

THE HIDDEN PEOPLE

Episode 2.20

"The Reaping"

Written by

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TEASER

211. Arcadia, the Hall of Sagas. Biography music.

NARRATOR

Niamh. Bastard daughter of Mirielda, a laird of the Court. Niamh was cast down for the shame she represented, doomed to be a drudge, the lowest caste of the Hidden. She slaved, worked ragged in service of those with more status, which was virtually everyone. Other drudges mercilessly took out their pain and anger on exiled fetches, the only living things in Arcadia over which they held power. But not Niamh. She always dreamed much bigger than bullying disgraced humans.

(beat)

Niamh. Who earned the favor of lairds who sought to undermine Mirielda. Niamh elevated herself to equerry, eventually maneuvering into a position where she could access her mother. Mirielda entered their reunion preparing to be blackmailed by her discarded daughter. Niamh slew Mirielda with such speed and ferocity that the older, more powerful Hidden never even got a good look at her.

(beat)

Niamh. Laird of the Unseelie Court, taking her mother's position after Mirielda's untimely death. Desperate to rise even further, seeking nothing but total power, she devoted herself to studying both the history and the future of her people. While others schemed, she studied. She stayed as close as possible to the Magister and Liliana, determined to learn everything she could from them, seeking both wisdom...and weaknesses.

(beat)

Niamh. Snatching the role of alder in the power vacuum created by the death of the Magister. Manipulating the other

alders and pitting them against one another. Creating a scenario where the Hidden would demand a new leader. And she knew it must be her. She simply needed a way to take full control.

(beat)

Niamh. Once a drudge. Now an alder. Poring over ancient texts in the Hall of Sagas. Digging deeper than ever, reading every obscure scribe and scholar of the Hidden People, going back even further than the great schism that divided the Old Ones loyal to their god and the upstarts rallied behind the Magister, the god's killer. The knowledge she uncovered over decades of reading has served her well, and even then, she hasn't been able to read everything yet. For the past weeks, she has barely left the Hall of Sagas. She has just scoured and read, finding nothing to solve her problem.

(beat)

Until now.

ALDER NIAMH

(reading)

"Cast down and un-whole."

(beat)

Cast down and un-whole?

(beat)

What? It cannot be.

(beat, reading)

"The slumber of the broken."

(beat)

This. This is it. The secret they kept for so long.

(beat)

We shall crown a new Magister.

NARRATOR

Niamh. From drudge to alder. And beyond. Only a young upstart, methodical and ambitious, could have uncovered what the more tradition-oriented Hidden never knew. Through centuries, only she could have found the answers to lead the Hidden People to a new age. To dig deep into the past in order to find the future.

ALDER NIAMH

I simply need to use the Reaping to gain their attention before I commence the awakening. The Court will beg for me to take power. They will all beg.

END TEASER

212. The beach outside Shaylee's beach house.

ALFIE

I vote to hold all strategy meetings at Shaylee's beach house from now on.

NISSA

I vote to just live at Shaylee's beach house from now.

SHAYLEE

You're welcome to visit any time you can make it all the way out here.

NISSA

Yeah, I'll just call up my private jet.

ALFIE

My girlfriend can teleport.

RILEY

Space and time are mine to command.
(mock evil laugh)

THOMAS

Quiet down, everybody. We need to make sure we're all on the same page for tonight.

MACKENNA

Thanks, Thomas.

SAM

I'm prepped and ready.

MACKENNA

We need to divide up the five hubs. We'll have six of the Hidden People at each of these Arcadia entrances, and only one or two of us.

NISSA

We've got the hubs divided. I have plans for three of the hospitals, but I can't get into the birthing center in Venezuela.

MACKENNA

We have the name of one of the contacts there, so Alfie will be going in as Luis.

ALFIE

Mi identidad secreta.

MACKENNA

Thomas will take the hospital in Texas. Nissa and Riley will take the one in Australia. Sam gets the hub in Russia; it's the farthest from a hospital.

SAM

The more remote the better. I think things will get...loud.

NISSA

The last hospital is in India.

