

THE HIDDEN PEOPLE

Episode 2.01

“Initiative”

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TEASER

1. Television news "breaking news" THEME.

MADISON

Madison Kepler coming to you live with breaking news. Authorities have apprehended the escaped suspect in the brutal double homicide case that stunned the small town of Conley. Chief McIlveen of the Conley police has confirmed that they have taken the suspected killer into custody without incident. This development comes just a day after the suspect escaped from a holding cell in the Conley police station. Complicating matters, between the initial arrest and the escape, the lead detective on the case, Samantha Mulligan, suddenly resigned.

(beat)

Sources close to the Conley police say that the suspected killer is none other than Mackenna Thorne, the only daughter of the two victims. Chief McIlveen declined to confirm or deny this report but did say he would hold a press conference soon to provide--

(beat)

Hold on, everyone, I'm getting another breaking news alert.

(beat)

This is also coming out of Conley.

(beat)

The St. Patrick's Church in Conley has apparently collapsed.

(beat)

We have a graphic of the tower here, as it once stood. The belltower was a very recognizable feature.

(beat)

Rescue crews on scene say the damage is very extensive. One person has been found in the rubble already.

(beat)

So far, we only know that they have been life-flighted to the hospital in critical condition.

(beat)

Authorities say that if anyone else was in the church when it collapsed, they are unlikely to have survived.

Starting to FADE OUT, eventually into theme song.

MADISON (CONT'D)

We have a camera crew en route to the scene, and SkyCam Five should be providing us an aerial view within a few minutes.

(beat)

As you can see from this photo of the tower, it's a tall, stone structure with a very large iron bell. We can only hope that no one else was in the church at the time of the collapse.

END TEASER

2. Hushed VOICES in the courtroom.

ALDER NIAMH

So she was a halfling all along.

NARRATOR

Yes.

ALDER NIAMH

Liliana's half-breed child. What a complete surprise.

NARRATOR

I trust you now see the importance of this story being told in its entirety.

ALDER NIAMH

(pensive)

Indeed.

NARRATOR

A halfling brought about the end of
your Magister. Fitting, wouldn't you
say? The Seelie versus the Unseelie.

ALDER NIAMH

The Seelie Court is dead. One halfling
does not change that.

NARRATOR

Don't be so sure, Alder Niamh. So far,
the Court has learned about two
halflings it didn't know existed.

ALDER NIAMH

But we all know now. And the trial
shall commence with additional charges.

NARRATOR

As if you weren't going to kill her
already.

ALDER NIMAH

The Court thanks you for the
opportunity to learn from your story.
After the trial, we can move forward
with your--

NARRATOR

Why do you assume the story is over,
Alder? Have we caught up yet?

ALDER NIAMH

You...

(beat, getting it)

You intend to tell the entire story up
until this very moment.

NARRATOR

Just until the beginning of this little
song and dance.

ALDER NIAMH

But we know the rest of what happened.

NARRATOR

Do you? She managed to keep her nature hidden from the Court the entire time. What other secrets do you think she brought with her?

ALDER NIAMH

(beat, trying hard not to lose it)
Will it be much longer? I'm not sure the Court needs to hear every detail of what has happened since.

NARRATOR

Oh, you'll want to hear the rest. I assure you.

ALDER NIAMH

(so over this shit)

Then by all means. Regale us with the rest of your riveting tale.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

3. In a FLYING HELICOPTER.

EMT

Patient is completely unresponsive. Severe head trauma, possible skull fracture. No other visible injury.

(beat)

Hey, can you hear me? Try squeezing my hand. Can you open your eyes?

(beat)

Still unresponsive. Pupils fixed and dilated. Becoming more hypertensive with possible increased intracranial pressure. Call neurosurgery to the ER, stat. This one's in really bad shape.

(beat)

Hang in there, man. We're almost there.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

4. Rescue crews working with construction equipment to clear rubble.

THOMAS

They need to work faster.

SAM

They have to be careful, Thomas.

THOMAS

I should go tell them to work faster.

SAM

If you go past that perimeter one more time, they're going to arrest you.

THOMAS

My sister is in there, Sam.

SAM

Keep your voice down. Your sister is on her way to jail, remember?

THOMAS

You know what I mean.

SAM

No way she's still in there. She teleported out.

THOMAS

How can you be sure?

SAM

Because...because the alternative is that she is still in there, and that's not good.

THOMAS

She isn't dead, Sam.

SAM

Thomas...

THOMAS

No, I would know it. I would. She's alive. I can feel it.

