Fairies!
A True Story

by Shirley Raye Redmond
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Random House New York
For Nancy and Michael Butner, with love —S.R.R.
To Mom and Dad, thanks! —R.H.
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Do you believe in fairies?
People around the world have told stories about fairies for a long time.
In some stories, fairies come out to dance when the moon is full. Sometimes they steal babies from their cradles. They leave fairy children in their place.
In Ireland, fairies are called the wee folk. In parts of Africa, there are kind fairies called azizas (say ah-ZEE-zahz).
The brownies of England and Scotland are helpful. They run errands and clean stables. But not all fairies are friendly.
Britain’s ugly spriggans
bring bad weather to ruin crops.

And the leshy,

A Slavic forest fairies,
eat people with sticks
and tree limbs.
autious travelers carried dry bread in their pockets to protect themselves from fairy mischief.
More than two centuries ago, brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm spent many years collecting German fairy tales. Their book, *Children’s and Household Tales*, as published in 1812, became popular around the world.
ut are fairies real?
oday, most people say no.
ome folklore researchers,
ough, say maybe.
hey say that
a long time ago
in Great Britain
there may have been
a group of small people.
they may have been conquered
by tall invaders.
To avoid capture,
these small people
hid in the forest.
They wore green clothes
so they would be hard to spot.
hey came out only at night
to hunt and steal food.

sometimes they even switched
their sick babies for healthy ones.

Over time,
these small people died off.

but their neighbors
still told tales about them.
here are others
who say fairies are real.
They insist they have seen them!
In 1842,
in Stowmarket, England,
an man saw a dozen fairies
dancing in the moonlight.
He ran home and told his neighbors. They rushed back to the meadow. But when they got there, the fairies had disappeared.
William Blake was a famous British poet. He claimed to have seen a fairy funeral.
He told his friends
the fairies were
as small as grasshoppers.
they carried a dead fairy
on a rose petal.
they sang a sad song
as they passed him
in the garden.
Did these men really see fairies?
Maybe.
Maybe not.
People sometimes make up stories to explain things they don’t understand.
Weather can play tricks
in our eyes.
Fairies dancing in a meadow
might be nothing more
than fireflies or snowflakes.
ome people who think they have seen fairies have been tricked. The most famous fairy prank took place in Cottingley, England.
One afternoon in July 1917, two cousins named Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths drew some pretty fairy pictures. They cut them out like paper dolls.
Elsie took a photo of Frances looking to the fairies. Frances took a photo of fairies dancing in Elsie’s lap.
Isie’s father, Mr. Wright, developed the photos. At first, he was puzzled. He thought the blurry images were birds or empty bags.
Isie told him that she and Frances had found fairies in the woods.
hree years later, Isie’s mother met a man named Edward Gardner. He was a well-known teacher of fairy folklore. Mrs. Wright told him that her daughter had taken photos of fairies.
Mr. Gardner showed the photos to men at the Kodak camera lab in London.

One man said the pictures were fake.
ut another man noticed blur in a photo. He said that meant the fairy was moving. He said the photos were real!
Mr. Gardner was delighted. He told everyone he knew that fairies lived in Cottingley Woods. He asked the girls to take more fairy photos.
hey agreed.
yhey sent three more photos
to Mr. Gardner.
Newspapers reported the amazing news. “Fairies in Yorkshire,” the headlines declared. “An Epic-Making Event.”
Some people laughed.
Others believed
the fairies were real.
They went to Cottingley
to hunt for fairies.
They visited Elsie and Frances.
They asked the girls
to show them where
they had taken the photos.
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a famous author. He wrote the Sherlock Holmes mystery stories. He believed Elsie and Frances’s fairies were real.
In 1922, Sir Arthur wrote about Frances and Elsie in a book called *The Coming of the Fairies*. 
All over England, people read it. More and more visitors went to Cottingley. The town became famous. People called it Fairyland.
Many years went by. In 1981, when Elsie and Frances were old women, they admitted that the fairy photos were a joke. "It was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun," Frances said.
I can’t understand to this day why they were taken in.”

Isie said the fairies were only paper cutouts mounted on twigs with long, sharp hat pins.
his fairy hoax happened long ago. But the photos are still famous. Recently, they sold for almost $40,000!
people still go to Cottingley
to look for fairies in the woods.
They still read
the fairy tales written
by the Brothers Grimm.
There are poems and plays
about fairies, too.
ould some of the old fairy stories be true?
Will a piece of dry bread protect you from fairy troublemakers?
What do you think?
Author’s Note

This is Frances Griffiths with the fairies drawn by her cousin Elsie Wright. The fairies were inspired by illustrations in the popular children’s book *Princess Mary’s Gift Book*. They were drawn on discarded sandwich-wrap paper.