

The clay shoes

Short – film script

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THE CLAY SHOES

[SUBJECT]

Children's will and resourcefulness.

[LOG LINE]

A poor little girl makes clay shoes to wear
at her sister's wedding.

[SUMMARY]

It is summer, in a Greek village (perhaps in Corfu), sometime in the late 1950s. Maria, a little girl of 10-11 years old, is the second out of three children of a poor agricultural family. She has an older sister (17-18 years old) and a younger brother (6-7 years old), the family's pet. Maria usually receives very little of everybody's attention, while Mama always bawls her out because Maria is a heller. On the occasion of the big sister's wedding, the family is visited by Auntie and her husband, Pete, from the USA. Auntie brings the big sister a pair of white wedding shoes for a present. Maria, who goes about barefoot because she has no shoes, gets jealous of her sister's beautiful shoes. Then she gets the idea of making her own brand new shoes out of clay. Her first attempt fails, but when she comes to the brick-kiln and notices the technique used to make clay-bricks, she decides to go for a second attempt. On the wedding day, Maria appears at the church wearing her new clay shoes, where she receives Mama's approval and praise, for the first time.

[TREATMENT]

The script takes place in a village of the Greek province, preferably in Corfu, my home island, from where all the images and inspiration originate.

It is a story that accentuates the persistence and ingenuity of a little girl, who tries to overcome the poverty and difficulties of the rural society in the decade of 1950s, seeking to make her dream come true. I believe it is even today an up-to-date issue, especially because of the economical and social crisis of our homeland, Greece.

The heroine's, Maria's, family is a typical agricultural family of the time, as it has many times been described to me through the recollections of my parents. They have few resources, enough only to ensure survival, yet the people go on with their lives, they are grateful for what they have, they marry and dream for the future.

An important character, other than the heroine, is Mama, the person who practically has the whole household upon herself, although typically the head of the family is still the father. Mama, who obviously has to struggle too hard to afford the time and temper to attend to stubborn Maria's needs, who nevertheless seems to be more like her than any of her other children. Maria, who is "capricious" as it is usually said of an independent, self-contained, energetic child. And quite because the similarity between mother and daughter is so great, is there between them conflict, but also a need for fellow feeling and acceptance. Because at the end of the day it is not only Maria who has earned, with persistence and resourcefulness, the accomplishment of her desire, but Mama has also gained something: to reveal her tenderness and self-complete.

A second important character is Auntie from America - the standard of prosperity and progressiveness - who comes from the other end of the world full of gifts, open arms and most of all with an open mind. She is the symbol of Nostalgia of the emigrated Hellenism and a symbol of providence and solidarity for the people back home, who try to make it through hard times.

So the story introduces the heroine, little Maria, from the very beginning as a child different than other. The coming wedding has created for the big sister certain privileges, in which Maria claims her own share, even to the cost of constant reprehension. Wearing her sister's clothes and most of all shoes is for her a break from poverty and childhood, with the latter being even harder because of the

first. Having imbedded the label of "untamed" and "capricious", Maria avoids welcoming the visitors from America with Mama and the big sister and instead of trying tricks and adulation in order to gain their sympathy, she hides and watches from afar. She wants to see first, weigh the facts and then act - it is her own way of taking things under control.

The sister's new shoes, the object of Maria's desire, incite the demon in her, a demon for which the Greek is so noted already from the times of Homer's Odysseus. And the solution that she seeks does not come from the intervention or help of anybody else, no! She wants to figure it out herself, so she draws away, she runs to the farm, outside in nature, near the animals, the trees, the dirt, under the rain, where she feels normal and complete. Right there, together with her imagination and innate acuity she will find her answer, the clay shoes, which she herself out of the gifts of nature will make. Thanks to the anticipation of this outcome, she accepts almost uncomplainingly all the mockery from the little brother, the adult-like arrogance of the big sister, the chores Mama assigns her with.

That's why Maria sees the failure of the first attempt - even only shortly - as a contestation of her own self. She is infuriated, she gives in to a destructive rage, she throws arms and legs about in fury and then she surrenders to the peace of nature, where everything goes on quietly, without explanations, without intention.

