

FAIRY TALE ACADEMY

By Michelle Van Loon

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ISBN: 1-931805-79-2

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CHARACTER LIST

KAREN SMITH, an imaginative “nine and three quarters” year old

MOTHER, a no-nonsense accountant

FATHER, as serious about business as his wife

BERNICE, Karen’s caretaker

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN, teacher at Fairy Tale Academy

FARLEY FIREBREATH, a dragon with the heart of a spoiled child

OLD WOMAN, a cranky aged crone

PRINCE, youthful and gallant

PRINCESS, a pampered “Valley Girl” type

KING, regal but a bit silly

QUEEN, a realistic and loving mother

PEASANT GIRL, a servant with big brains and aspirations

TIME: Today

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Karen Smith, age nine and three quarters, is set to begin attending a new school, carefully selected by her upwardly mobile accountant parents. Through the misguidance of her iconoclastic caretaker, Aunt Bernice, the imaginative Karen finds herself instead in Fairy Tale Academy, a training school for fairy tale characters.

Karen becomes a part of the class project, which is a play-within-a-play fairy tale that the characters have created. The teacher extends an invitation to Karen, asking her to become a part of the school.

Karen must summon all of her courage to convince her unimaginative parents to allow her to become a student of Fairy Tale Academy. The conflict is resolved as Aunt Bernice helps the parents to remember their own light-hearted imaginations buried within.

SCENERY PLOTS

SCENE I - THE SMITH FAMILY KITCHEN

Kitchen table, surrounded by three chairs. Moving boxes stacked at rear.

SCENE II - AT THE PARK

Lamppost (or lighting to suggest one)

SCENE III - FAIRY TALE ACADEMY

Seven stools/chairs arranged in a broad half-circle, plus one additional stool/chair center stage. A larger chair needs to be positioned downstage right facing classroom grouping.

SCENE IV - BACK AT THE SMITH FAMILY KITCHEN

Same as in Scene I

PROP LIST

2 briefcases
small table
large book
tote bag
tin cans and plastic daisies fastened together
backpack with lunch sack inside
oversize skeleton key on a bright yarn necklace
piece of paper
scroll
sword
pom-poms
several large shopping bags stuffed with paper
wooden spoon
costume effect for Bernice (see end of Scene IV)

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SCENE I

SETTING: The kitchen in the new home of the Smith family.

(KAREN is seated at a table center stage, lost in a book. MOTHER and FATHER enter, focused on their conversation with each other, bustling about with last minute preparations before they each leave for work.)

MOTHER: *(Checking her watch, flustered)* I've got a big presentation first thing this morning. *(shakes head)* There's simply no way I can, though.

FATHER: I can't be there either. We're lucky Aunt Bernice moved in.

MOTHER: Yes. Karen has been very understanding.

FATHER: *(a bit of doubt)* Do you think she's O.K. about it, really?

MOTHER: *(dismissing him)* She'll be fine; she adores Bernice.

FATHER: I did too, when I was growing up.

MOTHER: Frankly, Bernice does stretch my patience a bit. But, I suppose you're right...

FATHER: *(rationalizing)* We are fortunate, aren't we? A beautiful new house, a top-notch school... *(checks watch)* 7:16 already! We've got to get going.

MOTHER: *(walks over to KAREN, and gently removes the book from her hands, laying it down on the table)* We're leaving now, Karen. Have a productive day!

(They both kiss KAREN, then grab their briefcases and exit, improvising busy, focused conversation about their upcoming workday. KAREN stays attentive to them until they're gone, then rising from her seat, SHE picks up her book with a dreamy smile and continues reading as SHE exits.)

SCENE II

SETTING: A densely wooded park

(BERNICE enters from rear of audience, dressed like a walking flea market, carrying a bunch of plastic daisies and several tin cans strung together.)

