

# Chapter 8: Escaping Fire

## Raimie

Intent on getting out of Fissid and the trouble I'd found there, I took a step outside. My foot landed on something squishy, and on finding what had caused the noise, I leapt back, slapping my hand to my mouth. Shuddering gasps barely kept me from losing control of my stomach.

For outside of her waystation, Ytrella lay still, and more lumps were sprawled across the square. Hell, so many blank eyes were staring at me.

Doubling over, I coughed, which sent acid pouring from between my fingers. A town full of people... The monster had massacred a *town*.

Because of me.

Stepping over Ytrella, I dazedly wandered into the center of the square. Bending to retrieve a set of shackles, I tucked them into my waistband and closed my eyes.

This confusing mishmash of ice and fire, screaming and weeping inside of me? It must wait for a time. I needed to escape the tinderbox that Fissid had become before the fire braved the dirt sprawl of town square.

Maybe I could wait it out in the well?

Fluttering my eyes open, I forced them to land on that stone structure-

*I keep mama aloft with my broken arm, clinging to the rope with the other. The clumsy curses I mutter help with driving pain away, letting me stay conscious. If I see Bryruned again, I should thank the blacksmith's apprentice for teaching them to me.*

*"Help!" I call. "Mama, please wake up."*

*My whisper echoes alongside the slosh of water.*

*As time passes, light creeps up the well's walls, and a visible patch of sky turns orange and purple. By the time stars emerge, cursing can't retain my pain any longer, and I float, holding onto consciousness for the sole purpose of keeping mama above the water.*

*"Why did you chase me?" I ask. "Did you want to play Flee too? You should've said something. We would have let you join us."*

*Mama says nothing, and I swallow a lump in my throat. Voices shout into the dark, but I can't summon the energy to call for help. Doing so changed nothing earlier. Why should it help now? Instead, I hum a lullaby, indulging in the illusion that I'm putting mama to bed for once.*

*Her weight is lifted off of my arm, and it screams at that release of pressure. Mumbling my own protests, I slap at the water, looking for her.*

*From behind, something is wrapped around my stomach. I twist, flailing at whatever is holding me, but even still, it lifts me into the air. I dangle until it pulls me over the lip of the well, and once I'm released, I flop to the ground.*

*"Raimie!"*

*A rough hand touches my cheek, and I grab it.*

*"Mama?" I ask.*

*When my vision clears, my father's worried face crystallizes into something recognizable.*

*"She's fine. Waking up now. What happened?"*

*Closing my eyes, I surrender to sleep.*

Why the hell was I dwelling on the past when my future looked shaky at best? Alouin, what had I been doing before falling into memories?

Snapping and cracking sounds spun me in place while one of the taller buildings nearby collapsed.

Right. I'd been escaping a fire.

If I got into the well, it might help with the flames, but it wouldn't stop smoke from smothering me. It wouldn't work, which meant I'd have to choose a riskier solution.

Turning in place, I looked for the weakest section of the fire, but my initial inspection left me frozen. Too many options! Which would work best?

Right when hyperventilation was threatening to set in, I spotted something that I'd missed in the hazy darkness of this burning night. A shadowed figure was standing beside a building, frantically beckoning for me to follow it.

I didn't take the time to consider my fear of the figure or whether it was an ally or not. Something deep inside, almost beneath my awareness, instinctively trusted it, and so, I took off for the bakery.

Bursting into the shop, I threw an arm over my face with my eyes watering. Again, the shadowed figure guided me, standing beside a door along the back wall. Coughing, I avoided what flames I could, chasing an anomaly that I'd recoiled from that very morning.

Once I was on the other side of the bakery, I dissolved into wet coughs, all while watching a shadowed figure shuffle in place.

I'd made it out of town square. Not to escape Fissid.

The figure took the lead, although its jittering form was now warping in unnerving ways. With its path weaving, it seemed drunk, but even so, I never considered going my own way. Later, I'd examine why doing that felt unnecessary, but for now, the figure had proven itself reliable, and I couldn't find my way through this maze of death by myself.

But then, the figure led me into a dead end. Cottages crowded around the fringe of town, and to this point, we'd threaded through them with little trouble. Now, I could see the creek that bordered Fissid through flickering orange and yellow, and beyond that lay a plain, lit only by the moon and stars.

Unfortunately, a collapsed cottage was blocking my path to it.

Turning to the darkened figure, I hissed, "Really? There's no other way?"

