

The Lady Sigrid's Dwarven Minders

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The Lady Sigrid's Dwarven Minders

by [anubislover](#)

Summary

Though hardly the starving slip of a girl they'd met in Laketown, Thorin's Company finds themselves looking out for Sigrid in their own, small ways.

Basically just a bunch of one-shots about little moments between our favorite Dwarves and the oldest Bardling.

Bombur

“Something smells good.”

With speed that belied his size, Bombur whirled around, ladle raised to smack down on peckish princes or greedy captain of the guards, but he froze when he found himself face-to-face with Bard’s eldest daughter.

Swiftly hiding his makeshift weapon behind his back, the ginger cook gave her a nervous smile. “Thank you, m’lady! Balin told me your family would be visiting, so I’ve been cooking since sunrise!”

“You didn’t have to do that just for us,” Sigrid replied, blushing slightly as she eyed a mountain of sweet rolls.

“It’s no trouble, m’lady,” he said shyly. “It’s my duty. Besides, you fed us when we came to Laketown; I’m just returning the favor.”

Fidgeting slightly, Sigrid attempted to wave it off. “Nonsense! Strange as that visit was, I wasn’t going to let you all go hungry.” Swallowing, she indicated the boar slowly roasting on the fire. “And I certainly didn’t feed you this much.”

Bombur chuckled. He was a rather shy Dwarf by nature, but food was a safe topic. He could talk for hours about pies, stews, grilled fish, roast chicken, cakes, bread, and more. “Well, back then we were just ragged travelers, and you were the child of a bargeman. You made do with what you had. Now, you’re royalty, and I’m the head cook of Erebor. I think it’s within my means to make you a suitable welcoming feast.”

“We don’t need a feast,” she said meekly, rubbing her arm, “and I’d hate to see any of this food go uneaten.”

“Don’t worry, none of it will go to waste. Really, I have to make so much, otherwise, Kili and Dwalin will sneak in and eat everything before the table’s even set! They’re always pinching cookies and mutton without so much as a ‘please’ or ‘thank you.’ Always spoiling their supper, those two.”

She covered her mouth to stifle a giggle, though Bombur hardly heard it over the angry growl that came from the girl’s stomach.

Bushy eyebrows furrowing, he looked up at her blushing face. “Have you not had lunch?”

Embarrassed, she averted her gaze. “Well, we were planning on having a little picnic before we reached the mountain, but Tilda had forgotten hers and it was too late to head back, so I let her have mine. She’s still growing, after all, so I can’t let her go hungry. I just thought I might be able to grab a bit of bread to hold me over for dinner.”

“You’re growing too, from what I know of Men. Surely just some bread isn’t enough?”

She shrugged. "I've made do with less."

The dots connecting in his head, Bombur frowned. It made sense that Bard and his children were no strangers to hunger. How many nights, or even days, had Lady Sigrid gone without so her siblings could have enough? Bifur and Bofur had done that more than a few times back when they were struggling toymakers. It was why he'd taken up cooking; to learn how to make the most out of a meal so no one would have to go hungry. Those skills had kept Thorin's Company going even after they'd lost their supplies in the river, Bombur's ability to make a stew out of anything earning him the position of Erebor's Royal Chef.

Come to think of it, had she eaten the night they'd hidden in their house? Had she gone hungry so a gaggle of strange, waterlogged Dwarves wouldn't starve?

Such kindness would not go unpaid, and empty bellies had no place in his kitchen.

Nodding to himself, he gently but insistently led her over to a small table and began fixing a plate of sweet rolls, potatoes, roast pheasant, and apple turnovers. Setting it down in front of her, he handed her a fork and napkin, then set about filling a goblet with sweet cider.

"Oh! You don't have to—"

"Supper's not for many more hours, m'lady, and no Dwarf worth his beard would allow an honored guest to faint from hunger."

"I'd hardly faint," she protested weakly as the delightful smells tickled her nose, making her stomach grumble again.

He chuckled. He didn't doubt that; Men were sturdier than he'd given them credit for. That didn't mean he'd let her leave with anything less than a full stomach and a smile. "Maybe, but the King would be annoyed if a rumbling belly interrupted his and Bard's trade talks. So really, you're doing it for the benefit of your father, eh?"

Unable to find a suitable argument, Sigrid finally tucked into her plate while Bombur went back to baking bread, silently promising to himself that the Dale princess would never go hungry again.

Nori

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was rare for the Royal Spymaster to spend time in Dale, but Nori knew there was no better place to find Dori's birthday present. The city's trade had boomed since Bard had slain the dragon, and every day merchants flooded in with rich silks and embroidered tapestries and delicate figurines. Most importantly, there was less risk of Dori knowing what he was getting, considering how he was the one put in charge of Erebor's merchant guilds.

Still, that didn't mean the former thief had much clue what he was looking for. He'd settled on fabric since Dori loved making himself grand coats and tunics, but while Nori was an expert at determining the value of silverware and statuettes, fabric was not his forte. Perhaps he should have brought Ori with him...

"Good afternoon, Master Nori," came a feminine voice behind him.

Turning, he gave the Princess of Dale a polite bow. He may have spent much of his youth cavorting with unsavory men and running around in the wild, but his elder brother had done his damndest to knock some manners into him. "Afternoon, my lady. Running errands for your father?"

Sigrid smiled, shifting her basket so the weight rested on her hip. "For the cook, though I'm sadly about done. I've been sitting in on stuffy council meetings for the past few days, and I simply needed to get outside. Luckily, Helga took pity on me and insisted I was the only one who knew exactly where to get the right spices for tonight's dinner."

The Dwarf chuckled at her small show of mischief. Who would have thought the responsible princess would play hooky? "Aye, I hear ya. Before Erebor, I spent much of my time traveling and living out in the rough. After that, the mountain can feel a bit stifling sometimes."

"Well, in the interest of delaying my return to a stuffy study, is there anything I can help you with, Master Dwarf?"

Nori rubbed his chin, considering. "You know anything about fabrics?"

"A bit. Now that trade's increased, the councilmen have insisted I learn the origin and quality of just about every scrap that comes into the city. It's what we were covering before I slipped away."

A twinkle formed in his eye as he offered his arm. "Well, then why don't you put that knowledge to use and help me pick out Dori's birthday present?"

The polite smile on her lips widened into something more impish as she slipped her hand through his elbow. "That sounds like a lovely idea. I'm sure our beloved councilmen would

insist I put their teachings to good use and assist one of King Thorin's most esteemed confidants, even if it does delay my return."

"Absolutely. It's a princess' duty to maintain strong relations with her city's allies, after all."

They spent close to an hour perusing the various stalls, Sigrid expertly reciting her lessons about every bundle of cloth that caught his eye. Despite himself, Nori found he was enjoying spending his time with Dale's princess. She eagerly listened to his tales of living in the wilds near the Blue Mountains, laughing genuinely at his often unsavory exploits. It was nice, especially compared to the genteel horror he usually got from the upper-crust.

Their gaiety was interrupted when Sigrid stopped suddenly and pulled him into a narrow alley behind some fruit carts.

"We hidin' from something?" he whispered, hand going to one of the knives he kept hidden in his coat.

The young woman's face had paled, stiffly pointing in the direction of a large man dressed in dark orange silk. He had a deep scowl on his face as he looked around irritably, prominent mustache twitching. "That's Lord Uther. He's not exactly fond of me, so I avoid him when I can."

"What could he have against you?" he asked, baffled.

"He mistreated his wife, so I encouraged her to run away to Rohan. In our last correspondence, she said she's met a kind, handsome blacksmith, so I've been helping her finalize her divorce."

He couldn't help but chuckle. He'd heard something about that, but he had no idea the princess had been involved. "How scandalous."

"It was a scandal, and he's had it out for me since."

"Why hasn't your father stopped it? Bard doesn't seem the type to let his daughter live in fear."

She shook her head, pressing closer against the wall when the man seemed to glance at the alley. "Da doesn't know, and Uther's always careful to be polite to me when there are witnesses about. Most people don't know why his wife left him, and it's his word against mine. I just wish I could prove what a wretched snake he is! Last time we were alone, he said he'll see me married off to some Eastern prince if it's the last thing he does."

Nori's frown deepened. Sending Sigrid somewhere far away, unable to easily visit her family, was certainly cruel revenge. He recalled Fili saying she'd never been more than a few miles from home, and while some might find going East a grand adventure, the princess certainly wasn't one of them. Straightening his shoulders, he gave her arm a reassuring pat. "Don't you worry; the Dragonslayer won't let anyone marry you off without your consent. And if Uther's as awful as you say, his true colors will show soon enough." Especially if Nori's spy network happened to dig up anything particularly damning and it found its way to Bard's door.

She gave him a small, strained smile. "I just hope it's soon. Hiding in dingy alleys with Dwarves will lose its charm otherwise."

With a chuckle, Nori poked his head out and gave the market a thorough scan. "Looks like he's gone for now. But if he bothers you in the future, mention me to any of the Dwarven merchants and they'll whisk you up to Erebor before you can blink. I'd like to see him marry you off while under King Thorin's protection."

