The crown does not rest easy on Thorin's troubled brow. A new, rising star on his council has charmed Thorin's former champions while his bizarre, unwelcome overtures toward the
king have made Thorin's winter without Bilbo, Fili, and Kili far more difficult than he had ever anticipated. Unaware of the extent of Thorin's difficulties, Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur are on their way to Erebor with old and new friends alike for the wedding of Princess Dís and Dwalin--and not a moment too soon for Thorin, who desperately needs his loved ones by (and on) his side.

Loyalty. Honor. A willing heart...Thorin had once said he could ask no more than that. It has never been more true.

Notes

Welcome! Thank you for continuing on this journey with me.

If you're new here, there is a lot of story development you'll miss if you don't start at Part 1.
Looking Forward

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was only March, and far too soon for Thorin to send out ravens to foretell his anticipated visitors. He knew it was too soon, yet the impulse was already strong to start keeping an eye out for his love. Unwilling to disrespect the time and energy of his feathered allies, Thorin tamped down the urge and promised himself he would wait until April at the earliest.

Thorin reminded himself it was possible Bilbo and the others had not yet left the Shire. Thorin did not know how long this year’s winter had been that far West, and he figured Bilbo would find it pointless to send word ahead of his departure when the word would arrive more or less when he did. Bilbo’s last letter had said their plan was to arrive ahead of the wedding; Thorin could only hope Bilbo had meant it to mean as far ahead of the wedding as they could manage and still stay unfrozen and whole.

Even if Bilbo’s trip took the longest time possible, with their arrival being the same day as the wedding, that still meant there was finally more of their separation behind Thorin than in front of him. Additionally, if Bilbo was there in the best time possible, it could be as little as a four weeks before Bilbo was in his arms again! If it was (please, oh please) a mere four weeks, Thorin would need to ensure all his projects for Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur came to an end before March did. He went back to his list of tasks, making note of which ones needed a check-in or a following-up nudge.

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Dwalin had watched Balin’s face cloud over one too many times when Thorin’s name had come up in the king’s absence. Moreover, he noticed Balin preferring the place at the table next to Dain and Regnad much more often than the one next to himself and Thorin, where Balin used to be so proud to sit. Day after day, Dwalin witnessed them drifting further apart, noticing how much the pain of Balin’s loss seemed to reflect in Thorin’s eyes, and also seeing how the bitter disappointment in Thorin now lurked behind Balin’s. With the wedding only a handful of weeks away (and bringing a whole new host of problems for them all riding into Erebor), Dwalin had invited Balin to his chambers after dinner one night and let him know he had noticed…though he had omitted Regnad’s name for the time being.

“You were once ready to follow him anywhere, Balin. You were his closest ear. Now there’s a wedge between you,” Dwalin finished. “This can’t go on much longer.”

Balin shook his head sadly.

“You know as well as anyone I was resistant to the attempt to retake this mountain,” he said. “Before we had set out from the Shire, I told Thorin outright that the life of peace we had was not worth trading for gold. Thorin had spoken so passionately about reclaiming our homeland, though, and you are right—I had long since pledged to follow him. Therefore, I went, despite my misgivings, and I can tell you that even for all the danger and the risk, I am glad that I did. I had forgotten how much I loved Erebor—had spent decades talking myself out of how much I had missed this place, denying how much a part of me this mountain was—and now that I’m here, I’m here. I may be old, and Mahal knows I’m tired, but I’m ready to make Erebor’s restoration my mission for the rest of my life. There is certainly more than enough to do to keep me busy for the duration.”
Dwalin grunted. “So you have renewed purpose, all because of Thorin’s own passion and belief, yet you are disappointed in him and the job he is doing. How does that follow?”

“Though still my beloved home, Erebor is a new place,” Balin said. “It is different now than it was, and the council is different than Thrór’s had been, too. I look around and I think on how we could rebuild our kingdom, how we could be renowned again. We have the potential to be a more strong, steadfast, and prosperous community than before.”

“Do you not believe Thorin wants that, too?” Balin sighed. “He wants something he cannot have, and Erebor suffers.”

“Does it? I know he suffers, but how does Erebor suffer? What is he not doing?”

“Well, I—” Balin faltered, trying to remember Regnad’s arguments. “He is, he is—“

“He is…what?”

Balin couldn’t think of a thing Thorin’s private activities were doing to hurt Erebor (though he had spent the past weeks brooding vaguely over how they had somehow been doing just that), so he seized on one of Regnad’s most vocal issues.

“He’s hiring others, Dwalin. Folks not like us, some with whom we bear ancient grudge. He is giving them employment and sharing our resources!”

“He is merely giving them employment and resources where there are not yet enough of our own folk to provide for all who need such services to begin with,” Dwalin insisted. “If he employed dwarven mattress makers for the royal suites, who would be completing the barracks right now? The apartments? Look, I am not warm on the idea of elves or the craftsfolk of New Dale habitually tromping around our hallowed halls, but you’ve just said yourself: Erebor is a new place. Some of those old ideas will not prosper in this new ground.”

Balin opened, then closed his mouth. He nervously stroked his beard.

“Erebor is not for dragon, Man, nor Elf. Erebor is for dwarrows,” he said, as though it was the answer to all arguments.

Though they always had kept close loyalty with and to their own, Balin had spent their decades traveling together serving as a diplomat for them, often intervening when Thorin’s hand flew to the pommel of his sword and Dwalin was ready to knock heads together. To hear him speak in such firm, exclusionary ways about their race was unnerving to Dwalin, and for him to lump such a horrifying calamity as Smaug in with Men and Elves was dangerously absurd. Balin’s words did not sound like him at all.

Dwalin explained, “Thorin is simply remaking allies Erebor will need to regain the renown to which you are aspiring. You and I, we’re Thorin’s kin and closest friends. I don’t think anyone has seen him—nor has anyone seen us—through more trials and challenges in this life than each other. Dain has loved him since they were dwarflings, too. I wonder, then, who it is that has been putting ideas in your head that Thorin would just as soon hand the mountain over to be annexed into New Dale or Mirkwood. Who is bending your ear against him? Regnad of the Iron Hills?”

“Against him? Regnad adores Thorin!” Balin argued. “That’s half the issue between those two!”

Dwalin schooled his expression, though his gut told him Regnad didn’t adore Thorin nearly as much as Balin thought.

“Well, now,” Dwalin said knowingly. “Are you still on about what you told me before, then? About those attentions Thorin found unwelcome?”

Balin made a face, feeling somewhat caught. “Well, I have made no secret that I do wish Thorin would reconsider.”

“I don’t like this hobbit business any more than you do, but shoving him at the nearest eligible
“dwarf is not the way to go about fixing it.”
“Regnad is more than some warm body, though. He is exactly what Thorin needs--and by extension, what Erebor needs, too.”
Dwalin crossed his arms. “I don’t know how or when you got in the business of matchmaking, but it suits neither you nor the folks for whom you are trying to match. Please drop this issue with Thorin.”
Balin exhaled, resigned. “It has been as good as dropped, anyhow…which is half the issue with us.”
“How did setting Thorin up with a friend of Dain’s become more important than what you two have meant to each other all these years?”
Balin looked down at his boots and glanced up, chagrined.
Continuing, Dwalin said, “More than these outside alliances he is making for us in his capacity as king, the two of you will need each other if you want Erebor to return or exceed its former renown. Will you try to set aside this grudge? The thing with Bilbo irritates me, too. More than irritates me, truth be told, but I have to set it aside because it is obvious Thorin needs us now. Not near-strangers from the Iron Hills, not even you, me, and Dain in our official capacities. He needs his friends, Balin. You were once willing to run into what seemed like a hopeless battle against a never-ending flow of orcs at a single shout of ‘Du Bekar.’ All you need do here is stretch out a figurative hand, yet more and more often, you’re turning your back.”
For the first time in a long time, Balin had no response for his brother.

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Thorin’s work orders had been completed, one after the other, coinciding so perfectly over the course of the week that Thorin visited both the statue of The Maker and Yavanna’s Shrine simply to express thanks.
He did his best not to divert too many dwarven sources for the assembling of the suites, though he also had to be careful not to employ too many folk from New Dale, too, lest he send Regnad or Balin off on another tangent of Ereborian pride and purity. Quite frankly, this new way of balancing things had been exhausting. He far preferred the way Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur seemed to do things when it came to allies, resource sharing, and getting things done.
The suite for Ðís and Dwalin had been completed first at his insistence. He had wanted one less thing weighing on their minds as their blessed day grew nearer.
The princes’ suites’ and his own deliveries happened next, back and forth as this piece or that was carried in. Thorin had been instructing where to put a wardrobe when Balin came around.
Thorin tensed, expecting a scolding for the spectacle of the men that had delivered the bed frame, the team bringing up the mattresses, or possibly a dozen other things. Instead, Balin had simply walked through the suites, nodding and stroking his beard.
Once it was in place, Balin ran his fingers over the carving on the large wardrobe Thorin had commissioned.
“This looks dwarven,” he said.
“It is.” Thorin gestured to indicate more than just his suite. “Much of this is, in fact.”
Balin hummed in affirmation. “Did you do the metalwork in the princes’ rooms?”
Thorin’s stomach sank, remembering Balin’s disgust at Thorin’s laboring.
“I did.”
Balin nodded. “I can tell. You are incredibly talented, Thorin.”

Thorin bowed his head in thanks, attempting to hide his shock.

Balin looked around the room again before landing his glance on Thorin and smiling kindly. The rarity of this expression from Balin as of late manifested as a pang in Thorin’s breast.

“These finally look like royal suites and no mistake,” Balin said. “I’d say these are long overdue.”

Again, Thorin bowed his head, more deeply this time, keeping his eyes on Balin’s for the duration.

Balin nodded and, with an awkward half shrug, left Thorin with another smile. Thorin thought the brief visit felt like times between them before the mountain was won. There had been no formality in it, no announcing of arrivals nor taking of leave. It felt familiar and comfortable, like a soft set of socks.

Though Thorin still ached over Balin’s puzzling dismissal of his feelings and felt betrayed by his more recent seeming shift in loyalties (and Balin was no doubt still plenty annoyed if not outright angry for his part), this gesture or attempt or whatever it might have been was appreciated. Thorin wondered what had brought it on...and if the ease between them would last.

Chapter End Notes

If you're here, I'd love it if you'd say hello in the comments.

Thank you all!
The beginning of the journey to Erebor had been largely uneventful for the Shire travelers. There had been a touch of awkwardness in Bree when it had unexpectedly dawned that the only way for the lovers to split off for intimacy was to rent many rooms. The group from Bag End could not very well bed down together if intimacy was the known purpose, and if that had not been the purpose, then there would have been no need for Rorimac to sleep alone. Ultimately, they had decided on four rooms with Kili and Bilbo sneaking over to Fili and Bofur’s room—and doing their most heroic job of keeping quiet.

Rotating watch duty when inns weren’t available was new to Chadham, Thodora, and Rorimac. Bilbo and Bofur took turns staying up with Rorimac, while Ori insisted on taking watches with Chadham and Thodora. Sometimes, Bilbo, Bofur, Fili, and Kili would split watch duty outside their couples so that the waking ones could have quiet, private conversations together and the sleeping ones could claim snuggling in the name of warmth. Though frustratingly non-productive when it came to easing their carnal urges, it proved better than nothing.

On one of these mixed evenings before they neared Rivendell, Fili took a middle of the night watch with Bilbo. Everyone had been sound asleep when Bofur—having already sent a drowsy Rorimac back to his bedroll before time was up—woke them for their turn. No one else stirred as they took their place near the fire. Bofur himself fell asleep quickly, if his light snore was anything by which to judge.

Bilbo shuddered in the cold, pulling his fur around him more tightly and scooting his side of the log a little closer to the fire.

“Any closer and you’ll singe the fur off your feet,” observed Fili.
“I’ll really be cold, then,” Bilbo teased back.

Fili pressed closer against him, sharing his fur, too.

Bilbo hummed. “Oh, that’s nice, that is.”

In hushed tones, they talked on and off, but mostly they sat, leaned against each other, and enjoyed the comfortable silence.

Bilbo said, “It sounds silly since I see everyone all day, but I miss our hearth-times back at Bag End.”
“I do, too. Traveling isn’t the same as being at home. It is a different way to keep company. It is not unpleasant, but it doesn’t quite fill the soul.”
“We always give Bo the credit for being the wordsmith, but I also quite like the way you put things, Fee.”
Fili smiled bashfully at the praise and silence settled again, save for the occasional snore from the background or the odd hiss from the fire. The peaceful, still closeness encouraged Fili to bring up something he had been meaning to ask Bilbo for some time. He took a couple of deep breaths, lost his courage, and then took a few more. Finally, he managed to start.

“Do you remember when…” Fili winced, his voice sounding too high-pitched to his ears. He tried again, “Do you remember a few weeks ago, when you had me tied up next to Kee?”

“Ah yes,” Bilbo recalled with a grin. “What about it?”

Fili picked up a stick and fidgeted with the fire. “There was a point when it was just you and me, before you two fiends put us upright, when you mentioned that I was putting thoughts in your head. You were supposed to tell me what they were, but you never did.”

Bilbo was quiet.

“Do you recall saying that?” asked Fili, starting to feel foolish for bringing it up.

“I haven’t forgotten. I just can’t believe you remember something I said in the middle of a game weeks ago.”

Fili dropped the stick and faced Bilbo, tucking his leg in between them. Keeping his voice low so as not to wake the others, he was still passionate when he spoke.

“I confess to you, I’ve thought about it almost every day: What you could have meant. What you did mean. What else I hoped you might say when you confessed it to me.”

Bilbo gazed into Fili’s eyes, feeling the heat and the flutter in his core. The deep, late hour and the quiet softness of night worked its usual magic on Bilbo, calling forth thoughts and feelings that would not otherwise allow themselves be uttered. Fili’s beauty in the firelight only seemed to multiply the breathless sensuality of the moment.

“Tell me now,” Fili requested.

Something in Fili’s expression called to Bilbo, pleading in its intensity. He could not resist it.

“You already know. I know you know by the way you’re looking at me.”

Swallowing again, Fili whispered, “Say it.”

Lightheaded, his prick stiff as stone, and a with tightness that was simultaneously, impossibly, weightless in his chest, Bilbo’s lip quivered as he tried to form the words his heart, mind, and body were so eager to express. He blinked rapidly, not even sure why.

“You said 'inside' and I thought about more than my fingers. More than my tongue. When you say things like that, my mind—my cock—1…1—" Bilbo faltered.

Fili had been gradually leaning closer and closer as they had spoken. Straddling the log now, having attempted to close the distance between them, his face was close to Bilbo’s, close enough that Bilbo could feel the puff of breath when Fili spoke.

“Tell me.”

“I pictured me inside you, you wrapped around me.”

Against his lips, Fili murmured, “Making love?”

Bilbo’s eyes snapped to his, though they were so close he could not focus. He closed them again.

“Yes,” he answered.

“I think about that, too,” confessed Fili.
Bilbo flicked his tongue out to be captured and Fili did not disappoint.

He did not know how long they had kissed before he remembered they were on watch duty and attempting to keep this liaison of theirs a secret from four of their companions. He pulled back, peeking over Fili’s shoulder to see if anyone was awake and thankful to see they were not.

“Don’t want you to feel like you have to hide your fantasies from me,” Fili said, still close. “It isn’t like I don’t understand you still have to speak to Thorin about Bo, plus Thorin doesn’t even know about me, and besides all of that, the finality of a bond and all it entails is well beyond our consideration. I know the realities of trying to live out these obscene scenarios in our situation is less arousing than a cold water rinse, Bee. Not every fantasy has to be made real, but I like to talk about them, consider them, come to them. As my lover, I want you to share these thoughts so we can revel in them, even if we do not enact them.”

Fili had freed his cock from his trousers as he spoke, sensuous and low. He nodded downward, encouraging Bilbo to do the same. Bilbo released a shuddering, long exhale and nervously glanced over Fili’s shoulder again. In response, Fili spread the fur wider. No one would see—if they stayed quiet.

Licking his palm, Fili stroked himself. “I think about you inside me, the way you would move, the way you might handle me.”

Bilbo felt arousal skitter through his veins as he pulled his cock, listening to Fili whisper filth to him.

“But sometimes, when I have my fingers inside you, I consider how your tight arse might feel around my cock. Sometimes I’ll hear you whimper and I’ll wonder what noises you might make as I fucked you—and I would, you know. I would fuck you. That’s not to say we wouldn’t sometimes make love, passionate and slow, but I’ve seen you get it wild and that’s what gets me off when I have my hand on my prick. That night you and Kee gave us that show in the woods, do you remember it?”

Bilbo’s breaths were coming more and more shallowly, his eyes darting over the sleeping bodies in brief spurts of awareness while he struggled not to make noise.

“You were desperate, sobbing, and your cock was so swollen it was nearly purple, visible even in the firelight. Your orgasm was an event. I’ve thought about that since then, just like I am now, wanking and thinking what it felt like to be Kee, how it must have felt inside you as you turned practically inside out.”

Fili leaned quickly, narrowly missing his boot as he ejaculated in the dirt. Bilbo watched it pulse with wide, wanting eyes, following him rapidly.

Kicking dirt over the evidence, Fili and Bilbo both looked around. Not a soul stirred in their camp. There were only snores and deep, peaceful breaths.

Bilbo leaned his forehead against Fili’s. “I can’t believe we did that.”

“I needed it, believe me.”

“Me, too. This trip has proved quite challenging for my libido.”

“I, um, I meant it, though, Bee. I want to hear your fantasies, okay? Don’t be afraid of my reaction.”

Bilbo nodded. He didn’t know how to tell Fili it wasn’t Fili’s reaction he feared. It was his own.
With both ponies and wagons conveying them and their supplies, travel for the group was a bit more comfortable than if it had been with pony alone. They took wagon turns in shifts similar to watch duty, which did its own little part to improve spirits among them.

Some days had proven a bit colder than the hobbits—including Bilbo—had anticipated, though, and they had to bundle tightly to stay warm...and even then, it wasn’t always warm enough. Bilbo did his best to tough it out, telling himself in between shivers that he hadn’t always had the luxury of furs or leathers when traveling and he had turned out just fine in the long run.

Bilbo’s good humor might have lasted all the way to Rivendell had they not been caught in their first pouring rain. Though it was no longer wholly winter, spring was young at best and the rain chilled him to his bones. The coming of night chilled him further and by the time he woke, he had developed a heat behind his eyes, deep fatigue, and an ache in every joint.

“My jewel, are you alright?” Kee asked.
Bilbo replied, “Not especially at the moment.”
“Your color is gone,” noted Fili, frowning. “You’re not getting sick, are you?”

Kili remembered Bilbo getting sick while rescuing them to Lake Town, having gotten wet, and Bilbo getting sick in the Shire, after having gotten chilled. Now he had been both wet and chilled...and without a warm bed or a pot of good stock broth for leagues!

“I dunno,” Bilbo said. “I would like not to be upright for much longer, though.”

There was a whispered conversation wherein the rest of them discussed staying still for a day or two for Bilbo to rest or pressing on to Rivendell to get him to warmer comfort as soon as possible. It was decided to make room enough in the bed of the wagon for Bilbo to sleep while they traveled if he could, for quickness was better if Bilbo’s illness worsening out in the elements.

Kili urged him back in the space they had made, giving him his extra blanket for cushion underneath.

As Bilbo reclined, he said, “You know I hate it when you talk about me like I’m not here.”
“You did not get any input because what’s best for you and what you think is best for us is sometimes two different things. You know I hate it when you’re a martyr for your own cause.”
“Well, this time I would have pushed to continue to Rivendell instead of stopping.”
“I know, which is why we decided it.”
“I can’t decide if I’m just not feeling well or if you’re winding me up, you know,” Bilbo said with a weak smile.
“Maybe a bit of both.”
“Oh good. As long as you’re still willing to hassle me, I must not look too terribly pale.”

Kili kissed his forehead, grateful Bilbo’s eyes were already closed so he could not read the expression on Kili’s face.

Grouping with the others to decide who was on ponies and who was driving the wagon, Kili frowned.

“He is already warm to the touch,” he whispered so Bilbo could not hear.
“Then we had best make haste,” Bofur said solemnly.

Ori’s gaze had been nervously darting from Thodora to Chadham to Rorimac.
“Don’t worry,” Chadham said to Ori. “Just because one of us gets ill does not mean we all are going to.”
Rorimac chimed in. “Quite right. Illness from cold is not the same as passing illness along. It is rarely catching.”
Sheepish, Ori shrugged. “Dwarrows do not often deal with illnesses like these. I wasn’t sure if we would have four patients by the time we reached the valley.”
“We’ll just have to keep bundled,” Thodora assured him.
“And hope it doesn’t rain again,” Rorimac muttered. He had not cared for that one bit.

*****

Bilbo was worse by nightfall, complaining of a sore throat and not interested in his food. While Bilbo remained in the wagon, Kili frantically sifted through packs by the fire.

“I know we’ve brought tea,” he said. “Tea is at least warm.”
“I’m working on a bit of broth,” Bofur comforted, though he was worried himself. “We’ll have that for him.”
“But he will want tea,” insisted Kili, folding over the pack and weeping.

Fili moved to gather him in his arms.

“He’ll want tea,” Kili echoed pitifully.

Fili motioned Bofur over with his head, indicating the supplies. Bofur kenned his request immediately and dug through the pack while Fili gently rocked Kili.

“Then he’ll get tea,” he murmured into Kili’s hair. “I promise.”

Ori and the other hobbits looked on fretfully, not sure what to do or say in the midst of this scene. To see Kili worrying and upset to this extent was a jolt to all of them—even Ori, who had seen them through plenty of stress in the past.

Bofur said, “I’ve found it, Kee. I’ll set water boiling. He’ll have a cup and a bowl of warmth in no time.”

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Though Fili and Bofur both desperately wanted to comfort Bilbo themselves, they recognized Kili’s need and put it above their own. They hovered close, though.

“Bee?” called Kili softly as he climbed into the wagon. “I’ve brought you something to drink.”
“I don’t even want to sit up,” Bilbo croaked.
“Come now, sweetheart, nudge up just a little and I can help.”

Though doing so took tremendous effort, Bilbo did his best. Kili handed him the cup of tea first.

“It is warm, but not so hot that you can’t take a full drink.”

Bilbo hummed appreciatively after the first swallow.

“This feels good. It was just what I wanted, were I to have asked.”
Kili smiled in spite of himself, feeling the heat of impending tears behind his eyes. “I thought so.”
Studying Kili over his next couple drinks, Bilbo said, “Don’t think I’ve not noticed you’ve stopped attempting to sass me.”
Kili shrugged off the accusation, handing over the broth bowl next. Taking a sip, Bilbo made a face.

“What is in this?”
“I didn’t ask.”

With no further complaints, Bilbo took a few more drinks. He handed it back to Kili.

“Thank you. I don’t suppose you could help me up? I ache all over but I really need to make water.”
“Yes, of course,” Kili replied, hoping the dim hid the tears that had finally escaped.

Fili and Bofur watched Kili help Bilbo out of the wagon, both noting with alarm that Kili had to practically hold him up. They each gave Bilbo a soft kiss on the cheek when Kili brought him back.

“Bee should not sleep on the ground tonight, I don’t think,” Bofur said. “Nor alone. Warmth of another body will be best. Kee, I’m thinking we’ll shift some supplies so you can fit in there next to him.”
“That would be quite lovely,” Bilbo said, shivering.
Fili said, “Here, let’s get Bee in first so he can wrap himself up.”

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Bilbo shuddered through the night, regardless of Kili’s body heat or the fact that the air had no discernible chill that evening. By morning, he was blazing and hardly squeaking any voice out when he attempted to talk.

Bofur sat with him for the short time Fili was able to convince Kili to spend eating something himself. He smoothed the hair back from Bilbo’s forehead, swallowing around the threat of tears. Bofur climbed down and motioned the others over, away from the wagon…just in case Bilbo could hear.

“He was like this in Lake Town, just ahead of his delirium, and that was under Óin’s care. Do we have anything at all that might soothe him?”
“Nothing,” Fili whispered, horrified.
Bofur turned to address the other hobbits. “Thodora, Chadham, Rori: what do you know of herbs? Could you find anything that might help?”
“Nothing that would grow wild this early in the season,” Thodora said. “All I have with me are herbs of a…more personal nature. They are for neither pain nor fever, though.”

Her companions were kind enough to ignore the blush creeping across her face.

“Maybe there’s something in there that could help him anyhow. Would you share?” Ori said.
“Wait, would they hurt him?” Kili asked.

Thodora replied, “No, they will not hurt him and yes, I will share on the off chance that something in there might have double purpose to make him feel better, too. If I can have some water from a skin, I’ll make my tea for him.”

While Thodora did her part, the rest of them continued speaking in hushed tones.

Ori asked, “How long do you suppose until Rivendell?”
“We’re taking the faster way into the valley, the way we were taught the last time we were there,” Fili said. “I’m already recognizing little bits from the last time we rode out, but I hadn’t counted the
time it took to see them back then.”
Bofur frowned. “I’m afraid it is the same for me. Maybe we’ll arrive tonight. Maybe not for two days.”
“Two more days like this,” Kili mumbled. “What are we going to do?”
With an encouragement in his voice he didn’t quite believe himself, Fili said, “Look, Kee, maybe we’ll get a break. Maybe it will be tonight, or perhaps it will be a bit warmer today, and it doesn’t smell like rain, so that’s something, too.”

It took a bit of trouble to get Bilbo to sit up for Thodora’s tea. It also took two of the dwarrows to get Bilbo out of the wagon for his relief and—since they were breaking camp soon—they did not bother trying to drag him far. They figured in his current state, conserving energy was more important than retaining modesty. Bilbo was lifted back into the wagon and lovingly resituated by Kili.

It was a fine day, one of the warmest they had experienced so far, and Fili had been right—there had been no rain. Kili sat on the bench of the wagon while Bofur drove, making sure to hold a shade over Bilbo when they passed through sun. Unfortunately, Fili had not been right about the possibility of arriving in Rivendell that night and Kili despaired as they made camp. Bofur took a turn at comforting him while Fili popped up in the wagon to check on Bilbo.

“Bee? We’re camping, now.”
“Not in Rivendell?” Bilbo rasped dejectedly.
Attempting to swallow the emotion in his voice, hating how he was about to disappoint him, Fili said, “No, love. Not in Rivendell yet. Soon.”

Bilbo grimaced and Fili could see him attempting to swallow. Bilbo’s face crumpled as he began weeping.

“I feel awful, Fee.”

Watching Bilbo sob in pain eroded the rest of Fili’s own control. He held Bilbo’s hand, crying as well.

“I know, love. I know you do. We’re doing what we can as fast as we can, I promise we are. We’ll make you something warm to drink here in a minute, too.”

Bilbo continued crying, harder now out of frustration as much as pain. Talking hurt so much that he couldn’t explain to them he didn’t want anything else to drink, nor the reason why: Drinking made him swallow, which hurt, and it also made him need to urinate, which meant getting off the wagon, which hurt even more.

It was another terrible night. In addition to his violent shivers, Bilbo moaned and mumbled.

Fili and Bofur took their watch duty nearly on top of the wagon. Bilbo’s own misery was heartbreaking, but Kili’s helplessness and weeping doubled the ache.

“Now it is like the very worst of Lake Town,” Bofur said.
“Is it? I didn’t see him then. Thorin wouldn’t let us up there when he was this bad.”
“Aye, and he likely would not have left me in charge of him if he had known Bee would worsen to this before he had gotten back. Fee, I’m powerfully worried. Bee had Óin’s fever teats and actual
warm, comfortable beds to get him through Lake Town.”
“He has been sick since, though, and we three managed to nurse him,” Fili said.
“You know as well as I do that he wasn’t this bad the last time he was ill, and even then, he was home.”
“I know,” replied Fili, defeated. “I’m just trying to give us both hope, however thin.”
Bofur put his arm around him. “I’m sorry. I know you are.”
“I want to be with him, to take care of him like Kee is, or at least take care of Kee, because he is about to fall apart.”
“I do, too. It is killing me to step back like this, but he can’t have all three of us hovering in the wagon. The best we can do right now is be here for each other, do the best we can for him, and try to get to Rivendell as soon as possible. I think it might be tomorrow.”

Bofur left Fili at the wagon while he grabbed some more sticks to throw on the fire.

“Excuse me, Bo?” Rorimac said.
“You should be sleeping.”
“Forgive me, but it is hard to sleep with Bilbo groaning, though I know he cannot help it.”
“No, he can’t,” replied Bofur sadly.
“Chadham, Thodora, and myself have all seen sick hobbits, but we’ve never experienced something like this where the patient is stuck outside or jostling around on a wagon. I see the four of you growing more worried by the hour and it fills me with dread. Will he be alright?”

Bofur looked at Rorimac’s earnest face, scarcely illuminated by the moon. He wanted to give him an answer that might soothe him, but he could not lie to those trusting eyes.

Sighing, he said, “I don’t know. I’ve seen him come out of this before not a scrap worse for the wear, but those were different times and better circumstances. I don’t know if he will be alright, but I’m going to do everything I can, okay?”
Fighting back tears, Rorimac nodded. “Me too.”
Bofur ruffled his hair. “I know you will. Try a little more sleep, now. If we do manage to ride into Rivendell tomorrow, Bifur will never forgive me if you arrive half conscious.”
Rorimac grinned shyly. “I hope he is glad to see me.”
“You know, I’ll bet he is sprawled out in bed right now thinking the very same thought about you.”
“I will be. Oh, Bo! I will have never been so glad for anything in all my life.”
Smiling kindly, Bofur said, “I have a feeling he’s probably going to feel the same about that, too.”

The morning was worse than the night had been. Bilbo had ceased speaking at all, merely moaning at different levels of discomfort and annoyance. He barely opened his eyes and when he did, they did not focus and often rolled back or to the sides. He was no longer coherent enough to consume his own water or food.

Kili was inconsolable. All of them, down to the last, joined him that morning in weeping as they pressed on, hoping against hope they would reach Rivendell soon.

At an early afternoon hour, Bofur began pointing excitedly and smacking Fili out of his worry-stricken stupor.

“Oi! I recognize that! I recognize it! The entrance to the valley is only a few hundred paces!” Perking up, Fili brightened. “It is! This is that weird passage that barely fits a wagon. Kee!
Everyone! There it is!”
“Faster,” Kili urged Ori, who was driving the wagon. “Faster, I beg of you.”

The whole wagon jerked as the ponies sped up and Bilbo moaned in pained irritation.

“Hold on, my jewel,” Kili said, holding Bilbo’s limp hand. “We’re almost there.”

Kili didn’t know what would happen once they reached Rivendell, but it was better than the helplessness of being out on the open road.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone!
Illness And Awe

Chapter Summary

Rorimac has a long-awaited reunion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having been seen riding up, the travelers were met by the more readily available pair of Elrond and Nori. Bifur and their other friends had been elsewhere in the valley and—with the speed of the approach—there had not yet been time to fetch them for welcome.

Kili had jumped off the wagon before it had fully stopped, already chattering frantically. As Kili explained what had transpired, Elrond’s face rapidly darkened to concern and he scooped Bilbo out of the back.

“Nori, something urgent has come up,” Elrond said, not pausing as he carried Bilbo swiftly across the yard. “If you please, take over the welcome and get the others situated.”

Elrond shouted towards another elf in Sindarin and soon two more appeared. They all rushed after him, followed closely behind by Kili, Bofur, and Fili.

Though concerned about Bilbo, Nori moved to heartily embrace his brother. Peeking past him, he noticed the hobbit he vaguely remembered as Bifur’s Rorimac looking around, marveling…and searching. Nori warmly greeted Thodora, Chadham, and Rorimac and requested the whole group to follow him.

The hobbits craned their necks every which way, turning full circles more than once, stunned by their first experience with the astonishing beauty of Rivendell. Though Ori had seen it before, he had not been fully able under Thorin’s and Dwalin’s watchful (and—at the time—judgmental) eyes to give himself over to his wonder. After a brief glance to Nori for approval, Ori allowed himself the freedom this time, taking it all in and expressing his awe. Nori could not say as he blamed them; he still hadn’t gotten used to it himself yet…and doubted he ever truly would.

Nori led Ori, Thodora, Chadham, and Rorimac to the dwelling he shared with Nîfon for the time being, providing them with water, flannels, and vessels.

“You might wish to do a quick clean-up before food, which I shall arrange shortly,” Nori said. “After that, I'll see you to your own lodgings. I figured food before lodging might be your preference, though.”

The four of them smiled gratefully, though they were each still unnerved by the drama unfolding elsewhere. Chadham managed to get to the matter first, though it was at the tip of Ori’s, Thodora’s and Rorimac’s tongues as well.

“What about Bilbo?”
Nori regarded him kindly. “He is in good hands—the best hands, really. Though you could wait and and pace and fret for him, the time you would have to wait would not be made any shorter by it.
Therefore, no one would think ill of you if you took some of this waiting period to to wash off some road dust and eat...least of all myself or Lord Elrond.”

Thodora and Chadham decided that Nori was right--worrying about Bilbo could be done as easily on a full stomach as an empty one. However, Rorimac’s most pressing concerns had only been addressed by half.

“Excuse me, Master Nori, but Bifur is still in Rivendell, isn’t he?”

Nori’s expression softened further. “He surely is, though where I’m not quite sure of at the moment. Perhaps he’ll be joining us for our meal? The sooner you get yourself sorted, the sooner we may find out.”

A loaded, brotherly look from Nori had Ori suggesting the hobbits let Rorimac go first, which they did.

Rorimac was disappointed he would have to wait a little longer to reunite with Bifur, but also glad for a chance to smarten up a bit beforehand.

Once Rorimac was ready, Nori said, “I’m going to go set up our food. Perhaps you can come with me and give the lovers some, ah, privacy, eh Rorimac?”

A nudge of Nori's elbow to his ribs sent his meaning to Rorimac loud and clear.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, blushing. "Oh my, yes. I’ll, erm, go along to help you.”

*****

Bofur, Kili, and Fili raced after Elrond, who took rapid, long strides in his haste. Two of the other elves split away with clear purpose, while the third followed Elrond (along with the dwarves) into a room, brightly illuminated by the sun through several windows. There was a large bed, upon which Bilbo was placed. Apothecary jars lined a shelf off to one side.

Bofur watched, though he could not see much of what was going on as Elrond was bent over Bilbo and murmuring words, blocking the bulk of his view. For a moment, Bofur could have sworn that Elrond had been glowing. He quickly wrote it off to bouncing sunlight and his own exhaustion, which had been compounded by worry and minimal sleep the past couple evenings. He rubbed his eyes, leaving them closed for several moments because it felt unexpectedly lovely. It was only when he swayed from the danger of nodding off that he came back to himself.

When Bofur next glanced up, he noted one of the other elves bringing Lord Elrond two vessels of steeping water. He watched him pick and choose herbs to muddle and dump into a cup, pouring water over them. Elrond grabbed a bundle from another jar and crumbled it into a bowl. Dumping warm water in after it, he swirled it around with a flannel before squeezing it and draping it over Bilbo’s face. Elrond muttered more words in Sindarin Bofur did not recognize before instructing Bilbo to breathe deeply.

Bofur found himself following Elrond’s directions himself and was struck quite suddenly by a calm, almost wholesome feeling as the smell of the herb filled him. Realization dawned: Kingsfoil!

He must have said it out loud, for Elrond replied, “Yes, or athelas, as we call it. It is good for many hurts of the body, both inside and out. Bilbo is breathing it as a vapor right now, though some is also in the remedy I will have him drink when I’m sure he is with us enough to swallow on his own.”
“Aye, back in Ered Luin, we used it often for fever and infection ourselves. I’m ashamed to say we had none in our pack, nor did we see any off the road.”
“I believe around the Shire it is regarded as more of a weed, so I am not surprised none would have been dried last season or packed with any thoughts of usefulness. For many who know its nature, though, it is considered a gift. The Men of Númenor brought it to Middle Earth with them long, long ago.”

“Had we only found him some on the way, I could have dosed him,” Bofur said, regretfully.

Elrond shook his head. “It is sparse, even during height of the summer. It grows only where the Dúnedain dwelled, and is likely not sprouting anywhere at all this early in the season. I doubt there would have been a single leaf to find on the road in the first place, even if you had diverted whole days for its search. These leaves, for that matter, are dried, and so they are lacking some of their true virtue, but they will suffice.”

Kili had been silently (and anxiously) waiting and listening since they had followed Elrond to the room, even though his eyes had not left Bilbo.

“Suffice?” he asked hopefully. “So he will get well?”
“Yes, he will. Though I was alarmed when you brought him, his rapid responses to treatment have already eased my fear. I’m thankful you were this near when the sickness came on, though. He would not have done as well had more days passed.”

Elrond shared a meaningful look with one of the elves assisting him and then glanced back at the dwarrows.

“I’ve a little more to do here and then it will be time for sleep to do the bulk of Bilbo’s healing. My son Elladan will serve as your host in the meantime. He will bring you to food and your lodgings.”

“Son?” Fili said, rushing to bow. “Well met, Lord Elladan.”

Bofur and Kili hastily bowed as well, not realizing it was Lord Elrond’s son who had been doing the bulk of the assisting.

“Please, it is merely ‘Elladan,’ your Highnesses,” Elladan said. “I consider it luck that my errands have returned me home this particular week, for my father has had nothing but glowing praise for the Princes of Erebor and I had hoped to one day meet you. It is unfortunate the circumstances are presently solemn, though a little rest and some food should make tidings more glad.”
“If it is only Elladan, then we insist you drop the royal formalities for us, as well,” Fili replied. “I am Fili. This is my husband, Bofur, and this is my brother, Kili. His husband is Bilbo, currently on the bed, who will doubtless be quite put out by the fact that he was not aware enough to meet you or thank you either one.”

Kili bowed a second time, deeply. “I must thank you for your part of his healing in his place, though it is my hope his voice will return shortly to thank you himself.”

“It will, I assure you. Well, then, I consider you well met indeed, my friends. Let us leave Father to his task and find you some comfort of your own.”

Kili did not move to follow them.

“Kee?” Fili called.
“You go ahead. I will stay with Bilbo.”

Elrond turned to study him, recognizing the look in Kili’s eyes and understanding in an instant that it would be pointless to insist. He nodded for the others to go.
Embracing Kili, Fili whispered in his ear, “I’ll bring you something to eat.”

*****

Though his heart and mind were on how soon he might be able to see Bifur again, Rorimac could not keep himself from openly gawping at the beautiful valley as he and Nori walked. Nothing Bilbo had told them came close to preparing him for the breathtaking reality of being there in person.

Nori led Rorimac around, up stairs and across winding pathways. Each building was as lovely to behold as the last and all seemed to have balconies, large windows, stairs, or other ways to also appreciate the beauty of the valley on the facing-side.

Nori led Rorimac to Bifur’s favorite balcony, figuring if he wasn’t there he would at least be very close by. It was far enough from the courtyard where the wagon was received that the commotion of the travelers’ arrival would have likely missed Bifur entirely, making it double the surprise for both hobbit and dwarf. He grinned widely when he saw the unmistakable form of Bifur exactly where he had supposed he would be: leaning over the railing and staring out into the valley. Nori had no doubt the subject of Bifur’s thoughts walked next to him. He was almost sorry for the privacy he planned to give them, because the surprise and resulting reunion was bound to be delightful.

Rorimac stopped short when he realized who they were walking toward. He looked askance at Nori, who feigned an innocent smile in return.

“You know, now that I think on it, I'm sure the kitchen is the other way,” Nori said. “Isn't that funny? You’d think I would know where things were by now, wouldn’t you?”

With a wink, he left Rorimac alone.

Having heard voices, Bifur turned around and stood shocked as Rorimac strode toward him. He was not able to so much as open his mouth before Rorimac grasped his hands.

“Please, before you gesture anything, I must get this out,” Rorimac said, looking into his eyes before anxiously glancing down to spill out his first couple sentences. “I’ve thought of you every waking hour of every day. When I'm no longer waking to think of you, I dream of you instead. I've read your letters dozens of times. I know you have been concerned in the past but I beg you, give us a chance—give me a chance. I think I might be able to make you happy. I know you already do make me happy.”

Bifur regarded Rorimac with affectionate amusement as the hobbit babbled. Meeting his gaze again, Rorimac's nervous excitement seemed to spur him to speak even faster.

“I have planned so many times what I would say to you. Practiced, even, if you can believe it, which you probably can’t because I doubt I've ever been less smooth-spoken in my life because I'm nervous and rambling and so happy to see you again I could probably burst but I’ve been holding my feelings inside so long and you said to wait until we could look into each others eyes to talk about feelings and now I am and I can’t wait and—your axe. Your axe is not in your forehead. Why is your axe not in your forehead?”

Humming a giggle, Bifur raised Rorimac’s hands to his lips and kissed each one.

“I had planned what to say, too, yet here you are, surprising me all around and stealing my eloquence,” he said.
Rorimac’s eyes grew huge when he heard Bifur speak. “Wait…what? How?”
“Forgive me, but I was not entirely truthful with you about why I stayed behind. Lord Elrond is a master healer and he thought he might be able to help with my speech predicament. In case it turned poorly, I kept it a secret. However, things turned out better than we had hoped and it became my intent to surprise you when you arrived.”
Still astonished, Rorimac found enough words to say, “Well, you certainly did that!”

Bifur's grin faded as Rorimac's own bright, stunned smile unexpectedly fell.

"But Bifur, did you...you didn't do this because of me, did you?"
“No, I did not make this decision for you alone. What is between us was sure to be easier like this, though, and I cannot deny it helped motivate me.”

Rorimac opened his mouth to make a defense but Bifur quieted him with a soft raising of his hand.

“You have said before, have always insisted, and moments ago stood here and reiterated that you had feelings for me before you knew what I had done, or,” Bifur paused to chuckle, “before you even noticed the axe was missing. I will value and treasure that always. However, I have felt isolated for decades, being the sort of person I was with the difficulties communicating I faced. I did not consider myself broken nor do I think of myself now fixed, so to speak, though the things I wish for my future will be easier for me now that I’m able to speak fluently with more than just my kin.”

Heart fluttering, Rorimac asked, “What do you wish for your future?”

Bifur tipped Rorimac’s chin up with gentle fingers, significantly capturing his gaze. He leaned down and pressed a soft kiss to his mouth, lingering a moment before surrendering to Rorimac’s passionate response.

*****

Bilbo woke in the uncomfortably bright light of early morning. It took a few moments to realize he was in Rivendell, though he remembered nothing about arriving--much less getting into bed. He felt Kili stir behind him.

“Good morning,” Kili said. “How do you feel?”
Furrowing his brow and glancing around, Bilbo’s replied weakly, “Like I have no idea what is going on.”

Kili kissed his forehead.

“You were sick—so sick, my jewel. I was terrified we wouldn’t make it to Rivendell in time, but we did. Elrond snatched you up nearly the instant we arrived and carried you off to make you well. When he was finished with your primary treatment, he put you to sleep with healing herbs and walked with us as we carried you back here. You recognize our former betrothal suite, I see.”
“That makes twice now I’ve been unable to thank him for his hospitality due to unconsciousness. Oh! The bed! I’m sure I’m far too grimy for this bed,” lamented Bilbo, annoyed with how taxed his voice sounded so quickly.

“Elrond did some cleaning up as part of his healing process. I sorted you a little more afterwards--just before I changed you into a clean bedshirt--because I knew you would fret about it.”

Bilbo hummed gratefully and closed his eyes. For a moment, Kili thought he might have to wake him again to give him the tea Elrond had said he would be due.

Abruptly, Bilbo sat up. “The ponies! Yavanna’s Grace! What did we do with the ponies?”
Sooingly, Kili replied, “They are boarded and being cared for.”

Dizzy with the sudden movement, Bilbo fell back and relaxed into his pillow again.

“How long have we been here?” he croaked.
“You’ve been sleeping for roughly sixteen hours.”
“No wonder my mouth tastes like the floor of a barn and my bladder is about to burst. Could you…?” Bilbo gestured in a request for assistance.

Kili helped him up to use the facilities, noting with relief Bilbo didn’t need as much help remaining upright this time than he had the last couple times out on the road.

When he got Bilbo back into bed, he handed him a cup. “Here, drink this. Lord Elrond said you needed at least half the pitcher of water when you woke as well as this cup of healing he brewed for you. The brew has long since gone cold, I’m afraid, but he said administering it at any temperature would still be effective.

Bilbo wrinkled his nose, expecting the cup to be as bitter as one of Óin’s teas, but it was actually quite pleasant. He followed it with as much water as he could stand before his stomach felt sick.

“I’m tired again, Kee.”
“Good. Lord Elrond had said the brew would set you back to resting.” Kili kissed his forehead.
“Sleep now, my jewel.”
“But I want to know-“
“-Shh, you’ve already talked too much. Save your throat and your energy. There’ll be time for queries later.”

Bilbo made himself comfortable, turning away from the sun and tucking his hand under the pillow to raise it.

“You should be taking care of yourself,” he murmured sleepily. “Eating…”
“Fee is taking care of me while I take care of you, have no worry.”
“Hey, yeah…” Bilbo opened his eyes. “Where are Fee and Bo?”
“Like me, they’ve scarcely left your side. I finally talked them into going and taking care of themselves for a bit this morning.”
“That’s sweet,” Bilbo mumbled. “Kee?”
“Mmm?”
“Maybe…maybe tell them I asked about them first?”
“Sleep now,” said Kili, smiling lovingly.

Kili climbed into bed with him, nudging up behind him and noting (again, with such relief) that Bilbo was nowhere near as warm as he had been those last two nights in the wagon. It felt strange, wearing bedclothes, but with healers coming in and out—most notably Lord Elrond himself—modesty was called for. Exhausted, Kili let himself follow Bilbo to sleep for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone <3
Food And Secrets

Chapter Summary

Bilbo gets an appetite, the lads from Bag End get letters, and a few eyes get opened.

Chapter Notes

Ok, friends. I was going to break this up into two but couldn't find a good slice point....and I didn't want to make you wait, anyway. It is 11,125 words, so pinky swear you won't forget your favorite bits to comment about as you go, ok?

Thank you <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Other than a few stirrings for tea and the call of nature, Bilbo slept through the day and night.

“Whatever is in that tea with the kingsfoil must be strong indeed,” Fili said.
“Aye, I’m sure,” agreed Bofur. “Though we cannot discount whatever elf magic Lord Elrond has been murmuring in his ear as he has come to check on him.”

Kili gazed at Bilbo’s sleeping form. “Whatever it is, I’m grateful he is no longer wheezing or burning either one. Lord Elrond had mentioned the sleep was the key component of his healing.”

“Don’t forget that Elladan said food would be important, too, just as soon as Bee shows an appetite again,” Fili said.

“I’ll be immensely grateful for that moment,” replied Kili.

Bofur nodded. “It is disconcerting to see him like this, but even moreso for him to not be interested in a meal.”

Fili smiled comfortably, more optimistic about Bilbo’s prognosis than he was when they had arrived.

“Oh, it is coming, I’m sure.”

*****

Bilbo had an odd sense of having done this before, waking to bright daylight in an exquisitely comfortable elvish bed. This time, though, Fili slept to one side and Bofur slept to the other, and Bilbo had a leg tangled with the latter. He propped up on his elbows and found Kili on the other side of Fili. Kili was not sleeping. Instead, he peered back at him, flashing him a heart-melting smile and quickly rising. Bilbo tried to untangle himself from Bofur, waking him and Fili (somehow) in the process.

“Did you sleep well?” asked Kili.
“You know, I can honestly say I did.”

Fili stretched and yawned. “That’s something, at least.”

“So, I can see by the sun it is once again late morning, yeah?” said Bilbo.
“You slept all of yesterday and then through the night,” Bofur said. “Lord Elrond’s knock-out tea is mostly responsible, though.”

Fili shot Bofur a look. “It was necessary, you know.”

“I can’t believe I’ve slept through almost two days in Rivendell,” Bilbo said, glancing around the room. “Plus I feel like I could eat an entire warg.”

“You’re hungry?” Kili asked.

“Starved!”

Kili could almost cry with elation. “And your throat? How is that?”

“Fine, everything is fine. Oooh,” Bilbo said, having stood up and sat back down again. “The body isn’t quite used to moving around at my normal pace yet. There we go.”

Bilbo stood more slowly and was able to walk to the water closet unassisted this time. While he was gone, Kili began running a bath and spoke with Bofur and Fili about arranging some food for their patient.

Fili was anxious to spend some time with a waking Bilbo for a change, having been missing him desperately the past few days. However, he did not think he had the right to insist upon the time with Bilbo for which his heart yearned, no matter how much he desired it. Bofur had told him the night before he was feeling much the same, but he also reminded Fili the trials of traveling and enduring Bilbo’s illness were also part of what they had agreed to: secrecy in public, sharing in private. Fili thought about how he would feel if it was Bofur in a similar situation to Bilbo and swallowed his disappointment in having to wait a little longer, taking Bofur with him to see when breakfast could happen instead.

When Bilbo reappeared, Kili gestured towards the filling bathing tub. “I thought you might enjoy a bath while Fee and Bo are working on arranging breakfast. Elladan said getting some food in you will be the last portion of your healing, though it is likely Lord Elrond will insist you have another elvish tea with your meal just to keep you on the right path.”

“I hope that one doesn’t send me to sleep. I’ve missed so much. For example…who is Elladan?”

“One of Lord Elrond’s sons. He is often not here from what I gather, but he happened to be home when we rode in. He helped Lord Elrond with your healing.”

“So much to catch up on, then! Well, I’ll make this bath a quick one, though I must say I’ve missed this particular tub enough that perhaps I might want another one later just for soaking. For now, I think it will be nice just to wash some of the sickness off. What are you doing?”

Newly naked, Kili dropped his last piece of clothing. “I’m taking a bath with you. I could use to get clean myself.”

Bilbo crossed his arms. “You’ve not been seeing after yourself, have you?”

“Fee has been feeding me and I’ve been sleeping some of the time you have,” Kili insisted. “I’ve gotten my days and nights a little turned around, though.”

“Have you spent any time with your friends? Shot a single arrow? Washed up even a little?”

“I washed myself off some when I initially cleaned you up for bed.”

“And the rest?”

Kili shrugged and helped Bilbo into the water, following in after.

“How could I roam around Rivendell having fun when you were sick and sleeping?”

“Kee…”

“Like you would have done any less for me. Fee and Bo have been here almost nonstop, too. They’ve left only at my insistence.”

Bilbo had just dunked his head when he remembered. “Oh! What do you know of Rori and Bifur?”

Kili took over washing Bilbo’s hair, grinning. “Oh my goodness, just you wait until I tell you about Bifur!”
Kili filled Bilbo in on the gossip that he knew, most of which came courtesy of Fili. He prefaced the story of Bifur seeing Rorimac again with Bifur’s operation. In sharing the tale of the actual reunion, he also included the part (of which Nori was quite proud) about Nori’s ruse to surprise Rorimac with Bifur and vice versa, which also had the added benefit of giving Ori some privacy with his hobbits.

“--And then, while Nori had been taking Rorimac to see Bifur, Nîfon came home and inadvertently got an eyeful of Ori, Thodora, and Chadham!”

“Oh my,” Bilbo laughed. “I can only imagine what they were doing. Well, any road, I’m thrilled for Bifur’s good news. I hope things unfold well between him and Rori—you know Rori adores him so.”

“From what I’ve heard, things have unfolded, sprouted, and bloomed.” Kili’s tone turned conspiratorial. “Rorimac and Bifur disappeared after lunch the day before yesterday and have only surfaced for meals—and appearing quite pleased with themselves, if you catch the meaning. Bifur came looking for Bofur early on to hug him hello and another time at some point yesterday to check in, but that and meals are all anyone has seen of them since we arrived.”

“Mm-hmm, and I can’t imagine they have been stashed away all that time merely crocheting, after all. Well, then. That is glad news, indeed.”

*****

Pink and clean, if still a bit weak for Bilbo’s part, Bilbo and Kili went to a late breakfast. Breakfast for the rest had already come and gone and while Bofur had offered to get their friends for him, Bilbo insisted he not take the time from his own meal to gather them back. Bilbo was working his way toward returning to full social interaction, anyhow. Elrond himself was present, though, and Estel was with him, overjoyed to see Bilbo awake and about.

Bilbo said, “Lord Elrond, I’ve been told I’m only sitting here right now due to your skill and care. In fact, I’ve heard you tended to me yourself the majority of the past couple days.”

“How could I not? If I didn’t personally see to it that the Hobbit Prince of Erebor was healed, It would undo all the goodwill that has been done between dwarves and elves.”

“I hardly think that the case,” Bilbo said, waving off the flattery.

Under his breath, Bofur muttered, “Have you met Thorin?”

Cutting a quick, sideways glance towards Bofur, Bilbo continued to address Elrond, “Regardless, though, I thank you very much. I’m weary, but I’m feeling much better. Simply my voice alone—I almost sound like myself again.”

“You are most welcome,” Elrond said. “Do not be shy about filling your stomach, either. The majority of your current weakness is due to your marked lack of nutrients; you’ve scarcely had more than fluids since before you arrived. Lindir will see to it that the next few days carry a more hobbit-like food schedule for you to make up for the lack.”

“Few days?” Bilbo’s heart sank. “Forgive me, Lord Elrond, but we had not planned to be in Rivendell that long.”

While Bilbo had slept, Elrond strongly suggested to the dwarrows that he stay put for the better part of a week at the least. Kili had anticipated Bilbo might resist.

“You also had not planned on getting so ill,” Kili said gently. “We are in haste, it is true, but you must make a full recovery before we head back out. We do not have friends like Lord Elrond between here and Beorn’s to help us should you relapse and even if we did, it could prove a greater delay than simply staying here until you’ve regained yourself.”

Bilbo sighed. “You’re right, you know.”
“Not to mention, your friends have been eager to see you again,” Bofur said. “Some of them will depart with us, ‘tis true, but folks like Estel here only get the duration of your visit to spend. Surely a few more days in such company will pass rapidly indeed.”

Estel flashed him a grateful smile before glancing to Bilbo hopefully.

Bilbo set his face and nodded seriously for Estel’s benefit. “You make a fine point, Bo, and one I’ll make sure I do not overlook again. Staying longer will be both prudent and enjoyable.”

Bilbo ate, finding with some annoyance that his stomach was full to the point of uncomfortable well before his plate was empty. He had gone too many days without regular meals (or even solid food) and his capacity had diminished. Fili must have noticed, because he asked Elrond if Bilbo would be welcome to take a plate back with him. Bilbo warmed with affection that Fili would have so perfectly assessed the situation, taking it upon himself to make what would have been an embarrassing request for Bilbo to make himself. It hit Bilbo then how bone-deep he had missed them all. His only partial awareness and sleeping had kept them from conversation, and the road before that had kept them from bed. The ache in his gut was not entirely attributable to an overabundance of toast, to be certain.

When the meal had concluded, Elrond addressed them with purpose.

“Now that I have you all in one place, I have letters to distribute to you.”

Bilbo had not seen Elrond carry anything to lunch, yet a small group of letters was produced from somewhere beside the table.

“Letters?” asked Fili, perplexed.
“From the East, as a matter of fact,” Elrond said, handing one each to Bilbo, Kili, Fili, and Bofur. “They arrived only a handful of days before you did—along with a letter requesting me to hold them in my personal care until you arrived.”

Bilbo went pale, and this time not from sickness.

“Something has happened,” he murmured.
“I do not believe that is the case, though only reading them will tell you for sure.” Elrond stood as an unmistakable signal to the Estel that it was time to leave. “Perhaps we shall leave you to it.”

“But—” Estel started to argue, as he had been waiting with the most patience a lad his age could conjure to have a chance to catch up with Bilbo and Bofur again.

Elrond silenced him with a look. Bilbo was too distracted and distressed to notice it, though the exchange had not escaped Bofur’s notion. He clapped Estel’s shoulder.

“I hope you can find time to take a meeting with me later, if you please. I have new songs and stories to share, and I am eager to get a full report on your own endeavors since last we were able to collaborate.”

Estel grinned wide. “Yes, please! You do mean later today, right?”
“You bet,” replied Bofur, smiling back.
“And Bilbo?”
Bilbo snapped back to the present at the mention of his name. “Mmm?”
“You’ll have time later to meet with me and Estel?” Bofur asked.
“Of course! Of course I will. I do apologize for being distracted. I’ve not been well.”

Elrond cleared his throat and Estel knew he had better not give him need to do it a second time.
“That’s okay,” Estel said, jumping up and meeting Elrond in the archway. “You may find me in the library this afternoon.”

Once they were alone, Bilbo could not get his letter open fast enough.

Bilbo,

I will never be able to tell you how much I needed the letter you wrote me, not if I took one hundred years to do so. Simply know that I did need it and it was received with elation and gratitude.

Without you and Fili and Kili, the mountain has seemed empty. I have had that thought as far back as when I had returned to Erebor after the battle. Balin reassured me back then I simply needed to give it time. I felt that way all through those months after, with the only respite being the visit you four made before setting off to the Shire. Now, even with Dís here, I still find it lacking. I’ve tried, believe me, especially when I was trying to get over my heartache. When you arrive this spring-- when you, Kili, and Fili walk through those gates again--Erebor will finally and at along last feel like home. It cannot happen soon enough.

That is part of it, but not all of it. Your letter set me aflame. More than that, truly. In addition to the obscene yearnings already smoldering within me, your letter has been the fuel for new fantasies and imaginings. I’ve had more orgasms since I received your letter than I had in many of the weeks that led up to it put together. Thanks to you, if the mere thought of us tying each other down crosses my mind, I cannot think straight to accomplish anything until I’ve conjured the full fantasy and finished myself off. Even now, I’m thinking of what it would be like for you to restrain me--forcing pleasure after pleasure on me until I’m shuddering in rapture--and I’m desperate to come.

I still love you as I always have and my desire for you grows fiercer with every day. Keeping myself from pouncing you immediately upon your arrival at the gate will undoubtedly be one of the greatest trials of my reign thus far.

I hope you have packed that hithein, my love.

Yours Eternally,

Thorin

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Kili opened the note addressed to him.

Kili,

Your letter to me was unexpected and so salaciously stunning that I read it again with my hand around my cock. I did not know you would miss me in such sensual ways, though you’ve now made me bold enough to admit that I have indeed missed you like that.

When I’ve replayed our encounters, for my part, I’ve recognized I was still shy and uncertain of my boundaries with you and your wants for me. I hesitated to sample you then in the ways I’m fantasizing about now. That is not to say I was not satisfied with said encounters, but my own developing desires combined with the reading of yours only emphasizes how much ground was left unexplored.
If I may work my will, our reunion will be a conflagration. I’ve not yet been fully and properly touched by you. I consider what it would like to be tasted by you, invaded, and my hand slips back around my cock, stroking me until I come to those thoughts of you.

I’m ready for you to return to Erbor as my lover. This time, I promise I shall not hesitate.

Anxiously,

Thorin

Kili glanced up quickly, elated the others were still too involved in their own business to notice he was sitting there, half-breathless with a hard, aching cock. He swallowed and tried to get himself back under control before anyone noticed.

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Fili felt Bilbo’s concern, which was compounded by each of them having their own single letter from Erebor. Unsure what he was going to see, he unfolded his letter cautiously.

Fili,

Your letter was an enormous comfort, as well as a source of intrigue. The days cannot seem to pass fast enough now, not when I have so many questions for you. I would love to have some meetings with you and my favored, core council about these ideas you are having.

Additionally, you’ve mentioned some more personal thoughts that have stirred my interest. Of course, those are up to you if you wish to share or not, but perhaps your own growing pains might help me address the ones I’m feeling myself.

Is it too soon to send the ravens scouting to foretell your arrival yet?

Thorin

Fili smiled at Thorin’s jest, though he didn’t understand why it would be important for Thorin to send one last letter to Rivendell without some slice of vital information. He considered perhaps it was the loneliness that moved Thorin to do so and the thought made his chest ache. Suddenly, another few days in Rivendell seemed as disappointing to him as it had to Bilbo. Though the tone of the letter was light enough, something deep within Fili told him—and had been telling him, if he was being truthful—that Thorin especially needed them right now.

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If someone had asked Bofur what he might have expected less than a personal letter from Thorin awaiting him in Rivendell, he would have been hard pressed to come up with an answer. He hoped it was not ill news and curiously delved in.
Bofur,

Your letter came at a vital time for me, an unexpected support from a most unlikely source. I did not know how much I had needed your words of comfort until I held them in my hands.

I suppose there was a time when I would have thanked you between clenched teeth, perhaps bitter—or at least envious—that you were once again being magnanimous in a situation where so often I have not been. I’ve frequently been angry with you for being a better person than I have been. This time, however, I shall thank you sincerely and wholly.

Thorin

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“Oh, that’s a relief!” Bilbo sighed. “This was simply a reply. He is still expecting us for the wedding.”
“I knew he would never have called off the visit, even if the wedding itself had been called off,” Bofur said.
Fili glanced at him sharply. “Bite your tongue about that wedding cancelling business.”
“I didn’t think he would have called off the visit for any reasons of his own,” Bilbo said, remembering their beautiful shared dream. “More that I was worried something had happened outside his control.”
“Or he had gotten news of something that would imperil us, like goblins gathering numbers along the road,” added Fili.
“It was quite a strain on my body for a few moments, though. I don’t have enough energy restored yet to handle a rush of fear like that.”
“Here, why don’t you go back to the room and sit for a little while longer,” Bofur said, standing to help Bilbo up. “Maybe nap if you feel like it. Seems we have plans before—and likely after—dinner with Estel. He’s been asking about you ten times a day for the past two days.”

Bilbo didn’t need the help getting up, but Bofur’s touch felt lovely and he leaned into it.

“Yes, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll go back to our room for now. Lord Elrond assured me that last tea wasn’t dosed with sleeping herbs, but I’m certainly feeling something.”
Kili spoke for the first time since reading his letter. “I’ll go with you.”
“Kee, I’m fine. You’re welcome to catch up with your friends today.”
“Please, I want to.”

Bilbo evaluated him, noticing Kili was flushed, fidgety, and had a peculiar look in his eye.

“Of course, dear heart.”
“If you don’t mind, Bee, I might go see if I can find Bifur,” Bofur said. “Now that you’re on the mend, and all.”
“Mind? How could I possibly mind when you’ve spent so much time with me already, especially considering I was unconscious for most of it? Please, go see Bifur. Make sure you tell him I’m most anxious to see him again myself.”

Fili was torn between going back to the room with Bilbo and Kili or following Bofur. Though his first inclination was to follow Bilbo, he had gotten the impression that perhaps Bilbo and Kili might wish to be alone, or that Bilbo might want another rest on his full stomach. He decided to follow Bofur’s example and give them space.
Fee and Bofur kissed Bilbo and Kili on their cheeks only, in case anyone might have been watching, and took their leave.

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Both Bifur and Rorimac were happy to see Bofur and Fili. Though Fili wound up not lingering with them long, Bifur, Bofur, and Rorimac had no shortage of conversation after he had left. Bifur spent some time fleshing out more of the story of his procedure and recovery for Bofur, Bofur made sure to share as much as he could (without embarrassing him) about the majority of Rorimac’s focus this fall and winter being this reunion, and Rorimac spoke at length at how Bofur looked after him on Bifur’s behalf.

“I’d never held a sword in my life, but Bo especially made sure I had one for this journey,” Rorimac said.

Bifur raised his eyebrows, feeling the prickle of jealousy along his flesh at yet another tale of Bofur (Bo) being there for Rorimac.

“oh?” he asked cautiously.

“Us dwarrows have been training the hobbits, just in case something happens on the road,” Bofur explained, missing Bifur’s tone. “Rori has a surprising talent for the sword and Thodora…well, I daresay I wouldn’t want to cross her in close combat. She is deadly with the dagger Ori brought her. The hobbits all did remarkably, once some proper techniques were taught. Remember how Poor Bilbo had to learn as he went? I daresay he wound up doing just fine, though, considering how many times he saved our necks.”

Bofur chuckled at the memory, though he noticed Bifur’s stare seemed to burrow into Rorimac, showing no signs of mirth. Rorimac noticed it, too.

“Is something wrong?” Rorimac asked.

Crossing his arms, Bifur said, “He calls you ‘Rori,’ now? And you call him ‘Bo?’”

Bofur did not come straight out with an accusation, but his burning expression and suspicious tone spoke volumes as to the conclusions he was drawing. It became suddenly clear to Bofur how their stories could sound to someone who hadn’t been there. Bofur was quick to correct Bifur, lest he get too comfortable with the wrong idea.

“I’m sorry, Bifur. I think you’re misreading a certain degree of familiarity that does not exist between us. Bilbo calls him Rori and I’ve picked it up along the way. Bilbo, Fili, and Kili all call me Bo—even you call me that, sometimes—and he likely picked it up in a similar fashion. That’s all that is. As for the rest, he has thought of little but you since you left and I’ve done my best to bring him here to you in one hopeful piece.”

Rorimac laid a gentle hand on Bifur’s crossed arms. “Be not jealous. There is naught but friendship between your cousin and I. My focus has been on you alone and, besides, I daresay he’s already got his hands quite full as it is.”

Now it was Bofur’s turn to stare at Rorimac. “How did you…?”

“What? Please do not tell me you thought you had all been keeping it secret?” Rorimac laughed, incredulous.

If Bifur’s jealousy had been subdued by the reassurances, it had been utterly smothered by sudden curiosity.
“What are you two talking about?”

Bofur rubbed the back of his neck nervously. “Well, um…I should probably fill you in on what has happened at Bag End since I saw you last.”

Arriving back to their room, Bilbo collapsed in one of the more comfortable chairs. The walk to and from lunch had taken more out of him than he had anticipated. As Kili closed the door, they both began speaking at once.

“Alright, dear heart-“
“Bee, I-“

They both stopped.

“You first,” said Kili.
“I was going to say that you’ve been far too quiet and I know it has something to do with the letter you received, but as soon as I opened my mouth to tell you so, you were no longer quiet.”
“That is because I’ve been dying to tell you and anxiously awaiting for us to be in private. Bee, Thorin he…he sent me an erotic letter.”

Kili let the words hang in the air, waiting for Bilbo to be as astonished as he had been.

“Well, you sent him one, did you not?” replied Bilbo.

Kili quirked a half-frown, disappointed that Bilbo had not been appropriately astonished.

“Yes, but I didn’t think…you have to read it to understand,” he said, thrusting the letter into Bilbo’s hands and sitting at his feet. “It is more graphic than mine was.”

Kili watched the signs of arousal bloom as Bilbo read, somewhat more satisfied in his reaction now.

“It is erotic, to be sure,” Bilbo said.
Kili would not let such an understatement rest on its own. “Erotic enough for you to be turning pink, wetting your lips, and shifting as you stiffen in your trousers,” he pointed out.
“Fair enough,” Bilbo agreed. “I’m guessing from your own lingering reaction that wearing a dwarven tunic to lunch instead of a shirt with hobbity braces was a particularly glad choice, given the circumstances.”

Kili grinned. “Yes! Fuck, I was so hard, Bee. I am again, merely thinking about it.”
“I’m afraid I don’t have the energy at the moment to be more than a spectator, should you choose to take care of yourself. I don’t even have the energy to take care of my own at the moment.”
“What if I took care of it for you?” Kili said seductively, running his hands up Bilbo’s thighs. “Are you too sick still, you think, to just sit there and come?”

Bilbo moaned, “Kee, gods! I want to. I’ve missed your touch so much.”
“Then let me do this for you,” Kili said, freeing Bilbo’s cock. “Don’t strain yourself or worry about mine. Just let it happen.”

Bilbo’s head fell back the moment Kili’s hot tongue slid over his cock. He already felt guilty—he hadn’t touched Kili sexually in days and felt like he needed to do something for him in return. An obscene thought crept into his mind.
“Pretend I’m Thorin,” he murmured. Kili stopped, looking up at him. “What?”
“Just this once, with my permission, pretend it is Thorin’s cock you are sucking. Imagine what it could be like.”
“I.”
“It is okay, Kee. Do it. I want you to do it.”

Head swimming with arousal, Kili did as requested. This was filthy and forbidden in so many ways that he could feel himself already leaking. He tugged at his laces and grasped himself with one hand while adding the other to his lover’s pleasure. He closed his eyes and imagined letting himself go, having this without consequence, and drinking Thorin as he came. Bilbo having given him such an obscene and unexpected order seemed only to make the desire sharper and his want for both of them drove him further still. He recalled Thorin’s letter—"I consider what it would like to be tasted by you"—and bobbed faster, imagining this heat and weight against his tongue as Thorin’s. His desperation spiked as Bilbo’s moans blended with Thorin’s in his mind. Bilbo was not yet there, but when Kili imagined Thorin breathlessly begging and calling his name, it pushed him beyond his limit. Kili wound up groaning his own orgasm around Bilbo’s cock just ahead of Bilbo reaching his own. When they were both finished, Kili stood and looked around for something to clean his hand.

“I would appreciate if you wouldn’t tell Fee,” Kili said. “About the letter, I mean.”
“Again with ‘don’t tell Fee.’ That’s the second time, by my counting, and I must say it seems wholly unlike you.”
Kili looked at his feet. “I know.”
“He knows you and Thorin—”
“I know he knows,” Kili said. “I just...well, he, really, needs a little more time.”
“Kee, he has had weeks.”
“Please?”
“Of course. He never would have heard it from me, anyhow, but it might be wise for you to be prepared for the reality...both of how you will navigate it was well as the possibility that Fee might arrive in Erebor less prepared than he had promised.” Bilbo ended his thought with a yawn. “On a more pressing note, though, I’m assessing how many steps it will be from here to the bed, but only so much as to figure out where I’m sleeping than if.”
“Allow me to solve that for you, then.”

Kili scooped him up, carried him over to the bed, and helped to settle him in.

“How’s that?” he asked.
“More than wonderful. Yavanna’s Grace, these beds!” Bilbo gazed at Kili adoringly. “Thank you, Kee. I’m going to give you a proper seeing to soon, that I swear. I could curse this body—all these days of longing for you and now we even have a bed and I’m too weary to do anything about it. Later, though—”
“-Later you will be sleeping through the night. I am amenable to taking care of you and myself at bedtime, should it help you sleep, but you will not be exerting yourself as my lover tonight.”
“But—”
“-We can re-evaluate tomorrow and see if you’re back to something closer to normal. Rest up for now, though. I’ve no doubt Estel will be talking your ears off later…and likely you’ll need the energy so you can talk his off, too.”
“Kee, I know Fee has to be missing you—in bed, I mean--and no doubt Bo, too. If you would want to…I mean, if you get the chance and you think you might—”
“My next filthy encounter will not happen without you, my jewel. Fee and Bo might be there, if you’re well enough, but I’m not going to be off having dalliances while you’re trying to get well. It
is simply not going to happen.”
“In that case, I also promise I will not bed Bo or Fee either one until it can be the four of us. However, at least do some of your visiting while I’m napping, please? It is only a nap, brought on by the wonderful orgasm you just gave me. No guilt should be involved were you to go around and say hello to a few friends before the day is out.”

Kili kissed him and left him to rest.

*****

Fili had left Bofur with Bifur and Rorimac early on. He hadn’t been asked to, nor had it been hinted at, but he thought to give them a little space. Fili did not mind, though. Strolling along his favored paths, he breathed deep breaths of the valley’s healing, magical air and sighed them out contentedly. Much to his surprise, he ran into Kili.

“I thought you were with Bee?”
“He is resting again.”
“We’ll have to take care not to let him snooze through lunch. You heard Lord Elrond: food is important now.”
“I know.”

Fili thought he caught a hint of indignance and felt guilty. “I know you know, Kee. I’ve felt so helpless while he was sick—we all have—and it makes me feel more…I don’t know…grounded, I suppose, to be part of his care. It isn’t me thinking you don’t know how to do it yourself.”

Kili hummed his understanding but did not speak further. Fili wondered if he hadn’t somehow offended him more with his apology.

“So,” Fili said. “What are you doing, now?”
“I thought I might catch up with Nori and Nîfon, or shoot some arrows with the Captain. I’ve already been to see Daerbes and Nerithel, but they are not at home.”

Relieved Kili didn’t seem angry, Fili said, “That’s a good idea. I’ll go with you.”

Silence bloomed again as they walked, and not the comfortable kind Fili was used to. Before they reached their destination, he stayed Kili with a gentle hand.

“You’ve been oddly quiet since lunch. What’s going on?”
“Nothing,” Kili said quickly.

Fili’s eyes narrowed. This was not about Kili being upset with him over Bilbo at all.

“You’re hiding something.”
Simultaneously, Kili set his jaw, raised his eyebrows, and too-rapidly shook his head. “No, I’m not.”
“You are so. You’re doing that thing where you’re moving weird when you talk, somewhere between a jerk and a twitch.”
“Psssh, you’re daft!”
“There! You did it again!”
“I did not! I don’t do that!”
“Kee,” warned Fili, giving him the fail-proof look that always got Kili to confess.

Kili groaned in defeat. “Fine. I got a letter from Thorin.”
“It was a letter from Thorin that is making you talk too fast and get twitchy?” Fili crossed his arms
skeptically. “Seems unlikely to me.”
Kili glanced down again, then back up at Fili from under his eyebrows. “It was a, ah, sexual letter.”

Fili frowned. Now this was more believable.

“Let’s see it, then.”
“No,” said Kili.
Fili blinked. “What do you mean ‘no?’”
“I mean no. It was for me and not you. It was enough to tell you the nature of it.”
Still stunned, Fili said, “But we share everything with each other.”
“Which is why you should leave this be. It was my letter, not yours.”
“I know it was your letter. I’m just...really? You don’t think you can trust me with it?”
“Look, you don’t own me, you know,” Kili said. He paced back and forth a few steps. “I don’t need you in every corner of my business, and no, for the record, I don’t know if I can trust you with this, not when you’ve been so beastly about me and Thorin thus far. Maybe I want this for my own. Can’t I have some damned privacy for once in this life?”

Stricken, Fili said, “You can have all the privacy you want.”

Fili stalked away and Kili’s indignance soon faded to regret. He didn’t mean to tell Fili he didn’t trust him, though it boiled down to just that. If Fili hadn’t been jealous of Thorin, Kili would have shown him the letter as easily as he had shown it to Bilbo.

Fili’s shock at his unwillingness to share had riled Kili up. Now that his temper had somewhat cooled, Kili realized he would have been shocked, too, had their positions been reversed. They weren’t the type to keep secrets from each other.

He ruefully stared down the path where Fili had disappeared but did not attempt to follow him.

*****

Kili spent the next hour working out his frustration practicing his archery. On his way back to his room, he stopped for a visit with Nori and Nîfon. It had been quite something to see the change in Nori since he had left the Shire. He was still sly and roguish, but softer, somehow, and more talkative. Watching the two of them together reminded Kili of himself and Bilbo after their betrothal. Though he wanted to ask, he recalled how uncomfortable Fili used to be when people would ask after his marriage plans in front of Bofur and thought better of it. He was glad to see his friends not only happy, but happy together.

Kili went to rouse Bilbo for lunch, finding him already awake.

“Kee! You just missed Fee. He came to remind me it was time to eat again.”
“Did he wake you?”
“Oh no, I was just enjoying lolling around on our bed. That’s enough being a slug for now, though. I’ve got food to eat and a date with Bofur and Estel soon after,” Bilbo grinned up at Kili from his pillow, though it didn’t last. “What is wrong, dear heart?”

Kili shook his head, swallowing his emotion thickly, but then thought better of trying to keep any more secrets that afternoon.

“It is Fee. We got into an argument.”
Bilbo rose and embraced him. “Do you want to tell me about it?”
Hugging him back, Kili said, “Not at the moment. Is that alright?”
“Of course it is, dear heart.”

Lunch had brought no sign of Fili. In fact, it was only Nori, Ori, Thodora, and Chadham who joined them. Bilbo didn’t find it terribly unusual considering the way things had more casually run in Rivendell last summer, but he could tell Fili’s absence weighed upon Kili.

*****

After lunch, Nori walked with Kili and Bilbo to the library, where Bilbo was due to meet Estel. As it happened, they had managed to beat both Estel and Bifur there.

Because Kili had mentioned earlier he planned to leave Bilbo and Bofur to their special time with Estel—noting quite correctly that the three of them would have more than enough visit in them for the night all on their own—Bilbo told Kili he did not have to wait with him for their arrival. Bilbo knew Kili’s mind was on whatever argument he had gotten into with his brother and wanted Kili to have the opportunity to go look for him if he wished. It was worth it to get a smile and a kiss that told him Kili knew exactly what Bilbo was doing and how grateful he had been for it.

Much to Bilbo’s surprise, Nori didn’t leave when Kili did. Bilbo had been about to break the silence with some cordial conversation when Nori spoke first.

“I wonder sometimes about hobbits, you know.”
“Oh? Wonder what?”
“What it Is about you, I suppose.”
Bilbo smiled, bewildered. “Fair enough.”

The silence bloomed again, and Bilbo fidgeted with his hem, wondering what Nori’s point had been—and why he continued to linger.

“When you were last in the mountain,” Nori said, "you had left to live your truth. Later, you saw it the rest of the way through, all the way to marrying Kili. Now, I’ve never been a dwarf who needed extra courage, but there was something about you and Kili striking out to follow your hearts that gave me the extra bit of nerve I needed with Nîfon. With what he stirred within me, I had enough daring to court him on my own, but considering you and Kili served to fortify my resolve when it came time to do the more difficult, public things, such as telling my brothers and going to Lord Elrond. There is not a doubt in my mind that Ori drew strength from your boldness, too.”

Moved, Bilbo replied, “I, um, thank you.”

“As it so happens, the nearer spring has come the more I’ve been fretting about taking Nîfon to the mountain--not just to my brothers and our friends, most of whom know him, but to the rest of Erebor who might not be so kind.” He reached out and held Bilbo’s braid gently. “Here you are giving me courage again.”

Until that moment, Bilbo had thoroughly forgotten he was wearing more beads on his braid than would be served by proper explanation--and he wasn't sure how much explanation he wanted to attempt now. He went with the assumption, staying vague.

“Well, don't go thinking I'm more than I am, Nori. I'm Shire-brave, I suppose, but before I get to Erebor, some of these beads must come off my braid. There are...things that aren't considered proper within those walls and we will have to hold those secrets tighter to our bosom.”
“You’ll have no judgement from me, Bilbo Baggins, and Shire-brave or not, you still have my gratitude. If ever you need my assistance, I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me for help.”

Bilbo had never expected Nori (of all dwarrows) to move him to tears, but there he was, swallowing thickly and hoping his voice didn’t waver.

“Nori,” he began, but he was interrupted by—

“BILBO!”

Estel raced towards him, with Bofur jovially following behind. In a flash, Bilbo wound up with two arms full of enthusiastic youngster that nearly toppled him, due to Estel’s height.

“I’ll leave you to your composing,” Nori said.

He bowed deeply, reserving a quick, private wink for Bilbo. Bilbo smiled back and hoped Nori could see the appreciation in his expression.

*****

Kili might have taken a longer way back than he needed to, hoping to bump into Fili accidentally (on purpose). As luck would have it, he didn’t have to meander far to get his wish of seeing Fili. However, Fili had seen him, too, and disappeared quickly in the direction of their room.

Undeterred, Kili followed, tugging a paper from his pocket and softly tapping on the door. He endured a few tense moments of hesitation before there was an answer.

“Come in, Kili,” called Fili, sounding resigned.

Kili entered the room and walked straight to Fili, his hand outstretched with his offering.

“Here.”

Fili glanced at the paper, then back up at Kili. “What’s that?”

“The letter.”

“No,” Fili said, repentant. “You didn’t want me to see it.”

“Please, Fee. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I said what I said and behaved the way I did. I can’t stand us not speaking, so,” Kili gestured towards him again with the letter, “Here.”

Fili’s face felt warm with shame. “You don’t have to do this for me to talk to you. You are right—not everything you do is my business. I’ll get over it.”

“I don’t want you to get over it. I want to apologize for not trusting you and let you read it.”

“I shouldn’t have even asked.”

Fili meant it, too. After the shock of Kili’s tirade had worn off, he realized Kili had been right. Though Kili always willingly shared his secrets with him, it wasn’t Fili’s right to demand them. Kili having a secret without him had simply made him feel left out. It was doubly so given that, as the first heir, there was almost nothing in their lives Thorin had excluded him from in favor of Kili. For Kili and Thorin both to be involved in something that did not nor would not have anything to do with Fili seemed strange, even if he had never imagined being a part of it. He felt jealous, though he wasn’t even sure of whom.

“I don’t want the letter, Kee. Come here; I just want to hold you.”

They hugged and Kili nearly collapsed in relief in Fili’s arms.
“I should not have said those things to you,” he said. “I don’t want privacy from you. I don’t know why I even said that. I’ve—I’ve been so worried about Bee, worried and tired.”
“We all have,” Fili said, kissing Kili’s hair. “You know, I’ve been embracing you so much lately for worry and sadness…holding you like this makes me realize how much I’ve missed holding you simply for the sake of enjoying you. I’ve missed you both more than I know how to tell you.”
“Fili,” rasped Kili, looking up at him.

Fili met his lips, slow at first, but deepening with the inquisitive slick of Kili’s tongue. As it went on, hands tangled into hair and tunneled up tunics, their bodies pressed more tightly together, and their breathing grew heavier and more desperate.

“Fuck, I want you,” gasped Fili. “I’ve wanted you so fiercely and for so long but Bo and I promised each other we would not take you or Bilbo to bed until we could all go together.”

Kili laughed.

“What’s so funny, fool?”
“We have the same promise.”
“What in the bloody Void were we thinking?” Fili sighed. “I could burst right this moment.”
“Hopefully you and Bo have no such arrangement with each other. Bee needs to rest tonight, but perhaps we could keep the room vacant long enough for you to keep from bursting.”
“If it comes down to that, you needn’t stay gone on our account. We still have our accommodation, if you’ll recall.”

Kili smiled, remembering. When Elrond showed them their rooms, Fili had argued—a little too quickly for innocence—that they did not need to take up two rooms when the suite for Kili and Bilbo would easily accommodate three dwarrows and a hobbit. Lord Elrond had raised one elegant eyebrow and surveyed them—far too knowingly for Kili’s comfort. He told them, “We will not need use of this one, so you may retain it in case you find it cramped sharing a room.”

“I do recall. What do you suppose he knows?”
“He has foresight, Kee, and he told Bee he cannot always select what he sees. Who knows what sort of scene might have wound up flicking across his mind?”
Covering his face in embarrassment, Kili said, “Durin’s bloody axe! Don’t say things like that—I’ll never be able to look him in the eye again.”
“You’re half his height, you can’t look him in the eye now!” quipped Fili, scarcely able to hold back his laugh.
“It is astonishing how quickly you can make me go from wanting to suck you to wanting to thwap you.”
“Hush, you adore me.”
Kili smiled. “I truly do, Fee.”
Fili rested his forehead against Kili’s. “I do, too.”

*****

After a few hours—which included a break for dinner—Estel was eventually called away for his bedtime, though Bilbo and Bofur remained in the library for a short while after.

Bilbo huffed a sound.

“Are you cold?” Bofur asked, scooting to put his arm around him.
“No, just had one of those sudden breaths. Happens sometimes when I’ve been ill. Now that you
bring it up, though, it is odd how the chill doesn’t seem to affect Rivendell.”
“Perhaps it has just warmed the past couple days.”
“It is possible it has, though now I’m curious. I shall have to ask Estel some time if they ever get truly cold weather here. For example, could you imagine how beautiful the valley would look after a snow?”
“Cor, wouldn’t that be a sight?”
“One of these years, perhaps we could see about the potential of wintering in Rivendell, if Lord Elrond would assent to such a lengthy visit.”
“I wouldn’t presume to speak for him, but I couldn’t imagine him saying no to you. He has a tremendous amount of warmth and respect for you.”
“You as well, you know, and Fili and Kili, too. In fact, given all the animosity throughout more ancient history as well as more recent bruises, I’m still a little surprised just how well Lord Elrond has taken to all of you—Nori and Bifur not the least of which—and how well all of you have taken to Rivendell.”

Bofur hummed agreement, fidgeting against Bilbo’s arm.

“Speaking of Bifur…” he said. “Rori and Bifur both know. About us.”
Turning sideways on his seat to look at Bofur, Bilbo said, “About us?”
Bofur set his lip and nodded. “Well, Bifur kind of knew already—he knows I’ve been in love with you forever, and I probably would have shared confidence with him, anyhow—but Rori knows, too. In fact, he thinks it is amusing we thought we were keeping it secret.”

Bilbo considered this.

“We’ve been careful not to kiss or be too sexual in mixed company, but when I think on it, it is obvious now there are other ways we’ve not been keeping our love for each other much of a mystery,” he said. “Nori pointed out my braid today. Before that, I hadn’t once paused to consider I have more courting beads hanging from it than I have husbands.”
“Aye, and even at that you have one husband more than the rest of Erebor knows about. We have to get better at this before we get to Erebor and no mistake. I must say, I’m not looking forward to shamming convincingly, even as practice.”
Sighed Bilbo, “Me either, Bo.”

*****

Bed time was quiet. Bilbo had attempted to claim more amorous kisses, but Kili, Fili, and Bofur were a united front, all agreeing he needed one more solid night of rest before they were willing to tax him with a bed session. Fili took it one step further and brewed another of Lord Elrond’s healing teas.

Holding his hand up, Bilbo said, “No, thank you. I have no interest in sleeping another whole day away.”

Fili gently grasped Bilbo’s raised hand and placed the mug in it.

“This one is not as potent as the ones that made you sleep like that. Lord Elrond assured me there is only a small bit of the sleep aid and the rest is still needed.”
“Well…alright,” Bilbo said. “But if I agree to drink this, can we have an early bedtime tomorrow?”
“I’d wager if you drink that, you’ll be much more up for that early bedtime, which will be good news for all,” Bofur replied wolfishly.
Kili thought Fili and Bofur might slip off to their unused room for a bedtime session, but they climbed in bed as they had the night before, content to all be together.

*****

Bifur and Rorimac sat next to the waterfall, marveling at its majesty in the cloudless moonlight. Rorimac dreamily listened to Bifur talk and allowed himself to revel in his presence, in the surrounding beauty, in the very magic that seemed to softly kiss his skin every second of every minute he had been here in this elvish wonderland, finally reunited with his love. When he didn’t think he could bear the feeling inside his chest another moment, he moved to stand in front of Bifur. He cupped his face and kissed him.

“Bifur, these past couple days, the time we spent in the Shire this fall, your letters, all of it…I—”

He stopped, emotion welling in his throat. Bifur looked at him both curious as well as adoring and Rorimac decided a gesture might be easier than trying to find the perfect question. He dug into his pocket and held out his palm, presenting a silver courting bead.

Bifur’s eyes widened as the silver bauble caught the light of the moon.

“What is this?”

Taking deep breath, Rorimac spoke on the exhale.

“Fili forged it on my behalf, as I have no skill for such things, but I’m told this is the way things go when one wants to court a dwarf.”

Bifur’s gaze snapped up from Rorimac’s palm. Taking another breath, even deeper than the last, Rorimac finally gave voice to the words he had been holding inside for months.

“I love you, Bifur. I love you so much I feel as though I could break into a thousand pieces. I was hoping you might be willing to accept me as your suitor and assent to a courtship.”

Rorimac inwardly winced at how formal his courting proposal sounded. He had wanted it to sound official, but the phrasing seemed a thin representation compared to the fullness of his heart. However, as Bifur’s eyes seemed to sparkle more than usual in the moonlight, Rorimac realized with relief his lover was close to joyful tears.

Reaching up to cradle Rorimac’s jaw, Bifur made an emotional confession.

“Oh, my sweet. I think I fell in love with you before I left the Shire. Regardless of when it started, though, I know I’m in love with you now. For weeks I’ve dreamed of being yours. Will you be mine, in turn?”

Rorimac threw his arms around Bifur. “Please.”

Exchanging beads (though Rorimac’s did not yet fit in his hair), they kissed passionately to seal their courtship, silhouetted against the rushing waterfall by silver-blue moonlight.

*****

Kili woke to soft, fluttery kisses along his collarbone.
“Bee?” he murmured sleepily. “What are you doing?”
“What I’ve been anxious to do for days.”
“Where’s Fee and Bo?”
“Off on their own, possibly doing something like this themselves.”
“But-“
“Hush, you. I needed some time alone with my husband, returning some erotic favors and otherwise delighting in him before the bed opens up for wider merriment. If you are not interested, I will absolutely stop, but if your only concern is for my well-being, let it be known my well-being directly hinges on how hard I can make you come, right now, in our bed.”

Exhaling in a great whoosh, Kili arched his back in encouragement and threaded his hands in Bilbo’s hair. He no longer had the will to argue, not now that Bilbo was close to being back to himself.

Bilbo was true to his promise, kissing, tasting, invading Kili so thoroughly that the dwarf could barely hold onto a single thought. He straddled Bilbo, rising and falling, stretched by both cock and fingers, biting his moans into his own palm as he spurted and shuddered through his orgasm. In fact, he had been so wrapped up in how fantastic Bilbo had been making him feel, he hadn’t even noticed Bilbo had finished, too.

Landing next to Bilbo, Kili breathed heavily and growled in satisfaction. He rolled to face Bilbo, gazing at him in awe and lazily fiddling with one of Bilbo’s waves, only just beginning to re-form from his haircut.

“Sometimes I think about the time before I met you…or sometimes after, but before we went to bed…or sometimes even after we went to bed but before we consummated our bond. All of it makes my head spin when I consider it. I never had the slightest inkling it would be like this. Each step was more glorious than the one that came before it. Simply kissing you all on its own--I hadn’t known I could ever feel so good.”

Bilbo turned his head to kiss Kili’s wrist. “Just think--we still have so much more to show you.”
“Me and Thorin, me and Fee, Fee and Bo, me and Bo, Thorin and Fee…multiple lovers, all those filthy minds and bodies pairing up to dream up new ways to thrill you, just as you always dream up new ways to thrill us.”
Kili wrinkled his nose. “Thorin and Fee? Pffft. Fee barely wants Thorin to breathe on me. I think he would be utterly repulsed by the idea of working on me at the same time as him.”
“Well, perhaps not as a team, then, but it is still two more lovers putting their minds to your pleasure, regardless.”
“All those filthy minds considering my pleasure does sound incredibly appealing.”
“Kee, I’m…well, I know it sounds a bit odd for me to say this given my behavior in the past, to say nothing of my volatile over-reaction, but I’m glad you are no longer merely observing. You deserve all the enjoyment and all the adoration. I’m so sorry for any part I had in insisting you deprive yourself, even as I was indulging.”
“If you’ll remember, for a long while I was not ready to jump in, and every time I said your pleasure was my pleasure was absolutely true. In fact, you always fretted about it not being fair and I was the one who told you it was just as I needed it to be at the time—and it was. Don’t bother wasting time thinking about those old, imagined slights, not when we have all that fun you just mentioned ahead of us.”

*****
Though he enjoyed experiencing Rivendell with Thodora and Chadham, Ori was quite grateful for an opportunity to spend some of the afternoon alone with his brother. So much had changed for both of them since they last had a chance to spend private time. Nori—in his usual, inexplicable Nori way—had managed to rustle up a couple solid mugs of ale and they sat in the sunlight, drinking and catching up.

“I must say,” Ori said, reaching the bottom of his mug, “I was quite surprised that Lord Elrond… well, let me start over: it was unexpected that you—not you personally, but that a dwarf at all—would be given such responsibility in Lord Elrond’s valley.”

Grinning, Nori said, “It does seem odd, I grant you. I thought as much myself when he asked me to assist Lindir with arrangements for your stay. It makes me feel good, though, having a job of some sort to do. I’ve been here on his good favor and have enjoyed plenty of his hospitality due to my relationship with Nîfon. He might have known in that strange, knowing way of his that I needed to feel useful, or perhaps he only asked because I’m a dwarf and so are four of you, but regardless of why, I am glad he asked overall.”

“I’m proud, do not mistake me. I simply didn’t expect him to have delegated so many tasks to you. Just think—my dwarf brother, practically a Lord of the Elves.”

Nori cackled with laughter. “Hardly so! In fact, I would say that there are few things further from! Still, he did allow me to be a part of Bifur’s recovery, a process which moved me deeply and unexpectedly all around. Also, I love Nîfon. Anything that breaks down any obstacles we might face, I welcome with an open heart.”

Ori blinked, glancing down into his empty mug and idly wondering if the ale hadn’t been stronger than he expected. It was rare Nori shared his feelings this freely or eloquently, and he made note of it aloud.

“Maybe I’ve changed a little,” said Nori, shrugging. “Love has been known to turn many a worldly dwarf to a sop, as you well know. Perhaps it is being around philosophical elves and a love-sick Bifur all these weeks, maybe it is because I’ve missed you and Dori so much, or maybe Nîfon himself has brought out a different side of me.”

Ori regarded his brother with watery affection.

“Nori,” he began. “Since you are being candid, there is something I wanted to ask you, dwarf to dwarf. Do you and Nîfon…well, you know that book Bilbo helped me write…is that something, erm—“

Leaning forward, Nori remarked, “Durin’s name, Ori, you’re going to turn tomato well before you get to your point. Yes, I know of what you are referring and I will tell you, of course, if I may inquire what makes you ask?”

“It is new to me, all around, these ideas and connections and things—you never mentioned any of this in the nature talk you gave me.”

Chuckling, Nori said, “I didn’t know some of it myself when I gave you that talk—and not to brag, but I thought myself pretty experienced at the time.”

“So with Nîfon, when did you—if you did—how did it—“

“You managed two lovers with this tied tongue of yours?” Nori teased him. “You must be far more eloquent when you turn on your charm, Ori.”

Ori crossed his arms and worked up a good pout.

Nori saw he had jibed Ori one time too many and held up his hands in surrender.

“I’ll stop hassling you for a moment and be genuine. I had my eye on Nîfon the moment we met, though it wasn’t until the wedding that I had the opportunity to chat him up. When I finally
Nori clasped his hands in the widened space between his knees and met Ori’s eyes, guileless.

“After a night of passion the likes of which I had never known, I decided upon waking that I never wanted to be parted from him again.”

“You knew the very next day?” asked Ori, incredulous.

“Honestly, Ori, I think I knew the moment we kissed. Who would have thought me—out of everyone you know—would easily fall so prey to such romantic notions? If it hadn’t happened to me, I would probably have dismissed it as fairy-story nonsense. Anyway, after deciding that was that, it wasn’t a much bigger leap to go further.”

Ori smiled shyly. “We’ve…we’ve gone further, too.”

“Yeah? Good for you,” Nori said. “So what’s with all the blushing?”

“Like I said, it is new to me. You know what I’m up to isn’t quite how we were raised.”

“Kili is up to it too, at the very least, and he’s a prince.”

“I know, but we’re not married—I’m not even sure how we could be married—and although we knew we wanted to consummate what was between us, it makes me feel better knowing, I don’t know, that I’m not the only one questioning things, or doing things differently than we were taught. It helps me be, well, brave, I guess. I suppose that sounds silly.”

Nori shook his head fondly, recalling the conversation he had with Bilbo the day before.

”No, Ori. Not silly at all.”

After a full day (and a Lord Elrond-approved series of full stomachs), Bilbo felt almost fully himself again. As such, he let no excuse stop him from retiring to his room early with Kili, Fili, and Bofur, nor from getting their kits off, nor from running them an indulgent scented bath, nor from taking them (and being taken) to bed.

It seemed extraordinarily decadent to Bilbo, somehow, all four of them shaking each other to pieces there in Rivendell. Perhaps it was the luxurious, fragrant oils? Or maybe those soft, large, and heavenly beds? Or perhaps it was nothing more than being somewhere unusual, a place where the walls hadn’t yet borne witness to their more exquisite sins.

They managed two rounds—one abashedly rapid to take care of the needs of the flesh, the second more languorous for their souls and hearts. Sensual and teasing, they took their time to fully appreciate each other until the last, rapturous gasp.

Though nothing more was said of their clandestine, late-night conversation on the road, Bilbo and Fili exchanged heated, loaded gazes, each of them thinking about their wicked confessions.
when he had to go. Bilbo might have initially been resistant to the idea of staying longer than their plan, but he could not deny the extra days had vastly improved the visit. He had hoped a wider window of possibility might also mean crossing paths again with Gandalf, but it was not meant to be.

When time came to depart, they picked up new travelers for the wedding: Bifur, Nori, Nifon, Daerbes, and Nerithel. It was glad company and it pleased Fili, Kili, Bofur, and Bilbo, though leaving Estel behind saddened them. Bilbo had asked Elrond about the possibility of Estel being able to travel to Erebor either with them, with Gandalf, or with the elf lord himself (should the latter two choose to go), but Elrond’s response had been solemn and firm--

“No, Bilbo,” he had said, slowly shaking his head. “There are things about Estel I will someday share with you, but not before he knows himself. He is special.”

“He is special,” Bilbo echoed in agreement.
Elrond smiled. “You, Bofur, and Estel gravitated to each other from the start, as though a great magnet pulled you three together. I foresee your friendship will be a long one, full of poems, songs, and stories. For now, though, and for his safety, he will not be contributing any poems, songs, or stories from the road.”

Though his curiosity had been thoroughly piqued, Bilbo understood he could not very well demand details about Estel the lad hadn’t yet learned for himself.

“May I ask when he will find out he is this particular type of special?”

“When he is old enough.”

Well, that’s infuriatingly cryptic, Bilbo thought to himself. He had not pressed further, though.

Kili had been especially vocal about his fears for Bilbo’s health on the rest of their road, and Bifur and Ori had expressed similar concern for Rorimac, Chadham, and Thodora should they get caught in the rain and wind up affected as Bilbo had been. To this end, Elrond made sure medicine was packed into their provisions. In addition, before Elladan left Rivendell again himself, he had gifted them special blankets his own small cadre of scouts often used for warmth when they traveled in full winter. Elrond further comforted them by reminding them they now traveled with Daerbes, who also had some skill as a healer.

The farewells were bittersweet, as such things were, and they lingered long on the final goodbyes.

“When we come back this way again, perhaps we’ll bring you something special from the East,” Bofur told Estel.

“How about a toy from New Dale?” Fili asked.

“Or a special piece from the vast treasure hall of Erebor itself?” Kili added.

“I think,” Estel looked up, as though the name of his wildest dream was written above his head. “I think I shall like something out of Master Beorn’s garden.”

Bilbo laughed merrily and ruffled Estel’s hair—even though he had to put his hand above his own head to do so. “That’s our lad!”

Unable to delay it further, the company rolled out of the Valley and onto the next leg of their journey. Bilbo turned around for one last look, his heart squeezing when he saw Estel still standing there, watching them until the last.

Chapter End Notes
Current plan (depending on muses) looks like this--

Chapter 5: Thorin/Erebor
Chapter 6: The travelers/Beorn's
Chapter 7: THE ARRIVAL IN EREBOR OMG SQUEE

It has been a hell of a long winter--"What It Wants" started in January 2015, after all--and I hope everyone is eager to finally get the gang back together again.

I appreciate that you're here.

Thank you
Chapter Summary

Wedding talk leads to re-opening tender wounds for Thorin.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Thorin's visceral fears about not being believed about his harassment pop up again in this chapter. If you find that too difficult to read about, skip this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Thorin’s work on the royal suites was all but complete and Dís had wept when she saw the finished rooms for her sons. Though she was perplexed by the dish-shaped sculptures on the nightstands (“for emptying pockets, I presume?”), the reasoning behind the wash basins in each room wasn’t as big of a mystery, judging by her pinked cheeks when she kenned it. Thorin had belatedly realized that his concealment of the more salacious features of their rooms might have missed a detail or two. He told himself that no one—not even their Mam—had expected the couples to be chaste, anyhow. He wondered what folks would make of those same features in his suite…though few people were allowed in as it was.

Stocking the desks in the adjoining suites with writing supplies, Thorin closed the last drawer with a sigh. That had been the last detail of his final project and it was now done. It was a relief to be fully ready for the moment Bilbo and the others arrived, but it was also unexpectedly moving and immensely satisfying to complete months of intense and hopeful preparation.

With his mind and heart full, he went up to the Grand Overlook to tend the garden. It had been coming along nicely and the sprouted plants were growing with every passing day. Thorin smiled to himself—perhaps there would be flowers by the time Bilbo arrived.

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Balin’s attempt at a truce had not won Thorin’s trust, not after what they had been through, but it had been a step in the right direction. Though there hadn’t been many steps that followed it—not in the ways that counted the most in Thorin’s distress and disillusionment—the worst had seemed to soften and made life more tolerable than it had been. Because Balin was one of the two primary advisors to the king, those days when Balin and Thorin weren’t getting along were especially excruciating.

To maintain this tenuous truce, they had stopped talking about the things that bothered them, Balin stopped worrying about propriety, and Thorin had long since stopped spilling his heart. It might have been stunted and not particularly healthy, but it worked for the time being. Thorin was especially thankful they might be able to get through the wedding without openly feuding.

Thoughts of the wedding led to Thorin thinking of his own…and what to do about it. The closer Dís’s and Dwalin’s wedding day came, the more Thorin wondered how to handle the secret of his
marriage to Bilbo. Initially, he had figured he would let his sister get married first and reveal his news at a later date, like he had told Bilbo. As things in the mountain had grown more complicated and precarious, Thorin wondered how prudent it would be to confess their secret marriage at all. Then again, how could he not? How could he keep his love a secret after he had promised Bilbo he wouldn’t? How could he ask Bilbo to hide in the shadows for him when that was the last thing Thorin actually wanted?

*****

While chatting with Dís about the wedding, Balin was surprised to learn Dís had ordered special clothes for Fili, Kili, Bilbo, and Bofur. Her wanting royal raiment for her lads hadn’t been the surprise, but her inclusion of…well, Bilbo…Balin had not been expecting it and said as much.

“How holding the grudge has the potential to ruin both the occasion and the visit that had been planned to follow,” Dís had replied. “We left it in a workable place when I departed the Shire and I don’t see how it would serve anyone’s best interest if I insisted on going backwards from there.”

Later, Balin was still considering her perspective and pondered where he truly stood on the issue these days himself. He was disappointed still that Bilbo had betrayed Thorin, though Bilbo had long since explained himself and apologized. However, by the time Thorin returned from watching Bilbo and Kili well and truly wed, it was Thorin with whom Balin had lost his patience. More specifically, the sticking point was Thorin’s inability to let Bilbo go. If Thorin had wanted to hold onto the anger, Balin would have understood. If Bilbo had run off in the night to get married and it had been recent, Balin would also have understood that. Neither of those things had happened, though. Thorin had been given ample warning the wedding would happen and months to reconcile that Bilbo was gone, even if Thorin missed him. Thorin never had seemed to move on, though, and going to the Shire to see the wedding with his own eyes—something Balin had been certain would finally get through to him—seemed to have only made it worse somehow.

Balin eventually decided, like Dís, he would not continue to punish Bilbo for the sins of his past. He could not blame Thorin’s current issues on the hobbit, and though Balin was still gravely disappointed in Bilbo’s betrayal of Thorin, there was no getting around that Bilbo was a prince of Erebor now—and (as Dís had reminded him) an heir, Mahal help them all. Besides, it was Balin’s place to be diplomatic while Bilbo was there. Balin had always liked him, a fact which had made the dissolution of Bilbo’s relationship with Thorin all the more bitter at the time, but would make the current required diplomacy marginally easier.

*****

“Thorin, I have a problem,” Dwalin said.

Thorin was taken aback, because Dwalin did not often have many problems he did not wrestle down on his own--sometimes literally--and it was rarer still that he asked for assistance.

“Do you need my help?”

Dwalin rubbed the back of his neck and Thorin’s brow furrow increased—Dwalin being outwardly nervous was not a good sign.

“I have been planning to ask you to be my Pair. For the wedding.”

Despite Dwalin’s obvious discomfort, a smile broke through Thorin’s concern. Dwalin held up his hand.
“Please don’t with the smiling and the headbutting and the other mushy brotherhood sort of stuff, not yet. You being my Pair is part of my problem.”

“Oh. In what way?”

“I had considered both you and Balin. Balin is my brother, but you are my best friend. In the end, regardless of how close the margin was, I knew it had to be you…but it can’t be you.”

“Because of Balin?”

“No, because of Dís.”

“Dís doesn’t want me to be your Pair?”

“No, it is because Dís doesn’t have a Pair. She has been too busy with the wedding and council and adjusting to this new life in Erebor to make many deep friendships. She has friends, of course—who wouldn’t love her the instant they met her?—but not people she considers personally close. She has never had the relationship with Dain that you and I have, plus you can bet your last gem I don’t want Dain kissing on her, even for just a sealing kiss. It can’t be one of her sons, because then the other will be left out. How would she ever choose? We were talking about it last night and she said she was going to ask you as her first choice. We both can’t choose you, and her second choice is too awful for me to entertain.”

“Who is her second choice?”

The look Dwalin shot Thorin could have tarnished silver. Once Thorin realized why Dwalin had that look, Thorin’s answering expression could have melted said silver.

“Oh, not him. Not in a million years,” growled Thorin.

“You see my predicament, now. Balin is far from a hardship for me to ask, as I had agonized between you two at the start, and I know you would be happy to be Dís’s choice. I just…I guess I, you know, wanted you to know…”

Thorin didn’t make Dwalin suffer through anymore of his explanation that he had to. He put his hand on his shoulder.

“I do know, and serving as Pair for either one of you would have been my deepest honor. You will not hurt my feelings in the slightest by asking Balin. That leaves her free to ask me and I promise I shall accept.”

Dwalin sighed in relief. “Thank you, Thorin.”

“And since I’ll be my sister’s Pair, you won’t have to worry any more about missing your chance to kiss me,” Thorin smirked, knowing it would wind Dwalin up and diffuse any remaining awkwardness he felt.

“Oh, you son of a-“

*****

Dís to visited Thorin in his room that evening after dinner.

“I was hoping to ask you for something of a favor in regards to the wedding,” she said.

“Oh?” he replied, feigning ignorance.

She smiled shyly. “Yes, I’ve been thinking about my Pair and I would very much like it to be you.”

“Oh, Dís,” he said, taking her hands. “My dear sister, it would be an incredible honor. I accept.”

“Thank you! Oh, I hoped you would say yes! Between you and me, I worried for a while Dwalin would get to you first and the mere thought of it made my heart ache.”

“Dwalin?” asked Thorin, playing his part perfectly.

“Yes, he had a mind to ask you, which is something you might want to know—we both had you at the top of our lists to be our Pair, to be honest. He gave me the go ahead this afternoon to be the one to ask.”
“That was kind of him to step aside, and doubly flattering for me to know, thank you.”
“We both had second choices. His was Balin—whom I hope you won’t tell was behind you in his consideration—and since I would not be able to choose between my sons, Regnad had been my second choice…though far behind my wish of it being you, of course.”

Thorin had known it to be true, though it did not make it any easier to hear. He attempted to smooth over the disgust Regnad’s name evoked within him.

“I am pleased you were able to have your choice, then. In fact, now that I consider it, each of you will have their closest living sibling as their Pair. That’s probably preferable than if Dwalin had gotten his first choice and you your second.”

Dís studied him shrewdly. “Thorin, Regnad has hinted that he does not think you like him and I must say, I’m starting to wonder if it isn’t true, too. The frown that swept across your face the instant I brought him up as a potential Pair corroborates his suspicions.”

Thorin felt trapped. With the issue being addressed outright, he felt as though his choices were either to confess or to lie. For Regnad to even be in the realm of wildest possibility to be her Pair clearly meant her friendship with him was deeper (and worse) than Thorin had thought, which made speaking against him quite unwise. What could he do?

“There’s been some conflict of late, though we’ve reached an accord,” Thorin said, simultaneously telling the truth and lying. “I do find it concerning he wishes to bring you into it when there is absolutely no need.”
“He didn’t tell me outright. Something slipped and believe me, when I asked him about it, he was embarrassed.”

_**Oh, I’m sure he was,**_ Thorin thought bitterly.

“I had to virtually pry it out of him and even then it was all in vagaries. I hope the accord you’ve reached involves you giving him another chance. He admires you so. I think all he ever wanted to do was impress you.”

What should have been a happy moment between Thorin and his sister was soured by this speech and the bile it brought to the back of his throat. He wanted to scream at Dís that Regnad was using her, but would she believe him any more than Balin did? Could he tell her—his own sister—that it was more than civil conflict between them, that it was personal harassment Thorin had suffered? Would she stand there and tell him to give him another chance at preying on him sexually like Balin did? Just when things had seemed like they had gotten better, Thorin felt like he was thrown back to the way he had felt before: Regnad leering at him, making suggestions, touching him, talking about the incident like it had been mutual, whistling that infernal song to taunt him, and sending him thinly veiled political threats meant to keep him inert on the issue of sending Regnad away from Erebor. His mind raced and his gut churned.

“I’ve said something to upset you, I can see it all over your face. Heavens, Thorin, you’re turning green. Here, sit.”

Dís nudged him back in a chair, kneeling in front of him and holding his hands.

“What has gotten into you? Please, tell me.”

Thorin looked at her face, concerned and adoring. He couldn’t do this to her and Dwalin right now, not so close to their wedding. If there was to be a rift, he didn’t want to open it until he was able to see his beloved sister marry his best friend and finally find some happiness again. He couldn’t bear...
to miss it, even at the cost of his own well-being. He reached out and stroked her cheek.

“Something I ate must have gotten nervoused up in my stomach. As for Regnad, there will be no second chances and I will not speak of that again. Just know that when I say we have reached an accord, I mean whatever we have quarreled about will not affect council, policy, or your beautiful wedding. With those things in mind, I beg you to drop it.”

Dís opened her mouth to argue. Thorin shook his head.

“It isn’t an issue for you, not this time. That he made it your business—even accidentally—was unfortunate. And no asking him any more questions, either. Please, Dís.”

“I will respect your wishes. I do hope you reconsider him when you get past whatever this is.”

Fighting a grimace and the urge to argue, Thorin told himself to simply be relieved Dís was ready to drop the matter. He hated keeping his feelings bottled, and hated that he seemed to be losing his sister’s favor to someone so repugnant even more. When he was finally able to extract himself from Dís, Thorin went directly to his room and stayed there for hours.

****

The further Erebor drew into spring, the more the intoxication and boost Thorin had gotten from the letters and the dream had leveled out. He had expected the joyful anticipation to take over—soon, he would wake one day alone and end it with Bilbo in his arms—but it wasn’t exactly so. Some days, he was as happy as he had expected, it was true, but some days he was weighed down by melancholy. Other days he was anxious and inexplicably angry, as though nothing from waking to bed time could seem to go right. He did his best to reign in these mood fluctuations when he was not alone, lest people talk and think ill of him (or worse, Bilbo), and while it was worth the trouble to stay protected, it was also especially exhausting.

“Thorin,” said Dain one day, “is there anything I can do for you?”

“I don’t think so. Dís has the inspections for those reopened hallways in hand and Balin is handling that other new matter with the committee, the one with the excavation and repair of.”

“-No, I mean is there anything I can do for you, personally? Not for the king, not for the council, but for my cousin who has been making a heroic effort to put on his best face?”

Thorin rolled his lips in, feeling the strange tightness in his throat that hinted involuntary tears might not be far behind. “What makes you say this face is put on and not genuine?”

Dain put a gentle hand on his shoulder. “The pain that runs almost constantly in your eyes.”

Taking a deep breath, Thorin blinked rapidly in an effort to keep from welling up. He searched for a good response, something to brush aside Dain’s observation that would also explain why his hands were now shaking.

“Pain?” he asked, stalling for time.

“I do not know what is going on with you. I don’t want to assume I know, nor blame Bilbo Baggins as seems to be the more typical thing to do. This pain looks different to me than the expression you wore while you pined for him last year, anyhow. It doesn’t matter in the end. I don’t ask for an explanation, nor do I offer a judgement. Though you are going to great lengths to hide it, I see you hurting and that is enough for me. I ask you again, is there anything I can do for you?”

Tears spilled down Thorin’s face, though he was still trying desperately not to cry.

“You see me?” he whispered, incredulous.

With uncharacteristic tenderness, Dain said, “I do.”
Thorin broke down then, unable to keep himself together. Dain embraced him, holding him as he wept.

“It is obvious to me you want to keep whatever it is to yourself, and I can’t say I recommend it. You don’t have to tell me, but I want you to know you can. You can tell me whatever is troubling you and I won’t breathe a word, not even to Balin or Dwalin.”

Thorin wept harder, knowing full well he could not begin to start telling Dain of his troubles with Regnad, not with how proud of him Dain was. He also certainly could not tell him how much he missed his husband and how these final days of waiting for him seemed to somehow amplify all the hurts he had suffered that winter. As grateful as he was that Dain noticed, that he cared, Thorin was convinced opening his heart would only make it all worse for himself.

“It…it isn’t a trouble you need to shoulder,” said Thorin. “But what if I want to?”

Dain had him close to confessing—and Thorin had so fiercely wanted to unburden himself to someone who cared—but then he remembered Balin’s reaction to the last heartfelt admission. Squeezing his eyes tightly, Thorin did his best to will some semblance of his composure to return.

“This was a great help all on its own. Sometimes all the frustrations of being a king with Erebor’s princes so far away can get the best of me, you know.”

Dain studied him. “My offer shall stand.”

“And I shall continue to appreciate it.”

Thorin was relieved it seemed to be enough to end Dain’s inquiry, though he knew his cousin well enough to know he had convinced him of nothing more than his unwillingness to talk.

*****

By mid-April, Thorin had (respectfully) asked the ravens to add a specific lookout for Western travelers to their morning and evening flights. After five days of not getting the news he wanted, he rescinded his request, not wanting to waste their time…nor wishing to deal with the crushing disappointment twice a day any longer.

He leaned against the doorway to the Grand Overlook, watching a spring rain pour and (again) mulling over how best to receive Bilbo when he arrived. Snatching him up, kissing him breathless, and carrying him off to bed was unfortunately utterly out of the question, though Thorin was not sure he would be able to greet him stoically, either. He also did not know in advance who would be present for the arrival, which might also influence his behavior. He wondered what Bilbo’s own potential actions might be. It was likely Bilbo would ultimately let Thorin set the tone to avoid causing trouble, but Thorin spent several minutes lost in a sweet fantasy of Bilbo unable to keep himself from leaping into Thorin’s arms, completely oblivious to anyone else…even Regnad, who would doubtless worm his way next to Dís in the receiving line.

Thorin stopped short, scowling to himself. He did not want that villain anywhere near his Bilbo, Fili, or Kili. Regnad did not deserve the breath it would take for them to curse him. However, with Regnad being not only a prominent member of council, but also a close, personal friend of Balin, Dain, and Dís, Thorin did not think Bilbo and the lads would be able to dodge him.

There was the second, more terrible fear, the one Thorin would scarcely let himself consider: what if they liked Regnad? What if they found him as charming and winsome as Balin and Dís had? The mere thought made his stomach sick.
He forced his thoughts back to more pleasant things—such as the steady reveal of all his planned surprises for Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and even Bofur—and soon he was smiling again. He risked a peek around the corner to make sure the plants in Bilbo’s garden were getting a good watering. It pleased him to see the leaves in Bilbo’s garden quivering under the steady raindrops.

“Drink up, little friends,” he said to them before he headed back inside the mountain. “There’s someone very special for whom you need to grow.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you for being here. I hope you’re having a good time.

We're still on track with the muses for the next two chapters to look like this--

Chapter 6: The travelers/Beorn's
Chapter 7: THE ARRIVAL IN EREBOR OMG SQUEE
Fantalizing Tantasies

Chapter Summary

16 years ago today, I saw The Fellowship Of The Ring in the theatre with the man I would eventually marry.

This fic would not have been possible without either.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bilbo and Kili took a night watch. Kili had been cautious about being out of the warmth of their bedroll overnight, but Bilbo’s conscience could not let another day pass without taking his due turn--plus it was a nice evening to boot. Still, Kili had insisted Bilbo wear his elvish blanket for extra insulation.

“You know,” Kili said, clearing his throat nervously. “It might be…might be better for us to limit our travel.”
“Limit our travel? I do not know if you’ve happened to notice, dear heart, but we’re in the middle of it and it has a rather definitive ending.”
Kili smiled, chagrined. “I know that. I mean after.”
“You mean after we get home from Erebor?”
Kili swallowed and met Bilbo’s eyes. “I mean when we get to Erebor.”
Bilbo’s own smile faded and it felt as though his entire body had emptied of air when he exhaled. With a calmness he did not feel, he asked, “What is making you suggest this?”
“You were so sick. I couldn’t stop thinking about what Lady Yavanna said, about how we could still be parted by circumstance--“ Kili’s voice broke.
“Oh, shhh. Hush, come here.” Bilbo held Kili close. “That is not a chance only taken with travel.”
“But there are greater hazards on the road.”
“What happened to me was unfortunate, but hobbits randomly get sick sometimes. I know dwarrows don’t have the same susceptibility in that area as we do, but it is the way of things. I’ll get sick again, Kee, and then I’ll get well. This time was a little worse because we had not adequately prepared, but we’ve learned a lesson and we will do better next time, right?”
“Yes,” replied Kili hesitantly. “But--“
Bilbo leaned back and cupped Kili’s face in his hands, thumbing away a tear. “-Let’s simplify this, yeah? Do you want to stay in Erebor longer for any other reason besides worrying about me on the road?”
Smiling shyly, Kili said, “No.”
“Then,” Bilbo kissed him softly. “Unless another concern arises, let’s stick to our plan.”

Kili hugged him again.

“We’ll make sure to bring our elvish blankets and be mindful of the rain and pack proper herbs from here on out, I promise,” Bilbo said.

*****

Beorn had been expecting the group of travelers from the Shire and Rivendell. Bilbo had sent a
letter ahead weeks before to let him know they would be passing through on the way to Erebor and asked if he might not mind a visit. Though there were thirteen of them, none were strangers to Beorn. In fact, he was fairly sure he had danced or made music with all of them at one time or another during his stay in the Shire.

Meeting them in the yard, Beorn scooped Bilbo up into a warm greeting. Bilbo was so happy to see him he couldn’t even be fussed that Beorn carried him around as he greeted the rest of the group. The next order of business after the niceties was to care for their ponies, and after that, Beorn invited them in to fill their stomachs.

Fili, Kili, Bilbo, and Bofur insisted upon helping and a sense of nostalgia settled over all of them as they bustled about getting food together. How many times had they done this together? Bofur said as much to Beorn.

“Your absence is felt keenly within these walls,” Beorn said, adding with a laugh, “Along with the smell of Fili’s breads and Kili’s pies.”

Kili almost vibrated out of his boots with excitement. “Just you wait! I’ve been taking hobbit baking lessons from Mrs. Cotton.”

Beorn searched his memories. “Cotton, Cotton…Bunny, did I meet Mrs. Cotton?”

“Surely you did at some point, but you might know her better by her five layer chocolate cake and those little sugar pastries we had at the big dinner the night before the wedding.”

“Oh!” Beorn’s eyes and grin both grew wide. “Now those I do remember!”

“Once matters are in hand here, I’ll make some things for after dinner tonight and give you proof of my schooling.” Kili said.

Fili added, “And I’ll make sure we’ll have fresh bread.”

“I was hoping you would,” Beorn replied, winking. “As luck would have it, I’m freshly supplied—a full wagon of additional stores came just last week. I’ll wager you could do something with what I’ve got.”

As their late lunch commenced, comfortable conversation happened around Beorn’s enormous table.

“Do you ever see or hear anything from New Dale or Erebor?” asked Bilbo.

“Thorin and I….” Beorn paused, not wanting to say too much, a Thorin had confided the bath was to be a surprise, “…have remained in contact.”

Bilbo’s mouth quirked up in pleased astonishment. “Have you really? Oh, that’s good!”

Thorin having friends—especially honest and unassuming friends like Beorn—pleased Bilbo to his core.

“Will you be attending Mam’s wedding, then?” asked Kili.

“Yes, I will be attending the wedding, though I won’t leave when you do. I’ll depart closer to time.”

*****

When lunch was concluded and the others were discussing the fairest way to take turns washing up, Beorn pulled Bilbo aside privately to discuss the next logical thing—where they’d be sleeping.

He told him, “I did not have time for a letter to reach you to say of course you were all welcome to spend the night here, but that I had not beds for your large number. Of course, now that I see everyone, it doesn’t seem four beds will be too terribly short.”

More concerned about having seemed rude than the implication Beorn was making, Bilbo assured him, “Oh, beds weren’t the issue. I was asking for leave to camp on your land, should you be
willing to give it, and only because we wanted the pleasure of your company for a couple nights on our way.”
“No need to camp on my land, particularly as none of you will be sleeping alone. By my reckoning, if we add in my bed to the other four it should be just enough.”
Bilbo finally twigged his meaning. “Oh! Well…yes, I suppose there’s not a lot of point trying to get around your intuition or bear sense or whatever you’d prefer to call it. However, giving up your own bed seems hardly kind considering we barged into your home with thirteen souls.”
“Not all that different from our first meeting, give or take two. However, this time there seems to be,” Beorn’s expression shifted impishly, “far more eager willingness to share.”
“Beorn,” Bilbo admonished, blushing.
“Matters little about my own bed. For one, it shall only be for a couple evenings according to your plan. For the other, I would either ask two or more from your group—my guests—to bed down on the parlor floor or to simply do it myself. There’s no argument that could make me think it would be better for me to have a bed in that circumstance. It is enough for me that you would not ask it. One might say that makes it all the easier for me to do it.”
“We all appreciate it, to be sure.”

*****

A large dinner was had and Beorn exuberantly praised the baking of Kili, Fili, and Ori, the latter of whom had also been eager to show off his lessons from Mrs. Cotton. Retiring to the parlor, Beorn dragged in a bench from the dining room to have enough seats for all. There, they shared more stories, drank, laughed, and sang until well after what should have been bed time for all.

*****

With the night being so lovely and clear, Beorn actually opted to sleep in the barn instead of the parlor. He noted the hay would be more comfortable than the rug, and he caused all but Nori to blush to the very tips of their ears when he made mention of that night’s “lovers’ music” that would no doubt fill the house.

Of course, Bilbo didn’t let himself be so embarrassed that he wasn’t undressed nearly the moment the bedroom door had been latched. He fell into Kili’s arms first, but soon had wicked tastes of Bofur’s and Fili’s tongues, too. They had all sacrificed their comfort for most of the day in order to take the final bath with the last bit of soap they had brought from Rivendell and Bilbo breathed in the heady scent of those delicious oils mixed with his lovers’ skin.

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Without quite noticing how he got there, Bilbo found himself under Fili, being kissed quite breathless.

“Tell me I can touch you now, touch you there,” Fili begged, licking at Bilbo’s ear. “I can’t wait.”
“Yes,” Bilbo panted

Fili produced the bottle of oil he had rescued from his pack, slicking his fingers.

****

Bofur glanced up from nibbling at Kili’s nipple ring to see Fili and Bilbo quite involved in what appeared to be Fili stretching him for further pleasures.

“Looks like we’re behind. Fee’s already preparing him for you.”
Kili had felt something cool against his hip, but had been too interested in Bofur’s attentions to see about it. With this pause, he noticed it was a bottle of oil. Impishly, he held it up for Bofur.

“Then we should probably catch up…or return the favor.”

Bofur reached out to take the bottle but Kili evaded him, shaking his head and flashing him a sly, sexy smile. Kili tapped Bofur’s hip in signal and Bofur moved off him. Kili urged him back onto the bed, kissing from his stomach upwards, still holding the bottle.

When Kili reached Bofur’s ear, he spoke with a voice like velvet. “The thought occurs that I’ve not yet taken you up on your offer to finger you.”

Breath hitching, Bofur replied, “No, you haven’t. I thought you might not be interested.”

“Oh, I am quite interested,” purred Kili. “I’ve been waiting for what felt like the right time.”

“It seems like the right time to me. How about you?”

“Absolutely…if the offer still stands.”

“It stands, pulses, squeezes, comes…”

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Under Fili, Bilbo trembled with delight as Fili intimately pressed his digits into him. Fili’s open lips were on Bilbo’s, maintaining contact without kissing, as Fili whimpered and moaned in such bliss one would not be faulted for thinking Fili was actually making love to him. It was only the separation and texture of Fili’s fingers that helped Bilbo remember it was not Fili’s cock inside him, so affected was he by the intensity of their connection himself.

*****

Bofur parted his legs in anticipation and Kili insinuated himself between them, up on his knees.

“Spread yourself wider for me,” Kili said.

With a lusty moan, Bofur did as Kili requested, still keeping his eyes locked on him. Kili reached towards him, the touch being made easier by Bofur’s assistance in exposing himself. Bofur sighed with the first, silky passes of Kili’s fingertips over his sensitive skin. Drawing it out, Kili continued with non-invasive touches—using the back and sides of his finger to spread the slick liberally, teasing with a knuckle—until Bofur’s breathing grew ragged and his arms twitched with the strain of presenting himself. Kili oiled his fingers again and lowered his whole body, stomach against the bed and his head on Bofur’s hip.

“You can stop holding yourself open. That’s it, relax for me.”

Bofur felt Kili’s breath ghosting over his prick and held his own breath in turn. Had someone pressed him for an answer that instant, he would not have been able to choose what he wanted more: Kili’s mouth on him or Kili’s fingers inside him. Kili shifted, rubbing his cheek against Bofur’s erection and moaning quietly, sounding as though he had been yearning his whole life simply for the feel of it. Bofur’s eyes met Kili’s again and his stomach fluttered madly. He held back from asking Kili what his wicked plan was, lest he break whatever spell had fallen over them. Kili’s lips brushed soft, open kisses up and down his length. Were that not enough to drive him mad, the gentle grazing touches against his hole had continued uninterrupted.

