

Cloud Hopper

Beth Kephart

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Look up, up, up to skies filled with endless possibilities in Beth Kephart's young adult wonder, *Cloud Hopper*.

Around the municipal airport of Gilbertine live three friends: Sophie is "the tallest, Wyatt's the thinnest, K's the strangest: those are facts." They have heartbreaks in their pasts, but the wonder of flight fills their days.

The three watch as a girl in patent leather pink Doc Martens hops through the clouds, seeming to draw in the dawn. Even before she falls from the sky, requiring their rescue, they feel connected to her. But there are some people who won't welcome silent strangers in. If Sophie and team hope to help the hopper, they have to find out the truth about her before less sympathetic searchers do.

Kephart's lines are sensory and musical, leaning into zephyr and tempest winds with trust that the right words have magic. Here, a blueberry is not just a blueberry: it's a Wyatt blue, capable of intoxicating hungry souls toward compliance. A field is not just a field, but a place coined by ponds, dotted with colors, and alive with possibilities. Of the hopper's wreckage, Sophie observes: "there is the stuff of her hopping machine, all that has been shattered in the forest. Rusty parts of rusted things. The patchwork balloon with its busted crooked seams."

These poetic plays ease the audience into the book's tougher topics, including loss and xenophobia. Sophie and company have a keen sense of what's right, even when it's the "right wrong." They know that immigrants are "hardly different from the rest of us—all of us missing something," and they work hard to protect their new friend.

Shared secrets have the power to set young dreamers free in the awe-inducing story *Cloud Hopper*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

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