



Dark Promise

A Between Worlds Novel

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Dedication

To our readers

Prologue

Hidden in the trees, Azura stood watching her daughter from afar, as she had done so many times in the past. Her daughter's long blonde hair glistened in the sunlight, and her laughter danced on the breeze as she hurried down the sidewalk to the waiting car. Azura was too far away to see her child's bright blue eyes, but she knew them well.

The humans had named her Rylie.

The humans who had become her parents, who had given Azura's child a beautiful home, love, and happiness, and raised her as their own—and they had no idea that Rylie wasn't theirs.

Tears sprang to Azura's eyes as she remembered the day she had given her baby away to protect her. So much pain remained from what had been the hardest decision of her life. Azura had never been the same.

And now it was almost sixteen years later and time for Rylie's transformation to begin. Soon, the girl would begin to change, and she wouldn't understand why. She needed guidance; she needed to know what was in store.

But, most importantly, Azura needed to get her to safety before the dark faeries found her.

After her baby had been born with the mark of the Aurorian on her face, Azura was delighted to have such a special child. An Aurorian faery was extremely rare. The last one had been born over two hundred years before Azura's child and had gone on to be a great, powerful faery. The mark meant that Rylie's ability would be stronger than a normal faery's power.

Azura had been awed by her precious new daughter, but even amidst the joy, she knew that the small star-shaped symbol on her infant's face would bring darkness to them.

Only a few hours after Rylie's birth, the dark faeries caught whispers of a marked child. Like bloodhounds, they showed up at Azura's door and convinced her weak-minded husband to trade the child in exchange for access to their dark magick. Her husband had always thirsted for a better ability; it hadn't taken

much to sway him.

Even at the expense of his newborn daughter, Azura thought with disgust.

Azura knew she had to protect her child by switching her for a human one. In the human world, her daughter would have a chance. They knew nothing of faeries, much less the rare Aurorians, so prized for their power and revered for their ability to bring peace by force. Among humans, the child would have a chance at life.

While her husband discussed the terms of his agreement with the dark faery, Azura wrapped her child in a blanket and exited by way of the window. She went in search of a baby who was about to die.

If it weren't for the fey's ability to sense the passing of a life, things might have turned out for the worst, and her daughter could have been lost forever. But Azura thanked the gods for giving her not only the ability to sense the dying, but the power to disappear at will, so that nobody noticed Azura sneak into the hospital room, her child tucked against her body. Nobody saw as she took the dying human infant from its crib of wires and lamps to replace it with her own beloved daughter.

The human child didn't survive but moments beyond the switch, as Azura knew would happen. Azura returned home, where she marked the dead baby's face with the same birthmark—the birthmark that had been her daughter's death sentence.

It was the only way to keep her little girl safe.

Azura took the child to her husband and the dark faeries, who were still seated in her kitchen as if they weren't discussing the fate of a newborn. She had been relieved when the men believed the infant had died of natural causes.

She hadn't only lost her baby that day. Ashamed—of his own behavior as a father willing to sell his child or of being unable to suit the terms of the dark faery agreement—Azura's husband had disappeared. In one evening, she lost everything.

In the years to come, Azura had watched Rylie grow up from a distance. Although giving her up had been the hardest thing Azura had ever done, it only mattered that her daughter was safe.

Now, however, that was about to change. Once Rylie's transformation was complete, other faeries would be able to see that she was a faery, too. After they saw the birthmark, they'd know she wasn't just any faery, but an Aurorian faery—and that put her in danger.

Azura had to go to her daughter and warn her of what was to come...but

how?



Staring at my reflection in the mirror, I dabbed more concealer on the star-like birthmark near the corner of my right eye. It was useless; cover-up seemed to melt away when I put it over the pale shape. Stupid birthmark.

I considered making it pop, like I sometimes did by drawing lines to make it look like a shooting star, or outlining it with bright eyeliner to make it stand out—not that it didn’t already stand out next to the sapphire blue of my eye and my insanely pale skin. But if I tried to actually cover it, it rebelled—almost as if it had a life of its own.

With a sigh, I carefully placed the makeup back in the medicine cabinet, making sure everything was lined up perfectly. I switched a couple tubes around until they were color coordinated, and then arranged everything to face front to back. Things that were out of place drove me crazy.

I walked back to my room and stopped at the little white desk that my dad had made for me when I started middle school. An eerie feeling came over me, like I was being watched from beyond the window. Leaning over the desk, I pushed the turquoise curtains to the side and peered out, trying to find the source, but as usual, I saw nothing out of the ordinary. I shook it off and grabbed my iPhone and my early birthday present—a paisley Vera Bradley backpack. I had been bugging my mom to buy me one for months.