“Please, Bo. Say I can. I want to hear it again.”

Bofur didn’t know what Kili had been asking permission to do and frankly, he didn’t care. Kili could have asked almost anything of him at that point and he would have willingly yielded to him.
“You can, Kee. I beg you, continue.”

A long, hot breath warmed the twitching skin on his prick...then Kili popped back up on his knees, slicked his fingers a third time, and stretched himself along the length of Bofur’s form so that he could speak softly near Bofur’s ear while still reaching between his legs. Bofur felt Kili breach him immediately after.

Kili slowly worked himself deeper, thrilling in the feel of Bofur as well as the sight and sound of him. Though this was far from the first time he had touched someone so intimately, it was the first time he had done it to Bofur and his natural curiosity fizzed within him as he explored, learning what Bofur seemed to like best.

Adding a second finger, Kili murmured near Bofur’s ear as he stimulated him. “You feel exquisite inside.”

“You feel exquisite,” panted Bofur. “I only just now realize how deeply I’ve been craving you like this.”

“Yes, I can see how much you’ve wanted it. Your cock--how it glistens in the candlelight as your arousal leaks from you. I’m guessing I’ve found a good spot?”

“You’ve found a couple.”

Kili hummed. “Your cock nearly distracted me from my task, you know.”

Too aroused to mind his tongue, Bofur confessed before he had even realized what he was saying. “I thought for a moment you might break your rule. Oh, Kee, I prayed you would. I’m dying to know what you feel like.”

Kili hesitated for a moment and Bofur held his breath, hoping he hadn’t pressed for too much. Instead of stopping, Kili slyly changed the subject in an obvious bid to distract him. Bofur was so relieved he hadn’t turned Kili off their filthy encounter with his confession, he didn’t even mind that Kili had glossed over it...especially since Kili’s talk grew filthier.

“You’re so thick—it must stretch Fee out completely. How did he ever go so long without realizing he could come simply from your cock alone?”

Bofur envied Kili’s ability to form sentences so easily, as he had considerably more difficulty, moaning and gasping as he spoke.

“We had to learn the secret, is all. When we take our time getting him warmed up and I apply a trick or two, we can get him there like that almost every time, should we choose to. I’m a little proud, to be honest, that I have developed such a knack for it.”

“But that’s not always what he is after, is it? He gets a different sort of pleasure from rushing, doesn’t he?”

Kili’s words, touch, and the images he was putting in Bofur’s mind had his body singing with sensation.

“Fuck!” he groaned blissfully. “Yes, he does.”

Hissing into Bofur’s ear as he stimulated him, he said, “Bee is especially sensitive inside, I’m sure you’ve noticed--more sensitive than I think me and Fee combined. I think that is how we discovered the secret so easily, him being so responsive.”

“Bloody buggering fuck,” swore Bofur, partly from the actual feel of Kili inside him and partly from the phantom sensation of Bilbo’s arse stretched around him in his mind.

“He’s not used to anything as big as you, though. When you have Bee perched atop you, you’ll have him coming like a fountain just from the thick of you.”
Bofur cried out in bliss. He had done more than his share of erotically taunting Kili, particularly when it came to Thorin. For his part, Kili had never had any shortage of filthy talk, either, but this was the first Kili spoke about Bilbo and Bofur making love as though it was a certainty. Arousing was a weak description for Bofur’s reaction to it.

“So much, Kee. Fuck, so much.”

“Stroke me, please!” pleaded Bofur. “Or suck me. Either way, have some mercy! My prick aches, it wants you so badly.”

Quietly, Kili said, “You really think about my mouth on you?”

“I think about it too.”

Even as he was strung out on pleasure, Bofur could sense from Kili’s wistful tone that he was still reserving that particular intimacy for Fili and Bilbo only. He felt suddenly bad for begging so. Stilling Kili’s hand at the wrist, Bofur wordlessly asked him to stop stimulating him. Bofur rolled on his side, capturing Kili’s mouth in a filthy kiss before flipping Kili onto his back.

“What are you doing?” asked Kili.

“Sucking you instead.”

Kili’s head fell back against the pillow as Bofur engulfed him.

****

So intent and lost in his mission of making Bilbo come, of being deep in his fantasy that he was fucking him, Fili had not noticed the intensity unfolding between his husband and his brother beside them until he heard Bofur moaning and begging. As Bilbo panted under him, Fili glanced over to see Bofur descend upon Kili instead. Fili spared a moment to momentarily wonder what he had missed, then fully returned his attention to the still-trembling Bilbo.

“That was…” Bilbo shook his head, unable to find a word to do justice in order to complete his thought.

“It was,” agreed Fili. “You were magnificent.”

“Me? I didn’t do anything.”

Fili whispered, “I beg very much to differ,” and closed his mouth over Bilbo’s.

“Oh,” Bilbo said when they parted, “I’m taken care of but you aren’t.”

“Maybe I shall see how good of a job Kee did on Bo, then.”

Fili smoothed a hand over Bofur’s thigh. It pulled a moan deep from Bofur’s throat that made Kili whimper. Fili had to admit he loved the chain of reaction. Delicately dipping into Bofur’s entrance, he was shocked to find out Kili had prepared him exceedingly well; it was the most slick and relaxed Fili had felt him for a long while.

Bofur paused long enough to grunt, “Do it, Fee. For the love of the mountain, do it now.”

With a smirk, Fili ran his hand through Bilbo’s ejaculate and slicked it over his cock before pushing inside his husband. He relished the look on Kili’s face as well as the desperate sighs coming from both him and Bofur as Fili re-started the chain. Already somewhat strung out himself on the high of what he had done to Bilbo (who had at that very moment moved on to pornographically kissing Kili), he wanted to set Bofur off, too.

Falling forward, draping along Bofur’s back, he murmured, “I’m fucking you with Bilbo’s come.” Bofur choked on Kili’s cock, pulling off for a moment to breath and stutter, “What? How?”

Glancing over to Fili and back down to Bofur, Bilbo devilishly replied, “It is true. He smeared it all over him just before he started in on you.”
Bofur guttered a cry and fell upon Kili again, this time more frenzied. He had Bilbo’s spend inside him. *Inside* inside him. Perhaps it hadn’t gotten there in the way he had most often dreamed, but Fili willingly lubricating himself with it before fucking him was a delightful perversion he hadn’t yet considered. Kili squirmed and whined beneath him as Bofur utilized his best tricks to bring Kili’s orgasm on both fast and hard.

Having a fairly decent idea of what Bofur must be doing to Kili to make him react so, Fili increased his pace and shared Kili’s moans. He was overwhelmed by the compulsion to come with Kili. Reaching under Bofur in order to not leave him behind, he was surprised to have his hand nudged away. He slowed for a moment to see if an explanation was forthcoming, but Bofur continued bobbing rapidly while Kili’s whining morphed into staccato sounds and panting. Satisfied that Bofur was still pushing for Kili’s conclusion and did not want any help himself, Fili let the last of his control go. With the sensation of Bofur around him, the memory of what he had just done to Bilbo, and the moans of them all drifting through his ears, he came deep inside Bofur.

Kili’s hands gripped Bofur’s shoulders tightly and Bofur swallowed his pleasure, pulse after glorious pulse, until Kili was left gasping and spent. Bilbo dove for Bofur, thrusting his tongue in his mouth for a taste, and Bofur’s cock throbbed from the obscenity of it.

“What are we going to do about you, hmm?” Bilbo said to Bofur. “We’ve all had ours—you’re the odd one out.”

Fili glanced at Bofur expectantly, interested in the reason why he hadn’t wanted to finish before.

“I’ve got it in my head tonight that I want to be sucked,” Bofur said, low and dangerous. “I want to be drained positively dry.”

Kili shifted uncomfortably, feeling guilty that he was the one that put Bofur in this mood and did not finish it.

Bilbo rolled Bofur onto his back and kissed a trail down his stomach “I’d say you’ve gotten a head start on being drained dry. You’re *dripping* right now.”

Groaning to feel Bilbo’s mouth on him, Bofur let his head fall back and he closed his eyes. There was a pause, then the odd sensation of a different mouth. Bofur glanced down and Fili was on him, looking up at him with mischievously dancing eyes.

“What’s this then?” asked Bofur.

“Call it a race,” Bilbo said. “Only you’re the winner.”

Bofur blinked in surprise. “You two are going to-?”

“.Mmm-hmm,” Fili moaned.

“Until I-“

“.in one of us or the other,” Bilbo affirmed. “Possibly both.”

“Oh fuck,” signed Bofur happily, dropping his head back again.

Bofur figured seldom had a dwarf ever been as happy as he was in that moment with Bilbo and Fili taking turns at him, their goal to suck him until he came. Lazily, he opened his eyes and saw Kili looking back at him with a peculiar expression on his face. Bofur reached up to caress his jaw, gazing at him and hoping to convey wordlessly that he didn’t hold Kili’s preference or promise to Fili against him. Kili smiled back at him softly, stroking his arm as Bofur touched his face, and Bofur knew he had been understood. Kili grasped his wrist then, gently removing Bofur’s hand from his face but not letting him go.

“May I?” Kili asked.
As before, Bofur did not know what Kili was requesting, and just as before, he didn’t care—whatever it was, it was bloody likely Kili could have it. As Bilbo and Fili switched places again, Kili parted his achingly inviting lips and sucked two of Bofur’s digits inside his mouth. He moved with teasing slowness and agonizing precision, keeping his eyes trained on Bofur’s. The delicious tension coiling in Bofur’s core instantly increased fivefold. Bofur swore curses in Khuzdul as Kili fellated his fingers as masterfully as if they had actually been his prick. Between the three of them, his lovers had him close, grunting and breathing shallowly.

When Bofur was finished, he rolled over on his side to kiss Fili, who had crawled up next to him. Kili took the opportunity to spoon up behind him, resting one hand on Bofur’s hip while patting the bed behind him in invitation to Bilbo with the other. He received an obscene, Bofur-flavored kiss from Bilbo and it felt scandalous, somehow, to be tasting Bofur in his mouth after suggestively sucking on his fingers.

The four of them relaxed together with gentle hands smoothing over skin and soft kisses being placed on whatever flesh was in front of them. They murmured between themselves, Bofur and Fili sharing filthy snippets of their adventures apart while Kili and Bilbo did the same. Kili’s secret about Thorin and Fili’s and Bilbo’s private shared fantasy were not among the divulged details.

Bofur marveled at how pleasant the evening had been. Not only had they finally gotten a bed together again after so many leagues on the road, but he had also thoroughly enjoyed his time with Kili. He and Kili had waited a long time to be lovers, never quite experiencing that desperate infatuation they had felt with the others. However, once they had started getting physical, that part of their relationship came quite naturally and pleasantly, with no rush or urgency to push it further faster. Well…almost no rush. Somehow, along the way, Bofur had become as singularly obsessed with Kili sucking his cock as Kili had confessed he was about putting his mouth on Thorin. He needed to get that part under control, he scolded himself, lest Kili grow uncomfortable with him. Kili had already clearly explained for him why he held back and Bofur resolved to be more diligent about respecting it.

Fili listened to the others fall into a relaxed, deep-breathing sleep one by one until he was the last one awake. By all rights, he should be asleep, too, but his mind raced. For weeks, he had entertained fantasies about having sex with Bilbo and Kili. He told himself—and told Bilbo—fantasies were all they were, but the yearning had grown stronger with every night they shared in bed. It had culminated that evening with Fili being so lost to the idea of his cock pushing inside Bilbo that he almost came when Bilbo did. For a moment, he thought Bilbo could feel it too, feel some sort of soul-surge to accompany the moment of ecstasy. Though the moment passed when the clarity came back to Bilbo’s eyes, there was no denying that Bilbo’s participation in the fantasy himself profoundly affected him, too.

It always came back to the bond, though. They had already spoken of the possibility of Bilbo and
Bofur bonding and even though Thorin himself had suspected it might be an eventuality, there was much trepidation regarding it--some possibly between the four of them, for all he knew. Bringing more discussion of imprints into the situation, especially when Thorin didn’t even know about him and Bilbo at all yet…well, it was out of the question. Even if he could allow himself to entertain it, his was far from the only heart to consider.

The potential turmoil if he and Kili crossed that largest forbidden boundary also doused any consideration of pursuing it with him. Though the existence of a bond in their blood made it seem less complicated at first glance, their unique situation—and whom their consummated relationship might affect, in or out of their beds—made it problematic at best.

Sharing his desires with Bilbo—though carefully couched as fantasy only—at least kept him from carrying a portion of desire’s burden all by himself. He wondered if it would be beneficial to share his secret with Kili, too…or if it would make it worse, make him want all the more.

*****

In the morning, the full group of travelers convened for breakfast, shooting each other embarrassed looks. Not a single one of them let their beds go erotically unused the night before and, though all had attempted to (mostly) be mindful, they were painfully aware perhaps a little sound had carried from room to room.

Bilbo wasn’t sure what all still remained a mystery about him, Fili, Kili, and Bofur—or to whom. He racked his brain trying to remember if anything especially unusual to an outsider’s ears might have happened, such as Bofur calling Kili’s name. Halfway through his pancakes, it occurred to him that the very nature of the four of them sharing a room with any moan emanating from it would probably implicate them beyond normal dwarvish or elvish sensibilities, anyhow. He blushed to the tips of his ears as he pushed the next bite around in his syrup.

*****

Beorn was not a stranger to Rorimac, Thodora, or Chadham, but his home certainly was. The sheer size of things, the animals who coexisted with him, his interesting (but delicious) diet—they spent every moment in continuing wonder.

The elves were less stunned by his ways, his companions, and the size of things, but Daerbes had giddily confessed to Bilbo that she could feel it the moment they passed his borders. “Magic, a very old and unique magic,” was how she had described it.

Ori and Nori had been there before, though not quite like this, and they also soaked in the experience of simply existing there at leisure. It was particularly sweet this time around to have their partners with them.

By far, excluding the four who had lived there last winter, Bifur was the most taken with Beorn’s. In their haste the first time, Gandalf and The Fourteen had rushed through too quickly and Bifur had not time to appreciate the beauty of the grounds or dote on the wonderful creatures dwelling there. His issue with speech at the time had made him shy about communicating with Beorn, too. This time, he was full of wide-eyed questions as he immersed himself in his surroundings. Sensing Bifur’s respect for things that both walked and grew, Beorn enthusiastically gave Bifur all the answers, stories, and attention he wished.

*****

Wandering Beorn’s gardens gave Bilbo a very particular tug at his heart, for they reminded him of
last year’s bittersweet departure. The plants and flowers were further along in the season now than they were then, and Bilbo ran his hands over the leaves wistfully. One of these years, he would love the chance to spend full summer days at Beorn’s lazing and lounging and covering his lovers with flower jewelry.

Bilbo and Kili had to (of course) spend some of the lovely, sunny day at their tree, kissing and cuddling at its base. Kili pulled his special acorn from his bag and regarded it thoughtfully.

“When I plucked this from the ground, I had hoped for the courage to ask to be your suitor, and for the good fortune that you might one day accept. How long ago that seems, and also like yesterday. My warmest jewel,” Kili tipped Bilbo’s chin up. “I’ve never forgotten, and never will forget, how hard I wished for this, for you, how much of a dream come true you are to me every day.” He kissed him then.

“I won’t forget, either,” breathed Bilbo. He paused to think a moment. “Is that why you tell me so often? Because you worry I might forget?”

Kili shook his head. “Since those early beginnings, we’ve added lovers to our bed, promises to other hearts, and beads to our hair. I never want you to think our more complicated circumstances mean what I feel for you has been distributed or lessened, somehow, or that I might forget how passionately and desperately I used to wish for you to simply look at me with the light that is in your eyes at this very moment. I tell you so you know I haven’t forgotten. I’ll never forget, because it will never cease being the most amazing thing that has ever happened to me.”

“And you to me, dear heart. Perhaps I shall endeavor to tell you more often, too, for your own reassurance. None of these extra lovers, promises, and beads would even be possible without what I have with you. I love you so.”

They exchanged more soft kisses and sat happily in the sunbeam at the base of the tree, the eventual full canopy of leaves still merely the young buds and bundles of early spring. Bilbo asked for the acorn and Kili handed it over without question. Bilbo set it on the ground, tossing a little dust from the dirt over the top.

“What are you doing?” Kili laughed.

Bilbo shrugged. “Giving it a little renewal.”

“How do you figure?”

“This is a sacred place for you and me. I’m refreshing a little bit of the magic you carry with you.”

Kili’s bright, mirthful eyes sparkled with renewed adoration.

“My Bilbo. You never stop surprising me.”

Kili pulled him close and held him for a long time.

*****

Beorn did not mind his full house at all. This winter—despite a detour or two—had been far lonelier and quieter than the winter before. He had missed the chatter and merriment of hobbit and dwarf in his parlor. Now he had multiples of each, and elves besides. Two days was far too short a time to hold such lovely company, though he could not begrudge them the pull of their loved ones. All of the dwarrows had people they loved and missed dearly in that mountain and he could sense the longing and anxiousness emanating from them in waves--especially for those who were reuniting with a lover, with Thorin. He smiled to himself. Though he had been mistrustful of Thorin in the past, he had no trace of doubt about him or his intentions now. Beorn wished him only happiness.

*****
Daerbes was delighted to discover Beorn had ancient strains of esoteric herbs simply growing wild behind the house. Bilbo had encouraged her to request to harvest some and Beorn had assented kindly, as he had suspected. Curious himself, Bilbo had readily offered to help gather them. To his delight, Daerbes explained as they went what each plant was, why it was useful, and—often—why it was rare. She hadn’t seen one of the varieties in more than four centuries. The lore Daerbes shared was fascinating, and doubly so was the realization that Beorn—fittingly somehow—had an elf’s dream garden randomly growing wild behind his dwelling.

Gathering up the last clippings, Bilbo asked Nerithel and Daerbes, “Are you excited to visit Erebor?”

“Excited, and perhaps somewhat anxious,” Nerithel answered.

“Anxious because you think there will be…” Bilbo spun his hand in slow circles as he tried to conjure up the most diplomatic word. “…friction?”

“I suppose that is a good way to put it,” Nerithel said.

Daerbes saw the concern fall over Bilbo’s face and chimed in.

“But—we were invited specifically by the Princess as well as Master Dwalin, and we would be serving as the emissaries from Rivendell, besides, if Lord Elrond will not be able to attend. We cannot imagine too much unrest in the kingdom if we are not only ambassadors but also special guests of the royal couple themselves. It is mere caution, nothing to fret over on our behalf.”

“True,” Nerithel said, “And we would hardly be the first elves in the mountain. Thorin—“

There was an odd squeak and then sudden silence between the elves. Daerbes shot Nerithel a quick look before Bilbo’s curious eyes landed on her. If they told Bilbo elves were at that very moment making beds in Erebor, it could potentially ruin Thorin’s plans to surprise Bilbo and the others.

“What? Thorin what?” he asked.

Daerbes covered for Nerithel’s slip smoothly. “Thorin has shown—both in the Shire as well as on our return trip after your wedding—that his former grudges against Thranduil are not active, current prejudices against the citizens of Rivendell.”

“Oh,” Bilbo said, not sure if he was relieved or disappointed they did not have some sort of news about the king.

Daerbes put her hand on his. “You care about him, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Bilbo replied, twitching a small smile. “I truly do.”

There was another look between Daerbes and Nerithel then, one Bilbo witnessed, though he did not know what it meant to convey. It looked…reassuring, somehow, and most definitely kind. He considered what members of their party might have already guessed about his romantic entanglements and decided to trust Daerbes and Nerithel with a little more.

“I’m still in love with him.” he confessed. Immediately, he felt lighter.

Cryptically, Daerbes said, “I’m glad to hear that, Bilbo.”

That hadn’t been (in any way) a reply Bilbo had expected to follow such an admission. Bilbo studied her face, finding her as infuriatingly difficult to read as Lord Elrond. He wondered for a moment if she might have a touch of The Sight herself.

The subject changed and Bilbo moved on with them, but he couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling for hours afterward that something had transpired between Daerbes, Nerithel, and Thorin that he didn’t (or was not intended to) understand.

*****

Retiring for bed, it was Bofur who first noticed the enormous mug full of flower stems in their room.
“Oi, what’s this?”
“Perhaps if you all would be so kind as to undress, I will show you,” replied Bilbo.

Considering none of them had planned on wasting the bed that night anyhow, the clothes were quickly shed. Bilbo gathered the stems out, shook some water loose, spread them out on the bed, and climbed up after them. Sitting with his legs folded, he grasped a few stems and began to work.

“I could not help but notice a plethora of wildflowers blooming already in Beorn’s garden. When he gave Daerbes leave to trim herbs, he was also kind enough to give me leave to gather an armful of the more plentiful early openers. The little blue ones flower all along the stem, which make them perfect for weaving into wearables. I think these sweet white ones blend in quite well, don’t you think?”

Bofur and Fili stood there, agog. They had noticed some of the other couples with blooms in their hair at dinner and had felt both shame and envy that neither they nor their own lovers had thought this afternoon to share those sweet tokens of expression. Kili just smiled, because he had been there when Bilbo picked them—he was the one who suggested the water to keep them fresh for bedtime.

“Well?” Bilbo said. “Are you going to help me or not? You do not have to, of course, but the more time I take weaving these crowns and bracelets, the longer it will be before we can make love in them.”

Kili, Fili, and Bofur scrambled up on the bed, snatching up stems.

Once they were finished, all four were crowned and wearing bracelets, and Bofur was fastening the second of two anklets to Bilbo. There had been no advance discussion about how the lovers might split off tonight, and in the end there had been no need. Something about the flowers had done the deciding for them.

Bofur’s heart caught in his chest at the sight of Bilbo fully bedecked. He often conjured the image of Bilbo outside those very walls wearing flowers around his head, wrists, and (most importantly) ankles, straddling Kili as they sat up against the tree making love. So powerful was this image, Bofur had often sought to reenact the position, sometimes not even consciously, and looking upon Bilbo now would have surely made him stumble had he not already been sitting. As it was, he crawled back towards the headboard (retrieving the oil bottle they had stashed under a pillow), sat against it, and held a hand out to Bilbo. Bilbo joined him and sat astride, already just as aroused as Bofur was. Their mouths crashed together ardently.

“Bee, oh, oh Bilbo,” gasped Bofur. “You don’t even know what you do to me like this. Have I ever told you?”
“That it reminds you of your first filthy peek of me? Oh, I think you might have brought it up once, twice, half a dozen times,” teased Bilbo, though his eyes were dark pools of desire.
“It wasn’t just filth, you know,” said Bofur. He licked the column of Bilbo’s throat and mouthed down to his chest, speaking in between touches. “You were so beautiful, you were…cor, Bee, you were a work of art. That image burned itself into my mind as the height of abandon and eroticism. Did I ever tell you the first time Fili made love to me, I gave myself to him just like I witnessed you with Kili?”
“No, I didn’t know that.”
“So you see,” Bofur continued, smoothing his hands down Bilbo’s back to cradle his bottom as he continued nibbling across his flesh. “It wasn’t filth to me. It was love.”
“Bo,” Bilbo moaned, tugging his face up to claim his mouth again.

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Fili reached out, gently stroking a petal on Kili’s crown, breath taken away by Kili’s beauty.

“Remember we used to make these for each other when we were young?”

“Yeah, and Mam made us stop,” Kili said.

“I don’t know if I was more confused as to why or simply cross because she said no.”

“Well, I was cross about it, I can tell you. The times you would put flowers in my hair or make me circlets were about the only times I felt handsome back then. I would preen and preen.”

“Oh, Kee,” Fili said sadly. “You were always beautiful to me. Always.”

“It is okay, Fee. I’ve not felt ugly once since the vision with Yavanna, I’m just talking about how it used to be.”

“I can tell you putting that crown on your head this time, it stirred something in me it had never stirred when we were little.”

“Did it?”

Fili wet his lips and nodded. “You are breathtaking wearing your flowers, your careless hair, a few pieces of jewelry, and not much else.”

An image of him and Kili fucking while dressed only in gold and flowers flashed in his mind, making his cock throb. He paused a moment, debating on whether to share his taboo desire. In the end, he found neither voice nor courage to go that far.

Instead, Fili growled, “I want you. Mahal, I desperately want you.”

Pulling Fili on top of him, Kili fell back onto the bed. They kissed, licked, bit, rutted, and moaned.

****

Bilbo—still straddling his lover—slicked Bofur’s cock with oil, stroking it with both hands as he slowly rose and fell on the fingers Bofur had inside him. Bofur’s free hand trailed up and down Bilbo’s chest and stomach, smoothing over his piercings at every pass. Bilbo exhaled a shuddering breath and let his head fall back.

“Tell me you love me,” Bofur pleaded softly.

Bilbo opened his eyes and looked at him. “I love you, Bo.”

Bilbo took one of his hands off Bofur’s cock, rubbing the remaining oil into the skin as he moved it up Bofur’s side, over his shoulder, and eventually behind his neck. Still pumping the other hand (and feeling Bofur move within him), he pulled Bofur close and whispered in his ear.

“In fact, I wish we were making love right now.”

Bofur whimpered. “Me too, I wish that like mad.”

Adjusting just enough to rest his forehead against Bofur’s, they raggedly breathed each other’s breath, caught up in the intimacy of the moment yet not pausing in their quest to bring the other to the brink of ecstasy.

Bilbo gazed into Bofur’s eyes. “You should know-“ He had to stop a moment simply to gather himself. The words he was about to speak were already affecting him before he had managed to give them voice. His heart pounded and his breathing grew shallow, so deep was his desire. He licked his lips, swallowed, and then started again.

“-You should know I am planning on talking to Thorin. Not thinking about it, not ‘oh maybe if the wind is just right’ or if any esoteric series of events happens in a specific order. This thing between us, it is more than a fantasy for me. It is an intention, Bo. I want you inside me, within me, under my skin and in my blood.”
Everything inside Bofur stuttered and flexed, sending shocks and tingles radiating out from his core. His mouth moved on its own until it found Bilbo’s, tongue parting his lips and insinuating its way inside. He pushed deeper, feeling Bilbo yield to him, mouth to arse, and his efforts for both prodded him onward, hungry and intense. Bilbo groaned deep from his chest and Bofur felt it thrillingly on his tongue. He had so much he wished to say to Bilbo, wanting to convey what it meant to him to have Bilbo wreathed in flowers on his lap—confessing his love, his want, and his need to have Bofur possess him so intimately, so eternally. Without adequate words, he let his body tell Bilbo everything he wanted to know, kissing, touching, penetrating, and stroking until Bilbo came apart in his lap. Easing out of Bilbo, he took himself in hand, preparing to slickly finish what Bilbo had started before he had grown so overcome that he had stopped pumping him.

Bilbo gently knocked Bofur’s hands out of the way. “Rub against me, Bo. Come on me.”

Turning around, Bilbo slicked his crevice generously and guided Bofur to slide between, parallel. Bofur tentatively grabbed Bilbo’s hips and rolled his hips experimentally. Oh, it felt good. Doing it again, it struck him how similar this was in movement to actually fucking him. Gripping him more firmly now, Bofur undulated, each pass of the sensitive underside of his cock along Bilbo’s most intimate flesh pushing him further and further. He couldn’t believe how fast it got him there or how satisfying it was to lattice Bilbo’s back with spurt after spurt. He admired it for a moment before running his fingers through it, tracing wet patterns down across Bilbo’s bum. Remembering Fili’s inspiration from the night before, Bofur ran another digit through, drawing it down across Bilbo’s hole. Something came over him then, and he used the side of his finger to scoop down the remainder, down past the crevice, turning so the pad of his finger guided the dollop over the entrance. Slowly, he worked it in, little by little, until Bilbo was stretched out and whimpering, clinging to Bofur’s knees.

“Are you pushing it inside me?” Bilbo asked.
In reply, Bofur rasped, “Yes.”
“Yavanna’s grace! I…oh, why haven’t I thought of that before?”

Bofur drew back and Bilbo returned to his lap.

“You’re magnificently obscene,” Bilbo cooed, kissing him.
“To be fair, that little idea came from Fili’s caper last night. I can’t claim responsibility. You, though—your innovation messed with my mind in all the best ways. My brain, my body, doing that tricked almost everything into thinking we were making love. I don’t think a wank would have made me come so hard or involved so many of my senses.”
“Well, now, it is my turn to share the credit. That particular innovation, as you called it, was courtesy of our Kee. He discovered it quite by accident one night—here, actually, before we had bonded.”
“That husband of yours is an erotic genius, you know,” drawled Bofur.
“I could say the same about that husband of yours.”
“Must run in the family. Now I know why you’re so smitten with Thorin.”

Bofur winked at him and Bilbo giggled.

“You did very well, Bo. You said his name without frowning this time.”
“I do have a gorgeous, naked hobbit in my lap. That certainly helps.”

****

“So what is this new thing on between you and Bilbo?” Kili sensuously murmured into Fili’s ear.

Fili considered being coy, but saw no real point. Kili had obviously noticed the heat between him
and Bilbo intensify since they had admitted they’d fantasized about fucking each other. That hadn’t been the only change in their quartet, though, and Fili saw an opening to inquire about something he had been curious about himself since before they had left Bag End.

“I’ll tell you if you tell me what is going on with you and Bofur.”

Taking a moment to come up with a way to tell Fili a version of the truth without giving away his secret about Thorin, Kili finally said, “We’ve shared an erotic confession, I guess you would call it. Since then things have been quite different between us, but good. Exciting, honestly. It has made things even more--”

“--Intense when you’re intimate?”

Kili stopped. “Yeah, actually. How did you--“

“Because I could say the same thing, word by word.”

Their mouths crashed together again, both further aroused by the similarity and serendipity of their half-admissions. Their need carried them away, neither of them thinking for a moment to ask what erotic confessions the other had been referencing.

****

Bilbo, Fili, Bofur, and Kili ended the night coupled with their Chosens.

Kili covered Bilbo, making love slowly, languidly, each of them whispering filth and devotion. At Kili’s insistence, they finished in turns, one inside the other. They had not expected it, but making love to each other at Beorn’s seemed like a homecoming, especially after this afternoon’s walk and this evening’s flowers. That was where it had become real, where they had begun their courting, had first made love, had become engaged, and—further back—where Kili had first put a name to what he had felt for Bilbo, where Bilbo had started falling in earnest without even knowing. The significance of being there again, marking the occasion together gloriously one more time before the morning’s departure left them both intoxicated with devotion.

Bofur had Fili on his hands and knees, giving him exactly what he needed and as hard as he begged (before Fili had stuffed a pillow in his mouth to catch his cries). Having been well-warmed up by Kili, all Fili’s right places were awake and stimulated enough for Bofur to give Fili a pounding climax—all while both hands were on Fili’s back and Fili’s were wrapped around the pillow. Bofur followed after him, Fili still moaning and shuddering through the last shocks of his orgasm even after Bofur had finished.

The four of them had so thoroughly wrung each other out that no one wanted to get up to wash up, though Bilbo eventually volunteered. He discovered that while they had a flannel in their room, there was no water to go with it. Chewing on the inside of his lip, Bilbo glanced around. A flannel alone was not going to clean this night’s mess, not by a longshot. His eyes landed on the big mug, the one he had the flowers in. Shrugging, he grabbed it and used the flower water to clean them up.

*****

A germ of an idea had taken root in Fili’s mind, growing steadily. Spending those two delightfully obscene evenings at Beorn’s in Bilbo’s and Kili’s arms had fed it further until it flowered over almost every waking thought, nearly to the point of obsession. As they cleaned their room that morning and packed up, Fili quietly shut and latched the door.

Kili noticed and stooped what he was doing. “Fee?”

Looking up, Bilbo and Bofur also stopped, which made Fili more nervous, even though he had
planned on getting their attention.

“I have something to propose, and though I’m afraid of how you might react, my desire is so strong it has given me courage to speak it aloud.”

“Go on,” Bofur said, touching his arm comfortingly before sitting on the bed to listen. Fili’s eyes darted between them as he spoke. “I think I’ve come up with a way that we can enjoy making love with each other—all four of us, in any combination we choose—without it resulting in a bond.”

“You mean have full, penetrative sex without leaving an imprint?” asked Bilbo. Kili threw back his head, drawing out the word “fuck” as he grinned at the ceiling. “If only!”

“Sounds too good to be true,” Bofur agreed. “Though I’m willing to listen.”

“You know how—with the exception of me and Kee—the bond that stays in your blood only happens when we finish inside our lover, right?”

“Yes?” Bilbo said.

Fili took another steadying breath. “So we don’t finish.”

“You mean do everything but and then, what? Pull out before we come?” asked Bofur.

“Yes,” Fili said.

Kili considered this. “Huh.”

“It might work,” Bofur said. Emboldened by not being immediately talked down, Fili further explained, “I imagine it works much like the penetration we do allow ourselves, the mouth play and the fingers and the tongues: namely, that we will still feel something. However, we’re intimately connected from being inside each other in those different ways already. The bond is a different commitment, weightier and much more visceral, but the other attachment has already happened. It simply isn’t much of a crevice over which to jump to feel it with a cock as opposed to a digit.”

“I don’t know if Thorin would see it quite so charitably. I’m already giving him enough surprises as it is,” Bilbo said.

“I didn’t say we had to hurry,” Fili was quick to point out. “We’ll be in Erebor soon, and this is the kind of thing we can bring up with him at some point after we reveal ourselves. I’ll confess, though: I want it. I want to make love with you, Kee, and with you, Bee. I want to feel you, to move within you, to feel you move within me. I’m nearly overcome with wanting it so badly…and then there are the other possibilities, the extra pleasures and things we cannot do now with more than two of us.”

Bilbo and Kili looked at Bofur as Fili confessed.

“Yes, I already know he’s gagging for the two of you. Fee might have whispered such desires into my ear a time or twenty before. I didn’t realize he had devised a way to get away with it, though.”

“And what of you?” asked Kili.

Bofur’s eyebrows raised. “Me?”

Kili nodded. “Are you overcome with the same desires?”

Bofur smiled awkwardly. “Well, I think Bee knows how I feel, though I think we might wait for the outcome of our discussion with all five of us to dictate what actions we undertake.”

Despite coming that morning already, Kili was already hard again, thinking about the potential of an arrangement like this. He had never forgotten the dream he had with Bilbo and that second bottle of Lover’s Wine, had never gotten over the feeling of fucking and being fucked at once. The possibility of feeling it for real, of expanding their play so that Fili could feel it, too…it was rapturously exciting.

Fili said, “All I ask is that you consider it for a while. Last night being our last private night until Erebor, and Erebor itself being something of a murky area for expectations, it is doubtful we will be reopening the subject anytime soon. I will confess, though, it had taken hold in my mind and I
had to say something before it ate me alive.”
“Understood, Fee. More of a ‘what if’ sort of proposal to be thinking about,” Bofur said helpfully.
“And not a foregone conclusion,” Kili finished.
Fili nodded. “More or less.”
“Well, perhaps you should have told us last night while we were in the middle of things instead of when we were not due in the other room in a handful of minutes. I’m getting stiff again,” groused Bilbo.
“I’ve been wanting to tell you for longer than that,” Fili said, “but if I would have told you while we were in the middle of things, there likely wouldn’t have been much careful thought—at least not from my end.”
Bofur nodded solemnly. “Aye, if we want to be thoughtful about things, probably best to bring them up when all the blood is up in the mind instead of rushing down to the prick. Makes for less awkward and tearful mornings after.”
Bilbo said, “I suppose you’re right, as usual.”
Kili kept it to himself that if they had played like that the night before, he still wouldn’t have minded in the slightest when he woke that morning.

*****

This year’s departure from Beorn’s wasn’t the sad goodbye from the year before. They would be seeing him in Erebor in a matter of weeks, and likely seeing him again on their way home, too. Even so, Thodora and Chadham politely sought assurances from Beorn that they would be allowed back to visit—after all, the animals, land, and house they also loved weren’t coming to Erebor for the wedding along with him.

Bifur’s reluctance to leave was silent, though Beorn was intuitive enough to sense the sadness he had been feeling. Beorn squatted—with some difficulty—to look Bifur in the eye. He gently laid a mighty hand on Bifur’s arm.

“You love this land and its creatures as I do, which I appreciate more than I can tell you. Be not sad, Bifur. As with Bunny, Fili, Kili, and Bofur, you and your Rorimac are welcome any time you wish for as long as you wish. The land has told me there is much more for you to discover; it awaits your return.”
Comforted, Bifur bowed for him. “I thank you most humbly.”

Though Bilbo had argued their stop at Beorn’s was intended only to be a fond visit and was not for renewing supplies, Beorn nonetheless sent them off with a couple days’ worth.

Beorn added, “Tell your king it is still a touch early in the season for full hives at the moment, though I anticipate some honey with his name on it might fall into my bag when it is time to pack for my own trip.”
Bilbo blushed at the phrase “your king,” nodding his understanding. “Thank you, Beorn.”

Once all the goodbyes were given, including Beorn’s requisite lifting Bilbo up off the ground for a hug and kiss goodbye, the travelers were again on their way.

*****

Fili and Bofur volunteered to gather the fuel for evening’s camp, hoping to use the excuse to sneak off for a snog. After a furtive wank with each other, they straightened themselves back up and began looking for branches in earnest.

“Oh, is that—it is!” Fili exclaimed. “Look! It is a spring. Did you bring your waterskin?”
“Aye.”

Fili cupped his hand to drink, testing the water.

“Oh, this is clean! Every bit as clean as Beorn’s, I’d say. Hand me your skin and I’ll fill it. This will be the best we get between here and Erebor.”

Fili sat, patiently waiting for the skin to fill from the odd angle he had to hold it.

“We’re not that far from Erebor, really,” ventured Bofur. “Wouldn’t be difficult for that to be the best.”

“How are you doing with it?”

“With what?”

“With the mountain—with Thorin—not far away.”

Bofur pulled in a long breath through his nose. “Well, I’m nervous.”

“Me too. What vexes you?”

“Keeping our secrets. We’ve not been that good at it, not that we’ve been practicing like we said we would. I’ve said before and it still holds true: I’m not keen on having to rein in my impulses and feelings when it comes to Bilbo and Kee, nor for taking off my beads and our rings.”

“You think we have to take off our rings?”

“Unless you want to tell them all we are at the very least betrothed...and deal with Balin.”

Fili made a face. “That’s not appealing, either.”

Taking off his own waterskin, Fili took several swallows and filled it, too.

“So what about you?” Bofur asked. “What has you nervous about Erebor being so close?”

They looked at each other, smiled, and said in unison, “Thorin.”

Fili shook his head, his smile more wistful than merry. “What else, right?”

“Thorin has been dying for you to return,” Bofur reassured him. “I’ve read the letter he sent you. He can’t wait for you to get back.”

“You know it isn’t that, Bo.”

Bofur nodded knowingly. “This is about your brother, then.”

“No Kee only, you know. It is more than that. It is just...Thorin isn’t one of us. He’s not part of our magical quartet.”

“No, but you’ve made your peace that he is Bee’s husband, yes?”

“Ages ago.”

“And Kee’s lover?”

“Recently and reluctantly.”

“So what is the worry?”

“I trust this, the four of us, what is between us. It is safe. You all love me and would never do anything to hurt me.”

“And you think Thorin, somehow, loves you less?”

“No.”

“Do you think Thorin, in all these weeks of loneliness, doesn’t deserve the same comfort and relief we’ve enjoyed with each other?”

“No, I—no! I didn’t say that.”

“I know you didn’t, Fee,” Bofur said gently. “But that would be the unspoken implication of what you are saying.”

Contrite, the corner of Fili’s mouth twitched up in an embarrassed smile. “Since when did you become such an advocate for Thorin?”

“Since when haven’t you been one yourself?”

“Not fair countering my question with a question.”

“Fine. I understand him better now, though I’m certainly not without my jealousies. I think about
how this must have been for him and I cannot even bear to imagine myself in his boots. I was serious when I asked you my question, though. You always managed to see the good side of Thorin, even when the three of us were having our own issues. After everything we went through in the Shire with him, after the vulnerability he showed to all of us, after seeing how much he had grown, I thought you’d wind up being a bigger advocate than ever.”
“I’m scared, Bo. I told you after our wedding night: what the four of us have together is everything I never knew I wanted. Being here now, making room for him in our lives and the lads making room for him in their bed…it is change where I simply do not want it. It frightens me to alter our dynamic. I knew it was coming, I’ve had the whole journey to prepare, but it didn’t help. I would go as far to say that somehow, those last nights at Beorn’s made the stakes seem even higher.”
“I understand what you mean about Beorn’s. I was astonished how much more affected I could still be, how much more affected I was. I haven’t stopped thinking of it since, as a matter of fact, nor of your new idea. Things between us are wonderful and get better the closer we grow and you’re right about the stakes being high and getting higher. Believe me when I tell you I’m nervous about adding to it too. Regardless of my nerves about what Erebor will bring, though, I know this much: Kee and Bee are devoted to each other and to us. I know that as sure as I know the sun will rise tomorrow.”

Fili’s heart melted as Bofur spoke with a passion that matched his own, and he tucked the reassurance Bofur provided close to his heart.

“You’re right. I need to stop telling myself awful stories of what might happen and trust in what we have.”
“Thorin would want you to trust him, too,” added Bofur gently. “I truly believe that all he wants these days is simply to love and to be loved—and that is me saying that, which ought to tell you something. I don’t think for a moment he would try to take Kee away from you any more than you are trying to take Bee from Kee.”

Fili pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes. “You make sense, you do. My common sense knows you do.”

Gently tugging Fili’s hands down, Bofur cradled Fili’s face. “Don’t think it is easy for me to listen to my own advice. Being pragmatic is going to be more difficult when we’re faced with it in the flesh, but we both will try to keep each other strong in and in a good frame of mind, aye?”

“We will,” agreed Fili, granting him a small smile.

Bofur wrapped him in his arms. “Good, because we’ll need it. It is only going to hurt ourselves more if we give the voices in our heads too much attention, Fee.”

*****

They had stopped for what Fili and Kili had figured would be the last camp before the mountain. It was earlier than they would have finished traveling for the day otherwise, but the extra couple leagues they could have still covered before sunset would have had them camping in the wide open. They opted to stop at the last somewhat wooded area on their trajectory between there and Erebor.

Excitement was growing and the group was animated. Their good humor was further helped along by not having to so carefully ration the remaining food—dinner that night was practically a celebratory feast. As they chatted animatedly by firelight, Fili shushed them and held up a hand, indicating they should listen.

“What?” Kili whispered.

Faintly, there were soft thuds of an indeterminate nature.
Carefully reaching for his weapon, Nori asked, “Is it a beast?”

Fili shook his head slowly and motioned for them to take up arms. As stealthily as they could, everyone readied themselves as the noises neared. There were a series of rustles and a snapping of twigs so near it had all their hearts pounding.

Kili murmured, “Steady.”

Suddenly, a dwarf came out of the woods, followed by a Man. Both had weapons drawn.

“State your business,” the dwarf shouted. “In the name of Erebor, state your own first!” Kili shouted back.

The dwarf blinked, not expecting such a reply, and glanced at the man, who had slightly relaxed his stance.

“Wait,” the man said. “This is not quite the scene I had pictured when we saw the light from the fire. Who are you?”

Kili, still mistrustful, replied, “Who are we? Who are you?”

The man firmed up his stance again, clearly annoyed, and Bilbo thought they might go on like this all night if someone didn’t do something incredibly foolish first, like take a swing.

“Excuse me,” Bilbo said, shouldering out in front of Kili. “Excuse me, hello, hi. My name is Bilbo Baggins and these are my family and friends. We are traveling to the mountain and we’re probably as surprised as the two of you to meet you on our road.”

Both the dwarf and the man lowered their weapons slowly, as in disbelief.

“You’re The Hobbit Of Erebor!” the dwarf said. He glanced between Fili, Kili, Bofur, Ori, Bifur, and Nori. “That means…you’re the princes! Well, two of you are.”

The dwarf bowed in deference, smacking his companion’s arm with the back of his hand to get him to do the same.

“Please,” Fili said. “That is not necessary.”

“No, you don’t understand!” the dwarf said. “We were told specifically to keep an eye out for you at the behest of King Thorin.”

“For us? Really?” Bilbo said.

The man nodded. “We are one of several patrol pairs sent out as a partnership between New Dale and Erebor to keep the land and roadway leading to the mountain free from rogue goblins or other hostile elements. When he asked us to keep an eye out for you during the course of our usual duties, we did not think the odds very good we would ever run into you—indeed, it hadn’t occurred to us at all that the fire and noise coming from your camp was actually, well, you.”

“Surprise,” quipped Bofur dryly.

“King Thorin had told us—we and the other patrols like us—if we found you, we were to remain with you as your guards and escorts until you reached the mountain safely.”

“Well, in that case, have you had food?” Bilbo asked. “We’ve gotten this far with stores to spare and since we figure we’ll be at the gate by afternoon or so, there’s no point in rationing it now.”

“Ooh!” the dwarf exclaimed happily, setting aside his axe. “What have you got?”

*****

Bilbo snuggled up with Kili, his brain too excitedly full to fall asleep fast…though his body was quite ready for it to empty out and wind down, thank you very much. As the shifted on the
unforgiving ground, Bilbo thought about how tomorrow night might have him sleeping in a bed with Thorin—his real, warm, solid Thorin—for the first time in weeks.

Bilbo could scarcely wait to see him, though he was utterly clueless what to expect. It couldn’t be like any time before had been, where they could throw caution aside and disregard the whispers if they appeared too close or were too adoring. Bilbo was now officially married to a prince and there were rules to observe regarding propriety for both him and Thorin—not to mention a lot more eyes on them with all the new citizenry. He had to prepare for the realistic possibility that he might have to spend all day near Thorin with no kisses or tender contact until Thorin could sneak into his room (or the other way around) after the mountain had gone to bed. After that, however, the reunion could properly begin!

Bilbo dropped off to sleep imagining all the beautiful possibilities the next night might bring.
Our travelers arrive in Erebor at last.

Okay, I'll make you a deal.
I've posted all 16,000+ words of this section in one go. Your part is to not forget the stuff you want to comment on between now and the end.
Deal?
Deal <3

As usual, the left-aligned **** designate group changes within segments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Upon rising that morning, Bilbo reluctantly had Kili re-plait his hair without the additional beads, including Thorin’s. He reciprocated for Kili, who then quietly reminded Fili and Bofur to take care of theirs, too. They did not think the beads were noticed by their escort in the dark the evening before, and were doubly confident even if they had been, none of the symbols could have been recognized without especially near proximity or light either one.

Breakfast was eaten as the sun rose, and immediately afterwards the group had packed up their final camp of the journey and went on their way.

After barely a quarter of a league on the open plain, they sighted ravens in the sky. Bilbo watched as one came down and landed on the arm of the dwarf escort at the lead, who spoke to it and sent it off again.

"Thorin, please, you must reconsider this!” Dain said. “The wedding was a one-time thing. You are talking about months!”

A dwarf burst into Thorin’s council chambers.

"King Thorin! Ponies have been spotted! It is them!"

Thorin stood immediately, too happy and anxious to scold the dwarf for the interruption.

“How far out?” he asked.
“Not far. Another raven brought back word to Roäc that they would be here before high sun.”
“I must tell Dís,” Thorin said. “Dain?”
“Shall I call together a welcoming committee?” Dain asked.
Thorin smiled gratefully, as Dain had become as adept at Balin when it came to anticipating
Thorin’s requests. “A small one. Erebor doesn’t need emptied out just yet for their arrival. I know them well enough to know they’d rather not get swarmed or overwhelmed as soon as they arrive.” Nodding decisively, Dain said, “Just the necessaries, then…though you realize word will spread. There may yet be a fair amount of dwarrows out to greet them.”

*****

Bilbo’s small caravan was passing New Dale when a couple riders joined them on their path.

“What, ho? The Princes and Hobbit of Erebor do not have time for old friends as they journey to the mountain?” called Bard.

“Bard!” Bilbo shouted happily. “How lovely to see you!”

“Likewise, which is why my question still stands.”

“We hadn’t wanted to impose, for one,” explained Bilbo, “and for the other, we’re quite anxious to get to Erebor.”

“I’m sure Fili and Kili will be quite happy to see their family again,” replied Bard.

Asked Fili, “I must assume you are coming to the wedding?”

“Yes, I will be there. I’m always happy to drink on King Thorin’s coin.”

Bilbo laughed. “Is this what leadership does? Turns respectable men into scoundrels?”

“Nah, he was a scoundrel before,” joked Kili.

“As you are in haste, I will not delay you further,” Bard said. “I do hope you make the trip to New Dale to see how we’ve grown. There are many citizens still who remember and miss Bilbo, Kili, and Fili—not to discount the rest, but the three of you especially were quite the toast of Lake Town…before the dragon.”

Bilbo hated the dark sadness that suddenly clouded Bard’s face.

Hoping to bring his smile back, he said, “You can be sure we’ll make visits to New Dale. I believe I’ll make mine by the light of day this time, as long as Lord Thranduil isn’t there to insult my attractiveness.”

Bard laughed at the memory and they moved on to more pleasant, light talk before finally saying their farewell-for-nows.

*****

Thorin thought he might split out of his skin while waiting for the ponies to reach the gate. After months of waiting (and hours since the ravens brought back word that the wait was nearly over), the last, spare minutes separating them were too, too long.

Glancing around to distract himself, he noted Dain had been right—a fair amount of dwarrows had left their late-morning tasks and had joined them outside inquisitively. A small guard squad had been planned simply for ceremony, anyway, but now they were doing double duty keeping curious citizens in the area where Thorin preferred them to stand.

When the travelers finally came into view, it was all Thorin could do to keep from running towards them to see them all the sooner. By some feat of Mahal’s own will—and only for Bilbo’s own protection from whispers or worse—he stood with his boots rooted.

The moment they were close enough, Bilbo’s feet hit the ground with Fili’s, and Kili’s right behind. They had discussed what to do about greeting Thorin, their best idea being for the three of them to rush Thorin and embrace him as a group to minimize suspicion—and maximize the joy in seeing him again. Bofur, Ori, Nori, and Bifur followed close behind, each of them having people they had dearly missed, too.
Dís, Dori, and Bombur broke from the receiving line themselves to hug and shout greetings, overcome with elation in seeing their kin again.

****

Still clinched together between Fili and Kili, Thorin managed to whisper to Bilbo, “All eyes are on us. How does this go, my love?”

“I’ll play my part,” replied Bilbo.

The mass containing Fili, Kili, Thorin, Bilbo, and Dís slowly separated, though Thorin stayed close to Bilbo a little longer while Dís spoke with Fili and Kili.

Thorin whispered, “I’ll reluctantly let you play it, though I already hate this pretending.”
“‘I know you do,” Bilbo agreed. “So do I.”
“We’ll be alone soon…somehow,” Thorin promised.

“My sons, my sons!” Dís cried. “Home at last! It has been a life-age!”
“Mam,” Fili said bashfully. “It has only been half a year.”
“Well, it has felt like far longer,” she said. “Let me look at you!”

She stood back, looking them over, and clicked her tongue.

“Still too thin!” she said.
“It is only road-thin, Mam. We left the Shire quite robust,” Kili assured her. He kissed her cheek.
“You look radiant.”

Dís smiled brightly.

Fili said, “It is true, Mam. Being a bride suits you.”
“Oh, stop it, now,” she said, but she grinned all the wider.

Thorin tore his attention away from whispering with Bilbo.

“Erebor welcomes her beloved Princess,” he said.
“That’s good for Erebor, but what of you?” asked Kili. “What does Thorin say?”
Thorin regarded Kili and Fili affectionately. “I am pleased beyond measure to see you two rascals return to wreak your particular havoc on the mountain.”
“You must have really missed us, then!” laughed Fili.
Thorin’s eyes darted between Fili, Kili, and Bilbo. Softly, he said, “You have no earthly idea.”
Bilbo bowed deeply. “Princess, I’m glad to see you again and gladder still for your happy occasion. Betrothal and mountain life certainly favor you.”
“That’s almost as kind as it was when Fili said it a moment ago,” she replied.

Bilbo caught her eye, measuring whether she was being generally haughty or letting him know she noticed Bilbo and Thorin privately whispering in lieu of listening. Unable to to suss it, he simply replied, “That’s how you know it is especially true.”
Dís hummed. “Being around my lads has made you more gallant, Prince Bilbo.”

Bilbo’s time around his relations left him no question as to whether that had been a backhanded compliment! Still, Dís had a merry light in her eyes she usually did not have with him and figured that maybe—just maybe—she was having him on in fun.

“I’ve been doing my best to learn from them, Princess. They’ve taught me not to eat with my feet, too,” Bilbo glanced around furtively, as though he was telling her a giant secret. “Gets too much
“hair in the food.”

He nodded gravely and Dís burst out laughing. *This might not be such a difficult wedding, after all,* he thought to himself.

****

“I’ve missed you two, you know!” Bombur said to Bofur and Bifur. He smacked Bifur on the arm. “And you—you tit! You gave me the fright of my life! Going off and doing something so dangerous when I was leagues upon leagues away and could do nothing but wait!”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Bomfur smiled at him. “I’m glad it worked out, truly I am. It will take some getting used to, but I think you look quite nice.”

“It will only take an hour or two, tops,” Bofur chimed in.

****

“I’ve been counting the days!” Dori said to Ori and Nori, clutching each one tightly in an arm.

Ori squeaked something unintelligible, so Dori released him.

“What was that?”

Ori sucked in a heaving breath. “I said, ‘I can’t breathe!’”

“Sorry,” Dori said, looking contrite. “I’m just thrilled to see you—and see you both! After Nori’s last letter, I thought we might have lost his heart to Rivendell for good!”

“Nah,” Nori replied. “Just to Nîfon. Lucky for us all, he travels.”

“Any rate, I’m glad you are here. You will have to fill me in on everything you’ve been up to,” Dori said. “And I have some things to tell you, too.”

****

Once the initial familial rush and resulting hugs had taken place, the receiving line formed more solidly again. Fili, Kili, and Bilbo started at the front with Thorin. Dís was next to him, then Dwalin, Balin, Dain, Bombur, Dori, Óin, and Glóin. The folks the group did not recognize—Nabbi, Regnad, and the remaining newer members of council—were in a second line in the back, in front of the guard squad ensuring crowd control.

In the line, Thorin leaned in to whisper to Bilbo, “There has never been a torture in the deepest depths of the Void worse than seeing you right now and not being able to touch you.”

“I know. We’ll figure out how to slip away when we’re done keeping up appearances,” Bilbo whispered back.

When Bilbo had moved onto formally congratulate Dwalin and Dís, it was Kili’s turn to lean in and whisper private words to the king.

“I received your letter,” he said.

Thorin’s stomach somersaulted. “And?”

“I’ve been thinking of ways to express my gratitude.”

Thorin leaned back quickly to look at Kili’s face. With a wink, Kili moved on to his Mam.

“Do I even want to know what he said to make you blush so?” asked Fili, stepping up to Thorin next.

Thorin stuttered, not sure how to answer that. Fili rolled his eyes and shook his head.
“Nevermind, I can likely guess.”
Ceasing to stammer, Thorin stared instead. “Can you?”
“I think we all have a lot to discuss. In the meantime, though, I’ve missed you.”
“I’ve missed you too, Fili.”

****

Bilbo reached Balin.

“Prince Bilbo,” he said, nodding curtly.
“Oh, Balin, is it still to be like that?” sighed Bilbo disappointedly.
Wearily, Balin asked, “What do you want from me?”
“Some remembrance that we were once friends, Balin. I haven’t forgotten those days.”
“Neither have I,” Balin replied. “But things change.”

Bilbo regarded him a long moment before nodding and moving on to Dain, who was considerably happier to see him.

****

Thorin watched Fili, Kili, Bilbo, and Bofur as they worked down the line exchanging hugs and pleasantries. He was not surprised to be enraptured by his Bilbo, especially with his hair (intentionally, no doubt) clipped to just about the length it had been in Lake Town. More surprising were the other three. Fili, Kili, and Bofur all seemed different and Thorin found something about them unexpectedly striking. There was a comfort in their skin, and air of confidence around them the likes of which Thorin had never seen them wear. He wondered how much of it had to do with their sexual arrangement. He quickly caught himself, shaking the thought from his mind before anyone else could read it on his face…yet it crept back in again. What had they all been doing together that gave them this self-assured, suave bearing? How much participation in such group activities would be expected from him?

“Are you well?” Dís asked Thorin. “You look flushed.”
Thorin, if he had been pink from his thoughts before, now flamed crimson.
“Erm, yes, I’m fine. It has just…well, I’m a bit excitable, having waited so long to see everyone again, not to mention these robes are hot for a day as warm as this one. Between the two things, I’m feeling a bit…”
She glanced at the sky. “Yes, I understand. Perhaps the sun is a little high to be wearing such a cloak.”

Next to her, Dwalin smirked darkly, having the distinct feeling neither sun nor cloak had anything to do with Thorin’s present condition.

****

Daerbes and Nerithel curtseyed deeply in front of Dwalin and Dís. Dwalin reminded himself he needed to practice being more diplomatic as not only Thorin’s Elite Captain but also as the soon-to-be-husband of a Princess. Oddly, he did not find it difficult at all to replace his usual resting scowl with something more approachable for Nerithel and Daerbes.

“We are overjoyed to see you again and most humbly thank you for Rivendell’s invitation to the royal wedding,” Nerithel said.
“It is lovely to see you, too,” Dís replied, reaching a hand out to each of the elves, who clasped them. “We thank you in turn for your attendance. I hope we can repay Lord Elrond’s hospitality with accommodation of our own. Dwalin and I have commissioned apartments for you we hope you will find comfortable.”
Grateful his more eloquent betrothed was doing the bulk of the talking, the corners of Dwalin’s mouth twitched up at the mention of his name in a fair approximation of a smile.

“You both are far too kind, thank you,” Daerbes said.
“Will Lord Elrond be joining you?” asked Dwalin.
Nerithel replied, “He was unsure if he could get away from the valley in the timely manor needed for his attendance. If he cannot, we will serve as his ambassadors.”
“You are here and that is good enough for us,” Dís replied graciously.

****

When Bifur reached him in the receiving line, Bombur wasn’t entirely surprised to see Bifur’s arm around a hobbit. Letters from Bifur (and, more revealingly, Bofur) let him know Bifur had met someone, but to see him here as his companion for the wedding insinuated big things indeed.

Proudly, Bifur said to Bombur, “This is Master Rorimac Took. He is cousin to Bilbo…and my suitor.”
“I’m happy to meet you, Master Took. I look forward to learning more about you.”

Rorimac bobbed. With his nerves, it was more of a curtsey than a bow, but sincere nevertheless.

“Me as well,” he said. “Between Bifur, Bofur, Kili, Fili, Ori, and Bilbo, I feel like I know you already. They have shared many fond and affectionate stories.”
Chuckling, Bombur said, “Well, then! They had better plan on leveling the battlefield and telling me some of yours in turn. I do not intend to be embarrassed all by myself.”

Rorimac laughed along with him, liking Bombur immediately.

****

Once the travelers’ trip through the main line was completed, conversation broke into in smaller groups. Regnad sidled up to Dís the first chance he could get a moment with her alone.

“More halflings than I expected,” he said, evaluating.

Dís started at the use of the term. She had never heard one of the Shirefolk refer to themselves as such, nor had she remembered hearing any of The Fourteen use the term when she met up with them for Kili’s wedding (or any time after).

She quickly replied, “Um, yes, though none of them are unknown to me. The one with Bifur is actually a relation to Prince Bilbo.”
“Ah, yes, the famous Prince Bilbo. I’ve got to say, now that I have set eyes on him, I can’t honestly see what the fuss is.”

Though at one time such cattiness lobbed at Bilbo might have tickled her, Dís didn’t find joy in this particular barb of Regnad’s. Still, she laughed with him nervously.

“At least my sons are here now,” she said, hoping to change the subject.
“Absolutely. I know you’ve missed them so,” Regnad simpered. After a pause, he continued,
“These elves that travel with them, do you know them too?”
“Yes. I invited them personally,” Dís replied firmly, adding, “Fili and Kili introduced me to them. They are dear friends of theirs.”
Regnad clasped his hands together in exaggerated delight. “Very good, then!”

Dís wondered what he would have said if she had scoffed at them.
“So wonderful having the princes home, and in such interesting company,” Regnad said. “Already adept at making alliances for Erebor, I see. Oh, Princess! I couldn’t be more overjoyed for you that your sons are here with you where they belong. I cannot wait to speak with them at length.”

In the face of Regnad’s enthusiasm, Dís scolded herself for momentarily thinking poorly of him. He was simply new to hobbits overall and was only trying to be a loyal friend by taking her side with Bilbo in particular, having heard stories from her own mouth about how they got off to a rough start together. Her momentary uneasiness melted away to nothing.

“Regnad! Come over here, my fine fellow!” Dain called to him. “You must meet the Princes!”

Dís glanced in the direction of the voice and saw Dain standing with Bilbo, Fili, Bofur, Kili, and Balin.

“There’s your chance, now!” she said, urging Regnad to go, hanging back a little fondly watch this first meeting.

A happy Dain held out his arm in welcome. “Regnad, I would like to introduce you to Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur! Prince Fili and Prince Kili are not only heroes of Erebor, they are my cousins! Bofur was also one of The Fourteen and is also Fili’s suitor, and this is the esteemed Bilbo Baggins, now Prince Bilbo.”

“I knew about your cousins, of course, though I didn’t realize you were so well-acquainted with Prince Bilbo,” Regnad said.

“You’ve got to be kidding!” Dain exclaimed. “We are battle brothers, at the very least, plus I’ve had the pleasure of enjoying his singing and a handful of his tales the last time they visited Erebor. Bofur and Bilbo are gifted musicians and raconteurs, as well as formidable in a fight! All of that was well before your arrival, though.”

Bilbo, Kili, Fili, and Bofur all said hello to Regnad politely. Regnad returned the civility in kind, though his attention was sharply focused on Bilbo especially.

He said, “So this is the Hobbit of Erebor, prince and heir.”

Fili’s heart leapt into his throat and he gasped audibly.

“How did you know he was named an heir?” he demanded. “That is private information!”

Balin spoke up and sternly insisted, “Private information that is well within the rights of council to know, Fili.”

Bilbo blinked, trying to figure out how they so rapidly went from Dain’s gushing to…well…this. He spoke up, hoping to head off any further discomfort.

“Yes, I am Bilbo Baggins, or Prince Bilbo as I’m sometimes referred to amongst dwarrows now that Kili and I have wed. You may simply call me Bilbo, if you’d like.”

Regnad studied him and Bilbo got the odd feeling he was being sized up. He did not like it.

“Your legend precedes you,” Regnad flattered, finally turning his attention to the wider group. “All of you, I’ve heard so many of the stories and songs, I feel as though I know you…especially you, Prince Fili and Prince Kili. I’m close to your mother and not an hour goes by that one of your names does not escape her lips!”

“Usually followed quickly by the other, I’m sure,” Bofur replied. Laughing (a little too boisterously, if Bilbo had been asked), Regnad said, “Too true, too true. Ah, there she is, the dwarrowdam of honor herself!”
Having given them a little space for introductions, Dís had decided to join the group. She went directly to Bofur.

“Do not think I did not note the absence of a proper hug in the receiving line, Bofur.”
“A grievous slight, and one I must remedy immediately!” he said.

He picked her up and swung her in a semi-circle, making her squeal with delight.

“Oh, you are a rogue, an utter rogue! Fili, you had better marry this one soon!”
“That’s an empty threat, Mam. You can’t have him and Dwalin both!”

Giggling, Dís’s gaze landed on Regnad. “Oh, but you must think me completely wicked!”
“Not at all, Princess. It seems a merry time, indeed. I look forward to learning more of your jests in the coming weeks so that I might be able to play along, too.”
“Of course you will,” she said. “I trust you lads were properly introduced to Regnad? Or did Dain spend the whole time talking about himself?”

“Dain introduced us,” Kili said.

Grinning broadly, Dís said, “Good! Regnad sits council and I cannot wait for you to see him work. He is a brilliant orator—brilliant in general—and he has become a good friend of mine.”

“Don’t go hogging it all, cousin,” Dain said. “Don’t forget it was me who brought him in special from the Iron Hills. You merely glommed onto him when he got here.”

Regnad seemed bashful. “Oh, the two of you must stop. You’ll embarrass me in front of your friends and family going on like that.”

“I’m impressed. Praise from Mam and Dain is nothing to be scoffed at,” Kili said.

“That’s right,” Balin added. “Getting them to agree on anything is an uphill battle all on its own, even if they are disagreeing about other things while they agree about the one.”

“Oh, quiet, you,” Dís said to Balin. “You know we often agree on the important, fundamental things.”

Dain said, “Quite right she is. It is the minutiae we disagree over…and that mostly because it is fun.”

A call came from Thorin’s direction several feet away. He motioned to urge Bilbo, Fili, Bofur, and Kili to come meet his friend Nabbi.

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Eventually, introductions thinned and Thorin felt as though he could not wait another second to take Bilbo inside…and to get him and the lads far away from Regnad. Thankfully, once he had called them over, Regnad did not follow and neither Dís nor Dain had called them back.

Thorin intoned loudly, catching the attention of the crowd. “We thank you all for being present to welcome home the Princes, the absent members of The Fourteen, and their most esteemed guests. Though some of them might be strangers to you, it is my command that they be treated as you would treat myself or Princess Dís. Now, our friends are weary and hungry. We will feast in their honor tonight but for now, let us give them space for rest and renewal!”

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A cheer went up and the crowd petered out. The talk amongst them as they dispersed was about the long-awaited arrival of the remainder of The Fourteen, chiefly among them the Hobbit Of Erebor. For some, he was a hero--and new husband to the prince--but others remembered Thorin’s broken heart and the tales of the king’s sadness. The latter portion regarded him more suspiciously and the murmurs were not as kind.

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Thorin called his council members to gather briefly while he declared an immediate recess for all but emergency issues—of which there were currently none.

Dís waited for everyone but Balin and Dwalin to move out of earshot before she complained quietly, but firmly. “Balin and I were going to finish the final papers for the museum today and you promised you would sign them without delay.”

“Surely you can see we have more pressing matters!” argued Thorin. “For more lengthy business, I would agree, but it will only take a few minutes, a half hour at most. You know how important it is for me to have it finalized and open by the time guests arrive. I want to show all peoples that dwarrows are more than mining and building and gold, that in order to be legendary in our mining and building, we must also be and have always been wise in the ways of science. Here we are with the first group already—hobbits and elves among them—and the final release isn’t even signed!”

Thorin looked into Dís’s eyes and hated the distress he saw there. She was proud of Erebor and proud of this endeavor she and Balin had put so much of themselves into over the past several weeks. He found he couldn’t say no to her, not even with Bilbo standing ten paces away.

“How about this?” he reasoned. “Why don’t you and Balin finish the papers just as you had planned. The lads will have to unpack and bathe, anyway, so you can’t spend every moment of the afternoon with them. I’ll make sure they are signed by dinner, if not before.”

Dís threw her arms around him. “Thank you! Oh, thank you!”

She hugged Fili and Kili next, explaining she had one thing she had to do while they were settling in and that she would be back to spend as much time with them as possible. They lovingly assured her it was okay, and watched her scurry off with Balin, as excited as a dwarfling.

“While she is gone,” Thorin said quietly to Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur only. “I would very much like to show you your rooms and say hello more properly.”

Bilbo’s excitement nearly stood the hair up on his toes.

Louder, Thorin asked for volunteers to show the others to their lodgings. Unsurprisingly, Dori and Óin spoke up happily to take care of Nori, Ori, Nîfon, Thodora, and Chadham, and Bombur did the same for Bifur and Rorimac. More of a bewilderment was Dwalin volunteering to make sure Daerbes and Nerithel were looked after.

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Thorin brought Fili, Kili, Bofur, and Bilbo to their doors in the royal wing.

“Why don’t you take a minute with Bilbo first?” Kili suggested.

Making a face, Thorin said, “Won’t it be weird for someone to see you three milling about out here alone?”

Fili shrugged. “Who’s going to walk by in the span of a minute?”

Shutting the door behind him, Thorin dropped Bilbo’s pack and took him tightly in his arms, covering his face and hair with kisses until finally meeting his mouth hungrily. He melted in Bilbo’s embrace as his lover tasted his tongue and nibbled at his lips, giving back all he had gotten and more.

Thorin murmured, “I’ve missed you.”

“So much,” Bilbo replied, diving in to kiss him again.
So starved Thorin had been for the live, warm contact of his lover, Bilbo’s kisses had him as hard as a seam of diamonds. Groaning throatily, he pushed his body against Bilbo, delighting in the feel of Bilbo’s very real erection pressing back against him. Thorin’s hips moved obscenely, his body seeking more stimulation as though it had a mind of its own.

Thorin seized Bilbo’s hands and kissed the backs of them, turning them upside down after to kiss his palms. Something caught his eye and he froze.

“What’s this?” he asked.

Thorin pushed Bilbo’s sleeves back, raising his wrists higher to get a better look. He gasped. On one, Bofur’s and Fili’s names. On the other, Kili’s and Thorin's.

“Bilbo? You’ve--you’ve etched my name into your skin?”

Gazing at him adoringly, Bilbo replied. "Yes."

"Living with these dwarrows is affecting you," Thorin gently teased.

"Missing you was affecting me. I wanted your name with me always, for the times you couldn’t be with me in body."

Thorin laughed heartily--so much so that Bilbo grew offended.

"Tell me, what is so funny?"

Thorin opened his clothing layer by layer until the middle of his chest was bared. Close inward toward his heart, Thorin wore Bilbo’s name in ink. Bilbo ghosted his fingers over it.

"That’s just where we put it that night in Bag End,” Bilbo murmured, awed. "You wrote how you were sad when yours faded. I was also distraught when mine faded, therefore I decided your name would never fade from over my heart again. It wasn’t enough, though. I wanted to do for you at least as much as you had done for me. “

Thorin spreading his shirt wider, Bilbo saw Thorin was now pierced through each nipple, as he was.

“I hope it does not upset you that one is for you and the other for Kili. Kili was instrumental in bringing us to this point, after all.”

"Well, doesn't that beat all?” Bilbo said. “I’m not upset. This is...well, Thorin, this is quite appealing on you, I cannot lie, and flattering too, to see the evidence of your longing displayed so.”

"I’ve carried you with me in one way or another since I left. I pull out your blanket, I sleep next to your treasure box, and I used to carry your braid inside my clothes until I got overly worried about something happening to it. That’s when I did this.”

Thorin rolled up his sleeve. There, set in gold and protected by links of clear, polished quartz, Bilbo's hair wound around Thorin's wrist.

“I think Kili and I are due for a bath, dinner, and a very early bedtime, if you follow me,” purred Bilbo. “How do you feel about that?”

“In that case, let me gift you with something.”

Thorin walked over to a great, carved wardrobe, sneaking in the door so Bilbo could not yet see what else was stashed away there. He came out with a bundle, which Thorin sat on a nearby desk to unwrap, revealing several small rectangles that looked like they could be soap. He handed one to Bilbo.

“This...is this?” he sniffed it. “Thorin! How ever did you manage to find this again?”
"I didn't know if you'd remember it!"
"I'll never forget, ever!"
"Later, I’ll tell you the story of how I commissioned it. Part of It is sad, but the rest should fascinate you."

They were interrupted by Kili, Bofur, and Fili entering the room.

"Sorry," Kili said. "Someone was coming down the adjoining corridor so we figured now was a good time get out of the hall. We managed to give you well more than a minute, though.”
Bofur said, “Oi, here we had feared we’d be interrupting you half naked and you’re in here inspecting…is that soap?”

“Well, the half naked part is right,” Fili said, looking at Thorin pointedly.

Thorin moved quickly to put himself back together, but not before Bofur saw the unexpected glint of metal on his chest.

“I have just met our names on Bilbo’s wrist and was showing him…well, showing him he was not the only one commemorating our union,” Thorin said.
Kili inadvertently interrupted before anyone could ask for more of an explanation. “This room, Thorin!” he said, awed. “Is it truly ours?”
“Yes, it is.”
“Smells new,” Bofur noted.
“Most of it is,” Thorin replied. “Everything here was made to order, from the bed to the writing desk.”

Thorin pulled open a drawer to show it stocked with ink quill and paper.

“I know you like to write,” he said to Bilbo, tenderly.
Bilbo’s expression was a mix of wonder and love. “It is beautiful.”
Thorin smiled proudly as he continued his account. “Men of New Dale made the bed frame. I outsourced this from the mountain because there are a few naughty surprises inspired by Fili’s and Bofur’s creation and I did not trust the discretion of dwarrows. To be honest, I don’t trust the discretion of Men, either, but they have far fewer opportunities to spread gossip through my halls and less of a chance of it being believed, even if they did.”

The others laughed.

“I’m glad you’re using some of your deviousness in our favor for once,” Fili said.
“Come now, please don’t bring up that shameful time,” Thorin admonished him, though he smiled at the end. “Besides, you haven’t any room to talk, considering you were my conspirator for this next surprise.”
Fili glanced around. “Me?”

Thorin opened both sides of the wardrobe wide, revealing a bar loaded with clothing in sumptuous fabrics and magnificent colors. He turned sideways, gazing at Bilbo.

“Fili stole some of your clothes for me and I had a visit with your rather odd hobbit tailor, that Wilibad fellow? He shared with me information and drawings to bring back to Master Mingus for reference. I wanted you to have something dwarvishly royal that honored your own people. Fili also snared me more current things for the three of you,” Thorin gestured towards Bofur, Kili, and Fili, “In order for me to hand more current sizes over to Mingus. Fili and Bofur, you both have a similar wardrobe to this in your own room, filled with items for the two of you. Your wedding
wear will not be in there, though. Your Mam has ideas about what it should be and though Mingus is using the patterns based on the other items for your sizing, Dís will be insisting on fittings and the like to get it the way she wants it.”

It was easy to figure out which side of the wardrobe was Kili’s and which was Bilbo’s based on sizes alone, though it seemed Thorin had very thoughtfully commissioned some of the hybrid dwarf/hobbit items for Kili, too. Kili wondered if it was because he lived in the Shire—perhaps Fili and Bofur had garments like that, too?—or whether it was specifically because he was Kili Baggins, husband to Bilbo.

Bilbo ran his fingers over the jackets and shirts before opening the lower drawers to find them brim-full with garments, too. Bilbo looked up at Thorin in awe. "Thorin, this is..." Thorin took Bilbo's hands and brought them to his lips. "This is everything I wanted to give you last time. I've wanted to spoil you for so long...and now I can.”

Bilbo and Thorin gazed at each other a long moment before Thorin seemed to remember there were others in the room.

“Speaking of spoiling, why don’t the four of you hop up on that bed?” Thorin said. “What, with their traveling boots on?” Bilbo asked, horrified. Thorin tutted. “It won’t hurt to do it just for a moment.” As Bofur climbed on it, he said, “This bed is certainly large enough for four dwarrows, that is certain.” “I made them intentionally large,” said Thorin. “Dís thought I was, what was the word she used? Oh yes—overcompensating.”

The four on the bed all made similar noises of comfort and bliss when they reclined and relaxed into the mattress.

“Thorin,” Bilbo said, cheerfully suspicious. “What did you do?” Kili said, “Yeah, this feels just like the beds from-“ "-Rivendell,” Thorin said with pride. “That is because they are.” “How did you manage a feat like that?” Bilbo asked, sitting up. “I wanted one for all of us, for Dís, for whomever wanted one, but logistically you know what a nightmare that would be. So, I made a proposition to the crafts-folk who could make them--and several promises to Lord Elrond aside to ensure their safety—and they came back to Erebor with me. They have their own apartments on the residence level and have had enough work from me and other dwarrows to stay busy all winter.” “Wait, so Fee and I have a bed like this, too?” Bofur asked. Thorin grinned. “Would you two like to see your room?” “Yes!” Fili and Bofur shouted in unison, scrambling out of bed and moving towards the door to the hall. “I must say,” Thorin noted, smirking and crossing his arms, “I’m very disappointed in the lot of you. What burglar fails to notice an extra, mystery door? What master trackers miss this sort of detail?“

They all froze and turned around. There had been an open door to what they figured to be the water closet, but now their eyes went to the third (closed) door at once. If any of them had noticed it earlier, they hadn’t registered it.

“I’ll bite, then,” Bofur said. “Where does that door lead?” Thorin opened it and flourished his arm in welcome. “To your room, Bofur. Yours and Fili’s.” Fili walked through the doorway, astonished. “You…adjoined our rooms?”
“Yes. Your Mam had something to say about it, but I thought it would be easier for the four of you...all things considered.”
“And that’s exactly why Mam had something to say about it, I would wager,” Kili said.
“Oh, Thorin,” Fili said, eyes glistening at the gesture. “I can’t believe you did this.”
“I thought sure if one of you was going to be overcome, it would have been Kili,” Thorin teased.

Despite the swell of emotion in his chest, Fili made a face at him in jest.

Bofur sat on his new bed and bounced. “We do have a Rivendell mattress!”
Thorin nodded. “And a New Dale frame. I’ll admit to not being terribly creative as far as that goes—yours is much the same as Bilbo’s, save for the carvings.”

The wardrobe was examined next, revealing both gorgeous dwarven garments as well as some of the hybrids about which Kili had been curious. They warmed Kili’s heart to see.

“Oh! I didn’t show you in the other room but,” Thorin gestured to under the bed. “There are stores of, well, slick.”
Kili was on his stomach in a flash, peering under. “I’ll say! How did you explain that?”
“Luckily, food items are not difficult to explain away for the king, though sneaking them in here took some effort. You’ll find them concentrated under the middle of the bed so as not to be noticed. They’ll be as tough to get out as they were to put there, but they won’t be discovered by anyone you don’t want to see them.”
Fili joined his brother on the floor. “That will be enough for months!”
Thorin had been steadily flushing pink, but continued. “There are smaller bottles for filling and convenience, too.”
“And special dishes on each bedside table, I’ve noticed,” Bofur said with a wink. “Who knew you were such a thoughtfully gracious host, Your Highness?”

Thorin winked back, though he was sure he was fully red by then.

Fili had moved on, pulling open the drawer of the desk in their room to reveal the same writing supplies as the one in Bilbo’s.

“We have a writing desk, too?” he asked.

Bofur wandered over to admire its beauty, tenderly running his fingers over the carvings and across the supplies in the drawers.

Thorin said, “Aye, for Bofur’s compositions.”

Bofur’s head snapped up; he stared at Thorin feeling a dozen emotions at once.

Thorin thought it was queer how the sex talk so far hadn’t pushed him beyond his comfort but the bare, awed appreciation in Bofur’s look was too intimate for him to handle. With a nod of acknowledgement, Thorin turned took Bilbo back through the door to his and Kili’s suite.

Bofur glanced at Fili, the same expression on his face.

“That was incredibly kind of him, wasn’t it?” Fili asked.
“Thoughtfully gracious, indeed,” Bofur breathed.

“The work you put into all of this—the thought alone—I’m overwhelmed in such a wonderful way,” Bilbo said.
“There is more yet to show you, my love,” Thorin murmured, nuzzling his nose. “I’ve redone my own chambers, too, in anticipation of nights you might be able to steal away to spend with me.”
Bilbo accepted Thorin’s soft, lingering kiss. “When can I see it?”
“Not as soon as I’d like, I know that much. I’m not sure I’ll be able to sneak you off at the moment, regardless of how much I wish to show it to you.”
“It and other things,” flirted Bilbo, stealing another kiss.
“Those other things are regrettably on the same list for waiting. I’m honestly surprised we haven’t been interrupted yet as it is.”
“When can I see it?” Kili said, joining them in their side of the connected rooms again, followed by Fili and Bofur.
“Propriety, need, and the march of time, Kili. That’s what is interrupting,” Thorin turned his attention back to Bilbo. “As much as I do not want to leave your side, you have to be starving. There will be a great feast for dinner tonight, but let me put in a word at the kitchens for you ahead of time. I’ll have them put together your lunch while you bathe. It should be waiting upon your return.”
“As will our Mam, no doubt,” said Fili. Thorin nodded in agreement. “True enough. She is finishing up her last bit of work now and likely plans to glue herself to you for the rest of the evening.”
“I hate to do anything that puts me away from you for any real length of time so soon after getting here,” Bilbo said. “Though food will soon be a pressing issue and a bath and a change of clothes would make me feel more attractive for reuniting with my husband. Besides, I have my new soap to use to entice him.”

Thorin murmured in Bilbo’s ear, ”You’re already the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen and thoroughly enticing exactly as you are. I desperately wish I could bathe with you, though.”
Bilbo sighed. ”The springs are too public, I know.”
Thorin’s demeanor grew serious. “Kili will be with you, of course?”
“Yes. Possibly Fee and Bo, too, depending.”
“I’ll be sending a guard down with you,” Thorin said.
Bilbo shook his head with a disbelieving smile. “Surely it is not that serious!”

The answering look on Thorin’s face told him it was. Bilbo’s brow furrowed.

He asked, “What has happened since I last bathed in Erebor, Thorin?”
Thorin shook his head. “Erebor is more populated than it once was, and you carry a more publicly official title than you last did--and an even bigger one secretly. Just…”

Thorin sighed and kissed his forehead.

“Just always take a guard, for me? Please? And never go alone, even with a guard.”

Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur all exchanged looks. One of them would have to get to the bottom of this sooner or later.

“I’m going to go to the kitchens, then I’m going to go meet up with Dís and Balin in my council chambers to sign something special for them. Bilbo?”
“Yes?”
“I have something to show you before dinner, something I think we can get away with alone without setting tongues wagging. Will you meet me in my meeting chambers when you are done bathing and eating?”
Bilbo glanced to Kili who smiled his assent. “I would love to.”
Addressing the others, Thorin said, “When I’m done taking care of this task with Dís, I’m sure she’ll be eager to see you again. Do you want me to send her here or tell her you’ll see her at dinner? I warn you, dinner will not be her favorite option of the two.”
“No, here is fine,” Fili said.
Kili and Bofur nodded in agreement.

“And I’ll get Bilbo to dinner on time,” Thorin promised.

“Thorin,” Kili said gently. “You don’t need to fret. We’ve had him for weeks and weeks. It is only fair you have a little time yourself. An hour here or there won’t be the end of any of us.”

Thorin shot him a look of thanks and his gaze lingered. He was not sure how much physical affection with Kili would be welcomed by him outside the bed, nor how such a forbidden thing would be perceived by his brother—particularly given Fili’s cryptic comment earlier in the day. Still, he found his eyes slipping down to Kili’s lips as he longed to give him a more proper greeting of his own. He wondered if Kili had wanted to kiss him hello, too. He tore his eyes away.

“In that case, I shall reluctantly leave you to your baths and your meal. I will see you soon,” he said.

Bilbo embraced him, claiming another kiss. “I love you.”

Thorin closed his eyes, tears instantly hot behind his lids. It had been so long since he had heard those words in Bilbo’s actual voice, even if he had been counting the dream. Emotion and relief surged through him.

“And I love you,” he said.

He turned and managed to get through the door before his tears fell, thankful he didn’t have to explain this complex swirl of feelings to Bilbo, Fili, Bofur, or Kili. He wiped his eyes as he walked down the hall, musing that it had been a long time since he had been moved to tears so tinged with comfort and hope. Not since Bilbo’s letter, and even those were bittersweet.

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Bilbo washed himself and Kili with his new, delicious soap, handing it to Fili and Bofur to use next. If the pile on the desk had been anything to go by, there was plenty to go around and he hoped Thorin would not be cross that he shared it. For him to keep such a lovely treat all to himself (or just for him and Kili) after being on the road seemed the height of rudeness. He marveled that Thorin even managed to get little scrubby bits put into it, just as before.

Though they were alone in the bathing area for the time being (with Thorin’s requested guard outside the door), Bilbo kept his hands to himself when it came to Bofur and Fili…though he allowed his eyes to drink their fill. Already itching to touch, taste, and love, he wondered how they were going to negotiate who spent what night with whom…and how long it would need to be before such a conversation was initiated with Thorin.

Kili rinsed the last of the soap from his hair. “So what do you suppose all that fuss was about not coming down here alone and bringing guards?”

“I don’t know,” sighed Bilbo. “I’m steadily accumulating questions I want to ask him when we’re mostly alone and I can coax real answers from him.”

“Mmm,” Kili said, pulling Bilbo close to him. “That’s probably best.”

“Kee,” Bilbo hissed.

“What?” replied Kili, kissing his neck. “No one is going to care if we kiss a little. Besides, I can’t help it. You smell like Lake Town. We all do now, I guess.”

Giggling and holding Kili’s onslaught only somewhat at bay, Bilbo said, “What does that mean? I ‘smell like Lake Town?’”

Kili kissed up to whisper in Bilbo’s ear. “When we kissed in Lake Town, or whenever you held me, this is what you smelled like. You smell like me falling deeper and deeper in love with you,
only this time it is better because now you’re my husband.”

Bilbo stopped struggling to keep distance between their bodies, instead surging up to kiss Kili passionately.

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Food was welcome and the travelers devoured it, chattering happily with old friends and treasured family who had come to join them.

“Right Bofur?”
Bofur was shaken from his thoughts. “Eh?”
“I said, ‘Isn’t that right, Bofur?’” Bombur said, finishing a thought Bofur had missed.
“Oh, um. Aye, you better believe it,” covered Bofur, relieved with the resulting round of laughter that his answer fit whatever the inquiry was.

Bofur had not been paying attention to his brother, distracted and lost in his own mind instead. Something Kili had said to Bilbo in the baths clung to his thoughts and wouldn’t let go.

“You smell like Lake Town.”

Bofur hadn't heard what else Kili said after, whispered as it was, but “You smell like Lake Town” was enough.

Every breath Bofur had taken since Bilbo had first dunked that bar of soap in the springs had smelled like Lake Town. Bilbo leaning in to share a secret joke in his ear smelled like Lake Town. Lifting his fork to take a bite of food carried a whiff of Lake Town from his own skin, mingling with the smell of his potatoes.

Bofur remembered that smell from long, long ago, in sweet, lingering traces as Bilbo stood or sat next to him. Once in a while, he had experienced the rare and glorious opportunity to pull one or two deep lungfuls of it in when Bilbo would hug him.

Lake Town smelled like want and desire, need and longing, sleepless nights and sweet dreams that he never thought could ever become real.

He glanced at Bilbo, eating and chatting amiably beside him. Bilbo turned and looked at him, smiling at him with bright, affectionate eyes. Bofur smiled back at him, wishing he could duck in to steal a kiss to go with it. He sighed happily, knowing that sooner or later (away from prying eyes), he had Bilbo’s full leave to steal considerably more than a kiss.

Discreetly, he brought his wrist to his nose and inhaled deeply again.

Some dreams do come true.

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Bilbo arrived at Thorin’s meeting chambers but only Balin was there, working at Thorin’s desk. Balin looked up, then back down at what he was doing.

Approaching the desk, Bilbo said, “I was looking for Thorin, he said he’d be meeting you and Dís here?”
“He should be here shortly. I sent her on ahead to spend time with the lads. In fact, I’m wondering why you aren’t with them,” he said, curt, not bothering to glance at him.
Bilbo sensed a change in Balin’s overall demeanor that seemed to be more than simply being annoyed with him over Thorin. Regardless, he had never stood for that tone from Balin before and he was not going to begin now.

“Because, as I told you, I’m looking for Thorin.”

Balin looked up at him, emotionless, then back down at what he was signing. He opened an old book on the desk next to him, flipping through the pages to one half-full. He recorded a line and moved to close it.

"What—what was that, there?" Bilbo asked.
"Hmm?" Balin asked, absentmindedly.
"When you were flipping through that book, there was a picture."
"Oh, that. I am not so vain that I drew a younger version of myself in my log book to gaze upon, if that is what you are thinking."
"It wasn’t. Where did it come from, though?"

Bilbo could see Balin internally debating on whether to tell him or not, noting the instant Balin’s façade cracked as he made his decision. For a moment, a glint of the Balin he had remembered came through.

“When the dragon first came, there was not time to gather personals—especially from where I was on the ramparts—and I had completely forgotten this had existed for a time. This was a...a sketchbook, once, and the picture in it is a me from long, long ago. It belonged to someone I used to know, and when I found it again all these decades later, it seemed the right thing in which to chronicle the remaining events of my life and my time on council." Bilbo canted his head toward the book. "May I?"

Balin handed it over to Bilbo, who paged back to the picture.

"Balin! Look at this young warrior!" Bilbo glanced up to study Balin. "I see it still."

Balin muttered to himself in disbelief, taking the book back, a blush creeping across his cheeks. Bilbo put new information together in his mind.

"Who was he?"

They shared a look of solemn understanding.

With an exhale and a nod, Balin replied, "She."
"She," Bilbo repeated, waiting.
Balin ran his tongue over his teeth and took another breath. "We were to be married. Before--before the dragon."
"And after?" asked Bilbo softly.

Closing his eyes, Balin shook his head.

Placing a gentle hand on Balin's shoulder, Bilbo squeezed. Balin's hand reached up to rest on Bilbo's forearm. They were silent for a long time.

"Well, that was long ago," Balin finally said, straining a small, unfelt grin. Completely forgetting his earlier annoyance with Balin, Bilbo asked, "Do you get lonely?"
"Sometimes, though it has gotten better over the decades. The pain is less constantly sharp as the years go by. Most days, it is simply a quiet thrum in the background."
Bilbo knew that sort of grief all too well, and ached for him. "Have you ever considered...well,
doing like Dís?"
"Not me, lad. She was my Chosen and that's pretty well final in my mind. There will never be another for me."

Bilbo took his hand back and shuffled his feet nervously. Balin’s staunch traditionalism became less mysterious with this revelation, particularly when it came to matters of both heart and state like Thorin and his Chosen. Though Bilbo was not sure from where Balin’s newer development of cold demeanor had stemmed, he had a better understanding at least of Balin’s past annoyance with what he knew of the situation with Bilbo, Thorin, and Kili.

“Oh, you beat me here!” Thorin said to Bilbo, entering the room. To Balin, he said, “Where’s Dís?”
“Regnad stopped by and we decided I could finish up for Dís so she could go join her lads. She put up a fuss, wanting to do her part, but at that point her drafting had been finished and it only needed to be copied out properly.”

Thorin attempted not to bristle at the name—not in front of Bilbo, and not to give Balin any more reasons to look at him disapprovingly than he needed to. Balin was already glancing between Thorin and Bilbo suspiciously.

“Did he walk Dís down?”
“As a matter of fact, yes. Dís was hoping he might chat more with Fili and Kili. She’s been dying for weeks for them to meet.”
Thorin nearly bit the inside of his cheek to blood. “So, is that the final copy?”
“Aye, final, logged, and dated. It only needs your once-over and a signature.”
“I’ll take care of it. Go on and get ready for dinner,” Thorin said.

Balin hesitated for a moment, not wanting to leave Bilbo and Thorin together like this. There was nothing for it, however. “Thank you, Your Highness.”

Picking up his book, he left the two of them in the room alone.

“Since when does Balin call you ‘Your Highness’ in private like that?”
Sighing, Thorin said, “He always has, though in much smaller amounts and only when he wants to remind me of my role, either helpfully or spitefully.”
“Do I want to know which one that one was?”

Thorin made a face of exasperation and Bilbo decided perhaps a subject change would be well in order.

“So, what is this thing your sister needs done?”
“I have to review the final safety reports and sign off on the reopening of the museum.”
“What museum?”
“The Ereborian Agglomeration of Geology And Paleontology.”
“Come again?”
Thorin pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. “I know. Dís and I suggested to the committee the name remain the same as it was before Smaug, which was the Erebor Museum of Natural History, but our suggestions were outvoted for something grander-sounding.”
“They do realize most people are just going to call it the EAGAP, right?”
Thorin laughed hard. “Oh, that would annoy them most awfully, especially Regnad. He waited to support the project until he was sure it had captivated public interest—and after Dís and Balin had done the majority of the work—but then he pushed hard for the flowery name as his contribution to justify being credited on the roll. Since he has the respect of a large portion of the council, the committee didn’t fight against him.”
“So how have I never seen this Ereborian Agglomo-whatsis before? I’ve never heard you mention it!”

“The first time you were here, it was quite far, far down the list of passages to even check. Even after your visit last year, core survival was the most pressing matter and the revitalization of many other departments were priorities. The skills of our scientists were simply needed elsewhere. It took quite a while to determine Smaug either hadn’t known about it, hadn’t fit, or simply didn’t care to tunnel lower, but the passage leading down had to be rediscovered, cleared, and inspected for safety, not to mention the rooms themselves. You remember Smaug had done a considerable amount of internal damage and that even rooms he hadn’t pounded to pebbles still could have fractures and dangerous flaws in key, load-bearing structures. Though we have had blessedly few, cave-ins are a danger outside of the mines as they never have been before.”

Thorin noted Bilbo’s expression of alarm.

He assured him, “The residential, meeting, and merchant areas have all been declared safe. I’m referring mostly to the areas newly being reclaimed.”

“So, being as it was a rediscovery, was it in fair condition?”

“Yes, and shockingly so. There were not even vermin in residence, oddly enough. It was well-preserved. With an increasing population, we were able to redirect breathing resources back to the field of study. Not many, as of the moment, but they’ve sent word to their academic peers outside Erebor and are hoping this warm weather will bring additional dwarrows in before season’s end.”

“I suppose it makes sense—a people cannot rely on digging the earth so long without developing a study for what they are pulling out of it—but I hadn’t spent much time thinking of the hows and wherefors.”

“Yes! Which is why it is such a passion project for Dís. She knows Erebor will have its most varied and eclectic gathering for her wedding and she wants those people to have an idea of the intellectual mind and scientific heart of the mountain. She believes it will positively impact the way we are viewed by other peoples who may hold prior prejudices. Balin and I agree with her and have put energy and resources towards that end to get it done by the time visitors began arriving.”

“Wow,” Bilbo said, impressed. “I had considered her wedding to be a showcase of sorts for what Erebor has managed to accomplish so far, but she has taken it steps beyond. She really is quite wonderful at this whole Princess thing.”

“That is a stunning understatement, my love. My respect for Dís in her official role is why I am here signing papers even though the hobbit I love is in the mountain at last.”

“I do not begrudge you your duty. Perhaps when the museum opens, you can show me?”

“That would be quite fine,” Thorin said, beaming.

“Regnad’s name won out in committee, you said? Outside of Dain and The Fourteen, I don’t know that I’ve heard another dwarf’s name mentioned so effusively, and I’ve not been here a handful of hours. He’s quite a rising star, isn’t he?”

Thorin’s expression darkened. “You could say that.”

“But you don’t like him.”

Thorin sighed. “It is a complicated discussion to be had at another time, I think.”

“Oh,” Bilbo said, frowning. His expression turned to unwelcome surprise. “Oh! Did you…I mean, did the two of you…while we were apart?” Bilbo trailed off, not sure he was willing to give voice to the actual words.

“No! My dearest love,” Thorin swept Bilbo into his arms. “No. No kisses, no intimacies, definitely no sex. Other than the things I did to myself and by myself, I waited for you as I said I would…and as I have every time we’ve been parted, whether by decision or circumstance. Even when I despaired last spring, I took no other lover.”

“I’m sorry, I just…I don’t see your face cloud over like that very often and, well, I’m sure it was difficult. I had the others, but you had none.”

“I had you and my plans for your arrival. It wasn’t always as comforting as you solid in my arms,
but …well, any rate, no.”
“Okay. When you’re ready to tell me, I’d like to know.”

*****

When the signing was over, Thorin took Bilbo up to the Grand Overlook. His fingers itched on the way, wanting to touch him, but the passages were not reliably empty for long and it was already reaching as far as he dared reach to be walking around with Bilbo alone this first day, anyway.

“Oh! I know where we are going!,” Bilbo glanced around, not seeing anyone else. He risked a quick squeeze of Thorin’s hand. “You romantic.”

Thorin just smiled.

When they reached the door, Thorin held it open for Bilbo, who went right to the ledge looking outward instead of looking in.

“Oh, Thorin!” Bilbo peered over the edge, seeing growth where there used to be little but bleak. “This is beautiful. More life comes back to the land every year!”
“Turn around and you’ll see how much.”
“What?” Bilbo said, turning to face him.

His breath left him as his gaze landed on a whole garden of blooms along the length of the wall—wildflowers mixed with more obviously cultivated varieties. He took slow steps forward, noting how a retaining wall had been added along with no small amount of soil for nourishment. He gently touched the delicate white petals of what smelled like a gardenia.

“Thorin,” he whispered again, astonished.
“Beorn shared some seeds and some horticulture tips with me. He helped make sure many of these were your favorites.”
“You asked Beorn for help?”
“Yes.”

Bilbo thought for a moment how far Thorin had come, asking and trusting elves, Men, and Beorn for help. He opened his mouth to tell him just how proud he was when a fading piece of daylight reflecting on metal caught his eye. Examining the sculpture, his astonishment grew—something Bilbo hadn’t thought possible in light of the day’s surprises so far.

“Did you create this?” Bilbo asked, a tiny tremor in his voice.
“I did.”
“For me?”
Thorin’s pride shifted to uncertainty. “Yes. Did I…did I overstep?”
Gazing at him with watery eyes, Bilbo said, “You built a shrine to Yavanna with your own hands just for me, to stand in a garden you grew with help from my friend who keeps my favorite garden in the whole of Middle Earth with flowers you knew specifically I’d like. That was not an overstep, my king. That was….magnificent.”

Thorin was glad he had shut the door and that they were high up and out of sight, because he wound up with his arms and mouth full of hobbit. He let himself indulge as long as he thought was safe.

“I’m guessing you like it?” grinned Thorin.
“I don’t have words strong enough to tell you how this makes me feel. Since I don’t, ‘like’ will have to suffice in the interim.”
Thorin nuzzled Bilbo. “You know, we should probably get to dinner before they wonder about us.”
“I don’t want to leave yet.”
Thorin grinned wider. “It makes me incredibly joyful to hear you say that.”
“You’re probably right, though. We have to exercise some caution, especially in these early days. People will eventually get bored, or at least not fuss as much once our presence becomes more normal.”

****

After dinner, there was a merry gathering. With the hobbits especially in mind, a special dessert table was laid out, and with all in mind, another keg of beer was brought in case the first one went dry. Members of council, all of The Fourteen and their families, the travelers, the bed-makers from Rivendell (who were fantastically happy to see fellow citizens Daerbes, Nîfon, and Nerithel), and Thorin and Dís all milled about, either getting acquainted or catching up.

Dís stood with Regnad, Dwalin, and Balin, observing. She loved watching her lads as they made their way around the room as honored, welcome guests. Thorin, too, seemed livelier this evening than he had in a long, long time.

Regnad said to Dís, “Isn’t it funny? From what I’ve heard, I had been fully expecting your brother to be morose over the arrival of Prince Kili with Bilbo on his arm. It seems to be quite the opposite, though. I’d say his eyes were positively dancing!”
“Better than moping,” shrugged Balin.
“Is it?” Dwalin muttered, taking a long pull from his mug.

****

Rorimac was comparing notes about the mountain with Thodora and Chadham as Bifur stood a few paces away, chatting with Bombur and Bifur.

He subtly gestured in Rorimac’s direction. “I do hope you find him as agreeable for me as you found Fili for Bofur.”
“And why is that?” Bombur asked.
“Because I’m planning to ask him to marry me.”

Bofur was not surprised but Bombur’s eyes were like dinner plates.

“Oh!” he loudly exclaimed. Both Bofur and Bifur hurriedly shushed him.
“He doesn’t know,” Bifur explained.
“Oh,” Bombur whispered. “Well, that’s wonderful. Bifur and I will have to pull him aside for a longer conversation soon.”

****

When Bombur went to refresh his drink and have some dessert with his wife, Bofur leaned against the wall but slightly to the side, hoping to appear casual when his question was to be anything but.

“So…” Bofur drew out the word comically. “Bifur, if I can ask, have the two of you gone in for any of the particular hobbit bedroom specialty that was the subject of such great rumor?”
“No, I told you, I’ve not asked him to marry me yet.”
“I thought maybe you might have considered it a little early.”
“Learning from what you shared with me before I had even met him, I was prepared to know that things can be a bit different for hobbits. I told him early on in our intimate relationship that things
are different for dwarrows, especially when it comes to bonding the blood. We’ve been careful to be mindful, as it were.”

Nodding thoughtfully, Bofur said, “That’s wise, wiser than Bilbo himself had been with Thorin. Wiser than even I had been with Fee, truth be told.”

“I must tell you candidly, though…he has introduced me to other things. Having a hobbit for a lover has shown me pleasures the like of which I had never imagined.”

“I’d believe it.”

Bifur cast a sidelong glance at Bofur. “I know you would. Speaking of which…how are things going with that?”

“How are things going? Other than practically gagging for it all the time?”

“Be serious!”

“I am. I can’t stop thinking about them, the things we do when we’re alone, the things I haven’t yet done, and the things I’d sell my left foot for leave to do.”

“In other words, you’re going to put that new elvish bed to good use?”

“Aye.”

Bifur held his mug aloft and Bofur clanked his against it.

****

Thorin honestly did not want Bilbo out of arm’s reach at all, but he was not the only one who had missed him and he knew it would be too suspicious to glue himself to him all evening like he wanted to. While Bilbo was being pulled into this conversation and that, Thorin used the time he couldn’t be with Bilbo to take care of other things.

Spying Bofur alone for the first—and possibly only time—that evening, Thorin asked him to step out with him. He brought him to his council meeting chamber where other ears would not be able to hear.

“I must thank you for your letter,” Thorin said. “It came at a…a dark time for me. Words of kindness unlooked for and unexpected were appreciated more than I can tell you.”

“Good. I’m glad it was comforting. That was my intent.”

Thorin shifted nervously.

“But that is not why you pulled me completely out of the party, is it?” asked Bofur knowingly.

“No,” Thorin exhaled. He drained the rest of the mug he brought along with him. “I suppose there’s no way to work into this casually, so I’ll just ask. Have you and Bilbo consummated your relationship?”

“No. Bilbo said he promised you he wouldn’t, so we didn’t.”

“But you’ve…your feelings have developed enough that you’ve had the discussion.”

Bifur rubbed the back of his neck. “It was difficult not to. As long as we’re talking frankly, though, how come you gave me leave, even with Bilbo’s promise to you?”

“It felt…I wanted to have some manner of, not control, but I suppose some sort of say in it. I figured it might be inevitable and I would rather have assented than to be betrayed altogether. May I ask when you had the conversation?”

“December, or thereabouts.”

“December!”

“Aye.”

“You’ve waited this whole time, on the strength of Bilbo’s word to me?”

“Of course. I’ll admit to a little ego bruising that you did not trust us to wait, but once he told me he swore to you, we both vowed to hold to it.”

Thorin regarded Bofur with a new respect. “I’m grateful.”
“There is a conversation we should still have, though. Now that we are here, I must say I’m not any less in love with him than I was before. The two of you should have your reunion first, remembering what it is like to be lovers, but then I think it would be best for us all to have a conversation and discuss the ramifications of Bilbo and me pursuing more.”

Staring at him in wonder, Thorin said, “You’ve been incredibly level-headed about this. Some might even say generous.”

“I would be lying if I said I didn’t feel some of that old jealousy and trepidation, but I’ve learned something since last I saw you.”

“Which is?”

Bofur held his gaze. “We could remain rivals, but in doing so we hurt the ones we love. Bilbo, Fili, even Kili to a degree, would be caught in the middle of it if we continued our pissing contest we started more or less the moment we figured out the other had a feeling for Bilbo. Or we could have an understanding that we are part of the same circle, that Bilbo will never be ‘taken away’ by the other, that it is only in our best interest to find some common ground and both be happy we’re afforded this chance to share a very special and very unique relationship. I have too often chosen the former. I’ve grown and learned enough to understand the latter is going to be far more fulfilling. I have also had enough time to realize that perhaps you might feel differently, spending these months alone, and you might not be at that point for yourself yet. Maybe it will be such that you never see it that way. I’m going to do my best to understand you better as we go.”

“That’s…a very well-crafted and well-thought through way of looking at this. You’re right, I’m not sure I’m there yet. In the meantime, though, I’ve got to ask: who are you and what have you done with the Bofur I remember?”

“Did you just make a joke, Your Highness?”

“Did you just make a joke, Your Highness?”

“It is Thorin, for you, and maybe I did.”

****

On a path to refill his beer, Bilbo caught a glimpse of Thorin and Bofur leaving the hall. He paused for a breath, wondering if he needed to follow and mediate, though he ultimately decided the probability they were stepping out to argue was minimal. Bofur was Fili’s Chosen, after all, and Fili was the Crown Prince—they had plenty to discuss that didn’t involve reopening old disputes. Filling his mug remained the more pressing of the two matters.

At the keg, a voice from the side startled him.

"Well, Prince Bilbo, it is rather interesting isn't it?" Regnad said. “You having our king's name inked on your arm along with your husband's, I mean.”

Bilbo glanced down, remembering he had absent-mindedly rolled up his sleeves shortly before. Though he had decided weeks ago he wasn’t going to expend the considerable effort it would require keeping those particular tattoos secret, it surprised him how quickly they were noticed…and by someone who had only been introduced to him that afternoon. Luckily, he had already planned a response for such an inquiry.

"And Fili's and Bofur's, too," Bilbo answered smoothly. "Not that it is particularly the business of anyone whom I've just met, but they've all changed my life in one way or another. Why shouldn't I honor them if I'm so moved? I was led to believe the tradition was quite dwarvish."

Ignoring his other points, Regnad gave Bilbo a disconcerting smile. "Of course. In one way or another."

Bowing deeply, he walked away. Bilbo did not care for the insinuating tone he used one bit.

****
“So,” Nori nudged Dori. “You and Óin have moved in together, eh? How is living with him working out for you?”
“Wonderfully,” Dori gushed. “I never would have guessed it, myself.”
“Neither would I, truth be told, but good on you, brother.”

Nori held his mug aloft and took a long pull.

“And you? How is the most notorious dwarf in Ered Luin faring in fancy elf country?” teased Dori. “I’ve got to tell you, I had only wished to be where Nîfon was, wherever it might have turned out to be. After living there, though, I must say I’ve grown fond of the place.”
“And after living there with him, specifically?” Dori ventured. “What of that?”

Nori looked at Dori with a solemn sincerity Dori had scarcely seen him wear.

“I’m going to love him for the rest of my life, Dori. I promise you that much.”

Though he thought he should have been surprised by the conviction of Nori’s passion, Dori simply…wasn’t.

Smiling tenderly at his brother, he said, “I’ll drink to that.”

Nori grinned back and they drank, both emptying their mugs.

****

Joining the party again, Thorin figured there had been enough distance that night between himself and Bilbo to risk a little conversation. He walked with Bofur over to where Bilbo, Thodora, Chadham, and Ori were standing.

“Ah, my esteemed guests from the Shire,” said Thorin charmingly. “How are you enjoying your welcome dinner? Go ahead, you can be honest. You know I value your opinion on food.”
“The food is wonderful!” Chadham gushed. “But even if it wasn’t, I’d only care a little. What a place this is! And Ori said this is what it looks like in disrepair? I can’t even imagine what it would look like if it was more grand!”

All the eyes flicked to a visibly uncomfortable Ori.

“I didn’t say disrepair, exactly,” he said, sheepish.
“It is okay, Ori,” Thorin said, amused but comforting. “It is still in the process of being repaired. The worm did catastrophic damage—some of the works and structure will never again attain its former glory, though we hope to put our own shine on it as we go.”
“It is still incredibly beautiful,” Thodora said. “And I happen to think the food is delicious, too.”
“I’m glad you are enjoying the hospitality so far, my friends. And what of you, Bilbo? How are you finding your visit this time around?”
“Erebor has made incredible progress. You must be so pleased.”
“I’m more pleased now that you’re here.”

Bofur sensed a change in the air and came up with a deft excuse to bustle Ori and the hobbits off for more to drink before too much was revealed by either Thorin’s or Bilbo’s gaze. He turned to toss a wink over his shoulder, but didn’t bother when he noted neither Bilbo nor Thorin were taking their eyes off each other.

“Finally, a moment alone,” Thorin said quietly.
“Won’t there be talk?”
“Other than one moment no one else knows about other than our lads, and one moment that only
Balin knows about, there has been nothing yet for curious eyes to discuss. However, as I’m looking at you, it occurs to me that you suddenly look tired. Nigh unto exhausted, truly. It is possible you might need to retire soon, poor lamb.”

Bilbo couldn’t fight the grin that spread across his face if he wanted to. “Come to think of it, I am quite road weary. Perhaps I can drag Kee away from his elves and into an early bed.”

“It is for the best, I’m sure. I’m going to stay a little longer with Fili and Bofur, but I’ll probably be turning in soon, too.”

Bilbo nodded, remembering the plan.

*****

Saying goodnight to Bilbo, Bofur did not get into specifics of the conversation he had shared with Thorin, but he gave him similar sentiments.

“I will miss you tonight, Bee, but I want you and Thorin to enjoy being together again for a little while, perhaps see how Kee fits into it with you and the new changes. We will have plenty of time later to discuss the more intimate things we’ve talked about.”

Murmuring back, Bilbo told him, “I will miss you tonight, too. I haven’t had a proper kiss from you in far too long. Let us fix that sooner than later, please.”

Looking into Bilbo’s eyes soulfully, Bofur replied, “I need that more than I can tell you.”

Bilbo turned to Fili. “Don’t you and Bo damage each other too badly in that luxurious bed tonight?”

Fili smiled wanly, glancing down. “Oh Fee, it is not all that bad, is it?” asked Bilbo, attempting to catch his eye.

Shaking his head, Fili said, “No, I suppose it isn’t. I just…I want to…I…”

“Come here,” Bilbo whispered.

Fili rested his forehead against Bilbo’s, an affectionate gesture for the others in the room to witness, but not so overly familiar for relatives as to cause whispers.

Bilbo said, “I do, too.”

With a more genuine grin, Fili released him and turned his attention to Kili. The smile wavered as he considered what Kili would likely be doing within the hour—doing without him, which was the bigger point of contention—and Fili had to work to keep his expression light.

Kili tugged Fili into a hug and Fili hugged him back even more tightly. Fili had a dozen things he wanted to say to him, but he didn’t know how any of them would come out, so ultimately he said none of them. Instead, he kissed Kili’s forehead.

“Night, Kee,” he said.

Kili flashed him the smile that always melted his heart. “See you later, Fee.”

*****

Thorin surreptitiously observed Bilbo and Kili wishing Fili and Bofur goodnight. He had expected the wistful longing looks on Bofur’s part, but Fili’s reaction was a surprise. In addition to the pained expression on his face and the lingering forehead nudge Fili gave Bilbo, Thorin saw Fili turn and watch Bilbo and Kili to the very last.

After giving it a few minutes to not seem too suspect, Thorin wished Dís and Dwalin goodnight before moving on to Fili and Bofur.

“I’m so glad you are here, Fili,” Thorin said. “We’ve all missed you so.”
“I’ve missed you, too,” Fili replied. “Thank you for everything you’ve done. I still can’t get over the suites you designed.”
“Your Mam helped, too,” Thorin said.
“She said a great majority of it was you,” Fili said. Lowering his voice, he added, “And I know full well many of those more personal touches were not hers.”
“What’s the point of being a king or a prince if you can’t go to bed in a royal fashion?” Thorin said, winking.
“I like the way you think,” Bofur said with a grin.
“And on that note,” said Thorin cheerfully, “I’m going to retire for the night.”
“Royally, no doubt” said Bofur, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.
“Honestly, what do you do with him?” Thorin said to Fili, pretending to be exasperated.
Fili quipped, “Whatever he lets me.”
“Royally,” Bofur said.
Smacking his arm, Fili giggled, “Will you quit that?”
Bofur and Thorin joined Fili’s laughter and Thorin turned to go, shaking his head fondly.

“Thorin?” Bofur called.
Thorin turned back around.

“Thank you for the beautifully carved desk. That was…well, it was quite thoughtful of you.”

After arriving in his own room, Bilbo lingered with Kili, chatting, planning, and kissing, giving Thorin time to make his own farewells so that he could beat Bilbo to his chambers. When they had determined enough time had passed, Bilbo left the room by himself. Kili had come up with the idea that he would leave a few minutes after Bilbo, giving them a handful of potential excuses if Bilbo wound up in an awkward situation where he was intercepted on the way to Thorin’s room.

Bilbo crept through the passages, somehow not seeing another soul. He tapped on Thorin’s door (pleasebetherealreadypleasebetherealready), hoping he had given him enough time. To his relief, Thorin answered rapidly and Bilbo ducked through the door.

“Kili decide to keep to that staggered arrival plan of his?” asked Thorin.

When Bilbo didn’t reply, Thorin’s eyes followed Bilbo’s line of sight. Bilbo had been staring at the bed. Smiling, Thorin waited for Bilbo to burst forth in excited praise.

Bilbo was frozen to the spot. He had seen that bed before in a dream—the dream with Kili, the one that mended their last big fight over Thorin, right before they had first made love. Bilbo had only described it to Kili at the time as a “carved four poster bed.” On closer inspection, though Thorin’s bed had more of the finer details, the main familiar carvings were unmistakable.

When the expected reaction didn’t burst forth, Thorin read the expression on Bilbo’s face.

“You’ve seen this bed before,” he stated.
Bilbo glanced at him, eyes still wide. “Yes.”
“I don’t suppose I have to tell you this was made especially for me and the designs upon it exist
nowhere else in the world. It was in one of your visions, wasn’t it?”

Bilbo was silently grateful Thorin wholly believed in the stranger things Bilbo had told him he’d seen when he was not waking.

“It was…but I don’t understand. You…you weren’t even in that dream.”

Bilbo explained to him where he had seen it before.

Scratching his beard, Thorin summarized, “You’re saying that after the largest argument the two of you had ever had over me, you and Kili dream-bonded for the very first time in this bed—just before you bonded for real?”

Bilbo shrugged. “Kili wasn’t even there for the bonding in the dream. It truly was a regular dream that time, not one of our shared visions.”

“Not too regular of a dream, it seems—it still mended your argument and led to quite a milestone for the two of you.”

Bilbo couldn’t help but smile. “That it did.”

Thorin shook his head. “I wish I understood what that meant.”

“It is a gorgeous bed, Thorin,” Bilbo said, putting his arms around him.

“It was purpose built,” Thorin purred.

“Oh, is that so?”

“Inspired by yours, but with a few added features I thought might be useful for us specifically. You brought the rope, right?”

Blushing, Bilbo said, “I did not bring it tonight, but it is in my room.”

Eyeing the smallish bag slung over Bilbo’s shoulder, Thorin asked, “If you did not bring the rope, what do you have in your satchel? Surely there can’t be clothes in there?”

“No, though that would have been a good idea, bringing something to change into in the morning…or at least a dressing gown.”

Thorin quirked a bashful smile. “I might happen to have gotten a couple of your garments and a hobbit-sized dressing gown in my wardrobe. You know, by mistake.”

Raising an eyebrow, Bilbo said, “By mistake, hmm? You’re lucky your sister isn’t nosier or these grand coincidences would be getting you in the worst trouble.”

“Dis would never dig through my things. Perhaps you’ve been around Fili and Kili too long—they’ve always had far fewer sibling boundaries.”

You’ve no idea how right you are, thought Bilbo, before remembering Thorin had asked him a question before they got off the subject.

“Anyway, my satchel! Well, it just so happens there is something in there for you. A gift, of sorts.”

Bilbo reached in and pulled out the vessel of earth he had filled from the Shire and handed it to Thorin.

“Soil?” asked Thorin, curious.

“From the peach grove outside Bag End, more specifically. I thought…” Bilbo stopped, suddenly feeling foolish about the whole thing.

Tenderly, Thorin repeated, “You thought…?”

Sighing, Bilbo closed his eyes so he wouldn’t have to look at Thorin in his embarrassment. “I thought perhaps, given the unknown, that it might help in some way, I don’t know, for you to have a bit of Bag End with you, a bit of home to bring wherever you go, or to have with you if I’m far away myself. It is silly, I know—“

“No,” Thorin said, setting aside the jar carefully and snatching Bilbo into his arms. “it is not silly. It is lovely. I would have found it quite comforting this winter and I’m elated to have it now.”
“Obviously, the jar isn’t completely practical, but I figured you could always spoon a little out if you needed to travel light.”
“This is a thoughtful gift, my love, and I cannot thank you enough.”
Bilbo’s face was still hot. “You’re welcome.”
“I have something for you, too.”
“Something else? I can’t imagine what else you could possibly have! You’ve done so much already—the room, the furniture, the soap, the clothes, the garden. All of it!”
“I told you, these are things I’ve been longing to do for you. Now that I have leave to do so, I’m going to do as much as I can without getting us both banished from Erebor.”

Thorin kissed his nose and released him temporarily. He crossed over to his special bedside hiding place, crouching to dig for something. He popped back up and returned to Bilbo, holding out a closed hand.

“This is something, in particular, that is long, long overdue,” said Thorin softly.

He turned his hand over and opened his fingers. Resting on his palm was a small ring, much like a miniature version of the crown Thorin had made for him. The exception was an emerald set in the middle, a faceted and polished rectangle slightly taller than the band itself.

Bilbo gasped. “The detail! Thorin, the leaves! This…this is…this is—“
“This is your betrothal ring, many months late. I hope you don’t think it too presumptuous, but I made one for myself, too, for when we can finally wear them openly. Will you accept it?”
“Yes!”
“For tonight, may I put it on you?”

Bilbo held out a trembling hand in reply.

“That is Kili’s hand,” Thorin corrected gently. “Let’s put it on the other one.”

Thorin slipped the ring on Bilbo’s finger and gave Bilbo a moment to admire it. Truthfully, he admired it, too, quite liking the way his ring looked on his husband’s hand. He pulled Bilbo close to him again.

“I know you will have to take it off in the morning, and perhaps it is too much to hope that you could put it on and take it off every day without slipping up and getting caught, but for tonight…tonight let me make love to my consort wearing this symbol of our union.”
“Let me put yours on you, too.”

Bilbo wasn’t quite sure what he had expected, but he let out another delighted gasp when he saw Thorin’s ring was the larger mate of his own. He held Thorin’s hand and put it on him, reverently pressing his lips to it when he was through. They shared another tender kiss and gazed at each other. Thorin smiled at Bilbo and Bilbo grinned back, beginning to giggle. Thorin joined him, lifting him up and spinning him around for good measure.

“I’m just—I’m so happy,” Thorin said. “I’m positively giddy, in fact. I can’t help but smile and laugh when you’re here at last—as my husband—like some living daydream.”
“T’m feeling much the same. So,” Bilbo said impishly, “What else do you have stashed away in here, squirreled secret? You have a store of slick under your bed, too, no doubt.”
Thorin raised a sly eyebrow. “Of course. I also have other things stashed.”

He opened a cabinet about half the size of his wardrobe on the far side of his suite and turned back around with a bottle of wine and two goblets.
“Well, now,” Bilbo said, crossing his arms. “Look who has thought of everything!”
“I had a lot of time to think.”
“Oh, Thorin…” Bilbo’s grin faded.
“None of that, now. Giddy, remember? Here, let me pour us some wine and I’ll show you
something else while we wait for Kili.”

With a freshly filled goblet in hand, Thorin pushed open a door in his suite to reveal a full bathing
room. A grand tub—an easy fit for more than a couple dwarrows—now occupied most of the space
in Thorin’s original dressing room, with the water closet adjacent.

“Oh, Thorin!” Bilbo gasped. "This is gorgeous. If this is here, why did we have need of guards and
springs? Here, I could bathe with you and not be hidden."
“That is certainly a large reason for it being here, my love. However, it is not yet operational. I
had to send for Beorn to sort out filling and draining, and we have run into some issues on how to
reconcile that with the hot spring source available to this part of the mountain. He could not stay
long enough to solve our dilemma, being needed back home, though he will be returning for the
wedding and has promised to do his best to figure out if we can finish it at all. Luck willing, we will
have it for the summer…if you, if you still plan to stay past the wedding for the remainder of the
season."
Bilbo whispered Thorin's name reverently. "Yes, I do. I must--my very soul commands it."

Taking the goblet from Bilbo’s hand and setting both vessels aside, Thorin took Bilbo in his arms.
The two were kissing passionately when they heard a knock at the door.

“Kili,” Bilbo murmured.

Thorin released him to go let Kili in, both he and Bilbo still kiss-dazed and love-drunk from the
gifts and revelations of the past several minutes.

Kili glanced between them. “What did I miss?”

Bilbo showed him his ring and Thorin gave him the quick tour of his suite he had given Bilbo.

“This is beautiful, Thorin,” Kili said. “It all is.”

Thorin gazed into his eyes, the toggle inside him flipping from family to lover so quickly he could
feel it physically click somewhere in his core.

“It certainly is,” he said meaningfully.

Reaching for him, Thorin took the kiss he had fantasized about a hundred times that winter. It
started with lips, which came together and parted quickly when Kili’s tongue darted out, inviting
Thorin to taste him more thoroughly. Answering the invitation ardently, Thorin cupped the back of
Kili’s neck with one hand while pulling his body close with the other as they kissed.

Kili felt the passion growing—both within himself as well as pressed against his hip (for Thorin’s
part)—and leaned back to speak before he grew too aroused to go through with his plan.

“Thorin,” Kili said, near-breathless. “You deserve some time alone with him, time no one else
needs to intrude upon. Bee already knows I feel strongly about it. I only came by to make sure he
reached you without incident…and because after that letter, I couldn’t resist getting a kiss hello
and goodnight from you myself.”

"Kili," Thorin said, sensual and low. "Stay, please. We need you. We want you."
Kili rested his forehead against Thorin’s, groaning in erotic frustration, but ultimately insisting,
"Both of you are so very tempting, but this night is for the two of you. Perhaps you might return the favor for us some other time. I’ll take that kiss goodnight, though."

Kili pressed his mouth to Thorin’s again, sneaking a saucy slick of tongue past Thorin’s lips. Moments later, he broke away, panting.

“That’s enough if I’m going to keep any resolve I have left. Consider this a promise and a preview of what tomorrow night could bring,” Kili said.

“Would begging help?” Thorin joked.

Chuckling, Kili said, “Aside from the current obvious, we all know this is best and what the two of you truly need. With a gargantuan amount of effort and will, I’m going to leave before the answer to that question becomes ‘yes.’”

Thorin, also struggling to keep his desire under control, replied, “I look forward to tomorrow, then.”

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Bilbo walked Kili to the door and spoke low for their ears only.

"Kee, if you want to...extend your play with Fee tonight, the way we’ve talked about, I will not be upset."

Kili’s face fell. “I had thought you might rather be there when that happened.”

“It would be quite something to see, I’m sure, but I will not hold it against you should you decide to play. I will not be remaining chaste, that is to be sure.”

“Its just…”

Kili’s disappointment squeezed Bilbo’s heart. “What?”

“You’ve been there for all of it, for all my first everythings, from kissing onward.”

“This would not be your first time.”

“It would with him. It would be the first time with anyone other than you. It seems wrong for you not to be there.”

Noting the quiver in Kili’s voice, Bilbo laid a calming hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t fret so, dear heart. You can wait if you want to. I’m simply saying you don’t have to.”

Kili wiped a tear away before it could escape. “I know. I don’t know why I’m getting upset when you’re attempting to be thoughtful.”

“I love that you care so much, and I apologize I hadn’t considered it in such a way. Wherever your night takes you, so be it. I love you immensely and only want you to be as happy as you make me.”

“I love you, my jewel, and though I’ll miss you tonight, please do not spend any time missing me. I’ve got plans for you, you know, and though they might wait one more day, they certainly won’t diminish.”

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Thorin watched the quiet conversation with a deepening frown, unable to overhear it but able to see quite clearly that Kili went from soft and smiling to almost weeping. Though Kili kissed Bilbo goodbye with considerable vigor, Thorin’s concern swelled anew when Kili raised his hand in silent goodbye and left the room.

“What is wrong, Bilbo? Why is Kili so upset? Should we call him back? I told him we wanted him to stay. Did he not believe me?”

Bilbo sighed. They still hadn’t told Thorin about Kili and Fili and he did not know how much the brothers were currently planning to tell him.
“That had nothing to do with you and me or what we are doing tonight. Kili might yet share it with you, but I cannot rightly reveal his secrets for him. I promise it has nothing at all to do with you or his gift of giving tonight to us.”

Thorin hesitantly replied, “You are sure? I never thought I’d say this out loud, but I do not want to be the one to cause heartache or strife in your marriage.”

“No, Thorin. I swear on the Shire, that had nothing to do with you. I hate being cryptic, I do, but let me assure you that he left okay, I’m okay, we’re okay, the two of you are okay, and we can move forward with our evening without worry. Tonight I’m yours, mind, heart, and body.”

“Then I shall accept them, and pledge you mine in return.”

Their lips met again, sweetly at first but rapidly growing desperate and feral. There was no one left for whom to wait nor any reason to bother with propriety. Clothing was tugged off, trousers were dropped, and moans and growls were drawn forth with each bit of hot, tantalizing skin bared and caressed.

Bilbo reached for Thorin’s cock, sucking in a sudden breath and accidentally choking on it. He backed out of Thorin’s embrace to cough and sputter. Hurriedly, Thorin handed him a goblet which Bilbo quaffed gratefully.

Thorin watched him down the rest of the wine from the cup in one heroic go.

“Are you okay?” he asked with concern.

“Yes,” Bilbo managed to say. “I merely breathed in wrong. Embarrassing, but otherwise I’m fine.”

Able to breathe again, Bilbo looked Thorin over in the candlelight, confirming an unmistakable shine coming from the very reason for his gasp in the first place.

“Thorin,” Bilbo said, stunned. “You’ve…you’ve pierced your cock!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, darlings.
Kissing You Home, Part 2: Thorin and Bilbo

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Thorin renew their bond.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Being utterly shocked down to his stones did not keep Bilbo from lustily eyeing Thorin’s pierced member.

