND

- Why don't you fuck off? Move it now.

He pushes him hard to make him move ahead.

ARBEN

- You're not going to tell me what to do. I'll do whatever I like

He stands back and prepares for a fight, unconsciously making his hands into fists. Touland slaps him. Arben starts to cry. He flings at him and kicks him. They start to fight. Touland pushes him down, on the pavement, and kicks him as hard as he can. Dritan is at a loss.

DRITAN

(Scared, not knowing what to do)

- Stop it... stop it...

They're not listening to him. They continue the fight. Dritan tries to separate them.

DRITAN

- Stop it! Stop... we're not going to do well in our business if we're fighting among us. We must be friends.

He grips Touland and pulls him away from the other boy. He snatches him by his pullover and holds him, to prevent Touland from attacking again.

TOULAND

- Let go of me. Don't push me like that, the other one reacts, with his pride and egoism obviously hurt.

DRITAN

- Let go of him... he won't try the same thing again

Touland steps back, swallows his anger, but he explains himself.

TOULAND

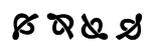
- Dudes, you have to listen to me, you're younger and new here.

Now he has lost the fight for his "ego" and he's trying to save his "title".

DRITAN

- Ok, Ok boss. Let's go now fellows, because I'm starving. Fuck it, there won't be any food left. The others surely will have eaten it all.

Arben gets up. He's furious. He glances angrily at Touland. They start to walk back to their "house"...



There is still lot of traffic on the streets. They arrive to an area near their neighborhood. As they're walking wearily down a quiet street, Dritan stops in front of a window and listens. Voices and laughter are heard. Out of curiosity he goes nearer and sticks his face on the windowpane. He's trying to see inside. Touland pulls him by his trouser.

TOULAND

- What are you looking at? Get away from the window, that's a brothel. Dritan smiles slyly. He refuses to take his face away from the window. He's trying to see inside from a slit of the curtain. Now the others are giggling and they, too, stick their faces on the windowpane, pushing each other. They're making too much noise. Maria, the hooker, appears at the door, apparently annoyed by all the noise.

MARIA

- What are you doing here? Maybe you would... like to come in?

She's trying to scare them off, with a shrill voice and a make-believe shrewd face.

TOULAND

- Of course we want to come in. How much is it? How much? Ha, ha... He answers mockingly as he's trying to take his 'wallet', which has a million holes on it, off his pocket.

When Maria scowls at them, they get frightened and run away, but she's faster and she manages to get hold of Dritan and Arben. The boss gets away. She brings her face very close to theirs and threatens them.

MARIA

- Don't you dare glue your faces on my window again, or I'll kill you. I'm not playing in there. That's where I work.

Dritan stares at her, scared, while Arben takes out his tongue, fooling her.

MARIA

- Go home, you miserable children, it's late. And don't you dare come back to my place, do you hear? That's all I need, an audience...

She lets go of them pushing them away, and they flee.

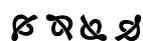
As she looks at them running away scared, she bursts into laughter.

She yells at them.

MARIA

- Come again when you've grown up my beautiful, and I'll take well care of you. With a nice price too.

She goes back to her "shop". The Albanians run away. Their shadows fade away at the end of the street.



The Albanians are sitting on the stairs of the entrance of a bank, and they are begging. They're watching the people, as they pass by on the street and the clients, as they pass in front of them. Most of them are well dressed, they're holding expensive briefcases and their mobiles are ringing continuously. Some of them are walking with their earphones on and talking to their cellphone. Others are walking by in a hurry. Dritan is watching them, and because he's a newcomer in this big city, he's very impressed by their appearances.

DRITAN

(Wondering)

- What are they doing? Are they talking to each other?

ARBEN

- Are you stupid? They're talking to others on their cellphones. You know, we could steal some of these and talk to each other! We could have a conversation through the cellphones!

He shows him how they're talking. He places his palm on his ear, as if it were an earphone.

ARBEN

- Halo, Halo... Mister Dritan? Ha, ha, ha...

TOULAND

- Bullshit. We can't use them, these are only for those idiots. Only they can own these things, we'll never have anything like it.

DRITAN

- Not even as grown-ups?

TOULAND

- Not even then, you fool... Will we have any money then?

Dritan wipes his nose with his sleeve and insists asking his "partner".

DRITAN

- Why not?

TOULAND

- Because we won't have any. We'll never become like them.
And he points at the crowd.

DRITAN

- I want to have money. I can't stand the hunger, the begging, not even this foreign country. I think of my mother and father. I want us to be together again.

ARBEN

- Me too.

TOULAND

- Never mind all this. I've left it all behind me a long time ago. I've forgotten it all.

And they continue to "earn their living". Dritan sits apart, with a sad look on his face, and raises his hand to beg again some money from the passers-by. He doesn't like all this. He sees the looks of the people who resent their presence, and he feels bad. He would like things to be different.

The gang is at a bus stop. All three of them stand in line, pretending that they are waiting for the bus. A gentleman in front of them is absorbed reading his pink financial newspaper. Toulant tries to steal his wallet. With great care and sleigh of hand he approaches his hand in the gentleman's pocket. But someone else, who's standing right behind them, sees him and stares angrily at him. When Arben realizes what's going on, he patters his "boss" who takes back his hand immediately. They move away carefully, taking with them Dritan, who hadn't realized what was going on. The man, who had seen them, follows them. They start to run. The unknown man runs behind them, and so a manhunt begins on the streets of Athens.

Dritan can't run very fast, that's why the others left him behind. Now the unknown man runs as fast as he can. In a few moments he's close to Dritan, who accelerates to escape, but sees the man closer to him. The others have already run away. Dritan runs, he is running with all his might. He crosses the street without noticing a taxi that speeds by at that moment. The taxi-driver puts his foot on his brakes, cursing at the same time. Dritan continues to run and every minute or so he turns his head to see where the man is. Suddenly, as he turns his head, the man is not behind him. He stops for a second, wondering what has happened, but immediately he starts to run again. The man has made a maneuver, trying to fool our little friend. He turns to the next alley and waits for him in the next corner. When Dritan comes close, the man jumps in front of him, and grabs him. Dritan falls down. Some passers-by are watching, astonished.

MAN

- I got you, little boy, he yells with malevolent excitement.
Dritan doesn't know what to do.

MAN

- Now, let's see what you have to say to the police
When he listens to the word "police" Dritan looks at him frightened. He becomes panicky. He begins to kick him and tries to get away. The man tries to immobilize him, but doesn't succeed.

MAN

- Behave yourself, you dirty little boy. You're coming with me, whether you want it or not.
He drags him by his arms, but Dritan resists. He sits down, on his knees, stubbornly.

DRITAN

- I didn't do it; the other boy tried to steal from him. It wasn't me; I don't do that kind of things.

His voice is filled with agony and he's sobbing.

MAN

- You're all the same. You were with him, weren't you? And you're trying to tell me that you're not like him? That you're different?

The man is holding his arms and tries to lift him to his feet, but with no avail. Dritan resists tenaciously, yelling.

DRITAN

- Please mister let go of me... let go...

MAN

- Get up. Move on and don't you dare scream like that again or I'll kick your ass.

He threatens the boy and drags him for a while. He becomes furious, he's losing his patience. Some passers-by stop; others just look furtively out of curiosity, while some others pass by indifferently.

MAN

- Get up punk, or else I'll call for help.

The man drags him by his arms; Dritan gets up and follows him unwillingly.

DRITAN

- Don't pull me like that mister... Don't pull me mister.

MAN

- Move it. I'm busy. The police station is down the street.

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They arrive at the police station and they enter the building. A policeman is standing at the entrance. He looks at them and nods his head.

POLICEMAN

- What happened again with those? He asks the man, pointing at Dritan.

MAN

- He tried to steal the wallet of a gentleman, at the bus stop. He was with some other boys.

DRITAN

- It wasn't me

MAN

- A gang. A gang of thieves. You came here, in our country, hungry and dirty, and you steal from us. That's what your kind does. I'm handing him over to you and I leave. I must go to my work.

The man strides to the door. He doesn't want to be late. After all, he's finished this "work". He has handed over to the police innocent Dritan. According to him, they are all the same.

POLICEMAN

- Come here. Tell me, what am I to do with you? What's your name?
Dritan is very scared. He doesn't answer.

POLICEMAN

- Let's go inside, and we'll see...

They walk up some stairs. They open the door of an office, enter, and close the door behind them. Then they stand in there, waiting. Two police officers are talking with a woman. They look at Dritan and the policeman for a second and then they continue their conversation with the woman. Dritan, surprised, recognizes Maria. The woman who's talking with the policemen is the hooker he met yesterday. Now he's in a worse situation. His agony is rising. He listens to the conversation.

