

ADVANCE
READING COPY

Valentina and Monster

Ángeles Ruiz

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DEDICATION
For all the children
of the world, and their stars
To my Mother

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It was a very special day, Monster's first at his new cotton candy stand. The sweet scent of cotton candy floated through the forest clearing.

Valentina was out walking, as she did every morning to shake off the nightmares that came during sleep.

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Although she had eaten far too much breakfast, she could not help but search for the source of the marvelous smell.

When Valentina spotted Monster, surrounded by sugary pink clouds, perhaps she should have felt fear.

But instead, she hugged him.

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Monster was touched.

He taught her to create buoyant cotton-candy clouds—delicate, round ones as well as others, elongated and slim.

Then he gave her a special cloud, the lightest of them all.

“Better for your teeth,” he said.



Every time the clouds dyed themselves gray,
Valentina would visit Monster in the forest.



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His fur grew brighter.
And she stopped having nightmares.

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Strolling through the forest, they imagined they were skywalking. Valentina would jump on the clouds, trying to reach the moon.

One night, she scratched herself on a tree branch.

“Nothing a bandage can’t cure,” Monster said,
“Or a kiss. A gentle kiss can cure anything.”



Although Monster never asked her, he knew Valentina was happy when they were together. He knew he was loved.

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And so spring, summer, and fall passed
among sweet, soft cotton-candy clouds.

Until winter came . . .



. . . and darkness covered everything.

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Valentina went to visit Monster.

But he wasn't there.

"Where are you, my friend?" she cried out.

Nobody answered.



The unbearable silence was soon broken by the sound of small footsteps crunching on dried leaves.

The animals came from every corner of the forest to hug and hold Valentina.



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The rabbit elder approached her with great tenderness.

“Life is a beautiful journey that we share with all that surrounds us. But at some point, when the body grows old, it stops feeling, stops breathing. It fades away. We leave this world to start a new journey. It was Monster’s time to journey on.”



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Valentina was furious with Monster for leaving her. She cried hot, angry tears, terrified that her nightmares would come back.

But then she remembered how much Monster loved her, and how much she loved him.

So she put all her love in a box, along with a picture and some cotton candy, to accompany Monster on his new journey.



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Her nightmares never came back, but Valentina still missed Monster terribly. Her grief was something a kiss couldn't cure. She was sure she would never be happy again.

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But life went on. Valentina grew up.

She knew she could be happy. And indeed she was, far from the forest, among the clouds.

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Now, each year, the forest animals eagerly await
Valentina's visit. She comes with her beautiful child.

"Do you think if we jump on the clouds we will reach
the moon?" she whispers to her daughter, as pink
cotton candy melts in their mouths.

Meanwhile, in the night sky, the biggest star of all
shines down ever so brightly . . .

. . . watching.

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Ángeles Ruiz was born in Barcelona, Spain, where she lives with her artist husband and daughter--her biggest inspiration and toughest critic. She has illustrated many books, including

The Lost Kitten. When not drawing and painting, she enjoys exploring nature and going to the library.



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