# Chapter 2: Confrontation

Evariste stood outside the palace entrance, waiting to confront Emerys. He’d given up trying to find him once it was clear he’d left the palace for the day, no doubt to avoid his and Angel’s wrath.

*What was Emerys* thinking?

When Evariste had told Emerys about the condition on his seal and asked him to help find an alternative, Emerys *had* been stubbornly insistent that they didn’t have *time* to find a way around the condition, and that Evariste needed to tell Angel the truth. But Evariste had thought he’d convinced him to at least *try* to find another way to break the seal first.

*I know Emerys meant well, but he crossed a line here.*

Evariste sighed. On the other hand, even if his methods were…questionable, to put it mildly, maybe Emerys was right. He’d clearly gotten to know Angel better recently, especially in helping her to *finally* accept her magic. Plus, the situation *had* drastically changed in the past six years. Angel was no longer paralyzed by fear and self-hatred, and no longer reliant on him to lead the way or provide for her. She was *fierce* and independent, and fully capable of standing on her own, though he was immensely grateful she *wanted* to stand with him. They were equals now -- the corrupt council’s refusal to formally recognize her as a full enchantress didn’t change the reality.

He felt a glimmer of hope stir in his heart, tempering the fear of rejection. Maybe… this new, stronger, *fiercer* Angel would at least be willing to hear him out and not immediately put distance between them. But…was “maybe” good enough? What if she hated him when she learned kissing her was his darkest desire? Worse, what if she thought he saw *her* as dark? No, he couldn’t risk it.

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As Emerys approached the palace, Quinn beside him, his shoulders tensed when he saw Evariste, arms crossed, glaring daggers at him. *Ugh, looks like my plan was a bust. Surely he wouldn’t be* that *angry with me if he and Angel actually had a heart-to-heart. He’d be too relieved that Angel didn’t reject him.*

Emerys had really thought the love note idea would work. Afterall, how much longer could those two really keep dancing around their feelings anyway? It had been obvious from the moment they’d arrived in Sideralis that Angel was now just as head over heels for Evariste as he was for her. Now, if the two of them would just *get their heads out of the sand*, breaking Evariste’s seal would be *simple*.

Once they’d reached the entrance, Quinn glanced between the two of them. “Looks like you two need to talk. But you should probably do that somewhere more private than the palace steps.”

“Yes, that would probably be wise.” Evariste’s voice was tight and he was still glaring daggers at Emerys.

Emerys gulped. “Uh, sure. Let’s go into one of the receiving rooms.”

He glanced at his wife, as if looking for rescue and Quinn held up her arms in defense. “Don’t look at me! I don’t know what you did to make Evariste so furious with you, but whatever it is, you’re going to have to handle it.” With that, she walked away.

As they entered the room, the tension was palpable in the air. Evariste’s fists were clenched and his eyes narrowed as he spoke.

“What were you thinking Emerys?! You wrote a fake love letter to Angel in my name, confessing my feelings for her! Do you realize how big of a betrayal that is?!”

Emerys flinched internally. “I’m sorry. I truly thought leaving the note would get you and Angel to have a heart-to-heart. I thought you’d tell her the truth and then, when she didn’t reject you, you could stop living in fear of her reaction. And, you know, you could get your magic back, which is *kinda* important right now. I certainly didn’t intend my actions as any sort of betrayal. But it’s clear now that I seriously misjudged the situation. I’m sorry."

Evariste sighed, unclenching his fists. “I know you meant well, Emerys. But I was very clear with you last night that I’m not ready to tell her. I *told* you how scared I am of ruining my relationship with her. But you just ignored that and tried to force the issue. You really crossed a line here.”

“You’re right, I should have respected your decision. I know how important Angel is to you and I never meant to make you feel your relationship with her was in danger. I’ll do whatever I can to make this right. If you want to find another way to break the seal, I’ll do my best to help find an alternative.”

