VOLUME ONE OF THE MAGICAL BOND SERIES

FORTITUDE

DEFIANCE IGNITES A REVOLUTION

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FORTITUDE Output Out

DEFIANCE IGNITES A REVOLUTION

A Novel by A.M. Bochnak



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Fortitude Rising Volume One of the Magical Bond Series

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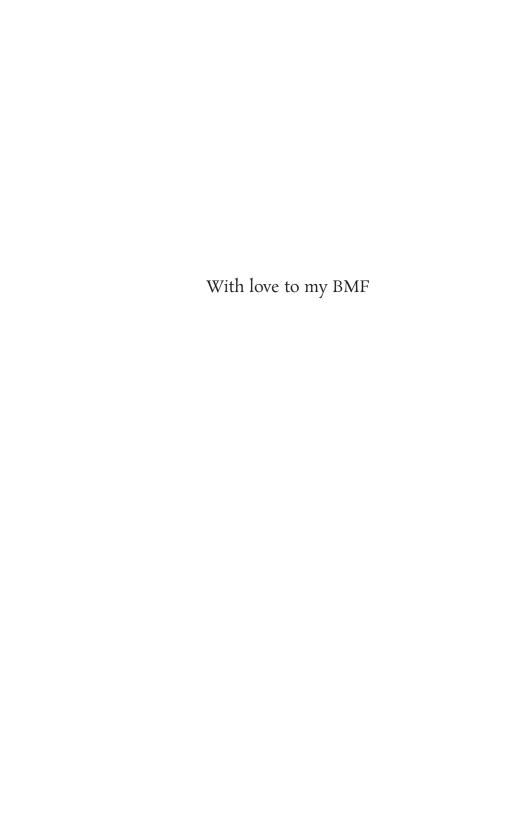
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EPISODE ONE INFRACTION OF THE





Spring 2031: Day 1, Late Tuesday

reedom is a dangerous right to fight for and if won, there's no guarantee it will bring happiness. Ebony Hunter fought her father for her freedom, nonetheless.

She tilted her head towards the stars above and took in a deep breath of fresh air. A light breeze blew her long black hair behind her, sending a shiver down her spine. If she had changed before teleporting to the lighthouse, she wouldn't be so cold. She looked down at her shirt, still damp with blood from her training session with her father.

Another request for some freedom gone bad.

She came to the lighthouse when she needed to escape her father and his unreasonable demands on her magic. It was her quiet place, tucked away on the opposite end of the island. Outside her own visits, there were no signs that another soul had been here in years. Its purpose and use long forgotten. The lighthouse was hers and hers alone.

The constant surveillance in the main compound kept her nerves

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on edge and she couldn't relax, not like she could when she was here. She felt the eyes watching her every minute of every day. Her father knew her every move. Or so he thought. She worried he would discover her visits to the lighthouse. No matter how careful she was, he always seemed to be one step ahead of her. The lighthouse was worth the risk though. She needed it to escape her prison and feel free, even for a brief moment.

Ebony found the last remaining dry spot on the front of her shirt and held it over her nose. Her defiance towards her father was not helping. She already struggled with her magic and this put too much strain on her. She leaned over the railing to gaze at the city off in the distance. A faint mist, fed by the cold evening air, was creeping across the river blanketing the reflection of the city lights. She loved the city skyline and how the soft warm glow of bright skyscrapers and flashing billboards dampened the darkness. She longed to walk among the skyscrapers and breathe in the glory of the city. She fantasized about how wonderfully freeing it would be in the city's streets with no one constantly watching her every move and pushing her magic beyond its limits.

Her father would never let her leave this island. He never let her leave the main compound of the institution. If he knew she came here, he would tear down the lighthouse. It was for her own safety he said, when she asked. That was a lie. It was so he could control her, manage her the way he saw fit. He treated her like the broken, eleven-year-old girl who just lost her mother. He never saw her for the grown woman she had become.

Her chest tightened, fighting back the tears threatening to fill her eyes. Her memories of her mother had faded over the years, and she struggled to recall her face. She remembered her smile; her mother always smiled. It was the bright, radiating smile that drew people in. Some say Ebony inherited her smile, but she didn't inherit the same comfortable ease her mother had with others. She lacked the comforting hugs and tender words that drew people to her mother. With more vivid memories of her mother rushing back,

Ebony shook her head to clear the thoughts and stop the tears she knew would come if she didn't end it now.

