# PROJECT FAIRY

# PROJECT FAIRY




JACQUELINE WILSON

*Illustrated by* Rachael Dean

PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk




First published 2022
001

Text copyright © Jacqueline Wilson, 2022
Illustrations copyright © Rachael Dean, 2022

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted

Text design by Janene Spencer
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN: 978–0–241–56714–2
International paperback ISBN: 978–0–241–56715–9

All correspondence to:
Puffin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens
8 Viaduct Gardens
London SW11 7BW




Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

*For Trish*

*Bindweed is the bane of her life*





# CHAPTER ONE

You'll never guess what my mum gave me for a birthday present. She came into my bedroom carrying breakfast on a tray, with my little brother Robin singing 'Happy Birthday' at the top of his voice. It was a special treat breakfast – orange juice and toast with strawberry jam cut into heart shapes. It's a Mum thing. She handed me the pink tissue parcel so eagerly, her eyes shining.

I felt the paper carefully. There was something soft folded up inside. Clothes.

I hadn't really wanted clothes. I'd wanted an electric scooter most of all, but a bike or skateboard would have been

fine as well. They probably cost too much even second-hand, so then I'd have liked one of those giant sets of felt-tip pens and a sketch pad. I didn't want a special colouring book because I prefer making up my own pictures. I like drawing outer space and jungles and wild animals.

If I had to have clothes, then I wanted a really cool T-shirt, maybe black with a gorilla on it. Or a skeleton, or a grinning face, or a cartoon character. I felt very anxious about Mum's choice. She's very much a pink person. She once bought me a candyfloss-pink T-shirt with *Mummy's Girl* written on it in fancy white lettering. I nearly died.

I slipped my hand inside the tissue. It didn't feel like a T-shirt. There was a smooth silky bit and then something like net, all puffed up. I felt sick. It seemed to be a party frock. It was totally the wrong sort of present for me. I didn't go to any parties for a start. Nobody invites me now.

I don't care. Well, I suppose I do a bit, but I actually hate parties, especially the sort where you dress up in your best clothes. A party dress would be my worst-ever outfit.

Maybe Mum thought I didn't go to parties because I didn't have a proper dress. I tried hard to get my face into a happy, thrilled expression. I didn't want to hurt her.



'Ooh, I think I've guessed what it is!' I said, trying to make my voice sound pleased.

Mum smiled at me.

'What is it, what is it, what is it?' Robin asked, jumping up and down eagerly on my bed.

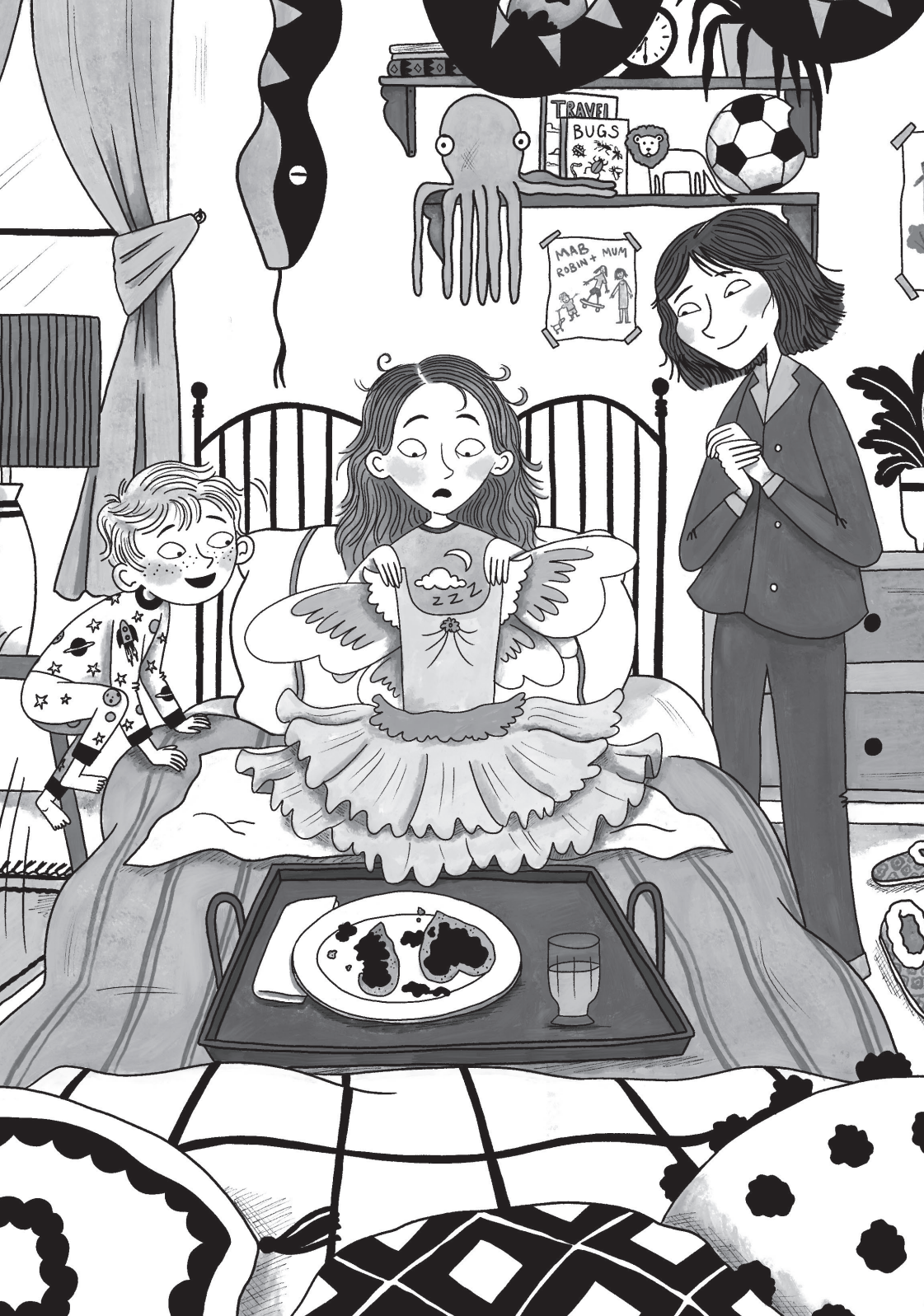
I took a deep breath and ripped open the pink tissue. A dress fell out. Not a party dress. It was far far worse. It was a *fairy* frock. It had a pale pink silky bodice attached to a froth of deep pink net, six layers of it, so it stuck out in all directions. And there were wings attached to the back of the bodice, floppy feathery wings.

