**Summary**

When a crew member of The Hobbit trilogy has a mysterious accident, she finds herself in Erebor, guest to the Royal Family. Meanwhile, a dark force gathers nearby.

I'm terrible at summaries, please give it a shot.

(Happens in the Happy Ever After universe where no-one but the Middle Earth equivalent of RedShirts dies.)

**Notes**

This is my first Hobbit fic, and I am hoping that it's good, but if you spot any inaccuracies, beyond those of the Happy Ever After head-cannon, please let me know.
Chapter 1

Russ Lawson was being a total dick when I escaped to the cliff. Six months into shooting the third movie in the Hobbit trilogy and everyone was getting tired of each other. Even a lowly line cook from catering, like me. My job wasn’t glamorous, but with close to 500 mouths to feed, it’s a necessary one. Russ, the aforementioned dick, works Logistics, and when not busy with being a martinet, he relieves boredom by being a colossal ass-hat. He bugs me on many levels, firstly by being mean and rude, secondly because the way he eyes the female crew ought to count as sexual harassment. He also smells like the port-a-loos. But the thing that was irking me most when I lit out to the edge of the cliff is that he’s close to 6’6”. I’m almost five feet on a good day, and he had spent that morning looming over me as he likes to do. Some days I want to grab a sword from props and hit him with it. Kerry might even let me get away with it, as she dislikes him as much as I do. The only thing that spared him that fate is the fantastic terrain on location. It’s hard to stay mad looking at rolling green hills, rushing rivers, and distant mountains. The current piece of violence-abating landscape was a tall rock crag. On the side I’d climbed was a steep, but manageable, hill. The side I hung my feet off of was a 40 foot sheer rock face covered in soft moss and colorful lichens. I had a lovely view of a lake in the distance, I wasn’t needed for an hour, and the brisk wind dispelled the heat of a sunny day. My earlier anger melted away in the face of such natural splendor. This was my dream job, a few assholes aside. I had loved the works of Tolkien since I was a child, and the Lord of the Rings movies cemented my desire to help bring the world I loved into the world I live in. Even if it was by cooking, my only marketable job skill. Swinging my feet cheerfully, I almost missed the warning shifting of moss and rock under my ass. I tried to scoot back onto more solid ground, but my effort only loosened the cushiony moss I’d thought so perfect to sit on. I let out a shriek as I slipped and fell. A white light blossomed around me, and then everything went dark.

Kili leaned against the balcony railing. Looking out at the slow rebuilding of the town of Dale, he pondered his future. Uncle Thorin was King under the Mountain; his brother Fili was dutifully learning the requisite skills for when he took the throne, but Kili himself had yet to find his place. He’d heard it whispered in the halls, that Fili was the heir, and Kili only the spare. It wasn’t even like he wanted to learn the royal protocols, but that was all that was expected of him. If he were honest with himself, he hated the stifling nature of the ‘proper’ things to do in any given situation. He missed the days when they were on the quest. Sure, it had been uncomfortable and dangerous, but he knew his purpose, and was valued for his strengths, not chided for his weaknesses. He also wondered if he would ever find someone to spend his life with, a love to call his own. He’d had a brief flash of hope when Tauriel healed him, but she soon returned to her kin. It was just as well, he supposed. An Elf and a Dwarf? There could be no greater mismatch. They came from two very different worlds.

Suddenly, a bright flash of light caught his eye. Leaning out over the balcony to find the source, he saw a sprawled figure on a small ledge near the knee of one of the great statues. He ran through the corridors at top speed until he reached the door he needed, an access hatch for cleaning and repairing the towering statue of a bygone king. Leaping from carven shelf to rough ledge, he neared the fallen figure. Upon closer inspection, the figure was that of a maiden. It had been hard to tell from the balcony because she was dressed most oddly, in strange, fitted trousers and an abbreviated tunic, but as he got closer, her ripe curves proved it. Kneeling next to her, he cautiously...
moved her onto her back and brushed her dark copper colored curls out of her face. She wasn’t anything like the Dwarf maidens he saw daily, with their squared features and wispy beards. Instead her heart-shaped face featured a snub of a nose, gently arched eyebrows and a full, rosy mouth unobscured by any facial hair. In a way she was almost elfin, though less tall and more curvaceous than they. As he moved to pick her up, her eyes fluttered open. They were a vibrant green speckled with flecks of a darker brown. Her exotic beauty clearly spoke of a far distant home, as did her clinging blue trousers and strange green tunic. This assessment was confirmed when she spoke.

“Aidan? What are you doing way out here? Oh, God, please tell me my scream didn’t interfere with filming. Pete would have my head if I screwed up a good shot by shrieking. In my defense, though, I thought for sure I was gonna be a pancake.” She used strange words, and acted oddly, addressing him by an unknown name. She might have taken a blow to the head, he supposed.

“Lay still milady, whilst I check to see what you may have injured.” She gave him a very odd look but let him run his fingers over her scalp with no complaint. Kili was certainly confused. On one hand, she didn’t seem to have a head wound, nor had the darks of her eyes gone large like he’d seen before. On the other hand, she was calling him by another name as though she knew him. Head injuries could be tricky things though, so he decided to err on the side of caution and take her to the infirmary. He needed to know how to introduce her though. The matronly healer would take him to task for not knowing the girl’s name. “What might your name be, milady?”

“It’s Chris. You know, from catering? I served you coffee just this morning, Aidan! And why do you sound all Middle-Earth-y? You aren’t normally a method actor.”

“Lady Chris, I believe you have me mistaken. My name is Kili, and I swear to you, we have never met. I would remember one such as you. But come; let us get you inside, where a healer might look you over.” The woman looked at him as though he were insane, but after rolling her eyes, she warily accepted his hand. She seemed steady on her feet, until she turned to look at him once more. Then she went pale and collapsed. Only his better than average reflexes and a stroke of good luck allowed him to catch her before she tumbled off the mountain.
I woke with a splitting headache in a small bed. At my height, almost all beds feel large, so that the bed didn’t feel like a queen to me, said something about the objective size. Of course, it wasn’t as bad as say, a cot, more like a double, which meant it was likely a broad-ish twin. My mouth felt cottony and I dreaded opening my eyes. Not just for the worsening of the headache that was sure to follow light, but because I had a relatively good idea why the bed felt small. If what I’d seen, the Aidan look-alike and the mountainside, hadn’t been some kind of fear induced hallucinations, then what I might see if I opened my eyes terrified me. Sure enough, the room I saw when I finally brought myself to open them and sit up was like something out of a Stone Street Studios soundstage. Dark granite and polished cherry wood accented by tapestries and what looked like a bear-skin rug. Candles flickered in sconces on the walls and an oil lamp burned on the mantle of a huge fireplace. The fire was banked, or I’m sure the room would be sweltering. Nope, I was not in Kansas anymore.

“Ah, fuck.” I swore. “Goddamn it! You’ve got to be kidding me!” I was about to let loose with a real wiz bang of a tantrum, but the Aidan look-alike had just walked in.

“I beg your pardon? What did I do?” He looked so confused, and yet slightly wary, as though perhaps he was used to being called on the mat, that I had to chuckle to myself.

“Nothing, you’re fine, it’s not you I’m upset with; it’s the situation. I’m so far from home no one either here or there would believe me, I’m without any local form of currency, and my bloody head hurts.” He listened very courteously to my complaints, but I wasn’t in much of a mood to see the good in things. Pain does that to me, it always has.

“Well, I can’t do much about getting you home just yet, but we’re not strapped at the heels, as it were, so until you feel well enough to go home you can just stay right here. And I brought a draught that the healer said would calm your aches.” He held out a shining silver cup with gold inlay that would probably pay my rent for a year back home. I took it and drank carefully from it. The liquid inside tasted like someone had ground up aspirin and dissolved it in hot-sauce with a dash of lemon juice. I almost spat it back out, but even the little that got down my throat before the taste set in was easing the pain. Relief of pain was worth a nasty taste, so I drank it all.
“Thank you for the painkiller. And for the offer of a place to stay. I don’t suppose I have anywhere else to go, but you should be aware, me getting home is… well, my home is just….” I screwed up my nerves to blurt out the truth. “In another world.”

“Wait, what?” Kili, I really must think of him as Kili, not as ‘the Aidan look-alike’, seemed just as shocked as I’d felt when I stood and found him to be the same height as me, not nearly a foot taller. In that moment I’d suddenly believed him when he said he was Kili, not Aidan. A lot can be done with movie magic, but not like that, in person.

“In another world. I’m from a completely different universe. My world only knows of Middle Earth through books and movies.” He looked confused again. “They’re like plays. Until today, I never thought they were real. That the stories actually happened somewhere, that beings like elves and hobbits and actual dwarves populated a whole other world.” I sighed, knowing what this must sound like. “I don’t blame you if you think I’m crazy.”

“Actually that explains your very odd clothing. Not bad-odd, and I’m sure it isn’t odd where you come from, but for Erebor….” His eyes twinkled with mischief as he wiggled his hands up and down in what I assumed was a ‘so-so’ gesture. Honestly, I hadn’t given my tee shirt and jeans any thought, being so used to them that they were like a second skin. Thinking about the costume aesthetics, I suddenly realized how inappropriate they were, especially my pale green fitted tee bearing the legend “Do not meddle in the affairs of Dragons, for you are crunchy and good with ketchup.” I’d worn it as a joke, but if I were now in a place that the dragon Smaug once ruled, surrounded by people who had suffered from his existence, it was in terrible taste. As I thought about it, I realized he was reading the legend at that moment.

“Oh my god,” I buried my face in my hands. “I swear I didn’t mean anything by it, I didn’t know I’d fall off a cliff and land here of all places.” He was laughing now, so I guessed he wasn’t super upset by it.

“It’s not a problem, milady. I actually think the sentiment is rather wise, if humorously worded. Although you might want to change out of it before my Uncle Thorin sees you; he doesn’t have my twisted sense of humor.” His grin was infectious as he held up a cloth bundle. “To that end, I also brought you some clothes. The skirts might be a little short, and I couldn’t begin to guess about footwear, but they should fit.” He lay the bundle of cloth on the end of my bed before retreating back a few steps like he worried about startling me, and I was struck by how kind he was to someone who literally fell onto his doorstep out of nowhere. I was lucky that he had found me and not one of the less pleasant denizens of this strange world. Just imagine if I’d landed in goblin or orc territory!

“Thank you. For the rescue, the medicine, the clothes, and well, just for everything.

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Kili smiled to himself as he left her room. She was a pleasing sight, to him at least, but then he had always favored tall women. Her gentle words of thanks warmed him in a most unusual, but welcome, way, and the slight blush favoring her cheeks sent a stirring low in his belly that he could not, or rather, would not name. The healer he’d taken her to had said there appeared to be no damage, although she would check in later just in case. The lady’s tales of coming from another world seemed fantastical, until one counted her dress and behavior, as well as the small, purple, brick-like thing he’d found in her pocket that lit up when handled. He’d removed it only so she might rest easier, but upon holding it he’d activated some trigger and one of the broad flat sides had lit up with a picture of butterflies on a field of brightest blue. It was like nothing he’d ever seen, and lent some credence to her claim of otherworldly origin, although her tale did seem like
something from a child’s bedtime story. Small, smooth light-picture maker in hand, he went to
find his brother and perhaps his Uncle. He found them in one of the smaller council rooms
discussing some point of rulership or other.

“Uncle, brother, I have some astonishing news! I found a woman on the side of the
mountain, where she simply appeared out of nowhere. She’s resting now, in one of the guest
chambers on the third floor. She claims she’s from another world, and things are adding up to lend
her credibility.”

“Nonsense, Kili. What sort of witchery did she use to cause you to lose all good sense?”
Thorin seemed displeased, but he often did, so Kili plowed on.

“You haven’t met her yet, Uncle. She is either a truly stupendous liar, or telling the truth.
And the way she was dressed! I gave her more appropriate clothing, borrowed from one of the
housemaids,” Thorin gave him a look, “with her permission obviously. I’m not Nori. And then
there’s this.” He pulled the strange object from his pocket, thumbing the little round button that
made the lit picture appear. He was gratified when his Uncle pulled back suddenly at the clear,
strong light. Even more gratifying was Fili leaning in to peer at the device.

“It looks like nothing of this world, for certainty. It’s not metal, and though this part might
be crystal or glass of astounding purity, the rest is of an unknown material. I honestly don’t see
how it was made at all.” Fili seemed fascinated by the thing, picking it up to turn it over in his
hands when the light went out. “I have never seen anything that made such strong and steady light
beyond that of the sun and moon, and the colors were far more vibrant than any dye or paint I’ve
ever seen. I’d have to meet her to say for certain, but you may be right about her, Kee. You said
she was resting, but how soon do you think she could handle visitors?”

“She seemed to be perking up right well when I dropped off the clothing. Certainly disoriented,
but according to her, her world knows of ours through tales, though not ones thought of as fact. I
believe this is helping her adjust without denial.”

“Which room is she in?” Thorin’s gruff voice always seemed somewhat disapproving to Kili,
though he knew his Uncle loved him and his brother like sons. When they were but young
dwarflings, he took on many of the duties of a father, their own having been slain in the same battle
as Thror. When Thorin’s tone and manner seemed over rough, Kili recalled how his Uncle had
taught him to fight, applauding his skill with the bow, even as other dwarrow mocked him for
favoring the weapon of elves.

“I’ll take you to it.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Explanations are made.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the late publish. Something that's normally on Saturday got moved to today and it really threw me for a loop. This chapter is what I like to call "All talk, no act".

Also, this chapter is dedicated to TheRaggedTiger and all the guests who left me kudos. It means a lot to me that this work is being read. You are all awesome.

I had gotten mostly dressed, all save the vest-like bodice that went over the incredibly long shirt-thing called a shift that tucked into the skirt. Fortunately for me, my best friend works wardrobe, and a few weeks before filming started, she’d dragged me to a renaissance faire. Meg’s a clothing nerd, so she spent nearly three hours explaining every garment we saw, how they were worn, what materials they could be made of, and what social status they indicated. The shift, skirt, and bodice combo was a simple commoner class outfit, if I recalled correctly. A good thing too, some of the more elaborate costume pieces we used needed three other people to get the actors into. The bodice wasn’t on yet because I had yet to figure out if it would stand as a bra or if I could wear my own bra under it. I’m not huge in the chest region, just a C-cup (although I’m a D when I gain weight) but even so I need some support or I start to ache. I was trying the bodice on with my bra when Kili returned, bringing with him a disapproving looking Thorin, and Fili right behind them. Perhaps it was my state of almost dressed, or the fact that the handsome Dwarf hadn’t knocked, but I got pissed that strangers were invading my space, even if technically it was theirs and I was the invader. Granted, it could have been worse. The heirs of Durin are the hot Dwarves of the original thirteen. And if I were back home and Richard, Aidan and Dean had barged into my room, well; I’d have thought I was dreaming. But at any rate, I felt pissed, and I let them know it.

“Good God! Were you born in a barn? Have you never heard of knocking? Just barge on in why don’t you!” I couldn’t have made a very imposing figure, bodice hanging open, but I put my hands on my hips anyway, and gave him a good hard scowl.

“Terribly sorry, Lady Chris.” He did seem contrite, not meeting my challenging glare, and his cheeks were turning red. “We’ll just wait in the hall until you’re ready, then. Right.” Stammering, he backed up until he bumped into his Uncle who hadn’t budged.

“You will explain yourself, girl. Who are you, and how came you to my halls?” Thorin was returning my glare ten-fold, and though Kili had slipped behind him and presumably out the door, his Uncle had stepped closer. He was attempting to loom, I could see, but I was a good four inches taller, which made it less than effective. I’d never been the tallest person in a room before, and the experience was interesting. I decided to take advantage of it, and straightened my back.
“My name is Christiana Abigail O’Malley, I’m a cook from New Zealand, and how I came to be here is just as much of a mystery to me as it is to you. One minute I was falling off a cliff sure I would die, the next your nephew is leaning over me. I’d like to know how I managed it so I can go home, but that seems unlikely any time soon. Kili already offered me your hospitality, but if you want me gone I will go. I have no idea where, but I know not to stay where I’m not wanted.” It wasn’t the strongest speech, but it was what I could manage.

“This New Zealand, this is the other world Kili tells me you claim to come from?” He wasn’t backing down, but he wasn’t telling me to beat it either.

“It’s a country in the other world. The world itself is just called Earth. And I know how insane I sound when I tell you that’s where I come from, and believe me, I don’t blame you for doubting. If you showed up in my world claiming to be Thorin Oakenshield of Erebor, King under the Mountain, you’d be locked up in a mental institution faster than you can say lickety-split. Of course, they’d think you had a fascination with a fictional character, but still.”

“What do you mean, ‘fictional character’? And what is a mental institution?” Oh boy, the arms were crossing. I steeled my nerves and looked him square in the eye, hoping he saw truth in mine.

“Firstly, a mental institution is where they treat people who’ve gone off in the head. Crazy people. Secondly, my world has an acquaintance with yours through the works of JRR Tolkien. He wrote fantasy books. Like The Hobbit, which features the adventures of the Quest for Erebor and the Battle of the Five Armies. I was working for the company responsible for making a trilogy of movies…” Thorin frowned, so I clarified. “They’re like plays, but any way, movies based on the book when I slipped and fell off a cliff, landing here.” He relaxed only a hair, but I could still tell he was softening. My story might be nuts, but as it was the truth, it would hold together no matter what question he asked. In fact, I might be able to sew this all up.

“I can prove it. When you were in Bilbo’s hobbit hole, and Balin said that the group was hardly the stuff of legend, you told him, oh wait while I get the line… ok, you said ‘I would take each and every one of these Dwarves over an army from the Iron Hills. For when I called upon them, they answered. Loyalty. Honor. A willing heart… I can ask no more than that.’”

“How could you know that?” His arms uncrossed in shock.

“Because I watched the movie? I can tell you almost everything that happened between Bag End and Erebor. Not so much about the Battle of Five armies, because PJ was keeping any alterations close to the vest, and obviously, this land didn’t follow the book’s timeline.”

“What do you mean?” That came from Fili, who had stayed in the room, but he had been quiet enough that I jumped a little when he spoke.

“Well, it’s not pleasant…You sure you want to know?” He nodded firmly, and Thorin grunted in a way that I chose to interpret as a yes. “In the book all three of you die in the battle. Thorin gets a wound that prevents him from fighting and you and Kili get killed protecting him. Later, Thorin dies of his wounds after forgiving Bilbo his part in the breaking of the siege of Erebor.”

“Well that’s nothing like what happened.” The blond Dwarf seemed almost put out that the book didn’t follow his own timeline.

“I told you it wasn’t. But if I’ve given you enough to put your mind at ease about my honesty, I’d like to finish getting dressed. Preferably alone, but if you feel the need to watch I could always hum a little tune and make it a reverse striptease.” It was a quip, but he turned beet red anyway. He and his Uncle filed out of the room and I finished getting the bodice laced up. It heaved my
breasts up like they were on a platter, and I’m sure I could have forgone the bra, but no way was I getting undressed again to remove it.

“Well?” Kili was impatient. When he’d realized she wasn’t dressed, he’d gotten out as quickly as he could, not wanting to be improper. Normally he didn’t care much about improper, much to the dismay of his family, but somehow, with her he needed to be. As a result, he’d not been in the room with his kin, and he wanted to know if they believed her, and by extension, him.

“She certainly seems to believe her own story.” Always Uncle must begrudge any movement in his position. “Since you already offered her our protection, I suppose she may stay. I’ll not have the House of Durin go back on its word.” Kili had no doubt that if his Uncle really wanted the girl gone, she would be on her way that very moment. But if it saved face for him to lay blame on Kili’s rash offer, the young dwarrow had no objection. Thorin harrumphed, and stalked off, leaving the two brothers standing in the hall.

“Did you know her people write books and plays of the happenings of Middle Earth? Although, I must say this Tolkien character took unholy liberties.”

“I told you, she mentioned something like that when I brought her medicine and clothes earlier. You never listen.” Kili rolled his eyes. “But I don’t know that name, who is it?”

“The man who wrote the first stories of us, apparently. Although his version of the Battle of Five Armies ended much differently. I wonder how someone from another world would know to write of this one?”

“I couldn’t begin to guess, Fee. What I wonder is how she got here. Not that I object to her being here, it seemed like she came from a perilous place. I didn’t get a chance to ask her anything about it but when she first woke up, out on the mountainside, she was speaking of having screamed.” Kili didn’t like the idea that the woman came from a place that was unsafe, not if she wanted to go back.

“She said something about falling off a cliff. Anyone would scream, falling to what might have been her death.” Fili shrugged, and then straightened. “I wonder if that’s the trick, going near Death? Not that it would be safe to test as a way to get her home.”

“I should think not.” He shuddered at the thought.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

A tour is taken.

Chapter Notes

So, to make up for the late publish last week, I've made extra certain to get this one out on time. This is another all talk no action, or mostly talk, but it kinda needed to happen, and I pared down the unnecessary bits of the tour. It used to be about three times longer. I promise action will happen in the next chapter, so stay tuned.

This chapter is dedicated to the two guests (I assume you know who you are) who left me lovely shiny kudos. I enjoy knowing that people are actually reading this and it's not just dumped out into the ether, so thank you.

Fully dressed and more or less calm, I poked my head out the door of what I guessed would be my room for the duration. Standing not far off from the door were the two brothers. It was as good a time as any to venture out, so taking a deep breath I stepped out and cleared my throat anxiously. The two dwarves turned to look at me and I was suddenly hyper aware of the way my breasts were served up by the bodice. It was nerve-wracking, but neither of them showed a sign of being aware of my boobs screaming ‘look at me!’ I wasn’t sure how to act around them, and had sort of been banking on not being in charge of my life for a while. Thorin had seemed like he’d be happiest if he was in control of everything and everyone around him at all times, and I was surprised that the only people in the hallway were the two brothers and me.

“So. Uh, I sort of thought Thorin would still be here, waiting to give me the third degree.”

“The what?” That came from both of them at once, and I smiled at the evidence of the synchronous thinking of the brothers. They also both bore expressions of confusion, although I could hardly call the looks identical, as their faces were just too different to sport truly identical expressions.

“Giving someone the third degree means asking them a lot of questions, in a somewhat hostile manner.” I would have to watch how I talked here, it would seem. My idioms didn’t quite translate in Middle Earth. Hopefully, I could pick up enough Ereboran expressions. (is Ereboran even the right word?) “So do you think he’s going to want to continue the interrogation? I’m sure he still has questions.”

“He probably does, but for now you’re free of that fate.” Kili smiled at me, and I suddenly felt hot all over. His grin tilted to his left a little, and the dimple on that side was so sexy. I realized that I actually thought of him as sexy, which was a little odd, considering we weren’t even the same species. Of course, in The Lord of the Rings, Arwen and Aragorn are a thing, and even have a kid together, so maybe it wasn’t as big a deal here. I realized he’d been talking while I pondered the nature of cross species dating in Middle Earth.
“I’m sorry; I was wool-gathering there. What did you say?”

“Just that we’d be delighted to give you a tour, milady. The Halls of Erebor are a sight many wish to see, and lucky you, can have us guide you about as you do it.” Oh, God grant me strength, he smiled again.

“Sure. Sounds good.”

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As they showed the attractive woman about the halls of Erebor, Kili kept wondering if perhaps she would stay with them. She couldn’t get back to her original home on her own, but all of Middle Earth was open to her. What if she was more comfortable in the lands of Men? He’d avoided mentioning it, but the road to Rohan was often traveled by the caravans that took goods from Erebor to the lands of Men. If she wanted to go, it wouldn’t be that dangerous. Focusing back on the tour, he heard his brother boasting again.

“And this is the Hall of Kings. See how the floor is made of gold? That happened when we were fighting the dragon.” Kili was mildly irritated by his brother’s showing off. Fili never could resist trying to be the most interesting person in the room. Normally, Kili would just have smiled and shrugged it off, but he felt oddly possessive of the out-worlder woman. Damn it, he was the one who found her, he should be the focus of those hazel eyes! As he thought this, he realized her eyes were on him, and his brother had been talking, though he couldn’t have said what of.

“Yes? I’m terribly sorry, but I’ve heard Fee tell that tale so often, I tend to drift off when he tells it. Especially as he wasn’t even there when it happened.”

“Only because you needed tending, brother,” Fili responded, teasing. “But I was asking you if you thought we forgot anything.”

“Not much I can think of, but perhaps the lady would know of something we missed. Is there anything you would’ve liked to have seen?”

“Now that you mention it, the kitchens.” The two brothers looked at each other, confused by the odd request. “I’m a cook by trade, and if I get to stay here, I’d like to earn my keep. So I’d like to know where the kitchens are.”

In the kitchens, dwarrow bustled about preparing for that night’s meal. Although each family living in Erebor had cooking spaces in their homes, the royal kitchens still had to feed all the members of Thorin’s court who didn’t care to cook for themselves, not to mention any visiting dignitaries. The Men of the Lake and the Men of Dale frequently sent ambassadors to the halls of King Thorin, and occasionally Lord Elrond would send a messenger. That night, the King was hosting an ambassador from Gondor, who had made the long journey specifically to speak of trade agreements between the two kingdoms. He was rumored to be a fussy man, prone to complain, so the kitchens were working overtime to ensure a good meal went before the court that night. All this was explained by the heavyset, white-bearded Dwarf matron in charge of baking. Her duties left more time to talk than those of the other cooks, so she became the unofficial tour guide for Chris, who was fascinated by the variety of foods being prepared for that one meal alone.

“And you said you’re a cook too, lass? What are your specialties?” Naya, the baker, asked.
“I can do a little of everything, as a rule. I’m particularly good at soups and stews, and sweet baking. I’m only middling with breads, but cookies, pies and cakes I can do.”

“Ach, are you now? If you wouldn’t mind aiding me with a sweet for tonight’s dinner, I’d be much obliged. I’d thought to make a bread pudding, but we’re running low on the fine white flour I need to make a large amount of it.”

“I assume that means you do have raisins?” Upon receiving a nod, Chris continued. “Do you have rolled oats?” Another nod. “Then we could make oatmeal raisin cookies. The oats take up most of flour’s job and you can use less-fine flour for what part you do need. Also, the recipe stretches farther, because almost everyone is satisfied by two cookies. Although not everyone, my Uncle Jeff can put away oatmeal raisin cookies like they were going out of style.”

Kili had stood in the doorway to see if the Lady Chris was truly happy to be in the hot, busy kitchens. He had tried to tell her she needn’t make herself a servant, but she laughed and brushed his concerns off. She claimed to be happiest when cooking, and as he watched old Naya show her where to find things, he realized she really was happy. Although maybe insane, as he’d never seen anyone mix raw oats, raisins, sugar and molasses together before and he wasn’t sure what it would be. At any rate, he could do no more to help her just now, and he’d been neglecting his sword work. He left the kitchens to find Dwalin and see if he wanted to spar before dinner.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

A rude guest leads to some unpleasantness.

Chapter Notes

Yay, we get some action!

I love ladies who fight for themselves, so be prepared that Chris gets some kick-assery of her own. Who knows, maybe one day she’ll rescue a dude in distress.

This chapter is dedicated to LAmeliaMischief and the guests who left me kudos.

The great Dining Hall was just as overwhelming to me as any other part of the ‘palace’ area. Although technically every part of Erebor was inside, by virtue of being in a mountain, I could easily tell the areas designed for use by the royal family from the more plebian zones by looking at the scale. The section I thought of as the palace was all soaring ceilings and forty foot tall doors. The middle and lower classes lived and worked in more comfortably sized spaces.

The great table sat on a dais at one end of the room, with two, lesser, tables forming a squared off U shape. I knew that the important people would sit closest to Thorin at the raised table, and the less important people would sit at the other end of the room. I also decided that I wasn’t going to sit anywhere in that Hall. I didn’t want to irritate my reluctant host, and the only clothes I had were the plain clothes that Kili had brought me earlier. Well, and my trusty jeans and tee, but I really doubted that would go over well. Instead, I would stay in the kitchens where I felt on even ground.

The early courses I had very little to do with, being occupied getting a third batch of cookies in the oven. But when the serving maids (or possibly boys, it was kind of hard to tell, I thought they might be women, but they were dressed in uniforms consisting of a long, loose tunic and thick wool trousers) started coming back to the kitchen complaining of a particularly obnoxious guest, I noticed. I’ve learned that what the wait staff thinks of a particular customer impacts how well they serve, which impacts how well my food is received. The last thing I want is to slave over a meal, only to have it dismissed because the waiter let the food get cold. Evidently, the dwarven cooks knew that too, as they rotated out serving staff for the main table. But whoever it was must’ve been a dick on the order of Russ Lawson, because as each course was cleared, another set of servers refused to go near the table again. By the time dessert was to be served, there wasn’t any of the serving staff willing to serve whoever it was. But I hadn’t spent the past three hours measuring with unaccustomed sized cups and mixing and baking to let my food go uneaten.

“I’ll do it, if no one else will.” The dwarves near me all jumped a little; as though they had forgotten I was in the room. I’m used to that, because I’m not a very in-your-face kind of person. I’d rather go along to get along, or just leave a room if someone is upsetting me. I have my occasional fits of temper like anyone, but mostly I like to stay quiet. I’m unusual for a cook in that.
“Oh, lass, would you? Lord Castamir has angered or upset all the others so. I fear he may be a brute to you, but…. ” Naya trailed off.

“But there’s no one else, unless we send out, and that would take too long. Pass me a platter and I’ll go on out.” Suddenly I remembered how I was dressed. It wasn’t too far from some of the things I’d seen the cooks wear, but it wasn’t a uniform like the other servers wore. “Um, should I change into an outfit like the others?”

“Ach, there’s no time. You can go as you are, and if that wag of a Lord gives you any guff, you don’t let it get you down. You’re our only hope to get these fine cookies of yours on the table at all.”

“I’m less worried about the man who drove off every server in the whole place, and more worried about what King Thorin will say. I am dependent on the man for his hospitality.”

“Oh, well, if he gives you trouble, you tell him to bring his grievance to old Naya. I helped raise that boy, you know.”

“We know Naya, we know.” The voice came from the back of a crowd, but everyone chuckled. I gathered that Naya often spoke of her role in Thorin’s formative years.