In my opinion it is because of that self-surrender in the arms of mother-nature that Maria gets her second chance - as human we often tend to want everything under our control, whereas sometimes it is better to leave ourselves to the harmony of the world around us, of the universe, which has been here much longer than we and it is certainly wiser. On the other hand, however, the answer to most human problems turns up through the contact with other people, not away from them, not through hermitism and definitely not through misanthropy. It is when Maria's wandering brings her to the brick-kiln, where the workers make the dirt to bedrocks to build upon, that she realizes the way to solve her problem and get what she wants.

Finally the story will have the anticipated happy ending. Within the laughter and the gaiety of the wedding, within the colours and music of tradition, Maria will have the opportunity to demonstrate her accomplishment, the brand new hand-made clay shoes, which she has created with her ingenuity and hard work making the best of what nature has to offer. And thus gain the praise and acknowledgement of Mama, namely gain her own place in the world and stand in it an effective and worthy member.

[SCRIPT]

SCENE 1. - INT. - HOUSE - TOP FLOOR BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's a dark room. A village house. Moonlight comes in from an open window. A stripe of moonlight shines on the wooden floor. Shadows of traditional furniture are distinguished in the darkness. A credence with two showcases stands against one wall, filled with different kinds of traditional bibelot and the "formal" tea-set.

We hear the quiet hum of a wedding song, along with the sound of locomotion and shoes being dragged on the floor.

On chairs and on the divan we can see different kinds of brand new linen and towels, two camisoles, panties with lace, a pair of silk stockings. A little girl's hand comes into the picture; it picks up one of the camisoles. We see a little girl of 10-11 years old (MARIA) in the mirror of a wooden wardrobe. She hums the wedding song, posing and making dance figures. The camisole that she has on is too big for her and the brand new white pumps that she wears look huge on her feet. She has make-up on her face which is very clumsily put on. On a turn of her dance, MARIA notices a young woman of about 17-18 (RINIE), standing at the doorsill. RINIE has her nightgown on and stands in a furious pose. MARIA stops dancing and humming, looking at RINIE like a thief caught in the act. RINIE puts down her arms, turns her hands into fists and screams out loud.

RINIE

Mama!

At the scream, MARIA frightened takes off the camisole and the shoes and tries to take off the make-up with the back of her hand, which makes it smear all over her face. She runs down the stairs to the ground floor of the house, passing by RINIE, who tries to catch her. MAMA's angry shout is heard.

MAMA

(Off)

Maria!

Fade to black.

BEGINNING TITLES

SCENE 2. - EXT. - VILLAGE MAIN ROAD - DAY

MARIA dawdles down the road. She has a poor dress on and no shoes. She holds an olive-tree rod and plays with it. Further down the road she notices the bus, which has stopped. Lots of people are gathered around it. Some get on, some get off, and others load or unload their suitcases. MAMA and RINIE are also there. MARIA looks at them greeting a middle-aged couple, AUNTIE, who is just a little older than MAMA, but much nicer looking, and PETE, her husband from America. They kiss and hug and the appropriate introductions occur.

AUNTIE

Pete, this is my sister
and her daughter Rinie ...

As the party moves on towards the house street, MARIA hidden behind the tractor watches them passing by.

SCENE 3. - EXT./INT. - HOUSE - DAYROOM - DAY

(a) EXT.

MARIA hides outside the front window and looks inside. In the dayroom she sees AUNTIE and RINIE emptying AUNTIE's suitcase. MAMA sits at the table with a little boy (BOY) of about 5-6 years old on her lap, while PETE sits somewhere near them. All watch the emptying of the suitcase commenting cheerfully on the presents AUNTIE has brought from America. Among the presents is a shoe-box, which AUNTIE opens to present a pair of white pumps (the same ones MARIA was wearing in SCENE 1). RINIE looks excited and MAMA laughs in joy, while giving the BOY a chocolate candy, from the box they have just opened, which Auntie has brought. RINIE takes off the clogs she is wearing and puts on the white pumps.