“How?” Bilbo managed to sputter. “And why? And…how?”

Thoroughly tickled by Bilbo’s reaction, Thorin couldn’t fight the mirth on his face if he had tried.

“I should think the why part is fairly obvious. It is for you.”

“Didn’t it hurt?”

Chuckling, Thorin replied, “Like a dragon bite! Took a goodly long time to heal, too, but as I told you, I’ve been celibate since I saw you last.”

“Whom would you even call upon to do such a thing? Surely not Óin?”

“I know of no one else.”

“Óin had his hands on your prick?”

“Only long enough to jab a sharp bit of metal through it.”

“How did you even know he would be willing to do it? Aren’t there medical concerns to consider when figuring where it goes?”

Fondly exasperated, Thorin said, “Really? I’ve made this painful, sweeping symbolic statement for you, our future, and my willingness to assent to your forbidden changes to our bed—not to mention, I’ve physically altered myself in a way that should make our sex more thrilling—and you’re only interested in the mechanics and whether or not Óin touched me?”

“I’m sorry, I was just…I can’t even imagine the process, is all. Wait, though—this is symbolic of what now?”

“I don’t know the whole of what you have planned for me or yourself as far as our bedplay goes, though I’m aware Kili is surely a part of it at the very least. I wanted to do something monumental for not only your personal pleasure, but to symbolize my…well, if not my willingness to join in all of it, then at least my full acceptance of our changed bed arrangement. Not to mention, if I’m sharing you with Kili, I needed to have something extra to offer you in order to keep up with that little sex demon.”

“Thorin, you need nothing extra at all to keep up with anyone, though your new jewelry is enticing and arousing—and your reasoning even more so. I’ve rarely seen anyone willing to back up a conviction with such an action.”

“So you like it, truly?”

Sinking to his knees, Bilbo said, “I can’t wait to feel it—on my tongue or in my arse either one.”

Thorin keened when Bilbo’s mouth wrapped around the head of his cock, experiencing delightful new sensations while Bilbo explored and wetly tongued the jewelry to rub him in unfamiliar (but incredibly welcome) ways. He tossed his head back and sighed, hotly anticipating other pleasure trials with this new addition.

Taking Thorin further into his mouth, Bilbo breathed deeply through his nose and was sent
unexpectedly reeling back through time. A familiar scent brought back a clear recollection of the
very first time his tongue touched Thorin’s fragrant skin, the memory replaying as though it had
happened only seconds before. For that moment, it was as though he was in Lake Town again,
sharing love confessions and making love for the first time.

"Thorin," he breathed. "Gods, the memories. Did you...did you get your Lake Town soap crafted
too?"
“As I believe I said once before, I couldn’t leave you to the fun by yourself. I might have purchased
also a little of the fragrance itself…and massaged some into my thatch for you to discover."

Bilbo eagerly took Thorin in his mouth again, sliding down the full length of him. He took another
sniff as he drew back up again, delighting in the sensory memory of both taste and smell.

“Oh, this is going to go so fast, Bilbo,” warned Thorin.
“I can stop.”
“I meant all of it. Any of it. I’ve had naught but my hands and anything soft I could find to rub
against since I left you on the path outside Bag End.”
“I’ve been hard for almost the entire day,” Bilbo confessed.
Thorin urged Bilbo up off the floor and towards the bed. “Bloody damn, me too. Kissing you,
imagining you naked in the bath, kissing you again, kissing Kili, kissing you again...I’ve
almost finished in my trousers more than once.”
Giggling, Bilbo turned around to climb up on the bed. “I could say almost the same thing. I was
naked with Kee in the bath and we didn’t even do-“
“-What is that?” Thorin asked, interrupting him.
“Hmm?”
“On your back. You’ve got a tattoo on your back.”

Bilbo peeked over his shoulder instead of rolling to face him, allowing Thorin to look his fill while
he explained. Thorin’s expression was difficult to read; it was a combination of shocked, solemn,
and hungry.

“Funny, remember the coincidence we discovered earlier with us both having name tattoos? It
would seem we were also of similar minds about commemorating the bed arrangement,” he
explained, feeling Thorin’s gentle fingertips brush over the design. “This is the symbol of our
house, signifying Durin’s bloodline—directly from the dagger you gave me, most specifically.”
Softly, Thorin said, “Tell me more.”
“When we played with the inkwell, you and Kee marked me as property of the House Of Durin,
and you already know I was sorry it faded. I thought about my fantasy and my game, the one
where I belong to the House of Durin, and I thought about the reality, wherein I do belong to the
House of Durin, in a different sort of way, which is also sometimes the same if we’re feeling dirty
enough. I considered the bed arrangement, considered you, and decided this was the best way to go
about it.”

The House Of Durin, Thorin thought. Was that only meant to be Thorin and Kili? He recalled Fili,
how he looked so bereft sending Bilbo off to bed. He considered Fili’s name on Bilbo’s wrist, too
—plus the dozens of things he had wondered on his own in the months they were apart—and
wanted to ask how much a part of things Fili had become. That was not the moment for it, though,
not when Thorin had been on the verge of coming just from brushing his cock against Bilbo’s thigh
alone.

“I don’t know how you’ve planned for tonight’s encounter to go,” Thorin said, “and for my part
I’ve imagined it so many different ways. Now that you’re here, though, I find myself growing
frantic to feel you in my blood again as soon as possible. Mark me, my love. Have me, let me feel
you again.”

Bilbo had been gagging to experience Thorin’s new addition inside him from the moment he saw it, though the raw emotion in Thorin’s eyes made it hard to argue any greater case. His darling husband had been halfway across the land and all alone for months. Bilbo found he couldn’t refuse. He asked Thorin to get on his hands and knees, getting off the bed himself momentarily to squeeze out a flannel in the water Thorin had had the foresight to fetch for his basin.

“I warn you, it is a bit cool,” Bilbo said, gently washing Thorin’s crevice with the flannel.

“Are we to re-live our first time?” Thorin asked. “Which one of us is the romantic, again?”

“That had been my thought. However, I’ll confess to being in enough of a rush to have considered condensing the preliminaries. I’ve been away from you so long and though I truly do wish to savor both your body and your pleasure, the urgency is almost too much for me to bear.”

“Then don’t bear it, and thus I shall not have to bear it, either. I would go as far as to suggest we stroke each other off first to dull this sharp edge of wanting before lengthier enjoyments, but even more than that, I need to feel you renewed in my blood again as soon as we can manage it.”

Bilbo set aside the flannel. “Then perhaps I will not lick you and move on to getting you ready.”

“This would honestly be the only time I would ever think that was an agreeable idea.”

“Turn over, then. I want to see and kiss you while we prepare.”

Thorin did as he was told, reaching behind and over his head to fiddle with the headboard. Inside the carving there had been a small door hidden by the design. When Thorin pushed on it, it swiveled back and disappeared, a dish filled with oil rotating around to replace it.

Blinking in surprise, Bilbo asked, “You had a revolving door with hidden slick built into your headboard?”

Grinning up at him, Thorin said, “There’s still a dish on the side, too, and a smaller bottle in the drawer. This is just for additional convenience.”

“No wonder you didn’t want this built in the mountain! There would have been talk for sure. My, it even stays recessed so we couldn’t tip it in a fit of passion. You truly did have time to think, didn’t you?”

“Yes, and now it is time to play, so if you wouldn’t mind hastening the process a bit, my burglar…”

Thorin tucked a pillow under his hips and spread his legs wantonly. Oiling his fingers, Bilbo kissed his name on Thorin’s chest, moving over to lick at one of Thorin’s new nipple rings as his hand traveled downward.

At the first, slick entry, Thorin moaned appreciatively. “How can it feel so different when you do it?”

Seductively, Bilbo asked, “Have you been inside yourself since we’ve been apart?”

“You know I have. I think I wrote you as much.”

“Tell me.”

With Bilbo’s digit moving within him, his warm lips spreading sensual kisses across his body, and the accidental sliding of Bilbo’s flesh against his sensitive, desperate cock, Thorin did his best to speak coherently.

“I would spread out a piece of fur on the bed and stretch over it on my stomach so I could stimulate myself without my hands.”

“And why would you need those hands, my king?” crooned Bilbo.

“Because I would reach around to my arsehole and use my fingers to fuck myself, pretending they were you.”
“Did you imagine they were my fingers? Or my prick?” asked Bilbo breathily.

Thorin whined as Bilbo pushed another digit into him, crumpling the blanket into his fists.

“Yes,” he rasped.

Glancing up at Thorin, Bilbo witnessed a veritable vision: his mouth open and panting, eyes closed, and skin flushing from neck to navel. He wondered how far he could push him into his fantasy before he shied away. He licked a stripe from the base of his cock to the pierced tip, taking the ring into his mouth for a brief moment before releasing it to speak.

“Just me?”

Thorin squeezed his eyes more tightly shut, attempting to shoo away the images Bilbo’s question sent flooding through his mind…though the sheer perversion of it sent the muscles rippling throughout his core. His cock throbbed and he wasn’t sure how much longer he could wait before it simply went off on its own.

“Fuck me now,” he begged. “Please!”

Swirling a little more oil over Thorin’s entrance, Bilbo slicked himself up well and pushed Thorin’s thighs back to ease his entry.

“I’ll go slow,” he promised.

Thorin’s eyes opened to gaze at him and then fluttered shut again.

Rocking his way steadily in, Bilbo had to pause a moment or two in order to keep his own control. Once he was pressed fully inside, he stretched for a kiss.

“So, you didn’t tell me, was it just me you were imagining inside you when you fingered yourself in these filthy little fantasies or were there others present and helping themselves to you?”

Blurry images from Thorin’s most deviant, heavily drunken fantasies floated through his mind, though he banished them quickly before shame could get the better of him—or make him come.

“Kili. Kili was, was…doing what you said,” was all Thorin was willing to admit.

“Feeling you? Pleasing you? Making you scream?”

Thorin whimpered, affirmative.


Surging forward, Bilbo’s mouth opened in a silent scream as he pumped his release inside his lover. Thorin groaned, feeling it spurt within him. The sensation morphed, quickly radiating through his blood—an erotic resurgence of the missing scrap of his soul. He shuddered in tandem with Bilbo, sensing nearly every part right along with his lover save the most urgent act of release itself.

Bilbo withdrew, tugged the pillow from under Thorin, and straddled him.

“Now it is like the first time,” Bilbo said. “Only I’ll be the one riding out your finish.”

Reaching over his head for oil, Thorin prepared Bilbo as thoroughly as he could while still in haste. Bilbo did little to curb the vicious bite of Thorin’s desire when he dropped his head back and moaned how badly he had missed his touch. Thorin had fantasized and imagined their reunion a hundred different ways, figuring in most of them that he would have to coax the things he needed
most to hear from Bilbo. Instead, words of love, praise, and desire bubbled from his husband’s lips like a beautiful spring, washing over him as if they were an elixir blessed by the Valar themselves, soothing much of the harshness of lonely months past. Bilbo continued sharing words of his devotion and love even while he slowly sank down on his prick.

The jewelry on Thorin’s chest rose and fell with breaths drawn in through his teeth and exhaled in shudders as Bilbo stretched around him. Bilbo felt Thorin’s hips stutter underneath him, Thorin grimacing in restraint even as he whimpered in delight. With each little bit Bilbo gained, he witnessed Thorin’s erotic struggle for authority over his own body increase.

“I can’t—” Thorin rasped.

Bilbo had only just finished letting Thorin in—not even able to undulate and experiment with the feel of the jewelry inside him—when Thorin came, gasping and growling. However, the refreshed bond thrumming through him was well worth the shortening of the encounter.

When Thorin managed to speak again, he said, “I told you it would be fast, my love, but that was embarrassingly brief even by my estimation. I don’t think I’ve ever been lost so quickly. I’m sorry.”

“There will be time for more exploration later. The comfort of your mark renewed within me was a fine trade for the brevity. I dearly hope you agree with that sentiment as well, because I also finished more rapidly than I had hoped I would.” *Due in no small part to your confession,* Bilbo thought, though he did not add it aloud.

“Still, I had all these ideas and plans of how I was going to kiss you all over, love and worship you, woo you as I went, but I needed you—you inside me, me inside you, all of it—as soon as possible.”

“Please, you don’t need to explain. I’m actually a little relieved we didn’t try to draw it out—obviously, I was far too anxious myself. I’ve been on the verge of orgasm at my own hand before and not been as desperate to come as I felt the moment you undressed me. My body missed your hands, your lips, your skin against mine…”

Thorin gently urged Bilbo to roll over on his stomach, caressing the tattoo at the bottom of his spine and bending down to kiss it reverently.

“You are breathtaking wearing this; it is more beautiful on you than I could have guessed. Did you get this done when you visited Ered Luin?”

“I did, though old Deig almost refused me service out of respect and loyalty to you. Fee more or less had to threaten him to get him to agree to it. After he assented, Kee threatened to carve him with your dagger if he caused me purposeful pain in retaliation. Between the two of them, they put such fear in the poor fellow that he nearly pissed his own floor.”

“Fili made your case for you?”

Recalling it fondly, Bilbo said, “Yes, it was as eloquent as it was violent, which is to say it was quite a bit of both.”

Thorin considered Bilbo’s words as well as the affectionate smile that lit his face with the memory, matching them with his observations about Fili from earlier. The uneasiness and curiosity swelled within him again, though he tamped it back down as before.

“I should send Deig a sack of coins,” he said instead. “It would be worth a wagon of coin to see you painted like this for me.”

“I think he might be relocating this spring. He was worried his reticence in tattooing me might have ruined it for him, though I think Fee has since set it right. Deig only refused out of loyalty, after all.”

“In that case, I’ll have to give him some sort of thank you or commendation, then.”
Bilbo shifted, chewing a nail awkwardly. He drew up all the courage he could muster and looked into Thorin’s eyes. He pulled in a deep breath and exhaled slowly, noting with annoyance that it did nothing to help his nerves.

“Speaking of Fili…” he finally said, “well, we need to talk about him.”

Thorin felt uncertainty and relief at once. At least he had been spared bringing it up himself.

“Does this have to do with Fili’s name being tattooed next to Bofur’s on your wrist?” asked Thorin quietly.
“Of course, I felt a closeness to him from all we had been through, elsewise I would not have been able to let him touch, but when we promised you he carried a similar role in that situation as Kili did in ours, we believed it.”

“And I believe you.”

“You do?”

“Of course I do,” Thorin said, pulling Bilbo’s hand to his lips and kissing it. “You have no need to lie to me, not with all the uncomfortable and unorthodox truths we already share…especially considering you were the one who broached the subject, I’m assuming, in order to make some manner of confession.”

“So you know what I’m going to tell you next?”

“I’m not sure, though I am apprehensive. Your letters contained the odd hints, and I’ve read fragments of it on your own faces today. I’ve been expecting some sort of discussion about him—not pleasantly, though I’m glad you are being up front. I suppose I’ll come right out with my wariest concern and ask if you’ve bonded with him?”

“What? No! No, I’ve not bonded with anyone new since you left the Shire, as was my pledge.”

“But?”

“Oh, Thorin…I love him.” Bilbo fumbled around in his mind for a way to explain. “We weren’t—I mean, I didn’t mean for it to…damnation, I don’t even know what I’m trying to do, here.”

“Self-flagellation, would be my best guess. There’s no need.”

“There’s not?”

“I’m assuming he feels the same?”

Bilbo quirked a sweet smile in spite of himself. “He says so.”

“I’m glad he has at least told you as much, for it is written all over his face and if he hadn’t given you the courtesy yet, he and I would be having words.”

“Thorin, I must admit I’m quite completely confounded by your reaction to this.”

“So much has happened and too much time has passed. I’ve been alone with my thoughts so many nights since I’ve met you that I’ve lost count. The thing I know best is that nothing was worse than not being yours…though the distance we’ve recently endured was a near second, to be sure. I’ve examined and re-examined every last thing we’ve ever said and done to each other.”

Thorin reached over to take another fortifying sip of wine. Before continuing, he gave Bilbo a gentle kiss of reassurance ahead of what he was going to tell him next.

“I’ve had to come to some soul-searching terms with what I had entered into when I agreed to marry you within the bounds of this arrangement. I’ve also spent considerable time thinking about the other implications of what it means to share your bed with your husband, including many, many hours of struggling with the fact that he is my own sister-son. The guilt of it was only
compounded by the inescapable conclusion that I like it, Bilbo. I want it. I want him. That didn’t exist before that fateful day in Bag End, wherein an exposed boot nail led to my utter moral ruin. I’ve adored Kili, to be sure, but I had never looked upon him with lover’s eyes. Anyway, what I’m trying to say is that the two of you taught me that going to bed—not the random hand-sport of my youth, but actually spending hours naked and exploring—changes things, even without an imprint. In realizing this about Kili with only a handful of bed sessions and a few months of fantasy, I did not expect you and Fili to escape it after nights upon nights of sharing pleasure.”

Bilbo listened, stunned, to Thorin’s candor.

He said, “So you…what? Approve? Disapprove? Are you mad? Sad? Resigned? Aroused?” Thorin hummed a wistful laugh. “Yes to all of those? I don’t know. I’ve prepared myself all this time for you to walk through that gate and tell me damn near anything. There’s a difference between preparing myself and actually hearing it, though. Part of me cannot believe another one of my addle-pated nephews has coaxed you into love with him. Another part of me knew it had to have been inevitable—on both sides, because you are both wonderful and lovable. A third part of me whispers that I cannot be sanctimonious about Fili when I’ve been wanking to his brother for weeks. All of me cannot believe I’ve managed the misfortune of getting embroiled into such deviant, dirty nonsense when all I wanted to do was marry my Chosen…just as all of me cannot believe I’m somehow lucky enough to get embroiled into such deviant, dirty nonsense.”

“When all you wanted to do was marry your Chosen,” Bilbo finished softly. “I—well, truly we have, both myself and Fili—have worried at length about this. The only thing we knew for sure was that you had to know, for good or for ill. I don’t know about the rest, but know I love you more than I ever have.”

“I love you too, my treasure. Thank you for respecting me and trusting me enough to tell me. It will take some adjusting, though adjust we will.”

“You say Fili’s feelings were written all over his face,” Bilbo noted. “That is not a good start for us, considering the four of us have agreed we need to keep more forbidden attachments hidden in Erebor or risk being outcasts.”

Shaking his head, Thorin replied, “I don’t think you have to worry about being detected, not in the same way that you and I need to worry about each other. The two of us are being scrutinized over our storied past together. No one has any reason to suspect the four of you of anything in the way they might be regarding us. Additionally, it is well known the four of you became close friends during the siege and—minus a few weeks for Bofur after the battle—you’ve all lived together from the day you’ve met until now. Those things alone would account for your affection and familiarity. It is also well known your group traveled to the Shire because Fili and Kili, as well as you and Bofur, would not be parted any more than the known couples between you.”

“But you noticed Fili’s soft demeanor in regards to me, and you probably would have noticed Bofur’s as well if you hadn’t already known we were in love.”

“I only noticed it because I remember how Fili used to look at you, and because I have my own fascination with you and tend to observe such things. I’m not sure anyone else would put it together, especially those who had not known about it already.”

A knock at the door startled them both.

“Who can that be?” Bilbo whispered.

“Kili changing his mind, maybe?” replied Thorin hopefully.

“Your Highness?” a voice called.

“No,” Thorin murmured in disbelief. “Oh no. No, no, no, no, no. Not him.”

“Not whom?”

Thorin hissed, “We’re not answering it.”
“Please,” the voice said. “I’m begging you, just a word.”

“You can’t not answer it,” Bilbo hissed back. “Everyone knows you’ve retired for the night.” Thorin shook his head emphatically. “It is locked. The room could just as easily be empty and I could be somewhere else for all he knows.”

“For all who knows?”

“Nobody. Shhh!”

Another knock at the door thumped much louder than the first. “I deserve your silence, I know I do, but I must speak to you. Please.”

“Whomever it is obviously thinks you’re in here and will likely knock until you answer. They’ll get more suspicious the longer you take.” Crossing his arms and fixing Thorin with a look, he said, “Frankly, I’m getting suspicious the longer you take, too.”

“Fine,” Thorin muttered, snatching his dressing gown. “I’m going to hide in the bathing room,” Bilbo said, already darting off.

Tying up the gown and having the forethought to tuck his ring into the pocket, Thorin answered the door. Regnad stood before him holding a bottle of wine.

“I was asleep, you realize. It is late and it has been a long day,” Thorin started, annoyed and weary. “No, I know it has. That’s actually what I came to talk to you about. I’m afraid my actions in the past have led to some misunderstanding between us, my intentions somehow misread, and it has fostered an unpleasant tension. It is most misfortunate, because that was the opposite of my wishes.”

Thorin eyed the bottle. “So what about this has you at my door past bedtime instead of discussing this during work?”

“It has been a long day, like you said--a most difficult day--and I cannot imagine tonight is going to be an easy one, knowing your beloved is finally here in Erebor again but sleeping with another. I mean, it is not a secret that you’ve been lonely for Prince Bilbo all this time--”

Thorin crossed his arms authoritatively. “Bilbo being there with him made him brave. “-As you have reminded me by taunting me with that song.”

“See? Again, a misunderstanding. I didn’t intend to taunt you. I wanted to show you that I understood, hoping maybe you would start to see how I feel. I had been attempting to woo you, hoping to catch a favorable glance, or perhaps win some of your affection. When you were naked and stroking yourself that night in the baths, I had been so full of want and longing that I imagined perhaps my fantasies had come to life. It wasn’t until later, after Balin spoke to me about what was proper and what wasn’t, that I realized I might have been mistaken about that...and so many other things. Not wanting to scare you off, I all but stopped my bid to charm you, holding in my feelings, waiting, hoping I might think of some better way.”

“If you have been so enamored of me, then why have you gone out of your way to go against my thoughts and plans in council? Why corner me with ominous warnings?”

“I would not be a dwarf of honor if I let my emotions for you cloud my duties in council. We argued, to be sure, but would you rather I be false in my effort to win your affections? Flatter you always instead of speaking my concerns regarding Erebor aloud? We don’t always agree, but does anyone? Does the Princess always agree with Dwalin?”

Thorin paused, his gut telling him this was another manipulation. Regnad’s tone softened along with his expression and he continued before Thorin could assess the weak point of Regnad’s defense to argue against.

“I am painfully aware I’ve not always behaved as you might have wished a suitor to behave. Truthfully, I’ve long since worried that perhaps in my awkwardness I had inadvertently made a
mess of things. I came here tonight hoping that even if you do not yet feel love for me, perhaps you might accept the comfort of my body so that you do not have to spend Prince Bilbo’s first night in Erebor in an empty bed while his is full. I should have told you of my affection and desire early on, or perhaps offered myself to you outright in the baths instead of trying to be coy and seductive so there would be no mistaking things.”

Thorin shook his head and opened his mouth to speak but Regnad cut him off.

“It would not have to go beyond this one time. Please…I’ve…I’ve wanted you for so long and in my ardency, I have inadvertently made a mess of things along the way. Please, let me distract your mind by overwhelming your body. Let me take care of you tonight.” Regnad reached out, sensuously stroking the lapel of Thorin’s dressing gown. “I have had months to plan the ecstasies I wish to give you. Allow me to demonstrate them for you now.”

Thorin jerked away from Regnad’s touch, stating firmly, “I am not interested.”

Regnad set his mouth to a tight, hard line and he peered past Thorin into his room.

“That garment on the floor doesn’t look much like the one you wore to dinner, Your Highness,” observed Regnad. Raising a calculating eyebrow, he lifted his head and sniffed the air.

Thorin held back a grimace, belatedly realizing the smell surrounding him (and coming from the room) was undoubtedly thick with the unmistakable tang of sex. He inwardly berated himself for not shutting the door behind him at the start, but he hadn’t expected…well, any of this.

“I believe the tidiness of my personal chamber is not your concern,” he said, clipped. “And while I recognize the courage it took to come here tonight, this conversation is now over.”

“Perhaps because His Highness already has a lover to warm his bed tonight?”

“Because I do not want you as a lover.”

“I see. Very well, one final question, then: Do you always take your evening wine from two goblets, Your Highness?”

Though he tried heroically to school his expression once more, there was a brief flicker as Thorin realized he and Bilbo forgot to hide their cups.

“As a matter of fact, yes, when I drink in my chambers two nights in a row,” he covered. “Like I said, the tidiness of my personal chamber is not your concern.

Regnad hummed shrewdly, smirking. “Then I take my leave.”

He formally bowed in farewell to the king…and walked away with the bottle of wine he had brought.

Thorin locked and leaned against the door, sighing and scrubbing his hands over his face as Bilbo crept back into the room.

“So, about that,” Bilbo started.

With a single glance, Thorin could tell that Bilbo had heard everything. Embarrassed, he rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah.”

“And you two haven’t…?”

“No! I told you I’ve not done anything with him…though I suppose after hearing that proposition, an explanation might be in order.”

Thorin took a long breath and did something he hadn’t the courage to do since he spilled his heart to Balin: he told the truth. Because Bilbo was his husband, and because Thorin did not want him
mistaking anything that had happened in his absence, he summoned extra bravery up from his toes and described everything that had happened—all the sordid details he hadn’t shared with Balin—from beginning to end. He did his best to get it out calmly and evenly, hoping for the best chance to be taken seriously. In truth, every syllable terrified him. He prayed with every fiber of his being that he would be believed by the one he loved the most.

The more Thorin spoke, the more Bilbo’s blood boiled.

“He harassed you?” Bilbo fumed. “Manipulated you? And Balin—Balin of all people—thought you should feel lucky? You were victimized by this, this cur and the best advice Balin could conjure was to suck it up because people are bloody fond of him?”

Relief flooded Thorin so viscerally, the only response his body could elicit was weeping. Once started, the tears came faster and faster, and soon Thorin was clutching Bilbo tightly, sobbing his heart out.

“That’s a love,” Bilbo cooed, rubbing his back. “It is okay. Cry it all out.”

Eventually, Thorin leaned back, wiping tears away. Bilbo, still keeping one hand on him, stretched as far as he could to rescue a handkerchief from his clothes. Thorin gratefully accepted it. As Thorin mopped himself up, Bilbo carefully studied his face.

“Have you had to keep this all to yourself? Did you not tell anyone else?” “Balin.”

Bilbo made a noise of disgust. “So you said, and I could wring that old coot’s neck. I meant anyone sympathetic?”

“No one else would have understood. Dis loves him. Dwalin already judges me for you and what little he knows about Kili. Dain is the one who brought Regnad here and he—oh, Bilbo, Dain is so proud of him! There…there was no one else.”

Bilbo rolled in his own lips, biting them between his teeth, trying to keep from adding to this flood of tears. He swallowed hard and canted his chin up, hoping to seem strong for his sweet, beleaguered husband.

“Now there is me, Thorin. I am so sorry I was not here for you then, but I am here for you now. Kili, Fili, and Bofur will also be there for you, if you will entrust them with this.”

Thorin’s eyes flickered at the mention of his former rival.

“Yes, Bofur too,” Bilbo reassured him. “It doesn’t matter what hurts were there between you in the past, he will support you. After all, what is right is what is right. What I don’t get is how Balin forgot right from wrong. He has always been your champion and voice of reason….well, voice of reason within reason.”

The corner of Thorin’s mouth quirked up for Bilbo, but set back to solemn when he spoke again. “Balin has changed. He has become a snob of sorts. He has gone from being diplomatic and a friend to other races to being…well, unkind about them. It is as though he has forgotten he was the one who used to have to remind me and Dwalin that dwarrows weren’t alone in the world, that we had to trust others sometimes. I could forgive some of his elf-grudge, but he also holds a grudge against Men.”

Bilbo realized this was the new change in Balin’s demeanor he had noted. “And hobbits.”

“Did he say something rude to you or your friends?”

“No, it was more simply an odd air he had, one that had temporarily faded when we had a moment between us, though fade it did.”

“What sort of moment?”
Bilbo told him about noticing Balin’s sketch.

“I don’t know if he remembered how we used to be friends, or if the compassion I felt for him was the thing that warmed him for those couple minutes. I’m sure whatever voice is bending his ear with terrible advice for you also probably tells him hobbits, Men, and elves don’t care for the troubles or the hearts of dwarrows,” Bilbo concluded.

“He used to know, Bilbo. That’s the worst part. Just as a small example, I can recall how spoke out as an advocate for you on the journey from the earliest.”

“I know the things that happened to you these past few months were personal, but please—promise you will consider telling Fili, Kili, and Bofur about them.”

Fearing a reaction like Balin’s, Thorin demurred. “I don’t want to tell them,” he sniffled. “What if they don’t believe me?”

“Oh, my love. Of course they will believe you. Besides, they need to know what you’ve suffered in our absence, especially Fili and Kili. Also—if this Regnad person is so beloved and popular—I want all three of them to know what sort of dwarf he really is before any of them fall for it…not that I believe they would. I promise you, all four of us will ensure whatever you endured this winter is well and over from this point onward. This ends now.”

Thorin sighed in resignation. It was tough pushing Bilbo off course when he was this determined.

“Very well, but can we, can we talk about it later?” he asked. “This is not how I envisioned our first night back in bed together.”

Bilbo wiped away the new tears that had rolled down Thorin’s face as they spoke. “Whatever you want. I’m here for you, however you need it.”

“Love me, then. Touch me, tell me you adore me, show me how much you missed me with your body pressed to mine.”

“Are you sure you are feeling together enough for that?”

“I am sure, my treasure. It is the only thing I want, the only thing that will make me feel like myself again.”

“In that case, it shall be my pleasure,” Bilbo drawled. “In fact, I plan on making you forget that knock ever sounded from your door.”

Sinking into Bilbo’s filthy kiss, Thorin gratefully allowed him to begin doing so.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter grew out of control, so while we WILL see what’s going on with Kee, Fee, and Bo, it will be in the next chapter.

Thank you all for being here. I love your comments so much.
This chapter picks up Kili's timeline after he left Bilbo and Thorin alone to be reunited as lovers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kili went back to his room, pausing to knock on the inside door that linked to his brother’s room to see if he was back.

“Fee? You in there?”

When there was no answer, Kili opened the door and peeked in to confirm, finding the suite empty. He huffed a sigh and sat on the bed, running his hands through his hair.

“I should have stayed in Thorin’s room,” he muttered out loud. “No. No. I was right, it was the right thing to do. I’m just frustratingly hard, alone, and…and talking to myself apparently. Bollocks.”

He fell back on the bed, waiting impatiently for Fili and Bofur to get back.

*****

Awakened by a rap at his outer door, Kili sat up and blinked in disorientation. He glanced back at the candle, which hadn’t burned too low yet, and figured he must have drifted off for a few. He thought it was a bit odd that Fili and Bofur would be knocking; he conjured up a smart remark to toss their way as he answered the door. The quip froze in his throat when he realized he was looking at that new friend of his Mam’s and not his tardy brother.

“May I help you?” Kili asked carefully.

“No. Yes. Well, that is to say,” Regnad stammered, petting the wine bottle he held nervously. “It is just...I was so pleased for your return to Erebor, and with the hobbit prince about whom I’ve also heard so many heroic tales. I’ve worried all evening that the intimidation and admiration I felt when I met Prince Bilbo this morning might have been misinterpreted through my tone the couple times I managed the courage to talk to him as something else. I want to set things right. May I speak with him?”

Though confused and cautious, Kili conjured some princely bravado. He crossed his arms and countered, “Isn’t it a little late to be out well-wishing?”

“Goodness, it is, isn’t it? I apologize. It took me a while to gather the nerve and, well, I suppose I did lose track of time. It was terribly inconsiderate of me, given your miles of travel and what was doubtlessly a long day. I suppose I need to apologize to Prince Bilbo for that, too.”

Kili frowned as Regnad stood on tip toe and tried to peek past him and over his shoulder. He subtly positioned himself more firmly in Regnad’s line of sight.

“He is not available right now,” he said.
Raising his eyebrows in surprise, Regnad replied, “No? Truly? At this late hour?”
Kili grew uncomfortable. “The long day you mentioned has him worn out. I’m sure you can understand that.”
“In that case, please accept this wine as a token of both my apologies to him as well as my belated congratulations on your marriage. Well, I’ll take my leave.”

Regnad bowed so deeply that his well-manicured beard almost grazed the floor.
Kili was left holding the bottle, wondering what in Middle Earth all that was about.

*****

Fili and Bofur arrived at their room, rapidly shedding their clothes and barely bothering with a single candle.

“Finally,” Fili exhaled, dropping his boots on the floor. “I feel like I’ve been in those for hours.”
“Probably because you have,” Bofur replied, following his own boot removal with the removal of his trousers.
“Hey, there’s light coming from Kee’s room,” Fili said in a tipsy, loud whisper that wasn’t much of a whisper at all. “And why is our connecting door cracked open?”
“Because Kee has been waiting for you,” Kili replied, opening it fully. “Where in the bloody Void have you been?”
Surprised, Fili replied, “We didn’t know anyone was waiting on us, you know! We ate dessert again and spent some more time with Bombur.”
“And the drinking,” Bofur supplied. “Don’t forget the drinking!”

Fili affectionately rolled his eyes at his husband, turning his attention—and his concern—back to Kili.

“What are you doing here? What happened? Why aren’t you with Bilbo? Did Thorin upset you?”
“No, nothing like that. I wanted to give them tonight as a couple’s night,” answered Kili.
“Cor, haven’t heard that term used in a while,” Bofur said, wrinkling his nose in disapproval.
“We’re going back to that, are we?”

Bofur had to admit he didn’t love the thought of it. At the very least, the four of them hadn’t much use for the concept once they worked through their initial growing pains.

Kili shrugged. “I don’t rightly know about that in particular, but however you wish to refer to it, I wanted them to have this.”
“Oh,” Fili said, trying (and failing) to fight the grin breaking through. “What are you going to do instead?”
“I was hoping the two of you had a suggestion.”

Overwhelmed with relief he couldn’t quite explain, Fili threw his arms around Kili and hugged him tightly. He knew it was only staving off the inevitable, but he had wished and wished since they had arrived that he could have another night with Kili to hold him over before surrendering him for however many days to Thorin’s bed. After several moments, that tight, grateful hug melted into the sensuous embrace of roaming hands and shifting bodies. Fili leaned back only far enough to gaze into Kili’s eyes. Seeing exactly what he wanted to see in them, he pulled him forward and greedily claimed a kiss.

Bofur looked on, amusement in his voice as he replied, “You know, Kee, I think we might.”

*****
Kili sat on his knees, naked, upright, and pressed between Fili at his front and Bofur at his back. Kili observed Fili having a silent conversation past his shoulder with a glance, one which resulted in Bofur scooting against the headboard and Fili urging Kili back, back, back until he was in Bofur’s lap. Fili helped Kili spread his legs on either side of Bofur’s while on his knees, Bofur’s arm sliding across his chest to keep him from tipping forward.

“What is this?” Kili asked, grinning and breathless.

Fili answered him with a smoldering look from under his eyebrows and pushed in for another kiss. Kili groaned as their flesh pressed together and whimpered when Fili moved away again. It served to be only temporary, though—just long enough for Fili to retrieve one of the more portable bottles of oil from the nightstand.

Kili took stock of his situation: He was in a position where it would be uncomfortable (if not impossible) to stay upright for long unless he was held steady, which Bofur had done thoughtfully. While Bofur held him—kissing his neck and whispering how good he felt, all while his erection poked Kili in the fleshy part of his arse—Fili had been preparing the slick to get Kili ready. Closing his eyes, Kili let his head fall back over Bofur’s shoulder and sighed audibly in thrillful anticipation.

Though a little inebriated, Fili was sensual and thorough. Bofur did not let his seduction wane either, despite being the primary force holding Kili up throughout Fili’s attentions. Kili allowed himself the luxury of surrender, moaning, sighing, and feeling the lovers at his back and front.

Fili pressed full against him, chest to chest and mouth to mouth with a filthy, promising kiss—all while Fili continued fingering him open. Kili whimpered for the loss when Fili broke the kiss, and whimpered even more frantically as Fili punctuated his words with slick, measured strokes of the digits inside him.

“I’ve been watching, you know,” Fili hissed, his breath hot and damp on Kili’s ear. “I’ve watched Bee fuck you and ached to be him. Say I can, Kee.”

“Say you can—bloody damn—can what?”

“Make love to you,” purred Fili duskily, “fuck you, however you want to describe me inside you, you tight around me, shaking together until we can barely stand it, the way I think we might have always been meant to. Please. Let me, let me do it the way I described at Beorn’s.”

Kili shuddered between them, his whole body responding to Fili’s obscene suggestion and the fingers within him. His words came out contrary to everything his body craved.

“I can’t, not yet. Not yet.”

Bofur did not hesitate to relax his grip to give Kili additional leverage of his knees against the bed, should he require more control to restore his comfort. Bofur peered past Kili, watching Fili closely to see if he was going to be upset.

“Not yet?” echoed Fili, carefully easing out of him.

“Believe me, I want to! I’ve wanted to since the day you made the proposition…but I can’t. Not without Bee. It’s just—” Kili faltered for a second, his emotions all in a single bunch and trying unsuccessfully to escape in the same sentence. “—Bee has been there for almost everything, and most certainly all my firsts. I’m not a virgin, but he has been the only one I’ve opened myself to so completely. I feel like if I’m going to allow a lover that is not him, if I’m to be taken so intimately by someone else, that he should be there for it. I hope you are not mad. I don’t…I don’t want to do it without him here. I need him here, would need him here even if I was the one taking you.”
As he finished, Kili’s sweet eyes were glistening with the early threat of tears. Fili cradled his face with a single hand and pressed their foreheads together.

“Then we will wait until he can be here,” Fili murmured.
“Really? You’re not upset?”
“Not at all.”
“There are other things we can do, though,” ventured Kili.
Smiling, Fili said, “You bet there are, and I’m planning on doing them.”

*****

Kili licked his lips, watching Fili’s mouth stretched wide around Bofur and hungrily pumping him. He wondered what it would feel like, sucking something that thick. Curiosity and want burned him, though he held back. Fili caught his eye and winked—winked, the damned brat—giving a few more strokes before he pulled off to tease. Kili dropped down, stealing a kiss from Fili’s irresistible tongue. Glancing up, he locked eyes with Bofur, who had been watching with his own curiosity… perhaps, Kili thought, to see what he would do. He didn’t dare try too much, though he did flick his tongue over the head of Bofur’s cock before sitting back. Bofur groaned appreciatively and Kili wondered how he might react if Kili would one day engulf him. Kili’s eyes cut over to Fili, to see if he had upset him with the small taste he stole. Though Fili seemed to be enjoying himself, Kili decided not to push his luck this round.

Ceasing his tease, it was Fili’s turn to be thrilled by his lovers. Switching off, Kili and Bofur both prepared him for Bofur to make love to him.

Fili perched on Bofur, facing out, feet planted and bracing himself with arms behind while Bofur guided himself to press inside. A wicked idea popped into Kili’s mind.

“Will you allow me to touch you while Bofur has you?”
“What kind of question is that?” Fili shot back cheekily, despite his delicate position. “What did you think we’ve been doing this whole time?”
“I mean inside, too,” replied Kili.

Fili’s breath hitched, and not solely from the sensation of Bofur within him.


If Fili’s heart had quickened by Kili’s request, it pounded faster and harder when Kili pushed in his first digit alongside Bofur’s cock, the pad artfully directed to face the way it would please Fili most. Fili softly moaned for Bofur to stop moving, just for a moment, in order to adjust. After several moments (wherein he begged Bofur to resume), Kili tried adding another. Fili now alternated between enormous gulps of breath—exhaled in wild vocalizations he did not recognize from himself—and scarcely daring to breathe at all.

Kili gazed up at Fili, muscles straining, jewelry gleaming, core rising and falling with each frantic pant. He was every inch of the “golden god” Bofur had nicknamed him.

“The lovely songs you have him singing!” Bofur exclaimed, envious. “I hope you’re planning to do that to me some time, too.”
“I’d let you take a turn now, but I don’t think Fee is going to easily relinquish his spot,” Kili said. Replied Bofur, “I couldn’t ask him to.”

Fili listened to them talk around him and about him, watched Kili stare at him with dark, lustful eyes while he perversely manipulated him—as Bofur fucked him—and it culminated into a frantic
intensity, familiar yet extraordinary. Overwhelmed and babbling nonsense, he rode out the tension until it burst into a stunning, screaming climax.

With his wits slowly returning to him, Fili grew sheepish with his rather enthusiastic expressions of pleasure.

“Do you think they heard that in Mam’s room?” he joked.

Bofur saw that although Fili was making an attempt at being self-deprecating, he was a touch embarrassed. He said, “Hardly, though perhaps a little carried beyond the door.”

“Then it is a good thing it is late, then,” Kili said, reaching for the flannel and cleaning up both himself and Fili, which Fili noticed.

“Wait, you finished?” Fili asked.

“I couldn’t wait, not with you writhing and begging like that,” Kili said, somewhat apologetic.

“I didn’t even notice you wanking!” said Fili, shaking his head.

Bofur tapped his hip, the silent signal they all used between them as a request to move either up or off. Moving instinctively, Fili’s mind caught up a moment later and realized Bofur must have also climaxed.

“You came too?” he said, incredulous. “How far gone was I?”

Kili handed him the flannel. “Pretty far gone, Fee.”

Sighing contentedly, Fili said, “Well, it was magnificent, I can’t deny that. Magnificent and powerful. It sounds maybe a little silly, but I feel somehow even more connected to you both than usual.”

“Not silly at all,” Kili replied, kissing him tenderly. “I’ve experienced that particular pleasure myself and it was intense for me, too.”

Kili and Fili spent some time at the basin, washing up more and getting ready to join Bofur, who had made himself comfortable in bed and was already on his way to a solid doze. Kili stole surreptitious glances at Fili throughout.

“Are you okay with being in Erebor so far?” Kili finally asked Fili.

“Yes, why wouldn’t I be?” Kili shot him a look.

“Don’t give me that face. I’m okay—more than, even. I’m overjoyed to see everyone again and to be reunited with Thorin and Mam.”

Kili’s continued to look through Fili, not twitching a muscle.

Scrubbing a hand over his face, Fili said, “Durin’s sake, Kee. What do you want from me? I am okay. I’ve missed Mam and Thorin so much—especially Thorin, though if you ever breathe so much as a word of that to Mam, I’m going to use your hair to tie your tongue up for drying with Bilbo’s herbs in the kitchen. I can’t even begrudge him this night alone with Bee. He’s waited far more than his share.”

Kili took another breath and got to his larger point. “And what about begrudging him me?”

Fili smiled bashfully. “Oh, Kee. We talked about this and we agreed. This thing…this thing between you two is going to happen. Being here with him again, I don’t even know altogether why I’m bothering to be jealous. Seeing him smile so often and so genuinely today did my heart good. Maybe I’ve built the two of you up to be too much of a thing in my mind. Maybe, well, maybe you staying behind for the first night gave me something I needed.”

“I’ll say,” murmured Bofur, half-listening even while he was nodding off.

“Hush, you maniac,” replied Fili fondly. To Kili, he continued, “I mean, not having to wait, having some kind of reassurance, I am not sure what it was about it, but I am less tied in knots about
tomorrow night, now."

“I’m happy to hear you say that, Fee. I’ve been in knots, too.”

“You have?”

“Sure I have. I never could bear to see you unhappy. I hated that you hated this. I’ve questioned myself and second-guessed myself so many times because it bothered you so much. I love you, Fee.”

“Is that why you’re here tonight? Because you second-guessed yourself and wanted to give me my way?”

“No. What I told you was true. I wanted them to be alone tonight. However, I think I might have needed to take a night in your bed before joining Bilbo’s for myself. I’m feeling better about, well, just about everything now.”

“Look, Kee,” Fili started, albeit hesitantly. “I’m… I’m sorry and embarrassed for pressuring you for sex tonight. I said we could wait however long we needed to wait and I didn’t last a week. If you count how many sleeps we’ve had in the same bed since then, I didn’t even last a night. We were supposed to discuss it with our lovers, too. I don’t know what I was thinking. Well, I know what I was thinking, I just wasn’t thinking clearly, I suppose.”

“I don’t blame you, Fee. I’ve been thinking of it since you mentioned it. You had Bo here to give you permission, I had Bee’s permission—”

“—you did? Have Bee’s permission?”

“Yeah,” Kili said, fiddling with his hair. “I told him what I told you. I want him to be there when we take that step. It is important to me.”

“Did you have Thorin’s permission?” asked Fili quietly.

“Um, no? Why would I ask Thorin’s permission?”

“Well, I confess I don’t know exactly how it is to be between you two, but you and Bee have both led me to believe you would be welcoming him into your bed as you have welcomed me and Bo. That would make him your lover, too, and perhaps he might have a strong feeling about it himself.”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way. I’ll confess, I only think of Thorin as he pertains to you and me together in two ways.”

“The first of which is?”

“As your perceived rival, though I don’t see it that way myself at all. I have to walk carefully around the subject of him as far as you are concerned. I also have to choose my activities with him carefully, so as not to give him more than I give you.”

Swallowing the guilt Kili’s statement made him feel, Fili said, “And the second?”

Kili smiled. “As our uncle who is going to birth a batch of kittens when he finds out we have become lovers.”

“I worry about that one myself,” replied Fili. “I’m still a little afraid to tell him, to be honest, though I understand why we need to.”

“Me too. The saving grace of it is that he can only judge you and me so much when I’m part of his bed as well. He can’t be too sanctimonious about our blood, all things considered.”

“I suppose there is that. I hope he sees it that way when the time comes.”

“Will you two please settle your admittedly enticing arses down and go to bloody sleep?” Bofur groaned.

Fili and Kili looked at each other and broke into hushed giggles, feeling like dwarflings again being scolded for staying up past their bedtimes.

“Fair enough, Bo,” Fili said, leaning over to claim a kiss before snuffing the candle. “I love you.”

“C’mere,” answered Bofur, holding his arms out for Fili. “I love you, too.”

Backing into Bofur’s embrace, Fili patted the bed in front of him for Kili to spoon into. All three of them nestled together, Kili tugged up the remaining blanket and sighed. He hadn’t spent many nights apart from Bilbo since they started and even though he was far from alone, he still felt the
absence of his hobbit.

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Kili woke cold. Sitting up, he noticed two things: one, Fili had rolled over into an empty space previously occupied by Bofur, stealing his blanket in the process. Two, there was candlelight spilling out of the open door to the suite he shared with Bilbo, thereby enabling him to see Fili’s thievery in the dim. Carefully, he got up and went to investigate.

He found Bofur sitting at Bilbo’s writing desk, utterly starkers (though Kili had also not bothered with a robe of his own), and writing.

“Is there something wrong with your desk, Bo?” Kili said softly, a hint of amusement in his voice. “Cor, you scared the hair off my chest,” Bofur breathed, also keeping his voice low. “What are you doing up?”

“Fili took advantage of the room you left in the bed…and took my covers while he was at it.” “Sounds about right. Sometimes I tease him that he was the real burglar, not Bee.”

Kili hummed a quiet laugh. “And what about you? What are you doing over here?”

“I woke up from a dream I can’t rightly remember, but it left me with an inability to sleep and an interesting phrase in my head, so I figured I’d write it down and maybe make something of it. Writing in our room would have only disturbed you, so I figured I’d borrow Bee’s desk. You don’t think he would mind, do you?”

“Not at all. So, what have you managed to write so far?”

Making a noise of indifference, Bofur replied, “I thought I’d write a bit of verse about this trip, sort of like a history, but it turned out a little more personal…like most things these days. Then I scrapped it, tried again, and have been sitting here with a blank mind instead.”

“Hmm. Well, perhaps it might help your brain to switch the subject to something else for a short while. I saw you and Thorin leave during the party and I must admit I’m rather curious to know how that went.”

“Honestly, I think Thorin and I were both surprised at how our discussion turned out. He seems different, somehow. Definitely more open to hear what I had to say, at the very least. It appears the four of us might not have been the only ones doing the deep soul-searching about all of this as the months passed. You know something, Kee? It might sound daft, but I’m starting to think the five of us might actually be able to make this work.”

“I’m surprised to hear you talk this way, though it is not an unwelcome notion. I hope Fee sees it your way, too.”

“While we are on the topic, how was your conversation with Thorin tonight? Your private one, I mean.”

“Good, actually. Maybe more than good in some ways, worse in others. This thing, what is between us…and he truly means to take me as a lover.”

Bofur replied kindly, “Didn’t you know that?”

“I didn’t know how much was loneliness, how much was arousal, how much was simply talk and nothing more.”

“So now that you have this confirmation, is that the good in some ways or is that the worse in others?”

“Both, I think. I’ve planned for it all to be true, but there was always the doubt that I’d get here and it would be different. He wanted me to stay tonight, even after I gave him my reasoning. He was actually disappointed, Bo. It was difficult to leave him. I’m also still a little worried about Fee.”

“But he just told you-“

“I know, and I hope it goes that way, but I also know my own feelings when Bee and I opened our bed. It took me a while to stop feeling those pangs of jealousy and—sometimes—I’ll still get a flash of it here and there. Even if Fee has left it behind with far less struggle than I personally experienced, there might still be those…well, those moments, you know?”
“I do know.” Bofur reached out and patted Kili on the hip in an attempt to comfort him, having somehow forgotten neither of them had on a stitch. “You know, it is sort of funny how you’re standing there chatting with me as though there was nothing at all unusual about us having deep conversations while being naked. Interesting how things change, isn’t it?”
“I was thinking similar thoughts when I saw you sitting there. I like the ease, though, and I like that we’ve been able to confide in each other, too. Besides, I think almost all of our meaningful conversations past the battle have happened with a minimum of clothes on.”
“Oh!” Bofur’s eyes lit up. “That gives me an idea for my verse.”
Eyeing him warily, Kili said, “This isn’t anything that is going to get me in trouble with Fee, is it?”
“Of course not. Your secrets will never get written down or sung, I promise.”
“All the same, why don’t you put down your pen and come back to bed. It is probably almost dawn as it is. Not a single one of us is going to be worth a piece of boot leather if we don’t get more rest.”
“Fair enough.”

Bofur blew out the candle and they crept back into bed. Fili slept deeply and unmoving—until Bofur and Kili decided to claim their share of the blankets again.

“Ugh. Fine.”
“Shhh,” Bofur soothed. “Go back to sleep.”
Fili’s annoyance turned to fuzzy comfort. “Mmmm, warm. Y’feel good, Bo.”
Bofur kissed his head. “You do, too. Sleep now.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone. I love you!
Kissing You Home, Part 4: Bilbo And Thorin (reprise)

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Thorin finish their evening together, making love and unpacking some old baggage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With the sense of urgency somewhat lessened after their first coupling, Thorin took his time ahead of the second one thoroughly reacquainting himself with Bilbo’s body. He spent several moments pausing at each tattoo, stroking and kissing them, still yet stunned Bilbo had marked himself so in the name of devotion. Thorin especially lingered over the one at the base of Bilbo’s spine—so long, in fact, that Bilbo squirmed, pushing himself up to encourage some manner of advancement. With a gentle-but-firm hand, Thorin stilled him.

“No, like this,” he murmured.

The thick sensuality in Thorin’s voice sent an erotic shiver through Bilbo’s core.

“You intend to have me on my stomach?”
“Yes.”

The kisses moved up Bilbo’s spine and Bilbo exhaled another shuddering breath.

“In that case,” he said, “I wish to make a request.”
“I’m listening,” the velvet baritone voice rumbled next to Bilbo's ear, further stirring him.
“Do you still have your fur? The one you used when you pleasured yourself on your stomach?”
Thorn’s lust flared. “I do.”
“May I use it as you did while we make love?”

Thorin growled and strained to the side to claim Bilbo’s mouth with fervor, eventually and reluctantly pausing—but only to grant the request.

Watching Thorin spread the fur out, Bilbo re-positioned himself on his stomach atop it.

“Like this?” Bilbo asked, suggestively wiggling his bottom. “Is this what you did to get yourself there?”
“You can bet you’re about to get a lot more help getting there than I got.”

Renewing the slick for Bilbo’s bum as well as his own prick, Thorin draped over Bilbo’s back and worked his way inside his lover, managing this time to push in fully without finishing. He rocked a little, receiving a couple satisfying moans (and emitting one of his own) before drawing his shaft back for longer, more purposeful strokes.

“Oh, oh by the Valar,” Bilbo groaned. “The feel of you! It is so…it is different than I thought it would be with your ring.”
“But good?”
“Exquisite. What of you? Does it change the feeling for you?”
Thorin exhaled raggedly, sighing, “Yes. There’s a new friction in addition to the usual sensations. It is…quite thrilling.”

With the initial carefulness out of the way, Thorin relaxed his weight on top of Bilbo, covering him, moving deeply and rhythmically inside him. Bilbo’s hands rested on either side of his head and Thorin placed his on top, threading their fingers together. He took a deep breath, inhaling the scent at the base of Bilbo’s neck. He reeled at its intensity, for it astronomically outpaced those sparse wisps of fragrance he formerly gathered with his nose pressed deep into Bilbo’s Shire blanket. Recalling those solitary nights of desperation for the smallest scrap of sensory fulfillment and comparing them to the waking dream of Bilbo currently underneath him--so very alive and lighting up all five of Thorin’s senses at once--his emotions swelled, rapidly growing out of his control. Whereas the session before this was healing, soothing much of the isolation that had been imposed on him the months prior, this one was a starburst of everything:

Love, joy, relief, ecstasy, elation, and--quite unexpectedly--hurt. Perhaps it was due to this slow, unhurried connection, or maybe it was Thorin’s earlier shedding of his worst secret that cleared the way for those older heartaches to emerge. In any case, Thorin cared for neither the dichotomy nor the confusion—not now, not when this was so good, so perfect, so right—but nonetheless, he was faced with the pain he had buried within himself, the anguish he had been shielding from Bilbo this whole time. Still moving within him, he wept for both love as well as pain. It was cathartic, but bizarre and ill-timed.

Adding to this overwhelming and unwelcome melange was Bilbo himself. His husband was beneath him, writhing and making such noises as Thorin had never been able to pull from him before. Bilbo’s entire body responded to him in a way that Thorin had only known it to react with Kili present and though he felt intense arousal and pride at finally being able to draw such a reaction on his own, it also flared those old, painful memories of being passed over and left behind.

So consumed was Thorin by this maelstrom of passion, hurt, love, euphoria, and resentment, it took him several moments to realize Bilbo was also overwrought. He paused, though he remained inside.

“You’re crying,” he noted, discovering his voice revealed his own delicate condition. Rasping back, Bilbo said, “So are you.”
“Do you want me to stop?”
“Please, no. Not--not unless you need to stop?”

Though he didn’t know what was going on with his feelings, Thorin knew for certain he wanted--needed--to complete this connection a second time.

“Not a chance,” he murmured.

Thorin resumed, Bilbo arching his back to encourage him further.

Explained Bilbo, “I just—I feel everything so fiercely right now. And here I used to tease you about weeping when we made love.”
Thorin smiled. “You’re not wrong, though.”
“I love you. Yavanna’s grace, Thorin, I love you so much.”
“I love you, too.”
“And I’m sorry, Thorin. I’m so, so sorry.”
“Shhh,” replied Thorin, feeling the swell of tears threatening to refresh. He didn’t know if Bilbo was feeling what he was feeling at the moment, but his heart couldn’t take the apologies—it would be too bold of an acknowledgement for as raw as he felt at the moment. “You’re here now. You’re here with me.”
Thorin felt Bilbo start to move more frantically under him, struggling for more friction against the fur.

“Yes, my king, my husband. I'm here, and I'm yours.”

Keeping his movements steady (and letting off some pressure from Bilbo’s back so he could grind against the bed), Thorin sucked a claiming mark into the junction of Bilbo’s neck and shoulder.

“Welcome to Erebor, Prince Consort,” he whispered.

Bilbo moaned, “Gods, fuck me!”

Rising up, Thorin re-positioned behind Bilbo to allow him to remain flat while Thorin took him. Digging his fingers into Bilbo’s hips, he impaled his lover over and over. Bilbo undulated and vocalized in unfamiliar but incredibly welcome ways, Thorin’s new, intimate jewelry rapturously pushing them both closer to climax. Thorin was not sure how much longer he could personally hold on.

He asked, “Are you—“

“-Close, so close,” panted Bilbo in reply.

When Bilbo moved an arm in an attempt to help himself along, Thorin again draped himself across Bilbo’s back, snatching Bilbo’s wrist and returning it to the pillow, lacing their fingers together as before. He kept pace, though, and held just enough of his weight off for Bilbo to still rut against the fur. He kissed Bilbo’s neck, murmuring words of filth and love until he felt the telltale heat build around his cock—at which point he switched to frantically whispered pleas for Bilbo to come. When Bilbo’s pleasure finally broke, Thorin felt it around him, heard it echoing between his ears, sensed it somewhere deep inside his soul, all three calling his own orgasm to follow. He squeezed Bilbo’s hands and came, pressed against Bilbo from shoulder to toe as he shuddered through every last pulse. It took several seconds before he realized the short, deep noises arising every time he panted were his. He stayed like that for several more breaths, appreciating the closeness.

Eventually, Bilbo made a move to shift and Thorin let him up. Bilbo rolled onto his back, sniffling and wiping his eyes.

“I don’t suppose you know where you tossed that handkerchief?” asked Bilbo dryly.

Thorin smiled, stretching to fetch it. “No need to be embarrassed.”

“Oh, only a little,” Bilbo said, smiling back just before blowing his nose. He fell against the pillow with a satisfied huff. “Regardless, that was...gods, Thorin—I don’t even have words.”

Thorin stretched along Bilbo’s side, smoothing Bilbo’s hair off his damp forehead.

“I suppose it is safe to say you rather like the way the ring feels,” he teased affectionately.

Bilbo took Thorin’s hand as it retreated, tugging it down to kiss it. “It was not just that, you know...though yes—I could not have guessed how much extra sensation it would produce.”

Raising his eyebrows flirtatiously, Thorin purred, “Hmm, well then. Now you have me curious...”

“No,” replied Bilbo firmly. “No, no, no, thank you very much! Even if I could get past the idea of a, of a, a needle through my cock, tell me...how long did you have to abstain after having it done?”

Thorin made a face. “Well, you say ‘abstain.’ The only thing I had to worry about those few weeks after I had it done was my own hand. They were rough weeks for me in general, so I didn’t have enough of a libido to miss it much, anyhow.”

“Right, and if I had been here? How easy would it have been then?”

“Torturous,” Thorin conceded. “Very well, you’ve made your point. Truthfully, it is plenty fun
simply for me to have it, anyway. It adds another dimension for me when I’m being stimulated, and what it does for you affects me considerably as well. You know how much I love it when you squirm and react.”
“I’m looking forward to getting another proper taste of it, too. I like the way it feels against my tongue.”
Thorin grunted in pleasure. “I like the way it feels against your tongue, too.”

Bilbo’s answering giggle turned into a yawn and Thorin regarded him seriously.

“You must be beyond worn out at this point,” Thorin noted. "I know how much travel takes it out of you and you’ve done nothing but expend energy since your arrival.”
“I had enough energy to carry me through until just a moment ago, but now I can’t seem to stop yawning.” Another yawn punctuated Bilbo's point.
“Let’s fix that, then.”

They cleaned up, took care of nature, blew out the candle, and climbed into bed. Thorin felt Bilbo settle into his arms and another wave of feelings washed over him.

Softly, he said, “I’ve spent so many nights imagining you here like this, falling asleep pressed against me. It has been…so long,” Thorin said, marveling that his voice didn’t break.
“Too long,” Bilbo replied gently. “But as you reminded me earlier, I’m with you now. We’re finally together, Thorin, and I won’t be leaving any time soon.”

Thorin held Bilbo tightly and said no more.

*****

Bilbo woke to Thorin shuddering. After a moment of silent, careful observation, he realized Thorin was weeping.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Bilbo asked.

Though Bilbo only meant well, the question made Thorin cry harder. He was afraid to tell Bilbo what had him so upset in this late hour, almost as afraid as he had been to confess about Regnad. For months—well over a year—he had said very little that would cross Bilbo, so desperate he was to win him back...and then so grateful that he had that he didn't want to risk losing him again. However, all those months alone at night making sense of the whole strange situation and coming to various realizations, he had also spent small moments—for small were all he could bear—confronting the pain Bilbo had caused while they were estranged.

Something about the evening they had spent together reuniting and renewing their bond, about his long weeks of fears it might yet all be torn from under him having been at last proved unfounded…oddly, at the moment of his greatest relief, he could not help being overwhelmed and confronted with how awful it all had truly been in a way that sheer self-preservation hadn’t allowed while it had been happening. How could he tell Bilbo he was crying because he was furious yet still so completely, devotedly in love? The contradiction seemed ridiculous to him and he was the one experiencing it.

“Please,” Bilbo begged. “Talk to me, my love.”
Thorin managed to speak. “It is too much. I’ve already dumped so much at your feet tonight.”
“Too much for whom? Thorin, you’ve had months of keeping it all bottled up inside. Tell me everything. I’ll tell you when it is too much, and even then only for long enough to catch a breath.”

Thorin knew he couldn’t hide this resentment forever. The realization of that particular truth was
what had started the tears in the first place. He and Bilbo had to lay it all out, clear and open, if they were to have a chance...though Thorin could physically feel terror's lump in his esophagus when he went to speak.

Sitting up, he said, “It was hard for me after the battle, when I had come back to myself and realized the mess I had made while under the influence of the stone. The wider reaching horror of nearly killing all of us for gold was terrible, to be sure, but to have lost you...to have lost you and then to have been so helpless to do anything about it was awful. In trying to make amends in those first days, I went to bed at night with a broken heart and your voice echoing my faults between my ears. I know I deserved the telling off, though such knowledge didn't help it haunt me any less."

He turned towards Bilbo, solely visible by the dimmest glow of what was left in the hearth, though he only risked a quick glance into his eyes before closing his own to soldier on.

"In the weeks that followed, in my fits of passion for you and anger towards Kili's betrayal, I did foolish things that only made it worse—and then I had to hear you dress me down about those as well. All the while, I could see the love in your eyes, feel it in your hugs and kisses, sense the barely humming remnants of our bond left under my skin. It was excruciating to be so lonely, scared, and heartsick when I knew you still loved me."

When he opened his eyes, tears spilled over Thorin's cheeks. Bilbo's eyes were not dry, either, and when Thorin looked into them, Bilbo took his hands.

Holding his gaze this time, Thorin continued, "I spent a lot of time with your voice in my mind listing all the terrible things I had done, telling me how this love I knew in my heart to be so real would never be enough for us, insisting how much you loved Kili. I cried myself hoarse so many times. I despaired, and regardless of those occasional flashes of hope and love, I was certain I would be miserable forever. Sometimes, I sat and asked myself: did my transgressions warrant such harsh punishments? Was what I did worth all these heart-rending things I had to endure? Worth watching you ride away with your new love, or being forced myself to ride away without you? A lot of the time, I thought so. Mahal knows I've said some awful things to myself for my part in the horror show. Sometimes, though...Bilbo, sometimes I think what you put me through was unusually cruel. Even-"

Thorin stopped for a deep breath, tears still falling down his face. He swallowed and wiped them away, marshaling his final shred of courage to spill forth the last bit of darkness that had been clouding his heart.

“Somehow—I don’t even know how, sometimes—we got married, but even then, I still had to leave. I had to be alone again, leaving you behind with lovers while I went forth on your word and my own hope for the future. Though I tried to be optimistic, those old doubts and your former insistence of how incompatible we were as husbands still visited me and made me despair. It wasn’t until I got your letter that I felt I could exhale a little. With you here tonight, I feel so much better and those old fears are mostly quelled, yet I remember those months of our estrangement so clearly that I can still feel the echo of the heartache in my breast. Perhaps it isn’t my right to feel that way, but looking back...I paid dearly out of my soul for wrongs I did you all those months ago and the price was many, many times beyond the balance that was truly due.”

Swallowing around his tears, Bilbo said, “I deserve that. I deserve that and more. I’m so sorry, Thorin. I’ll never be done apologizing to you.”

“I’m not telling you all this for an apology. We’re together now because we’ve renewed our love and finally made our vows, but I could not truly move forward until I was able to say it out loud, to tell you exactly how badly I was hurt.”
Bilbo nodded, finally understanding his input wasn’t what Thorin needed.

“I’ve been so afraid to tell you any of this,” Thorin said. “I thought if I let you know how hurt and, yes, even angry and resentful I’ve been at times, somehow it would all end. I believed I had to treat you as an untouchable treasure to keep you, to behave as though you had never been at fault for this anguish I carried inside, but it isn’t healthy for me, you, or our marriage.”

“No, it isn’t.”

“I love you. I’ve never stopped, and I know I never shall. It does not serve us if I love you as someone who can do no wrong, though.”

“Of course not, Thorin. It is easy to love someone who never does wrong, who is untouchable, as you say. It is much harder to love the person who sometimes might be a right arse, but that love is also more rewarding. I’d much rather have the latter.”

“So, my confession has not made you angry?”

“The furthest thing from. This is real, Thorin, and it is happening—and that means hurts might happen or have to be dealt with, too. I’m not going to disappear in a puff of wizard’s smoke because you’ve shared some things that weren’t pleasant. I’m not going to make excuses for how I behaved back then, or blame my inexperience and confusion—though those things certainly contributed. Truthfully, the whys and the hows don’t matter at the end of the day. What matters is that I hurt you and you suffered for it immeasurably. All I can do is acknowledge it, apologize, and commit to doing everything I can to do better by you with this glorious second chance I’ve been given.”

“We both have a second chance, my love.” Thorin leaned down to kiss him, whispering against his lips, “Thank you for mine.”

“Thank you. Has it helped to let all this out?”

“Considerably, yes.” Thorin wiped the remainder of his tears, feeling exhaustion heavy in his bones. “I’m suddenly so tired, though.”

“It is small wonder. You’ve set down two incredibly weighty burdens tonight and have had little rest in between. Come,” Bilbo flipped down the blanket and held out his arms. “Let’s sleep.”

Thorin climbed into his embrace. He was out before Bilbo was done arranging the blanket around them.

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A rapid knock on the door and a voice calling out woke Thorin and Bilbo. The knock sounded a second time shortly after.

“Thank you,” Thorin called back, bothered. “I’m awake.”

“Very good, your highness,” a voice behind the door said.

“Do you—shit, what are we going to do?” Bilbo hissed. Thorin shook his head. “No need to panic. That was merely my wake-up call. They're already gone.”

“You mean,” Bilbo yawned and rubbed his eyes, “that happens every morning?”

“No, only on days when I’ve business to attend to. It is frequently Dís or Dwalin, though I insisted a guard do it today so they could enjoy their late party.”

“And so you could enjoy a late, clandestine party of your own.”

Thorin kissed his nose. “You know me so well.”

“At any rate, that certainly woke me. My heart is pounding out of my chest.”

“It did get the blood pumping, though I’m fairly certain I only went to sleep some ten minutes ago.”

“It was an eventful night.”
Thorin’s grin faded as he remembered Regnad, his confession, the lovemaking that followed, and rather dramatically waking Bilbo with his weeping for the wary unburdening of his soul. Bilbo’s choice of words wasn’t wrong, but—by daylight—eventful felt more like embarrassing.

He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly and sighed. “Look, Bilbo, I know it has been…well, I’ve laid a considerable number of things at your feet in a short amount of time. I’m trying not to overwhelm you with everything in my heart and my head all at once, though I fear I’m well on my way to doing just that.”

Bilbo cradled Thorin’s face lovingly. “You’ve been saving the past few months worth of happenings and epiphanies to discuss with me in person, to say nothing of our prior history weighing upon your heart. I told you last night—I want to know the things you’ve been thinking, even the thoughts that might not be easy to hear. For months now, I’ve planned for any number of lengthy conversations to be had between us and though I’m sure I’ve not guessed all possibilities, I’m still ready to have those discussions and more.”

“Because this is real, right?” Thorin said, flashing that smile at Bilbo.

“You bet it is.”

After several kisses, they reluctantly parted to dress and get ready to face the day outside Thorin’s door.

“Um,” Thorin began. “While I want you to do and say whatever you feel you need to if Regnad says anything new that makes you uncomfortable, I am requesting that you please not confront him about what I’ve confided to you. I’m not sure quite how to proceed with any of that without making things worse instead of better.”

“Okay. I won’t say a word to him about what you’ve shared with me, but Thorin? I meant it last night when I said it was imperative you share your story with the others. I’ll hold your hand the whole time if it helps, but I truly believe you need to tell at least Kili and Fili, if not Bofur as well.”

“I told you I would and though I’m uncomfortable with it, I do plan to go through with it. One unpleasant thing at a time, though, which means I need to claim one last kiss before we sneak you out that door—”

“—And before we have to go back to pretending we are not married and disgustingly in love,” Bilbo finished.

“Precisely. It will only be for a few hours at a time, though. I can’t handle much longer than that before I’ll need to steal you away somewhere.”

After the promised, passionate embrace, they successfully sneaked Bilbo out into the hallway unseen and—with a final, longing look—parted ways.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your kind comments. I'm glad you're still here!
Bilbo’s room was close enough to Thorin’s that he effortlessly made it back with no need to use any of the excuses he had prepared. The lads weren’t in his bed, so he peeked into the connected room and found them still asleep. While he stood pondering whether Kili would want to be woken or not, Kili sleepily blinked his eyes open and looked at him as if Bilbo had called to him aloud. A bright smile spread across Kili’s face when their eyes met and he hastily climbed out of bed.

“Oi,” grumbled Bofur, who was awakened by Kili scrambling over him. “What gives?”
“Mmm?” Fili replied.
Kili said, “Nothing, back to sleep you two.”

He led Bilbo back to their suite, closed the door, and pulled Bilbo close in a strong embrace.

Into Bilbo’s ear, he explained, “I figured we’d let them sleep a little more, given we didn’t get much rest. If you’re here, it is likely close to breakfast, yeah?”
“Yeah. We didn’t sleep much, either.”
“I didn’t expect you to. So?” Kili released Bilbo and sat on the bed, patting the blanket. “Tell me everything. You know I’m dying to know.”

Bilbo sat, acutely aware that Kili had no clothes on while he was dressed in last night’s party clothes. “You first,” he said.

Kili needed no further prodding to share the highlights of his evening in Fili’s and Bofur’s bed, including Fili’s request to make love. When Kili was finished, he insisted that it was Bilbo’s turn to divulge details, but he only got as far as Thorin undressing before Kili interrupted him exuberantly.

“He pierced his prick?” exclaimed Kili.
Bilbo giggled. “Shhh, you’re going to disturb the others! Anyway, that’s what I said, didn’t I?”
With a wolfish grin and sparkling, curious eyes, Kili asked, “So what did that feel like? He fucked you with it, right? He must have.”
“I’ll say he did. Kee, it was-“

The door between the suites opened and Bofur and Fili appeared.

“I thought you were sleeping more,” Kili said to them.
Shrugging, Fili said, “Nah, we both woke when you got up-“
“And squished me arm,” teased Bofur, mock complaining.
“When you didn’t come back, we figured Bilbo must have returned. You in here screaming ‘prick!’ pretty well confirmed it, so we figured we’d join you.”
“You still didn’t have to get up just yet, not on my account,” Bilbo said.
“Meh, what is a little more sleep?” Bofur asked. “Besides, with you back it must already be close to
time to get up, anyway, which means we should be making an appearance for breakfast.”
Fili added, “And getting a bath. I’m filthy.”
“I’ll bet you are,” noted Bilbo. “I heard you spent most of your night debauching my husband.”
“And your husband spent plenty of time debauching us back,” pointed out Bofur. “Besides, I’m
sure you’re plenty debauched yourself.”

Bilbo smiled sheepishly and blushed, still a touch unsure about how much Bofur and Thorin
needed to hear about each other. Kili saved him from having to reply.

“You’ve both just said ‘debauched’ so much that it hardly sounds like a real word anymore!” he
laughed.
“Right,” Fili said. “Let’s all just agree we are shameless tarts who spent all night gagging for and
getting it, therefore common decency dictates we must go down to the baths to wash the come off
before breakfast with our Mam.”
“Oh that note,” Bilbo comically interrupted, clearing his throat and shooting Fili a look, “How
about I grab a change of clothes and my soap?”

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Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur joined Thorin, Dwalin, and Dís for a private breakfast. They had
decided prior to their baths that it might be considered more proper for them to wear fully dwarven
garments their first full day back in Erebor (as opposed to the lovely hybrids also hanging in the
wardrobe). The choice proved to be a good one, as Dís noticed immediately and complimented all
of them—including Bilbo—on how smart they looked.

When he was sure neither Dwalin nor Dís was watching him, Thorin couldn’t resist catching
Bilbo’s eye, just for the enchanting flush that would steal into his lover’s cheeks. He winked at Kili
too, for the same reason, and twice he caught Kili stealing surreptitious looks of his own. Though
Thorin couldn’t quite place the odd, inquisitive expression on Kili’s face, the blush was still there.

Thorin had hoped the day’s business could be brief, though he knew at least breakfast and
whatever meeting that followed would be necessary to keep Dís from growing suspicious. His
heart swelled with gratitude when Dís revealed that morning’s breakfast was purposely arranged
only to be the small group of them, as was the meeting after.

When the others left them to their official discussions after breakfast, Dís couldn’t help but frown
as she watched Thorin’s gaze follow Bilbo until the last. Once it was down to the three of them,
she explained the intent of the meeting was to split of a portion of Thorin’s daily royal duties
between herself and Dwalin in order for him to have more time to spend with Fili, Kili, and even
Bilbo, if he wanted. As they went over her agenda, Dís outlined a second plan of short-term, shared
responsibilities they could roll out at a brief council meeting (scheduled for that afternoon) that
would minimize the need to hold full council for the remainder of the week. She reasoned there
were time-sensitive wedding plans to be made requiring Kili’s and Fili’s presence now they had
arrived, not to mention the return of other friends and rare guests who might enjoy more attention
than their usual royal agenda would allow.

Thorin readily agreed to many of her plans, as Dís excelled in delegation and implementation,
though he diverted her whenever Regnad’s name came up for an important task. Luckily, appealing
to Dís’s own soft spot for Regnad made it easier to offer up alternatives for those assignments,
“freeing” the dwarf to help Dís in less council-related matters. Dwalin, having similar feelings of
trepidation about the dwarf, backed Thorin up for most of it…though Thorin could tell by his face
that he did not enjoy any reasoning involving his wedding or his bride. Still, the united front of the
two of them swayed Dís to reconsider the roles she had earmarked for Regnad and, since Dwalin supported Thorin’s points, she did not accuse Thorin of making the changes out of any personal prejudice. Instead, Námbi and Dain were to be delegated the tasks she had formerly intended for him. Thorin knew it was a dangerous gamble, giving Regnad an opportunity to get closer to his sister, but in the moment, he preferred that to Regnad getting an even deeper foothold in the running of their kingdom.

With her key items of business addressed and with Thorin visibly tired and struggling to stay alert, Dís ordered him off to a nap before he did anything else that day. He gratefully kissed her forehead and left. Watching him depart, she shook her head.

“He looks like he only slept a couple hours at the absolute most,” she said sadly. “He is putting on a strong front, but I’ll bet he was probably up all night over Bilbo.”

“Or under him,” Dwalin thought darkly.

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Back in their rooms, Bilbo, Kili, Bofur, and Fili debated the merits of a nap back and forth through the inner doorway. Something caught Bilbo’s eye and he interjected, walking over with a bottle of wine that hadn’t been there the day before.

“Not to change the subject, but which one of you fauntlings didn’t even make it to this bottle you brought back last night?” he teased.

Bofur, affronted, leaned in the adjoining doorway with crossed arms. “Look here! We drank rather heroically before even returning to the room, I’ll have you know. You can forgive us for not cracking into another bottle.”

Taking the bottle from Bilbo, Fili said, “Besides, we didn’t bring any wine back with us.”

“That’s because this wasn’t our wine,” Kili said, snatching it from Fili and turning to hand it ceremoniously back to Bilbo. “It was brought to us last night, while I was waiting for these two fools to return.”

Bilbo squinted in confusion. “Come again? Brought to us by whom?”

“That new dwarf Mam likes. He stopped by the room last night after I left you with Thorin.”

Bilbo thudded the bottle down on the desk, demanding, “What? Why didn’t you tell me this sooner? What was he doing here? Tell me what happened--don’t leave out a single detail!”

Stunned by Bilbo’s urgency and seeming fury, Kili fretted. Blinking, he searched his mind for what could possibly have outraged Bilbo so quickly. He could only think of one thing.

“I didn’t—Mahal, Bee! I didn’t take him to bed! I promise! I didn’t even touch him!”

Suddenly self-aware, Bilbo softened his tone and stroked Kili’s hair. “I didn’t think you had, dear heart, and I’m terribly sorry I shouted. It’s not about…I’m not angry with you at all, but please, you must tell me everything.”

Still skittish from Bilbo’s outburst, Kili continued cautiously. “Well, I was sitting here waiting to hear Fili and Bofur return to their room…”

As Kili relayed the events of Regnad’s brief visit, Bilbo’s face grew more grim and resolute.

“He wanted to apologize—said he was intimidated by you and your reputation when he met you,” finished Kili.

“He wasn’t too intimidated to come questioning me about my tattoos,” Bilbo scoffed.

He told them about Regnad approaching him at the party.
When Bilbo finished, Bofur asked, “If that is all true, and I don’t doubt it is, couldn’t an apology have waited a day? Why would he bother looking for you at such a late hour?”

Bilbo thought about the incident at Thorin’s door and Regnad’s accusation of Thorin having a lover in his room.

He sucked in a breath of sudden realization. “Because he didn’t actually come to apologize. It was merely an excuse to determine if I was here in our room.”

“Why would he even care?” asked Kili. Looking Bilbo over, he noticed Bilbo had balled his fists so hard his knuckles were pale. “My jewel, what in Middle Earth is going on? What has gotten into you?”

Bilbo replied, “Well, first of all, we’re dumping out that bottle of wine. No one is to drink it. Secondly, we need to get Thorin.”

“Thorin?” Bofur said. “What’s Thorin got to do with it? The fellow wanted to talk to you.”

“Thorin has a story of his own to tell. After hearing about this conversation, I think he will agree it shouldn’t wait.”

Kili’s worried expression was the only thing that slowed Bilbo for a moment. Bilbo kissed him. “Please forgive me for raising my voice, Kee. Things will be made clear very soon, I promise.”

Bilbo hurried into the hallway on a mission to see if he could find Thorin, nearly slamming into the dwarf himself just outside his door.

“Thorin! I was just going to see if I could have a word with you!”

With Bilbo immediately tugging Thorin into the room, Thorin giggled back, “Funny, I was just coming to see if I could have a nap with you!”

Bilbo released him and stepped aside, revealing Kili, Fili, and Bofur seated at the end of Bilbo’s bed, regarding him solemnly. Thorin heard the door firmly click shut behind him.

“What’s this, then?” asked Thorin, his smile leaving him. With dark realization unfolding, he said, “Bilbo, I told you I would tell them. Could you not have given me more than a handful of hours to collect myself before forcing me to do so?”

Picking up the wine, Bilbo said gently, “I did not bring you here to force you to do anything, nor have I breathed a word of your issue myself. However, once you hear what Kee has to say, you might reconsider your timing. Does this bottle look familiar at all?”

Thorin took the offered bottle, examined it, and set it down, puzzled as to what it had to do with anything. “Most bottles of wine in the mountain look similar.”

“Kee, would you mind sharing with Thorin how this particular bottle came to be in our room?”

Kili did as requested and through the telling, Bilbo watched Thorin’s face change as he doubtlessly drew the same conclusions he had.

“Something happened at the party, too,” Bilbo added. “Though it didn’t seem like the right time to bring it up when we discussed him last night, now I’m thinking it might be prudent for you to know Regnad rather brazenly came to me and made insinuations about the nature of the tattoo with your name on my arm.”

“What sort of insinuations?” Thorin asked.

Bilbo repeated the story he had earlier told Kili about the incident at the keg. After he finished, Thorin contemplated quietly—Bilbo could almost sense his internal war waging. For their parts, Fili, Kili, and Bofur had not asked many questions. All three seemed to sense something serious and personal was going on with Thorin; Bilbo was proud they were sensitive enough to the gravity of the situation to not demand a precipitous reveal.
Turning Bilbo’s and Kili’s stories over in his mind, Thorin saw the outline of the picture Regnad seemed to be attempting to paint, coupled with the dwarf’s potential reasoning to plot such alibis and justification for the various visits, needling, and digging he had been doing. Thorin surmised Regnad had mentioned Bilbo’s arm tattoos to rattle him, possibly hoping he might reveal too much in the planned resulting unease—which only proved how much he had underestimated Bilbo in the first place. Thorin could (and would later) kiss Bilbo for being so unflappably smooth with an available answer—he was almost sorry he hadn’t seen the look on the damn snake’s face. The point of Regnad’s visit to Thorin’s room was still a bit puzzling, however. How much of the proposition was part of the gambit? How much had he already theorized before knocking on that door…and how much had he been prepared to go through with if Thorin had called his bluff? It was obvious Regnad had suspected Bilbo as the lover hidden in Thorin’s chamber, given the visit to Kili’s afterward, but how, then, had he already fabricated an incident at the party that would require an apology? Was that merely luck and quick thinking?

Thorin’s eyes flicked between the solemn faces of Kili, Fili, Bilbo, and Bofur. They were oddly quiet, as though they were waiting for something. Waiting for him, he supposed. Before last night, he hadn’t planned on giving the others much detail about Regnad’s provocations and—though he had fully intended to keep his word to Bilbo—he definitely had not been planning to tell them so soon. His heart was not yet ready, to say nothing of how he might go about approaching it when the time came.

Clearing his throat nervously, Fili said, “One more thing, since it seems there’s more going on with him than I had realized. Thorin, did you know this Regnad person knew Bilbo was an heir?”

Thorin stared at Fili, incredulous. Once Thorin’s initial dramatic statement had been made (to great effect) at Bilbo’s wedding, cooler heads had eventually prevailed and the dwarves who attended the wedding had unanimously agreed to keep Bilbo’s place in the royal line of succession quiet unless it had to be revealed for Bilbo’s proof of legitimacy, should the worst occur. Balin and Dain were informed because they had to be, but it was made clear it was to be kept a matter of privacy unless harrowing circumstance made it a matter of state. Could Fili have been mistaken?

“What makes you think he knows?” asked Thorin.

“The moment he met him, he called Bilbo ‘Prince and Heir.’ I said Bilbo’s status as heir was not common knowledge, but Balin jumped in and argued it was reasonable for council to know.” Thorin must have worn his disbelief on his face, because Bofur chimed in. “It is true. Kee and I heard it, too. Both parts.”

Looking back to Bilbo, Thorin said, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know,” Bilbo said, shrugging helplessly. “I thought it was a little unusual, sure, but then Balin defended it so sternly when Fili spoke out. At that point, I made the choice to try and move the conversation on at least somewhat gracefully. I did not like Regnad much, but I didn’t realize at the time it was going to be something I needed to inform you about later.”

Thorin shook his head, disappointed. “That’s—Balin should never have told him that. Balin knew keeping it quiet was its own form of protection, and I cannot believe he told Regnad, of all the people he could possibly tell!”

“This Regnad fellow is close to Mam, though,” Kili pointed out. “It is possible she told him and Balin was just defending…I don’t know, his right to know, maybe?”

Thorin’s head reeled anew, his face crumpling in disappointment. “Dís…”

Bilbo urged him to sit and rubbed his back soothingly while he held his head in his hands. Thorin looked up at Kili, Fili, and Bofur, all of whom wore expressions of concern and confusion. His eyes lingered momentarily on Bofur, assessing—

“He will support you,” Bilbo had promised
--before scrubbing his palms over his face and making a decision.

“Very well,” he said. “I had hoped to delay this at least a little while longer, but Regnad is not wasting any time attempting to insinuate himself into your lives or your affairs. I will tell you what I know of him, not to color your impression, but so you can make informed choices.”

Kissing his cheek and taking his hand, Bilbo murmured, “I’m here, my love.”

Starting at the very beginning, Thorin shared what he knew of how Regnad came to be on the council, how he had been rising through its ranks politically, and how his popularity had grown. He made mention of Balin and Dís counting him among their closest, though he figured that tidbit wasn’t news to any of them at this point. From there, he moved on to relaying the odd little circumstances, such as the time Regnad followed him down to the merchant’s level. When he got to the incident at the springs, he paused a moment before continuing with the story as he had told it to Balin, quickly moving on to the irksome, bold behaviors that followed.

“Thorin,” Bilbo whispered. “Don’t do this. Tell them all of it.”

Thorin winced. In confessing the night before, he had admitted to Bilbo that he had been afraid to tell Balin all of what had happened in the bath, lest Balin blame him for instigating any of Regnad’s unvirtuous suggestions. His eyes met Bilbo’s.

“You can trust them,” urged Bilbo.

Swallowing hard, Thorin backed up his story and explained the incident in the baths as it had actually happened, omitting nothing this time around. From there, somehow, finishing the tale was easier. He detailed other bizarre moments, the song, the strangely veiled threats, and Balin’s reaction to Thorin’s attempt to spill his soul in the hopes of finding an ally. Thorin divulged as much as he could recall, ending with the whole of the licentious visit the night before. When he finished, he finally let himself look at Fili, Kili, and Bofur, all of whom had been stone silent the entire time.

“That’s everything,” he said with finality.

If Thorin’s tone hadn’t been signal enough, Bilbo looked to the others and gave a subtle nod that discussion would now be considered appropriate. Fili broke the silence first.

“I’ll say that’s everything!” he said, furious. “That’s enough for five lifetimes—and you’ve endured it in a matter of weeks. How dare he? How dare Balin? What in the bloody Void is going on around here?”

Bofur also fumed with horror. “That worm spied on you, imposed himself on you, exploited you, even threatened you, and Balin had the nerve to say you should consider his suit? As if you would entertain such a dishonorable swine for even a moment! Balin should have been as infuriated as we are!”

“And we are infuriated, Thorin,” Fili agreed, now up and ranting. “Balin is supposed to be your friend! How could he stand for this? How did he not march right into council with you and boot Regnad’s auburn arse back to the Iron Hills?”

While Fili paced, Kili had moved over and kneeled at Thorin’s feet, putting his hands over where Bilbo still held one of Thorin’s. He gazed up at him, brown eyes glistening with care.

“I—I hate to ask, but—“ he faltered, voice cracking. “Mam? How can she, how can she…how can she?”

“She doesn’t know, Kili,” Thorin replied quietly. “I couldn’t tell her. Balin is the only one who knows much of anything. Dwalin knows I do not like this dwarf, which works out well because
neither does he, but he only knows the barest hint that Regnad made an overture which had been rebuffed. After Balin brushed me aside, I couldn’t tell anyone else.”

In a startling, tender gesture, Bofur kneeled next to Kili, taking Thorin’s free hand in his.

“You can tell us anything, Thorin. Thank you for telling us this, for trusting us,” Bofur said.

Thorin stared down at their joined hands, agog.

“Forgive my boldness,” muttered Bofur, embarrassed, pulling his hand back.

Thorin reached out and grasped it again.

“No, I…I--thank you.” He glanced around, not speaking for a long moment, simply squeezing the hands he held and accepting their comfort. “Thank all of you for believing me, unwaveringly. I--”

Thorin’s took both his hands back then, but only to cover his face while he wept cathartic, grateful tears. He felt several arms around him as all four of them soothed him while he cried. Bilbo handed him a handkerchief when his tears slowed.

“So, what now?” asked Fili.

“Now, nothing,” replied Thorin. “Or at least that’s what I had thought before yesterday. Like I said, I figured it was pretty well and over—or at least dormant—until last night. I don’t know what last night’s ploy was, because I don’t believe a single excuse he gave me for his former behavior. The rest of it confuses me, too—he seems to want to tie me to Bilbo, but our history is hardly a secret. Either way, I’ve asked Bilbo, and I’m asking all of you: please do not confront him on my behalf for anything I’ve told you today. By all means, if he says something you don’t like or is otherwise rude to you or yours, defend yourselves, but I have no idea how to address the past, or if it would even be prudent at this point to try.”

“Although I’d like to give him a good thump to the nose for you, and one to the bollocks for good measure, I will respect your wish,” Bofur said.

Fili sighed, resigned. “I don’t know how good an idea it is to let the past go unchecked, but I will respect it, too.”

“I’ll agree,” Kili said, “But only regarding the old business. If he wants to continue haranguing you, he is going to have to contend with me.”

“He’ll have to contend with all of us,” Bofur said. “You are not alone, Thorin. Not anymore.”

Thorin took a deep breath so the tears would not return. His best hope (one he barely dared) for this confession had been to possibly have the support of his kin, but Bofur’s added sympathy and righteous anger on his behalf had been unexpected and wholly moving. Bilbo had been right about him.

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In the end, once the tears dried and the angry blood calmed, the originally intended nap was finally taken. Fili and Bofur weren’t sure whether to leave Kili’s and Bilbo’s room or stay. They ultimately decided to kip in their own bed citing comfort’s sake—though five could restfully fit on the luxurious elf-beds. Bilbo, Kili, and Thorin didn’t argue the obvious, unsure of the reason for the choice and not wanting to create an awkward position for any of them. Solid sleep was had, though, and all five woke up far more refreshed than they had that morning.

“I do believe it is a late spot of lunch for all of us now,” Thorin said, feeling much better in general. “Though I do have some council business to attend to once lunch is finished, Dís has assured me it should be brief. Fili and Kili, you could attend if you’d like. Your Mam would enjoy
that. Bofur, you too, considering you are one of The Fourteen and have a permanent seat yourself.”

“And Bee?” Kili asked dubiously. “He is one of The Fourteen, too.”

Thorin’s smile faded and he opened his mouth, not sure how to express why it was a bad idea all around. He didn’t have to, however, because Bilbo (oh, how he loved that hobbit) had already astutely assessed a hint of the tense political climate Thorin had been struggling with and spoke up.

“I don’t think, Fourteen or not, prince or not, that now is a good time for me to sit council, Kee.”

“But—” Kili started to argue.

“I know, and I love you for it,” Bilbo said. “However, I fear the atmosphere might be too delicate at the moment for someone who is not a dwarf to press issues of inclusion or integration by insisting upon a spot at council. The three of you should go with Thorin. I would like to catch up with my Shirefolk and see how they are faring, anyhow.”

“If you’re sure,” Kili said.

Bilbo kissed him. “I’m sure.”

In order to request it prepared, Thorin left for lunch first. The rest of them planned to follow soon after, but Bilbo whispered to Kili to take Bofur and go on, promising he and Fili would catch up. Kili shot him a curious, merry look, one that let Bilbo know he expected a full report of the (hopefully naughty) reason for this moment of privacy later on. Bilbo winked back.

Fili attempted to follow Bofur and Kili out of the room, but Bilbo gently stayed him by the shoulder, closing the door instead.

“Bee?” said Fili, looking to Bilbo questioningly.

“I told Kee we’d be along in a moment.”

“Oh?” Fili replied with devilish interest, licking his lips. “Well, then…miss me already, do you?”

Bilbo grinned. “I didn’t tell him we’d be along that much later! While I do, in fact, miss you already, this particular moment alone is because I wanted to let you know that I...erm, I had a talk with Thorin last night.”

The devilish look disappeared from Fili’s face.

“I wager you likely had several,” he replied carefully.

“Right. This one, though. This one was about you. Me. Us.”

“Oh.” Fili crossed to the bed and sat, worried that his legs might fail if he didn’t get off them.

“What did you say? What did he say?”

“I told him…well, I told him I was in love with you.”

Fili looked up, surprised. “You told him that?”

“Rather ineloquently, too. I just sort of blurted it out. If it helps at all, he was not surprised. He had noticed something between us, especially with you. He said he was glad you had told me already, because he could read your feelings on your face.”

“Durin’s beard! We’re in trouble, then, if we can’t even hide it from Thorin!”

Bilbo hummed a laugh. “That was my first worry as well, though Thorin’s explained his notice being mostly because of his familiarity with you and because he has a sort of fascination with me.”

“And I can’t blame him for that,” Fili said affectionately. “So, what else did he say?”

Bilbo considered how closely Kili tied into Thorin’s views on the subject and tried to figure out the best way to leave him out of it. That was a delicate enough situation without him putting his furry foot into it.

“He said a lot, actually, but the thing I think you want to know most is if he approves. Come to think of it, he had a lot to say about that, too, but ultimately he said we would find a way to adjust.”

“That’s a relief,” Fili exhaled, nodding to himself. “I must tell you, I hadn’t expected you to tell
him so soon...or without me."

“I hadn’t either, but once we were here, waiting didn’t seem the right thing to do. I felt like every kiss with him, as well as the memory of every kiss with you I kept secret from him...it was as though I was being unfaithful to both of you if I kept you secret. Gods, that sounds messed up, doesn’t it?”

Fili swallowed around emotion in his throat. “You really are in love with me,” he breathed. “As I’ve told you. Haven’t you believed me?”

“It’s just—fuck, talk about messed up—somehow, it seems considerably more real now that Thorin knows, or maybe it’s because you had such a strong, urgent need to tell him. It feels like a commitment.”

“I suppose in a way it is. I am in love with you, Fili.”

“I’m in love with you, too,” Fili whispered, just before kissing him. Without letting Bilbo go, he murmured, “You do realize it is going to be that much harder now not to throw you down on the bed and forget lunch?”

“Okay, but then you get to be the one who explains it to anyone who asks why we were absent...including your mother, who will likely be quite interested in our reasoning.”

“Fine,” Fili conceded. “But please...don’t make me wait too long. I already miss you terribly.”

“I miss you, too.”

Fili bit his lip nervously and toyed with the waves at Bilbo’s nape. “Have you given any more thought to what I said at Beorn’s?”

Despite his best efforts, Bilbo was now fully erect. Thank Mahal for long, dwarven garments.

“Fee,” he demurred. “If we get into discussing that, we’ll be explaining our disappearance to your mother for sure.”

“Just...have you thought about it?”

The searching look in those adoring blue eyes was too much for Bilbo to deny. He pressed a soft, lingering kiss to Fili’s lips and rested their foreheads together.

“I have thought about it.”

Fili closed his eyes in obvious relief and smiled. Bilbo marveled—that truly had been all Fili wanted to know: that Bilbo had considered it. Something about the sweetness, the earnestness, of Fili’s request, tinged with its obscenity and ardency, impelled Bilbo to give him more than he requested.

“And,” he added, “I’m looking forward to it.”

Fili leaned back to look at him, delightfully astonished. Cradling his face, Bilbo pulled him in for another kiss, though it was a far less exploratory one than Fili was trying to make it into. Bilbo backed away, taking his hand and turning towards the door.

“Let’s go. They’re probably already wondering where we are.”

Fili held fast to the spot for a moment; Bilbo swiveled back to face him when he felt the resistance.

“I love you, Bilbo,” Fili said.

Bilbo gazed at him. “I love you, too.”

“I know,” Fili said, smiling.

This time, he followed Bilbo out of the room.
Thank you, everyone, for your continued interest and your delightful comments. I appreciate you so much.
A Series Of Meetings

Chapter Summary

Thorin takes a series of meetings, some official and some decidedly not.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After lunch, Thorin, Fili, Kili, and Bofur attended the council meeting. It was unusual for there to be additional members present outside the core voting body—Thorin couldn’t recall the last time any of The Fourteen aside from himself, Balin, or Dwalin so much as had a look in—and seating had to be acquired.

Kili, Fili, and Bofur were met with the unwelcome challenge of not wearing their ill feelings for Regnad on their faces or in their tone when Dís presented them to him again. They did reasonably well, though none of them enjoyed the way it made them feel. Once they were seated and settled, Thorin addressed the room.

“Erebor welcomes home Prince Fili, Prince Kili, and Bofur of The Fourteen. We are privileged to have their presence at our meeting this day, and hopefully more to come.”

“What, no halfling?” Regnad said snidely, triggering a couple giggles around him.

Fili, Bofur, and Kili exchanged quick glances, but Thorin spoke up first.

Straightening his spine, he intoned with kingly presence, “Prince Bilbo, Ambassador to the Shire, Dragon Talker, Savior of The Fourteen, and Slayer of Azog will unfortunately not be attending this particular session, as he has important tasks of his own inside the mountain. However, should he attend in the future, as with the presence of Prince Fili, Prince Kili, and Bofur of The Fourteen here today, he will be afforded courtesy and attention as much as any dwarf present, and his opinions and votes will be afforded equal measure. Disrespect will not be tolerated. The rules of the council in this matter are not up to debate; violating them will result in charges of treason. Going forward, ignorance of the terms just described will not save violators from punishment. May anyone who needs the matter explained further speak up now.”

Glancing around, Thorin saw those who giggled at Regnad’s comment now looking ashamed. It was with no small satisfaction that Thorin noted Regnad wore a look of unpleasant surprise. For the first time in a long time, Thorin felt powerful in a room containing Regnad. Merely having the princes with him bolstered him, and that confidence helped him firmly shut Regnad down. When no one spoke up in disagreement or for clarification, Thorin turned the meeting over to Dís to explain her purpose and her plan.

Bofur had not often seen this side of Thorin, and seldom (if ever) had he heard Thorin speak of Bilbo using such titles. Not a single one was untrue, but something about Thorin’s regal, intimidating tone coupled with the partial list of Bilbo’s deeds filled Bofur’s breast with awe and pride over what Bilbo had truly meant--and should truly still mean--to the citizens of this mountain. Not a soul would be sitting there if not for Bilbo and it stoked his anger that not only would Regnad dare make a snide comment, but that anyone at all would laugh along with it.
As the meeting unfolded, Thorin could not help watching Kili and Fili. It brought to his mind the scouting mission they planned in Lake Town, where the two of them seemed to come alive. He saw the same interest here. Though they didn’t speak up much, there had also been little so far that called for their voices. They listened thoughtfully, though, and he could tell they were paying special attention, getting the feel for the culture of the council and the way things were done.

Thorin also spared some attention for Bofur. Though he was quieter than the princes, Bofur was also paying rapt attention. Thorin had no doubt Bofur was cataloging details as the meeting unfolded, as his powers of observation were keen and he was formidably intelligent. Thorin had cursed those assets in the past, but only because they had shed too much light on his personal darkness. Even if Bofur never uttered a word in council, having him present would be an incredible resource for insight after the fact.

Thorin’s focus snapped abruptly back to Regnad, who had stood and was arguing one for one of Dís’s duties that had been assigned to Nabbi to be assigned to him instead. Before Thorin could speak, Fili diplomatically and confidently countered the objection, unknowingly citing the exact reason Dís had given for why the task would be best for Nabbi. Dís, glowing with pride, seconded it, and Regnad sat down with a scowl. Thorin’s gaze sought Nabbi, who also looked none too pleased by the attempted replacement.

The rest of the meeting ran smoothly. Regnad did not make an attempt at arguing any of the other assignments, though most of Thorin’s surreptitious peeks saw him glaring at Fili, Kili, and sometimes back towards the king. Afterwards, Thorin hoped to get a private moment with Dwalin, but Dwalin had been in deep discussion with Balin and Dain. There was no way to pull him aside without creating questions as to why. Because discretion was important, he decided to try and get that moment with Dwalin another time.

“Thorin!” Dís called him over to where she stood with Kili, Fili, and Bofur. “If it is all the same to you, I’d like to spend some time with my lads today, too. You don’t have anymore lessons to impart or princely duties for them to perform, do you?”

“Not for a while,” he said, risking a quick glance at Kili, who blushed. Luckily, Dís did not seem to notice and kept talking.

“I’ve been dying to show you around more. I have some things I can’t wait another minute for you to see!” she said to the lads excitedly.

Bofur scratched his beard. “I suppose I should check in with Bifur and Bom, too. I’ve not seen them since last night’s party.”

Dís frowned. “You’re not coming with us, then?”

“My beauty,” he said, bowing deeply. “Though I shall keenly feel your absence, my own familial duties await.”

Dís giggled, tapping rapidly at his shoulder. “Oh get up, get up. You flattering scoundrel, you. Fili, how do you ever believe a word this silver tongue says?”

Thorin stifled a laugh. He was glad he and Bofur had found some measure of neutral ground to stand upon, because he didn’t need his sister this enchanted by two of his enemies. He thought perhaps, if pushed, she might even like Bofur more than Regnad.

After Dís left with the princes, Bofur turned to Thorin.

“Are you going to go look for Bilbo?” he asked discreetly, in case anyone was paying attention.

“Yes.”

“If he found Rori, he and Bifur might be in the same place. Want to search together?”

Thorin nodded. “Seems like a good idea. I have an idea of where to start, too.”
Out in the hallway, Bofur saw Regnad and Nabbi and they did not look happy. He tugged Thorin out of sight and put his fingers to his lips.

“Listen,” he mouthed, cupping a hand to his ear to illustrate his point.

“That’s not an excuse. The princess was giving me an assignment—a plum one, too. Is it not enough that she counts on you outside the council? Must you soak up every last pinhole of light for yourself?”

“My, my—I hadn’t taken you for such a glory hog.”

“Glory hog? That’s rich, coming from you.”

“Look, we’re supposed to work on the same side here. We were both chosen by Dain to represent the Iron Hills in two of the most prestigious posts in Erebor. Sometimes it will be my time to shine and sometimes it will be yours. We have to unite as a front, though, regardless of whose time it is.”

“You know, when it is my time to shine, someone on my side wouldn’t try to steal it from me. Someone on my side would be happy I was recognized.”

“You know, Nabbi, you are right. I was so busy thinking of myself that I didn’t see that I was jumping in your way. Besides, Princess Dís and Prince Fili were able to see the value in the choice of you, so it all worked out in the end.”

“I still would like an apology for you trying it in the first place.”

“You’re right. I apologize for challenging your assignment.”

“Well, I—thank you. I appreciate it.”

“I owed you as much. On the subject of favor—though you are right that I have a nod now and then from the princess, King Thorin still likes you best.”

“That’s all well and good, but you and I both know Princess Dís and Balin are the ones who truly run the council.”

They heard nothing else clearly as footsteps carried the voices away. Bofur shot Thorin an uncomfortable, sympathetic glance.

“Tough break, laddie.”

Thorin shrugged and quirked a crooked smile. “He is not wrong, though. Balin and Dain ran things while I was out West for the wedding, so Balin has a fair foothold. Dís excels at her role in council—and sometimes everyone else’s, when the occasion calls for it. I’m not so prideful that I cannot recognize how the work Balin and Dís have put in commands the sort of respect that would invite a comment like Nabbi’s.”

Nodding in contemplation of Thorin’s admirable (though surprising) assessment, Bofur moved on before the silence grew awkward.

“So, where to?”

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Bilbo sat in one of the larger parlor areas off the main dining hall with Thodora, Chadham, and Ori. They had a low table between them, though the bowl containing their snack of dried fruits and nuts had sat empty for some time. Bilbo liked the strange settee he was on—it was rounded inward, with enough room to be comfortable, and with three more surrounding the table with spaces in between, it made chats seem like they were happening in a cozy smial instead of an enormous royal hall.

Thodora sighed to Ori dreamily, “I think Erebor is even more beautiful than Rivendell.”

“I think so, too,” Chadham agreed.
“I’m glad you like it here. We certainly went through a lot to be here, didn’t we, Bilbo?”
“Yes, yes we did.”

Bilbo felt a twinge of guilt, for he did not have the same dreamy feeling about the mountain as the other hobbits. Erebor was grand and glorious, it was true, but no matter how much he loved its king or its princes, he still carried deep, disturbing memories of when it had been more like his prison, visceral memories that no amount of love could fully rationalize away.

Chadham noted, “Erebor is so much bigger than I supposed. I can’t get over the sheer size of it!”
“But a dragon lived here—an enormous one,” Thodora countered. “How did you think he managed?”
“I don’t know. I thought maybe it was like, um, like a crab or something, or a dog in a house. Like he came through the door but nearly filled it wall to wall. It seems silly now, I suppose…”
Chadham trailed off, quite embarrassed.

“Don’t feel bad,” said Bilbo. “I had a similar image in my mind. The first time I beheld the main hall alone, I was stunned with how enormous it was, how cavernous. If you can believe it, Smaug was almost made small by his hoard, nevermind the hall that housed it, even though I myself was barely the length of one of his great claws. He could easily move freely within that one hall alone.”
“Then why all the damage?” asked Thodora.
“He didn’t care,” a deep voice rumbled. “The filth barged in and moved about, terrorizing, horrifying, and murdering. When it was all finally his, he settled in on the hoard.”

They all turned to see Thorin and Bofur had crept in behind them. Bilbo idly wondered how much of the conversation Thorin had heard.

“I suppose if he did not care about the citizens, he wouldn’t care about the art they created,” surmised Chadham solemnly.

Thorin shook his head. “He only cared about treasure and death.”

Thodora said, “The whole thing is so sad. I knew it was sad all along, you know, but in that way that stories in books are sad. It is different, somehow, when there is not the connection, when even true stories are still stories, if you follow me. It is quite another thing to sit here and know, to look around where it happened, to see big bashes in some of the walls, to think about the people who called Erebor home, and…oh!” She stopped, overcome.

“I know,” Thorin put a comforting hand on her shoulder from behind the settee. “Awful things did happen here. Smaug walked right over me, you know. If not for the gap between his claws, I would not be here talking to you now…and even though I lived through the fire and the feet, I lost people I loved. Everyone I knew did. Sometimes the memory of that day will come to me as I look out over the rampart, or when I catch a whiff of dragon on a warm day where his stench still seeps into the stone—it can be devastating enough to buckle my knees from under me. Though ousting the worm vindicated those who died needlessly, I cannot lie—I wonder now and then if restoring Erebor as a living kingdom was not disrespectful of our beloved, honored dead. I was so obsessed with restoring our homeland that it didn’t occur to me returning meant I would be ruling over a mass grave.”

Bilbo was shocked. He and Thorin had many private, quiet conversations wherein they bared their souls, but Thorin had never mentioned feeling this way. He stood, scooting through the space between seats to put his arm around Thorin. He was joined by Bofur, who didn’t seem to know quite what to do. Bilbo saw him haltingly lift a hand, though once he touched Thorin, he squeezed his shoulder firmly.

“Well, never let it be said that I don’t know how to ruin a party,” Thorin sighed, chuckling in self-deprecation. “That grew considerably darker than I meant it to.”

Standing on tiptoe to whisper to Thorin alone, Bilbo said, “Count that among the things you can
lay at my feet sometime, if you so choose.”
Thorin glanced down at him and smiled. “So,” he clapped his hands together, trying to shake the melancholy and lighten the mood. “I only count two hobbits. Did you find your cousin, Bilbo?”
“Right, I was hoping I’d find Bifur with you, maybe Bombur, too,” Bofur added.
“We had Bifur and Rorimac for a short while, but really only in passing. I would say now is probably not a convenient time for a visit, if you catch my meaning.”
“Oh, I suppose I’ll go find Bom, then, see if he has disavowed me for having breakfast and lunch without him.”

He winked at Bilbo, nodded at Thorin, and waved at the others as he departed.

Thorin turned to Bilbo. “I had hoped I might talk you into a walk while it is still daylight, but I don’t want to interrupt.”
“Oh no,” Thodora said, standing. “We were just chatting. We’ll chat later. You go on ahead.”
Bilbo beamed up at Thorin. “Looks like I’m available.”

Thorin walked with Bilbo up to the overlook, itching to link their arms at every step.

“How was your meeting?” Bilbo asked.
“Oh, you know how things like that are. Dry and full of details.”
“How did Kili, Fili, and Bofur do?”
“Outstanding. They observed, eyes and ears open, and didn’t say much—though Fili challenged Regnad about his attempt to change something your mother had planned. He didn’t even know it was your mother’s idea, but she was so delighted she could have kissed him, I could tell.”
“And Regnad?”
“He didn’t like it at all. There was nothing for it, though. Fili’s argument was eloquent and Dís backed him up, so there was nothing for Regnad to do but sit back down and lick his wounds. The assignment he tried to get was supposed to go to Nabbi, too, and Bofur and I overheard Nabbi giving him an earful about it in the hall afterwards.”
“Well good, I’m glad maybe more people are seeing some of his undesirable qualities.”
Thorin made a noise of doubt, holding open the door to the Grand Overlook for Bilbo.
“You don’t think so?” asked Bilbo as he walked through.
“Well, you know he is slippery. I couldn’t see his or Nabbi’s faces, but there was a point where he rather abruptly changed tone, stopped arguing, and started telling Nabbi everything he wanted to hear. He has tried that technique with me before, too. His voice gets sugary—overly apologetic and disingenuous-sounding. Anyway, Nabbi accepted his apology and that was that. Sometimes I wonder if his false tone is something only I can hear.”
“No, because I heard a little of it myself, too, and you’ve described it well: sugary and disingenuous. Bo has been calling him a worm and I like it, except that I think it might be an insult to noble worms.”

Thorin laughed so hard and so loud that it seemed to echo into the valley. Bilbo loved seeing him like that and he silently vowed to try and get at least one good laugh a day out of him.

“So what was the point of the meeting today, exactly? Or do they not have single points?” Bilbo asked.
“Usually, it is a series of business, suggestions, paperwork, programs to implement, and so on. Dís wanted to free up some time this week to spend with Fili and Kili, work on things related to the wedding, and so forth, so she came up with a plan to basically assign out anything that could not wait to people we trusted, and then make an agenda for the things that can wait so they do not fall by the wayside.”

Bilbo stopped to smell his flowers. Remembering he had tucked some nuts in his pocket for later
— the kitchens were not as open or as accessible as his own pantry — he put them out at Yavanna’s shrine.

“Okay, then,” Bilbo said. “Tell me one thing that is important in the council right now, aside from the Erebor Museum of Natural History.”

Thorin grinned, pleased that not only did Bilbo recall it had been on the agenda, he also remembered Thorin’s preferred name for it.

“Why do you want to know?” asked Thorin.

“Because it is something that is important to you, Fili, Kili, their mother, and our friends. Even if I’m not taking my seat, it probably doesn’t hurt to know the highlights, and if I do wind up sitting council at any point in the coming weeks, being informed will help.”

Raising his eyebrows, Thorin nodded thoughtfully. “I can’t really argue with that. Alright, well, one of the other big, ongoing projects we have is housing. With the wedding coming up, we will be entertaining several traveling guests, not all of whom are dwarrows. Accommodation and height have to be considered.”

“Like for Beorn, the Men, and the elves?”

“Exactly. It might please you to know Beorn has his own Beorn-sized apartment on the residence level. He used it when he was here helping me with my bath and he’ll be staying there again for the wedding.”

“You built a place for Beorn,” Bilbo breathed, delightfully stunned.

“So, those are considerations for the short term, having places for wedding guests and diplomats to stay. In addition, though, shortly before you arrived yourself I had received word that a caravan full of dwarrows from the Blue Mountains were planning to relocate to Erebor in the spring. The letter said they had hoped to make it ahead of the wedding, but had worried it might be too soon to accommodate their numbers. You know Erebor still has room for thousands, and we also have need still for all manner of specialists, workers, and general citizenry, so to imagine this large group of settlers worrying about their welcome and delaying their move did not seem like a good idea to me. Plus, the wedding between Dís and Dwalin is going to be a rare event, particularly since you and I had to do ours privately, Kili married you in the Shire, and who knows what is going on in Fili’s head? Not even as a king, but simply a person with feelings, I didn’t want them to miss out on being a part of an event such as the royal wedding. When I showed the letter to Dís and Dwalin, they had absolutely insisted I write back immediately and welcome them whenever they felt it temperate enough to travel — if they arrived before the wedding, so be it. Part of the winter’s resource allocation had been set aside in the planning for new settlers this year, anyhow. Therefore, as part of the ongoing housing matter, we have implemented available resources — both materials and craftsfolk — in order for the settlers to have safe spaces to call home inspected and waiting for them by May. Most of the work, once assigned and begun, tends to run without council intervention but since this is a matter of great importance in both the short and long term for Erebor, we have sub-committees and leaders responsible for bench-marking progress and taking care of any emergencies that might delay that progress.”

Bilbo whistled, impressed. “That — that is a lot to consider, and it all seems incredibly involved. I agree with you, though, making them wait would have been ill-advised... and sort of sad, too.”

“The news such numbers were coming was completely unexpected, but more welcome than I can express to you. The work we are putting in is incredibly worthwhile.”

“You say that letter arrived just before we did?” Bilbo pondered, counting backwards in his mind.

“Oh! Oh, this is fantastic! Thorin, many of those people deciding to relocate here might have been a result of the visit Fee and Bo made to Ered Luin!”

Bilbo excitedly informed Thorin that Fili and Bofur had taken one last trip to the Blue Mountains specifically to renew interest in Erebor. He did his best to recall and relay what they had told him.
about the recruitment efforts they had made.

“Seems the job they did was quite effective,” Bilbo finished. “The timing makes me almost certain the letter you received was a direct result of that visit.”
Thorin smiled affectionately. “It was a brilliant idea, and obviously executed fantastically. Fili is a marvel, isn’t he? We needed this influx for a whole host of reasons and some how he guessed it, even across all those long leagues. What a leader he is becoming!”
“Actually,” said Bilbo, clearing his throat, “It was Bofur’s idea to go.”
“Bofur’s?” Thorin asked, puzzled.
Bilbo nodded, looking up at him earnestly. “He thought it might help you. He wrote those ballads I mentioned especially for the trip, too, and Fili says he sang them every chance he got.”
“Bofur did that? Because he thought it would help me?”
“You and Erebor, of course, which is an extension of you, Fee, and Kee in its own way.”
Amazed, said, “I…I wouldn’t have guessed. Thank you for telling me.”
Bilbo turned back to his flowers, inhaling their fragrance and exhaling a pleased tone. “These are so lovely. When more of them come in, we have a date with some braids.”
“Oh, is that so?” Thorin wrapped his arms around him from behind and rested his chin gently on Bilbo’s head. “From where I’m standing, I see a few ready blooms we could wind in now without the wait.”
“Yes, but,” sighed Bilbo, “Then they would have to come out again before dinner. Honestly, until we are able to tell everyone about us, we could have a whole field of blooms at our disposal some night, but they would still have to come out of our braids by morning.”

Thorin did not release Bilbo, though he fidgeted with his clasped hands against Bilbo's chest. Though Bilbo had agreed to keeping their relationship secret until after Dís’s wedding, Thorin had been experiencing doubts about the wisdom of coming out as married even after the wedding had passed. However, he hated hiding, too, and he especially hated how this good, warm feeling he had going was now turning cold and inky as he thought about the choice ahead. He changed the subject back to more pleasant things.

“You truly like your garden, then?”
“I adore it!” Bilbo gushed.
“You know, I had considered buying you a cottage in Dale for times when the mountain was too much, or when less pleasant memories of it made you feel trapped.”

Bilbo spun around in his arms, staring up at him with wide, incredulous eyes.

“I suppose the idea of it was sort of my version of your father giving Bag End to your mother. I had considered it so strongly, I actually did some scouting, but I had more doubts than I had confidence.”
“Oh, Thorin. May I kiss you?”
Thorin glanced around. “I believe we are good for a few moments.”

The kiss was sensuous, though meaningful.

Opening his eyes to look at Thorin, Bilbo said, “I love that you had the idea more than I can tell you, particularly the reasoning. I had not known you were aware I still had a few…difficulties…with the mountain from time to time. Nevertheless, I’m glad you did not do it. I have my beautiful garden up here in the open air for when I need it, but I am still close to you. I wouldn’t like to be spending nights in New Dale without you, not after we’ve been apart so long.”
“I’m glad I chose correctly, then. Though planning for you to be here was full of fun and anticipation, it also required much thought and I had more than a few internal wars about what choices might be best.”
“It is perfect so far, I can tell you that much.”

Thorin gazed into Bilbo’s eyes, watched his honey hair catch the late afternoon sunlight as it blew in the breeze, and his heart filled to bursting. He tugged him into a tighter embrace, feeling Bilbo rest his head on his shoulder. He thought about how short a time Bilbo had been back, yet how many lifetimes it seemed they had lived in less than 36 hours.

“Tell me everything. I’ll tell you when it is too much,” Bilbo had said.

That afternoon had been one of the best he had spent in a long time—absence of sex aside—and most of it had been because Thorin had either purged (or at least illuminated) so many of the things he had kept hidden inside. There was one more thing he wanted to share and shed in order to get back to making new memories instead of dwelling on old darkness.

“My love, come with me,” he said.

Back in Bilbo’s room, Thorin asked him to wait for him. Bilbo swung his feet off the side of the bed, wondering how long he was supposed to stay there. Almost as fast as Bilbo had thought it, Thorin had returned holding a bundle of papers.

“You said you wanted to know it all, as much as I could tell you,” recalled Thorin. “I wrote you every day, even after I had sent my first letter off. As time went on, that second letter became more of a diary than a missive. As I’ve told you many times, I was elated when I finally received your letter. My plan had been to send you the second one I had been working on so it could meet you in Rivendell. However, when I read back over the pages I had written from their start, they did not reflect the joy or anticipation I wanted you to feel as you headed towards me at last. You would have been too far away to do anything but worry. Therefore I wrote you a new one, which is the one you received in Rivendell. I saved the pages I wrote over those weeks, though. It seemed, odd as it may sound, like they were yours and not mine to dispose of. I thought perhaps, maybe and if the time was right, I might one day share them with you. After last night and this morning, I believe I might be ready. Though there is joy, love, and more than a little filth in these pages, you will also find the last bit of my hopelessness and despair. I want to let it go, now, so I can focus on our future…if you think you can help me lift this burden.”

As his answer, Bilbo held out his hands and Thorin rested the pages on them.

Thorin said, “I have something that needs my attention, plus I do not want to be here while you go through those. I have a feeling you would continually stop to react, or wish to discuss passages, and I would rather have you read it straight through.”

“You’re worrying me a little, but I’ll do as you say.”

“I’ll return for dinner.”

Thorin kissed him goodbye and left him alone. Bilbo carried the letter over the writing desk, lit a new candle to read by, and started on the first page.

“Dearest husband,”

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After a short search, Thorin finally found Dwalin without prying eyes about. Because Thorin didn’t want to take any chances, they still walked to his office where he locked the door, walked the
room, and checked under his desk (the front being a solid panel, making it the only real hiding spot) before leaning against it to speak.

“Have you been having Regnad observed like we discussed?” Thorin asked Dwalin.
“Aye.”
“When was your last report?”
“This morning. There was nothing unusual.”

Something unpleasant stirred in Thorin’s stomach. Was Dwalin not to be trusted, either? Or Dwalin’s spy?

“Nothing unusual? That’s interesting. When did surveillance end?”
“After the party. Wait--why did you say ‘interesting’ like that? What do you know?”
“I know he knocked on the door of my suite and made a rather untoward proposal.”
“What? When?” Demanded Dwalin, shocked and angry.
“A while after the party ended.”

Dwalin frowned deeply and fire still flashed in his eyes. “How untoward was this proposal? Were you in danger? Threatened?”
“No, no, not like that. His proposal was, um,” Thorin cleared his throat. “Carnal in nature.”
“Durin’s Bloody Axe!” swore Dwalin. “He just doesn’t let up, does he? Aside from myself, he only had a single tail on him, mostly during post-council and evening recreation hours. I believe I might need to step up my surveillance to avoid a repeat of last night.”
“That seems wise. When he left my room, he also briefly visited Kili. He wanted a word with Bilbo, though Bilbo was already in bed.”

As Dwalin studied him shrewdly, Thorin reasoned to himself that it wasn’t a complete lie. Thankfully, Dwalin let it pass without additional comment.

“We might need to reconsider my suggestion of utilizing guards for the royal hallway.”

Thorin shook his head. They had gone over this argument before and Thorin was as against it now as he had been then. They already had a considerable armed presence in the daily living areas as it was—more than his grandfather had—and Thorin did not think an increased military presence was any way to live, not for any of them.

“I acquiesced to having a pair of guards to this wing. We don’t need one for each individual passage, too.”
“Look, you have found the guard at the baths beneficial, right?”
“Right, which is all the more reason for you to leave it be. If I come to agree with you, I’ll concede just like I did with the baths. For the record, I still don’t like having the baths guarded, either, though I still believe it prudent.”
“Very well. No new guards, but definitely more eyes on him.”

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Fili ran into Thorin in the hall.

“Why aren’t you with your Mam and Kili?” Thorin asked.
“I was looking for Bo.”
“Last I saw him wasn’t too long after the meeting. When I found Bilbo, Bofur said he was going to go find Bombur.”
“Oh,” replied Fili. “If I know them, they’re probably still sitting around Bombur’s table,
thoroughly ruining their dinner.”
“I don’t know. You had all adapted quite well to the hobbit food schedule. I’m sure Bofur
wouldn’t mind a little dinner with his supper, or vice versa.”
“About that…” Fili said, shifting his weight from foot to foot. “Is there some place I can talk to
you…private?”

Thorin could not help but chuckle. His day had been full of secret meetings and revelations. This
time, though, he was fairly certain Fili wouldn’t be surprising him. Thorin led Fili back to his
office, once again locking the door.

“Bilbo told me that he told you about us,” Fili finally said. “I had thought we would tell you
together, but there had been no good time yesterday.”
“No, there wasn’t, not until he and I were alone…and you being there for that wasn’t really part of
the plan.”
Fili chuckled nervously. “No, I guess not.”
“So…”
“So…” Fili repeated.
“What does this mean for you? I know Bofur’s role, and Kili’s role has been long established. Are
you jealous or are you sanguine? What sort of conversations and soul-wrestling do we need to do in
light of this? I confess, I’m already twice out of my depth for etiquette. A third time is beyond me.”
“I guess we know whether you’re bitter, don’t we?”
Thorin hummed a wry laugh. “Wouldn’t you be a little bit bitter if you were me?”
“I don’t know.” Fili thought of Kili. “Maybe. I suppose the situation would depend.”
“Are you bitter? About Bilbo and me?”
“There was a Bilbo and you long, long before there was a Bilbo and me. Every step of my romantic
relationship with him—every flutter, every twitch—happened not only after you were with him, but
also Kili. I don’t feel possessive about him because, honestly, I have no right to be. I guess it was
different for you, Bo, and Kee because all three of you were falling for him when he was just
Bilbo, unattached, and completely unaware of the others. In a way, I suppose I’m lucky. That
doesn’t help you, though.”
“Maybe it helps a little. After all, I’ll only have to contend with my own feelings and not battle or
parry with your insecurities the way I had to with Bofur and Kili. I’ve had a little time to think
about it and—well, I’ve had a lot of time to think about it, if you count me playing through all the
different scenarios of what might have been going on in Bag End for all those weeks—but let’s
amend that to say I’ve had time to think about it since Bilbo confirmed it last night and, well, past
some initial bitterness, if I don’t have to navigate your own jealousies about it, I suppose it isn’t
much worse than what I’m already making peace with in regards to Kili and Bofur. I mean, I’m
taking another lover myself.”
“Another lover? Who?” Fili screwed his face up in confusion.
Thorin looked at him as though he had gone daft. “Kili.”
Fili took a moment to calm his heart. Because he hadn’t yet heard Thorin speak so plainly about
Kili in such terms, he truly thought Thorin meant someone else. It was going to take some
adjustment hearing Thorin call Kili his lover.

“What does this mean for you? I know Bofur’s role, and Kili’s role has been long established. Are
you jealous or are you sanguine? What sort of conversations and soul-wrestling do we need to do in
light of this? I confess, I’m already twice out of my depth for etiquette. A third time is beyond me.”
“I guess we know whether you’re bitter, don’t we?”
Thorin hummed a wry laugh. “Wouldn’t you be a little bit bitter if you were me?”
“I don’t know.” Fili thought of Kili. “Maybe. I suppose the situation would depend.”
“Are you bitter? About Bilbo and me?”
“There was a Bilbo and you long, long before there was a Bilbo and me. Every step of my romantic
relationship with him—every flutter, every twitch—happened not only after you were with him, but
also Kili. I don’t feel possessive about him because, honestly, I have no right to be. I guess it was
different for you, Bo, and Kee because all three of you were falling for him when he was just
Bilbo, unattached, and completely unaware of the others. In a way, I suppose I’m lucky. That
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adjustment hearing Thorin call Kili his lover.

“Of course. I forgot.”
“I’m surprised you could forget,” Thorin said. Fili seemed to miss any second meaning though,
because he moved on.

Fili said, “Then I suppose I don’t have much in the way to work out with you, other than
 eventual…well, I guess scheduling is one way to put it. And you are feeling some jealousy but
you’re resigned to work through it, is that a good assessment of what you are telling me?”
“Resigned…I’m not sure how much I like that word. It is an apt descriptor, but it might suit me better to think of it in less depressing terms. How about we say ‘resolved?’ I’m resolved to work through it. Ultimately, I want Bilbo happy. I want you and Kili happy, too.”

“And when does Thorin get to be happy?”

“Oh, Fili. Believe it or not, I am relatively happy now. I’ve got kin finally here to support me, I’ve got my husband back by my side, I’ve got you home, and I’ve got two lovers in my bed. The time for Bilbo and I to capture that old life I used to fantasize about is well and truly over. In its place is a life that wasn’t what I would have picked at the time, but it is still a life married to Bilbo, which makes it a good life indeed. I think it might just take time to adjust but adjust we will.”

Fili smiled, because Bilbo had more or less summarized whatever manner of epic conversation he shared with Thorin the night before as basically Thorin’s last sentence.

“If it helps, I love him,” Fili said. "I won’t hurt him, not intentionally, just as I would never hurt Bo or Kee. I’ll do my part to look out for him and look after him.”

“You speak as though I’m sending him off to war with you as his lone protector. I’m still here, you know, and so are Kili and Bofur.”

