

The Unwritten Rules of Magic

AUTHOR Q&A

Your debut novel explores the emotional tug-of-war between control and surrender—especially in motherhood. Was there a moment in your own life that sparked your desire to tell this kind of story?

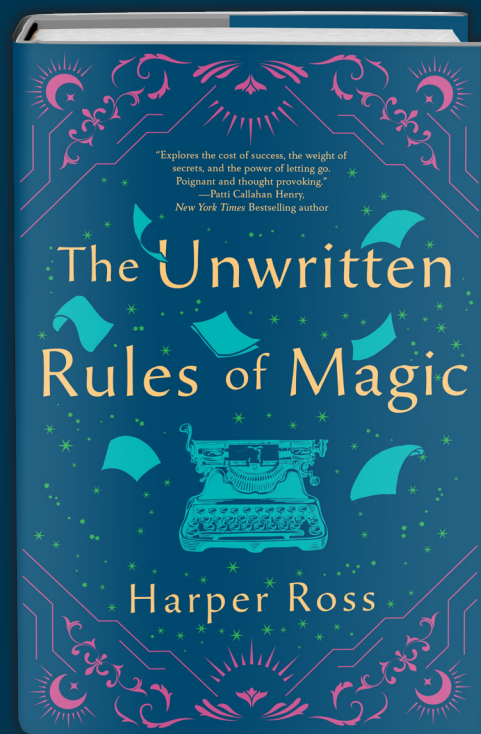
Following a long battle with Parkinson's disease, my father died a few months before I began plotting this story. He and I shared a complicated relationship, so my grief was laced with the need to finally reconcile the things I loved about him with the things I didn't. Anyone raised in chaos—be it abuse, poverty, neglect, or otherwise—can relate to that kind of emotional whiplash. And probably, to the resulting desire to control your environment. Yes, I own my control issues!

Writing a story built upon an emotional arc that mirrored my own struggles turned out to be unexpectedly healing. It also gave me a big mirror to hold up to my parenting, especially now that my kids are entering early adulthood. They're capable of making their own decisions, but bigger choices come with bigger stakes, making it difficult for this mom to remain silent. (Confession: I still fail too often, but I'm working on it). If this story helps anyone else loosen their white-knuckle grip on perfectionism or guilt, I'll consider that a win.

If you could trace your writing journey back to a single book that changed something in you—your voice, your ambition, your belief in fiction—what would it be, and why?

I couldn't possibly narrow it down to one book—but a handful of recent reads definitely nudged me toward writing speculative fiction. V. E. Schwab's *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* opened my heart with its masterful meditation on memory and legacy. Nikki Erlick's *The Measure* blew me away with its "what would you do?" premise. Sarah Addison Allen's *Other Birds* reminded me how powerful found-family stories can be. And Emilia Hart's *Weyward*—well, it's basically a spellbinding love letter to female resistance and resilience.

Each of these novels was like a flashlight, illuminating a path I hadn't realized I wanted to walk.



Your novel feels emotionally grounded despite its magical premise. What kind of research—emotional or otherwise—went into crafting a story that mixes whimsy with realism?

My fascination with human nature began in childhood and cemented in college, where I enrolled in multiple psychology courses. That helped me in my legal career because I had to understand clients' motives and actual goals to facilitate satisfactory resolutions. Similarly, motherhood requires one to don many hats, including that of a patient observer who can pinpoint the root of any emotional meltdown. To this day, I peruse *Psychology Today* for pleasure. In these ways, I've spent my entire adult life doing emotional research without even realizing it.

Yet, while I'm from the Midwest and, as such, was raised to remain firmly rooted in reality, I've also always had one eye on the stars. That duality helped me write an emotionally grounded story—but with just enough magic to lift it off the page.

Emerson, your protagonist, is a ghostwriter who helps others tell their stories instead of writing her own. Why did you choose that role for her character? Have you ever struggled with being the “invisible author” in your own life?