Evariste’s expression softened. “Alright, I forgive you. But,” he added, an edge to his words, “I need you to *promise* me you won’t try something like that again. If Angel is to know how I feel about her, it’s *my* decision when to tell her. If that means my magic stays sealed, so be it. Obviously I’d rather find a way to break the seal, but I’m not willing to risk losing her to do it."

Emerys nodded, relieved he was getting out of this so easily. “Of course. I promise I won’t try to force the issue again.”

Evariste nodded, looking mollified and Emerys pondered what the best way to move forward was. It grieved him to see Evariste so *afraid* of Angel knowing the truth.

Hesitantly, he spoke. “Like I said, I won’t try to force the issue again, but…*why* are you so sure that telling Angel the truth will make her push you away? She spent *six years* scouring the continent in her efforts to find you, and it’s not as if you two have been subtle in showing affection since you arrived.”

A dark look crossed Evariste’s face. “How could she *not*? Kissing her is my *darkest desire*, Emerys. I was her *teacher* when I fell for her. Plus it’s not as if she’s made a secret of how she feels about people falling in love in the midst of war.”

Emerys was taken aback at Evariste’s tone and expression. He’d never seen his friend so *ashamed* before. *I should’ve realized how much his years of captivity have affected him. No wonder he was so much angrier with me than I ever would have expected.*

“Don’t you think that maybe you’re being a little too hard on yourself?”

Evariste just frowned.

“Think about it. The chosen placed a curse on you that can only be broken by your darkest desire. They probably thought that would be killing someone or something equally horrible. But instead, your *darkest desire* is just to kiss the woman you’ve been in love with for years.”

Evariste’s expression lightened slightly, giving Emerys hope that perhaps he could get through to him after all.

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At Emerys’ words, Evariste felt that flicker of hope from earlier blaze to life and Angel’s lingering magic flared up as well, as if to encourage him. Am *I being too hard on myself?* Angel’s magic flared even more strongly, feeding that dangerous hope.

“Maybe you’re right. I’ve been so focused on my fear that she’d push me away if she knew kissing her was my darkest desire, that I didn’t stop to think that it’s not an evil desire.”

“Yes, exactly! Didn’t you say the specific condition is giving her a kiss *of true love*? That’s not even truly dark.”

Evariste’s eyes widened and realization hit him. For all this time, he’d tormented himself over his desire to kiss Angel, all because of *Lillian’s* claim about his “darkest desire”. And yet, her claim plainly contradicted what the magic of the curse itself had said the condition was. Afterall, true love, inherently pure, could never be dark! And it made far more sense that a kiss of true love would break the curse than performing his darkest desire anyway -- *most* sealing spells with built-in conditions were designed for use on criminals, as a way to ensure they could only regain their magic if they had truly reformed. A kiss of true love or performing some selfless act were common conditions for such spells. Undoubtedly, someone like Lillian would have preferred to use a spell that actually *did* have “perform your darkest desire” as its condition, but she would have had limited options to seal someone with as much magic as him.

As the realization washed over him, it was as if a veil was lifted from his eyes. That flicker of hope grew to a flame, the piece of Angel’s magic flaring up with it, shielding him from the fear and hopelessness he’d been plagued by.

“You’re right, Emerys. In fact, I think the whole “darkest desire” part was just a lie intended to torment me. It’s *exactly* the sort of thing the chosen would do and I can’t believe I fell for it all this time."

A relieved look crossed Emerys’ face. Tentatively, he asked, “So, now that you realize your desire to kiss Angel isn’t something dark at all, will you tell her? Or do you still want to see if we can find another way?”

“I’d still prefer to find another way. I don’t want to burden her with my feelings, especially not with everything else going on right now. And I still worry how it will affect our friendship.” He sighed. “But maybe you’re right and it’s best not to waste time looking for an alternative. I just need some time to think.”

“Of course. Take the time you need to think and process and, in the meantime, I’ll start researching possible ways to break magical seals.”