“I know. I just want to make sure you understand I’m taking this seriously.”

“I appreciate that, Fili.”

“I still love you as I ever did,” Fili said. “That hasn’t changed, either, even if our circumstances have.”

“Mahal, and have they changed!” Thorin laughed. "I have to confess, Fili, I'm riding blind with this situation most of the time. I don't know how all four of you managed a whole winter of it without breaking into a thousand pieces.”

“I can tell you, the most important thing we learned this winter was that it is best to talk through things, even if they make us feel bad—especially if they make us feel bad. That’s why I pulled you aside even though I knew Bilbo had already told you about us. Bilbo telling you doesn’t give you the chance to say whatever it is you might want to say to me about this, and I owe you that courtesy.”

“That sounds difficult.”

“It can be, and note I didn’t tell you that we always do that. I know I still don’t, especially if I can’t even explain something to myself in my own head yet. Just because we learned that it is the best thing to do doesn’t mean us fools always do what’s best. It does help, though, and for my part, I’m telling you it is okay to be honest with me.”

“Good advice, Fili. I’ll take that under advisement.”

“That sounds so official." Fili smirked, thinking ribbing Thorin a little might ease the tension in the room. "Do you suppose it is being in your office that makes you sound more regal and less like my annoying Uncle Thorin?”

“C’mere, you. Want annoying Uncle Thorin?”

Thorin snatched Fili, tugging at him and spinning him into a headlock, where he repeatedly knuckle-grazed Fili’s scalp.

“No, I don't want annoying Uncle Thorin! Quit it! You'll mess up my hair before dinner!” Fili squealed, giggling despite himself.

Laughing, Thorin shot back, “You should have thought of that before opening your smart-arsed mouth.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you everyone! I'm so glad you are here.
After their talk, Fili had continued seeking Bofur, leaving Thorin to return to Bilbo ahead of dinner as he had promised. Walking back to Bilbo's room, the thought occurred that if Fili had finished with Dís, perhaps Kili had, too. Would Bilbo keep Thorin’s letter private if Kili walked in on him reading it? Thorin found himself walking a little faster, for all the good it would do if Kili had already beat him there.

Bilbo answered the door when Thorin had tapped on it, tugging him quickly inwards and wrapping his arms around him the moment the door shut.

“Oh, Thorin!” Bilbo said, overcome with emotion.

Letting himself bask in the joy of holding Bilbo for a moment, Thorin nervously peeked around the room over Bilbo’s shoulder.

“Kili isn’t back yet?”
“No, you said Dís had run off with the lads.”
“I saw Fili along the walkway as he searched for Bofur, but neither Dís nor Kili were with him.”
“I’m not worried about Kili right now; I have no doubt he’ll be along soon. I have been waiting for you, however, and I swear the minutes have stretched into years in the doing. I finished your letter while you were gone.” Bilbo leaned back to look at him, his eyes filling with tears. “I… I don’t know what to say.”
“Simply say you love me.”
Bilbo held him close again. “I do, I do.”
“I didn’t show that letter to you to make you cry,” said Thorin, rubbing Bilbo’s back soothingly. “I know you didn’t, but it still did. There’s so much you’ve revealed since I’ve arrived that isn’t even mentioned in there, but knowing what I do now, I could sense it unfolding with every page. It made it so much better, yet so much worse.”
“I am sorry, Bilbo. I thought it would take care of anything left unsaid.”
“Don’t you dare apologize. You were right! I have a more complete picture now of everything you’ve been through. No, my love, it was so important that you allowed me to read it, which is why I wish to make a request.” Thorin leaned out of their embrace and eyed him warily. “Oh, no. What?”
Bilbo quirked a self-conscious grin, but still asked, “Will you allow me to share this with Kili?”

Rolling his eyes, Thorin began to pace. Hurriedly, Bilbo blurted out his explanation before Thorin could argue.

“I know it was difficult for you to so much as show me, but it is important Kili know, too. Honestly, I truly believe Fili and Bofur should read it, to fully comprehend and respect the sacrifice and pain you’ve been through—truly beyond our worst guesses— but I understand you might be
embarrassed. Kili, though, will you acquiesce?”

Thorin stopped pacing and regarded Bilbo’s tear-streaked cheeks and pleading, loving eyes. He had no doubt in his mind that Bilbo only wanted what was best for him and if he honestly believed it was that important, Thorin would allow it.

“Very well,” he conceded, letting out a grunt of surprise when Bilbo leapt into his arms again. “But only Kili, and solely because the three of us will be sharing a bed. I don’t need Fili or Bofur reading the obscene passages I wrote to you, and Bofur in particular already knows far much more about me than I had ever planned to confess to him—obscene or otherwise.”

“I will agree to those terms, as the more flirtatious portions were rather filthy indeed and I understand you not necessarily wanting them read by the others. As far as Bofur goes, I know he was not your first or even likely your tenth choice to have as a confidant, but I promise you he is worthy of your trust.”

“There’s a part of me that believes that, too, or I never would have told him what I have. That doesn’t make it feel much easier, though.”

“I hope you know I’m incredibly proud of you. It took a lot of strength to go through what you did, and even more courage to share with us. I may not have told you enough in the past, but I admire you. Not just love, but truly and honestly admire you.”

*****

When Kili walked in, Bilbo and Thorin were still holding each other tight.

“Oh! I probably should get in the habit of knocking first! Had you been naked or I had not been alone, someone might have gotten an eyeful,” Kili said.

“That is a good point,” Thorin said. “Perhaps we should make a policy that either we only get naked in my private chambers or only get naked in here when it is the three of us together and the main door is locked.”

Bilbo nodded in agreement before turning his attention on Kili. “What have you been up to?”

“Mam, Fee, and I ran into Daerbes and Nerithel. Mam got to talking to them and Fee decided to slip out and fetch Bo for dinner.”

“I suppose you didn’t have the same opportunity?” smirked Thorin.

“Actually, I chose to stay, though I did more listening than talking. It was somewhat fascinating, too, which is one of the reasons I didn’t take the opportunity to duck out with Fee. There’s something sort of…odd going on with Nerithel, at least in regards to how she has been with Mam. Do you know anything about it?”

Bilbo shook his head. Thorin picked an imaginary piece of lint off his sleeve and pretended Kili couldn’t possibly have been talking to him.

“Odd like how?” asked Bilbo.

“I can’t quite put my finger on it, exactly. You know how enigmatic elves can be, though. We started out initially inquiring after Nîfon, but Nerithel wound up mostly talking with Mam. She kept asking questions, some of them a little personal, and Mam was answering them--earnestly.”

Bilbo shrugged. “That sounds normal enough to me. Dís has honed her skill in diplomacy since I first met her.”

“I don’t know how to explain it, because the words were normal, but there was something in the air. I don’t know, the more I talk about it now, the less strange it seems.”

“Now that seems odd,” Bilbo said.

The conversation grew stale and faded in the space between them. Thorin spoke next, changing the subject to something that was on all their minds—and stomachs.
“I think we could probably leave for dinner now. I’m surprisingly starved.”

“Yes!” Bilbo and Kili agreed readily and merrily.

They were halfway to dinner before Bilbo remembered the letter he had left on the desk. He glanced up at Thorin, walking and chatting amiably with Kili, and decided it didn’t all have to happen that very moment. Though he thought it wise to get the rest out in the open so they could move beyond it, they had already drawn an exhausting amount of poison from Thorin in a short amount of time. Bilbo decided it might be good for Thorin to enjoy the night without introducing even more heart-wrenching business.

*****

Dinner was more private than the night before, but by no means was it a small gathering. Friends and family being welcome meant The Fourteen were present, along with their partners and dwarflings. Thodora, Chadham, Nîfon, and Rorimac attended too, as well as the elf craftsfolk, Dain, Daerbes, and Nerithel. Most unfortunately, Regnad had also been invited by both Balin and Dís.

Regnad had exhibited his more charming side during dinner with Dís and Balin, though he ignored Bilbo, Kili, Bofur, Thorin, and Fili outright—and the five of them had made no attempt of their own to engage him, either. He didn’t make any inappropriate comments, though, so it was counted amongst the others as a win.

Cheerfully swallowing a bite and stabbing into his next bit of potato, Thorin said, “Did you lads bring your fiddles?’”

“No. Bofur brought his whistle but we were afraid to try and transport the fiddles such a far distance again,” answered Kili.

Asked Thorin, “Again? Where else did you bring them?”

“We had to get them home to the Shire from Beorn’s last year,” Kili explained.

Nodding thoughtfully, Thorin said, “Oh, I hadn’t realized you had gone to the effort. I thought perhaps you had acquired them either in the Shire or perhaps when you stopped off in Rivendell.”

“No, Bilbo made arrangements with Gandalf to get the fiddles and the whistle, actually,” Kili said. Thorín’s chewing slowed. “Did he?”

Bilbo shifted uncomfortably, quite suddenly realizing that from the earliest points of interest, Thorin had gifted him jewelry, clothing, furniture, pens, paper, a garden, a shrine to his Maker, mithril, an ancestral dagger, and even soap (twice over), but Bilbo had never given him much in return. Shame colored him until the tippy points of his ears felt hot.

“Bilbo, are you okay?” Kili asked.

“Oh, yes,” covered Bilbo. “I think I put on too many layers tonight—I’m a little warmer than I’m used to is all.”

*****

An additional beer barrel was wheeled in after dinner for another party. Though he enjoyed himself, Bofur made a point of keeping an eye on who was talking to whom and ensured no one he loved stood alone and vulnerable, unwittingly serving as an obvious target for Regnad’s shams, false interest, or insults.

It fascinated Thorin to see the way the groups interacted when left on their own. Glóin, Dwalin, and Fili stood speaking to Iylthame and the other bed-crafting elves, Thodora, Chadham, Bombur’s children, Dain, and Glóin’s son were all playing some sort of singing game in the opposite end of
the hall (having been somewhat banished by Bombur for being too loud), Bombur, Dori, Dís, and Óin were off in conversation with Daerbes and Nerithel, and the list of unlikely friends went on. Balin was the only one without a regular grin on his face or laughter bubbling from his lips. Even Regnad wore his mostly plastered-on, simpering smile, though Thorin had seldom seen anything so fake in his life.

Half an hour later, the groups had shuffled members again. Thorin found himself standing with Bilbo, Fili, Kili, Dís, Rorimac, Bifur, Bofur, and—regrettably—Regnad, who had insinuated himself the moment Dís had walked over.

“Mam had us all over the mountain and back today,” Fili said.
Thorin asked, “Did she show you the special project she spearheaded with Balin?”
Before Fili could answer, Regnad said ceremoniously, “Ah, yes--The Ereborian Agglomeration of Geology And Paleontology. Pray, favor us-”
Perking up, Bilbo interrupted, “-Oh! She gave you a sneak preview of the EAGAP? My gracious! How was it?”

Thorin had to expend a tremendous effort to stifle a snort. A second one almost made him choke when Fili replied, “Oh, the EAGAP was extraordinary!”

For the next five minutes, Fili and Kili effervesced about the “EAGAP’s” unexpected history and scientific delight, so much so that Thorin finally had to step away or he was going to turn purple from holding in his laughter. When he finally returned, the conversation had moved on, though Regnad had left the group and stood (clearly fuming) against the wall several paces away.

Bilbo sneaked Thorin a wink that no one else saw but Bofur.

Eventually, that group morphed and faded into other conversations. Draining the rest of his mug, Bilbo announced his intention for another one and offered a refill for any takers.

Bofur glanced over, sizing up Regnad who was in turn eyeing Bilbo with a marked scowl on his face.

“Aye, I’ll have one if you’re filling,” he said.

As Bofur had expected, when Bilbo went for the keg, Regnad darted in his direction too. Bofur intercepted him with a firm arm around his shoulder, tugging him back towards the wall.

“Ah, Reggie! We haven’t had a chance to talk, and it is a shame because your good friend Dís happens to be a very dear friend of mine, too.”
“You don’t say?” Regnad said, distracted and glancing towards the keg.
“Absolutely. I have considerable respect and admiration for her and her lads, but of course my esteem for Fili is far from secret.”
Regnad shifted anxiously. “Um, glad to hear it.”
Bofur grinned, knowing Regnad’s window of opportunity was closing just as rapidly as Bilbo’s second mug was being filled. “Say, have you ever heard the story of how we got to know each other? It is actually rather amusing. See, we had agreed to go on this quest, some fool adventure of Thorin’s to reclaim Erebor from a bloody dragon…”

Regnad turned, looking at him as though he was daft. Before he had a chance to speak, however, Bilbo walked up holding fresh refills.

“If you’ll both excuse me,” Regnad said hastily, walking away and shaking his head.

Bilbo watched him stalk out of the room, handing Bofur his beer. “What was all that about?”
“Nothing, really,” Bofur grinned, pleased with himself. “A whole lot of nothing.”
“Your family and Thorin are all well?”
Bofur took a drink and wiped the foam from his mustache. “No, it actually was nothing—simply small talk meant to keep him from instigating trouble. I started telling him about the journey as though he had never heard about it before.”
Fixing him with a look, Bilbo said, “You didn’t.”
“I was going to begin in the Shire and see how far I could get before he scarpered.”
Bilbo tittered. “You know he’s probably off somewhere, half-seething that you took him for an idiot who hadn’t heard of the quest and the other half wondering what sort of maniac you are for taking it upon yourself to educate him.”
“I don’t know. He might be clever enough to know exactly what I was doing and seething about that instead. No matter. C’mon, let’s talk of more pleasant things before I lose you for the night.”
“Yes, Bo, about that—”
Bofur held up a hand. “-I know, but we have only been back for one sleep, tonight will make two. You’ve barely reacquainted yourself with Thorin, plus Kee hasn’t even had his turn yet. Fee and I knew it would be like this for a couple days. We four brought a lot of news, discussions, and even hang-ups with us, and it has become quite obvious that Thorin has been dealing with considerably more here in the mountain than solely being separated from his love. Though we’ve made quite an effort to do so,” Bofur stopped to hum a laugh at the understatement, “it cannot all be settled in two days.”
“There are things, though, things regarding you and me I do plan on discussing with him.”
“I know, and so you’ve said. However—and I cannot believe I’m saying this—it is too soon to start up the conversation with him about,” Bofur lowered his voice even further as his eyes darted around the room, “…us. It will be best if you give the both of you some time to let the fur settle from the revelations of the past two days before you start in on all that.”
“I agree, and I’m glad you see it, too. I didn’t want you to think I had changed my mind, or that I didn’t want to any longer. Merely considering what we will be like has me flying in a hundred directions inside, all of them wonderful. Bo, I—”
Bofur glanced around again. No one had been near, or so much as watching them, but there was only so long that would last. Bilbo couldn’t hide his love and desire for Bofur on his face in that moment, and Bofur doubted he managed to fare any better.

“-Shhh. Later, love, when we’re somewhere more private and have a couple hours at our disposal. When that happens, we’ll have leave to whisper all our fantasies and words of love.”

*****

Though some singing had broke out (despite the absence of Fili’s and Kili’s fiddles), the post-dinner conversation eventually wound down and Thorin, Bilbo, and Kili all separately itched to say their goodnights. Bilbo had forgotten that because Thorin was king, quite often his departure would hasten the end of a casual gathering such as this. In the end, all Thorin had to do was let out a couple well-placed yawns, give an excuse to Dís, and it proved not very difficult at all for Bilbo, Kili, Bofur, and Fili to also exit the party with little suspicion.

“Please get some sleep tonight, will you?” Dís said to Thorin on his way out.
“Thanks to my rather brilliant sister, I won’t have to worry about morning meetings or anything of the sort.”
“Yes, but you still should get up and get breakfast. Don’t think I haven’t noticed you losing weight since we got back from the Shire,” she fussed.
“Well, when we finally hire a hobbit crew for the kitchen, maybe I’ll fatten back up.”

Dwalin was torn between scoffing over any mention of hobbits by Thorin or enthusiastically
approving of a hobbit chef contingent in Erebor. He adored hobbit cooking almost as much as he disapproved of Thorin’s attachment to Bilbo. Thorin knew it, too, damn him—he had the audacity to wink at Dwalin before turning and going. Dwalin sighed and rolled his eyes.

*****

Upon returning to Bilbo’s and Kili’s suite, Fili addressed his brother.

“Kee, may I have a word with you--in my room?”

Kili followed him, noting with a frown that Fili had closed the door behind them.

“What is it?” Kili asked, wary.

“Nothing. I thought I might give Bo a few minutes with Bee before the two of you leave, and I knew he would not ask for privacy on his own.”

“That was nice of you.”

“Nice has nothing to do with it—I’m feeling guilty. I’m certain I’ve kissed Bee more in the last day than Bo has, then I saw them talking in the dining hall tonight and I swear, I could almost see the longing coming off him in waves. I felt as though I owed Bo some semblance of turnabout to make up for the kisses I stole.”

“Either way, it was still a thoughtful gesture.”

Fili shook his head, humming a laugh. “It is funny. Bo has been so understanding about the past couple days even though he has been in love with Bee longer than I have. He has the bigger claim, yet he has been more supportive than I have since we’ve gotten here.”

“Fee, you can’t think about things in those terms or you’ll drive yourself mad doing the measuring. You both love him. Does it matter who loved him first?”

“Did it matter for Thorin?”

“Oh, you tit,” Kili shot back, crossing his arms. “You know it did, once, but you have to admit things are a little different now.”

“So different that you didn’t feel the need to give Thorin his own night with him alone?” challenged Fili, crossing his arms as well.

“That’s not because Thorin loved him first, longest, or any of that, though. That was because Thorin and Bilbo have been apart for a long time. Thorin was indisputably due his reunion.” Kili dropped his arms and ran a hand through his hair. “Look, I’m not saying this isn’t complicated—I don’t think anyone has had a more complicated romantic situation in dwarven history—but trying to keep track of who is owed what based on length of devotion, strength of love, and so forth is only going to cause you stress and heartache. We have enough to negotiate as it is without you in your own head trying to calculate all the different variables to determine who is more deserving.”

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“What do you suppose that’s about?” Bofur said, glancing over his shoulder at the closed door. “Hopefully not another crisis,” Bilbo replied. “Or the same old crisis, more to the point.”

Bofur looked back at him, smiling. “I don’t think it is, not after last night. There was a bit of an understanding reached, I think.”

“Well, whatever it is, I’m not wasting this opportunity.”

Bilbo gently tugged Bofur down by his neck and claimed his mouth soundly. Bofur breathed in through his nose, groaning blissfully and burying his face in Bilbo’s neck for another deep inhale.

Giggling, Bilbo said, “That tickles! Bo, what has gotten into you?”

“Your scent. That soap is intoxicating,” sighed Bofur happily.

“So? You smell like this too.”

“I know! Don’t you understand?”
Bofur pushed away from him and gazed into Bilbo’s amused-though-very-confused eyes, Bilbo’s brow beginning to crease as he puzzled it out.

“You--we--smell like you did in Lake Town,” he said softly.

Bilbo’s brow furrowed deeper as he thought. The soft look of adoration laced with pain in Bofur’s eyes (coupled with a familiar, sad smile) launched him back in time. Bofur’s past confessions of how far back his love had gone floated freshly across his mind, helping Bilbo finally ken it. Just as his shorter hair reminded Thorin, Kili, and Bofur of those days, so would the scent—possibly more so.

“Bo, I…I didn’t realize it would bring up those feelings for you.”

“What ‘bring up’? Those feelings never went away. The familiarity of that smell, though—the reminder of how I had once been resigned to my unrequited love compared to what I have now… well, it makes me feel, feel, um, feel, everything, but stronger, more, or possibly just more grateful. The timing is rotten, though, because even though I’m your lover, it is still not time to take you to bed, or hardly even to kiss you. I’ve been fair desperate to kiss you, Bee.”

“You always are. I think sometimes you like that more than getting me naked.”

“Aye, but kissing you naked is even better, when I can get it.”

“And when you can’t?”

“I do this,” murmured Bofur against his mouth.

A wet, curious tongue swiped along Bilbo’s lips. He answered it with a saucy lick of his own before parting invitingly. Bofur heatedly accepted his advantage, deepening the kiss further. They held to each other, kissing wildly until Bilbo could feel himself aching—and dripping—with desire. Regardless of how much he wanted to continue, Bilbo knew they couldn’t. Bofur must have realized it as well, because the intensity on his end gradually faded. All too soon they were merely touching foreheads and panting, attempting to catch their breath.

Bofur smoothed out Bilbo’s clothes and fluffed his hair, tenderly framing a couple waves around his face. With a couple taps against his shoulder, Bofur said, “There. All straightened up. Now, go shake your king to ruin—or be shaken, if that is your preference.”

“Bo, you don’t…you don’t have to put on the brave face every time. I know it is difficult for you—and difficult for me to leave, too, you know.”

“I know I don’t, and I appreciate you saying so, but I am honestly okay with sending you to his room tonight. I would rather keep you here, of course, but as I said earlier, you’ve only had one night with him so far. Fee and I will take proper advantage of being alone together while you’re off corrupting the line of Durin.”

“Hey!” Bilbo said mock-indignantly. “Kee and Thorin have taken this corruption upon themselves, I’ll have you know.”

Bofur crossed his arms. “Right, and a certain wanton, sexy hobbit had nothing to do with them deciding—after all these decades of not so much as a single long look—to get naked and horrify the ghosts of their sires.”

Bilbo’s face fell and Bofur regretted his joke instantly.

Uncrossing his arms quickly, Bofur reached for Bilbo. “I was just having some fun, Bee. Please don’t take it to heart.”

Smiling weakly, Bilbo said, “I know, I’ve just…in truth, perhaps I’m still working through some residual guilt about forcing the four of you beyond your dwarven beliefs regarding love and sex.”

Bofur kissed him. “You didn’t force anything on us. You merely gave us something to consider, and maybe a little permission to act upon what was already in our hearts. I was in love with you and Fee well before you considered our arrangement. What I feel and have always felt for you
wasn’t even close to forced, Bee.”
“I love you, too,” Bilbo replied with a genuine grin.
“There’s that smile I adore. Now, your king is going to wonder where you are and if I know him at all, he might even start to fret you’ve changed your mind, so you’d best hurry along.”

Bilbo tapped on the door to Fili’s room.

“Kee? Fee? I don’t want to interrupt but—“

The door opened.

“No, we’re done,” Kili said, joining Bilbo and Bofur. “So, again like last night? You go over first, me after?”
“Worked well enough before,” Bilbo replied.
“Well, kiss us bye,” Fili said flirtatiously.
Bofur grinned. “I’ve already had my turn with Bee, but I wouldn’t mind a little snog off this cute brunet before he goes.”
Kili grinned back, biting his lip. “You planning on missing me too, Bo?”
“What sort of question is that, gorgeous?” drawled Bofur, tugging Kili towards him to claim his kiss.
Fili nuzzled Bilbo, murmuring, “Try to get at least a little sleep tonight, yeah?”
“Whatever for?” coquetted Bilbo.
Fili pressed into Bilbo with a promising, obscene kiss of his own. “We’ll show you tomorrow,” he whispered.

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After, Fili and Bofur retreated to their room, Kili pretended to study Bilbo’s face.

“Wonder how Thorin is going to feel about you showing up with this beard rash on your cheek from all these goodbye kisses?”
“Do you think he’ll be upset?” Bilbo said, hand rising to his face subconsciously. “Should you go first?”
“Bee, I was kidding! You’re so serious tonight. You’d better loosen up—I’ve got plans for you.”

Bilbo smiled sheepishly, thinking about the conversation he just had with Bofur.

“I’m just nervous, I guess.”
“Nervous about going to bed with Thorin? We’ve done this before, you and me, don’t know if you remember,” teased Kili.
“Oh, you. It isn’t only that. Much has happened since we got here, both wonderful and far from. I guess I’m starting to feel the weight of it.”
“None of that tonight. The far from wonderful things will still be there in the morning and you can fret about them then, if you’re still so inclined. Come on, let’s go have some fun. I’ve been thinking about this all day—I’ve missed you quite desperately, you know, and every second we stand here is one second longer before I get you undressed.”
“When you put it like that, I’ll meet you in Thorin’s bedroom in a few moments!”

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With Bilbo gone, Kili counted out the minutes as previously planned. While he waited, he packed his satchel and thought about how cute it was of Bilbo to be nervous about their evening. After all, they had done this before—erm, mostly, anyway. What was between him and Thorin had been far more hesitant and one-sided in the past, to be honest, though that was before the letters, the
promises, the distance, and however many overwrought, over-analytical conversations about the implications as they pertained to...well, pretty much all five of them. Hadn't he worked through the idea of being Thorin's lover so many times already--either sorting it for himself, getting permission from Bilbo, or confessing to Fili and Bofur?

He folded his trousers a little more slowly, giving the matter additional consideration. Joining Thorin's bed would be different this time--maybe more serious than before, and assuredly less tentative. He knew it. Of course he knew it. Hadn't he insisted as much to Fili, Bilbo, and Bofur practically a hundred times already? Which meant that what he had said to Bilbo a few minutes earlier--what he had told himself just a moment ago--wasn't true. They hadn't done this before...not like they were about to.

As he moved to secure the fastener on the bag, an epiphany struck him:

Only two doors and a few dozen paces separated him from Thorin, Bilbo, and a night of ecstasy that had the potential to change their lives.

Hands shaking quite unexpectedly, Kili had to take several calming breaths before he could finish the task. Though it was time to go, his feet stalled in place, hesitating to carry him across the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, my loves! I appreciate all your comments, support, and more <3
Intention, Part 1

Chapter Summary

Somehow, some way Kili had managed to leave his room and carry himself to Thorin’s door without fainting or losing use of his knees. A thousand thoughts, situations, scenarios, and outcomes had raced through his mind with every step through the corridor. Once outside Thorin’s suite, he had stood with his hand flat against the cool grain of the wood, eyes closed, allowing it to ground him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though Thorin had been expecting and anticipating it, the knock at his door still startled him out of his skin. Thorin paused for several moments, not moving, breathing deeply and trying to calm the sudden turmoil in his mind. Even after all the months of soul-searching, insistence, and both written and spoken affirmations, those old remaining shreds of shame over what would transpire after he answered that knock swirled inside him like so many dead leaves stirred up by a late-autumn wind.

“Thorin?” Bilbo whispered. “Are you waiting for me to answer it? I’m not sure that is the wisest idea.”

Jolted back to reality by Bilbo’s voice, Thorin looked at him. “Can you believe I’m nervous?” “Nervous or not, you can’t leave him out there all night,” Bilbo replied kindly. “However, on second thought, I can get it if you need to take a moment. I’m sure no one will see me.” “No,” Thorin said, breathing deeply and straightening his spine. “It is important that I’m the one to let him in, and not only because you might be seen.”

Bilbo nodded in solemn understanding.

Thorin answered the knock, standing aside with his arm extended in welcome when he saw it was indeed Kili on the other side. Closing the door, Thorin turned around to see Kili greeting Bilbo with an embrace and a kiss. Kili spoke softly into Bilbo’s ear and Bilbo smiled, whispering considerably longer in return. Thorin bristled with a wisp of irritation, wondering what they had to discuss that they hadn’t been able to say ten minutes prior. He had been about to remark something to that effect when Kili turned around and looked at him. The expression on Kili’s face took the smart-arse right out of him.

Kili was beautiful, of course, but that was not even half of it. Kili’s dark, soulful eyes were widened with hope and burning with desire—a strange combination that sent shivers down Thorin’s limbs. There was another element, too, something about Kili’s very presence that projected confidence and resolve. Thorin drew strength from it, his self-doubt fading more with every moment he gazed into Kili’s eyes.

The air between them crackled with possibility, everything about Kili from hair to floor sending the promise that nothing was going to be the same after that night…and that Thorin was going to love it.

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Somehow, some way Kili had managed to leave his room and carry himself to Thorin’s door without fainting or losing use of his knees. A thousand thoughts, situations, scenarios, and outcomes had raced through his mind with every step through the corridor. Once outside Thorin’s suite, he had stood with his hand flat against the cool grain of the wood, eyes closed, allowing it to ground him. Fili’s voice spoke in his mind, though whether it was a memory of some past indecision or something he freshly conjured, Kili hadn’t enough presence to recall.

“I thought you were the impetuous one, Kee. It isn’t like you to be arrested by fear, not when you already know what you want. You do know what you want, don’t you?”

Kili knocked, and it seemed to take an unusually long time to be allowed in. He was about to knock again when Thorin pulled the door open. After giving him a shy nod in greeting, Kili headed straight inside and dropped his satchel, taking Bilbo into his arms and kissing him. The contact with Bilbo made him feel better immediately—anchored, calmer, happy—just as he knew it would.

Sheepish, he whispered for Bilbo alone, “Before we start, I must admit to you I was mistaken earlier. Having been to bed with him before doesn’t mean we’ve done this before. I suppose stakes are higher this time, aren’t they?”

Bilbo’s mouth brushed his lobe as he replied, “I’ve expected an adjustment tonight, if not a full-on reckoning for this thing the two of you have danced around—with a little thrill thrown in for me here and there, of course. Do not spare too many worries for my feelings tonight. When it seems appropriate to do so, I will insinuate myself to get my own with the both of you. That is, if your realization hasn’t changed your mind. Regardless, I can see over your shoulder that he is impatiently waiting for you to do something other than share whispers with me.”

Drawing courage from Bilbo’s understanding, Kili turned around to face Thorin. The moment he looked at him, his remaining hesitation instantly disappeared. All that was left in his boots was the Kili who had wickedly fantasized about Thorin all that winter, the Kili who had wanted Thorin so badly that he had tested his own marriage to seek Bilbo’s permission, the Kili who had resolutely told his own beloved Fee that this was going to happen whether he liked it or not.

He took in the sparkling wonder painted across Thorin’s handsome face, gazing back at Kili as though he was some unexpected treasure. As the fleeting moments of silent evaluation passed between them, a heat also rose in those blue eyes, darkening them sensuously. With Thorin standing before him, waiting, wanting, the anxiety and conjecture of the prior minutes seemed altogether foolish. After all those weeks of thought, conversation, and restlessness, all he had to do was reach out and finally, blessedly, make it happen.

“I do know what I want,” he murmured.

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Kili said something, though he said it so quietly Thorin only saw his mouth move. Before he could ask, Kili closed the distance and kissed him. Moaning, Thorin immediately opened to him, sliding his own tongue against his. Kili snatched it, giving it light suction before releasing it and sliding his lips over it again. It reminded Thorin of fellatio and a loud groan escaped him at the mere thought of Kili’s mouth engulfing him like that. Seemingly encouraged by Thorin’s vocalization, Kili cupped the back of Thorin’s head, shifting to press more heavily into him, which made Thorin moan again. Kili growled in hungry response, tasting him deep.

The dead leaves of Thorin’s shame and doubt were gone, leaving only the fresh bloom of passion in their place.

By the time they parted, both of Kili’s hands were in Thorin’s hair and his eyes were wild.
“However you suppose we should proceed, I beg of you, let us then proceed,” Kili said. “I’m already so hard, I’m throbbing.”

Without comment, Thorin went to work on Kili’s trouser laces, forcing a gasp from him when he freed his erection from its confines.

“Feels so…” Kili didn’t finish the thought, pulling a long, pleasured breath in through his teeth instead.

Kili reached for Thorin’s laces next, but Thorin was already trying (and failing) to get Kili’s trousers off.

Giggling, Kili said, “Thorin, my boots are in the way.”

He inelegantly waddled over to the bed, tugging his bottoms up enough to get at his boots. Glancing over, he saw Bilbo had assumed responsibility for stripping both Thorin and himself… though they were experiencing a few awkward moments of their own because they didn’t want to stop kissing while he did it.

After nine hundred years (or so it seemed), Kili managed to free himself from his clothes. Bilbo and Thorin had made their way over, standing next to him fully naked and still quite attached at the mouth. Kili caressed Thorin’s arm tentatively and Thorin opened up the space between himself and Bilbo, turning to him with a welcoming, predatory grin. Kili grinned back but it didn’t last. As his eyes traveled down, it faded to open-mouthed incredulity. Thorin’s cock was majestically hard—and magnificently pierced.

Kili fell to his knees to get a closer look.

“Mahal’s light,” he swore reverently.
Thorin beamed, unable to contain his pride over Kili’s awed reaction. “You didn’t tell him?” he asked Bilbo.

“Oh, I told him alright. Seeing it, though. Seeing it is a whole other matter.”
“Obviously,” Thorin replied, utterly pleased.
Kili’s eyes flicked up to Thorin’s face. “May I?”
Licking his lips, Thorin replied, “Whatever you’d like.”

Reaching out, Kili smoothed a couple fingers over the jewelry, eliciting a shiver from Thorin. He encircled the shaft next, gliding loosely up and over the head to feel the difference. Thorin sighed and rested his hands on Kili’s shoulders. Kili’s lips were parted now, breathing shallowly, his heart pounding in his chest. He wanted to feel more, burned to catalog the differences of heat and texture with more than just his fingers. Still holding him, Kili splayed his other hand across Thorin’s hip and leaned in, rubbing his cheek side to side and up the length of his cock. Next, he used his nose, nuzzling along the same path again. Thorin whimpered and Kili’s eyes darted up again. Thorin was already well on his way to looking deliciously wrecked and Kili imagined he made a similar picture himself. His mouth watered.

Exhaling a long breath, Kili refocused his gaze on the thrilling, trouble-making appendage. He hadn’t planned to be so affected, yet there he was, on his knees, contemplating what he was contemplating. Fili would have an entire litter of kittens if he could see him right now—never mind what the consequence might be if Kili did what he truly wanted to do.

Kili couldn’t resist smoothing his closed lips over the ring and the silky, sensitive skin that surrounded it. A smear of arousal dripped down, wetting his mouth, and it was only then he noticed Thorin kneading his shoulders and whimpering. With his eyes closed, Kili tossed back his
head in frustration, licking the hint of Thorin’s taste from his lips.

*It isn’t breaking my promise if I don’t put my mouth around him,* he justified in his mind.

He knew it was more pedantic orc-shit than it was an acceptable excuse, but he simply *had* to analyze the feel of it with his tongue. He licked at it, flattening out to cover as much of it as he could, curiously considering the unique sensation. Thorín’s fingers dug into his shoulders and Kili knew if he didn’t stop, he was going to end up pulverizing Fili’s promise into fine powder. Groaning wistfully, Kili ran his tongue over it once more, savoring the rest of the slick at the tip, and forced himself to stand. Both Thorin and Bilbo stared at him lustfully.

“I forgot what a cruel tease you can be,” Thorin said affectionately, running his fingers across Kili’s jaw.

“It is funny you mention that word, ’tease,’” purred Kili. He picked up his satchel and withdrew coils of hithlain, striking a provocative pose with them.

Obscenely, Thorin moaned, “Oh fuck, you brought the rope.”

“I hope I won’t get Bilbo in trouble for telling tales out of turn, but I heard you had a special interest in some of our more restrictive games,” Kili said.

Thorin’s voice came out deep and hoarse. “You heard correctly.”

Kili and Bilbo had considered this ahead of time, having figured Thorin might be a little skittish to be the first one tied down and deciding it would be one of them the first time it happened—not that such a circumstance was any manner of hardship. Therefore, Kili stepped up to Thorin, pressing the coils against his chest.

“Well then,” Kili drawled. “Fancy getting a little of your own back?”

Thorin reflexively took the rope. “What? I’m doing the tying?”

“The bigger question, though, is which of us you’ll restrain first,” Kili said.

Thorin looked between them, both appearing only too eager to volunteer. He certainly had entertained fantasies of tying Bilbo down, but it was the prospect of being helpless himself—especially for Bilbo and a new lover—that turned him on most. He had wanked to it well over a dozen times. However, he could not deny the idea of doing the tying was arousing on its own merit, particularly with Kili tossed into the realm of possibility, so Thorin didn’t argue against waiting for his own turn at their mercy.

“I…I don’t know,” Thorin answered honestly.

“I think it should be Kee,” Bilbo said decisively.

Kili’s head whipped in Bilbo’s direction and he studied him, wondering how long ago Bilbo had decided this, because he knew him well enough to know it hadn’t been a snap decision.

“Hmmm, why should it be Kee?” asked Kili, waiting expectantly for an answer.

“Because, dear heart, you like a little adventure, you’re limber, this is your first night with us in Erebor, and because, if I’m not mistaken, you’re gagging for for me and Thorin to tie you up and take you to pieces.”

Thorin’s gaze, already dark with lust, hungrily set on Kili. “Is that last part true?”

“Definitely,” breathed Kili.

In a shocking move, Thorin swept Kili off his feet and deposited him onto the bed.

“In that case, let’s do a little preparation. Bend over, if you please.”

Eager to comply, Kili bowed forward, his chest on the bed and his arse in the air. He heard water
being wrung out from the basin and felt the weight of both Thorin and Bilbo join him on the bed. Hands separated his buttocks, giving him an overwhelming, shy feeling of being too exposed. He loved it. Still being held open, a surprisingly warm flannel gently brushed against his intimate skin. He glanced at the hearth, noticing a kettle. Brilliant, he said to himself. Why have we never thought of that?

As he was being bathed and dried, both his anticipation and sensitivity grew. Next he felt a warm, unmistakable slickness gliding over his entrance, and he gasped, gripping the blanket in his fists. He was being licked and, because the other lover was holding him open, he didn’t have the telltale scratch of beard (or lack thereof) to supply the identity of who was who. The person doing the licking kept it sensual and light, likely for the very purpose of anonymity. Kili grinned into the bed.

“There’s something interesting about not knowing which one of you is doing that. I think…I think I like that I can’t tell,” confessed Kili.

Thorin’s traitorous mind unlocked filthy memories of his darkest, deviant fantasies from his loneliest and most drunken nights. His arousal spiked so strongly it stole his next breath.

“Perhaps we’ll try it some time with a blindfold,” Bilbo said.

Thorin groaned involuntarily. Blindfolded, that inner deviant of his moaned along with him, just before Thorin locked him away again.

“Not tonight, though,” said Kili. “There are some things I don’t want to miss.”

Bilbo tapped his hip and Kili rolled over, watching Thorin separate out the coils. He tossed two aside and gestured Kili over towards him. He claimed his mouth briefly but intently before instructing him to sit upright on his knees in order to figure out how comfortable they were to spread.

“Reach over your head,” Thorin said.

Kili complied dutifully and Thorin stood on the bed next to him, sizing up the situation.

“What are you doing?” Bilbo asked Thorin.

“Tying him up.”

Bilbo studied the position. “Like that? How are you planning to make that happen?”

“See those slats up there?” Thorin said, pointing up to a series of wooden slats that spanned the bed horizontally over the top. “Those are for attaching ropes. Or just one rope, as this particular case might be.”

“I thought they were just for the canopy,” Bilbo said.

Kili’s eyes brightened with recognition. “Wait, we have some on our bed, too.”

“And so do Fili and Bofur,” Thorin replied.

“I thought they were for draping and decoration,” Bilbo said. ”I wouldn’t have guessed they were built in for sex games.”

“Nor would anyone else looking at them who isn’t privy to your filthy, inventive minds. To anyone else, they just like you said: support for draping fabric.”

He motioned for Kili to lower his arms and handed Bilbo the rope so he could demonstrate to Thorin best way he knew to comfortably tie wrists together. Once done, Thorin asked for Kili to put his hands over his head again. He shuffled around the back of him and set to tying the open ends of the wrist binds to the beam.

“But what about his legs?” Bilbo asked
“What about them?”
“We’ve been tying them to the bedposts.”
Thorin furrowed his brow. “Wait, how does that work?”

Kili lost the train of the conversation, distracted by Thorin standing behind him, rubbing against his skin. Bilbo stood in front of him, helping Thorin, and Kili couldn’t resist leaning forward to kiss his bare, inviting hip. As he inched closer to Bilbo’s cock, he felt Thorin’s own brush against his ear as he worked. Kili became distracted from both conversation and Bilbo’s skin as a new thought came to him: What was he going to do if Thorin presented his cock like this for mouthplay while Kili was bound? He briefly panicked. How could he keep honest with Fili without offending Thorin? How could he keep honest with himself by denying Thorin?

“Kili?” Bilbo said.

When Kili looked up, he could tell by Bilbo’s expression that hadn’t been the first time his name had been called.

“I said which do you prefer?”
“What which?”
Bilbo grunted in frustration. “Which way of tying? Do you like this or do you want to do it the other way, the way we do it at home?”
“Um, I don’t know. This way is new. Maybe we’ll try it? We can always compare it to the other way later and see which one is better.”
“He makes a delightful case,” Thorin said. “So, move your arms a bit. How is that?”
Kili had a fair amount of movement front to back and side to side with the lead. “It seems kind of…loose, doesn’t it?”
“I thought you might like it if you need to lean forward a little. You know, if you were overcome.” Thorin said, blushing a little because he had a very specific fantasy of his own in his mind when he did the measuring.
Considering it, Kili replied, “I could understand that, but I think I want to be more taut. It feels more restrictive that way.”
“How are your legs, Kee?” Bilbo asked.
“They’ll be burning tomorrow, I think, but for now they’re fine. I can spread a bit, should the occasion hopefully call for it, but I don’t have much control other than that. I don’t think they need binding in the position Thorin has invented.”

When the rope had been re-tied, Thorin returned to his knees in front of Kili and captured his lips, dipping between them for an extended, filthy taste, biting the bottom one as he retreated. Intently, he gazed into Kili’s eyes.

“There is no part of me you may not touch,” Kili murmured.

The shiver that ran the length of Thorin’s core was sinful, manifesting itself in wet arousal. He thumbed it from the tip of his cock and pressed it to Kili’s lips. Kili closed his mouth around the digit, humming enticingly.

Before Kili released his thumb, Thorin rumbled sensuously in his ear, “There’s no part of you I do not want to touch.”

He kissed down the column of Kili’s throat, lips brushing his collarbone as he mouthed across one side and back again. Returning to the exposed portion of Kili’s neck, Thorin flicked his tongue against the especially sensitive flesh where it curved towards shoulder.

“Are you ready to begin?” he whispered.
“Yes.”

Thorin’s tongue was replaced by teeth, scraping but not biting, surprising Kili with their command and the sensation they stirred. Next came the unmistakable sting of Thorin sucking a claiming mark into his neck. By the time he was finished, Kili was already breathless. Thorin’s fingertips at Kili’s chin drew his attention; Thorin stared at him with a look he had never given Kili before.

Dark and low, Thorin said, “Tonight, you are ours. Repeat it back to me.”
“Tonight, I am yours.”

Kili felt that ownership in Thorin’s hands and kisses, along with the particular strength and confidence he had long privately referred to in his own mind as “Lake Town Thorin.” He had experienced tastes of it in the past—most notably the night in Bag End when Thorin had touched him so intimately—and it had been his hope to see that version of him again. With Thorin gripping his buttocks while he licked and bit at his nipples, Kili groaned in delightful, welcome recognition.

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Bilbo had intended to move in once Kili’s bonds had been shortened, but he was arrested by what had been unfolding before him.

Thorin’s demeanor was not unfamiliar to Bilbo, though familiarity had not made it any less tantalizing. It was newer to Kili, though, and Kili’s breathlessness from experiencing Thorin like this was definitely worth watching. Thorin had surprised Kili and Bilbo both when he went from reverent touches to immediately and roughly marking Kili’s neck, and the words Thorin made him say went straight to Bilbo’s cock. When Thorin moved on to kissing down Kili’s body, Bilbo figured enough of the weighty moment had passed to jump in and get a little of his own.

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Kili watched Bilbo move, felt him lean against his back, and savored the feeling of his hands smoothing over his abdomen, down to his thighs, and back up again.

“I forgot to tell you something incredibly important I discovered last night,” Bilbo said. Kili’s voice caught when Thorin tugged one of his rings with his teeth. “W-what? What did you discover?”

“Thorin has cleverly engineered a little oil cup directly into the headboard, hidden.”

Newly slicked fingers teased in between his buttocks and Kili attempted to widen his legs. A hand stayed him at his waist.

“Don’t try to move to accommodate me,” Bilbo said. “I’ll manage just fine, and more importantly, you’ll manage, too.”

Kili sucked in a ragged breath, the anticipation from behind nearly rivaling Thorin driving him wild simply by this extended teasing of his piercings. He made a noise of desperation and Thorin paused.

“Is there something you need?” Thorin asked, irritatively smug to Kili’s mind.

“I need…” Kili searched his mind for the right way to ask. “Something more direct.”

“That’s rich coming from you, you know,” Bilbo said behind him, still teasing his entrance. “You are notorious for stringing a lover along to utter madness, sometimes for more than an hour. Here we’ve barely begun and you’re already fussing about it not being enough.”

“I know, but please—Thorin had me nearly out of my skin with that first kiss alone, and everything
we’ve done since has only furthered it.”
“Don’t hassle him so, Bilbo,” Thorin said tenderly, spreading kisses down Kili’s side. “We should be more accommodating of our guest.”
Kili grinned triumphantly, though Bilbo couldn’t see it. “See? Even your husband agrees, and—hey! I should hope I’m more than a guest.”

Glancing down, Kili’s indignant look faded when he saw Thorin on his hands and knees in front of him, roughly eye-height with his neglected prick. Thorin replied, and the velvet, sensual nature of his voice made Kili shiver.

“You are absolutely more than a guest.”

Before Kili could reply, Thorin’s mouth was on him, around him, and that odd sound in his ears were his own vocalizations of bliss and surprise. It was different than Kili had imagined this moment to be. He had thought the first time he penetrated Thorin's mouth would be more akin to some sacred rite of surrender, with Thorin so intimately allowing Kili inside. Instead, Thorin attacked Kili, going at him in such a manner that Kili did not feel as though Thorin was surrendering to him at all. It didn’t matter at all that Kili was inside Thorin’s mouth--it it was unmistakably Kili who was being taken.

Thorin was so masterful, Kili thought sure he would finish right there, but Thorin pulled off just before the point of no return. With a loud whine of annoyance, Kili’s head dropped back in frustration and he relaxed his weight, letting the rope and his arms hold him for a moment before he shifted gravity again.

As though Bilbo had been waiting for exactly that series of events, he finally pushed a single digit inside him. Kili had been so stirred up that he moaned whorishly and tried pushing back, though Bilbo was already in to the last knuckle.

“I need more,” whined Kili.
Bilbo murmured, “More what?”
“More fingers, more mouth.”

Thorin peeked around Kili, impishly catching eyes with Bilbo. Without verbal discussion, they simultaneously gave Kili both, respectively. Kili cried out affirmations, interspersed with wrecked moans of their names, and then cried out louder in disappointment when they both backed off just before the final build that would lead towards relief. He twisted, held fast by the hithlain, and his face grew pinker with the effort.

“Fuck! Please, please. Don’t stop, I’m begging you.”

Bilbo smirked. He tried to remember the last time Kili was so fraught this soon, coming up empty.

“Obviously, what we’re doing is too much for you,” he said. “Perhaps we need to diminish the intensity of our play, give you a chance to relax.”
“What? No!” Kili felt Bilbo’s presence move from behind him. “Where are you going?”

Bilbo appeared in front of him and Thorin snatched him, licking into his mouth obscenely. Bilbo’s tiny whimpers grew louder as Thorin reached down and gave him a couple strokes. He reached out, reciprocating, and the kiss grew even more passionate. Kili pouted as he watched the two of them touch each other the way he was aching to be touched.

He groused, “That’s not fair!”
“If you’re so desperate, Kee, why hasn’t the rope given way as you’ve fought against it, freeing
you to wank yourself? I think it knows what you truly want is not to come by your own hand,” Bilbo noted.

“Bloody elvish rope,” Kili muttered.

Turning from Bilbo, Thorin cupped Kili’s face and drank a deep kiss, effectively silencing his complaints for several moments. He mouthed his way from Kili’s jaw to his bicep, moving around with both lips and body.

“I used to be like you,” Thorin said behind his ear, ominous and low enough that possibly even Bilbo didn’t hear.

Kili wanted to ask how, or say something flippant like, “So you’ve said,” but something crackling between them stilled his tongue. He felt Thorin pressing to the back of him: thigh to thigh, cock to buttocks, chest to back. Thorin languorously smoothed his hands from Kili’s hips up his body and arms until his hands closed around his. Leaning into him, the voice came soft against his ear once more.

“Taking a warm lover to bed every night, scarcely a day going by without orgasm. It has been many months, though, since I’ve been you. Sometimes, I would utterly despair I’d never feel the sweet warmth of another body—the sweet warmth in another body—again.”

Kili dropped his head back, trying to see. “Thorin...” he rasped.

Thorin considered—and it was far from the first time--things Kili had once told him, how he used to fantasize about showing Thorin how good he was to Bilbo in bed. Thorin recalled their strange titillation that one night in Bag End, telling their stories about the first time they took Bilbo to bed—and how Kili seemed to get off on Thorin’s taunting just as much as he got off on taunting the king himself.

“I’ll have you know I have no intention of going unsatisfied tonight,” Thorin vowed.

Kili closed his eyes and exhaled, his middles tingling and purring with the filthy implication of Thorin’s promise. He felt Thorin’s hands slide down his hips, traveling ever so slightly inward, but not enough to give Kili the sensation he craved. Abruptly, Thorin’s heat and hands left him.

Thorin crawled around Kili, pulling Bilbo into his arms and whispering his plan into his ear. It lit a wicked gleam in Bilbo’s eyes, confirming he had a co-conspirator. Bilbo felt around for the bottle and handed it over with another lustful kiss.

Though Kili was still trying to parse what was unfolding in front of him, Bilbo’s burning glance his direction promised continued filth at the very least. And so it was--Bilbo bowed and presented his arse to both Thorin and Kili, sending another jolt of desire flying through him. Kili’s eyes widened in astonishment when Thorin set about slipping his fingers inside him in lewd preparation. Bilbo grunted, panted, and squirmed in obvious pleasure and Kili subconsciously squirmed along with him, his hips making small circles as he watched Bilbo react. With arousal oozing from him, he licked his lips.

“You could, you know, do that with him facing this way...maybe with his mouth occupied. You know you love him full at both ends,” Kili said beguilingly.

Countered Thorin, “Ah, but then you couldn’t see me stretch him open and watch how his hungry little bum swallows me up.”

Kili replied with a grumble of annoyance, though it was interrupted by Bilbo’s growl of ecstasy. It was not very long until Thorin had Bilbo rather well-conditioned. Thorin flashed a wolfish, sultry look to Kili and eased Bilbo down onto his side. He lined up behind him, hooking Bilbo’s free leg
over his arm, utterly exposing the point of entry. Kili chewed his lip, as titillated as he was irritated—it was obvious Thorin had chosen their positioning so Kili could see everything.

“You’ve got to be taking the piss, now,” complained Kili. “You’re going to fuck him and I’m supposed to what? Dangle here?”
“No, you’re supposed to watch me fuck him. Better, really—you get to watch him shake to ruin on my cock. He’s developed quite a fondness for my new adornment, you know.”
“Oh, come on!” shouted Kili.

Kili fought with his bonds again but the traitorous rope held fast. Even more perturbing than the rope was his own raging libido, responding heroically to this play of Thorin’s and Bilbo’s. Kili centered himself with a few deep breaths, attempting to channel his surface frustration with a deeper appreciation for the game itself. He wanted to come and come now, but truly he had to give an impressed nod to how well Thorin and Bilbo had wound him up so far.

Quite suddenly, Kili stopped thinking about himself entirely.

It wasn’t as though he hadn’t seen Bilbo fucked before, but there was something especially tantalizing about how exposed Bilbo and Thorin were, how helpless Kili was, and how the entire show had been deliberately set up for him to watch—it stole his breath and made him ache down to his stones. Were that not enough on its own, it was quickly obvious that Thorin had not merely been bragging about the effect of his new jewelry on his lover. Bilbo’s entire body responded to each of Thorin’s thrusts—wantonly and frantically—whining, twitching, and bucking back against him…which only started the reaction over again. Kili stared, amazed and wanting, feeling as though he was a skulking voyeur even though he was the one tied to the canopy of the bed.

The more wracked Bilbo became, the more it delighted Thorin. The newness of being able to make him keen and beg like this all on his own was nowhere near being dulled. He could tell from the strength of Bilbo’s wails that he could easily make him come without touching his prick, but he had a second part to this plan that might be more pleasurable for Bilbo—if he could hold off.

Realizing Kili had not complained in several moments, Thorin flicked his attention back to him. Kili was flushed all over, dripping arousal, and eyeing him with such lust that Thorin unexpectedly tipped over the edge, coming and coming hard. With Bilbo having not reached his apex yet, Thorin murmured in his ear, confirming their plans. It did not stop Bilbo from whimpering or writhing when Thorin left him empty.

Thorin’s head was a little light, putting him off his balance when he attempted to raise himself on his knees, but he pushed forward, claiming Kili’s mouth passionately…and leaning on him a little to steady himself from his post-orgasmic high. He clutched Kili’s head in his hands and pressed their foreheads together.

“I have no intention of leaving you unsatisfied tonight, either,” Thorin promised.

Kili saw him turn and nod at Bilbo. His confusion was short-lived, though, as Thorin uncorked the oil and slicked Kili’s cock. He shuddered and swore, gasping for breath from the surprise of it. Thorin did not stay on him, though, and—yet again—Kili found himself overly needy, strung out and under-stimulated by the tease. As before, the mattress and the body heat shifted, informing Kili that Thorin had returned to his back. In front of him, Bilbo had repositioned himself to his hands and knees. Kili licked his lips, hoping his filthy guess was correct.

“Spread yourself, burglar,” Thorin said.

Bilbo did as he was told. Kili could see his entrance, glistening and widened. He scarcely breathed,
anticipating that he might be inside it in a few moments.

Thorin spoke again. “Show him,” he commanded.

There was a flutter, then an obscene, unmistakable trail of come dripping from Bilbo, trailing down his stones.


“Fuck him with what’s left of my come inside you,” Thorin ordered Bilbo firmly. “No touching yourself, either.”

“What—” Kili’s question melted into a shout as Bilbo gripped him, lined him up, and engulfed him with his arse, seemingly all in the same instant.

With the oil still left on his hand from slicking him for Bilbo, Thorin smoothed the pad of his thumb across Kili’s hole. He couldn’t fight the satisfied grin that spread across his face when Kili threw his head back and begged, “please.”

Wanting a more forgiving slide for what he had planned, Thorin reached behind him for more oil. Leaning against Kili’s shoulders, he reached in between Kili’s legs again, this time thumbing him open fully, the pad side down for maximum pleasure. With Kili tight around him, Thorin felt the thud of Kili’s pulse against him, as well as rhythmic tremors from each of Bilbo’s undulations on the other end. There was another sensation, too—trembling, which Thorin attributed more to this erotic onslaught than he did to the actual strain on Kili’s body from being bound. The carnal delight of it was rivaled only by the noises Kili emitted in conjunction. Unable to help himself, Thorin increased his pressure at the same moment as he bit down to suck a second claiming mark into Kili’s neck. Kili’s reaction was instant and head-to-toe; it was glorious. Thorin tenderly licked over the new mark, moving his kisses up the line of Kili’s neck.

Nibbling at Kili’s ear, he murmured, “Do you like the feel of me inside you?”

“Yes,” panted Kili.

“Have you thought about this since we’ve been apart? Played through the last time in your mind?”

Somehow, it felt even dirtier for Kili to remember that not only had he replayed the memory, he had acted it out with Fili. He wasn’t ready to confess his forbidden relationship to Thorin just yet, so he sighed, “yes” in reply to that, too.

“Yes” was nearly all Kili could manage, anyhow, with Bilbo grinding on him frantically and with no control of his own over the pace or the thrust. He had Thorin in him, rubbing him expertly, and Bilbo on him, milking him at astounding speed.

“I’m-I’m not—I can’t…you’re making me…” Kili stuttered out fragments of sentences.

“I thought you said you wanted more direct stimulation?” drawled Thorin. “I thought you wanted to fuck? Or be penetrated? Bilbo and I are giving you everything you asked for.”

“You are, but—” he stopped abruptly, the rest of his argument replaced by a high, long whine. Gasping in short breaths afterwards, he puffed out, “Oh…fuck!”

Bilbo continued to move frantically, both through and well after Kili’s finish, and Kili’s orgasmic moans morphed into strained, broken wails of over-stimulation.

Utterly desperate for his orgasm, Bilbo groaned, “Almost there.”

Kili convulsed against his rope and screamed so loudly Thorin had to clap his hand over his mouth for him not to be heard halfway across the mountain. In the same instant, the hithlain released
Kili’s arms from the slat above and he used his new freedom to scramble back and out of his lover. Bilbo let out a morose wail, rolling over on his back. Shaking off his restraints, Kili dove for him, bringing him off with his mouth in moments.

As Bilbo came back to himself—a slow process, considering he had two bonds rushing through him, making him feel a little intoxicated—he studied the situation and his expression grew grave.

“Did I make you untie yourself?”
“It is okay,” Kili assured him. “That’s why we use the hithlain, right? I couldn’t take the sensation anymore. It was too intense, even for me.”
“I should have—“
Kili shook his head and silenced him with a gentle kiss. “Please, don’t. You were pretty far gone and it happened fast. I hated to do it, though, which is why I finished you.”

Landing on the bed next to them, Thorin rubbed Kili’s shoulders. “How do your arms feel?”
“A little sore, but I’ll be okay. I probably won’t be up for either sword or bow for a day or two, though,” Kili joked.

“Or being tied up again, at least not until the soreness goes away,” Bilbo added.

Kili grinned lasciviously. “That’s not a problem. There are other people to tie in this bed, and plenty to do even if we had left the rope behind.”
Kissing Kili’s shoulder, Thorin said, “That is very true.”

“Speaking of which, let us know when you’ve caught your breath enough for your turn with the rope, Bee.”
Thorin sat up. “Wait, you mean now?”

“Well,” Kili shifted to look at him. “That is, unless you were ready to go to bed for the night? I mean, for actual sleeping?”

Thorin considered a second round of play. The first one had been profound. A second one would doubtless be even more intense, given that his darling Bilbo would be the subject of it. His cock twitched from the image in his head alone and he figured between the tying and the teasing, they would all have enough time to recover enough to get off again. As for the loss of sleep, he had spent many sleepless nights in that same bed for much less worthwhile and thrilling reasons.

Thorin smiled broadly. “No, I think tying Bilbo up is the second most brilliant idea the two of you have had this evening.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone!
Thorin's first evening with Kili and Bilbo in the royal bed continues.

Though Bilbo was a touch dizzy—still a little intoxicated by being marked by Kili and Thorin in such rapid succession—a single orgasm of his own after a day of anticipation was hardly enough to count him out. He was quite pliable and rather agreeable to being the subject of the next game.

His session had been different than Kili’s—and undeniably more leisurely. He had supposed it was due to them all having already gotten off once that evening, though nothing about it warranted complaint. Bilbo hadn’t kept track of the actual time passing, but it felt as though Thorin and Kili had spent ages simply pressed against him—kissing, caressing, and worshiping.

At some point, Thorin had stood, holding his prick in a way that suggested Bilbo should open for him. Thoughtfully keeping his hand at the base so Bilbo would not choke, Thorin took what he wanted from Bilbo’s hot, slick mouth, stopping short of actually finishing.

Kili had watched with curiosity as Thorin rose and fed Bilbo his cock. He wondered to himself why Thorin hadn’t pressed his advantage on Kili like that when he was similarly bound.

Eventually, Thorin and Kili escalated their play, taking Thorin’s good idea from Kili’s session and upping the ante for Bilbo, since they were both bonded to him. They took turns, having Bilbo as well as being had, working in tandem to make sure Bilbo did not finish until they were ready…and they both showed noble (or damndable, according to Bilbo) restraint in controlling themselves, too.

The last time through, Kili had been at Bilbo’s back, thrusting into him, and Thorin had been in front of him, arse wrapped around Bilbo’s prick.

“Please, let me come,” a wracked Bilbo begged. “I need to!”

“I think I need to come, too,” Kili added.

In apparent response, Kili felt the strokes from Thorin’s side coming faster. Bilbo guessed it, too, elatedly shouting, “Yes!” Moments later, his moans were punctuated with giddy, grateful laughter as he came. Kili’s orgasm arrived immediately after.

When the joyful, filthy cacophony behind him waned, Thorin moved off Bilbo and turned around. He could see Kili had already eased back and off, rubbing the tired muscles in his thighs. Though Bilbo wore signs of fatigue, he seemed to be waiting for Thorin’s next instruction before he broke his restraints.

Thorin kissed him, running his hands up Bilbo’s arms and circling his wrists.

Against Bilbo’s lips, he murmured, “Release the rope from the bed, but do not unbind or shake it off yourself.”
Bilbo gazed up at him through his lashes, gave a tug, and lowered his arms.

Nuzzling his face, Thorin meaningfully asked, “May I finish inside you?”
“Yes,” whispered Bilbo.
“On your stomach then, please, arms over your head.”

Bilbo stretched out as he was asked. Thorin joined him immediately, and Bilbo felt him push in—thankfully, with slickness renewed. Thorin’s prick dragged across his gland, swollen and sensitive from all the evening’s attention, pulling both a shudder and a whimper from him. Thorin shifted above, draping over him and holding him down where his wrists were still wrapped together over his head. Thorin began to move, slowly at first, but increasing to a punishing pace as he chased his pleasure. Every stroke rubbed Bilbo ruthlessly, reducing him to a quivering mess. At the very moment he thought he might not be able to endure it any longer, he came sobbing into the blanket.

It had been taking Thorin a frustratingly long time to come, even though he had wanted to desperately. He was hard enough, but Bilbo—who had just come—unbelievably managed to beat him to it a second time. Saving Thorin from embarrassment, Bilbo’s fluttering around him and his muffled, frenzied cries into the bed were exactly what Thorin needed. He surged forward, finally spilling inside his still-pulsing lover. Thorin rolled off him, gently unwinding his wrists and nudging him over on his back.

Cradling his face, he asked, “My love, was that too much? Are you okay?”
Grinning goofily and taking a moment for his eyes to focus on Thorin’s, Bilbo giggled, “I believe that would be a vast understatement. Wait, understatement? I meant understatement. On both counts.”
Kili, who had been watching the drama unfold, joined them at Bilbo’s other side. “Oh, look! He’s love-drunk again.”
“Do you suppose?” Thorin asked.
Kili said, “Well, this is the second time tonight he has received us so. I would say—especially given that we did not bring any wine or ale back with us tonight—the rush of two pairs of bonds in his blood in such a short period of time is the most likely explanation for it.”
“Pffft,” Bilbo said, flapping his hand out and sliding down Kili’s face. “Love-drunk. More like come-drunk, if you ask me.”

Bilbo looked up at Kili, but Kili could tell he wasn’t actually focusing on his face. Bilbo yawned and moved to cuddle into him, presumably for a sleep. Kili glanced at Thorin, eyebrows raised in amusement.

“I’m glad we’ve at least seen this before, otherwise I would be a fair piece more concerned.” Thorin agreed. “Regardless, games seem pretty well done for the night. Let’s put ourselves back together and get him tucked in.”

Bilbo was seen to first, eventually settling in the middle of Thorin’s bed. Once cleaned up himself, Kili climbed in next to him. Thorin took a few extra moments to tend the hearth, by which time Bilbo was already softly snoring.

“No, leave the candles for a bit,” Kili said when Thorin went to blow them out. “Come here, stretch out next to me for a few moments. There’s plenty of room, you know.”
“I do know,” Thorin said, climbing in next to Kili. “These mattresses were made to my specifications if you will remember.”
“So…” said Kili, leading.
“So?” Thorin repeated.
“It was you, wasn’t it?”
Thorin raised his eyebrows in question. “What was me?”
“You were the one who tongued my arse, weren’t you?”

Bodies still touching, Thorin rolled on his side to face Kili, rested his head on his hand, and smiled.

“Maybe.”
“Maybe?” replied Kili.
“Wouldn’t have been entirely the first time, if you recall. Do you like thinking it was me?”
“Oh, yes.”

Thorin smiled wider and Kili could have sworn he was blushing.

“I liked it, too,” Thorin said. “I’d…I’d like to do it again. Longer next time.”
“Definitely longer.”
“Okay, well now that you’ve coaxed out my secret, can I ask you something?”
“Hmm…perhaps.”
“When we had you tied and moaning, I could have sworn at one point I heard you murmur, ‘Lake Town.’”

Kili’s face heated with embarrassment. “I said ‘Lake Town’ out loud?”

Shrugging, Thorin said, “It was more of a breathy sigh, I suppose, but it sounded a lot like that.”
Kili put his hands over his eyes. “How is it that we can do everything we’ve done tonight, but something so small can make me bashful?”
“You don’t have to explain it if you don’t want to.”

Kili scrubbed his hands down his face. “No, there’s no point being shy about it. It is you. You’re Lake Town.”
“How do you mean?”

“There was a demeanor you had back in Lake Town, back before you were challenged—not only for your suit for Bilbo, but before the worst trials of re-taking Erebor had come to pass, before the gold sickness. When I fought with the ghost of you during my own courting with Bilbo, I always felt like it was that version of you that was my greatest rival in bed. Based on what I knew of you back then along with Bilbo’s own breathtaking recollection, I had envisioned you a powerhouse, sensual and assured, commanding Bilbo’s heart and pleasure with every stroke. When things…changed for us, when I had the opportunity to be your lover, I had hoped perhaps that Thorin might take me to bed, too. I met him briefly in Bag End, but then he was gone for the winter. I felt him tonight, perhaps truly felt him for the first time, and it must have been then that I let something slip.”

Thorin used his free hand to toy with one of Kili’s. “You say he is me, yet you talk about this Lake Town Thorin as though we were not the same person. I’ll confess, I might feel a little jealous of him.”

“He is you, but you are not solely him. There are other aspects of you I enjoy, and some I’ve not yet met…though I’m quite eager to do so. I didn’t realize I had said anything at all—I must have been quite far gone.”

Lightheartedly, Thorin teased, “Still, if you’re going to blissfully sigh a name, I’d rather you use mine and not this Lake Town fellow’s.”

“Noted,” replied Kili with a grin.
“Tell me about these other aspects you’re eager to meet.”

After all they had experienced already that evening, Kili was not certain he had enough emotional fortitude left to get into his other fantasies—or how much Thorin would be ready to discuss regarding them.

His smile softened and he said, “Those are conversations best saved for another time.”
“Hmmm, I don’t know. This swelling erection of yours says you’re enjoying this conversation,
despite your shyness.”
“I enjoy thinking about what happened to me tonight. You were both incredible. The two of you
together, not only as a couple in your own right, but also in the way you play off each other when
I’m between you…” Kili trailed off, closing his eyes and wrapping his fingers around his cock.

Thorin stretched to reach the secret door in the headboard, sparing a glance to see if Bilbo was
awakened by their conversation—or interested in joining. Bilbo’s breathing stayed deep and his eyes
remained shut, the events of his night acting on him like sleeping herbs.

With a gentle nudge, Thorin’s slick hand replaced Kili’s around his shaft. “Go on. Tell me about
it.”

Lifting his arms over his head to capture some of the memory of earlier that evening, Kili exhaled
shakily and fought a moan.

“You two are so intuitive, and you’re so incredibly open to each other’s ideas. I would see one of
you glance over my shoulder and then wordless, a plan would be formed—a plan designed to tease
me or bring me some manner of ecstasy.”

Kili’s words came with more difficulty as Thorin worked him, but he wet his lips and continued.

“And the two of you together! There was a reason I was jealous of you for many weeks into my
relationship with him—because his body craves you, just as yours craves his. Only now, things
have changed, evolved, deepened…whatever you want to call it, he kisses and touches you like he
needs you to live, and the way he was squirming on you—fuck.”

Cupping his hand over his mouth, Kili’s glance darted over to Bilbo who, somehow, was still
sleeping soundly.

Thorin leaned over him, stroking with purpose. “I could have said everything you just said about
the two of you, too. Mahal’s light! And since you’ve shared your secret about my Lake Town alter
ego with me, let me share another something with you.”

Kili groaned into his hand as Thorin fixed him with a smoldering look. Voice dangerous and low,
Thorin confessed.

“I am most anxious for the two of you to let go this idea that I’m some rabbitish creature in danger
doing spooking and instead turn your attention to me like I’m on equal footing with you. I want you to
do to me as you would to each other and as you allow me to do to you. Tie me up or not, but surely
climb all over me as you please. Invade me with pleasure, make me cry out until I’m hoarse, make
me beg for release, and then devise some brilliant way to make me come.”

Kili couldn’t take it any longer, especially with Thorin essentially describing the very fantasy Kili
had once admitted to Bofur. The images of a willingly vulnerable Thorin open to Kili’s whim—
described in Thorin’s own arousing voice as he stroked Kili—shot him straight to his peak.
Clapping both hands over his mouth, he squeezed his eyes and shook through the pulses.

Watching Kili, feeling him come in his hand and imagining that perhaps Thorin’s admission had
helped push him there—to say nothing of the thrill of confession and the fantasy itself—churned
Thorin up inside with desire and want. From chest to hip, his core fluttered and flexed with the
sheer filth of it all…yet his cock could only muster to partial thickness. He had already finished
twice (the second time taking considerable effort) and did not have the third one in him that Kili
did—or that Bilbo had. He frowned at his anatomy, muttering at it in his mind for not keeping up,
as it were.
Thorin lifted his hand, gently rubbing one of his come-smeared fingers against Kili’s lips. Kili wrapped his mouth around it, holding Thorin’s gaze while provocatively sucking it clean.

Softly groaning, Thorin whispered. “Oh, you are an enticing menace.”
“You think so?” flirted Kili.
“Your mouth makes me think wicked, wicked thoughts when you use it like that. Know that I’m merely appreciating it, though. Your restrictions are your choice and prerogative and I will endeavor to avoid pressuring you to break them.”
Kili exhaled in both surprise and relief. “You know I’m hesitant to…do that?”
“I remember,” Thorin corrected him. “From before. Because you made no move to put your mouth on me, even when you came so close to it earlier, I surmised quickly that our changing relationship perhaps hadn’t changed in all ways.”
“Thorin-” Kili began.
“-You didn’t have to explain back then and you don’t have to now. After the other things you’ve allowed me to do, I doubt whatever holds you back has to do with me personally.”

Kili looked into his eyes, silent. It did have to do with Thorin, but not for Kili’s part.

Thorin quirked a smile. “Though if it should ever change for you, you won’t have to seek my permission. I grant you full privileges where that is concerned.”

Somehow, Thorin’s understanding and respect for his wishes made Kili feel worse, not better. He hated denying Thorin an experience he so badly wanted to give him. However, he hated hurting Fili more. Something else Thorin had mentioned had intrigued him, though, so Kili shifted the subject to something that would hopefully turn out more pleasant.

“I…I didn’t realize you knew Bilbo and I were being careful with you,” he said.
“Have a little faith that I do have eyes and a mind behind them. I know how he behaves with me alone, and I know how you two are with each other, and it is clear you’re both far more mindful with me when it is the three of us, especially when it comes to new things. I appreciate the consideration behind it, and I can even understand how it was once warranted, but things are different now. I’m different now, and it is time to let that former impression of me go.”
“We were trying not to overwhelm you, though we didn’t realize it would be such an obvious difference to you. You’re right, however. Where once you merely tolerated this odd arrangement Bilbo proposed for the three of us, I believe now that you truly want it. You are different, and the way we behave with you should start reflecting that.”

They shared a soft, understanding smile…broken by an enormous yawn from Kili. Taking the cue, Thorin got up to extinguish the candles, leaving the room only minutely illuminated by the hearth.

“Would you trade me places?” he asked Kili when he returned to bed. “From where I was a moment ago, I mean. Let me be the one between you and Bilbo.”

Kili didn’t question it and simply complied with the request. Once Kili situated himself again, he was surprised to feel Thorin’s arm wrap around his middle and pull him closer.

*****

Long after the smell of candle smoke had diminished, Thorin was still sorting his thoughts. Leaning against Bilbo with his arm around Kili, Thorin luxuriated in the reassuring sensation of being bracketed by his lovers.

“What?” Kili asked, somewhat startling Thorin.
“I didn’t say anything,” Thorin whispered, puzzled. “In fact, I thought you were long since asleep.”
“You huffed out a telling breath.”
"A telling breath? Durin’s beard, can’t a dwarf just breathe? You’ve developed your brother’s suspicion, I see.”

Kili rolled over and peered at Thorin skeptically in the dim. Thorin sighed, more exasperated this time.

“Very well. I just--I’ve been realizing over the past couple days how touch-starved I’ve been. I mean, I’ve obviously done without naked bedmates,” Thorin gave him a little squeeze for emphasis, “all these weeks, but in general, I didn’t realize how much I’ve needed…”
“Please go on,” Kili said when Thorin trailed off. "I won’t laugh."
“Since you’ve arrived, I’ve had numerous hugs, pats on my shoulders, gentle rubs on my back, my hands held—not necessarily sexual in nature, though I’ve certainly appreciated the more erotic touches as well. Your being cuddled into me with Bilbo’s warmth behind me is especially soothing, and it brought all the rest back to my mind again. My ‘telling breath,’ as you said, was really more of a contented sigh.”

Kili shifted again, maintaining contact while propping up on an elbow to face Thorin more comfortably.

“I knew it had been bad for you, but has it truly been so bad that no one has given you any scrap comfort at all?”
“Your Mam still hugs me, I suppose, but it isn’t like it was ever a daily occurrence, not even in Ered Luin. Balin and Dwalin, well, we used to have easier relationships with each other. I don’t think I realized how much amiable contact there always had been between us until things changed. Dain still occasionally gives me what he likes to call ‘the old noggin,’ but other than Dís, that’s mostly it.”
“Well, that is a shame. It is a good thing the four of us are here now to remedy it, then.”

Thorin’s brow furrowed as he counted in his head, realizing after a moment that Kili included Bofur, too. He didn’t bother making the argument to correct him. It had been too nice of a night and Kili felt too right pressed against him.

“Remedy what?” Bilbo asked, finally waking up and rolling over to snuggle into Thorin’s back. Smoothly, in case Thorin might be embarrassed, Kili replied, “Thorin was just sharing with me how soothing he has found our visit so far.”
“Oh?” Bilbo yawned. “I’m glad.”

Thorin breathed a soft, happy sound as Bilbo hugged and pressed against him a little more. Kili went back to being tucked into his chest and Thorin found himself surrounded by warmth and affection.

“I’m glad, too,” Thorin said.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed these two chapters of smuts before we go back to a little plot (and then some more smuts, because yeah).
Thank you, everyone! I appreciate you!
Deeper Understanding

Chapter Summary

Bilbo stopped short, his eyes focusing past Thorin. Inwardly commending himself for not dropping the instrument he carried outright, Bilbo lowered it to the floor.

“My love?” asked Thorin.
“I—” Bilbo’s voice broke unexpectedly. “I know this place. I mean, it has changed, but that bit of wall, the carvings there, the way this arch rises…”

Echoes of the past played through Bilbo’s mind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The morning knock awoke Thorin, Bilbo, and Kili, though Bilbo had prepared Kili for it better than Thorin had thought to prepare Bilbo for it the day prior.

So they wouldn’t arrive to breakfast reeking of the remnants of last night’s sex, Thorin heated some water in the kettle for a more thorough wash than the hasty wipe-down they had done before bed. Bilbo had insisted they each do their own grooming, lest they wind up making a new erotic mess to clean.

“You’re no fun,” Kili mock-pouted.
Bilbo shot back, “Now you know that is a lie.”

Thorin laughed at their banter, his smile lingering as he dressed. The last two mornings had been so easy and joyful; he didn’t know the last time he had felt this truly happy.

Bilbo said to Thorin, “I guess we probably shouldn’t arrive to breakfast with you?”
Thorin considered it. “Possibly someday soon it won’t be noticed, once the people who are waiting for the boot to drop between us get bored and move on. You’ve still only just arrived, though, and I’m sure folks are watching.”
“Like Dís and Dwalin,” surmised Bilbo.
Thorin cocked his head in resignation. “Especially the two of them.”
“It is okay,” Kili says. “This way, we can stop by to get Fee and Bo. Not only will it make the two of them happy, it will might also add another layer of plausibility that we didn’t spend last night doing what we were actually doing.”
“I’ll meet you at the table, then,” Thorin said.

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On the walk back to their suite, Bilbo considered the best way to introduce Thorin’s private letter to Kili. Ultimately, he simply handed it to Kili as soon as they walked in the door. He explained its significance and made note of Thorin’s request to keep it between the three of them. Kili tucked it
away, promising to read it as soon as he had enough time alone to comply with Thorin’s privacy request.

Bofur called from the other room. “I hear voices. I’m assuming you’re back?”
“Yes,” Bilbo answered. “Are you two up and about?”
Bofur popped into the room with Fili following behind. “Up, about, and unfortunately quite clothed.”
“Hmm…does that mean I don’t get a kiss?” flirted Bilbo.
“You’ll get a kiss, you will, just not the rest of what I want to give you before breakfast.”

Bofur swept him into an embrace obscene enough to promise, but too short to satisfy. When they broke, Bofur noticed Fili and Kili looking at each other with a rare, unsettling awkwardness.

“Ah, Bee? Let’s go warm ourselves up a couple chairs. Fee, Kee, you’ll catch up, right?”
Fili glanced at him. “Yeah. We will catch up.”
“Don’t take too long, else there will not be enough sausage left for the two of you to fight over,” Bilbo said, kissing each of them sweetly on his way out the door.

Fili turned his attention back to Kili. He schooled his expression and tried to speak with a casual tone.

“So, did you have a good evening?”
“Fee…” Kili said.
“Look, you said we have to find a way to work through this. If you were spending the night with Bilbo alone, I would still have asked because that’s what we do. If I’m trying to act natural about this, then asking if you had a good night is what I would do.”
“It was…” Kili couldn’t stop the ridiculously large, giddy smile that spread across his face when he truly thought about it.
“Okay, that’s enough being natural for today, I think,” replied Fili abruptly. “Your expression says it all and then some.”
“Seriously? But you just said-”
“Politely asking if you had a good time is one thing, but let me work up to you describing how incredible he is in bed, okay?”
“Ugh. Fine,” Kili said. He rolled his eyes and reached for the door.
“Did you let him-“
Kili turned around, shouting, “Durin’s bloody axe, Fee! Which is it? Either you don’t want to know or you do!”
“I’m sorry! I’m only—look, I don’t want details, but I was wondering if you had…” he trailed off.
Sighing exasperatedly, Kili asked, “Had what?”

Kili noticed Fili wouldn’t look at him and—though his face was more towards the floor—what he could see of the look on it could only be described as pain. Suddenly worried, he tempered his annoyance.

“C’mon Fee. You’ve gotten this far. I won’t yell again, okay? If I had what?”
Fili’s reply was scarcely above a whisper. “The thing I talked about at Beorn’s. My game. If you had played my game with him.”
“Oh, Fee. Didn’t I tell you I was waiting to do that?”

When Fili spoke next, the anguish in his voice squeezed Kili’s heart.

“Yes. You said you were waiting for Bilbo to be there and he was.”
“Come here, you grand fool.” Kili pulled him close. “I didn’t do anything with him I haven’t done with you—and there are things I do with you that I did not do with him, just like I promised,
okay?”
Fili swallowed and nodded. “Okay.”
“You’re right, I told you I was waiting for Bilbo before I played your game, but you must have
missed my broader point: I’m waiting for Bilbo and you before I do that…and Fee?”
Kili leaned back enough to look into Fili’s eyes.
“It won’t be a game when we do it. Not even close.”

*****

Thorin should have known a day without his usual council responsibilities did not mean it was a
day to lounge around with his long-awaited visitors as he pleased. Bilbo, Fili, and Kili were sought
after by other people who had missed them, too. For his part, Bilbo felt compelled to see after his
fellow hobbits as well, checking in regularly to make sure they felt safe and happy. Though Ori
and Bifur were also quite invested in such matters for their lovers themselves, Thorin admired and
respected Bilbo’s wish to do his own assessing. Of all people, he knew best how a hobbit new to
the mountain might feel.

Reluctantly, Thorin separated from Bilbo, Fili, and Kili while they were pulled in various
directions after breakfast. He had whispered his wishes in Bilbo’s ear for a meet-up before lunch if
they could manage it, though a glare from Dwalin made the conversation particularly brief.

*****

Kili found some time to sneak back to his suite by himself, his curiosity about Thorin’s letter
having quickly gotten the better of him. He flopped across the blanket, absorbing the pages. Bilbo
had been right—the letter was immensely personal, though also significant and insightful for
anyone who cared for him. It made him all the sadder that Thorin didn’t want Fili or Bofur to read
it.

Kili had read over halfway through it when a knock scared him out of his skin.
“Kili? Are you in there?” Dwalin’s voice called.
Leaving the letter on the bed, Kili answered the door. “At your service, Mister Dwalin.”
Dwalin’s lips twitched in a hint of a smile, which he quickly minded. Crossing his arms, he said,
“Have you forgotten your Mam had plans for you today?”
Kili’s eyes widened. “Shit! The tailor! I completely forgot!”
“She and Fili have been waiting for you for at least a quarter of an hour. Come on, before she add
some rubies to the tips of your ears and wears them for a brooch.”

*****

Bilbo discovered Thorin at the Grand Overlook, which was the first place he had looked.

“Here you are!” he said happily.
“Yes, I saw you leave Bifur and Rorimac and hoped I might be the next person on your list. If you
hadn’t found me, I figured it would still be nice to get up here and take in some of the spring air as
the season grows warmer. I had hoped, though.”
Bilbo glanced around. “Is it safe to sneak a little affection?”
“Please do,” murmured Thorin, leaning down to taste Bilbo’s lips. “So, where are the lads right
now if they aren’t with you? Dís mentioned something about their wedding garb.”
“Last I heard, your sister and Dwalin were rounding up Fili and Kili for exactly that.”
“And Bofur?”
“He was going to see Bombur, most recently. Bifur and Rorimac were talking about also having a
visit with Bombur when I found them, though I sought you out instead of continuing on…”
Something caught Bilbo’s eye, distracting him. He walked over to Yavanna’s shrine, noting there were indeed seeds and a few dried cherries laid out.

Concerned, Bilbo said, “Thorin, who else frequents this overlook who would know what this sculpture is? We didn’t come up here yesterday and there’s no way this food would have lasted two days.”

“Oh, I brought the food. I almost always bring something for the shrine when I visit, and I try to make time to visit every day now that it is nice out. Like I said, I like spending time here…and the birds seem to enjoy the snacks.”

Blinking in disbelief, Bilbo said, “You leave your own offerings for Yavanna?”

“Stop looking at me like that. It truly isn’t that odd of a stretch if you think about it. She favors my husband and I like to repay that kindness. After all, it is she in part who helped grant your longer life.”

“I had no idea you did this,” breathed Bilbo.

Thorin kissed him soundly. “Well, now you do.”

Holding him as long as he dared, eventually Thorin reluctantly released Bilbo.

“What are your other plans today?” he asked.

“Before lunch, not much of anything. After lunch, I thought about seeing if Ori would want to visit the library with me. I’m sure he has missed it, and I would like to nose around a bit.”

“We’ve not had many people working on it since Ori left—at least, not like he did. To be fair, he had accomplished a lot before he left for the wedding. I’m not sure what will come of it in the long-term now that Ori has relocated.”

“Do we know for sure he has fully relocated?” Bilbo asked.

“Unless Chadham and Thodora develop a sudden need to live in Erebor, I think we can safely say Erebor has lost her Head Librarian.”

“Has he spoken to you about making the move official?”

“Not specifically about that, but it is written all over him. Ori has chosen his mates, and your kinsfolk have chosen theirs. In fact, if there hasn’t already been a wedding, I predict there will be. I’d bet my boots on it. I can’t imagine Ori would suffer being parted from them, especially not for a job.”

Thorin’s conclusion about Ori made Bilbo uncomfortably self-conscious. It was not the proper time or place to have a discussion about their own future, though, so he shifted back to the original subject.

“And you?” he asked. "What shall you do with this freedom from the council today?”

“Since you have no plans before lunch, maybe you’d like to visit the treasury with me?”

“Treasury?” Bilbo repeated, disconcerted. “Are you sure? I mean, is it safe for you? Being around all that gold again?”

“I’ve done it since the battle, though admittedly rarely. In addition to worrying about the sickness seeping in again, the treasury has always reminded me of how I had lost you…and the terrible things I did and said in pursuit of the Arkenstone. However, I remembered we had once found harps which would be nice to give to Fili and Kili since they are here without their fiddles. Going to look for them with you especially might prove to exorcise some of the past darkness I associate with the treasury. If it helps you to know, I haven’t had any issues since the battle.”

Bilbo could not especially argue, and so they went. Bilbo was hyper-aware that he was walking with Thorin alone the full distance, though Thorin chatted amiably and ignored any potential for scandal. No one they passed seemed to glace at them twice, anyhow, and even the guard at the treasury door allowed them entry with nothing more than a “good morning.”
Looking Thorin over nervously as they walked through those first sections, Bilbo cleared his throat and asked, “Where is the Arkenstone now?”

“Though it is a beauty and stands as an heirloom, as I had proclaimed, the remaining members of the Fourteen and I decided in one of the very first council meetings after you departed that it would no longer be displayed, lest it work its shining enchantment and corrupt me again…or anyone else, for that matter.”

“You mentioned as much before, but I mean where is it?”

“Put away. Myself, Dwalin, and Glóin know the location, should the need arise, but no one else.”

“Wow, not even Balin?”

“You know, it is funny,” Thorin said, scratching his beard. “I had a firm feeling that he didn’t need to be involved in it—not that he even argued, mind. Looking back, I wonder if that hadn’t been intuition of things to transpire…and I also wonder where in the bloody Void that intuition went about other things that I wish hadn’t come to pass since then!”

Bilbo giggled in spite of himself.

“It is okay. I’ve learned sometimes we have to laugh, even if it is to keep from crying. Besides, it is much better and easier to laugh with you.”

Taking it in as they strolled, Bilbo noted there had been few changes to the vastness of the treasury or its enormous piles since he had seen it last. Whatever payments Thorin had made out of it had scarcely made a dent, and—contrary to Thorin’s way of thinking when they first arrived in Erebor—there obviously hadn’t been much of a priority made to organize it since. Nor should there have been, Bilbo thought, given so many more practical issues that could take precedence over organizing piles of gold. He felt a tap on his shoulder.

Pointing, Thorin said, “I want to show you something. That statue over there is—”

“—your Maker.” Bilbo finished softly, climbing over the smaller mound between them and the figure. He walked up to it and reached out with reverent fingers, lightly caressing it in astonishment. “It looks just like him.”

“This statue was carved long before even my grandfather’s grandfather’s grandfather was born—possibly by someone with the old memories, or maybe by someone who had a vision like you and Kili. I couldn't rightly tell you which, though. The artist's signature is not visible anywhere easily seen, and their name is otherwise lost to history.”

“Do you leave offerings?”

In response, Thorin pointedly glanced around with eyebrows raised.

Bilbo smiled, sheepish. “I suppose there isn’t much one could leave that he doesn’t already preside over,” he conceded.

“I reached the same conclusion the last time I was here, so I cleaned off his feet so he could be fully visible instead.”

“That is as good an offering as any, and maybe even the best one.”

As Thorin led them on, they passed the secret corridor where the dwarves had made their first return to Erebor…and where Bilbo himself had twice crept down to face Smaug. A shiver went through him at the memory. It was vividly fresh, yet it seemed like a lifetime ago.

Walking only a little further, they reached the area where Thorin had last remembered seeing the harps. Now deep into the hall and quite far from the door, neither of them fretted as much about what they said or how loud they said it.

“While I’m looking, you’re welcome to gather things to bring back,” Thorin said. “I’d like you to pick out some jewelry for yourself since Fili and I had to do it for you last time. Bring back something handsome for your suitors, too, if you wish.”

“No, Thorin…look, I’ve been thinking about this and I must say no to any more gifts from you.”

“Do you not enjoy me lavishing you with all that is available to me? I’ve told you, I’ve been
wanting leave to do this for so long.”
“Yes, but I’ve hardly given you anything. Just like your statue of your Maker, you have nearly anything you could want at your command as it is, and you have already taken care of our wedding rings yourself, and—“
“Did I overstep with the wedding rings? Would you have preferred to pick something out?”
“No, they are beautiful and meaningful and wrought by your own hand. That isn’t what I mean and—blast. This is coming out wrong.”
“Slow down, then, and we’ll figure it out.”

Bilbo breathed and tried to sort his thoughts back together. It was always so difficult to assemble coherent sentences when Thorin gazed at him so lovingly.

“You have given me so much, Thorin, but I have gifted you so little in return.”
“Your love is—“
Bilbo waved as though he could shoo the argument from the very air between them. “Yes, I know my love is enough but then so is yours. I’ve hardly given you anything, really, and gifts are part of my people’s courtship, too.”
“Well, as much as I hate to bring up the old business, as it were, you quite correctly stated once that we skipped courtship and went straight to engagement.”
“I know I said that, yet you’ve made up for it many times over and what have I given you? A couple beads and some jars of honey that were really Beorn’s to give.”
Thorin closed his eyes with a fond smile and shook his head. “How easily you forget, Prince Consort.”
“What?”
“You gave me your hair, which is a rarity all on its own. Most dwarrows don’t ever receive such gifts from their lovers in life.”
“But you gave me yours, too.”
“Hup-up,” Thorin said, shushing him. “We’re not talking about reciprocation. We’re talking about gifts. In addition to your hair, have you already forgotten you gave me Belladonna Took’s puzzle box that same evening?”
Something about hearing his mother’s full name spoken so reverently by Thorin’s soothing baritone touched Bilbo deeply. “I had forgotten,” he whispered. “How could I have forgotten?”
“To give someone an item once having belonged to a departed loved one is quite a statement in dwarven culture, for those items are rare and priceless. Such a gift is usually only bestowed upon one’s Chosen, usually as part of the wedding or not long after.”
“It is so with hobbits as well,” Bilbo said. “I’ve told you before how I had the feeling you should have been exchanging vows with me at the wedding alongside Kili. I hadn’t put it all together in my mind yet, not enough to approach you with my proposal, but my heart knew enough to give you that box. My heart knew.”
“You gave me gifts of comfort, too. Have you forgotten the blanket I brought back with me? All the food you’ve fed me? The jar of Shire soil to carry so that no matter where I went, I would have a piece of Bag End? That’s to say nothing of your displays of devotion that are quite outside your hobbit norms, such as your piercing and your tattoos. As far as the ‘couple of beads,’ I’ll thank you never to mention them in such disdainful tones ever again. Beads were not a natural thing for you to carry or wear, so you had to seek them out. You did, quite creatively, having them carved for me specifically…and on the road, no less, back when our resources were minimal. Those beads could be made of sapphire and I would not be able to love them more than I do a single one of the wooden ones right now.”
“Thorin—“

Thorin gently placed his fingers over Bilbo’s lips to silence him before replacing them with a soft kiss.
“There will be time yet for gifts, if you’re well and truly worried. I am not, however, nor am I keeping any sort of measure over what things your other lovers get compared to what I do.”

Bilbo glanced down guiltily, not realizing his purpose for starting all this had been guessed.

“If the only objection is your guilt, I’m not going to stop doing the things I’ve spent months dreaming of doing for you.”

*****

After visiting his family, Bofur went looking for Bilbo, Fili, Kili, or any combination thereof. When their suites turned up empty, he bounced on Bilbo’s bed, figuring maybe he would loiter a while—perhaps catch a nap while waiting for Bilbo or Kili to pop in before lunch, doubtless with his Fili not far behind them. A bundle of papers was in the way of his feet, so he moved them to the nightstand. Settling back, he smacked his lips in pleasant satisfaction as his body melted into the comfort of the mattress. He glanced over at the papers, wondering for a moment what they were. Shrugging as though they were no matter, he adjusted on the pillow again, readying for that nap.

An eye popped open, followed by the other. He had recognized the handwriting on those papers from times before. It was Thorin’s. He squeezed his eyes shut.

“Nope, not doing it,” he announced to the empty room. To punctuate his point, he rolled over to face the opposite direction of the nightstand. He made it maybe twenty breaths.

“Durin’s bollocks!” he swore to himself, rolling back again and snatching up the bundle.

Scooting so his back was against the headboard, he fluffed a pillow behind for softer support and began to read. Even though each new segment was addressed to Bilbo, unfolding before him was less an actual letter and more like a diary of the winter Thorin had spent alone.

“This invasion of privacy is not your finest moment, Bofur my lad,” he admonished himself. However—regardless of how shameful his behavior was—he found the letter far too intriguing to stop.

The Thorin on these pages was one he had rarely seen on the journey, though it was undoubtedly the same one he had received the tiniest glimpse of in the letter Bilbo had shared with them at Beorn’s. This Thorin was erotic, vulnerable, and greatly suffering; the things he had written moved Bofur to his soul.

Bofur considered Thorin’s frame of mind as it must have been as he wrote this: a dwarf (who had already been through ten lifetimes of horrors) leaving his new husband behind to return to a kingdom where his sister thought his harasser hung the moon, where his advisors tried to matchmake him with the very person who had beleaguered him, and where he had no one in which to confide about his loneliness and the love he had been forced to leave behind in the Shire…along with the fears that went with those things. Isolated and disheartened, Thorin had thought he could at least reach out to his most trusted for help with his harassment and not only was he not believed, he was laughed at.

Yet somehow,

after enduring all that,

Thorin could still have the gentlest softness in those eyes.
Bofur found himself weeping for him.

Forgetting any plans for a nap, Bofur carefully put the pages back the way he had found them on the mattress and cleaned up his face. Taking a few calming breaths, he made a decision: Merely calling a truce between them was not going to be enough. It was time for him to be a friend to Thorin.

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Thanks to his memory, Thorin found the harps rather rapidly, comparatively speaking. However, 'rapidly' in the mess of the treasury still meant it was lunch time by the time they were located and carried out. Along with the harps, both Bilbo and Thorin had stuffed pockets—several of the contents at Thorin’s insistence more than Bilbo’s.

Bilbo stopped short, his eyes focusing past Thorin. Inwardly commending himself for not dropping the instrument he carried outright, Bilbo lowered it to the floor.

“My love?” asked Thorin.
“I—” Bilbo’s voice broke unexpectedly. “I know this place. I mean, it has changed, but that bit of wall, the carvings there, the way this arch rises…”

Echoes of the past played through Bilbo’s mind.

"I want to be inside you. I need to claim you again."
"Yes, please. Mark me as yours within your mountain, my king."

He turned to look at Thorin, who had also set down the harp he was carrying.

Smiling wistfully, Thorin said, “I remember it, too.”
“It was the first time we made love here…and not far from the last time you were wholly yourself during our betrothal,” said Bilbo.
“It is one of my last clear recollections of our lovemaking before I was compromised. Oh, please don’t cry,” Thorin said, glancing around surreptitiously before reaching up a hand to cradle Bilbo's distressed face. “Though it is bittersweet, try to hold on to the more joyful part of the memory instead.”
Bilbo had felt the tears welling up as other memories of that evening also came back, unbidden. “It isn’t that. It’s…it’s guilt. Thorin, that night, that first night we came back after Smaug fell, Kili and I, we—“

Closing his eyes, Thorin felt a familiar twist in his gut. He moved the fingers that had been caressing Bilbo’s jaw over to his mouth to quiet him.

“Please do not finish that sentence. You have alluded to you and Kili starting in Lake Town, and although I know it carried into the mountain, I’m begging you, do not complete that thought.”
“I’m sorry,” Bilbo whispered against his fingers. “I want to hold you. Is it safe for me to hold you this close to the entrance?”
Thorin beckoned Bilbo a few steps over where any view of them would be mostly obscured and said, “Now it is.”

Jumping into his arms, Bilbo held him tight.

“Probably cannot risk any kisses, though,” whispered Thorin.
“Would you still even want to kiss me?”
Speaking quietly, Thorin answered, “Of course I do. I always will. It’s—we’re—okay. Our history
is full of pain and guilt on both sides and this will not be the last time we’re confronted with it, but history it is. We’re together now and that’s what means the most.”

Feeling Bilbo huff a ragged breath against his shoulder, Thorin quirked a queer smile.

“Funny, isn’t it, how we can spend last night doing what we were doing, but I could still feel the jealousy of you and him from all those months ago so acutely?”

Bilbo made himself shift to look Thorin in the eye. He owed him that much. “That is because last night was not betrayal. I betrayed you back then, Thorin, and then I blamed you for it when you were sick. Yavanna’s Grace, how last night could even happen after what I did to you—”

“-Is just as much of a miracle as how it could even happen after what I did to you. We can’t keep a running tally of whose pain was worse, or who owes who. We agreed, remember?”

“It just…it all came flooding back—both the beautiful parts as well as the shameful ones.”

“I know, and it will happen again, I’m sure, and when it does, we’ll talk about it.”

Bilbo breathed deeply. “You’re right. Oh, if I could only kiss you right now.”

Squeezing his hand, Thorin said, “We’ll make up for it tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

If you are still here, I appreciate you so much!
After lunch, Fili and Bofur requested a few moments with Thorin. Thorin wasn’t sure he could handle too many more of these personal meetings, nor the revelations they had been containing, but nevertheless Thorin led them to his personal council chambers. Fortunately for Thorin’s nerves, Fili went straight to his point.

“Bo and I were wed this past December. I’ve been trying to come up with a better way to tell you, but the longer it took, the more disrespectful it seemed that you didn’t know yet. This way was admittedly a bit inelegant, but now at least it is no longer secret to you. I apologize it took me this long.”

Thorin raised his eyebrows. “December, you say. I’m supposing it was in the Shire and not during your trip to the Blue Mountains?”

“Yes, in the Shire. We had a small number of witnesses, sworn to secrecy, but it was official. Isumbras Took signed off on it,” explained Fili.

“And you have it documented?”

“We do. I brought one with me.”

Thorin continued to slowly nod. He said, “I see. So, what do you wish to do about it?”

Fili cocked his head. “Pardon? What do you mean, ‘do?’”

“You’ve told me in the past you didn’t even want to admit your betrothal, lest you get roped into a formal wedding and a possible forced, extended stay in the mountain as Crown Prince. When I left the Shire, I remember telling you to do whatever it was you wanted to do—get married in secret and do the official betrothal and state wedding later, simply marry a single time in the Shire, wait until you got here to make announcements, or perhaps something else altogether. So, which path have you chosen?”

Fili glanced at Bofur, who nodded and gave him an encouraging smile. “Well, it is our thought that maybe we’ll keep the marriage a secret, possibly announcing betrothal before we leave the mountain in the fall. I figure Balin will have already had his first giant, official wedding with Mam, and Mam will be too exhausted from the memory of hers to bother hounding us about ours for a while.”

“Very well. I meant it then and I mean it now, Fili: whatever you want to do, that’s what you should do. If the past couple of years have taught me anything at all, it is that sometimes one needs to brush aside this ‘the way things are done’ nonsense. Though it is good to remember ritual and ceremony to honor our ancestors, being too staunch a traditionalist can also bring pain—pain I’m too well-acquainted with to wish upon you.”

“Thank you, Thorin,” Bofur and Fili both said.

“I appreciate that you entrusted me with your secret. Your Mam will hear nothing from me about it, nor will anyone else. In regards to the wedding itself, I hope you enjoyed enough of a ceremony to have Kili as your Pair?”

“We did, and he was,” Fili replied, hoping he wouldn’t blush. Glancing at Bofur, Thorin said, “And Bilbo was Bofur’s, no doubt.”
“Aye, you bet he was,” Bofur answered.
“Any excuse for a kiss!” Thorin said, rolling his eyes in pretend annoyance.
Bofur laughed. “You’ve gotten to know me so well.”
Thorin couldn’t help but return the grin. “I can’t exactly say I blame you.”

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With Thorin, Fili, and Bofur occupied, Kili took the opportunity to steal back to the suite and finish Thorin’s letter. He sat considering it for several moments, then read the whole thing from beginning to end one more time. Finishing his second read, he stashed it in Bilbo’s desk, sat back down, and bounced his leg nervously as he pondered the new information. There had been so many unexpected revelations in the past days that needed a proper sorting in his mind--he couldn’t recall having wanted a relaxing, meditative soak more in his life. However, he wouldn’t dare go down to the baths alone after Thorin’s warning. Maybe when Bilbo was done in the library, he would be interested in going with him.

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Bilbo noted a corridor on the way to the library had new, life-sized, and very familiar statues lined against the wall. He asked Ori about them.

“Oh, that’s one of Dain’s projects,” replied Ori. “He cajoled Thorin into letting him start these last year a little while before we left for your wedding. He thought The Fourteen should be commemorated for all-time, as Erebor would still be residence to Smaug without them. Us. Erm, you know what I mean.”

“Oh! There’s you!” Thodora said, running over to one. Smiling sheepishly, Ori said, “Yes, that’s me.”

“The detail is exquisite,” Bilbo said, running his hands over the “embroidery” on Ori’s stone chest. “How did the sculptor even have time?”

“To begin with, Dain had someone dedicated to it as their only job. It was a tough bit of convincing to get Thorin in particular to agree with it, considering all the other things yet undone at the time, but Dain’s argument that one person missing would not mean the fall of the mountain nor anyone going hungry managed to break through. The other thing is that they work from sketches, so the subjects didn't have to be present.”

“How do they work from sketches?” Chadham asked.
Ori shrugged. “I don’t know the process, really. All I know is that I had to sit for them for two days and they drew me every which way they could think of. They made the sketches incredibly lifelike—I looked like I could practically step off the page.”

“Hmmmm, I wonder if they kept any of the sketches,” Bilbo said, thinking what such an accurate drawing of Thorin would be worth to him. He glanced around to look for him next, but saw no statue of the king. “Why is there not a statue of Thorin? I would think he would be the first person to be done.”

“Well,” Ori said, his tone growing conspiratorial and hushed even though they were alone. “As the story goes, Thorin’s statue was indeed finished first. However, when it was completed, someone made a grave error in dropping the moving rigging before it was time to do so. Thorin’s statue fell over and broke. There were some who feared it was a sign something bad would befall his reign. I think there are still folks who probably still worry.”

“That’s silly. It was just a mistake,” Chadham said. “It isn’t though it fell over all on its own after it was installed.”

“Dwarrows are a superstitious lot, though,” Bilbo said. “Not to offend you, Ori.”

“No, it is quite true. I do feel a little strange about it, even though I know there was a practical reason why it toppled over. There are plans to sculpt a new one of Thorin, though the sculptor has asked for permission to do it last this time, with the rumor being they are more than a little
superstitious themselves. Thorin said he didn’t mind, so now he’s at the end of the queue.”

Bilbo turned around, walking up and down the corridor to account for who was done so far. “So Bofur, Fili, Kili, and Thorin are all missing, but I count the rest finished. I cannot believe how much work was done—and so intricately—in such a short span of time!”

“Yes. You four were long past gone already when the project started, therefore you were not around to be sketched. However, now that you are here, I would imagine Dain will ask you to do your sitting for your sketches sooner than later.”

“Why do you keep including me in this?” Bilbo asked. “You’re one of The Fourteen—and practically the most important one, if you ask me. Of course you would be included.”

“But I’m not a dwarf!”

“That makes what you did for us all the more noteworthy.”

“Oh, you,” Bilbo said bashfully, rubbing the back of his neck. “My battle brothers might see it that way, but Dain—“

“Dain most assuredly thinks so, too. I’m sure he probably has too much pride to go on about it to you, but in those early days, Dain was virtually in awe of you once all the stories had been told.”

Bilbo sighed resignedly. “I wish some of that would rub off on Balin, too.”

“You know Balin was always quite fond of you,” Ori said gently. “He knows what you did for us, even if his loyalty to Thorin changed his relationship with you.”

Thinking about what had transpired between Balin and Thorin that winter, Ori’s comment made Bilbo sad…but not for himself.

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Bilbo made a noise of satisfaction, sinking as far under the water as possible without submerging his head. “This was a delightful idea, Kee.”

When Kili made no noise of acknowledgement, Bilbo peeked at him. Though Kili was also quite sprawled out himself, his pose and his breathing made it clear he hadn’t dangerously fallen asleep in the past ten minutes.

“Kee?”

“Mmm? What?”

“I was talking to you.”

“Oh, I apologize.”

“Are you alright?”

Kili’s mouth quirked up in embarrassment. “Yeah. I’ve just—I’ve read Thorin's letter and I’ve been thinking about what it means in conjunction to all the other things we’ve learned about him in the past couple days…and what we’ve found out about what has been happening in Erebor in our absence, too. I guess I had gotten caught up in my own mind.”

“This is certainly the place to do it. I won’t talk too much, then.”

Reaching out to hold his hand under the water, Kili said, “I don’t want you to think I don’t want your company.”

Bilbo squeezed it back. “I know you want me here, dear heart, but I don’t mind quietly just being together. I could probably use to do a little mind-sifting of my own. I’ve had similar surprises to you this week.”

After several moments had passed, Kili spoke softly.

“What happened last night, what might happen tonight…” he trailed off.

Bilbo opened his eyes, wondering what thought process had spurred Kili to talk after all. “Go on.”

“Perhaps I’ve not had the full grasp or the proper appreciation of what I’m asking of-”
The water sloshed softly as Kili sat up to look around and ensure they were alone. Satisfied, he still barely whispered the king’s name when he spoke it.

“-Thorin, or of what he’s asking of me for that matter. Since we’ve gotten here, I’ve developed a more keen perspective of the trust he has exhibited allowing me to see him in such intimate moments, to read his personal thoughts, to be so,” Kili swallowed, suddenly feeling shy, “so passionately welcomed to taste his kiss, and what it means—honestly means—for him to eagerly and ardently invite me to share his bed with you. Those things seem so much...I don’t know...more now that I understand him better.”

Bilbo could hear a tinge of regret in Kili’s voice and he did his best to dissolve it. “You respected and appreciated what this would mean before we even rode through the gate, else you would not have spent all that time and all those tears preparing Fili. I do know what you mean--and it is quite thrilling In its own way, isn’t it--but do not punish yourself for any shortness of expectations. I’m sure he does not feel slighted by you.”

Though Kili was grateful for Bilbo’s assurance, he silently vowed to show Thorin he fully understood what gifts his trust and pleasure were.

Later--dried, dressed, and on their way out of the baths--Bilbo was astonished to find there were people waiting to bathe who had been halted and made to queue in the hallway outside the door.

“Why didn’t you let them in?” Bilbo asked the guard.

“The king and Captain Dwalin have strict orders that no one is to bathe with the princes, the princess, General Dain, non-dwarven guests, or any one of The Fourteen unless you bring them in yourselves.”

“Oh,” Bilbo said, exchanging a sad, knowing look with Kili. “I suppose if it is official twice over, there’s not much to be done for it, but we took so long simply soaking. We would have made haste if we knew we were keeping people waiting! The next time this happens, please let us know others are in line directly behind us and we will finish in a more timely and considerate manner.”

“Yes, Your Highnesses,” the guard said.

Bilbo and Kili apologized to the others in line as they passed, though no dwarf waiting was able to keep ill-humor after hearing Bilbo’s request of the guard to assist in avoiding future delays.

*****

“Is it true you were in the treasury today?” Balin asked Thorin after dinner. “Dís said that is where you found the lads those harps.”

“Yes, they told me they had traveled from the Shire without their instruments,” replied Thorin, slightly unsettled by the solemn expression on Balin’s face. He gestured towards where Fili and Kili were playing an old dwarven favorite, with Bofur accompanying on his whistle and Nori pounding on the keg. “Looks like they haven’t lost their touch in the interim, though.”

“You never so much as play your own harp anymore, yet you braved the treasury for these?” asked Balin pointedly.

“Yes. Not necessarily because I missed harp music, but because we haven’t had much music at all this winter, for starters, and because I missed Fili and Kili in particular making music for another. Besides, your brother and my sister would have a solemn wedding indeed if we didn’t bring music back into the mountain.”

“Dwalin has a fiddle and there are plenty of musicians who live here. Simply because you prefer to dine privately with your inner circle more often than not doesn’t mean there is any shortage of music in the mountain.”

Thorin stopped trying to force the smile on his face and the levity in his voice. “Balin, I’ve grown weary of all the mental sparring you seem to want to do lately when you have a point you want to
make, so please just make it.”
“Very well. You rarely go to the treasury—and with good reason! It seems foolhardy and peculiar that you would have taken such a risk for something as frivolous as finding instruments. How did it affect you, may I ask? Did you feel anything unusual—or worse, familiar? Were you afraid?”
“I’ve been there since the battle, though admittedly not often, and for your information, I do not consider it foolhardy or peculiar either one to have the wish to do something special for Kili and Fili, especially when it was also something that would benefit the rest of the travelers, their Mam, and us—particularly with the wedding around the corner. I felt so strongly about it that yes, I visited the treasury, and I felt nothing out of what we presently consider ordinary. No twitch of the old sickness, no gold lust. As for your last question, I was and I am cautious, but I was not afraid.”
There was a flash of irritation in Balin’s eyes, though he did not lash out. He huffed out a resigned breath, asking, “Did you at least bring someone with you?”
“Not that I had to, but yes.”
“Whom did you bring?”

Thorin looked at Balin, frozen for a moment as he figured the best way to respond. It was a moment too long. With a grim, tight-lipped smile of disappointment and acceptance—one Thorin had seen all too often in recent weeks—Balin nodded and said, “I see. Well, if you would excuse me, Your Highness?”

Inwardly, Thorin groaned. Balin knew how much he still hated the “Your Highness” thing. Though he wanted to explain, he had no explanations that would satisfy Balin, anyhow.

“Of course,” replied Thorin. "Enjoy yourself, maybe refill your ale. It is a party, after all.”

****

Thorin's heart still raced from the confrontation when Dís sidled up to him.

“Tell me, what was all that about with Balin?”
Exasperated, Thorin sighed, “Oh, what is it ever about with Balin?”
“He seems okay now,” she said, glancing over to where he was amiably chatting with Dain.
“Though he was markedly not okay when you two were chatting…and neither were you.”
“Everything I do lately seems to rankle him, which makes everything he says rankle me right back. We’re just, I don’t know, mining a rough seam right now. We’ll eventually break through the rock.”
“You say that, but I don’t think you believe it,” she said sadly.
“I’m trying to believe it.”
“Perhaps you need someone to mediate, help you mend things.”
“I don’t think even you could help, Dís, and I know Dwalin has already tried. It always works for a few days, then we’re back at the same rough spot.”
“I wasn’t thinking of myself or Dwalin this time, actually.”

Studying her for a moment, realization dawned and Thorin was unable to keep his face from crumpling in disgust.

“No. No, no, no, absolutely not.”
“He cares so much about the two of you, though,” she insisted. “Give me one good reason why not.”

With Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur on his side, it was so tempting for Thorin to tell her exactly why not, but her worried and completely guileless expression made him unable to bring himself to do it.

“He isn’t family, Dís. I know you and Regnad get on well, but Balin and Dwalin are bonded to me
by both battle and our ancestor’s blood. If Balin and I cannot solve this between us—if someone as
dear as Dwalin cannot talk us through it—then begging your pardon, someone I’ve only known for
months couldn’t. I am a private person. I don’t want everyone crawling around in my business or in
my head. Please, let this be the end of this discussion.”
Dís nodded in agreement and a wave of relief washed over Thorin.
She said, “Though I think an outside opinion can be sometimes better than a close one, I respect
your reason and your wishes. I know you value your privacy.”

Thorin kissed her on the forehead before taking his leave, his heart still thumping with anxiety
twice-over. He could not wait to climb into bed...and into the soothing, accepting arms of his
lovers.

*****

When the music wound down for the night, Fili, Bofur, Kili, and Fili went back to Bilbo’s and
Kili’s suite together.

Bofur said, “I kept thinking we’d meet up here today, maybe get a little naughty, but circumstances
continued to conspire against us.”
“Well, we’re here together now, so circumstances can kiss my sweet arse. Come to think of it, so
can you,” said Fili suggestively, taking Bilbo into his arms.
“That would be lovely, but…” demurred Bilbo.
Fili’s grin faded. “But?”
“But we had plans to go back tonight. To Thorin’s room.”
“We had plans, too, remember? I said you were going to need some rest,” Fili said.
Sighing, Bilbo replied, “I know, but then we never got ‘round to it, and now Thorin is waiting for
us.”
Fili had to remind himself once again of Thorin’s winter alone, reluctantly conceding, “I suppose
that’s fair.”
Tugging Fili down for a kiss, Bilbo said, “I could still do a little something for you before I go. For
both of you, if you’d like.”
Grinning impishly, Kili said, “And I’ll help.”
Bofur grinned back, more wistful than mirthful. “I can’t speak for Fee, but I’d rather wait until we
can all four get naked and do a ‘little something’ to each other for hours.”
“I agree,” Fili said. “I don’t want a hasty bit of pleasure when what I really want to do is get lost in
the both of you.”
“You do make it sound quite enticing to wait,” said Bilbo.
“Are you sure, though?” asked Kili. “I imagine getting us four somewhere uninterrupted and in
private is going to be a little difficult these next few afternoons.”
Suddenly concerned, Bofur asked cautiously, “Afternoons, sure, but why not the next few nights?”
“Well, I don’t know—we don’t know—how many nights Thorin was planning on before we
switched back,” Bilbo said. “He is working through a lot right now, as you know, and the two of
you are on firmer, surer footing with our love and your places in our world. I haven’t had a good
moment yet to remind him he will still sleep alone sometimes.”

Bofur thought of Thorin’s letter and it immediately tempered any vexation that had been welling up
within him.

“Aye, I see your issue and I can’t disagree.” Bofur pointedly ignored Fili staring at him with
surprised, annoyed eyes. “Things are still fragile--most of all him--and leaving him to sleep alone
again so soon seems too much for you to ask of him.”
Gratefully, Bilbo said, “Thank you for understanding. It has naught to do with you or how I feel
about you.”
“Or how I feel,” Kili added. “The two of you have each other at night. Thorin has no one, has had no one for weeks.”
Promised Bilbo, “It won’t be forever—I couldn’t stand for it to be forever, or even for a month—but leaving him alone right now…”

Fili had initially been horrified to hear that Kili and Bilbo planned more nights away from them—how many would “a few” be, anyhow?—but considering the subsequent conversation and factoring in the reasoning that Fili and Bofur still had each other at night, he couldn’t especially argue.

He said, “We will miss you and no mistake, but I can’t make a case that would win against your reasons. You two go take care of him. Just know that though Bo and I aren’t alone, it doesn’t mean we cannot feel your loss. It better not be a damned month.” The last part was spoken lightly.
Kili and Bilbo both laughed. “It won’t be a month, I swear it,” said Kili.
“Goodness, no!” Bilbo said. “If it looked to be that long, we’d have to go over to New Dale for an entire afternoon and let a room.”
“Something!” Kili agreed.
“Nice to know you have a plan,” joked Fili.
Bofur drawled, “But it won’t be a month, so we won’t need a plan so severe.”
Sensuously slipping his hand around the back of Fili’s neck, Kili asked, “Are you sure there’s nothing we can do for you before we go?”
Fili shook his head. “I want so much more than that. You’d never make it out of our room tonight, and that’s a promise.”

Several tingles went through Kili’s core. He leaned his forehead against Fili’s.

“Not playing?” he whispered.
“Not playing,” Fili confirmed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone! If you are still here, I appreciate you!
Chapter Summary

The second night in bed for Thorin, Bilbo, and Kili as they further explore the changes in their dynamic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Less tentative that night than the one that preceded it, Thorin, Bilbo, and Kili were naked in Thorin’s bedroom before they had done scarcely more than greet each other. Bilbo laughingly noted as much.

“Well, to be fair, we just saw each other less than an hour ago. It isn’t as though we just arrived from back West,” Kili said.

Thorin said, “Perhaps I was too eager to bother with a ‘how was your evening’ but I hope you know I still feel as grateful when you walk through that door as though you had just gotten here. There have been so many nights that I had wished for you. Now you’re here for those times when I need nothing more than to fall into your arms—both of you.”

Smiling at Thorin lovingly, Bilbo claimed a kiss that was far sweeter than it should have been, given their levels of arousal and undress.

“I…” Thorin began, wondering how much to say, and whether it would ruin the evening he had so dearly anticipated. He could almost hear Bilbo’s future voice in his mind insisting, “*What’s the point of having allies if you do not lean upon us?*”

“You…?” Bilbo said, encouraging.

“I had a trying evening. Balin shared his concern over me going to the treasury and showed obvious disapproval over with whom I went. Dís tried to make me feel better afterward, but her idea of a mediator for Balin and myself only made it much, much worse.”

“*Not him,*” groaned Kili.

Thorin rolled his eyes. “You guessed it.”

“I hate that you have to endure how much she likes him,” Bilbo said.

“I keep telling you that if she knew half of what he has done, she wouldn’t like him near as much. I just know it,” Kili pointed out.

Thorin sighed. “I might yet share some of that with her, but not before the wedding. Anyhow, it does feel quite nice to have your sympathetic ears after an evening like this. More than that, though, and the other reason for me speaking up at all, is because I could not wait to get back here and find my comfort with you, to be engulfed by you in much more pleasant pursuits. Tonight, whatever it brings, will be a welcome and soothing balm.”

Bilbo gazed into Thorin’s eyes and cleared his throat.

“*Kee* told me you’ve felt we’ve been too careful with you and when I thought upon it, I realized you were right. I owe you an apology and I want to stress to you that it was not due to a lack of wanting. It was only because we didn’t want to overwhelm you all at once. It never occurred to us you might welcome being overwhelmed so.”

“I know you wanted me—I was never worried about that—and please understand that I appreciate
the gift of allowing me to set the pace and keep my advantage in the spirit that it was intended. From here on out, though…"

Kili regarded Thorin, the lust burning in the king’s eyes no doubt a match for what Kili could feel heating his. He moved in, pressing against Thorin with his tongue leading his kiss. The moan that escaped Thorin excited Kili all the more and he thumbed at his bottom lip to encourage him wider. Suddenly, simply because he felt like it, he pushed his thumb inside Thorin’s mouth as well; the new cry this pulled from Thorin vibrated against Kili’s skin and made his prick throb. Kili pushed him backwards and urged him onto the bed, looming over him before swooping down for another filthy taste.

“You want us to carry you away just like you carried us away last night, don’t you?” he asked. “I’ll confess, I’ve been remembering it all day. Have you been thinking about it, too? Recalling how you took me apart? Replaying my cries of pleasure in your head?” Thorin squirmed under Kili, grinding against him, reveling in how good his weight felt on top of him. “Yes. Yes to all of that.”

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Bilbo watched and listened, getting the distinct impression that joining in would intrude upon a moment best left private. He knew Kili and Thorin likely wouldn’t agree, else they wouldn’t be having this conversation in front of him, but it didn’t change his thought that perhaps they needed a few moments alone. He scooted off the bed, inadvertently catching their attention.

“Where are you going?” asked Kili.
“Just realized I need the water closet before I get into it,” fibbed Bilbo. “Might be a minute, though.”

He gestured down at his erection and raised his eyebrows in explanation before leaving them alone in the bedroom portion of the suite.

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Kili pressed into Thorin’s mouth again and Thorin yielded deliciously, sliding both his tongue and body against Kili’s.

*This is the moment,* Kili thought. If he wanted to live out the scenario he had run through his mind a hundred times—the one he had confided to Bofur--circumstances would likely never be more ideal.

“How have you imagined it would be if I,” Kili paused for the briefest second, pulling in a soft breath of courage, “did last night’s things to you?” Licking his lips, Thorin nodded. “I have.”
“Tell me. Tell me what you thought about,” replied Kili, inwardly wincing that it came out more like a strangled plea than the seductive suggestion he had intended. “I’ve imagined,” Thorin started, not sure if he wanted to close his eyes or look into Kili’s. One felt like not enough and the other like too much. He settled on the latter and made himself glance up. “I want to be at your mercy, tied up at the wrists with my body made available to you. In my fantasy, all I can do is watch and feel you do whatever it is you want to do. You could do anything to me like that.”

Kili whispered so softly that Thorin felt the words more than he heard them. “Fuck, Thorin…” Desperately searching for a kiss, Thorin strained upwards and found one. ”You could simply take what you want and I’d be helpless to do anything but feel the ecstasy you would give.”
Kili could feel the arousal dripping from him as he moved against Thorin’s skin. What Thorin was describing to him was incredible, a level of surrender Kili had only let himself imagine a couple times before—and had come fantastically hard to each time—but there was something else he needed first.

“I want that too, Thorin. I have so much I want, so many filthy things I’ve imagined…” “What stops you?” Thorin murmured, leaning up to kiss the column of Kili’s throat, noting with some satisfaction that he still bore marks from the night before. “If you want me, take me.”

Kili whimpered, a new legion of erotic jolts racing through every extremity.

“I want all of that, just like you said, and I know I will love every moment of it. Tonight, though, tonight…” “Tonight?” Thorin repeated, still nibbling along Kili’s skin.

Kili’s hands found Thorin’s and he held them on either side of where Thorin’s head should be resting on the pillow (if he would stop stretching forward with that damned blissful kissing and let him think).

“Ask me what my fantasy has been.” Thorin relaxed into the pillow and he gazed up at him. “What has your fantasy been?” “My fantasy is you letting me in willingly: no ropes, no restraints, and most importantly, no possibility of denial. I know in some ways it might be easier to put yourself in a position where you could explain away the forbidden things we do, to say you had no control over it, which is exactly why it wouldn’t work for what I need from you tonight.”

Incredulous, Thorin shook his head so slightly it was almost imperceptive. Kili had managed to pinpoint the precise reason why Thorin loved the idea of being tied and ravaged. Thorin abruptly felt a thousand times more naked.

“I need you unfettered,” Kili said, this time dropping a kiss to Thorin’s forehead. “I need you to want it.” A kiss above both eyebrows. “I need you to want me.” A kiss on the jaw. “Although it sounds wickedly exciting for another evening, I don’t want to take this time. What I need tonight is for you to give.” Kili hovered over Thorin’s lips, breathing against them but not touching. He whispered, “Give me your willing surrender and I will fill you with the pleasure you seek.”

Releasing Thorin’s hands, Kili closed that final, tiny distance between them. Thorin’s fingers threaded into his hair, deepening their kiss passionately. Kili was acutely aware of every inch of hot flesh beneath him, particularly the hardest ones; his arousal made him dizzy.

When they parted their kiss, Thorin whispered, “You have my surrender. Kili, there is no part of me you may not touch” Kili looked into his eyes, recognizing his own meaningful words of invitation and permission. He quoted back to him, “There’s no part of you I do not want to touch.”

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Bilbo leaned against the doorway, having come back a little too soon to join the bed, but not quite willing to disappear again. He watched Kili and Thorin whispering and kissing, a wisp of jealousy rising up within him. He sternly reminded himself that it was not unusual—it was expected, even—that his other lovers would have their own tender, personal moments with each other…
particularly given how truly personal this arrangement had gotten. Bilbo had enjoyed the same and more from four lovers total, after all. His better sense eventually blew the wisp away--and his lust was only too happy to billow in to replace it. He had the feeling such tender negotiations were preamble to something far filthier and fun. Still, he kept his place, not wanting to disturb them in the middle of whatever it was they were sharing. It seemed intense.

****

Thorin rolled Kili over, slowly kissing his way down his torso. Kili enjoyed it, to be sure, and the more obvious destination gave him the impression he and Thorin had a common goal in mind for how this new phase between them might begin, but Thorin was still leading. Thorin had said he didn’t always want the advantage, so Kili needed to figure out how to wrest it back.

Scooting out from under him, Kili said, “Not like this, I don’t think.”

Thorin belatedly realized it was the opposite of what he had requested—and the opposite what Kili had asked of him.

Contrite, he asked, “How, then?”

Kili tossed a pillow on to the floor and climbed off the bed, half sitting and half standing against the edge. He toed the pillow into position in front of him.

“How do you plan to finish in my mouth this time?” asked Thorin.

Surprised by the frankness of the question, Kili looked over and, with their gazes locked, Thorin stalked slowly around until he was standing in front of him. It reminded Kili of a far less erotic altercation in their past, yet his desire still surged.

He replied, “Do you wish me to?”

Keeping his eyes on Kili’s, Thorin lowered himself to the floor. Kili could scarcely believe he was there, or that Thorin’s expression was soulfully affirming something he had spent hours dreaming about. He licked his lips, accepting Thorin’s silent (though astonishingly effective) “yes.”

“Given, not taken,” Kili reminded him with a whisper.

Thorin enticingly opened his mouth in invitation, making it clear the next move was Kili’s. Kili took his prick in hand, placing himself on Thorin’s tongue. With a soft moan, Thorin shut his eyes and slowly slid his tongue out a little more, though he did not yet close his lips. When he met his glance again, the vulnerable (yet heated) look in his eyes made Kili’s breath hitch.

He’s really giving me the fantasy, Kili thought.

Still holding himself, he traced Thorin’s lips with the very tip, smearing a touch of his arousal as he went. Returning to rest on Thorin’s tongue, Kili pushed forward, feeling the warmth against the underside of his cock. Kili rocked himself back and forth, desire searing through him as he exercised as much restraint as he could muster. It felt incredible. When he was not sure he would be able to stand it much longer, Thorin closed his mouth around him, pulling a broken groan from somewhere deep within. Slowly, Thorin mouthed down Kili’s length, taking him in, slicking him as he went before he pulled back slowly, cheeks hollowing out with the suction. Thorin’s next pass down was not as slow, though it was sensually deliberate.

Watching himself be engulfed, catching glimpses of Thorin staring lustfully back up at him, Kili could not help but imagine what it would be like to be in the same position in front of Thorin. Only for a moment, he tore his gaze from the erotic display before him and closed his eyes, picturing the
Looking up at Thorin, teasing his piercing with his tongue before having his mouth filled by him, feeling Thorin’s moans of rapture vibrate against his lips, bringing him closer and closer until…

“Fuck!” Kili groaned, cupping Thorin’s jaw and pushing back against him.

