

## DIRON'S CALL

BRANDON DENNIS

He liked to wander through the woods for that was his nature. He did not take to cities too well, although he could stand them for a short while. But his home was in the wild. The smell of the earth and rain captured his senses. The music of the woods lulled his heart. But most of all he loved the peace he felt while alone. Being alone kept his mind on the things that he felt were most important. Being alone kept his body and mind pure from outside influences. Being alone kept him from shaming himself by the works of his hands and tongue.

He rode upon a steed, not of a fine line but a steed well enough. It was hardy and ruddy, well accustomed to the rigors of the wilderness and the burden of man. She was of brown hair and white mane, uncommon in a horse of her breed. Her name was Lightgrazer, and her master loved her dearly.

As for her master, he was clad in a gray cloak that draped down past his knees. It had a hood, which was especially nice during the rains and winds, but at the moment he wore it down. Underneath the cloak he wore a thick hard armor made of leather and steel. It had brass buckled and buttons, and the color of the leather was brown. Despite its thickness, the armor was surprisingly pliable and comfortable. As for his feet he wore on them a boot that had seen many days yet had been cared for expertly. The face of each boot had a symbol sewn into it with silver thread.

Adornments he wore in few, but what he had meant much to him. About his neck on a silver chain was an amulet made of some precious stone long forgotten. There were many loops and dips elaborately designed and intricately woven, like a never-ending road that weaved in and out of itself. Yet the amulet did not look complete. It was as if there was a second half which inserted itself into the amulet. For what purpose? The man knew not. On his right hand he wore a ring. It also was made of an unknown substance, similar to that of the amulet, but its design was different. It was smooth all around except for one section. There were runes engraved in that spot, whose meaning was known only by he who wore them. The runes were thus:

**THM PMERMRM FP THM RHX MMWIKFTMM NIM TIFM TF XFM**

His countenance was calm; his eyes were clear yet sad, containing deep within them a world of hurt. His face was set and stern, yet there was softness there that could be seen by few. His name was Durin, and he was well loved by those who knew him and well acquainted with all.

It was growing dark. Lightgrazer was getting sluggish and Durin himself desired to sleep on something other than a blanket tonight. He made his way to a nearby town of which he was accustomed to visit. Its name was Haslan, and it was the chief town of the city Goronth. He rode through the main gate and stopped. There were many buildings in Haslan but they were hard to distinguish because of the growing darkness. Durin looked to his left. A short ways away there was a house that was well lit. He could hear the

noises of merrymaking and a smile came to his face. He rode up to the inn at a brisk trot, and dismounted at the door. A man came up to him, and when he recognized Durin he cheered.

“Durin! Well if it isn’t so!” exclaimed the man. “How long has it been, seven months?”

“About that,” Durin replied. The man walked up to Lightgrazer and took the reins. The horse nudged him affectionately with her nose.

“It’s good to see you again. You staying the night?”

“Hopefully.”

“That’s good. I know we have room. Well I’ll put ol’ Lightgrazer here in her usual stall for ya.”

“Thanks Simmons. You really are great.” Simmons chest puffed out with pride.

“Well I try to do my best. Besides, anything for an old friend!” Simmons took Lightgrazer away to the stables. Durin looked up at the sign hanging from the wall of the inn. *Seabreeze Inn and Pub* it read. Durin smiled, opened the door and entered.

In the room were many people and the tables were quite full. Men laughed with each other as stories were told and moments from the past relived. And there was Amber, serving one of the tables with her usual cheer and mirth. Over in the corner a vicious game of darts ensued. Off to the right side there was a stairway leading up to the rooms. Along the nearby wall a fire burned in the hearth. The bar was wide and two men sat up to it, keeping to themselves. Behind the counter were racks of bottles, some full of ale, some not. A door led to the kitchen. Posh was wiping down one of the counters when Durin walked in. As soon as Posh saw him he smiled.

“Durin!” he exclaimed coming out from behind the counter. He walked up to Durin and gave him a hug.

“Hello Posh, how have you been faring?”

“Ehh,” said Posh with a sigh. “Business is business. But enough of me, what about you?”

“Much the same,” he replied. “I’ve been riding for quite awhile and decided to sleep in a bed tonight. Here...” he brought forth a bag of money and took out two gold coins, placing them in Posh’s hand.

