



I was not born a monster.

People forget that. The cruel ones sneer and tell me I'm demon spawn. They think the words will hurt me, but they are closer to the truth than they know.

It is the kind ones who lie. "You have a good heart, like your sister," they say in their pitying tones. "Deep down, you are beautiful—like your sister."

I am nothing like my sister.

Across the islands, her birth is a legend. Many come from near and far for a glimpse of her beauty, and our neighbors have made good coin telling her tale—how on a moonbow night seventeen years ago, my father faced a terrible choice: to save his wife, who lay dying on a moth-ridden cot, or his newborn daughter, whose pink cheeks, silken curls, and divine glow had already enraptured everyone who saw her.

Adah chose his wife. He snatched my sister from the midwife's arms and ran into the jungle to sacrifice her to Angma, the Demon Witch. There, on a flat rock beside a crooked tree, he left my sister to die.

Yet even as a baby, my sister gave off a golden light, which mesmerized the Demon Witch such that she could not devour her. And so, the next day, Adah found my sister where he had left her, laughing and singing among the birds and the frogs, and she was returned to us.

The story has a touch of fairy tale, which is why the villagers love recounting it. But it does not explain what happened to my face . . . because that is not how it *really* happened.

It is true that from the moment my sister was born, she was so radiant she outshone the stars, and her smile could soften even the hardest heart. It is also true that Adah faced that terrible, fateful choice. To save my mother, he *did* try to sacrifice a child. Only it was not my sister that he took into the jungle.

It was me.