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Where Do the Balloons Go?

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Anna Jurinich, illustrator
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A childhood toy for many generations, balloons—and balloon animals—are found in scores of children's stories. Remember when Curious George gets a whole bunch from the balloon man and flies over the town? In this book, Nick loses his grip on the bee-shaped balloon that the balloon man just made for him, and his sister Kaya's mouse balloon gets caught in a tree. Sadly, they ask their mother, "Where do the balloons go?"

Their mother tells them a detailed story about balloon fairies that "live in a cloud too high for us to see." The balloon animals come to life in the fairies' world and play with the magical creatures. The night fairies collect lost bits of balloons and then the day fairies seam them together with fairy dust and make "like-new" balloons.

Once a year, they have a birthday party for the queen, the only one who's allowed to have anything sharp. It's a wild, frolicking party with crunchy foods, borrowed teeth, coins for the tooth fairies, and a big purple balloon around the cake that the queen pops with her pin. "It's the happiest of every happy day in Balloon Land—where the balloon fairies live—and where lost balloons go," Kaya and Nick's mother tells them.

Big pages burst with color and light, framed by a sky-blue background. The fairies are child-like, wearing simple shifts in a rainbow of colors and small white-feathered wings perched between their shoulders. The award-winning illustrator is a Croatian-American who has shown her watercolors in New York galleries and has illustrated cookbooks. These are her first children's illustrations, and they evoke a timeless quality on each page, with a carefully constructed, dreamy cloudscape. Her color palette offers a gentle kind of delight.

The author, a journalist, has previously written (under the pen name Eileen Morgan) an art book, *Lust, Love, and Longing*. The fairy world in her first children's book is quite complex. Some young readers may be upset that the fairies eat with children's teeth, which the tooth fairies have taken from underneath pillows. Had the story contained fewer such details, it would not have detracted from the fairies' magic.

The children's mother tells them that she learned about the fairies when she was a girl and asked about the balloons. The universal delight in balloons and their ability to transform the ordinary into the extra-ordinary is what makes this book special.

ANNA STEWART (September / October 2004)

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