# Chapter 22: Broken Seal and Unbreakable Bond

Angel and Evariste had just returned from the conclave and Emerys sat across from them at a round table in a meeting room. They were attempting to finalize the mission plan to steal the evil mirror, when a knock sounded at the door.

Samuel’s voice came through the door. “Your Majesty, we’ve returned from the mission and I have important news!”

Emerys got up to let him in. “For heaven’s sake Samuel, we’re friends! Are you ever going to stop your ridiculous insistence on formalities? Just call me ‘Emerys’ for once!”

Samuel shrugged, eyes twinkling with humor. “It wouldn’t be proper, Your Majesty.”

“I’m the king and I say it’s perfectly proper!”

“Very well, Your Majesty.”

“Ugh, you’re utterly impossible!”

Angel smirked. “What’s the matter, *Your Majesty*?”

Emerys turned to her with a glare, then an idea hit him and he grinned deviously. “Hey Angel, remember how I was *right* about ‘the power of love’ amplifying your magic?”

She scowled. “It was about *trust*. And that has nothing to do with anything.”

Emerys shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant, but couldn’t resist smirking. “Hey, if you’re going to participate in Samuel’s nonsense, I’m going to retaliate.”

Evariste laughed. “Careful Emerys. You’ve just shown Angel the best way to retaliate against *you*!”

Angel looked at Evariste and grinned, then gave Emerys another smirk. “Exactly…*Your Majesty*.”

Emerys shook his head, unable to hold in his laughter. “You two are just as impossible as Samuel!”

“As entertaining as this is to observe,” Samuel interjected, “I do have rather important news.”

They all sobered and turned to face him.

Emerys sighed. “Alright, what is it Samuel? Clearly nothing went seriously wrong, or you’d have said so already.”

“No, nothing went wrong. In fact, it went better than I ever could have hoped. Acri broke his seal protecting Sarah.”

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Angel froze in place at Samuel’s announcement. This was Acri, the same Acri who’d tried to murder her and who’d stood by as Evariste had been tortured. Her fists clenched at the memories, but sheer bewilderment quickly overcame her anger. Begrudgingly working with them out of self-interest was one thing, but for him to have had a true change of heart this quickly…that was something else altogether.

She turned to Evariste and saw her shock and confusion reflected on his face.

Emerys, however, looked thoughtful. “Perhaps this solves the problem of how to get past the mirror wards when you break into their stronghold.” He glanced between Angel and Evariste. “The spell you used can’t be tricked, correct? He had to have *truly* acted out of selflessness to break it?”

“Yes,” Evariste said. “This particular spell is all but impossible to get around.”

Angel nodded in agreement. “Yeah, I don’t see a way he could have tricked it…but it seems almost as unlikely that he’s genuinely changed this quickly. And why was he even *on* a mission in the first place?”

Emerys sighed and explained.

Angel’s mind raced at the revelations. Acri had *truly* held no malice in his heart, but rather, fear and desperation? That was… unexpected, yet it made a certain amount of sense given what they knew of Lillian. Unbidden, compassion and empathy welled within Angel. Living in fear was something she knew all too well -- how many years had she spent terrified of her own magic, driven to suppress it and never use it in its most natural form? Acri’s fear had been of physical pain and death, but fear was fear. And she shuddered to think what his childhood must have been like, with someone like Lillian as his mother. *The chosen spent* years *lying to me, manipulating me, convincing me my magic was evil*. *But Acri…he spent his* entire life *with such people.*

Angel rubbed her temples, trying to massage away a burgeoning headache. As if reading her mind, Evariste placed a hand on the back of her head and the soothing feel of healing magic instantly banished the rising pain.

She gave Evariste a look of gratitude and clasped his other hand, the feeling of their fingers laced together and the flow of their interwoven magics grounding her.

Able to think more clearly now, something dawned on Angel -- the delicious irony of just how badly Lillian had failed. By relying on fear to control Acri, she’d ended up driving him straight into the arms of those poised to defeat her. And now, in less than two months away from her toxic influence, he’d started to truly reform -- the broken seal proved it. And that meant they now had an actual chance of getting to that accursed mirror *without* trying to force their way through wards that might well blow up on them.

Unexpectedly, a snort of laughter escaped Angel’s lips, resulting in looks of bewilderment from Evariste and Emerys.

“What’s so funny?” Emerys asked. “*Please* tell me you’re not about to start Samuel’s ‘Your Majesty’ nonsense again.”

*Well I wasn’t* going *to but now that he brought it up…*

“Why no, *Your Majesty,* that’s *not* why I was laughing.”

Emerys groaned. “I suppose I asked for that.”

Evariste laughed. “You definitely did.” He turned to Angel. “So what *were* you laughing about?”

“Oh, just that it will be particularly ironic if Lillian’s own son is the reason we’re able to steal the mirror from her.”

“Wait,” Emerys said, smirking, “Are you admitting I was *right*?”

“That we should bring Acri on the mission to steal the mirror and have him go through the wards?” Angel rolled her eyes. “Yes, fine you were *right,* assuming we can’t come up with a better idea. And that we can even convince him to do it. Are you happy now?” She paused. “Though I still don’t like how risky it is to hinge the plan on him. Even assuming he agrees and doesn’t betray us, he admitted himself that he was only guessing that Lillian couldn’t adjust the wards.”

Emerys’ smirk disappeared as the conversation turned serious again.

Evariste spoke. “I’m not fond of the idea either, but I don’t see a better option. Risking the blow back from brute forcing our way through seems even more dangerous.”

“Sounds like it’s decided then,” Samuel added unexpectedly. He looked at Emerys. “Shall I fetch Acri so you can request his assistance?”

