

The (Quite Accidental) Courting of Dwarves

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The (Quite Accidental) Courting of Dwarves

by [SetsunaNoroi](#)

Summary

When Bilbo offered his home to Thorin in the Shire, he didn't know what that entailed exactly. Only family lives together for long periods of time in the way that Bilbo wants. It's an offer from a friend mostly, for the dwarf who's lost his way in life after giving up the throne. Courting and marriage though? He'd no idea! Thorin will explain it though, eventually. Maybe.

Family Ties

Chapter Notes

Yeah, I'm going there. While I admit I never really cared for the movies of the Hobbit, the odd sort of mess that the Battle of Five Studios made it, I will admit there was great parts of it I did like, especially the relationship between Bilbo and Thorin, which I think a wonderful job was done on. Those two were great playing off of each other in the book, and the films did a wonder for that.

And... then I saw the ship art. Once again, I've found while canon can be a hard pill to swallow, fandom is a sweet land full of happy endings, and well, I just kind of wanted to make my own too. So in this we have smitten dwarfs, clueless hobbits, and a hopefully fulfilling feel good story in which Bilbo accidentally asks a very important thing of Thorin without even meaning to but the King Under the Mountain accepts anyway.

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

Bilbo Baggins had never once lived in anything but a hole in the ground, and it had been perfectly fine with him for half a century before a wizard had come along and started this whole affair. While outside of Hobbiton and more east in the Shire there were kin of his that lived in houses and near the river, he himself had always appreciated having a warm little bit of earth around him, comfy and secure. He loved the way the walls felt under his touch, the sureness of the tile under his bare feet, and the way it got so pleasantly warm in the summer that he could open the shutters to his windows and let in a breeze that drifted in over the hill and through the flowers of his garden to bring the delightful smells into his home.

Lonely Mountain was not in any way like his humble but comfortable little hobbit hole. It felt cold and dark, chilled him at moments and made him feel unbearably warm at others. On top of that while there should have been work on sorting the treasure to get it all split up among the dwarves, nothing of the sort was really happening. Between Thorin's madness and the threat of the two armies waiting outside to start war over the riches inside, Bilbo didn't even feel much of a want for the share of the gold. In fact, he was starting to wonder about perhaps just giving it up to the humans and elves outside just to stop all of this nonsense. Even walking around was difficult, sharp gems kept getting underfoot and while the bottom of his thick feet couldn't really get badly damaged by the edges, stepping around treasure only to

get the pointed end of an emerald shoved right into his heel had caused him to pick up a piece or two and chuck it across the treasure room in frustration.

Yet when Thorin grabbed him to throw him from the mountain, tried to kill him, even as he climbed down as Bofur encouraged him to run for it, the hobbit's heart felt heavy. For all his intentions, for as sick as he was of the mountain and the suspicious people so eager to fly into violence for it, he could not help but feel as if he were betraying his company. Thorin was not his king, but he was his friend.

Giving up the Arkenstone was supposed to fix things, and yet in the ensuing mess, the fighting, the horrors, the reek of blood and the clashing of blades as the allied armies fought for their lives, he would have given just about anything to be in the mountain again with Thorin, to have proved the dwarf's faith in him right about being a true friend to him. He'd thought he'd done what was best, and yet everything was falling apart around him anyways.

It was why he ran to Thorin, had to warn him. The danger of losing him, of allowing him to fall into the trap and be killed was a weight on his heart he knew he would not be able to bare. When he felt an arm grab him and pulled him back, he thought it was Gandalf to stop him, and he pulled with a yell to try and get out of the grip before he was turned forcibly to see the face of a concerned elf in front of him, stooping down to look him in the eye.

"I'll help you. We can go there together," Tauriel assured him. "We will reach there faster on horse, little one."

Bilbo was sure it would be faster, but safer he wasn't sure about. With the ring he could reach the dwarves undetected, but would he make it in time? Would he be able to find them, all the terrain to climb before they were swarmed by the orcs?

"Alright," he said with a determined nod of his head. "We have to go now though."

"I have no reason for waiting," she assured him before picking him up with a surprising strength for her thin limbs and placing him on the large stallion, climbing up on top. "My Lord Legolas..."

"It is a strong horse, but it can not carry three," he told her, "but I will follow, I promise."

Bilbo did not understand the look between the two elves, or the soft smile that graced her features, but there was no time to question it. Understanding the urgency of the situation, she set the horse off into a gallop to get to Ravenhill, urging the creature to move with all speed possible to get there in time. He pushed his back into her frame and clutched anywhere he could in order to find a holding, desperate not to fall but not daring to ask her to slow down either. Fear of falling was nothing compared to what could happen if they wasted even a moment.

Later on, he might think something was out there, looking over him, ensuring his luck. It could be the only thing that would save him at this point, he was sure.

"THORIN!" he called, the sight of the dwarf king with Dwalin getting swarmed by goblins caused his heart to seize in pure terror. He felt him nearly flung off the horse as Tauriel

suddenly leaped off of it, blades drawn as she gave a warrior's cry the hobbit never would have thought he'd hear from an elf of all things. With no hesitation she threw herself into the fray and began cutting into the monsters, slicing them down with a rage and determination of a woman possessed. Bilbo himself drew Sting, and while his show of jumping down from the horse was much less graceful, he was just as determined to help.

"Bilbo!" the king called back, taken by surprise to see the burglar there. There was a clarity in his eyes that the hobbit had not seen for days, no longer clouded by the sickness that had wormed its way into his mind. He surely had to be shocked by the company of an elf side by side with him, and yet he said nothing and only rushed to the hobbit, cutting down goblins at all sides to reach him. "What are you doing here?"

"You have to leave here, now," he said quickly. "Azog has another army, attacking from the north. This watch tower will be completely surrounded. There will be no way out."

"It's true," Tauriel agreed quickly as the last goblin was felled, having no chance against the skilled warriors they'd been facing. "We'll be alone up here. No one will survive this if we don't do something."

"We are so close," Dwalin protested. "That orc scum is in there. I say we push on."

He moved forward but Thorin caught him by the chest, alarm clear in his face.

"No," he ordered. "That's what he wants. He wants to draw us in. This is a trap."

"Wait... where's Kíli? I thought he was with you?!" Tauriel suddenly demanded. A look of anger crossed Thorin's features as he looked at her, opening his mouth to no doubt ask her how it was any of his business to ask where his kin were before the sound of drums interrupted him. All four turned slowly to see the highest point of the watch tower, Fíli being drug across the stones as Azog shouted threats to them in his foul language.

"Oh no. No, no, no, no," Bilbo breathed out. He watched the sword embedded in Azog's arm rise up, ready to plunge into the defenseless dwarf. Time seemed to slow down as horror gripped him. He could do nothing to save them, even with the ring, could never get there in time. How could this happen? To have saved them in from the spiders, from the prisons of Mirkwood, only to lose someone like this?

Tauriel moved fast, suddenly drawing out an arrow and shooting. It did not find its mark in Azog's skull like intended, merely slicing into the side of his face as it past him, right by the eye, but it was enough. He gave a howl of pain and Fíli took the opportunity to turn, grabbing the arm of the orc and began to wrestle with him, trying to push him back in a desperate battle to win, even with no weapon of his own. Tauriel quickly drew another arrow to try to assist, but it was too late, the young dwarf being shoved forward and falling to the stone bellow.

"Fíli!" Thorin yelled as he gripped the stone wall before them. He suddenly took off, running as fast as he could, Tauriel springing like a gazelle onto the ice to follow, running to the dwarf's crumpled body.

"Thorin! We can't split up!" Bilbo yelled after him, but it did not matter. He was going too fast to chase after him, and before long he found himself surrounded by orcs himself with only Dwalin left. His mission to find Thorin and save his life was quickly looking like it would end his own. In the ensuing chaos of the battle, try as he might, as worried as he was, all too soon it was fading to black as he was struck and went down, unconscious before his body even fell to the ground.

Tauriel soon lost sight of Thorin, even her elven eyes unable to pierce the thick fog and snow of the watch tower, but it didn't matter. The dwarf was running ahead, no doubt for revenge. She could not fault him, the sight would have been enough to drive anyone insane with grief, but she had a different goal in mind. The fall had caught her attention of where the body had landed, and who else had seen it. She reached the spot, running across ice and climbing up rocks as fast as she could, just as Kíli had moved to run from it. Like the king, he was surely going for revenge, just as she was able to reach him, grabbing him and holding him back.

"Don't," she gasped as he tried to tug free of her grip. "Kíli, stop, please!"

"I'll kill them! I'll kill every last one of them!" he yelled angrily, struggling to get out of her embrace, and it was a fight he was winning. Smaller than he was, he was stouter and stronger, pulling free with her scrambling to keep him close. She was sure he would break free and run from her, go to die against impossible odds before the pained gasp of his brother stopped him short.

"Fíli!" he breathed in shock as he turned to his brother. His body was twisted at a horrible angle, the fall having broken his leg and arm on the opposite side, but he was alive. "Oh heavens to the west, Fíli you're alive! Tauriel! Help!"

She nodded quickly and helped him drag the dwarf inside of the tunnel, out of sight of any of the orcs. A trail of blood followed, the copper smell hitting her nose as she saw the red matted in the blonde hair. He'd had to have hit his head, and who knew how long his mangled body would last at this rate.

"Heal him, like you did for me. Tauriel, please!" he begged.

"I've no herbs or bandages on me. I can only do so much," she admitted, but went to work anyway, using her knife to slice away at one of her sleeves and bundled it up. "Put this to his head, stop the bleeding as much as you can."

She began to do what she could to set his bones, but with no wood as splinters or anything else to use, she could only move the bones in place of where they should be and chant as she worked. Poisons and antidotes were more her specialty, but she had to do what she could for him, to try and save him.

"We'll never get him off the hill like this," Kíli breathed out, holding the cloth to his head and gripping the hand of his brother tightly. Fíli wasn't even conscious, slipping in and out as he groaned in pain. "He won't be able to crawl, much less walk or run."

It was true. They would need a miracle to get out of this. Any moment they could be found, and she was not sure if just the two of them could defend him alone.

"I'll take him back," she said quickly. "Away from here I can get supplies, heal him, at least keep him alive."

"Tauriel, no. It's too dangerous," he said, gripping her hands in his own. "You'll be surrounded before you could even get out of here."

"I have a horse on the other side of the ice. If I don't make a break for it now we'll lose him," she insisted. Just as he opened his mouth to argue, she surged forward, kissing him suddenly. He was momentarily stunned by the action, and though he did not kiss her back, she was sure there was still affection for her in his heart. "You promised you'd make it back to your mother, Kíli. Surely she would want the same of both her sons. I will not fail you, I promise."

"Tauriel..."

"Thorin made way for Azog. He needs your help more than I right now. I swear on my life, your brother will not pass on my watch," she promised him. "The hobbit is here as well. Regroup and escape this place before reinforcements of orcs arrive. Meet me at the camps when this is over. I will be there, no matter what it takes."

He gave her a look of anguish before nodding. He could see the fear in his eyes, fear for her or his brother she could not tell, and she did not want to be presumptuous to think she was the same in his eyes as his kin. With his help, she hefted the blonde dwarf onto her back, slipping a little on the ice under the weight, but making her way as fast as she could back to her horse. The brave beast would be waiting for her, would not bolt in the battle. It was her only chance of escape, and she knew the steed would not abandon her to her fate. She spared only a moment to glance back and see Kíli take off to find his uncle, and she prayed he would be able to keep his promise to return safely.

When the world returned to, pain throbbed in the small hobbit's head. For a long moment it was hard to even think through it, and he was slow to move and push himself up. He heard the cries of the eagles overhead, bringing him to slowly.

"The... the eagles are coming..." he breathed out, hope filling him, but only for a moment before he remembered why he was even here in the first place. "Th-Thorin... Thorin!"

He pushed himself up, ignoring the pain swimming inside of him, pushing past it to scramble around and try to find the dwarf. He was not far off, laying out on the ice, Azog dead a good twenty or thirty paces away from him, and Kíli by his side. He was applying pressure onto his uncle's stomach, even as he had a gash on his own arm and head.

"Bilbo!" Kíli called as he saw him. "Thorin, Thorin, Bilbo is here. He's safe. Everything is going to be alright."

He rushed to the pair, falling as he reached the dwarf and ending up on his knees at his side. The smell of the blood nearly made him retch.

"Bilbo," Thorin breathed, a smile forming on his lips even as blood dribbled past them and bubbled as he spoke.

"Don't move. Don't move," he said as the dwarf reached for him. "Stay still."

"I'm glad you're here," he said regardless, seeming to pay no mind to his nephew trying to stop his bleeding. "I wish to part with you in friendship."

"No," Bilbo objected, not wanting to believe what was in front of him. Not after all this, no. He could not lose Thorin like this. He wouldn't allow it. "You're not going anywhere, Thorin. You're going to live."

"I wish to take back my words and deed at the gate," he said regardless. "You did only what a true friend would do. Forgive me. I was too blind to see it. I am so sorry... that I have led you into such peril."

"No, I am glad to have shared in your perils, each and every one of them. It is far more than any Baggins deserves," he said as he gripped his hand in his own. He felt hot tears stinging at his eyes before going to push with Kíli, trying to stop the flow of blood. The younger dwarf was not doing much better, sorrow filling him as he tried to keep his family alive.

"Farwell, Master Burglar," he breathed out happily. "Go back to your books, and your armchair. Plant your trees, watch them grow. If more people valued home... above gold, this world would be a merrier place."

"No! No, no, no Thorin! Don't you dare!" Bilbo sobbed out, shaking his head as tears fell down from his face and splashed onto the dwarf. "Don't... don't die. The eagles are coming! It'll be alright... please... please Thorin..."

The dwarf moved no more and an anguished cry escaped the hobbit, shaking the dwarf. He was fading fast. There would be no time to save him! He would not lose him now! Not after all of this! Despair filled him even as the shadows of the birds overhead landed down, washing over him in darkness for a brief moment. It felt like everything around him was consuming him, that the blackness would take him and cause him to drown in it. He raised his head, to curse the bird for not coming fast enough, knowing even with their speed it would not be soon enough to get Thorin to help in time before he saw who was astride it.

"Gandalf," he gasped out between his tears. "Galdalf, he's going to die. Please..."

The wizard rushed forward, laying hands on the king. The mere moments Kíli had been able to buy to slow the death of his uncle had been enough, and twice now Bilbo watched as the magic of the grey wizard seeped into Thorin, brought new life into him as he gasped out, the very last breath that would have ended him instead bringing forth more time. The hobbit didn't even wait for him to finish before he was surging forward and hugging the dwarf, sobbing uncontrollably now as he buried his face into his clothes matted with blood and not caring at all of the mess it made on his face. Thorin was alive, spared by mere moments, but alive nonetheless. He could have sworn he felt an arm wrap around him weakly, hugging him back, but it was so faint he would never entirely be sure before it fell away again.

Perhaps it was only a hope in his head and heart, that the King Under the Mountain truly had forgiven him, that it was not simply words spoken when he thought he would die. Perhaps he only imagined the return hug and refused the reality that even healed by magic, Thorin was probably too weak from his wounds to move so. Still, he welcomed and embraced the thought that this was the second hug they shared, that it was another moment of being accepted by the dwarf just like on the rocks seemingly so long ago in their adventure.

"The worse had better be over now," he almost laughed. "I think I am done with perils, even shared ones, for a while."

The cleaning up, while certainly not as dangerous as the battle, was every bit as weary. Bilbo did his best to stay out from underfoot during all of it, not much he could really do anyway. A large amount of tents were set aside for seeing to the wounded and Bilbo would not be moved from Thorin's side as he laid in a bed and rested. Well, actually, not true. He was moved by force a few times, but so determined was he that he simply slipped on the ring while no one was the wiser and only slipped back in to be near the dwarf. After getting tossed out only to come back in about a half dozen times the dwarven guards gave up and let him be. He would be rather proud to have proven more stubborn than them of all people, but he was too wrapped up in his friend to feel much of anything.

Thorin slept long hours and woke rarely. In his stead, his cousin Dain had taken charge for the time being. Money was divided fairly, given out to the men and elves, gems parted with and others went on in peace. Bilbo wished such things could have come sooner, but he supposed even he was not clever enough to fix every problem, try as he might to be.

He was promised reward as well, but the hobbit only agreed to two chests, unwilling to hear anything of taking more. The treasure was more trouble than it was worth in his mind, and he was sure if he tried to carry back a hill worth of golden trinkets it would only end with him getting waylaid by every greedy being between the mountain and the Shire. No, a payment of his services was enough and that was all he needed.

Besides, there were others who had much less than him...

He often saw Tauriel fretting outside, her shadow on the tarp of the tent as she walked around. Kili and Fili were inside with Thorin, and while Kili was in better shape it was only just barely. He'd been ordered on bed rest until he could move without his stitches tearing, even conscious while his family slept away most of their injuries.

"She's waiting for me," he breathed out one day, pain in his voice that Bilbo was sure did not come from his wounds. "I want to see her."

The dwarves would not allow it. Even fighting side by side, there was too much animosity between the two peoples. Bilbo supposed it would take a long time to mend, with more than just gems as well. He also supposed it was lucky she was even allowed by the tent, and while the hobbit did consider going out to tell her Kili's words... he just couldn't find it in himself to leave Thorin's side.

It felt selfish, putting his friendship above the love and adoration clearly shared between the two, but he supposed even he could be that way some of the time.

When Thorin was awake, Bilbo felt less guilty about his own fortune of being able to stay close. The first time he'd opened his eyes, the dwarf had looked confused, not sure what was going on. The hobbit was sure to take his time to explain, going over his words slowly and carefully. He'd expected the anger to be back, for him to surge from his bed at the news of the treasure being shared and try to reclaim it, but a calm only came over him as he nodded his head at the news.

"A wise decision," he breathed. "The crown needs such wise choices to always come from its king."

"You've learned from your mistakes," he assured the dwarf. "You'll make many wonderful decisions in the future, I'm sure."

Thorin just stared up at the canvas of the tent before closing his eyes again and spoke no more on the matter. At the very least, Bilbo knew he was truly forgiven and that all was as well as it could be considering the circumstances.

Time passed and he knew it was time to leave. The magic that healed Thorin had saved him, and though his second recovery was slower than the first, much closer to death's door this time Gandalf had explained, and would need more time to work properly, there was no doubt the king would live. Already merriment was spreading in the mountain as the treasure was cleared and put back where it belonged, and the halls were made livable again. Feasts were promised and the king left his bed to join his people while Bilbo found himself pushed back in the crowds. He understood it, a living legend walking among them all, but it felt like a pit in his stomach nonetheless. He wasn't sure the feeling of unease that crept inside of him from it, maybe seeing the dwarves in their home at last had him aching for his own. The last couple of weeks had been a tumbling mess of emotions, and he would be glad to be back home again before much longer.

He was leaving things unresolved as he left the gate quietly, his stomach protesting at missing a feast but still willing to forgo it. Home was awaiting him and he missed it terribly. It was time for him to go. Kíli and Fíli were even on the mend, hobbling around though with smiles at their good fortune of surviving such odds. He was sure they would understand his departure as it was intended.

"So the buglar thinks he can sneak off into the morning sun without so much as looking back?" a deep and rich voice asked him, just as he turned to see none other than Thorin himself at the gate. "You've gotten much less stealthy since the battle."

Bilbo swallowed a lump in his throat, thinking of the ring in his pocket. He hadn't put it on since fighting to get into Thorin's tent, and even that had been a risk with so many people around at the time. The ring was his, and while he'd been generous with his share of the fortune, he didn't want anyone to get the idea about possibly getting a magic ring from him in the bargain. He was just as happy to keep it his secret, even if it did smudge up his reputation for stealthiness just a bit.

"Out of practice, I suppose," he said with a chuckle. "You don't have to see me off, Thorin. Clearly you're busy right now."

"And how am I so busy, Master Baggins?" he asked, arms crossed and leaning on the door. He looked more relaxed than Bilbo had ever seen him. It truly was a sight to behold.

"You have dwarves moving in back home, a kingdom to settle, fires to reforge," he explained. "Really, it should be obvious, don't you think? An entire mountain is awaiting their king inside. I shall not hold him up for simple goodbyes."

"No, I am sure you wouldn't. The manners, ever impeccable on you, are simply astonishing. The same that allowed over a dozen dwarves into your home and fed every single one of them until your back ached from serving them, I'm sure," he said. "You need not worry though. Kili and Fili have things well in hand, and they will grow into the role."

"Kili and Fili?" Bilbo asked. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"It hasn't been officially decided yet, but one of them is to take the throne. As my heirs, it will have to be one of them. Traditionally, I would pick one but my ideas have not proven wise as of late. I think I'll leave it to someone else. Balin, no doubt. He's good at such things," Thorin explained.

"But... but... Thorin, you're the king," he said, barely able to get his mind wrapped around what he was saying.

"I was king, and in mere days I started war and nearly caused the death of my own kin. I care for my people and my home dearly, but I am not suited for this. I look to the forest and still feel the hate boil in my blood at their betrayal. Perhaps if the elves had not left us all those years ago this would be different. They would not fight for us, nor would they give us shelter or food when we showed up to beg for it, and only allied with the men for the want of gems... and those thoughts will not leave me. Even now, there are black thoughts still turning on me. I need away from this mountain for now, but in my stead younger minds who do not remember the fires and betrayal are needed. Perhaps they could even broker peace, once a king is chosen from the two of them, real and true peace."

"Where will you go in the meantime?" Bilbo asked, only now noticing the bag near the dwarf's feet. He was planning on traveling, on leaving as well as the hobbit?

"I have not decided. Somewhere I can find work, I think. Balin insisted I take some treasure, enough to get me on the road and off again. No specific destination in mind though," he admitted.

Bilbo only took a moment to think about it, sure as he was in what he was about to say next.

"Come home with me," he offered. "My home is as good as any other I would hope. I'll cook for you and you can find yourself, as long as you need to. Forever if you like."

It felt a little silly to say such things, but he wanted Thorin to know he was not alone, no matter how he felt he'd failed as a king. The dwarf was his friend and he would not see him

wandering alone with no one in the world by his side.

"I suppose the treasure I have on me would cover rent for a while under your roof," he admitted, but Bilbo only laughed.

"Rent? I wouldn't dream of it. My home is your home, if you would have it."

"I wouldn't impose on you," Thorin said, suddenly looking hesitant. "A short time is one thing, but without payment it really isn't proper for a dwarf to stay so long with no compensation at all. Such things are only for family and kin."

"Well, I wouldn't be so presumptuous to think of myself in those terms to you so easily, even with the travels we've had... but maybe in time you could see me that way," Bilbo said with a smile. He had family over a fair bit of the Shire after all, cousins far-removed and close, and even friends he saw as honorary family. He wouldn't mind if Thorin saw him like that, if only so the stubborn dwarf would accept the generosity he was offering.

"Bilbo... do you... even understand what you're asking of me?" he asked, looking absolutely flummoxed. "Being family is serious for dwarves."

"And I will respect it in every which way. Now come on, Galdalf is waiting. I don't want to dawdle," he said as he turned away and began to walk. He did not see the faint blush on the cheeks of the former king, nor the soft and shy smile that graced his lips. He only heard the footsteps of the heavy boots his companion wore and knew he was following, and that was enough for him.

It wouldn't be until much, much later, after he'd arrived home and found it to be getting sacked by his relatives would he lose his happy attitude about family bonds, souring a little. It would be even later than that would he learn dwarves did not have figurative family, so closely related in so many cases the concept was entirely foreign to them. That Bilbo's offer to share his home and his somewhat jesting comment of considering Thorin family if that's what he needed to live in Bag End without payment was a promise of something legal and romantic all in one. Sharing a house, an offering of family ties to make it proper to live together with no money changing hands in exchange, well the marriage proposal was very traditional in keeping with dwarvish people, not that the poor little hobbit could have known that.

And Thorin, who'd long since been smitten with Master Baggins, who'd come to love him, who'd offered mithral in the terror he might lose his precious hobbit to the war, and who'd felt his heart break when he'd thought himself betrayed by the male... well, he knew Bilbo couldn't know what he'd essentially just asked for, but he was not going to say no over such a trivial thing. In time Bilbo would understand what he'd just offered and that the dwarf had happily accepted. Their lives were long. He could accept an enduring engagement until the hobbit figured it out.

All cleaned up now, hopefully. I haven't had a beta reader for a long, long while so I've learned to accept I'll probably never catch all the mistakes. I didn't change much, story wise, just rewrote a few sentences that didn't read right. I've also decided to go with the Tolkien spelling of dwarves instead of dwarfs so that was changed too. Incorrect it might be, it seems to fit his feel better... and honestly most people use that phrase now anyway so what's the harm? In any case, thanks again for reading and review if you have comments. I love to read them.

Greed and Deeds, Fairies and Gold

Chapter Notes

First off I want to say thank you to everyone who reviewed. Comments always help inspire me to write faster, and it's good to know everyone is enjoying the concept of the story so far. It's really kind of you. I meant to get this chapter out yesterday since I wrote a ton, but then I ended up falling asleep and somehow my computer did a shut down and... yeah, it was just gone. Even a recovery didn't bring it back. So, I ended up writing it all again. Luckily it was still fresh in my mind. Makes me wonder what kind of mishaps happened to Bilbo that he couldn't finish his book in 60 years either.

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

The road back to the Shire was not nearly as perilous as it had been leaving it. With the battle clearing out so many goblins and orcs, there was practically none to bother them, not to mention having Gandalf along for the whole trip. He'd imagined the old man would have pulled one of his vanishing acts again, only to pop up later, but the wizard stuck by their side the whole time. Overall, the trip was a lot merrier this time, plenty of idle chatter with one another to take up their time. Thorin's side still occasionally bothered him, and he would need rest earlier than he would like due to his foot but he wouldn't hear of it when Bilbo suggested they stop their trip until he was fully healed. The hobbit wanted to be home, and he'd get him there as soon as he could.

At first having the wizard about worried him a little. He kept expected to be lectured about his actions from before, or even for coming with Bilbo to the Shire. He'd been instructed to get the Arkenstone and lead his people, and not only had he made a complete mess of it, he was now technically walking right away from the whole point of the trip in Gandalf's mind. Certainly the wizard had never shied away from sharing his opinion before, especially when someone did something that he didn't think was for the best, but nothing seemed to come from it. No knowing glances, no snide remarks about his actions, nothing at all and Thorin was all too happy not to ask about it.

Between the money Bilbo had taken with him in the chests, Thorin's own bag, and what they had dug up from the troll's lair, it had been successful enough of a journey as far as treasure hunts went. Even resting in Rivendell for a few days had been relaxing, though he'd used his foot as an excuse to stay in his room most of the time. It had long since stopped bothering him to walk on it, but he didn't really want to see any of the elves. He'd learned his lesson about greed and grown from it, but he was more than content to still feel bitter on other matters, thank you very much.

Besides, it had been very kind of Bilbo to keep him company in his room, bringing him meals and chatting away with him. He seemed to be in awe of how beautiful the place was, but was careful to add in how the halls of the Lonely Mountain were every bit as impressive.

Thorin appreciated the humoring, though he wasn't sure if the expressed opinion was spoken entirely truthfully but simply let the hobbit talk.

"You're smiling," Bilbo had noted, when the dwarf had just spent an hour letting him chatter away about the trees and how green their leaves were, and wondering if it would be rude to ask for a sapling to take home and plant in his garden. Sure enough, a soft little smile had been resting on his lips, feeling content as his burglar talked. "You smile much more now than you did before."

"I suppose I do," he said, but would not betray the reason why, even when asked.

When they finally reached the border of the Shire, it was only then that Gandalf left them after months of traveling together.

"Oh, but we're so close to Hobbiton," Bilbo said. "Surely you can come a bit farther and let me make you some lunch before you go off."

"I appreciate the offer, but I've business to attend to. I will no doubt swing by again though, but for now I must leave you. Though my goodbyes must be separate," he replied.

He shooed the dwarf off before pulling Bilbo aside to speak with him, keeping his voice low as he stooped over him and clutched to his staff as he whispered. He had no idea what was being said, but he didn't think he cared for the odd laughter that erupted from Bilbo or how his nose and mouth kept twitching, a tic to show how nervous he clearly was. This whole trip the blasted old fool had been able to keep his need to be mysterious and strange down, and now he was pulling this? He sent the hobbit off before giving Thorin a strong look. He almost considered ignoring it and just heading off but he knew that would not be the end of it. Gandalf would surely follow them at that rate and he had a sudden urge to be rid of the wizard and his meddling.

"What?" he asked, not even bothering to keep his tone polite.

"Look after Bilbo," the wizard said. That baffled him. He'd been expecting the long missed lecture about his actions or something of that nature. "He needs someone who will be able to keep him safe and occupied I think, unless I am wrong and I pray that I am."

"What are you talking about? We're in the Shire now. What could possibly threaten Bilbo?" he asked.

"It isn't your place to know, Thorin Oakenshield. Just remember the time you failed to guard and try to keep him from doing the same. It's enough to keep an eye on him," he said sharply. "Be his friend and give him something else to focus on."

The words utterly confused him, but before he could demand a better explanation the wizard turned sharply and made his way off.

"What was that all about?" Bilbo asked as he walked up to him. "He looked terribly frightening there for a moment."

"He wanted me to stay by your side," he replied, seeing no reason to even lie about it. Wizards and their flairs for the dramatic. What in the world could possibly threaten Bilbo in his peaceful homeland? "As if I wasn't already going to. Besides, I think he forgot all the tales you told about Mirkwood and the dragon, and how often you were the one to rescue me."

"Oh... well, I mean," he said, trying to sound humble even as his chest puffed out a bit in obvious pride. "Just quick thinking and flexibility in tough situations, really."

"Poetic way of saying how smart you are," he said as he clapped his hand on his shoulder. "Come on. Galdalf might not want any of your cooking but I'd be more than happy for it."

Besides, he realized as they continued on, Bilbo had nerves stronger than a dragon and wisdom even the elves would find themselves jealous of. What was there to fear that the hobbit would not be able to handle?

It took a while longer to get through the country, though the maintained paths and roads were certainly easier than the Wilds. No longer a need for camping, inns with warm meals were appreciated and hot baths a luxury that the dwarf felt a little pleased he'd be able to enjoy every day now. Though when they reached Hobbiton, he found himself wishing they'd hurried a bit.

To say the sight of Bilbo Baggins followed by a dwarf of all things caused an uproar in the otherwise sleepy town was nothing compared to how the hobbit himself acted when he saw people that were walking off with his furniture. When explained to the pair of them that he'd been presumed dead by a friendly neighbor, though not friendly enough to part with the items he himself had bought, the hobbit was off in a rage to stop anything more of his being taken. Thorin followed quickly behind him to hear the midst of the auction.

"Fine Shire-made," a Mister Grubb was declaring proudly, as if it was his own hands who'd made the table he was currently bidding off. "None of your dwarvish reproductions here."

