

Changling chapter 1

By : **Damian Aniela**

When Indigo loses his grandmother, he left to face memories of his younger years, that lead into a secret that had been held from him his entire life. Following the spirit of a long gone pet leads Indigo to a strange he feels oddly at home with. But the strange world holds new dangers he only read about in fairytales.

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Drake

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The rain tapped on the tops of the umbrellas softly as they huddled around in silence around the coffin. The most silent of them all was the small fair haired and pale boy in a green hooded sweatshirt, over his black suit that looked two sizes too big. After all the suit was a hand me down from his older brother, who stood behind him.

Of all the family the smallest boy took it the hardest, but never shed a tear. In fact he hadn't spoken at all since that day. When they arrived to the nursing home to find the Chaplin at her bed side praying. It was the first human dead body he had ever seen, and he never wanted to see another after that. She hadn't looked herself in the last few months. She was usually attached to tubes and wires, her appearance more gaunt and sunken in. Her smile had faded into a toothless gawking half grin. Her eyes lost that blue sparkle and were now dull and gray looking. She wasn't the woman he knew all his life. She had gone from his grandmother to a stranger in that time. Her mind slowly slipping and with it her personality and memories. She had faded from his life and was soon snuffed out forever.

Indigo hadn't felt the need to cry. Even after she was buried and the family gathered at the town hall for the wake. He sat in the corner alone, reading. His mother had come over to talk to him. His father gave him a hug. His brother had come over and set a piece of pie in front of him, coaxing the boy to eat, but Indigo was not hungry. His eyes scanned over the pages of his book. One he had gotten from her when he was six. Belle was never one to sugar coat the truth from Indigo, or avoid touchy subjects with the boy. She gave him the Grimm fairytales book as she told him "The cartoon versions are watered down crap. Read these. They are as the stories were meant to be."

The book was in both English and German. It helped Indigo learn German at a young age. He found he picked up on other languages rather easily. He learned German in less than 2 weeks. Enough to read and write the basics and follow a conversation in German. Indigo was quick and sharp that way. Something his Grandmother encouraged in him.

2 Days later:

Summer vacation was only a few days away, but Indigo got a free pass on account of his Grandmother Belle's death. He took his exams and went back home missing out on the last few days of school. Either way he didn't care. He had to help his mother and aunt with cleaning out Belle's house.

Grandma Belle lived in the woods, in a 2 story house. The last 4 years of her life, Belle had James, Indigo's brother, move all her important things down stairs where she could reach them. The upstairs was closed off and unused the rest of the time. Indigo recalled spending every summer here with her. Building forts in the woods and coming back to the house where she was waiting for him on the porch. A few times Indigo would find an injured bird, or other wildlife, and brought it back to her. Belle had the healing touch. She would mend whatever was wrong with the creature. They would keep in in a cage in the living room until the animal was well enough to be released. She always told Indigo that he had a way with animals that no normal person would ever understand. The older he got the more he could feel that ability. He could talk squirrels from the trees and coax wild cats to come eat from his hands.

The car pulled up to the house and his mother and aunt climbed out. Indigo was in the back wearing his green hoodie still. It was the last Christmas gift she had given

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him. Belle's favorite color was green, and she found a hoodie that was the same color as Indigo's eyes. The deep forest green of the fabric matched his eyes perfectly. Matched with his pale skin and almost white hair, Indigo looked like a strange doll.

"Sweetie, can you get those boxes and set them on the porch?" His mother asked. She walked up to the door and began to mess with the lock. His Aunt Laurie carried up a load of boxes as well and set them down.

"I'm almost scared to see the upstairs." Laurie said. "She had that thing closed off for years."

"Well she wasn't as spry as she used to be." His mother said. She pushed the door hard and it finally gave. "Well, let's get started." The two women marched into the house ready to work.

Indigo found himself unable to go inside just yet. He knew that photos of him and his brother were all over the walls. There would be unfinished crochet projects that would never get finished. There would be birthday gifts never wrapped and sent out. There would be her reading glasses next to an unfinished book. He would see the TV remote knowing that he would never sit through another old movie without thinking of her. There would be root beer drink mix in the pantry that would remind him of his summers with her. The bird cage that held so many animals as they healed would still be in the corner, empty. He realized the nursing home was like that cage, but Belle never got better. She was never set free.