It was her mother who named her special magical ability. Her mother described her magic to her as an advanced form of telekinesis. She called it Evanescence. Anybody of the Magical Bond could move objects around with their mind. Ebony could make objects disappear and reappear somewhere else. No one else could do that. Ebony's true gift, however, was her ability to teleport herself, a skill even the strongest Magical Bond didn't possess. Unfortunately, her magical well was shallow and using her advanced skills weakened her body.

She looked up at the sky and frowned at its darkness. The only lights shining near this side of the island were the stars and skyline in the distance. The fog subsided, as the night air cooled the river's surface. Without the fog, she could see the full reflection of the city lights illuminating the river. She wished she could see more stars, but they were hidden behind a glowing blanket created by the city lights. They masked her view of the stars even from this tiny island seated in the middle of the river. Ebony dreamed of running away to someplace without light pollution where she could see stars and constellations like the pictures in books. A dream she wished on almost as much as her dream of standing amongst those city lights.

She scanned the East River knowing she should head back soon. That's when she saw a boat heading in her direction. The darkness made it difficult to see with certainty, but it looked like it was heading straight for the island.

She never saw a boat this close to the island at night before. Not once in all the years she'd been sneaking out to the lighthouse, nor from the vast windows from her quarters. She often saw boats traverse the river off in the distance, but they never came anywhere near the island. The only boats that ever docked were the weekly supply boats, but they came in the mornings. She watched it closely, not daring to take her eyes off it once. She was afraid to even blink; afraid that if she did blink, it would disappear as if it never existed. She wanted the boat to be real, not an illusion.

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It soon became clear the boat was heading for the western dock, almost dead center of the island. The island was small and oblong. From her vantage point in the abandoned lighthouse, she could see the main compound on the opposite end where her father and friends were sleeping. More buildings belonging to the institution were clustered in the island's middle and spanned the distance to the main compound. There weren't any buildings next the lighthouse, but it was only a short walk to the center.

She didn't know the last time the beacon was lit; she assumed before her lifetime. If someone looked in her direction, it was unlikely they would see her standing at the top. The only source of light around her came from the soft glow of the city and the moon hovering overhead. The moonlight alone wasn't enough to push back the shadows.

A spotlight flashed over the approaching boat and she could see the writing on the side. It read SUM Transport Vessel. Ebony's breath caught in her throat. That boat belonged to the institution. That had to stand for Scientific Understanding of Magic, the name of this Institute. It didn't look like the supply boats. This boat was different.

She leaned over the railing, focused on the boat until it reached the dock. So much so, she hadn't noticed the men waiting for it to arrive until one of them yelled.

"You're late, where have you been?"

"You can go collecting next time if you think you can do it faster," a gruff voice answered from the boat. "You think this is a walk in the park?"

She stepped back into the shadows, leaning into the wall, making sure she was out of view and hidden. She held her breath and waited until she was certain they had not seen her standing there.

She watched from the shadows. It took several minutes for the men to tie it up and start unloading its cargo. *People*. Why were people coming off the boat, and why so many? Ebony targeted her energy on them, attempting to teleport her mind without taking her body, another one of her powerful skills. She used it to scan areas for others before teleporting or to spy on her father, and it benefited her many times. This time, however, her power failed her. Her knees buckled, and her head started to pound. She was too weak; her body hadn't recovered from her earlier training session. Being outside also made it tougher for her. There was too much open space. She needed the confines of walls to focus her power. She sensed their presence, their unhappiness and fear, nothing more.

It took a long time for them to unload. They were linked together, a rope or chain tied between each one. A long, narrow ramp connected the dock and the boat. They sullenly shuffled unable to take large steps because their feet were shackled together. The ramp wobbled several times as they unloaded. Ebony held her breath, waiting for them to fall over into the river but it never happened. They looked like prisoners. Why would prisoners be brought to the institution? This was a place of learning and research.

They were led to one of the smaller buildings in the middle of the island. Ebony had no idea what was in that building, or any of the other buildings for that matter. There were at least ten buildings besides the main compound. It never occurred to her to try going into any of them. She watched until the last person was inside. Thirty in all.

Her anger towards her father grew stronger. He had to know about these people and why they were here. He was the director of the institution. Seeing these people in chains made her doubt her father more. She already didn't trust him and now this. There was no reason for people to be brought here in chains.

Ebony slowly slid down the wall to a seated position, trying to make sense of what she witnessed. She longed to talk to someone about her powers, her pain, her father's agenda. If only there was someone she could tell about the boat and the people she saw. She reached out with her powers to feel for another living being. Nothing. Pushing her powers further and radiating farther from the

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lighthouse she still couldn't find a soul. Out here in the open, her powers failed her. She felt utterly alone.