Thorin snarled and decided immediately he didn't think he liked any of these hobbits when they laughed.

"Stop!" Bilbo cried out. "Stop, there's been a mistake!"

He roughly pushed his way past the other hobbits, but they sprang aside for the dwarf, seeing how he was a good head taller than most of them. A sour faced woman looked downright offended when Bilbo declared who he was and snatched his spoons from her, and Thorin took it upon himself to grab the rest before she could protest.

"It's been more than thirteen months since the disappearance of Bilbo Baggins," Mr. Grubb said. "If you are who you say you are, can you prove it?"

Bilbo looked shocked and offended, and Thorin could see why. He'd lived here for fifty years, hadn't he? Surely some of these people had to know his face.

"He is indeed Bilbo Baggins, or I should hope so, seeing as he's been in my employ for all that time," Thorin said as he stepped forward. He really should, seeing as how Bilbo had run off without official instructions or anything of the like when he'd left mostly due to him.

"And who are you?" the female hobbit sneered, a one Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. He'd quickly learn to despise her almost as strongly as elves.

"Thorin Oakenshield," he said, intentionally leaving out the part of being at anyone's services. He wouldn't know if any of them knew the customary greeting of dwarves, and he didn't much care either. "He was with me on an expedition and he is most certainly alive."

Sadly the word of a strange dwarf carried even less weight, and Bilbo was forced to show the contract identifying the two of them. Several people who did not get anything left in a huff, but it was nothing compared to the ones that had. Bilbo even found an adult and hobbit-boy in his bedroom, measuring the walls for furniture and left Thorin to chase them out. Apparently a cousin of his, the husband of Lobelia, and their son who'd been willed the home. The dwarf was all too happy to give them a dark look and chase them off, poor Bilbo in a fluster already. The boy himself looked terrified of the dwarf and he felt not a lick of guilt over it.

In the end no lunch came. It took most of the day to get all the furniture back inside even without taking the time to put it in its proper place, and well into the evening Bilbo was looking over all the receipts for the sales. Mr. Grubb was apologetic enough over the mistake as a lawyer, even though the declaration of death had been perfectly legal, to help him make a list of everything that had been sold and to who so that he could get it back. Bilbo had asked just to borrow the book that had the records but he'd flat out refused to be parted with it, as if suspecting the other hobbit of wanting to tamper with it for some reason.

"We'll not be refunding any money ourselves though," he told an irritated Bilbo once they were finished. "Legally those items were in our possession when sold, and now legally belong to the ones who bought them. You will have to deal with it yourself. Begging your pardon, but what did you expect to happen when you ran off with not so much as even a word or how you do?"

Thorin felt it annoying how badly he was stressing the matter, surely not wanting to give up any of the money for his office he'd made. They'd only been a couple hours late getting to Bilbo's home after the auction had started, but it looked like the mess it had caused would give them a headache for a while now.

"Bother burglaring and everything to do with it," the hobbit grumbled as he sat down in his chair and gave a little sulk. It was a terribly adorable look, but the dwarf said nothing and just gave him a soft rub on his shoulder to show sympathy. "Not even a speck of food in the cupboard either, though being gone as long as I have, I guess that's to be expected. I'll have to see if young Gamgee will be kind enough to lend us something."

"Who?" Thorin asked as he started to get a fire going. Luckily there was plenty of crumpled papers around to use as a starter, though sadly there was only one log. It wouldn't last the night.

"An apprentice to my gardener, old Mr. Holman," Bilbo groaned as he stretched out. "A good lad. I imagine he'll still be up this late and wouldn't mind sharing a pie or two, and I'll give him a bit of silver for the trouble. His father's a rope maker and his mother a baker, you know. Kind people, but not too well off. It's why I hired him so young, even though he's only fifteen... well, sixteen or seventeen now I suppose."

"Is that young for hobbits?" he asked, just to seem like he was listening. He wasn't sure he cared much about gossip on his new neighbors, but it was better Bilbo talk about that than focus on the mess of his poor home.

"Oh, well, adulthood for hobbits isn't until thirty-three and even then we don't usually get jobs until our tweens, that is to say in our twenties. Even if he's young though, he works hard. I couldn't say no when he asked for work to help his family," he said before he stood up and dusted off his pants. "Well, we'll get nothing else done with empty stomachs. I'll go and see about some food, then we can get the furniture put back in place, or at least the beds. Ah, the sheets will have to be washed though, and I'm sure the mattresses will be terribly dusty. And at the very least I need to get you a-"

"Bilbo," he said as he stood suddenly and placed two finger to the hobbit's mouth. "You're babbling. I've slept in mud and on sharp rocks before. A wooden floor and a few blankets are fine, dirty or otherwise."

The hobbit stood still for a moment, the rough fingers on his lips as his cheeks began to get a little pink from the light scolding. Thorin started to become aware of the warmth of his breath and felt the oddest urge to ask him if he perhaps wanted to use the dwarf himself as a mattress that could keep him warm before pulling his hand away.

"On the other hand it is your home. Do as you will," he said and quickly went back to the fire. Thinking such nonsense. He was starting to get addle-brained. Even in love, to say such drivel would be ridiculous.

"I'll be back soon, Thorin," he said before he went off and the dwarf found himself sighing. On the trip it had felt relaxing to be with Bilbo, but maybe that's because it was what he was used to. Traveling had been his way for a long time now. Even with jobs and earning his keep, he'd always been on the move, finding work as he could. For years after the dragon, he'd tried to keep his people together, but there was never enough to sustain them all. Most of them had been craftsmen and miners, not farmers or the like. They'd traded for food, not even having many cooks, and without things to sell and make, there just hadn't been work for all of them. They'd scattered to the other hills, unable to build a town and farm any more than they would have all been able to live comfortably in one job market.

Now... now the dwarf was somewhere he could call home, a place with beds and polished silverware, teapots and... and his hobbit. He should be comfortable here, and yet somewhere in his mind he was wondering how to proceed.

Bilbo was special to him, and he wished so badly to court him, to start making him pretty things to show his love and worth to the hobbit. It had been an idle fantasy in the mountain, of decorating him in treasures and nothing else. How he could have put pretty pearls in his hair until he shown like the stars, silver bands on his fingers and around his wrists, even thin

golden chains for his ankles that would rest in the hair of his feet and wrap around his toes. In the moments of his dragon sickness, when he'd thought less about the hard metals and more of soft flesh he'd thought of things that pleased him every bit as his hoard. In his worst moments he'd thought of tying his hobbit to the throne and claiming him, of ravaging Bilbo as he cried out for more and begged his king.

The thoughts no longer pleased him, in fact made him feel terribly guilty. Bilbo was precious to him, but no treasure, not an item that had no will or thoughts or feelings of his own. He was a brave yet nervous little hobbit, who'd faced down armies, dragons and spiders only to quiver at the thought of someone out of comfort because of him. A fine hobbit who loved food, cheer and song. If Thorin was to earn his love, not claim it but truly earn it, he was going to have to do it properly.

So when Bilbo came back, he moved from the fireplace to help him wash the dishes and set the table that was still in the living room. He promised Bilbo he would get all the furniture put in the right place in the morning if the hobbit promised him cleaning the beds was all he would do before allowing himself some rest.

Though when it took hours just to get one bed ready, Thorin allowed his dwarf greed to take hold a little as he firmly took the hobbit and forced him to it and made him lay down.

"It's big enough for us both, and I'm getting tired," he used as an excuse that the hobbit finally accepted. They stripped down to their pants and shirts before laying down and he promised he'd arrange for a tailor to make some sleeping clothes for the dwarf once everything was settled. Luckily Thorin had enough tact not to suggest the opposite for their solution and go without anything at all.

"Despite everything, it is nice to be back home," Bilbo said as he stared out the window and the stars. "I wonder how everyone is doing back on the mountain."

"Well, I hope," he admitted. "I'd try to get a letter to them, but I don't think it would really make it or that I'd get a reply in a timely manner."

"Do you miss it at all? Your home, I mean?"

"Yes, but I would have missed you more," he said softly.

Bilbo flushed and laughed at that, shaking his head before relaxing into the pillows. It was a warm night in the summer but Bilbo was happily deep under the blankets like a caterpillar getting ready to rest in his cocoon until emerging with bright green and yellow wings. Thorin chuckled at the thought of Bilbo fluttering around with such things on his back and happily rested next to him. He wasn't sure when his idle thoughts turned to dreams, but they were odd ones, filled with pretty little tiny insects kissing his cheeks and for some reason one becoming a fairy to lead him to pots of gold that he hugged to his chest and sang songs to. He clutched the gold a bit tighter as he started to imagine other greedy beings that would surely come and steal it, of treacherous fairies and bugs leading more to the treasure that he'd found and was therefore rightfully his. He began to see red flicks of fire coming from his nostrils before the fairy came back, somehow bravely sitting on the gold without an ounce of fear and singing sweet little songs to him before he calmed down and decided he liked having both

treasures of gold and a fairy he trusted enough to guard it for him, and rested his curled and scaly body around both to sleep contently.

When Thorin woke up in the middle of the night, Bilbo happily snoozing away and buried contently into his chest as the dwarf had his arms wrapped around him, he groaned a bit. He firmly blamed the pies and closed his eyes again, even as sleep didn't come to him.

Chapter End Notes

A dwarf in Hobbiton is sure to cause a headache for all involved, though anyone could argue if it'll be the hobbits or said dwarf who will get the most grief.

Being Lonely in the Mountain

Chapter Notes

I decided to take advantage of the last little bits of my weekend to get this chapter out since I didn't know when I'd be able to work on it again. It's always better to get creative things done when you have plenty of time, but between two jobs that's a luxury I only really get on one day a week. It seemed a good idea to get this written while I can since so many of you seem to be eagerly awaiting it.

Also, I should state that I'm going to be adding some lore to this story that isn't really covered (or was changed) in the films. I'll do my best to make the things mesh well together, but if something seems off, you might know why. One thing that was dropped completely in the movies was the fact birds could talk and were used a lot before the prepared siege of Lonely Mountain to communicate with other people, and there was some dialogue for the Eagles as well. This is stuff I will be using, along with other lore, so I wanted to just establish now before anyone got confused on why anything might be changed or different. Think of it just based on the film, but seasoned with the written lore.

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

In the time that Bilbo, Thorin and Gandalf were making their way out of the lands that had hosted the Battle of Five Armies, things were still very busy in Lonely Mountain and around the area as well. The elves of Mirkwood were happy to take the gems and leave, and while having acted as allies during the fight and some good will had been mustered over the giving of the jewels, there was not a single dwarf who wept at seeing them leave. There would probably need to be a lot more time and many more exchanges of gifts and work to silence grumbling sides that if the elves, or dwarves depending on who was speaking, had just been a little less stubborn about the whole affair then maybe a lot of this nonsense could have been avoided.

It just went to show some life lessons were not always terribly easy to learn.

Fíli and Kíli were not among the grumblers, too sore from the fighting and grateful to be alive to think too much on the gold they'd lost out on. In fact, the mountain had been lost a hundred years ago or so and both of them being only eighty-two and seventy-seven respectively meant they'd never even seen their lost home before now. Oh yes, they eagerly thought of the gold as much as any of the others had and they'd grown up on the stories of Erebor told to them by their uncle and mother, but it had been more legend and hopes to them than anything. Seeing the reality of it, and what it had done to their poor uncle had cooled their appreciation of glittery treasures a little.

Their own attitudes were a little somber though, even given the cheer of still being alive. Both of them were waylaid in bed most of the time, only able to get up and move when they had to and it was terribly uncomfortable one way or the other. Fíli had a cast on his left leg and right arm and it wasn't likely they would be coming off for weeks, and his brother had been stitched up like a cloth and had been warned severely not to tear them by Oin. They could hear the hustle and bustle about the mountain, work being done and decisions being made. Balin had seemed to have become something of a leader, every time he came in to visit them, he was trailed by at least three dwarves or more asking opinions on something. He often had to shoo them away so as not to disturb the two princes and every other dwarf in the large hall that had been set up as a make-shift hospital wing for the time being.

Fíli couldn't help but notice how distracted his younger brother was most of the time, his eyes flitting around the walls and trying to keep himself occupied. It was easy for him to get restless at the best of times and even if he wasn't currently cooped up, something was clearly plaguing on him.

No one had any idea where Tauriel was.

Once the damage of the battle had been cleared away and the dwarves had been brought into the mountain to heal and begin work, Kíli had clearly expected the she-elf to follow along and stay by his side. Apparently she had not though, and no one seemed to be speaking about it. He'd asked Balin once when Kíli had been asleep if maybe she was being kept out of the gates by some of the soldiers or something, and the old dwarf just didn't want to admit it to the younger prince, but he swore he'd heard nothing about the female trying to even approach the mountain.

"She didn't just go home. She wouldn't have," Kíli had said once, his face firm but his voice wavering in a way Fíli pretended not to notice for his brother's sake. "She's going to come, Fíli."

He sympathized with his brother, but he had to wonder if he was perhaps getting a little too attached to her. They'd met by getting captured by her after all, and in all the fighting and dangers, he was sure they'd maybe had three conversations total. On the other hand, she had played a vital part in saving them, so Fíli himself had no grudge for her. He just thought maybe his brother, who'd always had a bit of a weakness for women in the first place, might be just misplacing his feelings on a woman who was probably far out of his reach.

Besides that, the oldest prince had his own thoughts clouding up his head. Even with staying in the healing hall most of the time, he had heard talk about the succession business. Thorin had left quite suddenly, leaving instructions with only Balin and Dain before leaving. Even his nephews hadn't seen him off, being told by Óin they'd both been asleep when he'd come to say his goodbye with a single pack and dressed in traveling clothes to leave. No one had any idea where he was going, what he planned to do, and if he even planned on coming back. Even if he did, it certainly wouldn't be to take the crown as King Under the Mountain again. He'd made it very clear apparently he had no desire either for that or the Arkenstone, which he'd placed in the throne's clasp before taking off.

There had been a general understanding that despite having two heirs, Fíli himself would probably be granted the title officially. When they were children it hadn't meant that much,

growing up in the Blue Mountains where they had been wealth and politics, but not of the same way it had been understood in Erebor. Thorin had been in charge of the area, but he acted more as a leader in work and mining, and wasn't even around all that often. He traveled a lot for work and only came around to see the that day to day affairs were handled before striving off again to find more buyers for their goods. It was more like an acting guild head than a king, and Fíli had mostly been chosen to take over once Thorin was too old to carry out such duties. He was the oldest of the two brothers and considerably more mature than the fun loving Kíli, though he himself had his moments.

This was not the Blue Mountains though. This was Erebor and he felt a weight on his shoulders that he did not want to share with anyone else. Despite his older age, it had been decided that he should not just inherit the throne and a bit of council and decision from the other dwarves should be considered before anything official was ordained. There was a lot to get done, some parts of the mountain were not structurally sound, even with sharing with Dale it was possible there would be food shortages if they didn't figure something out, and just getting Erebor livable again for the many people who would be coming back to their home. Justifiable worries were raised about how Thorin had acted, how the insanity had taken hold of him, and whispers about if perhaps a similar sickness might affect the younger members of his bloodline as well.

"After all, Thrór was the first and Thorin proved he could catch it as well. We should watch them closely and see if the greed takes them," some had whispered.

He didn't want to admit it but he could see the reason for the worries. They'd all just thought getting here would be enough, that they'd have the gold and their home, and everything would just immediately get better. As it was, he supposed it had been foolhardy on everyone's part. He remembered fondly the party at Bilbo's and the rather undignified tizzy they'd worked themselves up to, acting more like it was a party then the start of a dangerous quest. In a more somber mood, he remembered the poor hobbit running around trying to find out why all these dwarves were even in his home as they carelessly ate his food, drank his ale and left a mess everywhere.

It was pretty likely Kíli and he were going to have to act much, much more dignified now... and less rude. It hadn't occurred to him until just now they might have been leaning a little too hard on the hospitality of their host. No wonder the hobbit had been less than eager to travel with them, danger or not. A mannered and homely person like that had probably thought very unkind things about them while traveling and had just been much too polite to ever voice them. No matter who got the throne, he resolved to find a way to get back to Hobbiton sometime and check up on Bilbo once things had settled and he'd have reached home, at very least to try and make a better showing of being gracious about accepting hospitality.

He wondered just where Bilbo was, since he had to be making his way back by now. As far as he'd heard Gandalf was going to be personally escorting him back, so he supposed there wasn't much reason to worry. If anyone could take care of him it would be the wizard. But the hobbit was an idle thought and one he didn't have that much time for. So after the third week of being stuck in his casts, he'd decided he'd had enough and was determined to make his way about the mountain. He was getting tired of the reports from Balin amidst visits, and Kíli

was due to be released today anyway. He was not going to be cooped up in here for another three weeks just because he was walking slow.

"You really shouldn't be moving so soon," Óin told him, even as Kíli handed him his crutch and he stood up with some difficulty. "Goodness sakes, you lost use of an arm and a leg, need I remind you?"

"I'll be fine. If I lay around any longer I'm going to grow mold," he said firmly. Even if it was just retiring to a private room and having to come back for check ups, he needed to see the rest of the mountain. Things would not wait any longer. While Balin seemed to be doing a good job in getting things underway, the fact of the matter was they were Thorin's heirs. This was their home now and their responsibility. Dain had arranged food to come and some of the people settled in the Iron Hills were coming to Erebor to either settle the mountain, live there, or both, but the lord could not be away from his own halls too much longer. The fact of the matter was the princes needed to get to work and start proving their worth as leaders to this place.

He walked out of the hall, Kíli by his side and keeping close just in case he stumbled, but Fili kept his balance well enough. He'd walked around a little already and he'd long since gotten used to the odd weight of the bandages around his leg and the sling holding his arm in place. Still, he appreciated the presence of his brother all the same. He'd feel like a fool if he walked along and tripped right in front of his subjects... and thinking of them in that case just felt weird in and of itself.

A room had be prepared for the two of them, near the throne room and settled off to the side. There was twin beds in there with plenty of blankets and pillows on them, a desk and a few bookshelves as well, some of them already filled with paperwork and reports on the going-ons of the mountain. He picked one up with his good hand and looked it over, something about a hopeful proposal about using some of the land around the mountain to farm with. Ash was a good fertilizer after all, and while the land was rather barren due to the dragon, with some work it could produce food for them once winter was over. It was probably a good idea too. Maybe some of the men of Lake-Town would be able to help teach a few of them how to farm, even if most of them were fishermen or the like. After all, not even dwarves could eat gold.

"You're really going to get to work on this right away?" Kíli asked once he saw what he was looking at.

"Nothing else to do, and this sort of thing is time sensitive. It won't wait until we feel like getting to it," he told his brother. "The first year is probably going to be the toughest on us. The Men are going to be busy enough getting their own home rebuilt to worry much about us, and we're probably going to need to reach out a bit for help from others for a while. Luckily we've got plenty to barter with, so as long as this is all planned out carefully, we should be okay."

"Spoken like a true king already. You sound like Uncle," Kíli chuckled as he set himself down on one of the beds.

He didn't say so, but a bit of pride swelled up in him at hearing that.

"Well, it's pretty important we act our role now," he said. "One of us is going to be king after all."

"Pfft. Oh come on, Fili. We both know there's no question about it. You're the oldest. Traditionally it's pretty clear you're the one who's going to get the throne," he said.

"You should pay more attention to the talk around here. I'm pretty sure tradition might just be put aside for this one matter," he replied.

"I doubt it. They're going to make a big fuss, deliberate a ton and then you'll get picked anyway. Not much sense to it otherwise," he said.

"You're acting like you don't even want the throne," Fili noted.

Kili got a look on his face, clearly thinking it over a bit before shrugging.

"I guess I never thought about it. I mean, a couple years ago I wasn't even sure we'd ever seen Erebor, much less rule it. Besides, Thorin has another good hundred years before he would have gotten too old for it, and he could have easily had an heir of his own by that point," he pointed out. "Between that and you, I didn't ever really hang my hopes up on it. Seems silly to be worrying about it now."

"Talk like that, and they will pick you just so fate can teach you a lesson about being prepared," Fili snarked, but he could see the younger dwarf's point. Besides, did it really even matter that much? The two brothers had been as thick as thieves since they'd been children. It didn't really matter all that much who was officially in charge since he could see the two of them sharing responsibilities and opinions on anything going on under the mountain. Whoever wore the crown, he was sure the other would be around to support him and offer help wherever he could.

"I do wish he'd stayed around a while longer though," the younger brother admitted suddenly.

"Thorin?"

He nodded his head slowly.

"He talked about Lonely Mountain so much when we were growing up. It seemed like sometimes it was the only thing he could think about, and then he just left like that? What could have been so important that he didn't want to stay?" he asked.

"Who knows?" Fili admitted. Shame, maybe? He felt Thorin had redeemed himself by going out into battle and his actions during the fighting but they both knew their uncle was nothing if not a fierce sort of man who took on responsibilities in a very grave manner. Their mother had told them of times when he smiled more, laughed easily and was a sort of wayward youth, going out of the mountain to explore the wilderness beyond. It was a hard image to place to their uncle with his permanent frown and the regal manner he carried himself in. It had been his place to lead them all home and it had not been the glorious time they'd all been expecting.

Anyone with half a brain should have seen the dwarf king blaming himself for all of it, once his mind had returned to him. Maybe he'd gone into exile as a way to try to make amends, even if all his people would have rather seen him stay.

"I wonder where he is right now. I hope wherever it is, it's somewhere safe," Kíli murmured, tucking his legs under his chin and wrapped his arms around them. For a moment he looked so much like a little child again it almost scared Fíli. Even though the distance of five years was nothing to dwarves, he'd always taken his role as the older brother very seriously. From the time his little brother had been born, he'd felt responsible for him. Not that he had memories of them, only a toddler at the time, but he'd been told often how he'd stayed near the crib at all times, comforted the babe whenever he'd cry and be the first to trot after him when they'd gotten older to try and keep him out of trouble. How successful he'd been was always up for debate, but he'd certainly tried his best.

He didn't want to think ill of his brother, but he couldn't help but wonder if the crown would suit him. They were both dwarves moved by their hearts but Kíli was much more so. Fíli could temper his passions and think about what needed to be done as well as the how, plan things out, focus on the details. His brother was much more free-spirited, always had been. While it ensured a happy way of going through life, he wasn't sure how well that would lend itself to the rebuilding effort. Technically he might have been an adult, but in many ways he was still a kid as well. It wasn't that he was selfish or anything, far from it, but he did sometimes get fancies in his head as opposed to actual solid ideas.

"I want to go and find Tauriel."

The older brother only just barely held back a sigh. Case in point.

"I'm not sure she wants to be found, Kíli," he pointed out.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked, sounding almost guarded. Fíli decided to word himself carefully, not wanting to upset him.

"It's been nearly a month since any dwarf saw her," he said. "She knows we're in here. She was there in camp when we were taken away after all. It wouldn't have been hard to come and see you."

"But what if she tried to enter the mountain and wasn't allowed?" he countered.

"Balin said no one has seen her. She helped save all of our lives. We officially owe her a boon for that at the very least. I don't think anyone would have refused her entrance if she'd shown up and then lied about it on top of it," he said. Well, it was possible given the animosity between the two, but he didn't see it as likely. There was always at least two guards stationed at the entrance at any given time, sometimes more, just in case of straggling orcs or goblins trying to sneak in. He could see a guard or two being petty enough to tell her to get lost, but all of them doing it and then refusing to talk about her being around? He just didn't see the reason for it. "Kíli... maybe she just went home."

The younger dwarf got a bit red in the face at that, opened his mouth to argue before shoving his face into his knees. He mumbled something to himself, his tone suddenly sounding angry.

and Fíli worried he'd earned his ire before glaring at the door.

"She was with a male elf," he admitted darkly after a few moments. "He... he didn't seem to like me... He kept glaring at me."

"The one on the shore when we left?" he asked.

"Yeah. The one who stole Glóin's pictures."

"Did Glóin ever get those back?" Fíli asked, suddenly feeling for the older dwarf. He had to make sure he went Mirkwood to see if he could get the locket retrieved if he could.

"Don't think so. Not like we could scavenging for our stuff before getting put in those barrels."

Oh, was he well aware of that. All of his knives had been taken in that time and he had to wonder if he was ever going to see any of those again. He could always make more, but it wasn't really the point.

"They might not be anything special to each other," he said to his brother, trying to comfort him. "Who knows? Maybe she's just busy. We're all busy right now. I'm sure she wants to come and see you."

"Or she doesn't... and I was just seeing things," he said softly. "She kissed me though... when she promised to get you to safety. I... maybe it was just to get me to let her go off with you."

It was clear he was second guessing himself now, and the look was completely pitiful. He himself didn't understand it. Kíli had been with women before, slept with a few and loved flirting with others. There hadn't been much of a female presence though during the trip. Had he gotten so desperate that the first woman who'd given him attention had captured his interest so thoroughly?

Or was it...

"She can't be your One," he said without even thinking about it, and the thoughtless statement earned him the hard eyes of his brother.

"What did you say?" he asked, sounding angry.

"Kíli... I don't want to be rude but... she's an elf. If you want to get infatuated with her that's one thing, but you're acting like she's your destined One and it's... well... it's..."

The words were getting harder to come by as the glare only got more intense, Kíli's face red. He was stepping on dangerous territory here.

"What if she is?" he snarled out.

Fíli didn't find that likely. Dwarf's Ones, their destiny, wasn't a very straightforward thing. While some humans liked to think it meant soulmate, and it wasn't close off the mark, it

wasn't entirely accurate. Dwarves just had a tendency to get very possessive of certain things, and held onto them tightly. Loved ones were common and plenty of dwarves paired off with one another, but it wasn't entirely just a dwarf thing. Their one could sometimes be someone of another race, though it was rare. Heck, there was a few times he'd heard a dwarf describe a particular treasure or their work as their calling and One. Plenty of dwarves never even bothered to use the label. He himself thought it less a calling in their blood and more a poetic word their race just liked to use. They were hardly the romantic sort of folk and that seemed to be the limit of it for them.

But not once, not a single time, had a dwarf gone and declared an elf to be his One.

"Kíli..." he said, about to try to talk reason to him in soft words before he wondered if it would do any good. No doubt it would just get him even angrier and he really didn't want the wrath of his brother on him. They almost never fought and he didn't really want to start now. "Alright. We can go look for her."

While he really wasn't sure on the matter of his brother's interests for Tauriel, or even if it was all that real or not, it was important to Kíli and that was enough for him.

"You'll really help me look for her?" he asked hopefully.

"As much as I can, in these casts. I might slow you down," he admitted. "But I'm willing to go with you at least. We can go out first thing tomorrow morning and see if the elves of Mirkwood are willing to talk to us."

Kíli seemed excited and immediately cheered up, already making plans about food to pack and what they'd need for the trip. His older brother let him handle those details and just wondered on other matters, like what Balin would say when he'd realized the other two princes had made their way off without saying much either.

At the very least, Tauriel had better not be playing with his brother's heart.

Chapter End Notes

Fíli is going to be supportive of the relationship, but as an outsider looking in, it's gotta seem strange the exact nature of what's going on between the two.

Hunts and Home

Chapter Notes

First off, sorry this was a little bit late. I'd intended this to come out yesterday but I had an errand that was supposed to only be a couple hours long that ended up chewing up a good part of my day since I had to go out of town to get it done instead of locally. On the bright side, while I was waiting on things to get done, I took a break and went into a bookstore in which there was a ton of Middle-Earth swag. I ended up blowing way more than I should have on new books, and a few replica items from the movies including the contract for one Mr. Bilbo Baggins, which I'll probably read over so I can include the details of it in the story if a need comes up.

Also, and I have to say a big thank you for this, I was shocked when I saw that this story in only three chapters has already reached 100 kudos. That's really amazing, and I want to thank you all for your support. While I adore reviews, the fact you read at all and gave me some of your time is greatly appreciated every bit as much, even if you didn't say anything. So again, thank you so very, very much.

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

It was no doubt that the light in Mirkwood was a rare thing, more scarce than even the coveted gems and jewelry loved by the very king of these woods. The forest, once the great Green Wood as called by men, had fallen to hard times and even harder presences. Tauriel had never known it under any other name than *Taur-nu-Fuin*, the forest of deadly nightshade, or the Westron name men had for it. There was no memories in her childhood of a green and plentiful place, full of healthy fruits and light dancing out of dirt paths between trees. Her home had always been a place of danger that elicited the need for caution. She was too young for it to have ever been any other way.

Still, there were places, safe places even here. Good magic of her people held strong, allowing parties and festivals, even hunts for fun in these twisted woods. In the south-western part of the woods off of their borders, there were villages of men who could tame the land enough to live safely. Even in these treacherous woods, there were ways to survive all your life. Fruit was rare, nuts only in safe season a few weeks in an entire year, and some of the animals had meat so bitter you'd think you'd just ingested poison, but to the ones who knew the woods, who'd been trained to endure it, could find what they needed in it.

The she-elf stalked her prey slowly, taking great care to not move even a patch of dirt as she walked, partially crouched and her bow taunt in her hands. She placed her foot down carefully on a root raised from the ground and steadied herself, daring not to even breathe as she lined up her shot. The deer was a ways off yet, but she did not want to get closer. The animals in this wood were as used to dangers as the peoples who lived here were. The helpless, slow and sick died quickly to the spiders, orcs and other menaces. It left only the

strongest and fastest alive, the creatures cunning enough to evade being eaten or torn apart. It left them with good senses and better reflexes, the culling being almost good for them in these woods.

Letting the arrow go, it was too late for the deer to move out of the way even as its ears flicked at hearing it only a moment before the sharp metal and shaft sunk deep into the creature. She was lucky to have gotten it with only the single shot. Usually these needed an entire party of elves to bring one down, herding it with arrows to a strategic place as it ran from them before being able to catch it. It had been a long time since she'd been part of the hunting party, one of the first duties when she'd joined the guard to bring meats to the palace, and even then it had usually been smaller game. The white deer was much harder to find and bring down. It seemed luck was on her side today though.

She walked to the dropped creature, the red blood staining the soft white fur that looked almost like the powdered snow she had sometimes seen on the Lonely Mountain. Kneeling down next to it, she worked to remove the shaft, her knife making careful slices so as to not to cut more than was needed. While she had brought down game before, it had never been her job to carve it up or prepare it. That had always fallen to the cooks and Galion to...

She paused for a second as she closed her eyes and tried to keep her mind from wandering too much over once pleasant memories turned bitter. The butler to Thranduil had always been a kind and chipper one, perhaps a little too loving of his wine, but good in his work and always had a smile or joke for anyone. He was the kind that never looked down on a single soul, and had often shared a drink with her when she was not busy working. She had considered him a good friend, and yet had not seen him for almost a month now.

"You're getting distracted," a voice called and she quickly swung her knife around to guard herself, but there was no one there but Legolas. He was several paces away, but raised his eyebrow at the sight of her armed and looking almost ready for a confrontation. "You do know I've been following you for hours now, right?"