MARIA

- The girl who's working with me isn't a bully. I can...
One of the policemen interrupts her and comments ironically.

FIRST OFFICER

- She's a pipe-blower... Ha, ha...
He laughs by himself with his crude joke, while Maria stares at him angrily and continues

MARIA

- Can I take her now?

SECOND OFFICER

- Yes, you can. But tell her that if she makes a fuss again she won't get away so easily.

Dritan stares at Maria. His fear is growing. He realizes that he's going to get into bigger troubles because of her. He's trying to hide behind the policeman. When Maria turns her head, she recognizes Dritan's little face. She smiles sarcastically as she walks near.

MARIA

- Well... Well... you're here too, my little bird. Where have you been peeping again?

POLICEMAN

- He tried to steal a wallet at the bus stop, he was with some others. A gang probably.

MARIA

- I know, I know the gang. Little diamonds.

DRITAN

- It wasn't me... The others...

MARIA

- Why don't you stand by the streetlights, to clean the windows of the cars? That's more honest.

DRITAN

- I'll do it... I want to work. I'm new here.

He lowers his eyes shyly.

MARIA

- When did you come to Greece?

DRITAN

- A few months ago, with my uncles. My parents haven't come with me; they stayed back, at Albania.

The police officer interrupts him.

FIRST OFFICER

- We'll lock you inside. We'll see if you'll try anything like it again. We'll arrest the other punks too and you'll all make a nice company, you and the mice, down there.

He points threateningly below, to the basement, where the cells are. Dritan eyes fill with tears. He's going to burst into tears. Maria feels sorry for him.

MARIA

- You seem to be better than the other two.

She addresses the police officer

MARIA

- Let him go; he's just a little kid. And you're going to be a good kid, yes?

SECOND OFFICER

- Let go of him. Go ahead; go back to your house. But if we catch you again stealing, you won't get away so easily.

He pats him at the shoulder and pushes him towards the door. Dritan runs and gets out of the door as fast as he can.

Next day Dritan rings the bell of the “store”. He is very serious and clean. A girl appears at the door. She’s surprised to see him.

DRITAN

- Is your Madame here?

MAID

- And what do you want here? Who are you?

DRITAN

- I want to talk to her. Can you call her?

He insists without losing his courage.

MAID

- Wait here.

She leaves the door half-open as she disappears inside. Dritan waits, feeling nervous and uneasy. He’s afraid that Maria will be indifferent or that she’ll kick him away. He looks stealthily through the half-open door. He combs his hair and he fixes his jacket, which is larger than he is. He’s borrowed it from a countryman of his in order to make a good impression on Maria.

In a few moments she appears at the entrance.

She opens the door a bit more, and she says

MARIA

(Bored)

- Tell me, what are you doing here, again?

DRITAN

- Thank you for yesterday.

MARIA

- So, you’re polite.

DRITAN

- You’ve saved me. I... want a job, so I came to you, lady.

MARIA

- You’re the first one to call me lady. Listen to me, there’s no job for you here. Go search somewhere else.

DRITAN

- But I want money!

MARIA

- And who doesn’t little boy? But you don’t have to get tangled to my feet. You’ll manage on your own.

She makes a move as if to close the door, but Dritan keeps it open with his hands.

DRITAN

- I don't know anyone here, in this country. I just need a job, only a job.

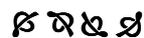
MARIA

- I told you, there's no job here for you, but you can come by anytime you want, I'll give you some food. Now go, I have to go inside. I'm working now.

She closes the door. Dritan sits on the stairs, disappointed. He looks at the sky, which is full of clouds.

"It's going to rain again. How am I going to sleep again in that house with the rain pouring in?" he is thinking aloud.

He sits there for a while, waiting, and then he gets up. He looks at Maria's door, he contemplates of ringing once more, but eventually he leaves.



The shops have closed. The Albanians are standing in front the window of a shop that sells television sets. The traffic is light now and only a few people are passing by. Arben is standing in front of the shop-window watching TV, while the other two are sitting down, examining an object they've found.

ARBEN

- Come and see some beautiful chicks! Whoa... whoa...

Touland gets up to takes a look. There's a soap opera playing on TV.

TOULAND

- They're not so great. Yesterday it showed some really beautiful women.

ARBEN

- Eh, guys it's the same play we watched last week. These two are in love with each other, but that's against the rules.

TOULAND

- No, you fool; we watched that on another channel.

ARBEN

- Well, then this channel too has the same story.

TOULAND

- And the same play is on at another channel.

DRITAN

- You must have confused the plays.

TOULAND

- No, we haven't. There are other actors starring at the second channel, but it's always the same story. They're in love with each other, and that is not right.

DRITAN

- Eh, look down there.

He points at something.

DRITAN

- Some big carton-boxes are over there. Let's go and fetch them. We can sit on them.

They run and get the carton-boxes. They place them in front of the shop-window. Each one sits on one of them. There are three television sets on.

TOULAND

- I'll watch this TV

He points at the first television set.

ARBEN

- And I'll watch this one, with the beautiful chick.

And he points at the second one.

DRITAN

- Fine, fine! And I'll watch this one.

What a luxury! Now each boy has it's own television set. They become absorbed by the show. After some time, they are once again on their way back. It's 1 o'clock, after midnight. They are sleepy and hungry. They've bought coke and they're drinking it.

ARBEN

- My belly's empty and we still have a long way to go. Let's take the other road, it's faster.

TOULAND

- No, not that road. Mafia is there.

ARBEN

- We're not afraid of the Mafia, ha, ha, ha...

TOULAND

- You should be afraid them, you stupid. Look what they gave me.

He opens up his shirt and he shows them a scar from a knife on his chest. Dritan and Arben look at it astonished.

ARBEN

- Man, what have they done to you?

TOULAND

- They've stabbed me because I didn't want to give them the money I had earned. I wasn't afraid of them, and look what happened to me. They threatened me and I was being smart. Finally they stabbed me and they took all my money.

In the same time they hear steps approaching. Dritan turns his head and sees them. Whispering, so as to avoid being heard, he informs his "colleagues"- "suspicious shadows".

DRITAN

- Look behind you, somebody's following us.

Some guys are getting close. They are older than the boys, at their late 20s. They are wearing leather jackets and sport-shoes.

TOULAND

- Oh no, it's the gang. Don't run away, they'll think we want to get away and they'll become angry.

ARBEN

- What are we going to do?

They are all very frightened. Touland, scared out of his wits, thinks aloud:

TOULAND

- Fuck it, I should have taken Stano's pocketknife.

DRITAN

- No, no war

He is very scared but he's trying to stop his "boss" from reacting on impulse. He knows that they're all going to 'pay' for his foolishness.

TOULAND

- Now you'll see what's going to happen.

He doesn't listen to Dritan, who's begging him to stop. They continue to walk, without looking back. They quicken their steps, hoping that the others won't attack them. Dritan whistles in an effort to shed away his fear.

TOULAND

- Have you lost your mind? Are you singing? Don't you realize that this is going to infuriate them? Shut up you fool.

The two hooligans come closer. Their steps are now heard louder. It's certain that they intend to take the boys' money. The three little punks decide that if it comes to that, they're going to fight back.

TOULAND

- If they attack us, take off the belts from your trousers and hit them.

DRITAN

(Desperate)

- I'm not wearing a belt.

ARBEN

- And how come your trousers don't fall without a belt?

DRITAN

- I don't know; They just don't fall...

He answers without being very certain. The truth is that his trousers often fall, because they're too big for him. Someone gave them to him.

TOULAND

- Shut up now, I want to listen to their footsteps.

He makes a threatening gesture and they stop talking. Now they walk faster, in silence. The footsteps of the members of the Mafia are getting closer. Their fear is growing and it's written all over their faces, especially Dritan's. He has never experienced anything like this before. He didn't know about these things, no one has ever told him anything about it.

The gangsters are getting closer. The two little beggars take off their belts and get ready. Dritan picks up a stone he sees on the road. He holds it tightly, clasp it in his fist. They are walking with the same rhythm, when suddenly one of the gangsters jumps right in front of them and the other one stands behind them. They are holding pocketknives. They immobilize and threaten them.

FIRST GANGSTER

- Dudes, give us all your money.

TOULAND

- We haven't collected much money today.

FIRST GANGSTER

- Don't give me that. I said give us all the money, or else I'm gonna beat you to death. Both you and the other babies.

SECOND GANGSTER

- Listen to him you ladies, go ahead; and make it fast if you want to get some sleep tonight.

DRITAN

- And what are we going to give to the “uncles”?

FIRST GANGSTER

- Chocolates. Go ahead, we’re not going to wait all day... give me the money.

