Summary

Directly continued from "The Lonely Road Home"

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After being convinced to once again part from the shire, this time for good, Bilbo leaves with his new family to travel across the great expanse of middle earth, aiming to settle back down in Erebor. The road traveled has never been easy, but with Frodo in company Bilbo finds himself and his dwarven companions facing new, unexpected challenges as they are forced to fight their way to the lonely mountain.

Notes

Hello everyone, I am back with yet another story for When Lions Meet a Mouse.

I would highly suggest you finish the previous work in this series, "The Lonely Road Home" before you start in on this new project of mine, otherwise you might find yourself slightly at a loss for lack of context.

Once again this is a beastly work in progress, with a 15k starter chapter, so I really hope you guys enjoy! Your comments and support continue to be my authorial lifeblood, and I love you all!

Also this is a rush edit, so please forgive any mistakes!

Reviews and Kudos are <3
Criticisms appreciated and duly noted!

Enjoy the read xoxoxoxox
“I still don’t see it!” Frodo whined where he was curled up at Kili’s front, knocking his head back against the dwarf’s chest rhythmically. “I thought you said their town was big!”

“It is little one, it is..” The archer lamented, leaning down to press a kiss to Frodo’s head despite the shireling’s dour mood. “Just be patient, we don’t have much further. Mahal, I know how badly you need a break, but I promise you we are almost there.”

The small hobbit looked displeased, but ceased in his squirming, sulking slightly as he slouched back against Kili’s stomach.

Bilbo couldn’t help but let out a fond chuckle as he glanced back from where he was riding, arms wrapped around Fili at his front. They hadn’t had a real rest in weeks, not since Bree, and their party’s resident shireling had been getting more and more restless with each passing day.

“Hold tight Frodo, we’ve only a little farther to go.” He called, watching with slight satisfaction as the hobbit-ling stilled under his attention, his miserable attitude fading a bit as he relaxed where he sat.

“Alright.” The small child relented, reaching out to grab at the edges of the saddle, his cheeks puffing up slightly.

Bilbo shook his head, returning to where he was pressed against Fili’s back, tightening his hands in their band across the dwarf’s firm stomach. “Told you we’d need places to stop with him.”

Fili made a noise of ascension, glancing back at the older hobbit with a small quirk of his lips. “And you were unsurprisingly correct. I’m afraid another day of this would unhinge the boy completely. He does not take to riding so well, it seems.”

“It just bores him is all.” Bilbo shrugged, leaning in closer to press his face to the firm span of Fili’s back. “Riding every day is tiring, even for us grown folk. He’s still not used to having to sit still for so long.”

“I can understand that.” Fili chuckled in front of them, urging his horse on as they carefully navigated the path down the canyon slope. There were high banks of tall grasses and bushes that surrounded the road at this height, preventing them from seeing much of the valley below.

“He’s also incredibly excited to see the elves.” The hobbit added almost as an afterthought, his body molded pleasantly to the dwarf’s back. “I bet you he’s getting impatient.”

The prince seemed to stiffen slightly at the mention of the big folk, but his attention remained dead ahead. After that, they fell silent for a few moments, before suddenly Fili called out, halting the party. “Wait.”

Ragnar came to a stop ahead of them, Kili, Dasil, and Foseil slowing behind. Bilbo pulled back from the blond’s strong frame for a moment, glancing around in confusion. “Fili, what is it-”

“We’re going to take a break here.” The prince announced firmly, already sliding off of his pony, leaving a startled hobbit sitting on the back of the saddle. “It’s the last stretch of green we’ll get
before the path becomes too narrow. Let’s take advantage of this.”

“What—” Bilbo barely had time to object before Fili was reaching up to him, catching him by the hips and lifting to set him down on the path below them.

The rest of their small company followed soon after, dismounting their ponies and settling in the grassy banks around them. Bilbo shook his head in disbelief, watching as Fili winked at him, before the prince was walking over the green hill, stooping down by a bush laden with wild blossoms.

Suddenly it the blond dwarf’s intentions were quite clear, and the hobbit found himself flushing a deep crimson. “You stopped us for this?” He found himself asking, completely taken aback even as the dwarf returned, clutching some of the delicate blooms in his palms.

“Of course.” Fili gestured him down on the grasses, patting a patch in front of him as he dropped to sit amoung the emerald green blades. “We haven’t taken the time yet today, and if we’re going to present ourselves in front of those tree-loving fair folk, we’re going to do it properly.”

Bilbo shook his head with a hard laugh, opting to ignore the rather unpleasant tone that the prince had adopted while discussing elves. Instead he just stepped forward, allowing himself to drop down into the cradle of Fili’s bent knees, shifting right up to the dwarf’s front.

“Uncle Bilbo, Uncle Bilbo!” Frodo came dashing up from across the path, Kili bless-fully right on the boy’s heels. They were quite a ways from the edge of the cliff, but that did not make him feel any more at ease about having the little shireling racing around the grassy slopes.

Bilbo smiled as his nephew approached, taking note of what the boy had clasped in his tiny hands with a bright laugh. “What have you got there little one?”

“Flowers!” He exclaimed, dropping down to his knees in front of his uncle and allowing his arm full of colourful blossoms to fall to the grass beneath them. “For our hair.”

“Oh, how thoughtful.” Bilbo preened, reaching out to rub a hand over the child’s head in an affectionate manner. “Are they for all of us?”

“Yep.” Frodo scooted back a bit, reaching up to catch Kili’s hand where the young dwarf still stood, hovering above the hobbit-ling. “Mister Kili is going to do mine, while you do his!”

“That is a wonderful idea.” The older hobbit laughed, winking up at the archer as he was tugged down, slipping in between Bilbo and Frodo with a sheepish shrug. “Did you suggest this?” He asked the dark haired prince, spreading his knees a bit to accommodate for the man’s larger frame as he came to sit at his front.

“I did not actually.” Kili chuckled, already positioning Frodo in his lap as the shireling squirmed with a giggle. “I think he saw Fili start to pick them, and decided he wanted to join in as well.”

“Of course.” Frodo exclaimed, turning to crawl up Kili’s front, leaning over the dwarf’s shoulder to peer at his Uncle behind him. “How else will all the elves know that we’re a family?”

“Oh ho,” Fili scoffed at that, pressing closer to Bilbo’s back as he picked up a few strands of the hobbit’s hair, starting to weave the stem of a flower between them, “They would know little one. Flowers or not, we would find a way to show them.”

Bilbo made a squawking noise of embarrassment at the heavy implication in the blond’s tone, his cheeks heating up as he aimed a well-placed elbow at the prince’s ribs. “Behave.” He chided
quietly, only to have the dwarf chuckle, the noise rumbling into his ear, low and pleasant.

“I meant no harm.” Fili assured him with a cheeky grin, dipping forward more to press his lips to the side of Bilbo’s face. He lingered there for a moment, before he slowly drew back to continue weaving through his hair.

“Either way, I think that flowers are a much more fun, and appropriate display of courtship.” The older hobbit continued, flashing Fili one last look behind him before he turned back to his nephew. Frodo was still propped up over Kili’s shoulder, clinging to the archer’s back as he watched his uncle carefully. “Wouldn’t you say Frodo?”

The little shireling seemed to think on that for a moment, before he nodded, patting his hands down across the expanse of Kili’s shoulder blade. “Lots of fun! And it looks nice too.”

“That’s right.” The bigger Halfling reached up, gently tapping his nephew’s nose and earning a soft squeak of delight from the boy. “So why don’t you settle back down and let Mister Kili get a start on those unruly locks of yours, hm? That way I can do his hair as well.”

Frodo made a bright noise of ascension, disappearing back down the dwarf’s front as he no doubt settled in the archer’s lap, already sounding pleased and delighted. Kili chuckled, shifting to lean back into Bilbo slightly even as he adjusted the shireling where he sat. “Are you going to make me look nice Mister Baggins?” The young prince teased, glancing back at the hobbit with a quick wink.

Bilbo laughed at that, tilting his own head back to give Fili more room to work as he felt the dwarf release the first blossom completely, having managed to firmly secure it in his curls. “I’ll try my best.” He shot back to Kili, dragging his hands up through the archer’s hair.

This was familiar, even within their strict travelling routine. As often as they were able, Fili and Kili would find a safe place to pause for a rest. These stops would often also miraculously coincide with areas containing a healthy variety of wild flowers. Inevitably the four of them would sit down in the grass, sprawled out in some comfortable arrangement of limbs, weaving blossoms into each other’s hair and taking some time just to…bond. While it often delayed their progress somewhat, it always served to make Bilbo’s heart swell with delight and did wonders to lighten Frodo’s overall mood.

The hobbit flushed slightly at the thought, ducking his head with a happy smile as he felt Fili shift up closer to his back. The older prince was starting on another braid, tucking blossoms inside the weaving curls with a pleasant hum. “I really appreciate you two always taking the time to do this.” Bilbo murmured quietly, knowing his voice would carry to both brothers as he worked a strange, red daisy into Kili’s hair at his front. “It means a lot.”

“Means a lot to us too.” Fili murmured, leaning forward to press a kiss to the back of Bilbo’s head.

“Makes it feel like we’re all connected.” Kili agreed, tilting his chin up slightly to catch a glimpse of Bilbo from over his shoulder, only to have the hobbit scold him lightly, readjusting his head to where he could continue working on the braid he had pinched between his fingers.

Even still, that didn’t stop Bilbo from beaming at the sentiment, finishing off one small weave before scooping up another flower and starting to carefully work it in with the first.

They were taking their time, their motions slowly, more relaxed than they’d been in weeks. Being so close to Rivendell, Bilbo felt for the first time that he could breathe easy and just enjoy the warmth of the glowing, afternoon sun. They had made it some ways, but their trip had been
relatively easy so far. He didn’t doubt that they would have to face a few trials before they managed to find their way back to Erebor…to their new home. Yet at the same time, he couldn’t help but allow himself to feel at ease as they lounged in the grasses, thinking pleasantly to the elven city hidden in the trees just down the pathway.

It had been so long since his last visit, and he was unfathomably grateful to be doing so under such pleasant circumstances this time around. It was a wonderful break from his usual habit of falling into the company of elves in the most dire of conditions.

Now he would be riding in with strong company, a family, to stay with friends that he had longed to see for quite some time.

He knew the dwarves still had their reservations about visiting the elven city, but when Bilbo thought to Arwen and Lord Elrond, he couldn’t help but feel a thrill of excitement rush through him. Somehow, he was sure that Fili and Kili would warm to the people of Rivendell, especially while he and Frodo were there to smooth the way.

Bilbo beamed, a hard surge of happiness sliding through him as he fixed another flower into Kili’s hair, already reaching for the next.

While he was reluctant to admit it out loud, there was no deny that his hopes were high for this stay.

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“Oh wow!” Frodo cheered out, leaning forward over the top of the saddle as he scrambled for purchase over his pony’s neck and mane. “Kili look! Look at that!”

Bilbo let out a startled noise of concern from where they trailed behind his nephew, the older hobbit sitting in front of Fili, holding onto his reins with a white knuckled grip. He didn’t have time to call out and warn the little shireling off before Kili’s arm had curled out, wrapping around the child’s small waist and tugging him back firmly to sit against his front.

“Careful now little one.” The archer chided, holding him firm even as he urged their pony on, trying to keep the bubbling hobbit-ling still. “Don’t want to topple over the edge before you meet any of the fair folk, do you?”

Frodo practically cheered at the mention of big people, wiggling around in Kili’s grip so that he could get a better look at the grand, elven city, sprawled out across the cliff faces and rushing waterfalls before them. The boy let out another high-pitched call of excitement, turning to beam up at the archer behind him. “We’re going to see elves, real elves!”

Kili had taken the lead when the first, delicately thatched rooftops came into view among the sea of rock and trees. He’d pointed the city out to Frodo as they approached, and the boy had been absolutely beside himself ever since.

“Oh wow, the river’s so far down.” The shireling chimed as he clutched to Kili’s tunic, gesturing to the side of the bridge as they eased their ponies up and onto it, leaving the curling, sloped paths behind.

“That it is,” the archer agreed, ducking down to press his face to the side of the child’s cheek, causing him to let a high pitched giggle as they clicked along the heavy stone bridge, “wouldn’t want you to topple off way down there would we? So just keep those hands and legs on the pony!”

“Alright, alright.” Frodo let out a delighted noise, easing back against the dwarf and stilling
slightly.

He was behaving fairly well, all things considered, though Bilbo could see just how much he was itching to just bounce in his seat, his little legs kicking out over the side of the pony.

Rivendell was always a sight to behold, it’s gorgeous cobble-stone paths winding deep into the heart of a sea of delicate architecture. The older hobbit couldn’t help but let out a sigh of relief as they eased under the first archway leading into the elven city; this place had come to radiate both comfort and safety for him, and instantly he could feel the tension that ran as an undercurrent of adventure slowly start to ease off of his shoulders.

“You seem happy to be here.” Fili rumbled, sliding up close behind him and moving his hands around to rest over the hobbit’s thighs.

Bilbo felt his breath hitch, his hips shifting back slightly until he was plastered against the dwarf’s solid front. “I always enjoy my visits.” He admitted, tilting his head up to meet the prince’s eyes. “More so when you two are in my company.”

The blond let out a pleased rumble at that, leaning down to press his lips to the top of Bilbo’s head. The hobbit tilted his chin more to beam up at the prince, unable to keep his attention from the splash of color that was woven through the blond locks, plaited above his rounded ear. He and Kili had made sure, with Frodo’s help of course, to braid a bundle of flower’s in the oldest dwarf’s hair before they’d peeled themselves away from their grassy rest stop. “You’re going to be on your best behavior right?” He chimed up at Fili, his grin twitching wide. “I am quite close to Elrond and his family. I would prefer not to offend them in any manner.”

“I’d promise you that I’ll be good,” Fili rumbled, slowly slouching over until his chin was resting on Bilbo’s shoulder, cheek brushing with the Halfling’s companionably, “but it would, unfortunately, be a complete and utter lie.”

Bilbo breathed in hard, feeling a warm heat settle in his stomach as the prince’s hands curled tighter over his thighs. “Would it now.”

“Mm.” The blond chuckled, pressing a kiss to the side of the hobbit’s throat. “We’ll have our own room here. Our own bed.”

The hobbit let out a hitching groan of approval, shifting slightly until he was sitting back, fitted against the prince’s groin. “That is the most welcoming prospect I have heard in many weeks.” His breath caught in his chest when Fili rolled against him slightly, the motion teasing and soft.

It had been almost a month since they’d last been awarded anything even close to privacy, and they couldn’t risk a tumble while they camped; not with Frodo in the company. Even at rest they were alert and well aware of their surroundings, ready to move at but a moment’s notice.

Rivendell would be their first opportunity for reprieve in many long weeks, and would be the last for some time as well. They would have to take advantage of the rare opportunity to steal some time to themselves without worrying for the safety of the group.

Bilbo shifted slightly as a comfortable heat twisted in his belly. “Did you have anything specific in mind?”

“I do.” Fili hummed, the sound positively filthy as he fitted his lips to the shell of Bilbo’s ear. “I was hoping you might help me in a surprise for my brother.”

“A surprise.” The hobbit couldn’t help but gasp in slightly, a shudder creeping down his spine as
the blond’s mouth slid over the sensitive cartilage, lingering at the tip.

Riding with Fili was proving to be…challenging.

Most days he was perfectly behaved, a regular gentleman in fact; making pleasant conversation with the smaller man at his back, or sometimes just sitting close behind the Halfling, a callused hand settled over his hip, that big frame a solid line of heat against Bilbo’ spine.

Other days, however, when they rode a ways from Kili and Frodo, or when Fili just seemed to find himself in one of those moods, were absolute torture.

The prince never pushed things to far, but he would certainly do enough to leave Bilbo feeling uncomfortably embarrassed and bordering on aroused, all day. However Fili never tried to act on any of the wicked deeds he would murmur into the hobbit’s ear at odd intervals during their travels, so while it made him flush scarlet, Bilbo could hardly find it in him to object. Really it felt more like teasing than anything, but sometimes it was downright wicked, and Bilbo had been dying for the chance to finally be able to do something about it.

“Mhm. You know how much he likes them.” Fili leaned closer, dragging his lips back now to press just behind Bilbo’s ears. “And I hear the elves of Rivendell braid some exemplary rope.”

“Mahal.” The hobbit let out a hard shudder, the name of the dwarven god slipping unconsciously past his lips. He started slightly, his face flushing beet red as his hands shot down, reigns and all, to urge Fili’s hands up from his thighs to his stomach. “Ah, we really-” he swallowed, sliding forward just a tiny bit on the saddle, shifting to guide the pony one handed, while drawing the other up to cover both of Fili’s where they were pressed to his belly, “there. We need to at least try to uphold the barest image of propriety for the first day, at least. Can’t lose our composure when we’ve only just arrived.”

The prince let out a rumbling groan, pressing one last kiss to the side of Bilbo’s chin. “Hard for me to be proper when you start invoking Aule.” He let his lips rest there for a moment before, with a low growl, he finally forced himself to pull back, digging his fingers in just so on Bilbo’s stomach, causing the Halfling to twitch with a startled laugh.

“Cut that out!” He wheezed, squirming as he smacked at Fili’s hands with his own. “I swear I will elbow you if you don’t stop right-"

“Uncle Bilbo, Uncle Bilbo!”

Frodo’s voice cut through to them as the boy climbed up to hang off of Kili’s shoulders on the
pony in front of them. He waved back towards where his Uncle and Fili were riding, his eyes bright and his smile wide and beaming.

“Uncle Bilbo, it’s the elves!”

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The fair folk who assisted them in stowing their mounts seemed to be taken completely aback by Frodo’s presence. They watched the shireling wearing open, curious expressions, following his movements with interest as he dashed about them on the cobblestone.

“They’re real!” The tiny hobbit exclaimed with a clap of his hands, moving up nice and close to a dark haired elven woman who startled slightly, before smiling down at the small child. He beamed back, gesturing at her as he reached his arms up as much as he could manage. “And they’re huge!”

“Frodo!” Bilbo scolded, thanking the elf who took his pony with a nod of his head, before hurrying off in the direction of his nephew. “I know you’re excited, but do remember your manners.”

“I will, I will.” Frodo hopped back a bit, gesturing wide and accidentally bumping into a passing guard. The shireling leaned back a bit, staring up at the man with bright eyes. “Excuse me.”

The hobbit-ling took a step forward, waiting for the elf to continue on his way, before turning to watch him go, making an excited noise in the back of his throat. “They’re bigger than anyone I’ve ever seen! Even bigger than those men in Bree! Oh, Sam will be so jealous when he hears and… look, oh look!”

Bilbo made a startled sound as Frodo bee-lined towards a hanging elven cloak, hooked outside the stables so that it’s edges dangled just above the ground. Thankfully he was saved from the possibility of further embarrassment by Kili (Frodo’s now undisputed favorite of the group) who dashed in to scoop the squirming hobbit up into his arms. He spun them around, shifting his grip on the child until he’d hoisted him over his head to sit on his shoulders, bracing him with a firm grip on his small legs.

The shireling let out a bright noise of delight, fistimg his tiny hands into the dwarf’s thick, dark hair as Kili stepped back in line with their companions, finally managing to get a handle on the bubbling child. As he drew closer Bilbo could hear the young dwarf as he engaged the tiny hobbit, keeping his tone bright. “View’s better from up here isn’t it?”

“It is.” Frodo agreed, leaning forward and pushing his hands around the archer’s head until he had his little palms pressed to his brow, hugging him close. “Thank you Mister Kili.”

“You are most welcome.” The young prince smiled up towards Frodo, the expression somewhat reserved even as he squeezed the shireling’s calves reassuringly. He settled in at Bilbo’s side, waiting for Fili to do the same as their party gathered, ponies being led off one by one.

None of the dwarves seemed at ease, their shoulders tense and their gazes narrowed. Kili appeared the most relaxed of the bunch, chatting away to a very enthused Frodo; but Bilbo could see the tight edge to his smile, hard lines of effort pinching up around his eyes.

Fili was no better; his jaw line was set, rigid and hard as he surveyed the buildings around them, pressed close to Bilbo’s side. The hobbit shook his head and reached out to clasp a hand over one of the older prince’s, squeezing there reassuringly. “Relax will you?” He urged gently, a smile creeping up across his features. “No need to be so tense. I promise, we will be among friends here.”
The blond raised an eyebrow at him significantly, skepticism painted across his features. “Our record with elves has not been the best.”

“You’re friends with Legolas aren’t you?”

“I think friendship is a strong word for it but…I suppose. Even still-” Fili made a noise in the back of his throat, the sound torn between agitated and displeased, “you can’t really expect me to believe that they’ll want to make friends with dwarf kind.”

“They just might if you give them the chance.” The hobbit shot back, smile still ever present as he cleared his throat slightly, gesturing for them to move forward towards the steps, past a set of silent, stony faced guards.

The soft exchange between Kili and Frodo served to ease the company’s tension somewhat as they started up towards the main buildings, the little shireling making all sorts of delighted sounds over the sights of the steep cliffs and expansive canyon that was spread out before them.

They’d just reached the top of the stairs when a flurry movement caught their attention ahead, figures hurrying towards them from across a small court yard. At the head of the group of tall, immaculate folk was a familiar face, Bilbo’s heart catching in his throat slightly as she met his eyes and beamed.

“Bilbo Baggins!” She called, picking up her pace as she dashed up towards him, a bright smile across her features.

He grinned, unable to help himself as he drew away from Fili and Kili, hurrying up to meet the elven woman in a warm embrace.

Arwen dropped easily to her knees as she swept him up into the firm hug, a light bubble of laughter escaping him as he wrapped his arms around her in turn.

“Arwen.” The hobbit pressed his face to her shoulder, taking in the distinct sweet, floral scent, and delicate fabric her dress. “It’s been too long.”

“That it has.” She held him for a moment, before she pulled back, darting down to press a kiss to the hobbit’s round cheek. “It is beyond a pleasure to see you looking so well.”

Bilbo felt something sharp tug at his smile, the words sending him back to the last time he’d visited here, and how utterly shattered he had been. He flushed a bit, fighting to keep his expression bright as he gazed up at her. “A lot has changed since we saw each other last.”

“I can see that.” Arwen’s tone turned playful and she reached out gently, pressing the tips of her fingers to the spray of blossoms that were woven through the hair at the side of his head.

His face burned scarlet and he felt a hot swell of happiness burst up inside of him when she glanced over his shoulder, noting the party at his heels.

“The little one must be that nephew of yours, yes?” She smiled a bit in wonder at Frodo where he was seated atop Kili’s shoulders, her hand already raising as she gave the boy a small wave.

The shireling returned it cheerily, which seemed to make the young dwarf holding him sour in turn. Bilbo almost rolled his eyes at the huff the archer let out, but Arwen only laughed, shaking her head as she returned her attention to Bilbo, dropping her voice slightly. “And if my eyes do not mistake me, those are the nephews of King Thorin of Erebor.”
He nodded to her, biting at the inside of his lips to fight back a cheeky grin. “Fili and Kili of the line of Durin. Heir Apparent and Prince, respectively.”

She took a glance back towards them, and he had no doubt that she had noticed the decorations in the dwarven brothers’ hair, and the matching one in Frodo’s dark curls. The woman nodded, humming to herself in an agreeable fashion before she turned back to Bilbo with a knowing smile.

“It seems to me that congratulations are in order.” She straightened, rising to stand as she turned to the group of fair folk at her heels. She spoke to them in soft elvish, and one by one they nodded, moving off into the building gracefully, their gazes occasionally sliding back to find the strange company standing in the courtyard.

Bilbo met her eyes with a curious gaze when she turned back to him, inclining his head towards the retreating elves with a slight quirk of his eyebrow.

“They’re going to prepare something special for dinner.” Arwen shot him a significant look, placing a hand on his shoulder as the two of them began to walk towards the dwarves. “This is hardly an announcement to go without celebration.”

“You don’t have to-” Bilbo began, slowing their walk slightly as he glanced up at her in concern.

“Of course we do Mister Baggins.” She chided him, gently easing him forward as she glided along, her gaze fixed down at him with a fond smile. “What sort of friends would we be if we did otherwise?”

She turned her attention back to the dwarves in front of them then, and Bilbo could see the moment her eyes picked out Frodo once more, her expression shifting just slightly with the warm coloring of her cheeks. His nephew was meeting the look with an awed one of his own, gazing at Arwen with his big eyes blown wide.

Immediately Bilbo wanted to get the two of them acquainted, and he glanced over at Kili, flashing him an apologetic look, before turning his attention to his nephew. “I think maybe Frodo might like to come say hello. What do you say little one?”

For a moment the shireling looked torn. Kili stiffened slightly beneath him, and the child looked down at him in mild concern, running his hands over the archer’s hair soothingly. The dwarf seemed to relax a bit, and then Frodo made eye contact with Arwen once more. He smiled and began to nod, before he glanced back down to the prince below him, murmuring a quiet question. “Is it okay Kili?”

The archer looked startled, twisting his neck to glance up to Bilbo with his mouth twitching open. It wasn’t the first time Frodo had ever sought out the dwarf’s permission on something, but it was the first time he’d done so even after his uncle’s approval. “Okay? Of course it’s okay.” Kili managed, schooling back his look of surprise as he reached up, grabbing Frodo under the arms and carefully hefting him up off of his shoulders. As he set the shireling down he crouched along with him, an easy smile on his features. “In fact, I think it would be just plain rude not to say hello, and we have to mind our manners, right?”

“Right.” Frodo giggled a bit as Kili leaned forward, rubbing his stubbled cheek against the shireling’s before he turned little one around, sending him off in the direction of his Uncle.

Bilbo beamed at Kili as he sent the hobbit-ling on his way, mouthing a silent ‘thank you’ at the dwarf even as he reached out for his nephew, gesturing him forward. “Come on then Frodo.”
The boy seemed to take a sudden turn towards shy, ducking his head slightly as he slid up just behind Bilbo, reaching out to curl a tiny hand in his pant leg. He glanced up at the woman coyly, his little cheeks rosy as he gazed at her with a dazed smile.

He seemed quite taken with her beauty, his breath catching on a small gasp when she knelt down in front of him, bringing them almost face to face. “It is a pleasure to meet you little one.” She murmured, and Bilbo could see his nephew relax visibly at the comforting tone. She smiled and continued on, extending a soft hand out towards the small boy. “I am Arwen Evenstar, a friend of your Uncle’s.”

The shireling smiled at her, glancing up to Bilbo one last time before he hesitantly peeled himself away from the older hobbit’s side, reaching out to fit his tiny hand into Arwen’s grip. “My names Frodo.” Then he paused, adding as if to clarify, “Frodo Baggins.”

Bilbo took a few steps back as the elf woman began to engage Frodo in a light conversation, the little hobbit-ling absolutely delighted by her very existence. It wasn’t long before Arwen had won Frodo over enough to scoop him up in her arms, marveling at his small size. Bilbo smiled fondly and flicked his gaze back to Kili where he stood, noticing the stiff set of the young dwarf’s shoulders. “Hey.” He eased up to the archer’s side, pushing onto his toes and dragging Kili down enough to press a kiss to his chin. “No need to be jealous.”

“I’m not.” Kili objected, but at Bilbo’s knowing look he sighed, shrugging his shoulders helplessly. “Okay, so maybe just a little.”

The hobbit laughed, shaking his head as he pushed up further, resting his hands on one of the prince’s shoulders while he pressed a kiss to his mouth firmly. “Don’t worry about it.” The Halfling drew back and let his gaze flick over to Fili at their side, raising an eyebrow suggestively as he continued. “We’ll find a way to make it up to you later.”

Kili groaned, chasing Bilbo back down for a few, chaste pecks. “That a promise?”

“Mm.” Bilbo grinned at the archer, before he flicked his gaze over to Fili once more. The blond was staring at them, something dark and heavy in his gaze. “You can count on it.”

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“Much as I hate to admit it.” Foseil started, gesturing with a fruit filled sticky bun, his beard kissed with crumbs and matted clumps of sugar. “These elf folk sure do know how to treat their guest.”

Bilbo hummed in agreement, leaning back against Fili’s side as he bit into a slice of candied apple. “They are incredible hosts, and even better friends.” He leaned his head up slightly, addressing the prince directly as he spoke. “Wouldn’t you say so?”

Fili grumbled, letting out a begrudging ‘I suppose’ as he bit into a slice of candied apple. “They are incredible hosts, and even better friends.” He leaned his head up slightly, addressing the prince directly as he spoke. “Wouldn’t you say so?”

Fili grumbled, letting out a begrudging ‘I suppose’ as he sat back in their seat, a piece of sweet bread hanging half out of his mouth. The hobbit scoffed at the distinct lack of manners, reaching up and snagging the rest of the pastry right out from between the dwarf’s teeth. Fili made an offended noise, watching as Bilbo munched away on his bread with a mock scowl.

“Stealing food is a low blow my friend.” The blond warned him, leaning forward to squeeze at the hobbit’s sides playfully.

Bilbo squawked, just about choking on the pastry in his mouth as he tried to wiggle away from those tickling fingers, only to just topple off of the chair. Only Fili’s quick reflexes saved him from crashing down onto the floor, one hand wrapping around Bilbo’s waist to pull him up and flush
“Easy there.” The prince teased, leaning down to press his lips to the side of Bilbo’s face, causing the hobbit to let out a puffing laugh. “Think the Elven drink might be getting to you a bit there.”

“No.” The Halfling countered, fitting both hands against Fili’s shoulders as the prince managed to haul the hobbit over and onto his lap. “I’m pretty sure you, my little lord, are the only think getting to me this evening.”

He shot an apologetic glance over to Foseil at their side, but the older guard wasn’t paying them any heed, lost in conversation with Ragnar and one of the Elven servers, who was listening to their boisterous stories with wide eyes and a careful smile.

“Little lord?” Fili shot back, shifting his hands to Bilbo’s hips, keeping the hobbit planted astride his thighs. The dwarf leaned in, pressing his lips to the underside of the smaller man’s jaw, his beard scratching against the bare flush of skin deliciously. “I’m sure you’d agree, there’s not much little about me.”

He rolled his hips up as if to prove the point, Bilbo’s thighs squeezing over Fili’s lap as he bit down on his lip, trying to fight back the surge of arousal that pushed through him. He flashed the prince a look, but the blond merely grinned, raising an eyebrow at him challengingly. With a scoff Bilbo shook his head, meeting Fili’s expression dead on with a small quirk of his lips. “You’re certainly shorter than your little brother.”

“Hey.” The blond sounded wounded, raising one hand up from Bilbo’s hip to press over his breast, just above the heart. “Low blow. There is no honour in cruelty, Master Baggins.”