Perhaps some girls might long for such a dress. Maybe very *little* girls. But I thought this fairy outfit the most startlingly horrible garment I'd ever seen. I was so taken aback I couldn't think of a thing to say. I just froze, my mouth open.

Robin was impressed. 'Oh, Mum, it's a fairy dress! With wings! You'll be able to fly now, Mab!'

He wasn't teasing. He seriously seemed to think I could spread those false wings and fly out of the window.

'Mab will be able to fly in her dreams,' said Mum, clasping her hands. 'You do like it, don't you, darling?'


TRAVEL
BUGS
MAB
ROBIN + MUM

I swallowed. 'It's . . . lovely,' I said, straining to sound convincing. 'Where did you get it?'

'I was looking up fairy dust online, wanting to order some more for your birthday,' said Mum. (Fairy dust is this sparkly sequin stuff that Mum sprinkles everywhere on special occasions. She puts it in birthday cards and Christmas cards too so you have to open them very carefully – and even then you get fairy dust flying everywhere and you discover the odd sequin about your person for days afterwards.) 'Then I noticed that Google was asking if I wanted to look up fairy *dress* and so I did, and I immediately knew I had to buy you one for your birthday! I did wonder if I should ask you first, because I know you mostly like your jeans and T-shirts, but who wouldn't want their own actual fairy dress?' said Mum.

*I wouldn't!* I screamed inside, but I grinned valiantly.

I hate upsetting Mum. It's so easy to make her cry. She was very ill after Dad walked out when Robin was a toddler – only two and a half! She was in hospital for quite a while and Robin and I had to go into care. For a whole year! We had a very kind foster mum but she wasn't *our* mum. We minded terribly. I was already missing my dad but I missed Mum even more.



She got better and finally, after we'd had lots of visits and some weekends with Mum, our social worker said we could go and live with her again. That was last summer, more than a year ago now. We moved right away for a fresh start. Mum got a job in a supermarket, so we get discount food, and our new flat doesn't cost much because it's social housing. I had to start at a new school. It was OK at first because I made friends with Billie, but then she palled up with Cathy and Anita at the end of last term and now they are my deadly enemies. It's horrible, but the only thing that really matters is that Robin and I are back together with Mum.

She's mostly fine now, but she still gets upset easily. She cries at the silliest things, even happy things like those cute kitten clips on YouTube. And she gets obsessed with stuff. She watches television a lot. She loves *Escape to the Country* and checks out every house as if she's considering it for us, even though we couldn't possibly afford it and she's terrified of cows anyway. Her favourite programme in all the world is *Strictly Come Dancing*. She's learned how to do the old-fashioned waltz and whirls Robin or me round and round our little living room until we get dizzy.

She loves making scrapbooks and photo albums, and taught

herself to write in fancy italic writing using silver and gold pens. She even writes notes to my teacher like that to tell her I've got a dental appointment.

Then over the last eighteen months she's got more and more into fairies. She's always been a fairy follower, ever since she was a little girl. I think she actually *believes* in them. She makes weeny fairy furniture, little cotton-reel things with tiny cushions and plaster tables in the shape of toadstools. She sprinkles hundreds and thousands, those tiny rainbow-coloured sweets, on top of the tables. In the morning they're all gone.