RINIE

Oh, but they're gorgeous!
Just gorgeous!

MARIA watches her in envy as she walks up and down with her new shoes on.

(b) INT.

AUNTIE notices MARIA's head sticking out from the window. She gets up, comes out to the threshold, smiles at MARIA.

AUNTIE

So, there you are, you little heller. Get over here. Let Auntie give you a big big hug, you darling teaser.

(To PETE)

My favourite little devil!

MARIA approaches shyly, AUNTIE hugs her and gently pulls her inside. When they reach the table she gives MARIA a lollipop.

AUNTIE takes MARIA to sit on her lap, stroking her, while MARIA gives MAMA a guilty look. MAMA responds to it with a disapproving eye.

SCENE 4. - INT. - HOUSE - DAYROOM - DAY

The whole family, MAMA, FATHER, in his mid-50s, simple and rather rough-looking, like a hard-working villager, AUNTIE and PETE, RINIE, MARIA and the BOY, everybody sit around the table at lunch: boiled greens, meatballs and wine. They raise their glasses. All have glasses except MARIA and the BOY.

AUNTIE

Well, here's to their happiness and may it be a wonderful wedding!

RINIE smiles shyly, while MARIA stares at the meatballs hungrily and licks her lips, exchanging gluttonous glances with the BOY. While everybody clink their glasses, MARIA reaches for a meatball, but MAMA strikes her hand and makes a reproaching eye at her. The BOY laughs befoolingly and MARIA scowls.

Sound of thunder.

SCENE 5. - EXT. - FARM - OUTSIDE THE HUT - AFTERNOON

MARIA sits under the shed of a mud-brick hut. She has two handmade rag-dolls and plays with them. Behind her, through the open door of the hut, the sheep bleat. We can hear the rain dripping on the tin shed. Distressed, MARIA leaves down the dolls, brings her knees to her chest, hugs them and frowns. As the rain falls, drops of dirty water sprinkle her making her already dirty legs even dirtier. She snivels and brings her hand to wipe her nose, but as her hand is dirty as well, she makes her nose dirty, too. She looks at the rain. Between the branches of the olive trees she can see a light-grey sky. She snivels again. She dips her fingers in the mud and plays with it. She picks a handful of mud and plays it in her hands while her mind drifts away. Little by little she comes to realize that the

mud in her hands is taking a shape. That draws her attention. She picks more mud and makes a flat oval shape. She puts it under her foot to check the size. It seems to need just a little more. Without being totally conscious of what she is doing, she makes a big ball of clay and places it on top of her foot, shaping it with her fingers so that it takes the shape of the foot. As she looks at the clay on her foot, she smiles hesitantly. She works carefully upon the clay on her foot, joins it with the oval shape under her foot and then slowly takes her foot out of the peculiar clay stuff. She backs up a little. She can't help to notice that it looks like a roughly-cut clog. Now she laughs in joy. She takes a thin wooden stick and makes little holes on the top of the clay-shoe, as if it were a stitch. She adds a little more clay to pass for a heel. Now it seems ready. She gets up all happy with her creation and puts her muddy hands at her waist swelling with pride.

**SCENE 6. - EXT. / INT. - HOUSE - WASHHOUSE/ALLEY-WAY/
KITCHEN/DAYROOM - DUSK**

(a) EXT. / ALLEY-WAY/WASHHOUSE

Out in the dark alley-way where the washhouse is, low yellow electrical light glints. The sound of splashing is heard, like when somebody washes up. Through the washhouse door we can see MARIA washing up in front of a concrete washbasin. She has stepped up on a large mud-brick, so that she can reach the tap.

(b) INT. / WASHHOUSE

She washes her arms and face from the mud. MAMA's voice is heard from afar.

MAMA (Off)

Maria! Maria!

MARIA turns around and sees the BOY standing at the washhouse door. His face looks like that of a ready troublemaker. MARIA turns off the tap, gets off the mud-brick, as clean as it gets, reaches for the BOY's shoulder but he runs away. MARIA turns off the light and follows the BOY.

