An Unexpected Road Trip: If This is to End in Fire
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An Unexpected Road Trip: If This is to End in Fire

by FarGreenCountrySwiftSunrise

Summary

After narrowly escaping from the Misty Mountains, Thorin Oakenshield and Company continue their quest to reclaim their homeland. They must pass through the deep south, avoid the perils of Mirkwood in Louisiana, and finally come to the Lonely Mountain in New Mexico. But what dangers and tricks is the dragon of the mountain preparing? What of the Orcs tracking them? And will Bramble Baggins be able to find the Arkenstone without becoming a victim of dragon fire? Modern Hobbit AU, Fem!Bilbo, and Bagginshield.

Trigger Warning: Non-sexual violence against a woman and general sadism in chapters twenty-one and twenty-four.
Thorin knew he was broken. He had known it since the Battle of Azanulbizar when he enjoyed slicing off Azog’s hand instead of considering it a necessity or a horror.

He tried not to show it, but some people could tell. Balin knew when he saw Thorin weep over Frerin’s body, but he thought Thorin was still worth something, even worthy of kingship. Dwalin knew the first time they sparred after the battle, but he thought like Thorin would still be a good king just as Balin did. Dís figured it out when Thorin stopped playing his harp. She wept for him, but always, always supported him, never treating him like the broken thing he was. Fíli and Kíli knew since their childhood their uncle was not right, but they always looked up to him and followed him, even to face a dragon.

Bramble Baggins knew. She probably always knew, maybe even before they first met. Yet, she came on the quest. She thought he was a good man despite his past and the uncertainty of his future. She believed in him.

The Hobbit who loved books and maps. The Hobbit with multiple pantries. The Hobbit who was terrified of fighting and yet faced one of the most fearsome Orcs in history to protect Thorin. The Hobbit who skipped practically everywhere because she was just happy. She believed in him.

And he had failed her. He had promised her he would protect her. Yet she was dying from a fall which should have never happened. He should have been there. He should have protected her. He should have been able to do something.

“Thorin, Beorn will be here soon,” Gandalf said quietly as he crouched down next to where Thorin still held Bramble.

The Dwarf nodded.

“I am telling you this now because you will have to let Bramble go. He will help Bramble or else he would not have come. However, the rest of the Company…”

Thorin felt his mind beginning to work again. “What did you not tell me earlier?”

“I might have left out a detail or two.”

“Wizard…”

Gandalf cleared his throat. “He is a skin-changer. Sometimes he’s a huge black bear; sometimes he’s a great strong man. The bear is unpredictable, but the man can be reasoned with. However, he is not over fond of Dwarves. Your sister has killed the Great Goblin, so that may assist your case. He will
either help us or kill us.”

“But not Bramble,” Thorin said.

“No, he will not harm her,” Gandalf said, “He knew Hobbits before they came to the Shire; he is fond of them.”

Thorin grunted an acknowledgment. Internally, Thorin berated himself for putting the quest in danger while also belittling himself for risking Bramble’s life for a mountain which would be around for a while longer.

“There is a way he might be more willing to help though,” Gandalf said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Gandalf, Óin, Thorin, and Bramble were the only ones sitting on the gravel outside of the abandoned bar. The rest hid inside.

A white van pulled up next to the group. A man at least seven feet tall unfolded himself from the driver’s seat.

“Gandalf,” the man said.

“Beorn, your patient,” Gandalf said, nodding his head to Bramble.

Beorn got on his knees next to Thorin. The two stared at each other, not saying a word.

Óin said, “If you two want to fight over who is Alpha Dog here, you will both lose since this is my patient.”

Beorn looked down at Bramble. “What is wrong with her?”

“We think internal bleeding,” Óin said, “She passed out about an hour ago and we haven’t been able to wake her. We don’t have any supplies to help her and there have been no cars.”

“She is a Hobbit?” Beorn said.

“Yes,” Thorin said.

“One Hobbit, two Dwarves, and a wizard. Why do I feel there is a story here, Gandalf?” Beorn said, “But I have no time for tales. We will have to go back to my clinic to operate. I do have the supplies to have one of you give her blood.”

“She is B-positive,” Gandalf said.

“I am O-negative,” Thorin said, “Universal donor.”

“And you have also loss a lot of blood yourself,” Óin scolded.

“Maybe one of the others…” Gandalf said.

“Others?” Beorn said.

Gandalf whistled. Dwalin and Balin came out of the bar.

“More Dwarves,” Beorn said darkly. He went back to the van to get the supplies.
“Are either of you B-positive?” Thorin asked.

“No,” Balin said.

“I didn’t think so,” Thorin said. He stroked Bramble’s hair.

“Get her into the bar,” Beorn said when he returned with a medical bag, “I think the rest of your friends are waiting. Don’t give me that look Gandalf. I can see them peeking through the windows.”

After a moment of hesitation on Thorin’s part, Beorn carefully picked up Bramble and carried her into the bar. The Dwarves eyed the tall stranger warily, but softened at the sight of Bramble.

“B-positive,” Beorn said as he laid Bramble on a long table.

“I got B-positive!” Bofur and Bombur said at the same time. Bifur raised his hand and waved it enthusiastically.

“You with the ear hat, now,” Beorn said.

Bofur ran over and rolled up his sleeves. “Glad it’s me. Sis and I have been planning on basically adopting the professor anyway.”

Beorn began looking for a vein in Bofur’s arm. “This is proving difficult.”

“Really? I’ve never had a problem before with doctors finding a place to stick me,” Bofur said.

“When was the last time you had something to drink?” Beorn said.

“Uh… well, sometime about… a day ago. A little more,” Bofur said.

“By all the…” Beorn growled. “And I assume the Hobbit is the same? No wonder she passed out. She’s dehydrated and with the internal bleeding…” Beorn muttered to himself and left the bar.

“Where’s he going?” Thorin said.

A few moments later, Beorn returned with a package of water bottles. “Drink up. We need to put a saline drip into the patient. I don’t want to do a blood transfusion between species unless absolutely necessary.”

“So, she’ll be alright?” Kíli said.

Beorn answered, “I have no idea. She is dehydrated. Look at her nails and lips. All the signs are there. Thank the powers that be your wizard had some sense to call me. The lot of you are too attached to her to see the problem right in front of you. Dwarves!” The skin-changer began muttering to himself as he cleaned Bramble’s hand to prepare the needle.

“What is your plan?” Thorin said.

“I am going to take her back to my clinic,” Beorn said, “Since my assistant is off, I will need to take your healer with me. I might as well take the rest of you.”

“My thanks,” Thorin said.

“Don’t thank me yet. I don’t know if anything I do will help. She is not… my usual clientele,” Beorn said.
“Hobbits are not common, no,” Óin said.

“It’s not that. I am a veterinarian. I can do surgery on a mouse, but one of the Free Folk?” Beorn shook his head. “Come on. I think I can fit all of you into my car.”

“A VET?” the Dwarves yelled at the same time.

The Company was stuffed into Beorn’s white van. Balin, Dwalin, Bifur, and Bombur sat in the back. Nori, Ori, Glóin, and Óin were in the three middle seats. Fíli, Kíli, and Dís sat in the next row with Bramble lying across their laps. Dís held up the saline bag. Bofur and Thorin sat on the floor near the Hobbit. Gandalf and Dori shared the passenger seat in the front while Beorn drove.

About a half-hour later, Thorin said, “How much longer?”

“I am going as fast as I can while avoiding the Orc gangs and without alerting the police. Some of them have been stealing motorcycles until they run out of gas,” Beorn said, “About fifteen minutes.”

“Well, it could be worse,” Bofur said.

Thorin glared. “Last time you said that, the Great Goblin landed on us. As your king, I am going to tell you to shut up.”

“Well, I didn’t vote for you,” Bramble mumbled, her eyes still closed.

The Dwarves let out a cheer and tried to scramble over to Bramble. “Back off the lass!” Óin said, “Professor, wake up.”

“Not the line,” Bramble mumbled.

Thorin looked around at the group. “If any of you say a word of this, I will personally throw you off the top of Erebor.”

The group was confused, but agreed.

Thorin knelt next to Bramble as best as he could in the cramped space. “You don't vote for kings.”

“Well, how’d you become king, then?” Bramble mumbled.

“The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I am your king.”

“Listen. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.” Bramble opened her eyes slightly. “You can't expect to wield supreme power just 'cause some watery tart threw a sword at you!” Bramble smiled.

“Something about violence inherit in the system comes after that,” Thorin said.

Bramble nodded. “My line. Not dead?”

“That’s another section entirely,” Thorin said.

The Hobbit tried to shift her arm position, but found her movements restricted. “What’s wrong with
“Dehydration among other things. We are getting you help,” Thorin said.

“Just a burglar. You have a quest.”

“I need my… we need our burglar,” Thorin said, “How are you feeling?”

“I still hurt,” Bramble said, “Everyone okay?”

“Everyone is fine,” Thorin said.

“You look like a chew toy,” Bramble said.

Thorin huffed. “That’s because I was one.”

“Hmmm… can I go back to sleep?”

“No. You can’t. You need to stay awake.”

“I don’t think I can.”

“Bofur,” Thorin said, “You are constantly keeping everyone up with your stories. Keep her awake.”

“Aye, your majesty,” Bofur said. They switched places. “Did I ever tell you about the time I accidentally stole Dwalin’s ax?”

Bramble barely clung to consciousness when Beorn finally stopped the van. Óin switched with Dís to carry the saline when Beorn lifted Bramble out of the car. “We will go into my clinic. My house is in the back. You may wait there or just outside the front desk,” Beorn said.

Many flowers and fruit trees surrounded the buildings where the van had stopped. Bees the size of a grown man’s thumb buzzed around. Dogs greeted Beorn, but kept out of his way.

“Lovely garden,” Bramble said, “Why is it so hot though?”

“Florida is almost always warm, little bunny,” Beorn said.

“Eagles called me that. Do I look like a bunny?” Bramble said.

“You are small and seem to be more prey than predator,” Beorn said.

“I am not a bunny,” Bramble mumbled, “I am… a folklorist. Much more fearsome.”

Beorn laughed heartily as he ducked his head to avoid hitting the door frame which led to his clinic. “Much more fearsome indeed.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I am aware because the mythology system in LOTR would not allow for the existence of the Holy Grail, Monty Python and the Holy Grail would not actually exist,
but we are going to pretend it exists in some shape or form. Why? Rule of Funny.

If This Is to End in Fire Fancast

The World Is Not in Your Books and Maps Mix

If This Is to End in Fire Mix

Also, a reminder/for your information just in case it is not clear.

Female – Bramble “Bilbo” Baggins, Dís, Fíli, Bombur, Glóin, Dori, Nori, Ori, and Bard.

Male – Thorin, Kíli, Óin, Balin, Dwalin, Bifur, and Bofur.
Chapter II: Siblings

Chapter Summary

In which our heroes finally get some rest.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bramble’s eyelids felt unusually heavy. She was in a twin bed with cool sheets. A ceiling fan, a desk fan, and the air conditioning ran at the same time, but the air was still stuffy. As she opened her eyes, she found the room mostly dark, but she could see a figure sitting up in another bed and another figure sitting in a chair, slumped over slightly. She tried to raise her right arm but found a slight pull from what she vaguely remembered to be an IV.

“Bram… burglar, are you awake?” Thorin said from the other bed.

“Where am I?” Bramble said.


“Hi, Bofur,” Bramble said.

“Thank the powers that be. I’ll tell Óin,” Bofur said, “Keep an eye on her and don’t be messing with your stitches, either of ya.” He ran out of the room.

“Where am I?” Bramble asked again.

“What was the last thing you remember?” Thorin said.

Bramble smiled. “You’re a Monty Python fan.”

“Hush. Not a word of that,” Thorin said gruffly, “So you don’t remember our host?”

“He’s huge,” Bramble said as she wriggled her nose, “He thinks I’m a bunny. I don’t understand why. Can we have a little light?”

Thorin twisted a knob on a lamp which sat on the table between them. It was a white room with a popcorn ceiling. Thorin’s wounds and scratches had been cleaned. She could see bandages wrapped around his left arm.

“What happened?” Bramble asked.

“Our host performed surgery on you with Óin,” Thorin said, “There was a tear on your liver. They fixed it, but Bofur had to donate his blood. We are going to have to keep an eye on you to make sure Hobbit and Dwarf blood can mix without ill effects.”


“I think all of the Company would have given their blood to you,” Thorin said.
Bramble blinked repeatedly as she looked up at the blotchy ceiling. She would not cry. “That is kind.”

“You are a part of the Company and we lo… care about you,” Thorin said.

Óin bustled into the room. “Now, how is our Hobbit?”

“My right side is aching,” Bramble said.

“We did cut you open there,” Óin said, “And you, keep your eyes over there. Give the woman some privacy.”

Thorin dramatically covered his eyes. “I see nothing.”

“I doubt our good leader wants to see anything I have, Óin,” Bramble said as she lifted her shirt for the doctor to look at her stitches.

“Got to give you a little privacy, lass,” Óin said.

“Everyone okay?” Bramble asked.

“Everyone except Thorin has got a few scratches and bruises, but they’re all fine,” Óin said, “Now, enough about us. How are you feeling?”

“Sore, thirsty,” Bramble said, “What’s wrong with you, Thorin?”

“I’ll have someone fetch you some ice chips in a minute,” Óin said, “You look well enough. I’ll be back in a minute. No hiding of symptoms or I will smack the back of your head. The same goes for you, Thorin.”

Thorin waved the hand not covering his face in acknowledgment. Óin left the room muttering about “stubborn idiots”.

“I’m decent,” Bramble said.

Thorin put down his hand before giving a half-grin. “You went on a madcap road trip with a bunch of Dwarves to go steal from a dragon. I don’t think decent is an adjective I would use for it. Brave and/or insane is more apt to describe you.”

Bramble smiled at Thorin. She liked the half-smile he gave her. Bramble thought it looked good with the stubble he was growing in and…

The Hobbit stuffed those thoughts into a trunk and drowned it in the river. She did not need to have a crush on a king.

“Are you okay, Thorin?” Bramble asked.

The smile was gone almost instantly. “I… I’ve been better, burglar.”

Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur rushed into the room, each carrying a cup. “We got you ice chips!” Bofur said.

“Mine has a little bit of cola in it,” Bombur said in a conspiratorial tone.

Bramble saw Bifur make a motion to Thorin the Dwarf king replied to. The Hobbit was still learning the basics of the hand signals, but she was fairly certain Bifur asked Thorin if Bramble was alright.
“The lot of you are so sweet,” Bramble said as she slowly sat up.

“Well, you’re our sister now. Well, cousin for Bifur,” Bombur said.

“What?” Bramble asked.

“Blood siblings!” Bofur said. He pointed to the bandage over where his blood had been drawn.

“Really?” Bramble said.

“Of course! We were going to keep you before we lost you in the mountains anyway!” Bombur said.

Bramble began to cry. Bifur patted her hair and gave her a handkerchief.

“What did we do wrong?” Bofur said.

“Siblings?” Bramble sobbed.

“Yes. We love ya professor,” Bofur said.

“I’m an only child. I always… always wanted….” Bramble said.

The three Dwarves tried to give the best hug they could without causing further damage to Bramble’s injury, which made Bramble laugh until her side hurt from chuckling. Bofur and Bifur fought over if they could braid Bramble’s hair while Bombur fussed over what the Hobbit should be eating.

“Oh for the love of… the three of you are going to suffocate her,” Thorin said, “She needs a bath before the braiding and we haven’t even seen if she will keep the ice down.”

The four of them to laughed. “You sound like me mum,” Bofur said.

Thorin crossed his arms over his chest and said with false grumpiness, “Go eat your vegetables.”

That created an even bigger laugh.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble was finally allowed to sleep. Óin and Thorin had to work together to get her new siblings and cousin out of the room. The medicine was still in effect from the surgery.

The Hobbit was not sure when she woke up. She only knew it was still dark out when she heard a soft female voice talking.

“Thorin, you stopped breathing,” Dís said, “You cannot act like nothing happened.”

“I’m fine, Dís,” Thorin said.

Dís made a quiet growling noise. “Stop being a cliché, Thorin. Strong silent types die.”

Bramble saw Thorin place his hand behind Dís’ head and stroked her hair. “I promise you, I will be fine with time. Does that satisfy you?”

Dís sighed. “Not for long. We will talk about this.”

“Not like I have much choice in the matter,” Thorin muttered, “You should be sleeping too, you know.”
“Our lodgings are queer, I mean odd. I keep forgetting some words change,” Dís said, “Beorn has disappeared and told us not to leave the house until sunrise. I am just… uneasy.”

“We will leave as soon as our burglar is better,” Thorin said, “Where’s my jacket?”

“I threw it out.”

“Why would you do such a thing? It was a good jacket. I’ve had it for thirty years.”

Bramble could hear Dís’ voice shake. “There were so many rips and holes and blood and… other things. I couldn’t… couldn’t save it.”

Thorin pulled his sister into a hug, wincing slightly. “It’s alright. I’m safe. We’re all safe, Dís.”

“Sorry. I’m so sorry,” Dís said, “Last time I had to… to do such…”

“It’s alright. I know. I’m sorry I put you through such pain.”

Dís smacked Thorin’s right arm. “You’re right to be sorry. You’re an idiot, you know that? Going after an armed Orc with only an ax. No armor. No shield. You would think you were a Dwarfling with how stupid you were.”

“Yes, yes. I’m a proper idiot.”

“A proper idiot who gets lost all the time.”

“I don’t get lost all the time.”

Dís laughed softly before she stood. “I need some sleep. I’m glad you’re okay, even when you are annoying. Good night.”

“Good night.” Thorin was quiet until Dís closed the door behind her. “Awake, Baggins?”

“I didn’t mean to overhear,” Bramble said.

“I know,” Thorin said, “You are usually much sneakier.”

Bramble turned her head towards Thorin. “Can I tell you something?”

“Always.”

“After the eagles found us, I was scared when Dís said you stopped breathing.”

Thorin knelt next to her. “I suspected as much.”

Bramble wanted to take his hand, but she was not sure if they were friends or just comrades. “And, I don’t remember much after I passed out. I know you were scared for me.”

Thorin was silent, but he did take her hand in his. Bramble said, “Let’s not almost die again, if only for the sake of our siblings.”

“Agreed.” Thorin smiled slightly. “You’re happy?”

“More than I have been in a long time. It’s nice, belonging to someone because you chose each other,” Bramble said.

Thorin squeezed her hand again before returning to his bed. “There is nothing better than that.”
A/N: Bramble will be healing faster than a human because… Hobbits and plot reasons. Also, I saw my sister from the time she walked into the ER from the time she walked out when she had her appendix removed do it in under 12 hours and tried to do her full dance act within a week. (There was a lot of yelling by everyone she was going to hurt herself.)

A story mostly unrelated to this chapter. Both my younger sister and I had the same moment of, “Words change meaning?” when we read the Little House on the Prairie books and at some point, Laura says she is “gay”. We were confused as we knew she married Alanzo. Our Mother laughs about it to this day. Thus, why Dís confused the word “queer” because it has a different meaning than when Tolkien titled his chapter.
Chapter Summary

Obligatory beach episode.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Óin was certain he was would end up punching one of his patients before the day was out. Thorin had already snuck out of the room by dawn and had tried to take a look around the perimeter of Beorn’s grounds. The professor kept trying to make breakfast. He prayed his two idiotic patients would not team up to make a great escape.

A screech caused the entire Company to come running to the hallway next to Beorn’s kitchen. Beorn had picked up Bramble.

“Put me down!” Bramble said.

Beorn gently placed Bramble on her feet. “I am just trying to stop you from hurting yourself, little bunny.”

“I am not a bunny! Stop calling me that!” Bramble said.

Thorin came up behind her. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Beorn, the Hobbit is not a rabbit and you will stop treating her as such.”

“I meant no offense,” Beorn said, “I apologize, professor. I am used to a different clientele who do not mind being picked up.”

Bramble took several deep breaths. “I forgive you.”

Beorn motioned for the Hobbit to return to her room. “I am sure your Dwarf doctor is going to want to make sure you have not been harmed by your stubbornness.”

“I’m not stubborn,” Bramble mumbled.

Thorin took her back to her room with Óin close behind. The king made the burglar sit up in her bed and fussed over her.

“He should not have done such,” Thorin said, “If you were not injured, we would leave immediately.”

“I’m fine. He was just overenthusiastic and he backed off when I asked him to,” Bramble said.

Thorin rubbed his forehead. “You are to tell me if he bothers you again.”

“I will. I’m fine. Well, I am going to claw my way out of this room, but I’m fine,” Bramble said.

Thorin sat on his bed and gave a small smirk. “I’ll help. I’ll find a spoon so we can tunnel our way out.”
Óin groaned. He should not have bet on Bramble and Dwalin.

A few minutes after Óin had checked to make sure Bramble had not ripped her stitches in the excitement, Beorn came to visit her. “I am sorry, professor, but I am going to be gone for some time. I hoped when I returned I might show you the beehives.”

“Oh, yes! I saw those enormous bees when you carried me in. Is that part of why you have such a lovely garden?” Bramble said.

“Partially, yes,” Beorn said.

“Where are you going?” Thorin asked.

Beorn said, “To check on your story. Slaying the Great Goblin? Escaping an Orc pack because the Eagles saved you? It’s a good story. However, it is a bit too good. I hope to return by tomorrow. Do not go off the property when it is dark out. My assistant will be by to take care of the animals. Tom is a good fellow.”

“Does Gandalf know? I haven’t seen him yet,” Bramble said.

“I have no idea where the wizard went. I only know he said he would come back sometime before the professor had healed,” Beorn said. He turned to Thorin. “Feel free to eat anything or rent any movies you like. The property is for you to roam. Make use of my beach as long as none of you get sunburned.”

“You have a lake?” Bramble said.

Beorn laughed. “No, my dear Hobbit. I live just off the Atlantic.”

“The ocean? We’re by the ocean?” Bramble said in awe.

“Indeed we are. If you behave, I am sure the doctor will permit your visit,” Beorn said.

Bramble laid still. “I am not going to move a muscle,” she whispered.

Beorn laughed again. “Good Hobbit. Farewell, Oakenshield.”

Bramble was not allowed to leave the house that day. The Company sans Thorin did some exploring of Beorn’s property with its great gardens, pens for some of the horses and ponies he cared for as a vet, the giant beehives (which were given a respectful distance), and the ocean. Bramble had slept most of the day, unaware of how exhausted she still was. Thorin poured over maps and looked up news when Dis and Óin did not fuss over him.

The Hobbit was given permission to watch a movie with the Company in the evening. After an hour long “discussion” a.k.a. fight, the Company agreed to watch *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. Who knew Dwarves found sci-fi (and sci-fi parodies) fascinating? The discussion of sci-fi parodies led to the group also watching *Galaxy Quest*. At one point, they had to stop the movie because of how hard Balin laughed. It took some time to get the movie began again because Balin snorted which caused Dwalin to cackle which meant the Company had two Dwarves who could barely breathe from laughter. Ori almost stabbed herself with her knitting needles from one scene and Dori fell out of her seat because of another.
It was, Bramble decided, a comforting night. The way all the Dwarves seemed to fall asleep while watching the movies before abruptly waking up again showed how exhausted everyone was. The only one who seemed fully aware was Thorin as she kept catching him observing her for some reason. He probably worried she would pass out again.

Thorin would interfere with Bramble making breakfast. That morning she did look ready to claw her way out of their, no, her room. Óin had tried to fuss, but Glóin had reminded her brother of an incident when Glóin had been pregnant and Óin had ended up with a black eye.

“What’s this white stuff?” Dori asked as she picked at her eggs.

“Tofu,” Bramble said, “Beorn didn’t have any meat. Sorry.”

“Thank you, Baggins,” Thorin said, which stopped any more complaints from the Dwarves about Beorn’s meatless food.

They decided to go as a group down to the beach before lunch. The dogs seemed to run the place led the way, barking and running happily.

Bramble smelled the beach before she actually heard or saw it. She never realized one could smell salt. The Hobbit licked her lips, trying to see if the breeze tasted of salt water.

The professor wondered if her perception of colors was ever going to be the same after this trip. If Mount Mitchell had been the greenest green she had ever seen, the ocean was the bluest blue and so clear. The sand was softer than at Lake Michigan or the other smaller lakes she had visited.

Best of all, the air was not overbearing. It was hot out, but not stifling. The breeze from the ocean was a reassuring friend, keeping her calm. She grinned as she saw seashells lying sporadically on the beach.

“Don’t get your stitches wet,” Óin grumbled at Thorin and Bramble, “Go on a walk, drink piña coladas or whatever you kids do, but you will be crying worse than babies if you get salt water on your wounds.”

Bramble walked over to where the waves had just retreated. She crouched down and reached out her hand. The water was warmer than she expected, but still cool as it slid over her hands and feet. As the waves went back again, Bramble lifted her hand and licked her fingertips and giggled.

“What’s so funny?” Thorin asked as he crouched down next to her.

“It’s salty.” Bramble said before sticking her hand back in the water.

“Oceans are known to be such,” Thorin said, “Do you like it?”

Bramble nodded. “I can breathe here. I haven’t felt that way since we left the mountains.”

Thorin made a noise of agreement. Bramble picked up some of the wet sand and let it drip out from her hand.

“You could make a drip castle with that,” Kili said as he crouched down next to Bramble.

“A what castle?” Bramble said.
“A drip castle,” Fíli said as she hovered between Bramble and Kíli’s shoulders. “You take the wet sand just like you are now and you make towers out of it. We didn’t think to bring buckets or we could have made a proper sandcastle.”

“And you won’t be getting your stitches wet,” Kíli added.

“What do you think, idad?” Fíli asked.

Thorin nodded his head while still watching the horizon.

The drip castle was both a brilliant and an awful idea. All of the Dwarves were eager to build something after having been on the road for so long, but drip castles were not stable. Eventually, some of the Company found driftwood or went back to Beorn’s for buckets so they could start building “real sandcastles” as Dori told Bramble. Thorin let the company play. He walked up and down the beach, stopping at a rock wall which connected to Beorn’s wooden fence on either side of the skin-changer’s property.

“My brother is brooding again,” Dís said to Bramble.

“I am delaying the Company. I am sure he has not expected all of these stops,” Bramble said.

“No, that is not the problem. We have no vehicles or supplies, so we would have had to throw ourselves to the mercy of Beorn even without your injury. No, he is worried about something else,” Dís said.

“Or someone else,” Nori muttered before being smacked with an empty bucket by Dís.

The Hobbit was confused by Nori’s comment, but ignored it. Bramble was much more interested in enjoying the ocean instead of figuring out a Dwarvish riddle. Besides, her guard towers needed reinforcements.

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The group returned to Beorn’s house for lunch just before a thunderstorm rolled in which lasted for the rest of the afternoon. Bramble assisted Bombur in making baklava and cookies. Thorin sat near them as he dealt with e-mails. Dís was next to her brother making sure he did not cause an incident. Óin did laundry since the Company only had the clothes on their back and the clothes Tom (Beorn’s assistant with the bright yellow boots) had brought. Fíli, Kíli, Ori, and Dwalin played darts while the rest of the Company watched *Pacific Rim*. Even the dogs and the mice watched the movie as well. (This actually made Bramble a little upset because who didn’t love giant monsters fighting giant robots? She certainly did and she wanted to see the movie again.)

“Thorin, you can’t say such,” Dís said.

“Why not?” Thorin said.

“Because Dain may be our cousin, but he will not take kindly to being called an idiot,” Dís said.

“He is an idiot,” Thorin said.

“No, he’s not. He just doesn’t want to do as you say,” Dís said.

“Thus, an idiot,” Thorin said.

Gandalf nicked a cooling cookie. “You will find the world full of idiots if you believe such, Thorin
Oakenshield.”

“GANDALF!” the three Dwarves and one Hobbit shouted.

“Where have you been?” Bramble said as she hugged the wizard.

“After I knew you were safe, I went to look ahead,” Gandalf said as he gave a half hug in return so he did not smash his cookie.

“There seems to be a pattern forming with you,” Thorin said.

“Not all of us can as shortsighted as you,” Gandalf snapped. He sighed. “I haven’t eaten in some time. Pardon me. I do not come with good news. There are Orcs and wargs everywhere. They are staying away from major cities, but country roads are completely overrun.”

“And here we had been avoiding the main roads,” Thorin said, “Not that it will matter since we have no vehicles.”

“I do believe you will find the last statement to be false by tomorrow,” Gandalf said, “Beorn helped me recover my car and he is looking for your Company’s other vehicles.”

“Unless the Impala grew wings before crashing, I think we will have too tight of a squeeze for Dori’s van,” Dís said.

“I have seen stranger things,” Gandalf said, “Oh. Is that baklava?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I still don’t understand why people don’t like Pacific Rim. It was amazing. (Admittedly, it’s in my wheelhouse because: giant monsters, giant robots, Idris Elba, Guillermo del Toro, and decent writing that didn’t make me feel bad about being a woman.)

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Idad - Uncle.
Chapter IV: Not Even a Scratch

Chapter Summary

Beorn comes back with good and bad news.

Oh, right that ring. Something has to be done about that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beorn came in at breakfast the next day deeply amused. “Your story is true, Thorin Oakenshield.” Beorn kissed Dís’ hand. “Thank you, my lady, for slaying such a wretched beast.”

“You are more than welcome,” Dís said.

“Tell me, why is Azog the Defiler hunting you?” Beorn said, his mood darkening immediatly.

“You know of Azog? How?” Thorin said.

“My people were the first to live in the mountains, before the Orcs came down from the north. The Defiler killed most of my family, but some he enslaved,” Beorn said, “Not for work, you understand, but for sport. Caging skin-changers and torturing them seemed to amuse him.”

“There are others like you?” Fíli asked.

“Once, there were many,” Beorn said.

“And now?” Kíli said. Bramble kicked the Dwarf under the table.

“Now, there is only one,” Beorn said.

The room went quiet. “I am sorry for your loss,” Bramble said.

“Thank you for your condolences, little Hobbit,” Beorn said. He looked over at Gandalf. “You need to reach the mountain before the last days of autumn?”

“Before Durin’s Day ends, yes,” Gandalf said.

“You are running out of time,” Beorn said.

“Which is why we must go straight west and through Mirkwood,” Gandalf said.

“A darkness lies upon the forest. Fell things creep beneath those trees. The Necromancer in Dol Guldur has some sway there, more even than in Florida at some places. I would not venture there except in great need,” Beorn said.

“We will take the Elven Highway. It is still safe,” Gandalf said.

Beorn snorted with disdain. “Safe? The Wood-Elves of Mirkwood are not like their kin. They’re less wise and more dangerous. But it doesn’t matter.”
“What do you mean?” Thorin asked.

“These lands are crawling with Orcs. Their numbers are growing, and you are without vehicles. You will never reach the forest alive,” Beorn said. The skin-changer moved closer to Thorin. “I don’t like Dwarves. They’re greedy and blind, blind to the lives of those they deem lesser than their own.” Beorn carefully picked up a mouse which had been scampering around on the table. “But Orcs I hate more. What do you need?”

There was a sigh of relief from the Company.

“Vehicles, supplies, weapons if you have any, and advice,” Thorin said.

“I have no weapons of my own, but the rest I can provide,” Beorn said, “In fact, if you will follow me…”

Beorn led the company outside. Safe from harm was Dori’s yellow Volkswagen bus and Bramble’s bicycle. Dori looked ready to cry.

“I also found a crashed Impala,” Beorn said, “It is wrecked, but I was able to retrieve some of the supplies and weapons.”

At the word “weapons” the Dwarves ran to the van and began checking on what had been found. Bramble stayed back and smiled broadly when Bifur passed her backpack to her and Nori tossed the Hobbit her I-pod.

Dís patted her brother’s shoulder. “Sorry about Minty.”

“Just a car,” Thorin grumbled, “A beautiful car, but just a car.”