Kili had looked about the Dining Hall for Lady Chris when he first took his seat, but hadn’t seen her. He knew they’d shown her where it was, so it wasn’t that she didn’t know where to go for dinner. Last he’d seen her; she’d been in the kitchen with her improbable raw oat mixture, so perhaps she simply needed to get cleaned up. Of course, he’d only obtained one set of clothes for her, so getting cleaned up might take a bit of doing, he supposed. He really should have had the foresight to see she’d need a second set of clothes. As the room filled beyond the point of being able to pick any one person, even so exotic a person, out of the crowd, Kili resolved to take her shopping for new clothes tomorrow. It was too bad that Dale wasn’t rebuilt yet, as a town occupied by Men would be more likely to have clothing fit for her. But there were a number of talented seamstresses in Erebor, so it wouldn’t be too difficult.

Through the meal, Kili kept grinding his teeth at the manners of Lord Castamir. He bossed the servants about with unutterable arrogance (yes, they were servants, but they have dignity too), he demeaned the nature and quality of the food, which Kili thought was excellent, and somehow managed to imply that he thought Dwarves beneath him in every word and action, without actually saying or doing anything that would give Thorin diplomatically acceptable reasons to ask him to leave. It was not lost on Kili that every course they had a different server at the high table, when ordinarily, the same few people were the only ones to wait on the king and his most honored guests. By the end of the meal, Kili thought he’d seen just about every attendant they had. He imagined that back in the kitchens, there was a furious argument of who would tend the great table. The first year Thorin had ruled, there had been similar arguments, although more for the honor and less to avoid a particular person. They were all starting to get tired of waiting when she came out.

Her thick, curly hair was tied back in a braid, and she was walking purposefully, the trays balanced in her hands level and steady as the rock of the mountain around them. Kili was shocked to see someone he’d thought of as a guest taking the place of a servant, and if he found out that the
kitchen lasses had made her do this, there would be trouble. On the other hand, if she chose to take a task no one else would, he would think her noble. As she neared the table, Lord Castamir finally took notice of her. With a leer and a chuckle, he leaned into Thorin.

“So I finally see a wench in this place! She must be awfully busy if she’s the only one.” Although the remark could be defended as only being about the presumed amount of cooking and cleaning that were needed in a city the size of Erebor, his tone and facial expressions spoke clearly of a sexual meaning. Thorin knew that he couldn’t afford to lose the trade agreement with Gondor, and the sneering Lord beside him had offered no direct insult.

Also, it would be most imprudent to point out that a third of the servers seen thus far were female. Dwarrow women were kept away from the world, and those that might hurt them, as much as possible, but when it was unavoidable, they dressed as the male dwarves did. It helped that they sported beards, if lighter ones like a boy’s. No, Thorin was well and truly boxed in by the strictures of courtly protocol. All he could do was put his very neutral face on and say nothing. Still, his hackles raised as the girl approached the uncouth man. It didn’t sit well to let any woman of any race go ill-treated, and this one he felt responsible for, by way of his youngest sister-son. As she neared the center of the table, it was certain she could hear the unsavory implications of the man sitting beside the King.

“She’s a pretty thing. And not under-fed like the Elf wenches.” Again the ambassador leered. The girl set her trays on the table at regular intervals, like would have been done with roasted goose, although the trays contained a multitude of flat golden brown disks. “But what have we here? Lumpy biscuits?”

“Oatmeal raisin cookies.” Her back stiffened and she paused perceptibly. “My lord. A recipe my grandmother taught me.”

“So she cooks as well! She must be a hidden gem of the Dwarven people. Or perhaps just a hidden gem of Thorin, eh old boy?” Thorin watched in horror as her face turned red at being talked of as though she wasn’t there, and as she stiffly walked away, continuing her task. He hated that any woman should suffer such slights, but found himself unable to form a coherent objection. Meanwhile, the girl had placed all the trays of cookies and was returning, when Lord Castamir snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her to his lap. Thorin, as well as Fili and Kili, shot to his feet in protest, when the obnoxious Lord let out a sharp cry of pain.

“I am going to be generous, Lord Castamir, and give you a warning. What you are feeling is called a gooseneck nerve pinch, and I know for a fact it is quite painful.” Her voice was even as she stood, her hands still clasped over his, bending his wrist at an awkward angle. “However, trust me when I say it could be so much worse. Grab me again, and I’ll show you.” She disengaged whatever hold she’d put him in and stepped back. Now out of the situation, she shot a nervous glance at Thorin, silently asking if she was to be kicked out now.

“Lord Castamir, I think perhaps you are not familiar with Dwarven Law regarding the treatment of our women. In Dwarf lands, the woman chooses. Always. Any person who tries to force the issue is dealt with most severely, punishments ranging from the removal of offending body parts, to death.” Lord Castamir blanched at the Dwarf King’s words. “I believe that your business with us is concluded. Count yourself lucky that you are a foreign emissary, and the lady is in a giving mood. If she insisted that you be punished any farther than what her own hands accomplished, you might find writing the next treaty you make much more difficult. You may leave us now.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Reassurances are given.

Chapter Notes

Ok, so more talking. And a few Durin family feels. We also learn a little more about Chris’s past, but just a little. Don’t worry, more is coming.

This Chapter is dedicated to i11iad and the lovely guests who left me kudos. I love knowing people read my writing and approve.

EDIT: I wrote a mini-chapter that takes place during this chapter, but elsewhere, and was planning on posting it next, but it screws up my chapter numbers, so I’m adding it to the end of this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I really hadn’t expected Thorin’s response. I honestly had thought that I’d be in deep shit for roughing up his guest, but I just sort of snapped when the douchebag grabbed me. When my actions were then backed up by the guy I thought would really rather get rid of me, I was flabbergasted. Even now, half an hour later, as I sat in my room, I kind of expected him to come barging in and kick me out. So, when I heard a knock at my door, my heart jumped into my throat.

“Come in.” My voice came out more quivery than I liked. I resolved to be strong in the face of whatever came.

“Milady Christiana, I wanted to see that you were alright.” It was Fili, not Thorin, who came into my room. He seemed genuinely concerned.

“Oh, aside from having assaulted a guest of the man who controls my fate, not bad.” I’d meant it to come out strong and funny, a quip. Instead it came out watery and unsure. “On a scale of mild to volcanic, how mad is he?”

“He’s in a towering rage, but not at you. Thorin is very protective of the women in his Halls, more so than any other Dwarven leader I’ve met, and that’s saying something. We don’t have as many women as the other races of Arda, so our customs are designed to protect the ones we do have.” Fili looked about for a chair, but the only one was a big, heavy armchair in the corner. Rather than let him try to haul it over near the bed where I was sitting I patted the coverlet beside me and he perched there.

“I’ve never been sure why, but Uncle Thorin takes the ancient laws very seriously, when it comes to that. Even though you aren’t a Dwarf, he was ready to gut Lord Castamir for touching you against your will. It’s fortuitous that you defended yourself, or we might have sent the ambassador back to Gondor in a box. Or several boxes, actually.”
“My parents didn’t want me going out into the big bad world without knowing the basics of what to do if attacked. I spent most of my afternoons in middle school though high school at a dojo, taking whatever they were teaching that day.” Another confused look; man was I going to have to adjust my speech. “A dojo is a place where you learn martial arts, hand to hand combat. I’ve got belt ratings in three schools of fighting. Judo, which is about using your opponent’s momentum against him, Karate, which is a striking and blocking form, and Aikido, which is where I got the nerve pinch you saw earlier.” He seemed impressed. “It was fun to learn, and useful.”

“It’s interesting to meet a woman who fights. Dwarven women aren’t overly encouraged to learn to fight, but occasionally it happens, if she’s stubborn about it. Mostly we protect our women through secrecy. You can’t hurt what you can’t see.”

“Is that why the servers wore that particular uniform? I could have sworn some of them were female.”

“Indeed, some of them were maidens.” Fili paused a moment, like he was thinking of how to say something. “He won’t say it, but I know Uncle Thorin appreciates that you took on the job of serving, when our own staff were unwilling. It was truly awful, sitting there, unable to find a way to tell that pompous ass to stop demeaning the servers that wouldn’t start a war. I know every face of every Dwarf that serves in the Dining Hall, and so does Uncle, so we knew there was no-one else who hadn’t already been subjected to that sordid display. We both understand that you didn’t have to take on the job yourself, and we appreciate that you did. I’m only sorry you had to go through getting grabbed.”

“Thank you for your concern, but I’ll be fine. Although, it’s been a long day, so we should both probably get some rest.” I walked him to the door. “Good night.”

“To you as well.”

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Kili was back out on the balcony, where he retreated to think sometimes. It calmed him to look out at the river and lake in starlight, and the light of a waxing crescent moon, and he needed calming as he thought of his failings. He knew he was reckless, and he tried for his family’s sake to control his impulses, but sometimes it was too hard to resist doing something that he knew would have repercussions. He’d been inches away from doing something like that tonight, when Lord Castamir put his hands on Lady Chris. He’d seen red before that, when the beastly man had made implications as to her virtue, and only Fili kicking him under the table had stopped him from making some snide comments of his own. Fortunately, the lady in question had defended herself, but she shouldn’t have had to.

What must she think, that he’d done nothing, said nothing? Was there anything that could redeem him from his inaction? He’d have to think about it. He was considering going on in to bed when his brother walked out on to the balcony.

“I thought I’d find you out here.” Fili leaned back against the railing. “You’re blaming yourself.” It was a simple statement of fact. Fili was only a few years older than Kili, and many said the two thought like twins. Kili didn’t see it, but he did know his brother knew him better than anyone.

“I should have said something, done something, anything. She shouldn’t have had to go through
that. I should go to her, apologize, but I can’t bring myself to face her this night. Perhaps I will find my courage in the morning.” He sighed deeply. “What could I possibly say to her?”

“Why don’t you offer her combat lessons?”

“Combat lessons? And imply she’ll have to defend herself again? Are you crazy, Fee? She should never have had to defend herself in the first place! Uncle has always taught us to protect the women in our care, that’s our job, and you want me to ask her to take the duties I ought to fulfil myself?”

“When I spoke to her earlier, she said her parents encouraged her to learn martial forms, and she seemed to have enjoyed learning them.” He saw his brother’s incredulous look. “Tis something to think about, at least.”

“Perhaps you may be right. I’ll give it thought.” And this was a good place to be, if he wanted to think. He spied a light on the water of the lake in the distance, probably a fisherman coming home after plying his trade. Kili decided to stay until the light reached its destination.

“Don’t stay out here too long, brother.” Fili clapped Kili on the shoulder in parting. “If you are to find your courage on the morrow, you’ll need sleep.”

“You know me too well. Dream well.”

“And you also.”


Interlude

Elsewhere, in the Halls of King Thranduil, a desperate plea was being made.

“But you are an Istari, Mithrandir! You have a charge to protect the free peoples of Arda. You know a terrible darkness has settled here, threatening the entirety of the forest. Beyond the sickness that afflicted the Greenwood, turning it to Mirkwood, this darkness is not like any we have seen for an age. And you say you will do nothing?”

“I said, King Thranduil, that I do not know what I can do, not at this moment. I have sent word to the chief of my order, but what he may do I cannot say. He has grown isolated, and unwilling to see beyond his own territory. As have you. You say your lands are being threatened, but the darkness will not limit itself to your borders. What of the Men of the Lake? Or of the new Dale? What of the Dwarves of Erebor? To look to the west, what of Beorn, who slew Bolg? Or your kin in Lorien? I would say they all have stake in what happens to your lands, yet I do not believe you have called upon any of them for aid. Instead you look to an old man like a child begging his mother to make it all better!”

“What may Men do against such a foe that even Elves cannot stop? Celeborn and Galadriel care not for my people, they guard their own borders and from their gifts, their powers, they need not fear for their people.”
“You are bitter about being denied a burden. And I believe that you underestimate the strength of Men. But you said nothing of Erebor, home of many fine warriors, as you saw yourself at the Battle of Five Armies. Tell me, why have you not sent to the Lonely Mountain?”

“The Dwarves of Erebor have no reason to bear me friendship, Mithrandir. I doubt that they would come, even if I begged them for aid. To them it would be a fitting punishment to laugh in my face as my home is destroyed.”

“In a time past, you would have been right. But I believe that the divide between your Kingdoms may be crossed, if you unbend enough to allow it.”

“Very well. If you bear the message, perhaps they will not dismiss it without at least a little thought. I will prepare a missive for you to take.”

Chapter End Notes

Just so you know, the 'burden' Gandalf refers to is the ring of Adamant, one of the three rings of power given to the Elves. Galadriel has one, Gandalf keeps another, and I believe Elrond has the third. Thranduil has never had a ring of power, so he only sees that Galadriel and Elrond can keep their people safe and not the terrible price they pay for it.

I know a lot of people like writing the Elvenking as a total dick, and that is canonically supportable, but I like even my villains to have reasons for what they do, and I think that Thranduil's fear for his people and his home is what makes him a three dimensional character.
The next morning dawned while I was still asleep. I’m not a morning person by nature, to say the least. Most days, only multiple loud alarm clocks get me where I need to be on time. Middle Earth doesn’t exactly have alarm clocks, though, so I was still in bed when a loud knocking woke me. I dragged my eyelids open and cast a baleful glance at the closed door. The knocking continued. Resigning myself to the fact that I would have to get up, I pushed off my covers and swung my legs out of the bed. I’d slept in the shift, and it had bunched up around my legs. I must have tossed and turned last night, not unusual for sleeping in a new environment. I wished I had my pajamas, instead of what might as well be a dress. Padding barefoot across the floor, I was at least glad that the room had several thick rugs, although the one by the fireplace that looked like fur took getting used to.

“Hold your horses, I’m coming!” I pulled open the door to see Kili standing there. “What do you want?” Yes, I knew I was being rude, but I was cranky. I may have mentioned I wasn’t a morning person.

“Lady Chris! You, you’re in your shift!” He was turning red. Belatedly I realized how it would look to him. I’ve worn shorter dresses than the shift, as it came past my knees, but all the dresses here went to the floor.

“I slept in it, so think of it as a nightgown. Now, how may I help you?” My effort to reassure him didn’t have the desired effect. If anything, he’d gone an even deeper shade of red. “Oh for Pete’s sake, Kili, I’m not naked.” That didn’t help either, and if I tried to calm him down any more, he might be sick. “Wait here and I’ll get dressed. Try to breathe, at least, you look like you’re about to pass out.”

After closing the door, I quickly dressed in my only outfit, this time forgoing the bra. As I’d expected, the bodice did just fine on its own. I still had to wear my tennis shoes, and I knew they must look odd in this world, so I hoped eventually I’d have skirts long enough to cover them. I finger-combed my hair, and wondered if they would mind providing me with a brush, although I didn’t want to push my luck. After I scrubbed my teeth with my finger, the best brushing I could do, I went back to the door.
“Better, now?” At least he wasn’t the color of a valentine anymore.

“Yes, thank you. I came to ask if you’d like to go in search of some more clothing at the market. I realized last night that you’d need more than what I got you.”

“You do realize I have no money, right? I don’t even like taking what charity I’ve been offered so far, although out of practicality I have to accept it until I can find work.”

“I wasn’t thinking of it as charity, but as recompense for what you went through last night. You’ve already baked and served for one night, and I’d say putting yourself between a brute of a man and strangers has earned you a little generosity. Please say yes, I really want to make up for the dishonorable level of my inaction last night.”

“Alright then.

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They had started the excursion in the great Market Hall, where simple items like already finished clothes were sold, purchasing several shifts and bodices, although the skirts were all too short. They then made their way deeper into the mountain where the skilled craftsmen worked. Measurements were taken of Chris’s feet by a cobbler, with reassurances that the boots commissioned would only take a few days. At a tailor’s, one of the bodices was left for alterations, and measurements were taken for skirts. They were almost ready to leave when Kili saw Chris run her eyes appreciatively over a blue dress in the window.

“Would you like one? It would look lovely on you.” She hesitated, and he recalled her reluctance to take charity. “I believe my Uncle wishes you to be at the high table tonight for dinner, as a thanks. A dress like that would be most appropriate, and he forever wishes I be more appropriate. Letting me buy it for you would be a kindness.” She smiled shyly at him, nodding. Kili signaled the tailor that they would need the dress altered.

“Yes, yes. A fine choice for the lady. The shade will set off her coloring nicely. And I hadn’t hemmed it yet, thinking to size it for the buyer, so it won’t even be too short. Just let me take one more measurement….”

After the tailor had the measurements he needed, they meandered back towards the market, pausing to buy a bag of roasted nuts from a strolling vendor. As they neared the main square, Chris spotted something in a window and stopped to look at it. Kili followed her, and saw that the object of her interest was a silver-backed brush set. He thought of trying to buy it for her, but the effort he’d gone to over the dress would be nothing compared to the fight that would break out over such an obviously expensive luxury item. She did need a hairbrush, though. Every Dwarf was aware of how much trouble hair could be if one let it get tangled. He decided to try getting a plainer version of the set for her. She couldn’t argue with the practicality of that.

“Let’s look inside. I’m sure you’ll find something that would work for you.”

Inside the shop they found a variety of grooming supplies, everything from soaps to combs and even a section of perfumes. Chris picked out a bar of soap scented vaguely of sandalwood and roses and a hair tonic, as well as a brush and comb set similar to the one she’d admired in the window, but backed with some golden colored wood instead of silver. She also selected a tooth
scrubber, after the purpose and use was explained to her. She mentioned something about her world having a brush to clean teeth, although Kili couldn’t see how a brush could clean teeth the way a scrubber did. While the shop keeper was explaining this to her, Kili quietly slipped a small vial of perfume, designed to work with the soap Lady Chris had selected, into the pile of things to be bought. He wanted her to have something nice, even just a bottle of scent.

Laden with purchases, the two of them walked back to Chris’s room in companionable silence. At her door, Kili juggled his burdens about while Chris opened the door wide to let him come in and place the packages on her bed.

“I’ll bring by your dress for tonight in a few hours, after it’s been fitted. Is there anything I can do for you in the meantime, milady?”

“Well, I did spend yesterday evening in a hot kitchen, so a bath would be lovely. I don’t know how you handle bathing here, but at any rate I need one before tonight.”

“Of course, milady. I’ll have a bath sent up right away.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Chris settles in and Kili trains

Chapter Notes

Ok, so I'm a bit of a history nerd, and I just had to do a scene where something ordinary is odd or more difficult because this is Middle Earth and therefore sort of pseudo-medieval. Also, I drool thinking of Kili sparring. In my head cannon he spars shirtless. And sweaty. And...Ok not going there, sorry.

Anyway, this chapter is dedicated to TheRaggedTiger for commenting and offering to beta, as well as Silklightning_Seychelles and a guest for shiny kudos.

P.S. If the beta thing works out, I may be upping my postage to twice a week.

The bath arrived in parts. First, a pair of Dwarf women (I was slowly learning how to tell the genders apart from facial differences instead of clothing) carried in a large copper tub. Not large in terms of the soaker tubs back home, but large in terms of I wasn’t sure how they carried the thing. It was round, not oblong, which was interesting. They set it on the slightly unsettling fur rug by the fireplace where it could get warm without the fire toasting me. Next came several buckets of steaming hot water and a wooden stool to place my soap on and a thick stack of towels. When the final preparations were done, the Dwarven maids that had carried all this stuff bowed to me and departed. Baths were apparently much more of a production here than back home.

I had worried at how hot the steaming buckets had seemed, but by the time the tub was halfway to full, the water had cooled enough to be comfortable. Once alone, I stripped out of the twice-worn outfit and slipped into the hot water. Grabbing the bar of soap I’d purchased earlier, I quickly scrubbed myself off, even working some of the lather into my hair. The thing they called a hair tonic worked like a conditioner, but there seemed to be nothing comparable to shampoo. The water was cooling faster than I liked, so I hurried to get finished quickly. I discovered rather belatedly, that the towels were just flat sheets, not the nubbly Terry cloth I was used to, but there were enough of them that I didn’t think I’d miss the big fluffy towels from back home.

After I was out of the tub and dry as the flat woven toweling cloths could get me, I looked at what clothing I now had. The skirt from the first day was all I had to cover my legs, so it would have to do, and the shifts were all pretty much the same, except one that had ribbon detailing on the cuffs. The only real fashion choice I had was the red bodice or the green one. The plain brown of the skirt would go with anything, but it was a warm brown, and I’ve always liked deep reds, so I decided to pair it with the garnet-colored bodice. Oddly enough, the simple act of deciding on an outfit made me feel more at home.

Dressed once more, I realized I didn’t know what to do with my left over wash water, let alone the
tub it now sat in. After some internal debate, I decided to go look for someone to ask, because I really couldn’t be expected to know how to handle it if no one told me, and surely there was someone I could find who would know. But as I stepped out my door, I nearly tripped over a Dwarf child.

“Oh! I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there.” Despite having been bumped into, the child seemed cheerful.

“No harm’s been done, Lady. I was to wait here and carry word when you needed someone to bear away the bath things. Prince Kili asked it of me himself!” He puffed out his chest a bit and stood taller as he said it. The little Dwarf seemed so proud of being asked to do something by a prince.

“Well, then I guess I shouldn’t keep you from that very important job. But if I may, what’s your name? I like to know the names of people who help me.”

“Tynn, son of Tryn.” With a cheeky smile and a wave, he ran off, presumably to find someone to haul off the bathtub. Smiling at the enthusiastic nature of children, of all races it seemed, I decided to go explore that grand library I’d seen on my tour.

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Kili grinned ferociously at Dwalin. The older Dwarf had his two blunted practice axes in hand, and the slight bunching of his lead shoulder told Kili he was preparing a charge. Kili shifted his grip on his practice sword. Normally, when they sparred, each used the same weapons as the other, but today they were practicing asymmetrical sparring. You never knew when you would have to face a foe with more reach, or with two weapons to your one.

As he expected, Dwalin sprang forth in a furious burst of speed that would have surprised any who didn’t know him, but Kili had faced this attack before. His friend could get up some fantastic speed over short bursts, but they tired him. All Kili had to do was outlast the initial burst, and Dwalin would slow down to a point where he was an easier target. Not an easy target, mind you, the warrior would never be an easy target, but easier. Swinging into the lead axe, Kili twisted his body to avoid the slice of the other, and then reversed his swing to knock back the blow aimed at his ribs. Moving backwards quickly, he drew the burly fighter with him as he danced away from strikes. His agility protected him as the axes swung, as much or more than his sword did. That was the trick to facing an opponent wielding two weapons.

As Dwalin slowed, Kili put more force into his own counter-strikes, pushing his friend back across the floor of the salle. Sensing the end, he swung to tap Dwalin’s neck and end the bout, only to have his sword caught by the under-curve of the older Dwarf’s axe.

“I win, laddy!” Dwalin crowed. Sure enough, the second blunted practice axe was resting on Kili’s hip. A blow there with one of Dwalin’s real axes would have bought him a quick trip to the Halls of his fathers.

“I don’t understand. How did you…” Kili paused, considering the whole of the fight. “You weren’t really as tired as I thought, were you?”

“Nay, lad. And I hope that in a real fight you’ll not be assuming you know the enemy’s strength.” Laughing, he clapped Kili on the shoulder. “Come, then. We’d best be getting cleaned up, or
you’ll not be fit for sitting at the high table tonight. And I hear tell that you’ve reason to want to sit beside your King this night.” One of his bushy eyebrows rose.

Kili blushed. “I would give honor to someone I failed, is all. Her first day here, and well, that happens. What must she think? I feel the need to reassure her that she is in civilized company.”

“Fili tells me she handled it skillfully. He seems to think she might appreciate joining us in the salle some one of these days.”

“And I’ve told Fili, I don’t want her thinking she has to defend herself. That’s our job. Now, if you want to join me in the hot spring, I’d welcome you, but I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

“We’ll not speak of it again tonight. I need to get in the spring before my old bones crumble to dust under the pressure of overworked muscles.” Dwalin’s face was lively as he said it; else Kili might have harbored actual concern for his friend.

“Oh go on, you old fraud. Your bones are no more about to crumble than your hair is about to sprout back out of that boulder of a head.”

In the underground hot spring near the practice salle, Dwarf warriors rested in the hot water that gathered in the smooth natural pools. Heat from deep in the earth heated the water that welled up from the floor of the cavern. At some point in the misty recesses of time past, skilled craftsmen had carved steps into the natural basins in the floor of the Spring Hall, creating perfect places to rest after practicing sword or axe work.

Kili waved to several friends and acquaintances he saw throughout the Hall, but he sought out a pool that had no-one else in it. Dwalin accompanied him, and after they both had placed their clothes on the racks provided, the two dwarves slipped into the hot liquid to soak. Dwalin leaned back against the edge of the pool, closing his eyes in contentment. Kili watched him warily for a moment before closing his own eyes. He knew his friend had said they’d speak no more of teaching Lady Chris combat, but Dwalin could be as clever as his older brother sometimes, and sneaky with it. After a small snore escaped Dwalin’s lips, Kili finally relaxed into the heat of the pool, resting his tired body.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so next Sunday is my birthday, so I may be posting the next chapter a little late, depending on what sorts of poor life choices I make with my friends. Apologies in advance.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Chris finds the library.

Chapter Notes

Hi all, sorry this took so long. I managed to convince myself I'd posted this chapter, when I hadn't. :( Hopefully you will forgive my lateness, and I promise that chapter 10 goes up on Sunday.

This chapter was beta'd by the lovely TheRaggedTiger. This chapter is dedicated to her and to princessoakenshield, who left me happy shiny Kudos.

A Note About the Word 'Writ'

As a history geek, I'm trying to keep all the dialogue from Middle Earth natives as close to medieval/renaissance language as possible, which means some words are funky. The word 'writ' in particular gave me fits, because everyone who read it (minus Dad, who taught me my history geek ways) thought it was a typo of the word 'written'. It is not. Way back when, 'writ' was an appropriate past tense of the verb 'write'. I debated changing it to 'written' but the feel wasn't right. So, it remains, sorry.

In the great library there were thousands and thousands of books. More like manuscripts than books really. This treasure trove was largely untouched by either time or dragon. Stone walls with no windows had protected the books from the ravages of age, and the entry way was only twenty feet tall, not nearly high enough for Smaug to have gotten in here, even if he were interested in books, which I doubted. I had no idea where to start looking, so I picked a shelf at random. Even if I’d had an idea as to what I wanted to read, I had no clue how the tomes were arranged.

“Damn.” The first book I’d pulled down was written in a runic script I couldn't read. I placed it back on the shelf and tried another. “Double damn.” I should have seen this coming. Why would books in Erebor be written in English?

“May I help you, young lady?” The voice was kindly, and somewhat familiar. I turned to see Balin standing next to me.

“No, I don’t think so. Unless you want to teach me to read this language. Somehow I completely spaced on the fact that I don’t read Dwarvish when I came in here.” I knew my smile was unconvincing, because I can’t hide my emotions well, and I was very sad that something as basic as a good book was out of my reach.

“Oh, now lass, not all the books in this Hall are writ in the runes. We have an extensive collection of tomes in Old Elvish, and some in the languages of Men.” He patted my arm comfortingly.

“What language can you read, and we’ll go from there.” I paused in thought. I could tell him my
“English. The only language I’m fluent in is English, and I don’t think that you’ll have any books in that, because it comes from another world.”

“Another… Oh, you must be the lass that Thorin spoke of. Well, you’re right that we don’t have any books from your homeland, but you speak the common tongue just fine. Let’s see if you can read it as well.”

He guided me to a section of thick books bound in green leather. Balin reached for a book that was easily the thickest there and steadily pulled it from the shelf. I was sure I’d have staggered under the weight, but the white-bearded Dwarf held it with little effort. We moved over to a table and he lay the book down gently. Upon opening the book, I found that I could indeed read it, although some of the letters were different and all of them ornamented in ways I’d never seen outside of a prop truck.

“Now then, lass, can you make out any of it at all?” Balin asked me in a concerned tone.

“Yes. The letters are formed a little differently than what I’m used to, but I can read it. It looks like… is this book about trade agreements?”

“Indeed it is; a book recording trade between Erebor and Rohan in the year 2550. Not the most colorful reading, but I picked it for the plainness of the scribe’s hand, not the intrigue of his subject matter. Now that we know you can read Adûni, we can find you something better suited to pleasure reading. What sort of book were you thinking of when you first came to the library?”

I wasn’t sure of my answer. I hadn’t really thought what I wanted to read, only that it would be interesting to do so. At home, my walls are lined with science fiction and fantasy, but I didn't need the escape offered by that kind of reading, now that I was actually in Middle Earth.

“I think I’d like to read a book of history. I’m moderately familiar with this world, through the stories of my own, but I never really read the annexes and appendices that detailed the history. It might be useful to know more.”

“Oh, now I think there’s a set of histories over here, transcribed fairly recently by Kerric, son of Korin. He’s got a lovely hand, very clear, so you’ll not have trouble with it. He didn’t favor flourishes as much as some of his contemporaries. In the time before the dragon, a fashion of ornamentation took hold that fair made the eyes water.” Balin chattered pleasantly as he guided me farther into the library. I was beginning to appreciate how large the room was when we stopped by a tall shelf with a ladder. Balin pointed out which books were the histories I wanted, and although he would have needed the ladder to reach them comfortably, I could pull them down with a little difficulty. I liked being the tall one for once. Settling in at a reading table, I flipped the book open to the first page and began to read.

It was late afternoon when Kili returned to the tailor’s shop to pick up the dress he’d bought for Lady Chris. The bell over the door rang merrily as he entered the shop, and the tailor’s wife looked up from a piece of mending she was working on behind the counter.

“Well, I’ll be. Jerr said a Prince had come by, but if I’m to be honest, I didn't quite believe him.
What might a humble old lady do for a son of Durin?

“You are by no means old, mistress,” Kili said with a smile. “And I've come to pick up some garments that were left for alteration. There was a blue dress that I must get to its wearer before dinnertime.”

“I know that dress. I saw Jerr working on it earlier. It’s just back here. Won’t take but a moment.” The Dwarf woman bustled off to the back of the shop, returning with a thick bundle wrapped in rough brown parchment. “A pleasure to serve, milord. If the Lady wishes any changes, have her let us know.”