BERNICE: Won't these make a lovely centerpiece in your new home, Lady Karen? I do have a knack for finding treasure among trash, if I do say so myself. ***(looks around, as if SHE's lost something)*** Now where is that child? ***(conspiratorially, to audience)*** Her parents think I'm missing a few cards in my deck. I tell them it's just those two silly jokers and a four of clubs. ***(saluting)*** My mission...to deliver my godchild, Karen, to the front door of her new school...but I seem to have misplaced her somewhere. ***(calling)*** Karen...oh, Lady Karen...where are you?? ***(continues calling for KAREN, SHE exits)***

KAREN: ***(Enters at rear, carrying backpack with sack lunch tucked inside. SHE approaches stage and mutters to self, looking for BERNICE)*** Where could she have possibly gone? I'm nervous enough as it is, first day at a new school and all. Now I'm going to be late and I have to try to find...

(BERNICE re-enters, sneaks up behind KAREN, and taps her on the shoulder)

BERNICE: Boo!

KAREN: You scared the wits out of me.

BERNICE: ***(disappointedly)*** Gee, whiz. I like your wits, Karen honey. I wouldn't mind knocking a few of those nervous butterflies out of your guts, though.

KAREN: You're one of a kind, Aunt Bernice. Where did you disappear to, anyway?

BERNICE: A treasure hunt, my dear. I know how your parents love my taste in interior design. I thought these ***(holds up daisies and tin cans)*** would look spectacular on their dining room table. But fine art should speak to the viewer's imagination...especially if their imagination is a teensy bit rusty. ***(SHE eyes her masterpiece critically, then hands it to KAREN, who holds it while SHE pats herself down, then rifles through her purse.)*** The icing on the cake...the grin on the Mona Lisa... ***(SHE pulls a large skeleton key on a neon colored string from around her neck, tucked inside her shirt. SHE holds it up to the light, then ties it on to the tin cans quickly.)*** Voila! What do you think?

KAREN: **(Nodding, then glancing at her watch)** I think we'd better get moving or I'm going to be late.

BERNICE: Where did you disappear to a moment ago?

KAREN: **(shrugs, kicks at the ground)** I wish I could tell you...I was just daydreaming.

BERNICE: A noble habit, my girl!

KAREN: My mom and dad hate it when I do that. **(imitating)** The world is about being practical, father tells me that all the time. **(SHE looks around, as if for the first time)** Sometimes I wonder if he just might be right. Bernice, where are we??

BERNICE: I was following you, Lady Karen.

KAREN: **(Reaches in pocket, pulls out a wadded-up piece of paper. Holds it up one way, then another, then hands it to BERNICE)** This is the address, I think.

BERNICE: **(Studies the paper for a moment, then purposefully turns it upside down.)** No, this is it. **(Glances up and walks over to the lamppost.)** Here's the address...see?

(KAREN follows her over to the lamppost. BERNICE casually waves the paper in front of her face, then hands it back to KAREN, who puts it in her pocket.)

KAREN: Thanks for walking with me this far. I think I'd like to go the rest of the way myself.

(BERNICE nods, hugs KAREN and exits into audience animatedly, giving her the "thumbs up" sign, waving, etc. KAREN watches her go and then freezes at the lamppost, scared and alone. Meanwhile, BERNICE sneaks back through the audience to assist the fairy tale characters set up the classroom scene. BERNICE exits, pantomiming gleeful giggles.)

SCENE III

SETTING: An upper-elementary school classroom

AT RISE: *Students are seated at rear desks as follows: (from left) QUEEN, empty desk, PRINCE, empty desk, OLD WOMAN, PRINCESS, KING. PEASANT GIRL is standing on center front desk with her arms folded across her chest. FARLEY FIREBREATH is crouched at floor to her right. There are 2 empty chairs downstage right, located a bit away from the class semi-circle. MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN stands right of PEASANT GIRL. Classroom group remains frozen and silent.*

KAREN: *(entering, pausing)* Look at this place! *(gestures off to one side)* Get a load of that moat down there. A person could almost imagine there are hungry alligators swimming around, looking for a meal. *(sighs nervously)* Yup, this is it... I think. But I've never seen a school like this before. *(looking up, sizing up the place)* It looks more like a castle to me. I must be more nervous than I thought. *(A deep breath, gathering her courage.)* Main Street Elementary School, ready or not, here I come!