“You get five minutes of brooding,” Dís said.

“Thank you,” Thorin said sincerely.

Thorin stalked off. Beorn chuckled. “I also will allow you to borrow the Napmobile, though I expect it to be returned.”

-“The Napmobile?” Balin asked.

“It’s a van I use when I am going long distances. Comfortable seating. I take naps in it sometimes when I need a break,” Beorn said.

“Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, NAPMAN!” Nori sang out.

Beorn chuckled. “A Dwarf with a sense of humor. I never thought I would see the day.”

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Bramble had been going over the checklist of supplies when Gandalf stood by her and placed his hand on her shoulder. “My dear, there is something we must discuss.”

“What’s wrong, Gandalf?” Bramble asked.

The wizard led the Hobbit over to the fire pit behind the house. Though it was far too hot for it, someone had started a fire. Beorn, Thorin, Balin, and Dwalin all waited for her. Bramble stood as far away from the fire as she could while still being close to where the group had gathered.
“Seriously, what did I do wrong?” Bramble said.

“It is about the ring you found,” Gandalf said.

“Oh, I forgot about it,” Bramble said. She pulled out the silver ring with the seven sapphires and held it in her hands.

“Yes, we want to test it and we will need your help,” Gandalf said.

“How?” Bramble said.

“Drop it into the fire,” Dwalin said.

“Why? Won’t it melt?” Bramble said.

The Dwarves laughed until they bent over, gasping for air.

“No,” Dwalin wheezed, “Needs to be… HA… much hotter.”

Bramble crossed her arms over her chest and rubbed them to soothe her embarrassment. “I didn’t laugh when all of you didn’t know Elves ate things besides fruits and vegetables. Please stop. There are no metal works in the Shire. I didn’t know.”

Balin patted Bramble’s shoulder. “There, there, professor. Terribly sorry about this. It is something we learn when we are quite young.” Dwalin slapped Thorin’s back as it appeared the Dwarf king was near choking. “And we also learn MANNERS!”

Thorin and Dwalin stood up and said with as straight of faces as they could, “We’re sorry.”

“I just toss it? It won’t get hurt?” Bramble said. She held the ring up against her heart.

Gandalf raised one wild eyebrow. “Bramble?”

“I mean, you say it won’t melt, but what if it does,” Bramble said, “And what are you going to do afterwards? Are you going to destroy it? It hasn’t done anyone any harm. Well, it might of, but…”

“Belladonna Bramble Baggins, throw the ring into the fire right now before I toss you into the ocean to be eaten by narwhals,” Gandalf said.

Bramble stiffened and nodded. She reluctantly dropped the ring into the fire. The Hobbit raised an eyebrow as she realized Gandalf’s words. “Narwhals?”

“It was the first thing which came to mind,” Gandalf said.

“Well, no sparks. That’s good,” Balin said.

“So… what were we expecting?” Bramble asked.

“Explosions. Dark beasts arising from the fire to devour our souls,” Dwain said.

“Narwhals,” Thorin added which caused Bramble to laugh.

Balin picked up metal tongs and pulled the ring out of the fire, dropping it onto a brick. “Now, don’t touch it, but wave your hand around a bit around it professor. See if it’s hot.”

Bramble waved her hand over the ring, not feeling anything. She barely touched it with the palm of
her hand before yelping back in pain. “HOT! HOT! HOT!” She sucked at her burn.

Thorin grabbed the water hose, turned on the tap, and ran the water over Bramble’s hand. “Better?”

“Much,” Bramble said quietly.

“Stand back,” Thorin said. He poured water over the ring, causing steam to rise from the hot metal.

“Well, water doesn’t seem to have killed us,” Dwalin said.

“Are all magic rings going to kill you at some point in a dramatic way?” Bramble asked.

“Yes to the death, not necessarily on the dramatic,” Balin said.

“Oh, I feel great about that,” Bramble said dryly.

“Hammer and goggles. Stand behind the fire,” Dwalin said.

Beorn handed Dwalin the tools before dashing behind the fire with the rest of the small group. It took one strike against the ring for the hammer to break off the handle.

“Not even a scratch!” Dwalin shouted.

“Sturdy thing,” Gandalf mumbled.

“It broke a hammer!” Bramble shouted.

Thorin picked up the hammer head. “Actually, it not only broke it, but it made a dent.” There was a circular indentation where the hammer had struck the ring.

“By all the hair on the feet of Hobbits!” Bramble said.

The Dwarves all tilted their heads and looked at Bramble’s feet.

“It’s an expression!” Bramble said. Her toes curled as she wanted to make her feet disappear.

“Magic ring or exaggerated legends, gentlemen?” Gandalf said.

“Exaggerated? So there is a bit of truth?” Dwalin said.

“Hobbit feet are not discussed about in public. You do not touch a Hobbit’s feet unless they are wounded or… with permission,” Bramble said. She tilted her head down and let her curly hair cover her face. “May we please change the subject?”

“Come on,” Thorin said, “We have something dangerous among us and we are making our burglar uncomfortable.”

Bramble sighed in relief as the group turned their attention to the ring still lying on the brick. Gandalf said, “What happened when you put on the ring?”

“Well, I obviously haven’t seen myself with it on, but Sméagol (the man who gave it to me) became almost invisible. It was like wherever he stood became a little blurry. When I put on the ring, it’s like… I’ve stepped into a Monet painting. Everything is still there, but it’s roughly hewn. My other senses seem to be fine,” Bramble said.

“Not one of the Seven. They do not cause invisibility,” Thorin said.
“The Nine were destroyed when the Ring of Power was destroyed,” Beorn said.

“And the Three are accounted for,” Gandalf said, “Congratulations, Bramble, you have a minor ring of power which will not bring about the downfall of the Free People of Middle-Earth. Your death, maybe, but not massive destruction.”

“I feel so fantastic about that,” Bramble said as she rolled her eyes.

“Professor,” Thorin said, “You had glasses with a magnifier. Do you have it with you?”

Bramble pulled out the item from her skirt pocket. “Surprisingly enough, it did not get smashed in the tunnels. I am now fond of its case since it survived my fall.”

Thorin slipped the glasses on. Bramble held back a “YOU’RE SO ADORABLE WITH GLASSES I MAY DIE” squeal. She wondered where the thought had come from.

“Baggins, will you hold it? I need better light,” Thorin said.

“Yes, of course,” Bramble said.

The Hobbit picked up the ring and cradled it in her hands. Thorin placed his hands under Bramble’s and tilted her hands side to side as he examined the ring. Sometimes his nose almost touched her palm.

“This is a tricky one. The coloring might suggest the Line of Durin, but the style belongs more to the Elves,” Thorin said, “There are neither markings of who the craftsman was nor who it belonged to.” He released Bramble’s hands and looked up. “You said a creature gave this to you?”

“A man. I do not know of which of the Free People he once belonged to. He had become… withered. Sickly,” Bramble said. She closed her hands around the ring. “He said a friend gave it to him as a birthday present, but I don’t know how much of the truth he told. He was not of sound mind.”

Thorin stood up and said to Beorn, “Is there a forge nearby?”

“None you can use. There are not any Dwarves in these parts,” Beorn said.

The King Under the Mountain crossed his arms and looked at the fire as he thought. “We will destroy it when we reach Esgaroth. There should be a forge there. For now, find a chain or something of the sort and keep it with you at all times.” Thorin turned to Bramble. “You will not use it except in the most dire of need. Do you understand, Hobbit?”

“I understand. I don’t like using it and I would prefer not to die,” Bramble said.

Thorin tilted his head and looked at the side of Beorn’s house. “All of you stop eavesdropping!”

There was a chorus of grumbles from the rest of the Company.

Thorin groaned and rubbed his forehead. “Honestly. How did I end up with the nosiest group of Dwarves in the history of my people?”

Beorn laughed. “Come, Hobbit. I promised you a tour of my beehives.”

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“Your bees live in palaces,” Bramble said.
“My bees certainly think so. I take care of swarms in the area as well so I have extras ready for use in the shed,” Beorn said.

“Um, Beorn, this may not be your expertise but, what of the Eagles? I saw giant birds save us, but also a motorcycle gang. Do they work together?” Bramble said.

“They are the same group,” Beorn said.

“Wait as in… the bikers and the giant birds of prey are the same people?” Bramble said.

“Indeed. They are a type of skin-changer, though not my kin. They would have died long ago if they could not hide amongst Mortal Men and other races,” Beorn said.

Bramble almost stepped on an acorn. She picked it up and smiled to herself. “This is a hardy breed and can grow in deserts if I remember my seed identification correctly.”

“You can keep it if you want,” Beorn said.

“Oh, really? Thank you!” Bramble said, her smile turning into a grin.

“You look like you had just found a piece of gold,” Beorn said.

She slipped it into her pocket. “Oak trees are strong. You know, Thorin got his name from using an oaken branch to defend himself in a battle.”

“And so you would plant it for him?” Beorn said.

She glanced back at the Company by the vans, her smile disappearing as she talked. “No, not for him. Not really. I always liked acorns and oaks. Good for climbing. I had acorns decorating my vest buttons before I lost all but one. Another tree in my garden would be good. Besides, I don’t think Dwarves would notice a tree for what it was unless it was for protection or firewood.”

Thorin glanced at her for a moment, smiled slightly, and returned to his conversation. Bramble fiddled with the acorn in her pocket. “I want to be strong enough to protect them. This will be a reminder of such until I get home.”

Beorn put his hand on Bramble’s shoulder. “I think you’re stronger than you think, stronger than any Oaksheild could ever be.”

“You’re a dear, Beorn. I’m not anything like them. I’m not a warrior. Just a scholar.”

“I hear differently.”

Bella shrugged. “Can we talk about something else? Like your bees! How much honey do they produce each year?”

Thorin ran into Bramble as she was about to go to bed. “Uh, sorry,” Bramble said as she pushed a lock of hair behind her ear. “Aren’t you going to sleep? We have to leave early tomorrow.”

“I need to go over a few things. Sleep, burglar,” Thorin said. He nodded his head before trying to leave. Bramble caught his arm.

“Just one question,” Bramble said. She let go when he turned to her. They leaned against opposite sides of the doorway.
“And what is it?” Thorin said.

“How did you know my ring was not one of the Seven? I know dragons destroyed four, but the other three are unaccounted for. The tales don’t have any descriptions of the rings. Is it part of Dwarves and being secretive?” Bramble said.

“Partially,” Thorin said, “The Seven Rings did not turn the Dwarf Lords to Sauron’s side, but they did have certain powers which have faded over time. Sauron took two of these rings before his fall.”

“And the third?” Bramble said.

“I cannot say,” Thorin said.

Bramble raised an eyebrow. “You don’t have it, do you?”

Thorin laughed. “No. Certainly not.”

“But you know about it.”

“I might. All I can tell you, burglar, is none here have it and you will not find it in Erebor.”

The Hobbit nodded and pushed another wayward lock behind her ear. “Okay. Well, good night. Sleep well.”

Thorin moved so Bramble could get into the room. “Good night, burglar.”

Bramble smiled slightly as she closed the door which caused Thorin to grin. He stayed at the doorway for a moment, pleased, though he knew the Hobbit was merely curious. Thorin liked seeing her smile. If he could be the cause of more happiness for her, Thorin thought he could be content with his lot.

“Well, don’t you look love sick,” Dwalin said.

Thorin slowly turned his head towards Dwalin. “I honestly don’t know what you are prattling on about.”

The captain of Thorin’s guard gave an insufferable grin. “You like the professor.”

“Like?” Thorin said with false innocence.

Dwalin wriggled his eyebrows. “You like the professor.”

“Shut up. Even if I did, I would not speak of it here,” Thorin said as he passed Dwalin, “Does Beorn have any beer left?”

“A bit of honey mead in the fridge,” Dwalin said as he followed Thorin.

They crept pass where the Company save for Dís, Bombur, and Glóin slept. Thorin grabbed two bottles of mead from the fridge before heading outside to Beorn’s backyard. They each took a seat in a wooden chair on the back porch.

“So…” Dwalin said as he took the first sip of the evening. They drank sporadically over the rest of the conversation until their bottles were empty.

“There is nothing happening,” Thorin said.
Dwalin just nodded and gave a condescending smile.  
“There truly is not,” Thorin said.  
“Sure.”  
“Nothing has happened.”  
“Of course.”  
“… on her side.”  
Dwalin smacked Thorin’s back. “I knew it.”  
“Shut up.”  

The guard shook his head. “Oh, that’s not going to happen. The great Thorin Oakenshield is in love. I have waited to tease you about this for almost two centuries.”  
“Infatuated. It’s not love.”  
“Whatsoever you say.”  
“It wouldn’t matter even if I was,” Thorin said quietly.  
“Now why are you saying that?”  
Thorin shrugged.  
“Oh, come on. Don’t hold out on me now. I’ll think of some horrible reasons like… she didn’t like the Impala or something.”  
“Well, Dwalin, oh observant one, the first thing is she feels nothing towards me.”  
Dwalin thought for a moment. “I am mostly going to agree with you there. I haven’t seen her going, ‘Oh, Thorin, you’re so wonderful’ and whatever else women do.”  
“Why am I talking to you? You’re just going to keep mocking me.”  
“Because I’m your best friend.”  
“Why did I ever decide to do that?” Thorin took a gulp of his drink.  
Dwalin laughed. “Come on. Finish what you started.”  

After another sip of liquid courage, Thorin said, “First, she doesn’t like me. I’m not an idiot. I know she would have protected any of the Company. I already knew such when she fought for Dís to get her medical care in Rivendell.”  
“Agreed.”  
“Second, she’s devoted to her craft. No one has tempted her from her studies. I could never ask someone to give up their craft for me, Dwalin.”  
“You would be a right and proper cur if you did.”  
Thorin drank some more. “Third, she has a home. As grand as Erebor will be when it is rebuilt, it
will not be the Shire or even her little Hobbit hole. I know what it is like to be separated from the
place you belong.”

Dwalin said nothing, but continued to drink.

“Fourth, I don’t know if we will make it out of this without awakening the dragon. She knows it too.
I don’t want her to rush any decisions purely because we are in a life or death situation.”

Dwalin shrugged. “Your premise is weak. You like her.”

“I never said it was wise.”

“Oh, so you wouldn’t choose her under other circumstances. Is that what has you such a mess?”

“I would always choose Bramble! Who wouldn’t choose her?”

Dwalin grinned again.

“You need to drink more. You’re acting smarter than me,” Thorin grumbled.

They drank in silence for some time. The sound of mosquitoes buzzing and frogs croaking to each
other dusted the air. The moon was barely visible as clouds kept blocking the light.

“There has to be something else you’re not telling me,” Dwalin said.

Thorin laughed without humor. “It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“No,” Dwalin said.

Thorin motioned to himself. “Fifth, I am an absolute mess. My ancestors are a mess. My kingdom is
a mess. Everything is a complete and utter mess. Why would anyone willingly choose this?”

Dwalin smacked Thorin across the back of his head. “That’s a stupid reason.”

“No it’s not,” Thorin mumbled as he rubbed the back of his head.

“I am not going to go all mushy on you and say you’re a proper catch, because you’re not. You’re a
numbskull with the world’s most delicate ego and have no patience for fools. You’ve got family
problems, well so does everyone. Well, maybe not a mountain with a dragon, but you know what
I’m saying.”

“You’re saying that because you’re my friend.”

“Actually, I’m saying that as Bramble’s friend. As your friend, I’m telling you that you can’t be
distracted until this quest is complete. Bramble will get hurt if you aren’t doing your best and you
won’t be your best if you are acting like a puppy around her.”

“I do not act like a puppy.”

“A deranged cat around catnip?”

“… I will accept that.”

They drank at the same moment.

“I’m doomed, aren’t I?” Thorin said.
“Yep. Want to see who can get to the bottom of their bottle first?”

“I thought you would never ask.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Major Plot Change #3: The Eagles being skin-changers.

I generally control myself when I see an attractive celebrity. I thought I had reached the stage with Richard Armitage I had reached with Orlando Bloom, Lee Pace, Benedict Cumberbatch, Tom Hiddleston, Ben Barnes, Zachary Levi, et cetera where I could go, “What an attractive and talented actor. I feel a little bit better seeing him perform or seeing a pic, true, but that does not mean I am a crazed fan girl.” Then the man wore glasses in The Vicar of Dibley and I just kind of squealed for a solid hour, covering my face, and trying not to keep saying “YOU ARE SO CUTE HOW DO YOU EXIST!” Ugh. I disgust myself sometimes. *glances back at list of crushes over the years* Yep. Definitely have a type.
Beorn led the Company to the Alabama border, pulling off at an abandoned gas station. Everyone got out of the cars to say goodbye.

“Go now, while you have the light. Your hunters are not far behind,” Beorn said, “I will distract them if necessary.

Bramble hugged the skin-changer. “Goodbye, Beorn.”

“Good luck, Hobbit,” Beorn said, “Do not use the ring unless you must and destroy it when you can.”

“I will,” Bramble said.

After Beorn had left them, Gandalf motioned to the road. “Here lies our path through Mirkwood.”

Bramble shivered. She was not overly fond of Florida, but being away from the sea made everything worse. “This forest feels... sick, as if a disease lies upon it.”

“It is not like the forests you are used to back home. Yes, you are right. It is sick. It was not always so and not everything is evil in these parts,” Gandalf said.

“Are you going to be in the lead again?” Thorin asked.

“No, I have other business to attend to,” Gandalf said.

“You’re not leaving us?” Bramble said.

“I would not do this unless I had to,” Gandalf said. He spoke to the Hobbit quietly. “You’ve changed, Bramble Baggins. You’re not the same Hobbit as the one who left the Shire.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing, Gandalf?” Bramble said.

“It depends on what you do with those changes,” Gandalf said. He spoke to Thorin. “I’ll be waiting for you at the overlook, before the slopes of Erebor. Keep the map and key safe. Do not enter the mountain without me.”

Gandalf opened his car door. “This is not the Greenwood of old. The very air of the forest is heavy with illusion. It will seek to enter your mind and lead you astray.”

“Lead us astray? What does that mean?” Bramble mumbled.

Gandalf got into the car and rolled down the window. “You must stay on the Elven Road; do not
leave it. If you do, you will never find it again. No matter what may come, stay on the road!” The wizard sped off back to Florida.

“Come on,” Thorin said as he got back into the driver’s seat of Beorn’s van, “We need to reach the mountain before the sun sets on Durin’s Day.”

Dwalin began escorting the Company back to the cars. “Durin’s Day. Let’s go!”

Dori, Nori, Ori, Dwalin, Óin, Glóin, and Bombur. went into the Volkswagen. Thorin, Balin, Dís, Bramble, Bifur, Bofur, Fíli, and Kíli took Beorn’s van. It began to drizzle.

Less than an hour later, Thorin almost drove the van off the road for no obvious reason. “What’s wrong with you?” Balin shouted.

Thorin winced. “Nothing. Can you be quieter?”

“Aren’t you hung-over?” Balin growled.

“It wouldn’t matter if I was. I can still drive,” Thorin said.

“You could get us all killed,” Balin said.

“I’m fine,” Thorin said.

“You won’t mind if we put on some rock music?” Kíli said.

“Absolutely not!” Thorin said, wincing at the sound of his own voice.

“Pull over. Switch out with Bofur,” Balin said.


“You can give up driving for an hour so you can sleep it off,” Balin said.

“I am perfectly capable of telling if I can drive or not!” Thorin said.

Dís said with an eerie sense of calm, “Thorin, son of Urd, you will pull over this car right now.”

Thorin did so immediately. Fíli and Kíli said, “Ooooooh. Uncle Thorin is in trouble.”

“Shut up you two. Bofur, switch,” Thorin snapped as he got out of the car.

Dori’s van stopped behind them. “What’s the matter?” Dori asked after she had stuck her head out the window.

Kíli swung the van door open. “Uncle Thorin is getting a time out!”

Thorin shoved his nephew back into the van. He sat in the middle seat of the first row, not noticing he had shoved Bramble to the side.

“You could have just asked,” Bramble mumbled.

“Sorry,” Thorin said.

Bofur locked the car doors. “Everyone buckled up? Okay, let’s go. Thorin, get some sleep.”
“I don’t want to,” Thorin said.

“Just close your eyes for an hour. We’ll be nice and quiet for you,” Dís said.

Quiet sounded pleasant. Thorin put his feet between Bofur and Balin’s seats and stretched out.

“Do you want the window side?” Bramble asked.

“Not sleeping. Just resting,” Thorin said.

He focused on breathing as he tried to calm himself. Thorin felt a blanket put over him. He opened one eye and saw Bramble shrug. “You don’t have your leather jacket.”

Thorin accepted her answer. He already felt warmer, and he wondered if it dealt with Hobbit magic or if it was something else. Thorin ignored the last possibility. Bramble was just being kind. He had seen her do the same for Fíli the other day. Thorin thought about how he needed to get a kick to the head so he could stop obsessing over nothing.

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Bramble needed to stop obsessing over nothing. Thorin sat by her. So what? It was just the next nearest seat. Admittedly, he could have sat at the end, but the middle seat had more leg room. How long did his legs go?

The Hobbit smacked her head against the window. Her thoughts became wilder than usual. Her… whatever she viewed Thorin as was becoming obsessive. She needed to…

Thorin rested his head against Bramble’s shoulder. She stiffened and looked over at him as best as she could without moving. By the lack of tension in his shoulders, she guessed he was truly asleep.

Bramble felt warmth flow through her. She had not had anyone fall asleep against her since some of her cousins took her on a trip to Fort Wayne. They definitely did not smell as good as Thorin.

No, she did not sniff him. His head was situated at just the right angle for Bramble to inhale the scent of his hair every time she took a breath. Nope. Nothing creepy.

Bramble wondered if anyone else had noticed. Bofur focused on driving. Balin seemed to not be paying attention. Everyone else she would have to turn to look at, but her movement would have woken Thorin.

The burglar did not think she had ever seen Thorin sleep except sitting up. He never seemed to be at rest. There were moments the Dwarf king seemed more at ease: when he teased Kíli, taught Fíli during their sparring, asked Ori a question about her record keeping, and spoke quietly with Dís.

The Hobbit was not sure how long Thorin would willingly subject himself to unconsciousness, so she remained as still as possible. If she rested her head against his, Bramble would just claim her neck hurt and it was easier this way. She certainly did not mind when Thorin’s hand, which had been resting in his lap, slipped off onto her knee.

Bramble realized in that moment she had failed at not having a crush on Thorin Oakenshield.

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Thorin woke with a start, sat up, and looked around. “Everyone here?” he said.

“Everything is fine, Thorin,” Bofur said.
Thorin looked over at Bramble who sat quietly before he looked at the back of Bofur’ seat. “How long have I been asleep, burglar?”

“How long have I been asleep, burglar?”

“About two hours,” Bramble said.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to drift off,” Thorin said, “Can I drive again?”

“We’ll be stopping for fuel soon. We’ll switch then,” Dís said.

Thorin realized he had his hand on Bramble’s knee. He quickly removed it. “Sorry. Don’t know when that happened.”

“It’s fine. I didn’t notice. I was asleep too,” Bramble said.

Thorin could have sworn he heard Kíli snort before being smacked by Fíli, but Thorin did not bother turning around.

“Can we have some music, Bofur?” Fíli said.

“Please,” Kíli begged.

“You still hung-over?” Dís said.

“I’m not,” Thorin said.

“Pass it up kids,” Bofur said.

Kíli tossed his I-Pod across the seats which Balin easily caught it. “What track, lad?”

“Playlist, Balin, not track,” Kíli said, “Rock That Violin, please.”

After a few moments of messing with the device, Balin started playing the music which was a mix of violin and electronic rock. Fíli and Kíli began chatting about how they could play off the music and different ways they could approach it.

“Can I ask a question?” Bramble said.

“Maybe,” Thorin said. He rubbed his forehead.

“What did Dís call you that made you pull over immediately?” Bramble said.

“Ah,” Thorin said, “Urd is my Mother’s name. Mothers are highly valued because women and births are rarer than in other Free Folk. If you use a person’s mother’s name, it means you have either done something very good or something very bad. Calling them by their Father’s name is just a way to differentiate.”

“Ah. Kind of like full names with Hobbits. If someone knows it, they’re close to you and/or have power over you,” Bramble said.

“Similar, yes. Is that why you listen every time Gandalf calls you Belladonna?” Thorin said. He leaned back and put an arm across the headrest not behind Bramble.

“No,” Bramble said. She knocked her knees against his. Thorin realized he took part of her side and gave the Hobbit more room. “It’s my mother’s first name, so no one called me Belladonna when I was growing up, and I hate the plant. Who wants to be known as Deadly Nightshade?”
“Where did the name ‘Bramble’ come from?” Bofur said.

“There is a story behind my name. Do you want to hear it?” Bramble said as she turned back to Bofur.

Bifur signed an enthusiastic “yes” while the rest of the back seats agreed with him. Thorin crossed his arms and watched Bramble as she told the story. She twisted back and forth so she could talk with both ends of the van.

“You see, Hobbits love food. That never changes. What does change is when they’re pregnant, Hobbits get these awful cravings. If Hobbits don’t get the food, there is a chance the baby and the mother may die.

“My Mother had a terrible pregnancy. They could not for the life of them figure out what she craved. They tried everything in just about every combination. Nothing worked and she became sicker and sicker.

“It was September 19th when my Father decided to call Gandalf. The wizard came as quick as he could, driving out all the way from Mexico City arriving in Hobbiton at four in the morning on September 21st. Gandalf talked with my Mother about how they could not figure out what she wanted. It was quite unusual. He went out of Bag-End to think in the garden when he notices some brambles my Father had planted in spring so in two years, when I was old enough, I could pick my own blackberries.

“’That’s it! That is what the Hobbit needs!’ Gandalf said. Everyone at Bag-End (both sides were there to help) were confused as they had already tried blackberries, blackberry tarts, blackberry pies, blackberry jam, blackberry jelly, blackberry preserves, and so much more.

“’No, no, no! That is not what Belladonna and the baby need. This is the only plant Bungo planted and he thought of his child the whole time. It is a special plant. We will just have to pick some blackberries and they will both be just fine.’

“Of course, the Hobbits all thought he was mad. Blackberries are ripe in July, brambles take two years to mature, and, of course, they had already tried blackberries! What an utter crackpot!

“But my Father said, ‘Now, my dear Hobbits, I am sure Mr. Gandalf knows what he is doing. He has never done harm to the Shire and has always been a friend to my wife and her family. He wants to help us. Any who disagree can leave now before first breakfast is served.’

“Well, never doubt a Hobbit’s love of food. Everyone shut up about Gandalf’s scheme. Gandalf told my Father he and Mother should go sit out in the garden and take care of the brambles as best as possible while thinking about their child waiting to be born. My Father was always weak (planting the brambles made him lie in bed for two days) and my Mother was, of course, ill. So, they sat in the garden after first breakfast and worked until second breakfast. There wasn’t much to do, but they did as Gandalf told them.

“The next morning on September 22nd, Gandalf woke up my Father and told him the blackberries were ready to be picked. Going as fast as his cane could go, my Father rushed outside in his nightclothes and his patchwork house coat. There the bushes were full of ripe blackberries. So, he stuffed as many blackberries as he could into his house coat and rushed back to my Mother’s bedside.

“He partially smashed the berries during transit, but no one cared. My Mother ate one and thought they were the best tasting things in the world. She ate them all and felt the best she had since her
cravings began.

“Of course, she immediately went into labor a full month early! My Father smacked Gandalf with his cane and shouted at the wizard for killing his wife and child. It’s one of the few times I have ever heard of my Father being angry at another person.

“At precisely 11:11 AM, I was born. They didn’t even have time to get us to the hospital. I was born right there in Bag-End, perfectly healthy. My Mother even made it through with almost no problems beyond the normal ones.

“That put everyone into quite state. How did Gandalf do it? Where did the wizard run off to? Why were the blackberry brambles without fruit when it was overflowing just a few hours early?”

“Well, how did he do it?” Fíli and Kíli shouted at the same time.

Bramble laughed. “To quote the man himself, ‘I did nothing in the matter.’ Gandalf told me this when I was in my tweens (though he had told my parents much earlier), ‘Hobbits may not have much magic, but they certainly can grow things. Something went wrong in Belladonna which her cravings were a sign of. Not through any fault of her own, of course. These things happen. Now, during that time, Bungo planted those brambles with every thought and action being full of love for his future child. As you know, Bramble, it takes two to make a child, and your Mother had to help with the brambles as well for the magic to work. And then, ta da! Your Mother healed and was able to have you safely, if a bit early.’

“Because of those brambles my Father planted, I am here today. So, I am Belladonna Bramble Baggins.”

“Can you do that? Make plants bloom and all that?” Bofur said.

“Not really. Gandalf and I have talked about it since. Magic is getting rarer and Hobbits have never particularly cared for it. It’s too messy. We do have the best agriculture on the continent. We’ve both noticed a Hobbit’s moods affect plants. After the Fell Winter… things did not go back to the way they were before for a long time.” Bramble rubbed her arms.

“That winter was not a natural thing,” Balin said.

“Thirty years ago, wasn’t it?” Kíli said, “Nasty. I remember when we ran out of coal and wood by March.”

Thorin could feel the biting winds and the slashing snow. It was the worst year for the Blue Mountains besides when they were refugees from Erebor. Many died from either the cold or the lack of food. Orcs from the North killed the rest who died in the Fell Winter.

“Yes. It was… nasty.” Bramble said. She plastered a smile on her face. “But, all that to say, I like blackberries. Oh, look, a fuel station!”

Thorin said nothing as they got out of the car. If the burglar did not wish to speak of it, he would not press her. She never pressed to learn more about the Desolation of Smaug beyond knowing where the dragon came in and where he might be hiding now.

If Thorin made sure Bramble always had a blanket or a coat after that well… he had to look out for his burglar.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: The chapter title is a reference to *Twelfth Night*. The music on Kíli’s playlist is mainly Lindsey Stirling because she rocks and she is also great to listen to when writing.

The calling Dwarves as “son of” their mother being the ultimate sign of being in trouble, I point to this [head canon](#).

On the choice of the name Urd: “From the Old Norse Urðr meaning "fate". In Norse mythology Urd was one of the three Norns, or goddesses of destiny. She was responsible for the past.” - From [Behind the Name](#).
Thorin drove again, but Balin had requested he not be navigator for the next part of the drive. “There is so little rock,” Balin said, “I cannot feel the earth properly. And those swamps…”

Bramble took over. Her usual cheerfulness dampened after the mention of the Fell Winter. She did her job well, even if they did have to use the Elven Road. Thorin watched her out of the corner of his eye. She physically looked the worse for wear. Though he could not sense it himself, Gandalf had said the forest was poisoned. A Hobbit who was tied to growing things would feel it more strongly than those born of stone.

It was a strange highway. They crossed bridges which could barely fit the vans. Winding roads almost sent them into water filled ditches several times. Moss hung from the trees which would sometimes hang so low the trees would brush against the top of the windshields.

The air disturbed Thorin the most though. It was almost as thick as when the great forges of Erebor at full capacity. The heat was not as wretched as he knew it to be in summer, but Bramble looked queasy from it, drinking a bottle of water every thirty minutes. Her ever present vest had been discarded in an attempt to remain cool. The air conditioning barely worked. Thorin worried with his luck it would break.

“I’m losing my mind,” Bramble said, “Someone, help. I need to do something related to literature. A fairy story. I will even talk Hamlet. Get my mind off this impossible heat.”

“And what’s wrong with Hamlet, professor?” Thorin said.

“Oh, by all the powers that be! It’s your favorite tragedy, isn’t it? You’re utterly morbid!” Bramble said.

Thorin shrugged, but smiled at the Hobbit. “It’s a good play.”

“It’s an awful play! It’s just a bunch of navel-gazing from an idiot who can’t stab a murderer!”

