

Winter Is Coming

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9440030) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/9440030>.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Rating: | General Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings |
| Categories: | F/M , Gen , M/M |
| Fandoms: | The Hobbit - All Media Types , The Hobbit (Jackson Movies) , The Hobbit - J. R. R. Tolkien |
| Relationships: | Bilbo Baggins/Thorin Oakenshield , Thorin & Fili & Kili , Thorin & Dis , Fili & Kili , Dwalin & Balin , Ori & Dori & Nori , Bofur & Bombur & Bifur , Óin & Glóin , Glóin & Gimli , Glóin/Glóin's Wife , Bombur/OC |
| Characters: | Bilbo Baggins , Thorin Oakenshield , Balin , Dwalin , Fili , Kili , Dis , Bofur , Bombur , Bombur's Wife , Bifur , Óin , Glóin , Glóin's Wife , Gimli , Nori , Dori , Ori - Character |
| Additional Tags: | Battle of Five Armies Fix-It , Battle of Five Armies - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies , Alternate Universe - Post-Battle of Five Armies , Consort Bilbo Baggins , Consort Under the Mountain , Hobbit Consort , Hobbit Culture & Customs , Alternate Universe - Bilbo Remains In Erebor , Hobbit in Erebor , Fell Winter , Food is Important to Hobbits , Especially in Winter , PTSD , Dwarf Culture Porn , Hobbit Culture Porn , Eating Disorders , Food Anxiety , rationing , Mentions of starvation during Hobbit Fell Winter , self-inflicted severe rationing , sort of self-harm , It's really more like , Neglect |
| Language: | English |
| Stats: | Published: 2017-01-25 Updated: 2017-06-05 Words: 8,293 Chapters: 7/9 |

Winter Is Coming

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

The dwarves discuss the quickly encroaching Winter, and its predicted severity. Bilbo immediately steps in to ration and handle the food distribution for those in the mountain. Pleased that Bilbo is becoming more involved with the comings and goings of the mountain he will be calling home, the dwarves don't question his passion for the subject, because after all, Hobbits and food just go together, don't they?
Or, where the Dwarves don't know the story of the Fell Winter.

Chapter 1

The council were convened in the Southern Hall, in full session for the first time since the coronation of Thorin as King Under the Mountain.

Bilbo sat on one of the high dwarven chairs, large feet swinging freely, hands on the arms of his chair. He sat next to Ori and Bombur, who were both quietly arranging documents in front of themselves on the massive stone table that overwhelmed the center of the room.

Despite how much time he had spent among them, more intimately with the company, and now on a much larger scale during the... Renovation of Erebor, Bilbo still never could get over the little tickles in conversation which has him stepping on Dwarven toes--or boots rather--with surprising regularity. Balin called it a part of his charm, Nori said Bilbo was just being stubborn. And Thorin, Thorin actually just... Smiled. Every time. Each blundering anecdote would be met with that grin, a show of camaraderie and good feeling if ever Bilbo saw one. Thorin sometimes even said that he was pleased that Bilbo tried so hard to make the mountain his home.

Clearly there were no hard feelings on Thorin's part about the whole Arkenstone business. Bilbo would have hated to lose him as a dear friend over an act meant to protect his friends.

"Order, please, I will call you all to order!" Balin thumped his gloved fist on the table from where he sat beside Thorin. Fili was opposite Balin, to the right of the King, the heir's seat, or so Bilbo had been told. And Kíli sat to Fili's right.

The other dwarves quieted and the room focused on Thorin. "My friends, this day has been long in coming. Many thought we might never see it come, but here we are, standing together in the halls of our fathers. Erebor is rebuilt!"

Thorin did always have a knack for making grand, majestic speeches.

Cheers followed for several minutes, and Bilbo enjoyed the richness of the dwarven joviality that seemed to pour out of their passionate hearts. Givers in all things, dwarves emotions could not be contained within their bodies: their rage, their grief, their shame, and most especially, their joy. Each one poured out of them like a room full of overflowing jugs of mead, coloring the room into a buzz of giddy delight.

"Thank you! My friends, our business calls to us today, Dwarves of Erebor. Our people have come home. But Winter is fast approaching, and my Lord Bombur of the Royal Kitchen and Pantry Guild, has intimated that our stores are not sufficient for the fell winter that will strike against our newly recovered kingdom."

Bilbo's blood ran cold.

"The reports, My Lord Bombur, if you could." Thorin's arm was outstretched towards Bombur who lifted a section of his stack of papers and walked over to the head of the table and laid his stack of papers on the empty space on the table between Fili and Thorin. The

rotund dwarf cleared his throat as he turned to address the council properly. His soft voice sounded deeper, more profound in this echoing stone chamber.

"My lords, as His Majesty introduced, our predictions for the winter are harsh, and snow will soon close all the passes. Dale is still not bountiful enough to provide us too much more in the way of stores from their fields on the renewed Desolation."

Bilbo's heart was in his throat, and his fingers had gone white as they gripped the arms of his seat.

"Our stores, upon delivery of our final shipment, will be sufficient to see us through the winter, but the food will need to be rationed, and there can be no Yule feast. The celebration may continue, but we will not have enough for even a roast dinner for His Majesty's family."

Bombur folded his hands over his large belly and turned to bow to Thorin.

The King Under the Mountain stood to address his council, who had started talking amongst themselves. "My lords," Thorin called for silence.

