

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

A Fairy Tale Follow-Up

By

Andra Laine Hunter

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

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HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

*For all the girls who are fighting crime.
And especially for the ones who are just fighting.*

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

The premiere production of *Holly Abel & the Missing Mothers* was in March 2016 by White Rock Theatre Project in Dallas, Texas. It was directed by Andra Laine Hunter. Choreography was by Melissa Rosales. Teresa O'Donnell and Hayden O'Donnell Downer were the crew. The cast was as follows:

Holly Abel	Hannah Hoffmeister
Opal Hall	Danijela Perge
Laina	Audrey Hunter
Rapunzel	Grayson Lesley-Milburn
Alfilda	Tyler Quintana
Rumpelstiltskin	Grimsley Hunter
Relinda	Emma Riley
Frog	Luka Perge
Maudie Mae	Hannah Berman
Lillian	Katrena Koellner
Christa	Hadley O'Donnell-Downer
Wilda	Lea Neal
Stella	Cassidy Martin
Lafern	Harper Burt
Mildred	Samantha Thompson
Lanora	Norah Noonan
Retha-Louise	Audrey Merlick
Margaret	Sarah Thigpen
Edith	Ellis Langford
Hansel	Ruby Snelson
Gretel	Emme Snelson
Burnell	Owen Rosales
Marlaina	Indigo Webber
Lotta Grimm	Emma Taylor
Karl Grimm	Jaden Lesley-Milburn
Jacob Grimm	Owen Brown
Wilhelm Grimm	Beckett Nichols
Officer Denise	Morgan Bryant
Officer Whitney	Kiley Whitson
The Mothers	Melissa Rosales, Susie Nichols, Angela Perge, LoAnn Burt, Jennifer Martin, Hallie Bryant, Christa Downer

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Characters: (18-29F, 6M, 2 any) Please use a diverse cast!

The Detectives:

- **Detective Holly Abel (F)**, A fast-talking, quirky gal. May be played with a Mid-Atlantic dialect.
- **Opal Hall (F)**, Holly's faithful, smart, practical assistant. May be played with a Mid-Atlantic dialect.

"Fairy Tales" - The below characters are referred to as FTs, or Fairy Tales for brevity:

- **Dancing Princesses (F)**: The number of Dancing Princesses could be adjusted up or down (no fewer than 2, no more than 12) as needed. Maudie Mae, Lillian, Christa, Wilda, Stella, Lafern, Mildred, Lanora, Retha-Louise, Margaret, Edith, and Bonnie (Bonnie is absent from this version of the play but could be added to accommodate another performer, redistributing lines and making a simple cut.) The actresses playing these roles will need to tell a story through movement. They should be of varying ages, as a group of sisters.
- **Laina (F)**, in the middle age range of your cast. A princess who can speak Bird, aka Snow White.
- **Rapunzel (F)**, on the older end of the age range of your cast. The classic princess locked in the tower.
- Rapunzel's twins: **Marlaina (F)** and **Burnell (any)**, on the younger end of the cast.
- **Alfilda (F)**, on the older end of the cast. A princess with a financial flare, aka the Miller's Daughter.
- **August(a) (any)**, Alfilda's child, on the younger end of the cast.
- **Rumpelstiltskin (M)**, a rather angry little elf.
- **Relinda (F)**, a princess whose love for science and nature shines through, aka The Princess & the Frog.
- **Frog (M)**, a very princely amphibian companion for Relinda.

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- **Hansel (M)**, brother to Gretel, younger to mid age range of the cast.
- **Gretel (F)**, sister to Hansel, younger to mid age range of the cast.
- **Handsome Prince (M)**, aka Karl, very handsome and quite princely, mid age range of cast.

The Grimm Family:

- **Jacob Grimm (M)**, Mild. The oldest of the Grimm Family. Mid-to-older age range.
- **Wilhelm Grimm (M)**, Medium. Second oldest of the Grimm Family. Mid-to-older age range.
- **Karl Grimm (M)**, Hot. The younger brother. (also plays Handsome Prince).
- **Lotta Grimm (F)**, Very spicy. The Grimms' little sister, a mastermind. Mid age range of cast.

Others:

- Police Officers: **Denise (F)** and **Whitney (F)** - best when played with Mid-Atlantic dialect.
- **The Missing Mothers (F)** of the Princesses and fairy tale characters (6 mothers).

The Setting:

A dungeon in darkness outside Holly's town, 1920s.

Holly's Office, 1920s

A performance space, 1920s.

The Grimm Family home, Germany, 1798.

The Storybook, a speakeasy in Holly's town, 1920s.

A forest outside Holly's town, 1920s.

Synopsis: Jumpin' jazz bands! It's the Roaring 20s, and root beer has been outlawed by the outrageous 18 ½ Amendment. Detective Holly Abel is short on cases, but when she reads

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about a suspected ring of soda smugglers operating in town, her toes begin to tingle. Then, a group of strangers whose stories sound *very* familiar barge into her office, begging her to find their missing mothers, and she knows her time has come to earn some clams! Is it a lot of phonus balonus, or are the Brothers Grimm headed to the big house? Will Holly & Opal figure out why the mother is always missing in fairy tales? If we know our onions, this delightful ensemble play for young performers and family audiences is the bee's knees. Nerts! *Holly Abel & the Missing Mothers* is root beer barrels full of fun for casts and audiences of all ages, so jump on the trolley with Holly, Opal and a gaggle of fairy tale characters!

Props:

Holly's magnifying glass (Holly)

Newspaper (Holly)

Other papers & files (Opal)

Notepad and pencil (Opal)

Banner reading "Dancing Princesses Support the 18 ½ Amendment" (Dancers)

Two police batons (Officers)

Giant Toothbrush (Rumpelstiltskin)

Candle or lantern (Lotta and Karl) and another (Jacob and Wilhelm)

Slip of paper or tiny scroll (Laina)

Door sign reading "Detective Holly Abel"

Pink handkerchief (Karl as Handsome Prince)

White handkerchief (Dancers)

Sword, Quiver, Bow (Karl as Handsome Prince)

One large glass of root beer (Wilhelm)

One even larger glass of root beer (Wilhelm)

Other bottles/glasses of root beer (Holly/Opal)

Silent Movie Signs (Karl)

Feather boa (Holly)

Large key (Holly)

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Moveable tree (Lotta)

Basket of gingerbread (Lotta)

Straw and/or spinning wheel (Lotta)

Four pillows (Karl)

Basket with thirteen oranges and one apple (Lotta)

Golden balls (Lotta)

Display of dancing shoes (Lotta)

Jar of flies (Lotta)

Giant pair of scissors (Jacob and Wilhelm)

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Production History & Notes:

Holly Abel & the Missing Mothers was performed in the spring of 2016 by White Rock Theatre Project to outstanding audience acclaim. The cast consisted of kids ages 6-16, plus six adult women to play the mothers, although the mothers can also be played by youth if needed.