The little punks are frozen with fear. For only a second Touland lifts his belt on the air, ready to strike, but seconds later the first gangster stops him with a strong punch on his face. Touland falls down bleeding. Dritan is furious, so he decides to fight this “enemy” with all his power. He kicks him and lifts his fist. He manages only to scratch his nose, because the gangster avoids his fist with an expert movement. But the kick found it’s aim and hurt him. He grabs Dritan by the blouse and stubs his face with his pocketknife.

FIRST GANGSTER

- I won’t finish you off today. But you’ll always carry the marks of my knife on your face, snotty.

The other two say nothing. They’re very frightened. Dritan is in big trouble. How did he get involved into all this? His legs are shaking. He’s sweating. He knows that it’ll be very difficult to get away from these two.

Touland gets up with great difficulty and staggers towards the gangster. His feels dizzy.

TOULAND

- We’ll give you all the money we’ve got. Today’s money and tomorrow’s and all the money you want. Just let go of him.

He takes out of his pockets all the money he’s got. Arben does the same. They throw it all down. Dritan is unable to move because the gangster is holding him tightly.

FIRST GANGSTER

- Pick it up and hand it over.

They pick up the money, crouching, and they give it to him. The gangster takes the money and lets Dritan go, pushing him. He stares at them.

FIRST GANGSTER

- We'll meet again the day after tomorrow and then you're going to give us more money.

ALL TOGETHER

- OK

How can they refuse? The members of the "Mafia" walk away and the little beggars, all together, sigh with relief.

Dritan sits on the pavement exhausted. Thank God, they're safe now.



Two days later Dritan is at the corner of the street, opposite Maria's "store", and waits for her to come out. He sings and he plays with the rubble of the road to pass the time. He waits for hours, until, finally, he falls asleep.

Eventually, Maria comes out of the building, closing the door behind her. Dritan wakes up by the sound of the closing door and sees her. He runs and appears in front of her. Maria is surprised.

DRITAN

- Please don't be angry, I had no other place to go

MARIA

- Don't give me that, you little fox.

DRITAN

- I told you, I have no one. I want to work. Take me with you. The other day my friends and me were in a really big danger. I'm very scared. "Mafia" is going to kill me. Please take me with you. I'll work as much as you want.

MARIA

- You're so persistent. Look, I've finished my work and I'm going home now. My house is at another district... a nice district. My neighbors don't know my real work. Besides, I don't often get out of my house. Have you eaten?

DRITAN

- Yes, I got a chocolate from a kiosk. I didn't steal it; I bought it. I love chocolates.

Maria, very thoughtful, walks towards her car. Dritan follows her. She turns and pats him on the shoulder. It's a warm and tender gesture.

MARIA

- Come with me, I'll buy you dinner, but only for tonight. I feel certain that you're gonna get me into more troubles...

The little boy's face lightens up with this unexpected happiness. They both get into her the car and Maria starts the engine.



When they arrive, Maria parks opposite her house. They get out of the car. When they reach the entrance of the building the hooker takes out her keys, looks right and left and then unlock the door.

MARIA

- I worked hard to make this detached house. I don't like apartments.

DRITAN

- I like all the houses here.

MARIA

- Do you know why I don't like apartments? Because I don't like skylights. That's where all the odors get mixed up, smells of fried fish, meatballs, onions and insecticide. You can hear the tenant from upstairs flushing his toilet and the one from downstairs airing himself. Besides, don't think that because they all live in the same building, they know each other. They don't, they don't even say good morning to each other. Come now, let's go inside young man.

Maria pushes gently Dritan inside, closes the door behind them and locks it.

MARIA

- I'm locking the door because there have been many burglaries lately. It's the Albanians, but also ours, Greeks. Come; let's go in.

Dritan moves inside. He looks around. The house is comfortable, very clean and cozy. The furniture is nice and most of it is new.

MARIA

- So here's my "place".

She lifts her arms and makes a theatrical gesture around the room, to show her little friend the house.

DRITAN

- It's beautiful and so big!!!

MARIA

- My name is Maria, what's your name?

She asks him suddenly, because it just came to her that they haven't been introduced to each other.

DRITAN

(Happily)

- Dritan. Here they call me Fotis.

MARIA

- So, I'll call you Fotis. Do you like my house Fotis?

FOTIS

- Yes, I like it very much.

MARIA

- I've decorated it myself.

She's very proud. She sits on a chair and takes off her shoes.

MARIA

- Won't your "uncles" worry?

FOTIS

- No... they won't care. I've done it before. The other night I was very tired and I didn't go home. I slept out, at the streets with the others.

MARIA

- That's very dangerous for a kid. How old are you?

FOTIS

- My mom says that I'm 12. She must be right. My brothers are smaller; I'm the oldest.

MARIA

- Let's have something to eat. I haven't cooked anything. I think I'll make an omelet and some salad.

They go to the kitchen. Maria reminds him

MARIA

- Don't forget the neighbors don't know what I do for a living.

Maria turns on the kitchen's light. Everything is clean and tidy. The sink is shining. She takes all the necessary kitchenware and makes the omelet. Fotis sit on a chair and watches her without making a sound; he seems mesmerized by her movements.

MARIA

- I've an extra room where you can sleep. But tomorrow, before I leave for work, I am going to wake you up and we'll leave together, ok?

FOTIS

- Ok. Do you mean that I'm going to have my own room tonight? He can hardly believe his ears.

MARIA

- Eh... yes, I have an extra room. Sometimes my nephew visits me and he sleeps there. He's a bit older than you are.

FOTIS

- You have a nephew!

MARIA

- Yes, I do. Why not? I have a sister at the village, whom I love very much. She's married and she has a son. I care for him. I often send them money.

FOTIS

- You're very kind, Maria

MARIA

- Of course I'm kind. What did you expect? That because of what I do for a living I'd be wicked? I'm not hiding behind my finger. I wanted to do this job; I've chosen it. Or, better yet, I think I was born to be a hooker. But do you think that we, prostitutes, don't have a soul, like other people have? We have my boy, but we bury it deep.

She opens a drawer, takes out a clean tablecloth and spreads it on the table. She carefully places the plates and, when the food is ready, serves it.

MARIA

- I like to eat on a clean tablecloth. I hate the ones that are made of nylon. Everyday I spread a new one. Even if I had a family I would do the same. I wouldn't be bored to wash them.

They sit at the table. Maria makes her cross solemnly. Fotis looks at her and does the same shyly. He's very hungry, so he begins to eat with appetite.

MARIA

- Eh, you've forgotten to wash your hands kid. The bathroom is on your right, hurry up.

She caresses his head. Fotis obeys her, gets up and goes to the bathroom.

The bedroom is neat and tidy. Maria takes off the bed's cover. The blanket and the sheets are perfectly made, as if they've been

waiting for someone to sleep in them. Everything is made in such a way that the room seems to be ready to accommodate a guest.

MARIA

- You'll sleep here. The sheets are ok, they're clean,
She looks at his clothes.

- Take off your clothes, you mustn't sleep with them on. I should bath you, but I'm too tired. I'm only going to have a quick shower.

FOTIS

- Don't worry Maria, I'll be careful.

MARIA

- If you need something call me; don't be shy. Goodnight.

FOTIS

- Goodnight.

Maria gets out of the room and closes the door behind her. Fotis feels happy. For the first time in his life he'll sleep in a room of his own. In his country something like this would have been a luxury. They used to sleep all together, in the same room. He sighs with relief and lies on the bed with his hands on the pillow. He stares at the ceiling and his eyes slowly close. He's exhausted...

Early in the morning Maria drinks her coffee in the kitchen. She's smoking her cigarette thoughtful. She gets up to make breakfast for Fotis. When she finishes, she sits down again and lights another cigarette. She swallows the last of her coffee. She seems undecided. She turns on the radio but turns it off immediately. She gets up, takes a glass of milk, bread with butter and honey and a can of juice from the sink and places them on the table. Then she takes a pen from the refrigerator and misspells on a napkin, since she's never learned to spell correctly - "*STAY FOR TODEY*"

She looks at her note, and then she tears it to pieces, talking to herself - "*But he doesn't know how to read!*"

She throws the pieces of paper in the wastebasket, grabs her purse and leaves the house in a hurry, before she changes her mind.



Fotis wakes up. He rubs his eyes, looks around and everything comes back to him, he remembers what happened with Maria last night. He stretches himself with satisfaction. He gets off the bed,

walks to the door, opens it and shouts at Maria, thinking that she's still at the house.

FOTIS

- Mariaaaa...

No answer. He waits for a second. Not a sound. He shouts again.

FOTIS

(This time louder)

- Maria?

