The Lostling

You're a human being who once upon a time wandered into fairyland, or once upon a time was stolen by fairies and brought here. Now you barely remember the mortal earth. The circus is your home.

In the circus, you can be performer, crew, creative collaborator, and problem solver. You're always there with encouragement and insight.

You might play someone by seeing through them, or by touching them with iron. You might play a situation by appealing to fairy law, or by speaking of summer or winter.

(And come away, come away, the waters, the wild, sings the Hob, forgetting somewhat the words, and forgetting outright the tune.)

The Lostling:
a playbook for
Under Hollow Hills

Large Print Version

© 2020

Meguey Baker & D. Vincent Baker

Permission granted to print & copy for personal use.

a lumpley game

The Lostling

To play the Lostling, create your name, your free & careful imagery, your place, your plays, your trappings, and your bindings.

Your Job

Your job as a player is to:

- Make your character vivid.
- Play your part in the circus.
- Take the bad with the good.

Your Nature

You are a human being who once upon a time wandered into fairyland, or once upon a time was stolen by fairies and brought here. Now you barely remember the mortal earth. The circus is your home.

I don't know whether you want to return to your old life, your old family and home. If you do, I don't know whether you ever can.

Your Name

Choose a human name.

Your Free & Careful Imagery

Choose 1: Sky, field, cloud, sun, moon, wind.

Choose 1: Jaw, eyes, hands, hair, face, lips.

Choose 1: Blue, red, green, orange, brown, gray.

Choose 1: Shoes, boots, coat, suit, gown, hat, vest, cloak, hood, jacket, gloves, scarf.

Choose 1: Mannish, womanish, androgynish, boyish, girlish, childish, queerish, sexy, sexless, charming, forbidding, enticing, unapproachable, —.

For each that you've chosen, customize it. Characterize it differently for free and for careful.

You can choose 2 sometimes if you want to, why shouldn't you?

Choose your pronouns for free and for careful as well.

Example:

Free	Careful
● A berry bramble in fruit	○ A berry bramble grown wild
● Shaggy hair	○ Tidy braid
● Burnished coppery orange	○ Dull rusty orange
● Bare feet	○ Soft soled shoes
● Womanish, queerish	○ Womanish

Begin play fully free: mark the free column.

Your Place

In the circus, at need, you can take all of the listed roles.

Plays

You can make all of the obvious plays and the Lostling plays.

Mark +2 next to your choice of three plays, +0 next to two, -1 next to two, and +1 next to all of the rest. These are only your plays' starting rolls; you'll have many opportunities to change them.

Mark: +2, +2, +2, +1, +1, +1, +1, +1, 0, 0, -1, -1

Trappings

You get all of the listed trappings.

Bindings

Everybody introduces themselves. On your turn, tell everyone your name, your playbook, your free imagery, your place in the circus, your wagon, and any of your other trappings you think the others might find noteworthy.

Once everyone's introduced themselves, go around again for bindings. On your turn, ask for volunteers:

- One of you has been traveling with me for a long time. We joined the circus together. Who? I can never put you off.
- Normally I'm the one who sees through people, but one of you has seen through me. Who? I can never waylay you or see through you.

If no one volunteers, so be it and move on. If more than one volunteers, accept them all, choose one, or ask them to decide between them, as you like.

On the others' turns, volunteer as you choose.

The Interloper

Name: _____

Free	&	Careful
○		○
○		○
○		○
○		○
○		○
Pronouns:		Pronouns:

Place

- Performer;
- Crew;
- Creative collaborator;
- Problem solver;
- Always there with encouragement and insight.

Plays

- You can make your Lostling plays. To play someone, you can see through them; or touch them with iron. To play a situation, you can appeal to fairy law; or sing of summer or winter.
- You can make all of the obvious plays. To play someone, you can confront them; draw them out; open up to them; put them off; size them up; or waylay them. To play a situation, you can: call for a line; sniff the wind; use your trappings; or weather the storm.

Trappings

- A comfortable wagon, remarkable among fairy things for its human touches: its shaped wooden doorhandles, the warmth of its colors, the simple beauty of its trucks and wheels well cared for, the soft-brushed coats and well-fed contentment of its two oxen, the chicken that rides along on its ridge beam.
- Comfortable work clothing, a flashy costume, a subdued costume, and well kept and well mended dress-up clothing. Also, stilts.
- Something of iron that you wear around your neck, by right, token of who you are.
- Memories of the human world, not whole, snatches of song and incomplete vignettes, that come to you in dreams and unbidden.
- A book where you keep your sketches, your journal, your notes and memories.
- If you'd like to add any other prostheses, sensory aids, communication aids, or mobility aids, please do:

Bindings

- — knows what I am, but keeps confidence for their own reasons. I can never confront them or pass myself off to them as royalty incognito. Who?

- — is my honest friend, though they don't know what I am. I can never put them off, and if I ever touch them with iron they must choose to die. Who?

Lostling Plays

See Through Them

Your Roll: ___

When you see through someone, roll. On any hit, call a quick break in play and talk them over with the MC and your fellow players. See if you can collectively figure them out in symbolic or metaphoric terms: not only who are they really are, but what do they represent, what do they mean in the game. Take these insights back into play with you. On a 7–9 hit, they realize that you've seen through them, and can react accordingly. On a 10+ hit, they don't. On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. Perhaps they've drawn you in somehow instead.

