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VIRGINIA CHRISOULAKI

The Shoes on the Dusty Shelf





Virginia Chrisoulaki was born in Athens but lived throughout her childhood in Crete. As a child she dreamt of becoming a teacher and she made that dream come true when she studied in the School of Philosophy in Athens. She has three sons, which are a source of inspiration and motivation for writing stories about all the things she wants to share with them.

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Eirini Dermitzaki was born in Sitia, in 1982. She has studied Industrial Design and Theatre Art in Greece and Film Making in London. She blogs in various websites and writes in literature magazines. She has also written various texts for radio shows, comic books, script for theatre and short films. She has won five awards in short story category and has been living and working in London for the last five years.

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To my parents
George and Rena Dermitzaki

Mike, the shoemaker, lived in a small house, in a small village, in a very small region. His shoe making workshop was in the basement of his house and his home was at the end of this small village. And everybody that came in or out of the village stopped at Mr. Mike's workshop to polish their shoes or to change their soles or to fix their shoe heels.

Mr. Mike would wake up every Lazy Monday from dawn and wait for the truck that brought him the new materials: beautiful leather, rubber soles, special varnish and so on.

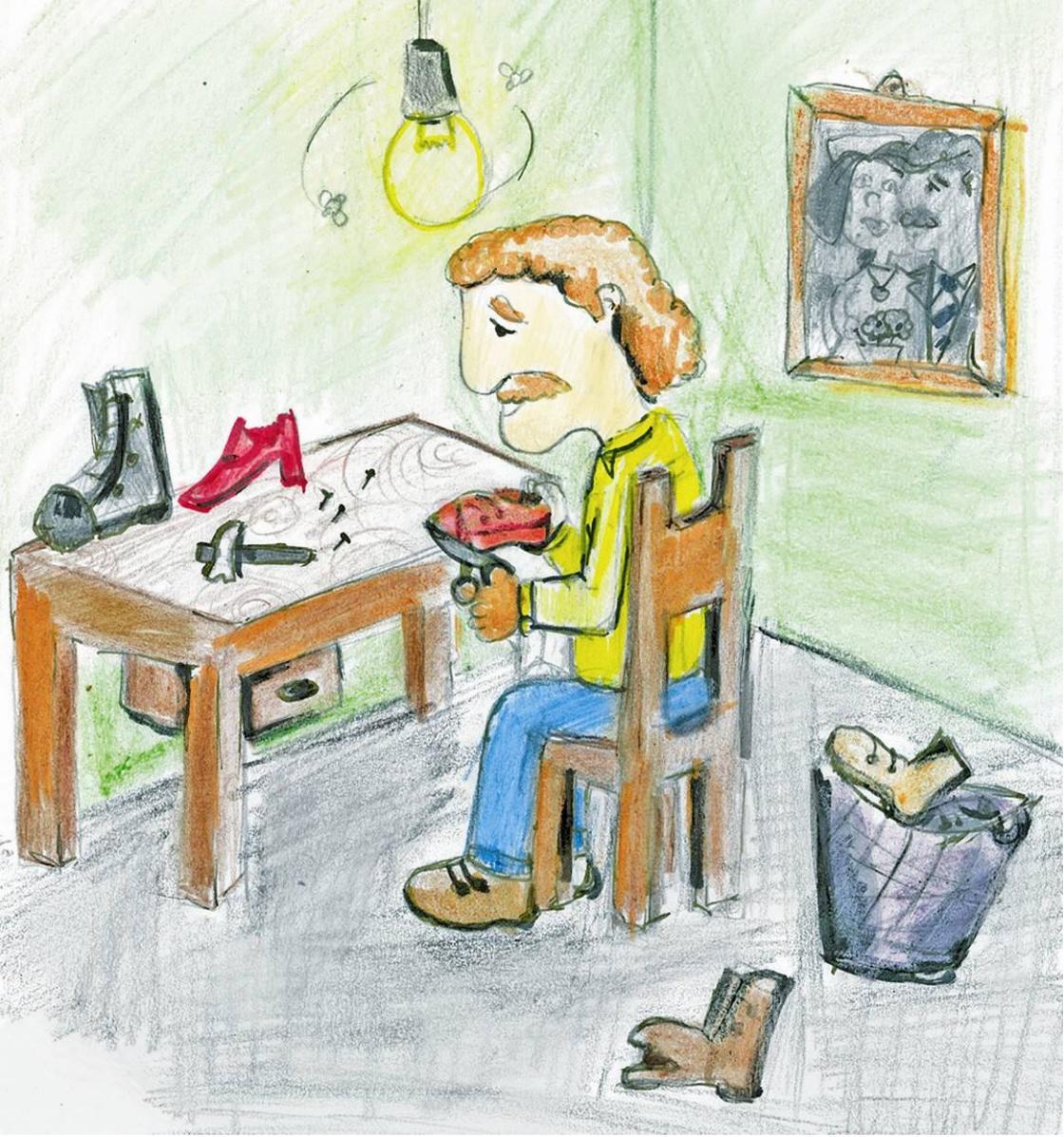
One day, his wife announced that he would become a father soon, and moreover that she thought it was a boy. The first image that crossed Mike's mind was a pair of leather shoes instead of the baby's face.