She slowly lowered her knife before going back to her work. Picking some rope out from a pack on her belt, she started to bind the legs of the beast together so it would be easier to carry on her shoulders for her trek.

"I thought I heard something," she admitted as she did so. "I was too busy with some stalking of my own to pay it much mind."

Then she paused again, feeling she wasn't being very polite here and offered him a small smile.

"It's good to see you, My Lord," she told him. Even though technically he wasn't her lord anymore, nor would he ever be again. On the other hand, she never felt technicalities were a reason to be impolite, at least to people she liked.

"Is it?" he asked her. "I was starting to wonder."

"I don't see why you would. My camaraderie for you has not waned."

"Yet you have not come back home," he reminded her. "Tauriel, it's been weeks. We had no idea where you were. I had no idea where you'd went."

"That is usually the effects of banishment," she replied as she stood and dusted off her pants. The vibrant green was starting to get a bit faded and washed away under dirt. She hadn't had the means or time to keep them as clean as she had in her old home, too busy with her tasks now to give it much thought. "His Majesty does not want me back, does he?"

Legolas didn't reply immediately, and it made her heart ache a little. She no doubt would have been pleased if she had just been told she was wrong, that her banishment had been rescinded and she was more than welcome to return home to her post. Still, it wasn't like any amount of shock filled her at his reaction either. One could only imagine the king was rather cross about the entire situation and he wasn't the type that forgave easily. He didn't often have his people ignore his orders like she had.

Though he'd ordered no one leave the borders after she'd already been gone, but it had hardly mattered as she'd completely refused to return. It had been more about the disrespect for his authority and ideas of isolation than anything specific she had done.

"Lord Legolas, we're stronger with allies," she said. "Even if we did what your father wants us to and set aside our feelings for other races, the fact of the matter is we're alone like this. Looking at it with logic and nothing else, we are losing our ground. The kingdom is shrinking within the very forest. Do we give ground to the spiders and monsters, to the very darkness that's infesting this land? What do we do when the orcs come and they are more of them than us? What do we do when the chop at our trees and set fire to it to shrink down our hiding places and march on our gate? Fighting alone will not work. We can not hide forever."

"Father has long since let himself be moved more by grief than anything," he agreed. "The loss he feels is..."

He drifted off and she glanced at him, wondering at the look of pain on his features before he was able to hide it away. Part of her thought to press, but he spoke again before she could.

"Tauriel, you could come back. I could convince him to allow it if you would just ask."

"I heard that he ordered a retreat during the fighting," she commented instead, "but that you stopped him and talked him out of it."

"I don't see what that has to do with you leaving."

"Mostly curious. Is it true?" she asked.

"Yes," he admitted. "We're immortal, Tauriel. He saw the dead on the battlefield, endless years torn away from our people that could have lived full lives. Wanting to leave was perfectly reasonable."

"Then why stop him?"

"Because... because they needed our help, both the men and dwarves. Leaving then would have surely condemned them to death," he stated before he heaved a soft sigh. "It didn't feel right. Buying time for our lives at their expense was... wrong."

She smiled, the expression bittersweet in her understanding of his words. Yes, even looking at it logically it wasn't wise not to have allies, but emotionally, it was selfish to put themselves above others. She was a wood elf, and she knew what it felt like to have other elves think they were more than what she was or could ever be. It was a bitter taste she did not want to inflict on others.

"I would like to go back," she admitted to him. "I don't think it will do much good though. It's why I've stayed so far from the palace and only hunt on the edge of the wood, did my best to stay away from the patrols. Those were my men, some of them I trained myself. I did not want to put them in the awkward position of having to choose between chasing me off, or bringing me in for trespassing, or ignoring my banishment to allow me to hunt. Testing any loyalty to the king is not my purpose. I don't want to cause dissension."

"Then what is it you want, since you still see the purpose of being here?"

"People still have to eat," she replied simply. "Dale is being rebuilt, and they're prepping for the oncoming winter. Burying the dead, securing their borders, it's been a busy time, and their town will need to be worked on for a long time before it's back in the glory it once was. I come here for game and bring it to them in exchange for lodging."

"You've been staying with the men in Dale?" he asked her. "Why?"

She hesitated for a moment. She was sure he meant why not come back to the palace, but in her heart was another question. Why was she in Dale? Why wasn't she elsewhere, further north and resting in a mountain with...

"I don't think I'd belong anywhere else right now, and it'll help everyone see us in a good light if I maintain a presence there," she said softly, the excuse ringing hollow even to her own ears. The thought of going to Erebor to try to find Kíli had plagued her many nights, and there was a yearning inside of her to run to him, but fear held her back. She had not even been allowed in his tent. What were the chances anyone would welcome her into the home of dwarves after what her people had done?

Standing down to Smaug, refusing to even try to fight him had been cowardly, even if it had been with reason. She still remembered that day of tragedy, how they had not even tried to offer assistance and turned them away without a single moment of kindness for them. Could she even get five steps in that mountain before someone filled with justifiable rage stormed up to her and demanded she leave?

And what of Kíli? She adored his smile, laugh and lovely sense of humor but were the moments between them real? She had found him fascinating because he was so different, so unlike anyone she was used to, but part of her wondered if she was just another elf to him. What was it that had caught his eye? Her face, her figure? Did he just wish to flirt or bed her? She'd heard her kind was very beautiful to the men of the world and she'd certainly felt the eyes follow her in town, slimmer and more graceful than many of the women there. Granted,

she'd never heard of dwarves having that reaction to her people before, but Kili's invitation to explore his trousers had hardly been a poetic declaration of devotion either.

She wanted to feel like his later declarations of devotion meant something, but the risk of dying could put false words in mouths. It was a hard thing to trust.

It felt petty of her to admit it, but she was scared of being hurt. She'd never been in love before, and she wasn't even sure if this feeling was love or not. It could just as easily be infatuation, a momentary feeling that would pass. With no mother around to explain much of the world of romance to her when she'd grown older, she was woefully lacking in such knowledge on how to sort out her feelings. Fighting in the woods, getting supplies for people even if they weren't her own, those were things she was more used to. Navigating the maze of interacting with the matters of the heart? She was painfully a novice and more than aware of it.

"I plan to leave soon," he told her, breaking her from her thoughts.

"You're leaving?" she asked him, feeling shocked. "Why?"

"I need to think over some matters," the prince replied. "Things you've said, that my father has said, and even some things the dwarves said. It's all a mess in my mind right now."

He approached and pulled something out from underneath his shirt and over his head, a chain for a necklace, fine silver with a locket attached to it that she'd never seen him wear before. He held it up to her so she could inspect it, seeing two drawn portraits inside.

"What is this?" she asked as she looked at the two bearded people. "Dwarves?"

"I confiscated it from one of them when we took them prisoner," he told her. "I never gave it back. I suppose I should have. It wouldn't have been dangerous to allow him to keep a locket of all things. There was never a moment I thought to do it though. Then in the battle... I kept thinking about him."

"Who? The one you took it from?" she asked, but he shook his head.

"No, the boy," he said as he showed her. "I think he said his name was Gimli. I couldn't stop thinking about it, as much as I wanted to. He's a child, a little boy, who probably misses his father. Somewhere out there he was waiting for his return or at least news of him. If I'd let Father pull back... that boy would have lost him. He'd be among the dead, laying out on the ground, and for what? Pride for elves? Arrogance? Out comfortable solitude? Why is our lives worth more just because they have the chance to go on forever? I don't even know this child and yet my heart bled for him. It wouldn't leave me be until I did what was right, even if he does look like a little twisted up goblin."

Tauriel almost gave a passing thought to admonishing him. It had all been a nice sentiment, up until that part, but she refrained. Besides, he did kind of have a point. The child was dreadfully strange looking. How was it a little boy could already have a beard that thick?

"It sounds like you agree with me," she said instead. "So why ask me to come back when you know as well as I do His Majesty does not agree with my view? It sounds like you're going to leave Mirkwood for the very same reasons as I have."

"It does feel a little selfish," he admitted. "I wish I could say I was staying and that I was only asking you back because I miss you. The truth is, I want you to try and change his mind. I want there to be some real peace between all of us. I can't do it. I'm only starting to see things you understand so clearly. Please, as someone who has done me such a wonderful service before, can you do this for me as one last favor?"

She frowned a little bit at the mentioning of her last favor she'd done for him. It had been no great burden to guard the secret for him, even from his father. Legolas had never been comfortable with the idea of Thranduil being aware of his son's preference for men and they were so close friends anyway, it wasn't hard to help along the rumors that the prince had become attached to her. It had certainly caused a bit of contention but had never gotten bad enough to cause her discomfort, though she was sure her feelings for Kíli made her out to be a little rotten to some of the she-elves who would have loved to have the prince themselves. Oh, she was sure there were some rumors going around on that little bit of gossip, not that she had to worry about hearing it now.

Still, this was much bigger than helping hide the fact Legolas would much rather be alone his whole life than ever marry a female.

"I'll admit that I do want an allied front," she sighed out. "I will consider going to the palace again, but not yet. Soon though. Showing up just to badger your father is certainly not going to work. When do you leave?"

"I'm still preparing for it. Traveling so far will take a while. I'm still looking over maps and planning my route. Besides, I don't know when I'll be home again. I think I need some time before I'm ready, even though I really know I have to go. I think another week or so at most."

"Perfect. Then it'll give us some time to come up with a plan," she said as she tossed the locket back to him. "I have to carry this back anyway, and there's some snares for rabbits I need to check too on the way, along with some pheasants I tied up to a tree a ways back that I was able to bring down. Carrying it all will be easier between two than one."

"You're going back to Dale then?" he asked as she hefted the deer up onto her shoulders and started to walk away.

"Of course. Men are the middle ground here. At the very least keeping them happy so they can help mend fences would be wise. Besides, I have nowhere else to sleep tonight," she called over her shoulder. "And you can give back the locket you stole."

"I didn't steal it! It was confiscation!" he objected as he followed after her. "There just hasn't been a reason to give it back yet."

"It not being yours is a pretty good reason."

She didn't see it, but the male elf behind her scowled and tucked the locket back in place. Probably for the best anyway. With her own growing fascination with the dwarves, she might have read too much into his actions as he hung it back almost protectively around his neck.

Reaching the ruins of Dale, even laden down as they were, did not take long. As natives to the forest it was easy for them to navigate and impossible to get lost. Reaching the edge and making their way up the road to their destination got them to the town just as twilight was bleeding out into the sky. Legolas looked about at all the bustling men and women running about, carrying supplies of cut stone and lumber as they worked on buildings or heaving about wicker baskets brimming with goods. No one so much as even glanced at the pair of them walking down the streets with Tauriel's catch. Apparently she really had been bringing them meat for a while now to not even question it.

"It's been busy around here," she said without him even asking. "They were able to get some lumber from the wood men who live on the west of Mirkwood. Costly, but it was worth it, and quite a bit was able to be salvaged from what was left of Lake Town. Prospects are looking good concerning winter, as long as they're able to keep a good pace."

"They certainly are fast with rebuilding," he commented.

"I've come to learn men are fast with everything they do," she stated before turning a corner. "In here."

She ducked down into a large building made of stone brick with a tiled roof. There were some patches of hay on in and a few discolorations on the walls from new stone meeting old, but overall it looked to be in good shape. Like outside, several people were moving about, among them a young looking woman with brown hair pinned up in a messy bun and layers of blue skirts and coat. She was directing others where to put supplies and writing down things on a little ledger. He saw everything in the building seemed to be storage of food, baskets and barrels alike. She looked harried and tired, but a smile warmed her face when she saw them approach.

"Tauriel, you're back!" she said as she rushed up to them, weaving about the others hefting things about. "You got deer this time!"

"A rather large one too," the she-elf replied. "I'm afraid someone else will have to carve and salt it though. I'm not good in the kitchen like you are."

"I can get the butcher to handle it," the woman assured her. To Legolas she looked like a child, only just now blooming into womanhood, but she carried herself like a mother, a mature woman wrangling children to properly care for them. It was a little odd to say the least, especially since he could easily see some of the people she'd previously been giving orders to were several years older than her. "Who is this?"

"This is Prince Legolas," Tauriel replied. "He's helping to get food to your town as well as myself."

"Oh! Oh, thank you and well met!" the woman said quickly as she courtesied for him, a little difficult to hold her skirts when she already had a book in hand. "Are you staying as well?"

"I hadn't planned on it," he said before figuring he should be polite. "Well met, daughter of the expansive lake. Do you have a name I could address you as?"

"I'm Sirgrid, the daughter of Bard," she explained, a little bit of color to her cheeks. "I've never spoken to royalty before."

"The one who slayed the dragon?" he asked. "Then it is well met indeed. The skies are much clearer now that Smaug no longer troubles us."

Her face got even more red at the praise, smiling broadly. It seemed she thought the same about the fortunes changing all thanks to her father.

"Is there a place you want this put?" he asked, holding up the ropes holding the rabbits and birds they'd brought as well, before she could say anything. Nice as a girl as she seemed, he didn't have plans to stay long in her company.

"Oh, just put them on that table over there," she said as she pointed to where a barrel of fish rested next to said table, cutting knives and other instruments for prepping the meat where waiting. "I'll get it all jotted down and prepared soon enough. Tauriel, will you be joining us for dinner this time? We'd love to have you."

"I can make due with some bread," she excused, to which the girl looked put out. "Maybe next time."

"You keep saying that. You know you're welcome to eat with us," she said, but Tauriel only shook her head.

"Thank you, but I'll be fine," she said. "In any case, thank you for the room and board. I believe I'll head in now."

He followed her out before he saw fit to comment.

"Still find it hard to converse with strangers for long?" he asked her, causing her to flush a bit.

"They are not strangers. I've spoken with them several times now," she said with a firm shake of her head. "It's just she keeps asking me to come to dinner and... well... it's just... difficult to know what to say to people over long periods of time. Making conversation isn't always easy and we're all so busy."

She could call it whatever she wanted, but he knew awkwardness from her when he saw it. He was sure to anyone not of their people she was graceful and sure of herself, but to anyone who knew better, it was always clear when she didn't know what to say.

He'd once watched her stumble over flirting with a dwarf over a rock after all. Once she was comfortable it wasn't hard, but confidence among people she did not know how to interact with had always been something she'd lacked in. With the guard it had been easier since she

was always working with them, but he found himself a little worried about her place here. She could talk all she wanted about bridging gaps and helping others, but was she really getting to know any of them?

This job might be a little harder for her than he thought.

"Maybe I can come to dinner too," he offered. "You made me carry those animals all the way here. I might as well get fed for it."

She looked over at him, curious, but he betrayed nothing of his actual thoughts. Tauriel and he might not always understand each other, but he considered her his best friend. If this truly was where she was making her home for now, he wanted her to at least be comfortable here.

"I will consider it... after I've gotten home and cleaned up," she said after a few moments. She waited a moment longer before smiling at him. "Thank you."

Chapter End Notes

This little side plot with the elves and dwarves is taking longer than I originally thought, and I do apologize for that since you all came here for Bagginshield. I promise one more chapter and we'll be back to our main couple and current timeline. Tauriel is a character I have mixed emotions on because I like her and her relationship, but I don't like how it was rushed and so mangled for both Kíli and Legolas. There wasn't even supposed to be a love element at first, and a lot of filming was done before it was changed with re-shoots to establish the relationship happened. It kind of gives it a disjointed feeling to it, but the fun thing about fanfiction is you can take weaknesses in the plot and use it to your advantage. They got together too quickly in the film, use it as a point of drama and doubt to further build it up! Legolas got friend zoned by a dwarf, make them just friends from the start! Besides, we all know he's going to be flirting like a sap with Gimli in a handful of decades later anyway. Why have him mope about a girl who he'll never mention again?

Also, I love the headcanon that Tauriel is a mess that doesn't know how to talk to people she doesn't know very well. So... you got a rock, huh? That's... uh... neat. Not to mention her scurrying off when she realized she'd admitted something of an attraction to Kíli via him being a bit taller than most dwarves. Yeah, she is not good at this kind of thing and it's cute as hell.

Though if this ship isn't your thing, I could scale it back. Like I said, I planned Bilbo and Thorin mostly, but this kind of grew a bit. I still have a ton of ideas for the main couple, and I will get back to them after a chapter, but what do you guys think? Is this good? Bad? Should I skip the elf and dwarf luvin' all together?

Boons

Chapter Notes

Oh man, I am so very glad I got some free time to write. Work has been killing me. We're getting busy due to summer approaching, and I've already pulled overtime this week, and they want me to do more this week, leaving me little time to get to this story. I'm happy that I was able to hide away for a little to get this done. I'm also going to try and get the next chapter finished soon so as possible to give you good people the Thorin and Bilbo goodness you all came for. As it is, enjoy some more elf, dwarf and human shenanigans.

Also, I went back and fixed up the chapters that had been posted already. Dear me, I am very bad at catching those before I post. I'm going to have to try to be better about that in the future. Thank you all for being so forgiving of my mistakes on spelling and the like. Of course as well as that I should also say thanks for all the positive feedback. While fanfiction is a huge bit of writing for self-indulgences, it is certainly best when it can be shared happily and enjoyed by the readers.

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

The wagon was slow making it's way down the mountain to the town of Dale, pulled along by the battle ram that had come along with Dain's army. It wasn't used to labor, more bred to be ridden on into battle, but there were few ponies for use in Erebor right now and all of them were being used on the construction of their home. There was no way that Fili could have been able to walk all the way so Kíli had grabbed one of the rams and, admittedly with a little difficulty, hooked it up to a small wagon and helped his older brother clamor in before setting off.

The wagon rocked gently as Kíli directed it, walking with the ram and pulling it along down the path. He had to admit he was both excited and a little scared all at the same time but wanted to find Tauriel so badly. He knew the others didn't understand, didn't care to, but he knew he was meant for this. His chest seized whenever he saw her, could still feel the warmth of her soft lips when she'd kissed him. It had felt like a whole lifetime ago and yet like it had just happened only moments before as well. It was too powerful to ignore, and it didn't matter to him anymore who approved. He was going to find her and figure out what her feelings were for him.

Gratitude swelled inside of him at his brother's actions. Fili always believed in him, always supported him. It was helping his courage to find the answers about where he stood with the elf, knowing he had his brother at his side. So often his older brother was taking care of him, supporting him and helping him along. Ever since he'd been a small child, he'd looked up to him and wanted to be like him, brave, true and the kind of dwarf anyone could be proud of.

To think he'd almost lost him. For the first time in his life, his older brother hadn't seemed so indestructible, laying out on the rock, broken and bloody. If it hadn't been for Tauriel, what would have happened? Would he have lost him? He'd been so pale and small, the sight alone had enraged him and nearly driven him insane with grief, unable to accept his strong and kind brother had been hurt so badly and nearly lost. And yet, even now, Fili was the one thinking about what Kíli needed. It really amazed him sometimes just the amount of love he had for his little brother. More dependable than the ground beneath their feet, he was.

If nothing else, they really should find the she-elf to thank her for saving him.

"So, are we go on to Mirkwood in the dark or stay in Dale for the evening?" Fili asked him as he leaned back in the little wagon. "You know someone is going to notice we left before too long. They might come looking for us."

"Aye. Good thing we were able to sneak out from the side entrance," the younger brother laughed, tossing up the key to the side door before catching it and putting it back in his pocket. "I think the guards might have said something about the two princes of Durin's line going off without escort."

"Oh, for sure. Óin will have a conniption fit," Fili snickered.

"Balin will tear at his beard."

"Dwalin will kill us."

The both looked at each other before laughing out loud. To them, it was actually quite funny to think of the consequences even as they were running off and surely making trouble for everyone else.

"We'd have to rush to get to the forest so soon, and I don't much think it's possible with the condition you're in," Kíli said honestly. "I say we stop by Dale and rest there when we arrive. We can always head to the forest first thing in the morning. Better to try that place by light anyway. We go to the palace and ask for her, then head back when we're done. With some luck, we'll be back in Erebor by tomorrow evening."

"Sounds poorly thought out and thrown together, so perfect for you," Fili teased before sighing with a smile on his face. "I've missed this."

"Hm? Missed what?" Kíli asked.

"This. The two of us, running off for fun and adventure," the eldest explained. "Not a care in the world, off to explore and see what we could of anything and everything."

"Having Uncle drag us back every time and scold us before huffing and promising to tell us another story about Erebor if we swore we'd behave."

"And we said we would."

"And it was always a lie."

Kili laughed at the memories. He was sure quite a few gray hairs on Thorin's head was directly their fault. He'd been helping their mother look after them since they'd been young and it had certainly grated on his nerves at times. He supposed they both still had some growing up to do, but for now he certainly didn't mind sneaking off again.

Dusk was just starting to set when they reached the borders of the ruins. The people quickly noticed the pair of them and several began whispering amongst each other, wondering just what the dwarves were doing there. After a few minutes a young man stepped close, dull red hair the color of rust, thin but tall. He was wrapped up in a wool coat that might have once been white, but instead had a gray shade to it from years of wear. In fact it even looked a little small on him, as if he'd started to outgrow it.

"Hail and welcome to Dale," he said, smiling to seem friendly. "What are dwarves from the mountain doing here? Were you in the need of more supplies for your food stocks?"

There was a general murmur about the group, clearly hoping that was not the case. They'd already sold a fair bit of their food to the dwarves for extra gold to rebuild the town. Giving up much more would be dangerous to them though.

"Nothing like that," Kili was sure to quickly assure them before bowing to the man. "Kili, at your service."

"Dreathen, to you and your family," the young man said politely, bowing back. "If I may ask, Master Dwarf, if you're not here for supplies then what are you here for?"

He couldn't help but wonder just who this young one was, speaking with any kind of authority. Someone elected, or just a man who'd taken it upon himself to talk for the crowd? He supposed it didn't really matter all that much.

"My brother and I are on the way to the forest of Mirkwood to speak to its ruler, but we need to stop for the night. A place to sleep and a warm meal is all we want. Oh, but we have coins to pay," the dwarf assured them. It had been decided quickly that the company could not take the original agreed upon shares of the entire treasure, but they'd gotten a decent bit for all of them being the ones brave enough to travel to the mountain in the first place and face Smaug. The seven percent of the profits they'd all been promised had been taken down to only three in order to share the wealth with the others coming home, but even that amount was enough to be worthy of kings, and would easily keep them their entire lives even if they never worked another day of it.

The young man hesitated for a bit before finally shrugging his shoulders.

"If you are here to speak to a representative then I don't believe you will need to go all the way to the forest," he said and Kili perked up at the news. "Prince Legolas is already here, visiting Miss Tauriel I believe."

"Tauriel is here? Where is she?" he asked immediately.

"Over at Lord Bard's home at the moment. I saw both elves enter there not long ago. It's down the street, towards the center of the town," he replied. "I can lead the way for you, if

you like."

"Yes, yes please," Kíli said eagerly, even as he felt confused. What was Tauriel doing in Dale? Had she been here the whole time? It certainly sounded like she'd been here for a while at least, if she was getting visitors and was not the one visiting. Pulling along the cart eagerly, he felt his heart leaping up in his throat at the thought of seeing her again so soon.

"So, you know Bard then?" Fíli asked curiously from the cart. "I didn't know he'd declared himself lord."

"Oh... well, I mean, he hasn't. Not yet, anyway," Dreathen replied as they walked along the cobbled street. "The town needs a leader though, and he's been doing right by us. It's become a sort of unofficial thing. I've traded with him a few years now, on the river leading to the lake where I worked as a fisher and monger. He's always been kind to me, and I think he'd make a wonderful lord or king. We have no one else to follow anyway."

Despite the impressive title, even if unasked for, the home was not all that large, certainly no bigger than any other around. The stonework was sturdy and decent, with a roof a fine looking redwood. It was right along the town square with a balcony pointed to the center fountain in town, but it was still much like many of the other buildings around the place in size or apparent comfort. It was certainly no mansion or palace that King Girion in ages past had lived in, that was for sure.

The man knocked on the door as the dwarf nearly hopped from foot to foot in his eagerness to get inside. The knowledge he would be seeing his elf even sooner than he had thought was making him feel jittery all over, and he was sure he heard his brother scoff, but he ignored it entirely. He didn't really care how foolish he looked right now, not after waiting so long for this moment to finally come.

The door was answered by Sigrid, looking out into the street curiously before seeing who it was.

"Oh! Dreathen, and Kíli and Fíli!" she cried out excitedly at the last two. "What are you two doing here?"

Dreathen bowed his head a bit to the girl, smiling a little shyly at her.

"Good evening, Miss Sigrid," he said to her. "They just arrived a short while ago, talking about going to Mirkwood come morning when they heard about Miss Tauriel staying in town. I brought them to see your home since I knew they were both visiting."

"Oh yes. They're having dinner right now with us," she explained. "We only just sat down for the meal not ten minutes ago. By all means, come and join us, won't you Dreathen?"

He smile twitched a bit, but he looked away before he shook his head quickly.

"Ah, no. That's alright, Miss Sigrid. I've still got work to do, and I wouldn't want to impose. I'll just leave you all to it. Thank you though for the kind offer," he said before bowing one

last time to the group and stiffly headed off. Kíli was far too concerned with getting inside himself to pay much attention to the odd human, helping Fíli climb out of the cart.

"We'd love to eat," he informed her quickly. "Is there a place where we can put the wagon?"

"Oh... uh, around back. There's a little fenced in area too, though the ram looks like he could barrel right through it," she answered as she peered at the beast a little cautiously, but Kíli only laughed and waved his hand.

"Won't do that. It's well trained," he assured her, getting the animal and cart led away to where she'd indicated. When he returned a few minutes later, he saw the girl was leaning over a little to help support his brother on her weight, looking over him in concern.

"I'd no idea you were so badly hurt, Fíli," she said. "Whatever are you doing coming down from the mountain in such a shape?"

"Had to see to it that my brother didn't get himself in any trouble," he replied. "You know how it is with younger siblings."

"Oh, I completely understand. Come inside, and I'll get you comfortable. There's a nice, plush armchair over by the fire I think you'll like," she offered as she helped him get inside and calling to her family. "Da! Look who came to visit!"

Inside the house, true enough the family was sitting around the table, piping hot stew and bread laid out before them, a perfect meal for the oncoming cold. Tilda immediately cried out happily as seeing the dwarves and hopped up from her chair to greet them, rushing over to hug Kíli around the middle excitedly, Bard and Bain looked surprised but not unwelcoming.

"Well, this is a surprise," Bard said as his eldest helped the blonde dwarf in and got him to the armchair with a smile. "I wasn't expecting a visit from the two princes of Erebor. If you'd sent word, I would have gotten more food for the table."

"Well, we were looking for a meal, admittedly, but our trip was a last minute decision," Fíli confessed. "I hope we're not putting you out too much."

"No worse than last time when a dragon came after," Bard replied, but it was a light enough jest.

However, even as as they talked and Tilda clung to Kíli, his eyes caught sight of Tauriel sitting next to Legolas, still at the table and looking shocked to see him. He felt his heart sink at seeing them so close together, their shoulders nearly touching.

"Kíli," she breathed out. "What are you doing here?"

The moment was upon him, and he felt his voice catch in his throat. All of a sudden he felt terrified, keenly aware of the impromptu audience they had. He'd imagined finding her in Mirkwood, pulling her away to talk privately and confess his feelings to her. All of a sudden he felt awkward and unsure of himself, even as he saw Fíli in the corner of his eye wave his good hand to prompt him to just say something. What was she even doing here, and with that

other elf of all people? Surely she couldn't have been here this whole time, right? Everything seemed to point to it, but he didn't want to believe it. It would have meant she'd been so close, free to come to the mountain any time. So why hadn't she come to see him? Hadn't she wanted to?

It suddenly crashed down on him what he was doing, running off from home like a thief in the night, dragging along his injured brother to chase the elf-maid down. The sight of the two elves so close together burned like bile in the back of his throat, the fear that no matter what he felt, she couldn't possibly want the same things when she could have the company of her own kind, her own kin that would live forever like she could, untarnished and never to be changed by time.

"I... I was looking for you," he said eventually. "As one of the heirs of Erebor, I owe you a boon for helping us on the battlefield. Without your assistance things could have potentially gone a lot worse."

Fíli only stared at him, and he felt himself burn in his own shame. This felt so cowardly, but he couldn't find it in himself to tell the truth. He could remember her on the shore, asking her to come with him, and she'd walked away with the prince. How would this be any different? He was surely just fooling himself.

"Oh, I see," she said. "I really hadn't gone there to get any kind of reward though."

"Still, we do owe you one. Several others have been given gifts. It's only right we give you your due as well," he replied, even as his voice felt hot in his own throat. He was aware of the others watching the pair, glanced up and saw a look on the male elf's face, a mixture between curiosity and almost a sneer. Kíli frowned and wanted to throw something at him, just to break the perfect composure he had. "I didn't know you were currently even in Dale. It does make this easier though."

"I've been in Dale since the battle," she explained. "I am actually banished from Mirkwood."

Banished? Why? For what reason? So she really had been here the whole time, yet had never come to see him. Though... why would she? The prince was by her side it seemed like. He must have left home too to be with her. No wonder Tauriel had never even missed Kíli with such company.

"Well, it was a bit of a trip. Even if nothing comes of it, I sure would like something to eat," Fíli said as he pulled out a coin purse and grabbed a handful of silver. "Is this enough to cover some of that warm stew?"

"Oh, we don't need to charge you," Sigrid said quickly, seeming to catch on to him trying to change the topic. "Do we, Da?"

"Well, actually-"

"Right, I'll go ahead and get some bowls ready. Sit, sit," she urged Kíli as she pulled out a chair for him. "You can take my seat and I'll use a stool to sit with your brother. With that cast I'm sure it would be hard for him to handle the bowl and spoon at the same time anyway."

Bard huffed out a sigh before settling back down as his daughter took Tilda and got her back in her seat, then went to fill two more bowls with the soup. Kíli at least felt better about that. His stomach was empty, and it did smell rather good as he grabbed the spoon and stirred it a bit to get it to cool down a little. The base was a thick and creamy, rich looking brown with vegetables and beef in it, delicious as he took a bite from it.

"How's reconstruction been going?" Tauriel asked after a few moments, giving Kíli a small smile. It almost looked hopeful to the dwarf, but he wasn't sure if he was imagining it or not. "I imagine you must be busy right now, with the damages and all."

"Ah, well mining work is easy for our people," he replied. "It's work we're used to, so we've already been able to assess a lot of the damages and get to work quickly. Mostly it's just been clearing the rubble... from what I've heard anyway. I've been in bed mostly, so I haven't seen a lot of it myself."

"Oh, right. You were hurt. How... how have you been recovering?" she asked him. "It's good to see you able to travel."

"Doesn't look able to travel to me," Legolas commented as he glanced over at Fíli, and Kíli glared at him.

"We're sturdy. We'll be fine," he said, even as he felt a twang of guilt over pulling his brother along for what was looking hopelessly like a fool's venture.