“It is a play about the complications of political life while trying to retain your humanity. And you can’t just stab the king! He’s the king!”

“Oh, you can if he is a threat to the state. Besides, he already upturned the natural order of things.”

Thorin eyed Bramble suspiciously. “It’s Julius Caesar for you, isn’t it?”

“Guilty as charged.”

Thorin gave a fake gasp. “Balin, remind me never to meet with our burglar on the Ides of March.”
“I’ll make a note,” Balin said dryly.

“It is one of the most boring of the tragedies. How can you stand it?” Thorin said.

“It’s about doing the right thing but doing it by the wrong methods and how it can lead to even worse consequences,” Bramble said, “It is a real philosophical conundrum, unlike, say, killing your incestuous, regicide-committing uncle.”

“I can’t believe someone as intelligent as you does not see Shakespeare’s greatest work for what it is.”

“Ugh. I have used New Criticism, Reader Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Marxism, New Historicism, Post colonialism, and Queer Theory. The only one I haven’t done is African-American Criticism though I am sure someone has done it! I have analyzed it to death and found it wanting.”

“Literature majors. You can’t even appreciate a great piece of entertainment without murdering it. Glad I never was one.”

Bramble smirked. “Hey, us literature majors are why you’re still reading off-color jokes four hundred years later. Never underestimate WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A RIVER DOING THERE?”

Thorin slammed on the breaks, Dori’s car bumping against Beorn’s. Thorin jumped out.

“Baggins, did you get us lost?” Thorin said.

“No! We’re on the road,” Bramble said. She motioned to a mile marker made of stone with an Elvish inscription.

Thorin, Balin, Dori, and Bramble spread their maps out and sat on the ground as they tried to make sense what had gone wrong.

“We’re just outside Baton Rouge,” Bramble said.

The Dwarves hissed and muttered curses.

“Listen, I know you hate the Woodland Elves and I get it, but we are passing though their territory. You have to at least acknowledge they are there,” Bramble said, “Besides, we have a bigger problem than some Elves who don’t know we’re here.”

“There isn’t supposed to be a river,” Balin said.

“No, duh, Sherlock,” Dwalin snapped.

“Dwalin, keep an eye on the road,” Thorin said.

“The only thing I can think of is maybe a creek flooded,” Dori said.

Bramble cocked her head to the side. “Can I try something?”

“What?” Thorin asked warily.

The Hobbit dashed to Dori’s van to unhook her bicycle. “What are you doing?” Bofur said.

“I’m going to ride over the road to see if the cars can get across. If my bike can do it, so can these,” Bramble said as she patted Dori’s van affectionately.
“Baggins,” Thorin growled.

“I’ve done this before at home,” Bramble said.

“Baggins! Shoes and sword!” Thorin said.

Bramble looked down at her bare feet. “Mosquitoes, alligators, and R.O.U.S.’s oh my!”

Thorin muttered curses to himself about the stupidity of Hobbits as he snatched Bramble’s sword and ridiculous rain boots from the car. Bramble was by his side in a moment and struggled to put on her boots. He helped her put on the shoes. She rested her hand on his shoulder while he knelt before. Thorin wanted to not notice her reliance for balance from him and how she smiled at him. He really didn’t.


Bramble laughed as she rode off. He stood up and watched carefully for trouble as Bramble began her ride through the river.

“Baggins, stop!” Thorin said.

Bramble paused just as she was about to enter the water. “What?”

He nodded to across the river. A wondrous white stag stood on the other side. “Oh, wow,” Bella said.

The Dwarves shouted at the deer, but it did not move. It only stared at the Company.

“Don’t move, Baggins,” Thorin said. He already had motioned to Fíli to pass him a rifle.

“What are you doing?” Bramble hissed.

“Deer are common enough and we don’t need it gutting our Burglar,” Thorin said.

“Thorin, no, don’t…”

He shot a round just past the stag’s head, hitting a branch. The stag leapt off into the woods.

“You shouldn’t have done that. It’s bad luck,” Bramble said with a tinge of sadness in her voice.

“I don’t believe in luck. We make our own luck,” Thorin said, almost spitting out the words.

Bramble shook her head at the Dwarf. “And you just made ours bad, oh fearless leader.”

She began peddling across, the world around her became colder. As she continued across the river, the water rose high enough to brush the bottom of her boots when her pedals were at their lowest point.

She made it across. Thorin exhaled, not realizing he had held his breath.

“I’m going to ride down a little bit while I wait for all of you to cross! There was a town marked on one of the maps a quarter of a mile down,” Bramble shouted across the river.

“Do you have your phone?” Bombur shouted back.
Bramble waved her phone before getting back on her bike.

“Don’t get into trouble Baggins!” Thorin said.

The Hobbit waved to him and continued her ride.

Thorin turned around back to his Company, half of whom tried to hid giggles. Warriors did not giggle.

“What’s so funny?” Thorin said.

“Nothing,” was the not so innocent response.

“Back in the vans. Our burglar can’t keep out of trouble,” Thorin said.

As he waited for the Company to get back in the vehicles, Thorin noticed there was something different hanging from the trees. Spider webs? They were too big to be…

The first breeze Thorin had felt all day brought the sound of whispering.

“What’s that?” Thorin said quietly.

He walked around the car to the side of the road. There was more whispering and it was getting closer. The Company chattered away merrily.

“Enough! Quiet! All of you! We’re being watched.”

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Bramble felt immensely better being back on her bicycle. She got a bit of a breeze as she sped down the Elven Road. The sun shone. The town was in shambles…

The town was in shambles.

Bramble stopped her bike. The town could have been deserted ages ago, but judging by the fuel prices, it was sometime in the past year. The windows and doors were knocked down and there were giant cobwebs everywhere.

“Okay. This is a horror movie waiting to happen,” Bramble said as she made her way back to the Company.

When she got back to the river, Bramble saw the van doors had been smashed open. She peddled over as fast as she could through the water, dropping Myrtle as soon as she was in front of Beorn’s van.

Bramble crouched down and looked into the wrecked vans. There was something dark staining the seats, but it was too dark to be Dwarf blood.

“Good. At least they aren’t dead. I should…”

Something pounced on Bramble. She screamed and pulled out her sword, but was knocked out almost instantly. All she remembered was the feeling of multiple limbs touching her.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: The chapter title is a quote from The Tempest. Yes, I am aware Hell doesn’t exist in Middle-Earth mythology.

All of the criticisms mentioned by Bramble were used when I studied Literary Criticism and Hamlet. It is a brilliant play, but it is hard to just watch it when you have a dozen different literary theories analyzing the thing.

Thorin’s favorite Shakespeare plays: Hamlet, Henry V, tie between Love’s Labor Lost and As You Like It.

Bramble’s favorite Shakespeare plays: Julius Caesar, Henry V, and Much Ado About Nothing.
Chapter VII: In Which the Writer's Arachnophobia Is In Overdrive

Chapter Summary

SPIDERS!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Hobbit was bound in something both dry and sticky as she was dragged across a large tree branch. Opening her eyes, Bramble was at first confused by what seemed to be cobwebs in her eyes. She certainly was not a fly; she remembered that much. Bramble also remembered multiple limbs taking her.

A spider bigger than Dwalin pulled Bramble deeper into the forest and up into the moss covered trees. The spider stopped and turned around. It came closer and closer…

Bramble remembered the sword in her hand and swung it up, stabbing through the webbing and into the spider. She yanked back, splitting the spider's guts. The Hobbit had enough movement to fling the spider off the branch and onto the watery floor of the swamp.

“Spiders! Why spiders? It even said it on the map! Of course it would be spiders,” Bramble squealed in horror as she cut her way out of the web encasing her.

Bramble looked up and saw the Dwarves hanging from branches. She could see the outline of Bofur’s hat. A spider began crawling up to the Dwarves.

“This is certainly an emergency,” Bramble muttered while she slipped on the ring.

The Hobbit felt ill as soon as she put back on the ring. The forest was darker than ever and the air more oppressive. Worst of all, she could hear what the spiders said.

“Kill them. Kill them,” one said.

“Eat them now!” another said.

Another added with glee, “Their hide is tough. There is good juice inside.”

A Dwarf (most likely Bombur from what Bramble could see) began to try to kick at the spiders. “Stick it again! Stick it again! Finish it off!”

“Ahh! The meat is alive and kicking!”

“Kill them, kill them now. Let us feast.”

The spiders began to chant “Feast”. A spider skittered above Bramble, barely missing her. She could stand it no longer. Grabbing a piece of wood broken off the tree, she tossed it as far away from the Dwarves as she could.

All the spiders save for one rushed over to the sound. “What is it? What is it? Kill it! Feast! Feast!”
The lone spider poked Bombur. “Fat and juicy. Just a little taste.”

It threw Bombur onto a thick tree branch and prepared to eat the Dwarf. Bramble moved as quietly as she could before slashing the spider’s back.

The spider hissed and tried to find Bramble, but could not figure out where the Hobbit hid. Bramble cut off one of the spiders eight legs.

“Curses! Where is it? Where is it?” the spider screamed as Bramble continued slicing at the spider.

Bramble pulled off the ring and smiled. “Here!”

She shoved her sword into the spider’s head.

“It stings! Stings!” the spider squealed.

Bramble pulled out her sword, allowing the spider to fall to the forest floor, dead.


She held up her sword and looked at it. “Dís was right. I do get to name it. Sting. That’s a good name.” She smiled manically as she looked at the Dwarves. “Sting. Let’s go save the Dwarves in distress, shall we?”

Bramble cut Bombur out of her webbing. The Dwarf only had a knife, but they both went to work to get the other Dwarves down. By the time Bramble and Bombur worked on cutting the Company out of their bonds, the Dwarves were awake and cursing.

Bifur hit the spongey swamp ground harder than the rest, so Bombur went down to help her cousin. By the time Bramble had finished cutting down the Dwarves, she could hear Bofur saying, “Where’s Bramble?”

All the Dwarves looked around for their Hobbit in concern. “Bramble!” “Professor!” “BURGLAR!” (The last one was probably Thorin angry his burglar had done something stupid, again. Bramble made a note to avoid him for a little bit until his wrath cooled.)

“I’m up here!” Bramble said.

A spider jumped at Bramble, knocking her from the branch she stood on. She stabbed it, but she went down with the spider to the forest floor.

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“There’s more of them!” Ori shouted.

“Circle, now!” Thorin commanded.

The Dwarves pulled out their guns, axes, and swords.

“Steady… steady,” Thorin said as he took aim at a spider with orange markings, “FIRE!”

The Dwarves took down three spiders immediately, but the rest they merely wounded. Bombur was knocked off her feet as a spider launched itself at her.

“Grab a leg!” Fíli said.
Seven Dwarves joined her. “PULL!” Nori shouted.

After some resistance, all eight of the spider’s legs ripped off, the body landing on Bombur.

“Disgusting,” Dori said.

A spider grabbed Kíli and began dragging him away. Dís went after her son. The spider died swiftly by Orcrist.

Thorin saw more spiders coming. He was about to shoot when he saw something moving in the forest trees above them.

“Parkour? Stupid, snotty Elves,” Nori said.

The blonde Elf swung down a spider’s rope and killed it just before it got to Thorin. The Elf sliced the spider in half.

The Elf had a gun to Thorin’s face when he stood. “Do not think I won’t kill you, Dwarf. It would be my pleasure.”

Elves. Elves everywhere. Thorin would have rather dealt with the spiders.

“Help!” Kíli screamed as he was dragged away by yet another spider.

“Kíli!” Fíli shouted as she tried to get to her brother. One of the Elves tackled her to the ground.

“Someone help my brother!” Fíli screamed.

“On it,” a female Elf said.

Kíli had hoped when he died, it would at least be a glorious battle, though preferably from old age. Instead, he was going to be killed by an overgrown flycatcher.

A female Elf came from above, killing three spiders as she descended the branches with a combination of her handgun and her long knife. She killed the spider dragging Kíli in one shot. A spider came behind her. The Elf worked on dispatching the creature. Kíli saw a spider coming towards him.

“Throw me your dagger! Quick!” Kíli shouted.

“If you think I’m giving you a weapon, Dwarf, you’re mistaken!” She killed the spider in front of her before killing the other spider by throwing her dagger.

Kíli looked at the Elf in awe. It was beyond amazing. When the Elf laughed, he realized he had said it aloud.

“Come, Dwarf,” the Elf said. She was almost a foot shorter than him, beautiful, and radiated the confidence of a warrior. “Let’s take you back to the rest of your friends. Hands behind your head.”

“And who do I have to thank for saving my life?” Kíli asked as he did what he was told.

“Tauriel, a captain of Thranduil’s guard. Come on, get moving,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Kíli said with a bit more glee than he should have had under the circumstances.
“Search them,” Legolas said. He went to the Dwarf nearest him, the older of the two red-headed women. There was a phone with a picture of two other Dwarves on the wallpaper.

“Hey! Give it back! That’s private!” Glóin said.

“Who is this? Your brother?” Legolas said.

“That’s my husband!” Glóin said.

“And what is this horrid creature? A goblin mutant?”

“That’s my lad, Gimli. He’s a child and he has better manners than you, tree hugger,” Glóin said.

Before Legolas could retort, some of the Elves jumped back from Fíli when she dropped a small device with a blinking red light. “Chill, guys,” Fíli said, “It’s just a toy I’ve been working on.”

Legolas looked down at Glóin’s phone and found it blank. He took out his own phone and found it to be dead as well. The Elf stalked up to Fíli.

“An EMP pulse?” Legolas said.

Fíli shrugged.

“Now, why would you need an EMP pulse?” Legolas said.

“Like I said, a toy I’ve been working on. It’s not my fault Elves are clumsy,” Fíli said with a smirk.

Legolas raised an eyebrow, but relaxed slightly when he saw Tauriel approach them with another Dwarf. He said in Sindarin, “Are the spiders dead?”

“Yes, but more will come. They’re growing bolder,” Tauriel said.

“What are you doing?” Kíli shouted as he covered his eyes.

Fíli stripped down to her underwear, showing several weapons strapped to her body. “I am not going to be groped by Elves.”

Thorin rubbed his eyes. He said to Dís quietly, “I’m blaming you for this.”

“It’s quicker and less embarrassing in the long run,” Dís said.

One of Legolas’ men handed him Dís’ sword, Orcrist. Legolas smiled and said in Sindarin, “This is an ancient Elvish blade. Forged by my kin.” He glared at Dís. “Where did you get this?”

“It was given to my brother,” Dís said, “I took it from him since he wasn’t using it.”

Legolas pointed Orcrist at Dís. “Not just a thief, but a liar as well.”

“I am many things, but I am no thief. I cannot say the same for the Woodland Realm and its king,” Dís said.

“You should remind your sister who she speaks to, Thorin Oakenshield,” Legolas said.

“She speaks to the son of a traitor,” Thorin stated.
It certainly raised Elf prince’s ire. The Elves roughly pushed the Dwarves through the forest. Fíli struggled to put her clothes back on while also walking.

“A little diplomacy wouldn’t hurt,” Balin muttered.

“They shouldn’t dismiss my sister as one who speaks out of turn when she merely spoke the truth,” Thorin said.

Bofur whispered, “Thorin, where’s Bramble?”

The Dwarf king looked around wildly. The Hobbit was nowhere to be seen. The last thing he remembered was… she was knocked down by a spider. Was she…?

But the Elves would have found her if she had been… no. She was alive. Bramble was alive and not captured.

The Elves shoved Bofur next to Thorin into a van with no windows save for the front seat. The Dwarves had been separated into four different vans filled with Elves.

Something (really, someone) landed on the two Dwarves’ feet.

“I’m not here,” came a hushed whisper.

Bofur tried to keep a smile off his face when he saw his feet were a bit too blurry.

“Feet up,” mumbled Thorin.

The three of them worked together so the Dwarves’ legs could partially cover Bramble while she slid as much as she could under the seat. Bofur felt infinitely better knowing everyone was alive and well (though not safe by any means). Thorin was tense, but not on the verge of panic like earlier.

“We’re going to be separated,” Thorin said, “Don’t say anything. Try to stay invisible in the eyes of the Elves. Don’t cause trouble. We want all of the Company safe.”

Bofur saw the edge of Thorin’s jeans being tugged in acknowledgment. “Alright,” Bofur said.

On the outskirts of Baton Rouge was a mini-city which sat along the banks of the Mississippi. It had several buildings of the French style with trees at least as old as Baton Rouge itself.

The Elves separated the Dwarves after being presented to the King of the Woodland Realm. (Dwalin was quite irate over being called “annoying”.) Thorin remained with King Thranduil. The guards led the rest of the Company to various cells in the building which was also used as storage situated over a tributary which led to the Mississippi.

Tauriel shoved Kíli into his cell.

“Aren’t you going to search me? I could have anything down my trousers,” Kíli said

“Or nothing,” Tauriel said dryly as she slammed the cell door shut.
Kíli tried not to smile. He thought idly he might have had a crush on her if she was not an Elf.

Legolas stopped Tauriel a few feet from Kíli’s cell, speaking to her in Sindarin. “Why does the Dwarf stare at you, Tauriel?”

“Who can say? Dwarves are strange,” Tauriel said.

Dwalin immediately tried to start breaking down his cell wall. As Balin passed by, he said to his younger brother, “Leave it! There’s no way out. This is no Orc dungeon; these are the halls of the Woodland Realm. No one leaves here but by the king’s consent.”

“Well, let’s hope Thorin can use tact with the Elves for once,” Dwalin said. He immediately realized they were doomed.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: THE THINGS I DO FOR WRITING! UGH! SPIDERS!

My apologies on the late update. FF.Net was down when I originally intended to post and then I was dealing with school stuff or being sick since then.

The band RED was my soundtrack for writing this chapter. They’re good for battle scenes and angry angst. For battle scenes with sad angst, I turn to Skillet.

Thranduil’s palace is completely made up for Baton Rouge. I have been to the city once, it was dark out, and we only stopped at a gas station for fuel for about ten minutes. (It was a mission trip to New Orleans post-Katrina to help with clean-up and rebuilding.) You could buy alligator heads there. Like real ones. I got a wooden one painted to look like a real alligator for my Dad as he had jokingly asked for one when I left. When I pulled it out of my bag when my parents picked me up, my Mother almost crashed the car. It was fantastic.
Thorin calculated if he could strangle King Thranduil with the Elven guards standing so close by in the throne room. The joy it would bring him was immeasurable. It would also probably lead to all of his Dwarves being executed. So, in the long run, it was a bad idea.

Not that Thorin did not think about all the different ways he could kill the Elf during the course of their conversation.

Thranduil walked around Thorin as he spoke. “Some may imagine that a noble quest is at hand: a quest to reclaim a homeland and slay a dragon. I myself suspect a more prosaic motive: attempted burglary, or something of that ilk.”

With graceful ease, Thranduil removed the map and key from Thorin’s jacket. The blond Elf king moved to remove the map from the plastic bag when Thorin snapped, “Don’t!”

Thranduil raised an eyebrow. “Why not?”

“You have to wear gloves,” Thorin said, “It’s almost two hundred years old. I would have an incensed historian after me if anything happened to it.”

The Elf smiled. “Indeed. I called Lord Elrond. He said you came to him with an academic question. He even consulted a Hobbit for it, of all creatures. Professor Baggins sends her regards from Rivendell.”

Thorin did not show his surprise. Lord Elrond somehow knew Bramble had not been captured, yet the Elf lord protected Thorin over his own kin. He knew it was not from love of Dwarves. Lord Elrond must not have been particularly fond of his Woodland kin.

Thranduil continued speaking. “You have found a way in. You seek that which would bestow upon you the right to rule: the King’s Jewel, the Arkenstone. It is precious to you beyond measure. I understand that. There are gems in the mountain that I too desire. White gems of pure starlight. I offer you my help.” He gave a slight nod of his head.

Thorin chuckled softly and resisted rolling his eyes. “I’m listening.”

“I will let you go, if you but return what is mine,” Thranduil said.

Thorin turned around and walked as far away as the guards would allow him. He would have knocked out the pretty boy’s teeth otherwise. “A favor for a favor.”

“You have my word. One king to another.”
Thorin’s voice rose with his growing anger. “I would not trust Thranduil, the great king, to honor his word should the end of all days be upon us!” He spun around. “You lack all honor! I’ve seen how you treat your friends. We came to you once, starving, homeless, seeking your help, but you turned your back. You turned away from the suffering of my people and the inferno that destroyed us! Imrid amrad ursul!"

Thranduil ignored the Dwarf’s personal space as he stood close enough to almost touch Thorin. “Do not talk to me of dragon fire. I know its wrath and ruin. I have faced the great serpents of the north.” His face changed as he spoke showing burns and scars along the left side of his face, his left eye milky white.

The Elf moved away and his face returned to normal. “I warned your grandfather of what his greed would summon, but he would not listen.” Thranduil walked back up to his throne. “You are just like him.” He motioned for the guards to take the prisoner away.

The guards began dragging Thorin backwards, away from the king. “Stay here if you will, and rot. A hundred years is a mere blink in the life of an Elf. I am patient. I can wait.”

Thorin began using every curse he knew. A hundred years? Thorin would be dead in half the time most likely. Thranduil expected to break the younger Dwarves. How dare Thranduil threaten those under Thorin’s care?

For a moment, Thorin saw the blurry movement of Bramble trying to follow him. He motioned and mouthed as best as he could, “Get the map and key!”

The blur stopped following Thorin and went to shadow King Thranduil. Thorin relaxed for one second before struggling again.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble would strangle stupid, stubborn, honor-bound Dwarf when she saw him again. Did he not understand he was more important to find than a scrap of paper and a piece of metal?

She soon understood his reasoning. Thorin would need food at some point. From the conversation between the two kings, Bramble knew Thranduil intended to keep Thorin as long as he lived. He would be easier to find than a map which would sit in some vault or other.

With that reasoning, she followed Thranduil. Bramble felt like she was waiting to get caught. The Elf King went to some sort of sitting room. Well, she thought it was a sitting room. It was grander than any ballroom Bramble had ever been in, but the king seemed somewhat relaxed here.

“I know you’re there,” Thranduil said, turning toward Bramble direction where she had hidden behind a pillar. “Why do you linger in the shadows?”

Bramble was about to take off her ring when Tauriel walked past the Hobbit. “I was coming to report to you.”

Bramble sunk to the ground and focused on breathing.

“I thought I ordered that nest to be destroyed not two moons past,” Thranduil said.

“We cleared the forest as ordered, my lord, but more spiders keep coming up from the south. They are spawning in the ruins of Dol Guldur; if we could kill them at their source…”

“That fortress lies beyond our borders. Keeping our lands clear of those foul creatures is your task.”
Tauriel was obviously agitated. “And when we drive them off, what then? Will they not spread to other lands?”

“Other lands are not my concern. The fortunes of the world will rise and fall, but here in this kingdom, we will endure.”

Tauriel gave a respectful bow, despite her disagreement with the king.

As she turned, Thranduil said, “Legolas said you fought well today.” She smiled. “He has grown very fond of you.”

Bramble felt instant sympathy for the female Elf. The news shocked and deeply embarrassed the Elf captain. The Hobbit had seen Tauriel fight and knew she was a fearless warrior. To be so undone disturbed the Hobbit.

“I assure you, my lord, Legolas thinks of me as no more than a captain of the guard.”

“Perhaps he did once. Now, I’m not so sure.” Thranduil walked past Tauriel to pour himself a drink.

Tauriel said quietly, “I do not think you would allow your son to pledge himself to a lowly Silvan Elf.”

“No, you are right. I would not. Still, he cares about you. Do not give him hope where there is none.”

Tauriel nodded and, holding back a look of anguish, left the king. Bramble remained with Thranduil as the Elf king examined the map and the key… without gloves. Both these events took away any guilt Bramble felt over the next few weeks of stealing from the king of the Woodland Realm.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I said it once and I will say it again, there is no escaping Labyrinth. I used “I Will Not Bow” by Breaking Benjamin to write part of Thorin and Thranduil’s scene.

I apologize for the slow update. I was finishing up my field experience these past two weeks.

Translation from Khuzdul - Thanks to the same folks in charge of the script!

Imrid amrad ursul! - Die a death of flames! (Rough translation)

I think this is pretty much the worst way Thorin can imagine dying besides the “clawing for breath” (which I address later on). I think it shows the depths of his hatred as about the same as someone who believes in the existence of eternal damnation telling someone to go to Hell. But that’s my personal head canon.
Tauriel did her rounds through the cells the night after the Dwarves arrived. The Woodland Realm rarely had long-term prisoners. Mostly it was drunk and disorderly Elves. The Dwarves had certainly shaken everyone’s routine.

Kíli threw a black stone in the air and caught it repeatedly. Tauriel found it odd. She had always been told Dwarves loved precious metals and gemstones, not a rock which could be found in a river.

“The stone in your hand, what is it?” Tauriel asked.

“It is a talisman. A powerful spell lies upon it. If any but a Dwarf reads the runes on this stone, they will be forever cursed,” Kíli said. He held up the stone, staring at Tauriel.

She stepped back slightly, unsure of how Dwarf magic worked.

“Or not, depending on whether you believe that kind of thing. It’s just a token.” The Dwarf smiled with kindness.

Tauriel smiled back. She did not think Dwarves had a sense of humor. All of the ones she met had been terse with her.

Kíli held the stone in one hand. “A rune stone. My Mother gave it to me so I’d remember my promise. She gave one to my sister and my uncle too.”

“What promise?”

“That I will come back to her. I mean, it’s a bit silly. She’s on this venture with us. But my Father… he forgot to carry it with him the day he died so she is rather superstitious about it. Not that I blame her.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Tauriel said.

“Thanks. It happened a long time ago. I was… almost six and a half. It’s been several decades. Fíli got so serious after…” Kíli cleared his throat. “Anyway, my Mom. She worries. She thinks I’m reckless.”

“Are you?” Tauriel asked.

“Nah.” Kíli tossed the stone in the air and missed. The stone skittered out of his cell. Tauriel stopped it with her foot.

She picked up the stone and inspected it. The Elf did not understand the words, but she could see the quality of the craftsmanship.

“Listen, I’m sorry about my comment earlier,” Kíli said, “It wasn’t gentleman-like of me. I wasn’t raised that way. I’m sorry.”

“You are forgiven,” Tauriel said, “But I’m afraid I must leave. I have tarried here too long.” She gave the stone back to Kíli. “Don’t do anything reckless or I will have to come by your cell again.”
Bramble vaguely remembered some psychological study about how people would not notice a gorilla running around if they were told to focus on how many basketball passes someone made. It was the only reason she could think of for not being caught so far. The other possibility was the Elves were just stupid, but that sounded a bit too Dwarvish to her. Honestly, it was a bit unnerving the Elves who were supposed to be watching out for Orcs could not notice one single Hobbit stealing their food.

Security, overall, was rather relaxed once one was in the King’s Halls. Getting in and out was impossible. Bramble had gotten the key and map with ease. Thranduil had locked it up that night before he went to bed in his desk. Looking around at the king’s office, she guessed he was not involved with technology. When there was no blow-up the next day, Bramble realized Thranduil did not care much about the Dwarves and their quest. As long as the dragon did not come to Mirkwood, than it did not matter to the Elf king.

The Elves were good at one thing: making mazes. Bramble had problems figuring out where everyone and everything was. She knew where the royals lived, but little else. What she needed was to find a security room or at least a map.

It was some time after her sixth meal in the dungeon when Dís received a visitor. She did not bother getting up from her cot. “Ah, Prince Legolas. What an annoyance.”

“I am not here to quarrel with you, Lady Dís,” Legolas said.

“I am not telling you anything. Not sorry,” Dís said.

Legolas held up a tablet. “Your children.”

Dís shot up and ran to the cell bars. “What about my children?”

Legolas hit play on a video of Fíli. “Is this some evil Elf conspiracy or something? Whatever. Hi, Mom. Fíli here. Not dead. I had some bread and cheese for whatever this meal is. Working on my great escape. So, don’t worry. I’m physically fine. Love you. Elves can go Ish kakhfê ai’d dur rugnu!”

“And your son,” Legolas said as he switched to another video, this time of Kíli.

“Why am I doing this?” Kíli asked.

“To reassure your Mother,” Legolas said.

“Yeah. Sure. You’re going to dub my voice over or something to make a ransom video.”

“You are not worth the effort,” Legolas said.


The video ended.

“What was that for?” Dís said.

“My Father understands the need for a parent to know their children are safe,” Legolas said, “We are
not cruel by nature, Lady Dís. We do not desire any of you to suffer. We would not separate a mother from her children.”

Dís gave a smile of disdain. “You see, Elf prince, I know it is not true. If your Father did care about such, he would have helped my people. Do you not know how many orphans were created that day? Parents who could not even bury their children? Who had to watch them die? Does he not realize my own mother was among the dead? And he expects me to be GRATEFUL for this taunt! I will not see my children face to face while your father holds us prisoner.”

Legolas looked at Dís blankly, but there was a flicker of confusion in his eyes for a moment. “Lady Dís, this was not done out of malice.”

“Not just cruel, but a liar as well,” Dís said as she mimicked his words from before.

Legolas sighed. “I am sorry to have caused you pain, Lady Dís. It was not done on purpose.” He nodded before leaving her.

Dís curled up on her cot, feeling cold and more alone than ever. She was overjoyed to see her children well, but the sorrow came with knowing she could not see them again was worse than being shot.

A voice whispered, “Dís!”

The Dwarf looked around and saw nothing. “Am I being haunted?”

“No. It’s me, Bramble.”

Dís stood up and looked as far out of her cell as she could. “I think I’m hallucinating.”

“You’re not,” Bramble said as she took Dís’ hand.

Dís jumped, but relaxed slightly when she saw the distortion where Bramble stood. “You weren’t captured?”

“No. I am trying to find everyone. You’re the first one I’ve found.”

“How?” Dís asked.

“I couldn’t get to a security room, but I found the kitchens. I followed the food,” Bramble said, “Thorin asked me to get the map and key. Do you think I should give them to you?”

“No. What if they search my cell?” Dís said.

“Okay. Good point. Do you know where anyone else is?” Bramble asked.

“No. I just know Fili and Kili are alright. My guess is they put me as far from the others as possible, particularly Thorin.”

“Why?”

“I am the mother of the heir to Erebor. I could lead the Company if necessary. The Elves know, though, I won’t leave without my brother or my children.”

“Good to know. Dís, I have to go. I haven’t been caught yet, but it’s because I keep moving whenever there are cameras around, like now. I will find the rest of the Company and get you out, I promise.”
“Good luck, professor,” Dís said.

It was somewhat easier from there to find the rest of the Dwarves once Bramble knew what building they were in. Hallways, doors locked and/or guarded, and a plethora of cameras separated the Company. Food was harder to come by and sleep was less likely. The Dwarves were more than willing to slip Bramble food.

The first Dwarf the Hobbit found after Dís was Balin. He was relieved to hear Thorin was alive and the map had been found. Balin was not happy about Thorin’s actions. “The boy is far too rash. The deal was our only hope. Save for you, of course.”

“Your confidence is overwhelming,” Bramble said dryly.

Dwalin was next and he was calmed to hear about his brother, Thorin, and Dís. Bifur was ecstatic to be able to be understood, even if it was just basic Khuzdul. Glóin cursed the Elves continuously. Dori, Nori, and Ori worried about their sisters. Bombur complained about the food. Fíli was on the verge of panic about her brother. Óin was getting new batteries for his hearing aids on a regular basis. Seeing Bofur again brought Bramble absolute joy.

“My dear lass! I would spin you around, but these bars are in the way!”

“Oh, Bofur, I think I’ve missed you most,” Bramble said. She was able to take his hand through the bars.

They leaned their foreheads together as best as they could. Bofur sniffled. “Now, namad, if you’re crying, I will be cross.”

“I’m not crying, except from maybe exhaustion. I think I have had two hours straight at one point. Everything else has just been naps of a few minutes. How are you?”

