Beyond the Forest

by TheElvenValkyrie

Summary

Natalya is an Elven warrior who was taken to Mirkwood to live under the rule of King Thranduil following her father's death in battle. The Elf never knew much about her mother as she died shortly after giving birth. Even though the Elves have always been kind, Natalya never felt at home. The Elf's heart yearned to leave the peaceful Woodland Realm and travel west to explore Middle Earth. Finally she had the opportunity to escape when Thorin and his company traveled through Mirkwood on their way to Erebor. Even though relationships between Dwarves and Elves had been forbidden, Natalya watched over Thorin until she found a way for them to escape. She was surprised when Thorin requested that she accompany them on their perilous journey to reclaim his homeland. Natalya accepted and before long realized that her life was changed forever as she discovered something secretive about her past she was never told.
Chapter 1

Stumbling back, Natalya touched her left temple to feel blood already running down the side of her face. She watched the thick red liquid drip into the white snow, staining it a deep crimson. Looking back up, the female stared at the Orc in front of her. Bolg, son of Azog. He had attempted to kill Thorin but she had intervened and stepped in the path of his mace. Quickly looking around, Natalya saw no sign of Thorin but suddenly heard a shout as Dwalin, Fili and Kili emerged from her other side and began attacking Bolg. Thankfully the Orc forgot about the female and turned his attention toward the Dwarves. The warrior gave a nod towards the group as she finally made it through Dale and up to Ravenhill. Battle continued as a light snowfall had just begun covering the ground. The females dark green tunic stood out against the white and dark grey stone of the ice-covered fortress. Fighting Orcs on her way across the barren watchtowers, Natalya saw no sign of Thorin. She began frantically looking around before hearing the sound of another Orc behind her. The warriors green tunic swirled around her ankles as she twisted to stab the enemy with her dagger. The golden details on the edges of the garment were fraying and it had splatters of dark blood across it. Her blonde hair once neatly braided, was now tangled and matted with blood and dirt. Natalya suddenly looked up as she heard the clash of swords on the ledge above her.

“Thorin!” The female called anxiously, heading towards the sound. She spun around as the cracking of ice could be heard underneath her feet. Suddenly, the woman found herself sliding across the ice on her back as pain shot through her abdomen. Natalya looked up through fuzzy vision to see another Orc charging towards her. She weakly deflected the blow from the creature as she saw his dull sword come down. Rolling out of the way in time, she rose to her feet and prepared to face the creature. Feeling pain shoot through her left leg, Natalya bared her teeth. Looking down, she saw that the Orc’s sword was stuck in the ice next to her left foot. Her leather pants had torn and she had a large scrape running down the outside of her thigh. Gripping her daggers she glared at him and spun her blades, ignoring the throbbing pain in her body. Natalya took a deep breath, closed her eyes and prepared for what she knew was going to be her final battle. As the warrior was about to charge with all of her might, she heard a yell.

“Du bekar!” Thorin shouted, seeing Natalya on the ice fighting alone.

Natalya and all of the Orcs looked up. It’s Thorin! He is here! She heard swords clash as the Dwarf fought on the lookout tower across the ice.

Stabbing orcs left and right, spinning and deflecting unfriendly blows, Thorin fought gracefully. He finally stabbed another Orc and shoved it over the ledge and down onto the ice. Jumping from the staircase, Thorin hurried to Natalya as quickly as he could, knowing she was in danger.

Natalya had luckily gotten away after the Orc became distracted. She slowly limped towards Thorin as he finally came down the steps. Her breath was ragged but she still wanted to continue fighting as she saw Bolg advancing from further off. The warrior soon felt dizziness overcome her and her movements began to slow down.

Thorin quickly ran up to Natalya and grabbed her arm to steady her. Watching her nod, he turned around and attacked Bolg. Trying to keep the creature away from Natalya, the Dwarf backed up one of the nearby staircases then gasped as he was suddenly attacked from behind. After twisting to kill the Orc, he watched in terror as Bolg turned back towards the female with his mace outstretched.

Natalya was caught off guard watching Thorin and did not see what was coming. She felt another Orc strike her, this time in the back. Falling to her knees, the female’s eyes went wide as she gasped
for air and one of her daggers flew from her hand. Looking up, she watched as Bolg was still coming towards her.

“Natalya!” Thorin shouted across the battlefield as he watched her slump to the ground. He finally stabbed the Orc through the chest and pushed its body off the staircase, watching it roll and land with a thud on the ice. The Dwarf then looked and saw Bolg still advancing towards Natalya who now lay on the ground with another Orc standing above her.

Natalya felt too weak to move or answer as her vision was now failing. She watched through a blurred and darkened haze as Thorin ran down the stone steps and onto the icy ground. “Thorin.” She muttered as he came closer.

The Dwarf gave a yell as he watched the Orcs advancing towards Natalya. Running to her aid, he stabbed the creature that had his sword raised, ready to kill. After the Orc slumped to the ground, Thorin gripped his sword as Bolg came closer.

Natalya struggled slightly, wanting to get up and fight, but became dizzier the harder she tried. Soon darkness overtook her and she lay on the ground, unmoving.

Thorin fought with the creature a few moments, continuing to look back over his shoulder at Natalya as she lay there, motionless. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his foot as Bolg brought his mace down upon Thorin’s foot. Slipping backwards, Thorin gasped as he laid on his back, using Orcrist as leverage against the creatures weapon.

Forcing her eyes open again, Natalya gasped for air. Looking over, she saw Thorin now lying on his back with Bolg towering over him. The Orc’s mace was interlocked with Orcrist and the Dwarf’s arms were shaking. The female slowly stumbled to her feet and rammed herself into Bolg with all her might, driving her blade into his chest. With heaving breaths, Natalya rolled to the side, letting go of her dagger. She felt weak from exhaustion and barely moved.

Thorin quickly crawled over and put her head in his lap. “Natalya …” Thorin started, voice shaking as he stroked her hair. “Don’t.”

“Thorin.” Natalya whispered, softly as she looked at him through half closed eyelids. “I’ll…” Her voice broke off as she tried to catch her breath. “I’ll…be…okay.” She managed to get out before her eyes fully closed and her body relaxed.

Thorin put his hand under her jaw, still feeling a faint heartbeat. He looked around for anyone to help them as he picked her up in his arms. Seeing no one but dead bodies of Orcs, the Dwarf began the long treacherous path down the mountainside. The pain in his foot was strong but he pushed it out of his thoughts as he finally reached Erebor and it began to snow again. The throbbing feeling was now overwhelmingly strong but Thorin continued ignoring it as he checked Natalya’s pulse again. She was still barely breathing in his arms as Dwarves and Men began to crowd them at the front gate.

“Congratulations!” They all shouted. “Long live the King!” A few others yelled.

“Move.” Thorin said, pushing past more bodies but they barely budged. “Move!” He finally shouted and everyone jumped out of the way and was silent. Even Natalya slightly stirred in his arms. “I need a healer!” Thorin called. “Now!”

It took a few moments before two Dwarves quickly appeared with a stretcher. “What is the situation my lord?”
“Battle wounds!” Thorin said loudly. “Be quick!” Placing Natalya’s body on the stretcher, she moaned in pain. He followed them, limping, as they carried Natalya to the infirmary.
Chapter 2

{Months Earlier}

Natalya gracefully ran across the limbs of the large trees, her bow and arrows in hand. A party of Elves had been sent into the forest to continue patrolling the woods and take care of the ever growing arachnid population. Suddenly, the female turned when she heard raised voices. Looking down from the trees she saw a group of what seemed to be Dwarves. Quickly gliding atop the large branches, her footsteps were almost noiseless as she hit the forest floor. Her eyes swept across the group of Dwarves to see another spider heading towards them. Quickly grabbing one of her daggers, the female threw it into the face of the spider. Looking around, she saw that the forest was now quiet and the Elves already had the Dwarves surrounded. She made eye contact with the Dwarven leader and immediately felt her throat tighten as she approached the group. “Menno nogoth!” (Search the Dwarves) Her eyes never left the Dwarven leader. Suddenly, she could hear a voice snapping her from her daze.

Anairë, one of the other Elves approached Natalya. “Gyrth in yngyl bain?” (Are the spiders dead)

“Ennorner gwanod in yngyl na nyryn.” (Yes but more will come) Natalya swallowed, knowing that they had been seeing more and more of them. “Engain nar.” (They are growing bolder) Walking next to the dark haired Elf, Natalya watched as an elven sword was presented that had been taken from Thorin, the Dwarven leader.

“Echannen i vegil hen vin Gondolin.” (This is an ancient Elvish blade) Anairë took the weapon and stared at it for a moment. “Magannen nan Gelydh.” (Forged by my kin) She paused for a moment before turning to the Dwarf and speaking in Westron. “Where did you get this?”

“It was given to me.”

“Not just a thief. But a liar as well.” Anairë pursed her lips as she looked around. “Enwenno hain!” (Take them)

Natalya nodded to the Elves then watched as Anairë looked back at her. Being two hundred years older than Natalya, the female Elf had been her best friend ever since she could remember. Walking up to Anairë, Natalya fell in stride next to her as they led the Dwarves towards the Woodland Realm.

Once they arrived, Natalya stood outside of the gates for a moment, ensuring everyone had returned. “Holo in ennyn!” (Close the gates) She then closely followed the group of Elves as they led the Dwarves to the cellars. After the Dwarves were secured, Natalya approached Anairë.

“What do you think?” The taller female asked, looking down at Natalya. She knew that her friend often read on the histories of the Dwarves and other races in her spare time, even though the other Elves disapproved.

Natalya nodded slowly, as they stood by and observed the group. “I am not sure.” The female had heard long ago of King Thror’s fall to the Dragon Sickness and how Erebor was sacked. Natalya had heard many stories of the Dwarves that were told to her by the other Elves although she enjoyed the stories written in the books of the library better. The books made it seem as if there was at least mutuality between the Dwarves and Elves at first. There were two different stories that had been told when it came to the rift between the Dwarves and Elves. Natalya quickly cleared the thought out of her head as she remembered the day when Thranduil had returned with his soldiers.
from Erebor.

“Did you help?” Natalya asked, running up to Thranduil.

“Of course not.” Thranduil said looking down at her as he dismounted his elk. “The Dwarves needed to be taught a lesson. I tried to warn them. But they would not listen.” He paused. “They stole something of mine and I wanted it back. I tried to be reasonable with them.” Thranduil said, smoothly. “They deserved what they got.”

That statement made Natalya’s blood boil, officially marking her hatred for the King. He had watched the entire kingdom burn in Dragon fire and did nothing.

Natalya walked up the flights of stairs in the Woodland realm, thinking about the events that had taken place afterward. She was only around one thousand years old when Smaug attacked, still very young for an Elf, but she supposedly had human blood in her as well, making her only half-Elven. She was taught Sindarin and all the different stories of the Elves. Natalya remembered how Mirkwood Forest had been called Greenwood until the dark shadow of Sauron descended upon Dol Guldur and the surrounding areas. The Elves stayed, however, fighting for The Woodland Realm that had been created by Oropher, Thranduil’s father. Some Dúnedain rangers of the north helped in the cause as well for they did not want to see Middle-Earth fall into the hands of the enemy. Natalya had been taught to protect the Woodland Realm at all costs while learning to fend for herself as well. The female remembered when the day finally came and she was chosen to join the King’s army. She had been given two golden bladed daggers with black handles and they immediately fit into her hand. From then on, Natalya enjoyed one-on-one sparring and was always trying to learn. Being about the height of a human, the female was much shorter than the others. Natalya was trained to be a soldier and a fighter, she had been gifted with the traditional outfit of the Woodland Realm guards. After that, the half-Elf soon made it up the ranks as one of the King’s guards which remained her position for several hundred years. Looking over to Anairë, Natalya nodded as she headed into her room. Looking over, she saw a tray with some hot soup on it. Taking the tray in her hands, the female realized she was shaking. Natalya picked up the spoon and took a small sip of the soup, her favorite. The female sighed, laying back against the pillows. After finishing her meal, she let her hair down and changed into a casual dark green suede garment that reached her ankles. The Elves in the Woodland Realm rarely ever wore dresses as they were almost all trained to be fighters. Natalya looked at herself in the mirror and saw that still around her neck was the necklace left to her by her mother, Edhelwen. The only thing Natalya had been told was her father died in battle right before she was born and her mother died in childbirth. She was not even sure which parts of Middle-Earth they came from. Sighing, her fingers quickly fastened the golden clasp at the collar of the garment before she stepped out the door.

Meanwhile, Thranduil had requested to speak with the Dwarven leader. “Some may imagine that a noble quest is at hand.” Thranduil paused, looking down at the Dwarf. “A quest to reclaim a homeland, and slay a Dragon.” The Elven King still never looked at Thorin. “I myself, suspect a more prosaic motive.” He turned slowly, striding towards Thorin, still not making eye contact. “Attempted burglary or something of that ilk.” He leaned down, his face right in front of Thorin’s. “You have found a way in.” Thranduil continued, rising back up to his full height. “You would seek that which would bestow upon you the right to rule.” Thranduil backed away, glaring down at Thorin. “The King’s jewel, The Arkenstone.”

Silence passed as Thorin looked down, not meeting Thranduil’s steely gaze.

“It is precious to you beyond measure.” Thranduil smirked harder. “I understand that.” He added, seeing Thorin’s reaction. “There are gems in the Mountain which I too desire.” The Elf said, voice
going cold again and his eyes narrowing to a glare. “White gems,” he paused, “of pure starlight.” Thorin just looked at him, expressionless. “I offer you my help.” Thranduil said, bowing his head. After a few seconds he looked up and eyed Thorin.

“I am listening.” Thorin spoke deeply.

“I’ll let you go,” Thranduil said but the words were like poison to him. “If you but return what is mine.” Thranduil paused, waiting for Thorin’s response.

Thorin smirked, knowing well enough the Elf King’s statement was a ruse. “A favor for a favor.” He said coldly, turning his back on Thranduil.

“You have my word!” Thranduil said, easily faking his promise. “One king to another.” The Elf finally said, hoping to get to Thorin.

Thorin shook his head. “I would not trust,” He spat. “Thranduil,” The Dwarf took a breath, raising his voice. “Great king! Should the end of all days be upon us!” He quickly turned around facing Thranduil once more. “You!” He shouted, pointing a finger towards the King. “Lack all honor!” Thorin continued as he strode back towards the Elven King. “I have seen how you treat your friends!” Thorin raged, taking purposeful strides towards the Elven king. “We came to you once!” The Dwarf spat. “Starving! Homeless! Seeking your help! But you turned your back!” Thorin continued yelling. “You turned away from the suffering of my people!” Thranduil’s body shook with rage. “And the inferno that destroyed us!” Then he spoke in Khuzdul. “Imrid amrad ursul!” (Die a death of flames)

Thranduil strode forward quickly, his face inches from Thorin’s. “Do not speak to me of Dragonfire!” He hissed and watched as Thorin glared back while he continued speaking. “I know its wrath and ruin!” The Elf King tensed his face, revealing the burned area that was normally hidden upon his cheek. “I have faced the great serpents of the north!” He backed away, staring Thorin down once more. “I warned your grandfather of what his greed would summon!” Thranduil spoke as he ascended the stairs to his wooden throne. “But he would not listen.” The Elvenking took his seat. “You are just like him.” As if on cue, two Elven guards grabbed Thorin. “Stay here if you will and rot!” Thranduil yelled. “A hundred years is a mere blink in the life of an Elf!” He sneered. “I’m patient. I can wait!”

Thorin snarled as he was suddenly grabbed by two Elven guards and drug away back down to the cellars.

Meanwhile, Natalya slipped out of her room. Walking quickly down the stairs, the half-Elf went to where the Dwarves were imprisoned. She treaded softly, hoping no one would catch her visiting them. After walking around for awhile, the female finally found the leader. He was sitting in one of the cells further away from his companions. She observed him from one of the cells across from his so she wouldn’t be seen. Shaking her head, Natalya cleared her thoughts. She was nervous to speak to him since she knew of his deep hatred towards the Elves. Hoping he would not ignore her, Natalya finally walked over to him. Looking inside, She saw that the Dwarf was sleeping. His hands were still tied from when he had probably been interrogated by Thranduil. Natalya bit her lip and kept going, walking quicker as her mind came up with a plan to help him. She finally released a breath she did not realize that she was holding. Going down to the wine cellars, the half-Elf found the keys to the prison cells, left there by one of the Elves. Before she could grab them though, she felt a hand on her shoulder.

“Greetings!” Anairë said, her voice cheery as she turned towards Natalya. “What are you still doing at this hour?”
“Greetings.” Natalya responded. It took her a second to remember that Elves do not sleep, but since she was half-Elven she still needed some sleep. “I was just going for a drink.” The lie easily passed her lips.

Anairë raised her eyebrows, knowing something more was going on. The women quickly hugged then Anairë began speaking of what was going on around the forest borders.

Natalya felt herself begin thinking of the Dwarf again. She leaned against the wall, not really paying attention.

Anairë looked at her quizzically. “Well, I will be off.” She left Natalya and ascended the stairs back up to the great hall.

Natalya really hoped that she had not noticed her behavior. She waited until her friend was gone then grabbed the keys, running light footed back up the stairs to the prison cells. Looking in, the half-Elf saw that the Dwarf was still asleep. Placing the key in the lock, she turned it with a click. The female cringed when the door creaked loudly, but the Dwarf still did not move. Kneeling close to the male’s figure, she used her dagger to quickly cut the rope bonds. The half-Elf gently pushed on his shoulders to rest his back against the wall. Hearing the Dwarf let out an incoherent sound as he slumped back, the female watched as his head rested against the cold stone. “You don’t deserve to be treated like this.” Natalya was not sure if he knew she was there or not so she sighed and turned to leave.

“Wait.” Thorin whispered. He had felt someone cut his bonds but he was too weak to see who it was. “M’imnu Durin.” (In Durin’s name) The Dwarf grunted, obviously still in pain as he attempted to sit up straighter.

Natalya slowly turned to see him looking at her through his half closed eyelids.

“Thank you.” Thorin whispered. He slowly moved his hands, rubbing his wrists where they had been rubbed raw.

Natalya smiled softly at him. “You are welcome.” She answered but said no more, stepping out and locking the door behind her. The half-Elf quickly returned the keys to the cellar and headed back up the stairs.

Thorin was taken aback by her kindness to him but knew he should remain distant all the same. He looked away from the female, not wanting to think anything of her kindness. The Dwarf leaned forward, stretching his back. He reminded himself that Elves were not to ever be trusted as he leaned back against the wall again. Thorin had seen them betray his grandfather as well as his father.

The half-Elf left quietly and planned to visit Thorin in the morning. Returning to her chambers, Natalya lay down in bed and thought about the day’s events. She was now conflicted in her feelings for Thorin. Knowing that he would probably never love her, the half-Elf settled with helping him get better.

When morning came, Natalya arose early with the sun’s first light and gathered bandages and salve. She was no expert healer, but she had been taught how to treat simple wounds. Being around Thorin made her more nervous than she had ever been. The half-Elf did not want the others to assume she had any feelings for him, yet she wanted to help as much as she could. She decided that she would only help him for a few more days then leave him be. She quickly changed into a long sleeved, navy blue overcoat with golden Elvish details down the front. Natalya enjoyed the color more than the dark greens and browns she had to wear while in the woods. She ran her hand slowly
across the fabric, smiling at how much she loved it. The female had often sparred in it and she knew she could fight while wearing it although Thranduil disapproved since it was the color worn by the races of Dwarves and Men. Natalya made her way quickly down the stairs, salve and bandages in her hand. She paused when she heard others talking below. Looking down, there were guards already patrolling the area. They were a level below her but she was still in plain sight if they happened to look up. She quietly walked by, hoping she was not noticed.

“Natalya!” One of the guards called as he saw her walking by.

Her breath stopped and she turned, hiding the bandages and salve behind her back. “Mae govannen.” The half-Elf responded politely

“Thranduil requested to see you.” One of the guards answered her. “I assumed you had been told.”

Natalya paused for a moment, staring at the two guards.

“What are you doing?” The other guard asked, wondering why she was not immediately reporting back to the King.

“I am going for a walk first.” Natalya said, her voice slightly shaking. “Is that forbidden?”

“Just make sure you find Thranduil.” The one guard reminded her. “He will not be pleased if he has to come looking for you.”

Natalya nodded and walked off, heaving a sigh of relief. Once she stepped around the corner, her hand instinctively reached in her pocket to feel the key to the Dwarf’s cell. The half-Elf had taken it the evening before and kept it hidden in her room. She finally stepped in front of the door and saw that he was sitting up and looked much better.

Thorin looked up when he saw the door open and Natalya walked in. Her blonde hair was down with a braid tying the top pieces away from her face. He knew such love was forbidden between a Dwarf and Elf. But she couldn’t really be full Elf. The Dwarf thought. She is so much shorter than the others. He watched as the female Elf knelt beside him, now below his eye level.

“Can I see your wrists please?” Natalya asked quietly as she looked up at the Dwarf, his blue eyes darkened in the dim light.

Thorin slowly showed her his hands and wrists. He swallowed as blisters could be seen forming at the sites and some of them were oozing.

The Female placed the bottle of salve on the floor and opened the top as she looked at Thorin’s wrists. Neither of them spoke a word as she applied the cream. “Is this ok?” The half-Elf asked, picking up the bandages.

“Yes.” Thorin whispered. He stayed still as Natalya applied the bandages but he noticed she only touched him when she had to.

Holding his hand gently in hers, Natalya unraveled the bandage and wrapped the tan material around his wrist. She then took the small end pieces and tied them together around the back of his hand. The half-Elf swallowed as Thorin automatically outstretched his other hand. She could not believe that he was actually allowing her to help him. He is probably just desperate. Wrapping the bandage around his other hand Natalya noticed a cut on his forearm as well. Applying salve to the wound the female placed the bandage on tighter so it wouldn’t slip. She swallowed as Thorin grimaced. “I’m sorry.” She quickly pulled her hands away.
“Don’t be.” Thorin reassured her. He gave a small smile as their eyes finally met in the dark cell. Natalya’s hazel eyes connected with Thorin’s blue-grey ones. They stared at each other until she finally broke the connection, looking back down at the floor.

“Did I do something wrong?” The Dwarf asked, wincing in pain as the bandage moved across the cut on his arm.

“No.” The half-Elf answered, shaking her head, looking back at him. She rose to leave, walking towards the door. “I shouldn’t be here.”

Thorin did not say a word but stared into the stone floor when she looked away.

The female did not really want to leave him but she knew that she had to. Thranduil needed her for something and she dare not refuse the King’s orders. “I have to go.” Natalya said, softly, looking back at him one more time as her hand gripped one of the metal bars on the door.

Thorin nodded. “I know that even speech between a Dwarf and Elf are usually forbidden.” He said slowly, looking back up at her.

Natalya looked back at him. “That is not what I am talking about.” She explained, looking over her shoulder as she was already halfway through the door. She stood in silence for a moment before letting out a soft sigh. “Thranduil gave me orders to see him.” She paused as her hand gripped the metal of the door. “I am not sure what it could mean.”

“Your words and actions say that you are not too fond of him.” Thorin spoke calmly, twirling his hair and looking down at the bead at the end of one of the braids framing his face. He looked back at her to see her face in slight shock. “Your thoughts are noticeable although not obvious.” The Dwarf gave her a small smile. “I will say however,” Thorin continued, “that you are not like the rest of them.”

Natalya looked at him, a curious expression on her face. “Why might you say that?”

“You just aren’t.” Thorin said, giving a slight smile as their gazes locked once more. “Well for one,” Thorin stated, then he paused. “You are much shorter than the rest.” He quickly stammered out, “But that is not to say that you are too short.” He quickly corrected himself. “You seem to be around the same height as me and…”

Natalya cut him off. “I take no offense. For I am only half Elven.” The female chuckled as she waited for Thorin’s response.

Thorin raised his eyebrows, looking at her. *That makes sense.*

Natalya smiled back, blushing. “I will try to be back this evening.” She paused. “I will make sure to find you some food.”

“Thank you for helping me.” Thorin said quietly, not meeting her gaze.

“Of course.” Natalya paused, giving a small smile. She gave him one last glance after she locked the cell door. As the half-Elf left and ascended the stairs, she saw the guards on the lower level had finally left. *Thank the Valar!* That was not a conversation she wanted to try and work her way out of.

Thorin watched her ascend back up the steps to the great hall. He knew she could just be trying to use him for the gain of the Elf King. The Dwarf shook his head as he slowly stood and walked
As Natalya walked into the throne room, the King almost seemed to not be as stern as he had in the past. He smiled down at her as she walked up. Bowing before the throne, as was customary, the female still did not know what he wanted.

“Greetings, Natalya.” The Elf king nodded as the female guard approached the throne. “I see that you have been excelling in your duties of late. For that I am thankful.”

Natalya blushed. It was unlike Thranduil to freely give compliments. Especially to the soldiers and guards. “Thank you my lord.” The female quickly bowed.

“I would like you to begin taking the night shift from now on.” Thranduil continued, turning away from her. “With your tracking and fighting skills, I’m sure you will manage well.” He already knew of her visits to the Dwarf leader. The two guards that had seen Natalya earlier had found her whereabouts at Thorin’s cell and reported her to him. The King knew of a manuscript that had been hidden a long time ago when Natalya first came to Mirkwood and it had a history of Natalya’s past.

The female immediately thought of the Dwarf as she had promised him that she would be back to give him food. “How long must I stay out there?”

Thranduil looked at her, an icy stare crossing his face.

I shouldn’t have said that. Natalya thought, quickly looking back at her feet.

“As long as you are needed.” Thranduil shot back. “And change your outfit before you go.”

“Yes my lord.” Natalya said, bowing. She then turned on her heel and left the throne room, returning to her room. Changing back into her ankle length green suede tunic and leather chest piece, Nataklya walked out into the sunset lit forest. She did not want to go, as she knew that Thorin would think she had betrayed him. Soon enough other Elves began arriving, Anairë included. They greeted each other in the usual fashion.

“Quiet evening.” Anairë finally commented after a few moments of silence.

“Indeed.” Natalya said softly. “I hope it stays that way.” She looked away, not wanting any of the Elves to notice her aggravated behavior.

The taller Elf side glanced at her friend, curious as to why she was so quiet. It was not like her. Natalya watched as the sun disappeared behind the trees and the air soon became chilly.

Deep in Mirkwood, Thorin sat alone in his cell. Minutes felt like hours and the days felt like years. Every sound he heard brought his eyes upward, hoping the Elf walking by was Natalya, but it never was. She is just like the rest. He finally thought as he rested against the wall and crossed his arms. Only using me for her gain. Thorin had wanted to talk to her because she seemed different.

Meanwhile, Natalya was just as much thinking of Thorin. She really hoped when she returned that he would not be upset with her.

“What is on your mind?” Anairë asked, seeing Natalya still deep in thought.

“Nothing.” The half-Elf easily lied. Anairë did not need to know about her visits to Thorin. Time passed and there was only the occasional snap of a twig or rustle of leaves. There were in total five Elves patrolling the front gate to the Woodland Realm. Natalya wished there were more so she
could slip away quietly.

“Do you know who took care of the Dwarf leader recently?” Anairë suddenly asked, trying to get Natalya to talk.

“No.” The female lied again, shaking her head. “Do you?” Natalya replied, wanting to see how much Anairë knew.

“The only thing I know is that someone had bandaged his hands and arms.” The female Elf said, shrugging. “I thought he was being punished for what he did but not now it seems.” Anairë was hoping Natalya would know something. She cared nothing of Thorin however, and asked no more questions.

It was quiet a little longer and Natalya was about to ask if she could retire when she heard a twig snap close by. She looked at Anairë who still stared off into the woods, not having heard. Natalya almost thought nothing of it before one of the other Elves shouted.

Suddenly, every Elf was in a line formation staring up into the trees, arrows pointed upwards. Staring down at them was a huge spider; spawn of Ungoliant.

Natalya looked up, quickly knocking an arrow to the bowstring and pointing it at the spider.

All of the Elves took aim at once and quickly brought the spider down.

Natalya saw several other eyes staring at them as well. Her fingers slid over the feather fletchings on her bow as she prepared to attack again. Suddenly one of the Elves yelled as a large spider came from behind. The half-Elf spun around to immediately see a large spider not two feet in front of her.

Anairë shouted when she saw Natalya get knocked to the ground. Running over, the Elf tried to fight the spider, but her attempts were not working. She finally grabbed Natalya by the collar of her jacket as she stabbed the spider in the eye. The arachnid shrieked and crawled back, but was still dangerous. Anairë looked down to see her friend with a large gash on her face laying on the ground. Once the spider was fought off, the Elf knelt beside the female but she was unresponsive. “Help!” Anairë shouted and quickly another Elf came to her aid. “I cannot carry her alone!” She said, trying to pick up Natalya’s limp body. The other Elf helped lift Natalya and they carried her back to the Woodland realm.

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“What happened to me?” Natalya asked when she finally awoke. A damp towel was laid over her forehead and a dim candle lit in the corner of the dark room. Her first sight was of Anairë’s face looking at her with concern. Her cheek hurt slightly but it was not terrible.

“You were attacked.” Anairë explained, softly, holding her hand.

“What has been going on?” Natalya asked, feeling that her body was weak when she attempted to move. She wanted to make sure that Thorin had not been tortured or hurt. She listened as Anairë told her all that had happened and there was not much. Thorin was still locked in his cell and had not been out. “All of that was in how many days?” Natalya finally asked, scared of the answer.

“Two.” Anairë answered, placing a new towel on her head that was warm. “The spider that attacked you injected a small amount of venom.” She explained, looking at the half-Elf’s unchanging stare. “That’s why you have been asleep for so long.”
“I assumed it would have been more.” Natalya admitted, trying to sit up.

Anairë quickly placed pillows behind her back to support her. “I will get you something warm to eat.” The Elf said as she stepped out of the room.

Natalya laid in bed trying to rest. She felt that her strength had improved but she had been ordered not to leave unless Anairë said she was well.

Anairë suddenly opened the door, having brought her some food. “You need to recover your strength.” The Elf looked down at Natalya and gave a smile. “It won’t take long for you to recover.”

The next day, Anairë came to see Natalya again. “You look better!” She exclaimed as she entered. Natalya slowly lifted herself from the bed, finally standing up and moving for the first time in a few days. Her body had quickly healed, much faster than if she did not have Elvish in her blood.

Anairë hugged Natalya, happy that she had gotten so much better. “What are you going to do tonight?”

“I’m not sure yet.” The half-Elf said, tucking her hair behind her slightly pointed ear. “I think I may rest for awhile.” Smiling, Natalya knew that that was not what she was going to do. She had to go see the Dwarf leader, no matter how weak she still was.

“I was thinking of a peaceful evening by the water.” Anairë suggested. “Would you care to join me?”

“I would like that.” The female answered as she smiled at her friend. “I will be down later.” Natalya added then left the room. She made her way to Thorin’s cell as fast as she could. Before she did though, she stopped at the kitchens quickly to see if there was any food left over she could take to Thorin. Luckily she found some bread and hid it in her coat.

Thorin heard footsteps coming. Just another guard. He told himself, not bothering to look up until the movement stopped at his door. Looking up, the Dwarf saw Natalya’s face at the door and stood to greet her.

“What have they done to you?” Natalya gasped, horrified. She saw him stand and when the light caught his face, realized that they must have beaten him up. Anairë didn’t tell me about this. “Have they hurt you?” The half-Elf asked as she quickly unlocked the door and stepped inside.

“I think they found out that you were visiting me.” Thorin answered. “Other than a few punches they have not hurt me bad.” He chuckled. “I have endured much worse. Elves are not nearly as strong as Dwarves.” Thorin paused, seeing the cut on her face. “Where have you been?” He asked, staring into her eyes. There was something different about Natalya. The way she interacted with him was so much more caring than the other Elves. He felt something for her that he didn’t really know how to describe.

“I was attacked.” Natalya answered, embarrassed and bowed her head. “By one of the spiders.” She looked up to see fear now in Thorin’s eyes. “I am better now.” She added, reassuring him and gave a slight smile. “I am more worried about you.”

“I thought Thranduil had you locked up or interrogated as well.” Thorin whispered, worry spread across his brow as he looked at Natalya.

“No.” Natalya shook her head. She stood a few more minutes with him before pulling some bread
from her coat. “I brought you this.” The half-Elf said, handing him the food.

“Thank you!” He said, smiling at her as he took the bread. Thorin took small bites and chewed slowly as to not upset his stomach. The Dwarf had not eaten nearly as much as normal even while traveling.

After a few moments, Natalya licked her lips. “What is your name?”

“Thorin.” He whispered, looking up at the female. Silence passed between them for a few moments, neither saying a word as they studied each others faces.

“Do they give you anything to eat?” Natalya finally asked, looking into his cell for a plate of food or a glass of water.

“Not much.” Thorin admitted. “Small scraps of bread and an occasional one of meat.” He said. “But that is few and far between.”

“I will try to give you as much food as I can.” The half-Elf kindly looked into his eyes.

Thorin smiled, looking at her. “I just realized I have not asked your name.”

“Natalya.” She answered, mirroring his smile.

“Natalya.” Thorin said as a whisper. “It is a nice name.”

“Thank you, your majesty.” The half-Elf bowed her head. She immediately knew who he was, knowing he was the great grandson of Thror and heir to the throne of Durin.

“Have you heard of me?” Thorin asked, his voice still low.

The female swallowed. “The other Elves used to tell me stories.” She simply said. “As well as the books I have read in the library.”

Thorin slightly nodded. “I assumed the Elves would never have books of my kin.”

“I had to search for them.” Natalya explained. “They had not been opened for ages but I was just tired of reading the same stories I have been told my whole life.”

Silence passed between them for a few seconds as Thorin was unsure of what to say or do. He did not want to so quickly believe she was there to help but he did not want to dismiss her so easily either. The Dwarf decided to think on the matter and decide what to do once he escaped. Thorin hoped that their burglar had not yet gotten caught and was working on an escape plan. They had to reach the mountain before the sun set on Durin’s day.

Later that night, Natalya had been with Anairë at the pool in the King’s hall. They spoke for a while before the Elf took her leave. Suddenly Natalya heard a voice behind her.

“If you choose to love him, the ending will not be happy for either of you.” Thranduil said coldly as he walked up behind Natalya.

The female quickly turned around to face the King. Her long hair shone with a silver hue as the moonlight flooded into the room. Shocked that Thranduil knew, Natalya swallowed as she looked at him, knowing he would have no problem executing her or throwing her out. The half-Elf wanted to stay in Mirkwood and take care of the kingdom and have a duty. At the same time though, she found herself caring for Thorin. The half-Elf looked Thranduil straight in the eyes with a cold
“I have seen the way you look at him.” The Elf King continued, a smirk playing across his face. “He will never love you.”

With that statement, Natalya quickly turned on her heel and left, knowing what she had to do. She had to help the Dwarves escape.
Walking back down to the dungeons after listening to what Thranduil had told her, Natalya found the rest of Thorin’s company. The half-Elf approached the young, blond haired Dwarf and looked at him.

The Dwarf quickly threw himself against the bars angrily. “What have you done with Thorin?” He growled and the bars rattled as he shook them.

Natalya jumped back, looking at him. “I have come to tell you…” She stated, staring intensely at him. “That I am going to help you.”


“What’s an Elf lass doing down here anyways?” Natalya heard another Dwarf question from a few cells down. She didn’t answer, as she knew he would find out soon enough. “Now I am going to need all of you to be quiet while I figure out a plan.” The half-Elf said in a hushed tone, looking around then all of a sudden she heard soft footsteps. A small creature with a curly mop of hair on his head and bare feet appeared around the corner. He twitched his nose when he saw her and dashed back around the corner. “Hello.” Natalya said, slowly going over to him. “I promise I will not do anything.” He looked up at her and twitched his nose again. “I’m here to help.”

“Well…” The small creature finally spoke. “Would you mind telling me where the keys are?”

“They are most likely…” Natalya stopped for a moment. She actually had no idea where they could be since she had been away from everything and everybody for days. Suddenly an idea popped into her head. “Follow me.” The half-Elf quickly nodded and led the way down the stairs. “Have you come up with a plan?”

“Erm.” The smaller creature paused. “Yes?” He said, sounding unsure.

“What is your name?”

“Bilbo. I’m a Hobbit from the Shire.” Once he found out that Natalya was indeed there to help them, he knew they had to leave as soon as possible.

“I want to leave as well.” The half-Elf whispered, looking down at the Hobbit.

Bilbo looked at her with a shocked expression. “You want to join us?” He added in a hushed tone, not sure if that would be the best. They continued walking until they were down in the wine cellars.

“Well if that is agreeable with you and the company.” Natalya said, suddenly realizing she was imposing. Thorin had not given any sort of inclination that she was to join them.

“The choice is not mine.” Bilbo said, looking up at her.

“Well, whose is it then?” Natalya asked, raising an eyebrow but knowing very well whose choice it was.

“Our leader’s.” Bilbo said, searching around. “Um. Thorin Oakenshield.” Pausing, he looked at the empty barrels. “You probably have not met him.” The Hobbit walked around them then stared at
the lever and the gaps in the floor.

Natalya stayed quiet, wanting to hear what others had to say about the Dwarf leader. “What is he like?”

“Well he is very…” Bilbo paused. “Let’s just say he does not like newcomers very much. I mean when he first showed up at my door he called me a grocer!” He huffed. “In my own home! The nerve.” Bilbo shook his head, laughing. “But look where I am now. On this ridiculous journey to help him reclaim his ridiculous homeland.” Bilbo looked at Natalya with his eyebrows raised. “You do know that he is next in line for the throne of Erebor?”

“I do.” Natalya said, knowing very well the line of Durin.

“Well it does seem that most people know considering most of the Middle Earth Orc population is hunting him right now.” Bilbo paused, wrinkling his nose again and looking at the lever harder.

“That lever dumps the barrels into the river.” Natalya said, pointing to it.

Bilbo looked up at her and pointed at the barrels. “They.” He paused, looking flabbergasted. “Well then.” He paused. He looked at them again, counting. “There are thirteen of them.”

Natalya looked at him, eyebrows raised. “That means?” She asked, wondering what the problem was.

Bilbo gulped, putting his hands in his pockets. He looked up at her, worried. “I will discuss the matter with Thorin.” The Hobbit said. “Once I can find him.” He glanced around and back up to the stairs. “How are we going to?” He asked, pausing. “When is a time when there are no guards around?” He looked back up at Natalya.

“Fairly soon actually.” Natalya said with a smile. “You are lucky.”

“How am I lucky?” Bilbo asked, slightly confused.

“There is a feast of starlight tonight.” Natalya explained. “Mereth nuin Giliath.” She said the name in Sindarin. “All the Elves will be in the great hall feasting.”

“Oh!” Bilbo said, his eyebrows rose into his scalp. “We are lucky.” He kept searching for something. “But first, to find the keys.”

Natalya looked around as well. The keys were sitting on a table in the corner of the room. “Someone is going to be in trouble.” Natalya said picking up the keys and jingling them.

“Why is that?” Bilbo asked, looking up. “Oh.” He said, seeing the keys in her hand.

“Thranduil always wants them when the night is over.” The half-Elf said as. “We have somehow had a prisoner escape before.” Suddenly they came to a spot where the staircase diverged. “Go free the others. I will be right there.” The half-Elf nodded. “We meet at the barrels.” The half-Elf hurried up the steps to go back to where Thorin was still locked in his cell. Looking inside she was happy to see him awake. “We are leaving.”

Thorin quickly stood up and walked over to her as she unlocked the door. He stepped out and looked at her shining eyes. “Are you joining us?” He asked, looking at her. Being able to stand beside her with his full height, he noticed that she was not that much taller than him; maybe by only an inch.
Natalya looked back at him, mouth slightly agape as she undid the shackles on his wrists. “That is your choice.” She answered quickly, unsure of what to say or do. She wanted to go but understood if he did not want someone else to keep up with on the journey.

“I think we will need you.” Thorin said, smiling at her. “You seem to have very good fighting skills if you took care of the spiders in Mirkwood.”

Natalya chuckled, becoming embarrassed. “I have a few skills but not many.” She looked at Thorin as he raised an eyebrow. Her head was spinning as she quickly stepped in front of the Dwarf and led him back down the staircase to where the barrels were. She watched from the top of the steps to see the rest of the company already gathered around the barrels. Swallowing, Natalya became nervous that their plan may not work. She had not realized that there would not be any barrels left once they all escaped.

“Natalya!” Thorin said, calling her over and snapping her from her daze.

Walking over, the half-Elf was nervous as she stood next to Thorin. “Yes your Majesty.” Natalya said, bowing her head. If she was going to accompany them on this journey, she had to remember that Thorin was still the King.

Thorin chuckled. He insisted that Natalya did not need to call him such, since his homeland was not yet reclaimed but he admired her loyalty to him though and did not object. After a few moments, he looked towards where Bilbo was standing. “We are short on barrels.”

Natalya spoke up quickly. “I can stay here.” She said softly, trying to back out. “It’s fine.” The half-Elf continued, her face turning slightly red from embarrassment. “I have grown up here, it’s what I am accustomed to…”

Thorin cut her off with a wave of his hand. “Peace, Natalya.” He chuckled, not understanding why she had all of a sudden become so anxious. The Dwarf paused and looked at her then noticed the entire company was watching their interaction.

Natalya waited for his answer as she also watched the members of the company shift on their feet. They all seemed anxious to hear what Thorin was going to say.

“I have a suggestion.” Natalya said but Bilbo interrupted.

“We need to leave now.” The Hobbit said, worried.

Thorin coughed, regaining his composure. “Alright everyone get in now!” He commanded with authority. “Quickly!” He watched as each member of the company slid into the sideways barrels.

“I can pull the lever.” Natalya said, nodding her head as she realized this had been Thorin’s plan all along.

Thorin nodded in agreement, sliding into the last barrel. “Ready.” He said gruffly.

“Hold your breath!” Natalya said pushing the lever and slowly moved it forward.

“Hold my breath! What for?” One of the Dwarves further down called out.

The ramp lowered and Natalya watched until the last barrel fell through. She quickly sprinted up the stairs and ran through the labyrinth of the Woodland Realm. Slowing down, she walked silently and unnoticed past the dining hall. The feast was still going on and was probably going to last until morning. The half-Elf headed down a narrow passage to the left that lead to the river.
entrance. Opening the door, she heard shouting. ‘Is she here yet?’ A voice yelled. ‘Be patient!’ Thorin, called out. ‘I’m here!’ Natalya answered and nodded then watched as Thorin released his grip on the stone walls and let the barrels start moving. The half-Elf jogged along side them on the ledge above the river. Looking ahead, she began to see Orcs coming into view over the rocks along the river. She swallowed as she pulled out her daggers and got ready to fight. As soon as the first Orc approached her, an arrow whizzed past her shoulder. Looking quickly behind her, Natalya saw other Elves emerging from Mirkwood to stop the Dwarves. They continued fighting the Orcs as Natalya looked down at the water to try and find Thorin. She searched but could not tell who was who anymore as the barrels moved quickly. Almost in a daze, the half-Elf watched as the barrels were now being tossed and turned even more by the swiftly moving current. After a few moments, the barrels were beginning to slow down as they approached the gate that officially left the Woodland Realm. Jumping up onto the ledge, the female twirled and stabbed another Orc. She continued fighting and with each dodge, another one would fall into the water with the Dwarves. Looking down, Natalya saw one of the younger Dwarves hopping out of his barrel, keeping the lever in sight. An axe was tossed to him and he impaled the Orc in front of him. Natalya gave a sudden shout as she saw a large Orc further off, pull out a bow and take aim at the Dwarf. It barely missed the brunette but he finally got his hand on the wooden lever and pulled with all of his might. The gates opened and Natalya’s head whipped around to see Thorin’s barrel floating down the river along with the rest of the company. She quickly jumped over the wall and continued running and fighting the still oncoming Orcs. Slowly the Elves’ numbers began diminishing as they all turned back towards the Woodland Realm, not caring that Orcs had crossed their borders. Meanwhile, Natalya continued running alongside the Dwarves. After a while, the Orc numbers began diminishing as well as the current finally began to slow. She noticed a rocky shore up ahead and went to wait until the Dwarves showed up.

“I think we’ve outrun the orcs!” One of the Dwarves said, popping out of his barrel and spitting water from his mouth like a fountain.

“Not for much longer!” Thorin shouted, attempting to paddle to the rocky shore in front of them where Natalya was standing.

The half-Elf watched as they came closer to where she was standing at the shore. She held out her hand to help Thorin out of his barrel. After all of the Dwarves had made it ashore, Natalya looked around to see how far they had gone. “Look.” The female said, walking past Thorin and the company to point out a large boat a few yards off. “We are near Esgaroth.”

“On your feet.” Thorin gruffly spoke to a few of the Dwarves who had sat to rest. “There’s an Orc pack at our tail. We keep moving.”

“Where?” Balin sighed, looking at their leader.

“Where?” Bilbo spoke up, looking past Natalya. “We’re so close.”

“A lake lies between us and that mountain, we have no way to cross it.” The elderly Dwarf looked to the smaller Hobbit.

“So then we go around.”

“The Orcs will run us down as sure as daylight.” Dwalin looked at Thorin. “We’ve no weapons to defend ourselves.”

Just as Natalya was about to announce herself to the company, a large figure appeared and looked down at them. He had a tattered jacket and dark brown hair pulled away from his face.
One of the Dwarves growled and picked up a stick and strode towards him, ready to attack.

The man quickly shot his arrow into the piece of wood as a warning shot and stared down at all the Dwarves. He looked to see one of the younger ones picking up a rock and he shot it out of his hand as well. “Do it again,” he paused “and you’re dead.” He proceeded to point another arrow at them.

An elderly Dwarf stepped up with his hands in the air. “Excuse me, but you’re from Lake-town, if I’m not mistaken?” He asked, slowly approaching the man. “That barge over there, it wouldn’t be available for hire by any chance?” The Dwarf raised his eyebrows, awaiting the man’s answer.

The man lowered his bow then began walking towards his boat, followed by the Dwarves and Natalya. “What makes you think I would help you?” He asked, looking back at all of them.

“Those boots have seen better days.” The Dwarf paused. “As has that coat.” He added, hoping to be able to persuade the man with what money they had left.

Rolling the barrels the Dwarves were carried in onto his boat, the bargeman ignored the statement.

The Dwarf walked towards the man and continued. “No doubt you have some hungry mouths to feed? How many bairns?” He asked with a smile on his face.

“A boy and two girls.” The taller man said, looking back at the Dwarf, continuing to roll the barrels onto his boat. He did not know what made this Dwarf think he would help them.

“And your wife, I imagine, she’s a beauty?” The Dwarf continued speaking, trying to be as polite as possible.

“Aye, she was.” The bargeman said, looking off into the distance.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to…” The elderly Dwarf sighed, bowing his head.

One of the larger Dwarves still near the shore was getting annoyed. “Oh, come on, come on. Enough with the niceties.” He said, looking back at Thorin.

“What’s your hurry?” The bargeman asked, hearing his frustration.

“What’s it to you?” The same Dwarf quipped back, his arms still crossed over his chest.

“I would like to know who you are, and what you were doing in these lands.” The man said, not wanting to help just anyone that came along. He looked to the whole company now, seeing their disheveled state.

Balin quickly answered for them. “We are traveling to visit our kin in the Iron Hills.”

The bargeman suddenly caught sight of Natalya and eyed her suspiciously. “Well what about you?” He asked, raising an eyebrow. “You are no Dwarf.” He said, seeing her pointed ear stick out from her hair. “Surely these are not your kin.”

Natalya tried to quickly come up with an answer but could think of nothing.

“She is with us.” Thorin answered, stepping up next to her.

The half-Elf tried to hide her blush as she swallowed. *How is he vouching for me when he barely knows me?* Natalya looked down at her outfit which was clearly Elven. The long dark green garment and leather corset stood out against the Dwarves more muted colored tunics.
“Is that so?” The tall stranger asked, not entirely convinced. “Why would an Elf be traveling with a group of Dwarves?” He said, staring down Natalya.

_Half-Elf._ Natalya thought, a slight glare crossing her face. She then realized her hair was still pulled back and she quickly undid the braid, letting her hair fall over her ears.

“She is with us and that is all you need to know.” Thorin said, glaring up at the bargeman.

“Very well.” The man said as he walked over to the river and began pulling the barrels out. “I know where these barrels came from.” He felt the side of one of the barrels where it was splintering off.

“What of it?” Thorin asked, looking up at the man.

“I don’t know what business you had with the Elves but I imagine it did not end well.” The tall man said, eyeing Natalya again. He started getting back on his boat and began untying the anchor to depart.

“Offer more.” Thorin gestured towards the Elderly Dwarf who nodded.

“Wait!” Natalya called out, going over to the bargeman. Thorin tried to pull her back but she did not notice. _Don’t you dare give us away!_ He thought, nervous. As he watched Natalya talked to the taller man, she kept glancing Thorin’s way as she conversed vigorously. The taller man kept nodding and looking at the company as well.

“You have to help us.” Natalya said, begging with a pleading look in her eyes.

“Very well.” The man answered, taking another look at the Dwarves.

Natalya walked over to Thorin. “He will help us.” She took a breath, pausing. “On one condition.” The whole company stared at her.

“He wants payment.” Natalya said, eyeing each one of the Dwarves.

“Very well.” One of the Dwarves mumbled pulling out a small sack full of coins.

“We will pay you when we get there but not before.” Thorin interjected, sticking his hand out, stopping the Dwarf from handing over the money. “One more condition.” Thorin added, tilting his head up to look at the taller man.

“What might that be?”

“We need food, supplies, weapons.” Thorin said, stepping closer.

“Very well.” The bargeman nodded, agreeing.

“And we need to enter the town unseen.” Thorin added. He did not want rumors of his quest being spread like wildfire.

“For that you would need a smuggler.” The man said, coiling up his anchor and eyeing them.

“For which we would pay double.” The elderly Dwarf added, stepping closer to the boat.

Natalya looked back and smiled at him.
The bargeman finally agreed to their terms and the company climbed on board the boat and they began sailing down the river into the oncoming fog. Thorin stayed behind Natalya as she walked to the front of the boat. The breeze caught her hair as she stood there, arms crossed, staring into the mist. “What did you tell him earlier?” Thorin whispered in her ear.

“Oh only what he needed to know.” Natalya answered, turning back to him and smiling.

“What was?” Thorin questioned her further. He stared deeply into the half-Elf’s eyes waiting for an answer.

“The fact that you are trying to reach Erebor before the last days of autumn.” Natalya said as he looked off.

“Is that all?” Thorin asked, looking away from her.

“Yes.” Natalya nodded. “Do you think I would tell him everything?”

“Well you were conversing a while.” Thorin said, looking back to the half-Elf.

Natalya said nothing as she took a seat next to Bilbo on the boat. She watched as Thorin slowly made his way closer to the front. “Bilbo, would you mind telling me a few of the other Dwarves names.”

“Of course.” The Hobbit gave a smile as he looked at the half-Elf.

As the boat continued through the water, suddenly large rocks appeared out of the fog and right in front of them. “What are you trying to do?” Thorin asked the bargeman as they came dangerously close to some of the boulders. “Drown us?”

“If I wanted to drown you master Dwarf,” the man answered from the back of the boat. “I would not do it here.” He pulled the boat into another sharp turn.

Natalya still sat silently next to Bilbo. She had never made it this far out of the Woodland Realm before. The half-Elf rubbed her sweaty palms on the dark green fabric of her jerkin as she thought about what Thranduil might do to her. Suddenly she heard one of the Dwarves, Dwalin, speak up.

“I’ve had enough of this lippy lakeman. I say we throw him over the side and be done with him.”

“Oh, Bard, his name’s Bard.” Bilbo sighed as he looked down at the small group of Dwarves who were counting their coins.

“How do you know?” Bofur asked, looking up at the Hobbit.

“Uh, I asked him.”

“I don’t care what he calls himself, I don’t like him.” Dwalin crossed his arms over his chest as he stared at Thorin.

“We do not have to like him, we simply have to pay him.” Balin looked to the group. “Come on now, lads, turn out your pockets.”

Natalya finally rose to her feet and continued staring out of the boat. She could hear the Dwarves suddenly bickering in the background before Thorin spoke.

“We’re here.” The Dwarf whispered. He looked as the fog cleared to reveal the sharp point of the mountain. He was happy to finally see Erebor again, even if there was a Dragon inside wanting to
burn them alive.

Natalya felt a lump rise in her throat at the sight. Even from the boat she could see that the Dwarven kingdom was magnificent.

“Why are we stopping?” Thorin asked tensely, looking up to the bargeman as the boat came to a halt.

“You said you wished to enter the town unseen.” The bargeman said. “I am helping you.” He held out his hand. “The money.”

“I said we will pay you after we get our provisions and not before.” Thorin answered, his arms crossed.

“If you value your freedom you do as I say.” The bargeman said, looking at them intensely. “There are guards ahead.”

Thorin nodded to Balin who handed over thirteen small sacks of coins.

“Climb into the barrels.” The bargeman ordered. “Now.” He looked back at Natalya. “Stay on the boat.”

The half-Elf stayed standing, and watched as they all climbed back into the barrels. She was grateful that Bilbo had told her a few more of the Dwarves names.

The man departed the boat and walked over to a tiny shack. “They were not here. You never saw them.”

“What is happening?” Thorin asked the company. He saw Natalya standing at the side of the boat through the small hole in his barrel.

“He’s talking to someone.” Bilbo said from the next barrel over. “He’s pointing straight at us.” The Hobbit continued. “Now they’re shaking hands.”

“What?” Thorin growled, getting impatient.

“He’s selling us out!” Dwalin exclaimed from a few boats over.

There was suddenly a creaking overhead and Thorin looked up to the sight of fish being dumped on top of them.

Natalya swallowed as they approached the main gate.

Moments later the barge stopped again. “Hello Bard.” A man’s voice said. “All in order.” He said cheerily, stamping the small piece of paper.

Natalya looked around, taking in the sight of the small town. It was quaint, but not well kept. Some of the houses looked as though they could fall apart if even the slightest breeze blew through.

“Not so fast.” Another voice said as a shorter man stepped out from behind a doorway. “You’re licensed as a bargeman. Not a fisherman.” He paused and looked at the barrels, picking up a fish. “These fish are illegal.” The man pointed to the barrels, throwing the fish into the river. “Into the river with them.”

Natalya started panicking but she dare not give away anything by trying to stop them.
“Times are tough.” Bard spoke up as the town guards began trying to overturn the barrels. “People are starving.”

“That’s not my problem.” The man answered cold-heartedly as he watched the guards tipping the barrels.

“And when the master hears fish are being dumped back into the lake.” Bard made eye contact with the shorter man, his look intense. “When the rioting starts. Will it be your problem then?” He asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Stop.” The man suddenly ordered, raising his hand.

The soldiers put the barrels of fish back upright and stepped off the boat. Luckily, they did not see the Dwarves. They each glanced at Natalya and nodded, not realizing she was an Elf.

Natalya quickly realized her height could finally be of help to her on this quest. She knew that she had to hide her ears for as long as possible. However, once in erebor the half-Elf knew she wouldn’t be able to hide her identity for long but she didn’t plan on staying. “Raise the gate.” The first man called out, letting them go through as Natalya continued to think about what she should do. The barge began moving again and they finally made it near Bard’s house.

Bard kicked over one of the barrels, announcing that the coast was clear for the Dwarves to come out.

The Dwarves quickly emerged, gasping for breath.

“You never saw them.” Bard said to a man sitting on a chair. “They were never here.” He gave him some coins. “The fish you can have for nothing.”

Natalya pulled her jerkin tighter around her as the company began walking through the town. Suddenly, she nearly ran into the back of Thorin as they came to a halt.

“Da our house. It’s being watched.” Bain looked at his father then behind them, towards the Dwarves.

Bard looked to the Dwarves. “Meet me in the cellar.” He swallowed. “You have to come in unseen.” He then saw the female and made eye contact. “Follow me.”

Natalya nodded and walked behind the bargeman as they headed to his house. She looked down to see two people sitting in a boat as the man informed them he was done for the day. She could only assume they were the spies the boy was speaking of. After stepping inside the house, the half-Elf watched as the young boy knocked on the wall next to a toilet. After a few seconds, she could see the bald head of a Dwarf coming out of the water.

“If you speak of this to anyone.” The Dwarf warned. “I’ll rip your arms off.”

Natalya swallowed and watched as they all came out of the water and through the toilet. Thorin finally came up last, soaking wet to the skin.

Finally the group huddled closely in the bargeman’s house after being handed dry clothes and towels. The weather had gotten colder within the hour of being there and the air was damp. Natalya stood off by herself, suddenly not feeling well. A cold sweat had started at her forehead and trailed down her back. She tried to shrug the feeling off, not wanting to show her discomfort, around Thorin and the rest of the company who had allowed her to come along. Assuming it was just her nerves, the half-Elf took a seat at the table in the center of the room.
Thorin looked out the same window to see a wind lance in the center of the town. His mouth fell open at the sight. “A Dwarven windlance.” He whispered to himself.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” Bilbo commented walking over.

“The last time he saw one of those,” Balin paused, “the town was on fire.” He began to tell the story of Girion and the day Smaug attacked Erebor.

Natalya heard the Dwarves talking and slowly made her way over.

Balin continued talking as the female walked up. “Girion, the lord of the city, rallied his bowmen to fire upon the beast. But a dragon’s hide is tough, tougher than the strongest armor. Only a Black Arrow fired from a wind-lance could have pierced the dragon’s hide. And few of those arrows were ever made.” He paused as he looked at the group. “The store was running low when Girion made his last stand.”

Thorin sighed as he continued looking out the open window. “If the aim of men had been true that day, much would’ve been different.” He then turned back to see that Natalya was listening as well. Before he could speak to her he heard another voice.

“You speak as if you were there.” the bargemen commented as he entered the room.

“All Dwarves know the tale.” Thorin spoke softly, looking at Bard and his son.

“Then you would know that Girion hit the dragon.” The young boy spoke up. “He loosened his scale under the left wing, one more shot and he would’ve killed the beast.”

Dwalin chuckled and shook his head. “That’s a fairy story, lad. Nothing more.”

“You took our money. Where are the weapons?”

“Wait here.” Bard nodded to them then quickly left.

After the man left Thorin looked at the Dwarves. “Tomorrow begins the last days of Autumn.”

“Durin’s Day falls the morning after next. We must reach the mountain before then.” Balin added, glancing in Natalya’s direction.

The half-Elf nodded, not exactly sure what they were talking about.

“And if we do not?” Kili shook his head. “If we fail to find the hidden door before that time?”

“Then this quest has been for nothing.” Fili swallowed.

Natalya quickly turned around as she heard Bard enter and dump the weapons on the table.

“What is this?” Thorin asked as he stared at the item he had just grabbed.

“Pike hook.” Bard swallowed. “Made from an old harpoon.”

“And this?” Kili questioned, looking up at the man.

“A crow bill, we call it. Fashioned from a smithy’s hammer. It’s heavy in a hand, I grant. But in defense of your life, these will serve you better than none.”

“We paid for weapons.” Gloin huffed, throwing the weapon back down. “Iron forged, swords and
axes!"

“It’s a joke!” Another Dwarf shouted as the entire company began dumping the weapons back on the table.

“You won’t find better outside the city armory.” Bard stated. “All iron forged weapons are held there under lock and key.”

Natalya watched as Thorin and Dwalin made eye contact.

“Thorin.” The elderly Dwarf quickly spoke up, seeing his leaders expression. “Why not take what’s on offer and go. I’ve made do with less, so have you.” He then turned to the company. “I say we leave now.”

“You’re not going anywhere.” Bard placed his hands on the table.

“What did you say?” Dwalin growled, turning back to the man.

“There are spies watching this house and probably every dock and wharf in the town.” The man looked around at the group. “We must wait till nightfall.

The Dwarves reluctantly sat back down. Natalya tried to hide her discomfort as Thorin took a seat next to her. A few moments passed before Bard said he would provide them with a meal.

Fili and Kili had finally noticed the half-Elf as they were sitting across the table from her. They did not know who she was or why Thorin would allow her to join them on such a perilous journey.

Natalya looked up, noticing everyone making glances at her. Rising from her seat, she tried to leave the room. When she stood up, everyone could see that she was shaking. As the half-Elf walked off her legs gave way and she fell. Someone had caught her though and she looked up to see the bargeman was holding her.

“Where are you going?” Bard asked her, concern in his voice. He immediately looked up when Thorin spoke.

“To her room.” The Dwarf said coldly, not breaking eye contact with him for a second. “I assume you have one for her?”

“Thank you.” Natalya whispered, looking up at the man. “For catching me.” She got back on her own two feet but she swayed again and Thorin quickly stepped forward to grab her arm.

“I have a spare room.” Bard said, answering Thorin’s question. He gestured up the stairs. “First door on your right.”

Thorin nodded his thanks. “Come, Natalya.” He gently grabbed her arm. “You need rest.” He walked slowly, helping support her after he saw that she could barely walk.

“Thorin no!” Natalya protested, trying to wrench her arm from his grasp. “I can walk.” She sighed as he let go of her and they slowly walked up the stairs. She had not meant to be harsh she just didn’t want Thorin thinking she was weak. As they approached the room Natalya smiled as Thorin opened the door for her.

Watching the female sit on the bed, Thorin looked at her. “You need to get some rest.”

“Thorin!” Natalya protested against him and attempted to rise. “I’m fine.”
Thorin stared her down and she fell silent as she sat back down. “If you are going to join this quest you listen to my orders.” He said sternly. “I cannot have you fall ill and be a burden to the rest of my company.” The Dwarf sharply turned on his heel and left.

Natalya swallowed, pulling the covers up over herself and she soon realized how cold she was. The blankets were thin and she did not receive much warmth from them. Looking around, the room was small but it only had three beds. **Bard must have children.** There were dolls next to the bed she was in and near the one next to her. Looking to the bed nearest the window, there was a pelt hanging on the wall. **Two daughters and a son.** Natalya concluded. She felt bad for taking their bedroom but knew Thorin would not allow her to leave. Her mind raced as she contemplated what could happen when they entered the mountain. The half-elf suddenly remembered that Thror, Thorin’s grandfather had gone mad from the gold within the mountain. **The Arkenstone!** Natalya remembered Bilbo speaking to her on the boat about having to be a burglar but had no idea what he was stealing. Swallowing, the female laid her head down against the pillow.

After going back downstairs, Thorin looked at the rest of the company and gave them a nod.

“Who is she?” Kili immediately asked after his uncle had taken a seat.

“Natalya.” Thorin answered as he folded his hands and looked at the rest of the company. “She saved my life and all of yours as well.” He paused as he looked around all of the shocked faces of the Dwarves.

Dwalin crossed his arms and looked at Thorin with disapproval.

Kili was in disbelief. “But she is an Elf. How do we know she won’t immediately return to Thranduil.”

Thorin stared at his nephew. “She is to join our company and I want nothing more said about the matter.” He immediately swallowed, not knowing what had come over him.

None of the Dwarves questioned Thorin for the rest of the day. Later, the Dwarf went to check on Natalya and saw that she was still sleeping. Going back down the stairs, he motioned for Oín to follow him.

“How is the lass?” Natalya heard someone say as they entered the room. It was one of the Dwarves. He was shorter and had grey hair that was braided in several updos.

“Natalya is not doing well.” Thorin looked down at the herbs and drink in the Dwarf’s hand. “Will this work?”

“I hope so laddie.” Oín said, shaking his head. “This is all we’ve got.”

Natalya could feel herself falling asleep but tried to stay awake so she could still hear what was going on. Her eyelids closed then all of a sudden a cold glass was pressed to her lips. She took a sip, not knowing what the drink was. Tasting herbs she knew it was a mixture to help her fever.

“That should help you.” Oín said to Natalya.

“Thank you.” Natalya said, her breath ragged. She kept her eyes closed, listening to the sounds around her.

Oín fetched a towel and a shallow basin. Filling the bowl with cold water, the Dwarf dipped the towel in, wrung it out and placed it across the half-Elf’s forehead.
Thorin watched over Natalya throughout the night, periodically replacing the towel on her head. The Dwarf did not know what had come over his actions. His mother always told him to care for women as that they were few and far between. But that was only Dwarf woman. After his brother then his sister’s husband died in the same battle, Thorin learned to be extra protective of everyone around him. Natalya seems different though. He watched the half-Elf’s even breathing as long as he could before he fell into a dreamless sleep in the chair beside her.

During the night, Natalya awoke in a cold sweat. Looking to her right, she saw Thorin asleep beside her. Not wanting to wake him, she tried to reach the water glass behind him but her hand knocked it over, spilling water down his back. Oh no.

Thorin awoke to something cold running down his back. He yelled and jumped, standing up. Turning around, he saw Natalya reaching across the table and the cup turned over. “Mahal, Natalya!”

“I’m terribly sorry Thorin.” Natalya whispered, ashamed. “I did not want to wake you.”

Thorin looked at her, seriousness on his face. “You could have asked for help.” He looked at her with his eyebrows raised. The Dwarf stood up and headed to leave.

“Where are you going?” Natalya asked as she watched Thorin head to the door.

“I’m going to find Oín to give you your drink.” Thorin answered, pausing at the door.

“No Thorin! Don’t!” Natalya called out. “You don’t need to bother him.” She suddenly coughed loudly.

“That’s why I am getting your medicine.” Thorin said, walking down the stairs. He heard a sneeze come from upstairs. Stubborn. He thought to himself, shaking his head.

Natalya lay there, listening to Thorin’s heavy boots clomp down the wooden steps. “I was doing fine!” She muttered as she rested against the pillows. The half-Elf felt cold again but knew there were no more blankets.

“Oín.” Thorin whispered as he walked downstairs. He saw that the entire company was sleeping in the kitchen and in various locations of the bargeman’s house. “Where are you?” He whispered, louder this time.

“Hey Uncle!” Thorin heard from at his feet. “What are you doing?”

Thorin looked into the eyes of his youngest nephew who was sleeping next to his brother. “What are you still doing awake?” He whispered, harshly. “Go to sleep.”

“Oín is over there.” Kili said, pointing to his left.

Thorin sighed. “Thank you Kili.” He said. Walking off he heard his name and turned back to see Fili awake now as well.

“What happened to Natalya?” Fili asked, concern in his voice. “Is she well?”

“She is fine.” Thorin said, only half ignoring them while he searched for the healer.

“Then why are you getting Oín?” The brunette asked, watching Thorin. He was concerned as well, knowing Thorin had just fetched Oín a few hours ago as well.
“A small cold.” Thorin said, walking off to find the healer.

He sighed and walked over to where the healer was. “Oín.” He whispered, touching the Dwarf’s shoulder.

The elderly Dwarf startled awake. “What is the matter laddie?” He stared straight into Thorin’s blue eyes.

“Natalya.” Thorin said, his voice deep. “She is not well.” He shook his head, keeping his voice low.

“Very well then.” Oín said, slowly rising from his bedroll. “We will get the medicine.” The Dwarf reached into his pack beside his bed and grabbed the goblet and kingsfoil. Taking a pinch of the herb, he placed it in the cup. “This will bring down the fever.”

Thorin nodded. “We must be quick.”

Oín walked across the room, stepping over Fili and Kili.

Thorin heard Kili mutter something as he passed, then a snicker erupted from Fili on the floor. He chose to ignore them as he walked back up the creaky stairs. Opening the door, he looked in and saw Natalya still awake.

The half-Elf sat up and watched as the Dwarves got the drink ready for her. She started coughing again and had to rest her head against the pillow.

“Natalya!” Thorin said, going to her side. “Oín hurry!” He said sharply, putting his hand behind her head, steadying her.

“Hurrying lad!” Oín said as he rushed over to Thorin, giving him the goblet.

“Natalya.” Thorin whispered.

The Female looked at him as he put the cup to her lips, tasting that its potency was stronger than the last one. Natalya did not know what to say. Thorin had been kind to her, more so than any of the Elves in Mirkwood. She was sure they had meant well they just did not come across that way. “Thank you.” She finally whispered, words failing her.

“I will sit with her the rest of the night.” Thorin said to Oín. “Leave the drink here.”

“As you wish, Thorin.” Oín said, shuffling out.

Natalya listened to the stairs creak as the Dwarf walked back downstairs. Turning her attention back to Thorin she spoke softly. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

Thorin placed his hand on top of hers. “You are most welcome. This is the least I could do after you got us out of Mirkwood and helped me recover as well.” Thorin chuckled. “I do not know how you put up with Thranduil all those years.”

“I didn’t.” Natalya laughed slightly. “I hated him ever since…” She paused, licking her lips.

“Ever since what?” Thorin asked, leaning towards her.

“Ever since the fall of Erebor.” Natalya said quietly, looking up at Thorin.

Thorin sighed as he stared down at his hands and sat in silence for a few minutes. “It was a hard
day.” The Dwarf finally whispered as he looked back to Natalya and saw her eyes closing. “You need some rest so you can continue to heal.” He said and she nodded slowly. The Dwarf leaned back in his chair keeping his hand on top of Natalya’s and watched her until she slept.
Chapter 4

Natalya slowly opened her eyes as an orange glow from the rising sun flooded through the nearby window. Looking over, she had forgotten that Thorin had been there all night. The Dwarf had fallen asleep at some point and was relaxed against the man-sized armchair. The female chuckled to herself seeing Thorin look fairly small although he was actually tall for a Dwarf and was around her own height. The half-Elf slowly rotated in the bed, swinging her legs off the edge then quietly tiptoed barefoot across the room to look out the window. She frowned slightly, disappointed that she did not have a view of Erebor to see.

“What are you doing up?” Thorin asked from behind her, his voice groggy with sleep. He had heard her moving but did not realize she had left the bed.

Turning around, Natalya smiled at him. “I was just looking at the sunrise.” She commented. “It is quite lovely, no?” The female asked, raising her eyebrows and walking back towards Thorin. She had woken up much later than normal but knew she needed the rest if she was to heal. Quickly dressing herself behind one of the changing panels, she then walked over to the bed to slip on her boots.

Thorin made a slight sound but let his head fall back on the wing of the chair. “Go back to sleep.” He mumbled. “You were up all night.” Really he had been the one up all night looking after Natalya and making sure she was not getting worse.

“Yes but I feel better now.” Natalya said walking towards him. “I can hear the company downstairs anyway.” She turned to go and join them.

“Come back here.” Thorin whispered, his eyelids half closed. “You need rest.” He said but she was gone. Listening to her boots lightly tread down the creaky steps, Thorin groaned, dragging himself out of the chair. He threw on his overcoat, noticing that the air was chilly in the small room. When he opened the door, Dwalin was there to greet him.

Dwalin looked at Thorin with a smirk. He and Balin had known Thorin the longest, having grown up with him in Erebor before the Dragon attacked. The Dwarf warrior stared his friend down until he said something.

“What?” Thorin finally asked, slightly annoyed. He saw the look in Dwalin’s eyes that spoke everything. He did not want to talk with his friend at the moment, knowing that he would only ask him about his night with Natalya.

Dwalin had been trying to push a suitor on Thorin ever since they were in Ered Luin. The Dwarf immediately backed down at Thorin’s scowl. The last thing he wanted was to make Thorin grumpier than usual. Backing up, he allowed Thorin to go down the stairs first.

Thorin reached the bottom and looked into the kitchen. What he saw was an interesting sight. Natalya had her arm linked with Fili and they were dancing around the table. Natalya caught his eye but did not seem fazed. Thorin watched the half-Elf turn her attention back to Fili and lean against him, laughing at something Kili said.

Balin had seen Thorin eyeing Natalya since they set foot in Lake-town. “She will come around laddie.” He said to Thorin as the two took a seat.

Thorin looked at him as he leaned against a nearby wall. “I do not believe you.”
“Breakfast anyone?” Bard suddenly called out as he entered the room. He looked around seeing that his three children had helped cook meals.

“I made eggs.” The boy called out, watching the Dwarves.

“I have toast.” The taller girl said happily, bringing some plates to the table.

“Here is some tea.” The youngest girl shyly walked in with a large tray and placed it on the table. She looked up at everyone nervously. “Are they Dwarves?” The girl asked quietly, pulling on her Dad’s jacket.

Bard looked down at her and put his finger to his lips, quieting her. He looked at the company hoping no one heard.

“We are actually!” Fili said, smiling at her.

“These are my children.” Bard introduced them one by one. “Bain, Tilda and Sigrid.” He said proudly.

All the Dwarves and Natalya smiled at them. Bard apologized that there were not enough bowls in the house so everyone had to take turns eating.

Thorin watched from a distance as Fili and Natalya shared a bowl of breakfast. He quickly looked away when he caught her eye. He knew this was no way for a King to act, it was just his instincts to be protective. The Dwarf finally removed himself from the wall and retrieved his breakfast. Bard handed him a plate and smiled. Thorin took it and simply nodded. He was headed back to the corner when he heard someone call his name. He knew that voice. Thorin turned to see Natalya looking at him. He wanted more than anything to ignore her but thought better of it and walked over.

“Will you join us?” Natalya asked, looking at him concerned. She did not understand what made Thorin suddenly feel the need to distance himself from the group.

Thorin grumbled and sat down. The seating was limited and he barely fit on the bench. Thorin felt the female reach out and touch his arm, attempting to be comforting. He tried to ignore it.

Natalya did not understand why Thorin was all of a sudden avoiding her. She was simply trying to get to know the company since she hoped to be traveling with them. Fili and Kili were eager to meet her and Natalya wanted to meet them as well, hoping she could get some information on Thorin’s past. She could almost see the Dwarf leader recoil at her touch. Had she done something wrong? Surely this was not Thorin reacting because I spent time with his nephews. Natalya removed her hand from his arm and placed it back on the table with a small sigh. She was glad however that Fili and Kili told her who the rest of the company was so she could call them by name if she needed to.

Thorin could still feel Natalya’s touch even after her hand was gone. He wanted to talk about what happened but did not want her to see that he was upset. The Dwarf stayed silent, listening to his own thoughts and blocking out the female. Just as he was about to leave, Natalya rose from her seat. Everything seemed to move slowly for him as he watched her retreat back to her room.

“Uncle?” Fili asked, looking at Thorin who never moved or looked his way as he watched Natalya walk back up to her room. “Uncle?” Fili said again, louder this time. Thorin broke from his daze and turned to him, not happy. He never said a word, but rose from his spot at the table, noticing
that most of the company was nowhere to be found. The Dwarf outside into the afternoon breeze, letting the wind blow his hair.

“Uncle?” Fili followed Thorin outside. “What has gotten into you?”

“I do not wish to speak.” Thorin said angrily, looking away. He did not want to be mad at his sister-sons for the acts of another. *I should never have let her come.* The Dwarf thought as he stared out at the small bustling town.

Fili backed away and re-entered the house, running into Kili. “Don’t go out there.” He quickly pushed his brother away from the door.

“What is wrong?” Kili asked, craning his head to try and see Thorin through the small diamond shaped window on the door.

“Stop.” The blond warned as he kept looking behind. “Uncle is in a foul mood.” He said with a warning. “We do not need to make it worse.”

Kili heard the strain in his brother’s voice and decided this was not the best time to speak with Thorin. “Agreed.” They trudged up the stairs together, trying to find the rest of the company. They saw Natalya in her room instead. “Natalya.” They both said at the same time.

Looking up at them, the female tried to hide her emotions. “Yes?” she asked, raising her eyebrows. The half-Elf had been cleaning her daggers while sitting in an armchair in her room.

Fili and Kili shifted in their feet, unsure of what to say. “Thorin is upset.” Kili started, earning a look from Fili.

“How so?” Natalya asked, she was concerned, but did not show it. She continued running the soft cloth over her dirty blades until they shined again.

“He isn’t speaking to us.” Fili said, his brow furrowed in confusion. “Maybe you should talk to him.” Kili looked at her with a pleading look.

“I can try.” Natalya said, unsure. “But if your Uncle is in a bad mood then I don’t think there is much I can do.” She turned her back to them, standing up and sheathing her knives into her belt. “I am lucky that he has even allowed me on this quest of yours.” She paused, turning back around to look at them. “I know about how much Thorin disapproves of Elves.” The half-Elf said with her eyebrows raised. “Are you trying to get me in trouble?” Glancing around, she made sure the room was tidy.

Fili and Kili smirked at each other behind her back as they had seen Thorin trying to hide his feelings for Natalya.

The half-Elf turned back around to go down the stairs. She placed the cloth back in the bedside drawer and walked down.

The company was huddled around the table staring at Bard. Natalya wondered what was going on. She soon realized they were finally getting the weapons they had bargained for.

“I will be right back.” Bard said, going to retrieve the weapons. He pulled them up from where he had hidden them in the water behind the house and carried them inside. Placing the weapons across the table, he stared at the Dwarves.

Thorin stood towards the back of the group, observing the company open the net and leather
“Pike hook. Made from an old harpoon.” Bard answered, looking at Thorin. He could tell that he was not pleased but hoped he would understand.

“And this?” Kili asked, picking up something that resembled a large hammer.

“A crow bill, we call it.” Bard answered looking at the Dwarves’ confused face. “Fashioned from a smithy’s hammer. It’s heavy in hand, I grant.” He paused. “But in defense of your life, these will serve you better than none.” The bargeman added with a nod, watching the Dwarves.

“We paid you for weapons. Iron forged, swords and axes!” Gloin explained, very frustrated.

“It’s a joke!” Bofur exclaimed, throwing the object back onto the table.

You won’t find better outside the city armory!” Bard nearly shouted, seeing the entire group of Dwarves throw the makeshift weapons back onto the table. “All iron forged weapons are held there under lock and key.”

“Thorin,” Balin said, looking at their leader. “Why not take what’s on offer and go? I’ve made do with less, so have you.” He paused, looking at the company. “I say we leave now.”

“You’re not going anywhere.” Bard said strongly, placing his hands on the table.

“What did you say?” Dwalin asked looking angrily at the bargeman.

“There are spies watching this house and probably every dock and wharf in the town.” The man said, frustrated. He walked outside to get some fresh air, trying to decide what to do.

The Dwarves reluctantly sat back down as they looked around at one another.

Natalya stayed further away from the group and quickly glanced at Thorin who was quite perplexed.

“Thorin.” Bard whispered, suddenly recognizing the name. He looked over to the Lonely Mountain in the distance as Bain opened the front door and looked at his father.

“Da?” Bain asked, looking at Bard.

“Don’t let them leave.” Bard said, placing his hand on his son’s shoulder.

Natalya shook her head and headed back up the stairs to her room as she noticed the sun was already beginning to set. She wondered why they could not just use the weapons that Bard had given them and leave since Durin’s day was fast approaching. The half-Elf retreated to her room and watched as the sky darkened. After a while Natalya realized that she did not hear voices anymore from downstairs and went down to investigate. “Where is everyone?” Looking around, the half-Elf realized where they were headed. Stepping outside, Natalya ran down the steps from the bargemans house and headed towards the center of the town. Picking up her pace, she jogged gracefully to try and find where the rest of the company had gone as the sun was fast setting.

Meanwhile, Thorin and the rest of the company had made their way to the armory. Located in the center of Lake-town, it was one of the largest buildings besides the master’s house. Timing was working to the company’s advantage as it was finally dark and no one was around. The Dwarves had made a ladder up to the top windows that lead them to the storeroom. “Hurry!” Thorin wrapping to reveal items that were certainly not weapons. “What is this?” He asked, stepping forward and picking one of the objects up.
commanded once they were inside. He carefully watched as each Dwarf grabbed as many weapons as he could. As Thorin was heading back through the door to the outside, an armed guard grabbed him and shoved him outside.

Thorin struggled to break free but there was no use as the guard had a grip of iron. Looking up, a tall figure was approaching him, drawing a sword.

Once Natalya arrived at the armory, the building was surrounded. Not by Lake-town men, but by Mirkwood Elves. The half-Elf saw a tall silver haired figure drawing out a sword. She recognized him as Thranduil immediately and watched as he pointed the sharp object at someone. “No!” Natalya shouted, recognizing the figure on his knees to be Thorin. She came to a stop not far from the group, all eyes turning to her.

“I thought we might find you here.” Thranduil said, stepping forward and taking his attention away from Thorin. “Word had reached my ears that you were in league with the Dwarves.” He stood stone still, a few yards from the female, staring her down.

Natalya glared back, hatred showing in her hazel eyes. She said nothing, not wanting to get Thorin hurt.

“I can tell you know nothing of the outside world.” Thranduil said, stepping closer.

“I know enough.” Natalya said, backing away.

Thorin watched as Natalya and Thranduil stared each other down. He attempted to move but the guard would not let him free. He grimaced, while watching the Elf King point his sword at the female.

Natalya’s hand went to her dagger as Thranduil’s sword came closer. She knew well that he would kill her in an instant without mercy. She had betrayed him, helping the Dwarves when they were the King’s prisoners.

Thranduil sneered. “You disobeyed me.” He continued. “You helped these Dwarves escape, forfeiting your own life.” He touched his sword to her sternum.

Natalya stood rigid against his blade. Thranduil quickly struck, cutting her in the side of her neck, causing blood to flow. In one swift movement, she backed up, pulling her daggers out of their holders and trapped Thranduil’s sword between them. The blade shook, but Natalya did not let go as she pushed back against him.

“Are you willing to die for them?” Thranduil asked coldly. He saw her eyes turn scared for a fleeting moment as he slightly sneered.

Natalya suddenly felt all fear leave her body and hatred replace it as she snarled back at the king. The half-Elf knew she could easily be killed if she stayed between the wall and Thranduil. “I am.” She said, glaring daggers at Thranduil.

Just as the Elf King was about to move, there was a loud shout from the center street. Everyone watched as a rather large man with highly decorated apparel approached the crowd, flocked by two guards. Natalya recognized him to be the master of the town. She watched his beady eyes sweep back and forth between her and the group of Elves that kept Thorin and the others from leaving.

“What is the meaning of this?” The Master exclaimed, red in the face. Just as he was about to speak again, Bard appeared, looking concerned.
“It seems Thorin Oakenshield was stealing weapons, sire.” Bard answered, looking at Thorin who was still on his knees.

“Oakenshield?” The master asked, confused. “Who is Oakenshield?”

Thorin heard the commotion but could not see much. He just prayed to Mahal that he would not have to go back to the dungeons in the Woodland Realm. He heard the muffled noise of shouts, as there was movement in his periphery. The Dwarf kept his head down, not wanting to be too obvious. Suddenly, there was pushing and shoving around him as the Elves moved out of the way. Natalya stood in front of him as the Elf guard holding him down finally released his grip. Thorin looked at the half-Elf, gently touching her arm. He then saw the blood running down her neck from where Thranduil had cut her. Thorin took a few steps forward as Natalya introduced him to the Master of Lake-town.

“Greetings.” Natalya spoke up.

The Master looked to her and away from the group of Dwarves. “An Elf and a Dwarf?” He laughed looking between them. “An unlikely pair wouldn’t you say?”

“We are the Dwarves of Erebor.” Thorin finally spoke up. Everyone turned to look at him as he continued. “We have come to reclaim our homeland.” He slowly began feeling his body regain its strength.

The Master and his guards looked astonished at Thorin. “It is the prophecy!” One of the townspeople exclaimed. “The prophecy of Durin’s folk!” Another person yelled in the crowd.

Bard looked to Thorin, recalling the prophecy in his mind.

*The Lord of Silver Fountains. The King of Carven Stone. The King Beneath the Mountain shall come into his own. And the bells shall ring in gladness at the Mountain King’s return. But all shall fade in sadness. And the lake will shine and burn.*

“If we succeed,” Thorin stated, looking at everyone. “All will share in the wealth of the mountain.” He then turned and looked between Bard and the Master. “You will have enough gold to rebuild Esgaroth ten times over!” He hoped to persuade them enough to help them even though he knew the risk.

Natalya watched as Thorin looked at the Master of Lake-town.

“I say unto you!” The master paused. “Welcome!” He was never one to pass up gold, even if it meant sacrificing the life of the Dwarves.

“Wait. Wait.” Another man stepped forward. “We don’t know anything about you.” The shorter man stood beside the Master. Looking at the Dwarves he asked, “Who here can vouch for your character?” He looked around the Lake-town square, seeing all of the townspeople looking at each other.

The town fell silent and finally Bilbo spoke. “I will.” He called out, raising his hand. “I will vouch for him.” Thorin and the Hobbit made eye contact. “Now I have traveled far and wide with these Dwarves.” He exclaimed. “And if Thorin Oakenshield gives his word. Then he will keep it.”

“If you awaken that beast, it will destroy us!” Bard suddenly shouted, stepping out from beside the master. By this time, civilians were looking out their windows at the yelling and commotion. “You have no right!” Bard stated, shaking his head at Thorin. “No right to enter that mountain.”
“I have the only right.” Thorin said strongly, looking up at him.

“Now let’s not be too quick to lay blame.” The Master jested at Bard. “It was Girion! Your ancestor, who failed to kill the beast!”

Bard looked down at his feet as he knew this was true. Arrow after arrow he shot, each one, missing its mark.

Thorin turned to look at Bard. “You!” He whispered. “How can you lay blame upon me when nothing has yet happened?” His words were venom.

“Girion shot the beast, loosening a scale under the left wing.” Bain, Bard’s son now stepped forward as well.


“You would just let him go?” Thranduil finally spoke up from further back in the crowd. “He was my prisoner!” The Elf King sneered.

“On what charges?” The master asked, staring Thranduil down.


“You refused to help us when our homeland was destroyed!” Thorin yelled back, stepping with long strides toward them. “You looked on and did nothing!”

All three of them looked at each other then Thranduil saw Natalya moving to the back of the crowd. “You!” He yelled, pointing at her.

Natalya felt his voice like a knife in her back and she knew he was talking to her. Slowly turning around, the half-Elf made eye contact with Thranduil.

“You would help them.” Thranduil said, continuing their earlier conversation. “Forfeiting your life?”

“Now let’s not be hasty!” The Master of Lake-town attempted to intervene but Thranduil shot him a warning glance.

“I would.” Natalya answered, strongly. “I have already said as much.”

Thranduil simply looked at the half-Elf and said nothing. After a moment he looked to the rest of the people. Thranduil glared, re-sheathing his sword and turned away. “The flames of war shall be upon you nonetheless.” He said, walking away. “You will all perish.” The Elf King called his guards who marched off in formation away from the Dwarves and the Lake-town men.

The next morning, the party was granted a few small boats to head to the mountain. Before leaving, the master gifted them with more fitting attire. Thorin nodded, taking his garments that he was given. Looking over, he saw Natalya donning a new thick leather belt and cloak.

The female saw Thorin looking in her direction and offered a small smile as she attached her knife sheaths to her new belt. Wrapping the cloak around her shoulders, the female followed the company to where the boats were waiting.
Passing a small pile of clothes, Thorin quickly grabbed a fur collar from the top of the stack. He glanced around, hoping no one had noticed. Keeping it hidden under his arm, the Dwarf watched Natalya step up next to him. He nodded to the nearby townspeople who were cheering.