It shook its head, soon followed by the rest of its form. A halting series of screeches contested the roar of destruction around us, and I lifted a hand to stop the figure.

"I understand," I said. "Thank you for getting me this far. I don't suppose you know how to get around that, do you?"

When I waved at the cottage's collapsed beams, the shadowed figure faced them, cocking its head. It shrugged with another jumble of high-pitched noises spilling from it, and making a face, I waved for quiet.

After examining the mess, I had to agree with the figure. I saw no good way through it. Several acceptable paths lay there, but all of them would hurt me. So, which one would hurt the least?

As if summoned, the shadowed figure's companion, all blazing light, stepped through the conflagration. It pointed at a smoldering plank, one that was perched above a reduced spread of flame. Could I even reach that spot?

Swallowing hard, I glanced over my shoulder, not so much from distrust but to alleviate the part of my brain that was screaming for another option. Unfortunately, manically cackling flames had already filled the path I'd taken to get here, making Fissid a beacon sure to be seen as far as the Fractured Peaks.

Cursing, I tested my weight on my sprained ankle, wincing when my leg nearly buckled. Hell, this would be fun.

With a growl, I sprinted for the plank, making the figures of light and shadow vanish as I approached. I jumped, reaching for something that I should never have touched, and when I caught hold of it, a piercing scream fought the flare shooting from my palms with both sensations begging for my attention.

I gave it to neither. I focused only on dragging my body over the wobbly plank and into the creek beyond.

Its icy water came as a blissful release, and I took a moment to enjoy it before pushing to my feet. Before I could take a breath of free air, however, a flash of agony sent me splashing below the surface again. With my air depleting, I thrashed in the water until something in my uncontrolled scramble moved me forward, and soon, I was dragging myself out of the creek by my elbows.

Collapsing on the creek's bank, I reluctantly lifted my shaking hands, and the sight of them made me feel like something had gut punched me. A black stripe ran across my palms with bone peeking through it in spots, and that same awful color was dotted across my fingertips. The skin between them was ruby red with blisters already forming, and I had to curl my hands into claws if I wanted to think clearly.

Ruined. They were utterly and completely ruined. Flopping my arms to either side, I burst into laughter while tears spilled from my eyes. Alouin, what would I do?

And how could I agonize over my woes when Fissid would soon become a graveyard? Why did I think I was more important than everyone who'd been murdered? How could this be real?

As if knowing how badly I needed the distraction, a roar split the night, one of a human's making, and I tensed.

I knew that voice.

As fast as I could, I clambered to my feet, racing toward the noise. A distant part of my mind wondered where my helpful figures from before had gone, but mostly, a constant scan of my surroundings occupied me.

There wasn't much to see. With its soil too rocky for farming and no other resources of value found here, the grasslands around Fissid had always lain empty. The only reason a town existed in such barren land was to serve as a gateway to Ratchav, the isolationist kingdom on Ada'ir's western border.

I darted around this emptiness, running low enough that tall grass slapped my face. After several minutes, I'd begun to wonder whether I'd imagined the shout, but before I could give up my search, two silhouettes popped into view on my right. One of them was chasing the other away from Fissid.

Veering toward them, I slowed down. I knew one of those people, and I had my suspicions about the other one, but considering all that this day had gifted me with, staying cautious seemed wise.

That conviction flew out the window as the man furthest from me paused to lift a bow. Its string twanged, sending an arrow speeding for his opponent's head, and he took off again, never checking if his attack had landed.

It didn't hit, but that wasn't due to poor aim. The archer's opponent swiped the arrow out of the air while continuing forward.

The flutter of that cloak as he batted the projectile down chilled me. It made the sword wielder the monster from Fissid, and the only person I knew who had such skill with the bow was my father.

Too much distance was separating me from the fight. I sprinted toward it anyway. My only weapon was a set of shackles, but I could do nothing else. I'd have helped even if the monster's victim had been a stranger, but despite my determination, I wouldn't reach the site of the fight before it was over.

It didn't matter how many arrows my father shot—and he was firing plenty—or how fast he ran... it just didn't matter. The monster would win.

Maybe that was the bastard's battle magic speaking, but if it was, my father felt it too. Dropping his bow, he raced for the monster. At the last second, he snatched an arrow from his quiver, jamming it toward his enemy's neck.

The monster caught my father's descending wrist. With a jerk, he spun my father around before placing his foot in the man's back. I watched him bed around that boot before he went flying, tumbling end over end.

