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Truths and Lies

They rode hard away from Krusborough, headed north along the Highroad, Allister setting a relentless pace through the night. Indan was more than happy to let the grizzled ranger take the lead, still stunned as he was.

In the boy's mind, he replayed the events at the Happy Hearth over and over; the small black creature crawling through his window, crimson eyes burning with hate; its rasping shriek as it lunged at him with the wicked, curved blade grasped in its black, clawed hands; Allister appearing as if from nowhere, gray cloak billowing like dark smoke and his silver sword raised; Denton ordering him to leave with the ranger, to ride out into the night with the strange ranger.

Indan was fortunate that his father had taught him to ride and find his way in the dark when he was just a boy. Now, these things came as naturally to him as walking. He could perform these tasks as thoughtlessly as he could his chores at the inn. If that weren't the case, he would have long since fallen and broken his neck, such was the preoccupation of his mind.

They rode in silence, following the beaten road. When dawn began lighting the eastern sky, Allister turned off, now leading them northeast, away from the Highroad. They continued that way all throughout the day, crossing through short, wooded hills and grassy meadows, pausing only to water and rest their horses.

It wasn't until nearly sundown that Allister finally reigned in, grunting.

“This is far enough for one day. We'll make camp here.”

“Here” was the center of a small copse of oak trees that had a rather decent view of the surrounding countryside in any directions. The trees pressed in somewhat tight, but there was room enough for a small fire and for them to lay down comfortably.

“Start setting up camp,” Allister ordered gruffly as they tethered the horses. “I’m going to scout around for a bit, and maybe see about gathering up some wood for a fire.”

Making camp was a rather short affair. With no tents, Indan simply had to find enough space to lay out each of their bedrolls comfortably. Then, he set about digging a small depression into the earth for a fire, before he lined it with stones. With that done, and Allister having still not returned, Indan tried to busy himself with the horses, brushing their coats and making sure that they had food and water. After that, he dug through the bag of supplies that Daleen had packed for him, pulled out an apple, and waited, the fruit crunching softly under his teeth, the scent of its sweet juices blending with the smell of soft dirt and leaves.

It was nearly dark when Allister finally returned. Indan hadn’t noticed him approach, but now the ranger was impossible to miss as he seeped from the shadows, emerging from them like one of their own. Beneath the strange cloak that faded from black to gray before Indan’s eyes, Allister held a bundle of wood against his leather armor, which he immediately began piling into the firepit.

Once that was done, Indan expected the grizzled man to bring out flint and steel to strike a flame. Instead, the ranger reached out his hand toward the pile, focused hard on it, and spoke.

What emerged from the man’s mouth was the strangest sound that Indan had ever heard. It was of a language, but it had no words. It had the shape of speech, as Allister’s lips moved, and his breath expelled, but for the life of him, Indan could not tell what was being said. The air

moved and vibrated with the shape of sound, but nothing was spoken. It seemed to Indan that this was much the same way that he might expect the wind to speak.

When Allister finished speaking in this wordless language, a fire burst to life amongst the logs, and warmth washed over them. But the fire was strange. It wasn't the orange and yellow flames that Indan was used to, but rather a dark blue and purple, the light from it was dim. Indan sucked in a breath.

“Thieves’ Fire!” He whispered in awe. Allister chuckled.

“I prefer Dimflame, as Thieves’ Fire has a rather negative association with it, but yes.”

Indan had heard stories of Thieves’ Fire, the strange mystic flame that gave off all the heat of normal fire, but far less light. It was the greatest of friends to thieves, fugitives, and other foul folk of the night. The secret to conjuring it was said to be known only to a handful of people, and Indan had never met anyone who could produce it. Until now.

“I would prefer no fire at all,” continued the ranger as he poked at the logs, making sure that they were catching, “but you have questions, and you were promised answers. I’m afraid that this may take some time, and I’d rather we were settled in first.”

They sat facing each other over the fire, and in what little light the Dimflame cast, Indan saw the ranger’s face. In the low light, Allister looked even older than his years. The lines of his face were deepened by shadow, and there seemed to be even more streaks of gray through his russet hair than in the daylight. Even so, his eyes still held a steely strength to them as he met Indan’s gaze.

“Ask me anything, and I’ll do my best to answer you truthfully,” he informed the boy calmly. “I’ll tell you whatever you’d like to know.”

