# Chapter 4: Confessions

As Evariste walked through the palace after the discussion with Emerys, he felt lighter than he had in a long time. The realization that his feelings for Angel *weren’t* dark had lifted a weight from his shoulders. But what did he do now? The obvious conclusion was to just go tell her everything, but he wasn’t sure he was ready for that. Before he could spend too long thinking about it though, he saw Angel walking towards him.

“There you are! I’ve been trying to find you. Can we talk?”

“Of course. What did you want to talk about?”

She bit her lower lip and shifted her weight. “I know you didn’t want to talk about this before and I’ve been avoiding bringing it up too. But after that prank Emerys pulled, I can’t seem to stop thinking about it, so I just need to know -- why did you try to kiss me when we had that shared dream?”

Evariste froze. He certainly hadn’t expected Angel to be the one to initiate such a conversation. But the fact that *she* had brought it up, rather than him, gave him more hope that she wouldn’t react negatively if he told her the truth. Still, he was hesitant to just outright say that he was in love with her.

“Why do you think I did it?”

She blushed. “I don’t know! That’s why I’m asking you. You’re the one who tried to kiss me, so you need to tell me why!”

He sighed. She wasn’t going to make this easy. He supposed he’d just have to say it.

“There were two reasons. But the primary one is because I’m in love with you Angel. I have been for years.”

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Angel stood stock still, a mix of disbelief, apprehension, and elation flooding her mind.

Could it really be true? Could he *really* be in love with her? After spending years fiercely guarding her heart against such foolish hopes, could she dare to believe it? Her traitorous heart *wanted* to believe it, felt a thrill at the idea. But…what if it was all a misunderstanding? Could someone as wonderful as him *really* be in love with *her*?

Her mind flashed back to Alastryn’s words, “He tried to kiss you. I don’t know how much clearer it could get.” No doubt Alastryn would say it was even *clearer* now. Still, she couldn’t quite bring herself to believe it.

Hope and fear warring within her, she stammered, “You’re…really in love with me? But…*why*? You’re…you’re *you* and I’m *me*.”

A look of relief crossed Evariste’s face and words seemed to spill out of him in a rush. “Why? Because you’re brave, kind, selfless, and so incredibly clever. Because you can more than match me in magical skill. Because you took all the years of abuse and bullying the conclave subjected you to and you never let it destroy you, never let it make you stop *caring*.” He paused, flashing a grin at her and her heart skipped a beat. “I love you *because* you’re you.”

The look in Evariste’s eyes was so genuine and heartfelt that, alongside his words, it washed away her doubts and soothed her insecurities.

“Evariste…I…” Angel’s voice held a note of awe as she gazed into his eyes.

*He really* is *in love with me.* The thought echoed in her mind, both alarming and exhilarating. *But what does that mean for us? Do I feel the same way? I know I love him but… could I really be* in love *with him?*

She’d told herself before that she didn’t knowwhat kind of love she had for him, but…had that just been an excuse? Hadn’t she known exactly what Stil was talking about when he’d described his feelings for Gemma, even if she’d refused to acknowledge it at the time?

Overwhelmed by the implications of her own questions, she seized upon the first distraction that flitted through her mind. “Wait, didn’t you say there were *two* reasons you tried to kiss me? What was the other reason?”

Evariste hesitated, his expression wary. “It’s sort of complicated, but it has to do with my seal.”

Angel frowned. “Your seal? What does trying to kiss me have to do with the seal on…wait…are you saying the seal can be broken by an act of romantic love, like all the curses I modified?”

He nodded, a cautious hope flickering in his eyes. “I think so, yes.”

She groaned, feeling a mix of annoyance and relief, with an undercurrent of something deeper she wasn’t ready to confront. “I don’t know whether to be annoyed that there’s *another* curse requiring romantic love to break it or relieved that at least now we know how to break your seal.”

Angel regretted the words almost the instant they left her mouth, her heart sinking as the flicker of hope in his eyes disappeared and his shoulders tensed.