"My lords, Lord Bombur brought this to my attention and we have a plan we should like to put into place: I will need members of this council to administer the Guild with Lord Bombur. His focus will be on the running of the kitchen and the meal planning. I will need a second lord to be instituted as his equal to be in charge of the pantries, rationing out the stores and coordinating the menus with my Lord Bombur."

Bilbo found himself on his feet, and speaking before his mind caught up with his body, "I can assist Lord Bombur. I," he shifted his gaze from the table to the assembled dwarves, "I know I'm just a simple Hobbit from the Shire," he paused as protests rose up, most notably from the members of the Company, which made him smile.

He lifted his hands to request silence, and after a moment, it was granted. "We Hobbits know a thing or two about food: stores, recipes, and rations. We've... Weathered a few harsh winters before, and I will make sure we never go hungry."

He exhaled deeply as calls of support echoed up and down the chamber, and he turned his gaze to Thorin. There was a small smile on the King's face as he lifted his own hands for silence. "I support the motion of Lord Baggins, DragonRiddler, as Lord Bombur's Master of Stores for the duration of this winter, and the following length of time to move out of rationing."

"Seconded," Balin spoke clearly, just a breath after Thorin had finished his declaration. Other members of the Company also chimed in, along with a few Council members.

"It is done," Thorin declared. "Lord DragonRiddler, you and Lord Bombur will perform an inspection immediately after this council session. Bring a master scribe and apprentice with you, to note anything that must be recorded or discussed at the next council session."

Balin cleared his throat as Bombur returned to his seat beside Bilbo, "The next matter on the agenda is from the Southern Mine Shafts."

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Once the council session had finished, Thorin and Balin stepped aside to speak with Bombur and Bilbo.

"Bombur, Bilbo," Thorin greeted. "I couldn't trust any two more than I do you with the needs of our people this winter."

Bombur blushed and bobbed a shallow bow, as the Company had been very vocally informed that the king would not brook any deep obeisance from the members of his company. Bilbo simply smiled and nodded, mind already spinning ahead of him to the lists he would need to make.

"And, Bilbo," Thorin added, "I am. I am pleased to see you taking such an interest in Erebor."

Bilbo stammered, "O-of course, Thorin. It. Erebor has become my home as well."

Without further ado, Thorin and Balin left the hall, leaving Bilbo and Bombur to approach the Scribes for assistance.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

Many random dwarven names coming at you. Most are straight-forward but my personal pronunciation guide is as follows:

Kefur: Keh-fur

Ignid: Ig-nid

Brami: Brahm-y

Orfor: Or(o)-for

Qwerl: Kwer-ul

Fint: Fint

Mith: Meeth

Enjoy!

Bilbo knew he wouldn't sleep well that night. Thoughts of winter and rationing always brought back memories. But he would damned if he didn't use every trick in his book to make sure that his dwarves never went through a fraction of what the Shire suffered.

He and Bombur spoke with the scribes for several minutes, asking a variety of questions, including: "We'll need a census. How many scribes would it take to coordinate a full census of the population, by family so we can be certain each family has its needs met?"

The Master Scribe, a golden-haired, flat-nosed Iron Hill Dwarf named Kefur, passed his silver gaze over the assembled apprentice scribes. "Four of them should be able to tally the work. One must also cross-reference the records from the Battle of the Five Armies, to verify that the two sets of information agree with each other."

"Splendid," Bilbo said, rubbing his hands together. "so, if you could choose the five scribes for that work, whilst you and at least one apprentice join Bombur and I down in the stores to begin our work."

Kefur grumbled out names as he nodded to the dwarves to whom they belonged, "Ignid, Brami, Orfor, Qwerl, and Fint. You shall need to report to Lord Balin before you begin." Kefur scrawled out a short note and signed it. "Bring this to him and set about your tasks. Orfor, you work on the records. The rest of you, take a compass-quarter of the mountain. Ensure that your regions share no overlap. Spend today working on the maps and lines and such. This note asks Lord Balin to diminish the work load for your two days of the census. We may need to add the list of miners last, if they aren't put of the deep mines sooner."

With five deep bows, beards to knees, the five apprentices turned and left to seek out Balin.

"My Lord DragonRiddler, My Lord Bombur, myself and young Mith here shall accompany you to the stores." As he said so, Kefur gestured to a dwarf with hair the color of Shire soil, a nose that resembled a specked goose egg more than a nose, and a beard braided securely in a netlike fashion, containing the inner bulk of hair. Bombur sighed dreamily as he stared at the short apprentice, and Bilbo felt his eyebrows raise without his permission.

Despite the severity of the situation, he was delighted for his friend.

"Shall we?" Bilbo asked gently, leading the way and starting up a conversation with Kefur over his concerns and the paperwork that ought to be completed with the tasks, allowing Bombur and Mith to follow side by side.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

The days had been long and Bilbo felt stretched thin, as butter must feel over too much toast. He sighed as he undid his ascot and tossed it over the back of the chair by his desk. The buttons of his waistcoat were slowly undone as his trembling fingers fought with the daily task.

He had done all he could. The final stores from Dale had arrived, been stored, and tallied. Bilbo, Bombur, Balin, Fili, and Thorin each possessed a copy of the records: the census of Erebor's population, the total numbers of produce and stock in storage, and the delivery and allowance system Bilbo and Bombur had slaved over. Bombur, Bilbo, and Balin each also held copies of the menus for the remainder of winter. The recipes involving food which would spoil soonest were set to be worked through during the first month. The second and third months would focus on utilizing the herbs and spices stored up to disguise the blandness of the food which remained. The final month would use up the remainder, but encourage the most sporting of the dwarves to hunt for a bit of meat to add to the diet. It wouldn't do, as Bilbo had said, to kill off all the livestock which was also providing the milk, eggs, cheese, and cream.

