

Strange Changeling Child

Plain Text Edition, v. 1.0

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Content Warning: This is a game about autism, ableism, the pain of pretending to be neurotypical, and the difficulties that neurotypicals place upon autistic people. It uses a metaphor that paints autistic people as literally non-human, which I personally resonate with in a positive way, but understand can be uncomfortable or triggering for others. Please take the utmost care with yourself as you read or play. This is a solo game, in part so that no one ever feels obliged by other players to continue play when it's no longer safe to do so.

There's a story that sometimes, fairies take children away and replace them with changelings: fairy-children of their own, who have strange mannerisms like being unwilling to look others in the eye, being more articulate than their age would suggest, or speaking with woodland creatures. All your life, people have whispered that you were a changeling, because they didn't act the way they expected you to, didn't fit in the way they wanted you to. This is mostly a case of unreasonable expectations on their part, but at the same time... you do have a little bit of fairy magic, don't you? You're already on such thin ice, will you reveal that magic to the people you care about, even if it might alienate you even further?

This is a solo game played with a single piece of paper, two six-sided dice that you can clearly tell apart from each other, and a writing implement. You can also play with a digital notepad file instead of a pencil and paper, but I suggest analogue if you're able. Over play you'll narrate or write a story while keeping and destroying notes about the people in your life as you deepen or damage your relationships with those people, or with yourself.

To begin play, take the piece of paper and fold it into three, like a pamphlet. This should leave you with six sections on the paper, three on each side. Each of these sections is going to be dedicated to a different character in your story, and will have short notes about things that you know about that character.

The first section is for your character. At the top of one of the section, write your character's name and pronouns, and immediately under it, write the word "changeling", because you know that you have fairy powers that others don't, and you don't quite act like what others think a normal human ought to act like.

Then, write a few Banes. These are situations or stimuli that, due to your fairy nature, cause you great distress that humans don't fully understand or sympathize with. Some example Banes might be "The feeling of iron against my skin", "the sound of large bells", "bright lights", or "the

sound of too many people speaking at once". Circle your Banes in a sharp-edged, jagged, or otherwise menacing way. Whenever you have to endure a Bane for longer than you can handle, **Suffer a Meltdown**.

Then, write any other notes you might have about yourself, like "Talented piano player" or "Rides a horse named Mopsy". You can add more here later, so don't worry if you get stuck.

Define one to five Confidantes - people whose opinion you care about, who you're afraid of alienating or disappointing, and who you wish you could be open with about your fairy nature. The game ends when they all know that you're a changeling, so the more Confidantes you have, the longer the game will be. Give them each their own section of the pamphlet, where you write down their names and pronouns, the phrase "ordinary human", their relationship with you, at least one thing you know about them, and an Expectation that they have of you. For instance, some example Confidantes might be...

"Cynthia (she/her), normal human, younger sister, never without her pet rabbit Mr. White, expects me to entertain her and generally be in a good mood"

"Anthony, (he/him), normal human, piano teacher, always has advice even if it's not always good and not always asked for, expects me to spend a great deal of my time practicing."

You have one stat, Fey, which measures how mystical, uncanny, or abnormal you seem to non-changelings. Track it with a single six-sided die, turning the die to the new value every time it changes. If your Fey ever reaches zero, then the strain of pretending to be a normal human takes its toll on you - **Suffer a Meltdown** and raise your Fey back to one, or end the game in tragedy. If your Fey ever reaches seven, then the jig is up and one of your Confidantes **Discovers your Fairy Nature**. Your Fey begins at three.

Narrate or write the story of how you risked one of your confidantes discovering that you're really a changeling, and whenever in the story meets a condition **In Bold**, follow the instructions for that condition listed below. Sometimes the instructions will immediately meet another condition, bringing you to another prompt - complete those instructions as well, until there are no more conditions met, at which point resume narrating the story.

When you **Work Fairy Magic**, raise your Fey by one to accomplish something incredible, such as speaking with animals, accomplishing a day's worth of work in a single hour of fixation, or flying a short distance. Then, roll a die: if you roll your Fey or higher, then everything goes smoothly and your magic is uninterrupted. If you roll under your Fey, then one of your Confidantes sees you and **Discovers Your Fairy Nature**.

When a Confidante **Discovers Your Fairy Nature**, whether because you tell them yourself or they piece it together on their own, write on their section "Knows that I'm a changeling" and roll a die to see how they react. On a one or a two, they react poorly, thinking that you replaced the normal human that they thought you to be. Scribble over their section of the pamphlet. On a three to five, they don't fully understand, but continue to love and support you as best as they

can. On a six, they reveal that they too are a changeling, and that you're not alone. Cross out the phrase "normal human" on their section of the pamphlet and replace it with "changeling." Then, set your Fey to three.

When you **Suffer a Meltdown**, draw a messy, painful-looking scribble on your own section of the pamphlet in such a way that it partially conceals some of the text without making it entirely illegible. If you're playing with digital notes, then a frustrated keysmash is a good substitute for a scribble. Then, roll a die. On a one or a two, one of your Confidantes sees you breaking down over something they deem unreasonable to be upset over - decide who, and raise your Fae by one. On a six, the moment was cathartic - adjust your Fae by one in whichever direction you like.

When you make an effort to **Hide Your Fairy Nature** in front of a Confidante, reduce your Fey by one, then roll a die: if you roll your Fey or higher, then they're convinced for the moment that you're an ordinary human, and place a new Expectation upon you accordingly. Write the new Expectation on their section of the pamphlet. If you roll below your Fey, then the act of pretending to be human takes its toll on you - once the situation passes, **Suffer a Meltdown**.

When you **Struggle to Meet an Expectation**, choose one of the following: **Work Fairy Magic** to accomplish the goal; **Suffer a Meltdown** after pushing yourself beyond your limits; or be honest with the Confidante about why you're struggling and have them **Discover Your Fairy Nature**.

When all of your Confidantes know about your fairy nature, the game is over. The weight of pretending to be a normal human has been lifted from your shoulders. For each Confidante who left your life because their expectations of you didn't match reality, consider how you might be better without them. For each Confidante who stayed by your side, consider how your relationship with them has been enriched now that they know who you are.