MACKENNA

That one's mine. They won't make it anywhere near the hospital in Mumbai.

ALFIE

How did you decide to take that one?

MACKENNA

That's where Niamh will be.

THOMAS

Are you sure?

SHAYLEE

When I had to go to her private chambers, I saw a map of Mumbai. I didn't understand what it meant until we located a hub there, but it makes sense. Normally, alders don't take fetches, but she wants a big win to sway the opinions of the Hidden People in her favor. She's probably planning to use this as campaign publicity.

MACKENNA

Well, she's going to fail. No one will vote for her after the shitstorm we rain down on them. Assuming she even survives.

SHAYLEE

Don't get too cocky, Mackenna. Niamh might be the only alder there, but she'll have five of the Hidden as her backup.

RILEY

And you don't actually need to win the fight.

NISSA

According to Dane's research, the rituals are weirdly specific, and the Hidden People care way too much about tradition, so if we can just get them to miss their window, we stop the Reaping.

ALFIE

I don't understand why they can't just try again tomorrow.

SHAYLEE

Nissa's right. The ritual is more important than practicality. Keep them from anointing the baby, making the changeling, and swapping them out, even if it's just for a short time.

SAM

Obviously Mackenna's in the most danger here. That doesn't seem right.

MACKENNA

You're all in plenty of danger.

SHAYLEE

The only danger I'm facing is to my wallet.

ALFIE

It's not totally safe for us, sure, but you're going to be a lot more exposed, Mack.

NISSA

Are you sure you don't want backup?

MACKENNA

We all have our part in this. Everyone's needed where they're needed. I've got this.

SHAYLEE

Remember: delay them. You don't need to fight to the death. If you need to run, run.

MACKENNA

I'll have a circle ready, just in case. And you all be ready to abandon ship, too.

ALFIE

Uh, I'm not abandoning my super badass plan.

RILEY

I'm also not abandoning Alfie's super badass plan.

SAM

But if you need us, Mackenna--

MACKENNA

I'll be okay.

THOMAS

You'd better be. This isn't a success unless all of us make it out safely.

MACKENNA

We will. Now I need time to prepare. Do whatever you need to do. We'll regroup when it's all over.

Mackenna walks away.

SHAYLEE

Mack, wait.

Shaylee follows. They walk together on the beach.

SHAYLEE (CONT'D)

No big hero plays, okay?

MACKENNA

I'm no hero, Shaylee.

SHAYLEE

I know you hate Niamh for what she put me through. I'm asking you to put aside your personal feelings and focus on the plan.

MACKENNA

I can stick to a plan. You've seen me stick to plans before.

SHAYLEE

Aye. And I've also seen you walk brazenly into the Magister's throne room with no weapons.

MACKENNA

It always works out, doesn't it?

SHAYLEE

Until it doesn't.

(beat)

I'm not trying to disagree with you. I know you're capable of what you need to do, and this plan is sheer brilliance. I'm impressed that Alfie came up with some of it. But it would work just as well if you weren't going to Mumbai. I know you're just going there for Niamh.

MACKENNA

She needs to be stopped. It will send a message to the rest of them to stay out of the human world.

SHAYLEE

Just be careful, okay? Extra careful. For me.

MACKENNA

Well, I wasn't planning on it, but since you asked nicely.

MACKENNA / SHAYLEE

(kiss)

SHAYLEE

I feel like there's something I'm supposed to tell you. But I can't quite...

MACKENNA

You can just text me when you remember.

SHAYLEE

Right. It'll come to me. I won't bother you anymore. You have the photos?

MACKENNA

I do. I'll see you after we win, Shaylee.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

213. A hospital in Australia.

NARRATOR

A hospital in Australia. The neonatal ward has new visitors. Nissa and Riley lurk in the waiting room, keeping an eye on the doors from both the stairs and the elevator.

NISSA

I'm ready to rain hardcore justice down on the assholes. Are you ready?

RILEY

"The damned stand ready."

NISSA

They'll probably be here any minute.

RILEY

I assume we'll know it's them from their black hats and goatees.

