

Chryssoula Loulopoulou

# The princess who didn't eat eggplants

Illustrations by  
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Once upon a time, in a marvelous palace, there lived a little princess named Helena. She had a pretty little face with big blue eyes and earrings of tiny pink pearls jeweled her ears. On her delicate hand she wore a bracelet decorated with turquoise gems. And on her tawny hair there was a small diamond crown revealing she was a princess.

Her mom, Queen Evaggelia, had sought after that her only daughter was always dressed with the finest clothes. Silken clothes, with lots of folds that made her billow out like a balloon once the wind was blowing and she was spinning around with joy. They were full with beautiful embroidery of suns, birds, flowers and bees. You could meet all of nature on her dress.

However, in spite of her finery, the little princess didn't look happy. She was wondering with sorrow around the palace's corridors and the

great garden. All alone, since she didn't have any friends or siblings.

"When will I have some company, mom? I don't like it at all being all alone! So many toys but no one to play with!" she complained to her mother one day.

"You have no use for company, my beloved daughter. You don't need anyone! You are the one and only Princess Helena! You have us adoring you and a palace full of luxurious things and wonderful toys that other people couldn't even dream of! Here, take a look at what I got for you!" said her father who just came back from another trip.

The gift he gave to her with a smiling face was a talking doll. The little girl jumped to his arms eagerly.

"Welcome back, daddy! But... another doll? I have loads of them!" answered Helena,



even though she took the doll in her arms, not to distress her father, King Dimitrios, who loved her so much.

"Well, my little one, play for a while and then wash your hands so that we can eat! The cook prepared eggplants with meat and they are really nutritious" her mother said.

"Eggplants? You know that I don't like eggplants! I hate eggplants!" Helena grumbled and pulled a long face.

"Eggplants are delicious and very nutritious. Eat, my little girl, so that you grow up and your cheeks turn red! Please! You are so weak and pale!" her mother kept saying sorrowfully.

"I'm telling you, I don't want to! I'd rather eat nothing!" she said in tears.

"Oh, if only it was just eggplants that you won't eat!" sighed her upset mother.

This kept going on and on. Helena wouldn't eat and her mother was chasing her in the garden to feed her with an egg, a fruit-cream and a yoghurt. Especially, when they had eggplants for dinner, the Princess kept her mouth closed. She used to run away from her mother, chasing peacocks and going up and down on the slide.

One day, when the sun was smiling, the little princess was hovering in the garden, alone as usual, smelling the musky flowers on the fence.

"Hey, you!" a whispering voice was heard.

Helena was puzzled and looked around, but she didn't see anyone.

"Hey, little girl, right here, right over here!" the voice went on saying.

And then, the little princess saw that there was a small hole on the fence. Looking carefully,



she discerned the face of a girl. She approached until she came close to a bonny, chubby and rose-red face. A couple of huge, brown eyes and a wide open smile helped her fancy the girl immediately, which was pretty much the same age.

“Who are you?” she asked filled with curiosity.

“My name is Felicity and I live in a farm nearby with my family. Do you want to play?”

Helena was so happy she could barely keep herself from jumping up and down. This was the first time she’s been asked to play with another child.

“Yes!” she yelled with ardour.

She made way with her hands through the fence and went out instantly without being noticed by anyone from the palace. With quick moves she took the crown off of her head, not to be recognized, and hid it in her pocket. She didn’t want to make friends just because she was the King’s

daughter. She wished to be accepted like she was just another girl.

“My name is Helena!” she said and kindly gave her hand to her new friend.

“I am Felicity, like I told you before. I have been here many times before to play, but it’s the first time I meet another girl. Do you want to go to our farm? We have chicken, ducks, a dog, a cat and a cow. My brothers and sisters are there too. Now that school is out, we spend all day diving in the lake’s water and rolling on the grass”.

Helena could not believe what she was hearing. Games, company, animals, a lake! She has heard of all of this before, but she had never had the chance to enjoy it.

“Let’s go!” she joyfully said.

The two girls held hand in hand and went running down the hillside where the palace was built. When they arrived at Felicity’s house, she called her brothers and sisters and



a group of six smiling and rosy kids gathered around them at once. They welcomed Helena in their group like they knew her for years and they all played hide and seek, tag and many other games. They also chased the chicken down bursting in laughter. And when they got so tired that they couldn't take another breath, they lied down on the grass to rest.

"Children, it's noon, enough playing, come for lunch!" said a sweet voice.

"Mom, can a new friend of ours, Helena, stay and have lunch with us?" Felicity asked.

"Yes, of course! Come, little girl! There's enough for everyone!" Mrs. Elpiniki answered.

The children sat along the big, wooden table and begun eating a food Helena had never seen before. She tasted it and found it was great!

"Why can't my mother cook such delicious meals too?" Helena wondered.

"Do you like it, little girl?" asked Felicity's mom.

Very much! Well done, Mrs. Elpiniki! What is it?"

"Aubergine slippers!"

Helena tried not to laugh to this food's funny name. She didn't want to give the impression she was making fun of this hospitable lady! She saw the rest of the kids with full mouths and ate all of her share with big appetite.

The little princess looked around her. The family's house wasn't big and fancy like her own. The little girls did not wear any finery like herself. Everything was shabby. There weren't any toys. Not many furniture either. Just the necessary ones. But there were many smiles and rose-red cheeks on happy faces. Like those her mother wished to see on her daughter's face. She thought



how happy she would be if she also had brothers and sisters and sighed.

