

Chronicles of Koeleth
Chapter III
The Local Tavern and Other Concerns

“So, what happened after that?” the bartender asked.

“Huh? Well. We just kind of hung out... Oh, you mean after Tom and Aaron rolled into town?” the old man chuckled.

“Yeah, that. And what do you mean ‘we?’”

“Well, the next couple of days were pretty dull, let me tell you,” completely ignoring the young man’s question.

“Wake up, ya lazy bums!” The voice that pierced Tom’s dreams was not that of an angelic maiden, but rather the hellish cry of a certain redheaded barmaid. “Tom, if ya don’t hurry, ya’ll are gonna miss breakfast!”

“Good morning to you, too, Cleo,” Tom groggily responded as he got up to answer the door.

“Wake up, freak!” Cleo shouted at Aaron as she barged her way into the room. The room exploded with light as she pulled back the curtains on the windows.

“Freak?” Aaron muttered to himself as he stirred from his bed.

“Did a bear get a hold of you two? You look awful!” The young woman seemed especially fiery this morning. After harassing the two men a little more, she left the room, presumably to prepare the breakfast she had previously mentioned.

“She seems perturbed this morning. Wonder what that’s all about,” Tom pondered aloud as he turned to his fellow traveler. What he saw caused him to break out in laughter. When he recovered, he asked the obvious question. “How did you get that?”

“What, you mean this?” Aaron responded, pointing to a recently blackened eye.

“Well, let me just say, that young lady certainly has the hots for you.”

“Why don’t I like that response?”

“After you went into the tavern yesterday, I scouted the town for potential valuables to steal, but concluded that the only place likely to have any actual wealth was the bar. Thus, I resolved to do all that was in my power to crack into the safe. While I was sitting at the bar, I observed that Cleo had access to the safe, and that she had stored

the key in her back pocket. I began flirting with her in an attempt to allow myself to get close to her, but when I reached around and slipped my hand into her back pocket, she felt it. Next thing I knew, I was on the ground with a bruised eye.”

“You deserved that. That also explains Cleo’s mood. Alright, well, we better be off. I take Cleo’s threat seriously, and she is an excellent chef.”

“Oh, I managed to steal your safe box full of diamonds,” Aaron said, revealing a small metal box. “Couldn’t seem to get it open, though. Really good lock.”

“Yep. Rosethorn Company lock. Small company based in the Thorn Crown Mountain Territory. I did some guard work for them, and they gave me that tiny little strongbox alongside my payment. Can’t get it open without a key, and you’ll never find the key. Also, never touch me in my sleep again. That’s the only way you could have gotten that. I feel...violated.”

“Oh, stop being such a baby. I smell food, and I happen to be hungry. We should go.”

“Yeah.”

The two men rushed down the stairs, hunger driving them on. The bar had two plates set out for them, both full with breakfast foods. Tom and Aaron reasonably assumed the food was set out for them. Each sat down before their plates and prepared to eat. Just then, Cleo popped up again.

“How ya plannin’ on payin’ for this meal, Tom?” Cleo mischievously asked. “If ya lack the funds, we could make other arrangements.”

“I’m not going on a date with you. Nice effort, though. Here, have a couple wilks. That ought to cover it.” Tom laughed at Cleo’s frustration.

“Ah’ll get ya one of these days, Tom! Ye’ll see!”

“Oh, get a room, you two.” They had forgotten Aaron was there.

Tom and Aaron continued their meal, with an occasional interruption by Cleo. When they had finally finished, Tom helped Cleo clean up the bar, while Aaron watched from the side. Afterwards, Tom and Aaron returned to their room, packed up what few possessions they had, and prepared to leave.

“Alright, Erwin, I have one more thing for you before I leave,” Tom said to the portly barman.

“Oh? What’s that?” Erwin responded curiously.

“I want you and Cleo to have this.” Tom presented him with a familiar purple jewel.

“A Despar diamond!? We can’t take this! It’s far too valuable for ya to just part with!”

“Nonsense! You are my friends, and you’re in a bit of a bind right now. It’s the least I can do for you. Do with it what you like. Fix up the bar, hire some help, go on a vacation, whatever. I’ll be fine without it.”

“Ye’re sure? Well, Ah guess Ah’ll take it, then. Thank ya so much!” Erwin gently took the gem, as if it was a child, and safely stored it away in his safe.

“Ye’re leavin’ already, Tom?” Cleo asked, with pleading puppy dog eyes. “Can’t ya stay a bit longer?”

“Afraid not, Cleo. I have other places to be. And the eyes don’t work on me.”

“Phooey!”

“Oh, don’t be like that! You know I’ll be back.”

“Bring back a souvenir for me.”

“Alright. I’m headed to Ramsthorne from here. Any special requests?”

“Somethin’ expensive?”

“We’ll see.”

“Well, don’t go doin’ nothin’ to dangerous, son. We’d certainly like to see ya again.” Erwin had returned from hiding away the diamond.

“I’ll try not to, Erwin.” Tom laughed.