Kili left the shop and made his way back to Lady Chris’s room. Knocking on her door yielded no answer. Kili supposed she might have gone elsewhere, as nothing they’d shown her was off limits, but he had no idea where. He was starting to feel a bit silly, standing in the hall by her door, when she came around the corner, arm in arm with Balin.

“Oh! Hi, Kili. I hope you weren't standing there long. I went to the library to see what I could find. Thankfully, Balin here rescued me when I thought I would need to learn how to read all over again.”

“Oh, you’re too kind lass; it was a simple matter of showing you where the right books were. I’d been meaning to meet you, and a joy it turned out to be.” Balin extricated his arm from hers and patted her hand. “I’d best be going. Thorin wished to discuss the reclaiming of Moria or some such thing.” He bid her a courtly farewell, but Chris’s face spoke of a sadness beyond the normal measure of parting.

“What is the matter? You look as though a friend has died.”

“No, he’s not dead yet. But knowing the future can be a real burden. Especially as I don’t dare tell you anything that might mess up your space-time continuum. Who knows what kind of damage I could do?”

“The future? I’ve heard rumors of Elves with the gift of foresight, but you are no Elf. What kind of magic lets you see ahead of what time brings?”

“The magic of perspective. My world tells stories, remember? But I really shouldn’t tell you anything of what’s going to happen. I might trigger the whole thing off early and Lord knows most of the Fellowship is either a child or not born yet. I just need to focus on the here and now.”

“Well, in the here and now, as you would have it, the dress for tonight is finished, and I have come to deliver it.” He held up the package. “Dinner is in a few hours, so there’s no rush, but I thought you’d like to have it sooner.”

“Thank you, Kili.” She took the package from him, and turned to go into her room. As she pushed the heavy door open, she turned to look him in the eye. A shadow of a frown crossed her brow, and her voice was soft. “You’re sure Thorin wants me at the high table? I didn’t expect him to be thrilled at how I acted yesterday. I wouldn’t want to strain his hospitality any more than I already have.”

“Uncle would do honor to one who risked much to aid those she did not know.” Kili took her hand and looked her straight in the eye. “As would I.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Dinner at the high table and news of a guest.

Chapter Notes

Ok, getting back on track with my original posting schedule.

Because this chapter went up so soon after my last chapter, there have been no new kudos or comments to dedicate this chapter for. Hopefully now that I'm not being a derp, the kudos shall flow once more. Or comments. I get that you can only leave kudos once, but every comment will get both a response and a dedication.

So, just a generalized sort of dedication: To all my readers, thank you for reading this so my work doesn't just sort of lay about the ether unappreciated. I write for many reasons, but a big one is all of you.

EDIT: I found a picture of a dress very like the one that was in my head while writing this chapter. It is here: http://azinovic.deviantart.com/art/Medieval-dress-Tamara-366371597

The Dining Hall was as impressive and overwhelming as I’d thought it would be. I sat with Kili on my right and Fili on my left. On the other side of the crown prince, Thorin sat in a cross between a throne and a chair. He looked as grumpy as ever, so I focused on being very quiet and not drawing any attention. As a result, I spent a fair amount of time examining my lap. The front of the dress Kili had insisted on buying me had a thick stripe of heavily embroidered decoration across the abdomen and another down the center of the skirt, so it wasn’t the most boring thing to look at, but I was still getting slightly tired of tracing the knot-work design with my eyes when Kili bumped my arm.

“THE dress is lovely on you, but it hardly holds the secrets of the Valar that you seem to be seeking.” He wasn’t quite whispering, but his voice was pitched low enough that I didn’t feel embarrassed that he was calling me on my avoidance of the conversation.

“I’m just not used to such company, is all. I’m so very nervous that someone,” I pitched my voice down and shot a glance at Thorin, “is going to look up and realize that a line cook is sitting not two seats from him, and that I’ll get kicked out of here. I wish you’d let me sit farther down.”

“Thorin requested your placement at the table himself. He’d hardly take offence that you obeyed his wishes. Why do you believe he’ll want you removed, when I know at least two people have told you that he wants you here? I know he can be a bit…” Kili trailed off as though he couldn’t find the right word. “Well, I mean he’s….
“Mr. Majestic Grumpy-pants?” I offered. Kili looked simultaneously confused and amused.

“That’s one way of putting it. I think the words I was looking for were taciturn and imposing. But I swear; he’s not nearly as fickle as you seem to think. He’s slow to let people in, but he’s not so cold as to turn you out.”

“Aye, my brother is right. Uncle indeed wants you here.” As low as our voices had been, and even over the din of happy Dwarves, Fili had still heard us. Not surprising, given he was sitting right next to me. “We all do. Whatever you may have been in your world, in this one you are an honored guest. Your selfless valor earned you our utmost regard.”

“Selfless valor my left foot. It was one handsy customer. I’ve dealt with that before, and it’s no big deal. I worked as a waitress in a dive bar to pay my own way through culinary school. It wasn’t quite Hooters, but I still learned how to deal with drunks making passes.”

“I’m not sure of half the words you speak, but I’m truly sorry you’ve had to endure such offences.” Kili really did look shocked that I was taking this so well. “That shall not happen again while you stay under our protection. In the future we shall be better at defending you.”

“Whoa there, mister. I prefer not to be a damsel in distress, thank you very much. Chivalry is all well and good, and I’m glad to know I landed in the land of knights in shining armor, but I think I defended myself pretty well. Aside from whatever repercussions might fall on me for attacking a foreign diplomat.”

“You did admirably, but you should never have had to. For that, you have my deepest regrets.” I jumped a little as Thorin spoke to me for the first time since he’d interviewed me that first day. “And for placing yourself within the reach of harm, for the sake of my people, you have my highest esteem. Our home is ever open to you, Lady Christiana.” He spoke with great gravity, as though he truly did think I’d done something amazing and worthy of respect. I wasn’t sure how to handle it, so I played with the ribbon of trim on the hems of my sleeves and muttered something that hopefully sounded like a thank you. I’m not a grand, noble speech sort of person.

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All through the meal, Kili couldn’t help but glance her way, every chance he thought he wouldn’t be spotted. The blue dress had looked good in the store window, but when the Lady Chris wore it, her copper hair spilling over the indigo fabric on her shoulders, her creamy skin peeking out of the squared neckline, well, it was something entirely different. But for all her loveliness, she didn’t seem happy. She ate well enough, so she wasn’t sick, but she had kept her eyes fixed on her lap the entire meal. When he could have borne no more, and finally asked her what troubled her, he couldn’t believe his ears. He knew he’d told her that Thorin wished to do her honor, as had his brother. Why would the woman fear Thorin’s displeasure even after all reassurance that any displeasure was to be aimed elsewhere?

Fortunately, Thorin had heard them discuss her bravery (which only seemed more courageous the humbler she became) and spoken his own piece. Debt never sat well with any of the sons of Durin, Uncle least of all, and Thorin had difficulty with the finer points of conversation at the best of times. So it warmed Kili greatly that his Uncle had managed to speak the debt that weighed on all their minds. The Lady Chris also seemed pleased at the King’s esteem, once he spoke it, but she still buried her gaze in her lap. Perhaps there was more than just unfounded fear weighing on her
mind. Kili resolved to ask after dinner was over.

At the end of the meal, as everyone was done with eating, but unready to depart the company of friends just yet, a messenger entered the Hall. It was one of the palace runners, not a messenger from outside Erebor. The lad silently approached the high table, and when he spoke, he kept his voice low, so as not to disturb any but the recipients of his message.

“Word has come from the Ravens, my liege. The Grey Wanderer has been seen leaving Mirkwood. Roac says his intent is to travel here. He is but a week’s journey from us, assuming he stops in Laketown as he has before.”

“We would of course be glad to host our wizard. We shall prepare a royal welcome for him. He might even arrive in time for the Feast of the Fallen, which would be kind providence, indeed.” Thorin did look glad that the instigator of the quest that got them their homeland back was coming to visit, and rightly so. Kili also would welcome a chance to visit with his old friend. But, surprisingly enough, it was Lady Chris that seemed most excited. After the messenger had left and the gathering of the court had mostly broken up for the night, Kili found out why.

“Kili, may I ask you a favor?”

“Of course, milady, anything in my power I shall do.”

“When Gandalf comes, would you speak to him for me? Just sound him out a bit. He may be the only person who can get me home, but I don’t want to get my hopes up if it’s impossible.” So that was her eagerness for the wizard’s arrival. Suddenly the good, filling food they’d eaten for dinner was a lead weight in his belly. He didn’t want her to go, he realized. She would want it, obviously. She had a life there, friends and family, surely. But in his heart, Kili had been so glad that this strange, courageous, beautiful woman was here, he hadn’t given any thought to whether or not she even could go home. Travel outside the world was such an outrageous impossibility he’d never even considered it. But she obviously had.

(Of course, my lady. I’ll speak with him of your situation. Even if he does not know the way to return you to your rightful place, he may well know of one who can. I believe he mentioned the head of his order being both wise and powerful.”

“I’d prefer not to deal with Saruman. He may be fine now, but…. She stood up quickly, as though she’d suddenly remembered something. “I shouldn’t talk about it.”

“Another question of perspective?”

“Yes. I hate grandfather paradoxes. Still, I wouldn’t feel comfortable with Saruman controlling my fate. But thank you for agreeing to ask Gandalf about getting me home. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Indeed you shall, milady. I look forward to our next meeting with bated breath.”

“Flirt. See you tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes
I like Thorin trying to be nice. In my headcanon, he tries to be imposing and majestic so people will respect him, but he does have moments where he's just a nice guy. Or trying to be, the imposing thing kinda works against him.

And for all those people who just went "Hey wait a minute there, you said you like strong female characters, why the hell is she being such an overanxious, self-conscious wimp?" I would like to point out that she has now spent over twenty four hours in a completely different world, and that fact is starting to sink in. Plus the whole Mr. Majestic Grumpy-pants thing hardly makes her feel welcome, and even the bravest women get nervous from time to time. I think it would be highly unrealistic to have a character, either sex, who never got nervous. Unless that was a part of the character, like Daredevil. So that's my soapbox for the day.

What are your thoughts on nice!Thorin and nervous!Christiana? Leave a comment!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Chris makes a new friend, Ori learns some things, and Kili is too clever (no, really) for his own good.

Chapter Notes

OMG, guys I finished the rough draft! It's at 31 chapters and the chapter counter thingumy has been changed to reflect that fact. It's also now at a cool fifty thousand words, though that may change because editing. Speaking of editing, I really truly hate it. I have been known to mimic Gollum on the topic. (We hates it, Precious!) To cope with editing, I generally write. (Yes, I am aware that this is a vicious cycle.) I'm probably going to write some short little ficlets or one shots in this universe, so if there's something you'd like to see, let me know. No promises, because I'm sure there will be some stuff that cannot be worked into existing timelines. But if you want to see what a particular member of the Company is doing during all this, or what's going on back in the Shire or in Rivendell, shoot me a comment!

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama for the lovely comments. I know there was also a guest who left a Kudos, so thank you for that too, kind stranger.

I managed to wake up on my own the next morning. Mainly due to needing to use the facilities, but I took it as a win. I had a simple version of a powder room adjoining my bedroom, thankfully. It may have been a garderobe, but with any luck I would never have to use a chamber pot. I wasn’t sure how they handled the issue of sewage, but I wasn’t going to ask.

Not sure what to do with my day, I put on the plainer clothes at my disposal and ventured out to see what could be seen. I wasn’t in a library mood; it would be too quiet, too still. I really needed to be around life, movement and excitement. Days like this, I generally hit the gym, back home, but there were no gyms here that I knew of. I considered going by the palace kitchens; although they may not have needed an extra line cook, at least it was familiar ground. If I had the timing right, they’d be starting preparations on the midday meal right about now. I had managed to miss lunch the day before, which might have been a good thing, considering the amount of food served to me at dinner, and I didn’t know what would be considered normal lunch food here. That considered, I decided that at the very least, Naya had been welcoming before, and I didn’t have anything else to do, so I might as well offer what help I could and see what could be learned of Middle Earth cooking.

The kitchen was as busy as any other I’d been in before, but without the note of frenzied panic that had preceded the disastrous meal my first day. I think it was the fact that we all knew the pain in the ass in question was gone. Either that, or lunch was much more relaxed. I found Naya near the large bread ovens, pulling a fresh batch of golden-brown rolls out to cool.
“Hi, Naya.” Although I hadn’t attempted to sneak up on her, she still jumped a bit when I spoke. I’d have worried about it, but her face was happy when she turned to me.

“Oh, lass, you gave me a start. I’d not thought to see you back in the kitchens so soon. In fact, yesterday our king himself put in a visit and gave the distinct impression he’d not thought to see you in the kitchens soon, if ever. Treating a guest like a pack pony was the phrase he used. Our Thorin can be a bit old-fashioned in the treatment of visitors.”

“It wasn’t that bad. I like baking. Well, sweet stuff, not breads, I can’t get dough to rise right for breads, but still. I like to feel useful, and cooking is about all I can do here to be useful. Speaking of which, I came down here to see if you could use another pair of hands.” I caught myself before I said “for the lunch rush.” I was getting the hang of keeping my other-worldly sayings to myself.

“Hmm, not much else needs to be done, in honesty. I could use a second set of hands when the next batch of rolls comes out, but we’re not pressed today. But, if you care to pull up a stool and keep an old woman company, I’d not turn you away.”

It was something to keep me occupied at least, and I liked Naya, so I sat on the tall four legged kitchen stool she pulled from under a counter. As we waited for the rolls to finish, she told me about her family and gossiped a bit about people I’d never met, and it generally felt like days I’d sat in my grandmother’s kitchen waiting for baking cookies or pies to be ready to pull from the oven. So much so, I half expected my grandpa to come in, trying to sneak a dollop of cookie dough. It was an almost-homesick feeling, thinking of them, but I shoved it aside and focused on the now. Later I would feel those things, when I was alone and couldn’t betray my origins. For now I had a friend to keep company and an oven to watch.

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Kili hadn’t seen Lady Chris since her request of him the night before. She seemed not to be pleased with the hour he had woken her the day prior, so perhaps she was still abed, but he doubted it, as even the least dawn-inclined would surely have to wake before noon. He had checked in the Great Library, as well as in several smaller ones that she may have found. It was only as his stomach reminded him of the midday meal that he thought to check the kitchens. Sure enough, he found her there, chatting with the baker she’d been so friendly with the first time she’d come here. As he approached the pair, Lady Chris grabbed a pair of mitts from the counter and went to the ovens, where she pulled a large tray of table breads out and placed it on the counter beside the great bread oven.

“Milady, why do I find you in the kitchens? I thought it had been made clear that you are an honored guest here, not a servant.” He was less confused than his words would have shown, as he knew she enjoyed it here, and his voice was consequently light and teasing.

“I’m just helping a friend. I need something to do with my time, you know.”

“I know, but I had thought I’d find you in the library, not here. At any rate, Uncle will want to know we’re not working you into the ground. Not that I intend on telling him you were working in here. But he will expect to see you at midday.” She gave him a look that spoke of stubbornness. That wouldn’t do. “You’ve scarcely eaten at all since you arrived. We’re not trying to be overbearing, I swear, we’re just worried.”
“Oh don’t worry, I’ll try to be better balanced in the future; I just got kind of swept up in all this.” She made a broad gesture that indicated the whole of the kitchens, if not the whole of the mountain, and possibly the whole of Arda. “Although I hope lunch is a less formal affair than last night.”

“Oh, yes. Midday is usually a working meal for most in the Royal Halls. The lower classes may take a break to eat, but Thorin likes to hold his less formal meetings whilst he eats, and most of court has followed where he led.” His eyes twinkled and he lowered his voice conspiratorially. “In fact, I tend to sit as far from the high table as I can get so I don’t fall asleep in my food from listening to dry-as-dust council discussions.”

“Would you mind if I sat next to you, then? I really don’t want to sit on that dais again if I can help it. I was so nervous….”

“So you said at the time, and had we known you would feel such discomfort at the placement, I’m sure Uncle would have amended the seating. He only wished to do you honor, not give you the fidgets. If you wish I can show you where I normally sit right now. I like to get in place early, so that Uncle can see that I’m there when he first comes in and won’t fret that I’m not next to him.”

She laughed a little, although Kili could not see why. At his puzzled look, she explained. “Somehow it’s hard to picture Thorin fretting over anything. He seems so in control it’s almost scary.” They bid farewell to the baker and took a little-used back hall towards the Dining Hall.

“He likes that folk have that image of him, and works very hard to maintain it. But those close to him see the truth.” Kili wasn’t sure how much to say, but if knowing Thorin wasn’t the perfect, inaccessible King he appeared to be eased her mind from what appeared to be apprehension, if not outright fear, perhaps letting a little bit of family business out wasn’t such a terrible thing. Checking that they were alone in the hall, he leaned in closer to her, keeping his voice low.

“The truth is, Thorin appears to never fret only because he is always fretting. He worries over every aspect of his rule, and his family. He’s lost so much, and I think that somewhere in his heart he thinks that if he can just be perfect, he will never feel that loss again. Balin has said I have the look of my Uncle Frerin, who died in the Battle of Azanulbizar far too young, and I think that sometimes Thorin looks at me and sees his brother.”

“That makes sense. But let’s talk about something happier. Dead uncles aren’t what I’d call appropriate dinner table conversation.” So they didn’t speak of Frerin or Thorin, instead talking of nothing in specific and everything in general as they entered the Dining Hall from a side entrance halfway down the right side of the room. They settled in seats near the large main doors, just as a crowd of dwarves dressed in the rich fabrics of the nobility came in. Two steps behind them came Thorin.

“Now that I know what I’m seeing, he really isn’t as terrifying. I mean he still kinda controls my fate and is therefore scary, but he’s, I don’t know, more human. Well I mean he’s obviously a Dwarf, but he’s less like a force of nature.”

“That’s why I told you, though I hope you won’t repeat it to anyone. We try to keep that sort of thing private.” He looked up at the doors, noticing a familiar dwarf come into the Dining Hall. “Ori! Over here!” He waved and his friend came over to sit with them.

“Hello. I don’t believe we’ve been introduced.” His voice was slightly quivery, and Kili knew that the scribe was shy, so he took things in hand.

“Ori, this is the Lady Chris, a guest from a foreign land. Lady Chris, this is Ori, he was our scribe
on the quest, recording what happened.” He was quite pleased that he’d been able to skirt the issue of Lady Chris’s origin. Thorin hadn’t forbidden sharing that information, but he hadn’t expressly said that it was public knowledge.

“Oh, where from? Do tell me all about it, I love learning about far off lands.” The scribe no longer looked shy, nor did he look like he would be easily swayed from his current topic. Kili reflected that perhaps he was too clever for his own good.

“Um, well….” Lady Chris shot a glance at him, looking for guidance. In that moment, Kili decided that they could trust Ori, and gave a nod of his head. “Well, it sounds patently insane, but I’m not from Middle Earth. I come from a place called New Zealand, in a world that thinks this world is a figment of the imagination of a man named Tolkien. I can’t really give you any proof…..” She seemed so dejected that her tale had no solid evidence, Kili couldn’t stand it. He reached into his pocket and pulled forth the little device that had convinced Fili.

“You do have proof. I found this in your pocket the day you arrived.”

“You stole my cell phone? I thought it fell out of my pocket while I was falling off that cliff. And this whole time, you had it?”

“I’d meant to return it, eventually. For all it’s a wonder, I wasn’t sure what it was, so I put it from my mind.” He handed it back to her. “What is it anyway?”

“A cell phone. They can communicate across great distances. But only if there’s another phone to contact, so it’s not like it’s super useful here. I guess I could use the tools section, but the only thing that’s of any importance is the pictures I have stored on it.” She pressed the buttons on the device in a smooth, fluid pattern that spoke of long held habit. The thing lit up as it had before, but now other images, beyond the butterflies sprang into being. When at last she stopped, an image of a woman and man were displayed. She tilted the device so that he could see, before shifting to show it to Ori. The man’s copper hair gave a hint that he was related to Lady Chris, and the woman’s heart shaped face and snub nose clearly spoke of direct relation.

“These are your parents, then?” She nodded.

“The picture is so fine in detail. I don’t think even our greatest artists could paint such a thing.” Ori seemed as enthralled as Fili had been, but Lady Chris pressed more buttons yet and the image disappeared with the sound of a chime.

“I’d let you play with it, but the battery won’t last forever and I don’t want to give up the only picture of my parents just yet.”

“Battery? What has an attack got to do with your picture maker?”

“We call the thing that powers it a battery. Don’t ask me why, I don’t know. But I think the food is ready.” She pointed to where the servers were filing in to the room near to the high table. As soon as the council members were served, the people sitting farther away got served. Consequently, the trio sitting at the farthest end of the room got served last.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the bathroom reference, but as I mentioned, I am a history geek. There's
some support for canonical indoor plumbing, with Bilbo's bathroom being referenced, but he also said, and I quote "I won't even tell you what they've done to the bathroom." I took that as a sign that Dwarven bathrooms are quite different from the set-up of the Hobbits. Also I love the various bathroom issues of Oakentoons on deviantart.

Oakentoons can be found here: http://peckishowl.deviantart.com/gallery/41509876
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Ori is inquisitive, Chris reveals some of her past and Kili considers Fili’s advice.

Chapter Notes

Again there is more talk than act, but at least we learn more about Chris’s background. By the way, I know diddly-squat about diplomatic corps in New Zealand. I assume they exist, but any details are figments of my imagination.

This chapter is dedicated to the three guests who left kudos.

I had a good time sitting with Kili and Ori, chatting over bowls of stew. The scribe started out shyly asking questions about my old life, but soon was pulling a small notebook out of his coat and retrieving a silver-colored stylus that he used like a pencil from another pocket, taking notes. It was funny the way he wrote so fast, like he was worried that if he didn’t get it all down right-fucking-now it’d be lost forever. I’d seen some of the more creative types at Stone Street do the same thing.

“You do realize I’m not going anywhere, right? You have plenty of time to wring details from me. I’m not going to vanish in a puff of smoke the moment you put your pen down. Well, I don’t think so, anyway. I’m still not clear how I got here.” I took a sip of the cider that had been served. It had been a choice of cider or ale, and the ale seemed the stronger of the two. I don’t generally like getting drunk, so I stuck with cider.

“I just want to make sure I have things right. Balin would have my hide if I reported inaccurate information.” Kili choked a little bit, and I patted his back to help him get over the coughing fit. When he was done, he turned to Ori.

“Since when is Balin sending you spying? Nori’s the Spymaster.”

“He’s not so much sending me spying as I’m taking it upon myself to find the interesting bits of life that he doesn’t get to see now that he’s helping Thorin run a Kingdom. I at least have the freedom to meet interesting people.” He bowed his head in my direction, and I smiled at the compliment. Kili just chuckled into his ale.

“Hate to break the news, Ori, but Balin already met her. Yesterday afternoon, in the library.” Ori looked crestfallen.

“We didn’t exactly talk about much besides books and languages. You’ll still have new things to tell him.” I was starting to like the scribe, and I didn’t want him to feel like his gesture to a friend was in vain. “I doubt that he’ll have the time to pick my brain any further than what he’s already done, what with the whole ‘advisor to the King’ bit.”
“Pick your…. Do all the people in your world talk like you do?” The look on his face made me want to laugh. It looked like a cross between a visitor at Bedlam and Jane Goodall studying a chimp, both shocked and investigative.

“Yup. I’ve been trying to amend my speaking patterns and idioms, but I slip now and then.” Then I thought about some of the bizarre turns of phrase used by some of the cast and crew. “Well,” I amended, “I suppose we all have slightly different ways of talking, regional dialects and all, but mostly it’s the same.” I flexed my lower back where a cluster of muscles was clenching, probably due to how I was sitting sort of sideways so I could see both Kili and Ori. I would need to stretch it out, and it’d been a while since I did the full kata routine, so I excused myself from the table to go back to my room and run through the basic stances. Kili and Ori both stood up as I did, Kili a few beats ahead of Ori.

“Milady, would you care to see the gardens later today? We have a fairly large one on the south slope that’s open to the public. My Uncle would surely prefer that to spending your time in the kitchens.”

It was a good thought. If they were going to insist I do nothing, I might as well do something in a pretty garden. The main Halls had plenty of light, but it wasn’t like direct sunlight, and I missed the breeze and that undefinable feeling of being under open sky. “Sure. Meet me at my room in an hour? I’ve got to do something first.”

“Until then.” He bowed slightly and I sighed inwardly. You can’t get chivalry like that anymore. Well, not back home at any rate. Here though it seemed to be like breathing, because apparently Erebor is Dwarvish for ‘Home of the Knights in Shiny Armor’.

Back in my room, I pulled out my jeans and tee shirt from under the mattress where I’d stashed them. While I had figured out how to walk in the long skirt, it wasn’t appropriate for a good work out. I estimated I had room for five repetitions of the moving katas before I would have to stop and turn around. Bare footed, I stood at the end of the room opposite the fireplace. I closed my eyes briefly to help center myself, taking three deep breaths as I did so. Once I had my mind calm, I began the first of the katas.

I had finished with my more strenuous exercises and was cooling down with a slow, dance-like Tai Chi pattern, the only one I knew, when I heard a knock at the door. Not wanting to break the flow, I called out to Kili to just come in. When I was finished, he was leaning against the door frame.

“What was that? If you don’t mind my asking.”

“That was just a little cool-down; you missed the big work out. I’m used to hitting the gym or the dojo every few days, and I don’t want to get out of shape.”

“You are aware that I did not comprehend any of that, right?” Hmm, how to phrase it so that a pseudo-medieval Prince could understand it?

“Ok, so you’re a warrior, right? So you must do something to keep up your strength or your body wouldn’t be able to do what is demanded of it in a fight. I’m accustomed to training my body like that every couple of days, and I don’t want to lose my edge. So after lunch, I came here and did exercises to prevent that, and as I’m sure you’re aware, I couldn’t just stop after I was done. What you saw me doing was so my body wouldn’t seize up.”

“Ah, that makes sense. So, would you care to see the gardens?”

“Yes, just let me get changed. I’ll be right out.” I pushed him gently out my door, not that he
resisted or anything, and once the door was closed, I stripped down and re-dressed in what I’d been wearing earlier that day. I rejoined Kili in the hall, and he gave me another one of those thought-halting smiles.

She really was a graceful creature. The dance he’d seen her doing was beautiful, if strange. Much like the lady herself. They didn’t speak much on the way to the southern garden, except for Kili pointing out interesting things that had been too inconsequential to have shown her the first day. Lady Chis seemed not to mind silence.

When they reached the garden, Kili walked beside her, not wanting to leave her alone just yet. He didn’t know much about flowers, but when she bent down to examine a familiar leafy cluster, he spoke.

“That’s kingsfoil. It has healing properties.”

“I thought it might be, but as it doesn’t grow in my world I couldn’t be sure. It certainly looked similar to the prop-plant we used in the second movie.” She looked up at him and blushed. “I’m sorry if my knowing about that sort of thing is uncomfortable for you. I don’t mean to be invading on private topics.”

“I don’t find it unpleasant, though I feel as though you know me and I do not know you. It seems rather unfair, wouldn’t you agree?” She laughed a clear strong laugh.

“It does. Why don’t we sit on that bench there and you can ask me any question you might have. Just ask them slower than Ori.”

Sitting on the carven stone bench, Kili thought about what he wanted to ask. He’d heard plenty about her world, thanks to Ori’s questions. What he wanted to know about was her, her life, her likes and dislikes.

“Tell me about your childhood.”

“That’s eighteen years’ worth, can you be more specific?” Only eighteen? His people must grow up fast. At eighteen, he still believed in tripping gremlins.

“Just whatever comes to mind, and not if it’s too personal. I want to get to know you, and the beginning seemed like a sensible place to start.”

“Well, my parents worked in foreign service, so I spent a lot of time traveling in middle and high school. During elementary, I lived with my grandparents. But after that, I must have lived in half a dozen countries over the course of my life. Mum’s a translator, a true polyglot, and she really despairs of ever getting me to follow her footsteps. I’m hopeless with languages. Although I do know how to say ‘I only speak English’ in five other languages. That and ‘where is the bathroom’. If you know those two things you can generally get along just fine. Dad’s a bureaucrat, and to be honest I have no clue what he does.”

“Bureaucrat?” It was a new word to him.

“A government official charged with the smooth running of some segment or other of the
government in question. Think council member.”

“Ahh. Please, continue.”

“Because of all the moving, I was homeschooled. There’s a distance curriculum that the diplomatic corps uses. I still had the same hours as a normal kid, but I did it all from wherever place we were living, so I didn’t exactly have a lot of friends. For that alone I’d be glad my parents pushed me towards martial arts. I made more friends in dojos than I ever would have on my own. Plus, it was fun.” Kili was surprised. He had thought Fili’s assessment of how she felt was wild speculation, but the lady herself was confirming it. He would have to reassess his refusal to ask if she’d like to learn combat. Perhaps a simple test?

“Milady, I hate to interrupt a most interesting and illuminating conversation, but I am reminded that I have been less than dutiful in my own martial studies. I must beg your forgiveness in my departure…unless you would like to see the salle? It’s unlikely to be crawling with uncouth warriors at this hour, if that worries you. But if you wish to remain….”

“No, I’ll go with you. It sounds fun. My technique is mostly founded in Oriental forms; it would be interesting to see something different.”

“Very well.” Kili offered her his arm and she blushed. He wondered briefly if he shouldn’t have, if perhaps that was something other than a polite gentledwarf’s gesture in her home. Or rather, gentleman’s gesture. There were so many things that were specific to one race, and he couldn’t even rely on research into the customs of Men, because she came from beyond any culture found on Middle Earth. Perhaps he would recruit Ori to do some spying. Well, not spying, exactly. Research, he’d call it research.

Chapter End Notes

So, just to warn you, I'm checking into the hospital tomorrow. It's nothing too serious, they just want to monitor me while fiddling with my meds. This impacts all you lovely people because they won't let me use wifi in the hospital. I can write and edit, but not get on AO3. Because of this, new chapters are on hiatus until I'm discharged. I'm sorry for this, and I hope the fact that I can't reply for a while doesn't stop you from commenting. I love comments. Even negative comments; I like to see where I've gone astray.
The space that Kili led me to was deep in the lower levels of the mountain. I noticed that some spaces, like the marketplace, seemed to mimic how spaces not built into a mountain were formed, but others seemed to simply be corridors, with no illusion of independent structure. This was one of the latter. There was a straight hall, with arches on the left opening up onto sandy floored courtyards, some large, others not so much, and doors on the right, presumably holding the things they used in their workouts, or offices for whoever ran the place. I looked around at my host to ask which it was and found Kili was watching my face, like he was trying to read my thoughts through interpretation of expressions alone. It was odd, but it didn’t feel as creepy as it might have, so I shrugged it off.