Indan opened his mouth and found that he didn't know what to say. Whatever he wanted to know? He had had a thousand questions running through his mind all day, and it seemed impossible to find one to start with now. He chose to go with the most obvious one.

“That... thing, last night,” he said, shivering, “What was it?”

Allister stared into the fire, considering the question. When he spoke, there was something in his voice that made Indan pause, something that it took him a moment to identify.

It was pity.

“It was one of the Scarred, a slave of the Empire. One of the many creatures that the Legion captures from all across Magusfall that possess particular skills. They rob them from their homes and families before torturing them with iron and sorcery until they are broken in body, mind, and spirit. Some last weeks before they break, others last months, some even endure it for years. But they all break in the end.

“The one that attacked you was once a goblin from the Valley of Stone. They're fierce warriors, but their real talents lie in hunting. Many goblins have a better sense of smell than hounds, and their climbing skills were perfected on the sheer cliffs of their homeland. He was probably taken on a hunt or scouting expedition. From there, he was tormented until he was nothing more than a mindless beast; just a bloodhound with a blade.”

Indan stared at the man, wordless. Allister noticed his gaze and barked a laugh.

“What? You thought they were just stories to tell children? ‘Be good, or the goblins will snatch you up in the night,’ eh?”

Indan felt his cheeks grow warm, and he nodded sheepishly. The older man shook his head and sighed.

“Where did you think those stories came from, hmm? Did you think they were simply conjured out of thin air? No, just as every tree starts with a seed, every story ever told starts with a grain of truth. They many of them may become embellished, but they all start somewhere. In this case, those stories of monsters stealing away children begins with a proud and noble race from the Valley of Stone.”

Allister noticed Indan’s now ponderous expression. “Worry not, my boy. You are not the first to be fooled by the words of singers and talespinners, and you certainly won’t be the last. Discerning truth from fiction is no small task. I think, Indan, you’ll soon discover that many of the things that you believe are true are not quite as they appear to be. Now, the night has only so many hours left in her. Ask your next question.”

Indan thought for a moment, before deciding to continue where he had left off.

“What was the Scarred doing in Krusborough? Why did it attack the inn, attack me?”

“It was there for much the same reason a dog enters a boar’s den,” Allister answered with a shrug. “It was hunting. Hunting me, specifically. Unfortunately, it found you first.”

“If it was hunting you, why did I have to leave the village with you?”

“For your own safety,” Allister told him firmly. “The Scarred are a secret that the Empire would much rather keep hidden, and many of those that know of them have their doubts about releasing them into the field. Every one of the Scarred is closely watched by their handlers, who don’t allow them to stray far. When the one that attacked you doesn’t return, the Legion will come after it. When they learn what happened, that it went rogue and attacked an innocent at an inn, things will become difficult.”

Indan felt a flash of fear thrum through him. He thought of Denton and Daleen, who had taken him in and raised him as their own after his father’s death, and Aaron, who had been a

brother to him. He thought of Wendy Cotton, Old Tom, and all the others from the village who would soon be in danger. Allister must have seen the panic in his eyes, because he held out his hands in a soothing gesture.

“Relax, boy,” he commanded softly. “They’ll be fine. It’s one thing to deal with a boy that witnessed the Scarred firsthand. Dealing with someone who has only seen the aftermath is something else entirely. Denton’s a smart man. He’ll play the ignorant country innkeeper, probably telling them that it was a demon, and I must be a wondering saint or something similar. He’ll have the body burned according to the holy books, in a pit that’s seven feet deep, and three feet wide. As for you, he’ll say I intended to make you my apprentice at the temple. It’s exactly what they’d expect to hear, so I don’t believe that they’ll argue it too harshly. Denton will cooperate with them, informing them that we headed north, they’ll send their trackers to verify, and then they’ll be on their way. Legate Emlyn is honorable and fair; she won’t punish a man that she believes has done no wrong.”

Indan released a breath, the tension fading from him. Allister smiled softly, his expression reassuring. A sudden thought occurred to Indan.

“How do you know Denton? He told me he’d never seen you before, when I asked.”

Allister nodded approvingly. “I was wondering when you’d ask. The simple answer is that I don’t. In fact, your uncle and I had never laid eyes on each other before the other night. But I’d been told all about him, and I imagine he would say the same of me.”

Indan stared at the man in confusion. A twinkle of something that he couldn’t quite name was glimmering in the ranger’s eyes.

“It was Ciaran that told me about him.”

Indan's eyes widened, and he straightened. The man was watching him thoughtfully, judging his reaction.