Following him out into the sunlight, they resumed their search. "I appreciate it, Master Nori. It's good to hear I have a place to hide."

"I've had to disappear a few times. I can assure you, the Mountain is far nicer than anyplace I've holed up while on the run."

That earned him another laugh, and within minutes, they'd found a lovely bolt of purple velvet that Nori was certain his brother would absolutely swoon over. It was thick and well-made straight from Gondor, and it was easy to imagine Dori using it to make himself a lovely coat for Durin's Day.

Handing the merchant a small satchel of gold, Nori gave her a grin. "Well, my errand might be finished, but I'm happy to hang about if you'd like."

Sigrid sighed regretfully. "Unfortunately, I should probably be getting back. Today's outing showed me those lessons aren't entirely useless, so I suppose I shouldn't be too keen to avoid them."

Nori shrugged and patted her shoulder. "If you say so. Still, if you ever want a change of scenery, you can always ask to visit Erebor. I'm sure Dori would love to tell you about every type of fabric in the world. That oughta give you all the lessons you'll ever need."

Laughing, she gave a little curtsy before heading off, throwing a smile and a wave over her shoulder.

Once she was out of sight, Nori ducked into the shadows, popping down a few winding alleys before he found one of his informants.

"Anything you might be looking for, Spymaster?"

With a scowl, he replied, "The home address of one Lord Uther, as well as any information on him you can get. Have at least one person watching him at all times. I want a copy of every letter he sends or receives, plus detailed reports of his interactions with Princess Sigrid."

"And once you have all that?"

A cold smirk crossed his face. "Then it's to find its way into the hands of King Bard, whom I'm certain will be happy to teach him what happens when you threaten a Dragonslayer's daughter."

Chapter End Notes

Any suggestions of which Dwarf should be next?

Oín

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The wretched, rattling cough that came down the hallway was so loud Oín didn't even need his ear trumpet to catch it. A frown marred his wrinkled face at this, and he practically stormed into the drafty kitchen, fists balled on his hips. "What in the name of Mahal do ya think yer doin', lass?"

Sigrid at least had the good sense to look guilty, as she was elbow-deep in soapy water. "Washing the dishes?" she replied hesitantly, voice raw and strained.

"Aye, that ye are. And what did I tell you to be doin'?"

"Resting in bed."

"Smart girl," he said sarcastically. "Now hopefully that smart mind can give me a reason why you're not listening to your doctor's orders? I didn't come all the way down from the mountain to be ignored, ya know."

She blushed in embarrassment, which stood out even more starkly due to how pale she was. "Master Oín, I swear, I sound much worse than I feel. And someone needs to wash these dishes."

"First of all, just because you say you feel fine doesn't mean you are. Fili says he's feeling well enough to get out of bed and help rebuild Erebor, but do you think he is?"

Winching, Sigrid recalled the Dwarven Prince's horrible wound after the battle. How could he possibly think he was in any shape to do anything only a month after getting a sword through the chest? "No."

"Exactly. Ya may feel fine lying in bed, but you push yourself before your body's ready and all that healin' will be undone."

"But I'm not injured! It's just a cough!"

"A cough that's been lingering in yer chest for well over two weeks, accordin' to yer Da!" Stomping over, Oín pulled her away from the sink before shoving a dry towel into her hands. "You've been coughing up mucus and clearly haven't been getting a decent night's sleep. The moon's got more color in it's face than you! Now quit playing housemaid and get back in bed!"

"I can't just sit around while everyone else is working hard rebuilding!" she insisted, though the effect was ruined as she doubled over, a painful, heaving cough wracking her body. It lasted almost a full minute, Sigrid barely able to gasp for breath between each choking cough.

Scowl melting into something more sympathetic, he gently rubbed her back, handing her a scrap of cloth to spit the phlegm into. When Bard had come to the mountain pleading aid, Oín had initially brushed off his concern for the Princess. Sigrid was young and strong, hardly about to keel over from a cough. Oín's time was occupied overseeing the recovery of the Dwarves wounded during the Battle of Five Armies. However, Thorin had insisted he at least check her over. Relations between the kingdoms weren't as hostile as they'd been a month ago, but there was no reason to stir up animosity again over such a small thing. Besides that, having nearly lost both his nephews, the King Under the Mountain could understand Bard's concern for his child. Whether nearly dying had softened his heart or he simply understood a protective parent was a dangerous thing, no one was certain, but his word was law.

So Oín had packed his things and made his way down to the icy, crumbling city, only to find a princess with a chest cold so horrid he'd immediately sent her to bed for fear it could morph into pneumonia if she stood in the chill even a minute longer. Immediately he'd sent a message to Thorin saying he'd be remaining in Dale for at least a few days, so he and his heirs had better not get any funny ideas about getting out of bed and undoing all his hard work in keeping them alive.

Funny how similar Dwarves and Men were. He wondered if such stubbornness was common, or if it was merely a royal thing.

"I understand you want t' help yer people," he murmured once her coughing had petered out, "but you're of no use sick, and less gets done when everyone's worried about ye."

Her face was utterly despondent, and his heart soften further when she whispered, "Da comes home every night exhausted. Bain and Tilda, too. I can't go outside to help with repairs. I can't lend aid in the healing hall. I even can't cook my family a hot dinner for fear that they'll get sick. I just... I don't want to be a burden."

Helping Sigrid to her feet, Oín gave her a small smile as he gently led her back to her room. Despite his earlier scolding, she was far from the worst patient he'd had. She was polite, didn't complain during his initial check-up, and didn't demand he cure her overnight like he was a wizard. She was just too used to taking care of others she didn't know how to let others return the favor. "Yer not a burden, and anyone who thinks that is an idiot. We all have our moments of weakness, and it's those times we know who truly cares about us. Yer Da didn't ride up to Erebor because he was worried you weren't pullin' yer weight; he just wanted his little girl to get better. You'd do the same for him, right?"

"Of course."

"If he were sick, you wouldn't think him a burden?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, there ya go." Walking into Sigrid's chambers, Oín pointed sternly to the bed, pleased when she gave no more complaint than a soft sigh before climbing under the covers. Pulling out his bag of supplies, he measured out a spoonful of slime-green tonic. Her disgusted grimace caused him to chuckle. Kili made the same face every time he had to drink one of the

healer's concoctions. "This'll taste rotten, but it'll help loosen up the gunk in yer chest. That means more coughing, but the sooner we get that all out, the better you'll breathe and sleep, which means the sooner you'll be back on yer feet rebuilding."

Solemnly, she nodded. "Fair enough. Shame you haven't yet found some miracle herb that can cure all ills in an instant."

"You say that, but I'm sure if such a thing exists it'll be the most rotten, foul-tasting thing imaginable. Like sour milk, Goblin blood, and turnips all at once."

She looked nearly green at the thought. "Ugh! I imagine being sick would be a better alternative."

"Everything has a price, m'lady. Personally, I think tonics *should* taste horrible; ya can't always help getting sick, but the fear of having to gulp down one of my potions has likely dissuaded fools like Fili and Kili from unnecessarily riskin' their health. Like jumpin' in a freezing river after a wayward pony."

"But if they taste worse than being sick, wouldn't that just encourage certain troublemakers to hide their ailments? I'd think making it taste good would ensure they actually took their medicine."

"There's no perfect way to cure someone, m'lady. Besides, everyone has different tastes; what might be lovely to you could be vile to others. You like apples?"

"Very much so."

"Well, Fili hates them. Can't even stand the smell. So, if I made a tonic flavored with 'em, you'd be perfectly happy, but he'd be miserable. Now quit stallin' and drink this down."

Accepting the medicine, Sigrid took a deep breath before downing it, sputtering in distaste as it slid down her throat. She nearly groaned as Oín poured another spoonful from a different bottle, though this one was milky white.

"This'll be a bit more pleasant, I promise. All the coughing you'll do will turn your throat raw, so this'll act as a soothing coat to protect it. Even has a nice, minty taste to it."

"I thought you said medicine should taste bad?"

He winked as she drank it down. "There's always an exception, m'lady. So long as you're not getting sick through your own foolishness, I'm willin' to offer the occasional pleasant remedy. Consider it an incentive to stay on your best behavior."

That got a smile out of her, and Oín decided that perhaps Sigrid had a point about making his tonics taste better. At least for mostly-decent patients like her.

This chapter was pretty easy to write as I had a similar chest cold for about a month not long ago. Feel free to offer suggestions in the comments!

Kili

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Though he hadn't been expecting an audience, Kili didn't mind Sigrid's quiet company at the archery range at the base of The Lonely Mountain. She didn't criticize his form like his uncle, try to distract him like Bofur, or constantly draw his eye like his lovely Tauriel. She simply sat off to the side, quietly mending a shirt while enjoying the mid-spring sunshine.

Deciding it was time to take a break, he flopped down onto the grass beside her. "What brings you out here, m'lady?"

The smile she gave was warm and gentle like a sunbeam. By human standards, she was growing into quite a beauty now that she was getting hearty meals and decent sleep. All of Dale's people were looking happier and healthier, and despite all the trouble awakening the dragon had caused, the Dwarf prince was pleased all was working for the best. "Just enjoying a bit of fresh air, Prince Kili."