“So, I get the purpose of the courtyards, but do the doors open into storage or something else?” I wanted to get my mind back on track. Sure, he had been looking at me, but it meant nothing, like how when he offered me his arm it meant nothing. I obviously needed to occupy my mind better if this is what it did.

“Some are for storage of arms, others for the supplies needed in maintaining the salle, and still others have been claimed by the masters of arms for each of the three City Watches, the Royal Guard, and the Army.”

“I see. And what were you thinking of practicing today? I don’t want to keep you, and I’ll admit I’m interested to see another fighting style.”

“That depends on if Dwalin is here at the moment. He usually is, this time of day, and when I’m training at the same time, he likes to spar with me. If I can’t find him, then I’ll grab a bow from the practice armory and set up a target in one of the long courts.” He suddenly turned a sort of pink color. “Archery is useful, I swear!”

“I never said it wasn’t. Seriously, Kili, I would never tell you otherwise. Even if half the things we put in the movies were utter fabrication, you still have some amazing talent. And ranged
fighting is one of the more effective ways to fight.”

“I, well, ah.” He was fading from pink to red now. I was starting to worry when a large hand descended from behind me to land on my shoulder.

“So you must be the lass I’ve heard so much about! I wondered when I’d get to meet you.” I turned to face a dwarf nearly as tall as I was, only a few inches shorter, really, which must make him a giant among dwarves. “Dwalin, very much at your service.”

“Pleased to meet you, Dwalin. I think Kili here was looking for you. I don’t want to get in the way of that, I know what a hassle it can be to miss a session.” I deliberately avoided using the word ‘workout’, and wasn’t sure if I’d made myself clear, but Dwalin didn’t make a comment one way or the other.

“What’ll it be today, lad? Swords or axes?”

“I think axes, today, Dwalin. I got plenty of sword work in yesterday. Do you mind if Lady Chris stays to watch? I need to keep her out of the kitchens, or Thorin’ll have my hide.”

I wasn’t sure if that should offend me, but as it was probably true, I decided to save my ire for the overbearing King who issued the demand, rather than his well-meaning nephew. While I was coming to that decision, the two dwarves pulled heavy looking metal axes out of one of the storage rooms we’d passed and headed to one of the smaller courtyards. I sat on a bench near the arched doorway, and they took starting stances across the room. The ferocity with which they went after each other rattled my teeth, for the first few minutes. Then the fight slowed down, as they often do in the middle stretches. Watching the fight was intriguing, but the bench was hard stone and not the most comfortable. I got up to stretch out my legs, and was standing by the arch, when Kili ducked a whirling strike, and Dwalin’s momentum carried him, axe and all, directly at me.

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Kili had no time to cry out, nor time to act. Lady Chris was standing in exactly the wrong spot, and with the speed of his attack, Dwalin had no opportunity to redirect his motion. Time seemed to slow; although it still gave none of them room to change what was to come. With sickening clarity, Kili could see the axe moving towards an unprotected, upraised hand. He had what seemed like hours to contemplate the horror he had perpetrated by dodging rather than blocking this particular attack. Then time regained its normal flow and suddenly, Dwalin was lying on his back and Lady Chris was keeling beside him. Ability to move restored, Kili rushed to his fallen friend’s side as well.

“I’m so sorry, Dwalin, I didn’t think the flip would be so hard on you. I’m accustomed to people who know how to fall.” Lady Chris looked distraught, her hands fluttering purposelessly over the fallen Dwarf.

“What do you mean by that, lass? I’m merely surprised, not injured.” Dwalin’s gruff and defensive tone reassured Kili that his friend was fine. He might be prideful, but he was wise enough to let them know if he was truly hurt.

“What happened? It seemed that one moment you were about to collide, and then…this.” Kili made a vague gesture to the prostrate Dwalin and kneeling Chris.
“When Dwalin came at me, I reacted without thinking, on instinct. I flipped him.” She placed a hand on the warrior’s chest as he tried to sit up. “Oh do lie still, that hit was far too hard, and you may have been injured. Kili, fetch a doctor.”

“I’m perfectly fine, lass.” Dwalin frowned at her, but Kili knew the Dwarf’s many frowns, and this was a ‘how do I reassure a fretting female’ frown. “Dwarves are sturdy folk; Mahal made us that way when he carved us from mountain stone. Also, I’m a Royal Guard; I’ve fought in wars, lass. I know how to safely take a fall.”

“He does, honest. I’ve seen him fall while wearing armor, then just get up and keep fighting. I don’t believe you hurt him, but I would like to know just how you did whatever it was that landed the toughest Dwarf I know on his back.” He held a hand out to Dwalin. The guardsman used the offered hand to help pull himself up off the floor.

“It was a simple flip, a judo move.” Now that Dwalin was standing and was visibly fine, she relaxed a bit. “I can teach you, but on the condition that you teach me some of these weapon styles. I’m only good at unarmed fighting and would like to learn to use a weapon as well. I did train with a bo-staff, but it’s been a long time.”

She wanted to learn to use a weapon? Fili had been right for once, it seemed. She certainly didn’t act like she thought she would have to protect herself, more like she wanted to expand a set of skills she already had, for the sole purpose of bettering her abilities. Well, if she wanted, honestly wanted, to learn, he would be happy to teach her. Especially if she taught him that flipping trick in return.

“What would you like to learn? I can teach you the basics of sword or axe work, but for anything more….”

“Fencing sounds fun. I don’t think I have the shoulder strength to use those.” She indicated the blunted practice axe. “Also, if you wouldn’t mind teaching me archery, I know you’re good enough to teach that. And in return I can teach you the hand to hand forms I know.”

“It’s a bargain.” Kili stuck his hand out to shake on it, and Lady Chris returned the gesture, although when he shifted the grip upwards in the traditional form for accepting agreements, a confused look crossed her face. He supposed that it might be different in her world, and renewed his resolve to ask Ori to do some research on the customs of her people.

Chapter End Notes

WARNING TEASER AHEAD

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“Lay off, Fee, I’m not in the mood. And by the way, this is the last time I take your advice regarding women.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Training! And object lessons! And sore muscles!

Chapter Notes

So the training scene was pretty much ripped from my own martial arts lessons. I have never used a sword like the ones in the movie, but by looking at them I would say that they're fairly heavy and lifting them over one's head would be dangerous. I understand that the dwarves had to do a 'boot camp' to really look like they knew what they were doing.

This chapter is dedicated to i11iad and tamarama for commenting and to Kasycleo and the guests who left me kudos.

Also much thanks to Stillman Sensei and Thorne Sensei for teaching me how to break a mugger hold. Domo Arigato Gozaimasu.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I shifted my grip on the practice sword they'd gotten me. It was heavy, and I don't think my arms had ever protested bearing any weight as much as they did the damn short sword in my hands. Kili and Dwalin were taking turns telling me how to hold the sword to block an attack. Just block, not actually attack myself. Currently, Dwalin was quizzing me on some of the blocking I'd been taught.

"Now, lass, if I should swing from the shoulder, high like, how would you block?" I lifted the sword as though I were blocking a high strike on my left. "Good, now on the other side?" I did that as well, though my arms were quivering a little. "And from above?" Oh lord, I didn’t think I could do that.

"I think I need to stop for now. My arms feel like jelly.” Dwalin looked like he was about to protest, probably with the same wisdom my first sensei had used.

A tall, thin, crane-like man stands over me. His eyes flash with warning. “You want to rest? And when you must defend yourself? When you face bad men in dark places, will they give you time to rest? Again!”

“There’s very little point in driving her like a cart horse, Dwalin.” Kili to the rescue. He had a serious habit of coming to my aid. “She won’t be standing guard duty or fighting in a war anytime soon, so we have the luxury of letting her set her own limits. Although, milady, if you are serious about these studies, you should be aware that sometimes to learn, you need to get a little uncomfortable.”

I rolled my eyes. “I know that, Kili. I’m trained in several hand-to-hand forms; I’ve spent plenty of
time being uncomfortable in the name of achieving a perfected stance, or a smoother hip toss. But I’m not sure I could get this thing over my head one more time without dropping it, and I’ve no desire to give myself a concussion when my grip fails.” I gave him a smirk. “Besides, I promised to teach you some of what I know, and I want a chance at revenge for my aching arms.”

Oh how the tables turned! I was enjoying directing the two fierce warriors into the basic stances. “How is this, this crouching, going to result in being able to toss around a full grown Dwarf like he’s a sack of oats?” Apparently Kili felt the same frustration I did when I first took lessons at a dojo in Osaka. I pulled on my memories of what Asano Sensei had said.

“How does learning how to crawl result in being able to run? How does baking clay into a brick lead to a house? You take it and you build on it. Here, stand in front of me, facing away. Now if I grab you like this,” I put my arm across his throat in what my Washington D.C. Sensei had called a ‘mugger hold’, ‘how do you free yourself?’ I knew he was unlikely to have the answer, and sure enough, he flailed about in a most un-useful way. After it was obvious that he wasn’t going anywhere, I released him, and turned my back. “Now you do it.” He did, although he was just a little too short for the maximum effect. This lesson had a bigger impact when the ‘mugger’ was larger and stronger than the sensei demonstrating it. Lovett Sensei had been barely over five feet, delicate and bird-like in her seventies. The first young tough I saw her do this with had been six foot four if he was an inch, with muscles developed playing American football.

“First things first. If I don’t secure my jugular, I’ll pass out in a matter of seconds. So I grab your arm and pull it down, just enough that I get blood to the brain. Now I deny you leverage by stepping towards the side that your elbow is on, dropping into a basic stance. I believe you called it ‘crouching’. Next, I gain the height advantage. I already have a little bit on you, but mostly people get attacked by those larger than them, so this step is important.” I jerked forward, bending at the waist. “See how much more my head is above yours now? That gives me an advantage. Next, I strike.” I mimed stomping his insole, elbowing his solar plexus and throwing a fist backhand into his nose. “And if that doesn’t get rid of the attacker, I can get really vicious. Now that I’m ‘crouching’ my arm is in a perfect place to do this.” I grabbed a fistful of his trousers right over the groin and twisted it. “Imagine if I were to twist what lies directly under this.” Dwalin blanched, and I was fairly certain Kili was swallowing hard behind me. I released him and he moved around in front of me.

“And none of that, aside from protecting my jugular, could be done without the stance I was teaching you. I’m sure you’ve practiced actions with swords and axes until they could be done in your sleep. Well, I can defend myself from being grabbed from behind in my sleep, because that stance is as natural as breathing at this point.”

“Point well made, milady.”

Kili was seriously regretting his deal with Lady Chris. Not that it wouldn’t be useful, to be able to fight without weapons, in a form none could know and anticipate, to the contrary, it most certainly would. But the way his thighs burned from unaccustomed use…. By Mahal, he thought he’d worked every muscle in his body before. Surely he wasn’t as soft as all this? He sank a little lower in the pool. He’d offered to order another bath for Lady Chris, not wanting to let her own sore body go without the comfort of a hot soak, but she’d waved him off.
“I can do with a quick splash from the sink. I don’t need a hot bath at this point, and so long as you promise I don’t have to sit at the high table tonight, I should be fine.”

He had no intention of demanding that she sit at the high table. The dramatic difference in her demeanor when she sat with them at midday had convinced him that she would be happier away from Thorin, who she seemed to have an irrational fear of, and the rest of the high placed members of his court. He planned on asking Ori to sit with her, so she would have a familiar person to talk to.

When at last the ache in his body subsided, he pulled himself from the hot spring and redressed before walking back to his own rooms. Although his sore and painful muscles felt better, better was not the same as good. Thus, he was walking with a limp when his brother spotted him in the hallway of the palace near their rooms.

“My, my, Brother! Either Dwalin has gotten harder on you, or you fell down a mine shaft. You don’t normally walk like that.”

“Lay off, Fee, I’m not in the mood. And by the way, this is the last time I take your advice regarding women.”

“What? You mean to tell me that this state you’re in is the result of teaching Lady Christiana combat? How is that possible? I’ve seen you teach others and you never looked like you do now. For another thing, I thought you were set against it. What changed your mind?”

“I saw her use her not unimpressive skill. Beyond getting that pig of a man to release her, she has this incredible ability to toss about fully grown Dwarves. She took Dwalin at full run and landed him on the floor faster than I could blink. It may have been the result of an accident, but it still spurred me to making perhaps one of the worst bargains I’ve ever made. That I would teach her if she would teach me.” Fili laughed, and Kili punched him in the arm. “I’m serious Fee, we spent near an hour perfecting a way of standing, and my legs feel like they’ve been pounded by smithy’s hammers.”

“You have my sympathies, brother, honest. But after how you laughed at me my one and only attempt at trying the bow, which you goaded me into, by the way, I feel it is only fair that I laugh a little at this. But to prove my heart isn’t made of iron, I shall depart and never speak of this to anyone else.” Fili was still smirking at him, but Kili was too damn tired to make a fuss.

“You are a gem among Dwarves, Fee,” he replied with sarcasm. “I’ll see you at dinner.”

Chapter End Notes

So, now I have edited the whole thing about as much as is healthy (the word ‘obsessive’ seems to start applying right about now). I now have a question for you lovely people. Do I continue posting just on Sundays, stretching it through August, or do I now up my posting to twice or thrice a week? Let me know which you prefer, one, two, or three times a week.

Also, there is now a separate work with my one shots and shorts, Wander 'Verse shorts and one-shots. Check it out!

TEASER WARNING
“I can’t leave you alone for a minute, can I? I go with the trading party to Laketown for a week and you give my spot to a stranger. I’m Roda, by the way.” She stuck her hand out to me and I shook it.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

New friends and family traditions.

Chapter Notes

Yes, this chapter is a little short, just over 1,400 words. The next one is even shorter. I'm sorry my friends, but so many of the chapters hover on that mark. I made my peace with it. Sort of. Good news is the one after the next one has a bit of length to it.

Also, the end of this chapter may give you cavities, it's so sappy sweet. I do not apologize, I know the crap they're gonna go through later and they deserve the rest-up time.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama and i1liad for commenting, and also to tamarama and a guest for kudos. I guess tamarama really likes my stuff, yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At dinner, Ori found me before I went in the Dining Hall, and guided me to a spot midway down the left-hand table. According to his cheerful chatter, as a member of the Quest Company, he could sit at the high table any night he wished, but he preferred to sit with the other scribes.

“More in common, you see. Most of the high table wouldn’t know good quill work if it bit their noses. And some of them aren’t very nice. Lord Alvar in particular, has a low opinion of scribes in general. He’d never say anything to me you understand, no, because I was on the Quest. But he’s hardly so careful with the feelings of my friends. I do not like how he speaks of them and around them as though they weren’t in the room. I prefer to stay well away from his lot.”

A relatively slim Dwarven woman sat down across from us. Her ink-stained fingers indicated that she was a scribe as well, and the easy smiles she and Ori exchanged said that they were friends. I figured I could trust a friend of Ori, so I smiled at her as well.

“I can’t leave you alone for a minute, can I? I go with the trading party to Laketown for a week and you give my spot to a stranger. I’m Roda, by the way.” She stuck her hand out to me and I shook it.

“Chris. Sorry I took your spot, we can trade if you want.” She shook her head and a mischievous grin lit her face.

“Keep it. But do tell me how one of the race of Men came to be sitting in it. I thought guests from other lands would be seated at the high table.”

“Oh God, don’t even joke. I sat there last night and thought I was going to die. I’m not anyone special, not to sit with Kings. I’m only even in Erebor through a strange, impossible to explain
series of events that sort of stranded me here.” She cocked her head to the side and raised an eyebrow. I decided that although she was a friend of Ori, I wouldn’t tell her where I came from. The fewer people who knew the less likely I was going to get asked awkward questions. “Don’t ask. I’d prefer not to think of it. Suffice it to say, I’m stuck here for at least a week, until Gandalf comes. I need to talk to him before I can go anywhere.”

“Oh, then you’ll be here for the Feast of the Fallen! It’s a celebration unique to Erebor. King Thorin declared it himself.”

“Oh here we go again. Roda’s scribal mastery project is a history of the days following the Battle of the Five Armies, as mine was a record of the Quest. She’ll go on and on if you let her.”

“I don’t mind. And I’ve never heard of the Feast of the Fallen before, so it’ll be good to know, if I’m going to be here for it anyway.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Roda reached across the table and whacked his hand with her spoon.

“Don’t mind him. As I was saying, after the battle, everyone was so glad to be alive, and to have Erebor back, that there were many nights of celebration. There was talk of commemorating the victory with a new feast day. But when the topic was broached with King Thorin, as soon as he was recovered from his injuries, he said that with the dead count as high as it was, a feast day to celebrate was inappropriate. But the people were set on a feast day, so he declared that the anniversary of the day the battle ended would be the Feast of the Fallen, for us to remember those who have died. It’s a bit like the Night of the Kill, but we get to drink and feast and sing songs that remind us of those we’ve lost. I’ve been preparing a song dedicated to my cousin, who died this last year.”

“Is singing a traditional way of remembering those you’ve lost?”

“Yes, but not the louder, more raucous songs. The songs to remember are lower, softer even as they are host to more emotion and therefore a bit harder to get out. Do you sing?”

“I sing fairly well. I sang at my grandparent’s funeral. Not the song I would have picked, but the one my mum wanted for her parents. I would have picked Canaan’s Land, but I got overruled in favor of Amazing Grace. Never understood why people sing Amazing Grace at funerals, it isn’t at all about death.”

“Well, then, this is the perfect time to sing it for your grandparents.”

“It’s been far too long since I’ve sung Canaan’s Land. I wouldn’t remember the words. But there is a song that would work that I do remember. Would it really be alright for me to sing, though? Because I’m not a Dwarf, I mean.”

“I suppose there would be a few hardened traditionalists who would object on principal, but I don’t think any would begrudge you your grief or the right to remember. We’ll sneak you up on the stage right after me, before anyone has time to object.”

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Dinner was fairly uneventful. No crises broke out, no messages came for Thorin. It was quiet and
Kili was glad. Sometimes a bit of quiet was needed, especially after such a chaotic couple of days.

After dinner, the two princes and their King retreated to the parlor of the Royal wing, where they would spend time not as King and princes, but as Thorin and Fili and Kili. For the whole of the brother’s lives they had just been a family, even if Thorin had technically been King-in-exile, and it was hard to give up the comfort of that.

“Has any word come as to when Mother will be returning?” Fili had been asking that same question for a week now. Dis had gone to treat with Dain of the Iron Hills, and she was sorely missed by all, but her eldest had a harder time of it. He relied on constancy and familiarity, whereas Kili was wild and a bit reckless, less prone to despondency over those who were elsewhere.

“As I told you, her message a week ago indicated that Dain is amenable to many of our proposals, although his advisors were protesting the rate at which we tax the goods coming in from the Iron Hills. I authorized her to promise a reduction of two percent, which is generous by any count, so her negotiations may be concluded soon. I presume she will send word when she leaves the Iron Hills, though with your mother that may be wishful thinking. At any rate, even if she had left Dain’s lands today, she’d still not be back for another three days. Patience, Fili.”

“I know. I just miss her. Our family isn’t quite the same without her.”

“It isn’t, you’re right there, but we can still spend our time together in happiness rather than longing. Kili, fetch your fiddle and we can have a bit of song.”

So, Kili retrieved his fiddle from his rooms, and Thorin sang of a feast that went on for seven days and seven nights, and soon Fili was joining in, and when the song was ended they spoke of what they had done that day. Thorin related his continued work with Balin concerning the possibility of retaking Moria, Fili shared his frustration over the complexity of the laws of Men, which he had been studying. And Kili recounted how Lady Chis had come to be in the practice salle, and how she had somehow managed to put Dwalin on his back and the deal that had been struck. He left out the ache that still resided in some of his muscles, but all the rest he shared. His uncle had started the tale disapproving, for many of the same reasons that Kili had been reluctant to make an offer of lessons, but by the time Kili was telling of the teaching of how to break a grip from behind, he was smiling at the unique way their guest made a point. When the fire in the hearth was dying down, the three of them said their goodnights and went to bed, still warm from love and laughter shared.

Chapter End Notes

So, tamarama convinced me to up my chapter postage from once a week to twice. I love that girl/guy. (Pronouns on the interwebs are hard.) So, All Those Who Wander is going to be updated Sundays (like always) and Wednesdays. The companion piece will be updated on Wednesday as well, but I don't have the 16 backlogged chapters of that that I do of the main story. (Good Lord, I just realized we're halfway done!)

For those of you who just can't wait for more Wander Verse stuff, I have a solution for you! I'm starting up a tumblr blog for my fannish creations. You'll find the things that inspire me, pictures of things that show up in the story (or as close as I can get, I have to rely on the interwebs for most of it, as my drawing skill is null), thoughts, perhaps even a contest or two (winner gets a commissioned one-shot).
You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

EDIT: I almost forgot your teaser! Silly me.

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“Oh about once a week somebody at this end of the room gets enthused about something and breaks into song.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Chris sings and a deal is struck.

Chapter Notes

The song Chris sings is All For One, by Blackmore's Night. I used it because of this vid: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrKY0s4F7ic

She’ll sing another Blackmore's Night song at the Feast of the Fallen. Any guesses as to the song she’ll be singing? First person to guess correctly gets a commissioned one-shot.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama and vic for their lovely comments. Another shout out to everybody who checked out my tumblr page, I get so excited that folks actually want to hear what I say.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day, I met Kili and Ori in the Dining Hall for lunch. We had just settled in when Roda arrived, eagerly settling down on the bench next to Ori. Her energetic greeting to Kili told me that the three of them must hang out a lot. I was starting to feel like a fourth Musketeer when Roda brought up our hastily laid plan to get me on stage during the Feast.

“So, will you help or not, oh my Prince? She really does deserve to sing like anyone else. And I bet she’s a marvelous singer.”

“Hello? ‘She’ is sitting right here. And I’m not sure I’d say I’m a marvelous singer, just fairly good.”

“Well, there’s one way to tell.” Kili’s eyes were reflecting the energy of his friend’s enthusiasm. “Sing something for us. Go on, nobody will mind.”

“What about the working meal? I don’t want to get in the way of ruling a Kingdom.”

“Oh about once a week somebody at this end of the room gets enthused about something and breaks into song. It’s never bothered them before, not that anyone said.” It sounded surreal, like living in a musical, but I figured there wasn’t much harm and if the high and mighty got their noses bent out of shape I could always blame Kili.

“Ok. I’ll sing.” The first song that came to mind was from the same artist as the one I wanted to sing for the Feast, and I had it memorized, not that it was that hard. I cleared my throat, braced myself and began to sing.

*We’ll drink together*
And when we drink we'll drink together, not alone!
We'll drink together
And when we drink we'll drink together, not alone!
All For One, and One For All!
We'll drink together
And when we drink we'll drink together, not alone!
We'll drink together
And when we drink we'll drink together, not alone!

Once I started singing, the worry about disrupting anything disappeared. Without a moment’s hesitation, I rounded into the second verse.

We'll sing together
And when we sing we'll sing together, not alone!

The idea was generally picked up by my friends, who joined me, as well as a few people sitting nearby. It was exhilarating to be leading the group in song, so I added a verse that wasn’t in the original song.

We'll laugh together
And when we laugh we'll laugh together, not alone!

I didn’t know if I could sustain such improvisations much beyond that, so I moved to the third verse.

We'll fight together
And when we fight we'll fight together, not alone!

This verse got a few more people adding their voices, mostly tough looking types from across the room. Guardsmen I presumed. They had that air. I really hated to end the song but I had to, and by God I was going to end on a strong note. I stood up, earlier fear forgotten; shed like water off a duck’s back and belted out the last verse.

We'll fall together
And if we fall we'll fall together, not alone!
We'll fall together
And if we fall we'll fall together, not alone!
All For One, and One For All!
We'll fall together
And if we fall we'll fall together, not alone!
All For One, and One For All!
We'll fall together
And if we fall we'll fall together, not alone!

A cheer went up from the guards across the Hall and suddenly I felt self-conscious. I sat back down and from the burn in my cheeks, I was beet red. Kili was grinning like a madman and Ori was smiling into his ale. Roda reached across the table to clap my shoulder.

“See? I told you that she could sing!”

“That you did. Very well, I’m in. What’s your plan?”
That afternoon, Kili and Lady Chris went to the salle. She had pulled him aside after the midday meal to ask if she could borrow a pair of trousers for use when learning and teaching combat. Instead of trying to see if a pair of his trousers would work (he knew they wouldn’t, not with her longer legs and fuller hips), he deviated their path to take them through the market, where they bought a few cheap pairs and tunics that were suitable. Lady Chris had tried to protest at the buying of such things, but Kili had pointed out that she had asked for them, and with her longer legs none of his would have fit her (he specifically did not mention her hips). He also said that as she was teaching Dwalin as well, and he would undoubtedly be teaching what he learned to the other Royal Guards, there was an imbalance in recompense for her services.

“If you can accept that this is not charity, that this is a fair and equitable exchange and it behooves me to see you well cared for, just until Gandalf comes and I speak to him, I promise I’ll talk Uncle around to giving you a proper wage for whatever services you do, be it cooking or teaching. Can we agree to that?”

“I suppose you won’t give me much choice in the matter, will you?”

“I do not intend for you to attempt teaching me your style of fighting in a skirt, no. I’m sure it would be much more beneficial if I could see the way you stand, which means trousers. Please just let me do this?”

“Alright, but only until Gandalf comes, and nothing unnecessary. I found the perfume you snuck into the purchases that day, and although it was a nice thought, I don’t want it happening again. If I’m stuck here longer than a week, I don’t want to rely on a Sugar Daddy.”

“Right, good. What’s a Sugar Daddy?”

“Never mind.”

In the salle, Kili found a little used supply room for Lady Chris to change clothes in, and when she emerged, they went to work. Dwalin hadn’t arrived yet, but Kili was sufficient to review the sword work they’d taught her yesterday. As they were running high block drills, the Guard Captain came into the practice court and seamlessly took over the Lady’s lessons. Two of them weren’t required to teach her, but occasionally Kili would spot something wrong with her grip that Dwalin missed, or offer a better way to remember the correct position for low block on her left side, her off hand. When her arms began to shake with strain, they changed roles, with Lady Chris running them through drills in the squat-like stance, then how to move across the room never falling out of that stance. She called it a kata, and said that for every stance there was a moving kata equivalent. When the two Dwarves were sweating and tired, they again traded roles, back and forth until none of them wanted to train even a moment longer. This time, Lady Chris did accept the offer of a bath, with as much eagerness as Kili had in his own heart for the hot springs he headed to after ordering her bath.

That night at dinner, Ori and Roda again sat with Lady Chris, this time joined by several other scribes and clerks from the palace. The group ranged from as boisterous as Roda to as shy as Ori, but all of them were friendly. This would set the pattern for the next five days. Lady Chris would meet Kili, Ori and Roda for the midday meal, then go to the salle with Kili, then at dinner sit with Ori, Roda, and whichever of their friends chose to sit with them. Kili made a point to get his academic studies done in the mornings so his afternoons would be free to spend with Lady Chris, then he would eat at the high table, where he was expected, before retiring with his family to their
private quarters as they had since Erebor was reclaimed. On the fifth day, the eve of the Feast of the Fallen, two arrivals, one expected, the other not so much, made that day much more eventful than even the preparations would have made it.

Chapter End Notes

WARNING: TEASER IMMINENT
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“I will never care for them, but it is hard to hold hate towards those who have saved that which was most precious.”

For those of you who just can’t wait for more Wander Verse stuff, I have a solution for you! I’m starting up a tumblr blog for my fannish creations. You’ll find the things that inspire me, pictures of things that show up in the story (or as close as I can get, I have to rely on the interwebs for most of it, as my drawing skill is null), thoughts, perhaps even a contest or two (winner gets a commissioned one-shot). You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Some arrivals, and a plea for help

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the lateness of this update, I have no excuse. But, here you go, so have fun!

This chapter is dedicated to Bofurl1, tigrislilium, and the guest who left kudos In addition, Bofur1 and tigrislilium left comments. tigrislilium actually left several, for which I am very grateful. The continued support of all of you makes me so very happy, thank you.

Remember, you still have until Sunday's post to try to guess which Blackmore's Night song gets sung at the Feast of the Fallen!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was nearing dinner time on the night before the big feast when she came. I was loitering near the entrance to the Dining Hall waiting for Ori or Roda when a messenger came running past me. Curious, I looked in to see he had approached the high table where Thorin had just sat down. Then a moment later I heard a whoop followed by coughing. The whoop had sounded a lot like Fili, and I presumed that the coughing was to cover that not very princely exclamation. It wasn’t any of my business and I was about to go back to loitering when a sturdy Dwarven woman in male clothing came walking in at quite a clip. Thorin stood and called out to her.

“Well met, Dis, daughter of Thrain. We had not expected you back so soon.” So this was Fili and Kili’s mum. Her dark honey hair was similar to Fili’s, but other than that I hadn’t gotten the chance to see if either of them took after her. She had been moving pretty fast.

“It is good to be back, brother mine.” She had rounded the end of the lower table and climbed the step of the dais, and Fili stood to greet her. They had just finished hugging when Kili came up to the table, fussing with something on his belt. I could tell he hadn’t looked up enough to register the new arrival. When he did he was only a few feet away and with a shout, hugged her fiercely. Words were exchanged, but I wasn’t close enough to hear them. Then Kili lifted his head and his eyes met mine and he gestured for me to come up to the dais.

“He better not think I’m eating up there.” I muttered to myself. I was in no mood to put up with that again, and wasn’t even wearing my fancier clothing. When I reached the high table and the little crowd of Royals, Kili introduced me to his mother.