MARIA

Wait up!

(c) EXT. / ALLEY-WAY

In the dusk light the alley-way is dark. The BOY runs to the house. MARIA comes half-heartedly behind him.

(d) INT. / KITCHEN / DAYROOM

MARIA comes inside the kitchen through the back door, while the BOY has already run up to the dayroom. In the kitchen there is a gas-stove, an old buffet with the dishware and a large earthenware jar covered with a tin tray upon which there is a bottle of oil, a funnel and a ladle. Going up two steps MARIA gets inside the dayroom, where RINIE makes a wedding-dress rehearsal with the SEAMSTRESS. The BOY goes to sit on AUNTIE's lap, who sits by and watches proudly, while MAMA helps the SEAMSTRESS with the rehearsal. When MAMA sees MARIA, she grabs her and gives her a coin.

MAMA

Ah there you are! Go to Frago's and get us a bobbin of white thread.

MARIA closes the coin in her hand and looks at MAMA, then at the SEAMSTRESS who takes pins from her mouth and sticks them in different spots on the dress, at RINIE who looks at her sniffishly, finally at AUNTIE and the BOY. The latter sticks his tongue out at her. MARIA is just about to return the face to him when MAMA pushes her towards the front door.

MAMA

Go already! And don't take ages!

MARIA crosses the dayroom and gets out the front door almost running.

SCENE 7. - EXT. - VILLAGE STREETS - EVENING

MARIA dawdles away in the village streets, holding the threat bobbin in one hand and a handful of sugarplums in the other, which she eats one by one with incredible enjoyment. Some VILLAGERS see her and whisper disapproving remarks but MARIA ignores them. She looks at the street lamp with its yellow light and smiles cunningly. She looks rather anxious to pass the time.

SCENE 8. - EXT. - SEVERAL VILLAGE PLACES / FARM - DAY

The street lamp is off now. It is a sunny summer day. MARIA walks down the main road of the village at a breezy pace, passes by the village church and down towards the family farm. She walks under the olive trees and the sun rays occasionally shine upon her. A little further from the hut, upon a cut tree trunk luminous in sunlight, she has placed her clay shoes to dry. She admires them, looking at them from all different angles. She touches them with the tip of her fingers and makes sure the clay is dry. She is extremely enthused. She picks up the shoes and hops here and there, dancing and singing while holding them up.

MARIA

Fine salt, thick salt
Oh, my mama I have lost.
She won't give me any shoes
and I can't dance unshod.
Fine salt, thick salt.

She stops short of breath but full of joy. She sits on the tree trunk and almost ceremoniously, she puts on the first shoe. She stretches her leg, looks at it as if it is the most elegant shoe in the world. She puts down the foot and steps on it in order to get up, but as soon as her weight falls upon the shoe, it crumbles to pieces. MARIA looks at it dreadfully. She kneels down devastated, picks up a piece of the broken clay-shoe and stares at it, ready to burst into tears. She then turns to the other shoe, which is still in her hand. Her face cringes with distress and anger. Suddenly she throws the sound shoe against the trunk of an olive tree and breaks it. She starts treading on the broken pieces, until she turns them to powder. She falls down on the ground and beats it with arms and legs, in a completely frantic state. Then she just lies on her back breathing quickly and heavily, looking at the clear blue sky, making great effort to restrain her tears.

SCENE 9. - EXT. - IN THE FIELDS - DAY

MARIA walks through the fields, head down in sorrow. A COUPLE OF PEASANTS dig their croft. ANOTHER PEASANT further away clears the space off reeds. Further down a WOMAN riding a donkey loaded with firewood passes MARIA by. MARIA moves to the path-side to make way.

WOMAN ON DONKEY

Hey Maria! Has the groom
arrived yet?

MARIA shrugs off and does not reply, she does not even look the woman's way. She takes off from the path and gets into a corn-field.