Again there's no answer. He goes out of the room. He opens the door of Maria's bedroom and looks inside. Nobody. He closes it and goes to the kitchen. He sees his breakfast on the table. A glass of milk, a plate with slices of bread spread with honey and butter and a small can with juice. Everything looks so tasty! He begins to eat with appetite this delicious breakfast. When he finishes, he puts his empty plate and glass in the sink. In the living room he turns on the TV and sits comfortably on the couch. On the screen appears the show "Smart money".

PRESENTER

- Today we're going to discuss smart ways to invest your money.

Fotis listens carefully, as if the discussion concerns him. But he understands nothing, so he puts on another channel. And he continues the zapping. He doesn't understand many things, he's just looking at the images that appear on the screen. He can't decide what to watch; there're so many channels. He just can't get enough of it. He's thinking:

"I'm very lucky to be sitting here, but the others are going to sit on the carton boxes this afternoon".

Despite his comfort, he's thinking of his friends.

He passes all morning in front of the television set. He likes it a lot. He'll never have another chance like this, to be able to watch television for hours on end, sitting on a comfortable couch and not on some carton box. If not tomorrow, then surely the day after tomorrow, he'll have to leave, that's what Maria's told him. This thought makes him sad. After a while he falls asleep, he's not used to watching TV for so many hours, and it made him dizzy.

A sound wakens him up. He looks to his right and left. He's trying to find out where it came from. It's a telephone ringing. He looks around, but he can't find it. The ringing continues. He's desperate; he wants to find where the phone is. He stands still to listen more carefully. Then he realizes that the sound comes from another room. It's Maria's room. He runs towards it. He picks up the phone and he waits for the sound of a voice. Silence. He doesn't talk. Then he listens to Maria's voice.

MARIA

- Fotis, can you hear me?

FOTIS

- Yes, I can hear you.

MARIA

- What are you doing?

FOTIS

- I'm watching TV

MARIA

- I'm going to be late, I'll come home late in the evening, probably. I'll bring you something to eat. Do you like hamburgers?

FOTIS

- I don't know; I have never eaten one of... those.
He doesn't say the word because he can't pronounce it.

MARIA

- I'll bring you some hamburgers to eat for dinner.

FOTIS

- OK, get me some ... of those... to try them.

MARIA

(With motherly care)

- Don't run away.

FOTIS

- I don't want to run away.

MARIA

- So, you'll wait for me, OK?

FOTIS

- Yes, I wait for you Maria.

MARIA

- Goodbye now.

FOTIS

- Goodbye

He places the phone back. It was the first time in his life that he talked to the phone. He actually enjoyed it.

♫ ♪ ♪ ♪

Maria walks fast; she's in a hurry to get as soon as possible to her place. She's holding some shopping bags. A few yards away from her house a woman pats her on the shoulder. It's Anna.

MARIA

- Oh... hello Anna, how are you?

ANNA

- I'm fine. You're early today...

MARIA

- My nephew is visiting and so I had to be back early. His mother is away on a trip and so I'll take care of him for a few days.

ANNA

- I left earlier from my work today, too. I have to take Catherine to the dentist. Last night she didn't sleep because of the pain, poor child.

MARIA

- I hope she gets better soon. I, too, had my mind on my nephew all day. You see I can't leave earlier from my work, like you.

ANNA

- Maria, we've met so many times on the street, we've talked for hours, but you've never come to my place, although I've invited you many times. Why don't you come tomorrow for a coffee and bring your nephew. Catherine will keep him company.

MARIA

- Thank you, we'll come. What time shall we be there?

ANNA

- Around 5.00 o'clock will be fine for us. Will it be OK for you?

MARIA

- Yes, it would be fine. See you then!

ANNA

- OK, I'll be waiting for you.

MARIA

- Goodnight Anna

ANNA

- Goodnight.

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Maria gets into her house, closes the door with her foot, because her hands are occupied and places the shopping bags on the floor. Fotis gets up from the couch to welcome her. He goes near her, and hugs her. Maria is at a loss. She's not used to such things. She, too, embraces him. She becomes friendly with him.

MARIA

- How are you my boy? What did you do all day long?

FOTIS

- I watched TV.

MARIA

- I bought you some clothes and I brought you something to eat, you know some of... those.

She laughs.

FOTIS

- Thank you, you are very kind.

MARIA

- Go ahead now, go and take a bath. I'm going to cook something for tomorrow. Lately I had stopped cooking, but since you're here, I'll start again. It's OK, I don't mind. To be honest, I actually think I like it.

Maria turns on the hot water to fill the bathtub. Then she pours bath foam in it. Fotis is standing beside her and watches her every move.

MARIA

- You'll get in and you're going to stay in for a while. You must wash yourself carefully. I want you to wash your hair three times. Maybe I should help you, to do it properly. Go ahead; take off your clothes. Fotis doesn't move. He's ashamed to get undressed in front of Maria. Maria understands that.

MARIA

- You're ashamed? OK, take off your clothes but leave your underwear on. Get in the bathtub with it on.

Fotis doesn't move. Maria waits for him.

MARIA

- Go ahead, what are you waiting for?

FOTIS

- I'm not wearing any underwear.

MARIA

(Smiling)

- OK, I'll turn my back and I won't look at you.

Maria turns her back and Fotis undresses quickly and gets into the bathtub. Maria asks him without turning her head.

MARIA

- How's the water?

FOTIS

- It's fine.

MARIA

- May I turn around now?

FOTIS

- Yes...

She turns her head and she sees Fotis hidden in the water. Only his head can be seen. It's so funny that Maria bursts into laughter.

MARIA

- Sit up, I want to wash your hair.

Fotis sits up and Maria begins to wash his hair.

FOTIS

- Why didn't you wake me up in the morning?

MARIA

- Because I felt sorry for you. I let you rest and enjoy the warmth of a real bed. You can stay here for a few days. But I'm afraid what the people might think; I don't want them to believe that I'm exploiting you. I'm not that kind of person.

FOTIS

- I know that. The only thing I want is a job. If I find one, I'll go and live on my own.

MARIA

- Do you think that you'll be able to live on your own if you have a job? Even if you had a job, you'd still need a family. Poor kid, things aren't so simple. Besides the money won't be enough for you to pay a rent. Where are you going to stay?

She washes him up. Fotis plays with the water, he's happy. Maria shouts at him.

MARIA

- Be careful, you're soaking me...

And she laughs feeling happy. Fotis continues to play with the water. Maria stands back; she doesn't want to become soaked with water and bath foam.

MARIA

(Faking an austere voice)

- Come now, stop it. I'm too tired. It's time to get out.

FOTIS

- I want to stay in the water.

MARIA

- OK, you can stay if you like. A neighbor has invited us for a coffee, tomorrow afternoon. I think we should go. But you'll have to be very careful and very quiet. I'll throw away these clothes; you're going to put on the new ones.

FOTIS

- You are very kind.

He can't believe how very kind Maria is with him.

MARIA

- We'll see what's going to become of you...

Maria takes the towel and puts it besides him, on a stool. She opens the door and gets out of the bathroom.



In Anna's place, Maria and Fotis are sitting on the couch. The furniture is rather austere but there are flowers everywhere. Anna loves flowers. The radio is playing soft music. On the coffee table there are cups and some spoons. Maria's trying to comb Fotis' hair. Anna comes in holding croissants and hot coffee. Their sweet smell fills the room.

MARIA

- Is the coffee ready? Its sweet smell has filled the house.

ANNA

- At this time of the day I like to sit and have a cup of coffee with friends. I like Sunday afternoons in autumn, especially when I enjoy hot coffee with croissants filled with cream.

As soon as Anna puts them on the table, Fotis takes one croissant and eats it ravenously. Maria stares at him angrily. He conforms and begins to chew slower. Anna serves the coffee and asks.

ANNA

- Fotis, would you like some orange juice?

FOTIS

- Yes, please.

She shouts at Katherine

ANNA

- Katherine, bring us a glass of orange juice, please. There are some simple things that us give so much pleasure, don't you agree Maria?

MARIA

- If you've found these things, then you're a lucky person. But, unfortunately, we usually don't realize how precious these things are.

Katherine appears at the door holding a jug with orange juice and two glasses. She puts them on the table and greets Maria.

KATHERINE

- Good evening. How are you Madame Maria?

Fotis stops eating and stares at her. He thinks she's pretty.

MARIA

- Hello Katherine. I came with my nephew for a visit and some coffee. We're keeping company to your mother.

KATHERINE

- That's very nice. Mom, I'm going for a walk, is it OK?

She gives her mother a kiss.

ANNA

- Are you going out again?

KATHERINE

- I've finished my homework

ANNA

- Ok... take a croissant.

KATHERINE

- No, thank you. I don't want one right now. I'm in a hurry. Goodbye.

She seems upset. As Katherine walks to her room Fotis stares at her enthusiastically. He likes her a lot.