“Of course! I’ll give you your usual room. Would you be wantin’ a meal tonight?” Durin thought about it for a moment.

“Maybe just something small.”

“Whatever you desire, Durin. And the meal is on the house!” he said with a grin.

“Thanks Posh. You’re a good friend.”

“Hey don’t mention it. I’ll send your food up when it’s done. You get some sleep now. See ya in the morning!”

Durin took to the stairs, lingering as he walked past the fire. Once at the top, he made his way to his room. It was the large one at the end of the hallway. He passed many other rooms on his way. All rooms were empty, save three. The door was open, anxiously awaiting his arrival. Upon entering he found everything just as he remembered. The focal

point of the room was of course the bed. It lay along the far wall in the center, its foot protruding into the middle of the room. A window in the far left-hand corner was left ajar and to the left of the window there was a dresser. This was the only room with a fireplace in it and it was full of dry wood. Durin gave this his attention first. He threw off his cloak and set it on the bed, along with his bag. He knelt down before the hearth. Out of his pocket he pulled out a small satchel. Out of the satchel he pulled some lint, moss, and some flint and steel. Using only half of these items, he soon had a fire burning bright.

With a yawn, he stood to his feet and stretched. He took off his armor and placed it at the foot of his bed. Approaching his bag, he pulled the drawstring and rummaged about for a moment before pulling out an old box. The box was very old and faded. It was a rusty brown color, and in its younger years was elaborately decorated, but now the designs had faded into ghosts. He stared at the box for a moment in contemplation. He began to open it.

Suddenly the door swung open. The fire in the hearth flickered and the drapes quivered. Quickly he hid the box back in his bag.

"I'm sorry, did I disturb you?" said Amber at the door. She was carrying a tray of hot food. Despite the fact that Durin asked for a sparse meal, Posh had loaded the tray with fine foods in a large quantity. He had mashed potatoes, two slices of beef covered in a thick, spicy sauce. There were peas and beans and corn. Buttered bread was there also, along with a small bowl of gravy. And to top it all off, a mug of frothing ale. Amber walked over to the dresser and set the tray down. The breeze from the open window brought the scent of the food under his nose. He closed his eyes, inhaled and smiled.

"That's all right Amber, I was just startled, that's all." He walked over to the dresser and bent over the food, smelling deeply. Amber was standing next to him, gazing at him. After a moment he looked up and noticed her stare.

"I'm sorry, here." Durin fished in his pocket and brought forth his moneybag. Amber started.

"Oh no," she said, putting her hands up and waving the bag away. "I don't want a tip. It's just..." She smiled at him. "It's just that I haven't seen you in a while." Durin looked up at her.

"Yes, I have been gone for a quite some time." He said putting the bag away. "It is good to see you and all the others again." Amber walked up to him. She fingered the outside rim of his plate of food.

"Durin," she said nervously. "I'm off tonight in about an hour. Would you like to walk with me by the lake and tell me of your recent travels?" Durin sighed.

"Amber, I would like nothing more than to drop everything and walk with you, telling you everything I know, and everything I don't. But..." her eyes were wide, waiting for his response. Again he sighed.

"Alright, I'll come down in an hour and walk with you."

"I'll be finishing my work!" She said cheerfully. She left the room and skipped down the hallway to the stairs. Durin shook his head. He knew where this was headed but there was nothing he could do. He definitely did not want to hurt her, but if he had

said no, that's exactly what he would have done. She would have wondered things like "What's wrong with me?" or "Did I say something wrong?" But now she would grow attached and it would just hurt her more when he left. And he would leave.

He walked over to the bed where his bag lay and picked up the box which he put back so hastily only moments before. He opened it again.

Abruptly there was a shriek from outside his window. Durin threw the box on the bed and covered it with a pillow, as if temporarily disposing of something he was ashamed of. He ran to the window, threw it open and peered out. He saw nothing but trees and the nearby lake. There it was again! But he recognized this sound, this shriek that was not human. He looked towards the noise and saw its source. High up on one of the branches of a nearby tree. "*How did they know I would be here?*" he wondered. With a sharp whistle he called for the bird. It hopped down a few branches then sailed over and perched itself on Durin's outstretched arm. It squawked a greeting.

"And hello to you also," Durn said as he pulled the bird inside. "Now let us see why your master has sent you out so late." He pulled on a small string attached to the bird's talon and it loosened allowing a small parchment to fall free of the bird. "Thank you my friend," he said. The bird squawked and flew over to the bed, perching itself on one of the posts.