Sing of Summer or Winter

Your Roll: ___

When you sing of summer or winter, roll. On a 10+ hit, the place where you are, and all the players' fairies in it, turn toward the season you sing of. Remind the MC to reflect the season's change in the NPCs here. On a 7–9 hit, the seasons don't turn, but any players' fairies who can hear your voice do, and any NPCs who hear you also feel the warmth or the chill. On a miss, some imperceptible warning shuts you up, you sing about something frivolous instead, and you step toward careful. You may make this play at most once per session.

Touch Them with Iron

Your Roll: ___

When you touch a fairy with cold iron, roll. On any hit, choose 1 of the following. If the fairy you touch is another player's character, they choose, not you.

- They will promise you anything you ask to be free of the iron's touch. What do you make them promise?
- They are so genuinely frightened of you that they immediately and truly abandon their interests and concerns, flee, and come near you never again.
- You press the iron to them cruelly and they die. Other fairies, not understanding that this is true death, might look for them to return someday, but they never will.

On a 10+ hit, you can keep them quiet while all this goes on. On a 7–9 hit, everyone nearby realizes that something's wrong, and can act to investigate or defend themselves. On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong, or should a 7–9 hit go poorly for you, be prepared for the worst. You've threatened a fairy with true death, and the consequences might be severe.

Touching another mortal with iron has no consequence.

Appeal to Fairy Law

Your Roll: ___

When you appeal to fairy law, roll. On any hit, fairyland itself judges in your favor, and you choose 1 of the following.

- Whatever or whoever is threatening you, it or they may not physically harm you, only affront, shock, startle, or dismay you.
- Whatever or whoever is constraining you, it or they must accept a gift or tribute from you, then release you and let you pass.
- Whatever or whoever is endangering you, must offer you a bargain, a test, or a trial to undertake, and may step only if you break or fail it.

On a 7–9 hit, though, you're beholden to fairyland for its verdict. On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Parhaps fairyland not only judges against you, but takes your appeal as an insult in the first place.

Outside of fairyland, appealing to fairy law has no effect.

The Obvious Plays

To Play Someone

Confront them. Your roll: ____

Draw them out. Your roll: ____

Open up to them . Your roll: ____

Put them off. Your roll: ____

Size them up. Your roll: ____

Waylay them. Your roll: ____

To Play a Situation

Call for a line. (No roll)

Sniff the wind. Your roll: ____

Use your trappings. (No roll)

Weather the storm. Your roll: ____

Consequences

Free & Careful

Instead of stepping toward summer, you step toward free; insteadof stepping toward winter, you step toward careful. When you step toward free, erase one of the marks in the careful column and mark the same line in the free column. When you step toward careful, erase one of the marks in the free column and mark the same line in the careful column.

Whenever you step toward free or toward careful, take 1 from one of your plays' rolls and add 1 to a different play's roll. Choose intentionally, to match your feeling about the change. Keep to a minimum of -2 and a maximum of +3.

Insults

When someone insults you, you're allowed by fairy law to answer it. It's considered to be your own unimpeachable right to weigh the insult and respond in due measure, so only you can choose what form your answer should take and how extreme it should be. Lenience is a human trait, not a fairy trait, so if you're moderate in your response, you can set fairy tongues wagging.

Beholden

When you are beholden, fairy law demands that you make good and deliver the balance. Human honor might compel you too, but it's a lax taskmaster compared to fairy nature. Regardless, if you are recalcitrant or uneager, your debtor may consider it an insult or worse.

Violence

For human beings in fairyland, like you, violence is no game.

You can shrug off a verbal assault that would murder any fairy dead, but a sword thrust through you, however playfully, will end your life forever.

Most fairies won't kill you on purpose — it wouldn't occur to them — but they might kill you at any moment by pure whimsical mischance.

Consequently, you must play violence in 2 different ways.

When you're verbally assaulted, shocked, affronted, or dismayed, choose 1:

- You withdraw in as much fury, and with as much dignity, as your human nature allows.
- You lash out in return, with that distinctive impulsive human passion.
- You consider yourself offended, and will nurse your fleeting human grudge as long as you're able.

When you're physically assaulted or wounded, roll a single die:

- On a 4, 5, or 6, you're wounded and must nurse your injury until it heals.
- On a 2 or 3, you're wounded dangerously, and you need to get skilled help quickly or the wound will kill you. (Any problem solver in the circus will know what to do.)
- On a 1, you're fatally wounded. Die now or die in a few painful minutes.

As a matter of curiosity, not of consequence, when you die, one of two things will happen, entirely outside of your control. The first possibility is that you will plainly and simply die. The second is that you will die, but not plainly: something of your nature will remain in fairyland forever, not alive but animate, some fairy's truly kept thing.

Under Hollow Hills

There is a traveling circus under the Hollow Hills.

It travels by moonlight, small wagons creaking in the night silence. It travels lost roads, where fireflies and whisps hover to watch it pass, where goblins peer down from their treebranch perches, and owls. It travels the night world and the day world, fairyland and the living earth, and places otherwise, and no border can keep it. It has mysteries to pose, drama to perform, it has music, juggling, acts of death-defying peril, pratfall comedy. It has dangerous secrets to tell.

Step up, step up. Come great, come small, come revelers all!