ANNA

- From what I understand my Katherine has started to go out with company.

MARIA

- Well, her time has come.

ANNA

- Yes, but I don't worry. I know where she's going and with whom. I try to be her friend. It's a great responsibility; I'm alone, as you know.

MARIA

- How long have you been divorced?

ANNA

- Ten years. I brought her up all alone. Her father is abroad. Whenever he comes here, he sees her and they spent many hours together. I'm

not complaining, his attitude is the right one. But you see the problem is that he doesn't live in Greece.

MARIA

- She's a good girl.

ANNA

- Yes, she is. She's very balanced. I hope she gets lucky in her life.

MARIA

- Why didn't you marry again?

ANNA

- Do you think it's easy? I've a love affair. We're together for two years now. It's serious for me. And for George too, I believe, but I don't know what'll become of us.

MARIA

- Is he married?

ANNA

- No. He's a good man.

MARIA

- You should get married.

ANNA

- I don't know. I'm thinking of Katherine. Besides, we haven't talked about it. Still, lately we don't see each other as often as we used to. At the beginning of our affair we were very close, we were together all the time. I love him very much. I've never loved anyone so much.

Fotis doesn't listen to their conversation. His mind is stuck on Katherine's image. He walks unnoticed out of the room and towards the corridor. Shyly he walks towards Katherine's room. The door is half-closed. He sneaks up on it and looks through the door's opening with curiosity. Katherine doesn't notice him, she has her back turned as she undresses. His eyes glue on her. Her freshly washed long hair is shining. Her slender body is hardly visible. She puts on her short dress and looks herself in the mirror. Then she takes her brush and brushes her hair. She looks again in the mirror. Fotis is sexually aroused. His heart is thumping. He looks at her for a while and then draws away. He doesn't want her to notice him.

They accept another invitation from Anna for a meeting with her friends, again at her house. After all, it might not be a bad idea to have a good relationship with a neighbor.

They're getting ready for Anna's meeting. They're late. The hooker is looking for her jewelry. Fotis is sitting on the bed. He's waiting for her to finish. Maria is very stressed.

MARIA

- I must wear some jewelry... to look like a lady, because Anna has invited all her lady-friends. You know, I only wear jewelry when I go for a walk with my nephew and my sister.

FOTIS

- Will Katherine be there?

MARIA

- I guess so... Are you ready? Let me look at you. Oh, this forelock's never as it should be.

She combs his hair and lowers his blouse.

MARIA

- This blouse looks great on you. I want you to be careful, so that we make a good impression.

FOTIS

- So you don't know for sure if Katherine will be there?

MARIA

- No, I'm not sure.

She opens up her jewel box and chooses the proper jewelry. She shows them to Fotis.

MARIA

- These should be perfect.

She wears them looking herself in the mirror. Then she asks him.

MARIA

- Get me my cell phone, please. I must take it with me, because the others will surely be carrying theirs.

FOTIS

- And who's going to call us?

MARIA

- Nobody. We'll just have it with us. Come on... let's go, we don't want to be too late. They'll be serving food, also.

They get out of the room but before opening the front door, Maria stops and looks herself in the mirror that's hanging above a drawer. She's not certain about her make-up; she doesn't want it to be too heavy. That wouldn't be proper for the occasion.

MARIA

- Is my lipstick too much?

She shows her lips to Fotis. He looks at them carefully.

FOTIS

- They're very nice.

MARIA

- I didn't ask you if they're beautiful. I asked if the color is too deep.

FOTIS

- What do you mean "deep"?

MARIA

- Never mind. Let's go.

They get out of the house. Maria is holding Fotis by the hand and they walk towards Anna's house hand-in-hand. Maria trips and the pain on her leg makes her stop for a minute. She bends and grasps her aching leg.

MARIA

- Fuck it. Shit I'm not used to wearing shoes without high heels.

FOTIS

(Wondering)

- Then why are you wearing them?

MARIA

- They're more aristocratic. Haven't I told you that we must be very decent? Anna's friends are going to be there. You must be very careful. You mustn't forget that they don't know what I do for a living. If they ask you, you'll tell them that I have a shop. Don't forget that.

FOTIS

- I won't forget it, don't worry.

They walk faster now because they don't want to be late.

♫ ♪ ♫ ♪

Anna opens the door. She's very pretty. She's wearing tight, brown leather trousers and a white wooly blouse. Her hair is beautifully done.

ANNA

- Welcome

MARIA

- Good evening. Sorry, we're a bit late.

ANNA

- Come in, we've been waiting for you.

They go into the living room, where two friends of Anna's and her cousin are sitting. Maria loses her courage for a minute, but Fotis pushes her to move on. In the same time he's looking for Katherine. They greet the others.

MARIA

- Good evening

FOTIS

(Shyly)

- Good evening

Anna introduces them. Maria goes and sits on the couch. She puts her purse on the floor. She's uncomfortable. Fotis doesn't follow her but stands on a corner. There's silence for a while. Nobody's talking. Then Anna breaks the silence.

ANNA

- Fotis, you can go inside where Katherine and the other kids are.

FOTIS

- Yes, I'm going.

Fotis walks away looking at Maria. One of the guests starts a conversation.

FIRST GUEST

- Have you been to the theatre lately?

No answer from the other guests.

ANNA

- I saw a play but I didn't like it much. We have too many theatres in Athens, so it's really difficult to decide which play to see.

SECOND GUEST

- I wish I had time for the theatre. I work for many hours, I help my son with his homework and the house-chores never end.

She addresses Maria.

SECOND GUEST

- Are you helping your nephew with his lessons?

MARIA

- He's staying with me only for a few days.

SECOND GUEST

- Well, do you help him even during these few days?

MARIA

- I've no time. I'm very busy at my... shop.

SECOND GUEST

- Do you have a shop?

MARIA

(Self-conscious and uneasy)

- ... Yes, I do.

SECOND GUEST

- Do you have many clients?

MARIA

- Yes, actually I'm working like a slave...

SECOND GUEST

- You must get very tired.

MARIA

- Yes, I often feel exhausted.

SECOND GUEST

(Insisting)

- But you must make a lot of money.

MARIA

- Yes, I earn enough money!

Maria's resentful. She gets up and helps herself to some food, because she wants to avoid the chattering that makes her very uncomfortable.

The table is filled with tasty snacks that Anna has made. The other guest continues the conversation.

THIRD GUEST

- My son is a genius. At least that's what all his teachers tell us.

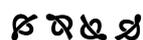
FIRST GUEST

- Good for the kid. Our children are well cultured, too. Did you watch "The loving one" on TV yesterday?

ALL TOGETHER

- Yes... Of course.

And they begin to talk about the soap opera. Maria watches how fast their lips are moving. She doesn't take part in the conversation because she hasn't seen the episodes. She doesn't like TV, she prefers to listen to music, so now she's bored. She regrets her visit to Anna. She gets up, fills her plate once more with snacks and sits down again. And so time goes by.



Katherine, Fotis and two more boys are sitting in Katherine's bedroom. They are drinking Coke and talking. Fotis looks stealthily at Katherine. He finds her beautiful. She's shining. She's wearing a short skirt and a tight T-shirt. The two boys are talking and Katherine listens to them indifferently.

GIANNIS

- So, what's your name?

FOTIS

- Fotis.

GIANNIS

- In what class are you?

Fotis blushes, he thinks before he answers.

FOTIS

- Sixth grade.

NIKOS

- You look older.

FOTIS

(Hesitating)

- That's how old I am... I just look older.

Fotis watches them carefully. He hopes that they didn't realize that he lied. Katherine goes out of the room. Fotis drinks his Coke slowly. He feels uncomfortable. Nikos talks to Giannis.

NIKOS

- I wanted to buy some shoes like the ones you're wearing, but finally I bought these.

He lifts his leg and shows the shoes.

NIKOS

- They're "NIKE".

GIANNIS

- They're nice. Mine are "Strike". They're more expensive than yours are; but it's Ok, yours are labeled, too.

He asks Fotis.

GIANNIS

- What shoes are you wearing?

FOTIS

(Uneasily he's searching for an excuse)

- I've bought so many. I've forgotten what these are.

NIKOS

- It's written on them... let me see.

He doesn't believe Fotis and he crouches to see the mark.

NIKOS

- There's nothing written on them

FOTIS

- It must be written under them...

GIANNIS

(Insistently, maliciously)

- It's not written on the sole, it's written on their side.

FOTIS

- On these it's written on the sole. They're from abroad. An uncle of mine sent them to me.

Fotis smiles, he's satisfied by his quick answer. The others are looking at him surprised.

FOTIS

- I'm going inside, my aunt may want me.

Fotis leaves the room before they realize that he's lying.



