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## Small Change

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. . . the wife of the neighbor with a large family, a middle-aged woman with five kids, had come over for coffee . . . coffee was being served . . . and the women were talking as usual, when the old lady, eyeing him all over, turned and asked her daughter:

“Is he still not talking? . . . after all we’ve gone through!”

“Ahha . . .hhha . . . ha . . . hahahahaha . . .” came the answer from the young man instead . . . eyeing the neighbor’s wife and pointing her out to the lady.

*Translated by the author*

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COSTAS TAKTSIS / GREECE

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## Small Change

“That’s my spit! You just make sure you don’t hang around in the street.”

She never really spat, only said she did, but the point of the threat was clear: you were to get back *before* the spit dried up.

How fast it dried up was a matter she alone determined according to the circumstances, according to her mood. Sometimes, it dried up before you could say jackrobinson, you flew out like a bird, and got back like one too, but the spit had dried up already, and she was waiting at the door with belt in hand.

Other times, you got back from the errand she’d sent you on, and at the sight of the house when you turned the corner, you began to shake all over, something snapped inside you, your knees gave, instead of going forwards, your legs went sideways, backwards, forwards, sideways, backwards. . . . You asked yourself furiously what had made you forget the time, what devil had made you stop and gape at the kids dragging the blackbird along by its leg, whether it was worth getting such a whipping for a piece of entertainment that had just *chanced* along your way, and in which you had not even taken any part, and which, to top it all, already belonged to the past, whereas the hour of judgment, the moment when accounts would have to be settled, was approaching inexorably with every step you made towards the door.

But often your fears were groundless. You went in, trembling like a man being led to his execution, and suddenly, from the expression on her face, saw that the spit had not dried up yet, and your chest heaved in relief and,

filled with love and gratitude, with ecstasy in view of this miracle, you gazed at her. You would have liked to run to her and kiss her, your guilt at dawdling all gone now, and you felt very sorry all of a sudden that you hadn't dawdled a bit more, you even dared to tell her that the kids from the next street up had caught a blackbird and they were dragging it along by a string tied to its leg and kicking it like a ball, and it was as if you were blatantly confessing to dawdling, as though you were provoking her to show you her cards, so that if she intended to whip you she might as well whip you then and there and get it over with. But she either ignored you or said something that had nothing to do with your dawdling and the blackbird.

"Leave the bottle in the kitchen, and run across to Mrs. Hrisí and tell her to drop in for a couple of minutes because I want to talk to her."

Every now and then, in fact, though rarely, when she was in a good mood—when the gentleman who'd bought her the tiny gramophone at the International Fair had come the night before, or the gentleman who always brought the mussels and red caviar—at such times she even forgot to spit, and when you got back from the baker's, struggling under the weight of the loaf, which you'd already dropped three times along the way, she not only did not scold you, but swept up in her arms and said:

"Aye, what a boy I've got, that's grown up now and runs errands for me, my good little boy, who'll look after me when I'm old, who'll take me from the sun and put me in the cold!" and she laughed with all her heart.

How marvelous life was on days like those! The gramophone never stopped, and she sang along with it:

*In a tango one night  
he pressed her tight  
but her eyes wandered  
his love she squandered. . . .*

On such mornings Mrs. Roxáni came from Toumba and did the washing, because she loathed doing it herself, or scrubbed the floors, made the house spick-and-span, a joy to see, or she came just to keep you company, tell you fairy tales, because she herself had to go out, first to the lawyer about the divorce, then to the dentist, and from there to Modiano's for her shopping. But if she stayed at home, she stuck her head out of the window in the afternoon and called out to the ice-cream man:

"Mr. Pródhromos, give me two specials, and make sure the cone isn't empty either—whatever's happened to you, man, where've you been these last few days?"

She got two ice-creams, one for Mrs. Roxáni and one for you—she didn't eat ice-cream on account of the dentist, though sometimes she couldn't stand it watching you licking at the thing and she not having any, and she said:

“Won’t you give a tiny bit to your mommy that bought it for you?” And she put her hands over her face and cried, “Wah, wah, wah!”

And straight away you ran to her, holding the hand with the cone high, even though you knew she was only pretending she was crying, proud of yourself that you too could do something for her, but, come now, admit it, watching her with bated breath, watching to see how much she would bite off, because, when all was said and done, the ice-cream *was* yours; she could have some by all means, but not all of it.

The evenings were even better when she was in a good mood. The place reeled with smells from the yard of the house across the way, jasmine and honeysuckle, and there was a holiday spirit in the air, like May Day, and she put on your flower-printed playsuit for you, the one with the elastic round the leg, and sent you out in the street to play to your heart’s content so long as you didn’t come back all filthy. Then she carried the flowerpots out on the front doorstep, the begonia, the hydrangea, and the two rubber plants, and watered them and poured a bucket or two of water on the pavement to freshen the place up, and then sat on the threshold herself, next to the flowerpots, and chatted with Mrs. Hrisí, or else gathered the big boys and girls from the third grade round her and taught them games, post office and patty-cake patty-cake baker’s man. . . . Once, in fact, she stood up and took the jump-rope to show the girls how to really jump, and she didn’t quit the game because she lost but only because she ran out of steam, and she burst into laughter, and said:

“That’s enough now, you little monsters. I’m not for things like that. I’ve got a grown-up son.”