The set for this play can be as simple as a two-cubes, two-rectangles modular set.

Costumes, also, can be very simple. Please do not go with the Disney versions of the characters' outfits for Act 1; the goal is to show them as real people who, through no fault of their own, were immortalized in tales that tell only a part of the real story.

We cast actual cast members' mothers as the "Missing Mothers." This was great because it increased family participation, and they could also help backstage during the run of the show.

Sound cues are underlined.

Run Time: Approximately one hour and twenty minutes.

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Line counts (approximate):

Holly Abel: 126	Opal Hall: 99	Laina: 54
Lotta: 55	Relinda: 23	Alfilda: 27
Rapunzel: 28	Lillian: 13	Maudie Mae: 9
Christa: 9	Wilda: 9	Stella: 8
Lafert: 8	Mildred: 8	Lanora: 7
Retha-Louise: 7	Margaret: 11	Edith: 7
Marlaina: 8	Burnell: 8	August: 7
Rumpelstiltskin: 16	Frog: 13	Hansel: 18
Gretel: 19	Karl: 31	Jacob: 47
Wilhelm: 43	Officer Denise: 15	Officer Whitney: 12
Laina's Mother: 8	Rapunzel's Mother: 2	Alfilda's Mother: 5
Harriet (Dancers' Mom): 4	Hansel & Gretel's Mom: 4	Relinda's Mom: 3

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A Fairy Tale Follow-Up

ACT 1

SCENE 1: FLY, LITTLE BIRD

A dungeon in darkness.

The stage is dark, except for a thin slit of light from a window, high above.

We hear the MOTHERS' voices; they whisper urgently.

This scene remains in darkness so the Mothers are not clearly seen.

LAINA'S MOTHER. Ladies, it's time; the sun is rising!

RAPUNZEL'S MOTHER. Where's the note?

ALFILDA'S MOTHER. I've got it!

LAINA'S MOTHER. Give me the crumbs you saved from last night's supper.

ALL MOTHERS. Here are mine! I saved so many! This will bring a bird, certainly! (*Ad lib, etc.*)

LAINA'S MOTHER. Harriet? Where are your crumbs?

HARRIET. I...I was very hungry last night!

ALL MOTHERS. (*Ad lib, etc.*) Harriet! How could you? How can we catch a bird with no crumbs? Don't you want to get out of here? Aren't you thinking of the children *at all*? Selfish! Greedy! Not even a few crumbs?

HARRIET. I'm sorry! I'm just so hungry all the time. (*They begin to complain again, ad lib.*)

LAINA'S MOTHER. It's all right, everyone. We all know how she feels, don't we?

RAPUNZEL'S MOTHER. Yes, of course. We're *all* hungry.

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ALFILDA'S MOTHER. But will we have enough?

HANSEL & GRETEL'S MOTHER. Without Harriet's?

(Sound cue: birds singing.)

LAINA'S MOTHER. Never mind about the crumbs! The birds are beginning to sing. Lift me up so I can call them! *(We hear some grunting and groaning as she is "lifted." Then, she begins to whistle sweetly, like a bird.)*

HANSEL & GRETEL'S MOTHER. Oh, dear! Do you think it will work? Crumbs and my family don't go so well together.

HARRIET. Hush, Mabel! It will work!

RELINDA'S MOTHER. It has to work!

ALFILDA'S MOTHER. I can't bear it if it doesn't work....

LAINA'S MOTHER. Quiet, please! We mustn't scare the birds away! *(She begins to whistle again. Just as we begin to despair, we hear an answering bird call. The Mothers utter muffled gasps of hope and delight. Laina's Mother coos and speaks soothingly to the bird.)* I've got one, ladies! Here you are, little winged friend! *(To the other Mothers.)* Hand me the note!

ALFILDA'S MOTHER. Here!

LAINA'S MOTHER. *(Reciting, an incantation.)* Little knot—hold. Little knot—hold fast! Little Bird, fly! Fly to our children at last.

ALL MOTHERS. Little knot, hold! Little knot, hold fast! Little Bird, fly! Fly to our children at last! *(Sound cue: a bird's wings flapping, flying away. Then, ad lib.)* Oh, oh! Fly, little bird! Fly! Find them, find them! All my hope goes with you, little bird!

SCENE 2: GIGGLE WATER

HOLLY in a spotlight. She holds her magnifying glass.

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HOLLY. I'm Holly Abel.

Orphan Holly Abel.

Detective Holly Abel.

I don't know much about me. Maybe that's why I'm always looking for clues.

Sometimes I pretend to be just another dumb Dora—a dingbat in a short dress, dolled up and droll, doing my best to lose myself in the doldrums of other people's dilemmas. But sometimes...well, I have to believe I can solve my own mystery. Mystery is at the core of...me.

It's a hard beat to walk. But it makes me a dang good detective. Show me the pieces you need put together. *(She raises her magnifying glass.)* Let's take a cold, hard look at all your clues. Maybe if I solve your mystery, I'll find a clue to my own.

Now, what's the best way to start a story? Once upon a time? Once upon a time, indeed.

What time? My time: 1922. The roaring twenties, time of bobbed hair and outlawed root beer. A time when old and new stand side by side—and new wins out over old.

Well, let's get on with it.

Once upon a time...*(Transition to Holly's office. Holly is looking over the newspaper with her magnifying glass, and OPAL HALL, her assistant, organizes files.)* Have you heard about this new tearoom opening up in town? The Storybook?

OPAL. Ho-hum. I want a jazz club!

HOLLY. *(Turning the page of the newspaper.)* Nerts, Opal! Listen to this *(She reads from the paper.)* “Mrs. Alaska Davidson joins the Federal Bureau of Investigation as the organization's first female Special Agent!” Alaska Davidson, Special Agent for the FBI! Can you believe it!?

OPAL. A girl special agent? In the FBI?

HOLLY. In the FBI itself! Isn't that just the elephant's adenoids?

OPAL. I'd say that's the cat's meow! The bee's knees! The strawberry's seeds! *(Beat.)* You don't think...

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HOLLY. What?

OPAL. Well, *she's* drawn to law enforcement; *you're* a detective... Could she be your missing mother?

HOLLY. Nerts, Opal! I don't think I look much like her.

OPAL. I guess not. Anyway, that story ought to be good for us: Alaska Davidson, female Special Agent; Holly Abel, Girl Detective! Maybe it will send a little business our way. We sure could use some cases! (*Beat.*) Holly, you know what I wish we had right now?

HOLLY. What?

OPAL. A root beer! Don't you remember how sweet and bubbly root beer was!