“Oh, so I’m being cruel now am I?” Bilbo glanced quickly over his shoulder, noting the room was empty save for Ragnar, Foseil, and their captive elven audience. With a small grin he turned back to the dwarf below him, rolling his hips forward in one slow, firm movement that had Fili’s hands stuttering on his waist.

“Ah-” The blond’s breath caught before he let out a growl, forcing his eyes up and fixed to Bilbo’s own, “yes, yes you are.”

The hobbit grinned, leaning forward until his chest and stomach were plastered to Fili’s front, propping his chin up over the blond’s shoulder. His smile only widened as he leaned up a bit, his lips brushing against the rounded shell of the dwarf’s ear. “I’ll make it up to you.”

Fili let out a groan, his eyes fluttering shut as he braced Bilbo’s sides with his hands, fingers digging in firmly. “Oh, you bet your ass you will.”

“Mm. But not now.” The hobbit drew back, pressing his mouth to the dwarf’s chin before he reached down to the fingers at his hips, carefully easing them off one by one. “Wouldn’t want to disgrace our very generous host by defiling his fine sitting room.”

That caused Fili to pause, and slowly, reluctantly he let Bilbo slide off his lap. He didn’t allow the hobbit to get far, however, keeping one arm wrapped around his waist as he tugged him close to his side.

The Halfling felt himself grin as he leaned into Fili’s hold, relaxing against the cushions behind them and thinking idly back over the day.

Arwen had shown them to their rooms first, where they were surprised to find their packs had already been laid out. Each of the guards had their own bed chamber, suiting them all fine, having
spent so much time in one another’s company for the past many months.

Bilbo, on the other hand, was politely informed by his elven friend that he would be sharing one of the masters with Fili and Kili. He’d been both embarrassed and ridiculously pleased with the gesture, smiling even as Arwen winked at him playfully. She’d even offered to keep Frodo company for the evening, and to stay with him in the hobbit-ling’s own guest chambers.

Frodo had appeared absolutely delighted by the offer, but Kili had objected almost immediately. He looked positively livid for a moment, before he caught glances from both Fili and Bilbo and reluctantly relented. The promise of privacy was enough of a lure to fight back the young archer’s apparent jealousy at Frodo’s adoration of Arwen. Though the dwarf hadn’t been impressed, he’d done his best to smile at the shireling and keep his demeanor companionable throughout the afternoon.

Once they’d all cleaned up and changed into clean clothing, Arwen had met them in the halls with a freshly washed Frodo and motioned them to follow her down to the dining halls. They’d met Elrond on the way, beneath the large arches of the hallway, and had immediately greeted Bilbo with a small hug. The elven lord hadn’t seemed all that surprised as he scanned the four of them, visibly noting flowers weaved into their hair. He had understood the meaning of the decorations well enough, but simply shook his head and opted to withhold all opinion on the matter.

After introductions had been finished, Elrond giving a familiar nod to Fili and Kili, greeting the three guards with a half-smile, and looking almost delighted by the tiny shireling clasped in his daughter’s arms, they began to make their way towards the dining chambers to settle down for supper.

The Halfling had no doubt that they would have to speak with Elrond formally about a few things before the end of their stay, but for the evening it seemed their hosts were happy to celebrate. The conversation had been light throughout the course of the meal, and the mood so pleasant that none of the dwarves could even find reason to sour.

Frodo, being the intuitive little hobbit that he was, had requested to sit with Kili for duration of his supper, something that had become a bit of a ritual for the two of them since the beginning of their journey. The archer had been absolutely delighted by the suggestion and Arwen had very easily agreed, handing Frodo over with a small smile.

The young dwarf’s mood had improved by leaps and bounds after that. He’d even willingly sat himself at Arwen’s side for dinner so that the shireling in his lap could still chat away with his new friend. Fili next to his brother, wedged comfortably between the archer and Bilbo, who in turn was framed by Elrond at his far side.

The course of supper had been incredibly pleasant as Elrond questioned them about their journey, only to eventually turn and fall into a conversation with Dasil about the frequency of recent Orc raids across the region. Arwen kept the rest of the occupied with the few other elves, moving about the room, and soon even the dwarves seemed to be enjoying themselves and their meals. Then afterwards they had all led to the sitting room to enjoy a series of specially prepared pastries and sweet, heavy liquor.

The conversation had lulled after that, and eventually the room began to clear out, one by one. Many of the elves left first, with Dasil and Elrond strolling out of the room leisurely, wrapped up in some discussion. Shortly after Frodo came dashing up to Bilbo, kissing his cheek and telling him that he and Kili were off for a tour of the city with Arwen and one of her friends. The hobbit had raised an eyebrow at that, but had bid both his nephew and the youngest prince fairwell, kissing the shireling’s brow before leaning up and pressing his mouth to the dwarf’s lightly. Then had watched
with a smile as the two of them moved out of the room towards where Arwen was waiting.

He’d been beyond pleased to see the his elven friend include Kili in her interactions with Frodo, noticing how the dwarf visibly relaxed once he was in close contact with the small hobbit. The young prince took his responsibility for the shireling very seriously, and thus far would not suffer to be parted from him for very long. Bilbo found it beyond endearing, his heart swelling as he thought back to the way Kili had smiled when Arwen led him and Frodo out of the room.

Already he could tell it would be difficult for the dwarf to part with the shireling for the evening.

“We have to treat him well tonight.” He stated suddenly, pulling himself out of his thoughts and glancing up to Fili at his side. At the prince’s confused look he continued, elaborating. “Kili I mean. He’s just been absolutely perfect with Frodo, and I think we should…oh I don’t know, reward him for it?”

Fili lit up at that, a grin curling up his cheeks as he leaned down, pressing his lips to the top of Bilbo’s head. “That would be the plan.” He then glanced around, before bending over a touch more to set his mouth next to the hobbit’s ear. “I believe we have spent more than the required amount of time with pleasantries hm? Our hosts have already left, what reason do we have to linger”

“Well,” The blond pressed a kiss to the shell of his ear, his grip tightening on the hobbit slightly, “I would have you go immediately to bed, while I run a quick errand of some necessity.” He leaned down further, pressing a kiss to the Halfling’s cheek this time. “I will not stray to come find you when I am finished.”

Bilbo made a noise of consideration in the back of his throat, tilting his head with a small smile as Fili’s lips pressed against his jaw. “Alright.” He conceded, carefully turning to catch the prince’s mouth with his own momentarily. “What about Kili though?”

“Mm, I’ll find him when the time comes.” The blond haired dwarf slowly eased himself away, pushing his chair back from the small table they were seated at, pillows slipping out from behind him and falling softly to the floor. “Come on then, I think it’s about time we to excused ourselves for the evening.”

Bilbo followed his lead, accepting a hand up from where he was sitting before catching Ragnar and Foseil’s attention, bidding them a quick goodnight. They grinned knowingly as them as he and Fili took their leave, strolling together a ways before the prince stopped, gesturing him on even as he disappeared down an adjacent hallway.

The hobbit didn’t dwell on the potential troubles that the blond dwarf could be getting himself into, instead just focusing on navigating his way back to their chambers, a hot swell of excitement roiling in his violently in his gut.

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When Fili finally found his way to the master he took Bilbo completely by surprise, dropping a bundle from his arms and barely waiting for the door to close before he was stalking forward, catching the hobbit’s face in his hands.

He bent down just as Bilbo gasped in sharply, pressing their mouths together with a surging heat that threatened to take the Halfling’s legs out from beneath him. He reached out quickly, catching
his fingers in the fabric of Fili’s tunic and just holding there, struggling to keep his balance.

One kiss quickly led to another, then another as prince began to press him slowly backwards, his hands trailing first down Bilbo’s throat, then over his chest and stomach until they were fisting into the hobbit’s shirt. The motion sent a spike of arousal through the smaller man, his whole body jerking as he pulled back from Fili, the blond catching his lower lip between his teeth in one last, lingering scrape.

Bilbo gasped, fighting to contain a moan as he glanced up at the dwarf, his whole body lit with arousal.

“What about Kili?” The Halfling managed to complain, nevertheless relenting to Fili’s ministrations as the prince caught the bottom of his shirt, pulling it out from where it was tucked inside his pant line. “I thought we were going to, ah-” his breath punched out of him as hands trailed down to work open the front of his trousers, causing his hips to roll involuntarily into the sensation, “I thought we were supposed to surprise him?”

“We will.” Fili assured him softly, already catching the fabric of Bilbo’s pants with his thumbs and dragging at them, stripping the hobbit down to his underclothes in one quick motion. With an appreciative groan the dwarf leaned forward, pushing down the top of the hobbit’s shirt with his nose in order to press a chaste kiss to his collarbone “We’re just going to get you sorted in the mean time.”

“We are, are we?” Bilbo groaned, his hands coming up to curl in Fili’s hair where the prince was mouthing over his shoulder, lips catching over the puckered scar there, causing the hobbit’s entire frame to tense with surprise and pleasure.

“Mm,” The dwarf straightened slightly, drawing back to set a hand against Bilbo’s chest as he gave the hobbit a firm push, knocking him off kilter. With his pants still trapped around his ankles he had no choice but allow himself to stumble backwards, shoving up onto the mattress behind him.

Fili crawled up after him and paused to draw Bilbo’s underclothes down too, taking them with his trousers and carefully working them off of his feet. Then, after folding them up and setting them to the side, the dwarf pushed forwards, sliding himself between the hobbit’s spread knees.

With their bodies pressed together he leaned up, catching Bilbo’s lips in another firm, lingering kiss. The hobbit made a noise of approval, unable to stop from rutting up slightly as Fili pressed down between his legs, grinding their groins together. The sensation left the smaller man reeling, his flesh feeling raw and exposed against the rough fabric of the dwarf’s trousers. He reached up, fisting one hand in the prince’s thick locks as he gasped into the kiss, squirming against the silken bed covers.

By the time Fili finally pulled back he’d left the smaller man breathless and dizzy, gasping as the dwarf started to move down his throat. He kept his hold on the blonde hair curled between his fingers. As the prince reached his belly he felt his whole body jump and he tightened his grip, tugging Fili’s head up slightly. “Wait, can we at least talk about this?” He asked breathlessly, keeping his hand nestled firmly in the dwarf’s hair. “I thought this was supposed to be a surprise for Kili, not for me.”

“Are you asking me to stop?” The prince teased, his fingers trailing down to squeeze over Bilbo’s hips, digging into his flesh slightly.

“No,” The smaller man gasped out, feeling his body give an involuntary jerk upwards, “no don’t stop just…” he groaned, scraping his nails against the dwarf’s scalp lightly, earning a low growl
for his efforts, “just let me know what’s going on in that big, beautiful head of yours.”

Fili glanced at him slightly, raising his eyebrows as he began to sit up, dislodging the hobbit’s hand. “Did you just call my head big?”

Bilbo made an annoyed sound at the back of his throat, wrapping one leg around the back of Fili’s thighs as the dwarf came to kneel at his front. “That’s really what you’re going to focus on right now?”

The blond chuckled, shaking his head and releasing his grip on the Halfling’s hips, moving instead to fish for something inside of his tunic. “Well, you are a crucial part of this plan of mine, so I suppose I could suffer to fill you in.” He made a bright noise in the back of his throat, looking delighted as he managed to pluck a vial of oil from his shirt, beaming down at Bilbo. “Would that make you feel better?”

“It ah,” The hobbit blinked, his mind momentarily skipping over what Fili was saying as he stared at the lubricant with a small surge of heat in his belly, “I mean yes, it would.”

“Alright.” The prince looked positively devious, reaching out to grip Bilbo’s shoulder with his free hand, urging the hobbit to turn over. He hesitated at first, glancing up at the blond skeptically before he rolled so that he was propped up on his hands and knees. Fili then came up against his back, pressing a palm down in between his shoulder-blades until Bilbo took the hint and sunk down on his elbows, forcing his hips just that much higher in the air.

Fili made an approving sound and Bilbo could hear the cork popping out of the vial, the noise loud and echoing in the quiet room. “Tonight, Mister Baggins, you and I will be giving my brother a very, special, treat.”

Something wet and cold suddenly hit the bottom of his spine, sliding down between the crack of his ass in a slow, teasing dribble. He gasped out sharply when Fili’s fingers followed the lubricant’s path, smearing it against his flesh before he rubbed down, dipping into him with the rough pad of his thumb. The hobbit choked on a moan, pressing his face into his arms as his hips gave a subconscious roll back, incidentally impaling himself further on the thick digit.

It was a comfortable stretch, not even bordering on pleasure yet, but still it itched with so much promise that Bilbo couldn’t help the hard curl of arousal in his stomach. It wasn’t enough, and already he could feel himself aching for more.

However, before he could find the wherewithal to ask, Fili was already drawing his thumb out, replacing it with a finger that he sunk readily into the hobbit, causing him to whine out with a punching breath.

“What, ah-” Bilbo spread his legs a little further, pushing his upper body down into the mattress as he breathed in hard, “what kind of treat?”

Fili hummed noncommittally, crooking his finger against the Halfling’s prostate, causing his entire body to buck back, a white flare of pleasure slamming through him. “I think you know.” The prince rumbled, starting up a quick rhythm, pressing against that sweet spot over and over as he spoke. “This dance we’ve been doing around the topic has been cute, but if you truly want this, you’re going to have to be more frank with me now.”

The hobbit flushed hard, burning with embarrassent at being caught acting coy. He sucked in a hard breath, trying to calm the tremor in his voice as he turned his face slightly, pressing one cheek into the mattress so he could glance up at the dwarf looming over him. “We’re going to tie him up.”
The prince groaned at the statement, leaning down to press a kiss to the side of Bilbo’s chin, drawing his hand back only to slip two fingers in this time, spreading in open in slow, careful movements. “Close, very close, but not we. I’m going to tie him up.” He leaned down, pressing a kiss to the top of Bilbo’s spine, then dragging his mouth a bit lower, tongue lathing between his shoulder blades. “I have a different job for you this evening little one.”

Bilbo was struggling to pay attention, his stomach clenching hard as Fili drummed his fingers against that sweet spot inside of him, pausing the rhythm every so often to scissor out, stretching him in firm motions. He fought back the mix of emotions that swelled in his chest, turning his head again to try and catch the blond’s eye. “Whatever you need. I’m… I’m at your service.”

The sound that rumbled up from Fili’s throat was animalistic, his free hand coming down to curl around Bilbo’s waist, hauling the hobbit up and over his kneeling lap. The motion forced the smaller man’s legs to spread wide, stretching to straddle his strong thighs and instinctively Bilbo reached back, bracing by wrapping an arm back around Fili’s side. The prince shifted then the fingers inside of him, quirking them down sharper over his prostate even as he leaned up against the hobbit’s back.

“I need you to do something for me.” Fili growled, the arm braced around the smaller man moving until the dwarf’s palm was splayed flat across his stomach.

“What?” Bilbo asked through a hard swallow, digging his fingers in slightly where he held onto the prince behind him.

Fili leaned down and fitted his lips just behind Bilbo’s ear, his hand dragging up the hobbit’s front until it was clasped over the breast pocket of his vest.

“I need you to abuse your power.”

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It didn’t take long for Bilbo to start to feel the slight tugging itch of regret for agreeing to go along with this ridiculous plan.

He knelt in the plush chair in the corner of the master guestroom, his arms crossed over his chest as chilled bumps prickled up across his exposed skin. He’d been alone for some time but his body still lingered with the blush of arousal, only sheer self-restraint stopping him from just giving in and relieving himself in the quiet evening air.

He resisted, keeping his hands rooted firmly over his thighs as he hunched his shoulders up, focusing on the rope that sat out on the bed at his side, coiled carefully in the heart of the silky sheets.

Before he’d left to find his brother Fili had been sure to prepare Bilbo for the upcoming encounter; he’d described in detail the particulars of his grand idea while he fingered the Halfling far more thoroughly than was strictly necessary.

Then he’d helped the smaller man strip down to his skin, watching the hobbit roll the smooth ring across his palm as he contemplated the thing carefully. Fili had reached down, sliding his hands around Bilbo’s to close it and pressing a kiss to the curly top of his head. With that he’d left, and slowly, reluctantly, the hobbit stepped back to sit in the chair, hands clenched in front of him on his lap.

It seemed like an eternity before he heard any noise beyond the room, his ears straining in the soft,
bubbling silence that rolled through the calm city. He just about jumped out of his skin when he finally heard it, a distant murmur of familiar voices that rang through the halls outside.

He felt his breath catch, subconsciously drawing the ring out of his palm as he eased up further onto his knees. He held the smooth band of metal between his fingers, one tip poised within the golden circle. There was a rumble of laughter, and then Kili’s familiar tone bounced down towards the room, causing Bilbo to tense hard.

He waited until the very last second, watching for the first hint of the doorknob turning before he slipped the thing on, feeling himself melt away from sight where he sat, poised atop the chair.

Not a moment later Kili came spilling into the room, chuckling as Fili slid up behind him, grabbing the archer and turning to pin him against the closing door. Bilbo had to fight down the hitch in his breath as he watched their mouths slot together, the younger dwarf melting into the kiss with a moan as Fili reached out, fiddling with the lock until he managed to slide it shut with a resounding click.

The older prince didn’t seem inclined to wait for pleasantries before he started to divest his brother of his clothing, fingers working over the fastenings of his tunic with a skilled and practiced ease. Kili didn’t protest, simply curling his hands in the blond’s hair and tugging hard, urging him deeper into the kiss.

Bilbo couldn’t help but sit deeper into the back of his seat, his face heating up and a hot curl of arousal punching through his gut as he braced himself breathlessly. While there was a lot that he had experienced between the three of them, this was the first time he had ever seen such a raw interaction between the two brothers; their movements sure and familiar as they pressed into one another, breathing shallow between the slide of their lips.

It didn’t take long for Kili to start divested his brother of clothing too, peeling away layer by layer with a series of delighted noises. Bilbo was so invested in the sight before him that he was actually jarred when suddenly the archer pulled away from his brother, looking confused and searching the room. “Fili.” The young dwarf stated, a frown pulling at his lips. “Where’s Bilbo?”

The hobbit felt his breathing catch and he had to shove a hand quickly up, plastering it over his mouth as he fought to stay silent through the tight swell of arousal that slid into him. He felt warmed and overwhelmingly pleased that even at a moment like this, the brothers still thought about him. It took everything he had not to shift, his cock stiffening further while he struggled to find composure.

“He’s otherwise indisposed.” Fili told him fondly, his tone so convincingly solemn that Kili instantly believed him, his expression slightly crestfallen.

“Should we wait for him?”

“No.” Fili shook his head, pulling at the lacings of the younger dwarf’s trousers, dropping them to the floor and leaving him clad in nothing but his underclothes. “Let’s just get started. He can join in when he gets back or, if he wants, he could watch.”

Kili shuddered hard and let out a soft noise, reaching out to brace himself on his brother’s biceps.

“Oh, you’d like that, wouldn’t you little brother.” The older prince wasn’t done, hooking his thumbs in the waist of the archer’s undergarments and shoving them down, leaving the younger dwarf bared completely to the room. “You’d like him to walk in and see what I’m about to do to you, to watch as I force you to come undone.”
Kili made a noise of desperation and pressed forward, chasing down his brother’s lips as they began to move back towards the bed, their motions jostled and rough.

Bilbo felt his heart stutter in his chest from where he sat as he watched Fili spin the two of them around, shoving his brother down into the mattress and crawling down on top of him. There the blond settled down between Kili’s thighs, pinning him firmly to the bed.

When they kissed again the archer keened, his hands sliding out to brace in the sheets beneath them. As he spread his fingers Bilbo watched him catch the edge of the rope, his entire body stiffening at the contact.

Instantly he was pulling away from Fili’s mouth, twisting and leaning over to try and get a look at what he was feeling. He didn’t make it far, however, before the older dwarf was bearing down on him, his hands sliding up to catch his brother’s wrists, holding them down against the bedding.

Kili let out a keening noise of disappointment at that, but contrary to the sound his legs spread wider, inviting the blond further down into the cradle of his lap. He didn’t try and resist his brother’s grip, simply breathing out a scoffing sound as he shifted against the sheets.

“You already know what that is.” Fili told him, his tone almost chiding as he leaned down, pressing a kiss to his brother’s chin. He paused there, and Bilbo could see his teeth catch on the stubbled flesh, causing the younger dwarf to arch and whine.

“Just because I know doesn’t mean I don’t want to take a peek.” Kili shot back cheekily, but the effect was lost with the wavering of his voice over a deep, hitching breath.

“Patience. There’ll be plenty of time for that later.” The blond stated simply, releasing his brother’s wrists and leaning up slightly, nodding him towards the head of the bed. “On your back, hands above your head.”

The younger prince took to the command instantly, pushing himself across the mattress to lie at the head of the bed, a pillow cushioned beneath him and his arms lifted up. He grasped at the intricately carved headboard with his fingers curling and stared over at his brother, a challenging grin on his features.

Fili didn’t waste a moment. He was across the bed so quickly that Bilbo felt his breath catch, his hand still pressed down firmly over his mouth. Already he had a delicate braid of rope in his hands, crawling up next to his brother to start weaving it intricately around the younger prince’s wrists.

From where he was seated the Halfling couldn’t quite make out how Fili was knotting the archer’s hands together, but when the blond finally drew away he had somehow managed to bind Kili’s wrists completely, securing them in turn to the smooth, carved spokes of the headboard.

“Too tight?” The older dwarf asked, leaning back a bit to give his brother time to shift and adjust.

The archer gave a hard shake of his head. “Not tight enough if you ask me.”

“That, I can live with.” Fili grinned, reaching out to give his brother’s cheeks an affectionate squeeze before he was shifting, sliding down to snatch up a second piece of rope and settling by the younger prince’s feet. “Hold still.”

“Yes sir.” Kili shot back, giving his hands a testing pull where they were secured above his head.

The comment got him a hard slap across the thigh and Fili flashed him a warning look, already starting to fasten the archer’s ankles together. “If anything starts to hurt, you let me know okay?”
“Oh, I will let you know.” The young dwarf puffed out, unable to keep from shifting his feet slightly as Fili finished off the last of the knots, securing the soft elvish rope around him tightly. It looked delicate, but from the way Kili was straining, it was obviously strong.

Satisfied with his work Fili sat back on his heels slightly, surveying his naked brother where he was bound down against the bed sheets. Then slowly, painfully so, the older prince began to divest himself of the rest of his own clothing, throwing his pants off to the side and shucking his undershirt with a casual shrug.

Kili squirmed where he was forced to watch, secured down to the mattress, unable to get any closer to touch the older dwarf. Bilbo could understand his condition, reaching out with his free hand to grasp at the arm of his chair, steadying himself where he swayed, his body heavy with arousal.

Then suddenly the mattress was creaking as Fili shifted down next to his brother, a familiar vial clutched in his grip alongside two strips of leather. He carefully gripped his brother’s bound ankles, encouraging his legs to part as he lifted and ducked underneath them, settling between the younger dwarf’s spread thighs. “There we go.” The blonde hummed, settling Kili back against the mattress from where he knelt. “How does that feel?”

“Good.” The archer replied, his tone slightly snarky as he shifted against the sheets. “Would feel better if you stopped stalling and actually did something.”

“So impatient.” Fili made a disapproving sound in the back of his throat even as he took one of the leather straps, leaning over to wrap it around the base of his brother’s cock.

The noise that escaped Kili at that was positively broken, his hips bucking up as he strained against the bindings around his wrists. The older prince shushed him half-heartedly, finishing securing the strap before leaning back slightly, repeating the same ministrations to his own, hardening arousal.

The archer squirmed and panted heavily as he waited for Fili to finish up, his face heated up and flushed bright red, his pupils blown wide with arousal. Bilbo let his tongue flick out across his lips subconsciously, feeling his own cock lurch at the sight.

After what felt like an eternity the blonde leaned forward again and undid the top of the vial, tipping the container to upend its contents over his fingers generously. Kili watched the drip of oil along his brother’s hand with a high whine, his teeth biting down into the swell of his bottom lip as he tensed his bound legs around Fili’s waist.

Then suddenly the blond was reaching over with his clean hand, hiking his brother’s hips up to rest over his knees and bracing there as he slid in with the other, fingers trailing down between Kili’s spread legs.

Bilbo could tell the exact moment when the older prince pushed the first finger in, the archer keening suddenly with a helpless buck of his hips. Fili didn’t give him time to adjust, however, his arm moving as he started working into the younger dwarf, his rhythm quick and brutal.

It wasn’t long until Kili seemed to be coming apart at his very seams, breathing hitched and ragged as he struggled not to pull at the ropes around his wrists. It didn’t take long before he was stiffening again, Fili adding another finger and lifting slightly, pressing deeper into the young prince.

From where they were sprawled out on the bed Bilbo had a perfect view of the brothers, watching as the older dwarf eased the other open, his expression hungry and raw. Still the hobbit’s attention was constantly divided, slipping back to the younger of the two where he was bound down to the
He’d never seen Kili like this before, so completely open and vulnerable. Realistically, he was sure Fili had a way to get the bindings on his brother undone quickly and efficiently, yet still…being so completely immobile showed a level of trust that had Bilbo’s breath hitching.

As he sat there with his heart pounding frantically in his chest, watching the raw, real interaction between the two of them, uninterrupted and heated in a way that made him feel almost like an intruder.

Then every so often Fili would look up from where he was working his brother open, eyes seeking out the chair by the bed, a knowing smile quirking up his features. That’s how Bilbo knew he was welcome there, wanted; a part of the plan, just biding his time and waiting his turn.

He smiled back every time, and every time he flushed red hot when he remembered that the blond dwarf couldn’t actually see him.

It didn’t take long from there for Kili to start to sound desperate, his breaths coming out in hard, whining pants as he babbled up at his brother, his tone pleading. “Come on, stop teasing me.” He complained, tightening his legs from where they were bound around the older dwarf’s sides. “Don’t make me beg for it.”

“Mm.” Fili sounded pleased, pressing in with what must have been the forth finger now, though there was a chance Bilbo had lost count somewhere along the line. “Begging sounds like a plan.”

“**Fili.**”

The blond just grinned, leaning down a bit more to wink at his brother. “That **is** my name.”

“Oh fine!” The younger dwarf let out a keening whine, tugging hard at the bindings around his wrists. “Please Fili. Please, please just **fuck me.**”

Fili let out a low moan at that, drawing his hands out of his brother with a wet slide. “See?” He stated, raising an eyebrow at the dark haired dwarf. “All you had to do was ask.”

“You’re horrible, you—” Kili started, but then the blond prince was reaching down, hefting him up by the hips and sinking into him in one, smooth movement, “oh, oh! I take it back. You’re wonderful. You’re fantastic and perfect, **god I love you.**”

Fili chuckled, leaning down to kiss the younger dwarf’s lips chastely even as he pulled his hips back, before rolling back in with a firm snap. “Love you too.”

Bilbo flushed beat red where he sat, hidden on the chair, the words seeming to slam straight into his heart and causing it to clench painfully. He’d always known how close the brothers were, and he knew that he had a place at their side, yet that did nothing to soothe the nagging, irrational fear that maybe in some way he didn’t belong.

He forced back the thought with a hard shake of his head, trying to keep his senses about him as he focused on the brothers, keeping his breathing calm and controlled. He shifted slightly and trained his eyes on the pair on the bed, finding with a hot punch of arousal that Fili had started fucking into his younger brother in slow, shallow thrusts, leaving the archer keening in frustration where he lay across the mattress.

“What’s wrong Kili?” The older prince rumbled, leaning down to press a light kiss to his collarbone. “You seem frustrated.”
“You’re being horrible is what’s wrong.” Kili groaned, his neglected cock flushed red and straining against the leather cord, wrapped snug against the base. He looked a complete wreck, his entire frame tense as he fought halfheartedly against the restraints that kept him pinned.

“No, I’m always horrible.” Fili countered, punctuating the statement with a sharp nip against the younger dwarf’s sternum. “Something else is bothering you. I can tell.”

The archer seemed startled by the observation, his face flushing impossibly darker as he stammered, flicking his gaze resolutely off to the side; which, coincidently, had him staring at the exact spot where Bilbo sat watching, sending the hobbit’s heart hammering hard in his chest.

“It’s just-” Kili started, moaning when his brother rewarded him with a deeper, more satisfying thrust, his entire body rocking from the force of it, “it’s just after what happened that last time we were all together, back at Bag End, I-” he cut himself off with a small, breathless sigh, “I wish Bilbo was here, that’s all.”

Fili positively beamed at that, flicking a quick glance over at the invisible Halfling where he sat in the corner. The hobbit met his gaze and felt his heart stutter hard, his breath catching as he positively itched to slip out of the chair; but Kili was still looking right at him, it would ruin all chance of surprise.

Luckily, the older prince clued in quickly, picking up the force of his thrusts as he gripped at Kili’s hips, pinning them down over his thighs. “Hey, look at me.” He demanded, drawing the archer’s gaze just as Bilbo caved and stepped down to the floor, moving quickly over to the bed. “That’s it, relax. He’ll be here Kili. I know he will.” Fili kept his brother’s attention, making a point of shifting on the mattress and glancing over towards Bilbo’s general direction.

The hobbit took his cue and quickly moved up onto the bed, trying to time his shifting with the bouncing movement of Fili’s knees, digging into the bed sheets. His heart was pounding in his chest, his entire frame wrought with the feelings of anxiety and even fear as he somehow miraculously managed to get to the archer’s side without his notice. He reached out to Fili first, carefully pressing his hand flat against Kili’s firm stomach.

The older prince grinned at the contact, stopping his thrusts suddenly and holding very still, flicking his briefly gaze over towards where Bilbo would have been kneeling.

The archer let out a brief whine of complaint at that, shifting in his brother’s lap as he strained to look down at the other dwarf where he knelt. “What is it? Why did you stop?”

Fili did nothing to respond, simply glancing back to his brother with a wide smile. Bilbo took it as his opportunity to move and before he could succumb to embarrassment or second-doubting he reached out, carefully pressing his hand flat against Kili’s firm stomach.

The young dwarf jerked hard at the contact, his eyes widening as he stared down at his torso in disbelief. “What-” On pure instinct the hobbit dug his fingers in lightly, shifting to drag his nails across the archer’s abdominals, causing him to squirm and leaving red, raised lines in their wake. Kili made a desperate noise, the sound choked as he bit down on his own lip, realization flashing across his features. “Bilbo.”

The sheer desperation in the prince’s tone sent the hobbit into motion, his hands slipping down to press over the dwarf’s chest as he stood up, lifting a leg over and straddling his waist. Kili’s entire body jerked up violently, a raw noise dragged from his lips as he stared down helplessly at the apparently empty space over his torso.
Bilbo could see the way the young dwarf’s hands strained against their bindings, desperate to touch what he couldn’t see, to try and find some way to ground what he was feeling in reality. So he took pity on the archer, leaning up over his chest to press their faces together, first sliding his cheek alongside the young dwarf’s.