I hurried down the stairs and through the foyer into the kitchen. It was always bright and cheery, because the early morning sun shone right through the glass French doors and lit up the room. With the white and yellow walls, it was enough to make you feel better just by being there.

Mom stood at the dark granite island peeling an orange. She looked prettier than usual; she had her long chestnut hair pulled back with a red barrette to match the boat-neck blouse she was wearing and there was even eyeliner around her light brown eyes. She glanced up and smiled. “Good morning, Rylie.”

“Morning, Mom.” I tossed my bag on the table and walked over to the island, where I hopped up on the barstool, propping my elbows on the counter.

She handed me a wedge of the orange, and I popped it in my mouth. I took a moment to savor the juiciness, tart and sweet on my tongue. “Mmm, amazing.”

“Take it.” She pushed the plate holding the orange across the counter.

Picking up her mug, she took a sip of tea before peeling a banana, her hip propped on the counter. Even though we had a perfectly good kitchen table, my mother wasn’t one to sit there for breakfast. She liked to stand at the island with the paper spread out before her and the TV on in the background. She was one of those people that was always on the go. Healthy eating and fitness were important to her.

Me...not so much. I’d take a doughnut any day.

My father’s keys were gone from the “Home Sweet Home” hook by the door leading to the garage. He left for work earlier than I or my mom got out of bed, so most mornings we didn’t see him. He was a detective for our local police department, which meant he worked long—and sometimes odd—hours. As much as I admired his work ethic, it still sucked that he missed out on so much while I was growing up. I’d lost count of the birthdays and recitals he wasn’t there for when working on a case.

“What do you have going on today?” Mom looked up from her paper. Her eyes met mine and she gave me her full attention.

“Not much. Hanging out with Adam after school.” I swiveled off the stool and went to the stainless steel fridge, pulling out the milk. Grabbing a tall glass from the cabinet, I filled it. “We have a project to finish.”

“Oh, yeah? What kind?”

“Something for French class.” There was a loaf of bread half-sliced on the cutting board near the toaster. I dropped a couple pieces in the toaster and pushed the bar down.

“Why don’t you ask him to stay for dinner? You know we love having him.”

“Okay, I will.” It made me happy that my parents liked my boyfriend. Adam and I had been friends for a long time before he asked me to be his girlfriend only a few months before. We had always clicked, so saying yes was a no-brainer.

We were silent as I slathered butter and cinnamon on my toast and walked back to the island. I motioned to the paper with my toast before taking a bite and speaking through my mouthful. “Anything going on in the world?”

“It’s falling apart around us. Nothing new.” Mom glanced at the clock on the microwave and then shut the paper with a rustle. “I need to get going.” She slid the paper to me, put her mug in the sink, and grabbed her purse from the table.

“Have fun.” I smiled sardonically, thinking of the day my mom was about to have. She was a kindergarten teacher, and her class was a handful. Most days she came home with a headache.

“Always.” She winked and hustled out the side door into the garage. Peeking back into the kitchen one last time, she narrowed her eyes and said, “Behave.”

“Mm-hmm.” I rolled my eyes at her warning. I wasn’t exactly known for being a bad girl. In fact, I was mild compared to most of the kids I knew.

The door closed, and I was alone in the house. I finished my breakfast and rinsed the dishes before I put them in the dishwasher. A loud honk signaled my ride had arrived. I grabbed my favorite brown Converse shoes from the shoe rack, slipped them on, slung my backpack over my shoulder, and rushed out the front door.

It was going to be a gorgeous April day. We would probably get a shower later on, but for now, the sun was glorious and high, the air cool but with an expectation of warm to come. I could smell the honeysuckle vines from the backyard on the breeze.

Sierra waited in her black convertible in the driveway with the top down and the music blaring. She had the visor down and was applying lipstick, so she didn’t notice me approaching.

Sierra was my best friend in the whole world. She had dark brown hair streaked with golden highlights that she usually left down to frame her oval face, and her personality matched her car—artsy and outgoing with a little bit of a wild in her. We had been friends for as long as I could remember.

I scanned the woods as I walked to the car, remembering the feeling of being watched from earlier. Nothing unusual stood out, but a chill went down my back as if there really were eyes on me. I brushed it aside. I often had the feeling that someone was watching me, and it seemed to be happening more often lately, but I was probably just imagining it. Having a father who was a cop made me a little paranoid. He spent most of my life drilling into me that I should be aware of my surroundings at all times. Between watching the news and hearing stories from him, I knew what kind of monsters were out there.

I opened the passenger door and slid into the low seat. It felt like sitting on the ground, especially compared to my boyfriend’s big truck. “Hey.”