An Affinity for Lies

Extended synopsis • Naria Khan

Princess Cecily feels a silver coil begin to drain the dealer demonstrating it. She breaks the connection, but afterwards he nearly burns his hands trying to summon heat. When his fleeing guard stabs a stranger, she stays to keep the wounded man alive. The dealer's papers point to Rochevaux, where Duke Amaury's aunt has felt something pulling at her own gift. Cecily's brother, the king, has no authority there. His sister, however, has forged references and an appointment to interview for the post of secretary.

As Miss Sutton, Cecily watches Aline ease the pain in the duke's aunt's hands one morning. By afternoon Aline can scarcely hold her pen. Someone has altered her writing folio's silver clasp to draw magic out of her. Amaury helps Cecily trace the work to a mill. On the way he tells her why he once refused to marry the king's sister. He chose a childhood friend he loved and lost her in the uprising. He has no idea he's telling the princess. When the mill wheel starts beneath them, Amaury shields Cecily and is pinned by the wreckage. She uses her gift to get him out and stays at his bedside while his physician, Armand Serac, treats him.

Cecily and Amaury become lovers. Afterwards, trying to help a cavalryman who lost his gift during surgery, she discovers that Amaury kept back the names of physicians who had access to his family's research. His grandfather tried to give his younger brother magic so he could inherit. That brother is still alive and wants his history kept private, but the physicians' names could have helped Cecily while the trail was fresh. Amaury opens the files. When Cecily discovers her colleagues have also

withheld evidence, she makes them release the supplier records while protecting the patients' names.

Those records lead to altered clasps already issued for the treaty ceremony. Cecily recognises Serac's signature on the payment order. His daughter Marianne needs a gift to keep the stewardship of a trust, though she's already asked for a reference so she can earn her own living. Beneath the treaty hall, Serac connects her to seven people upstairs. He promised they had all consented. Hearing him admit otherwise, Marianne asks Cecily to take the magic back. She unfastens the plates on her arms while Cecily reverses the flow. When a broken strap pins Amaury's wrist against live silver, Cecily holds on until he is free. All seven survive, though some recover little of their magic and Cecily's own gift remains impaired.

Serac faces charges, and Marianne will testify. Amaury gives up control of his specialist works to compensate the people harmed. When the king revives the royal match to secure the river treaty, Amaury offers Cecily a house where she can live as his mistress. She asks what he expects his wife to do while he visits her, then leaves for the palace.

Six days later Amaury refuses the marriage in Cecily's hearing, prepared to reopen negotiations. Only then does the king introduce his sister. Amaury asks who read what he told her in confidence. Cecily offers to show him her reports and admits he should have heard the truth from her. The river treaty goes through, and Amaury asks her to marry him in the glasshouse where the investigation began. They wed a fortnight later, and Cecily leaves Crown service to lead the duchy's intelligence work.