At the initial contact Kili jerked hard, a surprised noise escaping him before he leaned up into the touch, his torso coming into contact with Bilbo’s chest. “Oh-”

The young prince was cut off suddenly as Bilbo dragged his mouth over across his jaw, pressing their lips together in a firm, chaste kiss. He pulled away briefly, taking in Kili’s features as he pressed a hand to the dwarf’s jaw, before he drew back, sitting up to settle closer to the archer’s groin.

Then, casting aside all of his embarrassment Bilbo cleared his throat, rolling his hips against Kili’s stomach and breathing out a quiet, “is this alright?”

“Yes, yes-” The dark haired dwarf let out a desperate whine, his hands straining against the ropes as his hips jerked up helplessly where they were clasped in Fili’s firm grip, “more than alright, please.”

The hobbit felt a hard flush of arousal at the desperate crack of Kili’s tone, the archer’s entire body trembling beneath the his smaller frame. Bilbo acted impulsively, reaching back to grab at the young prince’s cock, using his other hand to hold himself open as he carefully eased down, sliding over the head of Kili’s flushed arousal.

The archer let out a sharp shout at that, only Fili’s firm grip keeping him from thrusting straight up into the hobbit’s tight frame.

Bilbo was grateful for the control, easing himself through the slight burn of discomfort, suddenly incredibly thankful for the older prince’s careful preparation earlier that evening. He took in a careful breath, pushing himself all the way back until he was seated fully on the archer’s cock, resting flat against his strong hips.

The hobbit let out a shaking moan, feeling stretched and deliciously full as he shifted in Kili’s lap, watching the young dwarf keen and twitch helplessly. “Oh Mahal, Mahal it’s so good, so very good. I can’t-”

He was cut off with a strangled shout, Bilbo raising himself up on his knees, Kili’s cock slipping out to the head, before he dropped back down, impaling himself with a sharp moan. The smaller man started up a slow rhythm, rolling his hips as he tensed his muscles, squeezing around the archer beneath him.

Then suddenly there was movement at his back, a hand reaching up to hesitantly brush against his back, before settling firmly between his shoulder blades. Fili let out a moan, his hips twitching up into Kili, forcing the archer into Bilbo in turn, the sensation all delicious friction and hard, spiking pleasure.

“This is so surreal.” The blond murmured, rubbing over the hobbit’s invisible back even as he struck up a hard rhythm, pounding into his brother and sending the both of them jerking and groaning. “I know it was my idea and all, but actually seeing it…or not seeing it now that I think about it-”

“What, are you saying this is weird?” Bilbo shot back, unable to stop himself from glancing over his shoulder at the older dwarf, even though he knew the other wouldn’t see it. “I can stop if you’d
“No, no no no!” Kili objected fiercely, tugging hard at his restraints with a helpless noise of frustration. “Please don’t stop.”

The hobbit felt his breath hitch at that, a hard moan ripping through him as he started up a rhythm again, bracing himself while he began to ride the archer in smooth, rolling motions. “I wouldn’t do that.” He assured the dwarf, his voice breaking slightly over a gasp. “This is your reward, for being so damned perfect all the time.”

The young prince seemed to stiffen at that, his pupils swelling with arousal as his eyes searched the area where Bilbo should have been, a soft cry ripping from his throat. “I’m not going to object to that.” Kili managed, his hands fisting and un-fisting where they were bound above his head.

“Smart choice.” Fili growled in return, tightening his grip on his brother’s hips and pounding into the dwarf, rocking him up to meet Bilbo each time in turn.

The hobbit felt himself cry out, his hands scrabbling for purchase across Kili’s stomach as he was bounced up with each of the older prince’s thrusts, the arousal he’d been carrying for what felt like hours now burning to a peak in his gut. He knew he wasn’t going to last too long like this, his movements becoming slightly rigid and uncoordinated as Fili effectively fucked up into the both of them, driving their pace with the steady roll of his hips.

Bilbo held out as long as he could manage, biting hard at his lips and willing back his building peak with every fiber of his being. Yet as he rolled his hips to meet each desperate, helpless twitch of Kili’s groin beneath him, he felt the heat building up and up in his belly until it was brimming at the top, about to tip over.

“Ah,” he cried out, unable to keep himself silent his whole body tensed with a shudder, his fingers spanning out against Kili’s chest while he felt his climax crest, flooding over his body like a crashing wave. His entire frame clenched down, cock throbbing as he spent himself, painting a thick white line across the archer’s stomach.

As his body twitched and trembled he could feel the young prince stilling inside of him, arousal straining and throbbing, yet unable to reach completion for the thick leather strapped around him. Kili looked positively wrecked as he rode through the waves of the aborted orgasm, a whimper slipping past his lips as he tugged at his bindings hard.

Fili blessedly stilled for the moment, waiting for his brother to recuperated, his hand still bracing against Bilbo’s back, rising and falling with the slow heave of the Halfling’s chest.

He made no move to try and lift off of Kili’s cock, still hard and hot where it was buried, deep inside of him. Instead the hobbit simply focused on gathering his wits, fully planning on continuing on until both dwarves reached completion.

“Bilbo.”

The smaller man blinked up at the sound of his name, eyes finding Kili’s even though he knew the archer couldn’t see him.

The young prince swallowed, his gaze half lidded as he licked at his lips. “Take off the ring?” He asked, poising the question in the silent evening air as his eyes searched for Bilbo’s frame. “Please.”

Without any further need for prompting the metal was sliding off of Bilbo’s finger, his face
burning with a hot blush as he slid the band of gold into the palm of his hand, forcing himself to glance up and meet Kili’s gaze.

He must have looked as wrecked as he felt, if the hungry shine to the archer’s gaze was any indication. The young prince let out a high moan, his hips rolling up slightly, pushing his still hard cock further up into Bilbo’s sensitive body, ripping a sharp noise from the hobbit.

“Hold on.” Fili leaned forward slightly, pressing a kiss to the back of Bilbo’s neck before he carefully pushed the hobbit forward, having him ease up off of the archer’s arousal slightly. The prince then reached down, and without having to look the hobbit knew he was unfastening the thick cord of leather from around Kili’s cock.

The younger dwarf let out a sound of pure relief at that, his body melting back into the covers as his hips twitched slightly. “Oh, thank Aule.” He groaned, his voice hoarse and desperate.

“You’re welcome.” Fili shot back cheekily, guiding Bilbo back down over Kili’s cock before he drew away a bit, no doubt removing the cord from around his own arousal.

The hobbit shifted slightly in the mean time, adjusting himself on the archer’s lap and glancing up at the young prince, taking in his flushed face with a slow rekindling of pleasure in his gut. He braced himself, biting at his lower lip as he felt Fili move behind them, rolling back into Kili’s tight frame in one long, smooth motion.

“Yes, oh yes.” The archer was close to babbling, his eyes half lidded as his whole body shuddered, straining hard against his restraints. Fili didn’t keep him waiting, shifting his grip to start up a hard pace, pressing into the younger dwarf in hard, deep thrusts.

Kili let out a sharp whine, his whole body rocking up into Bilbo as the hobbit just rode it out, clenching down around the sharp pulses of pleasure that started to work up his spine. He felt over sensitized, almost raw as he forced himself to roll back against the building force of each thrust, his stomach tightening hard at the welling sensations that flooded back through him.

Then suddenly Fili was shifting behind them, keeping up his rhythm as he fucked into Kili’s prone frame while he somehow managed to maneuver an arm around, wrapping it about the hobbit’s hips.

Bilbo nearly came out of his own skin as Fili’s hand closed over his cock, the rough sensation of the blond’s calloused fingers causing his arousal to harden violently, his vision spotting while he scrambled for purchase. “Oh, oh!”

He felt himself clench through a hard wave of pleasure, Kili letting out a desperate sound from beneath him as he tugged at the rope around the headboard, his eyes fluttering shut.

With a high whine Bilbo’s toes curled into the sheets, an almost painful wave of arousal burning through him as he Fili began to pump his cock earnestly, dragging him back to the edge of orgasm with hard, jerking strokes.

“I can’t-” The hobbit whined out, his body beginning to tighten and spasm as he rocked between one dwarf’s grip and the other’s hard cock, his second climax beginning to creep its way out from the base of his spine. “I can’t, I can’t.”

“Ahh.” Fili groaned out at his back, leaning down to press his lips to the back of Bilbo’s neck as he continued fucking hard into his brother, causing the archer to keen high in his throat. “Then don’t. We’re right behind you, just let go, just-”
“Bilbo.” Kili cut in, letting out a delicious whimper as he forced himself to meet the hobbit’s gaze, his face flushed. “Please I’m so close. So close, please.”

Bilbo let out a choked noise, unable to stop the hot fire that surged through his body as orgasm slammed into him once more, his frame clenching violently around the young prince beneath him. Even as he finished, his vision whiting out and his head reeling with dizzying pleasure, he could feel Kili stilling beneath him; the archer let out a sharp shout, his body trembling hard as his cock gave a hard throb, wet heat splashing up inside of the hobbit, causing him to squirm.

While he did release his grip on Bilbo’s cock, Fili didn’t stop moving, fucking Kili through his orgasm until the younger dwarf was just about sobbing, tears trickling down flushed cheeks. Bilbo twitched and tensed as he was bounced in the archer’s lap, his entire body reeling with over stimulation and his lungs burning for air.

Then suddenly Fili let out a loud growl, stilling as he pressed his forehead against Bilbo’s back firmly, his entire frame on edge. He finished with a hard tremble, his body already slipping forward slightly, a heavy weight against the hobbit’s spine.

For a time none of them seemed coherent enough to manage words, their bodies heaving as they struggled for breath, still connected in a mess of sweat and tangled limbs. Then finally Fili seemed to snap out of it, carefully pulling out of his brother and easing himself around from where he’d settled between the archer’s thighs. Without a word he started working on the knots binding Kili’s ankles, his movements hampered by the shaking of his fingers, body tense with the lingering tremors of pleasure.

In the mean time Bilbo drew himself forward on the young dwarf’s torso, carefully easing himself up off of his cock with a slightly wince and a quiet apology. Then he reached up, catching Kili’s face and starting to wipe at his eyes with the pads of his thumbs, brushing away the lingering remains of tears. “Hey, you okay?” He asked, keeping his tone soft as he careful cupped the dwarf’s rosy cheeks.

“Mm.” Kili blinked his eyes open, smiling up at Bilbo lazily as he leaned into the hobbit’s grip, a trembling sigh escaping him. “I’m amazing. That was—” he coughed, his voice sounding hoarse as he shook his head with a laugh, “I think you broke me.”

“Did we.” Bilbo flushed happily and leaned in, pressing their lips together firmly as he felt Fili move up to the head of the bed, starting to work on freeing the archer’s hands. “Glad you enjoyed it.” He murmured, his tone teasing. “Just don’t be expecting that every day. I’ve abused this privilege enough for some time I think.” He murmured, raising the ring up where he’d managed to keep it tucked against his palm.

“Fair enough.” The archer conceded, letting out a pleased groan as Fili managed to release his wrists, the older dwarf already rubbing at the reddened flesh in careful, soothing motions.

The Halfling smiled at the pair, pushing himself up off of Kili’s chest in order to crawl over to the bed side table, setting the ring on the hard wooden surface for safe keeping.

By the time he’d returned to settle at the brother’s sides both dwarves were beginning to settle, Fili on the far side of the bed, holding the covers back for Kili who was easing his way into the middle with a satisfied sigh. Bilbo watched the two of them with a fond shake of his head. “You don’t want to wash up a bit before bed?” He asked even as he slid up next to the younger prince, already getting ready to tuck in at his side.

“Mm, not particularly.” Kili reached out from where he was curled up, Fili’s arm around his waist
and the older dwarf draped around his back and side. “It’s a night for celebration, remember? Our hosts won’t mind if we make a bit of a mess.”

“A bit.” Bilbo repeated, his tone skeptical even as he grinned, slipping in to press down next to the archer beneath the sheets. “I didn’t get to say goodnight to Frodo.”

“We sent him of properly with Arwen and her friend.” Kili assured him, reaching up to lazily throw an arm around the hobbit, holding him close. “They’ll have kept him quite occupied and happy before bed.”

“Good.” The Halfling breathed out a sigh, his body feeling heavy as he sank down into the mattress. “Who was this friend of hers anyways.”

“Oh, well he’s a-”

“By Mahal, both of you. Enough of that talking nonsense.” Fili objected from over Kili’s back, shifting up to lean over his brother, pressing a kiss to Bilbo’s mouth chastely. “I’m not sure about you two, but I for one want to enjoy sleeping in a bed for the first time in who knows how long.”

“I thoroughly second that motion.” The hobbit murmured, leaning up to steal one last kiss before he settled back in against the pillows, pressing an arm up against Kili’s chest.

For some time there was nothing but silence, their breathing steady and even as they began to drift off, wrapped up in a tangle of warmth and comfort. Then suddenly Bilbo cleared his throat, murmuring sleepily to the room at large. “You guys have to admit, stopping in Rivendell was a pretty fantastic idea.”

“Bilbo.”

“Sorry. I’m sleeping, I’m sleeping.” The hobbit hissed, smiling apologetically even as he curled into Kili’s front, his fingers splayed out possessively over the young dwarf’s flesh.

The three of them nodded off like that, wrapped comfortably in the soft, fine silks of the elven linen; sweaty, sticky, and completely at ease for the first time in weeks.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

P.S., sorry about your panties.

Edit: JUST KIDDING NOT SORRY AT ALL
Beads and Braids

Chapter Summary

The road from Rivendell to Mirkwood is long, but Bilbo and his company find themselves with an unexpected companion for part of their journey. Fili and Kili take another step forward in their relationship with their little burglar, and the whole party runs into trouble on the path through the forest.

Chapter Notes

This is super late. The update isn't even that long. I am a failure and I have no excuses. This last week was a bit of a trainwreck of bad life choices for me, so this chapter ended up being a challenge and a half to get done.

But here it is! Please don't hate me. Oh my god I love you all you don't understand.

Also things start to plot from here so just a heads up.

Anyways reviewers you are amazing, it's 2am holy I'm so tired, I just finished editing so please forgive my mistakes.

Comments and kudos are the best and I like criticism too whoo and often actually apply it in my later chapters! ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Bilbo awoke, he found he was still plastered to Kili's chest, Fili's heavy arm a constant weight across his back. With a bleary smile the hobbit slowly pushed himself up, glancing to the boys laid out beneath him.

Fili was still curled up against their side, his eyes shut and breathing even as he pressed his face into the covers beneath them.

They never did manage to properly get themselves to bed. Instead they were just sprawled out on top of the comforter, pressed together from hip to shoulder in a mess of sticky, dry skin.

He made a small noise at the back of his throat, easing himself onto his elbows and wincing as his flesh pulled slightly, plastered to Kili's front. They would most definitely need a wash before they even thought about leaving the room…and a bath wouldn’t hurt either.

The thought was tempting, so much so that he found himself slowly lifting away from the solid warmth of the dwarf beneath him, sliding carefully off to the side. He paused for a moment at the edge of the bed, glancing back to see that Fili and Kili were still resting soundly before he gingerly dropped himself down to the floor, padding his way over to the wash basin at the side of the room.

He set about cleaning himself up, deciding to go and try to track down his nephew before they
went to the bath house. He hadn’t seen the little shireling since supper, and he was starting to miss his tiny little Baggins hobbit.

“How is it that even when Frodo’s too occupied to come drag us out of bed, you’re still awake at some ungodly hour?”

A voice from behind him shattered Bilbo’s concentration and he just about lost his wash cloth, the sopping fabric slipping from his grip.

Kili darted in beside him, however, reaching out to snag at the cloth, catching it and straightening with a small, sleepy smile. “For a creature of comfort, you don’t seem to sleep in a lot.”

“It’s hard to break habits when you start them.” Bilbo shrugged, reaching out to take the cloth from the archer with a small grin. “I haven’t really properly slept in since I returned to Bag End to find my nephew in need of parenting.”

The young dwarf hummed in understanding, leaning down to press a small kiss to Bilbo’s mouth. “Well then good morning Mister Boggins. Even if it is still too early.”

The Halfling hummed, pausing where he was bringing the cloth down over his stomach to lean up on his tippy toes, chasing the archer’s lips with firm, chaste kisses. “Mm, good morning.” He smiled, catching the dwarf’s mouth once more before he dropped back down flat on his feet. “I am sorry for waking you though. I was, believe it or not, being cautious not to rise you.”

“No no, it’s not a problem.” Kili shrugged his shoulders, accepting the cloth once Bilbo was finished with it and giving himself a quick once over. “Nothing you could have possibly helped. I just felt you move, and figured that if you were getting up, I might as well join you.”

As he moved the Halfling caught sight of the bruising around his wrists, the colour stark against the dwarf’s pale skin.

Without thinking he reached forward, stilling the archer’s movements as he gingerly caught one of his bigger, calloused hands in his own. Kili didn’t object to the hold, pausing as he regarded the small man in front of him carefully, waiting to gage Bilbo’s reaction.

The hobbit gingerly ran a thumb across the expanse of a dark patch of abused flesh, his eyebrows pinching together slightly. “You’re feeling alright?” He asked suddenly, the words slipping past his lips as he glanced up at the archer, a little shy. “Since last night I mean?”

“Mm,” Kili smiled, reaching up to set the wash cloth down in the bowl and turning his full attention to Bilbo, “I feel amazing actually. A little sore if I’m honest, but in a good way.”

The hobbit nodded, but found himself frowning again despite it. He brushed his thumb over the expanse of one of the dwarf’s bruised wrists, feeling the raised, swollen marks with a cautious touch. “These look painful.” He murmured finally, slipping his fingers back to once again grip around Kili’s palm, his eyes still trained on the dark marks across his skin. “The ropes were too tight.”

“They weren’t-”

“Kili.”

“Bilbo.” The archer shot back, his tone somehow soothing as he stepped forward, reaching out to cup the hobbit’s face lightly with his free hand. “Really, they weren’t. My bonds were no tighter than the ones we used on you that first night at Beorn’s Hall. I just…” He trailed off, as if trying to
sort out the best means of explanation, “well, to be honest, I tend to more rough on my bindings than you. I pull, I struggle, I resist; it leaves a mark, of that you can be sure. Yet you have to understand, it’s something I enjoy.”

The hobbit swallowed, his tongue darting out to lick across the seam of his lips as he forced himself to look straight up at the dwarf in front of him, fighting through the burning heat that swallowed his face.

“You know what that’s like.” Kili pushed, dragging his thumb up along Bilbo’s cheek, gently pressing it to the hinge of his jaw and watching with a pleased sound as the hobbit’s mouth slid open on instinct. “Wanting to feel it the next day, to see the marks splayed out across your own skin; to remind you just how good it was.”

The Halfling made a choked noise at the back of his throat, wetting his lips as his jaw slid open further, accommodating for the archer’s firm grip. “Yes.” He agreed breathlessly, staring up at the dwarf, eyes wide with understanding.

Kili’s expression changed at that, his face lighting up with a pleased grin as he leaned down, pressing his lips first to Bilbo’s forehead and resting them there for the moment. “We’re all a lot stronger than we seem.” He confided quietly, his mouth sliding against the hobbit’s flesh before he drew back a touch. His hand shifted where it was cupping Bilbo’s chin, and the Halfling felt his stomach twist with a hard punch of arousal as Kili instead reached around to fist in the curls at the back of his head, forcing him to look up.

“A little bit of pain.” The archer continued, his free hand sliding down to grip at Bilbo’s bare hip, digging in to the soft flesh just so. “A little bit of bruising.”

The hobbit made an embarrassing noise in the back of his throat, reaching up to grasp at one of the dwarf’s shoulders, unable to look away as he took in a shuddering breath.

Kili grinned, moving in to brush their cheeks together, his stubble scraping against the Halfling’s soft flesh in a delicious burn that had him squirming. Then the archer continued on, dragging his mouth back down over Bilbo’s chin. “It can be good.”

The hobbit let out a low groan, reaching up with his hands suddenly and grabbing at Kili’s face, tugging the prince forward with a force that crashed their lips together, teeth clacking slightly and catching at their mouths. Bilbo winced, flushing red as he began to pull himself away, an apology already forming on his lips. Only then Kili laughed against him, tightening his grip in the Halfling’s curls and pressing forward again, almost coaxing this time, the motion soothing and soft.

With a resigned groan the hobbit relaxed, and sure enough they melted into each other, pressed close as they stumbled back slightly, away from the wash bin and towards the center of the room. Bilbo went along willingly, but there was a nagging voice in the back of his head that gave him some pause. He forced himself to draw back from the kiss with a hard breath, still following Kili’s firm pull even as he tried a weak protest. “We just washed.”

The archer shook his head, his expression fond. “We can wash again. Even bathe after.”

“Fili’s asleep.” Bilbo’s protest was half hearted at best, his eyes darting over towards the bed.

“So we’ll wake him.” The dwarf raised a suggestive eyebrow, releasing his grip on the hobbit in order to take a step back towards the mattress.
Almost on instinct he was stepping forward, before he thought back to his nephew and hesitated. “I was going to check on Frodo…”

Kili softened slightly at that, turning and resting a hand across his sternum as he regarded the hobbit with a fond smile. “While it begrudges me to admit it, after spending some time with them yesterday, both Frodo and I were quite taken with Arwen and Strider-”

“Strider?” Bilbo interjected with the slow raise of an eyebrow.

“Arwen’s friend from last night. He’s a ranger, but surprisingly good with children, between the two of them I think they’ll have Frodo occupied for some time.” The archer gestured him forward, his expression inviting.

The hobbit let out a soft puff of laughter, relenting with a slow step as he shook his head and grinned. “Then I suppose I can find no further objection-”

“Again with the talking.” A groan interrupted them from the far side of the bed, and when Bilbo gazed around the archer’s side he could see where Fili was curled on top of the comforter. The blond dwarf was reaching to grab a pillow to pull down over his head, his movements sluggish and tired. When he finally spoke again his words were muffled by the plush fabric. “Why is it that you two always insist chatting while m’trying to sleep?”

“Oh no, did we wake you?” Kili teased softly, already turning and pulling himself up onto the mattress, as he shot his brother a cheeky smile.


“Are you now?” The archer glanced over his shoulder conspiratorially at Bilbo, raising a suggestive eyebrow. “What do you say little one, should we wake him up proper?”

The hobbit returned the grin, walking the last few feet over to the bed and climbing up onto the mattress. “Now, that does sound enticing.”

Sure enough, they had to wash again before leaving for the bath house…almost an hour later than they’d intended.

Not that any of them could find reason to complain.

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“Mm, we will have to spend some time with Frodo this afternoon.” Bilbo relented when they were soaking in the lavish, elven baths. He was floating on the surface of the water by the rock tile edge of the tub, eyes trained on the decorative, arching ceilings of the room.

“We’ll do something special for him.” Fili responded with a noise of agreement in the back of his throat and Bilbo shifted in the water until he was facing the blond prince.

Kili was leaning up against his brother’s side, his head tilted down to rest against the older dwarf’s shoulder where they sat on the steps. The water lapped up at their collarbones as Bilbo shifted, creating small waves that shook the still surface.

They’d finished scrubbing down some time ago, and now clean, were taking the time to just soak and enjoy themselves. The opportunity to be alone was a gift, and the leisurely bath was a luxury they hadn’t had since Bag End.
His heart gave a hard lurch at the reminder of his childhood home, one that he wasn’t sure he’d ever see again. Yet still even that was soothed when he let himself dwell on the thought of the Gamgee family settled into it’s warm rooms; their small children would be filling the hallway with the sound of tiny feet scampering about, and Bell’s baking would be wafting a sweet aroma through the house, drawing all of her shirelings to the kitchen.

Bag End wasn’t his anymore.

*He had a new home now.* With a small smile he reached up to grasp at the side of the pool as he began to float himself towards the shallow waters where Fili and Kili were lounging.

Their braids were undone, hair wet and plastered back from their faces, trailing down their backs until the strands hit the water, fanning out across its surface in a wave of blond and brown tendrils; Fili even had his moustache loose.

They looked good like this, Bilbo decided as he stretched his foot down, now able to just barely touch his toes to the slanted bath floor. Relaxed and at ease, without any dressing up. This is who the Durin brothers were at their very barest.

Yet at the same time, he couldn’t help but let his attention slip to the scars across the brothers’ throats and chests, his heart clenching at the sight of the faded, white marks. Usually, they did their best to avoid talking about, or focusing on each other’s scars. They’d all received their tokens of war, there was no reversing the damage done, and so they all had to learn to just accept them.

“Lost in thought again little one?”

Kili’s voice cut in through his daze, causing him to blink up at the two dwarves, finding his feet now firmly planted on the slanted pool floor. With a small smile he shook his head, moving the rest of the way over to stand at the brothers’ front. “Sorry.” He stepped forward until he was standing at the foot of the stairs, coming to rest a hand on one of each of the dwarves’ knees. “I think it’s all of the heat, trapping me in my own head and causing my mind to wander.”

“Mm, I was thinking we should get out soon anyhow.” Fili reached out, peeling Bilbo’s hand off of where it had rested on his knee, lifting it instead to hold in front of him out of the water. “Your fingers have just about turned into prunes.”

“That’s a fair good point.” The hobbit laughed, unresisting in the blond dwarf’s grip as Fili lifted his hand, pressing his lips momentarily to the Halfling’s small wrist. “I am starting to feel quite water logged.”

“Starting to look it too.” Kili teased, leaning down to press a kiss to Bilbo’s cheek before he was rising to stand, one hand coming down to rest over his brother’s shoulder. “We are also long overdue for food, and I for one feel like my stomach is devouring itself.”

Bilbo blinked hard where he stood in front of Fili, suddenly recognizing the cold, empty feeling of hunger ebbing at the bottom of his gut. “Oh.” He remarked with a slight start. “I almost forgot about breakfast.”

Fili let out a pleased chuckle at that, the sound rumbling as he stood, using his grip on the Halfling’s wrist to ease him along up the steps beside him. “That, my dear Master Hobbit, is a testament to our skills in the bedroom.” He teased, tugging Bilbo out of the water and plastering the smaller man to his chest with a grin. “The only time you ever forget a meal is after we’ve thoroughly blown your mind in the-”
“I just adore how humble you two are.” Bilbo cut the prince off with a chuckle, face flushed but grin still beaming even as he pulled away, accepting the plush towel that Kili offered him.

“Mm, can’t say I’ve ever heard of that word before.” Fili shot back, starting to dry himself off as well as Kili tossed him a thick, bundle of the heavy fabric.

“I think I read it in a book once.” The younger prince joined in, his grin bright while he worked to dry the thick, dark tresses of his hair.

“You can read?” Bilbo gasped out, unable to help himself as he laced his tone with as much mock wonder as he could muster.

“What? Of course I can-” Kili spluttered before cutting himself off short, leveling Bilbo with a knowing gaze. “Oh, oh you think you’re funny do you?”

“I’m hilarious.” The hobbit felt himself grin as he finished drying down his back, wrapping his towel around his hips instead.

“Why you-” The archer let out a playful growl and lunged forward at Bilbo, catching the Halfling off guard and sweeping him up into the air, throwing him over his back.

“Kili!” Bilbo gasped through a laugh, scrambling for purchase across the dwarf’s back as the archer spun them around, heading towards the exit to the baths with purpose. “Kili what are you doing! You can’t be serious…we can’t leave! What about our clothing!”

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It had taken them an unreasonable amount of time to get themselves dried off and clothed after their bath, the three of them laughing and roughhousing as they struggled to make themselves presentable for the day ahead.

Finally, after a great deal of effort, they found themselves making their way towards the guest chambers in order to try and track down their little shireling and his temporary keepers.

“God, I think I pulled something laughing.” Bilbo groaned as he held his side, fingers bunching over his hip in the soft fabric of his borrowed Elven tunic. “You two, really you make me feel so young.”

“Pssh, it’s not like you’re even that old.” Kili shot back, pressing forward into Bilbo’s side with his hand coming up to rest at the hobbit’s stomach. “And you’re in incredible shape, stronger than I’ve ever seen you in fact.”

Bilbo made a small scoffing sound. “It’s not polite to tease.”

“He’s not teasing little one.” Fili shot back, his expression easy as he reached out, giving the Halfling’s arm a firm squeeze. “You are well on your way to being a fine warrior.”

“Alright alright, that’s enough you two.” Bilbo flushed hard, feeling slightly bashful as he pulled ahead out of their grips.

“Oh, did we embarrass you?” Kili teased, stepping up to walk at the Halfling’s heels.

“You’re horrible.” Bilbo shot back, dodging away from the archer’s hands as they made to squeeze at his sides once more.
“I am not-”

“Uncle Bilbo!”

An excited shout from ahead caught the hobbit’s attention and he looked up, eyes scanning the hallway at their front. A tall man was walking towards them in a long, elvish tunic, his hair dark and a shadow of scruff across his chin.

Frodo was wrapped up in the man’s arms, waving his little hand towards them with a bright grin. “We were looking for you.” The little shireling continued as they approached, settling back against the man’s strong chest. “The elves have made us breakfast!”

“What a coincidence!” Kili chimed, walking right up to the pair and reaching towards Frodo instinctively. The man didn’t even hesitate to hand the tiny hobbit over, his smile fond as he set the child down into the dwarf’s strong arms. Frodo giggled as he curled his hands up around the prince’s neck, pressing their cheeks together in a happy nuzzle. “We were just looking for you as well! We’re all very hungry.”

“Arwen and I had a bite to eat with him about an hour or two ago. However that, he’s informed me quite presently, was only the first of many breakfasts.” The man informed them, smiling companionably at Kili before turning and nodding to Bilbo and Fili. “It is a pleasure to meet you. You can call me Strider, Ranger from the North.”

“Bilbo Baggins.” The hobbit smiled, stepping to where Kili stood with his nephew and offering Strider a smile.

“And Fili, Heir Apparent to the throne of Erebor.” The blond moved up as well, one hand curling around Bilbo’s shoulder and the other extending out to the man. “The pleasure is ours I’m sure.”

Strider accepted the offered hand, raising an eyebrow at the four of them as he gestured down the hall with a nod of his head. “Lord Elrond was wondering if you would sit with him at breakfast. He mentioned wanting to discuss a few things with you lot regarding your impending travels.”

Bilbo nodded, feeling the dwarven brothers reluctantly do the same thing at his side. “Will you be joining us as well?”

The man looked slightly hesitant, biting at the inside of his cheek as he glanced thoughtfully down the hall behind them.

Then Frodo made a noise of protest, reaching out towards the man from where he sat in Kili’s arms. “No, Aragorn! You should come too!”

