

**INKBLED**

**SWORD OF HOPE**

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**Prolog**

**The king couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. He had never considered himself a bad person; despite his hateful actions towards others; despite the chilling way he talked to people below him, despite torturing and slaughtering those with magic; despite tricking the Princess of the crown, the apple of his eye, into marrying him; despite assassinating his mother and father-in-law so that he and his wife could rule; and despite poisoning his pregnant wife's soup with the**

toxin that would force her body to give birth to a boy. Even after the toxin failed and not only caused her to give birth to all girls but to quintuplets. It had strained the Queen's body to the limit. Her last words had been their daughter's names. Prophecies. Predictions. Divinations. Forecasts for what they would be. The King had never considered himself to be a bad person until his daughters started to show power; that magic he hated. He tried to love them. He tried to raise them. But the older they grew, the more powerful they became, the more he couldn't stand them. Today, on their 12th birthday.... this is when the king decided he was a bad person.

**Chapter one:**

**Before**

Encre sat at the very center of the classroom. All the desks, where other students sat, had been pushed away from him to a safe distance. It wasn't a problem even though this was only the beginning of the third day of the school year. He was used to it. Who could blame them? He was dangerous. As always, he spent the

school day alone; drifting from class to class; and avoiding people as much as possible. He couldn't stand the scared look in their eyes but, again, he couldn't blame them. His arms were covered in markings; Dark Inky lines and shaped like symbols of language no one can read. But, that wasn't the worst of it. When he got angry, his eyes would turn dark black and empty, like an abyss. Sometimes, he wondered if they knew that his condition wasn't natural. Did they realize that it wasn't his fault? A witch had laid claim to his body. In casual terms, he was cursed. Finally, after another ghostly day, the bell rang. It was time that they go home but, to Encre, home wasn't that much better. As he walked home from school, he would hear a click at every store he passed by. Yeah, that was the sound of fearful people locking the door so that he couldn't get in. The click that was meant to keep him as far away as possible. After the decently long walk Back to his home, he entered his house to find his parents sitting at the kitchen table. This was strange because they usually avoided being home when he got there. He was sure they at least tried to love him, but they feared him like everyone else did. He knew this because everything in the house was "Encre-proof." Nails were removed. Pins were thrown away. Needles where kept hidden. All their cups were Styrofoam, and their utensils were plastic. The sharpest thing they had in the house were butter knives. Bandages could be seen in every pantry. They never even had sharp foods like tortilla chips. Everything was safe, for him and for everyone around him. He was glad. He didn't want to cut himself and didn't want

to hurt anybody else. Looking back to his parents, he noticed a concerned glance between them

"You're both home early. What's the occasion?" Encre asked.

His mom was the first to work up the courage to speak

"Encre honey, you know we love you right?" she asked, her tone wary

"Yeah." Encre responded though that wasn't completely true.

"well we were thinking about your 'Condition,' and After some searching online, we found the place Specifically made for...people like you."

she hesitated on the word "people." Was he not a person her eyes? Probably not. More like a dangerous pet they can keep anymore.

Probably reading his face His father introjected "we aren't trying to get rid of you son this place will train you to suppress and get a handle on Your condition people won't have to be afraid of you."

"we won't have to be afraid of you" Encre added silently.

But he conceded " OK I'll go."

it would definitely be better to have control Over his Curse then he might even be able to make friends Meet people who cared about him without hiding from him even if it meant spending Years Around people as strange and terrifying As him " so when do I leave."

his mom looked glad Way happier than he wanted her to be to see him leave

" you leave tomorrow we'll drive you to a place designated for the bus to pick you up."

Encre was confused "aren't there any papers to sign or anything."

"we already Took care of that" stated his father.

So they had been planning this for a while. Encre try not to feel hurt or, abandoned. In this situation it with a pretty difficult thing to do. More of him wanted to get mad And hate his parents for shipping him off like a broken phone to be repaired, and an even bigger part of him want to cry at the only people he thought he could somewhat rely on finally got him out of their hair. He did neither of those things. Instead, he spent the night packing his bags and wondering what tomorrow would bring.

The next day consisted mainly of driving. Encre spent most of the time on the road Eating junk food I'm playing video games. Sometimes his parents try to make conversation but, It was rare That they could relate to him Since they didn't see him as often as they should. They weren't exactly sure what he liked. Encre never really tried To start a conversation with them though. It felt like a waste of time. They would always just end it as quickly as they could, saying short sentences, answering questions, Never posting their own. So most of the ride was spent in silence.

