

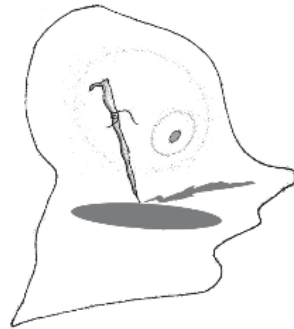


DRAGONLESS

- Book One -

**A THOUSAND HEARTS
DRAGON TALL**

Festim Famelarti



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A Thousand Hearts Dragon Tall

For my father **Beqir**,

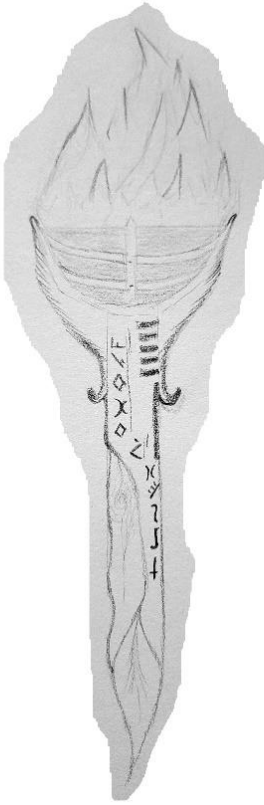
who taught me how to live with the dragon of the heart.



To the archeologist, who is digging in the backyard.
Searching for the bones of a dead forgotten dragon. Not
knowing that with every shovel, it is summoning a larger
hollow in the living room.

From the finite stars.

What is the strangest thing that you have found
in your backyard?



*You see, as my
grandparents were digging
trenches for the foundations
of the house they were
building, they said that they
had found relics of different
worlds and bones of forgotten
dragons. Now, my
grandparents' house a.k.a.
'my house' was built on the
sunrise side of the mountain,
standing alone, almost on top
of the mountain. It was built
with fine pine wood, cut from*

*the forest down below the mountain. The house is very wanted.
It has three floors including the cellar. So, it's the cellar where
granny keeps mostly the food. The first floor has a porch and a
living room, a kitchen and spiral stairs that take you to the
second floor, which has two bedrooms. Granny's bedroom and
mine. Before the house, the grey stone path takes you to the*



small garden that granny - HanaNafi made with her bear-hands. In the middle of the garden there is the well that holds the water of abundance. Not too far from the garden there is the barn where all the sheep, goats, cows, horses, chickens, and ducks' sleep. After that, the stone path becomes a muddy road and takes you to the forest. In the forest few trees down below there is the first house then you walk deeper in the forest there is another house and if you keep walking for a long time in the dense forest the houses crowd and the muddy road becomes stone path again, then cobbled streets, then my grandma says that you end up in the city. The city of the Forest. Oh, My Ground, the city is breathtaking. Miles away the lights of the city brighten the night. The city is so vibrant, the echoes of the music sometimes I even hear all the way here at my house. The city has an abundance of every desirable thing, it is full of life. Even though it's the city of the Forest, it is the most welcoming, warm, soft place on this ground. But let's go back to the fun part, the backyard. The mystery.

Oh, come on. Believe me, we will visit the city soon.

Now the fun part begins from and behind the house. Behind the house, there is a mulberry tree, and then the grass hill



becomes steep as it merges with the rock side of the mountain which is also the paramount of the mountain. On the other side of the mountain, on the sunset side, there lies a lake of true beauty. I call it the lake of Valsina.

Valsina is, is, a,

a... a name I came up with. It's my imagination. Now the reason why my house is not on that part of the mountain, and I don't have a house with a lake view is that the winter on the lake side is literally ice. It freezes everything there. To take an example; the other side of the mountain is like granny's cellar without a light. It's dark if dark were to represent cold. But during the summer, is like lighting a candle in the basement. You start seeing things, you see the basement is just like the other rooms where the light enters through their windows. And this analogy makes me think, if I could conjure a big window in the clouds where the light enters even in the winter and keep Lake Valsina warm forever. Now, summoning a window it was out of my gifts, but one day I dared to handle a torch, and in the middle of the winter, walk on the paramount of the mountain. Hold your breath for a bit. Before I did that, I did a simple plan; All I needed was winter clothes and sneak out of the house when granny is sleeping. She doesn't sleep much, but when she does, oh hooo, she is a heavy sleeeeeeper. She sleeps like boulders on a mountain. Never rolls down, unless a volcano erupts, or something like that. So, one night, that night I waited