“Aragorn?” Bilbo blinked, glancing over to the ranger with a raised eyebrow. “I thought you said your name was Strider.”

The man looked sheepish, scratching at his chin before reaching out, ruffling Frodo’s hair. “One of them is. I have many names. Arwen has known me for many years, and prefers to call me by Aragorn.”

“Ah, of course.” The Halfling felt himself flush with a knowing smile, nodding down towards the hallway. “Well, you should most definitely join us for breakfast Strider. I’m sure Lady Evenstar will be pleased to have you to join us as well.”

The man raised an eyebrow, but never the less relented, much to Frodo’s apparent delight. He motioned for them to follow alongside him, leading them deeper into the maze of buildings
towards the grand dining hall, answering what seemed to be a constant sea of questions from their little shireling as they walked.

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The time that they spent in Rivendell was rejuvenating and relaxing, the whole group of them finally getting enough rest to start up again fresh. They’d been packed and ready on the last day when Elrond and Aragorn approached them with a proposition.

As it seemed, the ranger was due for a mission in the forests of Mirkwood, and could ride with them until they made their stop at Beorn’s hall. None of them had found reason to object as Strider packed up alongside of them, one horse standing tall among their ponies.

They’d bid their farewells to the elves, Elrond and Arwen both taking added care to send Frodo off with loving blessings. The little shireling had actually cried and clutched to the two elves, having grown quite fond of them in their short stay. After each of them embraced him, managing to soothe the child before they sent him off, then turning to say their goodbyes to the rest of the party.

They’d provided them all with sturdy cloaks and a hefty supply of Lembas Bread to carry them through the long trip along the road. Bilbo had been beyond grateful for the supplies, knowing that the bread would do wonders to ensure that they could keep Frodo fed for the following stretches of the journey; especially once they passed through into Mirkwood, as wildlife there was few and far between. They’d packed up the bread and slid onto their mounts, Bilbo making some note of the lengthy farewell Arwen bid their ranger companion, their brows pressed tightly together as they spoke to one another in hushed tones.

From there they’d set off along the path by the misty mountains, sticking to the southern trails to avoid unnecessary strains on Frodo.

The ranger was, unsurprisingly, a welcome addition to their party. He was a proficient tracker, a deadly hunter, and he was familiar enough with the roads ahead that he successfully managed to steer them away from potential harms.

He acted as a sort of guide, leading them easily over the mountain pass towards Beorn’s hall.

They were less than a day’s ride away from the giant’s home when they decided to stop early for the evening, Fili catching sight of a lush, flowering field in the midst of the woods. They got their camp set up first before the four of them sat down, settling into their routine of braiding flowers.

In the mean time Ragnar and Dasil had started on supper, Foseil disappearing into the nearby trees in search of firewood.

Strider, on the other hand, had settled in next to Kili and Frodo, watching the shireling weave flowers into the archer’s hair while Bilbo did the same to Fili at his side.

“You know,” the ranger spoke up once the older hobbit finished with the blond’ prince’s hair, a puff of smoke sliding out from between his lips, “it may not be wise to continue on this shire tradition for the next leg of your travels.”

Bilbo blinked over at Strider, shifting to sit at Fili’s front, the warrior already starting to comb his fingers through the Halfling’s growing curls. He’d tried to cut the lengthening locks when they were at Rivendell, but Fili and Kili put up such a fuss that he’d reluctantly relented, just trimming his bangs and letting the rest grow wild. It was now well past his chin, honey blonde and tightly curled.
“What do you mean?” He asked, flicking his gaze over to Strider where the man sat, puffing pleasantly on his pipe.

“My destination, and the forest you pass through after leaving your shifter’s home, is as you know a very unforgiving place.” Aragorn sat up slightly against the grasses, flicking his gaze over to where Frodo had managed a decent braid above Kili’s ear, securing blossoms into his hair. “I would not risk touching the vegetation in Mirkwood, for you never know what might pose serious threat to you and your company.”

“Oh.” Bilbo blinked hard, suddenly feeling quite foolish for not considering such a possibility himself. “I suppose I never thought of it like that before.”

He could practically feel Fili frown from where the blond sat behind him, fixing a daisy into the side of his head. “Neither did I.”

The disappointment was evident in the older prince’s tone, his fingers lingering over the petals of the blossom before he drew away.

“While I know it is not any of my business,” Aragorn began, tapping his pipe slightly before he spoke, “is there not a similar courting custom with braids among dwarves? I’d think something like that would be safer and more convenient to practice on the roads ahead.”

Both dwarves seemed to stiffen at that, and when he looked up Bilbo could see that Kili was staring at him, his cheeks bright red and his expression flustered. The hobbit blinked, turning completely to look over his shoulder at Fili, finding with a hard squeeze of his chest that the older dwarf looked completely wrecked at the suggestion, his eyes dark and his cheeks flushed crimson.

“I uh-” The Halfling swallowed, looking to the blond’s braided moustache with a slight swell in his chest. “I’d always known they meant things, the braids I mean. I just didn’t think that they could mean, well-” Flowers were such an important part of hobbit courtship, he had hardly thought to look to dwarven customs as well. “If uh, if it’s too big of a step, or if it’s too soon, we could just wait it out until we get to Erebor and-”

Then Fili was shaking his head, leaning forward even as Bilbo spoke to seal their mouths together, silencing the hobbit’s tangent in a firm, pressing kiss. The smaller man let out a groan, melting into the gesture as he was turned to face the dwarf carefully. At the corner of his eye he could see Kili stand, carefully handing Frodo off to Strider and coming over to kneel next to Bilbo at Fili’s front.

“We’ve been over this Bilbo.” Kili began as Fili finally pulled away, leaving the hobbit feeling breathless and dazed. “We are set in our commitment to you.”

He drew back a touch from the older dwarf, moving so that he had both of them in his sights, his expression cautious. “You’ve mentioned more than once that this is not an easy process by your people’s customs. If we need to wait to make sure this is valid, if there’s any protocol we simply must follow, I would never hold that against you two.”

Both brothers seemed to contemplate this, their expressions serious as they regarded him carefully. Then Fili raised his head, catching his brother’s gaze and nodding back in the direction of the guards behind them.

The two princes seemed to have a silent conversation then, their eyes glued to one another and their expressions shifting to something serious.

“Under normal dwarven customs,” Fili began, turning his attention back to Bilbo and leaning
forward, resting his arm on the hobbit’s small knee, “we would be able to have one of the warriors in our guard serve as witness to our official courtship ritual. You’d need someone to stand for your witness as well.”

Bilbo nodded, the motion hesitant and short. “What would the ritual entail?”

“The three of us would sit together, braid beads into each other’s hair-”

“Not just any braid mind you.” Kili cut in, flashing his brother an unapologetic grin. “It’s a very special one, we may have to help you with it.”

“Thank you **Kili,**” Fili shoved the younger dwarf playfully, shaking his head as he turned back to Bilbo. “And that would be it. We could even show you some dwarven braids we can work on for Frodo as well. Lord knows his hair’s getting long enough for it.”

“That, uh,” Bilbo blinked, somewhat taken aback as he stared at the two brothers in surprise, “that actually seems rather pleasant. Much more permanent than the flowers too. I…well I like the sound of it.”

Fili squeezed his knee at the small smile that the hobbit flashed them, the older prince’s expression somewhat reserved. “See, that would be the easy part.”

“The rest of it,” Kili shook his head, bringing a hand up to his mouth and running a hand across his lips, “the rest of it is complicated.”

Suddenly Bilbo knew exactly what the brothers were talking about, his heart squeezing hard in his chest as he stared at the two dwarves in front of him in something close to horror. “This…we’re…this is like an elopement for you isn’t it?” They both winced, and he felt something like panic bubble up in his chest. He remembered Bofur mentioning something about royalty and succession; about Dis losing her husband, about Fili and Kili being Thorin’s sister sons. “**Oh god you…you need Thorin’s permission don’t you?**”

“Technically, yes.” Fili flinched away again, reaching up to scratch at the back of his head as he glanced off to the side.

“But also technically no!” Kili interjected, reaching out to Bilbo as the hobbit began to look uneasy. “Our mother basically gave us permission, and she will back us on our return to Erebor. She will help us deal with Thorin.”

“We still want to do this.” The older dwarf added, managing to force himself to meet Bilbo’s eyes as he tightened his grip on the hobbit’s knee. “We’ve wanted to do this for some time now we just…we just wanted to give you fair warning first. I cannot guarantee there won’t be turbulence when we return.”

“No that’s-” Bilbo swallowed, suddenly feeling quite choked up, “that’s not so much of a problem. I just…I just don’t want the two of you to suffer repercussions from this once we make it home.”

Kili seemed positively endeared at that, leaning forward to kiss the hobbit soundly on the mouth. “It’s sweet that you worry, but don’t fret.” He smiled, pulling back a bit and pressing another kiss to the tip of the Halfling’s nose. “We are named for our mother, she has an incredible amount of sway over our fate. That, and she’s the only one who’s managed to temper Thorin’s…ruling methods.”
Bilbo almost spluttered over a laugh, shaking his head as he drew away from the dwarf a little, regarding him fondly. “You dwarves have this talent for being completely un-reassuring at times, you know that right?’’

“I think that’s due to our spectacularly blunt personality.” Fili stated, nodding to himself and earning a laugh from the hobbit at his front.

“That it is.” The Halfling shook his head before he looked at the two of them significantly, a single eyebrow raised. “Alright, so how do we go about this?”

They started by practicing the braid, Frodo (who’d been listening with Strider at their side the entire time) immediately volunteered Aragorn and himself as the test subjects, much to the man’s apparent shock and chagrin. While reluctant, the ranger still found his way over with the shireling to settle in front of Bilbo and two dwarves.

It took them less time than expected to master the technique, Bilbo watching Fili and Kili carefully as they showed him the braid over and over, until eventually both of their subjects were quite thoroughly decorated.

By that point Ragnar had wandered over, the blond guard spluttering slightly as he caught sight of Frodo and Aragorn where they sat, their hair a mess of braids. Fili and Kili had howled with laughter, and Bilbo had hastily explained what they were doing.

Ragnar had a long hard chuckle at the Halfling’s expense before he looked over to Fili and Kili and asked which warrior they wanted for their witness. The blond guard’s straightforward acceptance sent a thrill of delight through Bilbo and he beamed up at the big dwarf, a wide smile on his features.

In the end, they got the ceremony going just before supper; Ragnar and Foseil seated comfortably on a log, smoking a pipe, while Dasil stood next to Fili, overseeing the three of them where they sat cross legged on the ground. For his witnesses, Bilbo chose both Aragorn and Frodo, as the ranger was a man of some status, and had become a close friend in the past few weeks, and he wanted to include his nephew in the ceremony.

As the dwarven witness Dasil approached them, producing three small beads. Bilbo stared at them in slight disbelief, an eyebrow raised as he glanced at Fili and Kili. “I know we agreed to do this, but where in Aule’s name did you find these all the way out here in the wild?”

Fili and Kili both flushed, their expressions sheepish as they ducked their heads slightly, looking to one another.

“Oh?” Bilbo raised both eyebrows, regarding them in shock. “Since you left for Bag End?”

The archer shook his head, biting at his lip slightly.

“When?” it was Fili who finally answered, the blond dwarf licking his lips in a small, nervous gesture. “Since we reclaimed the lonely mountain.”
Bilbo felt like the air had been knocked straight out of his lungs, surprise racing through him as he stared at them. “Even then?” He frowned, scrambling to try and find the words to explain how he was feeling, confusion and pain mixed with unbearable delight.

“For dwarves, this sort of thing is very rare, and very apparent.” Fili continued, glancing back to Dasil for reassurance.

“We just…hadn’t figured out how to go about everything, and it was never the right time, and then suddenly-” Kili made a slightly choked noise, rubbing a hand up over his mouth, “suddenly you were gone. We were never going to see you again.”

“Did you-” Bilbo swallowed and regarded them carefully, his tongue feeling thick and heavy in his mouth “did you tell anyone?”

Fili shook his head. “Just our mother.”

“Okay.” The Halfling looked between the princes, unable to keep from trembling slightly as he leaned towards them a bit more, his gaze imploring. “As long as you two are certain this is okay, that now is the right time.”

“It is”

They answered in tandem, their tones fierce and determined.

Kili shook his head, reaching forward to clasp onto Bilbo’s shoulder. “How many times do we have to tell you-”

“We are always-” “at your service.”

The hobbit couldn’t help the swell of emotion in his chest, his eyes watering up slightly as he nodded his head, his throat closing around a hard lump. He reached up to wipe at his face, trying to stave off the tears as an unbelievable rush of happiness and relief surged through him, threatening to bubble over completely.

When he managed to find his composure he just had to beam, reaching out to lay a hand against one of each of the brothers’ knees as he looked up to Dasil, giving the strong old dwarf a firm nod. The warrior moved forward, setting a bead in each of their hands before stepping back to stand behind them, a warm smile across his features.

The make was simple, a silver like medal with a small, deep blue gem set in the center. Bilbo rolled the thing between his fingers for a moment, before he smiled, looking up at his two dwarves with a warm expression.

“So now we each say the vow, and you approach the partner on your right, and we’ll start to braid.” Fili reminded him gently, his expression easy as he gestured for the hobbit to begin.

Bilbo flushed hard, scratching at the back of his head as he took a moment to go over the words silently, careful to be exact. He was beyond thankful that the boys had translated the phrase from Khuzdul, as he was having a hard enough time remembering it as it was. He cleared his throat with a cough, holding his bead out in the center of their triangle and starting, his voice trembling slightly. “As I stand here now before Mahal, I take you two to be my intended.”

His face flamed up as he finished, feeling as though the words were awkward as he ducked his head a bit. Yet when he glanced up both Fili and Kili looked beyond delighted, their eyes glazed and their cheeks flushed red. The younger dwarf went next, repeating the phrase as he looked
between Bilbo and his brother, his tone strong and serious.

In the hobbit’s opinion, the vow in Khuzdul sounded far more graceful and unique, his heart stuttering slightly as the secret words were murmured out loud; he knew how precious the language was to the dwarves.

Just as the young prince came to a stop Fili started up, his voice a low rumble as he spoke, staring at the two of them and leaning in a touch closer.

No sooner had the blond finished were the two dwarves moving forward, Bilbo scrambling to keep up as he leaned into Kili’s side, feeling Fili press to his back as the three of them gathered close. They pushed up on their knees when they started to braid, working the bead into the top before plaing down, securing it there firmly.

Bilbo couldn’t help but feel a hard swell of happiness as they pressed together, working away at each other’s hair. Fili had started to hum while they braided, the sound a pleasant buzz that slid through the night air. Even more the hobbit could hear Frodo behind him, the small child making happy noises where he was clutched in Aragorn’s arms.

The older Halfling couldn’t help but relax into the ritual, feeling the warm blanketing embrace of happiness slip over him, his smile so wide it just about split up his cheeks.

This right here, was the way the world was supposed to be.

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While parting with Aragorn had been sad, the ranger had assured them that he would see them at their stop in Mirkwood, as his business would keep him there for some time. He’d made sure they’d arrived at Beorn’s hall safe and sound before he’d bid his leave, taking extra care to give Frodo a proper goodbye.

The shireling had been crestfallen by Strider’s absence after so long in the man’s company, but just one day at the Hall with their friendly, giant shifter had the boy relaxed and happy once more. They took less time at Beorn’s than they had at Rivendell, eager to attempt to get the next, hard stretch of road out of the way.

After a few days reprieve they were ready to get on the road once more, feeling very much refreshed and replenished.

“Bunny must mind himself and his family on the road to the forest.” Beorn had warned them as he’d handed Frodo back off to Bilbo, bidding their small party a proper farewell.

The giant man informed them quite firmly that there had been an alarming series of attacks and raids along the weaving paths through Mirkwood. The elves, apparently, had been struggling to manage an influx of Goblin and Orc activity, and had been struggling to properly patrol their surrounding woods.

As well, the shifter told them that recently the animals had fled in droves, leaving all but the darkest beasts to dwell in the shadows of the trees.

With that he’d bid them safe travels, giving them extra supplies and waving off a tiny Frodo as the company slowly departed towards their mounts.

They’d taken the shifter’s words completely to heart, and after some conversation it had been decided that Frodo should ride the rest of the trip with Ragnar on his pony. The blond guard was no
stranger to keeping the shireling occupied, and Bilbo was delighted to see how pleasantly his nephew took the change.

Kili, on the other hand, was not so entirely pleased with the arrangement.

He hadn’t gone so far as to protest, knowing full well that the bulky dwarrow was more than capable of defending their tiniest party member; still the archer had a sour disposition about him as they gradually started to pack up their ponies.

The only thing that had managed to salvage his mood for the trip was that, after bidding Beorn farewell, Bilbo had strolled straight up to Kili’s pony, stepping in front of the startled dwarf to slide up onto the back of the saddle.

True to his occasionally slow but loveable nature the young prince stared up at Bilbo in shock for a moment, his mouth slightly slack as he glanced over his shoulder towards where his brother stood. The blond simply raised an eyebrow at the archer from where he was already perched on his pony, lips quirked up in a wide grin. Looking, if at all possible, even more confused than before, Kili turned back to Bilbo, his brows pinched together. “Why aren’t you riding with Fili today?”

The hobbit simply shook his head, feeling fond and happy as he reached down to pat the spot in front of him.

“You object to my company?” He teased, unable to hide his grin as the dark haired prince flushed red, stuttering over an objection.

Kili scrambled for his words, glancing one more time to Fili over his shoulder before he finally shook his head and reached out to accept the Halfling’s hand, sliding up onto the saddle.

Once the prince was settled Bilbo shifted forward, wrapping his arms around Kili’s firm waist and pulling himself flush against the dwarf’s back. Instantly he could feel the archer relax, the stiff set of his shoulders fading away as he reached up with one hand, using it to cover over Bilbo’s against his stomach.

“It’s just nice for a change.” The Halfling asserted, leaning forward until he had his nose pressed against the dwarf’s spine, tightening his grip around the prince’s waist. “I hardly get to spend any time with you on the road, or Frodo for that matter. And I don’t actually think you and I have ever even ridden together.”

That gave Kili a pause, and he could feel the young archer stretch to get a look of him where he was molded into his back. “No.” The prince finally managed, his tone surprised. “No we haven’t.”

Bilbo smiled from where his face was pressed down against Kili’s tunic, eventually pushing himself up in the saddle and stretching to place a kiss to the back of the dwarf’s neck. “Just think of it as another new experience for us.”

“Allright.” Kili let out a chuckle, his hand tightening where it was wrapped around Bilbo’s. The prince leaned himself back further into Bilbo’s grip, humming contentedly. “I’m not going to object to that.”

“Good.” The hobbit sat back down against the saddle, taking some of the young dwarf’s weight against his chest as their pony began to move, following the rest of the group as they trailed down and away from Beorn’s hall.

“Besides, it’s nice to have some reprieve from your brother sometimes.” Bilbo added on after a moment, glancing cheekily over to where Fili rode at their side, his expression playful. “Since
Rivendell, he’s been an absolute horror to ride with.”

The blond made an offended noise, steering his pony closer to their own as he leveled Bilbo with a firm look. “You, you friend. Are no better.” He accused, raising a hand to point at the hobbit significantly. “You can be a tease in a saddle sometimes Bilbo Baggins. You reap what you sow.”

“Me, a tease?” Bilbo tried his best to sound scandalized, but he couldn’t help the wide grin that split across his lips at Kili’s spluttered laugh in front of him. “Never, Master Fili.”

They rode onward at a steady pace, their postures relaxed and calm as they laughed and talked lightly, the company moving ever closer to their goal.

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Mirkwood was even more feral than Bilbo had ever remembered it being.

They managed to stay on their mounts for most of the southern forest, riding along new paths that the princes’ party had taken on their way to the shire.

However, about half way to the north end of the forest, they found themselves greeted by a fearsome sight.

Bilbo had been in the lead with Fili that day, sitting at the front of the pony as they navigated their way through the rocky terrain of the woods. Then suddenly they crested a hill, their breath catching as they halted the company with a sharp gesture.

The path ahead of them was completely blocked off by a thick nest of sticky spider webs, spanning out through the wood. The hobbit felt his heart lodge hard in his chest at the sight, his gaze flicking back to the company behind them as he began to turn his pony.

“Back, back.” He hissed, keeping a finger to his lips and his tone quiet as a few of the riders drew their swords, Ragnar reaching up to slide Frodo into the sling across his chest. The big guard then raised his shield up, navigating the horse one handed as he glanced around the wood, eyes peeled for the giant beasts they knew would be nearby.

Bilbo remembered their last run in with spiders vividly, his heart pounding his chest as he urged the group back down the slope the way they came. Once they were well enough away from the nest they gathered their mounts together, talking in hushed voices.

“Th’ ponies didn’t spook.” Dasil pointed out calmly, already sliding off of his steed and taking it by the reigns. “That means there’s a good chance tha’ those ghastly things aren’t anywhere near by.”

“True.” Foseil nodded, before looking to Fili and Kili, his expression calm. “Should we really risk enterin’ the nest though?”

“Is there another way?” Bilbo piped up, leaning back into Fili’s chest slightly on the pony.

The dwarf glanced over to his brother, waiting for the older warrior to nod before he continued on. “There’s a path by that gorge we passed a while back. If we take it ‘round the edge of tha cliff face, we’ve seen where it comes out ‘n tha other side. We should be able te clear the webs with tha distance.”

“I remember seeing that.” Kili stated, slipping off of his pony and coming around to stroke it’s face carefully, his expression serious. “That path looked fairly narrow in places, do you think the ponies
will make it?”

Dasil seemed to dwell on that for a moment, before he nodded his head. “Aye, by the look of ‘er it
was at least twice a pony’s length across.”

“That still sounds like a tight squeeze.” The archer responded, looking slightly reserved as he
 glanced back over towards Fili and Bilbo on their mount. “What do you think. Is it worth the risk?”

The hobbit glanced back at the dwarf behind him, their eyes meeting as they thought on that
 quietly. Then Bilbo gave the blond a firm nod, watching the prince let out a sigh. “We don’t have
 much other choice.”

With that they were all dismounting, Ragnar carrying Frodo in the sling with his sword and shield
raised while Bilbo moved forward to grab at his pony, leading it along as they made their way
 back towards the steep Cliffside of the large gorge.

When they made it to the new path they had Foseil and Dasil take the lead, moving along with the
 pack pony and their two mounts. Fili went next with Ragnar close at his heels, a pony trailing
 along behind their small group on the face side of the cliff. Bilbo moved behind them, with Kili
taking up the rear at his heels.

Leading the ponies along turned out to be a treacherous feat, their bodies trapped between the dirt
 side of the forest floor above them and the steep fall of the rock edge at their side. The air was
 eerily still as they moved, utter silence deafening around them while they led the softly whinnying
 mounts over the dangerous path.

Even Frodo had the wherewithal to stay silent where he was cradled against Ragnar’s chest,
sensing the tense atmosphere in the air and keeping amazingly still behind the dwarrow’s large
 shield.

Their progress was slow, but it was steady, and soon word came whispering back to them that they
 would be across to the other side shortly. Relief flooded through Bilbo as he tightened his grip on
 his pony, wincing when she gave a panicked nicker and danced closer to the edge of the path.

“Honestly Peggy I don’t know what’s wrong with you.” He whispered to her, trying his best to
 sooth her as he pulled closer to the wall, tightening his grip on the reigns.

He could hear the mounts around him start to whinny and shift, their motions panicked and jerking.
Then suddenly Fili was stilling infront of them, stepping back against the wall with Ragnar and
 Frodo and glancing around them quickly.

“Something’s wrong.”

No sooner had the words slipped from the blonde’s mouth was there a commotion ahead of them,
one of the ponies letting out a high pitched whinny as it reared back at Dasil’s side, kicking away
 from the large, ghastly creature that scuttled down over the edge of the forest floor, dropping to the
 path in front of them.

“Spider!” Came Foseil’s startled cry, and that’s when all hell went loose.

Everywhere around him Bilbo could hear the sounds of weapons being drawn, the horses crying
 out in their panic as they danced across the tiny path. Dwarves were shouting, already clashing
 with the creature as they fought to keep their balance next to the cliff’s edge.

Peggy was so spooked that she bolted forward, pushing her way past the mount Fili was leading,
forcing the two blond dwarves and the little hobbit-ling against the wall with the pony. Bilbo felt
his heart lunge into his throat, hands automatically drawing Sting from his hip as he looked
desperately to where Ragnar shielded Frodo against his chest.

“Frodo!” He was half way to the group when the shrill screeching of an arachnid sounded out
behind him, followed by a resounding thump.

Without thinking he turned, already racing back as he saw the spider descend on Kili, striking out
at the dwarf and knocking the pony he was leading back over the edge of the cliff; Darla, if he
remembered correctly, her panicked noises echoing towards them as she toppled head over heels
down the rocky face to the gorge below.

Kili managed to roll to the side at the last moment, dodging the creature’s attack but
simultaneously pinning himself against the wall with his blade knocked well out of reach.

Bilbo was moving before he could even register what he was doing, his feet pounding against the
stone path below him as he screamed, lunging at the creature. He swung out with Sting as hard as
he could, slicing across one of the beast’s thick legs and severing it at the joint, causing it to let out
a high pitched shriek as it stumbled backwards and away from the prone archer.

It didn’t topple completely over the cliff, however, and soon it managed to turn and descend upon
him with a vicious snap of its pincers. The sharp points caught in the fabric of Bilbo’s dress jacket
as he tried to pull away, tearing it across the middle and ripping it part way down one arm. The
motion just barely missed carving at his flesh, his whole frame jerking as he twisted back against
the rock wall behind him.

With a shout he readjusted his grip on Sting, throwing it up as the beast lunged again, this time
parrying its thrusting jaws with a firm blow of the sword. He didn’t waste any time in beating the
thing back, rolling to the side to dodge as it slammed forward at him with its pointed stinger,
watching the menacing glint of it with a renewed slam of fear.

He scrambled as he pushed himself up to his feet, taking the moment the spider chose to right itself
in order to dodge forward, ducking down and raising his blade to stick into the side of the beast’s
abdomen. Then using his momentum and all of the force that he could muster he slit across the
thing’s stomach, piercing through it’s vital organs and causing it to spasm hard above him. It’s
twitching knocked Bilbo’s feet out from under him, and suddenly Sting was wedged immovable
within the massive spider.

He tried to pull it free, realizing a moment too late that the creature was spasming forward, sending
the two of them crashing closer and closer to the edge of the cliff.

“Bilbo!” Kili’s alarmed shout shook through the air just as the hobbit lost his footing, stumbling
forward just as the spider lunged towards him, it’s stinger slamming in hard through the side of his
ribs.

The pain was instant and overwhelming, like being hit full force by a beastly cave troll. His entire
body was a flame of pain that seemed to sear up into his very brain, entirely overwhelming in a
way that had him collapsing.

The spider rolled up off of him, it’s massive frame catching and dragging him over as it scuttled
and twitched it’s way off of the cliff, it’s insides smeared across the ground.

As Bilbo went over he could hear something catch on his good sleeve, the motioning snagging him
just before he dropped right down the edge. His mind was swimming, his eyes rolling back in his
head even as he tried desperately to make out the figure above him.

He tried to speak, but when he opened his mouth all that came out was a choked sound and a flood of frothy bile that foamed up over his chin.

“Bilbo! Bilbo!”

Someone was chanting his name. No…not chanting, screaming. He struggled to try and make out that voice, that oh so familiar voice. Then all of a sudden he was slipping, slipping down and out of the soft fabric completely, his body giving a hard lurch as the entire world seemed to fall away beneath him.

“Bilbo!”

A black void filled his eyes, clutching to him in a wall of dark, heavy dread as he recognized the familiar, horrible sensation that rocked his last waking moments.

*He was falling.*

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

I'M SORRY IDEK WHAT HAPPENED I'M ALREADY WORKING ON THE NEXT CHAPTER FORGIIIVEEE MEEE
The Great Fall

Chapter Summary

Stranded and alone, Bilbo must struggle to survive his tumble during the battle with the spiders. He has a long way to go to catch back up to his family, and no one to help him along the way.

Chapter Notes

WARNING THERE ARE DESCRIPTIONS OF GRAPHIC INJURY/TREATMENT/VIOLENCE IN THIS CHAPTER

If you are squeamish I would maybe just give it a once through to see how comfortable you are with the descriptions.

As per usual I love you all you're amazing and I'm so so so so sorry for doing this to you.

I'm actually so glad it's St. Patty's day today, because I am now going to go drown the memory of writing this chapter in booze because it was painful, even for me.

Anyways, hope you guys like it?

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pain.

That was the only thing he registered as his mind clawed its way slowly back out of the black abyss of nothingness. He felt heavy and tired, his entire frame searing with constant waves of discomfort as he let out a gurgling groan, senses reeling.

Bilbo couldn’t open his eyes through the sudden sharp, blinding pain, his whole body a raw hurt as nausea roiled violently in his gut. He gasped in sharply, his head lolling against a hard and unforgiving surface as he struggled to breathe through a sharp, wet sensation in his chest; something rattling through his lugs and causing him to wheeze.

He fought back the sudden urge to panic and forced himself to calm, his breathing becoming slow and even as he fought against the waves of agony that gripped his tense, trembling frame.

There was no telling how long he stayed like that, sprawled out and knocked senseless by the sharp, squeezing pain that encompassed him completely; only that eventually, he began to come back to himself.

It started with other sensations, bleeding in through the hurt, each jarring and new.
The first was cold. Chilling, icy, bracing cold.

He tried not to shudder, wincing as his body jerked despite his efforts, causing a full blown ache to slide through him, pushing into his very core.

After the bitter chill came something else, a bone deep damp that bloomed down to full wetness below his hips, water wrapped around and over his legs, leaving him partially submerged.

That startled the hobbit out of his daze, eyes blinking open the searing white flash of pain that shot through him.

Tears flooded up so quick he had to squint to brace against them, fat drops of water rolling down his cheeks as he struggled to make out the blurring shapes around him. Gradually, things began to clear, and just as slowly he eased up on his elbows.

The motion caused his right side to burn painfully, his ribs screaming in protest as he tried to shift his weight. With a sharp cry he fell back, shoulders crashing against the hard ground below him. He felt his head spinning as he struggled to find his composure once more, his breathing labored and wet.

This time, when he cracked his eyes open, he stayed where he lay on his back. He tried to focus on his surroundings instead, swallowing through a surge of bile that splashed up his throat. That’s where he stayed, just trying to breathe as he blinked up at the canopy in the distance, the trees hanging above the steep cliff face that swept up from where he lay.