Lost in his thoughts of what was inside, Indigo caught sight of something white in the corner of his eyes. He turned his head sharply to see a long white tail disappear behind the house. His feet finally finding motivation, Indigo took off in search of the tail's owner. He turned the corner to see the white tail bouncing off into the woods, over the low brush. From behind it looked like a long haired cat. He recalled his Grandmother had such a cat when he was little. The cat had been killed by a stray dog when he was over for the summer. He recalled hearing the cat's terrible cries as the dog attacked her, and his Grandmother racing out with the 22, but it was too late. *What was the cat's name?*

Indigo took off after the cat. He could still see her ahead of him. "Kitty." He called out. He hoped the cat would stop and come to him. Normally they did. *What was her name?*

He knew there was a small stream ahead where there was an old stone bridge. He played there a lot as a kid, in hopes of finding a troll. Looking ahead he realized he lost sight of the cat. Indigo pressed on, pushing through the brush and small trees. One of the larger oak trees in the forest had been struck by lightning some time ago and lay in the path now. Indigo was no stranger to climbing trees. He was agile and skilled at climbing. His mother often joked that he was a spider monkey.

Climbing up over the large tree trunk, Indigo moved carefully through the branches. He reached his hand out to grab a branch to steady himself. His hand gripped the wood tightly as he moved his weight around. He heard the creaking before he jolted forward when the branch snapped. Indigo fell sideways fast, the branch still in his hand. He felt a few other branches slap at his face as he tumbled out of the fallen tree and onto the forest floor. After lying in a crumpled heap for a moment, he mentally checked himself over to make sure nothing was broken. His eyes slid open to do a visual check. Just some scratches and a nasty scrape on his hand. He looked up to see the stone bridge right in front of him and on the wall of the bridge was the white cat.

Indigo stood up shakily. He began to walk slowly toward the cat with his good hand stretched outright.

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"Good kitty." He said softly. "You had me chase you all over. I hurt my hand." He held up the injured hand and smiled. He barley felt it at the moment. Walking toward the cat cautiously, Indigo noticed she was staring at him the way a person stares at a puzzle. Finally reaching the cat his fingers barely touched her snow white fur before she turned sharply and took off down the bridge.

"Wait!" Indigo stepped onto the stone bridge. He noticed the cat had paused at the end and turned to look over her shoulder at him. "Tinker. That's the cat's name." He said out loud. The cat gave a small purring mew sound as if to say "Yes, that's my name." She then turned and continues to head deeper into the woods.

"Tinker, wait!" Indigo took off after the cat. Behind him he swore he heard the stones of the bridge shifting. At this point though he was more concern with the cat.

Indigo stumbled along behind Tinker, the former cat of his Grandmother. He was sure he was this was strange and shouldn't be happening. Tinker was dead. He helped Bell bury her in the garden. He recalled his Grandmother was so broken up by the cat's death that she hadn't gotten another cat since that day. Belle was heartbroken over Tinker's death and it made the woman bitter towards dogs.

Every so often he would lose sight of Tinker, but soon spotted her white form bounding ahead of him. He stumbled along the forest floor without paying attention to the darkening sky above. The fact that the forest was beginning to fill with sounds his mind was not registering yet. Everything around him was starting to change. Indigo kept on until he swore he heard voices. He paused a moment and listened. His eyes looked around at the changed forest. He was sure that through the woods behind his Grandmother's there was a highway if you walked far enough. He didn't see any signs of a highway at all.

Indigo heard Tinker mew, signaling to him to keep moving. His feet found the pace again as he plodded on ahead into the woods. His eyes could see the white fur ball sitting on a stump waiting for him. He could see a camp fire behind her and two other figures sitting around it. They were larger, and human shaped.

Indigo paused a moment. The voices he had heard a moment ago belonged to the two people sitting at the fire. He was sure of it.

Tinker mewed again and he heard one of the voices.

"What's that animal on about now?" It was an elderly man's voice with a slight German accent.

"I don't know. I don't speak cat." The other voice spoke. It was higher pitched with a more Scottish sounding accent. It was hard to tell if it was male or female.