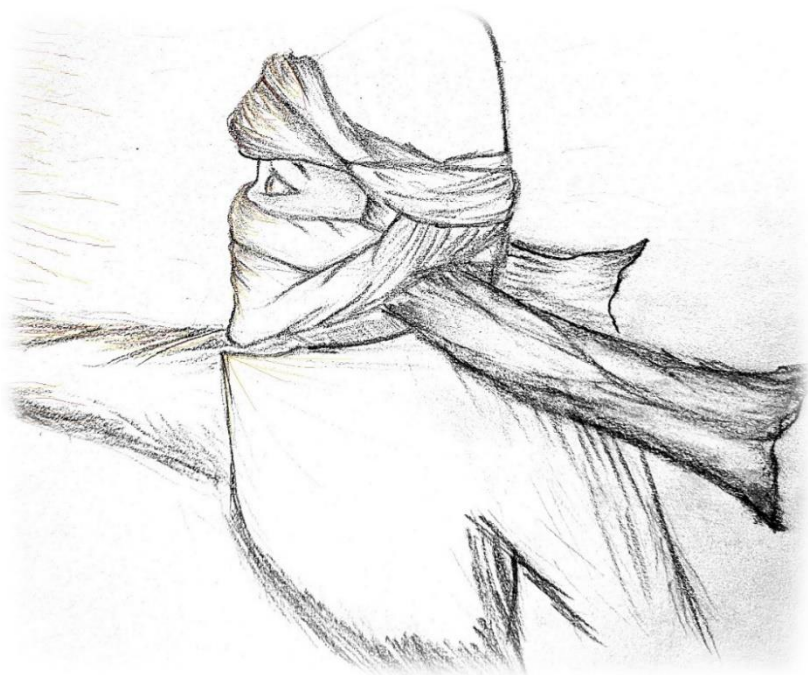
until granny went to sleep. I waited a little longer, I waited until the moon touched a flock of stars that looked like a dragon's tooth. And when it did, I took a long breath, I swallowed on my dry throat. I stood up slowly, silently. I wore two pairs of socks made from sheep's wool. I wrapped the scarf around my plis and around my face so you could only see the shadows of my eyes. I sneaked out of the window. I landed on the grass. And I froze for a few seconds, waiting for granny to call out my name even though I knew that she is a heavy sleeper. She didn't. So, I kept moving one step at a time, I wanted to make sure that only the sound of nature could continue its orchestra. And it did. Therefore, I scaled the mountain, as the light of the moon kept shining in my path. And closer I went to the peak, the noises of the katydids and the twitting of the birds were diming, the sound of the crows became louder and clearer. A wolf howled far in the distance. Then another one.

Goosebumps ran through my body. Deep in the chambers where secrets are kept, I wished granny would call out my name and I had thundered back home, but she didn't. Not even my fear could make that call; henceforth without that excuse I had to continue. Before I reached the peak, a snowflake landed on my eyelash, I stopped for a second as I was not looking about, I was climbing with my head down. I saw the peak of the



mountain blanketed with snow, white as clouds in the sky. I walked in the snow. And I reached the top of the mountain and over there even the cooing of the crows missed and the howling of the wolves vanished. It was peace brought by cold and elevation. I shivered as I expected, even though I wore all the necessary winter clothes. It was freezing. But this was the time. So, I pulled out the torch. I tried to light up the match, but it kept on sparking and not igniting the fire. So, I said the magic words as granny taught me to, or so I thought "Let there be light." Fire came to being, quickly with my hand shivering I managed to ignite the torch. I held the torch before me as the wind and the snow tried to blow it off. The earth shook. I looked about as my eyes bulged. For a second it felt like I summoned an earthquake. I tried to fix my eyes far down on the lake, that was all thick ice and covered in snow. It came to me as an echo of scratching. The echo became a clear crystal cracking sound. And it stopped for a second as the silence of the paramount came back in a hurry.





"Who... who... who... who's that whizzing down there in the snow? Show yourself or prepared to be summoned." I said those words with my voice trembling in fear. You would be scared too, even if you were not a child, or you were a dragon slayer.

Dear readers.

It erupted out of the lake. Thunders charging in the clouds enlighten the invisibility of the night. Thousand hearts dragon tall, bellowing at the sky. Its hands reached the clouds as its



lower body was still submerged in the lake. It screeched, and I felt pain. I felt like that sound was calling for help, although it terrified me. Its red firing eyes got a glimpse of me standing on top of the mountain. His claw reached towards me and as it did the dragon fell with all its weight on the mountainside creating a shockwave of high wind snow all around itself. The torch extinguished first. And the last thing I remember is that I was hurled back on the sunrise side of the mountain like a grain of dust that rests on this notebook. Blown away by that shockwave, launched by the force of dragon's fall.