SAM

Okay, so that means she teleported out.
That's the only way she survived.

THOMAS

What about Nissa?

SAM

Maybe they both teleported out.

THOMAS

Alfie didn't.

SAM

Nissa and Ma...Nissa and you-know-who
were probably together. Alfie ran in
after them. And on that note, we should
go to the hospital. We've been here for
hours.

THOMAS

I'm not leaving this spot.

SAM

Don't be irrational.

THOMAS

Rational left the building days ago.

SAM

Hear me out. Look at the possible
scenarios. If she poofed out of there,
she can't exactly come back here to
meet us. First responders are
everywhere. She can't be seen in this
town ever again since everyone here
thinks she's in jail. If she's still in
the rubble, she's--

THOMAS

She's not dead.

SAM

Okay, but if she is still in there alive, they'll take her to the same hospital. Where Alfie is. Where we should be. And if she got out? She can't come here. So where would she go? To the hospital. Where Alfie is.

THOMAS

(sigh)

Where we should be.

SAM

Hey, great idea!

THOMAS

I just feel like I should stay here.

SAM

If nothing else, maybe Alfie saw something in there. Maybe he knows what happened to them.

THOMAS

Okay, okay. Let's go.

NARRATOR

Thomas Thorne. Ever the optimist. Samantha Mulligan. Ever the pragmatist. What is it they say about opposites? Ah, yes: they cannot coexist in the same space.

(beat)

And as for Thomas's missing sister? Dropping an entire belltower on her might or might not kill a halfling, but if you think that this is the last time everything falls apart around her, you clearly don't yet know Mackenna Thorne.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

5. Hospital room. BEEPS and HUMS from machines. Door OPENS.

AMELIA

Doctor Garfield? Is that...oh.

THOMAS

Hi, Mrs. O'Toole.

AMELIA

Thomas Thorne. What are you doing here?

THOMAS

We came to check on Alfie. How is he?

AMELIA

And who is this?

SAM

Sam Mulligan. Nice to meet--

AMELIA

You're the detective who quit, aren't you?

SAM

Which makes me not a detective anymore.

AMELIA

You shouldn't be here. It's only supposed to be family. Garrett is on a plane back from Helsinki or he'd already be here.

THOMAS

How is Alfie doing?

AMELIA

(annoyed realization)

You're not leaving, are you?

SAM

At least tell us what the doctors said first.

AMELIA

(sigh)

Come in.

Door CLOSES.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

The head trauma is very bad. They reduced the swelling of his brain, but they're not sure if he will ever wake up. And if he does, they say he won't...well, it won't really be him anymore.

THOMAS

Oh god. I'm so sorry.

AMELIA

Well, it's not your fault, is it?

(beat)

Look, Thomas. You know I feel bad for what happened to your parents. I said as much at the funeral. I want you to know that I don't blame you for any of this.

THOMAS

Uh, okay?

AMELIA

You can't help it that your sister is a psychopath who manipulated my son. Along with his trashy manager.

THOMAS

Manager? You mean Nissa?

SAM

You do know that they're best friends, right? She's not just his boss.

AMELIA

Boss? She practically brainwashed my son into a cult.

THOMAS

Mrs. O'Toole--

AMELIA

Amelia. You're an adult now. Call me Amelia.

THOMAS

Okay, Amelia, I understand how it feels right now. You're looking for someone to blame for this.

AMELIA

I don't need to go looking. I already know who's responsible.

SAM

Nissa didn't make that church collapse on him.

AMELIA

Oh? And why was he in that part of town? That church is right by that roach motel of an apartment she lives in. Is it a coincidence they just re-arrested your sister at nearly the same time?

SAM

None of that has anything to do with a building collapsing.

AMELIA

He shouldn't have been there. He shouldn't ever be in that part of town at night. He should be working at his father's company, making something of himself.

THOMAS

Sam, I think maybe we should go. Let Mrs. O'Toole...Amelia...spend some time with Alfie.

AMELIA

I always liked you, Thomas. Your parents, too. I don't believe that one bad apple ruins the bunch.

SAM

You know what--

THOMAS

Come on, Sam.

SAM
I just want one more--

Door BURSTS OPEN. Shaylee RUSHES in.

SHAYLEE
Thomas! Sam! Thank the--
(beat, switch to American)
Mrs. O'Toole! Hello, there.

AMELIA
Do we know each other?

SHAYLEE
I'm a friend of Alfie's.

AMELIA
Oh. My. I didn't realize he had
a...friend. You're very pretty. What's
your name?

