

3-2015

Egg & Spoon: A Novel

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Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "Egg & Spoon: A Novel" (2015). *Publications*. 90.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/lib_pubs/90

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Maguire, Gregory. *Egg & Spoon: A Novel*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2014. JUV
PZ7.M2762Eg 2014.

“But as I considered how I came to be imprisoned, I realized how little sense this story makes unless you see both sides of it. Cat’s side and Elena’s side, too. The side of the rich and the side of the poor. (Let’s just say.) A bird sees out of both sides of its head. It can see two stories happening at the same time, on two sides of its world. We humans can’t do that very often.” – page 300

Elena Rudina is a peasant girl living in the impoverished town of Miersk where, as her father is dead, one brother has been conscripted into the tsar’s army and the other taken as a servant in the household of a fleeing local báryn, Elena cares for her dying mother alone. Ekaterina de Robichaux, known as Cat, is a wealthy French-Russian girl traveling from school in London to Saint Petersburg, where her great-aunt hopes that Cat will meet and perhaps even charm the Tsar’s young godson. But when the train on which Cat is traveling breaks down in Miersk, Cat, looking to alleviate her boredom, and Elena, searching for food, soon meet.

The two girls spend time together while awaiting repairs to the train and when the train finally begins to move again the girls find that they have accidentally switched places. While Elena masquerades as Cat on her way to Saint Petersburg, Cat leaves Miersk on her own and is soon taken in by none other than Russia’s most famous witch: Baba Yaga. After a disastrous reunion, Elena and Cat must put their feelings aside for with the help of a soon-to-be-imprisoned monk, a matryoshka doll, and a talking cat, Baba Yaga and the children – including the tsar’s adventure-seeking godson – must set out to save the spirit of Russia.

A dense and fantastical combination of Russian historical events and folklore, *Egg & Spoon* is one lush description after another. A smattering of Russian words lends authenticity to the work, but included too are French words, British phrases, and American expressions such as ‘drinking the Kool-Aid,’ as well as references to famous revolutionaries, philosophers, artists, actors, composers, and writers – all of a variety of nationalities. Despite its elaborate and fanciful plot, Maguire’s work continually circles back to central notions of inequality and human need. The subject and style of the novel makes it more suited to older readers perhaps, but when tackling *Egg & Spoon*, even adult readers should keep a dictionary at hand.