“Lady Chris, this is my mother, Lady Dis. Mother, this is Lady Chris. She’s the one I told you about.”
“So you’re from another world?” Dis’s raised eyebrow told me she wasn’t sold on my story. I was expecting that, it was actually weird how few of the people I’d told thought I was a nutbar. So Dis’s doubt didn’t faze me, and I had more confidence about it than I had my first day here.

“I know it sounds insane, and please do me the credit of understanding that if I were to lie about my place of origin I would pick a more believable story to tell. ‘From another world’ is just about the least believable story out there and it would have been far more convincing to say I was from Rohan or something.” She seemed to be weighing the merits of this argument.

“So I am to believe the story because it is unbelievable? That hardly seems logical.” Her right hand went to her hip, in a half-way ‘mum stance’, and I knew I needed to come up with a better line of argument.

“As it so happens, I know a few people who believe me who normally have what I would call good judgment, and I hope that even if you don’t believe me, you’ll believe them. I didn’t know I was going to have to offer proof or I’d have brought my cell phone.”

“Mother, she is telling the truth, I know it. I’ve seen wonders at her hands that could not have come from anywhere in this world.” Kili, sticking up for me, again. He was cutely predictable. “Even Uncle Thorin believes her now, as do Balin and Dwalin and Ori.”

“I’m standing right here, so please don’t talk about me like I’m not in the room. But at any rate I’m going to let you get back to the reunion stuff, I’m going to go see if Ori and Roda have come in yet.”

Dinner was over, but the court had not yet dispersed when a messenger came into the Dining Hall. In the middle of the room, she paused for breath, the proclaimed loudly, “Gandalf has arrived!” All through the room, galvanized by the announcement, Dwarves were busily brushing crumbs off of beards, straightening tunics, and composing themselves to give the wizard a good greeting. Shortly after, Gandalf walked into the Dining Hall, his stride purposeful, his staff clicking against the floor as he walked. Everything about him spoke of an assurance and an intention. For whatever brought the wizard to visit Erebor, it was surely important and urgent. The import behind his bearing was not lost on Thorin, who stood and gave greeting to the Istari before him, then suggested that they retire to the Royal wing to discuss the matters at hand.

In a sitting room of the Royal wing, Thorin relaxed into an armchair, while Dis, her sons and Gandalf, found places to sit, or stand in the case of the wizard. He did not need more problems, but problems were certainly what the wizard brought with him. Thorin waited for Gandalf to speak, but no speech came. Finally, Thorin spoke.

“Well I am pleased that you have come to visit us, Tharkûn. It has been far too long, and you have arrived in time for the Feast of the Fallen, which is good timing indeed. But I sense you did not come to share in the feasting, nor just to see old friends. I would have you speak your purpose here.”

“You are right; I have come for a vital reason. A real and present danger exists upon your doorstep, and you would be wise to help remove it. The task I would lay before you is not one I think you will relish, nor is the place I would have you go to do it a pleasant one for you. But the
task must be done, whether by you or by another, and I can think of no greater aid than that which you may offer.”

“Your words are pretty, Gandalf, far prettier than you would use for a friend. I would have you ask your favor of Thorin, your friend, rather than the King under the Mountain. For where the King must keep his head clear and unclouded by past alliance, your friend would do you any service you requested.”

“My apologies, Thorin. I have had many nights to think on how to approach this subject, perhaps too many. I will tell you my tale, and the part you may yet play, but I must ask that you not interrupt me. You may wish to reject my request before the end, and I would ask that you refrain, and let me finish.”

“Of course, my friend. I can at least do you the courtesy of listening. None here will halt your speech, on my word.” He shot a warning glance at Fili and Kili. They would not make a liar of him, he was sure. Of Dis, he was less sure, as she had a temper and was unused to keeping her tongue, but perhaps her time working Dain over would have cooled her fire.

“As you know, when, all those years ago, I left you at the border of Mirkwood, I traveled to Dol Guldur and battled a dark force. The Necromancer, who turned out to be so much more than what I’d expected. He was not slain, nor was any victory on either side final. There is much to settle with that one, and I believe him to be consolidating his power in preparation for war. Some of his forces are already doing his dark work, corrupting that which was good and destroying that which was strong. If we let it continue, we will be ill-prepared to defeat him when the time comes. This is why I ask for your aid in ridding Mirkwood of a foul invasion. I know you bear Thranduil’s kingdom little love, and even less for Thranduil himself, but the dark powers gathering in his lands will not stop at destroying his home, but instead will spread towards his neighbors as well. In the west, Lady Galadriel can hold back the darkness, but here in the east, the two towns of Men are woefully unprepared. If we are to defend them, and Erebor, for stone walls will not stop the menace I suspect, we must take the fight to the source. I would ask that you aid Thranduil. He knows that the relations between your two kingdoms are not particularly friendly, and so is not asking directly for aid, but for a treaty, to be negotiated at your leisure by whatever proxy you may send to him. The missive itself is here.” He reached into his robes and removed a packet of paper sealed with the sigil of the Woodland Realm. Handing the packet to Thorin, he spoke once more. “Please consider it.”

“You are finished?” The wizard nodded solemnly. “While you are correct that I bear little love for Elves, I recognize that you are also right that what affects my neighbor’s home also may affect my home. And I would be as faithless as Thranduil if I ignored his plight out of revenge and spite. I would be the better, and give aid where aid is needed. I will read his missive and give it thought.”

“You have grown, Thorin Oakenshield. You are not the Dwarf I once knew, and I am glad of it. But, might I ask, what inspired this remarkable change?”

“It is to Elves that I owe the life of my sister-sons, and quite likely my own as well.” He smiled at Fili and Kili who sat next to one another, close enough that their arms brushed together. They would always be a pair, those two, and the love they bore for each other was deep and true, as true as the love that Thorin held for his sister-sons. “I will never care for them, but it is hard to hold hate towards those who have saved that which was most precious.”

“That is a truth many do not learn, but I am glad that you have. It will be good to see the free peoples of Middle Earth united against the darkness once more. But we have time to talk of such
things later. For now, I would have us be merry. I recall that Dwarven music is jolly and bright, just the thing to chase off the lingering shadow of our former conversation.”

“That is a truth if ever there was one. Boys, fetch your fiddles, we shall have song.”

Chapter End Notes

WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT
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Kili didn’t think Gandalf would let loose his magic here, but wizards are an uncanny lot.

For those of you who just can't wait for more Wander Verse stuff, I have a solution for you! I'm starting up a tumblr blog for my fannish creations. You'll find the things that inspire me, pictures of things that show up in the story (or as close as I can get, I have to rely on the interwebs for most of it, as my drawing skill is null), thoughts, perhaps even a contest or two (winner gets a commissioned one-shot). You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Roda gets a sister, Chris sings at the Feast of the Fallen, and Kili fulfills a promise.

Chapter Notes

Oh, God, guys. This chapter was soooo hard to write. Not because the words wouldn’t come (that happens to me often but not here), but because with the words came the feels. So many feels. It’s a roller coaster, honestly. Happy, sad, concerned, confused/afraid, I ran the damn gamut with this chapter. So, yeah, WARNING FOR FEELS. Also this chapter has mentions of death and grieving so if you’re not ok with that, I’m sorry. Just skip the section that has italics every other paragraph.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama and tigrislilium for being continued sources of support and encouragement. I cannot say thank you enough, guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day of the feast, I was woken by Roda shaking my shoulder. I was irritated at first, but then she smiled the smile of one who knows something that you don’t and I became more curious than upset.

“Who’s the most brilliant Dwarf you know?”

“Given who’s asking the question I assume the answer is you.”

“That’s right, and you want to know why I’m the most brilliant Dwarf you know?”

“Even if I didn’t you’d still tell me. Just out with your secret, woman. No guessing games, it’s too early.” I rolled out of bed and began stretching. What with my lessons, both given and received, my body had a tendency to stiffen up overnight. I was probably overworking myself, but I was pumped about the improvement I was making.

“You are definitely singing tonight. I just spoke with Hallur, the Master of Ceremonies. He’s in charge of the feast. Well, not the food, but the singing and all the boring ceremonial parts. I’ve worked him round, and he agreed to let you take the stage right after me. We won’t even have to sneak you on. Isn’t that great!”

“Yes, actually it is.” I hadn’t been wild about the idea to sneak me up on the stage and hope that the next person on the schedule was in a giving mood.

“So let’s get you ready!”

“Now? I thought the feast wasn’t until tonight.”

“You can get dressed in your finery right before the feast, but doing your hair will take longer, and
you don’t have any relatives to help you, so you’d best start now if you want something presentable on stage.” The comment about relatives struck me as odd, until I recalled that Dwarves take hair care and styling very seriously and only a close family member or spouse would dare touch another Dwarf’s hair or beard.

“Well, I’ve never been to a Dwarvish celebration before, so I don’t exactly know what presentable is. How should I do it?”

“I’m sure our celebrations aren’t that different than yours are. How would you fix your hair for a feast day in your home? And I’ve been meaning to ask where your home is.”

“Let’s leave it at ‘very far away’ and not go into detail. It’s an awkward story that I don’t like telling. As for how I’d fix my hair, I would go to a hairdresser if the event was fancy.”

“What’s a hairdresser? I’m sure it isn’t what it sounds like.”

“Actually it’s pretty much exactly what it sounds like. My people don’t attribute the same significance to hair that yours do. And most of my people don’t want to put the time into learning how to style it, so they go to professionals who have training in such things. Personally, beyond a braid down the back, or pulled back in a tie, I have no skill at doing hair.”

“I see. Well you won’t find any here who do, that, for money, oh Mahal that just sounds wrong. So you’ll have to figure something out. So it’s good I woke you.” Roda seemed genuinely freaked by the idea of paying to get your hair done, but with my pitiful lack of talent in the hair department I really needed someone to help me.

“Roda, I’m going to ask you a question and I don’t want you to flip out. But as I am, as you pointed out, without any blood relatives who could help me and you have, in a surprisingly short amount of time become one of my greatest friends, would you accept being sort of, well, adopted by me as a sister, so that it would be appropriate for you to help me?” I braced myself in case this freaked her out even more, but instead I received a hug.

“I will take you as an Oath-Bound sister. Our friendship has grown fast as you said, but it is dear to me as well. Do your people have a ritual or ceremony for the accepting of such a tie? I would do this right.”

“The young and stupid sometimes cut their fingers and press them together so that blood is mingled with blood, but that can be incredibly unsafe. I think all that would be required on my side of things is that we agree. Is there something that your people do?”

“Well, an Oath must be made, but it can be simple. Here, I’ll lead.” She clasped my hand palm to palm, fingers up, and when she spoke her voice was calmer and statelier than I’d known she could produce. “My heart recognizes your heart, my spirit knows your spirit, and I take unto me the joy of sisterhood forevermore.” I sensed that I should repeat this, so I did. My Oath didn’t sound nearly as composed as Roda’s. But the moment passed and she became a whirlwind of activity. I was placed on a stool by the fire, and a piece of paper holding what looked like bobby pins was retrieved from somewhere, as were many little lengths of leather cord. “I brought these knowing that you didn’t have any of your own. It was a bit presumptuous, but seeing how things turned out, it must have been fate. Sit still.” She worked my head over for hours, and when it was over, I patted my head and felt dozens of braids coiled about on my head. Just from touch I couldn’t tell what it looked like, but I could tell it was an elaborate style. It had taken a proportionately long time, and my stomach was protesting the missing of lunch. Fortunately, I was friends with some of the kitchen staff.
After receiving some dark bread and a block of cheese from Naya, who looked knowingly at my hair and smiled at Roda, we returned to my room for some last minute preparations. Roda had to leave to go get dressed herself, but the blue dress wasn’t that hard to get into on my own.

The feast began with a ceremony, most of which was in a language I didn’t understand, and then settled down into some serious pigging out. The sheer amount of food served had me working out the logistical math of how the kitchens I’d worked in could produce so much in one day, and the answer was they couldn’t. There must be a secondary set of kitchens, or some of the food was of a ‘prepare beforehand’ nature. As the meal went on, singers from all over the Hall would come up to the low platform built in the center of the U, and sing. There must have been a method of signaling who was next, but I couldn’t find it. It didn’t matter much, as I knew I was going right after Roda.

Roda’s song was a hauntingly beautiful lullaby. As she sang, I edged around the table and got ready for my turn. I steeled my nerves and took the stage. I thought for a moment about how I’d felt the day my grandparents died, and held that memory close. Then I began to sing.

*Twisting turning*
*Oh, the winds are burning*
*Leaving me without a name*
*How will we ever find our way...*

It had been a cold July day. I’d gone to a friend’s house to play in the snow and drink hot cocoa. When the time came to take me home, I had a million little things to share with my grandparents, how I’d caught a snowflake on my tongue, the family of snowmen we’d built. Little, happy things. But what we found when we got there was a sight I would take with me to my grave.

*Snow was falling*
*I could hear the frightened calling*
*Fear taking over every man*
*Life meaning nothing more than sand...*

The flames could be seen from a block away. Fire trucks had blocked the road at that point. I could hear shouting as the neighbors ran from their houses to flee the flames that had got into the trees and were spreading. The mother of my friend had to restrain me from running into my burning house.

*Wind will sweep away*
*The traces I was here*
*A story and a teardrop*
*That's all I have to give...*

All of it gone, everything in my whole life that I had ever known was gone. My grandparents, who had, to that point been my parents in all but name, were gone. I couldn’t bring myself to say ‘dead’ yet. My home was destroyed, burnt beyond recognition.

*Rage inferno swallowing the life that I know*
*Strength’s not the only way to fight*
*You must look up to see the light...*

My parents, people I barely knew, came to take me. I felt numb, unable to process or connect to any of it. Then, deep in the night, I heard sobbing from the other room in the hotel suite. I climbed out of bed to find my mother sitting on her bed crying. I climbed into her lap and our grief took us both beyond our own pain and we became each other’s support.
Take all I know
Turn it into darkened shadows
They'll disappear in the sun
When a new story has begun

The day of the funeral was sunny and bright, even if there was still a bite in the air and snow on much of the ground. I held my mother’s hand as the priest said the words. There were no bodies to recover, the whole house and everything and everyone inside it were so much ash. We took an urn full of ashes from the house, and sprinkled those ashes over the ground in front of the grave marker.

She survived the nightmare
Began a whole new life here
But I can see behind those eyes
She still sees those fires in the night...

The next day, we took a flight to Osaka. In my sleep that night, I was back at the house the day it burned. I could see my grandparents and tried to call out to them, to warn them. But my cries went unanswered and the flames sprang up from nowhere to block my path. I woke with a scream and ran to the bathroom where I vomited hard.

Twisting and turning
Oh, the winds are burning
Leaving me without a name
How will we ever find our way...

My song faded and I felt the tears running down my face. I stepped down from the stage slowly, unsure of my feet, completely drained. Roda appeared beside me, putting my arm across her shoulders. At her height, she wasn’t supporting any of my weight with the gesture, but I leaned on her and took comfort from it nonetheless.

Her song took all of them by surprise. Laughing and talking was cut short by her clear, strong voice lifted in song, a song of loss and pain at the ever grasping hands of flame. It was a song many of them felt a certain connection to, those who had lived through Smaug’s attack, left without home and without hope. She could not possibly have known the dragon’s wrath first-hand, but none doubted that she had lost something dear in fire and smoke. Her song of grief and survival touched every heart that had ears to hear her. Those closest to the King could see the gathering of tears in the corners of his eyes, though none would mention it. If any looked to the King’s most trusted advisor, they would have seen a tension in his jaw and tears running down his cheeks and into his snow white beard. And the youngest son of Durin’s line wept openly, if silently.

When the song was done, her voice still echoing through the Hall, silence reigned as a friend helped her walk away from the site of such an outpouring of emotion that none were surprised she needed help to leave the Hall. It was some time before any broke the silence, and the Hall returned to its merry state. When the gathering had recovered from the sudden and unexpected emotions her song stirred up within them, Kili spoke to the wizard seated beside him.

“Gandalf, if you wouldn’t mind, a moment of your time would be most appreciated.”
“Why of course, young master Kili. I do believe there is a council room not far from here, where we might have some distance from the feast.”

“Yes, some distance would be good.” Kili knew the council room the wizard spoke of, and it truly wasn’t far. When they reached the room, Gandalf followed him into the over-sized room. It was originally for meetings with about twenty people, so with only two the space was rather cavernous. Kili did what he could by starting a low-burning fire in the hearth to give the room some cheer. They pulled chairs up to the fire and Kili cleared his throat nervously. He didn’t want to have this conversation, he didn’t want Lady Chris to leave, but he had promised to ask on her behalf. And Kili always kept his promises.

“Well, ah. Where to start?”

“The beginning is usually a good place.” The wizard had taken out his pipe and lit it with a mutter. “Yes, I’d say it’s the best place to start.”

“Well, I found a woman.” Kili was about to continue with the story, but Gandalf had suddenly started smiling, a disconcerting sight on a wizard. Usually it would precede some unnatural happening. Kili didn’t think Gandalf would let loose his magic here, but wizards are an uncanny lot.

“So you’ve found her then? I’m very happy for you, Kili. So few of your kind find their One so early in life.” Kili now understood where he’d gone wrong.

“No, no, you don’t understand. I actually found her, out on the side of the Mountain. She’s stuck here until we can find her a path home, and we were hoping you might have it.”

“Well, this is the unbelievable bit. She’s from another world. Apparently, her world tells tales of ours, if that narrows it down any.”

“Hmm.” The wizard’s eyes were shuttered, and Kili could see no trace of what went on behind them.

“I swear, although it may sound mad, many little things have added to her credibility. Even Thorin believes her, and he’s one of the least trusting people I know.”

“What? No, no, I believe you. I was merely pondering how she came to be tossed across the barrier between worlds. Can you tell me exactly what happened immediately before her arrival?”

“I was out on the balcony, feeling a bit sorry for myself, if you must know. I was thinking about how I don’t really fit in anywhere or with anyone. Then a flash of light caught my eye and there she was, on the side of the Mountain, unconscious.”

“Hmm.” The wizard blew a smoke ring that changed colors. He was being most unhelpful, and while Kili didn’t really want him to send Lady Chris home, he was getting impatient when Gandalf spoke again. “Have you considered, that it would take power like unto that of the Valar to send someone from one world to another?”

“What’s that supposed to mean? Does that mean you can’t send her home?” Gandalf made a noise low in his chest and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Save me from the ignorance of Dwarves.”
So, yeah, that happened. By the way, the song Chris sung was Gone with the Wind, by Blackmore's Night. You can find it here, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdX8X8aF8A8. I took some liberties with the lyrics, so that it could be sung without accompaniment and so that the lyrics matched the story a little better.

For those of you who just can't wait for more Wander Verse stuff, I have a solution for you! I'm starting up a tumblr blog for my fannish creations. You'll find the things that inspire me, pictures of things that show up in the story (or as close as I can get, I have to rely on the interwebs for most of it, as my drawing skill is null), thoughts, perhaps even a contest or two (winner gets a commissioned one-shot). You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT
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“If you don’t want people hearing what’s going on in your secret council, then you can bloody well close the damn door. I could hear you from near fifty feet down the hall.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Plans are laid.

Chapter Notes

Ok, folks, here you go. It's short compared to last chapter, but hopefully good.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama and quadrad for comments, and to Sam and quadrad for kudos. Quadrad has made some very helpful comments, hence the double shout-out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the night of the feast was a blur, my song having left me numb, and I only really started feeling things again when I woke up the next day. I was totally disoriented, feeling as though I’d slept a week. I climbed out of the bed, noted that someone had put me in the shift I used for sleeping (I hoped it was Roda) and began stretching, although I wasn’t stiff in the least. Rather I felt sort of boneless and weak. After I was done, I got dressed and scrubbed my teeth with the odd little scraper thing that they used instead of a toothbrush. My hair was still in its braids from the night before, so I didn’t need to brush it.

I ventured out to go to the Dining Hall, but when I arrived I found no one there. I thought perhaps it was later than I had originally thought. If that was the case, then Kili would have probably gone about whatever business he had. He had mentioned that he tried to get all of his other work done in the morning so that we could train together in the afternoon. I decided to go find him, so I set out among the hallways of the palace. I was growing frustrated at how many hallways looked the same when I heard a distant voice that sounded like Kili. Heading in the direction of the voice I came to the door of a room, and inside were Thorin, Fili, Kili, Dis, Balin and Gandalf. I hesitated in the doorway, not wanting to interrupt.

“His dark servants have attacked guard patrols, wounding and even killing them. They bear Morgul blades, so even the lightly wounded are at risk of death. I believe them to be working from a place of strength, the fortress of Dol Guldur, in the southern stretches of Mirkwood. They are not mortal as such, long having been dead in all ways that matter.”

I gasped at what Gandalf was saying. “The Nazgul,” I breathed. He looked up sharply. “You’re talking about the Nazgul, aren’t you? But they should be in Mordor by now, not Mirkwood.”

“And you should not be privy to this council. It would seem many are not where they ought be.” Thorin rose from his seat and tried looming again. Although he still scared me, I was in no mood to put up with him.

“If you don’t want people hearing what’s going on in your secret council, then you can bloody well close the damn door. I could hear you from near fifty feet down the hall.”
“My dear lady, you must be the one Kili spoke of to me last night. But how much do you know of the Ring Wraiths? What stories of them have been told in your homeland?”

I came in the room, closing the door behind me, and took a seat in a chair between Gandalf and Kili. “First off I will only tell you what I think will not damage the space-time continuum. The stories of my world cover both your past and your future and too much knowledge of the future can utterly derail what must be. I won’t risk the future for the sake of the present.”

“I understand. Tell us only what your heart thinks right.”

“The Nazgul, or Ring Wraiths, are all that remains of the nine kings of Men that received magic rings from Sauron. They don’t really live, because they died in all but name many, many years ago. Something like five thousand years, if that matters. When Sauron was defeated, they were imprisoned, but at some point, I’m not sure when, they escaped. Gandalf knows this, because he saw their prison busted open. They cannot be killed by any living man, nor, as I understand it, by any weapon currently in use. A bit like cockroaches.”

“So you’re saying that Gandalf wishes me to send my warriors against a foe that cannot be killed?” He rounded on Gandalf. “You told me that my aid would actually be of assistance! I cannot fight a creature that cannot die! Not and do any harm to it.”

“If you’d just shut up and listen, I have more information that you might find useful. No, they cannot be killed. But they can be driven off. Setting them on fire has worked before, or will work, or…I hate tense agreement. At any rate, they are driven primarily by the One Ring, and that’s not anywhere near here, so they’re unlikely to be brave enough to stick around a place where they keep getting set on fire.”

“We could just burn down Dol Guldur. No one would miss it.”

“Fili, if you had been paying proper attention, you would know that Dol Guldur lies within the boundaries of Mirkwood Forest. Forests are flammable things, and I doubt very much that any treaty we might make with the Woodland Realm would survive burning down their home.” Dis spoke with a logic that was irrefutable. Not that I would argue with her, she was just this side of too imposing to even talk to.

“You asked me what the weaknesses of Nazgul were, you never asked if they were feasible to use in this situation. The only other time I can think of that the Nazgul got even a little bit beaten; they got washed down a river by the defenses of Rivendell. Unless Thranduil has a magic river that seems less than helpful.”

“There are many ways to fight evil, and any light may push back darkness. But we stray from our initial reason for this council. You have agreed to send a delegation to negotiate a treaty with King Thranduil, but who shall you send?”

“Don’t look to me, I just spent a month with Dain, I demand a chance to settle back in before you send me anywhere.”

“Well one of the Royal family had better go, it’d be an offence otherwise.”

“I’d go…”

“The Crown Prince can’t go; you have too many duties here.”

“What about Kili?” The group turned as one to look at me like I was mad. “He is a member of the Royal family, and if he can spend half of his days in the salle with me, then he obviously doesn’t
have too many responsibilities. So why not Kili?"

Kili warmed a little at her words. He’d honestly not even thought about the possibility of being the official designate. His family loved him, he knew, but they never trusted him with diplomatic relations. He was too prone to rashness.

“Besides, he’s already on somewhat good terms with at least one Elf, unless something changed drastically since the dragon attacked Laketown. At least you know he can be on good terms with them, which is a trait you won’t find in many of your people, I’m sure.”

“Excellent points, all, but Kili is hardly trained in the making of a treaty. In fact, he is hardly trained in any of the matters that would need to be discussed.” Thorin looked to his youngest sister-son. “But if you can promise me that you will take no rash action, that you will listen to Balin and the other advisors I send with you, and that you will not neglect the mission to chase elf maids, I believe we could send you.”

“But I have no idea what to do on a diplomatic mission to Mirkwood!”

“Neither do I. That’s what Balin is for. We listen to him and we should be alright.”

“Easy for you to say! You’re a prince; you get lessons in how not to put your foot in it. You’re born to this; I’m just a line cook!”

“You’re born to this too, milady. Did you not tell me that your parents worked for your kingdom in foreign lands? Cook you may be, but you have as much a lineage of diplomacy as I do. In fact, I’d say you have a lower chance of as you said, ‘putting your foot in it’, than me. I’ll not let you place yourself lower than you are.”

“Well then that’s settled. Kili, Christiana, and I will go. Who else? It should be a party larger than three.”

“They’ll need guards, but we can leave the choosing of them to Dwalin, I think. As for other advisors, Rokur is the one most familiar with the laws of Elves, and his daughter is a credible scribe, which you’ll need.” Dis continued to rattle off jobs and names, and her sons jotted down her words on the papers in front of them. When at last the plans were laid, the meeting broke for the midday meal.

Chapter End Notes
You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

WARNING: TEASER IMMINENT
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“You may find that you have need of it, with where we go and what dwells there. Better to be armed and find it unneeded than to run into the forest with only your wits and discover a pressing need for a sword"
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

We set out for Mirkwood.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for posting this on Monday, rather than Sunday. Mothers Day kinda threw me off. Anyway, the Mirkwood arc is here! Sorry in advance for the feels I know are coming.

This chapter is dedicated to tigrislilium and quadrad for commenting.

Also, if you haven't read my ancillary tales story, Wander Verse shorts and one-shots, you might find the chapter titled "What you do" very informative vis a vi the relationship between Legolas and the Princes of Erebor. I would recommend reading that before you read this chapter, as Legolas behaves in a somewhat non-canonical way when Kili arrives, but I had reasons.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I found it impressive how quickly Fili and Kili’s mum pulled together a full diplomatic party. For someone who complained so vociferously about her duties as a de facto Ambassador, she sure was good at it. In addition to those of us from the meeting we had two advisors, Stigur and Rokur (Rokur happened to be Roda’s dad), three scribes, one of whom was Roda herself, and a contingent of four guards, including Dwalin. We were traveling by horse, or rather pony, and mine was a placid bay mare with black mane and tail, named Maisy. Kili came by my room late the day the party was decided with saddle bags, into which I packed pretty much every belonging to my name, excepting some of my clothing. After much internal debate, I packed my jeans (although I left the mortifying tee shirt tucked safely under the mattress). Under my skirt I wore a pair of my practice trousers, as I had no desire to have saddle sores.

We departed early in the morning a few days after the meeting, much to my general grumpiness. Thorin, Dis and Fili saw us off, and somewhere in my sleepy stupor I registered Gandalf telling us he would likely not be there when we returned. Later, when we stopped for a brief lunch of cheese and cold summer sausage I reflected that it was a good thing my pony was so calm and had such an even gait, or I might very well have fallen due to lack of attention to my seat. We remounted and continued on our way, not stopping again until the sun was touching the horizon. We made camp, setting up tents and digging a fire pit, and as we sat around the fire I found myself thinking once again how much I liked these people. The party had naturally formed small internal groupings, as any group of people shoved together by necessity would. I had somehow remained tangential to all of them; although I knew some would welcome me. I preferred to sit to the side and people watch. I hadn’t had much chance to do that for a while.

Rokur was telling a story about a cat and a barn owl and a prince, but he kept going off on tangents
and Roda would have to pull him back on track. Kili and Balin were deep in a discussion like the ones they’d had right before we left, with Balin advising him what to talk about in treaty discussions. I found myself sitting with Dwalin, as the only other unoccupied person I knew. He said nothing for a long time, which was just as well, because with all the other people having conversations (and in Rokur and Roda’s case a loud argument), I wouldn’t have been able to hear what he said anyway. Then, after most had gone into the tents to go to sleep, as I stood to do that myself, he stopped me.

“Lass, I have something for you.” I turned and looked at him, confused. What could Dwalin have for me? He went to his own saddlebags and retrieved a long, cloth wrapped bundle. “Now mind that this is what I could get on short notice, so it may not be the right weight for you.” He handed me the heavy bundle and I unwrapped it to find a sheathed sword. Taking the hilt in hand, I pulled it free with ease and held it in the ready position. I ran through the blocks I’d been taught and the sword felt like an extension of my body, no more difficult to wield than hands or feet.

“Dwalin, it’s perfect. Thank you.”

“You may find that you have need of it, with where we go and what dwells there. Better to be armed and find it unneeded than to run into the forest with only your wits and discover a pressing need for a sword.” He turned away, then back. “Dream well tonight, milady. We leave early again tomorrow.” I groaned at the mention of the early start I knew was coming. Dwalin chuckled.

“You, too. Thank you, again, for the sword.” In response he only grunted, but by now I knew that was just a part of how he communicated. I felt quite pleased that he’d felt me ready for a real sword, and that he cared enough to get one for me. It seemed Roda wasn’t the only one who’d adopted me, although she was the only official one.

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Their travels were uneventful, the five day journey speeding past with few complications. At the edge of Mirkwood, a contingent of Elves greeted them, escorting them through the perilous forest to the Halls of King Thranduil. In the Elvenking’s Hall, they were ushered to bathing chambers and shown the wing they would be staying in. The rooms were all of a kind, and the choosing of them was left to the party. Those who got on well were inclined to find rooms close to one another and those with more reserved relations found rooms farther apart.

That evening the group assembled to go to dinner. For all that they were here on a peaceful mission, the way they stood close together and the way many fingered the dented spots on belts where swords used to lay spoke of the tension they felt. The tension was somewhat broken when Kili stepped out of the cluster to greet the Elvenking’s son.

“Well met, Prince Legolas! Well met indeed. It has been, what, three years now?”

“Yes, three years as of a few weeks past, I believe. I am glad to see you well. How fares your brother?”

“Fili is well, but busy. I’m sure you understand. Shall we to dinner then?”

