



# The Moorchild

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## **The Moorchild** Eloise Jarvis McGraw

Half moorfolk and half human, and unable to shape-shift or disappear at will, Moql threatens the safety of the Band. So the Folk banish her and send her to live among humans as a changeling. Named Saaski by the couple for whose real baby she was swapped, she grows up taunted and feared by the villagers for being different, and is comfortable only on the moor, playing strange music on her bagpipes.

As Saaski grows up, memories from her forgotten past with the Folks slowly emerge. But so do emotions from her human side, and she begins to realize the terrible wrong the Folk have done to the humans she calls Da and Mumma. She is determined to restore their child to them, even if it means a dangerous return to the world that has already rejected her once.

## **The Moorchild Details**

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# From Reader Review The Moorchild for online ebook

## Valerie says

I picked this up when I realized it was about a changeling, from the point of view of the changeling herself. It's understandable that the legend of the changeling would arise, when people found that their children were 'different', in societies that were often ruthlessly conformist.

I personally have one major difficulty in identifying with 'Saaski'. She's far too high-energy for me. It may be that one of her main problems is that she devotes too little energy to emotions, and too much to physical activities. Still, it means she's as unequipped to hate as to love, and that's a good thing.

I gather that there IS some followup on the question of what happened to the human child abducted by the Moorfolk when the changeling was substituted. I hope so. What do the Folk need with slaves? I wouldn't want to think she went unrescued lifelong. But she'd probably still be an infant when she was returned, wouldn't she? I mean what with the time differences and all? So she might not have spent much time underhill, after all, even with the decade or a little more Saaski spends in the village.

Anyway, a good story, but not (as it might have been), a great one, at least so far.

The addition of the character Tam helps quite a bit. Tam reacts to the changeling in the way that everybody arguably should have--as a person, of whatever ancestry. The parochial attitudes of the villagers are quite likely a matter of being insulated by poor roads and inadequate travel possibilities. But that need not lead to cruelty. Why DO the villagers fear the Moorfolk? There's some implication that they were taught to so fear when they were Christianized. Before the 'heathens' were fenced in from the heaths, is it not likely that they used to join the Moorfolk for their revels?

There's a slight postscript in the author's statement, in which she argues that she began to feel sympathy for the changelings only when she tried to inhabit their skins. Maybe that is true of her. And probably of others. It was never true of me. When I would watch monster movies as a child, I was always complaining "Why did you build your blasted city on its migration path in the FIRST place?". I never had any problem feeling kindness and compassion for 'monsters'. But if this book helps people understand things from the point of view of the 'other', it will still do some good. And it's still a good, pleasant, readable book, which could, in the hands of a better writer, have been a great book. My comparison would be between Alexander Key's version of *Escape to Witch Mountain*, as compared to Zenna Henderson's *People* books.

Until the arrival of a Henderson heir to create the great version, this will serve as an adequate makedo.

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## Elizabeth says

Updated Review: 1/29/18

This book is exactly as good as I remembered it, which is wonderfully refreshing. It's always a shame when a book you read when you were younger doesn't hold up as you age, but this one did, thankfully. The part-mundane, part-mystical world the author created practically leaps off the pages and submerges you almost as entirely as the Folk's Mound does to Saaski and Tam, towards the end of the novel. I'm a sucker for fairies, and this wonderful fantasy novel both appeals to those who love the old-fashioned stories of mischievous

Fair Folk who have little regard toward others, but also has a rather touching human side to the tale. Saaski is a sympathetic and admirable heroine, who was forced to be a changeling due to her "difficulties" living with the faerie, and yet has an even worst time getting along with humans. Eventually, she must choose a different life, since both worlds cannot fully accept her. It's a story we've all heard, in various skins and covers, but it's no less powerful. I'm glad I picked this again, for the first time in almost eight years. Still highly recommended, to young and old, and to lovers of faerie tales, even when the Folk aren't entirely, er, kindly.