Every possible measure had been taken. Guards without keys were set before the grain and food stores. Bombur or Bilbo were the only ones allowed in the stores, short of the King himself. The mountain was warm and filled with coal and sledge for the burning. None were ill, but Oin kept the apothecary and healing ward in readiness.

Erebor would not suffer a Winter like Bilbo had in the Shire.

The Fell Winter has haunted him all this time. And he could not seem to let it go.

Determined to move his mind to other things, Bilbo pulled out the Khuzdul primer Ori and Balin had put together for him, so that he might improve his reading as he went through texts with Ori.

Having calmed his mind a bit, Bilbo treated himself to a long bath, tea and two biscuits-only two as food would soon be scarce and such treats scarcer still-, and a deeper peruse of the second chapter of the primer before sending himself to bed. He tucked himself into the cotton sheets and curled up on his side, staring at the bit of moonlight that played on his wall through a pseudo-skylight of dwarven make.

He hated winter. He hadn't hated it as a faunt, but then no winter had ever been as cold, as dark, or as long as the Fell Winter.

Bilbo eventually noticed that he was trembling. He tried to sit up, but fell in a dizzy pile to the floor. His gasp as he hit the stone floor kicked his brain into awareness that he had stopped breathing. He curled up on the floor, focusing on his breaths until he felt steady once more, and brought himself upright before he sought out a glass of water.

So fortified, he tucked himself into bed once more and worked to distract his mind with thoughts of Bombur's obvious crush on the young scribe, Mith, who was oblivious to his affection in the wake of her awe at this Lord of the Company of Thorin Oakenshield in the Reclamation of Erebor from the clutches of Smaug smiling at her and asking her opinion. Bilbo let out a quiet chuckle. Kefur had shared many knowing looks with the hobbit as the two worked on the charts and plans. And perhaps nudged their companions together a bit more than they ordinarily might have done. At least the four of them working together, Kefur and Bilbo would have front row seats to the romance that was begging to be written between the two dwarrows.

Mind contended with thoughts of spring weddings and stone flower chains, Bilbo fell asleep.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Bilbo had been in the midst of drafting the food charts when he came to his decision. He and his parents had rationed themselves from seven to four meals when he was a faunt during the Fell Winter. He could do so again. And if he began now, he wouldn't be so large a burden on the stores as if he started later. So, Bilbo nodded to himself, he would tighten his belt.

The first meal to go was second breakfast.



## Chapter 3

Bilbo woke at a later hour than normal, still unrested and stomach tight with hunger.

He had managed to get himself down to three meals a day, and had managed to ration every ounce of nonperishable food in his closet, ensuring that Thorin, Fili, and Kili would not go hungry.

His logs were in immaculate order. His information was checked by himself, by Bombur, by Mith, by Kefur, and then by himself again.

He made two walks of the stores every day, before the first meal and after the last. Daily deductions were compared to the menus and Bombur's notes. Nightly deduction never happened.

If a nightly deduction were to occur without documentation to explain the loss, Balin and Dwalin had established a means of seeking out the cause of the crime and a form of punishment suitable to the level of crime.

Hopefully Bilbo would never actually need to be aware of those details.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

The temperature had dropped considerably. After one particularly snowy three days, the mountain was buried and shut off from the rest of the world.

Steadfastly ignoring the reality of snow on his balcony, Bilbo moved from his warm bed to the cold lavatory and washed up for the day. Bilbo kept his eyes resolutely focused on his pupils and not the dark marks beneath his eyes.

His hands buttoned his shirt without touching his belly anymore. He could see his ankles behind his furry feet and tried not to think about what that meant. He fastened on several layers of undershirts, shirts, vests, cravats, and finally his dinner jacket before he pulled on his trousers. Ready for the day, and warmed by a mug of weak, black tea, the Hobbit left his quarters and marched, papers in hand, to the store rooms.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Bombur greeted him with a smile, and the two chatted amiably while they waited for Kefur and Mith. Kefur and Bilbo exchanged grins as their companions blushed greetings to each other.

"Shall we," Bilbo invited the rest as he lifted an intricate key from an inner pocket of his blue waistcoat, under the yellow waistcoat.

The group made their way through the room, checking their numbers and making note of any food which would need to be used up in the next few days before spoiling.

"It looks as though we'll need to be making some changes to this week's menu. Bombur, Mith, could the two of you make a full list of the changes and any supplies which will need to be paired with those meals, and get those plans to Kefur and myself by tomorrow morning's meeting?" Bilbo asked, genuine concern overriding his pleasure at the delicate matchmaking he and Kefur had undertaken.

"Of course, Lord Bilbo!" Mith had picked up on Bilbo's dislike of titles and managed to tease him while appearing perfectly polite. And Bilbo hadn't found the desire to say anything when he caught the small smile Bombur held each time she showed that bit of backbone.

"We can begin after breakfast has been cleaned; shall we meet at tenth bell, Mith?" Bombur turned his attention to the dwarrowdam and Bilbo and Kefur made their own way out of the storeroom.

"My Lord DragonRiddler," Kefur began.

"Just Bilbo, please, Kefur. All our titles will just make it ten times harder to say anything with our frequent conversations."

Kefur harrumphed. "So you've said. Very well, Bilbo. I've come to consider you a friend."

Bilbo blinked at the intimidating dwarf before smiling. "Well, of course we're friends, Kefur!"