(As KAREN pantomimes opening door stage left, the classroom scene comes to life. FARLEY FIREBREATH, crouched on floor, growls and snarls half-heartedly. PEASANT GIRL looks down at him dispassionately. MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN'S attention is focused on FARLEY FIREBREATH. KAREN takes one step inside the imaginary doorway stage left and gapes in surprise and confusion.)

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: More ferocity, dragon! Where's the smoke billowing from your snout? You're not scaring the Peasant Girl and you're certainly not scaring me.

(FARLEY FIREBREATH tries harder, gets louder, then abruptly stops.)

FARLEY FIREBREATH: Aw, Teach...I just can't do it.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: Farley, did you eat breakfast this morning?

FARLEY FIREBREATH: I wasn't my fault. My mom made me. She knows how I love burnt toast.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: I know how important a good breakfast is, but you are much nastier when you work on an empty stomach.

Both of you may return to your seats. (**FARLEY FIREBREATH rises, offers PEASANT GIRL a hand down from her perch on top of the desk, and they each return to an empty set at the desks in the rear. MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN notices KAREN. SHE crosses to greet her, and takes the paper SHE is holding.**) Come in, come in! (**SHE gestures her a few paces into the room.**) What have we here? (**glances at paper**) A new student? How completely irregular! But, where are my manners? My name is Mrs. Christian Andersen. Please introduce yourself to your new classmates.

KAREN: (**flabbergasted**) I...uh...it's...Karen. Karen Smith.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**to class**) Could each of you please introduce yourselves to Karen?

(**As they introduce themselves, MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN crosses to large chair right front, and sits absent-mindedly as SHE scrutinizes the paper KAREN handed her.**)

PRINCE: (**wearing sword, HE stands, with sweeping bow**) Salutations, Lady Karen! I am Prince Rupert, in training.

(**HE sits back down**)

KAREN: Wow! Are you a real prince? I've never met a real prince before.

OLD WOMAN: Don't be too impressed, Karen. There's lots of royalty around here. Most of 'em are royal pains. Me, I'm just your basic, run of the mill, cranky old woman. I'm studying here at Fairy Tale Academy so I can live in a cottage in the deep, dark woods and scare off any visitors I get.

KING: (**aside, to OLD WOMAN**) And you're doing a good job of it, too. (**stands regally**) I am His Royal Highness, King Trevor; learning here at Fairy Tale Academy how to be a kind and benevolent ruler.

KAREN: King? (**curtseys nervously**) Excuse me, I must be in the wrong place. I'm just a regular kid. This sure isn't a regular sort of school.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**interrupting**) According to this paper, you should be enrolled at Main Street Elementary School. It is a fine place, filled with readers of our tales. Perhaps you got lost on your way there. Fairy Tale Academy is very difficult to find.

KAREN: (**crosses to MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN, sheepishly**) Well, I was daydreaming...

FARLEY FIREBREATH: That explains it, Teach.

KAREN: I've never heard of a place like this. Could you tell me more about this school?

PRINCESS: **(in a Valley-Girl type voice)** For sure, Karen. This is like the place where we totally learn to be Fairy Tale dudes and dudettes.

KING: **(crosses to where QUEEN is sitting)** In preparation for my position as King of a tiny mountain kingdom, I am here studying subjects such as Fox Hunting, Ball Attendance and Jousting. In addition, I am taking Advanced Nobility lessons.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: As you can see, Karen, we here at Fairy Tale Academy train our distinguished students in the fine art of becoming Fairy Tale characters.

KAREN: **(paces, confused)** What about math? What about spelling? What about recess??

QUEEN: **(rises, next to KING)** I, Queen Esmerelda, decree these subjects, especially recess, to be of utmost importance. Yet, we are ever so aware that the basics are the foundation, the cornerstone of...

OLD WOMAN: Aw, give it a rest, Queenie. You can learn that math and spelling stuff in any old school.

QUEEN: **(glaring at OLD WOMAN)** In order to properly convey the power and majesty found in great literature, we must be able to show our readers...

