

# Chapter 74: Unfortunate Circumstances

Raimie, Rhylix

*Raimie*

“—hope!”

My shout was drowned out by the howl of the wind. Shivering, I hugged my chest as icy knives of rain drove through my uniform to beat against my skin. A gust of wind swooped into the city’s center, and pinwheeling my arms, I took several unsteady steps to keep from falling. The wind continued teasing at my body, trying to lift me off the ground, but it quickly capitulated, unable to keep still long enough to accomplish its ambitious goal.

How long had I been in the tear? It must have been a while if a storm this bad had rolled overhead in that time alone.

The sky had darkened considerably, more than it should have on a cloudy day, but I couldn’t figure out how long it had been since night had fallen. The tear was illuminating the city’s center with its brilliant corona of light, a corona that stably encapsulated the ellipsoid of darkness in the middle of it.

Braving the tear had worked! With my task completed, I could go home to Elisk, although after what had happened in the tear, I was hesitant to call that city home. Not after what I’d felt in the space between realities. Which had been... weird.

In any case, my work here was finished. One last hurrah completed before assuming the throne. At least I’d done some good with it.

Standing at the base of the stabilized tear, I quite literally thanked Alouin for the miracle, or for what I might have considered a miracle in my early teens. The more I encountered the impossible and the more meetings I had with Alouin, the surer I became that the being who most people in my world hailed as a god wasn’t really a god at all. Alouin had been surprised too often, fiddled with the air in every encounter I’d had with him, and he’d once told me that he had little power to spare, all of which didn’t scream ‘godly’ to me. Maybe Alouin wasn’t a god per se but a powerful mage or-

When something tugged at my leg, I absent-mindedly smoothed the cloth that covered my disturbed skin, but as my hand came away soaked by something much more viscous than rain should be, alarm kicked in. Glancing down, I found a jagged, one-inch hole boring through my thigh, and as I watched, gouts of blood spurted from it to the rhythm of my heart.

Where had *that* come from? And... oh, shit. This was bad, wasn't it?

"Dodge!" Dim lethargically shouted.

As prompted, I sprang sideways, gasping at the increased flood of my life's blood from my wound, but a palm-sized pebble soon shot through the space that my torso had been occupying a moment before. Maybe more than an even trade....?

I almost collapsed; the world was already spinning so fiercely. Gods, I needed to stop this bleeding.

"Torniquet, Raimie!" Nylion screamed.

I couldn't find my other half. This seemed like a problem, but I set it aside to woozily unbutton my jacket, thoroughly regretting my decision to go without a belt today. I tightened its cloth into a painful knot above the wound, but the gush pulsing out of it never slowed down.

With black bars closing in on my vision, I felt faint, so as I hobbled toward the building I'd used to enter the center of the city, I was careful, struggling all the while to stay on my feet.

In front of me, Dim bodily shook Bright, and while they did, the cracks that I'd spotted on their body earlier grew wider, letting something inky peek from beneath.

"He's bleeding out, numbskull, and my whole has nothing to stop it!" they shrieked over the screeching wind. "Snap out of it!"

I stumbled for a few more steps before spilling face-first onto the stone platform, feeling something *snap* in my chest as if from a great distance. My pant leg was soaked, only made worse when I dragged it and the rest of my body through a shallow puddle. Was that my blood or the rain? I couldn't tell.

I managed about a yard more before my strength gave out.

Nylion's familiar form lay still beside me with his eyes gleaming, and I reached a shaking hand for him. I'd found my other half. Everything would be ok, or I'd think so if Nylion's terror hadn't been splashing down our bond, much like the rain on our back.

"What happens when we die?" he softly asked.

*Nyl...*

I was so cold that I was warm. The quiet stillness that accompanied this warmth made staying centered feel next to impossible. Drifting was.....



A tendril of... something faintly reached across our bond while a hand lowered in front of my face. I couldn't take it, not truly, but it followed me as I got to my feet, and once I had, I flung my arms around Nylion, never bothering to look at his bruised and battered face.

"You smothered me," Nylion said into my shoulder. "You almost blocked me out of our mind."

Oh... hell. I had?

*I... I didn't mean to hurt you. Gods, Nyl. I SWEAR-*

"You were dying, and so was I," Nylion said. "Let's forget it happened."

He slid a hand down my arm until our fingers were interlaced, and together, we haltingly climbed through a window. Nylion spent the rest of our trip back seeping encouragement across our bond. For my part, I left a trail of blood in our wake, to be scoured from the earth by the hurricane.