The dwarf hummed and shifted his stance for a moment before continuing, "As your friend, I should like to inquire why you feel you must hide your illness from me."

"Illness?"

"It's obvious that you are not well, Bilbo. Your skin is pale, nearly translucent. I can see several of the veins of your wrists and arms, and the dark circles under your eyes are guarding large bags as well. You seem, well ill, Perhaps you are not sleeping well?"

Bilbo stuttered.

Kefur hastily added, "If you feel it isn't my place to--"

"No. Thank you, Kefur. You are a friend to me, and friends ought to share their concerns for one another. Especially as you brought your concerns to me and not another. I... Thank you. I have not been sleeping well."

Kefur paused and then said, "Have you tried asking for a sleeping draught?"

Bilbo sighed. "They don't work."

Kefur hummed and nodded as they watched Bombur and Mith slowly approach their place in the doorway. "Whatever is bothering you, Bilbo, you ought to share it with someone. Not myself, in particular, but whomever could best assist you in allaying your concerns, or dealing with your problem, whichever the case might be."

Bilbo stared at his companion, a warm feeling replacing some of the chill in his bones.  
"Thank you, Kefur."

Bombur and Mith stepped out of the storage room and Bilbo locked the doors. Bombur headed down to the kitchens to work on the day's meals while Mith and Kefur made their way to the Library. Bilbo paused and changed his direction, choosing to head to Bofur and Bifur's home for a pint and some conversation.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

"Well, as much as we love having you, and you're welcome any time, what brought you here, Bilbo?" Bofur's voice sounded strange as it echoed in his empty tankard, though Bilbo acknowledged having beer on an empty stomach hadn't helped.

"I just wanted to visit a friend and chat, Bofur."

"Ah, so you're finally going to tell us what's troubling you, then?"

Bilbo spluttered around the dregs of his drink before sighing. "Why does everyone think something is bothering me?"

"Well, we could start with your appearance, how you're always avoiding meals with the Company anymore, and all this business," Bofur added with a gesture to Bilbo's attire.

"What's wrong with my clothes now, Bofur?"

"Do you need to wear all of them at once?"

Bilbo's mind flashed hot white, recalling being dressed by his mother until he and his parents were covered in every layer of clothing and fabric in the house. "Yes, Bofur! Maybe I do! Maybe this stupid mountain of clot-headed dwarves is too cold, and all the white winter is trapping us in an ice box for months on end with no way out and we will all starve here just like...." Bilbo collapsed and was horrified to discover he was sobbing.

"Oh, Bilbo..." Bofur moved forward to hold his friend. "I've got you, lad. Let it all out. Everything that's been eating you up inside. Just let it out. Breathe, lad, that's it."

It wasn't for several minutes until bilbo gathered himself enough to face Bofur's further questions.

"Just like what, Bilbo?" Bofur's face was long and pinched with care. "Tell me, Bilbo. What happened?"

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I want to give a quick apology for my lag in updating. Essentially RL has been awful lately: a horrible bout of TMJ in conjunction with an increase in hours from my two jobs, and I'm planning to move over a thousand miles away in less than a month and a half! But, I'm not abandoning anything, despite any delays. Thank you for your patience.

Bilbo exhaled slowly.

Bofur stared at his friend's long, drawn face, and bit his tongue, waiting.

"When I was... very young. There was a winter. A terrible winter. It was later named "The Fell Winter"."

Bilbo glanced down from his hands to the floor.

"Bofur, we hadn't managed a large harvest that season, and the stores throughout the Shire were low. My parents and I were better off than many. But."

Bilbo suddenly found his hands in a warm embrace, the miner-turned-woodcarver simply held Bilbo's hands and said nothing.

After a moment, Bilbo continued, "We ran out of firewood near the end. By that point we were already down to... well, I thought we were down to three meals a day. It turns out, I was eating a meager three meals a day, and my parents were fighting off starvation with one meal every day."

Bofur's hands squeezed his own.

"They died. Before the Rangers came to save us from the orcs and wolves that had crossed the frozen river. My parents never got out of bed one morning."

Bilbo finally looked up at his friend, to find tears running from those brown eyes into a browner mustache. "Oh, Bilbo."

"I never liked Winter," Bilbo interrupted. "And I won't let us go hungry or freeze here in this mountain, Bofur. I will not."

Bofur exhaled gustily. "Bilbo, of course you won't. You never would. But is that what's been bothering you? You know we all have battle-dreams of our own. Bifur... Bifur spoke of waking up on a battlefield, surrounded by the dead once, and how that haunts him more than the rest. It doesn't take a battle to give you battle dreams, Bilbo."

"I know." Bilbo's voice was sharp and his throat was dry.

Bofur's warm hands rubbed his shoulders. "Thank you for telling me."

Bilbo managed a feeble nod before curling into Bofur's hold.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

It wasn't long before the Company began commenting on the shift in Bilbo's demeanor. He had worried them, although they hadn't been sure to mention it. But now he looked happier.

It had been the best of recommendations for Kefur to encourage his sharing of those bitter memories. After his conversation with Bofur, Bilbo himself felt lighter, more prepared to handle the full brunt of winter and all that faced Erebor.

It was a relief to know he wasn't the only one kept up by nightmares caused by old terrors, but also to know his concerns had been treated fairly and found inconsequential in the face of dwarven stubbornness was of great comfort, oddly enough.

