

A Note from Author
Gregory Maguire



That mensch, that mentor, that chum of mine Maurice Sendak believed that deep inside him, he was still a child. He implied that he worked from a chronic condition of having survived but never outgrown his childhood. I enjoy (or suffer) a similar complaint. I can feel vividly my childhood struggles to unpuzzle the bewildering world by using fairy tales as my guides. I remember how stories hit me — those heady, eureka moments when, for a moment, obdurate pieces fit together for the first time.

One such memory overcomes me whenever I pick up a periodical.

At about age six, I got a subscription to *Jack and Jill* magazine. How grown-up I must be, to receive a journal in the mail every month! It made me feel important, as if, like my parents, I must be kept abreast of the latest news. In those days, *Jack and Jill* occasionally published a Baba Yaga tale in three or four installments. I waited for these issues. I lusted for them, though the famous Russian witch was foul and frightening. She bore a kink-hipped resemblance — I'm just realizing this as I type — to the vaguely menacing, anarchic Cat in the Hat. I adored her for her quirkiness and power. And I believed she was both insane and dangerous, and her doings were as important to note as the Cuban Missile Crisis, with its mighty Russian threat, which was happening around me as I tore through those pages.

Egg & Spoon is inspired by the Russian tales collected by Afanasyev, by my *Jack and Jill* memories of Baba Yaga, and in a distant way by Sendak and Kushner's picture book, *Brundibar*, based on the Hans Krása opera about impoverished children trying to help an ailing mother. Thirty-one years ago, I set my first fairy-tale novel, *The Dream Stealer*, in the hardscrabble peasant village of Miersk, where *Egg & Spoon* begins. But this new novel seems to be happening several generations later with an entirely new cast of characters. All except for Baba Yaga, the Russian witch who lives in a house that stands on chicken legs. She, like menace and mercy — and childhood — is eternal.