"You knew my father?"

"Oh yes, quite well in fact. Your father was one of my dearest friends, and I feel his loss deeply."

The ranger fell quiet, his gaze falling back to the fire. As the silence stretched on, Indan became to fidget uncomfortably. When it became clear that Allister had no intention of continuing of his own accord, Indan spoke up.

"How did you know him?"

Allister turned his gaze back Indan. The look that the ranger gave him was deep and measuring. Allister stared at him for a long moment, selecting his words carefully.

"Tell me, Indan," he said quietly, still watching the boy, "how much do you know of Talinor, and the founding of Drovos Lén?"

Indan blinked. For a second, he thought he had misheard.

"What?" he asked, startled.

"How much do you know of Talinor, and the founding of Drovos Lén?" Allister repeated calmly. Indan considered this.

"Only the old stories," he said last.

"Tell them to me," Allister ordered smoothly.

Indan frowned at the older man in annoyance but did as he was told. He tried to remember the story told by the talespinners that had stayed at the inn during their travels, but it was difficult. While Talinor was a hero to all humanity, he was also the founder of Drovos Lén, the first kingdom of Men. The Silver Empire did not approve of stories celebrating the old

regime, so Talinor's story was not commonly told anymore. But it was still a story told, and any story ever told had passed through Happy Heart at one point or another.

Indan sat up straight, took a deep breath, and began.

Outline of *Bone* (First book in *The Last Dragon* trilogy)

I. Prologue

- Intro to Krusborough and the Happy Hearth
- “Stories are told, but not often made”
- Denton (Innkeeper) and Ciaran (Man in the Gray Cloak) [Too long – needs revision]
- Ciaran returns to town, brings child (Indan)
 - War is over
- Bandit raid on the Cotton farm
 - Daughter (Wendy) only survivor
 - Ciaran hunts down the bandits
- Ciaran and Indan's home catches fire
 - Ciaran runs back in to get the Dragonbone Amulet
 - Ciaran dies from smoke and burns (Gives Amulet to Indan)
- Denton takes in Indan – three years pass

II. Exposition (add in prologue scenes???)

- Indan works at the inn (mostly chores and serving)
 - Misses hunting and camping with his father

- Jokes with Aaron and Denton (show family bond)
- Wendy Cotton enters and discusses the upcoming festival in Marescourt
 - She and Indan are close after Ciaran saves her
 - She hints that Indan should ask her to the festival
- Denton says they're expecting the caravans any day now
- Rainstorm approaches, making Denton uneasy
 - "Storm's ah brewin'"
 - Makes sure Indan still has the Amulet ("keep it safe")
- Days later, caravans arrive
 - Performance troupe on the way to the festival
 - Traditionally drink and eat at the inn, but sleep in their wagons
 - Allister sneaks into town among them
- Indan serves the customers, is stopped by Allister
 - Allister asks Indan about Ciaran
 - Indan tells him that he died (Allister notices his tone)
- Indan notices Allister's cloak
 - Remembers the rumor about his father
- Indan asks Denton if he knows Allister
 - Denton realizes who Allister is
 - Admits they've never met before
- Everyone starts leaving for bed

III. Call to Action

- Indan woken in the middle of the night by the Amulet

- Indan hears noises outside his window
- Scarred crawls into his room
 - Attacks Indan while he is still shocked
- Indan manages to dodge, starts fighting back
- Allister hears the sound of them fighting, rushes to help.
 - Kills the Scarred
- Allister notices that Indan has the Amulet, questions where he got it
 - Indan says from his father
 - Allister realizes who Indan is
- Denton burst in with his family
 - Denton looks around, figures out what happened
- Denton begins shouting orders
 - Daleen to pack supplies
 - Aaron to saddle horses
- Denton and Allister have a brief exchange
 - “So, it’s true then? The boy lives?”
 - “Yes.”
- Denton tells Indan to start packing to leave with Allister
 - Admits that his father was involved somehow (wishes Ciaran could’ve explained it himself)
 - “Go with Allister. He’ll explain everything, I promise.”
- Indan and Allister leave
- **Indan and Allister ride all night and day**