SHAYLEE
I'm Shaylee. But it's not like that.
I'm just friends with Alfie and Nissa.

SAM
Ixnay on the issanay.

AMELIA
Oh. I see. Well, in that case, Thomas
and...this former detective were just
leaving so I could spend more time with
my son. Alone.

SHAYLEE
She's kicking you out?

THOMAS
It was my idea. She deserves some
privacy.

SAM
Yeah, she's kicking us out.

SHAYLEE

Mrs. O'Toole, we just want to make
sure...

(switch to Irish)

Fuck it. How is he?

THOMAS

It's not good.

SAM

He's comatose. Sounds like significant
brain damage.

SHAYLEE

Oh, no. And Nissa? And...Nissa?

THOMAS

No word yet.

SHAYLEE

It's been hours.

SAM

We know.

AMELIA

Excuse me. What is going on here? What
does that girl have to do with this?

SHAYLEE

Nissa is a grown woman, not a girl.

(beat)

Is she for real?

SAM

I keep asking myself that.

THOMAS

This is a difficult time for her. Let's
step outside, okay? Sorry, Amelia.

6. Door CLOSES.

SHAYLEE

Mackenna's not contacted you at all?

THOMAS

No word.

SHAYLEE

What happened? No one called, so I checked the hospitals.

THOMAS

I'm sorry. I didn't even think to call.

SHAYLEE

Do you know about...about Mackenna?
About what she is?

THOMAS

What she is? What do you mean?

SHAYLEE

What do you know? Did she get away from the Magister?

SAM

The Magister came after her?

SHAYLEE

They fought.

THOMAS

We don't know anything about that. We dropped the other Mackenna off with Ron. Then Alfie called us from the church, and we met him there.

SAM

There was a big explosion in the belltower. Alfie ran in shouting for Mack and Nissa. And then it collapsed on him.

SHAYLEE

They were in the tower? And it exploded?

THOMAS

Pretty much.

SHAYLEE

Did they escape?

THOMAS

We don't know. The rescue crews are still searching the wreckage.

SHAYLEE

If they'd stepped out of there, they would have contacted us by now.

THOMAS

I know.

SAM

We were hoping Alfie might know something, but we're not sure if he's even going to wake up.

SHAYLEE

It's brain damage?

THOMAS

Something like that.

SHAYLEE

It's possible that he's still in there but that his brain is too damaged for him to get out, to get control of his body.

SAM

Are you a neurologist, too? Is there anything you don't do?

SHAYLEE

What I don't do is sit around waiting and hoping. I have an idea. I know a bloke who knows a bloke who knows a druid. They have ways of going in and retrieving a person from their own mind.

THOMAS

Maybe we should let the doctors try first.

SHAYLEE

The doctors who so astutely assessed
his state as "comatose"?

SAM

But have we reached the crazy desperate
magic stage yet?

SHAYLEE

We need to find out what happened to
Mackenna. The Magister could be hunting
her right now. Could have her. If Alfie
knows something, we need to know it,
too.

THOMAS

Okay. What do you need from us?

SHAYLEE

Get rid of his mum and draw a circle on
the floor in his room. It has to be--

THOMAS

Perfect. We know.

SAM

When you say to get rid of his mom...

THOMAS

I'm not comfortable kicking out a
grieving mother. I know it might seem
like she was being mean and rude, but
she might lose her son. No one is going
to be polite in the face of that. None
of us would.

SHAYLEE

I know her kind. She was asleep when
she got the call. Barely had time to
put on any makeup. She'll be dying to
get home to change and make herself
more presentable. When that happens,
call me. I'll get what I need and wait
for you.

THOMAS

Thank you, Shaylee.

SHAYLEE

Don't thank me yet. This has to work first.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

7. Hospital room. BEEPS and HUMS from machines.

THOMAS

Shaylee? It's Thomas. Alfie's mom left, so we're in the clear.

STEPPING SIDEWAYS arrival.

SAM

I will never get used to seeing that.

THOMAS

Did you get what you needed?

SHAYLEE

Aye. I already mixed everything together. We just need to light it and breathe it in.

SAM

We're just getting high, aren't we?

SHAYLEE

I'm told this experience will be markedly different.

Lighter FLICKS a couple times.

THOMAS

Uh, won't the hospital staff smell something burning?

SHAYLEE

Good idea. Stuff a towel under the door.

THOMAS

Are we sure this is a good idea? What if someone comes in to check on him? Or if we set off the sprinkler system?

SHAYLEE

The journey to find Alfie might feel like it takes us a long time, but it's only our minds going in, so it will only be minutes in reality.