Thorin moaned encouragingly and Kili’s thoughts grew even more wicked.

“You want me to move, don’t you?” he said, stroking with a more steady beat.

Thorin moaned emphatically again, punctuating his wish with a blissful eye roll and putting up a hand to keep himself from choking.

Kili’s head swam with dizziness and desire as he took Thorin’s mouth, a different type of bliss than when Thorin devoured him the other day. In the midst of throwing his head back in pleasure, Kili caught a glimpse of Bilbo in from the doorway to the bathing area. He smiled at him, knowing full well Bilbo was considerately keeping his distance on purpose. Though it was appreciated, it was space he neither needed nor wanted. He paused for moment with a firm hand on Thorin’s shoulder. Thorin looked up, momentarily worried, then turned to follow Kili’s gaze to the doorway.

Beckoning with a hand, Kili said, “My jewel. I need you.”

Bilbo’s eyes darted to Thorin, who canted his head in invite as well.

Bilbo joined Kili, climbing up behind him on the bed. Kili dropped his head back to claim a kiss and nearly came undone at the pure filth of Bilbo’s tongue in his mouth and his cock between Thorin’s lips.

Whatever shyness Bilbo had displayed hiding in the doorway seemed to be gone, because Bilbo purred, “This looks familiar.”

Kili’s grin was salacious. “Mmm, in what way?”

Bilbo pressed his mouth to the shell of his ear, careful to keep his next words for Kili alone. “This looks to be the same way you had Fili’s mouth for the first time.”

For a moment, Kili forgot how to breathe. It was absolutely true: Somehow Kili had subconsciously recreated the first time Fili had allowed him in, down to the position and the pillow on the floor.

Bilbo spoke again, louder for Thorin’s benefit, restoring Kili’s attention to the moment. “What do you think of our king’s skills?”

Kili decided he could worry about the psychological implications of it all later, moaning in reply, “He’s so good at this.”

Peering over Kili’s shoulder, Bilbo said, “I must agree. I’m sure I should be burning with jealousy, but instead I’m going out of my mind with desire. You look amazing inside his mouth.”

“You can’t…” Kili breathed. ”Fuck, Bee, you can’t say things like that right now. Between your talk, the way he looks, and the way it feels, I’m going to finish.”

Thorin groaned then, affirmative, and it vibrated Kili enchantingly.

“Thorin, are you…are you sure?”

Thorin pulled off and looked up at him, flushed with exertion and eyes made somehow even more impossibly blue by watering from fighting Kili’s length against his gag reflex.

“Teach me your taste. Make me crave you,” he rumbled, deep and sensual.
Bilbo leaned his head heavy on Kili’s shoulder, exhaling a quiet groan and stroking himself, waiting for Kili’s response. Before Kili could answer, Thorin spoke again.

“Given for you to take, so take it all. I’m begging you.” Thorin opened his mouth, his tongue resting tantalizingly against his lower lip.

It was heady, exhilarating, and Kili did not make him ask again.

Bilbo swore under his breath. He had to see Kili’s face as well as Thorin’s. He left the bed, standing close to Kili and Thorin and shifting his glance back and forth between them. Whimpering, he watched Kili fuck Thorin’s mouth…and Thorin obviously loving it. Bilbo loved it, too; he was close.

“Come on my cock,” Kili managed to croak. “While he is sucking it.”

The request alone rapidly closed the gap on how long Bilbo had left to grant it. “Oh fuck,” he groaned. “Thorin?”

Thorin made a noise of approval, and barely in time: Bilbo spurted across Kili’s cock and Thorin’s face as Kili continued pumping. Thorin greedily licked up all he could reach without breaking Kili’s rhythm.

Kili was nearing his crisis as well. Thorin sensed it against his lips, that tell-tale hardening, and felt Kili’s thigh tense under his fingertips. Pleading more than commanding, Kili said, “I’m going to come inside you.”

The phrasing was odd to Thorin, but damned if it wasn’t an incredibly enticing prospect. He fully let Kili lead, again staying himself from choking with a hand at Kili’s base as he frantically thrust into his mouth, Thorin almost as desperate to taste it as Kili was to spill it. Kili cried out his name, body shaking, coming across Thorin’s tongue. Something stirred in his blood, something altogether different than a bond—less intense, but utterly distinct. The tingle spread through his veins and a flutter came up through his abdomen simply from being close to Kili, smelling the sex on him, hearing him breathe. Oh, Kili, his whole core seemed to blissfully sigh. What was happening?

When it was over, Thorin looked into Kili’s eyes. A soft astonishment reflected back at him.

“You felt something, didn’t you?” Kili whispered, helping Thorin up to stand. “Something you’ve not felt with me before.”

Thorin glanced down and away.

“Thorin,” Kili said, still quiet. He tipped a finger under his chin and his lips moved around silent words before audible ones came forth. “Please, if you did, I want to know.”

“I don’t,” Thorin replied, shocked at how raspy his voice sounded to his ears. He shook his head. “I don’t know what it is.”

Kili kissed him then, tasting the faintness of himself on Thorin’s lips.

“But it is something new?”

Thorin took a breath through his mouth and nodded, letting himself look at Kili again. Kili smiled with such sparkling warmth and affection that Thorin couldn’t help but smile back.

Bilbo pressed up behind him mouthing kisses on his spine and Thorin panicked--how was he going to explain this strange newness in his blood when he didn't understand it himself? He turned
around, noticed the gentle understanding in Bilbo’s gaze, and realized there was an excellent chance Bilbo already knew. The next question in his mind (*how did he know*) dissolved in slick arousal when Kili spoke again.

“Will you let me touch you, Thorin?” Kili asked, his voice rich like velvet.

Thorin shifted to look at him and the heat—the *need*—in Kili’s eyes nearly sent him to his knees again.

“Will you let me inside? Surrender yourself to me?”

Kili exhaled the last request, a sensual whisper, and any remaining hesitation Thorin might have had dissipated with it.

Trembling, Thorin licked his lips and murmured, “yes.”

Bilbo climbed up onto the mattress, lazily running his hands over his own body. His cock had barely softened after his orgasm and he was enjoying both buzzing along the afterglow and watching Kili continue to seduce Thorin. Though he had told himself (and his bum, thoroughly shagged and then shagged again last night) that he would not be on the receiving end of much tonight, he thought he might have to make a luscious exception if Kili was considering what Bilbo suspected. If he wasn’t, perhaps Bilbo would suggest it himself.

Thorin allowed Kili to lay him down on the bed, eyeing him hungrily as he caressed Thorin from chest to thighs. Bilbo’s hands appeared around Kili’s waist and Kili leaned back, stealing a filthy kiss. The two of them whispered briefly before Kili’s attention returned to Thorin. Bilbo helpfully supplied Kili with a pillow to tuck under Thorin’s hips and the more portable bottle of oil. Thorin’s eyes widened watching Kili slick his fingers, knowing it was for him, and widened even further when Kili handed the bottle back to Bilbo, who oiled his own fingers instead of sealing it.

Reaching down, Kili massaged over Thorin’s entrance, more to relax than to tease, and Thorin had to remind himself to breathe again. Those mesmerizing dark brown eyes met his and he was struck by the gravity of what they were about to do.

“Last chance to change your mind,” Kili said softly, though Thorin could tell the levity was a cover for Kili’s own nerves.

Without hesitation, Thorin replied, “Please touch me.”

Sighing a moan, Kili draped himself across Thorin, pressing his lips against his collarbone as he settled most of his weight. Thorin felt him press a digit into him with ease, drawing whimpers from them both. Kili’s finger was thicker than Bilbo’s, though Thorin knew he shouldn’t have been surprised. From his own solo adventures, he had been used to his fingers stretching him differently than a hobbit’s, though it was quite another thing for another *dwarf* to do the touching.

A moan from behind Kili pulled Thorin’s attention outward, his eyes darting up to catch a glimpse of Bilbo’s head thrown back and his mouth open in delight.

“I felt it too,” Kili murmured. “That thing you felt. It happened when you pushed into me.”

Though Thorin’s senses were bombarded, clues from numerous past conversations and experiences crystallized into astonishment. Because he and Bilbo had bonded the very night they first kissed, he hadn’t taken the time nor had the foresight to consider examining the steps in between. All he had known was the rush of feeling, of adoration, of desire, and—ultimately—of Bilbo in his very being. Perhaps there possibly could be other stages of connection in between nothing and a bond.
Everything that had happened since they undressed was already too much—Thorin was currently drowning in how delightfully too much it honestly was—but Thorin couldn’t stop himself from diving deeper.

“When? Last night?”
“In Bag End,” Kili murmured, rubbing him where he was especially sensitive.

Thorin guttered a cry, stirred as much by Kili’s confession as he was by being touched just so.

Kili shifted then, leaving Thorin empty, and when the delicious fullness returned, it returned doubly slick and doubly wide. He clutched at Kili’s back, groaning.

“I only had a hint of it in the Shire, mind,” Kili said, his breath now tickling Thorin’s throat. “Just enough to confuse me, to spark both shame and longing. I didn’t know what to do with it—you were gone before I had a chance to examine or experiment. Before we even fell asleep that night, I was already wondering if I had imagined it.”

Thorin writhed wantonly against Kili’s hand even as his words sent his thoughts racing.

“Some--” Kili paused, thinking of Fili, “--other things came to pass that gave me clarity, though even more questions arose from them. I meant what I wrote you and everything I said leading up to bed with you this week, but I didn’t know for sure how it would feel to give myself over to you again--or if you would consent to give yourself over to me.”

“Kili,” Thorin whined...and begged.

The whole of the time Kili had been sharing his secrets, he had been stroking his fingers in and out of Thorin, rubbing all the most sensual spots, and Thorin felt as though brain, heart, and groin were all going to fly to pieces at any given moment. The head of his cock was heavy and his whole body throbbed with want.

“When you touched me again, the other night,” Kili shifted, pushing into Thorin while he stretched his own body upwards. “When you made me come--”

Kili licked at Thorin’s lips. Thorin licked back, tangling his fingers into Kili’s hair to pull him into a frantic kiss. Leaning away only enough to speak, Kili’s mouth still touched Thorin’s as he talked.

“-I felt it again, that connection, something I was finally able to recognize. It wasn’t like it--“ he caught himself just short of mentioning Fili out loud this time. “-it wasn’t an imprint, but there was something there—and that time I knew it was real.”

As Thorin whispered his name again, Kili took a breath and exhaled the rest of his thoughts in a rush.

“I’ve been dreaming and fantasizing about you allowing me to touch you, to be inside you in one way or another, hoping maybe when I did that you might feel something too. When you put your mouth on me, when you swallowed me, the way you looked at me in that moment...I knew you must have felt it, I could have sworn you did. Durin’s beard, I’m babbling.”

“I did feel it,” Thorin confessed. “I felt it, I feel it now--fuck, I don’t even know what it is, but I want to keep feeling it. I want to come feeling it.”

Kili grinned against his lips and pushed back, rising above him on his knees and taking his hand away with him. Thorin hated the loss, but willingly drank in the sight of Kili—naked, gorgeous, and flushed with desire—looking at him so ravenously.

“I believe he is ready, Bee. Are you?” Kili asked.
“Beyond,” Bilbo breathed.

Kili hopped off the bed and Bilbo took Thorin’s hands, urging him up off his back.

“What is this?” asked Thorin.
Claiming his mouth hungrily, Bilbo said, “I want you to have me. I’ve made myself ready for you, all you have to do is say yes.”

Bilbo turned around on his hands and knees, looking back over his shoulder and lustily wiggling his bottom. Thorin glanced around for the bottle Bilbo had been using, only to have it held out in front of him by Kili.

“You two are the best kinds of wicked together,” Thorin said, slicking himself. “Did you plan this?”
Of course! What did you think all that whispering was about?” Bilbo said, his giggle turning into a groan as Thorin sank into him.

Thorin felt Kili’s warmth at his back as he returned to the bed.

“When you said I could touch you, we decided,” Kili murmured against his nape.

Thorin felt Kili push inside him again, unexpectedly thick, even as he pressed into Bilbo. A quick and curious study, Kili was thumbing into him (just as Thorin had done to him) in order to apply the best pressure to his sensitive spot. He cried out, swearing in Khuzdul.

“You’re going to come feeling this, just like you wanted,” Kili said. “And filling up our husband in the process.”

Thorin pumped in a slow, steady rhythm, pulling whines from both himself as well as Bilbo.

“That’s the last of it, then,” Thorin thought to himself. “There’s no question now that I’ve gone and committed…”

What? Adultery? He supposed it wasn’t quite so, not with Bilbo currently giving enthusiastic permission on the end of his prick, but it notably didn’t feel like fidelity, either.

Incest? Now, that was most certainly true.

He supposed he had already had long since done those things (and whatever else he hadn’t known to name) the first time he kissed Kili. Still, having Kili push inside him like this had been his own personal boundary, a firm signpost of no moral return—even having been inside Kili before hadn’t been the same as being opened himself. Going forward, there would be no more excuses, no bargains, no hiding from or talking around the truth of what he had allowed. Whatever this was, whatever his sires would call it as their memories looked on with dark, disapproving faces, Thorin could do nothing but own it from that point on.

The realization was strangely liberating…and the freedom served to further his pleasure. He found himself quite willing to turn himself over again and again to Kili’s hands, to let the little imp do whatever he wished. He whined obscenely as Kili manipulated him.

“With the elves’ Lover’s Wine,” purred Kili near Thorin’s ear, “there’s a sexual dream afterwards that both lovers share, often something fanciful. In one of the dreams that Bilbo and I had, I was fucking him—“

He punctuated the phrase with a thrilling movement inside Thorin that made him gasp.
“-and I could feel everything I was doing to him as though I was doing it to me; I literally fucked myself and him at the same time. It was astounding and obscene, feeling two lovers’ bodies like that. I immediately kenned it must have been what Bilbo had felt when we three went to bed that first time--and what he had denied himself in the days that followed. I didn’t understand how he could stand to know how it felt and still resist the pleasure. I had never felt anything like it…until you pushed inside while Bilbo was wrapped around me. That’s why I’m speaking from experience when I tell you that we’re going to make you feel so good…and come so hard.”

A bolt of desire shook Thorin to his core. “I want to feel what you felt. Show me.”

“You want to be filled with me when you come, squeezing around me even as you empty your desire into our husband’s arse?”

“Yes!”

Kili was stroking himself with his free hand now, sensing Thorin grow hotter with each filthy syllable he uttered.

“You still get a little possessive, don’t you? You love marking him with your imprint and making me watch.”

Thorin had no words left, just animal-like noises of lust and desperation.

“But you also love the filth of it being me inside you. I know you've thought about it, blushing crimson and heating with shame from head to toe as you came thinking about me committing unspeakable acts on you.”

Thorin was close, Kili could feel him tensing and hear the strangled sounds from his throat.

“But what is getting me off right now is that you are willing, Thorin. I didn’t have to take this from you. You want this, you want me, and you want me to make you-“

Thorin shouted, guttered, and swore as he shuddered through his climax. It stretched out longer than he had expected, intense and agonizing. When he finished, his lungs burned and it was a labor to merely remain upright. Slumping his shoulders on a mighty exhale, it was only then he noticed Kili vocalizing behind him, followed by warm wet pulses against his body. Wordlessly, Kili rubbed them into his skin, punctuating twice in the same hour Thorin had been painted with ejaculate—and from two different lovers. Thorin smoothed his hand over the tattoo at the base of Bilbo’s spine and chuckled to himself. If anyone was the whore in the bed that night, it was Thorin. The thought gave him a throb in his groin even though he had just finished. No wonder Bilbo likes that game, he thought.

He backed up and turned to try and face both Bilbo and Kili. Finding himself unexpectedly dizzy, instead he flopped forward on his stomach.

“Fuck,” Thorin sighed happily. “You two are…”

“A menace?” Bilbo supplied.

Thorin closed his eyes and shook his head, smiling. “Wonderful.”

Thorin was not sure how long he stayed there with his arms folded under the pillow, though when he felt some movement behind him, he stirred as though from a light doze.

A hand touched him and a warm wet flannel was drawn gently down his cleft. He twisted to glance behind.

“I’m just getting rid of some of the oil,” said Kili.

“Oh,” Thorin settled back down.
“Now that you’ve rested some, there’s one more level of surrender I seek from you tonight.”

Thorin was about to ask what it was when he felt himself exposed further. The undeniable feeling of a tongue smoothed over his hole and he sighed Kili’s name.

“Say I can,” Kili murmured against his skin.
“Whatever you want,” Thorin agreed, cock twitching beneath him in an effort to rally.

Breath hitching, Thorin squeezed the pillow and breathed a long, muffled groan into it. Kili was as talented at this as he had been at everything else and Thorin didn’t know whether to be annoyed or utterly grateful. Kili pushed into him with his tongue and the sheer intimacy of the act made Thorin shiver from head to toe. After several minutes of meaningful, carnal exploration, Kili shifted away from him and spoke tenderly.

“How...I do believe I might need some more oil after all.”

Thorin felt Kili’s fingers inside him—oh, how quickly they had become familiar! He exhaled, relaxing into the touch. Fully erect again, Thorin wondered what Kili’s next great plan was.

The mattress moved behind him, followed by strong hands re-positioning his thighs. Next, the unmistakable pressure of a cock at his entrance, penetrating him quite easily given the extensive preparation and lubrication. He drew in a sharp breath, heart pounding, thinking for a moment it was Kili, that this had been the last surrender he had sought. The lighter weight of Bilbo’s form rested against his back and when he spoke, Thorin could feel it through his skin from shoulder to thigh.

“I couldn’t leave you unattended, especially when I have been left so wanting.”
“Left wanting,” Kili scoffed from behind. “You were the one who couldn’t wait and wanked while Thorin sucked me.”
“Pffftt,” Bilbo said dismissively and Thorin thought it surreal that the two of them were having a light-hearted domestic while Bilbo had him.

Bilbo rolled into him ruthlessly, using Thorin for his own pleasure, with Thorin all the while trying to shake away the initial shock of thinking Kili had breached him. Bilbo’s bond renewing within him shortly thereafter ultimately cleared his mind, drawing more sighs of contentment from both of them. Thorin rolled onto his back and pulled Bilbo into his arms, kissing him.

“Mmm, you’re hard,” Bilbo said.
“Doesn’t seem like you’ve had quite enough,” agreed Kili.
Thorin quirked a sheepish smile. “It looks that way, but there’s a difference between being hard and being able to finish.”
Kili hummed, picking up the oil to slick his fingers. “True, but how do you know which one it is until you try?”
Kili offered the bottle to Bilbo, but Bilbo waved it off. “Tonight’s yours,” Bilbo said.

Reaching between Thorin’s legs, Kili found him already slick with oil and ejaculate, not to mention stretched and pliant. Though Thorin arched his back and exhaled through his teeth with delight, Kili stopped.

“Unless you don’t want me inside you anymore tonight,” he said with a wolfish grin, not believing for a moment Thorin would evict him.
“The touch is welcome, though the outcome might not please you,” answered Thorin.
Kili cooed, “Oh, I intend to be very pleased by the outcome.”
Thorin rolled his eyes and smiled, though deep within he was also a little mortified. He was not Bilbo or Kili either one—Kili’s quest for a second orgasm from him might prove embarrassingly fruitless…though the process would certainly feel nice.

“Is it thrilling to have me fingering you when you’re practically dripping with Bilbo’s come?”

“It thrills me to have you fingering me at all,” Thorin said.

Kili had planned to filthy talk Thorin into his next frenzy, but Thorin’s reply was unexpected. It stiffened Kili’s cock while simultaneously softening his demeanor.

“Truly?” he asked.

“You know it is true. All of this, tonight, I’ve wanted it but was afraid to give myself permission. I thought I needed the excuse of restraint to allow myself the indulgence—and still would like to experience it in the future, truth be told—but deliberately inviting you in liberated me in ways I didn’t expect.”

Kili oiled his hands again, wrapping the free one around himself as he pushed just his middle finger inside Thorin.

“I didn’t expect it, either,” whispered Kili.

Thorin arched again as Kili masterfully worked him. “Didn’t expect what you do to me?” he asked.

“What you do to me. I didn’t think you’d react to me like this. It’s making me….” Kili trailed off and breathed Thorin’s name, stroking himself steadily.

Thorin licked his lip and bit it, undulating against Kili’s touch. He could scarcely believe the ecstasy building inside him, and seeing Kili’s hand on his own cock meant Kili had no intention of helping Thorin along with any more than he already was. Part of him wanted to stroke himself while Kili fingered him open but the other part…the other part wanted to come solely from Kili inside him. Thorin still wanked to the memory of that very first time Bilbo finished him off without touching his cock. It it all did shameful, exciting things to him—things that only served to push him closer.

“You’re so beautiful right now,” Kili rasped. “You’re beautiful enough to make me come just from watching how you respond to my touch.”

Thorin could scarcely do more than whine, though he managed a few words. “I want to make you come.”

“You first,” Kili murmured, releasing himself and using that hand to brace himself on the bed, leaning over Thorin’s stomach. “I want to watch you finish like this, finish for me like this. Fuck, I need to get you off.”

The change in position gave Kili more control over the digit inside Thorin—and not trying to keep up with two rhythms improved his coordination considerably. Thorin was eventually reduced to nothing more than unintelligible grunts and keening as Kili brought him closer and closer. Grasping at the blankets, twisting and arching, he found himself balancing on the lusciously intense line between “please stop” and “never stop.”

Thorin sucked in a sudden breath, his eyes flying open only to meet Kili’s. The fixed look of desire and fervor in those endless pools of brown loosed something inside him. The syllables to Kili’s name matched to his heartbeat in his mind, repeating louder and louder until it was being shouted repeatedly in an orgasmic frenzy. The cries were his own and he was coming, each twitch spurring across his stomach in milky paths. Panting and trembling through the ebb, Thorin had been thoroughly dismantled once again. Head lolling, he watched Kili swipe his palm through the mess on his stomach and use it to pump himself. Thorin growled and surged forward, tossing Kili onto his back.
“I told you I want to make you come.” Thorin snatched Kili’s hand away from his prick and put it on the back of his own head. “Fuck me.”

He gripped Kili’s prick at the base and wrapped his lips around it; it bucked up to meet him. He could taste his own spend as Kili used his mouth, thrusting again and again until Thorin could taste them both together.

Glancing up at Kili, Thorin grew sheepish when Kili stared back at him in stunned, post-orgasmic wonder. Honestly, he was as surprised as Kili seemed to be at his own perverse outburst. He dared a glance at Bilbo, too, who also wore an odd expression.

Thorin wet his lips nervously and that was all Bilbo needed. He instantly dove for Thorin’s mouth, tongue invading him with a surprising and thorough enthusiasm.

“I never imagined I would love the taste of Kee from your lips like this,” Bilbo murmured. “I-um, me neither,” Thorin replied.

“Well, now I want to know how it tastes,” Kili said, claiming his own obscene kiss from Thorin. Bilbo giggled. “I might have gotten it all.” “Greedy hobbit,” Kili teased. “Suppose I’ll have to try some from yours, then.”

Still a touch light-headed, Thorin watched as Kili and Bilbo fell into a filthy embrace. It all seemed like a dream. The only thing reminding him this truly was reality was his self-consciousness.

Kili turned to him, affectionate and breathless. “Oh, Thorin! How beautifully you delivered tonight! This was everything I had hoped and more.”

Bilbo left the bed, excusing himself to the water closet again.

Argued Kili, “You don’t have to keep giving us privacy, you know.” “I know but,” Bilbo did a little dance-like hop on the floor, “I actually do have to go.”

Thorin and Kili laughed as Bilbo ran off. The sound faded as their eyes met, but the smiles remained. Kili smoothed a hand over Thorin’s hair and kissed him softly.

“You brushed out all but your courting braid for tonight,” he said. “You noticed.”

“Of course I did. You really were simply,” Kili sighed happily, “astounding this evening.” “Did it measure up to your fantasy?”

“And more. So much more! I didn’t know—I mean I knew, but I guess I didn’t anticipate how much—your permission would affect me.” Thorin toyed with Kili’s hand. “Me too. Your trust in me last night made me giddy; trusting you tonight was just as intoxicating.”

“And the new...connection? Do you like it?” “I think that might be why I acted a little wild there at the end. I suppose I wasn’t quite ready to be empty. I had to feel it again.”

“Seriously, though,” giggled Kili. "When you shoved my hand in your hair and told me to fuck you, I knew it wouldn’t take long!” Thorin sucked in a cheek, carefully choosing his next words. “Do you wonder…” “Wonder what?”

“No, I shouldn’t ask. I promised no pressure and I meant it. Tonight was magnificent. Being your lover is magnificent. What we’ve shared the past two days has been better than my imagination.”

Kili studied him. Thorin sincerely meant what he was saying, but Kili was also smart enough to know what he omitted.
“You’re thinking of my mouth on you, aren’t you?” he asked.

Bilbo joined them before Thorin could answer, the bounce in his returning step now due more to joy than to nature’s desperation.

“I brought fresh flannels from the bathing room!” he announced brightly, fetching the kettle to add some warm water to the lukewarm basin. He wet them and passed them out for washing.

“So when is Beorn returning to help you with that tub?” Kili asked Thorin, waggling his eyebrows flirtatiously.

“You know full well he is coming back for the wedding,” Thorin said. “My hope is that he also has an idea in mind for our solution, but first and foremost, I want him to enjoy himself as a guest.”

“Oh, don’t get all lecture-y on me,” Kili groused. “I want him to enjoy himself, too. I was just teasing.”

“I am holding out hope for both, though,” Thorin

Cleaned up, they climbed into bed. Bilbo had again suggested Thorin situate himself in the middle for the night, though Kili quickly fell sound asleep with neither discussion nor ceremony.

“How does he drift off so fast?” Thorin asked.

“An enviable trait. I thought perhaps it was hereditary.

“Many sleepless nights on these pillows will tell you no.”

Bilbo hummed a quiet laugh. “Well, maybe it was getting off three times, then. That’ll take it out of you.”

Thorin sighed. Though he had managed some marathon sessions with Bilbo before—that last night in Lake Town specifically coming to mind—it was much more an exception for him than the regular state it seemed to be for Bilbo and Kili. He knew he couldn’t dwell, lest he ruin his evening, so Thorin changed the subject instead.

“So, Kili mentioned your special Lover's Wine earlier,” Thorin said, leading.

“What of it?”

“I didn’t want to mention it to him just yet, but I have obtained a bottle.”

“Wait, what?” Bilbo cut his eyes over to Kili, hoping his outburst didn’t disturb him.

“How did that happen?”

“When I was in Rivendell this autumn, I approached Daerbes. With all my nerve (and red as a strawberry) I asked her the price of her wine. She demurred, more than a little puzzled how I knew of it to begin with. You and Kili never told me they keep it a bit of a secret, only putting it out on a need-to-know basis.”

“I hadn’t known they did,” Bilbo replied. “They said her demand was high and though I assumed it was nothing folks shouted across the countryside, I still thought that it was open for sale.”

“She asked me why I wanted the wine and I could not rightly tell her. I am not sure I’ve ever been less eloquent in my life, truly. She was kind but firm that the money she accepted was only so people would value the wine. The real price was the explanation. The explanation was how she decided who would be given the privilege of acquiring a bottle, regardless of coin offered. She said overcoming my embarrassment simply to ask was almost reason enough, because she could tell it had been beyond difficult, but considering I was an apparent bachelor with no explanation at all, she would have to decline.”

“Yet you have a bottle.”

“I’ve thought about it a lot and as near as I can figure, two things happened after I first approached Daerbes. One was giving Nori my encouragement to stay in Rivendell with his love if that was his wish, and the other was my sincere invitation for him to bring Nîfon to Erebor for the wedding, or whenever the two of them wished otherwise. I cannot say for sure if either of those things played a
part, but Nerithel and Daerbes came to my room the morning we were to depart, each holding a bottle of the special wine.”

“Oh! I’ll bet you were surprised. Wait, they had two bottles?”

“I was immensely surprised. ‘For your faith’ was all Daerbes said to me as she handed me the bottle she held. Before I could ask her more about it, Nerithel extended hers. She explained hers was for Dís and Dwalin’s wedding, a special gift they did not think either of them would be comfortable receiving from an elf, but something both Nerithel and Daerbes felt strongly about giving them. She had a queer look about her as she explained it, something I’ve never been able to put my finger on, but I pledged I would give it to them just the same. They turned to walk away and I called after them, reminding them I had not paid for my own bottle yet.

“Daerbes looked me in the face and asked me, ‘Are you in love, King Thorin?’ I replied I was very much in love. She nodded, turning to leave again. I called her name, confused.

“‘Your payment has been accepted,’ she said. She wore a smile that stopped any impulse I had to insist. That was the end of it. Afterward, I was inexplicably sanguine for the rest of the morning. It was one of the strangest encounters I’ve had with either elf or human in all my years. I still don’t understand it, but that is how I’ve come to possess my own bottle.”

Bilbo marveled. “I had no idea the wine was—well I knew it was special, because of course it is, but that story makes me feel as though I’ve never thanked them enough for the bottles were lucky enough to have. So you have a bottle for Dwalin and your sister? Have you given it to them?”

“I thought about saving it for the wedding, though I worried somehow giving it to them for that night specifically might be awkward. I wound up giving it to them a few weeks ago, to commemorate the completion of their suite, though explaining what I knew of the wine turned out to be fairly awkward anyway. I don’t know if they are saving it, or if they even believed what I told them about it.”

“How did you manage to sit on a story like that for three nights without telling it?” asked Bilbo, yawning.

Thorin smiled lovingly. “To be fair, we’ve had a whole winter on which to catch up.”

“Well, then. There is another piece of the puzzle of Nerithel, Daerbes, and Dís. What became of your bottle?”

“You mean did I get lonely enough to pop it open for a legendary wank?” Thorin teased. “Can’t say I could terribly blame you if you had.”

“As it happens, I managed to exercise some self-control.”

“A feat one could say was legendary in its own right with a bottle of concentrated, liquid sex at your disposal.”

“Quite right,” Thorin said, humming a quiet giggle. “Be that as it may, for better or worse, the bottle remains unopened and stashed in my nightstand. I planned to wait at the very least until you returned to me. Once I had you undressed and in my arms again, though, I must confess—liquid sex or not—I wanted our reunion to be us, just as we were. Kili and his surprises followed, and that brings us to now.”

“So, what do you think?”

Thorin shifted to look at him. “Look who is so interested,” he grinned. “I’ll admit to it freely. The prospect of a night in bed with you combined with a bottle of Lover’s Wine is incredibly enticing.”

“My original plan was to share it with you alone, though the idea of including Kili is not without intrigue—especially after the events of the past couple evenings. Half of me is eager to get into it soon, but I also like the idea of saving it...perhaps for an occasion of some sort.”

“My love, you’re delightfully sentimental. I like the idea of saving it as well.”

“You do?”

“Yes. Once we knew what it was, Kili and I saved our second bottle, too, and the third we gifted to Fili and Bofur for their wedding—” Bilbo caught himself at once, clapping his hand over his mouth. Gently, Thorin tugged his hand away. “It is okay. They’ve already told me of their wedding in the Shire this past December. They’ve also told me they are keeping it secret, so rest assured I’ve not
told anyone else."
Bilbo heaved a sigh of relief. "Anyhow, what I was saying is that one of these nights, it will simply feel right--maybe to commemorate a memory, or after a special evening we want to make all the more special—and we’ll know it is time.”

Bilbo leaned over to blow out the last candle before kissing Thorin and cuddling into his arms. The movement did not wake Kili, though it disturbed him enough to shift, rolling against Thorin and slinging an arm over his chest. Thorin and Bilbo said their good-nights and Bilbo rapidly followed Kili into slumber.

Though he was cocooned between warm, snuggling lovers after a night of unexpected, fulfilling passion, Thorin stared at the ceiling. Unsettled and unable to sleep, he couldn't stop thinking about summer's inevitable end when Bilbo would return to the Shire for another fall and winter. How would Thorin ever give nights like this up? How could he be expected to bear such loneliness again?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for waiting so patiently! Hopefully the length (nearly 10,000 words) of this chapter somewhat makes up for the delay.
Comments are my oxygen.

Love you all
“Um…” Kili looked to Bilbo, who shrugged his eyebrows. “I suppose. Did you need to talk about it?”
Shaking his head, Thorin said, “No, I just thought… I don’t know, so many things have needed to be talked to death since you arrived in Erebor.”

Thorin watched Bilbo smooth through Kili’s hair the next morning, his hobbit singing softly as he worked. He mused to himself how the three of them waking up together and getting ready for the day carried a unique intimacy of its own. These quiet moments were somewhat abbreviated out of necessity at present, however, and his mind wandered to how lovely it might be to start the day without such secrecy.

As Bilbo finished Kili’s hair, he noticed Thorin observing him with a curious expression on his face. Having been the one to groom Thorin the past two mornings, he hoped he hadn’t made a misstep by fixing up Kili before him… or in front of him. Strange, he thought, how simple acts of affection gave him more pause than the raw carnal acts that preceded them.

“May I fix your hair, too?” he asked Thorin. “We should probably put the braids back in before Dís notices.”
Thorin’s answering smile warmed Bilbo from head to foot. “I would like that very much.”

As Bilbo combed, Thorin noticed he was quieter than he had been with Kili.

“Why did you stop singing?” asked Thorin.
“Oh,” Bilbo said, embarrassed. “Kee likes it when I sing to him, so I do it almost every day. I wasn’t even all that aware I was doing it, not really. It has gotten to be a habit of sorts.”
“It was lovely,” Thorin said. “I’ve not noticed you singing much around me.”
“I didn’t know you liked it,” replied Bilbo with a confused frown. “Frankly, more to the point, I thought you disliked it.”

Thorin winced, remembering the times he had silenced Bilbo—not for any annoyance caused by his voice but from his own bitter possessiveness.

Thorin turned to face him, chagrined. Softly, he insisted, “I do like it, I like it very much. If I’ve ever quieted you or made you feel like I didn’t, it was because I was hatefully jealous.”
“But you’ve got such a beautiful voice of your own!” Bilbo said.
“Not jealous like that. Jealous because I didn’t want anyone else loving your voice—or you—like I do. It was wrong of me. To think I’ve been missing out because you thought I disliked it!”
“That seems like punishment enough,” Kili said.
“Well, then, let’s see if I can think of something to hum while I finish this.”

Thorin turned back around, a soft joy rising within him when he recognized the dwarven ballad Bilbo was humming from his youth. Bofur must have taught it to him.
“Hmmm, there seems to be a little something in your hair back here. Oh,” Bilbo realized, huffing a laugh. “Um, I’ll work it out well enough but you might be due for a wash.”

Kili figured out what it was before Thorin did, though soon all three were giggling that Thorin had dried semen in his hair—his own, no less—from passionately shoving Kili’s hand in his locks the night before.

When they were all nearly ready to face the world outside the door again, Kili cleared his throat.

“So,” he said to Thorin. “Bilbo let me read…something you wrote. He said it was with your permission.”

Thorin had been waiting for Kili to address this, though he had hoped not to have to. Resigned to another lengthy, soul-baring conversation, he sighed, “It was. He thought it was important to share, though I don’t know if I agree with him.”

“I do,” replied Kili gently.

Thorin waited, but Kili didn't continue.

“And?” he prompted.

“And…what?” replied Kili, confused.

“You brought it up for some reason, I imagine.”

“Well, just because I wanted to acknowledge it, I suppose, so it felt less like sneaking, and also to thank you for your trust in agreeing to share it.”

Silence stretched between them.

“That’s it?” Thorin asked.

“Oh…” Kili looked to Bilbo, who shrugged his eyebrows. “I suppose. Did you need to talk about it?”

Shaking his head, Thorin said, “No, I just thought…I don’t know, so many things have needed to be talked to death since you arrived in Erebor. With Bilbo’s insistence of sharing what I had written with you, I guess I supposed this would be another such time.”

Kili shrugged. “It was important and insightful to me, no mistake, but no matter how insightful and important it was, I also had the feeling you might not want to dwell longer on what spurred you to write those pages.”

Thorin exhaled in a grateful, relieved huff. “You were right, I didn’t. On that note, I would also appreciate if you did not discuss it or show it to your brother or Bofur. Parts of it were particularly ardent and not suitable for the eyes of anyone I do not already take to bed.”

Bilbo smiled to himself, because Thorin could not have chosen a better way for Kili to overcome his natural tendency to share everything with Fili than to appeal to him as a trusted bedmate.

*****

Although Bilbo was always reluctant to part with Thorin each morning, he was also equally eager to meet back up with Bofur and Fili. It seemed Bofur and Fili had looked forward to it that morning as well, given they were waiting on Bilbo’s and Kili’s side of the suite, jumping up for hugs and kisses before they so much as said hello.

Bofur pawed Bilbo’s arse while they embraced and Bilbo sucked in a hiss of air through his teeth.

“Easy there.”

Releasing him quickly, Bofur looked his question.
“Thorin and I have been fucking him practically in half for two days,” Kili explained with a lascivious grin.  
“Kili!” Bilbo barked.  
“What?”

Bilbo used his widened eyes to discreetly gesture in Bofur’s direction, though Bofur saw it anyway.

“My darling,” said Bofur, “you do not have to hide what you’ve been doing from me. It isn’t as if I don’t know, after all. I appreciate your consideration, but it is something for me to get used to and honestly, other than missing you at night, I’ve been doing alright.”

Kili glanced at Fili, hoping he would also develop Bofur’s way of looking at their arrangement… eventually.

Bofur continued, feigning disappointment, “Any road, I’m guessing that tender bum means that you’ve merely come back to claim us for breakfast?”  
Sheepishly, Bilbo replied, “I’m sorry, Bo. We’re both fair exhausted.”  
Ruffling Bilbo’s hair, Bofur said, “I’m only having you on. I’m famished myself and besides, we’ve told you--Fee and I don’t want a quick tumble for a reunion.”

Bilbo’s worried, embarrassed expression melted into a smile. “You rascal! You had me worried for a minute.”

“Though I must say, I’m still hoping for sooner than later,” Fili added. “Or maybe some moments sneaked in the meantime simply to trade stories away from prying ears, right Bo?”

“Aye,” Bo replied. “We could use with a few intentionally stolen meetings here and there to catch up on private tales since these past few days in Erebor haven’t given me much faith that it will happen on its own.”

Kili brightened. “Oh, that’s a good idea. We should definitely look at making time for that.”

“Yes,” agreed Bilbo.

Bofur noted no one was talking specifically about when, but he found himself too unexpectedly bashful to bring it up.

*****

Kili shared frequent looks with Thorin while they ate, each one warming him more than the last. Though Kili had predicted things would change between them after that first night, he could not have prepared himself for the intensity they experienced—intensity that further magnified upon switching roles. It was a good change, though. In truth, knowing what he did now, he would not want to go back to before. He couldn’t fathom willingly walking away from something that felt so exciting and right.

*****

It had not escaped Fili’s attention at breakfast how often Kili would catch Thorin’s eye and smile happily—that special grin of his with the apples of his cheeks high and glowing, the one that brought his eyes along for the dance. Fili also noted how Thorin gazed back with a slight tilt of his head and a sweet, almost shy smile of his own.

Fili hadn’t been the only one who had noticed, either. After the meal, Dís had asked him and Bofur to walk with her, remarking along the way, “I am too happy to question it, but I think Thorin and your brother have finally found their common ground again. I don’t even remember the last time they got along so well—the last time might have been a couple decades before Kili came of age! With Kili marrying Bilbo, my best hope was some manner of tenuous truce. I never dared hope they could be so happy with each other again. Mahal’s grace, they were actually smiling at each
other today!"

Fili simply couldn’t bear to talk about or mentally replay those breakfast glances so soon, not when he knew what they were likely truly about. He vaguely excused himself.

“What’s wrong with him?” Dís asked, concerned.
“His stomach, I think,” Bofur covered for him. “He said something about the meal not sitting right.”
“You should go see after him.”

Bofur wanted to, truth be told, but having a fair inkling of why Fili ran off to begin with made him think Fili might want a moment or two of space.

“And deprive myself of your company?”
“Oh, you,” replied Dís coyly. “Go on now, before I decide to marry you instead.”

After a respectable amount of time had passed that morning (in which Bilbo had managed to avoid the notice—and scrutiny—of Balin, Dwalin, and Dís), he went looking for Thorin on the Grand Overlook. It had become their unspoken meeting spot and he indeed found him waiting there. However, Bilbo could tell in an instant that Thorin was in a mood. He approached him, grasping his hand, peeking around, and pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek.

“What has happened, love?” he asked.
“I suppose there is not much point in asking you how you knew,” Thorin said with a wry smile. He ran his fingers over his hair. “It is just…if I’m not arguing with Balin or dealing with his general disapproval, I’m catching these looks of pity from him.”
“Pity?”
Thorin nodded. “And he isn’t the only one. I suppose it had never quite stopped after the end of our first engagement, but it has grown considerably more obvious since you’ve gotten back. Dain, Balin, Dís, Gloin…it seems that everyone who doesn’t know the truth has lent me concern. The only one who hasn’t is Dwalin, and that is only because he knows too much. His glances are loaded more with suspicion and disapproval.”
“I’d wager Dís’s are more of a mix, too, for that matter.”
“True. Dís and Balin can’t seem to figure out whether their pity should be tinged with annoyance or worry, though between them, Dís seems more worried and Balin seems more annoyed.”

They both commiserated with a laugh, though it wasn’t exactly cheerful. Bilbo’s expression softened.

“Believe me when I tell you that I know the embarrassment you’re feeling now.”
“Oh?” Thorin quirked half a smile he didn’t really feel. “Is a hobbit story forthcoming?”
“Yes, a hobbit story is forthcoming, and somewhat of a dwarf story, too. I’ve told you about my family and neighbors before and what awful gossips they are.”
“Even the ones you like.”
“Sometimes especially the ones I like. The ones I don’t like much are awful for more than just their gossiping. Soon after Kili came back to the Shire with me, he and Fili set out again to go see Dís. It was a necessary trip in so many ways and although I hated to see them go, I sent them off anyhow. It didn’t take long before the whispers started…then the pitying looks…then outright condolences about how my dwarf lover had up and left me. I was still planning my wedding through all of it, which made it so much worse because on top of the pity, people thought I was delusional to boot! Even Lobelia Sackville-Baggins came over to my home to let me know how sorry she was to hear of my misfortune—and tried to talk me out of Bag End in the process. Now, don’t you think that
burned me?”
“It must have! All that talk, and Lobelia having her say on top of it. I’m sure you were furious and mortified all at the same time.”
“I was, Thorin. I hated it, even though I knew Kili hadn’t left me. In fact, it not being true made it worse. It was embarrassing and upsetting and the longer they were gone, the worse it got. You know what, though?”
“What?”
“The lads came back. If there were any doubters left after that, they certainly shut their gobs after the biggest wedding the Shire had ever seen. It got better…though even telling the story, I can feel my face heat with embarrassment still.”
“So your point is to try my best to ignore the pity, worry, and annoyance because I know what is true and what isn’t?”
“Precisely. Besides, we’ll be telling everyone what’s what soon enough.”

Thorin chewed his lip.

*****

Though Dís had insisted they part for Bofur to see after Fili, he ultimately chose to follow his initial inclination to leave him be for a while. He knew from experience that Fili would doubtless put things back to rights in his mind once the flare of jealousy subsided. Instead, Bofur sought out his family and caught up with them for a short while. He went back to his suite afterwards, thinking perhaps Fili had been cooling his heels in there, but there was no one. He sat on the bed anyway, only to be interrupted by the opening of the adjoining door.

“Oh, hello,” Kili said.
“Hey! Are you looking for Fee?”
Kili smiled and shook his head. “Not in particular, I just heard the door and footsteps. I remembered what you said about stealing moments and figured I would come steal one from whichever one of you it might be.”

Bofur waved enthusiastically and Kili giggled.

“Actually,” Kili sat down next to him. “I’m happy to see that it was you in particular. Being here has been strange compared to what we were used to back home. Like you had noted earlier, there haven’t been many opportunities for our special discussions so far, and there is so much to talk about here.”
“Wouldn’t you just know? I was telling Fee this very morning that I miss how we are at home, and for that exact reason. Home,” repeated Bofur. “Funny, it is home, isn’t it? I mean, I know we call it that back in the Shire, but to be sitting in Erebor and saying it—and feeling it—I don’t know, it just does something to me.”
Smiling softly, Kili said, “Me as well.”

They sat quietly for a few moments before Bofur pushed against Kili’s arm with his own, making his body rock.

“Oi, alright. Out with it.”
“With what?”
“I think you know what. You can’t very well tell Fee but I know you’ve been dying to tell someone. How was he?”

With permission granted, Kili wasted no time in mooning over Thorin. “Oh, Bo! He was—he is—wonderful. Going into it with my head on straight and my eyes open has made all the difference, and I think the time to think this winter has made a difference for him, too. It is like we’re lovers
for real—not just happening to be in the same bed with Bee, but there for each other, too.”

“And how ‘there for each other’ has it gotten? Have you gotten your surrender? Have you made him bloom?”

On the last syllable, Bofur nudged Kili teasingly, and Kili nudged him back twice as hard.

“Don’t make fun, you walnut,” laughed Kili.

“Well, where’s the sport in that?”

There was a peal of harder laughter from them both. Kili fidgeted as it faded, his eyes on his busy thumbs.

“Bo, I’ve got…I don’t know what to call it. An issue maybe?”

“So tell already,” Bofur said kindly.

“What happened with me and Thorin before, in Bag End, I didn’t know what it was. When Fee and I felt it, it was so much stronger—an actual bond, which is decidedly not what the thing with Thorin was—and I didn’t know if my yearning for Thorin was due to the connection from before or if I had imagined it or what. Well, now I’ve felt it again, that connection between us, and though I’m still certain it is not a bond, I am also quite certain it is not imagined. It is…well, I don’t know what it is or what it means.”

“Cor, that is thoroughly confusing. I don’t know how you expect me to unravel it.”

Kili glanced up at him. “I don’t expect anyone to unravel it. What I need to know is what do I tell Fee about it? Or do I tell Fee about it?”

“Oh Kee, I can’t…I can’t be the one who tells you what to do in this instance. Please don’t put me in the middle of this.”

“I know you can’t, but if anyone could have helped clarify this for me at all or point me in a better direction, I thought it would be you.”

Kili looked so dejected, Bofur couldn’t stand it. Against his better judgement, he took a deep breath and spoke.

“Look, I value the ease we have in each other to be able to confide such things. I look forward to these talks of ours, actually, and I don’t want anything I say to you to make you feel uncomfortable sharing with me in the future. However, do you trust me to give you a little advice?”

Looking into Bofur’s eyes, Kili answered, “Yes, Bo. I trust you with so much more than that.”

“Fee is trying so hard with this and I think he will continue to try no matter what you choose to tell him—and I must reiterate that I cannot help you decide how much or when that will be--but Kee? Be prepared for him to possibly be unable to accept it without having something all his own.”

“You’re talking about making love. Not his game of stopping just short of the end, but the real thing…the whole thing.”

“I didn’t say that, but if that is the first thing your mind went to, what does that tell you?”

Kili sighed, eyes returning to his hands again. “It tells me I probably suspected that already.”

“Can I make another observation?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve got a feeling the idea appeals to you, too, but something inside is stopping you. I could guess it to be guilt maybe, but I don’t want to take any more liberty with assumptions than I already have. However, I will remind you that you’re already bonded. Going through with making love is merely formality unless you think you’re going to have some sort of elevated bond.”

Kili quirked a smile. “Honestly, I’ve wondered if somehow the resulting imprint would be beyond what we already know.”

“Maybe even been a little afraid of that being the case?”

Kili’s gaze snapped to Bofur’s. He exhaled, “Yes.”

Smiling kindly, Bofur said, “Consider this: Even if you do have some sort of mystical,
incandescent, double-extra-bond, there’s nothing you two could do that will lessen that I am Fee’s Chosen or that Bee is yours. Does it help you to know that I’ve already given Fili my assent to do what he will with you?”

“Really?”

“Aye, and I’ll wager Bee has already done something similar.”

Kili tried to look back down again, but this time, Bofur nudged his chin up.

“Hey, I’m not saying you have to go through with anything. I’m not even saying this is exactly the way it is. I’m only telling you what I’ve observed and what my thoughts are based on those observations, and even then only because you asked. None of this is a foregone conclusion, and definitely not worth that gloomy look on your handsome face.”

Bofur leaned in and kissed him—really kissed him—for the first time in days.

“I know,” Kili whispered against Bofur’s lips. “You’re not telling me anything I haven’t already told myself. Hearing it from you makes it much harder to dismiss as my usual nonsense, though.”

Bofur smiled, leaning into another soft kiss. “I happen to know three dwarves and a hobbit that respect, appreciate, and adore that nonsense of yours, Kee.”

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Bilbo and Kili stood in their suite alone at bedtime, having already said their longing goodnights with Fili and Bofur.

“I want you to go to Thorin’s room first tonight,” Bilbo said.

Kili’s face twisted into a confused grin. “That’s weird, why would you suggest that?”

“I thought maybe you and Thorin could use a moment or two for talking.”

“Bee, how many times do I have to tell you? We’re not keeping secrets; we can talk in front of you.”

“I know you can, dear heart, and I do love that you are both so eager to be transparent, but just because you can doesn’t mean you should.”

“I don’t follow.”

“There’s nothing wrong with the two of you having private or intimate moments of your own. I know it doesn’t mean you’re keeping big secrets from me.” Bilbo paused to chuckle. “I don’t need to be there to know, anyhow. You and Thorin will both tell me everything later as you overanalyze each other.”

“Oh, I do not do that!”

Bilbo fixed him with a look and crossed his arms.

“Well, okay, you’ve got me there,” Kili conceded.

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Bilbo was on his way to Thorin’s room when he heard Dís’s voice.

“A little late for a visit to Thorin’s bed chamber, isn’t it?” she asked coldly.

Thinking quickly, Bilbo replied, “Thorin and Kili had something to discuss. They asked me to join them after.”

“Indeed. Well, as long as you were meeting them there, I think I wouldn’t mind saying goodnight to them myself. I’ll come with you.”

She was so smug, so completely sure she had caught him in the middle of something illicit, that
Bilbo was almost going to enjoy it when she swanned into the room only to find both Kili and Thorin, exactly as he had said. Of course, whether Thorin and Kili had already started in was one thing (though unlikely, as they’d already discussed the possibility of being caught half naked with the door open before), and whether their story would match Bilbo’s excuse was another.

*****

Thorin had been surprised to see Kili instead of Bilbo at the door. Kili explained quickly, lest Thorin get the worrisome idea Bilbo might not be coming at all.

“Bee wanted me to be first tonight instead of him. He’ll be here shortly.”
“Any particular reason he insisted?” Thorin said, sitting on the edge of the bed. Kili shrugged, flapping his arms against his body. “He’s got this idea that we might want to talk about last night.”
“And do you?” Thorin asked gently.
Kili sat down next to him. “No,” he said, shaking his head and smiling. The smile faded into wide, curious eyes. “Unless, unless you do?”

Now it was Thorin’s turn to grin, because Kili was being so…Kili.

“Well, you were there,” he said affectionately. “Unless you weren’t paying any attention whatsoever, there wasn’t much missing how I felt about it.”
Smiling, Kili said, “That’s one way to look at it.”
“And yet…” Thorin paused, considering. “I was there, too, and though your pleasure was too obvious as to be in question, your feelings after are not wholly known to me, nor mine to you. Maybe you are wondering how I feel about it with my clothes on, just as I’m wondering how you feel.”
Kili swallowed. “Maybe.”
“Would it help you to know I thought about you, Bilbo, and the things we did all day today? That I’ve been mulling over the different ways I want both of you to moan my name tonight once Bilbo joins us?”
“Yes, it would,” replied Kili, his breath ragged with fresh desire.
Thorin slid his hand under Kili’s hair at his nape and his voice quieted to a seductive baritone. “I plan to make you two beg for it.”
Kili reached up to touch Thorin’s face, also murmuring sensually. “That’s funny, because I had been thinking much the same all day, too, down to my plan to make you two beg.”

They looked into each other’s eyes and leaned in, lips about to touch, when a sudden, loud knock at the door startled them apart. Kili clutched his chest.

“Scared me to death!” he proclaimed, giggling.
“Must be Bilbo. Why don’t you get it this time?”

Kili opened the door with a flourishing bow. “My jewel!”

Bilbo cleared his throat and Kili glanced up to see Bilbo with Dís standing right behind.

“Oh, um, two jewels. Mam, what are you doing here?”

Bilbo tried in vain to explain without Dís seeing, using only the widening of his eyes and a nose twitch.

Kili opened the door wider. “Thorin, look! Mam is here with Bilbo.”
Standing, Thorin crossed to the door and invited them in. “Well, this is a surprise.”
“That’s what I thought when I saw Bilbo sneaking out to your room well after you had retired,” sniffed Dís. "He said you and Kili were having a talk?"
“And so we were,” Thorin replied. “We still have some things to work out between us so that we may be able to enjoy your wedding with no remaining uncertainty.”
“I thought you had worked those things out already. As a matter of fact, I was just telling Fili today how much more agreeable you two seem. You appear to be getting on better than in the years preceding the journey.”
Thorin didn’t miss a beat. “You of all people know how feelings can linger, plus their arrival in Erebor predictably stirred feelings both old and new. I invited Kili here tonight to explore what the future holds for us and had specifically asked Bilbo to join us in the hopes that we could all drink to this new beginning and happier, surer footing going forward. What I don’t understand is why you’re here with Bilbo?”
She stammered, “Well, I, um…I saw him on his way to your room and, erm—”
“And thought he was sneaking over here for some naked, writhing tryst in my bed?” finished Thorin.
Dís blushed in shame. “Well…”
With a sigh, Thorin said, “I’m growing weary of reminding you that our business is ours, not yours, and although I’ve recounted tonight’s circumstance to you for Bilbo’s sake and reputation, I do not plan to continually justify or account for every moment I spend with my loved ones until you are so pleased.”
“I’m just—I mean, I’m only trying to…” trailing off, Dís stopped trying to explain herself and exhaled in surrender. “You’re right, and I apologize.”
Thorin took her hand and squeezed it.
“Well, since you’re here anyway, maybe you would like to join us in that toast? Regrettably, I don’t have a fourth goblet, but we can make do.”
Embarrassed by her suspicions (and his magnanimity), Dís said, “No, that’s quite alright. I’m… I’m going now.”

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Once Dís took her leave, Bilbo pulled Thorin down to a filthy kiss.

“Thorin, you’re positively evil,” he said breathlessly. “She had the complete right idea about us and you knew it!”
“And I didn’t at any point lie. I didn’t even deny the tryst; I simply described what she thought was going to happen. I cannot help if she drew the conclusions she did afterwards.”
Bilbo pursed his lips fondly. “You’re a scoundrel.”
“But I’m your scoundrel,” Thorin replied, kissing him again.
“This does bring up a good point, though,” Kili noted. “If I visit the room first, it doesn’t matter if Bilbo is caught because anyone who tries to dramatically ‘catch’ you two together will always be diverted by my presence when they try to do the big accusation.”
“As tonight well-proved,” agreed Bilbo. “From now on, you should come over first or we should simply come over together.”
Kili regarded Thorin solemnly. “We might do well to consider that tonight also proved eyes are still upon you in regards to Bilbo—perhaps on you both.”
“You would suppose the royal sibling and members of council would have better things to do,” groused Bilbo.
It was Kili’s turn to pull a kiss from Bilbo’s lips. “He is king, my jewel. Every day he draws breath, his actions and deeds are scrutinized, magnified, and held up for all to either aspire to or condemn, should they see fit.”

Thorin made a noise of interest, catching the attention of his lovers.

“Something you’d like to add?” teased Kili.
Thorin shook his head, but the grin he fought had already started breaking loose. “It is simply good to know some of those oft-repeated lessons of mine made it past your hair, even if they are now coming back to haunt me.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much
Bilbo chattered excitedly about the approaching weather.

“Is it always this beautiful when daytime storms approach here?”
Thorin nodded. “Beautiful…but dangerous. Mountain storms are their own spirits compared to what happens in woods and on plains.”
“I remember the Misty Mountains,” Bilbo said with a shudder. “That seemed far less beautiful, though.”

Later the following morning, Bilbo fretted to Thorin.

“It is getting exhausting—and more difficult--having to choose where I go and what I do with my daylight hours,” he said.
“How so?”
“I always want to be where you are, but I feel bad always abandoning Fili and Bofur, and sometimes even Kili. With council finally meeting again tomorrow, the four of you will have other obligations and though I do not begrudge you your duty, I’ll be seeing even less of all my sweethearts until said duty breaks again for the wedding.”
Thorin considered the issue. “Why don’t we invite them to join us on the overlook today, then? That way you don’t have to choose between myself or them, and we can enjoy some of our remaining freedom together.”
Brightening, Bilbo said, “You wouldn’t mind?”
“Why would I mind?”
“I didn’t know how, um, I don’t know…sacred, I suppose, for lack of a better term, the overlook was to you.”
“It is special to me, but so are Fili and Kili.”

Bilbo’s lips quirked, as he wasn’t sure if Thorin was intentionally excluding Bofur.

“But Bofur would also be invited, right?” he pressed.
“Of course he would. Leaving him out would be rude indeed, and although it is one of my favorite places as of late, it is not so sacred—as you say—that I could not welcome him along with those who consider him dear.”
“Oh, Thorin! I cannot wait to tell them!”
“They will also have to like the idea,” cautioned Thorin. “Perhaps they might not like it as much as we do.”

As it turned out, Fili, Bofur, and Kili adored the idea. Bofur in particular had rarely been to the overlook—and not once since their return. He had gotten the impression from Bilbo that it was
Thorin’s cherished place and hadn’t thought he would be welcomed. Therefore, the invitation was surprising but appreciated.

“I’ll bet you could get some fine naps up here,” said Bofur, spinning around and taking it all in. Thorin smiled, confused. “Naps?”
“Sure!” Bofur enthusiastically replied. “Getting warmer now—sneak off for a little kip on the afternoon, maybe on that bench or you could bring up one of the chairs from that spot off the dining hall. Stash yourself over in that bit of shade, drop a handkerchief over your eyes, and steal some rest. I’m sure you could often use it.”
“Huh,” Thorin said. “I hadn’t considered that. It does sound quite pleasant.”
Kili walked over to the rail, breathing deeply and exhaling a soft, sweet noise of contentment. “I haven’t been up here much, and now I’m wondering why. It is wonderful.”

“This is quite a garden you’ve grown.” Fili said, smoothing his hands over the leaves of one of the flowers not yet in bloom.

Thorin said, “Thank you! It was a fair bit of work, and I had to have a lot of help to get it started, but it has been incredibly worth it.”
Fili’s attention landed on the shrine to Yavanna. “Oh, look at that! What a fantastic sculpture!”
“Thorin made it,” Bilbo beamed.

Glancing at Thorin, Bofur replied warmly, “Of course he did.”
With a small, proud smile, Thorin replied, “Thank you.”

Some minutes went by, though conversation was pleasant and the view was beautiful, therefore no one especially kept track.

"What made you decide to travel to Erebor right when you did?” Bilbo asked Thorin. “If you didn't know what the map said, how did you know it was then-right then—’twas time to go?”
Thorin glanced over at him. "What is making you ask?"
"Just...I was looking out over all of this, mind wandering about how we got here, and it made me think how had things been a jot this way or that, we might not have met."
"That's a dark road for your mind to be wandering, my love. Besides, didn't we tell you when we hired you?"
"Mayhaps, but I was a little preoccupied."
"It was portended--when the ravens returned to the mountain, the end of the beast's time was nigh."
"Portentous indeed, then."
“What made you follow?” asked Thorin.
“Now it is my turn to say I’m fairly sure we might have talked about this before.”
“Then it is my turn to request you tell me again.”

Bilbo glanced around to see if the others were listening. They were, and for a moment Bilbo was self-conscious about giving his answer in front of his other lovers.

Tenderly, Thorin took Bilbo’s hand. “Please,” he whispered.

Worry or no, Bilbo could not deny Thorin’s searching, adoring gaze.

“Seeing your name there, your signature in your own hand…something about it called to me deep down inside. I sensed to my marrow that if I did not run after you, I would regret it for the rest of my life. It was all decided without a single thought, you know--I was packing before my brain even know what happened.”

Thorin stole a kiss and rested his forehead against Bilbo’s. “Thank you for telling me.”

Bilbo exhaled contentedly, risking a worried peek over at Bofur. However, there was nothing other than peace painting Bofur’s features.
As if sensing Bilbo’s need for reassurance, Bofur said, “Inviting us up here this afternoon was a great idea, Thorin. I appreciate it.”
Fili chimed in. “Quite right. Thank you for sharing this with us.”
“I wasn’t keeping it a secret this whole time,” Thorin explained. “I suppose it simply hadn’t occurred to me to ask until Bilbo mentioned his frustrations with wishing to spend time with all of us.”
“Well, to be fair, no one would have blamed you if you did want to keep it private,” Kili noted. “Not with Mam being so watchful.”
Bilbo tipped his head back and groaned at the sky. “Ugh, that whole thing last night…”
“Wait, what’s this? What happened last night?” asked Fili.

Bilbo, Thorin, and Kili took turns relaying the story of Dís’s attempted interception of Bilbo the evening before.

Rubbing his beard, Bofur noted, “If you don’t mind my saying, something seems off about that.”

Bofur hesitated for a moment, but he saw nothing but genuine, curious interest in Thorin’s face.

He said, “Everyone has been looking to you to be the one to be sad at the least, or potentially create a scene or make a play for Bilbo’s affections at the most. However, last night Dís thought Bilbo was sneaking willingly off to meet you for secret sex, not that you were sneaking off to coerce him. Seems to me there must be new suspicion that Bilbo himself is seeking your affections in return. When did that start?”
Thorin’s heart quickened unpleasantly. “I suppose I’m so used to being under scrutiny that I hadn’t even considered the finer nuances you’ve presented. You must be right, though how long it has been a suspicion—and to whom—I have no idea. Or how, for that matter.”
“How is not that difficult, I must regretfully admit,” Bilbo said. “I’m sure I’ve not done a very good job at couching my looks in your direction, even if I have refrained from most of my urges to touch you in front of others.”
“Is it just Mam?” Fili wondered.

Thinking back over the past few days, Thorin pressed his lips together tightly. He couldn’t imagine Balin (or anyone worse) quietly sitting on such an observation. “I think so.”
“Do you think Dwalin might have caved and confessed some of what he knew?” asked Kili.
“I think if Dwalin confessed even a fraction, we would all know without having to stand and ponder it,” chuckled Thorin.
Kili conceded, “Excellent point.”

“This is all we need—something new around which to tiptoe,” sighed Bilbo.
“Well, now, don’t fret too much,” Bofur comforted. “The nature of Dís’s behavior last night seemed off to me for the reasons I mentioned, but the three of you artfully skated the truth to the point of her fleeing in shame for the mere thought of it.”
“When you say it like that, it makes me feel like a heel,” groused Kili.
Thorin shook his head. “I daresay she deserved it, Kili. I’ve told her repeatedly to stay out of my business and to not hound Bilbo. We used literal truth to mislead her, true, but she was only there to be misled because she will not stay out of our business…and the rest was done only by using her assumptions against her. Do not lose sleep over failing to reward her continued digs into our personal lives when I’ve begged her to leave me well enough alone.”
“My point being that she might have been embarrassed enough to leave it be,” finished Bofur.
“You don’t know Mam, then,” Fili cautioned. “She’ll be shamed and chagrined up until she sees what she considers to be the next damning piece of ‘evidence’ to send her back to snooping again.”
Bilbo chewed the inside of his cheek. “That’s hardly comforting.”
“That’s Mam, though,” Kili said.
Thorin considered Bofur’s observation, as well as Bofur himself. Though Bofur had always been jovial (if a bit too cocky for Thorin’s preference), since his return to Erebor, his demeanor had morphed into a relaxed confidence that seemed to radiate outward and a new sincerity that put Thorin considerably more at ease. Their rivalry wasn’t exactly forgotten, but other than a good-natured ribbing here and there, it seemed to be in the past. More surprising, on occasion Thorin was finding himself genuinely grateful for him. Bofur’s insight—once the bane of Thorin’s existence—proved to be interesting, valuable, and sometimes outright pleasant now that Thorin’s questionable actions weren’t the things under Bofur’s razor-precise scrutiny.

As they talked and pondered, the breezes they had been enjoying unexpectedly changed to wind. The five of them lined up along the rail closest to the west, watching clouds periodically punctuated with lightning overtake the not-too-distant sky.

“Those look fat full of rain,” Bofur noted. “And some thunder and lightning, besides. That last run of flashes looks like it will be ugly by the time it is on top of us.”

“Think we should go inside before the rain starts?” Kili asked.

Bilbo protested, “Oh, I don’t want to go yet. Watching this front sweep in from up here is something else!”

The wind picked up, blowing Bilbo’s curls against his glowing, wondrous face. At that moment, Thorin wouldn’t have made him come in for anything in the world.

Thorin’s utterly adoring expression as he gazed at Bilbo was not lost on Bofur. Taking a few steps back, he clicked through his teeth twice to get the brothers’ attention without disturbing Bilbo and Thorin. When they glanced over, Bofur raised his eyebrows meaningfully, nodding first towards Thorin and Bilbo and then jerking back towards the door.

Catching on immediately, Fili said, “I think the three of us should head in. I had a…a…um…”

He stalled looking for an excuse as to why the three of them should go, but Kili was already ahead of him, understanding Bilbo and Thorin didn’t even need one.

Kili crossed over to Bilbo, kissing him sweetly. “You can catch up with us later, after you’ve watched your front blow in.”

Bofur and Fili joined them to also steal quick kisses from Bilbo.

Bofur said, “Oi, Thorin, you’ll keep him safe, yeah?”

Looking up to catch a wink from Bofur, Thorin quirked half a smile back at him. Thorin kenned it must have been Bofur’s idea to purposefully leave them alone, though he wasn’t sure how or even why it occurred to him to do so.

Bilbo chattered excitedly about the approaching weather.

“Is it always this beautiful when daytime storms approach here?” Thorin nodded. “Beautiful…but dangerous. Mountain storms are their own spirits compared to what happens in woods and on plains.”

“I remember the Misty Mountains,” Bilbo said with a shudder. “That seemed far less beautiful, though.”

“It surprised us at night and you were stuck in it with no option for shelter. Both of those things likely ruined it for you.”

“Not to mention the thunder battle and the two of us almost falling off the face. Sorry about that.”

“I…” Thorin trailed off, embarrassed at his former self. “I was not the kindest, especially
considering the scare you had.”
“Which was the same scare you had, except yours was caused by me. Well,” Bilbo exhaled, “as you are so fond of reminding me, that was the past, we were both at fault, and so on. I’m still sorry it happened and happy we’re standing here now.”

Thorin dropped a kiss on Bilbo’s forehead.

The full front had not yet reached them when the sky opened up quite abruptly, pouring down on them. There had been no slow start, no sprinkles of warning—simply nothing...then drenched.

Laughing, they dashed for the small shelter the ornamental doorframe offered them. Thorin reached for the handle but Bilbo stayed his hand.

“Wait. Let’s just...stand here a moment, before the lightning arrives. I love the sound and the smell of fresh spring rain—especially when I’m not in a wagon!”
“Or stuck between fighting stone giants,” teased Thorin.

Thorin turned to face the overlook, pulling Bilbo’s back to his front and cradling him as they watched the rest of the front blow in, listening to the sound of the rain sweeping over the mountain and the land surrounding it.

Thorin leaned in, lips nearly touching Bilbo’s ear. “You know you’re quite mad, don’t you?”
“And you love it.”
“I do,” Thorin whispered.

Bilbo turned around in his arms, pushing up on his toes for a kiss. Thorin knew it was risky, kissing this passionately directly in front of the door. There wouldn’t be much time to separate or make excuses if they were caught, but kissing Bilbo in the rain on the Grand Overlook was too much of a dream come true to worry about ifs and maybes. As they clung to each other, the rain intensified. They jumped apart after the first loud crack of thunder, though the core of the storm (and the lightning that preceded the noise to begin with) wasn’t quite on top of them yet. The wind was, though, and they were getting wet again.

“It’s coming in sideways now,” Thorin said.
“Oh! I’m quite soaked. I hadn’t even noticed.”
“Come on, I think it is finally time to go in.”
“Fair enough.”

In the hallway, Bilbo and Thorin dripped along the stone as they walked. They kept far enough apart from each other not to cause too many whispers, though Bilbo thought it was fairly futile considering that their proximity would be the least of things about which to wonder as they trod soddenly along.

They came to the hallway that separated their respective rooms in opposite directions.

“Ah, I guess I’ll go towel down and change,” Bilbo said, gesturing in the direction of his room. Thorin peered around, seeing no one, and leaned in. “Come back with me to mine,” he murmured.

Bilbo was about to argue he hadn't any dry clothes in Thorin’s room but the hopeful, almost pleading look in Thorin’s eyes stilled his argument before it reached his tongue. Instead, he simply nodded and followed him. He slipped past Thorin’s door with no one in the hall to see them.

Thorin found them a towel to help with drying after they slipped out of their wet things. He opened his wardrobe and pulled out some hobbit-sized clothes.
“Oh! I had quite forgotten you had…wait, did I know you had clothes in your wardrobe for me?” Bilbo tried to remember if Thorin had told him before. “You’ve spoiled me with so much since I’ve been here, I cannot keep track of it. All the more reason why you shouldn’t continue giving me gifts—I’m obviously terribly ungrateful if I cannot remember them all!”

“Or perhaps all the reason more why I should keep doing it,” Thorin replied, grinning. “However, no one should be looking for either of us for an hour or more, so while I do have some dry options for us both, I was rather hoping we might wait to change into them.”

Worn out and still sore from the night before, Thorin and Bilbo were content to simply hold each other in bed, warm and naked, kissing and caressing with no particular goal.

An insistent, deep rumble of thunder reached them inside the mountain. Thorin thought about what it had been like to giggle and embrace in the rain—merely one item on a whole list of things he had always wanted to do with Bilbo but never had. Unexpectedly overcome, he broke their kiss, burying his head in the crook of Bilbo’s neck and squeezing Bilbo tightly.

In an instant, Bilbo sensed the erotic tension between them shift to something far more concerning, though there were far too many possible causes for Bilbo to guess. He kissed Thorin’s temple and stroked his hair comfortably.

“I’m here, love. Do you wish to tell me what is wrong?”

Thorin exhaled in a shudder, removing any remaining doubt he might not have been weeping. Soothed Bilbo, “Cry all you need.”

After a few moments, Thorin had calmed himself and the soft shake of his shoulders was replaced by those annoying last final sniffles after a crying jag that Bilbo knew all too well.

“What happened?” Bilbo asked gently.

Thorin was afraid to tell him, yet he had reached the point where he could no longer keep it to himself. He drew a steadying breath.

"This happened. Kissing you in the rain happened. Making love to you every night since you’ve been back happened…and then other things haven’t happened. Seeing how the snow sticks to the waves in your hair? That hasn’t happened. Spending the long nights of winter in your bed hasn’t happened, either, nor has the combing out of the fur on your shins, nor a dozen other things I’ve missed out on.”

“Oh,” started Bilbo, wanting to reassure him but not knowing quite how. "I don’t wish to be apart from you again, Bilbo,” Thorin confessed. "I agreed to a distanced marriage because it was the way I could have you, but I did not know at the time the full scope—or horror—of what I was pledging. Living it these past months was too difficult to bear, even before the unpleasantness with Regnad. Now that you’re with me, I finally feel safe. Loved. I feel alive again at last and I’ve come to a conclusion that I hope you’ll share. I don’t wish to be apart from you…ever again. However, I have no wish for you to sacrifice the life you wanted back West, either. Therefore, I want to go back to the Shire with you in the fall, and I hope you will travel to Erebor with me again when the time comes. I’m so very tired of being alone. We are wed and I wish to finally live as your husband."

“Then that is how it shall be,” Bilbo said resolutely. Incredulous, Thorin confirmed, “You’re saying yes?”

“Of course I’m saying yes.”

“Just like that? No demurring that you need to discuss it with the others?”

“We will talk with them more as the summer progresses, figure out the logistics of how it is going
to go, and so on, but I do not need to ask their leave to give you the answer. Kili, Fili, and Bofur want my happiness and my happiness means my answer is yes.”
“I… I had not expected you to agree so readily, not without a committee.”
“We’ve discussed you more than you know.”
“Even this possibility?”
“Quite a bit, actually. I had thought I might ask you, though I did not want to shake your position here. I figured we’d feel it out over the weeks of our visit and I would come up with a proposal in a way that didn’t make you feel torn between love and duty. You beat me to it.”
“You were going to ask for the same thing?”

Bilbo nodded.

Thorin suddenly had difficulty swallowing properly. “Can you ask me now? I find I’m quite disappointed I preempted such a moment from you and I’m suddenly overcome with the need to hear you say it out loud.”
Bilbo understood, odd as it was. “Thorin, will you come home with me? To our home, the one in the Shire?”
Kissing him, Thorin replied, “Yes, my love. I will go home with you.”

Thorin held him closer, Bilbo’s cheek pressed to his own.

He said, “I never, ever want either of us to have to endure watching the other ride away again. We have done it far too often. Besides, I daresay I’d be a far better king to Erebor while in the Shire with you than I would be here without you.”
“I think you’ve still managed a wonderful job, though I’m not suggesting the solitude wasn’t awful and difficult this winter.” Bilbo hummed thoughtfully, quoting, “It is no small thing to be entrusted with the heart of the kingdom.”

Thorin reacted with instant recognition, rolling Bilbo away from him enough to intently gaze at him. “Where did you hear that?”

“Oh, um,” Bilbo stuttered, made somewhat sheepish by the fire in Thorin’s eyes. “I… oh drat, I do hope it wasn’t something I shouldn’t have shared. Well, nothing for it now: Bofur told me you had given him those words of wisdom when you had your conversation about courting Fee all those months ago.”
“Told you that, did he?” replied Thorin, frowning. “Had he been gossiping about me?”
“No! Not in a manner of speaking. He actually gave it back to me as… well, I don’t know if it was advice, but we were having a rather awkward conversation about you at the time—it was after you had spent that last passionate night with us before coming back here. I wasn’t sure how to address the things he must have heard; saying those words to me was how he assured me I didn’t have to.”
“Really? All the way back then?” asked Thorin, his expression softening to wonder.
“For the issues we’ve had—and likely still will have—he truly has made earnest efforts to be understanding, even in those earlier days of our arrangement.”

Thorin recalled his sad, mournful state of mind when he had initially said those words to Bofur. He considered, too, the kindness of Bofur sharing them with Bilbo at a moment such as that…and what it must have meant to all three of them, even if Thorin hadn’t known it at the time.

“Doesn’t that beat all?” he breathed.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much! <3
Perception

Chapter Summary

Another eventful night and day in Erebor

Chapter Notes

Again, biscuits became cookies. Don't at me :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Though they were tired and still a bit sore, Bilbo and Kili met Thorin faithfully at his room that night—arriving together this time.

Upon greeting them with joyful kisses, Thorin tilted his head down and glanced up guiltily from under his brows.

“I don’t know quite how to say this, so I’m going to have to come right out with it. I don’t think…erm, this is embarrassing…I’m not going to be ‘up for it’ tonight, so to speak.”

“That’s a relief!” Kili replied in an exhale.

Chiming in, Bilbo said, “Quite! Though I love them dearly, as I hinted at earlier, my body is feeling the strain of these marathon nightly sessions.”

“Wait, you’re both weary too?”

“Exhausted,” Bilbo said.

Thorin beamed, shaking his head. “And here I was, wishing the floor would swallow me for shame of having to ask for a break!”

“You don’t think we keep that sort of pace at home, do you?” Kili asked.

Shrugging, Thorin said, “Well…”

“Sometimes, I suppose, and even for a couple nights running, but we can’t keep up like that continually,” explained Kili. “Not without elvish assistance!”

“Or help from the Valar,” laughed Bilbo.

Thorin laughed along with him. “Sex help from the Valar! That would be quite something.”

“Right, then that is settled. So, what shall we do with what remains of the evening? Though my muscles and bits are sore, I’m also not quite ready to go to sleep just yet,” said Bilbo.

“This afternoon’s company and conversation were quite pleasant,” Thorin said. “Perhaps we can continue where we left off before the rain arrived.”

“With added snuggles,” Kili supplied helpfully.

*****

Lazy bedtime talk turned to the Shire and eventually (of course) to food. Kili’s mind was on sweets and soon they were discussing the differences between Hobbit and Dwarf baked goods.

“I could really go for a cookie right now…or ten,” sighed Kili wistfully.
Sitting up, Thorin said, “Well, let’s go then.”
“Am I king or am I king? Though one does not have to be king to avail themselves of the kitchens or the cupboards, as it goes. There are others with access.”
Kili sat up too. “Thorin, it is past bedtime!” he said, partly admonishing and partly hopeful.
“Good, then we won’t have to share.”
“It’ll take half the night!” insisted Bilbo.
“Like other things we do,” Thorin said, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.
Bilbo giggled with glee. “This is ridiculous.”
“Go on, now, get dressed. In case we do run into anyone, I don’t know if I could explain our dressing gowns to Balin or my sister.”

*****

Upon arrival to the kitchen, all three dug in straight away…though it took a little doing to find the dainties they sought in the enormous storage room. Kili had only started mixing the dough for the chocolate cookies when they heard footsteps approach.

Seeing Thodora, Chadham, and Ori, Bilbo asked, “What are you three doing here?”
“We got to talking about food-“ Chadham said.
“-What else?” added Ori.
“And decided on a snack,” Thodora finished. “What are you doing here?”
“We were talking about cookies,” Kili said cheerfully, “So that’s what we’re up to. Do you want in?”
Replied Thodora, “Does an orc shit in the-“
“Thodora!” Chadham interrupted, shocked.

She just smiled and shrugged.

The cinnamon batch Mrs. Cotton had taught Kili to make and the more traditional chocolate batch of his youth had just about finished when more unexpected friends arrived.

“Aye, you did,” Bifur replied.
Amused, Kili said, “The two of you too?”
Thorin laughed. “Hobbits?” he said to the other dwarrows.
Bilbo grinned. “Hobbits,” he confirmed.

*****

A happily fat night had passed and morning had come a little too early for the participants in Thorin’s late kitchen. Though Thorin, Bilbo, and Kili arose unenthusiastically (and grumpily), there was nothing for it. They had stretched the days without council far too long and now it was time for business to resume as usual—at least until the wedding itself. After breakfast, Thorin, Fili, Kili, and Bofur reluctantly parted ways with Bilbo in order to perform their civic duties.

“You're sure you don't wish to take your spot yet?” Thorin asked Bilbo.
"Would you honestly say it is wise?”
Glancing down, Thorin said, "No, I wouldn't. It vexes me, though. You have a right to sit there as much as any of them--more so, considering the seats that never saw a moment of battle in Erebor's
name."
"I know that is why you ask and I am grateful for it, truly. Perhaps we will get to the point where
we shall agree it is a good idea for me to try, but like the last time we discussed it, I still think we
are better off making less trouble, not more."

****

Once again at council, Regnad’s moments to speak were well-chosen and met with agreement and
admiration. He seemed to be entirely quiet during the briefing of the progress for housing of the
wedding guests, though, and Thorin was glad for it. Everything surrounding the wedding was dear
to his sister and Thorin did not need Regnad ingratiating himself to her any more than he already
had.

The better news was that all the housing for the temporary guests as well as the anticipated
permanent settlers had been completed prior to a single arrival. For this, too, Thorin was relieved
because it was incredibly important to him that the dwarrows relocating to Erebor had places to call
home when they arrived. Having been transient himself more than once, he knew the importance
of having a welcoming place in which to grow roots.

Regnad stood, clearing his throat. "If I may have the floor, I have business to address. To do so, I
must also bring up a measure of unpleasantness. It pains me, but the financial security of Erebor
requires it. King Thorin, I heard you’ve recently visited the treasury.”
“What of it?”
“And you brought someone with you who was not a dwarf?”

Groaning inwardly, Thorin thought to himself, This old argument again. He was acutely grateful
for Bilbo’s prescience that it was not yet time to take his seat in those chambers, no matter how
righteous his claim.

“Prince Bilbo went with me,” verified Thorin aloud.
“Right, right,” Regnad said, stroking his beard as if in thought. “What was his business in the
treasury?”
Making an effort to marshal his tone, Thorin replied, “His business was that I invited him—invited
him and encouraged to fill his pockets.”

Regnad looked around the room, eyebrows raised, as though Thorin had made a startling
confession.

“So you admit you allowed this person to take from the treasury!” he declared.

“‘This person,’” Thorin muttered, incredulous. “Yes, I allowed Prince Bilbo to take from his own
money that resides in our treasury. Prince Bilbo, one of the royal House of Erebor, someone who
has every right to go to the treasury unescorted if he wished, filling wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow
if his heart so desired.”

“Regnad,” Balin hissed, embarrassed and gesturing for Regnad to sit down.

Ignoring Balin, Regnad pressed onward. “Indeed, and you say it is his money because of the deal
you made with The Fourteen when they were hired, the one stating each of them would receive
1/14th the treasury when the mountain was reclaimed?”

Thorin answered firmly, “I ‘say’ nothing. It is his money.”

“That arrangement was fine for then,” Regnad looked out to address the room, voice shading more
authoritative, “but for the good of Erebor, I move to amend that original agreement of yours. I
propose a motion that vastly limits the amount of treasure The Fourteen can take from the treasury,
and also states that anyone who is not a dwarf must be voted upon and signed off by counsel
before taking any at all.”
Dwalin jumped up. “This will not stand. Motion denied!”

Balin stayed Dwalin by the arm, tugging him back down soothingly.

“Allow me to seek understanding, brother. Regnad, what in Middle Earth would make you propose such a thing?”
“Consider that if each of The Fourteen truly kept their full portion of the treasury, there would be nothing left for Erebor. By the terms of the original deal Thorin made, Erebor in all actuality is destitute. Regardless of the pride Erebor has in her esteemed heroes, we cannot allow that to be. We must pass a motion to secure our future. Surely the heroes wouldn’t want the mountain for which they risked everything to have nothing?”
“Have you seen the treasury?” Fili countered. “Erebor is in no danger of anything close to ‘nothing’ coming to pass!”
Regnad eyed him shrewdly. “Ah, but you do not even see it fit to remain here to live. What would keep you from up and deciding you were going to take all of your share with you back East?”
“The lack of enough available horses in a hundred league radius?” Fili replied acidly.

There was a rumble of amusement in the room.

“If I may,” Bofur spoke up, “Erebor’s running expenses are being taken out of my share.”
“And mine,” Fili said.
Kili piped up. “And mine and Bilbo’s”
“And mine,” Thorin said.
“And mine,” Dwalin said, expectantly regarding Balin next.

The brothers looked at each other hard for a long moment, assessing.

Sighing, Balin said, “And mine. Motion denied, Regnad.”
“But—” Regnad argued.
“Motion denied,” insisted Balin. “The vast wealth of Erebor is generously shared by her heroes for the rebuilding of Erebor, advancement of its policies, and the betterment of the citizenry.”
“As such,” Thorin added, “Such generous heroes should not have every gem in their pocket counted if they wish to enjoy a few blood-won comforts now and again—and that includes hobbits as well as dwarrows.”

When business moved on to an order of business from Nabbi, Balin leaned over towards Regnad.

“What has come over you?” he demanded in a harsh whisper. “I told you Bilbo went to the treasury with Thorin in utter confidence!”
“And you were disgusted by it. I thought you didn’t want the treasury looted so, especially by an outsider, and that’s why I put forth the motion. Thorin already hates me, so there was nothing for me to lose…unlike you. I thought I was protecting you.”
“No,” Balin said, almost a touch too loud, and lowered his voice again as to be undetectable under Nabbi’s oration to the group. He repeated, “No, I was disgusted because Thorin didn’t need the temptation of being around the gold, to say nothing of the temptation of being alone in private with his former Chosen. It was not about our financial security, and it definitely was not meant for committee—no matter how honorable the intention.”
“Apologies, friend. It won’t happen again.”

Dís shot them a withering look for whispering while a speech was being made and Balin quietly cleared his throat, sitting upright. Regnad smiled at her, looking contrite, and she couldn’t help but give him a motherly smile back.
Bilbo had gone for a visit and wound up having what more or less would count as Elevensies in Nori’s apartment with Ori, Thodora, Chadham, Nori, and Nîfon.

“No interest in sitting council, then?” Bilbo asked Ori and Nori. “All of you hold positions, yet I’ve heard the only of The Fourteen who do it with any regularity are Dwalin, Balin, and Thorin himself. I was told most of the members to make the minimum vote had to be given seats after Fili, Kili, and Bofur departed, with more added when the rest of you left for the wedding. Aren’t you curious about it?”

Shrugging, Nori answered, “I appreciate the honorary position, but can you honestly picture me dealing with things like forms and schedules? Besides, you said it yourself—they’ve filled it with enough people to make the minimum vote.”

Nîfon furrowed his brow. “So what happens if more went? What happens if one day, say, Dori decided he was feeling civic-minded and showed up? Does the vote broaden by one or must you unseat someone with your seniority?”

“Surely not,” Bilbo said. “For someone who hasn’t done any of the paperwork or the drudgery to swan in on a whim one fine day and boot someone out of their seat? I’d throw my chair if it happened to me. Besides, Fili, Kili, and Bofur have taken their seats and no one was ousted in exchange.”

“I don’t know, and I don’t want to know,” Nori said. “This political nonsense puts me to sleep.”

“But surely you care for the mountain?” Bilbo said.

“I’ve done my fighting for the mountain. It is pretty and well and good, but Nîfon is my home now.”

Nîfon’s expression gave the impression that his insides had melted into affectionate goo. He reached for Nori and—not caring a whit they had company—kissed him ardently.

Clearing his throat (and trying not to intrude upon the private moment not-so-privately happening next to them), Bilbo asked Chadham and Thodora, “Are folks still being nice to you?”

“Kind enough,” Thodora replied. “There are some dwarves who still seem a bit surprised to see hobbits about the halls.”

“Non-Bilbo hobbits, anyway,” Chadham added.

“I expected worse,” Ori said honestly. “Not so much because they are hobbits—not with how much Erebor owes to one of their own—but because of what might be rumored about our relationship. It doesn’t seem as though I’m much grist for the rumor mill, thankfully. I haven’t heard a single whisper.”

Trying not to obviously lead the question, Bilbo casually asked, “Have you had many conversations with that new friend of Dís’s? Regnad?”

Ori shook his head. “He hasn’t so much as acknowledged me or Chadham and Thodora since the day we met, not that I know him well enough to bother about it. There are plenty of dwarrows in the mountain who are new to me and opportunity—not to mention sheer odds—say it will likely stay that way for a while.”

“Oi, you talking about that slick chap who fawns all over the princess?” Nori asked, having paused his kissing to pay attention to the conversation again.

“Yes,” Bilbo replied. “What makes you ask? Has he given you any trouble over Nîfon?”

“Well, he still has his beard, so there’s your answer to that question,” Nori said. “Other than one or two flowery comments about me being one of The Fourteen, he has ignored us about as much as Ori, but there’s something…”

“What?”

Squinting in thought, Nori ran his tongue over his teeth. “Eh, I can’t put my thumb on it exactly,
but he seems...oily--shiny on the surface but hard to grip and even harder to wash off once he’s sullied something. The few speeches I’ve heard him give remind me of some of the more charming liars I’ve met in my travels.”

“What lies did he tell in those speeches?” asked Bilbo.

“That’s just the thing, innit?” explained Nori. "That type charms and wheedles, talking a good piece to build themselves a solid reputation. They’ll be practically unimpeachable at first. When they think they’ve got you, that’s when the lies start…but they won’t all be lies, you see? There will still be a few things in there true so that when they’re caught, people will look at the true things, stack it up next to their good reputation, and the lies are forgiven—if they aren’t outright accepted as truth by association.”

“You know a lot about this. Use this skill much in your former life?” Nîfon teased him.

“Once or twice, maybe, to save a skin or two, but never for long. That friend of Dís’s, he reminds me of the folks I know who have made a life of it—the ones who have no problem hurting others in the process.”

“Bilbo, do you think he is up to something?” asked Ori worriedly.

Crossing his arms, Bilbo said, “I don’t know rightly if I believe he is planning anything, but I will tell you that I neither like him nor trust him. My gut tells me he is not a good person.”

*****

Thorin walked along with Kili, Fili, and Bofur after council adjourned.

“What in Durin’s name was Regnad thinking with all that?” fumed Fili.

“It seemed…not exactly wise,” Thorin agreed.

Bofur scratched under one of his pigtails as the thought. “Aye, a rare misstep for him, as far as I have observed.”

“You’re right, Bofur,” said Thorin. “He’s usually quite shrewd and has most of council in his pocket with any given speech. That bit of business seemed to go uncharacteristically sideways all round.”

“Especially with Balin, I saw,” Kili added.

“I noticed that, too,” Bofur said. “Do you think he planned it to go sour, perhaps to get a read on something else?”

“Possibly,” Fili said, “or maybe he isn’t as clever as he thinks he is and he managed to completely misread a situation. It wouldn’t be the first time he was wrong about something involving The Fourteen. His cleverness cannot replace that heart-feeling folks who lived through the Battle or the close weeks that followed seem to share about how we came to reclaim Erebor. He doesn’t have the proper respect for it.”

“I don’t hold to blind patriotism, on the whole,” Kili said, “But in this case, I would say perhaps such an underestimation might be an egregious slip-up on his part.”

“One can only hope,” sighed Thorin.

*****

Bilbo was not easily found after council, and Thorin was tired besides. After not locating Bilbo in the dining area, he snatched one of the chairs on Bofur’s previous suggestion and took it to the overlook. It was a much more pleasant day than the day prior, and just the right time to hunker down in a pocket of shade. By the height of the sun, Thorin figured he had about two hours to kip before the sun roused him with either heat or light—or Bilbo woke him with something sweeter. He arranged himself comfortably with his bum on the chair and his feet on the bench, dropping the
handkerchief on his eyes and breathing deeply. He quickly fell off to sleep, contented with the freshness of the spring air, forgetting all about Regnad’s weird and unsettling awfulness.

*****

Still on the overlook, Thorin sat up. He was not alone, that much he knew, but he was also not entirely certain he was awake. The edges of his vision had a soft quality, as though his very mind was blurred about the edges. A smell of flowers yet to bloom washed over him and he knew when he turned to face the shrine he had built, he would instead see its subject.

“My Lady Yavanna,” he breathed, when he set eyes upon her.
“Your Royal Highness, King Thorin,” she said, granting him a sincere, non-mocking curtsy.
Filled with wonder, he dropped to one knee and bowed his head. “I have not petitioned you, and yet you grace me. What may I do to serve you?”

She tipped up his chin and motioned with her head in such a way that he knew she was bidding him to stand.

“I’m not here to ask you to serve. You’ve been bringing me offerings for weeks now, asking nothing in return.”
Thorin nodded in confirmation as he rose. “My Lady.”
“But there is something in your heart, something you wish but would never ask of me.”
Confused, Thorin knit his brows and shook his head. “I beg your pardon, but no, my Lady, there is nothing.”
“Are you sure?” she asked impishly, winking a twinkling eye as a wicked smile crossed her face.

Realization dawned, widening Thorin’s eyes and reddening his cheeks in an instant.

“Oh, no, my Lady. I wouldn’t—I mean, I couldn’t have said, asked…” he stammered, embarrassed to the point of being unable to straighten out a single coherent thought.
“Please. There is no need for shame, child. Love and pleasure are sacred to me. Surely, you’ve noticed the sensual nature of my hobbits? In fact, I daresay that might be the root of your wish.” Thorin scrubbed his hands over his face, mortified. “How is my luck so continually bad? Bilbo and Kili petition you without this sort of humiliation but me? I wasn’t even asking for your intervention and here I stand, turning apple red.”
“Your lack of requesting in conjunction with your offerings to me—and the joy I’ve watched those offerings bring to the flying creatures who make homes near or on the mountain, to your full knowledge—is precisely why I decided it time to grant you favor, favor you would never dare ask for yourself. Aside, do not think your mate has not had his own moments of shyness in my presence.”
Thorin tried one more time. “But my Lady, I have not presumed to ask—“

She held up a hand to silence him. With the gesture, he felt some of the heat leave his face; an airy sort of calm replaced it.

“And yet, I grant. It is my privilege to do as I see fit. You intrigue me, as do your mate, his mate, his mate’s brother, and that brother’s mate. Once Belladonna’s son stood before me and I cautioned him that sometimes hearts must be broken. He did not want to hear it and either by his faith, by yours, or by a combination thereof, I was both temporarily right yet ultimately proven wrong. Now here you stand, wondering how the limits of your body and your age can keep up with a hobbit or compete with three younger, virile dwarrows. That you have this dilemma at all is a rare surprise for me. Going forward, you will not have to fret about such things. That is my favor.” Blushing anew, Thorin bowed deeply. “Thank you, Lady Yavanna.”
She smiled when he spoke her name, though she bent to look at him face to face and when she did, her expression turned solemn. “I also bring you a warning.”

His pulse quickened with dread.

“Things are in motion that cannot be stopped—even by your Maker—without consequence. There is a choice that will need to be made.”

“What choice?”

“You know in your heart to what I’m referring. Long have you known it…and felt it. If you do not make that decision yourself and make it soon, then it will be made for you.”

“But—“

Yavanna cupped his face and kissed him soulfully, silencing him.

When next he opened his eyes, Thorin was alone in the chair on which he had fallen asleep. A faint taste of honey lingered on his tongue, though he hadn’t eaten any for months.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone!
Cross Words

Chapter Summary

No matter how much Thorin and Bilbo want it to be, it can't all be blowjobs and fancy gardens on the Overlook.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was inevitable that no matter how much they had missed each other nor how happy they were to be reunited, Thorin and Bilbo would have an argument. It had started innocently enough, with Thorin frustrated and annoyed that Bilbo hadn’t come to find him after council. Explanations turned into defenses, one wrong word flinted against another, and the angry sparks that resulted wound up singeing them both.

“Confusticate your stubborn-arsed nature, Thorin Oakenshield!” Bilbo had finally shouted, stomping out of the room. He didn't remember until he was halfway to his own suite that Thorin hadn’t gone by that name since he put on his crown.

Bilbo flopped across his bed, resting his chin in his hands. He should have expected them to have cross words sooner or later--they had always butted heads, two strong personalities as they were. Like such things usually went, the initial point of contention had been inconsequential and unworthy of the blow up that followed. Once Bilbo's temper cooled, he felt quite silly about the whole thing...and exceptionally embarrassed he had stormed off the way he had.

After Thorin had missed tea, Bilbo went looking for him. He found him on the Grand Overlook, sitting on the floor against the retaining wall where he had planted Bilbo’s beautiful garden. Thorin did not even stand when Bilbo approached him; he simply looked up at him with a tear-stained face. Bilbo knelt in front of him.

“Thorin,” said Bilbo softly.
“Have you made your arrangements, then?” asked Thorin miserably.
“What arrangements?”
“To leave.”
“Leave? Yavanna’s grace, Thorin! You’re sending me away? I came up here to apologize and you’re kicking me out of Erebor?”
“No! How could you think that?”
“You just said!”
“Because you’re done!”
“Done?” Bilbo pinched the bridge of his nose. "Wait, let’s try starting this conversation at the beginning instead of this confusing middle. We got into a stupid fight about...well, nothing, not when one gets down to it. How did we get from there to me arranging to leave if you’re not making me leave?”
“I thought since we fought so terribly that you’d go.”
“Over a silly little argument?”
“It didn’t feel that silly when we were in the middle of it.”
“Oh, sweetheart,” Bilbo sighed. “Even if it was a much more serious fight, spanning more than an
afternoon, that doesn’t mean I’m done with you, leaving you, or any of that. Do you wish to be done with me?”

“Never!”

“We’re going to fight, you know. Remember that whole conversation we had about how you cannot hold me up as some perfect being? That applies to the future as well as to our past. We’re going to make each other angry. It doesn’t mean you’re going to make me leave, and I certainly hope it won’t make you leave.”

“I’m never leaving, Bilbo. I swear it.”

“Come here, you magnificent fool.”

Disregarding the potential danger of being caught, Bilbo kissed him and held him tightly. This incident was yet another reminder of the deep psychological damage he had inadvertently inflicted upon Thorin, another layer of something he had been able to take for granted within his other romantic relationships. He re-examined their argument, running over it in his mind with this new perspective, and cringed at how it must have seemed to Thorin for Bilbo to storm off the way he had. Another point occurred to him then, one he thought might require its own separate apology.

“I’m sorry I called you that, my love.”

“Called me what?”

“Oakenshield. I know you don’t use that name any longer.”

Thorin quirked a soft, sweet grin. “I didn’t mind, really. When you say it, it isn’t an insult to me. I know you don’t mean it as disrespect, or use it to belittle me as others have in the past. For you, it isn’t the name of a prince in exile, or a king with no mountain. It was simply my name when we fell in love. When you revert to that—usually in times of great passion, for good or ill—it is because Oakenshield was your first Thorin, every bit as much as you with the shorter hair was my first Bilbo. I think, maybe sometimes, I like it when you call me that. I don't like it when you shout it, though.”

“Well, you did a little shouting too.”

“Yeah,” Thorin hummed a self-conscious laugh. “I wasn’t even…it was so foolish. I missed you after council, to be sure, but I wasn’t even mad at you. I had just…I had a trying morning and then something happened I wanted badly to share with you. My disappointment about not being able to find you for the latter got caught up with my irritation with the former and when I finally did see you, it all flipped wrong-side up.”

“Did your trying morning have anything to do with Regnad starting in on the treasury today?”

“How did you know that?”

“Kili found me before I found you.”

“That had gotten under my skin, but I still should have been relieved to see you after dealing with that, not irritated.”

“That’s okay. I was overly sensitive, too. Nori shared some insight into Regnad with me and it wasn’t good. His assessment left me worried and unsettled.”

“Nori? What does he know about him?”

“Not anything about him in specific, more about his type. Nori has seen plenty of Regnad’s type in his day and basically, he said no good comes of associating with them. Anyway, it seems like this argument might have been more Regnad’s fault than ours, eh?”

Thorin grinned widely now. “Might as well blame him, the lout.”

“I suggest we never fight about him again. So, what was it you wanted to tell me?”

Though he kept the more ominous part of the vision to himself for the time being, Thorin told the story of Yavanna’s bedroom blessing, much to Bilbo’s wicked delight.

“Well, that will be something on which to keep a solid eye,” flirted Bilbo. “Or a slick arse, as the case may be.”

“I’m sure you’ll put it to the test.”
In mock seriousness, Bilbo replied, “Oh, quite. Kee and I shall have to put it through days of examination and trials…merely to determine that it was indeed a vision and not only a dream, of course.”

Thorin played along. “Of course.”

They stole another passionate kiss before standing.

*****

After the odd tension at council, no one questioned Thorin when he chose a smaller, more private gathering for that evening's royal dinner. For her part, Dís did not dare breathe Regnad's name during the meal, let alone insist he be a part of it.

As they ate, Bilbo remarked to Thorin, “Hopefully not to begin a fuss, but I’m surprised to see so many non-dwarves about the main halls, seemingly in their workdays. I knew you’d reached out for specific artisans, such as the mattress makers, but there appears to be a healthy contingent from New Dale coming and going, too.”

"We all fought and died next to each other—elf, man, dwarf, and so on," Thorin explained. "Although I remain generally wary of non-dwarrows—a wariness stemming from prior and very real hurts—I would be foolhardy to deny that we can all help each other, particularly in the crucial period of rebuilding and ramping up trade again in this part of the world where the trails had long since grown over. Someone very important to me taught me that."

Thorin punctuated the last sentence with a meaningful glance at Bilbo. Bilbo blushed, gaze flicking down to his fork and then up at Thorin again, his smile sparkling all the way to his eyes.

“Indeed!” Kili said cheerfully. He held his mug aloft in merry acknowledgement before quaffing the remainder of its contents.

****

Thorin had sensed something amiss with his sister throughout dinner, but he couldn’t quite place what…only that it seemed to have something to do with him (if her strange looks in his direction were any hint). On a hunch, he excused himself from the post-dinner chatter by saying that he needed to do something in his council chamber.

He sat in his chair and counted backward from one hundred, waiting to see if he had been right.

Dís arrived at thirty-three.

The moment she shut the door behind her, indicating a clear wish to speak to him privately, Thorin knew it was going to be trouble.

“No,” he said.

“But you haven’t—“

“I said no, Dís. Forty-eight hours haven’t even passed since your last foray into my personal business. I thought perhaps being humiliated by your suspicious nature might put you off for at least a week, but clearly I’ve underestimated you.”

“Very funny. I’m sure you think you’re quite amusing.”

Thorin sighed wearily. “I honestly don’t think this is amusing in the least. Unless you’ve come to speak of something that does not start or end with Bilbo Baggins, I would like you to leave.”

“But—“

“I mean it. If his name was about to cross your lips, you need to go. Did you have other things to speak about?”
Dís stood, glaring at Thorin with flashing eyes.

“Did you?” he prompted.

Her silence and the flare of her nostrils as she fumed was answer enough for Thorin. He pointed towards the door. With a swish of her skirts, she stalked over to it as though she were going to leave but hesitated, her hand resting on the wood.

“Stealing some private moments with Bilbo and got caught in the rain, did you?”

Thorin let his head fall back and he let out an exasperated breath.

“Durin’s beard! Are you having me watched?”

“Are you doing anything needing watching?”

“For fuck’s sake!” shouted Thorin, throwing his hands up in the air. “Why won’t you quit this?”

“Why won’t you answer the question?”

“Because you should have listened to me the very first time I asked you to stay out of it! That was back in the Shire, if you’re keeping track, which means you’ve gone on and on about this for months even though I’ve begged you to stop! And because no, I don’t need to be watched!”

“I’m not having you watched,” she said, “but even you must admit you and Prince Bilbo squelching and dripping down the halls yesterday wasn’t exactly a common sight.”

“Not that I owe you a fucking word, but if you must know, we were up on the overlook with Bofur, Fili, and Kili and a storm came in. The rain started before we expected it to. End of story.”

“Thorin—”

“End of story, Dís. Are you happy? Will you go now? Preferably for a number of hours—I find I can’t quite stand to look at you at the moment. In fact, if this is not well and truly the end of it, I am not attending your wedding.”

She opened her mouth to argue but he stopped her.

“I am not exaggerating. Regardless of how it would grieve me, I’m absolutely prepared to forego your wedding—and your scrutiny. I’m at wit’s end.”

“You can’t!” she exclaimed. “I couldn’t stand to have you miss my wedding!”

“Which is why I need you to cut this out—you and Dwalin and Balin and anyone else who gets it in their head to put their nose in my affairs, no matter how good their intentions. I know you worry but for the last time, my heart is my own.”

“It isn’t your heart that worries me.”

“What?”

Dís sighed heavily. “Fine. I’ll confess that my concerns lately—verily, what has me repeatedly revisiting the subject despite your shouts and insistence—are...well...oh, Thorin!”

She paced, winding the fabric at the hip of her skirt around her hand. Pausing, there was a desperate edge to her gaze when her eyes set upon him again. She was silent for several more beats before she finally spoke.

“Bilbo looks at you now like you look at him. That would be damning enough on its own, but I also know he inked your name on his skin directly next to his husband’s, a tattoo Kili uncomfortably admitted to me Bilbo didn’t get until after their wedding. Why do you suppose Bilbo would give you such a distinction when Bofur and Fili—his battlekin, traveling companions, and housemates—couldn’t even rate?”

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Thorin said, “Dís—”

“I fear for my son. I fear what you and Bilbo might do to his heart.”

“Stop, please.”

“No, I can’t stop. Thorin, if Bilbo told you he wanted you again, would you resist him? Could you
say no? When it was you pining alone, that was a sad circumstance, but since Bilbo has returned, things are different. I see the looks that pass between you--and the way you stare at each other even when the other isn’t watching. That sort of longing and passion will not stay contained indefinitely. What happens when you and Bilbo cannot fight what is between you any longer? What becomes of Kili? That sort of heartache ruined you. What would it do to someone as sensitive as my Kili?"
“I promise you, I swear on all our ancestors: Though I will admit I hoped to win Bilbo away from Kili prior to their wedding, that time is no longer. Regardless of the way he looks at me or I at him, I promise I am not trying to steal Bilbo away from Kili for my own.”
“Swear it on Frerin,” she pleaded.

Though he was stunned at the gravity of her request, Thorin recovered quickly.

“Oh Frerin’s heart and beard and grave, I am not trying to break up or end their marriage.”

Dís’s face softened then, and she looked back at him with an unguarded, adoring expression he hadn’t seen in months.

“Oh, Thorin,” she cried, jumping into his arms. “I’ll stop. I promise I’ll completely quit now. I’m sorry. This will be the end of it. I love you and Kili so much, I only ever wanted to protect you--both of you. I’m so, so sorry.”

He held her close as she babbled apologies and wept tears of remorse and relief. Though the words Thorin had sworn on their brother were the very letter of truth, he felt as soiled as if he had lied.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much <3 I appreciate your time and your comments. Thank you for being here!
Proving His Quality

Chapter Notes

Borrowed a little line from Two Towers for the chapter.

In Thorin’s room that evening, Bilbo and Kili found a lover considerably more subdued and less jovial than he had been the night before. The thought occurred to Bilbo that gloomy, brooding nights like these had probably been commonplace for Thorin before they arrived, though he was heartened that at least now Thorin had him and Kili to bolster him through it.

He said to Thorin, “I can tell by the look on your face that something is amiss, and if I was someone who had been paying close attention to you this evening, I would guess that the disquiet came over you while you were gone to your office chambers.”

Thorin held out his hands and Bilbo took them.

“That would be a good guess, for it is the truth,” replied Thorin. He glanced towards Kili, too, addressing them both. “Once again, Bofur has proven himself shrewd and accurate in his observations. Dís verified for me tonight beyond a doubt that she has indeed noticed Bilbo’s affection towards me. It took some fancy talking and threats to get her to leave me alone about it, and in the end I had to resort to careful words to swear an oath that I wouldn’t break up your marriage.”

“There you go being clever again,” Bilbo grinned, squeezing Thorin’s hands.

Thorin did not return Bilbo’s smile. “I do not find it amusing or clever. I feel terrible having to deceive her so.”

“They aren’t lies,” Kili pointed out.

Thorin reached out a hand to Kili, too. “And they aren’t truth, either. Semantically true, perhaps, but we know full well we are guilty of what she is intimating, and I cannot delude myself: they are lies in spirit if not in letter.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make light,” Bilbo said.

Thorin kissed Bilbo’s fingers. “No need to apologize.”

“You pose a good point, though. We know what she is insinuating and we’re using wordplay to get around it, but getting around it only helps in the short term,” reasoned Kili. “Eventually, she is going to know at least part of the truth when you reveal your relationship with Bee and she’ll feel lied to, even if the words were truth.”

“That is the fear, and it is not a small one. Is it weird that I feel more shame non-lying to my sister about the filthy things we do than I feel in doing the filthy things themselves?”

Kili leaned in for a soft kiss. “I had hoped the shame about what we do had faded.”

“It has,” Thorin said, resting his forehead against Kili’s, still holding Bilbo’s hand.

Bilbo pressed his cheek to the outside curve of Kili’s shoulder, peering up at Thorin. “We must consider if she is picking this up so astutely, how long before she notices the rest of us?”

Thorin answered, “I’ve said before—I think she mistakes the looks the four of you give to each other for a different kind of fondness. You and I as a pair are under a special kind of scrutiny because of our past. Your present, as it is, gives your group a pass that I am not afforded.”

“Still, a little more caution might not be a bad idea,” Bilbo said.

Emitting a groan of frustration, Kili said, “The wedding hasn’t even happened yet and I’m already dreaming of home. I hate that we can’t be free here.”
Thorin didn’t say anything, unsure if Bilbo had discussed Thorin’s departure with them later that summer or not.

“Well, we could wallow in worry and self-pity, or we could engage in some dirty distraction,” Bilbo said.
Kili perked up. “And what would you have in mind?”
“Oh, I have many things in mind,” Bilbo said with a lascivious grin. “Thorin, why don’t you share with Kili what happened to you on the Overlook this afternoon.”
If such a thing were possible, Kil’s interest had been piqued even more. Licking his lips obscenely, he purred, “Yes, Thorin, please do tell me what happened this afternoon.”

*****

“What do you suppose the others are doing right now?” Fili said to Bofur, having just stripped his lover and stretched them both out onto the bed.
They had made a point of not mentioning Bilbo or Kili during private moments these past few absent nights, lest they make the void of them even less bearable. It had now been at least one night past too long, though, and Fili decided he would rather at least have the ghosts of their lovers in bed with them than none at all. Bofur must have felt the same, for he did not question Fili for bringing it up. In fact, in true Bofur form, he encouraged it.

“Oh, I don’t know if it is wise for us to discuss what they are doing with each other,” said Bofur, reaching over to slick his fingers. “Rather, let’s consider what we would do if they were back here where they belonged. What would you do, Fee, if Kee was here right now?”
Fili gasped when Bofur breached him, letting out a slow moan. “I’d do what you were doing. I’d slick him and stretch him.”
“I think I’d like to see that again. He always makes such a pretty picture, arching and sighing for you.”
“And you. I thought he was going to climb out of his skin when you were—” Fili cut off with a pleased hiss. “—working him over…just like that.”
Dangerous and low, Bofur replied, “Not quite like this. He doesn’t like it to bite the way you do. You’re ready to take it already, aren’t you?”
“Please.”
Bofur pushed Fili’s legs back, positioning them both where he wanted them and sinking in.

“Now, where were we?” he asked, not without difficulty. Sucking in another quick breath, he exhaled, “You were stretching him. And once you had him flushed and needy—much the way you look right now, you beautiful thing—what do you suppose you would want to do next?”
Fili moved with Bofur, whining and shifting until his knees were on either side of Bofur’s torso.

“Are you done considering then? Or do you simply not know?” pressed Bofur.
Intently capturing his gaze, Fili breathed, “I would have him.”
Bofur had been waiting for this—not the emotional discussion of his game, or even the practical desires, but the breathless, filthy fantasy of it while they were in bed together.

“Have him like this?”
“Yes.”
“Aye, you’ve been gagging to fuck him, haven’t you? Probably since the first time you had him coming around your fingers, I’ll bet.”
“No, it’s…no…”
“Don’t lie to me, Fee,” Bofur said, thrusting harder and faster to make his point. “You never have
to lie to me about your desire…unless maybe you had been lying to yourself.”
Fili considered it, a flutter going through him from neck to ankle. “I think I might have been. Oh, Bo, I’ve wanted him.”
“I know you have. How could you not? I want him, too. Maybe after you get your run in with him, I’ll play a little of your game with him, too.”

Fili groaned and wrapped his ankles behind Bofur’s back.

“Oh, Bo, I’ve wanted him.”
“I think I might have been. How could you not? I want him, too. Maybe after you get your run in with him, I’ll play a little of your game with him, too.”

Fili whined in the affirmative and Bofur grasped his cock with one hand, bracing himself low with the other. He was able to gaze more closely into Fili’s eyes like this. He grinned deviously.

“So, you’re having him, pleasuring him, making him growl and call your name. It is making you close—I feel how close you’re getting. You’re about to come—”
“I am!”
“Where will you come when you’re fucking him?”
“I… I…”
“Where do you come, Fee?”
“Inside him!” Fili shouted.

Fili spilled across Bofur’s knuckles and onto his own stomach, gasping both in spasms from his orgasm as well as the shock of his own unexpected confession. How does Bo DO that? he wondered.

*****

Thorin woke up and inhaled deeply, exhaling with a contented smile. Lady Yavanna had delivered and then some. Twice he had easily reached the pinnacle of pleasure with not so much as a hint of a lag in performance—handily keeping up with Bilbo and Kili both—and it was only their heavy eyelids (and not his flagging libido) that ended their play and sent them to sleep.

As he began the day, instead of being exhausted by their energetic and late night, he felt invigorated, virile, and better than he had in ages. He hadn’t considered his worry over keeping up in bed might have been affecting his overall confidence.

It was noticed, too.

“Well, someone has a bounce in their boots today,” Dain noted just ahead of breakfast. “To what do we owe the king’s good humor?”
“Spring air and a good bed, I suppose,” answered Thorin.
“Gives me some hope, then! Perhaps when my mattress is completed, I’ll be bouncing right along with you.”
“In that case, I might tell the elves to do yours last. I don’t know if the mountain needs a Dain with even more personality,” Thorin teased him.
“Oi! I’ll have you know I’m perfectly charming. I should know—I told me so myself!”

Thorin and Dain laughed together, continuing to banter back and forth good-naturedly.
“In all seriousness though,” said Dain after a short while, “it does me good to see you joyful again. I’ve heard…erm…I mean, I’ve sensed it might be a sensitive subject, and I’m not going to pry, but it is this old dwarf’s opinion that the lads returning was the best thing for you. You’ve been happier the past few days than you have the entire winter put together—even counting when you went through that odd cheerful period. I just can’t agree or believe it to be such a bad thing.”

Thorin could tell Dain had been trying to skirt the issue that he’d been around those who obviously did believe the quartet’s return to Erebor was a bad thing for him. However, it gave Thorin an odd peace that Dain was thinking for himself and holding true to his own opinions on the matter. Not all Thorin’s kin had resisted being swayed by whispers and idle talk.

*****

As though the Valar had been waiting specifically for the clearance of the council the day before (and Thorin idly mused they very likely could have been), the ravens had announced to the guards before dawn that a long trail of wedding guests and settlers had been spotted close to Erebor. They started arriving at the gate just ahead of what would have been Elevensies in the Shire.

…And arriving.

…And arriving.

In the end, the caravan from the East took almost an entire day to pass through the gate. Thorin, Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur were delighted to see that along the way, Beorn had joined the line along with a small contingent of Northerners they recognized as visitors from the winter they stayed with him.

It took dozens of dwarrows (plus Bilbo) the entire day and evening to get this influx of folk and ponies housed, fed, and settled. Thorin had to admit that, although it was a headache-inducing amount of work, he was not at all sorry that the matter took precedence over what would doubtless have been another bitter council session.

*****

As he assisted with the travelers, Balin could not help but admire the way Thorin handled the situation. It was times like this he seemed to Balin especially kingly: jumping right into the middle of things, delegating, sweating, working, and otherwise getting things done. His bearing and command was noticed by more than Balin, too, as people naturally flocked to him to find out what was to be done—and then trusted whatever he told them implicitly enough to exactly obey. For the times when Thorin was not sure, demurring to Dís, Fili, Kili, Dwalin, Dain, Balin himself, or even Bilbo for a good suggestion on how to solve a problem, it was still with that certain something Balin had always respected.

Also, although Bilbo (and Kili) were considerable parts of the afternoon’s efforts, Thorin did not seem to let his feelings for Bilbo slow him down or trip him up. Directly contrary to Balin’s and Regnad’s fears, there had been no change in his kingly demeanor when it came to Bilbo being around in an…well, not exactly crisis situation, but certainly an urgent and important matter of state. Thorin made requests of Bilbo the same as he had anyone, and Bilbo respected Thorin’s command like one of his own kin.

Dwalin’s words came back to Balin several times throughout the afternoon and evening, haunting his conscience:

“You were once willing to run into what seemed like a hopeless battle against a never-ending flow
of orcs at a single shout of ‘Du Bekar.’ All you need do here is stretch out a figurative hand, yet more and more often, you’re turning your back.”

Balin considered that perhaps he (and Regnad) had been looking at this all wrong. After all, there had been a reason Balin followed Thorin into what had seemed back then like an utterly hopeless quest: time and time again, Thorin had proved his strength, his character, and his worth. Lovesick or not, it was obvious Thorin had it in him to still be king. Somehow, Balin had shamefully allowed himself to forget *this* Thorin existed, the memory of his glory dimmed by the tedium minutiae of meetings, requisitions, paperwork, and Thorin’s own melancholy. He had a humbling epiphany: though it was not always necessary for that side of Thorin to be present, it would never be truly gone.

He resolved to do better by his kin, friend, and king.
Bilbo and Kili hugged and kissed that evening’s goodbyes to Fili and Bofur before joining Thorin for bed as they had been.

“If it is any consolation,” said Bilbo, feeling guilty for leaving then yet again, “I’m not in any condition to get frisky tonight, anyhow. I’ll be going straight to sleep as soon as my head hits the pillow.”

Nuzzling Bilbo’s nose, Fili replied, “Nor me with you, regardless of how badly I’ve missed you! I’m nigh exhausted. Today is the most work I’ve done since…I can’t remember when. Maybe spring cleaning week at Bag End?”

“Aye, I’m tired too, and that’s a fact,” Bofur said. “As worn out as we are, it is likely Thorin is five times as bad as any of us,” Kili noted.

“And we’ll be neither cold nor lonely, which is what Thorin’s bed would be tonight without you,” Fili continued. “I count Bofur and myself still very lucky, overall, so please don’t mistake my bedtime melancholy the past couple evenings for heartlessness. It is simply…when I’m more awake, I can’t help missing you, Kee, and the way we are when it is us four alone. I suppose I might have been pressuring you a bit lately.”

“I haven’t noticed, Fee,” said Kili. “Not anything that isn’t understandable, anyway.”

Bilbo said, “And I miss us, too.”

“Fee is right about Thorin’s bed,” Bofur noted, “which is the only thing that makes missing you easier. However, for my part, I sincerely hope there are less nights left of us being apart than there have been.”

“Soon,” Bilbo promised.

*****

It was late when Thorin was finally able to get his boots off his aching, tired feet. Kili and Bilbo joined him shortly after, and it was only then they took time to read the letters addressed to Thorin that had arrived along with the group (though some had been specifically for Dís and Dwalin, too—it seemed only the most diplomatic responses specified the king). The messenger that arrived with the group had also come on a wagon bearing gifts, though those all went straight to the happy couple. Many of the notes to Thorin were well-wishes from those who could not attend. Lord Elrond, in particular, sent regrets, though Thorin had expected as much.

“Any word from Gandalf?” Bilbo asked hopefully.

“None, my treasure,” replied Thorin. “But you know how he is.”

Bilbo did know, and probably better than anyone in Erebor, though he had still been hoping they would hear from him (and in the affirmative). He shrugged, his mouth turned downward in disappointment.

“He’ll appear again, even if it is not for the wedding,” Kili reassured him. "In fact, leave it to him to show up unexpectedly at Midsummer or to swan through Bag End on your birthday.”

“Or perhaps some random time altogether,” Thorin added.

Nodding, Kili said, “Yes! He’ll probably pick a time when he can make a grand, dramatic entrance all his own without having to share the attention with my Mam.”

Bilbo hummed a laugh, feeling better already. He truly did adore these dwarves. “That does rather sound like Gandalf, alright.”
After a night’s sleep, a full breakfast, and a more proper reunion with his former housemates than the meager one they had managed in all the chaos of the day before, Beorn informed Thorin he was ready to go straight to work on the plumbing problem.

“Please, you were invited as an honored guest, not merely to solve my hot water issue,” Thorin insisted. “At the very least, wait until after the wedding festivities and take some time to make merry.”

“Solving this problem will be merry for me. I’m eager to see if my new theory will prove to be right.”

“Bilbo and the lads have missed you incredibly, though. I encourage you to allow yourself some time with them first before you spend hours following the sound of water through the rock.”

“I’ve missed them, too, but we’ve just shared a meal...not to mention I’m sure they have business of their own about the mountain today, too, and you also have your hands full. Rest assured this is my wish, and if your advice was more for their benefit than mine, also be comforted that they—and you—will see me more before the day ends. If I know Bunny at all, he’ll likely find me sooner than later, anyhow.”

Thorin nodded deeply in both assent and gratitude. Though they perhaps had a rougher beginning to their relationship (and the unfortunate occurrence of Thorin’s less-than-honorable behavior when he tried to woo Bilbo back under Beorn’s very roof), he respected Beorn and truly wanted him to feel welcomed as a guest. He was certainly grateful for Beorn’s dedication to solving the issue with the hot springs for the royal wing, however, and Beorn wasn’t wholly wrong: Bofur, Kili, and Fili were indeed due at council, however brief it might be that day, and Bilbo was already off finishing something he couldn’t complete the night before.

Thorin’s guess that council would be abbreviated turned out quite correct. As anticipated, more immediate logistical needs had to be prioritized as they arose in getting the settlers...well, settled. Though the council and citizenry had spent many hours anticipating and planning for what they had hoped to be a sizable increase in their population, there were unforeseen details that tended to make themselves known when several dozen dwarrows relocated their lives halfway across Middle Earth.

For at least the tenth time since the arrival of the caravan, Thorin silently thanked the Makers for the circumstances. After the last council session (and Bofur’s observations regarding it), Thorin had an increasing sense Regnad was up to something—either something new or a more ominous continuation of the same—and he was certain any new business Regnad saw fit to bring forth would not be without considerable contention.

However, the main session itself being brief did not mean Thorin’s attentions weren’t needed in several different directions. After council—and a short meeting, and a walk-through of the residence level, and yet another meeting—Thorin finally managed to find a short, spare moment to sneak up to the Overlook to drop some nuts and dried fruits on Yavanna’s altar. Lady Yavanna had seemed particularly thrilled that the ravens were enjoying Thorin’s offerings, so he also added a couple small baubles in special thanks for his newfound vigor. With the exhaustion following caravan’s arrival, he hadn’t yet had a chance to test it out again, but Thorin knew—despite Bilbo’s affectionate teasing—none of them carried the slightest bit of doubt that he had been well and truly blessed.

Thorin understood Bilbo wouldn’t have a chance to join him on this brief, stolen break. There was
too much to do, and Beorn was there now besides. Bilbo—Bunny, Thorin considered with a smile—would doubtless be seeking out his old friend at his first chance, just as Beorn had suspected. Maybe Bilbo would have a better chance of convincing their special guest to take a little leisure.

It gave him a warm feeling to consider Beorn their guest, to have Bilbo there and as his partner, for Bilbo to be throwing himself into the work of getting everyone settled like a Consort would—and just as Thorin had always imagined he would. With every passing day, Bilbo being his husband became more and more real…and Thorin’s fear of the rug being yanked from beneath him grew dimmer. Even if Bilbo wasn’t publicly his Consort, they were in this together--at last!--as Thorin had always hoped, and maybe even better than his hopes because in this reality, his bedplay was considerably more enticing.

Thorin’s fond warmth was frozen over quite suddenly by the icy terror that comes from forgetting an incredibly important task, though he quickly realized it was merely an older memory: There had originally been wedding chores scheduled that day—last fittings, finalized arrangements, and the like—but upon the travelers’ arrival the day prior, Dís traded her bridal mantle for a royal one, stepping in and stepping up as princess and diplomat. She had re-scheduled everything wedding-related in favor of the more pressing business of Erebor, and still found some time for orientation tours and logistics in addition to helping Thorin and the others with their projects. Thorin had insisted she not take so much on so close to her wedding day, but she was having none of it.

“The wedding is so near, I had begun to despair that none from Ered Luin were going to make it in time. My relief overtakes any tiredness I might feel.”

Although he suspected she might be taking those words back by the time the dinner came around, he couldn’t deny she seemed energized in the moment she spoke them.

Once again, he marveled at how well her royal role fitted her. He supposed he shouldn’t be surprised—raising two young, rambunctious dwarrows after losing her Chosen, she had always been strong, keen, and task-oriented. He had benefitted from her intelligence and her diligence for decades. There might not ever have been a quest for Erebor if it hadn’t been for Dís keeping up with (and staying on top of) him, Fili, Kili-- even Dwalin from time to time--over the years.

Pulling in a last deep breath of fresh spring air, Thorin headed back to his duties.

****

The next day’s council session was by and large preempted again by the pressing needs brought on by the influx of travelers. Most of those matters were task-related and available to delegate (with thankfully almost no measures to agree upon and sign), therefore most spare energies were put towards getting said issues addressed in deed and not merely in word.

Most spare energies had been put towards it, but not all. There was still a marriage happening sooner than later! Thorin made sure there was time in the schedule for him, Dís, Balin, and Dwalin to split off to take care of the last wedding details and fittings, and Dís insisted Kili and Fili join them, too. Though quite gladdened she hadn’t invited Regnad, Thorin was still leery of Balin’s presence. For his part, though, Balin seemed to be quite caught up in his wedding role and was practically affable when speaking to Thorin.

“Well, Dís’s choice of white and silver for the three of you is quite dashing,” Balin effused to Kili, Fili, and Thorin. “I’ll admit I wasn’t sure about it at first, especially when she changed the original
Thorin could have sworn Balin actually had pride in his voice regarding him for the first time in a long time.

“Thank you,” Thorin said. “So, I don’t see any garments for you here. What are you going to wear?”
“I’m not planning to be as shimmered up as the rest of you, but Dwalin is my brother and I am his Pair. I finished fitting new robes last week.”
“Aye, and yours probably have less fiddly bits,” Dwalin said. “Bloody unfair.”
“If I were to be the groom, I would have more layers and fasteners too,” Balin countered. “And for the next wedding, you’ll likely be able to give the aforementioned bits a pass yourself.”
“Ah, the next wedding,” Dís said, resting her gaze on Fili.
Rolling his eyes, Fili said, “Can we get through this one first?”
“I didn’t say a word,” defended Balin.
Fili grumbled under his breath, “You didn’t need to.”

Dís, Balin, and Dwalin laughed, though Thorin and Kili looked on more thoughtful and somber.

Once Fili, Kili, and Thorin had changed back into regular clothes, it was Dís’s turn to try on her gown. She shooed everyone out of the room, lest it spoil the surprise.