"Hm," he said before glancing back at Tauriel. "You must have really felt it important to come here for that boon then."

"The boon... right," he said before he went back to his dinner.

"I can not believe this," Fíli muttered before coughing. "The soup is great but I'm surprised you're eating this, you two. Isn't meat off the table for elves?"

"Oh no, we hunt regularly," Tauriel replied. "It's one of the few resources we can get in the woods. Everything else, wheat, apples, wine, and other commodities, we rely almost purely on the men of the lake for."

"We're lucky so much of the plains wasn't burned," Bain said. "Some of the farmland was lost, but since Smaug mostly went after the city, we still had a lot on the shores like our orchard and the like. Why do you think elves don't eat meat though?"

"We were in Rivendell earlier this year, and it was all just salads and greens," Fíli said. "I guess they don't have the same diet as you do."

Legolas and Tauriel looked at each other for a moment, seemingly confused.

"What are you talking about?" the elven prince asked. "I've been there on journeys before as a messenger and they've always have meat at their tables."

"Yes. I'm rather fond of the slow roasted duck they have in the springtime when their honey is in season and they serve it as a sauce," Tauriel agreed.

"Wait... they aren't vegetarians?" Fíli asked, shocked. "Then why didn't they give us anything proper to eat?"

"Maybe they figured dwarves wouldn't know any better," Legolas said, a hint of a smirk on his lips.

"Oh, ha ha. Very funny," the dwarf grumbled, digging his spoon savagely into the bowl Sigrid held for him, trying not to giggle at the thought of the poor dwarves getting tricked like that.

"So how long do you plan on staying then?" Bard asked. "Tauriel has been a great help here, but if you have royal business with her that probably takes priority for her."

"Well, I mean I still could hunt for you. I don't mind, honestly," she said before looking to Kíli. "I don't have anywhere else to go now anyway. Besides, like I said before, I didn't help in the battle for any kind of reward."

"True, but I think we both know there is something you could ask for," Legolas said after a moment before he nudged his companion's side. "*Tul hi, Tauriel. Ha's clear cin anír na n with hon.*"

Kíli had no idea what he'd just said, but the way she flushed from it made him bristle in jealousy.

"Right, well... I guess if you don't know what you want..." he trailed off, not wanting to have to watch the two flirt like this any longer. He'd much rather just leave and find a pint of ale, or ten, to comfort him.

"Wait, I do know what I want but," she said quickly. "It might be too much to ask, but would be at all open to becoming allies with Mirkwood once more? I know after our history it's a difficult request to ask you to trust again, but we would all be stronger together than apart. At the very least, if you would be open to trade agreements, then I would take that as my boon."

"But... why do that for them?" Kíli asked. "They banished you!"

"True, but they are still my people and I care about their welfare. It's all I can think to ask," she admitted.

"Tauriel," Legolas said, but she only shook her head.

"*Ha's tríw, Hir Legolas,*" she said firmly.

"If that's what you want," Kíli said after a moment. "Fíli and I will see what we can do. I'll try my best for you."

"Thank you," she said softly.

Legolas suddenly huffed before looking at Kíli directly.

"I was the one who saved your uncle," he said suddenly. "I helped him in the battle and returned Orcrist to him. By your logic, I should get a boon as well."

The dwarf frowned deeply. Hadn't they already given enough in the gems that had been so important? Just what did this pompous prince want? Was he really about to take Tauriel's giving nature to ask for something for the people who'd discarded her and try to get something out of it for himself?

"I don't see how we owe you anything," he said. "Boons are ours to grant, not something you can just demand."

"Yet you offered one to her for similar actions," he said. "So I have a right to make a request too."

"Fine. What do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to take Tauriel's hand in marriage."

Everyone stared at the elf, Kíli feeling like he was about to choke in his shock, and the she-elf had gone as red as her hair.

"Lord Legolas, what are you doing?" she hissed frantically. "I can't... we don't... What would posses you to make such a request?!"

"Because you're too shy to do it, and watching you two dance around each other is nauseating," he replied bluntly. "*Ho'll n firn eventuallui. Enjoui hon ir cin tur.*"

"He wouldn't even want to-" she started before Kíli suddenly stood up and slammed his hands on the table.

"Yes, I would!" he declared quickly. "I'll honor that request! I'll marry you, Tauriel!"

"Kíli... why would you?" she breathed out and he swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Isn't it obvious? I love you," he said softly. "I thought you might feel the same. I mean, I'd hoped anyway."

Legolas shot her a look with an arched eyebrow as she only got more red before he stood as well.

"Thank you for the meal, but I have arrangements to make. I should inform my father of the oncoming request for a treaty. I wish you all a good evening," he said before he briskly walked out, not even seeming to be affected by the stunned silence of the room.

"What... what just happened?" Sigrid asked, surprised.

"A wedding!" Tilda cried happily. "Can I be the flower girl?!"

When your best friend gets sick of your lacking of flirting skills, and just does it for you. He still in no way likes Kili, or dwarves at all really, but Tauriel likes him so that's enough for him. Poor inexperienced Tauriel can't deal.

Also, fun note, did you know that elves do not have lovers outside of marriage? In fact, because they were nomadic for so long due to various circumstances when first coming to Middle-Earth, the only requirement for elves to marry was just to have sex? It's in Tolkien's notes and everything. No ceremony needed, just make love and boom, legally wed.

So effectively Legolas just picked a very poetic way to tell Tauriel to smash that.

Also, on note for the Sindarin, clearly I don't know the language, but I did translation as best as I could with the materials I had. Some I had to go online to do, which is why I kept the lines brief, but here's effectively what they were saying.

Legolas: "Come now, Tauriel. It's clear you want to be with him."

Tauriel: "It's fine, Lord Legolas."

Legolas: "He'll be dead eventually. Enjoy him while you can."

I know, last line is the height of romanticism, isn't it? Meh, he'll get better at it when he gets his own dwarf. Also, I have long since held the idea about Elrond that he was trolling the dwarves for Thorin being a little prat to him right before dinner. They eat meat in the books after all, so I really think the guy was just pranking them.

Warm Days Make Thirsty Throats

Chapter Notes

A pox, a pox on me for taking so long to get back to these two. Ah, little Bilbo and grumpy Thorin, may you always bring me and my readers joy. You deserve more love than I alone could ever truly give you.

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

Thorin could not say he knew the Shire particularly well, despite the many times he had traveled through and around it. When on business, he often stayed in Bree and when he'd moved through the land of hobbits it had never really been with the intention of dawdling. Very few humans to do business with lived in these lands, and even fewer dwarves. Because of that, despite spending a good chunk of his lives living near hobbits, he really didn't know all that much about them or even the Shire as a landscape.

So it was a little embarrassing when he kept accidentally taking a wrong turn on the many, many paths that wove around Hobbiton and Bilbo kept having to hurry back after him like a skittish rabbit to grab his shoulder and lead him the right way. Personally, the dwarf didn't understand the landscape of the town at all. Everything was roving hills and green grass, splashes of color everywhere in the plants and gardens, and trees here and there to only make it all the more confusing. He was used to stone tunnels with miner marks, specifically made to help prevent even children still learning to walk from getting lost. Sensible walls and tunnels leading to specific places and not all this... openness. How did anyone get anywhere in this confusing place was beyond him. Even human villages had sign posts to help along visitors, but it seemed Hobbiton didn't feel it needed such things.

It didn't help either he was laden down with stacks of items from dishes to books and other assortments, piled up past his nose. He kept having to crane his neck to see where he was going, not that it was doing much good. Bilbo had spent most of the day trying to convince his neighbors to give him his things back, usually with a bit of coin to entice them. It certainly hadn't been easy, since most of them weren't at home, instead out and mingling about in the fields while singing, dancing and feasting. It seemed to be some kind of festival going on, though Thorin didn't know what for, and he kept having to stop short as little hobbit lads and lasses would run by, laughing happily and nearly bumping into him.

"What a time to arrive," Bilbo sighed as he checked over his paper, making a note on yet another address where they'd been. According to him, his tea set was in that hobbit hole, but unfortunately the resident wasn't. "To think we could be enjoying 2 Lithe right now. Oh, the cooking smells amazing, even from here."

"I take it that's a holiday of some sort?" Thorin asked as he shifted the weight in his arms a little. It was no great burden on him. He'd carried far heavier for far longer after all, and he'd

brushed off Bilbo's attempts to take any from him. It would be better if the hobbit could focus on where they were going instead so as to avoid getting lost. He couldn't imagine anyone could navigate this maze of fields and unmarked paths well, even if they had grown up here. The whole place utterly confused him, though he was loathe to admit it. Despite every sensible sign of marking being utterly absent, Bilbo knew the place like the back of his hand, but he was a little worried if he got distracted and didn't pay attention they'd end up all the way to the Brandywine River or something.

"It's our midsummer festival," Bilbo explained, sniffing the air before sighing in a longing fashion. "We actually arrived on Mid-Year's Day. It's a three day celebration, you see. 1 Lithe, which is June 21st, then Mid-Year's Day, and then 2 Lithe, today. Except on leap years, then we also have Overlithe as well. Oh, it looks like so much fun."

Thorin glanced down and saw all the dancing and eating, and supposed it wasn't bad. It didn't look much like any dwarven holidays. Their songs were much more solemn, and while they had dancing it was slower and more structured on followed steps, while the hobbits just seemed to enjoy flailing around. Then again, maybe he just didn't know the dance. He also felt utterly confused when he saw a pole planted in the earth while several of the hobbits holding ribbons danced around the pole, wrapping it up in the silky materials. Was that some sort of group craft or something? Did they plan to sell it as a decoration to some buyer? He couldn't fathom any other reason for it.

Still, he couldn't help but notice a little light in Bilbo's eyes at the sight. While he himself didn't see the point of it, it was clear that his companion did.

"Perhaps we should take a break and go down there," he suggested. "Very few people seem to be home right now anyway."

Indeed, most of the ones they'd been able to talk to had been the elderly hobbits, probably too worn and tired to be bothered with the partying and had simply allowed themselves to enjoy the summer time in their gardens with tea and a comfortable chair.

"Well... I do suppose you have a point," he agreed with a nod. "Alright. Let's get back home for now. It'll be right around the time of luncheon once we get all that put away. Perfect time to join the festivities."

He scurried along the path and Thorin followed after him, his pace of long deliberate strides much different than the quick and several steps of the hobbit. It felt a little funny, actually. When traveling with the company, he'd been very used to the fellow dwarves around him, he'd barely even noticed how Bilbo had moved among the crowd, yet now as he'd been surrounded by hobbits he couldn't help but see just how quick and silent Bilbo really was. He moved almost like a squirrel and... why did he keep finding himself comparing him to different animals? Were hobbits so foreign to him that it was the only way he could relate to them?

Though the dwarf had found himself enamored with the hobbit for a while, he'd been too busy with the quest to really allow himself time to admire him. They'd barely had any breathing room for a lot of it, always on the move and some new danger to face. Mirkwood had been a walking nightmare he tried not to remember, and then in Erebor the madness had

taken him to too dark places. He'd fantasied often about Bilbo, but he'd had little time to really look at him. Now, he had all the time he liked to enjoy the sight of his hobbit, and it was a rather pleasing one. He knew Bilbo Baggins was a brave being, loyal and quick witted, had a mind as sharp as any blade ever produced in Erebor, but he was also soft and pretty, with light brown hair that seemed to shine almost golden when the rays of the sun hit it just right, a crooked little smile that he ached to taste, and eyes filled with great warmth.

And, if he would allow himself to be a little less poetic and more vulgar, a very fine form in those trousers as he walked along ahead of the dwarf, completely unaware how Thorin would crane his neck over his load to sneak glances at whenever he could.

"Do you have many holidays in the Shire?" he asked, just to keep the conversation going.

"Mmm, not so much, no. We only have this and Yule," Bilbo admitted. "Though to be fair, we have parties all the time, but it's more for birthdays and other matters like weddings or baby showers. I suppose we celebrate things so often, we never had the need to make holidays for them."

He laughed a little at that. Seemed so cheery to Thorin.

"Oh, I do look forward to settling down and being able to enjoy a feast or two again," the hobbit sighed out. "A little peace and quiet, along with a good meal will have us down in the right mind frame, I'm sure. Once I get all my affects again, that is."

"Peace and quiet might take a little longer to get to than you think," Thorin noted when they arrived back at Bag End and Bilbo opened the door to allow him in first. "Quite a few of those hobbits were rather flabbergasted at seeing you."

"Yes. It's always a big uproar when anyone goes and leaves like I did," Bilbo admitted. "Gandalf has quite a reputation around here for getting young hobbits in trouble by convincing them to go out and have adventures. Lads and lasses going off to the sea or mountains, usually the Took's, but there have been others too."

"Your women go on adventures?" he asked curiously as he put his load down on the dining room table. "Really?"

"Hm? Yes of course they do. Gandalf has never been picky over it, from what I understand. I guess he just sees a spark in them. Granted, it's just as unsightly for anyone to go, male or female," he laughed out. "I imagine I'll have quite a bit of gossip following me for a while. Funny, that would have mortified me ages ago. Now I can't seem to find myself minding all that much."

"I'm surprised you let your women travel," Thorin admitted.

"Let them? No one lets hobbits go off like that. That's the whole point of it always being a scandal. They just do it," he said, sounding surprised. "Why? Is it that strange?"

"A little," he said. "Dwarf women don't travel much. It's very, very rare for them."

"Truly? Whatever for?"

"Well, dwarf-women are rarer among our people," he explained. "They only comprise about a forth to a third of the race. Because of that, they much prefer just to settle where they are."

"So they're forbidden from going anywhere?" Bilbo asked with a cluck of his tongue.

"No one forbids a dwarf from doing anything, much less a female one," Thorin snorted. "It's just they prefer not to travel much. They're fierce and protective, and when they marry and have children it's very important to them to take care of their offspring and husband. They'd just as soon break your arm then let you tell them what they can and can not do. Despite their smaller number, they're fully in charge of their own affairs, and lead on several matters. For example, it's considered near blasphemy for a male to approach a female with the intention of marriage. We have to wait for one of them to approach us. Since they're less common and so headstrong, they have the pick of the males they would want to carry on the line of."

"They sound terrifying," the hobbit said.

"They are," Thorin said fondly. "My sister is my junior by many years, yet I wouldn't dream of crossing her, not unless I had a sudden desire for a concussion."

Bilbo giggled a bit and the dwarf smiled at him gently. He found himself wondering if he should bother explaining to him that it was much more acceptable for a male to propose when it concerned another member of the same sex and the restriction only applied with females, but he held his tongue. Too early to mention it. Proper courting hadn't even started yet. He needed more time to get settled and think about his plan of attack for winning the hobbit over. Curiosity filled him how Bilbo's people handled things like marriage and the preparations for it, but it would probably be too obvious where he was going with such inquiries.

"Where is your sister?" Bilbo asked him.

"Back in the Blue Mountains," he answered. "She acts as regent there, seeing over the affairs while I'm away. The plan was to send word back to her when Erebor was claimed, so others could start coming back to the mountain. She would have been among them."

"I thought you said they don't travel though."

"No, I said they don't travel much," he corrected. "Erebor was a lost home to a lot of us though, and there are many who would want to go back to it. Caravans are a little different than a handful of us going about. It's usually how we do it, finding underground lands to settle, always an expedition with male dwarves, and once things are settled and safe, the females follow after. It is very, very rare for dwarf-women to be involved in wars or adventures, mostly by choice. Like I said before, they often will go on to have a family to raise and that's more important to them than just about anything. I almost wasn't able to convince Dís, my sister, to allow Fili and Kíli to come along. In fact, she threw an ax at me when I suggested it. They were of age though, so she relented when they begged her to allow it."

"I had heard that some people think there are no female dwarves," the hobbit admitted. "I remember hearing a story from my mother when I was a child, saying that dwarves just came out of the ground, like potatoes. Then again, I was also told by others that the Took family was so queer because an ancestor married a fairy. I guess both stories sound a little silly, told by outsiders about people they don't understand."

"I'm sure your mother didn't mean offense by it. I've heard that rumor too. It's difficult to tell the difference between us, or so I'm told," he stated. "When they do travel or go to war, rare though it is, they dress masculine so as to hide the fact they are female. It's more comfortable to go on the road in trousers than skirts after all. Dís stayed close with me when we lost Erebor though. She refused to be left behind and insisted on going everywhere we did in an attempt to find a new home. Then she met her husband and had Fili and Kíli, and she told me that she'd found it, and would not move from it until she knew they were strong enough to face the world. She taught them much, fighting, their letters and how to face life with honor and courage."

"She sounds amazing. I think I might like to meet her one day. You know, you could send her a letter. The post office of the Shire does occasionally send postmen out that far. It would be easier to get word to her than all the way to Lonely Mountain," Bilbo suggested. "I'm sure she'd be delighted to hear of your safe return."

"Mail carried by foot is utterly slow, but better than nothing," he admitted. "What I wouldn't give for a constable of ravens again to carry messages for me."

"I'm pretty sure an unkindness of ravens around would annoy the poor farmers around here, which would make the name fitting," Bilbo said as he patted his arm.

"You call them an unkindness? Why would you use such a bleak word? They are ever watchful and good for information and counsel," Thorin asked, confused.

"Well, farmers don't like them, and for good reason. They make a mess of the food grown if you leave them be on your land," Bilbo tutted. "I've never heard a group of them called a constable before."

"You might feel differently if they talked to you."

"They'd be too busy stuffing their beaks with our corn, no doubt," he replied. "In any case, I'm serious. Send her word. I'm sure she'd love hearing from you. You can even use my stationary."

"Alright. I should let her know things worked out there, though I'm sure the birds already carried news to her long before we arrived in the Shire," he agreed. "For now, let's get these things put away so we can get you to your holiday lunch."

"Oh, don't tease. I went hungry several times due to your crazed adventure and it's quite time I got to indulge again," Bilbo scolded as he started to sort out his belongings. "The sooner I'm back to seven meals a day, the better in my opinion."

"You'll get a belly again," Thorin noted, remembering how soft the hobbit had been before long walking every day had toned his muscles. Actually, he couldn't decide if round and curved or lean and strong was a better look for Bilbo. They were both rather delectable in different ways in the dwarf's opinion.

"I still keep in well enough shape. I do exercise, you know," Bilbo said before he poked the dwarf's own belly, earning a surprised snort from him. "It's you who should worry. Whatever will you do when you spend all your time in my home, eating my wonderful food and no mountains to chase toward? I do swear you'll get rather roly-poly when I'm done with you."

"I actually plan to work," he informed him. "I'm sure that will keep most of the fat burned off."

"Work? Whatever for? We have more than enough between us to live very well off without worrying about anything like that," the hobbit pointed out.

"It's a matter of enjoyment," Thorin explained. "Even in the height of power, every dwarf in Erebor crafted or mined, even the richest among us. I spent plenty of time in my youth shaping treasures, even as the heir, as did my father and grandfather. We dwarves can't stand having idle hands. We like the work and we take a great deal of pride in it."

"How industrious. The other races must seem downright lazy to you in comparison."

"They are," the dwarf agreed, causing Bilbo to sputter in mock offense.

"Oh dear me, I didn't realize how foolish I must have looked to you, being rich enough to enjoy idle time," he teased. "What would you even do here in Hobbiton?"

"The same I did everywhere else, act as a blacksmith," he replied.

"Oh, but there's already a smithy in town, though he mostly works on farm equipment. There's no need for swords or other weapons here either, so what would you make?" Bilbo asked. "I suppose there are hobbit lasses that would love jewelry, but you'll be hard pressed to find much gems or gold to work with here. We have such finery, but it's not the most common thing. Easier to find things made out of wood than shiny metals here, though for the richest not impossible."

"I'll figure out something," Thorin said. He was hardly an apprentice, but maybe the smithy would appreciate an extra pair of hands. The dwarf could work long hours, and he didn't really even need much in pay. He just knew he'd have to have something to do to keep himself occupied. He already knew he would get terribly bored if he didn't have something to work on, and a space to work on the gifts he planned to grace Bilbo with to officially start their courtship and engagement would be needed.

Besides, most of his work had been simple jobs for men, none of the craftsmanship and specialty he would have learned in his ancestral home had it not been attacked. He'd never had a chance to find the one craft that would have been his mastery, so this was suited to him. Being a jack-of-all-trades had paid much better than it would have if he'd only known one thing very well.

The hobbit gave him a strange sort of look before he suddenly reached out and took the dwarves hands in his own. It took him a little off guard that the shorter one actually had a bit of worry in his eyes. Was something the matter?

"Thorin, is this about paying rent?" he asked. "I already told you, this is your home now as well as mine. I wouldn't have you pay me. You don't need to work. I can take good care of you. I want to take care of you."

He felt his heart leap into his throat, and he had to look away suddenly, hiding his expression in his hair. Such words, even though he knew the hobbit didn't know the way of dwarves, still moved Thorin. Exclaiming his self-worth like that, how he was good enough to provide for him, it was the perfect thing to say. Pretty words and songs were not the way to a dwarf heart. No, hard work, wealth, a sense of pride in oneself... that was so utterly attractive to his kind, perfect to entice a partner. He wanted to take the hobbit at his word and just have him there, to ease him to the floor and kiss him everywhere until Bilbo keened and moaned for him with a desire burning as hot as dragon fire, to worship him until the sun went down and rose again.

But he didn't, because he knew Bilbo didn't know how his words could be taken yet. He didn't realize his actions were kicking up flames of passion that wanted to lick along the hobbit's skin and warm them both. In Thorin's heart it counted, oh did it count, and in his mind he was promised to the hobbit and would be until the end of his days... but it didn't count to Bilbo, not yet. It would, eventually, but only if he was patient. He'd bungled the whole mission of Erebor in his haste. He would not make the same mistakes again over something so important.

Yet, how lovely would it be to kiss him now, to show the hobbit just how much he thought of his worth.

"Thorin. Are you angry? I didn't mean to insult you."

"No, no I'm not angry," he said as he slowly forced himself to let go of the hobbit's hands. "I'm grateful you offer me your home. Believe me, you have no idea how grateful I am. Still, I would like to work. Steel and iron are in my blood, just as food and gardening is in yours. I could not part with it, nor could I even if I wished to."

"Oh, well if you're sure it doesn't have to do with earning your keep," he said, still sounding hesitant, but Thorin shook his head.

"It doesn't, trust me. I'm happy to stay here without payment if that's what you want."

"Good, good. Because that is what I want," Bilbo replied.

He wandered away to get the assortments back where they belonged, even as Thorin imagined picking him up and placing him on the table that he was currently putting his doilies back on to strip away his pants and taste him. It was a good thing the unaware hobbit wasn't looking at him, because he was sure his expression was downright lewd as he thought over his sinful fantasy.

In time, he told himself firmly. In time. Bilbo could not be claimed. He would have to be won. Still... he didn't feel as guilty over those thoughts as he knew he should. It was not like when he'd been sick, thinking of possessing the hobbit and using him to satisfy his lust. Now he wanted to please Bilbo, to satisfy him and give him endless pleasure and devotion as a lover should. He felt better in those fantasies, but knew they were still just that. He shouldn't think of him in that way until the hobbit was ready to accept him. Thorin had to calm down.

And then Bilbo bent right over the table to wipe away some dust and the dwarf nearly choked at the sight before fleeing to the bathroom to splash cold water on his face before he did something stupid.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Thorin, you want it. You want it bad.

I imagine he's the kind of dwarf who would want to blow your damn mind in sex, and then cuddle you afterward and tell you just how lucky he feels to have you. Gentlemen in the streets, bad boy in the sheets type for sure. Also, dwarven courting isn't really canon anywhere, but there's a lot of fanon that I enjoy like the making of gifts for your intended. There's a lot of 'prove your worth' involved in it and I can't help but feel dwarves would be moved more by someone who has a healthy self-esteem and good work ethic, as opposed to elves who are all about the lounging in soft light and looking contemplative while being read fair poetry of a love that happened at the very least five hundred years ago. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but the fact of the matter that is not what would turn those guys on.

Especially since Thorin's interest in Bilbo literally sky rocketed the second the hobbit stopped being so scared of everything and began to assert himself. I don't doubt anything is more attractive to them than someone standing on their own two feet.

The festival celebrations will come next chapter. Trust me, I've got sooo much planned for that.

Unexpected Party Guests

Chapter Notes

I read some terribly sad (read, canon) fics about Bilbo and Thorin, and boy do I need cheering up now. Strap in, the place is about to become freaking fluff city in this chapter. I hope you guys enjoy it.

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

Bilbo worked quickly to get his things put away, feeling very accomplished and a little bit like he was in his own home again. Granted, there was still a fair bit to do, but if his adventure out of the Shire had taught him anything it was that every step toward your goal counted even if it was a small one. It was thirsty work too and he was all too happy to see the end of it for now and get something to eat. With the holiday, none of the groceries would be open for business and he knew he couldn't keep asking for meals off of the other hobbits under the Hill. Staying at the party for luncheon up to supper would be fine with him, indulging in the foods and drinks, and then he could easily see about filling up his pantry again the next day. Maybe he could even get a pinch or two of pipeweed for Thorin and himself for the later evening and blow a few smoke rings in the twilight hours.

Though he still had a lot to do, he was starting to feel relaxed. It was not what he'd imagined. In his mind the moment he got home he'd thought about sinking into a hot bath, resting by his fireplace in a warm robe afterward, and enjoying a good meal or two. Still, while the auction had certainly stirred up a headache, he had his home and pleasurable company.

"How is it going?" Bilbo asked as he peeked into the room that he'd designated for Thorin. It was rather spacious, though he had mostly used this one for storage before now, but there was furniture with a wardrobe, cupboard and with a bed tucked into a corner. He wasn't sure how his mother had come into possession of his great-great-grand-uncle's Bandobras Took's old bed, possibly a recycled birthday gift that always made the rounds around town, but it had never left Bag End when it had ended up here. While it was finely carved, comfortable, and polished to a nice shine, it was a bit too large for most hobbits since it had been made specifically to handle the big size of his far off uncle. He'd heard stories of the hobbit, how he was rather tall at four and a half feet, and all of his adventures being involved in battles against goblins. Bilbo himself had never had a use for a bed that size, but he liked heirlooms and hated getting rid of things even more than other hobbits did. It had been mostly unused until now, but he figured it would have been a perfect size for his dwarf roommate.

"Just getting dressed," Thorin replied, smoothing over a fresh change of clothes, a deep blue shirt with pants that looked almost black, and his boots freshly cleaned and shined up. It was a rather sharp image, Bilbo had to admit, but he was sure his friend would stand out easily. Hobbits more liked greens and yellows for clothing, with the occasional red or something

like it. While baby blue was used a bit, nothing like the strong colors the dwarf was in, rather bold looking.

Then again, he tried to imagine the former king in a crisp white shirt and suspenders with pants cut well above it ankles and it only made him chuckle at the absurd thought. He was fairly sure Thorin would never concede to such fashions. At the very least he would have to keep the boots. He couldn't even imagine how sensitive dwarf feet had to be, to wrap them up in such strong leather and heels. Not to mention cold too. All that hair on their chin, and not a bit on their feet. It had to be terribly uncomfortable.

"Is something amusing you, Master Burglar?" Thorin asked.

"Nothing important," he excused, not wanting to be rude. "Is the room to your liking?"

"It's very nice, thank you. Not a bad size at all."

"Yes, I thought it was better than my bed again, the two of us squished together and you having to tuck your knees up to sleep," he replied. "It must have been dreadfully uncomfortable."

"Sleeping next to you was no great burden," the dwarf replied, and Bilbo could swear for a second he was smirking. He supposed it did seem silly to Thorin, so much effort put on hospitality, but Bilbo really did want him to be comfortable here, to feel like this was his home too.

The hobbit hadn't broached the subject, not during all of their travels back home, but a small part of him was still worried for Thorin. Something unpleasant itched in the back of his mind, the memory of his friend out on the ice in a pool of his own blood. He really thought he would lose him there, and the anguish from it had torn at him. The events on Ravenhill seemed forever ago now, long banished to nothing but memory and the occasional fitful nightmare. He wanted the dwarf to be happy and comfortable with him, to have a good life full of cheerful memories and pleasant company. Bilbo was no pile of ancestral treasure, but he wasn't sure if Thorin wanted treasure anymore. He seemed more content leaving Erebor than he had been going towards it, but the hobbit considered it his responsibility to make sure regret did not come to haunt the dwarf later on.

"Oh here, your top buttons are undone," he suddenly said as he moved forward. He batted Throin's hands out of the way and quickly hushed him when he started to protest, fixing up his clothes as best he could. The material was worn from travel, his fine coat lined with fur long gone. It was too warm for such an item anyway, but it had still been of good quality. It had always hugged his frame rather regally, and these items just were not the same quality. "We have got to get you some new clothes. Maybe some soft cotton or silk."

"A dwarf in silk?" he asked with an arched eyebrow raised.

"Do not knock it until you've tried it. It's wonderful smooth and comfortable against your skin," he replied before he tutted. "Oh, just look at your hair. It's everywhere. I should-"

He reached for his black locks of Thorin's hair before large hands caught his own. He looked up curiously at him then flushed in realization at what he was doing. He'd heard once before dwarves were not fans of having their beards touched by others, though admittedly he didn't really know why. Funnily enough, it had never come up in the time he'd been traveling with the company, though he'd usually been too busy thinking of other matters to inquire about his companions' grooming habits of all things.

"Sorry," he said softly, his cheeks a bit hot. "That was rude of me. I suppose I got carried away."

"It's fine. You just took me off guard when you suddenly went to grab for it," Thorin said with a shake of his head.

"I wasn't going to grab it," he protested. "Just brush it back for you. Still, I forgot for a moment that wasn't polite for your people."

"It's better to ask, even if you're close to the dwarf," he explained. "Our hair and beards symbolized a lot in our culture, shaved in dishonor or cut only in grief, and different ties have different meanings. Letting another groom us is considered a very private matter."

They didn't cut their hair regularly, even for trims? Didn't they get split ends or anything? Bilbo looked closely at it, amazed it was so healthy looking, even if it was everywhere at the moment.

"I'm sorry tried to touch it without permission," he told him sincerely. "It won't happen again. It just looked so wild I thought it could use some brushing."

"Would you like to?" Thorin asked suddenly. "Brush it out, I mean? I suppose I should look my best for the party."

"If you like. One second. Where's your brush?" he asked.

"On the bed, with the rest of my things. I haven't finished unpacking yet."

"Perfect, perfect. One moment," he said as he went to grab it. He also picked up a cord as well, thick and a good length to use as a tie before gently urging the dwarf to sit on a stool so he could get to work. Despite his thick mane, it easy enough to work with, wavy and soft to the touch. It looked as nice as it felt too too, the thin streaks of gray looking rather distinct in between the darker hair. Thorin was as stiff as a board when Bilbo worked the brush through his hair though, and he had a feeling this wasn't very comfortable for him. Why let him do it then? He had to admit, he was a little baffled by this. A sign of trust perhaps, or maybe he wanted to make up for grabbing the hobbit so suddenly?

