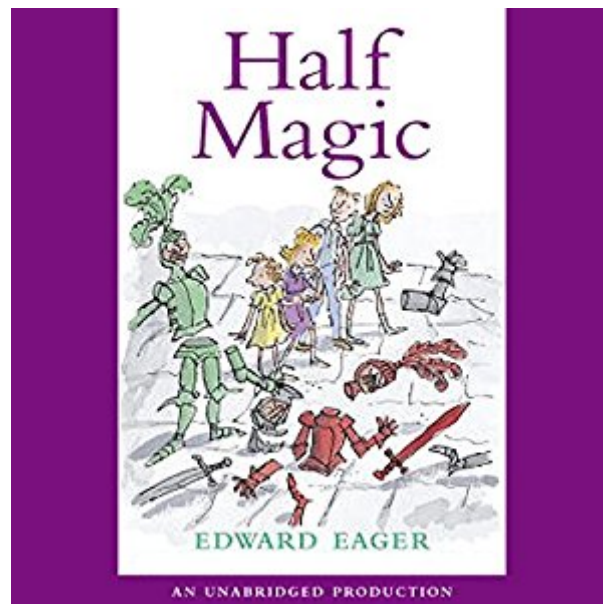


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# Half Magic



## Synopsis

It all begins with a strange coin on a sun-warmed sidewalk. Jane finds the coin, and because she and her siblings are having the worst, most dreadfully boring summer ever, she idly wishes something exciting would happen. And something does: Her wish is granted. Or not quite. Only half of her wish comes true. It turns out the coin grants wishes—but only by half, so that you must wish for twice as much as you want. Wishing for two times some things is a cinch, but other doubled wishes only cause twice as much trouble. What is half of twice a talking cat? Or to be half-again twice not-here? And how do you double your most heartfelt wish, the one you care about so much it has to be perfect? Includes an introduction by Alice Hoffman --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first read Half Magic when I was seven, courtesy of the El Segundo Public Library, and twenty years later, I still love it. My abiding love of children's literature probably began right here, in a book that has everything - plot, humor, intelligence, and fabulous characters. Half Magic obeys the rules of great magic books that are carefully delineated by the main characters in the first chapter. (See what I mean about intelligence and wit?) The magic has its own rules, which they must discover. They thwart the magic. Then the magic thwarts them. If it's a formula, it's one Edward Eager developed, and it works - you don't want to stop reading, from King Arthur's court to a highly

magical ending. (And I have no intention of telling you where that is.) Even though the plot is exceptional, it's the characters that truly make the book. The four children are clearly \*people\* - it's easy to imagine meeting them on the street or in a park - and not merely characters on a page. And even though the book is set in the 1930s, and was written in the 1950s, the kids still resonate. We all know, or were, Martha - "Martha was the youngest, and very difficult." Likewise with Jane and Katherine. "Katherine \*would\* keep boasting about what a comfort she was, and how docile, until Jane declared she would utter a piercing shriek and fall over dead if she heard another word about it." This first book in Eager's loosely-intertwined series is a masterpiece of children's literature. Children and adults alike will love Half Magic. Start here - and remember, to read one is to want them all. (NB: the quotes used here came from my memory - I checked them before I submitted the review, of course - and normally my memory is not the best. That should tell you something about the strength of this book, or at least the impression it made on me.)

Like all the other reviewers, I too read this book when I was 9 or 10 and then worked my way through the other 6 titles. I loved them all so very much that I read them again and again. Before I had reached my teens, they were like old and very dear friends. However, here in the UK, they've been out of print for quite some time and it looked as if my hope of owning my own set was never to be. As a librarian, I've frequently come across very old and battered copies of Half Magic in several Children's Libraries but about 10 years ago, I had the best piece of luck. I was working in a (nameless) library in Central London and came across a complete set in a store room as part of an out-of-print collection. I avidly fell upon them all and renewed old acquaintances with the children I'd thought of as my friends. When that collection was broken up for sale/pulping, I was given the 7 Edward Eager books for my own. Since then, I've read them to my own children. They are more than stories, they are part of me. Edward Eager had a huge gift; in a few words, he could paint a detailed picture with warmth, humour and clarity. His children are real and believable. The situations are zany and so funny and the magic that underpins everything is the same magic that lives in the readers' hearts and minds for ever. What a nice man he must have been. I wish I'd known him.

So this is what Dr. Eager did in his spare time. If Half Magic is indicative of his bedside manner, he must have been a very good doctor indeed. For this is one of those sleepy time read-in-bed books like the Chronicles of Narnia, that gently draw you into their fantastic world at that drowsy time when good things seem so much more possible and you're about to drift off into the Land of Nod. Half Magic is written in that wonderful, light, easy 'fifties style that gets so easily overlooked in favor of

more extreme excitements. Later discovered, though, one simply wonders how writing could have ever been this good. A wonderfully understated example is shown in the genial attitude of the good samaritan stranger who helps out the young adventurers. He's first respectful of their mother, then falls more and more in love as the book goes on. This undercurrent is so subdued and tasteful that it's barely noticeable amid the magical misadventures until the conclusion of the book. The Leave it to Beaver approach to problem solving is also delightfully refreshing--the spells only half work; unlike the obvious fantasy formulae in countless later books and movies, the magic leaves plenty of room for human ingenuity and skill, as well as the need to make decisions. Eager's other great fantasy, Knight's Castle, also continues in this vein, the hyjinks and hilarity deriving from, and always affirming, the human.

Half Magic may have been my favorite book as a kid -- I knew then what I loved about it, but it was only when I reread it as an adult that I realized just how much the book had given to me. Half Magic is a book of fantasy about real kids who play and argue and fight. They're good solid kids who know the difference between right and wrong. Edward Eager's style is matter-of-fact, succinct and hilarious. All of this I loved as a kid (and still do). But there's something else at work in Half Magic, aside from a terrific plot about a magic coin that grants half of your wishes, in its own inimitable way. The children in Half Magic have no father, and one of the strands of the plot has to do with a "rather small gentleman" who befriends the children and may wind up becoming their stepfather. Jane, the oldest child, will have nothing of it, telling her siblings "Everything's just spoiled, that's all!". A few paragraphs later, Eager gently explains: "She felt awful inside, the way you always do when you've been perfectly hateful to those you love best, and she didn't even know why she had done it. She didn't know why the mere thought of Mr. Smith upset her so -- or if she did know the reason, she didn't want to admit it, even to herself. But the thing was that Jane was the only one of the four children who really remembered their father." As it happens, I was the youngest child in a family where the father died at a young age. I think that when I first read Half Magic, I was simply pleased to have something in common with the heroes of the book. It was when I read the book to my own kids that I realized how simply, and how truly, Eager captured the emotions of children who need to come to terms with loss. And this in the framework of a rollicking, funny book.

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