Emerys glanced between Evariste and Angel with a questioning look. They agreed and Samuel left to fetch Acri.

A couple minutes later there was another knock at the door. It was a different guard this time, one Angel wasn’t familiar with.

“Your Majesty, Lady Alastryn requests your immediate presence, as it seems the children have gone missing.”

Emerys groaned and shook his head. “They’re probably just exploring the palace. Of course Alastryn would make a big deal out of it, but it’s nothing to worry about.”

The guard shifted uncomfortably. “She was very adamant that you come, Your Majesty.”

Emerys sighed. “Fine. She’ll make me regret it later if I don’t come now.”

He turned to Angel and Evariste. “If I’m not back before Samuel arrives with Acri, don’t wait for me.”

Angel snorted. “Why would we? We’re more than capable of handling Acri.”

Emerys rolled his eyes at her then turned to the guard. “Alright, let’s get this over with.”

After Emerys left, Angel and Evariste sat in silence for a moment. This was a rare moment of peace where they could just be together. Angel gently squeezed their clasped hands and felt him squeeze back. No words were needed, as they simply took comfort in each other’s presence.

Allowing herself a much needed moment of relaxation, Angel shut her eyes and focused on their bond, smiling as she felt magic pulse between them, connecting them and making them stronger. *To think, I was scared of letting Evariste so deeply into my heart, scared to let my magic be free to fully merge with his and create this beautiful bond we share, scared of my magic itself. Now, I wouldn’t want things any other way.*

“I love you Evariste.” Unlike the first time she’d said it, she didn’t have to work up her courage to force the words out -- they flowed naturally with no hesitation. “And thank you for supporting me through all of this.”

Evariste squeezed her hand. “Open your eyes.”

She did, only to see he’d pushed the table to the side and pulled his chair directly in front of hers. He was looking straight at her, his eyes saying he’d move the world if she asked. “Angel, I love you more than anything in the world. I’ve never been happier than when you first said you loved me back. I will *always* support you, *always* stay by your side, until the day you tell me not to.”

Angel stared back at him in awe, warmth filling her from her head to her toes, and the magic flowing between them seemed to rejoice with her. “Evariste. Being separated from you for so long was the worst experience of my life. The only thing that kept me going so long was that I refused to believe you were dead and that I was *determined* to find you. I was able to force that damned mirror to let you go because all the pain it threw at me was *nothing* compared to how much I missed you, how desperately I wanted you back. Now that we’re reunited and we’ve stopped hiding our feelings, I’m *never* letting us be separated again, not physically and not emotionally.” She joined their free hands, twining their fingers together and squeezed both their clasped hands. “I *love* you and you mean far too much to me to *ever* send you away. As long as you want to be at my side, I want you there and I want to be at yours.”

Now he was the one looking at her in awe. “Angel…being separated from you, unable to help you -- that was the worst part of my imprisonment. It was loving you, wanting so badly to get out so I could help you, that kept me from giving up. I almost *did* give up near the end, but I knew I had to hold on for your sake.” At this, Angel squeezed their clasped hands again, needing to reassure herself that he was truly here with her. “So if you really mean it that you never want to let me go, I’m never letting *you* go either.”

Tears welled in both their eyes, and Angel wanted to learn forward and kiss him. She would have, if not for the feeling of their magic tugging at her, clearly wanting to deepen their bond, but needing her to fully let down her mental and emotional defenses.

“Do you feel that?” Evariste asked. “The magic pulling at us?”

She nodded. “I think it wants to deepen our bond.” She grinned. “I’m game if you are.”

Evariste gave her that heart melting smile she loved. “Of course. I told you, I’m never leaving you.”

With that, Angel let down all her walls, marveling at how easily she *could* let them down, no doubt, fear, or hesitation getting in the way of opening her mind and heart fully to their magic. Somehow, she could sense that Evariste had done the same. Their magic spread out to fully envelope their minds, the bond now bridging them together, then doing the same with their hearts, building a bridge between them.

The old Angel would have been utterly horrified by the very notion of what she was doing -- trusting her own magic implicitly and opening herself to such closeness with another person -- it would have been completely unthinkable. Even when she’d let go and allowed their magics to fully merge together, choosing to trust Evariste with her magic and accept his reciprocal trust, she’d still not have been ready for *this*. But *now*…now she welcomed the deepened connection, relaxing at the feel of their familiar magic in her mind and heart, at the feeling of the bond between them strengthening, drawing them yet closer together.

She leaned into the feel of the magic and smiled at Evariste, who smiled back. She felt him experimentally prodding at his end of the bond. *You’re truly OK with this?* She started at his voice in her head, then laughed.

Prodding at the bond herself, she responded, *I dropped all my defenses and let it happen, didn’t I? And* *I could sense you doing the same.* She smirked. *Are* you *having second thoughts?*

He chuckled. *Not a single one. The only thing that would make me regret it would be if* you *weren’t happy with it.*

*Well I’m* quite *happy with it. Why wouldn’t I be? It’s our magic affirming the commitment we’ve already made to each other, afterall.*

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Evariste gazed at Angel with pure admiration. She’d already been through so much -- all the lies and abuse heaped upon her by the conclave; the pressure *he’d* put on her to use her core magic before she was ready; 6 years running around the continent single-handedly fighting curse after curse, all the while searching for him.Who else, after enduring *so much* pain*,* would ever choose such trust and vulnerability?

He shook his head and gave a joyous laugh. “*You* are truly amazing, Angel. I love you beyond what mere words can express.”

She grinned. “Then let’s not use words.” Abruptly, she stood, pulling him up with her. Then, she leaned forward and kissed him.