“Fantastic now you’re here! Where’s everyone else?”

“Nearby. Kíli and Thorin are the two I have left. Bombur and Bifur say hello. Bombur asks how the food is for you. She hates it.”

“I haven’t had problems with the food. Are you eating enough?”

“I haven’t felt the need to pass out,” Bramble said.

“Now that’s not good at all. Hobbits need to eat, particularly my little namad. If you challenged Smaug to a pie eating competition, you’d win!”

Bramble laughed. “Bofur, you are wonderful.”

“That’s true.”

She laughed again. “I have to go. I will come back and start delivering messages in a little bit.” Bramble sighed. “I’m not looking forward to seeing Thorin again. I’m sure he is going to berate me because of the spiders. He looked so angry when he realized what happened. It’s not like I brought the spiders down on us.”

“Trust me, professor, he wasn’t angry at you. He’ll be happy to see you. Even happier than me.” He winked at Bramble’s direction. “Just go find them and figure a way out of here.”
“I will.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble’s heart stopped when she almost ran into Captain Tauriel. The Hobbit relaxed slightly when she saw the Elf was preoccupied with Kíli.

“I think you tried tossing this the first time we met,” Tauriel said as she held up a smooth stone.

“There’s only so much recklessness I can do in here,” Kíli said. He leaned up against the bars and smiled. “And how are you on this fine evening… day… whatever?”

“It is evening,” Tauriel said, “I am well.”

“So, do you Elves do anything fun around here besides hunting spiders?” Kíli said.

“We have fun just like everyone else. We have feasts, dances, parties, TV binges…” Tauriel shrugged. “Nothing other people do not have. Dwarves?”

“All of that too. Our biggest is Durin’s Day and it’s my favorite. It is coming up in the middle of October. We have this huge feast with so much food we have leftovers for everyone for a week. We dance until our feet are blistered and we sing until our voices are hoarse. Even Uncle Thorin is happy. He doesn’t dance properly though. He says he won’t dance until… well, things. As far as I know since the fall of Erebor he hasn’t danced except for my Mom’s wedding and for the parties thrown after Fíli and me were born.”

Tauriel smiled at Kíli which made the Dwarf’s cheeks turn slightly pink. “I’m talking too much. You. What is your favorite event?”

Tauriel smiled even broader. “It is Mereth-en-Gilith, the Feast of Starlight, which we will celebrate in a week and a half.” She stepped away for a moment, her eyes bright. “All light is sacred to the Eldar, but Wood Elves love best the light of the stars.”

Kíli said softly, “I always thought it is a cold light, remote and far away.”

Tauriel turned towards Kíli. “It is memory, precious and pure. Like your promise.” She gave the stone back to Kíli, their hands touching a moment longer than necessary. “I have walked there sometimes, beyond the forest and up into the night. I have seen the world fall away and the white light forever fill the air.”

Kíli looked at Tauriel with open admiration. “I saw a fire moon once. It rose over the pass near Dunland, huge; red and gold it was, filled the sky. We were an escort for some merchants from Ered Luin, they were trading in Silverbuck for furs. We took the Greenway south, keeping the mountain to our left, and then, this huge fire moon, right in our path. I wish I could show you...”

Bramble crept away. It was an entirely unexpected development and she had no idea what to make of it.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Sometime after Bramble saw Tauriel left, the Hobbit went to Kíli who stood with his back to the bars of his cells. “Fíli and Dís send their love.”

Kíli spun around. “Professor!”
“Shush! Not so loud.” She placed her hand on his arm.

“Everyone is alright, professor?”

“Yes, I have found everyone except for Thorin. Do you have any messages you want me to carry? I can’t do much else at the moment.”

“Just that I am well. Are you alright, professor?”

“I’m fine, Kíli.” Bramble was silent for a moment. “So… any information on the Elves you could give me?”

“They aren’t pure evil?” Kíli offered weakly. “I don’t know, professor. There is nothing I could tell which could help.”

Bramble was glad Kíli could not see her smile. “It’s alright, Kíli. Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

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Over the next five days, Bramble had added passing messages to her list of things to do besides looking for Thorin, finding a way out, and avoiding detection. Her exhaustion built to a critical point. The Hobbit was not sure how much longer she could keep going on like this.

On the thirteenth day of their imprisonment, Bramble found a small storage room with some blankets. The room was dusty from disuse. Bramble nestled into a corner, wrapping herself in blankets she found in the room. She was finally warm for the first time in almost two weeks.

Bramble was unsure how long she had been sleeping, but she awoke by the voice of Captain Tauriel saying, “I don’t know how you’re doing it, but if you want to not be shot, you had better make yourself visible right this second.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: “Hide and Seek” by Imogen Heap is the unofficial song of this chapter.

Translation from Khuzdul - Thanks to the same folks in charge of the script!

Namad - Sister.

Ish kakhfê ai’d dur rugnu! - I spit upon your grave! (Rough translation)

I have seen several translations for this phrase which say it actually involves excrement, but either way it is safe to say the phrase is a high insult.
Tauriel often went to the small storage room to think things over. It had not been a particularly bad day. Just… awkward. It had always been hard for Tauriel to make friends. She was not “eloquent in speech” as Legolas had put it years ago. Ever since her conversation with the king, it had become uncomfortable to be around Legolas. Their easy conversations and jokes fell away. At the same time, her conversations with a Dwarf she barely knew were… not always easy, but certainly enjoyable.

The captain sat down on a dusty crate and focused on breathing in and breathing out. She felt ridiculous. There were much more important things to think about such as where the spiders nested and…

Tauriel noticed a bundle of blankets crumpled up on the floor. It would have been odd on its own. The fact the blankets moved slightly without anything visibly underneath them was alarming.

The Elf pulled out her gun and aimed it at the blankets. “I don’t know how you’re doing it, but if you want to not be shot, you had better make yourself visible right this second.”

A short, sickly-looking black woman with curly hair appeared in the blankets. “Don’t shoot! I’m mostly harmless!”

“What are you doing here?” Tauriel said.

“Napping.”

“I meant in the Woodland Realm. I have never sensed such a creature before,” Tauriel said.

“I’m a Hobbit. We don’t get out much. You see, I got a bit caught up in things and just kind of… landed here. It was all rather unexpected,” the woman said.

“Put your hands behind your head,” Tauriel said, “Though I have never heard of a dangerous Hobbit (of what little I have heard), I cannot risk the safety of this realm.”

“I am not a safety risk,” the Hobbit said as she stood up and put her hands behind her head. “I’m Belladonna, by the way. And you’re Tauriel?”

“How do you know my name?” Tauriel said.

“I’ve heard you called it. I also know Mereth-en-Gilith, the Feast of Starlight, is your favorite special event,” Belladonna said.

“You’ve been here some time. On your feet,” Tauriel said.
Belladonna stood up, revealing she had a sword at her side. Her clothes hung loosely from her body.

“You carry a sword. Hardly something which belongs to a creature claiming to be ‘harmless’.”

“I said mostly harmless,” Belladonna said, “If I wanted to do real damage, I would have done it far sooner.”

The Elf put away her gun. Tauriel did not have anything official to restrain the Hobbit, so she grabbed some rope and tied Belladonna’s hands together. “I doubt it.”

Belladonna tilted her head and said, “Other lands are not my concern. The fortunes of the world will rise and fall, but here in this kingdom, we will endure.”

Tauriel stiffened as she shoved the Hobbit into the hallway. “You heard that?”

“All of it,” Belladonna said. She fell to the ground on her knees. “I’ve heard many other conversations too. If I wanted to kill someone say, the king, I would have done it ages ago. Has anything been reported stolen besides some food and water? Nope. See. Harmless. Well, mostly harmless.”

The Elf bent over to help the Hobbit to her feet. Tauriel was hit in the nose with the back of Belladonna’s head. Blood began flowing from Tauriel’s nose. Before the Elf could recover, the Hobbit was gone.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble had no idea where she ran. She had slipped on the ring she had been able to keep in her hands, but the rope still bound her. All she cared about was getting away.

After running for fifteen minutes, Bramble stopped to catch her breath. No one had come close to her, but now the Hobbit was lost.

Voices spoke in Sindarin behind a closed door. “Anything weird on the monitors?”

“Not really, but we don’t have the best quality.”

“Keep looking. The video shows the creature disappearing. We are going to have to be extra careful with the prisoners. We should probably have an extra guard go when delivering the food.”

“That would make three for the one in the basement.”

Basement? Bramble did not think places so near swamps could have basements.

The door swung open as an Elf left. Bramble saw monitors. She sprinted into the room before the door closed, barely missing the Elf.

The guard watching the monitor was bored, but to Bramble it was a glorious sight. She saw the full extent of the security in the prison. Bramble could see cameras outside each cell, but not within to give the prisoners some privacy to use the facilities. Tauriel was escorted out of the building with a handkerchief pressed to her nose. (Bramble fully intended to bake scones for the Elf as an apology.) There seemed to be a large storage area at the bottom of the building stretched over the tributary. Best of all was a lone cell on the lowest level. It had a full door save for some bars at eye level the size of Bramble’s hand.

Though Bramble could not see the prisoner, she knew it had to be Thorin. Now the question was
how Bramble was going to get to him.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Dwarf in question had become disheartened. Thorin had not heard a word spoken since he had seen King Thranduil. From the meal schedule, Thorin guessed he had been a prisoner of the Woodland Realm for at least two weeks.

Speaking of meals, the door was unlocked. An Elf carried a tray and placed it a few feet into the room. Two guards instead of one pointed a gun at Thorin’s head this day. Something had happened to increase security. Thorin prayed to Mahal his Company had not caused it.

The Elf carrying the tray stepped back into the hall and allowed the guards to close the door again. Thorin groaned and rubbed his face. “I am so tired of this.”

“How do you think I feel?” a voice said.

Thorin leapt from his cot and looked around. In a corner by the door was a slight distortion. Bramble revealed herself, her hands behind her back.

“You are not an easy Dwarf to find, Thorin Oakenshield,” Bramble said.

Thorin rubbed his eyes. “Hallucinations. I have been told this happens during solitary confinement.”

“Untie me and I’ll slap your stupid face to show you have most certainly have not imagined me. Actually, such a hallucination would make you a bit of a sadist seeing as I’m tied up and rather weak at the moment,” Bramble said with agitation.

Thorin knelt before Bramble. He could not speak. With shaking hands, he untied the Hobbit while still kneeling before her.

Bramble talked in his place. “Everyone is fine and being cared for. Balin, Dwalin, Dís, Fíli, and Kíli all told me to tell you your diplomatic skills need some work. They also are going to be overjoyed you’re safe. I’m sorry I smell. I haven’t been able to even brush my teeth since Beorn’s. I’ll just sit in the corner until I can leave again.”

Once she was untied, Thorin pulled her into a tight embrace. “I could care less you smell.”

Bramble hesitantly returned the hug, hiding her face against Thorin’s chest. “I feel so gross, Thorin. I’m sorry I haven’t gotten you out yet. I’m trying. I promise.”

Thorin rested his head on top of Bramble’s, relief filling him to know she and their Company were safe. “I know and I am forever in your debt, dear burglar.”

Bramble leaned completely against Thorin. “They know I’m somewhere in this building. I’m sorry. I had to sleep. I was going to pass out in the hallway if I didn’t. I am so sorry.”

“Stop saying you’re sorry. You have nothing to apologize for. You have shown your quality, Bramble, and you are worth far more than I ever imagined.”

Bramble tightened her hold on Thorin. “I’m too dehydrated to cry right now. Please stop saying such nice things.”

Thorin in one movement picked up Bramble and carried her to the cot. “The good news is I have a sink, so you can drink as much as you want.”
She smiled. “Thank you.”

Thorin grabbed the tin mug the Elves gave him to use for drink and filled it with cold water. Bramble drank it almost in one gulp. She drank two more cups before being satisfied.

“You look terrible,” Thorin said.

“What every woman wants to hear,” Bramble said.

“You’re paler than me,” Thorin said as he compared their forearms. Bramble looked like a thin layer of white had been painted over her normally brown skin. “And your clothes are loose. Have you been able to eat at all?”

“Bits and pieces. I got an energy bar one day,” Bramble said.

Thorin grabbed the tray. “Eat.”

“It’s yours.”

“And I have had regular meals.”

“You’re our leader. You need to stay strong.”

“And you are our way out. I told you to eat.”

Bramble covered her mouth and shook her head.

“Baggins…”

Bramble shook her head again.

“Fine. I’ll eat.”

Thorin took a small bite of bread. “Hmmmm… so good. I think it’s freshly baked. So soft…” He took an olive and popped it into his mouth. “And these olives. I think they’re the best I’ve ever had.”

“You’re a jerk,” Bramble said as she ripped off a junk of bread.

Thorin kept his hand on Bramble’s shoulders as she ate, reminding her to slow down so she would not get sick. She stopped a little over half-way through.

“Eat a little bit, please. Guilt is not good for my stomach.”

Thorin consented. Bramble explained how the rest of the Company was doing and her run-in with the Elven captain, Tauriel. He felt she was leaving something out, but he could not place what it was.

“When was the last time you slept, burglar?”

“Uh… before I got tied up.”

“You need your rest. The guards won’t be back for several more hours. I’ll wake you before then.”

“We need to…”

“What we need is for you to sleep.”

Bramble rubbed her arms. “I reek though.”
“I don’t smell pleasant either. I’ve been using the sink to clean up.”

“Can I do that first? Is that okay? I don’t think I can sleep if being clean is an option.”

Thorin nodded. “Fresh washcloth and a bar of soap are on the sink. I’ll be facing the door.”

“Oh, wait,” Bramble said. She pulled out of her pocket the map and key, still in the bag along with her father’s book. “Sorry, I normally wouldn’t keep these together, but this is the only map with roads we have right now. I thought it would be good to keep these together and…”

Thorin embraced Bramble again. “You are a brilliant burglar.”

“Not really. Thranduil is paranoid about threats outside his kingdom, but not from within.”

Thorin rested his head against Bramble’s shoulder. “I would be so lost without you,” he said quietly.

“Says the man who got lost in his own home to find his bedroom.”

Thorin pulled back and glared. “I was three years old. I claim childhood ignorance.”

Bramble laughed before standing up to stretch. “Unfortunately, your sense of direction has not improved. Fortunately, you have the rest of us to keep you on track.”

Thorin turned away from the sink and flipped through Bramble’s book. “You do indeed,” he said to himself.

Bramble could have fainted from how happy she was. She was clean, had eaten something more than a stolen bite, and Thorin was not mad at her. In fact, he seemed downright pleased.

She wrung out her hair one last time before turning back to Thorin. He studied her book with more intensity than Bramble expected.

“Anything useful?” Bramble asked as she sat behind him on the cot.

“Hmmm… your Father truly loved you,” Thorin said, “I can tell by the little notes he made about places he thought you would like.”

Bramble’s heart twitched slightly in pain. “Yes, he did.”

Thorin turned around and gave the book back to Bramble. “We are going to have to cross Texas. It might be better to stick to highways instead of back roads.”

The Hobbit nodded. “Okay. Um… can I borrow a blanket so I can sleep?”

Thorin immediately sat on the floor. “Rest. I’ll wake you when the guards come.”

“It can’t be comfortable.”

“I need to do my exercises. Keeps me sane and I don’t feel as great of a need to punch the walls.”

“Thorin…”

“Baggins…”

Bramble collapsed dramatically on the bed. “Dwarves.” She curled up under the blankets. “There is
a bit of room at the end if you need to sit.”

Thorin made a noise of agreement. As Bramble fell asleep, she said, “I just realized you have a beard now.”

“No razors.”

“You look good either way.” If she had not been so exhausted, Bramble would have been mortified.

She felt Thorin’s warm hand rest against her shoulder. “Sleep, Bramble. I’ll look after you.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble dreamed it was the Fell Winter again. It was so cold glass shattered if pressed too hard. The Hobbits starved. The river froze. Bad omens were all about them.

She was not there when the Orcs and wargs came during the real Fell Winter. She saw their destruction of lives and homes afterwards. In her dream, she stood on the bank of the river closest to Hobbiton. Orcs and wargs crossed the Brandywine River before tearing into the houses of Hobbits. There was nothing but blood everywhere. Children were ripped from their parents’ arms and slaughtered. In her dream, all Bramble could do was watch.

What was new was Thorin. He stood behind her and said, “Everything will be alright. It’s just a dream. Dreams will bring you no harm, Hobbit.”

Bramble turned to him. The winter began to melt and the screams faded. It was spring. Thorin looked a little out of place in his leather jacket and heavy boots, but he was smiled kindly at her. “Sleep well, dear burglar.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin hated waking Bramble. Her sleep had been plagued with dark dreams, but he had been able to calm her by speaking to her or even singing. She began to look like herself again, but he could hear the doors opening and closing. “Burglar, wake up.”

Bramble sat up and rubbed her eyes. “What is it?”

“Under the bed,” Thorin said.

She did as he asked without question. Bramble slipped on the ring just as Thorin threw the blanket casually over the side of the cot to hide most of her as the Elves brought in his food. A minute later, Thorin grabbed Bramble out from under the bed while she pulled off her ring.

“Alright, burglar?” Thorin asked.

“Yeah.” She yawned. “Thanks for the nap. I should have left sooner though.”

“You can leave at the next meal. Eat.”

They sat in silence as they ate together. Thorin spoke first after the tray was cleared. “Were you dreaming of the Orcs we have faced?”

“No. Not those Orcs.”

Thorin got another cup of water from the sink for Bramble. “The Fell Winter?”
Bramble shivered and nodded.

“Are you going to talk about it, Hobbit?”

She thought for a moment. “Only if you tell me why you still aren’t sleeping. Don’t deny it. You look terrible.”

Thorin rubbed his beard as he thought. “I asked first.”

“But you’re more evasive than me.”

Thorin smiled slightly and took her hand. “You have my word, Baggins.” He was going to release her hand, but her grip tightened and he would not let go if she would not.

Bramble told him of the Fell Winter. The cold and the starvation. The loss of hope. The Orcs and wargs. How Gandalf and the Rangers had to save the Hobbits both with food and protection. She still had nightmares about it as apparently did most Hobbits who lived through it. The whole time Thorin could see how desperately she tried not to panic or cry.

“Your turn,” Bramble said.

Thorin cleared his throat. And he did it again.

Bramble said, “I don’t have any room to judge, you know. You could be having nightmares about clowns and I would think it is a legitimate concern.”

“I can shoot clowns. This is not like that.”

Bramble placed her other hand with their two joined ones. “And that is why you need to talk about it. It is the only chance you have to kill this fear.”

Thorin looked away from her at the opposite wall and then looked at her hands. “I died, Bramble. I went to the Halls of Mandos and I came back.”

“Oh.”

Thorin looked up. “I just told you I have come back from the Other Side of Death and all you can say is ‘oh’?”

“Wow?” Bramble offered.

Thorin groaned. “I knew this was a bad idea.”

“No. No. I’m sorry. I am taking this seriously. I am just trying to process it and I know it must be a million times more confusing for you. I’m sorry.”

Thorin rested his head against the wall and looked at the ceiling.

“I’m sorry,” Bramble said.

He shrugged. “It’s not your fault. You just always seem to… know and I was just disappointed, though I have no right to be.”

Bramble rested her head against Thorin’s shoulder, making his stomach jump. “I don’t know everything, Thorin. I am here for you for whatever you need.”
“I am blessed to have such a friend,” he said. Thorin inwardly slapped himself. He was being too forward with her. They were barely on speaking terms. Maybe he had been alone too long in his cell. Maybe…

“And I’m blessed to have you as a friend too,” Bramble said.

Thorin smiled perhaps a bit too broadly. He rested his head against hers. Once again, he fell asleep next to her.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Anyone who knows where the “mostly harmless” reference is from gets a cookie.
Chapter XI: Operation Huckleberry

Chapter Summary

It’s the great escape!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thorin had been in prison for two weeks and Bramble still thought he smelled fantastic. The Hobbit felt the need to bang her head against the wall, but Thorin was asleep and she was definitely not going to wake him.

Bramble hated herself. Thorin was relying on her as a friend. Just because she was in love with him…

Oh.

OH!

Bramble groaned. She had not realized until that moment she had moved past the, “I think you’re rather nice to look at” stage to the “I’m giving you my heart please don’t smash it” stage. It was utterly ridiculous. She could not even say what his favorite movie was and yet here Bramble was, thinking of different ways to ease the burden of the quest for her own completely selfish reasons.

Thorin sat up straight. “Burglar? Thought you said something.”

“I’m fine,” Bramble said.

“If you get caught again, don’t try to escape. They might shoot you. I would rather have a captured burglar than a dead one.”

“Pragmatic.”

“Concerned.”

Bramble heard the doors which led to Thorin’s cell beginning to open. Thorin squeezed her hand. “Go.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

A day later, Thorin had a visitor at his door. “So, how’s prison?” Bramble said through the opening of the door.

“Could be better,” Thorin said dryly. Inwardly, he rejoiced Bramble was alright.

“I have a plan. I’m calling it ‘Operation Huckleberry’.”

“Why are you calling it such?” Thorin said.

“It’s a surprise,” Bramble said, “Just be ready three meals from now to go. I am going to be using a
feast the Elves are having to our advantage.”

“Burglar, are you doing something stupid?”

“What a silly question. Of course I’m doing something stupid.”

“Baggins!”

The Hobbit was already gone.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble thanked the powers that be the Elves loved getting drunk. The two guards who were in charge of watching the monitors drank with the Elven king’s butler. And what did one of the guards have? The keys and electric cards to get into all of the Dwarves’ cells, of course.

The Hobbit was certain she had never been so terrified or elated save for when she signed the contract. Things could go terribly wrong or wonderfully right. Either way, she had to try.

Bramble ran through the cells and released the Dwarves. She was hugged, spun around (though Bofur stopped sooner than he usually did and without prompting), slapped on the back, and even received a kiss on the cheek from Bifur. Bramble understood enough Khuzdul to know he said something along the lines of “dear cousin”.

Finally, they reached Thorin. Bramble swung open the door to find the Dwarf king sitting on his cot.

Thorin glanced up at Bramble. “Aren’t you a little short for a storm trooper?”

Bramble held out her hand. “I’m Luke Skywalker. I’m here to rescue you.”

Thorin stood up and took her hand. “My thanks, burglar.”

“Anytime. Come on. This is only the beginning of Operation Huckleberry,” Bramble said.

“Lead on,” Thorin said.

Bramble let go of Thorin’s hand. She gave him time to greet his family and acknowledge the rest of the Company before making them move forward.

“Is it bad I have the Mission: Impossible theme is stuck in my head?” Thorin whispered to Bramble as they continued.

“I’ve had The Pink Panther theme stuck in my head for the past week and the Bond theme the week before,” Bramble said.

The Hobbit led the Company to the cellars where food was stacked in barrels and crates. “This way.”

“I don’t believe it; we’re in the cellars!” Kíli said.

“You were supposed to be leading us out, not further in!” Bofur said.

“I know what I’m doing!” Bramble said.

Bofur shushed her. Bramble rolled her eyes. She led them down to where several open barrels lay on their sides.
“Everyone climb into the barrels, quickly!” Bramble said.

Dwalin said, “Are you mad? They’ll find us!”

“No they won’t, I promise you. Please, you must trust me!” Bramble pleaded.

The Dwarves began to argue amongst themselves about what to do. Bramble gave an exasperated, pleading look to Thorin who stood next to her.


The Dwarves did as their king commanded.

Thorin grabbed Bramble’s arm and whispered in her ear. “For the record, this is the most dangerous and stupid idea I have ever heard.”

Bramble replied, “For the record, going after a dragon is the most dangerous and stupid idea I have ever heard.”

He released the Hobbit’s arm. She gave a mock curtsy and directed him to his own barrel.

The fourteen Dwarves each found a barrel and climbed in. Bramble counted them over three times before she went to where the lever was.

“What do we do now?” Bofur asked.

All of the Dwarves stuck their heads out of the barrels and looked at the Hobbit. Thorin quite literally slid his way out. Bramble gave a sweet smile. “Hold your breath.”

Bofur asked, “Hold my breath? What do you mean?”

Bramble pulled the lever. The floor tilted and the barrels rolled down the slope into the tributary below. The Dwarves screamed as they fell.

The Hobbit did a little dance. It had work! It took a moment for her to realize she was still in the Elven hall.

Sirens went off.

Bramble ran towards the edge of the trap door. She saw Tauriel coming towards her.

“GERONIMO!” Bramble screamed as she fell.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin held onto rocks on either side of him to keep the Dwarves from going forward. They would not leave their burglar behind.

“GERONIMO!” Bramble screamed. She did a back flop into the water.

After an unbearably long moment, Bramble’s head popped out of the water. She grabbed onto Nori’s barrel.

“Huckleberry Finn? Really?” Thorin said.

Bramble shouted, “Literature major!”
“Well done, professor!” Thorin said with a wide grin.

Bramble waved her hand again. “Go!”

“Someone put the Hobbit in a barrel,” Thorin said, “We don’t want her to be eaten by alligators.”

Nori and Dori slung Bramble into Nori’s barrel while the Hobbit yelled in terror, “ALLIGATORS?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I am not a fan of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but as soon as I realized I was going to be using the Mississippi River for the barrel scene, I had to make the reference.

Also, I found [this pic](#) after I already had my first read through.
Chapter XII: Barrels Down the Mississippi

Chapter Summary

Elves are annoying and Orcs are just downright unhelpful.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though they all looked like half-drowned rats, Nori thought the Hobbit looked three-quarters-drowned. The professor had been getting sick ever since they had been captured. Bramble was the only one to be wearing a skirt (which weighed her down more). Not to mention she was terrified of the water.

“Not natural. Traveling by water. Completely unnatural,” Bramble muttered as she clung to the edge of the barrel.

“How do you think Hobbits got to this continent?” Nori said.

“We were desperate. We were driven out. There is a reason none of us ever went back,” Bramble said.

“Hold on!” Thorin yelled.

Nori sighed as she braced herself. “Of course there would be a waterfaaaaaaaaaaaaaaal!”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The current was swift, much to Thorin’s relief. They had almost reached the water gate which would free them when a siren went off. Elven guards pulled a lever, causing the metal gate to close. The barrels rammed into the gate. Thorin was at the front and he tried to shake the gate open with Dís’ help. He could hear guns and swords being drawn by the Elves.

Something fell; an all too familiar war cry rang out.

“ORCS!” Bofur yelled.

Thorin wanted to be in the fight. The majority of the Company was out in the open, including Fíli, Kíli, and Bramble. Thorin could see the Hobbit draw Sting and kill an Orc which jumped at Nori’s barrel. Dwalin smashed an Orc’s face in with his elbow. Kíli jumped out of his barrel and out of sight.

“Kíli!” Dwalin shouted. He threw a sword up over the bridge.

Thorin clung to his barrel, praying to Mahal Kíli would be alright. Fíli killed another Orc. All of the Dwarves fought as much as they could in such a small and unstable space.

Kíli yelped in pain.

Fíli screamed for her brother. The look of horror on her face was too well-known to Thorin. He and
Dís tried to get towards their family but were trapped.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Kíli collapsed to the ground when the arrow hit him. The pain was more than he expected, but the Dwarf did not forget his purpose. He tried to stand to pull the lever to open the gate, but fell again.

An Orc leapt over to Kíli and prepared to stab the Dwarf. Before Kíli could defend himself, a bullet ripped through the Orc’s skull. Tauriel had come and killed the Orcs who dared to attack the Elf king’s home.

Many more Elves came with guns, swords, daggers, and even a few bows. Kíli took his chance and tried to pull on the lever again. This time it worked! Kíli slid himself off the edge of the bridge and landed in his barrel. The shaft of the arrow broke off when it hit the edge.

“Kíli!” Fíli said as she grabbed her brother’s arm before they fell over the edge of yet another waterfall.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

There were few things Hobbits hated more than water. Bramble personally found fire to be more troublesome, but she had never been a strong swimmer. Using the Mississippi for their escape had been done out of desperation and she knew it was the only way to save the Dwarves.

So, when she fell out of the barrel when the Dwarves went over the second waterfall, Bramble had a minor panic attack.

Barrels hit her head and kept her down. Bramble was so disoriented she could not tell up from down and actually touched the bottom of the raging river before pushing herself up.

Bramble gasped for air before being pulled under again. The rapids made her tumble forward over and over. Someone grabbed her shirt and pulled her up.

“Professor, hold on!” Dwalin said.

Before she could react, an Orc leapt on Dwalin’s barrel. The Dwarf head-butted the Orc and stole its ax, but let Bramble go in the process.

This time, Bramble only made it back up to air just as she felt like her lungs would burst. A log had been felled by the Dwarves and barely missed hitting her. The Hobbit was going to grab onto the log until she saw an Orc try to attack her.

Bramble became weaker. The weight of her skirt would kill her. She tried to unzip it, but a barrel smacked her before she could get it loose enough to kick off.

This time, she could not get her arms and legs to work properly. She could only focus on holding her breath and praying she would float without being smacked down again.

A hand grabbed the back of her bra through her shirt. It yanked the Hobbit up and into the air. Bramble clung onto the barrel.

“Got the Hobbit!” Dís said.

Bramble saw Thorin throw a sword at something above them. She caught a glimpse of the sword hit an Orc which tried to kill Legolas. The Hobbit looked at the Dwarf king wide-eyed.
“Get her out of the water!” Thorin shouted.

The Dwarf siblings lifted Bramble out of the water and tossed her into Thorin’s barrel. Bramble leaned over the side and began puking the river water she had swallowed. She was certain she would die of embarrassment.

Thorin rubbed her back. “We can’t have a drowned burglar. It’s okay. There would be something wrong if you didn’t get it out of you.”

Bramble only nodded and closed her eyes. It seemed the Orcs had fled, the Elves no longer followed them, and the barrels still floated downstream.

“Everyone?” Bramble asked weakly.

“All of the Company is here. We will get to shore as soon as we can and get onto the road. We will end up in New Orleans at this rate,” Thorin said. He continued rubbing her back. “You got us out, my brilliant burglar.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: My mantra while writing this chapter was, “Do not reference The Emperor’s New Groove.” I mean, just look at this post. Do you see how easy it is?
Chapter XIII: The Gunslinger

Chapter Summary

The Company really needs to take a nap after their escape.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thorin kept a hand on Bramble’s back as they continued down the river. She had stopped vomiting, but she seemed on the cusp of going into shock. The poor Hobbit had already been weak from her time with the Elves, but the river nearly did her in.

“Anything behind us?” Thorin asked.

“Not that I can see,” Balin said.

“I think we’ve outrun the Orcs,” Bofur said.

“But not for long; we’ve lost the current,” Thorin said, “Make for the shore! Come on, let’s go!”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble did not remember getting to shore, only that she was now on muddy ground. Thorin gave out orders. Nearby Kíli tried to bind his leg.

The Hobbit looked up and saw the blood seeping through the Dwarf’s trouser leg. “Kíli?”

“I’m fine, it’s nothing,” Kíli said.

“You are such an idiot. An Orc wound is nothing? Please,” Bramble muttered as she unzipped her skirt and shimmied out of it, leaving her in her jeans and t-shirt. She took out what little of her belongings she had left and put them to the side. The Hobbit began ripping her skirt apart.

“On your feet,” Thorin said.

“Kíli is wounded. His leg needs binding,” Dís said.

“There’s an Orc pack on our tail; we keep moving,” Thorin said.

“To where?” Balin said grumpily.

“To the mountain. We can’t turn back now. We’re so close,” Fíli said.

“Texas stands between us and the mountain. We have no way to cross it,” Balin said.

“We’ll steal a van,” Bramble said, “We’ll reimburse the owners later or just buy it outright. We have a thief, a burglar, and a mechanic. We can figure out something.”

“I’m so proud of her,” Nori said.
“We have no weapons to defend ourselves,” Dwalin said.