The next morning Mr. Mike had one more reason to wake up at the crack of dawn. He had ordered a very rare material to make a nice pair of shoes for his one and only son. He got up from his bed very early, even earlier than the rooster.





He started eagerly to draw designs and to try shapes and colors. While he was making the little shoes, he sang songs and spoke blessings for his unborn little child.



The days passed quickly and even though times were hard and they were poor, Mr. Mike was able to make ends meet.

He mended soldier boots, farmer shoes and sometimes sandals and high heels for the ladies. But every night before going to bed, he tried a new design for the small shoes of his first born son. He wanted him to have the most exceptional and comfortable shoes, who knows why? Maybe because he got to eighteen before he could wear any shoes and probably would still be barefoot if Mr. George had not given him a pair as a gift. Mr. George was the man who taught him the craft of making shoes.

The months passed very quickly and it was time for Rose to give birth. Mr. Mike closed down his shoe making workshop and ran to see both his wife and his first born son, bringing along the little shoes.

"Congratulations for your daughter" said the midwife.

"Daughter? Did you check closely, madam? We were expecting a boy!"

"What boy? Her belly was round which means she was caring a girl. If it was pointy, then you would expect a boy."



"May it be strong and I don't mind about the gender" said Mr. Mike and waved the midwife off. At night in his bedroom, he looked proudly at both his wife sleeping peacefully and his daughter in the crib.

"Never mind about the small shoes" he thought. "I will keep them for the next one".