Indigo made his way closer until he could feel the warmth of the fire on his face. His eyes must have been playing tricks on him.

The elder male voice with the German accent belonged to some strange looking creature with pointed ears, wrinkled old face dotted in what looked like warts, with long hair and a gray beard. His eyes grew wide when they fell on Indigo.

The other was a slender creature with skin that looked like tree bark. Its face was young looking and still hard to tell if it was male or female. It had no defining features or clothing on at all. It too looked surprised to see Indigo.

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1/2 This was the point where he should be pinching himself and trying to wake up. A normal person would freak out and run away. Some reason, Indigo didn't feel threatened by these beings.

"Hi." He gave an awkward wave. The sleeve of his hoodie was pulled over his hands. "I think I'm lost." He said softly.

The creature with the male features blinked his eyes at the boy. He then looked at his companion, then back at the boy. "You are, very lost." He said. He stood up and gestured to Indigo to take a seat on the stump he had occupied.

"Have a seat lad." The tree like creature spoke. Its hand swept over out in a gesture like motion. Indigo noticed its fingers looked like tree branches.

1/2 Indigo took a seat, Tinker quickly jumped onto his lap purring loudly as she rubbed against his chest happily. Indigo looked at the two creatures that were now staring at him intensely.

"Where are you from?" The strange man asked. His hands fished around his pockets until he pulled out a pipe.

"My Grandma's house." Indigo answered honestly. "That way, past the stone bridge." He noticed both creatures exchanging a strange glance. "I've never walked out here this far before. I thought the highway was out here. Grandma told me to never go past the bridge. She was afraid I would get hit by a car or something."

"A car?" The tree creature looked confused.

"He means a carriage." 1/2 The other rolled his eyes. Indigo noticed the white parts of the eyes were actually yellow on him.

"Oh I see." The tree creature smiled and folded its branch like hands in its lap again.

"Yes so, I started following Tinker, my Grandma's cat." He looked down at Tinker who was staring up at him, still happily purring. "I helped Grandma bury Tinker when I was little. Tinker was killed by a dog." He said. "I have to be dreaming." Indigo laughed. "Going back to Grandma's brought back some memories, mixed with old fairytales and I must have hit my head when I fell out of that tree." He began to laugh hard now. "I'll just close my eyes 1/2 and when I open them, my mom and aunt will be standing over me." Indigo waited a moment before opening his eyes. He glanced around at the two creatures still looking at him.

"Did it work?" the man asked.

Indigo groaned and slumped down a bit. Why wasn't he waking up? 1/2 "No, it was an epic fail." Indigo groaned.

1/2 The one creature had lit his pipe and the tree creature had taken to fussing with the position of its hands in its lap.

"Well, I am LimasDay, and this is Tom." The tree creature said cheerfully. "I am a Dryad, and he is a Dwarf." It shook its head pleased with its introduction. "What Kingdome do you hail from?" LimasDay asked.

"Kingdome?" Indigo raised a brow. "I'm not from a Kingdome." He corrected LimasDay.

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"Every Elf is from a Kingdome." Tom snorted.

"I'm not an Elf. I'm a Human." Indigo sat up a bit more.

Tom and LimasDay both began to laugh. "That's funny. I didn't know Elves told jokes." LimasDay said.

"I'm not an Elf." Indigo protested. "I'm a human. I'm 15 years old, I live in Grayling Michigan with my parents and my brother. He narrowed his eyes. "I don't know what this is but it's not funny anymore. I want to go home." He growled.

LimasDay, Tom and even Tinker all stopped to stare at Indigo.

"You really don't know, do you?" Tom said baffled. "You really think yourself human." He glanced at LimasDay then back at Indigo. "You must have stumbled here by accident. I don't think you were meant to be here. Not yet any way." Tom said.

"What are you talking about?" Indigo asked. Before Tom could open his lips to say another word, the sound of a horse caught his attention.

"Rangers!" Tom shot up and began to kick dirt onto the fire.

LimasDay jumped up and took Indigo by the shoulders. "Run and hide boy!" It urged him.

"What's going on!?" Indigo held Tinker in his arms as LimasDay pushed him toward a fallen tree.

"Hide. Whatever you see or hear, stay hidden!" It urged him.