- CHAPTER ONE -
- HEART NUMBER ONE -



"Guri. Guri. Wake up." Said Guri's granny.

Guri opened his eyes twitching as his right hand went instinctively behind his head "Ouch my head hurts." He cried "Granny!"



"I told you not to escape and climb in the night. Look, you slept all night here. Did you get a cold? It's not spring yet."

"No granny. It just... my head hurts and my back."

"You will be fine. Come inside."

Granny grabbed Guri by his hand and helped him get up. Guri stood on his feet and wobbled as he walked inside.

The torch was forgotten outside laying on the grass under the shadow of mulberry tree waiting for no one, except a heart uninvitingly fell from the tree on the grass and it rolled down and it stopped once it touched the torch.

Granny placed a wooden plate on the table before Guri, filled with two boiled eggs and three green peppers, then with her left hand she served a cup of warm milk. "Have this for morning. It will heal all your headache."

"Thank you, Granny!" Said Guri and took a sip of goat's milk, then placed the cup on the table and with his sleeve he wiped his mouth, then like a guest in a feast he unleashed himself on that meal.

Granny fixed her eyes on her nephew. She noticed that he was eating like he was in a rush, like he had to be at some place and the food is just a thing that he must do.

"Guri!"



Guri didn't hear Granny calling his name. He was lost in his dream, swallowed by the image of the dragon, the echo of its scream and the reach of its claw.

"Guri!" Granny called him again and touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Granny!" Guri shook his head and looked about and saw Granny's eyes dilated.

"Where have you gone with your mind? I called you eight times."

"I'm sorry, Granny. I, I, I was just thinking about a sleepulsion I had last night."

"Well, you slept outside. Of course, you had sleepulsions."

"Granny!"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"What do you know about the lake?"

Granny turned around showing her back at Guri and walked out of the room as she continued talking. "What lake my son?"

"The one on the other side of mountain."

"Just a lake like all other lakes. It has water, and where there is water there is fish, and on the bank, there are bears trying to catch some fish."

"Do you know any fairytales or strange stories about the lake?"



"Oh, my sweet boy. Just the same stories everyone tells to scare the children."

"Granny?!"

"Yes."

"Can you come here and sit with me?"

"One moment." Said granny and in a moment, she walked back and sat across the table.

"I want you to tell me the most frightful story you have ever heard about the lake."

In that very moment through granny's spine ran a cold chill feeling all the way to the top of her head, as her hands shook even more than usual. "He, he, he..." Laughed at herself granny then took a sip of water. "Well. It's just stories, if you get scared, just remember that your granny is one hundred twenty-six years old, and I have been through all crazy real things, and you will get through this lore. After all it's just a lore. Being passed from mouth to mouth like a food in an eagle's beak passed on its birds."

"Granny, are you stalling?"

"Alright. Right to the story. Well, there is this lore that old folks sang. The lake is the gate to another ground. The lake is the mirror reflecting the sky, making kings the stars, unleashing monsters of night."



"This is not a lore. This is a riddle."

"It's been chewed for long time."

"It's not scary at all." Complained Guri.

"The scary part is that if you swallowed the lore, it might never be heard again."

"You are full of riddles..." said Guri and thought how she always stalls when granny don't want to give an answer or just tells nonsense riddles. "Granny please don't be mad at me."

"Have you done something wrong?"

"Last night" Guri swallows on his dry throat "I escaped."

"Sure. And you fell asleep under the mulberry tree."

"No."

"What do you mean no? I found you there sleeping my sweet boy."

"No, granny. I was thrown from the top of the mountain."

"No you weren't." Retorted granny with a chuckle.

"Yes, I was."

"By whom?"

"By a dragon."

Granny removed the plates from the table. "It was a sleeeplusion. There are no dragons out there."

"No Granny, it was a dragon, I saw it for real. It was as big as a city. The ground shook first, then, then, came out of the lake, and tried to reach for the skies, and when it couldn't grasp and



hold to the moon, it fell on the sunset side of the mountain, then a magic shockwave threw me back home.”

“Sure, you fill my heart with joy, as I keep forgetting how children’s dreams are. You keep bringing them back. There is a dragon, but before a dragon there is a love you must impress, then after you slay the dragon, you kiss your love goodnight and go to sleep.”