“May I remind you we are going through Texas?” Dís said.

Thorin rubbed his eyes. “Bind his leg, quickly. You have two minutes. Nori, Bifur, scout around and see if there are any vans.”

Before anyone could do as Thorin ordered, Ori screamed. The group sans Kíli ran over to where the young Dwarf was and saw an alligator had crawled onto the shore near Ori.

Bramble did not bother thinking. She pulled out Sting and stabbed the alligator straight through its skull. Yanking it out, she repeatedly whacked the alligator’s neck until she chopped the head off.

The Hobbit collapsed to her knees. “Alligators! Trolls, wargs, Orcs, goblins, fire, spiders, Elves, cold, starvation, nothing for dental hygiene, drowning, and now ALLIGATORS! WHERE WAS THIS IN THE BLASTED CONTRACT!??!”

Bramble huffed and puffed before using every single curse word she had ever learned. The smooth complexity of the Elvish tongues melded into the sharp simplicity of the Dwarven language. The coarseness of Common Tongue burned Bramble’s mouth in a pleasing manner.

Finally, the professor of linguistics and folklore took three deep breaths before standing up. She smiled at the shocked Dwarves. “Much better. Now, Kíli, let’s look at your leg. Óin, come on.”

Bramble barely heard Thorin whisper to Dwalin, “Who taught her those words? Does she even know what it means?”

“Yes, I do know what it means Thorin Oakenshield! Just because I am an academic does not mean I do not know what a curse word is!” Bramble snapped.

Thorin held up his hands. “Peace, Hobbit. I meant no offense.”

“And besides, I figured it out from what you mumbled at the Elves,” Bramble said as she picked up her skirt and continued ripping it.

“Baggins,” Thorin growled.

“What?” Bramble said.

“Where are your boots?” Thorin said.

Bramble looked down at her feet. “Oh for the love of… the river took them! I swear Thorin, I am not doing this to be a pest.”

“Bofur,” Thorin said, “You are in charge of carrying her. You can switch with one of the others if you grow tired.”

“I am not a child tired out in the mall,” Bramble snapped.

“I am well aware of it,” Thorin snapped back.

Much to Thorin’s disgust, the Company was reduced to outright theft. They stole a white van from a parking lot near the river. It did not appear to be owned by a family, which eased Thorin’s guilt slightly. Ori kept in her records (now the back of Bramble’s book) the name of the car’s owner so
they could pay the person back. Most of the Company piled on top of each other. Thorin drove while Balin gave directions as best as he could with Bramble’s book. The book’s owner slept and shivered on the van’s floor between the driver and passenger seats.

They drove until they had left Louisiana and had almost run out of fuel. They pulled over to the next fuel station, but found it to be deserted. By the station’s store was an abandoned semi-truck for hauling live cattle which looked ready for the junk yard. A small rock formation about eighteen feet high was to the side of the station.

“This is great,” Dwalin said dryly, “First fuel station we see and it’s deserted.”

“A deserted desert station. How appropriate,” Bofur said.

Bramble had stopped shivering once she had stepped into the Texan heat. It was about eleven in the morning so the plains were warm, but not to the extent they would be in the afternoon.

“What do we do now?” Fíli said, “We can’t steal a car.”

“We may have to,” Nori said.

“We haven’t seen anyone for miles though,” Dori added.

“We are not going to leave someone out here,” Thorin said.

“Um,” Bramble said quietly as she tugged at Thorin’s sleeve. “Was the truck door open when we first got here?”

There was a sound of a gun being cocked. Bramble went to reach for her sword when a bullet hit the ground next to her.

“Move again and you’re dead,” a female voice said from the top of the rock formation, the sun glinting off her rifle, “Hands on your head. Curly hair drops her sword.”

Bramble struggled with untying the scabbard from her waist. Balin tilted back slightly and looked at the semi-truck.

“Excuse me,” Balin said, “You’re from Laketown, if I’m not mistaken? That truck over there, it wouldn’t be available for transport, would it?”

“Not to thieves,” the woman said.

Dís helped Kíli out of the van. “My son is injured. Orcs attacked us. We are in need of assistance.”

After a moment of silence, the woman sighed and put the safety back on her gun. “Come on. I’ll give you a first-aid kit.”

Bard permitted Óin to grab the first-aid kit from the truck, but the rest had to stay far away from her vehicle. She did not point the gun at the group, but she did keep her finger near the trigger. Bard did not trust the Company, but judging by the state of their clothes, their smell, and Kíli’s injury, their story about being attacked by Orcs near the Mississippi had merit.

“What makes you think I will help you beyond decent behavior?” Bard said.

“Those cowboy boots have seen better days,” Balin said, “As has the truck. No doubt you have
some hungry mouths to feed. How many children?"

“Two girls and a boy,” Bard said as she smiled slightly at the thought of her children.

“These two rascals,” Dís said as she motioned to Fíli and Kíli.

“A son at home,” Glóin said.

“Twelve little ones,” Bombur said.

Bard let out a low whistle. “Wow.”

“And your husband, I’d imagine he’s a looker,” Balin said.

Bard kept her face neutral, but her heart twisted. “Aye. He was.”

Balin stopped smiling and began to apologize. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to…”

Dwalin grumbled to Thorin, “Oh, come on, come on, enough with the niceties.”

“What’s your hurry?” Bard said.

“What’s it to you?” Dwalin said with a challenge in his tone.

“I would like to know what a bunch of Dwarves are doing in these lands,” Bard said. Before the Company asked the obvious question, she said, “I recognize Khuzdul cursing, though I don’t know what it means.”

Balin said, “We are simple merchants from the Blue Mountains journeying to see our kin in the Iron Hills.”

“Simple merchants, you say?” Bard said, smiling at the obvious lie.

Thorin, their leader, spoke to Bard. “We’ll need food, supplies, weapons. Can you help us?”

The Mortal Woman nodded towards the van. “The plates say the van is from East Baton Rouge Parish.”

“What of it?” Thorin said.

Bard laughed. “Dwarves having dealings with the Elves? Please. I already know you stole the van. There has been a call to keep a look-out for fourteen, possible fifteen Dwarves for disturbing the peace. I listened in on the Elven radio channels before taking my little nap.”

“It obviously can’t be us. I’m a Hobbit!” Bramble said.

“Your girlfriend is pretty vocal,” Bard said to Thorin.

“We’re not together,” the two said at the same time.

Bard shrugged. “No one enters Laketown but by leave of the Master. All his wealth comes from trade with the Woodland Realm. He will throw you in jail before risking the anger of King Thranduil.”

Thorin mouthed to Balin, “Offer her more.”

“I’ll wager there are ways to enter the town unseen,” Balin said.
“Sure. But for that, you will need a smuggler,” Bard said.

“For which we will pay double,” Balin said.

Bard smiled at the Dwarf. “Not worth it.”

“We will pay all up front,” Balin said.

“Not worth it,” Bard repeated.

Dís stood in front of the Mortal Woman. “As a favor from one mother to another, I ask you to take us and the money. All I want is for my son to heal and he will do it best where our kin can reach us easily. Such a place is not in the middle of nowhere Texas.”

Bard raised an eyebrow. “I could just drop you at a hospital, but…” she sighed, “I need the money. Hand it over now. I’ll get you some water and food the next time I get fuel. The injured one and the Hobbit can sit in the cab. The heat won’t do them any favors. Get in before I change my mind.”

Bard gave Thorin a walkie-talkie so they could communicate with the trucker, Bramble, Kíli, and Fíli. The last passenger was there both because someone needed to look after the sick as well as her refusing to leave her brother.

“The professor would melt in this heat,” Bombur said, barely sweating. She had taken the heat best of all of them. Though Bombur was a cook, like all Dwarves, she had worked in the forges. She had been in charge of bellows before becoming a chef’s apprentice.

Bifur made an aggressive motion which Thorin did not catch entirely. Fortunately/unfortunately, Bofur repeated what Bifur said. “Yeah, what are your intentions with my sister?”

Thorin tilted his head. “Excuse me?”

“I’m agreeing with those two. You’ve been acting weird lately around our professor,” Bombur said.

Thorin could not let this continue. “Nothing is happening. Drop it.”

“I don’t know. You did spend time with her Mirkwood *unchaperoned*,” Nori said, “You might have kissed her hand or something just as dreadful! Gasp! The horror!”

Ori snickered before being smacked by Dori.

“Baggins is our burglar and I am honored to be considered her friend,” Thorin said, “Any ill words towards her or insinuations to her reputation will be taken as an offense to me. Understood?”

Nori held up her hands. “Sorry. I was just teasing. You don’t generally get all… normal except around the professor.”

Thorin glanced over at Dís who smiled slightly. “And what is so amusing?”

“I promise you, Thorin, it deals nothing with this conversation,” Dís said.

Thorin rubbed his temples. *This is going to be a long ride.*
Bramble awoke to a dark sky and more stars than she had seen, even in Rivendell. “It’s gorgeous here.”

“It is one of the benefits of night drives,” Bard said, “Texas with its open plains has night skies like no other.”

“And New Mexico?” Bramble asked.

“They don’t call it the Land of Enchantment for nothing,” Bard said.

“How’s Kíli?” Bramble asked Fíli.

“Sleeping. He seems to have settled down. Óin is still going to have to remove the arrow when we stop, but he isn’t bleeding out so that’s good,” Fíli said.

“And the rest?” Bramble asked.

Bard handed Bramble the walkie-talkie. “This is M to 007, please respond, over.”

Bofur answered, “The devilishly handsome 007 here. How are things back at MI-6?”

“The sky is gorgeous out here, Bofur. How are things with everyone else?” Bramble asked.

“We’re fine,” Glóin said.

The semi-truck swerved as Bard avoided getting hit by a not so careful driver in a Pontiac.

“Are you trying to kill us?” Dwalin hissed through the walkie-talkie.

Bard snatched the walkie-talkie from Bramble. “I have driven this truck since my feet could touch the pedals, Master Dwarf. If I wanted to kill you, I would not do it here.”

Bramble saw a picture taped to Bard’s dashboard. “Your children? They look adorable.”

“They are. Smart too. Great kids. I’m biased though.”

“Believe me, you can’t be as bias as some of the stories I’ve been listening to the past few weeks.”

“Can’t we just throw her out on the side of the road?” Dwalin pleaded with Thorin.

“No, Dwalin, we can’t,” Thorin said quietly. Dís had fallen asleep next to him so he tried to keep everyone calm.

“How do we know she won’t betray us?” Dwalin said.

Thorin sighed. “We don’t.”

It was six in the morning when Bard pulled to the side of the road to put the Hobbit and the younger Durin siblings into the trailer with the others. “Listen, there are going to be somethings put in here with you. Don’t say a word. Just roll with it.” Before anyone could protest, Bard slammed the door shut.

“She’s going to sell us out,” Dwalin hissed.
“Give Bard the benefit of the doubt,” Bramble said.

“Who?” Dwalin said.

“Bard! The one driving this thing!” Bramble said, “Can someone slap him for me? By the powers that be, at least remember her name!”

They drove for another half-hour before Bard stopped the truck again. A minute after the engine turned off, the back doors opened. A forklift put crates of cow manure into the truck.

“You have got to be joking me,” Dwalin said as he covered his mouth and nose.

“At least no one will want to check it,” Bramble said with only mild discomfort, “And it doesn’t smell too bad. It could be worse. It could be pig manure.”

Bard stopped at the gates of Laketown. She climbed out of her truck as Percy, the security guard, came out of his booth.


“Morning, Percy,” Bard said before shaking the man’s hand.

“Anything to declare?”

“Nothing, save I am exhausted and ready for home,” Bard said as she gave Percy her papers.

“You and me both.” Percy stamped the papers. “Here we are. All in order.”

Bard rolled her eyes when she saw Alfrid step out of the toll house and snatch her papers. “Not so fast. An empty trailer after returning from the Woodland Realm delivering cattle. Only, it’s not empty, is it, Mrs. Bargeman? There is the distinct smell of cow manure coming from your truck.”

“First off, I was transporting cows. Second off, it’s none of your business,” Bard said.

“Wrong. It’s the Master’s business, which makes it my business,” Alfrid said as police officers came out of the toll house as well.

“Oh come on, Alfrid, have a heart. We need this for the spring if we have any hope of anything growing,” Bard said.

“You may be full of crap, but your truck can’t be,” Alfrid said, “Come on, toss it out boys.”

“You heard him. Onto the side of road. Come on, get a move on,” the police captain said.

Bard said coolly, “Fine. The Master will have less money.”

Alfrid held up his hand. “What do you mean?”

“Well, if you toss this to the side, anyone can take it. The Master can’t tax it and people will not buy manure from his warehouses. And besides, without manure, people can’t grow things and they can’t eat and work for the good of the Master, I mean, Laketown. Think about it Alfrid. A slight indiscretion…” Bard slipped a hundred dollar bill into his jacket pocket, “… or a loss of so much money.”
Alfrid thought for a moment. “Stop.” The police officers did as they were told. “Ever the people’s champion, eh, Bard? Protector of the common folk? You might have their favor now, Mrs. Bargeman, but it won’t last.”

Percy opened the gate. Bard climbed back into her truck and rolled down the window.

“The Master has his eye on you; you’d do well to remember. We know where you live,” Alfrid said.

Bard smiled sweetly. “It’s a small town, Alfrid; everyone knows where everyone lives.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The sun began to rise over the small town near the Lonely Mountain. Bramble tried to see the buildings they passed. Something was off. It took the Hobbit several minutes to figure out what it was.

Bramble said, “Isn’t Laketown supposed to have a lake?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dun dun DUNNNNNNN!
Chapter XIV: Does It Almost Feel Like You've Been Here Before?

Chapter Summary

In which the proverbial monkey wrench is thrown into the Company’s dragon slaying plans.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The title of this chapter comes from the song “Pompeii” by Bastille. I consider it to be Fíli’s song.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What do you mean there’s no lake?” Thorin said.

“Laketown was built on a lake. I have seen nothing suggesting any sort of large body of water,” Bramble said.

The truck stopped. Bard opened the doors. She said to one of the men waiting at the docks, “You didn’t see them. They were never here. You can keep the manure.”

After two of the crates were moved, the Dwarves crawled out of the truck. Kíli was able to walk some if he leaned on his sister.

Thorin spoke with Bard. “What happened to Long Lake?”

“Huh. The Master was able to keep it a secret,” Bard said. She rubbed her eyes as she tried not to yawn. “The lake has been drying up. About sixty years I think. Where you are standing used to be nothing but water. The river is blocked at some point, but we can’t find where. Probably in the mountain, but I’m sure you’ve heard about the local worm problem.”

“I have,” Thorin said.

“Idad!” Kíli said, “Is that it?”

It was Erebor. The Lonely Mountain. Thorin’s heart was full of both joy and grief. 171 years later and he was able to see his home again.

He felt Bramble touch his arm. “It’s beautiful.”

“No place more so,” Thorin said quietly.

A teenage boy ran up to Bard and hugged her. “Ma! Our house, it’s being watched.”

“Great,” Bard said dryly. She looked at Thorin and then at her son. “Bain, I need you to get Sigrid. Tell her she needs to drive”
Bard walked with Bain to the grocery store and picked up four cans of beans, three boxes of macaroni, and eight apples. As they walked, Bard saw the various townsfolk under the Master’s pay watching her. Two “construction workers” ate sandwiches on the sidewalk outside of Bard’s house, just beside the closed wooden gate where Sigrid had parked Bard’s truck. The trucker tossed one of the spies an apple.

“You can tell the Master I’m done for the day,” Bard snarked before going into her house and slamming the door behind her.

“Ma!” Tilda said as she ran from the kitchen into her mother’s arms, “Where have you been?”

Sigrid came from her bedroom. “They’re in.”

Bain put the groceries on the counter. “Should I fetch them?”

“Bain, close the blinds. Sigrid, get them in,” Bard said.

“Who’s coming?” Tilda said.

The eldest of the Bargeman children rushed to the secret storm cellar entrance which was hidden in the floor of Sigrid and Tilda’s room. The teenager swung it open to face several irate Dwarves and one traumatized Hobbit.

“Stop your whining,” Balin growled at his brother as he shoved Dwalin up the stairs, “At least you didn’t have Bombur on top of you.”

“This way,” Sigrid said.

As the Dwarves marched into Bard’s kitchen, Tilda asked, “Ma, why are there people climbing out of our storm cellar? Will they bring us luck?”

Thorin and Bramble were the last to enter the kitchen. “Depends on who you ask,” Bramble said.

Bard covered her nose. “No offense, but you guys stink. Showers. All of you. Make them quick. The Master may be checking my water usage.”

“Five second showers. Scrub the worst off.” Thorin said, “Bargeman, do you have a spare toothbrush? The Hobbit has been asking for one.”

“Thorin, you are my favorite person right now,” Bramble said as she rubbed her eyes.

“Yes, I do. I’ll grab it,” Bard said.

“Scratch that. Bard is my favorite person right now,” Bramble said with a smile.

“You’re a Hobbit?” Tilda asked, “Aren’t you supposed to be smaller?”

“No. I am just the right size,” Bramble said, “Aren’t Mortal Men supposed to be taller?”

Tilda laughed. “Do you like playing with dolls?”

“I should probably get cleaned first. I don’t want to make your dolls smelly,” Bramble said.
Bard fetched the Company a variety of clothes and was going to start a load for the washer once the Company changed. “It may not be the best fit, but I figured you weren’t a group of nudist.” Bard tossed several blankets at them.

“Thank you,” Bramble said.

“I’ll take the kids to school, Ma,” Sigrid said.

“But I want to stay with the Dwarves and the Hobbit,” Tilda said.

Bofur laughed. “Sweetheart, your school is far more important. All we’re going to be doing is sleeping while you’re gone. You won’t be missing a thing.”

Thorin peered through the blinds at the front and looked shocked. He said softly, “A Dwarvish Wind-Lance.”

Bramble walked over to Thorin. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“He has,” Balin said “The last time we saw such a weapon, a city was on fire. It was the day the dragon came.”

The elder Dwarf told the story of Lord Girion and his attempt to slay Smaug with a Black Arrow. There was something off about the story. Something Bramble could not place.

“Had the aim of Men been true that day, much would have been different,” Thorin said with an underlying bitterness in his voice. It sat odd with Bramble.

“You speak as if you were there,” Bard said.

Thorin looked at their host warily. “All Dwarves know the tale.”

Bain stood before Thorin, anger brimming beneath his words. “Then you would know that Girion hit the dragon. He loosened a scale under the left wing. One more shot and he would have killed the beast.”

Dwalin laughed. “That’s a fairy story, lad. Nothing more.”

_That_ was what Bramble could not remember. She had heard rumor of Smaug’s weak spot a long time ago. It had not been from reputable sources and had no back-up in the historical record.

“Bain, you need to go to school with your sisters. Come on,” Bard said.

“But Ma, they’re insulting…”

“Shush. You’re already late,” Bard said. She kissed each of her children’s foreheads and gave them each a written excuse for being tardy. “I love you all very much.”

“Love you too,” the children grumbled before running out to Bard’s truck.

Thorin spoke curtly to Bard. “You took our money. Where are the weapons?”

“They will be here by the early afternoon,” Bard said as she moved to leave the room. “I suggest you rest up and eat. It’s what I am going to do. Stay out of my children’s bedrooms and don’t open the blinds. If you need anything, I am the first bedroom after the bathroom. I request you murder me while I’m awake and not asleep. Clean it up before my children come home.”
“Uh, lass, do you mind if we break a wooden spoon?” Óin asked.

Bard stopped and turned around slowly. “Why?”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Kíli lay on Bard’s bathroom floor with ten other Dwarves. He rested his head on Fíli’s lap while Óin examined where the arrow had gone in. Dori and Dís held his right arm while Thorin and Dwalin held Kíli’s left. Nori and Glóin held down his uninjured leg while Bifur and Bofur held down the offending limb. Balin, Bombur, Ori, and Bramble stood outside the bathroom with Bard, waiting to assist if needed.

“This will not be pleasant, but it looks like there will be nothing left in the wound, so that’s good,” Óin said, “Give him the spoon.

Fíli placed a wooden spoon in Kíli’s mouth for him to bite on for the pain. “On the count of ten, I am going to pull it out,” Óin said.

Kíli prepared himself, but by the count of three, Óin had already pulled out the arrow. The youngest of the Dwarves was not sure what happened after that, but when he came back to his senses he found he had broken the spoon in half while Dís and Fíli fussed over him.

“I stopped the bleeding. You’ll be fine. We’ll keep an eye out since you look worse than our Hobbit,” Óin said.

Bramble protested, but Óin shushed her. “You look like one of those zombie things, lass. Get some sleep. All of you.”

“I’ll clean up. Fíli, stay with your brother,” Dís said.

“Yes, Amad,” Fíli said.

Óin spoke to Bard quietly, “Do you have any oral antibiotics?”

“Um… Sigrid has some for acne, why?” Bard said.

“Because I’m hoping it’s just an infection. He is going to need something to help him through this. If we give him the right medicine, he can bounce back to his usual, energetic self,” Óin said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

There were some jobs which had to be done which one should never need to do. One of them was cleaning up your child’s blood.

Dís nearly broke down into tears several times as she cleaned. It only hit her just how close she had come to losing Kíli. The worst was over at least.

After cleaning herself up, Dís examined the photos scattered throughout the home. It was mainly of Bard’s children at various ages, some formal and some informal. There was a blonde haired man next to Bard in some of the photos that Dís assumed to be Mr. Bargeman. She laughed at a photo of Bard in a wedding dress while she shot a heart arrow using a long bow.

After Dís flipped the wash (not wishing to wake Bard for such a simple task), she found Thorin sitting in the kitchen at the little island. He idly stirred his spoon in a mug of coffee.

“Everyone else asleep?” Dís asked.
Thorin nodded his head.

Dís sat next to her brother and rested her head against his shoulder. “I forgot how the air smelled here, Thorin.”

He kissed the top her head in acknowledgment. “I did too.”

“Why was the professor so upset about the lake? It is disturbing to see a once great thing diminished, but she seemed as if she would have a panic attack,” Dís said.

“Baggins considered drowning Smaug to be the most likely way to kill the worm. With no more Black Arrows, our chances of success have diminished extensively,” Thorin said.

“There are other ways to slay a dragon,” Dís said as she felt a chill start from her marrow and move outward.

“There are, which is why I have not lost hope,” Thorin said.

Bombur entered the kitchen and yawned a “Good morning” to the Durin siblings as she began making up lunch. “So, how long do you think the husband has been dead?”

“What a cheery topic of conversation,” Dís said dryly.

“I meant no offense. I’ve seen the pictures up. It doesn’t look too long ago, but the woman has herself together enough to have a clean house and a sort of schedule with her children,” Bombur said.

Glóin huffed as she came into the room. “It was sometime after last Durin’s Day. One of the photo albums was open. A picture with the husband had a date said sometime in November. Less than a year, the poor lass.”

The three women looked at each other and had a silent conversation. Thorin backed away warily and went to the living room where the rest of the Company slept. Mothers were not to be trifled with.

The Dwarf king felt at ease almost the moment he saw his sister’s children. Fíli and Kíli slept on an L-shaped couch, their heads touching where the two parts of the couch met. Dwalin and Dori slept by the young princess and prince on the floor. Nori and Ori slept near their older sister. Balin and Óin had fallen asleep sitting up in individual armchairs. Bifur and Bofur slept in the middle of the floor, flanking Bramble. The Hobbit seemed to sleep deeper than the rest, for which Thorin was glad.

Glancing around the room, Thorin decided the best place to sleep was between where Balin slept and where Bramble rested his head. The second had no influence on his decision, of course.

The smell of potatoes being fried woke Bard up. She moved drowsily to the kitchen, wondering what the Dwarves were up to after such a short time of rest. Bard barely had time to process the scene when she was ushered to a seat at the kitchen island. A plate of potatoes, beans, and a toasted ham and cheese sandwich were placed in front of Bard.

“You’re too skinny. Eat up,” Bombur said.

“You didn’t have to cook for me,” Bard said as she picked at the potatoes with a fork.
“We cooked for everyone else. It would be rude not to cook for our host,” Bombur said.

Bard took her first bite of potatoes and groaned. They were wonderfully spicy, heavy on the pepper with a bit of Cajun seasoning. “Amazing.”

“Thank you,” Bombur said.

Fili dashed into the kitchen, grabbed two plates, and ran back out. Bard asked, “The one who was injured, he’s okay?”

“Kíli is fine, yes,” Dís said as she sat next to Bard, “He’s hungry which is a good sign.”

The two women ate in silence, watching the bustle in the kitchen. Bifur and Bofur kept being smacked by their kin when they tried to steal the food still cooking. Nori used the distraction for advantage and did steal the food early.

“Thorin and Bramble are still sleeping,” Ori said with a yawn.

Bard startled slightly. The name “Thorin” sparked a memory of her father’s mother telling an old story. She pushed it away to think over it later.

“Let them. My brother doesn’t sleep until he collapses and our Hobbit hasn’t slept much for several weeks,” Dís said.

Nori stabbed her potatoes. “I’m still pissed I bet on Bofur.”

“Bet on what?” Bard said.

“Shut up, Nori,” Ori said.

“Yeah, that’s my namad you’re talking about you pervert,” Bofur said.

Bard raised an eyebrow. “I thought she said she was a Hobbit.”

“She is,” Bofur said, “Bombur, Bifur, and I adopted the professor.”

“How many titles does the woman have?” Bard said.

“A few. She keeps earning them,” Balin said.

“But the bet?” Bard said.

“A childish pursuit by some of our more childish members,” Balin said.

“We had bets on if the Hobbit would have any of the members of the Company fall in love with her,” Glóin said.


“The long shot was Thorin and it seems to be the best since all of the others definitely aren’t true,” Nori said.

Dís covered her face. “Nori, doorway.”

Thorin leaned against the kitchen entrance, glaring at the Company. “Do you remember nothing of our conversation yesterday? Our Hobbit will be deeply distressed by this groups imagining of who
fancies who. Drop it, Nori.”

Nori gulped. “Yes, sir.”

Bramble walked in wearily. “What’s all the fuss about?”

“Nothing, Baggins,” Thorin said, “Just a bit of foolishness.”

The Hobbit patted his arm. “Okay. Is there food left?”

“I certainly would not starve my namad,” Bombur said cheerfully.

Bard sat in the living room, watching Fíli and her uncle working on Bard’s laptop. The rest of the Company was either in the living room or in the kitchen. Dís sat down next to Bard with a mug of tea for each of them.

“Weapons will be here soon?” Dís said.

“They will be here when the children get back,” Bard said, “I have contacts. The kids won’t even know.”

“Good.” Dís said, “I took the liberty to order the Company to clean as much of the house as they could as well as fix the shower head. There was a blockage.”

“Um, thanks,” Bard said, “You didn’t have to do that. You’re already paying me.”

“This is not about payment,” Dís said, “I took the liberty to order the Company to clean as much of the house as they could as well as fix the shower head. There was a blockage.”

“Um, thanks,” Bard said, “You didn’t have to do that. You’re already paying me.”

“This is not about payment,” Dís said, “I took the liberty to order the Company to clean as much of the house as they could as well as fix the shower head. There was a blockage.”

Bard looked down at her tea. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“As I am sorry for yours.”

The two widows drank in silence. Kíli threw a pillow at Fíli but accidentally hit Thorin. Thorin pretended to smother Kíli before ruffling his nephew’s hair.

“Does it get easier?” Bard asked.

“It has been over seventy years, almost triple the time we were married, and I still miss him every day. It is no longer a sharp pain which makes it impossible to breathe, but I still feel it. I knew I would most likely bury him before me but, there was an accident and…” She sniffed and cleared her throat. “He would have been proud of them as I am sure your husband would have been proud of yours.”

The sound of a truck parking inside Bard’s fenced backyard interrupted the conversation. The children rushed into the house.

“Ma! Everyone’s talking about Dwarves at school!” Bain said in alarm.

“Yes! They said one of the dock workers saw Dwarves sneaking around and how it’s fulfilling the prophecy of Durin’s Folk,” Sigrid said.

“I didn’t say they stayed here, though I really wanted to,” Tilda said, “Nothing exciting happens
here. Even with a dragon next door, it’s boring here.’’

“I hardly call waiting for fire to descend upon us to be boring,’’ Bard said, “I will fetch your supplies.’’

Tilda, Sigrid, and Bain cheerfully took the sugar cookies Bombur had made for them and sat in the living room. Bain spoke first. “Are you warriors?’’

“Some, not all,’’ Thorin said.

“Why are you hiding out here?’’ Sigrid asked.

“We ran into trouble going to our kin,’’ Thorin said.

“Are you a prince?’’ Tilda asked.

Thorin laughed. “Why do you say that?’’

“Because you look like a prince and everyone listens to what you say,’’ Tilda said.

“Looks can be deceiving,’’ Fíli said, “Did you know Bombur, the one who gave you the cookies, met her husband when she decapitated an Orc during a battle? He was grateful and they became friends, but he fell in love with her the first time he tasted her cooking.’’

Tilda looked shocked. “She’s a warrior?’’

“Not exactly,’’ Dís said, “Many of us have fought to defend ourselves, but fighting is not our job.’’

“Oh,’’ Tilda said as she nodded in understanding. “Are you going to be staying long?’’

“No, in two days’ time we have an appointment,’’ Kíli said.

The living room group moved into the kitchen as Bard placed weapons on the dining room table by the kitchen area. As she unwrapped the weapons, the Dwarves became disgusted.

Thorin picked up a plastic and metal weapon. “What is this?’’

“Cattle prod. It works just as well as a stun gun,’’ Bard said.

“And this?’’ Kíli asked as he picked up a rifle.

“M1 Carbine. It may be half a century old, but it still works,’’ Bard said.

Thorin and Dwalin looked at each other to have a silent conversation.

“We paid you for weapons. Real guns, swords, and axes!’’ Glóin said.

“It’s a joke! We’d be better off with the musket on the wall!’’ Bofur said as he threw a rusting machete onto the table. The other Dwarves did the same.

“You won’t find better outside the city armory in the sheriff’s office. All of the best weapons are there and locked up tight,’’ Bard said.

“Thorin,’’ Balin said, “Why not take what’s been offered and go? I’ve made do with less; so have you. I say we leave now.’’

“You’re not going anywhere,’’ Bard said.
“What did you say?” Dwalin growled.

“There are spies watching this house and probably every road in the town. You must wait until it gets dark. It’s a small town. Everything except the grocery store, the diner, and the Dairy Queen are closed by five,” Bard said, “Children, I have to run an errand. None of you leave until I return.”

“Ma?” Sigrid said.

“I’m fine, sweetheart,” Bard said, “I just have to check something.”

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It took Bard a half hour to get to the library and unobtrusively look up Dwarven history. There was not much on it, but there was one old book which looked ready to fall apart at too harsh of a touch. A genealogy showed the Line of Durin, among the many names was Thorin II, son of Thráin II, son of Thrór, King Under the Mountain.

“Oh no,” Bard said before running out of the library and back to her home.

“Ma!” Bain said when Bard burst into the house, “I tried to stop them!”

“How long have they been gone?” Bard said.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Major Plot Change #4: Long Lake dried up because of reasons (those reasons being Smaug).

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Idad - Uncle.

Amad - Mother.

Namad - Sister.
Chapter XV: In Which Burglary Should Be Left to Hobbits

Chapter Summary

Bramble tries to reason with the Dwarves not to steal from a police station.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Don’t say it,” Thorin said.

“Say what, you majestic idiot?” Bramble said not-so-innocently.

“We need weapons and you will not know which to get,” Thorin said.

“Guns, swords, bows and arrows if possible, lots of ammunition. Big whoop,” Bramble said.

Thorin did roll his eyes at the comment. They all became quiet as a car drove by, its headlights barely missing the Dwarves. “Nori, Fíli, go!”

