

The Half of It

The Half of It is a 2020 American coming-of-age comedy-drama film written, directed, and co-produced by Alice Wu. It stars Leah Lewis, Daniel Diemer, and Alexxis Lemire, with Enrique Murciano, Wolfgang Novogratz, Catherine Curtin, Becky Ann Baker, and Collin Chou in supporting roles. It is loosely inspired by Edmond Rostand's 1897 play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and follows a Chinese-American student helping the school jock woo a girl whom, secretly, they both desire.

The film was released worldwide on Netflix on May 1, 2020. It received positive reviews from critics, who mostly praised Wu's direction and screenplay, as well as the performances of Lewis and Diemer. It was honored with the Founders Award for Best U.S. Narrative Feature at the 19th Tribeca Film Festival, while Wu was nominated for Best Screenplay at the 36th Independent Spirit Awards.

Plot

Loner Ellie Chu lives in the remote town of Squahamish, where she makes extra money writing homework papers for her fellow students. She lives with her widower father and performs most of his duties as station master and signalman.

Approached by Paul Munsky, an inarticulate football player, to write a love letter to Aster Flores, Ellie initially refuses. She later accepts the work after learning that her home's electricity will be shut off if they fail to make a minimum payment.

Aster is dating Trig, a boy from a wealthy family, and Ellie begins a heartfelt correspondence with her through letters and text messages. They connect over their shared interests in literature and art, though Aster believes she is communicating with Paul. Ellie's English teacher encourages her to apply to Grinnell College, but Ellie plans to stay in Squahamish, despite being unhappy there, because she does not want to leave her father.

Ellie sets up Paul on a date with Aster, but it goes badly because he is unable to converse with her like she can. Ellie regards this as the end of their attempts, but after Paul defends her from bullies, she agrees to teach him about art and literature. Ellie and Paul begin to bond as they open up about their family struggles.

The Half of It



Official promotional poster

Directed by	<u>Alice Wu</u>
Written by	<u>Alice Wu</u>
Produced by	<u>Anthony Bregman</u> <u>M. Blair Breard</u> <u>Alice Wu</u>
Starring	<u>Leah Lewis</u> <u>Daniel Diemer</u> <u>Alexxis Lemire</u> <u>Enrique Murciano</u> <u>Wolfgang Novogratz</u> <u>Catherine Curtin</u> <u>Becky Ann Baker</u> <u>Collin Chou</u>
Cinematography	<u>Greta Zozula</u>
Edited by	<u>Ian Blume</u>

Paul's second date with Aster starts to go as badly as the first, but Ellie saves the evening by texting Aster while pretending to be Paul. He abruptly confesses his romantic interest in Aster and later tells Ellie that he kissed her.

Paul brings Ellie to a party and later takes her to his home after she becomes intoxicated. There he sees letters in her bag addressed to food critics, presumably about his sausage creations.

Aster invites Ellie to spend the day together. She takes her to a hidden hot spring where they swim and share an intimate conversation. Aster reveals that Trig intends to marry her, while Ellie reveals that she does not believe in God and talks about her deceased mother. Meanwhile, at Ellie's house, Paul and her father bond as they make sausages. Later, Ellie watches from her window as Paul and Aster kiss, and she decides to apply to Grinnell.

After a game, mistakenly believing they both have developed feelings for each other, Paul attempts to kiss Ellie, but she rejects him. Aster sees them and walks away angrily. Paul realizes that Ellie loves Aster and, due to his religious upbringing, tells Ellie that it is a sin.

When Paul delivers sausage to Ellie's father, they have a conversation about love. He asks Paul if he has ever loved someone so much that he did not want to change anything about them.

Trig proposes to Aster at a church service, but Ellie and Paul publicly interrupt the moment by sharing the true meaning of "love" using Ellie's wording from a previous letter. Aster realizes that Ellie wrote the letters and text messages as Paul; she slaps him and storms out.

Before leaving for Grinnell, Ellie apologizes to Aster for deceiving her. Aster admits that she may have had feelings for Ellie and that she is applying to art school. Ellie kisses Aster and tells her that she will see her in a couple of years.

Paul sees Ellie off at the train platform and tells her that his sausages have received good reviews, and that he will keep visiting her father. As in *Ek Villain*, the film they watched together, Paul runs beside the train as it leaves. Ellie laughs at his silliness, then observes the passengers around her as she goes off to start a new journey in her life.

