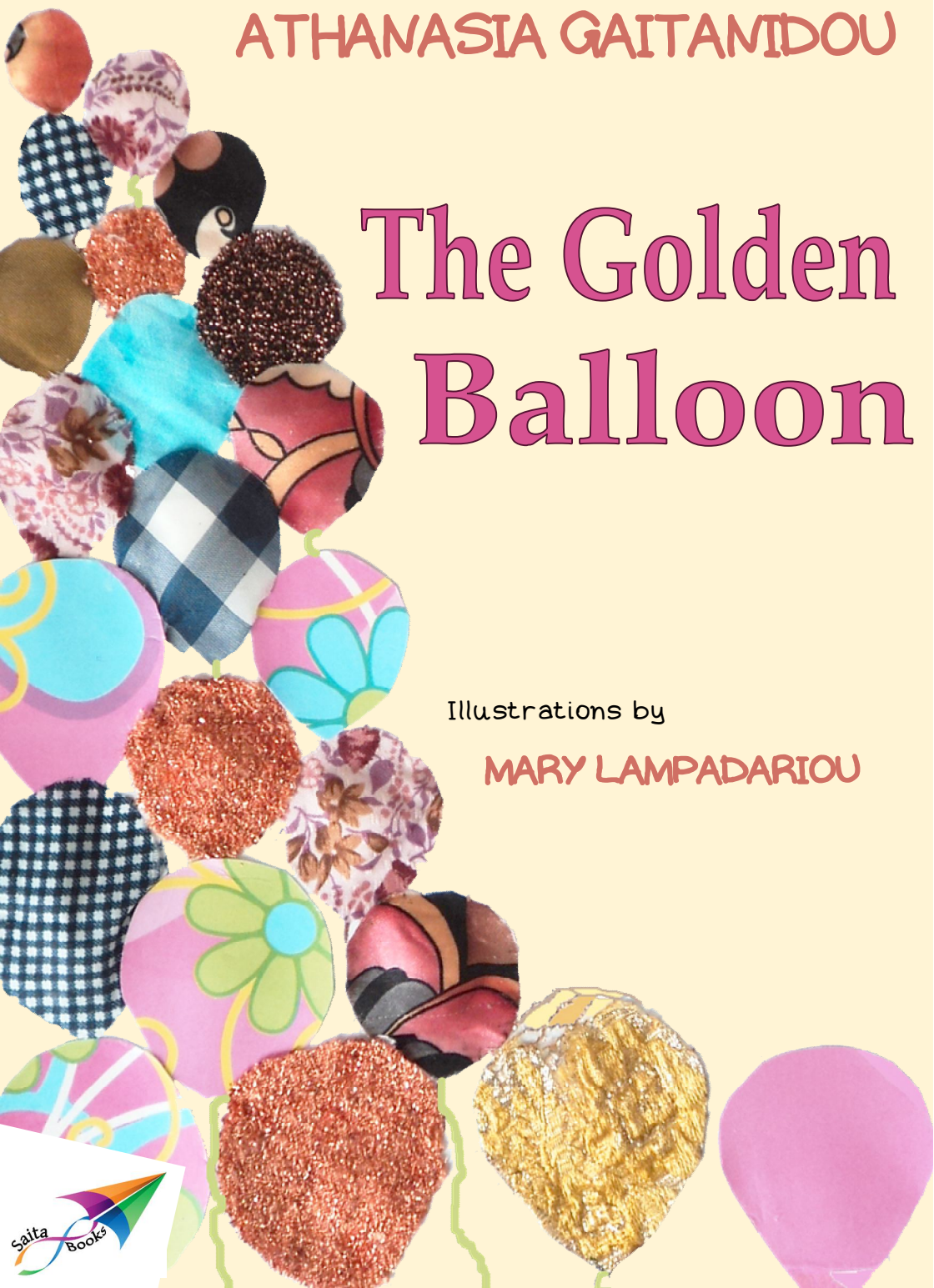


ATHANASIA GAITANIDOU

The Golden Balloon

Illustrations by

MARY LAMPADARIOU





Athanasia Gaitanidou was born in Korinos Pierias, Greece. She has graduated from the Zarifeios Primary Level Education Academy of Alexandroupolis and has completed her master's thesis on "Management and Administration in Education" (Roma Tre University). Today she lives in Kavala with her family and works as a principal in the 4th primary school. She does not forget the first years of her professional career, when she taught at the Roma encampments of Haideftou and Chrysoupolis, Kavala in Greece. Those "special" kids provided her with the incentive to continually search for ways that would lead to an education of equal opportunities to all children.

