



Book One of

The Last Elfairian Series

Beyond the Firefly Field

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Prologue

Bradley Curtis had decided that berry picking would be the easiest chore on his long list. He loved wandering the woods, searching for the enchantment that was always rumored to exist in this rural setting. The tales came from Native Americans living in the area—and who would know the lore of the woods better than they? *Ancient enchantments*, they claimed, and spoke only in whispers and riddles, as if unwilling to share their secret. But nothing strange or exciting ever happened in this particular piece of nowhere. Even the events in the news, on the radio, the Korean War, rockets going into space, and inventions like television seemed to have no effect on this forgotten Northern Michigan town.

Usually his friends joined him on these berry excursions, but not on this steamy, August afternoon. Every day, he went further into the woods to find the meadows he hadn't picked yet.

He was well over a mile from his house when he found a field with an abundance of berries growing along its edge. The field seemed strange, messing with the new compass he'd recently gotten for his twelfth birthday. The compass said north, but he knew it was wrong. The nearby lake was to the north. But his

compass pointed to the north, insisting that a large, partially dead tree was the North Pole. As he walked around in tighter circles, the compass circled wildly, always pointing north to the dead tree. Realizing he had wasted a lot of time, he shrugged his shoulders and set to the task of picking.

Hours had passed as his bucket became full of juicy, black nuggets. Then he saw fireflies lighting up for their nightly glow fest. He panicked. It would be dark soon. He stood, after being bent over for hours, and turned to see that the field was filled with fireflies and fast becoming as bright as a beacon. Without warning, he became lightheaded, dizzy, and faint, collapsing to the ground. *Heatstroke*, he thought. *Mom always warned me*. He had drunk all of the water he brought, and now he craved it, his throat parched. With a pounding heart, he realized he would never be able to walk back home in the dark. He lay deliriously, thinking half thoughts of trying to make it to the lake as fireflies danced around him. He struggled to move off a stone that dug into his back, but barely accomplished that. Then blobs of strange colors swirled above him, moving when he raised an arm to touch them. The steam on his glasses blurred his vision, and he passed out from heatstroke.

When Bradley awoke, he was lying in a dark field at the edge of the woods, but thankfully he felt much cooler. He felt around for the berry bucket, then sat up to search his surroundings. From the woods behind him, people were calling his name in the distance, and way across the field, he saw the lights from his house blazing a welcome. He *must* have walked through the dark woods somehow, though he knew that was impossible in his weakened state. Teasing his mind were vague memories

of floating, drinking cool water from cupped leaves held by colorful butterfly blurs, and soothing voices assuring him that he was on his way home. But that wasn't possible either.

"I'm over here!" he shouted. "I'm over here!"

He thought he saw a flash of color stir behind him, but when he turned around, there was nothing there except the glints of flashlights now pointed his way.