Sitting under a corn stalk, MARIA now makes a corncob into a doll. She is still very aggrieved.

SCENE 10. - EXT. - RIVERSIDE - DAY

MARIA walks along the riverside with her corn-doll hanging on one hand. She sits down among the reeds and ferns and puddles her feet in the water.

SCENE 11. - EXT. - BRICK-KILN - DAY

MARIA stands at the edge of a clearing where the brick-kiln is established. It's a stone construction with a smoking chimney next to which lies a large shed with a tin roof, where long lines of bricks dry out. Further away, SEVERAL

WORKERS, half-naked, sun-burnt, muddy, with kerchiefs on their heads, work hard. MARIA shows interest in their work. There are some WORKERS who mix mud and straw in a large pit. Others take the mixture and shovel it in the brick-casts. One of the WORKERS takes notice of MARIA.

WORKER

You gal! Your father's gone
back to the village!

MARIA looks at him totally absent-minded. Then, all of the sudden, she runs off, literally blazing with enthusiasm.

SCENE 12. - EXT. - SEVERAL PLACES IN THE FIELDS - DAY

MARIA runs all the way back to the family farm. She glows with happiness.

SCENE 13. - INT. - FARM - HUT - DAY

MARIA, inside the hut, steals some straw from the sheep trough, while stroking the muzzle of a sheep, which bleats.

SCENE 14. - EXT. - FARM - CLEARING - DAY

MARIA has dug a small pit, where she mixes mud and straw with her feet, just like the workers at the brick-kiln.

SCENE 15. - EXT. - FARM - CLEARING - LATE AFTERNOON

MARIA has built a small shed in the like of the one she had seen at the brick-kiln and has placed her new pair of clay shoes under it. Covered in mud from head to toes she stares at her creation totally satisfied.

Fade out.

SCENE 16. - EXT. - VILLAGE STREETS - DAY

Scenes of a folklore wedding (a nice suggestion is a Corfu folklore wedding, where there can be musicians and dancers with corfiot traditional costumes). MUSICIANS playing traditional music have the lead, then follow WOMEN holding big baskets in which the trousseau is displayed. FATHER escorting RINIE dressed in her bridal dress come next, then MAMA with AUNTIE and PETE, who holds the BOY's hand. MAMA occasionally looks around as if she is looking for someone and makes disapproving grimaces. Many villagers follow the family, talking, singing and dancing - everybody go to the church for the wedding. At the gate of the church awaits the GROOM, a decent young man in his late twenties, with his PARENTS, plain and decent town people.

SCENE 17. - INT. - CHURCH - DAY

The wedding ceremony is in progress. MARIA appears at the church door peeking inside. She has her Sunday dress on, she is clean and tidy. She worms through to where the family is standing near the bride and as she does so, some VILLAGE WOMEN comment quietly on what a handful of a child she is. MARIA comes and stands between FATHER and MAMA. The BOY throws her an indifferent look and joins PETE and AUNTIE who stand upfront, as they are best-man and maiden of honour. MAMA scolds MARIA with her eyes, making MARIA bring down her head submissively, but not at all sad. Her eyes are happily fixed upon her brand new clay shoes, which she has decorated with little flowers and ribbons. MAMA, too, notices the shoes. Suddenly her face relaxes and she smiles kindly. She gently places her hand on MARIA's shoulder and squeezes her closer. MARIA, blear-eyed and twice as proud, turns and watches the ceremony piously.

SCENE 18. - INT. - TOP FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

In the same house room as in Scene 1, MAMA and MARIA tidy up. MAMA takes the formal slipcovers off the furniture and gives them to MARIA to put away in the washing-up basket, before putting the casual ones. The BOY whirls up and down annoying them and finally, sits on the sofa, where - being bored - he starts playing with the "formal" porcelain tea-set, laid there in order to be placed back into the credence. MAMA sees him and flicks his hand, warning him with a reprimanding look. Then MAMA takes the tea-set piece by piece and gives it to MARIA to put inside the credence. MARIA's clay shoes are already there, situated in a prominent place.

END TITLES