Though Bilbo had been the one to start touching him first without permission. His Baggins side told him he really should try to be a little bit more proper around the dwarf, but ever since their rescue from the eagles they'd never been shy about contact. He was in Hobbiton again though and maybe he should think a little bit more about what he was doing instead of just letting instinct get away from him.

Especially since it was clear this contact was not making Thorin happy.

"I can stop if you want," he offered, not wanting his friend to force himself to suffer just for his sake.

"No," the dwarf bit out, a low and rumbling growl in the back of his throat. It was not terribly encouraging. "No, you can keep going."

He almost put down the brush anyway but it might have been rude to do so after being given permission to go ahead. He really, really didn't know how Thorin's people went about this kind of thing. Thinking it over for a moment, he tucked the item into his pocket and gently dug his fingers into the hair and began to massage at his scalp. It earned him a strangled gasp from the dwarf, especially when he moved down a little lower, just behind the ear where his jaw and the top of his beard started.

"Wh-what are you doing?" the dwarf groaned out.

"Trying to get you to relax. You're so tense after all," he answered, gently pulling his fingers through his surprisingly soft hair. It earned him another groan, and he was pleased it was having such an effect on him. It was clear to his ears that Thorin was enjoying it. He grinned a bit, his Took side completely forgetting about propriety, and playfully gave one of the braids at the side of his face a little tug as the dwarf sucked in a sudden breath. "Unless you want me to stop."

"No," he growled. "No, don't stop. It's... it's fine."

"Oh good. Glad to hear it," he said, rubbing the tips of his fingers into his scalp. He could swear he saw the dwarf shiver a bit, glad he was finally able to help him feel a little more at ease. He still looked pretty tense though, but on the other hand that seemed pretty natural for him. A soft looking Thorin was a rare thing indeed, but a very nice sight if the hobbit would allow himself to admit it.

He hummed as he worked, but was careful to note any changes in the dwarf's demeanor while he worked on him. Every once in a while Thorin would give a soft snarl, which he took to mean the touch wasn't well liked, or sometimes a shiver, which he was fairly sure meant that was a ticklish spot. Funny, he wouldn't have thought dwarves could be ticklish. Thorin was probably trying to hide it. Bilbo noted the different reactions and tried to remember them in case he ever did this again. Finally he got down to the base of his scalp and his roommate actually tilted his head forward and moaned a little.

Now that was an interesting reaction. Was he finally starting to unwind a little? Fingers pressed a little harder in experiment, and though he didn't moan again, he could feel him shift a bit, pressing into the touch. The hobbit mentally patted himself on the back for finally finding a spot Thorin didn't mind being touched, working on it with vigor.

"B-Bilbo," he groaned out.

"Hm?" he hummed happily.

The dwarf didn't respond after a moment and he wondered if he'd fallen asleep.

"Nothing," he said finally, his voice a faint hiss.

"Glad you're feeling better," he said before he finally took the brush back out and got to work. He didn't really know any plaits or braids. His own hair wasn't nearly long enough, nor was any other male hobbit's, and he'd never really helped a female with her hair before. While he did remember as a child sitting and watching his mother at her vanity, doing up her hair with curls, it was not nearly enough to know how to do any of that himself.

So instead he just tied it up into a ponytail just below the base of this neck, though left the two small braids be. Still outlandishly big and wild looking for hobbit standards, but it suited Thorin well. He circled around to look at it from the front, pleased at the look. Oh yes, it was very well suited, even a little fetching though he doubted any hobbit lasses would be throwing themselves at the dwarf. A shame really, he had a handsome look to him when he wasn't scowling.

Oh, who was he kidding? Thorin looked handsome even when he scowled. He just had one of those faces, terribly rugged yet with a softness to him when he allowed himself to seem vulnerable. Honestly, he looked good no matter what. If Bilbo could see that, he was sure any female hobbit could. Perhaps a Took cousin of his would find him intriguing.

Though, Thorin was still getting himself settled. The idea of him starting to look for a wife was utterly ridiculous. He might even prefer bachelor life. Bilbo might have to get around to asking him about that sometime.

"Well, I think you're presentable," he said as he had him stand up and smoothed his clothes over for him. "Still going to have to see to getting a tailor to make you some more clothes. Some nice ones for special occasions."

"I'm just as fine with you getting your house in order first," he replied. "Now, you haven't eaten since you had that loaf of bread and tea for breakfast. I'm sure you must be getting hungry. Shall we get going?"

"Oh, yes that's right. We'd better go before there's nothing left to eat," he laughed. "Just kidding. There's always plenty of food."

He led the way out of the hole and down the path to the meadow where the feast was being held. Aside from the tables laden down with food, kegs of ale and bottles of wine there was the dancing and several games being played, seeming like a terribly good time and he was happy to take the break and join in.

Bilbo did nothing to announce his presence when they arrived, but they were noticed anyway. The second they came into sight, several of the hobbits stopped to take notice, more than a few even began to whisper among themselves. It was rare for him to be the center of attention. Baggins were considered fairly well to do, and utterly predictable, a rather good quality in Hobbiton. Even when there was talk about his family, it was considered on every day sorts of things, perfectly normal matters like their money (from those that needed to borrow some) or the good food they laid out for parties (seeing as how they had so much

money, they did like having guests over to share with). Still, this in no way seemed the same thing from the frowns on many of the hobbits' faces.

He had already expected a bit of gossip. It would have been foolish not to, considering how he had left and come back, but he had expected idly talk. A little bit of exasperation and surprise, but the mood felt downright unfriendly.

The old Bilbo would have faltered, maybe turned back and gone to his hobbit-hole and tried to wait out the stain on his reputation, or do something to improve it. He would have been utterly mortified to think the citizens of his happy little town were so displeased with him, especially as he noticed a few of them were not even looking at him but Thorin. The company he was keeping now would surely get tongues wagging if nothing else, something that would have upset him greatly a year ago.

Now though? Bilbo had seen the outside world. He had seen hatred run deep over horrid deeds, coveted gold and broken promises and then that hatred overcome against terrifying foes. He'd faced down spiders, orcs, goblins and a dragon. He'd seen Thorin nearly die in front of him, had nearly lost him, and he was not going to let petty little farmers who'd never even been a hundred miles from their home judge him or his friend. He defiantly raised his chin and smiled widely at all of them, pretending quite firmly that he didn't notice the talk, and turned to Thorin.

"You simply must try some of old Mrs. Brownlock's candied apples," he said to Thorin as he plucked two up on sticks and handed one to him. While birthdays, weddings and other celebrations were often catered by the ones hosting it, holidays were paid for by the mayor's office in taxes, though it was a potluck as well, many hobbits bringing along food to make sure there was enough for the grandest of parties. "They have the reddest apple orchard in all the Shire, don't you know? Utterly delicious, I swear my reputation by it."

"What reputation?" an elderly hobbit woman asked, clearly annoyed, even as she beamed a bit at the shower of compliments.

"Mother, don't be rude," a younger hobbit shushed her. Gilly Brownlock, true to her name, was a hobbit with thick brown hair in delicate looking curls and a soft smile. Bilbo had fond memories of her, despite being fifteen years younger than him, she'd always carried herself responsibly yet generously, always giving Bilbo good deals on their fruit when he came to buy, even having snuck him one or two when he'd gone past on the paths during his walking vacations. "They were freshly picked this morning and dipped in caramel just a few hours ago. I'm sure you'll love them."

"Of course, my dear. Wouldn't dream of having another fruit on my tongue when these are about," he complimented her. He'd rarely been this outgoing before, and he felt a bit showy for it, but he was feeling rather bold. Besides, he was making a point. If the neighbors found his actions lately something worth gossiping about, he was determined to not disappoint them and give them plenty of material. "It is good to taste them again. I'll have to come by tomorrow and pick up a bushel. Don't you think so, Thorin?"

The dwarf had taken a couple small bites out of the food, and Bilbo nearly snickered at seeing how careful he was being with the fruit. Probably trying not to get caramel in his

mustache.

"You know, I just realized you wouldn't know him," he said as he pulled the dwarf forward. "Gilly, this is Thorin Oakenshield, the finest dwarf I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. We traveled together now thirteen months. Thorin, this is Gilly Brownlock."

"Thorin Oakenshield, at your service," he said with a bow of his head.

"Oh... uh, to yours and your family's," she said, seemingly to forget the correct reply for a moment. She had to crane her neck up to look him in the face, suddenly fidgeting with her hands at the sight of him. "Any... anyway, it's wonderful to have you back, Mr. Baggins. Everyone was so worried about you."

"Ah, bet they were. It's been a wonderful welcome so far," he said with a grin before he happened to glance down and see a rather dazzling ring on her finger, gold studded with a single diamond. "Oh, Gilly! I see you've found yourself a nice hobbit to settle down with. It's a dazzling engagement ring. Tell me, who is the lucky chap?"

"Oh... well, it's Posco actually," she admitted.

"Posco!" he gasped out. "Little Posco! Oh congratulations!"

He turned to Thorin, who looked utterly lost in all this talk already.

"Thorin, Posco is one of my cousins a couple times removed, an excellent Baggins. Why, Gilly, that will make us family soon. Tell me, when is the wedding?"

"We haven't actually decided yet. He only just proposed a few weeks ago," she confessed. "I'm hoping for a fall wedding though, but it might not be possible without rushing it."

"Gilly, if a fall wedding is your desire, it should be a fall wedding," Bilbo told her happily. "When you see Posco, you send him my way. I'd be happy to help him with any bookings or arrangements if you need a place to hold the ceremony or party. We can have it right at Bag End if we need to."

"Oh, Mr. Baggins, I couldn't," she objected, getting flustered.

"Nonsense! You're going to be family soon! I'd be happy to help out," he assured her, giving her a fast hug and leaving her stunned as he went on his way to find more food.

"I think you might have startled her a bit," the dwarf commented dryly as Bilbo picked up a plate and started to pile it down with chicken, potatoes and buttered peas, along with some biscuits. The hobbit was sure to give wide grins and compliments to anyone he saw, as if daring them to repeat their whispers louder. Hobbits never liked being rude, to someone's face anyway, and it was actually a giddy feeling to act so careless about their opinion.

"Maybe a little. She's a rather upstanding hobbit. Very traditional, and her mother is very protective. Probably pleased her daughter is marrying into such an upstanding family. Except me now," he chuckled. Oddly, their low opinions felt rather freeing. All his life he'd been worried about coming across as proper, never making any mistakes that might get his

neighborhood in a huff, but now that he'd gone and lost all of that, he could do just about anything he liked. It wasn't as if their opinions could get any lower. "I meant every word though. I'm fond of Posco and Gilly. I'd love to help them with their wedding, even if it is just to help them with their pavilion or the like."

"You're going to end up shocking half your relatives and offending the rest," Thorin predicted. Bilbo found himself honestly hoping he was right. It would serve the old gossiping hecklers right.

Still, he kept himself polite and cheerful the whole festival through. He spent most of the time talking with Thorin and introducing him to relatives and neighbors, or hobbits of note that he knew personally. Some seemed embarrassed just to be seen in the company of the dwarf and quickly made their excuses to go to another table, while others were more polite about it, even eager to see Bilbo back and stated they were happy the hobbit had not in fact met an untimely end.

He had just settled down following afternoon tea, a cup of spiked punch in one hand and his pipe in the other. He was feeling rather relaxed on the warm day, and while he could still hear the faint whispering about him on the very edge of his hearing, he certainly wasn't bothered by it. Thorin sat next to him, both of them resting their backs against a large oak tree with their legs kicked out in the grass.

"Almost like being on the road again," he sighed out.

"We only just got back, Bilbo," Thorin reminded him before blowing out a smoke ring several times bigger than Bilbo's own.

"I know that, but it was still... well, interesting," he admitted. "My armchair is lovely and I'm happy to be back to it, don't get me wrong but..."

"Is something wrong, Bilbo?" he asked him.

"Hm, no. Not wrong, really. In fact, I'm very pleased the journey is over. I need some comforts of home again, just like I said before, but something seems different. It's like Hobbiton is... well..."

"Different?" the dwarf suggested, but he only shook his head.

"No, it's the same. It's wonderfully the same. Not a thing has changed. The grass, the trees, and the food. I would often think of home when things got unpleasant, how when I got back I would be right back where I belonged, with bacon and eggs cooking in my fireplace and a kettle whistling for tea. I'm so happy to be back to that. I should think when I have everything back I'd just like to lock myself up in home for a month or two and indulge in it. I wouldn't even leave to check my mail if I didn't have to."

He shook himself a little bit, puffing on his pipe several times to keep it from going out.

"Yet, it's different. Nothing has changed. Nothing at all. Still, something is off."

"I wouldn't say nothing has changed, Bilbo," Thorin said. "You're not the same hobbit I met over a year ago now."

"Oh, you think so?"

"I know so."

"And how have I changed so much, my dear dwarf?" he asked him with a smile.

"You're bolder, better at speaking your mind. You've seen wonders around the land, and grew from your adventures," the dwarf replied. "You have changed, and for the better I would say. Out there, in all the dangers, you found yourself."

He chuckled a bit and pushed closer to the dwarf so their shoulders were touching, feeling rather happy at the moment. Even with the partying around them, he almost felt like he and Thorin were the only ones there. The dwarf was warm and sturdy, a nice weight to rest against.

"You changed too, Thorin, and it was for the better too," he informed him before he looked up at the sky. The clear blue day, not a cloud in the sky. He couldn't help but wonder what sky Erebor was looking at right now, if the Lonely Mountain was having a nice day as well. "You seem happier now. I'm not sure what brought it on, but I hope whatever it was, the effect sticks around."

"I think it will, Master Buglar," he replied as he reached up and touched his ponytail lightly.

The rest of the day continued on, Bilbo enjoying various foods, and though Thorin didn't eat nearly as much as the hobbit did, he still snacked and tried plenty. The odd three meals a day, or sometimes two if the road wouldn't permit stopping, had never made much sense to him. Just how anyone could live on so little food was baffling to him. Oh sure, he knew other races ate less, but he couldn't reason on why or how. Still, he doubted the dwarf was starving, even if he didn't eat as much as the others.

He was a curiosity in and of himself. Many hobbits had never even seen a dwarf up close before, and they certainly had never seen one like Thorin. Even after turning away from the throne, he still carried himself like a king. He had a way about him, the way he moved and spoke, this regal sense about him. Hobbits had no royalty, but it was a sense about the dwarf that could not be denied.

Some of the more curious hobbits had even approached Bilbo during dinner to ask about him, wondering where such a strange folk had come from. He probably wouldn't have shared, since it was private business and might not be appreciated, but he'd had a few tankards in him at that point as well as the punch from before and was feeling rather proud of his friend.

All too soon he was telling the tale of where he'd ended up, explaining the part with the dragon and the captured mountain.

"His wingspan was enormous," he said as he stood on top of a table and spread his arms as wide as he could. "With teeth like swords and scales so red it was like spilled blood."

"Bilbo!" an older hobbit gasped in shock. "You come down right now! Don't talk like that! Spilled blood, just what is wrong with you?!"

"Spilled wine then! Don't spoil the story!" he snapped back, kicking over the wineglass in front of the hobbit and feeling pleased when it tipped over and stained the trousers of his heckler. "Now, where was I? Oh yes! He was huge, and terrifying Smaug was. As deadly as he was greedy. After discovering us, he was so mad, the whole mountain shook in his rage! He flew out to destroy the nearby town of men!"

"Why did he leave the mountain if you were already there?" Flambard Took, a cousin from his mother's side asked.

"Shush," Bilbo hissed. "Now, anyway, he was flying out, his great wings beating so hard he shook poor Lake-Town, until Bard, a great bowman who lived there, fired upon him and killed the beast!"

"Wait, one arrow just killed the dragon?" Sigismond Took, yet another cousin of his asked. "Just the one?"

"Shush!" Bilbo hissed again.

"That seems a little anti-climatic though."

"It was not! It was amazing and epic! Stop ruining my and Thorin's story!" he demanded, even as the other hobbits shook their heads. He was fairly sure he heard mutterings of 'addle-brained' and 'crazy' among them. "I was just about to get to the part where Thorin was crowned King Under the Mountain."

"Bilbo, I think that's enough," Thorin said, though from the smirk on his face, he was rather enjoying the story. Well, at least he had one appreciative listener. "Why don't you come down now?"

"But your crowning is the best part," he grumbled, even as he stepped down. "Well, time for dessert anyway."

"Actually, I think it's time for bed," the dwarf said. "It's dark and I'm sure you're tired."

"Pah. I feel fine!" he exclaimed, suddenly stumbling back before Thorin caught him and kept him from tilting over.

"No, Bilbo. I really think some sleep would do you good," the dwarf insisted. "We're going home, now."

"Oh alright. You must be tired," he said, allowing his friend to help him walk along, his head pleasantly fuzzy. "Thorin... I don't think they believed me."

"No, I wouldn't say so," he agreed.

"Not a liar," he mumbled. "You believe me, don't you? You believe I saw Smaug?"

"Bilbo, I was there."

"But do you believe me?" he asked, staring up at him as they walked down the path.

"Yes. Yes, I believe you, Bilbo."

"Good. I'm glad someone does," he stated before he grinned. "Now let's go home."

"Great. Which way is that?" Thorin asked. "I can't tell in the dark."

"That way!" Bilbo exclaimed happily, pointing to the east, intent to walk back to Lonely Mountain and knock on the door. Maybe if he asked Smaug politely, the dragon would be kind enough to show up and prove he existed to the others.

Many, many hours later, the hobbit woke up with a splitting headache and a very sore back. The sun was beating against his eyes, and he was laying out on a riverbank. Groaning, he sat up and looked around. It took him a few moments to recognize the area, realization hitting him that he was about a mile away from home.

"What... what am I doing here?" he asked, glancing over and seeing a very irritated looking Thorin, who was scowling at him enough to make him squeak in fright. "Uh, Thorin?"

"I don't want to talk about it," he grumbled.

"But what happened?"

"Not. Talking. About. It."

"But..."

"No. Now, shut up and tell me how we get home."

Bilbo decided, quite wisely, not to point out fulfilling the two demands in that order would be quite impossible.

Chapter End Notes

All hobbits listed are canon. There was a rather extensive list of them that I was happy to use. I'm sure more will crop up as the story goes on.

Also, by all means please review this chapter. I want to know if everyone liked reading it as much as I did writing it.

Miscommunications

Chapter Notes

Get ready for some fun self-indulgence. Don't worry, the plot moves along... steadily.

Also, big, big thank you to everyone who reviewed the last chapter. It's always wonderful to hear from my readers, whether it's a paragraph long review or just pointing out a scene you liked. You're all so sweet to take your time to comment and I really appreciate it. Thank you again.

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

A few weeks passed in Hobbiton and it started to get into the middle of summer, warm days filled with sunshine, blue skies and fair weather. Thorin was sure he had never seen so many colors at the same time in all of his life from the bundles of flowers everywhere. It seemed every hobbit in town had some kind of garden, or if not the space for it, at least a potted plant or two sitting by their windowsills. He was reminded of Erebor, in the halls where the jewelers worked on polishing and shaping stones of a variety of shades and colors, though even that impressive amount didn't reach the burst of it that rested on the grassy hills of his new home.

He was far from a lover of nature but even he had to admit it was a relaxing atmosphere, which was a good thing because Bilbo needed all the relaxation he could get concerning his relatives. The little display at the festival, while it had been enjoyable, had plummeted what little scraps of his reputation might have been salvageable into the depths. At best some of them thought he had gone mad in his trip and others refused to believe it was Bilbo at all, but some far off Took relative who just happened to look a lot like him. No one seemed willing to believe such a respectable hobbit would have changed so much and there was constant whispers and theories of what might be wrong with him if he really was in fact Bilbo Baggins.

Which appeared to have been fine with Bilbo. He seemed to be carrying himself with a savage intent to act as outlandish as possibly without being rude, well at least in Thorin's mind. He was used to seeing his own people state quite clearly, and loudly, when they were upset about something but hobbits were something all together different. He noticed quickly they were much more likely to just grumble softly to themselves or snipe gently at one another, nothing that would have even gotten an ounce of ire from his kin, but seemed to be the height of callousness with them. Several times Bilbo went to someone to buy his things back and was questioned either on who he really was or gently asked if perhaps he needed to just retire away for a while and rest up after his 'ordeal' as many put it.

Bilbo's smile remained firm, if terse, and he would answer just the same as he always did, by launching fully into the story of where he'd been the last year. He had to know it was

offensive to the other hobbits because it always caused them to quickly change the conversation, take his money and give up the furniture or trinkets they'd gotten a hold of during the auction. It didn't take long for everyone to start talking about how rude Bilbo had gotten, and Thorin could only wonder at how sensitive these people had to be if storytelling set them off.

Here he'd thought his burglar had just been stuffy and odd. He'd no idea they were all like that!

It was amazing, truly. He was sure the only ones more stuck up were the elves, and that was only because those were so haughty. Hobbits at least seemed to be a modest folk, touchy as they were.

It seemed though Bilbo took it all with some grace, the worst he did was just poke them verbally in ways he knew would make them uncomfortable, but remained a good gentleman about it in the dwarf's opinion. The only time he saw the hobbit fly off the handle, for him anyway, was when they'd been by a Proodfoot's home and the hobbit there had clapped a hand on his shoulder before telling him how sorry he was that the thug of the dwarf was still following him around and whispered to him that perhaps the sheriff could run him off while Bilbo stayed with him out of harm's way until he was gone for good.

In the end the dwarf had to drag Bilbo away after he'd thrown the recipe book he'd come to collect at the Proodfoot's head, only missing him because the hobbit had had the sense to duck. He'd caused quite the scene, being pulled from the home and yelling at Proodfoot that Thorin was a better person than the hobbit could ever hope to be and if he ever called him a thug again, he'd tell everyone the secret to his blueberry muffins because he'd figured it out years ago. The dwarf had been happy to be stood up for, though the threat confused him even as it caused Proodfoot to panic and slam the door in Bilbo's angry face.

Still, it had been rather fetching to see his normally so reserved hobbit act out in such a way over his honor. He might have allowed himself to hold the hobbit very closely to him while he stewed and steamed in their home until he calmed down.

A few of them were more accepting of the situation though. Dora Baggins, a second cousin of Bilbo, eagerly took them into her home and laid out treats and tea with them. She was considered a little odd herself, refusing to marry despite being thirty-eight and having plenty of suitors calling for her, though seen as a sensible woman all around. Bilbo had explained during their meal she wished to focus on her career at the local newspaper, writing for an opinion and advice column.

"People have no business to judge on where you've gone, dear Bilbo," she'd said as she sipped her tea. "It's downright queer, a Baggins going off on an adventure, but you're a Took too and it's good for people to remember that. A wanderlust mixed up with good sense help out when you're needed. Baggins are known for being dependable and charitable, and Took are never one to say no to getting out into the world. A combination like that it is no wonder you went off when the time came. Now, I'd never have gone but Gandalf never even thought to ask me. He asked you, and if a professional like that says you should go, then you should go. It's just good sense to recognize what you're good at. Anyone who sees it otherwise don't

have no sense to them at all. Besides, imagine turning those poor, helpless dwarves away. Why it would have been downright disgraceful."

She'd given Thorin a kind look that made him feel utterly baffled. Helpless? Is that how he was seen by her? He wasn't sure if this was a subtle insult on her part and it wasn't until he'd asked Bilbo when they got back to Bag End did he assure the dwarf that she was being very kind and understanding, speaking so sweetly of him. He wasn't sure he entirely got it himself, but had accepted it, and figured he would never entirely understand the subtlety of hobbit conversation.

It probably helped that she'd given up the writing desk for free with the explanation she was hardly hurting for money, though with a small sigh.

"It's such a good desk, but I suppose I can make due with a different one," she'd admitted with a shrug.

Bilbo was in a wonderful mood by the time his home was properly furnished again. The last few items were back in place, and he settled down in his living room, a content smile on his lips.

"Well, it ended up taking a little while, but welcome back to Bag End," he laughed. "Ah, it finally feels right again. A few things are missing but I suppose I wouldn't be able to get everything. I know the number of spoons I have should be greater, but the odds of getting those back are clearly impossible."

"Truly you've suffered, Master Burglar," Thorin replied, sitting across from him. "To think after everything you come back to missing spoons."

"You know, just because you're not laughing doesn't mean I can't tell when you're making fun," he retorted before sinking down a little further into his armchair. "Rude dwarf. Whatever shall I do with you?"

"Keep me until the end of your days, I hope," he replied, to which Bilbo laughed gently.

"If I did then I think it's fair to say I received the finest treasure of all Erebor," the hobbit stated with a smile. "The wonderful Thorin Oakenshield, permanent resident of Bag End with me. I do like the thought of that."

"I'm no treasure," Thorin stated, even as he felt his heart flutter. The words were so nice to hear but he knew them to be a lie. A kind lie, but a lie nonetheless. "If anything-"

"No," Bilbo interrupted suddenly. "I know what you're about to say, and do not even start that."

"Bilbo, it's only fair you acknowledge how far I sank," he sighed out. "I was cruel to you. You shouldn't forget that."

The hobbit stared at him for a second before suddenly standing up and walking over to Thorin. Before the dwarf could even say anything, he placed his hands on his shoulders and

leaned in to look him right in the eye. For a moment his breath hitched, wondering if perhaps he was about to receive a kiss. The hobbit didn't move though, just gave him a long and hard look.

"How many days have you been alive, Thorin?" he asked him.

"What?"

"How many days have you been alive?" he repeated firmly.

"I'm well past a century, Bilbo. I don't know the exact number."

"And how many days did you have the dragon sickness?"

"I... well, a handful, I suppose. I have to admit my memory of it is a little fuzzy but-"

"So in the, if I had to wager, tens of thousands of days you've been alive, the week you were sick is the smallest fraction possible in comparison to all that time, do you feel it summarizes you as a whole?" he demanded of the dwarf. "In all the years you've been alive, leading your people, been a king without a home, thought of honor and your people, one week is all that matters to you? Because I remember a dwarf who risked dying in the rain of the Misty Mountains to save me from falling from the rocks even when he doubted me, a dwarf who trusted me to save him from the elves, a dwarf who is dear and special to me. You are a treasure, Thorin Oakenshield and if you think for a moment that I would judge you on that week and ignore everything else, our whole journey together, then you are a fool, but a treasured fool."

"Bilbo," he breathed. "I tried to throw you from the ramparts."

"But you didn't. You let me go."

"Because Gandalf told me not-"

"Because you didn't want to hurt me. Because you were in there. You were just lost, Thorin, but I saw traces of you fighting the madness. I saw a clarity in your eyes when you let me go, and when you looked at me holding the acorn, for moments you were the dwarf I knew. Even at your worst, you didn't hurt me. You never hurt me, Thorin. Please don't look on yourself like this. I wouldn't have it."

The dwarf met his eyes and reached for his hands on his shoulders, holding them tenderly. Bilbo had long since said he'd forgiven him and yet he really felt it now. He had such high opinions of him, truly? There was still a black spot of shame in his heart that he'd let it go so far, had tried to kill Bilbo even if he hadn't gone through with it, but it felt smaller at the hobbit's words.

He leaned forward and pressed his forehead into the smaller one's chest as he gently hugged him, arms resting along Bilbo's hips. He could feel the heartbeat of his loved one, the steady and sweet thumping. It was a comforting sound. To think this heart would hold such compassion for him. It was a wonderful feeling.

"Kurduluzdh," he whispered to his chest.

"What?" Bilbo asked, but Thorin only shook his head. It was forbidden to share the language of his people with outsiders, even one so precious to him. He adored Bilbo but it wouldn't be right to tell him the meaning. Besides, he wasn't sure what his reaction would be if he told him he'd just called him his heart treasure. It would no doubt fluster him. The soft and kind moment could not be ruined like that, embarrassment forcing the hobbit to turn away and run from him. Said hobbit who started to trace his fingers through the dwarf's hair and he choked out a sound of pleasure.

"Is this bad?" he asked softly.

"No. No, touch me if you wish," he assured Bilbo, reveling in the closeness and trust he could give him to allow the hobbit such a meaningful contact.

"Oh Thorin," Bilbo sighed softly as he thread his fingers into his hair, soothingly rubbing at his scalp. "Don't be upset. I didn't mean to distress you."

"You didn't. I'm actually quite happy," he assured him as he smiled. "How could you think your acceptance of me would have that affect?"

"Well, you certainly look upset, huddled up like this," he huffed out, sounding annoyed. "Perhaps I'm misreading the mood."

"You certainly are," he chuckled gently. Oh, if Bilbo only knew.

"Forgive me for not getting the odd habits of dwarven expressionism," he tutted, but didn't stop playing with his hair, nor did he pull away from the hug. "I'm reminded of a child hiding in a parent's chest to keep anyone from seeing the tears."

"There are no tears here," he said as he looked up at Bilbo. "Only a feeling of good fortune I get to be in the presence of a being such as you. Your kind nature makes you radiant."

The hobbit went red at that, sputtering. Ah, there was the embarrassment. He'd pushed too far.

"You're a silly dwarf," he said, his tone almost scolding. He pushed at him and Thorin regretfully let go, but Bilbo did not retreat and instead sat himself down on the dwarf's lap, straddling him with his knees resting on either side of him. Surprised by the action, he wasn't prepared for when Bilbo took two handful's of the dwarf's hair and pressed their foreheads together. "You look me in the eye and say such things like that? You're utterly foolish and silly. I am not radiant. I'm just a hobbit of Bag End who has some good sense to him. Now you take it back."

"Never," he replied in a teasing, but challenging, growl. For a moment he saw the hobbit shiver. What was that about?

"Foolish dwarf," the hobbit breathed. His expression had gotten rather soft, open and even a little timid. "Saying such things like that in that voice of yours."

"My voice?" he asked, wondering on this strange change in demeanor. "What about my voice?"

"You say as if you don't know. The sound of it, the pull you have in that low rumble of yours," he scoffed gently. "I do so find it irritating the power it has over me."

"I have no power over you," he denied. It was completely the opposite, actually.

"Yes you do, from the very start. When I heard you sing, it moved me. I saw the mountain in my mind, the glitter of treasure and felt a love of beautiful things. I felt the urge to carry a sword instead of a walking stick. It was so..." He struggled, looking like he was trying to find the right word. "Unpleasant."

Thorin had a feeling unpleasant wasn't at all what Bilbo was really feeling, especially right now.

"Did my voice really move you so?" he asked him softly, keeping his tone low intentionally, and was rewarded by the sight of another shiver. Oh, what a sight. What a treasure.

"I woke up the next morning and found you gone... and I couldn't help but think I would never hear you talk or sing again," he admitted. "Before I knew it I was grabbing the contract and running after you."

Thorin grinned before leaning in to whisper directly into his ear.

"Foolish hobbit."

