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## A HOUSE FOR FIVE

(Original title: *Spiti gia Pente*)

Summary - Extracts - Reviews

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# A HOUSE FOR FIVE

(Original title: SPITI YIA PENTE)

## Summary with extracts

A rather unusual family of four moves into a new house. It is larger than what they really need, "a house for five, not for four!" as Anna, the mother, keeps saying. However, the rent is cheap and they decide to take it.

Anna was a divorcee who has now married the widower Orestes. Thus a new family has been created, as each of them has a son: She has the 12-year-old Philippos; he has the 9-year-old Ares. Philippos likes the new house, especially the roof-room, but is not at all happy having to live with Ares, who is a real "pest". He asks for the roof-room to be his bedroom, so that he can keep away from the "little monster" as he calls Ares. Anna refuses "because it will be freezing in the winter and roasting in the summer".

The new family life starts but as time passes difficulties increase. Ares is really a "little monster". He admires Philippos and wants to attract his attention, but whatever he does has always the opposite effect. He keeps interfering with Philippos things and this outrages his new "big brother". Anna always takes the Ares's side, which makes Philippos even more angry and unhappy. Things get worse, when Anna announces that she is expecting a baby.

For all that is going on, Philippos wants to speak to someone eager only to hear and not to nag him. So he keeps an "oral" diary. He says everything to

his beloved tape-recorder, named Philoctetes. He narrates to it memories of his difficult childhood; he also tells it his grumble and problems created by the coexistence with the "little monster" who, among many other annoying things, reads comic books -especially Asterix- which Philippos detests.

Extract from Philippos's "oral" diary

*Recording Number 5 (...) Today Orestes was going to take Ares and me to Lycavittos Hill (...) My mother was supposed to stay at home to tidy up the verandah. I guess none of these will happen after all, because it is raining. So I decided to continue my spoken diary. I had abandoned it for a while, because I was recording some songs, which Christina likes. Also I had masses of homework and German lessons, so I didn't have time.*

*I don't even remember what I've said or not said to Philoctetes out of all that has happened in the last few weeks. And if I start listening to the previous tapes to find out, I'll waste all my time. About the baby, whom Mother will have, I certainly haven't told him. What should I say anyway? I only hope it won't be a little moaner and naughty like Ares. When it is born, I will let it have my room and I, at last, will sleep in the roof-room. This is my idea. I got Orestes to tell this to Mum and she did not say no! I suppose you understand what this means, Philoctetes? I was a bit offended by it. I told her: "Doesn't it matter to you now that it will be freezing in the winter and roasting in the summer?"*

*She didn't say anything. What could she say? How much she cared? But*

*the next day she bought me a book to make up for it. It was a novel titled "I care" and I liked it very much (...) She does clever things like that my mother, and I say afterwards to myself that there can't be a better mother in the world. And it is all right if she asks me into her room sometimes for the usual nagging.*

*God! It's stopped raining! Let's hope they won't decide to go out now that it's so late. I was in the mood yesterday, but not today; even though I haven't been up Lycavittos since I was little. I was in the first class then, I think. No, it must have been when I was at kindergarten, because by the time I was in the first class my parents had already separated.*

*Well, my father and I had climbed up, just the two of us. I remember when we got to the little church on the top; he lifted me up to see how far Athens spread. He showed me where our house was and it seemed so far away that I wanted to burst into tears. I hated all that distance between me and my mother, who had stayed at home. And it was then that my father told me he might leave Athens and move to Germany, and that even if he was not with us, he would still love me very much, he would write to me very often and things like that. I didn't speak at all. After a while it started drizzling. We came down the steps fast to find shelter inside the funicular railway station. Outside it smelled of wet earth and juniper.*

*"Are you crying?" he asked me after we went in through the glass door.*

*"No", I lied, "my cheeks got wet in the rain".*

*And he believed it.*

*At midday when we returned home, Mother had cooked fish. I can't remember ever eating such horrible food.*