With a grin, he brushed off her formality. "Ah, you don't have to call me that! Considering I nearly died on your kitchen table, I'd say we're on a first-name basis, eh?"

Her smile faltered slightly at the mention of that harrowing day, but if he was laughing about it, she'd let it pass. Instead, she focused on tying off the end of her thread. "Sorry. Honestly, I'm still getting used to being called 'my lady.' It's been a year, but I still check over my shoulder sometimes, positive they're addressing someone else."

"I hear you. Fi' and I always knew our birthright, but we never really put much stock in it. We still ran around the mountains, worked in the forge, helped Mum wash the dishes and generally got our hands dirty. Now we've actually got to act like royals. Gets a bit stifling, I must say."

"I'll admit, I hadn't guessed you were princes when you first came to Laketown. I'd figured King Thorin had to be important, though. He had that air to him."

He nodded sagely. "That he does. Doesn't matter if he's signing treaties or fighting orcs or stuck in a dungeon, he holds himself like a king. Fili aspires to do the same, but every time I try, I just look ridiculous. Dwalin says it's because my beard is too short."

Sigrid cocked her head, bemused. "Da keeps his beard short so it won't get caught in his arrows. I figured you were the same."

"Thank you!" he practically shouted, beaming from the validation. "Finally, someone who gets it! Archery's not as common among my people, so no one respects that it's short by choice. Last thing you want is chunks of hair ripping off your cheek because it got caught in the fletching. Probably why the Elves are beardless; it all gets ripped out."

Giggling, the princess dug into the basket at her side, offering him a sweet roll. Eagerly he bit into it, relishing the taste of sugar and cinnamon. He hadn't had many chances to interact with Sigrid since Smaug's death, but once it had been announced that he, his brother, and his uncle were finally fully recovered from their wounds, she'd sent them an entire basket to celebrate. They were almost as good as Bombur's or Mister Boggin's, and there had nearly been a battle over the last one.

"How is Tauriel? She's visited a few times on her way to Erebor, but she hasn't been by lately."

"She's well. Been helping clear out some of the spider nests for Thranduil. Since the prissy prince is gone, they're a bit short-handed, so she's been busy. I'm heading off tomorrow to visit her."

"Well, tell her hello for me. And Prince Legolas isn't so bad. I saw him before he headed off to meet the Dunedain, and he gave me some good advice."

"Like what?" Kili snorted. "How many times a day you should brush your hair?"

"Mostly that I should look after Da and not let him take on too many of the city's problems," she said, nibbling on a roll. "Also, that if I start to get overwhelmed, sneak off to the archery range. I can't shoot, but it's good for a few hours of quiet so I can get my head straight."

"Well, I guess it's not the *worst* advice," he said reluctantly.

A grimace twisted her lips. "Honestly, I wish he could have stayed longer to show me the ropes. I'm basically figuring it all out on my own. Dale's new council has been a massive help to Da, but they expect me to turn into a princess overnight," she sighed in frustration. "When we started rebuilding, it was easy because it was all stuff I knew how to do; mend and organize and make do with the little we had. Now that things are coming together, people have time to notice that I don't walk or dress or talk like royalty should."

"You'll get the hang of it," he assured. "Fi' and I have had loads more practice and we still get it wrong. Balin says the line of Durin is doomed."

This coaxed a small smile from her, but her eyes remained sad. "The worst is when other kingdoms come calling. Bad enough they treat Da like an idiot; then they talk about how pretty I am when they never would have looked at me twice a year ago."

"That's because they're the idiots," he scoffed, pulling out his pipe. "Dale's come a long way under his leadership, and if they couldn't recognize your beauty as a bargeman's daughter, then they don't deserve you as a princess."

Biting her lip, she asked, "But am I beautiful, or do they just see my title?"

With a sympathetic frown, he patted her shoulder. "The ones that matter can see you're lovely even dressed in rags and covered in troll puke. What's truly important is that you've got a good heart."

“So, I am beautiful?”

“Inside and out,” he said with a cheeky grin, pleased when the warm smile returned to her lips.

“I can definitely see why Tauriel fell for you,” she giggled.

“I’m glad someone does because the more I get to know her, the less I understand why she’d settle for my foolish little brother,” came a voice behind them.

The pair turned to find Fili had somehow snuck up behind them. Kili clutched his chest in mock pain. “Betrayed by my own kin! How could you say such things, Fili?!”

“Just stating the obvious, Ki’. Though, perhaps I should inform her that you’ve been cozying up to the Princess of Dale,” he said, mischief twinkling in his blue eyes.

“Oh, no!” Sigrid insisted. “I’d never—”

The smile he gave her was so warm and disarming her mouth instinctively snapped shut. “I know you wouldn’t, m’lady. You’re too honorable to do that to a friend and too sensible to fall for Kili’s lines,” he assured with a wink, earning a faint blush from the princess.

“Did you come here just to insult me?” the younger prince pouted, petulantly puffing on his pipe.

Chuckling, Fili turned to his brother. “No, but I’d never pass on the opportunity. Uncle just wanted to know if you’ll be joining us for lunch tomorrow before you head out to Mirkwood.”

Thinking it over, he slowly blew out a long stream of sweet-smelling smoke. “Hmm, suppose it’s best to leave on a full stomach. Sure, I’ll be there, though I can’t tarry too long. My starlit beauty is waiting for me, after all.”

Though he rolled his eyes, there was an affectionate twinkle in them as he mussed the brunette’s shaggy hair. “Just be sure to get back here before the week is out. Mum’s due to arrive in a fortnight and I won’t be setting up her rooms alone.”

Kili chuckled, though it trailed off as he noticed how quiet Sigrid had gone. He gently nudged her shoulder. “What say you, Sig’? Care to take my place so I can spend more time with my beloved?”

“Don’t try to foist off your duties on her,” Fili said, giving the princess a smile. “Though I’ll admit, she might do a better job.”

The vibrant blush that spread across her cheeks would put any painted rouge to shame. She ducked her head shyly. “I—I doubt that, Prince Fili. Besides, I’m sure your mother would be happier knowing both her sons took the time to set up her living quarters.”

The older prince frowned a bit at her formality, but it turned into a grin. “You couldn’t be more right. Looks like you’re outnumbered, Ki’. Be back here by the end of the week or I’ll

tell mother you've forsaken her for some elven temptress. Doubt that will endear her towards your lady love."

Kili's eyes bulged slightly as he imagined their mother declaring a blood feud with Tauriel. "I'll be there, and we'll make them the most beautiful rooms in the mountain."

"Good man," he chuckled, turning back to Sigrid. His nose twitched as the familiar scent of sweet rolls tickled his nose. He eyed the basket but seemed to decide it would be rude to ask for one. "Well, I hope you have a good day, Princess Sigrid. Just don't let my brother pull you into any trouble, eh?"

It didn't escape Kili's notice how Sigrid's blush deepened as his brother winked. She stumbled to her feet, giving a slightly awkward curtsy. Fili responded with a smooth, dignified bow, tossing them a final grin over his shoulder as he made his way back to the mountain gates.

They sat in silence, watching as Fili's golden head became barely a speck in the distance. Kili turned to his human companion, concern growing at her stiff shoulders and pensive expression.

"Copper for your thoughts?"

"Oh!" she started, eyes snapping back to him. "Sorry, didn't mean to ignore you. Just embarrassed over my curtsy. My knees still creak when I do it."

"I don't envy ladies having to curtsy. Bowing's much easier. Though, I'll admit I've fallen over a few times; mostly when I'm drunk." He was pleased when she giggled. "Just so you know, you don't need to be so formal around Fili, either. He's fine with a handshake or a wave."

That just made her blush harder. "Well, I mean, he's King Thorin's heir—"

"—Who came up through your toilet. We Dwarves care about respect, Sigrid, but we're not the stuffed-shirts you're used to. You've met Dain Ironfoot, right? You think he cares about curtsies?"

Unbidden, a chuckle came to her lips as she recalled the boisterous Dwarf. She certainly wouldn't have expected him to be royalty. When she imagined a king, she thought of Thranduil or Thorin; refined, handsome, covered in riches, and dignified. Someone who rarely smiled but could command a room with a wordless nod, who inspired loyalty with his mere presence.

Dain was loud, always grinning, wore as much armor as Master Dwalin, and seemed ready to brawl with anyone he spoke to, but he was as much a king as his cousin.

"Fair point."

"Even if that weren't the case, me an' Fili are the last people that'll hold it against you. I told you, we're figuring all this out ourselves. We've just got it easier because we always knew it

was coming and have enough people to push us in the right direction.”

“Wish I had people like that.” She bit her lip nervously. “Being a princess is so much more complicated than it sounded in Da’s bedtime stories.”

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “If you’re that worried, why don’t you come up to the mountain sometime after I get back? Fi’ and I could give you some tips on handling the pressure, and in return, you could bring another basket of those tasty sweet rolls,” he said hopefully, trying not to drool at the thought.

“You mean that?”