Indigo ducked down behind the fallen tree just as the horse with its rider came into view.

Indigo

Chapter 2: Drake

Chicago:

The smoke rolled from his mouth and out into the heated city air. His light hazel eyes followed the wisps of smoke until they were no more.

"You gonna help us out or what?" Chuck asked. He stood there with his arms crossed trying hard to look as tough as possible. To Connor he looked like a clown, complete with the oversized pants that often fell down around Chuck's ankles.

"I said I was in." Connor pushed the cigarette against the wall and put it out. "Besides, I run faster than the rest of you jerkoffs." He snorted. Connor pulled his ball cap off and adjusted his jet black hair. Usually he took the time to stile and spike it but today was a lazy day.

"Yeah which is why we need ya." Frank piped up. "I'll be look out and you be the runner, Chuck can be the muscle." Frank had their rolls rehearsed.

They were known by the locals in the neighborhood as the odd bunch. Chuck was a tall and lanky with dark skin. He tried hard to dress and act more gangster than he really was. Frank was a Polish, Italian mix. He was the mouth of the group. He was able to talk his way into or out of all sorts of situations. Connor was the stereotypical emo kid of the group. He spent more time painting his nails and messing with his hair than anything else. He felt looks were more important than his school grades. He was also the one the others referred to as the crotchety old man. Connor had a habit of acting far older than his years.

"After this I'm done. You two clown s can find another runner." Connor grumbled. Even with a smoking habit he was still the fastest of them. "Well let's get this over with." Connor placed his cap back on his head and grabbed his tattered backpack and tossed it on.

Chuck helped toss Connor over the gate as Frank took his perch on lookout duty. They gave the signal as both Chuck and Connor raced to the old warehouse by the river. Chuck grabbed the edge of the door, counted to three, then gave a hard yank, popping the door open with a loud snap of metal. The two froze in place for a moment and looked back to Frank. He gave the all clear signal.

Chuck turned to Connor and nodded. It was go time.

Connor bolted inside and darted into the darkness. His hazel eyes narrowed as they scanned the room. He spotted the cargo they were after and began to sneak in deeper. Connor slid along the wall with his ears and eyes open for any signs of human life, or guards. Finding all to be clear, Connor darted toward the cargo stacked in the center of the room. He pulled the back from his back and started to load up with the small boxes of brand new video game, hand held consuls into the bag.

"HEY!" Came a loud booming voice from Connor's left.

Connor didn't bother to look or turn his head. He darted toward the door only to find his entrance was blocked. He skidded to a near stop only to be grabbed at by another guard. Connor spun around and headed for the nearest exit. The open loading doors that faced the water. Connor could hear the guards coming at him and drawing close. They were fast but he was faster. Connor jumped over a crate and raced out the door. He could hear in the far distance, Frank yelling something.

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Connor felt someone grab the bag on his back and gave it a hard tuck. He slipped one arm free and felt the strap snap off at the other. The cargo was no longer important. They were just handhelds. Sure they could be sold at school for some primo cash, but it wasn't worth the time in jail, and being 17, Connor would do real time.

Connor saw the gates in this direction were higher and covered in barbed wire. Not so good for jumping over or climbing. He cut right and felt another hand reach out and brush his arm, but didn't grab him.

"Get back here you little shit!" The guard yelled. Connor saw the storm drain ahead. It was large enough for him to fit through. He could just see the conversation with his uncle now as to why he was dirty. Connor darted for the drain and in true baseball player fashion he slid feet first into the drain, only to find it opened up into a run off pipe that no doubt fed into the river.

Connor fell for a while before landing hard into cold water. It was dark and smelled bad, but he was still free. Now to find his way out of the drain and get out to the river. From there he could climb back onto shore and find his idiot friends and verbal tear them apart for this.

Connor felt along the walls as his feet moved cautiously through the dark water. Occasionally his foot would land on a rock and it would slip. He stumbled along like this for what seemed like forever, until he saw daylight ahead.

"About damn time. Those two are so going to get it." Connor grumbled.

He had to shield his eyes as he made it out at last. After a moment his eyes adjusted and he looked around. This wasn't the river, this wasn't the city, and this wasn't Chicago at all. Connor was eye to eye with a horse. His hand reached out slowly toward the large animal to touch it. He had to be sure it was real. The horse reared back its head and snapped its teeth at Connor. He drew his hand back quickly.