The dinner was elegant and sophisticated, though only Rokur and Christiana truly appreciated that
fact. Christiana because she had been raised well out of the racial tensions between Elves and Dwarves, and Rokur because he had always had what many considered an unhealthy interest in Eru’s immortal firstborn. The rest of the party behaved themselves, after many long lectures on the subtle nature of Elves they knew to contain their boisterous sides.

After dinner, the king and his son invited Kili into a private parlor to drink a glass of Dorwinion wine. They exchanged pleasant, but meaningless, talk and Kili was careful not to overindulge in the notoriously potent vintage. When it became clear that he would either have to drink another glass or admit that his tolerance was less than that of the Eldar, he instead excused himself with apologies and vague reference to the long journey.

Later that night, after all their guests had retired, Legolas and his father spoke of the coming negotiations. Thranduil was inclined to treat with their guests as he would with Elves, as a measure of respect, but Legolas pointed out that the long, elaborate rituals and even longer speeches were likely to bore the faster living Dwarves. After all, the Dwarves did not have the luxury of building treaties over the span of centuries, and if they were honest with themselves, neither did the Woodland Realm. The dangerous territory that surrounded Dol Guldur was growing every day, bit by bit the southern reaches of the forest that was their home was becoming too treacherous to travel into lightly. They needed an alliance with the Dwarves if they were to survive.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, as I warned quadrad, Chris picks up sword fighting way faster than is realistic. My only excuse is that the sword Dwalin gets her is Dwarven make and somehow makes fighting easier. It took me a while to come up with that excuse, I hope you like it. In all honesty, she picks it up fast because she needs to be in a battle scene and not die or be some weak little idiot who needs rescuing.

Also Dorwinion wine is canonically very potent, capable of knocking Elves under the table, when they have (canonically) a really high tolerance for booze. No, Kili is not a light-weight, he's just not as tolerant of alcohol as Elves and this is heavy stuff.

WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT
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"I came because Gandalf said I should, and I know not to question the wizard when he starts making plans for you. He’s very often right, and even if I tried to protest, I’d get nowhere."

You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com
Mornings were getting steadily easier to wake up for. Partially the extra light coming in my east-facing windows helped wake me earlier than I usually did, but I was sure my body was adjusting faster than normal to a schedule like the others. I got dressed and stretched out, my legs and rear still somewhat sore from the long, horseback trip. The hot bath the night before had helped, but I wasn’t about to let my body lock up. Thinking of the bath sent a little shiver down my spine. It had been in a communal bathing chamber (thankfully divided by gender), and I wasn’t a hundred percent cool with that.

After I’d completed my morning routine, I went to find Roda or Kili. From the light streaming in from all sides (the elves loved windows, it would seem) it was mid-morning, and I wasn’t sure if they’d be available, with the treaty making and all, but I didn’t want to just sit in my room. If Gandalf thought me being here was important, I doubted he wanted me to do nothing. Surely if I was supposed to be here it was to do something.

I didn’t find either of my friends, but I did find a library. It wasn’t as large as the one in Erebor, but the large bank of tall windows lit up the room and made the jewel-tone leather covers glow. In all, the room was simply beautiful. Thinking that the Dwarves I had been seeking were probably engaged in the business of what we came here to do, I decided to explore the library. The shelves were made of carved wood shaped like trees, I discovered. It was really clever, the way the ‘branches’ of the trees held the books. I traced a green-painted leaf with my finger, admiring the skill that made it so lifelike. I was so caught by the artistry, that when a voice sounded behind me, I jumped.

“Hello. I don’t believe I’ve ever met a Dwarf woman.” The speaker was Legolas. I was going to have to be on my guard against saying anything that might screw the future up. “I was under the impression that you never left the Dwarven Halls.”

“Erebor has recently been repopulated, Prince Legolas. It would have been hard to do that if Dwarven women never left their homes. And besides, although I live with them, and they number my greatest friends in all of Middle Earth, I myself am not a Dwarf. I’m human. That is, of the race of Men.” His eyebrows shot up.
“Someday, you must tell me how a daughter of Men came to be traveling with a Dwarven diplomatic contingent. It must be quite the tale.”

“Not really.” I shrugged to emphasize how non-important it was, and discourage further questions. “I came because Gandalf said I should, and I know not to question the wizard when he starts making plans for you. He’s very often right, and even if I tried to protest, I’d get nowhere. It was my idea to send Kili as the representative of the royal family, and somehow to Gandalf this meant I must go too.”

“Mithrandir can be like that,” he nodded sagely. “But why have you come to the royal library this morn?”

“I was looking for my friends, but when I couldn’t find them, and this marvelous room appeared, I couldn’t resist. I’m sorry if I’m not supposed to be in here.”

“As a member of a foreign delegation, the library is open to you. Although there are some fragile volumes here, so perhaps this is not the best of places to explore. Instead, how would you care to accompany me to the star garden and you can tell me more about your home?” I hesitated, unsure how he knew of my origin. I thought only Galadriel had the power to look into minds. “I’ve not been to Erebor since the reclamation.” Oh, he meant Erebor. I had said I lived with the Dwarves. “Of course. It’s an interesting place…. .”

It was nearing noon when Kili realized that he hadn’t seen Lady Chris that day. Back home, he had seldom seen her out of her rooms before then, but this was not Erebor, where she knew the corridors and stairs and could be expected to find her way. As the morning meeting broke up, and Thranduil’s councilors filed out of the meeting room, Kili used iglishmêk to sign to Balin. Do you know where the Lady is? I’ve been with you all morning, how would I know? At his exasperated look, Kili ducked his head. Of course Balin would know no more than he, and neither would any of the others, as they had all been in the meeting with him. He was worried that they’d left her to fend for herself in a strange place, though, and was about to ask Balin to cover for him, when the older Dwarf caught his eye. Check her room; I’ll make your excuses.

My thanks. It sometimes (frequently, when he and his friends had been Dwarflings) got irritating that Balin knew his mind so well, especially when he and Fili had been up to something, but in this instance it was a blessing. He slipped out the door and headed back towards the wing they were staying in.

She wasn’t in her room. Nor was she in the common areas of the wing. About to be reduced to wandering the halls in hopes of finding her, he heard her laugh. He would recognize that sound anywhere, but here in the Halls of the Elves, where everyone spoke in hushed tones and amusement was shown with a crinkling of eyes, the clear, strong notes of unrestrained laughter stood out. He took the branch of the hall that the sound had emanated from. As he came to another crossing, he heard her voice. Not the words, but it was definitely her voice. It was as though she was leading him to her, and he smiled as he followed where she led.
He rounded one last turn to find a garden, surrounded on three sides by a covered walkway. Several trees grew by a pond, and large, white flowered bushes scattered throughout the garden blocked a good view of many the garden’s angles from where he stood. He could still hear voices, and he followed them, pausing as he heard what was being said.

“You must tell me how you came to keep such company. It is like a dove deciding to live with a family of wildcats, there has to be a good tale behind it.” Kili’s face burned at the implications in that statement. As if he would harm Lady Chris, or allow another to harm her. A quiet voice in the back of his head reminded him he’d done nothing when that Lord from Gondor had laid hands on her. The Lady had handled it herself.

“Doves and wildcats have more in common than you might think, Prince Legolas. And I would say that any dove that decided to nest with wildcats could hold its own. Whoever said doves were birds of peace clearly never met one. And I’m afraid the tale of how I came to live in Erebor is not a very long one. I fell into some difficulty and Prince Kili saved me, simple as that.” Kili knew it wasn’t ‘simple as that’, but he liked her skillful parrying of the question. She was her parent’s daughter, as he’d said at the beginning of this venture. There was no need for her to keep dodging questions, though, not now that he could intervene. He stepped out into the little grove formed by aeglos bushes.

“My lady, I had wondered what became of you, so I came looking. I apologize for any neglect you suffered.”

“I managed, so there’s nothing to apologize for. Although, I am getting a little bit peckish, and I think it’s noon, so perhaps we should seek out lunch.” At that, Legolas rose from the bench they had sat on and offered his arm to her. Kili noted that her cheeks did not go pink as they did when he offered his arm to her. He wasn’t sure whether or not he was pleased that he got a tender blush where the Elven prince did not. Still, they did need to make their way to the Elvenking’s table, and he should not be thinking of rosy cheeks if he was to be conversing with Thranduil.

He composed himself and focused on the task at hand.

Chapter End Notes

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WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT

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Down the table, Roda and her father looked at me with mingled horror and sympathy. I wrested my mind back from the blank, dread-filled space it was trying to escape to. I had to do damage control.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Tempers flare and everyone's in danger.

Chapter Notes

So, now we get into the action. Also, food porn. Chris is a cook, so when they eat, she analyzes the meal.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama, for commenting. Thank you for being such a source of support.

WARNING for gore and death. (It's not too bad in my opinion, but I'd rather warn when not necessary than visa versa.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Because I was on Legolas’s arm when we entered the dining room, I wound up with a higher placement at the table. Unlike Erebor, this room was only big enough for two dozen, perhaps thirty people, and was host to only one long table. The space didn’t feel claustrophobic, though, because one of the long walls was filled with graceful arches that opened onto a deep balcony.

We had learned the night before that heavier clothes, made of wool rather than cotton or linen, would be necessary in a palace with so few solid walls between us and the winter’s chill. The Elves didn’t seem to notice the nip in the air or the slight breeze coming in the archways, and at least one guardsman had muttered an implication that they might be doing this to make their guests uncomfortable. I didn’t think that was the case, but racial tensions were tough to overcome. And I couldn’t just smack them all upside the head and tell them to get over it. I wanted to, oh I sorely wanted to, but I knew from my parents that when two groups of people decide to hate each other, only they can decide to not hate each other. It can’t be done for them, however much the rest of the world wants to tell them to pull their heads out of their asses.

I wound up seated next to Legolas, with another Elf on my other side. Kili was seated across from me, with Balin by his side. Our first course was a lovely marinated vegetable salad, made with beets, carrots, tomatoes, celery and onions in a somewhat spicy vinegar based dressing. It was delicious, despite the faces some of the Dwarves were making, although better suited to a summer meal. Then the soup course came out, a chilled cucumber soup. It too was delicious, but unseasonable. When the main course turned out to be a rice-like dish studded with raisins and nuts, I was thoroughly sick of summer dishes being served a month and a half into winter. And to top it all off, the breeze was going down the back of my dress.

Legolas noticed me shivering. “Milady, are you well? You shake like an aspen in fall. If something is amiss, I would fix it.”
He was courteous, although there was a part of my brain that whispered ‘Kili would never have let you sit next to him cold and miserable all this time, Kili would have noticed sooner.’ I silently thought to myself, is this how my life will be now? Measuring perfectly nice people against Kili and finding them wanting? But he was waiting for an answer. I tried to compose myself to give a diplomatic answer, one that wouldn’t offend. It was hard to think with the chill running icy tendrils across my neck.

“I’m cold, is all.” That was not the diplomatic nothing of an answer I was looking for, but it was what came out my mouth. It didn’t even come out politely; instead the words bit themselves off tightly. Balin looked at me sharply and I could feel my cheeks coloring with shame. Down the table, Roda and her father looked at me with mingled horror and sympathy. I wrested my mind back from the blank, dread-filled space it was trying to escape to. I had to do damage control. “Forgive me, I’m not at my best in cold weather, and with my back to the windows the breeze is rather distracting.”

“Cold?” Legolas tilted his head to one side. “You find it cold?” Not the question I was expecting, to say the least. Durin’s Day, the last day of autumn, passed by a few days before my arrival, of course it was cold!

“Well, yes. It’s winter and we’re in a room with an open wall. Do you not feel it?” This could have been interpreted badly, but thankfully Legolas seemed more distressed at my discomfort than offended by my phrasing.

“No, not really. Elves don’t generally suffer the cold as Men do. I didn’t even think that it might be too cold. In the future, I’m sure we can use another room for meals, if no one else objects.” He looked to the Dwarves, silently asking their thoughts.

“Another room with less of a draft would be most appreciated, Prince Legolas.” Balin’s voice was even and sure. “Dwarves are hardy, but we feel the cold too. Now the heat, we don’t feel near as much. Comes in handy in the smithies and deep in the mines where the air gets close.” Seated at the head of the table, Thranduil blinked confusedly; a rather incongruous sight on the Elvenking. From the context, I could tell he was processing the various implications of this new information. He kept his thoughts to himself though.

“We shall arrange for meals to be taken in one of the interior halls for the rest of your stay. Let it not be said that the Woodland Realm treated those we wish for friends poorly.”

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That afternoon, tempers flared. Balin, forever trying to keep the peace, barely restrained young Kai, a scribe, from physically attacking a rather supercilious member of Thranduil’s administration over a stray comment that nobody could even remember with any clarity. Kai was young and had a temper, and even the elves realized that the young and hot-headed made errors of judgment. Then, Thranduil himself had to ask a legist of his to leave the room, when that notable started arguing contract law with Balin. Rokur agreed with Balin on the point in question, and as he was along specifically for his specialty in Elven law, the other Dwarves followed suit. Only the terse command of the Elvenking prevented a standoff. Another incident might have occurred when Stigur, the third advisor, chosen for his expertise in forging treaties referred to Chancellor Goweston as nithûn. Fortunately, the elf in question didn’t know he’d been called a ‘girl-man’, or there might have been fighting.
By the end of the day, no progress had been made towards a lasting alliance. If anything, relations were more strained and frayed than when the Dwarves first entered the palace. The only good to come of that day was the shifting of their meals to another room, larger and more formal, better suited to banquets than regular dining, but at least it was warm.

Despite set-backs, Thranduil invited Kili and Balin to take a glass of wine with him and his son. The four of them were relaxing as best they could after a stressful day when a guard burst into the room. The Elf’s pale hair was soaked in sweat that darkened it several shades, and a fresh set of claw marks scarred his face in angry red lines. His right hand was bandaged and blood had soaked through the hastily wrapped linen. His breathing was labored and he had his unwounded hand clutching his side. In all, he looked a mess.

“Majesty, we caught an intruder. A vicious creature with teeth and claws like an animal, and we only succeeded through luck, I’m ashamed to admit. Every time we got close to it, my warriors started arguing amongst themselves. It’s uncanny and we still can only have one guard on it, or they bicker and lose focus.”

“You have done well in catching it, as it is likely a servant of the Enemy. It is in the cells?” The guard nodded. “Thank you. Go and have your wounds tended properly.”

When the guard had left, Thranduil turned to his guests and his son. “I fear I must deal with this quickly. This spy cannot be allowed to carry any word back to its masters.”

“I believe, your Majesty, that it may be a bit more than a spy.” Balin rose from his seat by the fire. “The bickering that Elf mentioned, the discord among those who need to work together, that sounds far too familiar to me. Never in all my years, have I seen so many trained, skilled negotiators and diplomats act like squalling dwarflings. I suspect that this prisoner may be to blame.”

“Your words have the weight of truth in them. Let us go examine the creature and see what we may find of its origin and abilities.”

Kili had better memories than most of the company of the dungeons, but he still felt a chill as they descended stone steps to reach the cell. What they found there chilled him further. Blood stained the landing by an open cell door, far too much blood. Lying on the steps going down from the cell door was the body of an Elf, eyes glassy in death. He had many wounds on his arms and chest that appeared to be from a dagger, but the cause of his demise was obvious, his throat was torn out. Within the cell itself was another, unconscious but breathing. His dagger was out and coated in the blood of the other Elf. Thranduil called for healers and called an emergency council of all his trusted advisors and the Dwarves as well. For if the creature had escaped to return to Dol Guldur, they were all in danger and it would be terribly improper for Elves to decide the fate of Dwarves without them there.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to apologise to those for whom canon is important (I know, I'm one of you). I'm adding more dark creatures than just goblins, orcs, and spiders. It seems to me that there ought to be better variety, and I needed something that doesn't specifically exist in Tolkien's work. To be fair, I only use one of these creatures, so they are fairly rare, and if it exists only in Mirkwood then Tolkien's writings could
have missed it. Yes, that's my story and I'm sticking to it. I'm sort of seeing it as a discord-spirit, like an evil kitsune.

WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT
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Elsewhere in the battle, other unlikely pairs formed; Elves and Dwarves fighting together. Some were more effective than others, and many took precious minutes to settle into partnership, but all recognized that they could ill afford to refuse any aid that might be offered.

You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com
I had just settled in to go to sleep when Kili came into my room. He was trembling and pale as he shook my shoulder to wake me. I would normally have protested being woken so soon after having lay down, but something in his face told me it was important. As did my knowledge that Kili wouldn’t even have entered my room without permission unless it was vital.

“Wake and dress quickly, milady, there is a danger in the palace and we are summoned to a council to discuss how to handle it.” He was so obviously shaken by whatever it was that I didn’t even think of fighting him on it.

“Give me a couple minutes. Is this something where I should wear the sword Dwalin got me, or would that make things worse?” Even as I spoke I was out of bed and pulling on a pair of practice trousers. If there was danger, I wanted to be able to move.

“Yes, bring the sword. You may need it.” Kili’s lack of blush as I changed into a shirt and bodice told me clearly that whatever it was truly was terrible. I grabbed the belt that held the scabbard and sword and buckled it about my waist. Prepared as I was going to get, Kili and I went out into the hall where we met the rest of the Dwarves. The four without significant fight experience were shifting nervously, while those with training stood protectively around them. I noted with surprise that Kai, the slightly scrawny scribe with a penchant for puns, was carrying at least half a dozen knives. He and Toki, a guard, were helping one another strap their various daggers to arms and legs. Jarvari, another one of the guards, had a large spear in hand, and Dwalin’s second in command had two swords on his belt. We looked like a small army.

Balin and Kili led the way to an interior council room. It was spacious and the walls were covered in maps of the forest. I had a feeling that this was a War Room. Thranduil stood at a large round table with several advisors and an Elf in armor who had the same stern look as one would expect on a commander of armies. When all the attendees of this hastily gathered council were present, the Elvenking spoke.

“This night, the palace guards captured a creature capable of turning friend to foe. We believe that this may explain some of the…tensions we experienced earlier today. Unfortunately, it escaped,
leaving one guardsman dead and another in a sleep from which he may not wake.” The Elves in
the room drew a sharp breath. I assumed that being virtually immortal, the death of one of their
own would shake them deeply.

“We must assume the creature is no longer within our halls, and has escaped back to whatever dark
master it serves. The enemy will not take kindly to the proposed alliance between our peoples, and
will surely try to disrupt it. General Maethon informs me that his patrols have seen signs of a
gathering of dark creatures to the south. Should they attack, we have but a day to prepare, perhaps
less.”

“We shall fight beside you, King Thranduil.” Kili’s voice was sure and strong and as I looked at
him he seemed to stand taller. “We do not need a treaty to see that if we fall, we fall together. You
have the axes of the Dwarves.”

“And you have my thanks, Prince Kili. We may well need those axes before this is over.”
Thranduil gestured his son forward. “Legolas will coordinate between your ranks and ours.
Captain Tauriel is out on patrol, but when she returns her squad will also fight with you.”

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The palace had strong walls on its perimeter, and the Forest River separated the ranks of creatures
to the south from the defenders. But the forest itself hampered Thranduil’s forces, limiting vision
and providing cover for the attackers. This cover is why the estimate of a day to prepare was
woefully inaccurate. The attack came in the middle of the night, when the full moon slipped
behind the cover of thick clouds.

Spiders threw webs across the river, building bridges of silk for light-footed goblins to cross. Once
across the river, the goblins threw rope back to their sturdier companions and together they built a
crossing. The river overcome, the forces of Dol Guldur surrounded their quarry. A sharp-sighted
sentry noticed them as they gathered together on the southern side of the palace and called the
alarm.

All about the Elvenking’s Halls warriors scrambled for weapons, to get into armor and get to the
walls. Archers placed near arrow loops shot any they could, but it was painfully obvious that this
would not hold them long. Reluctantly, General Maethon ordered foot soldiers to gather at the
gates in preparation for a charge. Captain Tauriel’s recently returned squad, together with those
Dwarves who knew combat, found places with the other fighters. They were not the freshest, but
every hand would be needed. The great gates opened and the warriors charged out onto the bridge
and into the gathered creatures of darkness.

Kili was lost in the dance of battle. He fought beside Dwalin, loosing arrows to keep the scrawny
goblinss from swarming his friend, as the guard captain swung Grasper and Keeper in deadly arcs.
When the prince was out of arrows, he took up his sword. At some point he found himself back to
back with an Elf from Tauriel’s squad.

Tauriel herself was fighting a cluster of spiders, grinning ferociously as she cut the oversized
arachnids down. So caught was she in battle-joy that she didn’t see a goblin sneaking up behind
her, pike ready to spear her. Kai saw, though, and hurled a dagger with deadly accuracy at it.
Tauriel turned at the sound of the creature’s dying scream, then glanced up at the Dwarf who had
saved her life.
“Eyes on your surroundings. Don’t you Elves learn that?”

“We do.” She pulled an arrow from a fallen goblin and shot it at the spider coming up behind Kai. “But four eyes see more than two.” The two fought beside one another for some time, each guarding the other.

Elsewhere in the battle, other unlikely pairs formed; Elves and Dwarves fighting together. Some were more effective than others, and many took precious minutes to settle into partnership, but all recognized that they could ill afford to refuse any aid that might be offered.

When at last the sun began to rise, the attacking army broke and ran, not willing to fight with the sun’s light shining down upon the clearing that held the battle. Tired, sweaty, and covered in blood and ichor, the defenders wearily filed back into the safety of the palace. Attendants came and helped them out of armor. Healers gathered those in need of tending and guided them to the rooms set up as infirmaries. Those lucky enough to be without injury gratefully sank into baths in the great communal bathing chambers.

In the wing set aside for the visiting Dwarves, word was received by the non-warriors that the battle was ended. As the returned Dwarven fighters trickled back in, the tension and fear in the common rooms lessened. But when it became clear that the only Dwarf not returned was the guard captain, worry took them all. Dwalin was popular, despite his gruff manner, and no-one want him to be one of the ones in the hands of the healers, or Eru forbid, one of the few fallen.

Unwilling to sit by any longer, Chris grabbed Kili’s hand and announced that they would go see what had become of Dwalin. They checked the bathing chambers, or rather; Kili checked the bathing chambers while Chris stood outside. He wasn’t there. They tried to check the infirmary, only to be chased out by the healers.

“If you don’t need healing, then you don’t need to be here. Get yourselves out from under foot so we may see to our charges.”

Fortunately the dead were few, and Dwalin was not among them. The two searchers were at a loss when the object of their concern walked out of the infirmary.

“Dwalin!” Chris spotted him first. “Are you alright? We were worried.”

“Ach, lassie, I’m fine. Got a lovely new scar on my arm, though.” He lifted his arm so they could see the white of bandages on his right arm. “Got to use a few of the moves you taught me, too. But I’m worn, maybe I could tell the tale after I’ve had some sleep.”

“Of course, my friend.” Kili stepped back and let Dwalin move toward the wing they were staying in. “There is plenty of time for stories after we’ve all had rest.”

Chapter End Notes

Dwalin’s story didn’t fit within the narrative of the main story, but you can find it in Wander ’Verse shorts and one-shots. Hopefully you will like it.

WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT
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“Please take it as a compliment when I say you have a most devious mind, milady.”
The next day, or rather the afternoon of the day the battle ended, as none of us had gone to sleep until after dawn, I found myself searching for the kitchens. The night before, with the terrible wait as warriors I cared about fought, had left me off balance and nervous. Fear often does that, leave me jittery after it goes away. The best solution I have ever found for that unsettled feeling is to do what I do best, which is cook. I found the Elven kitchens to be similar to the one in Erebor, but the cooks moved slower and didn’t shout at one another. A tall, red haired Elf noticed me and separated off to come talk to me.

“Hello. Might I ask why you have come to the kitchens this eve?” His hands smoothed imaginary wrinkles from the apron he wore. Elves seemed to be perpetually elegant, even in places that warrant a little mess.

“Well, I’m a cook by trade, and last night was…well, you know. And I just need to do something familiar for a time. I was hoping you could use an extra pair of hands.” He looked sympathetic to my distress, at least.

“You came with the Dwarves, correct?” I nodded. “Then you might know what they would like for supper. The dishes keep coming back with food still on them, but none of us can tell why our food is rejected. Do Dwarves not eat as much as Elves?”

“No, Dwarves eat plenty, but the dishes you’ve been serving are heavily plant based, with little or no meat. I can tell you from experience, Dwarves are meat eaters. Also, you’ve been serving summer foods like chilled soups, and we, the Dwarves and I, feel the cold much more than Elves.”

“Then perhaps you could aid us in preparing a meal they will like.” He turned to a female Elf nearby. “Malrin, this Lady has offered her services, and she knows what Dwarves eat.”

“Thank Ilúvatar! We’ve been doing our best, but….”

“It’s a cultural thing, I get it. When I first came to Erebor I had to adapt a bit too. Now, first off, do you have a meat dish for the main course?”

Back on familiar ground, I rapidly lost the unsettled feeling that had been hounding me. The steady rhythms and rituals of the kitchen relaxed me and I quickly hit my stride. I’d never
considered being the head chef (I normally wouldn’t dream of being as bossy as most head chefs I’ve worked with), but that role got handed me, and somehow I managed it. It helped that the Elves all recognized me as being a bit of a niche expert on Dwarven dietary habits. I had been worried that the Elves wouldn’t have adequate supplies, due to the absence of meats in most of the dishes served us, but it turned out that there was a completely different reason.

“The Sindar generally eat as little meat as possible, though we Silvan Elves enjoy it,” Malrin told me. “Silvan Elves are distinguished from the Sindar and the Noldor because they never made it to Aman when summoned, before the first age. We never saw the two trees, and are generally thought to be less wise than the Sindar.”

“Why would that make a difference in what you served us?” I was genuinely confused. I sensed that there were some deeply laid tensions within Elven society.

“We’re lesser, and what we do that the Sindar do not is considered lesser as well. As a result, meat-eating is viewed as common or base. When we chose dishes to send up, we tried to prepare foods fit for the highborn, so we used little meat.”

“Sadly, that was probably the reason so little of the food you prepared was eaten. We don’t have time before dinner to properly cook a roast, but a stew would be easier and I know they like it. Pass the onions and dice some of that venison.”

Kili was still tired from the battle when they went to dinner. He was dreading the event, too. It was hard enough pretending to like the cold, meatless food presented them when he was rested. Faking enjoyment when he was weary from battle and wanted nothing more than a nice big bowl of steaming hot beef stew would be excruciating. From the sour looks on the faces of the other warriors in the group, his feelings were shared. Frostin, Dwalin’s second in command, drug his feet as they approached the room their meals had been moved to. Jarvari grimaced as he sat down, which Kili suspected was not entirely from the pain of wrenched muscles. The Elves probably could have eased what pain he had, but he’d refused to let them work any form of magic on him. The only member of their delegation that didn’t look gloomy was Lady Chris. In fact, she looked rather pleased with herself. Curious, he made sure they sat beside one another through the simple ploy of pulling out a chair for her.

“You have a glow about you tonight, milady. Might I ask what brought such a smile to your face?”

“I did a good thing, I think. You’ll see.” With that cryptic comment and a small grin, she busied herself with settling her napkin on her lap. Kili sensed he would get no more from her until she was ready.

He didn’t have long to wait, as the first course was served, her smile grew. So did many of the dwarrows faces’ light at the sight of sausages wrapped in pastry. There were also stuffed mushrooms, some of which were tried by the party, but mostly they went to the Elves, who avoided the sausages. Next, plates of chicken in a savory sauce over wild rice made an appearance, although again the Elves were served a vegetable variation. When bowls made of hollowed out round loaves of bread were set before them, Kili realized why Lady Chris had seemed so self-satisfied. The smell of venison stew brought back many memories, mostly of his childhood; times when what game could be brought down was their only meat. He grew up on
venison, hare and pheasant.

“So this is where you were this afternoon. Fixing the food.”

“Yes, and the reason it was vegetarian was just a misunderstanding, it turns out. Their upper classes avoid meat, and the kitchen staff was trying to serve you high class food. I set them straight, though. You shouldn’t starve from lack of food you find edible. Honestly, it seems that most of the problems between Dwarves and Elves are a result of people assuming things and not asking enough questions.”

Legolas looked up from his bread bowl of potato soup. “And what sorts of questions should we ask?”

“Well, for starters, I’d like to know a little about Elven history. For instance, just the story of your royal family would be nice. Who was the first King of Mirkwood? Sorry, Greenwood, it would have been Greenwood.”

“The rule of the Woodland Realm began with my grandfather, Oropher, originally of Doriath, before he crossed the Misty Mountains to come to Greenwood the Great where the Silvan Elves took him as King, for they saw he was wise. He was also a valiant warrior, and answered the call of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men. He fought beside High King Gil-galad and Amdir, Lord of Lothlorien. He fell in a glorious charge on Mordor itself, and my father took up the burden of rule.”

“Durin IV also fought in that Alliance,” Kili said after he swallowed some stew. “I’m not sure which army he fought beside, though.”

“The histories are a little vague on that part, though often histories are. Things get lost over the years that can never be replaced.” Balin added. “I’ve found references to information I’d like, only it’s to be found in the Great Library of Eregion, which fell in the Second Age. One of the great losses of that time, and much mourned for many a year by Durin’s Folk.”

“Why would Dwarves mourn the fall of Eregion?” asked an Elf down the table. “It was an Elvish city.”

“Aye, an Elvish city that did much trade with Moria, when it was the jewel of our people. Lord Celebrimbor was a good friend of Dwarves, and a skilled craftsman whose work was much treasured. We fought to protect Eregion, but sadly were outmatched.”

The conversation wandered from there, carried on mostly by the scholars at the table, but with occasional questions from their less academic counterparts. Kili looked to Lady Chris, who had fallen silent after her initial question. Traces of a smile lingered in the corners of her mouth, and a smug look shone in her eyes.

“You knew your question would lead to this.” He spoke softly, so as not to disrupt the conversation.

“I hoped. I specifically asked it because he fought in the war that was the last I know of Elves and Dwarves working together. Now you’re all talking and there’s hope you can find common ground.”

“Please take it as a compliment when I say you have a most devious mind, milady.”

Chapter End Notes
Yay for more cultural differences! And yay for inter-Elf societal issues! And maybe yay for me putting in some history? What do you think?

