

*"Half Magic is a funny, charming, timeless book."
—The New York Times Book Review*

Half Magic



EDWARD EAGER

How It Began



It began one day in summer about thirty years ago, and it happened to four children.

Jane was the oldest and Mark was the only boy, and between them they ran everything.

Katharine was the middle girl, of docile disposition and a comfort to her mother. She knew she was a comfort, and docile, because she'd heard her mother say so. And the others knew she was, too, by now, because ever since that day Katharine *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 an-

other word about it. This will give you some idea of what Jane and Katharine were like.

Martha was the youngest, and very difficult.

The children never went to the country or a lake in the summer, the way their friends did, because their father was dead and their mother worked very hard on the other newspaper, the one almost nobody on the block took. A woman named Miss Bick came in every day to care for the children, but she couldn't seem to care for them very much, nor they for her. And she wouldn't take them to the country or a lake; she said it was too much to expect and the sound of waves affected her heart.

"Clear Lake isn't the ocean; you can hardly hear it," Jane told her.

"It would attract lightning," Miss Bick said, which Jane thought cowardly, besides being unfair arguing. If you're going to argue, and Jane usually was, you want people to line up all their objections at a time; then you can knock them all down at once. But Miss Bick was always sly.

Still, even without the country or a lake, the summer was a fine thing, particularly when you were at the beginning of it, looking ahead into it. There would be months of beautifully long, empty days, and each other to play with, and the books from the library.



In the summer you could take out ten books at a time, instead of three, and keep them a month, instead of two weeks. Of course you could take only four of the fiction books, which were the best, but Jane liked plays and they were nonfiction, and Katharine liked poetry and that was nonfiction, and Martha was still the age for picture books, and they didn't count as fiction but were often nearly as good.

Mark hadn't found out yet what kind of non-

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 that it has to be perfect?

“Ingenious make-believe.... Satisfying variety, surprise, and laughter.... A book children will want to read at one sitting.”

—*Library Journal* (starred review)