SAM

We're seriously going into his mind?

SHAYLEE

Aye. Prepare yourselves. No telling what we'll find there. Alfie will probably be locked away, hidden from us. We'll need to search through all manner of chaos to find him. This isn't going to be easy.

Ethereal mindscape sounds.

8.

ALFIE

Hey, guys.

SHAYLEE

Or perhaps not quite so difficult.

THOMAS

Alfie! I'm so glad you're here.

SAM

You need to come with us. We're going to bring you back.

ALFIE

(incredulous)

We can't go yet.

THOMAS

What do you mean?

ALFIE

The campaign isn't over.

SAM

Campaign?

SHAYLEE

Shite.

ALFIE

You have to earn the loot, people. A good DM doesn't just give experience points for showing up.

Table magically APPEARS.

THOMAS

Uh, where did that table come from?

ALFIE

Sit down.

Chairs SCOOT out.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Take these.

Handing them paper.

SAM

What are they?

ALFIE

I pregenerated your characters so we can get right into the game. These are your character sheets. And pencils to record notes.

SHAYLEE

"Estella the tiefling bard"?

SAM

I do not understand what is on this paper. Attributes? Skills? Alignment?

THOMAS

I think I understand. Alfie wants us to play a roleplaying game with him.

SHAYLEE

Alfie's mind is a roleplaying game?

(beat)

Of course Alfie's mind is a roleplaying game.

SAM

This is ridiculous.

THOMAS

It actually makes a lot of sense. This Alfie in front of us is only a part of Alfie. This is our quest to find the rest of him.

ALFIE

Pre-cisely!

SHAYLEE

What the hell is a "tiefling bard"?

THOMAS

That's you. That's the character he made for you. Estella the tiefling bard. It might represent how he sees you. A tiefling is part demon and part human. A bard is like an inspiring musician.

SHAYLEE

I am not part demon.

THOMAS

Of course not. Maybe it's a metaphor? See, I'm playing Morgard, a dwarf paladin. They're like virtuous knights.

SHAYLEE

Of course that's what he'd give you. What else does this sheet say about my character?

THOMAS

These are your attributes. See, you have a high Charisma and Dexterity, so you're charming and agile.

SHAYLEE

How do you know all this?

THOMAS

I played some Dungeons and Dragons with Mackenna, Alfie, and Nissa before. He

was always trying to get them to play,
and sometimes I joined in.

SHAYLEE

I sort of played once with them, too. I didn't really get it then, and Alfie didn't explain it to me so much as argue with Nissa a bunch. I was also preoccupied because I was...still in recon mode at the time.

SAM

This is so stupid. I'm not doing this.

THOMAS

Why? What's your character?

SAM

"Griselda the half-orc barbarian." My Intelligence and Charisma are both 5. That seems low.

THOMAS

That's...yeah, that's really low.

SAM

I am charming as fuck, thank you very much.

ALFIE

You must play your character, Sam. No metagaming.

SAM

I am not playing Griselda the dumb.

SHAYLEE

Sam, we need to play his game. Honestly, of all the ways his subconscious could have manifested as a world, roleplaying seems pretty tame.

ALFIE

Ahem. Your quest has led your band of rugged adventurers to the mythical land of Alfheim.

SAM
Alfheim? Really?

SHAYLEE
It's a real place. Well, in Norse mythology it's a real place.

ALFIE
Alfheim is the realm where the light elves dwell.
(beat)
Basically, it's fairyland.

THOMAS
I'm thinking the symbolism in this adventure isn't going to be hard to decipher.

ALFIE
A tiny, winged sprite guards the way in. She wears armor and wields a massive sword the size of, well, herself.
(sprite voice)
Mortals cannot pass into Alfheim unless bidden by the gods.

SHAYLEE
Is that supposed to be the sprite talking?

THOMAS
We need to convince it to let us in.

SAM
How?

THOMAS
We talk to it.

SAM
Okay, yeah, but how do we do that?

THOMAS
Just talk as your character. It's like playing make-believe.

SAM

Oh beautiful and magical sprite
guardian, we beseech thee--

ALFIE

Remember, Sam, you need to play your
character. You can't talk as Sam.
You're Griselda.

SAM

I cannot believe this.

(Griselda voice)

Me Griselda. Me barbarian. Let me into
Alfheim or me smash sprite with
battleaxe.

ALFIE

Great! Roll a persuasion check.

SAM

Huh?

Echoing dice ROLL.

SAM (CONT'D)

Jesus! Those are enormous dice.

