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Opening extract from

Changeling: Dark Moon

Written by

Steve Feasey

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The place:
A luxury apartment in Docklands, London. HQ of Charron Industrial Inc. – a global empire dedicated to fighting the powers of the Netherworld

The time:
Spring. Five months after fourteen-year-old Trey Laporte discovered he was a werewolf

The characters:
Lucien Charron – vampire
Alexa Charron – daughter of above; sorceress
Trey Laporte – ex-ordinary teenager; last hereditary werewolf
Tom O'Callahan – human. Tough guy and enforcer

The bad guy:
Caliban – evil vampire brother of Lucien Charron; bloodthirsty beast, intent on destruction

The mission:
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Bloodthirsty books by Steve Feasey

Changeling

Changeling: Dark Moon

Look out for

Changeling: Blood Wolf

STEVE FEASEY



DARK MOON

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



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For my mum.
Thank you for all the love.

1

The vampire Lucien Charron lay motionless on a high-sided bed in his Docklands apartment. The bleak early-morning light that came in through the window made the interior stark and unwelcoming. White sheets had been stretched smooth over Lucien's body, tucked in around the edges, tracing the hills and valleys of his body to create a miniature landscape of virginal snow. The covers would stay like this, intact and unspoilt, as he lay unmoving beneath them. It would be easy to think that the pale, still creature was indeed dead – the skin was the colour of grey pumice stone, and that essence of *being*, that you instinctively feel when sharing a room with someone, had all but vanished. The vast array of machines and monitors blinking and beeping from the other side of the bed were the only things to suggest that the vampire still defied the inevitable end that the doctors anticipated.

Lucien had woken only once in the five months that he had been in this state – a few weeks after he had saved his daughter's life from his evil vampiric brother, Caliban. Even then, he had regained consciousness for only a matter of moments – asking questions as to his daughter's safety and Caliban's defeat. Upon hearing the news of their success,

he had sunk back into the darkness, diving back down into a coma from which it was unclear if he would ever return.

The doctor glanced up from his chart to his patient, and recorded the data that again signified no change in Lucien's condition. He returned the clipboard to its position at the bottom of the bed, and turned to the three people waiting just inside the door who were staring back at him with eyes full of hope and worry.

'There is no improvement, I'm afraid,' he said. 'As I explained last week, the lung seems to have made an almost full recovery following the surgery, and the wound where the stake was driven through his chest and back has also healed better than we had any right to hope for. But this bite wound . . .' He shook his head and glanced down at the dressing that covered the offending injury. 'It defies all attempts that we have made to treat it. The localized infection that we have been fighting since we first saw it is, I am afraid, getting worse.'

The wound was a result of Lucien 'misting' between his daughter and Caliban at the very moment his evil brother had attempted to kill her. The huge fangs that were meant for her young neck had instead buried themselves into Lucien's shoulder. Lucien had survived only because the young werewolf, Trey Laporte, had attacked Caliban and forced him to release his brother.

The damage to Lucien's shoulder refused to heal. Like all wounds inflicted on nether-creatures by their own kind,

it would not mend in the extraordinarily quick fashion that ‘normal’ wounds would. The rejuvenating powers of vampires and other beings from the Netherworld made them almost impervious to injuries caused by humans and animals from the human plane. But the wounds inflicted by their own kind were subject to different healing processes, and were more often than not deadly.

The doctor peeled back the dressing to reveal a raw, infected lesion beneath. The bite marks where the teeth had punctured the flesh were still wet, refusing even to scab over, and an acrid-smelling pus still oozed from the angry red craters, despite the huge doses of antibiotics that the doctors had administered. The skin surrounding the puncture wounds looked pinched; a purple lividity discoloured the flesh, making it look sore and tender even after all this time. And it smelt. It reeked of the rot that attacked the body – a parasitic infection that was all too eager to consume its host.