NISSA

The real monsters wear red hats, nowadays.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

214. Outside a night club in Texas.

NARRATOR

A night club in Austin, Texas. A group of the Hidden People emerge, ready to make their way to a nearby hospital. Unfortunately for them...

Police siren chirps.

POLICE

(through car loudspeaker)

Hold it. The six of you: stop walking. Stay right where you are.

(beat)

I said: don't move. Yes, you. Don't move.

Cops move in to surround the Hidden People.

POLICE (CONT'D)
 (through car loudspeaker)
 Turn and face the wall. All of you.
 Turn and face the wall!

NARRATOR
 It won't take long for the Hidden People to convince the police that the report they're following, a call from another precinct about drug smuggling, is a false one, the work of a talented hacker. Her companion waits at a nearby hospital, hoping the delay is long enough.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

215. A remote building in Russia. More nature sounds than city sounds.

NARRATOR
 An abandoned shopping center in Russia, once a vibrant location for a door to Arcadia. Now, it sits empty, a shell of its former self. No one around to see or hear as the Hidden People step from the doors.

SAM
 (whisper)
 I have eyes on them.

Shotgun pump.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Might only get one clean shot, but I'll make it count.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

216. Crowded street in Venezuela.

NARRATOR

An apartment complex in Venezuela. The Hidden People step out and start down the street.

ALFIE

The Hidden People are not so hidden anymore. I'm going in. Wish me luck!

Alfie walks quickly after the Hidden People and catches up to them.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Hey, you guys are waiting for Luis the Birthing Guy, right? Well, that's me. Follow my lead. It's my honor to take you to the birthing center.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

217. Quiet street in India.

NARRATOR

A normally bustling street in Mumbai is oddly silent. Unlike her stealthy friends, Mackenna stands in the middle of an empty road. Pedestrians and traffic alike avoid the road, diverting around it without even realizing. She wants this to be personal.

MACKENNA

(calling out)

Niamh!

(beat, drawn out)

Alder Niamh!

Arcadia doors burst open. Niamh emerges.

ALDER NIAMH

Mackenna Thorne.

MACKENNA

We have unfinished business.

ALDER NIAMH

I assume you're here for vengeance. The changeling trainer never returned and no longer answers our summons. You must have killed her. How tragic for you.

MACKENNA

It would be funny if you had any idea what you were talking about. This isn't vengeance, Niamh.

Mackenna draws her scythe.

MACKENNA (CONT'D)

But that doesn't mean I won't enjoy it.

ALDER NIAMH

I will enjoy having that weapon back.
(beat)
Stay back, lairds. This is my fight.

NARRATOR

Niamh draws a pair of long, thin swords from the air around her and strides toward Mackenna.

ALDER NIAMH

(quieter)
I promised you that the next time we met, it would end in your blood.

MACKENNA

Come and get it. Unless you don't think you have time to fight me.

ALDER NIAMH

I don't anticipate that killing you will take more than a few moments. And then we shall reap.

MACKENNA

Blah, blah. Are we going to fight or what?

Iron blades clash.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

218. Australian hospital.

RILEY

That has to be them, though I don't see any hats.

Hidden People walk into the room.

HIDDEN PERSON 1

Where is...everyone is gone. Who are you? Where are the children?

HIDDEN PERSON 2

I recognize her. A changeling. Her fetch died in the gauntlet.

HIDDEN PERSON 1

And the other. She was a prisoner of the Magister in Arcadia.

NISSA

Guilty. Also, I'm one badass hacker. A few carefully timed fake gas leaks dumped the building twenty minutes ago. No way you have enough time to track down the kids.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

219. Texas hospital.

NARRATOR

If the Hidden People paid more attention to the humans instead of treating them like ants, they might notice that the hospital in Texas is deserted. Perhaps it's their haste after the police delayed them. They rush up the stairs to the neonatal wing.

Hidden people run up stairs and throw door open.

THOMAS

Hello, Hidden People. I'm terribly sorry you missed the kids. And the nurses. Doctors. Everyone.

HIDDEN PERSON 3
What's going on?