“Even me?” Thorin asked.
She replied, “Yes, even you.”
“Even me?” echoed Dwalin jokingly.
“Especially you!” She kissed him and swatted him on his hind end. “Get!”
Pretending to be offended, Dwalin said, “Just for that, you can’t see me in mine yet either,” as he was next (and last) for the final fitting.
She called after him, “I guess you’ll have to mind your own fiddly bits, then!” and closed the door with a raucous giggle.

*****

“You should be arrayed as a prince every bit as much as me or Kee,” Fili groused to Bofur privately, meeting back up after the fitting was done. “You are one.”
“Yes, but that’s not common knowledge, and Bee wasn’t included in any fancy fittings, either. Much of that was about family—Bofur cut off Fili’s impending protest. “-Blood family, Fee, and it truly is nothing worth being disquieted over. I mean, come on—you know your Mam adores me. Me not having matching white and silver glittering robes for her wedding has nothing to do with how she feels about me, and rest assured, I still have a very fine outfit to wear. Dís arranged something quite stunning for the wedding for me, including a couple fripperies I don’t quite understand. You’ll have to help me into those, Crown Prince.”
Fili smiled, effectively swayed by Bofur’s reasoning. “I’m getting pretty good at it, between Kee’s wedding and the fittings we just went through for our own outfits…and what’s better is that I can also help you out of them.”
“That’s my Fee,” purred Bofur, sweeping him into a passionate embrace.

The last hints of Fili’s concern about Bofur’s outfit for the wedding dissolved on his lover’s tongue.

*****

In the many months since the dissolution of their original engagement, Thorin had developed a
habit of looking Bilbo over and mentally cataloging as much of him as he could. Sometimes it was because he had missed him, other times it was because he was trying to memorize him in case he never saw him again, and still other times it was to confirm he was safe, sound, and taken care of. Thorin had continued this habit through their reconciliation, though under much more pleasant circumstances.

At breakfast, Thorin swept his eyes over Bilbo as he always did, though his gaze stopped quite abruptly. On the hand opposite of where Kili’s ring lived, Thorin saw a new ring sitting there. His ring; the wedding ring, the mate to the one Thorin dared not yet wear. His heart arrested for just a moment in his chest before his blood took over its operation, doubling his pulse. His glance darted around the table, wondering if anyone else had noticed.

Suddenly breakfast became hatefully long, as did the bits of day-planning that often followed. As soon as he could manage without suspicion, he excused himself to have a private word with Bilbo.

“What are you doing?” he asked the moment the door shut behind them.

“What?”

Thorin gently took Bilbo’s hand and raised it to Bilbo’s eyes. “This.”

Bilbo smiled adoringly up at Thorin. “Oh, that. My husband gave me that.”

Overcome with emotion he could not adequately express without extended privacy, Thorin took him in his arms, holding him tightly and resting his chin on Bilbo’s head. “What are you thinking? What if someone says something?”

“Doubtful if they do, but if it so happens, I’ll give them the same reply. People tend to assume things, especially when other things are yet secret.”

“But why? Why now?”

“I wanted to,” Bilbo said simply. “Truth be known, I’d much rather you be wearing yours as well, but in the larger picture, you adding an extra ring that looks a lot like my wedding crown might be noticed by the likes of Dís or Dwalin. I have other ways to explain mine away—if it is ever noticed at all. It never occurred to me that you might want me to wait until we can wear them together openly. I can stash it away again if you—”

“No! I mean, please, wear it. I like seeing it. I like seeing it so much that I’m going to hold you only a little longer and then we have to return, otherwise you’re going to have a pink face from me kissing you silly…then we’ll really be found out.”

Bilbo sighed against Thorin’s chest. “It is so difficult not being able to kiss you or be loving to you when I want to.”

“I know it is.”

Bilbo paused, a little embarrassed, because Thorin truly did know—and in much more heartbreaking ways. “I love you.”

Thorin kissed the top of his head. “I love you, too. I’ll show you later how finally seeing this ring on your hand makes me feel.”

“Promise?” flirted Bilbo.

“You bet that’s a promise.”

*****

“Point me towards the keg,” Bilbo crooned once supper—and another long, tiring work day—was done, “because I need about six refills.”

“I second that!” Fili said.

The group with whom they were sitting and chatting (Kili, Bofur, Bifur, Rorimac, and Bombur) crossed the room with them to top up their tankards, all having agreed it was quite a capital idea.
“Surely, I’ve lived a whole lifetime in the past three days,” Bilbo said, taking a mighty pull from his freshly topped mug.

“I’ll drink to that!” replied Bifur cheerily, quaffing his as well.

Said Bombur, “I believe it will be well worth it.”

“Aye, must be so!” Bofur said with a teasing glint in his eye. “This is the most work I’ve seen you put in since we took back the mountain!”

“Don’t needle him so, Bo” Fili said fondly. “I will say that I was surprised to see every last member of The Fourteen come out of retirement since the caravan arrived, though. It did my heart good.”

“We weren’t entirely retired,” Bombur pointed out, “but I will admit that after a goodly wave of dwarrows had moved in post-battle, some of us have enjoyed the comfort of not having to be be busy from dawn until dusk simply to keep fed and fires burning. It will be nice to have even more dwarrows here now, though, instead of being forced to lean so heavily on Men from New Dale or Elves.”

Bofur made a noise of disgust and sighed wearily. “Oh, Bombur, not you too! This nonsense purity talk is bad enough, but any one of The Fourteen should certainly know better!”

Shaking his head vigorously, Bombur protested, “No, no! I agree with you! I don’t mind Men and Elves, but Erebor could use a healthier contingent of her own, not only to help her grow into future generations as a dwarven kingdom, but also to quell the more incendiary talk.”

Still not much liking the exclusionary sound of the front half of Bombur’s argument, Bofur said, “Now wait a minute, Bom-“

Mid-drink, Bilbo had halted the arc of his arm. With the other hand, he waved off Bofur’s argument.

“-Hup-up! What talk?” he demanded of Bombur.

Bombur glanced around for privacy, then leaned in to speak low. “There’s been talk that while Elves and Men are well enough for trade and repairs, it is another thing—and not a good one—when we start accommodating them to stay amongst us, however temporary. People have been growing irritated that too many folk coming to work or reside in Erebor lately have not been dwarrows, and others are irritated that any work is being done by anyone who isn’t a dwarf, period.

“ He addressed Bofur specifically next. “I’m just saying that having a few more dwarrows to balance it out might be good to quiet the fussy ones.”

“’Talk’ and ‘people’ and ‘fussy ones,’” Kili said, uncharacteristically solemn for having a beer in his hand. “What you mean to say is ‘council.’”

Bombur shrugged his whole face in a way that made his mustache rise comically, though his words weren’t merrily.

“I don’t know from council. Other than the first early sessions, I’ve not sat in since...cor, that has to have been at least a year, now! No, it’s not politicians getting irritable about it, it’s just folks who live here.”

“And where do you suppose ‘just folks’ have been getting those ideas?” Bofur asked the group bitterly.

Bombur glanced back and forth at them all, shrewdly taking in the more grim, knowing expressions Bilbo, Fili, Kili, and Bofur were trading between themselves.

“What is going on, Bofur?” he asked.

“We’re not honestly sure,” Bofur replied. “But I know for a fact that whatever it is isn’t good for Erebor, and if there is some way to curb it, I’m certainly going to do my part.”
Chapter End Notes

Thank you, all!
Hobbits Make Passes At Kings Who Wear Glasses

Chapter Notes

The chapter starts the day following the talk with Bombur.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was close to lunch time and Bilbo had seen neither hide nor hair of Thorin. Figuring it would fall to him to remind the king he needed fuel in his body in order to keep up his work pace, he went looking and eventually found him bent over the desk in his office chambers, writing.

Approaching him, he said, “Thorin, I came to inform you that even kings need to-“

He stopped full short as he took in the sight of Thorin glancing up at him through a pair of glasses.

“-Kings need to what?”
Bilbo licked his lips. "Set that aside for the moment. You wear glasses?"
"Only now and then to sharpen things up,” he said, smiling and shaking his head self-deprecatingly. “I’m not as young a dwarf as I used to be.”
"How did I not know this about you? When did this start? Surely not on the journey!"
"I had been in denial about it for a good, long time, only admitting to myself I might need them when Dís told me off for muddling along without. That all happened shortly before we struck out towards Erebor and I decided my occasional fuzzy bit of vision was not the liability in battle that glass on my face would be. After that, we didn't have anyone here skilled with vision crafting until I returned from the Shire this past fall. That's when Dís finally talked me into having them made. I only wear them sometimes...I don't think they look very regal. In fact, as long as I’m confessing, I will say I had honestly planned to keep it from you as long as possible because they’re not very attractive.”
"Oh yes they are! They look wonderful," sighed Bilbo dreamily.
Blinking in surprise, Thorin replied, "Do they?"
"Oh yes, you look so...come here."
Thorin glanced down at his papers. “Hold on, let me mark my place-“
“-Nevermind, I’ll come there. You’ll come there, too, if I have anything to say about it.”

Thorin groaned at the bad joke, then groaned at something far more pleasurable once Bilbo shimmied under the desk and went to work on him. He gripped the arms of his chair, living yet another of what had been his once-impossible fantasies: Bilbo sucking him off in his very office. It was even more delightful than he had imagined.

“What are you doing in here anyway?” Bilbo asked when he was done, tucking Thorin’s cock back in his clothes while still sitting at his feet. “I thought sure you’d be somewhere with your sleeves rolled up. This was honestly the last place I went looking for you.”
“Hae had been, but I broke away to spend a little time on my speech for the wedding,” Thorin said.
“Oh, that’s-“

Bilbo was cut off by a knock at the office door, followed by the gruff, “Dwalin!” the dwarf always used to announce his presence.

“What do we do?” Bilbo hissed.
“Maybe he’ll go away,” Thorin whispered back.
“I didn’t lock the door!”

With no time to argue, Thorin glanced down at Bilbo, then around the room. The only thing able to hide Bilbo was the skirt of the desk behind which he already sat.

“Stay put,” said Thorin.

Thorin no sooner got the words out of his mouth than Dwalin opened the door. Thorin sat up straighter and scooted forward in his chair.

“Didn’t you hear me knock?” Dwalin asked.
“I told you to come in,” lied Thorin.
“I didn’t hear it.”
“No matter. What did you need from me?” asked Thorin, trying to sound natural.
“Does it have to be now?”
Dwalin peered at him. “You’re not one to want to wait for these sorts of things, particularly with it being a day late due to yesterday’s wedding arrangements.”
“I know, but the wedding…the wedding!” Thorin said almost too loudly, inspired with an excuse to get rid of Dwalin. “I’m working on my speech for the wedding right now, actually, so I’m a bit busy for reports.”
“So, you’ll pick the speech back up later. Are you feeling okay?”
“Yes…no, I—” Thorin searched his mind for another way around it. “-Actually, I’d lost track of time in here and I’m overdue to eat. I should do that before we talk.”
“Aye, ’tis true lunch is coming later and later this week. I’ve waited too long for mine as well, so let’s go get some food and afters we can discuss what Regnad has been up to.”
“No, not just yet.”
Furrowing his brow, Dwalin said, “You just said you should eat. Thorin, what in Middle Earth has gotten into you?”
Thorin put on his best neutral expression, clasping his hands in front of him. “Nothing. I think I’m not talking straight because I’m light-headed and hungry.”
“I need you to be thinking clearly when we discuss this report, which is currently a more pressing matter than a speech for my wedding, so let’s eat and let’s talk, in that order.”

Thorin huffed in resignation, realizing there was no way out of this without either leaving with Dwalin or revealing Bilbo.

He stood, “Very well. We’ll dine now.”

Thorin subtly motioned to Bilbo to remain where he was; Bilbo did his best to stay out of sight, continuing to barely breathe. He waited several beats well after the door clicked shut until he was satisfied with the silence of a genuinely empty room. Even so, he peeked out slowly from behind the desk.

Outside Regnad’s strange visit to Thorin’s room on Bilbo’s first night, that was the closest they had come to getting caught. It had been fantastically erotic to please Thorin in his own office—especially when the sight of him in glasses had been nearly impossible for Bilbo to resist—but it was far too close a call.

Standing, he straightened himself up and left the room.

*Some cheek Thorin has leaving me behind to go eat,* he thought to himself, able to be amused by the irony of it now that his heart wasn’t going to beat out of his chest in fear. *That was my whole*
point in going to find him in the first place!

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After lunch, Thorin and Dwalin slipped away to Thorin's suite for their intelligence briefing.

Shutting and locking the door behind him, Thorin asked without preamble, “What news?”
“Regnad has again been spotted here in the royal wing at night. I suspect trouble.”
“Perhaps he was visiting my sister.”
Shaking his head resolutely, Dwalin stated, “He was not visiting anyone.”
“Not visiting anyone,” Thorin confirmed, running his tongue across his teeth as he thought. "So what was he doing?"
Canting his head towards it, Dwalin said, “Standing outside that door.”
“What else did he do? Did he visit anyone else’s room?”
“No.”
“Do you have a time? Was it bedtime? Prior?” Thorin tried to keep his blood from chilling at the possibility of Regnad monitoring who entered Thorin’s room…and who didn’t exit it until morning.
“It was well after bedtime the first time.”
“Wait, the first time? How often was he seen?”
“He was spotted loitering three evenings ago, having come into the King's Corridor—that was the night he stood outside your door. Two evenings ago, he was reported to be lingering again in the area considerably earlier than the night before, but ran away prior to entering the hallway.”
“Ran? From whom?”
“Not from anyone--no one chased him. He likely heard voices; Beorn was seen leaving the royal wing shortly after.”

Thorin nodded, remembering. Beorn had walked them all back from dinner and stayed to talk a little while. He wondered if Regnad was afraid of Beorn. He was rather enormous.

Dwalin crossed his arms. “Do you want to be the one to confront him? Or would you prefer us to interrogate him?”
Scratching his beard, Thorin replied, “Neither at the moment, I don’t think.”
“I don’t know if it is wise to leave him unchecked. Perhaps he was waiting for you to come out to do something dangerous.”
“That’s not his style.”
“Fine, but this time we need to set up guards.”
Rolling his eyes, Thorin said, “Not this again.”
“Yes, this again. I say we install guards at both ends of each of the royal hallways--not merely yours--during sleeping hours with orders to restrict visitors and uninvited idlers.”
“I would rather keep an eye on him to see if it happens again, perhaps we can figure out what he is up to. Come on, Dwalin, I know you love a good bit of intrigue when you can get it.”
“I do, but not when you are at risk, either physically or politically.”
“It is the political risk I’m more worried about, and that’s what I’m hoping to assess by trying to ken his scheme.”
“Aye, I see the value in that too, and no mistake, but I would rather catch him in the act and interrogate him on the spot than to let it continue onward until Durin-knows-what transpires.”
“If we interrogate him on the spot, we will learn nothing. There’s something going on besides the obvious and if we move too soon, we’ll glean naught but the very surface and that will only help in the short-term, if it helps at all. Let’s give it a little more time to see if we can guess his deeper purpose. If we can’t, then we’ll go ahead with the plan of interception and interrogation.”
“Will you at least do me the favor of not sleeping in this suite until then?”
“I know a place where I’ll be hidden from him,” Thorin agreed, a little too easily for Dwalin’s
Dwalin fixed him with a look. “You know I’d far prefer you outside the royal wing altogether…for multiple reasons.”

“You said yourself he wasn’t outside anyone else’s doors.”

“And I’ve also said myself how I feel about you sleeping in Bilbo’s bed--and don’t attempt to insult me by pretending that isn’t exactly where you planned to go.”

Thorin pinched the bridge of his nose. “Dwalin, it’s not time to rehash that old argument now. Let’s deal with one matter at a time. So, the plan is for us to continue to observe with him not knowing I’m safely sequestered elsewhere and try to guess what his move is.”

“Aye, if you will not let me proceed with interrogating him and installing guards, we shall continue to watch and wait. I want to be officially noted as being against leaving him to his own nonsense, though. What he was hoping to achieve merely loitering outside your door perplexes me. If he was waiting for you to come out, it raises questions, such as why wouldn’t he knock if he wanted to speak to you and if he wasn’t hoping for a chance to speak to you, what had he planned to do instead when you came out?”

“Whether it was to speak to me or something more nefarious, as you fear, my question is why would he be waiting in the middle of the night for me to come out at all?”

“That’s my other question, too, and the mystery surrounding it is even more perplexing.”

Thorin exhaled, running a hand over his hair. Though he was happy Dwalin hadn’t pressed too strongly against the possibility of him fleeing to Bilbo’s room, the news of Regnad hanging around his door--potentially meaning harm to him or to anyone else who exited--was incredibly disconcerting.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you <3 I appreciate the hits and comments so much!
Chapter Summary

There are just two problems with Thorin's new sleeping arrangements: Fili and Bofur

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After enduring some good-natured hassling from Bilbo for having left him under the desk ("And after I had given you a stellar orgasm, too," Bilbo teased), Thorin was able to give Kili and Bilbo and update on Dwalin’s findings and their subsequent plan.

“Dwalin actually agreed to you spending the night in our room?” Kili asked, incredulous.
“Well,” replied Thorin, “I wouldn’t say agreed. We glossed over that part, though he was not especially happy about the little bit we did touch upon.”
Bilbo said, “Do you think he will tell Dís where you are? I worry there will be trouble if he does.”
“I don’t think he would--our whole investigation of Regnad is secret from all but his most trusted spies--but even if he did tell her, I would be in there with you both, plus there is also the oath I swore…” Thorin trailed off, feeling the guilt again.
“And Fili and Bofur right next door,” added Kili brightly, not yet realizing the dilemma he had just identified.
Bilbo clutched Thorin’s arm. “Gracious! Fili and Bofur! In the very next room! What…what do we tell them?”
“Yes,” Kili said, face falling. “We’ve been putting them off since we arrived.”

Thorin wasn’t sure what to do or say in the face of Bilbo’s and Kili’s fretting over the situation. He had to admit he hadn’t considered Bilbo’s other lovers when he had made the decision, either.

“We’ve got some time to figure it out still,” Thorin said. “It is mostly the two of you making the decision, anyhow. If it is time for them to get your attention, then I can sleep in your bed by myself…or elsewhere if the proximity makes you uncomfortable. I’m sure it would make Dwalin happier, at any rate.”
“But you’re being displaced from your own room by Regnad, of all people! This is not a good night for you to spend alone,” pointed out Bilbo.

Thorin exhaled. No nights would be ideal to be alone, not really, but Bilbo had already proven his devotion many evenings over. If his spending the night alone wound up being the decision, Thorin couldn’t make that much of a fuss.

“Thorin’s right,” said Kili. "We’ve got time to figure it out tonight.”

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After their post-dinner merriment, Fili and Bofur returned to their room and settled in for the remainder of the evening. While removing their boots, they quite unexpectedly heard soft voices and giggles drifting through the door from Bilbo's and Kili’s room. Though Fili and Bofur had left the party as soon as they noticed their sweethearts had gone, the closed adjoining door made them think sure they had missed them, figuring the pair to have begged off for another early bedtime in
Thorin's suite.

“They waited for us,” Bofur sighed happily, affection warming him from shin to shoulder.
“I’m glad. We’ve gotten far too few kisses from them this week.”
“Do you think tonight might be the night?”
“I think they would have come and gotten us for bed, but maybe?” responded Fili, hope welling. “I don’t know why they’d still be here, otherwise, unless they simply couldn’t leave without their good-night gropings. I have to say, I’d still be pretty keen on the idea of that, too.”

Excitedly and without knocking, they opened the door only to walk in on a bare-chested Thorin being snogged senseless by Bilbo...while having his bare shoulders caressed and kissed by Kili standing behind. All three of their heads snapped towards the doorway in surprise.

“Oh, um—” Fili said, faltering.
Bofur cleared his throat. “We heard voices and thought you had, that you were…well, we didn’t realize Thorin was with you.”
Fili tried to compose himself a little more. “You’ve been stopping to say goodnight to us on your way to Thorin’s room these past few evenings. I apologize. I—we—didn’t think we would be interrupting anything.”
“That’s, erm, my fault, I suppose,” Thorin explained. “Regnad has been sniffing around my door lately. Dwalin has had someone following him, you see, and after the latest report, he had suggested perhaps I not sleep in my own room for a few nights.”
“Dwalin?” Bofur asked, his concern about this news momentarily overshadowing the needs of his heart. “Why would he suggest you not stay in your room? Does he know who Regnad might catch coming or going?”
“Or coming twice,” Kili giggled. Bilbo shot him a stern (yet fond) look.
Thorin rubbed the back of his neck. “I don’t know what all Dwalin knows knows. Bilbo might have mentioned to you that he had caught us together back in the Shire—with Kili present, though without my hands on him—and we’ve had our share of arguments about it since then. However, his bigger worry right now is that Regnad might be up to something more violent.”
“And what is your worry?” Bofur asked.
“I’m concerned he is up to something in general, as we’ve discussed, and him idling outside my door only mystifies and concerns me further. My worries over him are compounded by the possibility of Bilbo and Kili getting caught by him in some way we cannot explain ourselves out of, no matter how clever our wordplay.”
“So Dwalin sent you here, knowing what he knows about you two, perhaps even you three?” Fili asked, still confused.
“Well, not exactly. He didn’t want me in my room, but he was also noticeably annoyed when he kenned I’d likely be here.”
“Let’s hope Regnad doesn’t figure out you’re here, too,” Bofur replied. “I hate to give him the credit, but he is a shrewd one.”
Fili regarded Kili and Bilbo solemnly. “Now that the bigger issue of ‘why’ has been addressed, I have to ask: when were you going to tell us about this change in location?”
“Fee, I’m sorry you had to find out so abruptly,” answered Kili apologetically. "Thorin sleeping here had only been decided for a couple hours and, to tell the truth, we weren’t sure the best way to bring it up."
Bilbo added in his part. “We were going to tell you about the situation before dinner so we could make a plan but we couldn’t get you alone enough to speak so candidly. After dinner, you were playing music and having such a good time that didn’t want to interrupt you—we figured we’d discuss it when you returned for the evening. While we were waiting here for you, one thing led to another, and…” he trailed off.
“Right. Well…” Fili shifted awkwardly. “That was, um…right, I guess we know now. We’ll just
wish you goodnight, then?”

Fili, Kili, Bofur, and Bilbo looked back and forth at each other, trying to decide if goodnight embraces, more explanations, or discussions of new arrangements would be prudent. Thorin, too, glanced between them, not sure what sort of unspoken conversation was occurring—but very sure one was going on.

Fili and Bofur retreated back to their room without claiming hugs or kisses, too stunned by the strange turn of events to have the presence of mind to press the issue any further.

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Fili sat on the bed, scowling and chewing on his thumbnail.

“Well, no good is coming of that,” Bofur said, nodding in his direction.

“What?”

“You only chew on your thumb when you’re upset or plotting.”

“I’m not plotting!”

“Then you are upset.”

“Of course I am! Aren’t you? It has been days. I know we were giving them room to reunite and reacquaint, but I’m fairly sure they’ve adequately reacquainted each others’ brains out by now. Due to necessity, security, and safety, Kee and Bee are back in their room, mere feet away—and they are still with him and not us. How long are we to wait? When is it our turn? When do we get our lovers back for a whole night?”

“Fee, shhh, they’ll hear you.”

Fili shook his head, though he lowered his voice anyway. “Yes, and we’ll probably hear them, too, have you thought about that?”

"Actually, I hadn't," replied Bofur softly, frowning.

Standing to pace, Fili went back to his original point. "I mean, we’ve made plans, the four of us: Kee said he and I could make love the next time we were all together, plus I don’t know even remember the last time I saw Bee naked…and that's just me. I know you and Bee and maybe even Kee have plans of your own, too. I hate be the one to say this waiting seems unfair given the circumstances, but damned if it doesn’t."

Bofur nodded slowly in thought, running his tongue over his teeth.

“I’m not disagreeing with you. This has easily gone on at least twice as long as I had expected myself. Perhaps--perhaps they need for us to ask? Maybe Thorin hasn't even thought about the fact that we're waiting. I mean, I don't know if I would be thinking about that if I were him--this whole type of situation is so new, he probably doesn't even realize there might need to be some sort of schedule.”

“I don’t know, but that is a discussion that should be had with all five of us present instead of being decided without you and me. Dammit, Bo, we’re part of this too. I know you’ve had some sort of sympathetic epiphany about Thorin—and believe me, my heart has gone out towards what he has endured myself—but how long does this go on? When are we allowed to advocate for ourselves—or each other? I don’t want you to suffer any more than I want him to suffer, and I see how much you’re missing Bee and Kee.”

“And I see how much you miss them, too. You’re right. We should say something and we shouldn't wait anymore. We should do it tonight.”

Fili held out his hand; Bofur took it and stood. This time, they knocked.

Chapter End Notes
Dun dun DUUUUUNNNN!

Thank you, everyone! I appreciate all the comments--both from my regulars as well as from those of you who de-lurk from time to time to let me know you're here. It makes me want to keep going.
The knock startled Bilbo, Kili, and Thorin out of the conversation they had been engaged in since Fili and Bofur—visibly shocked, hurt, and disappointed by the news—had left the room. Bilbo breathed a sigh of relief to see them seemingly willing to give the discussion another try and invited them inside.

"Would you like some of this wine?" Kili asked them. "I figure if we’re going to talk it out, we might as well pour a little sauce on it while we’re doing it.”

Fili shook his head. He didn’t want anything to blur the sharp edges of his resolve to reach a solution.

He said, “We’ve mustered as much patience as we’ve been able because we know Thorin has been alone all these months while he has endured horrible things. However, now that we’re here, I’m failing to see how it makes things any better to simply reverse who has to be waiting for weeks at a time. Perhaps it sounds selfish, all things considered, but when the four of us planned for this, not once did we discuss an indefinite separation, nor do Bofur and I want one, and more and more it seems like that is what is unfolding.”

"It is not as though it has been my command that you two be left by the wayside this whole time,” Thorin said. “Though I confess I’ve been waiting for Bilbo to make that call. I’m willing to share his attentions, as we all had agreed this autumn, but at the same time I’ve been loath to push him out of bed until he tells me that’s what he wants.”

Everyone turned to look to Bilbo.

“I don’t know what to do,” Bilbo said, fidgeting with both his hands. “You’re right, Fee. We never planned for our separation to carry on this long, and I truly miss the two of you quite awfully, but I cannot yet bear to leave Thorin by himself at night—not after all the nights he spent alone.”

Said Bofur, “That is exactly why we’ve struggled to keep our more intense frustrations to ourselves—or, failing that, at least within our quartet—and have not said anything to Thorin about it. With him staying in your room, though, you’re going to be so close, within hearing distance but still not in our arms and…I don’t know, it seems to me that it is well past time to bring him into the discussion.”

“Please, can we figure out some compromise to make this work for all of us instead of against Bo and me?” pleaded Fili. “Thorin?”

Kili nervously chewed his thumbnail (a habit he shared with his brother), near tears at seeing Fili so upset, but hesitant to join the argument with Thorin yet fully unaware of exactly how large a
stake Kili truly had in Fili’s bedroom interests.

Thorin considered the options, looking around the at those he loved most and seeing confusion, longing, and pain in their faces as they waited for him to speak. He was the common theme, the reason they couldn’t just toss off their clothes and have at it like they would have any other time. He considered the possibility of staying in Bilbo’s room by himself, loath as he was to do it, and letting them have the other room in order to do exactly that. Another option would be to continue depriving them, insisting on another night with just Bilbo and Kili, but at this point, it simply seemed cruel.

“Or,” his libido whispered, “We could stop putting off the inevitable.”

Considering it, Thorin wasn’t sure how much courage he could summon. Being in the same room while the other four were intimate with each other, himself potentially disrobing, or even possibly getting into the act with Bilbo—and Bilbo only, of course, as he would burst with shame to see Fili’s disapproving glare if he committed any forbidden acts with Kili—Mahal, to merely imagine doing the very least of those things in front of Fili and Bofur!

Though he had exposed his bleeding heart to Fili more than once, this would be a different sort of vulnerability entirely. As for Bofur, well, there hadn’t been the best precedent of warmth between them…

…except for Bofur finding him outside Bag End and bringing him to the wedding
…or the careful truce they had called for the arrangement
…or Bofur’s letter, which had brought him such solace
…or the discussion about how Bofur managed to wait for Erebor before sharing his imprint with Bilbo
…or how Bofur sat at his feet, comforting him, believing him, after he had confessed what he had dealt with from Regnad in their absence

Thorin paused. He conceded perhaps it wasn’t all bad. If he was honest about it, he might even consider admitting they had started becoming something vaguely resembling friends as of late but--just as with Fili--letting his guard down for a deep conversation or two was one thing while literally being naked, exposed, and potentially showing just what he was like in his most private moments was quite another.

He looked at their faces again, all of which had grown even more distressed by his silence. He asked himself: if he was not afraid--if the fear of being embarrassed, jealous, and vulnerable was suddenly gone from him--what would he truly want to say to them to soothe their anxiety and despondency? That would provide the real answer to this dilemma, and he already knew full well what it would be. He simply had to be brave enough to speak it.

“Perhaps…perhaps you have your reunion and I do not spend the night alone,” he said. Scrunching his forehead, Bilbo replied, “I don’t follow.”
“I’ve agreed to this unusual marriage with all it entails. Fili and Bofur agreed to this relationship with you knowing I am your husband. We could go on with all this silliness of marking out whose turn is whose, spending the next several decades drawing straws to see who gets a warm bed on a given evening, or we all can deal with the fact that we’re in a bizarre situation up to our necks, anyhow. I could begin by getting accustomed to seeing your lovers in bed with you if they can get accustomed to seeing you in bed with me.”

While Bofur and Bilbo stood speechless, having never expected such a suggestion to come from Thorin’s lips, Fili and Kili shared a silent conversation, subtly nodding to each other at the end.
“Thorin, if that is something you’re honestly considering, we…we have something to confess. It is not only Bee whom I will need to get accustomed to seeing with you,” Fili said.
“How do you mean?” Thorin asked.
Explained Kili, “Fee and I have been part of this arrangement…together. Bee and Bo have given us their leave and we’ve been exploring the past few months what it is like to be lovers.”
Thorin’s brow raised in surprise. “You have?”
“That is part of it, of course, but not quite all of it, and as long as we’re telling you this much, I think you should know it all. We have figured out something astonishing. It sounds fanciful but please hear us out,” Kili said.
“I’m no stranger to odd occurrences lately,” replied Thorin, smiling to himself at what an understatement that was. “I’m willing to keep an open mind.”
Kili continued, “We have discovered we are bonded—and likely have been all our lives—even though we’ve never had the kind of sex that has marked us by our Chosen.”
“You’re saying you share an imprint without having made love?”
“Yes,” said Kili. “Bilbo told me once what it was like to have the bond go to sleep in your absence, how it likely felt for both of you when you were estranged, that it was there under the skin but way down, quiet and still.”
Fili took over. “That is how we had always felt, though we did not know what it was. I mean, how could we have? When we started experimenting with being lovers, it flared in our veins. It shocked us both, to be sure, considering we’ve never experienced the formative act together.”
“So the two of you have been soul-bonded for decades and you only figured it out when your two couples agreed to join beds?”
“Yes,” Fili and Kili replied together.
Thorin nodded thoughtfully, sitting on the bed and quirking an odd smile.
“This explains so many things. The two of you…for the first decades of your lives, I thought it might be inevitable you could someday wind up together because you were always unusually close. As soon as Kili was old enough to toddle, he was at your side every possible hour of every day and sleeping at your side every night. Back then, Dís or I would often check in on you before bed and find you cuddled together so firmly, there was not so much as air between you. As you grew, so did your closeness—though Dís fought it hard. You did and said so many things that gave your mother considerable pause: you’d wear each other’s beads, weave flowers for each other, hold hands, insist upon bathing in the same tub, cry if we didn’t let you wash each other’s hair, ask why the two of you couldn’t marry, and so on. We caved on allowing the beads, as it wasn’t wholly unusual for family to share symbols, but she put her foot down on other things. She was terrified whatever set the two of you apart while binding you together would complicate your lives, if not get you ostracized. There was an incident.”
“Was this the one where she made us get our own rooms?” Kili asked.
“The same. What we had to go through to make that happen! Not that it mattered—I knew you two were still sneaking to sleep together.”
“What was it?” asked Fili. “The incident?”
“You don’t remember?”
Shrugging, Fili said, “She told us we were being split because I was getting too old to share a room with my baby brother. Privately, we always suspected it might have been a punishment because we had continued skulking around doing much of the stuff she told us we shouldn’t do.”
“Your reasoning on both points is a little right and a little wrong. She had been growing steadily more fretful about things—I’ll tell you more on that in a moment—and one night she had found you two sound asleep in bed together, naked save for various flowers woven around wrists and braids.”
Fili shook his head in protest. “But we were never sexual with each other, ever! Naked or not, there was nothing illicit about that. There was nothing illicit about anything between us until we returned
“And I honestly believe there wasn’t,” Thorin agreed. “You see, after she discovered you like that, Dís had dragged me to your door to witness the cause of her horror. There you were, sweetly snuggled together like always, except that time neither of you had on stitch of clothing…and you had obviously, blatantly ignored that she had forbidden you from making each other flower tokens. I knew at first glance the entire scene had been completely innocent, but she blew into a panic. She insisted we had to stop it before Fili reached the age of urges—or before the two of you grew accustomed to even more unusual behavior. Kili, do you remember the time you almost died simply from Fili being on a hunting trip without you?”

“Only bits and pieces,” Kili said, glancing up as though the memory was hovering over his hair. “I remember being inconsolably upset and being as sick as I’ve ever been, but that’s about it. Fili has told me the story more than a couple times, so I know what happened, but I was too young to have his clear memory of it.”

“Well, the whole mountain found out about that. There was no way to hide it—they had to send emergency messengers out to find the hunting party to bring him back in time to save you. Suffice to say, it was a highly unusual reaction to a separation—unheard of even for twins. She became especially sensitive about the whispers from then onward, so finding you clinging to each other wearing only blooms shot utter dread through her veins.”

Kili asked, “What did you make of it, Thorin? Not the flower incident specifically, but, well, all of it?”

“You two were happy; Dís was not. The neighbors certainly would not have been, either. I had been strict with you both in general in those days—you especially because you were far too much like myself to give you so much as an inch—but my discipline had nothing to do with Dís’s assessment or her resulting fear over your closeness. In fact, I disagreed with her. I believed the comfort you drew from each other was not simply some aberration, but something beyond our reckoning, possibly some manner of wonderful blessing. As you grew older and into your roles, Fili became your champion and your protector; at that point I decided it had indeed been a blessing after all. It appears as though I might have been more right than I could have ever guessed.”

“You think—you think this is a blessing?” Fili asked softly. “Even now? Even with what we’ve just admitted about our more recent experimentations?”

“I do, maybe more now than ever before.”

Tears of relief pricked Fili’s eyes and he hugged Thorin tightly. “Thank you for understanding…and for sharing. We’ve been so afraid you wouldn’t understand about us being lovers, yet here you are, giving us this needed and welcome insight.”

Fili drew back and they regarded each other for a lingering moment before Thorin shyly glanced away to make an admission of his own.

“I’ve…I’ve been afraid, too. I know Kili being welcome in my bed with Bilbo wasn’t a secret to you, but I’ve still been fearful of your disapproval of my sin. Hearing now that you have also found pleasure and solace in what we’ve always been told was forbidden…” Thorin trailed off, but a smile and the glow of joyful relief on his face said the rest.

Fili felt the thick, invisible bind of guilt around his chest, because he still felt possessive of Kili and though he understood what Thorin meant, it certainly didn’t mean Fili didn’t disapprove of another facet of their relationship out of pure jealousy. As his mind raced, a new thought occurred: Thorin’s own tolerance of such “sin” might be one thing when talking about more casual bedplay, but would it hold up when tested against Fili’s bolder, more intimate plan?

Fili found himself blurting out, “I’ve been wanting to play my game with Kee, but he wanted to wait for Bee to be there, and now that he is, that’s…um…that’s the first thing I want to do—as long as Kee still wants to, that is, and with the hope it won’t alarm you if you might be nearby.”
He cringed inwardly at how rambling and blunt it all sounded, compounded by the fact that his mouth had the audacity to bring it up at all before his brain had agreed. However, if it was ever going to be brought up, now was the best time for it...no matter how ineloquent his attempt. As well hanged for a sheep as a lamb, as Bofur would say...

“Slow down—I don’t understand what you’re talking about. Your game?” asked Thorin, his face painted with confusion.

Fili turned to Bilbo. “Bee, I thought you told him about the game I figured out!”

“I didn’t know if you two were going to tell him about you, and since the rest of us haven’t played it either, I hadn’t wanted to get into explaining it yet,” Bilbo explained.

Thorin glanced between them, more lost than before. “What game is this?”

Bilbo said, “Well...Fee has done some observation and has come up with the idea that we could expand our play to lovemaking without imprinting.”

“In what way?”

“Stopping before the finish,” said Bilbo.

“Or finishing somewhere other than inside your partner’s bum,” Bofur added.

Thorin nodded the slow nod of someone attempting to process the unbelievable. “And you think that will prevent bonding?”

“Generally, and of a sort,” Fili said. “There’s the odd situation with Kee and me where we have a bond, anyhow, and there’s the other thing, too.”

“What other thing?” asked Thorin with trepidation.

“As best we can tell, and you might have noticed it in your own bed, it seems that consummated and fulfilled sex is not the only thing that stirs up sentimentality under one’s skin, for lack of a better term. Whether it is the intimacy itself, or an emotional attachment present during invasive play--which is Kee’s and Fee’s current theory--it does seem that other, gentler connections might yet be made without the full rush of bonding,” Bofur said.

“In short, you don’t think the new game, as you call it, will result in the same commitment as consummation, but there’s still a risk it might add a little...fondness to the blood,” summarized Thorin.

“Exactly,” Fili said. “None of us have tried it outside our marriages yet, but I confess I am most eager to see about it. What I was rather nervously and inelegantly trying to say a moment ago was that Kee and I have talked about, well, being the first to try it out with each other, using our non-consummated bond to test the boundaries. I didn’t know if, if, if doing that would change your opinion about what he and I do together.”

“Of course it doesn’t,” Thorin said kindly, receiving a grateful grin in return. He turned next to Bilbo. “And you? You are also interested in trying this, uh, game with your unbonded lovers?”

Bilbo felt a quiver under his breastbone. This was his first real test of the bounds of their new relationship regarding the four of them and Thorin. He knew full well that if he couldn’t say it to Thorin’s face, then he definitely had no business doing it. Therefore, he took a breath and replied, “Yes, very much so.”

“I see,” Thorin said, assessing. “And it will not bother you for Kili to make love to someone else? For someone else to likewise have him?”

“Well, it isn’t just someone. It is Fee, and no. I have no right being upset about that when I’ve spent the past few nights making love to you.”

“It is unusual,” Thorin said at last. “You must understand this is all quite overwhelming to me. I’m not up for playing this game myself, I can tell you that much. For the rest, I don’t know enough about it to say.”

“I’ll refrain from playing for the time being, too,” Bilbo said. “But Kee, if you and Fee want to see how it goes for you, I’ll eagerly watch it unfold.”

“Aye, and yes please,” Bofur chimed in. “If this works out, I’m already pondering the new, filthy
things Kee and I can get up to with the two of you.”
Kili turned. “Thorin?”

Thorin was out of his depth and felt overwhelmingly underqualified to be asked his opinion about much of any of it. However, that he was included as a lover who was allowed an opinion about Kili’s bed made him feel delightfully warm inside.

“I don’t know how bothered I can be. I share you with Bilbo, and I’ve apparently been sharing you with Fili for months and hadn’t realized it.”
“And Bo. You’ve, um, been sharing me with Bo, too,” Kili added, sheepish. All those weeks ago when he had began exploring more thoroughly with Bofur, he hadn’t considered Thorin might have had the right to have a say in it.
“Bofur as well?” Though shocked, Thorin recovered admirably. “Okay, well…I obviously hadn’t realized that either. As it stands, it doesn’t change what I was going to say, which is that you and Fili already share a closeness beyond my reckoning. There’s nothing left to which I could object.”
“Well,” Kili said, weighing his next words carefully. “What if Fili and I skipped the game and went straight to following all the way through? Would any of you object then?”

Now it was Fili’s turn to be surprised. “Kee?”

Gazing into Fili’s eyes, Kili said, “I know we were planning to be the first ones to see if we could get away with it, but things have changed since we last spoke about it…or maybe nothing has changed and I’m simply seeing things more clearly. Regardless of why, all I know is there’s too much I want--too much I need--to only go halfway.”

“Are you saying-” Trembling with hope, Fili found he couldn’t bring himself to finish his thought.
“I want to make love, start to glorious end. I want to feel it, and I want you to feel it, too. That is, if you want it as well. If not, I suppose-“

“Hush, fool,” Fili said with aching tenderness. “I want that so much.”

“That certainly ups the stakes then, as far as permissions go,” Bilbo said. “I’ve long since told Kili already—I’m okay with whatever he wants, and that includes this.”

“I’ve had similar discussions with Fee, and I’ll say it stands for me too,” Bofur added.

“That just leaves you, Thorin.”
Thorin raised his eyebrows, repeatedly stunned by all these rapid revelations. “What else is there to say? I suppose my answer is the same as before: given what you already share, I don’t know how bothered I can be. I do think I could use that drink for sure now, though.”

“Aye,” Bofur exhaled agreeably.

“Not a bad idea all around, actually,” Bilbo said. “Might be good to relax a little before we undress.”

Though he was half undressed already, Thorin felt a fresh wave of apprehension. This was definitely new ground for him.

“Oh, we only have three cups for the wine!” Bilbo noticed.
Bofur shrugged. “That is okay, we can drink from the bottle.”
“And make a bad host of me?” Thorin said. He filled his goblet full and handed it to him. “You two share mine and I will drink from the bottle!”

Thorin tipped the bottle back dramatically to punctuate his point, his throat bobbing with each swallow. When the bottle lowered, Bilbo pushed up on his toes and threw his arms around Thorin’s neck.

“Kiss me. I love the way you taste after a drink of wine.”

Thorin granted Bilbo’s request, playfully at first, but growing deeper. Bofur watched with a sinking stomach--and heightened interest. He had seen them kiss before, but he had never been privy to
their seduction. Watching his lover with Thorin this way made him jealous, yet he could not look away.

Pulling out of the embrace, Thorin caught Bofur’s glance, recognizing the conflicted intrigue there as he had been feeling a little of it himself. Perhaps it might be easier on all five of them if they could talk things out more.

“So tell me, what was it like for all of you?” asked Thorin. “What sort of things did you get up to back in the Shire when you were four to a bed?”

The four of them looked at each other, awkwardly, no one wanting to speak and say something that would upset the others—or Thorin. They stammered, trying to form a single sentence between themselves…and failing.

“Well, uh.”

“Um…”

“That is to say.”

Thorin laughed boisterously, the mirth further pinking his cheeks, continuing long enough to cause the quartet to look at each other confusedly, which only seemed to fuel further peals of laughter.

“Oh, I stitched my side!” Thorin said, finally calming a bit and wiping his eyes. He noticed Bilbo had folded his arms, waiting for an explanation. “I apologize it is just…the four of you, of all people in this world most unlikely to be out of words, suddenly with not a thing to say! It was quite amusing.”

Bilbo’s indignation turned into a grin. He figured Thorin would grow broody and tense with this unexpected company and instead he was relaxed and belly laughing. Bilbo chose to speak for the other three.

“Thorin, the uncharacteristic speechlessness is the result of us not being quite sure what is proper to say. No one wants to put anything out there that would upset you.”

Thorin’s expression softened. “I appreciate you sparing my feelings but I’m not wholly unaware. I asked because now your other lovers are here, presumably for more of the same as you had back at home, and it occurred to me that while I have an idea, to be sure, I do not know specifically what it will entail.”

“I’m…we’re…” Bilbo looked to the others helplessly. “I don’t know the best way to explain it.”

“Then show me,” he purred.

“What?”

“Well, that’s what we’re easing into, right? Getting our clothes off and getting accustomed to whatever jealousies are going to arise by me seeing you with your other lovers and your other lovers seeing you with me?”

“Correct.”

“So maybe for tonight, we start out with me getting acclimated first. The four of you can have the reunion you planned and I can see what you’ve gotten used to.”

“Thorin, after being by yourself for so long, how am I supposed to go to bed and leave you out?”

“At my request, that’s how. If I’m to suss out how this is going to go, if we are going to consider that no one needs to sleep alone, I need to know what I’m getting into.”

“But it would be different if you were to participate a little, at least with me if not Kili—I wouldn’t be ignoring you in favor of another lover. I don’t want you to have to sit off to the side and pine.”

Bofur watched the exchange intently, not as fretful as Bilbo and therefore better able to see the hunger in Thorin’s expression, hear the deepening of his voice. Thorin wanted to watch. Bofur never would have guessed.
“Bee,” he said gently. “Thorin is grown and has an idea of what he is requesting. He knows we weren’t knitting in our bed at Bag End all those nights.”

Bilbo sighed, drawing in a breath for a new argument. Bofur beat him to it.

“Look, he cannot be expected to make decisions about how we need to work this out if he doesn’t know what four fifths of ‘this’ even is.”
“I don’t want you to be hurt by what you see,” Bilbo insisted. Softly cupping Bilbo’s jaw, Thorin said, “If I am too bothered, if it is more than the jealousy I’m already expecting, I will either speak up, excuse myself, or find some way to take myself out of it without making a scene. If the latter two happen, let it be, let me take a few moments to myself, and I will be fine. Trust me to let you know if it gets worse than that, though I can’t imagine it would.”
Bilbo conceded, adding, “If you’re sure, then that’s that, I suppose.”
“But—” Thorin intoned dramatically.

All four sets of eyes snapped to him.

“Promise you will not think ill of me if I watch too lustily, or take myself in hand.”

Those four sets of eyes grew wide in unison; Bofur recovered the fastest.

“Why, Thorin! How delightfully saucy of you,” he teased, though he was suitably impressed and somewhat intrigued by this earthier version of Thorin they had been discovering that evening. “I told you: I’ve had a long, long time to think about this…though that was when I was all by myself,” replied Thorin with a hint of caution. “I do not rightly know what my reaction will be to see it in person, though I can vow at the very least I will be calm about it.”
“And me, Thorin?” Fili asked. “Will you be okay with me being in the middle of it? It won’t be too weird?”
“I honestly do not know. I suppose we shall find out.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much!
“Well then,” Bilbo said, taking off the dwarvish tunic he had been wearing. “I guess the best place to start is the beginning.”

Kili joined in, gleefully shucking his clothes as well. The others looked at each other with uncertainty.

“Should I…do I undress the rest of the way?” Thorin asked.

Bilbo paused while taking off his trousers. “Erm, I sort of assumed…unless you don’t want to?”

“I don’t mind it for myself, but I don’t want to do anything that will make anyone uncomfortable. Would it be more untoward to be equally naked as the rest of you or clothed?”

Fili shook his head, more to wiggle the awkwardness loose than in any disagreement. “We’re overthinking this. Let’s just all get naked. It will be good to be on common ground.”

With that, Thorin began to do so. Fili and Bofur, having been given courage by both the evening’s wine and Thorin’s bravery thus far, set about removing their own clothes as Thorin finished undressing.

Though he felt nervous (and more than a little exposed), Thorin stood bare, the ring in his cock catching the candlelight—and two brand-new gazes.

Bofur tried—and failed--not to stare...though he did his best to try and feign casualness. Fili, however, appeared to have no such inclination. Openly gaping, he only tore his eyes away to glare at Kili accusingly.

“You didn’t tell me about that!” he exclaimed, pointing at it as though there could have been any mistake as to what he was referring.

Kili shot back. “What was I supposed to say? ‘Oh, by the way, Fee, Uncle Thorin has a ring through his business!’”

Thorin made a noise of disgust and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Could we please not call me Uncle Thorin when we’re naked?”

Fili had questions—so many questions—but opted for another healthy tug of wine from his goblet. Bofur practically snatched it out of his hands to finish draining it, so obviously Fili wasn’t the only
one suddenly feeling out of his depth.

Thorin had seen Fili naked dozens upon dozens of times before, but seeing him in this environment (with full knowledge of what was about to transpire) was something else altogether. The first thing that caught his attention were the additional piercings he hadn’t seen previously. In fact, now that he saw them together, he noted Fili, Kili, and Bilbo all had perfectly matched sets, Kili’s lack of jewelry through the top of his ear being the only exception. Though Fili and Kili had the one that had pre-dated Bilbo’s appearance in their lives, the fact that the rest of the piercings coordinated made him wonder how significant the first one had been.

To Fili, he said, “While we’re talking about rings through body parts…I never asked before, but you’ve got me looking at things anew. Is there a deeper story behind the ones you got when Kili turned 70?”

“We wanted to do something special once we had both reached our adulthood, something we could share that Mam couldn’t do or say anything about--especially when they were hidden from nearly everyone anyhow,” explained Fili.

Thorin nodded in understanding. “I knew you had gotten them on the occasion, but I never knew really why.”

“Well, it wasn’t like we were going to tell you what they were all about back then, or even before tonight,” Fili said. “We’d always sort of figured you were more on Mam’s side when it came to your view about us being close.”

“Like everything else, your nobler intentions were hidden by your strict-arse demeanor,” Kili said, somewhat teasing but with an palpable edge.

“I have a feeling we might need to have a discussion at some other time about my ‘strict-arse demeanor’ and its consequences. For now, though, allow me to reiterate that I am grateful you’re trusting me with your secrets tonight.”

Kili looked to Fili with a soft, shy smile and he was unable to resist him a moment longer. Fili kissed him gently and achingly slow, leaving only the promise of what was to come on his lips. It took all his will to hold back, lest they go too far too soon.

Out of pure curiosity, Thorin dared a surreptitious glimpse at a newly naked Bofur. Starting at the groin, Thorin noted immediately Bofur was flaccid—likely nervous—and couldn’t make out much beyond that due to the shadows. Chagrined, Thorin chided himself. Am I really attempting to assess Bofur’s prick? His eyes quickly darted elsewhere to continue his observation in far less personal places.

Bofur was by far the furriest of the five of them, and while he had no piercings like his lovers, his legs were decorated with tattoos…though without Thorin’s glasses, he could not make out what they were. The five of us are all so wildly different, aren’t we?

Noticing Fili and Kili had somewhat begun, Thorin became painfully self-aware he was standing naked in the middle of the room with nothing to do. He sought to remedy the situation as best as he could.

“I’ll, I’ll just sit here then?” Thorin said, grabbing his wine and tugging a chair over closer to the longways side of the bed, pushed back slightly off to the side. So I can see more of everything, he thought, promptly scandalizing himself.

Bilbo came over to claim another kiss, murmuring questions in his ear to make sure he was at ease. Thorin reassured him, sending him to his lovers with a gentle pat on his bottom. No longer in Fili’s embrace, Kili traded heated glances with Thorin, but did not kiss him. Thorin was disappointed, but only a little. He was not sure he was yet ready to passionately kiss Kili in front of Fili, anyhow.
Bilbo looked back one more time, questioning.

“Go on,” Thorin insisted.

*

The four of them faced each other.

“I’m not sure where to start,” Bilbo said to Bofur and Fili. “I want to touch both of you.”
“I’ve got a deliciously filthy idea of how this might go, so how about we give each other a nice little snog hello to warm us up and I’ll tell you all about it,” Bofur said.

*

Thorin observed as the lovers exchanged a few words…and then the kissing started. As Bofur and Bilbo both had their backs to him, he saw more roaming hands than faces—and oh, they definitely roamed! Heavy breathing interlaced with soft moans as the arousal heightened within the quartet, followed by more movement as partners traded: Bilbo switched from Bofur to Fili, Bofur from Bilbo to Kili. Somewhere in the middle of it, another quiet conversation took place. Thorin could not quite hear, but it was clear by the expressions on the faces he could see that it was agreeably wicked. After a few more kisses, the intimate cluster of bodies separated. A gasp escaped Thorin as (this time quite by accident, and from the gobsmacking, distracting girth of it) his eyes landed on Bofur’s now-erect prick. Bilbo approached Thorin, stepping into his line of vision and unwittingly (but thankfully) allowing him a moment to collect his wits.

Though Bilbo had done any number of perverse things with multiple lovers in his bed (up to and including Thorin), he seemed to Thorin to be quite unusually nervous about all five of them being there.

“We’ve…um, we’ve decided…that is, Bo had a plan—one we all thought was quite fine—that perhaps we, meaning him and myself, would get Fee and Kee, erm, ready for the step they are about to take.”
“My treasure,” Thorin said softly, taking Bilbo’s hand and kissing it. “I do not need explanations, nor do I need updates on each and every thing you are doing. I will make myself known if I need to, but please, continue and stop fretting over me.”
“Okay. I just—“
“-I know, but it is alright.”

Kili and Bofur had claimed the foot of the bed, laid out crossways with their heads closer to where Thorin sat, and Fili had been waiting for Bilbo next to the pillows in the same configuration. Thorin wondered if they picked being sideways on the bed specifically to improve his view.

*

Fili and Bilbo fell together, not bothering to hold back as they had when they were standing. On the bed, skin sliding against skin, the ache of separation melted into a lusty, loving homecoming.

“I’ve missed you so,” Bilbo murmured.
“I feel like I could almost come just from holding you naked against me, I’ve missed you so much.”
“I’m sorry this took so long.”
“We’re here now, and the oil dish just behind my head says you’re going to make it up to me.”
“I plan on doing much more than merely making it up to you,” Bilbo said, helping himself to some slick.
Thorin observed Fili and Bilbo, surprisingly soft together even as they were keenly wanting. He had never envisioned Bilbo like this with Fili, and Fili presented a surprisingly carnal yet earnest picture: yielding to Bilbo, yet moaning passionately and straining for heated, commanding kisses. Thorin found he hadn’t enough room for the jealousy he had anticipated over this pairing—he was alternately far too fascinated…and still self-conscious of the fact that he was watching Fili receive pleasure at all.

Bofur intentionally faced Kili on his knees in Thorin’s direction, his chest to Kili’s back, urging his chin to claim his mouth in an obscene kiss. Kili fell forward on his hands while Bofur oiled his fingers with the bottle he had the good sense to rescue from the nightstand. Bofur glanced over at Thorin, who still had eyes on Bilbo and Fili.

“What have you and Bo been doing at night while we’ve been away?” Bilbo murmured, voice velvety and dangerous as he worked Fili over.

“Talking about you while we get each other off,” Fili panted.

“Lately? Me making love to Kee, you making love to Bo.”

“Those are lovely things to discuss. I’m sure they’ve gotten you off a time or two.”

“Yes,” Fili moaned, partly because it was true, and partly because—Mahal’s Light—Bilbo had no right to have such talented hands.

“And what about you and me, hmm? Any filthy fantasies you might have discussed about that?”
“Like what?” asked Fili, quite aware of what Bilbo was asking, but hoping he would elaborate with something titillating.
“You’ve mentioned you and Kee making love…”
“And?” Fili coquetted.

Bilbo withdrew his fingers and shifted so he could look directly into his eyes, seeming to Fili to suddenly not be teasing at all.

“I want to play your game, Fee. With you.”

Fili swore under his breath, amazed.

“I’ve been thinking about it so much. Not tonight of course,” Bilbo continued, gaze unwavering, “and perhaps not tomorrow, but before this summer is out—before the month is out—I need to know how it feels to be split open by you…and you by me.”

Wide-eyed, Fili could do nothing for a couple moments but process what Bilbo had just said to him…and what it could mean. For the second time that evening, every feeling in him surged at once. Grabbing the back of Bilbo’s head, Fili said, “I love you,” and pulled him into a fierce and ardent kiss.

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Each time Thorin thought he had moved past the shame, a new circumstance seemed to spike it again. He needed to stop looking at Fili with Bilbo…though watching Bofur with Kili didn’t seem proper, either. Once rivals, he didn’t know what he and Bofur were now—friends, perhaps—but friends didn’t stare at each other’s enormous…Durin’s Beard, that’s thick.

He quickly averted his eyes, landing next on Kili’s ecstatic expression. Considering it had been put there by Bofur, Thorin didn’t exactly feel like looking at it, either. He glanced off to the side and, much to his horror, again looked straight at Bofur.

*  

Eyes on Thorin’s, Bofur whispered into Kili’s ear.

“Do you suppose he’s jealous? I think he might be…indeed, his husband is knuckles deep in your brother right next to us, yet he can’t stop looking over at you. Has he been touching you like this, Kee? Maybe he’s looking at that hard cock of yours and wishing he could suck it.”

Kili groaned, vibrating Bofur’s chest.

“I’ve got to imagine you’re dripping by now, judging by the noise you’ve been making. Have I milked your little spot enough to make you wet?”

“Yes,” Kili croaked.

“Seeing as my hands are busy, why don’t you use yours to give me a taste like a good lad?”

Glistening with harvested arousal, Kili’s index finger pointed over his shoulder; Bofur purposely maintained eye contact with Thorin as he sensuously sucked the length of it, humming as though it was the most delectable thing he’d had in his mouth all day. The ire in Thorin’s glare appeared to intensify.

“Naughty Kee, keeping secrets from me,” Bofur continued for only Kili to hear. “He’s had you in his mouth already, I can tell just by the way he is looking at you—and the way he’s looking at me! I count myself lucky he cannot actually set me afire with the blaze in those eyes. Oh, Kee, he has
Kili fell forward, *begging* Bofur to stop or he was going to come. Bofur withdrew and Kili rolled over onto his back, panting. Thorin was alternately relieved and disappointed he couldn’t see Kili’s face any longer. Bofur tipped forward, licking up the length of Kili’s cock and briefly wrapping his lips around the head, no doubt to swallow any ambrosia that might have remained—and he had the unmitigated audacity to *wink* at Thorin while he did it.

“No! Kili wailed. “No more! I mean it—I’m…I really do need a moment.”

As Kili’s chest heaved to catch his breath, Thorin was desperately curious as to what Bofur had been doing (and saying) to bring Kili so wildly to the brink like that.

Kili’s plea for a break seemed to be the signal for the group; after a quiet discussion Thorin couldn’t hear, Bilbo, Bofur, Fili, and Kili switched places, resituating themselves on the bed as they prepared to hand their lovers off to each other. This presented Thorin with a deeper problem: now he truly would not know where to look. As the jealousy Thorin had been expecting had finally made itself known, he felt compelled to strictly monitor every touch and sigh while Bilbo was in Bofur’s arms…though he wished to watch Fili and Kili, too. It felt taboo, yet his curiosity about this revelation of theirs burned. He had not lied to them—there had been a time long, long ago when Thorin thought Fili and Kili truly might have wound up together in the end, so having the opportunity to watch some part of that early prediction play out in front of him was indeed tempting.

This guilt is foolish and unwarranted, he reassured himself. Everyone had agreed upon what they were getting into, after all, and permissions had been granted, so why shouldn’t he watch? He took another drink of wine, wishing he had brought an extra bottle.

The couples stretched out along the proper length of the bed, Bilbo and Bofur having picked the side closer to Thorin while Fili and Kili were on the far side. Though there were four of them in the bed, the large mattress—the largest the Elves could make—gave them plenty of room to get into the act without inadvertently rolling onto or kicking one another. Thorin smiled to himself, pleased with the choices he had made so many weeks ago.

In between passionate kisses, Bofur sighed Bilbo’s name. He glanced up at him and dreamily sighed again simply from the beauty of him.

“I’ve got to tell you, I wondered sometimes if you were going to make us wait all summer,” he said tenderly.

“I’m sorry, Bo.”

“Shhh, no apologies. I’m just happy we’re here now.”

“I am, too. I love you.”

Bofur had heard Bilbo say those words to him one hundred times since the first confession, yet they always made his heart pound faster. Here, together once again, holding Bilbo warm and naked against him, Bofur had to struggle against the threatening mist in his eyes.

“I love you too,” he whispered, craning upward for another kiss. “So, whatever shall we do first?” “I know what I want to do,” purred Bilbo.
On their sides, Kili and Fili held each other, stroking and grinding against every reachable inch of flesh while they traded kisses and whispers.

“I can scarcely believe we’re about to do this,” murmured Fili. “But you want to, right?”
“I’ve been wanting it for longer than I admitted even to myself.”
“Me too.”
“Why are we so good at talking to each other and so bad at the same time?”
“Because this has been unexpected. Overwhelming at times, which can make it scary. Because we’ve always been so important to each other and we’re afraid to ruin it. Because I’m terrified to hurt you. Because I love you, Fee.”
Fili looked into his eyes. “Then show me. I’m ready, now. Mark me.”
Kili’s breath hitched. “You want me to mark you…first?”
“I made you wait last time and it wasn’t fair. Perhaps it was even cruel. I want to prove myself to you, show you that I mean it. I owe you that much.” With that, Fili rolled onto his back. “Like this, so we can look at each other.”
“Yes,” Kili said tenderly. “I want to be able to hold you.”

The passionate kissing between Bilbo and Bofur slowed and Bilbo moved on, mouthing down Bofur’s chest.

Oh Mahal’s Grace, Thorin swore to himself, closing his eyes tightly. He was well aware when he opened them again that his Bilbo would have those luscious lips around Bofur’s cock. A lusty groan from Bofur made it happen sooner than Thorin had anticipated--his eyes snapped open against his will when he heard it. Sometimes I detest being right.

His attention darted to Fili and Kili, who seemed to still be at the beginning of things. Though Thorin had observed Kili with another lover—with their lover—before, it was fascinating to watch him: the way his hands moved along Fili’s thigh, the way his muscles rippled as he rocked into Fili achingly slow, the way his hair fell between his shoulder blades while the candles lit his profile.

He’s exquisitely beautiful. Thorin’s cock flexed in agreement, forcing him to shift where he sat. However, as delectable as Kili might be, Thorin would have to deal with not being his lover this evening. He felt a second twinge of disappointment and envy as he reminded himself so, but that was the way of it. Tonight was for Fili and Kili, and it was an important one, too. Even from Thorin’s distance (and despite the care Kili was obviously exhibiting), he could feel the intensity of the moment radiating out in waves.

Kili stilled once he pressed inside Fili the rest of the way, sucking in tiny gasps of air as the whole of the situation combined with the sensation seemed to overwhelm him. Fili could relate—he was far from a blushing virgin, but there was something about having someone other than Bofur inside him, having Kili inside him, that sent his soul and senses in all directions. Glancing up, the look in Kili’s eyes was both awed as well as understanding, as if Fili had just said everything he had been thinking aloud…though he knew full well he had not.

Caressing Fili’s face, Kili said, “I’m glad it is you, Fee.”
Fili smiled, emotion swelling within him. “Me too.”
“Ready?”
“Yes, please.”

They had barely gotten underway when, all too soon, Fili felt a tell-tale rumble deep in his core.

“I think Bee did too well at getting me ready. I’m—fuck, Kee, I am already growing close.”
“That’s only because you’ve rarely let anyone properly prepare you lately before begging Bo to shove it in,” Kili teased.
“Well Bee sure did. Shift your hips, maybe we can make it...less.”
Kili did as he was told and Fili exhaled a shuddering moan.
“That was worse, wasn’t it?” asked Kili.
“Oh, wouldn’t I love it like this, coming just this way with you? I don’t want to come until I’m in you, though.”
“Should we trade?”
Fili shook his head. “You first. It is important to me.”

Kili reduced the speed of his strokes until going slow was almost more stimulation than pumping fast. He frequently paused at Fili’s feverish insistence, repeatedly carrying his lover up to the edge, only to be stopped each time before he tipped. For his own part, Kili had not yet reached the brink of his own orgasm, but his desire grew more and more desperate with each arrested attempt. Kili anticipated this growing desperation would soon take care of the dilemma Fili was attempting to avoid. Though he hadn’t pictured it going quite this way, Kili had to admit it had been a thrilling session and an unforgettable first time with Fili.

* 

Sitting in that chair holding his wine bottle, Thorin felt more like a king than most of the times he had sat on his throne. He had heard tales and hushed whispers in dark corners about the decadence of Men and their kings when in private: illicit exhibitions put on specifically for the pleasure of a viewer or two. The rumors had not been thrilling to him at the time; indeed, they turned his stomach as he thought about the faithlessness and rudeness of Men compared to the virtue and honor of dwarrows. As he sat there with a display of his own, the appeal finally made sense...with one notable exception: this was not a mere performance carried out at his whim or command, nor was it a writhing, sweaty pile of the faithless. Instead, it was an expression of love, joy, and rapture.

Though he had witnessed Kili and Bilbo together before, Thorin was still struck by how enjoyable he found it—jealous or not—to watch other people experience each other sexually. He had been achingly hard for the duration, and his desire was only increasing as the intensity between the lovers built. Was it that he could imagine himself in their places, could practically feel the phantom strokes that brought forth the sensual sounds that surrounded him? Or was it simply being privy to viewing them in their most private, unguarded moments?

* 

The urgency built within him until Kili had no control over the inevitable.

He cried out, “I can’t stop this time, I have to-“

Fili frantically moaned under him as Kili’s hips stuttered, releasing pulse after pulse inside him.

* 

Thorin’s cock throbbed from the forbidden obscenity of being there to hear Kili coming inside Fili for the first time. It was disgracefully exhilarating.
Bilbo could tell Kili was close—no one knew those sounds better—and although he had Bofur in his mouth, he could not help being mesmerized by the vision of Kili next to him as he groaned, tensed, and came. A small part of him was sad, as he had long enjoyed the distinction of being only person Kili had been inside (and who had been inside him) but this was Fili. Bilbo found it nearly impossible to be jealous of him. He chose instead to focus on the wonder spreading across both their faces as whatever it was between them became something more.

Bilbo had paused his mouthplay and Bofur supposed it was because of Kili and Fili reaching such a rapturous milestone beside them. Much to Bofur’s surprise, Bilbo climbed up past him, reaching over to the nightstand. With a wicked grin, Bilbo returned to his place…only this time he reached between Bofur’s legs, slick and searching for an entrance. After the initial surprise (and pleasured groans) subsided, Bofur experienced a bolt of self-awareness:

*Bee has his fingers up my arse right in front of Thorin.*

*Bilbo is inside Bofur, right in front of me,* Thorin lamented internally.

Thorin knew all too well the heat of that mouth, the skill of those fingers, and the love of that remarkable, marvelous, beautiful creature. Though he had made love to him just the night before, Thorin found himself yearning for Bilbo as though he hadn’t touched him in days. He had promised to keep an open mind, however, regardless of jealousy, and though it was Bofur receiving that glorious gift of Bilbo’s, there also was something fascinating about being allowed by both of them to observe. He pulled back two solid swallows from his bottle of wine in an attempt to soothe the maelstrom of conflicting emotions the past several minutes had stirred inside him.

A familiar sensation called his attention to his own cock. Before he even looked down, Thorin knew he was leaking so much arousal that it had started running down his shaft. Mortified and growing uncomfortable, he had to do something about it. Peeking at Bofur to make sure he wasn’t watching, Thorin stroked himself a couple times, just enough to rub in some of the fluid before it started cooling irritatingly at the base of his prick. As was his lousy luck, Bofur looked at him in the middle of it.

And came.

Between Bilbo’s hands and talented mouth, Bofur was nearing his peak. It had all been too much that evening, too arousing—Bilbo’s tongue in his mouth and on his cock again, Fili and Kili making love next to him, the raw, wanton dichotomy of Fili pleading not to come yet and Kili’s gorgeous cries when he got there, being watched by Thorin…

Bofur considered how he was about to come down Bilbo’s throat mere feet away from Thorin, the former king of Bilbo’s bed and onetime sole master of his heart. The idea alone was powerfully satisfying, pushing him even farther. Sneaking a peek at Thorin in hopes he was indeed witnessing the filth about to happen, Bofur saw something he could scarcely believe: Thorin was touching himself looking at them.

Looking at him.
Bofur’s orgasm shot through him so intensely he saw stars.

*

Gasping for air, Kili rested his forehead on Fili’s collarbone, aftershocks still somehow radiating out from his core. Though he was close to lost in the moment, his concern for Fili was foremost in his mind.

“Did I—did I ruin it?” he asked.

Fili hummed what could have been a laugh if he hadn’t also been struggling to compose himself.

“This is the furthest thing possible from ruined,” he managed to say, “but if you’re asking if I finished too early, no.”

Kili propped up to look in his eyes; Fili smoothed back Kili’s hair.

“It was perfect,” Fili whispered, tugging him down to claim his mouth.

*

After the ecstasy had abated, Bofur realized what he thought he had seen had been either mistake or accident, because Thorin’s hand was no longer on his cock, nor were his eyes on Bofur. With a disappointment that bewildered him, he conceded he must have looked over at just the right (or wrong) time to completely misread the situation.

That heady rush of superiority Bofur had been feeling faded along with the surprise and the arousal. He no longer felt like he was showing up the legendary Thorin Oakenshield by getting off in his beloved. Instead he saw simply Thorin—the one who wrote that deeply personal confessional of a letter, the one who wept as he entrusted him with the dark tale of what he had endured in their absence—sitting by himself practically in a corner, watching the one to whom he had hoped to vow fidelity forever (and who was to vow fidelity to him forever, too), and bravely attempting to figure out where and how he could possibly fit into this new, strange arrangement not of his making…while the four of them were happily getting their own. Bofur did not feel so powerful or proud any longer.

*

Bofur whispered to Bilbo; Bilbo glanced over his shoulder at Thorin then whispered back. They both giggled and traded more whispers. Thorin felt acutely self-conscious, and the embarrassment welling up inside made him angry. They were laughing at him. How dare they, when they knew how uncomfortable this could be?

As the bitterness of this humiliation grew, Bofur called Thorin over, doubly baffling him. What could he possibly want? Does he want to laugh directly in my face? Thorin’s blood went chill. Maybe he thought I was touching myself and staring at him the whole time. Bofur gloating over something like that—especially when it wasn’t even true—would be enough for Thorin to call the whole evening off and retreat to his own room, safe or not.

Bilbo looked fully at Thorin now, still grinning, soft and fond. Thorin could see the adoration Bilbo had for him all over his face and it quelled some of the blackness the previous giggles had bubbled up from deep within him. He remained wary, however.

“Please, just come here,” Bilbo requested tenderly, holding out a beckoning hand. “Please, my love.”
Thorin finished the bottle of wine and took a deep breath.

He went.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, darlings! I'm glad you're still here.
Bilbo and Bofur propose a change

Thorin Joins The Discussion Part 3

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Bofur propose a change

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bilbo took Thorin’s hand.

“Bo has decided it is time for you to trade places with him so you and I may take a turn together,” he said. “A turn I very much want tonight, Thorin.”

“I’m not supposed to be participating,” Thorin insisted.

Explained Bofur, “Bee and I just realized we’ve forgotten something: every bit as much as you have to get used to me, I need to get used to you, too. We were adversaries--and quite bitter ones, for a time--and there have been several conversations regarding my jealousy of you since we began all this in the fall. You’ve sat out this last round and gotten some eyefuls, to be sure. In the interest of fairness and in the spirit of the experiment, it seems like now might be the time to hand off so I can figure out my feelings, too.”

“But what about your reunions?” Thorin asked Bilbo.

“Between us, there have been several combinations of that already. Reuniting has thoroughly commenced, my love. Unless you are not yet ready to be seen? We would utterly respect your comfort if that is the case.”

Thorin glanced up at Bofur, then over to Fili and Kili, all of whom had found the courage to trust him with such unprecedented intimacies that evening already. He could not envision himself refusing to give them the same courtesy.

“No, that’s not it.”

“Then please, if your objection is only about reunions, or what you feel Fee and Bo are owed for having waited, leave those concerns aside and say yes. It will make me feel better…and I promise it will make you feel quite good, too.”

Thorin never could resist it when Bilbo’s tone turned flirtatious, especially when coupled with that hungry look in his eye.

“Who am I to argue?” Thorin conceded, voice already growing husky with desire.

* 

Fili watched (and eavesdropped upon) the conversation with Bofur, Bilbo, and Thorin carefully, wondering what the issue was. Upon hearing their rationalizations, and Thorin’s acceptance thereof, Fili felt a new nervousness. Thorin watching from across the room was one thing, but now Thorin would be able to feel the mattress move as Fili made love…and the other way around, too.

He glanced at a blissed Kili, sated but gazing back at him as though he was nonetheless quite intently awaiting the second part of their adventure. Fili’s desire surged within him, his pent-up need yet achingly unfulfilled after Kili had pulled him to the edge several times. He concluded
nothing about Thorin’s proximity was going to keep him from Kili’s body in that moment—a body that called to his, in eager need of his imprint.

*

Still standing, Thorin bent to claim Bilbo’s mouth lustily, the way he had been longing to since the moment he relinquished him to his other lovers’ arms. Getting into it, he mused Bilbo tasted a little bitter, like…

He froze.

”Thorin? Don’t stop,” breathed Bilbo.

You’ve got to make a decision and make it now, Thorin said to himself. This was already more far more intimate contact than he ever wanted to have with Bofur’s…evidence. Saying something to Bilbo might ruin the mood, but which was worse?

Bilbo’s brow furrowed as he kenned something amiss. “What’s wrong?”

Thorin looked at his beloved, who was gazing back at him with a flushed face and pupils wide with want. That’s all it took to make up his mind.

“Nothing at all,” Thorin replied, resuming their kiss.

Conflict arose within him as the taste renewed on his tongue. Both his rational mind as well as his fragile heart yearned to wash Bofur from his mouth with the strongest spirits obtainable, but his libido reveled in the sheer perversity of it…and as said libido was currently in charge, Thorin found himself wildly deepening the kiss.

*

Bofur picked up Thorin’s bottle as he sat down, frowning as he realized it was empty. We’d better start keeping better stores of this on hand if we’re to get through the summer sharing a room like this.

As Bofur considered Thorin’s vantage for the prior events of the evening, Thorin earnestly began Bilbo’s seduction. He idly wondered if Thorin could still taste him. There was a moment when Bofur thought perhaps he had—and was on the verge of reacting poorly—but it was only fleeting. Thorin had gone back to kissing Bilbo with redoubled enthusiasm, so Bofur concluded it mustn’t have had anything to do with him.

Thorin bent Bilbo over the side of the bed, landing Bilbo’s face in what Bofur thought to be the perfect spot for a close and personal view of Fili’s and Kili’s second act. Thorin took care slicking his fingers and though Thorin’s body was in the way of more explicit observation, Bilbo’s furry toes rising off the ground made it obvious when he had reached his prize.

Though there was a twinge or two of envy, Bofur didn’t feel the burn of fiery possession he had expected. Frankly, it puzzled him. Perhaps his surge of empathy for Thorin had lingering effects beyond the request to switch places.

Turning his attention towards Fili and Kili, Bofur’s prick gave a twitch in an attempt to come back to life. Currently kissing and caressing, Fili seemed about to vibrate out of his skin with want, already vocalizing those fraught moans Bofur knew well. Bofur guessed Fili would barely last a minute once inside.
Satisfied Bilbo was ready, Thorin flipped him over and picked him up; Bilbo kissed him passionately, wrapping his legs around his waist. Thorin self-consciously flicked a glance towards Bofur, catching an unmistakably lusty spark in Bofur’s eyes as he watched Bilbo’s enthusiastic response to the way Thorin commanded his body. It is my turn with him now, Bofur, thought Thorin. and I hope you can see he loves it--and me--like this. He now better understood Kili’s confession of his initial desire to show his prowess with Bilbo off to Thorin. Thorin found himself wanting to put on a similar show for Bofur--not that it would take any more than he had planned to do to Bilbo anyway. Yes, let Bofur see how Bilbo’s first lover handled him.

He sat them both down on the bed and twisted, landing on his back with Bilbo’s knees on either side of his hips.

Bilbo breathed excitedly, “This is exactly how I wanted you.”

Thorin smirked, because he already knew. It had been worth every ounce of pain his piercing had caused him for the way Bilbo continually begged to bounce on it—and the way he cried out once he was doing so.

* 

“Are you ready?” Fili whispered to Kili.

“Yes.”

“I’m, ah--” Fili stuttered. “I’m thinking my part of this will be not be a coupling for the ages or anything. I’ll count myself lucky if I get all the way in without bursting.”

“It already is a coupling for the ages. This, you…how it feels in my blood even now, before you’ve started a thing, the look on your face after I marked you…all of it. I can scarcely wait for you.”

Fili swallowed back tears yet again. “I don’t want to wait.”

Taking hold of Fili’s cock and guiding it between his legs, Kili whispered, “Then don’t.”

Though the limits of a body made Kili’s gesture only symbolic at best, Fili soon pressed against his entrance, slipping past it with ease.

As he had predicted, Fili was ready to finish almost as soon as he had started, though he fought it long enough to relish the experience of being inside Kili, feeling him, letting every emotion that bubbled to the surface (and there were many) wash over him with each stroke, nearer and nearer to the ecstasy that would finally make Kili his…the way he might have always been meant to be.

His orgasm shook him, layer upon layer, mind, body, and soul. His toes cramped, the scream he had drawn up from them morphing into a silent, strangled expression by the time it reached his mouth. He didn’t know how long he stayed frozen in that position, as deep as he could push inside, pulsing and pulsing. The only thing that brought him back to the present was the heat of Kili’s chest under his when he involuntarily slumped against him, spent.

* 

Though the gorgeous, blissful expression on Fili’s face made Bofur long for him, he stayed seated and let Fili and Kili have those sweet moments of quiet afterwards for themselves. He would join them when the time seemed right.

While Fili was already finished, the other couple had only just begun. Though Thorin had been the one underneath, Bilbo was far from dominant: each one of Thorin’s paws cupped one of Bilbo’s buttocks, moving him how he wanted. Indeed, it appeared as though Bilbo could only hold on for
the ride. He pitched forward, pressing his face to Thorin’s collarbone, whimpering in successively higher pitches as Thorin fucked him mercilessly. Thorin whispered in his ear, making him whine even louder. Bofur would have traded a month’s worth of orgasms to know what had been said.

Thorin pushed Bilbo’s torso upright, raising his knees for Bilbo to lean into for support while keeping his feet flat on the bed for more leverage. Thorin took his lover in a frenzy, Bilbo all but shrieking with every moan until he became unable to catch the breath to make the sounds.

However Bofur might have defined the act of fucking as recently as ten minutes ago paled in comparison to this.

*

Pressed into Kili’s side, Fili valiantly attempted not to gawp at Thorin openly. Kili did not seem to be shy about paying them the whole of his attention, though, so Fili soon gave up trying to be subtle. It wasn’t as if Thorin noticed anything other than Bilbo at the moment, anyhow.

Fili had considered Thorin in bed with Bilbo, sure, in the abstract as he had imagined what it would be like to reluctantly relinquish Bilbo to his arms, or in moments of innate curiosity when he tried (and often failed) to visualize Thorin as a sexual being.

This, though. Nothing Fili had ever wondered—not even the more perverted, had-too-much-wine-and-tried-to-picture-it sorts of things—prepared him for this.

The way Thorin took Bilbo…Fili had never seen anyone be so possessed by their lover, not that time Bofur begged him to fuck his pain away, not the times he demanded Bofur to shag him in two, not even Kili and Bilbo that first night in camp. Perhaps it was their size and strength differences—it was common knowledge that Thorin was exceptionally strong, even by dwarven standards—but he had never seen power like this translated to bedplay, and although Bilbo losing control to the point of hoarseness was not new to him, he had never heard Bilbo lose control so soon into an encounter. He wondered if it was the ring that unwound him so rapidly, or more the way Thorin used it. He felt himself stiffening against Kili’s leg…and Kili himself was not unaffected, erection having fully rallied.

*

Bofur watched Thorin reach towards the nightstand, drawing his hand through the oil dish while scarcely missing a beat.

“I can get there—“ Bilbo gulped, attempting a protest. “-I could come from just you, without help.” “Perhaps you could,” countered Thorin. “But you’re going to come like this.”

He gripped Bilbo’s cock and began pumping fast and slick. Bilbo managed to find his voice again, only if to aimlessly repeat the word “please.”

Fucking him (somehow) impossibly harder, Thorin held Bilbo’s hip with one hand while he used the other to wank him with expert precision. Bilbo had lost control, wailing as Thorin milked him, owned him. Bofur could see Thorin’s face reddening with the effort of holding his own back until Bilbo had his. Finally, in moments that seemed to Bofur stretch out for ages, Thorin forced Bilbo’s orgasm. When Bilbo was unable to spill anymore, Thorin shouted and finished, too, using both hands to grip Bilbo’s waist and push both their hips off the bed, filling him while Bilbo still gasped and twitched through his own aftershocks. Bilbo fell forward onto Thorin, who rolled him over, kissing him slow, tender, and passionate.
Bofur’s prick was stone-hard, yet his lungs had a particular sting of breathlessness as if he had just come, too; he realized he had been panting hard along with them. Kili had been right—more than right, and upon further reflection, perhaps had completely understated his description of what Bofur had just witnessed: Thorin truly did take Bilbo as though it had been his birthright, pleasing him foremost yet still taking his own pleasure from his body as he saw fit. Bofur let his head fall back for a moment with his eyes closed, attempting longer, slower breaths. What he wouldn’t give for a pipe at that moment.

It was far too much for Bofur to continue enduring on his own. Fili had been done for a while, he and Kili cuddling together while rather unabashedly watching the spectacle of Bilbo and Thorin. Bofur was thankful Thorin had been captivated and occupied with Bilbo, for surely it would have made him far too self-conscious to do what he had just done had he noticed the attention from them all.

Quite out of his mind with arousal, Bofur joined Fili and Kili on the bed, relieved to receive a warm welcome of smiles and kisses from them both.

“I want you,” Bofur whispered to Fili.
“Have me.”

Without wasting a moment, Bofur had Fili bent over and impaled. Kili shimmied under Fili, legs spread and resting against both pairs of knees in front of him, swallowing his lover’s moans in frantic kisses.

* 

Snuggled against each other with Thorin on his back and Bilbo tucked into his side (the one with a delightful view of Kili’s side of the bed, because he knew they were not finished), Bilbo lazily traced around his name on Thorin’s chest. His attention perked when Bofur joined Fili and Kili, and even more once he saw what they were getting up to. Thorin seemed to be noticing, too, though he struggled to hide his curiosity. Carefully lowering his voice to a whisper only Thorin could hear, Bilbo made an attempt to liberate Thorin from that particular inhibition.

* 

“It is okay to watch, Thorin. They like it, I know from experience.”
“But it is…me watching,” he whispered back, ashamed. “Not just you.”
“I’m willing to wager that might make them like it more. You’d be surprised at the things that turn them on. Fee, for instance…see what Bofur is doing? Fee likes to be handled rough, I think he wants it to hurt a bit. He also loves it when we come on him—Bo most of all.”

Thorin squirmed. He was already getting hard again. Was this a result of Yavanna’s assistance or was it this embarrassing, yet ridiculously arousing situation he was experiencing for the first time?

“Why Bo—erm, Bofur—most of all?”
“Oh,” Bilbo whispered conspiratorially. “Bo has the most stunning capacity. His release is easily at least three times as much as any of us. It just keeps going—I have to swallow really fast when I’m sucking him or I’ll choke on it, there’s so much. I wonder sometimes what it feels like for Fee to have it inside him.”

Thorin wanted to be jealous that Bilbo knew all this, but he was too fascinated by the gossip. “I don’t even know how you fit that beast in your mouth to swallow in the first place.”
“If you’re properly motivated, you’ll find a way.”
Aghast, Thorin replied, “Me?”
“Oh, I meant the royal you. Well, I guess you’re the royal you, too, aren’t you?” Bilbo giggled at
his terrible joke and Thorin relaxed again, smiling back. 
“Anyway, like I said. It is okay to watch, Thorin. Don’t be ashamed. Here, let me help.”

* 

On his knees, Bofur fucked Fili with long, hard strokes. In turn, Fili kissed Kili, who had propped up on his elbows for better reach. A filthy idea formed in Bofur’s mind, but before he could give it voice, a groan beside him called his attention.

Glancing over, he was treated to the unbelievable sight of Thorin holding his legs back by his knees, exposing himself for Bilbo, who to the best of Bofur’s estimation seemed to be stretching Thorin for a more intimate connection. Having prepared him to his apparent satisfaction, Bilbo shifted between Thorin’s legs, deftly manipulating his lover’s hips to more easily penetrate him. As Bilbo eased his cock inside, Thorin tossed his head back to moan, exposing his throat and elongating his body. Bilbo hefted him up for a better angle and began to move; Thorin undulated back, obviously loving it.

Bofur had seen Bilbo like this before, but it was quite something else to see him so dominant with Thorin, especially since he had just witnessed Thorin giving it to him ruthlessly only so many moments before. Seeing these two faces of his beloved Bilbo rapidly back to back—for that matter, seeing the surprising, opposing sides of Thorin so rapturously meeting them…perhaps if he had understood months earlier, he might not have given Thorin such a hard time about whether or not he and Bilbo were a good match.

A groan from Fili buzzed around his cock and Bofur was almost ashamed his attention had strayed so, though the sight of Thorin letting himself be vulnerable to Bilbo in such delicious, filthy surrender had been quite unbelievable.

He turned his attention fully back to his husband and the forbidden scene that had been in his mind before Thorin’s distraction.

* 

Thorin sneaked another glance over at the trio. Bofur was deep into his task and—once again—whispering something that made Fili moan even more wildly. Bofur then grasped Kili’s shoulder, getting his attention and quietly saying something to him that made him lustily groan as well. Bless me, what does he say that affects them so?

* 

With a smoldering look into Fili’s eyes, Kili turned onto his hands and knees and raised his bottom provocatively, leaving no doubt as to how he felt about Bofur’s suggestion. Fili pressed into him, shuddering a long, vocal exhale as incredible sensations nearly over took him. He stilled Bofur with a hand stretched back to rest on his hip—he had not been ready for the pleasure and intensity of having Kili while being had.

Not even close.

He needed at least a small moment to collect his mind before his lovers utterly scrambled it. He could scarcely believe he was doing this. He took a few deep breaths, patted Bofur’s hip, and after a couple false starts, found a rhythm that worked with Bofur and Kili both.

* 

Thorin licked his lips, stunned by the scene unfolding next to them: The three of them began to
rock, one into the other into the other in an obscene chain reaction. Thorin hoped there truly was no one lurking in the hall because the vocalizations that came from Fili would surely have been heard. Though he and Kili had done the same thing to Bilbo before, once again Thorin noted there was something fascinating about having the distance as an observer as opposed to being a participant, where the view was limited.

*

Having difficulty holding himself up, Kili let his chest, shoulders, and face drop forward onto the bed. He turned his head towards Bilbo and Thorin and marveled anew. He had been stunned from the instant Thorin had acquiesced to this evening, and had been further surprised at each turn. Thorin allowing Fili and Bofur into his personal moments like this had been the furthest thing from Kili’s expectations.

Bilbo had also been laudably patient and welcoming, worried for Thorin’s feelings and gently insistent that he not stay out of it. Kili felt a surge of need for him, missing him suddenly as though he hadn’t touched him in days. Bilbo was busy holding Thorin in place, though, and chasing both their pleasure.

Kili stretched out his hand, anyway, and Thorin’s warm fingers smoothed across his palm before grasping it. Kili’s gaze flicked up immediately; Thorin looked back at him. The connection between them crackled like lightning, intimate and charged. A particularly rough thrust from Bofur (and Fili) forced Kili to take his hand back in order to brace himself. The moment with Thorin had passed, but the feeling stayed with him.

*

“Who would ever guess you used to be so quiet in our bed?” Bofur purred to Fili. “Used to be you barely made a squeak—now listen to you! You only need a good fuck to open that pretty throat.” “Stop teasing and fuck me harder, then!” Fili demanded, which was not unusual for Bofur to hear, but Kili’s resulting, “Yes, harder, Bo!” was stunning and lewd.

*

Thorin watched Bofur push Fili into Kili, heard Kili begging for it, all while feeling his husband inside him, drawing him nearer. Modesty, propriety, and shame lost all meaning to him in that moment. There was simply want, and yes, and this is wonderfully obscene left over. Unable and too impatient to wait for a more drawn-out conclusion, he wrapped his hand around his shaft and exhaled a ragged sigh.

“That’s good,” Bilbo rasped. “Oh, yes, do that.”

*

Fili’s whole body twitched as he moved, his face contorting in both wonder and pleasure. He only just managed to warn Kili before he burst into a million pieces--and oh, the sensation! Coming inside Kili, feeling something so huge inside him as he did so…it was so much more than he had expected.

Bofur came not long after he did and a second rush of giddiness spun through Fili. Though Bofur and Kili hadn’t imprinted him anywhere near simultaneously, he wondered to himself it his wasn’t like the effects of double bonds he had heard Bilbo talk about before.

*
Seeing Thorin touch himself shot a network of unexpected erotic tingles through Bofur’s chest. Bofur felt Fili spasm around him, his rapturous cries filling the air, and his own pleasure surged. Within breaths, Bofur had a stunning finish of his own. After the last pulse had faded, he peeked over and Mahal, there it still was: Thorin, pumping himself wildly, exposed and riding the currents of his bliss with Bilbo. It was as Kili had described all those weeks ago at Bag End:

_He also likes to give of himself with no pretense and no title, being simply Thorin—curious, loving, pliable, and eager. I’ve watched him let down all his defenses, letting Bee take the lead, making himself vulnerable in a way I had never imagined him to be capable. I’ve seen him submit to Bee so willingly, so openly, blooming under his touch…to be one he trusts enough to do so must be intoxicating._

Watching the way Thorin turned himself over to Bilbo, Bofur idly wondered if Kili had ever had his moment with Thorin. Bofur had his suspicions, as he had hinted to Kili earlier in the session, but he vowed to attempt to get confirmation at the earliest opportunity. Regardless, he could again see how right Kili had been about him. While Thorin being a fierce lover hadn't been too shocking (though interesting to behold), Bofur thought Kili had vastly underdescribed the otherworldly nature of a vulnerable and trusting Thorin giving himself up so intimately like this. Watching him accept pleasure as opposed to giving it...

Bofur’s musings were abruptly halted by something he had never expected in eighty lifetimes to witness: Thorin arched his back--shaking, moaning, whimpering as though nothing had ever felt so divine--and he came across his own stomach, Bilbo still stroking within him.

_It was gorgeous._

Bofur chuckled at himself. Was he truly sitting there thinking of Thorin Oakenshield as “gorgeous?” Perhaps tomorrow he might see frogs fly.

Regardless, Bofur was almost sorry he had already finished.

* * *

Thorin pulled at himself while Bilbo pounded into him, the whole time listening to (and stealing peeks of) the perversion happening alongside him. Afraid to be caught peeping by Bofur again, Thorin kept his eyes either closed or fixed on Bilbo, listening to the intensifying sounds of rapture from both his immediate lover as well as the other side of the bed. Each pant and groan that reached his ears caused Thorin’s desire to surge. Fili tipped first, then Bofur, and their cries of delight aroused Thorin even further, beckoning his climax. Bilbo murmured more encouragement and once he felt that unmistakable tension of his final approach, Thorin didn’t fight it. His body bowed and he held nothing back as Bilbo wrung him dry.

Bilbo keened, stuttering into him, filling him the way Thorin used to crave so desperately all those nights he had slept alone. It was magnificent.

With a final, contented exhale, Thorin’s head lolled to the side and he opened his eyes.

The other three dwarrows in the bed were _staring_ at him. He became acutely aware of the awkward silence as the noise of him and Bilbo shouting in orgasmic bliss faded away, the barest echo still hanging in his own ears, a mortifying reminder of how wanton he had just been. Just as panic threatened to set in, Bilbo—his lovely Bilbo—pulled his attention back with a sweet kiss.

“Would you mind if I left you for a moment to help Kee along?” Bilbo whispered.
Though Thorin felt exposed and anxious, it did not feel right to command Bilbo to stay at his side if his wish was to go to Kili, either...especially if it meant Kili's pleasure would be denied. He nodded his permission.

*

Kili, last but determined not to be left out, rolled over after Fili had finished, stroking himself. Fili fell next to him in a lighter version of the daze Kili had seen Bilbo wear before, no doubt partially owing to the two bonds freshly under his skin. Kili thought he might quite like to try it himself sometime—possibly as soon as tomorrow—and as he conjured the picture of Bilbo and Fili both fulfilling that fantasy, his hand was nudged away and warm lips enveloped him. He knew them in an instant.

Sighing dreamily, he stretched his arms over his head. “My jewel.”
“I had to have some part of you tonight—and thought maybe you might wish to also have some part of me,” Bilbo whispered before returning to his task.

Kili wanted to tell him how spot-on his instinct had been, that despite the pleasure and the multiple lovers and the milestones, Kili had missed him, had needed his Chosen’s touch more than he had realized until Bilbo took him in. The words had gotten stuck in his throat, though, and all that came out was a long, soft moan.

Abruptly, the delicious wet mouth he had been enjoying went away. Before Kili could protest, Bilbo was positioning himself and lowering his arse onto his cock.

Bilbo bent forward, straining for a kiss. “Sucking you was good, but this is going to be even better. I want to feel you—all of you.”
“My love, my love, my love,” Kili repeated. “I needed you, just like this.”
“Come for me. No point in drawing it out.”
“I’m not,” gasped Kili, his hips now working on their own to get him there as rapidly as possible.

*

Bofur noted that Bilbo and Kili were making love so near to them that Bilbo’s thigh was touching Fili’s. Bofur lay on the other side of his husband—who seemed quite sanguine—and stroked his hand tenderly. At his touch, Fili lazily opened his eyes, grinned at him adoringly, and closed them again.

Bilbo and Kili were always beautiful to witness together, to be sure, but this time Bofur spared some attention for the expression on Thorin’s face as he watched them—and any possible truth it might reveal as to how well he was actually handling sharing Bilbo with Kili. Surprisingly, Thorin observed them attentively, lovingly, and guilelessly. For a moment, Bofur thought he might have seen something more wistful flicker across his face, though it was gone before he had a chance to verify he had truly seen it.

Thorin caught him looking; they both smiled with what Bofur figured to be the same sheepishness—Thorin wouldn’t have caught Bofur looking if Thorin wasn’t looking at Bofur, after all. Embarrassed nonetheless, Bofur averted his gaze and made sure to keep it away from Thorin until after the lovers finished.

*

As the sounds of Kili’s ecstasy faded and Bilbo collapsed into his arms, Thorin shifted, uncomfortable in both body and heart. The other two couples had each other to hold, murmuring
quiet words of tenderness, and there he was: sticky, cold, and on his side of the bed alone.

*But you’re not alone,* he corrected himself. *Have you so quickly forgotten Bilbo’s imprint is freshly racing through your blood at this very moment?* It felt awkward though, perhaps moreso than anything else he had experienced that evening so far. He heaved a sigh and got out of bed, rinsing out three flannels in the basin. He brought them back and handed one to each of the couples, who gratefully accepted the offering.

He hissed when the cold wet of the flannel touched his own skin, berating himself for not leaving a kettle by the hearth to heat some water for just this reason. He had gotten *considerably* distracted before the thought had occurred to him. Kili’s voice close behind him startled him out of his thoughts.

“Here, let me help.”

Thorin turned around, accepting the towel Kili held out to dry the chill away and nodding in thanks.

Stepping closer, Kili murmured, “You okay?”
Thorin nodded again. “You?”
“The night was almost perfect.”
“Only almost?”

Kili sent him a meaningful look, one that spoke volumes. Thorin threaded his fingers into the hair at Kili’s nape, leaning in to speak softly for Kili alone.

“May I kiss you? If it won’t cause you any strife to do it in front of Fili.”
“If you’re not too shy,” replied Kili.

Thorin pulled him into a kiss—achingly tender at first, but growing in intensity.

Fili looked over and saw Kili melting against Thorin’s mouth, clinging to him in such a way that Fili thought Thorin might be the only thing holding him upright. He tried not to stare, glancing down and back up a couple times as the embrace continued. He knew things between Thorin and Kili were unabashedly sexual—Thorin himself outright referred to Kili as his lover, after all—but Fili hadn’t put much thought into the sensual or the affectionate. He looked over to Bilbo who did not seem to twitch an eye at the emotional nature of the clinch. However, peeking at Bofur, he saw the same expression of subtle surprise he wore himself. Their gazes met and Bofur raised his eyebrows in question. Fili shrugged in reply—what could he really say? How could he object? Kili had literally just given him everything.

“You were breathtaking,” Thorin said to Kili, resting their foreheads together.
“As were you. I can’t believe…what you did tonight was brave.”
Thorin huffed a laugh. “Brave? You’ve all been doing this for a while now.”
“And you haven’t, so yes—brave.”

Thorin accepted the praise with a bashful smile. Looking around, he saw the others watching them—watching *him*—carefully.

“Alright,” he said. “I suppose we should…talk?”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you!
They Have The Conversation About Thorin Joining The Conversation

Chapter Summary

After the pleasure comes The Talk.
Well,...The Talk(s). You know our lads.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Alright, I suppose we should…talk?”

Fili, Bilbo, Kili, and Bofur all looked at each other for a long moment before Bilbo spoke up. He figured it was probably better to be him to begin the conversation, anyway, all things considered.

“I guess so. Erm, I’m not sure where to start. Do you have any…questions?”

Bilbo inwardly cringed at how awkward he sounded—and how foolish an opening volley that had been. He should have asked him how he was feeling first, and of course Thorin would have questions…and he wouldn’t need Bilbo to give him permission to ask them, either.

Whatever Bilbo, Fili, Kili, or Bofur might have expected as Thorin’s answer, it absolutely wasn’t what happened next.

Thorin sat on the bed, dropping his towel in his lap for modesty before folding his legs in front of himself and leaning forward with his elbows on his knees.

“So,” he addressed Fili and Kili with interest, “How different was it for you to physically consummate your bond? Compared to the bond already present?”

The four of them traded surprised glances.

Kili cleared his throat and answered, “I guess if I think about it, my blood is not any different—the same surge was there as before, and I still experienced a rush when it wasn’t me being, um, filled, which seems to be,” he paused for the briefest of moments, “mostly unique to when I’m with Fee. I feel different in another way, though, as though something within me that I hadn’t even known was tense is now at ease.”

Thorin nodded thoughtfully, satisfied with Kili’s answer.

Thorin’s sanguine and curious demeanor helped Bofur get over his own surprise that the first conversation after all that, all that, all that...well, all that had nothing to do with the potential drama he had honestly been expecting. Now that he thought about it, he appreciated Thorin’s question. After all, he was curious, too.

“No ‘super bond,’ then?” Bofur asked, reaching out for Fili’s hand.
Fili took it, squeezing. “No, no ‘super bond.’ It would have been interesting in one respect, but I’m glad it didn’t turn out that way. I would have felt oddly guilty for it.”
“I would have too,” Kili said. “Plus I’m not sure how it could ever be better than what we
experience when we’re imprinted anyhow.”
“There’s that, then,” Bilbo said decisively, hopping up on the bed next to Thorin.
“Well,” Fili said, sitting on the bed with them, “If no one else is going to ask, I’ll declare I’m far
too impatient to take the time to casually work up to the obvious question here: Thorin, what are
your thoughts about tonight and everything that has happened?”
Bilbo sighed. “And there’s that.”

Bofur and Kili joined the others on the bed, too, Bofur stretching out on his side with his head
resting in one hand and the other arm in front of him, purposely obscuring his bare groin.

“Oh,” Thorin replied, smiling bashfully and rubbing his beard. “I’m…uh, I’m, I guess I’m thinking
maybe the worst is over?”
“The ‘worst?’” Bilbo asked, concerned. “What do you mean by that?”
“Dealing with the unknown, testing my jealousy, experiencing the embarrassment of being seen
doing such personal, private things for the first time, to say nothing of witnessing you all do the
same…there were times I thought so much blood was flushing in my face from being embarrassed
that I’d pass out.”

If this had been a different time and place, Bofur might have made a quip about the blood in
Thorin’s prick holding a balance to keep him conscious, but he worried if he teased him too much
he might close back up.

“Was the experiment a success in your estimation, then?” Bofur asked instead.
“Yes!” Kili chimed in, eager. “Will we try it again? Tomorrow?”

Bilbo looked to Thorin, anxiously awaiting the answer to Kili’s question himself.

“I’m--erm, I hadn’t thought that far ahead yet.”
“But you’ll be sleeping here tomorrow, right?” Fili asked cautiously.
“That had been the idea…before all the rest of this,” Thorin said.
“And now?”
“The plan that drove me from my room at night hasn’t changed in the past couple hours, so it is
safe to say I won’t be sleeping in my own bed, regardless. I’m not sure what of my plan to stay here
in the interim will change in light of what happened tonight. Maybe nothing? I don’t rightly know.
I suppose that’s up to the four of you.”
Fili said, “That brings up another point, one I was too distracted to properly investigate earlier. You
said you are here tonight because Regnad has now increased his odd, invasive behavior to sneaking
around your room at night?”
“It does seem that way,” replied Thorin.
“What does he want?”
“Power,” Bofur said definitively.
“Hmmm?” Multiple voices sounded as four heads turned to look at him.

Bofur rolled over onto his stomach and propped up on his elbows, abandoning his earlier pretense
of modesty. It seemed a little silly to be self-conscious about his bare bottom after everything that
had transpired anyhow.

“Thorin, you remember what we overheard him discussing with Nabbí: Both of them consider Dís
and Balin to be the real forces that run the council, which makes it appear hardly a coincidence
when one considers to whom he has ingratiated himself. It’s all a power grab, innit?”
Furrowing his brow in confusion, Fili said, “But Thorin is king. Power in council is one thing,
certainly useful in Erebor, but a king! Regardless of how it works within our walls, outside of the
mountain, it is the king who is the face and name of Erebor, the one who commands respect and
represents Erebor’s power across many lands. It is a title that carries a lot of sway. Why would he foster this bad blood with Thorin if power was his wish?”
“Maybe he’s not very smart?” Kili guessed.
Bilbo shook his head. “No, he definitely is intelligent, as much as I hate to say it.”
“I don’t know how all the pieces fit, but ambition is what I observe driving him,” Bofur said.
Fili chewed his thumbnail. “I don’t doubt your premise, but getting on the bad side of the king seems like a funny way to get what he wants.”
“Not to mention that even with no crown at all, Thorin is the Champion of Erebor,” Bilbo said.

It was not the first time Bilbo spoke of him so, though Thorin still flushed with pleasure when Bilbo said as much. He did not often puff himself up, but it gave him such pride that after all he had said and done, Bilbo still looked at him with shining eyes as a hero.

“He wants power,” Bofur reiterated. “and as such, I see his wooing of Balin’s and Dís’s loyalties in his direction as an obvious play for it. What power he hopes to gain with his recent behavior towards Thorin is a bigger mystery, but harassing him—both sexually and otherwise—could have been part of some more complicated manipulation, or perhaps to test what influence he felt he had won…or to show Thorin how much he had already gained.”

“Well, he certainly proved the latter,” muttered Thorin, “as much as I hate to admit it. All the mess with him made it horridly clear Balin would believe him over me. It was more than enough to keep me from trying to tell anyone else--until my heroes showed up.”

Smiling, Bilbo took one of Thorin’s hands and Kili took the other, while Fili comfortingly rubbed Thorin’s shoulder and Bofur patted his knee…until he remembered they were both naked and withdrew it awkwardly. Thorin hummed a laugh and Bofur smiled back.

“Getting back to the subject, I suppose,” said Fili, “I have to say Thorin, you’re surprising me with how you appear to be accepting everything that has transpired tonight.”
“There have certainly been many revelations. It might take me a day or two for some of them to sink in.” With a lighter tone, Thorin added, “Perhaps I can look forward to a breakdown right after the wedding.”
“I hope not,” Bilbo said, pulling Thorin’s hand to his lips.
“I guess you were all expecting some astonishment from me, or perhaps a bigger reaction?” Fili said, “Honestly, I wasn’t expecting as much astonishment—well, maybe some regarding me and Kee—as much as I was expecting jealousy.”
“Jealousy,” Thorin considered, idly scratching his chin. “Well certainly there was some of that, too, but it was not as though I hadn’t been thoroughly warned what I would see.”
Thorin being so infuriatingly level and thoughtful about things drove Fili to guiltily confess his own inability to return the courtesy. “I’ve got to tell you, I’ve been jealous—so jealous—of Kee being your lover. I have been embarrassingly possessive since I found out about the two of you, not wanting your hands upon him. We’ve talked it over at length, because Kee has made it clear he very much does want your hands upon him. I’ve been doing my best to come to terms with it, though I hope you can all be patient with me if it proves too difficult on occasion.”
“Really?” Thorin asked. “You’ve been jealous of me and Kili?”
“Yes, and because I’ve been flying to a thousand pieces inside, I’m trying to figure how in the bloody Void you’re able to walk into this—especially given your history with such things--and just be…fine.”
“Well, for one thing, my history has cost me greatly. I’m well aware I’m working on a series of second and possibly third chances here, and I’m trying desperately to apply what I’ve learned in order to avoid repeating past mistakes. I am tired of hurting people I love, especially Bilbo, and most of all I hate being alone because of something I did or said to fuck things up. For another thing, I was joking a moment ago, but to be serious, tonight was an overwhelming experience. It is
possible I’ll have more to say about it—and more questions to ask—when I’ve replayed it in my mind a few times. I’m doing my best, too, Fili, just like you are, and I hope you can all have a little patience with me, too, in case my best isn’t always what you need.”

Fili nodded, silent. He found comfort in Thorin’s sincerity and vulnerability, though he also felt shame. Once again, he was faced with the heartbreaking realization that nothing they could say to Thorin would be worse than the things Thorin said to himself, the things he had been saying to himself for more than a year, nor was the offense of Thorin doing anything consensual with his lovers any reason for Fili to be upset with him in the first place. Fili hoped he would remember this moment the next time his jealousy bubbled within him.

“Thorin,” Bofur said, his voice thick with emotion. “Your feelings are valid, even if they aren’t warm and positive—and doubly so if they aren’t warm and positive about all of us naked on a bed. Believe me, the four of us have discovered that even bad feelings have to be expressed. Of all of us here, you and I have had the worst way to go with each other, and because of that I feel most qualified to tell you that sharing any reservations, jealousy, or outright hurt will not result in you being alone, not anymore.”

Equally emotional, Bilbo added, “You’ve grown so much, and I want you to understand that I—that we—have grown, too. I agree with Bo, I don’t want you going along because you think you must in order to be loved and supported. It isn’t always about what we need. What you need is important, too.”

Bilbo hugged him and Thorin returned it tightly, breathing in deeply through his nose and hoping he didn’t cry. As more arms surrounded him in support and understanding, his eyes grew wet, though he kept himself from weeping outright.

With the most pressing issue of the night addressed, the conversation lulled as yawns increased, and it was decided they would all five bed down together. Thorin settled in with Bilbo and Kili on either side, Fili rested next to Kili, and at Fili’s insistence, Bofur cuddled up to Bilbo (“You’ve not held him at night since we’ve arrived. You’ve held me every night.”)

Bilbo’s clock was wound and set for early enough for Thorin to make his morning appearances without any eyebrows raised. Dwalin had cancelled Thorin’s usual verbal wake up call, so there would also be no one rapping on his door or theirs.

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Warm and happy, Bofur considered his past misconceptions about the relationship between Bilbo and Thorin as he wound down to sleep. He was admittedly still stunned by having witnessed such debauchery between them, followed by an aching tenderness that was just as intense. In light of this new knowledge, Bilbo’s unwillingness to leave Thorin even when he had been in personal danger during the siege made far more sense. Contrary to what Bofur had believed for a long time, he understood now without a doubt that Bilbo had never been Thorin’s prisoner; Bilbo had refused to abandon Thorin to his madness because he was deeply, fantastically in love with him.

The love, sacrifices, and intensity Bilbo and Thorin shared made it all the more shocking that Kili had ever managed to receive so much as a second look…except that Bofur also knew Bilbo and Kili were meant to be together—he was as certain about it as he was the sun would rise in the morning. That match was true, fated, and Blessed.

Bilbo’s infidelity could have had—and nearly did have—disastrous results, yet somehow it led to this, now, all of them in the bed, quite naked and incredibly sated. Indeed, Bofur did not think he or Fili either one would have tried to have more than one lover without the combination of Bilbo’s bravery and Kili’s curiosity, pushing them all to discover their forbidden desires.
Bilbo was right when he said they had all grown, including Thorin. Bofur hoped this new, earthier side of him would come to the surface more often in the future. It was far less surly—and much more fun.

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The alarm sounded earlier than anyone was ready to hear it and Thorin had to dress and slip out. To reduce suspicion, Kili went with him. Staying behind with Bilbo, Fili and Bofur wasted no time digging for the gossip they were too shy to seek with Thorin in the room.

“So, I have to ask,” Fili said conspiratorially, “What is it like? Feeling that ring of Thorin’s inside you?”

“Yes, I’ve been dying to know, too!” said Bofur.

“Strange, but indescribably good,” Bilbo answered, unable to help the grin that spread across his face from the memory.

Bofur nodded knowingly. “At the risk of being indelicate, I will say that I’ve never heard you respond like that to him before. Lucky our suite is carved from stone—had he been pierced in Lake Town, those old wooden walls would have shared your business with all of us!”

“How easy is it for you come like that?” Fili asked. “Just from his cock and the ring, without touching yourself? Is it easier than it is without it?”

Knitting his brow, Bilbo shifted an incredulous gaze back and forth between Fili’s and Bofur’s curious faces. “It, erm, it seems strange that you two are so interested and not…”

“…Sulking jealously?” Bofur finished.

Bilbo quirked a smile. “Something like that.”

“I dunno, I think a surprise like that and the subsequent questions it brings about might have been the one thing capable of overriding the fact that I’ve been hatefully jealous of him for the past couple years,” joked Bofur. “Only temporarily, mind.”

Fili smiled as well. “And apparently it is also enough for me to set aside any familial awkwardness, too. I just…I had no idea. I knew Dwalin had his knob pierced, too, from when we all bathed together on various road journeys in the past, but I didn’t think much of it other than ‘ouch.’ That was well before I knew my arsehole had these delightful, additional uses, so I’d never considered what something like it would feel like during sex—not until you were having it and I heard the effect it had on you.”

“I daresay it was likely the only thing in the world that could have taken your attention away from Kee,” said Bofur.

“Oh, he got plenty of my attention, still.”

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Breakfast was brief and Bilbo was glad they seemed to have somehow missed Dís and Dwalin, because he was sure it was written all over their five faces what had gone on the night before. They were joined by Bifur, Rorimac, Thodora, Ori, and Chadham, though, and listening to the hobbits chatter on animatedly about the new things they had been discovering thrilled Bilbo.

When the meal was over, Bilbo went with them while Thorin, Fili, Kili, and Bofur went to council. Bofur had tried to talk Bifur into coming to the meeting with them.

“It will only the shortest of sessions!” he had argued.

“And therefore there is no point,” Bifur replied.

Bilbo had giggled inwardly, and though he had to agree with Bifur on that particular day—ten minutes of wrapping up prior to the wedding break wasn’t really a council session—overall, he shared more of Bofur’s view: Bifur’s insight would be a boon to the council, as would more of The
Fourteen’s. Knowing what he did about Thorin’s differences with the newer members of the current sitting council, he thought the king could use more support from those who had spent blood, salt, and boot leather to win the mountain back. He would be happy to add to those voices himself, but he knew too well his specific presence would be more contentious than helpful at the moment.

****

Though it was exasperating, Thorin was not surprised that Regnad interrupted the summary intended to adjourn the present council session.

“I know we are about to take time off for the most auspicious occasion of the royal wedding of the beauteous Princess Dís,” Regnad intoned, bowing reverently in her direction, “and as such no new business is on the table today, but I must reiterate: the arrival of new citizenry as well as the wedding being only the first of many occasions King Thorin will doubtless insist upon Erebor hosting varied guests from all over only makes it all the more urgent that we move my proposal about our army urgently to the top of our list of new business for when we reconvene.”

Though he didn’t miss Regnad’s jab at him, Thorin kept his face neutral and his tone firm.

“Adding items to a future agenda still counts as new business. Current motion denied.”

“Denied,” Dwalin seconded loudly.

With Dwalin’s second, the rest of the dwarrows echoed it. No one seemed to be in a hurry to extend the meeting any longer than it had to be, not when a couple days’ worth of relaxation and merriment were to follow its adjournment.

Regnad had plastered on what Bofur recognized to be one of his simpering smiles and stood down…though Bofur could tell by his eyes how false it was.

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After the meeting, Dís chatted with Dwalin, Fili, and Kili. Dwalin had come up with the idea that Fili and Kili should do a little exhibition fighting as part of the wedding entertainment. Dís wanted her groom to be happy, and insisted that although she was delighted he was proud enough to suggest showing off his new step-sons, she was not about to have the lads mess up their wedding finery the next day by fighting. It was white, after all. The compromise had been made for them to be entertainment that night for the pre-wedding feast instead.

Fili and Kili had hardly picked up a weapon since they had arrived and decided a little practice might be prudent to shake off the rust and warm up the muscles. They sought out their swords and walked down to the dining and party area where they would be performing later that night. No better place, they had agreed.

Fili stretched beforehand, eyeing Kili do the same. A shiver went through him as an image of the night before flashed through his mind, unbidden. Fili had to physically shake it out of his head.

“Do not think I’ll be going easy on you just because of last night,” he said, attempting to sound intimidating.

“Talk big all you like, but you’re not likely to hurt anything you’ll have a use for,” Kili said, cheeky.

“I’m also in no hurry to put on a poor showing for Mam’s party, so I suggest you watch your stroke.”

“Are you flirting with me?” teased Kili with a wink.
The two of them sparred. They came up with a touch of choreography here and there to make the show especially exciting, though overall they agreed the majority would be improvised. A flurry of movement unexpectedly put them with nearly vertical crossed blades, scant inches separating their faces. Panting from their exertion, their eyes met and for a moment, time seemed to stop. Fili’s heart pounded against his chest as he looked at his lover…no, his brother, he reminded himself. Hadn’t they agreed they would still preserve that when they were out of bed and in public?

Time sped up again and they broke apart with a clang of metal. Fili waved off for a break and leaned over with his hands on his knees, trying to tuck away the thoughts that threatened to make him dizzy. Now that they had made love, Fili considered it was going to be tougher to go back to being brothers by daylight than it had before. If he was honest, Fili was not only still reminded of the night before every time he looked at Kili, he was also thinking about the next time they could go to bed. Fili stowed away as much of his inner turmoil as he could for the time being and stood straight.

“Ready?” Kili asked.
Fili nodded.
“My go this time.”

Because they were practicing in a public area, they began attracting some attention as people passed…including Regnad and Balin.

Kili noticed Regnad’s insufferable, usual smirk as he observed them and did not appreciate it much. He masked his annoyance, jovially asking him, “Oi, are you a fighter, too? You’re welcome to borrow my sword if you want to give Fili a run.”
“I’m afraid I must decline. I wouldn’t even know how to hold a sword,” replied Regnad, chuckling derisively in a way that sounded to Kili as though he believed experience with a weapon would be beneath him. A couple other dwarrows tittered, too.

Kili sucked in a cheek, considering not only the condescending tone, but also the implications of such a statement coming from someone who had been pushing a militaristic agenda in council that very morning.

He said, “You’ve got a lot of strong opinions about our army and what we should be doing for someone who is not used to a sword, then.”

There were murmurs among the small gathering.

“And you do a lot of talking for someone without much in the way of brains,” Regnad shot back.

The murmurs turned to gasps of astonishment and a couple hoots.

With fire flashing in his eyes, Fili glared at Regnad. “Did you just call my brother stupid?”

The air in the room shifted sharply and palpably. This time, no one dared make a single sound.

“Fee, he probably just assumes someone this pretty can’t be smart.,” Kili flipped his hair playfully. “He’s wrong, of course.”

Fili ignored him, taking a step towards Regnad. With each word carrying emphasis, he demanded again, “Did you just call him stupid?”

Regnad took a step backwards. “I-I-I-I thought we were engaging in playful banter. That’s all. No offense intended.”

Fili kept his intense gaze on him, unmoving, until Regnad gave a hasty bow and retreated. Fili spun
his sword and turned towards his brother.

“Your move this time.”

The tension in the room eased considerably after that, though several of the folks observing shuffled off, figuring nothing as exciting as the previous exchange was likely to happen again.

Balin kept his eyes on Fili and Kili for a moment longer before leaving to catch up with Regnad. It wasn’t difficult—he was sitting on a bench two corridors over, stewing. Balin had not yet said a word when Regnad began ranting about the gall and disrespect of the princes.

Balin said, “Perhaps he cut a little close to the bone, but telling someone who doesn’t handle swords to stay out of the business of those who might handle them is a sight different than telling one of the princes you believe him to be outright brainless, especially Kili.”

“He gave it, I gave it back. If he can’t handle it, that is his problem, and Fili’s reaction was especially uncalled for; he all but threatened me with his sword! How dare he humiliate me like that?”

“By my reckoning, Kili handled it just fine. As you said yourself, Fili was the one who took the bigger offense, though if you’ve paid attention to anything Dís has told you, you would know that’s usually about the size of it. Fili has been Kili’s bodyguard since birth, not that Kili truly needs one. You’re lucky, to be honest, that Kili was easy-going enough to try and blow it off himself, else it would have gone much worse for you. Kili and Fili were Thorin’s two best fighters—fiercer than Thorin himself, or even Dwalin.”

Regnad goggled at Balin as though he had just grown a twin. “You’ve got to be kidding! Kili is practically a puppy!”

“You’ve got much to learn,” said Balin, shaking his head. “Kili is kind and soft, especially now that he is married, and he certainly likes his silliness, but there is a sharp mind under that mop of unbraided hair and a heart of absolute steel when he is engaged in a fight. Though Thorin, Fili, and Kili like to often remind council that we would not have retaken Erebor without a lot of help, we were in many battles and if we had not had fierce fighters among our number—Fili and Kili chief among them—we would not have made it as far as those allies in the first place. Thorin, too. I would not be here if Thorin weren’t also cunning and especially vicious in battle. He has saved my life many times over the decades.”

Regnad’s gaze narrowed suspiciously. “I thought you were exasperated with all their recent antics.”

“I can be exasperated with my eyes open, Regnad. Being annoyed with this strange love triangle of Thorin’s and Kili’s doesn’t mean I haven’t traveled with them, depended on them, loved them, or respected them, and Fili has done the most he can to be largely the voice of reason, so I have no quarrel with him, save for the occasionally addle-pated decisions he makes in the name of protecting and loving his brother. Also, I am well-served—as you would be, too—to be aware that how he conducts himself in matters of the heart doesn’t mean that a ‘puppy’ like Kili doesn’t have razor sharp teeth.”

“Noted,” Regnad sighed. “I’ll keep what you told me about Fili and Kili central in my mind going forward.”

Balin smiled benevolently, patting his shoulder as he rose.

“Oi! Fancy meeting you here,” Bofur joked to Kili, running into him just down the hall from their rooms.

Kili grinned. “I was coming to see if Bee had returned yet.”
After checking both the adjoining suites, they sat on the bed on Bofur’s side.

Bofur asked, “I get why you might be looking for Bee, but I thought Fee was already with you?”

“He was.”

“I came back here half-expecting I might find you two in bed together again…I’ll confess to maybe hoping I would, and more than a little.”

“A couple hours ago, I thought that might be the way of it, too, but I think he might be off somewhere having a crisis about us. He had an air about him during and after our exercise.”

“What sort of ‘air?’”

“I can’t quite put my finger on it, but it reminded me of other times sex has left him overwhelmed—and when I say reminded, I mean It was almost exactly like.”

“He’ll come around, Kee.”

“I’m confident he will. I’ll admit to being quite upset by it the last time it happened to me, but now I realize that he just needs a little time to work through whatever is sticking in his mind and it will be okay again…and likely far better.”

Bofur hummed fondly. “You’ve got that right. He had that enormous crisis about us back at Beorn’s last Spring—“

“I remember!”

“I despaired, but once Fee worked through it, it was beyond rapturous.”

“Yes! If you ask me, that is the best part of Fee’s personal strops—when he finally lets go of whatever was holding him back.”

“Speaking of holding back—“

“-And speaking of looks I’m quite familiar with,” Kili grinned. “Go ahead and ask me whatever filthy thing you’ve been wondering about.”

Bofur grinned back. “Aye, you’ve come to know me so well. Last night, with Thorin, I was mostly taunting you about him to get you excited—and okay, to give his nose a little tweak by stirring you up, too—but I’ve honestly been dying to know.”

“Dying to know what?”

“With the things we talked about before we arrived, your fantasies about him making himself vulnerable to you, I’ve been wondering if he has allowed you touch him the way he touches you?”

“They tied me up that first night I was with them,” Kili replied, voice hushed even though they were alone. He subconsciously stroked his wrist. “Thorin had a new idea of how to do the hithlain, too. Look up—see those slats? He ordered those built that way specifically on all our beds for rope play once he received our letters.”

“What, ah, what new way of doing the rope had he devised?” asked Bofur, wetting his lips.

“My hands were bound over my head and I was on my knees, open and bare on both sides. They were all over me, top to bottom and front to back.”

Bofur exhaled, pulse quickening. “That sounds quite arousing, without a doubt, and believe me when I say I’ll be interested in more details later, but if your hands were tied, that doesn’t rightly answer my question about you touching him.”

“Patience, Prince Bofur,” Kili said, giving him a wink. However, as he went on with his story, the mirth on his face was replaced by gentle awe. “The next night, Thorin asked to be the one who was tied up. I truly shouldn’t be sharing that with you, private as it is.”

“I swear I’ll keep it to myself. So, did you?”

“I wanted to, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. If he was to let me in, I wanted it to be his free and open choice, not part of a game where he was restrained. I told him as much and that’s when…” Kili paused, lost in the memory.

Bofur prompted him. “…When?”

“He went to his knees and opened his mouth to me.”

Bofur swallowed hard, trying not to linger on the image in his mind because he had yet more pressing questions. “And have you opened your mouth for him? Tell me truly; I won’t tell Fee.”

“No, but I catch myself thinking about it more than Fee or Bee either one would like.”
“I don’t know, I think Bee might like it more than you imagine. So, did he let you finish, too?” Kili was blushing now. “He did. He said he felt it, as sort of a connection, like we’ve talked about before.”

“It sounds like the whole exchange was rather intimate. Was that the whole of it?”

“It was intimate, and no, that was not the whole of it. Oh, Bo! After he swallowed me, he parted his legs for my hands, another time for my tongue, and then he swallowed me again. He let me do nearly everything to him—all but making love to him, and Bee took care of that. He thoroughly gave himself to us and believe me when I say that we took it all.”

“Bless my beard! It sounds like almost all your fantasies wound up coming true that night, didn’t they? And did you find those things as intoxicating as you had guessed?”

“I’m still drunk from it! In fact, I might never be sober again.”

A new grin of self-satisfaction spread across Bofur’s face. “I knew something special must have happened between you two; I could tell by the way he was watching me with you. I think he burned with more envy over you than he did Bee.”

“I very much doubt that.”

“Thorin…might have made me little drunk last night, too,” Bofur confessed.

“How so?”

“You were right. From the moment he suggested we all stay in the same room, there was something about him that struck me. That curious and open dwarf wasn’t the Thorin I thought I knew, nor was the Thorin that sat there and watched quietly as we all shook to pieces not ten paces away from him, nor was the Thorin who accepted my invitation to trade me places. I would never have guessed in a life-age that Thorin would have allowed us—not even us, allowed me—to watch him be so vulnerable with Bee. I couldn’t get over it, Kee, it was just like you described: he wasn’t king, he was simply Thorin, feeling and experiencing, willing and trusting. I know I’ve teased you quite often about your choice of words, but now that I’ve seen it, I understand; he honestly did bloom for his lover.”

Surprised by Bofur’s ebullience, Kili studied his face. “Do I detect interest, Bo?”

Bofur shook his head. “I’m just fascinated. It isn’t often I get a shock like that about someone I believed I knew fairly well—and you know not a lot gets past me. Fee and I never imagined Thorin might be willing to share you two without making us, as he put it, draw straws for the next few decades. I’ve had to revamp my entire impression of him.”

“And?”

“In some ways, this only makes the jealousy over Bee worse. In others, though… I think Thorin and I might be able to get along at least well enough to make this work in a way that doesn’t break yours or Bee’s hearts.”

“Don’t forget Fee! He hated you and Thorin warring, too.”

“I just meant that I wouldn’t be the one making you and Bee choose. You’re the one in danger of breaking Fee’s heart with Thorin.”

A cloud fell over Kili’s face and Bofur instantly regretted being so blatant.

“Kee, I didn’t mean it to come out like that.”

“It is okay. It—it might be true.”

“Might not, too. Remember we talked about what Fee needed from you to feel more secure and—bless me!—you certainly gave it to him. Maybe that will be enough to smooth the rough edges and make it easier.”

Kili considered what he knew about his brother. “Or it make it ten times worse.”

“Come now, chin up and keep a good thought. After all, I thought last night was going to be a complete disaster and look how wonderful it wound up being!”

“True. I suppose we all still can surprise each other from time to time.”

“That’s the spirit!”
Fili arrived in their room less than a half hour after Kili had left again to find Bilbo. Bofur didn't bring up anything about the brothers, in case Kili was right about Fili needing head room to work things out. Fili didn’t bring it up either, preferring instead to tell Bofur about Regnad and his offense at the practice session.

“Hmmm, that is interesting,” Bofur said. “More pieces of the puzzle. I suppose Kili insulted him first, but Regnad seemed to be pretty full of his oats to outright call the prince—and his best friend’s son—stupid in front of a crowd like that. Whatever he has going on that we don’t see, it seems it has made him quite bold.”