The game Encre was currently playing stared a man With a strange weapon that looks like a piece of metal with the handle And an opening at the end. There was also a place For the character To put his fingers. Whenever Encre pressed the button, the weapon would make a loud sound, and smaller bits of metal would fly

out. As far as Encre knew there were no weapons like that in the world, and there probably weren't. Like most games, This game Was just a reproduction of one found near a rift. He had read That most technologies were only copies Of those Items that rifts had pulled through. That mimicry wasn't perfect. Devices From The rifts we're powered by A strange Energy that no one Had found A way to create yet. They got by storing Energy in gems and imputing Those gems Into their Devices. Encre personally didn't see a problem with doing things that way though he did sometimes wish At gems held a charge longer.

After the long drive they came to a path going into the woods by the road Encre looked around but couldn't see a bus stop Anywhere " are you sure this is our stop" he asked " of course it is" his mother said clearly trying to sound reassuring as she got out of the car and began the walk down the forest trail why was she going into the forest were they just going to drop him off there Maybe the place that they had been talking about wasn't even real Encre decided to investigate " so What's this place like" he asked making sure to add an edge of suspicion to his voice " according to the website the compound Is similar to boarding school Well you'll have education and also be taught about your condition and how to suppress it the building even looks nice... I'm sure you'll enjoy it there" his father stated almost robotically those words Did nothing to decrease Encre's suspicion as they neared the end of the path Encre began to notice a clearing up ahead and in the clearing was placed a single empty park bench completely out of place. He must have been seeing things who would

place a park bench in the middle of a forest though stranger things were possible he was evidence of that. But still a park bench? Here? "this is where we part ways for now" cooed his mom "we'll see you in three years" what did she mean part ways? They weren't going to just drop him off in the middle of the woods where they wouldn't do that to him they at least instinctually wanted him to live "where's the bus...?" Encre asked trying to keep the hint of fear out of his voice "it should be on its way" his father said his tone matter of fact Encre was still confused he took a long second to form his next question "you're not just trying to get rid of me here are you" he finally asked to his genuine surprise his parents looked hurt really and truly hurt as if the thought that he might think that they would want to rid themselves of the monster that had haunted their lives for 15 years was ludicrous his mom tried to speak and then paused as if the right words weren't coming out after a full minute she said "Encre honey I... I know we haven't been the best parents or the best people but we really do love you we want you to have a good life not having to fear every little pinprick or scratch we want you to be able to make friends and have a family" she was starting to cry "we just want you to be happy and I'll hate both that witch and myself forever for keeping that from you for all these years I'm sorry but please grant us this little bit of trust I know we don't deserve it but please this is for your own good Encre" she was talking through sobs at this point Encre didn't know what to say he wanted to distrust his mother and father but that display had been so genuine it seemed impossible for it to be an act plus after all of all the things his parents had done

they never lied to him "I trust you" he breathed though his mother was still crying his father looked relieved "if the bus doesn't show up in an hour call us we'll turn back around to get you" with that his parents turned around and began the walk back to their car they didn't even say they would miss him another great example of how they didn't lie.

Encre sat down on the bench after checking carefully for bent nails or sharp pieces of wood or anything else that might draw blood and waited. he didn't really expect the bus to show up. how the heck would a bus get out here? but he had an hour to kill so he watched as the nature of the forest went about its business he particularly liked seeing the birds flit from place to place though it bothered him quite a bit to watch as the avian acrobats would pull insects and worms from the ground and devour them whole the way the small critters would disappear down the throat of the fowl was disturbing. if this bus he was waiting for somehow came would that be him an insect spiraling down to a unknown doom if everyone at this "boarding school" was cursed like him how long would he last and on the other hand if he was the most dangerous case there how long until they lock him up for the good of everybody in the world Encre didn't have didn't have much time to worry about these things though because at that very moment the ground began to shake Encre struggled to identify the source of the rumbling until he realized the trees and dirt to his left were literally sliding out of place to make room for the bus driving out of the ground Encre did a double take yet he still saw as clear as day a bus digging its way out of the forest floor this situation put the