The company soon stepped onto the boats and headed for Erebor. Looking back at the half-Elf, Thorin turned to her. “Natalya.” The Dwarf smiled as he presented to her the fur collar. “I picked this up for you while we were in Lake-town. It is much cooler in Erebor than Mirkwood. I would not want you to be cold.”

“Thank you Thorin.” Natalya smiled, blushing as Thorin helped situate the brown fur collar on her shoulders.

After a few moments, Thorin turned silently back to stare at Erebor which was coming ever closer. Thorin sighed as they finally reached the shore and docked their boats on the gravel at the edge of the lake. The Dwarf looked back at the company as they gathered their supplies. Map in hand, he headed in the direction of the overlook. Gandalf had said to meet him there but once they reached it, the Wizard was nowhere to be found.

Natalya was one of the last ones to reach the top of the hill. Looking out, she saw the ruined city of Dale. Beside her, Bilbo finally spoke.

“What is this place?”

“It was once the city of Dale.” Balin answered the Hobbit. “Now it is a ruin. The Desolation of Smaug.”

“The sun will soon reach midday.” Thorin looked around at the rest of the Dwarves. “We must find the hidden door into the mountain before it sets. This way.” He turned to begin heading down the hill. He now knew how much was at stake should they not find the entrance by nightfall.

“Is this the overlook?” Bilbo called out. “Gandalf said to meet him here.” The Hobbit stammered, looking at the Dwarf.

“Do you see him?” Thorin asked, intensely gazing at the Hobbit. “We cannot linger.” He quickly walked off, searching for the hidden door.

The Dwarves searched for a long while, occasionally calling out to each other. Bilbo stayed at Natalya’s side as they continued the search.

“Anything?” Thorin shouted to the rest of the group.

Dwalin sighed as he looked around at the mountain. “Nothing!”

Thorin looked back down. “If the map is true, the hidden door lies directly above us.”

“Over here!” Bilbo called out, pointing to a massive stone Dwarf carved into the side of Erebor. There was a jagged pattern engraved in the side of the sculpture, acting as a stairway.

“You have keen eyes master Baggins!” Thorin praised the Hobbit as he ran up to see for himself.

Natalya had noticed Thorin’s attitude had suddenly changed as he had become quite angry with everyone until then. The half-Elf tried to shake the feeling but couldn’t. Something was not right. She watched as Thorin allowed Bilbo to go first up the staircase. The company climbed quickly up to the ledge and Natalya brought up the rear, not wanting to get in the way. She watched as Thorin suddenly turned back to the group and smiled, holding up the key.
“Let all those who doubted us, rue this day!” Thorin cheered with a large smile. All of the Dwarves cheered for their king but Natalya felt a foul presence over the mountain, making her stomach churn. The air felt thick and it was getting harder for her to breathe. The Dwarves had all stepped closer to the hidden door to try and find it. Suddenly, the female jumped out of her daze to Thorin yelling. Three of the Dwarves began smashing the stone with their axes, to no avail.

“The door is sealed.” Balin stated, staring at all of them. “It cannot be opened by force.”

“Stand by the grey stone when the Thrush knocks, and the setting sun with the last light of Durin’s day,” Thorin paused, looking at the map, “will shine upon the keyhole.” He then looked up at the rest of the Dwarves. “What did we miss?” The Dwarf looked around at everyone who was suddenly standing still to watch the sun. “Balin?” Thorin asked, desperate, as the sun finally went down in the distance.

“We’ve lost the light.” The elderly Dwarf stated, downcast. “There is nothing more to be done. We had one chance.” He then turned to the group. “Come on lads, it’s over.”

Thorin stood still for a few more moments before he looked at the key in his hand and slowly let it slip away, watching as it clinked to the ground. Trudging away, the Dwarf pushed the map into Bilbo’s chest and went back down the staircase not even looking in the female’s direction.

No. Wait. Natalya thought, suddenly realizing that Thorin was leaving. You can’t...

“You can’t give up now!” Bilbo called out as all the Dwarves descended behind Thorin back down the staircase.

Natalya looked over at Bilbo, her cloak and hair flowing around her in the gentle breeze. She softly whispered what Thorin had spoken earlier. “Taro na ‘ond vithren, ilui damma I Navor, a celiathari edeldes, I anor annúdl, na ngalad vedui aur Durin.” (Stand by the grey stone when the thrush knocks, and the setting sun with the last light of Durin’s day will shine upon the keyhole)

Suddenly, the female heard an odd tapping noise and turned her head to see a small bird tapping against one of the rocks. Looking up, Natalya saw the moonlight shining through a gap between two rocks as the heavy air lifted from around her. “Look!” The half-Elf exclaimed to Bilbo, pointing. “The last moon of autumn!” She smiled, watching the moonlight move across the stone. The light stopped, hovering over an indentation in the rock. “See!” She gasped. “The keyhole.” She called down the ledge towards where the Dwarves had left. “We found the keyhole! Thorin come back!”

“Yes! Yes!” Bilbo exclaimed, looking around. “Where’s the key, where’s the key?” The Hobbit asked himself, shuffling around on the ledge. “It was just…” He cut himself off mid sentence as he felt his foot collide with a large metal object.

Natalya gasped as Thorin suddenly appeared and lunged forward, stepping on the string before it fell. She swallowed as the Dwarf made eye contact with her as he reached down and retrieved the metal object. Giving a soft smile, the half-Elf tried to push aside her emotions of happiness. Natalya knew that once the mountain was reclaimed she would have to try and return to Mirkwood to be with her kin. She did not belong with the Dwarves. Once Erebor was Thorin’s to rule, he would have no more need for her help.

Thorin took the key and stared at it then beyond towards the grey stone. Walking over to the wall, the moonlight lit up exactly over the position of the crack in the rock. The Dwarf slowly put the key into the slot then turned it gently as there was a snapping sound inside the rock. Thorin hesitated, placing his hands on the rock and pushed the door open. The door swung inwards with some force to reveal a tunnel. Thorin stepped in, taking in every second. He was finally home.
“Erebor.” The Dwarf whispered, taking tentative steps inside. “I know these halls.” He paused, touching the wall. “This stone.” He looked back, seeing some of the other Dwarves in tears. “Do you remember it Balin? Chambers filled with golden light.”

“I remember.” Balin nodded.

“Herein lies the seventh kingdom of Durin’s folk. May the heart of the mountain unite all Dwarves in defense of this home.” One of the Dwarves read aloud.

Natalya stepped inside then looked up to see an inscription of the wall with runes and a drawing. It depicted a throne with a circle above it and rays coming out.

“The throne of the King.” Balin explained, looking up.

Bilbo and Natalya both looked at it. “And what is that, above it?” The Hobbit asked, looking towards Balin and Thorin.

“The Arkenstone.” Balin said, barely above a whisper.

“And what’s that?” Bilbo asked, again, confused.

“That master Burglar,” Thorin paused, cocking his head in the Hobbit’s direction. “Is why you are here.”

Natalya had no idea what the Arkenstone was but she was afraid to ask. The half-Elf watched as Thorin and Balin instructed Bilbo on what to do. He was to find a ‘Large, white gem’. Whatever that was. There had to be tons of white gems down there. She watched as the elderly Dwarf led Bilbo further down into the mountain.

Bilbo’s eyes dilated in fear. How had I forgotten Smaug? The Hobbit walked slowly down the chamber halls, turning in the direction he was told until he finally reached the treasury. “Hello.” He called out, stepping slowly forward. Once he saw a better view of it he saw that the treasury was massive. It spanned the size of Hobbiton if not larger! A large, white gem. Bilbo told himself. “Very helpful.” He said out loud, looking around. Descending the stairs, The small Hobbit stepped into the gold, hoping he would not drown.

Meanwhile, Thorin ushered everyone back outside, away from the doorway. He was becoming more anxious by the moment. The company was quiet, aside from Fili and Kili gently tapping their swords together.

Natalya was the last one to make it outside. She felt like the mountain was closing in on her the longer she stood in the hall. She stumbled forward and out into the night. The air was getting even chillier outside and she wrapped her arms around herself to keep warm. Fili and Kili called her over but she ignored them. Natalya sat by herself, leaning against the smooth stone on the side of the mountain. The half-Elf watched as Thorin and Balin conversed. ‘I fear for you.’ She heard the elderly Dwarf say.

“A sickness lies upon that treasure.” Balin continued. “A sickness that drove your grandfather mad.”

“I am not my grandfather.” Thorin said flatly, not bothering to look at Balin.

“You’re not yourself!” Balin stated sharply. “The Thorin I know wouldn’t hesitate to go in there…”
“I will not risk this quest for the life of one Burglar.” Thorin said harshly, cutting the elderly Dwarf’s statement short. Balin had always been Thorin’s advisor in some matters.

Balin was shocked. “Bilbo.” He corrected. “His name is Bilbo.” The Dwarf was seeing the effects of the Dragon Sickness already taking a hold of Thorin’s mind.

Natalya stood up to go inside the mountain. She had enough of Thorin’s stubbornness.

“And where do you think you are goin’ lass?” Dwalin asked with a huff. Everyone turned to look at her.

“To help Bilbo,” Natalya answered, anger rising in her voice. She turned her back to them and descended into the mountain. *If Thorin will not help Bilbo, then I will.* Ignoring the foul air, she entered Erebor.

Bilbo, meanwhile, had awoken Smaug. He quickly jumped, sliding down a mound of gold when he saw the Dragon’s eye move. The Hobbit quickly put the ring on that he had found in the goblin tunnels and disappeared entirely. “Where are you? I can smell you.” The Dragon continued. “I feel your air.” Bilbo watched in terror as Smaug came ever closer, inches from his face.


Bilbo jumped away, running across the floor. Suddenly he saw Natalya standing on the ledge at the entrance. *No.* The Dragon would surely kill her if he saw her.

“There is something you carry.” Smaug had finally caught Bilbo’s scent and followed him. “Something made of gold.” He paused. “But far more precious!”

At the word precious Bilbo felt all of his senses screaming at him. He removed the ring, becoming fully visible in the Dragon’s presence.

“Well.” Smaug said, proudly. “There you are, thief in the shadows.”

Natalya kept a close watch on the Dragon as she began to move down the steps. So far, she had not been noticed. Getting to the bottom stair however, her boot hit a coin and sent it skipping over the other stacks and hitting several objects. She watched in horror as Smaug quickly turned his head to her. “Well well well. What do we have here?” The Dragon asked. “A female.” He came over to her. “And an Elf.” He sneered. Natalya looked behind him and immediately saw Bilbo begin heading over to a pile of gold. Smaug turned his head back in the direction of the Hobbit. *He must have found it.* Looking at Smaug, Natalya said nothing. She had heard of the great worms and how Thranduil had faced some and how he had received the scar on his face.

Smaug heard a shout behind him as Bilbo yelled, coins hitting him in the face. He whipped back around to see Natalya sprinting up the staircase alongside Bilbo.

“We made it!” Bilbo huffed, out of breath. Suddenly the mountain shook as there were crashes heard inside the treasury.

“Oh no.” Natalya said, terror in her eyes. “Run!”
Natalya and Bilbo finally reached the top of the stairs, out of breath. “Thorin!” The female shouted, pausing as he turned around.

“You’re alive!” Thorin gasped, seeing Natalya.

“Not for much longer.” Bilbo panted, dashing to the half-Elf’s side.

Thorin turned towards the pair. “Did you find the Arkenstone?”

“The dragon’s coming!” Bilbo nervously looked around, heading for the exit.

“Did you find it?” Thorin asked his voice shaking.

“No, we have to get out.” Bilbo said tensely, backing away from Thorin’s sword as he tried to head outside but the Dwarf stopped him, placing his sword across the exit.

“Thorin.” Bilbo swallowed as the Dwarf used his sword to push him back.

“Thorin!” Natalya pleaded after the Dwarf didn’t answer. “The Dragon!”

The Dwarrow kept his sword pointed at Bilbo as he looked at him threateningly.

At that moment, the Hobbit noticed Smaug appear behind Thorin. He watched as the Dwarf turned to face the dragon as shouts could be heard from down the nearby walkway.

“You will burn!” The dragon roared as he opened his mouth, ready to send flames after them.

Thorin suddenly watched as the rest of the company dashed into the treasury in front of them. “Run!” He shouted, seeing the Dragon preparing to shoot fire. Everyone jumped off the staircase and slid down the piles of golden coins, barely escaping.

Natalya gasped when she turned and saw flames chasing Thorin. The edge of his cloak suddenly caught fire as he entered the room.

Thorin quickly rolled on the ground, shedding the cloak and extinguishing the fire then looked at the stunned group. “Come on!” After leaving the room, the Dwarf suddenly came to a halt as they neared an opening in the mountain. “Ssh. Ssh-ssh.” He extended his hand, looking around but didn’t see or hear Smaug.

“We’ve given him the slip.” Dori whispered from behind Dwalin.

“No, he’s too cunning for that.” Natalya shook her head as she looked over Thori’s shoulder.

“So where to now?” Bilbo whispered, looking out into the kingdom.

“The western guard room.” Thorin looked back at the group. “There may be a way out.”

“It’s too high.” Balin responded, shaking his head. “There’s no chance that way.”

“It’s our only chance.” Thorin sighed. “We’ll have to try.” He slowly stepped forward and out onto the bridge. “Come on.”
Natalya followed close behind, making sure her feet made no sound as she treaded. Suddenly the whole company stopped as a coin dropped and the sound echoed.

Thorin stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes wide in fear. Looking back at Bilbo, he then looked up to see Smaug moving above them. Golden coins that had been stuck to Smaug’s body were falling. Thorin moved slowly forwarded and motioned for them to follow as Smaug had not seen them. Finally once they reached the other side, they broke into a sprint.

Natalya swallowed and followed the Dwarf’s lead as they continued running through the mountain.

Thorin looked back and saw the half-Elf. “Stay close.”

As they entered the small room, the group stopped when they noticed a pile of decaying corpses.

After a few moments, Dwalin sighed. “That’s it then. There’s no way out.”

“The last of our kin.” Balin sighed, stepping forward. “They must’ve come here, hoping beyond hope.”

Natalya swallowed, staring at the bodies in shock.

“We could try to reach the mines.” Balin stepped up next to Thorin. “We might last a few days.”

“No.” Thrin quickly answered. “I will not die like this. Cowering, clawing for breath.” He turned back to face the company. “We make for the forges.”

“He’ll see us, sure as death.” Dwalin shook his head.

“Not if we split up.”

“Thorin, we’ll never make it.” Balin stood next to his brother, staring at their leader.

“Some of us might.” Thorin nodded. He did not want to die running from his fears and past. He knew that he had avoided this for far too long, especially when he retreated into Ered Luin. The heir of Durin had built a name for himself there, but not a good one. The Dwarrows talked nice to his face but Thorin knew what kinds of names they called him behind his back. Stories had been commonly spread throughout the Blue Mountains about his weakness and exile. “Lead him to the forges. We kill the dragon. If this is to end in fire. Then we will all burn together.”

The Dwarves ran throughout Erebor, finally deciding to split up. Natalya, Bilbo, Thorin and Balin quickly ran, towards the forges. Passing a doorway, Thorin knew they were close.

This way!” Balin shouted, seeing that Thorin had gone too far. “It’s this way! Come on!”

“Thorin!” Natalya shouted after him. Suddenly she turned back as Smaug rounded the corner.

“Follow Balin!”

“Thorin.” Natalya whispered, backing away as the dragon prepared to shoot fire.

“Come on!” Balin shouted, ushering Bilbo and Natalya into the nearby hallway just as Smaug unleashed his fire.

Thorin quickly ran and jumped down into the nearby mine shaft and grabbed hold of a nearby rope. Suddenly he looked up to see Smaug descending upon him.
“Thorin! Hold on!” Dwalin had finally caught up with the group and had seen Thorin jump. The Dwarf quickly raised his mace and smashed the mining mechanism. The wheels began to spin backwards, pulling the Dwarf back to the top.

Natalya gasped and rushed towards where Thorin had descended into the mine. She heard Balin calling her but she ignored him.

Thorin gasped as he passed Smaug then suddenly felt something pulling him back. The Dwarf looked down in fear to see that he was standing atop Smaug’s mouth. Just as the dragon opened his mouth, Thorin jumped off, trying to reach a nearby ledge when someone grabbed his hand. Looking up, the Dwarf saw Natalya staring down at him. She quickly helped pull him to safety just as Smaug breathed fire around them.

“Go! Go!” Thorin shouted as they headed through the wrought iron gates and into the forges. “Natalya.” He looked at the female, putting his hand on her back.

“Yes?” The half-Elf jogged behind him, placing her right hand on her dagger just in case.

“Stay close to me.”

“The forges are stone cold.” Balin explained as Thorin and Natalya approached them. “With no fire hot enough to set them ablaze…”

Suddenly, there was the sound of stone cracking behind them as Smaug appeared. Thorin’s eyes widened. “No…” He paused stepping over to the wrought iron gates. “I did not think you would be so easily outwitted!” The Dwarf yelled. The rest of the company looked on in shock as he continued yelling insults at the Dragon. “You have grown slow!” Thorin yelled, louder. “And fat! In your dotage.” He paused, and then whispered, “Slug.” Turning back to face the company, he smirked. “Take cover, now!” The Dwarf yelled, running closer to the gate.

Natalya followed the group, hiding behind the large metal pillars. She could soon see the flames surrounding them, but they were all unharmed. The metal against her back was quickly heating up to an uncomfortable level through the thick beams. The half-Elf squeezed her eyes shut, not wanting to see what was going on around her. Suddenly puffs of smoke rose from the forge as it came alive once more. Creaks of gears could be heard turning and the forge started working once more. Smaug’s fire had lit them ablaze. So that is what Thorin had wanted! After a few moments Natalya quickly ran towards the forges and could hear Thorin yelling.

“Bombur! Get those billows working! Go!” The Dwarf quickly put everyone to work. He then quickly turned to the Hobbit. “Bilbo! Up there. On my mark, pull that lever.” Thorin watched as Smaug continued to bend the large iron gates. “Natalya!” He called as she jogged over. “Stay with me.” He then looked to where Balin was. “Balin.” Thorin continued, turning his head to the older Dwarf. “Can you still mix a flash flame?”

“Aye, it will only take a jiffy!” Balin quickly began heading to one of the nearby store rooms with Ori and Nori following. “Come on!”

Dwalin swallowed as Smaug threatened to break through at any moment. “We don’t have a jiffy.”

Natalya swallowed and nodded, brandishing her daggers as Smaug finally broke through.

“Now!” Thorin shouted as he started jogging towards the left side of the forge.

Natalya ran beside Thorin as he instructed other members of the company what to do. She soon
heard strange noises that sounded like gentle explosions. The half-Elf looked around to see Balin, Dwalin and Ori throwing the flash flames against Smaug’s tough scales.

“Natalya!” Thorin shouted out. “Lead him to the Gallery of the Kings!”

The female nodded and ran from the forges the way that he instructed. Turning down several different corridors, she hoped that it was the right direction. *Surely it cannot be far.* The half-Elf stopped when she reached a large room with tapestries. There was a large stone figure at the end but she could not discern what the figure was supposed to be. Natalya figured that the rock was acting as a mold of some sort, seeing all the cracks and pieces. She walked down the steps and into the middle of the floor. Turning to leave, she suddenly saw Bilbo come running in as well.

Natalya quickly ran towards him, making sure he was safe. Suddenly there was a loud crash of marble breaking and a large metal object falling to the floor. The half-Elf turned her head to the left, seeing Smaug come tearing full force into the room. One of the large tapestries slowly descended upon them, luckily covering them from the Dragon’s gaze.

“You thought you could deceive me!” Smaug raged, breaking the columns in the gallery as well. “You have come from Lake-town.” The Dragon growled. “Well then I will have to pay them a visit.” He sneered. “I knew the Dwarves were in with these horrible lake-men!”

“No!” Bilbo and Natalya called out at the same time as they had just escaped from under the heavy fabric.

“You cannot go to Lake-town!” Bilbo called out.

“You care about them.” Smaug whispered, looking between them. “Good.” He added. “Then you can watch them die!” As he turned to leave, another voice was heard.

“Here! You witless worm!” Thorin yelled. The Dwarf was standing atop the giant stone sculpture, holding onto one of the chains.

“You!” Smaug sneered, turning around to face the Dwarf.

“I’m taking back what you stole!” Thorin yelled, triumphantly.

“You will take nothing from me, Dwarf!” Smaug moved back towards Thorin slowly. “I laid low your warriors of old.” He continued. “I instill terror in the hearts of men.” Smaug drew himself up to his full height, almost eye level with Thorin. “I am King Under the Mountain.”

“This is not your kingdom!” Thorin replied back, fiercely. “These are Dwarf lands. This is Dwarf gold!” He paused. “And we will have our revenge! Ikhf’id-ursu Khazâd!” *(Feel the fire of the Dwarves)* At the last comment, he yanked on the chain, and swung from it along with the other Dwarves pulling the pins out from around the stone mold. The pins detached from the metal holders and fell away, releasing the melted gold that had previously been poured in.

Smaug watched in shock as the gold began pouring out from the sides of the statue and puddled at his feet. Suddenly, the rush of the gold sent the Dragon to the floor, fully immersing him.

Thorin watched, smiling with joy, hoping that his plan had worked.

Natalya and Bilbo had quickly gotten far away from the middle of the floor. The half-Elf turned back and looked on, knowing that this would not work and would only antagonize the Dragon more.

The gold liquid on the floor stilled for a second before it began rippling and Smaug emerged,
angrier than ever. “Revenge!” Smaug yelled, “Revenge!” He climbed out of the thick substance on the floor, body twisting. “I will show you revenge!” With that, he crashed out of the front gate of Erebor and flew towards Lake-town.

“No.” Natalya whispered, watching the Dragon leave to set fire to the town of men. She bolted towards the door, but heard her name being called. She knew Thorin was yelling at her, so she ignored him, having other things on her mind.

“Natalya no!” Thorin yelled after her but she was already gone. “You won’t make it.” He whispered to himself.

“I am fire.” Smaug raged. ”I am death.”

Natalya left Erebor and everyone else behind, knowing that she had to go to Lake-town. She had to try to save as many people as she could. Suddenly someone was grabbing her and pulling her back.

“Natalya!” Fili yelled. “There is nothing you can do!”

Natalya continued pulling against him, tears streaming down her face. “This is all my fault.” She paused. “I have to go and help them!”

“It is folly!” Fili yelled as he continued to pull against her. “You will die!”

“Then I shall die!” Natalya shouted back, still straining against him.

“No!” Fili yelled, pulling on her as hard as he could. She turned around to face him, aggravation in her eyes. “Do you know what that would do to Thorin if you did not return?”

Natalya scoffed. “My leaving would make him happy.” She said, laughing through her pain as she stared the blond haired Dwarf down. “Thorin does not care for me. He probably wished I never joined in the first place.” Natalya whispered. She looked away, not wanting to meet the Dwarf’s gaze. “I really should just go back to Mirkwood. I should have never left.” The half-Elf continued, looking into the night. Soon the water and skies would be blazing bright with Smaug’s wrath.

Fili could not believe what he was hearing. “Thorin asked you to come with the company. You can’t leave us now.”

“I don’t belong with you.” Natalya looked back down at the Dwarf with tears in her eyes. “I was careless to leave Mirkwood, maybe if I asked for forgiveness he would accept me.”

The blond Dwarf was in shock at the female’s words.

“Hurry!” Kili yelled, suddenly running past them. “Over there!” The brunette pointed forward and continued running to a staircase visible from where Natalya and Fili were standing.

Fili glanced Natalya’s way and tilted his head. “Let’s go!” He ran off, following his brother.

Natalya followed a few steps behind, not wanting to be seen. She watched as Fili caught up with Kili and they ascended the stairs. Natalya feared going up there, knowing what she would see. The half-Elf was scared. She wanted least of anything to see the destruction of Lake-town.

Thorin ran out of Erebor a few minutes after everyone left. Upon reaching the lookout tower steps, he noticed a figure standing off to the side. “Natalya?”

Earlier in Mirkwood, Anairë had finally heard of Natalya’s absence. “I assure you my lord,” Anairë
said, speaking to Thranduil. “I do not know.” She shook her head.

“Was she not acting strange the other day?” Thranduil further questioned.

“Not that I can remember my lord.” Anairë answered. Pausing, she added. “Well she was acting rather odd in the wine cellar.” She kept trying to remember. “I just assumed she had too much to drink.”

Thranduil looked at her, waiting to hear an explanation.

“Looking back.” Anairë looked up at him as she continued. “I believe she was trying to hide something. She was speaking about Thorin and almost defending him.” The Elf gave a confused look. “Surely she must know that he is just using her and will never reciprocate the feelings…” She knew Natalya had seemed to take a liking to Thorin but could not let Thranduil know. It would be the end for her friend.

Thranduil suddenly cut her off. “Then you must think she does have feelings for him.” The Elf King raised his eyebrows.

“I can only guess.” Anairë answered, softly. “I have never seen them together.”

“Do you not know who cared for him?” Thranduil asked, staring down at the rings on his fingers. “Bringing him scraps of food and tending to his wounds.”

“Natalya?” Anairë questioned.

“Indeed.” Thranduil smirked. “And for that, She is banished.”

“My lord?” Anairë said, startled as she looked at him. She wondered what caused him to suddenly act so harsh and she had assumed he would forgive her.

“Do not question me!” Thranduil said loudly. “She helped the prisoners escape.” He glared at her. “Do you approve of this action?”

“No I just…” Anairë started but she was cut off.

“Then do not argue.” Thranduil said, returning to his throne and sitting down. “Natalya will pay the price.” He crossed his legs and placed his hands upon the armrests. His rings clinked together as he tapped his fingers.

“She does not deserve this!” Anairë shouted. She saw Thranduil’s gaze turn back towards her with his eyebrows raised. “Natalya did what was right!” The Elf stepped towards the throne, her threatening side coming out. She glared at Thranduil who looked shocked. Continuing, she added, “You treated the Dwarves unjustly.” Anairë was mad. Mad about the fact that Natalya would be for doing the right thing. Anairë had always liked Thranduil and thought him fair, until now. “And for that.” Anairë said bowing. “I take my leave.” Now she saw what Thranduil really was.

Meanwhile, Natalya stood still on some of the steps leading up to a nearby watchtower. Pondering her decision to leave Mirkwood, she cursed herself for being too hasty. “I should have stayed.” The half-Elf could hear Fili and Kili conversing behind her but couldn’t make out what they were saying. She watched as more of the Dwarves were leaving the mountain and heading closer to where she was.

Fili shook his head and looked at Kili. “Natalya wants to leave. She thinks it was foolish of her to come with us.”
“Why?” Kili was confused as well. He thought that Natalya wanted to stay with them and escape the woodland realm.

“I am not sure.” The blond looked over to where the female was standing and staring out into the night.

Anairë quickly packed her things and left the serenity of the Woodland Realm. Once the Elf finally reached Lake-town it was eerily quiet, like the calm before a storm. There was some soft chatter, but nothing more. She looked around, hoping to see Natalya still there. Suddenly, the Elf understood why it was so quiet. Everyone seemed to be leaving as something was coming from the mountain and it was coming fast. “No.” Anairë whispered, looking towards the dark silhouette of the peak against the grey sky. She had heard of the rumors of Smaug but never knew what to believe. Some said that he had died while others say he still lived in the mountain. He was very much alive. The Dragon flew over the town, fury raging as fire spewed from his mouth. The Elf ducked, taking cover under an archway as Smaug descended close to her. People were screaming and running for their lives. Anairë continued her mission to find Natalya as fire rained down upon the town. She could still be here. The Elf knew asking around would prove fruitless as everyone was evacuating. As she jogged across a bridge she came face to face with a boy who was frantically looking for something.

Back at the overlook near Erebor, Natalya looked up, hearing Thorin’s voice. She offered him a small smile, not wanting to tell him that she would be leaving.

“Natalya.” Thorin whispered, noticing she had suddenly become distant.

“Natalya!” Kili yelled, watching her. “Come look!”

Back in Lake-town, Anairë looked the boy in the eyes. “Have you seen an Elf?” She quickly asked.

“One was staying with us when the Dwarves came through.” He quickly answered and tried to run off.

“Where did she head to?” Anairë called, running after him.

“Erebor!” The boy called back, running around a corner and disappearing.

Anairë turned to look at the mountain and quickly left Lake-town, hoping her friend had not been hurt.

Natalya gave Thorin a small nod and ran up the steps to where Kili was looking. At the top of the stairs, Lake-town could be seen. Now, buildings were burning. Tears stung in the female’s eyes as she blocked out everything else around her; even ignoring Kili’s rapid tapping on her shoulder. She finally turned her head to look at him through teary eyes. Following to where his finger was pointing below, the half-Elf saw a tall slender figure with brown hair running towards them up the slope. Her knee length olive green jacket was dirty and her hair was slightly tousled. “Anairë!” Natalya called out, recognizing her immediately. The female quickly headed back down the steps, attaching her bow to her back quiver as she ran to meet her friend. She passed Thorin who stood still as a statue as he stared towards the mountain. “Anairë!” The half-Elf called out again as she got closer.

Anairë finally saw her and ran a bit faster. “I have been looking for you! I feared you were still in the town.” The Elf exclaimed, excited and scared at the same time.

“What’s happening in Esgaroth?” Natalya asked, worried.
“It is not good.” Anairë answered grimly, looking back over her shoulder. “Smaug has set the whole town on fire.” She shook her head. “There won’t be a town tomorrow morning. I had gotten out just in time.” The Elf said, looking at Natalya. “I was coming when the fire first started. I had to find you.”

“Why?” Natalya asked, confused as to why she had left Mirkwood.

Thorin watched them converse from his view on the steps, but not for long. He kept his eye on Erebor at all times, ensuring his kingdom did not fall into the enemy’s hands. He knew it was dangerous to leave but the company would think him strange if he stayed. Slowly he felt the pull of the gold inside the mountain calling him. He stood still however, waiting to see what would happen to Smaug. He remembered the tales of the Lake men using black arrows and wind lances to try and shoot Smaug at the attack on Dale. Surely there was still one left.

Bilbo looked over the wall on the tower. I thought I saw… He thought to himself. Yes!

“What was that?” One of the younger Dwarves asked, looking towards Lake-town.

“It fell I saw it.” Bilbo said, stepping forward. “It’s dead.” The Hobbit spoke up, feeling sure of himself. “Smaug is dead.” He confirmed, turning back to the others.

Thorin heard these words as well as the words of the others. ‘Look there.’ He heard someone say. ‘The ravens of Erebor are returning to the mountain.’ Knowing the Lake-town people would come to Erebor in search of gold and shelter, Thorin descended the steps, heading back to the mountain.

Natalya watched as she saw Thorin quickly walking down the steps. “Thorin!” She whispered. She took a step towards him but Anairë grabbed her arm.

“Natalya!” Anairë exclaimed. “There is no time. We must hurry.” She ran back down the slope towards Lake-town, Natalya following.

Thorin entered Erebor and felt an odd presence. He felt good to have his kingdom back yet he was scared. Scared someone would try and take some of his gold from him. The gold is mine. I am King now. Thorin knew this and he knew what it meant. He would be hunted even more. Some of the Orcs wanted his head after their defeat at Moria at the Battle of Azanulbizar and his mind flashed back.

“Thorin no!” Thrain had said to him. The young Dwarf had tried to charge the Orc who had brutally slain his grandfather. “They mean to kill us all.” Thrain intensely stared his son in the eyes. “I will go.” The Dwarf turned and charged into the battle. “NO!” Thorin yelled after him. He never saw his father again. The Dwarves were close to being defeated and many of them were being slain. They were leaderless. Thorin finally rounded up a smaller group of Dwarves and led a charge towards the Dimrill gate. Charging the leader of the Orc pack, Azog, who had decapitated his grandfather, Thorin stood alone. No one else dare go against him. The Dwarf took a blow to his chest from Azog, the mithril shirt protecting him, but he fell to the ground. His shield had been broken a few feet next to him. Looking quickly to his other side, there was a wide branch he could use as a shield. Azog’s mace came down into the piece of wood. Thorin then fastened his grip on his sword and drove the blade through the Orc’s arm, cutting it off. Azog fell to his knees in pain, yelling. Thorin stood back; ready to deliver the final blow when he heard another yell behind him. But it was not the yell of any Orc. It was Dain, Lord of the Iron Hills, who had come to his aid. He decapitated the Orc with his red axe in one swift blow. Once the Orc’s saw their leader was dead, they fled in all different directions, some however, retreated back into Moria.

The Dwarven army had slain one third of the Orc army and left them leaderless. They finally saw
Thorin and the Dwarves as a threat. The new King under the Mountain tried to not think about the treasure but he did. The gold was his and he had to make sure it stayed that way. Thorin’s mind was racing and he soon found himself standing amongst the piles of gold in the treasury. Walking into a room built into one of the pillars, he found what he was looking for.

Natalya and Anairë arrived at the shores of Lake-town just as the sun was rising. People were everywhere trying to drag hurt friends and relatives out of the debris filled water. Farther off, Anairë saw the boy hugging a taller figure. “Hey that’s…”

“Bain!” Natalya called out running over to them. “Tilda, Sigrid!” She said each of their names, looking down at them. “Bard?” Natalya asked. “What happened?” The half-Elf looked as there was a voice coming out of the crowd.

“It was Bard!” One of the townspeople shouted. “He killed the Dragon!” The man proclaimed, stepping out from behind a crowd of people. “I saw it with my own eyes. He brought the beast down. Shot him dead with a black arrow!” Everyone turned to look at Bard, amazed, mouths agape. Then the people started cheering and moving forward to hug and congratulate him.

The man in black, Alfrid, quickly stood up from where he had been knocked down. He shoved Natalya out of the way and grabbed Bard’s arm, lifting it up. “All hail to the Dragon slayer!” He called out. “All hail King Bard!” Bard yanked his arm from Alfrid’s grasp. “I have said it many times!” He continued, “This is a man of noble stock! A born leader!” Alfrid was trying to win the favor of the people now. He had been the second most despised in the town, next to the master.

“Do not call me that.” Bard said, staring Alfrid down. “I am not the master of this town.” He looked around, searching for their leader. “Where is he?” The man looked around again. “Where is the master?”

“Half way down the Running River!” A lady shouted. “Along with all our gold.” She walked up to Alfrid, pointing her finger at him. “You would know.” She said, glaring at him. “You helped him empty the treasury.”

“No!” Alfrid protested. “I tried to stop him!” He frantically looked around. “I said master.” He wagged his finger. “No!”

“Liar!” Some of the townspeople shouted out. “To the tree with him!” Another yelled. They all grabbed at Alfrid and tried to tie him up.

Natalya got out of the way quickly, walking back over to Anairë. “Well.” She said. “I don’t see why we need to stay.” They walked away as they heard Bard yelling.

“Have you not had your fill of death?” Bard shouted, shoving Alfrid to the ground. “Winter is upon us.” He looked around. “We must look to our own.”

“We cannot linger.” Anairë said, seeing Natalya turn back to listen.

Natalya and Anairë jogged to the base of the mountain then hiked up the slope.

“There was something I meant to tell you!” Anairë shouted down to Natalya. She had gotten a bit ahead and was almost to the top.

“What is it?”

“I knew.” The Elf paused, wondering if she wanted Natalya to know she had found out.
“Knew what?” Natalya asked, reaching the top where her friend was waiting for her.

“About you and Thorin.” Anairë admitted, looking down.

Natalya was shocked. She had not thought she had been that obvious. “How did you find out?”

“First by the bandages on Thorin.” Anairë admitted. “I had not done them and I asked around and no one else had either.” She looked up to meet Natalya’s gaze. “I could only assume it was you, since I had not seen you that day and apparently Thranduil knew too.” The Elf paused. “That is why he went searching for you in Esgaroth.” She licked her lips, not wanting to continue.

“What of it?” Natalya asked. She knew there was more to this story.

Anairë turned away tears stinging her eyes. “You are banished.” She paused. “Thranduil told me.” She watched, as Natalya could barely comprehend what was happening. Anairë knew all of this was sad for Natalya. She had not even told Natalya of when she spoke up against Thranduil. She would save that for another time. “He will hunt you down.” Anairë said. “He will not want you speaking to the Dwarves of us.” Anairë paused, watching Natalya walk towards the mountain. She quickly added “But there is something else.”

Natalya did not turn back as she continued to head toward the mountain. Now there was no chance of her returning to Mirkwood. She could only hope that Thorin would allow her to live in the mountain once it was restored.

“It is about Thorin.” Anairë let a few tears fall down her cheeks.

Natalya finally turned around at her friend’s statement.

“I know how you feel towards him.” Anairë said quieter. She really did not want to tall Natalya the next part. “But he is a Dwarf.” She stopped, biting her lip.

“Yes.” Natalya said, getting frustrated. “So what.”

“Of the lineage of Durin.” Anairë said to her, hoping she would understand. She knew Natalya had read stories about the Dwarves.

“One of the strongest.” Natalya said with her brow furrowed. “Leader of the seven Dwarf armies.”

“Yes but do you know what the seven Dwarf armies pay allegiance to?” Anairë asked, worry now in her voice.

Natalya thought. It had been a few years since she had read up on the Dwarven history. She gasped, suddenly remembering. “Thorin!” The half-Elf whispered, breaking into a sprint towards the mountain. She knew he had been acting odd. Why didn’t I see this before?
“He has the Dragon Sickness already!” Natalya exclaimed to Anairë as they walked under the destroyed doorway to Erebor. “I don’t know how I missed it!” She strode quickly through the halls, looking around for any indication of where they were headed. The half-Elf did not know Erebor, but she knew the Dwarves kept their gold at the center of the mountain, away from even their own people. Natalya had to give it to the Dwarves; Erebor was incredible.

“Over here!” Anairë spoke up, seeing a warm golden glow further down a set of stairs.

“Wait!” Bilbo called out, seeing them approach. “Wait!” He yelled again when they did not stop. “Stop. Stop. Stop.”

“Bilbo!” Natalya exclaimed.

“We need to leave!” The Hobbit gasped. “We all need to leave.” He had fear in his eyes as he looked at the two females.

“But…” Anairë started, but she was cut off.

“I’ve tried talking to him but he won’t listen.” Bilbo said quickly with worry in his voice.

“Thorin?” Natalya asked in a hushed whisper, pretty sure of what was happening.

“Thorin.” Bilbo said, again, a bit louder. “He’s been down there for days. He doesn’t sleep. He barely eats. He. He’s not been himself.” Bilbo paused, pointing upwards. “It’s this place.” He took a deep breath. “I think a sickness lies upon it.” The Hobbit swallowed. “This is far worse than even the Arkenstone.” Bilbo said, shaking his head. “This is…”

“Dragon Sickness.” Natalya whispered as she looked towards the orange glow. She turned her head as Fili and Kili suddenly came running into the room.

“Natalya!” The brothers exclaimed at the same time then paused, looking at the Elf beside her.

“Yes.” Natalya said. “It is worse.”

Fili, concerned for his Uncle, ran down the steps that were right next to Natalya.

“Fili no!” Bilbo called out. “Fili!” He yelled louder. Only Bilbo had seen what Thorin had become in these past few hours. He made the others stay far away in another part of the mountain in case they were to be affected as well.

Natalya glanced at Anairë, becoming more worried.

Anairë went down the stairs after Kili and Bilbo, Natalya coming down last.

The half-Elf stood a few steps behind everyone else. Looking down, all Natalya could see was gold. It spanned the entire expanse of Erebor. She swallowed as Thorin finally emerged from one of the rooms in the treasury.

“Gold.” Thorin paused. He looked up at the gold coins reflecting on the floor to the jade walls. “Gold beyond measure.” The Dwarf said, darkly. He had heard the others come in, but he would address them in a moment. “Beyond sorrow and grief.” Finally looking up, Thorin saw Fili, Kili and Bilbo as well as another Elf. He saw Natalya standing further off but paid it no mind. “Gold.”
He repeated, looking back down. “Behold, the great treasure hold of Thror.” Thorin smirked, noticing the gold as far as he could see.

Fili looked on, concerned. His uncle had never cared for something this much. He always had put his kin and family first. This was a whole new side that he had never witnessed and did not want to.

Anairē was terrified. She had only heard of such madness in tales told to her about the Dwarves. She had always thought they were exaggerating.

“Welcome my sister sons.” Thorin said, smirking and placing his hand over his chest. “To the kingdom of Erebor.” He opened his arms as if welcoming them.

Natalya swallowed and felt tears sting her eyes.

Anairē turned around and put her hand on her friend’s shoulder. “I’m sorry.” She said, sorrow in her voice.

Natalya stared at her feet, speaking barely above a whisper. “Can I speak with you later?”

“Sure.” Anairē said with a small smile. She then nodded and squeezed Natalya’s shoulder before leaving the room.

After everyone had left, Natalya slowly turned and made her way up the steps, walking into one of the nearby rooms, she heard voices. Going further she saw all of the Dwarves gathered and conversing softly. She stepped over towards Anairē and stood against one of the walls.

“I fear we have lost him Kee.” Fili said, shaking his head as they entered the accounting room. The other Dwarves were sitting quietly, fiddling with various objects they had found. No one was talking. The blond sat down on some steps next to his brother.

“There is always hope.” Kili said looking at Fili then to Natalya who had just walked in.

Fili saw him look at her and knew what he was thinking. “She won’t talk to him.” The Dwarrow said, shaking his head. “This is pointless.”

“Well she must still like him if she is staying here.” Kili whispered. He looked over to see that Bilbo had joined Natalya and the other Elf.

“I should have never let him enter the mountain.” Bilbo said, getting more worried with each passing moment. “Gandalf said to wait for him and to not enter the mountain without him.” The Hobbit was beside himself. “I can’t believe I let this happen!” He wrung his hands in distress.

“It was not your fault.” Anairē said, shaking her head as she looked down at Bilbo. “There is no way you could have stopped him.”

“Thorin would have entered the mountain regardless.” Natalya stated strongly, brushing past the Hobbit. She felt so lost. She was still angry with herself for leaving Mirkwood but pained for what Thorin was going through. She hated seeing him like this. Trying to shake the feeling off, the half-Elf walked over to a corner and sat by herself.

Anairē had watched Natalya walk off and was concerned for her. She quickly finished her conversation with Bilbo and went over to speak with her friend. “What has been bothering you?” Anairē asked quietly, watching her friend as she stared into her lap.

“Let’s go somewhere else.” Natalya suggested, looking over at Fili and Kili watching them. The
half-Elf went out of the exit next to them and around another corner. She wanted to ensure that she was out of earshot. “Yesterday.” Natalya started then paused, shaking her head. She drew a deep breath, not sure if she really wanted to explain herself. She tried to find the words as Anairë stared at her. “I knew from the moment that I stepped out of Mirkwood that I should have never left.” Natalya sighed. She did not cry, even though she felt a stinging sensation within her chest. “Now Thranduil has banished me and Thorin doesn’t want me here either.” She finally made eye contact with her friend. “I don’t have anywhere to go.”

Anairë did not know what to say. She looked at Natalya, knowing the half-Elf was conflicted.

“What should I do?” Natalya finally asked, looking at her friend for advice. She suddenly paused, hearing movement in the other room and she listened.

“Uncle!” Fili said standing up as Thorin walked into the room.

“I need all of you.” Thorin stated strongly as he glared at everyone in the room. “In the treasury. Now.” He added, striding back out of the room.

Fili looked to his brother with a sigh. “This plan may just be useless.”

“Try to talk to him.” Anairë said, whispering to Natalya in the hall. “See what he says.”

“I highly doubt he will allow me to stay now.”

The Elf stood and thought for a moment. “I understand.” They silently walked back into the room to notice that everyone was gone.

“Where are they?” Natalya asked, looking around.

“Follow me.” Anairë said, cocking her head. “I think I might know.”

Back in the throne room, Thorin kneeled over the broken marble seat. He did not feel that he had the right to sit upon it. He was not a King without the Arkenstone to rule his people. “It is here in these halls.” The Dwarf paused, getting more frustrated and anxious by the minute. “I know it.”

“We have searched and searched.” Dwalin said, tired.

“Not well enough.” Thorin growled, still not looking at his companions.

“Thorin,” Balin said, choosing his words carefully. “We all would see the stone returned.”

“And yet, it is still not found!” Thorin yelled, his voice echoing throughout the cavernous hall. He was seething with anger, mad that the Dwarves were not looking hard enough for the stone.

“Do you doubt the loyalty of anyone here?” Balin asked, hoping to pull Thorin from his thoughts of treachery.

Thorin slowly turned around, still not looking at the brothers. “It is the King’s jewel.” He said, finally glaring daggers in their direction. “AM I NOT THE KING?” The Dwarf shouted, pointing to himself. Taking a breath he spoke again. “Know this.” Thorin’s voice became softer. “If anyone should find it and withhold it from me.” He paused again, turning to look at Bilbo as well who was standing near the throne. “I will be avenged.” With that Thorin turned around and walked out of the throne room, his long cloak trailing behind him.

Bilbo, Dwalin and Balin all looked at each other, wide eyed. Balin shook his head and headed out.
of the throne room, opposite of where Thorin had left.

Natalya and Anairë walked by a small room where they peered in to see Bilbo and Balin quietly talking.

Bilbo spoke first. “Balin, if, if Thorin had the Arkenstone…or if, if it was found…” He paused, raising his eyebrows. “Would it help?”

Balin looked Bilbo straight in the eyes. “That stone crowns all. It’s the summit of this great wealth, bestowing power upon he who bears it.” The Dwarf was grave. “Would it stay his madness?” He shook his head. “No, lad. I fear it would make him worse. Perhaps it is best that it remains lost.” He stared at the Hobbit, having a feeling of what he was hiding.

In the treasury, Fili and Kili searched through the gold endlessly. They did not know that Bilbo had already taken the Arkenstone. Nonetheless, they did not really try at all to find the gem, since they knew it would only escalate Thorin’s condition.

Fili suddenly looked up to see Natalya at the top of one of the larger staircases. “Kili.” Fili whispered to his younger brother, tilting his head in Natalya’s direction. The brunette walked over and they both made eye contact with the half-Elf and quietly snuck out of the treasury.

“I need to speak with you two.” Natalya said urgently. “Fili.” She started. “Is there any way to get Thorin out of this state?”

“Well.” Fili started, swallowing. “I don’t know. It has never been done before. I just hope that it wears off.”

“It won’t.” Anairë shook her head as she looked at the others.

“Bilbo already tried talking to him.” Kili added. “What more could we do?”

Natalya sighed, tears in her eyes. Turning away from the group she knew this would be a better time than any to try and leave. *It would be highly unlikely that he would remember me anyway.*

“Natalya you should try to talk to him.” Fili looked to the half-Elf. “He’s listened to you before, maybe he will listen to you again.”

Natalya scoffed, not bothering to look back at them. When she knew they were all staring back down at the gold, she quickly left the scene. The half-Elf kept walking until she found herself at the front gate of Erebor that was just now a pile of rubble. She had nowhere to go. Except for where the Lake-town people were now settling in Dale. They might welcome her back considering she knew Bard and his children. Natalya paused, looking up to where the town was. There was movement as the people were coming back into Dale to take shelter. After a while, she retraced her steps back down to the treasury. She saw Fili, Kili and Anairë still in the same place, quietly hidden away. “I will speak to him.” She watched as the brothers turned to look at her.

“I thought you had left.” Kili said in shock, his eyes wide.

“I just went to clear my thoughts.” Natalya replied softly.

“So you will talk with Thorin?” Anairë asked, happy her friend had made the choice.

Natalya looked at her. “Yes but first…”

“Well then we have to go now!” Kili exclaimed, grabbing her hand and pulling her down the hall
back to the treasury. “Only you can help him.” The Dwarf paused then whispered. “Thorin loves you.” He had never seen Thorin act that way around any of the other Dwarrowdams in the Blue Mountains for as long as he had known.

Natalya felt shivers down her spine at the thought. Thorin loving me? She was not quite sure. Sometimes his actions seem as if he hates me. Natalya quickly snapped out of it. Halting, she waited for Fili and Anairë. “I have to tell you guys something. It is important.” She tucked her hair behind her slightly pointed ears. “There are people coming into Dale.”

“What?” Kili exclaimed. He looked at his brother who shrugged.

“It must be the Lake-town survivors.”

“It is.” Natalya answered. “When I went back to the shores of Lake-town to help them, I spoke with Bard and he said they were going to head to Dale to find shelter.”

“Thorin will not be happy with that.” Fili said with a sigh.

“Why not?” Anairë asked, turning her head towards them.

“Because Thorin promised them some of the treasure,” Bilbo piped up as he suddenly appeared around the corner. “And now he is hoarding the gold like the Dragon.” The Hobbit shook his head dismayed. “This may be hopeless.”

“It is not hopeless, Bilbo.” Natalya said. “I will speak with him.” She looked to her right and to her left. Passageways were leading all around the outside of the treasury. “Which way do you think he would be?”

“That way.” Fili pointed to his right. “Be careful.” He said, grabbing the half-Elf’s arm before she could walk off.

“I will.” Natalya said, offering a small smile. She then turned and headed down the dimly lit corridor. The torches on the wall eliminated a soft glow with her reflection dancing on the jade wall as she walked. The wall on her left side was open to the treasury. She kept looking at the gold. Surely he can give some of this to the people of Esgaroth? Natalya thought, still looking down at all of it. She tried to be as quiet as possible so she would not startle Thorin. Soon though, she began to hear voices. There was shouting and shuffling of coins. “No sign of it here.” A voice said. “Keep searching!” Natalya heard Thorin’s voice boom. She could only assume he was still talking about the Arkenstone. Now that she came closer to his voice, she was becoming a little more terrified. This was not the Thorin she knew. The greed of the Dragon had now consumed him. He was the Dragon. Natalya finally came to the end of the tunnel. She saw Thorin standing at the ledge near the railing watching the rest of the company search through the endless piles of gold. He was ever watchful, keeping a sharp eye on their every move. Natalya stayed back a few moments. She wanted to talk to him but was fearful of what he would do. Thorin had never been soft spoken with words and now that he was under the influence of the gold, it was going to be much worse. The half-Elf took a deep breath, trying to steady her voice before she spoke. “Thorin.” She said, stepping into the light. Natalya watched as his head slowly turned around to see who was speaking.

“Natalya.” Thorin said, his voice deeper than usual. The Dwarf had not slept or eaten in days and he felt terrible. His stomach was hurting from lack of food and his head was pounding. He knew that he could not rest until the Arkenstone was found. Thorin finally stepped away from iron railing and fully turned around to speak to her.
Natalya swallowed as he stepped forward. As their eyes met, the hatred seemed to leave.

Thorin felt his facial features relax and he just stared at her. She was beautiful to him but he never dared to say his thoughts aloud. “Why are you here?”

“To speak with you.” Natalya said, her throat going dry. She really did not even know what to say. “You have been worrying me.”

“How so?”

“You have not slept much and you barely eat.” The half-Elf was simply trying to make small talk.

“True.” Thorin said, stepping even closer. “But the legacy of my mountain is quite important don’t you think?” He asked, tilting his head back. “I need the Arkenstone to rule my people.”

“How do you need it to prove you are the King?” Natalya asked, trying to understand. “If the other Dwarves respected you then they wouldn’t need to see the stone in order to know you are the King.” She never planned on trying to talk sense into Thorin. She now realized one wrong word and he would try to kill her.

“You know nothing of this world.” Thorin said softly. “Go. Now.” He could not believe she dared question him. Natalya did not understand. The Arkenstone shows my birthright. “It is the King’s jewel.” Thorin glared. “I am the King!”

Natalya stood her ground, knowing Thorin was still in there somewhere. “You are the King,” She said strongly. She dare not be afraid. Someone had to stand up to Thorin. “but this gives you no right to treat all of us like this!” The half-Elf continued, raising her voice. “We are not your servants.” Natalya seethed, angrier than ever. “Most of these Dwarves are your family!” The female paused, letting her words sink in. “Why would you doubt their loyalty?”

Now all of the Dwarves in the treasury heard Natalya’s voice. They were shocked. She had never let this side come out of her.

Natalya glared Thorin down as he stared back at her. “You can keep acting like this King under the Mountain.” The half-Elf was now trying anything to get to him, “but no one will follow you.” With that, she turned and left. As she stormed down the hall, she ran into Fili, Kili and Anairë and she brushed past them. Little did she know that Thorin had tried to follow her.

Thorin had clearly heard every word she said. He shook his head, looking back over the gold. No. “This is my kingdom.” He whispered to himself. “I am the King.” The Dwarrow looked back over the company looking up at him. “Any sign of it?” Thorin asked, yelling down.

“No.” One of the members called back up. “That jewel could be anywhere.”

“Keep searching! All of you! No one rests until it is found.” Thorin then turned away and quickly left the treasury to find Natalya.

Anairë watched as the half-Elf pushed past the group in the corridor, not saying anything. Looking to Fili and Kili, she saw their worried expressions.

Natalya was horrified. Now what will Thorin think of me? She shook her head and let out a sigh. Wandering the halls, she found herself standing in front of large Oak doors with intricate detailing. Touching them, she opened the door, hearing the hinges creak loudly. The room was far away from the treasury, probably the reason it had been left untouched by Smaug’s fury. Stepping inside, it was very dark and only the slight light from the hall shone through. As her eyes slowly adjusted,
the female saw that the room was quite large. Looking back outside, there was a torch hanging on the wall near the door. Natalya took it out of its holder and brought it with her inside. Holding the fire in front of her, she made sure not to bump into anything. As the torch began to emit a soft glow, the half-Elf saw that it was a much bigger room than she had previously thought. Large tapestries, taller than herself, hung along the far wall, depicting several different scenes. Crowning of Kings in two of them and one skinny blue one showed an anvil with two hammers crossed and seven stars in an arc above it. She immediately recognized the image as Durin’s crest, the eldest of the seven Dwarf fathers. As her eyes kept adjusting, she looked to her right to see a few steps that led down to a sitting area. Walking past a few tables, the woman swiped her finger across one. Dust came off and fell to the floor. The room had obviously not been used in ages as the Dwarves had been forced out over one hundred years ago. Natalya walked down the three steps leading to the two navy chairs. The chairs were adorned with an elegant gold lace trim. As Natalya walked closer she saw sitting in one of the chairs was a crown. Looking closer at it, the shape of two black birds with outstretched wings could be seen across the front. She picked it up with one hand and held it near the torch, noticing that it was quite heavy. There were no curves in the design except the curve to fit the head. *This must have been the King’s room.* The half-Elf looked over to her right and saw a large fireplace. She felt the urge to start a fire in the chilly room. Placing the crown back on the chair, Natalya searched the room. Looking around, the female saw a broken table leg near a large dresser. Picking it up, she used it as a small log and placed it on the metal holder in the fireplace. Being very dry from years of being in the room, it caught fire quickly. The wood was not very big so she knew it would not last long. Natalya looked at the chair sitting across from the other one. It looked more worn and with a tray sitting next to it. There were teacups still sitting on the silver tray and one on the floor, shattered. Dried liquid contents were on the rug and the marble floor beside it. Nataly swallowed, running her hand over the fabric. She could only guess that this is where someone had been when Smaug entered Erebor. Finally the fire grew a little bigger and Natalya saw a torch holder on the other side of the room. Several of them lined the wall but there were no torches. She picked one closer to the center and placed her torch in the round ring. The room was now brighter, but still not much. She saw a huge bed across from where she had come in. The covers were not made but the bed had furs and fine velvet covers lying atop it. Large light gold pillows rested against the headboard. Carved into the dark brown wooden headboard was the same shape of the ravens above a throne. It was the same throne that had been at the hidden entrance. Some runes bordered the image as well. Getting cold, she went back over to the fire to warm her hands for a few more moments. She knew she shouldn’t linger. Just then, the door was kicked open and stomped Thorin himself. Natalya jumped back, too scared to move.

“Natalya!” Thorin exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

The female began backing away. She knew she should not fear Thorin; he had never laid a hand against her, even in his anger, yet she did. His face was glowing a pale golden hue in the firelight with eyes still shining the same blue as the day Natalya had met him. “I…” Natalya swallowed, not sure what to say. “I was simply exploring.” She admitted, looking at the floor. Tensely awaiting a response, the half-Elf expected Thorin to be angry but he did not speak.

A few moments passed before Thorin finally spoke as he stared towards the fireplace. “You could have gotten lost.” He really did not want to get angry with her as he did before. Somehow the Dwarf felt different when Natalya was in his presence. Thorin wanted to apologize to her for his actions earlier, but his mind could not form the words to do so.

Natalya watched as the Dwarf came down the steps and stood behind the King’s chair, tapping his fingers on it but did not try to sit. He never looked at her but stared instead, directly into the fire.

Finally looking down, Thorin saw the crown of his grandfather. His hand slowly reached down and picked it up.
Natalya looked up, scared, mouth slightly agape as he placed the crown upon his head. She awaited some sort of response but nothing happened.

Thorin sighed as he felt as if a great burden had been placed on him.

“Can I ask you something?” Natalya timidly spoke, her head down.

Thorin took a deep breath. “Speak.” He said, sharply turning his head towards her, the golden crown shining brightly in the firelight.

“Is gold so important to you?” Natalya asked, whispering. “What about….” She paused, speaking louder. “Your family and friends.” The half-Elf paused again. “Are they not more important?” Natalya continued, still speaking softly then she suddenly remembered his speech back in Esgaroth. “You made a promise to the people of Lake-town.” Natalya stressed. “What kind of King will you be if you do not fulfill your word?” She asked, finally looking up at him.

Thorin paused, a dark expression on his face as he chuckled. “I am doing them all a great favor.” His eyes still didn’t meet Natalya’s gaze. “As for you I have been very accommodating do you not think?” The Dwarf raised his eyebrows as he finally looked at the half-Elf. “I have allowed you to stay in this mountain under my protection.”

Natalya shuddered and a lump had formed in her throat making it hard to swallow. She nodded slowly but Thorin was beginning to terrify her.

Thorin gazed over to where Natalya was still seated and noticed that she was not looking at him. The Dwarf could feel the metal of his rings digging into the wood on the edge of the chair from his grip. “Leave.” He whispered. “I wish to be left alone.”

Natalya’s head snapped up. “Thorin.” She whispered then shook her head. Apparently she had not talked any sense into him at all. The half-Elf rose quickly from the chair and left.

Thorin sat there the rest of the night as the fire died down. He finally allowed sleep to overtake him as he slumped against the side wing of the chair.

Natalya quickly walked towards the front of Erebor and stood again at the entrance, letting the breeze blow through her hair. She closed her eyes and just listened to the whistling of the wind. Voices coming towards her snapped her out of her daze.

“There she is.”

Natalya recognized the voice immediately as Bilbo. She turned around and saw that Anairë was with him as well. “I have been meaning to speak with you.” The half-Elf said. “I just…”

“We understand.” Anairë gave a smile. “Bilbo.” She said looking down at the Hobbit. “Tell Natalya.”

“Well.” Bilbo stated. He looked around lowering his voice. “Thorin may never find the Arkenstone.”

“Do you have it?” Natalya asked, suddenly remembering that he had picked something up in the treasury.

“Yes.” Bilbo said, timidly. He nervously glanced around again, looking for any sign of Thorin. He would kill them all if he found out. Slowly reaching into his jacket, he withdrew the large white gem which shone brightly in the moonlight.
“Wow.” Anairë and Natalya unanimously said.

“I can see why Thorin wants this so bad.” Natalya whispered. “I always knew Dwarves loved gold. I just never understood the extent of his greed until now.”

“Not all are this way.” A voice behind them said.

Bilbo quickly tucked the Arkenstone away.

Natalya looked behind them to see Balin striding towards them.

“Greetings Balin.” Bilbo said, cheerily.

“Good evening.” Balin replied. He looked between Natalya and Anairë. “It would be best for you two to get some rest.”

“I will stay on patrol.” Anairë immediately responded. “Orcs may be on their way.” She really just needed some fresh air. The deeper into the mountain, the more foul the air was to her. She was surprised that Natalya did not seem as affected.

Balin understood, knowing Elves did not sleep. He then turned to Natalya, raising an eyebrow. He had seen her in Mirkwood and knew she was only half-Elven by her size.

“I can’t sleep.” Natalya said, watching Anairë leave with her sword and arrows on her hip.

“I understand.” Balin replied. “But your eyes say otherwise.” He put his hand on her shoulder. “I will show you a place where you can rest.” The Dwarrow led Bilbo and Natalya to the side of the kingdom, away from Thorin’s chambers. There was a small room a few hallways away. It had a wall right next to the forges so it was fairly warm inside. The rest of the company was there as well.

Natalya looked around at everyone. Kili and Fili looked downtrodden as they stared at the ground.

“I hoped it would have worked.” The brunette mumbled as Natalya walked past.

“Me too.” Natalya whispered, hearing what he had said. She went over to a bench and sat next to Bilbo. She finally realized that her heart loved Thorin, but not the state he was in now.

“Are you feeling okay lass?” Balin asked. He was concerned for her as no one in the company would have ever stood up to Thorin the way she did.

“I’m fine.” Natalya replied quietly.

Balin sighed and went over to a corner and picked up a bedroll. “Here you go.” He said, offering it to her with a smile.

“Thank you.” Natalya replied. She looked up at him and gave him a slight smile. Standing up, she found her own spot in another corner of the room and laid out the new bedroll. Lying down upon it, she quickly fell into a dreamless sleep.

Meanwhile, Thorin had spent most of the evening sleeping in the armchair beside the fire. Suddenly, he jumped awake to hear a voice calling him. The Dwarf looked around the room, but saw no one. There was a distinct eeriness as the sound of his name being called echoed in his head. The voice was soft, as if someone was speaking in a hushed whisper. Thorin looked to see that the fire in the fireplace was now just dying embers. The torch on the wall was still lit and cast his
shadow against the dark emerald wall. He stood up out of the chair, facing the wall as he stared at his kingly silhouette. Giving a slight glare, Thorin left the room. He began walking mindlessly and he soon found himself in the treasury. *I can’t believe they have not found it. The Arkenstone is my birthright. It is the King’s jewel.* He was not sure how long he was down there, searching endlessly. He soon gave up and decided to get the help of the rest of the Dwarves. He started walking towards the entrance and saw someone near the mountain entrance. Striding up to the taller figure, Thorin recognized her as the Elf that was with Natalya and his nephews the other day.

“What business do you have here, Elf?”

Anairë heard his voice and quickly turned. “I’m sorry my lord. I had just been out on…”

“Leave.” Thorin spoke harshly, cutting off her explanation as he shot her a glare. “We have no need of your kind.”

Anairë opened her mouth to speak but no words came out. She was shocked but decided arguing would not be best at this time anyway. Looking towards Dale, she turned and left without a backwards glance. *I hope Natalya finds better favor.*
Natalya awoke to the smell of food and realized her room must be near the kitchens. The half-Elf opened her eyes to see that no one else was there. Standing up, she stretched and looked around again. Natalya usually awoke before breakfast but she knew her mind and body had been under a lot of stress the past few days. Being in the mountain was hard for her with barely any sunlight to help her tell the time. She went to where the food was to find a large kitchen and the dining hall in the room beyond it. Walking into the small space, the female took a seat at an empty table.

All of the Dwarves watched Natalya as she went and sat by herself. Bombur, the cook of the group, silently walked over and handed her some food.

“Thank you Bombur.” Natalya had no idea what the meal was but she ate it anyway and the food was not too bad. Definitely more filling than the Elvish breakfast she was used to. She ended up rather enjoying the food and cleaned her plate. Natalya took the tray back over to Bombur who nodded and took it from her hands. Walking back into the room where they were sleeping, she sat next to Kili on one of the benches who had his head in his hands. “Are you alright?”

Meanwhile, Thorin watched the city of Dale. There were people moving all inside the desolated city. They have come for it. The Lake-town men had come for their share of the treasure. “We need a barricade.” Thorin whispered to himself. The Dwarf went off searching throughout Erebor for the rest of the company.

Natalya and the other Dwarves were sitting quietly in one of the side rooms when Thorin suddenly came stomping in. The half-Elf swallowed nervously as the Dwarf’s lowered glare and body stance threatened everyone in the room.

“Natalya.” Thorin said, still glaring down at her.

Balin saw what the madness was doing to Thorin and his eyes teared up.

Natalya felt her heartbeat quicken. This cannot be good. “Yes my lord.” Natalya answered, looking him in the eyes.

“Get out.” The Dwarrow said, barely a whisper.

“What?” Natalya asked, confused. She hoped that she had just misheard him.

“I said, get out.” Thorin said, this time louder.

Fili looked at his Uncle in shock. He could not believe his ears. If Natalya left, he knew there would be no hope for Thorin to defeat the sickness.

The half-Elf stood up and swallowed as she watched the rage in Thorin’s eyes still burning. Giving a sigh she gave him one last look before grabbing her belongings and leaving the room. Natalya quickly walked towards the front of Erebor. As she reached the broken entrance she gave a sigh and headed towards Dale without looking back.

Thorin’s breath was heavy as he turned and looked at Dwalin. “Call everyone to the gate.” He quickly left the room, heading to the entrance of the mountain. After a few moments he looked back to see the other Dwarves behind him. “I want this fortress made safe by sun up! This mountain was hard won, I will not see it taken again!” Thorin yelled, ordering everyone to work. He glared slightly as he turned back towards the city of men. Looking out, the Dwarf watched the
female’s small figure making her way to the city. Giving a sigh, he let the flame he once had burning for Natalya die.

The company immediately scattered, bringing broken stones of all sizes. There were luckily some larger stones already at the front gate from when Smaug had destroyed it. Quickly putting together some pulleys from ropes and wheels the company had found, the company tied some of the larger stones and started creating a wall. After a while, they noticed Thorin was nowhere to be found.

A few hours later, Thorin strode back through the group and stood upon the partially built barricade, looking out at the fires glowing in Dale.

“The people of Lake-town came to us in need; they have lost everything!” Kili suddenly spoke up, dropping the cart he and Bilbo had been pushing.

Bilbo stopped and kept his eyes on Thorin who slowly turned around.

“Do not tell me what they have lost!” Thorin looked at his nephew. “Those who have lived through Dragon fire should rejoice.” He scoffed as he looked back out at the city. “They have much to be grateful for.” He looked around at the progress the company had made. “Bring more stone to the gate!”

Natalya soon arrived in Dale just as the sun was beginning to set. Only when her stomach growled did she realize that she had not eaten anything all day. She had not seen much of Anairë either in the past few hours. Natalya assumed she had left to go back to Mirkwood. She spent a few minutes wandering around the city looking for Bard or one of his children.

Meanwhile, Anairë had seen the half-Elf from a far way off. “Natalya!” The female called out, chasing her down.

Natalya turned around, seeing Anairë running towards her. “Anairë!” She called back in surprise. They both ran towards each other and embraced. “I assumed you were headed for Mirkwood.” Natalya confessed.

“No.” Anairë laughed. “I wouldn’t have been able to leave you.” She paused for a moment. “Did Thorin kick you out?”

“Yes.”

“He did me too.” The Elf nodded. “Early this morning.”

Natalya stared at the ground, thinking about the Dwarrow. After a moment she heard her stomach growl again. “I am quite hungry if you have found any food.”

“Not yet.” Anairë shook her head. “I am working on it.”

“Bard!” Natalya called, seeing him a few meters off. She quickly walked up to him.

“Natalya!” The man said, concerned. “What happened?”

“It’s nothing.” Natalya said, not wanting to talk about Thorin.

Bard was concerned but knew Natalya did not wish to speak about whatever had happened. “I have some food over here if you would like.”

“Yes.” Natalya said, desperate. “Please.”
Bard led Natalya and Anairë over to where he had some food. Soup had been made out of the provisions that were saved from Lake-town. There was not much, but it was enough for now.

Natalya put the bowl to her lips tasting a few carrots and some other herbs. The soup was not completely filling but it was certainly better than nothing. Natalya and Anairë exchanged glances.

“Is there anywhere we can sleep tonight?” Natalya asked, politely.

“Won’t you be heading back to Erebor?” Bard asked, looking at her.

“No.” Anairë said sternly.

“Why not?” Bard asked. At that moment, Tilda and Sigrid appeared.

“Natalya!” They both exclaimed. The girls ran up and hugged the half-Elf one at a time. “I was hoping we would be seeing you again.” Tilda said with excitement.

“Me too.” Natalya admitted, hugging her. “I just wish our meeting was on a happier occasion.”

“What happened?” Tilda asked, looking like she might cry.

Natalya shook her head. “Thorin had banished Anairë and I.”

“Do not underestimate the power of gold.” A voice said behind them.

Natalya turned to see a tall grey wizard who she had never seen before.

“Gandalf.” Bard said. “Thorin is far worse than we thought.”

The Wizard looked to the two Elves, concerned. “Make sure they are taken care of.” He said as he looked back at the bargeman.

Later that night, Natalya barely slept. She kept tossing and turning, thinking about Thorin. I cannot believe he has become this. She stood up and went to find Anairë. After a few moments of wandering, she found her friend looking out towards Erebor. The braziers were lit and a wall was now fully made in the place of the entrance. “What did Thorin say to you?” Natalya asked Anairë.

Anairë looked at Natalya. “He just told me to leave.” Anairë stated flatly. “He was definitely not this way when he was in Mirkwood.” She tried to make light of the situation but saw Natalya was not smiling. “I’m sure he will change back.” Anairë assured, offering Natalya a small smile.

The half-Elf swallowed and crossed her arms, still unsure of what to do. Finally she decided to tell Anairë what had happened. “While I was exploring Erebor and I found a room.” Natalya paused. “I went inside only to find out it was the King’s old room.” She slightly shuddered. “I thought Thorin was with the gold and would not be doing anything else.” The half-Elf paused, looking away. “He came in and seemed to still be in a rage so I sat down in one of the chairs waiting for him to say or do something. He walked near me but never looked at me.” Natalya swallowed hard. “I tried to talk some sense into him again but he only told me to leave.” She shook her head. “I had wanted to then, but I did not want to leave the company alone with Thorin in that state. I was scared for them.” Natalya continued. “Then the next morning he kicked me out.” Natalya looked down at her hands in her lap. How did I think helping Thorin on this quest was a good idea?

“I just do not understand.” Anairë shook her head. “I thought he cared about you.” She sighed, looking back at her friend. “I think it would be best for you to stay away.”
Natalya sighed and looked at the ground. Deep down she loved Thorin, not this monster he had become. She could only hope now that one of the other Dwarves could help him. Staring at Erebor in silence, her mind was racing. *Bilbo! He has the Arkenstone!* Natalya’s eyes went wide. She could only hope the Hobbit had kept it safe for this long. It had been a few days now since they had entered the mountain and Natalya had not seen much of him. She finally allowed her thoughts to calm down before she returned to her bedroll and fell asleep.

Anairë still kept a watch on the walls of Dale. As the sun was beginning to rise, the Elf saw something coming towards Dale. She soon recognized it to be the Elves of Mirkwood and behind the leading pack was the entire Mirkwood army. Anairë drew a sharp breath. Running off, she went to where Natalya was still sleeping. “Wake up!” She said, urgently shaking her.

“What?” Natalya asked, sleepily.

“The Mirkwood army is coming!” Anairë said, worried. “We need to hide.”

Upon hearing these words, Natalya shot awake. “They can’t be coming here!” She exclaimed, quickly getting to her feet. “What business do they have?” The half-Elf quickly attached her belt and daggers.

Natalya and Anairë ran together to a high watchtower in Dale. Once they reached the top of the staircase, their eyes scanned the town to see the Elves moving closer towards the city. Soon the townspeople noticed as well and began to cheer.

Back in the town square, Bard approached Alfrid. “What news from the night watch?”

The smaller man quickly jumped awake. “All quiet sire. No news to report.” He answered with a yawn. “Nothing gets past me.”

Bard looked out into the town, his lips forming a thin line. “Except an army of Elves. It would seem.” The bargeman nodded, unimpressed.

All of the Mirkwood soldiers had lined up in perfect order, moving aside when the man came through.

As Bard stepped through the ranks of soldiers, Thranduil came trotting in on his Elk. “My lord Thranduil.” The bargeman addressed. All of the Elves moved in turn to the entrance of their King. “We did not look to see you here.”

“I heard you needed aid.” Thranduil answered, staring Bard down. At that moment, a large cart with provisions arrived, being driven by two Mirkwood Elves.

When all of the townspeople saw the cart, they began cheering again as the food and drinks were handed out first.

Natalya and Anairë could not see what was happening so they sat down in the tower and rested, listening to the bustle and noise of the cheering crowd.

More townspeople began swarming the cart when they saw the Elves start handing out the food to everyone. There were sacks of flour, bottles of wine, lettuce and other provisions.

“You have saved us.” Bard said, smiling, watching the people. “I do not know how to thank you.”

“Your gratitude is misplaced.” Thranduil said, coldly.
Bard’s smile faded.

“I did not come on your behalf.” The Elf King paused, staring at Bard with steely eyes. “I came to reclaim something of mine.”

Bard looked at Thranduil, confused.

Back in Erebor, Thorin was walking through one of the large supply rooms. He chuckled as he came across something he had not seen since his youth. “The White Gems of Lasgalen.” The Dwarf said, picking the necklace up. “I know an Elf lord who would pay a pretty price for these.” Thorin snarled as he threw them back into the pile of white gems.

Thranduil stared down at Bard. “Surely you know of what I speak.” He motioned with his hand and the Elven soldiers began marching towards the side of the town that faced Erebor. “They were my wives. When she passed on I decided to have the Dwarves forge me a necklace for her memory.” He looked back at Bard, who had his mouth slightly agape. “When the time came, they would not give them to me. I wanted to retrieve the gems but they were still in the mountain while the dragon attacked. I would not risk my Elves against its wrath.” Thranduil spurred on his elk and began walking off.

“Wait!” Bard called out. “You would go to war over a handful of gems?” He questioned, surprised at the Elf King.

“The heirlooms of my people are not lightly forsaken.” Thranduil snapped back.

“We are allies in this.” The man nodded, watching rank upon rank of Elven soldiers move into position. “My people also have a claim upon the riches in that mountain!” Bard shouted, pointing towards Erebor. Now he was desperate. “Let me speak with Thorin.”

Thranduil slowly turned his head in Bard’s direction. “You would try to reason with a Dwarf?” He almost laughed.

“To avoid war. Yes.”

“They are preparing.” Anairë stated, looking out as the Elves began marching towards the far gate.

“For war.” Natalya finished, looking grim. She swallowed the lump in her throat knowing if Thorin’s company decided to face the Elves, it was certain death. The Elves were skilled archers who could shoot them on the barricade of Erebor if they really wanted. Natalya followed Anairë back down the steps from their lookout spot and ventured closer.

“The Dwarves refused to give me the gems.” Thranduil watched as Bard rode towards Erebor. “Now, they will pay.”

Natalya and Anairë looked at each other, scared.

Bard continued riding to the front gate of Erebor. As he approached, a raven flew out, cawing loudly. The bargeman looked at the top of the barricade, seeing no one.

“Thorin!” Dwalin called as he saw Thorin walking up. The whole company was still assembled at the front of Erebor. The barricade had been completed a few hours ago and the Dwarves were resting. “Someone is coming.”

“Come on.” Thorin ordered as he strode past everyone.
Fili just stared at him for a few seconds before moving. He picked up an axe on the way to the barricade.

Moving quickly up the steps, Thorin looked out to see someone on horseback approaching. Placing one hand on the barricade wall his eyes stared down. It was Bard.

“Hail Thorin, Son of Thrain. We are glad to find you alive beyond hope.” The bargemsn stated once he approached. He was cordial in order not to make Thorin any angrier. Bard had to try and reason with the Dwarf to get the gold that had been promised to the people of Lake-town.

“Why do you come to the gates of the King under the Mountain armed for war?” Thorin asked, tense. He had looked out only a few moments prior to see shining gold armor of the Mirkwood Elves lining the outside of Dale.

“Why does the King under the Mountain fence himself in?” Bard asked, looking up at Thorin. “Like a robber in his hole.”

“Perhaps it is because I am expecting to be robbed!” Thorin shouted back, not wanting to hear Bard’s reasons.

“My lord. We have not come to rob you.” Bard paused. “But to speak fair settlement.” He looked up at Thorin. “Will you not speak with me?”

Thorin sighed, tilting his head as he turned back to descend the stairs.

Bard dismounted his horse and walked cautiously up to Erebor. Looking at the wall, a small diamond shaped hole had been built into it. He walked up and peered in as Thorin slid into view.

“Am listening.” Thorin said, not making eye contact with the man.

“On behalf of the people of Lake-town, I ask that you honor your pledge.” Bard said, getting annoyed. “A share of the treasure so that they might rebuild their lives.”

Meanwhile, Natalya gripped Anairë’s arm. “Look!” She exclaimed, pointing towards Erebor. A figure could be seen standing at the barricade.

Anairë turned her head to look as well. “Bard is speaking with Thorin.”

The half-Elf swallowed, knowing the Dwarf would not so easily be persuaded.

Thorin was still not sure why Bard had come to them for help. “I will not trade with any man,” Thorin tilted his head in the bargeman’s direction, finally looking at him. “while an armed host lies before my door.”

“That armed host will attack this mountain if we do not come to terms.”

Thorin slowly shook his head. “Your threats do not sway me.”

“What of your conscience.” Bard finally said. “Does it not tell you our cause is just?” He paused, watching Thorin look away. He placed his arm upon the barricade and leaned in closer. “Our people offered you help.”

Thorin looked at him. *Since when did they offer us help?*

“In return you brought upon them only ruin and death.” Bard looked sternly at Thorin, awaiting an answer.
“When did the men of Lake-town come to our aid but for the promise of rich reward?” Thorin yelled, finally turning his full body towards Bard.

“A bargain was struck!” Bard shouted back.

“‘A bargain’?” Thorin quoted back. “What choice did we have but to barter our birthright for blankets and food? To ransom our future in exchange for our freedom?” He paused again, raising an eyebrow. “You call that a fair-trade?” The Dwarf asked, nodding his head. “Tell me, Bard the Dragon-slayer, why should I honor such terms?”

Bard looked up at Thorin’s words. “Because you gave us your word?” He answered, becoming frustrated.

Now it was Thorin’s turn to look down.

The man shook his head. “Does that mean nothing?”

Thorin glared back at Bard, sliding back behind the wall. He turned to see the company staring at him, listening to the conversation. The Dwarf stood in silence for a moment before shouting, “Be gone! Ere our arrows fly!”

Bard, in his anger, hit the stone barricade of Erebor and hastily left on his horse, returning to Dale.

Natalya and Anairë watched him return.

“He will give us nothing.” Bard said, riding up to Thranduil.

“Such a pity.” Thranduil said, looking towards Erebor. “Still you tried.”


Thranduil continued. “It is fruitless to reason with them. They understand only one thing.” He withdrew his sword, staring at it. “We attack at dawn.” The King commanded, turning his elk back towards Dale. “Are you with us?” He asked Bard.

“Push!” The Dwarves shouted in unison. Back in Erebor, Thorin had ordered the bridge to be smashed at the entrance to keep intruders out. Dwalin, Bombur, Dori and Bifur had been told to break the head on one of the great statues at the front of Erebor. They had created a crack in it using their hammers and mining tools and finally finished the job with leverage from steel beams. The head of the statue crashed to the ground, breaking the bridge.

Natalya and Anairë’s eyes widened as they saw the statue crash to the ground. “Thorin doesn’t want any visitors I’m guessing.” Anairë said, shrugging her shoulders.

“Well he doesn’t have to worry about me.” Natalya said, standing up. She adjusted her daggers in their holders and strode off.

Anairë followed her, curious as to where she was going.
“What are you doing?” Bilbo exclaimed. “You *cannot* go to war.” He said, looking at Thorin, shocked and confused.

“This does not concern you.” Thorin said strongly, not turning to look at the Hobbit.

“Excuse me!” Bilbo exclaimed. “Just in case you haven’t noticed, there is an army of Elves out there!” He was becoming entirely distressed by the whole situation and Thorin did not seem to even care. “Not to mention several hundred angry fishermen.” The Hobbit continued. “W-we are, in fact, outnumbered.”

The rest of the company now turned and looked at Bilbo.

“Not for much longer.” Thorin answered strongly. He finally turned to look at the Hobbit as well, his hands folded in front of him.

“Wh…? What does that mean?” Bilbo asked, furrowing his brow.

“It means, Master Baggins.” Thorin paused, looking down at Bilbo with raised eyebrows and a smirk. “You should never underestimate Dwarves.” He turned to face everyone before descending the steps. “We have reclaimed Erebor. Now, we defend it.”

The company exchanged glances after hearing Thorin’s words. They did not know that a few moments prior to Bard’s arrival, Thorin had sent a raven with a message to the Iron Hills. It was for his cousin, Dain, informing him that Erebor was reclaimed and the Dragon was dead. They were scared. The Dwarves knew open war meant certain death and defeat of the homeland they had just won.

Thorin headed straight for the armory knowing he had to ready everyone for battle.

Natalya had walked back to where her bedroll was and sat down. “I can’t let him die.” She whispered to herself.

“What?” Anairë asked, walking up.

“Nothing.” Natalya said, shaking her head and looking away. She crossed her legs and sat in silence.

“I know it’s hard.” Anairë said, trying to be comforting. She had heard what Natalya said. “He is going to have to come to his senses.”

Natalya shook her head, dismayed. “I don’t think he will. If an army of Elves on his doorstep ready to kill him over some shiny gems doesn’t persuade him then I don’t know what could.”

“I think *you* could.” Anairë said, looking at the ground.

“How?” Natalya asked, laughing. “He most obviously wanted nothing to do with me when I stood up to him.”

Anairë licked her lips. “Try to…”

“No.” Natalya answered forcefully. “I really don’t want any part of this.” She started to walk off. “I didn’t know this is what it was going to come to.”
“Wait.” Anairë said, grabbing her arm. “You joined the Dwarves.” The Elf said. “You are part of the company.”

“No.” Natalya laughed again. “I’m not.” She looked at her feet. “They are Dwarves while I am Elf kind.”

“Half-Elf.”

“He still wouldn’t just let me in.” The female said with a sigh as she looked away. “I will make a decision by tomorrow morning.” She then looked back at Anairë, forcing a slight smile.

“What are your options?” Anairë asked.

“Either I go join the Dwarves.” Natalya said as she took a deep breath. “Or I ask for Thranduil’s forgiveness.” She paused. “And if he kills me for betraying him…Well Thorin would probably kill me anyway.” Natalya walked off; the brisk breeze that had just picked up blew through her hair.

Back in the armory, all the Dwarves had donned their metal armor. Thorin stood alone, away from the others. He knew someone in his company had betrayed him. Looking down, the Dwarrow watched as the metal of his armor reflected the fires lighting the armoury. The chest plate was solid gold with the pauldrons having blue-grey ravens on the front. The metal was also painted blue on the sides and where it went down to his knees. The belt front had the same ravens on it as well, with a blue braided belt that went around his waist. Looking down, Thorin saw a silver shirt discarded in a pile of other Dwarven armor. Picking it up, he then looked to see Bilbo standing at the end of the hall. “Master Baggins. Come here.”

The Hobbit tentatively walked over to Thorin who was holding up a silver shirt. As he got closer he could see that it was chain mail.

“You’re going to need this.” The Dwarf said to Bilbo.

The Hobbit removed his jacket and slid the silver chainmail over his head. “I…” Bilbo stammered. “I look absurd.” He paused. “I’m not a warrior, I’m a Hobbit.”

Thorin smirked. “It is a gift. A token of our friendship.”

Bilbo gave a slight smile.

“True friends are hard to come by.” The Dwarf grabbed Bilbo on the shoulder and shoved him further down the hallway. “I was blind. But now I begin to see.” Thorin turned Bilbo around to face him. “I am betrayed!”

“Betrayed?” Bilbo asked, trying to remain calm.

“The Arkenstone!” Thorin said, his crystal blue eyes wide in fear.

Bilbo could practically see the Dwarf he knew disappearing.

“One of them has taken it.” Thorin continued, his voice dark. He glanced back towards the other Dwarves. “One of them is false.” A hissing sound crossed Thorin’s lips as he said the last word.

Bilbo shuddered on the inside. “Thorin… the quest is fulfilled. You’ve won the mountain. Is that not enough?” He asked, trying to reason with him.

“Betrayed by my own kin?”
“N…no, uh.” The Hobbit stammered. “You made a promise to the people of Lake-town. Is this treasure truly worth more than your honor?” He shook his head, smiling. “Our honor, Thorin, I was also there. I gave my word!”

“For that, I am grateful. It was nobly done.” Thorin offered a slight smile before letting it fall. “But the treasure in this mountain does not belong to the people of Lake-town.” He looked down then back up at Bilbo with a piercing stare. “This gold is ours. And ours alone.” The Dwarf started backing away. “On my life, I will not part with a single coin. Not one piece of it.”

Bilbo gulped and watched as the company began marching back towards the front gates of Erebor. He followed farther behind as they climbed the barricade.

Meanwhile, Gandalf was speaking with Thranduil and Bard. “You must set aside your petty grievances with the Dwarves.” The Wizard warned Thranduil. “War is coming! The cesspits of Dol Guldur have been emptied.” He paused. “You’re all in mortal danger.”

Thranduil tilted his head. He had enough of this Wizard telling him what to do.

Bard looked between the two of them. “What are you talking about?”

“I can see you know nothing of wizards.” Thranduil said standing up. He poured himself and the bargeman a glass of wine. “They are like winter thunder on a wild wind, rolling in from a distance. Breaking hard in alarm.” He looked towards Gandalf. “But sometimes a storm is just a storm.”

“Not this time.” Gandalf warned again. “Armies of Orcs are on the move. These are fighters; they have been bred for war.” He huffed. “Our enemy has summoned his full strength…”

“Why show his hand now?” Thranduil asked, coolly, cutting Gandalf off.

“Because we forced him.” Gandalf said, tensely. “We forced him when the company of Thorin Oakenshield set out to reclaim their homeland.” The Wizard left the tent, the others following. “The Dwarves were never meant to reach Erebor.” Gandalf spoke, looking towards the great Dwarf kingdom. “Orcs were sent to kill them. Their master seeks control of the Mountain, not just for the treasure within, but for where it lies, its strategic position.” Gandalf shook his head. “This is the gateway to reclaiming the lands of Angmar in the North.” He looked back at Bard and Thranduil. “If that fell kingdom should rise again, Rivendell, Lórien, the Shire. Even Gondor itself will fall.”

“These Orc armies you speak of, Mithrandir.” Thranduil paused; an icy cold look crossed his face. “Where are they?” Thranduil asked, staring Gandalf down.

Gandalf nervously looked at them.

Meanwhile, the Orc armies were on the move and they traveled closer and closer to the lonely mountain. The only barricade left for them to cross was a small mountain range. Bolg led the armies forward. He intended on using the great earth eaters to gain passage to the other side.

Back in Dale, Thranduil had taken a seat while Gandalf continued to speak.

“What do you think I am trying to do?” Gandalf asked, exasperated.

