



# The Red Balloon

*Susan Stark Hilt*

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## **The Red Balloon** Susan Stark Hilt

In a close-knit lakeside community, two families are separated by only the narrowest of dirt roads. It's the 1970's, a time of gin-soaked barbecues and carefree summer crushes and the families share a seemingly idyllic life amidst plush green lawns and soft breezes blowing in off the lake, relatively untouched by the outside world. Margaret and Dar share motherhood the way best friends do, carrying secrets of favored children and husbands' impossible expectations. Until one day. While busy tending to her young daughter's birthday party, Margaret spots a red balloon floating on the surface of the lake, the very same red balloon that was tied to her 3-year-old son, Hanky Pank's wrist that morning. The tragic drowning of this beloved boy begins a downward spiral between the two families as Margaret's belief she can protect those she loves is forever shattered. Dar grapples with her growing attraction to an unlikely confidant as her son Ricky's draft date looms. The two families continue their lives across the road from each other, once so intertwined and now so separate as each is forced to re-imagine what will be. Ultimately, redemption is found in the most unlikely of places when a man appears, years later, with a young girl and the answer to what really happened that fateful day.

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