

She's still here!

Our Ladies and Gentlemen are asked to investigate a seemingly absurd marriage between an elven widower and a young human woman. It's clear that the spirit of Lord Fatestring's late first wife didn't leave their picturesque estate of Rosefield, but what exactly does "spirit" mean?

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Synopsis

She's still here! is an open-ended adventure best suited for socialites and investigators. It is centered around the legacy of glamorous Helena Fatestring, the late lady of Rosefield, a remote country estate in Alfheim. The PCs will travel there after being asked to investigate Helena's husband's strange deeds – just in time to save Daphne, the new Lady Fatestring, after her suicide attempt, and to encounter the mysterious hellhounds from Alfish moors. After this scene *She's still here* becomes a sandbox-style

game, with descriptions of main NPCs and Rosefield instead of a set order of events.

It is worth noting that *She's still here* is heavily inspired by Daphne de Maurier's novel *Rebecca*. My main addition is the hellhound/Ceola subplot which, while probably not being as good as Mrs de Maurier's intricate plot, adds a layer of complexity and mysterious, gothic atmosphere very fitting Alfish moors and villages.

The opening scene – a memorial ball

PCs are invited to the ball held in Lyonesse to celebrate the memory of late Helena Fatestring, the most active and most popular member of Alfish high society, a judge of elegance and good taste. Her death during a mountain hike two years ago was a shock for everybody. A month ago, though, something no less shocking happened: the widower, Lord Percival, returned from a trip to Aquitaine with a new wife! Furthermore, he didn't marry an elven lady, but an obviously lowborn human! Lord's decision is completely incomprehensible – it is against the social rules, against his wife's memory, and probably even against his own taste, for even most beautiful humans are bulky and unrefined for elven standards. In fact, the main point of the ball is to show the world that there are still people loyal to Helena, poor soul betrayed by her husband.

Players know all these facts from their friends or from newspapers. At the ball, they can find out even more by talking to other guests, especially Suzanne Austin, Helena's good friend and the host of the ball. The most popular theory is that Lord Percival, eccentric as always, has consciously entered a marriage that would make everybody unhappy –

including him and his new wife. It may sound crazy, but in fact, most of the guests do believe him to be crazy.

Furthermore, nobody remembers Daphne's name – they call her simply “Lord Percy's new wife” or even “that girl”.

There is also much talking about two other people. The first of them is Edward Derey, the butler of Rosefield. He is praised as a really faithful servant of Helena who keeps Rosefield in the same state she left it. The other person is a woman addressed only as “the Witch”. It is said that she arrived in Rosefield soon after Helena's death, since the deceased Lady Fatestring would banish all witches (see **Appendix: Witches of Alfheim**) from her estate's surroundings. However, Lord Percival let the Witch stay – it was his first crime against Helena's memory, but in that time everybody was shocked by her death and nobody protested. However, not much later the Rosefield village was attacked by hellhounds – fierce, demonic dogs that inhabit Alfheim moors and deep forests. Their connection to the Witch was obvious, especially since they didn't attack her, but Lord Percival got convinced that she is innocent after a single conversation. Everyone thinks he's been charmed by her magic. However, Ladies and Gentlemen interested in this matter will soon get to talk with Stephen Mittrel, trollish hunter who tried to drive hellhounds out from Rosefield. He also suspected the Witch, but in the forest he met a giant talking hellhound who actually encouraged him to kill the hag. Since then Stephen, aware that they are enemies, thinks that the Witch has indeed nothing to do with these fiendish canines.

Besides all this gossip a ball is a ball, an opportunity for a lot of fun, good food and flirting! Let your players meet their old friends and find new ones, regain Reputation (if they have lost any during previous game sessions) and admire art from all around Alfheim collected in the Estate. Everything has been chosen to suit Helena's taste, so if PCs spend some time watching things gathered here, they'll gain a +3 bonus on all social rolls against Edward Derey. But don't tell them that right now.

