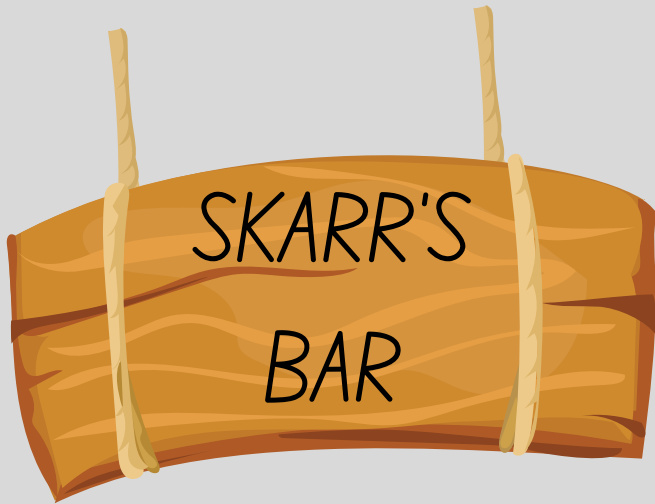




"Pardner, I think ya got sum 'splainin' ta do," Quin says, motioning to Skarr's shoulder. The wound has almost entirely healed by this point, yet the ink-black blood still clings to his arm.

Skarr continues staring out the door, eyeing the spot where he tossed this Boss D'Angelo's messenger. Nothing to be done about it now.

"It's a long story, and I don't feel like sharing." Skarr's body creaks as he goes and closes the door. "Count the till. I'll give you your night's pay."

Quin chews her lip. Her curious nature just might get the better of her. Quin opens her mouth to speak, but Skarr stomps past her and into the back closet for cleaning supplies.

Skarr can feel Quin's eyes upon his back, a thousand questions burning in her tiny heart. For a moment, he contemplates sharing... something, anything. Surely opening up to someone can't hurt. Right?

Flashes in his mind prove Skarr wrong. A montage of moments he opened up to others, and the sheer carnage that followed. Sometimes by happenstance. Others... by a more active hand. No, Skarr thinks to himself. He won't go down that road again. His heart of stone is solid for a reason.

Quin quietly counts down the till, the only thing stopping her from pressing the issue is the understanding of just how much bigger Skarr is. Still, first chance she gets – with the knowledge she won't immediately die – she's asking.

"Heya! Looks like we had ourselves one purdy good night tonight! I count forty-nine silver fer tha night!"

Skarr busies himself with wiping down tables, nodding as Quin speaks. "Good. Take your ten, as payment. You should head home soon," Skarr says, glancing at the clock on the wall. "It's almost three in the morning."

"I reckon I should. Well, it's been a night, that's fer sure! I 'spect a tale'er two one night though. Ain't a person alive I know can heal that fast. Nor one that bleeds ink! But I ain't pressin' no issue tonight. Y'all stay safe now, ya hear? Don't be a stranger!" And with that, Quin bebops outside and heads home.

Skarr pauses mid swipe of a table. Slowly, he sits down, his ancient bones buckling under the weight of his muscles. Skarr lets out a long sigh, a deep and pained one. In his mind, he knows. Knows it is only a matter of time before his past catches up with him. Knows it is only a matter of time before someone causes trouble in a way that Skarr can't avoid putting a stop to. Just a matter of time...



But today is not that day.

Skarr stands, wrapping up his cleaning for the night. With tables wiped, floors mopped, and kitchen cleaned, Skarr calls it a night.

Thirty-nine silver for a night's work is not bad. For an honest night's work that is. That will definitely cover the cost of food and supplies. Though... no, that wouldn't work. But could it?

Skarr tucks the thirty-nine silver hexes in his coin purse, alongside his remaining gold valors. He lightly palms the pouch, grunting in acknowledgement. It's a far cry from his younger years, but it ought to do.

The night passes quietly, early morning moonlight giving way to the first glimmers of dawn. As sunlight begins to illuminate the lightly clouded sky above Summerton, Skarr heads out on his mission.

The clomp of horse hooves on cobblestone roads brings back memories for Skarr, of the many hundreds of times he and Everest travelled the roads, from one end of the continent to the other. Things were different back then. For starters, the skies were fair. Now... a cloud hangs over Skarr at all times. Skarr vows to pay Everest a visit before opening tonight.

In the market square, merchants are setting up shop for the day ahead. Fresh vegetables and fruits dot eager stands, cured meats hang from hooks out in the open, and bauble-peddlers are already hawking goods on anyone that comes within a hundred feet of their booth. Yet, none of these appeal to Skarr, not now.

Skarr makes his way to one of the more permanent storefronts, a tinkerer's shop. He ducks inside, his head barely an inch below the low hanging ceiling. Machinations of all sorts line the many shelves of this place. And from behind the counter, a small voice eagerly calls out.

"Halloo!" Says a small gnomish figure stepping into sight. "How can I help you?"

Skarr eyes the figure, a man not much taller than Quin. "I need something. A machine. I need... a coffee maker."