“I think you are trying to save your Dwarvish friends and I admire your loyalty to them.” Thranduil paused before he spoke again. “But it does not dissuade me from my course.” The Elven King rose from his chair. “You started this Mithrandir, you will forgive me if I finish it.” He looked Gandalf straight in the eye before heading to a guard outside the tent. “Are the archers in position?” He
asked, a steely look upon his face.

“Yes my lord.”

Thranduil curtly nodded his head. “Give the order.” He instructed. “If anything moves on that mountain.” The King paused. “Kill it.”

The Elf soldier nodded and walked off.

“The Dwarves are out of time.” Thranduil said, calmly.

Back in Erebor, Bilbo knew what he had to do. Tucking the Arkenstone away in his jacket, the Hobbit began heading towards the entrance of Erebor. Heading up one of the side staircases, he tied a long strand of rope to a chain link on the wall. Bilbo suddenly heard a voice and turned, seeing Bofur.

“You should be inside…out of the wind.” The Dwarf stated, rubbing his hands together for warmth.

Bilbo paused, stuttering for words. “Uh, I, uh…needed some air.” He paused, smiling. “Place still stinks of Dragon.”

“The Elves have been moving their archers into position.” Bofur simply stated, staring across the barricade with a saddened look.

“Agh.” Bilbo nodded, rocking back and forth on his heels.

“The battle will be over by tomorrow’s eve. Though I doubt we will live to see it.”

“These are…dark days.” Bilbo stated, not sure what else to say.

“Dark days indeed.” Bofur agreed, still looking out over the wall. “No one could blame a soul for wishing themselves elsewhere.” He paused and both were silent. “Must be near midnight.” The Dwarf looked back to Bilbo. “Bombur’s got the next watch.” He said, beginning to walk off. “It’ll take a bit to wake him.” Bofur chuckled and started heading down the stairs.

“Bofur.” Bilbo paused, smiling. “I will see you in the morning.”

The Dwarf smiled sadly at the Hobbit. “Goodbye, Bilbo.” He looked away, finally walking down the steps.

Bilbo took a deep breath and climbed over the wall. Hanging onto the rope, he began scaling a flat surface next to the wall. He slipped, but kept a firm grip on the rope. Once he reached the bottom, he headed to the stone dwarf that had fallen over the bridge. Climbing over it, the Hobbit made his way to Dale.

Within the city, Gandalf walked up to Bard. “Bowman.” He addressed him. The man turned around. “Do you agree with this?” Gandalf asked, speaking of Thranduil’s actions. “Is gold so important to you? Would you buy it with the blood of Dwarves?” The Wizard continued.

Meanwhile, Bilbo was sneaking around Dale trying to find the wizard. He needed to give Gandalf the stone. He would know what to do. Finally he heard voices coming from outside of a large tent.

“It will not come to that.” Bard shook his head. “This is a fight they cannot win.”

At that moment, Bilbo appeared to them, hearing what the bargeman said. “That won’t stop them!”
He called out. “You think the Dwarves will surrender? They won’t. They will fight to the death to defend their own.” The Hobbit looked between the Wizard, Man and Elf King.

“Bilbo Baggins!” Gandalf said, relieved and happy.

The Hobbit smiled up at Gandalf.

Thranduil watched as the small creature walked into the tent. “If I am not mistaken, this is the Halfling who stole the keys to my dungeons from under the nose of my guards.” The King sat down in his chair, not at all impressed.

Bilbo paused, looking down before answering softly, “Yesh…” He paused again, shifting. “Sorry about that.” The Hobbit looked up as he approached the table where they were gathered. Pulling something out of his jacket, he placed an object on the table wrapped in a dark red velvet cloth. “I came to give you this.” Bilbo opened the bundle to reveal the Arkenstone.

Thranduil rose from his chair and looked at the stone in shock. He could not believe his eyes. “The heart of the Mountain!” The Elf said in awe. “The King’s Jewel.”

“And worth a King’s ransom.” Bard added, looking to Bilbo. “How is this yours to give?” He asked, confused.

Bilbo took a breath. “I took it as my fourteenth share of the treasure.” He said, looking at all of them and saw Gandalf smiling at him.

“Why would you do this?” Bard asked, shaking his head. “You owe us no loyalty.”

“I’m not doing it for you.” Bilbo quickly added, shaking his head. He saw Bard and Thranduil immediately look at him. “I know that Dwarves can be obstinate and pigheaded and difficult, and suspicious and secretive, with the worst manners you can possibly imagine.” He paused, looking up at Gandalf. He continued. “They are also brave and kind…and loyal to a fault.” The Hobbit shook his head. “I’ve grown very fond of them, and I would save them if I can.” Bilbo put his hand over the Arkenstone. “Now Thorin values this stone above all else. In exchange for its return, I believe he will give you what you were owed.” He smiled. “There will be no need for war.”

A few minutes later, the meeting finally ended. They decided to offer the stone to Thorin in the morning.

“Rest up tonight.” Gandalf said to Bilbo. “You must leave on the ‘morrow.”

Bilbo looked at Gandalf in surprise. “What?”

“Get as far away from here as possible.” Gandalf said, menacingly.

Bilbo was flabbergasted. “I…I’m not leaving.” He stated, standing his ground. “You picked me as the fourteenth man I’m not about to leave the company.”

Gandalf quickly turned to face him. “There is no company. Not any more.” He paused. “I don’t like to think what Thorin would do when he finds out what you’ve done.”

“I’m not afraid of Thorin.” Bilbo spoke up loudly.

“Well you should be.” Gandalf said, turning around quickly to look at the Hobbit. “Don’t underestimate the evil of gold. Gold over which a serpent had long brooded.” He looked down at Bilbo, worried. “Dragon-sickness seeps into the hearts of all who came to this Mountain.” He
paused, smiling at Bilbo. “Almost all.” The Wizard saw a figure walking past in his periphery. He recognized it as the same man who had tried to stop him in the courtyard earlier. “You there!” Gandalf called out to him. “Find this Hobbit a bed and fill his belly with hot food. He’s earned it.” He stopped the man quickly. “Keep an eye on him. If he should try to leave, you tell me.”

Alfrid nodded then looked to Bilbo. “Move it.” He spoke gruffly, waving his arm.

Only a few feet away, Anairë and Natalya followed Bilbo as he was led to a small room away from everyone else. They had heard Gandalf’s conversation with the Hobbit concerning Thorin and the gold sickness. Standing outside the door, the Elves waited for the shorter man to leave so they could speak with Bilbo alone.

Alfrid suddenly jumped when he saw the two Elves standing behind him. Mumbling something under his breath, he quickly moved around them.

Anairë shrugged her shoulders, watching the shorter man walk off.

Just as Bilbo had started to lay down, he saw Natalya appear from around the corner. “Hello.” The Hobbit said, yawning.

“How could she want to go back to him?”

“Can you help me?”

“With what?”

“I need to get into Erebor.” The half-Elf looked at Bilbo intensely.

“What?” The Hobbit looked at her, confused, quickly sitting up. “Why would you want to…”

“It’s urgent!” Anairë said quickly.

Bilbo still looked up at Natalya. “But after Thorin…”

“I need to get inside.” The half-Elf said again. “Can you please help me?”

Bilbo squeezed his eyes shut, not believing what he was hearing. How could she want to go back to him? He shook his head and sighed, opening his eyes. “I will help you.”

“Thank you.” Natalya said, smiling. “I need to try again.” She paused as she looked at the Hobbit. “I need to get back to the ramparts as soon as possible.”

“But the Elven King has his archers on watch of the mountain wall.” Bilbo warned. “Gandalf told me. He said I must have left right before he gave the order.”

Natalya frowned as she rose to her feet. “Anairë.” She asked, turning to her friend.

“Yes?”

“Will Thranduil speak to you?”

“I… I am not sure.” Anairë said furrowing her eyebrows. “I left without saying anything and I am not even sure he knows I am gone.”

“Will you please speak with him?” Natalya asked. “I need to get inside and with his archers on the lookout I will not be able to make it.”

“I will try.” Anairë said. She had tears in her eyes as she spoke to Natalya. “Goodbye friend.” The
Elf gave a soft smile. “I hope to see you in the morning.”

Bilbo still had not told them that he was going back to enter into the mountain as well. He wanted Thorin to believe he did not give away the Arkenstone. The Hobbit sighed as he led the way down to the exit of Dale that led to Erebor.

Anairë jogged off, heading to see Thranduil. “My lord.” Approaching him, she bowed her head. The Elf had a plan to distract the archers while Natalya and Bilbo were heading back to the mountain.

Thranduil turned to see Anairë approaching him. He was surprised she had not made herself known sooner. “Ah.” He said, looking at her. “I thought you would be here.”

Anairë stopped dead in her tracks. *How did Thranduil know I had left?*

“I do not know why you came.” Thranduil stated, looking away. “I will not speak with any Elf who defies me.” He walked off, heading back to his tent, a different guard with him this time.

“Thranduil!” Anairë shouted, but the King did not turn towards her. She walked off, seeing the line of archers. Looking down near the bridge, the female saw two figures begin to walk out.

“Ssshh!” Bilbo hushed Natalya as they made their way down the path that lead away from Dale. “The Elves may still be watching.” He stepped out a few feet and looked up to see an arrow pointed straight at his face. His eyes went wide. Gasping, he rushed back under the archway just as an arrow whizzed past.

Anairë’s head turned to the sound of the arrow. Running, she attacked the archer. “Do. Not. Shoot.” She ordered.

“Are you okay?” Natalya asked Bilbo as she heard a scuffle on top of the wall. Looking up she saw Elves scattered and confused. “Now is our chance!” The half-Elf exclaimed. Jogging out, Bilbo ran right behind her.

“Look!” Another archer shouted. He pointed at Natalya and Bilbo running towards the mountain. He quickly put his bow down when Anairë shouted.

“Hold your fire.” Anairë said from where she looked down at the Elf on the ground.

“What is going on?” Thranduil asked, seeing the commotion. He had heard it from inside his tent and came back to investigate. “Anairë.” He stated coldly, seeing her over top of the archer. He looked to his right to other elves shouting.

“My lord.” One of the archers informed Thranduil. “They are running towards the mountain.”

“Let them go.” Thranduil said. “As for this one.” He said, pointing to Anairë. “I can not say the same.” He glared at her.

At that moment one of his guards ran up. “What happened my lord?” The Elf asked, looking at the scene.

Thranduil looked to Anairë. “Take her back to Mirkwood and lock her in the dungeons.” Thranduil instructed the guard.

“Yes my lord.” The guard bowed. Taking Anairë by the arm, he dragged her off.
At the barricade of Erebor, Natalya and Bilbo looked up. “Over here.” The female whispered, waving Bilbo over. She saw the gap in the wall that Thorin and Bard had spoken through. The half-Elf looked through, seeing someone on the other side. Staring harder, she saw the Dwarf move and knew it to be Dwalin. They had never really spoken much but she also knew Dwalin was Thorin’s right hand warrior and friend. “Dwalin.” Natalya spoke through the gap, her voice being louder than she thought it was going to be.

“Natalya?” Fili asked, looking around. He was sure he had heard her voice coming from somewhere.

“I’m outside.” Natalya said, hearing Fili say her name.

Fili and Dwalin both went over to the angular gap and saw that it was indeed Natalya and Bilbo.

“We need to get back inside.” Natalya stated urgently.

“Why?” The blond asked, speaking softly. “It would be safer for you to remain in Dale.”

“It is urgent.” Natalya said. “I think I can help Thorin.”

“It seems you were trying lass.” Dwalin said. “It was smart of you to leave though.” He looked down. “I would have feared for your life had Thorin gotten any angrier.”

“Hold on.” Fili interjected as he ran up the steps to the top of the wall.

Natalya looked up as a rope was dropped from the top of the barricade. She quickly began climbing up the rope as Bilbo still talked with Dwalin.

“Thorin will never forgive me.” Bilbo said as he walked off and grabbed on to the rope, seeing that Natalya had already made it to the top.

Natalya looked down to see the Hobbit starting to climb up. “Hold on Bilbo.” The half-Elf began pulling the rope up and Fili helped her. She grabbed onto Bilbo’s arm once he was at the top and got him to the other side. Natalya, Fili and the Hobbit all quickly went down the steps to where Dwalin was. At that point Kili, Ori and Balin had now showed up as well. “I need to speak with Thorin.” Natalya said. “It is urgent.” She looked at all the Dwarves who stared back at her, shocked.

“Why?” Dwalin asked. “Even after he banished you?”

“Because I love him.” Natalya said softly, watching everyone’s faces turn to shock.

All the Dwarves and Bilbo softly gasped.

“Lass.” Balin started. “I do not think that would be in your best interest.” He paused. “You see. Thorin has gotten worse.” The Dwarf was saddened at this fact especially now knowing Natalya’s feelings toward him. “He has yet to find the Arkenstone, but I think it is best that it remains lost.” He looked up at the night sky.

Bilbo gulped. He had been standing at the back of the group, nervous about what the Dwarves would ask him. The Hobbit stepped forward, about to make his way to his bedroll.

“You did a noble thing laddie.” Balin stepped toward Bilbo, tears in his eyes. “You should know that.”
Bilbo gave a small smile. He had hinted to the elderly Dwarf about stealing the Arkenstone but never fully told him. “Thank you, Balin.” Bilbo said, bowing his head. “I don’t suspect Thorin will ever forgive me.”

Balin shook his head, tears still in his eyes. “He may yet laddie.”

Dwalin and the others bowed their heads as well. Bilbo suspected that Balin had told them. The Hobbit slipped away through the corridor on the right side near the barricade. He headed back to his bedroll near the kitchens and lay down, hoping to get at least a few hours of sleep that night.

Natalya looked at all the Dwarves that were standing there. “I will try to reason with him tomorrow.” She said, giving a slight smile.

“We will try to be close if Uncle decides to do anything irrational.” Fili said, returning a smile.

She looked around at all of them again. “To all of you,” Natalya paused. “I give my thanks. You allowed me to join your quest because I wanted to.” The half-Elf shook her head, laughing. “You probably would have been better without me…”

“Now don’t say that!” Kili interjected. “You have already done more that the lot of us could dream of doing.” He took a breath. “Standing up to Thorin.” He paused, raising his eyebrows. “That takes a lot of courage.”

Natalya gave Kili a soft smile. She walked off, heading back to her bedroll as well. “I had best get some sleep.” She nodded and walked off. Once she was in her bedroll though, she could not fall asleep. Natalya was terrified of the idea that Thorin could come in any minute and see that she had returned.

“Don’t worry Natalya.” Balin said, stepping in. “Thorin will not be in here tonight. You are safe here with us.”

“Thank you, Balin.” Natalya said with a smile. She laid on her back, realizing that what she had dome was a mistake. At first she had been happy to leave the Woodland Realm but now she realized how little of the outside world she knew. After a while, the female finally closed her eyes and rested.

Morning came and found Natalya still sleeping. Her eyelids slightly opened as a small shaft of light crossed her face. She immediately shot awake, hoping there was still a chance to talk with Thorin. Hurrying back to the barricade, the female stood nearby as the company was already looking out over the wall. Thorin and the rest of the Dwarves now had on all of their armor, ready for battle. Natalya felt a lump rise in her throat at the sight of Thorin. He looked so regal and majestic. She quickly pushed the thoughts away.

The armies of the Elves and Lake-town men stood before Erebor to face the Dwarves. Thranduil and Bard had ridden up to the barricade to speak to Thorin about the return of the Arkenstone.

Natalya watched as Thorin suddenly raised his bow and shot an arrow towards someone on the ground. She heard it clink to the ground as a warning shot.

“I will put the next one between your eyes.” Thorin shouted, raising another arrow, now fully pointed at Thranduil.

The Elf king glared up at him then gave the signal for his army to aim their arrows. All of the Dwarves hid behind the barricade except Thorin, who stood stone still, his arrow still pointed.
Thranduil then motioned again for his army to stand down. “We’ve come to tell you payment of your debt has been offered and accepted.” He said, coolly, keeping his eyes on Thorin.

Natalya worried as she heard this. Thorin was going to find out of Bilbo’s treachery and surely hurt him. “What payment?” She heard Thorin shout down. “I gave you nothing.” He paused, shaking his head. “You have nothing.”

Thranduil looked to Bard, giving him the signal.

Bard took the Arkenstone from the pocket in his jacket and held it up. “We have this.” The man simply stated, looking between the gem and Thorin.

Kili saw this and acted outraged. “They have the Arkenstone.” He said to Thorin. “Thieves!” He shouted. “How came you by the heirloom of our house? That stone belongs to the King!”

Thorin glared down at the Man and the Elf even harder.

“The King may have it” Bard stated simply, tossing the Arkenstone in the air and catching it. “In our goodwill.” Putting the stone back in his pocket he said, “But first he must honor his word.”

Thorin shook his head. “They’re taking us for fools.” Some of the Dwarves turned and looked at him, not believing that Thorin would not accept the deal. “This is a ruse,” The Dwarrow growled. “A filthy lie! The Arkenstone is in this mountain. It is a trick!”

Natalya’s heart jumped into her throat when she saw Bilbo step forward, knowing he was going to confess.

“It…it’s no trick.” Bilbo said. “The stone is real. I gave it to them.” He did not want any of the Dwarves, Elves or Men to suffer for what he had done.

Thorin turned to face Bilbo, not believing his ears. “You?” Thorin asked, shocked and outraged. The Hobbit stared at Thorin for a few seconds. “I took it as my fourteenth share.” He said, rocking back on his heels.

“You would steal from me?” Thorin asked, shaking his head.

“Steal from you?” Bilbo asked, raising his eyebrows. “No, no.” He slightly laughed. “I may be a burglar, but I like to think I’m an honest one.” He paused, turning serious again. The whole company had now turned to look at him. Only a few seemed to be surprised. “I’m willing to let it stand against my claim.” Bilbo finally stated.

“Against your claim?” Thorin slightly chuckled, although not amused. “Your claim?” He repeated, angrier. “You have no claim over me, you miserable rat!” The Dwarf said, throwing down his bow and moving towards Bilbo, fists clenched. Thorin stopped When Bilbo spoke.

“I was going to give it to you.” Bilbo said as-a-matter-of-factly. “Many times I wanted to, but…”

“But what, thief?” Thorin spat, baring his teeth.

Natalya could barely watch any more. Tears were in her eyes as the Dwarf she had once loved was now a monster.

“You are changed, Thorin.” Bilbo said, raising his voice for the first time. “The Dwarf I met in Bag End would never have gone back on his word.” The Hobbit paused, giving a slight nod. “He
would never have doubted the loyalty of his kin.”

“Do not speak to me of loyalty.” Thorin said, eyes glassy from tears. He could not believe the Halfling had stolen from him. The one I trusted! Thorin looked out over the armies then to the rest of the Dwarves. “Throw him from the rampart!”

Bilbo looked up, shocked.

Thorin shouted but none of the Dwarves moved. They refused to obey as they had all seen what the sickness had done to him. “Did you not hear me?” The Dwarf yelled, grabbing a hold of his nephew, Fili.

Fili wrenched himself away from Thorin. He liked Bilbo and would never want to hurt him, knowing the Hobbit was only trying to help snap Thorin from his madness.

“Fine!” Thorin shouted, moving towards Bilbo. “I will do it myself.” He yelled again, grabbing the Hobbit.

Natalya’s eyes widened in fear. She started to head to the staircase to try and stop Thorin.

“Curse you!” Thorin shouted as he dragged Bilbo closer to the edge. All of the other Dwarves tried to stop him from throwing the Hobbit off the wall.

“No!” Fili shouted, trying to grab a hold of Thorin and stop him.

“Cursed be the wizard that forced you on this company!” Thorin shouted, bending Bilbo backward over the ledge.

Bilbo could feel the air leaving his lungs as Thorin grabbed him by his collar.

As Natalya almost got to the staircase, she heard Gandalf’s voice.

“If you don’t like my burglar, then please don’t damage him. Return him to me.” The Wizard said to Thorin.

Natalya quickly returned to her hiding spot for fear of being seen.

Thorin stared down at the Wizard. He would not have Gandalf tell him what he should do in his own kingdom.

“You’re not making a very splendid figure as King under the Mountain, are you, Thorin, son of Thrain?” Gandalf asked. “Thrain loved you Thorin. He wanted you to know that.”

Thorin let Bilbo go, the Hobbit sliding to the ground as shock crossed the Dwarf’s face. He had assumed Thrain to be dead. Thorin knew his father was dead now if he was not here. Glaring back down at everyone he shouted to the Elves and Men. “Never again will I have dealings with wizards!” He paused, leaning forward on the wall.

Fili and Bofur quickly escorted Bilbo back to the rope that led him to the ground.

“Or Shire rats!” Thorin added, baring his teeth.

Bilbo quickly descended the rope to join Gandalf and the Elves and Men of Lake-town.

Natalya watched him go. She was saddened at what Bilbo had to endure for the sake of this quest that had taken him from his home.
Bard spoke up. “Are we resolved? The return of the Arkenstone for what was promised.” He watched Thorin’s intense glare.

Thorin looked over to the horizon. He moved away from the wall, angrier than ever. “Why should I buy back,” He paused for a moment, breathing heavily. “that which is rightfully mine!”

Natalya sighed hearing these words. She could not bear to see Thorin like this; it was breaking her heart.

“Keep the stone.” Thranduil said, looking to Bard. “Sell it. Ecthelion of Gondor will give you a good price for it.”

“I will kill you!” Thorin shouted down, hearing the Elf’s words. “By my oath.” He paused, pacing back and forth. “I will kill you all!”

“Your oath means nothing!” Thranduil snapped. “I’ve heard enough.” He stated, turning his elk around and beginning to walk off.

Thorin continued pacing behind the barricade, the members of the company staring at him.

“Thorin!” Gandalf shouted from amongst the crowd. “Lay down your arms. Open these doors.” He paused. “This treasure will be your death.” He stated softer, shaking his head.

“We cannot win this fight.” Balin stated, looking sternly at Thorin.

Natalya nervously looked up at Thorin, praying he would open the doors and give the people their share of the gold.

Bard spoke up again. “Give us your answer.” He said, looking at Thorin. “Will you have peace or war?”

Natalya closed her eyes, praying that Thorin agreed to the terms.

The King looked out towards the east, about to decide, when a black crow, Röac, landed in front of him. The Dwarf then raised his head as the sound of footsteps came from the east. “I will have war.”
Anairë had been escorted back to Mirkwood that morning at sunrise. Feren and her rode back double, the female Elf riding behind. She kept looking back toward Dale, praying for Natalya and Bilbo’s safety. She finally turned forward as they rode silent the whole way.

Feren and Anairë had known each other for a long time. Long enough to become fairly close friends. When Feren heard of her treachery, he was shocked. Anairë had always been so loyal to her King and Kingdom. Feren shook his head. Anairë had been lucky that Thranduil did not have her executed on the spot. Usually anyone who turned against him ended up dead.

Once they made it back to the Elven kingdom, Feren quickly led Anairë down to the dungeons. “I would not be doing this if it were my choice.” The Elf stated, putting her in a cell and locking the door. “But I have no choice.” He did not want to see her face full of pain and sorrow so he quickly turned and did not look back. “See that she is well tended to.” Feren said to a guard as he walked back up the stairs before riding back to Erebor.
Chapter 10

Back at the Lonely Mountain, Dain’s army from the Iron Hills began marching over the Eastern horizon, row after row.

Gandalf looked to his right to see the Dwarves clad in dull, silver armor march over the crest of the hill. “Ironfoot.”

Thranduil looked and saw the Dwarves advancing as well and commanded his army to face them.

“Thorin!” Dain yelled, seeing his cousin standing upon the barricade. He waved his arm as they began cheering.

In the center of the Elf army, Bilbo and Gandalf started moving in the same direction as the Elven troops.

“Who is that?” Bilbo asked, concerned. “He doesn’t look very happy.”

“It is Dain, Lord of the Iron Hills, Thorin’s cousin.” Gandalf commented, hurrying over.

Bilbo was now running to keep up with the tall Wizard. “Are they alike?” He asked, short of breath.

Gandalf looked down at Bilbo and paused. “I’ve always found Thorin the more reasonable of the two.” He looked back up and kept striding towards Thranduil.

Bilbo stood for a second before moving. Considering Thorin’s current state, the Hobbit could not imagine someone even less reasonable.

Dain began riding toward the Elf and Lake-town army on his battle ram. “Good morning!” He smirked at the two armies. “How are we all?” The Dwarf paused and continued riding down the hill. “I have a wee proposition, if you wouldn’t mind giving me a few moments of your time.” Dain tilted his head. “Would you consider…” He paused then yelled. “Just sodding off?” He had stood up in his stirrups, threatening them. “All of you! Right now!”

“Stand fast!” Bard called out to the Lake-town men.

“Come now, Lord Dain.” Gandalf said, stepping forward.

“Gandalf the Grey.” Dain announced, tilting his head and sitting back down. “Tell this rabble to leave.” He pointed his hammer at the Elves and Men. “Or I’ll water the ground with their blood!”

“There is no need for war between Dwarves, Men and Elves.” Gandalf tried to convince Dain. “A legion of Orcs march on the mountain. Stand your army down.” The Wizard insisted.

“I will not stand down before any Elf! Not least this faithless woodland sprite.”

The Elf King smirked back at the Dwarf, laughing at his insults.

“He wishes nothing but ill upon my people!” Dain continued. “If he chooses to stand between me and my kin, I’ll split his pretty head open!” He shouted. “See if he’s still smirking then.” The Dwarf added, riding back toward his army.

“Let them advance.” Thranduil said, laughing. “See how far they get.”
Dain huffed. “You think I give a dead dog for your threats you pointy eared princess!”

“He’s clearly mad, like his cousin.” Thranduil smirked, tilting his head towards Thorin.

“You hear that, lads?” Dain shouted to his army. “We’re on! Let’s give these bastards a good hammerin’!”

“Stand your men down.” Thranduil instructed Bard. “I will deal with Ironfoot and his rabble.”

Bard held his arm out, signaling for the Lake-town men to stand still.

“Alright then.” Dain said riding up to a battle cart driven by more rams. “Let’s get this done.” He looked at the driver. “Send in the goats!” Upon his command, goats with Dwarves riding them came in from in between the Dwarf lines.

Thranduil ordered his army to prepare for battle. All of the Elven archers lined up their bows to shoot the Dwarf riders.

“Thranduil!” Gandalf yelled out to the Elf King. “This is madness!”

Just as the arrows were shot, there were spirals coming out from the middle of the Dwarf ranks. They broke the Elves’ arrows and landed in the center of Thranduil’s army.

Thranduil gasped, glaring at the Dwarves.

“Hey how do you like that? You old twiddly widdly!” Dain called down to Thranduil. “Ah you buggers!”

Back in Erebor, Thorin looked down at the battle, observing but doing nothing.

Natalya started to advance toward Thorin to tell him he was wrong, but thought better of it. She had a plan and was going to stick with it.

The Elves re-formed ranks as the Dwarves came in closer. They quickly raised their shields with the spears sticking out over the top. Right as the Dwarves were upon them, they slanted their shields, protecting themselves from the incoming riders.

The two armies fought for a while, each struggling to gain the upper hand. Suddenly, the ground began to shake.

Gandalf had already turned to look, as he heard the sound before anyone else felt the movement.

The Elves and Dwarves ceased, seeing now that they were not the only ones in this fight.

“Were-worms!” Gandalf exclaimed.

At that moment, a massive creature burst through one of the mountains, crushing rock in its jaws, before being joined by two others.

“Oh, come on!” Dain shouted, exasperated as he watched.

Dain and the Elves see legions of Orcs, led by Bolg, appearing through the tunnels in the mountain that had been made.

“The Hordes of Hell are upon us! To battle! To battle, sons of Durin!” Dain shouted to his army, leading them closer to the Orcs so they would not come near Erebor.
The Orc army started marching towards the Dwarf army.

Kili, seeing the battle, shouted to the company. “I’m going over the wall, who’s coming with me?”

“Aye! Yes!” All of the Dwarves agreed.

“Come on, let’s go!” Fili said, picking up his sword.

“Stand down.” Thorin strictly stated, not looking at any of them.

All of the Dwarves looked at their King in shock.

“What?” Fili asked. “Are we to do nothing?” He could not believe his Uncle. Only a few months ago nothing would have stopped him from fighting next to his kin.

“I said.” Thorin emphasized. “Stand down!” He began walking down the barricade stairs. The Dwarf did not want to watch his people die.

“The Elves, will they not fight?” Bilbo asked back on the battlefield, seeing the Elf army standing still while the Orcs advanced.

Thranduil looked towards the Dwarves in Battle and finally instructed his soldiers to fight.

“Uh, Gandalf, is this a good place to stand?” Bilbo asked, looking around and seeing all the Elf soldiers marching around him.

Natalya stayed hidden as Thorin strode past. She had no clue where he was going but she was going to try and stop him. As soon as she saw him turn a corner, she stepped out and tried to follow him.

“Don’t do it lass.” Dwalin said behind her.

The half-Elf turned around, looking at him. “I think I can handle him.” She said, starting to walk off.

“Oh no you don’t.” Dwalin answered, getting in front of her and crossing his arms. “I will not let you.” He said, his expression stern.

“And why not?” Natalya questioned. “I think I have shown I can stand up for myself.”

“Aye.” Dwalin agreed with a nod. “That is why we want to keep you around.” Now all the Dwarves had stepped down from the barricade and began to remove their armor. They came over and stood by Natalya and Dwalin.

“He is right.” Ori piped in.

Natalya looked around at the Dwarves and forced a smile. “I appreciate all of you.”

“If anything should happen to anyone.” Dwalin spoke up, raising an eyebrow at Natalya. “I would not want it to be you. I will speak to him first.” The warrior said, his expression grim. “And you stay here.” Dwalin shook his head. “And if I cannot convince him otherwise, you can try to speak to him as well.”

Natalya nodded “Agreed.” As Dwalin walked off, she ran up to him. “I will stay back and watch in case something happens to you.”
Dwalin laughed, knowing what she was doing. “You can come.” He paused. “Only if you just watch.” He warned. “Do not let Thorin see you.” The Dwarf raised an eyebrow at Natalya. “Understood?”

“Yes.”

They both made their way to the throne room where they had seen Thorin go.

Dwalin walked in and Natalya stayed back. She stopped at the doorway taking a quick glance inside. Thorin was looking down at the ground, seated upon his grandfather’s throne. Her breath hitched. He had donned the golden regal armor of Erebor’s kings that matched his crown. She quickly hid again as Dwalin started speaking.

“Since when do we forsake our own people?” Dwalin asked, marching up to the throne.

Thorin looked at him, stoic and unmoving.

“Thorin!” Dwalin said, trying to get his attention. “They are dying out there.”

Thorin looked away, refusing to acknowledge Dwalin’s words. The Dwarf finally turned his head slowly back to look at his companion. “There are halls beneath halls within this mountain.” Thorin says, fixated on the gold. He knew Dain’s army would not be able to hold them off for long. The Orcs, Elves and Men would come seeking the treasure. “Places we can fortify, shore up, make safe.” Thorin rose from his throne and walked toward Dwalin, reaching out his arm. He looked to his right, deep in thought and then snapped his head back. “Yes!” He exclaimed. “Yes! That is what we must do. We must move the gold further underground. To safety!” He quickly started to leave when Dwalin yelled at him.

“Did you not hear me?” Dwalin exclaimed, looking Thorin straight in the face as he turned around. “Dain is surrounded. They’re being slaughtered, Thorin.” He swallowed a lump in his throat, as his friend still did not seem to care.

“Many die in war.” Thorin stated, tilting his head. “Life is cheap. But a treasure such as this cannot be counted in lives lost. It is worth all the blood we can spend.”

Natalya heard these words and she knew no one could break him from this but himself. She still knew she had to try.

“You sit here in these vast halls,” Dwalin said, looking at his friend. “With a crown upon your head,” He paused, “and yet you are lesser now than you have ever been.”

“Do not speak to me,” Thorin glared at Dwalin. “as if I were some lowly Dwarf Lord. As if I were still...Thorin...” He paused, beginning to cry. “Oakenshield.” He covered his face. He knew he had lost that title. “I am your King!” Thorin pulled out his sword, now angrier than ever.

“You were always my King. You used to know that once.” Dwalin was scared for Thorin. “You cannot see what you have become.” He said, softly.

Thorin could not believe what he had just heard. “Go. Get out,” he paused with tears filling his eyes, “before I kill you.”

Dwalin backed away in shock, mouth slack. He never knew Thorin would go so far as to threaten death upon him. Dwalin took a deep breath and walked away. The Dwarf reached the doorway where Natalya was standing. “It’s hopeless lass.” He said, putting a hand on her shoulder, eyes still filled with tears.
“I must still try.”

“Be careful.” Dwalin said, looking at her. He nodded his head then walked off, leaving the female by herself.

Natalya looked in the throne room and did not see Thorin. She sighed, realizing what needed to happen. Thorin needed to realize what he had become and change. She shook her head, hoping he would realize it in time. Looking back into the throne room, Natalya prayed to the Valar that Thorin would come to his senses. She sighed, heading back to the barricade to join the other Dwarves. As the half-Elf was heading down a staircase, she saw Thorin heading not to the treasury, but to the Gallery of the Kings. Quickly changing directions, she followed him, remembering suddenly about the golden floor from when their plan to kill Smaug had failed. As Natalya watched, Thorin walked slowly along the floor, looking down at his reflection the whole way.

Am I not the King? Thorin remembered yelling at Natalya and the other Dwarves. He continued walking across the golden floor, watching his reflection. As he looked down, he could see the gold begin to move and ripple underneath his feet. A treasure such as this cannot be counted in lives lost. Thorin still remembered the gold and what good it would do for his new kingdom. The blind ambition of a Mountain King. The bargeman’s voice rang loudly in the Dwarf’s head. I will not part with a single coin. He finally felt the weight on his shoulders of what he had become and fell to his knees. I am not my grandfather. He remembered his conversation with Balin outside Erebor. He heard another voice speaking. You are the heir to the Throne of Durin. He remembered Gandalf saying this to him all those months ago in Bree. They are dying out there. His recent conversation with Dwalin still remained in his head. Take back Erebor. Thorin’s head was spinning as he squinted, seeing the golden floor begin to glow. Dain is surrounded. Thorin then saw the battle raging beneath the golden surface. Take back your homeland. Everything seemed to stop then another voice began speaking. You are changed, Thorin. Looking over to his right, Thorin saw the figure of Bilbo speaking to him. I’m not my grandfather. He looked back to the left, seeing himself speaking. I’m not my grandfather. He saw the figure of himself repeat as he stood outside by the hidden door. The Dwarf King rose to his feet. Looking back down again, he saw Smaug beneath the surface of the gold and cringed as he saw the Dragon coming after him. Thorin then saw himself, falling into the gold, only to be swallowed by it. This treasure will be your death. Gandalf’s voice said in his head. Thorin continued hearing these voices inside his head, fighting. One, however, broke out clearer than the rest. You must change. “Natalya.” Thorin whispered.

The female watched as Thorin slowly rose to his feet then tossed his crown aside and stood up. It looked as though the sickness was gone.

Thorin quickly strode towards the exit. As he passed under one of the archways, he saw a figure in the shadows. “Natalya!”

The half-Elf looked at him with tears in her eyes. “Thorin.” She whispered to him as he walked up. Her hands fell to her sides as he came closer to her.

“Natalya.” He repeated, bringing his hand up to cup her face. He saw light dancing in her eyes as he softly reached out and took her hand.

The company was restless but they dare not go over the wall for the fear of Thorin’s wrath. Time passed by as they heard the horn’s blaring on the battlefield and the crashing of metal armor. They were all silent, waiting to see what was going to happen. Just as they had given up hope, Kili noticed two figures walking toward them, silhouetted against the light coming from behind them, one behind the other.
The Dwarf quickly stood, chest heaving in anger as he stared down Thorin when he entered. His expression slackened when he saw Natalya by his side. “I will not hide behind a wall of stone while others fight our battles for us!” Kili yelled in anger, pointing towards himself, tears starting to form in his eyes.

“Peace Kili.” Natalya stepped forward, extending her hand. “Thorin is healed.” She turned to smile at the King.

“We are sons of Durin.” Thorin said, looking Kili straight in the face and stepping forward, past Natalya. “And Durin’s folk do not flee from a fight.”

Natalya placed a hand on Thorin’s shoulder and smiled at him. She looked toward the rest of the company who were all watching their King.

Thorin placed his hand on Kili and he placed their foreheads together. He was so proud of both of his nephews. The Dwarf looked to Fili and nodded. “I have no right.” He paused, looking at his friends. “To ask this of any of you.” He paused again and took a breath. “Will you follow me? One last time?”

All of the members of the company rose to their feet and Fili smiled at his uncle.

“Now we have to figure out how to knock down this wall.” Dwalin said after a few moments of silence.

“Agreed.” Nori piped in, looking around at the rubble piled around the front gate.

“What about this?” Kili asked, pointing to a large golden bell resting on the floor. “There is already a lever attached and we could swing it into the wall.” The Dwarf suggested. “Like a battering ram.”

Time passed but it was not long before the company had the bell hanging from a pulley attached to the solid stone of Erebor’s walls. Some of the Dwarves held the rope pulling the bell back, getting ready to release it.

Natalya watched, nervous to see what was happening on the battlefield. She tightened her daggers in her belt and put on her quiver, full of arrows. Picking up her bow, she plucked at the string. Placing a single arrow to the weapon, she was ready to charge.

“Are you ready?” Thorin looked back at Natalya offering her a smile.

“I am.” Natalya answered confidently, not admitting that she was nervous.

“Now!” Thorin shouted, raising his sword.

The Dwarves released the rope holding the bell and it swung forward. A mighty clang resounded with the impact of gold against stone and the wall came crashing down.
Chapter 11

Thorin led the charge followed by Natalya, Fili, Kili and the rest of the company. “Du bekar!” (To arms) The Dwarrow yelled, charging onto the battlefield.

Natalya followed Thorin’s lead out onto the battlefield hearing other Dwarves shouting ‘for the King!’ For the first few moments of the battle, the pair fought together. Natalya’s attention suddenly turned away from the group as an Orc tried to stab her from behind. The female heard him coming and she spun to deflect the blow, bringing her daggers down on the neck of the creature, killing it instantly.

Thorin turned, seeing Natalya moving away from him to fight the other Orcs. Their eyes connected, panic slightly spreading across his face at the thought of losing her.

The half-Elf continued fighting, occasionally watching Thorin to make sure he was still safe. She suddenly looked over to see an Orc heading towards him while he was not aware. Dashing quickly across the field, Natalya attacked the creature to draw him away from Thorin. The half-Elf ducked as he spun around and swung his mace. She staggered back slightly as the weapon grazed her temple, drawing blood. Natalya’s eyes widened as she saw more Orcs advancing toward them from behind.

“We can handle this Natalya!” Fili, Kili and Dwalin shouted to her, heading towards the large Orc.

The half-Elf looked back over to where she had last seen Thorin but he was not there. She knew that Thorin felt he had to lead the charge because he was their King, but Natalya feared for his life.

Meanwhile, Dain looked over to see Thorin fighting not far from him. “There are too many of these buggers Thorin!” Dain yelled, smashing his giant war hammer into an oncoming Orc. “I hope you’ve got a plan.”

Thorin simply nodded as he impaled another enemy. “Aye!” He shouted back. “We are going to take out their leader.”

“Bolg.” Dain said to himself, still fighting oncoming Orcs. He looked over and saw Thorin jumping onto one of the battle rams.

“I’m going to kill that piece of filth!” Thorin said strongly, an intense look upon his face.

“Thorin you cannot do this!” Dain protested. “You are our King!” He added as he brought another Orc down with his hammer.

“That is why I must do it.” Thorin said sternly, looking down at his cousin.

“And how do you plan to fight your way single handed to Ravenhill?” Dain asked, still shouting above all of the battle noise. At that moment, a Dwarven war cart appeared with Balin, Fili, Kili and Dwalin all riding it.

Thorin swung his sword and let out a battle yell. “To Ravenhill!” He shouted, spurring his mount forward, the war cart following.

“I like it!” Dain shouted as they rode off. “May Durin save you all.”

Through the battle, Natalya made her way into Dale, unsure of where Thorin now was. Just as she
ran up a nearby staircase, she saw Thorin riding a battle ram up the rocky cliff towards Ravenhill. She quickly ran down roads and alleyways, killing Orcs as she went. The half-Elf had to reach Ravenhill. Just as she turned a corner, she spotted Bilbo and Gandalf.

“He’s taking his best warriors.” The wizard said proudly.

“To do what?” Bilbo asked, seeing Thorin and a few Dwarves following him, all astride battle rams.

“To cut the head of the snake.”

“Thorin.” Natalya whispered as she heard footsteps coming from nearby. Looking to her left, she spotted Thranduil and some of his troops.

The Elven King stared at the ground, seeing that some of his own soldiers had been slaughtered. “Recall your company.”

The Elf behind him quickly pulled out a horn and blew into it, sounding the retreat.

“My lord!” Gandalf quickly approached the Elf. “Dispatch this force to Ravenhill. Thorin must be warned.”

“By all means warn him.” Thranduil gave the Wizard an icy glare. “I have spent enough Elvish blood in defense of this accursed land. No more.”

“Thranduil!” Gandalf yelled after him.

“I’ll go.” Bilbo spoke up, silencing everyone.

“Don’t be ridiculous you will never make it.” Gandalf said to the Hobbit. “It is out of the question. I’m not allowing it.”

“I’m not asking you to.” Bilbo nodded as he looked up at the Wizard.

Meanwhile, Natalya continued towards Ravenhill. As she was passing Thranduil’s tent, she saw an object shining in her periphery inside. Walking over to it her eyes saw that it was Orcrist, Thorin’s sword that had been taken from him in Mirkwood. Natalya quickly picked it up, strapping it on her back and continued heading down the narrow streets. Quickly pulling out her bow and arrows, the female prepared to fight her way to Ravenhill. Running past a crowd of Lake-town men, the half-Elf swallowed as they all stared at her. They looked weak and ready to quit. Natalya had no time to lose though if she was to help Thorin. She quickly rounded another corner to see more Orcs leading an attack in her direction. The half-Elf let out a yell and charged head on at the lead Orc, firing a shot into his shoulder.

The Orc only growled and pulled the arrow out, black blood coming from where the arrowhead had penetrated. He walked quickly forward toward the woman and broke her bow into two pieces with his weapon.

Natalya gasped as the Orc’s other arm hit her across the chest, sending her flying into a nearby wall. She stayed still for a few moments before slowly rising to her feet, seeing that the Orcs had left to head into Dale. The half-Elf quickly pulled out her daggers and unbuckled her quiver, letting it fall to the ground. Natalya headed down another side street that led North. Continuing to fight her way through more Orcs, her green tunic became more disheveled by the minute. Jogging to the edge of the town, the half-Elf saw a narrow road that led to the top of the ridge. Heading down the narrow road, Natalya soon reached the bottom of the ledge. Scaling the mountain quickly and
quietly, the only sound was her cloak blowing in the cool breeze.

Meanwhile, Thorin, Dwalin and the brothers had already reached the icy fortress.

“Those Orcs are still in there!” Dwalin harshly whispered to Thorin. “I say we press on.”

“No!” Thorin exclaimed, placing his hand on the warrior to stop him. “That is what they want.” He looked up to one of the barren watchtowers. “It is a trap.”

Dwalin looked to Thorin, fear in his eyes.

“Call back Fili and Kili! Now!” Thorin yelled to Dwalin. “We live to fight another day.” He whispered as he looked up at the abandoned watchtower, hoping to see one of his nephews.

At that moment, Bilbo came running up to the group. “This watchtower is surrounded. There’s no way out!” Suddenly he looked to his left as Fili and Kili ran out of a nearby doorway.

“Bilbo!” Thorin exclaimed, hoping they would all make it out alive. Now he knew a fight was inevitable. The Dwarrow looked up to see hundreds of creatures coming down from further up the mountain.

“Goblin mercenaries!” Dwalin shouted, looking over his shoulder. “No more than a hundred.”

“We will take care of them!” Thorin yelled. He looked to Fili and Kili. “I want you to run.” The Dwarf said, looking down at them. “I need you to get as many of the Dwarves to safety in Erebor.”

The brothers nodded and headed back down to the battlefield.

“Bilbo, Dwalin.” Thorin said, looking at each of them. “You need to help me and scout out the towers. We need to reduce their numbers. I will head this way.”

Meanwhile, Natalya had been searching for Thorin but saw no sign of him. Thorin! She had lost him. The half-Elf shook her head and continued her search atop Ravenhill. Single Orcs often came along to challenge her but she killed them with ease as her thoughts remained on Thorin’s safety. The half-Elf finally found shelter underneath one of the stone structures. She rested against the wall and took a moment to catch her breath. She looked to her right to see an archway leading out to an opening. Natalya knew she had not seen that before and went to investigate.

Meanwhile, Thorin had been surrounded by more Orcs and was fighting them alone. He knew he could not keep his strength up much longer. He looked behind him to see that the Orcs below had trapped him on top of the tower. The Dwarf saw a staircase to his right but now the creatures were coming from that direction as well. He had lost hope when he had not seen Natalya for a while. The last Thorin saw of her was when the battle had first started and she was driven from his sight by Orc’s attacking.

Natalya went under the archway and it led out onto what looked like a frozen waterfall. She finally caught sight of Thorin, far off, and thankfully alive. The half-Elf watched as he turned and they made fleeting eye contact before another Orc approached her from behind.

Thorin had seen Natalya and was trying to find a way to get to her. He looked back over his shoulder again for her and tripped. Another Orc advanced on him and hit him in the shoulder, sending him falling down the staircase. The Dwarf quickly got to his feet and felt blood dripping down his nose from a cut on his forehead.

Natalya looked back towards the watchtower again and did not see the Dwarf. “Thorin!” She
yelled, hearing her voice echo off of the stone and ice. She frantically looked around as the sound of swords clashing came nearer. Looking up, Natalya saw two figures on one of the lower watchtowers from across the ice. The half-Elf immediately recognized Thorin’s figure.

The Dwarrow heard Natalya’s yell but was unable to answer. He looked behind him and saw her standing underneath one of the archways. Stabbing the nearest Orc, Thorin shoved it over the edge and onto the ice. The Dwarf watched as he saw Natalya fighting another Orc that had just appeared.

Natalya was focusing on Thorin and never saw what was coming. She suddenly felt a stabbing pain throughout her body as one of the Orcs from the Erebor gate attacked her and swung his mace into her stomach. The half-Elf flew backward, landing on her back and sliding across the ice a few feet.

Thorin had seen the Orc that was about to attack Natalya but could not do anything to help her. As he looked away another Orc punched him on the shoulder, sending him to the ground. Thorin tried to pull his sword out from under the creatures’ foot but it snapped under his Orc’s boot due to the weight. The Dwarf looked up, wide-eyed as he scrambled to his feet, facing the Orc once again. Thorin was finally close enough to the staircase to be able to escape the creature.

Natalya still worried about Thorin and took a quick glance to look for him as another Orc advanced towards her. The creature brought down his sword to kill her but she quickly spun out of the way, avoiding the blow. Looking down she saw that his weapon had become lodged in the ice at her feet. She felt a sting on her leg and saw that her pants had been torn and she had a scrape down her left thigh. The half-Elf felt her strength failing as she saw a few more Orcs running toward her. As she began to rise, she saw another Orc charging toward her. Natalya quickly deflected his blow with one of her daggers. She continued fighting, however and killed two more Orcs. Looking up, she saw the first Orc advancing again as her vision began to blur. Natalya knew she was not going to be able to fight him with what little strength she had left. Just as she took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, staring down the Orc, she heard a yell.

“Du bekar!” (To arms) Thorin shouted, seeing Natalya under attack. He had escaped from the Orcs attacking him on the watchtower and quickly ran to the female’s aid. Jumping from one of the staircases onto the ice, Thorin hurried, slipping occasionally, but kept her within his sight.

Natalya slowly rose to her feet and limped towards Thorin across the frozen sheet of ice. “Thorin.” She whispered, seeing him come towards her. The half-Elf looked around to see Orcs coming at them from almost every direction. Slipping as she neared him, she felt Thorin reach forward to catch her.

The Dwarf grabbed Natalya’s arm, preventing her from falling. He could tell she was becoming weaker by the second.

Natalya looked up at him and gave him a slight smile. She finally found her footing and stood with the Dwarf. “Thorin this is yours.” She gasped, feeling her chest tighten as she drew Orcrist out of the sheath and handed it to the Dwarf.

“Thank you!” Thorin exclaimed, letting his broken sword fall to the ground. Natalya nodded to him and they stood back-to-back, ready to fight. The Dwarf gripped Orcrist tight. “I will protect you.” Thorin whispered into Natalya’s ear.

Natalya slightly gasped then swallowed. “I will always fight for you, my King.” She whispered, watching the Orcs come closer.
Thorin smiled at her as he placed his hand on her forearm. He then turned back, placing both hands back on the hilt of his sword and prepared to fight.

The half-Elf watched as well, seeing the other side of the frozen lake and the surrounding towers. She saw all of the Orcs suddenly stop and form a pathway. Jumping down from the icy stone steps came the Orc leader. Natalya tightened her grip on her daggers and saw Thorin turned around to face the creatures as well.

“Bolg.” Thorin growled, his eyes narrowing into a threatening glare.

The female felt her throat tighten, waiting for the Orc to attack. She looked back over her shoulder at Thorin, and saw him raise his sword higher.

Bolg recognized Natalya and went for her first. His first blow was deflected by Natalya’s dagger but not well enough as it sent her to her knees. Just as the Orc was about to kill the half-Elf, Thorin swung Orcrist.

Thorin fought with Bolg, attempting to lead him away from Natalya and up a nearby staircase. Watching the half-Elf he finally saw her body fall to the ground, unmoving. “Natalya!” Thorin shouted, looking back at her. He left Bolg and ran back to the female’s side. The Orc followed him and made a stab at Thorin. He missed and the blade drove into the Dwarf’s foot. Thorin yelled as he stumbled and Bolg hit him in the side. He then found himself on his back, the Orc towering above him with his blade pointed at his chest. Thorin used Orcrist as leverage, but was not sure how long he was going to be able to hold him back.

Natalya finally came back to her senses, seeing Thorin in danger a few yards away. She picked herself up and rammed into Bolg with all of her might, driving her blade into his chest. The half-Elf breathed deeply, rolling to the side and letting go of the dagger. She was weak from blood loss and exhaustion and barely moved. Trying to keep her eyes open, she saw Thorin coming to her.

“Natalya.” The Dwarf said, worry crossing his face as he saw her eyes close.

“I’ll…” Natalya whispered, her voice weak. “I’ll…be…okay.” She looked up at Thorin and smiled through her pain, not wanting him to worry. After a few moments, her body relaxed and she felt nothing.

Thorin placed his fingers under her jaw and still felt a faint heartbeat. Frantically, he looked around for anyone who could help them as he picked up Natalya in his arms. The Dwarf finally began the long treacherous path down from Ravenhill. Climbing up and down the mountain was not new for Thorin as he had always done it as a youth, but had never carried anyone. His foot hurt him terribly but he ignored it and headed for Erebor as fast as he could. Thorin checked Natalya’s pulse again as he reached the front gate. Dwarves and Men alike immediately surrounded him. “Long live the King!” They shouted as he came in. Thorin tried to move past them but they would not budge.

“Move.” Thorin said as calmly as he could. When no one listened, he finally shouted. “Move! I need a healer.” He frantically looked around at everyone. “Now!”

Two Dwarves quickly arrived with a stretcher. “What is the situation my lord?”

“Battle wounds.” Thorin said loudly over the crowd. He placed Natalya’s body on the stretcher. “Be quick.” He said as he heard her voice in pain. The Dwarf quickly limped after them as they took Natalya to the infirmary.

“My lord, please.” One of the Dwarven healers motioned towards a bed.
“I’ll be fine.” Thorin insisted as he watched some of the Dwarven healers help Natalya onto the nearby cot. He walked over and sat in the armchair next to her. “Natalya.” The Dwarf whispered, putting his hand over hers as the healers tended to her wounds. Thorin stayed by Natalya’s side the whole night as the Dwarves periodically came through and checked on her.

“My lord you really ought to lie down and rest.” A healer approached Thorin, seeing that he had still been sitting in the same chair for several hours.

Thorin shook his head. “I’ll be fine.” He continued to watch as the healers bandaged the large gash on the female’s temple that she had gotten during the beginning of the battle. Some of the Dwarves had tried to clean the cut on his forehead as well but he simply waved them away. Finally, Thorin fell asleep shortly after they had finished.

Natalya moved around in her sleep constantly waking up. She would always see Thorin still asleep in the chair beside her, his face shadowed in the glowing candlelight. The next morning, the half-Elf awoke suddenly to the clatter of a tray falling to the floor and someone gasping. She went to sit up but pain shot through her back. She felt something on her forehead and reached to touch it, feeling a bandage. “Ouch.” She muttered.

“Don’t touch that miss.” The Dwarven healer quickly went over to her. He had been heading over to Thorin when he saw Natalya touch the bandage.

“What happened to me?”

The Dwarf was hesitant to answer. “You took a hard blow to your face and your back.” He explained, seeing Natalya’s face go white. “You are lucky it did not cause permanent damage.” The Dwarf paused and licked his lips. “You are a strong warrior.” The healer said, smiling at her. The Dwarf then looked over to Thorin. “My lord.” He said, shaking him awake. “Your foot.” He commented, staring down where a puddle of dark red blood had been forming on the floor.

Thorin slowly awoke and looked down, realizing the pain was still there. He saw the puddle of blood but barely said anything.

“I am going to have to take a look at that.” The healer said, bending down.

“It’s fine.” Thorin muttered again and shifted in his seat.

Natalya looked down as well, eyes wide when she saw there was indeed a large area of blood underneath Thorin’s foot. She tried to move as little as possible so Thorin did not see she was awake. Her muscles were still bothering her and she could feel some of them cramping.

“My lord!” The healer insisted. “You need treatment.” He hurried off and brought a stool back. “Put your foot on this.”

Thorin was not at all happy with being tended to. “Just make sure Natalya gets taken care of first.” He whispered, pulling the Dwarf aside.

“Of course my lord but I still must tend to you as well.”

“Fine.” Thorin said curtly, slowly waking up.

The healer winced as he unbuckled the straps that went around Thorin’s boots. He saw that the blade had clearly penetrated through the sole of his foot. “You should not have been walking on this sire.”
“There was nothing else I could do.” Thorin said, angrily. “Natalya was in danger and…” He did not want to finish what he was about to say. The Dwarf knew she could have been killed but he did not want to think about it.

“I will get your foot cleaned and in some bandages.” The healer said, leaving the room once again.

“How many days have I been here?” Natalya asked in a whisper, staring up at the ceiling. She had wanted to speak with Thorin but did not want to bother him.

Thorin turned his head in Natalya’s direction. He could not tell her how long as he honestly did not know himself. “You should be sleeping my love.”

Natalya sighed and rested her head back against her pillow. Her lips formed into a slight smile, realizing that Thorin had never called her his love before. The female sighed as she assumed he did not know what he was saying.

Later in the day, Thorin awoke to his foot hurting again. He groaned attempting to sit up straighter in the chair.

“Your Majesty!” The same Dwarf healer was attending to Natalya when he heard Thorin wake up. “Is your foot bothering you again?”

Thorin slightly frowned. His back had been hurting from sitting for so long. “I need to get up.” He said, attempting to stand. The healer immediately grabbed his arm and helped him to the cot that was next to Natalya’s.

“I was wondering how long it was going to take you.” The Dwarf healer nodded.

Thorin simply nodded and said nothing as he laid down on the cot.

“It’s good to see you finally comfortable.” The Dwarf said. He turned to Natalya seeing her awake. “And how are you feeling lass?” He asked, looking down at her.

“Better.” Natalya simply answered, looking past him to see Thorin. She knew that she had been given medications to relieve the pain. She had seen several healers enter in and out of the infirmary, including Oín, but this Dwarf had always been there.

The Dwarf smiled at Natalya. “You are half-Elf if I am not mistaken.” He stated, taking a long draw from his pipe.

Natalya had been watching the Dwarf rearrange supplies and medicine. “Yes.” She quietly answered looking at him. To be in the presence of Dwarves with any Elvish blood. Natalya shook her head, knowing most of them probably wanted her gone as soon as possible.

“Do not be ashamed, lass.” The Dwarf said, gently resting his hand on her arm. “I know what Elves think us Dwarves will do to you if you ever step foot in our kingdom.” The Dwarf snuck a glance at Thorin. “You will be safe here in Erebor.” He said with a smile. “Our King seems to have taken a liking to you.” Turning back to Natalya, the healer still smiled. “And if Thorin likes someone that is saying a lot.” He said as he took a deep breath and went about his business.

Natalya blushed and quickly looked back down at her hands. She looked over at Thorin to see him breathing deeply in sleep and her mind wondered what everyone had been telling her was true. Natalya never thought that Thorin would enjoy the company of someone like her. She wanted to ask him at some point how he felt but she decided to wait until they were both healed.
Chapter 12

Natalya stayed awake until the healer came in once more. “How long will I be here?” She asked, looking at him. The half-Elf had already been in the infirmary now for a few weeks. The healer had ensured that she started trying to walk as soon as possible. Natalya walked almost daily now and was improving even though she still had back pain and could not walk very far.

The Dwarf looked at her and sighed. “You will not get out for a few more days.”

“How has he been?” Natalya asked, looking over at Thorin.

“Better.” The Dwarf took a deep breath. “We got him to take a few steps this morning while you were sleeping. He will most likely be able to leave tomorrow.”

“Will he ever be able to walk normally again?” Natalya asked, worry crossing her face.

“Oh yes.” The healer said. “He will most likely have a limp the first few months but it will slowly go away.”

Natalya nodded then winced in pain as she shifted on the cot.

“Are you alright milady?”

“I’m fine.” Natalya grimaced. The healer came over and placed his hand on her forehead, feeling her temperature.

“You need more medication!”

“No.” Natalya protested, reaching out. She knew it was around the time the healer said he would have Thorin walk again to see how he was doing.

“Why not?” The Dwarf questioned. “It will make you sleep and forget the pain.” He walked over to a cabinet and opened it, looking for the right bottle.

“I want to see Thorin.” Natalya choked out. “I know this is usually the time he gets up to go walk.” Her voice was quiet and hopeful.

The healer glanced over at Thorin. “Well as of right now he is resting.” He paused, taking a breath. “I guess I do need to wake him.” The Dwarf looked back at Natalya. “He has been doing much better lately. The other day he could not put weight on that foot at all but now he can put some.”

“That’s good to hear.” Natalya said softly, still watching Thorin’s even breathing.

The Dwarf walked over to Thorin and gently shook him. “My lord.”

Thorin groaned as he was forced awake. Everyone knew that he never liked being woken up. He looked up to see the healer standing over him.

“My lord you need to try walking again.” The Dwarf said, looking down at him.

Thorin groaned again and looked up at the healer. “Fine.” He mumbled, unaware Natalya was watching. The Dwarrow sat up and swung his legs over the bed, putting weight on his left leg first then slowly stood up. Thorin knew that he had spent a long time in the infirmary. Almost a month. Luckily the other members of his company had luckily come back to the mountain mostly
unscathed.

Natalya watched intensely as Thorin slowly began to walk. He still limped a bit but seemed to be doing better. She smiled slightly, seeing his improvement.

“Agh.” Thorin grunted. He stepped wrong, sending a spike of pain through his leg.

“Sit down my lord!” The healer exclaimed, grabbing Thorin’s elbow.

Natalya bit her lip in fear.

“I’m fine.” Thorin protested with a slight growl as he placed his hand on the cot for support. He refused to sit in the chair that the healer had pulled up and took a few more steps. Thorin suddenly stopped and turned to see Natalya staring at him. “Natalya.” The Dwarf said, his voice deep as he was surprised and slightly out of breath. “I did not expect you to be awake.” Thorin grimaced as he walked over to her.

“I am glad to see you doing better, your majesty.” Natalya said, smiling at Thorin and bowing her head.

Thorin smiled back down at her. After a few moments of standing, the pain became unbearable and he backed into the cot. He heaved a sigh of relief as he finally took the weight off of his foot.

After a few more minutes of sorting medications, the Dwarf walked back over to Natalya. “Would you like to try and walk?” The healer asked and Natalya nodded.

She was scared that she might not be able to, but wanted to try all the same. Looking over, Natalya saw Thorin staring at her. The half-Elf swallowed and slowly stood up. Still not being able to stand up straight from the large bruise in her back frustrated her. She took a few steps before having to sit back down on the bed then looked down at the floor.

“You are doing so much better.” The healer said to Natalya.

Natalya looked up at him and nodded. “Indeed.” She agreed as she swung her legs back over the bed and laid back. Her eyes then traveled over to where Thorin was sitting on the edge of his bed, smiling at her. Natalya smiled back at him then sighed. She was tired from walking just those few steps and she knew she was going to be in there for several more days. Most of the time in the infirmary she had been sleeping, allowing her body to heal faster.

There was a sudden loud knock at the door and the healer opened it, letting a Dwarf guard inside. “My lord.” The guard addressed Thorin. “Your chambers have been prepared and are ready for you.”

Thorin nodded his approval, watching the Dwarf.

“You can come at any time.” The soldier said then he bowed, taking his leave.

Natalya knew that Thorin would most likely be leaving to return to his chambers as soon as possible. He still had yet to be crowned King and there needed to be a ceremony.

“I can accompany Natalya to a room as well.” Thorin said. He looked at her as she turned her head towards him. “If I recall correctly, there is a smaller room adjacent to mine that she can have.” The Dwarf smiled at her.

Natalya’s mouth hung slightly agape. She was surprised at the sudden offer and gave Thorin a
slight smile.

The healer looked between them. “She is not allowed to walk too much.” He reminded Thorin. “You will have to keep an eye out on her and make sure she does not do any extensive work.”

Thorin nodded his head, looking back to Natalya.

“She will still not be able to come out for a few more days.” The Dwarf added. “However, I will allow her to have recovery time there.” The healer turned and looked at Natalya. “How does that sound?”

The half-Elf simply nodded, still shocked at what Thorin had given her. She could not wait to leave the infirmary and see the light of day again.

“You will both need to rest up.” The healer said then looked at Thorin. “You can leave this evening.”

“Have the ravens been sent?” Thorin asked the Dwarf, quickly changing the subject.

“Yes my Lord.” The healer answered. “Some of them have returned already.”

“What messages do they bring?” Thorin asked, some pain still across his face.

“Some Dwarves had begun the journey as soon as they received word you survived the battle.” The healer answered. “They will be here in a few months time.” He paused. “Some of the Dwarves of the Iron Hills have decided to stay as well, including your cousin Dain.”

Thorin turned his head and looked at him. He remembered Dain being on the battlefield but had no idea he chose to stay.

“They are helping to restore some of the mountain as you are healing.” The Dwarf explained. “The Hobbit has stayed as well and is helping as best he can.”

Natalya smiled, imagining Bilbo trying to help the Dwarves with the repairs of the mountain.

“Send them my thanks.” Thorin said, bowing his head. He finally laid back down to rest for a while longer.

Natalya sighed, knowing that she too needed to rest if she was to leave the infirmary on time. She slowly leaned back and closed her eyes.

Thorin woke up later that evening to a loud knock on the door. He watched as the healer stood up to answer it. The same guard entered as before.

“Are you ready my lord?” The healer asked, bowing.

“Yes.” Thorin answered. He snuck a glance over at Natalya who had fallen asleep on her back; her breaths even and shallow. The Dwarf slowly rose from the bed and walked over to the door where the guard was standing. The healer handed him his black royal robe and helped Thorin put his boots back on. The leather straps had been repaired and the sole of the shoe fixed from where the sword had penetrated. Thorin stood up, glad to finally be headed back to his own chambers. He took one last glance at Natalya as he prepared to leave the room. Just as he was about to leave, he slowly walked back over to Natalya’s side. “Imbir bâhuh, ivsit.” (Sleep my friend, heal) The Dwarf whispered as he put his hand gently on her arm. Thorin slowly made his way back to the door where the healer and Dwarf guard met him.
“You will not be allowed to walk very much for the first few days.” The healer explained. “You are still expected to hold meetings now that Erebor is under repairs.” The Dwarf paused. “We have arranged for them to be held in one of the smaller rooms, but it is closer.”

Thorin nodded. “How many will be allowed in?” Thorin asked, his voice tight as the pain in his foot made him grimace. He assumed Dain and some of his Dwarves would want to hear what was going on as well as the Lake-town men and possibly Thranduil.

“Not many.” The healer answered. “Maybe five at most.”

Thorin looked around, thinking. “That will be fine.” He then followed the guard to his chambers. Pushing open the door, he saw the room had indeed been cleaned up from when he had been there with Natalya. New torches had been added to the room and everything was dusted off. Thorin looked to the bed to see new fur added on top and around it. Several logs also glowed in the fireplace with food ready for him on a small table. "Who did this?" Thorin looked around in shock.

“We did!” A voice sounded at the doorway as Kili poked his head in. “Hello Uncle!” The brunette said cheerfully. The brothers had heard from some of the other Dwarves that Thorin was being released from the infirmary and wanted to surprise him.

Fili followed in after. “It’s wonderful to see you Uncle!” He said, his voice cheery and full of enthusiasm.

Both of the nephews gently hugged him. “We are so glad you are safe.” Fili said as he embraced his uncle. “We heard that you and Natalya were under attack.” The blonde paused. “Kili and I assumed you were headed back to Erebor after us so when we did not see you for a while we were worried.”

“No one knew where you were.” Kili added in. “The whole company was waiting at Erebor for you then the Lake-town men showed up as well. Then you finally came back carrying Natalya…” The young Dwarf paused, looking around. “Where is she?” Kili asked with his brow furrowed.

“No one was allowed back there Uncle, what happened?” Fili asked looking up at Thorin with curiosity written across his face.

“Natalya will be fine.” Thorin nodded. “She will be joining us in a few days.”

Fili and Kili looked at each other and did not ask any more questions. They had luckily escaped with only minor injuries and a few stitches.

Thorin looked to the healer. “Return to Natalya and make sure she is recovering.” He said, his voice low.

The Dwarf nodded to him and quickly left the room, passing the guards who were already stationed at the entrance to the royal wing.

Natalya awoke to the room empty. She sighed, knowing Thorin had gone back to his chambers. Lifting herself up, she grimaced in pain. The half-Elf finally sat up on the bed and prepared to stand up. Natalya paused for a moment, resting before pushing herself up to stand. Her back still hurt her but she knew she needed to walk if she was going to see Thorin soon. She slowly made her way around the bed, grabbing the footboard for support as the healer came in.

“Natalya what are you doing out of bed?” He asked, exasperated. The Dwarf had a bowl of soup for her supper that he had grabbed on his way from the kitchen. “You need to be resting.” He exclaimed. “Thorin wants to see you healed, not injured more.”
Natalya sighed and slowly walked over to the armchair where she sat down. Did Thorin say something about me? Taking the soup from the healer, she gently sipped on the dark broth. There were chunks of meat and carrots in the soup for her to chew on as well. The half-Elf ate slowly and watched as the healer moved around the room. He had gathered more flasks and ointment and was rearranging them on different shelves. Once the bowl was empty, Natalya placed it on the table next to her, slowly stood up, and made her way to the bed. Her abdominal muscles cramped as she sat down and she grimaced. The half-Elf finally laid down against her pillow and stared up at the candlelight that was making shadows on the ceiling.

The healer left, seeing now that Natalya was finally resting. As he opened the door to leave, Bilbo was at the door. “Hello there.” The Dwarf said, smiling down at the smaller creature.

“I came to see how Natalya is doing.” The Hobbit looked at the Dwarf.

“Well she is about to sleep so make it quick.” The healer smiled and let Bilbo in.

“Thank you.” Bilbo said, returning the smile. “Greetings Natalya.” The Hobbit said as he entered the dimly lit room.

“Bilbo!” Natalya exclaimed, surprised he visited her. “How have you been?”

“Well enough.” Bilbo answered with a small smile. “The mountain is finally undergoing repairs and I am helping Balin and Ori look through old manuscripts.”

“That sounds relaxing.” Natalya said, looking at the Hobbit.

“It is.” He paused for a moment. “How has Thorin been?” Bilbo asked, looking to the empty cot. “I visited a while ago but you were both asleep.”

“He is doing much better. They moved him to his own chambers so he can get started doing work as soon as possible.”

“That’s understandable.” Bilbo paused, seeing Natalya yawn. “Well I will let you rest.” He said, starting to head out the door.

The half-Elf nodded, watching him leave. Her last thoughts were of Thorin as she drifted off to sleep.

Meanwhile, Thorin lay awake as well, staring at the ceiling lit up by the candle on his bedside table. He prayed to Mahal that Natalya would make it through and heal quickly. He had a lot of faith in the healer and in her. He then remembered that soon, more Dwarves from the Iron Hills would be arriving to help with repairs and then in a few weeks, more from Ered Luin. After a while of thought and worrying, Thorin finally rested his eyes.

In the morning, the Dwarf awoke to knocking at his door. He rolled over, wondering what time it was. “Yes.” He mumbled. The door cracked open and a small shaft of light came through. Thorin knew whoever it was could not have possibly heard him through the large doors.

“Hey Uncle.” Fili said, poking his head in. “Remember, you have that meeting today.” He reminded him. The nephew fully stepped in, followed by Kili who was carrying a tray of breakfast.

“Good morning, Uncle.” The brunet said, placing the tray on the table beside him. “Are you feeling better?”

“A bit.” Thorin mumbled as he rubbed his face, trying to wake up.
“The meeting is set to start in two hours.” Fili paused. “You had best eat up.” He added, handing Thorin a plate.

“We don’t want to sit through a meeting with your stomach growling the entire time.” Kili laughed.

Thorin glared up at him and sat straighter, holding the plate. He ate the meat, bread and cheese his nephews had gotten for him. The Dwarf sighed, thinking about Natalya.

“What are you thinking about?” Fili asked Thorin, smiling as he had an idea.

“That is no concern of yours.” Thorin answered, looking away.

Fili shrugged his shoulders, knowing his boundaries. “Well you should at least make yourself look presentable for the meeting.” The older brother advised, standing up and going over to the large armoire. He opened the double doors and looked at all of the Kings old clothes.

Thorin watched as Fili shuffled through the shelves, looking at different coats and shirts. He picked up the mug beside the bed and drank the ale that was in it.

Fili picked up a royal blue tunic. “This can go with your coat.” He stated, tossing it on the chair where Thorin had discarded the garment.

Kili watched in amusement. “Alright now.” He said, looking at his brother then at Thorin. “You had better dress yourself.” The brothers quickly left the room chuckling.

Thorin sighed, placing the mug back on the nightstand. He slowly made his way out of bed and got dressed. Looking at himself in the mirror, he suddenly noticed that he had lost some weight from all those days in the infirmary. It was not much but it was enough to be slightly noticeable. Quickly dressing himself, Thorin went to the meeting room accompanied by one of the guards. He made sure he was the first one there so no one would notice his limp. A few moments after he sat down, the door opened and the Dwarf stood to see who it was.

“Your Majesty.” The guard bowed, addressing Thorin. “Thranduil of the Woodland Realm.” He stepped aside as the Elf King stood in the doorway, stoic, with his robes trailing out behind him.

“Thorin.” Thranduil said, slightly dipping his head, his lips in a straight line. “It is good to see you alive.”

Thorin nodded his head and gestured for him to sit. He watched as the guard appeared at the door again.


Thorin rose from his seat again and nodded his head to both of them. They took their respective seats. “No one else may join.” Thorin said to the guard and waved his hand.

The guard bowed then backed out and closed the doors.

Silence settled throughout the room for a moment before Thorin spoke. “Erebor’s supplies are running low now that we have to accommodate for more Dwarves.” He looked between Bard, Thranduil and Dain.

“What do you suppose we do?” Bard asked, his hand on his knee. He looked to Thranduil who still held an icy stare.
“I am guessing he will want resources from us.” Thranduil said, staring Thorin down.

Bard turned to Thorin. “What do you wish for, my Lord?” He asked, side glancing Thranduil.

“I wish to offer a trade.” Thorin said, tilting his head as he looked to Thranduil. “I will give you the gems.” He paused. “If you but give us food until we have rebuilt enough to sustain ourselves.”

Thranduil leaned back in his chair and nodded, thinking about the offer.

Thorin then turned to Bard. “I will give the people their share of the gold to aid in restoring Dale if in turn I can have some workers to help with rebuilding Erebor.” He looked at the bargeman and shook his head. “I need all the help I can get until my people arrive from Ered Luin.” Thorin looked at him, desperate.

“Agreed.” Bard said nodding and looked over to Thranduil.

The Elven King looked to Bard, shocked that he would accept the offer with what little resources and people Dale had left.

“What do you say, Thranduil?” Thorin asked, turning his head toward the Elf king. “Do you accept my offer?”

“I do.” Thranduil said. His lips turned into a twisted smirk. “On one condition.”

Thorin stared back at him. *It’s always something more.* “What is that?” Thorin asked, raising his eyebrows.

“I get a share of the gold as well.”

The Dwarf took a deep breath. “Fine.” He grumbled, knowing that the Elf was only doing it to get to him, as he had no need for the gold.

“I’m glad an agreement could be made so quickly.” Thranduil said, his lips forming back into a straight thin line.

“My Dwarves will help getting the forges repaired on the ‘morrow.” Dain said, nodding to the group.

Thorin nodded his agreement and looked around the room, seeing Bard and Thranduil agree as well.

Dain stood up, nodded to Thorin, and left the room.

Thorin turned his attention back to Bard and Thranduil. “We take our leave.” Bard said, slowly rising from his chair.

The two of them stood and bowed to one another. Thranduil never said a word as he silently left the room followed by Bard.

Thorin watched as the Dwarven guard came back into the room.

“Your Majesty.” The guard stood at attention and bowed. “The healer wishes to see you back in the infirmary.”

Thorin’s eyes widened as the sudden entrance of the healer could only mean one thing.
“It’s Natalya.” The guard said, his face grave.

Thorin strode past the guard, cloak trailing, and walked quickly to the infirmary. The Dwarf then knocked on the wooden doors and the same healer answered.

“My Lord.” He said, bowing.

“What has happened?” Thorin quickly asked, looking to where Natalya lay.

“She had some bad abdominal pains.” The healer explained. “It was just cramps from the healing so I used the herbs to reduce them. Her back is healing but since she has had to accommodate to a new way of standing for a few days the pain in her stomach muscles have increased.” He smiled at Thorin. “She had said your name so I thought it would be best if she saw you.”

Thorin walked over to where Natalya lay. She had fallen back asleep and seemed relaxed. The Dwarf reached down and held her hand, causing her to stir.

Natalya felt someone holding her hand and forced her eyes open, seeing Thorin staring back down at her. She gave a weak smile that immediately faded when she felt her muscles cramp again. She felt Thorin squeeze her hand and call for the healer. The half-Elf looked up again to see the Dwarf handing her another drink. She took a sip and tried to relax as she slowly finished the drink. Her and Thorin never said a word but stared at each other, Natalya feeling herself getting sleepy.

Thorin looked around the room and sat down in the armchair next to her bed.

“How is your foot feeling, my lord?” The healer asked Thorin as he walked past still with a slight limp.

“Better.” Thorin said softly, still watching Natalya. He saw as her eyelids closed and she fell back asleep.

“That’s good to hear.”

Thorin nodded and continued watching Natalya. When he was convinced she was finally asleep, he slipped quietly out of the room, nodding to the healer. He returned to his chambers and sat down on the bed, rubbing his temples. Thorin worried for Natalya, knowing it would be a while before she was completely healed. He wanted to postpone his coronation as late as possible to ensure she could attend. Members of the company, as well as Dain had been bothering him about it for days. He lay back on the bed and went through the day’s events in his mind, thinking about what he should do.
Days continued to pass in the mountain and Thorin was becoming busy with all of the meetings and repairs that needed to take place. He knew that he should visit Natlaya soon as it had been almost a month since the battle and she was still healing.

Meanwhile, Natlaya awoke in the dark room with a single candle lit beside her bed. She had been dreaming of Thorin. He never spoke a word but was always there, watching over her. Sighing, the female continued staring up at the ceiling.

The healer noticed she was awake and walked over to her. “Since you are awake, would you care to try and walk?” The Dwarf asked, looking down at the half-Elf.

Natlaya nodded, still thinking about her dream of Thorin. She finally decided that she really liked him after denying it for so long but was not sure if he reciprocated the feelings. He cared for her in a way but she knew that was also just his nature as a future King to care for his kingdom and the people inside it. *But I’m really not one of them.* Natlaya told herself. She slowly pulled the blankets off, swung her legs over the bed and stood up. It was now the fifth day Natlaya had been in the infirmary. She was improving greatly but walking was still a struggle.

The Dwarf healer watched Natlaya’s progress. “It seems like you are doing much better today.” He said, happily.

“I am.” Natlaya answered with a smile.

“If you want to you can try walking around a bit outside and see how you feel about walking to your new room.” The healer said, watching her face brighten.

“Oh I would love that!” Natlaya said, getting more excited. She immediately looked down to see that she had been wearing the same outfit the whole time she was recovering. It was the brown under tunic she had worn almost a week ago when she charged into battle. Looking around, she saw her long green tunic and cloak folded nicely on a nearby bench. Walking over to where the healer held the door open for her, the female stepped out. It was definitely brighter outside of the infirmary and Natlaya could already feel better and her spirits lifted even though the air was slightly chilly. Winter was finally starting to settle on the mountain and the days were slowly becoming colder. The hallway was huge with torches lit on either side of the wall which reflected off the dark green stone. Every few feet there was a bench made out of stone carved out of the side. The half-Elf slowly headed down the hall, stopping at irregular intervals to sit down and rest. The healer always kept her in his sight, making sure she was not hurting herself further. Natlaya stayed sitting as she heard voices around the corner. She quickly looked up when she saw two Dwarrowdams appear. They abruptly stopped and stared at her for a few seconds before leaving and talking in hushed whispers. Natlaya sighed and reached up to touch where the point of her ear stuck out of her hair. She shook her head and stared at her hands where they were folded in her lap.

*I’m going to have to leave as soon as possible.* The half-Elf knew however she had nowhere else to go. Tears pricked Natlaya’s eyes as she suddenly rose from her seat, feeling pain shoot along her back. She ignored it and walked as fast as she could back down the hallway.

The Dwarf healer quickly chased her down. “Natlaya!” He shouted, walking up to her. “Slow down or you will injure yourself more.” The Dwarf warned. “Do you not wish to get better?” He asked, looking up at her.

“It’s Natlaya!” A voice suddenly shouted behind them.
The half-Elf turned to see Fili and Kili running down the hall towards her. She forced a smile, not wanting them to know her feelings. “Hello boys.”

“Are you doing better?” The brunet asked with a worried expression across his face.

Natalya genuinely smiled. The brothers always knew how to cheer her up when she was in bad spirits. “I am doing much better.” She answered, bowing her head. “Thank you.”

“Uncle has been worried.” Kili said with a smile.

Fili kicked him in the leg and gave him a glare.

“What was that?” Kili asked, looking at him with a confused expression.

Natalya giggled. “You two.” She turned back to the Dwarf healer who had an eyebrow raised. He sighed and began walking back to the infirmary with Natalya following.

Fili and Kili walked beside her. “You are still walking so slow.” Kili relentlessly teased her.

“You had better stop antagonizing me.” Natalya warned, giving him a playful glare.

“And why might that be?” Fili asked, walking backwards in front of her.

“When I finally get my strength back,” Natalya paused. “You two don’t stand a chance.” She smirked, watching as confused expressions crossed the brothers faces.

Kili laughed, putting his hand on her shoulder. “You are no match for my bow and arrows.” He tilted his head in her direction.

“Or my throwing knives.” Fili added with a wink.

“I wouldn’t test her.” The healer piped in with a small chuckle. “She has been through more than you know.”

“That’s right.” Natalya added. “So you had better watch your backs.” She gave them a playful warning stare.

“Oh we will watch out.” Kili wiggled his eyebrows. He and Fili left Natalya when she reached the infirmary.

“We need to tell Uncle we saw her.” Kili said, enthusiastic as they exited the medical wing.

“We should.” Fili said in agreement. “He will want to know that she is improving.”

“But you were the one who kicked me in the leg when I told Natalya that.” Kili said with a confused look.

“Yes but he has a surprise for her.” Fili said. “I didn’t want you to give it away.” He paused. “Don’t you remember?” The blond added, looking at his younger brother.

“Well of course I remember.” Kili said, rolling his eyes.

“I had to say something before you opened your mouth so you didn’t give it all away.” Fili looked at his younger brother. “You are always the one spilling secrets.” He paused, chuckling. “Remember when you weren’t supposed to tell Amad about the…”
“Never mind that.” Kili blushed.

“She told Adad so fast.” Fili laughed. “You were lucky I stuck up for you that day. I won’t always be around to save your sorry hide.”

They finally made their way back to the royal chambers. “Hello Uncle Thorin!” Fili greeted his Uncle.

“Hello boys.” Thorin said, smiling at them. “What mischief have you been up to today?” He asked, straightening his robe. The pain in his foot was still there and he winced slightly as he stepped funny.

“Oh nothing.” Kili said innocently.

Thorin cocked his head and raised his eyebrow at them. He turned his attention to the shorter Dwarf worker next to him. “Make sure Natalya’s room is finished by tomorrow evening.”

“Oh!” Kili said, raising his eyebrows. “I want to see.” He tried to follow the Dwarf down to Natalya’s room but Thorin stopped him.

“I don’t think so.” Thorin said, pulling his youngest nephew back. He eyed him then spoke. “This is special.” He paused for a moment before speaking softer. “Just for her.”

“What did you say Uncle?” Fili asked, knowing already what he had said.

“Nothing.” Thorin growled. He turned back towards the way that the other Dwarf had gone. “I am going to go check to see how things are improving.” He paused. “And don’t you dare follow me.” He warned. “Stay here.” Thorin commanded as he began walking off, a slight limp still in his step.

“Oh Uncle!” Kili called after him, remembering what he was going to say. “We saw Natalya a while ago!”

Thorin immediately turned around and stared at them intensely.

“She was outside of the infirmary but it looked like she was heading back.”

“Did she look like she was improving?” Thorin asked with worry in his voice.

“Yes.” Fili said, nodding his head. “We laughed and joked for a few minutes.”

“Did the healer say when she would be free to go?” Thorin further questioned.

“No.” Fili answered, shaking his head.

“I will have to visit her later then.”

Fili and Kili smiled at each other.

Thorin sighed. “Don’t follow me.” He warned the brothers and began walking down the hallway to where he had a group of Dwarves fixing up Natalya’s room. He stepped into the space, which was small compared to his room, but still bigger than the average room within the mountain. The Dwarves had built a small wooden ledge going all the way around the room with small candles flickering on top of it. Thorin requested these since he knew Natalya still needed some source of light since that was what she was accustomed to. “Good.” Thorin said stepping into the room and seeing the Dwarves hard at work. “No.” He suddenly stopped them, looking at a group of Dwarves in the corner. “That needs to go over there.” Thorin pointed to a dark brown dresser that some of
the Dwarves created with a geometric and vine pattern going up the sides. The Dwarves nodded and moved it straight across the room from where the bed was positioned. He observed as the small crew moved quickly around the room and created a more of an outdoor ambiance for Natalya. Thorin had several of them collect branches and twigs from what they could find and place them in the room. They also crafted thin gold and silver leaves with meticulous detail to place near the branches. Thorin was proud of the way the room had turned out and hoped Natalya would enjoy it.

“What do you think, my Lord?” One of the Dwarves asked Thorin once he had finished moving the dresser. The bed was covered with a dark green velvet duvet and golden bed sheets. The bed matched the dresser in color and style. It had large fur pillows as well as a blanket draped across the foot of the bed and a rug on the floor to match.

“Very well done.” Thorin praised them. He added the last touch by placing a handcrafted golden bracelet on the bedside table. “Make sure the candles are lit and the room in order tomorrow evening.” He walked back towards the door, seeing hurried movement. “Fili! Kili!” He called out.

The brothers stopped dead in their tracks. They both sighed and turned around.

“You disobeyed me.” Thorin said coolly, looking down at them.

“We’re sorry Uncle.” Kili said, looking at his feet.

“I’m sure you are.” Thorin said. “But now you will not be able to visit Natalya and you must stay over here on the west side of Erebor do you understand.” His voice was firm as he stared them down. “This is serious.”

“Yes Uncle.” Fili said sadly, looking at his feet.

Thorin stepped over to one of the Dwarves leaving Natalya’s room. “Keep an eye on my sister’s sons.” He said, glancing back to where Fili and Kili were standing.

“Yes my Lord.” The Dwarf said, bowing. He walked over to the brothers. “Just make sure you do not bother your Uncle.” He said, shaking his head.

All three Dwarves watched as Thorin headed off to the East side of Erebor where the infirmary was. Kili nudged Fili who gave him a smirk.

“Alright you two keep out of his business.” The older Dwarf said to the boys. “Now let’s get to work.”

Thorin meanwhile knew he needed to check on Natalya but time had not permitted it. Slowly over the days, more Dwarves had been arriving from the Iron Hills and some even from Ered Luin. He was stopped only a few times by occasional families who wanted their children to meet him or talk about the rebuilding of Erebor. Thorin made the conversations quick, but not rude. Finally, as he kept heading to the other side of the kingdom, the number of people became less and less. The Dwarf soon arrived at the infirmary where almost no one was. Two guards were now stationed outside the doors with the new Dwarves now coming into the Mountain. They stood up straighter as Thorin approached. He nodded to them as he knocked on the door to the infirmary.

The healer heard the knock, knowing it was most likely Thorin as Dwarves rarely ever stopped by. He opened the door to let him inside.

“How is she?” Thorin immediately asked, looking over at Natalya. He saw that she was peacefully asleep, as the painkillers would knock the strongest Dwarf out in minutes.
“Better.” The healer took a deep breath. “I’m afraid she still will not be out for a few more days after what happened yesterday.”

Thorin looked at him. “What happened?” He asked, his voice deep with concern.

“She tried to move faster than she could and made her back hurt.” The healer said. “She needs to stay on bed rest the rest of today and tomorrow if she is to still recover on time.”

Thorin looked down at her unmoving form, shaking his head with a sigh. Almost two weeks had passed since the battle and she was still healing. Walking over to her he gently put his fingers in the palm of her hand. She stirred slightly, but did not wake. Thorin smiled down at her and removed his hand. “Ensure she continues recovering.” He nodded to the healer and left the room. Thorin suddenly realized that once the mountain saw her, they would immediately begin making assumptions. The Dwarf continued walking down the hallway and heaved a sigh. His stomach rumbled and he headed towards the kitchens.

“Thorin!” Balin called to him, stepping out of a storage closet full of old scrolls and manuscripts.

“Yes Balin?” Thorin turned towards the elderly Dwarf, exasperated.