Bilbo's fingers tightened in his hair and Thorin's hands moved to hold the hobbit's hips, even as he shifted in his lap. The stillness of the room started to get thick between them, a buzzing filling the dwarf's head. His hobbit didn't move away, even as his lips traced over the lobe of the pointed ear. He thought he heard a little whimper but he couldn't be sure.

"Bilbo," he spoke softly into his ear as he felt him press close. "What does my voice do to you? Tell me."

He felt hope rise in his chest, that maybe his love wasn't so one-sided. Maybe, maybe Bilbo knew. Maybe Bilbo felt the same. Maybe Bilbo loved him and wanted this as badly as Thorin did. Maybe there was a heat of lust inside of the hobbit, a yearning to touch and be touched in return. He didn't reply at first, making Thorin wait with baited breathe until he finally answered.

"It makes me want to see Erebor again, and hear the whole company sing again," Bilbo sighed out. "To think, I just got back and I'm pondering over adventure again. You're right. I am a foolish hobbit."

Thorin felt like he'd had a bucket of ice water dumped on him as his roommate clucked his tongue and climbed off of him. Bilbo was shaking his head and rubbing at his face, though while did look rather pink, he saw no traces of wanton yearning.

No, no he had not misinterpreted what had just happened. He had not! Had he? Helplessly he watched Bilbo stretch until his back popped and shake his head.

"I think I need to do something to ground me. Something a little less wistful and more home oriented," the hobbit stated. "Now that this place is finally all settled I believe I shall finally plant the acorn. Silly of me that I kept putting it off. If it gets too far into summer it won't be proper temperature for it to grow. Would you like to join me, Thorin?"

The dwarf only stared at him. He could swear his patience was being tested here by Mahal himself. He'd surely break like a brittle piece of metal if he was hit by life like this just one more time.

"Thorin?" he asked him. "Thorin, are you alright?"

If he didn't know any better, he could swear he was being teased. Surely Bilbo had to have some clue, some inkling of what he'd just done to him, what he was currently doing to him. The hobbit wasn't cruel though. He wouldn't tug pointlessly at his heart. There would be no reason to except for malicious mirth and he just wasn't that kind of person. Still, Thorin could swear he'd felt something there between them and it had not just been his wishful thinking.

At least he didn't want to believe it had been.

"I think I will join you, thank you," he said after a moment. "I'm sorry, I was... thinking of something else. A nice smoke outside while I watch you work sounds very relaxing right now."

"Wonderful! I'll go and get my tools and meet you outside then," he said, his voice and manner as chipper and bright as ever.

The dwarf groaned as the back of his head hit the chair with a solid thunk. He knew he was desperate for the hobbit, but this was just insane. Was his heart getting away from him? Had he just imagined the tone in Bilbo's voice had practically been begging for a kiss? Had he done something wrong himself somehow and ruined the moment? Bilbo might have wanted something from him and he'd been too unaware to notice the invitation. Maybe the hobbit had been inviting him all along and he hadn't seen it clear enough to act.

Hobbits and their subtle way of acting was not at all something he knew how to navigate.

He moved to his room and quickly grabbed a few things, and his pipe was only one among them. He also snatched up some papers and a quill. There wasn't any more time to put this off. He needed to start acting on this courtship while he still had some brains to him. Any more moments like that and he was sure he would go and do something idiotic.

"What's all that?" Bilbo asked when he met him outside, seeing Thorin with the paper placed on a book to balance on his knee and write. The pipe was clenched in his teeth, puffing hurriedly on it as he wrote.

"A list of my skills as a blacksmith, jeweler and craftsman, including the metal I'm best with working on," he answered distractedly.

"Oh, so you've decided to get to work then?"

Work wasn't really the goal here. He needed a smithy and he needed one now. If he was going to get anywhere in this courtship he needed to start on the gifts. He'd shower Bilbo in goods until there was no misunderstanding between them and it was as clear as crystal what his intentions were. Asking was out of the question. He could not just bring it up. If he was wrong, if his hobbit didn't love him, then it would only cause them both discomfort. They were close now, so very close, that he would not dare risk losing that. If he asked and Bilbo said no, there would be nothing to salvage. He had to seduce him in the way befitting a dwarf until everything was understood and reciprocated.

"In a sense, yes," he replied.

"Well, I still don't see the point when I've got enough money for the both of us, but if it makes you happy I certainly don't have the right to dissuade you," he replied. "I'm going to get to work on planting the acorn then. Just tell me if you need me for anything."

Thorin needed Bilbo for several things. That was the problem. However, he was determined now, even more than before. If there was something between them, the dwarf would have it. He'd earn his hobbit's love and desire in the only way he knew how. It would be easy to make him see, with the right courtship gifts, crafted from his own hand, just how he felt about him.

He'd make it so obvious a blind dwarf could see his affections.

Too bad Bilbo wasn't a dwarf. In his frantic scribbling of the application he planned to give to the local blacksmith, that little issue hadn't quite entered into his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Why do I get the feeling some of you will want to strangle me at the end of this? Bilbo's no tease, but maybe I am.

Piquant Employment

Chapter Notes

So, funny story about this. In stories like this I have a strong desire to use mostly canon characters, or at least canon names I can assign my own ideas to. Tolkien created a wide, wide world with plenty of characters, communities and histories I love to get dive into. In places like Lake Town it's harder since there's so few named characters, but the Shire is fresh with names to use. In stories like these, I'll create OCs where needed but use canon elements as much as I can. This can lead to really fun developments.

One of the things I've really always loved about hobbits is just how into being respectable they are, yet they all seem to have this completely ridiculous idea of just what was respectable and how often these very ideals were ignored. Hobbiton was very much a community of farmers and landowners, and even other hobbits from other towns were considered off for doing anything out of their norm. Adventures were hinted in the narrative as happening on a semi-regular basis, yet there was always this amount of shock and hushing up about it. This clearly led to things like how Gandalf was seen. Everyone knew he was the one coming along and grabbing both boys and girls to run off and get into trouble, yet would specifically talk as if he was "just part of the entertainment" for parties, despite clearly knowing better. It lends to an imagine of a bunch of these folk just sitting around with their fingers in their ears and ignoring anything they didn't morally agree with.

So the idea of families like Took, Brandbucks, Bolgers and others having this reputation of traveling about and caring so little about Hobbiton's chill level just tickles me senseless. "Did you hear? They go out on boats! And, and, and they live near a forest where the trees move with no wind!" Yeah? And? You live in a world where trolls have anti-theft purses that talk when they get stolen and this old man who never ages keeps coming to make you fireworks and encourage your family members to run off to have interesting lives, NOT TO MENTION YOU BORDER A SEA WHERE ELVES GO TO LIVE IN WHAT IS BASICALLY PHYSICAL HEAVEN! Calm down, this all is perfectly okay. But no one in this town wants to admit it's normal and everyone else just rolls their eyes and puts up with them.

Perfect example is how everyone in Hobbiton feels poor Frodo shouldn't live in Buckland cause all those hobbits are so weird, only for it to be revealed the Buckland hobbits feel the exact same way about him being in Hobbiton. Or how happy Bilbo is to be home, only to get a late midlife crisis at how boring and dull his hometown is that he can't wait to offend every single one of them before running away.

So when I came across the canon names of Salvia Brandybuck and Gundabald Bolger, the idea of the dynamic Thorin would have with them, their general attitude about Hobbiton and so forth fit immediately. Hobbiton, did you ever think everyone else is normal and you're just the ones who are off?

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

The smith, while technically local like Bilbo had told him, was not really in Hobbiton exactly. The land was close to the Green Dragon Inn and a bit south past that, seemingly wedged right between the borders of Hobbiton and Bywater. It was, luckily, easy enough to find on its own. The Green Dragon Inn is where they'd been able to get their ponies and supplies before setting off on their journey, and the path was not winding at all as it bore him to his destination. The walk only took about thirty minutes from Bag End and the dwarf actually felt a bit of nostalgia hit him when he saw the place, though to be fair, it was nothing at all like the forges and hearths he was used to in his mountain home, it was much less like the hobbit holes he saw everywhere else.

In all actuality it was very much like a mixture between the two. While there was a small hill jutting out from the ground, it was clear that it had been worked on and modified extensively with arches extending past the hill to give more space for extra rooms, windows and the forge itself. It was opened up, like the smithy had been tacked onto the hill itself. Carved wooden pillars held up part of a roof with grass growing on it, and instead of a lawn there were bricks laid out everywhere to walk on while bits of greenery sprouted up between. There was a large chimney poking out from the side, curved up from the forge almost like a tea kettle's spout. He couldn't decide if someone had tried to build a house inside of the hill or if the house had been made first and large amounts of dirt had been piled up on it instead in order to make it more suited to hobbits.

It was odd looking and Thorin found himself actually kind of liking it.

He approached and walked past the small stone wall circled around the place, the iron gate unfastened and opened. He saw only one hobbit outside in a yellow cotton dress and leather apron, stooped down low over the furnace and pulling a rake over some unlit coals and spreading them out. He waited until she was finished before coughing gently to announce himself, not wishing to spook her. Even when he'd been a child he'd been taught never to startle someone while they were working near a furnace, lit or not, unless you wanted them to get startled and get yourself cuffed on the ear for your stupidity. Forges were not places to play around in, not with how dangerous they could be.

The hobbit turned toward him, her hair in a messy bun atop of her head. Several of her red hairs were falling out already, sticking out like straw in a haystack and her skin was tanned like someone used to being outside, freckles all over her face and spreading down steadily from her neck to her shoulders and chest. She didn't look young, but she certainly wasn't old by any means, seeming to be in the age range of Bilbo. Then again, Bilbo was just in his fifties and that was still like a teenager for dwarves. He wasn't even going to try to guess her age. They were just much too differently spaced to think he'd be able to do it with any kind of accuracy.

"Good morning and hello," she said with a warm and welcoming smile. "I must say, it's been a while since I've seen a dwarf in these parts. Would I be correct in assuming I'm addressing Thorin Oakenshield?"

"You know me?" he asked, feeling vaguely suspicious despite being in such a calm land. People recognizing him had not always worked out in his favor. In fact, often it had led to dangerous encounters, especially in the last year.

"I know a dwarf with that name recently arrived in this sleepy little town with one Mr. Bilbo Baggins," she explained, "and that said Mr. Baggins has been causing quite the uproar coming back from the dead, taking back all his property and getting drunk at parties to tell everyone tall tales of dragons. I also remember a little over a year ago when I received a message from the Green Dragon Inn that a group of dwarves had just put in an order for an expedition they planned to go to in less than a month and suddenly the inn needed extra saddles and packs to fit to their ponies that they were about to sell to a company under the same name. Like I said before, I haven't seen dwarves in these parts for some time, so it's not hard to put the little details together."

"Are you the blacksmith of these parts?" he asked curiously.

"Oh no, that's my husband. I'm Salvia Bolger, née Brandybuck," she said as she thrust out her hand to shake his. "I'm a leather worker myself, so if you ever need more bags for supplies I'd be happy to work directly with you next time. Did those saddles work out for you? I'm afraid they were kind of rushed since I didn't have much time to work on them."

"They were fine," he replied. At least they had been before the ponies had gotten chased off by the orcs. He wasn't sure if they'd ever been found by anyone. "I was hoping to speak with your husband. Is he in?"

"He's just inside getting some breakfast into our son before starting on today's work," she said. "I'll go get him for you."

She left to go and fetch him, leaving the door open as she went. After a few moments another hobbit came out with her, her husband he assumed. Dark and curly brown hair was atop his head, long enough to be tied back into a small ponytail. He was round at the stomach, but sturdy with broad shoulders for a hobbit and wore a similar leather apron as his wife.

"Good morning," he said with a welcoming smile. Unlike other hobbits who'd often viewed Thorin with a small amount of weariness, he did anything but. Without a second of hesitation he took the dwarf's hand and shook it happily. "Gundabald Bolger. Very nice to meet you. My wife told me you needed to talk to me? An order, perhaps? I'm sorry if that's the case, but I already have several orders on hold already. Whatever you need me for might take some time."

"No, I don't need any commissions from you," the dwarf explained. "Have you been busy with work?"

"We always are, especially during the spring and summer," Gundabald told him. "Plenty of hobbits need repairs on their equipment and things pile up, you see. Good amount of work to get food on the table so I can't complain if my neighbors are willing to give me plenty to do."

He could see that. They certainly didn't look like they were starving, that was for sure.

"In that case, I'm glad I came to talk with you," he stated as he pulled out the paper he'd been working on and handing it to the hobbit. He opened it curiously as his wife peered over his shoulder at it. "My name is Thorin Oakenshield, and I've been working at various smiths for men almost my entire life. I've worked on all sorts of projects, and have crafted with everything from iron to the finest of golds. I wish to ask you for employment if it would suit you."

"Employment?" Salvia asked. "With us?"

"This is very impressive, though any dwarf coming here would probably be qualified," Gundabald admitted as he looked over the paper. "I was never disappointed with them over the years."

"You've work with dwarves before?" he asked.

"Here and there. Mostly on outsourcing work," the hobbit stated. "Back when I lived in Bucklebury I often traveled to Bree for trading and materials. I like dwarf quality. Very strong and sturdy, but not bulky or heavy like men's work can be at times. They never were very good for hobbit measurements, those people."

He smiled again at Thorin.

"I can't imagine you've found much else for jobs here, have you?" he asked.

"Honestly, I haven't looked. I was told that this was the only smithy even in town," he confessed.

"And right that information is," Salvia laughed. "Before we moved here there were always orders coming in our town from theirs, lots of traveling for us to get things to them. Don't think any of these soft folks ever thought about forging anything themselves. They don't like leaving much, or outsiders really. Our work has been prosperous since coming here but the neighbors leave something to be desired. Think they would have been happier to be without a smith and just send us orders than to deal with us directly all the time."

"I will admit, I have been looking for help lately," Grundabald confessed. "Can't get anyone to sign on as an apprentice and I was starting to think about going to Brandy Hall to see if one of my cousins would be looking for work. You're hardly on the level of an apprentice though, so I won't insult your honor by suggesting that title to you."

"You find I'm too experienced?" he asked. He might not want to hire him if that were the case.

"Not at all, not at all. Just I had thought whoever I took on I would have to train from the ground up, if you'll pardon the expression," he laughed, clapping him merrily on the shoulder. "With a dwarf that's no issue at all. There's plenty of work and I'm more than happy for your application, believe me. Payment would be a percentage of the commissions of course, but I'm sure you'll find that more than fair with what we're paid here."

"That does sound more than fair," he replied. "I have to admit I'm not picky over the numbers. I'm more eager to get to work than anything."

"Ah yes, idle hands for a dwarf never have been very welcome," he laughed again. "We can start you today if you like?"

"Why don't you come inside for breakfast first though?" Salvia suggested, grabbing Thorin's arm and pulling him inside before he could even have a chance to reply. It was clear she would not take no for an answer. "Surely you'd like a meal before my husband gets you to work. He's a real task master when he wants to be."

"Oh ho. Let her feed you and you'll be as roly-poly as me, though I do like it," he said with a wink as to her as she giggled like a young girl and drug the confused dwarf off. These were not like any hobbits he'd met before. "We should get a contract written up for you anyway. It's best to get the terms agreed on before we start any kind of deal."

She pushed him to a seat at the table without even asking and he saw a young hobbit child at the table, happily digging into a slice of seed cake. She bustled herself around the kitchen and started to put meats and bread on a plate along with a couple boiled eggs.

"Coffee or tea?" she asked him.

"Coffee, please," he said, feeling it would be rude to refuse. He wasn't sure she wouldn't just go and give him both anyway, even though he'd already had something to eat with Bilbo this morning. He wasn't even sure that would be a good excuse to say no anyway. He knew of the 'wonders' of second breakfast, as Bilbo loved to call it.

The hobbit child had temporarily stopped eating to look at him, curiosity in his big eyes. He looked back at him, keeping his expression neutral.

"What?" he asked.

"You're no hobbit," the little boy pointed out.

"No, I would think not."

The boy looked under the table before back at him.

"Did you hurt your feet? Why are they covered?"

"They're boots, Theobald," Salvia said as she put the food down in front of Thorin. "It's the things Mama sometimes makes for the big folk. They don't have tough soles like we do, remember?"

"Ohhhhhh," he said before he glanced at him again. "Does it hurt? They look tight."

"They're comfortable," he replied and started to eat, though slowly. He was mostly full already. Bilbo's table was always rather generously laden after all.

"So, is it true?" Gundabald asked as he took a mug of coffee as well. "There's rumors about Baggins going mad, talking about going after treasure and a dragon?"

"Bilbo Baggins is not mad," he replied shortly before the hobbit shook his head.

"I didn't mean that. I meant the bit about the dragon?" he asked, clearly curious. "I've heard tales of them of course, but there hasn't been anything like that here in centuries, before there was even a Shire, from what the legends say. Even hearing about one is bound to be exciting. So, is it true? Did the pair of you go and steal treasure from one before killing it?"

"After a fashion," Thorin admitted to which Salvia whistled.

"Very impressive. Oh, it must have been a wonder to look on," she said with a small bit of envy. "The most dangerous thing I ever saw was trolls."

"You saw trolls?" the dwarf asked, surprised.

"Why of course, at least she says so," Gundabald said. "Salvia always did like wandering, and she would often go off in the Old Forest at times."

"In my youth anyway," she confessed. "I was wandering around close to the edge once when I came across one. It was so big, and ugly, as ugly as sin I swear. It was in the middle of the night, and it was carrying this big sack. Scared me half to death, but I couldn't keep from creeping closer to get a better look. Figured it wouldn't hear me, and I was too small to bother with."

"Then the trees got it!" Theobald cried out excitedly. It was clear he'd heard this story before.

"Trees?" Thorin asked.

"Oh yes. The trees... well, they moved," she admitted. "Before I could make a peep this root came up, I swear on my life. Tripped the troll and it crashed on over, right in front of me. I was so surprised, I turned and ran the other way. I was sure I was going to get caught and gobbled up right there, but it never came after me. Instead I heard it scream and... well, I don't wager it got out alive. Unfriendly things are not allowed in that place. Ever since then I was very careful to treat the trees along the border with as much respect as I could muster."

Thorin had never heard of moving trees before, but something in him told him not to doubt her words.

"In any case, I don't go off looking for trouble like that anymore. Too busy raising my cute family," she cooed as she pinched her son's cheeks, who giggled and waved her off.

The hobbit family certainly wasn't like any other he'd met in Hobbiton before now. Even the little one didn't shy away from him, finding him more a curiosity than anything. It was easy to fall into a conversation with Gundabald, discussing various jobs and work practices. True to Bilbo's word, most of what was worked on was just farm equipment, sometimes cookery or nails and other bits needed for construction. It would be easy enough, but there was more than enough bulk to keep them busy.

Thorin agreed on a fifteen percent from commissions for a wage before cost was cut from the profits. It was a little on the low side for his experience but he didn't really need the money for much. There was still plenty of gold coins that would last him a while from the treasure. Besides, unlike Gundabald he had no family to worry about feeding, not anymore anyway. It would be plenty for his purposes. Besides, he would agree to just about anything if it meant he would be able to get started on crafting his gifts for Bilbo. After yesterday he was determined not to let any more time pass for their courting.

"I would hope that I could use the forge at times for side projects, when there's not too much work to be done," he admitted to his new employer. "For them I'd use my own materials. I just would need to borrow your tools and forge."

"As long as we're not backed up on any commissions, I don't have a problem with it. Just let me know when you plan on that," he agreed.

Salvia was working on the contract, writing down the notes as they talked before she handed it over to her husband to sign and then to Thorin.

"Well, I'm more than happy to have you here, Master Oakenshield," the hobbit said. "I have to admit, I am glad that you came along. It'll be very profitable for the both of us, I'm sure."

The two went outside and Salvia stayed in, ready to get started on her own things. Her workshop was apparently inside to keep her leathers clean and dry for her own work.

"So, she is a leather worker?" he asked as Gundabald lit the wooden logs in the oven and closed the door on it before waiting for the coals over it to catch.

"Indeed. It's how we met. I was always buying strips of it for my work, and she needed buckles and so forth for her own commissions. We decided to become partners, and she was such a swell lass eventually I asked for her hand in marriage," he sighed out. "Been the happiest fifteen years of my life, it has."

"I can imagine," Thorin replied. Well, he'd like to imagine it, anyway.

"Ah, eyes like those. I can see what they mean," the hobbit said with a grin. "Found someone here you're sweet on?"

The dwarf looked at him but betrayed nothing. There was enough gossip about him and Bilbo as it was. The last thing he wanted was every single resident in this town to know of his feelings before his intended did.

"Hm, well I suppose it's your own business. I won't pry," he said even though it looked like he'd love nothing better than to do just that. "There are a fair few pretty lasses around these parts after all. Farmers daughters the most of them, so hard workers and good cooks. I suppose that would appeal to a dwarf's heart, wouldn't it?"

"There are things here that might interest a dwarf's heart," he admitted. He didn't want to give up anything, but it might be wise to figure out how courting for Bilbo's people worked. It

could only increase his chances of winning him over properly. "Though a hobbit's heart is more interesting to know about."

Gundabald guffawed at that.

"So it is that there's a hobbit out there you like," he said before he started to rake at the coals to increase their heat. "I'm not sure what luck you'll have. The folks in these parts are hardly adventurous types in any kind of way. You might scare them off, not that I mean any offense. It's just you're hardly the norm around here when anyone thinks of husband material. I think you'd have to have quite a bit to offer in order to get any of their fathers to give you the time of day."

"Their fathers? What does that have to do with it?" he asked, confused.

"Well, traditionally you go to the father to ask for the right to marry their children, especially the daughters," Gundabald explained. "I take it dwarves aren't the same?"

"Any dwarf who tried to talk for a female wouldn't have a tongue to talk for long," he snorted. "They're perfectly capable of making their own decisions."

"Heh. I don't suppose I'll ever cross one if I meet her then. Good advice to keep in mind. Here though, you'll find the ladies much more timid. Even the ones that aren't, it's still for the best to approach their family first. Rude to do otherwise. Good chunk of the marriages here are to merge families or lands, and so a lot of them are arranged with the family's permission and blessing in mind."

He was fairly sure he didn't have to worry about that. Bilbo was master of Bag End after all, and thus had no parents that he even needed to consult. It eased his worries a little bit. That part at least sounded easy. If that was the only difference in courting, he supposed that was good. Not that he would have minded making presents to prove his worth to Bilbo's father and mother, but it would have made the whole affair take that much longer. Thorin was feeling more than a little eager to get started on the hobbit himself without having to worry about others he had to attend to first.

It didn't take long for the coals to get hot enough to work with and Thorin started to show Gundabald what he could do. It wasn't hard. The forge was well clearly cared for, and easy to work with. The tools were all on a sturdy rack to the side and the anvil just the right size for a hobbit or dwarf to work at. A familiar rhythm started in his body, the motions long since memorized as he took the metal and heated in the forge before setting it on the anvil to begin his work. He could age to be three centuries old and he wouldn't forget the feel of this, the way his arm arched when he brought the hammer down, the clang ringing in his ears at the strikes, or the firm grip he had to keep on it to keep it from shifting even an inch. He used to hate this kind of work, found it insulting to have to take what he could get as he went from village to village for any kind of work he could find before they reached the Blue Mountains and their luck changed. How often he'd been called 'apprentice' only to know more than what the man who hired him did, sometimes chased off when the customers noticed the change in quality and wanted to come directly to him instead.

He did not feel that way here, and he didn't think it was more than just for Bilbo's sake either. True, he wanted this to be able to make the lovely things he knew would delight his hobbit, but even from the start it was clear Gundabald didn't seem him as any kind of novice or fool. He was clearly impressed with the work he saw and was kind in a brash sort of way that reminded Thorin of his own people. He'd spent as much time in Bucklebury as he had in Hobbiton, that was to say not all that much, but it was clear this hobbit had some experiences with dwarves and held their skill in high regard. He found himself thinking it might actually be a pleasure to work here, and not just a chore he would have to endure in order to reach his goal of getting his hobbit. Plows and barrel rings were hardly high work, but it did not feel so demeaning as Gundabald helped him and they worked together. It was nice to be Master Oakenshield, and he was sure to repay it by addressing him formally as well. He also found himself finding respect in him as the hobbit poured over the metal too. It was clear he was well learned in what he did, as sure in his form and practice as any dwarf would be.

Around lunch time they stopped and came inside to find a chicken cooked along with rolls of bread, corn and potatoes. This time he tore in the food like a starved man, easily having built up an appetite from the job. Gundabald had servings even larger, and hugged his wife around the middle in thanks for the meal. They seemed a happy family, not reserved at all and rustic, but happy.

It was almost like being back home.

He paused as he ate. Bilbo was his home now. He didn't want to be anywhere else than at his hobbit's side, but part of him missed his own family. His sister, his cousins and his nephews. He wondered how things were going in Erebor, how the reconstruction was going. Surely it had to be well under way by now.

He'd said good bye to almost no one, and given Balin no way to contact him. He'd planned to wander and when he was settled give word. There had been no time frame in mind, but he hadn't intended to go so far in the beginning before Bilbo had made his unknown proposal. A messenger bird would have been able to reach them if he hadn't gone so many miles away. Now though, even if he was able to find a raven willing to take his message, it might be a while for even a bird to reach them. A post to his sister would be best, just like Bilbo had suggested. He should get in contact with her and let her know he was okay.

Still, his life was here now, and for all the fussy hobbits around, he liked it. He felt calmer than he had in ages and was happy. Bilbo was a relaxing presence when he wasn't causing his heart to try to beat out of his chest, and even then he didn't mind the sensations in the slightest. He was kind and comforting, always had a good word for him. Bilbo had invited him to share Bag End and think of it as home. It was his home, and no mountain could compare any longer.

When the day was over and the evening was getting on, he shook hands one last time with both Mr. and Mrs. Bolger, even patted Theobald on the head before he headed out to get back. Light poured out from the open, green door and his hobbit was on the doorstep, rocking back and forth on his heels with a pipe in his mouth.

"I see you made it back without getting lost," he said with a smile as the dwarf approached. "I'm glad of that."

"Well, I didn't have a drunk hobbit trying to give me directions."

Bilbo gave a sputter at that, coughing a little on the smoke.

"It was just that one time, and I'd thank you not to mention that. It was utterly embarrassing the next morning. It took hours to get the grass out of my hair," he said, his cheeks a little flushed. "In any case, I take it from the fact you got back so late that you secured your employment?"

"I did. I found it very enjoyable even," he agreed.

"Yes, I was sure my cousins would take good care of you," Bilbo said, looking very pleased.

"Cousins? You mean they were your relatives too?" he asked. Just how many did this hobbit have?

"Yes. Gundabald is my fourth cousin three times removed and Salvia is my fifth twice removed," he explained. "Not terribly close to me, I will admit, but good people. I have to admit, before my adventure I did find them a bit odd."

"You keep track so closely," he sighed. The most dwarves ever bothered with was second cousins, perhaps third if it was a dwarf of some note. After that it hardly mattered. "Do you hobbits have any other hobbies besides genealogy?"

"Why yes. Sometimes we go off and follow stubborn dwarves into an adventure of a lifetime," Bilbo chuckled. "Now come inside, I bet you would like a bath before we eat. I already have the water nice and hot for you."

He felt grateful to hear it. As he went to the bathroom and stripped down to sink into the water, he felt his muscles ease gratefully, the bath salts feeling wonderful on his skin.

His mind idly wondered over where he could go to purchase some gold and stones to work on, maybe emeralds of a nice green shade. It was a color that suited his hobbit well. A decoration to match his door might be a good start to show him his affections. To have Bilbo do such nice things for him already made him feel lucky and treasured, and he wanted to return the feeling as soon as he was able to. Patience was one thing, but every kindness from the hobbit only made him feel more eager to move their relationship along to where it should be.

Bilbo would make such a wonderful husband, and he wanted to prove to him he could be as well.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for this coming out a little late. I know I promised a day or two, but computer ended up having some trouble. Thanks everyone for being patient on it. Let me know

what you guys thought of the chapter and the hobbits.

Lessons of Love

Chapter Notes

Oh man, this has been much too long since an update. Sadly my laptop with all the chapters and notes for this sadly died. I kept meaning to get it repaired, but so much other stuff kept piling up and when I finally did then I found out the darn thing was pretty much not going to be salvageable. It's not really an excuse for going so long without giving this any kind of update, but I did wish to explain so no one thought I had just gone and abandoned the work. It's still very much something I want to see worked on, and someday finished.

With that out of that way, I am happy to present chapter ten of this little drama.

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

There was a sure sign in the air that winter was going to be coming soon. Sigrid of Lake Town, now Sigrid of Dale, had spent her entire life on the waters. The feel of the moisture in the air, the creeping chill that seeped into your clothes and refused to leave, the importance of keeping the wood dry for fires that would be the only source of warmth, it was all deeply instilled in her. It had been that way since she was a child, even before she had taken over the duty of looking after her family. She might not be the oldest in Dale, far from it, but she had her own experiences and wisdom collected in the years of her life.

Winter was not far now. It would be a week at the most, but something told her they more likely had days. There was hardly any more time to make preparations, but they had made a good showing of it. The stores were full to burst, crates of grain, salted and cooked meats, and barrels upon barrels of fruit. The town had done all that they could to make sure they would have enough for the oncoming months and she had a feeling it would be enough for them if they were careful.

She sighed a little and looked down at her ledgers, wiping the sleep from her eyes. It had been long work and her father was busy enough to worry about this kind of thing. People trailed after him every moment of the day, asking his advice on matters of all sorts. The very least she could do was make sure the food was accounted for. Still, it was late and she had already woken up early on top of it. Dinner would have to be made soon as well. She could imagine poor Bain and Tilda were getting hungry. There was still some leftover soup from yesterday. It wouldn't be hard to heat it up again with some more water to make sure it was not too thick.

A yawn escaped her as she closed up her book and shoved it into her coat before locking up the door behind her. Twilight was quickly turning to night and she had to hurry home. The streets were already empty, torches and lamps outside of a few doors. Dale was still cold to her, still didn't feel like home. On the lake she could have closed her eyes and found her way

home, knowing the creak of every board under her feet, but here it was too different. She didn't know it, was not used to the feel of stone underneath her boots. She'd found herself having to raise her feet a little higher than what she was used to in order to avoid tripping over the stone, had to force herself to walk straight instead of leaning her body to one side or the other in order to compensate for the water rocking against the lumber keeping her town up above the water.

Her feet stalled at one corner as her gaze drifted off to a small little building. It wasn't much. A large chunk of the roof was missing and it was only the fact that it was a two story that it was livable at all, the first floor at least serviceable enough. Still, no one had wanted to take it, no one except...

She fretted a little before approached the door, giving a sharp knock. Tauriel never accepted an invitation to dinner. She only had once, those two weeks ago when the dwarves had come to see her. It had been an interesting night that one, the sudden declaration to marry by Kili. It had all gotten a little crazy then, Tauriel fidgeting and stammering for a full minute before suddenly standing up, thanking them for the meal and promising to come to see the dwarf in his mountain before rushing off. Kili had sulked and said that it hadn't been a yes, but his brother had been quick to assure him it wasn't a no either.