The thief and the princess ran to the edge of the sheriff’s department. They worked together to disarm the security system before Nori unlocked a window leading to a storage space.

Thorin, Bofur, Nori, Fíli, and Bramble shimmied their way through the window while the others kept watch. (Kíli tried to come as well, but Dís smacked him over the head.) Bramble was not as useless as Thorin imagined her to be in the armory. She was able to pick out decent weapons and found the ammunition.

Unfortunately, Nori missed the silent alarm and the group found themselves at gun point.

The guards divided the group into two cells: one for the women and the other for the men. Dís was nowhere to be found.

Bramble banged her head against the cell doors. “48 hours? 48 hours and you’re back in jail again. I told you I could have done this myself!”

Thorin yelled back, “And you would have been caught!”

“And you could have broken me out! Instead, we’re stuck in here!” Bramble snapped back.

Thorin cursed in Khuzdul (to no one in particular) and Bramble joined him (though she aimed her cursing at the stubbornness of Dwarves). Nori tried to stealthily take out her earrings which doubled as lock picks.

“Both of you shut up!” Balin said. The two did so immediately. “It doesn’t matter either way. We just have to deal with the here and now.”

“And what do you suggest we do, nadad?” Dwalin said with no kindness in his tone.
“We need to plead out case as soon as possible,” Balin said.

“We have no leverage,” Thorin said.

“Which is why one should simply tell the truth,” Dís said as one of the sheriff’s deputies escorted her into the room, “Come on. We are going to see the Master.”

The cell doors opened. The sheriff and his deputies surrounded the Company and lead them out of the police department. Thorin made sure Fíli, Kíli, and Bramble were behind him and in the center of the group in case things turned sour. Dís and Dwalin walked at his side.

“What is going on?” Thorin said in Khuzdul.

“I went to that Alfrid fellow who is an assistant to the Master. I told them of our quest and how it was simply a… misunderstanding and we fully intended to pay for the weapons,” Dís explained in Khuzdul.

“We don’t have the money,” Thorin said.

“Oh, but we will,” Dís said.

“That is not a guarantee,” Thorin said.

“But they don’t know that,” Dís said, “I may have… exaggerated about our burglar.”

“What have you done?” Thorin growled.

“Just be your usual charming self, nadad,” Dís said in Westron with a sweet smile.

A crowd had gathered around the town hall. The Master and his assistant waited on the steps.

“What is the meaning of this?” the Master said, “You were caught stealing weapons which makes you enemies of the state. Are you mercenaries? Spies?”

Dís nodded to Balin, who stepped forward at her signal, “Master of Laketown, we come to you in peace. We are not mercenaries. We are the Dwarves of Erebor. This is our leader,” he motioned to the king.

Thorin said, “I am Thorin, son of Thráin, son of Thrór, King Under the Mountain! I have returned to reclaim the homeland of the Dwarves of Erebor!”

The crowd began whispering in shock of the news. They spoke of fairy stories and legends, gold and long-lost homes.

Thorin stepped forward. Before he could speak, Alfrid said, “And who can vouch for your claims? We only have the word of your supposed sister.”

Bramble raised her hand. “Me. I’ll vouch for him.” She stepped away from the Dwarves. “I am Dr. Bramble Baggins of Hobbiton University in the Shire. I am an expert about Elves, Hobbits, and dragons as well as currently studying about the Dwarves.”

Bramble tipped her head to Thorin before looking back up at the Master. “I am a Hobbit and we love our homes and dislike strangers. Yet I left my home to follow these Dwarves to reclaim Erebor.

“Now, I have traveled far with these Dwarves through great danger. Would I, an academic who is a homebody, go on a quest with just any passing stranger? Most certainly not! Thorin is King Under
the Mountain and, more importantly, a good man. If Thorin Oakenshield gives his word, then he will keep it.”

The crowd cheered. Some of the Dwarves looked a bit bleary-eyed. Thorin could barely hold back a smile as he nodded his thanks to Bramble. What she said in Rivendell came back to him. There was no duplicity in her.

Turning his thoughts away from the burglar, Thorin addressed the Master and the crowd. “I remember this town in the great days of old. Fleets of boats lay at harbor, filled with silks and fine gems. Wagons came from all over this continent to trade for the smallest bit of our wealth. This was no forsaken town on a dying lake! This was the center of all trade in the southwest, making Santa Fe nothing more than a mere trading post.”

The speech certainly had the town’s attention. The only reason Laketown still existed was because it was the county seat. Laketown considered Santa Fe uppity and overbearing on the dying town.

Thorin turned completely to the townsfolk. “I would see those days return. I would relight the great forges of the Dwarves and send wealth and riches flowing once more from the halls of Erebor!”

The crowd cheered. The Master was certainly interested now. Bard stepped forward through the crowd.

“Death! That is what you will bring upon us. Dragon fire and ruin. If you awaken that beast, it will destroy us all,” Bard said. She stopped in front of Thorin, tilting her head slightly to keep eye contact.

“You can listen to this naysayer, but I promise you this; if we succeed, all will share in the wealth of the mountain,” Thorin said, “The lake will return! You will have enough gold to rebuild Esgaroth ten times over!”

The crowd was in an uproar at the thought. Even if just the lake returned, the town would thrive. But the return of the true Esgaroth? It was beyond their greatest dreams.

Bard interrupted the celebration. “All of you! Listen to me! You must listen! Have you forgotten what happened to Dale? Have you forgotten those who died in the firestorm?” The people whispered what they did remember. “And for what purpose? The blind ambition of a mountain king so driven by greed, he could not see beyond his own desire!”

Thorin glared at Bard and was met with an equally intense stare of disdain. The masses were confused on how they should feel.

The Master spoke to calm the crowd. “Now, Mrs. Bargeman, your grief blinds you. Just because your husband did not take proper precautions going near the Lonely Mountain where bandits are known to reside, does not mean all who travel there are so reckless.”

“At least he tried to save this town, unlike you!” Bard snapped.

The Master held up his hands in a gesture of peace. “I did warn him of the dangers of the mountain, going there unarmed…”

“Because of your laws against weapons of any kind!” Bard accused.

“We must not, any of us, be too quick to lay blame. Let us not forget it was Girion, Lord of Dale, your ancestor, who failed to kill the beast!” The Master said as he pointed at Bard.
Thorin felt anger rise in his heart. This woman was the descendant of the one who could have saved Erebor. How dare she speak out against the dangers of the mountain and the dragon when it was her family’s fault Smaug lived?

Alfrid said, “It’s true. We all know the story: arrow after arrow he shot, each one missing its mark.”

Bard glared at Alfrid before looking back at Thorin. She spoke in a hushed, pleading tone. “You have no right to enter that mountain.”

The Dwarf king leaned down to Bard and said, “I have the only right.”

Bard closed her eyes in sorrow and defeat.

Thorin turned back to the Master. “I speak to the Master of the Men of the Lake. Will you see the prophecy fulfilled? Will you share in the great wealth of our people? What say you?”

The Master thought for several moments before smiling. “I say unto you... welcome! Welcome and welcome three times over!”

Thorin climbed the stairs of the hall. He and Bard glared at each other.

The Master threw open his arms and said, “Welcome Thorin, King Under the Mountain, and Bramble Baggins, Slayer of the Green Dragon!”

Thorin mentally patted himself on the back for not strangling Dís immediately. Bramble had the fortitude to not faint until the Company was left alone in a house the Master had prepared for them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I adore Santa Fe. It is one of the places I have considered moving to after I graduate because of how gorgeous it is. (If you ever get a chance, you can actually see a part of the Santa Fe Trail where the ruts left from the wagons still exist 200 years later.) Laketown, however, doesn’t like Santa Fe. I based it loosely on my grandparents’ hometown in Texas where our family visiting is considered newspaper worthy. (They have a stop light and a Dairy Queen! It’s a hip-hopping town!)

Nori’s earrings actually exist.

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Nadad - Brother.
Chapter XVI: Raise a Glass of Wine for the Last Time

Chapter Summary

Thorin and Dis have a heart to heart.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The title of the chapter comes from the lyrics of “I See Fire” by Ed Sheeran.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bofur fanned the passed-out Bramble with his hat as Thorin yelled at Dis. “MY BURGLAR IS NOT A DRAGON SLAYER!”

Nori and Bifur exchanged IOU’s (since everyone gave their money to pay Bard).

“Keep your voice down. They might hear you,” Dís said.

“THEY DON’T SPEAK KHUZDUL YOU LYING SON OF A…”

“You’ll insult yourself if you do that!” Dís said as she began yelling back.

“I think my hearing aids are going to burst,” Óin said as he took the offending technology out of his ears.

Dwalin and Balin watched the siblings fight as they snacked on popcorn. Fíli and Kíli looked at them in a mixture of awe and fear. Bombur stress cooked. The rest ignored them as they looked around the two story house for a place to sleep.

“Will you two shut up? Bramble is going to keep like this if you keep on fighting you idiots!” Bofur said.

“SHUT UP BOFUR!” Dís and Thorin yelled.

Bofur rolled his eyes before returning his attention to the Hobbit.

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It took another fifteen minutes for Thorin and Dís to calm down enough to have a somewhat rational discussion. They removed themselves to the laundry room in the house since every other room was occupied.

“Dís, we cannot promise them to slay the dragon. You have known this from the beginning,” Thorin said.

“I am aware of it, but they do not. I had to do something to get the lot of you out of prison,” Dís said.
“Lying about what we can offer will get us nowhere!”

“I was not lying! I believe the professor can get the Arkenstone. I believe the dragon can be defeated. You know why?” Dís poked his chest. “Because I believe in you, idiot.”

Thorin cleared his throat. “Um… oh.”

“Oh, nothing.” Dís punched his shoulder. “I wouldn’t have come along if I thought this was a suicide mission you dolt.”

Thorin looked away to collect himself before continuing. “It still does not solve our problem. I would have paid the town back later, but now they will be expecting something. This is going to be unpleasant to negotiate. I don’t trust the Master of this town.”

“Yeah. You would be a complete idiot if you did,” Dís said, “He’s a bit…”

“Slimy?”

“I would say ‘flexible in his morals’, but ‘slimy’ works as well,” Dís said.

“Hopefully, our association with him will be limited,” Thorin said.

Dís hugged her brother and he returned the affection. “I am sorry for the trouble I have caused you, nadad.”

Thorin sighed. “It is neither the first nor the last time. Apology accepted.” He smiled. “We’re almost home, Dís.”

“Almost, but not yet,” Dís said.

“It’s all down to my burglar, excuse me, dragon slayer,” Thorin said.

“Hmmm… you know, if you want people to at least pretend they don’t see you being love sick over the Hobbit, you might want to avoid endearments like ‘my burglar’.”

Thorin pulled back and glared at Dís. “I am not love sick.”

Dís patted his head. “Keep thinking that.”

“It is nothing you need to worry about.”

“Thorin, I will interfere if it is something I deem to be worrisome.”

“No berating?”

“Why would I berate you?”

Thorin lowered his head. “I have been acting a fool.”

“Uh huh. If you acting the fool is listening to counsel and smiling more, than I welcome it gladly.”

“I am not…”

“I know. I know. You like her. I get it. Everyone gets crushes, Thorin. It will pass. Just cut the ‘mine’ stuff.”

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It certainly would not pass. Dís knew Thorin well enough to know he did not get “crushes”. He was a bit flirty before the loss of Erebor, but nothing unusual for his age. Besides, love was precious to Dwarves. They only ever had One lasting love. If Thorin felt anything beyond a passing fancy, it would be his only love.

So, Dís subtly watched the Hobbit’s interactions with the Company and her brother.

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“So, what’s going to be my story?” Bramble asked at breakfast.

“What story?” Bombur asked.

“My dragon slaying story,” Bramble said.

“Um… you used your feminine wiles?” Bofur offered.

“I don’t have feminine wiles! If I had feminine wiles, I would not be grading freshman essays by myself on Friday nights which misspell ‘Hobbit’! I don’t have ‘gentleman callers’ as they say,” Bramble said.

Thorin choked on his orange juice. Dwalin cackled.

“Are you alright?” Bramble said.

“Fine. Perfectly fine,” Thorin said as he caught his breath.

“Are you sure? You look a bit flushed. Are you getting a fever? The river was rather cold,” Bramble said.

“I’m fine,” Thorin repeated as he punched himself in the chest.

“Anyway, we need to agree on a story now,” Bramble said.

“The problem, lass, is it is not very believable you are dragon slayer since you are rather…” Balin thought for a moment, “… tiny.”

“Yeah. You have no battle scars. Surely slaying a dragon would leave something behind,” Dwalin said.

Bramble became fascinated with her eggs.

“What do you have running in that smart little head of yours professor?” Bofur said.

“I um… have some… convincing scars,” Bramble said quietly.

“And you haven’t shown them off?” Kíli said before being slapped over the head by Fíli. “What was that for?”

“Shut up, Kíli,” Fíli said through gritted teeth.

“It’s um… it’s kind of embarrassing,” Bramble said.

“Listen, you’ve heard every embarrassing story about us, we will only laugh a little,” Bombur said.

Bramble gulped. “It’s not… if I wore a bathing suit, you would see it, but…” she rubbed her cheeks,
“… it is a bit more than I’ve shown.”

“We can leave if you wish,” Thorin said as he motioned to himself and the other male Dwarves.

“No. You need to know,” Bramble said. She climbed up onto her seat and pulled up her skirt to mid-thigh.

The Dwarves let out a mix of a hiss and an “oh”. There were burn scars all around Bramble’s thighs.

“Convincing?” Bramble asked.

“I’d say so,” Dwalin said.

Bramble let her skirt drop before sitting back down. “It goes all the way up to just before my um… main parts start.”

Dwalin elbowed Thorin who had looked away after a glance. “She’s sitting.”

Thorin looked back at Bramble. “If it is not… personal, what did happen?”

Bramble swallowed and covered her face. “I used to be a smoker and I set myself on fire when I fell asleep drunk. It’s why I fuss at Gandalf for smoking and why I’m scared of fire. It’s because I was an idiot. I’m blessed just to be alive, let alone able to walk or look semi-normal.”

“Ow,” Kíli said, “Sorry. I didn’t mean to be…”

“No. It’s fine. I’m embarrassed by my own stupidity, not by something truly horrifying,” Bramble said.

“Catching on fire counts as horrifying. Don’t belittle your hurts,” Thorin said.

Bramble finally looked up. “I doubt any of you…”

The Hobbit was than reminded by the Dwarves of the various injuries the Company had received based on reckless actions, including Fíli shooting Thorin in the backside when she was seven-years-old. Thorin did not tell the tale, but Kíli did with great enthusiasm.

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“Balin, Dwalin, Dís, Glóin, Fíli, and I will be visiting the Master to deal with supplies,” Thorin said to the group as he prepared to leave, “Óin will remain with Kíli. The professor wishes to visit the library to see if they have any materials she did not previously have access to. Bifur and Bofur will escort her. Bombur, Dori, Nori, and Ori, you may go where you wish as long as you stay in a group or go with the professor. Understood? No one is by themselves. I will at the latest see you at the banquet.”

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“So, what are we looking for?” Bofur asked as he leaned over Bramble’s shoulder as she worked through a roll of microfiche.

“Dragons, Laketown history, or anything specific to this area and this dragon,” Bramble said, “Are you sure you two won’t be bored?”

“We’re fine, professor,” Bofur said, “I think Bifur has gone to get some books on whittling.”
“Hmmm…” Bramble said, “There is definitely a slow descent into a more… government friendly view as the years go on.”

Bard sat next to Bramble rolling through her own microfiche. “Try to convince Oakenshield the mountain is not worth it.”

“I understand your feelings on this, but if the dragon is still alive, it will wake up eventually without the Company’s interference,” Bramble said.

“Is that what you are telling yourself to sleep at night?” Bard said.

“Yes,” Bramble said.

“Does it help?”

“Nope.”

Bard nodded. “You might want to check for bugs at where you are staying.”

“Already been taken care of,” Bofur said.

Bifur had come back and cast a glare at Bard. Bofur said to Bard, “Anything else you need, ma’am?”

“I have given my warning,” Bard said. She packed up her things and left them.

“Why does she think I can convince Thorin of anything? He acknowledges my existence and does not show particular malice to me. I am the Company’s burglar and am thus necessary. That’s about it,” Bramble said.

Bifur snorted back a laugh and Bofur elbowed his cousin. “People get funny ideas in their head, professor. Besides, I think it’s safe to say Thorin considers you a friend. Maybe Bard was trying to play that up?”

Bramble shrugged. “Maybe. Dwalin is a tad bit scarier than me.”

“That’s right,” Bofur said as he slapped her shoulder, “You’re the most approachable of all of us.”

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Bofur adjusted his jacket in the hallway mirror next to Thorin. They were about to leave for the banquet. It was the first time Bofur had been able to speak to Thorin without Bramble within earshot. “In the future, would you be so kind as to stop mooning over the professor in front of people?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Bofur,” Thorin said, “If I have made Baggins uncomfortable, I will gladly rectify it in any way I can.”

“It’s not that. The lass doesn’t seem to notice these things, so it’s good she has the rest of the family to watch out for her. No, Bard approached Bramble to persuade you. Others might try to do the same,” Bofur said.

“Anyone who thinks I show favor to the burglar would be mistaken,” Thorin said.

“Ha! Anyone with eyes thinks it,” Bofur said.

“I have not…”
“You have and you will continue to do so. Nothing has the three of us worried. Bramble hasn’t shown you any favor, so the shotgun doesn’t need to be brought out. Before you pull the ‘I’m a king’ line, I could care less if you ruled all of Arda, let alone Erebor. Just keep my newest sister safe from harm, would ya?”

“I try to protect all of the Company.”

Bofur shrugged. “Good enough… for now.”

Thorin noticed Bramble was deeply uncomfortable throughout the banquet. He was unsure why. It was a casual event and she was surrounded by friends. Questions about her “dragon slaying” were minimal after she gave an animated rendition of how she tricked a dragon into stepping onto thin ice and causing it to drown.

Fíli tapped his shoulder. “Nori and Ori wondered if it was alright for them to dance?”

“All of you are to enjoy yourselves of all the festivities you wish,” Thorin said.

Fíli grinned and kissed his cheek. “Thank you idad.” She ran off to tell the younger members of the group.

“I mean no rudeness, your majesty, but why a female heir? As far as I know, there are no female rulers of Dwarves in your history,” the Master said.

Before he could snark a response, Thorin felt Dís kick him to remind him of his manners. “Fíli is the eldest of my sister’s children. By the time Kíli was born, I was set on her being my heir. She has a heart for her people as well as being clever and efficient.”

“Ah. Indeed. All good marks of a ruler,” the Master said.

Dwalin muttered in Khuzdul, “All things you don’t have you selfish...”

Balin kicked Dwalin. “My brother was just complementing the meal.”

Dís and Thorin walked around the room after sitting for several hours. Fíli and Kíli had acquired violins and amused the group which had come to the banquet. The rest of the Company had scattered around the room either drinking or dancing.

“Kíli is missing more notes than usual,” Thorin said.

“That’s because he’s getting sicker. Óin said Kíli needs to rest more,” Dís said.

“We’re leaving tomorrow,” Thorin said.

“I am aware,” Dís replied.

Thorin groaned and rubbed his eyes. “He should be there.”

“My son also needs to recover. Would you rather Kíli come to Erebor a few days after you have reclaimed it or to be buried in it?”

He snarled, “That’s not what I meant.”
“Shush. I know. I know it’s not. Please, tell him he cannot go. I will stay with him.”

“Dís…”

“Would you rather Fíli stay? She might go if I remain behind.”

“It’s your home too.”

Dís gave him a side hug as her other hand held a glass of wine. “I know it is. I also know you concentrate better when you are not worrying about your loved ones’ safety.”

Thorin looked away and took a sip of wine. Dís raised her glass. “To the Line of Durin, may it continue to serve its people.”

“To the Line of Durin,” Thorin said, clicking his glass with hers.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bramble made her way outside into the moonlit night. She leaned against a plaster pillar as the autumn air cooled her. Though she had danced little, she had cheered for Bofur as he soundly beat all of the Men in a drinking contest. The Hobbit placed her hand on her stomach, trying to calm it as she became nauseated at the thought of what she had to do the next day.

“Bofur is going to have a terrible hangover tomorrow,” Thorin said.

Bramble looked over and saw the Dwarf king leaning against the pillar next to her, watching the moon. She said, “Probably. Or maybe he will drink lots of water and go to bed.”

Thorin laughed. “I doubt it.”

Bramble smiled. “There is always a possibility.”

After standing in comfortable silence together for a while as they watched the moon and stars, Thorin said, “You are always such a cheerful soul, burglar;”

“I have to be. I’m a woman,” Bramble said with a shrug.

Thorin blinked. “I don’t see how that has to deal with anything. Bofur is the most cheerful person I know and he is a man.”

Bramble sighed. “Forget it. You wouldn’t understand.”

As she turned to leave, Thorin grabbed her hand. “I’ll try.”

Bramble faced Thorin again and clasped his hand between her own. She dared not look up. “I am… a middle-age spinster. If I were a middle-age bachelor, it would be different. As a man, people would think I chose my life. As a woman, it means nobody wanted me, which isn’t true at all. I have had several offers, but I didn’t want those fortune hunters. Believe it or not, I am quite rich in the Shire.”

“You are devoted to your craft. Why do your people not realize that? What shame is there in such? Teaching and preserving history are honorable crafts.”

“A man may have an occupation and a spouse, but a woman may only have one or the other. I love words and stories. I could never give them up simply because someone wanted me to be an ornament in their home.”
“I know you love words and stories,” Thorin said quietly. He tilted her chin up with his free hand. “Anyone who thought of you as something to gather dust is beyond an idiot.” He tilted his hand to cup her cheek.

Bramble leaned into his hand and closed her eyes. “You are really being sweet.”

“I am speaking only the truth. Why must you be cheerful because you are a woman?”

“Men may grumble and complain about, say, forgetting their handkerchief. It is considered their right. The world must fit them. As a woman, I am commanded to be small and fit to the whims of all others.” Bramble opened her eyes. “I am far too selfish to do such. I will not be ignored. I do find happiness in many things. I guide people’s focus on that and make them ignore the things I can quietly change without their notice so I will have more of a place in this world, at least enough to stretch my legs.”

“So your cheer…”

“It is not an act. I truly am happy in many things. I just… exaggerate. I deemphasize things which disturb me.”

“In the van when we traveled and I sat next to you…”

“It’s why I stretched out more. I didn’t like you taking up so much space as to not give me my own. If I said anything, it would be awkward and you would think me silly since I am almost a foot shorter than you.”

Thorin dropped the hand cradling Bramble’s face. He would have stepped back, but Bramble kept her grip on his hand. “I would not have intruded…”

“I like where you are right now and I liked sitting next to you. I just wanted a change in arrangement so my legs didn’t cramp up.”

“Still, if I have ever caused you discomfort…”

“You have always been a gentleman in that regard, Thorin.” Bramble smiled and took his other hand. “Don’t you see how awkward it would have been to just state it outright? To whine? Complain? You would think it an affront to my honor. It isn’t. It is just an annoyance.”

“You will tell me of such in the future.”

“Thorin…”

“You are my… friend. I want the best for you in all things. I will never think less of you.”

“Now you’re being ridiculously sweet again.”

“I’m not. I am only telling you what is true.”

Thorin rested his forehead against hers as their hands intertwined. Bramble hoped he did not hear the hitch in her breath. He had just told her he thought of her only as a friend, not as anything more. It would not do to make him uncomfortable with her romantic notions.

“Bramble, thank you for speaking to me so candidly.”

“Thank you for listening, Thorin.”
She was unsure how long they stood together. The party still went on, but Bramble found herself far more interested in the way the callouses of Thorin’s hands rubbed against her skin, the warmth of his breath, and how she could almost hear his heartbeat.

“We have the last part of our journey tomorrow,” Thorin said, his voice low and close enough Bramble could feel the vibrations coming from his chest.

“Yes. We do.”

Thorin led her back to their lodgings, keeping hold of one her hands. He kept his hold on her until she was in front of her room. Once again, he rested his head against Bramble’s, this time with one hand behind her neck.

“And on your eyelids crown the god of sleep,/Charming your blood with pleasing heaviness,/Making such difference ’twixt wake and sleep/As is the difference betwixt day and night/The hour before the heavenly harnessed team/Begins his golden progress in the east.”

“Henry IV Part I,” Bramble said a bit more breathlessly than she would have wished.

“I hoped it would please you,” Thorin said. He kissed her hands. “Good night, dear burglar.”

Bramble was certain she had the stupidest grin on her face once she left Thorin. She did sleep well that night, not dreaming of dragons or other nasty things.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: *face palm* They are such idiots.

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Idad - Uncle.

Nadad - Brother.
Dís had come to the conclusion Thorin was hopelessly in love with the Hobbit and Bramble was completely oblivious to it. It tore at Dís she could do nothing to help her brother, but Dís would never force someone to love another, even for Thorin’s happiness. Admittedly, she had been suspicious of it since Thorin agreed not to pay for the food they ate in Bag-End. Thorin was always concerned about debts. To not pay their host and potential burglar? Dis knew from that moment on Bramble would be special in Thorin’s life.

Said Hobbit currently looked at the pile of armor and cloaks provided by Laketown for the Company’s procession to the mountain. “Why are we getting these… cloaks?” Bramble said.

“It makes us look more regal,” Dori said.

“Did they get these from a high school drama department?” Ori said.

“Smells like teen perspiration,” Nori said as she wrinkled her nose.

“We’ll take it off as soon as we are out of sight of the town,” Thorin said.

“Oh, come on idad. I thought I didn’t have to deal with cooties anymore,” Fíli said.

Thorin ruffled his niece’s hair. “They do not have cooties.”

“Idad! My hair!” Fíli groaned.

“You’re going to be wearing a helmet,” Thorin said. He put her in a headlock and earnestly messed with Fíli’s hair.

“Idad! Idad!” Fíli said as she tried not to giggle.

“Nope,” Thorin said.

“AMAD!” Fíli called out.

“Thorin… she’s ticklish at the elbows,” Dís teased.

“AMAD!” Fíli cried.
Thorin finally relented. He kissed the top of Fíli’s head before letting her go. “Get dressed.”

“I was getting dressed before you began acting like a baby,” Fíli mumbled as she snatched a cloak from Dori.

As she finished up her toast, Bramble felt a cloak being placed over her shoulders. “It’s about your size,” was all Thorin said as he tied it at her neck. It was made of heavy red velvet which smelled of a mixture of mothballs, dust, and cheap cigarettes.

“Thanks,” Bramble said.

His hands lingered on her shoulders for a moment before he released his hold. “The Company’s burglar should always be recognized as a part of the Company.”

Bramble smiled slightly and looked down at her hands. “I don’t care if other people recognize me only if you and the Company do.”

“And we do,” Thorin said. He said in a softer tone, “I do recognize you, burglar, as our Hobbit.” He left Bramble so he could shoo the rest of the Company to finish preparations.

When Bramble looked up, Dís stood next to her. “Have you not had your hair braided, Hobbit?”

“Um, no. I figured I would just put it up into a pony tail.”

Dís stood behind Bramble and placed several pins and ties into Bramble’s hand. “It’s just a quick job. Most Dwarves have straight hair, but Fíli had the sweetest curls before she hit puberty.”

Bramble sat compliantly. Dís did up Bramble’s hair in a braid bun with almost no hassle. “There. So it won’t get into your eyes.”

“Thank you,” Bramble said, “It was kind of you.”

Dís whispered in Bramble’s ear, “Keep him safe and sound, dear Hobbit. He’s the only brother I have left.”

“I will,” Bramble said.

Thorin kept Bramble close to him as they made their way through the crowd and to the vehicles. They made it to the jeeps far slower than the Dwarf king wished.

Bramble grabbed his hand to get his attention. “You do know we’re one short; where’s Bofur?”

“If he’s not here, we leave him behind,” Thorin said, though he wished he could say otherwise.

“We have to, if we’re to find the door before nightfall. We can risk no more delays,” Balin said.

Bramble muttered under her breath, “Well, we shouldn’t be having a parade, should we?”

Thorin helped put the last of the supplies into the jeep he would be driving. Kíli limped towards a jeep, but Thorin put his arm out to stop his nephew. “You’re hurt. You need to heal. We must travel
with speed and you will slow us down.”

Kíli smiled, thinking it was one of Thorin’s jokes. “What are you talking about? I’m coming with you.”

“No,” Thorin said simply.

Fíli popped her head out of the jeep she was already in, glaring at her uncle.

Kíli said, “I’m going to be there when the door is opened, when we first look upon the halls of our fathers, Thorin.”

Thorin placed a hand on his nephew’s shoulder. “Kíli, stay here. Rest. Join us when you’re healed.”

Kíli stared at Thorin in shock, pain evident in his face. Thorin could not stand to look at him any longer. Puppy eyes did not work on him. No. They did not. He just had to pack. That was it.

Óin went to Kíli. “I’ll stay with the lad. My duty lies with the wounded.”

Fíli marched up to Thorin. “Idad, we grew up on tales of the mountain. Tales you told us. You can’t take it away from him!”

Thorin sighed, “Fíli…”

“I will carry him, if I must!” Fíli said.

Thorin spoke softly. “He is ill, Fíli. If the dragon still lives, do you think he could run? Do you think we would leave him behind? No. We would not do that. One day you will be king, and you will understand. I cannot risk the fate of this quest for the sake of one Dwarf, not even my own kin.”

The heir of the Line of Durin shoved her way past Thorin.

“Fíli, don’t be a fool. You belong with the Company.”

“I belong with my brother,” Fíli stated before joining Kíli and Óin.

Dís walked up to Thorin and kissed his cheek. “Thank you. Good luck.”

Before Thorin could respond, music began to play, announcing the arrival of the Master. The speech was dull, but thankfully short. The Dwarf king did not miss the look between Dís and Bramble which seemed to be a silent conversation.

When the speech was finished, the Dwarves waved before entering their jeeps. The passengers rolled down the windows and waved to the people as the music and cheering followed the Company out of Laketown.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bofur would never hear the end of it. He had slept in on the day they were to reclaim Erebor! How come no one had woken him? Surely his siblings or his cousin had noticed.

When he arrived at the main square, it was to the scene of Dís staring down the sheriff. “At least get me a car!”

“Ma’am, we have no deal with this,” the sheriff said.
“It isn’t a deal! It’s decency! My son is ill!” Dís said.

“Unless you have money to pay for the ambulance and the hospital stay up front, you won’t be getting any help. There is no need to be hysterical,” the sheriff said.

“HYSTERICAL!”

Bofur grabbed Dís’ arm before the princess could strike the government official. “We understand, lad. We’ll move along.”

Dís glared at Bofur. “What are you doing?”

“There’s somewhere else we could go,” Bofur said.

Bard opened the door after some insistent knocking. Dís, Fíli, Kíli, Óin, and Bofur looked at her expectantly. “No. I’m done with Dwarves. Go away.”

Bofur stopped the slamming door with his foot. “No one will help us; Kíli is sick. He’s very sick.”

Bard looked at Kíli. He was unusually pale, but she could not see how they could not just take him to a hospital, even if they had to borrow a car.

Dís’s demeanor changed from a harried mother to a royal lady. “Bard, I ask you once again as a mother, to help me. If you do, I swear upon the bones of the first Dwarves the Line of Durin will be in your debt.”

Bard groaned and rubbed her eyes. “I say yes for the first, but I do expect the second to be fulfilled. The Master refuses to let us leave this town.”

“Is there no one else who can help us?” Fíli asked.

“Many would if they could, but the Master would hinder them as well,” Bard said, “Bring him in.”

The Company drove for three hours before having to abandon their vehicles. Even as off-road capable vehicles, the jeeps could not deal with the chaos which surrounded Smaug’s destruction.

The Company save Bramble gathered their supplies. The Hobbit huddled in the backseat of the jeep she had ridden in.