- **They made camp, and Allister lights a fire with magic**
 - **“Thieves’ Fire” – magic fire that gives off little light**
- **Allister promises to answer any question Indan has**
- **Indan asks about the Scarred**
 - **Creatures that are tortured until madness and made slaves**
 - **Scarred that attacked him was a goblin (great trackers and climbers)**
- **Allister explains that “All stories start somewhere”**
 - **Major theme introduced**
- **Indan wonders why it attacked him**
 - **Allister tells him it was random chance**
 - **Second major theme introduced**
- **Indan wonders why he had to leave**
 - **Keep him safe (Legion is closing in)**
 - **Would kill him to stop rumors of a rogue Scarred/Keep the Dragonbone Amulet from falling into Imperial hands**
- **Allister reveals that he knew Ciaran**

IV. Storytime

- **Beginning of the world**
 - **Magus carves himself into many pieces (each piece creates something in the world)**
 - **“Lords/Ladies” (gods and goddesses) are formed as well**
 - **Magus dies creating the creatures of the world (i.e. Humans, elves, dwarves, etc.)**

- World named Magusfall – Magus’s Fall
- Not everything made was good
 - Demons of the Nightlands
- Humans had no protection against the demons
 - Demons attacked them relentlessly
 - Humanity endures
- Temron (Lord of Wind and Storm) takes pity on Man
- Chooses Talinor to be his champion
 - Tells him to slay the dragon Scarnorn, the Shadow of the Sky
 - Most powerful dragon
- Talinor goes to fight Scarnorn
- Temron creates the strongest storm ever seen
 - Wind prevents Scarnorn from flying, rain prevents him from breathing fire
 - Talinor has Temron’s blessing and is unaffected by the storm
- Talinor takes Temron’s Gifts from Scarnorn’s body
 - Fangblade – Sword made from his fang
 - Unbreakable, forever sharp
 - Dragonbone Amulet – Necklace carved from his bone
 - Powerful magical conduit
 - Dragon’s Blood – Drank his blood to gain his powers
 - Unnatural physical prowess, and resistances to magic and fire
 - Royal line
 - Graycloaks (12) – Altered dragon scales

- Resistant to magic and weaponry, near-perfect camouflage (not part of Indan's story – kept secret).
- Uses Gifts to defeat the demons and found Drovos Lén (The Dragon's Land)
- Allister reveals its true (to an extent)
- Tells Indan his father was a Graycloak (like Allister)
 - King's most trusted servants
- Indan doesn't believe at first (asks why his father would tell him)
 - Allister tells him it was for his own safety (Ciaran was a fugitive)
- Tells Indan the Empire is hunting the remaining Graycloaks
- Allister asks Indan what he knows about the rise of the Empire
 - Indan says it was the result of the cruelty of the last king (Titus II)
 - Claims the king was purposefully prolonging the war to collect taxes.
 - Impoverished nation overthrew him, and the Silver Empire took the kingdom's place (Lead by Alberic)
- Allister reveals that Alberic was behind the war
 - Secretly funded the Alkari rebellion
 - Hired bandits to attack villages after troops moved south
 - Had the support of the people when he performed his coup
- Allister tells Indan that Ciaran had a plan
 - Saved Temron's Gifts from Alberic (symbols of the old kingdom)
 - Allister, Ciaran, and (female surviving Graycloak) each took one (Blood, Bone, Fang) for safe keeping, before going into hiding.
- Allister reveals that Indan has the Amulet

- “You, Indan Ciaranson, are the Keeper of the Dragonbone Amulet”

V. On the Road

- Indan and Allister head north
- Allister starts training Indan
 - Swordsmanship and Forestry
 - The broader world (What’s real and what’s story)
- Indan wants to learn magic
 - Allister says it’s too dangerous to learn on the road
- Night before reaching the Inland Road, attacked by another of the Scarred
 - Catching them faster than Allister thought
- Take the Inland Road to Eastport
- Allister books passage for two on a ship
- Night before they leave, Allister tells Indan that they aren’t travelling together
 - Separate boat for Indan headed to Graywater
 - Doesn’t want the Empire to learn who his allies are/Where hid the “Blood”
 - Made sure people knew who booked Allister’s ship, so the Empire will follow him
- Allister tells Indan to head to the Drunken Goat when he arrives in Graywater
- Gives Indan secret passcode
 - “May the Three protect you”
- They separate
- Indan’s boat is attacked by pirates