But there were other days, all of them winter days, all full of clouds, when she was in a vile mood, when she smoked like a chimney stack, and bit her nails, and on days like those, not only were you not to dawdle in the street, but you weren’t even to play in the house with the silver paper from the cigarette pack, nor utter a single word. Because she’d say:

“You watch out you don’t breathe a word today or I’ll tear you apart like a sardine.”

On such days it was better that she didn’t send you out on errands at all, because you knew that however quickly you came back, the spit had dried already, and if the spit hadn’t dried, you’d forgotten to get the salt.

“What else did your mother tell you to get?” the grocer would ask, but however much you racked your brains, it was impossible to remember; or you dawdled in the street, completely forgot that today she was in a vile mood, and you hung around and watched the kids dropping coins into the peep show, or else they saw you clutching something tightly in your fist, and said:

“Come on, let’s have a fight, and I’ll let you beat me,” and they stole the

small change off you without you realizing it, and she, instead of coming out to whip the kids, whipped you.

"Forgive me, mama," you howled between sobs, "forgive me. I won't do it again," and you tried to hide between her skirts, but the more successfully you evaded her, the louder you cried, the more frenzied she became—she didn't like you crying or pleading, she wanted you to take your punishment like a man:

"Either you become a man and learn not to cry," she screamed, beating you blindly, "or I'll kill you right now once and for all, and forget you. This world doesn't need any more cowards like that good-for-nothing father of yours—tell me, will you become a man or not? Now say: 'I'll become a man!' Say it or you'll never leave this place alive. It'll be your last day!"

And you yelled, "Yes, mama, I'll be a man."

"And I won't dawdle in the street again!"

"And I won't dawdle again."

"And I won't let any street boys fool me out of my small change."

"Yes, mama, yes."

"Now get out of my sight before I change my mind. Go and wash your face, and don't let me hear a squeak out of you. I wish to God I'd never brought you into this world, I do."

On days like those, the gramophone either didn't play at all or else it played the same record over and over again.

*In this world of ours, Misery,  
You're the mother of us all. . . .*

And she went out in the evening without calling in Mrs. Roxáni to sit with you, she just put you in bed and left, and came back late, how late you never knew; often, even, you didn't know she was gone, but you must have been in your third or fourth slumber when you heard voices as though from a great distance away, and for just an instant you opened your eyes and saw your angel stark naked and wingless, beside her bed, and then the oil lamp went out, the voices went out too, and the darkness was like a heavy blanket on your eyes, and, like lead, you dropped into your fifth slumber. . . .

Ah, mother! Twenty-five—how many is it?—thirty years have gone by since then, and I still haven't learned my lesson. I still haven't become a man, I still dawdle in the street watching the kids, and the street boys still steal my small change. And that's your greatest punishment. And my punishment too—I, who didn't understand, while there was still time, what you were going through then, and I tried to get my own back on you. But, god-dammit, did you have to pick on me to let off steam? I mean, couldn't you have turned a blind eye when I was ten minutes late, or when I forgot the

salt? And, if I remember correctly, the small change the kids from the next street stole off me was, for sweet Jesus' sake, mother, it was just a nickel or two!

*Translated by N. C. Germanacos*

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RICARDO REY BECKFORD / ARGENTINA

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## The Enigma of Samos

*This work, fundamental to the understanding of phagyanalysis, was published by Professor Wilhelm Wagner in the journal Anthropologie und Erwartung only two years ago. The echo of the controversies it stimulated in the most prestigious scientific centers of the old world has reached us even here. Our journal is honored today to publish, for the first time in Spanish, the text which renews the explosive and prolific dispute which the theories of Wagner and his followers have provoked in the scientific world.*

Almost three years ago I published the results of my investigations under the title *Phagyanalysis: A Theory of Ingestive Conduct in Human Beings*.<sup>1</sup> Of all the criticisms which the single printing of this work provoked—and they certainly were not few in number—the only ones which a scientific spirit can and, in fact, should consider valid, are those which question the data and the concrete observations which would support my theoretical propositions. The other criticisms, whether they stem from certain sectors of the society or from individuals poorly acquainted with the proper concerns of scientific investigation, do not even take into account, in the majority of cases, the grounds on which to raise the question.

However, in spite of the emotional nature of the majority of these attacks, of their virtually total inability to dispute facts pertinent to a discipline which they begin by ignoring in a manner that is at times alarming, we must admit that they gained (and not only among the greater public!) an acceptance which has little to do with the merit of their position. The preceding, however, should not greatly surprise us. It was predictable—one