"You're not a troll." Came a soft female voice from behind the horse.

Connor leaned to the side and looked past the creature to see a girl with long blond hair and bright green eyes looking at him.

"I'm not a what now?" He asked.

"A troll." She repeated. She stepped closer to Connor. Super close, like invading personal space close. Her nose pressed to his for a moment before she backed up with a shocked look on her face. "Oh my." She gasped. "You're not a troll at all." She gasped.

"Duh lady. I might not be the hottest dude around but I'm not butt ugly. Where the hell am I?" Connor glared at her. "I smell like crap, I'm cold and wet, and my friends are idiots." He growled. Connor noticed the girl had not only backed up and pulled the horse back with her. "Sorry. I didn't mean to snap." He held up his hands in surrender.

"You really do not know what you are?" She asked.

"Uhm. I have no clue what drugs you're on girl but."

"I have never seen one of your kind in such a convincing skin before, and to have no recall as to what you are. That is a strange enchantment." She smiled.

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Connor stared at her dumbfounded. "Did I wander into a SciFi convention or something?" He grumbled.

"I read about those." The girl smiled. "I read literature from the human realm sometimes. Even though it is forbidden." She nodded. "Can you tell me of that realm?" She clapped her hands together happily. "Please. I wish to know about this thing called glitter, oh and why humans feel the need to drive large metallic carriages without a horse?"

Connor began to look around. He was waiting for Frank and Chuck to pop out as if he had been Punked or something.

"My name is Dinah." She waved. "And this is Gale." She patted the horse. Gale stared at Connor as if she wanted to eat him. He had never met a horse but he was sure they weren't supposed to be hostile creatures.

"I'm Connor." He waved back. "Now tell me how to get back home so I can forget this all ever happened." Connor ran a hand over his face. He needed a bath bad.

"You must have fallen through a portal." Dinah said.

"Good. Find me another and I can jump through it and head home."

"It doesn't work that way." Dinah said. She pulled her hair back and Connor noticed her ears were pointed and covered in random earrings that looked like they had slipped into this world from his. None of them matched. "You must find a magic user to open a portal specifically that leads into your world and your time. If they mess it up you could end up time traveling or in the wrong content or country." She explained.

"Well then find me the right one." Connor threw his hands up.

Dinah bit her lip nervously. "Easier said than done. Most of magic users in this realm have gone into hiding. At least the portal wielders have. They are sought after for great evil." Her voice cracked slightly.

"For what reason?" Connor asked.

Dinah shook her head. "No need to frighten you. You will only be here a short time. I will find you a magic user who can tap into portals. You will forget this place soon enough."

Connor noticed the sadness and disappointment in her face. It seemed she was already growing attached to him.

"Well for now, can we go someplace where I can dry off and change my clothes?" He asked. He shot her a small smile. "I'll tell you all about glitter. In fact." Connor dug into the pockets of his jeans. He had fingernail polish with black glitter in it. He held it up. "I'll teach you how to use this and you can keep it. A gift for helping me." He added.

Dinah's eyes lit up and she jumped up and down happily. "You have a bargain." She squealed.

"You mean deal. You have a deal." He corrected her. Connor handed over the nail polish and followed her and Gale.

Connor took a seat next to Dinah on the floor. She already had her toes and fingernails painted.

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"This is amazing, but it smells terrible." She wrinkled her nose. Her eyes then went wide again and she lunged at Connor. Her hand instantly touching the tattoo on his chest. "That is amazing. You are marked. No wonder you are cursed!" She looked up at him.

"Cursed?" Connor laughed. "It's a tattoo." He said. "It's a tribal design of a dragon." He shrugged his shoulders.

Dinah looked at the tattoo then up at him. "It is no wonder you chose that mark then." She said.

"Why do you say that?" Connor noticed she hadn't pulled away from him yet. She was really pretty. Scratch pretty, she was stunningly beautiful, and not a hint of makeup.

"You are a dragon." She whispered softly. "You are an endangered species. Like myself."

Connor looked into her eyes. They were amazing up close.