Thorin himself pulled Bilbo to the side after the weekly Company supper to ask after his health, and if that wasn't enough to signal to Bilbo that he hadn't been taking care of himself as he ought have, nothing would ever be! For the King himself, with all his care and duties, worries and concerns, to notice Bilbo hadn't been sleeping well! Although it was possible some of Thorin's concern stemmed from Bilbo's responsibilities with the Stores, Bilbo was certain he knew his friend better than to assume it was a very great part of the King's concern.

And so, Bilbo made sure to relax more, and to talk with Bofur when his fears would truly not leave him alone. And for a time, that was enough.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

It was three weeks until Yule when his throat began to ache. Fearing a cold on top of the infernal nature of winter, Bilbo approached Dori for a soothing tea recipe, wondering what supplies could be devoted to such trivialities as a ticklish throat during the rationing. Dori seemed a little concerned, but once Bilbo smiled and informed his friend the tickle was more likely a combination of being cooped up, dust, smoking his pipe, and talking a touch more than was healthy, Dori relented and dutifully rummaged for a tin of herbal tea he guaranteed to do the trick.

It was four days after that Bilbo found himself on the floor of his bathroom with no memory of he'd gotten there. Putting the embarrassing incident behind him, he continued with his tours with Bombur, checking and double checking his lists meticulously, tiny numbers slowly crawling across the grid of his page, documenting the morning and evening checks. across the calendar.

Thorin joined the three dwarves and Bilbo for a visit that evening and praised the team for their efforts and the results he could already see in the meals, in his people, and in the plans for the remainder of the winter.

Mith had blushed very prettily, and Bombur had been unable to take his eyes off her. Bilbo gave a cheeky grin to the two, before turning to cough into the pocket handkerchief Ori had gifted him the week before. Thorin moved closer to the hobbit who fussily waved the King's concern off like a pesky fly. Bilbo waggled his eyebrows a bit with a nod to the two moon-eyed dwarves, inspiring an abrupt guffaw from His Majesty and a quiet chuckle from Kefur.

"Alright," Kefur intoned, "This has gone on long enough. My Lord Bombur, as her family has not yet joined us in the Mountain and will not for some time, I must ask you, just what are your intentions towards my apprentice?"

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Thorin and Bilbo walked away from the storeroom, Bilbo locking the door firmly first, giggling together like schoolboys over the newest courting couple in Erebor. Or, soon-to-be courting couple, after Bombur had prepared and presented his first gift for Mith to Kefur for approval.

"And they've been like this the whole time?" Thorin asked, cheeks rosy from laughter.

"He was sighing over her beard braids since they met, Thorin," Bilbo scolded teasingly. "She will be good for Bombur, I think, and I know he will do everything he can to be all that she might ever need and provide any want she might ever have."

"Aye," Thorin agreed. "The line of Ur has always treated their women like queens, in good times or ill. Mith could not find a finer dwarf for her spouse should she consider his offer."

Bilbo grinned at his feet, scraping the odd boots along the stones as he slowly moved, afraid of stumbling. "It has been very amusing for Kefur and myself to play old gossiping biddies, but I have to agree that it had gone on quite long enough."

"I'm simply pleased I got to see it unfold." Thorin accompanied Bilbo to his rooms and, at Bilbo's quiet request, looked over his work in the Khuzdul primer. Once Bilbo was satisfied he had mastered what he had managed to learn so far, he and Thorin sat before the hearth, a few smaller logs burning between them.

"Bofur tells me you have been weary lately from old worries," Thorin broached hesitantly.

Bilbo hummed and looked down at the quilt folded over his lap. "We had a Fell Winter in the Shire when I was very young. Many hobbits died from cold, hunger, or wolves. My parents were both lost to hunger. It.... I hadn't talked to anyone about it, you know? It's just... Everyone in the Shire knows, and none like to remember, but talking over it with Bofur... I haven't slept as poorly, nor had so many nightmares." Bilbo brought himself to look up at Thorin, only to find Thorin's gaze on the fire.

"I am glad to hear you have found some peace for your worry. You know we all care for you, Bilbo." Thorin turned to face the Hobbit in full. "You can share anything with any of us, and we will listen, you know that, right?"

Bilbo smiled, "I know. Thank you."

The rest of the evening was quietly spent discussing warmer topics, and passed easily enough.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Summary

A treat for all of you: a very quick new post in the turnaround between chapters! (mostly, I was more inspired to work on this one than the rest, so you get to enjoy this first!)

The mountain was cold.

A bitter cold that sank its teeth into bones, and tightened its grip with the tremble and shake of every shiver to dislodge it.

Bilbo was wearing three pairs of trousers, one over the other. He had asked Ori to knit him a pair of socks to wear inside his ungainly and uncomfortable boots, and his toes appreciated the warmth, for all that the new pressure was constricting.

After his morning checks with Bombur, Kefur, and Mith, Bilbo accompanied Bombur to the kitchens, which were a lovely source of warmth. Bilbo worked to light the fires while Bombur and apprentices started filling massive pots with water from the pump. Once the water was beginning to boil, the three apprentices moved to begin washing the vegetables, another began measuring grain into the large granite mortar, pestle lying idly to the side. Another two apprentices carried in a length of salted pork, and began slicing it into workable pieces.

Bombur and Bilbo sat together in the corner, revisiting the menu and approving the plan before the day truly got started.

"So Thorin tells me you must present a courting gift. What does that entail?" Bilbo pressed, leaning forward with a mug of tea warming his hands.

Bombur smiled, glanced around the kitchen, checking that all of his workers were where they ought to be, before confiding, "It's meant to be a symbol of myself, which I offer to her. But, I don't know when I'll find the time to work on it! I've just finished the menus with you, and I need to get started on all the meals. Until more cooks arrive, we're stretched thin here."