ALFIE

A nine. Not great, but not bad. Now add
your Persuasion modifier.

THOMAS

It's in the Skills section.

SAM

My Persuasion is negative three.

(beat)

This game is stupid.

ALFIE

The sprite looks angry at being
threatened. Her grip tightens on her
sword.

THOMAS

Morgard steps forward.

(Morgard voice)

Forgive my companion, noble sprite. We seek passage into Alfheim to find our missing friend. His name is Alfie.

ALFIE

(sprite voice)

There is no Alfie in Alfheim.

SHAYLEE

Can I make a Persuasion roll? My Persuasion is plus twelve.

ALFIE

You can, but you have to tell us what you want to say.

SHAYLEE

Why?

ALFIE

It's part of the game.

SHAYLEE

But it didn't matter what Sam said. You just used the roll to determine it.

ALFIE

Shaylee, that's how the game works. You aren't allowed to metagame.

SHAYLEE

Fine.

(Estella voice)

Let us in.

(Shaylee voice)

Can I roll now?

Echoing dice ROLL.

SHAYLEE (CONT'D)

Could you perhaps roll the two ton dice a little further away from us?

ALFIE

A fifteen! That's a total of twenty-seven. Great job. Your smooth talking convinces the sprite, and she happily allows you entry to Alfheim.

SAM

Is this how actual roleplaying is played?

THOMAS

I mean, pretty much.

ALFIE

As you prepare to enter, the sprite has a final word of warning.

(sprite voice)

Beware, adventurers. Your time is short. The blight encroaches further by the minute

(Alfie voice)

She points to the horizon, where you see a crackling black void slowly eating its way closer.

THOMAS

That does not look good.

SAM

I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that the blight is the brain damage closing in on what's left of Alfie.

SHAYLEE

We have to hurry, then. For Alfie's sake. And for Mackenna and Nissa. Come on.

ALFIE

A great forest glowing with red and yellow leaves stands before you. Paths lead north and south.

SHAYLEE

So we have to choose which path to take?

THOMAS
Looks that way.

SAM
How do we tell the difference?
(beat)
Alfie, are the paths different from
each other?

ALFIE
How so?

SAM
Like has one seen more traffic than
another? Maybe different sorts of
tracks?

ALFIE
Those feel like detective questions.
Griselda wouldn't ask that.

SAM
Can you just tell me what Griselda
sees?

ALFIE
Griselda squints at the paths, but a
pretty leaf catches her eye! Ooo,
pretty leaf.

SAM
I think I'm fine leaving Alfie brain
damaged.

THOMAS
Morgard examines the paths to see if
there are any differences.

ALFIE
Good choice!

SAM
Are you fucking kidding me?

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE

Morgard's Perception check is good. He notices that all the traffic takes the north path. The south path is untouched. Almost as if no one dares go there.

SHAYLEE

Sounds like we're going south.

ALFIE

You follow the path southward. As you walk, you see a small, pathetic goblin dart across the path and hide behind a bush. It looks like it's running from something.

SHAYLEE

I can probably use my charm to--

SAM

Griselda stomps over to the bush and picks up the goblin by the scruff.

ALFIE

The goblin squeals. You see that it is clutching something in its hands.

SAM

(Griselda voice)

What you hiding from?

ALFIE

(goblin voice)

Constable chasing poor Pick. Pick hiding from constable.

SAM

(Griselda voice)

Why constable chase? What Pick do?

THOMAS

Morgard looks at what Pick is holding.

ALFIE

It appears to be a silver spoon engraved with a heart.

THOMAS
(Morgard voice)
Pick, did you steal this spoon?

ALFIE
(goblin voice)
Well, yes, but Pick likes the shiny.
Pick is all alone and has only the shiny.

SHAYLEE
That's very sad. Alfie, this is a very sad story.

THOMAS
It's a pretty basic moral dilemma, I think. I've played games like this before.

ALFIE
You hear men in armor close by.

SAM
That's probably the constable. I suppose now we have to decide what to do with Pick.

THOMAS
He did steal this. Morgard wouldn't like theft.

SHAYLEE
But he's just a poor little goblin. He has no one. Spoons never come singly. Whoever he stole it from certainly has more. Let him keep it.

ALFIE
Does Griselda have an opinion before the constable sees you?

SAM
I don't know. I'm still thinking.
(beat)
Griselda lets Pick hide in the bush.

ALFIE

The constable approaches.

(constable voice)

Hail, travelers. Have you seen a
sniveling little goblin roaming around?
Goes by the name Cherbook. He is a
thief and must be dealt with.