Making Emerson a ghostwriter felt inevitable. Given her upbringing in a literary household, it made sense—especially one overshadowed by a charismatic, wildly successful father. But it's also metaphorical. Emerson is reactive rather than proactive—defined by her roles as daughter, mother, and fixer. She's been so focused on keeping her boat afloat that she's never thought to raise the sails and chart her own course. Going from ghostwriter to novelist in her own right illustrates the internal shift in how she eventually begins to face life's challenges.

That dynamic made her growth arc incredibly satisfying to write. On a personal note, I didn't truly step into my own power until I hit my thirties either. These past twenty-plus years have been a journey of self-discovery—and while I'm still a work in progress, I'm steering my own ship without fear or apology.

Why did you set the novel along the affluent Connecticut shoreline?

Part of it was the old “write what you know” advice. Although born and raised in western Pennsylvania, I've lived in Fairfield County for over two decades, so I could accurately paint its nuances. But the real reason? With its manicured hedges and gilded facades, this place perfectly mirrors one of the book's central tensions: how much of what we show to the world is a performance?

It's a region where beauty and affluence often mask pain and pressure. That dynamic felt like the perfect stage for Emerson's unraveling illusions about her family and herself. And for readers, the setting adds a bit of aspirational escape à la *Big Little Lies* or Elin Hilderbrand's Nantucket novels.

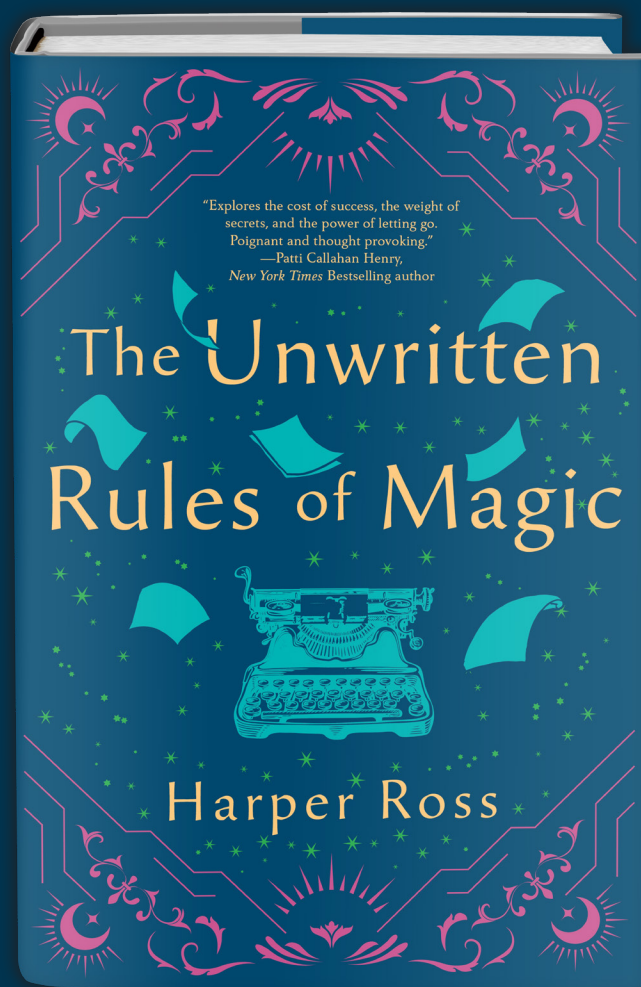


What do you hope readers walk away thinking about after they finish *The Unwritten Rules of Magic*?

I hope readers walk away with this message ringing in their ears: Be here now. Don't let fear of the unknown—or the desire for a particular future—rob you of the life you already have. Also, humans are incredibly resilient, especially when we connect with our most authentic selves. And right now, in a world that feels like it's spinning faster every day, I think keeping that in mind is more important than ever.

Can you tell us what you're working on next? And should we expect more magic, more mother-daughter dynamics . . . or an entirely new kind of spell?

I'm a bit superstitious, so I won't spill too many details—but yes, more magic is on the way. And more tangled family relationships, too. The next book is set in Vermont (a place I love and frequent often), and it will explore complicated sister dynamics, family secrets, the pros and cons of social media, and the ethical tightrope between truth and privacy. I think book clubs will have much to chew on with this one.



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