park bench to shame after 3 minutes That felt like 3 hours of this unexplainable Weirddness The bus finally made its way out of the ground and parked itself right In front of Encre the bus Was White with 3 blue stripes Going down the side The bright colors contrast in heavily with the dirt Still clinging 2 its sides other than that That was absolutely Nothing remarkable about the bus at all that was Until The door opened the only person in the bus was the bus driver At first glance She seems pretty normal she was young and wore a white button down shirt with a ribbon tying up her medium length hair her pants where plain but she wore Expensive looking shoes unlike Most Bus drivers Encre had seen on TV She was not unpleasant look at except for The marks Litter in her arms There is absolutely no way to tell she could have been cursed except for the fact that her body was transparent Like stained glass dyed the color Her skin "um.. excuse me but Are you Encre Stiller" she asked with a slight southern twang. after seeing The woman's Strange body Encre had forgotten That she was supposed to take him on the bus "y-yes that's me" he said he knew the answer to his next question It's obvious but he felt the need to ask anyway " will this bus take me to a place for cursed people" she nodded " yeah it will but we don't call it curses there we call them the our rarities just hop in and get a seat and will be there Before you know it" Encre hesitated " what do you think I'm lying Can't lie You can see right through me" the woman said holding up her hand to show that you could in fact see the forest Behind it Encre I hadn't really hesitated Because he didn't believe the bus driver but really that he wished he knew more about what he was getting

himself into but Encre had to go now he had already told his parents he was doing this And after seeing his mother cry He didn't feel like he could back out now So he got on the bus And took a seat as the it began to lurch forward and dug its way underground

The bus ride was long and impossibly boring. Encre had thought riding an underground bus Would be more exciting but it wasn't. It was mostly dirt, dirt and a couple of rocks absolutely enthralling. every now and then the transparent lady Would try to make conversation, but she talked too fast It was hard for Encre to keep up with her, so they never lasted long. Finally, Encre decided to ask the woman some questions "um...m-miss" he stammered, he hadn't realized how nervous he was "I didn't catch your name" "oh! Its crystal" she said with a sigh "yeah my parents had a brilliant sense of humor" after Encre's lack of reaction she looked confused "don't you get it because I'm crystal clear usually people laugh at my name" Encre had got it but he hadn't think you were supposed to laugh plus She wasn't crystal clear you could make out the shapes behind her everything was still toned the color of her skin " by the way What is this boarding school like? Like what's its name and stuff" crystal looked a little sad " you don't even know that you're those whose parents just drop them off trying to get rid of them aren't you well don't worry Mirrordrop school for the rare and strange will take good care of you" Encre if she was insensitive or not "so the schools name is Mirrordrop" he asked "yesirree" replied crystal enthusiastically "and it's a SCHOOL" Encre asked making sure He Wasn't Willingly sending himself off to a

containment unit "umm.. yes" crystal replied sounding more confused this time that settled Encre a bit her genuine confusion definitely added a kind sincerity that just a simple yes couldn't have he could tell he was going to get along with her but he still had one more question to ask "what's this place...I mean mirrordrop like?" he asked crystal giggled "you'll see just about now!" she said as the bus began to dig upwards out of the ground

## Chapter two:

### Hopeful beginnings

after Encre got out of the bus crystal informed him that the school was still a two or three-minute walk away, but she couldn't drive the bus Any closer any closer without absolutely destroying the schools pipe ways and crystal lines so Encre would have to walk. Not very long after he began walking he began to take notice of the school-like building in the distance it seemed completely normal in front of him but as Encre looked at it he realized that he completely missed it before he had gotten this close even though he had been directly walking towards it that was strange but what had he expected after a underground bus and meeting crystal he suspected from now on strange was going to be the norm as he approached the building's open gate he began to worry about what might be inside sure crystal hadn't been dangerous but who knew what kinds of curses the kids inside held. He really didn't know what to expect but as he finally got