HOLLY. (*Looking around furtively as if they might be overheard.*) Opal Hall! What is the matter with you? Giggle water is outlawed! Illegal! Jail time! The slammer!

OPAL. (*Stretching longingly across her desk.*) But, honestly, don't you *miss* having an ice-cold root beer at the end of a sweltering day detecting crime?

HOLLY. Of course I do; I'm only human! But it won't do to talk about it. (*Turns the page of the paper. A beat.*) Now this is apropos! Listen up, Outlaw: "*Reward offered!* Police seek to capture a band of smugglers in possession of contraband root beer, sarsaparilla, and other evil, bubbly, sugary beverages outlawed by the 18 ½ Amendment. Citizens, the selling of giggle water is no laughing matter! Be alert for any sign of possible illegal activity relating to the sale, transportation, or production of sugar-sweet sodas sure to rot your teeth and ruin your life."

OPAL. The authorities believe those crooks are here? (*Holly nods.*) In our town? (*Holly nods.*) Selling giggle water? (*Holly nods.*) I want some!

HOLLY. Didn't you hear? They're offering reward money! We've got to catch those crooks and claim those clams!

OPAL. Yes, ma'am! We'll claim those clams!

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HOLLY. If I know my onions, Herman's is the place to start. Head over to the Mercantile and ask for some sugar. Try to get old Mr. Herman talking. See if anyone's come along scrounging around for sugar lately. You can't make root beer without sugar! It could be a clue!

OPAL. And how, Holly! Consider it done! *(Opal grabs her notepad and pencil and exits.)*

HOLLY. Soda smugglers, you may not know it yet, but you're on the lam from Detective Holly Abel! *(Holly reaches over and turns on the radio as...)*

SCENE 3: A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

A performance space.

THE DANCING PRINCESSES, HANSEL, GRETEL, AUGUST, MARLAINA, BURNELL, FROG, and the OFFICERS enter.

FROG. *(Announcing.)* Ribbit! Ribbit!
(DANCERS cross the stage carrying a sign saying, "Dancing Princesses Support the 18 ½ Amendment!")

MARLAINA. Now it's time for a public service announcement!

BURNELL. Broadcast over the radio, right into your living room!

OFFICER DENISE. In these days of excess—

OFFICER WHITNEY. Of more, more, more—

OFFICER DENISE. Of too much everything! Especially too much sugar!

OFFICER WHITNEY. Waaaay too much sugar!

OFFICER DENISE. My fellow officer and I want to tell all the children:

AUGUST, MARLAINA, BURNELL, HANSEL &

GRETEL. Healthy teeth are happy teeth!

HANSEL. *(Dramatically.)* Oh, Gretel! My tooth hurts!

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GRETEL. Oh, Hansel! Mine, too!

HANSEL. Oh, the agony!

GRETEL. Oh, the pain!

AUGUST. It must be all that gingerbread you've been eating!

FROG. (*Agreeing.*) Ribbit!

AUGUST. Not to mention all the root beer you used to drink!

OFFICER WHITNEY. Before sodas were outlawed by the 18 ½ amendment!

OFFICER DENISE. Sodas: sure to rot your teeth and ruin your life!

HANSEL & GRETEL. What should we do? (*Nothing happens. They give the cue again.*) What should we do?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Humph!

GRETEL. Go on, Stilty. Say your line!
(*Rumpelstiltskin stomps his foot.*)

OFFICER DENISE. (*Tapping her baton, forcefully.*) Stilty!
Get out here!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Oh, horsefeathers! (*As his character in the announcement.*) I can save you! (*Heroically leaping out from behind the curtain with a large toothbrush.*) With my special weapon—the toothbrush! (*He “brushes” Hansel and Gretel’s teeth with the gigantic toothbrush.*)

BURNELL. Soda, you've met your match!

MARLAINA. Sugar, run and hide!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. The toothbrush saves the day!

OFFICER WHITNEY. Along with the 18 ½ Amendment!

HANSEL & GRETEL. My teeth feel great!

FROG. (*Happy.*) Ribbit!

OFFICER DENISE. Please, kids: stay off root beer!

OFFICER WHITNEY. Just say “no” to sugary sodas:

ALL. Sure to rot your teeth—and ruin your life!

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SCENE 4: BURDEN

1798, the Grimm family home in Germany.

KARL and LOTTA GRIMM sit at a table, dimly lit by a candle or lantern.

KARL. Do you think Jacob and Wilhelm will really leave us, Lotta?

LOTTA. How can they help it? With Mother and Father gone...They have to find a way to support the family. They need to get an education if we're going to survive.

KARL. I guess I'm lucky I'm not the oldest. I wouldn't want to go away, and I don't want them to go, either. Who's going to tell us stories?

LOTTA. I can tell you stories, Karl. But who's going to take care of us? *(Lotta and Karl hear JACOB and WILHELM coming and scamper to hide outside the room, to eavesdrop, taking their lantern with them.)*

JACOB. *(From off.)* Come on, Wilhelm! We should get some sleep. We move to school tomorrow. It's going to be a long—

WILHELM. *(With disgust.)* School!

JACOB. Alright, grumpy grumplepants. We've talked this through again and again. If we don't go to school, we'll never... *(Wilhelm stays silent.)* We'll never? *(Still nothing from Wilhelm.)* We'll never improve our circumstances. We'll never have any money for the family.

WILHELM. The family, the family! Ever since Father died, the family has been our burden!

JACOB. Burden is such an ugly word to describe Karl and little Lotta...Surely you don't mean to—

WILHELM. I know what I mean! How can we carry them on our backs forever?

JACOB. *Genug!* We're Grimms! We're family, and we stick together!

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WILHELM. But they're crushing me! I can hardly move! You must feel the same. Admit it!

JACOB. *Genug!* We take care of each other. We always have; we always will. Our future is school in Kassel. And of course, we must keep writing, keep researching. Our stories—and school—will save us.

WILHELM. Those stories are just folktales—legends—fairy tales! Nothing more.

JACOB. People love them!

WILHELM. They're on the brink of being forgotten. The world is moving on! It's industry now, not sitting in the kitchen telling stories. It's machines and factories and merchandise the world wants now, not stories! The world is a machine, Jacob, and its gears are turning like mad. We must turn with it!

JACOB. Then what do you suggest we do? Nothing? Leave our family to starve? Pawn off Karl and Lotta to relatives who don't want them?

WILHELM. Of course not! How could you say such things?

JACOB. What do you want me to say when you're raving like a madman?

WILHELM. Sometimes it is out of madness that the most brilliant ideas are formed!

JACOB. Out with it, then. I'm listening.

WILHELM. *(Very quietly so that Lotta and Karl must lean in to hear.)* My idea is this: We must **capture** the p—*(Lotta leans so far in she bumps into the door. The noise gets their attention.)* Who's there?