“Laddie you need to…” Balin paused, taking a breath. “You need to do your coronation as soon as possible.” He looked Thorin in the eyes. “I know you wanted to wait for Natalya to heal but this can’t.” The elderly Dwarf said, shaking his head. “Word has begun to spread.” Balin whispered, getting closer to Thorin.

“Of what?” Thorin asked, getting more frustrated by the second.

“Of your apparent weakness.” Dwalin suddenly interjected, marching down the hallway towards them.

Thorin turned his head and glared at him. “So what.” He growled. “What does it matter that I wait?” The company had been barraging him for days about when his coronation was to take place.

“I know it has only been a little more than two weeks since the battle.” Balin tried to reason with him. “Your injuries are still healing; yes, but you need to claim the throne.”

Thorin huffed. “I will do it in my time, Balin.” He said, angrily. “I will not speak of it until I am ready.” The Dwarf raised his hand to silence them. Looking between both of the brothers, he walked off and continued heading towards the kitchen. He passed the forges, as they were adjacent to the kitchen for heat. Looking in, Thorin saw some Dwarves already crafting at the anvil, pounding the metal with their hammers. He turned the corner, going into the kitchen from the back entrance. Bombur, who normally occupied the kitchen night and day was nowhere to be seen and it was just Thorin alone. He fixed himself a quick meal and sat down at one of the small tables inside the kitchen, watching as Dwarves occasionally passed him by. They would nod or bow, then continue on their way. Thorin quickly finished his meal then headed back to his chambers and sighed as he entered his room. Maybe Balin was right. He thought. Maybe I should just have my coronation now so that no one doubts my rule as King. Thorin changed into his nightclothes and lay down on the bed, staring into the wall.

The next morning came and Thorin awoke with a pounding headache. He groaned and rose from the bed. Heading over to the cabinet by the far wall, he pulled out a bottle of ale that the company had placed there for him. Taking a sip, he sat down in the blue velvet armchair by the fireplace. Almost as soon as he sat down, there was a knock on the door. He grumbled and walked over to the door. Opening one of the large oak doors, he saw the faces of his nephews smiling up at him.
“Morning Uncle!” Kili said, a smile upon his face. “We were wondering when you would wake up.”

“And already having a drink I see.” Fili chuckled and pointed to the bottle.

Thorin grumbled. “What do you want?” He asked, raising his eyebrows. Leaning against the doorframe, he placed his fingers on the bridge of his nose, trying to reduce the pounding.

“We were coming to ask what you are going to do about your coronation.” Fili said timidly. “Balin was speaking about it this morning and…”

“Yes I am well aware of what he has to say about the matter.” Thorin said, gruffly cutting his nephew off.

“Did we do something wrong?” Kili asked, pouting.

“No. No.” Thorin said, shaking his head. He took another sip of his drink. Sighing, he looked back at them. “I need to speak with Balin.” Thorin paused. “Get him for me. Now.” He decided that it would be best if he made a decision now.

Fili and Kili dashed off in the direction they had last seen the elderly Dwarf.

Meanwhile, Balin was looking through old manuscripts with Ori and Bilbo when the two brothers came dashing up. “Hold up there laddies what is going on?” Balin chuckled, watching the Dwarves gasp for air.

“Thorin.” Kili gasped. “Wants to see.” He took another deep breath. “You.” He finally managed to get out.

Balin stared at them for a moment. “Where is he?”

“In his chambers.” Fili said, still slightly out of breath.

“It seems rather urgent.” Balin chuckled, raising one eyebrow.

“Yes.” Kili gasps. “He wants to speak about his coronation. Go talk to him before he changes his mind.”

Balin smiled. “He’s not going to change his mind that fast, lads.”

“Good.” Fili said, sighing. He knew how much of a grouch Thorin could be when talking about specific matters.

Balin, Fili and Kili all walked back to Thorin’s room. The elderly Dwarf stepped up and knocked on the door. “Thorin!” There was a pause before there was a response.

“Come in.”

Balin pushed open the door to see Thorin standing in the middle of the room.

Thorin looked at Fili and Kili. “I need to speak with Balin alone.”

Fili and Kili sighed and left the room. “Why are we never involved in any of Uncle’s conversations?” Kili pouted. Fili shrugged and kept walking alongside his brother.

“Now Thorin.” Balin started, looking at Thorin who had his head in his hands, mumbling. “You
knew this was going to come.”

“I just did not know it would be so difficult.” Thorin growled. He had dreaded figuring out what to do for his coronation. The Dwarf knew that Erebor had not seen a new king in hundreds of years and it had to go perfectly or else he would be seen as weak.

“The lads and I will be beside you every step of the way.” Balin said, reassuringly. “I’m sure Natalya will as well as soon as she is healed.” He added with a smile.

Thorin looked at the older Dwarf at the mention of the female’s name. “She would not know what to do.” He said, sadly, looking at the ground.

“Then we will guide her.” Balin said with a smile. “I’m sure she would love to help.”

Thorin sighed. “I spoke with Oín yesterday and it is not likely that she will recover as quickly as we thought.”

Balin sighed, not sure of what to say. He knew that Natakla had spent more time in the infirmary than anyone. He remembered when Thorin personally explained to the company how she had saved his life on Ravenhill.

“It will be fine.” Thorin sighed. “She will heal. Now let’s get this over with.”

Balin chuckled. “Well do you have a specific time frame in mind lad?” He looked kindly to Thorin who had now stood up off and gone over to his desk.

“As soon as possible.” Thorin answered, looking at Balin.

The Dwarf was shocked. He would have expected Thorin to wait at least another month after all he had said. “With the daily arrival of Dwarves, I am sure we can get the coronation decorations up and invitations written and sent within two week’s time.”

Thorin raised an eyebrow. “I am impressed.” He said, picking up the tankard of ale on his desk and taking another sip.

Balin smiled. “You must have forgotten that us Dwarves are very diligent workers when we have a task at hand.”

Thorin smiled back.

“What would you wish your colors to be?” The elderly Dwarf asked. All the former Kings had specific colors used during their coronation that were personalized specifically for them. Out of all the King’s Erebor had seen, no two ever used the same colors. It would also be the color their wardrobe revolved around. New clothes were hand made for each King to their liking of color and what fit their style.

“I would prefer darker shades of blue.” Thorin said then he paused for a moment. “With silver accents.” Thorin added, looking at Balin who nodded.

Balin understood if Thorin never wanted to see a gold piece ever again after the Dragon Sickness plagued his mind. “That can be arranged.” The elderly Dwarf had been acting as Thorin’s personal assistant for a few days now as Thorin began to slowly settle into his role as King. “Anything else you would like?” He asked, watching Thorin who had begun pacing back and forth across the room.
“Not at the moment, Balin.” Thorin said, never looking at the Dwarf. He walked across the room to sit down at his desk, sighing. The Dwarf pulled out a piece of paper and a quill and began writing. He knew that later that day there was to be a small meeting held and Thorin would officially announce his coronation. In addition, he was to begin choosing the lords of his court to advise him.

Balin could tell that Thorin was becoming frustrated again and bowed, taking his leave. He sighed, knowing what kind of a toll this was taking on Thorin.

Thorin dipped the quill into the ink and quickly began writing on a piece of spare parchment, his thoughts racing.

Natalya,

_I regret to inform you that_

Thorin muttered under his breath, his hand trailing off the page. That was not really what he wanted to say. The Dwarf sighed, scratching it out and writing again.

_I am writing to inform you that I will be crowned as King soon and preparations will be taking place immediately. I did not want you to worry, love, as I would rather you heal and stand beside me than exert yourself too much. The coronation will not take place for a while but I thought I should tell you of why I have been busy these past few days. I have been meaning to visit you more often although time has not allowed it and for that I am truly sorry. I hope you will forgive my absence._

_Yours truly,_

Thorin

He stared at the page for a few minutes, thinking about what to do. The Dwarf finally sighed, crumpling the piece of paper and tossing it into the fireplace. He had to go speak to Natalya himself. Thorin knew that would mean possibly cutting the upcoming meeting short but he knew he had to see her. He grabbed a spare coat from off of one of the nearby chairs and headed for the door. The Dwarf finally stepped out of his room for the first time that day, seeing sunlight. He squinted his eyes as he looked out into the hallway. Thorin saw that more and more Dwarves had been arriving as the days were coming closer. He had been sent several ravens from Ered Luin, letting him know that his sister Dís would be arriving any day now. He had not seen his sister since he decided to reclaim Erebor. Dain and her had thought him to be a fool for doing it. Thorin chuckled, remembering his cousin’s face when he had seen him one the battlefield. The Dwarf had sent a raven to him not long after Erebor was reclaimed and the sickness fell upon him. Thorin knew he needed to speak with his cousin regarding his coronation. Thorin wandered the halls watching as they slowly became filled with the chatter of Dwarves once more. He smiled, remembering the great halls when he was a prince so many years ago. Pushing the thoughts of his grandfather out of his mind, Thorin tried to think of more joyous thoughts but he couldn’t. He remembered when his Amad first noticed something was off. The Dwarrowdam had told Thorin immediately. The young prince had kept a close watch on his grandfather, seeing the sickness plague his mind. Thorin was distraught, as his attempts to help his grandfather did not do anything. _I am not my grandfather._ Thorin remembered telling Balin outside of the secret entrance to Erebor. He sighed, disappointed in himself for allowing the sickness to take hold of him as well. He knew he had treated his companions awfully and would never forgive himself for it. Walking to one of the larger council chambers, Thorin smiled as he saw the elderly Dwarf heading the same way.

“I am glad everything could be arranged.” Balin smiled. “He had spent the previous afternoon
sending out invitations to Dwarrows that had been closest to Thorin in Ered Luin.

Thorin simply nodded as they continued walking. “I will make sure to tell the council.” He paused for a moment. “How many are there?”

“Ten.” Balin nodded. “But you will need to pick five for your personal court.”

“Thank you for doing this.” Thorin placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder.

Balin nodded as they entered the small room. He watched as all the Dwarves rose to their feet at the sight of Thorin.

The Dwarf stepped into the room and made his way to the head of the table. After motioning for everyone to sit, Thorin remained standing. He intended to keep the meeting as short as possible. “As many of you know I have made the decision to start the preparations for my Coronation. It will be held as soon as possible.”

“Agreed.” Several of the Dwarves muttered.

Thorin swallowed, deciding now would not be the right time to inform them of Natalya. He did not wish to keep her hidden but at the same time did not feel that just after the battle would be acceptable either. “I will begin assigning you tasks to aid me in my preparations. In addition to this, I will begin to choose some of you to be my council.” Thorin paused and placed his hands on the table. “I know almost all of you from our time in Ered Luin. I will be sending out invitations over the next few days.” He nodded as he looked to the group of Dwarves. “This meeting is dismissed.” The Dwarrow smiled as he walked back over to Balin. “I wish for you to be on my council.” Thorin’s voice was low as he watched the other council members leave.

The elderly Dwarf gave a bow. “It would be my honor.”

Thorin nodded then began heading to the infirmary. He knew he needed to speak with Natalya and ask for her forgiveness. He prayed to Mahal that she would understand. Gently opening the door, Thorin did not bother to knock. The Dwarf looked inside the dimly lit room to see Natalya sitting up on the cot, awake and eating. “Natalya.” Thorin smiled, looking at her.

“Greetings, Thorin.” Natalya said, smiling back as she looked up, not knowing what to say. Thorin looked even more regal than the last time she had seen him. Whispers had spread of his coronation to happen soon and Natalya hoped she would be there to see it. “I hear your coronation is going to happen soon.” The half-Elf looked up at the Dwarf, watching as he walked over to Oín.

“It is.” Thorin said softly. He turned to the healer. “How long until she is better?” Thorin asked the Dwarf softly.

“Only a few more days.” Oín answered, smiling at Natalya. “She has been recovering better than expected.”

“That’s wonderful.” Thorin said, smiling down at Natalya, glad that Oín had been wrong the other day. After a few moments he asked the healer to leave.

Knowing Thorin wanted some time alone with Natalya, Oín quietly slipped out of the room.

Natalya smiled back up at Thorin, blushing. She continued eating her meal as the Dwarf still said nothing. Finally after a few moments the female heard him clear his throat.

“Natalya.” Thorin gently reached down and touched her arm. “Please forgive me.”
The half-Elf stared up at him and licked her lips, sighing softly, unsure of what to say.

“I treated you harshly.” The Dwarrow felt his throat tighten at the memories. “I was not myself. I should have never made you leave.”

Giving a shaky sigh, Natalya put her bowl of soup down and put her hand on top of Thorin’s. “I understand. None of it was your fault. There is nothing to forgive.” She gave a soft smile as she stared into his blue eyes.

Thorin forced a smile, still feeling ashamed. After a few moments, he turned to see Oín opening the door.

Natalya sighed and looked down into her lap. She had hoped the healer would allow her to leave the room more now that she had been improving.

“What is wrong?” The Dwarf asked as his brow furrowed in confusion.

“Nothing.” Natalya shook her head as she looked up, attempting a smile. “I’m just thinking.”

“Thinking of what?” Thorin asked, looking into her eyes, a gentle smile crossing his features.

“I really want to get out of here and explore the mountain.” Natalya spoke quietly, hoping Thorin and Oín would understand.

Thorin’s smile widened. He wanted to give her a tour of his kingdom but he had to wait until the right time.

“Well Thorin and I were actually talking about that earlier.” Oín interjected, walking back over to her.

Natalya raised her eyebrows, waiting for one of them to say more.

“I thought it would be best to let Thorin decide.” The healer said, looking over at the Dwarf.

Natalya’s jaw slackened. *Maybe now I have a chance of getting out of here. I just have to prove to Thorin that I can walk.* Her smile widened slightly at the thought of exploring Erebor with Thorin.

Thorin nodded then looked to Natalya. “Whenever you are ready.” He knew that if she could walk, he could show her to her new room. Thorin gave a soft smile at the thought.

“We are greatly lucky she is part Elf laddie.” Oín smiled at Thorin. “They are known to be quick healers.”

Thorin nodded as he crossed his arms and watched the Half-Elf.

Natalya slowly swung her legs over the cot and stood up, never taking her eyes off Thorin.
Chapter 14

Thorin watched as Natalya took a few steps forward. The half-Elf never stumbled, but the way she walked said that she was in great discomfort. Natalya was slightly doubled over but it would be easy to miss had Thorin not been paying attention. He stayed where he was as she walked back over to him.

Natalya breathed deeply, looking Thorin in the eyes. She was anxious, waiting for what he had to say.

Thorin looked over at Oín. “Maybe it would be better if I could see her walk down the hallway a bit.” He raised an eyebrow at the healer.

The Dwarf already knew about the room that Thorin had fixed for Natalya but was under strict orders not to say a word. “That would be fine.” Oín said, waving his hand. He knew that Natalya would not be returning. “Just make sure you take it easy lass.” He said, giving her a smile.

Thorin put his hand on Natalya’s shoulder and opened the door for her.

Natalya blushed at the contact. She knew Thorin liked his personal space as much as anyone. He is just being protective because I am injured. Natalya told herself even though she wanted him to feel the way for her that she did for him. The half-Elf gave a soft sigh, knowing it would never happen.

“Sad to leave?” Thorin asked, hearing her sigh. Taking the coat he had been carrying, he handed it to her. Closing the door behind them, Thorin and Natalya walked out into the torch lit hallway.

“I will be returning tonight.” Natalya chuckled, taking the coat from him. She wondered why he was handing it to her, as she knew she had a few more days to rest until she could leave. Putting her arm through the sleeve she slightly gasped as pain shot through her back.

Thorin quickly helped her into the coat. “Don’t move.” He ordered as he stood behind the half-Elf and pulled the garment up onto her shoulders.

“Thank you.” Natalya smiled at him. She felt herself blush when his hand brushed across her shoulder. She was slightly confused as to why Thorin was so adamant about her wearing the coat. She knew that even just over the past few days it had gotten colder. The forges were still under repairs so they could provide heat to the mountain as soon as possible.

Thorin didn’t say anything as he did not want to give his surprise for her away.

“Where are we going?” Natalya asked, looking at Thorin as they walked side by side.

“As far as you can.” Thorin said, watching her as they walked farther down the long hallway away from the infirmary.

Natalya swallowed, looking at the Dwarf. “Thorin?” She paused for a moment, stopping in the hallway.

“Yes?” Thorin answered, looking back at her.

“In all of our time together, I realized that I have never had the chance to tell you about myself.” The half-Elf gave a small smile.
Thorin could tell that speaking was physically exhausting for her but he did not make her stop, knowing she wouldn’t no matter what he said.

“I know some things about you but you barely know anything about me.” She looked him in the eyes, trying to read his expression.

“What about yourself would you like to tell?” Thorin spoke softly. “I had assumed you were fleeing Mirkwood to forget your past.” The Dwarf paused. “I did not want to bring up any ill memories.”

Natalya shook her head. “What you say is true.” She paused, still keeping eye contact as they slowly walked. “I think you should know about me, even if there is not much to tell.”

“I would love to hear it nonetheless.” Thorin said with a genuine smile.

Natalya returned the smile then began slowly speaking. She told him how she had been brought up with the Elves in Mirkwood since her birth. “I never knew my parents.” Natalya said sadly, swallowing. “There were other Elves who cared for me there but I knew that I never truly fit in. One day I met Anairë.” The half-Elf sighed, not knowing what had happened to her friend.

Thorin immediately tensed, assuming this was the Elf he had banished earlier.

“She was the only one who never made a comment about my height or appearance.” Natalya continued, realizing how amazing of a friend Anairë was.

Thorin stayed quiet as he listened. He greatly enjoyed hearing her have enough energy to speak.

“We became friends from the day we met and she has been through a lot with me.” Natalya commented quietly. She looked at Thorin once more. “Then one day I was informed that I was to be a member of the King’s guard. I was not sure why he made that decision.”

“You can fight.” Thorin commented, looking at Natalya with a smile. He could feel his feelings for her growing more as they walked together.

Natalya smiled back. “I remember the day in the forest when we first saw each other. I assumed Thranduil would have treated you better so I took it upon myself to help you. Even though I ended up banished.” She sighed. “I decided that after Smaug attacked Erebor and Thranduil did nothing, I did not belong in Mirkwood but had no way to escape. Then when I met you it was the perfect time for me to leave and help you reclaim your homeland.”

“I am very glad you did.” Thorin gently touched her arm and halted.

The half-Elf turned to face him. “Me too.” She whispered, staring into his eyes.

“Well your story was certainly more interesting than mine.” Thorin chuckled and paused. “After the fall of Erebor our people wandered the wild, homeless. We took work where we could find it, often laboring in the villages of men on our way to Ered Luin.” The Dwarf paused, remembering the battle of Moria. “My grandfather, Thror, however wanted to reclaim the Dwarven kingdom.”

Natalya looked at her feet, knowing parts of the story.

“My cousin, Dain, slew Azog the Defiler at the gate of Azanulbizar.” Thorin gave a slight chuckle, not wanting to go into too much detail. “It is because of that battle I earned the title of Oakenshield.” He smiled at Natalya. “Once my shield was broken I saw a large Oak branch and it was the closest thing for me to use to defend myself.”
Natalya smiled at the thought of the mighty Dwarf King using an Oak branch as a shield.

“Our numbers were reduced.” Thorin continued. “My grandfather and brother were both slain.”

Natalya swallowed, knowing this was hard for Thorin to speak of. She gently touched his arm in reassurance.

“After, I led the charge towards the gate.” The Dwarf paused. “We did not win the battle but we did succeed in reducing the Orcs.”

Natalya smiled at him. “Then what?” She gently asked.

“We traveled onwards toward Ered Luin. I was made King there although I always knew my rightful throne was here. I decided to reclaim The Lonely Mountain, much to the dissuasion of others.” Thorin slightly smiled, remembering all those who had doubted him.

“You have succeeded.” Natalya smiled.

“Indeed I have.” Thorin said, still looking at the half-Elf. “Only with your help.” He whispered. “I would have died on the battlefield had you not been there to save me.”

Natalya blushed, looking back down at the ground.

“I am forever in your debt.” The Dwarf whispered.

The half-Elf shook her head with a smile. “No, Thorin.” She felt him take her hand and they continued walking. Natalya suddenly stopped when they arrived at the entrance of the main gathering room of Erebor. She suddenly noticed the same Dwarrowdam who had looked at her with disgust that day she was with Fili and Kili.

“What is wrong Natalya?” Thorin asked, seeing her stop and tense up. He stood in front of her and looked at her.

“Nothing.” Natalya lied, trying to hide her emotions.

Thorin eyed her. “Does your injury hurt?” He asked, wanting to make sure he was not pushing Natalya farther than she could go.

“I’m fine, Thorin.” Natalya said, shaking her head. “I do not hurt.”

“Then why did you stop?” He asked with a slight chuckle, crossing his arms over his chest. “I thought you wished to see more of Erebor.”

“I…I do.” Natalya said, looking into Thorin’s eyes. She kept glancing over Thorin’s shoulder and saw the Dwarrowdam looking straight at her.

Thorin looked over his shoulder to see the Dwarf woman still staring. Thorin huffed and turned back to Natalya. “Do you know her?” He asked quizzically, placing his hands behind his back.

Natalya shook her head. “The day I talked with Fili and Kili she saw me and gave me a funny look.” Natalya paused. “I then realized she saw my ears.” The half-Elf bit her lip and finally met Thorin’s gaze. “I had forgotten how much hatred was between the Dwarves and the Elves.”

Natalya muttered, looking down at her feet.

“Natalya.” Thorin said, a serious tone now in his voice. “You helped reclaim Erebor.” He paused. “You saved my life.” Putting his hand under her chin, Thorin lifted her head so their eyes met
again. “That is more than I can say for any Dwarrowdam.” He reached up and gently touched her ear that was showing from beneath her blonde hair. “I don’t care what the others say about you.” Thorin whispered. “Do you understand?”

Natalya nodded, her eyes slightly filling with tears.

“I will ensure she knows her place.” Thorin said, smiling at Natalya.

Natalya slightly smiled and they continued walking in silence.

It didn’t last long as Natalya and Thorin soon saw the Dwarrowdam marching towards them, fuming mad. She was only a few inches shorter than Natalya, her large dress not giving her much room to walk.

“How dare you Thorin Oakenshield.” She spat in the Dwarf’s face.

Natalya’s eyes widened as she watched Thorin. She stayed by her King’s side, unmoving.

“How dare you allow an Elf in our kingdom!” She continued to yell at Thorin. “I know what she is.” The Dwarrowdam paused to look at Natalya. “She is an Elf spy sent here from Thranduil.”

Natalya looked back at her, waiting for Thorin to speak up.

“How dare I?” Thorin finally asked. He had a calm voice, but it was like the calm before a thunderous storm.

Natalya could practically sense the rage building up inside Thorin and knew it would not take long for him to explode.

“How dare I?” Thorin asked again, his eyebrows raised. How dare this simple Dwarrowdam doubt one of the members of my company. He had known this Dwarrowdam from back in Ered Luin and they talked occasionally. “How dare you question me and what I feel is right to do in my own kingdom.”

The Dwarrowdam fell silent, looking at the future King.

“I will have you know.” Thorin said, his voice low. “That this Elf has done more for me than you have or ever will.” He paused, watching the female’s face slacken.

“Well.” The Dwarf woman said, licking her lips. “I would do anything for my King.” She said proudly, looking straight at Natalya.

By this time, the whole hall had fallen silent at the Dwarrowdam’s yelling.

“I would even give my life.” She added with a smirk. “I don’t think she could say the same.” The female looked at Natalya with a smug expression.

Thorin immediately glared at the shorter Dwarrowdam. “Actually.” He said growling. “She already saved my life.” The Dwarf stared at her with a smug look upon his face, crossing his arms.

The Dwarrowdam looked back at Thorin, hatred still in her green eyes.

“If it had not been for Natalya,” Thorin paused, not meeting the Dwarrowdams gaze as he stared back at Natalya who was blushing. “I would not be here.” He said, silencing the woman once more. “You owe her your allegiance.” Thorin gave a small smirk.
“I would never,” The Dwarrowdam said, aghast, “be seen alongside an Elf.”

“Then you can be free to leave my Kingdom.” Thorin said, looking away from her. “If you can not accept who I chose to be at my side as I rule then you need a different King.”

Natalya stayed silent but side glanced at Thorin occasionally.

“You are right.” The Dwarf woman chuckled. “We do need a different King.” She paused, looking over her shoulder where other Dwarves had gathered. “One who is more accustomed to actually ruling. Dain perhaps?” She smirked and crossed her arms.

“What did you say?” Natalya growled, finally speaking up. She glared intensely at the Dwarrowdam. “Are you doubting the King’s rule?”

“No.” The Dwarrowdam said, cocking her head. “He is not the King yet.” She looked back at Thorin who stood, stoic. “I was beginning to think you could not speak.”

“He will be the King.” Natalya said, threateningly. “Rather you like it or not.”

“I hope so. For your sake.” The Dwarrowdam said then huffed and walked off, not wishing to engage the Elf in conversation.

Thorin sighed and shook his head. “Thank you, Natalya.” He said, taking her hand and kissing it. “Sometimes it takes one woman to another to straighten things out.”

“Any time, Thorin.” Natalya said, looking at him. She glanced back over to where the Dwarrowdam had rejoined her group. “You will always be my King.” She bowed her head.

Thorin chuckled. “Come.” He said, taking her hand gently. “I have something I need to show you.”

Natalya looked at him. “What is it?” She asked, curious. The half-Elf was still slightly upset at the Dwarrowdams accusations but did not let it show.

“It is a surprise.” Thorin said, smiling as he continued to lead her through the corridors of the mountain.

Natalya huffed, rolling her eyes. *Curse Dwarves and their secrecy.* She thought to herself as she followed him down a narrow corridor.

Thorin continued leading her down the winding hallways. “Do you think you will be okay to climb some stairs?” He asked, concerned.

“Yes.” Natalya answered, but she doubted herself. She knew that her body was still weak but she would manage. They soon came to a large staircase, leading to the royal chambers. Natalya remembered it well from when she had gone exploring while Thorin was in the midst of his Dragon Sickness. She pushed the thought from her mind as she followed Thorin up the stairs slowly. The Dwarf took her hand and led her through the doors of the double doors of the royal wing, past his room to a smaller door further down the hallway. It was similar in the intricate carvings on the double doors. “Wow.” Natalya whispered. She had not bothered to venture this far down when she had previously been exploring.

“Stay here.” Thorin instructed. He smiled at her as he disappeared into the room. “No looking!” The Dwarf called from inside, realizing the door was slightly ajar.

Natalya forced herself to stay rooted where she was. She knew Thorin would be disappointed in
her if she disobeyed his orders. She heard Thorin moving around inside the room but kept her back to the door, squeezing her eyes shut.

Thorin had not known Natalya would be occupying her room today. He hurried and quickly lit the candles along the wall and repositioned a few objects as well as quickly lighting a log and throwing it into the fireplace. Returning outside, the Dwarf bowed and extended his arm, signaling for the half-Elf to enter the room.

Natalya nodded with a slight smile on her face as she stepped into the candle lit room.

“It is yours.” Thorin said behind her, waiting for her reaction.

Natalya’s mouth went agape as she stared inside the room. “Thorin.” She whispered. “This is…” Pausing, she licked her lips, not being able to find words to say how much she loved it. “This is marvelous.” The half-Elf said, still in awe as she finally turned to face the Dwarf. “Did you do this for me?”

“You and only you.” Thorin answered softly. “Make yourself at home.” He said, stepping forward into the room.

Natalya stepped further into the room as well, admiring every detail. She first went to the fireplace where Thorin had just lit the single log. She watched as the flames crackled, spreading to the nearby logs. Moving her eyes upward, the half-Elf saw the leaves and branches that had been placed upon the mantle. Picking up one of the thin golden leaves she looked at Thorin. “Did you make these?”

“I had my craftsmen create them just for you.” He answered, placing his hand on her shoulder. Thorin then saw Natalya look back at him, tears in her eyes.

“Thorin.” Natalya paused. “This is more gorgeous than anything I have ever seen.” She finally looked around the room more, taking in the amazing craftsmanship.

“Even more than Mirkwood?” The Dwarf asked, standing behind the half-Elf. Thorin chuckled as he placed both of his hands on her shoulders.

“Of course!” Natalya said, turning around to look at him, still in disbelief. “Mirkwood did not have a room for me nearly as nice as this.”

“Well I am glad you love it so.” Thorin said, letting his hands fall back to his sides.

Natalya turned around and headed towards the bed, still in shock. “I cannot believe you went to all the trouble to do this for me.”

“It was the least I could do.” Thorin smiled, watching her as she walked around the room, leaving nothing unseen.

“Is this a…” Natalya paused, seeing double wooden doors with small glass openings near the top. She walked over and opened them to see a balcony overlooking the road to Erebor that led from Dale. Snow was gently falling now, creating a crisp white gleam. “Is that your balcony over there?” She asked, pointing back to the right. The wind was cold as it blew in from the north but Natalya was too caught in the moment to care.

“It is.” Thorin answered, walking up behind her. He placed his hand gently on the small of her back and continued to tell her more about the royal family. “My great grandfather insisted we keep our chambers where they had been first located which was farther within the mountain. My
grandfather put up such a fuss about it that the council decided to let him have his way.” Thorin laughed, looking at Natalya. “He was very stubborn. Perhaps the most stubborn in the line of Durin.”

“That is sure saying something then.” The female said, gently holding the railing.

Thorin raised his eyebrows. “Why is that?” He asked with a smile. “Do you know of someone more stubborn?” The Dwarf continued, watching her blonde hair blow in the breeze.

“Possibly.” Natalya answered, looking over to smile at him.

Thorin smiled as he watched the female’s face light up. Her smile was so soft, so genuine and her teeth gleamed a perfect shade of white that was brighter than any gems in the mountain.

Natalya felt happy whenever she saw Thorin’s smiles as they were few and far between. The half-Elf blushed as his face came closer to hers.

Thorin looked at her, their eyes locked. “Natalya.” He said softly over her shoulder. “I have been wanting to ask you for a while.” The Dwarf paused, licking his lips and tried to find the right words. Ever since she had helped them in Lake-town, Thorin knew there was something more to her that caught his eye. He was nervous as well, since they had not known each other but for more than a few months.

Natalya looked back at him with curiosity in her hazel eyes. “Yes?” She asked barely above a whisper.

Thorin could not wait any longer. Turning her towards himself with his hands on her shoulders, he leaned forward and kissed her tenderly but quickly pulled away. “I am sorry.” Thorin apologized immediately. “It is not in my place to…”

Natalya chuckled. “Don’t apologize.” She spoke softly as her eyes were still closed and her lips slightly parted. The moment felt magical as snowflakes continued to softly land on them when the gentle breeze blew.

Thorin leaned forward and kissed her again. His hands slowly moved down Natalya’s sides and he placed them on her waist. Pulling the female closer to him, their bodies were now flush against each other.

Natalya smiled into the kiss and tilted her head, happily returning it. She felt him remove one of his hands from her waist to behind her head as their lips fully interlocked for the first time. It was more tender than Natalya expected as his soft beard rubbed against her face. She felt safe in Thorin’s arms as he gently held her. Melting under his gentle touch, Natalya sighed into his mouth. Her hands instinctively came up to touch his face as he deepened the kiss.

Thorin had never experienced a moment such as this one before in his life. He had kissed a few Dwarrowdams in his younger years before the fall of Erebor but nothing compared. Thorin pulled away first, pressing his forehead to hers. “Natalya.” He whispered, closing his eyes and taking in the moment. Thorin’s hands stayed where they were on the female’s waist and behind her head, holding her close to him.

The half-Elf smiled and closed her eyes, the crisp breeze catching her hair and blowing it back behind her. She moved her hands back to Thorin’s shoulders as his ocean blue eyes stared into her soul. Chuckling, she noticed him looking her up and down. Natalya swallowed, never having felt this way towards anyone before. She had always felt like an outcast in Mirkwood, but in Thorin’s
arms she felt at home. “Thank you for everything.” Natalya whispered, moving her hand down to play with the hair bead attached at the end of his braid.

Thorin stayed silent and ran one of his hands through her hair, playing with a section that had gotten tangled in the wind before placing a chaste kiss on her forehead. “I think I should be the one thanking you.” The Dwarf whispered, looking into Natalya’s eyes. “You saved us several times.” He paused. “It would have taken longer to reach the mountain without you.” Smiling at the female, Thorin meant every word he said.

Natalya blushed, having nothing to say. Their eyes locked for a while and time seemed to slow down as the gentle breeze continued to blow.

“It is finally beginning to get colder.” Thorin simply stated, trying to make conversation as he looked back out towards Dale. The snow was still falling and there was a chill in the air that could be felt. There was movement over in Dale as people were beginning to settle in what had been rebuilt. “Winter is now upon us.”

Natalya simply nodded. She wondered what Thorin’s question was going to be, but decided to let it be.

Thorin’s stomach grumbled and he looked back at Natalya, embarrassed.

“Would you care to get a meal in you my King?” Natalya asked, teasingly.

Thorin smiled. “Would you accompany me?”

The half-Elf returned the smile. “I would love to.”

Thorin reluctantly released her as they made their way back through the candle lit room. He closed the doors to the balcony behind them. The Dwarf was especially happy seeing Natalya finally smiling again.

The female slowly made her way down the stairs, Thorin holding her hand. “I’m sure I can manage.” She giggled when he had reached for her hand.

“Yes but I would feel the burden upon myself if you fell.” Thorin said, concerned. “You are not yet fully recovered.”

Natalya sighed, then looked back at Thorin. “I know.” She could feel the pain still strong in her back. “You are not either.” Her eyes had caught him moving slower down the stairs than normal and his gait was slightly off.

After a few minutes of walking, they finally made it to the dining hall where most of the Dwarves had gathered.

“Oh there you are…” Fili’s mouth fell open and he swallowed when he saw Natalya and Thorin holding hands.

Thorin immediately let go when he saw his oldest nephew’s face. He cleared his throat, placing his hand on Natalya’s lower back. “What is for dinner tonight Fili?” Thorin asked, staring his nephew down with warning in his eyes.

Fili stammered slightly and looked to Bombur who answered.

“Pork my Lord.” The Dwarf bowed. “Some of the people from Lake-town were nice enough to
provide us some food. In addition, more Dwarves are bringing supplies every day.”

Thorin nodded his approval and took Natalya to the head of the table where he sat. “Sit here.” He said, placing her on the right side of him.

Natalya sat down and avoided eye contact with the other Dwarves who stared at her. Dwalin seemed to eye her the longest. The half-Elf kept side glancing as he stood near her, arms crossed over his chest in a menacing stance. She swallowed, looking back down at the table.

“Here you go.” Thorin presented a plate full of food and took a seat.

“Thank you, Thorin.” Natalya smiled at her as he sat the food in front of her and his hand gently brushed against hers. She still spotted Dwalin out of the corner of her eye still with a smirk plastered across his face. Luckily, he took a seat farther down the table next to Kili.

“Can I sit here?” Ori asked, walking up to the empty seat at the bench next to Natalya.

“Of course.” Natalya smiled at him. They had not spoken much as Ori mostly kept to himself and wrote and drew in his journal.

Thorin watched Natalya and occasionally glanced down the table at Dwalin who was almost always caught staring. He shook his head, thinking about returning to his chambers.

Natalya laughed as she conversed with Ori. The Dwarf told her tales of his youth and adventures with Dori and Nori.

Thorin remained silent for most of the dinner, only saying a few things to Natalya.

The female wondered what the sudden change in Thorin’s behavior was for. She sighed, hoping she had not pushed things too fast. Thorin was the one who initiated the kiss. She pondered her thoughts and did not realize Ori had even asked her a question.

“Lady Natalya?” Ori asked again, politely.

“Yes Ori?” Natalya looked at him, snapping out of her daze. “I’m sorry.” She paused, looking in his direction.

“I was wondering if you would allow me to draw a sketch of you?” The young Dwarf asked quietly.

Natalya smiled at him. “Of course.”

Ori blushed, smiling. “I want to have something to remember you by.” He said, looking back down at the table.

Natalya gave a confused look. “What do you mean?”

“My brothers have spoken of trying to reclaim Moria.” Ori shook his head, looking down at his journal.

Thorin looked over in their direction having heard the young Dwarf speak of reclaiming Moria. “What is it your brothers have said?”

Ori immediately looked at Thorin, bowing his head. “They have not said much other than they wish to reclaim the lost kingdom my Lord.”
Thorin thought about it, rubbing his beard but did not give a response. Thorin stood up, looking down at his empty plate. Giving a smile, he placed his hand on the half-Elf’s shoulder and watched as she looked up at him. “Natalya would you care to accompany me?”

“Of course my Lord.” Natalya said with a nod. She said goodbye to Ori and rose from the table to follow Thorin.

Thorin knew he still had some more papers he needed to sign as the Mountain continued being repaired. He rose from the table and walked next to Natalya, wanting to return to his chambers for the rest of the day. As they were about to leave, Dwalin blocked his path.

“We need to talk.” The Dwarf said gruffly.

Thorin raised his eyebrows, assuming Dwalin was going to talk about his time with Natalya.

“We cannot let them try to retake Moria.” Dwalin stated gravely.

Thorin took a deep breath. “I do not feel that they will do anything rash until I am the King.” He paused, looking back to where Natalya and Ori were still talking quietly. “They know they can not possibly go to war until Erebor has regained its strength.”

Dwalin looked at him, nervous. “Thorin.” He said, grabbing the Dwarf’s arm.

Thorin turned back to look at him, slightly frustrated.

“They have already been recruiting soldiers from Dain’s army.” Dwalin paused, worry in his voice. “They agree that now Erebor has been reclaimed, the Orcs in Moria will fear the Dwarves as their numbers were reduced in the battle of Azanulbizar.”

Thorin thought about it. “Yes Dwalin but it will have to wait. I am not yet King so there is nothing for them to fear.” He paused. “I first must solve the problems in my own kingdom.” The Dwarf muttered as he brushed past Dwalin.

Dwalin had a confused look on his face. “What problems?”

Thorin shook his head, not answering.

The Dwarrow decided not to push the conversation further and left the room.

Natalya stayed silent. She knew that as long as Thorin was King, he would have to endure the weight of the crown.

Thorin continued walking but decided to take the long route so he could spend more time with Natalya. He sensed her confusion and chuckled.

“Are you not heading back to your room?” The female asked, walking beside him.

“I am.” Thorin said, a small smile on his lips.

“Then should we not be headed that way?” Natalya said, pointing to her left.

Thorin looked at her, shocked at how good her sense of direction was. “Yes but I wanted to give you a personal tour of Erebor.” The Dwarf smiled at her, watching her face turn into shock. “Well that is if you are feeling up to it.” He added. “I know your back is not fully healed.”

“My Lord.” Natalya said, bowing her head. “I am feeling much better.” She paused, their eyes
“Is this really necessary? Don’t you need to see to more important matters?”

“Well I need you to know your way around should you need anything.” Thorin insisted.

“Of course.” Natalya gave a nod, not wanting to argue.

Thorin smiled at her and they continued to walk. “I intend to make a formal announcement once more Dwarves arrive.” He stopped walking for a moment and placed his hand on the half-Elf’s arm.

“Th…Thorin.” Natalya licked her lips. “That will not be necessary.”

“I think it will.” The Dwarrow insisted. “I do not want them questioning you.” He paused a moment, seeing a soft smile on Natalya’s lips. “It will have to wait however, until I am crowned.” Thorin shook his head.

“But you are still King.” Natalya smiled and gently took his hand. “Even know.”

“Technically I am. However, that was back in Ered Luin.” Thorin smiled. “There must now be a formal ceremony to ensure my rule is not challenged.”

Natalya nodded as they continued walking. She knew however that no matter what Thorin said, there would always be those who doubted her loyalty.
Meanwhile, Thranduil was finally interrogating Anairë. The Elf King had left her in the dungeons for a week, hoping that would be enough motivation for her to tell him all he needed to know.

The female Elf begrudgingly walked up the stairs being led by two guards. Being of their kind they treated her will with plenty of food and gave her one of the larger cells. She had thought about Natayla every day, knowing that almost no one came out of that battle unscathed. Only suffering a bruise to her upper arm and a cut across the eye, Anairë was lucky her injuries had healed quickly. The Elf was still physically exhausted as she had never been in a battle like that before. She knew in her heart though that Natalya had to have survived. The female watched as she neared Thranduil’s throne and her throat tightened as she saw the King sitting upon the wooden seat, a displeased look across his face.

“Anairë.” Thranduil said as the Elf soldier approached. “I had expected better from you.” He never made eye contact with her as she entered the room. “You were held in the highest of regards by me and my soldiers.” The King finally turned his head and gave Anairë an intense stare. “You disobeyed my orders.” Thranduil continued. “Attacking one of my guards so Natalya and the Halfling could escape Dale to help the Dwarves.”

Anairë stared into the floor knowing that she had defied her King’s orders and attacked one of his guards. “If Natalya had not helped the Dwarves.” The Elf paused. “They could have been slaughtered.”

Thranduil laughed, tilting his head. “Yes they would have died.” He paused, a smirk across his face. “Today, tomorrow, one year hence, a hundred years from now.” The King paused. “What does it matter? They’re mortal.”

Anairë was shocked. “You think your life is worth more than theirs?” She asked. “Thorin will soon be King and there is nothing you can do about it.” She looked up at Thranduil. “I know Thorin negotiated with you.” She paused. “And you accepted.”

Thranduil’s mouth was agape. “How did you know that?” He sneered.

“Your guards in the dungeon talk.” Anairë smirked. “You agreed to help the Dwarves with food and supplies until more of their people returned to the mountain.”

“What does it matter to you?”

“It shows that each kingdom must live in at least mutuality.” The Elf answered. “You know very well you would have not gotten the gems had Thorin died in battle.” She paused. “And Natalya saved him.”

Thranduil sighed. The Elf has a point. He would not have the deal to get the gems had Thorin not survived the battle. He may not like Thorin but he knew that he was more reasonable than other Dwarf rulers.

Anairë looked up at Thranduil with an intense look, knowing her life was on the line.

Thranduil looked down at her. “Well then I suggest you go join Natalya.” He said, a smirk playing across his face. “You are free to leave.” He dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

Turning quickly on her heels, Anairë left the room. She gathered her weapons and supplies and
headed immediately for Erebor, also putting on a few extra layers as the cold of winter was now settling in. As the Elf heard the doors of the Woodland Realm close behind her, she remembered that Thorin had thrown her out. *Will I be allowed back?* She was now stuck with nowhere to go. Thranduil would not let her back and surely Thorin would not let her return either. She knew he had survived the battle from what the guards had told her but she had no idea if the Dragon Sickness still had a hold on him. Wandering further into the woods, Anairë found a tree to sit down by and rest against for a while. Heaving a sigh she pulled off her supply pack and set it down. Anairë had packed extra items of clothing for Natalya in case she needed anything to keep her warm. Leaning back against the old tree, Anairë sighed as she looked up into the canopy and felt the rough bark against her back. Luckily the trees of Mirkwood were thick so there was no snow on the ground. The spiders had been coming around less after the battle and had returned to Dol Guldur but she dare not risk falling asleep. With her short sword in hand, she stabbed at leaves on the ground, wondering what to do. Her mind wandered and she imagined what would have happened if Natalya had not helped the Dwarves. *We both would not be banished.* She thought to herself, staring into the darkness of Mirkwood. Just as she was about to leave her spot and continue towards the mountain, a Raven landed near her. She looked up at it as it squawked at her and stared with its black beady eyes. Anairë pushed herself up and walked over to where the Raven was perched on a low hanging branch. The bird stuck its leg out towards her and she saw it was carrying a message. Untying the piece of paper from the birds’ leg, she opened it, her mouth falling open as she read.
Natalya had quickly returned to her room after accompanying Thorin and immediately wrote to Anairë, telling her that she would be in Dale that night, helping more with rebuilding and tending to the injured citizens. She did not specify a reason should the note be intercepted by unfriendly eyes. Quickly finding a raven, she attached the message to his leg and watched the bird fly into the grey sky. Later that night, Natalya took one last glance around her room and gave a sigh. Thorin had been very kind to her but she knew she could never fit in with the Dwarves. The female shook her head, remembering how the Dwarrowdam had made it clear that she was not one of them. Gathering her belongings, she fastened her cloak around herself and pulled up the hood. The half-Elf waited for the cover of night to leave but just as she stepped out, a silhouetted figure stopped her, clutching her arm. Natalya gasped, staring into Thorin’s cool blue eyes. “My King!” She stammered. “I would not expect you to be out this late.”

“Leaving already?” Thorin asked, concerned. “I thought you would have stayed longer.”

“I’m not,” Natalya paused, “leaving.” She hoped he could not feel her pulse beating from where he held her wrist in an iron grip.

“Then why does it seem as if you packed all of your belongings?” Thorin asked, his voice low as he released the grip on the female’s wrist. He had begun wondering if Natalya would leave after all of the rumors going around about her.

The half-Elf paused, hoping he couldn’t detect her lie. “I was just going to assist the people in Dale.” She bowed her head. “I know they need help and provisions.”

“I will allow you to leave in two days,” Thorin nodded, licking his lips. “I have some matters that I need your assistance with.” He was speaking of the trading of the gems and food with Thranduil. “I assumed you were leaving for good; even after all we did for you.” The Dwarf paused, a confronting look upon his face.

“No.” Natalya looked at him, feeling guilty.

Thorin finally gave a slight smile. “Well then.” He looked back towards his chambers. “Since we are both awake, would you care to join me in my room for a while?” He raised his eyebrows then saw the half-Elf give a slight nod. “I have never known any other Dwarf to stay up till the hours I do.” He walked back to his room opening the door to let Natalya inside first.

Natalya immediately walked over to one of the twin armchairs by the fireplace. The upholstery had been fixed from when she had first been in the room. She looked up to see Thorin removing his cloak and laying it across the bed before he walked over and took a seat across from her. They sat in silence for a while, neither of them saying a word. Natalya watched as Thorin finally rose from his seat and went to start a small fire.

“I would not want you to get cold.” He stated, turning to look at her.

Natalya forced a smile. “Thank you, Thorin.” She had really enjoyed Thorin and the company’s hospitality, she just did not feel welcome with all the other Dwarves coming into the mountain on a daily basis. She had gotten several strange looks and could practically hear the whispers and rumors spreading.

“You look deep in thought.” Thorin stated once he sat back down. He could see that Natalya had
gone into almost a trance, staring at the small log that had begun to catch fire. “What’s on your mind?” The Dwarf asked. He leaned forward, putting his elbows on his legs and rubbing his hands together.

“It’s nothing.” Natalya shook her head, not wanting to say. She did not feel like explaining to Thorin how she was feeling. He had already done enough for her and she felt like she needed to solve these problems herself. Natalya knew she probably would not be gone for forever, just long enough to have time to think.

“I forgot to tell you.” Thorin started, looking into the fire. “Tomorrow Thranduil will be here.” He looked over to see Natalya stiffen. “I had a meeting with Dain, Thranduil and Bard while you were still recovering.”

Natalya looked at him. “What happened?”

Thorin took a deep breath. “Thranduil wants the gems.” He paused. “As well as some of the gold.” He stared into the fire. “In return he is bringing our people more provisions.”

Natalya swallowed, simply nodding.

“He is just trying to get to me.” Thorin shook his head. “I no longer care about the gems or the gold for they are of no importance now.”

More silence passed between them as they exchanged glances and small smiles. As the fire died down, Natalya stood up and stretched. “I have enjoyed your company.” She bowed to Thorin. “Thank you.” Walking back over near the bed where she had discarded her belongings, she picked them up and headed out the door, looking back to see Thorin still sitting in his chair. She thought it odd that he did not say anything back to her. The half-Elf sighed after she closed the door and returned to her room. Lying down on the bed Natalya could not fall asleep as she tossed and turned. She finally got up and packed some of her belongings into a soft leather bag that had been gifted to her from the company then left before sunrise, heading to Dale.

Thorin awoke to the morning light coming through the balcony. He stretched and yawned, opening his eyes to the golden glow reflecting off the marbled jade walls. The Dwarf remembered that Thranduil was coming to get the gems later that day. Thorin dressed himself nicer than usual, but not yet in his full regalia. Stepping outside, he headed to where he could smell breakfast from the dining hall. The Dwarf took a seat at the table, seeing no sign of Natalya.

Minutes passed and all of the Dwarves were at the table, as well as some others that had arrived yesterday. They came down to where Thorin sat, congratulating him on the reclaiming of his kingdom.

Thorin nodded. “Do you know my sister, Dís?” He asked, after having been told they traveled from Ered Luin.

“Yes my lord.” One younger Dwarf said, bowing. “She will be here tomorrow.” He paused before speaking again. “The Dwarves of Ered Luin were able to make it here earlier than expected which is a good thing considering winter is now upon us.”

“Thank you,” Thorin said, bowing his head. He finished his meal, no one saying anything else to him before he returned to his room. With the large amounts of Dwarves arriving each day Thorin had guards stationed outside of the wing of the royal chambers. They straightened as they saw him approaching. “Have you seen Lady Natalya?” He asked, walking up to one of them.
Thorin slightly glared and continued walking. It was not like Natalya to skip breakfast. He went to her door and knocked. The Dwarf stood for a few moments, not hearing any sounds. “Natalya.” Thorin said, knocking again. Noticing the door was slightly ajar, he pushed it open. The fire in the fireplace was now only glowing embers and the female was nowhere to be seen. Thorin quickly left the room, striding back past the guards towards Erebor’s main entrance. He knew that if the guards had not seen her then no one would have. Quickly walking, the Dwarf headed back to where he knew the rest of the company was congregated in one of the meeting rooms. They had been discussing his coronation, which was quickly approaching.

BALIN had a large scroll and the Dwarves were all staring at it intensely. They all looked up when Thorin entered. “What is wrong Thorin?” Balin immediately asked, sensing Thorin’s distress.

“Have you seen Natalya?” Thorin asked, getting worried. “I haven’t seen her all morning.” He paused, looking around. “It is unlike her to miss breakfast.”

“Maybe she is just exploring the kingdom?” Kili suggested, shrugging his shoulders.

“I don’t think so.” Thorin said, looking behind him, shaking his head. He had hoped that Natalya would be here with all that was happening. The coronation had to be arranged, his sister was coming and Thranduil would be in the mountain shortly to collect the white gems. The Dwarf pinched the bridge of his nose.

“We will help you find her Uncle!” Kili piped up, eager to help Thorin. He would much rather search for Natalya than listen to the Dwarven traditions that they had heard their entire lives. Erebor was slightly different from the way he had grown up in Ered Luin, but it still bored him.

“I will help as well.” Fili said, looking up from the yellowed manuscript.

Balin chuckled, finding the boys’ enthusiasm amusing. He shook his head. “Go help your Uncle.” The Dwarf said, waving them off.

Thorin looked at the brothers. “Fili check the East Wing.” He looked to Kili. “You take the West Wing.” He was worried that she might have gotten lost and the days were slowly getting colder.

Both the boys hurried off in their respective directions.

Thorin turned back to the other Dwarves, worry still crossing his features. He had to find Natalya but he also knew there were more pressing matters to be attending to. His mind raced, thinking about her. She couldn’t have left. He thought to himself. Thorin shook his head, trying to clear the thought from his mind. “When is Thranduil expected to arrive?” He asked gruffly, trying to think of the task at hand.

“Any time Thorin.” Balin said, sensing the Dwarf’s stress.

Thorin sighed. “Get the gems.” He said, his voice still sharp. “And some of the gold.”

“I have heard word that Bard will be accompanying him.” Balin said, trying to make eye contact with Thorin.

“Get his share of the treasure then as well.” Thorin waved his hand and the Dwarves scattered. “Meet me at the front gate.” He growled, leaving the room. He tried to stay calm as he walked to meet Thranduil. As The Dwarf approached the gate he saw other Dwarves moving away from the tall Elven King. Bard was next to him, an unhappy look upon his face. Thorin greeted them,
allowing them entrance into the mountain. There were hushed whispers as he led the Elf and Man to where Dori and Ori were standing nearby with the white gems and gold coins.

Thranduil’s mouth slackened. “The White Gems of Lasgalen.” He muttered, looking to Bard who was collecting his share of the gold.

Bard took the sacks of gold and nodded, never saying a word.

Thorin nodded in return, watching him leave and throw the sacks of gold onto his horse and ride back to Dale.

“I give you my thanks.” Thranduil said, nodding and taking the box that the gems were still in.

Thorin nodded back, seeing the shock on the rest of the Dwarves’ faces who had been watching the exchange.

Thranduil swiftly left, mounting his Elk and returning to Mirkwood.

Bilbo! Thorin all of a sudden remembered the Hobbit and began frantically looking around. He was to also receive his fourteenth share of the treasure. “Balin.” Thorin sharply said, looking at the Dwarf. “Have you seen Bilbo?”

“Relax Thorin, Bilbo is fine.” Balin said, smiling. “He is still in his room.”

“Find his share of the gold as well” Thorin growled. He cursed himself for nearly forgetting Bilbo who had helped them more than half of the quest.

Balin simply nodded.

Thorin sighed. “I just realized I had not seen him for about a week.” Thorin made a promise to himself to get Bilbo his fourteenth share. He had earned it.

Meanwhile Natalya was in Dale, looking around at the damage that had been done to the town and its people. She had found an unoccupied place to rest until the sun rose above the mountain. Snow covered the ground but it was only a slight dusting. Pulling up her hood and wrapping her cloak around herself, the half-Elf wandered the streets, looking for people to help. She knelt down next to an older woman with her back against a pile of rubble. “I can help you,” Natalya said to the woman, seeing a large cut across her arm where her shirt had been torn.

“I know you.” The woman squinted at the half-Elf, studying her face. “I know of your father.”

“Relax Thorin, Bilbo is fine.” Balin said, smiling. “He is still in his room.”

“You know of my father?” Natalya asked, staring into the woman’s gentle eyes.

"He would often pass through here with an Elf maiden who looked exactly like you.” She paused. “This was before the Dragon came. I was only a girl then, about nine or ten.”

Natalya waited patiently, waiting for the lady to tell more.

“He was one of the Dúnedain rangers. A healer. Like you.” The lady smiled up at her. “They were very kind to us.”
“Do you remember their names?” Natalya asked, curious. If she could get their names she might be able to find out more about her past.

The lady shook her head, looking back down at the ground. “They never revealed their identity.”

Natalya slightly frowned. “What did they look like?”

“The man was taller than the woman, his hair dark and he always had a rugged look about him.” The woman paused. “You are almost an exact replica of her.” She said, never taking her eyes off of the half-Elf.

Natalya thought for a while. *This is why I must be so good at picking up scents and tracks.* It all clicked now. She knew the Dúnedain to be able to speak Sindarin, which is how he must have met her mother. Thranduil had told them of the rangers often watching over the forests when his father, Oropher, was King.

“I do not know much of their backstory.” The woman spoke again. “Other than soon one day it was just your father coming through the town saying his wife was with child and would not be able to accompany him for a while.” She paused again, her eyes starting to water. “Then one day I never saw him or her again.”

Natalya felt sadness overcome her. She had hoped to learn more about them. “Thank you for telling me.” Natalya said, continuing to bandage the ladies arm.

“You are welcome dear.” The lady smiled at her.

Natalya stood up and turned around, seeing a familiar face. “Anairë!” She commented, hugging her friend.

“Natalya!” Anairë exclaimed and hugged her back. “I brought you some supplies should you need them.” She said, handing over the pack to Natalya.

Natalya looked, seeing the bag she had taken with her out of Erebor not too far away. She walked over and retrieved it, handing it to the elderly lady. “You need it more than I.” Natalya said, smiling down at her.

The lady smiled back up at the half-Elf and took the bag, grateful. “Thank you my dear.” She said, her thin lips turning upwards in a smile.

Natalya turned back to Anairë. “I had to leave.” The Elf said, downcast.

“Why?” Anairë asked since the reason was not conveyed in the message.

Natalya shook her head, explaining to Anairë about the Dwarrowdam who had started rumors within the mountain. “I would never be able to lead a kingdom.” She half laughed.

Anairë chuckled with a slight smile. “You have changed.”

“How?” Natalya asked with one eyebrow raised.

Anairë shrugged her shoulders. “You have just changed.” She paused. “You are not as carefree as you used to be.”

“I just feel like I have so much weight on my shoulders.” Natalya answered, sad. “I guess that is part of the reason I left.” The lady’s words still rang in her head and Natalya knew she should have
been happy but something didn’t seem right.

They continued walking through Dale, helping people that had injuries.

“Look!” Anairë said pointing. “It’s Bard.”

Bard was riding through the street with the sacks of gold draped across his horse’s saddle.

Natalya knew that Thorin must have finally made the trade. They never saw Thranduil but knew he had been there to collect his gems. “Maybe now all of the kingdoms will be on better terms.”

“We can only hope.” Anairë said, seriousness in her voice as she watched Bard disappear.

Natalya simply nodded. Noticing a small staircase, she went and sat on the bottom step.

Anairë had waited to tell Natalya of what Thranduil had done to her. She licked her lips, looking at the half-Elf. “Thranduil banished me as well.” She said, staring at the ground.

“Why?” Natalya asked, shocked. She would have never imagined Thranduil banishing his best warrior.

“He did not like me covering for your escape.” Anairë said. “It is fine.” She said, looking at Natalya’s shocked face. “I know I am doing the right thing.”

“I feel like everyone is suffering because of me.” Natalya said softly with a sigh. “Thorin could easily lose his rule as King if I so chose to stay with him.” She shook her head. “I would not want that to happen to him. He deserves to be happy after all that he has already been through.”

Anairë said nothing as she stared at the rocks beneath her feet.

“You lost your position as the head of Thranduil’s guard.” Natalya sighed, thinking about how all of her actions had affected those around her. “I really should have just stayed in Mirkwood.”

“There is nothing you can do to change it now.” Anairë said. “Besides,” She paused, “I was not so sure about Thranduil anyway after the way he treated you.”

Natalya gave a slight smile to her friend. “Well Thorin will just have to come look for me if he wants me bad enough.” She stood up, continuing to explore Dale.

“Look!” Anairë suddenly pointed. There was a long caravan of Dwarves headed towards Erebor, some on foot and some riding horses.

“Thorin’s sister is possibly among them.” Natalya commented. “He said the other day that she would be arriving soon.” The wind began to pick up and blew through her hair. “It is a good thing they arrived before more snow falls.”

Back in the mountain, Thorin watched the Dwarves arriving from Ered Luin, knowing his sister would be among them. The snow had quickly been melting, allowing his kin to arrive quicker than was expected. Thorin had sent a raven to Ered Luin immediately after the Mountain had been reclaimed. Standing at the gate, Thorin watched as Dwarves arrived with numerous carts and items. Looking over the crowd he searched for his sister amongst them. After a few minutes of searching he did not see her. As the Dwarf was walking away he heard his name being called. “Dís!” Thorin shouted, quickly turning around. He ran towards his younger sister, embracing her.

“Thorin how I have missed you!” Dís exclaimed. Tears filled her eyes as she looked at his face.
She had been astounded and slightly angry when she heard that he would be attempting to reclaim Erebor. When the Raven had arrived at Ered Luin, the Darrowdam was hesitant to open the message, knowing it was either good or bad. When she had read that the journey was a success and Smaug had been defeated with Thorin, Fili and Kili all survived the battle, Dís was relieved. She had remembered long ago when her sons ran up to her in Ered Luin.

“Amad Amad!” Fili and Kili shouted, running up to their mother.

“Is it true that Uncle is going to reclaim Erebor?” Fili asked, highly interested. Neither of the brothers had ever had the chance to see the grand kingdom of Erebor. They had been born in Ered Luin but were told about their lineage of how they were of the line of Durin. They had always looked in awe upon their Uncle, knowing he was next in line to the throne. Erebor was known to be the strongest of the seven Dwarf Kingdoms.

“Yes.” Dís nodded. She did not want them to take any part of the quest but could not lie to them. “Uncle is to leave in one months time.”

Fili and Kili looked at each other then gave their mother their best sad faces. “We would like to go.” Kili said, excited and nervous at the same time.

Dís sighed, knowing they would ask. Fili, being the older one, was finally of age by Dwarven standards. Kili, three years younger than Fili would be of age in two years. “I will speak with Thorin.”

“We have already asked him.” Kili said, all too enthusiastic. “He said that it was okay with him as long as it was okay with you.”

Dís paused, looking at the hope in her son’s eyes. She looked at them. “I will give you boys an answer on the morrow.” She smiled and kissed them on the head. She remembered how their father had died in battle. He was much too young to see Mahal’s halls. She had pondered it all night, finally telling them in the morning they could go.

“Amad!” Fili and Kili yelled, running towards her. They had been searching all over the vast mountain for Natalya but saw no sign of her. The brothers finally both were back at the front entrance to Erebor about the same time. They saw each other and shrugged their shoulders then spotted Dís.

“Fili!” Dís shouted, “Kili!” She embraced them tightly.

“Amad we are choking!” Fili exclaimed, making a gagging sound.

Thorin chuckled, happy that Dís saw the boys could take care of themselves.

“I assume they did not get into too much trouble.” Dís said, raising her eyebrows, looking at Thorin.

Thorin looked at the brothers and chuckled. “Well besides losing the ponies they were very helpful.”

“It wasn’t my fault Amad!” Kili shouted.

“Of course it was.” Fili laughed.

Dís looked between the brothers and shook her head. “I am just thankful to Mahal that you are still in one piece.”
Thorin looked out of the front gate, into the distance towards Dale. He sighed, wondering where Natalya could have gone. The Dwarf then turned his attention back to Dís, seeing worry cross her face.

“What troubles you brother?” The Dwarrowdam asked, placing a hand on her brother’s shoulder.

“It’s nothing.” Thorin said, shaking his head. He did not feel that Dís needed to know about Natalya yet.

Dís walked back over to Fili and Kili and fussed over them a little longer.

Thorin chuckled, seeing their interaction of playful banter and laughter.

Finally food was prepared for all the Dwarves arriving from Ered Luin. Thorin was pleased to finally see the mountain regaining the joy that it had once so long ago when he was prince. Bombur had help in the kitchen preparing meals for the sudden amount of Dwarves that needed feeding. More torches along the wall had been lit and the soft orange glow reflected off the walls, giving a warm glow.

Thorin took his usual seat at the table but did not eat anything. He was worried for Natalya and had made up his mind to go to Dale later that day to search for her. As the meal was finally ending, Thorin rose from his seat and walked over to Fili and Kili. “I need to speak with you boys.” He said, making eye contact with Dís and nodded as the boys walked with him. “Have you said anything to Dís about Natalya?” The Dwarf asked, worried.

“Of course not Uncle.” Fili answered. “Why would we?”

Thorin sighed. “Did you see any sign of her?” He asked, distress in his voice.

Kili shook his head. “No.” The young Dwarf answered, softly, watching Thorin become more anxious.

“I have to find her.” Thorin said. “I don’t understand.” He muttered.

Fili and Kili shifted uneasily on their feet as Thorin walked down the hallway. “Where could she have gone?” Fili wondered.

Kili looked at his older brother and shrugged his shoulders. “I am not sure but she had better come back soon or Uncle is going to tear this mountain apart.”

The older brother shook his head. “She seemed to be acting odd the other day.” He commented.

Later that day, Thorin decided to search for Natalya himself as he was overseeing repairs. He walked through much of the mountain but some of the areas were still not accessible. The Dwarf sighed, still seeing no sign of the half-Elf. Thorin finally returned to his room and changed into his traveling outfit and cloak and headed for Dale after eating dinner. Luckily no one stopped or questioned him on his way out the door. The sun was beginning to set as he looked upon the city of men. He situated his sword in its sheath and began the walk to the city. Thorin reached the entrance to Dale just as the sun was disappearing over the horizon and sighed, knowing it would be tricky to spot Natalya at night but he knew he had to try.
Chapter 17

Natalya and Anairë found a set of cots next to each other in a small room off from the main street of Dale. The half-Elf lay on her back, staring at the grey stone ceiling. Anairë did not speak a word as she sat on the next cot over, legs crossed, sharpening her daggers.

Time slowly passed as Thorin walked around Dale, searching for Natalya. He finally gave up and turned down the dark alleyway to head back to Erebor, his boots crunching through the thin layer of snow. Suddenly, the Dwarf heard movement inside of one of the side rooms and looked in. “Natalya.” Thorin exhaled slowly, seeing her lying there.

Natalya turned to see a silhouetted figure standing in the doorway. “Thorin?” She whispered, hearing his voice. She was surprised he came looking for her. Sitting up on the cot, Natalya looked at Anairë.

The Elf quickly got up and brushed past Thorin, leaving the room.

Thorin looked back at the half-Elf, their eyes locking. “Natalya.” He said softly. “Please forgive me.” The Dwarf licked his lips, expecting her to yell at him and tell him to leave. “I am terribly sorry for the way I treated you before the battle and I will do anything to earn your trust and forgiveness back.”

“I already forgave you Thorin. Long ago.” Natalya whispered, rising to her feet. “I knew it was not you and none of it was your fault.”

“Yes but I should have fought harder.” Thorin whispered, feeling ashamed although he knew Natalya had already forgiven him. “You left so soon…” His voice began to trail off.

“Yes Thorin.” The half-Elf said softly. “It is over now. All has been forgiven.” She felt her stomach churning, wondering what had made Thorin want to come after her. She remembered their first kiss on the balcony and swallowed. “You have shown more kindness to me than anyone ever has.”

Thorin looked down, not sure how Natalya would feel about what he was going to say. He paused, trying to find the right words as he stepped closer to her. “I understand how you feel after all that has recently happened.” Thorin whispered, staring deep into Natalya’s eyes. “Zari ruthukhizu.” (I ask for your hand)

Natalya gave him a blank stare, having no idea what he said.

Thorin swallowed and cleared his throat. “Would you allow me to court you so that we may have a life together as King and Queen?” He paused, waiting for a response. Thorin had wanted to ask her the afternoon when they were on the balcony. “I have had feelings towards you ever since we met in Mirkwood.” The Dwarf swallowed, awaiting her response. Thorin could normally control himself and hold it back, but not this time.

Natalya was shocked at the sudden proposal. “Thorin.” She said in a hushed tone, shaking her head. “You cannot possibly.” Looking down at her feet, the half-Elf sighed. “I am not one of your kind. I would not be accepted.” She wanted this to happen badly but she knew it would never be possible. When Natalya finally looked back up, Thorin had moved closer to her.

“Natalya listen to me.” Thorin looked into her eyes as he rested his hands on her shoulders. “I love you.” He paused, studying her face. “That is all that matters.”
“There will definitely be talk then.” Natalya chuckled. “A Dwarf king courting a half-Elf?” She asked as she shook her head with a smile.

“Let them talk then.” Thorin whispered, placing his hand behind her head, their foreheads touching. “If they cannot accept you then they do not belong in my kingdom.”

Natalya looked up at him with tears in her eyes. “Yes.” The half-Elf answered softly. “I accept your courtship.” She continued smiling at Thorin, her eyes bright even in the dark room.

Thorin smiled back and kissed Natalya, wrapping his arm around her slender waist and pulling her close. He was relieved to finally have her back in his arms. They stayed like that for a while, Natalya’s head on his shoulder as he stroked her hair.

“Thorin.” Natalya whispered, looking into his crystal blue eyes. “What do you possibly see in someone like me?”

Thorin shook his head and smiled at her. “Everything I want in a wife and a Queen to rule by my side.” He whispered, staring into her hazel eyes. “You are a warrior, a fighter and bloody stubborn.” The Dwarf chuckled.

Natalya smiled, knowing all of that to be true.

“Come back with me.” Thorin sighed. “Please.”

“I will Thorin.” Natalya said, running her fingers through his hair.

“I love you.” Thorin whispered, giving her a quick kiss on the lips.

“I love you too.” Natalya whispered, still smiling. They stayed silent for a moment before she broke the connection. “I need to speak with Anairë quickly.” The half-Elf whispered. She had to tell her friend about her decision to return with Thorin to Erebor.

Thorin immediately fell silent, knowing he had treated Anairë poorly as well while he was under the influence of the Dragon Sickness. “I will speak with her as well.” He said, feeling bad for his previous actions.

Natalya nodded and they went in search of Anairë. She was standing a few streets over, sitting on a set of steps.

“Anairë.” Natalya said, approaching her first.

The Elf tensed, seeing that Thorin had come as well. “Yes?” She asked, looked past Natalya to where Thorin stood still, watching them interact.

“I am informing you that I will be returning with Thorin to Erebor.” Natalya said, looking back over to where Thorin was still standing.

Anairë nodded, licking her lips. She looked away from Natalya and Thorin, torn with what to do.

“Anairë.” Thorin said, stepping forward. “Please forgive me.” He looked at her. “My actions.” He shook his head. “I was not myself. Please understand that.”

Anairë simply nodded, not saying anything.

“I will allow you to return to Erebor.” Thorin said with his head bowed.
Anairë turned to look at the Dwarf, shocked. “Thorin.” She paused. “I do not need to come back to Erebor.”

Thorin looked at her with his eyebrows raised. “Are you sure?”

Anairë sighed, looking into the distance.

“Thorin.” Natalya interjected, cocking her head towards her friend.

The Elf looked back towards them, seeing Natalya walk towards her.

“Anairë please come with us.” Natalya said, placing her hand on her friend’s arm.

The Elf agreed. “I still don’t know where I will stay.”

“You can stay with me.” Natalya said, smiling.

Anairë smiled back.

Natalya and Anairë walked back to where Thorin was and they began heading back to the lonely mountain. Thorin led the way with the two females walking a few paces behind.

After entering the mountain, Natalya caught up to Thorin, grabbing his hand and giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. “I am sorry for running away.” She said softly, rubbing her thumb along the back of his hand.

Thorin reached up and touched her cheek with a smile, not saying anything. As they walked further into the mountain, he saw a familiar figure. The Dwarf sighed, recognizing it to be his sister. She stood there with her arms crossed and an unhappy look on her face.

Natalya swallowed, having had enough of Dwarrowdams for a while.

“Thorin.” Dís said, annoyance crossing her features. “Who is this?” She asked, looking at the half-Elf.

Natalya immediately tensed up at the stern tone in the Dwarrowdam’s voice.

Thorin swallowed, hesitant to speak. “This is Natalya,” Thorin answered, gesturing towards the half-Elf. “and this is one of her friends.” He gestured towards Anairë.

Anairë nodded her head, nervous. She had never interacted with a Dwarrowdam before and did not know what to expect.

“Dís.” Thorin said, quickly pulling her aside.

Natalya watched as Thorin whispered to his sister and her face changed from anger to happiness and surprise.

“Natalya. Anairë.” Thorin said walking back over to where they were still standing. “This is my sister, Dís.”

Dís blushed, embarrassed by her behavior. “I had no idea.”

*Did Thorin tell her?* Natalya forced a smile.

Anairë stayed silent, looking at the ground.
“I cannot believe you saved my brother.” Dís suddenly pulled Natalya into a hug. “I don’t know what I would do without him.”

Natalya thought the same thing but didn’t confess her and Thorin’s courtship yet as she did not know if Thorin had spoken of it. “I completely understand.” The half-Elf said with a genuine smile on her face.

Dís then introduced herself to Anairë as well, finding out about how she risked her life to save Natalya from being discovered. “You are very brave as well.” Dís said, looking up at the Elf. “I thank you.”

“It was the least I could do.” Anairë said solemnly. “If Natalya had been caught.” She paused, looking over to where Natalya and Thorin were in deep conversation. “Thranduil would have killed her.”

Dís nodded, looking back over her shoulder at her brother and the half-Elf. “You and Natalya have definitely proved yourselves to be some of the best fighters.” She said as she turned back to Anairë.

The Elf blushed at such a high compliment. “Thank you milady.” She said, bowing her head.

Dís chuckled. “Well it is getting late.” She stated. “I had just heard from Fili and Kili that Thorin was gone and had to make sure he returned.” She saw that Thorin and Natalya were still conversing. Dís shook her head, chuckling. “I will show you to a room you can stay in.”

“Natalya.” Thorin whispered to her after his sister and Anairë had left. They had been speaking of what had transpired while Natalya had been gone. Thorin gave the half-Elf a quick kiss on the lips. “Shall I make the announcement tomorrow?” He asked with a smile, speaking about their courtship.

“If you feel it is best.” Natalya smiled back at him. She wanted the mountain to know as soon as possible so that wedding preparations could be underway.

“My sister will have my life if I don’t tell her first.” The Dwarf laughed, putting his hand on her lower back. “If Fili and Kili find out and they are the first ones to tell her then she will be especially mad.” He stared into her eyes.

“Then make the announcement tomorrow morning at breakfast.” Natalya said kindly, taking his other hand. “Fili and Kili cannot keep their mouths shut for too long.” She laughed. “They have already seen us holding hands.”

“Indeed.” Thorin agreed, smiling as they walked back to their respective chambers. He placed his hand on her back and pushed her into his room.

Natalya chuckled as he pulled her into another kiss and backed her into the bed. “Thorin.” She whispered.

“I’m here.” Thorin whispered against her skin. He leaned in and gave her another kiss, this one more passionate than the other ones.

Natalya kissed back equally hard, gripping his arms. She let Thorin push her down onto the bed and she lay on her back, feeling Thorin break the kiss. The half-Elf watched as he climbed into the bed next to her and laid his arm across her stomach. She watched as Thorin laid on his side, holding her hand in his. Natalya smiled at him, getting lost in his eyes. “I love you.” Natalya whispered with a smile.
“I love you too.” Thorin whispered. “Soon you shall be my Queen.” He touched her cheek, a twinkle in his eyes.

Natalya shook her head, amazed at how quickly her life had changed. *I would have never in her wildest dreams imagined I would be courting the soon to be King Under the Mountain.* She chuckled, amused at the whole idea.

“What amuses you my Queen?” Thorin asked, his voice deep.

Natalya turned her body towards him. “Just that I am soon to be married to the King Under the Mountain.” She laughed. “Leader of the strongest of the seven Dwarf Kingdoms.”

Thorin smiled. “You are fit to rule by my side.”

Natalya shook her head. “What could I possibly do?“ She paused. ”It’s not like they would listen to a half-Elf.” She chuckled slightly.

“If I say they are to listen to you then they will.” Thorin growled, turning defensive.

Natalya laughed, touching his beard.

“Mmmmm.” Thorin, hummed. “You are gorgeous.” He said softly.

Silence passed between them as they lay facing each other, exchanging smiles.

“I will have a dress made for you in time for the coronation.” Thorin said, breaking the silence. “The finest material and jewels.” He smiled, imagining it.

Natalya smiled. “I am curious to see what a dress made by your people would look like.”

Thorin smiled, running his hand through her hair. “It will be the most magnificent dress you have ever laid eyes on.”

“I’m sure it will be.” Natalya said, scooting closer to him.

Thorin smiled as he explained his plans to Natalya. “I will have to see to repairs around the mountain before the coronation can take place, but luckily they are coming along quickly.”

“When will your coronation take place?” Natalya asked, her eyes full of anticipation.

“But for too long.” Thorin said, rubbing her side. “A good thing too.”

“Very.” Natalya said, still smiling. Silence passed between them for a while before Thorin finally spoke.

“Even while on all my adventures and times in Ered Luin I never knew anyone like you.”

The half-Elf gave a chuckle. “I’d love to hear more about your adventures.”

Thorin slowly intertwined his fingers with Nataya’s as he began telling her all that took place on the road to Erebor. He told her of the Shire and how he did not want Bilbo to accompany them at first but Gandalf had made them. “The Elves in Rivendell are too delicate.” Thorin gave a chuckle, staring into the female’s eyes. Time slowly passed as Thorin continued his story. “Then we ended up lost in Mirkwood.” The Dwarf smiled. “That’s when I saw you.”

Natalya smiled, remembering the day well. “I had never seen Dwarves before.” She gave a slight
chuckle. “There was something different about you that caught my eye.”

Thorin continued to stare at Natalya, keeping their fingers interlocked. “And now my life will never be the same.”

The half-Elf gave a smile as she blushed and stared into the eyes of her betrothed.

“It has been a long day.” Thorin stated with a sigh and a smile. “You need to get a good night’s rest.”

Natalya simply nodded at him, finally realizing how sleepy she was. The half-Elf leaned forward and they exchanged another kiss before she rose from the bed to head back to her room.

“Wait.” Thorin said quickly as he rose from the bed and followed her. “Take a seat.” He motioned to his desk chair.

Natalya walked over and took a seat. She heard Thorin rummaging through a drawer beside the bed before coming back over.

“I had made this for you.” He said, showing her a hair bead. It was gold, etched with two vines intertwining.

“What is it?” Natalya asked, slightly confused.

“It is a courting braid my dear.” Thorin answered with a smile.

Natalya smiled back at him as he handed the bead to her.

“It’s gorgeous!” She exclaimed, never having seen craftsmanship like this in the Woodland Realm.

“I made it just for you.” Thorin kissed her gently on the head. “May I?” He asked, taking the piece of metal back out of her hand.

“Yes.” Natalya said softly, realizing he was asking to put it in her hair. “Please.”

Thorin gently took a section from the under layers of her hair and began to braid it. “Three strands.” He explained. “One for our past, one for our present, and one for our future.” The Dwarf finally finished the braid and attached the small bead at the end.

“I love you so much, Thorin.” Natalya said, touching the bead at the end of the braid. She stood up and gave him a chaste kiss on the lips.

Thorin smiled. “I love you too.” He cupped her cheek. “Now you should really get some rest.” The Dwarf accompanied Natalya back to her room, turning her back to face him when they reached the door and gave her one last kiss. “Sleep well my Queen.” Thorin whispered in her ear.

Natalya chuckled, as she watched him walk back to his room. She dressed herself in a long nightgown and lay down on her bed, her heart beating and mind racing. Looking at the dresser she noticed the golden bracelet for the first time. She picked it up, studying the intricate carvings etched into the golden band that matched her hair bead. She put it on her wrist and sighed, happier than she had been in a long time.

The next morning, Natalya awoke to sunlight coming through the small windows on the doors leading out to the balcony. She decided that after Thorin had made the announcement she would ask Balin to explain to her the rituals of Dwarven courtship. The half-Elf realized that she accepted
but knew nothing about how it all worked. She did know a little bit about the courtship of Elves, having seen many weddings in the Woodland Realm. Laughing at the idea of doing something completely embarrassing to ruin it all, Natalya walked over to the fireplace and put a small log on the fire. After sitting there for a while and warming up the chilly room, she walked over to the closet and chose a dark green dress that had been hung up when she had moved into the room. It was floor length with long sleeves and a V-neck with jewels. It fit her perfectly as she easily slipped it on. Natalya wondered if it had also been one worn by Thorin’s mother. She hoped it was not too fancy for just eating breakfast and doing some daily chores. The half-Elf looked down at her wrist, noticing that the bracelet also matched the dress. Walking out of her room, Natalya caught sight of a Dwarven guard. Approaching him, she gave a slight smile and watched as he straightened up.

“Good morning my lady.” The Dwarf greeted the female. “What can I assist you with?”

“I need to speak with a craftsmith.”

The guard nodded, looking to another Dwarf who immediately left. Turning back to Natalya he smiled. “He will be back shortly. Luckily one of the best crafters from the Ered Luin arrived recently.”

The half-Elf smiled and nodded, folding her hands in front of her as she waited. After a few moments, another Dwarf returned alongside the first one.

The Dwarven smith bowed as he approached Natalya. “What can I do for you, my lady.”

The female stepped close to the Dwarf and whispered. “I need a wedding ring.” She watched as his reaction turned to shock then pride.

“Of course lady Natalya. Any specific colors?”

Natalya quickly explained to him what she had in mind. She knew that soon, almost the whole mountain would know of her and Thorin’s courtship.

“I will get to work on it right away.” The Dwarven smith bowed low and began heading back to the forge.

Smiling, Natalya then began making her way to the dining hall but did not see any sign of Thorin. Anairë and Dís were however already at the table talking casually. She walked over to them and took a seat next to Anairë, smiling at her.

“You look gorgeous today.” The Elf stated, looking at her with a slight smirk. “Are you expecting anyone?” Almost as soon as she had asked, Thorin appeared in the doorway to the dining hall, dressed nicer than usual. “Oh.” Anairë said, raising her eyebrows.

Dís was confused. She had seen them in deep conversation but would have never thought there to be anything between Thorin and an Elf. The Dwarrowdam did notice how much shorter Natalya appeared to be in comparison to the other Elf that had come with her and she realized she probably was not full Elf. The female shrugged her shoulders, figuring she would know more all in good time.

Fili and Kili had been eying Natalya ever since she came in. “Why is she dressed like that?” Kili whispered then fell silent after he got an elbow in the side by Fili.

Thorin spotted Natalya across the dining hall and went to go stand behind her. “Good morning Natalya.” Thorin said, putting his hands on her shoulders.
“You will not be able to sleep this late once you are the King.” Dís quipped from down the table.

Thorin merely scowled.

Natalya looked up at him and smiled. “You look nice today.”

“So do you.” Thorin said, his voice low as he gave a slight smirk.

The half-Elf suddenly saw Bilbo appear and made eye contact with him, seeing him walk closer to them. “Good morning Bilbo.” She greeted the Hobbit.

“Good morning Natalya I hope you are healing well.” Bilbo said, then he looked to Thorin. “Good morning your majesty. I am glad to see you with your kingdom back.”

Thorin smiled at the Hobbit. “You did a lot to help.” He paused. “I will see that you are rewarded well.”

Bilbo smiled and took a seat. “Oh there is no need.” He responded, shaking his head with a smile.

Natalya then looked back up at Thorin, wondering when he was going to make the announcement.

Thorin nodded, knowing what her look said. The Dwarf walked over to his normal seat at the head of the table, all eyes on him. He didn’t sit down though but remained standing. Clearing his throat, the room suddenly fell silent. Other Dwarves had begun to enter the dining hall as well. “As many of you know,” Thorin began, “repairs have started and we are moving along at a productive pace.” He gulped, trying to work himself up to what he mainly wanted to say. “We have only had a few setbacks but it will not slow down progress. With more Dwarves arriving things should be happening faster.” Dwarves had begun entering the dining hall when they heard Thorin speaking about Erebor’s repairs. “Something else has recently happened as well.” The Dwarf paused, licking his lips as he saw the crowd expanding. “Natalya and I have begun a courtship.” Thorin looked over at the half-Elf, causing everyone’s eyes to look between the two of them in shock.

Natalya blushed as she looked at Thorin with a smile. Some Dwarves started clapping but most remained silent. She knew this was very uncumstomary for a Dwarf to even allow Elves in their company after what happened at the fall of Erebor. “This is an outrage!” Natalya heard the same Dwarrowdam’s voice yell from somewhere in the crowd. She looked around to see her striding purposefully towards the table and gulped.

Thorin glared her down. “This is my kingdom.” He growled, not wanting any disapproval. “Not yours.” With a wave of his hand, two guards appeared and grabbed her.

“Where should we take her my lord?” One of the guards asked, holding her by the arm.

“To the dungeons for now.” Thorin said, staring the woman down. “If she cannot accept who I choose to marry in my own kingdom, then she is free to leave. I have already told her that.”

The Dwarrowdam growled as the guards took her away. “You will pay for this!” She shouted, struggling. “Allowing an Elf into your kingdom!” She spat, fury in her eyes. “She will betray you!”

Thorin sighed, shaking his head as he sat back down and rubbing his face. The Dwarf realized everyone was now staring at him as the room was still silent.

Natalya reached over and put her hand on Thorin’s shoulder.

Thorin reached up and covered her hand with his own, holding it. “Nothing will ever separate us.”
He whispered, kissing her hand.

Natalya smiled, feeling his beard scratch across the top of her hand. She looked around to see most of the Dwarves in the dining hall staring at them, mouths agape. “I think they know you are in charge now.” The half-Elf whispered with a slight smirk.

“I hope so.” Thorin said, his lips curved in an identical smirk as he paused for a few moments. “I would like to speak with you in private.”

Natalya nodded, backing up to let him get out of the chair. They walked out of the dining hall and it was completely silent except for Dís and Anairë whispering. Thorin and Natalya finally ended up in an abandoned hallway. “I wanted to ask you about our marriage.” The Dwarf said, speaking softly with his face close to hers. “I want it to happen before I am crowned.”

“Why?” The female asked, looking at him with confusion in her eyes.

“I will be devoted to my beautiful wife before my Kingly duties.”

Natalya wanted to ask him about Dwarven courting rituals but decided it would be best to wait until another time. She stood there in the hallway enjoying a few quiet moments together with her betrothed. “I love you so much.” She whispered, their foreheads touching.

“I love you too.” Thorin whispered, wrapping his arms around Natalya’s waist.

Natalya pulled him closer putting her hands on top of the fur on his coat and pulling him in for a kiss. She gripped the fur tighter as the kiss became more passionate.

Thorin finally broke the kiss. “I still need to breathe.” He chuckled, looking at Natalya who had a slight frown on her face but it quickly turned to laughter.

The female smiled as their noses touched. She felt him reach up to touch the tip of her ear and she blushed.

“You will always be perfect to me.” Thorin smiled, staring into her eyes.

“And you to me.” Natalya said softly, running her hand along his beard. She felt him lean into her touch and she smiled.

A few quiet moments passed between them. Thorin reached up to grab her hand and give it a kiss. “My Queen.” He whispered.

“My King.” Natalya whispered back, looking into his crystal blue eyes.

“Everyone might be wondering where we have gone.” Thorin chuckled. “We should be heading back.”

Natalya simply nodded, not wanting to go.

They spent a few more quiet moments together before Thorin took her hand and led her to go find Balin and speak about the wedding. They spent a few minutes searching until they found the elderly Dwarf and some of the other members including Anairë in one of the larger storage rooms. They were all pouring over old pieces of parchment. Balin had pulled out his spectacle to look at the small smudged print on one of the yellowing documents. Thorin walked up to him. “Balin.” The Dwarf started, his hands folded in front of him. “I need to speak with you.”
Balin looked up at Thorin. “Well tell me.” The elderly Dwarf said, a smile of amusement across his face.

“Natalya and I wish to be married before my coronation.” Thorin stated flatly.

All of the Dwarves and Anairë stopped what they were doing and looked at him.

“Thorin your coronation is in a week.” Balin said in a hushed tone. “The preparations and decorations are already being made.”

“I understand.” Thorin said. “Natalya and I do not wish to have a large wedding ceremony.” He further explained. “I feel that if that were to happen there could be a likely uprising.” Usually Dwarven weddings were all held in private except for the King and Queen’s.

Anairë knew that being a half-Elf in Erebor had already caused some disturbance as she thought of the Dwarrowdam that had become absolutely livid. None of the other Dwarves seemed too upset by it though; although they were probably staying silent since Thorin was to be King and they saw what he did when people opposed his ways.

Balin touched the tip of his beard, thinking. “That is a good point lad.”

Thorin smiled at Natalya as Balin went to look through some old manuscripts.

“Some of what you are doing is not exactly…” The elderly Dwarf paused. “accepted by most of the standards of our people.”

“I do not care.” Thorin said strongly.

Balin chuckled. “I am aware you do not agree but some of the Dwarves might.”