“Dwarves don’t make promises lightly, Sigrid.”

Eyes lighting up, she grabbed him in a hug. “If you can turn me into a princess, I’ll bake you a mountain of sweet rolls!”

“I’ll hold you to that!” he laughed. Honestly, it would be nice to get to know Sigrid a bit better, and he was sure Fili would agree. Who would better understand the pressure that comes with being the first-born? Maybe Tauriel could help, too, since she’d spent so long with a pointy-eared, stick-up-his-ass king and his prissy son.

Pulling away, she absolutely beamed at him. “Thank you, Kili. Sincerely.”

He happily returned her grin. “We misfit royals need to stick together, aye?”

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to offer suggestions in the comments for which Dwarf should be next and plot ideas! Also, don't be afraid to ask for Dwarves that have already been done; I'm already considering it, especially for the Line of Durin!

Bifur

Though he now had more gold than he knew what to do with, most days Bifur could be found in Dale's marketplace selling toys. Well, "sell" might be too strong of a word, as he practically gave them away, barely charging what it had cost in materials. Money had never meant much to him, even before gaining a share of a dragon horde; he was a Dwarf of few needs, and he found more reward in seeing the children smile.

Princess Tilda was a frequent customer of his, often visiting while running errands with Princess Sigrid. The younger sister was a chatterbox, filling him in on the comings and goings of the city and how her family was doing and the like. He rarely responded with more than a grunt, as he couldn't speak her tongue, but she understood that her company was welcome after he started bringing along an extra stool for her to sit on behind his stall.

This day, however, it was the older sister that had come to his booth, studying the array of toys with intense scrutiny. Her eyes lingered on a beautifully carved puzzle box that made music when solved. He'd found she was quite good at figuring them out, having the determination and patience most children lacked, and he'd started making more complex ones so she'd have something to occupy herself with during Tilda's frequent visits. However, this time she moved on from them quickly, focusing on his other wares. When none seemed to meet her approval, she gave him a curious look. "I don't suppose you take requests?"

Bifur's only response was to pull out the empty stool, patting it when she didn't seem to understand. The seat was a bit lower than was probably comfortable for a girl her height, but she made no complaint. "Tilda's been doing really well with her lessons. She used to hate math, but she's shown drastic improvement over the past few months. She's even starting to help with the storehouse's inventory. I want to get her something as a reward, since she's being so responsible, but nothing you have quite seems right. Or she already has it," she added quickly, clearly afraid of offending the Dwarf.

He merely grunted in understanding, motioning for her to speak her mind.

Wringing her hands a bit, she continued, "I was wondering if you could make her a doll. When we were little, mother had made me one out of scraps of cloth, and I gave it to Tilda when I got too old for toys. It was one of the few things we could save when the dragon came. But I know she's always wanted one of those beautiful, fancy dolls with painted faces and real hair that wore embroidered gowns and could sit up without flopping over. We could never afford it before, but now that the city's prospering, I think she deserves it. Mostly, I don't want her feel like she has to grow up too quickly."

There was an unspoken *Like I had to*. Bifur could recognize it from a mile away. He'd seen it in plenty of older siblings during harder times. Big brothers and sisters became adults due to money troubles or the death of a parent. They rarely outgrew their toys naturally; they forced themselves to pretend they were too old but passed them on to their younger kin so they wouldn't have to throw away those precious links to better times.

Tilda had told him about their mother, once. How she'd died of sickness when Tilda was barely old enough to remember her face. How Bard would say that Sigrid looked more and more like her every year, a glimmer of tears in his eyes. How she used to wake up late at night to the sight of Sigrid holding the doll their mother had made, crying into the soft, worn fabric of its cotton dress.

Nodding to himself, Bifur pulled out a pad of parchment, listing what he would need as Sigrid began to describe the doll in detail to him. Porcelain for the head and limbs. Sturdy linen and sand for the body. Horsehair to turn into curly locks. Silk for the dress. He made a note to request Dori's help with the clothes, as while the toymaker could serviceably repair his own garments, making a fancy doll gown was out of his depth. Everything else he could do himself.

Rubbing her chin, she added, "If it's not too much trouble, I'd like to request a little something for Bain, as well. He's been such a big help to Da, and I know he says he's too old for toys, but he deserves to be a child sometimes, too."

Another grunt of understanding, and Bifur flipped to a new page, looking at her expectantly. With a relieved smile, Sigrid began describing a horse and rider like those of Rohan. Her brother had apparently been quite taken with the warriors when they'd visited several months ago, and while she didn't want to encourage him to run off to join their ranks, she knew it would make him smile. Nodding along, the Dwarf jotted down his next shopping list. Metal and silver from the blacksmiths. Gemstones from the mines. This project would be as fit for a prince as the doll was for a princess.

Satisfied, he finally wrote what the pair would cost Sigrid, handing her the paper for confirmation. His notes were in runes, but he'd kept the numbers in the common tongue for simplicity. Studying them, she frowned, clearly doing some calculations in her head.

"You're under-charging me."

When he made no motion to deny it, her eyes narrowed a bit. "I know this is going to be an expensive task, Master Bifur, but it's one I'm willing to pay. One I'm *able* to pay." Tilting her chin in a regal manner, she handed back the paper. "Now, I suggest you give me the real price."

Scowling, Bifur crossed out the number, writing a new one and handing it back.

Her eyes practically popped out of her head. "This is even less!" Grabbing his pencil, she crossed it out before writing down her own, much higher number, pushing the paper back into his hands.

Bifur wasn't having that, though, and so a silent back-and-forth of them crossing out and rewriting prices began.

It was only when the toymaker finally wrote down a large, clear "zero" that the princess stood up in frustration. "Why won't you just take my money?!"

"My cousin giving you trouble, lass?"

Turning around, she felt her anger cool a bit when she found Bofur standing behind her. It was rather difficult to be mad with him around, that silly hat and warm grin instantly cutting through tense situations like an arrow through the air.

“He’s refusing to tell me what I actually owe!” she grouched, crossing her arms stubbornly.

“Well, we Dwarves can be pretty fearsome hagglers.”

“Except I’ve never had to haggle a price up!” she exclaimed. “I know the materials I’ve requested cost more than what he’s charging, and he’s not even factoring in labor! I’m not stupid.”

Patting her shoulder consolingly, he said, “I know you’re not, lass. Bifur, tell the lady what she owes.”

Frowning, the mute toymaker stubbornly signed *I did*.

“Well, clearly she’s not ok with that price.” Taking the list of materials, he raised a bushy eyebrow. “An’ unless you’re givin’ her one heck of a discount, I’m inclined to agree with her.”

Sighing, Bifur started signing, hoping to get his point across to the miner. He vividly remembered the creaking, drafty house Bard and his children had lived in. It was clean and maintained as best it could, but no amount of love or hard work could undo the ravages of poverty and the elements. Still, despite its small size, the bargeman and his family had welcomed thirteen strange Dwarves and a Hobbit into their home. It hadn’t escaped his notice that most of the gold Bard had taken as payment went to bribes to get them into Laketown. What he had left was likely less than a third of the coin. Coin that would likely go to feeding the influx of additional mouths, as Sigrid had quickly gone about toasting bread and making tea for them. Tilda and Bard had rushed to get them blankets and dry clothes, even though it was unlikely they had much to spare. Yet they didn’t even hesitate.

Debts like that, Bifur felt, couldn’t be paid back in gold. If it were that easy, he’d have dumped chests full of it on their doorstep ages ago. No, kindness must be paid with kindness.

If Tilda wanted a doll, she’d get one fit for a princess. If Bain wanted a toy horse, he’d get the best ever made. And if Sigrid wanted to give her younger siblings a gift from the heart, he wasn’t going to charge her a single copper more than what it took to maintain her pride.

Silently, he explained to his cousin that if she haggled any more, he’d make the toys *and* give her his share of Erebor’s gold, so she’d best not push him.

Chuckling in understanding, Bofur looked up at the princess with a wry smile. “Sorry, lass, but there’s no reasoning with him. Just pay the first price before he changes his mind.”

Sigrid sighed. Clearly, arguing with Dwarves was like beating your head against a rock. No wonder Da’s trade negotiations with King Thorin gave him headaches. “Very well, but I’m throwing in a blueberry pie as a tip. A craft for a craft. It’s only fair.”

Bofur eagerly responded “Deal!” before Bifur could object, and with a nod, she called over her shoulder that she’d have the payment delivered to the mountain in the morning, and he’d better not even think about sending any of it back.

Bifur scowled at his cousin. “What?” Bofur asked innocently. “If she wants to pay, let her pay, an’ if you don’t want it, I’ll gladly take that pie off your hands.”

Rolling his eyes and cuffing him over the head affectionately, Bifur returned to his spot behind the stall, already planning how he’d get back at her.

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Two weeks later, Bifur arrived at the Dragonslayer’s doorstep, several large packages in tow. Tilda had practically tackled him with a hug as he revealed the stunning doll. Its brown curls were soft to the touch, the face painted with tiny details like freckles and different flecks of color in its hazel eyes, and the blue gown was nearly as grand as the one Princess Dis had worn to Thorin’s coronation, with real gold thread embroidered along the trim, neck, and cuffs.