LOTTA. Brothers, it's only Karl and me.

WILHELM. Have you been eavesdropping?

KARL. *Nein, Bruder.*
(Wilhelm looks hard at them.)

LOTTA. No, Wilhelm. We're only coming to say *gute Nacht*. We're very sad you're leaving us tomorrow. I stumbled and bumped into the door, that's all. I hope I didn't disturb

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you... You must be working. (*Sadly. Turning to leave.*) We'll go.

JACOB. No, no. Please, come sit with us.

(*Lotta and Karl hesitate.*)

LOTTA. I couldn't sleep knowing you leave tomorrow.

KARL. We're going to miss you so much—

LOTTA. We're thankful you take care of us!

LOTTA & KARL. We love you!

JACOB. Of course you do! (*Pointedly, to Wilhelm.*) We know that.

WILHELM. (*Not sure he means it.*) Yes, of course. Don't worry, Lotta. We'll always take care of you.

LOTTA. (*Having Wilhelm's goodwill, she skips the rest of the way into the room.*) Will you tell me one of your stories, please?

JACOB. Which story would you like to hear?

WILHELM. How about the one where the boy and the girl wander too close to the witch's castle?

KARL. (*Eagerly.*) The witch turns him to stone and the girl into a beautiful bird!

LOTTA. No, there's another one I want to hear now.

(*Carefully, pointedly.*) The one where the little sister gets lost in the woods with her brother, and they find the cottage made of gingerbread and candy, and they must *take care* of each other until their parents find them...

(*Jacob and Wilhelm exchange a glance.*)

WILHELM. Yes, of course. (*Beginning the story.*) There was a mother and father who lived near a forest—

LOTTA. You're forgetting, *Herr Forgetful!*

(*Wilhelm thinks a moment and looks to Jacob.*)

JACOB. Ah, yes! Of course. You mean for us to say, "Once upon a time!"

LOTTA. Oh, yes, *bruder!* One should always begin a story with "Once upon a time!"

WILHELM. It does have a ring to it, doesn't it?

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JACOB. How did you come up with that, Lotta?

LOTTA. It just sounds right, don't you think?

KARL. *(Trying it out.)* Once upon a time...

JACOB. Yes, it does sound right.

LOTTA. Once upon a time...

WILHELM. Alright! If you want to hear the rest of the story, go to bed!

(Jacob, Wilhelm, and Karl turn and go.)

LOTTA. I'll be right there! *(Once the others are gone.)* They want to capture something, huh?

SCENE 5: SPEAKING BIRD

Just outside and then inside Holly's office. Opal and LAINA enter from the back of the house, coming through the audience. Opal can't seem to get Laina to walk more than a few steps at a time without stopping to talk.

LAINA. It's terrible, just terrible—

OPAL. Right this way, Miss.

LAINA. *(Stopping to speak.)* I just knew she was lost or trapped—Oh! After all these years, I just can't believe they've sent us a message! A message, a real message!

OPAL. *(With all the patience she can muster.)* Don't worry, Miss! I work for the detective, you see, Detective Holly Abel, and she—

LAINA. *(Still not moving.)* The bird flew right up to me. Did I say that?

OPAL. Couple of times.

LAINA. And the little note was there, tied to its leg! A call for help!

OPAL. *(Trying to draw Laina forward.)* Of course. Just like you said! Already.

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LAINA. It looked me right in the eye. Didn't even sing! Just started chirping very particularly.

OPAL. Holly Abel will help you, Miss. If we can just get to the office—

(Laina stops again and grabs Opal by the shoulders.)

LAINA. Is that a promise? Because it isn't just me, you know! We need help desperately. *All of us. (Holding up the note.)* Especially *them*.

OPAL. I have no idea what you're talking about, but I promise: We'll help you. *All of you!*

LAINA. *(Walking along with Opal.)* Terrible misfortune has befallen us. But now we have a real clue!

OPAL. Clues are just the thing a detective needs, Miss. Can't solve a case without 'em! Here we are. See that sign: "Holly Abel, Detective." Let's go inside and get all this straightened out. *(Opal and Laina have reached the stage. Opal calls out to Holly, who is seated at her desk, looking over papers:)*

OPAL. Holly! Ma'am!

HOLLY. I've been going over root beer recipes. Yes, you can still find them, if you search hard enough, and it turns out—

LAINA. *(Rushing forward.)* Are you Holly Abel, Detective?

HOLLY. Does a bee have knees?

LAINA. Pardon?

HOLLY. Never mind. Yes, how can I help you?

OPAL. Holly, I met this young lady standing in front of the Mercantile. Her name is Laina, and she has a mystery to solve.

LAINA. Terrible misfortune has befallen me! But I have a clue!

HOLLY. If you have a clue, then you're better off than most folks!

LAINA. A clue to the mystery that has defined my life.

HOLLY. I'm a detective; mysteries should define *my* life.

LAINA. Yes, you've hit it there! How one's life *should* be and how it *is* aren't always the same. *(With a sad smile.)* Haven't I had time to think on that!

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HOLLY. That's true if anything ever was. How about that clue?

LAINA. Yes, that's right. *(She produces the note and hands it to Holly.)*

HOLLY. *(Reading.)* "To he who finds our cry for help—
King, Prince, Knight, or Knave:

We are six mothers for you to save!

In the land where sugar haters seek

To ban all sweetened, bubbly drinks,

In darkness deep,

In dungeon's keep,

Here we have been kept.

Many tears for our lost babes we've wept.

Seek ye through the forest deep;

The place of stone and darkness deep.

A castle, yes, but do take care,

For sister's always watching here,

And bubbles fill the damp, dark air."

OPAL. Jumpin' jazz bands! All this fuss over that phonus balonus?

HOLLY. Does it make any sense to you, Miss?

LAINA. Isn't it obvious? The six mothers are *our* six mothers. Can it be a coincidence that we are missing six mothers and that these six mothers are seeking their babes?

OPAL. Oh, Holly! They're missing their mothers. Just like...

HOLLY. This one hits close to home. Please go on. Opal, take down her story. *(Opal takes out her notepad.)*

LAINA. When I was very young, my mother disappeared. She'd been out in the forest with her ladies in waiting—

HOLLY. Ladies in waiting? You tryin' to tell me your mother was a queen or something?

LAINA. Why, of course she was!

HOLLY. Then that makes you a—Royalty? In my office?

LAINA. Please, don't think about that. Just think of my mother as you'd think of any other woman.

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HOLLY. Go ahead then, your Highness.

LAINA. You don't have to call me—Never mind. As I was saying, Mother was in the forest seeking a feather from the great horned owl. The entire kingdom searched high and low for her, but alas! No sign was ever found. Not a chirp, tweet, or whistle. She simply vanished!