THOMAS
Nissa cleared the building, so it's
just us. Did you want any muffins?

HIDDEN PERSON 3
We will settle for taking you, human.

THOMAS
Okay, but seriously, you should really
try these muffins first.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

220. Russia. Shotgun blast.

HIDDEN PERSON 1
(cry of pain)

Shotgun pump. Shotgun blast.

NARRATOR
They dive for cover, their enhanced
speed protecting them from the second
shotgun blast. The initial target,
however, is not so lucky. As his allies
try to get clear of the blast radius of
their companion, Sam lobbs a
fragmentation grenade directly into
their path of egress.

Grenade explodes.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
The grenade isn't iron, so it can't
cause lasting injury, but that doesn't
mean it doesn't hurt to take a blast of
shrapnel to the face.

(beat)
And speaking of blasts...

Hidden Person cracks and explodes.

Shotgun pump.

SAM

Come on, you bastards!

Shotgun blast.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

221. Venezuela. Alfie following Hidden People.

HIDDEN PERSON 4

How much farther? We are on a schedule.
It should not be this far.

ALFIE

Hey, I'm the nurse, remember?
Or...birthing center attendee. I'm your
way in. You have to trust me. Don't I
have a trustworthy face?

HIDDEN PERSON 5

Something isn't right. Where are you
leading us?

ALFIE

Just up here. Around the corner.
(beat)
See? Right there. Come on, let's hurry.

Alfie and six Hidden People hurry into a building.

HIDDEN PERSON 4

What is this?

ALFIE

Wait, did I say birthing center? I
meant abandoned gas station. This is
where you wanted to be, right?

HIDDEN PERSON 5

This is a trick. You work with the
rogue changeling, don't you?

ALFIE

Gulp. Uh, I'm not the nurse you're
looking for.

NARRATOR

Yes. That was his entire plan.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

222. Blades clash as Mackenna and Niamh fight.

NARRATOR

Mackenna and Niamh battle in the deserted street. Niamh quickly gains the advantage, using the speed and maneuverability of her swords to slip past the halfling's defenses and slice long lines of blood across her arms and body. Mackenna moves sluggishly, barely parrying.

ALDER NIAMH

Have you ever even killed anyone in battle? Ever learned to wield that weapon? No. Everything you know is just unearned knowledge. I'm essentially fighting Liliana now.

MACKENNA

Says the one who killed her own mother for her power.

ALDER NIAMH

I learned to use these blades well before that. I used them to end her life. I have earned everything I have.

MACKENNA

How nice for you.

NARRATOR

Mackenna stumbles, nearly losing her head to a powerful backhand swing.

ALDER NIAMH

This? This is what you bring to battle? This is what ended the Magister? I am severely disappointed in you.

MACKENNA

(struggling)

I don't need to win. I just need you to miss your window.

ALDER NIAMH

If I kill you, I don't need the Reaping. Your head will be more than enough to gain the attention of the Court and all of the Hidden.

NARRATOR

Niamh catches the scythe between her blades and disarms Mackenna with a twirl and a flourish. The scythe lands behind Niamh. She points a sword at Mackenna.

ALDER NIAMH

Of course, it looks like I may get both.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

223. Australian hospital.

HIDDEN PERSON 1

This is all the work of the changeling the alders have been seeking.

NISSA

Uh, credit where it's due. We all helped ruin your child soldier human trafficking plot.

RILEY

You're not taking any babies today. Suck it, Hidden People! You have lost, you big, dumb losers! Eat my shor--

Iron stabbing flesh.

NARRATOR

Perhaps, Riley, you underestimated how angry the Hidden People would be. Perhaps you underestimated their speed. Perhaps you underestimated how deadly an iron knife to the gut would be.

Construct explodes.

NISSA

Riley!

MUSICAL TRANSITION

224. Texas hospital.

THOMAS

Might as well turn around, head back home. Maybe wait another ten years. You can have some muffins for the road.

HIDDEN PERSON 3

Take him.