- Tries to fight them, kills a man
- Horrified by this, he is wounded and knocked overboard
- Indan washes ashore and is saved by Stella and Martin
- They tell him that pirates from the Everblue Isles have been raiding the northern coast for months
 - Rumored to be hired by the Empire
 - Conflict between Empire and the North
- Fewer trading vessels mean fewer supplies (northerners suffering)
 - Indan is touched that they would help him when they had so little
- They tell him how to get to Graywater
- Indan continues his training as he travels
 - Sticks to the forest instead of the main road, fearing bandits and Imperials
- Arrives in Graywater relatively easy
 - City guards give him trouble

VI. In the North

- Finds the Drunken Goat
- Gets a room and a meal
 - Gives the innkeeper the passcode
 - Told to wait until his room was prepared
- Indan eats and listens to the other patrons
 - Learns northerners hate the Empire
- Given his room, which he goes to
- Aofie is waiting for him inside (attacks him)

- She asks Indan where Allister is
 - He tells her they separated because the Legion was tracking them
- He shows her the Amulet
 - She tries to take it, but he stops her
 - Amulet's magic prevents her
- Indan manages to convince her that he isn't the enemy
 - Allister would never have given up the passcode
 - Tells her that he is Ciaran's son
 - Few knew that he survived
- Aofie informs Indan that Allister was helping enemies of the Empire
 - Doesn't trust him enough for specifics
- Aofie decides to take the Amulet (and its Keeper) to the "Blood"
 - Her warriors take Indan prisoner while they travel
- They travel disguised as merchants
- Attacked by bandits on the road
 - Hired by the Empire to raid the north
- Indan gets free of his bindings, and helps fight the bandits
 - Saves Aofie by killing a second time
 - He is still horrified, but able to rationalize it using Aofie
- Aofie thanks Indan for saving her (doesn't have him bound anymore)
 - She has a newfound respect for him.
 - Doesn't believe an Imperial spy could have such a genuine reaction to taking a life

- Indan and Aofie talk as they travel
 - They begin to trust one another more (semi-friendship!)
- Arrive at Snowhold (Northern “Capital”)
 - Indan still isn’t told their destination
- Stop at a manor house outside the city
 - Smuggled into the keep, away from public eyes
- Indan is taken to Ulric for questioning
 - Ulric brings Alenia to see if he’s lying
- Tells Ulric the same thing he told Aofie
- Ulric is grateful to Indan for bringing them the Amulet
- Aofie enters, revealing her identity as Ulric’s daughter.
- Ulric tells her to show Indan to his rooms
- Indan attends a dinner hosted by Ulric
- He speaks to Alenia
 - Wants to know more about the elves
 - She promises to tell him more about her people
 - Says she can teach him magic as well
- Titus III enters with Aofie
 - He is disguised as a northern lordling
 - Wants to get to know Indan before revealing himself
- Indan and Titus speak
 - They become fast friends

VII. Needed South

- Several weeks pass
 - Indan trains with northern warriors
 - Starts learning magic with Alenia
- Indan called by Ulric
 - Spies learned that Allister was captured by the Legion
 - Indan wants to save him, but Ulric refuses
 - Trap
- Indan decides to leave anyways (Titus agrees)
 - Aofie refuses to let them go without her
 - They steal the spy's report to learn where Allister is held
 - Blackfort
- Before they leave, Alenia stops them
 - Gives Indan an Elëianwood bow and blesses their journey
 - Tells them of a secret passage into the Blackfort
- They decide to stay on the road, despite the danger of northern troops finding them and returning them to Snowhold
 - Aoife and Titus know very little forestry
- They evade the northerners and return to Imperial territory
- Travel to the Blackfort
- Find the secret passage unguarded
- Start searching for Allister
 - Blackfort has suspiciously few guards
- Find Allister in the dungeon

- Allister reveals that it's a trap
- Irnak appears
 - Demon
- Villain's monologue commences
 - Reveals Titus's identity
 - "Now the Last Dragon is within my grasp"
- Attempt to fight against Irnak
 - Normal weapons shatter against his sword
 - Uses magic
- Desperate, Indan swings his bow
 - It hurts Irnak, and blocks his sword
 - Elëianwood magic resists demon magic
- Use the distraction to flee
 - Irnak orders his Scarred to pursue (Blackfort makes the Scarred)
- Allister guides them to a storeroom
 - Retrieve his gear (given to Titus and Aofie)
- Allister guides them to a sewer
 - They escape into the river
- They manage to make their way back north
- Ulric is angry
 - Can't risk the Prince until they have the Gifts
 - Didn't want his daughter in danger
- Need to get the Fangblade

- Empire tracking them north
- Prepare for war with the Empire