I chuckled before a sting in my chest reminded me of how bad of an idea that was.

This storm didn't care that three hundred years ago, a seer had foreseen me defeating Doldimar. It couldn't be bothered to learn that the man beneath its fury had lived through attacks from allied Esela and from an Enforcer. It couldn't care less about the atrocities that Doldimar had perpetrated and how I was trying to reverse them. It merely followed Mother Nature's directive, producing massive amounts of wind and rain while using the fore of its gales to shoot twenty-two-year-old dual primeancers with pebbles before dispassionately departing. It was enough to make anyone feel insignificant.

"Your Majesty!" a faint voice yelled into a break between the gusts.

One of my soldiers braved the fierce weather to trot out to me.

"How did it go?" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Is the tear-?"

Throwing my arm around the man's shoulders, I shifted my weight to him.

"Take me to Little," I gasped.

Whatever surprise the soldier must have felt was thrust aside as he followed his orders, summoning a comrade to support my other side. When we stumbled through a doorway, I reclaimed my arms.

"Where?" I gasped.

"Through there, Your Majesty," one said, pointing to the left. "Are you sure you don't need-?"

"I'm fine!" I snapped.

I advanced in the indicated direction, dragging my bad leg behind me.

"You're not fine," Bright started.

"Shut up, Bright!" I grunted. "I gave the two of you one job. Watch my back. Look how well that went."

Both splinters shrank to the side right as I tripped, grabbing a door frame for support.

Little glanced up from where he'd been writing a missive. The knife that he'd been absently twirling through his fingers thumped into the grass on seeing me.

"Alouin, sir! You look awful," he said. "What happened?"

I dragged my now unresponsive leg into view, but that motion tilted me too far, and I lost my balance. At least I hit cushioning grass rather than stone on landing this time.

"Shit! Dieldrenil, run and find Korlatry," Little shouted "Orlanon, I need your belt. We need a much better tourniquet."

Weakly rolling to my back, I spat dirt out of my mouth. Little had already dropped to his knees beside me.

Once I'd cleared my mouth out, I wheezed, "Don't bother. Get me to Qena and Rhy as quickly as possible. I'm staving off the injury as best I can, but I'm not sure how much longer I can last."

"If we don't properly apply a tourniquet, sir, you *will* bleed out on the journey," Little said. "I'm not sure how you haven't already."

Snatching the spy's collar, I dragged him closer.

"Little. Primeancer."

Pointing at my chest, I grimaced, releasing my hold.

"Just get me back!"

"If you insist, sir," Little said with a sigh. "Orlanon, belay the previous order. Tell the soldiers to prepare for a hasty retreat. I'll need volunteers to carry the king."

"I can walk," I weakly said.

"Respectfully, sir, shut up," Little snapped. "You look like death warmed over. If you want to reach Qena as soon as possible, you'll let us carry you."

"Fine," I thought I mumbled.

If I had, I didn't hear the word spoken. Something repeatedly hit my cheek, and Little started shouting. Behind the spy, my splinters stood in sharp relief against a steadily fading background.

“To stay alive, all you must do is maintain your hold on Ele,” Bright said.

“And to do that, you must stay awake,” Dim added.

Even they soon faded to fuzzy blobs, but I didn't let sleep take me any further. For an interminable length of time, I balanced on that knife's edge, clinging to the bundle of life circling my wound. The one steadily eroding beneath the pressure of the death it contained.

The rumble of a much-beloved voice added itself to the muffled noise around me.

“Hold on a little longer for me, Raimie,” Rhylix said with a strained voice. “Please, my friend.”

Rhylix had asked the impossible of me. I fought with the dregs of my strength, but soon after hearing my friend's words, a long resisted, crushing wave of darkness crashed down on me.

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### *Rhylix*

When I heard shouting outside, I assumed that someone new had joined the disgruntled Qenans outside the inn. I was almost impressed by their dedication, given the constant downpour that had started soon after I'd returned to the town.

The villagers hadn't been happy to learn that Raimie and I were planning on taking two of their youngest away from their families. Still, if I was forced to hear one more accusation of kidnapping, I was liable to wind up in a fistfight. Whether Miranon and Tejesper joined us on our trip to Elisk, it would be *their choice*, not something we forced them into.