He frowned, his mind turning slowly through the haze of pain as he flicked his gaze along the jagged rock surface.

That was right, they’d been crossing along the edge of the gorge. Then the spiders had attacked and he-

He fell.

The realization sliced through him like a hot blade, his body seizing with another wave of fiery pain as he made a broken noise in the back of his throat. The drop must have been massive, and for one bleary moment all he could do was thank the gods that he’d passed out before he’d hit the bottom.

Bilbo knew, he knew he had to catalogue the harm done by the fall. He’d been so dizzy and delirious that he had yet to focus on identifying the points of pain across his body; almost afraid now to find out the true extent of the damage.

He swallowed hard, his breath coming in sharp pants as he gingerly began to push himself up again, this time keeping all of his weight on his left arm. He didn’t sit all the way up, didn’t risk moving too much for fear of causing more harm. He needed to assess his surroundings first, then evaluate his injuries, before he even dreamed of trying to move.

With a hard whine he propped himself up on his one elbow, gingerly turning his head from left to right, working out his stiff neck and brimming with relief when he realized his spine seemed intact. His entire body felt like one giant bruise, but he was conscious, he was still breathing, and those were in themselves godsends.

Blearily he forced himself to look about him, trying desperately to concentrate on the terrain through the blinding pain that still gripped his frame.
He was on the edge of some sort of calm pool, the water circling in slowly from the rushing river beside him. It seemed that he must have floated in with the current, becoming lodged against the rocky shoreline as the calming water carried him along. He took a shuddering breath and glanced around the pool, looking for signs of anything else from the fall.

Then suddenly he caught sight of a massive, dark shape, wedged between the rocks and the quicker current of the full river body. The spindly legs and enormous frame of the spider shot fear instantly into Bilbo’s heart, his entire body tensing as he let out a hitched gasp.

For a few long, horrifying moments he stood there just watching the thing as it twitched above the surface, his heart hammering in his chest and knocking the breath straight out of him. Then dazedly he realized that the creature made no move towards him, simply swayed back and forth in the current, wedged hard into the rock.

It was dead.

A soft swell of relief settled inside of him, his breath wheezing in as he sagged back against the rock shore beneath him. It would pose him no threat.

Having gathered his bearings somewhat he set about evaluating the damage to his body. He kept his movements cautious and slow, wincing through skin that felt too tight and an entire body that sang out with sharp ringing agony.

With a careful breath he first eased himself up to sit, finding his torso in fairly good shape beyond his ribs. However, as he eased up completely, shifting his hips even the slightest, his entire body was wrought with a bright shock of pain, causing him to curl forward over himself with a sharp cry.

“Ooh,” he gasped out, his voice broken and rough as he tensed through a ragged sob, “oh Aule.”

Even from where they were beneath the water Bilbo could tell that his pant legs were both still mostly intact, the fabric ripped in places, but otherwise still clinging to him in one relative piece. However, he also feel the distinct burning wrong in his left leg, sharp and nauseating in a way that made his stomach flip painfully.

It felt shattered, unresponsive save for the searing pain that shot through him as he jostled it too much in the water. Most of the damage seemed to be contained within his trousers, and he could see no leak of blood in the water around his waist. Either bones hadn’t broken his skin, or more likely, the flow of bleeding had been stoppered by the pressure from the surrounding water.

It hurt, more than anything else did it hurt. He felt a desperate sound escape him, panicked and pained as he lowered himself back against the ground, gingerly reaching down with his good arm to carefully brush over the submerged limb.

His upper leg seemed intact, if not slightly cut up as he winced, pain shooting up from the lacerations his hand brushed over. With a careful breath in he pushed past to his knee, feeling over the joint with a breath of relief…until he reached his shin. Instantly he jerked his hand back, his entire body stiffening through a nauseating punch of pain as his vision spun, bile choking up his throat.

His eyes watered up and he felt a ragged sob escape him, sharp, burning agony rolling through him, all consuming. He knew then that the bone was broken, his entire body seizing with horrible waves of anguish that trembled up from the limb, leaving him gasping.

The urge to give in to the pain was so incredibly strong; he just barely managed to contain the
building wail that pushed at his throat, begging to slip passed his open, quivering lips. Panic was a luxury that he could not afford at the moment and he knew he needed to keep calm, keep his heart rate down.

Taking in a trembling breath he left his leg for the moment, unable to feel too relieved, as it was in favor of checking out the damage to his chest.

With a hard swallow he brought his good hand up, gingerly fingering over the glaring hole in the body of his tattered shirt. He could feel where the puncture wound started, the edges jagged and slick with blood. When he moved he could feel a sharp pain inside of him, and he suddenly thought that maybe he’d broken a rib at contact with the creature’s stinger.

There’d be no way he could travel without doing something about his shin, and now his chest too. He’d have to try and find a way to seal the wounds up and bind them for support, otherwise he’d risk succumbing to his injuries and forgoing any hope he’d had of surviving.

He made a desperate noise at the back of his throat, feeling full-bodily exhausted as he sank against the rock beneath him. Everything was suddenly just so entirely overwhelming that he had to close his eyes again to keep his composure, trying to ride out the pain as adrenaline slowly began to kick in.

He’d stayed there for some time, just gulping in air and fighting to push through the sudden urge to up heave his stomach over the ground at his side. Then suddenly a noise caught his attention, echoing over from the direction of the spider’s remains.

It was soft at first, barely audible among the popping splutter of the rapids as the river rushed along at his side. Then suddenly it raised in pitch, the sound familiar and tugging as it drew him up to lean on his elbow once more.

It was a whinny.

“Darla.”

That was right. The pony had toppled over the cliff just moments before Bilbo had taken his own fall, tumbling down the jagged rock face to the river below. There was a potential that she still had a large amount of their supplies strapped to her…and she sounded close.

As if on queue she nickered again, the noise bouncing across the water and ringing through the pool where he rested.

She would have a medical kit on her, each of their mounts did. With any luck, it hadn’t been knocked loose during the fall, or washed away once she’d landed.

Bilbo sucked in hard through his teeth, carefully starting to ease himself down further into the water around him, trying his best not to knock his damaged leg where it floated beneath the surface. His movements were slow, agonizing and exhausting, yet somehow he managed to start the steady, careful motion back towards the source of the noise.

He kept his hips up, moving with slow strokes of the water and glancing behind him repeatedly as he maneuvered himself around the rocks, his breathing labored and his nostrils flared. He choked a bit, feeling a curl of nausea as he caught the foot of his broken leg on something in the water, his entire body reeling from the impact.

His teeth grit together tightly around the bright blooming pain that slid out across his eyes, his whole body stiffening in the pool as he let out a choked noise, spluttering. Somehow he managed to
stay steady through the onslaught of burning agony, starting up again cautiously as he fought to
draw himself back around the corner of the cliff face, past where the carcass of the spider was
trapped on the river side of the barrier rocks.

No sooner had he rounded the corner did he make out the shape of something solid, laid out across
the rocky shore of the extended pool. He sucked in a deep breath, taking in Darla’s curled up form
as he drifted closer, fighting to keep himself afloat.

By the time he finally hit the shore again his entire body felt exhausted, his leg throbbing and
stinging in a constant sharp ache that seemed to cripple his entire frame. He forced himself to focus
on anything and everything except his injured limb, trying to ignore the horrible sensations that slid
up through his knee.

With a tight gasp he eased closer to the pony, watching the lap of the water against her hind legs
with a steady focus. Keeping his mind busy helped to fight through the constant sear of pain.

The saddle was miraculously still strapped firmly across her back, bags hanging from the sides,
some half submerged in the water.

He reached the shallow waters of the pool, dragging his body up alongside the mare with a wet
gasp. “Darla.”

The pony whinnied, the sound weak and exhausted as she strained to look over at him. She had
scrapes all along her soft, dark snout, her eyes half lidded and her movements weak. He couldn’t
tell the extent of her injuries yet, but she seemed hesitant to shift too much.

“That’s ngh-” he wheezed, pulling himself closer on his back, gritting his teeth as the heel of his
damaged leg dragged up against the bottom of the rock ground, “that’s…a good girl…ah. We uh,
we took a bit of a fall there eh?”

He forced himself up to the pony’s side, staying on his back as he reached out to the creature, his
touch cautious and soft.

Darla tensed slightly, her eyes fixed on him as her muzzle dropped down to rest on the rock shore
beneath them. He made a reassuring noise at her, his mouth trembling hard as he desperately
scrambled to undo one of the saddle bags with his one good hand. The process was tedious and
slow, his fingers shaking uncontrollably as he tugged at the thick strap of leather, working it loose.

He didn’t realize he was holding his breath until it came puffing out of him as he pulled the pack
off of Darla, using all of the strength he could muster to drag it up and across the rock ground at
his back. Once the first bag was settled he let out a panting breath, his lungs pinching with the
burning need for air. He clenched his teeth together, gritting against the swell of nausea while he
once again fought back the urge to cry.

Everything hurt so badly that he could only just barely stand it. All he wanted to do was curl in on
himself and give into sweet nothingness. He was tired of fighting the raw aching pain already
cresting within him, leaving him gasping.

Then he thought of Frodo, his poor sweet Frodo, and his heart shattered to pieces. All of the
company probably thought he was dead and for his fragile, tiny nephew, that would be three
parents in the past three years, stolen away from him.

Even worse, the child probably thought he drowned.

Bilbo felt a full body shiver, his heart aching through the blaze of pain that gripped his body,
clearing his head even as he embraced the rush of sorrow.

They’d all seen him stabbed by the spider, all watched him slip away over the edge of the cliff-

There was no doubt in his mind that they thought him dead. By all rights he should have been. Yet somehow here he and Darla were, clinging to life in the unforgiving wilds of Mirkwood.

No one would be coming for him. They all thought the worst for him, with good reason, and now it was his job to fight his way back to them…

*To survive for his family’s sake.*

With a ragged sigh Bilbo forced himself to calm down, fighting back the swell of saliva that rushed his mouth, swallowing hard.

“Alright.” He breathed out, shaking his head as he readied himself, already turning where he sat to grab at the pack behind him. If he remembered correctly, there would be a tin of salve somewhere in amongst the folded clothes, and a kit buried at the bottom of the bag.

He forced himself to search through from where he was plastered against the ground, his fingers feeling cautiously around the bag as he tried to keep his breathing steady. While he looked he allowed himself to glance back over towards where the pony had settled, taking in the creature’s soft nickering with a tight clench of his jaw.

“Sorry about this girl.” He grit out, before making a small noise of success when he managed to close his hand over a hard, wood container. He breathed out a sigh of pure relief, his entire frame sagging as he forcibly dragged the kit up and out of the pack. There would be gauze there, and maybe some medicine to slather on the wound. What he really needed, however, was the salve that Elrond had given them. He’d somehow have to force himself through applying it directly to the wound on his shin. With all of his movement he could see the bleeding pick up again, crimson leaking down into the shallow water below him. There was a slit in the bottom section of his pant leg, and he could see where the red had welled over the edge of the fabric.

If he left the cut and simply bound it as it were, he’d either bleed out despite it all, or lose himself to some fevered infection. This was Mirkwood, you could trust the water in the south just as well as you could trust the roads. The forest was more vicious than he’d ever seen it before, and he knew; even as he reached up to fish for the tin, his throat lodged in his throat, he knew this would not be pleasant.

He would start with the leg, because it posed the most risk, and he already knew it would cause him the most pain. Adrenaline and shock wracked his body, his entire frame trembling as he fought to pull the intricately carved metal container out of the bag. It was fairly large, about the size of his palm, and Elrond had had the forethought when they left Rivendell to give them one for each of their mounts.

The hobbit made a noise of relief as he drew the canister out to set at his side next to the med kit, his heart already pounding in his ears. He thought back to the day that Dasil had taught him splints when they were still at Bag End, desperately trying to remember their brief talk about breaks.

With a shudder he shook his head, gingerly pulling his body up further onto the shore. Even with his careful efforts he could feel his throat closing up, sharp agony flooding through him as his left leg straightened slightly, something shifting inside of him. He breathed in desperately through his teeth, trying to keep back the dark spots that suddenly flooded at the edges of his vision.
As soon as he was fully out of the water he let out a ragged groan, sitting up as much as he could and putting the majority of his weight on his right hip. From there he breathlessly managed to work open the med kit one handed, taking the scissors and gingerly cutting a line down his pant leg from knee to ankle. The motion put pressure on places that at the moment just couldn’t take it, and yet somehow through the grip of pain and agonizing nausea he managed.

The first thing he noticed as he peeled the fabric away (mostly because he was avoiding glancing to where the blood seemed to well up, flooding over his leg and spilling across the rock beneath him) was how swollen his ankle was becoming. The joint had puffed up around the start of his foot, which also looked purpled and swollen. He realized with a tight frown that he would have to wrap those before he made any real attempt at moving.

Then slowly, hesitantly, he forced himself to glance down at the rest of his leg, a lump catching hard in his throat as he tried desperately to distance himself from what he was seeing. There were numerous gashes carved along his limb, some shallower than others, but nothing comparing to the mangled shreds of flesh that tore up the center of his shin.

He tried to keep his breathing even, tried to keep looking even as he felt his stomach flip painfully, his heart pounding up into his throat.

The thick, shards of white that pierced up through his flesh looked surreal, his mind skipping over the image as he stared blankly down at his leg for a moment, eyes wide. Then he realized with a horrible sense of clarity that that was his shin, fractured and sticking up through the mass of dark, welling blood.

He clenched his teeth shut so hard that his jaw started to ache, his nostrils flaring as he scrambled to grasp at the round container beside him, his hands staining blood over the intricately carved vegetation on the metal. He worked off the lid, scooping up a healthy amount of the viscous salve while he tried to steel himself for the task at hand.

Already he felt sick to his stomach, his head light and dizzy as he leaned forward again, sucking in raggedly through his clenched teeth.

He didn’t give himself the time to think, to hesitate; instead he simply pressed his tongue up hard to the roof of his mouth, trying to ensure he wouldn’t bite it as he brought his trembling fingers down.

The very first touch had all of his senses reeling, his whole body shaking with a violent tremor as he struggled to stay focused. He breathed in hard, staring at his finger tips as he worked the thick glob of ointment over the wound. The stuff stung, red hot like fire as it burned through his leg, causing his muscles to twitch and tense.

“Ngh.” He felt his eyes wince shut at the first brush against exposed bone, his entire body lurching with the gut wrenching sensation. He fought back a scream, his trembling increasing tenfold as he forced his eyes back open, working around the shattered remains of his shin and finishing with a healthy coat of salve at the top of the wound. When he was done he pulled back violently, his whole body trembling as he leaned over to his far side, away from Darla, and promptly lost the contents of his stomach.

Which thankfully, as it turned out, was not very much.

He winced as he spat away the lingering taste of bile, his entire body coated in a thin sheen of sweat. It brought back the feeling of the chill two fold, his entire body wrought with shivers as he made himself straighten.
With a new, set resolve he went back to the med kit, pulling out a bundle of the thick, cloth bandages. He forced himself to focus, forced back the shock and the agony as he breathed hard, managing to maneuver the rest of the pack beneath the thigh of his injured leg with only a muffled shout.

Everything hurt, just everything, and he had to blink through the rush of pained tears that squeezed passed his clenched eyelids.

A soft noise at his side pulled him back from that place, drawing his attention off of the sensation as he looked to his side, now directly next to Darla’s shoulders. When he glanced up she met his gaze, nickering again softly and glancing at him with her big dark eyes.

He let out a slow breath, smiling at the pony as he picked up the bandages again.

“Thanks girl.” He murmured, forcing himself to focus on the noises that the pony made at his side, her soft breathing a gentle lull which soothed his nerves while he forced himself to work.

The first thing he did was shove a piece of cloth from the pack in his mouth, before he started to bind over the break, his entire body reeling with the overwhelming, nauseating waves of pain that gripped him whole. He just had to keep his hands moving, binding tightly and forcing himself to breathe through the agony.

He couldn’t risk passing out during this; couldn’t afford to face the prospect of losing more blood.

It seemed like forever before he finally managed to tie off the bandage, his breathing coming in short, pained gasps and his head spinning slightly.

“Oh this isn’t good.” He groaned to himself, his voice wheezing as pain shot through his chest. Another wound he’d have to deal with, but he wasn’t done with the leg just yet. He breathed in hard, reaching over to Darla at his side, being sure to keep his touch gentle and light as he began to unfasten the second pack, his fingers trembling as he finally managed to loosen the buckle. He knew that Kili’s pony had the supplies for a splint packed away somewhere, as Dasil had been firm that each of the mounts have their own set of medical supplies, just in case.

Bilbo was beyond grateful for the old dwarf’s foresight, his heart swelling as he managed to tug out two thin, sturdy planks of wood, and a bundle of thick gauze binding.

He paused long enough to dab some more of the salves on the wounds that decorated the rest of his leg, wincing at the biting sting as medicine went to work. Then he slowly, carefully began to splint his shin.

The angle was awkward and the progress was agonizingly slow, with Bilbo having to restart twice in the first few minutes.

He had to constantly fight away the swell of hurt and frustration until he finally got the hang of it, starting the slow process of securing the splint around his leg from knee to heel. It was time consuming and exhausting but somehow he managed, even going so far as binding the swollen expanse of his foot for support before he fastened the gauze and sat back with an exhausted shudder.

*That* (he decided, too tired to even utter the words aloud) had been the single more horrific experience he’d ever had in his entire life. Which was truly saying something as well, given his past history; he’d faced down a dragon, taken an arrow in battle, suffered through exile, and, need he forget, been stabbed through the stomach.
He shook his head at that thought, gracing himself with a moment of reprieve as he carefully shifted the pack to support beneath his throbbing shin. He knew enough to keep the limb elevated even as he leaned back on his elbow, breathing hard and shaking his head while he tried to reason out what he was going to do once he was finally all wrapped up.

In a delirious moment he found himself starting fearfully at the thought that maybe, just maybe, the rest of his party had somehow been lost as well.

For all he knew, they could have been overwhelmed by those beasts after he fell. The thought chilled him to the bone and he had to fight back a cold shudder, willing himself not to dwell on such dark things.

He had to continue on as if his companions had escaped, and were now on their way to Thranduil’s domain, where they might find aid.

He would simply have to meet them there.

He took in a shaking breath, sitting up a touch and starting on the buttons of his tattered shirt, easing the garment open fastening by fastening .

Tending to his chest went along easier than his leg, though it also used more of the salve.

Blood had welled up from deep inside the relatively wide puncture beneath his breast. He could feel bones shifting as he moved and had no doubt that his ribs were broken, his whole side burning with agony as he began to slowly pack the ointment into the wound.

Only when the deep puncture had been fully slathered did he start to bind the last of the bandages around his ribs and up over his shoulder, wincing as his lung twinged with a sharp pinch in protest.

"Ah." He froze for a moment on his third wrap around, focusing on steadying his breath before he went over his shoulder one last time, securing the wrapping and letting out a short sigh of relief.

The worst of it was over now.

He shuddered hard, sweat dripping down his face and arms, drenching his bare skin and leaving him feeling overly exposed to the cooling bite of the air. Vaguely the implications of his fall began to sink in, weighing down on his conscious as he rested against the rock. He let out a groan and grit his teeth against the pulsing beat of agony that seemed to course through his frame, finding his thoughts creeping in despite the rhythmic throbbing.

The first he realized was that the ring was lost.

_The ring._ That precious thing that he’d had through all of this horror and heart break; the one advantage he had in every battle, which had kept him alive for so long.

It was gone.

He sucked in a slow breath, the sudden ache of the loss like a blade thrusting straight into his chest. A noise escaped him unbiden, his whole body seizing where he lay as his thoughts melted into a steady mantra of _the ring, the ring, I’ve lost it, the ring_ -

He rocked slowly, panic sliding into him as he raised a hand to fist in his hair on instinct, fingers dragging at the long, matted curls.

A damp, sticky feeling startled him out of his stupor, his fingers sliding through the viscous slick
that was clumped in his hair with a tight clench of fear in his gut. He let out a noise of distress and dragged his hand up in front of him, regarding the crimson liquid with clear and apparent disdain.

*Head trauma.*

Oh how he and Dasil had talked about head trauma. ‘*Always keep tha patient awake. If they doze, never more’n fifteen minutes a time.*’ He could hear the old dwarf’s voice in the back of his mind, a low groan escaping him as he swallowed hard.

He wouldn’t be able to sleep until he reached help; not without the risk of never again waking.

The noise he let out was positively broken, his stomach lurching at the thought of the hard, long trek he’d have to make before he saw any chance of reprieve.

Then he brought his hand back up to his head, pressing carefully over his curls in an attempt to assess the damage. In running his fingers through the long strands he felt a sudden slam of dread in his gut.

*His braid was gone.*

Panic surged through him, all consuming, his back flattening against the ground as he forced both hands up to search through his hair, ignoring the nauseating way the motion pulled on his damaged ribs.

*The bead, the braid. They were both gone.*

“No, no, oh please no.” His voice came out in a strained wheeze, eyes stinging and throat closing up as he struggled with the renewed and crushing need to cry.

It had only just been a few weeks since their initial ceremony, and already he’d lost their courting token. The bead seemed to mean so much to Fili and Kili, and it had been such an *intimate* gift. One of the very few that they’d ever had opportunity to exchange.

That thought brought on another gut wrenching realization, his eyes opening wide as he stared up at the sky above him, his mouth dropped open in disbelief.

Kili’s bow and Fili’s sword had been strapped across his back all day, every day since they’d first left the shire and instantly he knew…

He’d lost them too.

He’d lost them with his pack, with the arrows Legolas gave him, with Ori’s wonderful sketch that he’d kept pristine for so many years; his courting bead had been ripped from his head, no doubt cast downstream by the thundering currents of the river at his side; his ring and the picture of Drogo and Primula were in his jacket pockets, all taken in the fall.

Everything material that he had once held dear was now gone.

The realization dropped down over him heavily, his face crumpling as his vision blurred with a flood of tears. His breathing was ragged and sharp, liquid streaming down over his lips as he tried to fight back the urge to sob.

Of all the things he’d lost, the bow and sword struck him the hardest.

For so long, they had been his only reminders of his two dwarves: the bare shreds of their
relationship that he was allowed to bear when he was forced to depart home *alone*. Even in that
time of exile, his life had, in a way, been built around those two weapons. They’d kept him alive
through his struggle home from Erebor, had provided him a means for food and protection. They
had been his drive, his focus, they’d kept his skills honed and his body strong…but they’d also
been his hope.

Hope that one day the heart ache would stop, that one day he would be happy again.

A choked sob escaped him at that, his chest heaving painfully as he finally gave into the hard pull
of sorrow that tugged at him.

It was too cruel that he would lose them now; that he would have all of the happiness he’d finally
scraped back ripped away from him in one *steep drop*.

His mouth was trembling hard, his entire body aching as he cried into the silence, his shuddering
breaths mixing with the gurgling of the river at his side.

There was no way to tell how long he stayed like that, but eventually Bilbo forced himself to calm,
his whole body tense and lagging as he forced himself up to sit. It took some time for him to shake
the lingering weight of despair from his frame, his lips tugging down and his shoulders tense with
tight surging tremors.

Through the haze that still hung around his head the hobbit managed to gather his wits about
himself, dragging a hand up over his face as he stared down along the edge of the water. He could
see a distinct, rock shoreline bracketing the river body, the cliff edges steadily angling downwards.

Vaguely he thought to the path above him, to the great distance he had yet to cover before he
reached anything even close to safety.

By foot it was still almost a two day hike two the nearest Elven outpost, and another two days to
the safety of Thranduil’s Mirkwood domain. There was little chance that he would be able to scale
his way up the cliff faces, but he also knew that there were places where the gorge narrowed out to
something more like a ravine. Foseil had mentioned it earlier, as a place that they might bring the
mounts to the water to drink. The inclines were not severe, and the paths were sturdy enough to
support a full grown horse by the old warrior’s reckoning.

That’s where he would go to find the main path.

They each had a walking stick, and he was sure he’d seen Kili with his stashed along the side of his
bags earlier in the day. It was probably sitting strapped to the bottom of the saddle just on Darla’s
other side.

It took everything in him for Bilbo to drag himself carefully up against the mare’s body, trying his
best not to put too much weight on her prone form as he eased himself up towards the far side of
the saddle. Almost immediately the walking stick came into view and he made a small noise of
success, leaning over to grab at it.

As he pushed up higher on his knee, however, he caught a glimpse of something stark and crimson,
staining out across the ground at Darla’s side. Bilbo froze at the sight of the blood, his heart
lodging in his throat even as he managed to get the staff in his grip.

Slowly, gradually he forced himself to look further, his eyes trailing over to where the pony’s legs
were, only to have a rush of bile surge up in his throat, causing him to choke violently.

Her limbs were a mangled mess of unnatural, twisted angles and sharp broken bones, jutting out of
her flesh in various places. There seemed to be more blood than skin left on the poor beast, her
breath heaving in her chest and her legs lying useless on the ground beside her.

She was going to die.

Bilbo finally forced himself to peel away from the grotesque sight of her gored limbs. He could
feel his stomach turning violently, his whole being rejecting the sight waiting on the other side of
the pony’s strong frame. For all kin of horse kind, a break of any sort could be entirely fatal, let
alone the shattering of all four legs.

There was no saving Darla. That much he knew for a fact.

Yet he also would not sit idly by and watch her suffer, nor would he leave her to bleed out into the
river, alone.

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It took him more time and effort than he could have possibly afforded, however in the end Bilbo
still chose to ease Darla through her passing.

He’d tried initially to search the saddle for a means by which to put the pony to rest, but
unfortunately his efforts appeared fruitless. With neither Kili’s bow, nor Fili’s blade remaining on
his person, he had but one option left.

With a great deal of caution and strain he navigated his way over to where the carcass of the spider
was trapped alongside the rock barrier. He made most of the trip lifting himself from bolder to
bolder, sliding along on his bottom. More than once he gave his leg a hard knock, nausea gripping
him as he was forced to pause and gather his bearings all over again.

However, all of his hard work ended up paying off in the end, when he found with some delight
that Sting remained where he’d last left it, embedded deep within the upturned spider’s abdomen.

By some miracle he managed to free the blade and navigate back over to the rocky shore without
either killing himself or toppling headlong into the water. He’d taken up his walking stick where
he’d rested it against the last boulder, using it to help ease himself down with a low, pained hiss.

He’d then spent the better part of the next hour gathering up the supplied he’d need, placing them
in one bag, and then going through the packs for spare clothing. Darla, being Kili’s horse, was
loaded with plenty of the young archer’s tunics and belts, Bilbo letting out a noise of relief as he
pulled one of the warm, knitted shirts up and over his head.

Everything was a touch too big for him, but it was warm and soft, and it smelled of the dark haired
prince; comforting him in ways he couldn’t even begin to articulate.

He’d been lucky enough to keep Sting’s sheath, strapped about his hips even after his fall. He
returned the blade readily, sorting out the supplies and barely containing his relief at the sight of
Lembas bread among the packs. When he tracked down the water skin he suddenly realized just
how thirsty he was, his tongue dry and his body desperate as the first damp drops slid along his
throat.

He swallowed greedily, feeling his head spin as just a touch of the ache faded back, relieved by the
sparing gulps of fresh, clean water. Suddenly he could recognize the symptoms of dehydration
through the pain, his brows furrowing together against the sensation as he fastened the lid back on
to the container.
Briefly his eyes found Darla’s once more, and he felt a surge of empathy for her, lying broken and bleeding on the hard rock ground.

He knew what he had to do…he just couldn’t bring himself to, just yet.

Still there was only so long that he could put off the inevitable.

He let out a shuddering breath, making sure that he had everything sorted. Then he steadied himself, once again taking the cowards way out and opting to go through the bags one last time. He was searching through one of the front packs when suddenly something hard met his hand, wrapped up in cloth. He tugged out the bundle, working open the fabric’s knot and peeling it aside, marveling at what he saw. A small wooden blade and an apple, no doubt a snack Kili was saving for himself.

The fruit was a little soft, but it was still fresh, no rot or discoloration anywhere to be seen.

That had been enough to push him into action and finally he dragged himself back up to Darla’s front, forcing himself to stay calm through the wrench of heart ache that suddenly drilled through his gut.

“Hey girl.” He croaked, first pulling up the water skin and overturning a bit of it into his cupped hand. Then he lowered it to Darla’s mouth, feeling her tongue dart out even as her lips moved to catch the lingering drops of liquid. “Thirsty, hm?”

He poured another hand full, reaching down to hold it out to the pony. “Figured as much.” He admitted to her softly. With both of them so obviously weathered, and it growing lighter out, rather than darker, there was no denying that they’d been stranded in the gorge overnight already. He had been out for some time.

Even more reason for him to avoid all sleep in the near future.

He let out a tired sigh, pouring one last hand full of water for the pony before he set in on the apple, cutting it into small, manageable pieces and spreading them out in his palm. Darla watched him with her large, half-lidded eyes, nickering softly when he drew closer with the portioned fruit.

She went through the apple as readily as she had the water, only this time Bilbo made no move to stop her. He patiently cut the apple up, bit by bit, making sure she got each scrap as she munched away, looking weathered and worn.

“I’m so sorry about all of this girl.” He murmured to her, his voice cracking slightly over the word as he finished with the last of the fruit, offering her the core with a harsh tremble of his lips. “Wish I had something better to give you.”

She made a soft whinnying noise, the sound almost more pleased than pained as she leaned forward a touch, snatching up the last of the apple and chewing on it slowly, her nostrils flared with her labored breath.

Bilbo watched her for a moment, gently moving his hand over her head and ears, rubbing in slow, therapeutic circles as he started to cry. It was quiet at first, just a steady roll of tears down his face as he reached to the side, feeling for Sting where it rested at his hip. Then he reached down, pressing his lips to the top of her snout, his breath hitching hard. “I’m sorry.”

He shifted back around, maneuvering so he was kneeling with his bad leg sprawled out in front of him, both hands clutching to Sting firmly. He reached out again, touching her carefully against her throat, his fingers catching at her main as he gave her a few, soothing strokes.
He’d done this a dozen times before with the deer he’d snagged, slitting their throats in smooth, deft movements without so much as a second though.

This…this was different.

He slowly drew back, his throat tight and his head pounding as he let out a choked noise.

He raised the blade, watching her eyes shift to his as he fixed his gaze on the side of her throat.

It was horrendous, and in the end he’d been left a blubbering mess on the hard, rock shore, his body trembling with hard fits of tears; but for her at least, it had been quick.

Sometime later, when he’d forced the tears to stop and managed to clean himself of the sweet mare’s blood, he finally managed to start on his way along the treacherous river path.

He didn’t look back as he turned on Darla’s still frame, his heart lodged hard in his throat at the thought of the way her life had drained from her body, spilling out across the river bank in thick, crimson streams.