“Well, he doesn’t know half of what he thinks he knows if he believes Kili is not smart. Whatever he might be calculating, he is missing large chunks of information.”

“I think we knew that a little already. He already underestimates Thorin, after all. You and I know full well that Thorin could easily eviscerate him with both words as well as his bare hands if he had a mind to. I don’t know if Regnad realizes Thorin’s love for Dís has likely been what's protecting him most.”

“That, and Regnad’s threats to turn the citizens against him and cost him his crown.” Fili noticed Bofur pull a face. “What?”

Bofur rolled his lips towards his teeth and back out again. “Fee…I’m—I’m not so sure he cares about his crown.”

“How can you say that?” demanded Fili, shocked.

“I think he cares about it in the abstract—he cares about it as part of your future, he cares about it for his family, for Dís, and for his legacy—but I don’t think that is what drives him personally, not since we've arrived, and possibly a while before that.”

Fili stared at him, disbelieving. Bofur continued.

“The crown was all he had when his heart was broken, and how many times did he tell Bee even then that he would be willing to give it up? Now he has his hobbit back, and back for all time.”

Bofur rubbed the back of his neck and hummed a wistful laugh. “I have to admit to you, I didn’t really know what that meant to him—to them—until last night, or anywhere near the extent of what the two of them…well, that’s neither here nor there. My point is that I believe Thorin would abdicate in a minute if Bee asked him to, and I wonder if one of these days he might yet do it even if Bee didn’t ask. Thorin is fulfilling his duty by being king, but it is not his love of his crown that keeps him from unleashing his full wrath upon Regnad, that much I believe to my bones.”

Fili sat down on the bed with a whump.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” he glanced up at Bofur, “Or of how difficult a time you might have had handling last night yourself, not with me being so caught up with Kee and worried about Thorin. Oh, Bo, I’m so sorry for not checking in sooner. You saw it too, then? The spark with Thorin and Bee?”

“If it had been pitch dark, I still would have seen it. As it is, that ‘spark’ nearly singed off my eyebrows,” Bofur chuckled.

“I…had some eye-opening revelations myself. I think I underestimated Thorin’s effect on his lovers—both of them.”

“Aye, I was wondering what you thought about that kiss with Kee at the end.”

“I didn’t know Thorin was so…”

“…Sensual?”

Fili shook his head. “No. Well, maybe that too, but I was thinking more along the lines of captivating. Whatever it is that he does, it is like Bee and Kee are drawn to him. I noticed Kee at the beginning, too—though I know he tried to hide it from me and wasn’t as vocal as Bee, I could
tell he didn’t quite want to leave Thorin on his own.”
“T’ll tell you true: of all the things I had expected in this world, Thorin suggesting what he did last night was near the bottom of the list, right along with most of what happened afterwards.”
“I don’t know if I hate it or if I love it. It could make things better for your grander plans, though—he might have had the same stunned realization about you and Bee that you had about the two of them last night, which could make the renewed idea of you two consummating your bond less shocking. When do you think you will bring it up to him?”
“I don’t rightly know. I suppose we’ll ease into this thing for a bit, get Thorin used to seeing us all at night, and then I’ll guess I’ll broach the subject, Bilbo still willing.”

Fili didn’t miss the part where it was Bofur assumed it would be on him to bring it up and not Bilbo, though he chose not to press that particular raw spot.

“I’m sure you’ll be happy for the wait to be over. I think Bee is dying to have you inside him as much as you’re dying to give it to him.”
“I don’t know if ‘dying’ is the word, though I am quite looking forward. It isn’t about the pleasure, though.”

Fili raised his eyebrows, running his tongue across his teeth skeptically.

Conceded Bofur, “Okay, it is the pleasure too—of course it is—but pleasure can be had in many other ways. What is so compelling to me about penetration—for game or bond either one—is the closeness, the trust…and the permission. That a lover wants me enough to allow me within him, and that he would willingly welcome and look forward to such closeness from me. I mean, I know what it takes for me to want that from someone else. The love, the trust, the intimacy it that is required just to play the game without the finish, it is…it is its own declaration, you know?”
“Declaration of what?”
“Love.”
“But we’ve both told Bilbo we love him.”
“With our voices, sure, and perhaps with our bodies, but not like that…and, well…I’ve never rightly told Kee much of anything at all—even with my voice—weird and unhurried as things always are with us, but while we’re on the subject, I care about him and trust him enough to allow him in if he ever asks, and I hope he cares about me enough to perhaps allow the same one of these days, when or if the mood is right.”

With wide eyes, Fili asked, “For bonding?”

Bofur shook his head. “Playing, for now, but who is to say where the future might lead? I’ve been too often surprised to give myself any delusions as to how things might eventually shake out. Six months ago, I was having mighty strops and sulks because I didn’t think Bilbo would ever let me touch him like Thorin. Now, not only will I get to soon, but I’m also sitting on the bed watching Thorin touch him that way…and not crying about it. What’s that thing Gandalf used to say about not being able to predict the future?”
“I don’t remember, but it doesn’t take a wizard to see the sense you’re making. To be fair, I wasn’t arguing against any of your points. I only wanted to get inside your head a little, learn your perspective. You’ve been surprising me lately, too.”
“I think we’re all contributing a little intrigue as things change.”

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Dis walked up to Thorin. “There you are! I’ve been looking all over for you. Come on!”
She tugged on his arm, but he resisted. “What?”
“I’m getting married tomorrow and you’re my Pair.”
“And?”
“And we have things to do! Plans to plan! To say nothing of getting ready for tonight’s dinner!”
The Pair! With all the heat of the evening before, Thorin had nearly let it slip his mind!

Now that she had reminded him, a touch of confusion replaced the panic of forgetting. Why would she need her Pair this early on? He supposed what each couple wanted from their Pairs could be different from wedding to wedding—and this was an official, royal wedding at that. Any road, she was smiling, happy, and marrying her love tomorrow, so he wasn’t going to argue if she had things for him to do that afternoon or evening.

As she led him by the hand, a different realization struck him and his heart sank: he would likely be expected to spend that night in Dís’s room while Dwalin bunked down with his brother.

Damn.

He had been breathlessly anticipating spending that evening in Bilbo’s room again. He sighed inwardly. It was rotten timing, but there was nothing for it. Dís was going to have to come first.

Maybe he could swing some way to do both?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much! I appreciate all of you!
Dís led Thorin to her suite. Thorin was surprised to see Dwalin there, who had temporarily stood to greet them. In addition to Dwalin’s seat, there were two additional chairs. One was new to Thorin’s eyes and none of them were usually in the middle of the room as these were.

Thorin furrowed his brow. “What…?”
“Please, sit,” Dwalin said to him, tone betraying nothing.
Lowering himself to his seat, Thorin tried again. “What is going on here?”
“I apologize for the pretense,” Dís said, sitting herself. “I wanted to get you alone without answering a dozen questions or making anyone suspicious, especially you.”

Thorin’s heart, which had quickened upon the additional confusion, now beat frantically. What sort of trap was this? Was this about Bilbo yet again? Or worse, Regnad somehow?

“How?” he managed to say.
“Thorin, we…well, Dís?” Dwalin looked at her.
“You tell him.”
“No, you should be the one to—
“Tell me what?” Thorin demanded. “What is this all about?”
Squealed Dís, “I’m going to have a baby!”
“What?”
Grinning, Dís nodded enthusiastically.
Flooded with relief, Thorin said, “A baby?”
“Aye,” Dwalin said, smiling as widely as Thorin had ever seen.
Joy and astonishment replacing his earlier apprehension, Thorin repeated, “You’re going to have a baby!”
“Yes we are!” replied Dís, beaming.
“But that would mean…” Thorin looked to Dwalin, blinking twice and then smiling smugly. He crossed his arms. “What was all that about waiting for the wedding night and tradition and so forth?”
Clearing his throat nervously, Dwalin said, “Aye, about that, well…our bed was finished and you had given us that bottle of wine.”
“The elves gave you that bottle of wine,” Thorin reminded him.
“Right. Well, it turns out that after your…intriguing description…it was a tougher wait until the wedding night than I had originally anticipated.”
Thorin felt his cheeks turning pink. “That’s probably enough of an explanation, I think. I’m just…by my beard! I have to confess, I didn’t think it was possible.”
“I didn’t, either, though I knew Dwalin hoped desperately that perhaps there was something about
me that would make the difference—perhaps I was still somewhat young enough for a remarrying
widow, or perhaps the years between the lads and now would somehow be a boon instead of the
detriment it commonly is. I didn’t think so, though. When I first suspected, I didn’t think it was
possible. When we were sure, I was shocked. Thorin,” she dropped her voice conspiratorially, even
though they were alone. “We believe it was the wine.”
“Really? The wine?”
“Well, it was as special as you described. Have you—” she paused, turning a bit red herself. “Have
you ever had any?”
“No, though I’ve heard more or less the effects.”
“Whatever its enchantment might have done within me aside, there was also the matter of
Dwalin’s… volume.”
“Volume?” He asked, confused…then it dawned. “Ugh, Dís!”
“Oh, you big child! It isn’t like you haven’t had sex yourself, you know. Pffft. Anyway, Dwalin
and I think it is very likely our chances increased due to the-" she fixed Thorin with an exasperated
look. “-effects of the wine on his body, beyond a normal dwarf’s capabilities.”
“I wonder, sometimes,” Thorin said, looking off to the side at nothing in particular.
“What?”
His eyes snapped back to her. “Lord Elrond has a Sight, a way of sometimes seeing the future. He
has had visions concerning myself, the lads, and Bilbo more than once. Daerbes and Nerithel were
passionate about you getting that wine, so much so that they worried you would not accept it
directly from them and they put me through that bit of bashfulness to give it to you myself. I
wonder if perhaps Daerbes or Nerithel didn’t have some sort of premonition of their own.”
“It is funny you mention premonition,” Dís said. “Because I’m going to have a lass.”
“How could you possibly begin to guess you’re having a lass?”
Dís looked to Dwalin.
“Tell him,” he urged.
“I had a dream the very same night we had the wine.”
“You had a couple dreams,” Dwalin said, trading some of his supporting softness for a cheeky leer.
“After our dream,” Dís insisted. “I had one of my own. There was a wee lass playing in the sun,
just outside the mountain and down towards the meadow. Her hair was the color of Dwalin’s when
he was younger, the same beautiful hints of auburn and gold embedded in the deep brown, but only
when the sun would strike it just so…”

She trailed off, lost in some former memory of her betrothed. He took her hand and she turned to
him, smiling adoringly before she continued.

“I called hello to her and she turned her sweet face up to greet me. She had our eyes, Thorin. I
asked her what she was doing and she said she was waiting for her Mam. I woke up then.”
“And you think this could have been a vision of your future daughter?” Thorin asked.
“I might have dismissed it had it merely been the one time, but she has been in my dreams every
few days. For the past two weeks, I’ve been able to ask one more question before I woke up. I’ve
asked her, ‘Who is your Mam?’ She replies, ‘The Princess of Erebor, of course.’”

Thorin’s skin raised into goosebumps and the hairs on his body stood on end.

Dwalin regarded him knowingly. “Doesn’t that just make you feel like someone stepped on your
grave?”
“I know it sounds fantastical Thorin, but you must believe me,” Dís pleaded.
“I do, actually. I’ve seen and heard too many things that defy explanation since I left Ered Luin to
scoff at things such as this. I’m a believer these days”

Smiling, Dís exhaled with obvious relief. “We are not telling Balin, Fili, Kili, or anyone else about
the baby until after the wedding. It is still early days yet and with the cut of my gown, I didn’t even need it adjusted for tomorrow. We wanted to tell you first, though. With the wine, we knew you’d understand more than anyone else."

“So, you wee schemer, you didn’t drag me off for any Pair things after all?” asked Thorin, smiling.

“No, I don’t have much to request of you at the moment, other than a toast at dinner. Pair duties don’t start until bedtime, and even then that’s not so much of a duty as it is me being sentimental and traditional. The real job starts in the morning when you have to braid my hair and help me with my gown!”

Thorin laughed. “Not much of a job, I shouldn’t think. I know my way around both hair and elaborate clothes.”

Conversation moved on to other morning preparations, who was going to the baths when, the picking of flowers for adornment, and other small yet important details. Before Thorin left, Dís touched his sleeve.

“I know you’ll keep our secret for us until we make it more official, but I wanted to let you know that even afterwards, we’re, ah, we’re probably not going to tell anyone but you about the visions.”

“Not even Balin?”

Dwalin made a noise. “Especially not him. I love him, but he’d think we’d have gone ’round the bend.”

“I will not share a word of what is not mine to tell,” Thorin promised solemnly, “But I think you should reconsider and share the part about the visions with Fili and Kili when you tell them.”

Asked Dís, “What makes you think they’d understand?”

“Lots of things, actually. Besides, I believe it would be good for you to have more people to confide in. That’s a big secret to carry, just the two of you.”

“The three of us, counting you,” Dwalin said, reaching out to squeeze Thorin’s shoulder. “Thank you for understanding. We hoped more than anything that you would.”

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Thorin changed clothes, fixed his hair, and—with no small amount of luck—managed to catch Fili, Bilbo, Kili, and Bofur all in their suites on his way towards dinner.

Bilbo shut the door and jumped into Thorin’s arms, kissing him.

“To what do we owe this pleasure?” he asked.

“Not time enough to give you the pleasure I’d prefer,” drawled Thorin. “In fact, that’s sort of what I came to talk about.”

Bilbo’s face fell. “Oh?”

Taking both Bilbo’s hands, Thorin said, “Nothing bad, not like the look your face would suggest! I haven’t had a change of heart or anything. It’s just that…well, I am my sister’s Pair, you know. I hadn’t expected her to want me to stay with her tonight, but she seems to be looking forward to it. It isn’t even that common of a tradition these days.”

“I don’t know, we decided to do that as well,” Kili said.

“Aye, we split out with our Pairs the night before our wedding, too,” added Bofur.

“You did?” Kili answered for both of them. “Sure, though our reasoning was more perverse in origin more than it was traditional. We wanted to wait so that we’d be climbing out of our skins for each other.”

Bofur held up a palm. “Well, hold on now, what makes you so sure that isn’t Dís’s reason, too?”

“Bleargh, Bo!” said Fili, making a face.

“All I’m saying is the two of you managed to come into the world somehow. Fairies didn’t leave you on the doorstep.”

“Honestly,” added Bilbo thoughtfully, “For all anyone knows, building physical anticipation might
have been the reason the tradition was originally started!”
Fili shot him a look. “Be that as it may, let’s move the conversation out from under our Mam’s skirt, if you don’t mind. So, Thorin, you’re saying you won’t be here tonight because Mam wants you to be where she is?”
“Mostly. I’d like to figure out how I could do a little of both. I don’t know yet how I might want to go about it, if I go about it,” shrugged Thorin. “But if I’m absent, it isn’t because of second thoughts or anything to do with last night… and because I’m open to trying it again, I wanted to assure none of you would mind if I found a way to be present. Fili? Bofur?”
Bofur and Fili looked to each other and nodded. Fili said, “We would not be averse if you wanted to be here tonight.”
“Neither would we,” Kili said.
Thorin sighed in relief and smiled. “That’s good to hear. Thank you.”

As boots were being laced and hair was being combed, Bofur surreptitiously signaled to both Thorin and Bilbo that they should leave first. Aloud, he said, “You know, I think we should probably arrive separately again, just for appearances—switch it up and keep people guessing. How about Thorin, Bee, and me go first this time?”

Though Thorin didn’t quite understand why Bofur wanted Fili and Kili to have their privacy, he went along eagerly. It made him feel good to be included in some covert plan, as though he was part of the group. He knew he wasn’t really, but he had been on the outside looking in on the four of them for so long that it filled him with elation to be any measure of included.

Once the three of them left, Kili turned to Fili. “Bofur seems to have learned some cunning tactics from you.”
“I’m not sure why he would feel the need, but it does seem to be that way, doesn’t it?” laughed Fili. “Well, as long as we’re alone to gossip, how funny is it that after all my fussing and impatience, Thorin is going to probably wind up spending the night tonight in a different room, anyway? Had we simply waited one more night, the wedding would have sorted the whole thing out for us without the confrontation. Fate has a sense of humor, it seems.”
“Maybe, but you can’t blame us for not being able to guess Mam would have planned her Pair to stay all night with her. Even Thorin seemed sort of surprised by the decision.”
“I guess I haven’t realized…I’ve been thinking of the wedding as important to Mam, of course, and it is also a big affair of the state, but part of me figured since she had been married before, she wouldn’t go in for all the particulars. I suppose I’ve not given it—or her—the proper respect and weight they deserve.”
“We’ve been wrapped up in other things, Fee.”
“I still feel bad about it.”
“I don’t think she has even noticed. It isn’t like you’ve told her any of that, and other than a fitting or two for which you were indeed fully present and participating, it is more tonight and tomorrow that she will be calling upon us to pay closer attention and be nearer to her side. Instead of dwelling on it, I suggest you give yourself the forgiveness for it that you would give the rest of us and if it is still bothering you, commit to doing better from now onward. As far as the other thing, yes, you could have waited one more day to get me and Bee alone without the fuss, but we would still have all the other problems to address after that. One night wasn’t going to fix the issues we had, and it certainly wouldn’t have brought the conversation about the two of us up to Thorin. No, I honestly think it is much better the way we did it.”
“You’ve got good points, Kee. You always seem to know how to make me feel better. Hey, hand me that vest, will you?”
“What, this long one?” Kili replied, holding it up. “Do you think it wise to wear something that hangs about your knees when we’ll be sparring?”
“All things considered, I’ve just decided it would probably be nice if I made the effort to dress up a
little more for dinner. I think Mam would appreciate it, and that’s one of my favorite formal pieces Thorin had made for me. I’ll likely take it off for our demonstration, though now that I think about it, it might fan out rather fetchingly as I show off my moves!” Fili spun around and swung an imaginary sword.

Kili shook his head affectionately and handed the garment over. As Fili shrugged into it, Kili helped him pull his hair from under the back collar. He paused with his hands on Fili’s back and for a long moment, neither of them moved or spoke.

Softly, he whispered, “Fee?”
“Yeah?” breathed Fili.
“What was all that about today?” Fili turned around to look at him. “All what?”
“Whatever was bothering you when we were done with practice. I don’t think it was that mess with Regnad because you would have wanted to talk with me instead of going off like you did. My best guess is that it was some manner of crisis about what we did last night.”
“Only a small one,” Fili smiled, a touch sheepish. “It has passed.”
“I knew it would. Do you want to tell me about it?” Fili shrugged. “We’ve sworn we were brothers first, always, and I’ve mostly been able to maintain that out of bed. Today…after last night…not only was it harder to push the lover out of the way for the brother now, I realized I don’t necessarily want to.”
“You don’t?” asked Kili gently.
“No. That’s not to say we can’t wrestle and hassle each other and give each other the business, but I just--after thinking about it, I’ve decided I’m tired of pretending what we do at night doesn’t matter by daylight.”
“I don’t want to pretend that, either. I suppose I never did.”
“Which was the other thing I came to understand. I was going to talk to you about it later, actually, but we’re in the middle of it now and I don’t see the point in putting it off: You’ve always gone at my pace with this, waited for me to catch up, and let me act strangely or sometimes even hurtfully while you knew how you felt already. It hasn’t been fair, but your compassion with this has been nothing if not appreciated. I know we can’t exactly kiss in the halls of Erebor, but I’m done trying to reconcile this whole brother versus lover thing. We’ve made love, for Valar’s sake! There’s nothing left for us to give each other except for the freedom to let ourselves feel. I-” Fili paused, swallowing. “-I love you, Kee.”

Kili had heard Fili say those words to him thousands of times in hundreds of ways, but this precious expression on his face and aching tenderness in his voice were entirely new. The air left Kili’s lungs; he had been waiting months for this and hadn’t even realized it until that very moment.

“I love you too,” Kili said, tugging Fili into an embrace and hugging him tightly.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone <3
Strange Bedfellows

Chapter Summary

The night before the wedding

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bilbo noted Kili arrived to dinner with the hair at the crown of his head pulled back into his clip, finished in a braid clasped with one of his own beads. He figured it to be Fili’s handiwork. He cast an admiring glance towards Bofur, who had somehow kenned that Fili and Kili had something to work out and helped give them the space to do so.

“Oh, my! Don’t my sons look so handsome!” exclaimed Dís. “Kili, all braided for dinner, and Fili! I don’t often get to see you so dressed up. Are both of those things for me?”

“Oh course they’re for you.” Fili said, kissing her cheek. “It is the eve of your wedding.”

Kili was less than pleased to see Regnad seated at the lead table with them. He leaned over to Fili.

“Should be family only,” he whispered.

“There’s enough tables set up for tonight that he could have easily been sat elsewhere,” agreed Fili. “I don’t know what she was thinking, I really don’t.”

Kili sighed. “Maker give us strength.”

The meal was delicious and Regnad was full of effusive flattery for Dís and Dwalin…and phony, hollow smiles for the rest of them. Fili, Kili, Bofur, Bilbo, and Thorin mostly ignored him, anyway.

Before the entertainment, Thorin stood. Balin reached for a fork to bang on his goblet to quiet the room, but Thorin’s presence was so effective that merely standing was enough to command everyone’s attention. Thorin picked up his own goblet.

“It has come to my attention that as King of Erebor, I’m expected to say a few words about the soon-to-be-marrieds at this special gathering and, as King of Erebor, I suppose I would say it does my heart good to see such indispensable parts of Erebor’s beating heart—her Princess and her Captain Of The Elite Guard—join together for hereafter, or perhaps I would note a marriage between a vital member of council and one of the honorable Fourteen is a smart match indeed. However, as simply Thorin, I want to say that I’m delighted and honored to be the one soon presiding over the wedding of my darling sister Dís and one of the best friends I’ve had in this life, my cousin Dwalin. It has been a long time coming and I declare I’m the third happiest person in this room that tomorrow you two will be wed at last.”

There were warm laughs and shouted affirmations as Thorin held his cup aloft.

“To Dís and Dwalin!” he toasted, his rich voice carrying across the assemblage with both kingly authority as well as an unmistakable warmth.

Everyone held up their drinks and shouted, “To Dís and Dwalin!”
After everyone had a respectable pull (or three) from their cups, Thorin added, “I understand the Princes, at the request of their new Step-Father-to-be, have put together a demonstration for our post-dinner enjoyment!”

Fili took off his vest and met Kili in the middle of the floor. They circled each other dramatically before Kili made the first move, resulting in a clang of swords.

While they put on their show for an enthusiastic and vociferous crowd, Regnadj watched with crossed arms, periodically rocking back and forth from toe to heel.

Leaning to Dís he said, “Did Prince Fili and Prince Kili tell you about the fun they had with me this afternoon?”

“No,” she replied, grinning. “Tell me!”

“Oh, it was something! They were rehearsing this performance and had gathered quite a crowd. I’m still trying to get used to their Blue Mountain humor, though. In the Iron Hills, being threatened isn’t seen as a way to create fellowship. It seemed to please the princes and some of their spectators well enough, so it appears I have still have some things to learn about the ways of other lands.”

The grin left her face and she turned her head to look at him. “What? Who threatened you?”

“Fili. He’s certainly a scamp, isn’t he?”

“But he threatened you? Out of nowhere?”

“Well, I was defending myself against Kili and he jumped in.”

“Defending yourself against Kili? Did he threaten you, too?”

“No, he was telling me how I didn’t have the right background to put forth policy in council. Oh, how all the people watching had laughed!” he said lightly, humming a little laugh of his own.

“That’s…that’s not acceptable,” Dís said. “Even for a joke. What were they thinking?”

“Oh no, don’t go on about it. I’m sure, like I said, that it was just a bit of fun. I thought they would have told you about it, they were quite pleased with themselves by the whole thing. Those lads of yours play such interesting games. Oh! Do you suppose that was some sort of initiation into their clique?” he said, brightening.

“Dís clapped, still half-bewildered by Regnadj’s revelation. What would have possessed her sons to bully Regnadj like that? It seemed nothing at all like them—they were always the defenders of the bullied, especially Fili. She glanced to the side where Regnadj stood, grinning and shouting. She couldn’t see how his story could have been the truth, but she also couldn’t see why he would lie, especially because his optimistic guesses about the reasoning were so unfortunately wrong. It definitely was not Blue Mountain humor, nor any initiation she had ever seen them make any other friends endure, and that Regnadj had been so hopeful about it being an overture of friendship made it all the more sad to her. He wanted so badly to be accepted by them! Indeed, even after recounting that awful tale, he stood cheering for them as loudly as anyone.

After a few more minutes of sparring, Fili used a circular disarming move to get Kili to drop his sword, which flew to the side and out of reach in dramatic fashion. Fili rapidly rolled to the side and returned himself to standing with a single flip up, spinning around to retrieve his sword and brandishing it when he was successful. The whole place jumped to their feet in thunderous applause.

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carried out of the sparring area, waving excitedly as though he were in a parade.

The crowd wildly yelled and applauded in delighted ovation.

Thorin was still laughing when they reached him. “Nice ending!”
“‘Aye, I was wondering how you two were going to work that out,” Dwalin said. “It was a great show, far exceeding my already high expectations of the two of you! Thank you.”
“Very clever, making the match a draw,” added Bilbo. “Well done.”
“Did you really like it, my jewel?” asked Kili, kissing his knuckles.
“I loved it. Very much.”

About then, Rorimac, Thodora, and Chadham rushed over, bubbling with excitement and talking over each other.

“What a spectacle!”
“You were hilarious!”
“We don’t have shows like that in the Shire!”

Beorn was next, also full of good-natured chuckles and praise. “I didn’t realize how much I’ve missed the two of you practicing out on the grass until a few minutes ago! It is a shame these folk didn’t see you in your actual form, though I do hope they are also blessed enough to never have the need. This was mere horsing around compared to the ferocity I saw from you during the battle!”

Regnad, still at the table and within earshot, choked on his ale. No one seemed to notice, though, as they were all crowding around Fili, Kili, and their growing group of admirers.

By the time Beorn was done talking, the remainder of The Fourteen had made their way over. Dori congratulated Fili on his daring escape mid-fight while Glóin gloated he knew before they even started that the brothers were going to end the demonstration without anyone having to suffer being the loser.

The conversation grew louder and more boisterous as they went and somehow, before the end, both Fili and Kili wound up with ale poured over their heads. This resulted in a round of raucous and near-deafening laughter—none louder than Kili’s and Fili’s themselves—and calls for more ale all around.

“Is that dousing a dwarven tradition or something?” Rorimac whispered to Bifur.

Once the ales were topped up, the music started. Though most party-goers saved their dancing energy for the following evening, there was singing from all corners and some dwarrows scurried back to their living quarters to get more instruments.

Dís begged off to bed before the festivities were over, citing the need for beauty sleep. Though he was not ready to leave yet, Thorin dutifully went with her anyway. When they departed, Bilbo had been deep in conversation with Nori, Nîfon, Ori, and Thodora about something, so Thorin caught his eye and a small wave served as their goodnight.

As Thorin walked back to his suite to gather his overnight supplies, his heart was in his boots. One night apart wouldn’t kill him, of course—not with the months he spent alone—but there was something about saying goodnight to Bilbo with the possibility he might not see him again before morning that reminded him far too much of more heartbreaking times.

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Clad in his long nightshirt, Thorin poked at the hearth before extinguishing the candles and joining
Dís in bed.

“Bunking down with you brings back so many memories,” Thorin said.
“I don’t think we’ve done this since a fair piece before I was married the first time.”
“There was another time after that. Remember when I didn’t have a bed of my own for about a week? It was when I first came to live with the three of you after…well, you know…after.”
“After Nöli was killed,” she said quietly.
“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bring him up in such a manner, tonight of all nights.”
“No, he deserves to be brought up and thought about, considering what I’m about to do. I’ve thought of him practically every day since he’s been gone, though I’ve not had the courage to say his name out loud in I don’t even know how long. It…it feels good, better than I thought it would. I don’t know why I’ve been so afraid of it. Um, don’t tell Dwalin, but I’ve been asking Nöli, sort of quietly and in my head, if it is okay with him that I do this, to give me a sign for good or ill.”
“And have you gotten one?”
“Well, I’m pregnant,” she said, deadpan, making Thorin laugh. More seriously, she said, “And given that I never thought I would be again, if he is around, there’s no greater sign. A part of me, though,” she paused, sighing. “Please do not think ill of me, Thorin, but a part of me hopes our loved ones go straight to the Halls of Mandos and do not watch over us after they pass. It is too sad.”
“Hmmm, what makes you say it is sad?”
“Because in life, you are a person with interests and friends and hopes and dreams and agency about what happens to you and what you can do with your time. Then you die and are what? Stuck watching the living live? Maybe you get to help from time to time but other than that, it is like being trapped and mostly powerless in a story that is not yours. I hope better for Frerin, Nöli, Da, Mam, and everyone we’ve ever loved and lost. I have been seeking Nöli’s blessing in case it is otherwise, like so many folks seem to find comfort in believing, but my true hope is for all of them to already be in the Halls together. Do you think that is a bad thing to hope? That our loved ones aren’t with us in spirit?”
“Dís, until any of us become spirits ourselves, we won’t know. There have been times when I thought it possible perhaps Frerin or Mam might have been with me, possibly guiding me, but more often and—most damningly--during the darkest times when I would have needed them most, I’ve felt no presence or comfort at all, save my own memories.”
“I wish I knew you felt that way sooner. I might have liked to have had this talk with you years ago.”
“Would it have made a difference in guiding your choices?”
“I don’t know. Maybe not. Still, I feel better knowing you’ve had similar thoughts.”

Several beats of silence had stretched out when Dís spoke again.

“Thorin, do you…nevermind.”
“Do you what? Go on,” he gently encouraged her.
“Do you think I’m disrespecting my husband’s memory by marrying again?”
Solemnly and firmly, Thorin answered, “No, I don’t. You deserve happiness, and you aren’t required to be alone your whole life because something terrible happened when you were younger.”
“Thank you,” she said, sounding relieved. After a few moments, she said, “In that case…”

There was silence.

“What?” asked Thorin.
“Do you wonder sometimes? About why our traditions like that are so firm? Why it is viewed as bad to move on? What purpose some of the stricter codes serve at all, especially when it comes to love?”
Thorin was surprised to hear Dís (of all people) speak this way, though he welcomed it more than she would ever know.

“Dís…” he started, not sure which of the twenty things he wanted to say to her should be first. “Forget it,” she said abruptly. “Forget I said anything. It is disrespectful of me to even have such thoughts. The codes keep moral order.”

“But Dís—”

“I know, and you’re the King now, which makes it all the more important for you to keep that order, and oh, nevermind. I’m so nervous about tomorrow and tired, I don’t even know what I’m saying. Good night, Thorin.”

She rolled over with her back to him, closing back up in such a way that Thorin thought even the air in the room had changed. He wanted to speak to her, encourage her, but he knew her well enough to know it was fruitless to hope she would open up again.

“Good night,” he sighed.

After a conversation like that, Thorin decided it would be rude to make an excuse to duck out, no matter how badly he wanted to see Bilbo. The last thing he wanted his sister to think was that he disagreed with her, not when the mere possibility that she might be questioning some of the stricter traditions gave him such hope. With that in mind, he did his best to settle in again.

He wondered what was happening in the other suite. Had they returned from the party yet? Were they undressed? Would they take this opportunity to talk about him? If they did, would it be bad or good? He smiled to himself, fantasizing a possible conversation where Bilbo glowed while praising him as a lover, and then a second where Kili joined in. He rolled over on his side, tucking the covers around his shoulders, and was just about to try to imagine what he hoped Bofur and Fili had to say about last night when Dís groaned next to him.

“You have got to stop squirming!” she fussed. “All I did was roll over!”

“Yes, and you’ve been fidgeting with the blanket, and your nervous leg has been shaking the whole bed for easily the past half hour. Mahal’s light!”

A half hour? he thought. He hadn’t realized he had lost track of time like that.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t even know I was doing it.” Exasperated, Dís said, “I need to get some rest or I’m going to look a fright tomorrow! Would you please settle down and go to sleep?”

Thorin wondered if he might not have an opportunity to slip away without making her feel bad after all.

“Would it help if I stepped out for a little bit? Give you a chance to fall off?” She rolled over, interested. “Yeah? Where would you go?”

“I could go take a walk, maybe pop up to the Overlook or something. You know I like it when the stars are shining.”

“In the middle of the night? You wouldn’t mind?”

“Not if it would be better than keeping you awake.”

“Okay,” she said, sounding happier. “Maybe I’ll be able to fall asleep before you return. Don’t forget you need some beauty rest, too. You’ll be a hulking grouch with bags under your hulking grouch eyes if you’ve not slept enough.”

Thorin tossed on his dressing gown over his nightshirt, put his indoor bootlets on his feet, and
kissed his sister on the forehead. “I won’t forget. Back soon.”

*****

There was a knock on Bilbo’s suite door. He figured he knew who it was, but he quickly wrapped himself in a dressing gown just in case. He pressed against the door.

“Who is it?”
“Thorin,” he called back as quietly as he could and still be heard. The door cracked and he saw Bilbo’s eye peek out.
“Are you alone?”
“Yes.”

Thorin was let into the room and found them all naked except for Bilbo, who rapidly shed his dressing gown and greeted him with a heated kiss.

“Okay, I have to know: how did you get away?” Bilbo asked him.
“It worked itself out, actually. My fidgeting was keeping her awake, so my absence wound up being beneficial to both of us. I’m still going back, but I have some time to get up to a little mischief first.”
“Well, we’re glad you found a way after all,” Fili said, hugging Thorin.
"Aye, that we are," Bofur agreed.

Fili felt Thorin’s hands rest on his bare back at the same moment his cock brushed against the softness of Thorin’s dressing gown, both things reminding Fili that he was quite naked. He stepped back with an awkward nod, which Thorin returned in a similarly sheepish fashion.

Clearing his throat, Thorin said, “I must say it is a nice surprise to be welcomed by the two of you.”
“We were hardly going to evict you,” Fili said.
“I know—we had talked about that last night—but there’s also a difference between quiet, reluctant resignation and actual welcome.”

Fili smiled and Thorin had thought for a moment he might even be blushing, but Bilbo drew his attention with another kiss.

"Mmmm,” hummed Bilbo happily. “You’re certainly welcome as far as I’m concerned.”
“And you know I far prefer erotic moans to quiet resignation,” flirted Kili.
“On that note,” Thorin’s voice changed to a purr and he began to remove his garments, “How far behind am I? Who has had an orgasm already tonight?”
“None of us, as it turns out so far,” Kili said, “Though we were just finishing preparation for a rather interesting experiment. Want in?”
Bofur nudged Thorin with an elbow. “And he means literally.”
Grinning, Thorin said, “What do I have to do?”

*****

Tingles shot through Thorin’s core as he pumped in and out of Bilbo’s body, the unique circumstances surrounding him only serving to accelerate the inevitable climax:

He was inside Bilbo, who was inside Kili, who was inside Fili (and having an intense verbal reaction to this new, erotic experience), who was inside Bofur. Each snap of Thorin’s hips caused a reaction forward. He considered the possibility that some of Fili’s and Bofur’s cries of pleasure were the result of a motion he started, scandalizing and further arousing himself in the process. It
was an obscene chain of debauchery and Thorin could scarcely believe he was witnessing it, never mind a part of it—especially considering he wasn’t even drunk!

Kili came first, to no one’s surprise. Thorin and Bilbo were next, breaths apart from each other. Kili slipped out of Fili, which proved helpful because Bofur was having trouble reaching his finish and Fili had been far too close to hold out for him with lovers at both front and back.

Bofur grunted as he frantically pulled at himself, trying to support his weight on one hand while the other was busy.

“I can’t keep up,” rasped Bofur. “Can’t prop myself much longer.”
Fili said, "Let's change up and fix that."

Fili fell on his back, landing parallel to where Thorin still held Bilbo’s body close. Bofur climbed on top, begging Fili to do the moving while he stroked himself.

Bofur swore in frustration. “I’m so close and I just can’t—I can’t get past it. My everything is getting tired.”
“I’m not going to be able to hold off,” Fili gasped.

Kili sat up and moved quickly, oiling his palm and straddling Fili’s legs to nestle in behind Bofur. Replacing Bofur’s hand with his newly slick one, Kili pumped with renewed purpose as Fili came underneath them.

“Stay inside,” Bofur pleaded with Fili, just before his voice broke in a whine. His head fell back on Kili’s shoulder.

Thorin watched the events unfold in front of him, noting yet again the utter comfort they all had with each other—Kili had taken over without any hesitation and Bofur and Fili had accepted it with ease. He watched Kili whisper in Bofur’s ear as he stroked him, the sound of Bofur’s delight increasing in both volume and intensity as he went. Kili mouthed from Bofur’s ear down to where his neck met his shoulder, licking, biting, and then--to Thorin’s surprise--marking him. That seemed to be the thing that pushed him over the edge, because he finally spilled (and spilled and spilled), getting semen all over Kili’s hand, Fili’s skin, and Bofur’s own stomach. Thorin’s eyes widened more with every pulse; Bilbo had not been exaggerating about Bofur’s capacity! To wit: A few days before, while Thorin was in bed with Kili and Bilbo, Bilbo had the idea that they all should finish on his skin. The incredible mess that resulted on Bilbo’s skin from three orgasms that night was less than what Bofur had just unloaded.

Bofur gratefully received help from Bilbo to get cleaned up after the rush subsided. As it always was for him in such circumstance, it took more than one rinse of a wet flannel to set him right.

When Bilbo finished the final round, Thorin asked Bofur, “Would you like me to fetch you something to cut the chill?”
“Aye, that would be thoughtful.”

Thorin walked a fresh flannel over to where Bofur sat near the nightstand; Bofur accepted and dried himself with the offering. With the closer proximity (and a touch more candlelight), Thorin risked a longer glance at Bofur’s tattoos. He still couldn’t see them clearly enough to make out the finer features, not while he was attempting to be casual about it.

“Go ahead, ask,” Bofur said to Thorin.
“Hmm?”
“My tattoos. If I’m not mistaken, you seem to be interested in them.”
Thorin silently cursed Bofur’s habit of keen observation. However, he had been curious, so he tamped down the embarrassment of having been caught and pressed onward.

“Very well. Will you tell me about your tattoos?”
“I began getting them the year I turned fifty. Bifur went with me for my first one, matter of fact. We each have a matching one. I kept going after that, whenever I felt I had something I wanted to celebrate or symbolize, like family, milestones, people who mean the most to me…you know, traditional things. Would you like to look closer?”

Thorin’s eyes snapped to his, checking to see if he was serious.

“It wouldn’t bother me, y’know. Seems a bit silly to keep them secret from anyone who has permission to see me without my clothes, anyway. Here, I’ll cover my business so it isn’t too awkward.”
Thorin crouched to observe. He had to admit it was lovely work. “Did Deig do these?”
“Aye, all but the most recent ones. I had some done by his apprentice to give Deig the confidence to promote him. It was well past time and I knew Deig would be eager to move to Erebor if he thought the shop was in good hands, which it was.”
“That was a thoughtful thing to do for both of them. Oh!”
“What?”
“Just…Bilbo and Fili right here.”

Thorin brushed his fingers over the names on Bofur's thigh without thinking. Bofur shivered and emitted a tiny noise of surprise, prompting Thorin to stutter a hasty apology.

“Erm, sorry, I didn’t mean to-”
Bofur swallowed, shaking his head. “-No, it is--I…wasn’t ready, that’s all. It's fine, really.”
Thorin moved past it quickly, hoping to gloss over the intrusion. “Both of them in the same spot, though?”
Bofur glanced over at Fili and coughed nervously. “The choice of proximity for those might have caused a little friction at the outset.”
“But we’re past that,” Fili said. “I rather welcome it now.”
“You have Kili’s name in with your family. Well then,” Thorin smiled, pleased. “that was very nice to do.”
“Well, it is very true,” Bofur said, his face heating with the unanticipated praise. He changed the subject away from himself. “So, what all of yours is symbolic?”
“All of it,” said Thorin, straightening up. “though I’m sure none of it needs explanation or examination.”
Raising his eyebrows and nodding down toward’s Thorin’s groin, Bofur asked, “Not even that bit of shiny through your tadger?”

Thorin’s eyes widened and Bofur chuckled, though not derisively.

“I meant explanation for that one, not examination,” said Bofur, "though some fine day when the sun is shining, I could be persuaded to examine--if you gave me some wine and asked me really sweetly.”
Bofur winked at him and Thorin couldn’t tell whether or not he was being mocked.

“I think that one has a pretty obvious explanation,” Thorin replied, purposefully cryptic, and the subject was thoroughly dropped after that.

Once everyone was cleaned up and comfortable, Thorin heaved a reluctant sigh.
“I suppose I can’t linger much longer. I still have to spend a few minutes up on the Overlook so I can return to bed smelling like night air, just as my alibi suggested.”
“Before you go, Thorin,” Bilbo said, steadying himself to give a speech he had gone over in his head at least twenty times before, “The four of us have tried our best to settle in before we hit you with wave after wave of things, especially since we have come from the Shire with so much to discuss. These past two nights in particular have brought about things quite new for you, such as Bofur and Fili sharing the room with us and Fili and Kili confessing they are lovers. I do not want to overwhelm you, but there is another matter than has been waiting for months. As I’ve told you, Bo and I have not consummated our romantic bond, though I would very much like that to happen and happen soon. Therefore, I would like the five of us to discuss—and debate, if needed—the permissions for that to become a reality.”

Bofur became unexpectedly breathless: Bilbo asked first.

*Bilbo asked first.*

Bilbo.

Asked.

First.

Bofur couldn’t believe it.

“Bless me, that’s it all laid out, isn’t it,” Thorin said, rubbing the back of his neck uncomfortably. “I must be honest—I’m not sure I love it more now than I did before. However, I don’t believe I can make an argument that could stand up to debate.”
Bilbo said, “If it upsets you, your feelings aren’t less valid because you can’t find words to further justify them. However, I would be upset myself if I was to be denied this with Bo.”

Bofur watched the conversation thoughtfully, careful not to pile on.

Replied Thorin, “I know that you would, and there’s also the matter of other things that used to upset me that aren’t so bad now, such as you and Kili. Perhaps during our first engagement, I would have been firm about my refusal, but everything is different now. I’m different now, too, and as strange as it sounds, it might hurt me more to insist upon something that would leave you unfulfilled than it would to give you the freedom to follow this desire. Kili? How about you? Or Fili? Bofur is your Chosen. How do you feel about this?”
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Replied Thorin, “I know that you would, and there’s also the matter of other things that used to upset me that aren’t so bad now, such as you and Kili. Perhaps during our first engagement, I would have been firm about my refusal, but everything is different now. I’m different now, too, and as strange as it sounds, it might hurt me more to insist upon something that would leave you unfulfilled than it would to give you the freedom to follow this desire. Kili? How about you? Or Fili? Bofur is your Chosen. How do you feel about this?”
“Very well,” Fili sighed. “I feel good about this. This has been a long time in the making and any jealousy or misgiving I once had has long since evaporated. As weird as it may sound, this seems right to me.”
“Me as well,” Kili said. “In the end, I want Bee to be happy and I want Bo to be happy, too. If this is what they want, then I want it as well…not to mention, I’m also interested in the new possibilities it might bring us.”
“Possibilities like what?” Thorin asked.

Kili shrugged. “Different combinations in which to please each other, for one. New pleasure to watch them both experience, for another. You know how I like to watch.”
Thorin hummed an embarrassed laugh. “I suppose I do know that…and I guess I’ve been watching, too.”
Having been silent since Bilbo had broached the subject, Bofur asked. “Do I get something to say about it?”

Bilbo’s head whipped to look at him, a touch alarmed. “Of course you do. I didn’t ask you before I brought it up because I thought, I thought—well, drat! We had discussed this not long ago and…” he trailed off, looking distraught.

Cupping his face, Bofur said, “Shhh, none of that. Nothing’s changed about that.”

“So I didn’t upset you by asking about it tonight?”

“Mahal’s light, the furthest thing from! I’m elated you asked, and stunned you asked without any pressure or provocation from me…well, recently, anyway,” Bofur quirked a small, self-deprecating smile. “No, what I have to say is this: I’ve wanted this since before I knew it was even a physical possibility. Long have I been in love with you and ever after shall I remain in love with you. I do not need a physical bond to go with what I feel inside, but I know down to my marrow that I want one. I can’t tell Thorin, Fili, or Kili what to feel or force anyone’s assent, nor do I think it would be good for anyone if I did, and if that is the only way this can happen, then the only solution would be to wait longer and hope maybe there will come a time where we can work it out.”

Eyes shining with tears springing forth from a myriad of emotions, Bilbo whispered, “Oh Bo,” and kissed him.

Thorin looked on, moved by what everyone had to say, and perhaps Bofur most of all. He cleared his throat.

“If it is my assent you are seeking, then it is my assent I give.”

“Are you sure?” Bilbo said. “I share Fee’s worry that you—”

“-Don’t,” Thorin interrupted. “Remember when I left the Shire? I left believing it would be inevitable this would have already happened when you arrived. When it hadn’t, I was happy about it, but the majority of the joy was simply from knowing you had kept your promise. I see you two together, though, and even if I let my fear and my jealousy win this time, I believe this union is inevitable. Putting anyone through disappointment and pain just to prolong it seems foolish at best. I love you so, my burglar, far too much to be selfish at your expense…not anymore.”

“Oh, Thorin!” Bilbo crawled over to fling himself into his arms. “I love you, too!”

“So, when?” Kili asked.

Thorin bit his lip nervously. “Yes, when is a good question.”

“Well not tonight, certainly,” Bilbo said. “I don’t think Bo would argue that we should be a little… fresher for one another?”

Bofur laughed. “Is it my potency or my capacity that most concerns you?”

Reddening, Bilbo said, “Hush, you’re every bit as invested in mine.”

“And I guess there’s the next question,” Kili said. “Will you two want privacy?”

Bilbo and Bofur looked at each other, both shrugging.

“Um, I’m not sure,” Bilbo said. “Bo?”

“I don’t…Fee? Kee? Do you want to be there?”

Kee quirked a shy smile. “Sort of, but not if you need to be alone.”

“Thorin?” Bilbo asked.

“What?”

Bilbo crossed his arms and looked at him exasperatedly.

“Wait, you’re asking me?” asked Thorin, incredulous.

“Yes, do you want to be there?”

“Be there when it…happens,” Thorin said. Sighing, he looked up at the ceiling, blinking rapidly as he mulled it over. He swallowed hard. “A part of me says ‘not on your life,’ but another part says ‘absolutely yes.’”
“That’s a mixed message and no mistake,” said Bofur.
“It is ultimately up to you two and what you want,” Kili said. “Like Bofur said, this has been a long time in the making and no one would fault you for wanting to go off on your own.”
“Perhaps we shall all sleep on it, then,” Bilbo said. “If it isn’t happening tonight, no decisions regarding it need to happen yet, either.”
Thorin kissed Bilbo. “After all that, I really don’t want to leave, but I have to.”
“And I don’t want to let you go, but I understand.”

Putting himself back together, Thorin noted that Bofur was getting dressed, too. He caught his eye and shot him a questioning look.

“I’m not tired yet, was thinking I could use some of that night air myself.” Bofur explained.
Thorin hummed skeptically, but did not voice an argument.

Once Thorin had left the room (and earshot), Bofur popped his head back in to whisper to the others, “Walking with him in case that worm is waiting somewhere to cause him trouble. Back soon!”

“Thank you,” Bilbo replied, beaming.

Suddenly deeply ashamed he hadn’t thought of it first, given his position as both Crown Prince and Thorin’s blood, Fili said, “Yes, thank you…and be careful!”

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Bofur gave a little jog to catch up with Thorin, who was already halfway down the corridor.
Thorin smirked. “Do I need to give you the same speech I have repeatedly given Dwalin about not constantly needing an escort?”

“Pish, escort. Who’s an escort? I’m simply walking with my friend.”

Thorin glanced at him with a disbelieving eyebrow raised.

“Okay, and maybe to discourage Regnad from harassing you if he is skulking about waiting for a chance…though I wouldn’t mind attempting to be friends, you know.”

“Has the mountain fallen?”

“Oh, it isn’t that far-fetched! Things haven’t been so bad with us since I’ve arrived.”

“No,” Thorin said. “No, they haven’t. I guess I wouldn’t mind that myself. Being friends.”

“Alright then. Good.”

On the way to the passage that led to the overlook, they had to walk through an area that had no official name, so in his mind Bofur had been calling it “The Junction Of The Halls.” It was an immense and wide vertical corridor that served as a magnificent open-air intersection: paths, arches, windows, stairs and doorways could be seen in all directions, many floors high and many floors deep from the level on which they stood. Though Bombur told him there had been many necessary repairs to reach the hall leading to its inner doors and stairs safely, this area itself had been entirely spared Smaug’s wrath and had been one of the first areas in Erebor populated. Even at this hour, torchlight flickered and illuminated the stonework and the spaces in between nearly as far up or down as Bofur had vision. He stopped (like he always did) to marvel at it for a moment. It never failed to take his breath away.

“Sometimes, it seems impossible that this exists at all, let alone that we are standing here,” Bofur said to Thorin, who had stopped to admire it with him. “You’ve accomplished so much in the time we’ve been gone. I know on some level it grieves Fee to have missed it.”
“Believe me, I have wished thousands of times for the lads to be by my side. Back when Erebor was a slim hope—nothing more than an ancient key in my pocket—a considerable motivation for the journey was to create a better future for them than what awaited in Ered Luin, to finally reclaim our ancient home and give them their rightful places in the halls of our ancestors. Their hearts called them elsewhere, though. I couldn’t have predicted that they would forge a happier future of their own, nor can I begrudge them it. It would be a lie to say it hasn’t been hard doing this without Fili and Kili, though, not when all my dreams had involved them here alongside me.”

“Thorin,” Bofur said, resting a hand on his arm. “You’ve done something so astonishing, so amazing—I honestly do not have a word majestic enough to truly describe how very how it was—”

“-Which is surprising, considering what a skilled wordsmith you are,” interjected Thorin good-naturedly.

Bofur smiled. “It is a gift you’ve given to every misplaced or lost dwarf in Middle Earth—both this retaking of Erebor as well as the tone you’ve set for your rule. You do not hold grudges about clans—nor sometimes hold that one must even be a dwarf at all. At long last, any and all wandering dwarrows have a place to return. We finally have a place to belong. Though Fee and I chose to live elsewhere, it is no longer because we do not have a homeland. We’ve simply redefined for ourselves what ‘home’ means to us. It is unfortunate that Fee is a Crown Prince, which means there will come a time he will have to square home versus duty, but it is important to me—and to us—for you to know that we are eternally grateful that your dedication means we have that choice.”

“You lay this,” he gestured around him, “accomplishment at my feet, but do not forget you were part of it—you, Fili, Kili, all the rest…and especially our Bilbo. We would not be standing here without the help of all who traveled with us. This home, this place to belong, this accomplishment belongs to The Fourteen, not simply to me alone.”

“Aye, I’ve got a few scars that insist I agree with you, but there wouldn’t have been a Fourteen at all without a Thorin Oakenshield and his determination.”

Thorin smiled bashfully, glancing away.

“Listen now, I did not mean for this to devolve into a load of sap and sugar,” said Bofur, suddenly self-conscious. “But seeing as you’re one of us now, it was important for me to explain our living in Bag End is not us rejecting the home you’ve made for our people.”

“I’m… I’m one of you?” asked Thorin, astonished.

“You’re kith and kin to my husband, husband to my lover, and a key, colorful thread in this strange design that we’ve all woven together…plus I’ve seen your bare backside!” His expression softened and his tone turned gentle and kind. “Of course you’re one of us, Thorin.”

Thorin was unexpectedly and deeply moved, twice over inside practically the same minute. “Thank you.”

Up on the Overlook, they both took big, welcome breaths of the fresh night air. Thorin pulled his dressing gown a little tighter around himself—the late Spring night had a bite that signaled summer wasn’t there quite yet.

“It really is quite something up here,” Bofur said.

“I’ve always liked it, ever since I was small.”

They made light, casual conversation about the view, Bilbo’s garden, and the phase of the moon.

“Um, Thorin?”

“Yeah?”

“I was sincere when I said Bilbo and I would find a way to wait if you weren’t ready for us to consummate what is between us.”

“I know you were, and I was also sincere: prolonging the wait would be an act of selfishness on my
part, drawing out the hurt for everyone and ultimately changing nothing.”
“And the watching?”
“Hmm?” Thorin said, though he had heard perfectly well.
“The watching. You said you were of two minds about it.”
“Well, what about you?” deflected Thorin. “Do you want him all alone?”
“For this particular event, I feel in my heart like Fee should be there, if he wants to be, and Kee was so insistent about waiting for Bee before he had sex with Fee that it would seem almost rude to tell him he can’t be present, either.”
“And me?”
“Well, that’s the big question, isn’t it?”
“I suppose it is.”

Thorin didn’t press any further, and a quiet fell between them for several moments. With the camaraderie that had been present between them over the course of the evening, Bofur was easily seduced by the late, quiet dark that gives voice to deeper thoughts and questions. He murmured a question he had been wondering about since they arrived.

“Is it difficult for you still?”
“What?”
“Bilbo having lovers. I mean, I know Fee and I are still a little new to you, but Kili hasn’t been for a long time.”
Thorin scratched his beard. “That’s sort of personal.”
“C’mon Thorin. Friends, remember?”

Thorin nodded, glancing down and then back up, both sheepish as well as appreciative of the offer of fellowship.

“Very well.” He huffed out a big breath. “Sometimes, yeah. I’ve made peace with Kili, and to the two of you to some degree since you started down that road back in the Shire, and I cannot deny I’ve enjoyed seeing him receive such pleasure these past two nights, but I still get the unpleasant roil in my gut from time to time.”
“Me too, if that makes you feel any better.”
“Seeing Fili take other lovers?”
“How does that follow?”
“Bilbo was the first person I loved. I never had the chance to be his only choice, and though I’m thrilled with the way things turned out overall, there’s a part of me—deep, down—that mourns a bit for what never was, even while I’m happy that so much more came about instead of it.”
“But not Fili?”
“Fili is my Chosen, but my heart was not unoccupied when he moved in. I think in some weird way, Bilbo and I are alike. Though Bilbo and I did not start nearly as intensely or physically as you two did, in many ways, Bilbo is my Thorin the way you are his—the one I loved first, the one I could never quite get over even though I found my Chosen, the one I never wanted to have to let go. I would, of course, if Fili asked...just like Bilbo once let you go for Kili...but in the end, we’ll never be happy without the two of you.”

There was something touching about Bofur trusting him to open up so candidly, and doubly so about likening his own love for Bilbo to Bilbo’s love for Thorin. Maybe Bofur had understood things better (and for far longer) than Thorin had given him credit.

“I had never quite looked at it like that before," Thorin said. "I can’t say the analogy isn’t a good one, though.”
“Don’t get me wrong—I love to see Bilbo get off—and I’m not willing to put an end to any of
these shenanigans any time soon. Just…I know a bit how you feel. Everything is great, interesting, and hotter than dragon’s breath, but every so often there’s just a—”

“-Twinge,” they both said in unison.

Bofur clapped Thorin on the shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze of solidarity as they smiled at each other.

After they left the Overlook, Bofur walked with him back down to the split in the royal corridor where they had to each go their own way.

“See you in the morning,” Bofur said.
“Right, if my eyes aren’t too bleary from the lack of sleep.”
“I have faith the excitement will carry you through.”
“I hope so. Well, good night.”
“Good night.”

Thorin had only taken a few steps when Bofur called after him. He turned around in question.

“It wasn’t so bad being your bodyguard for a little while. Thank you for the walk and the talk.”
“Thank you for being my friend,” Thorin replied sincerely.
“’Night.”
“’Night.”

Friends, Bofur thought happily, warmth flooding his chest as he returned to Bilbo’s room.

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“You were gone for longer than I thought you’d be;” a sleepy Bilbo said when Bofur came to bed.
“You didn’t find the trouble you were trying to prevent, did you?”
“Nothing like that. While we were shoring up his alibi, we found some things to chat about.” He kissed Bilbo’s hair. “Like you, for instance.”
“He wasn’t having second thoughts about us, was he?”
“Not at all.”
“That’s good,” Bilbo said, settling down again. “Is everything else okay?”
Smiling to himself, Bofur said, “You know, it just might be.”

Chapter End Notes

Bofur’s Junction Of The Halls is the big, wide shot we get of the inside core of Erebor at the prologue to the An Unexpected Journey film.

Thank you, everyone!
Erebor's First Wedding, Part One

Chapter Summary

Wedding preparations, flower weaving, and fiddly bits.

Chapter Notes

I want to wish a very happy birthday to our ManhattanMom! Love you <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Morning came and though Thorin was tired, he pleasantly noted Dís seemed fairly refreshed. If she did see the predicted bags under his eyes, she did not remark upon them. After breakfast and bathing was sorted, Dís kissed Dwalin a temporary farewell while she and Thorin got ready for the day.

Thorin laid out the basic layers of his ceremonial outfit first, opting to wait until Dís had her gown on and was ready to go before adding his final flowing pieces so they wouldn’t get dirty if he had to bend or kneel. It was going to be difficult enough keeping an entirely white outfit fresh as it was.

As he dressed himself in almost every royal frippery Mignus could think of to frip (and a couple Thorin suspected the tailor had probably looked up), Thorin’s thoughts drifted away from the wedding, landing squarely in the memories of Bilbo’s bed the nights before. There was much to still process: aside from sleep, Thorin had spent his other hours actually in said bed, making the memories and doing the things that were vexing him now.

That lonely, bitter winter, there had once been fantasies—awful, shameful things, only unlocked by extended consumption of Erebor’s strongest available spirits, things he couldn’t bear to even recall once his blood sobered and the dried, flaking evidence of his bliss had been cleaned away. Even then, in the depths of his inebriation, he never gave them faces or names—there were only strange hands on him, a tangled limb here and there, a light brush of an unfamiliar cock against his hip, or maybe more pairs of lips against his skin than lovers allowed to kiss him…mere ideas only fueled by drunkenness and Bilbo’s tales of his more salacious adventures.

Now, over the past couple nights, two additional, actual, corporeal bodies had been mere inches away from his. What barriers would he need to put in place to keep Bilbo from getting upset? From making missteps that might inadvertently embarrass himself, Fili, or Bofur? How would he protect his own sense of propriety? How much protection did that sense of propriety need?

He huffed out a heavy breath to clear his own head and get back to more immediate concerns.

“How shall I braid your hair?” he asked Dís next. “I know you will have blooms from your special wedding garden for Dwalin to weave. How many plaits do you think he’ll do?”

“He will be doing two, one upon each side.”

“Okay, bow your head, then. Let me try your tiara on to see where everything is going to sit.”
Thorin braided a five braid design that met in the back, leaving her hair from the ears down long so Dwalin could do her framing braids with her blooms. He placed the jeweled tiara on her head lovingly. She never wore any of the tiaras that were her right to wear as Princess, citing impracticality. For his part, Thorin never pushed her to wear them because he often skipped wearing his for the same reason; he knew full well Dís was likely even more hands on in her roles than Thorin was in his. However, looking at her now, Thorin was struck by how well it suited her.

“You should wear this more often. You’re quite beautiful in it.”
“Oh, stop it this instant,” she tutted at him, though her wide, blushing grin belied her admonishment.

She braided him in kind, opting to also keep his hair long so they would coordinate as both Pair as well as kin. He had acquiesced to wearing a crown for the wedding, though he still hummed in disapproval when she rested it on his head.

“Today of all days, you’re really going to grumble?” she fusses. “Even the lads will be wearing something.”
“I know.”
“It is the platinum one, at least, so you are matched well with your outfit. Go, see in the mirror how dashing you are and then try and complain.”

Thorin checked his reflection and even without the extra layers of his outfit, he had to admit that in head-to-toe white (with gleaming silver accents and his platinum crown), he looked rather kingly already. He wondered if Bilbo and Kili would find him handsome.

Dís had chosen to wear a gown of deep blue, the color commonly associated with their house, and Dwalin’s wedding clothes were primarily made of the same blue fabrics as hers, along with white and silver accents for both to coordinate with Thorin, Fili, and Kili. Despite Mignus’s warning, Thorin had no trouble getting Dís situated with her gown, even with the loops, buttons, and bows. He remarked how easy it wound up being.

“That bodes well for later, then,” Dís said.
“Later?”
“For when Dwalin has to get me out of it!” Thorin laughed. “Let’s be honest—if a few ‘fiddly bits,’ as he calls them, stand between him and his wedding night, he’d sooner shred the dress than waste time.”
“Well, well, well,” she said, turning around and crossing her arms. “My brother hasn’t reverted to blushing virgin after all. I was beginning to wonder.”
“Let’s just say I’m selectively uncomfortable, how about that? Anyway, we can stand here and you can hassle me some more or we can go meet your betrothed and gather your blooms.”
“We will go get the blooms. I can always hassle you while we walk,” she teased.

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Thorin was the first through the doorway, peering out on the smaller overlook where Dís had her own wedding garden. When she first planted it, she had fretted it might not properly bloom out, but now it was bursting with all manner of suitable blossoms for weaving. As they had planned, Dwalin and Balin were already waiting.

“Are you ready to see your bride?” Thorin asked.

Dwalin nodded, his lip trembling with nerves.

“With great pleasure, I present Princess Dís of Erebor,” Thorin said, bowing deeply.
Both Dwalin and Dís gasped as they looked upon the other; tears sprang to Dwalin’s eyes. No words were yet spoken---Dwalin simply strode forward and embraced her, lifting her off her feet. They kissed and held each other, softly murmuring to each other words of pride and devotion.

Dís only pulled her attention from Dwalin when Balin began cutting the flowers for their hair.

She said, “Wouldn’t it be lovely if we all had some to wear? You, Thorin, my lads…it would be so beautiful and spring-like!”

Balin frowned. “But you know, flowers tokens carry traditional meaning…a very personal traditional meaning, if you follow me.”

“Yes, of love, joy, and hope for a beautiful future. I don’t see the harm in wanting our wedding to be filled with all of those things. It is just one day, and I want my family wearing the symbols of that love and hope for the future along with us.”

Dís beamed, lost in some pleasant thought, and Thorin didn’t miss the way she lovingly touched her stomach. His heart ached when her smile faded.

“Unless,” she hesitated. “Thorin, do you really think it would be unseemly?”

Resolutely, he said, “No, I do not. I think it is a lovely idea. Besides, I think in this one instance, it won’t be a kingdom-wide scandal if family does a little adorning for each other, and that’s if the lads wouldn’t want their loves to do it. Balin, you can just tuck a few stems in your beard if you’re that concerned about what people might think of you.”

Balin looked up at him from under his eyebrows, chagrined.

When they were finished on the overlook, Thorin carried a sizable armful of flowers over to Kili’s suite.

He tapped on the door.

Fili answered. “Thorin! Are you alone, where’s Mam?”

“She’s with Dwalin and Balin. Are you all decent? May I come in?”

“Sadly, we are decent, and yes you may come in,” Bilbo called from behind Fili. “I didn’t expect to see you so early! Yavanna’s Grace, how fantastic you look!”

He rushed over to claim a kiss, noticing Thorin only had one arm to hold him.

“My word! It appears as though your sister had you trim everything already in bloom!” he said.

“Yes, well, Dís had an overabundance of flowers in her garden and decided as this is her wedding day, everyone standing up with her at the very least should be wearing her flowers. These are for the lads, though there are more than they’ll need and I know she wouldn’t mind if you and Bofur wore a few yourselves.”

“There are certainly plenty for that and then some!” Bilbo said. “Do you have time to stay a bit?”

“Yes. I made sure I had a buffer to do whatever needs doing here, plus however long The Blessing might take.”

“You do look rather breathtaking,” Kili complimented him. “I’ve never seen an outfit quite like that before!”

Fili said, “It definitely has a few more pieces than your wedding outfit, Kee. The whole ensemble compliments you, Thorin. Your eyes are even bluer, if that is possible.”

“That’s about as royal as a royal ensemble gets, I think,” Bofur agreed. “The lads are right, though—you do look quite becoming.”

It wasn’t until they were dressing that Bofur realized he and Bilbo, though not matched the way Dis’s sons and brother were, were still matched to each other. Their raiment was princely and he
wasn’t sure what touched him more: that Dis was publicly, sartorially recognizing the title Bilbo wore by marriage, or that she conferred upon Bofur the same even while thinking he didn’t officially hold the distinction. He had to admit, the deception made him feel even worse in light of the kindness.

Peeking in the mirror as he dressed, Bofur was impressed with the thought that went into the color selection, too. This particular burgundy made his hair stand out and his skin practically glow. He glanced over, noting it also made Bilbo’s eyes seem even more impossible to classify…and five times as beautiful. Yes, she did a wonderful job wardrobing them for the event.

“Come on, I thought you helped Kili get ready for his wedding?” Thorin teased Fili. “Look, this sash goes like this.”

Thorin pulled back his outer robe to show him.

“Well, I don't know how to tie it in order to get it to do whatever chevron thing you’ve got it doing!” huffed Fili.

Thorin pressed his lips together in thought. “Here, I don’t think I can do it front-ways, but let me—“

Thorin took Fili’s sash off and came around behind him, encircling his waist with it once again. Fili was struck a little breathless with the intimacy of it, the unsteadiness furthered by Thorin resting his chin on his shoulder while he tied it from muscle memory.

“There! Now let me fix your brother’s.”

While Thorin situated Kili’s sash, Fili tried to will away the flush in his cheeks. He had never been shy with him before; Thorin had assisted Fili with everything from cleaning wounds on his naked skin to getting him dressed when he was too sore to manage it alone. However, Fili was beginning to realize he might have overestimated his ability to remain wholly unaffected by seeing Thorin naked and making love. Luckily, everyone was too concerned with getting themselves ready to have noticed.

“As long as you’re helping,” Bofur said to Thorin, dangling something satin with a ruffle in front of his groin. “This has at least one more strap than I understand and I know it isn’t supposed to be knickers.”

Grinning, Thorin took it from him. “No, not knickers. With this particular ensemble, this goes around the neck. Lift your hair.”

Thorin slipped the cravat around Bofur’s neck, trying to ignore the intimate proximity necessary to sort it with his collar and finish tying it. With two quick taps of his palms against Bofur’s chest, he said, “There you go, Prince Bofur!”

Smiling, he looked up, finding he was the subject of Bofur’s intense, curious gaze. They held eyes a moment longer, then Bofur thanked him for the assistance and the odd spell was broken.

“Do you need yours sorted?” Thorin asked Bilbo.

“Now I wish I did! Perhaps I’ll undo mine so I can have you do it again.”

“And why is that?” Thorin flirted.

Bilbo slipped his arms around him. “To have you close.”

“You can have that without a cravat. In fact, you can have that when you’re not wearing a stitch! Unfortunately for me, I don’t think I buffered in that much time. Later, though.”

A strange look passed across Bilbo’s face, but a kiss chased any concern about it out of Thorin’s mind.
“On the subject of time, let’s sort some of these flowers!” Fili said.

Bilbo didn’t have hair to plait, so bracelets were woven for him—both by Thorin.

“It has been a long wait,” he murmured, kissing Bilbo’s wrists.

Bilbo plaited flowers into Thorin’s hair and Fili and Kili did the same for each other. Bilbo made sure to make Kili a bracelet, a gesture special to them because of their shared history, and when Bofur popped back out from whereever he had temporarily disappeared to, Bilbo made sure to weave a special braid for him. Fili made Bofur his own crown since he did not have a metal one yet.

Kili hesitated, wanting to make something for Thorin but unsure what the reaction would be, especially from Fili. He decided that between what his Mam had done and what Bilbo had added, Thorin was floral enough.

Bofur put Fili’s official crown on his head, kissing his forehead as he did so. “Well, if it isn’t the Crown Prince of Erebor!” he said. “I wonder if he will give me a dance later.” Fili flirted back, “I’ll give you more than that.”

Prior to leaving the Shire, Kili and Bilbo had debated whether or not to bring the crowns Thorin made them, eventually figuring they may as well, considering there were few more proper occasions to wear them than Kili’s mam’s royal marriage.

Kili opened the box that held them. “Will you put them on us, Thorin?” “Me? Why not each other?” Kili’s mouth twitched in a piece of a smile. “The day of our wedding, the master artisan who crafted them was not available to present them to us. We would be so honored if he might do so now.”

Thorin swallowed, touched. Kili kneeled before him, and Thorin placed his crown on his head. When he stood, Thorin pressed his lips to his softly. He turned to Bilbo.

“My consort,” he whispered as Bilbo kneeled.

Thorin lovingly rested the crown in his honey waves. As Bilbo rose again, Thorin seized his face and kissed him.

Pressing their foreheads together, he sighed, “When I made these, I never thought I’d get to kiss you in this crown.” “Now you’ve done it twice.” Thorin’s cock twitched with the memory. “A whole lot more than twice, if you’re counting each kiss from that night.”

Bilbo giggled slyly. “Probably save time to just count the days.” With a wolfish grin, Bofur joked, “Hmmm, I’m guessing you’ve kept this perverse story from me to save my feelings, but in light of recent events, be advised it will not break my heart to hear it!” Kili grinned back. “Yes, I was there and I can verify that it is a Bofur-preferred level of filthy, but we don’t really have time to tell it now.” “I hate to admit it, but he is indeed right,” Thorin said. He glanced around the room. “Before I go, though, I must tell you that you all look astoundingly handsome today. Fancy dress suits you.”

Thorin stole another kiss from Bilbo, then grabbed Kili by the waist and gave him one as well. With a quick nod each for Bofur and Fili, Thorin took his leave.
“He’s in pretty good spirits, all things considered,” Fili said. “What do you mean ‘all things considered?’” asked Bilbo. “Just, you know, he didn’t get his big Erebor wedding with you. I thought he might be a bit melancholy.”

Bilbo considered this briefly, but Kili waved it away. “What he wanted was Bilbo’s vows and you best believe he got them. He’s not drowning in any sorrows, I don’t think.” “Right,” Bofur agreed. “This is a grand party and celebration of love: his dear friend who has pined decades for his sister, his sister finding love again after decades of being a widow, having raised two fine lads but spending hundreds of overnights alone. Like he said yesterday, he’ll likely be the third happiest person in that hall when they make their promises to each other.”

Nodding, Kili said, “Besides, Bilbo and I have talked about Thorin having a Shire wedding this autumn with him anyhow.” “What?” Fili and Bofur both said together. Fili went on to ask, “Thorin is going to be in the Shire this autumn?”

Kili looked to Bilbo. “Erm…oops?” Bilbo patted his arm. “It is okay, dear heart. It wasn’t a secret, I just hadn’t had the opportunity to bring it up yet.” “Bring what up, Bee?” asked Bofur. Bilbo held out his hands to Fili and Bofur, who each took one. “I’ve asked Thorin to travel home with us at the end of the summer, his duties and office permitting, and he has accepted. We are endeavoring to split his time between Erebor and the Shire going forward, and at the very least it is no longer acceptable to me that he is forced to spend weeks at a time without his husband. I told you all back when we had our serious discussion about the future that Thorin was a permanent part of this equation. I meant it then, but after hearing what he has been through, I mean it exponentially more now. I didn’t wait to speak with you to make him the promise because I know you all love me enough to trust my judgment on this, and that you care for Thorin enough not to want to subject him to anymore despair.” “Wow,” Bofur exhaled. “That’s…that is honestly something, now isn’t it?” “It is something for sure,” Fili agreed.

Bilbo looked between them, concerned. “If I was in error, tell me now.” “No!” Bofur said. “Not in error. You are right—I don’t want him to suffer any longer. I’m just… this is, for lack of a better word, big.” “It is big,” added Fili, “but not beyond our agreement. I think maybe on some level I might have known this was going to happen all along. I mean, how can we leave him, knowing what we know? And how can we stay, with all our plans at home?”

Bilbo grinned in relief. “So, you see,” Kili said happily, “Thorin will be in the Shire with us this fall and we’ve been talking about throwing him a more cake-y, dance-y wedding on the anniversary of the more private one he had with Bee.” “One thing at a time, though,” Bilbo said. “Which includes today. Get your boots on and we’ll head down to the hall.”

*****

Dwalin and Dís waited in their suite for either Thorin or Balin to come get them for The Blessing. Dís hadn’t known it, but Dwalin had specifically asked Balin to leave them alone while Thorin ran the flowers to Fili and Kili.

“You truly are stunning, Dís,” Dwalin said, gazing at his bride. “As are you.” “I can’t help thinking, though…”
“What?”
“There’s something missing.”
“There’s…what are you talking about?” Dís asked, glancing around.
He gently tapped her necklace. “This necklace is all wrong.”
She crossed her arms, growing miffed. “You gave me this, you know.”
“Indeed I did, and on any other occasion I might compliment my exquisite taste, but it is a little…
plain, I think, for the Princess of Erebor to wed in. She requires something more grand for a day
this auspicious.”
“A little late to tell me now,” she fumed.
Dwalin stepped away from her, digging into one of his drawers in the dresser. “Maybe not
necessarily.”

He held out a flat box, the trembling two hands holding it a far piece from the confident bearing he
wore on his face.

“Dwalin?”
He gestured towards her with it. “Open it.”

She popped open the lid and gasped. An elaborate sapphire and diamond neck piece lay inside.

“Where…when?” she breathed, running her fingers across the details.
“It was my mother’s,” he said quietly.

Her hand went to her mouth as Dwalin removed the necklace she had on.
He set it aside and pulled
the new piece from the box.

“How is that…possible? There’s no way you’ve had it all this time!”
Dwalin took a deep breath.
“Balin found it,” he exhaled. “In her former quarters, which were most unfortunately in one of the
wings currently condemned. There had been a partial cave-in, probably the very day Smaug came.
Balin dug this out of her smashed bureau on one of our explorations.”
“Explorations!” She temporarily snapped out of her trance. “You promised me you were not going
to do those anymore!”
“Aye, and I haven’t, but that was a different and very personal circumstance.”
She licked her lips, nodding. “I suppose I can understand that.”
“Anyhow, though beautiful and precious, it had seen finer days. Thorin used his remarkable skills
to restore it to its prior glory. Now it is my gift to my bride.”

He fastened it around her neck and gently turned her around to look in the mirror. Her eyes met his
in the reflection as she reached up to touch it.

“Balin…Thorin…I just—Balin! He was willing to part with it?”
“What other dwarrowdam in our family is there to wear it? Know it will bring Balin and myself joy
and happy memories--not sad ones--to see it on a neck as lovely as yours once again. Perhaps some
day in the future, my daughter and Balin’s niece will wear it on her wedding day, too, and that will
double our joy.”
“Oh, Dwalin!” she said, jumping into his arms. “I love it!”

*****

There was a private atrium slightly down the corridor from the hall where folks were assembling
for the wedding that Dís and Dwalin had chosen to be the location of The Blessing.

Balin said, “You’re the king, Thorin, so you go first.”
Thorin laid a hand on Dwalin’s shoulder. “Well now, what to say to you, today of all days, after the thousands of conversations we’ve had since we were young? You’ve both taken different paths, each winding through both pain as well as happiness. Now your paths have converged and I could not ask for anyone finer to walk the road ahead at my sister’s side. I would warn you to take care of her heart, to be good to her, and to love her, but I have no doubt you will. I wish you joy and a long life of love together.”

Dwalin twitched a bashful smile. “Thank you, Thorin.”

Thorin leaned forward (pushing up on his toes to reach) and pressed his lips to Dwalin’s. It had been a long, long time since had kissed another dwarf’s mouth besides Kili’s, and possibly even longer since it had nothing to do with the physical. Though this kiss was traditionally meant to be firmer and longer than a peck in order to transfer the good wishes, Thorin did not linger past the point of comfort, nor did he move his lips once they were on Dwalin’s.

He turned to Dís and took her hands. “You are another one I’ve spent countless hours speaking with over the years, and we’ve had some rather meaningful conversations as of late. I’ve thought long and hard about what to say to you, especially in order to not repeat what I’ve said to Dwalin, and it is difficult because I truly could say the same, all the way down to the warning. He has spent many years waiting for you, darling sister, and I can promise you he will cherish you always. More than that, though, I beg you—let yourself be happy. Do not let the past, nor the traditions webbed through it, let you think for a moment you do not deserve to spend the rest of your life loving and being loved. You’ve got another chance, and you’ve got my blessing to take it for all that it is worth. I love you so much, Dís.”

Dís dabbed at her eyes. “I love you.”

Cradling her face with a hand, he drew her to him, placing a gentle kiss to her mouth. Like Dwalin, he did not move his lips past the initial touch, and after a handful of seconds he drew back and rested his forehead against hers.

“Well, it is my turn I do suppose,” Balin said. Thorin stepped back so Balin could take Dís’s hands. “To be honest, I thought we would be doing this long, long ago, back before my hair went full white. After you married, there were many years when I didn’t expect we ever would. It just goes to show me that sometimes—despite the odds or what tradition dictates—what is meant to be is meant to be. Sometimes, love makes its own rules. Long have I waited to call you sister. May the two of you always know joy.”

Thorin frowned inwardly when Balin brought up the unfortunate past—he knew Dís was already troubled enough about it for the both of them—but the more Balin spoke, the lighter Thorin’s heart became. Thorin had despaired many times that he might have to break the promise he made Bilbo about announcing their marriage after the excitement of Dís’s wedding had died down. Perhaps he had not given Dís and Balin enough credit for being understanding about the stubborn nature of love. Maybe their issue with Bilbo was more about the heartache he had brought him in the past...and perhaps they might yet give him a chance to be Thorin’s future, after all.

Balin gave Dís a sweet, lingering kiss, more familiar than Thorin’s had been, but still (mostly) within the bounds of propriety. It was notable that Dís both blushed and giggled afterwards. Thorin wasn’t the only one who saw it, either. Dwalin’s expression had gone cold.

“Oh, pipe down, you jealous brute,” Balin said to his brother, waving his hand as though he was waving off the mood itself. “That was my first kiss in years and damned if I wasn’t going to enjoy it at least a little! Now, if you can get happy in the same boots in which you got mad, I’ve got a few words to say to you.”
Dwalin grunted, but his demeanor softened.

Balin cleared his throat. “No one knows better than me that it is a wonder you even have a heart left after eating at it all these years. Now look at you, giving it away to the dwarrowdam of your dreams. I had no idea that everything we went through would lead us to this moment, but I can tell you this: all of it—nearly starving, nearly burning, nearly spending eternity in an elvish dungeon, nearly drowning, and nearly starving again—was all worth it because those treacherous roads brought us here. When times get rough, it is my hope you two remember what you went through to have this, and allow that memory to smooth your path forward. May the Maker smile upon your home, your life, and your love. I know I do.”

Balin grabbed Dwalin a little more roughly than he had Dís, and this kiss was neither sweet nor lingering, but it was coarse and very much them. At the end, instead of the gentle forehead press the other siblings had shared, they violently knocked heads.

Thorin smiled to himself when he thought about the vast difference between this Blessing and what went on at Bilbo’s wedding to Kili. He still remembered the feeling of utter shock that grew with each kiss that quartet had exchanged. What a scandal that would have been if anyone else knew! Of course, in the world of dwarven royalty and Erebor, Balin’s kiss was the scandal today.

“What’s that queer little smile about?” Dís asked Thorin.
“Nothing, just happy. Are you ready then?”
“Yes.” She faced Dwalin, slipping her arms around his waist. “Dwalin, my sweet, I share my blessings with you.”

He gently cupped her face with both hands. “And I share my blessings with you.”

Their lips met, signifying the mingling of the good wishes shared by their Pairs.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone!
Erebor's First Wedding, Part Two

Chapter Summary

Dwalin and Dís get hitched

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They left the atrium and found Fili and Kili waiting for them outside the doors of the biggest hall in the whole of the mountain. Other than the dwarrows either guarding or preparing food (the kitchens contained its own small army of cooks, working in tandem with folk from New Dale), they managed to get everyone inside who wanted to be there…which was just about everyone who had relocated to Erebor so far.

“Oh Mam,” Fili said, suddenly moved. “You look…you’re gorgeous, positively glowing! I’ll tell you, when Bo sees you, he is going to be so disappointed he wasn’t here to flirt with you in your final moments as an unmarried princess.”

“Oh, that’s going to be my wife!” Dwalin said.

Dís feigned as though she was whispering privately to Fili, “Do you think he will still flirt later?”

“Dís!” said Dwalin.

Fili grinned. “You bet he will!”

“Fili!” Dwalin shouted, though he was already laughing.

“You know Bo is not a threat,” Dís said to Dwalin, “but it does make a lass feel and pretty to get a compliment from a handsome dwarf from time to time, especially when she has two grown sons.”

Dwalin kissed her knuckles. “I suppose I’ll have to marry you then, and show him what’s what.”

“Let’s do that right now.”

*****

Thorin entered the hall first, music filling the air, and Balin, Fili, and Kili followed after him. The whole of the assembly stood when Dís and Dwalin entered and the collective shuffle caused a great rumble through the room.

“We’ve integrity-checked this hall, right?” Dwalin whispered to her.

She smiled and kept walking, her arm laced through his.

Murmurs surrounded them about how beautiful she looked. “Queenly” was said more than once, and perhaps she stood a touch straighter when she heard it.

At their destination, Fili and Kili each bestowed a kiss to their mother’s cheek and took their places in the first row next to their partners.

With Dís and Dwalin in front of him and Balin standing slightly to the side as Pair, Thorin held his hands up and the wedding guests sat. He cleared his throat and welcomed them all for coming.

“Though I am King Of Erebor, truth be told this is my first time doing this in my crown,” Thorin said candidly. “Indeed, many things we’ve experienced over the past several months have been new to all of us. There was likely once a book with royal wedding ceremonies and speeches within
it, but if it survived the tragedy, we’ve not yet located it. Therefore, I hope our guests—Dwarf, Man, Elf, and Skinchanger alike—will understand if I do this from my heart.”

A quiet, respectable round of applause went through the room. Thorin nodded gratefully.

“One tradition that will not change is invoking and petitioning The Great Smith, Mahal, to be present with us this day. We invite you, our Maker, and also the Lady Yavanna, for we would not exclude your own love on a day of celebration and union. Receive this welcome!”

At the mention of Yavanna’s name, gasps were heard, followed by murmurs. Although it was common to invoke Mahal at weddings, and while Yavanna was recognized at one or two lesser dwarven harvest festivals, no dwarf present could personally recall an officiant also requesting her presence for any wedding, much less a state affair.

Thorin looked over the room and his eyes landed on Bilbo, who was stroking the ring Thorin gave him and gazing at him lovingly. Thorin smiled at him and went on, his voice and bearing quieting the room without him calling for it.

“There are others we must honor. For those dear to us who could not be here today, whether having passed beyond our sight or still living, let these flames represent them: their light, their warmth, and the love that Dís and Dwalin carry within them always.”

Dís looked to Dwalin and he gave her a solemn nod. She stepped towards the candelabra that had been set up for this very purpose and lit the candles. After she returned to her spot, Thorin said, “This portion of the ceremony will be performed in our language.”

Thorin spoke some words to Dís, and Bilbo recognized a couple of the names she spoke back. Kili grabbed his hand when his father was called and Bilbo squeezed it comfortingly. Thorin, in a voice less steady than before, spoke again, then turned to Dwalin, who had his own list of names. By the end, many dwarrows in the room were weeping, including Dís, Thorin, and Dwalin. Bilbo’s own eyes were wet as he watched Thorin take a deep breath and compose himself in order to continue on. He spoke more in Khuzdul, voice rising surer as he went, and though Bilbo had no idea what he was saying, there was great love and pride on his face. At the last, he held his arms aloft and nearly every dwarf in the room jumped to their feet, cheering and clapping. Bilbo stood, shouting and clapping through tears alongside Kili. Thorin was such a skilled and amazing orator that even the humans, the elves, and Beorn seemed to be deeply moved, even though most of them were likely about as lost as Bilbo as to what Thorin had actually said.

When they were all seated again, Thorin continued. He spoke of Dís and Dwalin, doing his best to tell their love story while carefully dancing around Dwalin’s decades of pining and Dís’s marriage to another. Those stories were theirs to choose to share on a person by person basis, not a room filled with hundreds. He kept it to more recent events, starting it in the Shire and framing it romantically: Dís attending her son’s wedding and finding love herself. He frequently searched Dwalin’s and Dís’s faces as he spoke for any signs of displeasure or discomfort, but they only had eyes for each other, virtually glowing from head to toe with adoration.

“Dís, Princess Of Erebor, do you have vows?”

She bobbed in curtsey towards the king and took her intended’s hand.

“Dwalin, I love you. I thought sure that decisions made in my younger years meant I would never stand here with you, but here we are. Know I am grateful for this chance beyond measure. I hereby vow to love you, to appreciate you, to support you, to share with you, and to challenge you when you are not acting with your or our best interests in mind. Moreover, within this vow I also issue a
request: for you to do the same for me. Support me, share with me, appreciate me, challenge me, and, above all, love me.”

Dwalin was already nodding in reply when Thorin spoke.

“Dwalin, Son Of Fundin, and one of The Fourteen, do you have vows?”

Without releasing Dís’s hand, Dwalin bowed to Thorin before grasping her other hand and turning to gaze into her eyes.

“Aye, I will surely do as you ask. I vow to be there for you, always, the way I’ve always dreamed I could be. I will indeed support you, share my heart and life with you, value you, love you, and ‘challenge’ you…what a royal and diplomatic way you’ve found to say we won’t put up with each other’s strops!”

Though he said it lovingly, a peal of laughter rang through the room.

“That’s my Dís, though—strong, smart, diplomatic, beautiful…I’ll be good to you, Fili, Kili, and anyone else we might be so blessed as to come along. I never thought I’d be here, either, and there isn’t a word strong enough for how thankful I am. I promise I’ll spend every day forward showing my gratitude.”

Bilbo didn’t know what he was expecting at this point, though a song was pretty far down the list. Nevertheless, Thorin’s beautiful baritone rang out, echoing off the stone walls. The song itself was in Khuzdul; he wanted to ask Kili about it, but didn’t want to interrupt the moment with whispers. Bilbo didn’t need to understand it to be moved by its beauty, though.

Much to his surprise, the dwarves in the hall joined voices with Thorin for the last chorus, and if Bilbo’s heart had been stirred before, now brought an unexpected round of tears to go with it. Never in his life had he heard anything like a hall resonating with of hundreds of dwarrows’ voices.

“It is time now to make your formal commitment,” Thorin said. He turned to Dís. “Will you accept Dwalin’s vows?”

“I will.”

“Will you likewise honor your vows and commit your love to him, from now henceforth?”

“I will,” she said, smiling sweetly at Dwalin.

“All present, in body and in spirit, witness this commitment!”

There was a shout of “Aye” from all the dwarves in the room. Bilbo glanced over at Nerithel, who looked about as confused as he was.

Addressing Dwalin next, Thorin asked, “Will you accept Dís’s vows?”

Dwalin’s face could have lit an entire room when he replied, “I will.”

“Will you likewise honor your vows and commit your love to her, from now henceforth?”

“I will.”

“All present, in body and in spirit, witness this commitment!”

Now that the folks new to dwarven weddings had seen how this part was supposed to go, every voice in the room shouted, “Aye!”

To Dwalin and Dís, Thorin said, “Before your Maker, Mate, and all who have borne witness, confirm your vows with a kiss if they be true.”

Dwalin pulled Dís close to him and passionately kissed her without a wisp of shyness or care that they were being watched by hundreds. As they parted, very quietly so only his bride could hear,
Dwalin muttered, “Take that, Balin.”

A boisterous giggle joined the deep flush on Dís’s cheeks.

“As Erebor’s king and officiant over this ceremony today, I proclaim you married. Honored guests, please stand and welcome Princess Dís of Erebor and her husband, Prince Dwalin of The Fourteen.”

Dís and Dwalin walked down the aisle together, unshakable smiles on their faces and heads held high as the hall erupted in near-deafening ovation. As was tradition, the first two rows of guests followed them down the aisle, out the door, and into another hall prepared as a dining room for anyone who would not fit in the biggest hall when it was made ready for dinner. There, they were surrounded by friends, family, and special guests, such as Bard of New Dale, Daerbes, Nerithel, and Nîfon of Rivendell, and a small contingent from the Greenwood.

Even though they were privileged to see them prior to the ceremony, Fili and Kili were the first to hug and congratulate their Mam.

Kili eyed Dwalin, wary but hopeful. “How is it to be with us going forward? How long will you remain angry with me?”

Dwalin pressed his lips together in a line that couldn’t decide whether it was a smile and a frown. Tears annoyingly pricking the back of his eyes, he pulled Kili into a hug.

“I always hoped one day I’d be able to call you son,” his wavering voice said for Kili’s ears alone. “That doesn’t mean I can ignore hurts you cause, but I cannot say they will keep me from loving you.”

Whether it was unexpected break in Dwalin’s voice when he said it, or the sentiment itself which had shocked Kili to his bones, Kili found himself quite on the verge of tears himself.

When the embrace broke, Dwalin beamed at Fili and Kili with watery eyes. With pride he exhaled, “Our lads.”

When it was his turn, Bofur took Dís’s hand and kissed it. “If you aren’t the fairest bride this mountain has ever seen…you’ve even stylishly matched your gown to your beautiful eyes! What a vision you are!”

“Flattering scoundrel!” Dís giggled. “I’m married now!”

“Aye, and to one of the luckiest dwarrows! I wish you both the best. Perhaps you might save a dance for me later?”

“Oh, you—I’m practically your mother, you know!”

“And why should I not wish a dance with my youthful, vibrant mother on her wedding day?”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Dwalin interrupted, playing at sounding gruff but not actually jealous. “You’ll get your dance, son-in-law. Time to move down the line.”

Bofur winked at him and he winked back.

“Well now,” Bilbo said. “Bofur certainly has set a high standard for charm and compliments. I know I surely cannot compete at that level. Instead, I’ll thank you for allowing me the honor of being here today. You both look wonderful and I offer you my sincerest congratulations.”

Dwalin was so overjoyed to be married to Dís at last that he couldn’t even conjure his usual stern look for Bilbo. “Thank you, Master Ba—erm, I mean, Prince Bilbo,” he said.

“Yes, thank you,” Dís replied pleasantly. “As our son-in-law, we were pleased you were able to
make the journey with Kili.”

Bilbo stared, stunned by the acknowledgement, and she smiled at him kindly. His face broke into a wide grin of its own and he found himself taking her hand and squeezing it before he stepped away.

Dain pushed his way in next. “Well, Bilbo might not be willing to compete with Ol' Bofurbraids over there, but I am! Allow me to say-“
“-Consider your next words carefully, cousin,” Dwalin said.

Bowing so deeply his beard nearly touched the floor, Dain caught Dís’s hand on the way up and brought it to his lips. “Never has a princess been more fetching or more resplendent. Every dwarf present burns with envy for the one who has captured your heart.”

Dwalin made a show of crossing his arms, though much like with Bilbo and Bofur before him, he was far too jubilant to be arsed about Dain's flattery. He couldn’t let him know that, though, or he’d simply be impossible in the future.

“That’s enough,” Dwalin said.
“…who has Inexplicably captured your heart,” Dain said, doubling down with a sly gleam in his eye.

Dwalin rushed him, using the leverage from his upper body and arms to hoist Dain up by the waist and over his shoulder. For his part, Dain was laughing uproariously.

“Lads, lads, lads!” Dís said, her smile belying her stern tone. “Don’t get your dress clothes messed up! At least wait until after dinner!”

As Dwalin put him down, Dain said, “Yes, Mam.”
“Mam?” She asked. “What happened to ‘most fetching and resplendent?’ Only four people present can call me Mam--and you’re not one of them!”
Dain laughed and bowed again, this time with a flourish of his arm. “Only a jest, my most beauteous vision! I lovingly congratulate you both and wish you luck…especially you, fair Dís. You’re going to need it!”

Giggling, he dodged out of Dwalin’s reach.

The rest of The Fourteen, Nîfon, Rorimac, Thodora, and Chadham (all alongside their respective escorts), Regnad, Nabby, the remainder of the council, Beorn, Bard, and the emissaries from the Greenwood all took turns congratulating the couple. At Thorin’s insistence, his artisans hired from Rivendell had stayed close to Daerbes and Nerithel for their comfort, and as such they were also in that first group to be received. After them came Daerbes and Nerithel themselves.

After bowing, Nerithel said to Dís, “Today is a blessed and happy day, Your Highness. I have never seen such a glow about you.”

Dís beamed, glancing down shyly and quickly back up. When Nerithel met her eyes a second time, she gazed into them, searching.

With another, wider smile, Nerithel said, “A joyous day indeed, and Daerbes and I were honored you invited us to witness it. May your union be blessed with laughter and love.”

Dís stared after her, feeling uncommonly seen. She knows, Dís said to herself, though she felt no alarm. She was merely sanguine and serene.

*****
As the well-wishings happened in one dining room, the wedding hall was transformed into another one. As it was the bigger hall, it was where the music and dancing would happen, as well as where the couple, those closest to them, and as many as could fit after would be dining. After being received, Bilbo, Thodora, and Chadham and sneaked over to watch the transformation. In addition to a sizable regiment of dwarrows (many who had been wedding guests) moving things around and carrying food, there were also several folk from New Dale adding hands to the process.

“And I thought my wedding was big,” Bilbo breathed.
“Biggest wedding the Shire had ever seen,” Thodora agreed, “but this is something else entirely. Where did they get enough food? How long have they been cooking it, even? Where have they been cooking it?”
“Look at all that wine,” Chadham added, eyeing down a long table that was a sea of bottles, also flanked by several kegs on both sides that doubtless contained beer. “Is there a grape left in Middle Earth?”
Bilbo shook his head slowly and shrugged. “I’ve asked Thorin how they’ve managed the logistics of the mountain, particularly when it had started from nothing: no stores, no crops, no anything, save for maybe some nearly hundred-year old wine, half of which had likely turned to vinegar while the worm sat on the hoard. The answer is a convoluted muddle of gold, traveling, caravans, immigration, preparation, and so on. I can scarcely understand it myself, but Thorin has repeatedly assured me that parties, weddings, and evenings with good supper doesn’t mean that we’ll starve next month. I have to believe him.”
“I guess that’s what all those council meeting things are for,” Chadham mused. “Ori says they happen almost every day, deciding this thing and that.”

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Dinner was delicious and animated, everyone talking ‘round the table and buzzing from both drink as well as the day’s excitement. Due to the familial nature of the celebration, Fili was pleased to note Regnad was not able to weasel his way into sitting with them at dinner. The couple’s table included Kili, Bilbo, Fili, Bofur, Thorin, Dain, Balin, Óin, Dori, Gloin, Gloin’s wife and son, Nori, Nifon, Ori, Thodora, and Chadham—basically, all relatives and the spouses and suitors of the relatives. It was already the biggest table in the hall and though if tradition had allowed it Dís might have preferred her good friend Regnad to be at the table more than a distant cousin like Dori, Fili knew at the very least five people who would rather break bread with Dori any day of the week.

Mid-way through the meal, Fili stood for a toast.

“King Thorin said he’s done enough orating and officiating and, although they have been delighted so far, I’m sure my Mam and Dwalin can agree it might be time for another voice.”

Thorin smiled and canted his head, taking the ribbing good-naturedly.

“It has been decided that I am to give the toast on behalf of myself and my brother, Prince Kili. If you know our story, then you know it hasn’t always been easy for Mam, bringing up the likes of us after the passing of our father. There were times I’m sure she despaired, and though she was not always alone,” he turned and tilted his cup to acknowledge Thorin, “I’m sure there were many times she went to sleep lonely. Dwalin, Kili and I are so happy you will be there to ensure that never happens again.”

Dwalin reached over and squeezed Dís’s hand.

“So, if you’ll all raise whatever it is you’re drinking,” Fili continued, “To Mam and Dwalin: May you be poor in misfortune, rich in blessings, slow to make enemies, quick to make friends, and—
more than anything—may you know nothing but happiness from this day forward.”

Affirmations were shouted throughout the room and everyone drank. Afterwards, a round of applause broke out for the couple.

*****

Dessert was an event that was expected to last as far into the evening as guests wished to snack—and the dessert tables were a spiritual experience! Each dining room had an enormous complement of cake, cookies (a special request of Dwalin’s), pies, pastries, nuts, and dried fruits. After the dessert buffet was opened, the guests in the second hall trickled into the main one, mingling throughout the room, trading tables or not worrying about chairs altogether, many of them carrying their personal plates of sweet treasures over with them.

*****

Bilbo lost sight of Thorin for several moments but was quite pleased to see him return with a harp. The room gradually quieted as Thorin dragged a chair out to the area that had been cleared for dancing. He sat, situated the harp in his lap, and spoke.

“My sister has asked me to play a song for her. I’ve not had much time to prepare, so just a reminder: when time comes to applaud,” he fixed them all with an impish grin. “I am the king.”

Laughter came from the crowd.

*

While Thorin sang, Regnad took up an unoccupied chair next to where Dwalin was helping himself to chocolate cookies.

“I’m always surprised your cousin—His Highness—has such a sense of humor. He is bitter as a lemon around me,” Regnad said.

Dwalin formulated five withering retorts in less than a second, but a glance over at his glowing, happy bride raptly listening to her brother sing stilled his tongue. A fight with someone she holds dear would certainly dampen her mood.

“Aye, he can be remarkably light of heart when the world isn’t weighing upon it,” Dwalin said. Regnad eyed him. “Indeed.”

*

When Thorin finished singing, he made his way over to thank Thranduil’s emissaries for coming. He wasn’t particularly surprised the Elvenking had not come himself; a small truce was not enough to mend a veritable lifetime of contention, especially since he didn’t personally have a relationship with Dis. Thorin knew Thranduil would probably have come for his own wedding, had it happened in Erebor, and he especially would have attended for Bilbo’s sake, but Thorin did not perceive sending someone else for this specific event as any slight. He was not eager to see him, anyway, not after the embarrassment of the gold sickness.

Thorin encouraged them not to be shy at the dessert table nor with the wine and continued onward to chat with other guests.

*
With the music having started, Dís--to the shock of many--called specifically for the elves of Rivendell to sing something traditional that their folk might sing for a wedding of their own. Nerithel and Nîfon complied, though Thorin noted darkly that not all attendees clapped at the end. Those dear to him did, though, and loudly.

Beorn asked Dís for permission to request a tune and—quite pleasantly surprised he was interested in such a thing—she happily granted it. He called for one of his favorite hobbit songs next and to his utter delight, all four hobbits sang it for him. This was also the official start of the dancing, for although not many in the room knew steps to hobbit music, they all enjoyed the brisk clapping to the beat. By the time the tune was through, several musicians had joined in, guessing as it went what notes were next…and getting them right at least half the time.

A waltz was next, led by the newlyweds as well as Fili, Bofur, Kili, and Bilbo.

*  

Regnad had been chatting with Balin over a slice of cake when Kili spun Bilbo past the otherwise empty table on their first trip around the floor.

As they whirled away, Regnad subtly gestured towards them with his fork and swallowed his bite. “There, where did Prince Bilbo get a crown? Did I miss some sort of ceremony?” Balin shook his head as he chewed. “Thorin made crowns for Kili and Bilbo as a wedding gift.” “Seems rather odd, given the history there, doesn’t it?” “He wanted it to serve as a gesture of truce, peace, and welcome, for one, and for another, hobbit he may be, but he is also a prince.” Regnad put down his fork and wiped at his mouth with a napkin. He scoffed, “The Halfling Prince Of Erebor. I can only imagine how other kingdoms are laughing at us right now. At least he is not Prince Consort. Could you imagine? A halfling on the throne at the king’s side? What a political disaster that would have been. It might have broken Thorin’s heart, and that’s unfortunate, but leaving Thorin was the biggest favor he ever did for Erebor, even bigger than ousting Smaug.” “Mind your tongue a touch,” Balin cautioned, resting his fork and looking around to see if anyone was listening to them. “For one, it is neither kind nor wise to refer to him as a halfling. For another, you did not know the dragon, so you don’t know how poor a jest that is. If he does nothing else for the rest of his days, Erebor will always owe Bilbo for helping oust him.” “Pffft, I’ve heard the songs.” He nodded towards where Bard stood. “It is Bard over there who won that day.” “Aye, but Bilbo went down the passage twice, facing the beast, conversing with it. No one else did what he did, for no one else even could, and it was from those intimate and dangerous meetings that Bilbo learned of the flaw. If Bilbo had not seen it up terrifyingly close and told the thrush, Bard would never have known where to aim. Bilbo and Bard both slew Smaug, each in their own way, but it is good to keep in mind that as noble as Bard might be, only Bilbo did what he did for dwarvenkind. Bard, though no less a hero, did not risk himself in our name the way Bilbo did.” “Hmmm,” Regnad said, eyeing him. “Here you are again, speaking of Bilbo as though he was Durin himself, yet I thought he angered you.” “Today is not the day for old feuds. In truth, I shouldn’t have even said the worm’s name aloud on such a blessed occasion. May the Maker forgive me and not lay any ill luck on this union.”

Regnad nodded slowly, as though he was deeply reflecting, then smiled broadly. “You’re right as usual, my fine friend. Today is indeed the happiest of days, and not a day for dark memories.” He held his cup up. “To my dear Dís and her marriage to your brother!”

Balin raised his along with him and they both drained their goblets dry.
“Well,” Balin said with a twinkle in his eye. “Can’t let this stay empty, not on a night like this! If I am still able to walk out of here with my own two feet at the end of the night, I will have failed to adequately celebrate my brother’s joy!”

“Here here!” Regnad said, clinking his empty wine cup to Balin’s again, laughing and clapping him on the back.

* * *

When the dance finished, Kili said to Bilbo, “Sure looks like they are having a ball.” He indicated Regnad and Balin. “I know I shouldn’t let it get to me, but I think of how Balin basically let Regnad take Thorin’s place as his friend and it makes me so mad.”

“I know, dear heart. I sometimes wonder who Balin has become…or who Regnad has made him. Still, Balin has been better, lately, and he’s not upset Thorin today or we’d know about it. Let him and Regnad laugh together tonight if they want—as long as they are having a good time together, neither one of them are giving Thorin trouble, right?”

“Right.”

“Where is Thorin?”

“He’s over at the keg chatting with Bofur.”

* * *

“Who knew one dance was going to make me so warm?” Bofur said. Thorin filled a mug and handed it to Bofur. “So take off your top layer. You’ve already made your appearances.”

“Aye, I would, but in a room full of such beautifully attired peers, I might be too vain to remove it.”

Filling his own mug, Thorin looked with a wry grin. “Vain, eh?”

“Oh yes,” Bofur said. “In fact, I do believe a wise king once said that fancy dress suited me. How could I give my adoring public any less after a compliment like that?”

“I see your point,” Thorin chuckled. “For what it’s worth, it does suit you. I knew that color would look good on you.”

“I thought Dís had these made?”

“She did, but have you forgotten who helped her and Balin plan the wedding? I can’t take any credit for the garments themselves--Dís picked the more traditional royal design, opting pointedly and specifically to outfit you both as princes—but it was me who suggested that shade of burgundy. I thought it would be flattering on you both, each in special but different ways, and I was right.”

“Oh,” Bofur said, face heating with the compliment. “I suppose then I should thank you twice over.”

Bofur took a large quaff from his mug, for he didn’t know quite else what to say.

* * *

Bilbo saw a familiar figure approach his table. It was his tattoo artist, Deig. Bilbo stood to greet him and invited him to sit with him, Rorimac, and Bifur.

“Oh no,” he demurred. “I’m just on my way across the room to get some cake. I just wanted to take a moment to thank you. I know it must have been you who spoke on my behalf to the king to support my business, despite the fact I still owe you apologies for what happened back home.”

“You really don’t. You were protecting your traditions. I’ll be the first to admit that a hobbit being part of the royal family of the Heirs of Durin sounds more like a tale than a fact.”

“Any road, you still made a point of speaking for me for King Thorin, even though I was rude about putting his family symbol on you. You didn’t have to do that, and I do appreciate it.”
“You do beautiful work, Master Deig, and it is no small undertaking to move a business halfway across Middle Earth to a new city. I hope you will do well here. I think you shall.”

Deig bowed politely.

*

Bilbo was having a grand time, eating, dancing, chatting, and generally taking in the scene of a dwarf wedding. It wasn’t wholly unlike his own-- perhaps a touch rowdier. He was pleased that even a dwarf wouldn’t dream of wasting wedding cake, though, therefore none of it had been thrown or had landed in his hair.

When the song changed, Thorin came to him with his hand outstretched.

“I do believe I promised you we would dance more,” Thorin said. Bilbo accepted the hand and took his position with Thorin on the dance floor. “Aren’t you worried about the talk?”

Thorin took his stance, pulling Bilbo a touch closer than the dance required. “Not at the moment.”

The music started and they began to move. Gazing into Thorin’s eyes, a memory came to him.

“Thorin…” Bilbo started, “Do you remember the last time we danced?”

Thorin leaned in and whispered, “On a starfield that was everywhere and nowhere all at once--”

“--Then we made love until dawn. Sometimes I still wonder if I had imagined that!”

“Did you doubt it?”

“No…and yes…and no again. It still astonishes me.”

“Well, if you remember it and I do too, that is proof that no matter how astonishing, it still happened, really and truly.”

“Along with your bond freshly humming under my skin for days after.”

“And the spend that dried in my body hair.”

Bilbo giggled, “Shhhh!”

Thorin glanced around. “We’re being quiet and no one is listening.”

“Oh, how I want to kiss you right now.”

“Me too. Later.”

Thorin pulled him closer still and spun them around the dance floor. Though he was loath to do so, he relinquished Bilbo to Kili at the end of the song, bowing deeply and taking his leave. His heart pounded, though. He still found new ways to fall in love with Bilbo every day.

*

Despite insisting to Bilbo he didn’t care about the talk, Thorin was mindful of being perceived as spending too much time enjoying company under watchful eyes. He decided it might be wise to sit out the next few dances by himself, close enough to watch but far enough for appearances.

A new one started up, the Over Under, which was a lively partner switching dance. Dwalin joined the band on the fiddle and Bofur jumped in to sing. Dís called her lads to dance, looking over to Thorin in invitation; he held his mug up to politely decline. Thorin was thankful Regnad also hadn’t joined the crowd assembling on the dance floor—he didn’t want anyone close to his heart stuck as that weasel’s partner.

A wide grin spread across his face as the song began. Kili showed Bilbo how to do the basic steps before jumping into the chain and then they were all off, skipping and weaving through the line of partners coming the other way, arm over arm as they cycled through, giggling as they went.
He caught a glance from Fili and the smile that followed was…not usual. Bashful, maybe? Surely not, though given recent circumstances, Thorin supposed it wouldn’t necessarily be unheard of. They had been in some unexpected, naked proximity lately and damn if Thorin knew quite how to handle it himself…or what needed handling in the first place.

Sure, there had been shared looks with both Fili and Bofur, looks he might have described as lingering if it had been Bilbo or Kili. There had also been brushes of skin here and there as well as an odd sort of charged air in moments of closer proximity, like when he was helping Bofur dress today. He had told himself those moments were likely nothing…though perhaps a small part of him found that disappointing.

_No, I must be delirious from only getting fifteen hours sleep for the whole of this week_, he thought, draining his mug all the way to the bottom. He stared at it thoughtfully. _I need to switch to wine._

* 

Without preamble, Balin plopped down in the chair next to Thorin and declared, “You saved my life once, the day Smaug came.”

Thorin saw Balin was obviously somewhat into his cups and though not slurring or incoherent, he seemed to have joined Thorin midway through a conversation he had been having with himself.

“What?” he asked, just to make sure.

“Dragon fire, a great burst, I don’t know how we weren’t melted, even from behind the pillar where you dragged me.”

“Erm, yes. It is a wonder we managed, being faced with him as direct as we were. What, ah, what brings that to mind?”

Balin continued with his train of thought as though Thorin hadn’t just asked him a question.

“That might have been the start of it, when I began to see you as more than my cousin, more as the prince, when I began seeing the seeds of the leader you could become. I suppose it was possible, perhaps I was simply especially happy not to die and credited you with it.” Balin giggled to himself, then waved the air as though to dismiss the sound. “Regardless, from that point on, you proved yourself, over and over. Somewhere along the way I…lost sight, I suppose, of the leader you are. My worry about what your separation from Bilbo did to your character, mind, and heart superseded what I always had known to be true about you. Erebor became more important to me, became almost _everything_ to me, and I mistakenly thought your heartbreak put it at risk. I’m beginning to see I was wrong. I apologize for not seeing it sooner.”

Thorin felt a flood of relief, though even as he felt it, he cautioned himself to remember that Balin had still said nothing of Regnad and the dismissal of Thorin’s harassment, nor of his own attempts at coercion and matchmaking Thorin with his harasser. Still, he welcomed the abatement of at least some of the tension, and the additional validation from Balin helped his more troubled soul.

“Thank you, Balin. Perhaps we can get back to the business of Erebor as allies once again.”

“Thorin, I never intended to be your adversary.”

“All the better that we talked, then,” he replied, his own way of dismissing it without starting a new argument.

Thorin waved Dain over. “Hey! Did you tell Balin about the…thing?”

“Thing, what thing is this?” Balin asked.

Dain knit his brow, thinking. “Oh! You mean that new proposal?”

“Yes! That’s the one!” Thorin said, relieved Dain took the bait of changing the subject for him. He
supposed he should feel guiltier for using him like this, but Dain was clearly happily babbling about some proposal he had actually never mentioned to Thorin before. While they were engrossed, Thorin managed to just sort of…float away.

*  

“No, left foot front,” Bofur instructed Bilbo. “Ow!”  
“Sorry, I’ve only ever done this particular dwarven dance once before. Bet you’re sorry you asked now!”
“If I hadn’t asked, painful as it is, I’d still be waiting to get my chance on the floor with you. There, now! You’re getting the hang of it.”
“It isn’t as though you have been hurting for partners. I thought I’d have to fight Dís for you, to say nothing of the times you’ve joined the band. Your voice sounded wonderful, by the way.”
“Thank you,” Bofur said, wondering how Bilbo could still make him blush with the slightest compliment after all this time. He glanced across the room, seeing Thorin chatting with Balin and Dain. “Did you tell him yet?”
The smile left Bilbo’s face. “Not yet.”
“He’s going to figure it out sooner or later.”
“I know, I know! I just—oh, he has needed a day like this for so long! Appreciated by his people, no one lobbing criticisms at him, eating well, laughing, dancing…I’ve just not found the right time.”
“We can change our plans,” Bofur suggested.
“I don’t want that, either.”
“Let me know what I can do to help, then.”

*  

Beorn stopped Thorin next, though he took steps to speak more privately than Balin had—appearing casual to anyone watching, but near no one’s ears. He crouched down beside Thorin, ensuring their conversation was even more their own.

“You do not like that auburn-haired dwarf,” Beorn said. It wasn’t a question, nor did Thorin need clarification.

Though he had been there for a bit over the winter, it occurred to Thorin that Beorn had not crossed paths with Regnad much at all. At the time he remembered even being annoyed by it, as he had chalked it up to Regnad’s snobbery or intolerance. In light of his conversation with Dwalin, Thorin considered it might be possible Regnad had given Beorn a wide berth on purpose. Whatever the reason, Thorin knew there was not much point in trying to keep his feelings from Beorn, and quite frankly he had no desire to try. He was already exhausted from the appearances he had to keep up. He looked at him and plainly replied, “No, I do not.”
“Neither do the princes, I can well see, and for that matter, neither do I. That dwarf wears sweetness on his face but it smells foul. Why does he keep such company with your sister and Balin?”
“They are bosom companions.”
“That is…most unfortunate. I would warn you to keep an eye on him at the very least, but I can already tell you do not need such advice.”
“‘At the very least,’ you say. What would you do if you were me?”
“If I was in your skin, I would banish him, never to return. I can sense conflict, though, and not with your own feelings. You believe you cannot send him away?”
Thorin shook his head. “That is true, but it is not that only. He wields influence.”
“More influence than the king?”
“There is trouble he could make that could undo the good we’ve done here, to say nothing of the
trouble he could bring me personally.”
Nodding gravely, Beorn said, “There is malice that comes off him in waves, a kind I thankfully do
not sense often. Keep your awareness about you, and make sure the ones you love know they
should as well. If you can find a way—any way at all—to warn your kin, I hope you will do so.
Princess Dís and Balin might believe they have his affection, but he is not their friend, Thorin, not
for his part. I sense nothing even slightly warm or fond from him when he speaks to them,
regardless of the smile that he wears.”

A chill ran across Thorin’s skin at the tone Beorn’s warning took in his voice.

* 
A new circle dance started up and calls rang out for Thorin to join. A handful of voices turned to
several, then the majority of the revelers joined in to chant his name to the vamping drum beat, the
dance intentionally on pause until Thorin stood. Effusive shouts and applause went up when
Thorin joined them all on the floor, and he allowed himself to get swept away by the rhythm and
merry pace. A second group dance followed, one with periodic claps and shouts of “hey!” and “oi!”
By the end, although quite out of breath, Thorin’s heart felt considerably lighter. As a less raucous
tune began, Kili approached him.

“A dance, if you would?”
“I need to catch my breath.”
“Please?”
Thorin sighed. “How can I ever say no to those eyes?”

They circled each other in the first steps of the dance, spun, and circled again before linking hands.

“I wanted to make you something with flowers today,” Kili said. “Though I wasn’t sure how Fili
would react.”
“You did?”
Kili felt a strange sensation in his throat. “Yes.”
“I did, too,” Thorin confessed.

The odd feeling spread into Kili’s face and fluttered down to his stomach.

* 
Óin fed Dori a bite of pie off his own plate.

“Oh, you’re right! That is good,” Dori said, near to Óin’s ear.

In their time together, he had learned that if he spoke closely enough, he didn’t have to repeat
himself nearly as often, and Óin had told him more than once how much he loved having Dori
speak to him so intimately. Sometimes Dori intentionally brushed his ear with his lips just to feel
him shiver, even if he was only asking them whose turn it was to wash dishes.

“Yes, it reminds me of a pie I had at one of the dozen and a half parties leading up to Kili’s
wedding. Between all the festivities and eating decadent food on a hobbit’s schedule, I grew too
round for my trousers, but I loved that trip the most because the day after Kili’s wedding, I woke
up with you,” Óin said.
“Don’t be daft! I know you were there. The point I am making is that it was a wonderful surprise,
possibly the best one of my life.”

Óin continued eating like he hadn’t just melted Dori’s heart right out of his chest, and the
obliviousness only made Dori love him more. He made a decision.
“We should find out if these pies were made by our folk or the chefs from New Dale,” Dori said.
“Mmm, if you would like,” Óin said, taking another bite.
“You know, so I know who to hire for our wedding.”

Óin paused mid-chew, and turned to look at him, eyes wide.

Dori gazed at him sincerely before leaning in again. “Would you like a wedding?”
Swallowing his bite, Óin asked, “Do you come with it?”
“One would presume.”
“Then yes. I want whatever brings me you: here, after, and always. Let’s have one.”

*

Dís and Dwalin paused the music, thanking everyone for attending. Before they left for the night, they expressed a wish that everyone continue their revelry as late as they pleased in their absence.

"Often, parties end when the king leaves, but tonight Dwalin, Thorin, and I beg you to suspend that etiquette. This party ends when everyone has drank their fill and the last person standing wishes to go to bed."

Hugging Thorin goodnight, Dís said, “Thank you for this beautiful wedding.”
“Don’t thank me,” he replied. “You, Balin, and Dwalin made most of this happen. I merely signed my name on a few requisitions, and even that was for show—you carry enough authority that you could have signed them yourself.”
“I’m not talking about the royal things. You helped me plan and schedule, pick out colors, fastened my dress, braided my hair...for the rest of my life, when I think of today, I’m going to think of my older brother. I love you.”
“I love you too, Dís,” Thorin said. He laid a hand on Dwalin’s shoulder. “I love both of you a great deal.”

In a rare show of tenderness, Dwalin grasped the back of Thorin’s neck and pulled him closer, pressing their foreheads together.

“Now we are brothers in name as well as heart,” he said.

*

Thorin observed Fili and Kili snatching four bottles from the wine table and scurrying from the hall. He sidled up to Bilbo, “Did I just see those two purloin four bottles of wine for the evening, on top of what we’ve already consumed between us? They must have some night planned!”
Worrying his bottom lip, Bilbo said, “I’m going to go back to the suites. To ensure there is no talk, wait a minute and then follow me, okay?”
“Shouldn’t we get Bofur?”
Bilbo shook his head. “The lads will take care of that.”
“But they’ll already be there? They just took the wine?”
“Just meet me in a minute.”

****

The door to Fili’s side of the suite was open, so Thorin let himself in and closed it behind him. Bilbo was waiting for him.

“Should I lock it?” Thorin asked.
“Yes, the others have a key for when they come back.”
Thorin glanced over, noting the adjoining door was closed, too.

“Come back?”

Nodding, Bilbo said, “I sent them away for a little while.”

Thorin grinned, pulling Bilbo towards him. “Wanted me alone for a minute, did you? I’m glad for it, because I’ve been obsessing over you all day.”

Putting his fingers up to stop Thorin’s kiss, Bilbo said, “A moment, please?”

“Of course, my treasure. What is it?”

“Bofur and I talked this morning and we decided that tonight was, um, our night, if you follow me.”

“Oh, I see.”

Bilbo waited a moment, but there was no further discussion, and Thorin’s face infuriatingly betrayed no expression.

“‘You see?’ So you do not oppose the decision?”

“You told me last night how you felt, and I told you how I felt. I knew it was going to happen soon, and though I hadn’t expected tonight, I also can’t be surprised the two of you are tired of waiting after all this time. If you’ll recall, we didn’t wait at all when we confessed our love and even then, it seemed like we had waited too long.”

Thorin ardently claimed his mouth.

“Well,” Bilbo said, breathless, struggling to continue his thoughts as Thorin kissed his way across Bilbo’s cheek and nibbled at his ear. “I suppose that settles that. I’ll admit I was loath to tell you today, as lovely of a time as you had been having, and I’m glad to see that it is not ruining your mood. There is the other matter, though.”

“Other matter?” Thorin asked absently, liberating the rest of Bilbo’s neck from his cravatte.

“Kili and Fili have chosen to be present and Bofur and I have agreed upon it.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Thorin said, sampling the skin he had just revealed.

“And,” Bilbo squeaked the syllable, clearing his throat and trying again, “and, um, do you wish to be there, too?”

Popping up to look at him, Thorin replied “Yes,” a smile plainly in his eyes.

“Yes? Truly? Well, Bo and I had talked about that, too, and we extend you welcome, though I must say I am a little surprised you would so eagerly take it.”

Thorin clutched Bilbo’s biceps and tugged him into a kiss. “All day I have been thinking of you, what you mean to me, how I almost lost you, and how you found me again: proposing to me and swearing your vows with me deep inside you. I thought about the despair of being apart from you, despite us being sworn, and how I have you back in my arms again with a promise never to be parted. All this has been running through my heart all day, filling it to bursting, and for the duration, I’ve had to restrain myself from holding you, kissing you...oh, my love, my burglar, my Bilbo! Nothing save your own personal request would keep me from being where you are tonight, even if it means watching you share yourself with another.”

Thorin licked into Bilbo’s mouth again, walking him back against the adjoining suite door, opening it, walking through it, and still managing to mostly undress them both with only the rarest breaks in their connection.

“Thorin,” Bilbo rasped when he was pushed back onto the bed. “Maybe you’re not understanding what I was telling you. Are you inebriated?”

“True, I’ve had my share of beer and wedding wine, I but I assure you I’m not that drunk,” Thorin said, grabbing the smaller bottle of oil from the nightstand. “I understood you perfectly: you’re going to make love to Bofur and he is going to make love to you, but if you expect to fit that beast
of his inside you, you’re going to need to be well-prepared. Let me have a few moments of my own and I will release you to him slick and ready to be his lover.”
“Yavanna’s Grace,” Bilbo moaned, letting his head fall back on the bed.

****

When Kili, Fili, and Bofur returned, they were greeted by the sight of Thorin naked on top of Bilbo with their mouths locked together and Thorin’s fingers inside him.

“Cor! You’re lucky we were alone!” Bofur said, quickly shutting the door behind him so no one passing in the hall might see.

Bilbo only moaned in reply.

“What’s all this then?” Fili asked.
Bilbo broke the kiss to answer. “Preparation,” he panted.
“Preparation,” Bofur repeated. “For whom?”
“For you,” Thorin said, easing out of Bilbo and rolling on his side to look at them. He noticed with amusement that Kili was already eagerly undressing even as Fili and Bofur stood staring at the scene, frowning.

“That’s thoughtful of you, I suppose,” Bofur said dryly, crossing his arms.
“Now look, you helped get Kili ready for Fili, and Bilbo helped get Fili ready for Kili. I’m about to send my lover—my husband—into your arms and arse tonight. Am I not allowed to do for him what you did for Kili? What Fili allowed Bilbo to do for him?”

“Are you drunk?” Fili asked Thorin, shocked to see him there at all, much less witnessing what appeared to be him enthusiastically getting Bilbo ready to be fucked by his rival.

“No! Why do you all keep asking me that?”

Bofur had to admit that Thorin’s request appealed to his sense of fairness, despite having looked forward to stretching Bilbo open himself. Obviously, Bilbo had consented, which was the most important part.

“Very well,” he said. “Carry on, and perhaps Fili might be willing to do the same for me. Either way, I’m going to need some of this wine.”

“Good idea,” Fili said. “Pass me the bottle when you’re done.”

Kili joined Thorin and Bilbo on the bed while Bofur and Fili traded gulps of wine.

“You know,” Thorin drawled, “Bilbo is going to need more than his usual help getting ready. Maybe you can slick a digit up a bit and help me.”

Bilbo groaned ecstatically when Kili’s index finger joined two of Thorin’s already inside, the dwarves kissing each other obscenely as they pleasured him. The visual delight, the physical stimulation, Thorin’s non-stop filthy suggestions coupled with anticipation of what was to come (if you expect to fit that beast of his inside you, you’re going to need to be well-prepared, Thorin had said, which was almost enough to finish him on the spot)—it was all driving him to crisis.

“Stop!” Bilbo pleaded. “Oh, please! You must stop! There’ll be nothing left for Bo if you don’t stop right now.”

“Well, you’d better wait for me, then,” Bofur said, handing them the open bottle of wine. “I’m only just now undressing.”

Electric tingles fizzed up and down Bofur’s spine as all four pairs of eyes followed him with each piece of clothing shed.
“Perhaps it is just the quarter bottle of wine I just drank in under three minutes, but this is making me so hard right now,” Bofur said.
“What is?” asked Bilbo.
“All of you watching me take off my clothes, desire in your eyes, knowing full well I’m about to be fucked.”
Kili leered, “We’ve watched you do it before.”
“Aye, but not with this one,” he nodded towards Bilbo. “And not for something of this magnitude.”
Fili, now undressed, kissed him. “You are trembling.”
“Yes, I quite like it,” Bofur answered. “I’m…I’m glad you’re all here. The hundreds of times I’ve imagined this night in my mind, I’ve never once guessed how exciting it would feel to have witnesses.”
“I’ll say you’re excited,” Fili said, smoothing his hand along Bofur’s cock. “You’re wet.”
“Fee,” Bofur moaned. “Open me and make it so good that I cannot help myself; I want to be so desperate that I don’t care if I make a wanton spectacle in front of everybody,” he paused, staring into Bilbo’s eyes. “And then I want you to have me. Forever.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone!
Surrender, Part 1

Chapter Summary

Though Thorin’s enthusiasm had considerably dimmed when he released Bilbo from his arms, he had been honest when he told Bilbo how the events of the day made him love, appreciate, and need to be near him all the more, regardless of how the night was planned to go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fili answered Bofur’s request quite well, reducing Bofur into a groaning, writhing mess before withdrawing and pronouncing him ready. As Bofur tried to catch his breath afterwards, Thorin offered him the bottle of wine to share. He thanked him and took a solid pull from it.

Turning to Fili again, Bofur said, “I am loath to remove the braids and blooms you put there so lovingly for today, but I would like to be unbound for this. Would that hurt your heart?”

Smiling lovingly, Fili unfastened and smoothed them out himself.

“Thank you,” whispered Bofur.

Thorin considered the design in his own hair. Should he take the plaits out? Leave them in? It wasn’t as though he was going to take any lovers of his own tonight, not unless Kili abruptly decided to leave his worry of Fili behind to return to Thorin’s arms…or if Bilbo would want him in addition after consummating his bond with Bofur. Not bloody likely on either account, Thorin thought.

“There is something I’ve often imagined the hundreds of times I’ve envisioned this,” Bofur said to Bilbo. “I made off with some of the flowers Thorin brought us earlier since they were spare and I was hoping I might I adorn you?”

“Yes, please…and perhaps I shall make you a crown and two bracelets?”

Bashfully, Bofur smiled and nodded. Bilbo knew exactly what he wanted and why—that first accidental glimpse of Bilbo and Kili making love had engraved many things into Bofur's heart and mind. Bofur disappeared into the other room for a moment and returned with flowers, some slightly dripping.

“Though I would beg you perhaps hurry,” Bilbo said. “Kee and Thorin did their job quite well with me, as Fee with you, and I don’t know how long my desire will wait for me to craft things.”

“Agreed,” replied Bofur.

Things went quickly enough, and although some rushed links might not last through the first thrusts, they were starting with them on and that was as much as anyone could reasonably expect.