Biting off my scream, I increased my pace. I made so much noise while flying through the grass, but the monster didn't seem to notice, merely stalking to stand over where my father had fallen.

"-don't want to kill him," the bastard was saying as I approached. "He could lead us to Shadowsteal."

Who was he talking to? My Father? There was no one else here.

"Yes, I suppose that damn ringing could serve as a beacon just as well," the monster continued, "but you know I don't like unnecessary killi- AGH! Fine! You don't have to do that."

He lifted a boot to stomp on my father's head, and I leapt onto his back, looping my shackles' chain around the bastard's neck. My hands screamed snarling protests as I applied pressure to them. I bit my tongue to counter that pain until the taste of blood filled my mouth.

Off balance, the monster wavered before falling to his back, pinning me between him and the ground, but even stunned, I continued pulling on the chain with all my strength.

The monster didn't seem to care. One moment, blurry stars were revolving overhead, and the next, the monster had shot to his feet, which had my forehead clunking into his skull. The bastard drove his elbow into my side with impossible force, and something snapped, leaving a jagged end tickling

at my lung.

I couldn't breathe! Couldn't- couldn't!

The chain I was clinging to was torn out of my hands, and I fell like a limp doll off of the monster's back, barely keeping myself upright.

I didn't notice my impact with the ground. All I could focus on were my sips of air and the click produced by each of them.

Something slammed into my head, and reeling, I awkwardly fell on an arm. I should do something, should get up and- and- what else? What must I do?

"I've revised my opinion of you, foreseen child," a voice said.

Why did it spawn such fear and hatred?

"You're too dangerous," it said. "So, despite my initial reservation, I must kill you, but please know that I looked for any reasonable excuse not to end your life."

A vortex of black was towering over me with a smaller twin at its side. A length of something shiny rose into the air, hovering, and a voice I knew and loved shouted angry, unkind things.

"Shh, shh," I mumbled to it. "You'll scare Volatility away."

The glint, flashing for my chest, faltered, and a new person, someone with white light streaking over them, barreled into the vortex, knocking it to the side. What... what... what...?

"Raimie!"

I heard love. Something I... I should... how to...?

Between blinks of the world, the ground and I reversed positions with my hands...

Oh, my hands...

Light and dark were clashing somewhere nearby, a display that would have taken my breath away if I'd had any to give. Why were they...?

Didn't matter. I'd reach... reach...

I looked upon familiar, drab hair and blue eyes.

"Raimie," this mash of colors breathed.

Such relief. Why?

With my goal achieved, I stopped resisting my body's call. I fell face-first into flattened grass and stayed down, gone to wherever the mind fled when its body failed.

*"This place again?" I sighed. "I thought I died."*

*Inky black swirled above me, and the temptation to scream at my immobility struck me once more. Hard.*

*But I wasn't totally restrained. Wonder began a slow seep into me as I flexed my hand, no free.*

*"It doesn't hurt," I said. "Injuries don't transfer here?"*

*"Why would they? We are in o- your head."*

*The wraith was sitting beside me, yet another man hidden beneath copious amounts of fabric, but this one was different. I thought. I didn't know how I'd missed his presence until now.*

*For a while, I watched as the wraith sawed at something I couldn't see. This man disturbed me, and yet, I trusted him, much like I had with the figures of light and shadow. Could they be connected?*

*"You have returned," the wraith said. "I am glad."*

*"I didn't get much choice in the matter," I said. "Kind of had to stay conscious when your body's taken as much damage as mine."*

*The wraith stopped dragging his jagged knife along my invisible bonds, jerking his head to face me.*

*"That sounds... bad," he said.*

*"It'll be fine," I said. "I'm not dead; I don't think. I suppose this could be the afterlife."*

*Resuming his work, the wraith said, "You are live."*

*"How do you know that?" I asked.*

*"I know it because I live," the wraith said.*

*He glanced up at the sky.*

*"I must retreat for a moment," he said. "You will wake up soon. Doo not descend too far into panic before that happens. Your screaming... I do not like hearing it."*

*Rising, the wraith flicked his knife up a sleeve before stalking out of view. For a moment, I merely flexed my hand, marveling at the motion.*

*"Even my dreams have turned topsy-turvy," I said.*

*Stretching an unmarred palm toward the sky, I waited to leave my nightmare.*

## **TTS Chapter Eight**

---

Revision #3

Created 18 August 2024 22:37:00 by FatalisticFable

Updated 18 March 2026 21:44:16 by FatalisticFable