



## The Cottingley Fairies

**Ana Sender**

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Writer and illustrator Ana Sender revisits a historical controversy in her charming children's book *The Cottingley Fairies*

Two young friends, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffith, seek to rekindle adults' belief in magic by taking what they allege are photos of actual fairies in 1917. Are the photos real? Do fairies exist? Adults weigh in on both sides of the debate. No less than the creator of the Sherlock Holmes novels, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, defends the pictures' authenticity.

The tale unfolds with often only a couple of straightforward sentences of text per page, masterfully revealing the story in child-sized chunks. The vocabulary is likewise accessible. Well-turned dialogue serves to revive the voices of Elsie and Frances, sweetly recounting their story in words that recall their ages.

Frances narrates from her twilight years, which enables her to recapture the wonder and intention of the photos she took with her friend while realizing that perhaps her memory isn't what it used to be. That is: she both tells the "truth" about the photos and leaves the audience wondering. It's an effective, awe-protecting literary device.

The whimsical and deceptively simple illustrations rely primarily on blue, gold, and magenta, and they are captivating. The dark-tinted drawings before the fairy pictures reveal the adult view of the world that the girls wish to dispel; a newspaper in the book reads "War," subtly explaining just one of the challenges that the grown-up world is up against. The illustrations of the fairy photos explain how the photos themselves imparted wonder, inquisitiveness, and excitement to the adults during a gloomy, difficult period.

With its appealing drawings and intriguing historical context, this (literal) fairy tale delights.

DREMA DRUDGE (January/February 2019)

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