close he realized a figure was standing about a yard in front of him behind the main gate. On closer inspection he realized the figure was a girl about his age on even closer inspection he realized it was a cute girl. Cute was really the only way to describe her she was neither short nor tall and in good shape without being skinny she had curly dark hair that just barely touched her shoulders her caramel-chocolate skin was completely unblemished leaving Encre to wonder if she had ever had acne at all and her intelligent brown eyes and generous lips left her facial features leaving little to be desired her sense of fashion wasn't terrible either the girl wore expensive looking jeans, an aquamarine t-shirt, and a white jacket to tie it all together the t-shirt had a picture of a can of soda with a face talking about how much you made its heart pop "hi you're Encre right" the girl asked Encre was both shocked and relieved the girl looked completely normal she wasn't even see-through. All at once all that relief and shock Encre was feeling came out in the form of a heavy sigh "WHAAAA" the girl shrieked as to Encre's surprise she was blown back as if Encre had let out a strong wind as she fell backwards Encre noticed that under her sleeves curse marks covered her arms if her unexplained lightness and appearance at this school wasn't proof enough this made it clear she was cursed "sorry" Encre said as the girl got up brushing the dirt of her backside "its ok" the girl said clearly exasperated "Happens more than you'd think and more than I'd like" she let out a sigh of her own " and I had just bought these jeans too" Encre wanted to say sorry again but got the feeling it would make this girl feel bad. after the girl had completely recovered she seemed

to brighten as if a happy switch "let's try this again I'm the student council president" that explained the sudden switch in demeanor all politicians were like that "my name's Hope" the president continued her name rang out feeling more a statement than a name. no. it was more like the truth it was hard to explain but the rightness of it made Encre want to move toward her she was hope he didn't know what for but she was hope and hope was what mattered after a second the strange feeling passed and Encre looked up at Hope to find that she looked just as astonished as he did " that was...weird" she said ruffled "but, third times the charm...right" she was obviously unsure of this fact but wasn't going to give up on her introduction " I'm the student council president Hope" the name sounded normal this time nothing peculiar in the slightest but... Encre could swear that he had heard her name before. Though it wasn't like it was an uncommon name the hope he remembered was probably someone from his old class "and you are?" hope asked. the last few minutes Had been strange enough to make Encre forget his own name for a second "I-I'm Encre, Encre Stiller." He stammered what was with him and looking stupid around girls today "good!" Hope chattered "then I'm supposed to show you around follow me" she told him as she walked away following her Encre decided to try to strike up a conversation maybe he could make a friend before someone found out about his curse and everyone hated him "so what's the school like" Encre asked "the bus driver wouldn't tell me" "oh you mean Crystal Yeah she's like that" hope said with a laugh "oh by the way tell me about your rarity? " Encre didn't know how to respond " I Don't-I'm not..."he

mumbled but before he could really say anything Hope interrupted him "No! no! wait don't tell me anything I like to be surprised" Encre had almost forgotten that this was a school for cursed people to everybody else in the world his curse... or rarity was weird and scary but to Hope and the people in that building it was an everyday thing if he was here maybe even he could make some friends maybe he could be...NO! how could he let think thoughts like that he couldn't let himself feel like that or he would be disappointed he had been burned before and had no intentions of being burned again. the first place Hope took Encre on her tour was a large dome-like building that shined reflectively in the midafternoon light its metallic sheen looked unreal as if it was a dream Encre was afraid if he touched it his hand might just phase through "This is the Rarity dome" hope told him "this is where the training happens also they do some poky-prody tests here to get numbers and stuff" she paused as if expecting questions Encre really only had one "so on a scale from one to ten how bad is the torture" hope gave him a look that he could only describe as a mix of pity and amusement "what do you mean torture yeah some of the tests might be a little uncomfortable but it's not like the people here want to hurt us you don't have to worry" she said as she went to the door of the dome " don't worry I was scared when I first got here too. Now Follow me" she opened the door and headed inside Encre followed her to find that the inside of the dome was made up of many large cubicles each containing a different machine or set of equipment for a certain task Encre noticed hope looking contemptfully at a certain machine the machine looked like giant fruit

scale with a large computer attached to its side where the bowl of the fruit scale should be was a uncomfortable looking chair padded with pink pillows "what's that" Encre asked hope. Still glaring at the device " a special scale Meant To measure how much I would weigh without my rarity, it does some stupid calculations and numbers are always way too high I keep trying to tell the teachers it's broken but when they check it's in 'perfect repair'" ignoring the obvious Vanity in her statement Encre thought she had A whole scale built for her that can happen done In a couple of months "hope," Encre asked "how long have you been here" she paused for a second a though she tried to hide it she was clearly hesitating "well I'm 15 now so...two to three years" so she had been here since middle school that was horrible "What kind of parents would leave there kid at such an early age" Encre hadn't thought before he spoke and wondered if he had insulted hope she couldn't not get the he was talking about her parents. "my dad... is definitely That kind of person" the look in her eyes When she said that held a hollow sadness that she quickly pushed back. "Well Shall we continue" hope asked Walking on before Encre had any chance to answer Encre didn't know what to say anyway so instead He just continued going forward Without protest. at what seemed like the center of the Dome at the center You found What looked like a large gym Complete with basketball hoops and a weightlifting area but the main attraction was the line of shelves near the back of the room which were lined with objects of all shapes and sizes huge swords shields as thin as paper a spear that's tip seemed to be on fires well as normal looking objects like