“Granny. It was not a sleeplosion.” Said Guri with a scoffing sound.

“If there was an earthquake, I would have been woken.”

“Granny, for one thing I can swear to you, that even if that was just a sleeplosion, I would give everything to see it again.”

“I’m sure you would. That must have been one special sleeplosion.”

In that very moment something outside of the window cough Guri’s eye.

“Granny!” Said Guri and stood on his feet with both hands flat on the table as his eyes grew. Granny didn’t respond. “I think I saw an apple falling from the mulberry tree.”

“Oh, stop it. Apples don’t grow in a mulberry tree.”

“I know, I know, but I think I saw one falling from its branches.”

“Food might have fallen from a bird’s beak.”



"I'm going to check out outside."

"I'm coming outside too; I have to shave the sheep."

"Okay."

"Don't get lost, bring me the bags. I have to stuff the wool."

"I will once I check what's outside."

Guri thundered outside. But he halted once his eyes caught a glimpse of his torch and something bigger than an apple that looked red standing side by side. He walked with the steps of a cautious explorer, thinking of apples and tomatoes. The red was dark, was bloody red. No apple or tomato he had ever seen with a bloody red color. Mulberry? That big? No way. That thing that was on the grass, started beating. Guri froze in fear. A living thing was breathing, he thought. He hid behind a wheelbarrow and peeked to see that thing that was beating. Guri didn't know what that thing was. But it didn't make sudden moves, it didn't jump, it didn't smell strange, but blood. Guri looked around and nobody was there. "Who could have put or thrown this spell on his backyard?" he thought. "Life is full of traps and curses." It could be a trap. He searched the ground for a tool that was long and pointy and saw a broken branch on the grass. He picked it up and slowly poked that thing that was beating. He pushed it slowly further from the torch. No trap. No crazy moves. It kept beating with the same pace as it had started, bit bit... bit bit... bit bit... Guri



followed the beatings and listened closer, “It beats like Granny’s heart.” Guri placed his palm on his chest and felt the beatings of his heart as he had fixed his eyes on that thing that was beating at the same pace.

Guri ran back around the house and into the basement where Granny had folded a bunch of bags. He grabbed a handful of bags and ran outside.

“Guri!” called out his grandmother.

“I’m coming.”

“I need those bags, otherwise the wind will blow the wool away.”

“I know.”

Guri went back behind the house and opened one of the bags, dove his hand all the way to the bottom and using it as a glove he gently grasped the heart, which was still beating and bloody, then unfolded the bag and wrapped the heart. “What do I do with you?” In that very moment another heart fell from the mulberry tree, then another one, and another one, and the whole ground around Guri and the mulberry tree covered in hearts.

Three bags of hearts he carried to the basement. There were no more hearts on the mulberry tree. As he started to



close the door of the basement, he felt like the basement finally was becoming alive. He closed the door and ran to her grandma with a handful of bags.

“You stink.” Said granny, “Did you dig these bags from the ground? It took forever.”

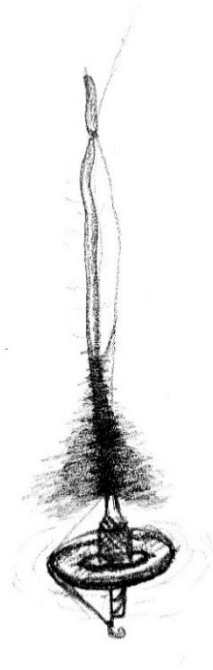
“I, you know? Just! Mmm... I couldn’t find them.”

“Yeah, sure. Help me stuff the wool.”





- CHAPTER TWO -
- ONE IN HUNDREAD HEARTS -



As the days
went by Guri
began his venture
on the pursuit of
hearts. Within a
week he had
found hearts all
over the hill.
Behind his house,
but not even a
single one had
made its way

down and before the house. If you were to wake up on a good morning day, you wouldn't see any difference before the house even if the cattle were not exactly in the same position as you had left the other day, they were where they should belong in the field surrounded by fence. However, if you were to wake up on a sunshine morning, climb the mulberry tree



and look up the mountain behind the house you would notice that the mountain was topped with beating hearts.

“Guuuriiii...” An echo of his name was heard from far below the mountain, or from his house. Except that day Guri had climbed almost the peak of the mountain collecting hearts. He felt like the echo came all the way from the city of the Forest.

“Guuuriiii... Come home.” Granny called out to his nephew.