Original Review: 9/1/10

When I chose this book at Borders, I felt a calling that told this book **MUST BE READ**. Very rarely does this calling come, especially without the reviews I've received from past readers. In this case, the story of a young changeling's life was just the sort of story I'd adore. And I did. Saaski is the human child exchanged for a half human-half fairy, who was exiled after nearly placing her world into danger. As Saaski grows up, she is taunted and shunned by the people of the village; only her parents and grandmother accept her as a part of the family. With human emotions merging (and sometimes, clashing) with her fairy instincts, Saaski befriends a goatherd, and slowly regains her memories after meeting a fisherman who is responsible for her exile. The author's lively diction and beautiful descriptions draws the reader into the book, page by page, like a classic fairytale that has been drawn out in order to last a little longer. I highly recommend this book for children between the ages 9-14, for this is a story for all children who felt like they never truly belonged.

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### **Alice says**

I found this randomly in my Jr. High Library. At first I only liked it for its fantasy setting and good story telling. Now I seem to relate more and more to the main character Saaski. I have lived in Japan for a number of years and I understand what it's like living between two worlds. This book got me through some hard times in Japan. Whenever Japanese people reminded me that I am indeed not one of them I just imagine them as the fey king saying, "Aye, you're neither one thing nor yet quite t'other. Pity, but there 'tis."

I think anyone who is stuck between two places will find this book speaks directly to them.

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### **Nati says**

What's interesting to me about this book is that you could say it has a mixture of cuteness and darkness. My aunt bought me "The Moorchild" for my birthday when I was a kid, and I asked for a book about fairies. So there aren't really fairies in this novel, but rather other types of amusing, albeit dark, mythical creatures, which steal human babies from their parents, to replace them with their own. Oh and the ruckus... Such is the story of 11 year old Saaski, who has no recollection of her babyhood, but is weird and different then all the other children in the village. I love how the characters in this book are likeable, but not way too likeable which makes them rather realistic in my eyes. Also, the writer does a very good job with nature and environment description - particularly with the hills of the moor - with a tinge of mystery and darkness but also playfulness and innocence.

As I said, for me this novel is all about the balance (;

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### **Kailey (BooksforMKs) says**

Bewitching and alluring! I couldn't put it down. Adds depth to the typical fairy tale.

Saaski is half-Folk and half-human. She is exchanged for a human child and forced to grow up among humans, but she never feels like she belongs anywhere, either with the Folk or with her human family. The villagers tease and ridicule her, calling her a witch, but Saaski finds an unexpected friendship with a goatherd boy on the moors.

One of the reasons I love this book so much is because I grew up also torn between two cultures, two countries, and never quite felt that I belonged in either one of them. Like Saaski, I had to find my own way, and make my own world.

Saaski is beautifully strange and brave. I love the magic of the Folk and the imaginative story! Just as good reading it the second time!

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### **Sara says**

[ it was probably the first book I read where the ending is lonesome, rather sad, and doesn't tie everything up in a neat bow. (hide spoiler)]

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### **Debbie Barr says**

I bought this on a whim, and hoped that I would like it, because I really hate buying books that end up being disappointing. Thankfully, this book was well written and had a great plot, so no worries there. I liked the way people spoke in it (reminding me lovingly of the secret garden) and the story was just lovely.

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### **Swankivy says**

This Newbery Award-winning book really captured my attention. It is about the half-fairy Moql, who doesn't know she's half human until she is unable to become invisible in front of a human, and he ends up almost catching her and endangering the other fairies, or Folk as they call themselves.

They have a strange way of handling emotions; they aren't affected the same as humans and don't have the same morality (or even the same way of living within time), so they have no qualms about casting her out, switching her with a nearby un-Baptized baby named Saaski.

She then is raised as Saaski, having had her heart broken by the exile and her memory drowned in wanting to move on. She knows she is strange for a human, but doesn't know why, or why people seem to look at her strangely and call her "changeling." The book is all about her trying to find her identity and how to be accepted, and where she belongs.

This very much appeals to me because the books I write involve a character who doesn't quite know if she is

human either, and has similar problems fitting in. (Well, that and I like stories about fairies.) Besides the subject matter, the book is very well-written and has a sort of old-timey feel about it without sounding forced. It's a very enjoyable read, even for adults.

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### **M.M. Strawberry Reviews says**

If you're well-versed with fairy folklore and the idea of changelings - where fae will switch a human baby with one of their own - you should enjoy this book. In the story, the fae are very much real, though usually not seen by humans, and this leads to some interesting situations.