glasses, clothes, cooking utensils and even a video game controller though the objects seemed completely unrelated there was one thing that they all had in common, they all had an aura that pulsed around them turning the hope he knows that the same anomaly was surrounding her. Encre couldn't identify which of his five senses he perceived it with, but he could tell it filled the room "what's going on with the air?"

Hope gave Encre a look the kind of look you give if you're not sure if someone's joking or really can't guess but Encre also caught a bit of pity and... envy "there cursed objects, Encre. Why else would they be here most people can't sense this kind of thing you must have some talent for it."

"Oh, so why are they here?"

"for weapons purpose of course!" hope said with a laugh. When Encre was still confused her pitying look returned "you... don't know what we do here...other than training curses?"

"force knowledge into our brains and retain almost none of it" it was a school after all

"Well...that too but, we also...um...well..."

She was hesitating "just tell me" Encre sighed

"we also...fight witches"

"you fight what?"

"witches and other magical threats."

Encre was Dumbfounded. Witches? Like the one that had cursed him when he was a baby? Of course, his parents had sent him off here he was going to die! Did they want him to die?!

"is there any way I can get out of this"

Hope stopped to think "in no expert in legal matters, but if your parents signed the waiver and registration the answer is Nope."

"Don't I get a say in this?!"

"not until you're eighteen, buddy" hope said in a semi-sarcastic manner

"so, I'm stuck here for the full three years!?" Encre screamed

"I guess so, on a more fun note lets continue our tour."

Encre looked hope straight in the eyes and screamed at the top of his lungs

"freak your tour!!!" and ran out of the dome as fast as he could "wait! Come

back!" hope yelled, but Encre wasn't going to listen to her instead he went the

opposite way toward the gate of the school nobody was stopping him! Encre

looked around to see that literally nobody was trying to stop him. Why was that?

He really couldn't say that he cared. Until he ran face first into the Invisible wall.

After his head stopped spinning Encre noticed hope slowly falling towards him

"are you ok?" Encre planned to only groan in response but found that he

couldn't not ask the questions that were on his mind "how did you get up there

and how do I get out there?" he asked pointing to the to the forest right outside

the gate. Freedom was so tantalizingly close.

Hope was very clearly holding in laughter "to answer your first question I jumped" that made sense. Encre remembered that just by sighing he had blown her to the ground. Being that light she would have no problem leaping so high in the air. "to answer your other question, you'll need one of these" she was holding up something attached to a string a rectangular gem with hopes name and a rough picture of her face carved into it. "this is a kind of key card you'll need it to get anything out of the barrier, and that includes yourself." Looking down at Encre she added "id help you up, but you'd just pull me down I'm not heavy enough" Encre didn't want her help anyway. She was just lucky he didn't have a nosebleed his whole face still hurt. As he got up, Encre made a lunge for the keycard which was easily dodged by a simple backstep by hope

"really..."

"Figured I try."

"I'm pretty sure your name isn't 'Hope Gormond.'"

"your last names stupid."

"You'll get yours soon enough. I understand why you're scared, but you can't leave so why not finish the tour tomorrow it's getting late, so I'll show you to the dorms. You'll be going to classes tomorrow."

It was getting late, and Encre was kind of tired plus he couldn't see anything better he could do at the moment. If only he could get his hands on one of those cards.

Hope took Encre to a large brick building with many tinted windows and two doors one on the left one on the right

"this is the dorm the left is the boys side the right is for girls you can't be in the other genders dorm or outside after midnight so watch out" hope said handing Encre a key "you're in room 122 I'd like to help you find it, but I'm really sleepy. will you be fine by yourself?"