SAM

(Griselda voice)

Constable, me has seen--

ALFIE

(constable voice)

I didn't ask you, filthy half-orc.

SAM

Oh, that's it. Can I kill them?

THOMAS

That would go against Morgard's code.

SHAYLEE

How about we compromise and only
Griselda and Estella kill them?

THOMAS

Okay, I get it. Don't kill anyone. Just
let the goblin hide.

SHAYLEE

(Estella voice)

There's no one here by the name of
Cherbook. But we did see a goblin way
back down that path, near the sprite.

ALFIE

(constable voice)

Thank you, ma'am.

(Alfie voice)

The constable and his men leave. Pick
sneaks out, thanks you, and darts off.

SHAYLEE

How close is the blight, Alfie?

ALFIE
Getting a lot closer now.

THOMAS
We can't waste time. Let's go.

ALFIE
Shortly up ahead, you see a man
approaching on horseback. He carries a
lute and wears brightly colored
clothes.

THOMAS
Morgard approaches the man.
(Morgard voice)
Hello. We are in need of your help.

ALFIE
(minstrel voice)
I will help if I can. I am Lief
Comicry, the most famous minstrel in
the land.

THOMAS
(Morgard voice)
Well met, Lief. I am Morgard the
paladin. This is Griselda the barbarian
and Estella the bard. We seek a man
named Alfie.

ALFIE
(minstrel voice)
I have never heard of Alfie. I am
sorry.
(beat)
Did you say that Estella is a bard?

SHAYLEE
(Estella voice)
Hello, Lief. Yes, I am a bard.

ALFIE
(minstrel voice)
I've always wanted to be a bard. You go
on adventurers, rescue the princesses,
fight the dragons. It sounds wondrous.

SHAYLEE
(Estella voice)
I suppose it's pretty cool.

ALFIE
(minstrel voice)
I can pack a tavern and entertain the largest crowds, but I've never fought the villain and saved the day. I'll never be a hero.

SHAYLEE
(Estella voice)
Nonsense. You underestimate the importance of entertainment, Lief. You ease the burdens of adventurers and commoners alike. You bring joy and enrich their lives. Is that not also heroic?

ALFIE
(minstrel voice)
I suppose you're right. Thank you, Estella. If you travel further down this road, you will find answers to your questions.
(Alfie voice)
Lief departs from you.

SAM
This all feels weird.

THOMAS
It's not that weird if you've played games like this before. Come on. We don't have much time.

SAM
It just feels like there's more going on than random encounters.

ALFIE
You continue until night begins to fall. Ahead, you spot a light flickering in the window of a small, isolated hut.

SAM

A witch. I'm calling it.

SHAYLEE

I don't trust hags anymore, but I'm biased on account of one tried to have me killed.

THOMAS

How close is the blight now?

ALFIE

Very close now. You can't see much of the path behind you anymore. What are you going to do?

THOMAS

We have to knock on the door of the hut. It's clearly here for a reason.

ALFIE

Thomas, you're metagaming. Don't use Thomas knowledge to influence what Morgard does.

THOMAS

Do you want us to knock on the door of the hut or not?

ALFIE

What I want doesn't matter. But yes, that would be nice.

SHAYLEE

If we skip it, you'll just come up with another way to get us the information, won't you?

ALFIE

Sooo...you're knocking on the door?

SAM

Sure. Griselda knocks.

Echoing KNOCK. Creaky door OPENS.

ALFIE

(old man voice)

Greetings, weary travelers. I am Fred,
a hermit of the Southern Woods of
Alfheim.

SHAYLEE

Fred? I think Alfie ran out of clever
names.

THOMAS

(Morgard voice)

Hail, Fred. We adventurers are questing
after our lost friend, Alfie.

ALFIE

(old man voice)

I don't know of any Alfie. The only
thing that lives beyond here is the
dark troll, Daggerclaw.

THOMAS

(Morgard voice)

Tell us of Daggerclaw.

ALFIE

(old man voice)

Come into my home and have a seat.

(Alfie voice)

The hut is cozy. A fire crackles, and
the furniture and other accents are all
leather. You assume that the old man is
a tanner by trade.

THOMAS

We sit down.

(Morgard voice)

Fred, please tell us what you know.

ALFIE

(old man voice)

Legend states that Daggerclaw was once
a kind troll, but somewhere in his
life, he betrayed his friends. They
shunned him, and now he lives alone,
eating anyone and anything foolish
enough to come too close.

SAM

Sounds like a villain. I have a whole section on this character sheet talking about combat. I assume we're supposed to fight an evil troll.

