

# The Calling Stone

## PROLOGUE

As a new arrival to Havenshore, experience has shown us that your first instinct would be to grab those nearest to you asking them either 'where am I?' or 'how did I get here?'. These questions betray your status as a new arrival, and it won't be long before the authorities come for you.

Take this man for example. According to the woman who found him, he seemed out of place. His eyes were wide, despite the glaring sun above. His gaze darted about as he stumbled from the alley there, next to Blood River Inn. As he reached for her, he finally asked... "Ma'am... please... where am I?".

Her quick step away from him was a sure sign she has seen this before, and the speed with which she flagged down a member of the street guard most certainly sealed his fate.

It's not always bad though. Some have been known to be released from the Spire after only a few days. Havenshore has many who sympathise with new arrivals as some of them were once new to the city as well. Once released, The Guard give instructions to those new arrivals who are ready, pointing them in the direction of these citizens who willing to help with food and a place to stay.

The sooner a new arrival comes to terms with their circumstances, the sooner they are released. You see, a new arrival knows nothing of their previous life. As far as they know, they opened their eyes and they were here. There have been said to be cases where an individual recalled some fleeting memories of a time before their arrival, but it fades quickly, and there is no way of determining the reality of the recollection. The Guard do what they can to record these memories, scribes like us accompany them regularly, but they fade so quickly from the new arrivals mind that often they are gone by the time they get to the Spire.

None of it ever makes sense of course. I remember the first time I saw a new arrival. She was being escorted to the Spire tower and could be heard yelling at the street guard about her home in "Alanza", or something similar.

There is a vast record hall full of these recollections. They are poured over by Watchers

determined to solve the mystery of the new arrivals. Of course, it is generally accepted that the Calling Stone has something to do with their circumstances, hence its name, but there are others who have more interesting theories.

Anyway, it looks like the guards have him secured. You want to wait until they say they are ready for you, at which point you follow them to the South gate of the Spire. From there, you will hand your notes off to a Watcher and return to the area you have been assigned with the guard who you are on duty with.

Remember what I said earlier; don't ask them questions, only write what they say during the trip. If you ask questions, they feel you are the authority and often times they will direct hostility towards you.

This one is yours, I'll be here when you return.

## **Chapter 1: The Shadows**

When the sun is directly overhead, the shadows of Havenshore disappear. The city would appear to most as any other city of the kingdom, albeit much larger than any of them. Even the Spire casts no shadow. Though it is the hub of activity in the largest human city, it is the place in Havenshore that citizens know the least about.

Built around the Calling Stone over a thousand years ago, it's peak can hardly be seen now, as if it pierces the sky far from the view of those below. It is so impossibly tall that many believe it could not have been constructed by man. These people would be wrong however, and the answer does not live up to the constructions of their imaginations.

The Spire can be seen from anywhere in Havenshore, and at this moment Ben is preoccupied with it. In fact, if it weren't for the slap of the guard next to him, he may have missed the last few words his new arrival just spoke.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled, more to himself as he remembered he was not to speak to the new arrival.

The man, now shackled, looked at Ben as they walked. Sweat dripped from his hair and he leaned in as best he could.

"What are you writing? Why am I being held?" he asked. Ben wrote the words as they were spoken, avoiding eye contact as he was trained.

“Watch your step,” one of the guards growled to the man, “once we get ya to the Spire up there your questions will be answered. For now, just tell us what you remember before get’n here.”

The man looked to the guard, “What do you mean?”

“It’s simple,” the second guard responded, “you don’t know how you got here. So, what is it you recall before arriving here?”

The group continued walking for a few blocks, closing in on the Spire ahead before the man finally responded, “I don’t know. I...” tears were forming in his eyes. Ben had been told that once the shock of their new environment began to dull, the realization that their memories were gone or were fading would be an even bigger shock. New arrivals had various reactions to this, and it looked as though this man was going to be one of the more ‘calm ones’.

His eyes looked to the ground and he began to slump, putting the burden of carrying him on the guards.

“Hey now, watch it. One foot in front of the other, we ain’t gonna carry ya.”

The man was broken, and Ben was feeling very uncomfortable.

During his training, he was given many examples of the kinds of behaviors the new arrivals had exhibited. Some were deadly, and others were docile. One might be friendly, and the next might spit in your face. It would always be hard to tell, so you must stay alert at all times.

It seemed like a lot to ask someone to deal with. These people were experiencing emotions that we could not begin to understand. They were coming into a world that was completely new to them. After all, even if they had originally been from this kingdom, their mind was betraying their origin and it was all new to them anyway.

Ben shook his head as the man began to sob. The guards had no sympathy and simply pulled on him harder to get him moving faster. They were incredible too and wanted nothing more to do with the sobbing mess that was this man.

“Maybe we could let him sit a minute,” Ben stated against his better judgement. The guards ignored the comment, but it did not escape the attention of the first guard.

“Boy”, he scowled, “don’t make me regret lettin’ you tag along on this one. I’ll send ya

back to Ronner with a message that you ain't cut out for this.”

The new arrival's ears perked up, “cut out for what?” the man asked. He seemed alarmed now. The sobbing had come to a stop, and his eyes seemed to have focus now, like that of a trapped tiger.

“If you want yer answers yer gonna have to wait till we get there,” the guard responded. As he did so, he pointed to the Spire ahead.

