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# Egg And Spoon



## Synopsis

"A beautiful reminder that fairy tales are at their best when they illuminate the precarious balance between lighthearted childhood and the darkness and danger of adulthood." — School Library Journal (starred review)

Elena Rudina lives in the impoverished Russian countryside, and there is no food. But then a train arrives in the village, a train carrying a cornucopia of food, untold wealth, and a noble family destined to visit the Tsar in Saint Petersburg—a family that includes Ekaterina, a girl of Elena's age. When the two girls' lives collide, an adventure is set in motion, an escapade that includes mistaken identity, a monk locked in a tower, a prince traveling incognito, and—in a starring role only Gregory Maguire could have conjured—Baba Yaga, witch of Russian folklore, in her ambulatory house perched on chicken legs.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (141 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

I have been a fan of Gregory Maguire's for years and years, ever since I picked up *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (*Wicked Years*). I enjoyed that book so much that I went in search of everything he wrote. While I have enjoyed virtually all of his novels, I was a bit disappointed in the sequels to *Wicked* which came on the heels of its success as a novel, play... feeling that while they extended the story line they did so at a cost. They were neither as rich nor original as the other novels. While *Egg and Spoon* breaks with his tradition of reimagining classic

tales it falls within the realm, incorporating classic themes and elements, creating a vivid world built on classic themes and incorporating characters from Russian fairy tales. From the moment you crack the book, starting with his cleverly worded disclaimer, you know that you are in the hands (or are holding in your hands) the work of an artisan writer and story teller. *Egg and Spoon* is the story of two young girls: Elena and Ekaterina who hail from very different backgrounds. Their lives collide and they accidentally switch places, much like the *The Prince And The Pauper* (Unabridged And Illustrated) (Did I just say this wasn't based on a classic? ;) ) setting off a series of adventures and insights. The novel is masterfully written and like many classics incorporates layers of reference, social, literary and artistic.

In *Egg and Spoon*, Gregory Maguire takes a classic tale of mistaken identity and weaves it together with Russian folklore in interesting and unexpected ways. At the center of the story are two young women: a city girl borne of privilege and a country girl suffocating under the weight of poverty and loss. Their paths crisscross and collide as they make their ways through this tale. Maguire gives us several strong female characters throughout this book. Not only do we get two female leads, but we also get a menagerie of interesting women who guide them along their respective paths.

Unfortunately, the two leads, while charming and interesting, are rarely ever proactive. They are both pushed and pulled through the story and show little initiative. Meanwhile, Baba Yaga, an old witch written as a secondary character, tends to take over the story and guide the plot more than anyone else. She's charming and intriguing, and it seems Maguire has much more affection for her than his leads. Her arc is poignant and ultimately satisfying: it feels like this story really wants to be about her. While the story has moments of brilliance and some edge-of-your-seat excitement, the plot is a bit muddled and drags through the middle. There are a lot of missed opportunities to develop the two young women, to show them taking control of their lives, and to earn the connections they later have with the ancillary characters. The book cheats a little in this regard, as these characters grow in ways both expected and unexpected, but they never really earn it. Despite its flaws, *Egg and Spoon* is worth reading. It provides an intriguing introduction to Russian folklore that could spark a reader's interest in other stories.

(3.5 stars) I'm a part-time fan of Gregory Maguire's work. I've enjoyed his takes on *Cinderella* (*Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister: A Novel*), *Snow White* (*Mirror Mirror: A Novel*) and the first book of his OZ series (*Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (*Wicked Years*)). (Well, who doesn't like WICKED?) But I've never read any of his tales for children and thought to get

this to read with my oldest grandchild. Turns out it's more a children's story for grown-ups (or perhaps very mature children). In 2013 in an interview with Geek's Guide to the Galaxy, Episode 80, Maguire says the following of his upcoming EGG AND SPOON: "It's really a meditation on some things we are facing right now in dystopian 2013. The threat of climate change, floods and droughts and weather that won't sit in the month in which it belongs and the implications for human suffering and the human need to begin to find new ways to share resources." Well, that sounds like heavy stuff for my granddaughter, but it is told charmingly, with fun characters and an interesting take on the cause of climate change involving Russia's mythical Firebird.

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