Bombur spoke to her quietly. “Bramble, namad, what’s wrong?”

Bramble’s body shook. “This place is wrong. It’s sick. It’s worse than Mirkwood. There was life there, even if much of it was evil. This…” She laughed and sobbed at the same time. “It’s a desert and this is the first time I have felt death from the land.”

Thorin gently moved Bombur aside. “I am sorry, but it was not always this way. Do you want to make this place better, Hobbit?”

Bramble nodded her head. Thorin held out his hand. “We have to stop Smaug. I need you with me, Bramble. I cannot do this without you.”

The Hobbit hesitantly took Thorin’s hand. When she had both feet on the ground, Bramble
immediately collapsed. Thorin caught her, so she did not touch the ground.

“It’s poison. The ground is poison. Don’t touch it,” Bramble whispered.

Thorin helped her sit in the jeep. “We won’t, but we need to keep moving. Do you consent to be carried?”

Bramble nodded. “I’m not a damsel in distress.”

“I know, but let me help you,” Thorin said.

Bramble rode Thorin’s back, her arms around his neck and his arms around her legs. He tried to ignore how he touched her higher on her legs than usually was proper. Thorin berated himself as he was almost 200 years old and Bramble was ill.

It lasted all of fifteen minutes before Bramble asked to be let down. She leaned heavily against Thorin, but they continued walking.

“We need to fix this, Thorin,” she kept saying over and over again.

“We will. I promise,” Thorin always replied.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

They had walked for several hours when Thorin realized he knew this area well. It was the first time he actually knew where he was. Bramble walked with Bifur, allowing Thorin to run up the embankment overlooking the valley. The rest of the Company joined him as they looked at a ruined city.

“What is this place?” Bramble said.

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

Thorin looked up at the sun and then at his watch. “The sun will soon reach midday; let’s find the hidden door into the mountain before it sets. This way!”

Bramble grabbed Thorin’s arm. “Wait... is this the overlook? Gandalf said to meet him here. On no account were we…”

Thorin interrupted her. “Do you see him? We have no time to wait upon the wizard. We’re on our own.” He grabbed Bramble’s hand and pulled her to follow him. “Keep moving. We’re almost there.”

Bramble held his hand tighter. “Lead the way.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Both “Die Trying” by Art of Dying and “Look After You” by The Fray were played during the writing of this chapter.

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Idad - Uncle.
Amad - Mother.

Namad - Sister.
Chapter XVIII: The Last Light

Chapter Summary

They find the hidden door.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thorin stabbed his sword into the ground. He was lost. AGAIN! He remembered his Mother saying once, “Thorin, you get lost trying to find your room when you’re standing outside it. How in the world do you expect to travel?”

Well, Thorin somehow made his way in the world. Admittedly, it was mostly by accident, but he still took it as a win.

The only reason they had even made it this far up the mountain was because Balin and Bramble kept giving quiet hints to Thorin. He appreciated the way they did it so it did not make him look weak or at least not look like a complete idiot.

“Anything?” Thorin asked.

“Nothing!” Dwalin said.

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

Bramble had wandered off on her own. She whistled at the rest of the Company. “Up here!”

The group ran up to her and saw stairs carved into the side of one of the great statues. One could barely tell it was not a part of the design and a person could climb up it.

Thorin put his hand on Bramble’s shoulder and squeezed. “You have keen eyes, professor.”

Bramble seemed to beam at the compliment. At least, he hoped she beamed. Thorin questioned himself if he had crossed the line by touching her. It had not been out of personal desire, but simply joy at finding the way to the door. His thoughts went round and round in circles as they climbed.

There was a small shelf where the group could stand which stopped in front of a somewhat smooth stone wall. “This must be it. The hidden door,” Thorin said. He held up the key to the Company as he smiled broadly. “Let all those who doubted us rue this day!”

The group cheered loudly, save for Bramble, who let out a quiet “whoop”.

Dwalin rubbed his hands together. “Right. We have our key, which means somewhere, there is a keyhole.” He began patting down the wall, trying to find the said keyhole.

Thorin walked to the edge of the clearing and looked out at the setting sun. “The last light of Durin’s Day will shine upon the keyhole,” he said mostly to himself.
“There is still time,” Bramble said. She patted his shoulder. “You’ll find it.”

Bramble’s word barely calmed Thorin. The sun went lower and lower. “Nori!”

The thief ran up to the wall and began tapping different places with a spoon. She placed a cup against the stone to try to hear any hollow points. Dwalin began shoving at the wall.

“We’re losing the light,” Thorin said. He unconsciously grabbed Bramble’s hand.

“Come on!” Dwalin said as he kicked at the wall.

“Be quiet! I can’t hear when you’re thumping you great oaf,” Nori said.

“I can’t find it... it’s not here! It’s not here,” Dwalin said.

The sun was about to disappear entirely. “Break it down!” Thorin commanded.

Dwalin, Glóin, and Bifur began smashing at the wall with their weapons. The weapons lost.

“It’s no good! The door’s sealed. It can’t be opened by force. Powerful magic is on it,” Balin said.

The sun was gone.

Thorin let go of Bramble’s hand. He stumbled forward and tried to find a catch in the wall.

There was nothing.

Not bothering with the gloves, Thorin opened up the map. “The last light of Durin’s Day will shine upon the keyhole. That’s what it says. What did we miss?”

Erebor had fallen again only this time it was Thorin’s fault. He had failed. Everyone on the quest had almost died at some point. Bramble had been taken away from the safety of her home to be thrown to the dangers of the wilds. Azog still lived. The Elves hunted them. Laketown was dying. Fíli had been injured. Fíli hated him.

It was all Thorin’s fault.

His voice caught. “What did we miss, Balin?”

“We’ve lost the light. There’s no more to be done. We had one chance,” Balin said quietly, “Come away, it’s over.”

The Dwarves began to leave.

“Wait a minute!” Bramble protested.

“You wait,” Glóin grumbled.

“Where are they going? You can’t give up now!” Bramble exclaimed.

Thorin held the key in his hand, looking at the false piece of hope before dropping it.

Bramble tried to grab his arm but he shook her off. “Thorin... you can’t give up now.”

The way she spoke nearly killed Thorin. He threw the map at Bramble, not daring to look at the disappointment in her face.
Thorin was not sure how he was able to walk, even for a short time. He collapsed onto a boulder just around the turn of the secret way. He wished he could return back to the rocks from which Dwarves had been made.

After Azog’s attack, Gandalf had said it was not Thorin’s time yet to die. Was this what he was meant to live for? To fail? To lead the people he cared about most to ruin? He had wished he had never woken up from the Halls of Mandos.

He heard Bramble screaming. “The last light! The keyhole! Come back! Come back! It’s the light of the moon! The last moon of autumn!”

Thorin ran. It was a riddle. It was a stupid riddle. Nothing could be simple with Dwarf doors, could it? Of course Bramble figured it out. She had saved herself by winning a riddle game. She figured out how to get out of Mirkwood.

Bramble scrambled around the shelf looking for the key. She accidentally kicked it off the clearing.

Thorin was there just in time to stomp on the leather string attached to the key. Bramble looked ready to faint. Thorin kept his eyes locked with hers as he slowly knelt down to pick up the key.

He grinned at her and she had just as ridiculous of a smile as he did. The Dwarves had made their way back up to the door as Thorin stood up.

Thorin placed the key into the keyhole and turned it slowly. He pushed at the door. After slight resistance, it swung open, stopping with a soft thump.

The tunnel was lit only by the moonlight, but it was enough. He was home. “Erebor.”

“Thorin…” Balin tried to speak but choked back a sob. Thorin placed a hand on Balin’s shoulder, not needing words to express what they both felt.

Home.

Thorin stepped into the mountain, running his hand against the walls, the texture just as he remembered it.

“I know these walls… this stone.”

He remembered running in Erebor as he played tag with Dwalin while waiting on the birth of his sister. His mother would sing her children to sleep with songs about the days before the Dwarves came to Erebor. Thrór showed the craftsmanship of his people to his grandchildren before the madness took him. Thráin eagerly showed Thorin the land surrounding Erebor and taught his son about the people Thorin was to protect and love when he was king. Frerin learned how to create a necklace for their mother’s birthday. There was beauty and craft which went into making the Lonely Mountain a home.

“You remember it, Balin. Chambers filled with golden light,” Thorin said.

“I remember,” Balin said softly.

The rest of the Dwarves walked into the mountain with reverence. Bramble waited outside until Thorin motioned for her to stand by him. When she came to him, he took her hand and squeezed it with affection.

There was a carving above the door. It was the throne of Erebor with the Arkenstone above it. Glóin
read aloud the inscription. “Herein lies the seventh kingdom of Durin’s Folk. May the heart of the mountain unite all Dwarves in defense of this home.”

“The throne of the king,” Balin said.

“Is the Arkenstone above it?” Bramble said.

Thorin’s heart twisted. He may have been home, but none of them were safe. A dragon waited for them. It all would be for nothing without the Arkenstone.

He said softly, “Yes. That, dear burglar, is why you are here.”

Bramble walked arm and arm with Balin for two turns down the tunnels, away from the light. “So… Balin… it’s a large white jewel?”

“Yes,” Balin said.

“That’s it? I imagine there’s quite a few down there,” Bramble said.

“There is only one Arkenstone. You’ll know it when you see it,” Balin said.

“Right,” Bramble said. She let go of Balin’s arm and rubbed her eyes. One white jewel. She knew it was special, but there had never been any photographs or drawings of it in any of the books she had read. The carving was the only clue she had, and it had been a bit more abstract than she wanted.

“In truth, professor, I do not know what you will find down there. You needn’t go if you don’t want to. There’s no dishonor in turning back,” Balin said with utter kindness.

Bramble stood up straighter. “No, Balin, I promised I would do this and I have to try.”

Balin chuckled. “It never ceases to amaze me.”

“What does?” Bramble asked.

“The courage of Hobbits. Go now with as much luck as you can muster.”

“I am neither brave nor lucky,” Bramble said, “Well, the last part isn’t true. I have all of you as friends. There is definitely some luck there.”

Balin chuckled again and gave Bramble a hug. “What a smooth talker. May it help you. If there is, in fact, a live dragon down there… don’t wake it up.”

Bramble nodded before letting Balin go. She began walking further down the tunnel. She had only gone a few feet when Bramble heard footsteps behind her.

“Burglar,” Thorin said.

Bramble spun around and clutched her heart. “By all the… Thorin, I’m trying to be sneaky.”

Thorin nodded. He took her hands, tracing the outside of her palms. The Dwarf kept his gaze firmly on their hands. “The Arkenstone will fit within your hands. It’s not the size of your head or anything close to it. It gives off both warmth and a soft glow. Think a prism only much brighter. I had to stare at the thing every time I stood in the throne room to talk with my grandfather. Balin has seen it only a few times. I thought it might help you.”
“That is actually helpful,” Bramble said.

Thorin looked up at her and said rapidly, “If you find the dragon, run and get us. Scream until your lungs hurt. I don’t care if it seems cowardly, but I will get you out of there if you call. There is no shame in needing help. Smaug is the most destructive thing I have ever seen and I have seen some terrible things since we lost Erebor. I will not lose you to the beast.” He kissed her forehead.

Bramble closed her eyes. “I will.”

Thorin let go of Bramble’s hands and stuck his own into his jean pockets. “Blessings upon you, Baggins.”

Bramble opened her eyes. Thorin looked at her with such open admiration. It made her… the polite word would be bold, though Bramble thought it would be classified as impertinent if she were honest with herself. Facing certain death did make people act more rashly.

“Thorin, um, can I ask for something?”

“Anything,” he said with no hesitation.

“I, um, you see, you can definitely say no if you’re uncomfortable with it. You can chalk this up to me about to do my one stupid thing of this quest and I am losing my mind a little, unless you are completely okay with it, then it was totally on purpose.”

Thorin nodded and watched her closely.

“You see, I, um, you, if we could… I like you and… as in I like you… I have wanted to kiss you for a while and…”

Bramble was unable to finish as Thorin wrapped her in his arms and kissed her. Bramble threw her arms around his neck and stood on her tiptoes. He placed a hand behind her neck to steady her and dipped her slightly. She tangled her fingers in his hair and pulled herself as close as she could, trying to bury herself in his warmth. Both of their lips were chapped and their noses bumped together, but all it did was make Bramble kiss him harder.

Thorin broke off the kiss and rested his head against Bramble’s. “I’ve wanted to do such for a while now too.” He kissed her lightly on the lips, both of them smiling.

“Definitely want more,” Bramble said.

“You are going to have to come back.”

Bramble nodded and kissed him again, taking her time and trying not to show her desperation. “I will come back.”

“And I will be there for you,” Thorin said.

They reluctantly disentangled themselves. Thorin kissed her forehead. “Every blessing I have goes with you, Bramble.”

The burglar walked backwards so she could look at him for as long as possible. Once she was out of sight, Bramble faced forward and began chanting to herself, “Find the jewel. Don’t wake the dragon. Snog Thorin. Find the jewel. Don’t wake the dragon. Snog Thorin…”
A/N: Yay! Kissing! Finally!
Chapter XIX: Waiting for the World to Fall

Chapter Summary

Tauriel is here to kick butt and chew bubblegum and she’s all out of bubblegum.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The chapter title comes from the song of the same name by Jars of Clay from *Music Inspired by The Chronicles of Narnia*.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tauriel could not remember the last time they had taken an Orc alive. For some reason, Thranduil wanted to interrogate this disgusting creature, even in the heart of his kingdom in the throne room. Tauriel stood back, her hands ready to whip out her long knives at the slightest hint of antagonism while Legolas had his own knife at the Orc’s throat. Thranduil paced as he spoke with the mutant.

Thranduil said, “Such is the nature of evil. Out there in the vast ignorance of the world it festers and spreads, a shadow grows in the dark. A sleepless malice as black as the oncoming wall of night. So it ever was; so will it always be. In time, all foul things come forth.”


“Not fourteen; not any more. The young one, the black-haired archer, we stuck him with a poisoned arrow,” the Orc growled. He focused on Tauriel and licked his lips at her distress. “The poison’s is in his blood. He’ll be choking on it soon.”

“Answer the question, filth,” Tauriel said.

“Sha hakhtiz khunai-go, Golgi!” *I do not answer to dogs, She-Elf!*

Tauriel whipped out one of her knives while Legolas applied more pressure to the Orc’s throat. “I would not antagonize her.”

Tauriel said, “You like killing things, Orc? You like death? Then let me give it to you!” She went to slash the Orc’s heart out when the king spoke.

“Farn! Tauriel, ego! Gwao hi.”

Tauriel took a deep breath and regained her composure before leaving. The Orc snarled at her as she left.

“I do not care about one dead Dwarf,” Thranduil said.

Tauriel flinched. She *did* care and she had to do something about it. Kíli had become a sort of friend to her. How could she abandon him?
It took a day for Tauriel to get out of the Woodland Realm. Legolas followed soon after. He knew Tauriel would need him and Tauriel knew he would come for her. They met up at the border of Louisiana and Texas. After a few words, Tauriel’s motorcycle was tied down to the back of Legolas’ truck and they made their long trek across Texas.

“Why do you protect these Dwarves, Tauriel?” Legolas asked as they drove.

“Because they are chased by an evil not of their own making,” Tauriel said.

“No, there is something else.”

Tauriel became silent and looked out the window.

“Did my father say something to you? You’ve been acting strange since you reported to him after we captured the Dwarves,” Legolas said.

“I’m… I’m sorry if I…”

Legolas pulled over to the side of the road. “Tauriel, did my father say something to you? Whatever it is, I will rectify it.”

Tauriel blurted out, “Do you have a crush on me?”


Tauriel looked at her hands. “Your father said…”

Legolas smacked his head against the steering wheel. “My father thinks every woman man is in love with me. Ugh. He’s so embarrassing.”

“So you don’t…”

“No! I mean, you are one of the most wonderful people I’ve met but… I just don’t see you that way,” Legolas said.

Tauriel sighed and sunk into her seat. “You have no idea how relieved I am to hear you say it.”

Legolas shivered. “Is that why you’ve been avoiding me?”

Tauriel shrugged. “Maybe.”

Legolas gave a half-hug to Tauriel. “I am sorry Father made you uncomfortable, mellon. If anyone does it again, even me, you will tell me, won’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Good. Let’s hunt some Orc.”

Kíli’s fever had worsened as the day progressed. He had become incoherent, barely responding to Fíli and Dís. The group had to place him on the kitchen island counter so Óin could treat him with more ease. Kíli rested his head against Fíli’s lap, his sister stroking his hair.
“Can’t you do something?” Fíli pleaded.

“I need medicine, something to bring down his fever,” Óin said.

Bard came into the house with a plastic bag of medicine. “I’ve got Advil, Vicadon…”

“They’re no use to me. Do you have any Kingsfoil?” Óin said.

“It’s not medicine! It’s a weed. We feed it to the pigs,” Bard said.


“Kingsfoil?” Bard said.

“Where do you think your fancy medicine comes from? It comes from plants and fungi,” Óin said.

“I’m a fun guy,” Kíli mumbled.

Dís let out a brief, hysterical laugh. “Of course you are.”

“Haven’t you ever wondered why it’s called Kingsfoil?” Óin said, “It is the medicine of kings. ‘When the black breath blows/and death’s shadow grows/and all lights pass,/come athelas! come athelas!/Life to the dying/in the king’s hand lying!’ It would be best with a king or an Elf, but just the plant alone should help him.”

“No Elf shall ever lay a hand on my kin,” Dís said.

Óin smacked Dís across the back of her head. “Curse the stiff necks of the Line of Durin! Lass, I have been taking care of your family since the dragon came and I helped Thráin with his injuries from the attack. If an Elf shows up, I’m going to force it to heal your son. Do you understand?”

Dís rubbed the back of her head. “Yes. I understand.”

“Elf… starlight…” Kíli muttered.


The air shook in the house as the ground trembled. Óin and Dís looked at each other, hoping the other would correct what they knew to be certain.

Sigrid, Bain, and Tilda gathered around their mother. “What was that, Ma?” Sigrid asked.

“It’s coming from the mountain,” Dís said, her hands shaking.

Fíli needed no more information to act. “You should leave us. Take your children; get out of here.”

“And go where? There is nowhere to go,” Bard said.

“I will get them out of here as quickly as I can. It will at least give them a head start,” Dís said.

Bard replied, “You don’t know if…”

“Neither did my Mother and all three of her children lived long enough to escape the dragon,” Dís said.

“Are we going to die, Ma?” Tilda asked as she clutched the edge of her Mother’s shirt.
“No, darling,” Bard reassured as she stroked her youngest child’s head.

“The dragon, it’s going to kill us,” Tilda said, her breath catching as she tried not to cry.

Bard gently moved away from her children. She took down from the wall the mounted musket. When she flipped it around, Bard pulled out a Black Arrow. “Not if I kill it first.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The poem Óin quotes is from *The Return of the King*. Yes, I’m playing with the rules of healing, but Peter Jackson did it first.

There are many things I have accepted about changes in *The Hobbit* trilogy, many of which I approve. But… DO NOT GET ME STARTED ON THE MORGAL ARROW! YOU WILL REGRET IT BY ALL THAT IS GOOD AND TOLKIEN! YOU COULD HAVE JUST SAID THE ARROW WAS POISONED AND THE DRAMA WOULD STILL BE INTENSE!

Translations of Sindarin - Thanks to the same folks in charge of the script as well as for Black speech!

Farn! Tauriel, ego! Gwao hi. - Enough! Tauriel, leave! Go now.
Chapter XX: Starlight

Chapter Summary

The Master has to go and ruin everything.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bard took Bain with her to set the Black Arrow in the wind lance. Sigrid had trained in First-Aid so remained to help Óin along with the young Tilda. In less than a half-hour, Bain was back with the Black Arrow and without Bard.

“The Master has Ma!” Bain said.

Dís nodded. “The three of you, pack a change of clothes and any photos your Mother loves. Take only one bag of things you cannot replace. Sigrid, you are going to be taking your siblings and my children and driving as far from here as you can.”

“Amad! We’re not leaving you!” Fíli said.

“We need to use the Black Arrow. Fíli, I am trusting you to protect your brother and these children. Do you understand me?” Dís said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Fíli said.

There was a noise outside. Dís grabbed a kitchen knife. The door swung open as it had been unlocked from Bain’s quick entrance. An Orc burst through with a sword.

Dís ducked as the Orc swung its sword at her. Óin and Fíli moved as quickly as they could to grab other knives.

The ceiling collapsed above the dining room table as an Orc fell through. Sigrid grabbed a bar stool and swung it at the Orc as it came near her siblings.

Fíli tackled another Orc as it entered into the house. Kíli fell off the kitchen island and tried to fight, but collapsed.

Óin shoved the children behind the kitchen island and away from the incoming Orcs. Tilda handed the elderly Dwarf a frying pan, which he used as easily as he would an ax. The children began throwing dishes at any Orcs which tried to come near them.

Bofur came in by tackling an Orc, smashing its head into the kitchen floor. “GET AWAY FROM THEM!”

An Orc behind Bofur raised his sword to cut the Dwarf in half, but was hit by a bullet through the heart.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb
Legolas put away his rifle and pulled out his knives. He did not have a clear shot of the other Orcs and might have hit a civilian otherwise.

Tauriel led the charge into the house, slitting an Orc’s throat which had leapt from the house’s roof. Legolas jumped onto the roof and took a few steps to land in the house, slaying two Orcs with ease.

An Orc grabbed Kíli’s wounded leg and began to drag him away. Tauriel threw a knife into the Orc’s throat.

The Elves and Dwarves continued killing the Orcs. Kíli’s mind was clear enough for him to take an Orc sword and stab an attacker. Tauriel helped Kíli dispatch the Orc. Kíli howled in pain from his movements.

Legolas saw the rest of the Orcs begin to escape. “There are others. Tauriel, come.”

Kíli still screamed in pain. Óin said, “We’re losing him!”

Tauriel froze. Legolas called her again before beginning his chase through the town.

Bofur grabbed the Kingsfoil which had been knocked out of his hand during the fight. Tauriel looked at the Dwarf in amazement. “Athelas.” She reverently took the plant from him.

“What are you doing? You can’t take him. He’s sick,” Dís said. She stood between Kíli and the Elf, knife drawn.

Tauriel looked at Kíli, then at Dís, and then at Kíli again. “I’m going to save him.”

Kíli cried out. Tauriel flinched, moving forward only to step back when she saw the knife. Sorrow was evident in the Elf’s eyes. “Please, Lady Dís. Let me save him.”

After looking over the Elf for one agonizingly long moment, Dís stuck her knife into the kitchen counter. “What do you need us to do?”

There was no time to clean the kitchen counter and the dining room table was broken. The next closest raised flat surface was Bard’s bed. Tilda boiled water while Bain fetched bandages. Fíli, Dís, Óin, Bofur, and Sigrid held down Kíli.

Tilda came in with a bowl of the boiled water. Tauriel flinched when she saw the state of the wound. The Elf closed her eyes as she chanted an Elvish prayer while she worked with the Kingsfoil in her hands and placed it in the water.

“Menno o nin na hon i eliad annen annin, hon leitho o ngurth.” Tauriel pressed the soaked Kingsfoil against Kíli’s wound.

Kíli thrashed in pain, barely restrained by the others. Bain and Tilda helped hold him down.

Tauriel focused on Kíli’s wound, cleansing the poison out of the laceration with the water. She continued chanting over and over again until Kíli began to relax. In a few moments, all of the poison was gone, dripping out onto the bed.

“Bandages, please,” Tauriel said, “He will live and heal.”

Bain tossed the bandages to the Elf, which she caught easily. Óin nodded to Tauriel. “I’ve heard tell of the wonders of Elvish medicine. That was a privilege to witness.”
“Thank you. I think it would be best, Master Dwarf, for the bodies to be removed from the house,” Tauriel said.

Óin nodded and motioned for the others to help him. Dís stopped by the Elf. The Dwarf princess stood up straight, tilted her chin up, and said, “Thank you… for saving… for saving my son.”

“I am merely grateful to be of service to Kíli. No thanks is needed,” Tauriel said.

Dís’ looked at the Elf and at Kíli. “I don’t trust Elves, captain, but my son speaks highly of you. He spoke of your abilities against the spiders and he seems… impressed with you.”

Tauriel felt she was reliving the conversation she had with Thranduil two weeks earlier.

“My son does reckless things,” Dís continued, “However, he is a good judge of character. I do trust him.”

Tauriel bowed her head, aware of what a moment it was for a Dwarf princess to tolerate an Elf, let alone an Elf who served a sworn enemy. “Lady Dís, I thank you for your kind words.”

“Captain,” Dís said before leaving the room.

Kíli was certain he had died. After what felt like days of agony, his first clear thought was seeing Tauriel surrounded by white starlight. His leg began to hurt only to the level of a normal wound, so he was certain it meant he slept in the Halls of Waiting next to his father.

When he opened his eyes, however, he saw he was in a bedroom. Kíli moved his head slightly, which took up almost all of his strength. His heart leapt when he saw Tauriel tending his wound. He knew he had to be dead. She never could be near him, not even in his wildest dreams. “Tauriel,” he whispered.

She gave the kind smile he adored. “Lie still.”

“You cannot be her,” he said mostly to himself, since it was obviously a dream, “She is far away. She is far, far away from me, and she walks in starlight in another world.”

Tauriel moved up the bed and stood next to his hand, not touching him. Kíli could feel the imagined warmth of her hands he felt only three times, but each was etched into his memory.

“It was just a dream.” He held her hand as best as he could, entwining their fingers as he had wanted to do for some time. “Do you think she could have loved me?”

Bard awoke in a jail cell with a burning headache. She felt the earth move, but it was not an earthquake. Bard began banging at the cell bars, trying to get someone’s attention. “Listen to me! You don’t know what is coming! Smaug is awake!”

Bramble found herself in a massive hall, but could not see what lay below. She whispered, “Hello?” The echoes made her jump and press herself up against the wall. When there was no other sound, Bramble sighed in relief. “You’re not at home. Not at home. Well, that’s good news. Finally.”
The Hobbit walked to the edge of the platform and nearly collapsed. Rationally, she knew it was just a bunch of shiny rocks piled up together. The irrational side screamed, “IT IS A LITERAL MOUNTAIN OF GOLD!”

Bramble’s breaths came in gasps as she tried to calm herself down. The thought of a fifteenth of it being hers did not even cross her mind. All she could think was, “So THAT’S why Dwarves love gold.” There was a beauty to it Bramble could vaguely understand to be attractive.

After several minutes of trying not to faint, Bramble was back to her rational self. “Shiny rocks, Baggins. Just a bunch of shiny rocks.” She fell when she stepped onto the gold coins. “Slippery shiny rocks.”

After taking a moment to check for injuries, Bramble began searching through the gold, unsure of where to begin. She found several white gems, but none of them had a glow to them without the help of light.

“You could have at least given me a shovel,” she muttered as she made her way down the mountain of gold.

Bramble picked up a golden cup and tossed it aside. There was a small avalanche of coins which made Bramble jump away. When she looked up Bramble saw…

… a red haired man, sleeping.

Bramble said a bit too loudly, “Uhhh… what?”

The man woke up, his golden eyes falling upon Bramble.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Looking at the translation of the Elvish, it seemed prayer like, which makes sense to me. Religion and beliefs are not talked about in-depth in *The Lord of the Rings*, so this is probably my own bias coming through.

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Amad - Mother.

Translations of Sindarin - Thanks to the same folks in charge of the script!

Menno o nin na hon i eliad annen annin, hon leitho o ngurth. - May the blessing that was given to me be sent from me to him, may he be released from death.
Chapter Xxi: The Dragon’s Captive

Chapter Summary

In which dragons are sneaky.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Non-sexual violence against a woman and general sadism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bramble jumped away from the man and hid behind a pillar. She slipped on the ring, hoping it would give her some cover.

“Um, hello?” the man said groggily.

The coins shifted as the man moved. “Um, yes, I know you’re there. Please show yourself. The dragon is not here. I can hear you moving around. Where are you?”

The red-headed man stood before Bramble. She averted her eyes as she realized the man was naked and it was not something she wanted to see.

“I feel your air,” the man said, “Come now, don’t be shy. Step into the light. Please, don’t leave me alone.” The man waved his hand towards Bramble’s distortion.

Not wanting to be grabbed in any place unsavory, Bramble took off the ring.

The man raised an eyebrow. “There you are thief in the shadows.”

“I didn’t come to steal anything,” Bramble said. (Which was true. The Arkenstone rightfully belonged to Thorin.) “Can you put on some pants or something? I make it a rule not to talk to naked people. They have a tendency to be drunk.”

“I fear I have nothing else. Dragons care not if their captives are clothed,” the man said as he assessed the Hobbit.

Bramble undid the long, blue sash at her waist. “Here. Cover up your… areas.”

The man’s skin was unusually warm. He took the sash and covered himself. “Better, thief?”

“I’m not a thief, but thanks,” Bramble said. She was able to look down at his chest without getting an eyeful further down. His eyes made her nervous.

“Why are you here? To slay the dragon?” the man said.

“Oh no! Have you seen me?” Bramble said as she motioned between the two of them and their height difference of almost a foot. “Me? I’m mostly harmless. The dragon is known as Smaug the
Unassessably Wealthy. I merely wanted to gaze upon his magnificence, to see if he really was as
great as the old tales say. I did not believe them. I’m a folklorist. I wanted to tell the true story of his
wonders.”

The man went to touch Bramble’s face, but she jumped away and tumbled down the heap of gold
again.

“Why do you fear me?”

“I’m just being cautious. Maybe you are here to lure women to their deaths to feed to Smaug. You
know, there are bandits in the area. Maybe you are one of them,” Bramble said as she stood up.

The man laughed. “No one is in this area. The last time there was someone, it was almost a year ago.
Someone tried to enter the mountain through the river gate to steal.”

“Oh, dear. I am afraid you’re wrong there,” Bramble said, “The river is blocked and…”

The man grabbed Bramble’s throat and lifted her off the ground. “Are you calling me a liar, thief?”

Bramble gasped for air and shook her head as best as she could. The man dropped her.

“What is your name? You don’t have magic like anyone else I have met before. Who are you, and
where do you come from, may I ask?

Bramble lay on the ground for a moment as she caught her breath. Out of the corner of her eye, she
saw a gem glowing with an inner-light. The Dwarves had been right. There was no gem like it. The
Arkenstone.

Now the question was how to get it.

Bramble pushed herself up onto her elbows. “I… I come from under the hill, dragon captive.”

“Underhill?” the man said.

Bramble nodded. “And under hills and over hills my path has led. I am friend to those who fly. I am
she who walks unseen.” The thought of the Eagles sparked a memory of a legend about the origin of
dragons…

“Impressive. What else do you claim to be?” He crouched down and smiled at her.

The Hobbit pushed herself back and towards the Arkenstone as the man continued his advance. She
felt sick every time she looked into his eyes. “I am... the blackberries’ child. Riddle-maker.”

“Lovely titles.” He waved his hand. “Go on.”

“Barrel-rider,” Bramble said. She moved back some more. Her hand almost touched the Arkenstone.

“Barrels? Now that is interesting. And what about your little Dwarf friends? Where are they hiding?”
The man leaned over her and sniffed her hair.

Bramble shoved herself further back, overshooting the Arkenstone. “Dwarves? No. No, no Dwarves
here. You've got it all wrong.”

“Oh, I don’t think so, barrel-rider. They sent you in here to do their dirty work while they skulk
about outside.”
“Truly, you are mistaken, oh Smaug, Chieftest and Greatest of Calamities.”

The man laughed. “So you figured it out, riddle-maker?”

“I can assure you no one else has. I only guessed it because I have met skin-changers before, oh Smaug the Golden,” Bramble said.