THOMAS

Typically the trolls are enemies, yes. And combat is pretty inevitable in these kinds of games.

ALFIE

Thomas...

THOMAS

Metagaming. Right. Sorry.

(Morgard voice)

Where can we find Daggerclaw?

ALFIE

(old man voice)

He dwells deep in a cave on the cliffside. It is a very dangerous place. Many adventurers have perished on the way.

SAM

How do we know Fred is telling us the truth?

ALFIE

Do you doubt him?

SAM

Something seems off about this.

SHAYLEE

I was thinking the same thing.

THOMAS

What do you mean?

SAM

Why would a tanner live all the way out here alone? Wouldn't you do something more practical? Who is buying the hides he tans?

ALFIE

Remember that Griselda is not a detective.

SHAYLEE

Estella realizes all the things Sam just said. Because her Intelligence is fifteen.

SAM

My character is worthless.

ALFIE

Estella is right. It is weird that a tanner lives out here alone.

THOMAS

Morgard looks around the room. Is there anything weird here?

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE

Something seems off about the chair you're sitting on.

SHAYLEE

Shite.

THOMAS

What's wrong?

SHAYLEE

Estella examines the leather.

Echoing dice ROLL.

SHAYLEE (CONT'D)

It's human, isn't it?

ALFIE

It appears to be.

THOMAS

I don't think Fred is Fred.

SAM
Fred is Daggerclaw!

ALFIE
Fred stands and transforms, morphing from a decrepit old man into a towering dark troll. He bursts through the ceiling and smashes down the walls around him until you're all basically standing outside.

(beat)
Roll for initiative.

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE (CONT'D)
Griselda acts first. Then Estella. Then Morgard.

SAM
I think we've finally reached the part of the story where Griselda is useful.
I attack the troll!

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE
Griselda lunges with her battleaxe, but the troll easily steps out of the way.

SAM
Isn't he like twenty feet tall?

ALFIE
Yes.

SAM
How could I miss that? My attack is plus fourteen!

ALFIE
You rolled badly.

SHAYLEE
Estella casts a Sleep spell.

SAM
You can do that?

SHAYLEE
See, it's here on the sheet. Under
Special Abilities.

SAM
You have six spells! My only Special
Abilities are "foul odor" and "really
pissy."

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE
The spell fails to affect the troll.

SHAYLEE
Feckin trolls.

THOMAS
Morgard uses his divine radiance.

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE
Unfortunately, you didn't roll well
enough to call upon your god's favor.

THOMAS
What?

ALFIE
The troll winds up and slashes with its
claws.

Echoing dice ROLL.

ALFIE (CONT'D)
A critical hit on Griselda! She suffers
a mortal blow from the razor-sharp
troll claws. She takes thirty-six
damage and falls prone.

SAM
This is impossible. We can't even hit
it, and I'm already dying.

THOMAS

This isn't right.

SAM

Tell me about it.

THOMAS

No. We're too caught up in the game being a game. Look past that. This has to mean something more than a game.

SHAYLEE

Daggerclaw the troll betrayed his friends and was banished. Does that mean anything?

THOMAS

Even before that. Think about what's happened so far. Pick the goblin, stealing a silver spoon with a heart on it. What did the constable call him?

SHAYLEE

Cherbook.

SAM

Pick...Cherbook? Picture book?

THOMAS

That wasn't just a goblin! It was Alfie's jealousy of his little brother.

SAM

Representing Amelia with a silver spoon is pretty perfect, actually. Good symbolism, Alfie.

SHAYLEE

What about Lief, the minstrel?

(beat)

Lief Comicry.

THOMAS

Comic relief.

SHAYLEE

That's Alfie's sense of worthlessness.
He's not a hero. He's just the comic relief.

SAM

But we helped each of them. Made him realize his brother just needs more attention since he's little. And showed him that being the comic relief has value. So why is he still killing us?

THOMAS

Because we didn't solve it all.

SHAYLEE

We didn't solve Fred.

THOMAS

I don't think Fred is Daggerclaw. I think Daggerclaw is Fred.

SAM

Fred? Wait...like Alfred? So the troll isn't guarding Alfie...it is Alfie.

SHAYLEE

Alfie thinks he betrayed his friends. Left them to die. And now he's banished himself here.

THOMAS

He blames himself for what happened.

ALFIE

Guys, Griselda is currently dying, so it's Estella's turn. You have to decide what to do, Shaylee. The troll is gearing up for another strike.

SHAYLEE

What do I do? We can't fight him. He's rigging the dice rolls, continuing to torment himself.