It had been impossible to get her sister to sleep that night, having to sit by her side at the bed while she babbled her excitement about the idea of a wedding and asking several times if she would be allowed to be a flower girl at the ceremony.

"I don't know if elves or dwarves have flower girls at their weddings," Sigrid had informed her, trying to tuck her in.

"Well, they should. You'll ask for me, won't you Sigrid?"

"I'll do my best to find out for you, promise. Now sleep."

She had barely seen the elf after that, either her or the prince. She could only assume Legolas had gone back home, but Tauriel was almost as scarce. While she came to deliver her kills every day, she refused to stick around and would only rush off before anyone could get a word out of her.

Sigrid didn't like to think she was the kind to pry, but she wasn't shy either and when it seemed like someone needed help, she liked to offer it. Her father had taught her that the strength of one person was tenfold in a community, that those that helped one another had a better chance to survive the world than one who refused to do anything for his neighbor. Bard had done his best to instill good values into his children and his eldest was no exception to that.

"Tauriel," she called. "It's Sigrid. Are you home?"

There wasn't any answer, but that only caused her to knock again.

"I know you're there. I can see the light under the door," she tried again. "Will you open the door, please?"

Sigrid chewed on her lip when she heard nothing, before suddenly giving a yelp.

"Heavens to the west! How did an orc get here?!"

The door opened a moment later, the elf-maid giving her an ill-amused look with an arched eyebrow.

"There are no orcs in the town. I would have heard them, even over your screaming," Tauriel informed her.

"Then why did you open the door?" she asked, confused.

"Because if I didn't you would have kept yelling that silliness and scared someone," she informed her. "Did you think I would have rushed out to your rescue?"

"I'm sure you would have if there really had been an orc," the human replied with a small smile. "Am I wrong?"

"No," she said tersely. "No, I suppose you are not. Did you need something?"

"I thought you might like to join us for dinner," she stated. "We have soup. I made it with the rabbit you caught the other day."

"Thank you, but no," she said with a shake of her head. "I already have bread and a little wine."

"That can't possibly be enough for you. You rush off to the forest and back every single day. Doesn't that build up an appetite?" she asked. "I'm sure even elves need to eat after all."

"We do," she admitted before she stood to the side. "All the heat will get out at this rate. Why don't you come in for a moment?"

The human woman stepped in and looked around. Despite the undamaged area being relatively small, it still felt homey. There was a thick blanket over a bed near the fireplace, and a single table and a stool to sit upon with a pillow on it. On the wall laid her weapons, bow, quiver and knives.

"I'm nearly out of arrows," the elf admitted. "Though since there will not be a need for hunting much longer I suppose that's a moot point."

"Yes, you've caught more than enough for us. We have you to thank for a lot of things. Without you I'm sure Da himself would have ventured out to hunt, and he really is needed here," Sigrid mentioned before seeing a pan set just above the fire, creamy looking brown bread in it. "This is your dinner?"

"Well, yes. It's filling. I think it's done too, actually. Would you like a piece?" she asked as she moved to take it away from the heat. "It always crumbles when I take it out of the pan, but it does its job to restore my strength."

"Wait, don't take it out yet. It'll-" Sigrid tried to say before the elf flipped the pan over onto a small table, sighing when it broke into pieces into a bowl. "You know, it comes out easier if it cools first."

Tauriel looked at her with impossibly huge eyes, and for the life of her, she could swear the hunter looked confused. Odd, she didn't think she'd ever seen a confused elf before.

"Oh... I assumed there was a problem the pan or something," Tauriel confessed. "Lembas is supposed to be flat after all, but this loaf pan was all I could find."

"Lembas?" Sigrid asked. "What is that?"

"It's a bread we elves eat during long travels or when food is scarce. It lasts a long time and is enough to fill a full grown person for a day," she confessed. "I... I don't know the recipe though, and I only had it once, centuries ago when I was still a child. You see, it's actually a very special food among my people. Not something we share often and only the highest of elves, our rulers have the actual recipe. Tales say it was once only known by an elf queen from ages past. I've been trying to make it from memory on how it tastes. It's been quite a few attempts now, with different ingredients. I tried making it sweeter today, to see if I could get it closer to how it's supposed to be."

"So it's kind of like cram?" Sigrid guessed. "Well, I guess cram isn't really fancy, and everyone here can make it. They're biscuits really, last forever, but taste bland and stick to your throat if you don't have anything to drink with it... so... uh... suppose it's nothing like Lembas."

She watched the elf laugh a little before picking up the bowl and holding it out to her.

"To be fair, this isn't really like Lembas either," she admitted. "So I suppose it doesn't hurt anything to let you try some. It smells sweeter than I remember though. I'm starting to think honey wasn't one of the ingredients."

Curious, the girl plucked up a small piece before popping it in to taste it, only to clap a hand to her mouth to keep from spitting it back out. It was so sweet it made her teeth ache and her head spin, as if she'd just shoved an entire honey cake down her throat in a few moments. It was a chore to swallow, much too sticky, and sadly she couldn't keep her expression neutral as she choked it down.

"It's... no good, is it?" Tauriel asked, the disappointment clear in her voice.

"You eat this every day?" Sigrid asked.

"Well, yes. I try a new variation each time. I guess I used too much then?"

"How much did you use?"

"Well, I found a jar today, so I used that."

Sigrid could only stare at her. The entire jar? No wonder it was so sweet. She didn't even think children like Tilda would be able to handle such a flavor.

"I can see that you were not being humble when you said you didn't have experience in a kitchen," she sighed. "We can give that to the pigs, if you don't take offense. No one is going to be able to stomach a meal from that, not even you I wager."

Tauriel seemed to look as if she'd just been dared and suddenly took a bite herself, only for her eyes to go wide and turn away. Sigrid imagined she was forcing herself to chew and swallow it just not to lose face. The girl pretended not to notice and look at anything else, not wishing to be rude.

"Giving Lembas to pigs," Tauriel breathed out. "Have I really fallen so far?"

"Oh wait now, don't be sad," Sigrid said quickly, wanting to cheer her up. "It's like you said before, it's not technically Lembas, now is it? Besides, that's not so bad, messing up a recipe when you don't know how to cook. When I started I was awful at it. I once accidentally dumped all the salt in a roast my mother was making and cried when I told her. You're learning, and on your own to boot. Now you just know your bread doesn't need a whole jar of honey. See?"

Tauriel turned back to her, looking unsure for a moment before smiling softly.

"Your words are very kind."

"And true. We all have things we do well, and things we don't," Sigrid assured her before fidgeting a little with her skirt. "After all, you're amazing. As fierce a warrior as my Da, strong, fast, and never once seem to flinch in a fight. When we were attacked in our home, I was no use at all. Barely able to keep Tilda safe, and in the battle I was just running around trying to dodge the fighting."

"Well, you haven't been trained how to fight," the elf pointed out.

"You haven't been trained how to bake. So we're even," she said before frowning a little. "Ah... unless it's rude to imply I'm equal to an elf? I always get the impression you're a very proud people and I-"

"It's perfectly fine to see yourself as equal to me," Tauriel cut her off, her tone actually quite sharp. "I am above no one, and I would never wish to be."

The firmness in her voice caught Sigrid off guard. She hadn't been expecting such strong words from her, but the elf only shook her head.

"My apologies. I didn't mean to come off as strong there, but I've been thinking about my place in this life quite a bit lately. Even before my banishment I didn't think I was better than anyone, though the solitude from my people has only proved it further," she admitted. "Change comes very slowly for elves, unaccustomed to it at all in some cases. It's been proving an odd transition for me, being among people like you who seem to hurry with everything."

Sigrid paused for a moment, wondering what it might be like to be in such a situation. True, Dale wasn't really her home, the lake was. It all felt different to her, but she had her family.

Many people important to her had survived the attack of Smaug and the battle. She was transitioning, but she wasn't alone. How must poor Tauriel feel right now, to have lost everything, her home, her friends and who knew what else?

"You're homesick," she guessed.

"That is one of the problems I face right now, yes," she admitted. "I had thought that I would have heard from Lord Legolas again, but it's been silent on that front. He hasn't sent me word about the treaty between Mirkwood and Erebor, though I have seen messenger birds fly between them at times. I'm sure no one has reason to keep me informed in the progress is all. I'm curious about what is going on in my old home, and yet at the same time I do not really want to go back. I do want to stay here. I can help here, and that is a more than worthy goal for one such as I. It's only that I also want to be back in Mirkwood... and I also want to be..."

"On the mountain?" Sigrid asked. It wasn't hard to guess, even for her who didn't know much about the situation. It didn't take a great mind to figure out flushed expressions and nervous responses after a passionate marriage proposal and love confession. It was clear to her Tauriel felt the same way, or at least very close to it.

The elf did not say anything to that, only placed the bowl of ruined bread down and stared into the fire for a moment. Sigrid let her take the time to collect herself, sure that this couldn't be easy for her. She herself had never felt love, in all the seventeen years she'd been alive which had to be laughably short to Tauriel, but even an inexperienced girl like her had a feeling it wasn't something to be taken lightly. Her father and mother had been completely blissful when she'd been a child, and losing her had nearly destroyed him. She still remembered how he'd wept when he lost her, and even how these days mentions of his lost wife were bittersweet to him.

Such deep feelings seemed to her like it would be terrifying, even if elated by them at the same time. Tauriel was carrying herself like someone never in love before, at least that's the way it seemed to her. Besides, it was no question that dwarves and elves did not get along. Even she knew that. There were plenty of tales about the animosity between the two. A dwarf going off and declaring his love to one? That had to be for the history books, she was sure.

"Do you love him, Kili I mean?" she asked. She expected some hesitation or blushing, but the elf only smiled sweetly.

"I have been asking myself that every waking moment since I first spoke to him," she admitted. "Not when I first met him, but the very first real conversation I had with him. He spoke of his mother and fire moons. He was charming in a foolish way, but also poetic and wonderful. He made me feel so at ease, and my heart flew just from his words. I do not know if it is love, but every time I stop to ponder it... I can not think of what else it could be."

She chewed her bottom lip a moment before a look of sadness crossed over her face.

"I know he waits for me, waits for my answer. The fact I could not give him one no doubt hurts him. I want to ease that hurt, I do... but it's... difficult. Lord Legolas probably believed he was helping, rushing the matter so, even if it's clear he does not care for dwarves. He cares for me and that is enough, but I still feel unsure. Love can be very dangerous to elves."

"Dangerous?" Sigrid asked. "How so?"

"We are eternal. It is said in our stories that even those that die remain as spirits in the heavens, never to move on. There are even tales that a very select few, special ones, can return after death. We do not die, not truly. We will go on forever... but those that have lost the ones they love... been separated from them, it is a horrid sorrow. Kíli was not even alive when Smaug attacked, but I was... already an adult then... and I will remain after he passes... and he will not remain as elves do, even in death. I know even now I will mourn him, but it seems it would be more painful if I were to give in."

Sigrid could not help but feel that was beautiful, sad and wonderful all in the same words. She'd been told of men's mortality, how it was called the doom of man. She'd seen her mother die, years before it should have been her time, and missed her terribly. How would it feel to face an eternity like that? Being an elf had to be truly wonderful and saddening at the same time.

Still, this didn't feel as if it were her business, and she had a feeling she was starting to intrude at this point. If Tauriel didn't wish company, it wasn't right to push it on her. It looked as if she had plenty of factors pulling at her right now. Being another force demanding her attention might not be good for her.

"If you like, I can show you how to make cram sometime," she offered, feeling a little less than graceful on the changing of the subject matter, yet she had to say something. "If you want to learn how to bake. It's an easy recipe, though a bland taste. Maybe... maybe we can try to add some of the things you've used to try to make Lembas? Might help the flavor. If you want to though."

She wiped her hands on her skirt, trying to think of a good way to leave before just turning away and heading to the door.

"Wait," Tauriel said suddenly, surprising her. "It's dark out. I should escort you home... just in case there are stray orcs about. You can hardly take care of yourself after all, like you've pointed out."

Sigrid didn't know why, but she couldn't help but giggle at the words and nod her head.

"Do you have any more bread?" she asked, to which the elf shook her head. "Well, then I'll bake some more for you. If you want to stay and eat more than that with us though, you're welcome to."

"I would probably just cause another awkward dinner like last time," the elf lamented.

"By all means, please do. It certainly entertains Tilda," she laughed before offering her hand to Tauriel. While the elf hesitated for a moment, she did take the gesture and walk out with her. In the human's mind, it was a grand accomplishment. "In all seriousness though, I'm not sure I entirely understand your fears. I've never been in love, but I'm sure this must all be a mess inside your own heart. If there's anything I can do to help, even if it's just to listen, then I'll be here for you."

"You seem so interested in my welfare. Why, may I ask?" Tauriel questioned, but Sigrid just shrugged.

"The same reason I held down a dwarf while you healed him. The same reason those dwarves helped protect my family, and the same reason you did. Because it's the right thing to do," she replied. "Does that seem strange to you?"

"No, no I actually quite like that about you," the elf confessed. "It is not a mindset I am used to, but it is one I find myself quite fond of."

Sigrid felt her face flush a bit at that and forced herself to laugh it off. Getting complimented by elves seemed to make her go into a bit of a little tizzy.

"You know," she said just as they reached her home, "considering the fact we traded with Mirkwood as Lake Town, and that they are our allies, it would do us good to know the relationship between the elves and dwarves. Perhaps tomorrow, I should go up there? As a representative of my father. Da is so busy trying to see to all the people in town, I do all that I can to lessen his load. Perhaps news of what is going on could help him. Of course, I wouldn't mind an escort... if you want."

"I am not sure I would be welcome there," the elf said.

"Tauriel, if I may be so bold, you said that he was waiting for you, that you know he is," she whispered. "Even if you do not say yes to him, do you not at least own him a discussion? Surely he would love to see you, even if only to talk."

The both paused in silence before she gently squeezed the woman's hand.

"I will be going to the mountain tomorrow one way or the other," she decided. "It is up to you if you wish to tag along. I will not press, but I do hope you do come."

The dawn rose languidly, like it always did. Sunlight splayed over the land, gentle and soft as it slowly lit up the world. Tauriel breathed in deep as she watched it. Somehow dinner had turned into staying the night, all the sooner to leave with Sigrid in order to go to Erebor. She'd already made several promises to Bard to keep the girl safe on the trip, short as it would be. He hadn't seemed happy with the idea of her leaving, but had admitted it was a good idea to keep abreast on the situation. Alliances were far more firm than they had been before the battle, but it was still something that would require work, and he was far too busy to go himself. Already he was getting ready to go and see to the many things the villagers still needed answers on, questions on rationing and rebuilding the town.

He truly was a king, even if he did not admit it yet. A crown would rest well on his head, a man concerned only for his people.

The elf pulled a stone from her pouch, running a thumb over the etchings of runes in it. She still did not understand why she had been given this. Where did she equate in a promise between a mother and son? Had it been a promise to return to her instead, to come for her?

How was the dwarf so sure of his feelings after so few meetings between them? How did he know this was right? Was it because his life was shorter than her own? Was he afraid to waste any time between them?

Did that mean in her waiting, she was wasting his time instead?

Sigrid was right, she did owe him an answer, and in her own heart she yearned to know what that answer was herself. Why could it not be simple for her too? She did not want these fears and doubts, to worry about what would come after time claimed him.

One way or the other way though, she knew that she had to face this. Whichever road she picked, it needed an answer. It seemed the world would no longer wait for her to decide this.

Her gaze perked up when she heard the door open and she quickly put the stone back where it was safe. This was not to be shared with anyone, not yet at least.

"Sorry for the wait. I had to make sure everyone had their breakfast first before we left," Sigrid said with a smile. True enough, she'd been awake for a while now, working in the kitchen and getting a meal warmed up for her family. Tauriel didn't understand how she can look so bright at this time of the morning since she'd gotten to sleep so late. Did she have no need for rest? "I'm ready to go now, if you are."

"I think I am, yes," Tauriel said. "Come. It's not a long trek but we shouldn't waste too much time."

"Then we're in agreement," she said as she patted at her hair and dress. There was still a little bit of flour in her brown locks and the elf reached for her, wiping it away. "Heh. Thank you. So then, let's get going."

They walked in silence, but it was a comfortable one. Tauriel was not sure when it happened, but it felt much less labored to talk to her now. Perhaps she was becoming more comfortable around her. She knew that it took her a while to warm up to someone at times, but when she did, they became very precious to her. Perhaps sharing her thoughts with Sigrid, without fear of being judged or looked down on, without the feeling she needed to prove her emotions were valid since the girl just accepted it, perhaps it had helped them become a bit closer. It felt like she could just talk to her, to not have to worry about the weight of her words. It helped her feel more at ease with her presence by an infinite degree.

The Lonely Mountain loomed closer and closer with every step they took. She could imagine after winter this road would be full of travelers and traders, but for now it was only the two of them. It would be good for life to return here, to have more green and more people. Maybe once winter was over it would become more lively for everyone.

Two dwarves were at the gate, donned in armor and both with axes in their hands. Sigrid hurried her step and approached first, bowing to the pair.

"Good morning and good fortune to you, fine dwarves," she said in a cheerful tone. "I am Sigrid, daughter of Bard of Dale. I come seeking an audience with the ones in charge of this mountain."

The two looked at her and then to Tauriel.

"The elf-maid," one muttered to the other. "Seems our prince can finally stop pacing."

"Uh... I'm sorry?" Sigrid asked.

"The prince has been by every morning to come and see if she'd stopped by," the other dwarf grumbled. "Eh, at least this way he'll stop hassling us while we have to work the morning shift."

"Oh, we're expected. That's good," Sigrid said to Tauriel with a smile, but nerves were starting to get the better of her. Her feet were feeling heavy and numb, unwilling to move her forward. No, she had to see this through. She'd come this far. Running now would be cowardly. "Can we come inside then?"

"You said you wanted an audience?" the first guard asked. "With who?"

"Well, I'll admit I'm not sure," the girl confessed. "I'm under the impression a possible trade agreement is to be formed between your people and Mirkwood. I have come to request details on what has been decided so far. Anyone that has had dealings in this would do, I suppose."

"Right. Come inside, I'll take you to Balin. He's been acting as council for now," he said before turning away from the pair and walking inside. Sigrid followed quickly afterward, but Tauriel had to take a deep breathe before walking inside herself. She'd never been inside of the mountain before, and she wasn't sure what was going to greet her.

Much like Dale, it seemed like a lot of work had been done. There was shattered stone and rock everywhere, but she had a feeling it had been much worse right after the altercation with the dragon. The shaking of the mountain had been felt from miles around and she could only imagine what it had done to try and kill all of the dwarves. This felt livable though, not too unlike her own home carved into the rock of the palace of Mirkwood.

She steeled herself against the thought that it was similar to her old home. She could not get too comfortable here, not yet. There were still matters of her heart she had to sort out. She needed to be tempered right now, think this out logically. She needed to-

"Tauriel!"

Her head jerked up at the sound of Kíli yelling and saw him at the end of the hall. His eyes were dazzling in delight and he ran toward her with a speed of a mad man. Before she could even say a word, he was barreling past the guard and Sigrid, nearly knocking them both over without even seeing that they were there.

"Kíli, I-" was all she got out before she found his arms around her, lifted up and spun around as he gave a happy cry.

"I knew you would come! I knew I would see you again," he said happily as he placed her down, his large hands resting on her hips, even as she trembled from the suddenness of all of

this. "I was just on my way to see if the guards had seen you today. I've checked every day for you."

"Yes, I heard. I'm sorry for not coming sooner. I simply..."

"Yes?" he asked her eagerly as she trailed off. "You've come with answer then?"

"I... I..." was all she managed to get out as he looked up at her. So much happiness in his face, love in his eyes, as if she were the only treasure in this mountain. It struck her so deeply she felt speechless. How could she, a mere lowly silvan elf, have lucked upon a love so true and devote? What had she done to earn this? Why did he give it to her so freely, to put his heart out for her to accept or reject with no regard or fear? How could just a look from him, a simple happy expression suddenly make everything feel right to her? Why is it that the answer came so suddenly to her when she'd agonized over it before? "Kíli... I... I do not know what lays ahead of us, but I know now that whatever happens I want to face it with you. Please... teach me to love as my husband?"

He pulled her down into a kiss and she felt her heart once again take flight and soar. She was sure sorrow would match this one day, that she would grieve and weep when he was gone, but she would not waste what time she had with him on fear, not when she could have something infinitely more beautiful and fulfilling.

Tauriel of Mirkwood did not yet understand love, but with him she was sure that she could, no matter what obstacle she would have to face in order to learn its lessons.

Chapter End Notes

I really, really hope that was worth the wait. Honestly, I truly do.

Our Promise

Chapter Notes

Okay, wow so it's been a long time since I've visited this story. The fact of the matter is there was a bit of a tiff with some people in the fandom. I won't get into too many details but there was some issue with my opinions on the movies. I'll say this now, if you enjoy the films more power to you. There's plenty good to it, but on the whole I think it's a weak film series. I can still more than appreciate the good elements though and I don't see the point of starting an argument because I don't think the films are flawless. Suffice to say that between my computer dying and taking a while to replace it, and the fact I was verbally berated online because I wouldn't say the trilogy was perfect(not on this site though, no worries on that), caused me to lose my taste for writing this particular tale. However, I've been thinking about it a lot lately and I wanted to give it another shot. The fact of the matter is most of you have been wonderful and very encouraging about this story and I'd rather focus on that than less than favorable experiences with some other fans.

That little bit of explanation out of the way, I should state the story will be staying with Erebor for a bit now. Readers might have noticed the stated timeline in the Shire is happening in the summer, while everyone is speaking about winter in Dale. This is because it's essentially happening just a while after Thorin left. At first, it didn't seem to matter much since I had not planned Tauriel and Kíli to be that important to the story, and I didn't even plan Sigrid and Fili at all until some kind readers informed me they'd love to see the couple. I'd figured at first there would be a few flashback scenes and then be done with it. However it morphed into this parallel story, so I've decided to stick with these two couples until the timeline is aligned properly. Don't worry, this doesn't mean ten or so chapters without Bagginshield or anything. Two or three, at the most, is what I'm thinking. Just enough to establish things, bring Erebor to summer too and move on with the story. So far it has been working well going back and forth, but I think this will just make it easier to keep it all straight later on as things start getting expanded upon.

That being said, who's ready for some motherfucking DWARVEN POLITICS?! Don't worry, it won't be as coarse and violent and I'm sure everyone is expecting.

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

The mountain was a sight to behold to Sigrid, there was no doubt about that. For a girl who had spent almost her entire life on the waters, it was altogether entirely different to be surrounded by stone. Of course, she hadn't had much time to fully take it in before she found a dwarf barreling past her to get to Tauriel. It hadn't been very polite, but she supposed all things considered it was understandable. Besides, as she watched the two, she had a feeling the sight of an elf and a dwarf of all peoples profess their need of one another was a much rarer sight than anything else in Erebor.

The guard grumbled as he picked himself up, glowering a bit. It didn't seem he had the same fascination for such a view.

"I imagine those two will carry on like that for a while," he said to the human. "Shall we continue on without them to Balin?"

"That would probably be for the best," she admitted as she looked on at Tauriel. She was getting to know the elf better, but obviously couldn't say she knew her well. Still, it seemed best this moment was allowed to be had privately between the two new lovers. It seemed there would be a wedding after all. She would have to remember to ask if flower girls were allowed in an elven or dwarvish ceremony.

For now she just followed the guard, quickly becoming lost over the stairs and walkways. She did her best to keep track of where they were going but it didn't take long for her to become hopelessly turned around. She kept turning her head this way and that to take in the sight, amazed at how the walls themselves seemed almost to sparkle under the torchlight, the green shade of them making them look as if they were carved out of giant slabs of emerald. Cranes and pulleys were everywhere as well, construction to make the mountain presentable again clearly underway, but if she had to be honest even with all the debris scattered around it still looked a wonder to her. She could understand why the dwarves had been so desperate to reclaim it such a jewel of a home.

After a while they came to a large chamber, the doors open and several dwarves inside standing around a long table, all older looking and debating harshly, or at least she could only guess that's what they were doing. She didn't know the language they were talking in but it sounded deep and rough to her ears, and some of them didn't look too happy as they spoke back and forth. Even though she didn't understand a word that was being said between all of them it didn't seem like something that was wise to interrupt, but she was already here and there was no turning back from it now.

The guard rapped hard on the door to get their attention, and the conversation died down as they turned to look at the pair interrupting. She looked over them, all bearded and fierce looking, until three of them came out from the crowd.

"Ah, Sigrid. What a surprise to see you," the oldest of the three said, and she sagged a bit in relief to see it was Balin. Fili was next to him, still with a cast on his arm and hung in a sling but no bandages on his leg any longer, though he did walk with just the slightest limp now. She didn't know the third one with them but he seemed enough on his own to catch the attention against everyone else in the room. He looked large and wild, and were those tusks braided into his beard? She glanced down and was shocked to see one of his boots was not leather or hide but instead a false foot made of metal. It took everything she had to tear her eyes away from the sight as she sincerely hoped that she hadn't been staring long enough to appear rude.

For a long moment she was a bit intimidated to stand before so many dwarves. She felt oddly small despite being taller than every single one of them. It took more than a few seconds for her to gather her skirts in her hands and courtesy low as she tried to remember her manners. Even those that knew little of dwarves knew that they were not the type of people that suffered insult.

"Sigrid, daughter of Bard, at your service," she said as she lowered her head a bit.

"Balin, to you and your family," the dwarf said, giving the polite response. "Whatever are you doing here, dear girl?"

"I came on behalf of my father to inquire about the progress of the treaty between the dwarves and elves, and how it might concern Dale," she explained. "He's interested in progress and how it might affect us."

"Wise inquiries, lass," the tusk-wearing dwarf said, his voice loud in a way that seemed to echo off of the walls yet gentle as he smiled brightly at her in a way she had not expected. "The fact of the matter is three people now live in these lands again. It would be best to have unity between us for prosperity's sake if nothing else."

Despite her best hopes, it hadn't exactly been the attitude she was expecting, especially from a dwarf so ferocious in look as him. Still, there was a refined manner to him as he took her hand and bowed deeply to her in a revered way she didn't think she'd ever been on the receiving end before.

"Dáin Ironfoot, son of Náin, at your service," he said. "Don't bother to go on to offer to return it to my family, or we shall be here all day as introductions are done all around."

He gave a laugh at that, throaty and kind, and it made Sigrid feel much more at ease in his presence. The dwarf was a fair deal more friendly than his looks might have suggested. Her experiences with dwarves had been limited so far, and had been relatively so-so if she had to be pressed to be honest on the matter, but she liked to think herself a sensible young woman and felt it was better to get along with someone than to try and come off as harsh or unapproachable. It was infinitely easier to handle a person who laughed than held a scowl and angry words.

"For now it seems there's mostly a trade agreement on the table," Balin explained. "Food stores are going to need to be maintained, and the elves love gems deeply. At the very least an agreement can come about from that. An alliance might come afterward, but with the battle over and the goblins and orcs driven from the lands no one sees the need to take up arms in defense of one another, at least not for a while anyway."

"There will still be wandering bands about, survivors that might get desperate enough to attack once the winter chill really sets in," Fili added in. "We're planning to take care of the ones we happen to find, if any, but a warning system to communicate with the others will be a good idea. I was thinking a fire signal would be a decent start, and we'll send out messages with the ravens where we can as well in case there's any trouble."

"That's a good idea," she admitted with a nod of her head. "I'll talk to Da about that. I'm sure he'd be more than willing to return the favor and warn you about any troubles that come to us, though hopefully it won't come to that."

"It seems that fortune favors those that prepare for doom," he noted with a soft snort and a smirk.

Balin looked between the two, a curious expression coming over his face as he did so. Suddenly, he placed a hand on the younger dwarf's shoulder and pushed him gently forward toward the female.

"It seems there might be a good exchange of ideas between you two, and plenty to keep you busy I am sure," he stated. "Perhaps you can show Sigrid around and more ideas can come to you, in interest of good relations between the Men and dwarves."

"I... right, of course," he said as he bowed his head a bit to both Balin and Dáin before they both went inside.

Sigrid could not help but notice this time the door was shut firmly behind the two after they went back inside. It was no mystery from the look on Fíli wasn't too happy about it, but why she couldn't guess.

"Go ahead and go back to your post," Fili said to the guard. "I'll see to her for now."

All too soon the two were left alone. The silence between them seemed to stretch on and she wasn't sure if she should say something or keep quiet. He wasn't exactly inviting any information forth about the confusing display that had happened just moments ago, and it might have been rude to pry. Still, the moment was becoming distinctly uncomfortable and she felt she just had to say something or otherwise her voice might die in the void of this quiet, never to return to her.

"Did I do something wrong?" she asked him, willing to take the blame for whatever was suddenly causing his black mood if only to get him to cheer up a little.

"Oh! Oh... no," he said with a little bit of surprise in his voice. It was like he had gotten lost in his thoughts and had forgotten she was even standing next to him. "It's nothing you did, trust me. It's just some debate going on right now concerning where we're going to go from here."

He rubbed the back of his neck with his good hand before sighing softly.

"There's some discussion... well, arguing really, over who is going to be the next King Under the Mountain," he admitted to her. "Balin is pushing for me. He seems to think I'd do a good job of it, once I have time to settle into the position. Not to mention it's what Uncle decided long ago, and I'm the oldest between me and my brother."

"Sounds like a lot of reasons to pick you," she noted. "Why the long face then?"

He looked around, a few other dwarves milling about, and he sighed again.

"Would you like to come with me to get something to eat?" he asked her instead. "I can explain better somewhere private, and I owe you a meal anyway after you put up with all the theatrics from my brother."

"You mean the boon turned proposal from an elven prince?" she asked with a bit of a giggle. It had been shocking at the time to watch happen, but still sweet despite the unorthodox

nature of it all. "Well, I have had breakfast but it was quite a climb up to the front gate. I'm sure I'll be famished by the time I'm back if I don't eat now. I'll be happy for a meal."

"Great. Come on, we can go get some from Bofur. He and Bombur have been keeping close watch on the larders, though I think he might just be keeping Bombur from taking advantage of an entire mountain worth of food to take advantage of," he laughed as he began to walk away.

"Are you alright?" she asked suddenly, not paying much attention he was saying about the other dwarves.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Your limp," she pointed out. It was not hard to keep up with him between her longer stride and the way he shifted his weight with every step he took. He didn't seem to be in much pain, but she'd been in her family long enough to know that didn't necessarily have to mean anything. Her father had a bad habit of always overworking himself and coming home exhausted only to insist he was fine, and she'd come to see her brother Bain starting to do the same thing as well. "You're not in pain, are you?"

"Oh, no. I've been healing well," he assured her. "Another couple of weeks and I'll be as new. If I sat around too much I'd just get stiff anyway, and Óin has been forcing nearly daily check-ups on me to ensure that I'm on the mend properly. Another few days and I should even have this off."