	<u>Lee Percy</u>
Music by	<u>Anton Sanko</u>
Production company	<u>Likely Story</u>
Distributed by	<u>Netflix</u>
Release date	May 1, 2020
Running time	104 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English

Cast

- Leah Lewis as Ellie Chu, a shy, introverted, Chinese-American straight-A student
- Daniel Diemer as Paul Munsky, a school jock whom Ellie helps out by writing love letters
- Alexxis Lemire as Aster Flores, the daughter of a local deacon
- Collin Chou as Edwin Chu, Ellie's father
- Wolfgang Novogratz as Trig Carson, Aster's boyfriend
- Becky Ann Baker as Mrs. Geselschap
- Catherine Curtin as Colleen Munsky, Paul's mother

- Enrique Murciano as Deacon Flores, Aster's father

Production

Alice Wu started writing *The Half of It* in the aftermath of the 2016 United States presidential election.^{[2][3]} The screenplay drew inspiration from the 1897 play *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand.^{[4][5]} In April 2019, it was announced that Leah Lewis, Alexxis Lemire, Daniel Diemer, Becky Ann Baker, Catherine Curtin, Wolfgang Novogratz, and Enrique Murciano joined the cast of the film, with Wu directing and Netflix distributing.^[6] Anthony Bregman of *Likely Story*, M. Blair Breard, and Wu served as producers, and *Likely Story*'s Erica Matlin and Greg Zuk executive produced. In June 2019, it was announced that Collin Chou had joined the cast.^[7]

Filming

Principal photography began on April 22, 2019, in New York, and concluded on May 31, 2019.^{[8][9]}

Release

It was scheduled to have its world premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival on April 18, 2020.^[10] However, the festival was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^[11] It was released on May 1, 2020.^[12]

The reason Wu went with Netflix as her production company is that those in the industry said that more people will watch it on Netflix, even though a theatrical release would give her better renown. A Netflix executive asked her why she wrote the film, She thought to herself "Oh, those people are not going to go to the theater to watch this movie but in the privacy of their own home... they might press play."^[13]

Wu did a test screening in a small conservative town. She wanted to know how those who would be morally aligned against the movie would feel about it. She was shocked to learn that people who were conservative leaning enjoyed the film. People marked the film as 'excellent.' This helped her realize how potent the reach of Netflix is. Netflix will help the movie reach these people who would otherwise not watch the film.^[13]

Reception

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 97% of 104 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.8/10. The website's consensus reads: "For viewers in search of an uncommonly smart, tender, and funny coming-of-age story, *The Half of It* has everything."^[14] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 74 out of 100, based on 23 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[15]

Decider said the plot is "an unbearably cute premise—a modern-day *Cyrano de Bergerac* with a queer twist—that seems so perfect and so obvious, it's a wonder the movie hasn't been made yet", and "an adorable teen film that will no doubt service an extremely underserved audience."^[16] *Rolling Stone* praised the direction, stating that "the gentle touch Wu uses as a filmmaker, which only occasionally drifts into tidiness, does not dull the edges of her quietly revolutionary achievement in telling the story of a young

lesbian immigrant's journey to self-acceptance. In a movie brimming over with the pleasures of the unexpected, that's the best part."^[17] *The New York Times* noted that "Wu suffuses the film with a painfully mature understanding of the ache of longing for the impossible."^[18]

Bitch magazine wrote that "while these teenage-focused...movies flirt with the idea of lesbian relationships, they quickly pivot before their casual interest can evolve into any fully realized romance", with the film's story seeming "to be more about the halfway happiness Ellie's given: maybe some acceptance, maybe a friend, maybe a first love. It's not the happy story we were sold via the trailer, and it feels like more promises that only halfway delivered."^[19]

Leah Lewis told Teen Vogue in an interview on 1 May 2020 that: "Most people think a love story has an equation, and that's usually boy meets girl, girl meets boy, or girl meets girl." However, in this case "[i]t's a self-love story because these characters don't really end up with each other, but at the very end, they end up with *something*. For me, that's even more valuable than just finding your other half; it's finding a part of yourself along the way. It is a love story, it's just not a 'romance' story."^[20]

In a post dated May 22, 2020, A.O. Scott recommended it as his top film of 2020 so far.^[21] Similarly, Educating Georgia's film expert Steph called it their film of 2020 in their retrospective of the year.^[22]

Accolades

The Half of It won the top prize, the Founders Award for Best U.S. Narrative Feature, at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival.^{[23][24][25][26]} The film was nominated for Best Screenplay (for Wu) at the 36th Independent Spirit Awards,^{[27][28]} and for Outstanding Film – Limited Release at the 32nd GLAAD Media Awards.^{[29][30]}

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External links

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