“If ya intend to go to Ramsthorne, ya might want to leave soon. Aim to get to William’s Knoll before sundown, Ah say.”

“That was my plan. Thanks for your concern, though.”

“No trouble. See ya’ll when ya get back.”

Tom said his final farewells and set out on the road with Aaron. He knew their next stop well. William’s Knoll was only slightly larger than Pasture’s Edge, but due to its proximity to Ramsthorne, it was better off than Pasture’s Edge and had a more powerful police presence.

“So, how did you get into the thieving business?” Tom inquired several minutes into the journey.

“I am so glad you asked!” Aaron answered with mock enthusiasm. “When I was but a wee lad, I got involved in a bad crowd, and it turned my innocent heart to the life of crime and evil.”

“I smell bullshit.”

“You’re right. I just don’t care. I started thieving for a living because it was a way to alleviate the ever pervasive boredom of my life. Unfortunately, Apathos saw fit to equip me with the most obnoxious weapons for a thief to have. Spears are loud and hard to disguise. I always have to find a hiding space for them. The most adventurous job I’ve ever had was when I was contracted to steal the Star of Isolati from Coldwraith Keep. I actually ran into Dustin Frost, the paragon of Isolati. He was on a completely different mission in Coldwraith, so our meeting was entirely coincidental. Naturally, I avoided him when possible. I almost died several times, was courted by a woman, and a goat bit me in the ass.”

“I’m sure it was all deserved, too.”

“You aren’t necessarily wrong.”

“Was your mission a success?”

“Maybe...”

“So, no.”

“I would offer a response, but I don’t care enough.”

“You never do.”

“Nope.”

“Good to know I have a shoulder to cry on when I need it.”

“Do I detect sarcasm?”

“Is that a rhetorical question?”

“Is that?”

“Is the sky blue?”

“Is the sun yellow?”

“Do fish swim?”

“Do birds fly?”

“...You win.” Tom relented.

“I’d brag, but I just don’t care enough.”

“Is that your catchphrase?”

“Trademarked.”

“Thou art a villain and a devil.”

“Lo, I am pierced unto death.”

After a little more banter, and several more hours of travel, a large green hill with buildings scattered all around it rose into view.

“That’s our destination. Be careful. Something’s been off about the townsfolk for awhile now.” Tom was nervous as he voiced his concerns.

Upon entering the town, Aaron understood what Tom was saying. The atmosphere was tense and the townsfolk watched the two wanderers with suspicion. Tom headed straight for the inn, “Bill’s Hill”, as it was late in the evening and he was uncomfortable with the environment. Aaron felt it was wise to stick close by, and he followed Tom.

“Hello, Oslo,” Tom greeted the innkeeper. “How goes life?”

“As busy as ever.” The man returned Tom’s politeness with an unfriendly glare
may I be of assistance?”

“Uh, we would like to know if you had a room which we could purchase for the night. Preferably, one with two beds.”

“We only have single bed rooms available.”

“We would like two rooms, then.”

“Seventeen wilks a person.”

“Seems fair...” Tom and Aaron each paid for their rooms.

“This way.” Throughout the entire process, the man’s expression had never changed. “Lock your doors overnight.” With that warning, the man left.

“What’s his deal?” Aaron asked.

“Don’t mind him. He’s been like that ever since his brother and co-owner of the inn disappeared. He really is a nice guy. Or he used to be.”

“Huh. Well, goodnight, I guess.”

“Yeah, see you in the morning.”

Aaron could here the clanging of metal as Tom locked his room. Aaron did not follow suit, however. Instead, this shady business caught his attention. He went down to the bar and ordered a drink.

“Why are you down here?” Oslo asked.

“Just getting a little drink in me, that’s all. Nothing so wrong with that, is there?”

“Hm. Don’t stay down here too late. It could get dangerous.”

“Alright, I’ll keep that in mind.” Aaron tuned to the man next to him. The muscular arm had several plantlike thorns sticking out of it. “Woah, what’s up with you?”

“Nothin’. Just drinkin’.”

“I mean, what’s wrong with your arm?”

“I have a magical disease called ‘farmthorn.’ Farmers like myself get it from workin’ to closely with certain plants. Now leave me alone.”

“What kinds of plants?”

“Leave me be!”

“Alright, chill out, scarecrow man!”

“What did you call me!?”

Before a fight could start, something hard struck Aaron on the back of the head, knocking him senseless. The next thing he knew, he was in his room and the door was locked.

“Hey! You awake?” Tom was pounding on the heavy door.

“Yeah, hold on.” Aaron roused himself to life and unlocked his door. “My head hurts. What happened last night?”

“You tell me. Oslo woke me up to help him carry you to your room.”

“I may have started a fight.”

“You’re so much trouble.”

“Quite.”

“Let’s get food and leave as soon as we can.”

“I actually agree with that.”

“Let the records show that we agree.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

The two followed through with their plan, and it was successful until a certain farmer noticed Aaron leaving the bar and heading to his room.