HOLLY. A chirp, tweet or whistle? Did your mother love birds?

LAINA. Oh, yes! She could speak Bird, in fact.

OPAL. Speak “Bird”?

LAINA. My mother can speak to birds! She taught me, too, before she disappeared. That's why the little bird with the note came to me. I'd bet nearly anything my mother sent the bird with the note!

OPAL. *(Under her breath.)* Phonus balonus!

HOLLY. *(With a sharp look at Opal.)* Very interesting. Go on.

LAINA. The whole kingdom mourned for her, but there was nothing to be done, and eventually my father took a new wife. Things went from bad to worse then, for my stepmother had an evil, evil heart.

OPAL. Do you think your stepmother was evil enough to harm another person?

LAINA. Oh, my dear, Opal. She tried to *kill* me!

OPAL/HOLLY. Jumpin' jazz bands! / Nerts!

LAINA. When the huntsman she hired to kill me took pity on me and left me to wander in the woods, why, she came after me herself and poisoned me. I was very nearly killed—and I still can't stand to look at an apple. If not for the help of my seven little friends and the man on the white horse, well... Yes, my stepmother is capable of harming someone. But I just don't think she caused my mother's disappearance.

OPAL. Why don't you suspect your stepmother?

LAINA. Her motivation for harming me was very clearly vanity. She was always asking, “Who's the fairest of them all?” as she gazed into her mirror, and since she came to our

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kingdom only *after* my mother disappeared, I don't see that the two are connected.

HOLLY. All the same, we'd best not rule her out this early. But there is one more thing I'd like to ask about. You said your mother had gone to the forest looking for an owl feather with her ladies. Were the ladies interviewed?

LAINA. They only reported that my mother was in full conversation with an owl just before she disappeared. Mother told them the owl was no longer speaking correctly. The ladies could hear its calls, but Mother said the bird had stopped making sense.

OPAL. Is there anything else?

LAINA. Only that Mother stopped them from following so she could check on the poor creature. She was afraid it was sick or injured and didn't want her ladies to be upset at the sight of it.

HOLLY. So, your mother left her ladies behind to check on an owl she believed to be sick or injured just before she disappeared?

LAINA. Yes. Could that be a clue?

HOLLY. Well, my toes are beginning to tingle, and that's a sure sign the mystery is heating up. All my instincts tell me there are clues in your story, if I can only sort them out.

OPAL. You've mentioned there are others suffering under this same misfortune. Could you bring them here? We'd better get their stories, too.

LAINA. Yes of course! I'll fetch them at once. Oh, thank you! Thank you! I'll be as swift as a sparrow! (*Laina exits.*)

OPAL. Holly, do you believe that story? Speaking Bird and all? Sounds like a lot of phonus balonus to me.

HOLLY. I don't know what to think...*She* certainly seems to believe it, if that means anything.

OPAL. It might mean we're getting mixed up with a loony-bird!

HOLLY. No, there's a mystery here: my toes are tingling, after all...

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OPAL. If your toes are tingling, then we better interview her friends!

HOLLY. Something about her tale strikes me as familiar, although I'm sure I've never seen her before.

OPAL. It's strange you say so, because I'm feeling the same way.

HOLLY. Oh! What did you find out at Herman's? About the sugar?

OPAL. Holly, you were right! Someone bought all the sugar in the store!

HOLLY. Nerts! When it rains it pours! Did he give you a description?

OPAL. He could only tell me—

(Now we begin to hear the FAIRY TALES (FTs) coming in from the back of the house. They are making quite an excited racket.)

HOLLY. Nerts! Are you hearing this?

OPAL. Jumpin' jazz bands, Holly! She wasn't kidding about there being a lot of them!

SCENE 6: PIPE DOWN, HEY!

Holly's office. Continuous.

Now the Fairy Tales begin pouring in from the back of the house, led by Laina. Dressed rather archaically in frilly ball gowns, they really stand out. They are talking noisily: Laina, then RAPUNZEL with Marlaina and Burnell (her twins), RELINDA and Frog, ALFILDA and her child August, and Rumpelstiltskin, Maudie Mae, Lillian, Christa, Wilda, Stella, Lafern, Lanora, Margaret, Retha-Louise, Edith, Mildred, Hansel and Gretel, and Karl (as the Prince). They are all talking at once, and the racket is terrible. Opal and Holly stare from the stage as the FTs approach, mouths open, in disbelief. The Fairy Tales approach the stage and come right on into the office, led by Laina, who quiets them.

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LAINA. (*Very loudly.*) Quiet! (*They all stop talking. Very sweetly.*) Quiet, everyone. Here she is!

HOLLY. Thank you all for coming! I'm Holly Abel, Detective, and this is my assistant, Miss Opal Hall. We hope to help with your case. Or cases. Whichever the case may be.

ALFILDA. I hope you can help us!

RAPUNZEL. We feel so hopeless!

CHRISTA. Nonsense! We've held onto hope for all these years! We can hold onto it long enough to give this detective a chance!

LILLIAN. She's the first detective we've hired, after all!

MAUDIE MAE. A new strategy!

WILDA. That's right, ma'am! We're pursuing a new strategy!

MAUDIE MAE. Well said, sisters! (*With a dance move.*) I will hold onto my hope! (*Each sister punctuates her "And I!" with a dance step.*)

MARGARET. And I!

MILDRED. And I!

EDITH. And I!

LILLIAN. And I!

RETHA-LOUISE. And I!

STELLA. And I!

CHRISTA. And I!

LAFERN. And I!

LANORA. And I!

WILDA. Jazz hands!

MAUDIE MAE. Well said, sisters!

HOLLY. *All of you are sisters? **

MILDRED. Oh, no, not all of us in the room. Just the eleven of us here.

OPAL. Eleven dancing sisters!?

LAFERN. Well, twelve, with Bonnie, but she's not here.

HOLLY. Where's Bonnie?

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

STELLA. She's representing our family at an international dance competition!

WILDA. The prize is a year's supply of dancing shoes!

EDITH. We sure can go through dancing shoes!

LAFERN. (*Snickering.*) Do you think they have a clue what they're in for if we win? (*The Dancers giggle mischievously and dance a step or two.*)

HOLLY. Twelve sisters! Well, I certainly hope you have a lot of bathrooms at your house.

OPAL. (*Trying to get things on track.*) Laina tells us all of you are missing your mothers.

ALL FTs. (*Etc., ad lib. Once again there is quite an uproar.*) Yes, yes we are! That's right! She's my grandmother! She's been gone so long! I miss her!

HOLLY. Yes, yes, good. Alright. (*They don't hear her. She climbs onto her desk and shouts:*) **Nerts! Pipe down, hey!** (*The FTs quiet.*) I have an idea. Why don't you wait in our lobby and come in *one at a time* to tell your stories?