“What is he talking about?” Natalya asked, confused.

Thorin looked back at her and explained it. “What usually happens is in the line of Kings, either the Dwarf has a suitor picked for him at a young age or if no suitor is deemed acceptable by the father then he must wait until he is King to pick a bride.” He paused, still keeping his eyes locked onto Natalya. “Since Dwarf women are so rare it is customary for the King to have first pick for his son. If he does not think that any of them are worthy, the commoners of the Kingdom are then allowed to arrange marriages with the Dwarrowdams parents.”

Natalya nodded, trying to understand.

“My father did not see any Dwarrowdams that would be acceptable for me to marry.” Thorin paused and smiled. “And for that I am glad.”

“Me too.” Natalya whispered, grabbing Thorin’s hand.

“I can hear you two.” Balin chuckled.

Natalya looked in his direction, a slight scowl on her face. She then looked past the Dwarf and saw Anairë intently staring at an old book she had laid out on a table. The half-Elf was curious to know what had caught her attention but Thorin spoke.

“Can we speak in private?” Thorin asked Balin, realizing all of the other members of the company in the storage room had stopped to stare at them.

Balin nodded and they all stepped outside of the room, out of earshot of the others. “When would
you like to make the wedding?” He asked quietly.

“As soon as possible.” Thorin answered, reaching out to take Natalya’s hand.

Balin nodded. “A dress will have to be made.” He explained. “As well as some more royal attire.” He chuckled. “I am just glad you do not wish to have a large ceremony or else that would have to wait.”

“That is another reason I wish to have it as soon as possible.” Thorin said, urgency in his voice.

“I’m sure we can make it work.” Balin said, smiling at them.

Thorin nodded and looked at his wife to be. “I will have a dress made for you in no time.” He said, smiling at her. “I know Dís will probably want to help with the alterations and style.”

Natalya nodded. “I would love that.”
“It is settled then.” Balin nodded, leaving the couple alone and heading back to the storeroom.

“I will have Dís fetch a seamstress right away.” Thorin whispered as he smiled at Natalya. “The dress has to be perfect for my beautiful wife.” He kissed the back of her hand, gently.

The half-Elf looked at Thorin, tears in her eyes. “I can’t believe I am to be married to the most handsome Dwarf of all Middle-Earth.” She chuckled. Natalya liked calling Thorin handsome, as she knew he did not feel that way.

“I have told you before I am not…” Thorin started but Natalya cut him off.

“You are.” She smiled and looked into his eyes, putting her finger over his lips. “Even if it is only in my eyes.”

Thorin smiled back at her, loving her more than he ever had. “I think lunch will be ready shortly.” He said, putting his arm around Natalya’s slim waist and pulling her close to him.

“Good I’m starving.” The half-Elf laughed, putting her hand over top of his. “I must see to something first.”

Thorin nodded, watching Natalya leave.

The half-Elf quickly returned to her chambers. Walking inside, she saw a small box sitting atop her dresser with a small note written beside it.

For Lady Natalya

Smiling, the female opened the box to see how amazing the ring looked in real life. Closing the box, she quickly tied a piece of ribbon around it and placed it back on the table. Stepping back outside, Natalya finally headed to the dining hall. She watched as Dwarves were constantly entering and exiting with trays of food. The half-Elf saw Thorin sitting at the head of the table in the center of the room and headed towards him.

Thorin had seen Natalya enter and had waved to a Dwarf to bring them food then smiled as Natalya walked closer. He could not understand how such a beautiful woman could fall in love with him. She was kinder and gentler than any Dwarrowdam he had ever met in his years in Erebor and Ered Luin.

Natalya could feel eyes on her at almost all times. She stared into the table, looking at the patterns in the emerald marble. Most of them were natural swirls in the stone but there was a geometric pattern with gold detailing etched into the edge going all the way around the dark green stone.

Thorin nodded as a Dwarf came back with their meal. It was a piece of meat with potatoes and another side that Natalya had not seen before. Thorin placed it in front of her, watching her face turn from expressionless to curiosity.

“Oh thank you, Thorin.” Natalya smiled as she looked down at the plate. “I do not think I have ever had this meal before.”

“Good.” Thorin said with a smile. “I’m glad the Dwarves prepared something different.”
Natalya picked up her fork and knife and began eating. She felt like she was under inspection as Dwarves walked by and were constantly staring at them. The half-Elf swallowed hard, all of a sudden not feeling like eating.

“Are you feeling okay?” Thorin asked, holding her hand across the table.

“I am fine.” Natalya answered, faking a smile. “I guess I was just not as hungry as I thought.”

Thorin raised an eyebrow at her, knowing that there was another reason she had suddenly lost her appetite, but he chose not to say anything.

Natalya sat silently and watched as Thorin finished his meal a few minutes later.

When the Dwarf finished, he picked up his plate and Natalya’s and went back into the kitchen. He came back out and stood behind the female’s chair and rubbed her shoulders. “Tell me love, what is troubling you?”

Natalya tilted her head back and stared up at him. “Nothing.” She said, her eyes twinkling as she faked another smile.

Thorin shook his head, knowing something was wrong. “Tell me, please.” He said, moving his hands up to massage her scalp.

“Can we talk about it elsewhere?” Natalya asked softly.

“Of course.” Thorin said, backing up as she rose from the chair and turned towards him.

Natalya and Thorin left the dining hall hand in hand, getting several looks from passing Dwarves. The half-Elf kept her head down, avoiding eye contact.

Once they arrived back at the royal wing, Thorin stopped Natalya and lifted her chin. “What is bothering you my love?” He asked, looking deep into her eyes.

Natalya sighed, knowing she had to talk about it with Thorin at some point. “I just do not feel like I belong.” She said sadly, looking at Thorin.

“Oh Mahal.” Thorin said, looking at her, exasperated.

“Please let me finish.” Natalya said gently. “I know with all of my heart that I belong with you but I am always receiving looks and glances by all the Dwarves in Erebor. I know they all feel the same way that Dwarrowdam does. They are just scared to express it for fear of what you would do.”

Thorin licked his lips, not knowing how to answer.

“I feel perfectly fine around the company as they all know me and that I would never bring harm to you or the kingdom.” Natalya continued with a sigh. “The other Dwarves from the Iron Hills and Ered Luin most likely think that I am a spy for Thranduil. Anairë even more.” She said, becoming slightly exasperated. “That is why she barely leaves the room.” Natalya sighed, knowing that her friend must be feeling much worse than she did.

Thorin looked at her, thinking about what she said. “I will speak with Balin about it and see if he has any ideas.” He leaned forward and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “I would never want you to feel unwelcome in our Kingdom.”
Natalya smiled at him. “I love you so much.” She said, hugging him.

“I will do anything in my power to make sure you are treated with respect as the Queen you are.” He said, getting slightly emotional. Natalya did not deserve this. “I will speak to Balin tomorrow and see what he has to say about the matter.” Thorin said, repeating himself, as he held Natalya for a little while longer.

A few moments of silence passed between them and Natalya took in Thorin’s scent, which helped calm her down.

“Thorin.” Natalya finally spoke, looking at him. “There is also one more thing Elves do before marriage.” She paused, getting nervous. “It is a way that Elves show that we are betrothed.”

Thorin raised his eyebrows, looking at her, curious as to what she was talking about.

Natalya broke away from his grasp and started walking back toward her room. She looked back over her shoulder to see him following her. She licked her lips, getting more nervous. The half-Elf opened the door and led him into the dimly lit room. Walking over to her desk she picked something up. “It is customary for the Elves to give their intended a silver ring.” Swallowing, Natalya handed Thorin a small box with a silver ribbon tied around it.

Thorin opened it to see the ring. It was not bulky, but still had elements of the Dwarven style etched into the silver band. He looked up at her, admiring the craftsmanship. “Which finger does it go on?”

“It does not matter.” Natalya answered. “But at the time of marriage another ring is given and it is worn on the index finger of the right hand.”

“Very particular.” Thorin chuckled as he slipped the silver ring onto his left hand. As he looked closer, he could see a small dark blue gem in the center of it. “It is gorgeous.” He said, smiling. “Alas I do not have a ring to give to you but that is also part of the Dwarven tradition.” The Dwarf paused, getting nervous. “The bead is one of many courting gifts…”

“Thorin.” Natalya said laughing, seeing him get even more nervous than her. She placed her finger over his lips. “We have just reclaimed Erebor.” The half-Elf giggled. “I do not care for presents as we do not have the resources or time.” She said with a smile. “I had one of the Dwarven smiths make the ring for you this morning.”

Thorin smiled and captured her lips in a gentle kiss.

“Thorin.” Natalya said, leaning against him. “I am so glad you are here.”

“I will always be here.” Thorin said softly, stroking her hair.

“I do need to do something today though.” The half-Elf said, smiling up at him.

“What might that be?” Thorin asked with his head tilted.

“Something personal.” Natalya answered, not meeting his gaze. She intended to look up facts about the Dwarven courtship and what other gifts she should be giving him.

“I will take that time to speak with Balin then.” Thorin said softly, giving her one more kiss on the lips.

They walked back to the door and Thorin opened it, stepping back out into the cooler air of the
Natalya headed back to where she had seen Anairë in the storage room earlier. She looked in and the Elf was still there, looking over the same old manuscript.

“Natalya.” Anairë whispered, seeing Natalya come in out of the corner of her eye. “You should look at this.”

“What is it?” Natalya asked, walking over and looking down at the old parchment.

“I think it is about you.” Anairë answered, looking up from the faded paper.

Natalya furrowed her brow in confusion. “I don’t think so.” She laughed. “That may be Elvish but I do not think it is talking about me.”

Anairë looked at her. “From what you told me about what the lady in the market said.” She paused, looking back down at the parchment. “I think it is you.”

“What does it say then?” Natalya asked, looking at the faded writing. “Why is it all the way over here in Erebor?”

“I have not figured that out yet.” Anairë said, shaking her head. “Perhaps Thranduil did not want you to find out.” Anairë said, pointing to a section on the paper that was the most faded. “It almost looks like it was purposely erased.” She said, picking up the parchment and carrying it into the light. “You are one of the Peredhil, half-Elven.” She explained to Natalya. “Not rare, but not common either.” The Elf paused, making her way quickly across the storeroom passing shelves of manuscripts. “Tell me again what the lady at Dale said.”

“She told me that she had always seen a man who she thought to be one of the Dûnedain rangers and he often traveled with a female Elf.” Natalya paused, following Anairë across the storeroom. “She then said one day when the ranger was helping her family she asked where the Elf was and he said she was with child.” She looked at her friend, still not sure what she was looking for.

“Then what?” Anairë asked, shuffling through more parchments. Finally she found the one she had seen earlier. It was a family tree of all the half-Elves. The female gasped, seeing a worn area where there had once been a name.

“She said that one day they just never came back.” Natalya said, swallowing hard, not yet seeing the diagram.

Anairë nodded. “Look at this.” The Elf said, pointing to the faded area. “It seems that there is more than one name erased.”

“So what?” Natalya said. “Are you saying that is supposed to be me?”

“Or your parents.” Anairë said, looking at Natalya with her eyebrows raised.

“But why would it be smudged out?” Natalya asked, genuinely confused.

“Maybe the ranger was not really your father.” Anairë said, intensely staring at Natalya. “If he had been your father then why would there be such secrecy?”

“How could he not be my father?” Natalya asked, confused. “The rangers were the only ones to be seen with the Elves and they even spoke Sindarin.”
“Exactly and the Elves did not care that they were with them so if he was your father then you’re right, no one would care.” Anairë then went over to another shelf and picked up another lineage of the Dwarves. Off to the left of the page another area was smudged out much in the same way.

Natalya could barely make out the name on the parchment. Edhelwen. Her mother. “Are you saying?” The half-Elf asked, looking up at Anairë.

“Your father was a Dwarf.” Anairë explained, smiling. “He had to be.” She then picked up a manuscript that was written in Khuzdul but had the Westron text below each name.

Natalya was in shock, saying nothing.

“It explains the height.” Anairë laughed, looking at Natalya.

Natalya stood there with her mouth still agape. “From what line?” She asked, finally coming out of her daze. The female looked at the tree and traced the lineage all the way back. The half-Elf paused, looking at the page. “Moria.” Natalya whispered. She knew that in the Misty Mountains were eventually home to the Ñoldor Elves for a short time. *That means my mother must have been living there and met a Dwarf from Moria. “So I must have been added to the tree before the hatred between the Dwarves and Elves.”*

Anairë nodded, still shocked by her own findings. “The Elves had left Belegost and Nogrod and had joined the Dwarves in Moria, forming a friendship. It is also known that the Ñoldor became friends and students of Aulë, the maker of the Dwarves. From what I can recall they lived in Eregion and there was a connecting bridge between the city of the Elves and the Dwarves.” Anairë looked at Natalya, making sure she was following.

Natalya stepped forward and hugged Anairë tightly. “Thank you.” She whispered, still surprised by the entire thing. “So what about the ranger then?”

“It was the least I could do.” Anairë said with a smile, looking down at Natalya. “I am not sure.” She paused. “I think he was simply protecting your mother and that is why she traveled with him whenever she wanted to leave Mirkwood.” The Elf paused, licking her lips. “The only thing I can assume is that your father died in battle.”

Natalya nodded, it all made sense now. “I will repay you.” First she had to find Thorin and tell him the news. Hurrying out of the storeroom, she ran almost directly into Balin.

“Where are you goin’ lass?” He asked, smiling at her with a twinkle in his eye.

“Oh need to find Thorin!” Natalya said quickly, looking around.

“He is in the forges.” Balin said with a smile.

“Thank you Balin.” Natalya said, picking up her skirts and jogging off. She headed to the forges as fast as she could. Looking around, she saw Thorin at the farthest anvil, hammering away at something. She felt her throat tighten. Thorin was shirtless and she could see sweat glistening on his back as his muscles flexed. The half-Elf walked up to him hearing the hammer pounding louder on the anvil and the sound ringing in her ears. She could see his muscles rippling and moving and as she got closer and her throat tightened more. “Thorin.” Natalya said, walking up behind him. She did not want to startle him but he did not hear her. She stepped closer, going to the left side of him.

Thorin saw something move out of the corner of his eye and immediately put the hammer and the small piece of metal down on the anvil. “Natalya!” He exclaimed, shocked. “Forgive me I did not
hear you.” He turned to look at her, hiding the anvil behind him.

“Thorin there is something I must discuss with you.” Natalya said, looking at his face. She was trying not to become red with embarrassment as he stood in front of her shirtless and sweaty.

Thorin finally turned his full body towards her, dipping the hot metal in a cold bucket of water, causing a column of steam to rise. “Yes?” He asked with his eyebrows raised.

“Well…I need to show you something.” Natalya said, nervously. She started to walk off but Thorin grabbed her arm, turning her back towards him.

“You can tell me now.” Thorin said, being stubborn.

“Thorin please.” Natalya said, touching his hand. “It will make more sense if I show you.” The look in her eyes pleaded with him.

“Very well then.” Thorin agreed. He picked up his shirt from where it was beside the anvil and put it on, following Natalya back out the door.

The female led him back to the storeroom where Anairë was still there, looking at the old parchments and scrolls.

“Hello Thorin.” Anairë greeted him as they walked in.

“Anairë.” Thorin greeted her, smiling. “Natalya said she has something to tell me and it is in here.”

“Yes.” Anairë said, going back over to the corner where she had stacked all the pieces of parchment. She bowed to Thorin and Natalya and took her leave.

“Thorin.” Natalya said, her voice shaky. “We have found out something.”

The Dwarf looked at her, waiting for her to continue.

“Something that has been hidden from me my entire life.” Natalya was not sure how she would break this to him. “While I was in the Woodland Realm I never felt that I truly belonged. I had always felt like an outcast. Not just because of my height but my interests.” She paused again, looking at Thorin. “I had always enjoyed reading the few stories about the Dwarves that were in the libraries of Mirkwood.” She swallowed hard, pausing for a while.

“Natalya it is okay.” Thorin said, gently touching her elbow. “You can tell me.”

“I had always wondered what had spiked my interest.” The half-Elf paused again, reaching for one of the parchments and handing it to Thorin.

The Dwarf looked down at the fragile paper in his hand. “How have I never seen these?” His brow furrowed as he read, his eyes moving down the page, finally reaching the family tree. “I never knew he had a brother.” Thorin whispered. He then looked up at Natalya, his mouth agape.

Natalya swallowed and handed him the Elvish parchment, pointing to the part on the tree where her family had been erased. She watched him with tears in her eyes.

“Natalya.” Thorin whispered, shaking his head. He dropped the papers and let them float to the floor as he picked the female up and spun her around. “I had always known something about you was different.” The Dwarf whispered. “The moment I laid eyes on you I knew.” Thorin paused with his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. He wiped the tear that fell down her
cheek and kissed her. “Oh Natalya somehow I always knew.”

Natalya smiled at him but it soon faded. She was nervous. Partly because she was hoping they would accept her but she also knew that she was still half-Elven. Even the thought of a Dwarf and an Elf having a child was practically unspeakable now after the fall of Erebor.

*It had not really been the fall of Erebor that had kindled the races’ hatred for each other. In the beginning of the second age and the fall of Beleriand had caused the Ñoldor to seek new dwellings. They eventually settled west of Moria and were on good terms with the Dwarves. The Elves even aided the Dwarves in creating the western-gate of Moria and presented King Durin the third with a lesser ring of power. The bond abruptly came to an end as Sauron corrupted the dwellings of the Elves and destroyed their homeland. The Dwarves had attempted to help but to no avail as the Doors of Durin were shut and the Dwarves secluded themselves from the outside world, mining deeper into the mountain.*
“Everything will be fine Natalya.” Thorin reassured his betrothed, giving her a kiss. “They dare not disrespect you now.” He whispered as he ran his hand along her jawline, moving in for another kiss.

Natalya chuckled as he pressed his lips to hers again. She too had felt an immediate bond to Thorin the moment she saw him in Mirkwood but she had tried to fight her instincts for as long as possible. The half-Elf was thankful now that she did not have to. Natalya could finally be with the one person she truly loved and was meant to belong with.

Thorin pulled away first with a smile.

“How do you think Erebor will react?” Natalya asked, staring into Thorin’s blue eyes. “Knowing that I have Dwarf blood in my veins does not automatically mean everyone will accept me.”

“I am not sure.” Thorin shook his head, knowing she was right. “We will speak with Balin about it.”

“Do you wish to speak with him now?” Natalya asked, slightly nervous.

“The sooner we do it the sooner that the mountain will know.” Thorin said, pressing their foreheads together. He took her hand and they left the room, going to find Balin. They spent a while searching but eventually found the elderly Dwarf and Ori in the library.

The younger Dwarf immediately looked up from the book he was reading when they came in. “Thorin! Natalya!” He exclaimed, getting up and bowing.

Thorin smiled at the Dwarf, admiring his constant loyalty. “Hello Ori.” Thorin greeted the younger Dwarf, bowing his head.

Natalya smiled at Ori, wanting to know what he was reading. She looked at Thorin, smiling and giving his hand a squeeze.

Thorin looked around, seeing Balin at another table. He let go of Natalya’s hand and went to speak with the older Dwarf. “Balin.” Thorin said, speaking softly. “There is something I must tell you.”

“What is it laddie?” Balin asked, looking at Thorin’s anxious expression.

“It is about Natalya.” Thorin answered, looking over to where she was conversing with Ori.

“What about her?” Balin asked, slightly confused.

“She is also half Dwarf.” Thorin said in a hushed tone. “Her lineage traces back to when the Ñoldor Elves and Dwarves had mutuality in…”

“Moria.” Balin said with a smile, looking up at Thorin.

Thorin looked at Balin, mouth slightly agape. “How did you know?” He asked, shocked Balin had already known.

“I was in the storeroom when Anairë found the writings.” Balin said, kindly looking at Thorin. “You were in the forges so I did not wish to disturb you. Natalya came running up to me asking where you were and I immediately knew that she had found out as well.”
“This will change everything.” Thorin said, looking at Balin. “Did you read the manuscript as well?”

“I did.” Balin answered with a nod. “Natalya’s mother was most likely born in the Elvish land of Eregion before it was destroyed by Sauron in the second age.” The elderly Dwarf explained. “Her father was from the Dwarves of Nogrod who fled to Moria after the War of Wrath.” He continued piecing parts together in his mind. “That means that when the Dwarves aided the Elves against Sauron her father was probably killed and her mother fled, going to the Woodland Realm.” The Dwarf paused, rubbing his chin. “But by her age her mother must not have yet known she was pregnant with her.”

Thorin was shocked. How had he come up with that much information in such a short amount of time?

Balin continued. “If Natalya has the blood of the Ñoldor in her then she comes from a very powerful family. It was also known that the high Elves were taught how to smith and craft by Aulë.” He smiled slightly. “That is why both races found such mutuality.”

Thorin looked over to where Natalya was still conversing with Ori.

“We must get married at once.” Thorin stated, staring intensely at Balin.

“It will all happen in good time Thorin.” Balin said, reassuring him with a smile.

“I must speak with Dís about making a wedding dress.” Thorin said, getting slightly worried. He quickly walked back to where Natalya was with Ori. “Hello love.” He said, smiling at her. “May I speak with you?”

“Of course Thorin.” Natalya said. She turned back to Ori. “It was nice speaking with you.”

Ori stood back up and bowed to both of them. “The pleasure is all mine, your majesties.”

Thorin and Natalya smiled at the young Dwarf and left the room. “I need to find Dís.” Thorin stated, looking at Natalya. “She will gather some seamstresses and they will make your wedding dress.”

Natalya smiled at him and nodded, still in shock that this had all happened. She wandered the halls with Thorin, searching for his sister. They soon found her amongst a group of Dwarrowdams and among them, Anairë was conversing. “I’m surprised she is with them.” Natalya whispered to Thorin as they walked up.

Thorin simply nodded and approached Dís.

“Hello brother.” Dís said, looking up at him. “What do you need?” She asked, crossing her arms. The Dwarrowdam then looked behind him to see Natalya. “Oh Natalya!” She exclaimed, brushing past Thorin to give her a hug. “Anairë told us all about what she discovered.” Dís paused; studying the half-Elf’s face. “I could not have asked for a better bride for my brother.”

“Well thank you Dís.” Natalya smiled at her. “I think Thorin wishes to ask you a question.”

“Yes Thorin?” Dís asked, slightly annoyed. She knew Thorin had wanted to talk to her but she did not particularly want to speak to him at the moment.

“I was merely going to ask your assistance in making Natalya a wedding dress.” Thorin said, looking down at his sister with his eyebrows raised.
“Oh.” Dís exclaimed, looking between Thorin and Natalya, suddenly becoming more interested.

The other Dwarrowdams and Anairë looked at them with large smiles on their faces.

*Dís must have persuaded them to not hate me.* Natalya thought to herself, seeing them all smile.

“Well as it so happens these are some of the most talented seamstresses in Erebor and I am sure they would love to ensure that the future Queen has the perfect wedding gown.” Dís said, praising the two Dwarrowdams who blushed at the compliment. “Now I must ask you.” She continued, looking at Thorin. “Do you have a color scheme in mind?” The Dwarrowdam asked, looking at Thorin as he thought about it. Dís then turned to Natalya when Thorin did not answer immediately. “Do you have an idea dear?” She asked, hoping at least one of them would have an idea of what they wanted on their wedding day.

“Well we have not really talked about it but I really like the idea of a blue color scheme.” Natalya said softly, looking at Thorin.

“Whatever you would like.” Thorin said, kissing her cheek. “I want everything to be perfect.” He smiled at Natalya who blushed. The Dwarf had already told Balin that he wanted blue to be his main theme but decided to let Natalya pick her own.

Natalya smiled, looking back at Dís as Thorin held her hand.

“It is settled then.” Dís said, clapping her hands together. “We will get started right away but we first need to measure you.”

Natalya nodded, looking at the two Dwarrowdams who continued to smile.

“We are at your command my lady.” One of the Dwarrowdams said, bowing before Natalya and Thorin.

Natalya smiled. “Thank you.” She was going to need to get used to being treated as royalty now that she was betrothed to the future King of Erebor.

The other Dwarrowdams bowed as well, including Dís. “We must get started right away if the dress is to be made in time!” She said, all of a sudden in a rush.

Natalya then saw Anairë awkwardly standing; knowing that she was not included. “Anairë can help as well.” She added, smiling at her friend.

Anairë immediately looked in Natalya’s direction, hearing her name. “Would you like my assistance my lady?” She asked, looking at Thorin and Natalya.

“I would love your assistance.” Natalya smiled as she walked over.

“I am honored, my lady.” Anairë said, bowing.

“The honor is mine.” Natalya said, smiling as their eyes met.

“Well let’s get started then.” Dís said, putting her hand on Natalya’s back and ushering her inside the royal chambers.

“I will see you later Natalya.” Thorin said chuckling as Dís took her to get her wedding dress measured. He walked off to find Balin about the wedding preparations.

Natalya was then dragged back into her room. “You need to think of how you want the dress to be
designed.” Dís said, sitting her down in a chair. She looked at the two other Dwarrowdams and Anairë. “What were some of the designs of the previous Queens dresses in the past?”

One of the two Dwarrowdams that had accompanied Natalya pulled out a blank paper from the desk and began to sketch down some designs. “There was this one.” She said, pushing the design towards the half-Elf. It had a deep V-neck with jewels running along the neckline and sleeves. “More or less.” The Dwarrowdam added, taking one last glance at the design. She quickly sketched another one and handed it to Natalya. “This was an original design but it was never used.”

Natalya eyed the sketch, amazed. She sat and stared at the design for a while, thinking of how to add her own touch to it.

“Of course we can make it in any color and fit you want.” The other Dwarrowdam said. She had been previously speaking in hushed whispers to Dís about the wedding. “It will probably take place sometime in the evening.” Dís said, still whispering. “At least that is what Thorin told me.”

The Dwarrowdam nodded and walked over to where Natalya was. “What color would you prefer?”

Anairë stood beside Natalya and looked down at the drawing of the dress. “Maybe the sleeves should be looser.” She suggested.

“I love that.” Natalya agreed, looking at Anairë. “Thank you.” She said, putting her hand over her friend’s.

The Dwarrowdams left Natalya alone for a few moments while her and Anairë sketched out a design.

“I have made my decision.” Natalya finally said to the Dwarrowdams standing around her, seeing them all perk up. “I would like this dress style.” She pointed to the design of the second dress. “With sheer material over the top in dark blue.” Natalya pointed to the bottom of the dress. “I would like the sleeves to be in the same sheer material as the overlay of the bottom.”

“So you would like two layers my lady?” One of the Dwarrowdams asked, looking down at the paper.

“Yes.” Natalya nodded. She paused, continuing to look at the drawing. “I would also like a fur collar.” She thought about a color that would go with the dark blue. “In dark brown please.”

“Of course my lady.” The Dwarrowdam said as she drew the pattern out as Natalya described it. She added her own Dwarvish touches as well to the design. “I think that is good for a base of what you want for now.” The woman said, looking at the drawing. “It is also tradition for the seamstresses to pick some of the designs to match the King’s outfit.” She explained to Natalya.

Natalya nodded, seeing Dís come over.

“I have some glorious ideas for jewelry.” Dís said, smiling at Natalya. While Natalya had been talking about the dress, she had been sketching simple ideas for jewelry as well. She showed Natalya the geometrical design with blue stones in the middle that would match the color of the dress. “You would also have a matching crown.” She explained, watching Natalya nod.

“This sounds amazing.” Natalya admitted. She at first was uneasy with the fact that she would be served since she had never had a life like this in Mirkwood but she understood that she could not physically finish everything that she would need to get done without some help. “Thank you again
for everything.” Natalya said, looking at the three Dwarrowdams and Anairë.

“Oh it was no problem!” Dís said, a beaming smile on her face. “Now it is time to measure you.” Still excited about the whole thing, the Dwarrowdam pulled out a piece of measuring string and measured Natalya for the dress measurements.

Natalya stood still, feeling awkward. She let Dís quickly get her measurements and watched as she scribbled them down on a piece of paper.

“That will be all for now.” Dís finished, smiling. “We will take our leave.” She said as her and the other two Dwarrowdams bowed and left the room.

Natalya looked at Anairë. “This is so awkward.” She laughed, shaking her head.

“Well you had better get used to it.” Anairë smiled, a twinkle in her eye. “You will be the Queen in a few weeks.”

“What if I don’t make a good Queen?” Natalya asked, getting discouraged. “I know absolutely nothing about helping to rule a Kingdom.” She paused. “I will be expected to perform some duties although not as much as Thorin.” The half-Elf smiled slightly, thinking about Thorin as King ruling the kingdom and sitting majestically upon his throne.

“You will make a fine ruler.” Anairë encouraged, smiling down at her. “Stop doubting yourself.” She stepped closer to Natalya. “Just remember,” The Elf paused as she put a hand on her friend’s shoulder, “You will always have people you can ask for help if you need it.”

Natalya smiled up at Anairë. “I’m glad you are here.” She said, seeing the Elf smile.

“I’m glad to be here.” Anairë admitted. “I always told myself that Mirkwood was where I belonged but when I saw you deciding to help the Dwarves I saw that there is more to the world than just Mirkwood.” She paused. “There are others besides just Thranduil who insists that we stay blocked away and never see what is going on anywhere else.”

Natalya and Anairë talked for a while longer while Dís and the two other Dwarrowdams went off to find Thorin.

Thorin was still speaking with Balin about the courtship rituals when Dís entered the library. “Mahal.” He muttered, seeing his sister.

“How did it go?” He asked, putting his hands on her shoulders.

“Thorin!” Dís shouted, walking across the library. A few Dwarves looked up from their readings at her shouting but quickly looked back down when they saw who it was.

“Can you keep it down?” Thorin hissed as she approached. “I don’t need all of Erebor knowing where I am with your shouting.”

Dís rolled her eyes. “Well brother.” She started, putting her hands on her hips. “I was just coming to tell you that Natalya has picked a design for her dress so now it is your turn.”

Thorin sighed, knowing this was the part he was going to hate the most. “Fine.” He muttered. He turned to Balin. “I will continue speaking with you later.”

Balin rose from his chair and bowed. He then saw Natalya quickly entering the library but she started talking to Thorin.

“How did it go?” He asked, putting his hands on her shoulders.
“It went very well.” Natalya beamed. She looked over and saw Dís getting slightly impatient. “I will see you for supper.” She gave Thorin a quick kiss on his cheek and headed over to Balin.

“Hello dear.” Balin said, seeing Natalya approach. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes.” Natalya said softly, hoping Thorin was out of earshot. She turned and looked to see that he had indeed left the room. “I need help understanding Dwarven courting traditions.” She said, licking her lips and shifting her weight.

Ori heard Natalya’s comment and immediately came over, carrying a large book. “Do you mind if I help?” The younger Dwarf asked.

“Of course you can Ori.” Natalya smiled at him. “The more help the better.”

Balin smiled, opening the book. “I understand why you don’t know much about our traditions seeing that you grew up in Mirkwood almost your entire life.”

Natalya smiled at them as they flipped the pages of the book, looking for the section on courting. “Courting.” Natalya read aloud when they stopped at the page.

Ori sighed. “I will need to teach you some Dwarvish as well since you do not know our language.”

Natalya nodded. “The Elves had a few books in Mirkwood about the Dwarves but not any on their traditions. She paused, looking between them. “They were mostly just stories but they did have a few written in Khuzdul.”

Balin continued looking down at the book. “I assume you do not wish to go through the whole courting process?”

“No.” Natalya said, shaking her head. “But are there not rituals that must be done?”

“There are.” Balin answered, nodding as he looked at the book. “The most important is the gift of the rings.”

Natalya nodded. “It is an Elvish custom as well.” She explained. “The couple starts with simple silver rings worn on the left hand.” The half-Elf stopped, realizing that she did not have a ring to show them so she quickly continued. “Then at marriage the rings are exchanged for gold ones that are worn on the right hand.”

Ori and Balin paused, still looking down at the book. “If you wish to have a short courting period really only the rings are needed.” Ori explained, looking back up at Natalya.

“I see you already have the courtship bead.” Balin said, eyeing the small piece of metal in one of Natalya’s braids.

Natalya smiled and nodded. “Do I need to make him a bead?” She asked, all of a sudden realizing.

Balin licked his lips. “That is usually part of the tradition.” He said, timidly. “But I am sure Thorin understands.”

Natalya became nervous and suddenly started wringing her hands. “… I…” She stammered. “I must rest up tonight so I can get to work tomorrow morning.” The half-Elf bowed and started to leave.

“Where are you going?” Balin asked, watching her leave. “We still have much we need to talk about.”
Natalya turned slowly back around and walked back over to them. “Yes?” She asked, slightly frustrated. It was getting late and she just now understood what she was going to have to do in order to be married to Thorin and have Erebor accept her.

“Please take a seat.” Balin said, sitting down across from where Natalya was still standing. “We still need to explain to you what happens during the wedding ceremony.”

Natalya nodded, licking her lips as she took a seat, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Usually a high member of the court marries the couple and they say their vows.” Balin explained, pointing to the runes in the book. “The rings are then exchanged. Thorin will hand you a golden ring, which has markings of his clan on it, while you will hand him a plain golden ring.” Balin paused, making sure Natalya understood. “This symbolizes again that you are now part of the clan of Thorin and a daughter of Durin.”

Natalya nodded. “Wow.” She sighed. “That was a lot to take in. Who makes the rings?”

“Thorin will most likely make your ring and usually the wife has someone do it for her but it is completely up to you.” Balin smiled.

“That’s only part of it.” Ori said, still reading the book. “The marriages of any Dwarves that are not royalty are usually small and only in between the two families which is lucky in our case.” He paused. “I just know that you and Thorin wish to have a small wedding for personal reasons.”

Natalya nodded. Now she was very intrigued.

“Since there has not been a real court session held yet.” Ori paused, looking at Balin. “Would you be willing to marry them?” He asked with a pleading look on his face. “Thorin has yet to choose the high members of the court and I assure you that is not on his mind right now.”

Balin chuckled. “I have not performed a wedding ceremony in ages.” He paused. “But if Thorin does not deem anyone else acceptable I would be more than happy to do it.”

“Thank you Balin!” Natalya exclaimed. “Now it really is getting late and I have much to accomplish tomorrow.” She rose from her seat and bowed. “Now I shall retire.”

Balin and Ori both stood up as well and bowed, watching her leave.

While Natalya had been reviewing all of the Dwarvish wedding customs, Thorin had been dragged into his room by Dís. She insisted that he choose his outfit for the wedding. It would not take nearly as long as Natalya’s but it would still take time to put all the usual jewels that were added to the trim. “Dís.” Thorin started, looking at her. “I do not have time right now.” This was getting on his last nerve. Thorin knew he needed to be getting other matters in Erebor tended to even though his wedding was quite important.

“Well if you are just agreeable then it shall take no time at all but if you continue to gripe about it then it will take twice as long.” His sister huffed, glaring at him.

Thorin groaned as Dís began speaking to him of different styles of outfits. He sat down in his armchair and he stared at the wall, not listening to what she was saying anymore.

“Thorin are you even listening to me?” Dís scolded, snapping her fingers in front of his face. She immediately realized when Thorin was not paying attention to anything she was trying to say to
him. “If you are not going to listen then you can just make the entire outfit yourself.” The Dwarrowdam crossed her arms and tapped her foot.

“Continue.” Thorin said with a sigh and wave of his hand. He tried to pay attention but did not really care about what the line of Durin had worn at their respective coronations. He soon found himself staring off into space again and he looked over at Dís.

“Thorin I am serious.” The Dwarrowdam said, not at all happy with her brother ignoring her. “Mahal help me you will make this entire thing yourself if you cannot listen.”

Natalya was walking past Thorin’s chambers on her way to her own and heard yelling from inside. She chuckled, knowing Dís was having him decide on an outfit for the wedding. Even the solid Oak doors could not muffle Thorin’s yelling as Natalya continued on her way.

“Dís.” Thorin said, sighing and pinching the bridge of his nose. “Please just pick something and show me later.”

The Dwarrowdam huffed. “Fine Thorin.” She said, annoyed. “I will show you a design tomorrow and you had better like it.” Dís pointed her finger at him then picked up the loose sheets of paper and left the room.

Thorin said nothing and watched her leave as the door slammed. He sighed, waiting a few moments to calm down before he stood up and headed over to Natalya’s room. The Dwarf knocked three times, awaiting a response.

Natalya had been getting ready to head to bed when she heard the knocks. Immediately she knew it was Thorin and smiled, happy he had come to see her. “Hello.” She answered cheerily as she opened the door.

“Hello dear.” Thorin said with a smile, seeing the half-Elf already in her nightgown. “I had just come to wish you a good night.” The Dwarf said, leaning down to give Natalya a quick kiss on the lips.

“I heard your yelling as I passed your room.” Natalya laughed. “Was Dís annoying you?” She asked with her eyebrows raised in amusement.

“Slightly.” Thorin chuckled, his arms crossed as he leaned against the doorframe.

“Oh come on.” Natalya said, still laughing. “Picking an outfit is not that bad.”

“It is when she threatens to make you sew the entire thing by yourself if you don’t pay attention.” The Dwarf smiled, watching Natalya shake her head. Thorin paused before speaking again. “I had better let you get some sleep.” He said, giving his intended one last kiss before leaving.

“Goodnight Thorin.” Natalya smiled, watching him leave. She closed the door and went to lie down, quickly falling into a deep sleep.

Thorin smiled as he headed back in the direction of the forges.
Chapter 20

Thorin quickly made his way towards the forge, heading out of the royal wing. His scrap of golden metal was still in the bucket of water where it had been left earlier that day. Most of the Dwarves were leaving by now since the hour was getting late but Thorin could not sleep. His mind was racing now with all of the things that needed to happen in order for the wedding to be on time. The Dwarf hammered heavily on the piece of metal lying on the anvil. He soon felt the sweat dripping down his brow as the fires within the forge were still blazing. The Dwarf picked up the small piece of metal with a pair of tongs and used another pair to bend the metal to his will. Forming the small rectangular piece of metal into a ring, Thorin made sure it was small enough to fit Natalya. Then soldering the ends together, he connected them so it formed a complete circle. He then stared at his work, trying to decide on a design as he wanted it to match the ring Natalya had crafted for him. Thinking of an idea, Thorin wiped the sweat from his brow with his forearm and continued staring at the small piece of metal. Pulling a small leather sack out his pocket, the dwarf poured the contents into his palm. He picked up the small emerald stone with a smaller pair of tongs and carefully lifted it, placing it on the soft metal of the ring and pushed it in. Adding more designs around it, Thorin crafted until the ring had a simple dwarvish design all the way around it. He dipped the whole ring back in the bucket of water again and watched the column of steam rise. Pulling it back out, he examined it one last time. The Dwarf was pleased with it and he smiled as he imagined Natalya wearing it.

The heat from the forge had slowly begun to die away as Thorin was finishing. He knew it was way into the night but his thoughts were still racing as he added the shiny finish to the ring. He still had to ask Ori to write the Zarb, or marriage contract. Thorin also needed to help Dís come up with an idea for his wedding attire. As Thorin walked back to his chambers, he realized that he would not have much time to spend with Natalya before the wedding. Thorin sighed and smiled, knowing that they would have a week afterward where it would be just them together. When The Dwarf returned to his room he changed into his nightclothes and lay down on the bed, heaving a sigh. He stared at the ceiling for a while before falling into a restless sleep.

Sunlight shone through the balcony doors at an early hour, gently waking Natalya. The half-Elf sat up slowly and stretched. Smiling, she couldn’t stop thinking about her wedding that was going to take place in a few days. A set date had not yet been planned but her and Thorin wanted to have it as soon as possible. Natalya was glad they had decided to skip over most of the rituals with the courtship as both knew they were perfect for each other. Slowly slipping out of bed, she went to put on her robe and sat down at the desk chair, sketching out another quick dress pattern idea and smiled. It was the perfect mix of Elvish and Dwarvish and she could not wait to show Dís. Folding the paper Natalya placed it on the desk, planning to show it to the Dwarrowdam over breakfast. She dressed herself for the day in a simple navy floor length dress as she knew that she would not be allowed to wear simple clothing for much longer. Becoming the Queen came with great power but also much responsibility. She was going to be expected to act and perform as a Queen of any kingdom would. That meant lots of help, fancy dresses and tons of meetings and papers to sign. Natalya was so glad to go through this stage in her life with Thorin by her side and to help him bear the responsibility as well. Picking up the folded piece of paper with the drawing inside, Natalya carried it with her to breakfast.

Thorin awoke later than usual and quickly dressed himself, eager to see Natalya at breakfast. He brought the ring with him, examining it one last time, making sure that there were no imperfections in his craftsmanship. When the Dwarf arrived in the dining hall, he saw Ori, Balin and Anairë all gathered around a large scrap of blank parchment. His eyes scanned further down the table and he saw Natalya speaking with Dís who was nodding vigorously as she held a small sheet of paper. As
Thorin came closer he saw that it was a dress pattern that he assumed was for Natalya. He smiled as he made eye contact with her. “Good morning.” Thorin greeted his betrothed, putting his arm around her waist and smiled at Dís. He then looked back at Natalya and gave her a quick kiss.

“Good morning Thorin.” The half-Elf said with a big smile. She gently brushed some strands of hair from Thorin’s face. “I was just speaking with Dís about the new dress design I came up with this morning.”

“I am convinced it will be the most gorgeous dress Erebor has ever seen.” Dís exclaimed, ecstatic, as she hugged Natalya.

Natalya hugged her back. “I’m so glad you like it.” She said, smiling at the Dwarrowdam.

“Am I allowed to see it?” Thorin asked, looking at the paper, which was now being held onto by Dís.

“No Thorin son of Thrain.” Dís scolded when she saw Thorin reaching for it.

Natalya chuckled and gently grabbed his hand, smiling at him. “You will just have to wait and see.” She whispered, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Shall we sit then?” Thorin smiled, motioning to the table.

“Yes.” Natalya chuckled, sitting in between Thorin and Dís and across from Anairë. “What is for breakfast?” The half-Elf asked, watching as Bombur and some of the Dwarves moved in and out of the kitchen.

“Anything you would like my dear.” Thorin said, putting his hand on top of hers.

Natalya thought for a moment then told him what she wanted.

Thorin nodded and looked to Bombur who quickly began preparing their meal. He felt the cold metal of the ring in his pocket as he checked to ensure it was still there. The Dwarf suddenly looked up, seeing Balin standing near him.

“I need to tell you something laddie.”

Thorin nodded and rose from the table, following the elderly Dwarf.

“I will have your dress start being made today.” Dís whispered to Natalya, making sure Thorin couldn’t hear.

The female smiled, happy progress was being made. She looked back to the doorway where Thorin had exited, awaiting his return. Looking around Natalya caught Balin’s eye and all of a sudden remembered that she still needed to craft a ring for Thorin. Natalya suddenly snapped out of her daze to see the Dwarf sitting down next to her as their meal was presented.

“Here you go, love.” Thorin said, smiling and taking a seat. The Dwarf put his arm around her waist and pulled her closer to him.

“Thank you Thorin.” Natalya said, resting her head on his shoulder for a moment before sitting up to eat.

Thorin smiled and watched her eat. He played with the ring in his pocket, waiting for the most opportune time to present it.
“So Thorin.” Dís said, leaning forward to look at him with a smirk.

“Yes sister?”

“Would you care to see the design I have made for your wedding outfit?” The Dwarrowdam questioned with her eyebrows raised.

“Yes.” Thorin had been under a lot of pressure lately to begin his rule and to wed Natalya. He hoped that Dís and her seamstresses would begin the outfits as soon as possible since they were the only things that kept him and Natalya from being married.

Dís pulled out a folded piece of paper, similar to Natalya’s and pushed it towards Thorin with a smile.

“Dís this is…” Thorin paused, speechless as he unfolded it and studied the drawing. “This is wonderful.” He looked at his sister.

The Dwarrowdam continued to smile. “I stayed up all night working on it so you had better like it.”

“I do.” Thorin said, still in shock. “Is this even possible to make?” He asked with a slight chuckle.

“It sure is.” Dís answered. “As I have told you, these are the most talented seamstresses in all of Middle-Earth.”

Natalya smiled, taking the piece of paper and studying the drawing, smiling. “I love it.” She commented with a big smile.

Thorin smiled back at Natalya as he handed the paper to his sister.

Dís snatched it out of his hand and tucked it quickly back into her pocket.

Natalya held Thorin’s hand, quickly finishing her meal and smiling at him occasionally.

“What are you done?” Thorin asked as she put her fork down on her plate and sat back in her chair.

Natalya nodded, looking at Thorin as she rested back against her chair and let out a sigh. She had enjoyed the meal and had cleaned her plate for the first time in a few weeks.

The Dwarf nodded back and kissed her on the head as he rose from his seat and carried her plate back into the kitchen. When he came back out he looked at Natalya but didn’t sit down. “I have something for you.” He said, barely above a whisper.

Natalya quickly looked up at him. “Yes?” She asked with her eyebrows raised.

Thorin pulled the ring out of his pocket and took her hand, gently sliding it onto her finger.

“Oh Thorin!” Natalya exclaimed, her eyes wide as she gasped in shock.

Thorin kept hold of her hand and kissed it. “My Queen.” The Dwarf said with a smile. “I apologize it took longer than I had expected.”

“Oh it is gorgeous!” Natalya said, excitedly looking up at him. She quickly rose from her seat and threw her arms around his neck, hugging him tight. “I love you so much.” The half-Elf whispered, putting her hands on either side of his face and giving him a kiss.

Thorin kissed back, smiling into it.
Dwalin suddenly coughed loudly, interrupting the moment.

Thorin gave him a death glare then looked to Dís who had now stood up and had her eyebrows raised. “Are you finally ready?”

“Ready for what?” Thorin asked in an annoyed manner as he glared at his sister with his hands still on Natalya’s waist.

Dís placed her hands on her hips and looked at Thorin. “Well if you want this wedding to go as planned, Thorin, then I need to figure out what size to make your attire.”

Thorin sighed, knowing he had other important matters to tend to rather than just stand there while Dís measured him for his outfit. “Make it quick then.” He said, looking back at Natalya who looked as if she was trying to hold in laughter.

Natalya gave him another hug, reassuring him. “You will be fine darling. It will not take as long as you think.” She gave him a quick kiss before turning back towards the Dwarrowdam and Anairë. “I have some work I must complete today and I will speak with you later.” She twirled the ring around her finger, feeling the engraved details and the emerald stone set into it.

“I may need to see you throughout the day so you can approve the progress on the dress.” Dís smiled as Natalya got up.

“Of course.” The half-Elf agreed, looking at all of them and nodding. She said her goodbyes to the group and turned around, heading towards the forge.

Thorin tried to follow her but Dís grabbed him, shaking her head. “You need to stay with me.” She said strongly, giving him a look. “We are going to get this over with now, Thorin son of Thrain and you will not complain about it.”

Thorin sighed as he followed Dís out of the dining hall. His eyes however followed Natalya as she walked down a side hallway and then disappeared from view. The Dwarf was still in disbelief that such a beautiful woman would soon be his wife.

“If you would stop staring like a young Dwarfling then we could get this over with and you two could get married sooner.” Dís commented, seeing Thorin stare longingly after Natalya.

Thorin blushed hard, swallowing. “Fine.” He grumbled and followed his sister back to his chambers.

Anairë stood as she watched the scene, chuckling to herself. She went back over to Balin and Ori and sat down next to the younger Dwarf.

“How are you liking it here lass?” A voice came from behind Anairë. She looked behind her to see the Dwarf that seemed to be Thorin’s bodyguard during the whole quest.

“Oh I don’t believe you have been introduced.” Ori piped up, hearing Dwalin speak. He rose from the bench to introduce them. “Anairë this is Dwalin.” He paused, looking at Anairë. “Dwalin, Anairë.”

Dwalin clapped the Elf gently on the shoulder. “I hope we don’t annoy you too much lass.” He chuckled, smirking.

Anairë shook her head. “Don’t worry Dwalin I will let you know if you do.” She paused. “I will say this is much more interesting than the mundane life in Mirkwood.”
“How you lived with Elves for so long is beyond me.” Dwalin snorted, shaking his head.

Anairë shrugged her shoulders. “Time does go by fast for us I guess.”

“I guess it does.” Dwalin said, sitting down next to her. “You and Natalya are two of the bravest women I have ever seen.”

“Well someone had to yell at that hard headed Dwarf.”

Suddenly, a shout was heard from behind them. “Nori no!” Dori yelled, coming out of the kitchen.

Nori was always known for being mischievous and playing tricks on the rest of the company, save Thorin and the two ladies. He held a mug of water above Ori’s head and it was threatening to spill at any minute.

Anairë attempted to get up, knowing that she would get soaked should it spill.

Dwalin was stifling laughter as Nori slowly let drips fall onto his brothers’ head.

“What in Durin’s name!” Ori exclaimed, quickly shutting the book and standing up, facing his brother.

Nori laughed, moving backwards and more of the water spilled onto the floor, causing him to slip. He caught himself on the table, still laughing.

Balin sighed and rolled his eyes. He picked up the manuscript he was reading and moved further down the table.

“You disturbed Balin!” Ori scolded, smacking his brother on the arm.

“Oh he is fine!” Nori exclaimed, still cackling.

“That would have made quite the scene.” Dwalin piped in with a smirk across his face.

“Indeed.” Dori added, not at all pleased with his brother’s shenanigans.

They finally all settled back down and Anairë walked over to Balin and sat next to him, ignoring Dwalin’s yelling for her to come back. “Have you found anything else?” She whispered to the elderly Dwarf, looking at the faded manuscript.

“I think so.” Balin said, looking at her. He paused and took a breath before speaking. “If Natalya was indeed from the Ñoldor and the line that came from Nogrod then she is probably from a powerful line of smiths and possibly rulers.” The Dwarf looked back down at the page. “The bottom looks as if someone attempted to burn it but they did not succeed.” Balin ran his hand along the charred edge.

It was silent for a little while longer before more laughter and the dropping of a pan could be heard from inside the kitchen.

“Durin help us.” Balin muttered, shaking his head.

“Bofur no!” Ori started yelling as the pan crashed to the floor. “That was supposed to be for the wedding!”

Nori could be heard cackling, causing Dwalin to finally get up from his seat and go into the kitchen, stopping the rowdy crowd. The other Dwarves soon emerged from the kitchen looking sad.
and defeated as their fun was abruptly stopped. Dwalin did not want Thorin to come back to a mess of food in the kitchen, knowing he was already frustrated as it was.

Meanwhile Thorin was indeed stressed out of his mind as Dís and the same dams that had helped Natalya were now fussing over him, trying to make sure his wedding outfit would fit just right.

The most important piece of the groom’s outfit was the elaborate cloak that was worn on top of the other garb. The cloak was traditionally adorned with various gems along the lapels as well as fur. It was known to be the heaviest garment for the King besides the regal armor.

“We still need to make a new tunic and trousers.” Dís explained to the Dwarrowdams who all nodded. She turned back to Thorin who was still looking rather annoyed. “It is customary that completely new garb is made for the bride and groom so that they enter their new life together new on the inside and the outside.” She explained to him and saw him slightly nod.

Thorin sighed, knowing the tradition all too well. He remembered Dwalin would constantly be bugging him about it while he was ruling in Ered Luin. He would always comment to Thorin. You need to pick a sturdy Dwarrowdam to rule by your side once we reach Erebor. He would always pause before adding. It is a way for you to acquire a new wardrobe. Thorin had always ignored him and never heeded his advice knowing that if he fell in love it could jeopardize the whole quest should the Dwarrowdam wish to accompany them. He also knew he could not afford to be easily distracted with love or reclaiming Erebor would have surely failed. The journey did end up being quite perilous and almost failed, especially in Mirkwood. If it hadn’t been for Natalya. Thorin’s mind suddenly flashed back to the first time he had seen the half-Elf in Mirkwood as they were being captured. The Dwarf had been immediately drawn to her beauty although he did not know why at the time. Thorin felt a slight smile play across his lips as he remembered the first time she had spoken to him in the cell. He suddenly snapped out of his daze when he realized Dís and the other Dwarrowdams had stopped what they were doing to stare at him with funny expressions across their faces. Thorin swallowed, looking between all of them then quickly looked back at the ground, embarrassed.

Dís shook her head with a smile, knowing very well what was going through her brother’s head. “That is all for now Thorin.” She paused, collecting her belongings. “We will come find you again when we have decided on materials.”

Thorin nodded as he was finally glad they were leaving him alone. He left the room, not long after them and went to find Balin and Ori. After searching the dining hall Thorin moved on to the library when he did not find them. The Dwarf finally found them in one of the scribe rooms. “Oh good.” Thorin said as he entered the room, making Ori jump. “I see you have begun writing the Zarb.”

Ori nodded. “Yes, your majesty.” He said, bowing his head. The Zarb was the marriage contract that was read at the wedding then given to the couple to keep in a safe place once the ceremony had ended.

“I will be in the forge should you need me.” Thorin said, nodding to Balin and Ori.

“Yes, your majesty” Ori answered, still writing on the parchment.

Thorin quickly left the room, heading with long strides to the forge. When he entered he saw a sight that he was not expecting. Natalya had her hair pulled into a low ponytail and had a hammer lifted above her head, bringing it down onto the anvil. She wore a loose navy tunic with charcoal grey pants and boots. Thorin quickly walked over to the half-Elf, his blood boiling. “Natalya.” Thorin said strongly, grabbing her slender wrist and pulling it away from the hammer and anvil.
“What do you think you are doing?” The Dwarf asked in a hushed tone, his eyes furious.

“What?” Natalya startled, jumping as she stared at him in fear. “I was just making the ring for our marriage.” She gulped, dropping the hammer on the stone floor as the Dwarf pulled her away from the anvil. Looking back in fear, Natalya saw the ring she had been crafting fall to the ground and bend, giving barely a clink as the metal was not fully set.

“My wife will not be seen doing peasants work.” Thorin growled in her ear not caring that her few hours of hard work had just crashed to the floor. “You are a lady.” By this time some of the Dwarves in the forge had stopped what they were doing to watch Thorin and Natalya.

The female felt heat rising to her cheeks as Thorin put his hand to the small of her back and began to push her out of the forge. “If you have not forgotten Thorin son of Thrain…” Natalya scolded, taking a deep breath. “I have just as much right to forge our marriage rings as you do!” She exclaimed, her voice getting louder. The female knew that they had already attracted most of the Dwarves attention in the forge by now anyway.

Thorin clamped his hand over her mouth and drug her out of the forge and over to a side hallway.

“Natalya.” He said strongly, looking into her hazel eyes. The Dwarf backed the half-Elf into a wall and had a vice grip on her arm and did not show any signs of letting up. “You are to be a Queen.” Thorin said, the anger fading from his voice. “You should not be crafting…”

“I am not the Queen yet.” Natalya said softly, putting her finger over his lips in an attempt to calm him. “Have you forgotten?” She asked, looking into his eyes, seeing the anger drain from them. “My people were both crafters. On the side of the Elves and the Dwarves.” She had even been taught to craft some things while in the Woodland Realm, although not much.

Thorin sighed, realizing she was right. “I just do not want you to be disrespected.” He whispered, looking at her. “You need to be treated as a Queen should be. With respect.”

“I will be treated with respect.” Natalya assured him. “Perhaps even more so than if I sat in council meetings all day and didn’t understand that the people work hard all day to make a living.” She looked at him raising her eyebrows. putting her hands on her hips. The half-Elf felt his hand release its grip on her arm and fall back to his side.

Thorin sighed. “I just do not want you to overwork yourself either.” He explained, looking away, embarrassed that he had reacted so harshly.

“I assure you that I am not.” Natalya said with a smile, placing her hand on his cheek and turning his face back towards her. “I want this ring to be special to you.” She said softly, staring into his eyes.

Thorin immediately felt guilt pooling in his stomach, realizing that in his anger he had caused the ring to fall off the anvil. He licked his lips and swallowed hard, not wanting to tell Natalya but knew he had to. “Natalya.” The Dwarf whispered, embarrassed. “About the ring.”

“I know.” Natalya said, looking at him. “I saw it fall to the ground.” She saw pain cross Thorin’s face, knowing what he had done. “Luckily I was going to redo it anyway.” She whispered with a smile, putting her hand on his arm.

Thorin sighed. “I apologize.” He paused, still staring at the ground. “Please forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive.” Natalya chuckled, shaking her head. “It will be fine.”

Thorin gently touched her cheek. “I was just so happening to come to work on your ring as well.”
He smiled, staring into her eyes.

“Shall we get to work then?”

“Yes we shall.” Thorin answered, pushing the sweaty hair strands out of Natalya’s face with a smile.

They entered the forge again, this time together. The eyes of almost every Dwarf in the room were locked onto them. Natalya gave Thorin a slight smirk as they each went to an anvil with their backs to each other. Immediately, the pair began working vigorously on their wedding rings, ensuring they were perfect.

Natalya smiled as she started over, knowing just how to make the ring perfect for her betrothed.

Thorin already knew what he was going to do, having made the other ring for Natalya just yesterday. Removing his shirt before he started to work, he discarded it on the ground at his feet. The Dwarf began hammering away, using the same design as Natalya’s other ring; however, he added several more Dwarvish designs on this new one. Thorin then took another small piece of metal. He shaped it into a square slightly larger than the width of the band and carefully etched the symbol of the clan of Durin onto it. Gently picking the small piece of metal up, he bonded it onto the rest of the ring, ensuring the design did not fade.

Meanwhile Natalya had been forging her ring, unable to wipe the smile off of her face at her accomplishment. She added a slight bit of a raised detail on the edge so it was not too plain and boring. Beaming with pride, the half-Elf stared at the ring, hoping Thorin would like it as much as she did. She looked over to see that he was still hammering away and at some point had pulled his hair back with a leather string so it would not interfere with his work. The half-Elf gulped, feeling herself get red in the face. Finally forcing herself to look away, she took the tongs and picked up the ring, dipping it into the bucket of water beside her. Listening to the hot metal touch the water with a sizzle, Natalya looked back over to Thorin, unable to help herself as she kept the ring in the water a few more seconds for it to cool off. She stood still and watched, as if in a trance as his hardened muscles flexed with every movement. Natalya noticed when he turned his head that he had left the two braids on either side of his face loose and hanging. The female wondered how he still managed to look attractive while hard at work and his hair pulled back. Pulling the tongs back out of the water, Natalya took the ring and dried it on the edge of her shirt. The half-Elf swallowed and took a deep breath before slowly making her way over to Thorin. Her heart was now threatening to beat out of her chest at the sight of him. “Thorin.” Natalya smiled, making her presence known. She swallowed again when he turned towards her, a smile on his face as well.

“Natalya!” Thorin exclaimed, turning to face her, still smiling. He hid the ring behind his back, wanting to keep it a surprise until the wedding day.

“I see you copied my hairstyle.” Natalya commented with a slight smirk and a chuckle.

“I liked it.” Thorin chuckled, playing with the ponytail then flipping it back over his shoulder. “It is easier when I do my smithing.”

“I suppose it is.” Natalya said, trying to form words as she reached up to play with one of the loose braids framing his face.

Thorin smiled as she wrapped the braid around her smaller fingers and gave it a slight tug. “Did you have anything to say to me?” Thorin asked with one eyebrow raised. “Or did you merely want to stand in my presence?”
Natalya looked at him, thinking about how to answer. “Well.” She paused, looking away with her brow furrowed as if in thought. “I was contemplating on showing you my ring but now I don’t think I will.” She said, looking back to meet his gaze with a smile.

Thorin chuckled. “Well then Dís had better put her seamstresses to work so we can have the wedding as soon as possible.” He slowly brought his face closer to hers, the heat radiating off them mixed in the air, making it dense.

Licking her lips and swallowing, Natalya could feel the heat radiating off Thorin’s body as he stepped closer to her. Suddenly, his lips gently touched her in a quick, chaste kiss. “Thorin.” She whispered, closing her eyes. She soon felt a rush of cold air against her lips as he pulled away but she kept her eyes closed and felt his hand reach up and touch her jawline.

“Natalya.” Thorin whispered, making sure only she could hear.

The female simply nodded, knowing what he wanted to say without him saying a word.

They stayed silent for a moment as they stared into each other’s eyes. Natalya side glanced, seeing other Dwarves staring at them. “Thorin.” She whispered. “We are being watched.”

“I know.” Thorin whispered, gently touching the pointed tip of Natalya’s ear.

Natalya grinned, enjoying his soothing presence. “I need to speak with Dís.” The half-Elf continued to whisper as she looked at her betrothed.

Thorin nodded understanding that if the dress was to be finished, Natalya had to still pick out fabrics and try it on. “Make sure she sews that dress as fast as she can.” He smiled, looking at the half-Elf.

“I will.” Natalya answered, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek and hid the golden ring in her pocket as she left the room.

Thorin smiled as he watched her leave, barely being able to contain his glee. The day of the wedding now all depended on how fast Dís and her seamstresses could sew two outfits.

Natalya walked across Erebor searching for Dís. As she caught her reflection in a mirror, she saw that her hair was disheveled and she had a few black smudges across her face. She quickly wiped them off with the sleeve of her shirt. Continuing to look for Dís, Natalya finally found the Dwarrowdam in her chambers where she had the partially finished dress laying across the bed. It was the same shade as the comforter and Natalya almost did not see it. “Wow.” She breathed, walking up behind the Dwarrowdam.

“Hello dear I did not hear you come in.” Dís smiled, turning to face Natalya. “I hope you like it.”

“It is the most gorgeous dress that I have ever seen.” Natalya said, walking closer to it as it lay across the bed. She touched the fabric, looking at the Dwarrowdam.

“Do you like the fabric choice?” Dís asked, watching Natalya’s facial expressions. “I knew you were forging your ring so I decided not to bother you.”

“Dís I think it is perfect.” Natalya exclaimed, still running her hand along the fabric.

Thorin’s sister watched the half-Elf with a smile as she continued to inspect the dress. “You will need to try it on before I make the final stitches.”
“Of course.” Natalya said, more than happy to try it on. She picked it up and slipped into it. As soon as the dress was on her, she knew she loved it. It had slim fitting silk under sleeves with the same shade of blue tulle in a bell shaped over sleeve. Natalya loved the style of the loose style paired with the fitted. The corset area of the dress had a built in waistband made of gold textured material and hugged her waist perfectly. The dress also had a v-shaped neckline with jewels studded across the edge.

“Here is this.” Dís said, handing Natalya a dark brown regal fur collar.

Natalya took it and draped it over her shoulders and turned around to admire herself in the mirror. She saw that the same tulle also covered the bottom of the dress and there were gems running along the bottom edge. There was so much detail to the dress that Natalya wondered how late Dís and the other Dwarrowdams must have been up to work to make it. She looked over when she heard the door open. “Anairë!” The half-Elf exclaimed, looking at her friend.

“Oh Natalya!” Anairë exclaimed, happy to see her friend finally wearing the dress.

“We made the front slightly shorter than the back so you would not be tripping over yourself as you walk.” Dís explained, walking around Natalya and examining the dress to make sure there were no imperfections.

“You look stunning!” Anairë said, looking closer at the details of the dress as well.

Natalya touched the fur, feeling something cold against her fingers. When she looked down she saw that clasps had been sewn into the fur to keep it from sliding off. Examining them closer, Natalya noticed that gems had been placed on the clasps that were also used on the hem of the dress. The tulle had been cut into a V-shape at the front so it had a train in the back while exposing the silk under layer that shined in the torchlight. She could not stop smiling as she walked across the room in the dress, examining it from every angle.

“You are going to make an amazing Queen and an even better wife.” Anairë said with tears in her eyes as she beamed with pride.

“Thank you.” Natalya said, touching Anairë’s elbow with a slight smile. “I really hope so.” She whispered, looking down at the ground.

“You will.” The Elf reassured her with a smile.

Natalya smiled at her then looked back at Dís.

“I am so glad it fits.” The Dwarrowdam said, beaming.

“Me too.” Natalya commented, proud to wear such a beautiful garment.

“I just want to ensure it is perfect for your special day.” Dís said as the half-Elf slipped the dress off and changed back into her other clothes.

“It is more than perfect.” Natalya said, gently handling the dress and giving it back to the Dwarrowdam.

Dís took the dress and laid it back across the bed, taking a good look at it for loose seams or any imperfections.

“What time is it?” Natalya asked, seeing a soft golden glow coming through the window signaling the setting of the sun.
“Almost time for dinner.” Díns answered, straightening out the wrinkles in the dress.

“How long was I in the forges?” Natalya asked, shocked as she looked at Anairë, her eyes wide.

“A few hours.” Anairë answered. “I assumed you were not hungry so I did not come get you.”

Natalya did not realize she had been down there that long. “I do feel hungry now that you mention it.” She chuckled.

“Well let’s go eat then!” Anairë exclaimed, putting her hand on Natalya’s shoulder and started to lead her out the door. “Díís are you coming?” The Elf asked, looking back at Thorin’s sister.

“I will be there in a little while.” Díís turned back towards them with a smile.

Natalya and Anairë walked out of the room, heading to the dining hall. It was earlier than they usually ate and the room was considerably more empty. Natalya looked around to see that their normal spot was open. It was the first time that she noticed that the table was the only one fully decorated. The others were a plain grey polished stone. Natalya figured that that was the way the King and some of his advisors always had a place to sit. She took her normal place at the right side of where Thorin usually sat as she quickly scanned the room for him.

Thorin entered the dining hall a while later with black smudges on his face and he smiled when he saw Natalya.

Natalya was talking to Anairë when she saw him walk up. “Hello Thorin.” She smiled, seeing him all dirty. “Did you finish?”

“I did.” Thorin beamed proudly. At that moment, Díís entered the room as well, and walked up behind Thorin.

“I have to sew your outfit together tomorrow.” She said, making Thorin jump. “Luckily it will not be as difficult as Natalya’s.”

Thorin sighed. “Very well.” He said, turning and smiling at his sister.

“Would you like me to prepare a meal for you Thorin?” Natalya asked, looking back towards the kitchens.

Thorin waved his hand. “That will not be necessary.” He smiled at Natalya, not wanting her to do anymore work.

Natalya watched as he slumped into his chair, exhausted. “You need to eat.” She stated, going back into the kitchen to prepare a meal for him. The half-Elf smiled at Díís who was standing next to his chair on the other side.

“Natalya no.” Thorin protested but she was already gone. He sighed and looked up at his sister who was laughing.

“You have taught her how to be stubborn.” The Dwarrowdam said, smiling down at her brother.

“I think it was you who taught her to be stubborn.” Thorin chuckled. “I have barely seen her these last few days since she has been with you preparing her outfit.”

Díís shook her head and saw Natalya come out of the kitchen with a tray of food in her hands.

“This is for both of you.” She said with a smile as she placed the tray of steaming hot food in front
of Thorin and Dís.

“Thank you dear.” The Darrowdam said, taking a seat to Thorin’s left.

Instead of taking her seat next to Thorin, Natalya walked down to where Ori was sitting with Balin. They had come into the dining hall a few moments after Natalya. “Good evening.” The female said, walking up to them. She looked down at Ori. “Would you mind helping me?”

“Of course.” Ori said, turning to face his future Queen.

“I know that vows are said during a marriage.” Natalya said, nervously licking her lips as she paused. “Are they spoken in khuzdul?”

“They are.” Ori said looking up at her. “I had planned on speaking to you about that but it seems you beat me to it.” The young Dwarf smiled.

“Could you please teach me?”

“I would be honored.” Ori smiled. “Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.” Natalya confirmed.

Ori bowed his head and turned back to the table.

Natalya would have never imagined that she would be learning the most secret language in all of Middle Earth. She got goosebumps just thinking about it and she couldn’t control her smile as she walked back over to Thorin and Dís.

“What makes my Queen so happy?” Thorin asked, seeing the beaming smile on Natalya’s face.

“Nothing my love.” Natalya said, sitting next to him. “You will find out soon enough.”

Thorin held her hand once she sat down and he finished his meal. He sat back in his chair, yawned and stretched.

“Tired?” Natalya asked, still holding Thorin’s hand.

Thorin nodded, rising from his seat to head back to his chambers. He bid everyone a good night and walked with Natalya back to the royal wing. “Good night my love.” The Dwarf whispered and kissed the female as he dropped her off at her room.

“Goodnight Thorin.” Natalya said, her voice soft. “Words cannot express my love for you.” She whispered, kissing him again.

“Nor I for you.” Thorin said with a smile. “Now get some sleep.” He tucked her hair behind her ear, smiling.

“I will.”

Thorin reached past her and opened the door for her, smiling. “Good night.”

“Good night, Thorin.” Natalya said, smiling back at him as she entered her room.

The next morning, the half-Elf awoke earlier than usual, knowing that today was the day she was to learn her Dwarven vows to recite at the wedding. Nervous and excited, she headed to the library to find Ori and Balin. Ori was of course already sitting at a table with an old worn down book. He
raised his head when he saw Natalya enter.

“Morning.” Ori said in his usual cheery voice.

“Good morning Ori.” Natalya said, sitting down and folding her hands on the table. “What would you like me to start off with?”

“I think it would be best if you just memorized the blessings and the vows for now and the rest can come later.” He explained. “I just do not want to give you too much information to confuse you.”

Natalya nodded, looking at the book that Ori had lying on the table.

“This is the first verse you are expected to know.” The Dwarrow explained, pointing to the first line on the page.

Natalya gulped, the words looking completely foreign to her.

“It goes like this.” Ori said, speaking it aloud. He then looked to Natalya with a smile and pushed the book closer to her. “You try.”

Natalya placed her finger on the first word, not even sure what to say. She took a deep breath and was about to attempt the first word when shouting was heard from outside the library. Suddenly, Fili and Kili came crashing into the library, laughing their heads off.

“What is going on?” Ori asked, shocked at the sudden outburst in the middle of his lesson.

“Oh Mahal.” Kili said, doubled over laughing. “Uncle Thorin is so angry.”

At the mention of Thorin’s name, Natalya looked at both of the brothers. “Why is he mad?”

“Well uh.” Fili paused, trying to look innocent. “We might have snuck up behind him and poured water on him.”

“You what?” Natalya asked, now getting slightly frustrated as well. The brothers should have known better than to mess with Thorin when he was already stressed.

“He didn’t find it as funny as we did.” Kili said, sheepishly. Both of the brothers looked at the ground, expecting Natalya to scold them. “We just wanted to try and make him lighten up.”

The half-Elf shook her head, chuckling. “You just need to learn when is the right time to do something and while Thorin is under a lot of pressure.” She paused. “I do not think now is the right time.” She then gave them a look of disapproval.

“Yes Natalya.” The brothers sighed, seeing her look and hanging their heads before shuffling out of the library.

“Where were we?” Natalya asked herself, looking back at the page. She looked over to Ori who was smiling and shaking his head. The half-Elf looked back down at the Khuzdul and tried to pronounce the first word. “Mam-” she paused, trying to sound out the rest. “-ahdûn.” She continued, looking nervously at Ori.

“Not bad,” The Dwarf said, “but you need to pronounce each letter.”

Natalya tried again, getting better each time. A few hours later she had finally memorized all of the verses of the blessing.
“It will also be helpful since Thorin will be the first one to say it then you will repeat him.” Ori said, looking at Natalya who still seemed nervous.

“That will definitely help.” Natalya agreed, a smile crossing her face at the thought of Thorin speaking Khuzdul. He had already said a few words in her presence; but nothing more.

“Now for the vows.” Ori said, turning the page. “These are a little harder.” He admitted. “If you would like to take a break and come back later you can.” The Dwarf said, waiting for a response.

“I would like to try it now.” Natalya said, feeling more confident. She swallowed, staring at all of the letters with different accents.

“Essentially you and Thorin will again say the same thing although when it is your turn to speak you use a different form of the same word.” Ori spoke Natalya’s verse and she copied. “You are learning quickly.” He said, happily, seeing the female smile at the compliment.

Meanwhile, Thorin was not happy having been drenched by his nephews. “I will send you straight to Mahal’s halls!” He had just changed out of his regal attire that Dís had made for him and it was within splashing distance of his nephew’s mischief.

The Dwarrowdam was gathering some supplies to finish up the outfit when she saw Thorin marching out of his room, soaking wet. “What happened?” She asked, stopping him from chasing them.

“You can clearly see.” Thorin growled, looking at his sister.

“I am sure it was harmless.” Dís said. Her son’s always had a keen eye for pranks and would pull them on various Dwarves of Ered Luin, quickly earning a name for themselves. Dís had told them many times that they were not to act like that, fearing they might put shame to the Durin line but they never stopped. She sighed, looking back to Thorin. “Well just go dry yourself off and wear different clothes.” The Dwarrowdam said, pushing him back towards his room."

“Fine.” Thorin grumbled and walked back to this room, slamming the door.

Back in the library, Ori was showing Natalya the Zarb. “The marriage contract, or Zarb as it called in Khuzdul, is always hand written by a scribe and states how the wife is acquired.”

“Acquired?” Natalya asked, confused.

“Well usually the Dwarf has to show that he has enough money to be able to support the wife and possibly a child should one come along.” Ori explained.

Natalya nodded. “But since Thorin is the King…” She paused, wanting to know what Ori would say.

“That is his right to marry.” Ori explained. “The King, or future King in this case, does not need to present money to acquire his spouse since he will be ruler of Erebor.”

Natalya looked at him, waiting for the Dwarf to continue.

“Your Zarb will be fairly short in this case since neither of your parents are here to bless the marriage.” Ori paused. “Most likely Thorin will ask certain members of the company to accept and bless the marriage.” He continued. “You need to pick two people as well to accept the marriage from your side.”
Natalya licked her lips. “Would Anairë and Dís suffice?” She asked, getting nervous again.

Ori nodded. “They would. You just need to ask their permission.”

Natalya nodded. “Thank you for your time Ori.” She finally stood from her chair and bowed, leaving the room. Deciding that now would probably not be the best time to see Thorin, the female headed to the dining hall to find food. It was slightly past midday and she was starving. When she walked into the large room however, Thorin was there. “Thorin!” Natalya exclaimed, surprised to see him.

“Good afternoon.” Thorin said, smiling.

Natalya smiled back then she noticed his hair was still slightly damp but his clothes were dry. “I heard about what happened.” The half-Elf said, standing beside him and holding his hand.

“Yes.” Thorin sighed, slightly grumbling. “I overreacted slightly but they still need to learn their place.”

Natalya continued holding his hand, saying nothing as they took a seat. “What is to eat?”

“Fish.” Thorin answered. “The Dwarves picked up some from the Lake-town traders yesterday. I had one made one for you as well.”

“Oh Thorin.” Natalya said, shocked. “You didn’t have to.” She smiled at him.

Thorin kissed her on the cheek as Bombur presented their food. Natalya rather enjoyed the meal, as she had not had much fish while in Mirkwood. Occasionally the Lake-town men would give the Elves some when they traded for the wine barrels.

“This is delightful.” Natalya said, looking at Thorin who seemed to be enjoying it just as much.

“It is indeed.” Thorin agreed, watching Natalya eat.

The rest of the day went by quickly and it was soon time for dinner. Natalya had been in the Library with Ori, perfecting her Khuzdul while Dís had been finishing up the wedding outfits. Thorin had been attending to some Kingly duties that had come up at an unexpected time. Once the meal was over, Dís stood up. “I have something important I need to share.” She said loudly, causing all heads to turn towards her. “I have officially finished the outfits of the bride and groom.” She stated, seeing Thorin and Natalya’s shocked faces. “This means that they will be able to wed whenever they are ready.” She smiled at the couple and saw Natalya grab Thorin’s hand.

Natalya had a wide grin on her face as she and Thorin stared at each other. They quickly kissed as the table cheered. “What about tomorrow at sunset.” Thorin suggested to his betrothed. “Then we will still have time to have last minute preparations.”

“That sounds wonderful.” Natalya said, staring deeply into the eyes of her betrothed.

“Tomorrow at sundown.” Thorin said now loud enough for the whole table to hear. Him and Natalya stood up as everyone began clapping and cheering.

Natalya felt butterflies in her stomach at the thought of being wed to the one of her dreams.

The night finally came to a close and Thorin led Natalya to her chamber. “This will be the last night I get to do this.”Thorin whispered, his face close to Natalya’s.
“Yes it is.” Natalya giggled.

“I am proud to have such a strong woman to be called my wife.” Thorin said, brushing his lips over hers.

“And I am proud to be married to the King of the strongest of the seven Dwarf clans.” Natalya said, still smiling as her eyes fluttered shut.

Thorin and her shared another kiss before they parted ways. Natalya entered her room and changed into her nightclothes. Lying down on the bed, she was not able to sleep as her mind was racing thinking about the events of the next day.

Thorin was lying in the next room over, not able to sleep either. He tossed and turned, his mind racing.

Morning finally came and Natalya was already awake, excited to start a new chapter in her life, married to the one she loved. Wanting to remember her Khuzdul lines, the female began rehearsing. She smiled, as the words now all seemed to come naturally to her. Knowing the rest of the mountain was not yet awake; she took a hot bath and dressed herself in her best attire for the day. The half-Elf went down early to the dining hall and fixed herself breakfast, awaiting the arrival of the others. Slowly more members of the company began entering the room and went to congratulate her.

“So does this make you our Aunt now?” Kili asked, sitting next to Natalya with a smile.

“I guess it does.” Natalya answered with a chuckle. She suddenly looked up to see Thorin entering and the room fell silent. He walked over to her and kissed her tenderly.

Thorin had no words to say as he kissed his soon to be wife. Pulling back from the kiss, he smiled at her. “Natalya.” He whispered, touching her hair. “Long have I waited for this day.”

Natalya smiled back, feeling his hand on her waist. After a few moments of silence between the two, they took a seat and were served breakfast. The rest of the day dragged on for Natalya, as there was now much to do but wait. She had been sitting in her room sketching when she finally heard a knock on the wooden door. The female opened it to see Dís standing there with a grin spread across her face.

“It is finished.” She said, handing Natalya the folded garment that was the dress.

“Thank you so much Dís. It is gorgeous.”

“I am so glad you love it.” Thorin’s sister said, still smiling.

Natalya leaned forward and hugged the Dwarrowdam, careful not to crush the dress in between them.

“I will go present Thorin with his clothes now.” Dís said, flashing a smile.

“Oh I am sure he will love that.” Natalya said with a chuckle. She held the dress in her arms as she watched Dís head to Thorin’s chambers. Walking back into her room, she unfolded the dress, holding it up to herself in front of the mirror. She was still impressed with the immaculate attention to detail. She knew it would be best to wait to put it on so it was not wrinkled before the wedding.

Meanwhile, Thorin finally had the chance to see the Zarb. He looked over Ori’s shoulder as the Dwarf wrote a few final statements then added simple designs along the edge to make it more
fancy. “How do you like it?”

“It is wonderful.” Thorin said, looking at the parchment. He smiled down at Ori, proud of his work.

The young Dwarf beamed up at Thorin. “I am glad you approve. Your majesty.”

Thorin put his hand on Ori’s shoulder. “Thank you.” He said softly. Walking out of the library he headed towards the dining hall. He could smell the food being prepared in the kitchen. Looking at the large archway that led towards the royal wing, Thorin waited for Natalya. She finally arrived with Anairë and Dís at her side.

“Thorin!” Natalya said happily as she walked over to him. “Dís and Anairë have agreed to accept the marriage.” She smiled, looking at her betrothed.

“That’s wonderful.” Thorin answered with a smile. “I have chosen Ori and Dwalin.” He looked over to where the two Dwarves were still in conversation.

“I am so happy for you.” Dís said, looking at the couple.

Natalya couldn’t stop smiling as she put her hand on Thorin’s shoulder.

They finally all sat down and the meal was brought out.

“This is extravagant.” Natalya said as more plates were brought out than she could count.

Thorin chuckled, holding her hand. “This is nothing compared to the feast that will be prepared for tonight.” He smiled as he looked down at the half-Elf’s shocked face.

Natalya smiled, suddenly thinking about the wedding.

“You need to start getting ready after the meal.” Dís stated, looking at Natalya.

The half-Elf looked at her and nodded, swallowing hard. She was excited and nervous at the same time. Thorin must have noticed as she felt him squeeze her hand. They all ate the meal joyously and the hall was filled with laughter and loud chatter. Natalya smiled; glad the company was finally enjoying themselves after the stress the quest had put on all of them.

Anairë sat diagonally from Natalya, glad she was finally happy as well. She knew that Natalya had not particularly ever cared for Mirkwood; she just enjoyed having something to do day by day. Suddenly she remembered something, *The Arkenstone*. The Elf thought, a shocked look crossing her face. She did not know what had happened to it after the battle but knew as long as the stone was not destroyed, Thorin had the chance to fall prey to the sickness again. Anairë shook her head, clearing the thought from her mind as she did not want to be thinking bad thoughts during a joyous celebration. The Elf looked to see that Dís was staring at her.

“What is wrong dear?” Thorin’s sister asked, seeing worry cross the Elf’s face.

“Oh I am just shocked this is all finally happening.” Anairë lied, not wanting to tell Dís what she had just thought of. “I know Natalya has been in love with Thorin ever since Mirkwood.”

Dís smiled. “I am happy for Thorin as well.” She commented. “He deserves to finally be happy.” The Dwarrowdam shook her head. “I have not seen him smile this much since before the fall of Erebor.”
“I know him and Natalya will make great rulers.” Anairë said, looking down the table at Thorin and her friend, seeing them laughing joyously. Thorin had a mug of ale in his hand and it looked as if he was going to splash it everywhere. Anairë laughed at the sight.

“Now don’t get drunk just yet!” Dís commanded, yelling down the table at her brother.

“I have no intention to.” Thorin said, still smiling. “I can actually hold my liquor.”

Natalya laughed and shook her head. “I think you should stop now before it gets out of hand.” She kissed his cheek, grabbing the mug from his hand and putting it on the table.

“Well we know who the smart one in the relationship is.” Dís smirked, looking at her brother.

Thorin rolled his eyes, ignoring his sister. Silence settled on the table for a few moments before Natalya stood up. “I had best be getting ready.” She said, looking down at Thorin. Just saying the words made butterflies in her stomach. The half-Elf gave Thorin a quick kiss before heading back to her chamber. She stepped into her room and went to the bathroom, drawing a bath for herself. After relaxing in the tub for a while, Natalya entered her room to see Dís.

“Natalya.” The Dwarrowdam smiled. “I was just coming to ask if you would like assistance with your hair.”

“I would.” Natalya answered, smiling. “I never really learned how to braid that well.” She chuckled.

“Well you just sit back and relax and I will braid it for you.” Dís said, motioning to the chair.

Natalya took a seat and felt Dís run a brush through her hair. She felt her finally begin to start braiding and she watched in the mirror.

Dís worked in silence but after a few minutes, began softly humming. She took a clip and separated the hair coming from the already braided top section, and pinned it back. Moving to the side of the half-Elf’s head, she added two braids running down either side and joined the ends into the large braid then pulled the end over her shoulder. “Done!” Dís finally said, looking at Natalya in the mirror.

“It’s gorgeous!” Natalya exclaimed, trying to keep from touching it and messing it up. The half-Elf smiled, examining it in the mirror. It really brought out the Dwarvish features in her face that she had not noticed before.

“Once your dress is on then we can add the adornments.” Dís said, pulling various jeweled items from her pockets.

Natalya smiled, seeing how sparkly they were and nodded. She went and retrieved the dress from where she had neatly hung it in the armoire. The half-Elf let Dís help her into it and stood once again in front of the mirror, barely containing her excitement.

Anairë was on her way to Natalya’s chamber, trying not to act nervous. She did not want Natalya asking her what was wrong. Knocking on the door, she smiled as Dís, who was beaming as she opened it.

“Come in.” Thorin’s sister exclaimed, ushering the Elf inside.

“Natalya you are gorgeous.” Anairë said softly, barely recognizing the woman that stood before her. She was completely regal and her looks fit for a Queen.
“Thank you Anairë.” Natalya said with a slight smile.

Dís walked back over to Natalya and began adding the adornments to her hair. She attached a golden chain headpiece with a large jewel in the front then added a matching hairpin to her braid. The hairpin stuck up in the back, making it visible from the front and was almost like a tiara. “You look gorgeous.” Dís whispered. She then handed Natalya two golden cuff bracelets with Dwarvish designs on them. “Now you are ready.” The Dwarrowdam smiled, happy that Natalya was to become a part of the kingdom.

Natalya nodded, her throat running dry. She would have never guessed that she was going to get this nervous at the happiest moment in her life. She kept looking towards the balcony doors, wishing she could open them to let some cool air in but she noticed that there were large snowflakes outside the winter.

Dís smiled, seeing Natalya staring at the double doors. “Ah the first blizzard of the winter.”

Natalya nodded, looking outside to see the soft glow of the sun setting behind the already snow covered mountainside.

“We must go now.” Dís said, looking at Natalya who was still staring at the sunset and the snow.

The female followed Dís and Anairë out into the quiet hallway. The tradition was that the bride entered into the hall of her betrothed, signaling the start of their new life together. She licked her lips, nervous as the large doors to the royal wing closed behind them. Natalya twirled her silver ring around her finger and held onto the plain golden ring that she had forged.

Dís and Anairë each had one of their hands on her for comfort and reassurance.

Natalya was getting more nervous by the second as the Abkân (marriage) was finally beginning. The half-Elf felt her hands getting sweaty and she dragged them across the fabric of the front of her dress.

“Don’t do that.” Dís scolded her, not wanting to see the dress ruined before the ceremony even began. They were quietly standing outside of the royal wing, awaiting the signal to enter.

Natalya swallowed, more nervous than she had ever been in her entire life and she felt as if she would faint at any moment. She nervously began touching the end of her braid, reciting the Dwarvish she had learned in her head. Soon, trumpets sounded from within the wing and the large doors opened to reveal Thorin and Balin standing in the center of the open space. Natalya felt her heart hammering in her chest as she slowly walked in, the ends of her dress dragging behind her. She was for once thankful for the crisp, winter mountain air that kept her cool in the heavy garment.

The ceremony was small, as promised, and was held within the royal wing. The doors leading to the other respective areas had been shut from prying eyes as Thorin and Natalya were wed. The sun was continuing to set and the torches along the wall were lit. Their golden glow reflected off the jewels and adornments of the bride and groom. Natalya and Thorin were positioned apart from each other as was customary and they watched each other silently as Balin read the Zarb aloud.

The signal was given for Natalya and Thorin to finally approach each other. Natalya stood still as Thorin circled her, representing that he would guard her in his halls all of his life. They smiled at each other as cheers from the company were heard with Fili and Kili being the loudest. Once the noise had finally died down, Natalya and Thorin faced each other once more and the blessings were spoken aloud. Thorin spoke first, easily saying the Dwarvish words.
“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ muha sullu khama akrâzu Sulladad.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who has created everything for the glory of Eru)

Natalia was nervous and she could feel her hands begin to get sweaty again. Thorin had just spoken the first verse and she realized it was now her turn to speak. She took her time, enunciating each letter and syllable, the words surprisingly rolling off her tongue with ease. The rest of the blessings were then spoken.