OLD WOMAN: That recess is our favorite subject!

(KING and QUEEN return to their seats, shaking their heads.)

PRINCE: **(stands, walks toward KAREN, speaking melodramatically)** But where can a person learn to be courageous and good? Where does one go to learn the art of rescuing damsels in distress? Of slaying dragons?

FARLEY FIREBREATH: Hey! Watch it, bud!

(PRINCE returns to his seat)

PEASANT GIRL: **(rises, steps in front of her desk)** I'm here studying to be a not-so-simple peasant girl, and part-time brain surgeon. This school is a great place. Where else could someone like me get to be a cheerleader?

PRINCESS: I'm the head cheerleader, of course.

(PRINCESS rises, picks up two sets of pom-poms from behind her desk, beckons PEASANT GIRL to join her center stage. KAREN backs off from center to right. PEASANT GIRL pushes desk that is sitting there off stage to left.)

PRINCESS and PEASANT GIRL: (**chanting in unison, and waving pom-poms**) Fantasy for you and me! Go — Team!

PRINCESS: (**PRINCESS drops her pom-poms into PEASANT GIRL's arms.**) Here!

(**PRINCESS flounces back to her seat.**)

PEASANT GIRL: (**curtsies**) I'll take care of these Princess Tiffany. (**to KAREN**) Even when wronged by those more powerful than I, I shall learn how to triumph.

(**returns to her seat**)

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**to PEASANT GIRL**) And you shall! (**to KAREN**) You see, Karen, our purpose here at the Academy is to mold characters. Surely you've read about the exploits of some of our former students: Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood and five of the seven dwarves. When you become a Fairy Tale character, you become a world traveler with your own important story to share.

KAREN: I love fairy tales! What kid doesn't? Once upon a time, happily ever after...

QUEEN: Our school motto, my girl.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: We rarely have civilians here in our midst. Our students find us, we don't find them.

PRINCE: You just have to know where to look.

KAREN: Actually, I wasn't looking. I started daydreaming and the next thing I knew...

OLD WOMAN: Those must have been some daydreams! They got you way off course from Main Street Elementary School.

KAREN: (**modestly**) I have been told that I have quite an imagination. It comes in handy when I write stories...but mostly, it gets me into trouble. My parents get so exasperated with me. You'd think that they were born with a fax machine instead of a heart. (**to other students**) Do you guys think there is such a thing as too much imagination?

FARLEY FIREBREATH: (**looking around**) You're asking us?

KAREN: (**laughing**) I guess that's a pretty ridiculous question, huh? A school like this would be a daydream come true for me. Do you have computers here?

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: Computers? Pardon me?

KAREN: Never mind. (**A bit breathlessly, excited**) Could I stay? Could I become a student here at Fairy Tale Academy?

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**mysteriously**) We'll see...in the meantime, I don't see what the harm would be in letting you remain

for today. You're already terribly late for Main Street Elementary, and I've heard that they take a dim view of tardiness. You're welcome to sit quietly and observe. (**KAREN finds seat at right, near MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN. MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN rises, crosses to center and claps her hands to compose class and focus their attention.**) Now, where were we?

FARLEY FIREBREATH: I believe you were chewing me out for not being able to muster up a decent dragon-sized temper tantrum.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**impatently**) Ah, yes...well? Are you getting hungry yet?

FARLEY FIREBREATH: Maybe a little...

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: Excellent! Perhaps we'll be able to see some of that smoke and fury that's ever so useful in creating exciting tales. Let's see...since we have a reader of our stories in our presence, I'm sure she'd enjoy seeing your current class project.

KAREN: Really? May I?

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: How about it, class?

PRINCESS: (**raising her hand**) I like personally and totally don't think it's fair. I am not perfectly prepared, so Karen here might think our project is...like...bogus, you know?

PEASANT GIRL: You just don't want Prince Rupert to know that instead of doing your homework, you spent the evening thinking of new ways to style your hair.

PRINCESS: Style is my middle name! (**To KAREN, pointing at PEASANT GIRL**) She always does her homework. She's the class genius.