The story of Oropher is slightly different as Legolas tells it from how Tolkien told it. I just didn't see him saying "Yeah, my grandpappy died in a bone-headed frontal charge on Mordor because he was a racist and didn't want to take orders from a Noldor." I figure he learned the story from his father who had a biased opinion. Ask Glorfindel though, and you will hear a whole 'nother story.

And, while there was no canon statement of the Great Library of Eregion existing, in my head there has to be an equivalent to the Great Library of Alexandria. I picked Eregion because it was a cross-cultural city, more likely to house a great center of learning. It literally lay at the gates of Moria. (The whole "Speak Friend and Enter" thing being in Elvish? Because that was the gate that opened onto Eregion.)

Sorry if I nerded on you.

WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT
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A realization dawned on him then. Perhaps Tharkûn hadn’t been as mistaken as he’d thought. In fact, his cryptic comment about the Valar now made sense.
I was in the garden with Legolas again, enjoying the sun’s warmth, when the news came. There are certain events that everyone remembers where they were when it happened. This was one of them. The Elf that brought the news was pale and shaking, never a good sign. He bowed deeply to Legolas, then worked his mouth, but no sound came.

“Duvainor, just tell me. Whatever ill tidings you bring, I would prefer to learn of them sooner than they become a danger.”

“Captain Tauriel. She was out with her squad, clearing the area south and west of the palace. Her apprentice got her to the gates, but… she was struck by a Morgul blade. According to him, no-one else survived. She’s in the infirmary now.”

“Oh my god.” I could feel my face going white. “Does Kili know? They’re friends; he should know that she….”

“If he does not know, he soon shall, for we will tell him.” It was a sign of how upset Legolas was that he didn’t offer me his arm, as he had every other time we were to go someplace together. Instead, he held himself stiffly upright, as though relaxing could cause him to crumple, and perhaps it would.

We found Kili sitting with Balin in the small parlor-like room in our wing. When Legolas broke the news, Kili turned slightly green around the edges. I could see him fighting to remain calm, but he was losing that battle when he finally spoke.

“This shall not go unpunished. Treaty writing be hanged, I’m sending to Erebor for an army. Together, Elves and Dwarves shall drive this menace from your lands and avenge Tauriel.”

“She’s not dead yet, Kili. Avenging should be done after she dies. And the Elves have medicine to treat Morgul wounds, don’t they?”
“Even Elven medicine has its limits. We can make a treatment of Athelas, we can use magic to increase its potency, and our healers can even use their own fëa, or spirit, to burn out infection and speed healing, but with a Morgul blade, luck and her own strength play as much a part as the healers do.” With careful slowness he turned back to Kili. “On behalf of the Woodland Realm, I accept your offer of an army. We will eventually have to have a treaty, but the situation has become more perilous, and fast action is needful. Who will you send to carry the message?”

“The scribe Alfin had been the Ered Luin pony racing champion three years in a row before we reclaimed Erebor, and he took second in last year’s Harnkegger race. He can make the trip fastest. I will write a letter for him to take, and we should have our army in less than a fortnight.”

“When that is done, come to the infirmary. If she has friends about her, it might help her fight the creeping darkness in her blood. Tauriel is strong, but I want her to have her best chance. I would array every weapon in the arsenal of fate on her behalf.”

“Of course. If anything I can do will help her, I shall do it.” His face had faded from sick to grim, and I knew he would bring down an unholy fury on the Nazgul the first opportunity he got. I just hoped he didn’t lose track of keeping himself alive in the desire to bring down the being that hurt the woman he loved. I felt somewhat upset that he obviously still had feelings for her, despite the utter illogic of that. Examining my own heart I was surprised to find that I was jealous. I had no right to be jealous. Of course, she was a lot of things I wished I could be, brave and graceful and an actual part of this world, not some outsider dumped here for god knows what reason. That might have added to the jealousy, too. I had been lost in thought, and when I came back to myself, we were in the infirmary.

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Kili sat silently beside Tauriel’s sleeping form. He’d been brought a lap desk on which he composed the letter to Thorin, but after that task was done he had set it aside. Lady Chris had joined him in his vigil at some point, though he could not have said when. His heart was heavy as he watched the Elf-maid’s chest rise and fall with disconcerting slowness. Every so often, her breath would stop for a long, fearful time. He wished more than anything that he could heal her as she had once healed him.

A hand came to rest on his shoulder. “I’m so sorry. It must be terrible, watching the woman you love like this.”

Her words confused him. He had, at one point, thought love might grow there, but Tauriel’s devotion to her home, her duties as a Captain of the Guard, had made sure there was no chance for that vein to be mined. He never had the chance to learn the things that bind two hearts together. He knew more about Lady Chris than Tauriel.

He knew she lost family to fire, a trait that bound her tale and that of Erebor. He knew her parents worked for their Kingdom, and that their skill ran in her veins. He knew her to be both quiet and fierce, a skilled warrior in her own way. He knew she loved to cook, and read. He respected her conviction to protect the future from what she knew, even though it was a battle for her.

“No, it isn’t that. She’s not my One, just someone who healed me of a similar wound, and saved my life on the battlefield, and I can’t do anything. I feel guilt and debt, not heartbreak.”
A realization dawned on him then. Perhaps Tharkûn hadn’t been as mistaken as he’d thought. In fact, his cryptic comment about the Valar now made sense. Thank you for this most precious gift, Mahal, he prayed silently. As an afterthought he added, Please don’t let me foul this up. He turned to face the woman that he now knew he loved.

“The one I love, whom I would give my heart to, if she wanted it, is thoughtful and patient, though fierce in defense of friends.” He needed her to know his feelings, though propriety forbade making the first advance. That fell to her, as the woman. All he could do was hint as plainly as he could and hope she felt the same. “She guards a priceless treasure, and possesses such a strength of mind and body as I have never seen elsewhere. That I know her is a gift of Mahal.” There, that ought to do it.

“I had no idea you were such a poet,” she said somewhat stiffly. “I’m needed in the kitchens. I hope she wakes soon.”

As she stalked off, for there could be no other word for that stiff, fast walk, he pondered where it had gone wrong. Even if she felt nothing for him, she would have let him down gently, he was sure. He’d seen her true empathy, he knew her heart was kind. Instead she seemed angry, acted as though he had betrayed her in some way. Were his words somehow displeasing? She had practically spat the word ‘poet’ at him. Were pretty words something to be angered by in her home? He regretted never having asked Ori about the laws of propriety in her land. He’d meant to, but then Gandalf had come and everything had gone so fast.

“Oh, how I wish you were awake to ask how a woman’s mind works. I thought I did it right, but now…. Why do I ask you, you’re sleeping.”

Chapter End Notes

So, perhaps I should explain my headcanon for Dwarven dating customs.

Because there are so few women, they are all sort of treated as cultural treasures. This means that dwarrowdams have certain unalienable rights. The right to choice in their partners is one of those rights. Nobody is allowed to force or pressure a relationship, and that includes the subtle pressure of saying "You're the only one for me, if I can't have you I won't have anybody. Would you really damn me to a life without love because you don't care for me like I do for you?" So the system is set up that the woman makes the first move. Always.

It's a little rebellious and a little risky for Kili to hint at his feelings for her, because by Dwarven Law, he could be seriously punished for pressuring her. The rule is offending body part removed, so yeah, he could lose his tongue for this if she protested. So that's why it's so vague and circuitous, so he has some plausible deniability if she gets upset. Not because he thinks she'll actually demand that his tongue be cut out, but because it's the only culturally accepted way of letting her know how he feels.

If Chris were a Dwarf, with the same cultural background, she would have known what that little speech was, and accepted him on the spot and the story would have had a very different ending (you'll see). But she's not a Dwarf, she's human, from a culture where the guy is expected to make the first move.
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WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT
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“When Gandalf bore your message to us, he also made a very convincing argument for helping deal with the threat you face. Uncle has been preparing for the day he got word we’d come to an agreement.”
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Chris copes, sort of. Kili doesn't so much. An army approaches and Thranduil is caught off guard.

Chapter Notes

This chapter kinda went everywhere. It's sort of mimicking the emotional roller coaster that Chris and Kili are facing. So it could be a literary thing. Or it could be the coffee concentrate I accidentally drank without diluting it right before I wrote it. I don't know. But I'm going with literary genius because that sounds better than caffeine junky. Sorry I ramble, it's 1:05 am here.

This chapter is dedicated to tamarama and tigrislilium for their lovely comments that give me such hope that I'm not bungling this writing thing horribly. And to Casums526 for the kudos. You guys can have no idea how happy any form of recognition for my work here makes me. Seriously and from the bottom of my tired aching heart, thank you.

I couldn't believe it. I find I love him, only to assume he loves someone else, to discover he didn’t, feeling that I might have a chance, and then he goes and waxes poetic about some woman I was sure I’d never met. I mean, I’d only been here for a few weeks, not hardly enough to meet all the people in his life, obviously. I hadn’t even met all of the Quest members. The rollercoaster alone would have made me sick to my stomach, but the yanking away of a newly discovered dream made it damn near impossible to even breathe. And to top it all off, the woman he described sounded damn near perfect. In my experience people are hardly ever perfect, but love can make us see things that aren’t there and miss the things that are. If he saw her that way, he was well and truly smitten.

Thinking of how love blinds us, I reflected that I somehow missed the fact that Kili had a girlfriend. Or maybe she wasn’t his girlfriend yet, he did say he would give his heart, not that he already had. I would drive myself insane if I followed that line of thought, however, and I needed to focus on the cooking in front of me.

“What’s the roast for tonight?” I had told them to prepare a roast, but hadn’t checked to make sure they had started it. A true roast, an actual whole animal over fire, took time to cook all the way through.

“A patrol brought down a boar; we’ve had it on the spit for an hour now. It will be ready in time.” Uirebon, the red haired Elf that first met me in the kitchens, gestured to the large hearth and the slowly rotating pig being turned on the spit by a pair of young Elves. “I thought we might serve a jelly of winter apples accompanying it, and perhaps something with potatoes. Do you think they’ll
object to root vegetables? You said they don’t focus on vegetables, but potatoes compliment meats so well….”

“I think potatoes will be just fine as a side dish, mashed or boiled, and the apple and pork combination is a good one.” The thought of apples and pork brought to mind the night I’d sat at the high table, there had been boar then, as well. Applesauce had been served with it and Kili had spread some on the boar. I had found it funny at the time. My heart hitched.

“Are you well?” Malrin placed a gentle hand on my shoulder. “You seem a bit grey. If you need rest….”

“No, I don’t need bloody rest!” It came out harder and louder than intended. All over the kitchen, Elves turned to look at me in what seemed to be horror. “I need activity, something I can bury myself in for a time. Do you have any work that might do?”

“No, sadly. The preparations have hit the quiet point. I don’t think the kitchens will afford you the work you want. Is there any other activity that might help?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Do you have a practice salle? Suitable for sword work?”

About half an hour later, I was in the palace salle, armed with my sword and taking my frustrations out on a wooden target designed for that purpose. My strikes were sloppy; I could see that, anyone could have seen that. My roiling emotions were making it hard to remember what little Dwalin had taught me about attacking. When my sword bit deeply into the dummy’s side, it caught and my shaking hands couldn’t pull it free. I screamed at it, then fell to my knees and cried until the sick knot in my stomach was gone. I would survive this, but that didn’t mean I was happy about it.

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Kili avoided talking to Lady Chris for the rest of the day. It was hard, but he didn’t want to anger her further, and still wasn’t sure what he’d said wrong, so staying away seemed safest. Then the next day, she seemed to be avoiding him, sitting with Legolas at dinner and not looking at Kili at all. He felt anger and betrayal, but he recognized her right to choice, however much he wished she had chosen otherwise. The next week passed that way, the two not talking, barely glancing at each other. Kili’s heart burned at the loss, but he had other things to think of and work to throw himself into.

Now that Kili had already committed to bringing aid in the battle for Mirkwood, talks seemed to go smoother. They hammered out a treaty that all could agree on over the course of the time it took for Alfin to reach Erebor. The fourth day since the scribe had left, a raven landed in the window of Thranduil’s throne room, cawing loudly. He would not leave, and when guards tried to chase him out he only flew farther into the palace, until he found the Dwarves he sought. After much explanation by Balin about the friendship of Dwarves and Ravens, the guards sought out their King and his son. Any news brought by such an unusual courier was something that the royals needed to know. When the two arrived, Kili and Balin had some good news for them.

“The army marches. The Prince’s estimate of a fortnight was a little long. Apparently Alfin can ride faster than any of us thought, and the King was anticipating the call to arms.”

“How could he have anticipated that?” Legolas frowned in confusion.
“When Gandalf bore your message to us, he also made a very convincing argument for helping deal with the threat you face. Uncle has been preparing for the day he got word we’d come to an agreement.”

Thranduil was privately shocked. The only sign of this that could be seen was a slight widening of his usually shuttered eyes, which was really only recognizable to his son. Knowing what his father had feared, Legolas was sympathetic to the uncomfortable sensation of debt and sudden release of tension that his father now faced. He stood to excuse himself and give his father a path out of the conversation.

“If the Dwarves are on their way, then we have preparations to make. Thank you for your aid, Prince Kili. Father, I believe you may be needed to get the eastern annex ready for our guests. The work goes so much faster when you direct it.” With that, and a slow and grateful nod from Thranduil, the two Elves left.

Chapter End Notes

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WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT
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“You would not say that if you knew anything about what he lost the day Smaug came to Erebor.” Her voice was dark and angry. “Until you do, keep your mouth shut.”
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Chris and Kili continue not talking to each other, and tensions arise in the camp of the Dwarven army.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys. More pain for you today! This chapter was hard to write for me because all I really wanted to do was have Balin take one look at them and go "You idiots love each other don't you? Go in here, talk about your feelings and don't come out until you've made up. Have hot angry 'why didn't you ask me what I meant' sex. Next time I see you both I want there to be disheveled clothing and swollen lips and beard rash all over Chris. I mean it." Unfortunately, he's bound to silence by the same strictures that had Kili making the awkward riddle/declaration. He probably has an idea what up, but he's not going to say anything to Chris (because he can't) or to Kili (because Kili can't and why cause more pain). Dwarven customs are there for good reasons, but they cause problems too.

This chapter is dedicated to tigrislilium and tamarama.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To prepare for a literal army of Dwarves, the Elves opened something called the eastern annex. It was essentially a field, or as much of a field as you can have in a forest, a large flat area with fewer trees. It abutted the river on one side, and the other three were surrounded by blackberry bushes that had been planted both for an extra source of food in summer, and protection for the annex. There was work in plenty for me as the annex was prepared. Branches had fallen and needed to be gathered into piles for campfires, the blackberries needed trimming back so that vicious thorns didn’t menace the general populace, and deep pits needed to be dug at the direction of the healers. I’d wondered why the Middle Earth equivalent of doctors were making the Middle Earth equivalent of port-a-loos, until one of them started scolding someone who tried to dig too close to the river. It made sense then, they were there to keep the waste from running into the water table.

I threw myself into the work that lasted four days. I would have kept working, but with as many hands as we had, the job was over soon enough. We were kept updated on the army’s progress, though I wasn’t sure how. I thought briefly of asking Kili, then discarded the idea. He’d been avoiding me, and I wasn’t going to push myself on him like a schoolgirl with a crush. He was probably missing his ladylove, and I would be no part of that. I wasn’t so desperate as to try to get in between them.

The fifth day, with the army still a few days away, the kitchen started prepping for the larger number of meat eating mouths to feed by making a jerky-like preparation that could then be boiled to make a stew. It was ingenious, really. I helped out, grinding and pressing the meats that were brought by the patrols. It seemed that in addition to protecting the forest, the patrols were also the
main supplier of meats and mushrooms, hunted or gathered during their sweeps. After the meat was smoked and dried, it was wrapped in cloth bundles with dried vegetables, mushrooms, and herbs. I wished I could recall how to make pasta, as noodles would have made the stew more filling, but it’d been several years since I made homemade pasta, and I wasn’t sure of the recipe.

It took the Dwarven army eight days, all told, to reach the edge of Mirkwood, where they were met by Elves who guided them through the forest. It took another full day to get them all to the eastern annex, because things that had been in wagons had to be moved to pack animals or the backs of marching Dwarves. The forest wouldn’t allow for carts of any kind. Once people and goods were all within the safety of the annex, another bout of labor that I could throw myself into began. I helped pitch tents, dig another two dozen fire pits (no, Lainor, twenty wouldn’t feed them all, nor keep them warm enough), haul water to said fire pits (yes, Gloin, one bucket for safety at all fires, not to be used for cooking), deliver the stew-bundles to the Dwarven cooks (I know it’s elf food, Lofar, but they worked hard on them, I worked hard on them, please just try them), and set up the large round table that came in segments, carried by pony to be assembled in the center of the camp. There was also a large pavilion style tent that housed the big table, but that had been set up before I’d been recruited to help with the table. By the time I was done, I felt every single muscle in my body and was grateful for the hot bath, despite my original discomfort at communal bathing. Sore body eased, I returned to our wing. I was considering bed when Balin caught me in the hall.

“Lass, I’d been meaning to ask you something.”

“Yes?”

“You and the prince are awfully close, and I have need to know something but he won’t tell me and I hoped you might know it, too.”

“Why wouldn’t he talk to you? You’re here to advise him, you can’t damn well do that if he won’t tell you what you need to know. He knows that.”

“He says there’s nothing to discuss, but he’s been far too focused on his work. Normally, I would be thrilled to get such single-minded devotion out of a pupil, but he’s not acting like himself. He’s grown quiet and sober, where he once smiled and laughed at every little thing. He was a handful, but he was also light and joy, and that has dimmed. Something is grievously wrong, but he says he’s fine. Do you know what ails him? He might talk to a friend where he wouldn’t with an elder.”

I stiffened. I would have to face the thing that hurt, but I couldn’t tell Balin I wouldn’t answer him either. “I think he’s missing the woman he loves. It might be my fault; I mistakenly thought he was so upset by Tauriel’s…condition…because he loved her. He corrected me, but it brought up thoughts of the one he does love. He told me about her.”

Balin’s eyebrows shot up. “He’d not told me he’d found his One. It must be recent; perhaps he didn’t have the time with all that’s gone on. Though why he would agree to go on the voyage, and be separated so soon after finding her….”

I shrugged. “Beats me. I feel bad, though, if I’m the one who parted them. No wonder he’s been avoiding me.” One more thing to worry about, I guessed. At this rate, I’d have grey hairs before we got back to Erebor. “Well, good night.”

“Dream well, Lady Christiana.”
One might have thought that once the Dwarven army (specifically the 13th cavalry and 42nd infantry companies) arrived, that the work of clearing the forest of fell creatures would begin quickly and smoothly. That was not the case. Although there was a treaty in place, there would never be great love between Elves and Dwarves. Several times, Kili was forced to mediate arguments, alongside Legolas. The Elves had a hard time taking anything he said to heart, while the Dwarves refused to listen to ‘that pointy eared princeling’, as some called him. Kili got them to stop using worse epithets, and Legolas backed him up when the Elves resisted accepting Kili’s judgment in inter-racial disputes. It was hard, frustrating work that tried his nerves and all but eliminated any patience he had, but Kili welcomed it. He threw himself into the work as he had with the treaty, grateful for the hours spent contemplating someone else’s problems.

He was painfully aware of his own problems, as Lady Chris found work elsewhere in the camp. Sometimes, he’d be stepping out of the command tent for a bit of fresh air and hear her voice, look up to see her across the field as she stirred a pot of stew. Other times, he’d be drawn to solve a quarrel and feel a sense of being watched, only to see her quickly turn away. He found himself trying to get closer to her, only to recall her distaste at his proclamation. It was unbearable. He soon started avoiding mealtimes, because she would be there. Instead he worked through meals. He couldn’t sleep. His advisors started gently telling him to rest, and he wished he could, but when he closed his eyes, she was there. He wasn’t sure which dreams were worse, the ones where she turned him away into cold darkness, or the ones where she laughed and took him in her arms. It was a mark of how tired he was, and how distracted Balin was by his exhaustion, that neither of them noticed the sudden increase in fights. The number doubled, then tripled. It didn’t matter if it was an Elf and a Dwarf or two Dwarves, Kili still had to sort them all out. An argument between Gloin and a golden haired Elf drew him in one afternoon.

“I’m telling you, the rabbit is not cooked through. You’ll make yourself sick, you stubborn fool!”

“When I want advice from a faithless Elf, I’ll ask for it!”

Legolas who had run from the other side of the field, quickly placed himself between the irate dwarrow and his subject. “Malrin, what seems to be the problem?”

“This, this barbarian, wants to eat uncooked rabbit.” She pointed accusingly at Gloin, then turned to her prince. “You asked me to see to the culinary needs of the Dwarves, and one need is to not catch rabbit fever and die!”

“What’s this, Gloin? You know better than to eat raw rabbit, what’s really going on here?” Kili laid a gentle hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“I don’t see why the Elf-witch needs to be here at all, poking and prying and acting superior.” The Elf in question stiffened at the slur, and Legolas’s face darkened.

“Malrin was simply trying to help. We don’t want you sick or dying, any more than your own people want you sick or dying. To lose you would be a terrible loss.”

“Do not speak to me of loss, Elf! If you cared for the loss of Dwarves, you would have aided us when the dragon came. You know nothing of loss.”

Suddenly, Lady Chris was there, between the enraged Elf prince and the equally enraged Dwarf,
her hand whipping through the air to strike a blow that landed with an audible crack across Gloin’s cheek.

“You would not say that if you knew anything about what he lost the day Smaug came to Erebor.” Her voice was dark and angry. “Until you do, keep your mouth shut.” She turned to walk off, then turned back. “And the rabbit was undercooked.”

Chapter End Notes

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So, what do you think? I want to hear crazy theories for what Legolas lost the day the dragon came! Seriously, guys, I want to know if you can guess my horrifically painful backstory is for him.

WARNING: TEASER IMMINENT
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“Someday, I would like to meet this scholar, Everyone. He has written so much and most of it wrong. Do you want the tale or not, Prince Kili?”
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Story time. Roda straightens out Chris and Legolas bares a family tragedy.

Chapter Notes

Please Note: This chapter is three different things happening at once. The linking parts are the alarm bells at the end of each segment. So Roda and Chris's conversation, Legolas's story and the last part are supposed to to happen in the same approximate time span.

This chapter is dedicated to tigrislilium for commenting and to the guest who left me a Kudo. Thanks guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I was pissed. I was seething and roiling with anger. I had never seethed or roiled in my entire life, I never even really needed those words beyond college competency exams. But here I was, seething and roiling with the best of them.

I had gone over to the argument in its early stages because Malrin looked so upset. Little wonder, too, as Some Idiot was planning on eating rabbit that was dangerously undercooked. I don’t work much in game, but I knew as well as anyone that any member of family Leporidae can carry tularemia, commonly called rabbit fever for a reason. It’s simply suicidal to play Russian roulette with your food, and even worse if he was intending to share it.

I stuck around, because I felt I owed Malrin, who had welcomed me and given me a way to escape hurting feelings. Then, Legolas and Kili got involved and before I could contemplate leaving to get away from Kili, Gloin (it had taken me a moment to recognize him) came out with what I knew to be the worst thing he could possibly have said to Legolas. The only way it could have been worse was if Thranduil was there, too. And something inside me snapped. I could have said I did it to keep Legolas from doing it, or that I said what I did because it simply needed to be said, but in the moment, that wasn’t why I slapped him, or why I hurled angry words at him. I had just… snapped.

I had escaped back to my rooms, somewhere I barely went to these days, except to catch snatches of sleep, when Roda found me. Seeing her concerned face, I felt a pang of guilt. I had been so eager to get away from Kili that I hadn’t realized I was ignoring my sister. We had been tasked with jobs in totally different places, but that was no excuse. She didn’t say a word as she came into the room and wrapped me in her arms. I hadn’t realized I’d been crying, but I got her shirt wet all the same.

“There, there now. Let it out.” I had heard those words before, but not for sixteen years. My mother had never been prone to sympathy where action could be taken, unlike her mother. The oddly familiar phrasing broke the dam and I cried until I couldn’t breathe. Finally the tears slowed,
“Tell me, what’s the matter? No secrets between sisters, now.”

“It’s just all too much. I’m so far from home, I’ve no guarantee that I ever can go home. We’ve been preparing for war, and I’ve no idea what to do in a war. And I’ve been working myself into the ground to keep from thinking about...something. I’m a wreck, physically, mentally, emotionally, and my period starts in two days and I just can’t handle it anymore.”

“We’ll take it one thing at a time, then. I’ve no idea where your home is, or how to get you there, not that I want you to go, so we’ll shelve that for now. As for war, you aren’t a soldier, you’re camp staff. You do what you always do; you take care of people. You’ve always said you’re a cook, so you cook. I’ve seen you tend stewpots so warriors and leaders can do their jobs, and you sorted out that thing yesterday with portion rights. That’s what you do. But you’re right you’ve been working far too hard. You rise with the sun and don’t leave the camp until it’s darker than an untended mineshaft. Need I remind you, you never rise with the sun? What’s so terrible that you drive yourself like this?”

“Have you ever found something, something you would give anything for, only to discover it will never be yours?”

“Nay, I cannot say I have. I don’t believe that I’ve ever felt so strongly about anything but my work, and that will always be mine. What is this thing you need and do not have?”

“It’s not a what, it’s a who. The guy I love, but will never have, because he loves someone else.” My hands curled involuntarily into fists. “He was waxing poetic about her the other day, not five hours after I discovered that I loved him.”

“Is this, by any happenstance, Prince Kili?” I nodded. “I thought as much. He, too, has been overworking himself. But he had not yet found his One when we left Erebor, I am sure. He is a dear friend, but he cannot hold news to himself for all the mithril in Moria. We all would have been told, even if it’s not proper until the lady makes her choice. What exactly did he say?”

“As best I can remember, it was that the one he would give his heart to was patient and thoughtful, and fierce when defending friends. That she is strong in mind and body and guards a precious treasure. He also said that knowing her was a gift of Mahal. It was very pretty stuff, in a cryptic poetry riddle sort of way.”

“I think I know what has happened here. He really botched the execution, though. And he can’t have assumed you would know the ancient laws, even Kili isn’t that dense.”

“I have no bloody idea what you’re talking about.”

“You’re the one who said that tensions between peoples rise up when assumptions are made and questions go unasked. Kili assumed you would know how Dwarves handle such things, and you didn’t ask him what he meant.” She shifted herself to fold her legs in a tailor’s seat on the bed facing me. I turned in response so we could comfortably make eye contact. “In Dwarf law, the woman chooses. Her right to choose is inviolate, and pressure of any kind is prohibited, so that she can make the choice of her own heart. Dwarves love but once in our lives, so making a good decision is important. It’s skirting the bounds of custom, but if a Dwarf decides he loves a woman he may hint that he has feelings for her. He’s forbidden to tell her outright, so the declarations frequently take on a riddling form.”

“So you’re saying that Kili…”

“Was declaring his love for you. When that didn’t work he must have made further assumptions
about your response, and now we have a prince who’s driving himself to the point of exhaustion, while you do the same. And it could all be fixed by telling him how you feel.”

With a lighter heart, I was about to thank her, when a scream rang out and bells sounded.

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“What in Mahal’s name was that?” Kili scratched his head as he watched Lady Chris storm off. “I’ve never seen her so angered. Not even when… Never mind.”

“She was defending friends. Surely you know her well enough to know that threat to her friends can rouse her emotions more than anything else. She and Malrin have been near inseparable since preparations began, you know.”

No, Kili didn’t know. He’d been avoiding her longer than that, and shame burned in him at the thought. Even if she didn’t feel for him the way he did for her, that was no reason to deprive her of a friend.

“Well I’d like to know why she slapped me,” Gloin grumbled.

“I like to think I’m her friend too, and you crossed a line. It is not a tale I wish to tell the whole camp, however”

“The command tent is currently free. I think that this might be another case of problems arising when assumptions are made. We’ll be better prepared to handle this in the future if we know where the line was that Gloin crossed.”

In the command tent it was significantly warmer than out in the field. In part that was due to the thick felt walls of the tent and the ambient heat of Kili, Balin, Dwalin, Gloin and Legolas, but mostly it was thanks to the bronze brazier hanging from the cross braces of the ceiling. To Legolas’s mind it was almost too warm, but not quite. Certainly it wasn’t hot enough to prevent him telling the tale they had gathered to hear.

“Firstly, the tale I tell is not one I want repeated. I’ll not have my family mocked throughout the Halls of Erebor. It’s rather painful to tell at all, as it has to do with my mother.”

“You have a mother?”

“Kili, everyone has a mother, quiet yourself.”

“My mother and father ruled the Greenwood from before the beginning of the Third Age. For over two thousand years, our home was beautiful and prosperous. Then a darkness came to Greenwood the Great. The battle you are here to fight is only the final confrontation of a war that began four hundred and eighty-four years ago. The sickness spread quickly, and all our craft could not turn it back.

My mother was light and joy, and much beloved by our people, but she was not made to endure such losses as we suffered in those days. You must understand, once Elves lived in all corners of Greenwood the Great, the twelve clans of Silvan Elves each had their own territory and the Sindar lived around the palace. But when the darkness came, the Elves were forced closer together for safety. Some did not want to move from their ancestral homes to live in ever tighter spaces. We
lost whole families, the entirety of the Beech-tree clan were taken by spiders.

My mother felt these losses strongly. She begged my father to take our people and sail to the undying lands. But my father felt honor-bound to be a good king as long as he had a kingdom to be king of, and would not abandon the home they had built together. They fought about it, which is uncommon in Elves. Our marriages are enduring and eternal, so we afford them little strife, but that which Ilúvatar allotted to my parents was exhausted by the time the dragon came to Erebor. One of our kin has, had, the gift of foresight, and warned us of the impending disaster. We had a pact with Erebor then, though it was a thin, fragile thing at that point. So my father gathered his troops, those he could spare from guarding our home, and rode to aid Erebor.”

“But aid was never given! I may be young, but I know the tales, the Elves turned away from us, abandoning us. Everyone knows that.”

“Someday, I would like to meet this scholar, Everyone. He has written so much and most of it wrong. Do you want the tale or not, Prince Kili?”