He lifted his bound arm in meaning, but she only found herself frowning a little bit at the sight. It reminded her of when he'd arrived at her home carried in a cart and hardly able to move without help. She'd immediately began to fuss over him, helping him eat since she'd known he wouldn't have been able to handle both the bowl and spoon at the same time. The same worry was born in her heart this time as she gently stopped him by placing her hands on his shoulders.

"The battle... it must have been horrible for you," she said softly, "to have been hurt so."

"I... Well, I'd like to say I'd seen worse but it would taste a lie," he admitted slowly to her. "I'm lucky to be alive."

"It was terrifying," she admitted. "I was so scared throughout all of it, sometimes it took everything just to keep moving. Knowing how hard my father and brother fought my and Tilda's sake makes me wish I could have done more back then. I think it's why I've been working so hard in Dale, to try and help to lift their burdens."

She paused for a moment before offering him a soft smile.

"Back in my home when the orcs came, you fought so hard to defend me, with no weapons at all," she said. Though to be fair, she knew a large part of it had all been to keep his brother safe but she could still feel touched that he'd jumped in right after she'd been attacked. "If there is anything I can do to help you with your burdens, just let me know and I will do my best for you."

The dwarf didn't meet her gaze at that. In fact, it seemed like he was looking at anything but her at that moment. Had she embarrassed him?

"Balin will be pleased to hear that, I'm sure," he eventually settled on saying. She couldn't help but give him a confused look though he didn't elaborate further at the moment. "Eh, just come along. I'll explain in a bit."

She trailed after him for a short while before he led her into an alcove that opened up into a much larger area with shelves and shelves of food along with a large kitchen with several stoves with places for firewood and grills atop them for cooking. Bofur was currently sitting back on a chair with his feet kicked up and a pipe clenched between his teeth, smoking trailing out from the bowl of the pipe and lingering in the air around his hat. When he saw the two of them, he gave a smile and stood up to greet them.

"Well, isn't this a surprise?" he asked. "Welcome to Erebor, Sigríð."

"Thank you," she said with a little bow.

"We were hoping for some lunch while we discussed some business," Fili told the other dwarf. "Think we can get something to eat and drink? I could really go for a pint anyway after this morning."

"Aye, bet you can," Bofur chuckled. "They still arguing?"

"Like the wind howls," he sighed out before looking to Sigríð. "Anything to drink for you? We have some wine here, pretty sweet tasting."

"Oh, thank you, yes," she said.

The two ended up with a goblet and tankard respectively, along with a place each of roast beef and potatoes to go with it. Bofur didn't join them to eat, instead Fili pulling her away to sit away in a corner. She wasn't sure the need for privacy but she respected the fact that the dwarf seemed to feel it was needed. Clearly if he wanted to talk where no one could hear them, it wasn't her place to argue.

"So, what's wrong?" she asked him, because it was obvious to her in all of his actions that he was feeling somewhat distressed. It was as clear as day to her and she didn't feel as if it would help to beat around the bush.

"It's the debate," he admitted. "There's been arguing about this for days now and I'm kind of at the end of my rope. I don't want to show that it's getting to me, but well..."

He rubbed a bit at his face with his free hand before shrugging.

"Like I said before, they're trying to decide who should be the next king. I have a lot of support for the reasons I told you before, but it's not as secure as you might think," he explained. "After Thorin's actions they're worried about me, that I might end up the same as him and grow sick in the mind. I'm young and an unknown to them. After all, most of the dwarves here are from the Iron Hills. Some of them originally from Erebor and remember the

calamity as it came, and while it's not like my great-grandfather summoned Smaug or anything there's whispers his insanity didn't help. The ones who never lived here and were only here to help for the siege also have lived a long time under Dáin and know him to be a wise and just ruler. There are some who want him to stay here and rule the Lonely Mountain instead."

"And you want the throne?" she asked.

"It's more that I was always raised to take it," he answered. "I'm not against it, and I'd like a chance to prove I could do right by my people if I am chosen but I never expected it to come about like this. Balin believes I'm the best choice and he's thrown his support behind my claim, and is doing everything he can to show the others the wisdom behind it. It's why he sent me off to you, since you're the oldest daughter of Dale's new ruler. If we are seen getting along and working well together, he can use that to show how well the position will fit me. I guess saying it like that makes it seem like he's using you though..."

"Well, maybe a little but it's not in a bad way," she admitted to him before giving him a reassuring smile. "I don't mind. I don't know anything about ruling anything but there is wisdom about allies you know and all that. So then, what about Dáin? Will he be upset that we're talking like this?"

"No, I doubt he'll mind. He's experienced and despite us sharing the same blood connected to Thrór, has never shown a single sign of dragon sickness. Of course, his home is in the Iron Hills and he's made it clear he'd be happier to return there and rule those lands, but he's also said he'll stay if that's what is decided. Right now it's all a mess, and nothing is helped by the fact almost everyone here is from the Iron Hills. Things will probably be delayed until there are more dwarves from other lands like the Blue Mountains in order to have it be less of a lopsided vote. It's becoming a bit of a mess in my opinion. There's even a couple voices saying that Balin should lead us, or Kíli."

"Kíli? Really?" she asked. She didn't know the dwarf well, most of their time together had been while he'd been sick, but he seemed a bit rash and impulsive. Was that really the right choice?

"It's just because of Tauriel," he admitted. "He's been running around since he was asked to marry her. In his excitement he might have allowed his tongue to wag a little too much. Some want him to take the throne just so he won't be able to accept."

"What?" she asked, shocked. "That's horrible, and why would that even affect anything in the first place?"

"As king, Kíli will name an heir, and while he could just name a dwarf it would be better if he could have his own children for a direct line," he explained. "We're not the youngest of Durin's line right now, but very close to it. If the family continues, it will need to be with children. As far as anyone knows a dwarf and elf have never been in a relationship, much less bore a child. No one knows if it's even possible, and if it is then... an immortal child with possible elf loyalties in Durin's line is..."

He didn't meet her gaze, just staring at his drink before taking a big gulp.

"Politely put, they just think the union would be a bad idea," he supplied.

She had a very distinct feeling it hadn't been put so politely in these debates.

"Even I have my doubts. I want Kíli to be happy, and if it's with Tauriel then the more power to him but this isn't the first time he's acted rashly about something, though I'm more worried about him getting hurt than anything concerning politics. He's made it clear though he doesn't care, telling everyone and anyone that she's his future and he won't budge on it. Which would be fine if there wasn't the whole future of our people hanging on all of this."

"But wasn't it a boon?" she asked as fidgeted a bit, realization dawning on her about the trouble she might have caused by convincing the elf to come here and accept Kíli's proposal.

"Yes, but that was just an excuse Kíli made up to go see her. It wasn't actually officially sanctioned, but it's also a manner of honor. They figure putting him on throne will be a good enough loophole to just ignore it, and they're hoping it will give him enough sense to say no to her. Then again, she hasn't been by to accept so it might not even be an issue."

Sigrid swallowed thickly, looking at the wall about five inches above the dwarf's head and felt sweat began to gather at her neck from her nerves.

"What?" he asked her.

"I... I might have convinced her to say yes. She's already here."

He stared at her in shock and she could only weakly shrug in response, not knowing if she should apologize or not.

"Well... I guess... Oh, Mahal have mercy," he groaned eventually before he smiled. "He'll be so happy, the whole mountain will know by nightfall. He'll never take the throne now, not if she can't come with it. Ah... Well, all's well that ends well I suppose."

"You're not upset?" she asked but he only shook his head.

"They're in love. Hang all the rest. I'll figure it out somehow," he replied before getting started on his food, though he struggled a bit with his knife.

"Oh, let me," she said after a few minutes of him trying to get the meat to cut properly, smiling at him. Swatting his hand away when he wouldn't give up the knife, she held the food up for him on the fork.

"I can eat on my own," he grumbled a bit but she just ignored him, blaming the stress for his attitude.

"You didn't mind with the soup," she reminded him with a small laugh. "Well, I'm glad that I didn't do the wrong thing, it just seemed so romantic for them to be in love. I couldn't imagine having those feelings myself, but if I happened to find them I would want to be with the one who could make me happy."

Fíli looked thoughtful as he chewed before eventually swallowing and allowed her to wipe away a bit of gravy on his lip.

"I suppose it's with its merits."

She wasn't sure what he meant by that, but he refused to say any more on the matter.

The bedspread felt warm and soft against Tauriel's skin, laying against it and rubbing her cheek gently against the thick and furry fabric. She felt more relaxed than she had in over a month now, not since she had first met the dwarf that was currently laying down next to her. The bed was much too small, her boots hanging off the edge even with the way her knees were tucked up. Between the two of them there was barely any room on the mattress, but she didn't find herself minding.

"I feel like we're hiding away in here," she noted to Kíli as he stared at her, a small and crooked smile on his lips. He hadn't stopped the expression since she'd said yes to him, even as he grabbed her hand and pulled her away to his bedroom so they could have some privacy. Their moments together so far had been rare and short, leaving him to want to indulge as much as possible. She had to admit, she was enjoying it, just laying here with him and watching him watch her.

"We kind of are. I just want to have you to myself for a bit before we officially get started," he told her.

"Started on what?" she asked.

"Courting. It'll be involved and dragged out a bit," he explained. "You do want to get married here, right, or would Dale be more acceptable to you? I can't imagine it'll be in Mirkwood, what with you getting banished and all? That hasn't changed, has it?"

"No. I still am not welcome back as far as I know," she confessed. Not that she had bothered to ask, but as far as she knew there was no real reason to. "I imagine it will be easier to do in the mountain, though I confess I know nothing about courting, dwarf or otherwise."

"Really?" he asked, sounding surprised. "What about your parents? Didn't they tell you how they met and fell in love?"

"I lost them both to orcs when I was very young," she admitted to him. "I know next to nothing about romance or the pursuit of it. I know ceremonies of course and have seen a marriage or two between elves but that's about it, and that is all very clinical. The emotions behind all of it are still very new to me. It's why... it's why I took so long to reach out to you. I wasn't sure what I was doing. I'm sorry for that."

He traced a hand over her cheek before leaning in to kiss her gently, the action soft and chaste, but with all the acceptance behind it that it made her heart ache so sweetly.

"It's okay. We're together now," he said. "We'll make it work. Well, I guess dwarf courting is the way to go then but if there's any traditions from your culture you want to see observed

then just let me know. This needs to be special for the both of us."

"What do your people's traditions entail?" she asked, willing to follow him in this. She really had meant it when she'd asked him to teach her how to love.

"It's mostly giving gifts, proving your worth as a partner to be able to support each other and to show that you know their mind and heart as your own," he explained. "They're supposed to be ones that would mean a lot to the one you gift them to. Traditionally you're supposed to make them, but a rich dwarf can also buy them to show that you are able to provide in wealth. There's no specific number required, just done until the ceremony takes place. I'll need to make at least three for you though before we can exchange vows."

"Only you? Will I not present gifts to you as well?"

"Well... I don't know if you craft or anything," he admitted. "You don't have to if you don't want to."

She didn't actually make many things, she had to admit that. Still, it felt important to do this respectfully, and it would be nice to show him her appreciation to him.

"I will do my best to show my worth to you as well," she promised before she dug into a pouch and pulled out the stone he'd given to her for safekeeping. His eyes lit up at seeing it.

"You kept it," he breathed out happily.

"Of course I did. It was a promise," she informed him. He reached out for her, their fingers meeting over the smooth stone, interlacing between them. His hand was large and warm in comparison to her own, rough while hers would always stay smooth despite her many years as a warrior. Such was the gift of her blood, for physical wear to never touch her. One day he would be wrinkled and gray but she would still love him. The stone would stay smooth and her feelings for him would never fade. She no longer felt the need to fight them, and felt foolish for even thinking she should in the first place. "A promise between us that I would return to you. It is all that matters now."

"I feel so lucky," he breathed as he rested his forehead against hers. "I have never felt anything like this."

"Im will mel cin na i meth," the elf-maid breathed to him.

"What does that mean?" he asked her softly.

"Just another promise," she informed him with a soft smile. "How long until we must leave this room? I imagine the others will come looking for you soon?"

"Let them look. I'm perfectly happy here," Kíli replied. "Why should I want to be anywhere but here with my future wife?"

It should have felt odd to think of herself in those words and yet instead it felt just right to her, perfect and meant to be. Something inside of her felt like it was coming alive, like a blossom in its first bloom of spring. Kíli was so sure of himself and of them, had a

confidence she had never truly felt. In her centuries of life she had never truly ever belonged, not really. There had been doubt and worry, yet now with him it all felt so clear. There was something special between them and she wanted to see it become stronger as time went on. With him she was home and her need of him no longer frightened her. It made her want to face the future, not shrink away from it.

"I will need to return to Dale for a short while," she confessed to him. "Some of my things are still there, and I will need to see Sigrid home safely as well. I will return though, in a few days at the longest. That is, if it is okay for me to live here?"

"Engagements usually have two people living together before marriage," he said. "It's to make sure that they compliment each other well before the final act of taking vows. It's not needed, but it's frowned on to do otherwise. A lot of courting is practical that way, proving we can compliment each other rather than a lot of romance. You'll find dwarves are more for rational thinking than flights of fancy."

"Except for you," she pointed out. He'd seemed to have decided he loved her after only three total meetings.

"I mean, well..." he scoffed before snuggling closer to her, not that there had been that much room between them in the first place with the small bed. "I guess I do come off as a bit impulsive, don't I?"

"Perhaps, but I find myself enjoying it. You have a way about you that is wonderful, to be so strong in your convictions. I must warn you... there might be times I seem hesitant, but that is more a reflection on myself than my feelings for you. I don't want to accidentally hurt you if there are moments that I don't know what I'm doing. I will treat your heart as best I can though, I promise you that."

"With this position of where your knee is, you're more likely to hurt my groin," he teased before she snorted and shoved him off the bed, luckily him laughing as he fell off it. "Okay, I deserved that."

Chapter End Notes

Translation, "I will love you to the end." I just love Sindarin. It's a very romantic language. Kíli, on the other hand, is still the big goof that he was in the movies.

As for Sigrid and Fili, things are just starting with them. I've got some ideas on how to get them moving but right now there just being friendly with a couple hints between them on how they could complement each other. Sigrid is not a complete blank page but there isn't a lot to her either. Most of what we know about her personality actually comes from interviews, that she's the oldest and that her mother died by giving birth to Tilda and from that Sigrid had to step up and start taking care of the house. Considering the age difference between her and her sister is only something like seven years, that is a big

responsibility for a girl that age. It gives her a well-meaning and caring kind of coloring to her personality, at least to me. Also a bit of a mother hen. Anyway, what do you guys think?

Start of Something New

Chapter Notes

This ended up coming out so short I actually feel ashamed of it, but this chapter ended up kicking my butt. As cute as Tauriel and Kíli are, the fact of the matter is there is just NOTHING with them in the movies. They don't bond over that much except starlight and there was little interaction with them as characters to cover things like interests or what they'd have in common. "Because it was real," just... Yeah. I found myself on such a stumbling block because I didn't know what to honestly do with them. Like I knew in my head the direction I wanted them to take, but actually writing it fought me every step of the way.

So I do sincerely apologize. This feels far from my best work, but I did my best. Hopefully the next one will be better.

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

It was a bright day outside. The sun was shining strong and not a single hung cloud in the sky. Kíli tried to take it as a sign, some show of good fortune for today's proceedings. Winter would no longer wait despite the bright day, one could easily feel the cold in the air. They had days, at best, before the first snow fell and blanketed the land. This respite in the weather, blessing or not, would be a brief one.

There was no doubt that's why the gathering was happening today, in the middle of Dale. Kíli looked around at the three races all here, talking over a long table with papers laid out so all could see. Thrandruil and Bard were present, as was Dáin right next to Fíli. There was still debate among the dwarves on who should lead them so of course they both had to be present. Kíli was glad that he'd abdicated the throne himself shortly after getting his answer from Tauriel. He hadn't even waited a day after she'd left to announce that he would forsake any future kingly duties in order to have her without issue. Despite popular opinion, he wasn't an idiot. Naive, maybe. Rash and bold, most certainly. He was not stupid though. He understood having a future with an elf would mean certain sacrifices, but he'd never thought he'd get the title of king anyway. The young dwarf didn't even much want it.

Speaking of which, he felt a little fidgety in the crowds. There were plenty of people to witness the signing of the treaty between the three races, well trade agreement but it was only a matter of time before it grew. Among them were wagons of food, and carts of gems and gold, all waiting to be exchanged. He wasn't looking at any of the people though, instead glancing over at the elf-maid in question who was currently on his mind. She was standing among the humans, particularly Bard's children, making her relatively easy to spot.

It had been three days now since he'd seen her when she'd visited him. Her need to return to her temporary home in order to pack had been necessary but once this was all over she would

be returning home with him to Erebor. Honestly, he would be happy when this was all over and he could take her back with him.

Craning his neck a bit in an attempt to catch her gaze, he grinned wide when she glanced in his direction and their eyes met. He couldn't resist the urge to wave at her a little, not obvious enough to drag attention to himself but a slight raise of his hand and wiggle of his fingers. She glanced away for a second as if to check if anyone was looking before waving slightly to him as well. Grinning wide at the attention, it only lasted a second before he found himself elbowed roughly in the gut.

"Pay attention," Dwalin hissed as the younger dwarf did his best to force himself to try to breathe again after the wind had been knocked out of him. The warrior sure did know how to put some force into his blows, no doubt about that.

"Sorry," he grumbled as he rubbed at his stomach, though he did catch Tauriel smile just a little bit. The show of it was faint, only a slight curl of her lips upward and it was gone after a moment, but he enjoyed the look all the same. He hadn't seen her smile much yet since most of their time together had been complicated, dangerous or both. Being able to witness it now was worth the whole ceremony as well as the blow from the grumpy dwarf right next to him.

While it would be best to pay attention to what was being said between the three parties, he wasn't all that interested. It wasn't that it was even boring or anything like that. It was simply... well he kind of expected it would be like what had been in place before. He'd grown up hearing older dwarves talk about the mountain and what life had been like there. Though he'd never seen Erebor before they had arrived on their journey, everything had been recounted to him and all the other young ones time and time again by those that remembered it. Thorin had always put a dark twist on it, moody whenever he spoke of his old home, though Balin and some others had been more kind and grandiose about it. The treasures and payments, trade and everything else would probably all be the same. For the exception of the Men, just about everyone else here had been alive ages ago when there had been peace in the valley before the dragon. There wouldn't be much sense to go for anything terribly different than the same trading that had been in place before Smaug.

He wanted to catch Tauriel's eye again, but he knew better than to risk it. He'd probably get caught again anyway. One slip up could be excused or explained away but another would no doubt earn him a talking to. Worse yet, it might end up making his brother look bad. Kili was really pulling for Fili to become the next King Under the Mountain. Not that he thought his removed cousin didn't deserve it but it had always been understood who would inherit after Thorin. All his brother needed was a chance to prove himself and things would work out for the best. Of course, that did mean as good as Fili would have to look to the other dwarves, Kili himself would have to be careful too. It wouldn't do the older brother any good if rumors started to spread about Kili being a bit of a wild child.

Which was tough, seeing as how he kind of was. He was pushing his luck enough by taking an elf as his wife. There was no illusion to him that it would be completely smooth sailing, but he hoped some goodwill would help that along. The last thing he wanted was for his intended to be uncomfortable in the courtship. He supposed he'd have to learn to start seeming more regal and responsible for a lot of people's sake.

Still, he really wanted to see her smile again.

After about another hour, it was done. Horns and trumpets blew, filling the air along with cheers from the people. It didn't take long for the crowds to break up a bit and start to mingle to talk and discuss what had just been witnessed. The dwarf himself made a beeline for his One, eager to talk to her now that there wasn't a constraint on where they'd be standing of all silly things.

"How's your stomach?" she asked him before he could even say hello. He could swear there was a hint of amusement in her voice.

"Oh, it'd take more than that to bother me much," he assured her, patting his belly under his shirt and coat. He tried not to wince as it stung. Oh well, maybe she'd take pity on him and give him a kiss for it later on if it bruised.

"That did feel like it took a while," Bain said as he stretched his arms over his head. "Do these things always take so long?"

"It's not over just yet. You're going to have to help me catalog what we're putting in for storage," Sigrid informed him, earning her a groan. Kili didn't envy him the work. "Bring Tilda over to Da. He'll feel more comfortable with all this ceremony with her around anyway. After that, come back to the carts so we can get to work."

"Better than starving this winter, I guess," Bain muttered but scooped up his younger sister all the same and made his way to his father.

"Looks like it never stops for you, does it?" Kili asked.

"No, but Bain is right. It is better than going hungry. I would know," Sigrid replied before her face going pink. "That is to say... I mean, there was food most of the time. It's just that... Uh, never mind."

Kili didn't think there was any shame in coming from meager means, but he didn't say anything about it. He wasn't sure if it would help or if it would come off as pity. Even exiled, he had grown up not wanting for too much. His uncle and parents had worked hard to make sure he and his brother had always had what they needed, prospering in the Blue Mountains.

"It will be time for my departure soon, Sigrid," Tauriel told her, maybe to change the subject for the girl's benefit. "A shame we never got to our baking attempts."

"We can start in the spring if you like," Sigrid offered with a smile. "I'm sure we'll see each other lots when the weather isn't so oppressive."

"I... I think I would like that," the elf replied before she suddenly found herself engulfed in a hug. Kili had to bite his lip to hide his mirth for the surprised look on her face even as Sigrid let go.

"I'll miss you," the human said softly.

For a second Tauriel didn't respond before she nodded her head.

"I'll miss you too," she confessed.

"Well, I better get to work. No sense to dawdle," Sigrid said before she wiped her face. The dwarf couldn't help but notice her eyes were a bit wet. "This is so silly. You won't be gone for that long. I just feel like I'm saying goodbye to a friend I haven't even been able to get to know that well yet. Well, goodbye then. Oh, and please tell Fíli I said hello and I hope everything works out for him."

She turned and ran off before either could respond, leaving Kíli a little confused. Had that girl and his brother been talking or something? One could think he'd have mentioned it. Then again, things had been busy for the both of them. He'd have to remember to ask about that later when he passed the message along.

"Are you ready to go or did you want to wait around a little bit?" he asked Tauriel once they couldn't see Sigrid among the other humans, her figure completely merged in with the other people.

Tauriel glanced over at the crowd of elves and he followed her gaze, seeing the king and prince of the forest among the other elves. There was a hint of sadness to her eyes, an old and quiet sort of expression. He hated the look, wished it could just wipe it away.

"He'll be leaving now. I can tell," she noted. Kíli didn't need to ask who she was speaking of. It was clear the one in question was Legolas.

"Do you want to go over there and say goodbye to him?" he asked, not the slightest bit jealous or worried of her intentions. It was hard to say goodbye to friends and she'd more than proven she'd accepted his own feelings for her. He was even grateful, in a way, to the blond elf so there was no reason for any ill will towards him over any kind of potentially imagined slights.

"I suppose I must or otherwise there might not be another chance for a long time," she agreed. Gripping her hands tightly into fists, she took a few steps forward before looking over at her shoulder at him. "You may come along if you wish... Ah, that is to say, will you come along with me? I didn't mean to make it sound like I would tolerate it. I'd actually like your company and support..."

"You're cute when you're flustered," he chuckled. "Don't worry. I won't hold any flubs against you. We're both new at this after all."

"I'll still try to make sure it's not too often," she stated before taking in a deep breath to steady herself and went forward with him.

In all actuality there wasn't much point to him coming along except to stay by his intended's side for the moral support. Aside from her, they spoke in Elvish and he didn't understand a word of it. While she responded in the common tongue, probably to allow Kíli to be part of the conversation, she really needn't have bothered. With her replies short he wasn't getting much meaning from just what she was saying. There was a bow of her head to the two members of royalty, though he was surprised when an elf standing close to the king smiled a

bit at her and held out a dark green bottle with some rose-colored liquid inside. She took it and cradled it to her chest before smiling back at him.

"Thank you. I hope you have a good life," she whispered softly before suddenly turning around and walking away, her free hand gripping the dwarf's tightly.

"What was all that about?" he found himself asking.

"That was... Well, it doesn't matter much now," she confessed to him. "He is the personal servant of King Thranduil, a butler of sorts. He's fond of the wine and we would drink together occasionally. Aside from Legolas he was one of my few friends. He gave me this as a wedding present."

"Oh. That was kind of him. Did... Do you want to invite him to the ceremony when it happens?" he asked.

"He won't come," she replied, the softness in her voice from before becoming a bit hard. "The king informed me I'd doomed myself to-"

Her voice cut off before she scoffed.

"It doesn't matter what was said. I wanted this choice," she said as she squeezed his hand tightly in her own. She looked down at him and smiled, and he was glad to see it was a genuine one. "Come now. Let's go home. I want you to tell me everything I need to know about your courting rituals."

"If you want, though it's a bit early. I imagine there's a bit of a celebration to be had here," he mentioned, though if he were being honest he wouldn't mind having her all to himself all the sooner.

"We can beat the foot traffic back up the mountain," she reasoned, and that was all the persuading he needed to agree.

It didn't take too long to leave Dale, the elf already having packed most of her things in a traveling pack. Once her things were collected, they headed up the mountain. A few others were heading back early as well, but they were either far behind them or a ways ahead. It left the pair alone for the moment.

"Nervous?" he asked her. "This will be a pretty big change for you, living among dwarves."

"I will do my best, but I have a long memory. I was alive long before the dragon attacked," she informed him. "Though I will confess that I've never been inside except when I came to see you a few days ago. How will this work exactly? Will I be expected to only interact with you or will I be allowed to wander about on my own?"

"You know, I'm not sure," he confessed. "I already arranged a room for the two of us to live together, but I haven't been able to get you your own bed yet."

"I see," she said coyly, causing him to flush a bit.

"I'm not being untoward here," he protested. A shameless flirt he may be, but he was going to do this properly with her. "It's just we don't really have beds your size is all. I had to get one ordered for you, which is going to take some time."

"Is that one of your gifts for me?" she asked him curiously. "For the courtship, to prove you can provide for me?"

"Ah, not officially but I suppose it could count," he said. "I mean, I did buy it for you, and I asked it to be nice with silks and the like to... uh... Well, it's going to be nicely carved. I ordered it with decals like leaves and birds to make it feel more like home to you."

"I'm afraid you have me at somewhat of a disadvantage," she confessed to him. "I've little to no money and there are very few things I can craft at all. I'm not even sure what I would make for you, and you're already going to all this effort for me."

"You know, it's not unheard of for a dwarf to go to the effort of learning a new skill purely for courtship," he assured her. It wouldn't do for her to get discouraged and think she wasn't good enough for him. "I'm sure there would be an apprenticeship you could get. If you're that worried about it that is. Honestly, Tauriel just being with you is a gift for me. You could give me a lump of clay you only spent a few minutes on and I'd be satisfied."

"No. It's important that I treat this with as much dignity as we can manage. I'm no fool. I know there are dwarves in your mountain that won't be happy with me living with you or in Erebor at all. If I'm going to gain anything more than begrudging acceptance then I need to show that I'm willing to honor your way of life."

"Well, I think with that attitude it will all work out," he reassured her with a smile. He stood up on his tip-toes to give her a small peck on the cheek before they continued on. "So is fighting really the only talent you have?"

"Yes. I would have probably learned cleaning and some skills like sewing and the like when I was young if not for losing my parents. The king took pity on me and fostered me, raised me when I was but a girl. To be fair, I didn't want for much, and when I got older I found fighting suited me well. I ended up taking up the bow and arrow, along with other weapons, and eventually joined the guard. Over the years I worked hard and moved up the ranks until I made the rank of captain," she said before she trailed off, seemingly lost in thought.

"Actually... maybe there is something..."

"What is it?" he asked her eagerly, but she only poked his nose.

"I think I will keep it secret for now," she stated.

"Aww, no fair. I told you about the bed," he protested.

"You don't even know if the bed counts or not. Besides, it's only a small idea. I'm not sure if it will work as a proper gift or not. Give me some time to think it over before I go any further."

"Alright, fair enough. Making gifts for you will take me some time too, and surprises would make it more fun," he relented. True, he was really curious about what she had apparently

thought up, but he supposed he would just have to be patient about it.

Granted, he wasn't a very patient person but he'd struggle through if he had to.

Once in Erebor, he led her to their room, explaining how to get there and what landmarks to look for. The walls were marked everywhere for directions on where the main halls were, but he doubted very much she knew the language and the smaller paths might throw her off.

"For now, just stick with me," he said to her with a grin. He had learned the lay of Erebor fairly quickly but he was used to living in mountain ranges and underground already. "You'll pick it up before too long."

He took the time to help her unpack her possessions, though he couldn't help but notice she didn't have that many. That was going to have to change. She didn't strike him as a very material person but his share of the treasure would set him up for life. He was going to spoil her with all the fine things that he could manage to get his hands on. She deserved to be in the finest clothes with jewels of all shapes and colors to decorate her features, to just be showered with affection, acceptance and love. The dwarf was determined to show her just how deeply he valued her.

Though a greedy part of him was still anxious to know just what she planned to give to him.

Chapter End Notes

Again, I know it's short. I will sincerely try my best to up the production quality for the next chapter.

UPDATE and happy Hobbit Day

Chapter Notes

Not an actual chapter, just a fast update for readers.

Hello! First off, I should point out this is not a chapter. I'm sorry to anyone who got an update alert in their email and rushed over to read. If anyone is still following this story with that much anticipation. After a year without an update, I sort of doubt it but you never know.

Second off, happy hobbit day. September the 22nd, maybe it have found you all in good health and good cheer. I wanted to post an actual chapter to celebrate the day, but well... that sort of leads into point three.

I want to come back to this story and make a decent attempt to finish it, but my life the last year has been hectic to say the least. To give a fast run down, my family has been facing some drama. Nothing alarming, I assure you, but concerning a hopeful adoption. Due to legal reasons I can't say more than that, and I can't answer any questions so please don't ask. It has however led me to have to move over 2,000 miles to be closer to my extended family and has been going on since last October. I've also had to take a job that is taking up about sixty hours a week on average, usually with only a single day off to take care of any errands around the house that must be done. This is leaving little time for much of anything. If you see my page, I've barely updated anything I've been working on.

I'm not saying any of this to complain, merely to explain where I've been this last year. Family is and always will be very important to me, and as much as I'd rather bury myself in my writing, real life will always have to come first. On the other hand, I kind of hate how I've done nothing for my own hobbies in so long, so I'm announcing a return to the story! I'm going to be rearranging my schedule so I spend at least one hour writing every day. It might not get updates out very fast, but it will at least be better than going 12 months without so much of a word.

Note, this update will be deleted in a day since it's not an actual chapter, but simply letting anyone who's still interested in this story know I do plan to return to it as soon as possible.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!