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ muha kâmin, abbad ra hanâd.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who fashioned the earth, the mountains and the hills)

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ muha ìbin ra ritîh ni kurdû id-âbad.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who fashioned the gems and metals in the heart of the mountain)

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ muha khazâd ra barraf haded.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who fashioned the Dwarves and the seven houses)

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ gashara khazâd atrâb d’amzur ìbin ra ritîh ni kurdû id-âbad.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who taught the Dwarves the skill to work the gems and metals in the heart of the mountain)

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ mahgayada dûmmâ tur naddanhu.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who gladdens our Halls through his children)

“Mamahdûn Mahal ku’ mahgayada mayastro ra mayasthûna.”

(Blessed are you Mahal who gladdens groom and bride)

“Now for the vows.” Balin nodded, looking between them, his eyes glassy with tears at the joy radiating from the couple.

Thorin instinctively began speaking.

“Ni dûmê zasamkhiyiya zahar, ni kurduzi zâmkhihi azhâr.”

(In my Halls you will find a house, in your heart I will find a home)

Natalia took a shaky breath then replied with her verse.

“Ni dûmzu zâmkhihi zahar, ni kurdumê zasamkhihi azhâr.”

(In your Halls I will find a house, in my heart you will find a home)

Thorin smiled, as he listened to Natalia speak Khuzdul for the first time. The Dwarf then took Natalia’s hand, and removed the silver ring.

Balin opened a silver box with red velvet lining for them to place their betrothal rings in.

Natalia’s hand shook as she removed Thorin’s ring and placed it in the decorative box. She then held the golden ring in her palm, presenting it to Thorin.
Thorin did the same, revealing the ring he had meticulously crafted with a smile.

Natalya’s eyes widened at the sheer beauty of the ring as it caught the torchlight and seemed to emanate a glow. She felt Thorin take her hand and slip the ring onto her index finger of her right hand. Natalya took a shaky breath and did the same to Thorin, placing the golden ring she had made onto his index finger. The half-Elf felt a sense of relief after the rings were placed on their fingers. Looking down, she smiled as she saw that the symbol of Durin had been carved into the top of the ring.

Thorin and Natalya slowly locked eyes and leaned forward, sharing their first kiss as a married couple. Natalya’s hands rested on her husband’s shoulders as she finally felt relaxed. When they broke the connection, the whole room erupted into more cheering and celebration. Natalya and Thorin stood still for a long time, staring dreamily into each other’s eyes. They finally turned to face the small group with smiles across their faces. Balin then stepped up to present the Zarb to them, then bowed, backing away.

A large banquet of honor was held that night with a surplus of food and drink. Natalya had somehow convinced Thorin to only have one mug of ale so he would not be drunk. She laughed, seeing Fili and Kili beginning to get slightly tipsy and Dís trying to stop them. She suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder as she sat next to Thorin. The half-Elf looked up to see that it was Anairë.

“Congratulations.” Anairë said, bowing to both of them. “Your majesties.” She added with a smile.

Natalya chuckled, shaking her head. “Natalya is fine.” She insisted, seeing Anairë smile back.

“Now that Thorin and I are wed you can move your belongings into my old room.” She smiled up at the Elf.

Anairë smiled back and bowed. “Thank you, your majesty.”

Natalya nodded and saw Bilbo coming towards them.

“That was a pleasure to witness.” Bilbo said, approaching Thorin and Natalya and standing next to the tall Elf.

Thorin and Natalya smiled at the Hobbit. “I am glad you stayed.” the female nodded.

“Me too.” Bilbo stood there for a few more seconds before taking a seat further down the table.

The rest of the night went quickly and soon everyone was heading back to their chambers for the night. Natalya felt nervous, as this would be her first night with Thorin. She gulped as he gently put his hand on her lower back, leading her into his room.

Thorin shut and locked the door as well, being nervous himself. “Natalya.” He whispered, passionately kissing her again. He pulled away first, staring deep into her hazel eyes.

“Thorin I love you.” Natalya whispered as he held her. She leaned back to stare into his ocean blue eyes with a smile.

“I love you too.” Thorin whispered, their eyes still locked. They stayed silent for a while, simply enjoying each other’s company, not wanting to rush anything.

“We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.” Thorin whispered. He would never do anything his wife was uncomfortable with.

Natalya nodded. “I want to.”
They finally consummated the marriage and became one, husband and wife.
Natalya awoke with the rays of the sun’s first light. She was considered an early riser within the Dwarven kingdom; but such was the tendency of the Elves to always awake at the beginning of a new day. She lay perfectly still, as to not disturb the sleeping figure of her husband next to her. The Half-Elf felt a smile form on her face as she turned and watched Thorin still peacefully sleeping beside her. His breaths were even and deep as he was completely at rest. Natalya slowly stretched, trying not to move too much as to wake him. She slowly grabbed the white robe with fur trim beside the bed and slipped it on. As the half-Elf turned to rise, she heard Thorin mumble something. Her hazel eyes looked back at him to see that he had one of his bright blue eyes open, staring at her.

“Talya.” Thorin whispered as his eyes shut and he fell back asleep.

Natalya smiled and leaned over, softly kissing his cheek before rising and walking softly over to the dresser. Slowly opening the creaky doors, the female stared at the clothes for a moment.

“We are going to have our first official council meeting today.” Thorin groaned, still half asleep.

Natalya smiled to herself, having never heard him call her that before. Talya. She said nothing, knowing he would fall back asleep again. Shuffling through the folded stacks of clothing, she found a suitable dress for the day. Natalya wanted to be elegant but not too fancy as this was just a council meeting. The half-Elf swallowed hard, knowing this would be the first time most of the Dwarves saw her now as Thorin’s wife. She left the room and went into the bathroom to get dressed then returned to the room and stood in front of the full-length mirror, braiding her hair over her shoulder in a simple style. She could still see Thorin asleep in the reflection and she gave a soft smile. The council meeting was not for a few more hours so she decided to go to the kitchens to make herself some breakfast. Treading lightly out of the room, she walked down the corridors and staircases. Natalya only spotted a few Dwarves who simply nodded at her. She figured that most of the mountain by now knew of her by now either from seeing her, or the rumors. Finally making it to the kitchen, the half-Elf made herself breakfast. She then decided to prepare something more fancy for Thorin and took it back to their room. Slowly opening the door, she noticed that Thorin was not in bed. She then heard the bath water running from the other room. “Finally he is awake.” Natalya chuckled to herself. The half-Elf strode over to the fireplace where a log was now beginning to crackle and placed the tray of food on the table in between the two armchairs. She jumped when she felt a hand lightly touch her shoulder.

“Good morning my love.” Thorin said with a smile, looking at Natalya.

Natalya turned to look back at Thorin and smiled. “Good morning.” She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and held his hand. “Are you ready for the council meeting this morning?” She asked, still looking at him with her eyebrows raised.

“I am.” Thorin stated, holding his wife close to him.

“Who will be there?” Natalya paused, becoming slightly worried.

“Just a few Dwarves who may possibly become one of my lords in waiting.” Thorin said. “It will not be a big deal.” He paused. “I understand that you are to choose a lady in waiting as well.”

The half-Elf slightly nodded, her throat tight. She knew that not many Darrowdams would be willing to aid her in her daily routine.
“I have an idea for you.” Thorin said, turning her towards him and placing his hands on her shoulders. “As I understand it you already have made quite the bond with Dís.” He raised his eyebrows as a smile played across his face.

Natalya simply nodded. “Yes.” She paused, staring into Thorin’s eyes. “She has been kinder to me than any other Dwarrowdam in this mountain.”

“The normal Dwarrowdam may have a lady in waiting if she is within the court however you are the Queen so you are required to have two.” Thorin raised his eyebrows.

Natalya swallowed again. She knew that while the ladies in waiting were to only aid her in simple tasks, she knew that they might try to influence her on how to rule the kingdom. “What about Anairë?” She asked, her face quizzical. “I understand however that she is not a Dwarrowdam…”

“If Anairë agrees to it then I will not disapprove.” Thorin cut her off, giving her a slight kiss on the lips. “Now I must continue getting ready.”

The half-Elf smiled, staring at her husband. “What about your breakfast?” She asked, looking over to where she had sat the tray down on the table.

“I will eat in a moment.” Thorin called from the bathroom.

Natalya took a seat in one of the armchairs near the fireplace while she awaited Thorin’s return. He finally stepped back into the room, fully dressed in a royal blue tunic and dark grey trousers. “I like your dress.” Thorin said with a smile as he took a seat in the other armchair across from his wife. “It brings out the green in your eyes.” He commented, studying her face.

Natalya was surprised it had taken Thorin this long to notice and she looked at him and smiled. “Thank you.” She paused, leaning back in the chair.

Picking up a fork, Thorin looked at Natalya as he leaned forward towards the tray of food. “Will you not eat?”

“I have already eaten.” Natalya smiled at him. “I was not that hungry.”

Thorin knew she was nervous and did not say any more. He continued eating slowly and occasionally glanced at Natalya who had become more anxious by the moment. “You will be fine darling.” Thorin reassured her once more, putting his hand over top of hers. “There is absolutely nothing to worry about.”

Natalya nodded and licked her lips as she stared at Thorin’s calm expression. She watched as he finished the small tray of food. “Has a date been decided for your coronation?” She asked, trying to calm herself.

Thorin shook his head. “It will hopefully happen sometime within the next few days.” He paused. “I am having Balin and Ori try to find us a good time.”

“Us?” Natalya asked, slightly confused. She assumed that as Queen, her job would be mostly to aid Thorin in running the kingdom while being unseen.

“Why yes.” Thorin slightly chuckled. “You are to be crowned as well.”

Natalya’s jaw slackened. “I assumed it would be just you.” She swallowed, getting nervous again. “I have never heard of a Queen in a Dwarven Kingdom.”
Thorin nodded, smiling at his confused wife. “Normally they are not crowned and rarely ever leave the royal corridors but I have arranged to make things different for you.”

“Thorin I do not want any traditions to be broken on my behalf.” Natalya said strongly with her brow furrowed.

“Yes but now that I am to be the King I can change things.”

Natalya mirrored his smile, still nervous. She sat quietly, occasionally glancing his direction and wished that the meeting would come quicker so she could get it over with.

Thorin rose from his chair and stretched. Grabbing a small hair bead he quickly attached it to the section of beard near his chin that had been growing longer. The Dwarf smiled, remembering the mountain before the time of the dragon. He had kept his facial hair in a simple braid, but had cut it as soon as they reached Ered Luin. All of the Dwarves had cut their beards to remember their mourning. After a while, many of them allowed the hair to begin growing out but Thorin had kept his short as a constant reminder of his true home. After a few moments he picked up a few pieces of parchment on the desk.

“Are those the…”

Thorin nodded, showing them to his wife. “Now the whole Mountain has no reason to disrespect you.”

Natalya nodded, feeling her throat tighten.

“We should be going now.”

The half-Elf nodded and stood up, following Thorin out the door.

“There is nothing to worry about dear.” Thorin said, linking his arm with Natalya’s. “It will be a small meeting and you need not talk if you do not want to.”

Natalya nodded. She stayed quiet as they made their way past the other royal chambers.

“Ah.” Thorin slightly chuckled. “After the festivities last night Fili and Kili must have slept in.” He commented, looking to their closed doors.

“Well I would assume so.” Natalya slightly laughed, speaking for the first time in minutes. “It seemed as though they were thoroughly drunk last night.” She smiled at Thorin, feeling at ease in his presence then sighed, hoping the council meeting would be as calm as Thorin said. They finally reached the double doors where two guards stood on either side.

“My Lord Thorin.” One of the guards nodded to Thorin. “Lady Natalya.” He said, turning towards her and nodding.

Natalya and Thorin nodded and smiled back as they entered the room. The half-Elf sighed audibly, being glad they were the only ones in the room. Thorin took his seat at the far side of the table, at the head, and motioned for Natalya to sit next to him. “It is customary for the King and Queen to arrive first.” He said, watching as one of the guards brought them drinks on a silver tray. “Thank you.” Thorin said, nodding as the guard bowed and left the room.

Natalya relaxed in her chair, making sure to take deep even breaths to calm herself. She felt Thorin put his hand in hers and she turned to him with a smile. “I will be fine.” The half-Elf reassured her husband.
Thorin looked up as there was a knock at the door and the guard opened it, introducing a Dwarf.

“My Lord.” He bowed to Thorin. “My Lady.” He turned and then bowed to Natalya.

Natalya felt her throat tighten.

The Dwarf soon took a seat on the right side of the table. This went on for a few minutes until just about half the table was full.

Natalya scanned the room, noticing she was the only female. The half-Elf watched as a few of the Dwarves made casual conversation amongst themselves while waiting for the meeting to start. She picked up her glass and drank the last of the contents before setting it back onto the tray. Watching Thorin rise from his seat, she knew the meeting was now in session.

Everyone’s eyes turned towards the future King as he began speaking. “Good day to everyone. Now I understand this is the first official council meeting to be held within Erebor in over a century.” He paused, looking around the room to see everyone nodding. “I have summoned you all here to speak about our upcoming coronation as well as a few other pressing matters.”

Natalya suddenly felt all eyes in the room turn towards her as Thorin squeezed her shoulder and took his seat.

“This will be the first time a Queen has ever been crowned in the kingdom.” One Dwarf flat out stated, looking perplexed. It had not been announced yet Thorin insisted on crowning Natalya in front of the entire kingdom as well.

Thorin slightly stared him down. “Is that a problem?”

“No my lord.” The Dwarf answered, bowing his head.

“I’m glad to hear it.” Thorin answered with a smile as he held Natalya’s hand under the table. He then placed the pieces of rolled parchment on the table and began to untie them. “These show Natalya’s heritage.” The Dwarrow nodded towards each of the council members who strained to take a look.

“How do we know this is her?” One of the Dwarves exclaimed, looking at Natalya.

“Indeed.” Another Dwarf interjected, slamming his fist on the table.

“Atkat!” (Silence) Thorin shouted, rising from his seat. “If you are here to question me about who I marry then you are free to leave.”

Silence fell through the room for a few moments before everyone finally became calm once more.

Natalya swallowed, becoming slightly uneasy. She was not sure if she should say anything or not. She knew Thorin had told her she was not required to speak but she felt awkward if she did not participate.

“What about the Dwarrowdam you so hastily threw into the dungeons? She has been down there for quite a while.” A Dwarf with fiery red hair commented from the end of the table. “You do know she is one of Dain’s best warriors. He will not take lightly the news that she was thrown into there for no reason. Dain would have gladly sent her to this meeting if it had not been for you.”

“You are forgetting that Dain is also my cousin.” Thorin quickly added as he stared directly at the Dwarf that had made the comment. “The Dwarrowdam was insulting Natalya after she had just
saved my life in the battle.” He explained, looking around at all of the Dwarves shocked faces.

“But an Elf has never helped a Dwarf.” A younger male whispered further down the table.

“Silence.” Thorin commanded, his eyes narrowing. “This is not what we are here to discuss.”

“I will speak with the Dwarrowdam this evening.” Natalya spoke up with a slight smile, quieting the room. She wanted to give herself enough time to think about what she would say. “I’m sure we will be able to come to some sort of agreement.” The half-Elf said, feeling Thorin squeeze her hand under the table again.

All of the Dwarves nodded, surprised that she decided to speak.

“I presume the coronation takes place as soon as possible.” An elderly Dwarf quickly spoke up, changing back to the topic at hand. “If the throne is not taken soon then word of Erebor’s weakness will spread.” He looked around the table at all of the Dwarves who nodded.

“Aye.” A few chimed in, looking at Thorin and Natalya.

“And what of the plan to reclaim Moria?” The red haired Dwarf spoke up again. “I have heard that plan has been set in motion.”

“Not until Erebor regains its former strength.” Thorin simply answered. “That will take time. Much of the mountain had been destroyed in the dragon’s wrath and will need to be rebuilt.” He paused. “Repairs have started but they are slow. I will order every able bodied Dwarf to help if they are willing. I also understand if Dwarves of the Iron Hills wish to return to their homeland.”

“We will stay.” The same Dwarf immediately answered. “Dain sent me to this meeting to speak on behalf of the Iron Hills.”

“Very well.” Thorin said, nodding. “Does anyone else wish to speak?”

“My lord. There is also the matter of the gold.” The same elderly Dwarf spoke up again. “I understand provisions have been given to Mirkwood and Dale.”

“Yes.” Thorin nodded, looking at him. “More will be given as needed.” He assured them then paused before speaking again. “Anything else?”

The room fell silent as all the Dwarves shook their heads and looked around the table.

Thorin and Natalya rose to their feet, signaling the end of the meeting. The other Dwarves followed suit, bowing on their way out the door. Once everyone had left, Thorin turned back to Natalya. “I did not expect you to speak up.” He quickly grabbed the pieces of paper off the table and rolled them back up.

“Was I wrong?” The half-Elf asked, swallowing.

“Not at all amrâlimê.” (My love) Thorin smiled at her.

Natalya smiled back, unsure of the words meaning but knew it was good when Thorin planted a kiss on her cheek.

“Who even is this Dwarrowdam?” Natalya asked as Thorin and her left the council room.

“Duliera Ironheart.” Thorin answered, not meeting the questioning gaze of his wife.
“Ironheart?”

The Dwarf simply nodded but said no more as he continued walking. He handed the pieces of parchment to Balin and ordered for them to be framed in time for the coronation.

Natalya stayed silent as she followed Thorin back to their chambers then pulled her wrap around herself as she stood on the balcony. The half-Elf could see that snow had quickly begun to cover the ground as the large flakes had begun falling. She had never witnessed much snow in the Woodland Realm as most of it stayed in the trees. “Wow.” Natalya breathed as her eyes scanned the white glistening ground.

“Beautiful isn’t it?” Thorin asked, walking up behind his wife.

Natalya simply nodded as she felt him put his hand on her shoulder.

“You will have to find something suitable to wear.” Thorin smiled as Natalya turned back to look at him. “I have decided to take the rest of the day off but it will not interfere.” The Dwarf paused. “Luckily I think Dís found an old outfit of my mother’s that will fit you.”

The half-Elf smiled and followed Thorin back inside. She quickly turned around when she almost immediately heard a knock on the door.

Thorin walked over to answer it and saw that it was Dís. “Thank you.” He smiled as the Dwarrowdam handed him the outfit for Natalya. “This is for you, love.” Thorin closed the door and handed the garment to Natalya.

“Wow this is stunning.” The Queen took the garment from Thorin’s hands and saw that it was a long grey dress made out of thick material. The sleeves were slightly bell shaped and had gold trim around the edges with a Dwarvish design. The hem on the dress slightly flared out as well to accompany the rest of the design. Natalya smiled as Thorin helped her into the dress and felt him tie some strings in the back to make it more fitted. “Thank you.” Natalya smiled.

“This goes with it.” Thorin handed her a large white fur collar with detailing trimmed into it.

Natalya was continually amazed at all the work that the Dwarves put into their clothing. It was unlike anything she had ever seen. “Thank you dear.” The half-Elf whispered and kissed him on the cheek.

Thorin chuckled and grabbed his own fur trimmed cloak as they stepped into the torch lit hallway. He took his wife’s hand as they made their way to the front gates of Erebor. The large wooden doors were already slightly ajar and some snow had blown inside. The King pulled it open slightly more and stepped out into the crunchy snow.

Natalya smiled as Thorin led her outside. “It’s gorgeous!” She exclaimed as she looked up in awe to watch the sky rain down with the soft white snowflakes. Standing still for a moment, time seemed to stop as everything was crisp and brand new with the glimmering white sheen. Suddenly Natalya gasped when she felt something hit her.

“How’s that Auntie!” Kili laughed from a few yards away. He and Fili had seen Thorin and Natalya finally step outside and went over to surprise them.

“What was that?” Natalya exclaimed as she looked down to see a splatter of snow on her jacket which soon melted into the fabric. Hearing another sound next to her she jumped when another white ball exploded on Thorin’s coat.
Thorin chuckled at his wife’s reaction. “It is only Fili and Kili dear. Nothing to be afraid of.” The Dwarf bent over and made a snowball in his hands and sent it flying towards the brothers who yelled and jumped out of the way. “This is often how we spent our winters in Ered Luin.” Thorin smiled as he watched Natalya make a snowball as well.

The half-Elf gave a slight smirk and sent the snowball straight for Kili’s unsuspecting back.

“Hey!” The young Dwarf yelled as he jumped around and saw Natalya giggling. “That’s not fair.”

“It’s quite fair.” Natalya smiled back at her nephew.

Kili rolled his eyes and looked at his brother who smirked.

Fili quickly threw a snowball at Natalya who, this time, easily dodged it.

“You’ll just have to try harder now won’t you?” The future Queen laughed as she threw another snowball at the boys. Soon though, Dís came outside and quickly ushered in the brothers when she saw her brother and Natalya together.

“They can be quite the handful sometimes.” Thorin chuckled as he watched his sister escort Fili and Kili back inside the mountain.

“But they mean no harm.” Natalya smiled as she took Thorin’s hand.

The Dwarf simply nodded as he and his wife began walking through the ankle deep snow. “It’s been a long time since I’ve seen this sight.”

Natalya looked up to see what Thorin was referring to. It was the city of Dale and people were still out in the streets despite the chilly weather.

“I would love to buy you something my love.” Thorin smiled and kissed Natalya’s hand.

“That’s not necessary dear.” Natalya smiled back as her and Thorin entered the city. Many people bowed as they approached and Natalya blushed, not really wishing to be noticed. She followed Thorin through the crowds of people as they headed to the town square where the market was set up. There were countless vendors lining the streets trying to sell their merchandise. Natalya stopped at a cart with a man selling some handmade fur items. “These are lovely.” She smiled at the man who simply nodded.

Thorin noticed his wife had suddenly stopped and he turned around. The Dwarf stood next to her and looked down to see what had caught her eye.

“Aren’t these lovely?” Natalya asked, showing Thorin the fur items.

The Dwarf nodded and picked up some grey fur trimmed gloves.

“Oh those are gorgeous!” Natalya smiled when Thorin handed them to her to try on.

Thorin pulled some coins out of his pocket and paid the man with a nod then continued walking down the streets alongside his wife. “It is getting late. We should be heading back. If you are still wishing to negotiate.”

Natalya nodded and they headed out of the town and back towards Erebor. “Wow it looks magnificent from here.” The half-Elf said as she stood at the entrance to Dale overlooking the Lonely Mountain.
“Indeed it is.” Thorin answered. “Long has it been since I’ve seen it restored to its former glory. Luckily most of it was untouched by Smaug but there is still considerable damage to be fixed.”

Natalya nodded as she and Thorin continued heading to the front gate. “Thank you for the gift dear.” She gave him a soft kiss on the cheek as the doors to the front gate closed behind them.

Thorin smiled back at his wife as they made their way to the royal chambers.

Natalya quickly changed into a less formal gown and was heading out the door when Thorin stopped her.

“I will accompany you to speak with Duliera.” He said, looking his wife in the eyes.

Natalya smiled and waited for her husband at the door.

Thorin quickly shed his robes and changed into a simple blue tunic with silver trim.

They left the chambers together and headed down the torchlit corridors, passing some Dwarves on the way who bowed.

Thorin showed her to the dungeons, heading down several flights of steps.

Natalya felt bad for whoever had to endure the dungeons for long. The stench was awful and it was damp and dark. They finally reached the bottom and a single Dwarf with a headlamp greeted them.

“Greetings to you my Lord and Lady.” He bowed.

Thorin nodded. “We are here to speak with Duliera.” He said sternly.

The guard simply nodded and showed them the way.

Duliera heard footsteps approaching and looked up from where she was sitting. She had been ordered to change into a simple tunic and trousers. “Thorin?” She asked, looking at him.

Thorin looked down at her and nodded. “Greetings Duliera.”

“My Lord.” The Dwarrowdam muttered, getting to her feet and bowing.

“Your actions were inexcusable.” Thorin stated sternly.

Duliera looked at the ground, acting ashamed. She did not feel much resentment after what she said to the half-Elf, she only wished Thorin would excuse her so she could be free.

Natalya pulled Thorin aside for a moment. “May I speak with her alone?” She quietly asked.

Thorin nodded and walked a few paces away.

The half-Elf turned back to the Dwarrowdam who now had a glare on her face.

“Why are you here?” Duliera spat in a hushed tone so Thorin could not hear.

“I just wish to speak with you.” Natalya explained, speaking softly.

“I don’t know why Thorin allowed you to join us.” Duliera said, raising her voice. “You are not one of us.”

Natalya slightly chuckled as she took a seat on the bench next to the cell. “The only thing you
Natalya listened, now realizing why the Dwarrowdam said the things she did. The half-Elf could not believe Thorin had still been close with Duliera when he met her in Mirkwood.

“I remember first seeing Thorin at the battle of Moria.” Duliera said softly, looking back at the ground. “I then asked Dain if I could accompany him back to Ered Luin to be with Thorin and he agreed. From there we formed a friendship.” She swallowed. “Apparently it was only a friendship to Thorin.”

Natalya swallowed, feeling slightly sorry for the Dwarrowdam. She did not know what to say that would not anger her more.

“I do confess that these past few days I have not been thinking about him like I once did.” Duliera sighed. “He is not right for me. I could never be a Queen and rule at his side.” She slightly smirked. “I have more of the warrior blood in me.”

Natalya nodded, simply listening. After a length of silence she spoke up. “Is that how you earned the name ‘Ironheart’?”

Duliera looked back up at her and nodded. “Moria was my first battle. I had been training for years and easily became one of Dain’s best soldiers. I had my first rukhsulsuz at that battle and killed more Orcs than any other Dwarf of my age.”

“What is ‘rukhsulsuz’?” The half-Elf asked, trying to pronounce the word.

“Orc lust.” Duliera simply stated. “It is a strong desire to kill Orcs during one’s first battle.” She paused. “I was ruthless. Dozens of Orcs were killed by my axe so Dain gifted me with the name.”

Natalya nodded and swallowed, realizing that is how she had felt atop Ravenhill trying to save Thorin.

Duliera sighed as she sat back down and leaned against the wall.

Thorin had been listening to their conversation from further off. He knew Duliera had liked him and he slightly reciprocated the feelings but knew he could not be easily distracted while he was attempting to reclaim Erebor. He then saw Natalya in Mirkwood and she looked at him like no one else had. He finally heard a silence in the conversation and walked back over. Thorin stood next to his wife as he pondered what to do. “Duliera you are free to go.” He simply stated and turned abruptly to leave.

Natalya quickly turned back and followed Thorin as the other Dwarf unlocked the door to release the Dwarrowdam.

The Dwarf handed Duliera her clothes as she stepped out.

Duliera simply nodded as she took her jacket and put it on. She quickly brushed past Natalya and
when she got close to Thorin, she elbowed him in the ribs.

Natalya’s eyes went wide, hoping she didn’t do anything she would later regret.

Thorin merely raised his eyebrows and looked at the Dwarrowdam as she narrowed her eyes into a glare and left.

“Thorin.” The half-Elf whispered quietly, stopping Thorin on the stairs after Duliera left. “Are you sure that was a wise decision?”

Thorin nodded as he watched the jailor head up the stairs as well. “She is Dain’s best warrior. I do not think he would take lightly to me locking her up.”

Natalya closed her mouth, surprised at his statement but decided not to speak. She thought after all that had transpired Thorin would think of Duliera as a bigger threat. The half-Elf slightly frowned as she followed her husband back up the stairs.

Duliera briskly walked through the halls of Erebor, searching for Dain. She was sure he would at least have something to say to Thorin. She finally found him with some of the members of Thorin’s company in the dining hall. “Dain!” She shouted, a smile forming across her lips.

The larger Dwarf turned when he heard the female’s voice. “Duliera!” He said back with a chuckle. Pausing, he added. “I thought you had traveled back to the Iron Hills.”

Duliera shook her head. “No. Thorin had me locked up.”

“Now what?” Dain asked, finally turning his full attention to her.

Thorin and Natalya saw them all gathered as they walked past the dining hall. Thorin heard his cousin’s question and walked over, feeling the need to explain himself.

Natalya stayed back, not wishing to engage in conversation. She watched as Thorin approached his cousin who was still speaking with Duliera.

“Ah cousin!” Dain said, his face breaking into a smile as Thorin walked over.

Thorin nodded, his eyes moving between Dain and Duliera.

A smug look crossed Duliera’s face when she saw Natalya did not join them. Good she should be scared.

“So.” Dain spoke, noticing the tension between Thorin and Duliera slowly building. “What gave you the right to throw her in the dungeon?” The red haired Dwarrow asked, looking over at Duliera who had her arms crossed.

“She insulted Natalya for no reason other than she believed her to be a spy for Thranduil.” Thorin answered simply.

Dain tilted his head, looking over to where Natalya was still standing. “Are the rumors true laddie?”

Thorin raised his eyebrows. “Rumors?”

“She is an Elf is she not?” Dain asked, curiosity on his face.

Thorin nodded. “Half-Elf.” He answered, trying not to speak loudly.
“And the other half?” Dain further asked.

“Dwarf.” Thorin said with his eyebrows raised.

Shock crossed both Duliera and Dain’s faces.

“From what race of Dwarves?” Duliera asked, now slightly curious.

“Moria.” Thorin answered. “Her lineage even traces back to the Dwarves of Nogrod.”

Duliera bit her lip, realizing what this meant.

“Well that will surely create some talk.” Dain chuckled slightly.

Dwalin, who had been listening for a while, finally interjected. “She has the same right to stay here as any of you.”

Dain nodded, running his hand across his beard.

Duliera tried not to let her mouth fall open at the sight of Dwalin. She simply nodded, her face turning red.

Dwalin took notice of her staring and chuckled then headed back to the kitchen. “Ale?” He asked, looking at the three Dwarves.

Thorin shook his head. “Not now.”

“Aye!” Duliera spoke up quickly then looked to Dain who nodded.

Thorin nodded to Dain and walked back to where Natalya was still quietly standing.

As her husband approached her, the half-Elf raised her eyebrows.

“Dain knows.” Thorin said, barely above a whisper.

“Knows what?” Natalya asked, slightly confused since she only caught bits and pieces of the conversation.

“About how you have the same right to live here as any of them.” The Dwarf smiled back at his wife as they headed back to their room.

Natalya gave a slight nod as she walked alongside him. She softly grabbed his hand, squeezing it as she stepped in stride with him. “Does Dain accept me?” the female asked softly after a period of silence.

“I am not sure yet.” Thorin said as they approached the doors to the royal wing. He nodded to the guards who opened the doors as they stepped closer. “Only time will tell.”

“What if he doesn’t?” The half-Elf asked, lowering her head with a sigh.

“Then I will see to it.” Thorin said sternly. Once they arrived at their chambers he pushed the door open. “How many times have I told you dear?” The Dwarf asked quietly, turning to face his wife. “The Dwarves of Erebor will accept you.” He smiled. “Everything will be explained after the coronation.”

“How?” Natalya questioned as she knew it took more than just words to persuade the Dwarves.
“I will have the old manuscripts brought out.” He paused. “The ones in Khuzdul and Sindarin.”

Natalya nodded with a small sigh, still looking at the ground. She met Thorin’s gaze as his hand moved up to tuck some of her hair behind her ear. “Thorin I love you.” She whispered as his hand then moved to cup her cheek.

“I love you too Talya.” He whispered with a smile.

Their moment was soon interrupted when there was a loud knock on the door. Natalya went to go answer it. As she opened she saw the familiar face of Anairë. “Greetings Anairë.” Natalya smiled. “What brings you here?” She opened the door wider to let the Elf in.

“Hello your majesties.” The Elf said, bowing to both Natalya and Thorin. “I came with some news.” She paused. “I understand that your coronation is to take place soon.”

Thorin nodded. “Yes.”

Anairë glanced between them. “I simply wished to inform you that I will be leaving shortly afterwards.”

Natalya’s mouth slightly opened in shock. “Anairë!” She paused. “You can’t be serious.” The half-Elf said as she looked to her friend, seeing her eyes begin to glisten with tears.

“You have treated me wonderfully here and I could not possibly ask for more.” Anairë slightly smiled. “I just do not simply feel Erebor is where I belong.” She admitted, letting her smile fall. The Elf then shook her head. “I will travel to Lothlorien.” She simply stated, not meeting Natalya or Thorin’s gaze.

Natalya was shocked but she understood. Stepping closer to Anairë, the half-Elf put her hand on her friend’s shoulder. “I understand.” She smiled.

Anairë nodded, feeling sad that she was leaving her friend but she knew it was for the best. “Thank you, your majesty.” The Elf said, bowing to Thorin.

Thorin nodded, hoping he had not done anything to cause her discomfort.

“The coronation will be held in three days.” A voice said.

Natalya looked towards the door to see Dís walking in with a smile across her face.
Chapter 22

A few weeks later Natalya felt herself growing restless as the coronation was to take place that night. She had been told that the coronation ceremony of a new King was the largest event to ever be held. Natalya watched Dís as the Dwarrowdam was helping sew another dress.

Dís had been sitting in Natalya’s room the past few hours, finally sewing the dark green velvet coronation dress and making sure every detail was perfect.

Natalya had a section in her hand that she was intricately weaving an Elvish pattern into. “How is this?” The half-Elf asked, showing Dís the sleeve.

“Oh it’s lovely!” Dís exclaimed. She had never witnessed many Elvish patterns before she met Natalya but she soon grew fond of them.

Natalya smiled, staring down at the pattern. She knew that she couldn’t hide who she truly was any more.

“The Dwarves will have to accept you now.” Dís commented with a smile. “You are to be their Queen.”

“A Queen has never been crowned within a Dwarven kingdom.” Natalya answered softly, hoping her coronation would not create any more rifts within the mountain.

“That is true.” Thorin’s sister answered, a smile across her lips.

“I am surprised Thorin would so easily go against the traditions.” Natalya commented quietly, still sewing the design into the sleeve.

“It is not a tradition.” Dís said, looking over at Natalya. “It has just never been done.” The Dwarrowdam paused. “There is nothing against it but since female Dwarves are so rare the Dwarf men feel the need to protect them at all costs.”

Natalya nodded and continued sewing. She suddenly realized she had not yet heard anything of Dís’ husband.

The Dwarrowdam smiled as she watched Natalya. “I hope my brother has been treating you well.”

Natalya smiled. “He has treated me better than almost everyone else.” She paused for a moment. “Before I met Thorin, Anairë was the only one who ever cared about me.”

“I hope you know Erebor will always be your forever home.”

“Thank you Dís.” Natalya smiled, finally finishing the pattern on the sleeve. She reached to pick up the other one from the table. “I really appreciate all of your help.”


Natalya looked at the ground. “I did not do as much as you think.”

The Dwarrowdam was shocked at this statement. “You saved my brother’s life.” She said strongly. Natalya nodded with a slight smile. “I couldn't just let him die in front of me.”
“That is something the kingdom will need to forever be grateful for.” Dís smiled, placing her hand on the half-Elf’s arm. “Trust me.”

Natalya nodded, pulling the needle in and out of the sleeve, copying the pattern she had created on the first one.

“It is almost finished.” The Dwarrowdam said as she finished a few more stitches and tied them off.

“I still have yet to see the whole dress finished.” Natalya chuckled. “You never showed me a drawing.”

Dís raised her eyebrows and gave a half smile. “I want it to be a surprise.”

At that moment there was a firm knock on the door and it opened. “Greetings.” Thorin’s deep voice spoke as he stepped into the room. “I hope I am not interrupting anything.” He smiled as his eyes landed on his wife.

Natalya shook her head, smiling up at her husband.

“No brother.” Dís smiled.

“Then Natalya will you please come with me?” Thorin nodded towards her. “There is something we need to discuss.”

The half-Elf nodded and stood up, running her hands along the front of her dark green dress to straighten out the wrinkles. She grabbed Thorin’s outstretched hand and followed him out the door.

Thorin led her out of the royal wing and down a few narrow corridors.

“What is it you wish to speak with me about?” Natalya asked, suddenly becoming slightly nervous. She could tell something was wrong as Thorin gripped her hand tighter. He did not answer but kept leading her down hallways that she had never seen before. One could easily be lost here. There were so many small hallways and pathways that led deeper into the mountain. “Thorin where are you taking me?”

Thorin never answered but led Natalya to a narrow staircase but before entering, the Dwarf stopped and turned Natalya to face him. “I just needed to speak with you alone.” He whispered as he looked down, not meeting her gaze. “Up here.” Thorin said, tilting his head towards the staircase.

The half-Elf followed her husband as he began walking up the stairs. Suddenly they came to a door and upon opening it, Natalya saw that they were at one of the highest lookouts of the mountain. “This is lovely.” Natalya whispered as she took in the amazing sight.

Thorin turned back and smiled at her. “It is a pretty secret place.” He paused. “It is not used very often. I was thinking it could serve as a spot for us to meet when we need more privacy.”

Natalya nodded and stepped closer to her husband, becoming slightly nervous at the thought of the coronation coming in only a few more hours.

“More decorations are being added.” Thorin said as he stared into his wife’s eyes. “Soon the mountain will be ready for us.” He added, smiling at Natalya. The Dwarf noticed fear in her eyes as she stood in front of him. “What is wrong dear?” Thorin asked, placing his hands on her slender
Natalya bit her lip and leaned forward, placing a chaste kiss on Thorin’s lips. After a few seconds, she slowly pulled away, staring deep into his eyes. “At least I will not be required to say anything in Khuzdul this time.” The half-Elf chuckled.

Thorin smiled. “That is true.”

Natalya gave a slight smile, looking into her husband’s eyes. “I am nervous.” She admitted. “Probably even more so than at our wedding.” The half-Elf swallowed. “This is the first time the whole mountain will see me at once.”

“Nothing will happen” Thorin reassured his wife, his hands still on her waist.

Natalya nodded and looked slightly down, running her hands over the fur on his cloak. “I love you so much.” She whispered as her hazel eyes traveled back up to meet his blue ones.

“I love you too dear.” Thorin said, rubbing his thumbs up and down on her sides. “Now we had best be getting ready.”

Natalya nodded. “Dís will probably have my dress ready by now.”

Thorin smiled and gave her a chaste kiss. “I cannot wait to have you ruling by my side as Queen.” He whispered as he broke the kiss. “You must understand.” The Dwarf paused. “Once this coronation happens our lives will never be the same.”

Natalya nodded. “We will be much busier.” She gave a slight smile.

The Dwarf nodded as he took her hand and led her to the door and then back down the stairs. He didn’t speak as he walked alongside his wife to the royal chambers. “I will see you later.” Thorin whispered as he gave Natalya a kiss on the head.

“Won’t you be joining me in getting ready?” The half-Elf asked with a confused look on her face.

Thorin shook his head. “I will meet you in the front of the royal wing.”

Natalya nodded and stared at her husband for a few more seconds before returning to her and Thorin’s room. Upon opening the door the half-Elf saw Dís still sitting in the same chair with her dress across her lap.

“Just a few more stitches.” Dís said, looking up when Natalya entered.

“Thank you so much Dís.” Natalya smiled. “It is lovely.”

“And it was not nearly as hard as your wedding gown.” The Dwarrowdam chuckled. She finished tying off the last few threads. “There.” Dís paused and stood up, presenting Natalya the dress. “It is finished.”

Natalya beamed as she gently took the dress from the female.

“Now it is time for you to start getting ready.” The Dwarrowdam commented. “It is already past midday.”

The half-Elf nodded as there was a soft knock on the door and she strided across the room to open it.
A smile spread across Anairë’s face when she saw Natalya behind the door. She quickly bowed before speaking. “Would you like some company while you dress?”

“Of course.” Natalya smiled as she opened the door wider to let her friend enter. Silence passed between them for a moment before the Half-Elf spoke. “I am sad you must leave.” She admitted, looking at Anairë.

“Me too.” Anairë said, not making eye contact with Natalya. “But it is for the best.”

Natalya looked at her and slightly nodded, still not fully understanding her friend’s decision.

“Here Natalya I will help you into your dress.” Dís spoke up, breaking the silence.

Natalya nodded and allowed the Dwarrowdam to help her. The dress was silky and fitted as she pulled it up. Looking down, she saw the golden Elvish embroidered patterns on the sleeves and smiled. She noticed that Dís had also added the same golden design around the hem. She smiled, realizing the whole kingdom would finally know who she truly is. Natalya moved and stood in front of the full length mirror and admired the dress as the dark green velvet shimmered in the firelight.

“Would you like me to assist you with your hair my lady?” Dís smiled.

The half-Elf shook her head. “I will do it tonight.” She looked over her shoulder and smiled at the Dwarrowdam.

Dís bowed. “I will see you at the ceremony.” She smiled and left the room, shutting the door behind her.

Natalya turned to Anairë and gave her a hug. “I will miss you dearly my friend.”

“I will miss you too.” The Elf paused. “My Queen.”

Natalya chuckled. “Please. There is no need to call me that.” She turned as there was a gentle knock on the door. “Excuse me.”

Anairë bowed.

“Thorin!” Natalya exclaimed as she opened the door.

“Hello dear.” Thorin said softly as he reached out to touch her hair. “You look stunning.” He whispered, seeing her dress.

“I just need to figure out what to do with my hair.” The half-Elf said with a slight frown.

The Dwarf smiled and kissed his wife on the head then turned and saw Anairë. “Greetings.”

Anairë bowed. “Greetings King Thorin.”

Thorin smiled as he placed his hands on Natalya’s shoulders.

“Don’t stop.” Natalya whispered as she felt his fingers rubbing into her tight shoulder muscles.

Thorin continued to massage her back, watching as his wife pulled her hair back and made a bun, allowing a few strands to hang down and frame her face. “You look lovely dear.” He smiled, kissing her on the cheek.
“I thought you were to wait outside.” Natalya smiled as she turned around to face Thorin. He wore a long black robe with a fur collar and a dark blue tunic and the silver belt shone in the dim candlelight. Their outfits were not nearly as fancy as their wedding day but Balin told them that it would not be necessary.

Thorin nodded. “It was lonely out there by myself.” He whispered against her shoulder.

Natalya chuckled. “I know but we should really be getting ready.” She commented, turning back to the mirror and watching Thorin’s reflection. The half-Elf caught sight of her pointed ears as she added a few crystal hair pins to her bun. Giving a smile, the female then turned back to face her husband. “It is time.” She finally said with a smile as she took his hand. Seeing Anairë still standing near the door, Natalya walked over and hugged her tight. “You have been a better friend than I could ever ask for.”

Anairë nodded as they embraced. “You will be an amazing Queen.” She said softly in Natalya’s ear. “I am glad to have known you.”

Natalya smiled as she leaned back and looked Anairë in the eyes. “I will try my best.” The two females headed for the door, walking behind Thorin as they left the room.

Thorin reached behind his back to take Natalya’s hand. “Come dear.”

Anairë stayed back and saw Dís walking towards them out of her room. “Greetings Dís.” She smiled at the Dwarrowdam.

Dís nodded, smiling at the Elf. “Have you been enjoying yourself?”

Anairë nodded. She had not yet told Dís that she would be leaving shortly after the coronation. The Elf had already packed her belongings that afternoon and tidied up Natalya’s old room. She was saddened at the thought of leaving but knew her heart truly belonged with her fellow kin.

Dís smiled as they walked behind Thorin and Natalya.

“That is quite the dress you made.” Anairë commented, impressed by the craftsmanship as she watched Thorin and Natalya walking out of the royal chambers.

“Thank you dear.” Dís said, beaming at the compliment. She paused when Natalya and Thorin stopped to talk to Balin in the hallway. The door to the throne room was still shut. “This way.” The Dwarrowdam said, leading Anairë around the couple and towards the viewing balcony around the throne room.

Balin smiled as he saw Thorin and Natalya approach the double doors that led into the throne room. “Laddie I am honored.” Balin said, pausing and looking at Thorin. He then turned to Natalya. “You will make a fine Queen milady.” He paused for a moment. “I just presented Natalya’s family tree to the Mountain.” The Dwarf gave a soft smile. “They really like you.”

Natalya smiled, still holding Thorin’s hand. She then nodded, feeling Thorin give a soft squeeze. The half-Elf noticed that Balin had dressed more regal than usual. His burgundy overcoat had golden designs along the sleeves and he wore small beads in his white beard.

“Are you ready?” Balin finally asked with a smile.

Natalya and Thorin nodded at the same time. “Yes.” Thorin answered.

The elderly Dwarf nodded. “You are free to enter when the trumpets sound.” He instructed.
Thorin and Natalya both nodded as they watched Balin enter the throne room. The half-Elf felt herself getting nervous and her palms started to sweat as Thorin held her hand.

“You will be fine my love.” Thorin reassured her, giving her hand a squeeze.

The half-Elf smiled at her husband, hoping to gain some confidence. She finally heard the trumpets sound and stepped in stride with Thorin. The doors to the throne room opened and cheers erupted from either side on the balconies. Natalya looked around and easily spotted Dís, Anairë and Bilbo standing as close as they could. She also spotted Fili and Kili further down, cheering and waving. She flashed them a quick smile before turning her attention back in front of her. Balin stood in front of the throne, a silver crown perched on top of a navy velvet pillow with gold trim and tassels. Behind him was another Dwarf holding a similar pillow of a dark green color with a small golden tiara on top of it. She suddenly felt Thorin slightly pull her to a stop as they stood a few feet away from the throne.

Thorin let go of his wife’s hand as he stepped up to the throne and bowed down on one knee. He lowered his head as Balin stepped forward.

“Now come the days of the King.” Balin announced loudly, holding the crown high above Thorin’s head. He slowly lowered the solid metal onto the Dwarf’s raven hair and paused. “May they be blessed.” Balin smiled down at the newly crowned King of Erebor.

Thorin slowly rose and faced the crowd, his eyes quickly scanning the room. He gave a slight smile as his eyes finally landed on his wife.

Natalya smiled and nodded. Stepping up to the same spot Thorin had just stood, she kneeled in front of the throne with her head bowed.

The other Dwarf stepped up with the smaller tiara and presented it to Balin who gently picked it up.

The elderly Dwarf stepped towards Natalya, the crown held gently in his hands. Taking the gold metal circlet off of the cushion, he placed it on Natalya’s head. “All hail the Queen.” Balin said with a smile. “May your days be blessed.”

Natalya rose to her feet after a few seconds, smiling as she watched the crowd cheer for her as well.

Balin stepped back as Thorin stood in front of the throne, Natalya standing next to him.

“May this kingdom prosper once more!” Thorin stated loudly a smile crossing his face. He looked around the room as all the Dwarves cheered and clapped. After a moment The Dwarf looked over at Natalya standing next to him, her beauty radiating. He took her hand in his and slowly descended the steps in front of the throne and walked out of the hall, his Queen and wife at his side.

Natalya smiled at Thorin as they made their way to the dining hall. The room was already full by the time they arrived and there were more streaming in by the moment. As the Dwarves noticed them, they began to slowly clear a path to the head of the long table in the center of the room. Two chairs had been placed next to each other, one slightly smaller than the other. Thorin took Natalya’s hand as they nodded to the Dwarves who smiled at them.

“Well done lad.” Dwalin said with a smile as Thorin passed him. He then looked over to Duliera on his right then past her to Dain, who was clapping.
Thorin smiled at his friend and kept walking towards the table, still holding Natalya’s hand. He was the first to take his seat at the head of the table.

Another Dwarf quickly pulled out Natalya’s chair for her and she sat next to her husband.

Food was soon brought out and the feasting began. Assortments of different meats were presented as well as some side dishes that were placed all along the table on gold plates.

“When was all of this done?” Natalya asked, slightly in shock at the magnitude of it.

“Before our wedding even happened.” Thorin chuckled, reaching for the decanter of wine in front of him. He filled Natalya’s goblet first, then his own.

The Queen smiled, remembering how all of the decorations had been hung throughout the mountain only a few weeks ago. “It is lovely.” Natalya commented as a plate of food was placed in front of her.

“For the Queen Under the Mountain.” A Dwarf bowed before her and presented a golden platter with more food than she could eat.

Natalya smiled and saw that another Dwarf was presenting Thorin with food as well. An announcement was made to start the feast and the dining hall began bustling with activity.

Thorin reached over and took Natalya’s hand. “I forgot to tell you something.” He smiled mischievously.

Natalya raised her eyebrows as she took a sip of wine.

“There is to be a dance after the feast.” The King said, taking a bite of food. “The first dance of the King and Queen Under the Mountain.”

Natalya chuckled as she picked up some food with her fork. “Who proposed this new idea?”

“I did.” Thorin smiled at his amused wife.

The half-Elf shook her head at her husband. “Is your plan to turn the whole mountain upside down?”

Thorin nodded and continued eating with a smirk across his face.

Natalya smiled as her eyes scanned the large room. She spotted Duliera farther off speaking with Dwalin, Bilbo and Thorin’s nephews. Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder and jumped.

“You looked amazing tonight.” Anairë commented, walking up behind Natalya’s chair.

“Indeed you did.” Dís added as she stood on the other side of the chair.

“The dress is lovely Dís.” Natalya said, looking up at the Dwarrowdam with a smile across her face. “I couldn’t have asked for anything better.”

“You added some lovely touches to it yourself, your majesty.” The Dwarrowdam smiled. “Now if you will please excuse me.” She paused to bow. “I need to see to my sons.”

Natalya smiled as she felt Thorin squeeze her hand. Turning her attention to him she saw him glance to her plate of food. She knew he was wondering why she was not eating as well as she normally did. “I am nervous that is all.” Natalya assured him, giving his hand a reaffirming
squeeze. “I will be fine.” After a few moments, Dwarves began approaching them ang congratulating them. Some even had small trinkets and gifts that they had crafted. The Queen smiled, giving her thanks to every one of them.

“It seems they accept you now.” Thorin smiled as he took a sip of wine from his goblet.

Natalya nodded, giving her husband a smile.

Thorin watched his wife as she continued to look around the dining hall. The golden light from the torches reflected off of her crown and it gleamed in the light. As Dwarves in the dining hall began to disperse, the King stood up and grabbed his wife’s hand.

The half-Elf was snapped from her daze and she looked up into her husband’s eyes.

“May I have this dance?”

Natalya nodded and rose to her feet, taking her husband’s hand and letting him lead her. Beyond the dining hall was the gallery of the Kings. It was a grand room that usually hosted social gatherings. The half-Elf noticed that the golden floor had been removed and the tapestries rehung. Torches flickered on the walls and Dwarves had already begun to gather in the space with mugs of ale in their hand. As soon as the King and Queen entered, the room fell silent and soft music began to play from somewhere farther away.

Thorin turned and pulled Natalya close to him, his hand on her petite waist as he looked into her eyes.

Natalya smiled at Thorin as her free hand lightly gripped the fur on his shoulder.

“Talya.” Thorin whispered. “Amralizi.” (I love you)

Natalya smiled but said nothing as Thorin began to dance, starting a gentle motion as he swayed back and forth. He soon began taking larger steps and Natalya grinned when he twirled her. The Queen barely noticed that the room was getting less crowded as the minutes passed and it was soon just the two of them. “Thorin.” Natalya whispered as he began to slow down after a few minutes.

Thorin smiled and dipped her, pressing a gentle kiss against her lips. “Yes my love?” He asked softly, holding her in his arms as they gently swayed back and forth, the music still playing in the background.

“I am lucky to be with you.” Natalya whispered. She leaned forward and kissed him again, her arms wrapping around his neck.

Thorin deepened the kiss and pulled his wife even closer to him, their bodies flush against each other. He sighed, wishing this moment could last forever. “Talya.” He whispered in her ear. “Melhekinh.” (Queen)

Natalya leaned into him. She always enjoyed listening to the sound of his baritone voice. “I love you Thorin.”

Thorin smiled as he continued to hold his wife close to him and gently sway side to side. A few moments passed before he pulled away and took her hand. The days and nights had slowly been getting warmer as springtime was already approaching. “I have a surprise for you tonight.” Thorin smiled as he began leading his wife back to their chambers.

“Oh?” Natalya asked, raising an eyebrow.
Thorin simply nodded as they made their way down the torchlit corridors. Approaching the royal wing, the King pushed open the doors and continued leading his wife to their chambers.

The half-Elf followed him into their room where only a few candles were still lit. She watched Thorin as he went over to the dresser and pulled out a pair of trousers and a tunic.

“Put these on.” Thorin instructed, handing them to Natalya.

“Why?” Natalya asked, very confused as she removed her crown.

“It’s a surprise.” Thorin smiled.

The Queen shrugged and quickly changed then looked over to see Thorin doing the same thing. She removed her jewelry and let her long hair cascaded down her back. Smiling as Thorin approached her, she was still unsure of what he was up to.

“Are you ready?” Thorin asked, taking her hand and leading her to the door. He opened the bedroom door and led Natalya back out into the royal wing.

The half-Elf nodded and said no more as Thorin led her to the front gate of Erebor. She watched as her husband slowly pushed open the large wooden door and stepped outside. Luckily the snow had mostly all melted but the air remained cold. When she slightly trailed behind she heard his voice call her from outside. “Thorin we don’t need to go outside.” Natalya protested. “It isn’t safe and we have no way of defending ourselves.” She then looked up to see guards standing watch but was still hesitant.

“Relax dear we will be fine.” Thorin reassured his nervous wife. He looked back when he noticed she still was not following him. “Don’t make me come back and get you.”

Natalya shook her head and sighed as she stepped out of the Kingdom onto the still snowy ground. She caught the scent of fresh air blowing across the mountain and smiled. The moon was high in the sky and reflecting across the jade marble of the mountain.

Thorin smiled. “See.” He said as he watched his wife step closer to him. “I knew you would enjoy it.”

The half-Elf closed her eyes and let the breeze blow through her hair. After a few moments she felt a gentle touch on her lower back.

“Come.” Thorin said gently. “There is a place I want to show you.” He led Natalya farther away from the mountain and out to the top of a hill where there was a single tree. “I used to come out here with my brother when we were younger.”

Natalya simply nodded, knowing that Thorin had lost his brother in battle.

“Frerin was his name.” Thorin said softly, remembering the good times. “He stayed by my side every day. When we found ourselves in trouble we always had one of us to pull the other out.”

The half-Elf smiled. She had always wondered what it would have been like to have siblings.

“We always made quite the ruckus.” Thorin laughed as he continued. The King kept walking until he was standing under the tree.

Natalya stood next to him and looked up at the stars. She smiled as she felt her husband wrap his arm around her shoulder and pull her close.
Thorin smiled as she leaned into him, standing in silence.

The half-Elf smiled and looked up into the ink black sky. “The stars.” She whispered, looking up. A few moments passed before some dark grey clouds moved to unveil the bright crescent moon.

“Gorgeous isn't it?” Thorin asked, letting the soft breeze blow his hair.

Natalya looked at her husband, completely at rest. Leaning her head on his shoulder, she snuggled into Thorin’s side. “This was a good idea.”

“Indeed it was.” The Dwarf whispered as he gave Natalya a soft kiss on her temple. They relaxed in silence for a while longer before Thorin saw his wife yawn. He chuckled as he watched her. “We should be heading back.” The King said, turning back towards the mountain. “It is late.” Thorin looked over at Natalya then continued to hold her hand as they slowly made it back to the mountain.
Chapter 23

A few more days passed within the Kingdom and many repairs had already been made although not all. Natalya had awoken first and looked over at Thorin sleeping next to her. Her daily tasks had not yet been too tedious and she was rather enjoying her role as Queen especially when there were things that needed to be repaired outside of the Kingdom. As Natalya slid out of bed to begin getting ready for the day, she heard Thorin sit up and groan.

“Morning.” Thorin mumbled, rubbing his face. He never liked staying up late but knew he was going to have to get used to it.

“You are up early.” The half-Elf said happily as she turned to look at her husband who was exhausted. Taking a seat at her vanity, Natalya began braiding her hair.

Thorin nodded, suddenly realizing there was a meeting he needed to attend. He slowly rose from the bed and walked over to his wife and planted a kiss on the top of her head. “I have some tasks I need for you to do.” He paused, his voice still sleepy sounding. “I have arranged for you to be with Dís for most of the day.”

Natalya nodded. She was disappointed, knowing that from now on she would not get to spend as much time with Thorin as she would like. “What meeting do you have?”

The King paused, trying to remember. “Still trade agreements and repairs.” He answered, massaging Natalya’s shoulders. “Erebor is finally becoming self sustainable again.”

The Queen nodded. Her eyes suddenly widened when she remembered that Anairë was going to leave today. She quickly finished the braid she was working on, added a hair bead at the end and stood up.

Thorin watched her, confused as to why she was suddenly in a rush. “What is wrong dear?”

“Nothing.” Natalya smiled at him. “I must see Anairë before she is off that is all.”

Thorin nodded, realizing that meant Bilbo was leaving as well.

Natalya was adding Thorin’s courting bead into her hair when there was a knock at the door. Walking over to the door, Thorin opened it to allow his sister in.

“How are your first days as Queen Under the Mountain treating you?” Dís slightly smirked.

Natalya chuckled. “Well I have yet to do anything.”

“Nothing.” Natalya smiled at him. “I must see Anairë before she is off that is all.”

Thorin nodded, realizing that meant Bilbo was leaving as well.

Natalya was adding Thorin’s courting bead into her hair when there was a knock at the door.

Walking over to the door, Thorin opened it to allow his sister in.

“How are your first days as Queen Under the Mountain treating you?” Dís slightly smirked.

Natalya chuckled. “Well I have yet to do anything.”

“Oh that will change.” Dís said with a smile as she shuffled through Natalya’s clothes. She picked out a suitable dress in a deep burgundy color with silver details along the edges. Since the mountain air was finally becoming warmer, everyone was glad that they did not need to wear as many layers. “You don’t ever really need to dress too fancy.” Dís paused. “That is unless you simply want to or there is a particularly important council meeting to attend.” The Dwarrowdam ushered Natalya behind the changing panels in the corner of the room and laced up her corset. “If Thorin was strong I might suggest he do this instead of me coming to barge in your room every morning.” She chuckled, waiting for Thorin to give some sort of remark.

Natalya laughed when she heard Thorin grunt.
Dís helped the Queen into the dress. “There you go dear.”

“Thank you Dís.” Natalya smiled at the Dwarrowdam.

Dís curtsied and left the room.

Thorin smiled and shook his head. He walked over to Natalya and put his arm around her waist, kissing her cheek. “I love you dear.”

The half-Elf leaned into her husband’s side. “I love you too.” She looked into his eyes and smiled. “I must be off now to make sure I see Anairê before she leaves.”

Thorin nodded and watched her walk out the door. “I will see you later.” He continued getting dressed for the upcoming council meeting.

The Elf had meanwhile been packing her belongings. She brought very little so it didn’t take her long until she had everything neatly placed in her small leather pack. The Elf looked around the room one last time before she slung her bag over her shoulder and walked out. On her way through the royal wing she saw Natalya walking towards her.

“Anairê!” Natalya exclaimed, seeing her friend walking through the royal wing. She noticed that the Elf had packed already and was wearing her traveling cloak.

The Elf smiled when she saw Natalya. “I will miss you.” Anairê embraced her friend.

“Mellon.” Natalya whispered, looking up at the taller Elf. She felt tears in her eyes, knowing this would possibly be the last time she saw Anairê and she was at a loss for words. As they walked softly through the royal wing, the half-Elf caught sight of Dís striding towards them.

“Hello dears.” Dís smiled as she walked up to them. She turned to face Anairê. “I am sad that you will be leaving.” The Dwarrowdam said with a downcast face, having known about this for a while.

Anairê smiled back, surprised that anyone really cared she was leaving. The three of them began heading towards the front gate when they saw a tall figure with a pointed hat passing through into the mountain.

Natalya slightly gasped, immediately recognizing him as the Wizard she had encountered during the battle.

“Who is that?” Dís asked, slowing down. She was shocked the Dwarven guards at the entrance had let him in. “Does Thorin know him?”

Natalya slightly nodded as she heard footsteps behind her and saw Bilbo and Thorin heading towards the front gate as well. She suddenly remembered that the Hobbit was leaving as well to return to his home in the Shire. The half-Elf smiled as Thorin put his arm around her waist and pulled her close. She had not spoken with Bilbo much these past few weeks and felt terrible.

Moving away from Thorin, Natalya approached the Hobbit. “Bilbo.” She said softly, smiling down at him. Her eyes moved towards the small wooden chest he was carrying under his arm as well as other various items gifted to him.

“Hello your Majesty.” Bilbo bowed before Natalya. “How have you been?”

“Well, thank you.” The Queen answered. “I hope you have enjoyed your stay.”
The Hobbit nodded and smiled. “Your coronation was certainly a privilege to watch milady.” He then turned to Gandalf and Anairë. “Well.” He paused, taking one last look around. “I had best be going.”

“Wait Bilbo wait!” Ori shouted as he ran down the hallway towards the small group, a piece of parchment in his hand. He approached them, slightly out of breath. “I drew this for you.” The younger Dwarf said, handing Bilbo a drawing in charcoal.

“Ori this is…” The Hobbit paused, astounded. “This is amazing.” He hugged the young Dwarf and took the drawing gently in his hand, studying it closely.

“It was from when you were looking out over Rivendell.” The Dwarf explained. “I noticed how much you enjoyed it.”

Bilbo smiled and placed his hand on Ori’s shoulder. “Thank you my friend. It will be treasured always.”

Ori watched Bilbo turn to leave, tears in his eyes.

“Where do you think you’re goin’ laddie?” The loud voice of Dwalin boomed from across the hall. He walked next to Balin who had also come to say his goodbyes.

Bilbo turned back and smiled at the brothers, shaking his head. “Now I really did not wish to make a big scene.” He explained, slightly chuckling.

Dwalin huffed and crossed his arms. “We are all about big scenes.” A slight smirk crossed the Dwarf’s lips.

Natalya chuckled and shook her head. “Yes we are aware.” She laughed, stepping next to her husband.

Balin smiled as he looked at the Hobbit. “You will be missed.” The elderly Dwarf placed his hand on Bilbo’s shoulder.

The Hobbit smiled at the group. “I am very thankful,” he paused as his eyes filled with tears, “that you allowed me to accompany you on this journey.”

“It was an honor Bilbo.” Balin said, bowing.

The rest of the Dwarves lined up and bowed in unison, including Anairë and Natalya.

Bilbo smiled at all of them and turned to Gandalf who had been standing there for a while.

“Hello master Baggins.” Gandalf said, looking down at the Hobbit. He smiled and looked at the group.

Thorin nodded to the wizard as he held Natalya’s hand.

Natalya smiled as Bilbo and Gandalf headed out the door. She looked over her shoulder and saw Anairë standing further off, watching off, looking at the ground.

The Queen smiled, her eyes filling with tears once more. She looked over to see Thorin approaching them as the small crowd began to disperse. “Hello dear.” Natalya smiled.

Thorin smiled at the Elf. “I am sorry to see you leave so soon.” He commented, nodding his head.
Anairë smiled back as she curtsied. “I thank you for your gracious hospitality, your majesty.”

“The pleasure was all mine.” Thorin nodded his head with a slight smile. “You are not like the rest of your kin.” He smiled, looking at the Elf.

“I will take that as a compliment.” Anairë smiled.

“You should.” Dís interjected with a smirk as she approached the group. “My brother does not lightly give them.”

“Only to those whom I deem it necessary.” Thorin said, side glancing at his sister.

Anairë slightly chuckled. “I should be going.” She paused and looked out the door. “Lady Galadriel and Celeborn are expecting me. I sent word earlier asking if I could go to Lothlorien and they accepted.” She gave Natalya one last hug and walked towards the gate, not looking back.

Natalya sighed as she felt Thorin’s arm around her. She leaned into him, standing there for a while before Anairë merely became a speck in the distance.

“I must go.” Thorin whispered, kissing his wife on the cheek. “I have a council meeting I must attend and other matters to see too. I am sure Dís could use your help.” He looked over to where his sister was engaged in conversation with another Dwarrow.

Natalya nodded, not saying a word as Thorin walked off. She saw Dís look over and begin walking towards her.

“Thorin said you could help me today.” The Dwarrowdam smiled, looking at Natalya.

The Queen smiled and nodded. “Of course.”

“Good.” Dís smiled. “We have lots to do.” She led Natalya to one of the storerooms. “We have to start sorting all these papers.” She said, her hands on her hips as she looked around.

Natalya swallowed, realizing there was indeed a lot of work to be done.

Dís looked behind one of the shelves when she heard the shuffling of papers. “Morrigan!” She exclaimed. “I did not expect to see you here. I assumed you would have been in the library.”

“Dís!” The Dwarrowdam replied, looking up with a smile. “I haven’t seen you since we arrived.” She embraced the Dwarrowdam. “Where is that hot headed brother of yours you have been speaking of?” Morrigan questioned with a smirk, raising one eyebrow.

Dís chuckled. “He is occupied at the moment but there is someone else here I would like you to meet.”

Morrigan followed the Dwarrowdam around the shelves to see Natalya. “Your majesty.” She bowed quickly, immediately recognizing the Queen from when she had first seen her at the coronation.

“Please.” The Queen smiled at the Dwarrowdam. “Natalya, is fine.”

Morrigan smiled. “It is a pleasure to finally meet you.” She paused, licking her lips. “Your coronation was quite marvelous.”

“Thank you.” Natalya smiled. “There was a lot of hard work that went into it.” She looked to Dís who beamed. “Where are you from?” The Queen asked, trying to make simple conversation.
“Ered Luin with Dís.” Morrigan smiled at Dís and Natalya. “She has mentored me these past few years and taught me all there is to know about the Dwarves.”

Natalya smiled, wondering what happened to her parents but she did not bother asking. “I’m glad you decided to come to Erebor.”

The smaller Dwarrowdam smiled at Natalya. “As am I.”

While the ladies tidied up the storeroom, Thorin sat in the council meeting. He had chosen Balin and Dwalin to be his royal advisors as well as a few other Dwarves and they all accepted. Thorin felt Dwalin keep kicking him under the table to stay awake. The Dwarves were trying to write a trade agreement with the Woodland Realm and Lake-town. They wanted to present the agreement as soon as possible. “This is so boring.” Thorin muttered as one of the Dwarves talked for what seemed like hours.

Dwalin ignored him and looked to his brother who was the only one listening. He tried to pay attention but he couldn’t stop thinking about Duliera. He had only known the Dwarrowdam a few days and he knew she was probably being sought after by several other Dwarves since she was a fierce warrior. The Dwarf sighed and leaned back in his chair, his thoughts wandering.

“Finally.” Thorin grumbled as the meeting ended and all the Dwarves shuffled out of the room. The trade agreement had been pushed in front of him and he quickly signed it, not really reading what it said.

Balin noticed and he shook his head and read over it for Thorin. “Everything seems to be in order.” He commented, seeing that he had snapped Thorin from his daze.

Dwalin suddenly gasped and nudged Thorin. “Hey weren’t you going to go look at that present for Natalya that Dís brought.”

“Yes!” Thorin’s eyes went wide as he suddenly remembered and stood up. “I must be going.” The King headed for the door.

“Thorin!” Balin said, coming after him. “Wait!”

The King didn’t stop as he took long strides through the hallways. He rushed to find Dís. “Where could she be?” Thorin grumbled as he kept hearing Balin call his name behind him.

Balin finally gave up and shrugged. He knew that once Thorin was determined to do something no one could stop him.

“Thorin.” Dwalin said as he finally caught up with the King. “Why so fast?”

Thorin didn’t answer. “Where could she be?” He growled at Dwalin as he kept searching. He walked in and out of several storage rooms with no sign of his sister. Finally he heard laughter as he approached one of the parchment storage rooms near the entrance. He knocked on the open door and stepped inside.

Natalya turned as she heard the sound of her husband’s footsteps. “Hello dear.” She smiled, walking towards him.

“Hello.” Thorin said with a smile. “Where is Dís? I must speak with her.”

“She is over here.” Natalya smiled as she led him through the shelves. “Reorganizing is coming along nicely don’t you think?”
“Yes.” Thorin agreed. He was amazed at how quickly they reorganized the fairly large sized room. The Dwarf looked among the shelves, smiling at all the hard work that had been put into it. “Hello Dís.” He smiled at his sister who was dusting off some shelves. He turned back to Natalya. “Dear, may I speak to my sister in private?”

Natalya nodded and made herself busy among another set of shelves.

“Yes Thorin?” Dís asked in a hushed tone, looking at her brother. Her eyes suddenly went wide as she remembered the surprise he had in mind for Natalya. “Yes. Yes.” The Dwarrowdam said frantically as she put down the pieces of parchment she was holding.

Natalya had a puzzled look as Thorin and Dís quickly walked past her. As she started to follow, Thorin turned around and placed his hands on her shoulders. “You must stay here Talya.”

The Queen slightly frowned. “Why? Where are you going?”

“It is a surprise dear.” Thorin smiled, looking into her bright hazel eyes. “You will find out soon enough.”

Dís smiled at Natalya from behind her brother.

The half-Elf raised an eyebrow. “Another surprise you say?”

Thorin nodded with a smile. “You will love it I am sure.” He paused. “Now you just stay here and I will come find you when I am ready.”

Natalya nodded and watched them leave. She turned around to see Morrigan standing behind her, slightly in shock.

“He’s taller than I originally thought.” The Dwarrowdam simply commented before heading back to work. She shuffled through some more papers staying silent for a while.

Natalya started with another shelf across from Morrigan sorting stacks of old manuscripts that obviously hadn’t been touched in decades.

As Morrigan was sorting through a shelf, she saw an old leather book falling apart at the seams. She picked it up as well as a few other pieces of parchment that belonged together. As she passed Natalya she told her she was going to the library so she could fix the book later. Walking out of the door the young Dwarrowdam suddenly fell backwards. “What the!” Morrigan yelled, looking around to see that all of her books had been knocked out of her hands as she fell to the ground. She frowned as she saw a pair of dark brown boots standing by her. Looking up, she saw the Dwarf’s hand outstretched. She grabbed it and he pulled her to her feet.

“I’m so sorry.” The brown haired Dwarf apologized. “Are you okay?” He asked as he pulled Morrigan to her feet.

“I’m fine.” The Dwarrowdam simply said, not really in the mood to say anything.

“Here I will get those.” The Dwarf said, bending down to pick up the books. “I guess I should be more careful.” He chuckled as he gently handed the books back.

The Dwarrowdam simply nodded and started to walk off but she felt the Dwarf grab her arm.

“What is your name?” He asked, feeling terrible for knocking Morrigan down. “I’m Kili.”
“I’m Morrigan.” The Dwarrowdam simply nodded. This was the first time she really noticed his face. He was young for a Dwarf, probably around her own age she guessed. His bangs were plastered to his forehead with sweat and he had a grin spread across his face.

“This is my brother, Fili.” Kili said, introducing the blond standing next to him.

“Hello Fili.” Morrigan nodded again. Just looking at them, she would have never guessed they were brothers. “Are you the sons of Dís?” She asked with her eyebrows raised.

“Indeed we are.” Fili spoke up with a gentle smile. “You must forgive my brother’s behavior.” He paused. “He was simply in a rush to find…” The Dwarf paused again, looking at the brunette.

“Natalya.” Kili finished his sentence. “I needed to speak with her about some important matters.”

“She is in the storage room.” Morrigan said, tilting her head towards the doorway.

“Thank you.” Kili said, still smiling. “Uh, is there anything I can do to help you?” He asked timidly, not sure what to do.

“No I will be fine.” Morrigan smiled for the first time in front of them.

Kili licked his lips and nodded, finding her smile quite attractive. “Well.” He gave an awkward pause. “Again, I am terribly sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Morrigan reassured the young Dwarf, seeing him nod. She smiled at the brothers and began heading down the corridor towards the library. Walking through the double doors, the Dwarrowdam was surprised that it was busier than usual. Morrigan set the book and parchment down on an unoccupied table. The female paused and realized she needed to find someone to see if they had bookbinding supplies.

Meanwhile, Natalya heard someone enter. “Thorin?” She asked, looking around the corner.

“Hey Aunt Natalya.” Kili beamed.

“Hello boys.” Natalya smiled down at them. “What do you need?” She politely asked, still curious as to where Thorin had gone.

Fili looked at her and paused, looking at his brother. “Where is Uncle?” The blonde asked, looking around.

“It’s the surprise!” Kili exclaimed and ran out the door.

“Mahal.” Fili muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose. “I will see you later Auntie.” He turned quickly on his heel and left the room as well.

“It must be some surprise.” Natalya muttered to herself as she turned back towards the shelves and continued organizing.

Meanwhile Dís and Thorin headed to the stables. “This is the horse I was telling you about.” Dís said, motioning to a dark bay in one of the stalls. “She is one of the finest horses I have ever seen.”

“Gorgeous.” Thorin whispered, patting the horse on the face. “Where did she come from?” He asked, looking back at his sister.

“From the Rohirrim.” Dís smiled. “I do not remember how she came to us.” The Dwarrowdam
paused, deep in thought.

“Natalya will love her.” Thorin smiled, snapping Dís from her thoughts. “Thank you sister.” He paused. “Will I be able to present her today?”

Dís nodded and smiled. “That should work well.”

“Good.” Thorin smiled, patting the horse one more time. “I will go find her.” He started walking off. After taking a few more steps he quickly turned back around. “Does she have a name?”

“That will be Natalya’s decision.” The Dwarrowdam smiled as she walked next to her brother.

Natalya looked up as she heard footsteps approaching her. “Hello Morrigan.” She smiled. “Where have you been?”

Morrigan slightly smiled. “Well I found out who your nephews are.”

“Oh?” The half-Elf asked with a chuckle. “How did that go?”

“Well Kili knocked me down before I even knew who he was.” Morrigan laughed. “I was on my way to the library and he and Fili were running to find you I believe.”

Natalya shook her head with a smile. “They can be a handful.” Silence passed between them for a moment before the half-Elf looked up to see Thorin standing in front of her.

“Hello dear.” Thorin smiled at his wife, taking her hand. “There is something I want to show you.”

The half-Elf smiled and followed Thorin. “Where are we headed?” She asked as he led her closer to the front gate. Gathering some of her dress in her hand, she kept in stride with Thorin. “You are in quite the rush.”

Thorin said nothing but simply smiled and nodded as he continued leading Natalya to the front of the kingdom. “You will see.” The Dwarf said as he pushed open the large double doors.

Natalya was curious but she did not say any more as he led her to a part of the kingdom she had never seen before. She followed him down a narrow path that led to a fairly large opening further down the mountain. “I didn’t know this was even here.” The half-Elf whispered as she looked around.

“Not many do.” Thorin simply said, leading her under an intricately carved stone archway.

Natalya paused for a moment as her eyes were suddenly plunged into the dark. Sniffing the air as her eyes adjusted, she realized they were in a stable. A single torch was lit in between every stall. “I didn’t know the Dwarves took interest in horses.” The Queen said quietly, walking over to one of the horses and softly stroking its face.

“Come here.” Thorin motioned her over to where he was standing beside a dark brown horse.

Natalya walked over to Thorin and observed the animal. “Wow.” She stared into its brown eyes.

“She was given to Dís by one of the Rohirrim.” Thorin explained as he watched his wife pet the horse’s face. “I know not where or how.” He paused, looking at Natalya. “She is yours now.” The King said as a smile crossed his lips.

“What?” Natalya asked with a smile, slightly in shock.
Thorin nodded, stroking the horse’s neck. “I have heard Elves have a way with horses like no one else.”

“Is that so?” The Queen asked, turning back towards the horse to look at Thorin. “I only rode a few times in Mirkwood.” She paused. “We did not have much need for horses unless we were to travel far.”

Thorin nodded. “I rode more in my younger days through the streets of Dale and occasionally further.”

“That sounds quite peaceful.” Natalya smiled at Thorin, turning back to pet the horse’s face again. She traced her finger over the oddly shaped star, admiring how it almost looked like a heart.

“If you are willing my Queen I suggest we go on a ride together.” Thorin smiled, looking at his wife’s sparkling eyes.

“I would love that.” She smiled as she chuckled. “Although I must admit I have not ridden in years. I do not want to appear clumsy.”

Thorin smiled as he took her hand. “Not to worry dear it has been ages since I have ridden as well.”

Natalya smiled as Thorin always knew how to make her feel better.

Suddenly, there was the sound of running feet as the brothers dashed into the stable, causing some of the horses to jump.

Natalya backed away as the mare jumped and retreated into her stall. “Fili! Kili!” Turning around, she looked at the brothers in shock. “What are you doing here?”

“Did Uncle say something about riding?” Kili asked, his eyes lighting up.

Thorin slightly grumbled, not answering. “Why are you here?” He asked sternly as he looked down at the boys and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Dís told us you were here with Natalya.” Fili explained, worried they were in trouble.

Thorin sighed. “I was just speaking with her about the horse.”

“Did you accept, Auntie?” Fili asked, his eyes sparkling with curiosity as his brother nudged him.

“Of course I did.” Natalya answered the young Dwarrow with a smile.

The brothers smiled, highly excited. “Now we can show you more of Erebor that is further up the mountain.” Kili exclaimed.

“There is more?” Natalya slightly chuckled in surprise.

“Indeed.” Thorin smiled as he put his arm around her waist and kissed her cheek.

“I would love to see it.” The Queen smiled as she looked in between the brothers and her husband.

“Well if you are going to ride I will have to show you something.” Dís said as she stood at the entrance. “Come with me.” The Dwarroadam said to Natalya as she tilted her head.

Natalya smiled back at Thorin and the brothers as she followed Dís back to the mountain. “What is it you wish to show me?”
“You will have to wait and see.” The Dwarrowdam smiled. “I promise you will like it.”

Natalya smiled knowing that whatever Dís showed her, it was bound to be good. She followed the Dwarrowdam into her chamber and over to a dresser that was similar to the one in her and Thorin’s chambers. She watched as Dís pulled out a piece of folded cloth from one of the drawers.

“Fili. Kili.” Thorin called back his nephews before they could walk off. “Help me saddle Natalya’s horse.”

“Sure thing Uncle.” Fili smiled, turning back towards Thorin. “Kili go get the saddle and bridle.” He watched as his nephew rushed off.

Thorin put the horses halter on and tied her up outside the stall. Grooming her slowly, he knew she would be the perfect horse for his wife.

Meanwhile, Dís showed Natalya the garment. “It’s a riding skirt.” The Dwarrowdam explained as she showed the Queen how it worked. “There is an overlapping slit that allows you to sit on the horse without your movement being restricted.” Dís in addition handed Natalya a fancy stitched matching tunic and slim fitting pants to wear under the skirt.

Natalya was impressed at how well the skirt fit as she buckled the two brown leather straps in the front. “This is amazing.” She ran her hand over the fabric, admiring the dark green color.

Dís smiled as her and Natalya headed back to the stables to see the horse saddled and ready. The Queen smiled, finally being able to admire the beautiful creature in the light. “She’s incredible.”

Thorin smiled at his wife. “I am glad you like her already.” He looked to his sister who nodded. “Are you ready?” The Dwarf asked, looking back at Natalya.

Natalya nodded as Thorin handed her the reins and she led the horse outside and away from the stable. As soon as she had one foot in the stirrup the horse reared and she fell backwards, hitting the ground.

“Talya!” Thorin shouted as he rushed over and kneeled beside his wife.

Dís quickly grabbed the mare in case she tried to run.

“Are you okay?” Thorin asked with worry in his voice as he helped Natalya back to her feet. “Are you hurt?”

“I am fine dear.” The half-Elf chuckled at her husbands fretting.

Thorin nodded as she smiled at him and he watched her mount successfully. This time there seemed to be an almost immediate bond between them as Natalya gently settled into the saddle.

The half-Elf gathered the reins in her hands and got situated before she nudged the horse into a walk. Slightly jumping as the horse threw its head, Natalya gripped the reins tighter. The Queen chuckled as the mare finally settled down into an even pace. “She is wonderful Dís!” Natalya exclaimed, feeling the horse relax. “How did you come by her?” She asked, stopping near Thorin, Dís and the brothers who looked up at her in awe.

“She belonged to one of the Rohirrim.” Dís answered Natalya. “Not for long though.”

The half-Elf smiled then looked at Thorin. “Will you join me?”
Nodding, the King went into the stable and quickly saddled and bridled his pony, Minty. He returned outside and swiftly mounted, riding next to Natalya. “We will be back before too long.” The Dwarf said over his shoulder to Dís and the brothers.

“Can we come too?” Kili asked but the Dwarrowdam yanked him back.

“I’m sure your uncle would like some quiet time without all of your ruckus.” She said, pulling the younger brother back by the arm.

Thorin chuckled as he and Natalya rode towards Dale.
“Wow.” The Queen breathed as they rode into the city of men for the first time in a few months. The streets had been mostly cleaned and all the rubble hauled away.

Thorin smiled. “They have been hard at work.” He looked to a group of men who upon seeing them bowed.

“The King and Queen Under the Mountain.” One of the men addressed them as he bowed. “Welcome.”

“Thank you.” Thorin nodded his head towards them. He nudged his pony into step with Natalya’s mare.

A few moments of silence passed as the pair rode through the stone cobbled streets, admiring the progress. Natalya was impressed as the city had almost fully recovered from Smaug’s fury those many years ago. Her eyes scanned the buildings as they finally reached the highest point in the middle of the city. “Thorin look.” The half-Elf whispered, seeing Bard approach them with a smile on his face. The man’s appearance had not changed much but his clothes were more regal looking.

“Thorin. Natalya.” Bard paused, glancing between them. “I did not look to see you here.” He smiled as he stood beside Natalya and rested a hand on the mare’s neck.

Natalya nodded. “We simply wished to see the progress of the city.” She smiled down at Bard. “How are you faring?”

“Well, milady.” Bard answered with a smile as he looked up at the Queen.

“Or should I say Lord of Dale?” The Half-Elf asked with a slight smile.

Bard chuckled and raised his eyebrows. “You noticed.”

“You do have the clothes.” Natalya smiled down at the man and paused. “I hope everything is well with you.”

Bard nodded. “Aye. It is.” He looked around. “More repairs are being made daily.” Looking to Thorin he nodded. “With the gold you have generously given we have begun an expansion at the south gate.”

Thorin nodded and smiled. “I am glad to see it being put to good use.” He looked around the town before nudging his horse forward. “We must be going.”

Bard nodded. “Good day to you my Lord.” He watched them walk off, wondering why they seemed to be in a rush.

Natalya and Thorin rode through the town in silence, taking in the sights. The Queen smiled as she watched some merchants begin setting up their tables and items. She then nodded towards two females who seemed shocked.

“Milady.” One of the women called to Natalya and bowed.

Natalya turned her horse to face them and smiled. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Thorin had continued going down the street. “Good afternoon.” Natalya smiled down at them, knowing her
husband wouldn’t leave without her.

“You are the new Queen of Erebor if I am not mistaken?” The other lady asked after she had seen the golden tiara on the female’s head.

Natalya smiled and nodded. “I did not think word would travel this fast.” She admitted, seeing the shorter woman nod.

“It does.” The taller lady with dark brown hair admitted as she smiled back. “I am glad to see a warrior as strong as you at the King’s side.” She added with a slight smirk. “Since you saved his life maybe you can convince him to not fall prey to the Dragon Sickness again. Hopefully King Thorin will not let a Dragon loose on us like his grandfather did. I do not wish to see this city laid to waste all because of the greedy actions of a Dwarf.” She narrowed her eyes as she looked up at the half-Elf.

Natalya licked her lips and swallowed, surprised at the sudden turn in the conversation. “I assure you nothing of the kind will happen again.” Answering as politely as she could muster, the half-Elf nodded.

“Good.” The woman smirked as she crossed her arms. “Ensure that it doesn’t. Good day to you.”

Natalya said nothing as she nudged her horse into a trot. She quickly caught up with Thorin who had not gone far.

“Hello Talya.” Thorin smiled then saw the look on her face and worried. “What is wrong love?”

“Nothing.” Natalya easily lied and flashed him a smile as she rode next to him.

Thorin wasn’t convinced but said nothing more as they turned around and began heading back to the mountain.

The half-Elf sighed, thinking about what the lady had said as she soon saw Erebor looming overhead.

“Did you enjoy that?” Thorin asked, breaking the silence as he and Natalya approached the Dwarven gate.

The Queen nodded and smiled, still not speaking. She halted the mare before she reached the road to the stable.

Thorin turned back and looked at her. “Tell me what happened.” He spoke softly, looking into her eyes. “I noticed something happened.”

“The woman accused us of…” Natalya’s voice trailed off and she licked her lips, not wanting to speak of it.

“Of what?” Thorin asked, furrowing his brow.

She swallowed as she looked her husband in the eyes. “They do not think you are strong enough to fight off the sickness should it come again.” The half-Elf spoke softly.

Thorin sighed and nodded. “It has crossed my mind these past few days as well.” He answered gently as he looked towards the ground, avoiding Natalya’s gaze.

The female bit her lip and said nothing more as she looked off into the distance.
The King quickly turned his horse towards the stable and contemplated on what his wife had told him. He could not let himself fall prey to the sickness again. It would destroy him. Looking over his shoulder, Thorin saw that Natalya was following him back as well.

“What is her name?” The half-Elf asked quietly as she patted the horses neck as they walked back to the stables.

“That is for you to decide my dear.” Thorin smiled as he dismounted Minty and looked back at Natalya who was still sitting atop her horse. He led his pony into the barn and began untacking her and brushed her off.

The Queen sat in thought. “Roheryn.” (Horse of the Lady) She whispered. Giving the mare one last pat on the neck, she thought about the name. It fits. The half-Elf smiled to herself as she dismounted and led the horse into the barn, tying her next to Thorin’s pony.

“So?” Thorin asked with a smile as he looked at Natalya. “Have you decided?”

“Roheryn.” Natalya said with a smile as she looked at Thorin. “We do live in a mountain full of gems after all.”

The Dwarf smiled. “Roheryn.” He whispered to himself, pondering the name. “I like it.” He said louder, looking over at Natalya.

The half-Elf smiled as she locked eyes with Thorin and continued to groom her new horse.

“I am glad we finally had some time to spend together.” Thorin said quietly as he continued brushing his horse.

“Me too.” Natalya said softly, smiling at him. They finally finished and headed back to Erebor. Walking through the large gates, Natalya saw Fili and Kili running towards them.

“Uncle Thorin! Aunt Natalya!” Kili yelled as he ran up to them. “You are needed in the council room.” He said urgently as a worried look crossed his face.

“For what?” Thorin asked, suddenly concerned.

Natalya swallowed and looked at Thorin with a worried expression across her face. She saw Fili standing and looking concerned as well. “What’s happening?” The Queen asked, knowing that something of urgency must be going on if the nephews were acting this way.

“Follow us.” Fili said and he quickly turned on his heel and began heading towards the council room.

Thorin huffed and side glanced at Natalya as they followed the nephews. Entering the council chambers, they saw some of the same Dwarf Lords as earlier sitting at the elongated table. “What seems to be the problem?” Thorin asked in a gruff tone.

“It is a problem with what has been written.” One of the elderly Dwarves explained as he swallowed and pushed the parchment towards the King. He did not dare accuse Thorin of anything.