Fluffing a pillow to cushion the headboard, Bofur bade Bilbo sit against them. Straddling his lap, Bofur licked silent promises into his mouth, promises which Bilbo passionately returned. He sat back, feeling Bilbo’s erection brush against his skin.
Bofur had waited for this moment for so long, in some ways since almost the very beginning of the journey. Happy daydreams, agonizing yearning, hope, hurt...he had gained and lost this chance well over a hundred times in his mind before he had gotten Bilbo’s clothes off once. Now here he was, permissions granted, arrangements agreed upon, with the other husbands’ assent (“and how fucking up is that?” Bofur from journey’s beginning would have asked). Bilbo gazed up at him in glowing anticipation, gazed up at him in love, ready to mark and be marked, irrevocably. All Bofur had to do was begin.

Cupping Bilbo’s face in both hands, Bofur whispered, “Is this what you want, well and truly? Do you want me to be part of you always?"
“Yes, I’m sure I want this, want you, for always. How about you? Are you ready for the same from me?”
“I’ve been ready for a long, long time.”
Bilbo quirked a loving smile. “Were those vows?”

Beginning in his chest, the flutter of all flutters shot through Bofur in every direction, momentarily spinning his vision.

“Gods, if you want them to be,” He exhaled something else in Khuzdul, either a swear or a blessing, Bilbo wasn’t sure which.
“I’m about to give myself to you by blood and soul. May as well consider it by word, too, if it would please you,” BIlbo said.

Bofur hadn’t discussed any of this with Fili, but his heart was virtually singing out of his chest. He reached behind, positioning Bilbo against him. He gasped when he felt the first stretch of penetration, allowing his weight to lead him gently downward until he was filled. Bofur grasped the back of Bilbo’s neck and leaned against his forehead.

“Marry me,” he whispered.
Bilbo moaned in reply, rolling his hips. “Yes, I’ll marry you.”

Bofur hadn’t realized how long he had truly wanted to ask that question--the mere act of voicing it aloud had sent his head swimming again--nor did he know how desperately he had desired to hear those words from Bilbo’s lips until they were spoken. He kissed him, holding their lips together as he rose and fell, the physical pleasure mingling with the swirling spiral of joy in his heart, tears rolling down his cheeks as he chased Bilbo’s release, needing that final, irreversible promise to pulse within him, surging through his blood until his dream was fulfilled.

* 

Though Thorin’s enthusiasm had considerably dimmed when he released Bilbo from his arms, he had been honest when he told Bilbo how the events of the day made him love, appreciate, and need to be near him all the more, regardless of how the night was planned to go. True also was the good feeling he had, the smile he had shared with him, and even the good-natured flirting and banter between the five of them leading up to this moment. While it felt different when his arms were empty, he would not take back anything he had said prior.

Thorin sat in one of the three armchairs Fili and Kili had assembled side by side and across the room from the foot of the bed. There was enough floor between them for the width of the rug to start at the bed and end just at their chairs—not too close, lest they intrude, but still close enough to witness.

Helping himself to another bottle of wine (he, Bofur, and Fili had polished off the first one), he took some swallows. Though it ached to see the tenderness between Bilbo and Bofur as they
adorned each other with flowers and shared quiet words he could not hear (words full of love and passion if Bilbo’s expression was anything to go by), Thorin surprisingly did not find himself completely gutted when the obvious physical coupling began.

Bofur clung to Bilbo as they moved, either kissing or leaning against him, therefore Thorin could see very little of Bilbo’s face. Other than his lover’s familiar moans, it was almost as if Bofur was making love with someone else. It was interesting to Thorin, watching a person—Bofur, of all people—having sex from this vantage point. Since the first time joining them (was that truly only two nights ago?), he had developed an appreciation for how interesting and, yes, okay, arousing it was to watch others trade pleasure. He shifted a bit in his chair, taking another drink and using the excuse of the movement to steal a peek over at Kili and Fili, both of whom were raptly observing the proceedings.

*At least I’m not the only one interested,* he thought to himself.

* 

Fili had been sneaking surreptitious glances at Thorin from the moment the other couple had begun. At first, it was simply to check on him, but the more he looked at him, the more surprised he was by what he saw: Thorin's lips enticingly parting, occasionally wetted by a tantalizing swipe of his tongue, eyes following the bodies attentively, chest rising and falling with quickened breathing…Thorin seemed a lot more aroused by Bilbo fucking Bofur than Fili would have guessed. Soon, Fili was looking at him just to look, Kili's voice from a long, long ago conversation echoing in his mind: “He’s skilled.”

Fili’s curiosity—having already been piqued by the change he had noted in Kili since he had become Thorin’s lover (and further fueled by the events of the nights before)—started to get the best of him.

As interesting as he had become, however, Fili’s attention wasn't solely on Thorin; Bofur and Bilbo certainly commanded their share. He observed them with warm affection, knowing how much they both had wanted this. There was a jealousy present, too, and it regarded both parties. With Bilbo, Fili felt the ache of no longer being Bofur’s only bondmate...and perhaps the sting was compounded by knowing Bofur had never once let go of his love or his desire for Bilbo, not even when he had first made love to Fili himself. His jealousy of Bofur was because Fili wanted to be him in those moments, feeling Bilbo inside, soon to be inside him, feeling that sweet flex and heat that came from filling one’s lover full, marking them and being marked. He shivered. He certainly couldn’t hold any of those inky feelings against Bilbo and Bofur for having each other when Fili wanted desperately to have Bilbo himself, even if it was only the game...though if he could work his will, he would have it all.

* 

The sighs and groans of Bilbo’s delight increased exponentially, rapidly growing frantic.

“Bo, I—oh, this is going to be so fast,” he whined.
“It’s okay, I’m ready to feel it.”
“But I wanted it to be so good for you.”
“It is! Please, just...begin it...bind me to you,” Bofur begged in between gasps. “Marry me.”

Keening, Bilbo clutched Bofur close, his whole body shaking as he pulsed inside him. Bofur vocalized with him, holding to him tightly, letting the feeling roll through him.

“Cor, there you are,” Bofur breathed. “Oh, Bee, I feel you. I love you.”
“I love you too,” Bilbo panted. Bofur kissed his hair. “I’m yours now, really yours.” “I like the sound of that, though I do wish I could have held out longer to make it more of an event for you.” “Believe me when I tell you it was. You, though? You are lamenting how short it was. Did I give you pleasure?”

Bilbo’s heart went out to how sweet the anxious look was on Bofur’s face.

“I think the bond tingling under your skin should be your answer.” “I know you got off, but was it…good? Worth it?” “Oh, my darling Bo. It was better than good. I’ve been fantasizing about what you’d feel like for ages, well before we ever discussed it, yet my best daydreams pale in comparison to the reality of you. You felt exquisite.” “As did you. Still do—so many times I’ve hoped for this, but actually experiencing your imprint within me now…”

He let his kiss finish describing his feelings.

* Thorin observed Bilbo and Bofur holding each other and speaking softly after Bilbo had finished. He felt the expected envy but without the pain he had feared. *That wasn’t so bad,* he considered.

After several moments of quiet discussion and kisses, Bilbo and Bofur traded places. Thorin had kenned bits and pieces of the reason why Bilbo and Bofur wanted to be in a specific, special configuration for marking each other, though he wasn’t sure he understood it fully. Aside from that, though, he had to admit that there was an intimacy with sitting up as they were together, combined with additional leverage for both lovers. He tried to remember the last time he had made love to Bilbo sitting with his back against the headboard.

All too easily from his seat, Thorin could see Bofur slip two slick fingers inside Bilbo, no doubt to ensure he was still adequately ready. His throat grew tighter, making swallowing more difficult. Bilbo rose up taller on his knees, positioning Bofur’s prick against himself, and as he sank down, the dark feelings Thorin had dreaded finally made themselves known—in abundance.

* Though he had always known it was going to be a breathtaking experience, nothing in the world could have prepared Bofur for how pressing inside Bilbo would truly feel. Bit by tantalizing bit, Bilbo lowered around him until he was fully, snugly, obscenely engulfed. Bilbo shuddered against him, exhaling his name. “Is it…okay?” asked Bofur. “More than okay,” Bilbo whispered back. “Everything. It is everything.”

The fresh bond still sizzling under his skin, Bofur kissed him, his core trembling anew.

Bilbo rose and fell in experimentation, forcing groans from both of them. “It’s—oh, I’m so full,” Bilbo sighed. “I didn’t expect to be this full. There’s nowhere I don’t feel you.” Promised Bofur, “I’ll start slow. I was planning to, anyhow.”

To his word, Bofur rolled his hips in a slow, sensual beat, giving Bilbo time to adjust and find a
rhythm of his own to answer it. With each movement, Bilbo moaned a little louder, which served to further raise Bofur’s voice and desire.

“I used to wish and wish for you, but for the longest time I feared we’d never get here,” Bofur moaned into Bilbo’s neck.

“And now?”

Bofur didn’t have words...or rather, he didn’t trust himself to confess them. Bofur clutched Bilbo’s face, gazing into his eyes, heart thumping wildly. How could he possibly say that he might be the first dwarf in recorded history to have two Chosens? For there was no doubt in his mind now: Bilbo was his Chosen every bit as much as Fili, and perhaps he always had been. Had Fili outright demanded it, there was a time when Bofur might have attempted to leave Bilbo to please him, but as much as he would have hated it back then, now it was nothing short of an impossibility.

*This must have been what it was like for Bilbo when he finally married both Kili and Thorin, he marveled, and how he felt inside all those times I was so terribly angry with him for not being able to let Thorin go.*

He squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head before passionately claiming Bilbo’s willing mouth again.

* Thorin scowled; Bofur disappeared within Bilbo and the noises coming from the bed left zero question as to how much the two of them loved the feeling of Bilbo undulating sensuously around his new lover…

No, Thorin self-corrected, for this was not a night he could afford the luxury of fooling himself. Though Bilbo had not known the ramifications of dwarvish consummation the first time he and Thorin shared their bodies, no one in the room remained ignorant of the gravity and permanence of what Bofur and Bilbo were doing now. *Bofur is not Bilbo’s new lover, he’s his new husband.*

The thought sliced through him more bitterly than any before it and, without thinking, Thorin’s body moved on its own, rising out of his chair and taking a step towards the bed. His thinking brain caught up to his aching heart, stopping his advance before he did something everyone would regret.

* When Bofur had finally breached Bilbo, desire had consumed Fili to the point of pondering taking himself in hand; Bilbo’s and Bofur’s cries of pleasure made him drip with unanswered want. Before he had a chance to do so, Thorin stepped forward from his chair and Fili tensed, unsure if he should be ready to intervene. Thorin stopped himself as abruptly as he had stood, his hand outstretched and momentarily hovering before it fell, defeated, at his side.

Fili considered his (mostly) warm feelings about Bofur and Bilbo finally consummating their love after all the months of longing, hours of conversation, and mountains full of angst, contrasting them to how it must be affecting Thorin. Although Thorin had done remarkably well with the new experiences they had thrown his way, he was still putting himself through the ordeal of bearing witness to sharing his dearest love with his rival. Subtly, Fili looked him over and concluded three obvious truths--

Thorin was crestfallen.
Thorin was naked.
Thorin was *alluring*.

Fili was a tornado of varying emotions himself—sorrow for Thorin, comfort, envy, lust, curiosity—and when Kili jumped up to soothe Thorin, Fili followed.

* Kili went to Thorin, smoothing his fingers up his arm. When Thorin didn’t startle, Kili’s lips traced over where his hand had just caressed his shoulder. Thorin turned his head, dipping down to accept Kili’s kiss. Another sensation—a second set of caresses—caught Thorin’s notice. Counting hands, he realized there were four, not two, traveling across his bare skin. He turned his head to see Fili at his other shoulder.

“What are you doing, Fili?” he asked carefully.

“Touching. Will you…allow it?”

Thorin noted Fili’s glance next shifted over to Kili, as if asking them both the question. Thorin, too, looked at Kili.

Kili shrugged his eyebrows. “It is not my place to say.”

Thorin’s eyes flicked to Bilbo, still quite involved in something considerably more serious than what Fili was…well, he didn’t know what Fili was asking, really, and not wanting to seem any more unsophisticated in the matter than he already had been the past couple evenings, Thorin didn’t ask for clarification. Instead, he shifted his attention back to Fili, who had taken another step around from his side and was now scant inches away from him.

The nature of a face is funny, Thorin thought to himself. There was something different about someone’s features when they were so near, as though their spatial relationship also altered one’s inner perspective. Standing this close, Fili’s face was not the same familiar face Thorin knew from hours of fight training, nor the one that had told him hard truths in Erebor after the battle, nor even the one who came to him during his darkest hour in the Shire. This was Fili as his lovers saw him—his features not entirely familiar to Thorin at this close range, but not unattractive. It was quite easy to give his reply.

“I’ll allow it.”

Fili kissed him then. It was not tentative or shy, as it might have been if Thorin had been the one to lead it. He tasted Fili’s insistent tongue, felt the touch on his skin grow tighter, rougher, and found himself yielding to let him in deeper. The shock mingled with shame only served to make him harder, the need within him for pleasure and relief quick to guide his own hands across Fili’s naked body and pull him closer, grinding against Fili’s hot flesh.

A choked, desperate moan of ecstasy from Bilbo caught Thorin’s attention and he paused their kiss to peer over at the bed again. Bofur had Bilbo now, was really having him, and though Thorin thought he had made his peace with this eventuality many times over, hearing how Bofur affected Bilbo—how he *pleased* him so ruthlessly—made him burn with renewed jealousy. So caught up was he, he hadn’t noticed Fili had taken a step back.

Though the look Fili observed on Thorin’s face was pained, the cock that had been flaccid before they kissed was now rock solid, the jewelry through it gleaming in the firelight. Fili’s own desire throbbed with all that was happening to and around him. His intense interest in Thorin’s new adornment, his curiosity about Thorin as a lover (spurred further onward by how taken Kili had seemed with him), his wish to ease Thorin’s sadness, and his need to feel that ring on his tongue all...
pulled Fili down to his knees.

Thorin was shocked at how quickly Fili went from a first kiss to potentially taking him inside his mouth; he would have preferred more...affection, conversation, *something* leading up to it. It was far too fast for his taste, though Thorin was too raw from the proceedings to consider turning down the pleasure and the distraction Fili would doubtless bring.

Kili stood stunned. The kiss itself had been a surprise, to say nothing of how enthusiastically Fili and Thorin had fallen into each other, but now Fili was kneeling before Thorin, teasing that glorious prick with long licks, doubtless planning to engulf it next. Fili was. Fili. After the promises and the tears and the worry about what Kili did with Thorin, Fili was getting his taste of what Kili had been longing for—getting it before him! Thorin’s groan of pleasure further infuriated him and made him feel doubly betrayed. Thorin was supposed to want *him*, want *his* mouth, sigh and moan for *him*, not Fili.

He kneeled next to Fili. He didn’t want to join—he didn’t want to share this, his sacred first time—but he’d be twice damned to The Void if Fili got to feel Thorin fill his mouth before he did. As far as he knew, Fili didn’t even *want* that sort of attachment to Thorin, whereas Kili had dreamed of it since before they had even left the Shire. Kili fervently prayed his mouth on Thorin might surprise Fili enough to back off and when he did, Kili planned to finally fulfill the fantasy he had put off so long--and to think he had done so in favor of Fili’s feelings, that hypocrite! *It would serve Fili right to have to watch it, too*, he brooded.

Before Fili had the chance to go further than teasing, Kili ran his own tongue up the other side. As Kili had hoped, Fili stopped and hissed, “what are you doing?” Ignoring it, Kili shifted to lick another path along the sensitive front of the shaft, base to tip.

Thorin whispered Kili’s name, prompting him to look up at him. Thorin gazed back adoringly, cradling his face with a single hand. In an instant, Kili forgot all about being mad, about Fili sitting next to them, and about Bilbo getting bonded behind him. With the look that passed between them, leaning into his touch and feeling the heat of Thorin’s arousal so close to his lips, Kili felt as though the world had narrowed down to just him and Thorin.

“I want to know what it’s like,” Kili said. “I want to feel what you felt.”

“I want to show you, and I desperately hope you feel it, too.”

Fili sat back on his knees, speechless, furious, watching whatever this was happen between Thorin and Kili. Thorin and *HIS* Kili. What in Durin's name were they talking about?

Feeling Kili’s tongue against him again, toying with his ring the way he had wanted Kili to since he had arrived, exploring, tasting, and testing...Thorin breathed deeply, marveling how similar to yet different it was from the way Bilbo's felt. He was torn between savoring each lingering moment as it happened and wishing for Kili to open up to let Thorin in at last. How many times had Thorin imagined this? Hoped for it? He longed for Kili's surrender so fiercely that he could feel himself quivering.

A second difference also had Thorin floored: how carnally and quickly Fili had dropped to his knees for him, a sharp contrast to the months-long and carefully considered build-up that had been happening with Kili. With more time to breathe and reflect, he was glad Fili had changed his mind before he had done something he might regret and, likewise, incredibly thankful Kili seemed to have decided it was finally time to have his (both literal and figurative) taste of him.

*
Steadily, Bofur had picked up speed and Bilbo had matched it. The stimulation from Bofur’s thickness, the emotion, the aforementioned everything had not only aroused Bilbo’s prick again, it also pushed him towards coming a second time in that deliciously agonizing way. With every stroke, he lost more control of his voice, babbling and pleading. He didn’t know how Bofur was holding on through this without finishing himself, though there were plenty of matching groans and filthy words spilling from those lips. He reached back to brace himself with an arm, grateful for Bofur’s knees that rose up to support him.

Bofur watched Bilbo lean back, scarcely able to believe how his whole fantasy was playing out before his eyes. The shift in position was all Bilbo seemed to need, too, as his desperate whines grew into sobs and his thighs began to shake. Bofur was going to watch him—and make him—fall apart like he had always dreamed…and then he was going to claim him for his own.

He felt it only a moment before he heard and saw it: Bilbo’s cock erupting between them as he desperately cried out Bofur’s name. Bofur finished a moment later, pushing in as deep as he could manage, as though the further he finished inside his lover, the more it would bind them. He could tell the moment Bilbo felt him by the expression on his face and Bofur reveled in all of it: the pleasure, the meaning, the command, the yielding, the trust, and the love.

Bilbo fell forward against him, practically boneless, kissing him with the sweet, sloppy laziness of someone who had just gotten thoroughly shagged. He buried his face in Bofur’s neck and giggled.

“I was right: you are a lovely fuck.”
Bofur laughed. “Thank you, you are as well.”
He felt Bilbo grin against his skin. “I do,” Bilbo whispered.
“Do what?”
“Consent to be your husband.”
“Oh, Bee,” Bofur whispered back, holding him tightly and (once again) near tears. “I do, too.”

*

The spell between Thorin and Kili was temporarily broken when Bilbo’s frantic gasps swelled to unmistakable sobs of liquid-hot rapture followed by Bofur’s name. Bofur came right after, sounding every bit as wantonly wrecked.

Well, that’s it then, thought Thorin, resigned. It is done.

Peering up at him, Kili asked, “Are you okay?”

Thorin didn’t know how to respond. Yes? No? As he looked into Kili’s face, the thought occurred that Thorin wasn’t Bilbo’s only husband that might be conflicted by the milestone that had just happened scant feet away.

“Are you?”
Kili smiled softly, nodding.

He is honestly okay with this. Thorin felt unexpectedly comforted by Kili’s acceptance and found himself smiling back, running his tongue over his lips. In the next moment, he felt something even more.

For the very first time, at long last, Kili had wrapped his mouth around the head of Thorin’s cock.
It has been a while since we've had a good smut-hanger!

Who is surprised by this turn of events?
Who is thrilled by them?
Please, share your thoughts!

Thank you, everyone!
Surrender, Part 2

Chapter Summary

And now, the thrilling conclusion(s) of the smut-hanger!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thorin felt unexpectedly comforted by Kili’s acceptance and found himself smiling back, running his tongue over his lips. In the next moment, he felt something even more.

For the very first time, at long last, Kili had wrapped his mouth around the head of Thorin’s cock.

Kili felt the first hints of weight of Thorin on his tongue, ever so slightly inside him, and suddenly that wasn’t nearly enough. He slid down the shaft, taking it in all the way to the root. Thorin’s resulting groan vibrated against the softest parts of Kili’s mouth and a strange, answering sensation snaked up through Kili’s core, making his head swim and his cock quiver. Thorin was gloriously within him; Kili had had no idea how divine this surrender was going to be.

The physical pleasure (and an unexpected surge of emotion) had Thorin clutching Kili’s shoulder to steady himself, lest he waver too much on his feet. The next shuddering breath made the likelihood of his ability to remain standing even narrower. He stepped back, gently tugging Kili to move with him, and sat in his chair.

Kili took his time with him, slow and teasing. Thorin threw his head back after one especially breathtaking suck of his full length before looking back down at what was happening to him with lustful awe. He spread his legs more, lifting one up so his heel rested on the chair, giving Kili better access to his arse if he wished. He cursed himself for not having had the presence of mind to have oil at the ready.

* 

Earlier, Bofur had briefly peeked at Fili, Kili, and Thorin while Bilbo was riding him, planning and hoping to see the dwarrows staring back at them hungrily. Though Fili and Kili had not disappointed, the lusty interest that had lit Thorin up while he watched Bofur undress had faded considerably, and the new expression had briefly made Bofur question the wisdom of doing this in front of him...until Bilbo’s body had demanded his attention once again.

This time when he looked that direction, to his complete surprise, he saw Kili on his knees and giving Thorin a grand time of it. At least something finally took that heartbreaking look off Thorin’s face, he thought.

Though Bofur was happy Kili was fulfilling this long-held yearning (while also providing a delightful distraction for the heartbroken Thorin), it distressed him that Fili was now sitting on the floor alone and looking mightily unhappy.

That absolutely wouldn’t do.

As much as he had wanted this night with Bilbo, Bofur would have made a different plan for the
evening if he had thought for one moment Fili would end up being the only one left out. Though he could tell well enough by the path of Fili’s brooding stare to know it wasn’t him or Bilbo who had created the vexation, he hoped perhaps the two of them could at least assuage it for the time being.

Bofur whispered back and forth with Bilbo and soon, they called to Fili.

*

Fili hadn’t been sure what he imagined Bilbo or Bofur would be needing when they urged him over, but it hadn’t been this. He had barely gotten on the bed when Bofur pulled him down on top of him, kissing him ardently. He felt Bilbo’s hands smooth over his skin for several moments before they grew impatient and tugged him to roll back so Bilbo could get his own taste.

Though he fiercely wished to join them, Fili protested dutifully, “This night is supposed to be for the two of you.”

“Then it is up to us to decide how we spend it, isn’t it?” purred Bofur.

Fili yielded eagerly, not having the will to press his side of the debate further. For the time being, the thick murk of jealousy was forgotten as two gorgeous lovers tended to him.

*

Kili drew out Thorin’s pleasure for who knew how long, keeping him riding along the line of madness, backing off before he could reach release, then giving him moments of less urgent pleasure before starting all over again. It was agonizingly delicious. Thorin had seen Kili do it to Bilbo before, and Bilbo had done it to Thorin...though this sort of practiced intensity only came after their reconciliation, which seemed to affirm Bilbo had learned this particular technique from Kili himself. He supposed that should make him jealous, but he was too busy enjoying the experience from the master.

When his gaze fluttered down again, he saw Kili’s shoulder flexing in a provocative, telling way; Thorin reached out to still it.

“No, don’t finish yourself,” Thorin said. “Save it for me. I promise won’t leave you wanting.”

Kili released himself and went back to deliberately, meaningfully making love to Thorin with his mouth. The hotter Thorin burned for him, the less time it took each time for Kili to return him to the brink. Finally, he interrupted Kili, seizing his face and kissing him.

“I can’t stand it any longer. Please, do it. Finish me.”

Kili could scarcely stand it much longer himself, especially with Thorin requesting Kili not to address his aching erection. He increased his speed, quite satisfied with the louder moans and twitching in Thorin’s thighs.

“Can I...oh, Kee,” Thorin sighed. Kili looked up at him, wide-eyed that he used that name—something he had done only on the rarest of occasions in the past. “I want you to—inside you--will you-“

Kili groaned in affirmation, waiting, heart pounding, sucking greedily. Thorin spilled in his mouth and Kili was so affected by it, he almost came without any touch at all.

Though he had imagined this many times, finishing inside Kili was better than Thorin’s most perverse fantasy. “That’s it, swallow me,” he whispered, though Kili already had been enthusiastically doing just that.
On his side, Fili slipped his tongue over Bofur’s, grinding against him while Bilbo pressed himself to his back, fingers inside him. He hadn’t thought he had imbibed that much, but the whirlwind of going from aroused to being jealous and mad to being adored front and back made him feel floaty and disoriented. Nevertheless, he wanted them—Durin’s beard, he wanted them both.

Impatiently, he whined, “I’m ready already. Switch places with Bo unless you plan to have me yourself.”

Bilbo’s fingers retreated but his body stayed where it was. “Do you wish to play with me?”

Fili’s mouth went dry and hope soared within him. He twisted his torso to look into Bilbo’s eyes. “Play with you how?” he asked carefully.

“I’m ready already. Switch places with Bo unless you plan to have me yourself.”

Bilbo’s fingers retreated but his body stayed where it was. “Do you wish to play with me?”

Fili’s mouth went dry and hope soared within him. He twisted his torso to look into Bilbo’s eyes. “Play with you how?” he asked carefully.

“Intimately,” Bilbo said.

Stealing a glance at Bofur (who seemed wholly unsurprised by this development), Fili’s gaze flicked back to Bilbo. Could this really be happening right now?

“You mean make love but stop before the…end?”

“Yes, exactly that. Do you want me, Fee? Do you want me tonight?”

“No, tell me, what do you mean by that?”

Shhh, my beauty,” Bilbo said, quietly in control. “One thing at a time, and even for the game only, there is no denying this is a pretty weighty step we’ve agreed upon for now. Tell me again how much you wish to play it with me—I delight in hearing it.”

“I know you find a thrill in the sting that comes with rushing things, which might be nice when you have the payoff of an imprint at the end but for tonight, I think you will find greater pleasure with me when you’ve been warmed up more thoroughly.” Bilbo kissed across his face to his earlobe, licking it first, then biting it enough to make it smart. He whispered, “I won’t hurt you until the night I finally come inside you.”

Yes, that’s not quite enough for tonight. I don’t want to hurt you, not yet,” Bilbo replied, voice honeyed and low.

Fili stilled, barely able to breathe for the second time since he joined them on the bed. “Um, when do you want to hurt me?”

Bilbo hummed a dangerous laugh.

Craning his neck to try and look at him, Fili insisted, “No, tell me, what do you mean by that?”

“I know you find a thrill in the sting that comes with rushing things, which might be nice when you have the payoff of an imprint at the end but for tonight, I think you will find greater pleasure with me when you’ve been warmed up more thoroughly.” Bilbo kissed across his face to his earlobe, licking it first, then biting it enough to make it smart. He whispered, “I won’t hurt you until the night I finally come inside you.”

“Shhh, my beauty,” Bilbo said, quietly in control. “One thing at a time, and even for the game only, there is no denying this is a pretty weighty step we’ve agreed upon for now. Tell me again how much you wish to play it with me—I delight in hearing it.”

“I do,” Fili confessed, giddy. “I’ve been dreaming about us taking each other longer than I’ve been brave enough to mention aloud. I’d—I’d give you everything tonight if you wanted it.”

Bilbo caressed Fili’s face, leaning down for another kiss. “Let’s draw it out, savor it…and each other. Everything doesn’t have to happen tonight for it to still be wonderful.”

Fili had to confess, he adored Bilbo’s confidence when he was in a mood such as this. It reminded him of the first tryst the two of them stole alone the afternoon Fili realized he was falling in love
When he was satisfied with his preparation, Bilbo rolled Fili over on his back. Bilbo’s expression was softer now, reverent and adoring.

“I feel a little drunk, though I don’t know if it is from my new bond, love, anticipation, or wine,” Bilbo said.
“I’m feeling much the same, save the part about the new bond,” Fili said. “But though I’m tipsy, I also know very well what I’m doing. I’m aware of the choice I’m making and I’m not going to regret it tomorrow.”
“I know what I’m doing, too, Fee. When morning comes, I promise I’m going to feel the same about this as I do now.”
“Which is?”
“Which is that I want you. I love you.”

Fili flicked his eyes to Bofur, who had given them more room on the bed to take the moment for themselves. Bofur nodded his encouragement.

“Do it now, Bee,” Fili begged. “I want to show you I feel the same.”

Bilbo positioned himself, lifting Fili’s hips and slicking his cock once more with the bottle that had been rolling around on the bed. He pushed himself into Fili’s willing body, his thorough preparation considerably easing his way. All the way in, he paused and both of them shuddered.

“I hadn’t expected it to feel like this,” Fili said, voice wavering.
“Me either,” Bilbo replied, similarly affected. “Oh, Fili.”
Fili reached up with a hand, resting it on Bilbo’s heart. “I know.”
They gazed into each other’s eyes and Bilbo began to move.

* * *

After Thorin finished, he urged Kili up to straddle his lap and took him in his arms.

“It’s different isn’t it?” he said knowingly. “Stronger now?”
“Yes,” whispered Kili.
“While I want to discuss this further and very soon at that, I believe I promised you pleasure of your own.”

Thorin wrapped his hand around Kili’s cock, though that first desperate whimper from his lover made Thorin crave giving him more than a fast wank.

“I want to taste you,” growled Thorin.

Thorin thought Kili might back up to stand on the floor or possibly trade him places. Instead, Kili stood up on the chair with a foot on either side of Thorin’s thigh. Thorin hummed in amusement before he went in after his prize. Kili didn’t take long once it had started either—he had obviously been quite turned on by getting Thorin off.

Once Thorin had sucked him dry, Kili couldn’t hold himself up on his shaky legs any longer. He lowered himself, snuggling sideways in Thorin’s lap so his feet could dangle over the arm of the chair.

With one arm around Kili’s waist and the other cradling his head, Thorin said, “I feel it, too, you know. I’ve felt it every time you’ve been inside me. Is this... for you, I mean... is it,” he hesitated. “I guess don’t know even what I’m trying to ask you.”
As if he had read Thorin’s mind, Kili answered the question Thorin couldn’t figure out how to phrase. “I felt a connection before, with Bilbo, back in those early weeks when we had this in place of making love. With Fee, I felt a full bond pretty much from the moment we started getting each other off. This lies somewhere in the middle, the differing intensity probably warranting further analysis when my brain is more present, and—like you guessed—swallowing you indeed made it stronger than it was when I had only known your fingers inside me.”

“That first night I opened myself up to you, something changed inside me when I wrapped my lips around you. When I swallowed you, it intensified, and then it surged again when you penetrated me. I’ll admit, a sizable part of me has been hoping you would put your mouth on me so I could make you feel those surges for yourself. I wanted to link you to me the way you had linked me to you.”

“You didn’t want to be left on the other side alone,” Kili said.

“That’s an eloquent way to put it.”

“It is something we’ve said to each other in the past, Fee and me…maybe Bee, too, and probably Bo at some point while we were working it all out. I can’t remember how it started, but we’ve all agreed it isn’t a nice feeling for any of these connections—even the smaller, harder-to-pinpoint ones—to be one-sided.”

“Well, I wasn’t there entirely alone—not as alone as you were those months in between when I touched you the first time, and anyhow, even if you had never wanted tonight’s connection, it wasn’t as if there would be nothing between us.”

“There was most definitely something there prior to tonight,” Kili agreed. “And though it is stronger now, it was hardly insignificant before.”

He rested his head against Thorin’s shoulder, humming softly in contentment as Thorin gently toyed with his hair. After several moments, Thorin spoke softly.

“Sometimes when I’m sharing my body with you, I can tell exactly why Bilbo chose you over me.” Kili’s head whispered up to look at him. “Thorin, please—“

“Though it is hard to be too heartbroken when you’re showing me exactly what he found so irresistible. I’d probably leave me for you, too.”

“Don’t say that. This sort of talk is too dark for when I’m in your arms like this. It broke my heart to break yours back then and I don’t like thinking about it.”

“But you and Bilbo also put my heart back together for me, and in some ways better than before.”

“Better?”

“I have my Chosen again, but I also get to experience you. You’re so very skilled at the art of pleasure—and inventive! The things you and Bilbo have discovered together have brought me to new peaks and turned me inside out in ways I hadn’t known were possible. Perhaps Bilbo and I would have never made those discoveries on our own, and we certainly wouldn’t have figured out the joys that come with adding to the number in our bed.”

Kili settled down, resting his head against Thorin again. “Perhaps the pain you went through still takes your mind to dark places from time to time, but always remember that he chose the both of us in the end. Bilbo found he didn’t want to be without you just as he once decided he didn’t want to be without me, and you’re right: because of it, we’re all here together. I regret the sadness we caused along the way, but I don’t regret being here with you.”

Thorin kissed the top of his head and sighed happily, “I don’t regret it, either.”

Kili glanced at Bilbo to see how those aforementioned joys were working for him and was surprised to see Fili had joined them on the bed—quite literally, from the looks of it. Although Kili had engaged in many conversations about such activities with both Bilbo and Fili in the past, he was relatively sure Bilbo had not cleared the current activity with Thorin. He peered up through his fringe to see if Thorin had been paying attention. He hadn’t. Thorin had closed his eyes and a sated smile played at the corners of his mouth while he continued stroking Kili’s hair.
Bilbo moved inside Fili, slow and deliberate, until Fili thought he was going to lose his mind—not from the pleasure of his body (which was substantial), but from the delightful swell of emotions threatening to burst forth from his chest. Indeed, his whole upper body was alight with so much everything, he could scarcely contain himself.

Exhaling raggedly, he said, “How far does this go? Do you want to wait until you pull out to finish before we trade?”

Bilbo stopped. “I hadn’t honestly considered…well, of course you would want a turn, wouldn’t you? And I want you to have one, too, I simply hadn’t thought about what point we might be getting around to that part. Um, how about now? Where should I be?”

Somewhat shyly, Fili said, “I think, for this time, on your back? I would like to look at you.”

Bilbo complied, pausing to rescue the bottle of oil from where it had rolled under him when he had moved.

Looking over at Bofur, Fili said, “At least I know he’s pretty well warmed up for me after fitting you in.”

“Aye, and likely fairly slick, too,” Bofur replied with an impish grin.

“I can’t help but notice you’re looking pretty ready, too,” Fili flirted, eyeing Bofur’s erection.

“Well,” drawled Bofur, “I can hardly be blamed, can I? It has been quite a show.”

Fili said, “We’re going to have to finish sometime, somehow. Maybe you could be a part of the finale, so to speak. I’ve got something I want to show you.”

“That’s something worth anticipating,” Bilbo agreed. He handed Fili the bottle, pointedly adding, “later.”

The fluttering, expanding, glowing sensation started up in Fili’s head and chest again as he slicked himself. He adjusted Bilbo, tucking a pillow under his back and lifting his hips.

As he lined himself up, Bilbo whispered, “Fee?”

Even in the dim candleglow, Fili could read all of Bilbo’s feelings across his face. “Yeah?” he whispered back.

“I felt you, in here,” he put his hand on his chest. “When I was inside you, I already felt it. I wanted you to know that before you started.”

Fili licked his lips. “I’m glad you told me.”

Pushing inside Bilbo, Fili thought he might cry. It felt gorgeous—it felt right--and Fili was already wistful he wouldn’t be able to finish right there, deep inside this unlikely creature who had stolen his breath and his heart out of nowhere. Bilbo groaned, rolling his hips, and quite suddenly, Fili stopped feeling any regret and began to stroke into him, living in the glorious, rapturous moment.

Bilbo undulated his body, doing his best to meet Fili thrust for thrust, though Fili had gripped him in such a way that his feet weren’t able to give him leverage. It didn’t matter, though; the pleasure was exquisite, explicit, and just when Fili’s moans grew to the fervent point of nearly no return, Bilbo’s lover slowed within him and strained towards his mouth for an impassioned kiss. Bilbo returned it with everything he had.

“Are you ready to come?” Fili panted.

“You mentioned having something with Bofur in mind?”

*Thorin lazily glanced over to see how Bilbo was faring—and finding he was faring very well,
indeed. He trusted Bilbo enough not to add a second imprint to his blood that night without telling him, and any other envy or outrage merely dissipated along with the ebb of the bone-shaking orgasm he had just had across Kili’s tongue. Besides, he had experienced something new himself that evening: Kili’s mouth, trust, vulnerability, and the deeper connection it created for them.

He closed his eyes, mentally congratulating himself on the choice of soft armchairs he had selected for the suites as he drifted off, Kili still in his arms.

*

Bilbo groaned as Bofur slid inside him again. There was a pause and shuffle as Fili positioned himself behind and Bofur rested against Bilbo’s torso, shuddering and moaning as Fili filled him.

“I’ve wanted you to know this pleasure since the moment I felt it for myself,” Fili said. Bofur moaned again. “Cor, I’ve been wanting to know it. I—it is so, so, so…” “Let Fee lead you,” Bilbo purred. “He’ll find what we need.”

Bofur did as he was told and Bilbo was right. Fili established the perfect rhythm for Bofur to fly into a million pieces. Bofur squirmed under him, babbling and crying out as Bofur repeatedly stroked his hot spot. For his part, Bofur was prezeled in bliss: Bilbo wrapped around him, Fili hot within him and having no problem himself finding Bofur’s own spot that made him keen. All too fast—and yet not nearly soon enough—he was nearing his crisis.

“Bee,” he groaned, frenzied. “I’m almost there,” Bilbo rasped back. “Let go.” “Yes, let go,” sighed Fili, picking up speed for all three of them.

Being driven into Bilbo’s tight heat--growing ever hotter as Bilbo got closer--and being pumped himself, Bofur let go with such a wail, he had to bring his hand to his mouth to quiet himself. Bilbo came underneath him, meeting him nearly twitch for pulse, and Fili followed a beat behind, flooding him even as he shook through the aftermath. He and Fili both fell to the side, spent, while Bilbo lay on his back, panting towards the ceiling.

Eventually, they had to move and clean up at least a little; Bofur had muttered in protest when Bilbo woke him from his light doze to wipe himself off. Bilbo couldn’t rightly blame him for drifting off so easily (or for being cranky about being disturbed), as every limb of his own was heavy and his head ached. Had the wedding only been that afternoon? Bilbo felt as though he had lived four separate lifetimes since lunch.

“I’d better get Kee and Thorin,” he said. “They’ll hurt something awful if they sleep cramped in that chair all night.”

For a short, blessed while, Fili had forgotten all about Kili and Thorin—finally having the opportunity to make love to Bilbo would do that do a dwarf—but as the memory came back, so did the inky feeling inside him. He was still so angry at Kili he could spit.

“Thorin? Kee?” Bilbo said, gently shaking each of their shoulders. “Would you prefer to come to actual bed?”

Kili stretched, sore in spots from sleeping in an odd position in the chair. Thorin, obviously sharing his discomfort, complained aloud.

“Oh, my neck! Yes, I do think we’ll move over. Thank you for waking us, my treasure.”

Kili well-remembered being furious with his brother, scowling in his direction as he walked to the
bed...not that Fili saw it. He had been draped over Bofur, not paying the slightest attention to him. It only served to annoy Kili more.

Even though there had been many new revelations and encounters they doubtless could have discussed, they silently went to bed. Many of the pending conversations were probably best left to privacy, anyhow.

Fili and Kili fell asleep on far ends of the bed, as separated from each other as they could be.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you!
Bilbo and Thorin wake up before the others.

Bilbo’s bladder woke him before he was quite ready, though the clock told him it was still later than they had been usually sleeping. Even so, he was the only one awake. He gently moved Thorin’s arm off him, shimmying downward to get out of bed so he didn’t disturb anyone else on his way to the water closet.

Upon his return, Kili, Fili, and Bofur were sleeping still, but Thorin was up and waiting for him in one of the chairs. Bilbo opened his mouth to speak, but Thorin put a finger to his own lips to indicate quiet. He took Bilbo’s hand and led him to Fili’s suite.

Carefully closing the door behind them so it would not make a sound, Thorin turned to Bilbo and claimed a passionate kiss.

“Um, it is lovely to see you this morning,” Bilbo began, careful to keep his voice down, “But after last night, my body is telling me nothing needs to be going into it or spilling out of it for a few hours—sexually, at least—not to mention my mouth surely tastes like the floor of a barn.”

“I missed you last night and looking at you now, I couldn’t help kissing you, barn or not. I didn’t bring you in here to take you to bed, though. I thought since we were both awake, and especially since the others weren’t, it might be good to take some time alone this morning, just the two of us, to discuss how the night went.”

Though he felt trepidation, Bilbo knew it needed to happen sooner or later. “Yes, I agree that might be a good idea.”

Thorin sat, patting the bed next to him in invitation. When Bilbo sat down, Thorin turned sideways to face him, one leg swinging nervously over the edge.

He asked, “How much did you see last night?”

“Me?” Bilbo had thought this conversation would be more about what Thorin had seen regarding his making love to Fili. “I’m not sure what answer you’re seeking. I saw you and Kili together, if that’s what you mean.”

“Nothing else?”

Shrugging, Bilbo looked away uncomfortably. “I was occupied.”

“With your new husband?” asked Thorin gently.

Bilbo met his eyes. Soft, he replied, “Yes, I suppose he is.”

Thorin took his hand. “I will not deny I had some moments of bitter jealousy last night, and I’ll even admit a moment where I almost spoke up. I never wanted anyone but me to wear that title—or your bond, to be honest—but that hope has long since dissolved.”

Contrite, Bilbo sucked in one of his cheeks and peered down at his toes. Thorin touched his chin, urging him to look back up.
“In its place is something new. For a long time, while I dwelled on the worst of it, I hadn’t considered the scope things that are happening right now—not only in the interest of providing new pleasures for you, but also in new adventures for myself. I’m not even sure quite how I feel about them all the time, but I won’t deny if nothing else, I’ve found them intriguing. Bilbo, Fili kissed me last night.”

“He did?” That certainly was new information. “And what did you do? What did Kili do?”

Thorin told him the story, and as the events shifted to Kili taking over, Bilbo better understood the circumstances that led to Fili sitting heartsick and alone on the floor.

“So, that is the whole of my confession,” finished Thorin.

“Seems like you had an eventful night, too. At the very least, I’m glad Kili and Fili snapped you out of being upset.”

“You’re not angry with me?”

“Over Kili sucking you off? I’ve watched you do the same for him before—while cheering you on, if memory serves. His abstinence from reciprocating since we’ve been here has been his condition, not mine.”

“No, I mean angry about Fili.”

“It was a surprising turn, I’ll grant, but I’m not one to judge. I have a Fili confession of my own.”

“I saw.”

“And?”

“I’m sure you didn’t imprint each other, right?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it. You had told me before you were interested in playing his game with him and we’ve talked about the two of you falling in love. I wasn’t expecting for something like that to come along with you tying yourself to Bofur last night, but it wasn’t a complete surprise.”

“I hadn’t been expecting it, either, but suddenly…I don’t know, it seemed like it was time, if you follow me. Today, I’m feeling guilty we didn’t consult with you first, but last night, I can’t explain it—I just knew it was right.”

“In a way, you did consult with me,” Thorin teased him. “It was simply more general and less immediate.”

“I guess it is my turn to be surprised at how well you’re taking my Fili news.”

“That we both have Fili news at all is the other part of what we need to discuss.” Thorin took a deep breath before he continued. “It might have been the wine, a hint of that joyous, invincible energy weddings emit, or who could say what else, but last night—before Fili kissed me and Kili gave himself to me—even though there was a new comfort between all of us, I also felt tension. It wasn’t unpleasant; it was as though the air itself was erotically charged…and I have proof I hadn’t been imagining the desire of at least one of the extra pairs of eyes on me.”

“I noticed all of that, too, down to the interested looks your direction…and the heated glances you had been casting about yourself.”

“I don’t know, Bilbo,” lamented Thorin, standing suddenly and running both of his hands through his hair in frustration.

Bilbo blinked in concern, startled a touch by the outburst. “Don’t know what?”

“Anything.” He paced as he talked, trying to keep his voice low lest he wake the others. “What my boundaries are, what your expectations of me might be, where your boundaries for me lie…I am having trouble recalling the last time I was this far out of my depth. How do I deal with the added number to our bed? What do I do? How do I proceed? That’s what I mean when I say I don’t know.”

“My boundaries are wherever we set them between the five of us, for everyone’s peace and enjoyment. As far as my expectations, this is almost as new to me as it is to you. I have no
expectations of you. Wait a moment, actually. That’s not true.”

He stood to still Thorin’s pacing, sliding his fingers up his chest and throat before settling behind his neck. He pulled Thorin forward for a long, filthy kiss.

Seductively, Bilbo said, “I expect you to give in, to give yourself over, to get out of your head and be in tune with your body instead. Accept—and give—whatever indulgences might please you, whatever might thrill you, whatever makes you groan the loudest and shudder the most. These pleasures are not for only me, Kili, Fili, and Bofur to hoard exclusively between the four of us. Take some for your own…or allow yourself to receive some. Matters not as long as you come at the end.”

Trembling with desire, Thorin’s voice turned breathy. “But how do I know where to start? What if…what if some touches aren’t wanted?”

“You’ll figure it out as you go—and fairly easily, I would wager. Your signals carry further than you might guess, and once you’ve opened yourself to possibility, you’ll be able to read signals easier, too.”

“And you?”

“And me what?”

“You’re going to be okay with me, erm, ‘opening up to possibility?’ We’re married.”

“Kili is married to me, too, and though it took a lot of work and a couple embarrassing incidents, I’m now allowed the divine indulgence of watching him experience all manner of ecstasy with you, Fee, and Bo, much of which I also get to partake in. I’m wed to both of you, yet I’ve had you and Kee in my bed fingering or sucking the other dry. As far as the others go, if you’re considering allowing the touch of Bo or Fee, there’s little I can say…other than I wholly endorse their talents.”

Simply hearing their names aloud in such context sent Thorin’s face straight to crimson.

“No, I didn’t mean--I didn’t say…anyone…specifically,” he spluttered.

Seeing Thorin’s struggle reddening across his cheeks, Bilbo kindly didn’t point out that since Kili’s touch was already welcome on Thorin’s body, that only left two people they could have possibly been discussing.

“You are safe with the four of us, Thorin, regardless of how you choose or do not choose to interact with us on an intimate level, and not choosing is indeed very much an option if you don’t feel the attraction. When the door closes and the clothes come off, you’re safe, secure, and limited only by your own comfort and boundaries, whatever you shall decide them to be.”

Overcome with relief and love, Thorin whispered to Bilbo in Sindarin, “All my heart, all my body, all my soul, all my life, my crown, and the mountain itself. Yours.”

“Where did you pick that up?” asked Bilbo, chest fluttering like mad at hearing that particular, familiar sentiment coming out of Thorin’s mouth in an elvish tongue.

“Our friends.”

Bilbo’s chest fluttered again. “But why?”

“Because I knew it would surprise you and put that delighted sparkle in your eyes, along with that beautiful grin. I wanted to see that look, so I asked Daerbes to teach me how to say a couple things.”

Bilbo silently recalled the Thorin who had once practically spat at the mention of elves and marveled.

As if he heard Bilbo’s thoughts, Thorin said, “So much is changing and in so many ways. The Thorin who first wrote those words to you would not know me right now; I believe that to be a good thing because I appreciate how I’ve grown. I do not recognize you as the Bilbo who first read
that letter, either, and though there was a time that threatened me terribly, now I understand and appreciate you had to be free to change, too. We’ve found a way, somehow in the midst of this, to grow back together, only now it is no longer a matter of who is making a sacrifice for the other to bloom. We’re both blooming.”
“Like the garden you built for me.”
Thorin kissed Bilbo’s knuckles. “Like your garden.”

They heard stirring on the other side of the door.

“I think the others are waking up,” Thorin said.
“We’d better let them know we have neither absconded or been abducted.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you!
Many, many, MANY things need to be discussed by daylight to get and keep Thorin, Fili, Kili, Bilbo, and Bofur on fair footing (with as little fallout as possible).

When Thorin and Bilbo rejoined the others, the only things left in the bed were broken, crushed flower remnants from crowns and anklets falling to pieces the night before.

A handful of smiles were exchanged among the quintet—some shy, some sweet, and at least one a little embarrassed. However, Fili and Kili only had seething glares to share with each other.

“I thought it might have been the two of you who had closed the door!” Bofur teased Thorin and Bilbo.
Thorin replied, “We weren’t doing what you think.”
“Indeed, I’m not doing much of any of that for a few more hours at the very least,” added Bilbo. Grinning, Bofur said, “No large matter. I just needed something out of our room to wear to go looking for food. I would have knocked if my stomach got too rowdy.”

Fili followed Bofur into their suite as Thorin gathered up his own clothes from the night before.

“I don’t think I thought this through well enough,” he said, shaking out a fancy jacket. “Maybe I can get back to my room before anyone sees me.”
“At this late hour?” Bilbo scoffed. “Even if half the mountain has the day-afters, we’ve slept in enough that there will still be people in the halls.”
“It probably wouldn’t be as big of a deal as you’re imagining,” Kili said. “The royal wing isn’t as heavily traveled as the public areas, for one. Also, because half the mountain might actually have the day-afters from the same event you went to, even if you’re seen, they probably wouldn’t think anything of it if you had fallen asleep in your outfit.”
Thorin pointed out, “Ah, but it would raise questions if it was supposed I fell asleep outside of my own bed.”
Fili appeared in the doorway. “I’ll bet between Bo and myself, we’ve got something that will fit you and be respectable enough to at least get to your room.”
“If not all the way through the day,” Bofur said.

While they were all getting dressed (and dumping out Fili’s and Bofur’s wardrobe to find things for Thorin to wear), Bilbo couldn’t help but notice the tense, angry looks the brothers continued to shoot each other…when they were in the same room at all. Though Bilbo was not amused by the conflict itself, he had to inwardly chuckle: Kili was the only person he had met in his entire life who could actually sulk at someone.

Bofur pointedly cleared his throat, catching Bilbo’s eye and subtly gesturing with his chin in the direction of the door.

Bilbo said, “Thorin, since we’ve far missed breakfast, maybe we can swing by your room to get..."
you whatever you want to wear for the rest of today and then after, you can help Bo and I figure out how to get us all fed?”

Furrowing his brow, Thorin stared at him in utter confusion, as they all knew at this point how to go about getting food at nearly any time of day without his leave. Bilbo stared back, widening his eyes and tilting his head for emphasis. Bofur let out another quick cough, at which point Thorin caught on.

“Quite right,” he recovered. “Not sure how the kitchens are operating after what we put them through yesterday. Let’s go see.”

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Halfway down the hall, Thorin asked, “This is only because they are fighting?” Bilbo and Bofur replied in unison, “Yes.” “And you think it is a good idea to leave them alone? Now? I’ve lived with them for decades—I’ve always found it is best if they decide to resolve their conflicts in their own time.” “Ah, but you haven’t lived with them as,” Bilbo glanced around to make sure no one was listening, “lovers. This is how we do things in Bag End.” “Force the conflict?” “Those two fools want to talk to each other right now.” Bofur explained. “They’re more hurt than mad.” “Right,” Thorin said, skeptical. Despite what Bilbo and Bofur might think they had learned about their husbands, he hadn’t a single doubt in his mind: his nephews were about to have a screaming row because they hadn’t done enough brooding yet. “So, do we know why they are fighting?”

*****

Fili knew an excuse to leave when he heard one; he had practically written the book on such ploys. Since he hadn’t been the one plotting, he figured Kili had asked Bilbo to come up with a ruse in order to get Fili alone to explain and apologize. With this in mind, Fili busied himself putting away all the clothes that hadn’t worked for Thorin, waiting for Kili to come make his inevitable plea for amends. As the seconds ticked into (many) minutes, the less likely it seemed that Kili was one bit sorry, and the more angry Fili got about the prior night all over again. When the last garment was folded, Fili was so filled with renewed rage and betrayal that he shook.

He stomped over to the adjoining door and flung it open, shouting, “How could you fucking do that to me?” Kili stalked across the room, crowding Fili backwards across the threshold to his own side of the door.

“How could I do that to you? I should slap your face for asking me something so hurtful and ridiculous, and it is taking all my will not to. I think the finer point is how could you do that to me?”

“Do what to you? I didn’t break any promises to my lover last night, not like you!”

“No, you just decided you might help yourself to Thorin’s cock!”

“Yeah, so?”

Kili gritted his teeth and his eyes flashed fire. “Oh, I do hate you sometimes Fili.”

“Wait, no, you don’t get to be mad. I was mad first. What about that could possibly make you mad?”

“Because you told me you didn’t want me tasting him! You wanted that to be something special I kept from him….then you turned around and almost did it yourself!”

“You said you didn’t do that with him, anyway!”
"For you! And I expected if I wasn’t going to, that you weren’t going to, either!"
"Mouthplay isn’t my hang-up like it is yours!"
"Well, it isn’t mine anymore, either! It hasn’t been! I’ve only been holding back because of you!"
Fili took a stunned step backwards, blinking. "Why didn’t you say something?"
"Because you seemed to like having something that he didn’t! I decided to not do that with Thorin or Bo either one because you liked how it was only for you! You even made me promise Thorin wasn’t going to get that from me. You aren’t supposed to be touching him, anyway."
"Wait, what?"
"You didn’t want Thorin touching me at all, remember? Or did you forget the nights we sat up as you worked through how much you hated the thought of us together, which is why I had promised you I’d exclude him from mouthplay to begin with? Which brings up another thing: If you were so arsed about him even touching me, then I don’t know why you would want him touching you, either!"
"But you aren’t me!"
"You weren’t even attracted to him enough for us to even discuss! Yet we spent hours on it when it came to my attraction…and now you’re suddenly so gagging for his prick that you’re just going to swoop down on it without an ounce of discussion? The prick I’m depriving myself of because I thought you needed…oh fuck it. Nevermind. Why am I even bothering?"
"Depriving yourself?" scoffed Fili. "Like you need his come to live?"
"Shut up!"
"You shut up!"
"You bet your arse I’ll shut up. This conversation is over, and so is me sucking your cock from now on!"
"Fine!"
"Fine!" Kili shouted, grabbing the edge of the door and slamming it in Fili’s face.
A voice screamed out from the other side, “Fine!”

****

Thorin still made sure to escort Bilbo and Bofur to the kitchens, as he didn’t like to lie, but as soon as they were sorted, he let them know he was going to see if anyone had yet seen his sister. One of the chefs informed him Dwalin had ordered a table set for a late morning meal in the dining hall; Thorin requested another place setting added.

Though Thorin had despairied for a while about the feasibility of coming forth with his marriage, the conversation he had shared with Dís the night before her wedding gave him wonderfully renewed hope. Her unexpectedly critical views of old traditions might very well mean now that the wedding was over, Thorin’s life of secrecy could at last be over, too--maybe as soon as he had a moment to speak with her alone!

Adding in the pleasurable night spent in the bedroom, Bilbo’s interesting discussion that morning, and the good fortune of not having seen hide nor hair of Regnad at all that day, Thorin was so joyous he practically skipped as he walked.

As luck had it, he ran into Dwalin and Dís on his way to the dining hall. Thorin lifted Dís off the ground, whirled her around, and pressed a kiss to her cheek. Turning to Dwalin, he placed his hands firmly on his shoulders and then--BAM--thumped their foreheads together.

“Well, I must say! Someone doesn’t seem to have any trace of the day-afters!” Dís said.
Dwalin was still stunned—not from the conk on the noggin, but more from the fact that Thorin had rarely ever engaged in it. “Right, and what possessed you to do that?”
“That’s how you and Balin like to greet each other. We’re well and truly brothers now, right?”
Dwalin beamed, “I suppose we are at that.”
“What brings on this fine mood?” asked Dís.
“I’m,” Thorin filled his lungs with air and exhaled with a wide, open grin. “I’m happy. I’m just really, blissfully happy.”

Thorin gallantly offered his arm to Dís and she took it, both walking away without seeing the falter in Dwalin’s grin.

*****

Kili sat against the headboard, holding a pillow while he sulked. He hoped that if Bilbo and Fili had intentionally left them alone to fight, they would at least have the decency to bring back some of the food they used as an excuse.

There was a soft knock on the adjoining door.

“Kee?”

He didn’t answer.

“Kee? I know you’re still in there. Look, I’m sorry. I thought about what you said and I—I didn’t know you didn’t want my mouth on him, and I didn’t know you’d been personally avoiding it just for my happiness. Kee, please. Let us talk, okay?”

To Fili’s relief, the adjoining door opened. Kili stood before him, pouting.

“I didn’t know,” Fili began gently. “I hadn’t realized you had a desire for that with Thorin. I wish you had told me.”

“Why, so you could have another crisis?”

“Yes, actually, so I could work it out for myself, discuss it with you, and hear you reassure me that wanting that from him didn’t mean what we do with each other is any less special.”

“It wouldn’t be. It isn’t.”

“I swear I didn’t know I was going to want to touch him. I also had no idea you were going to snap like that.”

“You made me wait. You made me wait so long, but you were willing to let him inside you so fast.”

“Because I promised you—no more being afraid. No more running away from intimacy. I was thinking of my promise to you when I did it!”

“You were thinking of me when you put your tongue on his prick. How obvious and silly of me to miss.”

“Don’t be like that.”

“It’s just—” Kili’s voice cracked. “It brought up all these feelings I had buried or had tried to explain away. Bee made me wait months for what he had once given Thorin the same night they had confessed their love. After that, he let you and Bo put your fingers inside him your first night together, too, even though there had been a time he had made me wait and wait for that. Then—knowing we were bonded and that yours had already come full to life in me—you made me wait for you to have some sort of existential crisis before you’d put your mouth on me. Meanwhile, Thorin didn’t even have to ask and you were already on your knees. It is hurtful; it makes me feel like something is wrong with me. On top of everything else, I have been Thorin’s lover longer and I’ve been wanting him, but I had made you a promise. To see you doing the very thing I’ve been denying myself and all because of you… it was like someone hit me in my stomach. I honestly haven’t even gotten to the point of thinking about whether I’m more jealous of you or him because I’ve been too busy dealing with how fucking terrible the rest of it feels first.”

Fili reached out and stroked Kili’s cheek. “I…I didn’t know. Half of that I never knew and the other half, I had no idea you were still carrying it around with you.”
“Well, it seems I am.”
“I…oh, Kee. I can’t believe I’ve been so short-sighted. Well, I suppose I can believe it, but I’m certainly ashamed of myself. You know all that making you wait had nothing to do with anything being wrong with you, right? For Bee, for me…it was all—all—only because we didn’t want to do it wrong and wind up hurting you. It is unfortunate we both hurt you anyway, despite our best efforts. I promise,” Fili took his hands. “I promise no more weirdness, no more judgements, and no more restrictions. You deserve pleasure as much as any of us, and it is up to you to decide who you want to share yourself with. You are a mighty gift, you know. If you want to taste Thorin, or Bofur, or if you—”

Fili had to stop and take a breath, because even the words tightened his chest.

“-If you want to play my game, feel him inside you—or Bo, too, for that matter—I promise to you I will not make a fuss.”
“That won’t bother you?”
“Whether it does or not, I have a lot to make up for. My jealousy of Thorin will pass.”
“What about Bo? Is there jealousy there?”
“It is different with Bo. I believe someone I once knew likened a similar situation to you being practically me, anyway, given how close you and I are.”
“Be serious.”
“I am. You two already do what you do, and you’ve welcomed the developments with myself and Bee with unmatched enthusiasm. How could I be any different?”
Sighing, Kili said, “I don’t know…I don’t have any of those plans, anyway.”
“And I didn’t plan to fall in love with Bee, nor did I plan to make love to him last night, yet here we are.”
“I thought that’s what I saw! So did you-?” Kili made an obscene gesture with his hands.
“-No, we didn’t bond. Anyway, Kee, I honestly am sorry I was jealous of you and Thorin. I suppose it was indeed me in the wrong, though I swear I wasn’t trying to be malicious with my lack of consideration.”
“I know you weren’t,” replied Kili reassuringly.
Fili rubbed the back of his neck. “I don’t know what had gotten into me with that, anyway.”
“From my vantage point, it looked like it was going to be his cock.”
Rolling his eyes, Fili said, “You brat. I mean, I hadn’t expected…had never dreamed…but, well, you were there.”
“I have no idea what I’m doing, and I’m pretty sure neither do you, Bee, Bo, or least of all Thorin. I don’t think any of us had guessed anything like this would happen.”
“No, I truly hadn’t.”
Kili sat on the bed, smoothing his hand through his hair. “I’ve been thinking a lot—about everything—and I keep coming back to the disparity between the winter we had and the winter he had. Although we had some thorny patches on our way, we also had so much love, so much sex, and so many wonderful days and nights. Meanwhile, Thorin was here holding onto his faith at night and nothing more, dealing with not only the loneliness but also the pressure of being king. As if that wasn’t enough to drive any dwarf to the brink, he endured the horror of not only being harassed, but of not being believed, of being afraid, and of being isolated. I cannot bear to think of what he went through, and yet I can’t get it out of my head. He possesses more strength than I had ever guessed!”

Kili shook his head, needing a moment to collect himself. Fili sat next to him, taking his hand. Wiping his eyes, Kili continued.

“Now we’re here and I’m stunned how understanding and open he has been. That he is taking his clothes off not only in front of Bee and myself, but also making himself vulnerable in front of you and especially Bo, someone who used to be his nemesis…I cannot speak for anyone else, but I
think about what he endured and how I personally feel about him and, well, I’m willing to give him whatever he is open to receiving. I want him to feel safe, feel affection, feel pleasure, and have some wonderful days and nights of his own.”

“A part of me thinks about this winter like you do, that looks at him and wants to give comfort and joy and maybe some filthy delight, too, if he wishes it. Maybe that’s part of why I got on my knees. I don’t know,” Fili trailed off, shrugging. “Which reminds me, I’m going to have to talk to him about last night, I suppose.”

Kili furrowed his brow. “About kissing him?”

“About Bee.”

Kili frowned, confused. “Why’s that?”

“I didn’t tell Thorin ahead of time I was going to make love to Bilbo.”

“To be fair, you didn’t tell me either.”

“Yes, but you and I have had the discussion many times before. In fact, back before I got married, there was that one day you practically begged me to have him right in front of you. Thorin and I have skirted around it, and maybe Bee hinted it could happen when we explained the game to Thorin, but I never got his permission the way Bo did. I owe him…an explanation, or maybe a chance to yell at me…something, I don’t know.”

Kili decided there might not be a better time to broach the other subject that had been on his mind for a while…even if it started a new fight.

“There’s something more, Fee. Knowing what Thorin endured without us, I will not leave him alone here again. Not just this autumn--never.”

Fili’s eyes widened and he sucked in a breath to speak. Kili cut him off.

“I know you wanted our quartet forever, but Bee told you, I told you, even Bo told you, that Thorin was part of the package with Bee. It might have been a consideration at one point to live with him only part of the time, but knowing what I do now, I…I just can’t, Fee. We might still go back and forth, Shire to Erebor, but this past winter will be the last season of his life he will have to endure alone, I swear upon my blood. I desperately hope your connection with me and your love for Bee is enough for you to be a part of it, too, because I need you fiercely, madly, immensely by my side.”

“I wasn’t going to argue with you, fool, though I’m intensely aroused by the passion you’re showing--I only hope you defend me with such fire in your veins! What I was going to say was that I had already reached the conclusion myself that if a quintet is what it takes to protect Thorin from further heartache, then that’s what we shall do. I did not lie, though—it would cost my happiness to have to return to Erebor permanently, though I don't think I'm alone in feeling that.”

“No, you're not.”

“So we will have to work it out how we will be able to still live back West while also occasionally returning to Erebor as needed. Seems simple enough, I suppose.”

“Famous last words,” laughed Kili.

Fili joked, “We should probably stop saying things like that, right?”

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After they ate, Thorin had hoped to chat with Dís alone, but Dwalin begged a meeting before Thorin had gotten around to ask.

“There’s a matter of importance I want to discuss with you,” he told Thorin.

“Oh, Dwalin, it is the day after our wedding!” lamented Dís. “Must you work now?”

Sweetly, Dwalin said, “I never said it was work, my love, merely that I wanted to speak to our brother.”
Grinning back in delight, Dís said, “Well, in that case, how can I possibly refuse?”
“Okay,” Thorin said, “but you and I should also take a special sibling meeting of our own later.”
Dís kissed him and Dwalin both on their cheeks, beaming. “Oh, my strong, brave dwarrows! I’m the happiest soul in the mountain today! Don’t take long, Dwalin!”

Dwalin led Thorin to his private office chambers, locking the door and looking around for spare ears before addressing Thorin.

“What happened last night after we left the wedding?” Dwalin said, crossing his arms.

An image of Kili’s lips wrapped around his cock flashed across Thorin’s mind.

“Nothing,” he said.

“Nothing, you say? Nothing that turned you into a different dwarf almost overnight?”
“I’m not a different dwarf.”

“Oh no?” Dwalin sniffed. “How do you feel right now?”

“I told you, I’m happy.”

“Exactly! And when was the last time you were happy? No, this assuredly has Bilbo Baggins written all over it. Please tell me you didn’t spend the night sucking him and Kili off in their marriage bed.”

“They sucked me off, actually,” deadpanned Thorin.

“Thorin!”

“Well, dammit, Dwalin! I’ve had enough of your snide comments!”

“Oh no, you don’t get to ‘dammit Dwalin’ me! And I’m way past snide—I’m well into outright angry and disgusted. Are you out of your fucking mind, Thorin? Whatever you were playing at in the Shire was one thing, but brazenly admitting to fooling around with them right here in Erebor? I cannot have this. I forbid it.”

“You have the right to forbid nothing. You’re Captain of the Elite Guard, not Captain of My Tadger!”

“When your tadger is endangering Erebor and the well-being of my family, I bloody well am!”

“The well-being of your family? Hardly not!”

“Absolutely so! I cannot have my best friend having it off with my son by marriage, especially when you are his uncle.”

“Look,” Thorin tried to diffuse the situation, which was rising rapidly out of hand, “that’s not even why I’m happy. I made my flip comment about Bilbo and Kili to deter you from being nosy and making assumptions, not to start a shouting debate about whether I have the right in the first place. If you must know, I’m happy today because now that you’re married, I’m finally free to openly, honestly explore my feelings for Bilbo—something which, by the way, would legitimize half the issue you’re angry about in the first place.”

“What in Durin’s Sacrifice does me being married have to do with you and Bilbo?”

“I didn’t want to cause strife or distractions leading up to the wedding, but—”

Thorin paused. How much of Dís’s mind did Dwalin really know? Would it be betraying her trust to let him know she also had spent quiet hours questioning the validity of the stauncher traditions?

“-but Dís and I had a conversation during our Pair night that cast my prior concerns about acceptance in a new light. With the stress of the wedding now passed, I’m ready to explain to her about the future I want with my love.”

“New light? What new light could she possibly have cast that would make it okay to encourage Bilbo to openly violate his vows to Kili? That would make her okay with it? Have you forgotten she is carrying our child? Given all improbable circumstances for her to be able to conceive and who knows what issues she might have along the way, there is no way I’m going to let you drop something so upsetting in her lap that it could possibly jeopardize the birth of our daughter.”
“What? No, I—“
“-I don’t give a blessed fuck about your conscience or your great love affair--brother be damned, you’re not going to put Dis or my child at risk. Swallow your perversions back down and hide them away in the shadows like you’ve been doing however long. Both your family and Erebor herself will be better for it.” Dwalin spat a litany of curses in Khuzdul. “I knew this whole situation of yours was going to cause trouble.”

Furious and deeply wounded, Thorin had no additional argument; he simply wanted to be anywhere but there. He moved to leave, but Dwalin’s hand at his chest halted him firmly.

“I mean it,” Dwalin said, quiet yet forceful. “Don’t breathe a word of this nonsense to her. Don’t test my allegiance between you and my child, because no matter how much I love you, you will still lose.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much!
More talks continue to happen in the wake of what happened last night.

As Kili had hoped, Bilbo and Bofur did return with a food plan, though they were minus Thorin for the time being. Thorin’s absence concerned Fili (thinking perhaps he might have been avoiding him), but Bilbo dispelled his anxiety when he mentioned Thorin merely wanted to seek out the newlyweds.

After a meal and a wash up, Fili intimated he’d like have Bofur to himself. Bilbo had already decided he would give an unquestioning and wide berth to any need or hint among the others for privacy; more conversations doubtless needed to happen after such an eventful evening. He only hoped they would all go as well as his discussion had gone that morning with Thorin.

As the couples parted company, Kili whispered to Bofur, “It might be good to have one of our talks today as well.”

Bofur nodded his agreement. “Meet me at the rooms later, I’ll sort something,” he whispered back.

“So yeah, that’s what happened,” Fili finished.

He peered anxiously at Bofur, rolling in his lips and inwardly bracing for Bofur’s reaction to the news of Fili’s attempted seduction of Thorin.

Nodding slowly and smoothing his tongue over his teeth, Bofur asked. “How was it?”

Fili blinked twice. “‘How was it?’ That’s your reaction? ‘How was it?’”

“What’s my reaction supposed to be?”

“I don’t know! How about ‘what possibly possessed you?’ or ‘how could you, he’s my rival?’ or ‘that’s disgusting, you’re related?’”

“Hold on,” Bofur said sternly. “I’m going to stop you right there. Do you think I believe you and Kee are disgusting?”

“No.”

“Do you think I believe Kee and Thorin are disgusting?”

“No. I don’t know. No.”

“Do you think those things are disgusting?”

Fili hesitated. “Personally, I don’t, no, but I know some people—”

“I’m not talking about some people. You. Do you? Because if you don’t, then you shouldn’t think I do, either. If you do, well, we’ve got bigger problems than me worrying about you kissing Thorin.”

“I’m just—Thorin and I don’t do that. Kee and Thorin never did that. Maybe I do still feel some shame of the forbidden when it comes to Thorin, in particular…but not apparently not enough to control my curiosity or keep my tongue in my mouth.”

“Or maybe the lure of the forbidden drives the arousal a little?” asked Bofur.

Fili covered his face in embarrassment. “I think I’d rather you be angry than analytical about this!”

“I just think things like that matter…especially when you’re going to try to project them on me. I don’t think what you did was disgusting. Puzzling and interesting? Maybe. Surprising? Definitely.
But not disgusting, so don’t try to put those judgmental words in my mouth. I’ll put up with a lot from you, my golden one, but I won’t put up with that.”
“I’m sorry, Bo. I didn’t mean to imply anything offensive.”
“I know. So…what did possess you, anyway? Also, I really do want to know how it was.”

*****

Kili peered through the door that adjoined his room to Fili’s. “Hello?”
“Oi, I’m here,” Bofur said.
“Did everything go well with whatever Fee wanted to discuss?”
“Aye, things are fine.”
“Good.”

At that, Kili closed the door behind him and started removing his clothes. *So it is going to be one of those kind of talks* Bofur thought slyly, wasting no time taking off his own.

“Where’s Bee?” he asked.
“Checking in on the other hobbits. He wanted to make sure they had a good time at the wedding, compare stories, and share reviews of the food.”
“He’s quite thoughtful, isn’t he?”
“Yes he is. He is concerned about them, being so far away from home. I let him know I was meeting up with you. What did Fee say when you sent him out?”
“I didn’t have to send him anywhere, though he probably wouldn’t have minded had I asked. He left on his own accord a few minutes ago to try to find Thorin. Seems our fearless leader caused himself quite a stir last night, didn’t he?”
“I’m guessing you heard I’m no longer bothering to entertain my rule with Thorin.”
“I happened to witness a little bit of it while it was happening, though I surely heard about it, too.”
Kili huffed out a laugh. “I have no doubt.”
“Fee said the two of you talked this morning, though, and things are okay with you now?”
“Yes, as okay as they can be. It was quite a fight.”
“He didn’t go into detail describing it, though I can only imagine.”
Kili climbed on the bed, stretching out on his side and resting his head on his hand. “There’s really only one last element with that situation surrounding who is and is not allowed in my mouth left unresolved.”
“Oh no…is Bilbo upset?” Bofur asked, joining him on the blanket and mirroring his pose.

Kili shook his head, a smile creeping across his face.

“Surely Thorin has no compunction!”

Kili shook his head again, smile growing wider. “‘Unresolved’ doesn’t have to mean ‘upset.’”

He leaned in and kissed Bofur, deepening it with a moan when Bofur clasped the back of his head. He shifted, resting his body on top of Bofur’s, kissing down his neck to his chest.

“Kee,” he said with a sharp inhale of surprise. “Am—I the element?”
“If you’re willing to be persuaded to let me taste you.”
“Wait,” rasped Bofur, gently stilling Kili’s descent by his shoulders. “You’ve been thinking about this? Did you know when you asked me to meet with you that you wanted to, erm, resolve me?”
Kili rested his hands and his chin on Bofur’s chest, gazing into his eyes. “You’ve known and kept secret my wish to have Thorin in my mouth for so long—even brilliantly using it to get me off rather spectacularly on more than one occasion—and in case there had ever been any doubt, I wanted to make it clear at the first possible moment that I’ve yearned for you the same way. Make no mistake, Bo: I’ve desperately wanted to wrap my lips around you. I hope I haven’t merely been
imagining that you’ve wanted me to just as much.”
“You know I have; I’ve told you outright.”
Kili hummed a self-conscious laugh. “Okay, well, I have to wonder what this hesitation is, then? Is
now a bad time? Did I miscalculate?”
“No, not at all. I only wanted to verify I wasn’t mistaking this fantasy coming to life in my bed for
something else before I allowed myself luxuriate in it. Please, continue.”

Grinning, Kili resumed trailing kisses down Bofur’s trunk.

“One more question, a quick one,” Bofur said softly, peering down at him, cradling Kili’s face with
his palm. “Why this afternoon? Here? Why not tonight?”
“Because some things are just for us, Bo.”

Closing his eyes, Bofur groaned as Kili’s words touched him—mind, body, and soul—shooting
both erotic chills and smooth warmth through his extremities at once. Kili’s tongue touched his
cock next and the mind-body-soul pattern repeated, this time stronger. Kili teased him until Bofur’s
entire body trembled before he finally, blissfully took him in.

“I’ve dreamed about this,” Bofur whispered. “We always talked about your desire for Thorin, but I
wanted this for myself so badly I couldn’t stand it.”
Kili pulled up along his length, freeing his mouth to momentarily reply, “I thought about it, too—
every time Bee or Fee had their lips on you, I wondered what it would be like if mine were on you
instead.”
“Why didn’t you tell me?”
“It seemed too cruel…for both of us. So many times I wanted to simply—”

Kili illustrated his point by engulfing him again, causing Bofur to arch in delight. This time he
went to work on him in earnest. Bofur’s sheer size made some of his usual tricks and teases
difficult, but this afternoon he found he was a little impatient himself. Drawing it out too long
would mean waiting for that glorious (almost legendary) release and the connection Kili had
craved…and he had waited long enough.

“Cor, I didn’t know that sort of thing ran in a family,” Bofur marveled. “Both of you lads could
suck the soul out of a body!”
“Maybe that’s what I want,” Kili whispered.

A groan rumbled through the air, the thrill that spurred it making Bofur’s thighs twitch.

Kili could tell the final build was growing by the way Bofur’s muscles tensed and his fingers
pressed into his skin. His own cock throbbed and when Bofur finally spilled across his tongue, Kili
moaned as though he was the one finishing. The sensation he had been anticipating shuddered
through him instantly and it felt as though some ages-old longing had been fulfilled. Suddenly, he
fervently needed to come.

Bofur noticed Kili stroking himself and urged him up until he straddled his chest. Kili finished
strikingly fast, with Bofur straining upwards to swallow what he could and Kili pitching forward to
help.

Panting, Kili collapsed in Bofur’s arms. They kissed frantically at first, then gradually slowed until
they were simply holding each other. With Kili’s head tucked under Bofur’s chin, Bofur stroked
Kili’s hair and their breathing fell in line.

“That was unexpected,” Kili sighed, happily.
“‘Wonderful’ was the term I was going to use myself. What makes you say ‘unexpected?’”
“I don’t know,” Kili giggled. “If I knew, then it would be expected.”
“Come on.”
“Really though, I don’t know how I thought it was going to be, but this was so much better.”
“Can I ask you something?” Bofur asked.
“That’s what these private talks are for, right?”
“Right,” Bofur said. “What made you decide last night was the right time for Thorin?”

Kili hesitated because he didn’t know how much Bofur knew about the whole of Fili’s involvement in what had transpired.

“No,” Bofur answered. “Fee told me he attempted to seduce him,” prompted Bofur. “Was that part of it?”
Looking up to meet his gaze, Kili said, “Yes, it was. For a moment, it had really seemed as though Fee might get a taste before I did and the mere possibility of that being the case infuriated me. At that moment, my gut told me I could only be so terribly upset by it if putting my mouth on Thorin meant more to me than just the physical act. That I had waited on behalf of Fili that whole time only to wind up in line behind him, if not to still be expected by him to continue abstaining…well, you saw how I handled my indignance.”
“And after you put your mouth on Thorin? Any realizations then?”
“That it really, really wasn’t just about the sex.”
Bofur smiled at him with warm eyes, kind yet knowing.
“You already knew?” asked Kili.
“I had an inkling when you were willing to tell your brother outright that Thorin was an unnegotiable condition in our arrangement, but I didn’t actually know until I saw the two of you kiss—truly kiss—for the first time the other night.”
“Was I obvious?”
“Let’s just say it was a good thing you and Fee had come to your specific conclusions prior to that,” Bofur huffed a laugh and glanced off to the side before meeting Kili’s eyes again. ”And possibly, maybe I was a little jealous, too, watching you melt into him like you hadn’t kissed him in a week when it had only been an hour.”
“You were jealous over me?”
“Not enough to want to ruin your good time, and I do mean it when I say I’m glad you got out of your own way when it came to something you’ve obviously wanted to do for ages now, but yeah, maybe I was.”

Kili toyed with the hair on Bofur’s chest as he considered Bofur’s confession.

“It isn’t merely sex with you, either,” he finally said. “You know that, right?”
“I know, or we never would have started anything in the first place. There had to be something there to begin doing the things we’ve done; we’re not the type of folks who separate the heart and the body very well.”
Kili giggled. “No, I suppose we’re not. I don’t think any of us are.”

*****

Thorin went to the Grand Overlook, scowling that the beautiful, sunny day didn’t match his newly dour, rainy mood. He had been so elated that morning! He should have known such utter joy couldn’t last long.

He sat near the garden and buried his head in his hands. *Dwalin couldn’t be right, he just couldn’t.*
It seemed obvious to Thorin that Dís had kept her private beliefs secret from her new husband just as she had kept them all those years from Thorin. Regardless, Thorin would never compromise Dís’s heath and risk the princess they seemed so sure she carried. If he thought for a moment it would hurt either of them, he would not dream of confessing.
He had been up there long enough to see a notable shifting of the shadows made by the sun when he heard the door.

“I hoped I might find you up here,” Fili said.

Feeling mild panic, Thorin asked, “Wait, am I supposed to be somewhere else right now?”

“No. I didn’t have anything special I needed to be doing at the moment and,” he took a fortifying breath, “I wanted to talk about last night.”

“That might be prudent, I suppose.”

“I played my game with Bilbo,” Fili blurted out, explaining rapidly as he went. “Or however it is you prefer to think of sex without an imprint. Perhaps you even saw us, or maybe he told you when you talked this morning. We didn’t check with you first and I—well, if I’m being honest, I was not exactly thinking of anyone’s feelings at the time besides mine and his. Any road, I owed it to you to tell you face to face and if there are consequences, I’m ready to discuss them.”

“Oh Fili,” Thorin began. “Perhaps before you had arrived in Erebor, I would consider what happened with Bilbo last night to be an offense, but let’s just say it wasn’t the biggest surprise… not like, for example, learning how your kiss tastes.”

Blushing, Fili lost some of the bravery he had summoned for the speech about Bilbo. He glanced away. “I’m not sure what to say about that.”

“Perhaps you could start with why? What made you do it?”

“Could we maybe just please go back to discussing me and Bilbo instead? Perhaps you could do some shouting?” joked Fili nervously.

Thorin reached out and touched his arm. “Please,” he said softly.

Fili swallowed hard. “I don’t know what to say about that.”

“Exhaling resignedly, Thorin said, “You’re right; it leads to another half dozen quite handily. Still, the short answer is still an answer. I won’t press you to explain any further.”

“No, you asked, and if I were in your boots, I’d want to know more.” Fili fidgeted as he attempted to assemble a coherent explanation. “Having you in bed with us has been strange, but not in the uncomfortable way I had thought. Well, sometimes a little uncomfortable, but also kind of interesting—and unexpectedly exciting. Last night, I don’t know, I got curious enough to touch you, and touching you made me want to, well, you were there, you know the rest.”

“It surprised me that you were moved to kiss me at all, but I was more surprised by how much I seemed to want it. Things are…well, they’re just different in your bedroom with the five of us. In there, when we’re all undressed, I don’t know—I don’t feel like we are who we are out here in the sunlight. I know at the very least, I’m bolder, braver…and considerably more curious than I had anticipated. It is new to me, but I’m doing my best to be more open to the experience.”

“So you’re not uncomfortable with me now?” asked Fili. “Even though we’re out here in the sunlight?”

“No, especially not now that we’ve talked.”

“And later?”

“I suppose we’ll see how we feel when we’re naked,” Thorin demurred. “So, are things okay with your brother now?”

“How did you know about that?”

“Fili, I know what the two of you look like when you’re not getting along.”

“No, I mean—erm, do you know why?”

“Bofur said the two of you get a little territorial, which seemed unlikely to me because you’ve always been uncommonly generous about sharing between yourselves your whole life.”

Fili exhaled sharply, looking up at the sky. “Yeah, well, the issue of sharing each other isn’t one that came up a lot back then.”

“Okay, I’m lost.”
Gaze landing on Thorin, Fili explained, “Kili and I had some misunderstood issues about what it meant to be lovers and what intimate experiences, if any, were meant to be kept exclusive between us.”

Thorin’s eyes grew wide in realization. “Mahal’s grace! You are the reason he had given himself restrictions…and last night…oh!”

“It is okay,” Fili calmed him. “You didn’t do anything wrong. None of us did, really. Kee and I abruptly realized we hadn’t exactly made certain things clear with each other. Some expectations were high and others were outright wrong, but we had a good talk and things are okay now.”

Thorin quirked a knowing grin. “You two screamed your heads off at each other when they left you alone, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Doors were slammed?”

“And walls were kicked. We settled down, though, and when we did, we worked it out like we always do.”

Thorin’s grin faded wistfully. “I guess Bilbo and Bofur know you better than I thought. I would have come up with an excuse to separate you two for a while until you cooled down and found each other on your own to talk it out, but they insisted the other way was better.”

“Your way is the way that works best for us by far, actually,” Fili said. “So it seems to me you know us pretty well yourself.”

Thorin’s smile brightly returned, this time tinged with pride.

“Look, since we’re talking about last night,” said Fili, “Suppose I told you that now that I’ve done it, I don’t think the game isn’t going to be enough for me with Bilbo? Suppose…suppose I told you I might want more?”

Humming thoughtfully, Thorin said, “I suppose if you told me that, I’d be offended you thought me so blind.”

“What?”

“I might not have seen it coming the first time with Kili, but damned if I didn’t learn the signs. I’m a little surprised it took you this long to come this close to asking me.”

“Well?”

Thorin pressed his forehead to Fili’s. “Give me a day or three to get used to him being more or less married to Bofur, of all possible dwarves, yeah?”

“Fair enough.”

*****

Kili and Bilbo strolled hand in hand, leisurely making their way to the Grand Overlook, not realizing they had missed Fili and Thorin up there by a handful of minutes.

“I take for granted sometimes how you and I are able to do this openly here,” said Kili, holding up their clasped hands. “Especially when there are those who cannot do the same with you while we are away from home.”

“It is these little things we do in the Shire without a second thought that make me appreciate it more when we're gone.”

Bilbo opened the door, leading them out into the sunshine and taking a deep breath of the fresh air.

“Oh, I do love it up here, though,” he sighed happily.

“I enjoy it as well. It is funny, now that I think about it—I’ve rarely been up here without Thorin at the very least, and you and I have been up here alone even more seldom.”

Kili took something from his pocket and laid it on Yavanna’s shrine.
“What’s that?” Bilbo asked.
“A cookie from the wedding.”
Bilbo tsk-tsked, “You and Thorin are shaming me in front of my own Maker; I’ve hardly left any offerings since I’ve been here.”
“Well, we have a lot to thank Her for,” Kili said with an adoring look. He sat on the bench. “Here, come sit.”

Kili wrapped his arm around Bilbo when he joined him and Bilbo took Kili’s free hand with the other.

“It is funny,” Kili began. “I feel like I’ve talked to everyone about last night except for you.”
“Everyone?” Bilbo said, gently teasing.
“You know what I mean.”
“Okay, so what do you think we need to discuss?”
“That’s the funny part--I don’t necessarily think we need to discuss anything…like we could be fine already without anything being explained. I want to, though. Talking to you helps me clarify my own mind, somehow, and in a way that I find soothing.”
"Then let’s do so. You start.”

Kili explained how he wound up on his knees for Thorin, though his perception of Fili’s role in it was more blemished than it had been in Thorin’s telling. Afterward, he took care to reassure Bilbo he and Fili had talked things out that morning and were on happy footing once again.

Asked Bilbo, “That raises an interesting question: how possessive do you suppose you’re going to be with that situation going forward? Was your reaction to Fee because you wanted Thorin first or was it because you don’t want Fee to touch him at all?”
“Because I wanted to be first, and because it was made all the more egregious by the fact that Fee was the whole reason I was waiting. If it had been Bo on his knees for him, I wouldn’t have been as upset.”
“I hope you mean that,” said Bilbo. “Because Fili might not be done kissing Thorin and your hypothetical scenario with Bo doesn’t seem as far-fetched as it had seemed a couple weeks ago, either.”
“What gossip is this?” asked Kili, intrigued. “Explain!”
“No one has said anything specific, mind you, and this is only me making assumptions, but I had a talk with Thorin today. It started with him telling me about last night, but while we discussed things, I encouraged him to follow his desires when we’re all in bed together. I don’t know what he wants or doesn’t want, as it might go, but Fee has already kissed him once and if the looks he and Bo are shooting each other are any indication, it is possible some kissing might eventually happen there, too.”
“That…I don’t know what to say about that. Are you sure it was Thorin you were talking to?” grinned Kili.
Bilbo gave him a light-hearted shove. “Yes. Did you think he was going to be immune to the charms of you all?”
“I don’t know what I thought. Now that I’m replaying it, minus a few sad or jealous moments we had well guessed, he does seem to be taking all this far better than I thought. I’ll admit, last night he seemed to be pretty into everything before he surrendered you to Bo, and even while you were having Bo first, well, I won’t lie--he seemed into that, too. It only went downhill when it was your turn to be taken.”
“Speaking of taken,” Bilbo said, clearing his throat uncomfortably. “Fee and I have, ah, escalated our intimacy. There’s some still room to go, if you follow me, but new things did happen.”
“I saw a little of it. It’s okay, my jewel. We’ve discussed it many times.”
“I know, but it felt like one of those things I should tell you.”
“Like me telling you about Thorin.”
“Exactly.”
Kili absent-mindedly toyed with one of Bilbo’s curls. “I don’t think I need to keep my mouth exclusive to you and Fee anymore. I mean, I know I’ve already let Thorin in once now, but I think I would like to continue, and as long as I’m continuing with him there’s no point in leaving Bo out, either.”
“If that’s what you want, then I support it. Besides, far as Thorin goes, can’t really shut that gate after the horse got out, anyhow. There’s already a connection.”
“Um,” Kili chewed his lip. “Bo’s horse has gotten out, too.”
“Really? Was that this afternoon when you went to find him?”
“Yes. I didn’t think I would need your permission, but now I feel a little guilty for not telling you.”
“I’ll bet he was surprised!”
Kili giggled. “He was.”
“And delighted too, I’m sure. I think he has hoped for that for a long time.”
“I made sure he was delighted…and I enjoyed it, too. I felt a touch of that soul-link there as well. I guess it isn’t all that surprising, because such things seem to follow when there are feelings, but it took me by surprise how much I welcomed it, like a part of me had been longing for it for an age. So, you’re not mad?”
“Kee, we’ve talked about this. I’m done doing conditions and restrictions—and that goes for any of you. All I ask is that there are no secrets…but that doesn’t mean you needed to consult me before you tasted Thorin or Bofur either one. Telling me now is nice, or showing me later would also be especially fun.”
“While we’re on the subject of speaking and showing, what is it like for you now, being bound to Bofur?”
“Lovely. Exciting. Overdue. I suppose you know already, having what you do with Fee, but Bo’s mark within me in no way lessened yours or Thorin’s. In fact, I think I may have room for one more in time. Fee and I aren’t quite there yet, but it feels inevitable, both in my mind and my heart.”
“Speak for yourself about not being quite there yet: Fee wanted to mark you before he came up with the game. In fact, the whole reason he even came up with the game was because he wanted to mark us both so badly he could taste it. The game was his consolation but make no mistake: he wants you.”
“Bo and I whispered vows like Thorin and I did, and like you and I probably could have if not for all our odd hang-ups—”
“-Your odd hang-ups,” Kili reminded him.
“Okay, fine, yes, my. I was preoccupied at the time with not hurting you, with doing things in a certain order, with following a few traditions, and so on. What our wedding taught me, and what figuring out everything afterward taught me even more, is that the forever business happened when we made the decision to bind ourselves to each other in bed. Fee might be ready to come inside me, but I’m not entirely sure he’s ready to essentially be my husband—not like Thorin, you, and Bo were.”
“You’re not sure he is or not sure you are?”
Bilbo didn’t answer him.
What About Second Reception?

Chapter Summary

A nice party without Regnad...though he still finds a way to haunt it.

Balin had planned a second party after dinner that evening for Dís and Dwalin. It was not as widely cast as the wedding reception itself had been—maybe 50 people were present, all told—but it was still lively and interactive. Bilbo enjoyed dwarven parties of this style, for they reminded him of the merry gatherings at Brandybuck Hall: open space, kegs for refilling one’s mug, and room to mingle, lest one find oneself stuck too long speaking to a fair-weather friend or nosy relation. There were always a pair of eyes to catch across the room or an empty mug one could beg off to fill if the conversation became tedious.

Regnad had been present for the meal but had not lingered. A couple of nights back, Thorin had mentioned Dwalin’s theory that Beorn’s presence might deter Regnad on occasion. Though Bilbo had mostly dismissed it at the time, he couldn’t help but notice Regnad had gone scarce right around the time Beorn had stopped to chat with someone near him. Less guests ultimately meant less buffer for someone like Regnad to appreciably avoid someone of Beorn’s figurative and literal stature.

Regardless of what made him retire from the party early, it had kept Regnad from spoiling the evening for Bilbo and he was glad for it.

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"I need to speak with you lads," Dís pointedly said to Fili and Kili, sweeping her skirt back with authority before sitting down next to them.

"Ah, you know, I think it just might be a good time to go refill my mug," Bofur said, kissing Fili on the head. "If you’ll excuse me."
“Deserter!” Fili called after his retreating form. He turned back to his Mam who had fixed them with a glare.

Fili leaned over to Kili. “Oh, I don’t like that look.”
“Me either,” his brother agreed.
“Nor should you,” Dís said. “What’s this I hear about you bullying poor Regnad before my wedding?”
“What?” the brothers asked in unison.
“When did we bully anyone?” Fili demanded.
Kili said, “Yes...pretty much ever?”
“When you were practicing for Dwalin’s show. I heard all about how you humiliated him in front of a room of people and then threatened him on top of it. All he has ever wanted was your respect and truly? That is how you behave? Had he been anyone at all, I would have been embarrassed to have my sons behave so rudely, but I’m doubly ashamed as he is a respected member of council.”
“He was rude to us, too. Are we not also respected members of council?” Kili asked, indignant.
Fili placed a calming hand on Kili’s back, taking over their defense. “Did the teller of this tale also inform you that your friend derisively inferred that knowing how to fight—and therefore Kili himself—was beneath him? Then, and only then, did Kili allude to the fact that perhaps someone
who thought so little of those who use swords should not be advocating in council to risk their lives.”

With a measuring stare, Dís asked him, “Is that the way of it Kili?”

Fili had often flowered up facts to get his brother out of trouble in the past, but Dís could always count on Kili being a terrible liar when challenged by his Mam. From the time Kili first began to talk, all she had to do to test Fili’s accounts of Kili’s innocence was to ask Kili himself if they were true.

Kili met her stare with a defiant one of his own. “That is the way of it, though Fili paints him kinder than he was to me.”

This was not the answer Dís had expected; moreover, it contradicted her character assessments. Either Kili had somehow learned how to effectively deceive her after some 78 and a half years of folding like a fan under her withering gaze or her best friend had lied to her face about her own son on the eve of her wedding. Neither possibility was favorable to her, nor did either one seem probable.

“What about the threat, Fili?” she asked.
“He called Kee stupid, Mam. Nobody calls Kee stupid.”

The look in Fili’s eyes was genuine, a combination of righteous anger and hurt. It was one she had seen many times in their youths when Fili had fiercely protected his brother from the cruelty of others. It was so viscerally familiar and sad to her, she could feel the pang in her gut as though they were decades younger again.

“I don’t understand it,” she said, more to herself.
“Mam,” Fili said gently. “Regnad is…we do not believe is a good person.”
“You barely know him,” she said defensively.
Aggravated, Kili said, “No, *you* barely know him!”
“Kili!” she said sternly.
He straightened his posture and sharpened his tone. “I cannot claim to understand why he wants to play these games, but the version of him you know is not who he is. I refuse to sit here and be reprimanded for these lies of omission he spit to you—lies you so easily believed--as though I was a dwarfling getting grounded to my room. Excuse me, I need a refill, too.”

Kili stalked away, leaving Fili and Dís both agog.

“So is it true? Neither of you like him at all?” asked Dís.
“We don’t see him the way you do,” Fili explained.
“None of this makes sense to me. He adores the two of you! He’s one of my dearest friends! I just…I don’t understand how the two of you don’t…but then why would he have…yet then you wouldn’t…” she trailed off, grasping the lap of her dress with both fists as though she could snare her thoughts in taffeta to keep them still.

Fili had figured for a while that a confrontation regarding Regnad would be inevitable at some point, though he believed Thorin’s suggestion to use caution was prudent. However, he hadn’t expected Regnad to start in on them quite so soon, and to be brazen enough to do it with their own mother! He couldn’t fault Kili for speaking his mind, but it was not time yet to show their hand. It also gutted him to see that lost, confused look on his mother’s face at a time when she should be nothing but happy. He was going to have to smooth this over somehow, inwardly cursing Regnad for putting him in the position in the first place.

Soothingly, he said, “We can’t tell you who to pick for your friends, but it is our right to defend
ourselves against half-truths. Kili will calm down and though he will likely not regret his actual
defense of himself, he will be incredibly sorry he spoke sharply to you. Please, do not frown so on
such a happy night. These are no thoughts for a post-wedding party, hmm?”

She smiled weakly at him. “Right.”

He kissed her cheek. “Let’s speak of merrier things!”

He changed the subject to tales from the reception itself and soon any crease of worry had left her
face.

* 

Throughout the evening, Dwalin effectively steered Dís away from any chance Thorin had to speak
with her privately. Dís suspected nothing, as she simply saw it as her adoring husband doting on his
brand new wife. Though Thorin was sure those things were also true, the occasional looks of
warning he perceived from Dwalin told a more specific story.

Although Dwalin’s vicious disapproval had blackened Thorín’s spirits earlier, the dour mood could
not last, not entirely. Dwalin had hurt his feelings, but there was far too much else happening in his
personal life that was interesting, mysterious, and wondrous. Speaking with Bilbo that morning had
expanded his mind, his conversation with Fili had given him a boost of self-confidence…and that
was to say nothing of the experiences with Kili and Fili that had spurred the discussions to begin
with. Dwalin’s hateful words (and the small doubts they had renewed about his public future with
Bilbo) could not dim the anticipation of taking off his clothes in Bilbo’s suite at bedtime.

*Let him think he’s pulling off a caper, keeping us from talking about it tonight.* Thorin thought to
himself. *I’ve waited this long to speak to her about it, waiting another day or two won’t kill me.*

As though he had heard Thorin thinking about the five of them, Bofur approached where he stood
and leaned against the wall across from him. Thorin knew by the tell-tale deepening of Bofur’s
dimples that he had something wicked he wished to say.

Bofur glanced from side to side to assure they were alone before he spoke, lest he be overheard.

“I heard you had yourself an interesting night last night.”

“Oh?” replied Thorin, nonchalant. “Mine could have hardly been more interesting than yours.”

“That’s not what people are saying.”

Thorin smirked. “There’s talk?”

“Such talk. All the tongues are wagging about it.”

“Indeed? Pray, and how reputable are these sources? You know the ubiquity of royal gossip. How
do we know this information is at all reliable?”

“Well, this particular wagging tongue was in your mouth last night. You could say he was a key
witness.”

Thorin hummed in mock seriousness, pretending to count on his fingers. “That narrows it down to
three people, then.”

Bofur raised an eyebrow. In return, Thorin lifted both of his, sliding his tongue over his back teeth.
After a moment, both of them broke the silence with raucous laughter. Bofur clinked their mugs.

“You just live to hassle me, don’t you?” said Thorin, taking a mighty pull of his ale.

“I wouldn’t say live, but I do enjoy it from time to time.”

“So, I guess you heard about what transpired, and I’m also guessing this good humour is your way
of letting me know you’re not bothered?”

“I’m glad you had some fun, honestly. I know it couldn’t have been easy for you.”
Thorin glanced about, but there was still no one close enough to pay their conversation any mind.

“I’ve tried to stand in the way of love before and you know what happened? I was the one sleeping alone. No, I’ve finally learned this lesson. I’m not going to say I won’t be jealous or speak up for myself, but I’m finished with trying to tell other people how to feel. I’d much rather,” Thorin peeked around again, leaning in and lowering his voice, “I’d much rather go to bed with the four of you every night and deal with a bit of discomfort now and then than endure the alternative.”

“I rate better than the alternative, well! If that isn’t high praise!” Bofur pinched Thorin’s cheek as though he were a babe, cooing. “You say the sweetest things, don’t you, Thorin?”

Thorin swatted his hand away as they both erupted in giggles again.

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“Did you apologize to Mam before you left?” Fili asked Kili, back in their suite with the others.

Thorin looked over. “What’s this? What apology was needed tonight?”

Fili told them about Dís’s reprimand and of Kili’s wounded reaction.

“Oh dear,” Bilbo said.

Bofur sighed. “‘Oh dear’ is right. She’s going to tell him and the two of you will have your honest feelings exposed. If you think he is bad now…”

“I think they were exposed before tonight, which is half of the reason he ran to her with an exaggerated version of what happened, featuring us as the terrible bullies. Besides, I just couldn’t sit there and let her—let him—start in on me, especially when I know what I know about him,”

“But we have agreed we’re letting Thorin take the lead on these matters,” Fili reminded him. “And you’re not supposed to know all the things you know about him, as far as he knows.”

“I think I’m getting a headache,” Bilbo said, sitting down.

Thorin put his hands on his hips. “Well, I can’t say I’m pleased you’ve spoken roughly to your mother, but let me make something clear: yes, I’m taking the lead when it comes to what happened to me personally this winter, for the reasons I’ve already explained. However, perhaps you have forgotten I’ve also already mentioned that any of you are free—encouraged, as a matter of fact—to defend yourselves or others for things that are happening now. Kili, you did the right thing, though it would have been better to have saved the telling off for Regnad instead of your Mam.”

"I did manage to smooth over it, so I doubt Kili's reaction will make it back to Regnad," explained Fili.

"If it does, it does," said Thorin. "I don't want any of you having to endure his nonsense simply because I've made a personal choice about a specific incident based on my circumstances at the time. In fact, I insist you speak up for yourselves and advocate for each other if Regnad tries to disparage any of you again...and rest assured I will not allow him to get away with it if I hear it, either. Are we all clear on this?"

Everyone either mumbled or nodded agreement.

“Enough of this unpleasantness! Let’s get naked!” Kili laughed.

Bofur drawled, “Aye! You’ll hear no argument from me!”

“For once,” Thorin shot back.

Bofur winked at him.
Beginning conservatively after the explorations of the past few evenings, the lovers split off in relatively predictable couplings: Fili, Kili, and Bofur were together in one group while Bilbo and Thorin fell into each other’s arms next to them. After a few minutes, the bodies shifted and Thorin and Fili found themselves face-to-face...and not quite sure what to do about the proximity. The conversation they had shared that afternoon made Thorin brave enough to speak first.

“Slower this time, yeah? Doesn’t have to be everything at once?”

Thorin and Fili each leaned towards the other, their lips meeting in the middle. Thorin was more confident and commanding than he had been the night before and this time it was Fili who yielded. Though it was heated, Thorin led the encounter in such a way that it didn’t grow out of control before he wound their kiss down and drew back.

Meeting his eyes once again, Fili agreed, “Slow.”

With that, there was another quiet shift in partners. Fili and Bilbo had gravitated toward each other, Kili and Bofur were another pair, and Thorin scooted to the end of the bed, not yet sure where he belonged (or wanted to belong) in the mad press of bodies.

Out of the corner of his eye, Thorin saw Bofur and Kili get up too, with Bofur sitting sideways dangling his legs over the edge of the bed. Bofur tugged a giggling Kili into his lap, his chest to Kili’s back.

Bofur quirked a brow at Thorin as he oiled his fingers from the dish. “Oi, wanna have a go at this one? Someone ought to prime his pump while I’m getting him ready for someone to fuck him.”

Thorin looked to Kili for consent; Kili held his hand out, granting it.

Regarding Thorin more closely, Bofur could see Bilbo’s name inked just over Thorin’s heart, only slightly hidden in the dark of his chest hair. He must have been too busy (or too worried about being caught looking him over) to notice it before. Touched, Bofur wondered when Thorin had picked it up.

Thorin kneeled on the floor between four pairs of legs. It seemed odd, yet deliciously taboo, sucking Kili while he sat in someone else’s lap. He remembered the jealousy he felt that first night, watching Bofur finger Kili open with a smug look on his face. Now Thorin was a part of it, making Kili moan along with him. He still felt some jealousy, truth be told, but he was also undeniably hard.

As he and Thorin worked on Kili, front to back, Bofur felt Thorin’s hand on his leg. He thought it was just a casual brush—his and Kili’s lower limbs were pretty much everywhere—but it happened again, this time on both sides. Soon, the touches became long, sensual strokes, fingers digging in occasionally for emphasis, often coinciding with Thorin moaning over the delight of
Kili in his mouth. Bofur shuddered with a thrill of his own and wondered if Thorin realized his hands weren’t on Kili. He was loath to say something because if it was a touch meant for Kili, Thorin would certainly stop caressing him. However, if the touches weren’t meant for Bofur, it would be wrong to allow himself to continue enjoying them.

The fingers dug in again, coupled with an animalistic grunt from Thorin, and an alarming surge of desire shot through Bofur. It took every ounce of will he had, but he shifted, easing Kili off his lap enough that it would be obvious to Thorin whose thighs were whose. Thorin pulled off Kili, leaning around to one side to see what was happening next. One of Thorin’s hands remained on Bofur’s thigh even though Kili was full standing. Bofur looked down into Thorin’s eyes, expecting disgust or surprise there once the realization had set in. Instead, all that blinked back at him was curious lapis expression.

“Is he ready?” Thorin asked, using Bofur and the bed as leverage to push himself up off his knees. He claimed an obscene kiss from Kili once he was mouth-height again. “And who were we getting him ready for?”

Kili rubbed their noses together. “Whomever wants me, I suppose.”

“D’ya hear that lads,” Bofur called behind him, “Or are you too wrapped up in yourselves back there to see this beautiful thing is set to go?”

“I’ll give him a go, alright,” Bilbo said. “Nothing’s going in my arse after last night, anyhow.”

“And what a shame that is,” flirted Bofur.

Fili swooped in and claimed Bofur’s lips. “Well, mine is wide-open.”

“And that’s a delight,” Bofur purred. “Our delight.”

Thorin followed Bilbo and Kili, standing on the bed to get gloriously fellated by Bilbo as Kili was thoroughly shagged from behind. Thorin noticed Fili was getting an enthusiastic fuck as well and though he was not exactly sure where to look, he was surely looking.

Kili whined in ecstasy and Bofur glanced over, appreciating the filthy threesome for the erotic vision it was. His eyes flicked up to find Thorin watching and though Thorin quickly glanced elsewhere in seeming embarrassment, Bofur did not. It was only when Bofur noticed his own strokes had taken on the same rhythm as Thorin's thrusts into Bilbo’s mouth that he tore his gaze away, falling forward on Fili and going faster.

“Harder!” cried Fili from underneath him, setting him ablaze.

He pulled out, flipped Fili over on his back, and continued working him over. Fili groaned in hot approval, leveling his hungry stare at him. Thorin was quickly forgotten as Fili’s fuck sent him over the edge.

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Cleaned up and blissed out, Thorin lay in the middle of the bed being cuddled by Bilbo and Kili, who were themselves flanked by Bofur and Fili, respectively. Lazily smoothing his fingers over Bilbo’s shoulder, Thorin said, “Where do you suppose it comes from?”

“Where what comes from?” asked Bilbo.

“Well, imprints are well-known, though you’ve revolutionized how exclusively male couples may receive them,” Thorin said, pressing a kiss to Bilbo’s hair. “But these smaller attachments, connections, whatever you want to call what happens from other, erm, penetrative play…what do you suppose makes those stick?”

“I’m still not following,” Bilbo said.

“You were my first actual love, and my only bond, but I…well, I explored when I was considerably younger. Mouthplay, wanking, that sort of thing, and I know I’m not the only one
Kili shifted uncomfortably, having no stories to add from his younger days if they were to start swapping.

“And yet I carried nothing with me, not like I feel from playing with Kili. Going by present standards, I should have felt something, carried some manner of wisp from those fleeting partners, at least for a little while, but I have zero recollection of anything even remotely close. I mean, do any of you remember anything like that?”

“No, now that you mention it, I surely don’t,” Bofur said.

Fili hummed as he considered it. “I don’t either.”

“Hobbits don’t experience things quite the same with each other,” Bilbo said carefully, “Which is why we might seem quite promiscuous by dwarvish standards. I didn’t know I could feel these things—or even what they were—until Thorin and I went to bed and even then he had to explain it all to me because it was so beyond my knowledge.”

“Okay, so just for the dwarves then: How do we have those certain somethings now when we didn’t then?” Thorin reiterated.

Bofur cleared his throat. “I think…I think the feelings matter.”

“The feelings?” repeated Fili.

“Aye, it is possible no one I had toyed with in my youth stayed with me because I was not in love…I wasn't even infatuated with anyone above their waists, to be honest. I was merely stiff in my trousers and wanting a bit of fun. Would you say it was the same for you?”

Again, Kili felt uncomfortable and stayed silent.

“As you said, it was only ever just a bit of fun,” Thorin replied. “And honestly, not that many people…or that much fun.”

Fili said, “Same goes for me. When there was getting off at all, that’s all it was.”

“So now, here we are, doing what we do, and I think all of us have felt some manner of attachment to everyone they’ve played with, ah…penetratively, as Thorin so delicately put it. All things considered, it might be fair to say the difference here is the feelings we have for each other.”

It was Fili’s turn to shift uncomfortably, recalling how he had almost sucked Thorin off the night before.

Kili said, “Do you ever think it might be just us experiencing these things? I mean, there’s something special about us together, even Gandalf says so.”

“I don’t know if what Gandalf means carries over to the bedroom,” Fili said gently.

“I don’t know, either,” Bilbo said to Kili. "If you remember, we felt an incredibly strong connection together well before we bonded. We hadn’t quite formed our quartet—or quintet--then.”

Thorin said, “I think Bofur and Kili both could be onto something. Feelings might definitely make a difference in these attachments, though there’s the possibility that something we don't understand might factor in along with them. I’m certainly a much bigger believer in things I can’t explain since the four of you began this little unit, and even more since you’ve allowed me to join it.”

“Now that you bring it up, there was definitely something unknown behind Fee and Kee having those strong bonds without consummation,” Bofur said.

Thorin considered the magnitude of the surge he had felt with Kili. “And the circumstances that amplify the things that aren't quite imprints.”

Bilbo asked, “Extenuating esoteric extras aside, do you really think it could be our emotions at the root of helping these attachments to 'stick’?”

“Seems as good a theory as any. It isn’t like we can exactly consult the scientists about this!” laughed Bofur.

“I wish we could,” Kili muttered.
Maybe someday someone will be able to, thought Thorin, making a mental note to speak to his sister about Bilbo as soon as possible.
A Wrinkle In The Plan

Chapter Summary

The last day before council resumes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It hadn’t even been an especially spectacular dream. Rather, on the surface it was quite plain: Bofur had been chatting with Thorin, who had been standing before him with a hobbit-ish shirt on, unbuttoned fully and exposing his chest. He wasn’t sure how they had gotten there (or even what they had been discussing) but of the part he could remember, the conversation was mundane and soon over. Thorin had reached out for him then, tugging him into a hug. As Bofur returned it, the fever of Thorin’s bare skin seemed to burn through his clothes. It was the rush this contact had given him that startled him enough to wake; he could still feel the heat as he sat straight up, blinking into the dark. He glanced over towards Thorin, but the hearth had died too much to see anything.

Fili touched him. “Everything okay?” he whispered.
“Aye…just…just had a dream.”
“A vision?”
“Nah, just a regular dream. Let’s go back to sleep.”

As they settled back down in body, Bofur’s mind refused to relax. Naughty dreams about sex were…well, they weren’t *nothing*, exactly, but they were at least easy to understand the whys and the wherefors. However, this wasn’t one of those. In fact, though sensual, there was nothing inherently filthy at all about this fantasy; it wasn’t even close to being about the sorts of things that made one squidge when they walked. It was almost…sweet.

The image of Thorin, the feel of his body, and the *warmth* such casual tenderness had given Bofur inside kept him awake far longer than he should have been.

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Thorin had slipped out the next morning, partly to avoid being seen by anyone in the hall, and partly in hopes he could catch a moment alone with Dís. It was not meant to be before breakfast, it seemed. Dwalin had slyly seen to that.

Though he was somewhat disappointed, things weren’t at all bad. For starters, Regnad was notably scarce, which suited Thorin fine. He was far too happy to waste any time that day being suspicious or on guard, anyhow—no when his schedule was still mostly open enough that he could plan things such as this rendezvous with Bilbo on the Grand Overlook.

It had turned out to be a perfectly gorgeous mid-morning. Thorin breathed the fresh, warming air, practically able to taste the green of the life that had spent the past few weeks sprouting not only from the surrounding valley, but his own special garden. He watched the sun dance on Bilbo’s honeyed curls and allowed the simple pleasure of being there together wash over him. He wished he could somehow stretch through time and send the slightest suggestion of their present bliss back
to the Thorin who used to stand on that same balcony while mourning the love he thought he had lost.

_Possibly that is what I might be doing at this very moment, and maybe it worked_, he mused fancifully to himself. _After all, something must have sent me to the Shire last summer and well, maybe something similar is what finally sent him back to me, too._

He glanced over at Bilbo (who was pulling a scone from one pocket and some dried fruit from the other, arranging them in front of the statue for Yavanna) and imagined Past Bilbo getting some manner of message from this present happy version of himself that had changed all their fortunes. He grinned at his wild imagination, shaking his head, and joined Bilbo’s side.

Clearing his throat, Bilbo said, “You know, I’ve been meaning to say something…or perhaps ask you something…maybe a bit of both: invoking Lady Yavanna at your sister’s dwarven wedding?”

“I couldn’t rightly leave her out, especially as I have laid eyes on her personally,” Thorin said, wearing a soft smile as his fingers reverently brushed the sculpture. He shifted to caress Bilbo’s cheek next, though the touch was surely no less reverent. “Besides, as I said, she is our Maker’s mate, and my husband’s Maker to boot.”

“Though you didn’t share that last part with the group, I’m noticing.”

Answering Bilbo’s teasing smile with a wink of his own, Thorin grinned, “Not yet.”

*****

Fili, Kili, and Bofur had also happily avoided Regnad for the whole of the morning. Fili spoke his thoughts on the matter aloud.

“I’ve enjoyed having less Regnad in our lives while council has been on Mam’s wedding break. I’m not especially looking forward to it reconvening tomorrow.”

“A shame, that is,” noted Bofur, “because when you’re not dreading him, you’re incredibly good at it. It kills me neither Dís nor Balin have any idea the pall he has cast over the whole council. I often wonder what else they—and Erebor—could be missing out on by elevating him as they have.”

Kili sighed. “At least the first return session is somewhat abbreviated. Do you think Mam has spoken to him about what we said to her?”

“Well, if he wants to bring it up, we’ll find out,” Fili replied.

“Honestly,” added Bofur with an exasperated sigh of his own, “even if she told him everything, word for word, he’ll probably not mention it at all. He seems to be playing a wholly different game…I just wish I knew what it was.”

*****

Dwalin, as much as he might have liked to, couldn’t spend every second at Dís’s side and when other duties called, Thorin managed to capture the few moments he wanted to have alone with his sister.

“It has been such a wonderful few days,” Dís said, beaming. “We should take some time out for merriment and relaxation more often, even without an occasion! I mean, leaving me and Dwalin aside, this week has done wonders for you! There’s light in your eyes again and you’ve regained the warmth in your voice. I think everyone has enjoyed having such merry company, feasts, and time to do whatever we want.”

“Speaking of time, I spent some time with Bilbo and Kili after the wedding,” Thorin said. “I’ve been spending a lot of time with them lately, honestly, and it is Bilbo I would like to discuss.”

Dís’s face fell. “Thorin, we talked about this and I do remember I promised to not say another word after you swore on our beloved brother, but please—for the love of all we hold dear, please do not tell me this good humor of yours has to do with him.”
It was Thorin’s turn to lose his grin. “What do you mean?”
She stood, pacing. “I know, I’m sorry. I did promise but that look on your face coupled with you saying we need to discuss him…I couldn’t take it if the reason you’ve been so joyful was, well, him.”

Thorin’s heart sank. Apparently, her rejection of tradition hadn’t gone as far as Thorin had hoped. He remembered Dwalin’s warning about the baby and had to think fast.

“No, if you’re thinking I’m about to announce to you that Kili and I have found a way to both exist as Bilbo’s husbands and that’s how we will be living going forward,” he paused, gulping around the sadness of finally saying the words aloud solely for the sole purpose of refuting them, “you’re completely mistaken.”
She exhaled in a whoosh, followed by giddy laughter. “I’m so relieved. Oh, doesn’t it sound absurd when you say it out loud like that? Thorin, I do apologize. So, tell me what you wanted to discuss about Bilbo.”
“Don’t you think, um…well…” he struggled rapidly to develop a new reason for why he would need to speak to her about Bilbo. “…having been made Kili’s official husband and Prince of Erebor since the original appointment, don’t you think his ambassadorship to the Shire could be more?”

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Thorin sighed miserably as he dragged himself back out into the hall. After ten minutes of making up an excuse (culminating in an extra title for Bilbo along with at least one upcoming session worth of paperwork for him to take back home), he managed to extract himself from the conversation to go lick his wounds in peace.

*****

Despite Thorin’s attempts at avoiding him, he was eventually found by Dwalin.

“I’ve just spoken with Dís,” Dwalin said carefully.
“Then you know I’ve taken your advice and not done anything to upset my sister or your unborn child either one, so what is your purpose in bothering me? Leave me be.”
“Please, don’t spit bitterness at me.”
“Why not, Dwalin? Hmm? If I am stuck hiding my heart under a stone, can I not at least have a few minutes to be upset about it? Or do you want to tell me how to feel about this, too?”
“Stop,” Dwalin said a touch more forcefully, though his eyes were more sad than angry. “Look, once the flare of my passions had died down, I thought about your situation from a perspective not colored by my love for Dís or my fears for our child. As your best friend as well as head of your personal security, what you wanted to do was still a dangerous move.”

Dwalin’s solemn sincerity paused Thorin’s self-pity for a moment.

“I’m listening.”
“I know well the pull of love and I also know that when you’re in it, it can be easy to disregard your safety but let’s say, improbable as it would be, that you didn’t have to worry about yourself at all. You’d still be wise to consider the danger you’ll be posing for Bilbo. Though I have my own issues with how things fell apart between you and the way they’ve also come back together, do not presume I lack respect for what he’s done for Erebor, nor believe that I’ve forgotten the friend he once was to me. Thorin, Regnad is already up to something we don’t think is any good. Aside from whatever has him spying on you, he’s also spent months sowing seeds of discontent about the presence of non-dwarrows in Erebor, to the point that even Balin has started talking desirably about the very folk who he helped make our allies. So far, Dain and the rest of the Fourteen have been able to keep all that ‘outsider’ talk to a minimum but think about the fuel you would be
gifting Regnad and his cronies for the fire! Even if you escaped the worst of it, Bilbo might not. Regardless of how it might pain you, your silence is his best protection while he is here, and possibly Kili’s as well.”

Thorin scrubbed his hands over his face because he knew in his heart that Dwalin was more right than even he knew. There had been some falter with Regnad’s rising status when Fili, Kili, and Bofur had all arrived, all of whom had at least Dís’s high esteem, if not Balin’s as well. Thorin, too, was bolstered on all fronts by having the princes and Bofur present. Regnad had grown accustomed to the reputation he had won over the winter and the more desperate he became to retain his image in the face of the princes’ challenges, the more outrageous his premises, new business, and arguments became as well. He was already a danger for Erebor’s policy-making without news of Thorin’s unorthodox marriage to Bilbo. Thorin could not also risk the safety of those he held most dear by giving Regnad more, as Dwalin said, fuel for whatever fire he might set next.

While Thorin had already been occasionally worrying over the possibility of not being able to go public with Bilbo in Erebor, his fears up to that point had been mostly based upon scenarios made up in his head. Now he had confirmation: coming out with their relationship would not only mean a hard rift with Dís and Dwalin, it could also endanger Bilbo…and likely Kili along with him. As sorrowful as it would be, he could yet find a way to live without Dís and Dwalin if he was forced to choose. However, he could not and would not abide being the one to put his beloved Bilbo and Kili in peril's path.

Though he knew to his bones it would be worth any outcome to keep them safe, he was so terrified of what Bilbo’s reaction to the news might be that his hands trembled as he walked through the corridor. He remembered too well the first time he had kept Bilbo a secret back in Lake Town—and how much it had eventually cost him.

*****

With at least the good fortune to have found Bilbo at the same time he had finally worked up enough courage to speak with him, Thorin requested to see him alone. Too upset to care about who might see them or run off to gossip, Thorin brought him to his suite; he couldn’t risk this conversation to be interrupted or intercepted by Kili, Fili, or Bofur until he managed to say what needed to be said…and faced whatever consequences there might be. As they walked, he tried his best to school his expression, but once the door was shut, he found he couldn’t keep up the mask.

He exhaled, “There is something we need to discuss.”
“The look on your face certainly seems grave and unsettling.”
Thorin canted his head, the corner of his mouth quirking apologetically. “Please, sit.”
“And that isn’t any less unsettling. Thorin? Please, you’re worrying me.”

Thorin sat next to him on the edge of his bed, holding both his hands and rubbing his thumb over the ring he gave Bilbo.

“Marrying you was a dream come true, and still the second most joyous thing that has ever happened to me, meeting you being the first.”
Exhaling, Bilbo said, “Thank goodness. You looked so regretful I thought perhaps you were going to tell me we had to be apart.”
“Not quite.”
The color drained from Bilbo’s face. “Not quite?”
“You know how we had been waiting for my sister’s wedding to pass to break the news about us?”
“Yes,” Bilbo said warily.
Closing his eyes, Thorin squeezed Bilbo’s hands and spoke. “My love, I don’t think we’re going to
He opened them to see Bilbo’s reaction; Bilbo’s face was still.

“What do you mean?”
“I mean our relationship is going to have to remain a secret for the foreseeable future.”
Bilbo took his hands back. “A secret? But you said—”
“I know. I know I did, my love, and that is the way I wanted it: to say to the Void with the old rules and brazenly declare my heart.”
“You said ‘wanted,’ like it is past. What has changed for you?”
“For my feelings, nothing, but it is too big a risk right now.”

Bilbo crossed his arms and stared at Thorin with such hurt in his eyes that Thorin wanted to pluck his own out to stop seeing it.

Bilbo said, “You vowed nothing would come between us again, least of which being politics.”
“And it won’t! I didn’t say we had to part, only that we cannot announce that we are a couple. Please, listen to me—this is not about ambition, I swear it! It is for your own safety and preservation. Things are precarious right now, much more so than when I made you that promise in Bag End. I hadn’t the faintest idea of Regnad back then, let alone his climb to political renown. He’s been bold enough to make threats towards me and my position—who knows what he might do to you or to Kili? I don’t know if I would have enough allies to keep you politically or physically safe either one should court and council turn against me. My relationship with Balin is tenuous at best these days and his strange talk echoing Regnad’s divisive sentiments isn’t exactly comforting and Dís…well, she was always my biggest worry, and now more than ever. She’s…”

Thorin stopped himself, unable to betray his promise to keep her pregnancy secret. He swallowed back the emotions threatening to spill from his eyes from the sadness and conflict of it all. Somehow, Bilbo—his beautiful, empathetic Bilbo—saved him.

“Oh, love,” sighed Bilbo, climbing into Thorin’s lap. “What else can I say? I can’t argue any of those points, even if I wanted to. But does this mean you will not be coming home with me?”
Thorin kissed him soundly. “That part of the plan has not changed. I don’t have to admit to our marriage to want to stay with the four of you, traveling West and all of us returning East when need and duty call. Folks might find it odd, but that is non-negotiable.”
“Very well,” Bilbo said. “Though in the Shire we can be as public as we please. I might even make you wear a sign to make up for the sneaking this summer.”
“Property of Bilbo Baggins?”
“Something like that.”

Bilbo smoothed his fingers over Thorin’s chest where the fabric-covered Bilbo’s name. Thorin kissed him again.

“Can we just stretch out on the bed and hold each other? I think we can risk a few more moments together before we have to face the world again.”

As his answer, Bilbo scooted out of his lap and scrambled further up the mattress. Thorin followed him, opening his arms for Bilbo to snuggle into.

“To think it had been such a bright, hopeful morning just a handful of hours ago.”
Cuddling against him, Bilbo said, “This business with Regnad…the most shocking part to me is how willing to stand behind him Balin is. At least with Dís, she doesn’t know about what that worm put you through, and your reticence to include her can also be traced directly back to Balin being, frankly, a horse’s arse. If you would have told me a year ago he would have changed like
th这家…well, I would have more rapidly believed a great many thousand things before I would have believed this.” He tsked sadly. “Balin once told me he considered you the greatest dwarf of this age, ‘Durin’s like, once again walking the earth,’ he said.”

“When did he tell you that?”

“When the four of us visited Erebor last, before Kee and I were married. He was trying to convince me to give you another chance. I think about who and how he was then, compared to what I’ve seen him become, and I can only imagine the sadness you feel. He loved and respected you so much. How does someone like Regnad—a virtual stranger, really, compared to the rest of The Fourteen—manage to get such a foothold in Balin’s heart and mind? He was ready to follow you into dragon fire, but a nobody like Regnad of all people has him doubting you. I don’t understand it, will never understand it.”

“Sometimes fear is more powerful than love. I know that’s not what the songs teach us, but it can be the truth, and when we fear losing something we love…well, sometimes that’s the most powerful combination there is. Balin put his heart into the mountain and Regnad preyed upon his love to stoke his fear of losing it again. He used Balin’s concern about my heartache as the entryway because it was the easiest path, but do not blame yourself: he would have found a different way if it hadn’t been so. I see now that he didn’t make Balin cease caring for me, he made Balin fear for what I might do in the name of my wounded heart. He didn’t make Balin dislike our allies, he made Balin fear worst-case outcomes of our allies getting too powerful or comfortable with Erebor. He used the terror of the dragon and the worst catastrophe of our age to get a foothold deep in Balin’s fear, then used it to leverage himself upward.”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way. Now that you’ve explained it so well, fear does seem to be what is behind most of what we’re up against.”

“I don’t know if I would have been able to put it into words until recently. Having you here—all of you—has given me enough peace to sort through some of the ugliness and understand it better. It has given me insight as well, the four of you being smart and discerning. Hearing your perception and analysis has helped me find clarity. Said clarity isn’t a solution or even a solid reason for why Regnad has started this silent attempt at a coup, but being able to see the steps he has taken to get here might help us create some sort of defense.”

“Or offense.”

Thorin huffed a laugh. “That sounds like Bofur’s influence.”

“More Kee’s, really. He’s the first to run into anything that makes his blood pound, for good or ill.”

Thorin’s smile faded wistfully. “You’re not wrong there.”

Gently, Bilbo said, “I thought our past didn’t haunt you like that anymore.”

“No, and yes. I can’t quite describe it: the memory itself aches because the pain I felt at the time was unreal. I don’t feel it in the present, though, if that makes sense. In the present, things are better and more interesting than I had ever dreamed back then. As a matter of fact, I was just wishing this morning that the Thorin who used to mope around the mountain could have known how his fortunes would change.”

Suddenly, Thorin asking him to understand about the matter of keeping their marriage secret did not seem to Bilbo to be such an unreasonable request at all.

“Look, Thorin, I understand your decision to keep us a secret in Erebor, I truly do, and I have complete faith that if there was any way around it where we would also be safe, you’d have figured it out by now. I love you, you love me, and it is enough for us to know we’re together from here on out. It doesn’t have to happen by public decree to be genuine and real.”

Thorin kissed him passionately, relieved and grateful.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for being here! Spaces between chapters can be quite long these days, but know this work is never abandoned. Also, the comments you leave are always appreciated and loved.

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