Time seemed to slow.

One foot in front of the other, the guard had said.

Step.

The air was suddenly cool as they passed into the shadow of a nearby building.

Step.

The guard began lowering his arm, his gaze turning away from the group towards an alley where children were playing.

Step.

There was a clanging sound just behind the man. Ben turned to see the shackles falling to the ground, he was loose!

Step.

Suddenly, Ben's face was wet and the second guard dropped straight onto his knees. Ben could now see the man had this guards sword and was spinning towards the first one.

Stop.

Ben stood still and instinctively raised his hand to his face, wiping away what appeared to be blood. A deep groan could be heard from the first guard as his partners' sword was thrust up and into his throat.

*I'm dead and I don't know it yet*, Ben thought. He stepped back as the first guards body began its descent to the ground. He grabbed for his own throat now, expecting to find a fatal wound but there was none.

Suddenly, things were moving very quickly.

The sword was thrust at him by the man, who was yelling something about getting him out of there. With the sword to his back, Ben was quickly ducking down alleys and winding around corners hoping at some point that the man would simply leave him somewhere, preferably alive.

There was yelling at first, both from the man and from pursuers, but he seemed to have gotten the jump on everyone and before long he was whispering commands to Ben.

*Turn here.*

*Go there.*

This man, who moments ago was crying and was weak as any man Ben could have imagined, was now fully in charge of the situation. In fact, the change was so distinct that he began to think the man was faking it all. If it weren't for the man occasional wiping away of tears, or brief moments of despair during the escape, it would be the logical assumption.

Eventually the pair came to rest under a porch that sat just over a small stream. The porch was attached to a building Ben was not familiar with, but in all likelihood was some kind of tavern. The roar of laughter and applause above them indicated as much, and the mood of the patronages within seemed to have a calming effect on both of them.

“Now what”, Ben ventured. It had only been moments, but the time under the porch had seemed like hours already.

“I..”, the man started, “I don't know. How did I get here? Where is here?”

Ben shook his head at the questions, “I don't know how you got here, but you are not alone”.

*That's it, he thought, comfort him.*

Ben continued, “You do not know this place right now, like many who come here. It can be a jarring thing, but you have to remain calm.”

“Remain calm? Are you...”, he almost yelled the response, but the man lowered his voice as he continued, “are you kidding me? Who are you to tell me to be calm? You said many

come here like this, did you?”

“No, I was born here. Most are, but there are many new arrivals...”, Ben was cut short.

“New arrivals? Where am I?”

“You are in Havenshore. It is the capital of the kingdom,” Ben responded, though he knew that would not be much of an answer to the man.

“What kingdom? You know what, never mind, tell me what happens to people like me, the ‘many’ people like me you mentioned.”

Ben told the man what he could, careful to be as honest as possible as he felt that was the only way he could escape this situation with his life.

The shadows grew longer as they spoke. A muffled screech nearby startled them both, but when it was apparent they were still alone below the porch, they relaxed.

Ben told the man about a friend of his, Riley, who was a new arrival over a year ago. He explained that there were places for new arrivals here in Havenshore, and that the authorities simply wanted to question the new comers in an attempt to solve the mystery surrounding their appearances.

Of course, this man had killed two of the guard, and even Ben was not sure what would happen to the man if he turned himself in, but he did his best to convince him that it was the best thing to do. He tried to convince the man that if he continued to run, it would only get worse once caught.

His words fell on deaf ears.

The man shook his head at any suggestions that involved turning himself in. He was in a world unfamiliar to him, but at the same time he didn’t know what familiar would be. From what he had seen so far, this was not a place he would be safe in any longer.

He quizzed Ben about the lands outside of Havenshore. It seemed the city sat on an island called ‘The Island of Ways’. A swim to the nearest shore had not been attempted according to Ben, who he now believed was being honest with him.

Taking Ben with him had it’s benefits. The boy knew the city well enough, and could help him get through any social situations that an outsider would otherwise stumble through. But on the other hand, Ben was someone people would recognize, especially

those looking for the two of them. Without Ben at his side, most people would not recognize him at all.

The indecision was burning him up inside. His heartbeat pounded in his ears when suddenly a head appeared upside down next to them, looking at them from the porch above.

“You don’t intend on sleeping here do ya?”, asked the man. His manner was gruff and serious. Chances are he worked at the tavern, or perhaps owned it.

Before the man could respond, Ben spoke up, “We were just talking but could use a drink. Perhaps we will come inside.” His gaze drifted to the speechless man sitting next to him.

“Fine then,” the unannounced stated flatly. He stood and walked away, his footsteps above their head could be heard heading into the tavern behind nearby.

“My name is Ben by the way. I would imagine you don’t recall yours, so might I suggest ‘Enrik’?”

“Why Enrik?”, the man asked.

Ben slowly rose to his feet, hunched down so as not to hit his head on the porch above, “Enrik was a friend of mine when I was young. His parents moved off of Ways a long while ago.”

With a nod, he stood as well. He would go by Enrik for now, but his intention was to get answers, including what his real name was. It was also in this moment, as he emerged from below the porch, that he decided he could not trust Ben. He knew that, at some point, he would have to push his blade through the boy that walked before him.

A moment later, they passed into the shadow of the tavern and were swallowed by the voices within.

When the sun is directly overhead, the shadows of Havenshore may disappear, but they are never gone for long.