"whatever" Encre sighed

"ok goodnight then" hope chirped

Encre didn't respond. Instead, he started moving up the hall as the numbers went up counting with them as he went...15...16...17....18...19....20...21...there it was room 122 his prison for the next three years 'hurray' when he unlocked the door and headed inside to find the room was immensely nicer than he was expecting. It was large and, walking around he observed plush carpets, two shelves and a desk made of expensive looking wood, a large closet that he would Definity never fill and a bed that was so comfortable that he was sure it put the king's bed to shame as well as lots of extra space assumably for him to decorate as he pleased. the only drawback he could see at the moment was the quite incursive smell that was poof another male his age had lived here

After looking around Encre found his tiredness had multiplied by ten usually he would watch some tv at a time like this, but the room didn't have a TV, so he ended up going straight to bed.

Encre looked up to see his dad looking down at him. Encre was either very small, or his father was very large though his environment pointed to the former his dad was holding him, and the room they were in was huge. The room was also strangely blurry as if its existence itself had few details turning his head he saw his mother laying on a white bed she looked very disheveled and tired he wanted to wonder where he was but couldn't think clearly enough. Suddenly the door to the room opened, and a strange person shuffled in like the room she was blurry but there where Encre could tell she was a woman, she was beautiful, and her eyes held nothing but cruelty. She was moving toward Encre and his father as his father backed away from her, terrified. Step after step they drew closer and closer to the wall until the man's back was up against it the woman said something and Encre's father responded then she said something else and Encre's father tears welling up in his eyes spoke again. To Encre the words were as blurry as the woman and the walls. He had no idea what they were saying. The strange woman held out her arms and Encre's father after a moment's hesitation placed Encre into her arms as soon as he touched the woman's hands Encre felt as if he were on fire every inch of his body burned as if the air were acid. The woman took Encre's hand in her own and taking a needle out of a pocket she pricked her own finger and then pricked Encre's finger, a drop of crimson blood fell to the ground. Out of nowhere the walls that had been so burry seemed to be oozing darkness. It was filling the room rising and rising drowning everything. By the time it reached his father's knees Encre was panicking. As he was consumed by the blackness,

the last thing he could make out was symbols etching themselves into his arms. Then there was nothing the only the very clear whisper of his father voice "I'm sorry..."

Encre floated in this abyss for what felt like an eternity. He wasn't bored, but he still couldn't seem to think clearly still. Something had changed about where ever he was the silence seemed wrong, like there was something missing. "it's time to awaken." the voice wasn't any he had ever heard before. Not his father's not his mother's or anyone he'd ever met, yet it seemed like he knew it, but he didn't want to listen to it. It was wrong like the woman "Wake up." the voice said firmer this time Encre mentally refused. "WAKE UP ENCRE!" the voice shouted not angry but loud and then the blackness was gone.

When Encre woke up at first, he wondered where he was, then he saw Hope at the edge of his bed and remembered. Unconsciously he let out a massive sigh of dismay which sent Hope flying across his new room "hey! Don't do that! Jerk." "What are you doing here?!"

"I was given a spare key. I'm here to wake you up." hope said, annoyed "and here I am thrown across the room."

Encre thought it was her fault for sneaking into his personal space "I can't say I'm sorry."

"So, mean. After I brought you breakfast and everything. I landed on it though" she said getting up and handing him the bag. As Encre took the bag and resisted

the urge to blow at Hope as hard as he could to see what happened he notice that the bag wasn't crushed it the slightest instead it was as if it had been landed on by nothing more than a piece of paper. Opening it, he found that it's contents included a bagel, a banana, three backs of cream cheese, a sliced orange, and a bottle of apple juice.

"...thanks"

"I do what I can." hope chimed smiling "next time come to the caf and use your own money."

"Fair enough" spreading cheese onto the bagel and taking a bite. it was good, toasted perfectly.

Inturpting his meal, hope blurted "we have to go to classes soon are you going to get dressed?"

"why do you care."

"oh...well we have new students show off their rarities the first school day, so I'm just curious."

Encre nearly choked on the bagel. His curse? A room full of people? NO!

Absolutely not! But for some reason, he stayed quite hope looked quite excited and she had brought him breakfast. Most likely to get his vote in the next student council election but it was nice nonetheless he didn't want to ruin her fun, and he could politely refuse and give them a rundown on his curse verbally. He was used to explaining it to teachers by now.

