

### No such thing as fairies

“There’s no such thing as fairies.” My daughter was four when she told me this. Such confidence! I made a shocked face. “How can you be so sure?”

She smiled. It had been a test, the confidence false. She was uncertain exactly what of the stories she had been told was real, what was not.

“Let’s look for some.” We were in the park; I led her to a likely spot. An ancient hornbeam, its sinewy roots exposed as they tumbled down an earthy bank. Within them: dark places, secret spots.

We examined the twists and turns together, the hidden niches, the neat cups holding little pools of water, the tunnels that seemed to have no end, disappearing off into darkness. An ideal fairy house.

Some years later and my daughter still delights in finding a hollow in a tree, a jumble of roots, a semi-rotten stump - places where, just maybe, another world might lurk. But I sense she no longer quite believes. She is in a rush to be sensible, adult. Her uncertainty fading, her confidence now unstated.

I had that same confidence for many years, blind to the hints in those roots, those hollows. What was it that changed? Was it when my daughter came into the world - a curious, wrinkled, little sprite? In any case I am grateful now to be alive to the secrets of the trees, to that magic possibility. I hope one day she will be alive to it again too.