“I apologize Prince Legolas, please continue.”

“My father rode to help Erebor, either to defend against the calamity foretold or to aid those who escaped it, depending on when he got there. He left my mother in charge of the palace, though really, Lainor did the work. I was with him when he received word of my mother’s flight. She had fled in the night to the Grey Havens, alone. We got the news the day the dragon came. We were readying ourselves, to give what aid we could, but my father, in his grief led our warriors back to the Woodland Realm, where he then sunk into a gloom that lasted years. Only the need to continue to care for our people and our home kept him alive. He blamed the Dwarves for a long time, because had he not ridden to Erebor’s aid, my mother could not have drugged a guard and stolen a courier’s mount.

And that, Master Dwarves, is what I lost when Erebor fell.”

There was little that could be said to that, and the silence stretched into the realm of uncomfortable, until it was broken by a scream and the sound of alarm bells.

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Interlude 2

In a cave to the south of the palace, dark forces gathered to plan the doom of the Woodland Realm. A small, animalistic creature with claws clicking against stone approached the great darknesses that occupied the cave.

“It is done, my masters. They set upon each other with vigor and cannot trust their fellows. They have been weakened.”

“Yes. We can smell it; they are afraid, juicy morsels. My sisters and I can build you bridges, but you must remember your promise”

“Yes, the bodies of the fallen are yours. Prepare the troops”

Troops were marshalled and marched upon the banks of the forest river. A sharp eyed scout saw
the concealing fog and recognized it as unnatural. He sounded his horn, but as he did so, a Morgul shaft pierced his gut and he died with a scream as the bells of the palace sounded the alarm.

Chapter End Notes

You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

WARNING; TEASERS IMMINENT
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“You may not be killed by living man, but let’s see if living woman might!”

(OK, I know, that's the cheesiest line I've ever written, I'm sorry. No I'm not. Chris has a touch of showman in her.)
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

The Battle of the Annex.

Chapter Notes

As promised, they declare their love. Also, I would like to say that headcanon-wise the Dwarven culture is very much like the Norse culture and what happens here would make a great epic or saga. Later, there will be minstrels writing incredibly inaccurate songs about the Battle of the Annex and all you need do to get Kili to turn beet red is hum the tune. And duck, because he will try to shoot you.

This chapter is dedicated to quadrad and tigrislilium for comments and to the two guests who left kudos.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Roda and I ran out to see what the matter was. I had the presence of mind or perhaps just the dumb luck to think to grab the belt with my sword and buckle it on as we ran. Thankfully, I had been wearing trousers for work; otherwise running in skirts might have been a problem. Out on the somewhat trampled grass of the eastern annex, we saw the camp rousing to battle. Soldiers grabbed weapons, assistants helped them put on armor, and Elven warriors were running out of the palace to fight for their home beside the Dwarves. Lainor was keeping people calm as he guided the camp staff to the safety of the palace. Roda went with them, and I was about to follow when something stopped me. I couldn’t say with any certainty what kept me on the field, but I froze for a moment, then turned myself away from the road to the palace. I saw a figure across the annex, a short dark figure running out of the command tent, accompanied by a white-haired figure and a ginger one. Half a beat behind came an Elf, identifiable by the height difference. They turned towards the river, and broke into a run. My feet carried me that way as well.

The bank of the river was shrouded in fog. Shapes moved in the fog, some slowly, others in jerky bursts of speed. I almost slipped, and when I looked at my feet I saw frost had coated the grass. It may have been winter, but there hadn’t been frost on the ground when I last was in the annex. I drew my sword and moved to flank the nearest line of Dwarven fighters. The tension grew as the fog rolled slowly towards us, until with a rush of air, the fog blew off, revealing the forces aligned against us.

Ranks of goblins both large and small filled the bank. Spiders came behind them, clicking their venom-dripping mandibles. Alongside the spiders were Orcs on Wargs, but thankfully none of them seemed very brawny. Although I knew from experience that some of the deadliest fighters are tiny and wiry rather than hulking muscle heads. In a fight, I’d rather have Bruce Lee over Schwarzenegger any day. The advance ranks blocked my view any farther than that, but I knew, somehow, that some fresh hell awaited us behind them.
Kili stood nearby me, and I could see him sweating despite the cold. He stepped forward and pitched his voice loud enough to be heard over the length of the line of our people.

"Today, we fight not as Dwarves, not as Elves, but as the free peoples of Arda. We fight united, to the end, and if you need reason to keep fighting, look to your brothers. For today the battle makes us kin. For Arda!"

"For Arda!" The reply came from every mouth, a tidal wave of sound that I frankly expected to come with visible shock waves like in the comics. Our ranks rushed forward into the enemy, pushing them back to the river. I found myself glad I had taken the time that horrible week after Kili’s declaration to focus on sword work. Also I found myself glad that goblins weren’t that hard to kill, just a little slashing or stabbing and down they went. But I was painfully aware of my exposed back.

Dwalin wasn’t that far off, I moved towards him. We fell in together, back to back. We fought like that for what seemed like hours but were probably minutes. Sparring can change how fast you perceive the world to be moving, and it turned out battle does too.

"Lift your guard of your left, lass.” This was only the latest in a series of comments he’d made, treating fighting for our lives like another lesson. It actually eased my fear a bit, oddly.

"Yes, Dad.” I spotted something odd across the battlefield. “Is your brother insane? He’s trying to take down that spider alone.”

“Oh for Mahal’s sake! And the prince isn’t guarding his flank in the least.” He seemed torn between two people he cared about.

“I’ll take Kili, you keep your brother alive.”

Crossing the bloody ground between us was an adventure all its own, but I made it to Kili’s side eventually. He seemed surprised when I fell in beside him, but an Orc appeared and he had no time to question my defense of his back. When the creature fell, he turned his head a bit, putting his mouth near enough to my ear that I could hear him over the din.

"Why are you here? This is the last thing I would think you to do.”

“Someone needs to guard your stubborn, idiotic, clueless ass. Goblin on your left.” He turned and dispatched it. “If you won’t do a halfway decent job of it, I have to. You may be frustratingly chivalrous, irritatingly vague and prone to assumptions, but you’re also too sweet to let die.”

“Really? Spider.” We both stabbed the thing, but it took a while for it to die, and in the midst of its death throes it caught Kili across the thigh with a claw. He screamed a little, but kept his feet.

“You alright?”

“This? This is nothing. Now what were you saying?”

“Later, the endgame is here.” I pointed at the bank of the river, where nine shadows stood. They weren’t the black riders of Fellowship, nor did any of them wear armor like the one in Return of the King, but they were unmistakable. Our forces retreated before them, and even their own seemed wary of them. Here’s praying I can pull an Eowyn, I thought. I steeled my nerves and stepped forward. Every inch felt like miles. My body fought me as I tried to make forward progress. I stood mostly alone; everyone else’s retreat had lengthened the apparent distance I traveled. “You may not be killed by living man,” I called out, “but let’s see if living woman might!”
Kili was shocked to see Lady Chris beside him. He knew her warrior spirit, but had thought she would still be in the palace. Also, he wondered at her appearance beside him. They hadn’t so much as spoken in weeks, and yet she seemed intent on guarding his flank. A thing he ought to put more thought to, it seemed, as a wiry Orc bearing a rusty sword charged him. When at last the foul thing went down, he asked his query of her.

“Someone needs to guard your stubborn, idiotic, clueless ass.” Clueless? What was her meaning? “Goblin on your left.” Indeed there was a goblin on his left, though not for long once he saw it. “If you won’t do a halfway decent job of it, I have to.” He had been a bit reckless this battle. “You may be frustratingly chivalrous, irritatingly vague and prone to assumptions, but you’re also too sweet to let die.” Sweet? She thought him sweet? Was there hope again? Even just a glimmer, the slight shine of an untapped vein, buoyed his spirits.

“No, Kili was not alright. His wound felt like it was on fire, and he wouldn’t be surprised if the foul thing had poison on its claws. “This? This is nothing. Now what were you saying?”

She frowned and shook her head. “Later, the endgame is here.” He wasn’t sure of her words, but her look towards the bank directed his eyes and he could see what she meant. The nine had come to join the battle. Tall and shadowed, they projected fear and despair, driving back the stalwart warriors arrayed against them. Their own forces made way and gave them wide berth. A great divide was now visible, a swath of frost-killed grass and churned mud separating the defenders from this new threat. Into this space stepped Lady Chris. She moved with surety and grace, and Kili could have admired her bravery if it were not so foolhardy. Still, he loved her and he would stand by her side until the world was remade, even if the glimmer of hope was as false as fool’s gold. Every step was a battle, but he came to be at her side as she mocked and taunted the wraiths.

“You are a fool, and you shall die. But tell me, why you think you have the strength to best us?”

“Are you insane?” Kili whispered at her. “Did you injure your head in the fight?”

“Maybe. But who stands beside the crazy person, but another madman?” Then she lifted her head and called out once more to the slowly moving shadows. “This is my home now! Not yours. You have no place in this world anymore. I’m not of this world and I belong here more than you. I take this world as my own, and I will defend it and the friends you threaten to my last breath.”

“You are a fool, and you shall die. But tell me, why you think you have the strength to best us?” The lead shadow was almost upon them. The hoarfrost on the ground grew as it approached.

“I draw strength from the home I have found, the friends I defend, and the man I love.” Kili’s heart stuttered, and he could not say it was entirely from the aura of the wraiths.
“You mean…?”

“Yes,” She held out her hand. “Kili I love you, and I choose you.”

There is a legend among Dwarves, called Lukhudel. It is said, that when the first six dwarrowdams pledged themselves to the Dwarves that Mahal had made for them, a brilliant light, like the sun off of polished gold, poured out of them. This is accepted lore. Some few others have said that whenever a perfect match, a couple especially made by Mahal, pledge themselves, a similar light, like moonlight on mithril, pours out of them. If, the day before, one had asked the Dwarves of the 13th cavalry and 42nd infantry companies if they believed in Lukhudel, many would have laughed.

But when Kili took Lady Chris’s hand, a light shone brightly from them, causing the dark beings that had gathered around them to flee, screaming. A spider that didn’t move fast enough shriveled and died in the light. A terrible screeching sound came from the Nazgul, and they too, fled. When the light’s brilliance faded, the companies of Dwarven soldiers and the squads of Elven warriors took the opportunity to chase down many dark creatures and fell beasts.

As for the couple that still glowed faintly, the shock of the light held them still for many moments and they knew nothing save each other. Then Kili took her in his arms as he had longed to do, and the embrace was returned. When at last they could see beyond their bond, they joined in the efforts to set the camp back to rights. They did not shirk, but it was clear they were less driven than they had been, and happier with it.

Chapter End Notes

I know, deus ex machina. I shall not apologize for that, as Arwen in LOTR was basically Aragorn's personal DEM and the barrow wight sword came out of nowhere. If the Professor can do it, so can I, dammit.

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---Edit (I forgot your teaser, sorry)---

WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT

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“Oh mighty Mahal, take our brothers into your Halls of Waiting and shelter them at your hearth. Bless those who mourn, creator, shield them from the pain with your hammer and guide them to a new day. So be it struck.”
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Things need to be settled after the battle.

Chapter Notes

Almost done! I originally thought that this chapter would be the end, but then Chapter 31 just sort of happened. So this is the second to last chapter instead of the last chapter.

Dedicated to tigrislilium and tamarama for comments, and to Rhythmy and the guest who left kudos.

Cleaning up after the battle took nearly as much work as preparing the annex had. People still needed feeding, so I cooked. The injured had to be treated and the dead buried, so Kili took up a shovel and found a place to dig. At one point, before the dead were in the ground, someone called for an impromptu funeral. The dead lay at our feet, lined up neatly in rows, covered by sheets. There were so many of them, my heart lurched. We had won, but at such a cost. Someone began a prayer farther down the line.

“Oh mighty Mahal, take our brothers into your Halls of Waiting and shelter them at your hearth. Bless those who mourn, creator, shield them from the pain with your hammer and guide them to a new day. So be it struck.”

“So be it struck.” The reply was a little ragged, the Elves a beat behind the Dwarves. I was somewhat proud that I came in exactly on time, though all emotions were dimmed by the grief. I hadn’t known all of them, but those I had, I would miss. I heard an Elven prayer, but it was in their language, so I didn’t understand it.

The dead buried, we all returned to the work of getting the camp back to working order. Even though the battle seemed decisive, sweeps needed to be sent out to clear the forest of any creatures left. The Elves did most of that, being better suited to travel through the woods, but the Dwarves insisted on staying in case they were needed. I suspected it had more to do with everyone needing a chance to mentally regroup, but I knew better than to suggest such a reason.

When at last, a week and a half later, the army seemed ready to leave I knew we were going with them. I spent the day before we planned to depart saying goodbye to the Elves that I’d made friends with. Smiling Malrin who only wanted to make people happy, we had bonded over food. Stern Lainor, who held everyone together with a will of iron, we may have butted heads from time to time, but I still counted him as a friend. Rhovaneth and Iestel, twins from the kitchens, sources of endless curiosity who begged for tales of Erebor every time I saw them. I would miss them all, but when I said goodbye to Legolas, who had taken it upon himself to entertain me and thus I knew fairly well, the Elven prince said I was welcome back at any time. Now that the forest was considerably safer, visits wouldn’t be impossible.
The trip home was unremarkable. The only thing that happened that stuck out in my mind was Kili holding my hand at campfires. We’d been so busy handling the clean-up and preventing renewed racial tensions that we hadn’t really had time to spend with one another after the light show. I was still a little freaked out by the idea that the creator of the Dwarves had handpicked me out of my world to match make me with Kili, but according to Balin, what happened was incontrovertible proof that we were essentially soul mates.

We moved slowly; the reloaded wagons could only go so fast. It took three days to reach Laketown, where we rested a day, and another three to get back to Erebor. By the end of the week, I wanted nothing more than a hot bath and a real bed. Fortunately, we were expected.

The Ravens had taken a message to Thorin from Kili estimating our time of arrival, so when we rolled into Erebor, there were swarms of workers to take our ponies, unload the wagons and generally speed us on our way to our rooms. I drug my tired, aching self to my room with my saddle bags slung over one shoulder, happily surprised by the sight of the large round tub by the fire being filled by a maid. I thanked her, then stripped and climbed in to soak out all the soreness.

There was much to be done upon their return to the Lonely Mountain. Resettling an army took work, and there was inevitably a list of things that should have been done that weren’t, because the people who ought to do them were out in the field. But at last, Kili got away from the responsibilities of being (technically) the leader of two companies of warriors. He didn’t want to shirk his duties, but he needed to get to Thorin before the rumors that were likely spreading even now did.

He was walking briskly to the palace when Ori skidded to a halt in front of him.

“Is it true? What they’re saying?”

“Depends on what ‘they’ say. And who ‘they’ is in this case.” He was concerned at the speed at which the story had spread, if Ori already had it. He would have thought that folk would be more considerate of such a personal matter.

“One of the soldiers said Gloin fell in battle! Please tell me it isn’t true.” Oh. So that was the rumor. Kili gestured in front of him, indicating they should talk as they walked.

“It depends what you call falling. He isn’t among the dead, not last I checked. But we had to bring him home in a wagon with the other injured. Thankfully Elvish medicine saved many lives, and sped the healing so it was safe to bring them home, but Gloin lost half of his left foot. He may learn to walk again, with luck and patience, but he will never fight again.”

“He’s going to hate that. At least we don’t have to explain to Gimli that his adad didn’t come back.”

“Yes. Knowing that little firepot, he’d go on a quest of vengeance. He turned 65 this year, you know.”

“He may be old enough to go on quests, officially speaking, but he’s nowhere near ready to, as far as maturity.”
“Agreed.” They were close to the office Thorin kept, where Kili thought he might be. “I have some things I need to tend to, but it was good seeing you. I’ll be at dinner, and the old fusspots are likely to have me tell the tale of our adventures in Mirkwood, so if you want to hear it, you might want to attend the high table.”

“I’ll do so for the sake of the story, but I hope Lady Chris doesn’t mind me abandoning her.”

“I’m going to request that she brave this one night at the high table as well. I know she dislikes it, but it may be a necessity.”

He waited as Ori trotted off before knocking on the study door. He heard a scrape of a heavy chair on stone floor, and then Thorin was before him.

“Kili! You’re back. That was rather fast.” He stepped back to let Kili enter the office and they took seats by the low burning fire. “Did the mere sight of a true Dwarven fighting force scare the darkness off, that you return so soon?”

“Well, Uncle, about that…” Kili was truly nervous about this part. Not that there was anything Thorin could do to refute the bond, not with so many witnesses to the Lukhudel.

“What’s the matter? Did the Elves do something that drove you to leave?”

“No! Mahal, no. Their healers are the only reason we could travel so soon. Besides, they are now battle-brothers with us. Elven blood spilled as much as Dwarven did, in that battle. We were almost through when the Wraiths came, but Lady Chris acted with such bravery as I have never seen, and I grew up with you and Dwalin. She stepped forward when all others drew back, threatening and taunting the Nazgul. It asked her where her bravery came from, and she replied that it was in her love for this world, her love for her friends here…and her love of me.”

“Wait, what!?”

“Don’t interrupt, Uncle, and close your mouth. You told me you can catch flies that way. She said she loved me; that she chose me. I’d tried earlier to hint at her, but I bungled it badly and we’d spent two weeks not talking to each other. But there on the battlefield, she declared herself, and we experienced Lukhudel.”

“Lukhudel is a myth, Kili. A memorable detail for romantic tales sung by bards.”

“Then ask Balin, Dwalin, or Gloin what they saw. Actually, don’t ask Gloin, his foot was already mangled and he might have been more focused on that. But anyone else on that field that wasn’t hip deep in their own problems will tell you, Lukhudel happened. And what’s more, it drove off the dark forces. I saw the singed bodies of fell beasts that didn’t flee fast enough. And before we left, the Elves had swept the entire forest to find no trace of the Wraiths. We won by virtue of the light of all lights.”

“Kili, you are a prince of Erebor and she is not a Dwarf. This cannot be, much as I would like you to be happy.”

“It’s less a matter of the lad’s happiness and more a question of the will of our creator, Thorin.”

“Balin! I didn’t hear you come in. Please talk some sense into Uncle.”

“Rather, he should talk sense into you, nephew. Rambling about Lukhudel, wanting to take up with a daughter of Men, you’ve obviously gotten hit on the head or some such.”
“Oh, but the tales he tells you are true ones, Thorin. It was obvious, blinding as it was, that Mahal has ordained that those two shall be, whether or not the King under the Mountain wills it. Best make your peace now, for there’s over a hundred and fifty dwarrow that saw it and will vouch for them. And if by some feat of kingship you block their union here, I distinctly heard Prince Legolas offer that they may come back to the Woodland Realm at any time. Do you really want your youngest sister-son to go live with the weed eaters?”

“Fine.” Much as it pained Thorin to admit, there were worse people for Kili to love. He could have wound up with that Elf for a niece-in-law. And if the tale was true, there would be many who would seek to aid the couple. By nightfall there would be bards composing songs of it. It was romantic as anything, pledging love on the battlefield, and Lukhudel just made it all the more compelling. “You’re going to have to announce it at dinner, before the bards run away with the story. And you two get to convince the Council. I did not witness the light, I cannot testify.”

Kili smiled. That was about as close to a wish of well-being as he had hoped to get from his stern uncle. He knew Thorin would warm up gradually, but this first telling had caught him off guard. “Many thanks Uncle.”

Chapter End Notes

I did a lot of research on Dwarven burial customs when they don’t have access to their mountains, and aside from the burned Dwarves of the battle of the difficult name, there were very few answers. I did find that Dwarves hate to burn their dead, so I figured that if solid stone was unavailable, burial in earth would work. I also sort of winged it when it came time to write a prayer. Some of it came from the Dwarrow Scholar website, but at least half I made up. (So be it struck is supposed to be the equivalent of so mote it be or amen, btw.)

You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

WARNING; TEASER IMMINENT

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* “From what I hear of her, she’s braver than that. Being on display may make her skin crawl, as it does me, but she’ll do it for love of you. For love of you she taunted the nine. And we’ll not let her be overrun, no indeed. If the doubters want to take on one of our family, they have to take us all on.”
I was just getting ready for dinner when a knock came on my door. Mindful of the fact that I was still in just a shift, I opened the door only a little, enough to speak face to face, but not much more. I had expected Kili or Ori (not Roda, she’d expressed a desire to go straight to bed), but instead I saw Fili.

“My Lady, I was wondering if I could beg a moment of your time. There are some things we should discuss, preferably in private.”

“Give me five minutes, I’m not quite dressed.” He nodded and I closed the door. Five minutes wasn’t long enough to put on the lace-up bodice I planned on wearing to dinner, but it was enough to put on the rougher buttoned version they’d given me for travel. I looked odd, in a nice skirt and a rough top, but hey, it was Fili. Surely Kili’s brother wouldn’t get on me about something like that. I let him in and sat on the bed.

“Firstly, let me say congratulations, and I wish you all the happiness in the world. I’m so happy that Kili has finally found you, and so is the rest of the family. That said, you just stepped into a whole new world of responsibility, and while we know you to be wonderful and brave and probably better than my oaf of a brother deserves, there are going to be people who doubt you. You have enough supporters among the 13th cavalry and 42nd infantry to keep the complaints from being too loud, but they will still happen. We can stamp out a few of them tonight, at dinner.”

“I don’t think I like where this is headed, Fili.”

“Look at it this way; at least tonight you’re an almost-princess rather than a line cook. You need to
sit by Kee’s side tonight. And probably a few more nights, so that people get to see you. You need to be calm and polite and brave enough to face the court. If you can face a Ring-Wraith and mock it, I’m sure you can handle a few stuffy councilors. Wear that blue dress, and pull your hair back. We don’t have time for you to do a proper style, but Mother sent these.” He pulled out a little cloth bag that clinked. He handed it to me and inside were several hair ornaments.

“Fili, I don’t know how to be a princess! I love your brother, and I’m so glad he feels the same, but that’s different from making a whole kingdom like me. God, I wonder if this is how Kate Middleton felt?”

“Who?”

“Ordinary girl who married a prince, back in the other world. Shit, I’m not even from this world! What the hell am I going to say to people? ‘Yeah, I gate-crashed your world and now I’m marrying your prince, deal with it.’ I can’t breathe.” I bent at the waist and tried desperately to get air. Fili’s hand rubbed circles on my back until the knot of panic in my chest subsided. I sat back up and took slow, shaky breaths. He was right, I’d just faced something that hardly anyone would willingly face, and I was stronger than this. I’d told the Wraith that I fought for this world, and my friends, and for Kili. If I could fight a goddamn Nazgul for those things, I could fight for them in a nice, safe mountain. “Sorry, panic attack. Just tell me one thing before I go bearding the lion. Does Dis approve?”

“Mother couldn’t be happier. She likes you, you know, so none of the nonsense like you pulled with doubting Thorin’s approval. I won’t let you.”

“No, I’m not going to.” I smiled at him, and I’m fairly sure it was more fierce than cheerful. “But with Dis on my side, I can move mountains. I mean this in the nicest way possible, but your mother is a freaking Sherman tank. She just goes over obstacles.”

He threw his head back and laughed. “It’ll be a delight having you in the family, Christiana. Now get ready. I’ll be waiting outside to escort you to the Dining Hall.”

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Kili brushed nervous hands on his trouser legs, trying to rid them of the sweat that seemed to be gathering on the palms. The Dining Hall was far fuller than it would be for anything but a feast day, a sure sign that word of his new-found One had traveled to every bit of the court. Kili had asked Fili to explain things to her when he had spoken to his brother and their mother. It was cowardice, but he couldn’t bear the thought of seeing her anger when she found she was to sit at the high table again. Dis had wanted to go, too, but her sons reminded her that she could be a little overwhelming, and Lady Chris had a tendency to assume things about the motives of their family. Instead, she contented herself to stay with her youngest son as they waited in the little anteroom they used for preparing before feasts. Now, she gripped his shoulder tightly, her low voice soothing him.

“You’re working yourself up, my boy. She’ll be here soon, don’t fret.”

“I’m not fretting, Mother. She hates sitting at the high table. Makes her nervous. What kind of husband-to-be am I that I would have her do something she fears? I didn’t even have the courage to ask her myself.”
“From what I hear of her, she’s braver than that. Being on display may make her skin crawl, as it does me, but she’ll do it for love of you. For love of you she taunted the nine. And we’ll not let her be overrun, no indeed. If the doubters want to take on one of our family, they have to take us all on.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, your Highness.” Kili turned and his jaw dropped. He had thought the dress looked good before, but with her hair drawn up and held by elegant mithril claps and her skin lit with the glow she had held ever since the battle, a glow that had nothing to do with Lukhudel and everything to do with love, she was breath-taking.

“Struck dumb, Brother? You found the gem; I just polished her up a bit.”

“Fili, son of Vili, you mind your words. That’s your sister you speak of. You were saying, my dear?”

“I said I was glad you stand in support of my relationship with Kili. As I mentioned to Fili before we came, I do believe that with you supporting me, I could move mountains.”

“From the battlefield reports and the word of Balin and Dwalin, I think you could do so without my assistance.”

“No, not mountains. Foothills, perhaps.” Dis laughed. “You think I’m joking, but with the right tools, a backhoe and maybe some dynamite…. A scholar of my birth world once said ‘give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the Earth’. We’ve never put that particular test in motion, but the point remains.”

“Aye, with the right tool, anything is possible.”

“Bofur!” Kili’s head was getting dizzy from all the turning to look at new arrivals. “What are you doing back here?”

“I invited him.” Thorin had been quiet until now. “I invited all of them, though he’s the first to arrive.”

“Not for want of trying, Thorin.” Balin and Dwalin walked up together, and Balin embraced Lady Chris.

One by one, the Dwarves of Thorin’s Company entered the antechamber and gave their well wishes to Kili and Chris. Gloin could not come with his foot injured, but sent his wife and son, and Chris’s eyes shone with excitement as the young Dwarf greeted her. She made a cryptic comment about great destiny, and then turned pink and coughed. Bombur also brought his wife, though their many children were left behind. Dori and Nori gave very different blessings, at the same moment, then scowled at each other before Ori gave both of them a glare. Oin’s ear trumpet could not keep up with the growing noise and eventually he gave up to go stand beside Bifur, the two of them bound by their inability to effectively communicate.

“Well, this is all lovely, but we have a dinner to get to. Thorin, you walk beside me, Fili, Kili, you flank the Lady, and the rest of you try to come to some sort of order. It’s a show of support, not a drunken revel.”

“But, Dis, drunken revels are the only kind of revels worth having!”

“And that would explain more than it doesn’t about your personal life, Nori. Shape up. This is for my baby, and you lot won’t muck it up.” Kili let out a muffled cry of ‘Ma!’ and the troop of Dwarves entered the Dining Hall.
There was a lot of muttering in the Hall when Kili settled Lady Chris at his side. Even more when she turned her head to speak to Fili and the light caught what were unmistakably ornaments of the Royal line. The only place the hair clasps could have come from was Lady Dis, the only daughter of Durin’s line to live in Erebor. That the princess gave her support swayed many who had been undecided about the possibility of a daughter of Men marrying their prince.

Further minds were swayed by the whole members of the 13th cavalry and 42nd infantry, who had been given seats higher than they might ordinarily, due to their recent return. They sat throughout the Hall, giving glares to those who looked disapprovingly at the couple and quietly spreading the tale of the Lukhudel they witnessed. Up on the dais, the members of the company who had been in Mirkwood told the story of their work there to the other high-placed members of Thorin’s court. They were met by some disbelief, when they told how the battle ended, but Balin and Dwalin held firm in their insistence that they witnessed the remarkable event. Kili and Chris relayed that while the light shone, neither of them was aware of much beyond the other. At last, the meal drew to a close, and Thorin stood and raised his tankard in a toast.

“To our returned brothers, in gladness at their safe arrival,” he began the traditional benediction the King was expected to give when armies returned “and to our fallen, in honor of their sacrifice....” He paused before continuing. “And most especially to the newest member of the Royal Family, in hope that she and Prince Kili have many happy years together. Menith!”

The sound in the Dining Hall reached a level it had not since the first feasts held in a newly reclaimed Erebor. As one, the supporters of Lady Chris stood to cheer in response to Thorin’s toast. And if any had doubted that the Royal Family stood as one, they were now quite firmly corrected. At the high table, Lady Dis smiled at her brother for delivering the coup d’état she had insisted on. Thorin for his part inclined his head in solemn salute to the pair next to him. Fili slapped his brother on the back, and as the roar faded, he leaned in to be heard.

“I think you can relax now, the worst is behind us.” He delivered the reassurance with a smile, but Lady Chris looked rather more nervous than she had before.

“Damn it Fili, you’ll jinx us! Never say the worst is behind you, it just encourages the irony gods. Now we’ll have to be on the lookout for trouble.”

“My apologies, but if I may, this world is tended by the Valar, not these gods of irony. Perhaps their reach is not long enough to harm you here?”

“I direct your attention to all that happened after Bilbo said those words on the Carrock. Irony is not limited to the world of my origin.”

“You speak as though it no longer is your world,” Kili interrupted. “Don’t mistake me, I’m glad you haven’t spoken of returning, but is it no longer your world?”

“It’s my world to a degree, but this is the world I feel at home in. There may be things I miss, showers, for instance, but for the most part I’m ready to move on. There are people and things here I would miss more than I miss hot showers. I kind of wish I could at least explain to my friends why I disappeared, but this is my world now.”

“Then may I say, welcome home, my Ghivashel. Kanon iserij nim rukuh.”

“Someday, I want to know what that means.”

“Someday, you will.”
Ok, so this chapter has some more Khuzdul. Here are translations:
Menith- To cheer. Used after a toast as "cheers" is used.
Ghivashel- Treasure of treasures. An endearment.
Kanon iserij nim rukuh- Never leave my side.

You can find me here: bairnsidhe.tumblr.com

I don't have another chapter to teaser for, but I think I'll leave you a line from the first chapter of the sequel.

WARNING, TEASER IMMINENT
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“Katla, you once punched the Dwarf who dislocated your elbow. With the hand that elbow was attached to. He could probably break your wrist and you’d keep going. Just tell him when it would get difficult to maneuver with your arm locked.”

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