When the party ends, Suzanne Austin will ask our Ladies and Gentlemen for a private conversation. Its topic is easy to guess, isn't it? Mrs Austin asks her guests to go to Rosefield and discover the truth

behind Lord Percival's new marriage. She asks not to hurt the new Lady Fatestring in any way and promises help from Edward Derey.

I hope that all the strange circumstances surrounding this case would already stir players' curiosity and they are willing to investigate the case simply for the honour of Alfheim's upper class. If not, Mrs Austin will promise to give an equally splendid ball to celebrate *them* if they succeed. If this offer wouldn't be enough, she'll simply promise money, but getting to this point probably means that your players don't understand their Ladies and Gentlemen's role in the world of *Wolsung*.

Whatever they will get in return, the players are heading towards Rosefield. Let's see what awaits them there...

A suicide attempt!

Rosefield is located in northern Alfheim, in the shadow of a huge mountain range. When PCs drive there, it's very foggy outside and despite having a map they are not sure if they're going the right way.

Luckily, after a moment, a sign appears next to the road, welcoming to Rosefield! Soon, the way up to the estate appears...

Then a terrific howl cuts through the night air! A fiery light blinks in the fog and two hellhounds appear – as black as night, as big as horses and as mean as furious trolls! Players can engage them in any kind of confrontation and demand any reasonable stakes – driving them off or gaining their respect seem most suitable.

However, there's one special rule: at the beginning of this confrontation, you put a queen of clubs at the middle of the gaming table. This card can be played both by you (for the hounds) and by the players, and it can be played only once, so whoever uses it first discards it. It gives the usual +4 bonus *and* it can be played in conjunction with archetype and/or power card, so properly used it can give a great advantage. Waiting for a suitable moment, but also trying to use the card before the opposing side, will add a little tactical complexity to this confrontation.

Of course, this card introduces a new element of scenery, but don't tell in advance what it would be. When the card is played by either side, a beautiful young woman – Daphne Fatestring! – jumps from a cliff and falls nearby PCs and the hellhounds. Getting to her is a move action, helping her requires a TN 15 *nature* or TN 20 *common knowledge* test. In either case, the fall isn't lethal, but without immediate care (that is, without providing effective help before the end of the confrontation) she'll be in a coma for the next few days. If the players manage to help her, she'll be weakened but stay awake.

What happens next depends largely on what Daphne tells the party (see her description) and where they decide to go. They can drive to the Rosefield estate, the village, or maybe hide the poor woman far from civilization.

From this moment on, the whole adventure is driven by interactions between the players and five most important NPCs of this story. You may have to push action forward to avoid a dead end, but generally players' actions and NPCs' responses to them should build the whole plot. So it's time to introduce you to the key characters as well as to Rosefield itself. Let's begin with the latter.

Rosefield

Rosefield is the name of both Fatestring's estate and the village built near it. The estate – sometimes even called a "palace" – is placed on a steep hill just south of the mountains. It is surrounded by a gigantic garden in a typical Alfsh style: everything's wild and lush, with minimal attempts to civilize the greenery.

Rosefield itself is probably the most beautiful country estate in the whole Alfheim. It is famous for its large main hall where carnival balls are held, and the west wing, completely redecorated by Helena in an eerie, dreamy, slightly gothic style.

The Rosefield village is first and foremost the food supply for the palace. There are a few houses, an inn and a small Alfsh chapel run by sister Clara, a helpful and motherly halfling.

Main NPCs

I begin every NPC's description with "fluff" text about his/her past, then write what his/her current goal is and finally what new goals may come to his/her mind as the plot unfolds. Stats come last.

Daphne, the new Lady Fatestring

Daphne is a typical damsel in distress – beautiful, good-hearted and extremely shy. When Lord Percival ("Percy" for her) fell in love with her, she felt like in a fairy-tale. However, when they returned to Rosefield after their honeymoon she found herself no match for Helena – even though Helena is dead. Everybody compares her to the late Lady Fatestring, Edward Derey shows her ill-hidden contempt, and Percy became upset and short-tempered despite assuring her of his unchanged love. Just before our Ladies and Gentlemen reached Rosefield, Daphne had a dramatic conversation with Edward, who had indirectly suggested that it would be best for everybody if she killed herself. Desperate, she decided to jump off the cliff.