Just another ache to add to the growing weight that tugged hard his heavy heart, dragging him down even as he stumbled along, thinking only of those who were waiting for him; his family.

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Two nights.

Two long nights he’d spent, moving at a snail’s pace, half blind as he stumbled from fallen log to low-lying boulder.

He never slept, but he did take a lot of time to rest on small stops where he sat, panting and desperately trying to catching his breath. He would take a few bites of the Lembas bread and carefully sip at his reserves of water, before he’d force himself to rise and start moving once more.

It was agonizing, frustrating, and by the beginning of his second night he was struggling to just barely keep back the sniffling cries that slipped past his lips. He couldn’t risk the dehydration that flat out crying would cause, fighting back tears as often as he was fighting back pain. He just felt so tired, stretched thin and steadily breaking, his resolve chipping away with each passing hour without sleep.

The entire first day had been spent navigating his way alongside the river. He’d hoped to make it to the path out of the gorge before night fall, but unfortunately as the skies began to darken, he had still some distance to cover along the damp, rocky shore.

He hadn’t been able to stop for so much as a moment when night completely fell. Navigating his way along the gorge had been treacherous, and his progress awkward and slow. A few awful times he’d slipped into the water, or banged his splinted leg against something hard and unforgiving.

The canopy and distant skies above it were a velvet black by the time he finally stumbled his way up the much more forgiving slopes of the gorge-turned-ravine, making his progress all the more difficult. Thankfully, however, even in the pitch dark of night he’d managed to come upon the pony path that let down to the river’s body.

Somehow he had forced himself all the way up to the crest of the path before he’d allowed himself the chance to stop and rest, keeping occupied as he ate, watered, and tried not to succumb to the building dread that clawed at his chest.
He’d barely started moving again when the first light creaked eerily through the darkened canopy, slowly chasing away the lingering touch of night.

The realization that even with a day and an evening of effort behind him he had yet to so much as make it to the main trail, had been a devastating one.

Still, he had forced himself on.

Over the second, agonizing day of his hike, he’d made more progress than the first. The path became easier to weather, and he could keep a steady hold on his walking stick to avoid catching his foot on any roots or boulders he passed.

Sleep deprivation had begun to wear on him before high noon, and he had realized with a staggering surge of desperation that there was a good chance he would not survive this.

It was not the first time that he had danced so closely with death, but it was the most dire. He had no chance of ever seeing his family again if he so much as tried to stop.

So he kept moving; pushed through at a gasping stagger, fighting his way over rocky steps. He panted each time struggled to pause for food or drink, set in his determination.

A constant beat of pain drummed through his skull, spreading out in a flare across the backs of his eyes and spiking when he sat or rose. So for as long as he could manage he just forced himself along, dragging onward over the path as he struggled to push through the lead set of his body.

Then the second night fell.

By the time darkness swallowed him up, a thick blanket of black that flooded through the trees in an all-consuming wave, he felt as though he was bordering on hysteria.

He was beyond exhausted. The dull ache that rocked him seemed to be set straight into his very bones, riding him steadily as he staggered his way through the heavy, evening hours.

He should have been grateful when the first, grayed hues of morning began to slide into view, illuminating the bumps and catches of the path before him as he carefully eased along, using both hands to grip at his walking stick, but he wasn’t; he was miserable.

Never in his life had he ever gone so long without rest, nor had he ever experienced such a constant onslaught of pain.

He stumbled slightly where he hobbled along on his good leg, wincing as it set his aching head spinning. He felt sick to his stomach, and more than once over the past few hours he’d had to stop, bent over and just barely managing to keep down the precious scraps of Lembas bread he’d consumed earlier.

Each time he’d stood there hunched over he’d thought about taking a break, just sitting down and letting his body relax for a time. He resisted, however, pushing forward steadily until finally the first signs of daylight had his pace picking up, his whole body straining with the effort to keep moving.

He’d long since given up on his attempt to hold back the tears, a steady stream of liquid leaking down to stain across his face in long, dry, crusted streaks. The constant tremble in his shoulders was only intensified by the soft, ragged breaths that spluttered past his split, chapped lips.

The pack across his back kept shifting, the weight dropping heavily towards his injured side as he
stepped down to brace himself with his good foot. He hissed, his eyes scrunching up at the sharp shifting of his ribs, bile splashing against the back of his throat in a wet cough.

Making a desperate noise the hobbit finally allowed himself to stumble to a stop, finding a fallen log and dropping down cautiously on top of it with a broken sigh. He was exhausted.

Completely and utterly exhausted.

That same bone deep feeling that had been riding him since he woke up, damp and alone on the side of the river bed. He had never truly been able to shake it; like a vice grip of panic waiting to settle in around his heart, just resting heavily on his chest.

He let out a shuddering breath and set his walking stick to the side, glancing around the woods about him as he carefully eased his pack off of his shoulders.

There was only so often he could allow himself a moment to breathe and take a few sips of water, exhaustion already dragging at his eyelids as he sank back on his spine where he sat. He had no idea how much longer he was going to last without sleep. Really, it was a miracle he’d managed to go for this long, especially considering the severity of the damage his body had taken.

He was running on pure adrenaline and the burning, driving need to survive; for his nephew, for his dwarves, for his family.

With another hard swallow of liquid he stowed his water skin, trying his damndest to ignore the light, spacious slosh within the bag as he set it back.

At this point, there was no telling what would give out first, him or his supplies.

He felt a low, humorless chuckle escape him, the noise the product of his building delirium from the lack of sleep, and an utter and genuine disbelief of the fact that he, Mister Bilbo Baggins of the Shire, was dying alone in the wilderness.

The thought had the hobbit shaking his head hard, whole bodily rejecting the fleeting notion that this was where he would meet his end.

Already he knew that he would find a way out of here, that he would see his little Frodo again, that he’d get to hold Fili and Kili one more time.

Sucking in hard through his teeth Bilbo fastened his pack back up and swung it up over his shoulders, swallowing through a bright burst of pain even while he stumbled forward, limping his way down the path once more.

By the time the full creaking rays of dawn seemed to break through the darkest of the lingering night’s shadows the Halfling had set back into a rhythm for himself. He kept both hands on his walking stick, using it to hop his good foot forward, pulling his injured one up using the muscles of his thigh.

Even that seemed to hurt well enough, his stomach clenching painfully over the sharp stabs of discomfort that raked up through his knee. He dutifully ignored it, however, in favor for the steady push forward, his mind thinking to the family he had waiting for him in Thranduil’s domain.

Keeping his mind distracted made the path seem easier and certainly served to pass the time along; before he knew it he was moving quickly, hobbling efficiently around the curling roots as he pushed forwards through the forest.
He was focused on keeping up with the motion, on casting aside the pain and the discomfort as he
dug down hard into the dirt with his crutch, heaving his way along the path. He was so completely
lost in his own head that he hadn’t noticed the crumbling ridge of the forest side path, moving
along with as much speed as he could manage as he fixed his gaze to some point in the near
distance.

All it took was one misstep; one slip of the walking stick on loose dirt, causing the side of the path
to crumble away to the ditch below it, and Bilbo was knocked completely off kilter.

He fought for his balance, losing his grip on his staff and toppling over to the side, unable to find
his footing on just one good leg. As he pitched over sharply, his whole body lurching forward, he
couldn’t help his startled shout; his entire mind a steady mantra of this is going to hurt, this is
going to hurt, by Mahal this is going to hurt.

His body hit the side of the ditch at a roll, his broken shin catching up underneath him and causing
him to positively scream in agony, his vision whiting out from the pain.

When he finally regained his senses he had struck the ground with a hard thunk, knocking the wind
out of himself and causing nauseating waves of anguish to slam into him. He tried to curl up
against the gut wrenching surge of sensation, only to have his entire frame lock up hard, his broken
leg sending a hard lurch of agony spreading up through his body.

A noise echoed loud through the trees around him and with eyes shut, delirious with pain, it took
Bilbo a few moments before he even registered the high pitched, tortured scream as his own.

In a show of sheer determination he forced his jaws to lock shut tight around the sound, cutting it
off short. He almost gagged around the sensation, his whole body shuddering hard against the
ground as he blinked, trying to sort through the brutal, pounding pain that had slid up through the
back of his mind like a massive nail.

He felt his lips tremble around a whimper, his hands straining to come up and brace his aching
head. However the motion was met with another sharp cry, his entire right arm immobile and
positively flaming with agony. With a whine he dropped back down against the ground, sucking in
hard through his mouth and ignoring the sensations that clawed at his trembling frame, leaving him
reeling. It took a great deal of effort, yet still he managed to force himself to open his eyes, blinking
up through the stream of tears that flooded down his temples towards his ears.

It seemed to take ages of lying there just breathing and staring before finally his vision cleared
somewhat. He made a breathless noise in the back of his throat, gingerly forcing his head over and
gaping in horror at the state of his side.

Somehow in his fall he’d managed to loose some of the boulders, sending them tumbling down the
steep incline after him. His right arm was completely sandwiched between two of the rocks, a
trickle of blood already slipping down to where his bicep was free of the confines. Complete, utter,
heart wrenching fear gripped him as he regarded the limb, instinctively giving it a small tug,
shouting out sharply as pain gripped through him.

He was pinned.

Lying flat against the ground once more he took in a deep breath, feeling his throat close up as his
mouth quivered, his face scrunching with the sudden need to cry.

No one was coming to save him.
This was it.

Panic came first, gripping and cold and all consuming in a way that had fat streams of tears, rolling steadily down his face. He could feel his breath start to hitch around broken, half-sobs as his ribs gave a hard pull, complaining violently; yet still he couldn’t stop.

This was the end…and he was alone.

He shook his head, wincing through the sharp slap of pain as he hiccupped violently, his entire body jerking and his leg screaming in protest.

He tried to stay calm, tried not to lose himself to it even as the hopelessness slammed through him, sweeping him under in a brutal current that dragged him down, down into despair. There was no feasible way for him to free his trapped arm, nor to get enough leverage to amputate it himself, if he somehow had the courage. There was nothing he could do.

Or well…there was one thing.

His hand shook like a leaf as he cautiously reached across with his free arm, feeling for Sting’s hilt where it should have been belted around his hips. It appeared that his pack had been knocked loose in the fall, but his sword it seemed, had stuck with him to the ground.

Bilbo breathed in hard as he set his hand on the top of the hilt, his mind reeling and his body tight with indecision.

He didn’t want to die like this, not trapped like an animal…pinned to the forest floor. Yet at the same time…

Hesitation gripped him tightly and he found himself releasing his grip on the handle, his eyes fluttering shut as a barrage of faces flitted through his mind. He thought to Fili and Kili, how horrified they must be, and poor, sweet, beautiful Frodo, who had lost too much already; Bilbo could not bear to take his own life, not when he kept theirs in mind.

His face was a mess of distress and agony, his good hand fisting in the dirt of the ground below him as he let another shout escape him; the frustration, the rage, the destitution, and the fear, all pouring out of him at once.

The action left him feeling utterly broken, like a mule had kicked him square in the chest, his ribs stinging in pain and his lungs wheezing with the effort to suck back much needed air.

With that he let himself relax back against the dirt, feeling worn out, exhausted, and drawn far too thin. His eyelids were getting heavy, the weight of the last three days dragging them down, down, as he forced his breathing to calm, trying to battle the harsh rattle in his chest. Everything just felt so weighted and dense, all he wanted to do was relent, let go, and give in to the roaring need to sleep that burned through him like wildfire.

“ilbo!”

A voice dragged the hobbit forcibly from where he’d teetered on the edge of the sweet abyss, his eyes flying open wide with shock. He recognized the tone, his heart aching in his chest and his mind desperately stumbling over the slam of hope that suddenly swelled within him.

“Bilbo, Bilbo!”

Without a doubt, he knew that voice.
Desperately sucking in a careful breath he brought his good arm up, bracing it across his chest as he steeled himself to shout. “I’m over here!” He managed, his voice ringing and clear despite his hacking cough of pain. Then with everything he could muster he let out a final cry, “Aragorn!”

The scream took its toll, his vision spotting and his mind swimming as he dropped back down flat against the ground. He blinked against a new rush of tears, sniffling and swallowing hard while he tried to focus on the path edge above him.

Then he heard it- a noise like hooves across dirt and the soft snort of a steed- followed by footsteps pounding across the ground towards him. He tried to focus, tried to make out the figures that leaned over the edge of the ditch, calling down to him where he lay. His vision had started spinning again, the sound in his ears buzzing out to a high ring as he struggled with another, sudden surging need to sleep.

For what seemed like a moment he blinked his eyes closed, only when he opened them again, he was looking up at the pale features and beautiful, golden locks of his old friend and fellow archer. Legolas looked positively wrecked with worry, his brows pinched down over his baby blues and his hands carefully cupping at the hobbit’s soft face.

“That’s it Bilbo, stay with us.” The elf breathed out, sounding relieved even as the Halfling stared up at him owlishly. With that the blond turned to look at Strider where he knelt further down the small man’s body, the ranger leaning over his injured leg intently. “I have him up.”

“Good.” Aragorn stood back from where he was examining the now bloodied splint, his expression pinched and serious. “Don’t let him fall back to sleep. At least not until we have that arm of his sorted.”

The elf nodded, turning his attention back to Bilbo even as Strider shifted back up his body, moving over to his pinned arm with a sharp intake of breath. The hobbit coughed, the sound wet and cracked as he struggled to sit up slightly, trying again to catch sight of where his arm was crushed.

“Easy.” Legolas stilled the motion with a gentle touch, carefully convincing Bilbo to lower flat on his back as the hobbit let out a choked breath. “You shouldn’t move.”

“I-” The Halfling was shaking again, his entire frame wrought with trembles as he struggled to keep his composure about him, “I know, I just-”

Aragorn turned to him suddenly, hushing him softly as he reached out to brush the back of his hand against the hobbit’s cheek. “I need you to stay calm and awake for this alright?”

Bilbo swallowed, simultaneously dragging in a hiccupping breath as he nodded against the ranger’s touch.

“Okay, good.” The man returned the gesture, gently removing his hand as he looked down to the hobbit, eyebrows pinched in sympathy. “This isn’t going to be pleasant. I don’t think you’re going to be able to move that arm on your own, and there’s only so high I can lift those boulders.” When the Halfling nodded in understanding Strider continued, his eyes flicking up to the elf prince. “Legolas will have to move you to the side, then the blood will come back to your arm all at once. It’s numbed now, but it’s going to hurt once we get it free.”

The hobbit felt his chest squeeze, fear and cold anticipation settling into his gut as he nodded again, this time letting out a gusting shudder. “What do you need me to do?”
That got a smile out of Aragorn, and slowly the man began to shift back towards his pinned limb. “I just need you to stay with us, and lie very, very still. Think you can do that?”

“I can.” He managed to gasp out, reaching with his good hand to try and find Legolas at his side, breathing out a sigh of relief as the elf clutched at him reassuringly.

Strider gave him a firm nod, reaching out to curl a hand around the knee of Bilbo’s good leg and squeezing there reassuringly.

“You’re strong Bilbo.” Legolas stated from his side, shifting steadily closer with the hobbit’s hand held firmly within his own. “Stronger than most I know; including all those of man, elf, and dwarf kind.”

The hobbit shook his head with the choked ghost of a laugh, blinking up at the prince as a single tear slipped down the side of his face “Not strong,” he countered, his speech slurring slightly as he breathed in, ragged, “just determined… ’lot to live for.”

“That you do.” The elf shot back moving closer and already sliding a hand down to Bilbo’s good hips, preparing to hoist the hobbit to the side the moment his arm was freed. “Your family is waiting for you eagerly in my father’s domain.”

Bilbo lit up at that, his heart squeezing in his chest as he let out a puff of breathless laughter, feeling happier and generally more at ease. “They’re-” He whined slightly as Aragon shifted the boulder at his side, the movement causing a blooming swell of pain to roll up from elbow, “they’re safe?”

“Yes.” Legolas nodded, leaning down to press his forehead to Bilbo’s for the moment, trying to distract him as Strider gave the rock another shove, causing the hobbit to tense up with a whimper. “They’re safe and they are desperate to have you back Bilbo.”

“I won’t give up-” The Halfling found himself assuring Legolas, nodding his head against the elf’s, trying to fight back the sudden roll of his eyes into the back of his head, “can’t give up. Got m’family to worry ‘bout.”

“That’s good.” Aragorn had ceased his movements with the rock, shifting up to crouch at Bilbo’s side, resting a hand on the top of the hobbit’s head lightly. “You think of that beautiful family of yours, and you stay with us alright?”

Even as Bilbo nodded he could feel Legolas release his hand, opting instead to slide both arms beneath the Halfling’s small frame. The movement jostled his injuries in all the wrong ways, yet somehow Bilbo managed to avert a sharp shout at the flare of pain. He grit his teeth, prying his eyes open and staring straight up at the sky as Aragon returned to grip the boulder.

“On my count.” The ranger started, and already Bilbo could feel the way Legolas tensed at his side, arms supporting the Halfling firmly. The hobbit took a trembling breath, clenching his teeth together hard when Aragon continued. “One. Two-”

Bilbo didn’t hear the third count, couldn’t have hoped to as he was knocked senseless by the sudden wave of agony that encompassed him. With all of his strength Strider had lifted up the boulder, freeing his trapped arm to the cool, forest air. Somehow Legolas managed to simultaneously pull the hobbit back, using as much care as he could manage while he positioned the small man far away from the pinching rocks.

The throbbing in his arm was unimaginable, his entire frame convulsing as his blood rushed back
to the limb with a sharp stab of agony. Bilbo felt his head spinning, nausea and delirium gripping him as his vision began to black out. Everything hurt and even as Legolas held him closer he could feel himself begin to slip away.

“Bilbo!”

Suddenly Aragorn was at his side, already working to bind the twisted, mangled remains of his right arm even as he called out to the hobbit urgently. “Stay with us Bilbo!”

The hobbit tried to listen, tried to cling to the shreds of consciousness that still slid through him, but the searing pain proved too much to handle. He felt his head lolling to the side, his eyes rolling back completely as he sagged against Legolas behind him.

He was losing himself fast to the darkness, falling once more, only this time to the depths of his own, weighted exhaustion.

“Bilbo-”

His entire frame was limp, his mind fogged with sleep and a steady ringing building in his ears. He tried one last time to fight, to pull himself back out of the warm, tempting clutches of the unconscious as he felt hands gripping him, shaking him slightly.

“Bilbo!”

Then he was gone.

**TBC...**

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**Chapter End Notes**

Holy cow, can I just say that this was like one of the most gruesome chapters I have ever had to work on for just the level of uncomfortable? I have a thing with shins. I can't handle broken shins. I just.:FAJhika;fhewsodlij;askldjfslkjfkls

This was a challenge for me.

A CHALLENGE. HOLY.
Help Among Friends

Chapter Summary

SO HERE'S WHERE I APOLOGIZE TO YOU GUYS PROFUSELY FOR THAT LAST CHAPTER.

Like no really, I am truly sorry for putting you guys through all of that, but there is a reason, and it will come into play later.

In the meantime, you have survived the hurt, so here, have some comfort! Take it! Here!

You guys really deserve it after that last grueling update.

Thank you for your amazing reviews and continued support. Each of you are fantastic, amazing, wonderful people and as an author you guys help me keep the words flowing. Thank youuuuu!

Hope you enjoy the update.

Reviews and kudos are love! Criticisms always appreciated. ;)

xoxoxoxoxox

Everything was searing white light and bright, brilliant pain.

Bilbo groaned and moved to shift, his eyes blinking up against the harsh blur of images that flashed before him. He started to sit, only to have hands slide up over his cheeks, pulling him back down against something firm and warm beneath him.

His ears were still ringing, but through the haze he could make out the familiar tenor of a soft, murmuring voice. He felt his mouth drop open, a breathless wheeze escaping him as he forced himself to drop back.

"-it Bilbo. Easy now."

The groan that escaped past the hobbit’s was ragged, broken and strained, his entire body tensing through a tight gripping ache. “L-” He coughed, cracking one eye open to focus on the figure leaning over him, tears welling up across his vision, “Legolas.”

“Hello friend.” The elf soothed through a sigh of relief, his grip on the hobbit’s face loosening as he wiped at the flow of tears across Bilbo’s small cheeks. “Thought we’d lost you for a while there.”

The Halfling made a small noise of distress at the flare of pain that shot through his head when he squinted both eyes, regarding the blonde above him with a small degree of confusion. Once he managed to focus the world around him came flooding in bit by bit. It started with warmth, the feeling surrounding him like a cocoon, soft and comforting.
He flicked his eyes down his body, blinking in surprise as he noted the thick fabric tucked around his body, sealing his injured limbs in against his frame. “Wha-” He started, blinking as he felt something shift beneath him, only just coming to the realization that he was leaning against Legolas’ thigh.

Flushing slightly Bilbo already started to apologize, once again moving to sit up against the archer’s leg. Legolas would have none of it, however, quickly easing the hobbit back down against him, one hand pressed to the small man’s cheek, stroking the reddened flesh soothingly with his thumb. “It’s alright Bilbo.” He encouraged the Halfling to relax, watching him carefully while occasionally flicking his gaze up to their surroundings. “You’ve only been out for a few hours, you can afford to rest a little longer.”

“A few hours.” Bilbo groaned, looking up to the elf with his eyebrows pinched. “Did you try to wake me?”

Legolas made a small sound of ascension, his lips pursed together slightly. “Many times, but nothing we attempted managed to stir you.” He looked off to the side at that, staring at something in the distant forest. “After we saw to your wounds, Strider went off in search of two plants. One to help with the pain, and a second to act as a sort of smelling salt.”

The hobbit swallowed, nodding his head up at the canopy with a lick of his lips. “In case I pass out again?”

“I’m afraid so.” The prince flashed him a sympathetic look, his attention returning to the Halfling as he curled in on him a little more, keeping his touch gentle and soothing. “Until my father and his healers can get a good look at you, we can’t afford to let you sleep for too long.”

He gave a short nod, relaxing back against Legolas as he took in a trembling breath. “How-” he swallowed, breathing in through the sharp squeeze of his chest, feeling the elf start to rub at his shoulder soothingly, “how did you two find me so quickly?”

“Quickly?” The blond archer scoffed and leaned back where he sat, drawing Bilbo closer in the cradle of his lap. “You’ve been out here nearly three full days.”

Bilbo winced at the reminder. “Even still, it’s a two day ride from your home-”

“We weren’t at my home.” Legolas countered gently, one hand still resting carefully against the smooth round of the Halfling’s cheek. “When he first arrived, Aragorn met with my father and mentioned that he’d travelled with you, noting your impending arrival, and route. We’ve been losing more and more of the south each day to the darkness that claws through our wood; our patrols lost control of these paths just last week. So we were sent out with a caravan to find you.”

The hobbit started slightly, twisting his head to stare straight up at the elf as his eyes widened slightly. “I thought you said that my family made it to your father safely?”

“They did.” The prince assured quickly.

“How can you be sure?” Bilbo felt his voice crack, his chest tugging with pain at his startled shout. “How can you be sure, if you’d already left-”

“Calm, my friend.” Legolas urged him, leaning over once more and raising his other hand to cup the hobbit’s cheeks in both of his large palms. “If you give me chance to speak, I will give you my assurances for the safety of your family and their escorting friends. However, I need you to stay calm.”
Held firm, his jaw braced in the elf’s strong, smooth fingers, he could do nothing but nod, his breath sliding out in a slow tremble. “I’m sorry.” Gingerly he eased his good arm out of the fabrics he was bound in, carefully slotting his hand over one of the blond archer’s own against the side of his face. “I just worry.”

Legolas made a noise of ascension, smiling down at the hobbit reassuringly. “It’s too be expected. Though I have to tell you, you have nothing to fear.” The blond looked back up again to the woods, scanning for something before returning his gaze to the small man resting in his lap. “We ran into the princes, their guard, and that small child of yours when we approached the border to the southern forest. They informed us of what happened.”

Bilbo swallowed hard, nodding even as his chest tightened painfully. “How-” he coughed, feeling his breath catch on a sharp twinge, “how were they?”

The prince’s expression seemed to soften impossibly more, a small sad smile twitching across his features. “If I am to be honest with you, they were beside themselves. All had thought you dead when they watched the spiders venom take you.”

“They weren’t the only ones.” Bilbo licked his lips, dropping his arm back down to rest across his bundled sternum. “I survived the fall by luck alone, but I was sure that that damned stinger was going to be the end of me.”

“It might have been, had it struck your heart.” Legolas pointed out carefully. “However, as it didn’t, you simply slipped into a state of paralysis and lost consciousness.” He paused, looking slightly concerned. “The blond prince, he took the news much worse than all of the others. He blamed himself for losing you in the first place.”

“Fili?!” The hobbit exclaimed, wincing as the shout sent a shock of pain, sliding across frame. “How could he possibly think he had anything to do with my fall?”

The elf grew slightly solemn after that, his gaze flicking up and off into the distance even as he responded. “He apparently grabbed you before you went over-”

Bilbo could see it in his mind’s eye. 

*The spider’s frame fell away from over him, toppling down the cliff face at his heels.*

*He was tumbling backwards and something reached out, snatching his arm by the sleeve and hauling him up to halt his steady drop. Someone was screaming his name, and there was a face leaning down over the edge after him.*

*He could see the panic there; watch those features melt into sheer horror…*

*Then the darkness was closing in too fast and he was slipping away, plummeting down into nothingness and the rocky gorge below.*

“Oh Mahal.” Bilbo brought a hand to his mouth, remembering more now that he wasn’t trapped in the pain and delirium of his solitary hike. “He tried to pull me back up, but my jacket had been ripped. I slipped out of it and I…I-” he groaned, “I fell right out from beneath him.”

“They fought to come with us.” Legolas murmured after a long moment, resuming his careful stroking of Bilbo’s cheek with his thumb. It was apparent now that the elf was trying to keep him calm and relaxed, trying to ease him through pain as he spoke. “Both of them; with our entire party, their three guards, Aragorn and myself arguing against them.”
The hobbit felt a hollow chuckle escaping him, smiling through the dull ache in his chest as he thought of his family, and how distressed they all must have been. “That sounds like Fili and Kili alright.”

The elf’s own lips quirked up slightly, his expression soft as he continued on. “For a time, I thought for certain they were going to come along no matter what we said, but then that little one of yours, Frodo, he just started crying where he was strapped up with the larger dwarf guard.” Legolas’ smile fell at that, watching as a wave of hurt washed over Bilbo’s features. “My apologies, perhaps this is not the time to—”

“No!” Bilbo ignored the sharp tug of pain from his shout, surging up with his good hand to grasp at the elf’s forearm. The hobbit grit his teeth slightly as a pounding ache slid through him to the bone, breathing in hard through his nose to regain his composure. “I need to know.”

“Bilbo—”

“Legolas.” He shot right back. “Please, you must understand.” He tightened his grip on the prince’s arm slightly, meeting his gaze dead on. “I’ve been waiting for this family to be whole for years, and now that it finally is I will do everything in my power to make sure it stays that way. I need to know what to expect when I find them again if I’m going to have any chance of controlling the damage.”

The elf frowned down at him slightly, concern still stark across his features. “Alright.” He relented after a moment, noting Bilbo’s sigh of relief and relaxing slightly himself. “I just want to make sure that you aren’t straining yourself. I’m supposed to keep you awake and occupied, not distressed.”

“I’m not.” He assured the tall man readily, releasing his death grip on his arm slightly. “Thank you, my friend.”

Legolas seemed to give in completely at that, shaking his head as he continued without his previous reluctance. “As I mentioned, poor Frodo started to cry. The tiny little thing was so quiet about it that I didn’t even notice, we were all too wrapped up in the argument I suppose. Only then suddenly Kili had stopped, looked around frantically, and had Frodo in his arms within moments. He tried his best to soothe him, only no matter what he did the child would not settle—”

“He was afraid.” Bilbo groaned out, feeling his heart squeeze painfully over the thought. Frodo must have been terrified, listening to the dwarven princes talk as though they were leaving.

The elf winced, a heavy breath escaping him as he nodded. “Kili gave up the fight right then, but Fili took some more convincing. He came around soon enough…the longer he held out, the more desperate the little one seemed to become, until finally he relented and agreed to follow my escort back to our domain.”

The Halfling sucked a lip in between his teeth, chewing on the flesh as his mind drifted to Fili and Kili, how desperate they must be feeling, and how helpless. “Okay.” He nodded, mostly to himself as he sucked in a slow, labored breath. “Okay. Thank you, for telling me.”

“You are most welcome Bilbo.” The blond archer responded even as he glanced up and to the side, looking at something in the distance. He squinted slightly, then after a moment a smile cracked out across his features. “Aragorn approaches.”

“With medicine hopefully.” Bilbo wheezed, his tone surprisingly light despite the full bodied ache that still gripped him.
“Most definitely.” Legolas assured him, shifting to clasp at the hobbit’s hand, giving him a firm squeeze. “We will deliver you safely to your family my friend. I promise you.”

The hobbit smiled, returning the gesture with as much strength as he can manage. “I know you will.”

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“How are you faring?”

A rumbling voice from above him jolted Bilbo out of the pleasant haze he was drifting in, blinking up at Strider with the hint of a smile. “Well.” He hummed out in response, leaning back against the man further where they trailed along behind Legolas on his mount, already well into the northern forests of Mirkwood. “That plant of yours does wonders for the pain,” he continued, subconsciously glancing down to where his broken leg was propped up on a bed of carefully positioned saddle bags, “though I’m afraid it’s making my head a bit fuzzy.”

The ranger chuckled, shifting his arm slightly where he bracketed the hobbit’s waist, mindful of the small man’s injuries even as he kept a steady hold on his swaying frame. “That is one of the unfortunate side effects, yes.” He slowed his horse slightly, easing the stallion carefully up a steep slope, the path spotted with heavy rock stepping stones. “You’ve done well today though, considering.”

“Mmm.” The hobbit let himself sag back further against Aragorn, cautious of the arm he had trapped in a sling, bound down to his chest. “To be honest, I’m just beyond relieved to have some company.” He’d meant for the words to come out light hearted, humorous, but instead they were laced with the heavy weight of dread that leveled in his gut as he thought back to the past few days, suddenly overcome with emotion.

He breathed in hard, bringing his good hand up to his face and pressing it over his eyes, trying to stave off the sudden well of tears that threatened to brim over.

“Bilbo?” Aragorn’s voice was laced with concern, his hand tightening in his grip around the small hobbit’s waist as he spurred the horse on at the top of the incline, catching up to where Legolas had moved further down the path.