“You! I never got my proper fight with you!” The man was drunk and belligerent.

“Uh-oh.”

The man rushed the currently unarmed Aaron. Tossing him onto a table, the man riled up a few more of the bar patrons. Before long, a massive bar fight was wrecking the inn. Tom knocked a few heads, while Aaron did his best to dodge the flurry of blows raining down on him. Oslo grabbed a couple of brawlers and settled them down. Others were not so complicit, and the innkeeper had to take a more assertive approach. When the fight had finally settled down, Oslo rebuked both Aaron and the farmer, taking the repair costs out of their respective wallets.

“I’ve gathered all of our stuff. We’re ready to go once Oslo finishes with you.” Tom had repeatedly apologized to Oslo, who insisted that it was a minor matter. “He can be quite reasonable, if you don’t cause too much trouble.”

“Three more tables to clean.” Aaron answered a question that had not been asked.

After he had finished cleaning the tables, Aaron rejoined Tom, who, true to his word, had his pack readied, his halberd in hand, and Aaron’s spears strapped to his back. Taking his spears back, Aaron rushed out the door, eager to avoid further adventure. Tom, after another hasty apology, followed him.

“Please don’t cause trouble when we get to Ramsthorne. That city’s been good to me, and I would hate to be banished.”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Don’t pull that attitude with me.”

“Yes, Mom.”

“I hate you.”

As with the day prior, they had a rather eventless journey to Ramsthorne. The first thing to come into sight was the massive, richly adorned, wall that surrounded the city. Approaching the gate, Tom reached into his jacket and pulled out an iron badge in the shape of a ram’s head. Upon seeing it, the guards immediately allowed him and his partner to enter the city. Passing through the small crowd of people still trying to sort out

their travel papers, Tom and Aaron entered the plaza of the western marketplace of the city.

“So, this is Ramsthorne, huh?” Aaron appeared to be unimpressed.

“Yeah, peaceful, comfortable, and wealthy. A pleasant haven in these troubled times.”

“Mm.”

“Well, I’m off to finish my job. You can do whatever you want. I’m sure you’ll find me when you need to. Behave yourself.”

“Yes, Mom.” With that, Aaron faded into the environment.

“Now, where was it?” Tom whispered to himself. His eyes set upon the stone mansion atop a large hill in the near distance. The grandeur of the palace defined the relatively large city. After trekking through the sleepy city, he finally reached the lord’s mansion.

“Halt! State your business!” The guard performed his duty admirably.

“I have a delivery for Lord Dorian Ramsrest.”

“Allow me to inspect the package.”

“It was requested that Lord Ramsrest be the only one to handle the package.”

“Allow me to see your badge, courier.”

Tom produced the iron ram’s head from before.

“My apologies. If Lord Ramsrest himself has requested your services, then I shall no longer delay you. Please, proceed.”

“You have my thanks, good sir.”

Tom proceeded as directly as he could to the lord’s throne room. He required some direction, but he reached his destination with ease. After repeating the process with the guards here, he entered the chamber.

“Who enters my hall?” a rotund man atop an ornate throne inquired.

“Your humble servant, Thomas Riversedge of Lilly Pond, Sorowa’s Cradle.”

Tom bowed.

“What brings you here?”

“Several weeks ago, your lordship requested that I retrieve a certain rare item for you.”

“Ah, yes. I recall. You are the strange mercenary, are you not?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Come. Bring it to me.”

Tom approached the throne, and he was once again stopped so a guard could check his badge. This time, the guard politely requested he hand over the badge. He complied and was allowed to advance.

“Let me have it!” the noble excitedly demanded.

“As you wish, my lord.”

Tom handed over the package. Too impatient to wait, Lord Ramsrest grabbed it from Tom’s hands. Producing a key, he unlocked the strong box that held the item.

“Good, good! Lilly! Present the good man with his reward!”

A cheerful young woman garbed in steel armor approached Tom with another badge in her hands. It was shaped the same as the iron badge, but was formed out of gold, and sapphires sat where the eyes would have been.

“I, Captain Lilly Flowermaiden, on behalf of the good Lord Ramsrest, present you with the official signet of Ramsrest, the Fat Ram. With this signet, you may purchase property anywhere in the city, and you may access the lord’s mansion at any time of the day, though the lord’s chambers and the throne room are still off limits without an appointment. I also present you with four Despar diamonds and one thousand kelons.”

“Thank you, my lady.” Tom accepted the gifts and exited the throne room. He made the long journey back to the market and found himself a tavern to stay the night in.

“So, what did you get?” Aaron appeared suddenly in the room Tom had paid for.

“A thousand gold pieces, four diamonds, and the key to the city,” Tom said, no longer shocked by Aaron’s shenanigans.

“Seems like a good deal.”

“Yeah. I might buy a house tomorrow. Maybe I will laud my wealth over the poor folk.”

“That seems evil for you.”

“Yeah, I’m too nice for that. Tomorrow is going to be a big day, though.”