When she wakes after the fall she'll be in despair and will try to commit suicide again if the PCs won't do anything. A discussion is needed to change her mind, and she'll still be distraught until she gets a clear proof of Percy's love or until she begins a new life.

Current goal: die to save Rosefield from hellhounds and let Percy be alone with his memories.

Possible goals:

- Disappearing from Rosefield forever and starting a new life;
- Trying harder to regain Percy's love and becoming Helena's worthy successor;
- Confronting Edward Derey and firing him or making him remove all signs of Helena from Rosefield.

Mechanics:

Default conflict: discussion

Opponent, human, dice pool 2d10, challenge 3

Abilities:

A real talent: Daphne always paints when she needs to collect her thoughts and there's something magical about her works. Anyone watching her paint can make a TN 15 *occultism* test to find out that after a little practice (rules-wise: an increase of her *expression* skill) she could begin to use True Art.

Charmingly shy: using *bluff* or *intimidation* against Daphne requires spending a token.

Good and understanding: Daphne can use *empathy* as an offensive action during a discussion.

Combat: *brawl* 0/10+; defense 12.

Chase: running away 3/10+; endurance 12.

Discussion: *empathy* 9/9+, *expression* 3/9+, *persuasion* 6/9+; confidence 14. Charmingly shy, good and understanding.

Edward Derey, Rosefield's butler

Edward is an ogre in his middle age and a perfect butler. Thanks to him, Rosefield is both beautiful and well prospering, and everything looks as if Lady Helena still lived. He is respectful towards Lord Percival and all guests, but to earn his sincere friendship one has to show respect to Helena's legacy. Derey doesn't think the Lord does so, not after marrying Daphne. Furthermore, Helena's husband couldn't have ever been really worthy of her, otherwise she'd have appeared to him after her death.

That's because Helena's spirit still lives in Rosefield, or at least Edward believes so. He's the only one who knows the true reason of her death: Lady Fatestring committed suicide! She was not a pureblooded elf, but an alvar – an elf with a bit of troll blood – and alvars go insane as they age just as troll women do (that is, without physical changes). Helena began having trouble with her tangled mind so she decided to enter her beloved mountains and die there instead of losing free will. However, she left Edward an orchid enchanted to grow for as long as she is in Rosefield. Though he has never seen her ghost, the

flower is still in full bloom so he is certain that Helena is watching over her home.

Edward will gladly show the orchid to Ladies and Gentlemen acting as investigators on Lady Austin's behalf to convince them that Helena is still present in Rosefield. However, simple TN 10 *occultism* test will show that the flower is, in fact, enchanted simply to grow for eternity! Persuading Edward that his mistress has lied to him requires winning a discussion and will cause him undergo a serious nervous breakdown.

Current goal: remove Daphne from Rosefield at any cost!

Possible goals:

- Summon a ghost of Lady Helena to find out why she lied to him;
- Burn Rosefield down if Lord Percival wants to get rid of Helena's legacy.

Mechanics:
Default conflict: discussion

Opponent, ogre, dice pool 2d10, challenge 4

Abilities:

Edges: Devastating critique, veiled threat, powerful attack.

Racial traits: He's just an ogre, superhuman strength.

Combat: *brawl* 6/9+; defense 14. Powerful attack.

Chase: *athletics* 3/9+; endurance 14.

Discussion: *persuasion* 6/9+, *intimidation* 9/9+; confidence 14. Devastating critique, veiled threat.

Hellhounds, legendary beasts

Hellhounds don't really come from hell. Or maybe they came from there once, a long time ago and decided to stay on this mortal coil? Either way, they are indeed hellish – giant, with skin like coal and fire burning in their mouths and eyes. And they are mean as hell, living only to hunt mortals. Generally,

they can't remain in one place for long, but a great disaster or a scent of great pain can make them stay forever. Players can find this out with a TN 20 *occultism* test. In Rosefield, only Ceola and Daphne know about it, and Daphne thinks that the pain that Percy feels as he has to be with her is what lets them stay.