Thorin looked over his shoulder, seeing Dwalin come in behind him. He took his seat at his normal spot and rubbed his hand across his forehead. Raising his eyebrows he looked at the Dwarf. “What is it that needs changing?” Thorin did not bother to look down at the parchment as he knew very well what was written, having overseen it himself.
“Thranduil will most likely not accept this.” The Dwarf explained as he swallowed. “It is too little an amount to be of any use to their kingdom.”

“Why not?” The King asked, his teeth clenched. “It is perfectly reasonable.” He paused as his eyes scanned over the trade agreement. “Send it.” Thorin said curtly, pushing the paper back towards the Dwarf and standing up.

“My King.” The Dwarf protested as Thorin started leaving.

“If he cannot accept our trade agreements then he is welcome to negotiate them here in person.” Thorin said with a nod of his head as he left the room, Natalya and Dwalin on his heels.

Fili and Kili heard everything and quickly jumped out of the way as Thorin strode past them. “I wonder what made him so angry.” Fili asked as he looked to his brother with a concerned expression.

“I am not sure.” Kili replied. “I did not wish to get involved.”

Fili nodded in agreement and they each started to head back to the royal wing.

Kili was looking around and his eye caught something. “Fili.” He whispered, pulling his brother’s arm.

“Yes?” The blond asked, looking at his brother.

“Is that the Dwarrowdam from the other day?” The younger brother asked, not completely sure since she was farther away.

“I think so?” Fili said as a question, unsure himself.

Kili smiled. “I will join you later then brother.” The brunette smiled as his brother gave him a confused look.

Fili shook his head when he saw his brothers look and knew it meant mischief. “Always falling in love.” He whispered to himself as he walked off.

The younger Dwarf turned back to his brother and flashed a smile. Sure enough, as he entered the library, he saw the Dwarrowdam heading in between two bookshelves.

Morrigan had finally found Ori in one of the storerooms and he had given her supplies to bind the book together again. She was sitting at a table in the back and humming to herself when she was suddenly jostled from her thoughts. “Kili!” She exclaimed louder than she had meant to. Her eyes quickly scanned the room to see if anyone had heard her yell.

“Your name is Morrigan correct?” Kili asked nervously, hoping he had remembered and not just made a fool of himself.

Nodding, the Dwarrowdam continued fixing the book. “What brings you to the library prince Kili?” She questioned as she slightly smirked, knowing he was usually too loud for quiet spaces.

He swallowed and shifted on his feet. “I just saw you and thought I would come say hello.” He said honestly, hoping she didn’t turn him away.

“I am honestly surprised you remembered me.” Morrigan said quietly, still looking at the book and trying to fix it.
“Of course I did.” Kili chuckled. “How could I not remember someone I nearly ran over?” He smiled at her, placing his hand on her arm.

Morrigan shrugged and continued working, not really paying attention to him.

“Would you care to join me for dinner?” The brunette Dwarf asked, hopefulness in his eyes.

“Mnhmm.” Morrigan nodded and finished the section she was working on before she looked up and met his gaze with a smile. “I would like that.”

Kili smiled at her. “I will see you later then.” Bowing, he continued smiling and left the library.

Meanwhile, Thorin felt bad that Natalya had to miss lunch because of the complication with the treaty. “Natalya.” Thorin stated as they began walking back to the royal wing. “Would you care to join me in the dining hall?” The King paused as he stopped in the hallway.

Natalya nodded. “That would be lovely but isn’t it past lunchtime?” She asked, knowing that Dwarves usually never had leftovers after a meal and hours had passed since midday.

“It is but I am sure Bombur has some snacks hidden away.” Thorin smiled as he put his hand around her waist and led her to the kitchens.

Sure enough, Bombur was still in the kitchen, already prepping for dinner along with some other Dwarves. He smiled as he saw the King and Queen enter. “I must have missed you at lunch.”

“We could not make it.” Thorin simply said. “There was an unexpected meeting I needed to attend.” He paused as he looked around and saw Dís standing further off and talking with Duliera.

Natalya felt her throat tighten. She did not want to get into a fight at the moment and she turned her attention back to one of the counters where there was a plate with round pieces that almost looked like crackers. She gently picked one up and noticed that it was brittle around the edges but soft in the middle. She looked to Thorin with a confused expression. “What is this?” She asked with one of her eyebrows raised. She gasped as she heard the stomping of boots and suddenly the food was snatched from her hand.

“That’s a cookie lass.” The deep voice of Dwalin stated as he came into the room. He grabbed the snack from Natalya’s hand and stuffed the whole thing in his mouth. “Very good.” The Dwarf stated and crumbs fell out of his mouth and into his beard.

Duliera saw him from across the room and chuckled.

Natalya looked at him with uncertainty and picked up a smaller one. She took a dainty bite out of it and chewed slowly. Looking around the half-Elf saw that most of the room was looking at her to see how she would react. Her head nodded as she enjoyed the sweet taste. “A cookie?” The Queen asked, looking at Dwalin.

“That’s right.” The Dwarrow smirked then looked at Thorin. “How have you not introduced her to cookies?”

“I am afraid we have not had the leisurely time to discuss food.” Thorin responded, his arms crossed over his chest.

Dwalin shrugged, grabbed some more cookies off the plate and walked over to where Duliera and Dís were standing. “Hello Duliera.” The Dwarrow smiled as he handed her a cookie. “How have
“Well enough.” Duliera answered, taking the cookie and biting into it.

Dís smiled, knowing about the strong bond they were creating and slowly slipped away and joined Thorin and Natalya. “I assume the ride was successful.”

“Indeed.” Thorin answered, nodding his head. He watched as his wife grabbed another cookie off the platter and ate it.

“These are good.” Natalya said as she chewed.

Thorin looked at her and smiled. “I am glad you enjoy them.”

“How did the meeting turn out?” Dís asked, wondering how Thorin did as she knew meetings were stressful for him. He would often lock himself in his room for days in Ered Luin after a meeting and slave away over the pieces of parchment.

Thorin sighed. “Not as planned.” He paused and grabbed a cookie for himself, taking a bite out of it. “Some of the Lords of the court do not believe Thranduil will agree to my terms.” The King paused again. “They say I am offering too little.”

“What did you propose?” Thorin’s sister asked, curious.

“I proposed that if he does not feel that I have given him enough, he can come here to settle it.” Thorin stated curtly as he watched Natalya reach for another cookie.

Dís swallowed. “Thranduil?” She asked, slightly shocked. “Here?”

Thorin nodded and said no more as he left the kitchen and strided through the dining hall.

Natalya swallowed and looked at Dís as she had never seen her husband react that way before. She bit her lip, slightly nervous as she remembered what the woman had said to her about the Dragon Sickness returning.

Dís saw the scared look in Natalya’s eyes and placed her hand on the Queen’s arm. “He will be fine.” The Dwarrowdam softly reassured Natalya.

Duliera heard the commotion and looked over from where she was talking with Dwalin. “Well Elf how do you feel about your King coming to Erebor.” She

Dwalin huffed at Duliera’s comment and slightly smirked. “He is under a lot of pressure is all u’zaghith.” (Little warrior)

The red haired Dwarrowdam blushed but hid it as she chuckled and her green eyes glimmered in amusement. “Well I am under a lot of pressure!” Her voice stammered. “What can you do about that? Eh?” She continued when Dwalin gave no response. “I can just imagine your reaction if you had to deal with the pointy eared princess.” Duliera laughed, imagining the scene unfolding in her mind.

Dwalin growled and crossed his arms. “He would have his head bashed into the table and…” He paused, seeing Dís give him a disapproving gaze.

Duliera looked to Natalya. “Well Elf how do you feel about your King coming to Erebor.” She
crossed her arms as well, trying to look as intimidating as possible.

Narrowing her eyes into a slight glare, Natalya stared the Darrowdam down. “Thranduil is not my King.” She couldn’t believe the nerve of Duliera to still be questioning her loyalty. “He is just as much of a traitor to me as he is to all of you.” The half-Elf spoke strongly, causing everyone to pause and look in her direction, including Bombur who was still preparing meals.

After a moment of silence Duliera finally spoke. “Well.” She paused. “You haven’t proved that of any of us yet, Elf. You march in here, marry our King, but where does your loyalty really lie? You’ve got nothing to show for that yet.”

“My loyalty has been with Thorin ever since I met him.” Natalya simply stated and she glanced at Dís whose eyes were wide. “I would never betray him.” She watched as Duliera’s face got red and Dwalin handed her another cookie.

Dís swallowed and saw that dinner was nearly ready. “How about we continue this conversation another time.” She said as she folded her hands in front of her dress and smiled.

Natalya nodded and quickly left the kitchen, immediately heading back to the royal wing.

Dwalin looked at Duliera. “You need to give her more credit.”

“How should I?” The Dwarrowdam huffed. “What has she proved?” She quickly stuffed another cookie into her mouth.

“I assume you have forgotten that she did save Thorin during the battle.” Dwalin gave a slight smile. “She is actually a good fighter.”

Duliera huffed and rolled her eyes and walked out into the dining hall.

Thorin looked up when he saw Natalya open the door to their chambers and step in. “Talya.” He whispered as he turned to look at her and shake his head. The King swallowed as she closed the door and looked at her.

The Queen looked at her husband and simply nodded. “It’s fine.” She shook her head as she thought about what Duliera had said to her about loyalty.

Thorin pulled her beside him and looked into her eyes. “Natalya I am sorry.” He hung his head and looked at the ground, letting go of her.

“For what?” The Queen asked as she set her crown aside on the bed and looked at her husband, sitting on the edge of the mattress.

Thorin sighed and did not meet his wife’s gaze. “I left you back there and I apologize.”

“Thorin that’s nothing.” Natalya smiled. “I understand.” She stood up and walked over to Thorin. Placing her hand on his arm, the half-Elf looked into his crystal blue eyes.

Thorin smiled back as he gave her a soft kiss on the lips. “Dinner will be served soon.” He said softly. “I can have it brought in.”

“That would be lovely.” Natalya nodded in agreement.

The King opened the door and motioned to one of the guards who walked over and bowed. “I wish to have dinner brought here tonight.”
“Of course your majesty.” The Dwarf guard bowed and left the royal wing.

“Dinner will be here shortly love.” Thorin smiled at Natalya as he stepped back into the room. He paused and took a seat in one of the armchairs. “Well this has been quite the day.”

Natalya nodded and sat in the chair across from him. Soon enough, there was a knock and their dinner was brought in.

Meanwhile, Fili and Kili were in the dining hall. “Do you think it will work?” Kili whispered to his older brother.

Fili shot him a look as he saw Morrigan enter the room, much more dressed up than usual and walking next to Dís.

“They chose to eat in their room is what I was told.” Dís answered Morrigan as to why Natalya and Thorin would not be attending.

The younger Dwarrowdam nodded. She had wanted to speak with Natalya about a few things but would now have to find another time. She approached the brothers with Dís still beside her.

“Greetings Kili.” She smiled at the cheeky brunette. “Fili.” She nodded and the blond smiled.

“Please take a seat.” Kili said as he stood up and motioned to the seat next to him on the long marble bench.

Morrigan smiled and sat next to him. “Dís won’t you join us?” She asked, turning back to look at the Dwarrowdam.

“No, I have other matters to attend to.” Thorin’s sister smiled as her eyes scanned all three of them. “I hope you enjoy yourselves.” The Dwarrowdam gave one last nod before she headed back the way she came.

Fili and Kili looked at each other and smirked before Kili turned to Morrigan.

“Why do I have the feeling you are up to no good?” She asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Because we aren’t.” Kili simply stated. “Listen I know we have not known each other for long but can I trust you?”

“With what?” Morrigan asked, still skeptical of their motives.

“We are going to play a prank.” Fili smiled and spoke softly as he leaned forward. “We have been setting it up for months even while we were on the road.”

“Is this to prank Thorin again?” Morrigan asked. “I heard about the water and if I have to admit.” She paused, giving a slight smirk of her own. “It was not very original.”

“I know.” Kili stated, still smirking. “That is why we have to come up with something better.”

Morrigan paused and thought. “No that might be too dangerous.”

“What?” Kili asked, surprised she had an idea.

“I will tell you mine after you tell me yours.” She challenged.

Kili chuckled and whispered in her ear, seeing her smirk.
“Well that was a good idea but how about.” Morrigan paused as her voice lowered and she whispered back in his ear.

Kili raised his eyebrow and smiled. “Wow.” He simply stated. “Well why don’t we think about this while we grab some food.”

Morrigan nodded and rose from the bench and headed to the kitchens to grab a plate of food that Bombur had prepared. “Wow Bombur this looks delicious.” She smelled the plate of food and carried it back out to where she was sitting.

Fili and Kili came back out as well and took their seats on either side of her. “This plan.” The blond paused. “How severe?” He looked at Kili and Morrigan. He did not want Thorin to throw them out should they do anything too insane.

“Not too bad.” Morrigan smirked as she started eating her meal. Her mind raced as she considered ideas for what they could possibly do to cause some mischief. We could do something in the library, the kitchens. She paused and her lips turned to a smirk and her eyes glimmered. The forges. She looked at Fili and Kili. “What about the forges?”

Fili gave her a shocked look, his eyes wide as he realized what danger that could cause.

“What could we possibly do there?” Kili asked with a slight smirk.

The Dwarrowdam smirked as she continued eating. Saying no more, Morrigan quickly ate her meal then stood up.

“Where are you going?” Kili asked, looking up at the Dwarrowdam and setting his fork down.

“Back to my room.” Morrigan smiled. “I need to think about what to do.”

Down the table Dwalin grumbled. “Well don’t they look like trouble.” The Dwarf chewed his food as he looked at Duliera.

The Dwarrowdam simply shrugged and continued eating. “No more than when you were a young Dwarfling.” She teased and elbowed him in the side.

Dwalin rolled his eyes and continued eating, occasionally glancing at the Nephews. “Do you know the other Dwarrowdam they were with?”

Duliera looked up from her plate and shook her head. “She arrived with Dís so I assume she is from Ered Luin.”

Meanwhile, Natalya and Thorin were eating in silence. The half-Elf looked up from her meal to see that Thorin’s beard had continued to grow longer over the past few weeks. A smile crossed her face, knowing Thorin was proud to have his Kingdom back. The female knew Thorin would be under a lot of stress most of the time but he was now doing what he was destined to do.

Thorin noticed her staring and smiled. “Did you enjoy the ride today my dear?”

Natalya smiled and nodded. “It was very enjoyable. We should do that when we can.”

They finally finished their meals and Thorin called a guard in to return their plates. Turning back to Natalya he placed his crown next to hers and sat back down with a sigh. Resting his elbows on his knees, the King put his head in his hands. “Mahal give me strength.” The Dwarf groaned and sat back in the armchair.
The Queen sighed and looked at her husband. “Thorin.” She said gently, standing up and walked over to him. “Everything will be fine.” Natalya placed her hand on his shoulder and squeezed.

Thorin looked up and their eyes connected for a moment before he looked down at her hand and covered it with his own. “I know dear.” He gave a weak smile. “I know that Thranduil will not accept the terms and he will request to come here to negotiate.”

Natalya nodded and swallowed as Thorin continued. She could tell he had been worn thin and was likely to snap at any moment.

“There is still a lot of tension between the Elves of Mirkwood and Erebor since you are the Queen.” Thorin sighed as he saw Natalya look down at him and bite her lip. “I love you. That is the one and only reason I asked you to marry me and be by my side.” The Dwarf paused and swallowed before continuing. “I know that many believe I only married you to aid in the restoration of the relationship between Mirkwood and Erebor but that is far from the truth.” Thorin sighed again, glad he said what was on his mind and his eyes lowered and he stared into his lap. “I have been thinking of this ever since we married.” The King admitted softly.

Natalya knelt beside him, now being lower than his eye level so he would have to look at her. She placed her hand on his knee and looked up into his eyes. “Thorin no matter what happens with Thranduil I will always defend you and I hope everyone is there to see it so I show them where my true loyalties lie.” The female licked her lips and continued. “Duliera had just lectured me of how I have not done anything to prove my loyalty yet.” The Queen sighed, seeing Thorin’s eyes narrow into a glare.

“How dare she.” The King spat. “I knew there was a reason I did not trust her.” Thorin felt his anger rising by the moment.

“She is simply trying to be loyal to the kingdom, Thorin.” Natalya explained softly. “I understand that still many of the Dwarves must feel this way since I am half Elven; they are just too scared to show it.”

“But you come from a line of Dwarves as well.” Thorin said, lowering his voice into a growl. “They must understand that.”

“They will but not immediately.” Natalya tried to convince him. “It will all happen in good time.”

Thorin nodded and said no more as he stood up and helped Natalya to her feet. He discarded his robe on the chair and walked over to the mantle. Grabbing a small log next to the hearth, the King lit it with a match and threw it into the fireplace. “Come here my love.”

Natalya gave a slight smile and walked over to Thorin. “I love you.” She whispered, staring into his eyes, seeing them glow in the dim light.

The Dwarf smiled and took a seat on the large fur rug; Natalya sitting next to him. He said nothing for a while but watched as the flames slowly spread over the small log. Thorin felt his wife lean into him and he put his arm around her, pulling her closer.

The half-Elf smiled and gave a content sigh as she felt Thorin’s strong arms holding onto her. Placing her hands overtop of his, she shifted her weight and leaned into his chest, watching the gold and orange flames flicker in the fireplace. “We won’t have many more moments like this.” Natalya softly commented, feeling Thorin’s head nod on her shoulder.

“My duties as King will come sooner than I would like them to.” The Dwarf agreed. “That is not to
say I will not enjoy ruling Erebor.” He added as he played with Natalya’s long hair. “I have always
dreamt of the day that this kingdom would once again belong to the Dwarves.”

Natalya smiled, happy that her husband had finally accomplished his dream. “From what I
understood many of the Dwarves did not want you to try and reclaim Erebor.” The half-Elf
chuckled.

“No they did not.” Thorin answered, shaking his head as he continued massaging Natalya’s back.
“They believed that the quest would surely fail.” The Dwarf said no more but sat in silence as he
pulled Natalya into his arms again. “Now I finally have the perfect wife and Queen.” He kissed her
head as the room fell into silence once more.

Natalya closed her eyes and leaned into Thorin, feeling the even rise and fall of his chest against
her back. The Queen felt the warmth of the fire hit her and she sighed, enjoying this moment to
relax with her husband. After a few minutes passed, she turned back to see Thorin’s eyes closed.
“You had best get some rest.” Natalya smiled and pushed a strand of hair away from his face.
Rising to her feet, she helped Thorin up and led him to the bed.

Thorin followed her and laid down. Sighing, the King stared up at the ceiling.

“Get some sleep.” Natalya said to him, her voice soft. She walked over to her husband and sat on
the edge of the bed next to him. “You will feel better in the morning.”

Thorin nodded and closed his eyes, feeling her fingers run through his hair then down to his beard.
“You noticed.” The Dwarf smiled as he felt her run her fingers through the longer hairs on his chin.

Natalya hummed. “I did.” She leaned down and kissed him on the cheek.

“I had those hairs braided when I was prince in Erebor many years ago.” Thorin stated with his
eyes still closed. “I hope to once again bring Erebor to its former glory.” He whispered as he felt
himself falling asleep quickly.

“You will.” Natalya smiled as she looked down at him. “I am sure of it.”

The King simply nodded and drifted off into a deep sleep.

Natalya retreated into the bathroom and drew herself a hot bath. She relaxed in the tub for a while,
letting the thoughts of the day swirl in her head. After a while she dried herself off and slipped into
her nightgown. Laying next to Thorin she could hear his even breathing and an occasional snore as
his chest rose and fell. Natalya started at the ceiling for a while before finally drifting off to sleep
as well.

A few days later, the King and Queen headed to the dining hall together. They dressed less regally
than on council meeting days but they were still fancier than the everyday garments of the other
residents in Erebor. Natalya squeezed Thorin’s hand as she noticed one of the Dwarf lords walking
amongst them with parchment in his hand.

“From the Woodland Realm your Majesty.” The Dwarf bowed low as he presented the scroll.

Thorin took it and saw the fancy ribbon with Elvish leaves across it. He nodded to the Dwarf as he
turned on his heel and returned to his chambers with Natalya.

Natalya swallowed as she followed him back, knowing Thranduil would not hesitate to come to
Erebor to try and teach Thorin a lesson. She shut the door after they entered and Thorin began
opening the scroll.
The King nodded and ran his hand across his beard as his eyes traveled down the page. “Thranduil wishes to meet here in exactly three days.” He looked at Natalya as he placed the parchment on the desk.

“That will give us time to get ready.” Natalya said as she took a deep breath, trying to be as positive as possible.

Thorin simply nodded as he looked at his wife.

Meanwhile, Fili and Kili entered the dining hall for breakfast and when they saw no sign of Thorin they immediately began searching for Morrigan. Kili suddenly spotted her across the hall talking with Dwalin and Duliera. He quickly began walking over and as he caught Morrigan’s eye contact she left Dwalin and Duliera and walked over to him.

“Hello Kili.” The Darrowdam smiled as they all took their normal seats. “Have you devised any new plans?”

Kili shook his head. “Fili and I were discussing our idea and I don’t think it will work.”

“But.” Fili interjected with a mischievous smirk. “I came up with another plan.”

“What might that be?” Morrigan asked, placing her hands on the table as she listened intently.

Fili smirked and told her about what he had planned late in the night.

“I think that would work.” Morrigan smirked as she looked at the brothers. “When is the plan going into effect?”

“Day after tomorrow.” Fili answered. “Then we will have today and tomorrow to prepare.” He smirked.

They were all completely unaware that Thranduil would be heading to Erebor only a day after. Rising from the table they all giggled on the way to get their breakfast.

“Durin’s beard I know they are up to no good.” Dwalin muttered to Duliera as the group walked past snickering.

“So what if they are.” Duliera replied. “Thorin probably deserves whatever they are going to do to him.” She smirked, thinking of all the possibilities.

Dwalin shook his head. “Thorin has a lot to worry about right now.” The Dwarf explained. “There is a meeting with Thranduil in three days and Thorin is worried he will risk war.”

Duliera’s eyes glinted. “If he risks open war then I can fight.” She said louder than she intended to. “We can take down those pointy ears no problem.”

“Duliera.” Dwalin hissed, realizing that now many of the Dwarves in the dining hall were looking at them. “You realize they probably think you are talking about Natalya now be quiet.”

“Oh.” Duliera swallowed and looked down at her plate. She quickly ate her breakfast and looked at the Dwarrow who had already finished.

Dwalin rose from the table and headed over to the nephews who were still sitting with Morrigan. “What sort of plan have you devised?” He asked with a smirk as he crossed his arms.

“Quite a good one Mr. Dwalin but we aren’t going to tell you.” The youngest nephew smirked as
he watched the Dwarf roll his eyes.

Duliera smirked as she walked up to the group. “I hope it is a good one.” She stated as she looked down at the group.

“Oh it will be.” Fili reassured with a laugh as he looked at Kili and Morrigan.

The red haired Dwarrowdam laughed. “I hope the mountain is talking about it for months.” She exchanged glances with Dwalin nd smirked before walking off.

“What will you propose?” Natalya asked with worry in her voice as she watched Thorin keep rereading the scroll back in their room.

“I may be willing to offer more if he agrees to allow us safe passage through Mirkwood should the time ever arise.” Thorin paused. “I will speak with Balin on the matter.”

The Queen nodded. “I think it would be best if you ate before any of this took place.” She stated, knowing how hungry he was in the mornings.

Thorin nodded and they headed back out the door. As they walked into the dining hall, he saw the nephews talking with Dwalin and Dís as well as Morrigan. “What are they up to?” He chuckled and glanced at Natalya who shrugged. They passed the group who suddenly fell silent and stared at them.

“What a merry gathering.” Natalya smiled as she walked up to the group. “Was the breakfast good?”

“Indeed.” Dwalin answered, seeing the nephews turn red in the face.

“Good.” Natalya smiled, seeing Duliera give her a side glance. The half-Elf looked to the brothers. “I see you have met Morrigan.”

Fili and Kili nodded. “She is really nice.” Fili smiled as he looked at the Dwarrowdam who giggled.

“What do you think of my nephews?” Natalya turned to Morrigan who laughed.

“They are quite the handful.” The brown haired Dwarrowdam answered, looking at the brothers. “Kili nearly ran me down the first time we met.”

Kili blushed as Natalya raised an eyebrow at him.

“You ran into her?” The half-Elf asked, looking surprised at her nephew.


Natalya chuckled as she saw Morrigan smile. “I must be going but I will see you later.” She smiled and nodded her head then walked over to where Thorin had already prepared a plate of food for her. “Thank you dear.” The Queen said, putting her hand on her husband’s shoulder.

Thorin smiled up at her. “How are my nephews?” He asked as she sat down.

“They seem to be handling themselves quite well.” Natalya answered with a smile. “They have taken quite the liking to Morrigan it seems.”

Thorin chuckled. “Maybe they need someone their age around to help them grow up.”
Natalya smiled as she ate her breakfast. “It just might work.”

Later that day before lunch, Fili, Kili and Morrigan were discussing their plan in the library.

“I say we do it while he is asleep.” Kili suggested with a mischievous grin on his face. “I can’t wait to see his face when he figures it out.” He paused as they all looked at each other. “Is there any other place he sleeps besides his bedroom?” The youngest nephew paused again and thought. “I have often seen him fall asleep in here while he is looking over important documents.”

“Perfect.” Fili grinned. “I will do that part of it since I am most equipped.” His lips turned into a slight smirk.

Morrigan nodded. “When is the other one going to happen?” She paused and thought. “How about while Fili is pranking Thorin, you can be in the forges hiding it.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Kili smiled. “Now let’s go get some food.”

The trio make their way to the dining hall when they catch a glimpse of Dwalin and Duliera.

“Hello Dwalin.” Kili called out across the hall.

The Dwarf turned to face them and smirked. “Been planning have you?”

Fili and Morrigan nodded. “It will certainly work.” The Dwarrowdam smiled at Dwalin and Duliera.

Duliera chuckled. “Thorin sure deserves it.”

They all head into the dining hall laughing as Fili and Kili explained to Dwalin and Duliera what they were planning to do.

“This will be interesting.” Dwalin muttered as he caught sight of Thorin and Natalya at the head of the table, eating their meal. “Now how do you know Thorin isn’t going to send you straight to Mahal’s halls for doing this?”

“We don’t.” Kili shrugged as he headed to the kitchen to grab his meal. He grabbed a large plate of food and headed back out to the dining hall and took a seat. Soon the others joined him and they all ate and talked.

“Is there anything else you must accomplish this afternoon my dear?” Natalya asked, looking at Thorin as he finished his meal.

“I need to speak with Balin about what to say then tomorrow I will rewrite a trade agreement.” Thorin looked at Natalya who nodded.

“What idea do you think Balin will propose?” Natalya asked as she stood up.

“Other than the fact that I should not lose my temper, I am not sure.” Thorin chuckled. He took Natalya’s hand as he started walking and saw the Nephews and Morrigan.

Morrigan gave a slight smirk as Natalya and Thorin passed. “So you think it will work?” She turned to Kili.

“Of course it will.” Kili smirked as he watched them leave as well.

Natalya could tell that Morrigan and the nephews were up to something but she couldn’t tell what.
She was snapped from her daze when she felt Thorin slightly pull her to the right and she nearly tripped.

“What are you so deep in thought about?” Thorin smiled as they stopped in front of the door to Balin’s chamber.

Natalya didn’t have time to answer before the elderly Dwarf opened the door and stepped out.

“Greetings Thorin.” Balin smiled. “I have not seen you for a few days.” He paused and looked to Natalya. “You look lovely as always my Queen.”

Natalya smiled and nodded. “Thank you Balin.”

“Won’t you come in?” Balin asked as he opened the door wider and motioned for them to enter.

“Wow.” Natalya breathed as she stepped into the room. It was much smaller than her and Thorin’s room but it felt more like a small library. There was a large rug with details laid in the middle of the floor and the chairs upholstery matched the red color scheme of the room. There were marble shelves built into almost every wall and small torches lit up the room with a bright light. On the only wall that didn’t have a bookshelf, there was a giant window that overlooked a wooded section of the mountain. “The view is gorgeous.” The half-Elf stated as she made her way over to the window and looked out at the glow from the sun.

Balin smiled. “I am very glad to see you are settling in.”

“Yes.” Natalya smiled as she looked back at the elderly Dwarf.

“If you had not seen Thorin in Mirkwood then I am not sure what would have happened.” The Dwarf chuckled as he looked between the King and Queen.

“Me neither.” Thorin smiled as he looked at his wife. Silence passed for a moment before he cleared his throat and spoke again. “I came to speak with you about the treaty that is going to be negotiated with the Woodland Realm.” The King looked at the elderly Dwarf with concern in his eyes.

“Thranduil has now announced that he will be here the morn’ after next, correct?” Balin asked as he took a seat at his desk and pulled out a piece of parchment.

“Indeed.” Thorin nodded as he looked over the Dwarf’s shoulder.

Natalya looked over Balin’s shoulder as well from the other side. Her eyes followed his hand across the page as he scribbled down notes.

Balin paused after writing a few lines and looked over his shoulder at Natalya. He swallowed as their eyes met. “I will need you to attend the meeting as well.”

Natalya simply nodded and looked over to see her husband staring at her as well. “What would you like me to do?”

Thorin paused and licked his lips. “You need to prove to them that your loyalties belong with us.” The Dwarf looked back down at what Balin was writing. “If you do not show up then the Elves may see you as wavering.”

Natalya nodded, knowing that she had to show everyone where she truly belonged. Especially Duliera. The half-Elf looked between the two Dwarves. “I understand.”
“Good.” Balin stated as he continued writing across the parchment. “Thranduil said he is to arrive in the morning.” The Dwarf never looked up as he spoke.

Thorin looked at Natalya and reached out his hand. “It will be fine dear.” He reassured his wife as he saw a worried look cross her face. “I will not let anything happen.”

Natalya gave a weak smile. She had not seen Thranduil in ages and knew he would try to dissuade her from having dealings with the Dwarves.

Balin paused his writing and looked up at the King. “I will also begin arranging your daily schedule after this meeting concludes so you need not worry about it.” He smiled. “If there is anything you wish to have changed just tell me.” He paused. “I do not want to see you work yourself to death.”

Thorin nodded. “Thank you Balin. That will be a great help.” He paused and thought for a moment. “I will also need extra guards on patrol.”

“That can be arranged.” Balin answered as he scribbled down another note across the page.

“Thank you again.” Thorin smiled. “This means more to me than you know.”

“Certainly your majesties.” The Dwarf stood up and bowed as they left.

The King took Natalya’s hand and they left the Dwarf’s room then headed to the library. Stopping in the hallway, Thorin turned his wife towards him. “I must see to some important business and will meet you tonight for dinner.” The King placed his hands on her shoulders. “That is unless you wish to accompany me.” He chuckled, looking into her eyes.

“I have nothing better to do.” Natalya chuckled as her eyes sparkled. “What is it you will be doing?”

“Just need to legalize some papers to get the mountain in running order again.” The King smiled as they walked to the library.

Natalya chuckled. “It does sound quite boring and tedious but I will help you so maybe it can go a little faster.” She smiled.

Thorin held her hand as they entered the library and took a seat in the back. He heard snickers from a few rows over but chose to ignore it.

“Here they come!” Kili giggled as he saw Thorin and Natalya enter from across the large room. He quickly sat back down and watched them walk closer from through the shelves of books.

“Now don’t be hasty brother.” Fili shook his head. “We can’t pull it off too early. The timing needs to be just right.” He continued watching the King and Queen through the shelves of books.

“What would happen should he not come back tomorrow?” Kili asked with one of his eyebrows raised.

“Oh he will.” The older brother nodded towards Thorin and Natalya as he watched his Uncle pick up a stack of about two hundred papers. “They all require his signature.”

The brunet Dwarf’s eyes went wide and he looked at Morrigan. “He will be in here for weeks.” Fili slightly smirked when he saw Thorin’s golden crown was still on his head. “Everything we
need is right there.”

“Right where?” Natalya asked, walking up to the group. She gave a funny look as they all jumped.

“The books we were looking at reading.” Morrigan said quickly as she nodded to the shelf of books.

Natalya nodded and raised her eyebrows. “I am on my way to bring Thorin some more food. Do you want anything?”

“No thank you Auntie we will get something in a bit.” Kili smiled at Natalya.

The half-Elf nodded and began leaving the library.

“Mahal that was a close one.” Morrigan sighed as she leaned back in her chair. “I knew I had to speak quickly should one of you spill the plan.”

“I would never.” Kili said, taken aback as he saw the Dwarrowdam give him a look.

“We are also lucky that your Aunt doesn’t know Dwarvish.” Morrigan laughed.

“Why is that?” Fili asked, his brow furrowed as he looked at the shelf of books that Kili had pointed to when he told Natalya they were going to be reading. “Oh.” He chuckled. “I think she would have known we were not studying that.”

The Dwarrowdam laughed as she looked at the title of the books. “I will find something more fitting.” She rose from her chair and went over a few shelves, picking up some books on Erebor’s history.

“That’s much better.” Fili stated as he watched Morrigan put the books down on the table.

The three of them were still casually flipping through the book as Natalya walked past with a tray of food and took it to where Thorin was still sitting.

“How is the signing coming along?” Natalya asked, setting the tray down while she looked at Thorin. “It seems that you have made some progress.” She commented, seeing the stack of about ten papers set off to the side that had Thorin’s signature at the bottom of the page.

Thorin simply nodded as he continued signing. “Mahal.” He muttered as he looked at the stack that was almost ten times as big as what he had finished.

The Queen took a seat next to her husband. Taking the feather quill out of his hand she set it down. Natalya rubbed her thumb across the back of his scarred hand. “You need to rest and eat a bit before you continue.” She could feel his hand slightly shaking in her own.

“Yes but then I will never be done.” Thorin sighed as he picked up the quill and placed it in the ink with his other hand. He finally reached for the mug and tasted it. “Mead.” He smiled. “Thank you dear.”

“It is finally warming up enough.” The half-Elf smiled. “Bombur said this is the first of it they have made all year.”

The King nodded and took a few more sips before he sat the mug down and ate the lunch that Natalya had put together for him. “Thank you so much my love.” He smiled at his wife.

“I know how cranky you become if you get hungry.” Natalya chuckled as she watched him quickly
eat the food.

“Are you not hungry?” Thorin asked, seeing that she had not prepared anything for herself.

Natalya shook her head and smiled. “I will eat at dinner.”

Thorin simply nodded as he continued eating. Looking over, he saw his wife looking through the unsigned papers.

“What does this even mean?” Natalya asked with a confused expression on her face as she looked at the Dwarven symbols. She also saw some westron words but could not discern what they meant.

“Some of them are written in Khuzdul and others are written in westron but use the runes.” Thorin explained as he pointed to different places on the page. “This paper is actually in the middle of a very long set of laws.”

“Interesting.” Natalya nodded as she stared at the page.

“When we have time I would be honored to teach you the language of our people.” The King smiled as he held her hand. “Would you be willing?”

“More than.” The Queen’s eyes lit up as she imagined Thorin and her studying Khuzdul by candlelight late at night.

Thorin smiled. “I will make that one of my highest priorities.”

Meanwhile, the brothers and Morrigan were still flipping through the books on Erebor’s history. They had become quite interested in it and barely even realized that it was dinner time until Thorin and Natalya rose from their table and walked past.

“I did not know you were in here.” Thorin said, slightly shocked when he saw them.

Fili and Kili nodded. “We were just reading up on the history of Erebor.” Fili smiled up at his Uncle.

“Dinner will be ready shortly if you are coming.” Thorin nodded and left the room.

“Why does he look like he is stressed all the time?” Morrigan asked as she got up from the table and looked at the brothers. “He needs to lighten up.”

Fili and Kili chuckled as they headed to the dining hall. “Finally dinner.” Kili exclaimed.

Thorin gave a big sigh as he walked across the large room. It was much busier than usual and he was surprised no one had tried to talk to him yet and bombard him with questions. He quickly grabbed his food and walked with Natalya back to the library.

The Queen felt like she was being stared at the entire time she was there and she quickly followed Thorin.

Fili and Kili looked at each other and smirked as Thorin and Natalya left. “Tomorrow.” Fili giggled as they left.

“Tomorrow eh?” Dwalin asked as he walked up behind the group with a smirk.

“Poor Thorin doesn’t know what’s coming.” Duliera said as she put her hands on her hips and
mirrored Dwalin’s smirk.

“No he doesn’t.” Morrigan chuckled as she continued to eat her meal.

Time passed quickly as the sun fell behind the mountain and night time came. Thorin was still sitting in the library and signing the laws into effect for the kingdom.

Natalya sat quietly and she could feel herself nodding off occasionally. She jumped when she felt Thorin place his hand on her arm.

“If you wish to return to the bedchamber you can.” Thorin looked at his wife who was about to fall asleep at any minute.

The Queen nodded and slowly rose from the table. After giving Thorin a kiss on the cheek she left and headed to their room. Natalya immediately climbed onto the bed and fell asleep.

Thorin stayed in the library late into the night and when morning came he had fallen asleep with his head buried in the pieces of parchment.

“Uncle is lucky he doesn’t drool.” Kili snickered when he saw Thorin asleep and the papers strewn everywhere the next morning. The brothers and Morrigan had awoken early to assure that the prank would work to their advantage.

“Let’s go.” Fili smirked when they saw Thorin dead asleep at the table.

Morrigan snickered as she kept door duty.

Kili went with Fili and grabbed the crown from where the King had placed it on the edge of the table. The younger Dwarf quickly ran back over to where Morrigan was standing guard at the door.

Fili slowly approached Thorin and studied his face for a few seconds to make sure he was asleep. He smirked to himself as he saw some of the longer hairs growing out on Thorin’s beard. Pulling out one of his small daggers he gently grabbed some of the hair and ran the blade through it, cutting it. His hand slipped as Thorin slightly stirred and it went much shorter than he had originally intended. Grabbing the hair that he had cut off he ran to where Kili and Morrigan were standing. “To the forges!” He gasped. “Run.”

The trio ran directly to the forges, out of breath by the time they got there. “Kili hide it!” Morrigan hurried the Dwarf.

Kili rushed to the nearest shelf he could find, not realizing where he had placed it and ran back to the group. He heaved a big sigh, trying to catch his breath. “Let’s get out of here!”

Morrigan and the brothers headed to the dining hall, acting like nothing had happened as they grabbed their breakfast.

Meanwhile, Natalya had awoken and washed herself off. As she stepped into the room after putting her robe on, she fetched Dís to help her into a dress for the day. “Have you seen Thorin?” Natalya asked the Dwarrowdam, becoming more nervous by the moment.

“He’s probably still asleep in the library.” Dís chuckled. “Wasn’t he there all day yesterday?”

The half-Elf nodded. “He should be awake by now. He usually is.”

“I will go search for him.” Dís said. “You wait out here in the wing for him to come then you can
proceed to the council room together.

Natalya nodded and watched Dís walk off, hoping Thorin would make it on time.
Chapter 25

Natalya was nervous. More so than she had been in a long time. Minutes passed and she looked around and still saw no sign of Thorin and her eyes continued to scan the royal wing. The Queen’s stomach churned at the thought of having to run the meeting alone. *He will be here shortly.* As her hazel eyes looked across the room she saw Balin heading towards her with a rolled up scroll in his hand and Thorin following behind him, fuming mad. As they got closer she could see that part of the longer section of his beard had been shaved off at an irregular angle.

“I’m going to kill them.” Thorin growled as he passed Natalya who was standing there with a confused look across her face.

“Thorin what happened?” Natalya asked in complete shock.

“I assume this was the doing of my nephews.” The King growled as he headed to the chambers.

Natalya jogged to keep up, following her husband into their room. “How do you know it was them?”

“I just know.” Thorin said, still fuming mad. He grabbed one of his daggers from his bedside table and walked over to the mirror, making his beard as even as possible although some of it was still noticeably shorter.

Natalya watched in the mirror and swallowed, knowing he must feel humiliated. “Thorin I am so sorry.” She said quietly, hanging her head.

“Nothing can be done now.” Thorin said harsher than intended as she slammed the knife down on the table. Looking around he saw no sign of his crown. “WHERE DID THEY PUT IT?!” He yelled and looked back at his wife. “I will join you once this is over.” Storming back outside, the King headed back to the library where some Dwarves were picking up the pieces of parchment and tidying them again. When he didn’t see it there either he knew for sure Fili and Kili had hidden it. As he was leaving the library he spotted Dís not far off.

“Thorin.” Dís swallowed as she approached him. “I have looked everywhere and have not seen any sign of it.”

The King growled. “Of all days they chose today.” Thorin paused as he searched through storerooms for the crown. “Tell Natalya to proceed with the meeting without me.”

“What?” Dís exclaimed. “Thorin you cannot simply miss this meeting.”

“Yes I can.” Thorin growled. “Natalya can handle it.” He paused as he shifted through old manuscripts. “Get Dain and Dwalin as well as Balin to join her.”

Dís nodded and swallowed. “I will inform them.” She left Thorin to go find the other Dwarves. “Stubborn Dwarf.” The Dwarrowdam muttered as she strode through the halls. “He can attend a meeting without his crown.” She shook her head as she made her way to the dining hall. “Dwalin!” She shouted as she entered, seeing him eating with Duliera. “You are needed at the council chamber now!”

Fili, Kili and Morrigan’s eyes all went wide. “What happened?” Fili asked, looking at his brother and the younger Dwarrowdam.
Kili and Morrigan shrugged their shoulders.

“Mahal.” Dwalin muttered as he rose from the table.

“I’m coming too.” Duliera said and she followed Dwalin and Dís out of the hall.

“What happened Dís?” Dwalin asked, slightly perplexed.

“Fili and Kili pranked Thorin and cut off some of his beard and while they were at it they stole his crown as well.” Dís took deep breaths, trying to stay calm as they left the dining hall. “I assumed they were not told of the meeting that was going to take place today.” The Darowdam was perplexed. “The meeting with Thranduil can not go awry.” Dís said in a hushed tone as she walked quicker down the corridors leading towards the royal wing.

“I thought we were heading to the council room.” Dwalin said as they passed through the arched doorway to the royal wing.

“You will in a moment but someone needs to escort Natalya since Thorin is not available.” Dís explained and Dwalin nodded.

Natalya swallowed, knowing Thranduil would try everything since Thorin was not present. She shakily took the scroll that Balin handed her.

“Here is the final trade agreement.” Balin stated as he handed over the parchment. “Not to worry you will have Dain, Dwalin and I there with you.” The elderly Dwarf smiled at the Queen.

“Thank you Balin.” Natalya smiled back. She looked to Dwalin and nodded as Dain entered the royal wing.

“I hear there is some pointy ear who needs persuading.” The large red haired Dwarf growled, cracking his knuckles.

Balin saw him and sighed. “You are only expected to aid Natalya during the negotiations should something go terribly wrong.”

“Understood.” Dain said, clapping Dwalin on the back and looking at Duliera.

Duliera looked at the two Dwarves. “Am I allowed to join?” She asked with a slight smirk across her lips.

“I do not see why that would be a problem lass.” Dain chuckled. “You are my best warrior.” He paused, putting his hand on her shoulder. “Maybe you can become one of my best negotiators as well.”

Dwalin chuckled at this statement as he looked at the shorter Dwarrowdam.

While the Dwarves and Natalya made their way to the council meeting, Thorin found Fili and Kili still sitting in the dining hall. “Fili! Kili!” He shouted, causing the brothers to look at him in shock.

“Yes Uncle?” Fili answered, swallowing. He could now clearly see that a part of Thorin’s beard was shorter than the rest and knew they were going to be in big trouble.

Kili and Morrigan stood up too and they all went and stood in front of Thorin. Morrigan shifted nervously on her feet as Thorin glared them all down.

“Where is it?” Thorin asked as calmly as possible.
Kili nervously bit his lip as Fili swallowed. “It is in the forges.” Fili answered softly, looking at the ground.

“Thank you for telling the truth but that does not excuse you for what you did.” Thorin said as he gave them an intense look. “Show me.”

The brothers nodded and they started walking towards the forges with Morrigan following.

Thorin shook his head and sighed. As he saw Morrigan walking with them he pointed to her. “Morrigan!” The King said loudly.

The Dwarrowdam slowly stopped and turned around, knowing that Thorin was probably going to punish her as well. “Yes your majesty?” She asked nervously.

“Did you have any part in this?” Thorin asked, looking at her with an intense gaze.

Morrigan swallowed but as she opened her mouth to speak, someone else did.

“No Uncle.” Kili answered for the Dwarrowdam. “It was just us.” The Dwarf looked at his Uncle who raised his eyebrows.

“If you are certain then she is free to go.” Thorin dismissed her with a wave of his hand as he walked up to his nephews. “Now let us proceed.”

Fili and Kili nodded and continued walking, knowing Thorin would no doubt punish them harshly for this. They hesitantly headed towards the forges, hearing Thorin’s heavy boot steps behind them. Once they entered the forge, Fili looked to his brother. “Where did you hide it?”

“Over here.” Kili answered as he tried to find the spot. “It was right here next to this…” The Dwarf paused and his eyes went wide when he realized what he had done. Swallowing hard, the Brunet turned around to face Thorin and Fili. “It’s…It’s.” He stammered as his face turned red and he stepped aside. “It melted.”

Thorin’s eyes went wide when he realized what his nephew had said. “What?” He stepped over to where there was a large puddle of melted gold and a blue stone in the middle. Taking a deep breath he turned back to the brothers. “Shaving my beard and melting my crown.” He said loudly as Fili and Kili hung their heads in shame.

“I didn’t mean to melt it.” Kili said softly, biting his lip as he stared into the floor, wishing he could sink into it and disappear. “I am so sorry.”

“No matter.” Thorin said harshly as he glared at them. “It is still melted nonetheless. I am highly disappointed in your behavior. I would have expected more rational behavior from you now.” The King paused, trying to think of a suitable punishment. When nothing came to mind he looked at the boys. “Go to your rooms and stay there the rest of the day. You are not allowed to come out unless it is with my permission.” The King stated strictly.

“Yes Uncle Thorin.” Fili whispered. “We understand.”

The boys slowly shuffled back to their rooms and stayed there.

Thorin huffed and went back to his chamber, exhausted. He sat in the armchair and quickly dozed off.

Meanwhile, as Natalya was finally leaving the meeting, the tall Elf King approached her. The
Negotiations had gone better than she anticipated but she was not in the mood to engage in idle chatter. As she started to walk back to her chamber, she felt someone grab her arm. “Thranduil?” The Queen asked as calmly as she could.

“You are the new Queen Under the Mountain?” The Elf questioned and seeing Natalya nod he continued. “Why would you stay with him?” Thranduil asked cooly, staring at her confused expression. “Isn’t it obvious to you that he is only using you for his personal gain?” The Elf’s lips formed into a slight snarl. “I did not expect you to last this long.” He admitted. “Thorin only wants you so he can have peace with the Elves but it will not work. I know all about you and where you came from.”

“How dare you say that!” Natalya exclaimed, wrenching her arm from Thranduil’s grasp. “How dare you insult me!” She stared at some of the passing council members who heard but said nothing.

“Why do you think I tried to stop you from getting to Erebor?” The Elf King asked with a slight glare. “I knew you would betray us as soon you figured out who your true parents were so I hid the manuscript hoping you would never find it.”

“Well now that I do know, there is nothing you can do about it. The Dwarves care for me more than you ever could.” Natalya gave Thranduil one last glare and continued walking down the corridor to her chambers. What the Queen saw when she walked in made her blood boil even more. Thorin was now casually relaxed in the armchair by the fireplace, asleep. “Thorin!” She shouted, immediately waking him.

The King jumped, hearing Natalya’s voice. “Yes?” He asked sleepily, rubbing his face.

Natalya marched over to him. “Where have you been?” She shouted, anger still in her voice. “I was in that council meeting while you were sleeping?”

“I dealt with what I needed to and decided to let you handle the meeting.” He said as calmly as he could while rising from his chair. “I knew you could do it.” He kissed her head with a smile.

Natalya huffed and stared at him. “I cannot believe you!” She yelled. “After you told me you would attend the meeting if you finished before it was over!” She approached him. The half-Elf’s face was stern as she raised her arm to slap him, but she felt him grab her wrist before she could do anything. Nervously staring into his eyes, she was suddenly pushed backwards into the cold stone wall, her breath quickening as he closed the distance between them.

“Do you want to try that again my dear?” Thorin asked, his voice husky as he breathed down her neck.

Natalya swallowed and shook her head, staring at the floor. “No Thorin.” She said softly.

“Good.” Thorin smirked, kissing her hard. He pulled away and looked into his wife’s hazel eyes. “Now we have both been under a lot of stress so why don’t we just put this behind us.”

Natalya nodded and looked at Thorin. “I am sorry.” She whispered. “I shouldn’t have tried to slap you.”

Thorin gave a sigh as he pulled her into a hug. “It’s okay dear. I understand.” He could feel her heartbeat against his chest as he ran his fingers through her hair.

They stayed like that for a while before Natalya leaned back with her arms still wrapped around Thorin. She studied his face and her eyes traveled down before they finally rested on his beard.
Gently reaching out and touching it she whispered, “You will always be perfect to me.”

Thorin smiled. He was still frustrated that Fili and Kili would do such a thing but knew the hair would easily grow back. “How did the negotiations go today my love?” Thorin gently asked, hoping he did not anger Natalya again.

“Better than I expected.” Natalya nodded. “Thranduil was reluctant but when he finally figured out I was not going to give in he agreed.” She smiled, proud of herself. “You should have seen Duliera’s face when it happened.” The Queen gave a slight smirk. “She had told me to prove myself.”

Thorin gave a chuckle. “I’m sure you showed the whole room who was in charge.”

“Indeed.” Natalya agreed with a smile. “I have been so quiet these past few weeks I bet they are surprised I know how to speak.” She chuckled, her eyes connecting with Thorin’s.

“Speaking of Duliera I think I will have her oversee my Nephews working in the forge.” Thorin smiled. “Dain tells me she can be quite ruthless.”

Natalya nodded. “I know.” She paused as Thorin continued to hold her. “I think I finally gained her respect.”

A few hours later Dwalin and Duliera were discussing the meeting over dinner. “Well I am surprised that half-Elf held her own against Thranduil.” The Dwarrowdam stated as she chewed her food. “She may not be half bad after all.” She chuckled with her mouth full of food as she pointed her fork at Dwalin.

The Dwarf shook his head as he continued eating his meal. “I told you she was better than you thought.”

Duliera rolled her eyes as she stuffed in another mouthful of food, not liking to be proven wrong. She looked up when she saw Thorin and Natalya entering the dining hall. “Hello your majesties.” The Dwarrowdam nodded her head as the King and Queen walked up.

“Greetings Duliera.” Thorin smiled down at her. “I have a task for you.”

The Dwarrowdam nodded, looking up at him. “Yes?”

“After my Nephews shaved half my beard off and melted my crown I would like for you to personally oversee them as they work in the forges for the next two weeks.” Thorin stated with his arms crossed over his chest. “They are there simply there to learn discipline.” The King raised his eyebrows at the Dwarrowdam. “I do not want them injured but simply worked. Hard.” Thorin paused again. “Dain has informed me about your fighting skills so handling my Nephews should be easy work.”

Duliera nodded. “I will be more than happy to assist, my King. I assure you they will soon know their place.” She side eyed Dwalin who chuckled and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Good.” Thorin commented, his lips forming a thin line. “They are to start work tomorrow at the crack of dawn.” He curtly nodded then turned on his heel and left.

“Natalya may I speak with you?” Duliera asked as she poured herself a glass of mead.

Natalya nodded and walked over to her, slightly nervous.
“Take a seat.” Duliera stated, pointing to the seat on the bench next to her.

The female sat down, wondering why Duliera wanted to speak to her. Swallowing, she waited for the Dwarrowdam to speak first.

“You aren’t that bad.” Duliera chuckled. “You held your own pretty well with the negotiations today.” The red head stated, taking another large gulp from her mug. “Dwalin has been trying to convince me your loyalty lies here and I didn’t realize it until today.”

Dwalin chuckled from the other side of Duliera. “It took a lot of work Natalya.”

Natalya smiled, not really sure what to say as she folded her hands on top of the table.

Duliera chuckled as she pushed a mug of mead towards Natalya. “Drink up.”

The half-Elf swallowed as she picked up the mug and took a hesitant sip.

“Good isn’t it?” The Dwarrowdam chuckled as she grabbed her own mug and chugged some more.

“Now don’t drink too much lass.” Dwalin warned, trying to stop the Dwarrowdam. “I don’t want to be carrying your drunk body back to your room.”

Duliera gave him an eye roll and continued to drink. “Mahal this is good.” She stated loudly as she slammed the empty mug on the table. Her eyes traveled over to Natalya’s mug which had barely been drunk. “Not one for mead are you?”

Natalya chuckled and shook her head. “I’m more of a wine drinker myself.”

Duliera jokingly gagged. “Only mead and ale for me!” She stood up to get another mug but Dwalin pulled her back down.

“I think you have had enough for tonight.” The Dwarf stated with a laugh. “One more of those and you will be roaring drunk.”

“I think I can handle myself mister Dwalin.” Duliera smirked as she wrenched her arm from the Dwarf’s iron grip.

Dwalin merely sighed as the Dwarrowdam marched into the kitchen to get another mug. “You had better leave now while you can Natalya.”

Natalya smiled and nodded as she rose from the bench. “Goodnight Dwalin.”

“A good night to you too milady.” Dwalin nodded. “Duliera!” He shouted as he heard a crash from the kitchen.

The half-Elf chuckled to herself as she left the dining hall and made her way back to her chambers. Upon entering the room she saw Thorin asleep at the desk. Natalya chuckled as she saw all the papers on the floor again. “Thorin dear.” She spoke softly as she walked over to him. “Thorin.” She said again, putting her hand on his arm.

Thorin felt something touch him and he slowly woke up. Looking up he saw Natalya through blurry vision. “Hello dear.” The Dwarf whispered groggly as his eyes adjusted with a few blinks, seeing his wife smiling down at him.

“You fell asleep again.” Natalya chuckled softly. “At least it was not in the library this time.”
The King nodded and slowly sat up, rubbing his face. “Mahal.” He muttered, looking down at the papers. “Why does this need to be so long?”

“It is the rules of the mountain dear.” Natalya answered as she went and found Thorin’s nightclothes. “You wouldn’t want everyone running rampant now would you?”

Thorin shook his head as his wife placed his clothes on the desk. Slowly standing, he shed his robes and royal garments and changed clothes as Natalya headed to the bathroom. After changing, he walked over to the bed and laid down. “Natalya?”

“Yes?” The female answered from the bathroom then stepped out after she had changed into a nightgown.

“I told Balin to make time in my schedule so I can start teaching you some Khuzdul.” Thorin smiled at his wife as she walked over to where he was resting against the pillows.

“I would love that.” Natalya smiled as she laid down in the bed next to her husband and faced him. “Is it hard?” She asked, looking into his eyes as they stared at each other.

“Not at all if you are willing to learn.” Thorin smiled as he reached over and played with a section of Natalya’s hair.

The half-Elf giggled as she watched him study her hair intently. “Thorin what are you…” She watched as he found the courting braid he had done months ago.

“I’m surprised this is still here.” The Dwarf smiled, seeing the bead still at the end of the braid.

“I check every morning to make sure it is there.” Natalya smiled as she watched him remove it.

“No other person is allowed to touch this.” Thorin whispered as his fingers quickly worked to undo the braid. “Since it is a sign of our union it is forbidden for anyone but the spouse to undo the braid.” He slowly combed the section with his fingers and redid the braid, attaching the bead at the end again.

“Thank you dear.” Natalya smiled at her husband and gave him a quick kiss. “May I rebraid yours?” She asked barely above a whisper.

Thorin nodded and found the courtship braid she had put into his hair. “Here you go.”

Natalya smiled as she took the section of her husband’s hair and removed the gold hair bead. She gently set it aside and began unbraiding it. Humming, the Queen slowly worked at the braid, making it look like new again and added the silver bead at the end. “I love you Thorin.” She whispered as she smiled and looked into the Dwarf’s crystal blue eyes. “For eternity.”

Leaning forward to kiss his wife, Thorin smiled as their lips gently met. “I love you my Queen.” The King whispered as he pulled away. “Now you should try to get some sleep if you still wish to have the lesson tomorrow.”

The Queen nodded. “Indeed I do.” She smiled as she intertwined their fingers and laid her head against her pillow.

Thorin smiled and watched as her eyes closed and she fell asleep. Resting his head against his pillow, Thorin fell asleep as well with their hands still intertwined.

Hours later, Natalya’s eyes slowly opened as she felt Thorin rising from the bed before the sun had
risen. “You’re up early.” She muttered as she closed her eyes again.

“I need to figure out what to teach you first.” Thorin smiled, looking down at his sleepy wife. “That is if you still want to.”

The half-Elf nodded slowly and mumbled something Thorin could not quite catch.

The Dwarf chuckled, looking at the desk. “I seem to have moved the books.” He licked his lips and ran his hands across his beard. “I will be back shortly love.” Thorin stated and he quickly got dressed in a simple tunic and trousers and headed towards the library. Upon entering the high archway, the King was glad it was quiet. He seemed to be alone as he walked through the tall shelves, searching for the Khuzdul books. “Here.” Thorin whispered to himself as he finally found the leather bound books. Taking two of them off the shelves, he started carrying them back to the room. As he was leaving, he heard footsteps behind him.

“Already awake brother?” Dís chuckled as she approached Thorin who turned to face her.

“I am going to begin Natalya’s Khuzdul lessons today.” Thorin stated as he looked at his sister. “As the Queen of Erebor and the fact that she is half Dwarf makes her more than able to learn our language.”

“Of course.” Dís agreed, nodding her head. She paused a moment, crossing her arms over her chest. “When does Fili and Kili’s punishment begin?” The Dwarrowdam slightly laughed, seeing her brother’s unevenly cut beard.

“Today.” Thorin smirked. “Duliera will oversee their work in the forges.” He left the library with Dís at his side and headed back to the royal wing.

“I am surprised Natalya is not awake yet.” The Dwarrowdam commented as Thorin headed towards his room.

“She is.” Thorin answered.

Dís nodded and headed back towards her room.

“You can take Fili and Kili breakfast.” Thorin called after Dís and saw her nod. He entered the chamber and saw Natalya asleep on the bed. Walking over to her, the King sat on the bed next to her and started massaging her back. “You never sleep in this late dear.” He whispered, hearing his wife stir. “I assumed you would be awake by now.”

“Thorin?” Natalya asked sleepily as she opened one eye and saw Thorin sitting on the bed next to her. A sigh escaped her lips as she felt him kneading into her back. “That feels so good, don’t stop.” The Queen whispered, closing her eyes again.

Thorin continued pressing his fingers into Natalya’s back, massaging her tight muscles. “What has made you so exhausted, love?”

She sighed and whispered. “Probably the council meeting yesterday.” A slight smile crossed her lips as her eyes stayed closed.

“You did wonderfully.” Thorin praised his wife. “Balin even said so himself.”

Natalya nodded and smiled, slowly opening her eyes again as Thorin removed his hands from her back.
“Shall we start the lesson or would you like breakfast first?” Thorin asked and smiled, knowing the answer.

“Breakfast.” The Queen whispered, slowly sitting up and rubbing her face.

“Feel better?” Thorin asked gently, holding her hand.

Natalya nodded as Thorin helped her out of bed. “I have not slept that well in years.” She admitted with a smile.

Thorin smiled as he cracked open the chamber door and called a guard to get their breakfast. He looked around and followed his wife over to where she had walked out onto the balcony. “I am glad you are willing to learn the language of our people.” Thorin smiled as he stood next to Natalya and put his arm around her waist.

“I am glad that you are willing to teach me.” The half-Elf answered with a smile. “I understand that it is not customary for a Dwarf to tell Elves their secret language.” She teased, leaning into him.

“You are an exception dear.” The King smiled as he kissed his wife on the cheek.

Natalya giggled as they stood in the morning breeze. “I did not expect the mountain to get this warm.” She commented as the sun began rising above the mountain ridge and she felt the sun’s rays heat her body. Spring had now begun in the mountains and the air was already considerably warmer.

Thorin smiled and nodded as he took his wife’s hand and led her back inside the bedroom. “Get dressed dear.” He said softly. “Then I will show you to the library and I can begin your lessons.”

After getting dressed for the day, Thorin and Natalya made their way to the library. Turning the corner, they nearly ran into Dís and Duliera.

“Thorin! Natalya!” Duliera exclaimed, her eyes going wide.

“Ah Duliera I have been meaning to speak with you.” Thorin said with a smile, looking at the Dwarrowdam.

Duliera looked between Thorin and Natalya, wondering what was going on.

“What offer?” Duliera looked at the King in confusion.

“My Nephews need to be taught a lesson…” Thorin started as he looked to Dís as well.

“Yes.” Duliera answered quickly, suddenly remembering that she was to oversee Fili and Kili’s work in the forges. “I will find them immediately.” The Dwarrowdam bowed and began to walk off.

“They are in their rooms.” Thorin answered with a chuckle at her enthusiasm. “Dís has the key and I am sure she will be more than willing to help you escort them to the forges.”

Dís chuckled and walked next to Duliera. “I will show you to their rooms.”

“They shouldn’t be punished so roughly they are still young.” Natalya said, looking at Thorin.

“Yes however that does not excuse them from their actions.” Thorin commented, looking at his
wife, his eyebrows raised. “They simply need to be taught a lesson.” The King and Queen continued making their way down to the library. “Speaking of lessons, are you ready for yours?” Thorin asked with a smile, seeing Natalya nod. Finding an empty table in the corner of the library, they took a seat.

Over in the royal chambers, Duliera and Dís knocked on the boy’s chamber doors.

“Fili get out here!” Duliera shouted loudly, knocking with all of her might. The door rattled and sounded as if it was going to fly off the hinges.

Dís’ eyes went wide as she knocked softer on Kili’s door. “Get out here Kili.” She said with a warning tone in her voice.

The brothers came out of their rooms and trudged into the hallway. “Yes Amad?” Kili said softly, looking at the ground.

“You boys are to go with Duliera and she will oversee your punishment.” Dís explained with a serious look on her face as she watched Fili and Kili look at each other.

“Can’t you just oversee our punishment?” Fili asked as he saw Duliera standing with a smirk and her arms crossed.

Dís shook her head and chuckled. “Thorin knows I will be too easy on you.”

“That is why I am in charge. Now let’s go.” Duliera said as she headed towards the forges. “NOW!” She yelled when they didn’t follow her command immediately.

Fili and Kili scrambled after her. “What are we to do here that could possibly take two weeks?”

“There are things in here that would require five years of your hard labor.” Duliera said as she marched straight ahead and did not look at either of the brothers. “Unless you wish for me to inquire of Thorin to extend your punishment I suggest you keep silent.”

Fili and Kili shut their mouths and continued following the Dwarrowdam into the heart of the forges. They immediately felt themselves start to sweat and glanced at each other with wide eyes as they swallowed hard.

“Your first task of the day is to begin tidying up the forge.” Duliera said with a slight smirk as she turned and saw the looks on the brothers faces.

Fili and Kili bit their lips, not daring to say anything.

“Get to work today not tomorrow!” Duliera suddenly shouted, causing the boys to run and start cleaning up what they could. The Dwarrowdam chuckled as she leaned against the nearest wall and kept her eye on them the whole time. “NO!” She shouted when she looked up and saw them moving an anvil. “That stays where it is!” Duliera stomped over to them, causing other Dwarves in the forge to look at her. “You have been simply instructed to clean.” She paused, glaring at them. “Don’t move anything. You will be doing that enough in the next few days.”

Fili and Kili continued working, feeling the sweat quickly soak through their shirts as they cleaned the forge of all the debris they saw.

Hours passed and Duliera huffed as she heard her stomach growl. They had missed lunch and she knew the boys must be starving as well but did not know if Thorin would allow them a break. Just as those thoughts were going through her head, she heard footsteps coming up behind her.
Dwalin swallowed when he saw Duliera and he looked next to him to see Thorin smirking at him. The Dwarf King noticed his friend’s slight anxiousness whenever he was around the Dwarrowdam. Looking past Duliera, he saw Fili and Kili working hard to clean the forges. “It looks very nice in here.” Thorin stated, causing Duliera to whip around and look up at the two Dwarves.

The Dwarrowdam felt her heart skip a beat when she saw Dwalin grinning at her. “Good afternoon.” She bowed her head, trying to hide her blush.

“Would you care for a meal lass?” Dwalin asked as he continued smiling at Duliera.

Duliera nodded as her stomach gave another loud grumble.

Fili and Kili saw their Uncle and Dwalin enter the forges and quietly snuck over behind Duliera who was still talking with Dwalin.

“You will be allowed to join us for some food boys if Duliera feels you have completed your task well.” Thorin said, crossing his arms over his chest and observing his nephews who already looked like they had been worked to exhaustion.

Duliera turned around and looked at the brothers with a scowl. Stepping past them, the Dwarrowdam observed the cleanliness of the forges for a few moments before turning back to the group. “I will allow you to get food.”

Fili and Kili sighed in relief. “Thank Mahal!” Kili exclaimed. “We are starving.”

The group headed to the dining hall with Thorin leading and Dwalin and Duliera bringing up the rear. “Move faster.” Duliera occasionally growled at the brothers who were walking exceptionally slow.

“We would be able to if you didn’t work us so hard.” Kili retorted, earning him a smack upside the head from the Dwarrowdam.

Duliera huffed. “Maybe if you chose not to aggravate your Uncle before a trade agreement then none of this would have happened.” She shot back, silencing the younger brother.

Fili gave his brother a look as they continued heading to the dining hall. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Natalya leaving the royal chambers as she walked towards Thorin. “Hello Auntie.” Fili said with a smile, seeing the Queen turn towards them.

“Hello boys.” The half-Elf smiled. Or rather should I say “Shamuk.” (Greetings) She chuckled, seeing her husband smile at her. “Thorin has graciously decided to teach me Khuzdul. Maybe now I can finally understand what you are saying.” Natalya paused as she stepped in line next to the brothers. “Well don’t you look like you have been working hard?” She smiled, finally seeing their exhausted faces. “I am sure Duliera found some good tasks for you to complete.” The Queen gave a slight smirk as she looked back over at Duliera over her shoulder. Taking longer strides, she stepped up to walk next to Thorin.

“Indeed milady they will work hard.” Duliera chuckled as she thought of another task for them to complete.

Upon entering the dining hall, Fili and Kili took their seats immediately and rested their heads on the table. “I never want to get up again.” Kili moaned.

“Well you will have to.” Duliera laughed from behind them. “You are just getting started. At that
moment, she caught Thorin’s eye as she looked to the end of the table and she saw her motion her
don. “Yes your majesty.” Duliera bowed once she approached the king.

Thorin looked down the long table to see Fili and Kili with their heads still down on the table. “I
have decided to shorten their sentence to only one week but under no circumstances are you to tell
them until the seventh day.”

Duliera nodded and bowed again. “Yes your majesty.”

Natalya entered the dining hall from where she had gotten her meal in the kitchen and saw Duliera
bowing to Thorin before walking off. “What was that about?” The Queen asked as she took a seat
next to her husband.

“It’s a secret.” Thorin whispered as he picked up a bite of food with his fork. “I will tell you later.”

Natalya nodded and stayed quiet. Her hazel eyes scanned the room as she observed the slow
bustling of the crowd. Dwarves were constantly entering and leaving at a steady flow and everyone
would either nod or bow if they caught eye contact with Thorin.

“If you would care to join me I shall retire for the day.” Thorin said as he watched Natalya finish
her meal.

Natalya nodded as she sat her fork down on her plate and smiled. “I will gladly join you.”

Thorin smiled back as a Dwarf came and took care of their plates, carrying them back to the
kitchens.

The King and Queen headed back to their chambers, hand in hand.

Meanwhile, Dís saw Morrigan as she was making her way to the dining hall. “Good afternoon
Morrigan.” Thorin’s sister smiled at the younger Dwarrowdam.

“Dís!” Morrigan exclaimed when she saw her friend. “How are the brothers taking their new
punishment?” She chuckled as they began walking toward the dining hall.

“Well they are already tired and they have only been working for a few hours.” Dís laughed as they
walked through a few narrow corridors then began walking through crowds of people.

“It seems to be getting more crowded every day.” Morrigan commented as she passed a large group
of Dwarves.

“Indeed.” Dís smiled, looking at Morrigan’s confusion. “When I came that was just the first
group to arrive from Ered Luin.” She paused. “There is expected to be at least two more groups
arrive. This must have been the first group.” Thorin’s sister said, looking around at all the
Dwarves. “They were told to wait until a Raven was sent to begin the journey back to the
mountain.”

Morrigan nodded as they finally made it to the dining hall. Her and Dís took their seats, seeing no
sign of Thorin, Natalya or the boys. “I guess they have been put back to work.” Morrigan chuckled
as they headed to the kitchens to grab a plate of food.

“Thorin won’t let them get away with what they did.” Dís answered as she piled her plate full of
food. Grabbing a mug of fresh mead, she headed back out into the large room.

Morrigan and Dís took seats opposite each other at the table and talked for a long while. “How long
until Erebor is back to its full strength?” Morrigan finally asked, breaking the silence.

“All in good time.” Dís took a deep breath. “I have not told Thorin any of this yet.” The Dwarrowdam paused, looking at Morrigan in the eyes. “Ori and Balin as well as Dwalin have already been speaking of attempting to reclaim Moria.” She swallowed, speaking softly. “That is where they are originally from. The Dwarves of Moria.”

Morrigan nodded. “Why would they want to start a war now?” She asked in a hushed tone, leaning closer to Dís. “With Erebor’s forces only starting to rebuild, starting a war right now would be dangerous.”

“Agreed.” Dís answered as she took another bite of food and chewed slowly. “They don’t have any plans of doing it immediately. It would take a few months to a year to recruit soldiers and think of a battle plan.” The Dwarrowdam paused again and took a breath. “Natalya also comes from the race of Moria Dwarves but that is not all.” She looked up to see Morrigan’s mouth slightly agape. Nodding, Dís continued her explanation. “Natalya is from the Dwarves that came from Nogrod. After the fortieth year of the second age, the Dwarves fled to Moria after their city was destroyed in the War of Wrath.” The Dwarrowdam paused again, taking a sip of mead and a bite of food. When Morrigan said nothing, she continued. “On her Elvish side, her mother resided in Eregion which lay in the woods near to the west gate of Moria. That means Natalya is from the race of the Ñoldor that Mahal taught to forge. Her father must have been young when he traveled to Moria and spent most of his life there. She is probably the last half-Elf before the dispute between the Dwarves and the Elves.”

Morrigan nodded as she continued to eat, trying to understand.

“When the Dwarves aided the Elves against Sauron in the war on Erigon, her father was probably killed and her mother left, going to the Woodland Realm. Natalya’s age tells us that her mother must not have yet known she was pregnant when she arrived in Mirkwood.” Dís explained, looking at Morrigan. “That is all we have gathered for the time being.”

“That is impressive.” Morrigan said with a shocked look on her face. “How did you find all this information?”

“Natalya’s Elf friend, Anairë from the Woodland Realm. She found an old manuscript in one of the storage rooms that looked as if it had been burned. The Dwarves were probably mad that they were ever seen with an Elf after what happened.” Dís explained, turning slightly sad.

Morrigan nodded. “That means that if anything is said about reclaiming Moria, Natalya will want to join as well.” She looked at Dís who nodded.

“I know Thorin will not take lightly to that after what happened a few months ago.” Dís said as she licked her lips.

“What do you mean?” Morrigan asked, her brow furrowed in confusion. “Why would he not allow her to fight? She seems like a skilled warrior.”

Thorin’s sister nodded. “She is.” The Dwarrowdam paused. “He just does not want to see her nearly killed again.”

“Again?” Morrigan asked, shocked. “What happened?”

“During the battle to reclaim Erebor, Natalya fought at Thorin’s side and saved his life, nearly getting killed in the process. It took her awhile to recover from her injuries and it pained Thorin to see her that way.” Dís explained as she finished her meal.
Morrigan nodded as they rose from the table and walked back towards the royal chambers in silence. Passing the hallway that led to the forge, Morrigan heard shouting.

“Fili! Kili! Get back here!” Duliera shouted, marching after the boys. She had ordered them to start forging a new crown for Thorin and it had not gone as planned. They had not even found a design to agree upon and many small arguments had broken out over it. “You will decide on a design this very moment!”

Fili and Kili cringed as they headed down the hallway. The hour had gotten late as it approached dinner time and the boys still could not think of anything suitable.

Dís saw them coming and she stood at the end of the hallway, arms crossed and a scowl across her face.

When the brothers saw her they came to a screeching halt, their eyes wide. “Amad please help.” Fili begged Dís. “We must come up with a design for Thorin’s crown.”

Dís raised her eyebrows and slightly took pity on them. She looked up when she heard Duliera’s footsteps approaching.

“Lady Dís.” Duliera nodded. “They have not yet completed their task for the afternoon.”

Dís looked again to the brothers. “I will help you just this once but none of you are to to speak a word of it.” She warned the three of them.

Fili and Kili looked at their mother with hopeful eyes. “Please.”

The Dwarrowdam sighed and motioned for Fili and Kili to follow her to her chambers. “Thank you Duliera.” She said, quickly turning towards the Dwarrowdam. “You are free to go.”

Duliera nodded and began heading to the dining hall, exhausted.

The brothers followed Dís to her room and went over to where she took a seat at her desk, pulling out some spare parchment and ink.

“Now do you have any ideas at all?” Dís asked, looking to Fili and Kili.

“Well the symbol of Erebor is depicted as a Raven.” Fili suggested with a shrug. “Maybe we could add that in like his old one.” The Dwarf said, remembering the one he had worn before the Battle of the Five Armies.

Dís nodded and started a simple sketch. “It would make sense to match Natalya’s tiara in style.” Her hand moved in long strokes across the page then she went back and added in the details of the Ravens in the front and where their wings met there was a small stone.

Fili and Kili looked at each other in awe. “Amad that is perfect.” The brothers said as she showed them the drawing.

Dís smiled then turned back to her desk. “This won’t be the last time I save your hide.” She muttered under her breath.

Fili took the drawing as the Dwarrowdam handed it to him. “Thank you so much!”

Dís simply nodded. “Head to bed now. I know Duliera won’t let you rest tomorrow now that you have a design.”
Fili and Kili nodded and trudged back to their rooms.

Meanwhile, Thorin and Natalya were still awake and she was having her husband teach her more Khuzdul. “It is getting late my dear.” Thorin said gently as he gave a yawn and leaned back in his chair. He had been teaching her for hours. He had dinner brought to their room as Natalya had insisted that she keep learning.

Natalya smiled at her husband. “I am surprised that it is coming so easily to me.” She gave his hand a kiss when he placed it on her shoulder and stood up.

“Well it may have to do with the fact that you are also half Dwarf.” Thorin chuckled softly as he kissed his wife on the head. He changed into his night clothes and went over and laid down on the fur on top of the bed and let out a sigh. Staring at the ceiling, he waited for Natalya.

The Queen continued reading for a few more minutes before she changed into her long nightgown and joined Thorin. “I’m exhausted.” She whispered as she looked at her husband. “I love you.” The half-Elf whispered after they exchanged a kiss.

“I love you too amrâlimê.” Thorin whispered, smiling at Natalya.

“Love of mine.” Natalya whispered as she continued smiling at the Dwarf.

“You are learning quickly.” The King whispered, stroking Natalya’s hair. He paused for a moment. “Your hair is the most gorgeous I have ever seen.” Thorin admired it for a few more seconds. “The way the light reflects it.” He ran a section of it between his fingers. “Especially in the morning sun.”

Natalya smiled, putting her finger over his lips. “Hush dear.” She paused, looking into his crystal blue eyes. “You need some sleep.”

Thorin simply nodded and gave her one last kiss before he laid back against his pillow and fell into a deep sleep.
The next week in Erebor passed quickly. Fili and Kili finally finished Thorin’s crown with Duliera constantly watching over them like a hawk. It luckily took them less time than they had originally thought it would and they were able to present it to him a day early.

“Good job boys.” Duliera praised when she saw the completed crown finally removed from the mold. “Now I don’t expect either one of you will ever pull a trick like that again since you put your blood and sweat into that.” She looked down at Fili’s bloody knuckles as he held the silver crown in his hand. Dís had gifted them the small blue stone that the boys set in between the ravens outstretched wings.

Kili looked at Fili and nodded vigorously at Duliera. “I swear on Mahal never to do anything of the sort again.” The brunet piped up.

Duliera raised an eyebrow at him, not entirely convinced. “I will inform Thorin of your accomplishment then you can present it to him this evening.”

“Agreed.” Fili said quickly, looking at his brother who nodded.

Duliera gave a curt nod and started leading them to the royal wing. As they passed under the archway, Dís was leaving her room and she walked over to the brothers, seeing the crown in Fili’s hands. “I see you have finished.” The Dwarrowdam smiled as she looked down at her sons.

“We have.” Kili smiled at his mother. “Do you like it?” He asked as Fili held it up for her to see.

“It looks lovely.” Dís smiled as she placed a hand on either one of their shoulders. “I am sure Thorin will appreciate it.”

The brothers smiled. “When will we be allowed to present it to him?” Fili asked, looking at his mother.

“This evening while he is at dinner would be an opportune time.” Dís answered with a nod. “Meanwhile why don’t you see if there is anything Duliera would like you to do.” She gently took the finished crown from Fili’s hands and watched as they swallowed and looked behind them at Duliera’s stern expression.

“You boys are in luck.” Duliera chuckled when she saw their nervous faces. “Dwalin wishes to meet me for lunch so you are free to leave and your punishment is over; but, under no circumstances cause any more trouble is that clear?” She raised an eyebrow at them.

“Yes Duliera.” The boys answered with a sigh. “Amad may we join you for lunch?” Kili asked quietly as Duliera left the royal chambers.

Dís nodded and answered. “I do not see why that would be a problem.”

Fili and Kili let out a sigh as they followed Dís to the dining hall.

Meanwhile, Thorin and Natalya were getting dressed for lunch. Thorin had been helping Natalya with her Khuzdul for the last few hours. “I have some other matters to attend to after lunch.” Thorin stated as he put his royal robe on over his tunic.

Natalya nodded. “Is there anything I can do to assist you?” She looked over at Thorin as she added
some jewelry to her wrists and ears as well as a necklace.

“Not today.” Thorin said with a slight smile. “You are free to do whatever you choose.”

Natalya nodded, knowing her husband was still upset after what Fili and Kili had done. “Everything will work out for the best dear.” She said softly as she rested a hand on his arm.

Thorin sighed and nodded as he looked at her. “I know.” He took her hand gently in his and they left the room to head to the dining hall.

“After lunch I think I will go for a ride.” The Queen smiled as she looked at Thorin. “It was very relaxing the other day.”

“Make sure you don’t ride too far.” Thorin said with a slight warning in his voice. He didn’t want her to end up near the borders of Mirkwood and get herself killed should they think she’s a spy.

“I won’t.” Natalya smiled as she squeezed his hand reassuringly.

Thorin smiled back at her as they entered the dining hall. He looked to see that his wife had a slightly confused look on her face. “What is it dear?” Thorin asked, feeling her hand tense in his grasp.

“Have more Dwarves arrived?” The Queen asked quietly as her eyes scanned the room seeing it full of mostly male Dwarves.

Thorin nodded. “It is our kin returning from Ered Luin.” He paused as they took a seat and the food was presented. “There is to be one more group after then the mountain will be getting closer to its original population.”

Natalya simply nodded and picked up her fork to start eating. Silence passed between the couple as they ate lunch. Finally finishing, they rose from the table and headed back to their chambers.

Thorin gave his wife a chase kiss outside the chamber doors. “I will see you this evening my dear.”

“Dinner?” Natalya asked, raising her eyebrows. They normally always ate together, she just feared that soon Thorin’s duty as King would interfere with their time together.

“Of course.” The King smiled as he gave Natalya a kiss on the head before tuning and walking down the hall that led to the council room. Thorin was heading to attend a meeting with the nobles to discuss the rest of the repairs inside the mountain now that more Dwarves were arriving by the day.

While Thorin attended the meeting, Natalya changed into her riding skirt and stepped out into the corridor. Looking around, she smiled as she saw Dís walking towards her. “Good afternoon Dís.” Natalya greeted the Dwarrowdam as she walked up. “Has your day been productful?”

“Very.” Dís answered with a smile and a nod. She had just left her room when Fili and Kili gave her Thorin’s new crown to hold on to. “Fili and Kili finally finished their task.”

“That is good to hear.” Natalya smiled as she headed out of the royal wing. She knew that now that the boys had finished their task, their punishment had been lifted. “I am headed out to the stables.” She informed Dís as she began heading to the entrance of Erebor.

“Will you be alone?” Dís asked and Natalya turned back to face her.
Natalya simply nodded, wondering why Dís asked.

“I will send my sons with you.” Dís smiled. “I assume they are still in their rooms. Thorin would not want you traveling alone.”

“I will not go far.” Natalya said she really wanted some time to herself to relax and enjoy the warmer weather that had been coming over the mountain.

Dís ignored her and went to her son’s rooms and banged on the door.

“I assure you this isn’t necessary.” Natalya chuckled.

“Get out here now.” The Dwarrowdam said firmly to Fili and Kili.

“Yes Amad?” Fili asked, looking at his mother.

“Natalya is about to go riding and I wish for you to accompany her.” Dís said, looking over to where the half-Elf was still standing in the corridor.

“A ride?” Kili asked, immediately perking up. “I would love to go!”

The Dwarrow looked less impressed as he walked over to the group. “I will come.” Fili nodded with a smile at Natalya.

Natalya smiled at the brothers and turned to leave. She headed to the stables, listening to the snickers of Fili and Kili behind her. Rolling her eyes and ignoring them, the half-Elf quickly saddled her horse. She admired the dark brown leather on the saddle and how immaculate it looked. It had a small emblem of a horse head on one of the leg flaps that had been carved with immaculate detail. She ran her hand across it, admiring the detail. Putting on the bridle, Natalya’s eyes caught a familiar emblem on the browband. She studied it closer and realized that she had seen it on one of Thorin’s swords in the chamber. Leading Roheryn outside, Natalya saw that the boys were still talking. “If you wish to ride with me then I suggest you hurry up.” The Queen said as she swiftly mounted her horse. Her skirt laid perfectly into position as she settled into the saddle and nudged the mare into a walk.

“Wait for us Auntie!” Kili exclaimed, quickly tacking up his horse and heading out.

Fili was the last to arrive and slightly grumbled as he mounted his horse, bringing up the rear.

“How about we ride to Dale.” Kili suggested to Natalya. “I know that you and Uncle already did that but I would like to see the city.”

“Very well.” The Queen agreed as she smiled at the brunet. She turned back to see Fili riding slower than everyone else. She was not sure what was wrong was but chose not to ask as they headed towards Dale. Entering the city, Natalya gave a slight chuckle as Kili was in awe.

“I haven’t seen it like this since before Smaug attacked.” Kili whispered as he looked around. With the weather finally getting warm again, the people of Dale had already set up market for the day and were buying and selling. Natalya smiled as some of the people greeted her and bowed their heads. She occasionally glanced behind her to make sure Fili and Kili were keeping up.

Fili felt his spirits brighten as he entered the small bustling town. Even though he was a Dwarf, he had always hated being confined to the mountain for weeks at a time. Getting some fresh air in his lungs, he breathed a sigh of relief. The blond looked around and saw a girl buying a beaded necklace from one of the townspeople he smiled when she caught his eye. The girl slightly blushed
and hurried off, not saying a word. Fili chuckled and continued riding behind, taking in the sights but his mind kept wandering back to the girl he had seen. The Dwarf tried to shake the feeling that was building inside him but it wouldn’t leave. He slightly smiled as he caught up with Kili and Natalya.

Natalya winded through the streets, the brothers still following close behind. Looking down an abandoned alleyway, she spotted a pile of rubble, emitting a strange glow. Asking Kili to hold her horse, she quickly dismounted and walked over to the pile of rubble. She picked up some of the large rocks and put them to the side, trying to figure out where the glow was coming from. Natalya’s eyes went wide and she slightly gasped when she saw what it was. “The Arkenstone.” She whispered and swallowed hard. Nervously glancing over her shoulder, she saw Fili and Kili at the end of the alleyway, staring curiously at her. “Get me a spare piece of cloth.” She ordered, hoping she had one somewhere in her saddlebag.

Kili quickly searched through his saddle bag and Natalya’s. “There’s nothing here.” The brunet said loudly as he rummaged through the bags. “What is wrong?” He called out to Natalya who was still standing by the pile of rubble.

“I need both of you to go back to the mountain now!” The Queen instructed strongly.

The brothers gave their Aunt a confused look but did as she said and quickly rode their horses back to Erebor.

Natalya swallowed hard as she looked back down at the glowing stone. Biting her lip, she picked it up and carried it back with her to her horse who looked at it funny and gave a loud snort. “I know.” The half-Elf whispered as she put the stone in her saddlebag and mounted quickly then left the town. *It must have been lost after the battle then forgotten.* Natalya thought as she quickly rode through the streets of Dale and back to Erebor. She nudged her mare into a canter once she left the city and rushed back to the mountain, riding up to the front gate. The Queen saw Dwarves on top of the newly rebuilt rampart and looked up at them, making eye contact.

Soon, the gates were opened and one of the Dwarven guards rushed out. “Are you hurt, milady?” He asked quickly, looking at her. “When Fili and Kili returned but you did not, I informed Thorin immediately. He is on his way.”

“I am fine.” Natalya said, slightly frustrated. “Find Balin for me. Now!” Natalya said harshly and watched the Dwarf run back into the mountain. She gave a big sigh, knowing Thorin would be in a frenzy. She stood outside the gates for a while and waited for Balin and the Dwarf to return. Soon though, she heard approaching footsteps and when she looked up, her hazel eyes caught Thorin’s gaze. Natalya saw the worry in his eyes as he came closer.

“Natalya are you hurt?” The King asked quickly, putting his hand on her arm.

“I am fine Thorin.” Natalya reassured with a smile.

“I will accompany you to the stables.” Thorin said with fear still in his voice.

“That will not be necessary.” Natalya swallowed. “I can manage.” She gave another smile, hoping Thorin would take the hint and leave so she could speak with Balin.

Thorin looked at her and raised his eyebrows. “Only if you are sure.” He gave her a quick kiss on her cheek and turned to head back inside.

The Queen gave a sigh as soon as Thorin was back behind the double doors. She waited a few
more minutes before they opened again and Balin stepped out.

“You called for me milady?” The elderly Dwarf asked, worry spread across his face.

Natalya nodded and moved towards her horse’s flank to open the saddle bag. “I was in Dale today when I found this.” She said as she reached in the bag to pull out the Arkenstone. “I can only assume it was lost during the battle and everyone forgot about it.”

Balin swallowed hard. “Did Fili and Kili see it?”

“I do not think so.” Natalya shook her head. “I tried to hide it from them as best I could.”