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Achilles Konstantellos



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*How is it
That birds share so justly
The blue kernels of the sky*

MARY LAMPADARIDOU POTHOU

(From the poetry collection

"I collect my belongings"

Wounded voices)

There were once in a warehouse ten beautiful shiny, full of colour balloons, all of the same round shape! They were inflated and tied up with cords fastened to a base. They were so beautiful! They even admired themselves in the mirror of the warehouse!

- How pretty we are! Look at all these colours!!

- I heard we are going to be decorating the party of a boy.

- We'll surely dazzle the children that will be there!

One of the balloons looked down and saw something that attracted everyone's attention.

- Hey, who are you? shouted the balloon to what it could see but could not make out.

- I'm a balloon too! it said from where it was, lying on the floor.

It was really different from the rest of them; long in shape and very thin, with a colour unlike the others, that of almost gold. It was inflated and abandoned on the floor.

- Ha, ha! Listen guys, it's a balloon! answered one of the tied balloons and the rest of them burst into laughter.

- And what kind of balloon are you, all long and thin like this? How will the kids hold you and play with you?

- But I...

- Surely, the clown that inflated us moments ago made a mistake and that's why he abandoned you. You must be the only one in the world with such a shape. Tough luck kid...

The balloon became very sad. It coyly looked one more time at the balloons hanging directly above it and felt discontent. Why should it have been created so different from the others? It started thinking that it was really ugly as well. It is unfair it thought, being a balloon that didn't have a nice colour and could not be used in anything... There must have been a mistake at the manufacturing plant.

- And what kind of colour is this? It's the first time that we have seen such a colour, went on mocking the round balloons.





Suddenly the door opened and the clown entered the warehouse once again!

- Here we go, he said loudly as if he was talking to the balloons. He took the tied balloons in one hand and with the other he took the long one from the floor. Shortly before closing the door he turned back, got a pouch with something colourful in it and went on. He put the tied balloons in one corner, to decorate the party and he left the long balloon and the pouch on the table alongside other stuff he had brought.

The kids had arrived early. There was loud music, a mouth-watering buffet and presents scattered everywhere for the boy who had his birthday.

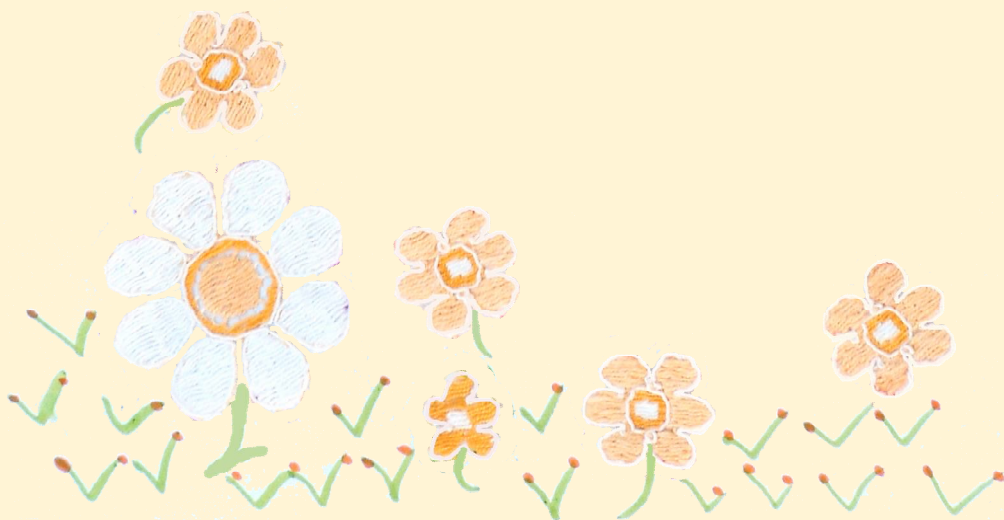
The clown took hold of two drums and in a funny way he hit them in order to attract the children's attention!