On their way back home they're both silent. Maria breaks the silence.

MARIA

- They're all assholes. Hypocritical women, pretending they are aristocrats.

FOTIS

- My shoes have no mark on them. Why is that Maria?

MARIA

- Why? Should they have a mark written on them?

FOTIS

- That's what the other kids told me.

MARIA

- They're assholes, exactly like their mothers.

They arrive at their place.



A few days later Katherine and Fotis know each other better. They've already visited each other's house a few times. One day Katherine knocks at Fotis windowsills. The kid opens up and is glad to see her.

FOTIS

- Hello Katherine.

He smiles at her.

KATHERINE

- Look what I've brought you.

She lifts a small box, opens it and takes out a small rabbit. She holds it by the ears and puts it on the window's baseboard. The little animal seems frightened.

KATHERINE

- An uncle of mine brought it to me and I thought to bring it to you as a present. I'm too old for that and besides it won't live in an apartment. It'll be better off here, with you, because you have a yard.

FOTIS

- Thank you, it's pretty, but I don't know if Maria will allow me to keep it.

He holds it tenderly in his arms.

KATHERINE

- Of course she will, why would she object, anyway? It'll live in the yard. Do you want it?

FOTIS

- Yes, I want it. Thank you.

Fotis looks at her tenderly, and then he bends over and kisses her on her cheek. He whispers without hesitation.

FOTIS

- Katherine, do you us to be together? I like you very much.

Katherine bursts into laughter.

KATHERINE

- What are you talking about? We can't do that, Fotis. I'm like a sister for you. Besides, you're too young for that staff. When you get older you'll meet some other girl and then you'll fall in love with her.

FOTIS

- They say that love is sorrow...

KATHERINE

- Yes, but a sweet sorrow... Good bye now. Take care.

As she starts to go, Fotis asks her worryingly, because he doesn't really want to confirm his suspicions.

FOTIS

- Are you in love Katherine?

KATHERINE

- I'll tell you some other time, now I'm in a hurry. Good bye.

She yells at him as she walks away. Fotis yells at her too.

FOTIS

- How shall I name it?

KATHERINE

- You christen it. It's yours.

FOTIS

- I'll name it Katherine.

KATHERINE

- Is it a female?

FOTIS

- I don't know.

Fotis doesn't care, besides that's the only name he likes.



It's 1 o'clock after midnight. Maria is watching a show on TV about the environment. Fotis sits beside her, with his head on her shoulders, he's drowsy. He can hardly keep his eyes open to watch TV. Suddenly the doorbell rings. They're both startled. Maria runs to the door and looks through the eyepiece. It's her pimp, who disappeared from her life a long time ago. Before opening the door she nods at Fotis to go into his bedroom. Fotis obeys and leaves the room. She opens the door. A furious guy gets in. He's younger than she is, tall, muscled, with long hair.

PIMP

- What have you done to me, you crazy woman?

MARIA

- What did you expect me to do, leave that bitch unpunished? She took you away from me and she'll pay for it.

PIMP

- Why should she pay for anything? I don't want you anymore in my life. All I want from you is to stay away from me. I'm going to fuck any woman I want. I don't need your permission.

His face has turned red from all the shouting. He's going to become violent any minute now.

MARIA

- Why? Didn't I make you happy? I gave you so much money; I made you so many presents.

PIMP

- Fuck your money and your gifts. I don't like you anymore. Get it in your head and don't get mixed up again in my life because I'm going to beat you up.

Fotis is standing behind the door, eavesdropping. The pimp walks to the door, but Maria runs behind him and pulls him by the arm.

MARIA

- Don't leave me. I'll be very kind with you, I'll buy you as many gifts, as you want. Please, don't go...

She's holding him tightly. He's irritated. He pushes her away. She falls on her knees and grabs his legs. She's begging him.

MARIA

- I want you very much and you know it. Please don't go.

Fotis has glued his ear on the door. He's very upset by the shouting. He opens the door and looks into the room. He's amazed to see Maria in such a position. He didn't expect her to be so very much in love, to be so humiliated, to be begging on her knees. He listens to him as he shouts, bending over her.

PIMP

- Get up you slut and stop crying, you're not going to succeed anything with that. I'm not coming back to you. It's all over between us.

Maria doesn't let him go. She's holding his legs, trying to stop him from walking out on her. The strong, muscled man becomes furious. He slaps her with all his power. Maria falls on the floor, with her lips are bleeding. She looks at him disgustingly and spits at him.

MARIA

- You're a bastard.

PIMP

- I told you to let go of me, but you didn't listen.

MARIA

- Fuck you. Go to hell.

The man finally leaves the house, banging the door behind him. She starts sobbing. Fotis, scared and angry, goes inside to help her. He's very upset.

FOTIS

- Maria...

MARIA

- Don't panic, kid, I know how to survive. I'm hooker, am I not? Let him go to hell. Get me some cotton and peroxide from the cabinet that's over the shoe-drawer.

Fotis runs and gets the things she's asked from him. He hands them to her.

FOTIS

- Don't be afraid, I'm here with you now. I'm going to protect and help you.

MARIA

- Great, now that the two mugs are together we're going to be just fine. She puts on her bleeding lips the cotton with some peroxide on it.

MARIA

- Did you get it kid? You give away everything you've got and what do they give you in return? Slapping and kicking.

She gets up from the floor and they go together into her bedroom. Fotis's holding her protectively. He helps her to lie on her bed. Maria is very upset. He lies on the bed, beside her, takes her hand and holds it tightly. Then Maria hugs him and they lie there, together, trying to calm down. The woman has tears in her eyes.

MARIA

- I loved that man very much, but he didn't care. I gave away too many things of myself to him. It doesn't matter. I've loved. It's the best thing that can happen to a person during his or her lifetime.

She turns off the light. They remain silent. Maria gets up, opens the CD player. She wants to find a song that she likes, a song that makes her heart ache. She finds it and puts it on. She sits on her armchair, where she usually sits to relax after a difficult day at work. She listens to the song, whispering the lyrics, and Fotis watches her with sadness in his eyes, silently. Then Maria bursts into tears.



Days go by quickly, more happily. One afternoon Maria tries on one dress after the other. She's nervous, she doesn't know which dress to chose. Fotis holds his rabbit in his arms. He caresses it tenderly.

MARIA

- What the hell, I don't know which dress to wear.

FOTIS

- Where are you going?

MARIA

- I've a date. After many years, I've got a date. Do you understand what you've managed kid? You've changed my life. You've brought luck to me. His name is Aristos. He's come by the "shop" many times, we've talked a little and today he's asked me for a date.

FOTIS

- Is he without a woman?

MARIA

- He's divorced and rather worn out, life has tired him. He has two daughters, but he hardly ever sees them. He must have been a handsome man in his days.

FOTIS

(With agony in his voice)

- Are you going to marry him?

MARIA

- Of course not. Who's going to marry someone like me, and whom am I going to marry?

She looks out of the window.

MARIA

- Has he arrived yet? He told me that he'd sound his horn when he arrived.

FOTIS

(Admiringly)

- Has he got a car?

MARIA

- Yes, but it's an old car. Don't wait up for me. Go to sleep.

They hear a car honking. Maria makes her hair.

MARIA

- Ah, there he is. I'm going now, kid. You be careful while I'm gone, sweet dreams.

She kisses him and runs to the door. There she stops. She winks at him.

MARIA

(Laughing slyly)

- Am I beautiful...and sexy?

FOTIS

- Yes, you are. Very.

She leaves.



The tavern has a sign "Nicola's place". Aristos gets out of the car. He's smartly but a bit old-fashionably dressed. He's put plenty of gel on his hair and he's wearing a handkerchief in his lapel's pocket. He goes to the other side of the car and opens the door for Maria. She goes out with grace. She likes this polite gesture. She smiles at him

saucily. They sit to a table out-of-the-way. Only a few people are inside the tavern. They give their order for the first dishes of appetizers.

After a while:

ARISTOS

- What would you prefer to have now, my little bird? Stake or souvlaki?

MARIA

- I can't possibly eat anything else. I'm full. Actually, I feel a little dizzy from all this food.

ARISTOS

- Tonight we're going to eat and drink a lot. This is a special day for me.

He looks at her tenderly. Maria does the same.

MARIA

- It's a special day for me too, Aristos. So, you give the order, take whatever you like most.

With a French accent he shouts.

ARISTOS

- Waiter...

He summons him with his hand.

§ § § §

Fotis has fallen asleep on the couch, while the TV is still on. He sees a dream.

Fotis is rich. He is sitting behind a throne like desk. All around him there are telephones, computers, papers, pens, ashtrays, cigars, and chairs. He's wearing an expensive costume, a very expensive watch, his tie is colorful and his hair neatly done. He lights a cigar, turns round his huge armchair and looks at the city lights, out of the window. A few minutes later somebody knocks at the door. Fotis, answers, without turning round.

