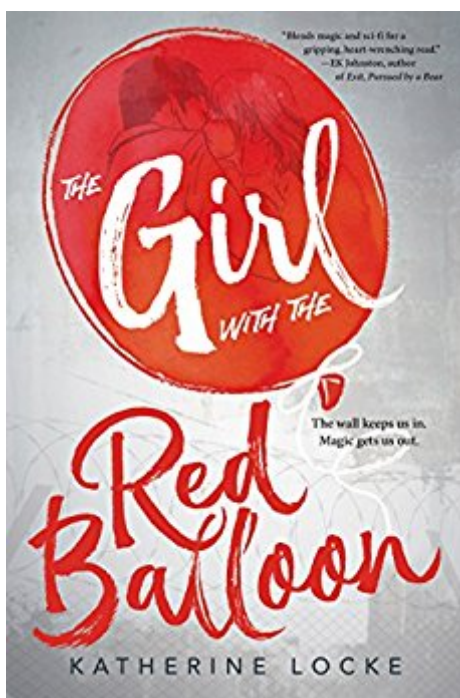


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Girl With The Red Balloon (The Balloonmakers)



Synopsis

When sixteen-year-old Ellie Baum accidentally time-travels via red balloon to 1988 East Berlin, she's caught up in a conspiracy of history and magic. She meets members of an underground guild in East Berlin who use balloons and magic to help people escape over the Wall—but even to the balloon makers, Ellie's time travel is a mystery. When it becomes clear that someone is using dark magic to change history, Ellie must risk everything—including her only way home—to stop the process.

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Customer Reviews

Because of its timeliness with the current issues of anti-Semitism, but also the ignorant acts of hate, *The Girl with the Red Balloon* engages with these similar discussions and the individual acts of rebellion in a thoughtful way. It's not just a love story, it's not just a book about the Holocaust, but it's something deeper than that. There are ways we are separated,

physically and invisibly, from those we love, our future, or even our past. It is poignant, rich, and meaningful. The Girl with the Red Balloon has the power to resonate within you, to make you feel hopeful in the face of the injustice, and will change how you look at red balloons forever. Disclaimer: I received this book in exchange for an honest review

For Ellie Baum, being in Berlin on a school trip is little unsettling: she's grown up listening to tales from her grandfather, who escaped from a death camp in 1942. She loves her grandfather, but his stories don't always make sense. Like the ones of the balloons carrying people to safety. She's heard his stories, she just doesn't believe them. Until she catches the string of a red balloon, and ends up in East Berlin in 1988, before the Berlin Wall fell. Stranded in the midst of an oppressive regime, Ellie meets Kai, one of the Runners who help balloon passengers escape over the wall. But no one knows what happened to Ellie's balloon; they just know its real Passenger is dead. With the help of Kai and Mitzi, Ellie must unravel the mystery of her time travel if she's ever to return to her own time. But someone wants to use time travel to change history. And that person doesn't care who has to die to do so. At first, I wasn't too sure about this book and Ellie herself, but I ended up really loving it. This is such a unique concept, and I've personally not read much "if anything" set in East Berlin while the Wall was still up. The tale of Ellie's grandfather is just as enthralling as Ellie's is, and Kai and Mitzi are so intriguing I wanted to know much more about them. A very compelling book, set in a bleak time in history.

Please Note: I received an advance reader's copy of this book from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. This did not influence the opinions of my review in any way. East Berlin in the 1980's was a seriously messed up society. One could look out their window and see the freedoms of the West, yet their city was on lock-down. Neighbors were rewarded for spying on each other, and the Stasi (secret police) bugged people's homes. I visited a country behind the Iron Curtain in the 80's, and it was bizarre. I remember entering stores where the shelves were bare. Waiters would whisper in our ears and ask us if we wanted to sell our western clothes. I think the author captured the bleakness and desperation of the city, and the resilience of its people perfectly. Story: Who wouldn't want to escape an oppressive regime simply by holding a bright red balloon? The symbolism of invisibility was powerful. So many people did small, brave deeds during the Soviet era: broadcasting banned news and music, helping others hide and escape, NOT turning in their neighbors. The quiet defiance of people faced with the impossible was on display in this story. I also enjoyed the secret

society of people using magic to smuggle others out to The West. The use of the disused subway system as the group's headquarters was a eerie touch. I particularly liked the ongoing threat of discovery by the police. As an American who only speaks a little German, Ellie is in constant danger. She needs to find a way to blend in to, not only a different political reality, but also to another time. It made for a tense game of cat and mouse whenever Ellie was out in public. What if someone speaks to her? Will she be able to pass for a Berliner? Ellie: Ellie has a resiliency to be admired. While she does have a tough time accepting her new situation, she quickly realizes that a key component of her survival is perfecting her German. What a way to be motivated towards fluency! I appreciated that Ellie didn't act spoiled or self-important. She grew to empathize with her new friends and see their struggles as her own. What I Was Mixed About: Although I enjoyed the secret society, I didn't feel that this was explained enough in the novel. I would have liked to have more background information, and more character development of the people who founded the group. I'm sure the author thought this would bog down the story, but I think it would have added more to the story, and even presented some openings for a sequel! What I Didn't Like: I thought that the resolution of what happens to the bad guy was very rushed, and a little convenient for the story. I would have liked to know more about this person and why they did what they did. I also didn't find the ending very satisfying. I don't like putting in spoilers, but the ending was very abrupt. I needed to know what actually happens to Ellie!!! I was surprised when the book just ended as it did. I, the reader, have invested so much time in the book, the characters, the situation... I needed more!

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