NARRATOR

Thomas is no match for their speed as two of the Hidden hold and drag him forward. The other four put their knives to his throat. Thomas might have found the distraction he wanted, but the cost will likely be much higher than he intended.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

225. Russia. Shotgun blast. Grenade explodes.

NARRATOR

Weapons more advanced than the Hidden use are good with the element of surprise. A shell filled with iron shot can kill the unwary Hidden. But once that surprise has gone, what hope could a human possibly have against a foe that can move as a blur?

Shotgun pumps.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Before she can fire again, they are upon her. One grabs the shotgun while two others hold blades and lunge.

SAM

Get off me!

NARRATOR

Perhaps we have found how they intend to stop the Reaping: by trading the lives of the children for their own.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

226. Venezuela.

ALFIE

These aren't the babies you're looking for.

(beat)

Uh, this isn't the Reaping you're looking for?

(beat)

I thought this would work a little better.

HIDDEN PERSON 4

You look familiar. You were brought before the Court. Tell us where the children are!

ALFIE

I'm not the Alfie you're looking for.

(beat)

Shit.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

227. Mumbai.

ALDER NIAMH

You thought you would just interrupt a tradition that goes back millennia, to the origins of humanity. You. I suppose you've sent allies to the other locations, yes? Your changeling

friends. Perhaps even the humans. All of their lives are forfeit. As is yours. Did you really think that just holding us up for five minutes would stop this?

(beat)

I was hoping you would justify the threat of your existence with an actual fight, but you can barely wield your weapon. A waste.

NARRATOR

Her blade presses against Mackenna's chest.

MACKENNA

One thing you should know, Niamh. I didn't send my friends to stop the Reaping.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

228. Australian hospital.

NARRATOR

Nissa runs. With no one else in the entire hospital, the Hidden People have decided to take their vengeance on her. The chase is brief.

NISSA

No! Get off me! Get off--

Iron stabbing flesh. Construct explodes.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

229. Texas.

THOMAS

Wait! Before you kill me, there's something you need to know.

Watch alarm goes off.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Perfect. That was your window. You missed your--

Iron stabbing flesh. Construct explodes.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

230. Mumbai.

NARRATOR

In Russia and Venezuela, Sam and Alfie each meet the sharp end of an iron blade. Each one bursts into leaves.

MACKENNA

That sinking feeling in your gut right now? It's you realizing that you've lost. There's a reason I can't fight you. But wait for it.

NARRATOR

Niamh lunges, her sword aimed for Mackenna's heart. Mackenna's eyes flash with power as her life force floods back into her with the destruction of her constructs. With a loud clap, she catches the blade between her hands.

MACKENNA

You wanted a challenge? I'm whole again.

NARRATOR

Mackenna vanishes from sight. Niamh smartly turns, and she barely ducks when the scythe lifts off the ground and tears apart the air above her head. Mackenna reappears holding the weapon.

ALDER NIAMH

This was all a trick?

MACKENNA

A trick? You have no idea.

They fight.

NARRATOR

They clash again. But this time, Mackenna matches Niamh blow for blow. Their speed and strength are an exact match; neither gains any advantage, but neither gives any ground.

MACKENNA

Every one of your teams failed. One of the Hidden even took a lethal dose of iron buckshot.

ALDER NIAMH

How would you know this?

MACKENNA

I've been listening in the whole time you were rambling on about how you would kick my ass. A few leaves, a little magic, a bit of personality tweaking to make them resemble my friends.

ALDER NIAMH

You made changelings of your allies.

MACKENNA

Changelings? Fuck you. Changelings are alive. They think and feel. I don't play with lives like that. I made automatons with some preprogrammed personalities and goals. Not too much unlike the giant monster I made. And I left a little bonus inside, in case we didn't delay them enough.

231. Venezuela.

HIDDEN PERSON 4

He...he was a construct? I don't understand.

HIDDEN PERSON 5

Wait, what's that in the leaves?

HIDDEN PERSON 4

It's blinking...

Explosion.

232. Mumbai.

MACKENNA

The charges weren't huge. And Shaylee's covering the damages with anonymous donations. But the iron shrapnel probably took out whoever was standing too close.