FOTIS

- Come in.

Katherine comes inside wearing a dainty dress; her hair is pulled back, in a studious hairstyle.

He turns his armchair and sees her. He nods at her to come closer. She sits on his knees, hugs him and caresses his body. He lifts her skirt a little and strokes her leg. He holds her tightly in his arms. Katherine brings her lips near his...

He wakes up and jumps up from the couch. He puts his head in his hands. He moans. He looks at the door and then at the clock. It's midnight. He's alone. Maria's not back yet. He lies again on the couch, hoping that he will continue to see the same dream.

♫ ♪ ♫ ♪

The doorbell rings insistently. Fotis opens the door. It's Katherine.

KATHERINE

- Hallo. Is Maria here?

FOTIS

- Yes, she's in the kitchen.

Fotis is happy to see her. Katherine walks towards the kitchen and goes in.

KATHERINE

- Good evening Maria, what are you cooking?

MARIA

- Meat balls for the kid. I'm going to be out of the house all day tomorrow.

Katherine sits on a chair while Fotis is standing behind her, leaning on the door.

KATHERINE

- I like meatballs very much.

MARIA

- Stay and eat with us, the food will be ready in a few minutes.

KATHERINE

- I've just had a hamburger with Dimitris... I've told you about Dimitris, haven't I?

MARIA

- No, you haven't.

KATHERINE

- I met him a few days ago in my friend's house. The moment our eyes met for the first time, I felt very strange. I liked him from the very first moment.

She stops, turns towards Fotis and looks at him intensely for a moment. Then she continues.

KATHERINE

- Since that day I'm very much in love with him. I can't sleep or study, I think of him all the time. From the moment I wake up in the morning until I go to sleep at night my thoughts are just for him. Only in my sleep he's not there, although sometimes I dream of him. That's love Maria... love!

MARIA

- You are very excited. I think you've fallen in love, my little one. It's your first true love. Are you two dating?

KATHERINE

- Yes, we are. We're together a lot. But that's not my problem. I don't know what to do... I don't know how to tell you. It's something very personal, but I must talk about it with somebody. I've talked about it with a friend of mine many times. I don't know why I came to you Maria, after all I don't you know very well.

MARIA

- I know how you feel. I understand you very well, but I think that you'd better talk about it with your mother. She loves you and she cares for you very much. She's young and smart. You two can be friends.

They hear the front door closing with a loud noise. Fotis has gone out very upset. They look at each other. Maria doesn't understand.

MARIA

- It's Fotis... he's gone.

KATHERINE

- I must be going now. You're right, I'll talk to my mother.

Maria escorts her to the front door and then goes to look for Fotis. She finds him sitting on the stairs of a house, a few yards away. She sits beside him.

MARIA

- What's wrong with you, my little punk?

Fotis doesn't answer, instead he bends his head and clenches his fists. Maria tenderly lifts his face and dries the tears from his face.

MARIA

- Are you crying for a woman so soon? What will you do later on?

FOTIS

- I'm not crying for a woman.

MARIA

- You can't fool me.

FOTIS

(Persisting with anger)

- I'll never cry again.

MARIA

- That's what you think. I wish you were right.

FOTIS

- I'll become tough. I'll be careful.

MARIA

- You can't be careful when it comes to love, because it's always so unexpected.

FOTIS

- I'll try to avoid it.

MARIA

- You'll never succeed, kid. You are going to meet many girls and some of them are going to touch your heart more than others. And then you're going to get hurt inside and you'll react in exactly the same way. Come on now; get up. Let's go in our living room to watch TV that you like so much.

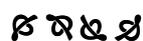
FOTIS

- I want to stay here for a while.

MARIA

- OK, sit here for a while if that's what you want. But you should know that one-day you're going to be very strong. I believe that Fotis, I really believe it.

She hugs him, kisses his forehead and leaves. Fotis watches her as she moves away without moving from his seat.



Inside Aristos' car Maria sits in the front seat and Fotis behind. They're all going for a Sunday ride in a festive mood. Aristos has turned on the radio and a Greek folk song, which is a big success, is playing. Maria sings along, while Fotis looks out of the window the cars that pass them by. Their car can't go fast because it's very old.

ARISTOS

- Where shall we go?

MARIA

- To the fun-park. Do you want us to go there Fotis?

FOTIS

- Yes, I do, very much.

ARISTOS

- We're on our way, my boy.

He steps on the accelerator.

Aristos is going from one cashier to the other, to get tickets for all the games, while Maria and Fotis wait for him in front of a doll that's swirling around. They sit in one of the ballerina's seats and as it swirls around with speed, Fotis yells, holding Maria tightly. She's also shouting with fear. Aristos, who is at the opposite seat, is also shouting.

ALL TOGETHER

- Whoa... whoa... whoa...

They are having fun. They are having a great time. Fotis is so excited! Each time they get off a game, he hugs first Maria and then Aristos, and kisses. He's very happy.

ARISTOS

- I've tickets for all the games, let's go to the next one.



Maria walks from the kitchen to the living room, she's very stressed. She's preparing the table because she has invited Aristos over for lunch. Anna is helping her.

ANNA

- What time did you tell him to be here?

MARIA

- Around 2 o'clock. What do you think of the table? Is it OK?

ANNA

- It's very nice.

MARIA

- I want to please him and have a good time. It's been a long time since he's last eaten homemade food or sat at a proper table to eat. He lives alone and he doesn't have much money.

ANNA

- But the house smells of fried food. What have you made meatballs?

MARIA

- Yes, it's his favorite food, he told me so yesterday.

ANNA

- Don't you have any air-deodorant?

MARIA

- No, I don't. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to take the freshly washed clothes out of the washing machine and place them on the radiators. So, with the heat of the radiators the entire house is going to smell of Soupline.

ANNA

- That's very clever.

Maria stops walking around and stares at her. She wants to tell her the truth about her work, but she hesitates. She'd better postpone it. Then the doorbell rings. Fotis opens the door. Aristos appears, clean and freshly shaved. He's holding a box with candies and a chocolate.

ARISTOS

- Hello my boy.

He caresses his head and hands him the box and the big chocolate.

FOTIS

- Hello mister Aristos.

ARISTOS

- Is the doll inside?

FOTIS

- Yes, she's waiting for. Anna is here, too.

Aristos goes into the living room.

ARISTOS

- I salute the beautiful ladies.

He kisses the hands of both of them.

ANNA

- I'm very glad to meet you, mister Aristos.

ARISTOS

- Me too, madam.

ANNA

- I'm a friend of Maria's.

ARISTOS

- Will you join us?

ANNA

- No thank you, I have to leave. Come on Fotis, let's go.

FOTIS

- I am not coming with you; I'm going to meet my friends.

MARIA

- Go ahead, but I don't want you to be out late.

ANNA

- Good appetite and have a great time.

Fotis puts the box with the sweets on the table, takes the chocolate and goes out with Anna. As soon as the door closes behind them, Aristos kisses Anna. He's very pleased. He asks her.

ARISTOS

- What are we going to have for lunch today?

MARIA

- Anything you want, my boy.

He patters her ass.

ARISTOS

- Ok then, let's sit down and eat.

Lunch is over. Maria picks up the dishes. Aristos gets up and approaches her. He hugs her before she enters the kitchen. His embrace is very tender. He kisses her sweetly on her neck.

MARIA

- Aristos, are you going to be romantic?

ARISTOS

- Why do you ask, madam, is it forbidden to be romantic?

He kisses her again.

MARIA

- Oh come on Aristos stop it.

ARISTOS

- No, I'm not going to stop it my little bird. We're going to have fun tonight.

He caresses her again and again. He lifts her blouse, strokes her belly.

MARIA

- It's been a long time since a man has treated me like that.

ARISTOS

- You'll like it even more in a while, my little bird.

MARIA

- Take it easy, my man, you're going to make me drop the dishes.

ARISTOS

- We are going to brake them all, my doll.

Maria puts the dishes on the table. She takes him by the hand and leads him to her bedroom. When they reach the door, she embraces and kisses him passionately.

Dritan goes to the meeting-point. His friends are already there.

TOULAND

- Look who's coming, the aristocrat.

DRITAN

- Hello boys.

ARBEN

- Why have you stopped coming? Where are you staying?

TOULAND

- What are these clothes?

He clutches the sleeves of his shirt, mocking him. Dritan sits on the pavement and tells them his story. The others are listening carefully.

TOULAND

- Are you in love?

He bends over Dritan and smiles at him slyly.

TOULAND

- You mean you want to...

DRITAN

- I want to hug her, see her, and kiss her. But she's in love with a jerk. He has a bike and I don't.