"What would you make?" Bilbo asked before coughing into his elbow, not able to pull his handkerchief out in time to catch it.

Bombur waited for his friend to pull himself together before responding, "A cake from my mother's family recipe. The dough is braided like bread, but as light as any cake you've ever had. I might just be able to requisition a portion of the spices I need, especially if i make the cake palm sized, just for Mith." Bombur smiled again. "Do you think she'd like that?"



Bilbo grinned, "I'm sure she'd love it! Do you think, if I were to help out, you might have time to work on it this morning? Giving you another set of knowledgeable hands, as it were?"

"Oh, would you! I should be able to finish it before the midday meal, if I get started now!" And with that, Bilbo was passed a hat and apron, stood on a stool, and set to scrubbing and peeling potatoes.

As the day wore on, the kitchens heated up rather quickly, and Bilbo began sweating through his layers, truly warm for the first time in months. Stripping away one layer of pants and his waistcoat, Bilbo moved from potatoes to chopping the other tubers: carrots and beets and turnips. Slicing the pieces finely for the stew that would be served later that night.

Jokes and songs floated around the kitchen, a playful banter that never rose in pitch but simmered throughout the room. Bilbo trailed the back of his hand over his forehead and stepped down from his stool to gather another basket of produce when his legs folded under him his vision blacked out.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

He came to a few moments later to a kitchen of chaos. Shouts in Khuzdul were barked left and right. The youngest apprentice was crying as she waved a bunch of wet rags in Bilbo's direction, whether her attempt was to fan or soak him no one could say. Bombur himself was holding the Hobbit, resting Bilbo's bruised head against his rotund stomach.

The dish boy ran out of the kitchen calling for a healer.

"Ohh," Bilbo murmured, pressing his face into Bombur's stomach. "My head," he mumbled.

"Bilbo!" Bombur cried out. "Stay awake for me, Bilbo. You've knocked your head, and Oin'll want to be having a good look at you."

Bilbo mumbled something like agreement to his friend, but his head lolled on his neck, and his face was flushed darker than a ruby. Bombur stood, and gathered Bilbo in his arms, "I'm going to bring you to the infirmary, just you hold on, Bilbo!"

And, with a sprint which defied his bulk, Bombur trotted off, careful of jostling the limp hobbit in his arms.

Along the way, the ginger Broadbeam was joined by Mith, Kili, Dori, and an anxious Thorin. By the time Bilbo was laid out on a bed for Oin to begin his examination, the full company was gathered around, listening to Boimbur's repetition of the events.

"He stepped off the stool, and then just collapsed onto the floor. He was flushed, and was sweating, but.... He just, he just dropped and I couldn't.... I wasn't able to catch him before he cracked his head against the floor. And it was so loud, so loud. He was helping me so I could make my gift but he never once said he wasn't feeling well, and he should have just said something, I could have waited! He didn't need to... I didn't want him to.... To get hurt!" Bombur's rambling fell into quiet gasping sobs, and Mith put her hand on his shoulder, offering comfort.

Bofur stepped forward and cleared his throat. "It's probably all those layers he's taken to wearing. The kitchens ain't the coolest place to be, and hes been wintering himself up something fierce from the cold. He probably just got too warm."

"He has a cold," the old healer spoke up. "His body is overheated, and there's a rattle in his chest I don't like the sound of."

"He's been coughing, but I didn't think it was too bad," Thorin broached.

"I made a tea for him several weeks ago for a sore throat, has it not left yet?" Dori asked.

Bilbo groaned a bit as Oin prodded at his forehead, gauging his goose egg. "I don't like the look of this bump, laddie. You'll need to lie up for a day or two. I'd like to keep you here for a touch before returning you to your rooms, just to keep an eye on everything.

"What can we do, Oin?" Thorin's voice was quiet, and his gaze was focused on the hobbit, starting to drift off on the bed.

Oin shook Bilbo a bit, chastising him, "None of that now. No sleeping until I'm sure that bump didn't do more than kick your cold loose, Master Burglar." Oin tucked a blanket around the hobbit before answering his king, "I'll need someone to watch over him and keep him awake for the next hour or so, while I finish up with my other patients. I can take over after that until he's brought to his room. Once in his room, he can sleep, and I'm sure he'll be needing it, with this cold he's got."

"I can stay," Kili volunteered.

Thorin nodded, "My thanks, nephew. Keep our hobbit company. Oin, anything he needs is his."

"Of course, your Majesty. As if I'd let our burglar go without anyhow." The rebuke was gentle, and drew smiles from those gathered.

"Why don't you get something in your stomach, Bombur, and then let's all get back to our duties, and give Bilbo and Oin some peace," Balin spoke up.

Kili settled himself on a stool to Bilbo's right and began teasing his "Mister Boggins", and the company filed out.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

It wasn't until Bifur and Dwalin were bearing Bilbo's stretcher to his rooms that the news came to Thorin. Bombur, Mith, and Kefur stood before Thorin, heads bowed. "Bilbo's key wasn't on him, Majesty, and three bags of grain are gone, along with four tins of spice and seasoning."

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

I managed to get this up in time to fit in an announcement formy new update schedule! You can pop over to my profile for more, but until it is finished, this story will updated every Monday starting in June!

Dwalin and Bombur returned to the stores to seek out any possible clues, working methodically from one corner to the other, ensuring the tally of missing products was complete, and that no potential trails had been left behind. Finding nothing new, Dwalin had a scribe draft his report, before returning to Thorin with his news. In concern for what news of this theft would do to the populace, Thorin elected to not have the news blasted, but set up a new guard shift, which included Nori and three of his selected dwarrow lurking within the stores.