ALDER NIAMH

Cowards, all of you. So afraid to risk your actual allies that you make constructs while they sit at home. Or would they not even help you?

MACKENNA

See, that's the part of this that's the trick. While you went out on your little baby stealing mission, the rest of the Hidden People performed the ritual of waiting around for you to return through the hub doors. So guess what they weren't watching? All the other doors into Arcadia.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

233. Arcadia.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile. In Arcadia.

SAM

These four are the last ones.

THOMAS

The other kids are all safe?

RILEY

Yep, I've already moved them. All fifty-six of them. Safe as houses.

ALFIE

Good, because my arms are tired. Infants are heavy!

NISSA

You've mostly been carrying the two-year-olds.

SHAYLEE

Sam, hang back a second while they get them out. We'll meet you all later.

THOMAS

Be careful, whatever you're doing.

RILEY

Come on, hurry up.

ALFIE

Remember, walk backwards out the door.

Thomas, Nissa, Alfie, and Riley run away.

SAM

What are we doing?

SHAYLEE

We've cleared out the nursery, but they don't know that yet. I have a little surprise to leave them in place of the children.

SAM

Are those what I think they are?

SHAYLEE

Aye.

SAM

I like the way you think.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

234. Mumbai. A lull in the fight.

ALDER NIAMH

No.

MACKENNA

Yes. By now, they've cleared out every child fetch from Arcadia. All sixty of them.

ALDER NIAMH

Stop watching and get back, you fools!
To the nursery! Stop them!

Hidden People run away.

MACKENNA

Your power is over. Your time is over.
Your influence in the human world is done.
No more fetches to enslave. No more changelings to hunt.

ALDER NIAMH

No!

Fight resumes.

NARRATOR

Usually, Mackenna Thorne is the hotheaded spitfire in any given scenario. It seems, now, that she has met her match in brazen stupidity. Mackenna easily sidesteps an all-in lunge and boots Niamh to the ground. The alder rolls away and comes up with her swords ready. But she looks back at the door to Arcadia.

ALDER NIAMH

We will finish this. I promise you.

Niamh runs.

MACKENNA

Anyone that comes after us dies. You'll all learn that lesson quickly. Do everyone a favor and stay in Arcadia.

Door slams shut.

235. Arcadia. Niamh sprinting.

ALDER NIAMH

(calling out)

Everyone, get to the nursery! Seal all entrances! Find the humans! Secure the fetches! They cannot--

Massive explosion. Niamh is thrown back.

NARRATOR

Yes, that would be the nursery. The one the Hidden People swarmed to. Even with iron shrapnel in the charges, not many Hidden People are killed. The damage to their pride, however, to their way of life...

ALDER NIAMH

No.

NARRATOR

It would take quite the event to take attention from this spectacular disaster. Perhaps an elaborate trial for the person responsible followed by a glorious coronation. Hypothetically.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

236. Outside of Shaylee's beach house.

ALFIE

Thank you, everyone, for acknowledging my vote to hold all meetings at Shaylee's beach house.

NISSA

Loath as I am to say it, I think we need to be thanking you, Alfie.

MACKENNA

I'm with Nissa. This is the most mature plan you've ever had. By a lot.

ALFIE

I appreciate that. Like, no joke. I literally have no joke.

SAM

What's the status on the building?

THOMAS

Have they broken ground?

ALFIE

Oh, more than that. They'll have the whole thing done next month. And then, Saint Xavier's School for Gifted Youngins will officially open for sixty former fetches. We've got the kids staying at a few different hospitals now, getting checked out in case the Hidden People did anything to them in Arcadia.

NISSA

We hired staff already.

RILEY

Nissa and I are on the board.

NISSA

As soon as the facility is ready, we'll move all sixty kids in. They'll have normal lives in a safe environment. Lots of therapy, too.

SHAYLEE

Hopefully the Hidden People didn't do too much damage to one and two year olds.

ALFIE

Hence the therapy. Just in case.

MACKENNA

How proud of you is your mom? On a scale of one to you get your trust fund back?