*No, that’s not what I wanted. Why did I say that?*

She wanted him to smile at her again, to see his eyes full of warmth. And…she hardly dared to even think it but…perhaps she even wanted more than that. Maybe…did she also want their almost-kiss to become an actual kiss?

*I berated myself for dreaming of such a thing, sure such feelings were one sided and inappropriate. But now…*

She stammered, “Not that I’d be annoyed with *you*… I mean, if you… kissed me. It’s just frustrating, all these curses.” The vulnerability of such an admission made her want to flee, but, at the same time, she desperately wanted to bridge the rift her words had created between them.

Hesitantly, she held out her hand. His shoulders visibly relaxed and he smiled as he accepted her hand, twining their fingers together. She smiled back, her own tension easing, and she found herself starting to lean forward before catching herself and straightening. *What am I doing?*

Evariste’s smile widened, and there was a flicker of humor in his eyes. “So…if you wouldn’t be *annoyed* if I kissed you, does that mean…you might actually *want* me to?”

Angel felt a blush crawl up her face and she stared down at their clasped hands. “I…I don’t know,” she stammered, though her traitorous heart knew it was a lie. Now that he’d actually voiced the question aloud, she *did* know. If someone had asked her that morning if she’d wanted Evariste to kiss her, she’d have laughed at the absurdity. But now, after hearing his declaration of love, after her heart had soared and fallen with his expressions, she could no longer deny the truth -- she was in love with him too and she *did* want to kiss him.

His expression lit up. “So you’re saying there’s a chance you could feel the same way?” His voice held a note of wonder.

“Uhh…” How did she say this? This was all so unexpected and overwhelming! She wanted him to keep smiling at her, wanted to see the light in his eyes, but she couldn’t seem to speak her feelings aloud.

“Maybe?”

His smile didn’t waver. “‘Maybe’ isn’t no. If your answer isn’t ‘no’ then I’ve got a chance.”

Unexpectedly, he pulled her towards him in a gentle embrace. They’d been in this position many times before, but this time felt different, more intimate somehow.

“Evariste, what are you doing?”

“I’m sorry.” He pulled back, sobering. “I shouldn’t pressure you. This must be overwhelming, and I’ll wait however long it takes for you to figure out your feelings.”

Strangely, with just those simple words, her hesitation melted away, replaced with certainty and resolve. His willingness to wait made her realize she didn’t *want* to wait. The idea of admitting her feelings out loud still felt terrifying, but really, what *was* there to fear? He wouldn’t reject her, nor would he ever take advantage of her vulnerability. She *could* do this. No, she *wanted* to do this.

Pressing her lips together, she forced herself to take a step towards him, feeling her nerves ease slightly as she laced their fingers together once again. *I don’t think I’ll ever stop being comforted by his touch.*

His responding smile strengthened her resolve, though her voice still wavered. “You don’t need to wait. I…I do feel the same way about you. I’m…in love with you too. I just… couldn’t get myself to say the words aloud before.”

Evariste’s face lit up once again, his smile bright, but his eyes held a hint of caution. “Angel, are you sure? I know this was all rather sudden and I don’t want you to feel rushed or pressured.”

She forced herself to meet his eyes, which were full of cautious hope. She wasn’t used to being this open with anyone, but…this was *Evariste*. “Yes, I’m sure. Deep down I’ve known for a while I think -- and I’m done hiding from it. And anyway, we really *do* need to break the seal on your magic. If a kiss is all it takes…then, well…” She blushed.

“*You’re* far more important to me than my magic, Angel. If I kiss you it will be because I love you and I know you *want* me to, not just to free my magic.”

Her heart melted at his words. Taking another daring step towards him, she released his hand and, even more daringly, put her arms around him.

“Evariste.”

“Yes, Angel?”

*I can’t believe I’m about to say this but…*

“I told you I love you, so just kiss me already.”