What would happen if a mortal man fell in love with a fae/elf (in this story, called moorfolk) woman? This story deals with the consequences that happen to an offspring of such an union. At first, she is happy among the Fairy Folk, and does not know of her paternity because the fairy children are raised communally and thus do not know their real parents, but after an incident in which Moql's human side is inadvertently revealed, the poor kid through no fault of her own is kicked out of the community and has to deal with human parents after their baby has been stolen and swapped with her.

One cannot help but feel bad for Moql (Saaski) because after being cast out by the Folk, she is ostracized by many of the humans in the village because she is 'different' even though she is half human. You can't help but feel bad for poor Saaski as she tries to figure out who she is (after having lost her memories of her magical heritage) and dealing with the feelings of not belonging in her village. A few people are kind to her, but as anyone knows, the kindness of a few people just can't cancel out being teased and ostracized for something that is not even her fault. Poor kid.

This is a great novel that was written for kids, but it's also a good (if a bit quick) read for adults.

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### **Sunshine says**

An enthralling fairytale peppered with dynamic characters and engaging scenes of whimsy and reality braided to together to create a classic and enduring story for children of all ages. The author's attention to detail and apparent research/knowledge regarding her subject matter, it's location, and life on a moor leaves readers feeling as if they have walked side-by-side with the changeling Saaski as she gathers firewood, attends to farm animals and fends off the persecution of other children as she comes to terms with being "different". McGraw's subtle lessons on love and hate are told is just the right tone with just the right amount of pondering.

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### **Sara - thelookingglassreads says**

2.75

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## **Katrina Zartman says**

\$0.99 wasn't too much to spend to see what is winning awards in children's literature, though.

I enjoyed learning about The Folk (fairies, pixies, however you would like to categorize them). I wouldn't know if the information is historically accurate or just made up by this author. It was interesting to learn about bee hives and about the medicinal use of herbs. I also gained a better understanding of how a set of bagpipes works.

Moral tone? The author doesn't punish the main character for her faults. It isn't completely clear that the girl- changeling is wrong in her disobedience. The explanation of the changeling's parentage was written in such a way that I don't think a child would pick up on the immorality of the union between her human father and Folk Fairie mother.

Quick read. Enjoyable, but not destined to become a classic.

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## **Nick says**

Glad this little fantasy tale came across my desk last week. I had never heard of it or the author before, and thankfully didn't read the back cover. The first sentence got my attention: "It was Old Bess, the Wise Woman of the village, who first suspected that the baby at her daughter's house was a changeling." And we're off.

Most tales like this for young readers veer off into grand epic battles of good vs. evil which require at least 5 books to tell, which is fine and all, but this one stays in the village and the moors and is a little gem because of that. The writing is wonderful and the story is weaved in such a way that it feels timeless.

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## **Gail Levine says**

The main character is difficult to identify with and yet I did, couldn't help myself. A surprising, engrossing read.

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## **Josiah says**

The first thing that stands out to me when I take a look at the career of author Eloise Jarvis McGraw is her outstanding record of successful longevity. She won a Newbery Honor in 1952 for the book *Moccasin Trail* and then another in 1997 for this book, *The Moorchild*, with a third honoree (*The Golden Goblet*) thrown in there for good measure in 1962. Being hailed as an excellent writer over that long a stretch of time is a remarkable accomplishment really matched among contemporary authors of youth literature only by E.L. Konigsburg, with perhaps a couple of others included in the conversation, as well.

*The Moorchild* is a book that sits on the crossroads between fantasy and reality, never shifting too far one way or the other. Most stories with such heavy fairy influence tend to be liberally coated with fantasy elements, but this book maintains its grip on realism even as it explores the lives of the fairy folk who live

just outside the awareness of most human beings. The effect of this is that we never know for sure what could happen next in the story, as things change on a dime from mythical to realistic and the characters all sort of inhabit both worlds, cognizant of the truth to the legends about fairy folk while themselves still living normal lives like any other humans.

In *The Moorchild*, it seems that the fairy folk aren't particularly malevolent in the games they play; they're driven more by a sense of rogue playfulness and deep-seated mischief, which unfortunately has a way of drastically messing up the lives of humans who would rather have no part in the "fun". The most devastating trick is the swapping out of a human baby for a changeling, a fairy pushed against its will to take part in the cruel prank for whatever reason the leaders of the folk have in mind. It's not entirely made clear in this book why the babies are stolen, but our story begins when a young fairy named Moql is chosen to be a changeling because of her inability to learn the tricks of the trade as quickly as her peers. Moql was born half-human, and her less-than-purebred descent has marked her as the best candidate to be left behind.