ALFIE

Honestly, all the money went into the school and then some. But my parents loved the idea of helping out trafficked kids so much that they raised the rest from their rich friends.

SHAYLEE

You're welcome.

ALFIE

And Shaylee wrote a check, too.

SHAYLEE

My real superpower is my bank account.

RILEY

Check my guy out. Alfie O'Toole, genius, billionaire, playboy philanthropist. Except poor.

NISSA

And guitar tuner. Don't forget guitar tuner.

THOMAS

So you'll still be working at SoundScapes, I take it.

ALFIE

Yeah, looks like.

SAM

That took a lot of courage to give up your fortune.

ALFIE

All I did was spend money that I never earned. Mack's the real hero.

MACKENNA

Huh?

ALFIE

You led us in a wild battle to stop the Hidden People and save a bunch of kidnapped children. You fought one of their leaders to a standstill and sent her packing.

SAM

Don't forget the bombs. I really enjoyed the bombs. I wish we could have seen that nursery in Arcadia go up in smoke.

THOMAS

I'll be content with knowing we all got out safely.

SHAYLEE

The nursery was symbolic. It's not like it will stop them, or even slow them down much. But missing out on the Reaping and losing all the youngest fetches will be a serious blow. They were at each other's throats before this. Now, I wouldn't be surprised if it's all-out civil war.

RILEY

Two Hidden enter. One Hidden leaves.

ALFIE

Heh. Leaves.

MACKENNA

You two are so perfect for each other it's disgusting.

NISSA

I just vomited a little in my mouth.

THOMAS

Well, I for one think this calls for a celebration. Mackenna?

MACKENNA

Yeah, we can party tonight. We earned it.

ALFIE

Mostly me.

MACKENNA

But tomorrow, we have more work to do.

SAM

Uh, didn't we do enough work? We stopped the Reaping. Killed some Hidden People. Sent them packing.

MACKENNA

We did. They're on the ropes now. And that's why we can't let up. If we give them enough time to regroup, they'll be back at it. And they'll definitely come after us.

SHAYLEE

They have long memories and even longer lives.

MACKENNA

So we're taking the fight to them. I'm not sure how, and I'm not sure when, but we'll find a way, and we'll do it soon. We're going to make things safer not just for us but for everyone else they victimize.

RILEY

Awesome speech. Now let's get this party started.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

237. Arcadia.

NARRATOR

Niamh. From drudge to alder. She's enjoyed more victories than defeats, so this particular failure hurts far more than anything else she's experienced. Days after the battle, Niamh still paces the empty dance floor just inside the doors to Arcadia, both humiliated and furious. She can feel her control slipping, see her ambitions crumbling. It would take a miracle to repair her reputation after such an epic downfall. And one should never count on a miracle.

Tiny knock at the door. Niamh slowly crosses the room and opens the door.

NARRATOR

An eyeless doll stands in the doorway. Without a word, it takes Niamh's hand. Whether from despondency or defeat, she follows it wordlessly into an English town at night. The two pass houses before emerging into the countryside. And there, beneath a giant oak...

ALDER NIAMH

You. I know who you are.

BLACK ANNIS

Alder Niamh. Black Annis knows of this one. Black Annis knew this one's mother. Mirielda. This one slew her own mother. Black Annis cares not. Black Annis never liked Mirielda, anyway.

ALDER NIAMH

What do you want, Black Annis?

BLACK ANNIS

Black Annis has something this one wants. This one has something Black Annis wants. Black Annis and this one will bargain.

ALDER NIAMH

What could you possibly have that I want? Monstrous dolls?

BLACK ANNIS

Do not listen, Winston! Cover your ears!

ALDER NIAMH

I should kill you where you stand.

BLACK ANNIS

But then this one would never see. Black Annis has found something for this one. Just hours ago, the halfling has walked right into Black Annis's home.

ALDER NIAMH

Mackenna Thorne?

BLACK ANNIS

(chuckles)

Black Annis knew this one would be interested in a bargain. Come, Winston. Parlay awaits.

NARRATOR

A miracle, indeed.

THE END