Bain was just as thrilled at his gift. Bifur had completely outdone himself, painting the shiny metal of the horse and soldier with triumphant expressions as they charged into battle. The armor was inlaid with gold and silver chainmail and the saddle studded with tiny, semi-precious gemstones. The real surprise came when the Dwarf inserted a small key into the back of the saddle, winding it up so it could walk across the floor.

“An automaton,” Bard said, impressed. “You’re quite the talented craftsman, Master Dwarf.”

Sigrid was absolutely beaming, pleased that her younger siblings were so happy. So she was left baffled when Bifur offered the last, smallest package to her.

Curious and too polite to reject what the toymaker was so clearly offering, she unwrapped the cloth bundled around it, gasping at what was revealed.

In her hands was what appeared to be a large, elaborately decorated egg studded with small gemstones. However, upon closer inspection, she could see shallow grooves carved into it. Gently, she gave the top a little twist, and she realized that the bejeweled patterns seemed to line up a little better. Giving the middle section another turn, she beamed as she realized what he’d given her.

“Is this a puzzle?”

Bifur nodded. He didn’t tell her that when she managed to solve it, the sides of the egg would open like a flower, revealing a bird taking flight while music played. She’d figure that out on her own, after all.

“You do realize you’re getting another pie for this, right?” she said with a smile. “Maybe some raspberry tarts, too.”

He just shrugged. Clearly there was no stopping her, but if it let her be a child for a little bit with her siblings, he was willing to accept it. Baked goods were more useful than gold, anyway, and he had two cousins he knew would be happy to accept a share of his payment.

Thorin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

King Bard was holding a massive festival to celebrate a particularly good harvest, trade alliances being formed with the likes of Gondor and the Shire, the unveiling of a statue of Bilbo Baggins, and the near-completion of the city as a whole. It had taken much work and hardships, but three years after the Dragon's death, Dale was finally beginning to resemble what it had during its glory days, and the citizens were eager for a chance to show it off and enjoy themselves.

In the middle of it all were multiple contests, from eating to archery, and the highlight was a fighting tournament where the prize was a boon from King Bard himself. Elves, Men, and Dwarves alike entered, eager to test their mettle and show off their prowess to the other races.

When Thorin Oakenshield, King Under the Mountain, had heard of the competition, he had not planned on entering any such contest; he had fully healed from the Battle of Five Armies, but he was not as nimble as he used to be, and his foot still ached when the weather got too cold. Still, he'd encouraged the rest of the Company to join in, wishing to ensure Erebor was well-represented. Bombur was already a favorite for the pie-eating contest. Balin had been asked to judge the craftsmanship competition. Kili was eager to represent the Dwarves in the archery contest, while Fili and Dwalin had immediately signed up for the tournament.

Unfortunately, the morning before the competition was set to begin, Fili ended up spraining his wrist while practicing with Nori. It wasn't too bad, but it was enough that Oin had basically ordered him to withdraw.

Turning blue, pleading eyes to his uncle, Fili said, "I can't withdraw! I promised Sigrd I'd win it for her!"

"You should have thought of that when you decided to forgo sleep for more training. I admire your determination, but I will not enable such recklessness from you," he scolded, dark brows furrowed in a frown, though it was mostly out of concern. His heir had been training for weeks, practically since the day the tournament was announced. Unfortunately, it seemed he'd been neglecting other important aspects of his life, like sleep. Thorin had warned him such an accident could happen, but he didn't relish being proven right. Still, he did soften his tone. Fili was likely already berating himself enough for both of them, especially if he'd made a promise to Dale's elder princess. Dwarves didn't take such things lightly, and he knew they'd grown close over the last year. "I'm sure if Princess Sigrd knew of your condition, she'd take Oin's side. She'd certainly forgive any promise broken, considering it wasn't intentional. Furthermore, I'm sure you're not her only champion."

Fili's eyes widened as if in revelation, and with formality and reverence, he knelt before his king. "Then I implore you to take my place!" He glanced up at him nervously. "... Please?"

Thorin's jaw nearly dropped. "You must be joking."

Beside him, Balin gave him a serious look, though there was a familiar twinkle of mirth in his eye as he stated, "If a Dwarf is unable to fulfill a promise, he may request a family member to take on the burden."

Glaring, he replied, "Said Dwarf can also refuse if he thinks the promise impossible for him to fulfill. I'm not the warrior I used to be, you know."

"You're not that out of practice," Dwalin snorted. "You still do well enough when we spar."

"That doesn't mean I'm in fighting shape. Oin, talk sense into them," he ordered.

"Yer in better shape than the lad, an' so long as you don't go battlin' to the death, I see no problem with you entering," the doctor replied.

"You'd risk your king's well-being over a tournament?"

The half-deaf Dwarf pretended not to hear him, and Thorin let out a low, frustrated growl.

"Oh, come on, Uncle," Kili chimed in, standing beside his brother to create a united front. "Fi's your heir! He'd take your place if you were injured!"

Pinching his brows in irritation, he wondered what he'd done to have both his heirs and his most trusted companions turn against him. "Be that as it may, I doubt Bard will accept a substitute a mere day before the tournament."

"You won't know unless you ask," Fili replied desperately. "Bard's quite reasonable; I'm sure he'll understand if you explain the situation. I made a promise to his daughter, after all."

"He might understand, but he could still reject it. In tournaments like these, last-minute substitutes make for easy sabotages. He'd be completely within his rights to refuse to avoid accusations of cheating or favoritism."

"Then I'll fight in the tournament with just one arm!" he declared hotly, shooting to his feet.

"Like hell you will, laddie," Oin snapped, hearing having miraculously returned. "You step in that ring and I'll drag you out by your ears, and I can guarantee Sigrid will help me!"

Frowning, Thorin considered his heir carefully as Kili and Dwalin tried to talk him down. Pride and stubbornness were traits the golden prince had certainly inherited from him, but why was he being so insistent? It couldn't be just because he made a promise to Sigrid; she was quite the reasonable human, based on what he'd heard, so of course she'd forgive him and absolve his honor. Did he want the prize? What could Bard give him that his own king could not? What was worth risking further injury for?

Before he could ask the many questions running through his head, Balin slyly put in his own two cents. "A boon from King Bard could be a dangerous thing in the wrong hands. If Fili forfeits, my brother will be the only Erebor Dwarf in the competition. In a contest filled with Elves and Men, is that truly a risk worth taking?"

Dwalin huffed, insulted. “What, you’ve got no faith in me, Balin?”

“Of course, I do,” he replied placatingly, “but wouldn’t it be better to hedge our bets? I’d especially hate to give King Thranduil the satisfaction of having any sort of victory over the Line of Durin, even by default.”

Later, Thorin would be embarrassed at how easily his advisor had played him, but at the moment all he could imagine was the Elf King’s smug grin, and he’d accepted without hesitation. Before he could change his mind, Balin sent a message to the Dragonslayer requesting the change. Bard had immediately accepted, much to Thorin’s surprise, but he felt no need to question this good fortune. Fili’s promise would be kept, the Line of Durin would be represented, and with a little luck, he’d be able to rub his victory in the Elf’s skinny face.

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Despite being somewhat out of practice, the first few rounds had been frighteningly easy. Due to the sheer number of entrants, the first round had consisted of several small battle royales, which quickly eliminated most of the green, untrained boys hoping to luck their way through. After that had been the proper fights, the hardest being against a particularly skilled Elven swordsman. Fortunately, the pointy-eared tree-hugger’s arrogance had been his downfall, and Thorin had managed to dodge a lunge in time to counter-attack, forcing his opponent out of the ring, instantly disqualifying him.

Poking his head out of the competitors’ tent, he chuckled as Dwalin postured for the crowd before the next round. Most of the others were outside watching the Captain of the Guard closely, hoping to discover some weakness that would give them an edge. The tournament was almost halfway through; if both continued their winning streaks, Thorin and Dwalin would face off in the semi-finals. The king found himself relishing the opportunity. He’d forgotten just how much he enjoyed a friendly match against a skilled opponent, and he especially looked forward to taking on his oldest friend in a real bout. Any other Dwarf might hold back out of fear for hurting their king’s pride, but Dwalin had no such reservations.

Light footsteps approached him, and he turned to politely greet Sigrid. “Shouldn’t you be in the stands, Princess?”

“I thought I should check on the competitors,” she said, giving a demure curtsy before handing him a large cup of water, which he accepted with gratitude. “Fili and I both truly appreciate you stepping in,” she continued, though she looked him over with concern. “Your foot hasn’t been causing you any trouble, has it?”

“It keeps me from dancing about like the Elves do, and I’m sure the rest of my body will remind me I’m not as young as I used to be tomorrow morning. Still, I’m rather enjoying myself. Perhaps I’ll enter again next year,” he chuckled.

The smile she gifted him was warm and genuine. “I hope you do. In fact, the more Dwarves, the better. At least I won’t have to worry about what you lot’ll ask Da for as a boon.”

“Oh?”