'Oh-oh! The fairies had a feast last night!' she says. It's obviously for Robin's benefit, not mine. Though I suppose I used to half believe it when I was his age.

Mum's tried making her own fairies with pipe cleaners and scraps of silk ribbon. She took all the fairy stuff to craft fairs at weekends for a while, but hardly anyone ever bought them. She makes fairy potions too, and special fairy soap with little rosebuds that come off in the bath. Our flat always smells sickly. She buys all the films she can find that have got fairies in them. We have fairy lights all over the flat, even in the toilet.

Robin and I have even got fairy *names.* There's some fairy character called Robin Goodfellow in a play. He's meant to be

very mischievous and plays tricks on people. Our Robin can be mischievous and play tricks, but not in a bad way. He really *is* a good fellow. I'm called Mab. People always think it's short for something, maybe Mabel. No, it's just Mab, after another fairy who was a queen. Still, I suppose it could have been worse. Mum could have chosen another fairy queen – Titania. You can guess what the kids at school would have called me then.

School! Even thinking the word makes my heart start thudding. Home-schooled children are the luckiest kids ever. I hate school. I especially hate Cathy and Anita. They have turned Billie against me. They have a club called the ABCs. The club seems to have only one rule – be as mean and spiteful and mocking as you can to Mab Macclesfield.

I don't mind my teacher. Mrs Horsley's really kind. She's always trying to make lessons fun, and she reads to us at the end of every day and lets us have a dance in the hall when it's a wet lunchtime. She bakes cookies for us and brings in halwa for Diwali, and dresses up at the end of the winter term as Father Christmas – red costume and white beard – and gives us each a little present. She even gives a birthday cupcake to every child when it's their birthday and lets them wear whatever



they like that day, if they want, instead of school uniform, though not everybody does.

*Oh no!* I thought, *I told Mum this.* I hurriedly dressed in my white blouse and grey skirt before she remembered. I almost got away with it, but when we were going out the door Mum suddenly clapped the palm of her hand to her forehead.

'I've just remembered! You can wear whatever you like today, Mab, because it's your birthday!' she said.

I thought frantically. 'Oh yes, that old rule. But Mrs Horsley's changed her mind. Cathy came to school in a tiny top and shorts a bit like knickers and Mrs Horsley said they were inappropriate, so now none of us are allowed to wear birthday clothes,' I said. I was very proud of myself, especially for using such a grown-up word as *inappropriate.* And Cathy *did* wear that top and shorts, and even the big girls in the top year don't wear clothes like that.

'But Micky in your class wore really cool rapper clothes last week, with sunglasses and a baseball hat!' said Robin. He'd seen him when we went to school and had been very impressed.

'Shut up, Robin!' I muttered, but Mum had heard. It wasn't Robin's fault – he was only trying to be helpful.

He probably thought I was longing to wear my fairy dress to school.

'There you are then, Mab! I'm sure Mrs Horsley wouldn't mind now. And you'll be the envy of all your friends, wearing a *fairy* costume,' said Mum.

I didn't *have* any friends. Perhaps Robin's little friends in Reception might be envious, but my class would fall about laughing.

'There isn't really time to change into my lovely fairy dress now,' I said quickly. 'And I don't want to risk getting it messed up at school. But I'll wear it all day long on Saturday and Sunday.'

The light had gone out of Mum's eyes. I hadn't been convincing enough. 'You don't have to wear it at all, darling, not if you don't like it,' she said.

'I do! I absolutely love it! OK, I'll go and put it on,' I said, unable to help it.

I ran upstairs, pulled off my uniform and wriggled into the fairy dress. Then I took a deep breath and looked in the mirror. It was even worse than I'd thought. It was exactly the right size but still looked totally wrong on me. I don't suit pink for a start. I have pale skin and pink just makes me look plain. I have

plain hair too, long and limp and mousy. I'm bony and I bite my nails. I am so not a fairy sort of girl.

The dress hung on me, the net skirts scratching my legs. It stuck up at the front, because the weight of the wings dragged it down at the back. My scruffy socks and trainers didn't help. I looked a total ninny.





I grabbed a T-shirt and shorts, stuffed them into the pocket of my big raincoat, and ran downstairs.

'Let's see!' said Mum. 'Oh, darling, you look lovely! Look at your new fairy sister, Robin!'

'You're so pretty!' said Robin, clapping his hands.

They weren't teasing – they really meant it. Sometimes I think Mum and Robin come from another planet altogether.

I held my net skirts out and gave them a little twirl, and then quickly pulled on my raincoat.

'I don't think it's going to rain today,' said Mum doubtfully.

'I know. But I want to keep covered up on the way to school so then I can give everyone a surprise when I take it off in the cloakroom,' I said.

'Oh, I get you now,' said Mum. 'Good thinking!'

So we set off schoolwards on my birthday morning, Mum in her maroon shop overall, Robin in his tiny school uniform, and me bundled up in my raincoat, still with at least ten centimetres of shocking pink net showing below the hem.