Moql (who has now taken on the name Saaski, which the baby she is changed for was named by her parents), forgets completely over time her history with the fairy people. The villagers know that there's something not quite right with the new baby, though, and "Saaski" is never accepted by any of them other than her "parents" as anything but an outsider. The villagers' simmering anger lies fairly dormant for years, until a luckless incident gives them the chance they'd wanted to condemn Saaski and seek retribution. The changeling girl now must escape from her village just to save her own life, all the while trying to remember who she is and who she used to be, and and figure out a way to set things right before it's too late.

The fantasy elements to *The Moorchild* are often original and impressively rendered, showing Eloise Jarvis McGraw to be a very creative writer even as she neared the end of her life. There are some well-built and memorable characters in the book, as well, particularly the goatherd boy, Tam, who becomes something of a safe harbor for Saaski from all of the craziness that rages around her. Saaski *is* a fairy, it's true, but what the villagers can't seem to grasp is that she didn't want to be exiled to live with them any more than they wanted one of their babies to be swapped out for a changeling. Saaski is at least as much a victim of the circumstances as the people of her village. When that brutal mob mentality forms, though, and people give up control of their individual brains, innocent victims always seem to get hurt. Perhaps the most significant part to this book is its veiled warning of that truth.

*The Moorchild* is the first of Eloise Jarvis McGraw's stories that I've yet read, but I'd be interested in trying others to see what they're like. Ultimately, I would not have awarded this book a Newbery Honor for 1997 ahead of such worthy non-recipients as *The Music of Dolphins* by Karen Hesse, *Crash* by Jerry Spinelli and *After the War* by Carol Matas, but it's an interesting read that enhanced my perspective on Irish folklore and the old Celtic fairy stories that have been a part of common legend for almost as long as mankind can remember. I would probably give one and a half stars to *The Moorchild*.

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## Cassandra says

"Why, you'll be 'changed, m'dear. We'll just swap you for a human child who'll make a good servant to the Band. Half Humans never work out 'mongst the Folk. No, never do."

"But--I'm half Folk too... What if I never work out 'mongst the humans?"

"Aye, you're neither one thing nor yet quite t'other. Pity, but there 'tis."

This is one of those books I remember reading and loving (and re-reading, over and over, until the library's



copy was nearly worn out) as a kid, but wasn't sure how it would hold up reading it as an adult. So I was a bit nervous to return to it, afraid I'd find the magic had faded.

I needn't have worried. If anything, I love this book even more now; it is such a perfect blend of two different types of story--the faery-tale of the Fey, the Folk, the Little People, the clever trickster spirits of the wild places, and the torments they inflict on poor hapless mortals; and the very human story of a misfit child finding her place in a world she doesn't seem to belong to.

The former was what interested me as a kid, being infatuated with all things Other--elves and unicorns and faeries and children raised by wolves. But I think the latter element of the story, the human story about prejudice, and being different, and finding strength in being yourself, must have had more impact on me than I realized--because it feels familiar, not as a book I've read, but like I've lived it.

Many of the make-believe games I played involved a person of unknown magical abilities who is misunderstood or feared by everyone around them. Granted, this is a fairly common theme in Fantasy, but I do wonder if this book is the one that planted the idea in my imagination.

This re-read and review was prompted by the fact that Little Sister is now reading this book. I'm excited by this for a couple reasons. One, Sister is probably the closest to Saaska a human being can be, from the unquenchable physical energy (usually finding release in music) to the fey sense of mischief to the untameable blond curls. Two, this is the sort of book that all little girls who have ever felt like the freaky-odd one in the class--which is to say who have ever been a pre-teen--ought to read.

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## **Stephanie says**

This is one of those books I never knew existed until I just came across it randomly. The plot looked interesting, so I thought I might as well see what it was like. Essentially it's about a child who actually is a changeling left with humans by the moorfolk because she had a human father.