Her thin shoulders lifted in a shrug. “In my experience, Dwarves are honorable and straightforward, and I find much more comfort in a Dwarven victor than most others.”

Such an admission caught him off guard, and he was grateful he wasn’t currently in the ring as it likely would have been fatal. Recounting the day, he realized that, among the voracious cheers from his subjects, Princess Sigrid’s had always been among them. Her voice easily stood out against the deep roars of his people, yet he could hardly recall hearing it for anyone else. In fact, as the day went on, he was certain her applause for her own people had dwindled to a polite clap. He knew she’d supported Fili, but he’d chalked that up to merely friendship. Was she truly so against one of her own people winning?

Curiosity ate at him. “Might I ask what Fili would have requested as the victor?”

She stifled a giggle behind her hand. “I believe he was torn between a wagon full of sweet rolls and the right to be my first dance at every celebration for the next year.”

“He was willing to fight injured for that?!” he growled incredulously. Of all the stupid, childish—

“Are you just here to support the Dwarves, princess, or do you plan on acknowledging your own people?” came a voice from across the tent.

The pair turned to face a tall, broad-chested lad perhaps a handful of years older than Sigrid. He was still fresh from his own match, sweat and dirt covering the front of his tunic, wooden mace casually resting on his shoulder. He’d probably be handsome by human standards, had his face not looked like it was permanently twisted with distaste.

“Bromley,” she said blandly, though Thorin could see the way her whole body tensed up. Immediately, he was on guard, hand resting on the wooden sparring sword he’d laid on the bench.

“*Your Highness*,” the young man sneered, giving a mock bow. “Guess all those princess lessons up in the mountain haven’t been improving your manners much. Then again, you’re learning from a bunch of greedy hole-dwellers, so I shouldn’t be surprised.”

Growling at the insult, Thorin’s response was cut off by the lady. “I could spend ten years with Trolls and my manners would still be leagues better than yours.”

“What’s the saying? ‘You can put a pig in a dress, but it’ll still be a pig?’”

“I believe you’re thinking of the former Master.”

“And I’ll bet you’re just thrilled he’s gone, aren’t you?”

“Considering he bled most of Laketown dry and let rotten cockroaches like you do what you wanted just because your family was one of the few with money, yes, ‘thrilled’ would be a good description,” she quipped coolly.

“Aw, still mad about that time I gave baby Bain a bloody nose?” he taunted.

“That, and the bruises, and the black eyes, and the time you stole his shoes and threw Tilda’s basket in the lake, and the—”

“How has Bard not arrested you for such flagrant abuse of his children?” Thorin interrupted, glaring at the young man.

“Because we were kids at the time,” Sigrid replied, hands balling into fists. “He has far more important things to worry about than punishing our childhood bullies.”

Bromley gave her a smug look. “If he put me in jail for a few scraps with his son back before he was king, he’d have to arrest half the city for worse, and wouldn’t that just be an abuse of power?”

As much as it infuriated him, Thorin had to concede the man’s point. Bard had his staunch supporters, but if he decided to use his new position to take revenge against those who had wronged his family in the past, he’d be overthrown within a week. So long as such men kept in line, they’d be allowed to go about their days without fear of the former bargeman holding onto old grudges.

Shoulders back, head held high, and voice calm but firm, Sigrid was every inch the princess her birthright declared. Thorin was vaguely reminded of his sister, and his approval of the girl rose. “Da’s willing to give you a clean slate, Bromley. Even I planned to overlook your bullying and bury the hatchet for the sake of Dale. But I’m warning you; if you even think about hurting my family, you’re the one who’ll get buried.”

This made the lad laugh so hard he nearly fell over. Personally, Thorin didn’t find it particularly funny; Sigrid was no warrior, but she was his ruler, and clearly had those willing to carry out her orders. The King Under the Mountain was slowly starting the count himself among them. “Is that right? Is that why you’ve made friends with the Dwarves? Guess you’ve developed a real taste for dirt.”

Having had enough, Thorin took a heavy, menacing step forward. “Leave this tent right now,” he growled, “or there won’t be enough of you left *to* bury.”

Despite having over two feet and probably a hundred pounds on Erebor’s king, the young man flinched. He may have been an arrogant idiot, but basic survival instincts made it clear that an angry Thorin was a real threat. Smirking, Bromley turned to leave, but not before throwing over his shoulder, “When I win, I think I’ll demand you and your siblings lick my boots; maybe that’ll remind everyone that you’re really just the brats of a filthy bargeman.”

It took an incredible amount of willpower not to charge forward and knock that shit-eating grin off the lad’s face, but Thorin managed. How dare he speak to his own princess that way? How dare he openly plot to humiliate her and her siblings? How dare he do so in front of *him*?

Taking a few deep, calming breaths, he allowed the pieces of the puzzle to fall into place. Fili’s determination finally made sense, though he really should have said something instead of guilting his uncle into taking his place. In fact, at least half the company must have known the situation. Why didn’t they just tell him it was to protect the king and his children from old

grudges? Perhaps a few years ago he would have told them not to get involved in such affairs, but he liked to think he'd softened somewhat since then.

Then again, he'd basically ignored Kili's request to openly court that she-Elf. He thought it had been a tremendous show of growth and tolerance that he didn't outright deny it, but perhaps that wasn't enough? Honestly, Thorin didn't even really have a problem with Tauriel, *per se*, since she'd been instrumental in saving his nephew's life, but old grudges died hard.

Watching Bromley leave the tent, Thorin decided that he could stand to let go of a few of them, lest he end seeing *that* in the mirror. More importantly, he wanted his kin and court to trust him, and if they cared enough about Bard's children to fight for them, then he would do the same.

Besides, basic courtesy across all races (except perhaps orcs and goblins) stated that you don't let a man insult a young lady like that without repercussions. Especially not the daughter of one of your closest allies and friend to your nephews.

"Princess Sigrid," he said, voice a low, calm rumble, "that fool's the reason Fili entered the tournament, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"There are others here like him?"

"Yes."

"Ordering Nori to arrange an 'accident' for such men would be an abuse of my power?"

Despite her best efforts, she couldn't quite keep her lips from twitching upwards. "Yes."

Nodding, he gave her a deep, respectful bow before hefting his wooden sword onto his shoulder. "Then it appears I have a tournament to win."

The brilliant smile he was awarded was well worth tomorrow's aches.

Chapter End Notes

Before people think Bard is a bad king or father, he NEVER would have actually granted Bromley's request, but it still would have been a pretty major blow to his authority, especially with so many snakes in the grass.

Also, this will likely not be the last Thorin chapter, and I'm always willing to take suggestions for both past and future Dwarves.

Dori

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dale's oldest princess was quickly becoming a common sight in the halls of Erebor. Word had circulated quickly that the crown princes had befriended her and regularly invited her to the mountain. Though some Dwarves were wary at the presence of an outsider in their halls, most were quite pleased that the young royals were going out of their way to ensure the relations between the two kingdoms remained on good terms.

Today, however, Sigrid was without her usual escorts; Fili had been called away to some important negotiations, and Kili'd had a prior commitment with the palace guard. Thus, princess lessons were canceled for the day. The golden prince had felt guilty about her wasted journey and had suggested she take tea with Dori before heading back to Dale.

She'd been reluctant to disturb the head of the merchant guilds, but when she arrived at his chambers, the grey-haired Dwarf had been absolutely thrilled to see her.

"Please, come in!" he said cheerfully, holding the door open with a deep bow. "With Mister Baggins in the Shire putting his affairs in order, I've been lacking civilized company. You may just be my saving grace until he returns."

"Again, I'm sorry for the sudden intrusion," she replied, curtsying. After a month of lessons from the princes, she didn't feel nearly as awkward and her knees no longer creaked. She still felt out of sorts in more formal settings, but though she knew Dori was a stickler for propriety, he wasn't the sort to embarrass her by pointing out her flaws.

"Oh, think nothing of it!" he insisted, leading her towards his sitting room. "I've been telling those boys how rude it is to keep you to themselves. I've been meaning to invite you to tea for ages! I've a rose petal blend I've been anxious to try, but good tea deserves good company."

Cheeks turning pink, she giggled. "Then I'm glad I can be of service."

Opening the door, Dori frowned, a faint blush coming to his round cheeks. "Oh dear. I hope you'll pardon the mess, my lady; Queen Dis was over earlier and I was just cleaning up when you arrived."

Peeking into the room, Sigrid's jaw practically dropped. Nearly every surface was covered in the most beautiful fabrics she'd ever seen. Velvets the color of jewels, brocades with real gold thread, silk that looked like it could run through her fingers like water; the sight of it all made her feel giddy. Back in Laketown, she'd occasionally helped out at the local dressmakers for some extra coin. Back then she hadn't really been able to appreciate it as an art form, merely considering it another way to get by. But with the markets now thriving and the trade lessons her father's councilmen had been giving her, she was slowly but surely developing a love for fashion.

“This is incredible! You may call this a mess, but I’d say it’s a dressmaker’s paradise!” She spied a stunning white satin with silver embroidery. “This one’s from Gondor, right? The merchants in Dale have been gushing over it for almost a month!”