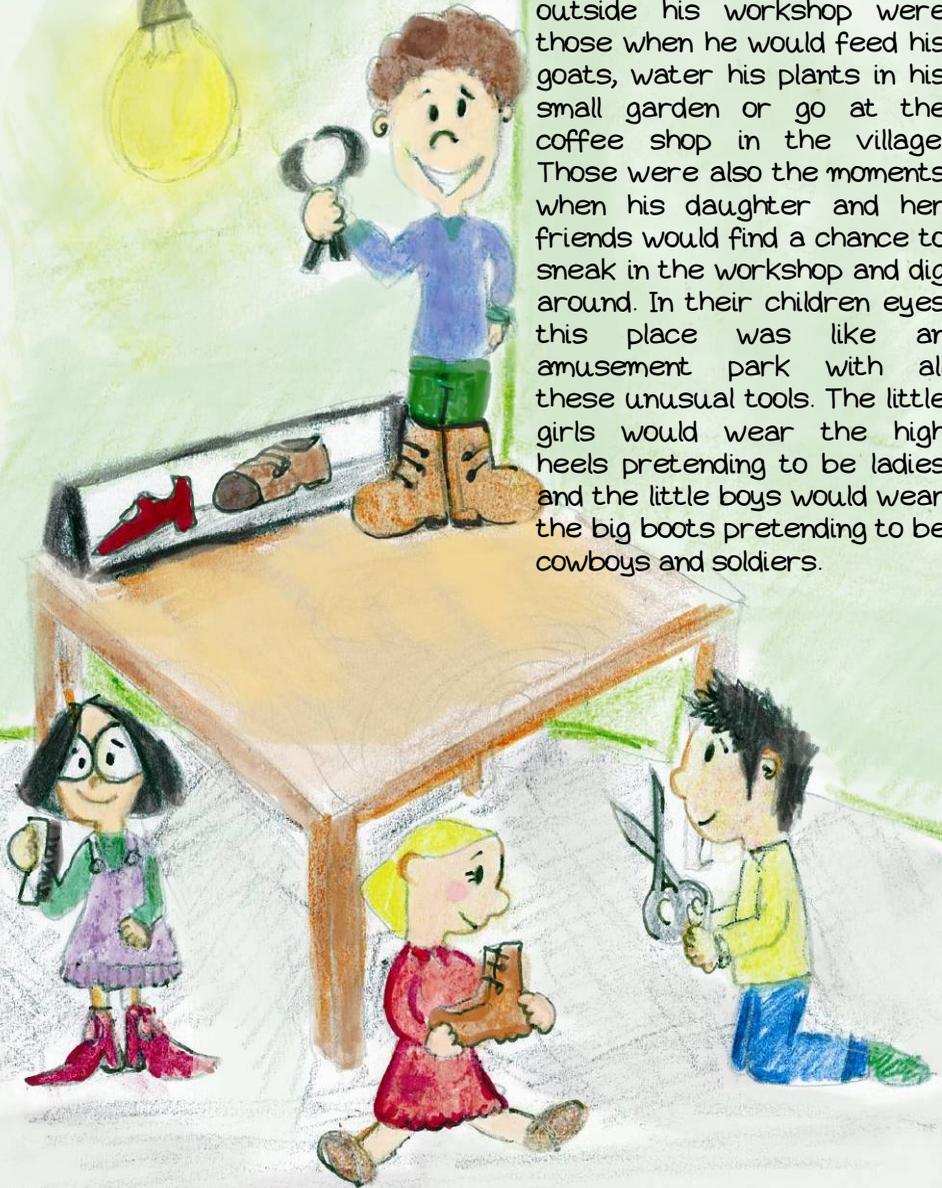
And the years went by with poverty, war, sorrow but also laughter. And Mr. Mike was always sitting behind his workbench. He mainly mended old shoes, since his fellow countrymen did not have money to get new ones. He used carton and sacks and anything you can think of, to fix and mend the worn out but many-times-mended shoes people brought him.

On his bench in a small box he kept safe the small shoes he made, when he thought his wife was having a boy. Every time that Rose announced she was pregnant, he dusted off and polished the small shoes. But when she would come with her head lowered to tell him she had lost another child, he would put them back again into their box.



"Never mind my love, there will be a next time. The Lord is good" he would say and smile at her. And that was always his way, he would say "never mind" and smile because those were cruel times and they were very poor. The years went by and Mr. Mike was always there, bending over his bench and mending all kinds of shoes. The small children's shoes got forgotten in time, behind a pile of shoes he kept for repairs.

The only moments that Mr. Mike, the shoe maker, spent outside his workshop were those when he would feed his goats, water his plants in his small garden or go at the coffee shop in the village. Those were also the moments when his daughter and her friends would find a chance to sneak in the workshop and dig around. In their children eyes this place was like an amusement park with all these unusual tools. The little girls would wear the high heels pretending to be ladies and the little boys would wear the big boots pretending to be cowboys and soldiers.



After some time the daughter became older and got married to a fine young man, and they moved to the capital. Mr. Mike continued working and bending over his bench and his wife sometimes went to keep him company because she felt lonely in the empty house, ever since their daughter moved out. One day Rose entered the workshop crying with joy. She held a letter saying that their daughter gave birth to a healthy little boy in the capital. As soon as Mr. Mike saw the picture of his new born grandson, and once again the small shoes, that he made when his wife was pregnant, sprang to his mind. He turned everything upside down, looked everywhere for them, and he finally discovered them full of dust under a pair of huge hunting boots. He polished them with great care and affection and then, he put them on the shelf to dry, along with the rest of the other shoes that were fixed and ready to deliver.