Indeed, the beasts feel a great pain coming from Lord Percival (but reasons behind it are different, see Lord's description). For an average hellhound it means simply that he can prey on Lord's men, but Old Rotter, the leader of their pack understands more: he knows that Lord is fighting with some terrible sin he committed and that Ceola, the witch living next to the village, wants to relieve him of his guilt. Old Rotter can't get the witch himself – she protects herself with spells even more powerful than his anger – but he will manipulate or bully others into killing her.

Current goal: have fun preying upon villagers, find a way to kill Ceola.

Mechanics:

Typical hellhound

Default conflict: chase

Opponent, dice pool 2d10, challenge 3

Abilities:

Brawl over brains: one could discuss with hellhounds – such a confrontation represents attempts to tame them or gain their respect. However, they have little patience for weaklings and the first failed attack by any of their enemies makes discussion erupt into combat or chase. In such a situation, everybody gets their challenge markers renewed and stakes have to be renegotiated.

Edges: Bloodhound, relentless assault

Fiery bite: an attack with a raise causes its victim to catch fire and lose two tokens.

Frightening: causes Fear (TN 15).

Combat: bite 9/9+; defense 14. Fiery bite, relentless assault.

Chase: *athletics* 9/9+; endurance 14. Bloodhound, frightening.

Discussion: *intimidation* 9/10+; confidence 14. Brawl over brains.

Old Rotter

Default conflict: discussion

Opponent, undead, dice pool 3d10, challenge 4

Abilities:

All abilities of a typical hellhound without brawl over brains;

Assistance: once per session Old Rotter's rotting flesh can fall off his body and come alive as a pack of three ghouls.

Devil's tongue: undeclared finishers using *bluff*.

Combat: bite 12/8+; defense 16. Assistance, fiery bite, relentless assault.

Chase: *athletics* 9/8+; endurance 16. Bloodhound, frightening.

Discussion: *bluff* 6/9+, *intimidation* 9/9+; confidence 16. devil's tongue.

Lord Percival Fatestring, the troubled heir of Rosefield

Lord Percival hated Helena. She enchanted him with her wit, beauty and tenderness, but just after they got married she revealed to him that she wanted him only for Rosefield, that she would take one lover after another, spend all their money on exotic and decadent pleasures, and study dark arts while making him play the role of the happiest elf in the world, or else they would divorce and his family's reputation would be shattered forever. And this reputation was so important to Lord Percival that he agreed.

However, one day Helena asked him to secretly meet her in the mountains. There she told him that she is going to have a baby and that it will probably be an ogre! Lord Percival lost his mind and threw her off the cliff, killing her. A week later somebody found a body in a mountain stream and this corpse – which may in fact not be Helena's – lies now in family crypt.

Lord isn't insane as some say, but he has the fragile, moody nature of Alfish aristocracy. He is still unable to judge if he had the right to kill Helena, afraid both of being damned to Abyss in the afterlife and of having his family ruined if anybody finds out the truth. He honestly loves Daphne, partially for being the polar opposite of Helena, but in Rosefield he found himself too weak to fight his memories and couldn't give his new wife all the love she deserved because of his depression. What's more, every notion of Helena moves him – Daphne thinks it's still love, while in reality it's hate mixed with anger.

Current goal: bring Daphne home and let nobody know the truth about Helena.

Possible goals:

- Take revenge on Edward Derey for trying to destroy his wife;
- Gain evidence that he had the right to kill Helena.

Mechanics:

Default conflict: discussion

Opponent, elf, dice pool 3d10, challenge 4

Abilities:

Edges: Disarm, nerves of steel, well-aimed riposte

Racial traits: elven grace, hypnotic grace.

Splendid isolation: Lord Fatestring can easily turn his thoughts away from the events of this world. He can reduce his dice pool by 1d10 for one round to gain +3 to confidence during that round.