OPAL. (*Gesturing to the offstage lobby.*) You can wait comfortably in here, and we'll be able to hear!

LAINA. They've heard my story, girls. Alfilda, why don't you begin?

ALFILDA. Alright.

HOLLY. That's the berries! To the lobby, please! (*Opal shows the rest of the FTs off and comes back in to take notes. Alfilda, Rumpelstiltskin, and August remain.*)

OPAL. Let's begin by taking down your names, please.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Humph! I will give you my story but never my name! Never, never, never my name!

ALFILDA. Calm, down Stilty. Your name is no longer a secret. You know that. Ms. Abel, I apologize for his behavior.

AUGUST. Mommy says he has anger issues.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Horsefeathers! (*To Holly.*) How would you feel, ma'am, if someone made a bargain with you and then up and cheated!

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ALFILDA. I did *not* cheat! I *outfinanced* you!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. (*Jumping up and down.*) Cheater!
Cheater! Pumpkin eater!

ALFILDA. Stilty! I take accusations of improper recourse very seriously. (*Rumpelstiltskin sulkily ceases his display.*) Excuse us, Ms. Abel. My name is Alfilda. Like the others, my mother disappeared when I was young.

AUGUST. I never got to meet my own grandmother!

HOLLY. Tell us everything you can about her, please!

ALFILDA. The two of us were in the forest looking for berries. Mother and I had calculated a quite profitable cost ratio for wild-picked berries to jars of jam sold at market. Alas! She stepped around a blueberry bush and disappeared completely! Father and I grieved to the bottoms of our souls, and our bottom line suffered deeply as well.

OPAL. How awful!

ALFILDA. In his financial desperation, my father took hold of the unlikely idea that I should become the wife of the king. So, he told the king that I could spin straw into gold! Naturally, the king wanted to see this monetary miracle for himself, and he locked me in a room with a mountain of straw and a spinning wheel and said, “There you go, Missy! Spin all this straw into gold, and you’ll become my best asset. Fail, and just see what happens.” (*Rumpelstiltskin and August make a threatening gesture.*) It was quite the acid test! I was grasping at straws, so to speak, when this elf here came and offered me a bargain. He got me out of the mess with the king, but I’ve been dealing with him ever since.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. *You’ve been dealing with me!?*
Horsefeathers! I saved your neck, I did!

ALFILDA. It was a rather hard bargain, though, don’t you think? (*Covering August’s ears with her hands.*) You knew I didn’t have any collateral other than my son!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Eh, we were at arm’s length!

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OPAL. Thank you, Alfilda, I think I've got it all down here.
Thank you, Mr. Stilty.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. Horsefeathers!

HOLLY. Alfilda, did you and your mother often gather berries in the forest?

ALFILDA. Quite frequently! It *was* our business plan, after all! Why do you ask?

HOLLY. I know it was a long time ago, but was there anything strange the day she disappeared?

ALFILDA. Hmm....

OPAL. Even the slightest thing that seems insignificant might actually add up to be a clue.

AUGUST. Mommy, tell her about the girl!

ALFILDA. Yes! Of course! I've always remembered I saw a little girl dressed all in white. Our house was the nearest one for miles, so it was strange to see anyone else in that part of the woods. She was such a beautiful little child, too, and she had a quill pen and a writing book. I spoke to her as we passed, and she told me she was collecting...something. I can't remember what it was.

OPAL. Did you see her again?

ALFILDA. No, come to think of it, I did not. But I hardly see what a child could have to do with my mother's disappearance.

HOLLY. Of course, Alfilda. But a detective must be told all the details. Will you send in the next person, please?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. (*As they exit.*) Now, about this whole business of just telling any stranger who asks my private aff—

HOLLY. (*As Relinda and Frog enter.*) Nerts, Opal! They're all sounding very familiar. Twelve sisters who love to dance? A princess whose stepmother gazed into a mirror asking, "Who's the fairest of them all?" A little man who can spin straw into gold! ... But of course, it's impossible ...

OPAL. I was thinking the same thing, Holly!

FROG. Ribbit!

RELINDA. Oh! It sounds as if the *Felis catus* is out of the bag!

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

HOLLY & OPAL. Huh?

RELINDA. Fame isn't everything it's cracked up to be. You've heard of us. Or at least you've heard *their* versions of us! I'm Princess Relinda, and this is my...pet frog, Princey, *Rana principiopa*, if you like to be scientific! *Rana principiopa* is endemic to the spring by my father's castle.

FROG. (*Proudly.*) Ribbit!

HOLLY. Endemic, huh?

RELINDA. Endemic means found nowhere else.

HOLLY. I knew that, of course.

RELINDA. You've heard my story, too, I presume: self-involved father, no mother to help me navigate my teenage years, dropped a golden ball into a pool of water, and ended up betrothed to a frog?

FROG. (*Enthusiastically.*) Ribbit!

OPAL. Yes, that rings a bell!

RELINDA. I can't help but think if Mother had been around and Father hadn't been so focused on seeing me settled, I wouldn't have ended up betrothed to a frog.

OPAL. Probably not, no.

HOLLY. If I know my onions no mama pictures a frog husband for her daughter!

FROG. (*Offended.*) Ribbit!

HOLLY. But of course, he's a lovely frog. So green and...slimy...

OPAL. And just look at those warts!

FROG. (*Proudly.*) Ribbit!

RELINDA. Well, what you want to know about is the day my mother disappeared. The pool of water where I dropped my ball was a spring at the foot of an enormous linden tree, *Tilia europaea*, to be exact. As everyone knows, nectar from linden blossoms makes the most delicious honey, which of course is no secret to the *Apis melliferas*!

HOLLY & OPAL. Huh?

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RELINDA. The bees, of course! There was a large hive way up high in a hollow of the tree. My mother had taken me to charm the bees and gather honey. We heard a child crying, and we could just see a young girl dressed all in white a short way into the woods. Mother climbed down to check on the girl, fearing she was lost. I saw the girl take Mother's hand, and then I never saw either of them again.

FROG. (*Sadly.*) Ribbit!

HOLLY. Oh, my. (*Beat.*) Well, your mother sounds like a very adventurous woman.

RELINDA. Indubitably!

HOLLY. I take it that's all you remember?

RELINDA. Yes, that's all. If I may ask...do you...believe me—about the girl in white?

HOLLY. Why wouldn't we?

RELINDA. Father refused to consider it as evidence. He thought my imagination created the girl to explain the inexplicable.

OPAL. You mean they never even looked for the girl?

RELINDA. Quite a search went underway for my mother, of course. But, no, they never looked for any girl.

HOLLY. I'll look for her. Ignoring a clue like that was very irresponsible on the part of your father, if you don't mind me saying so.