In the meantime, the company spent their free time with Bilbo. He had a full-fledged cold now, and barely any appetite for the soups Bombur kept sending to his room.

Oin kept assuring everyone that the hobbit's stuffed nose was affecting his sense of taste, and his body was busier sending away the disease than it was with reminding the hobbit he was hungry. But of course, Dori couldn't help but notice just how much lighter Bilbo was when he helped change Bilbo's sheets. And Kili couldn't remember the last time Bilbo had baked anything.

Bofur recalled the terrors of Bilbo's childhood and tried to subtly remind his friend that he wasn't starving, that no one in Erebor was starving.

But the Hobbit Under the Mountain continued to worry.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

"You look more yourself today." Thorin's voice drew Bilbo's attention from the book across his knees to the kin gin his doorway.

"And you look much worse than the last time I saw you. What is wrong?"

"I... The Company has been... We..." Thorin cut himself off and ended up starting at the quilt thrown across his burglar's knees. "Have I ever spoken with you about the Wandering?"

Confused by the abrupt shift in Thorin's demeanor, Bilbo simply shuffled in place and shook his head.

"The Wandering... We had no destination in mind at first except... away. Away from everything which had ever meant home." Thorin's voice was thick with an emotion Bilbo had never heard in his voice, not even when the dwarf spoke of his dead brother.

"We were homeless, and many were injured. And we had no food. The Men of Dale had nothing to spare us, as their city was in chaos and on fire." Thorin's face pinched in anger, "Thranduil gave us nothing, no aid against the dragon, no food, no water, no balm for the burns of our women, children, elders... Nothing. We sent out hunters as soon as we could, but the Desolation reached far."

Thorin's face was blank now, his eyes locked on the ring on his thumb. "We followed the River Running, so we managed with water, and worked to treat the burns and smoke inhalation as best we could. But food... We had little and would find less."

Bilbo reached a hand out and placed it on Thorin's arm. "You don't have to-"

Thorin interrupted, "I must. I must speak of it."

Bilbo nodded, but left his hand where it was.

"Dwarves. We are not meant to live above ground. We... We are born of stone and our air is mineral-rich, in the mountain halls, not the weak air in winter sunlight. With the smoke, it hurt many of us, as it should never have done, never have been."

Thorin continued, "Our hearts... They are like our stone as well, loving strongly, and only once. Defending and standing by that love. We cannot forsake it, in the same way a fire cannot leave heat behind. We are One. One and the same."

Thorin clenched his hands into fists. "Many who left their hearts behind found their bodies too heavy to move, and they returned to the stone. Except... We could not bury them in deep tombs. Some we buried in shallow graves, dug as deep as the tallest among us. When there were too many..."

"You had to burn them." Bilbo spoke quietly, "the fires started in Tuckborough when... The ground was too hard with frost. Our... Our farm tools were not dwarven steel, and even should they have been... They were not given to the gardens, but to fire."

Both men sat in silence for several long minutes, eyes on the fireplace in the room.

Thorin finally broke the silence, "It was none of that which haunts me, not near as much as the hungry babes. The bellies tight with hunger: old and young alike. I thought I would die hungry. I was just always hungry..."

Bilbo just nodded.

"And then we found food. A little more here, a little more there. We followed the food sources to the south, until we had enough. Not plenty, but enough to not be hungry one day. Then the next, and then the next."

Bilbo blinked up at the Dwarven King.

Thorin met his gaze steadily, "Dwarven memories are long, Bilbo. And we have not forgotten our hunger. We will do everything we can to never hunger again as we once did."

Bilbo nodded, biting his lip to keep from crying as his own memories and the images his mind conjured to Thorin's story intertwined: Belladonna, dying from poor air. Bungo dying because Belladonna had gone. His little cousin Flambard, so hungry, until he wasn't anymore.

"Do you think, Bilbo, I would have lied to you, concerning our stores?"

"What? No! Thorin?"

"Then why have you been starving yourself?"

Bilbo didn't have a good answer for that.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I'm happy to be updating this on my new update schedule! The full schedule can be found on my profile, but tWiC updates for the next two Mondays. We are nearly done!!! I plan to have some oneshots ready to update once this fic is complete, so look forward to that as well.

We find the thief in this chapter!
And a lot more interesting things as well.

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

Bombur had never been so nervous in all his life.

He waited, with baited breath as Mith and Kefur inspected his gift as his offer of courtship.

And why would Mith be tempted by his offer? It was Mith.... She was stunning and lovely and kind and delightful and beautiful and a hundred other things a cook could never hope to touch. Even a cook who went up against a dragon.

He had rethought his gift, after the chaos with Bilbo, which had allowed him little time to make a truly perfect baked gift, he decided to tackle another aspect of his suit.

Mith was currently holding his gift in shaking fingertips. "A recipe?" Kefur questioned.

"It was my mother's. Her treasured secret until she passed it onto me. I made my own changes, and they are present in the card you bear." Bombur spoke by instinct, ears barely catching what his mouth delivered. "It is yours, Mith, to do with as you choose, as is my offer."

"Oh, Bombur, it's lovely!" Mith wrapped her arms around Bombur's neck and pressed a short kiss to his cheek. "Of course I accept!"

Both dwarves ignored Kefur's spluttering as they continued to embrace.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Bilbo's heart fell to the floor, and his hands flew to his chest in a futile attempt to catch it. "What?" he squeaked.