"And what are you?" He smiled. He would play along. He didn't mind her invading his personal space any more.

"I disguise myself as an Elf, but that is not my true form." Dinah gazed up into his eyes. "I am a unic.."

A loud explosion cut her off. It rattled the tree house that Dinah called home.

"What the hell?" Connor got up and looked out the window to see three horses clad in dark armor outside. There were three men dismounted from the horses, in matching armor. They were approaching the tree house.

"They found me!" Dinah sobbed. She pushed a leather vest and light gray tunic at Connor. "Dress quickly. We must escape." She urged.

Connor began to dress as Dinah darted off into a one of the rooms. She raced back out with a sword tied to her hip. "You must arm yourself as well." Dinah handed him a sword as well.

"I don't know how to use this." Connor gasped.

"You will learn quickly." Dinah smiled. She charged at the door just as the first man in armor kicked it in. Dinah swung at him with a loud cry.

Connor froze in place. He watched as Dinah's blade sliced through the man's arm and cut it clean off. She booted the man in the chest and turned to yell at him. Connor snapped back to reality and darted off toward her.

On the ground Dinah took a running charge at another guard. The two were locked in battle. Connor didn't know what he was doing. He didn't belong here. This was all a weird dream. He heard something zipping through the air at him. On instinct his hand flew up and grasped the air. He looked at his hand, stunned to see he had caught a small arrow shot by a crossbow. Connor snapped the arrow in half and tossed it on the ground. The guard who shot it at him was already rushing at him with a sword.

Connor found himself struggling to stay upright. He could dodge the attacks easily. The man in the armor was weighed down by the stuff and Connor was already faster than most. He heard Dinah behind him scream out in pain. It was the distraction the guard was looking for. The man in armor sliced at Connor's side with the blade. The sharp pain laced through him setting off an adrenaline rush Connor had never had before. In all his

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years he had never been so injured that it triggered this reaction.

Connor's eyes flashed a bright yellow as a loud deep growl rumbled up through his throat. He swiped at the guard closest to him. His fingers felt heavier and more powerful. He watched as the long black claws at the ends of his fingers tore through the armor like a hot knife through butter. He grabbed the guard and whipped him toward his comrade. The two collided in a jumbled clash of metal.

Connor moved quickly at Dinah's side and lifted her up. She had a nasty cut across her chest. She looked up at him and lightly touched his face.

"You need medical attention." Connor heard the change in his voice. It was deep and gravelly.

"There is a village to the east." She said softly. Her eyes kept sliding closed. "I am not healing fast enough." She whispered.

"Hang on." Connor growled. He lifted her up in his arms and began to run. He ran and ran until he saw buildings in the distance. His only thoughts were to save Dinah. He didn't think of how he looked at all.

He could hear villagers gasping as he rushed into the village square.

"I need a medic!" He growled angrily. He could see the fear in the eyes of the villagers. He didn't know how he looked, and he didn't care.

A woman pointed toward a building at the edge of the village. "The healer is there." She said softly.

Connor gave a nod of thanks before rushing toward the building with Dinah. He kicked the door in startling the old man inside.

"She needs a medic, or healer. Whatever!" Connor growled.

The old man walked over calmly. He didn't seem phased by Connor's appearance at all.

"Set her down there and take a seat before you explode son." The man said. Connor noticed the man had a strange accent. Unlike Dinah or the woman that showed him where the medic was. This man's accent was strangely familiar.

Connor set her down and watched as the man pulled out a medical bag filled with modern medical tools. The last thing he expected to see here. Connor looked up at the man. "You're not from here too?"

The medic examined the wounds and pulled out a stethoscope. "I'm from Ohio." He said plainly. "Now take a seat and calm down. You don't want to break that skin in here. You'll have all the kingdoms in an uproar." He grumbled. "Dragon's haven't been seen in quite some time. I can play you off to the villagers as a demon for now, but sooner or later, someone will wise up."

Connor took a seat as told. He felt his body easing up already. He began to feel lightheaded. He looked down at his hands and watched the large black claws retract into his fingers. Connor looked at his side where the sword had struck him and found barley a scratch there now. He felt sick and dizzy. This was too much. Connor looked up in time to see the medic threading a needle and that was when everything went black and he passed out.

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