RELINDA. Hearing you say it makes me feel much better! Please tell me how I can help you!

HOLLY. For now, you can help by sending in the dancers.

RELINDA. (*Exiting.*) Lillian! Stella! Girls!

(*The Dancers enter.*)

OPAL. Ladies, will you tell us your story?

LANORA. Well...we do better with dancing than with words.

LAFERN. Dancing really is such a wonderful way to express oneself.

RETHA-LOUISE. Our story is too sad for words.

STELLA. I can hardly even stand to dance it!

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LILLIAN. But this time we're dancing it for Mother!

MILDRED. We must be brave for Mother's sake!

CHRISTA. May we dance our story for you?

OPAL. Jumpin' jazz bands, that sounds lovely!

HOLLY. As long as you give us every detail!

MARGARET. We'll dance it, then!

EDITH. We won't leave anything out!

MILDRED. Maudie Mae, you play Mother.

MAUDIE MAE. Of course!

LILLIAN. To your places, Sisters.

(Music plays as the Dancers dance the story of their mother's disappearance. Holly and Opal react to what they see, verbalizing the story for the audience.)

OPAL. You were so happy. Your mother danced with you all day long! ... You loved each other very much.

HOLLY. One day, you went into the forest to pick flowers ... You grew drowsy from the sweet scent of the flowers in the warm sunshine, and you fell asleep ... You were awakened by the sound of a struggle, and you couldn't find your mother anywhere. ... A white handkerchief with an owl embroidered on it lay on the ground...

OPAL. The handkerchief didn't belong to any of you ... You looked and looked for your mother ...

HOLLY & OPAL. But you never saw her again.

(The dance is finished. There is a moment of silence.)

LILLIAN. Yes, I believe they understood it all.

STELLA. Thank you, detectives.

CHRISTA. Oh, how we miss her!

HOLLY. It's heart breaking!

RETHA-LOUISE. You will do all you can?

EDITH. We can only hope it will be enough.

MARGARET. Sisters, we must have faith and keep our spirits up!

LANORA. Just to have someone trying to help us is worth more than all the jewels and gold in the world!

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ALL DANCERS. Yes, yes!

HOLLY. It's too soon to thank me, ladies. (*Seeing Hansel and Gretel peering around the curtain.*) Ah, and you, young lad and young lassie, I see you hiding over there.

HANSEL. (*Fearfully.*) You don't happen to keep any cages in your office, do you?

GRETEL. (*Fearfully.*) And you've no large ovens, I hope?

HOLLY. I think I've placed the others. Allow me to guess: You must be Hansel, and you're Gretel.

RAPUNZEL. (*Entering, searching for Hansel and Gretel.*) There you are, you poor dears! I hope they haven't disturbed you, Ms. Abel.

HOLLY. They were as quiet as little mice nibbling on gingerbread crumbs! Can you tell me your story, children?

RAPUNZEL. Their mother disappeared too.

HANSEL. Sometimes Mommy went out into the forest to enjoy some quiet time.

GRETEL. She needed to hear herself think *some* of the time!

HANSEL. But one day she didn't come home.

GRETEL. We call that day the ghost day, because that's the day a little ghost looked in our window.

HOLLY. A little ghost, you say?

GRETEL. Yes, it was a little ghost in a white dress. She followed us around. Almost like a friend. A scary friend!

HANSEL. A hungry friend! After the ghost day we got a new stepmother who hated us. She abandoned us in the woods!

GRETEL. My brother tried to leave a trail of crumbs, but that same ghost followed right along behind, gobbling them up and giving us nasty looks!

HANSEL. By the time we got to the gingerbread house we were too hungry to feel scared.

GRETEL. We just started eating.

HANSEL. Then the ghost rang the doorbell and made the witch come out!

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GRETEL. The witch put my brother in a cage and tried to fatten him up!

HANSEL. But luckily, I have a fast metabolism, so it didn't work!

GRETEL. It was terrible! I can't bear to see ovens!

HANSEL. And gingerbread still makes my tummy bumpy!

HOLLY. I—I don't know what to say! It's so horrible!

HANSEL. Just catch the ghost!

GRETEL. And find our Mommy!

HOLLY. We're going to do everything we can!

OPAL. *(To Rapunzel.)* You, ma'am. I don't believe I've placed you just yet.

RAPUNZEL. Ah! Let's put our detectives to task! Children, come here, dears.

(Marlaina and Burnell join their mother.)

RAPUNZEL. These are my twins, Marlaina and Burnell. Say hello, dears.

MARLAINA. *(Curtsying.)* Pleased to meet you, ma'am!

BURNELL. *(Bowling.)* It is a pleasure, Miss Abel and Miss Hall.

OPAL. What charming children you have!

HOLLY. Twins, did you say?

RAPUNZEL. Yes, twins. And I'll give you another clue. I named my daughter after one of the most important places in my life: Marlaina means "from the high tower."

HOLLY. "High tower"? A set of twins? Looking at all the evidence, I'd say you must be Rapunzel, then!

RAPUNZEL. Yes!

OPAL. I would have thought your hair would be even longer!

RAPUNZEL. Alas. It doesn't seem that my hair grows very fast. Although it is still extremely strong.

(Rapunzel and the twins demonstrate the strength of her hair: She gathers it into her hand, and Marlaina and Burnell grab onto the hair. She pulls her head to the side while Burnell and Marlaina jump up.)

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MARLAINA & BURNELL. Whee!

HOLLY. But this is a new twist on the case. You were *taken* from your mother. *Your* mother didn't disappear. At least according to the story I've heard.

RAPUNZEL. You're right, Ms. Abel. Very good. She didn't. But she never came after me, either.

OPAL. What do you mean?

RAPUNZEL. All those months in the desolate wilderness...All that time I didn't give a single thought to my hair. How could I? There I was: just married, pregnant, cast out of the only home I'd ever known, stumbling around, trying to find shelter, not to mention foraging for three! Although of course I didn't know it yet. Twins! *That* was a surprise! When I found the prince he was blinded, weak—worse off than I was. Well, I am ashamed of it now, but my first thought was to turn right back around as if I'd never heard him whimpering! It was all I could do not to sneak quietly away and leave him to fend for himself. I didn't know how in the world I would feed another mouth. But something arose in me—I could feel it blossoming!—and I knew I could do it. I knew that one day—one moment—one berry, bug, leaf, and lizard at a time—I could take care of him, too. And do you know what that was? That blossoming? That was when I knew it for sure: (*Beaming.*) I'm a mother.

You'll see what I mean if we can bring in the others now.

OPAL. Please come in, everyone. (*The other FTs enter.*)

RAPUNZEL. Are you a mother, Opal? Holly?

OPAL. I'm afraid not.

HOLLY. No.