‘The sepsis that continues to seep into Lucien’s blood from this wound is not responding to any of our treatments I’m afraid that he appears to be losing the fight that he has waged for so long. The situation is very bad. If we can’t find a new way to stop this infection, then we will lose Lucien.’

Three pale and strained faces stared back at him. A mean-looking man with a scarred face, a tall, lean teenage boy and a fine-featured girl with jet-black hair all searched the doctor’s face for some sign of hope.

‘How long does my father have?’ Alexa asked in a small voice.

‘It is too hard to say, Miss Charron. To be honest, we’re amazed that he is still alive, so it is beyond me to predict how long he might be able to continue fighting. We really have run out of options. We will use any and all palliative care at our disposal to keep your father as comfortable as possible, but you should prepare yourself for the worst.’

The tall Irishman, Tom, stepped forward into the silence that followed and shook Dr Tremaine by the hand. ‘Thank you, Howard. We appreciate how hard you and your team are working.’ He gently guided the doctor to the door and followed him out, leaving Trey and Alexa behind.

‘Are you OK?’ Trey asked when the silence in the room became too much to bear.

‘No, not really,’ Alexa replied, trying to summon up a brave smile.

‘Is there anything I can do?’ he said, feeling utterly helpless as he looked between his friend and his guardian on the bed.

‘No. But thanks, Trey. I think that I’d like to be alone with my dad if that’s OK.’

Trey nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him. On the other side he sank back against it, closing his eyes and trying to absorb everything that the doctor had just said. He sighed and opened his eyes again, briefly taking in the opulence of the apartment that he now lived

in – the fine furnishings, the artwork and tapestries that lined the walls, the vast array of technological gadgets and equipment that filled the luxury penthouse. It would not have looked out of place on a TV show about the houses of the rich and famous. But the apartment was only a tiny part of the empire that Lucien Charron had built up through the years, an empire that was dedicated to destroying the evil forces of the Netherworld and to protecting the human race from those creatures within it that would do them harm. It was a business that needed Lucien at its head to function, and Trey didn't want to imagine what would happen if his guardian was not around to lead the fight. Tom and Alexa had been running things, keeping on top of everything as best they could, but Trey suspected that they had only been able to do so because Caliban had been so very quiet. Too quiet. They hadn't heard from the evil Netherworld lord since they had returned from Amsterdam five months ago. The lack of contact with the vampire lord had led Trey to hope that he might have perished as a consequence of his own injury – Trey had bitten off Caliban's hand in the battle to rescue Alexa – but he knew better. Vampires were hard to kill; Lucien was living proof of that. No, Caliban's silence was deliberate, and that could only be a bad thing – whatever it was that he was planning, it was something big. And they needed to hear from the vampire; Lucien's survival depended on them doing so and finding out where he was.

Trey nodded to himself and strode towards the elevator

set in the wall to his left, heading for the research rooms on the floor below.

Moving to her father's side so that she could hold his hand, Alexa fought to stop the tears from falling. She leaned forward and whispered to the prone figure on the bed, 'Don't you listen to them. There *is* something that can be done for you. Trey, Tom and I are still working on it. So you . . . you just hang on in there, OK? Do you hear me? You just keep on fighting for a little while longer.'

She reached out and ran her hand across his bald, smooth head, the way that she had done since she was a little girl, sitting on his lap and listening to stories about the things he had seen during his incredibly long existence. As far back as she could remember, he had always been bald, and she found it impossible to imagine him with hair. She leaned forward and kissed his cool cheek, before placing the hand that she had been holding back on top of the covers.

She left the room and wasn't surprised to see Tom waiting just outside for her. She nodded to him and smiled sadly. They had only one option left. They were going to have to steal Mynor's Globe – an ancient object with incredible powers to heal nether-creatures. But to do this they would have to enter the Netherworld and take it from right under the nose of Gwendolin, Alexa's mother, the most powerful and ruthless sorceress in the realm.

If they failed, her father would die.