Now I'm Bigger
Author:
Susanna Isern

READER'S NAME: Julia Shirek Smith

When Little Elephant tells his mother, "I'm a big boy now," she agrees and after a hug and a few words of caution she sends her son out to pick up a few items for Tortoise's 100th birthday party. Proud of his first solo mission, the young shopper is polite and grown-up at each merchant's but once out on the street, he succumbs to temptation. After gobbling up the entire chocolate bar in his shopping bag, Little Elephant stops to play jump rope with his buddies and breaks the eggs purchased at Ostrich's store. Splashing merrily through the river rather than sensibly using the bridge, he ends up with a waterlogged box of matches and a lost shopping list. Now a bit confused, he muddles the numbers and buys too few birthday candles and too many balloons.

Just before the last stop on the list, a tearful baby meerkat appears in search of his mother. Elephant steps in, inflates all 100 balloons with his trunk, ties them around his waist, picks up the young one and parades through town, a sight so visible that mother soon spots her lost boy. And the balloons float away in the sky.

Now Little Elephant rushes home, late, empty-handed, anxious, a failure. But no one seems upset. The many birthday party guests have brought such an abundance of goodies and gifts that a few missing items don't matter. Little Elephant joins in the singing and dancing, actually something of a hero for his kind and clever rescue effort.

Yo soy mayor is a lively narrative that should delight 4 to 6 year olds. The style is clear and straightforward, without the constant repetition of words or attempts at cuteness that often characterize writing for young children. The dialogue is natural and believable The Spanish text does not pose any particular problem for a translator who would be sure to keep in mind the author's care not to talk down to her audience.

The illustrations add to the story's charm. Free-lance artist Marta Cabrol's drawings are imaginative and detailed. Each page is fun, from the mouthwatering treats in the pastry shop to the knicknacks in Giraffe's variety store. A child might well enjoy Ya soy mayor simply as a picture book after Mom or Dad has grown tired of reading it aloud.

The theme is definitely familiar. It's the age-old story of the youngster sent on a mission with specific orders to follow (think Little Red Riding Hood). But there's a different slant here—no terrible happenings for non-adherence to the rules, no encounters with wolves or witches and no parental scoldings. The moral is not the customary "You must obey your parents or else." As Little Elephant's mother puts it when she gives her boy a welcome home hug, "making mistakes and learning from them, that in itself is a mission accomplished."

And indeed, there are other messages here, as in most of Susanna Isern's 60 children's books—generosity, kindness, and forgiveness.

The author's works, mainly animal stories for children from ages 3 to 10, have long been popular not only in her native Spain, but around the world. Translations have been published in 12 languages, among them Chinese, Romanian, Polish, and German. Checking an online bookstore in the US, this reviewer counted 26 Susanna Isern titles available in English. An English-language version of Ya soy mayor would be a fine addition to the collection.