Guri looked down and his house was as small as the top of his thumbnail. Guri looked back at the peak and decided to keep moving. Once he reached the place where the grass merged with the snow, he placed the bag of hearts on the side where the mountain was covered in snow and walked slowly.

“Guuuu...” the wind took the echo away as Guri kept walking up the hill reaching the peak of the mountain. It snowed and froze up there. He shivered and moved as his desire to know more about the hearts and the event that he still wasn’t sure was real kept him pushing further into the unknown.

Guri reached the peak where he once stood and looked about, but there was nothing to be seen, but the veil of snow that had covered everything before him. No sign of hearts. No sign of a dragon. He waited for some time. Then he did a long whistle, nothing but the echo came back. He fished out of his

pocket a small stone and threw it with as much force as he had. The stone flew far down with a whistling sound, and it sank in the snow. Nothing. He took a long breath, bowed his head, and walked back towards his house.

Guri from a far distance saw his grandmother feeding the cattle. He didn't try to hide the bag full of hearts, as he knew that granny's vision was slowly impairing. He placed the bag in the basement where he had stored the other hearts and scoffed. A soft silence gave room for his heart beatings to be heard.

From the outside came granny's voice. "Valsina was here."

Bom bom, bom bom, bom bom bom bom.... His heart beats grew instantly.

"Val, Val..." He jumped in excitement and hit a low wooden joist that was always there in the basement. "Auch." He held his head and rushed up the stairs towards granny.

"She was here?" Guri's voice came out in a high pitch.

"Yes. She just left."

"When?" His voice came back to the normality "How?"

"The traders came by; She is leaving with the caravan."

Guri looked about and saw the caravan leaving. He ran a few steps down the hill trying to catch the caravan, but he felt like the dragon that reached for the skies, but it couldn't even



touch the moon. He halted. He fished out of his pocket a monocular and looked through it at the caravan. He saw Valsina smiling, looking back, rocking on the carriage as her yellow shawl waved sideways. He felt like her blue eyes sparked star lights.

He waved his left hand at her while looking at his monocular thinking that she could see him. The smile faded away as she dove her head back in the carriage without waving back at him. Guri removed the monocular from his eye as a big bright smile drew on his face.

“She just came to say hi. She will come back.”

“Where do those traders go?”

“Where they came from. The city of the Forest.”

“Oh, the city... Sure.” Guri bowed his head and turned around and wobbled towards the basement.

“Where are you going? Come here, I’ll show how to spin yarn by using drop spindle.”

Guri was already a few steps down into the basement and an idea sparked in his head, that only good things revolve around granny and the feeling of missing something that could come back, scared and bored him even more. He halted. He turned around and walked back to granny. “Do you need anything?”



“No, son. I have everything I need.” Said Granny and sat on the grass “Here sit.”

Guri sat by his granny and watched granny as she spun the drop spindle and how the fiber was made and was wrapping around the drop spindle. “Here, the first rule to remember is: never make thin threads as they will cut, they don’t hold anything. The breeze can cut it through. You take the wool you stuff it and spin it first and you can see how a fiber is made, afterwards, the end of the fiber you tie to the top of the spindle then you drop the spindle with a twisting move. You see as it goes down it pulls wool from your hand, and it spins it.

“Wow. Can I try it?”

“Of course. Check in this bag I have another spindle.”

Guri opened the bag and saw a few spindles in it and a few other things that he didn’t care to ask what they were.

A spider climbed on Granny’s hand and wandered on top of her hand.

“Granny, you have a spider on your hand.”

“Don’t worry kid. It’s just trying to get some silk for its web.”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you ever wondered where spiders get their silk for the webs they make?”

“No.”



"Well, granny will tell you a secret. There are some special sheep, and with their wool you can make silk for spiders."

"Noooo way." Said Guri as his eyes widened and his jaw dropped. "Really, that's where they take the silk?"

"Yes." Said Granny and chuckled.

"That is so cool."

"Indeed."

"Can anybody make silk for spiders?"

"Only your granny."

"Woow."

"You can also make strings for lahuta, and qifteli."

Guri's eyes didn't even blink as granny explained to him what he could do with the right silk. "You can make a gorgeous scarf for her."

"Really? Can you teach me how?"

"Of course. I'm teaching you right now." Said Granny and raised the drop spindle level with Guri's eyes. "You see a fiber ball wrapped around the drop spindle."

"That's impressive."

"By the way she said she will come back next month."

When granny said those words Guri's face buried within.

"Granny can you take me to the city?"



“When the snow melts. Learn how to make a scarf for her first.”

Guri scoffed.