As I heard feet pounding up the stairs outside of my door, I prepared to once more listen to the Qenans' understandable fears.

When my room's door was flung open, however, a host of soldiers spilled into my rented room instead of the eccentric scientists I'd expected, and my heart seized up. Streaming rainwater, five of them lugged a delirious Raimie to lay on my bed.

Blood had soaked my friend's leg from hip to ankle with a chit-sized hole gouged through the medial of his thigh. It was so clean of a through-and-through that I could see a sliver of blanket on the other side of his exposed muscle, tissue, and a nicked artery.

I froze at the sight of that clipped blood vessel, the source of the sticky liquid coating my friend. In the past, I'd treated injuries where that artery had been punctured. The victims had never lasted long, despite my best efforts, but where blood *should* have been spurting from the gash, only a slow drizzle was dripping instead.

Two things were slowing the flow of Raimie's life from his wound. One was the cinched belt wrapped around his thigh. The other was the faint Ele glow swirling around the wound.

Gods damnit, I'd known this would happen. What *always* happened when I let Raimie take on a dangerous task alone? I'd rather if the interruption to my afternoon had been another irate parent.

Clutching at my shoulder, Little broke me free of shock.

"Save him!" he hissed with frenetic eyes.

Ok. I could do this.

"Clear the room, people!" I bellowed while holding Little's gaze. "You stay. I may need help."

The room emptied of soldiers faster than they'd filled it.

"Get my cloak," I said. "I'll need my supplies."

While Little's back was turned, I knelt beside the bed and tried to Let Go, releasing the flood of Restoration that was regularly beating against my control, but something or *someone* blocked me from doing it today.

"The hell, Creation?" I hissed. "This too?"

"You don't need Ele to fix him," was all the splinter would give me.

Biting back a scream, I transitioned into healer mode. Raimie was no longer a friend, merely a patient requiring treatment.

Just in time, Little dropped my cloak beside me.

"I'll need a *clean* bottle of the tavern's strongest alcohol, the sheets from the bed next door, and a basin of water," I said.

Little scurried off, but before he could disappear, I stopped him with a demand for the shears lying on the side table by the door. Little obligingly tossed the pair to me.

While I waited, I cut a stiff pant leg off of Raimie's limb before rifling through my cloak's pockets for my smallest sutures and string as well as a clamp. Heavy footsteps soon announced Little's return, and I moved to give the spy my spot at center stage.

"Clean the skin around the wound as best you can," I said. "Then, liberally irrigate it with alcohol."

While the spy complied, I summoned fire from the hearth downstairs onto the only open-air candlestick in the room. I was convinced that for my purposes, the gas-fed lanterns populating the room wouldn't work as well as a clean, wax-and-wick candle for sterilization purposes. By the time I was done heating my instruments over the candle's flame, Little had wiped Raimie's leg free of blood, standing ready for his next task.

"Your job is to keep my work space dry," I said.

When I inclined my head to the wadded-up blankets, Little frantically nodded, and I knelt, running alcohol over my hands before reaching into the wound with my tools. Treating an injury like this wasn't complicated, at least not the way I did it, but it also wasn't easy.

First, I clamped the end of the artery closest to the heart to control bleeding. Because the damage to the blood vessel was so slight, I'd be able to suture the nick closed rather than searing it, like a larger gash would require.

This task took my full concentration for a while. I was almost finished with it when Raimie's near-incessant mumbling broke off, leaving silence behind.

My patient couldn't faint now. Ele was the only thing keeping Raimie's heart from exsanguinating his body. I'd almost repaired the artery's break, but two more sutures remained. If Raimie fell asleep, letting everything Ele had retained go free, the pressure of that blood flow might ruin my hard work, even with a clamp in place.

So, I picked up the pace.

"Hang on a little longer for me, Raimie," I said.

I tied off a suture. One left.

"Please, my friend."

As I secured the last suture into place, white light fled from the injury, and I hastily retrieved my clamp. I watched the artery bulge, certain that one of my neat sutures would fail, but they held. Slumping, I massaged my shoulders.

"He'll live," I said.

"How do you know that?" Little asked. "I can still see into his leg!"

"Trust me. The dangerous part is over," I said. "Putting his leg back together will be difficult, but he won't die from the process."

As Little grumbled to himself, I smiled. I hadn't played healer in years, but damn, if my skills weren't as sharp as they'd ever been.

Cracking my knuckles, I reached for a needle. Time to sew my patient up.

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