TOULAND

- She doesn't want you because you're not a man yet. What bullshit are you talking about a bike! Look at a man in love. We have nothing to eat and he's running behind girls' shirts. And what shirts, aristocratic ones! You don't even smoke.

He lights a cigarette.

DRITAN

- It's her birthday the day after tomorrow. I want to buy her a gift, but I've no money and I am ashamed to ask from Maria.

ARBEN

- She doesn't give a damn about you and you want to buy her a present?

DRITAN

- Yes, I want to. She's very kind with me. The other day she brought me a rabbit.

ARBEN

- Well then, let's steal something. A ring. That's the kind of gifts they give to the broads, isn't it?

DRITAN

- But she's not a broad. Anyway, I don't want a ring. Better give something to hang on her neck.

TOULAND

- At the next street I've seen some guys who sell necklaces and rings.

DRITAN

- There you go again... We are going to get caught and I'll never be able to go to Katherine again. Besides, Maria will be sad and disappointed if she finds out what I did.

TOULAND

- So, what do you want us to do? Give you one of our millions to buy her a gift?

DRITAN

(Hesitating)

- I'm going to beg for money.

TOULAND

- Will you manage to collect enough money by begging? What are you going to buy her with only a few Euros? We must do a "job", if you want to get her a really nice present.

DRITAN

- Let me think about it. I don't want to get caught again.

TOULAND

- By the time you've made up your mind her birthday will have passed and you'll lose the bread, you fool.

ARBEN

- He's right, man.

DRITAN

- Ok, I agree. Let's go to the uncles now. I want to see them and then I'll go back to Maria.

They walk down the street. Some illegal immigrants are gathered in front of their poor houses and some policemen are talking to them. There's uproar. The kids approach. The conversation becomes more intense. Nobody pays any attention to them. They are all very upset. A police van comes down the street. They look at each other, worryingly. The police van comes closer and parks right in front of them. The Albanians are protesting. Their voices become louder. The policemen become violent. They push them inside the police van. They panic.

TOULAND

- Let's not try to escape, we're not going to make it this time.

They go inside the police van one by one.

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Once again they find themselves inside a police station's lock up room. Dritan sits shyly in one corner. He's scared and sad. The others feel the same. Dritan gets up, goes to the window and looks at the policemen next room, trying to understand their intentions by their movements. One of them is talking to the phone, a second has fallen asleep in an armchair and the third is sitting behind his desk, writing down something. He's beginning to worry, because they have kept them in there for a long time. He asks his fellow-countrymen.

DRITAN

(With agony)

- Are we going to leave in the morning?

They remain silent. Nobody answers. He asks them again.

DRITAN

- Are they going to free us? I must go to Katherine and Maria. They have got to let us go back to our homes.

ARBEN

- What homes? Do we have any homes? Stop whining and come sit down here. We're not in the mood to listen to your sniveling.

An Albanian, which is better dressed and cleaner than the rest, knocks on the window and calls a policeman. He asks if he can talk to him. The policeman opens the door.

POLICEMAN

- What do you want?

ALBANIAN

- Can I have a few words with you, please?

POLICEMAN

- Come this way.

The Albanian goes to the other room.

ALBANIAN

- Are you going to keep us here all night? We have all the legal papers and we can show them to you. There are some kids with us. How can they possibly stay in here all night?

His eyes are swollen and his voice is trembling.

POLICEMAN

- Those kids? What are you talking about? They walk around Athens all day long, don't worry about them. Go back inside. We'll call you when we're ready.

But the Albanian continues to talk. He asks the policeman again and again.

ALBANIAN

- Why don't you separate the ones who'll be freed from the others? Me and another man have all the legal papers, we're educated, we can work.

POLICEMAN

- You'd better go back inside. Stop this conversation, you're getting nothing out of it.

ALBANIAN

- Let me explain a few things.

POLICEMAN

- I don't want you to explain anything. It's a waste of your time. Go back.

He forces him to return to the lockup room.

After some hours a policeman unlocks and opens the door of the lockup room.

POLICEMAN

- Get out, all of you.

They walk out. He nods at them to move on. They've all had a sleepless night. Their eyes are red from the lack of sleep. They all wait for a while, standing at one corner. A second policeman approaches.

SECOND POLICEMAN

- You are going to be expelled today. A police van is going to take you to the borders and you'll be returned to your country.

Dritan looks at his fellow countrymen. Nobody reacts. The policeman pushes them one-by-one towards the front door of the police station. Dritan doesn't move. He sits down, on the ground. They shout at him to get up. He doesn't pay any attention. He's determined to protest.

POLICEMAN

- Get up kid. I'm going to hit you if you don't.

DRITAN

- I'm not leaving, I'm not going anywhere. I live with Maria.

POLICEMAN

- Who is Maria?

DRITAN

- Maria is Maria

POLICEMAN

- What's her surname?

DRITAN

- I don't know.

POLICEMAN

- You don't know her surname and you're living with her? Are you kidding us?

DRITAN

- I'm telling you the truth. I live with her.

He's trying to control himself, he doesn't want to start crying, but he can't stand it any more. This injustice is too much for him.

POLICEMAN

- Ok, get up now and when you arrive at your country, you'll send her a postcard.

Dritan is furious, he's determined. He doesn't move. The others are watching the scene amazed. He ties his hands behind his neck and lowers his head to the ground.

POLICEMAN

- Don't behave like that. You're going to leave, with or without your own free will. The rest of you move it, go and sit in the van.

The Albanians walk slowly towards the car. Two of them turn and look at Dritan, as if they want to offer him their help. But they change their minds and they do nothing. Instead they enter the police van. Two policemen lift him up by his arms and carry him to the front door of the police station. He's slender and light, so it's easy for them to put him inside the van, despite his resistance. They lift him up and throw him inside.

They shout at the driver.

POLICEMEN

- Close the door and start the engine. They're all inside.

The doors close tightly. Inside the police van everybody is seated in his or her places. Their faces are sullen. Nobody's talking. Dritan sits near the window, next to Arben. They are looking at him, pleased with his behavior, because none of them dared react like him.

Arben talks down on him.

ARBEN

- What were you thinking in there? Are you trying to be smart? These things will get you nowhere.

DRITAN

- It's not fair; it's very unfair. I was so happy with Maria. I was going to get a job.

He looks out of the window. His eyes fill with tears, but he doesn't cry. He punches the seat with his fists. He remembers the

beautiful moments he had with Maria and Katherine. Images keep coming back to his mind, like when Katherine came and gave him the rabbit and he kissed her. He recollects Maria cooking, putting him to bed and Aristos giving him his chocolates. The sound of the engine is heard. The driver starts the van. The sky is grey with clouds. It starts to rain.

Arben looks at him with sadness in his eyes.

ARBEN

- Don't worry man...we'll come back, we'll make it.

DRITAN

- I will come back. You'll see I will come back.

The rain gets harder. The car moves slowly away from the police station, because the road is slippery, and it turns at the corner of the street. He can no longer see anything familiar.

♫ ♪ ♫ ♪

Maria is chain smoking. She nervously walks up and down the room. She's talking to herself.

MARIA

- Where is he now? How did I become involved with his kid?

She looks out of the window. Then she telephones Anna.

ANNA

- Yes please.

MARIA

- He's missing since yesterday.

ANNA

- Who is missing? Aristos?

MARIA

- No, Fotis. He left yesterday noon, when Aristos was here and I haven't heard from him since. I believed that he would be back by now. I'm worried Anna, I'm afraid something bad has happened to him. I knew things wouldn't go well. Why should they?

ANNA

- You know, I don't want to scare you, but I've read that they approach people with lies and then persuade them to follow them. You should go to the police.

MARIA

- I know police very well my dear. They won't help me. They won't even pay any attention to me. Why should I go?

ANNA

- Why not go? He's lost. Where else can you look for him?

MARIA

- I won't go. I'll see what else I can do.

Why stay in the house without Fotis? She sits on the stairs, lights a cigarette and inhales deeply. Their rabbit appears through the half open door. Maria takes it in her arms and caresses it gently. She decides to go out. She places the little animal inside, closes the door, without locking it and leaves the house.

Maria goes towards the "shop". Before entering, she looks around, hoping to see Fotis's little head. The streets are empty. Everything is quiet. She doesn't go in; instead she sits on the stairs and lights a cigarette.

MARIA

(Talking to herself)

- Where can I find you, my little punk? Where are you? You should have made it. Tonight I'll stay here. All night I am going to stay here and wait up for you.

She gets up, opens the door and goes in. The door closes behind her and in the same time the small red light over it turns off. She won't work tonight. She's not in the mood.

"There is hope, there is always a light in our lives", she thinks to herself.

THE END