Combat: *brawl* (swordplay) 3(9)/9+; defense 14. Elven grace.

Chase: *athletics* 3/9+; endurance 14.

Discussion: *expression* 6/9+, *persuasion* 9/9+, *intimidation* 6/9+; confidence 14. Hypnotic grace, nerves of steel, well-aimed riposte.

Ceola, a witch holding a secret

In fact there was no baby, but one could say there were two Helenas. The lady was so evil that she couldn't be worse, therefore her change due to insanity had to be a change for the better. She began to feel pity for poor Percy and doubt the point of her whole life as a *femme fatale*. It drove her to suicide – not because of pangs of her conscience, but because she couldn't stand getting better! She lied to Percy about the child because she knew that he would kill her and thus ruin his own life.

However, not everything went as planned. Helena survived the fall, but the pain made her lose control of herself and her insanity progressed. And so Ceola was born – deformed, wounded and extremely good-hearted alvar witch. Having practiced magic while being Helena, she used her spells to make herself look even more wretched and become completely unrecognizable, then returned to Rosefield as a sorceress: a perfect alibi for appearing right after Helena – an enemy of these "savage" witches – was gone.

She helps those she hurt before – both common folk and Percy. The two meet regularly and he considers her to be the only person he can talk about his problems with Helena and her legacy. However, he still didn't have the courage to admit that he killed Helena – and only then will Ceola tell him that he didn't. She doesn't want him back – she had her chance and she wasted it – so she'll do anything to help Daphne.

Current goal: free Lord Percival from his guilt and memories.

Possible goals:

- Drive off the hellhounds;
- Reveal her identity to Edward and convince him to support Daphne.

Mechanics:

Default conflict: discussion

Opponent, alvar, dice pool 4d10, challenge 4

Abilities:

Edges: Getting on one's nerves, outrageous liar, veiled threat.

Racial traits: hypnotic charm (elven), flame of passion (troll)

Ritualist: powers: *illusion, second sight, shield, smite (occultism), telekinesis*; spells: *dispel magic, hold magic, weather control*.

Skills: *nature 6/8+, occultism 12/8+.*

Combat: *brawl 6/10+, occultism 12/8+; defense 12. Illusion, shield, smite.*

Chase: *athletics 6/10+; endurance 12. Illusion, telekinesis.*

Discussion: *bluff 9/8+, expression 6/8+, intimidate 9/8+; confidence 16. Edges, racial traits, illusion.*

A conclusion?

This adventure will end when everybody feels that it is the right time to end it. If the players discover Helena's secrets, they may write a happy ending for Daphne, Percy, Ceola, and maybe even Edward with everybody forgiving each other and planning a bright future. If they miss important clues, terrible things may happen: Edward may set Rosefield on fire, Lord Percival may kill himself if he ruins or loses Daphne, Ceola may get eaten by the hellhounds... everything is in players' hands.

Appendix: witches of Alfheim

Witches are numerous in rural parts of Alfheim, serving common folk as witch doctors and advisors. They are helpful and only rarely malicious, however, they're uncivilised and mischievous. They speak in riddles and demand strange things for their services – giving one's child a certain name, keeping light in the house every night for a month and so on. Nobody can ever know for sure that they aren't up to anything sinister. What's more, their absolute lack of etiquette and the fact that most of them are alvars (elves with a bit of troll blood) makes them unpopular among country's nobility. This makes the witches fight on two fronts, for they have another dangerous enemy: the industry. Their traditional, "flawed" magic is not tolerated in cities full of factories and machines, so increasing industrialization of the entire country is pushing them further and further away into wilderness. That changed one of the most important rules of witchcraft – not dabbling in politics – and now some witches align with conservative gentry, nihilists, or even the Phantom of Lyonesse's Opera, the most powerful anarchist in Alfheim.

You can use Ceola's stats for any other witch by altering her suite of powers and spells. Just remember that she is really powerful and if you want a less formidable NPC reduce her dice pool to 3d10 or even 2d10.