“Ah, it’s so nice to meet someone who can appreciate good fabric!” he replied, clearing off the table by the fireplace. It was covered in parchment showcasing different gowns of various cuts and styles, all of them fit for nobility. “I just knew Nori couldn’t have picked out that velvet on his own. Still, I should have tidied up before you got here.”

“It’s my fault,” she insisted, helping move a few large bolts of silk over to the far wall. “I did drop in unexpectedly.”

“Irrelevant; I should have been putting away fabric just as much as I was taking it out.” Internally, he berated himself for allowing his sitting room to get to such a state. He was always a tidy, fastidious Dwarf what prided himself on always being presentable. So, of course the first time he has a neighboring princess over, it was an absolute disaster. He was certain if Nori could see this, he’d be doubled over laughing at his brother. “I suppose I was just in a bit of a tizzy; the Queen is commissioning a new gown from me. We’ve settled on a design, but we’re having trouble picking what it should be made of.”

Taking a seat, Sigrid continued to gaze about in wonder. “They’re all just so beautiful, I can’t imagine it will be easy for her to decide.”

The kettle above the fire began whistling merrily, and Dori quickly removed it from the heat. “Actually, the trouble is she can be quite picky. She’s a sensible woman who’s always ready to put others before herself, but she knows what she likes and refuses to settle once her mind is made up. She’s much like the king in that way,” he chuckled, pulling out a dainty purple tea set. “Back in the Blue Mountains, King Thorin used to take on too much responsibility, but she basically strong-armed him into passing along certain duties to her before he ran himself ragged. It’s the reason we consider her our queen, even though she’d technically a princess.”

“She sounds like quite the remarkable woman.”

“I’m surprised the princes haven’t introduced you.”

Frowning, Sigrid wrung her hands nervously. “They’ve offered, but...I don’t think I’m ready. I’ve only been getting decorum lessons for a couple of months, and I’m afraid I’ll embarrass myself. I mean, she’s a queen!”

Handing her a cup of tea, he gave her a meaningful look. “You’re royalty too, my lady. And even if you weren’t, I imagine Queen Dis is quite keen to meet her sons’ friends. She certainly gave each of us a thorough inspection before we set out on our quest.”

Taking a sip of the fragrant beverage, she forced herself to calm down. “Well, of course! You were going on a life-or-death mission together. If it were Bain, I’d want to meet every last person who could affect whether or not he came back alive.”

“Quite true, but if the likes of Nori can meet her approval, I’m certain you have nothing to fear,” he said with a wink.

That brought a smile to her face, and she took another look at the bolts of fabric. “Have you at least narrowed down what she’s looking for?”

“Thankfully, yes. She’s leaning towards purples and golds, and it’s to be for formal occasions like meeting visiting dignitaries, so I’m imagining a brocade or satin would be most suitable. I’ll be going down to the marketplace tomorrow to see if anything new has arrived that might tickle her fancy.” Eagerly, he handed Sigrid the sketch of the gown. “What do you think?”

The highly-detailed [design](#) was quite stunning, and Sigrid could easily imagine the Queen would be the most enviable Dwarf in Erebor. The waistline was high, which was quite flattering on her stouter figure, with the square neckline emphasizing her cleavage in a tasteful way. The overdress would clearly have gemstones or elaborate beading in the bodice, with the bottom half flowing down the sides like a waterfall. There was even the additional drama of a cape. It was a gown that simply screamed royalty.

“You’re quite the designer, Master Dori,” Sigrid said, not bothering to hide the awe she felt. “I can already tell Queen Dis will look radiant.”

He practically swelled at her praise. “Why thank you, my lady. Such flattery ensures I’ll be inviting you to tea more often.”

“I wish I could pull off a dress like this. Every time I put on a formal gown, I feel like I’m playing dress-up,” she replied with a self-deprecating smile.

Studying the princess closely, Dori quickly came to a decision. “Perhaps I could make you something? I’ve rarely had occasion to make gowns for Men, and it would be a lovely opportunity. Besides, you’re up here enough with the princes that it would be easy to make time for fittings.”

“Are you sure? I’d hate to be a bother, especially when you’re already making something for Queen Dis.”

“Nonsense! I’d be happy to do it. Perhaps it’ll give you the confidence to finally meet our Queen.”

With a smile, Sigrid raised her teacup. “Well, then, Master Dori, what say we get started? I have an unexpected gap in my schedule and I’d hate to keep Queen Dis waiting much longer.”

Clinking his cup to hers, Dori beamed, pleased that he’d managed to guarantee continued teatime with the charming princess. Perhaps, with the princes’ encouragement and his sewing skills, she’d find the confidence to count herself among her royal peers.

It seemed just this once, a messy sitting room was perfect for company.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay! A much shorter chapter this time, which makes me feel a little like I've cheated Dori. I may have to give him another chapter in the future to make up for it. I'm thinking of doing Gloin or Balin next, if anyone has any ideas!

Dwalin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

On a warm, sunny morning, the training fields at the base of the Lonely Mountain were close to bursting with Dwarves honing their skills. Soldiers trained, miners indulged in axe throwing before their shifts, and seasoned fighters tested the skills of the young blood.

The Captain of the Guard, however, found himself dealing with an unusual situation.

“What kind of woman doesn’t know how to throw an axe?” Dwalin asked, completely agog. The gruff Dwarf hadn’t expected to be approached by King Bard and his eldest daughter, nor had he ever imagined the former bargeman would request he give the lass combat lessons.

Sigrid blushed a bit, embarrassed. Even at fourteen she was nearly a head taller than him and stuck out amongst the Dwarves even more than her father, with her beardless face and slight build. “Human girls rarely get weapon training, Mister Dwalin, especially when they spend most of their time looking after their siblings.”

“But you’ve at least held one before, right?”

“Not since she was ten when she asked me to teach her how to chop wood,” Bard replied, puffing on his pipe, a small grimace tugging at the corner of his lips. “It...didn’t go well.”

The Dwarf flinched and not-so-subtly checked her hands. A wave of relief washed over him when he counted all ten fingers.

Red deepened across her cheeks as she caught his inspection, wringing her hands together nervously. “I hit the log wrong, and a chunk smacked right into Da’s face and broke his nose,” she explained.

That earned an amused snort from Dwalin. “Aye, sounds like Thorin’s first camping trip with Kili.” Furrowing his brow, he turned back to the human king. “Not meaning any disrespect, but why do you want me to train her? Wouldn’t that she-elf be better?”

“Tauriel has been gracious enough to teach her and Tilda some basic knife skills, but she has her obligations to Mirkwood, too. Thranduil’s asked her to help clear out the ruins of Dol Guldor of lingering spider nests and stray goblins, so she’ll be away for a while. I’ve been teaching them archery when I can, but my duties now rarely allow me the time,” he said, a hint of sadness in his voice. He shook it off quickly, brown eyes resting warmly on his daughter. “Tilda’s still a bit small for an axe, but Sig’ here wants to learn. Since I’ve been told you trained Prince Fili and Kili, I thought you might be the best option.”

Dwalin desperately wanted to point out that there was a massive difference between teaching a pair of young Dwarf princes and a frail human girl but held his tongue. In his experience, humans were almost as stubborn as Dwarves, but their attention spans, like their lives, were

significantly shorter. Most likely, he'd lose no more than a morning showing the lass the ropes before she gave up because it was too difficult.

If nothing else, Balin couldn't claim he wasn't helping mend relations with Dale.

Crossing his massive arms, the Captain of the Guard fixed her with his best scowl. He was vaguely impressed when she didn't shy away and met his gaze head-on, the only sign of nerves a slight wringing of her hands. Then again, she was the daughter of the man who'd faced down Smaug; what was one Dwarf compared to that? "Fine. I'll have one of the lads set up a target for us away from the others and I'll hunt down some baby axes."

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Two hours later, and Sigrid was making decent progress for her first time wielding an axe. At the very least, she hadn't injured anyone, which was more than could be said for most newbies. Bard had certainly seemed pleased, praising her when she succeeded and giving encouraging words when she failed, but as the sun grew higher, the king had been forced to return to Dale to oversee the repairs.

"I promise I'll be back at sunset, and you can show me how much you've improved," he said, dropping a kiss to her hair. "Remember; I'm proud of you no matter what."

"I know, Da'," she murmured, giving him a tight hug.

Dwalin forced himself not to roll his eyes at the sickening display of affection. He was grateful for the king's departure; he'd always hated it when parents would hang around to watch their kids. Half the time they'd coddle them, and the other half the wee ones would feel so much pressure impressing their mother or father they'd overdo it and end up hurting themselves, and Dwalin would get the blame. To an extent, he understood it; tough as they were, Dwarf children were rare, so any perceived harm or threat was taken seriously. Humans reproduced far more quickly, but he had no doubt they loved their children, and after Smaug's desolation of Laketown and the lives that were lost in the Battle of Five Armies, most families were a bit more protective of each other.

Add in the fact that Sigrid was royalty and the daughter of a dragonslayer, and he was certain if she got so much as a splinter, Dale would be calling for his head.