- So, my dear kids! Since I know how much you like games with pirates, I have a surprise for you. We'll make swords and pirate hat balloons for everyone!



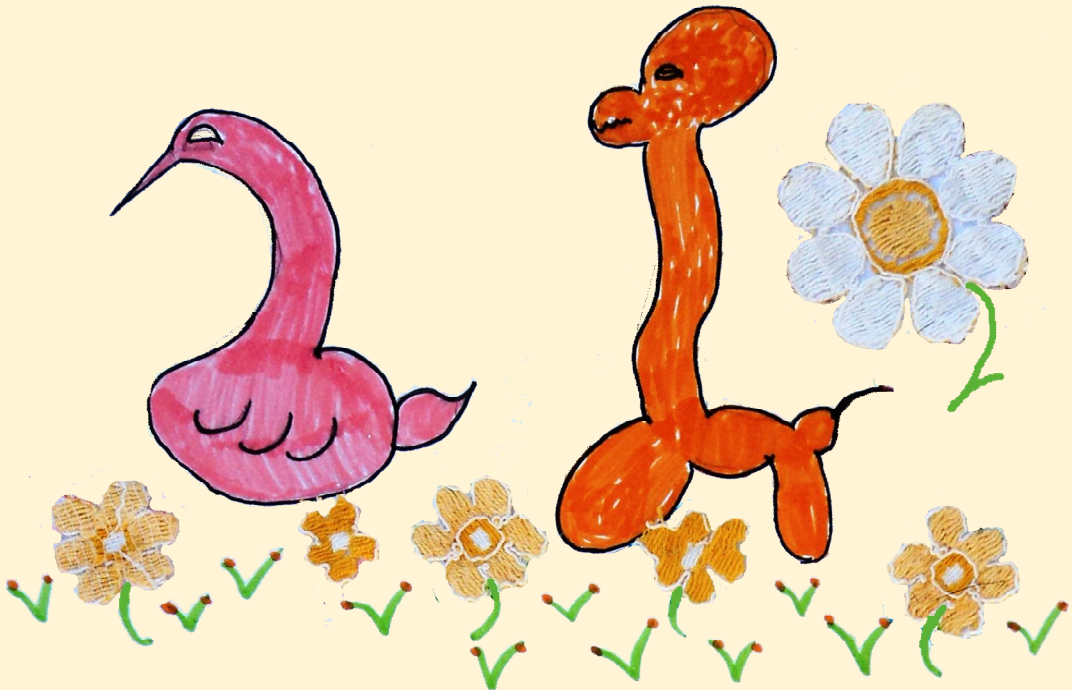
- But, how? wondered the round balloons and looked at one another.

The oblong balloon was watching as well, puzzled. The clown took the pouch and started taking out uninflated balloons; blue, red, yellow, green and a whole bunch of other colours. With a special machine he slowly began giving them shape. The important thing is though, that they were exactly like the balloon lying on the warehouse's floor some time ago.



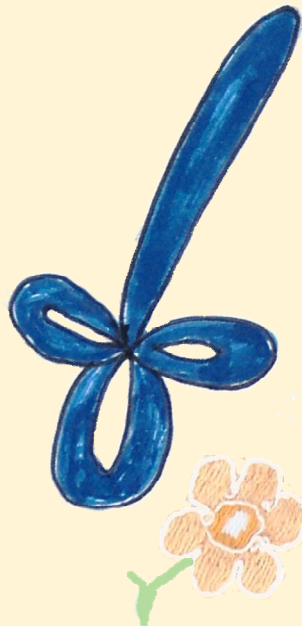
- I'm not alone! There are others like me! Look! shouted the golden balloon happily!

The rest of the balloons could not believe their eyes. Then, the clown bended them with skilful moves, and gave them beautiful shapes. Hats, belts and swords for boys, flowers and puppies for girls and anything else every child wanted.





- Finally, said the clown,
this special golden balloon,
will be the sword of the
pirate leader who has his
birthday today!



The golden balloon not only understood that it was not alone, but also it was the most important of them all, the most special one.

- I wasn't as insignificant as you thought after all! it said to the balloons that were looking at it, regretting talking to it so badly.

We are sorry, they said looking as if they really meant it.



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