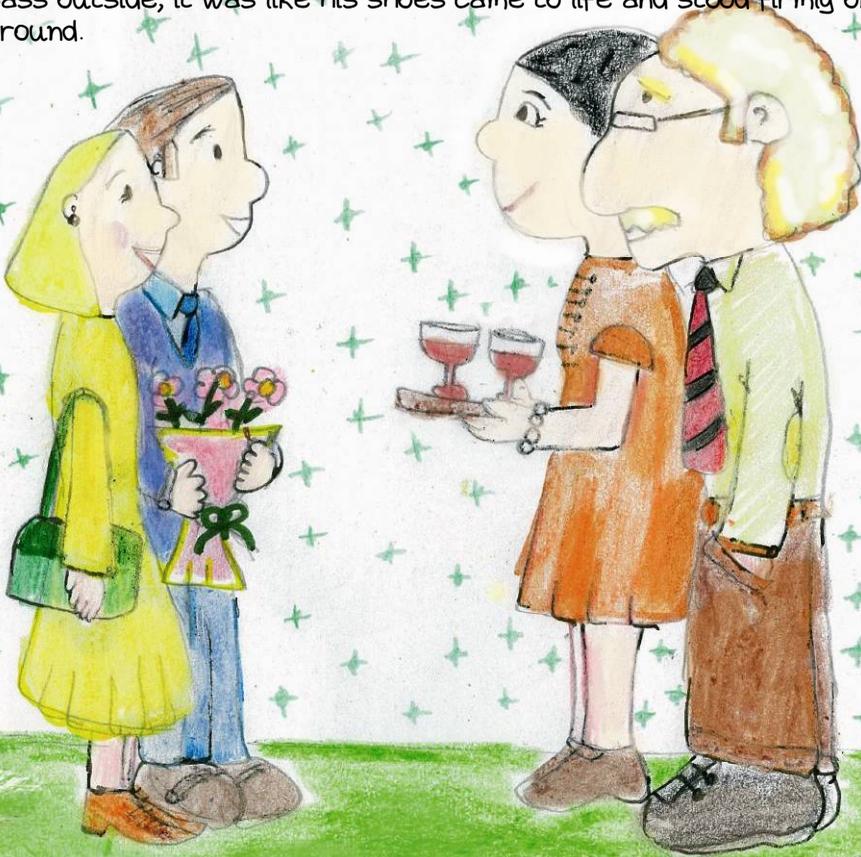


Some years later their daughter came to visit them with the little boy. Mr. Mike was very proud of his grandson. He could not wait to see him wear the shoes, and share with everybody the story of the small shoes that had been waiting patiently for so many years to warm up the feet of a child.

He went in a hurry to get the small shoes from the workshop. He unlocked the door and saw them through the glass shining on the shelf. They were glowing and they were special and different from the rest, just like him. He was different from the rest of his fellow countrymen, full of compassion and patience. It seemed as if these shoes had taken some of his personality traits.

As soon as he opened the door he felt a tingling sensation in his heart. "It's probably nothing", he thought and took one step to enter the shop. But that was his last step because Mr. Mike left his last breath on the entrance of the workshop.

Years passed by and one day his old lady, Rose, made the same long journey. The workshop was deserted but every time somebody would pass outside, it was like his shoes came to life and stood firmly on the ground.



Some summer day, Mr. Mike's daughter went to the island with her son, Mike junior, and her husband to spend the summer. It has been many years since they last went to the village, because the sight of the house without her parents made her sad. As the years went by, the pain became less and she took the decision to bond again with her birthplace.

It took many hours for Mr. Mike's daughter and her husband to clean the house and get rid of all the old things, two moth-eaten pieces of furniture full of dust, pieces of the ceiling plaster and sheets torn by rodents. By night fall, they went downstairs to clean the workshop. They threw away big black bin bags with varnish and leather, soles and old shoes. The little boy, Mike junior, was playing around trying to imitate his parents, pretending to throw away garbage. With the little strength he could carry a string or a small nail.

"Why are we throwing away all these?" he asked with child innocence and Mr. Mike's daughter could only bite her lips bitterly. She did not know what to answer.

They kept cleaning for hours and the little boy, who was very tired now, wrapped himself around his father's leg, pulled his jumper and asked questions about every tool: how it is called and where it is used. Mr. Mike's daughter was explaining to her son with love and patience, while his tongue was getting twisted by trying to say the strange words.



"Small flyers", said the little boy.
"Small pliers", she corrected.
"Shoe three", he said later.
"Shoe tree", she corrected again.





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