By now Encre had finished his breakfast

**"Hope, get out."**

**"what! WHY?"**

**"because I need to change."**

**"Oh..." hope breathed. A little red rushing to her face. "I'll be going."**

**When she was gone, Encre began to strip as he took off his shirt he ran a hand up the markings engraved into the skin of his arms. He could swear that he had, had a dream about them. Why couldn't he remember it? He supposed it wasn't important. It was just a dream. Right?**

**Encre put on a change of clothes from his bag and stepped out of the room to meet Hope who was reading a novel, The Wanderer, probably from a rift, seeing him hope closed the book**

**"are you ready?" she asked.**

**Encre was as ready as he would ever be so he told her so. The pair left the dorms and made their way across the campus Encre following Hope as she strode. At last, they came to a building at the center of the campus it looked like a typical school building this time Encre really, really hoped it was. Entering the building and walking down the hall hope led Encre to a classroom "we're in most of the same classes. This is our homeroom" all of Encre's irrational desire that the school would be somewhat normal was drained away like an opened bottle turned upside-down. This class was filled with people of all shapes and sizes, literally. From a boy antlers, a girl as small as a mouse, an ordinary looking frog**

writing in a notebook (he was struggling since the pen was half his weight) and so many more strange new classmates

Encre knew that he was no exception. In fact like him there were many students (including Hope) who looked mostly normal though every arm in the room bore cursed marks. Encre stepped into the classroom. Every eye was looking at him. It was bone chilling. Where was the teacher? Couldn't class start already?!

Encre searched for a place to sit with any luck there was a place that was shielded from as many gazes as possible "Hey, Encre!" Hope called she had already sat down and was beckoning him to a seat next to her. Looking for anywhere else to sit (Anywhere!) but finding none, Encre gave up and took a seat beside her. Nearly instantly Encre could feel the hostile stares of most of the guys in the room... and some of the girls... pretty much anyone who might be attracted to women in the slightest hated him right now. Including himself (but that was always true.) the glares continued until the bell rang and the teacher walked into the room. Encre had never been so relieved for a class to start. The teacher who was a tall, slender woman of her mid 40's seemed to be cursed with flaming hair, quietly looked at Encre. At first, he wondered if she had a crush on Hope like every person in the room seemed to, but then remembered what the girl in question had said earlier. He would have to show his curse now... or at least explain it. Yeah, he would explain it. That wouldn't harm anyone. In fact, it would protect them...from him. "Please welcome our newest student Encre Stiller."

Encre had no choice but to get up and go to the front of the class and introduce

himself. He told them where he was from and about his home life and a bit about school but as he tried to move to sit down "Encre" the teacher said his name as a cat might call a mouse's "aren't you going to demonstrate your rarity."

"Well...no my cu...-rarity is a little too dangerous, so I think I'll just explain-"

"NO."

"but I..."

"NO. there is a sterilized needle in the case on my desk, please go get it, by the way only one drop, please. "

So, she knew what his curse was. It must've been on the paperwork he had never seen. Seeing no way out of it Encre walked up to her desk and opened the case to find as she had said a needle was kept in a small sealant tube opening the tube Encre took out the needle and held it to his left pointer finger.

The sting of the prick to his finger was strangely nostalgic as the needle pricked Encre's skin a single drop of blood made its way out of the wound before he pinched the base of the digit to stop its flow turning his hand upside-down and letting the droplet drip off until it hit the table. His blood as always was impossibly black.

There was a muttering across the room Enre heard comments ranging from "that's so creepy" to "wow that's cool" even including "that's it black blood? How anticlimactic." that last one was from Hope. So they thought it was that simple. Huh? They were in for a show. Almost on queue the liquid on the table began to bubble and ripple and grow changing shape and taking form as a

grotesque, gelatinous pitch-black arm. The appendage took a second to flex its new fingers, and Encre hated that he could feel every digit. But that's where his connection to the arm ended. Almost as quickly as it had appeared the arm reached out across the desk grabbing anything that was close to it. Everything it grabbed was collected into its grasp after the arm could hold no more it began to retract pulling everything it held into itself everything it was touching was consumed by its pure darkness as if none of it had ever existed. After all of the objects were... gone, the arm shriveled and disappeared returning to its previous form of a single drop of black blood which rolled off the table. The "demonstration" was over. Encre walked back to his desk and sat down. All the eyes in the room were on him in a stunned silence even hope was silent, the room was a ticking time-bomb, and Encre had no idea what would happen when it went off. After a minute the teacher whose name was apparently Mrs. Welside told them to open their textbooks and turn to page 32 then told them she asked them some questions after that she passed out worksheets and sat down at her now empty desk. To Encre the sheets were easy he had spent most of his time studying most of his life. It wasn't like he had been going out with friends or anything . he finished.