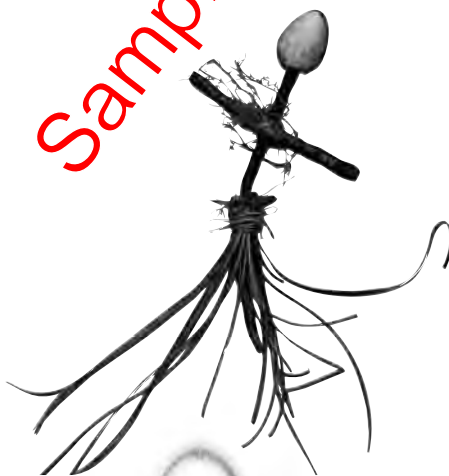


WORLD OF DARKNESS  
**Dark Ages**  
**FACES**™



Sample file

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# WORLD OF DARKNESS DARKNESS FAE™

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# Prelude:

## The Loss of Hadan's Creek

The village of Hadan's Creek was silent and still as we approached under the light of the crescent moon. The cluster of farmhouses and stables looked almost empty; shutters locked tight against the incursion of the wind, doors barred shut to keep the night creatures at bay. Although the Town Road ran straight through the center of the tiny settlement, rutted and pocked from the passage of wagons and horsemen, no one stopped here, and the place was in a dismaying state of disrepair. There was nothing to see, no inn to offer a comfortable seat and mug of mulled wine to a weary traveler. The town seemed dead, but Garain had chosen it regardless, and nothing I could say would sway him. He strode purposefully and without discussion toward the small cluster of houses. A pair of horses in a nearby stable whickered nervously as we passed, but no one came to quiet them.

I had to try again. I knew it wouldn't do any good, but I had to try.

"Garain," I began, my voice pitched low so as not to awaken the farmers and their goodwives. His jaw set firmly at the sound of my voice, pale skin glinting like polished marble in the sharp moonlight. I held my hands up in a gesture of placation, sending my crown of leaves to rustle. I repeated his name, using the lulling monotone I often employed to soothe the forest creatures that came near my grove, and almost against his will his feet stopped. Still, he refused to turn to me, or to look me in the eye.

"I will do this, Thewlis," he said simply, and as always, the beauty of his voice was enough to bring tears to my eyes. The drops ran down my cheeks, staining them with sap, but I heeded them not. Garain and I had been constant companions since the days of our Fostering. Although I could never grow used to the Tear-Bringer's voice, I had grown to accept it.

I pushed on regardless, something that amazes me to recall. We willows are not known for obstinacy; that is a trait better suited to describing the oak or the evergreen. It is against my nature to push. It is a testimony, I believe, to the strength of my feelings that I pressed on despite the resistance that the firstborn had given me.

"Lyselle was tricked," I protested. "Bepheth lied to her."

"Lyselle is gone," snapped Garain, looking down at the bundle clasped closely in his arms.

"Yes, Garain, I know." I walked next to him and ran a hand down his back. He wore the armor I'd made him out of my own branches, and I could still feel the magic I'd bound into those loops of wood wrapped around him, protecting him. "She is gone, and no punishment to Bepheth or his kind will bring her back."

"Neither will mercy." His voice was death, winter, bleak days with no true sunshine. "I cannot take arms against Bepheth and the coward will not fight me. I have no recourse but this."

"But the truce will end soon—"

"Thewlis, I don't care!" In simple speech Garain could make a stone weep. In anger, the dim light fled from him and left the three of us in shadows. His arms tightened around the bundle in his arms possessively, and I knew immediately that I had pushed too far. Still, I pressed. I cannot explain why I did it: it was obvious that I could never win this argument. The only explanation I can offer is that I feared the humans and what they might do to a faerie-born more than I feared my friend's temper.

"This is not justice, Garain."

He looked up at me, and stood there a long moment before he turned his back on me, silent and stern. He paced to one farmhouse that stood set back from the road, as if seeking some small measure of isolation. A small earthenware bowl filled with fresh cream sat on the doorstep, but otherwise, it looked no different from the other human dwellings we had already passed. I watched him, and I felt strangely small, frighteningly alone. It must have shown on my face, because Elsabet crept up behind me and slid her small hand into mine. She gave me a comforting squeeze; I winced inwardly at the feeling of cracking bark and snapping twigs, but still, I embraced the comfort she was trying to offer. I wanted to accept it.

She turned her eyes up to meet mine; they glittered yellow in the dark, giving her an almost feral look that contrasted with the sweet, soothing smile she wore. "All will be well," she murmured. "Remember, I know."

Elsabet did not give me a chance to answer. Those yellow eyes fell upon the cream on the doorstep and she practically cooed with delight, scampering over to crouch in front of the bowl, picking it up and drinking hungrily. Garain looked down at her slight figure as he stood on the step; she offered him the bowl, but he ignored the gesture. To her credit, she did not take it personally, but then again, Elsabet has always been accepting of her fates. Once, I think the same might have been said of me.

Garain put his hand to the door and pushed, but it would not open. This was less than surprising; most mortals are so afraid of the dark that I imagine them sleeping with the covers pulled over their heads to shield them from whatever might be lurking about outside. His jaw set tighter, and he glanced down at Elsabet. She smiled, cream dripping from her teeth, and stroked the door as if tickling a cat. From inside, we heard the wooden bar move, and the door swung open silently.

Garain hesitated then, either out of a sudden reluctance to go through with his task, or a sense of revulsion for what he was about to do. Neither of us had ever spent much time around mortals; we had always kept ourselves cloaked in the Mists whenever possible. Now we were about to enter the home of a mortal family, and mortals are and have always been dirty, mewling little things. But Elsabet remembered well her time spent living in a mortal village, and she scampered through the door, turning back to us with her eyes like foxfire in the dark. Garain followed, and after a moment's reflection in which I tried to think of some reason to turn back, so did I.

We passed the mortals with barely a glance. The female shifted in her sleep and reached out to the wooden cradle that rested beside her pallet. I looked down at the human infant that slept peacefully within it, and I fought against the wave of revulsion that swept over me.

"We cannot do this," I hissed through clenched teeth. "You cannot leave her here. The child is one of us, and she shouldn't pay for her father's deeds."

"It is the only way," replied Garain. He looked down at the face of his enemy's infant daughter, cradled in his arms. "I cannot keep her and I will not return her. Elsabet, if you would please..." He gestured to the cradle, to the human within it.

Elsabet knelt swiftly and pulled the child from the cradle. The child let out a muffled cry before her yellow eyes caught the infant's gaze and held it transfixed. The mortal woman shifted in her sleep, able to hear her