*From that day on, I never had the chance to go up Lycavittos again.*

*Nor did Dad and I ever go anywhere again together on our own. He was always away, always working and my mother was upset. Only once in the summer the three of us went to the seaside on a Sunday. I was very happy. I thought that we had started going out again, the three of us together, but instead of a new beginning it was the very end. Just when we were having lunch at a tavern, Mum and Dad started quarrelling, I didn't know why. The only thing I knew was that I wanted to be sick. The fish we were eating smelt all burnt and the whole tavern smelled of it, too.*

*After a few days, Daddy left home.*

*"It doesn't matter if we don't live in the same house from now on", he said, "just be sure that your mother and I love you very much. Tell me now that you 're not going to be upset!"*

*"I'm not going to be upset", I mumbled.*

*And he believed it.*

*Why remember all that now? Because outside it smells of wet earth and I also feel like telling Philoctetes my news. Recently I don't even feel like chatting at lunchtime and my friend Christina noticed it. My mother, who gives a psychological explanation to everything, says that I am - what did she say - "cyclothymic", something like that? She seems to have forgotten, besides everything else, the argument we had a few days ago, when she completely spoilt my mood. She tried to force me to go to Germany, to my father's new family, for Christmas. I told her it was impossible to leave Athens, because... because Christina was going to have a party and she's invited the whole class.*

*And my mother believed it.*

*Yesterday she started the same conversation. I don't know what came*

*over her suddenly, because at first she didn't want me to go either. Mother has changed lately. Only with Ares she has stayed the same. She continues to do everything for him. Today we are going to eat wild pig, because that is what our little monster wants. She looked in all the supermarkets to try and find it. Ares said it would be good for her, because that is what Obelix eats.*

*And she believed him!*

.....

However, what irritates Philippos most of all is that Ares insists on calling him "brother" and often imitates him. For example, he too starts keeping an oral diary, like Philippos, using his own small tape-recorder, that he names Fifi.

Meanwhile Anna keeps a regular correspondence with her sister. Orestes makes short telephone calls to a close friend and tells him how things are going. Thus, the story unfolds through four monologues.

Orestes is the only one towards whom Philippos has no complaints. In fact, day by day he likes him more and more. On the contrary, the more Ares wishes to attract his "brother's" attention the worse their relation becomes, even when the "little monster" tries to be as nice and helpful as possible. What he cannot help, however, is not to interfere with Philippos things.

Then one evening Philoctetes, the tape-recorder, vanishes. Everybody - especially Philippos- suspects Ares. A big quarrel puts in danger the coherence of the family. Orestes takes Ares for a ride, to cool off. Philippos stays home with his mother, who now is in her 7th month of pregnancy. Half an hour later a friend of Philippos helps him unexpectedly to discover the truth. Ares was not guilty for Philoctetes disappearance. The tape-recorder is found.

The night comes, but Orestes and Ares are not back. At midnight, a telephone call informs Anna that Ares was wounded in a car accident they had. Anna and Philippos rush to the hospital.

Ares is in real danger and Philippos feels guilty. While waiting with his terribly upset mother and desperate Orestes for the doctors' further advice he realizes he should not have been so angry at the "little monster". After all, he can now remember so many times when Ares was indeed nice and helpful to him.

The doctors decide that if Ares is not operated immediately, he may die. At that late hour, no blood can be found for the operation, because he has a rare type of blood, the rarest. Philippos has the same type and is willing to help but the grownups disagree due to his young age.

Desperate efforts are being made by the hospital so that the necessary blood can be found. All of them prove fruitless. Time passes and Ares's life is more and more threatened. Until Philippos manages at last to persuade the grownups to let him help.

Ares is operated and his life is saved. From that time on, Philippos's attitude towards him changes day by day. He now realizes that he does care for the little one, despite their quarrels and fighting. What difference does it make if they do not have the same mother or father? Soon they are going to have a common little sister. So, they are -they can feel like- brothers. After all, they belong to the same family despite their different surnames; and they live in the same house, an appropriate house for five -as many as they soon will be.