PEASANT GIRL: (**To KAREN, tattling**) She has a crush on the Prince.

PRINCESS: I do not!

PEASANT GIRL: It's quite obvious that you do!

PRINCESS: Do not!

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: Stop it, girls! Am I to understand that you didn't do your homework, Miss Princess?

PRINCESS: (**backpedaling**) Uh...no! I would never dream of not doing my homework.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: I'm glad to hear that. Shall we begin, everyone?

KAREN: (**clapping her hands in excitement**) Oh, go ahead, go ahead. I'll be the best audience you ever had.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (**pacing back and forth as SHE begins telling their story**) All right, then. Long ago, in a far away land across the great Ocean divide, set in a time shrouded in mist so that we cannot pin the date on anything as mundane as a calendar, there once was a tiny mountain kingdom ruled by a kind and generous King and Queen.

KING: (*waving to KAREN*) That would be us!

QUEEN: (*To KING*) A bit more dignity would be in order, Trevor dear.
After all, we are royalty in training.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: They had one child, a dearly beloved son named Prince Rupert. His parents were getting on in years and were ever so anxious to hand over the crown to their son...

KING: The wife and I want to take a cruise, do a little sightseeing...

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: King Trevor, please! Shh...

KING: Sorry!

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: (*pausing from her pacing*) Where was I? Ah, yes...The crown. But they longed for him to find a wonderful wife, a gentle young woman who could help him to rule justly and benevolently... (*Long pause, then PRINCESS coughs loudly*) Uh, King Trevor, that's your cue.

KING: (*QUEEN and KING rise and stand center. KING claps hands, calling*) Son! Son!

PRINCE: (*approaches KING*) Yes, dad?

KING: Your mom and I have decided that you must go out into the world to find a wife, someone to stand beside you and help you serve your loyal subjects well.

PRINCE: (*agreeably*) O.K.

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: So his parents bid him farewell...

KING: Choose with your heart, dear son, and I'm sure you'll choose wisely.

QUEEN: (*hands PRINCE his sword, assists him in putting it on*) Don't forget your sword, son. I worry about you! I don't think you're dressed warmly enough. Maybe you should wear that nice sweater that I knitted for you...and don't you think you'll need a heavier jacket?

PRINCE: (*rolling his eyes*) Oh, Mom...

(HE hugs them both in parting. KING and QUEEN return to their seats, waving good-bye to PRINCE.)

MRS. CHRISTIAN-ANDERSEN: So our hero set off into the wide, wide world. (*PRINCE begins wandering the stage, circling behind the desks*) Never having been outside his kingdom, he soon found himself quite lost in a deep, shadowy forest. He began to despair of ever finding his way out, when he happened across a solitary old woman living in a tiny dark cottage with a thatched roof.

OLD WOMAN: (*meeting PRINCE center stage*) Who's this... this... trespasser?

PRINCE: Salutations! I come bearing peace and goodwill.

OLD WOMAN: (**gruffly**) Peace and goodwill aren't welcome here! And neither are you! (**To KAREN and audience**) What do you think? Scary enough?

KAREN: (**delightedly**) Oh, yes! Go on, go on!

OLD WOMAN: (**To PRINCE**) What on earth are you doing wandering in this dark and unfriendly neck of the woods, anyway?

PRINCE: I have been sent out from my tiny mountain kingdom over yonder... (**confused, points off left**) or maybe it was yonder... (**points right**) to find a princess to help me rule. You wouldn't happen to know of any available princesses, would you?

OLD WOMAN: Only one, and she just happens to be nearby.

(winks at audience)

PRINCE: Hmm...sounds promising. Point me in her direction, if you please.

OLD WOMAN: Sure thing. Always glad to be of service. (**OLD WOMAN pantomimes offering directions. PRINCE sets off, circling upstage as if HE's back wandering in the woods. OLD WOMAN addresses her comments to audience.**) The only Princess I know is Her Royal Majesty, Princess Tiffany of the Mall. Something tells me he's not her type. Anyway, do I look like a matchmaker?

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