“M’sorry.” The hobbit groaned out, the words cracking and muffled as he scrubbed his hand over his face, fighting back the urge to cry. “It may be the lack of sleep, or maybe it’s that herb of yours, but I’m feeling emotional and-”

“Hey. It’s alright.” Strider’s voice was calm and reassuring at his back, his hold careful as he eased them along at their steady pace, his eyes scanning the darkening wood around them with slight concern. “In your condition, after all that you have been through, tears are to be expected.” He paused, urging his horse up closer to the elf in front of them as the path widened, their mounts shifting to walk alongside one another. “If you need it, we can stop and rest here for the evening. The woods are quite safe, and we could press on for the final stretch in the morning?”

They had been riding nonstop all day since Aragorn had returned with the herbs he needed to treat Bilbo on the road. The ranger had already gone over and re-bandaged his wounds while he was unconscious, and once they’d given him a dose of the strange plant (something Bilbo had never seen before, and couldn’t seem to process through the fog of pain that clouded his mind) they’d saddled up and started moving back towards Thranduil’s domain with a s much haste as they could afford.
The pace was exhausting, and at many points the hobbit was struggling just to stay awake and alert as they pounded on along the paths through the trees. They stopped only for brief moments, and stayed mounted on their horses, taking drink, food, and more medicine for Bilbo. Thankfully, the strange plant did its job well, and while the riding wore down on him, he was left with a calm, soothing buzz that rolled through his body while they pushed on.

“No, keep moving.” Bilbo shook his head hard, taking in a deep breath and blinking at the subtle hint of an ache that spread out across his chest. “I just need to be with them.”

Aragorn glanced over to Legolas at his side, and the elf gave him a firm nod.

“We will be in my Father’s kingdom shortly after nightfall.” The blond prince supplied, picking up the pace a bit, Strider urging his mouth on in turn. “They won’t be expecting us for another few days at least…No one thought you would make it out of the gorge on your own.”

The hobbit almost laughed at that, the sound hollow and weak as he shook his head against Aragorn’s sternum. “To be honest, I got lucky. Kili’s pony fell when I did.” He felt a sad twinge in his chest at the thought of Darla, his heart going out to the sweet mare and the horrible fate she’d been forced to endure. “If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have had the supplies to patch myself up and start moving.”

“Even so-” the ranger spoke up at his back, his tone firm, “you made it amazingly far without any sort of aid. You’re incredibly brave, Master Hobbit.”

Bilbo scoffed, shaking his head. “People keep saying that, but let me tell you-” he couldn’t help but smile a little bit, his tone joking, “there’s rarely a time in my life when I am not afraid of something.”

“You’re brave.” Aragorn countered pointedly, “pushing forward despite your fears. That’s where true courage lies my friend.”

“If you say so.” The hobbit couldn’t help but chuckle, shaking his head and sagging back, if at all possible, even further against Aragorn’s strong frame.

He certainly didn’t feel brave. He felt like he was just barely keeping it together, his mind frayed and his body wrecked and broken. The only thing that kept him pushing through it was the thought of Fili and Kili, waiting for him with Frodo in Thranduil’s kingdom.

When he had been sure that he had nothing left to cling to, they gave him strength.

The thought warmed him some as he tried to ease back into his comfortable daze, letting Strider support him as he sat back in the saddle.

They had a ways yet left to travel before they reached their destination, but with each yard gained across the thick, vegetation laden terrain, he felt his heart growing lighter.

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Bilbo stared blankly off into the looming darkness that lingered beyond Legolas’ torch light, his head cocked to the side where he sat against Aragorn’s chest. He’d been wrapped up in the heavy, clouded sensation that weighed on him from the herbs he’d consumed, his body relaxed and almost pleasantly numb, when all of a sudden the ranger brought their mount to an abrupt stop. The hobbit would have lurched forward had it not been for the firm hand around his stomach, steadying him cautiously.
“Easy does it.” Strider murmured, carefully straightening the Halfling, keeping a firm hold on him in case he toppled forward once more.

Blinking and dazed he glanced up at the ranger behind him, his expression creased with confusion. “Why did we stop?”

Aragorn raised an eyebrow, his lips twisting into a slight grin as he gestured off in front of them. “We are here my friend.”

Bilbo blinked, before he looked up ahead, seeing the first traces of the familiar lights of Thranduil’s domain. Disbelief rocked through him first, his mind cynical and raw from the struggles he’d endured. Only then realization began to set in, his skepticism slowly fading back to a surge of overwhelming happiness, his chest clenching tightly. “So we are.” He murmured, sounding dazed as their horses started forward again, moving steadily closer to the glow.

Legolas chuckled and glanced over to where the hobbit sat, a smile creeping across his features. “Welcome back, Mister Baggins, to the Kingdom of the Elves of the Woodland Realm.”

Even through his medicated haze Bilbo could feel a familiar flood of wonder as they made their way through to the heart of the grand city, slipping deep into the trees to the sound of the quiet clacking of their mounts, padding down the hard dirt path.

It didn’t take long for a party of elves to come out to meet them, converging on them without hesitation. They spoke to Aragorn and Legolas quickly, Bilbo unable to make heads or tails of the language as he lazed back against the ranger’s chest, his eyes scanning the darkened figures of the fair folk with mild interest.

After a moment more of talking the elves seemed content; then suddenly Legolas was dismounting at their side, handing his reins off to one of the servants that approached him. Strider followed suit soon after, disappearing from behind the hobbit and causing his small frame to sway slightly in the saddle.

“Careful now.” Aragorn warned him, reaching up and gently easing the hobbit down into his arms, supporting him underneath his knees and across the span of his back. “I don’t think we can afford to let you fall to any more harm, my friend.”

Bilbo made a noncommittal noise of ascension, his good arm pressed against the ranger’s chest, encouraging him to curl his fingers into the fabric of the man’s tunic. “Just make sure you don’t drop me then.” He managed to tease back, his words slightly slurred as he yawned, struggling to fight back the lingering grip of exhaustion that seemed to squeeze over him. “My family, and my friends—”

“-are sleeping at the moment.” Strider moved over towards where Legolas stood waiting, keeping his grip on the hobbit firm as he walked. “We’ve sent someone now to go wake them.”

“In the mean time however, we are going to take you to our healers, and have my father look you over.” The elven prince insisted, sliding up next to Aragorn as the three of them started deeper into the darkened city, the hobbit clinging to the man for dear life while they moved.

“But I’ll be able to see them?” Bilbo asked, this time sounding a touch more desperate as they met up with a small group of other elves, the men and women taking in the Halfling’s physical state with sharp gasps and quick gestures, motioning them further down a warmly lit passageway. “They must be worried sick. I don’t want them to have to wait any longer, it isn’t fair—”
“Worry not friend.” Aragorn interrupted, his tone fond. “They’ll be allowed to see you as soon as they receive news of your arrival. However they will have to leave afterwards while the healers do their work. From the looks of your injuries, the process might be rather grueling, and you will most likely be given a strong tonic to put you under.”

Swallowing the hobbit gave a slight, hesitant nod, resting back a bit further where he was clutched carefully in Strider’s arms. “That sounds fair.” He conceded reluctantly, shuddering slightly as he thought to the severe damage to his body. Thankfully he was pleasantly numbed to the hard aches that had been riding him for days; but what he could feel was a tight knot of distress in his chest that seemed to surge at the thought of Kili, Fili, and Frodo; his boys. It was a weighted sensation, one that he knew would not be relieved until he was reunited with his family once more. He felt his throat tighten, choking up slightly over a sudden surge of emotion. “I’ve just…I’ve really missed them. That’s all.”

The expression on the ranger’s face was one of sympathy and understanding, and instantly Bilbo thought back to Arwen at Rivendell. He had no doubt in his heart that Aragorn understood his pain, as the man had to live with it himself, every time he left the fair Evenstar elf behind. “I know you have,” the man shifted his grip slightly, drawing the hobbit carefully closer to his chest, “just a little bit longer, and I promise that they will be brought to you.”

Bilbo gave him another nod, this time more firm and assured. “Alright.”

They fell silent, the hobbit allowing himself to slip back into the lingering warmth brought on by the effects of the strange herb, his deep, bodily ache still dulled down to something light and tolerable. He didn’t know how long they walked in the intricate elven domain, nor where they were when they stopped.

What he did know almost immediately, however, was that they were in the presence of the great Elf King.

“Thranduil.” He murmured, still clinging to Aragorn even as he scanned the room for the tall, fair blond, unable to keep his face from lighting up slightly as he caught sight of the man, standing by a cot draped with sterile, white sheets.

“Bilbo Baggins.” Thranduil greeted in return, sliding up to them with an impossible grace even as concern creased his smooth brow. “We feared the worst for you.”

The hobbit let out a slight chuckle, his tongue loosened by his hazy mind. “Don’t speak too soon, you haven’t even seen the damage yet.” When that only served to make the Elf King’s frown deepen, Bilbo realized with a sudden startle that the King too, had been worried. “I uh-” he coughed, continuing on with a wheeze before anyone else had the chance to comment, “I’m sorry. That was supposed to be humorous, but I fear it was in bad taste.”

Thranduil’s expression softened slightly and he looked up to Aragorn and Legolas, his gaze questioning.

It was his son who spoke first, the young prince dropping into smooth elvish, which soon had the three tall folk conversing between one another in the flourishing language where they stood. The hobbit shook his head, leaning back against Aragorn’s chest once more as he half listened to the strange words. His head was still foggy, his body heavy like lead, weighing down in the ranger’s firm grip.

“Aernica leaf should not be used lightly.” Thranduil interjected suddenly, switching back to English as his voice raised. “How long has he been on it?”
“Only since early this afternoon.” Aragorn insisted. “He would not have survived the ride otherwise.”

The elf lord seemed resigned at that, nodding his head as he took a small step back and away from the three of them. “One day of use is perfectly acceptable. He should have no more, however, or we risk the development a dependency.”

Bilbo winced at that, his motions groggy as he shook his head up at Thranduil. “No thank you, that does not sound pleasant.” He coughed out, flinching around the ghost of an ache in his chest. “Stuff makes me feel strange anyhow.”

The tall blonde king regarded him kindly at that, gesturing for them to follow him as he started back towards the cot. “That it will, Mister Baggins. Aernica leaf is very strong, and very addictive.” He came to a stop next to the bed, gesturing for Aragorn to gently set the hobbit down. “It is only to be used in the most extreme of circumstances. Such as your case, for example.”

The Halfling tried to nod to Thranduil as he was lowered down, but the gesture was thwarted when the ranger bent over him completely, carefully easing him against the mattress. “You have nothing to fear from me.” He hobbit sagged back against the pillow that was being nudged beneath his head, his body going limp as a breathy sigh escaped him. He never thought a bed would ever feel so good. “I don’t plan on needing it again anytime soon.”

“Good.” That got the ghost of a smile out of the tall elf and he pulled a chair in from the cot side, settling at Bilbo’s side and regarding him carefully. “Though I’m afraid that’s enough pleasantries for now.”

The Halfling swallowed, making a quiet noise of ascension in the back of his throat.

“I need you to tell me what happened,” Thranduil continued, his gaze trained unwavering on the hobbit’s small frame, “exactly.”

The idea of reliving that horrible experience, especially when it all still felt so raw and close, was almost too much to bear. Still, he understood the necessity, and therefore had only one real option. Bilbo licked his lips nervously, taking in a low, shuddering breath, before he relented.

“Alright.”

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Going over the specifics of his ordeal had been just as awful as Bilbo had originally suspected. Even worse, as he spoke he could start to feel the numbing herb, Aernica leaf, start to wear off. A low, humming ache was riding him down to his bones, digging deeper and deeper even as he described his horrific fall and the painful aftermath to the room in agonizing detail.

Thranduil listened closely, Aragorn and Legolas taken with his story as well, only just then hearing it in full for the first time.

Bilbo felt somewhat vulnerable, talking about some of the most horrific moments in his entire life in front of such an engaged audience. He found himself fixing his gaze on the ceiling as he spoke, trying to keep his voice even and steady.

When he described his injuries Thranduil asked him questions about them in length, making him go over the process he underwent to treat and bandage his wounds before he allowed the hobbit to move on. By the time they started into discussion about his second fall Bilbo was starting to feel slightly sick.
He had paused to have Legolas help him sit up, the elven prince stacking extra pillows in behind his back to prevent him from having to strain himself. From where he was poised he could see the injuries right down the front of his body, his gaze training on his arm where it rested in its sling while he recounted being pinned by the boulder below the trail.

“If Legolas and Aragorn hadn’t come when they did…” Bilbo trailed off with a hard shudder, pressing his good hand up to his mouth as he tried to stifle the gusting breath that pushed out of him at the thought, “I’d probably still be out there, pinned beneath that god awful rock.”

Strider seemed to stiffen at that, the Ranger’s jaw clenching as he tightened his hands into fists at his side. “He’s also forgetting to mention the head trauma.” He murmured gravely, carefully reaching up to Bilbo and thumbing across a bandage over his brow.

The hobbit blinked, having not even noticed the wrapping through all the chaos, shock striking into him. “I didn’t even realize you’d tended to my head.” He admitted, bewildered.

“You have had at least two concussions by the sounds of it.” Thranduil explained to him calmly. “In addition to such corresponding complications there are your injuries, and the exposure. You are no doubt in shock.”

“That is true-”

Bilbo was cut off short as a commotion sounded from just outside the room, footsteps pounding closer from beyond the heavy set curtains draped around them. Immediately his eyes were trained on the entryway, his heart clenching in his chest as he heard a familiar hum of voices, bouncing closer.

Then suddenly three familiar figures burst into the room, Fili stumbling to a stop with Kili at his heels, Frodo grasped carefully in the archer’s arms. They looked out of breath, their hair disheveled and deep purple bruises circling their eyes.

It looked as though they hadn’t slept in days.

They both froze just steps away from the bed, their eyes wide in disbelief and their expressions positively wrecked. Even Frodo seemed too shocked to react, his hands fisted in Kili’s shirt and his mouth dropped open in confusion.

At the sight of them, Bilbo felt a punch of breath slam out of him, his face pinching up with an uncontrollable surge of emotion. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but he choked up, the sound coming out broken and raw.

That’s all it took to set Frodo off, his tiny nephew letting out a sharp cry before he burst down, his breath coming in short, ragged gasps. He wailed and thrashed, incoherent as he grabbed frantically at where Bilbo rested in the bed across the room.

Bilbo felt tears well up in his eyes, his lips quivering as he reached out desperately with his one good arm, gesturing towards them in a helpless manner.

“Bilbo-” Kili’s voice broke over a hitching sob and he hiked the hobbit-ling closer to his chest. He practically ran across the room, Strider and Legolas stepping back as the young dwarf pushed up close next to the bed, hesitating only once he’d reached the hobbit’s side. “Oh Aule Bilbo-”

Frodo was frantic at that point, squirming and kicking against the archer’s strong hold. “Uncle Bilbo.” The small child sobbed out, the words barely audible through his soft swell of whimpering.
The older hobbit could see the hesitation warring in the young prince’s eyes, torn between moving as close as possible, and giving the small man some room to breathe. “It’s okay.” Bilbo managed, patting the empty space next to him on the cot. His voice was trembling, his expression pinched as he tried to urge them forward. “It’s okay just-” he breathed in hard through his noise, his teeth chattering hard for a moment, “just mind my leg and-”

Instantly Kili was climbing up onto the mattress, cautious to avoid jostling the Halfling even as he set the sobbing child down against the sterile sheets.

Frodo scrambled straight up against Bilbo’s frame, wailing in despair when the hobbit keened at him softly, curling his good arm around his tiny frame. “Frodo, Frodo, my poor sweet boy.” He felt tears rolling down his cheeks, his body trembling with the aftermaths of the Aernica still lingering in his system. “I’m sorry dear child,” he choked up slightly, his hand trembling as he reached up to cup at the shireling’s round cheek, “I’m so sorry I did that to you.”

His nephew’s face crumbled further, his breath hiccupping as he grasped at his uncle’s shoulders. “I thought you left me!” The tiny hobbit-ling sobbed, whining high in his throat while he tried to curl closer still to Bilbo’s injured frame. The older Halfling winced at that, carefully easing the child into a comfortable position against his good side, the movement tugging on his injured ribs. “I thought you were gone, like mom and dad-”

“I know, oh sweet heart how I know.” Bilbo wanted to pull him closer, to rock his young, fragile nephew until he felt safe and at ease once more. “You know I wouldn’t do that to you. I will always find you little one, always.”

Frodo hiccupped a hard breath, his tiny hands curling and uncurling against Bilbo’s body as he pressed his head up to slide their faces together, tears slicked between their cheeks.

The older hobbit carefully dragged his good hand down and around, rubbing it across his nephew’s back in a slow, comforting motion. The shireling cried, his entire frame wracked with hard shakes while he dropped his head down, burying his face into the crook of his uncle’s neck.

Bilbo hushed him soothingly, keeping his arm moving firmly even as his gaze instantly shifted to where Kili knelt at his side, his hands extended but hovering hesitantly above his frame. The hobbit felt his lip give a hard tremble at that, eyes flooding up further while he dragging Frodo up closer to his side. “Kili-”

At his broken tone the prince was practically falling forward, his hands raising to frame the small man’s face. He didn’t say anything, just gently smoothed his thumb up over the bone of his collar in a firm, careful motion. Bilbo made a broken noise at that, his mouth trembling hard as he leaned into the dwarf’s calloused grip.

“Bilbo,” Kili’s entire face just fell, tears streaming down over his chin, “Bilbo, Bilbo, Bilbo-”

The archer chanted his name even while he dipped down, pressing their lips together in a trembling, desperate kiss.

The hobbit keened softly, his heart skipping a beat in his chest as he tried to push forward, ignoring the sharp ache that shot through him when he jostled his head. He swallowed up the pained noise with a relieved moan, emotion riding him ragged as he sobbed between their slotted mouths.

He could almost taste the relief flooding through Kili when the kiss pressed deeper, their breaths hiccupping and their lips slick with tears and just the barest hint of blood. The archer’s hold on his face was firm and careful, his finger tips gingerly digging into the soft flesh as he slid right up to
the hobbit’s good side, pressing Frodo’s trembling frame between them.

After what seemed like ages Kili finally drew back, leaning down over and over to pepper kisses against the hobbit’s lips and chin, crying quietly even as he moved. “We thought you were gone. We were so sure until Aragorn and Legolas told us about the spider venom and—” The young dwarf whimpered, sucking in raggedly as he leaned down one last time, slotting their mouths together in another, lingering touch. “Just, just thank Mahal that you are alright.”

“Alright is a relative term, really.” The words slipped out before Bilbo could stop them, an apology already jumping the tip of his tongue as he caught sight of Kili’s crumpling face. “I’ll be okay though,” He quickly assured the archer, dipping his head down to press a kiss to the top of Frodo’s head as well, knowing that the child was listening, “Lord Thranduil is going to fix me up, good as new.”

“Promise?” The little shireling asked, turning his head so that he was facing his uncle, his cheek pressed to the older Halfling’s shoulder.

“I promise.” Bilbo murmured, sagging back a bit further against the pillows where he sat. He could feel the tears still sliding down his face, his breath hitching slightly as all of the horror and the hardships of the last few days slowly started to fade back, making way for a rush of blinding, delirious relief. “I promise sweet thing, I’ll be okay.”

When the hobbit glanced back up he could see that Kili looked skeptical, his teeth worrying his lips as he scanned his injuries, the young prince’s face paling with each passing second. “We weren’t expecting any news of you for days,” he started, unable to keep the distress from filtering into his voice, “when we last saw them, Aragorn and Legolas were at least two days ride from the gorge, how…”

“We didn’t find him at the gorge.” Aragorn piped up where he stood with Legolas and Thranduil next to the bed. When Bilbo glanced at him he noticed that Fili had moved up to the ranger’s side, watching the bed with his jaw clenched tight and his eyebrows pinched together.

“What do you mean?” Fili snapped, the older dwarf unable to keep the raw emotion out of his tone.

“He wasn’t washed up stream?” Kili exclaimed a moment later, looking even further horrified by the thought.

“No, no nothing like that.” Bilbo reassured him quickly, simultaneously pulling Frodo closer as he spoke, ignoring the sharp twinge of pain in his ribs when the shireling curled up against his side. “The river treated me quite kindly, and I was at no risk of drowning at all.” He assured his nephew quietly, feeling the child quiver against him. “When I awoke I had drifted into a nice shallow pool, just below where I had fallen. In the deepest part, it only came up to my shoulders.”

The child seemed to relax at that, resting full bodily against the older hobbit’s side.

Bilbo let out a sigh of relief, flicking his gaze up to flit between Fili and Kili, teeth worrying hard at his lip as he tried to figure out what to say.

Thankfully Aragorn came to his rescue, continuing on carefully as he glanced in the hobbit’s direction. “He tended his own wounds after the fall and managed to hike his way back to the main path.”

“How?” Kili demanded, disbelief coursing through him even as Fili stiffened at his side, his jaw locked and his expression stony. The archer turned immediately back to Bilbo, flinching slightly.
“Not that I doubt you in any way I just-” his gaze flicked between the sling across the hobbit’s chest and the splint around his leg, “you’re two limbs short.”

“Ah.” Bilbo let out a humorless chuckle, glancing down to where his hand dangled down from where it was strapped about his breast with a tight sigh. “The arm was a more recent development.” He explained, choosing his words with care and keeping his tone cautious. “I had a fall just this morning, after my second night of travelling, I’m afraid that exhaustion must have gotten to me. I ended up with my arm pinned down in a ditch.” He felt Frodo whimper into his throat and he tightened his grip on the back of the boy’s borrowed elven tunic, hushing to him softly as he spoke. “Everything was alright though, because when I fell, I shouted, and that’s how Aragorn and Legolas found me.”

Kili let out a strangled string of Khuzdul, the words harsh and angry as he sat back slightly, causing Frodo to stiffen and cling harder to Bilbo’s frame. “We should have never left you. We should have gone back for you immediately,” the archer growled, fisting his hands into the sheets on the cot beneath them. Fili shifted slightly, his whole bondy tensed and his jaw clenching when he dragged a hand up to fit over his mouth, watching his younger brother continue. “We should have gone back for you immediately, we-”

“Did exactly what you needed to.” Bilbo snapped, wincing when his raising voice caused his ribs to give a substantial throb of protest, his body’s all encompassing ache sliding back in with a vengeance. He ignored it, pushing it aside and embracing the surge of indignant anger that washed over him instead. “I walked that riverside, and there would have been no way to get a party, let alone horses along those jagged slopes-” he was breathing in hard, emotion and exhaustion suddenly slamming into him with the waves of constant pain, and he found he could no longer fight back the tremble of his lips, “I am small, and I am determined, but I barely just made it with the little space I take up. Imagine if you’d tried to get through with Ragnar? Or Foseil even? Because they would not have let you go alone-”

“Bilbo Baggins.” Thranduil was suddenly leaning over him where he sat on the cot, one hand carefully pressed to the hobbit’s brow.

Instantly he could feel a wave of calm slide over him, the Elf King’s voice sliding through his mind like a gentle breeze. You must stay calm.

He shivered, the rest of his frantic tangent dying on his lips as he sagged back against the pillows, realizing with a start that Frodo was crying quietly into his shoulder, the small hobbit’s body trembling with his flood of tears.

Thranduil drew away and Bilbo instantly started soothing the shireling, apologizing and stroking his back, while pressing small kisses to his forehead. “I didn’t mean to frighten you little one.” He croaked, realizing with a wince how much his outburst had strained his throat. He swallowed hard, hitching Frodo impossibly closer while he turned his gaze back to Fili and Kili.

He looked to the elder first, his heart plummeting in his chest when he found that the blond dwarf was no longer so much as looking at him, his eyes cast down to the side. Bilbo fought against the sudden heartache that clenched in his chest, and in his delicate state his mind nearly took it as a sign of rejection, cold hard dread dropping down to settle in his gut. He swallowed, breathing in hard while he forced his gaze away from the warrior, his heart lodged in his throat.

As much as he wanted Fili by his side, he understood why the prince kept his distance, thinking back to what Legolas had told him earlier that day.

There was nothing he could do to fix that yet, not until he and the older dwarf found the opportunity to be alone to talk. In the mean time, he would just have to allow Fili to deal with his
warring emotions in whatever way he could, and try not to feel too wounded by his distance.

So instead he dragged his attention to Kili, noting the way the young archer’s lip trembled with a tight squeeze of emotion in his chest. “Is there any way that we could just, push all of this aside for now?” He murmured softly, flicking his gaze between the two of them, unsurprised yet still hurt to find that Fili’s eyes remained averted.

“I’ve just—“ Bilbo felt his breath catch in his throat, his whole body burning with pain while he winced, trying to fight back the tears that began to brim over his eyes, dripping down his cheeks, “the last few days, they’ve been really rough on me and—” He was struggling to keep his composure, fighting a losing battle as he choked on a wet cry, “all I wanted…the whole time I was out there…I just wanted my family back.”

Kili’s entire face fell, a sob escaping him as he moved forward, Frodo crawling up to hook his arms around the older hobbit’s neck even as the archer carefully slid up to him, pressing their foreheads together.

“We’re here Bilbo.” The young dwarf gasped out, sniffling while he gingerly wrapped a hand around to rest at the back of the Halfling’s head, gingerly curling his fingers into the hair there. “We’re here.”

The hobbit sucked in a shuddering breath, nodding against Kili’s brow, his heart giving a hard lurch of longing for their missing third.

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind did Bilbo feel the thin mattress dip down beside him, a hand reaching out to carefully cup around his arm when Fili leaned in, pressing his bearded lips to the corner of Bilbo’s mouth from beneath his brother’s frame. “All of us.”

Bilbo was nodding again, only this time the action was more instinct than anything, his eyes squeezing shut and his mind spinning with overwhelming relief as his lips quivered hard. “Thank you.” He managed to bite out, the words broken and desperate. “Thank you, thank you—”

“Don’t.” Fili managed, sounding completely wrecked where he settled, nuzzled against the older hobbit’s chin and encompassing Frodo’s small frame where he pressed close on the cot. “Just, please Bilbo.”

The hobbit felt his jaw clench hard, a breath gusting out of him as he agreed anyways. “Okay.” He managed with a wheeze, forcing himself to relax back against the pillows as his family surrounded him, clinging to him carefully and filling him with a sense of warmth and ease. Even the hard, sharp ache of his body seemed to subside to the swell of emotions that bubbled up within him, soothing him in ways he could never have expected.

Shuddering breath after shuddering breath escaped him until finally, inch by inch, he felt his body start to calm; all of the anxiety and fear that had been haunting him melting away as he tightened his grip on his nephew against his side, reveling in the familiar touch and smell of the dwarven brothers in front of him, his boys.

He made a content sound, his eyes still shut, only now relaxed and easy as he just gave in to the warmth that surrounded him, finally able to fully breathe through the knot of tension that had been riding him since they’d been separated.

Even with the building itch of pain that crept its way back to the forefront of his mind Bilbo did not want to let go, did not want to have to see his family leave so soon after getting them back.
He knew, realistically, that they would not vanish if they pulled away, but that did nothing to soothe the small twinge of dread that settled in him at the thought.

It was only moments later that Thranduil gently cleared his throat, and Bilbo could hear Aragorn and Legolas cautiously approaching the bed.

“I’m afraid I am going to have to ask you all to wait outside of the curtains, if you would.” The Elf King stated, not unkindly. “We will have to see to his injuries immediately.”

Fili was the first to pull away at that, hesitating on for a moment to lean down and place one last kiss to Bilbo’s cheek. Then reluctantly Kili followed suit, gently urging a very disgruntled Frodo out from under his uncle’s arm.

Immediately the shireling let out a small noise of distress, and the older hobbit felt his heart clench hard in his chest. “It takes time to put me under, does it not? For the tonic to kick in?” He found himself asking, not even pausing to think as he tilted his head to glance up at Thranduil at his side. “Would they be able to stay for a while? At least until the medicine takes effect?”

The elf seemed disgruntled at that, blinking down at the tiny being in his medical room with the slow quirk of one of his fine, dark eyebrows. “I suppose I can see no reason to deny such a request.” He nodded to Legolas, who turned to draw two intricately carved chairs from the corner of the room. He brought them to Bilbo’s bedside, setting them close to where his head was propped up on the stack of pillows. “Please sit, it will not take long for him to sleep once the full dose is administered.”

The two dwarves nodded in understanding, Kili moving first to settle into a chair, Frodo in his lap, and Fili coming up to sit at his side. The small shireling had calmed somewhat at the allowance, his hands reaching up to curl in the bed sheets as he gazed up at his uncle imploringly.

“I’ll be okay sweet thing.” Bilbo murmured with the hint of a smile, reaching his good hand out to hold his tiny nephew’s gently. “The elves have taken good care of me many a time before, and I have no doubt in my mind that they will do the same now.”

Surprisingly, neither Fili nor Kili commented at that, their gazes fixed on him and their faces reflecting different states of concern; the older dwarf still looked furious, his eyes burning even as he fought to keep his expression strategically neutral, regarding Bilbo with caution; the younger on the other hand, looked entirely stricken, his expression pinched while he struggled to maintain his calm for the benefit of the small child, perched in his lap.

“We’ll be a bit late to Erebor I’m afraid.” Bilbo managed after a moment, accepting the bowl placed to his lips by an attending medic. The liquid was thick and heavy in his mouth, a bit tart, easy going down as he swallowed. He finished the entire thing at the elf’s gentle urging, relaxing as it settled in his gut, cooling while it through him.

“That doesn’t matter.” Kili shook his head with a chuckle, one arm still wrapped firmly around Frodo’s small waist. “All that matters is that you focus on getting better. No matter how long it takes, we can wait.”

Bilbo smiled back at him, before he tried to meet Fili’s gaze, his heart dropping as the blond dwarf looked away. The hobbit tried for their little ritual anyways, his tone imploring as he spoke. “At my service, right?”

The older prince made a half noise of ascension, his expression still creased and his eyes fixed firmly on the ground.
The Halfling had to fight back the sudden surge of heartbreak that slammed through him, shattering him to the core. Before he could lose himself too fully in the sensation, however, Kili was reaching out, carefully squeezing a hand over his hip. “Always”

The prince’s firm reassurance was like a sweet wave of warmth that washed over Bilbo, leaving him comfortable and sated while he let a little of the hurt melt away. Already he could feel the way the tonic was settling into his very bones, weighing him down against the sheets and causing his breathing to slow to a steady hum.

“I’ll be better.” He murmured, his eyes drooping slightly, a dark shadow beginning to slip in around the edges of his vision. Lazily he looked down to Frodo, smiling at his nephew fondly. “I’ll be better soon, just-”

He blinked, suddenly feeling light headed as he sagged further against the pillow behind him, a steady noise buzzing in his ears while he blinked dazedly up to Kili and Fili. They were both looking at him then, regarding him carefully, the younger crying openly where they sat in their chairs.

