# Chapter 9: Hostage Situation

Shock and fury hit Emerys in full force at the guard’s announcement. After everything they’d put the elves through already, how *dare* the chosen show up like this and make demands! And had they really taken a *child* hostage? He took a breath, trying to calm himself. He needed to handle this situation rationally and he couldn’t do that if anger was clouding his judgment.

“Did you recognize the mage or the hostage?”

“No, your majesty. I’d never seen either of them before.”

“What exactly is the situation -- what’s this spell he’s using on the hostage? And are you certain there really *is* a hostage, instead of a ruse by two Chosen mages?”

The guard shifted uncomfortably. “I suppose I can’t be certain, Your Majesty. But the girl seemed terribly frightened and awfully young. I don’t think she could be older than ten. He has her inside of some kind of strange barrier that none of our spells seem able to break. I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“Did he say what he wants or why he’s here, other than to speak to Angelique?”

The guard shook his head. “No, he refused to say anything besides that he’s a member of the Chosen and that if we didn’t bring the lady enchantress to talk to him, he’d kill the girl.”

Emerys clenched his fists at the sheer callousness and audacity of such a threat and tried to think. It did seem unlikely such a young child could be culpable. But still, he had to approach the situation with utmost caution, lest his people end up trapped in another curse or something equally horrible.

He turned to face Angel and Evariste. Their faces were pale and eyes wide, mirrors of his own shock and horror. “This is obviously a trap, but I’m honestly not sure the best way to deal with it. You both have more experience with the chosen than I do and he’s asking for Angel specifically. What are your thoughts?”

Angel spoke. “This has to be a reaction to us flushing out all their spies from the conclave. This sort of move seems far more reckless and desperate than their usual schemes.”

Evariste nodded. “I agree. This doesn’t feel like one of Lillian’s usual plans. Sending a single mage with a hostage to contend with *all* the elves *and* Angel, especially when they no longer have me as a power source? Either they’ve gotten *really* desperate or there’s something about the situation we’re not seeing.”

Emerys frowned and turned back to the guard. “Tell the captain that I’ve ordered extra patrols around the border and they need to be alert for hostile mages. And alert me immediately if anything changes.”

“Yes, your majesty.” He bowed and left.

Emerys turned back to Angel and Evariste. “I’m increasing border patrols in case there are other chosen hiding nearby, but that’s a defensive move. We need to decide on how to handle the mage we know is there. He’s demanding to speak to you Angel, so it’s your call.”

“I don’t think we really have a choice. We can’t just abandon an innocent child. And if none of your guards can break whatever spell he’s using to hold her prisoner, our combined magic is probably the one way we have a chance of freeing her.”

Evariste took her hand. “We’ll face this together.”

Emerys nodded. “Alright. Let’s go.”