“What’s wrong, little girl?” Mrs. Elpiniki asked.

“I am... thinking that I had a great time with you, but I have to be back home soon. My parents should be worried”.

“Feel free to come back anytime, Helena! Since you are playing so nice and lovingly with my children, you can come here each and every day, if that’s what you want! Know that you’re not alone, here you have brothers and sisters!”

“Thank you very much! You are so kind, Mrs. Elpiniki! I will come back again!” Helena said with joy.

In the afternoon, Mr. Christos, the father, came back from his work really tired. Before he sat down at the table, he kissed his wife and children and welcomed their little guest. Helena noticed that he was limping and pacing slowly.

“My dad has a problem with his leg”, Felicity whispered in her ear.

“Why won’t he see a doctor?” asked Helena.

“The treatment is too expensive. My dad works all day long to earn money. We are a big family and not enough money is left for him!” said Felicity sadly and lowered her head.

“Do you feel like going for a cart-ride?” dad playfully asked when he was done eating.

“Yes!” the kids yelled with one voice.

“Let’s go! Old-Onoufrios will be glad to carry such a jolly company”.

They went up the hillside, they went all around the lake and during the ride all kids were singing songs about Onoufrios, the donkey with the big ears, about the cunning fox and the butterfly with the colorful wings.

At night, when the sun was hidden behind the tall mountain, Helena thanked and greeted the family. After that, she held hands with Felicity and slowly went up the hill. They did not want to part, that's how nice it was, that's how much close they got. Once they reached the palace's thick-flowered fence, Helena kissed Felicity goodbye.

"Will we play together again tomorrow?"

"You don't have to ask about it. Goodnight, my friend!" said Felicity and she kissed her back.

"Goodnight, my friend!" blissfully said Helena.

She got in the garden of the palace and there she froze. Her dad and mom were sitting at the balcony and they looked so sad.

"Where have you been all day, my child?" queen Evaggelia asked her as she enfolded her in a firm embrace.

"Don't you ever do that, ever! We were worried sick. Where were you, tell us!" King Dimitrios shouted at her in anger.

"I am sorry! I know that I should have not left without your permission, but I had the most beautiful time of my life! I met Felicity with her many siblings, I chased chicken, I threw stones in their lake, I went for a ride with Mr. Onoufrios, I ate aubergine slippers..." said Helena with enthusiasm.

Her parents stared at each other. Then they laughed their hearts out.

"What did you eat? Slippers?"

"Yes! Mrs. Elpiniki cooked it and it was delicious. Mom, you should cook it too! But, I also felt sad because Mr. Christos is sick and they cannot afford a doctor".

"One thing at a time. You got us confused!"

And so, the little princess recounted in full detail all day's events to her parents.

"So, will you forgive me? Will I be able to see my friends again? I want it so much! They are amazing, all of them! And don't you think that they played with me because they know I am a princess! They don't know anything about me! They are just good and gentle people. I am so happy that I finally have friends! Felicity is the world's sweetest girl! And you should see, mom, that she has red cheeks, just like you want me to have. You are going to love her, as soon as you meet her! If I'm allowed to spend time with her, I will eat all of my food, I promise! But, you should also cook the meal I liked, alright?" said Helena with one breath.

"Which meal? Slippers?" said the Queen laughing.

"Yes!"

"It's not slippers, my love! It is called aubergine slippers. Do you happen to know out of what it's made? Eggplants!"

"What? Is it true, mom?" Helena marveled.

"Yes, my dear! Those eggplants I've been insisting that you should taste even once! Do you see now that I was right? Do you see how tasty eggplants are and what have you been missing all this time because of your stubbornness?"

"Yes, mom! I am sorry! From now on, I will trust your words!" Helena said in sorrow and lowered her little head.

"Come on, don't feel sad! Do you know now that everything we tell you to do is because we love you so? Even if we shout at you sometimes! Always remember that!"

"Yes, mom! Mommy, please, will you come with me tomorrow to meet Felicity, Mrs. Elpiniki and Mr. Christos?"

Of course, my darling! I'd like to thank them for making my daughter so happy!"

"They are very poor, mom! The children have no toys. I have so many and I never play with them. What if I gave my toys to them?"

"I would say that you are an amazing girl with a great heart. Well done for thinking like this!"

"Awesome! I'll go check for those I don't need anymore! I have many dresses too! I want to share everything with them. Besides, what's the worth of things when they remain locked in drawers and closets and nobody enjoys them?" Helena said and ran up the marble stairs to her room.

"Have you ever seen our child so much happy?" the King asked his wife.

"No! And you should know that I did my best to see her smile! It looks like all she ever needed was friends, my dear! That is why she didn't eat,

sadness is to blame. Dimitri, we should help this family too. None of them knew that Helena is our daughter. Whatever they did was without waiting for something in return, just out of kindness".

"Exactly, Evaggelia my dear! We shall definitely look after them, it is our duty! When people are suffering, all of us must do something to lighten the burden they're carrying", he agreed.

The day after, while Mrs. Elpiniki was doing laundry and Mr. Christos was crafting something, they couldn't believe their eyes when the royal carriage stopped outside their farmyard. The little princess came joyfully out of it and ran towards them. Felicity ran too and embraced her friend.

"But, you... you are..." Felicity stammered.

"Yes, it's me!" Helena laughed.

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