"40 silver for the whole cart, may the local lord not try to seize our plants this year to feed some fools war we can get through the winter warmer than last.
if things keep as they are we might even get a slave to help around the farm, heard them bull-kin can plow like 10 men, but they might eat us out of our profits.
goat-kin then? they'll be cheaper to feed at leas- what's that sound?" the young Farmer looked far and opened his ears to the winds hearing it faintly still…

"a baby? this far into the woods? The nearest town is 100 furlongs away still, and no neighbor is due to give birth for another 2 months...
a Fae trick maybe? but if it's a child I can't rightly leave it be, the wolves would have it before dusk falls."

So he found the child, shortly off the well trodden muddy road, wrapped in nothing but leaves, no signs of a mother yet perfectly clean minus a little mud, a young boy.
and he sat and watched for nearly 2 hours before deciding that no Fae was patient enough for this to be a trick of theirs, and no mother came for him.
"hmm... I'll need to take him into the local mage to check that he's human next time I sell vegetables but he should be fine in the barn for the night."

and so the farmer took him, and placed him in an empty box labeled odd vegetables, those who grew strangely in shape, some say its a faes little prank,
to make a blue tomato or a potato that's red, only the destitute or those who don't believe would buy such strange things, the boy took well to it and quieted down.
and the Farmer went back towards his little farm, with a nearly empty cart and a nearly full coin pouch.

Near to dusk he finally reached his home, his own little kingdom as he sees it.
"Honey I'm home, what's in the pot tonight? I even bought meat today, the lord had the local deer culled before they could get too old, good price for it today."

he said boisterously feeling richer for not having to hunt his own game today, more time for his wife and children,
"Oh, and I picked up a stray."

"I told you unless it's to help around here we don't have room or food for another pet, and you better not think it's getting any of that meat," she said sighing at the softhearted man she loves.

"well... I don't know if he'll help around for a while but you always said you wanted a little boy!" he said not thinking of any of the consequences of such a thing.

"what?" dumbfounded she stepped out of the kitchen to see her husband with a little boy, pale blue eyes that almost seemed to shift like smoke as the light caught them,
paler than any child should be and shaking like a leaf.

"GIVE HIM TO ME NOW, CAN'T YOU SEE HIM SHAKING, GET A SPARE BLANKET FROM THE CHEST," she said fuming at him, a soft hearted and well trying father... but the raising was left to her for a reason

he reached into a wooden box less than a foot tall and pulled a blanket that seemed impossible to have fit in such a space, he never did understand how she filled things so tightly.
after 10 minutes tightly swaddled the boy settled into a much deeper calmer slumber
"Now, where did you find him?"

"side of the road," he said knowing full well what she really wanted but a little annoyed at her yelling

"oh really?" sensing his annoyance but not wanting to admit any fault she just played along
after realizing nothing would come of this he relented and explained the whole story just in time for the boy to awake and perform the duty of all babies

"I'll get him cleaned, the girl's spare tunics should do well enough for now at least, and no he is not sleeping in the barn, you said it yourself, no fae would wait that long for a trick"

She knew the real dangers that the boy could be, a changeling, or maybe they would wake up to see it was really a burning log entire this time, set to catch again when they slept and take their home.
but she could look into those eyes of his and see the son she never got, the one she lost, the cruelty of the gods who weren't there anymore to take her ability to even try for another.

after a heavier than usual supper that still seemed to not last nearly as it should, the family and the new member were filled, the chores were done until the final check at night,
and the girls aged 13, 10, and 7 were looking over the little one sleeping on the floor and arguing over what to name him, only the youngest staring a bit more worried over him.

she had been the baby for so long now, she didn't want to be bushed aside for this new sibling, she had heard her older sisters complain about each other doing that to not worry.
"Do you think he's a changeling? I heard they eat the youngest and then pretend to be them.” The eldest was only joking, she trusted her father to keep them safe.
but the youngest still felt a deep fear in her heart hearing it.

"stop that talk, you know it frightens your sister, any more of that and I won't let you play with your uncle tonight."

each of them piped down quickly, they hadn't known he would be coming, the great hero, the strongest mage they ever knew! also the only one but they wouldn't let that dampen their thoughts on him
"And so we know its safe I'll ask if he knows how to spot a changeling, you'll be just fine."

Finally, just before dusk their uncle showed up, first giving his brother-in-law a little jolt during their handshake, to keep him honest he says, but he never did think his sister should've settled for the farmboy.
then he gave each of the girls their gifts

"For the littlest niece of mine have this doll, its paint will never peel, and it cleans off easy."

"Next a locket, think really really hard and the image in the locket will show it, just make sure to give it an imprint every few days so it doesn't fade."

"And for you last but not least, a sewing needle, it will never rust or dull, and just a little magic will thread the needle for you, no more fiddling!"

"But uncle, why not a doll or a new dress this time? doesn't seem fair to me," she said with a quiet huff

"In just a few more years you'll be marrying age, no man will want a wife who can't even patch his pants, better to learn it now, and that will make learning all the more easy."

"I've not forgotten you two, for my only brother-in-law, an amulet of water! it takes your magic but so long as you keep it going it will make clean water.
and my dear sister, a mana gem charged with a minor beauty spell, you really could use it" never far from a wooden spoon she gave a hard wack for that one.
"Wait, did you have another? I was at the frontier not the deeplands, you should've sent a letter telling me! And a

boy no less..." he almost brought up the one she lost but found his better judgment.
"no, my husband found him on the side of the road."
Before he could give his brother-in-law a stink eye for being so foolish as to fall for a fae trick and once again proving that she should've got a better husband she asked to check him out.

after a few minutes of faint light from his hands and eyes he let out a sign
"well, I'm pretty sure it's human"
"he" she quickly corrected
"yeah yeah yeah, but I'm a soldier, not a healer, he could just be a well-hidden one, I'll stay for the night and watch him at least, it gives me a bad feeling"
"he" this time she corrected him with the wooden spoon again
After another indigent yelp and a few more hours of catching up between them, and a few stories from the frontier that would keep the girls up, they tucked in for a night's rest.