Thorin's blue eyes pierced his, unwavering. "Why are you starving yourself?"

Bilbo could hear... heartbreak and betrayal in Thorin's tone. But none of the rage from the last time Thorin felt Bilbo had betrayed him. Thorin's voice sounded hollow, defeated.

"Bilbo?" Thorin insisted on an answer.

A sob burst through Bilbo's lips. "Don't banish me." His voice was a whisper.

Thorin reeled back as though struck and found his lungs empty when he asked, "What?" with no air and no voice.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

Balin sat in place for Thorin and for Bilbo, symbolically, as one was healing and the other was trying to get to the bottom of those concerns. Bombur and Kefur stood on either side as the culprit was brought before them. "And you have confessed?" Balin asked Jarin, son of Tarin.

The young kitchen runner nodded, miserably. He was only thirty-five; seven by the standards of men. His father had taken ill while working in the mines, and his mother was long gone. His father hadn't reported to the collection zone, and they'd been without food. He hadn't been sure what to take, and had helped himself to what he recognized.

Balin didn't want to prosecute to the full extent of the law, nor did either of his companions.

"Why did you not tell me about your troubles, Jarin?" Bombur asked, large face folded in frowns and echoes of frowns.

Jarin rubbed his sleeve across his nose, not quite able to meet the eyes of the dwarf who gave him work and an opportunity to apprentice under him. "Da told me not to complain, when he got sick. Beacuse... beacuse I had work and... and we'd be fine for a sennight."

"And, Jarin, how long has it been since your father fell ill?" Kefur asked not unkindly.

"Near a fortnight, master lord, sir."

The three dwarrow paused. "And no Overseer came to call? No healers?" Balin inquired.

"No, sir."

A deep frown laid itself on the brow of the Master of Guilds. "Then, I find you are at no fault for theft, Jarin son of Tarin, as the large neglect falls to others." An astonished look of relief broke across the barely-bearded lad's face. "However, you failed to bring your concerns to your Master of Employment and Instruction. Therefore, I command him to pass on a punishment to you, under his own judgement, as this falls under the jurisdiction of an Apprenticeship Contract."

Bombur stepped forward with a nod. "First things, first lad. Give me your address. Then fetch a healer with this note," he gestured to Kefur who dutifully scribbled out a note of instruction, "and bring him to your home. I will meet you there with food for your father and yourself. As your Master of Employment and Instruction, I have a responsibility of care to you, and your well being."

The boy stared in adoration at the large cook. "Master Bombur, I..." He rushed forward and hugged the dwarf. "I live in the Three Coppers District, the building at the back of the Grey Hen Inn. Third door on the right!" He said before plucking the note from Kefur's hands and tearing out of the hall.

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

"I'm so sorry," Bilbo gasped through sobs. "I never... I never meant to doubt you, or betray your friendship! I just... It was so cold, and with the rations... I... I remembered the Fell Winter in the shire that took my parents and... I couldn't help it. I couldn't eat. The thought even now makes me ill... And... I am sorry, Thorin. I am terribly sorry to have doubted you, without meaning to, and please- don't banish me. Not in Winter. I can leave in Spring, if you need me gone, but I-"

"BILBO! I will never cast you from Erebor ever again." Thorin looked shattered, when Bilbo finally brought his teary gaze up to survey his dear friend. "That you still fear..." Thorin's cut himself off. "It is I who owe apologies to you, Bilbo. Not the other way around. I could see you hurting, but didn't ask because I thought you would come to me when... When you felt you could. I see now how foolish it was of me to..."

"Thorin," Bilbo's voice was small, but he trudged forward. "Can I talk to you about... About it?"

Thorin stared at the hobbit as if he could not see him for a moment. And then Thorin's shoulders sagged with relief. "Tell me, anything you would like to share with me, Bilbo. Your cares are mine."

"When I was very young. There was a winter. A terrible winter. It was later named 'The Fell Winter'."

~~~~~\*~~~~~\*~~~~~

"I am sorry. For not coming to you with my fears..." Bilbo added at the end of his story.

Thorin looked far different from anytime Bilbo could remember seeing him. There were tears on the king's face. "Thank you for sharing them with me, Bilbo; would... Would it help you if you had company for all your meals, and not just breakfast?" Thorin offered hesitantly.

Bilbo leaned back against his pillows once more, which were now leached of any body heat. "I'd like that."

"Good." Thorin's face still looked down, eyes on Bilbo's large feet under the blankets. "I hope I can help you to not feel the weight of this demon too terribly. Though I know your demons are your own to face. I would... be there, if I can, if you'll have me."

"You know you don't have to, right? I mean, it means a lot to me, and I really do want to spend more time with you..." Bilbo knew he was rambling, but he didn't want his friend to feel beholden to spend meals and extra time with him. "And it will be easier to... not think

about it, when I need to eat, with good company. But, well, you're the king. That hardly leaves you plenty of time to eat with sick hobbits."

Thorin's gaze met Bilbo's with all the force of a hammer strike. "Bilbo, I will eat with you."

"I'm not fighting you on this, you stubborn dwarf," Bilbo huffed, "I'm telling you that I appreciate it but you don't have to; I know you're busy and I'm not nearly as important as matters of state or-"

Thorin stood and roared, "You are more important than ALL of my duties, Bilbo; I love you!"

Chapter End Notes

Mic drop.

I've been waiting for this scene forever, and then it took four days for me to get it out. Argh, but now it's done and dusted, and please let me know what you think!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!