Usually understatement is a good thing, but I feel like this book was too understated. The premise was good, but there just wasn't a whole lot of drama or build-up. For a strange child, Saaski seemed almost boring at times. I liked the first chapter the best because you just don't know if Saaski is really unnatural, or if superstition and prejudice is just taking its toll. The plot follows a pretty expected route, and I actually expected the ending to be more dramatic than it was. (Slight spoiler) One human stays in the mound, while another escapes. It would have been more satisfying to have a willing "life-for-life" exchange instead of an accident.

I would still recommend the book, since there isn't really anything badly done about it. I just feel like it could have been better, stranger, and more surprising. I might actually give "The Moorchild" more stars because of the way the ending affected me. There is something very wistful in the way the human child turns from Saaski, her real rescuer, which shows that Saaski will never be accepted no matter how heroic she becomes. And I like the mysteriousness of the ending with Saaski's human parents and their unexpected nostalgia for their strange child. The music over the moors adds a sense of longing--which is what fairies and humans are all about.

edit:

On reading the book for the second time, I gave it another star. Sure, the plot drags a bit in the middle where it's just a series of everyday encounters and then goes a bit too quickly near the end. There might have been

more made of Saaski's interactions with the other villagers. A few times there's telling, not showing on the part of the author.

But I really like how effortlessly the Scottish feel is worked into the dialog and the setting. You never forget you're reading a folktale, and it doesn't seem forced at all. I like the delicacy McGraw uses portraying characters such as Anwara, Yanno, and Old Bess. You can really understand where they're coming from.

And of course, I'm a sucker for anything with tropes from old folk tales. The description of the Mound, and the glamor, and the superstitions is all excellent. (I particularly like the idea of seeing false with one eye and true with the other.) The world feels very real, without being bogged down in details (which series such as Harry Potter can be prone to).

So Moorchild isn't like those books that are "the next big thing," but it is one you can read again and wonder about whether we ever can escape our fate.

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### **Grace says**

I had this book many moons ago in my youth and then made the stupid blunder of getting rid of it. Fixed that.

When I reacquired it, I worried that re-reading it would be disillusioning. There is often such a gap between the impressions I got as a child and the way things seem to me now. I shouldn't have worried, though. *The Moorchild* is still just as bittersweet and haunting even though seven years have passed. I love this book.

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### **Tobias says**

The Moorchild is definitely a charming little book. It is well-written with interesting characters and a language style that I really enjoyed, though I can see it being difficult for a younger reader. The mythology was fairly standard, but could have been developed and explored further, as could the culture. Also, after rereading *The Moorchild* after a few years, I was surprised to see how different the moral structure is than I remembered from when I was younger.

The dedication is to all the children who have ever felt different. Now, I was bullied quite badly as a child because of my personality and appearance, and my parents are from different countries, so I very much relate to Saaski, the story's main character, who is caught not only between two cultures but really between two worlds, and sympathized with the cruelty she underwent at the hands of the other village children. However, I highly disagree with how McGraw handles this situation as an author. "Different" is portrayed to equal "Wrong." Saaski is taunted, blamed, physically attacked, and even threatened to be killed throughout the story. I realize that being different can cause people to hate you, it's life and kids shouldn't be sheltered from it, but how it's dealt with bothers me. Saaski not only rarely stands up for herself, but is portrayed as unable to do so; she is constantly hiding and avoiding other children, and in the end runs away. Even her parents, who do their best to love her and treat her as a normal child, very clearly never fully accept her. Is this the message we want to send children who feel different? That no one -- not even their parents -- will ever love them or even accept them unless they, too are outcast? That these other outcasts are the only people they can trust? That the solution to bullying is running away? Likewise, do we want to portray bullies of "different"

children as having no consequences, not even from their parents? And what about Bruman, who is alcoholic, beats Tam, and is still portrayed in a positive light? Other reviewers have noted the "happy ending" of the book, but that ending comes of Saaski essentially giving up on people and making things in the village as if she had never existed. Her tormentors get what they want, essentially being rewarded for their cruelty to the young child.

Be careful with this book, especially if you're going to give it to a child who is "different." Read it first, be aware and talk about how Saaski and the villagers handle situations and how they could have acted differently. It's worth a read because it's interesting, compelling and has a great language style, but don't take the dedication lightly.

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### **Josephine (biblioseph) says**

Read this a couple times when I was younger. It's great.

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