Balin looked at the stone, still shining as brightly as it did when it was created. “After I just spoke with Thorin about reclaiming Moria.” Balin muttered under his breath.

Natalya heard him say something about Moria but did not question it. She sighed again as Balin reached for the stone and reluctantly handed it over. Biting her lip, Natalya watched as Balin observed the stone and turned it over in his hand.

The elderly Dwarf sighed. “It needs to be destroyed.”

The Queen simply nodded. “Yes.” She agreed. “How?”

“In the forges.” The Dwarf answered. “Thorin cannot know.” Balin tucked the stone away into his pocket. “I will keep it hidden for now. When you enter the mountain, go directly to the forges, I will meet you there.”

Natalya nodded and began leading her horse back to the stables. Her mind raced as she imagined what Thorin would do once they told him. Will he be glad or angry? She quickly groomed off the mare and put her back in her stall. Rushing out of the stables, she headed back to the mountain. The doors were opened immediately for her and she quickly walked to the forges. Natalya was slightly out of breath when she arrived and saw Balin standing by an anvil. “How are we going to destroy it?”

“I am not sure yet.” Balin said, standing close to the anvil to keep the stone out of the sight of prying eyes.

“Would smashing it work?” Natalya suggested as she looked down at the stone.

Balin shook his head. “I just want what we do to work the first time.”

Natalya nodded. “I agree.” She paused as she continued to look at it. “But it is just a stone.”

“Indeed.” The elderly Dwarf agreed. He went to grab a large hammer from one of the other anvils. “Well I hope this works.”

The Queen nodded in agreement. “May I do the honors?” She softly asked.

Balin looked at Natalya, slightly shocked. “Of course milady.”

The half-Elf smiled as she lifted the hammer and watched as Balin quickly stepped back. With a slight growl, she lifted the hammer above her head and brought it down on top of the Arkenstone as hard as she could. A deafening crack was heard and a bright light emanated from the stone, slightly blinding Natalya for a moment before the rock went completely black. The Queen stared at it, slightly in shock and it almost felt as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.
“Balin.” She whispered, looking over her shoulder, seeing the elderly Dwarf’s eyes widen.

“It’s gone.” Balin said softly, walking over and looking down at the pieces of the stone that had now turned black. He looked at Natalya who had a shocked look on her face.

Natalya simply nodded, not saying anything as she looked at Balin. “I will inform Thorin tonight.” She turned to leave but felt Balin grab her arm.

“Dwalin and I spoke to Thorin about reclaiming Moria now that Erebor is about to be back to its former strength.” The Dwarf paused and licked his lips then spoke again. “He agreed that troops should be trained and we should start rebuilding our army as soon as possible.”

Natalya nodded. “Did he agree to war?” Her mind raced as she thought about what trying to reclaim Moria could mean. She knew that her father had moved there from where he had originally resided slightly south of Ered Luin.

Balin nodded then answered softly. “Aye.”

The Queen bit her lip, slightly frustrated. She wished Thorin had spoken with her about this beforehand. Going to war was not some trivial matter. Natalya did not understand how he could simply say they were going to war when they barely made it out of the last battle alive. The half-Elf sighed before she left the forges, her mind spinning with everything that was happening so fast. I cannot believe Thorin has already agreed so easily to go to war. She stared into the ground as she walked, knowing her way by heart. Picking her head up as she passed through the Gallery of the Kings on the way to the royal chambers, Natalya wanted to seem approachable should anyone wished to speak with her. Luckily she caught only a few eyes and some nods in her direction. Walking quickly back to her and Thorin’s room, the Queen was not surprised when her husband was absent. Natalya finally felt the weight of the mountain come crashing down onto her shoulders. She now understood that having the glory of being Queen also came with a price. Sighing, the female stayed in the chambers for a while and awaited Thorin’s return.

Meanwhile, Balin sighed as he knew how much pressure had just been placed on Natalya in such a short amount of time. The Dwarf quickly discarded the shattered pieces of the Arkenstone in a secret place and headed back to speak with Thorin.

The King was still hard at work in the library as he had now been assigned to settle a proper trade agreement with Dain and the Iron Hills as well as Ered Luin. Although the trade agreements would be easier to figure with other Dwarves, it was still not ideal. He had luckily finished the laws and hoped to set them into effect when the next council meeting was to be held in a few days. Running his hand through his beard which had now grown back to normal, Thorin gave a big sigh. As he heard footsteps near to where he was sitting, he looked up and saw that it was Balin. “Have you come to bring me more ill news?” The Dwarf grumbled.

“Not this time laddie.” Balin gave a soft smile. “I was going to simply ask if you would like to go to dinner while I finish the trade agreements.”

Thorin contemplated it for a moment then decided he would agree. As much as he hated making Balin do his work, the King’s eyes and mind needed a rest. Nodding, he rose from the table. “Thank you Balin.” Thorin gave a tired smile as he placed his hand on the shoulder of the elderly Dwarf.

“No problem Thorin. “Balin smiled as he pulled out his spectacle and began looking over the parchments. “I know how much you need rest.”
The king slowly walked back to his chambers to see Natalya sitting at the desk and studying Khuzdul. “Would you care for dinner my love?” Thorin asked when he saw her looking at him.

Natalya simply nodded but said nothing. She feared Thorin would be angry if she revealed that the Arkenstone had been found and destroyed so she decided to keep quiet. The Queen waited in silence for their meal to arrive and continued reading over the book.

Meanwhile, Fili and Kili sat in the dining hall in silence. “What has you so deep in thought brother?” Kili chuckled.

“Oh it’s nothing.” Fili shook his head. He did not want to tell Kili but he couldn’t get the image of the girl he had seen earlier in Dale out of his mind.

Kili shrugged as he rode from the table. “I will be seeing you later brother.” The Dwarf smiled and left the dining hall, eager to find Morrigan. He quickly headed to the library, knowing how much the Dwarrowdam loved it there. Sure enough, when he entered, Kili saw Morrigan walking through the shelves, returning books to their proper places.

Morrigan saw Kili enter the library and smiled to herself as she looked back down at the books in her hands. She did not want to admit to herself that she had feelings for him in case it led to a false hope. As she saw him approach out of the corner of her eye she looked up and smiled at him, tucking her dark brown hair behind her ear.

“I thought I might find you here.” The young Dwarf said with a smile as he looked at the Dwarrowdam. “Isn’t it getting a little late to still be working?”

“I am almost finished.” Morrigan answered as she walked deeper into the shelves to put the books back. “Bugger.” She muttered as she couldn’t reach one of the shelves.

Kili quickly rushed over. “Here let me help you.” He smiled as he took the book and reached up to place it on the shelf. He was only slightly taller than Morrigan and even he could barely reach it.

Morrigan tried to hold back her blush when his hand brushed across hers. The Dwarrowdam swallowed and hoped he didn’t notice the goosebumps that appeared on her arm. Quickly bringing her arm back to her side, she rubbed it, making the feeling quickly disappear.

“I still do not understand why they have the shelves so high.” The Dwarf slightly frowned as he looked up at the stacks of books that were more than three times his height. He noticed Morrigan quickly pull her arm away when their hands touched but thought nothing of it.

“There is a ladder. I just did not feel like getting it.” Morrigan chuckled as she pointed further down the shelf to a sliding mechanism. An awkward silence passed between them before Morrigan licked her lips and gave a smile. “Well I think my job is completed for the night.”

Kili smiled, becoming slightly nervous himself. “Shall I escort you to your room?” He had never really felt this way towards anyone but the more he was round Morrigan the more he wanted to get to know her.

“Only if you have time.” Morrigan replied, not wanting to refuse his offer. “I do not wish to keep you from any of your tasks.”

“I am done for the night.” Kili answered as they began leaving the library.

The Dwarrowdam simply smiled and walked next to Kili. “Thank you for walking me back.” Morrigan blushed as he walked her to her room. They stopped in front of the door and the pair
stared into each other’s eyes.

Kili smiled. “Have a good night Morrigan.” He gently took her hand and kissed it, seeing her blush.

“Goodnight Kili.” Morrigan smiled as she opened the door to her room and watched him walk off.

A knock finally sounded on the door and Thorin opened it to see a Dwarf standing there with their tray of food. “Thank you.” The King said as he took the tray and the guard bowed. He turned back to Natalya and saw her look up at him. “Dinner is ready.”

Natalya closed the book and walked over to where he sat the try in between the two armchairs near the fireplace. She sat down and picked up the plate of food, and began eating, not talking much.

“Did you have a good ride?” Thorin asked, looking at his wife as she ate.

Natalya simply nodded. “Dís insisted that your nephews join me.” She chuckled and her hazel eyes met his blue ones.

“Did they behave themselves?” Thorin asked before he took a bite of food.

“Very well actually.” The half-Elf chuckled. “I think they are still scared of what you would have them do should they step out of line.”

The King gave a slight laugh. “I was simply trying to teach them a lesson.”

“Well I think they learned.” Natalya stated as there was a knock on the door.

Thorin sat the plate of food back on the golden tray and rose from his chair. He headed to the door and there was another knock as he turned the handle. Upon opening the door, the King stared down into the faces of his nephews. “Good evening boys.” Thorin smiled. “What brings you here.” He watched the brothers shift on their feet.

“We felt bad for melting your crown.” Kili said softly as he looked to the floor and kept his hands behind his back. “We made you this.” The Dwarf looked up at his Uncle as he presented the crown.

Thorin’s eyes widened as he looked down at the crown. It was much less bulky than his previous one but he felt drawn to it even more. Licking his lips he gently took the crown from his nephews hands.

“Wow.” Natalya breathed as she looked over his shoulder. When she heard Fili and Kili at the door she immediately got up to go see what they were doing. Upon seeing the crown, her eyes widened. “That is incredible boys. It almost matches mine.” Her smile widened.

“That was our idea.” Fili piped up with a grin at Natalya. “I hope you like it Uncle.” The older Nephew said as he watched Thorin place it on his head.

“I quite like it. Thank you boys.” Thorin smiled and looked at his wife. “What do you think?”

“It looks wonderful dear.” Natalya smiled at her husband as his spirits seemed immediately lifted. The Queen turned and smiled at the brothers as well. “Thank you.” Nodding to them, she rested her hand on Thorin’s arm.

“I am very grateful.” The Dwarf smiled at his nephews.
Fili and Kili bowed then took their leave, heading back to their rooms.

Thorin turned to Natalya. “I would have never expected that out of them.” he chuckled as they headed back inside their room. Sitting down near the hearth, the King and Queen ate the rest of their dinner.

“They want to make you proud.” Natalya smiled as she picked up the goblet of wine. “They see you as their father now.” She watched her husband’s expression at her words.

“I cannot possibly be a father to them although I do try.” The Dwarf paused and licked his lips. “I helped Dís raise them in Ered Luin for a little while.”

The half-Elf nodded and remained silent as she finished her meal. She looked at Thorin’s crown, noticing the small dark blue gem set in between the outstretched wings of the ravens.

“I was speaking earlier with Balin.” Thorin stated, finally breaking the silence as he watched Natalya raise her eyebrows.

“What did he say?”

“He is going to write up an order that he wishes for me to sign so that troops can start being trained.” Thorin stated simply, watching his wives expression.

Natalya licked her lips and swallowed. “An army?” She asked timidly. “We already have more than enough guards.”

“Indeed but even they would need to be trained should we go to war.” Thorin said as he set his goblet down on the small table.

Natalya looked at him with a confused expression on her face. “War? Do you mean Moria?”

“Indeed.” Thorin said as he looked at her with an eyebrow raised. He was shocked she knew. “Who told you of the plan?”

“Ori at first.” Natalya answered softly. She did not want the young Dwarf to get in trouble all because he spoke to her of a rumor. “Then Balin.”

Thorin simply nodded. “Moria has long been a Dwarven stronghold. Second greatest to Erebor at one point. Reclaiming it would increase trade and strengthen the forces of the Dwarves.”

Natalya swallowed as she saw what this meant to her husband. “Thorin this would take time if soldiers are to be trained and the war is to be successful.”

“That is why I must agree to starting now.” The King answered. “I will not declare war for a few months, but everyone will need to be as prepared as possible.”

Natalya bit her lip, realizing what this would do. “Thorin this is too dangerous.” She finally said stronger than she intended. “The Orcs in Moria have probably tripled in number from the battle of Azanulbizar.”

Thorin simply nodded. “Recruits from Dain’s army will join us as well.”

“Even with that many it would still be folly.” Natalya argued, shocked that Thorin would even consider this. “A wise King does not eagerly seek battle.” The female heard Thranduil use that phrase in her presence many times and it was the only thing she found herself agreeing on.
“It is a risk I am willing to take.” Thorin stated, his lips forming a thin line. “The mountain needs to always be ready for an attack.”

“What about the risk of your life?” The half-Elf asked, getting slightly angry.

“Natalya I will not have this discussion right now.” Thorin growled as he rose from his chair. “This is my decision to make. Not yours.”
Chapter 27

Natalya had been in charge of the mountain for a few days as Thorin had suddenly become ill. She finally agreed to the training of the soldiers as she agreed the mountain would need to defend itself should an attack come to them. The Queen still did not agree with Thorin’s idea on the act of open war. Luckily there was not a council meeting as she knew that Thorin should still be making the decisions, not her. Some Dwarves in the mountain still doubted her rule at the King’s side even after she handled the dispute with Thranduil, but Thorin always assured them of her loyalty to him and the kingdom. The half-Elf had been in the kitchen fixing Thorin’s lunch when Fili and Kili came running in with their swords drawn.

“I’ll get you this time!” Kili shouted, running after Fili.

Fili dodged his brother's weak stab and bumped into Natalya. “Oh I’m sorry Aunt Natalya.” Fili apologized quickly, giving a warning look to his brother.

“It is fine.” The half-Elf chuckled, seeing that the brothers were only playing. “I was making Thorin some lunch.”

“Ooh can we come?” Kili eagerly asked as he sheathed his sword.

“I do not see why that would be a problem.” Natalya answered, smiling at them. “I only hope you are not planning any sort of mischief.” She said as she raised one eyebrow at Fili and Kili.

“Never.” Kili smirked at his brother as Natalya turned her back and started walking off with the tray.

As they approached the bedchamber, Natalya turned back towards the brothers. “Now Thorin is probably sleeping so it would be best if you could be as quiet as possible.” She raised her eyebrows as they nodded. Slowly opening the door she looked inside to see Thorin at his desk, quill in hand, scribbling on pieces of parchment. Natalya cleared her throat, causing Thorin to meet her disapproving gaze.

“Hello my dear.” Thorin greeted her, his voice sounding raspy and hoarse. “How has your day been?” He paused to put his quill down before he started coughing.

Fili and Kili looked at each other in shock. “I have never seen him like this.” Fili whispered to Kili.

Kili shook his head. “Let’s go. We need not bother him.” They walked off, quickly saying goodbye to Natalya who nodded with a frown upon her face.

“Thorin! What are you doing out of bed?” Natalya turned back and scolded her husband, stepping further into the room and putting the tray down on the bedside table.

“I had…” Thorin began then started coughing again. He rose from the chair and walked over to Natalya. “Work I needed to do.” He finished, covering his mouth as he continued to cough.

“You don’t look well.” The half-Elf said, staring into his eyes. They were still their vibrant blue but it was obvious he had not been sleeping.

“I’m fine.” Thorin protested, trying to walk past her as he coughed again.

Natalya placed her hand on her husband’s shoulder and turned his attention back towards her. “I
made you lunch.” She paused. “You need to lie back down and rest your body.”

“Natalya, there is work to be done; the kingdom cannot stop simply because I am ill.” Thorin protested, raising his voice.

“It will all be taken care of.” Natalya stated, her voice still calm. “Now you had better rest after you eat.”

Thorin said nothing but stared at her, a small grin on his face.

“What?” Natalya asked, looking at him with a confused expression on her face. “Why must you be so stubborn?”

“You have forgotten one thing.” Thorin stated, the corner of his mouth still turned up.

“And what might that be?” Natalya asked, getting slightly annoyed with him.

Thorin stayed silent and looked at her. “I won’t lie down until you have figured it out.” The Dwarf said, crossing his arms and he chuckled before he covered another cough.

Natalya shook her head. “Stubborn.” She muttered. A few moments went by and she looked at the tray. “Well you had best tell me or your meal will get cold.”

“Then it will get cold.” The Dwarf said with his voice low as he stepped closer to Natalya. He stared into his wife’s hazel eyes for a few moments before his blue ones traveled down to her mouth.

Natalya shook her head and sighed, giving him a light kiss against his lips. “Is that what you wanted?” She asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Exactly.” Thorin said, smiling at her and taking his hands off her shoulders. “Now I will be more than willing to rest.” He stated as he slowly got back into bed, smiling up at his wife. Thorin thanked her for the meal as she placed the tray on his lap.

“You are welcome.” Natalya answered. She tidied up the room and the mess Thorin had made while he finished his meal. Before she left the room she gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Just for you.” She smiled, looking down at the small smile on his face then picked up the tray and began leaving. “But you had best not get me sick as well Thorin Oakenshield.” She said loudly as she walked out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Thorin gave a slight chuckle as his wife left and he rested his head against the pillow and finally slept.

Natalya was headed to see Dís when Fili and Kili nearly ran her over. “Boys have you not learned your lesson about running?” Natalya asked as her reflexes kicked in and she jumped out of the way.

Kili bit his lip, knowing she was speaking mostly to him.

“Speaking of knocking people down Kili was actually going to visit Morrigan.” The blond smirked as he decided to embarrass his brother.

“Well Fili is about to go leave and see…” Kili paused and looked at his brother who said nothing. “I am not quite sure. Some girl in Dale.” The Dwarf shrugged.
“That is sweet of you boys.” Natalya smiled with a twinkle in her eye. She had noticed Fili hanging back during their ride through Dale the other day but chose to say nothing of it.

Fili slightly smirked as he looked at his brother and Natalya. “It just so happens that I actually do not know her name.” The older brother paused as he looked at his Aunt and brother's shocked faces. “I will find out today if I can find her.”

“I will not keep you waiting.” The half-Elf smiled and she watched Fili begin heading down the corridor towards the entrance of the mountain. Turning back to Kili she raised an eyebrow. “I have seen you and Morrigan practically dancing around one another.”

Kili blushed a deep red and bit his lip as he looked up at the female.

“I suggest you take the poor girl some flowers or something or she will think you are uninterested.” Natalya smiled as she looked at the younger nephew who nodded.

“Indeed I shall.” Kili smiled. “It was nice talking to you Auntie.” He started walking off to find Morrigan.

Natalya gave a content sigh as she did a few chores around the mountain before searching for Dís. When she finally found her she looked frazzled. “What’s wrong Dís?” The Queen asked as her brow furrowed in worry.

“Oh nothing I just can’t seem to stop my boys from running around with every Dwarrowdam in the whole mountain.” She laughed as she looked at Natalya who was smiling.

“Kili seems to be mostly with Morrigan.” The half-Elf pointed out as she thought about how they had spent a lot of time together the past few weeks.

“That is true but now Fili is running off to Mahal knows where to see some lass.” Dís gave a slight huff and laughed. “I guess it is just in their nature.”

Natalya gave a slight nod. “I am just glad they are not bothering Thorin.”

“What is wrong with him anyways?” Dís asked. “I haven't seen him for a few days now.”

“He is just sick.” Natalya answered simply. “I have made sure he has been on bed rest but he refuses. Every time I go in to check on him he is trying to finish up some treaty or whatnot.”

The Dwarrowdam gave a chuckle. “That sounds just like Thorin. He never knows when to give it a rest.”

The Queen smiled as she followed Dís who was heading to the library. When they entered they were surprised to see no sign of Kili or Morrigan. Natalya helped Dís work on a few projects of her own for a few hours before standing up and stretching. “I had better go check in on Thorin again.”

Dís nodded. “I can't wait to hear the stories my sons will tell me in a while.”

“I am sure they will be highly entertaining.” Natalya laughed as she left the library. As the Queen made her way to the large wooden doors, she surprisingly did not hear any sound from the other side. Slowly opening the door, the half-Elf gave a faint smile when she saw that Thorin was finally asleep. She lightly treaded around the room and tidied up another mess that he had made while she was gone. As Natalya passed the desk her eyes wandered over and she saw the order to start training the troops. She gently picked up one of the sheets and tried to read over it. Unsurprisingly, the manuscript was in Khuzdul but she could still make out a few words. Licking her lips, she set
the paper back down on the desk as she heard Thorin stir. “Hello dear.” She said as she turned towards her husband with a smile. “How are you feeling?”

“I am not sure yet.” Thorin muttered as he blinked and sat up.

“You have slept most of the day so I hope you are feeling better.” Natalya smiled. She watched as the Dwarrow sat up slightly more and yawned. “I will go find you some dinner.” Nodding towards her husband, the Queen headed out the door and walked to the kitchens. When she returned, Thorin had propped himself up against a pillow and he looked much better than the past few days. “I brought you some soup to help your throat.”

“Thank you.” Thorin kindly looked up at his wife as she placed the tray on his bedside table and handed him the wooden bowl of soup. “You have done so much for me these past few days. I hope I can find a way to repay you.”

Natalya paused as she turned away from him and spoke softly. “You could teach me how to fight so I can be by your side when we retake Moria.”

Thorin set his spoon down into the bowl and looked up to see Natalya staring back at him over her shoulder. The King had been wondering how long it would take for her to tell him that she wanted to fight. Thinking for a moment he shook his head. “No.” He stated flatly, and looked at her to see her jaw slacken slightly. “I will not allow it.”

Natalya swallowed, knowing how Thorin felt after she had nearly died trying to save him but she couldn't live with herself should something happen to him. Sighing, she took a seat in her arm chair and tried to relax. Finally breaking the silence, the female spoke. “I hope you at least consider it.”
Chapter 28

Almost fifty years passed before the conversation of retaking Moria surfaced through Erebor once more. The mountain had been prospering greatly under Natalya and Thorin’s rule and even surpassed that of Thror’s.

“Natalya you cannot come with us.” Thorin lowered his voice into a hushed tone as they walked through the corridors of Erebor. The King had just ended a council meeting where he finally announced the plan to begin training the Dwarven soldiers. At the end he shocked everyone with his plan to lead the attack on Moria in only a few months time. It was risky, but Thorin knew that the Dwarves were more than capable of reclaiming the lost kingdom especially since Dain was willing to join them. “You must stay here.” Thorin insisted as he grabbed Natalya’s wrist and pulled her into the royal wing. He quickly motioned for the guard to shut the door behind them.

“Why Thorin?” Natalya asked, stopping in the gathering area of the royal wing as the door clicked shut. She wanted to understand what was making him think she was unfit to fight. The Queen knew that she would need to be trained to fight better as this would not be as easy as hand to hand combat.

Thorin shook his head, not wanting to answer her question as he dragged her towards their room.

The Queen intensely glared at her husband as they walked into their chambers.

“Natalya I will not allow you to risk your life.” The Dwarf said loudly as he closed the wooden door with a bang. “You already have once and it pained me to see you get hurt and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.” He was getting more frustrated by the minute as he did not want to see his wife injured again. “You have done more than enough for our people.” The King stood in front of her and put his hands on her shoulders, trying to calm her.

Natalya crossed her arms, looking at his stern expression. She knew he would not easily give in but she was going to try.

“Talya.” Thorin said as he took a breath and looked deep into her eyes. “I need someone to stay here. Please try to understand that.” He paused and licked his lips. “If I die then I need someone to rule over the kingdom. This will perhaps be our toughest battle yet and I do not know what will happen.” The Dwarf leaned in and kissed his wife on the head before turning to leave the room.

Natalya sighed, hearing the door click shut behind him. “You had better come back alive.” She grumbled, staring at the closed door. The battle was not to happen for a few more months at least but the soldiers needed preparing and training was to begin tomorrow at dawn. The Queen started to pace back and forth in the room, letting her thoughts consume her. Hours passed and Thorin had not yet returned. She hoped that he would have at least allowed her to accompany him to the armory to begin readying the supplies. Pausing, Natalya finally sat on the bed for a while, trying to busy herself by looking over some important papers given to her to sign at the council meeting earlier that day. She stared at the ink filled page, her thoughts easily wandering. Natalya then shook her head, trying to concentrate but she couldn’t. Getting out of the bed, the half-Elf headed over to the large wooden armoire and pulled open one of the bottom drawers. A smile formed on her lips as she stared down at the new battle outfit that had been created for her not too long ago. She had it made by Dís without Thorin’s knowledge as Thorin would not approve of her fighting any more. Knowing that the Dwarves were only beginning to prepare the supplies, she wanted to make an impression on her husband and show him she was ready. The female pulled out the navy blue suede tunic and quickly changed into it. The fitted style followed the gentle curves of her petite
body. A detailed golden embroidery ran along the asymmetrical hem, giving it a regal look but still sturdy enough for fighting. Natalya picked up a dark brown belt that had been crafted for her as well. After she fastened the double buckles around her waist, she attached her double wrap belt that held her sword and daggers. Pulling the strap through the metal end, she gave it one last tug, making sure it was attached securely. Natalya then pulled on her boots which were made of the same matching leather. She quickly looked for her leather armor and put it over her tunic, tightening the laces on the sides. Looking around she realized she forgot her cloak but found it still neatly folded under the bed and attached the brass fittings around her neck. Giving herself one last glance in the mirror, Natalya headed out the door. She quickly walked down the dimly lit hallways, signaling the setting of the sun. After turning several corners, Natalya began to recognize the faint glow from the armory and the forge behind it. She took a deep breath and pushed a strand of hair away from her face as she approached the armory.

Fili and Kili looked up when they saw a pair of unfamiliar boots stop near where they were sitting. The brothers had been trying on armor when they looked up to see the stern face of their Aunt looking down at them. “Oh hello Aunt Natalya.” Fili said, adjusting the pipe in his mouth. “Where is Thorin?” Natalya demanded, staring down at the nephews. “Down there.” Kili answered and pointed further down the armory.

Natalya turned on her heel and walked quicker, her cloak trailing behind her. The Queen looked around, noticing every eye was now turned towards her.

“Then we attack from the east gate.” Thorin explained, taking a long draw from his pipe. He paused and looked up as loud footsteps approached in the suddenly quiet armory. “Hello dear.” Thorin smiled at his wife as he placed the map that he was holding down onto the table.

Natalya slightly glared at Thorin. “I have just as much right to fight as you do if not more.” She said with fire in her eyes.

Thorin swallowed, and turned to face his wife as he rested against the small metal desk. He gave his wife a quick up and down glance, noticing her new fighting attire.

“The Dwarves of Moria are my people as well or have you so easily forgotten?” The Queen felt herself beginning to shout, causing the whole armory to look her way and she paused. “Surely you think I am a good warrior.” The female challenged.

“I do Natalya but that does not mean…” Thorin cut himself off as he shook his head. “I will not allow it. That is my final word.” He stated and turned away from her as he looked back down at the map.

Natalya’s mouth went slack. “Thorin I don’t believe this.” She whispered, knowing it would be nearly impossible for her to change his mind. The half-Elf sighed and trudged back to their chambers, awaiting his return.

Thorin blankly stared over the map, pondering his choice to force Natalya to stay in the mountain. He knew he would need to help train her.

“My King.” The guard spoke and snapped Thorin from his thoughts.

Thorin nodded and continued planning their battle tactic. He decided that he would speak with Natalya later on the matter.

Hours passed before Thorin finally returned to the royal chambers to see Natalya laying across the
bed, asleep. He walked over to her and lightly touched her shoulder. “Talya.”

Natalya slowly awoke to Thorin looking down at her. “Hello love.” She whispered with a slight smile.

“It’s nearly midnight, you should get changed.” The King continued whispering and pulled his wife into a sitting position as he took a seat on the edge of the bed.

Natalya nodded and rubbed her eyes. She let her body fall forward and relax into her husband’s warm embrace. “I’m sorry I lost my temper.” The half-Elf whispered into his shoulder.

“It’s okay amralime.” He kissed her head as he gently removed the tiara from her tangled hair and placed it on her bedside table. He then pushed aside the papers that Natalya had been looking at.

The Queen shook her head and looked down into her lap. “It is not my place to argue with you.”

Thorin placed his hand under her chin and gently tilted her head back until their eyes met. He said nothing but stared lovingly at her. “I love you.” He whispered. “We will speak more of it in the morning.”

Natalya nodded as she got out of the bed and changed into her nightclothes. “Goodnight Thorin.” She yawned and gave her husband one last kiss before she quickly fell back asleep.

Thorin sat on the bed for a while, watching Natalya completely at peace as she slept. His mind raced as he thought about what to do. Natalya was right that she should be able to fight, he just feared losing her. He sighed, finally making up his mind as he drifted off to sleep.

Morning came early for Thorin and as he opened his eyes he saw no sign of Natalya. He slightly grunted, not knowing where she went to, and he worried, knowing he had upset her yesterday. Sitting up, the Dwarf saw that light was already beginning to stream through open doors and the sheer curtains that lead to the balcony. The King quickly sat up and rose from the bed, his body protesting. He slowly treaded over to the balcony to see his wife standing in the morning breeze. Her blonde hair soaked up the light of the morning sun glowing a golden hue. Thorin smiled, knowing she was happy. “Good morning dear.”

Natalya turned back and looked at her husband. “Did you sleep well?” She asked as he kissed her on the cheek.

“Indeed.” Thorin answered as he rubbed his hand up and down on his wife’s back and looked out from the balcony.

The Queen smiled and leaned into her husband’s touch. Sighing, she did not want to accept the fact that Thorin forbade her to go to war. Natalya was frustrated but tried as hard as she could to see it from his point of view. Knowing that she could argue with Thorin no more, the half-Elf simply hoped that he would allow her on his own to fight. Her father came from Moria and she felt that she had more right than even Thorin to try and reclaim the Dwarven kingdom. After these thoughts flowed through her head, she looked and saw that Thorin was no longer standing next to her.

Natalya walked back into the room and noticed Thorin already dressing himself for the day. The King dressed himself in a simple tunic and trousers and fastened a belt around his waist.

“Today the soldiers officially begin their training.” The Dwarf said simply, not meeting his wife’s gaze. He understood why she felt the need to reclaim Moria as her father had come from there. Thorin sighed as he continued dressing himself. Looking at Natalya, he saw the hurt in her eyes. “I have a few tasks I will need you to complete today.” The Dwarf said softly as he licked his lips and
saw Natalya nod and bite her lip. “Please understand that I only want you to be safe. I could never live without you.” Looking into her eyes, Thorin saw them gloss over with tears. He placed his hands on her shoulders and pressed their foreheads together. “Never.” The Dwarrow whispered as he gently rubbed his thumb across his wife’s cheek.

Natalya nodded and pulled away, looking Thorin in the eyes. After taking a deep breath she answered, her throat tight and she gave a slight nod. “I understand.”

The King sighed and looked down at the ground. He then explained the things he needed for Natalya to do for the day he left the room, the door clicking shut behind him. He headed to the armory and sighed.

The Queen licked her lips as a few silent tears cascaded down her cheeks. Walking across the room, Natalya got herself ready for the day and soon Dís came in and aided her.

The Dwarrowdam stayed silent having heard what was happening the day before. Fili and Kili had explained how Natalya yelled at Thorin in the armory and tried to convince him she was more than willing and ready to fight. Suddenly the door flew open and Thorin strided into the room.

“Natalya gather you things.” The Dwarf said in a strict voice. “Dress yourself for training.”

The half-Elf paused as she was putting in her earring and she turned back to face her husband. “Thorin.” Natalya said softly and rose from her chair and stepped towards the King. Hugging him tightly, she smiled as she put her head on his shoulder. “Thank you.” The Queen pulled back and looked at her husband to see him smiling at her.

“I cannot imagine you not fighting by my side my dear.” Thorin said softly. “I only fear losing you.”

“You will not lose me.” Natalya said strongly as she looked into her husband’s eyes. “I promise you that.”

“Get dressed and meet me in the training room in ten minutes.” Thorin said and he walked out of the room.

After Thorin left, Natalya turned back to see the Dwarrowdam smiling at her.

“I knew he wouldn’t make you stay.” Dís chuckled as she looked at the half-Elf. “He almost always gives in to those he cares about.”

Natalya gave a slight chuckle as she quickly changed into her battle outfit. “I cannot believe he agreed.”

Dís smiled as she gave her friend a wink. “Just make sure you sweep him off his feet.” Closing the door behind her, the Dwarrowdam left.

Natalya smiled and took a deep breath as she continued dressing herself, putting on her leather armor. Adding her plain leather bracers last, she stepped out the door and headed for the training room.

Thorin removed his tunic just as he heard soft footsteps entering the training room. He turned to see Natalya across the room with her back turned to him. The Dwarf gave a slight smirk as he quietly approached her from behind. Placing his hands on her hips Thorin whispered in her ear. “Hello my love.” He smiled, seeing his wife blush as she jumped. Thorin loved being able to still make her heart race even after they had been married for a while.
“I did not know you were here already.” Natalya confessed with a slight smile. She turned to face him and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. The half-Elf felt her husband pull her closer to him then she suddenly realized he was shirtless. She swallowed hard, trying to form words.

“I decided to come early.” Thorin said, still whispering in her ear. He played with a strand of her hair, twirling it around his finger.

Natalya nodded, still unable to speak as her heart raced. She was not sure how she felt sparring with her husband.

Thorin smiled as he released her and went back to retrieve his sword.

The half-Elf turned her head, watching her husband in awe. “Thorin are you sure you want to teach me?”

“Of course dear.” Thorin smirked and twirled the sword in his hand. “Now take this sword.” He paused as his wife looked at him.

Natalya nodded and took the weapon from his hand. She was not sure yet how she felt about using a sword since she had only ever used her daggers or bow and arrows. “I just hope you don’t cut me open.” The half-Elf chuckled as she picked up a smaller sword from off the wall.

“The edges are blunt for training my love.” Thorin chuckled as he gripped the blade to show her.

Natalya twirled the one in her hand the same way she saw Thorin do it and gave him a slight smirk. She practiced her technique on her own for a while then suddenly felt Thorin grip her waist.

“Do this.” The King instructed as he helped position her body with her shoulders forward and holding the sword out and away from her. Putting his hand over hers, the Dwarf pushed his wife’s hand further up the hilt of the sword.

Natalya nodded and tried to concentrate on the way the sword moved in front of her as Thorin guided her body from behind.

Thorin continued to help Natalya train for a while longer and saw her skills improving. “Much better.” He praised. They paused for a moment to rest before picking up his sword again.

Natalya fought hard as the sound of the weapons colliding rang in her ears. She twirled to deflect one of Thorin’s blows and their swords suddenly clashed, neither one yielding.

The Dwarf’s eyes went wide when she swiftly disarmed him and laid her sword under his chin.

Natalya gave a proud smirk. “You’re lucky I’m merciful my King.”

The Dwarf chuckled as he watched Natalya lower the sword. “Yes I am.” He agreed. “I think that is enough for today. We can continue tomorrow.” Thorin hung his sword back on the wall and slipped his tunic over his head.

Natalya smiled over at her husband as she placed her sword next to his before leaving. On the way out, she caught sight of Duliera and Dwalin who looked like they had been training as well. They both held axes in their hands and were walking side by side. The half-Elf noticed that they were holding hands and she chuckled. “It seems that Dwalin and Duliera have taken a liking to each other.” Natalya whispered to Thorin who quickly looked over his shoulder.

“Indeed they have.” Thorin smiled. “About time Dwalin did something about it. He has been
eyeing her for months.”

The Queen chuckled. “It seems that Dwarves take a long time to show their true feelings.” She teased Thorin as she leaned into him. Suddenly, she heard the running of feet as Fili and Kili went dashing through the hall. Natalya turned back to see Morrigan watching them with a slight scowl and her hands resting on her hips. Looking further behind the Dwarrowdam, Natalya saw Ainira shaking her head at the brothers. She had met the young female not long after Fili had brought her back to the mountain from Dale. Luckily, the Dwarrowdam and her parents agreed to move into Erebor to be closer to their kin. Natalya chuckled as she watched the two Dwarrowdams sigh and walk quickly after Fili and Kili.

Thorin gave a smile as he walked next to his wife through the mountain, leading her away from the armory.

Heading towards the front of Erebor, Natalya could hear more clashing of swords. She followed Thorin to the top of the rampart and looked down to where there were soldiers all training. As her eyes scanned the field, she spotted Dain and Balin out on the battlefield, commanding the Dwarven army. “Wow.” She breathed. “Incredible.”

“I have faith in them.” Thorin stated as he watched Dain and Balin command the army.

“Yanad Durinul!”(Sons of Durin) Dain shouted, trying to motivate the Dwarves to move as one.

Natalya stood and watched alongside Thorin for a few minutes before they turned away and headed back inside the mountain.

“I must say after all that has happened today I am very proud.” Thorin stated as he smiled at Natalya. “Especially of you.”

The half-Elf gave a smile as she looked at her husband. “Thank you dear.”

Thorin continued training Natalya for days, weeks and months. “Faster, harder and stronger.” Were the three words that he always told his wife. “That is how we win a battle.”

Natalya nodded as she looked at Thorin, sweat dripping down her face. The half-Elf was now using double swords and they were twice the weight of the training sword she had started with.

“I am so proud of you Talya.” Thorin said as they finished their last training session.

“I never knew I was capable of those things.” The female admitted as she put the swords away for the last time.

“It is because you were never trained that way.” The Dwarf explained as he put away his sword as well. “Here come with me.” Thorin led Natalya back to their room. Opening the door of their bedchamber, the Dwarf walked across the room and beckoned for his wife to come closer.

“Natalya I want you to have this.” Thorin said, reaching towards the back of the armoire. He pulled out Orcrist which was carefully sheathed but covered in a thin layer of dust. “You gave this to me in my moment of need and I will never forget that.” He smiled at her.

“Thorin I cannot accept this.” Natalya said, shaking her head. She pushed the sword back towards him as he tried to place it in her hands. “It belongs with you.”

“Please.” Thorin whispered, closing Natalya’s hand around the sword. “I must know it is safe.”

Natalya nodded, knowing she couldn’t refuse him. “Thank you Thorin.” She smiled and leaned
forward, giving her husband a kiss.

A few weeks later, Thorin and Natalya were in the dining hall enjoying a mid afternoon meal. “We leave for battle on the ‘morrow.” The Dwarf simply stated, looking into Natalya’s hazel eyes. He was nervous, knowing this was definitely going to be the hardest battle in his lifetime.

The Queen simply nodded. “We must rest well then so we can have our full strength.”

Thorin agreed. “I will have dinner prepared right away.”

Once they finished dinner, Natalya and Thorin laid down in bed and stayed silent, not wanting to talk about what could happen during the battle. The Queen laid awake, nervous as thoughts ran through her head of the possible outcomes. Soon, she heard Thorin’s even breathing beside her and she rested her head against the pillow, falling asleep as well.

The next morning, Thorin awoke to a loud knock on the door. Slowly getting out of the bed, he headed over to the door and opened it a crack to see Balin’s face at the door.

“We must leave as soon as possible.” Balin whispered, looking up at Thorin.

Thorin nodded as he looked at the elderly Dwarf and headed back into the room.

“Is it time?” Natalya asked sleepily as she sat up and watched Thorin nod.

The King walked over to a tall wooden dresser and opened the doors. He sighed, running his hands along the fabrics. His eyes caught Natalya’s navy battle garment and realized how much it reminded him of his mother. He smiled over at his wife as she often reminded him of her as well.

Natalya watched as Thorin stared at the dresser before turning back to her.

Smiling, the Dwarf presented his wife’s garment that was folded neatly in his hands. He handed it to her, ignoring the other garment that clinked to the floor. “I remember you wearing this when you first arrived in the armoury.”

The half-Elf smiled, sitting up in bed. She took the tunic from his hands and admired the beautiful gold Dwarvish detailing on the edges.

Thorin bent down to pick up the other garment that had fallen to the floor. “Mithril.” He whispered. “This will keep you safe.” The Dwarrow said, looking at her.

Natalya quickly dressed herself and slipped into the armored shirt. Adding the tunic, she then attached her belt around her waist. Picking up her cloak, the female threw it back over her shoulders. Natalya then looked to her husband. “Thank you, Thorin.” The half-Elf smiled, still slightly nervous.

“You look ready to kill some Orcs.” Thorin smiled at his wife as he donned his tunic as well and quickly braided his beard, adding a small silver bead at the end. “Let’s go.” He tilted his head as he watched her slip on her soft leather boots before leaving the room. Thorin was nervous that he might not return and now his biggest fear was keeping Natalya safe. I will not let her die.

Natalya quickly followed Thorin to the armory. Other Dwarves had obviously been there earlier as most of the armor was now gone. The half-Elf grabbed her simple leather shoulder armor from where it was sitting next to Thorin’s and strapped it on. She then grabbed Orcrist and attached it to the leather holder underneath her quiver. Filling the quiver with arrows, she placed her double daggers in her broad belt and looked at Thorin as she picked up her bow. They quickly hurried
back to the front of Erebor where hundreds of soldiers were lined up and ready to march. Almost all of them were going to be traveling on foot. “Will they not get tired quickly?” Natalya whispered to Thorin as they headed over to where Dís was holding their horses. The Dwarrowdam had decided to stay in the mountain and run things until Thorin and Natalya returned.

“They will but I have made sure that they will have enough time to recover their strength before the battle.” Thorin nodded at his sister and mounted his horse then saw his nephews next to him. Looking down, he saw Morrigan saying her goodbyes to the brothers with tears in their eyes.

“Please return to me Kili.” Morrigan whispered as she hugged Kili, her eyes tearing up. “I couldn’t bear to lose you.”

“I will.” Kili whispered. “That’s a promise.” He smiled at Morrigan as he mounted his pony. Reaching down, he handed her the same rune stone his mother had given him before he went on the quest.

Meanwhile, Ainila looked at Fili. “Stay safe please.” She said as they hugged before she watched him mount his pony next to his brother.

“I will.” Fili smiled down at the Dwarrowdam. He had strong feelings for her for a while now but knew nothing would be able to happen until the battle was over.

After Thorin mounted his horse next to Natalya he gave the order for everyone to move out. The King then rode to the front of the line and watched as Natalya stayed back with Dwalin, Duliera, Balin and Ori as the army soon began heading south. Thorin planned to go around Mirkwood and he had sent a raven to Lothlorien to gain permission to stay outside their borders before the battle.

The Queen spoke with the Dwarves for a while and finally got the chance to know Duliera better as they walked side by side on their mounts.

“Well I’m glad you are on our side.” Duliera chuckled as she looked at Natalya and saw the various weapons she had strapped to her. “I’d hate to be your enemy.” The Dwarrowdam added.

Dwalin laughed and looked at Duliera. “I have been tellin’ you all along lass that she is on our side.” He chuckled when she smacked him on the arm. “Thorin has been helping her train so she can use a sword now as well.” The Dwarf chuckled when he saw Duliera’s shocked face.

“I see the two of you are finally courting.” Natalya spoke up, breaking the silence after a while as she saw Duliera’s courting braid with a large bead at the end.

“That’s right.” Dwalin smirked when he saw Duliera blush. “She is the best Dwarrowdam I could ever ask for.”

Duliera gave a playful glare when she heard Ori giggle.

“They had been dancing around each other for ages.” The younger Dwarf laughed and looked at Duliera and Dwalin who chuckled.

After a while, Natalya conversed with Ori and Balin then pushed her mare into a canter and caught back up with Thorin.

“We will set up camp in a few hours.” Thorin simply stated as his wife rode up. “I had been speaking with Dain and he believes this quest means certain death.”

Natalya simply nodded as she swallowed and they rode in silence most of the way. Her thoughts
were racing with everything she had been told and overheard.

The days passed slowly as the Dwarves continued to make their way south. Luckily, they did not see many people on the road so they were seldom bothered. They made makeshift camps along the road when they could, and tried to keep up their strength as best as possible. The Dwarves finally came to the top of the hill that overlooked Lothlorien.

“We’re here.” Thorin said as he looked at Natalya. He ordered the troops to stay where they were and set up camp. Turning back towards the forest, he saw a few Elves coming from the trees to meet them. “Greetings.” Thorin said and bowed his head as they approached. “I am thankful for your generous hospitality.”

The Elves stayed silent and motioned for Thorin and Natalya to follow them towards the forest. The barely mistakable outline of a path could be seen in the dirt as leaves covered the pathway. Luckily, the hottest days of the years had passed already while the training was taking place and it was only predicted to become colder with the passing months. The smell of a new season’s arrival was in the air as all of the trees were beginning to change color under the golden sunlight.

Natalya took a deep breath and breathed in the scent of the forest. She knew that a lot of her kin resided in these woods.

“You are the only reason we are allowed here.” Thorin whispered in Natalya’s ear as they continued following the two Elven guards.

Natalya looked at him and smiled as they continued walking through the dense forest. Soon enough, the trees cleared and they stood in front of a bright Elven gate that seemed to almost be glowing.

The two male Elven guards opened the double doors and continued leading Natalya and Thorin up the numerous staircases until they were at the bottom of a large white marble staircase.

Natalya and Thorin looked up as two figures were at the top of the stairs conversing. Natalya squinted her eyes and saw a tall Elven Queen speaking with another male Elf. They finally were notified of Thorin and Natalya’s arrival and headed down the stairs to greet them.

“The King and Queen under the Mountain.” The Elven King greeted them as he bowed. “I have heard you are the first to rule in over one hundred years.”

Thorin nodded. “That is correct, your majesty.”

“I am Celeborn and this is my wife Galadriel.” The Elf spoke softly, motioning to the Queen. “We understand that you are part of our people.” Celeborn continued and looked at Natalya.

“Yes.” Natalya answered softly and nodded. “You are most gracious to allow us to stay here on the eve of battle.”

Celeborn and Galadriel stayed silent for a moment before speaking again when another Elf guard appeared. “This is our most trusted marchwarden, Haldir.” Celeborn introduced the Elf who bowed. “He will make sure your troops are safe outside of our borders.”

“Thank you, your majesty.” Thorin nodded again to the Elves.

“That is not all.” Galadriel said, her voice smooth and flowing as she spoke. “We wish to honor the allegiance between the Dwarves and Elves once more.” She paused as Natalya and Thorin looked up at her in shock. “Our soldiers will join you in battle tomorrow morning. I remember when we
all fought on the same side against evil and we wish to not let disagreements interfere with the unity we once had.”

Natalya smiled, surprised at Galadriel’s words. “Thank you. We are more than agreeable.”

Thorin nodded as well. “Thank you, your majesties.”

“There is someone here who said she knows you.” Galadriel continued speaking as she looked back at Natalya. “I will send her to you when it is time.”

Natalya nodded and bowed, realizing that no one else heard what Galadriel had said.

“Go gather a few of your companions to rest here for the night.” Celeborn told Natalya and Thorin. “You will be well protected in our borders.” He then turned and nodded to Haldir. “Go with them.”

The silver haired Elf nodded and escorted them back out of the kingdom and through the woods. “Galadriel has never taken so kindly to outsiders.” Haldir informed Thorin and Natalya. “Consider yourselves lucky.” He continued walking and they finally reached the edge of the woods where the rest of the Dwarves were. “Go gather your companions. I will be waiting.”

Thorin nodded and walked back to the encampment. “Balin, Ori, Fili, Kili!” Thorin said loudly, causing each Dwarf to look up from what he was doing. He nodded his head as an order for them to follow and they rose to their feet. “We are allowed to take refuge inside Lothlorien should you wish to accompany me.” He walked over to Dwalin. “I need you to stay here.” Thorin said softly, putting a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Should anything happen you are the only one who can stop it.”

Dwalin nodded. “I don’t fancy being near the pointy ears anyway.” He looked back to Duliera and chuckled. “With the exception of Natalya.”

Thorin smiled and walked back to where he had gathered the smaller group. The four Dwarves nodded and followed Thorin back to where Haldir was standing at the edge of the woods. “I wish to see Moria.” Thorin stated simply to the Elf soldier.

“You can go that way and see it from the top of the hill.” Haldir pointed to the nearest hilltop to the west.

Thorin walked to the top of the hill and looked out as the sun fell behind the Misty Mountains. His eyes constantly studied the Moria gate. The Dwarves would march on the mountain at sunrise. At least that’s what he hoped. The journey had taken longer than expected and everyone was already growing weary. Another day could be spared if needed but it would not be for the best. Thorin wanted to attack as soon as possible so the Orcs would be caught by surprise. The longer they lingered the more likely there was a chance of being spotted. “Tomorrow.” Thorin whispered to Natalya as she stepped up beside him, the wind catching her hair in the breeze.

The half-Elf smiled, looking at her husband. She put her hand on his arm and gave a light squeeze. “Everything will be fine.” The Queen reassured him. Pulling up her hood over her head, she stood next to Thorin and felt him put his arm around her as they watched the sun set before heading back to the Elven kingdom to rest for the night. As they were walking back, Natalya saw a familiar figure running towards them. “Anairë!” The half-Elf exclaimed as she saw her friend come out to meet them.

“Natalya!” Anairë hugged her friend tightly. “When Galadriel informed me that you were here I had to see you. How is Erebor faring?”
“Very well.” Natalya nodded as she walked in between Anairë and Thorin. “Most of the trade agreements have been settled.” The three of them began heading back to the safety of Lothlorien just as the last rays of sunlight were disappearing.

“That is good to hear.” Anairë smiled and paused as they entered the woods. “What of Mirkwood?” She looked at Natalya with a questioning gaze.

Thorin gave a slight chuckle at her question. “Natalya took care of that quite well from what I hear.” He proceeded to tell Anairë the story of Fili and Kili’s prank and how Natalya held her own against Thranduil.

Anairë smiled at Natalya. “I knew you could do it.”

Natalya chuckled and shook her head as they finally reached the silver gates.

Anairë showed them where the rest of the Dwarves were heading. She chuckled when she saw Fili and Kili already asleep. The spot was a mossy area underneath a great tree that must have been growing for thousands of years.

At first, Natalya was unsure of why they were not given rooms but as she sat down she realized why. The moss was the softest thing she had ever sat upon and she sighed.

“I will fight with you tomorrow.” Anairë informed the group. “Haldir nicely helped me train and keep my skills up.”

“You do not need to do this.” Natalya said as she looked up at her friend.

“It would be my honor to fight alongside you.” The Elf smiled. “I will let you rest now.” Anairë bowed and took her leave.

Natalya looked at Thorin as he sat next to her. “No matter what happens tomorrow I will always love you.” She leaned over and kissed her husband, resting her hand on his shoulder.

Thorin kissed back and rested his hand on her waist. “I will always love you amralime.” He whispered as he touched the courting bead in her hair. “I will forever be with you.”

Natalya nodded and felt tears sting her eyes at the reality that neither of them were guaranteed to last through tomorrow. After a few moments, she saw Thorin was asleep. Looking over, she saw Balin watching her.

The Elderly Dwarf sighed and looked at Natalya. “After the dragon took the Lonely Mountain, King Thror tried to reclaim Moria, but our enemy had got there first. Moria had been taken by legions of Orcs, led by the most vile of all their race, Azog the Defiler. The giant Gundabad orc had sworn to wipe out the line of Durin. He began by beheading the king.”

Natalya swallowed, knowing many Dwarves had been slain in that battle, including Thorin’s brother.

“Thrain, Thorin’s father, was driven mad by grief, he went missing, taken prisoner or killed, we did not know. We were leaderless. Defeat and death were upon us. That is when I saw him. A young dwarf prince facing down the Pale Orc. He stood alone against this terrible foe. His armor rent, wielding nothing but an oaken branch as a shield.”

The half-Elf looked over to where Thorin was still sleeping. She had heard some of the story of Moria, but not all.
Balin continued. “After Dain decapitated Azog, the Orcs learned that the line of Durin would not be so easily broken. Our forces rallied, and drove the Orcs back. Our enemy had been defeated, but there was no feast, nor song that night for our dead were beyond the count of grief. We few had survived. I thought to myself then, there is one who I could follow, there is one I could call King.”

Natalya smiled and nodded, thinking about Thorin in his younger years, charging into battle. The smile soon fell from her lips however as she did not want to think about what could happen. Shaking her head, the half-Elf took her daggers out and inspected them, making sure they were ready.

Thorin awoke in the middle of the night to look over and see Natalya still awake and sharpening her daggers. “You need to rest dear.” He whispered to her.

“I can’t sleep.” Natalya said softly and shook her head as she set down her dagger. “Please go back to sleep. I will be fine.” The Queen looked at her husband’s worried face.

The Dwarf gave a sigh as he laid down and quickly fell back to sleep. He slept through the rest of the night, undisturbed.

Natalya kept watch over all of the Dwarves as she continued readying her weapons, knowing the sun was going to rise soon. The hours slowly passed and she soon heard the light steps of someone coming down the nearby staircase. When she looked up she saw Anairë at the bottom of the steps, looking at her. Natalya stood up as the Elf walked over.

“It is nearly Dawn.” Anairë informed Natalya as she looked down to where Thorin was on his back sleeping peacefully.

Natalya nodded. “I will wake them.” She paused as the wind whistled through the trees.

“Meet me at the treeline when you are ready.” Anairë said quickly then ascended back up the narrow staircase.

Natalya licked her lips as she slowly kneeled down and gently shook Thorin awake. “It’s nearly dawn.” The half-Elf whispered to her husband who slowly opened his eyes. “You need to get dressed.”

Thorin nodded and opened his eyes, blinking a few times. He woke the rest of the Dwarves and they all got themselves ready. Thorin pulled on his boots and attached his sword to his belt, the adrenaline already pumping through his veins.

Natalya led the group to the edge of the forest and saw Anairë already there readying the Elven army alongside Haldir. She looked to Thorin who had walked over to speak with Dain and Dwalin. She joined them and listened to the plan of attack.

“They likely have guards patrolling the area. When we arrive they will see us immediately and we need to be ready.” Thorin said, speaking loudly. “Soldiers assemble your weapons. We go to war!” Swallowing, he mumbled to himself. “Yā Mahal, mahinsis kanāgē.” (Oh Mahal, save my people)

Natalya felt her throat tighten as she watched the soldiers begin getting ready and putting on their armor. Off in the distance she could Dain yelling and assembling his army. Natalya jumped when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned and saw Thorin standing behind her.

“Here is your armor.” Thorin said, handing her the leather garment.

Natalya nodded, not feeling like saying anything as she put on the shoulder pieces and walked next
to her husband. She could feel the tension in the air as the entire army began marching with the Elven army coming last. Soon enough, they crested the same ridge that she and Thorin had stood upon the night before. Natalya swallowed and immediately felt her palms become sweaty when she saw movement at the west gate.

“Ready your arrows.” Thorin whispered to Natalya. He watched as she swiftly pulled out an arrow and knocked it to the string. “You fire the first shot.”

Natalya simply nodded and watched as the Orcs began streaming out of the mountain.

“On my command.” Thorin whispered in her ear. “When you fire, the Elves will all follow suit from the back of the line.”

The half-Elf felt her breath quicken as the Orcs ran closer. “Thorin.” She whispered nervously, wondering why he had not yet given her the command.

The King started counting down. “Three. Two.” He paused as Natalya quickly raised her bow. “Shoot.”

Natalya felt time almost stop as she picked a singular Orc to take out amongst the crowd. Her breath released when she saw her arrow shoot straight into its heart, killing instantly. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Thorin give a slight smirk and she knew he was proud of her. A few more seconds passed before Natalya heard the sound of arrows flying over her head. Continuing to look forward, she saw almost the entire front row of the Orc army fall.

“Fire at will.” Thorin quickly told Natalya, realizing how quickly the other Elves would run out of arrows.

The half-Elf had luckily been supplied with extra arrows by the Lothlorien Elves. She continued to fire until Thorin raised his sword, commanding the attention of everyone on the battlefield.

“Du bekar!” Thorin shouted and led the attack straight at the Orcs.

Natalya continued firing until she had no more arrows. She luckily was able to help the Dwarves take down a few more Orcs until she was out of arrows. The Queen suddenly let out a battle yell and unsheathed Orcrist from her back, slicing into the oncoming enemies. The half-Elf suddenly noticed the Orc’s fear at her sword and she gave a slight smirk. Continuing to fight, the female was surprised that she felt no fatigue. Her training with Thorin had greatly paid off. Looking across the battlefield, Natalya saw Duliera and Dwalin fighting side by side. Her eyes continued to scan her surroundings and she saw Fili and Kili taking down Orcs left and right. Natalya suddenly heard another Orc coming towards her and she twirled and decapitated it with ease, black blood splattering everywhere. She continued fighting her way across the battlefield but soon her arms got weary as Orcrist started feeling heavy in her hands. Quickly resheathing it, she pulled her double daggers out from the holsters in her belt. Minutes passed as Natalya continued fighting. She noticed the Orc numbers slowly decreasing and realized that without the help of the Elves, the battle would have been lost. Her hazel eyes widened as she watched the Elves swiftly kill Orcs faster than she could fathom. Natalya quickly stabbed another Orc and looked to see Anairë pulling out double swords. The Elf easily killed two orcs at once as she stabbed them through their mid-sections. Natalya suddenly spun around when she heard a shout and charged at an Orc that was attacking Balin. Quickly bringing it down, she helped the Dwarf back on his feet.

Meanwhile, Thorin was fighting with all of his might. He seemed to always have Orcs coming at him from every direction and he quickly became tired. Just as he was about to give up he saw a blade pierce straight through the neck of the creature in front of him. “Natalya!” He exclaimed,
seeing her gasping for air as she pulled the dagger out.

“I saw you were in danger.” Natalya shouted. “I thought you might need some assistance.” She smiled at her husband who was a few strides away.

Thorin simply nodded then his eyes widened. “Watch out!” The Dwarf shouted and pushed Natalya aside as another creature had it’s sword raised to kill her.

The half-Elf quickly spun around and watched as Thorin decapitated the Orc and it fell to the ground, lifeless. “Fili! Kili!” Natalya shouted, seeing the brothers about to be in immediate danger. Quickly running across the battlefield, she jumped over corpses on the ground, trying to reach the brothers in time. She had a sudden deja vu of trying to save Thorin atop Ravenhill and she sprinted as fast as she could to reach the Dwarves. Realizing that she wouldn’t be able to reach them in time, the female readied her dagger and sent it flying straight into one of the Orcs. The other one attacking Kili stopped and turned towards Natalya with a growl. The half-Elf could see that the brothers were exhausted and she raised her other dagger to fight and pulled Orcrist back out as the creature came closer. She raised her sword for the kill but this Orc was quick, their blades interlocked and Natalya pushed back as hard as she could but her feet slid across the stone ground. Looking over the Orc’s shoulder she saw Thorin helping the brothers to their feet. Suddenly, the Orc spun her around and put his sword to her throat. Natalya let out a strangled yell, catching Thorin’s attention and the blade was pressed tighter to her neck.

Thorin’s eyes went wide as he saw the Orc holding a sword to his wife’s throat. He stepped closer but the creature growled and pushed the sword harder into the female’s throat. The Dwarf was ready to charge when he heard something go whizzing by, then the Orc shrieked and let Natalya go.

The half-Elf gasped and fell forward but Thorin caught her. Trembling, she looked up at him. “I thought I was going to die.” She looked around and saw that only a few Orcs were left and they were all retreating away from the battlefield. Reaching up, she touched her neck which had a slight cut across it and it stung.

Thorin hugged his wife. “Thanks to Fili you are alive. He threw the dagger.” The King still held onto his wife for a few more moments and pushed some strands of hair from her face. He then turned back to look at the older brother gripping his leg.

“Fili!” Natalya exclaimed, seeing that he was hurt. She quickly straightened up and walked past Thorin as she ignored the pain in her neck, and went over to Fili. “Let me look at it.”

Fili shook his head. “I’ll be fine.”

“Let me look at it.” Natalya said louder and she looked around then saw Anairê heading over to them.

Fili showed her the wound. It was not long but it was deep. The Dwarf looked up as he saw Anairê approached.

“Fili let me see it.” Anairê demanded as she bent down to look at his leg. She bit her lip when she saw the incision. “This needs binding.” She looked at Natalya. “In your pouch do you have a bandage?”

Natalya quickly looked in the pouch attached to her belt and pulled out a long bandage and handed it to Anairê.
The Elf quickly bound Fili’s leg. “I will need to sew it up here.” She spoke gravely as she looked at the Dwarf’s shocked face. “We do not have time to make it back to Lothlorien.”

Kili swallowed and walked over to Thorin and Natalya, holding his arm. “I need a bandage as well.” He whispered. As he pulled his hand away, a large piece of skin fell open. It didn’t bleed much, but it was a big area.

Natalya stammered. “I… I am not sure if I have anything else.” Biting her lip she quickly thought about what to do. Pulling at the edge of her tunic that hung down below her belt, the half-Elf pulled off a strip of cloth. “This should do.” She quickly wrapped his arm and winced when he grunted. The Queen paused and tried to pull her thoughts together as Kili went back over to his brother. This battle was unlike anything Natalya had ever witnessed. It was brutal. She looked around and saw bodies lay strewn across the rocky ground. As her eyes scanned the battlefield, the female looked over to see Thorin carefully treading towards the Moria gate with Balin, Dwalin and Duliera as well as Ori.
Walking into Moria, Natalya felt a quiet hush over the entire place. The devastation seemed to be way beyond repair after it had been inhabited by Orcs for several hundreds of years. The air was foul and she wrinkled her nose slightly as she breathed it in. Looking over to Balin, the female saw his eyes tear up slightly and she put a hand on his shoulder. Turning back, Natalya now noticed that all the Lothlorien Elves were gone.

“We must move quickly.” Thorin said, lighting a torch and walking through the hall. “The battle is not over.” The King whispered as they moved through the abandoned mountain. “Other Orcs are hiding. I am sure of it.” He raised his sword and led the small group farther into the darkness, his torch lighting the way. Sure enough, after a while, there was a shrieking sound and a few Orcs came to try to attack them.

Natalya gasped as she felt something move behind her and she turned to see Duliera killing an Orc with her large war axe. She turned back to where Thorin was continuing to lead them. Suddenly another Dwarf came running up to them.

“Greetings Thorin, King under the Mountain.” The Dwarf introduced himself and bowed. “I am Flói Stonehand of the Dwarves of Erebor.”

“What brings you here?” Thorin asked, turning his full body towards the Dwarf.

“We need to reach Kheled-zâram.” The Dwarf said with urgency in his voice.

Balin nodded. “Long have I wanted to look into the lake to see the stars of the seven Dwarf fathers.”

“This is a dangerous business.” Thorin grabbed the elderly Dwarf’s arm as he tried to walk off.

“Thorin.” Balin said strongly, looking back at the King. “This is now my choice. Not yours.”

The King sighed, knowing Balin would not listen and he simply followed the elderly Dwarf and Flói as they turned off onto a narrow staircase that led away from the way they had been going. He looked to Natalya and held her hand as they walked. Moving further into the mountain, there was a large staircase that led directly to a bridge. “The bridge of Khazad-Dum.” Thorin whispered gravely as he motioned for them to all move slowly.

Meanwhile, Anairë was still with Fili and Kili. Haldir had seen her helping the brothers and quickly brought a healer over. “Anairë stop.” The Elf quickly spoke up before Anairë could start sewing Fili’s leg.

Anairë looked up and stepped back when she noticed the healer.

Fili winced as the Elf healer gently touched his leg. Sitting as still as possible, the Dwarf watched as he began speaking in Elvish and rubbed some herbs into his leg, the pain ceasing almost immediately.

“That should help it heal quicker.” The healer said, smiling down at Fili. “You are one of heirs, am I correct?”

The blond nodded. “For now.” He watched as the Elf nodded and walked back to his people. He looked over to Kili and noticed his arm had been bandaged. “Who did that?” Fili asked, looking at
“Natalya.” Kili answered. He paused and looked around before turning to Fili. “Where did they go?”

“Inside Moria.” Anairë answered. She had been sitting on a nearby rock, watching over the brothers to make sure they didn’t try to do anything foolish.

Fili simply nodded, knowing how angered his Uncle would be if they went charging in there after being injured.

Thorin made sure everyone stayed silent as they traveled further into the mountain. Shrieks of Orcs could be heard from far off but nothing close. Yet. They slowly made their way further and further down a nearby winding staircase. The Dwarf kept a steady hand on Natalya’s back as the staircase suddenly became skinnier and they had to move single file.

“Where are we headed?” Natalya asked as she paused and looked back at Thorin.

“You will see soon enough.” The Dwarf whispered as he gave the half-Elf a slight nudge to keep going.

Natalya gave a sigh of exasperation but continued walking down the steps. Finally, it flattened out for a while but still continued at a slight decrease. She gasped loudly as she nearly ran into the back of Ori. “Why are we stopping?” She tried to look around the Dwarf’s shoulder and she felt a cool breeze blowing slightly.

“We are here milady.” Ori turned back to her and smiled.

Balin was in awe when he finally reached the opening in the mountain. “The Mirrormere.” He took a deep breath and stepped out of the opening of the mountain. “There is Durin’s stone.” The Dwarf pointed to a large stone pillar near the side of the lake.

Natalya looked up at the sky when she first entered. “Where are the stars?” She asked, looking back at Thorin.

“They can only be seen at full night time.” Flói answered, stepping up beside the half-Elf. He noticed her ears and her height but said nothing. “The sun will set soon enough and they will be visible again.”

“Did Durin the Deathless not see the crown of stars in the daylight?” Nataya asked. She soon realized they were within an odd opening in the mountain. The pool and some surrounding grass and rocks was the only thing to be seen until the mountain jutted out of the ground all around them on every side.

“Indeed he did.” Flói answered. He shook his head as he continued. “The stars have never revealed themselves during any time of the day since.”

Thorin stood back near the entrance, should Orcs suddenly make an appearance. He watched as Balin made his way to the lake and stopped to stare into the reflection.

“The crown!” Balin exclaimed loudly as he looked into the water.

Natalya and the other Dwarves heard this statement and quickly turned around.

“That’s not possible!” Flói said in shock. He quickly walked over to where Balin was standing and indeed saw the crown of seven stars as well. “Durin’s beard.” The Dwarf exclaimed, shocked that
it could be seen this clearly.

Thorin was amazed as well and took a few steps closer to the pool.

As Natalya was looking around, she suddenly felt an eerie chill settle over the place. The half-Elf shuddered and placed her hand on the hilt of one of the daggers. As she looked over to where Balin was still staring into the pool, her eyes caught sight of something moving among the rocks. An Orc archer suddenly rose from behind one of the rocks but Natalya was quicker. She took her other dagger and threw it as hard as she could and it embedded itself right into the Orc’s forehead before it could shoot Balin.

All of the Dwarves heard the crash of the Orc falling and looked back at Natalya who still had a shocked look on her face.

“It isn’t safe here, we need to leave immediately.” The half-Elf ordered everyone to start heading back inside Moria. As the group was leaving they heard a shout and saw that Flói had been shot by another archer in the back.

“Ifriðî bekâr!” Thorin shouted, pulling his sword out of its sheath as he looked around for more attackers.

Natalya quickly turned around to see Dwarves coming out of one of the other doorways in the mountain. She swallowed, seeing more and more come out. “We cannot fight all of them!” She said nervously as she looked to Thorin.

“We must try!” Thorin said back strongly. “They are coming in from the Silvertlode.” He pointed to where part of the lake became a river and streamed into the mountain. The Dwarves began backing towards the door they had originally come in from. The King raised his sword and swallowed as the creatures came closer.

Dwalin was still kneeling next to Flói as the Orcs approached them. “You need to come with us!” The Dwarrow stated strongly. He heard Duliera calling his name but he ignored her.

“Leave me.” Flói ordered as he placed his hand on Dwalin’s arm. “There is nothing to be done now. My soul will find a place in Mahal’s halls.”

Dwalin swallowed as he rose to his feet and left the Dwarrow behind. He rejoined the group and got ready to fight the Orcs. “I thought they were already all gone.” Dwalin growled as he raised his axe. He watched as the creatures got closer. “Ye wouldn’t happen to have any more arrow would ya Natalya?”

The half-Elf shook her head as she lifted Orcrist and got into her battle stance, ready to charge.

“Du bekar!” Thorin suddenly shouted and led a charge at the oncoming Orc army.

Natalya gave a yell and charged after him, running at the Orcs with all of her might.

Thorin’s Dwarven blade sliced through the Orcs with ease but he was becoming more weary by the moment.

Natalya swallowed as she was suddenly facing down an Orc twice her size. The creature made punches at her but she easily dodged them. Rolling out of the way, the Queen quickly rose back to her feet and sliced her blade across it’s back. Natalya gasped as she was sent flying into the rocks when the creature’s hand connected with her shoulder. The female then let out a soft groan and looked up to see the Orc with it’s blade raised above its head, about to bring it down. Rising up on
one knee, Natalya blocked the blow of the blade with her own. The half-Elf’s arms shook as she
gripped the handle of Orcrist with both hands. Realizing she was not strong enough to push the Orc
off, she gripped his black blade with her bare hand and gritted her teeth as the edge cut into her
skin. Blood flowed freely as the sword dug deeper, her blood dripping off the edge. Pushing the
Orcs sword up, she managed to rise up enough to kick the creature in the chest, knocking it to the
ground. Her chest heaved as she took deep breaths, oxygen rushing back into her lungs. With her
teeth bared, Natalya growled as she drove the blade of Orcrist deep into the enemy’s chest then
watched as the light left its black eyes and it stopped breathing. Yanking the sword out, Natalya
quickly turned to face more Orcs which were all thankfully much smaller. Fighting them one at a
time, she was shocked when the numbers started diminishing. Looking across the lake, the half-Elf
saw several hundreds of the Orc’s retreating back into the mountain.

“Block the doorway!” Thorin ordered as he looked at Dwalin and Duliera. “We do not want to see
them again!”

The two Dwarves nodded and began making their way down towards the lake and beyond it to find
out how to barricade the northern entrance.

“Natalya you are safe!” Thorin exclaimed when he saw his wife standing a few strides away from
him. “I did not see you when the Orcs dispersed and I feared the worst.”

“I am fine amralime.” Natalya reassured Thorin and she gave him a quick kiss against his lips. “I
will never leave your side.” She saw where Thorin’s jacket and tunic had been slightly torn and he
had scratches along his arms.

The Dwarf nodded and wrapped his arms around Natalya’s waist, holding her close. “You have
seen too much bloodshed.” He whispered into her shoulder.

The Queen stayed silent as she ran her fingers through Thorin’s raven black hair. The palm of her
other hand still burned from the cut but she ignored it as she enjoyed this moment with her
husband. “I will be fine Thorin I promise you.” She whispered to him as she clenched her other fist
to stop the blood flow.

The Dwarf nodded and pulled away. When he looked down he noticed her hand. “Natalya!” He
exclaimed, as he gently grabbed her wrist and turned her palm towards him. “This needs to be
cleaned.” Thorin led Natalya towards the lake. Leaning down, he grabbed a section of his tunic
that had been torn and dipped it into the water. The Dwarrow quickly created a makeshift bandage
and wrapped it around his wife’s hand.

“Thank you.” Natalya nodded with a slight smile as she made eye contact with Thorin. They both
rose to their feet and headed back to the doorway they had come in, slowly making it back to the
western gate. When they stepped outside, there was not a living soul to be seen. “Where is
everyone?” Natalya asked as she looked across the barren battlefield. Dead bodies scattered the
ground as far as she could see. There was no sign of the brothers or Anairë either. The half-Elf
swallowed, hoping there were no more Orcs around.

“This way.” Thorin instructed and he began leading them away from the Moria gate. Suddenly he
turned back to face Ori and Balin. “Stay here.” He instructed them. “I will send soldiers back to
you once we reach Lothlorien.”

The two Dwarves nodded and waited near the entrance to the mountain.

Thorin and Natalya as well as Dwalin and Duliera began heading back to the Elven kingdom. Sure
enough, when they arrived, the surviving soldiers had already begun stripping themselves of their
armor and resting.

“On your feet!” Thorin commanded as he entered the camp. He watched as all of the soldiers immediately followed his orders. “I need most of you to stay here to defend Moria now.” The Dwarf King spoke loudly. “It is to be your new home.” He paused, seeing the look of bewilderment cross many of their faces. “Although, those of you that have families will stay in Erebor.” He saw a few of the Dwarves sigh. “The rest of you need to decide who stays and who comes back.” Thorin paused as he scanned the crowd of Dwarves. “You have ten minutes.” The Dwarf looked to see Anairë and Haldir approaching them. “Where is Fili and Kili?” Thorin demanded. “Where are my nephews?”

“They are recovering your majesty.” Anairë bowed. “You can come visit them now.”

Thorin quickly nodded and followed the tall Elf back into the kingdom. Walking through the twisty paths of Lothlorien, Thorin soon found himself outside an intricately carved wooden Elvish door made of white wood.

“They are awaiting you.” Anairë bowed again and she left them.

Natalya swallowed and stepped forward, gently pushing open the door. As she opened it, she saw Fili and Kili laying in their beds, asleep.

“I never meant for this to happen.” Thorin whispered, looking down at his sleeping nephews. “They did not deserve this.”

“I hear they recovered well.” Natalya said as she looked at Thorin who nodded. “They should be able to leave whenever we are ready.”

“Tomorrow morning.” Thorin simply stated as he continued to watch the brothers as they peacefully slept. He stayed in the room a few more minutes before heading back out to where the soldiers were awaiting his command. The King watched as the Dwarves separated themselves into two groups. He dismissed the group that was to head to Moria and the other Dwarves stayed in the camp.

Natalya watched as the remaining soldiers all returned to their tents and laid down to rest. “This was a hard day.” The Queen simply stated. “One which I hope never happens again.”

Thorin nodded with certainty. “It will not.”

Natalya gently took his hand in her own and began leading him back towards the Elvish kingdom. “Come.” Her voice was gentle. “We need to rest. I will clean your wounds.”

The Dwarf agreed and followed his wife back to where they had rested previously under the trees. The sun had finally set and the glow of white light in the kingdom was quite peaceful. Far off, voices could be heard singing a song in Elvish. “What do they sing of?” Thorin asked, looking at Natalya as he laid down, ignoring the pain in his back.

“Our victory.” Natalya smiled at Thorin. She looked to see that a silver basin of clear water had been brought to where they were staying.

The King swallowed, knowing that it was not a complete victory. Orcs still dwelled in the mountains but they were now too scared to show themselves. He tensed slightly when his wife slowly took his arm and began gently cleaning his wounds.

The half-Elf gently held Thorin’s hand in her own and cleaned the cuts on his arms. She didn’t say
anything, knowing Thorin already had a lot weighing on his mind. Natalya continued cleaning his forearm then moved to the other one. Dipping the rag back into the basin, she rang out the blood and dirt that had gotten on it. Swallowing, Natalya sighed as she partially lifted up her husband’s tunic and cleaned the large cuts across his abdomen. Her eyes then landed on the other scars from years of battles and turmoil. “I am so sorry Thorin.”

“For what?” Thorin asked softly. “You did nothing wrong.”

“I know.” The Queen answered barely above a whisper. “It just pains me to see you like this.”

The King reached up and touched Natalya’s cheek. “I am fine dear.” He reassured her. “Believe me. I have had worse.”

“I know that.” Natalya sighed. “I was scared for you the entire battle, knowing…” Her voice trailed off.

“Knowing what?” Thorin asked.

“That we might have not seen each other again.” The half-Elf answered, her throat tight.

The Dwarf sighed, knowing she was right. “I was scared as well.” He admitted as he shifted his weight and slightly winced.

“Sit up.” Natalya instructed her husband. As he pushed himself into a sitting position, her eyes could see blood that had soaked through his shirt. “Oh Thorin.” She gasped softly and watched as he pulled his shirt over his head to reveal several deep cuts. Luckily they did not seem to need stitches but Natalya knew they were painful. She pulled the small basin of water closer to her and cleaned them best she could, making sure to be as gentle as possible. The half-Elf slowly ran the damp cloth over the red inflamed cuts, hearing Thorin make a sound and she winced, knowing it stung. She took her time, making sure all of the dirt was cleaned out of them. Rising to her feet once she had finished, Natalya told Thorin to stay where he was. Walking up the small staircase near where they were resting, the half-Elf easily found Anairë and had her retrieve more bandages and salve. She headed back to where Thorin had stayed where he was. Natalya kneeled down next to him and put salve on the wounds, then bandaged his abdomen. “There.” She said quietly, staring into her husband’s eyes. “That should feel better.”

Thorin nodded. “Thank you.” He whispered. The Dwarf stayed silent for a while and stared up into the canopy of light. He finally sighed and looked at his wife who was finally laying on her side. Putting his arm over her waist and pulling her closer, he kissed her on the head. “I love you Natalya.”

“I love you too Thorin.” The Queen whispered. “Now please rest. You need it.” She turned over on her back and looked at him. “The journey tomorrow will be long.”

Thorin nodded and laid on his side and allowed the soft voices of the Elven songs to put him to sleep.

The morning sun came and the rays of golden light shone through the trees. Natalya was already awake and dressed before Thorin even moved. She turned her head as anairë softly treaded down the stairs.

“I have come to bid you farewell.” The Elf slightly smiled.

Natalya embraced her friend. “It was good to see you again.” She paused and looked around. “Give Galadriel and Celeborn our thanks as well.”
“They wish to escort you out.”

Natalya waited a few more minutes before waking Thorin from his sleep. The Dwarves followed Anairë back out to the edge of the woods where the rest of the company were awaiting their return. Natalya gave her friend a hug. “Thank you for everything.” She whispered, putting her hand on Anairë’s shoulder. Before they could mount their horses, they saw Galadriel and Celeborn emerge from the trees.

“We bid you farewell.” Galadriel said with a smile. “I am glad we can live in peace and unity once more.” She nodded to Thorin. “Here are some gifts I present to you for your journey home.”

Celeborn stepped towards Natalya. “A bow and arrows made of the finest materials.” He presented to her an ivory bow with leaf designs carved into it.

Natalya gently took the bow and quiver, amazed by the quality. She simply bowed her head, at a loss for words.

“What would the King of the Dwarves wish for?” Galadriel asked Thorin with a slight smile and a nod.

“I need nothing, your majesty.” Thorin bowed his head.

Galadriel nodded towards Celeborn who took something from another Elf and stepped towards Thorin. “I present you with this as a peace offering.” The Elven Queen handed a Lorien leaf to the Dwarf. “May it serve as a reminder of the mutuality we now have.”

“Thank you, your majesty.” Thorin bowed his head again as he gently took the leaf.

Swiftly mounting their horses, Thorin and Natalya nodded to Celeborn and Galadriel before beginning their journey back to Erebor. With less soldiers to look over, they covered ground quicker as the days became longer.

A few days later, the group passed through the wilderland and began making their way through the Rhovanion. The Dwarves finally set up camp for the night and Thorin approached Natalya.

“Thank you.” He said softly, causing her to turn and look at him.

Natalya looked into his blue eyes. “For what, Thorin?” She asked as calmly as she could. Her husband had not spoken to her after their previous conversation and she knew that he simply needed time to think things over.

“For everything.” The King whispered, looking into his wife’s hazel eyes. They began sparkling in the firelight as Fili and Kili lit the small bundle of twigs.

Natalya swallowed and looked at him as he gently took her hand in his and led her over to where the small fire was starting to glow. The half-Elf took a seat on the ground Thorin, sitting next to her. Feeling her husband’s arm around her Natalya leaned into him. “I am so glad you are safe.”

She whispered as she touched the courting bead in his hair. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“There will come a day when I am not by your side amralime. You must continue on; knowing that we will see each other again.”

Natalya nodded and looked across the small fire to see the brothers sitting quietly next to each
other. They had their knives out and were whittling away at pieces of wood they had found. “I need to redress your wounds.” The half-Elf said softly, not wanting to think about what Thorin had previously said.

The Dwarf nodded and they headed to where the bed rolls had been laid. Sitting down, he watched as his wife took the old bandage off.

“They are healing well.” Natalya commented with a slight smile. The redness had decreased from the cuts and they were less inflamed. Nevertheless, she added more salve and applied a fresh bandage. “Feel better?” The Queen asked when she noticed how dirty the other bandage had become.

Thorin simply nodded and slipped the tunic back over his head.

Soon the other Dwarves had prepared dinner for everyone and Dain approached Thorin. “Cousin.” He said quietly and rested his hand on the Dwarf’s shoulder. “At dawn my troops and I will leave to go back to the Iron Hills.”

“What of Duliera?” Thorin asked. He knew of the courtship between her and Dwalin but was not sure if word had reached Dain’s ears.

“She is free to go wherever she wishes.” The Dwarf smiled. “She told me immediately of her and Dwalin’s courtship.”

Thorin nodded, not realizing she had told anyone. He looked over to where Duliera and Dwalin were sitting a little farther from the crackling fire, enjoying each other’s company. Turning back to his cousin, Thorin nodded. “I will allow her to choose as well.”

The sky finally darkened and Thorin pulled out his bedroll and laid it next to Natalya’s. “We should make it back in a few days.”

The half-Elf smiled. “I cannot wait to be back.” She laid back and stared up at the stars. “This reminds me of that time we stood out under the stars after our coronation.” Her lips curved into a smile at the happy memory.

“Hopefully Dís has not let the kingdom fall into ruin.” Thorin chuckled as he ran his hand through his beard which had become significantly longer over the past few weeks. He gently took Natalya’s hand and observed the cut across her palm. “Here let me tend to this.” The Dwarf propped himself up on one elbow and looked around for something to wrap it in. “It needs to be wrapped or it will become infected.”

Natalya nodded as she felt Thorin’s fingers run across the palm of her hand. Her eyelids began to get heavy and her breathing became deeper as she started falling asleep.

Thorin rose from his bedroll and found a spare piece of clean cloth and some ointment near where Fili and Kili were laying. Walking back over to Natalya he took her hand again and rubbed the balm across her palm and gently wrapped it in the cloth. The King stayed awake for a while and watched as Natalya slept deeply. His body was exhausted but his mind raced from all the events of the previous days. Finally, Thorin’s mind and body relaxed and he fell asleep next to his wife.

The birds began chirping early in the morning and woke Natalya from her sleep. Rolling over on her side, she saw Thorin still in a deep sleep. As she moved her hand to sit up, she looked down and saw a bandage wrapped around it. The Queen smiled to herself and got up from her bedroll and began packing her belongings for the journey home. “Just a few more days.” She whispered to
herself. Once the half-Elf had packed her bedroll, she walked over to where the fire had burned out and looked through some of the containers for food. Picking out some pieces of dried meat, she chewed on them for a while, waiting for everyone else to wake up.

Thorin finally smelled the scent of breakfast cooking and slowly woke up.

“Wow he’s finally awake!” Fili gave a slight chuckle. Thanks to the Elvish medicine his leg was almost healed and Kili’s arm was back to normal.

The brunet gave a chuckle. “Don’t wake up Uncle from sleep. That is the one thing I have learned.”

Natalya smiled at the brothers and continued helping Dain prepare plates of food.

“I still want to thank you for saving my Cousin.” Dain said, looking at Natalya.

The Queen smiled. “Thank you for joining us in the battle. I heard you thought it was futile.” She looked back down at the plate of food she had just prepared and handed it to Kili.

Dain sighed. “Aye I did say that.” He paused before speaking again. “I did not want to risk losing Thorin again after the Battle of the Five Armies.”

Natalya nodded and spoke. “I promised myself I would not let him die in battle.”

Dain gave a small smile. “We cannot determine who lives and who dies on the battlefield.”

Looking at Natalya, he saw her suddenly become slightly sad.

The half-Elf remembered how her father probably died on a similar battlefield while fighting alongside the Elves. Suddenly, she felt an arm around her waist and looked over to see Thorin standing next to her.

“Good morning dear.” Thorin whispered and he kissed her cheek. “How is your hand?”

“Much better thank you.” Natalya gave a soft smile in Thorin’s direction.

Finally all of the troops were fed and they continued their journey north. They traveled a few weeks, rising at sunlight and not stopping until sundown to rest. Finally, they reached the overlook and Dale was in sight.

“It’s so beautiful.” Natalya smiled as she watched people moving throughout the city. She remembered seeing it over a year ago still in desolation after the wrath of the Dragon.

“Home.” Thorin smiled, looking over to the Erebor gate. He could see Dwarves at the mountain entrance. “They are glad for our return.”

The Queen nodded and they began making their way down to the front gate. “It would seem so.” She smiled as she heard cheers and the Dwarves began coming out of the mountain to greet them. On her left she could also hear the cheers from the people of Dale. Finally they made it to the front gate and Dís was already there to greet them along with Morrigan and Ainila.

Dís gave Thorin and Natalya each a hug once they dismounted their horses. “I am so glad you are alive!”

“Me too.” Natalya said softly as she hugged the Dwarrowdam.

Ainila and Morrigan each hugged the brothers tight, not wanting to let them go.
“I feared I would never see you again.” Morrigan said as she hugged Kili.

Kili pulled away and looked into her eyes. “I want to marry you.” He said softly. “Do you accept my courtship?” The Dwarf asked, pulling a silver hair bead out of his pocket. He had carried it all through the battle as a reminder to himself to return.

Morrigan looked at him, her mouth agape. “Kili yes!” She smiled as he immediately took a section of her hair and began braiding it, attaching the bead at the end.

Fili saw his brother and looked at Ainila and chuckled. “Always rushing things.” He took the Dwarrowdam’s hand in his own and led her back to Erebor, the limp still slightly there.

“Fili are you hurt?” Ainila asked when she noticed his uneven gait.

“I’m fine.” The Dwarf said and brushed it off. “It will heal soon.” He smiled down at Ainila.

The Dwarrowdam asked how it happened as they continued walking through the main gathering area of the mountain.

Fili recalled the story of how he was trying to save Natalya and an Orc lunged at him, striking him across the leg.

Finally Thorin and Natalya headed back into the mountain as well as the rest of the Dwarves. The King and Queen smiled as the rest of the members of the company came out to greet them and congratulate them on their victory.

“A great feast will be held in your honor.” Dís smiled at Thorin after everyone had greeted him. “You will need to get washed and changed first.” She chuckled. As she looked at Thorin’s blood and dirt covered clothes.

Thorin smiled and led Natalya back to the royal wing. “We must get ready for the feast tonight.” He smiled at her. “I will draw you a bath.” Giving her a quick kiss he entered the room and turned on the hot water.

Natalya smiled, proud to be able to call such a great King her husband. Finally they both cleaned up and joined the feast in the great hall.

“A toast is to be made tonight!” One of the members of the Dwarven council stood with his goblet in the air. “The victory and return of the King and Queen under the Mountain!”

The whole room erupted in loud cheers as Thorin and Natalya stood in front of their chairs and smiled at all of the people.

The food was soon brought out and the feast lasted late into the night. Almost all of the Dwarves tried to greet Thorin and Natalya to personally congratulate them on the victory. Each Dwarf drank their fill especially Fili and Kili who were thoroughly drunk by the end of the night and had to have Dís escort them back to their rooms.

Natalya and Thorin finally retreated to their room as well way past midnight when the feast was starting to end. “Menu zirup men.” (You complete me) Thorin whispered as he wrapped his arms around Natalya and kissed her deeply.

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