Smaug laughed again and yanked Bramble by her hair to her feet. “You have nice manners... for a thief and a liar! I know the smell and taste of Dwarf. No one better. You are covered in it. It is the gold! They are drawn to treasure like flies to dead flesh.”

Bramble was tossed aside, over a ledge, and onto a pile of gold. The Arkenstone tumbled further down the mound.

“Did you think I did not know this day would come, when a pack of canting Dwarves would come crawling back to the mountain?”

A change began in Smaug. His skin morphed into scales. He became larger and larger. The size of him was incomprehensible to Bramble. The dragon knocked down one of the pillars in the hall when he almost reached full-size.

Smaug stretched and preened for Bramble. “Do you believe the tales now, thief?”

Bramble let out a squeak before answering. “Truly, the tales and songs fall utterly short of your enormity, O Smaug the Stupendous. As a folklorist who specializes in dragons, I can say it with certainty.”

The dragon smiled, showing off his sharp teeth. “Do you think flattery will keep you alive?”

“No,” Bramble said as she began to move away.

Smaug laughed at the Hobbit. “Oh, you think your Dwarves will save you. How… sweet. You are not in one of your tales, thief. No one will be able to save you.” He let out a burst of flames from his mouth.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

There was a crash almost at the same time as the earth began to shake.

“Was that an earthquake?” Dori asked.

Balin looked over at the doorway. “That… was a dragon.”

The Dwarves began gathering their weapons when they saw an orange glow from the mountain coming from the hidden passage. Thorin spoke calmly. “Who has the grenade launcher? The professor requested it.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Hobbit scrambled away from Smaug as he continued monologuing. “The King Under the Mountain is dead. I took his throne. I ate his people like a wolf among sheep. I kill where I wish, when I wish. My armor is iron. No blade can pierce me!”

Bramble ducked under what must have been a platform before it was filled with gold underneath it. She tried to grab the Arkenstone, but it tumbled just beyond her reach.
Smaug stalked around the platform. “It’s Oakenshield. That filthy dwarvish usurper! He sent you in here for the Arkenstone, didn’t he?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Bramble said, her voice higher than normal.

“Don’t bother denying it. I guessed his foul purpose some time ago. But it matters not. Oakenshield’s quest will fail.”

The Hobbit leaned against a pillar, just next to the dragon. The more reckless side of her wanted to scream at Smaug that just as snow came after fire, even dragons had their ending. Thorin was not the usurper; Smaug was.

“You have been used, thief in the shadows. You were only ever a means to an end. The coward Oakenshield has weighed the value of your life and found it worth nothing.”

Bramble’s heart stopped for a moment. To be thought worthless by Thorin… but she knew it to be false. He had valued her since the mountains. He cared for her. He kissed her… Besides, Thorin trusted his Dwarves. The Company loved her. He would value her simply for such loyalty. Dragons were dishonest creature. Smaug could not be telling the truth.

“No. No. No, you’re lying!” Bramble said as she found her voice.

“What did he promise you? A share of the treasure?” Smaug said, “As if it was his to give. I will not part with a single coin. Not one piece of it.”

Bramble dashed for the Arkenstone. Smaug saw her and whipped his tail at her. Though she avoided the appendage, Bramble tumbled down the mountain of gold until she smacked into a pillar.

“My teeth are swords! My claws are spears! My wings are a hurricane!” Smaug spread his wings.

It was his great mistake for Bramble saw the weak spot of the worm. “So it is true. The black arrow found its mark.”

The dragon hissed “What did you say?”

Bramble scrambled to her feet. “Uh… I was just saying your reputation precedes you, oh Smaug the Tyrannical. Truly, you have no equal on this earth.” The Arkenstone was just a few feet from her.

Smaug saw it as well. “I am almost tempted to let you take it, if only to see Oakenshield suffer, watch it destroy him, watch it corrupt his heart and drive him mad.”

Bramble should have been terrified, but instead she was angry. She remembered Ori’s words at Bag-End and completely understood the Dwarf’s sentiment.

Smaug watched the Hobbit with faint amusement. “But I think not. I think our little game ends here. So tell me, thief, how do you choose to die?”

The dragon’s chest began to glow. As Smaug opened his mouth, a small explosion hit his left wing. The worm roared in pain.

The gunshots began immediately after the explosion. Smaug breathed fire towards where the shots came from. Bramble slipped on her ring and ran back to the hidden door.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Major Plot Change #5: Smaug is a skin-changer like Beorn and the Eagles, only a different subset. (It’s how he’s been getting around the past 60 years, but there will be more on that later.)

This was written several months before I saw the prompt for The Guardian of Erebor.

Say it with me: Bazoooooooooooooooka. It’s a great word, isn’t it?
Chapter XXII: Then We Will All Burn Together

Chapter Summary

Stupid gold and its stupid sickness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The King Under the Mountain had forgotten how beautiful gold was. He felt its call and he wanted to protect it. Thorin vaguely remembered he should kill Smaug for reasons besides for stealing the treasure, but it seemed unimportant now.

Using a grenade launcher was a brilliant idea by… someone. Who was it? Thorin decided it did not matter. Smaug actually did take some damage to his wing at the edges. It might mess with his flight pattern and slow the worm down.

As Thorin quickly packed the grenade launcher, he saw something move out of the corner of his eye. He drew his gun. The burglar ran towards him.

Right. The burglar. The burglar had awoken the dragon. It was why Thorin had come in.

“You’re alive,” Thorin said.

“Not for much longer! I ticked off a dragon. Hurry!” the burglar said.

“Did you find the Arkenstone?” Thorin asked as he put away his gun.

“Did you miss the whole dragon thing?” the burglar snapped.

“The Arkenstone!” Thorin demanded as they both stopped at the entrance to the tunnel. “Did you find it?”

“Dragon!” the burglar insisted, “We have to get out, Thorin!”

Thorin blocked the burglar’s way. It was a burglar after all. Maybe it did have it. Maybe it had decided to keep the Arkenstone…

“Thorin. Thorin? What’s wrong? Are we waiting for the others?” the burglar asked as it stepped away from the Dwarf.

The king walked slowly towards the burglar, stopping only when they stood at the edge of the platform.

“What’s wrong? I don’t know… don’t know what you’re doing. What am I supposed to do to help you?” The burglar reached out and touched Thorin’s hand. “Tell me what you need.”

Thorin blinked rapidly as he felt a haze lifted from his senses. Bramble’s whole body shook with what he could only describe as fear. Before he could say anything, Bramble’s eyes looked at something behind him.
Smaug snarled when Thorin turned. The Dwarf pushed Bramble behind him as he drew his sword.

“Should I grab the bazooka?” Bramble said quietly, placing a hand on Thorin’s shoulder.

Thorin nodded as Smaug drew closer. The rest of the Dwarves came out from inside the tunnel or from the upper-staircase, having failed in keeping the dragon distracted for long.

Smaug roared, “You will burn!”

The Company jumped off the staircase and tumbled down a pile of treasure toward the entrance of another tunnel. Dwalin snatched the rocket launcher case as they ran away. Smaug sent fire after them as they escaped into the tunnel.

Thorin barely made it into the tunnel as the flames licked at his clothes. He threw himself into the room, rolling on the ground to put out the flames until he could toss off the coat he wore. Thorin jumped up and saw the absolute panic in Bramble’s eyes. He grabbed her hand and yanked her after him as he ran. “Come on!”

Smaug roared in rage at the loss of his prey.

“We have a big problem,” Bramble said.

“Really? I didn’t notice!” Thorin snarked.

“BIGGER!” Bramble replied.

“How can we have a bigger problem than a dragon unless it is a bigger dragon?” Thorin snapped.

“I don’t talk and run well and this affects your strategy!” Bramble said.

Thorin made the Company halt. “What is it?”

“Uh, well, do you remember me saying back in the lecture we don’t know much about how dragons originated?” Bramble said.

“We don’t have time for fairy stories!” Thorin said.

“There is always time for fairy stories,” Bramble said, punching him in the arm, “And this one is important. One of the supposed origins of dragons is Morgoth corrupted and twisted Eagles. What was so odd about the Eagles we met?”

Balin said, “You cannot be serious. He’s a skin-changer?”

“I am serious. It may not be that dragons are from Eagles, but it doesn’t matter. What does matter is that Smaug can change into the form of one of the Free Folk. He could be following us right now. We don’t have size to our advantage. He is a little shorter than Thorin and he is… fit? Is fit the appropriate term? I got a bit of an eyeful and I am really trying to kill the memory,” Bramble said.

Ori was about to ask what Bramble meant by an “eyeful” when Smaug roared again.

“Right now it seems he is still in dragon form, but this information is necessary. Is he easier to kill in his other form?” Thorin said.

“I have no idea. I didn’t get a chance to hit him. Girion did hit his mark when Smaug attacked Dale. There is a weak spot beneath his left wing. Your bazooka,” she nodded to the case Dwalin held, “did
do some damage. Do not look into his eyes in either form. It makes your… thoughts go wrong,” Bramble rubbed her arms.

Thorin took Bramble’s hand again. They walked briskly, but no longer ran.

Thorin said, “So we have drowning, stabbing, and Black Arrows for certain to kill a dragon. High explosives are a possibility. Another possibility is he is weaker in his other form. What else? Anything from any story, even the most absurd ones?”

“Uh… switching out virgins with ladies of the night for eating causes indigestion, dragonsbane is poisonous (though I have never heard of the plant outside of books), hoist by his own petard type stuff of drowning dragons in their own gold, nuclear bombs…”

Thorin stopped at a stone bridge over a chasm to glare at Bramble.

The Hobbit began to explain, “Looking at the timing of Smaug’s ‘sleep’…”

Thorin covered her mouth and shushed her, motioning around them and the echoes her voice made. Bramble licked his palm. He glared at her, but did not move his hand until Balin cleared his throat.

“As I was saying,” Bramble whispered as Thorin wiped his hand on his shirt, “Smaug went off the radar around the time of the nuclear arms race. He probably didn’t want to get nuked in the mountain. It took the combined forces of the Lady Galadriel, Lord Elrond, and King Thranduil to stop Gondor from nuking the Yukon at the time.” The Hobbit paused and tilted her head. “Has anyone heard the dragon recently? This is generally the point in the horror movie when people start getting killed.”

“We’ve given him the slip,” Dori said as she relaxed slightly.

“No, he’s too cunning for that,” Dwalin said.

Bramble motioned to Thorin. “So where to now?”

Thorin nodded to the bridge. “The western guardroom. There may be a way out.”

“It’s too high. There’s no chance that way,” Balin said.

“It’s our only chance. We have to try,” Thorin said.

Moving as silently as they could, they made it half way across the bridge without incident. A coin fell to the floor in front of Bramble. Everyone looked at her, but she was just as confused as everyone else.

Bramble looked up and her eyes became wide with fear. The rest of the Company looked up and saw how the coins fell from the belly of Smaug as he silently prowled around the mountain, looking for the Dwarves and their thief.

Thorin motioned for the rest to follow him, taking Bramble’s hand when she hesitated to move.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Company saw the corpses first and then the blocked exit. Men. Women. Children. All were huddled together in their last dying breath.

“That’s it. There’s no way out,” Dwalin said quietly.
“The last of our kin. They must have come here, hoping beyond hope,” Balin said, “We could try to reach the mines. We might last a few days.”

Thorin remembered the deaths. He remembered his people choking on the smoke, ash, and dust. And the fire. Even his own Mother… no, he could not think of her death.

He did think on a promise he made to two children crying out for comfort after the loss of their mother.

“No. I will not die like this. Cowering, clawing for breath.” A plan began to form in his mind. “We make for the forges.”

“He’ll see us, sure as death,” Dwalin said.

Thorin turned around. “Not if we split up.”

“We’ll never make it, Thorin,” Balin said.

Something stirred in Thorin as the plan became clearer. He dared not call it hope. “Some of us might. Lead him to the forges. We kill the dragon. If this is to end in fire, then we will all burn together.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Company divided into four groups. The first to leave would be Thorin, Bramble, and Balin as Smaug would be more likely to recognize them. Dori, Ori and Bombur were the second group as they were the slowest, but loudest. Dwalin and Nori were the next group, a mixture of brawn and brains while also carrying the grenade launcher. Glóin and Bifur were the last group as they had more experience in mines than the rest.

Thorin held his sword in one hand and Bramble’s hand in the other. As Smaug began to chase them, he remembered Bramble’s words in Mirkwood how going after a dragon was the most dangerous and stupid idea she had ever heard. He disagreed. Purposefully angering a dragon was far more dangerous and stupid.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hoist by His Own Petard is a term from TVTropes.org. Don’t go there unless you want to lose all of your time for at least a month if not longer.
Chapter XXIII: Circus for a Psycho

Chapter Summary

In which they purposely anger a dragon.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The chapter title comes from the song of the same name by Skillet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thorin led them to the forges. Balin turned to a side tunnel. “It’s this way! Come on!”

Bramble went towards Balin, stopping when she realized Thorin did not follow her. They both saw Smaug turn into the hall.

“Follow Balin!” Thorin said.

Bramble walked backwards towards Balin, trying to plead with Thorin. Balin yanked the Hobbit into the tunnel just as Smaug unleashed his fiery breath on them.

“Follow Balin!” Thorin said.

Bramble walked backwards towards Balin, trying to plead with Thorin. Balin yanked the Hobbit into the tunnel just as Smaug unleashed his fiery breath on them.

Thorin ran, dropping his sword along the way. He jumped into a deep pit, catching onto a chain with a bucket on the end of it. His weight caused him to descend.

Smaug followed behind him, using his claws to cling to the walls as he followed the Dwarf. The dragon kept snapping at the chain which held Thorin.

The Dwarf king could hear Dwalin shout something just before Thorin rapidly began ascending. Smaug caught the chain holding Thorin and pulled down.

The machinery broke and fell into the pit. Thorin landed on the tip of Smaug’s closed mouth. The dragon opened his mouth, ready to both burn and eat Thorin.

Another chain began ascending. Thorin jumped and was pulled up the shaft, fire following close behind. He stumbled onto the platform towards Nori and Dwalin.

“GO! GO!” Thorin yelled as fire followed them.

The Dwarves were hard at work trying to figure out how to light the furnaces. They were all frustrated as they did not have the right equipment, even though there was plenty of fuel.

Bramble kept watch. Nori, Dwalin, and Thorin ran towards her and the rest of the company. Thorin stopped next to her, grabbing her arm. They nodded to each other to show they were alright.

“The plan is not going to work. These furnaces are stone cold,” Dwalin said.
Balin added, “He’s right; there’s no fire hot enough to set them ablaze.”

Thorin looked at the furnaces and back at the pit. By the smile on his face, Bramble could tell the Dwarf had an idea. An awful idea. Thorin got a wonderful, awful idea.

“Don’t we?” He stalked towards the grating.

“No, no, no no. Bad Thorin. Bad,” Bramble said as she realized what he would do.

Thorin shouted at the dragon, “I did not look to see you so easily outwitted! You have grown slow and fat in your dotage. Slug.”

Smaug snarled at Thorin. The Dwarf said, “Take cover!”

They all rushed to hide behind the pillars just as Smaug unleashed flames at them. The fire whipped past the Company all the way to the furnaces. The heat and pressure of the flames made Bramble cringe in pain.

When Smaug stopped, the furnaces were lit. She felt Thorin patting her hair, which confused Bramble until she realized some of her hair had caught on fire. By the time she was aware of this, her head was safe and Thorin pulled her away as Smaug rammed into the metal latticework.

Thorin kept Bramble with him as he gave out orders. “Bombur! Get those bellows working. Go!”

“All right!” Bombur said before jumping onto a chain which made the bellows blast air into the furnace.

Thorin pointed to a lever. “Bramble, up there, on my mark, pull that lever.”

Bramble nodded and ran towards it.

“Balin, can you work the grenade launcher?” Thorin said.

“It’ll only take a jiffy,” Balin said as he took the case and ran back for cover while he loaded the ammunition.

The latticework almost completely broke. “We don’t have a jiffy,” Dwalin said.

Smaug broke his way into the forges. He looked around for his prey.

Bramble reached the lever. If she stood on her tip-toes, she could just reach it.

The Hobbit felt someone watching her. Bramble turned and saw Smaug coming towards her, his teeth shining in the light from the furnaces.

“LOWLY LIZARD!” Thorin shouted.

The dragon turned towards Thorin, his anger towards Dwarves greater than to the thief.

“Now!” Thorin yelled.

Bramble jumped and pulled the lever just as Smaug leapt at Thorin. Water burst from the statues around Bramble. It knocked Smaug off balance and extinguished the flame in his belly. Steam rose around them and Smaug roared in pain. A watermill began turning some gears. The containers on wires began to move.
When Smaug was no longer steaming, he continued stalking towards Thorin. The Dwarf king held his ground. Balin shot the grenade launcher, hitting Smaug in the chest. The dragon stumbled back, but no damage was visible.

Containers fell onto Smaug, making the dragon fall to the ground. Thorin ran over to a furnace and pulled on a chain, opening a gate which let molten gold flow freely through the troughs.

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

Bramble ducked as a metal bucket tangled around Smaug as he flew towards her. A chunk of the wall came loose. Smaug broke the base of the staircase with his tail. She yipped as she fell all the way down to the floor.

When she looked up, she could see Thorin floating on some sort of metal sheet down the river of gold. “Keep going, Bramble! Run!”

Bramble ran past the dragon, catching Smaug’s attention. She fell down a stone slide, Smaug close behind her. What the burglar did not notice until she landed was Smaug changing back into the first form she saw him in.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Iron melts at a higher heat level than gold, so the wheel barrel could have survived. *shrug* There’s a dragon chasing a Hobbit. Physics is not the main concern, but there you go.
Chapter XXIV: Taking Back What Was Stolen

Chapter Summary

Bramble is done with Smaug’s garbage.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Non-sexual violence against a woman and general sadism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Hobbit kept running until she heard Smaug speak again as she was half-way down the Gallery of the Kings. “And here I thought you said you would not steal from me.”

Bramble drew Sting as she spun around. “None of this is yours. I was hired by the rightful owner.”

Smaug walked closer while the burglar stood her ground. “Ah yes, those filthy Dwarves, barrel-rider. This is some sort of scheme hatched between them and those miserable cup-trading Lakemen. Those sniveling cowards with their longbows and Black Arrows!” He was almost to Bramble. She raised her sword, ready to strike. “Perhaps it is time I paid them a visit.”

“This isn’t their fault! You cannot go to Laketown!” Bramble said.

Smaug took another step. Bramble slashed at his neck. He grabbed the sword with his bare hand, yanked it away from Bramble, and tossed it to the side. His hand barely bled before healing completely.

“It takes a little more to kill me than a pocket-knife, thief,” Smaug said. He grabbed Bramble by her shirt before throwing her forward onto the floor. “You care about those worthless Mortal Men doomed to die, don’t you?”

Bramble kicked at Smaug. He avoided her feet and grabbed her by the hair, dragging her along with him. “Good. You can watch them die.”

The Hobbit kept fighting, clawing at Smaug’s arm, breaking her nails when she hit his skin. “Keep trying, Bramble. It’s what the usurper called you with such fondness. After I deal with those Men, I’ll leave a little mess for him. I’m trying to decide if I should kill you before or after I rip out each of your bones, thief. Are you his little pet? Doubtful. If you were mine, I wouldn’t let you out of my grasp.”

Bramble’s hand shot backwards in an attempt to stop Smaug. Her hand bruised when she hit his chest. Smaug chuckled. “Do stop. It’s pathetic. Nothing you do will save you.”

Thorin shouted, “Over here, you witless worm!”

The dragon stopped and turned towards Thorin’s voice. Thorin stood on top of roughhewn stone which was at least as tall as Smaug was in dragon form. Smaug tossed the Hobbit to the side at the
sight of a better prize.

“Your!” Smaug snarled.

“I am taking back what you stole,” Thorin said.

Smaug walked towards Thorin. “You would take nothing from me, Dwarf. I laid low your warriors of old. I instill terror in the hearts of men. I am King Under the Mountain.”

Bramble scrambled to a platform at the side, knowing what was coming.

“Nothing and no one in this mountain is yours. This is not your kingdom. These are Dwarf lands, this is Dwarf gold, and we will have our revenge,” Thorin said.

The true King under the Mountain shouted something in Khuzdul which Bramble did not know before he yanked on a rope. It pulled him up at the same time the stones fell away, revealing a golden statue of a Dwarf king. Smaug was mesmerized. The great dragon had never seen so much gold in one object. He stepped forward.

The eye of the statue warped and exploded. The statue became liquid again as it did not have enough time to set. Smaug tried to move back, but the gold engulfed him. The dragon had drowned in the gold he so coveted.

No one cheered yet, but Bramble could see the Dwarves smiling. Thorin looked years younger. He watched the gold, his eyes becoming glazed over the longer he stared.

As the lake of gold began to settle, Smaug emerged from it in his dragon form, screaming in agony as he tried to escape from the mountain. “Revenge! Revenge! I will show you REVENGE!”

Bramble ran after Smaug, avoiding the molten gold to follow the dragon outside. Smaug smashed his way through the blocked front gate. Gold fell from the sky as Smaug shook off the molten metal as he spun in the air.

Smaug growled, “I am fire. I am... DEATH!”

Bramble climbed a boulder to watch Smaug as he descended upon Laketown. “What have we done?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: One more chapter…
Chapter XXV: I See Fire

Chapter Summary

Some things cannot be forgotten nor should they be.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The chapter title refers to the song of the same title by Ed Sheeran.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dís heard shouts from the people of Laketown. Tauriel, the Dwarves, and the children all looked around in fear. Óin was the only one besides Dís to know what was happening. Dís ran outside, but could see nothing. She climbed onto the roof and noticed water began to flood the town.

Fire came from the gates of Erebor. The dragon had come.

“Oh, Thorin,” Dís said quietly as tears began to fall from her eyes, “Why did you promise us we would come home? I just wanted… not like this.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Erebor, 171 Years Earlier

Dís sat before the fireplace on the floor while her mother sat in a chair to have a better angle to braid Dís’ hair. Frerin sat at the desk in the sitting room finishing up the last bit of his translations into Common Tongue before starting school.

“Amad, it’s sunny out. Can we go to Dale?” Dís asked.

“You have lessons today, Dís. Hold still. Your braids will not look right if you keep moving,” Urd, said.

“Ugh, lessons,” Dís said.

“Ugh, I agree,” Frerin said.

“Ugh, you should have done your work last night,” Urd teased.

“But Amad…” Frerin protested.

“You should have finished your work, Frerin,” Thorin said as he entered the room.

Dís ran to her brother, ignoring the mess it made of her braids. Thorin picked the ten year old up and swung her around.

“THORIN! THORIN! YOU’RE HOME!” Dís exclaimed.
“I am, dear Dís,” Thorin said. He held her close and kissed her cheek. “I am back and I plan to stay home for a long, long time.”

“How are our kinsmen of the Iron Hills?” Urd asked.

“Uncle Nain is well. Dain is becoming quite the warrior,” Thorin said. He still carried Dís as he ruffled Frerin’s hair.

“Watch it!” Frerin said as he smoothed back his hair.

“Is Frerin still primping more than an Elven prince, Dís?” Thorin said.

“Most of the time,” Dís said.

Thorin put Dís down and kissed his mother’s cheek. “Hello, Amad.”

“Hello, son. Do you think you can help me wrangle Dís back long enough to make her look presentable?” Urd said.

Thorin sat on the floor and undid one of his own braids. “Dís, will you help me?”

The four of them spoke of Thorin’s journey to the Iron Hills. Dís redid Thorin’s braid before he did one of hers. Frerin did another one of Dís’ braids once he had finished his school work.

“Almost done,” Urd said.

“I came just in time,” Thráin said.

Dís would have jumped up to hug her father, but Thorin held her back. “Adad! Thorin is home!”

“Yes, he is. I heard of my son’s return and how he went straight to his Amad,” Thráin said as he knelt next to Thorin and affectionately ruffled his son’s hair.

“Amad is much more frightening than either you or Udad,” Thorin said with a smirk.

It was a bit of a joke in the family. Dís knew her Grandfather was King of Erebor and thus had great power while Thráin looked fearsome with his great beard and his missing eye. However, Dís had never worried about anything but the mildest of chastisements from either of them. The beautiful Urd was the one who always knew Dís had been troublesome to her tutors or had pulled some prank on her brothers.

Thráin worked a braid around Dís’ head so it would act as a circlet. A sapphire pendant with silver wiring hung from the middle of her forehead to show the colors of the House of Durin. Thráin tapped Dís’ nose when he finished. “There we go princess.”

“Thank you, Adad,” Dís said.

“As much as I would love to stay, I must take Thorin to see the king and to cousin Fundin,” Thráin said. He kissed his children on their foreheads. “A good day to all of you.”

Thráin stood up and kissed Urd on the mouth, causing their children to cry out in disgust at their parents’ affection. “A wonderful day to you, yâsith.”

“And to you, yâsun,” Urd said.

BbBbBbBbBbBb
Dís was in the library and enraptured with examining a mithril bead which had been brought in by her tutor when they heard a great rumbling. People screamed.

Frerin ran into where Dís and her tutor studied. “Dís! We need to leave.”

“What’s happening?” Dís asked.

Frerin knelt down in front of Dís, his body quaking from fear. “We are going to run. You keep running until you can’t anymore. Do you understand?”

“What’s…”

“Come on! We need to find Adad!” Frerin said as he pulled Dís out into the hallway.

People panicked and Dís heard the words “fire” and “dragon”. It made no sense to her. Why would a dragon come to Erebor? Did it not know her family would destroy it?

There was one person who did not panic. Urd walked calmly up to her children and picked up Dís. “We need to keep moving. Stay calm. Frerin, we are going to get out of here. Do not show fear. The people are watching us. Move quickly, but do not run.”

The people still ran, but Frerin no longer shook.

After what seemed like ages to Dís, her Father was with them. “We have lost the front gate,” Thráin said.

“Is it all…” Urd did not finish and stifled a groan of anguish.

“We will fight this,” Thráin said as he placed a hand on Frerin’s shoulder and another hand on his wife’s lower back so he would urge them along, “Thorin is looking for my father right now. We need to keep moving or…”

There was another roar. One of the columns near the family collapsed. Dís closed her eyes as she was certain she was going to die and she did not want to see it.

When Dís opened her eyes, there was dust and smoke in the air. She could smell burning sulfur and slime. The young Dwarf began choking on the dirty air; the ash covered her tongue.

She had not hit her head as her mother’s hand had protected her. Urd covered most of Dís, protecting the child from falling debris; Urd did not move. Through the smoke, Dís could see Thráin did not move either and blood came from his head.

“Help! Someone help!” Dís screamed.

Frerin struggled against the rocks pinning him against the floor. It took a moment, but he did get out. He coughed and crawled over to Dís and began trying to move the debris pinning his family.

Two burly figures came through the smoke. “DÍS! FRERIN!” Thorin shouted.

Dís cried. They were saved. Thorin would slay the dragon. Princes did such and Thorin was the most storybook prince like prince she had ever met.

“Frerin, hold back Udad,” Thorin said as he shoved Thrór at Frerin, “He keeps trying to go back to the treasure room. The dragon is there.”
Thorin shoved some of the smaller rocks off of Urd before pulling Dís out from under her Mother. Dís clung to Thorin. “You’ve saved us!”

“Not yet, I haven’t,” Thorin said. He kissed his sister’s forehead and made her stand behind him.

After an agonizingly long minute, Thorin pulled Thráin out from the debris. Thráin coughed and blearily opened his good eye. “My leg. Something is wrong with it.”

“Just give me a moment and I’ll help you get out of here,” Thorin said.

“Children?” Urd groaned.

Dís ran to her mother and stroked her head. Thorin struggled against a boulder which pinned Urd. Frerin tried to help him as Thráin held onto Thrór’s leg.

“Amad. It’ll be alright. Amad. Everything will be alright,” Dís said.

“I can’t feel anything below my waist,” Urd said quietly. Tears began filling her eyes.

The dragon roared again.

Urd shoved Dís away. “Go!”

“Amad!” Dís said. She tried to grab Urd again, but Frerin grabbed his sister around the waist and began dragging Dís away. “Amad!”

“I love all of you,” Urd said.

Thorin still tried to move the boulder pinning his Mother. Urd pulled at his coat to make Thorn kneel next to her.

“You are to not feel guilt. There was nothing you could do,” Urd said, “My sweet boy, don’t ever feel guilt from this. I love you so much.”

Thorin nodded and gave his Mother a kiss good-bye. Frerin carried Dís while Thráin leaned on Thorin. Thrór ran ahead away from the dragon.

The last Dís saw of Urd was when Smaug breathed fire onto the pinned Dwarf.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Dwarves of Erebor ran from the burning mountain for so long Dís did not remember how to stop. Sometime in the night when their legs could no longer carry them, the Dwarves collapsed.

Dís lay on the ground next to Frerin, both of them trying to hold back tears. Thrór and the injured Thráin were nearby, but they both did not move and barely breathed. Thráin had been barely cognate all day and sleep finally took him. Someone gave out orders.

It took Dís some time to realize the person shouting orders was her eldest brother. Thorin moved around the people and tried to start campfires to keep the wild animals away. Dwarves had always been friends with fire, but many now feared it.

More time passed before Thorin sat down and pulled Dís and Frerin into his arms. “Are you two hurt?”

They both shook their heads.
“Are you lying?” Thorin said, “Is there anywhere which hurts?”

Dís sobbed, “It’s my fault. Amad would be here if I sat still for my braiding. It’s all my fault.”

Frerin began to cry as well. “If I was stronger, I could have helped.”

Thorin shushed them gently and he began rocking his siblings back and forth. “Shush. Shush. This is not your fault. Nothing you did brought the dragon. You have done nothing wrong. This is not your fault.”

Dís screamed and Frerin wept. Thorin held them as close as he could, whispering to them promises: he would slay the dragon, they would have their revenge, they would not die like their mother did, and they would go home again.

Above all, he promised they would go home again.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Dís choked back the memories of her life.

Of the years of wandering. Of the day her braids began to fall apart and she chopped them off rather than undo her families work, swearing to never have her hair braided again. Of the day she found out of the deaths of her grandfather, brother, and so many other Dwarves along with Thorin’s wounding and her father’s disappearance.

Of the day she broke her promise of not braiding her hair when a poor miner with a heart worth more than all of the gold of Erebor proposed to her. Of the day she held her own daughter for the first time and her family had rejoiced the Line of Durin would last even after dragon fire. Of the day her son was born, showing there could be blessings even without the Arkenstone. Of the day the mine had collapsed and killed her beloved. Of the day her brother told her of a wizard he had met who had urged him to reclaim Erebor. Of the day she found her children missing. Of the day she saw the Hobbit who was already winning her brother’s broken heart after knowing him only a few hours. Of the travels and trials the Company had gone through.

All of it was pushed back to one memory: her brother, daughter, and son smiling when they saw Erebor. The joy amongst them was all Dís ever wanted.

And she would not let an overgrown, fire-starting, witless lizard take away her family.

Dís knew there was no escape in Laketown. Smaug was the fastest creature Dís had ever seen. He could destroy entire forests with just his wings alone. His fiery breath… She knew he could kill them all without even trying.

But Dís also knew her Mother was at peace, even when consumed by fire, because she had protected her children. Urd had given her children a chance to escape from the wrath and ruin of dragon fire.

It was hope Dís wanted to give all of the other parents in Laketown: the hope of their children’s lives.

Dís ran back into the house and grabbed her weapons. “Come on. We have a dragon to slay.”

TO BE CONTINUED
A/N: I am currently writing Part III and Part IV. Part III will be called “One Day I’ll Remember”.

This was one of the hardest chapters I have ever written in my entire life. Though I wrote this with the original version on repeat, this one I can imagine Dís singing.

Translations of Khuzdul - Thanks to khuzdul4u.

Amad - Mother.
Adad - Father.
Udad - Grandfather.
Yásith - Wife.
Yásun- Husband.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!