

How It All Began

Clare Jaget

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A menagerie of fantastical creatures await in a land beneath an uprooted tree in this exciting beginning to a new series.

Clare Jaget's *How It All Began* is a delightful story that is suitable for children of all ages. Youngsters will see themselves in the story of Thomas and Emily, two cousins who love adventure and find it in the most interesting of ways.

Emily is visiting Thomas and his family in America for the holidays when suddenly there is a torrential storm that's strong enough to take down a gigantic oak tree. Because the tree is now toppled over, they are able to see a spiral staircase leading into the ground. They, along with Thomas's dog, Henry, can't resist seeing what's down there and find themselves in the middle of fantasyland, with fairies, pixies, and even a few Shakespearean characters thrown in for good measure. Before long, Emily, Thomas, and Henry are on the guest list for Queen Mab's birthday party, along with all their new friends.

There are quite a few characters in this book, and to Jaget's credit, they're easy to keep straight. In fact, there are so many characters who talk differently (including Henry), that *How It All Began* would be an ideal choice for acting out in the classroom or at bedtime. As the story itself is only about fifty pages, some characters don't get a lot of speaking time, but in future books in the series, hopefully each one will be fleshed out a little more.

A few characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* make an appearance at the party, so this book would be ideal for introducing children to the Bard himself. It's also filled with fairies, pixies, leprechauns, brownies and the like, and Jaget wisely includes a glossary at the end to define all the groups. Here, there are some interesting facts about all these fantastical creatures that even adults would probably not know; they'll enjoy reading them right along with their children or students.

The book does contain quite a few punctuation errors, but they don't detract dramatically from the writing quality and plot development. Each chapter reads quickly and ends on a cliffhanger. Characters flit in and out of the scenes, and many are very funny. The climax of the book, Queen Mab's birthday party, features all of the characters coming together to create a special celebration for their leader.

How It All Began is the first book in the Enchanted Tree series, and it has a very open-ended final page that leaves children wanting more. Henry, Thomas, Emily, and the menagerie of fantastical characters introduced here start their adventures in a strong, well-developed story that will appeal to kids of all ages.

KELLY THUNSTROM (April 18, 2016)

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