ALFIE

You need to decide, or you'll forfeit
your turn to Morgard.

THOMAS

I have an idea.

ALFIE

Five.

SAM

Uh, hey, what happens to us in real
life if we die in Alfie's mind?

ALFIE

Four.

THOMAS

I said I have an idea.

ALFIE

Three.

SAM

I mean, that's cute and all, given that
you're not the one dying right now.

ALFIE

Two.

SHAYLEE

What's your plan?

THOMAS

Delay your turn until after me.

ALFIE

One.

SHAYLEE

I delay my turn until after Morgard!

THOMAS

I'm not Morgard.

Pencil ERASING.

SAM
What are you doing?

THOMAS
Metagaming.

Pencil WRITING.

ALFIE
What are you doing? You can't change
your character sheet.

THOMAS
I'm only changing my name. Isn't that
something I can decide?

ALFIE
Oh. I guess so.

SHAYLEE
Why are you changing...oh, Thomas...

THOMAS / NISSA
Fred. I am not Morgard. I am Nissa
Sifsdottir. Paladin, music store
manager, and friend to Alfie.

ALFIE
What are you doing, Thomas?

THOMAS / NISSA
I am not Thomas. I am Nissa.
(beat)
Fred. We know that you blame yourself
for what happened. But I am not lost to
you. You never betrayed me.

ALFIE
Niss?

THOMAS / NISSA
I forgive you for your bad jokes and
for that time with the fried chicken.

ALFIE
But the tower...I couldn't save you.

THOMAS / NISSA

You think you needed to save me? Uh, excuse me, a woman can save herself without help from a man.

SHAYLEE

(whispering)

He's really good at playing Nissa.

SAM

(whispering)

He's known her a long time. She was always like that. You should meet her mom.

THOMAS / NISSA

Fred...Alfie. Everything is going to be okay now. We're together. We will always be together. Come with us now. We need to get back.

ALFIE

But I'm not sure--

THOMAS / NISSA

We need to help Mack. She needs us right now. I need you right now. Please. I know I can count on you.

ALFIE

Okay, Niss. I'm coming.

Leaving mindscape sound.

9.

SAM

Whoa. I feel super light-headed.

THOMAS

That was trippy.

ALFIE

(groggy)

Guys?

SHAYLEE

Alfie? Are you okay? Are you...you?

ALFIE
I'm me. I think.
(beat)
Am I me? How do I know if I'm me?

SAM
It's him.

THOMAS
This is incredible. We brought you back.

ALFIE
You did? I don't really remember what happened.

THOMAS
Do you remember the belltower? What happened in there? Did you see Mackenna and Nissa?

ALFIE
I remember everything falling. But...I don't think I ever saw them.

SAM
So we still don't know if they made it out.

SHAYLEE
I have to go.

THOMAS
Yeah, we should probably clean up this incense before someone--

STEPPING SIDEWAYS departure.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Did she just leave?

SAM
Uh, yeah.

ALFIE
Hey. The TV.

THOMAS
You want to watch TV?

ALFIE
No, it's on. Turn it up.

MADISON
(volume increasing)
(on TV)
...on the scene at the collapse of St. Patrick's church in Conley. Rescue crews have finished going through the wreckage. Fortunately, no one else was found. I'm told that the previous survivor is now officially the only person who was in the church when it collapsed.

ALFIE
No one else but me.

SAM
So that means Mackenna and Nissa got out.

THOMAS
But where are they? Why haven't they come back yet?

NARRATOR
Yes, Thomas. Why not? Where could they have possibly gone that would hold them, prevent them from leaving? What place, in-between, could they be?

10. Arcadia DANCE MUSIC. Massive doors OPEN and CLOSE.
Music MUFFLES.

ALDER NIAMH
Welcome, Shaylee. I am Niamh, an Alder of the Unseelie Court.

SHAYLEE
What am I doing here? How did you...

ALDER NIAMH
Summon you?

SHAYLEE

Only the Magister could do that.

ALDER NIAMH

The Magister is dead. As is Liliana.

SHAYLEE

Dead? How?

ALDER NIAMH

That is what we would like to know.

SHAYLEE

I don't work for you. If he's dead, I
don't work for anyone.

ALDER NIAMH

Then leave, if you think you can.

(beat)

No? Not so easy to walk out?

SHAYLEE

What are you doing? Why can't I leave?

ALDER NIAMH

You are mistaken, Shaylee. Your
contract was not with the Magister. You
worked for the Unseelie Court. Which
means that, now, you work for me.

THE END