RAPUNZEL. Well, I am. And I know, I *know* I would search for my children with every last breath in my body if they were taken from me. I *know* it, you see, and I can't help but feel that my mother feels the same way about me.

ALFILDA. Every last beat of my heart would go to finding him!

LAINA. That's the hope we're all clinging to, Ms. Abel.

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RETHA-LOUISE. Our mothers never meant to leave us.

CHRISTA. We think they've been *prevented* from coming to us.

HOLLY. Nerts! I thought you all ended up “happily ever after.”

OPAL. Married to a handsome prince, with a whole kingdom at your disposal!

WILDA. With respect, ma'am: Handsome princes aren't all they're cracked up to be.

HOLLY. But—but—

LAINA. Oh, I know. It's not what you're *supposed* to believe. But take it from us, having a handsome prince in your life does *not* solve all your problems!

MARGARET. We can introduce you to one, if you'd like.

HOLLY. (*Perhaps she adjusts her hair or touches her cheek delicately.*) A handsome prince? Here in my office? Well, if you insist...

OPAL. Oh, yes, please! Introduce us! Isn't it a *dream*, Holly?

RAPUNZEL. As you wish. But remember: you asked for this. (*Calling.*) Prince! Could you come here, please? Say hello to everyone, dear.

KARL (AS THE PRINCE). (*Catching sight of the audience, he smiles brilliantly and speaks.*) Hello, everyone! Hello, Ladies! Good evening and best wishes unto you all! As you can no doubt see without my pointing it out, I'm a handsome prince. My father is the good and noble king of the land of Allandadaria, and it is with his blessing that I have set out to seek adventure (*Trumpet sound cue.*) and honor for the glory of our house. I have here a sword (*Makes sure to flex biceps when demonstrating sword.*), a bow, a quiver of arrows (*Poses like a bodybuilder.*). And this, this— (*He waves a dainty pink handkerchief. Perhaps he sniffs it, too.*) Ahhh! This is the handkerchief of the fair Lady Helen. Well, it goes without saying I won her favor in a jousting tournament prior to my departure in search of adventure (*Trumpet.*). Adventures!

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(Trumpet.) Now there's the stuff life's made of! Fighting dragons is a fair sport—if you aren't afraid of the brutes, of course—as is defeating giants, or running through an ogre from time to time if it steps too far outside the bounds of civility. And of course, you have the occasional troll and the odd monster that must be firmly dealt with. Why it was only very recently I encountered a horde of flying monkeys wielding swords and snapping overgrown canine teeth. The villagers were simply beside themselves, and who can blame them? Turns out I'd left my sword at home, so with my bare hands—**RAPUNZEL.** Thank you, dear.

KARL (AS THE PRINCE). Not at all! *(He exits.)*

RELINDA. Flirt and brag.

ALFILDA. Flirt and brag.

LAINA. That's really all any of them do.

ALFILDA. And as cute as they may be, flirting and bragging get old after a time.

LAFERN. A very short time.

FROG. Ribbit!

RELINDA. It's alright, Princey! You never brag... *(Sighing sadly.)* or flirt.

(Frog catches a buzzing fly, and all Princesses sigh in sympathy for Relinda.)

HOLLY. You mean that's really all there is to those handsome princes?

RAPUNZEL. They just sort of follow us around, like puppies.

RETHA-LOUISE. Very talkative puppies.

LILLIAN. That's what we've been trying to tell you! Tell her, Wilda.

WILDA. It's just stories!

CHRISTA. And it's all *their* stories anyway.

OPAL. Yes. I was wanting to get back to this. *(To Relinda, looking back at her notes.)* You said that before, too. You said “*their* version” of you. Whose version?

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LANORA. Oh, do we have to talk about *them*? I don't like *them*.

EDITH. Please, let's not talk about *them*.

STELLA. I'm frightened of them.

MAUDIE MAE. It will never do for our courage to fail us now, sweet sisters.

RETHA-LOUISE. We must tell the good detectives everything.

WILDA. You see, we were regular people once.

MARGARET. For most of us, we only got to be normal for a few short years, but some of us had longer before they....

CHRISTA. Before they stole our lives—

MILDRED. And immortalized us in these awful stories!

HOLLY. Immortalized?

RAPUNZEL. Why, how else could we have lived to the Roaring Twenties?

HOLLY/OPAL. Nerts! / Jumping jazz bands!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN. They didn't just steal our lives! They stole my *name*! Stole it and published it to all the world! It was supposed to be a secret!

OPAL. Another mystery!? *Who* stole your lives? And your name, sir?

LILLIAN. That is no mystery, I'm afraid!

RAPUNZEL. (*With German accent.*) Yacob und Vilhelm, of course!

HOLLY. Of course! (*Beat.*) Who?

LAINA. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The Brothers Grimm?

OPAL/ HOLLY. Jumpin' jazz bands! / Nerts!

ALFILDA. We believe the Brothers Grimm took our mothers from us.

LILLIAN. They took our mothers, and then just watched to see how our lives would get messed up.

RELINDA. And they wrote it down as it happened, making their livings from our misfortunes!

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

LAINA. They've left us, motherless, trapped in time to make our way in the world as best we can—and all for the sake of writing fairy stories!

OPAL. That's criminal!

HOLLY. So, you believe if you could only find the Brothers Grimm, they'll know where your mothers are?

RAPUNZEL. We believe they've been holding our mothers prisoner!

HOLLY. Nerts...that's....

OPAL. So crazy it just might be true.

MILDRED. Will you take our case, Ms. Abel?

HOLLY. My toes are tingling up a tsunami, and that certainly means we're in store for a really good mystery.

OPAL. It would be an honor to help you.

HOLLY & OPAL. (*Looking at each other.*) We take the case!

FAIRY TALES. (*Ad lib.*) Woohoo! Wonderful! Yay! (*Etc.*)

HOLLY. I'm formulating a plan—it involves flappers and feathers and undercover work—are you brave enough to go undercover? This is serious business.

LAINA. Ms. Abel, I've been waiting my whole life for this moment.

LILLIAN. Our mother would have done anything for us. We can only do the same for her.

AUGUST. I want to meet my grandmother!

MARLAINA & BURNELL. Me, too!

RAPUNZEL. Oh, Holly, we've spent so long as damsels in distress—whether it was misfortune or the Grimms, or just bad luck, I cannot say. But you are a new kind of damsel all together, dear detective. Thank you for helping us.

LAINA. I guess it's settled, then. We're going undercover!
(*The FTs talk excitedly amongst themselves. Opal pulls Holly aside.*)

OPAL. Holly! What have we gotten ourselves into?

HOLLY. This is the kind of case that will make *us* immortal, Opal! But first we have to solve it!

HOLLY ABEL AND THE MISSING MOTHERS

OPAL. And how!

Curtain. Intermission.

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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