After a few more shots with the wooden axes, he decided it was time to switch her over to steel; Sigrid needed to build up her arm strength, and it was hard to judge the rotation of the spin when the blade simply bounced off the target. They weren't as sharp as the standard axe, but they were certainly enough to cause injury if she wasn't careful. Before he'd handed them over, he'd made sure to drill into her head all the injuries she could inflict on herself or innocent bystanders if it went wrong.

Looking a bit green around the gills, Sigrid took her stance and flung the axe, which managed to bury itself deep in the ground almost a foot from the target. Dwalin was kind enough not to comment; she needed to adjust to the different weight, so he hadn't expected her to get it on her first try, anyway.

Still, he could see an irritated frown tug at her lips. Clearly, her brain was making all the criticisms for him.

After another twenty minutes with only a small amount of improvement, Dwalin sighed. “Lass, I think I see your problem; you’re not focusing on hitting the target.”

“I can assure you, I am,” she replied tersely, lining up to take another shot. This one she lobbed awkwardly, though it was at least in a straight line.

Getting up, he grabbed the fallen axe, handing it over and standing just off to her side so he could study her movements better. “Then try again. By now, you should have adjusted to the weight and figured out how hard you need to throw to reach the target.”

Taking her stance, she carefully lined up her shot, but instead of watching her movements, he studied her face. Just as she pulled back, her eyes flicked off to the side, nervously eying the Dwarves having a wrestling match off some fifteen feet away. He could see her arms weaken just a little, and as she released the axe, her gaze didn’t return to the target until the last second.

The steel blade clipped the edge of the target before plopping pathetically to the ground. Off to the side, a few of the lads chuckled at her failure, causing her cheeks to turn a fiery red. It wasn’t surprising; the girl stuck out like a sore thumb on the training field, and more than a few Dwarves, young and old, had stared at her, especially once Bard had left. The lads to their left were the worst of the lot, having a front row seat to the princess’ lesson, and no matter how many times Dwalin glared at them, one or two would still end up watching.

Awkwardly, Sigrid trotted to the target to retrieve her weapon, deliberately averting her gaze from the sweaty, shirtless warriors.

Growling, he rubbed his forehead. Of course. She was a young woman, after all. “Yer getting distracted by the lads, aren’t you?”

Jaw dropping, Sigrid looked at him, shocked. “What? No, I’m not!”

“Then why aren’t you using all your strength? Why aren’t you pulling all the way back? Why do I keep seeing you glance off to the side instead of at the target before you throw?” He gave a derisive snort. “You wanted to learn to throw an axe to impress some boy, didn’t you?”

“Ugh, no!” she insisted, nose wrinkling at the thought. “I’ve got siblings to take care of, a city to help rebuild, and about a thousand lessons every day. Boys are at the bottom of my list of priorities right now.”

“Then why do you keep watching the lads over there?”

Anxiously, her small hands fiddled with her skirt. “I—I keep thinking one of them’s going to trip and stumble over here the moment I throw, and I’ll accidentally bury the axe in his head.”

Grunting, he was relieved her reasons had nothing to do with romantic flights of fancy, at least. “Let me be the one to keep an eye out for trouble. Yeah, a wayward axe can ruin some bastard’s day, but every Dwarf here is smart enough to watch where they’re goin’.”

“But what if I throw it wide—”

“I moved us plenty far away from the others, so even if you threw that thing with all your strength, you couldn’t hit anyone. Shit, even if you were aiming at them, I doubt you’d even scuff the lads’ boots.” At her embarrassed expression, he softened. He was training her too much like his soldiers and not enough like the young lady she was. In a way, she reminded him of Ori; smart and eager to learn, but nervous and prone to overthinking. “I know I gave you a long list of all the ways you could hurt someone, but that’s just to make sure you understand that an axe is a weapon, not a toy. It’s not something you can just pick up for fun one day.”

“I know that,” she grumbled. “If you think I shouldn’t use it, just say so.”

“Tell me why you want to learn, then I’ll decide if it’s something worth teaching.”

“I just want to be able to defend myself.”

“Then you might be better off with your dad’s arrows or the elf’s knives. Something small and quick that doesn’t rely on strength.”

“Knives are all well and good, but I don’t think they’d do much good against an orc attack,” she mumbled, studying the weapon in her hand with a pensive frown. “And I don’t want to learn to shoot from anyone but Da, but he’s too busy lately. It seems like axes and hatchets are all over the place, though, so I thought if I could learn to throw one, I’d be ok in an attack.”

“That’s...not the worst reasoning I’ve ever heard,” he admitted, rubbing his chin. Honestly, he was kind of impressed; most warriors he knew gravitated towards a specific weapon and carried it with them at all times. It made them next to unstoppable with that weapon, but if they were forced to fight with something else, they were at a serious disadvantage. This lass was trying to familiarize herself with everything she could think of, so even if she never mastered them, she could put up a decent fight.

Plopping down on the ground, Sigrid took a swig of water from her flask. “When the orcs attacked us in Laketown, all I could do was hide under the table with Tilda. I kept thinking ‘if I could use a weapon, I wouldn’t have to sit here like a coward.’” Worrying her lip, she said, “Da faced down a dragon with a broken bow; Bain risked his life to get him that black arrow. I just want to show that I can be brave like them and they don’t have to worry about me. But I’m starting to think you’re right. With my aim, I’d more likely hit Tilda or Bain than protect them. I’m sure that lot,” jerked her head towards the wrestling Dwarves, “thinks so.”

“You’re not going to become an expert overnight,” Dwalin said gruffly, but not unkindly, sitting down next to her. “And they’re not laughing because you haven’t succeeded; they’re laughing because they’ve all messed up just as badly. See that one?” He pointed at a warrior with a brown mohawk and long goatee. “Datir nearly took his own foot off first day I trained

him. Falin,” he pointed at a Dwarf with dozens of tattoos, “managed to hit everything *but* the target. The ground, the tree, the weapons rack, me, the list goes on.”

“So, they’re not laughing at me?”

“Nah, and even if they were, it doesn’t matter. You’re here to learn how to throw an axe, not impress a bunch of ninnies that *should be focusing on training instead of botherin’ the princess!*” he shouted, glaring at the group who immediately went back to sparring, pretending they hadn’t been trying to eavesdrop on their conversation.

Sigrid giggled and with a determined nod returned to her feet. “Perhaps you’re right, Mister Dwalin. In any case, I should be practicing instead of sitting around feeling sorry for myself, shouldn’t I?”

She’s a sensible lass, and more stubborn than I’d given her credit for, he thought with a tiny smile, one that was nearly invisible under the whiskers of his bushy beard. *Maybe this isn’t such a waste of time.* Getting up, he ushered her to stand, grabbed a spare axe, and took his own stance next to her. “Then let’s stop wasting time and get back to it. Copy me; you need to pull back all the way to your spine.” He tapped his bicep as it arched next to his ear. “And you want to stretch this muscle out like you’re pulling back the string of a bow.”

Nodding, Sigrid mimicked him so the back of the axe tapped the base of her spine. As she swung it up and over her head, she transferred her weight to her front foot like he’d instructed, but while the axe went significantly further, the head buried itself in the ground in front of the target. It was at least closer than she’d gotten for a while.

“You’re releasing too soon. You want to let go just as the handle gets in the way of the bulls-eye.”

“But if I’m swinging fast to get the force I need, how can I aim that quickly?”

“Honestly? Trial and error. As you mess up or succeed, you’ll start to figure out the timing. Once you do, it’s all about training your body to instinctively release at that moment. In a fight, you’re not going to have time to line up your shot; you’re going to be relying a lot on instinct and muscle memory. So even if you managed to get a bullseye on your first try, it’ll still take years of practice before you can apply it in a fight.”

“Then I guess I’d better keep at it,” she said, finally smiling.

“Agreed. I’m here most mornings, so if you want to stop by for an hour or two a few days a week, we can squeeze in some lessons.”

“I couldn’t take up your time like that; you’re the Captain of the Guard! Aren’t you busy training soldiers or protecting King Thorin?”

He waved off her concerns. “Most of the younger recruits are at that point where I don’t have to watch them like wee little babies who’ll lop their own heads off, and there’re plenty of other instructors lending a hand. Most days, I’m here to supervise and put the fear of God into them so they don’t slack off.”

Her smile widened as she pictured the tattooed warrior glaring down at the trainees like a basilisk. “Then I’ll do my best to come by and save them from your scorn.”

“You do that,” he chuckled.

It took a few more tries, but just as Dwalin was going to suggest they break for lunch, Sigrid gave a mighty throw. Spinning through the air, the blade buried itself a mere inch from the bullseye.

No one could tell who shouted louder in triumph; the princess, the Captain of the Guard, or the Dwarves who’d given up wrestling to watch.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry it's taken me this long to post a new chapter! Work has been insane, my muse strayed towards other fandoms, and Dwalin simply proved trickier than I'd expected, but hopefully the next chapter will come more easily. I'm not going to promise who the next Dwarf will be so my muse will hopefully cooperate better, but as always, suggestions are welcome!

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