Durin unraveled the small note. After reading it he frowned. Without a word he took a small piece of paper and some charcoal out from his pocket. He walked over to the dresser and placed the paper on it next to his food, beginning to write.

*"It is as you say. I will leave for Hosgaroth on the morrow."*

With that, he rolled it up and walked over to the bird. He tied it to its talon using the same piece of thread. He picked up the bird and walked it over to the window. Durin let it loose and the bird flew away with a goodbye squawk.

"Goodbye," he said, watching the bird fly away. A moment passed and the bird was out of sight. Durin abruptly slammed his fist on the windowsill, loosening it from its hold.

"Curses."

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The next morning he woke up early and stared at the ceiling. Slowly he sat up, stepped out of bed and began to dress. He picked up his bag and began to put away his things. He pulled the box out from under his bed where he had placed it the night before prior to falling asleep. He looked at it and sighed, then placed it back in his bag.

He walked down the stairs and into the parlor. Few people were up this early, but Posh was awake, busily preparing for the breakfast rush. Posh looked up.

"G' mornin'! Sleep well?"

"Splendid," he said, smiling.

"Excellent. Did you enjoy the meal?"

"The food here can compare with no other." Posh grinned.

“Why thank you, we try, we try.” He noticed Durin’s sack. “You headin’ out already?”

“Yes, I must be on my way. I received an urgent message last night.” Posh frowned.

“That’s too bad. Are you coming back any time soon?”

“Of course! I would miss this place too much. Oh…” he said reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a folded piece of paper sealed with a wax seal bearing the letter “D”.

“Could you give this to Amber when she wakes?” He walked over to the counter and handed the letter to Posh.

“You got it” He winked. “Now you’d *better* come back, or I’ll hunt you down!” Durin walked over to the door and opened it. He turned around and waved.

“Be seein’ you soon Posh.” Posh waved back.

“You bet you will. Bye now, and take care of yourself!” Durin closed the door and left the inn. He walked around back to the stables. Lightgrazer was standing in one of the stalls fast asleep.

“Time to wake,” Durin said quietly in Lightgrazer's ear. The horse stirred and awoke. “We must leave now. We are on our way to Hosgaroth.” Lightgrazer neighed in defiance. Durin just smiled and stroked the horse’s mane.

“Don’t worry, we will be back soon.” This seemed to quiet the horse down. He led Lightgrazer out of the stables and onto the trail. He placed his sack in the saddlebag then hoisted himself onto the horses back. They began to trot down the road. Durin began to think about the previous night. He and Amber had walked along the edge of the lake and he had told her of some of the strange things he had seen and the strange people he had met. Durin had stopped and taught her how to skip stones. The two of them stood there skipping stones as the sun set. Amber looked up at him.

“Durin,” she asked. He looked to her. “Why haven’t you ever settled down and raised a family?” Durin looked out to the lake. He picked up another stone and skipped it across the water. Each time it struck the surface a new ring was born.

“It’s just not my way,” he said. She looked into his face. It was stern and somewhat foreboding, yet in its own way, handsome. She then looked into his eyes. There was a sadness there, a sadness that was still alive and had never been buried. Amber had a sudden wave of pity pour over her.

“Who hurt you?” she asked. This question took him by surprise. He stared at her for a moment then looked down and said nothing.

“Will you tell me about it?” Durin picked up another stone and threw it into the water.

“Someday.” Amber leaned her head against his shoulder.

“You’re leaving again aren’t you?”

He nodded. Both were quiet for a moment.

“I have this terrible feeling that you won’t return.” Durin remained silent. Amber looked up at him.

“Promise me.”

“What?”

“Promise me that you will come back.” He looked into her face. It was a young face that had not seen many troubles. Her eyes were wide and full of a love he had never seen before. They were comforting eyes.

“I promise,” he said.

The inn was now out of site, and Durin continued to ride away. “*I hope she understands,*” he thought. “*I hope my note explained everything.*” He brought Lightgrazer off of the trail and onto the main road.

“Hiyah!” he said and gave Lightgrazer a quick kick with his boots. The horse began to gallop down the road. Durin’s cloak whipped about wildly. A wave of fear crept over him as he rode further and further away from the inn. A fear that he would never see her again. And he never did.