Bilbo watched the pair of them, his heart swelling in his chest. The heavy ache of his body was slowly starting to fade away, pain just an afterthought, riding gently through his waves of discomfort as he tried to train his gaze on the archer. He was saying something, but Bilbo couldn’t hear it, focused blearily on the shapes around him as the room began to spin out.

Vaguely he could still make out the figures of the three of them, sitting at his bed side. They were just a blur, however, shapeless against the swirling background that seemed to creep in on Bilbo, drowning him in the cloud of confusion that fogged his mind, leaving him reeling.

He sank back against the cot, feeling that oh so familiar sensation of fading into nothingness as heavy darkness swam across his vision.

Tiny fingers squeezed over his hand, holding him tightly when he began to drift away, his heart swelling with the comfort and knowledge that he was not alone.

He floated, letting his eyes slide completely shut as a sigh escaped him, quiet and easy.

With one last delirious thought he gave in to sleep, sagging with his entire body pleasantly numbed.

_He was with his family again._

_TBC..._
Finding the Words

Chapter Summary

Bilbo is safe and sound in Thranduil's domain, yet things still aren't back to normal between Fili, Kili, and himself. With the older prince still lost to his own guilt, Bilbo has little choice but to confront him with...mixed results.

Chapter Notes

OH GOD IT IS SO LATE RIGHT NOW I DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT MY BETA-JOB BUT I GET AN "A" FOR EFFORT GUYS RIIIGHHHHTT?

This month has been ridiculous, but look here's another chapter! With talking and emotions and things! Yayyy resolution.

I'm exhausted, I need sleep, but you need this chapter, so here you guys go. I love you all and hope you enjoy this<3

Also I guess check the updated tags for chapter warnings?

Comments and Kudos are Love!

And love for criticism too!

I might edit this again later idk let me know what you guys think! xoxoxoxoxoxo

When Bilbo came back to the world again it was to the soft humming of elven song, ringing in the distance. The noise eased him from his slumber, enticing him with a warm melody that washed over his still frayed and travel wearied mind. He sucked in a deep breath and released it, feeling the tension slip out of his frame while he tried to blink open his eyes, shifting slightly.

He was about to attempt sitting up, his sight bleary as he squinted at a bright room and high ceiling, when a large, smooth hand pressed gently to his collar, easing him back against the soft mattress beneath him.

"Careful my friend."

Blinking rapidly Bilbo gazed at the shapeless figure that suddenly leaned over top of him, recognizing the voice even before his eyes finally slipped back into focus.

"You are healing well, but you shouldn’t risk too much movement."

"Legolas." He murmured the name like a breath of relief, his mind still addled with sleep while he sank back against the bed, the elven prince’s face lightly up as their eyes finally locked.

“It’s good to have you back with us Bilbo.” The tall blond stated, his expression soft and friendly.
“You’ve been asleep for some time.”

The hobbit winced at that, panic sliding into him as he instantly thought to his family. “Kili, Fili and Frodo,” he swallowed hard, glancing around the room and noting with a tight clench of nerves that it was absent other parties, “where are they?”

“Perfectly fine, that I can assure you.” Legolas eased, sliding his chair up closer to the bed side and reaching down to take up Bilbo’s good hand. He gave the hobbit a reassuring squeeze, his smile light hearted. “They have scarcely left your side since we moved you here. Aragorn took them some time ago to the kitchens in order to find food.”

Bilbo sagged back in relief, his breath easing out of him slowly as he smiled back at his friend. “Good.” He curled his fingers further around Legolas’ hand, squeezing there. “How long was I out?”

“Just over a day.” The elf stated, straightening slightly. “An expected side effect of the tonic. It prevents you from waking until your body has recovered sufficiently from the injuries it has sustained.”

“Oh.” Bilbo blinked, once again taken aback by the strange wonders of the world, glancing down at himself curiously.

He was lying on a fine bed a top a thick comforter, pillows scattered about him. Someone had taken the time to change him into an elven tunic, the shirt falling like a slip over his body, stopping just past his knees.

His injured leg was still wrapped, bandages wound snugly from his knee to his toes, but the splint was gone, and from the looks of it the bones too had been reset. Someone had propped the limb up on a thick pillow, keeping it raised.

With an audible sigh of relief he dragged his gaze back up to his chest, finding that his arm was still bandaged in the sling. He frowned, but when he gave his fingers an experimental wiggle he wondered at the lack of pain. There was a dull ache that seemed to ride residually through him, but it was almost an afterthought compared to the searing sense of relief that he felt, finally having some reprieve for his frayed nerves.

“Don’t move that too much.” Legolas stated, rising from his seat and reluctantly releasing Bilbo’s good hand. “Everything is still bandaged to ensure that you stay off of your injuries and allow them to finish healing. You can manage that, can’t you Mister Baggins?”

Bilbo flushed at the firm look the elf leveled him with, offering his friend a sheepish smile. “I can, I apologize.” He couldn’t help it when the expression bloomed into a full on grin, spreading up his cheeks. “It just feels so good to be better.”

“Not quite better just yet.” The elf reminded him firmly. “But you will be soon, if you can only remember to mind your wounds.”

“I will.” Bilbo assured him, all the while raising a single brow at the way the blond archer moved to leave the room, already walking towards the door. “Wait, where are you going?”

He couldn’t help the panic that filtered into his tone, still unable to shake the lingering fear of being alone once more, isolated and afraid with no one to help him. He shook his head, trying to remind himself that he was safe, he was with the elves, with his family, and they would let no harm fall to him. However he still could not shake the tight wedge of fear that drove into his chest at the
idea of being once again alone.

Legolas seemed to instantly recognize the source of Bilbo’s distress, the elf quickly stepping back to the bed to clasp his friend firmly on the shoulder. “Fear not, my father moves down the hall towards us as we speak.” He assured him with a smile, his bright blue eyes flicking over towards the door. “I simply intend to seek out our ranger and your family. I’m sure they are all desperate to see you.”

“Oh.” Bilbo felt himself relaxing in the tall man’s grip, fear ebbing away at the prince’s careful words. He was more than comfortable in Thranduil’s presence, and the prospect of seeing Fili, Kili and Frodo again was too tempting to ignore. “Alright.”

The blond flashed him another reassuring look, squeezing him one last time before he stepped away and turned on heel, strolling out of the room. “I’ll be back soon Bilbo, and I won’t be alone.”

The hobbit watched him go, waiting until the elf had the door open and was one step out into the hall before he called out suddenly. “Legolas wait!” The prince stopped dead, turning over his shoulders to flash the Halfling a questioning look. Bilbo flushed and scratched the back of his head sheepishly. “Just…thank you.”

That got a bright smile out of the tall archer and he nodded his head, giving the hobbit a slight bow. “You are most welcome my friend.”

With that the elf disappeared from sight, vanishing into the passage beyond Bilbo’s sight without so much as a footfall to signal his departure. The Halfling sucked in a low, careful breath, feeling himself sag back against the mattress as he tried to take in the room around him.

He didn’t have ample opportunity to look around, however, before the sound of heavy footsteps caught his attention. Legolas had left the door to the room open a jar, allowing the noise from the hall beyond to drift in with the cool, constant breeze. Instantly he knew that the steps could not belong to someone of elf kind, who moved silently and gracefully through these halls; no, those sounds belonged to familiar feet.

Dwarves.

It couldn’t have been Fili and Kili, not with Legolas only just departed to track them down. Instantly he thought to what the elven prince had said before he left the room, about his father coming to pay him a visit.

His heart swelled as a sudden thought slid into him. The Elf King must have been with Ragnar, Foseil, and Dasil. He couldn’t help his sudden surge of excitement at the thought of being reunited the guards once more. He hadn’t seen heads nor tails of them since he’d been rescued, and he was desperate for news on their wellbeing.

Sure enough, moments later Thranduil stepped into the spacious bedchamber, moving with three dwarves in tow, his expression serene.

Bilbo greeted the lot of them enthusiastically, gesturing them frantically over to the bed as Ragnar began to fuss about his injuries, cursing the spiders and all of their beastly kind. All three guards showered him with more concern than he ever thought to receive from them, embracing him and cursing him for giving them such a scare.

The conversation between them after that was easy, warm, and comfortable, Thranduil observing quietly from the side. Bilbo had been in the middle of discussing his new abundance of practical
medical experience to Dasil, who was torn between pride and horror at hearing the details of the hobbit’s tale, when suddenly the door burst open once more.

Legolas came in first, Kili and Frodo in turn. Both archers moved straight to the bed, the shireling in their company squirming and calling to his uncle, obviously beyond delighted to see him awake and well.

After them came Aragorn, his smile easy as he caught sight of the Halfling, sprawled against the bed. The ranger didn’t crowd up to the mattress with the rest, however, opting instead to stand at the side of the room with Thranduil, watching the crowd around the hobbit with a fond grin.

Bilbo had an armful of shireling by the time Fili finally entered the room, instantly stealing the older Halfling’s attention as the prince strode forward, his gaze fixed firmly on the ground.

The blond dwarf still would not look at him.

With a slight clench of his jaw Bilbo forced himself to ignore the tight clench of pain in his chest, watching Fili out of the corner of his eye when the prince moved off to stand behind his brother, not so much as glancing towards the bed.

Bilbo knew. He just knew that he had to deal with this. At the moment, however, he had a room chalk full of people who cared for him and demanded his attention, the conversation around him already rumbling on in a constant, low hum.

The hobbit kept up well enough, smiling and talking with each of his friends and family in turn from where he sat back against the cushions. Yet his gaze always managed to find it’s way back to his dwarves, heart breaking a little more each time he saw Fili staring firmly at the floor, Kili glancing over to him constantly, his face a pinched in concern.

From the moment he laid eyes on them Bilbo knew.

He knew that they couldn’t put it off any longer.

They needed to talk about this, and they needed to do it soon.

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The whole group of them stayed in Bilbo’s room for some time, keeping the conversation light and easy as the hobbit lounged in the bed, Frodo curled up on the comforter at his side. Though he looked relaxed and calm, the older Halfling was wrought with nerves, his gaze constantly flicking to where Fili and Kili stood, the pair now talking to each other in hushed Khuzdul. The older dwarf’s demeanor hadn’t improved even remotely since he’d entered the room, his eyes down cast and his posture tense.

Constantly Kili attempted to draw his brother out of his mood, the young archer’s expression pinched and his mouth tugged down in a hard frown as he tried in vain to keep their discomfort from Frodo and Bilbo on the bed.

Finally the hobbit simply had enough. He waved Aragorn over gingerly, the ranger coming to his side next to the bed without a moment’s hesitation. “What can I do for you Mister Baggins?”

“Could you take Frodo here and get him some tea and a snack?” He asked the man carefully, and when his nephew began to protest he hushed him soothingly. “Once you’re done you can bring me something up to eat, hm? I think that would be a lovely thing to do.”
The shireling seemed to hesitate, before he slowly and reluctantly agreed. “Alright.” He leaned up and gave his uncle a kiss on the cheek, sliding off of the bed and into Aragorn’s waiting hold. “Who’s going to stay with you?”

Bilbo licked his lips, flicking his gaze to where the brothers stood in the corner. “I think that maybe Fili and Kili might like to keep me company.” He then flicked his gaze to the guards, dragging it past the three of them to land on Thranduil and Legolas where they stood. “I think it might be nice for the three of us to have some time alone.”

Even Frodo seemed to understand at that, all of the child’s protests dying as he pulled himself up to cling to Aragorn’s shoulder, holding himself to the man with grasping fingers. Bilbo made sure to wave to his nephew when they departed from the room, the rest of them leaving one by one, glancing back over their shoulders briefly as they left. Then finally it was just the three of them, Thranduil stepping out last and closing the door behind him with a resounding ‘click.’

Bilbo swallowed hard at the noise, his eyes flicking up momentarily as he breathed in slowly, trying to gather himself. There were things they needed to talk about, things that he still hadn’t told them.

The bead.

Suddenly he wanted to cry, his lips trembling as he brought a hand to his mouth, struggling with his composure. “There are, ah-” he blinked rapidly and gave his head a shake, forcing his gaze up to where Fili and Kili stood at his bed side, the archer watching him carefully but the older prince still staring pointedly at the ground, “there are things we have to talk about.”

“We know.” Kili nodded, taking a step towards the mattress only to pause, frowning when Fili did not do the same. He turned back to his older brother, reaching out and curling a hand around his arm. He gave him a firm tug, directing him towards one of the chairs with a tight frown marring his stubbled lips. “Bilbo, we -”

“I’m sorry,” Bilbo cut in, his voice cracking slightly as his lips gave a particularly vicious quiver, “not to be rude, but if you don’t mind I just…there’s something I have to tell you.”

The archer fell silent at that and Fili actually looked up, his gaze distant and haunted. Kili was the one who spoke, dragging his chair a little closer and reaching out, carefully setting a hand on the hobbit’s hip. “Whatever you need.”

Bilbo nodded, breathing in hard through his nose while trying and failing to keep back to suddenly wave of anguish that flooded through him. Everything that he had been robbed of by the fall came slamming back to the forefront of his mind, his heart giving a hard ache. “During-” His breath hitched and he shook hard, his whole body straining against the building swell of emotion, “during the fall I-” he couldn’t help but reach up with his good arm, fisting a hand in his curls where his braid should have been, “I lost some things.”

The brothers looked confused at that, their brows pinched and their gazes following the motion of the hobbit’s fingers, tugging through his hair. Then Fili’s eyes widened slightly, his jaw clenching as he swallowed.

Kili took notice of the change in the older dwarf immediately, though is eyes were still wide with confusion, glancing between the blond and where Bilbo sat on the bed. It took him much longer than his brother, but eventually even the archer caught on, his gaze locking on where the Halfling’s hand was fisted in his hair.
The young dwarf’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped open, disbelief and heartache pouring across his features. When he finally managed to speak the words were short and broken. “Your braid-”

“I’m sorry.” Bilbo didn’t know why he felt the sudden, overwhelming urge to apologize, but he couldn’t help himself, tears dripping down his face while he tried in vain to blink them back. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry-”

“Bilbo-”

He shook his head, his eyes squeezing shut while he clenched his teeth together tightly, his entire mouth trembling uncontrollably. “I-” He was shaking too hard to speak, breathing in desperately through his quivering lips, “I lost the bead.”

The brothers both sucked in audibly, Bilbo subconsciously flinching away at the noise, tears spilling out from between his clenched eyelids. He didn’t wait for either of them to speak, just continued on miserably, the words spilling out before he could put a stop to them. “I woke up, and I was alone, and it was just gone-” he swallowed, his hand dropping down from his hair miserably, “all of it was gone. The braid, the bead, my jacket, all of it.”

He felt his heart clench painfully in his chest at the thought, his breathing coming in short, trembling gasps. “I lost my pack, Ori’s sketch, my ring, and oh,” he let out a pained noise, his face crumpling up further over a hard sob, “the only picture I had of Primula and Drogo.”

Frodo would grow up without memory of his own parent’s faces, robbed of the chance to gaze upon them ever again. The idea was heart wrenching and Bilbo just about couldn’t take it. He shook his head, clenching his teeth together tightly as his mouth gave a hard tremble.

That hadn’t been all he’d lost, however.

His face scrunched up, nose stuffed and eyes swollen from the tears that dribbled down into his mouth, leaving his breathing wet and rasping. “I um,” he had to cough, unable to push on through the hard lump that had settled in his throat, “I lost the bow and sword you gave me.”

It hurt so much more this time around, as if saying it out loud somehow made everything more real. He couldn’t help the broken sob that escaped him, his shoulders bowing as he curled in on himself as much as he could manage, still minding his wounds. “I lost everything.”

Kili let out a desperate sound, already crawling up onto the bed when the hobbit gave a high whine, crying uncontrollably. “Oh Bilbo.”

As soon as the mattress dipped Bilbo turned into the archer, allowing himself to be gingerly tugged to that firm, warm chest while he sobbed out raggedly. The young dwarf simply tightened his grip, dragging one arm around to curl against the Halfling’s back, rubbing there in a constant, reassuring motion.

They stayed like that for a moment, the brothers waiting for Bilbo to regain his composure while he sucked in hard through his quivering mouth. Even when his breathing had calmed and his tears had dried on his puffy cheeks the younger prince still did not release him, holding to him firmly and pressing his mouth to the top of the Halfling’s head.

Then suddenly Fili’s voice cut through the silence, his tone strained and quiet. “You didn’t lose everything Bilbo.”

The hobbit blinked, drawing back slightly from the archer in order to level Fili with a startled stare.
The blond was once again looking away, finding something particularly fascinating about the far wall.

“Exactly.” Kili smiled at his brother, unperturbed by the older dwarf’s strange demeanor as he took the idea and ran with it, grasping to Bilbo’s shoulders gently. “You haven’t lost everything Bilbo.” The prince murmured, leaning forward and pressing their lips together chastely, swallowing down the hobbit’s shuddering breath. “Those were just things, little one. What really matters is that you’re safe, and you’re with your family again, and there’s nothing that wi-”

“That’s not what I meant.” Fili’s voice cut through his brother’s soft assurances, jolting the young prince up from where he’d been pressed into Bilbo, the hobbit looking just as startled where the two of them stared at the blond dwarf. Even in the weighted silence that followed neither of them moved to speak, their eyes meeting briefly before they settled in to wait it out, watching the warrior carefully.

Then slowly, almost reluctantly, the dwarf began to dig something out from beneath the folds of his thick, tunic top. The bundle of fabric that he drew out was achingly familiar, and quite suddenly Bilbo felt as though he’d forgotten how to breathe. He pulled himself up slightly where he sat, his eyes finding the blond dwarf’s, gut wrenching hope twisting into him violently.

“Is-” Bilbo swallowed, licking his lips while a trembling breath escaped him. He had to blink back tears, clearing his throat through the scratching lump that lodged there. “Is that my-?”

“It is.” He carefully handed the bundle to Bilbo, cautiously meeting his gaze with a quick nod before drawing back again, his eyes downcast.

The hobbit felt a small noise punch out of him, his gaze flicking over to Kili where he sat on the mattress at his side. The archer was staring at his brother, eyes wide with shock.

“You kept it?” The young prince murmured, his voice soft and disbelieving. “How did I not notice…”

Fili gave another shrug, still looking firmly off to the side. “It just never came up. That’s all.”

Disbelief slammed through him as Bilbo slowly unfolded the fabric in his hand, his heart hammering against his ribcage painfully. He almost burst into tears again at the sight of the tattered jacket, finding the pockets closed neatly with their buttons intact.

It only took him but seconds to have both the ring and the portrait of Frodo’s parents hand, his eyes watering up and his breath coming in hard through his clenched teeth. “Oh Fili, Fili,” he clutched it all to his chest, gathering up the entirety of his tattered jacket, “thank you, thank you so very, very much. This means the world to me and I just…thank you-”

“Don’t.” Fili snapped, his tone quiet and broken as he shook his head, flinching away from the pair on the bed slightly. “Don’t thank me, not after everything that’s happened.”

Bilbo felt his lips thin tightly, his entire body stiff while he stared at the prince, his gaze open and concerned. “Fili, I-”

Then suddenly the door was opening once more, Frodo’s tiny frame coming barreling into the room at full force, a hand fisted in the tunic of their resident ranger. Aragorn had a plate of food in hand and a sheepish expression on his face, apologizing immediately for the sudden intrusion.

Frodo, as it seemed, had had quite enough time away from his uncle at the moment, and had pointedly told Strider that he wanted to go back to the room; there had been no swaying him
otherwise. So slowly, reluctantly Bilbo let the conversation drop, his eyes still trained on Fili where he sat.

Kili soon moved to the chair at his brother’s side, his attention too fixed on the older dwarf, mouth tight with concern. They didn’t have time to linger in their discontent, however, not with Frodo trying to feed the lot of them by force. So they stowed their concerns for the moment, choosing instead to simply enjoy the company of their friends as more bodies filed back into the room.

The conversation kept a light and comfortable air around them, and just for the moment, Bilbo allowed himself to forget their worries, focusing instead on the utter relief that flooded through him at being safe and reunited with those he cared for once more.

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As the day wore on to evening Thranduil approached Fili and Kili where they sat in Bilbo’s room, asking them if they would take shifts keeping the hobbit awake throughout the night.

The tonic he had been dosed with was a strong one, and would linger in his system for a few days. Still so soon after regaining consciousness, the elf king did not trust Bilbo to sleep just yet.

Both brothers agreed, with Fili hastily volunteering to put Frodo to bed and take the later shift. Bilbo had met the announcement with a tight lipped frown, his gaze trained on the blond prince where he sat; only once again, the dwarf was avoiding his eyes.

He felt his lips purse together tightly, discontent slipping across his features even while he cuddled Frodo close to his good side, trying to keep up with the conversation that Foseil was engaging him in. There was a part of Bilbo that wanted Fili to change his mind, to take the first shift and allow them to talk out whatever it was that was stagnating between them, souring their relationship with hard tones of loathing and regret.

He just wanted his boys back.

Yet when the time finally came for everyone to bid their goodnights, Fili was shockingly the first to leave. The prince rose and moved over to the bed, scooping Frodo up and pausing long enough to place a quick, half-kiss against the older hobbit’s brow.

Bilbo had managed to keep his expression neutral as he waved his nephew and lover off, but his heart gave a hard lurch at the dwarf’s quick departure, his face falling to something more akin to despair.

“Fear not friend,” Legolas had soothed him before he made to leave, Aragorn at his side, “he will come around.”

“These past few days have been hard on all of us.” The ranger agreed, clasping him gently on the shoulder.

He offered them the trace of a smile and a nod in response, more than thankful for the support of his friends. They left on the heels of Foseil, Dasil and Ragnar, leaving Thranduil to hover in the doorway last. The regal elf surveyed the two of them carefully, his gaze lingering on Bilbo for a moment as consideration flashed across his smooth, milk white features.

Then Thranduil’s mouth twitched up in a tentative smile, his attention turning to where the young dwarven prince sat, pressed up next to the hobbit’s bedside. “If you find yourself in need of anything, Kili,” the king inclined his head slightly, long golden hair pooling down over his shoulder as he regarded the archer, “please do not hesitate to ask. You are our guests here, we are
Kili blinked up at the elf where he hovered in the doorway, his eyes blown comically wide and his face heating up in a bright red flush as he stammered slightly. “I, well, I mean–” The prince cut himself off with a frustrated sound, scrubbing a hand over his mouth for a moment before his forced his gaze to meet the towering elf’s where he hovered in the doorway. “What I mean to say is thank you, Lord Thranduil.”

The dwarf’s tone was laced with an almost startling degree of sincerity, his face still burning scarlet as he rose to his feet next to the bed, clasping a hand to his chest and bowing slightly. “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me and my kin through the years,” the dwarf kept his head lowered, staying where he was as he spoke, still dipped down towards the floor, “you have saved my brother’s life, my uncle’s, my own; you have faced nothing but animosity from myself and my kind, yet still you come to our aid when we need it most. And what you’ve done for Bilbo–”

The prince swallowed, slowly straightening while his eyes flicked suddenly over to where the hobbit was seated, as if reassuring himself that he was still there. “What you’ve done for Bilbo and our family…for that I will forever be in your debt.”

Thranduil’s eyebrows raised slightly when the dwarf drew to a close, his bright blue orbs focused unblinkingly on Kili where he stood. Then suddenly a noise escaped the elf, light and disarming in the quiet room. His expression was almost fond as he chuckled lightly at the prince’s firm statement and flushed features. “It gives me hope, to see that not all in the line of Durin are too rooted in stubbornness to tell ally from foe.” The smile was still stark across the elf’s features as he offered Kili a small bow in return, his hair pooling down in front of him in long, silken strands. When he straightened his expression was still bright, his gaze flicking to Bilbo while he offered the dwarf a firm nod. “There may be hope yet for a true alliance between our people.”

With that the elf king took leave of the room, stepping back and into the hall with one last lingering glance at the pair behind him.

The moment the door clicked shut Kili sagged back into his chair, his hands coming up to cup over his flaming cheeks as he glanced up at Bilbo through his fingers. “Well, that was humiliating.”

“Oh it was not,” the hobbit chided, using his good hand to push himself over on the bed slightly, minding his injuries while he moved, “stop being so dramatic.”

“Why did I have to bow?” The archer shook his head, groaning. “What sort of self-respecting dwarf actually bows to an elf?!”

“One who remembers his manners, who has respect for his allies, and has the common decency to thank the elf to whom your very family owes their lives.” Bilbo raised an eyebrow at the archer, patting the space on the mattress at his hip.

Kili didn’t need to be told twice. He pulled himself up onto the bed, already coming to lie down, curled up at the Halfling’s side.

“I just don’t want to appear weak.” The dwarf admitted after a moment, his voice quiet.

“That wasn’t weak.” Bilbo countered, bringing his good arm up to curl around Kili’s shoulders, drawing the archer to his side and letting out a low sigh. “It takes courage and strength to admit when you are wrong; and it takes a great sense of responsibility to push aside pride in favor for doing what is right.”
“If you insist.” Kili hummed, sitting up slightly and shifting until he was kneeling in front of the hobbit’s uninjured leg. He carefully started to rub his hands up and down the limb, working out the tension there with his steady ministrations.

Bilbo let out a groan of relief at the sensation, sagging back against the mattress and smiling down at where the archer knelt, working away. “You make for an excellent prince Kili.”

The dwarf flashed him a cheeky look at that, leaning down to press his lips to the hobbit’s exposed knee. “I do try.”

That’s how they spent the early hours of the evening, pressed close while Kili worked the tension out of Bilbo’s frame, leaving him relaxed and easy where he lay sprawled on the bed.

They kept the conversation light, the archer having to rouse Bilbo from states of half-sleep as the time drifted comfortably by them. There were, no doubt, still things to talk about between them, and it was easy to see how Kili had taken on the brunt of the responsibility since his fall. The prince was holding it together phenomenally, with all things considered, yet still it was not fair to make the young archer shoulder all of that weight alone.

Yet Bilbo already had one tense interaction to look forward to that evening, so he was beyond relieved for the brief reprieve. He just allowed himself to relax, enjoying the young dwarf’s company as he pushed back against the ebbing exhaustion that slid through him.

It took Fili’s soft knock on the door to finally stir Kili from where he’d settled in to sit by the bed, lazily massaging the tension out of Bilbo’s good hand and humming quietly to himself. The hobbit blinked from the pillows that propped him up on the mattress, a near sea of the soft, intricately designed things packed up behind him around the head of the bed. The plush cushions framed him softly where he had sunk down against the bed, feeling relaxed and at ease from the young dwarf’s ministrations.

The archer’s touch felt good, relieving him of built up tension while still being firm enough to keep him on edge, preventing him from slipping to the temptation of sleep.

At the sound of the visitor Kili quirked an eyebrow at Bilbo, straightening and leaning down to press a kiss to the hobbit’s lips, sealing their mouths together firmly. “That will be my brother.” He murmured against the Halfling, smiling while he drew back. “I’m going to go turn in for the night, and see to that little shireling of ours.”

Bilbo couldn’t help but beam at the young prince’s choice of wording, his cheeks heating up at the thought of how easily Kili had taken Frodo as his own. “Keep him safe and warm for me, would you?” He asked, leaning up just a touch for one last chaste peck before he sagged back against the pillow, smiling. “And wish me luck?”

“All the luck in the world.” Kili shot back, his teasing tone trembling with something more weighted and heavy as he drew back from the bed.

The young dwarf looked haunted, his eyes darkening as he flicked his gaze towards the door. Bilbo recognized concern when he saw it, and thought to where Fili was waiting silently in the halls, suddenly such a stranger to him now that he would not so much as move to enter without express invitation.

The hobbit tried not to give in to the sharp tugging ache in his chest, fighting to keep the ghost of a smile plastered across his lips even as Kili turned to open the door, greeting the blond prince on the other side.
At first the older seemed intent to brush past and into the room, only then the dark haired prince reached out and stopped him, murmuring to him firmly in Khuzdul. Fili seemed to hesitate, his expression dark but carefully blank, before he leaned up slightly to meet his younger brother’s mouth in a quick kiss, whispering something to him, his lips trembling slightly.

The exchange was over almost as quickly as it had begun, Kili turning over his shoulder to flash Bilbo one last small, reassuring look before he was moving out the door. He disappeared into the passage beyond, leaving his older brother standing alone, hovering at the front of the room.

Slowly, still avoiding Bilbo’s gaze from where the hobbit rested on his bed, he closed and latched the finely carved door; sealing them together in the expansive, candle-lit room. The sound of metal sliding against metal bounced about them, echoing violently before it was absorbed and muted by the thick curtains, hanging about the room.

The Halfling shuddered at the noise, licking his lips as he watched Fili carefully, noting the way that the prince moved forward with his eyes downcast. As much as he tried he could not meet the dwarf’s gaze, blonde hair hanging loose of its usual clip in a curtain about the warrior’s face.

Bilbo swallowed hard, trying to force himself to relax where he lay against the bed, eyes trained on Fili’s movements with each step the dwarf took towards the chair by his bedside. The Halfling wanted to say something, anything, to interrupt the weighted silence that seemed to drown the room, suffocating them with words unspoken; but he knew he couldn’t.

So instead he waited, patient, calm, watching as the man he’d grown to love so dearly pulled himself up into the chair at his side, his eyes still downcast and his entire frame wracked with tension. Nothing had been right between them since the fall, and it had been eating at Bilbo steadily from the moment he’d first laid sight on the blond dwarf. Whenever he glanced at Fili it seemed as though his eyes were averted, looking everywhere and anywhere but directly at the injured hobbit. Each and every time it hurt, like a sharp spike being driven straight through his heart, leaving him wheezing even now with his ribs healed.

They couldn’t go on like this.

“Would you—” Bilbo coughed, his mouth Trembling hard as he brought a his good hand up to scrub over his lips, the gesture nervous and pained, “would you just—I don’t know—” he felt his voice break, and he’d been trying so hard not to cry, but when Fili didn’t so much as glance his way the tears just flooded over, “please just look at me.”

Even to his own ears the plea sounded harsh, broken, torn between a sob and a whimper while he wiped hard at his eyes, trying to stem the sudden streams of liquid that pooled down to his lips.

Fili made a wounded sound in response, turning immediately to Bilbo and rising quickly from the chair. “Don’t cry,” the prince begged, already pressed up against the hobbit’s bedside, his hands reaching out to grasp at the smaller man’s thigh, “I’m sorry Bilbo, I’ll stop. I’m an idiot and I’ll stop just—” He leaned up further against the mattress, reaching his other hand up to careful wipe at the streams that flooded down the Halfling’s face, “just please don’t cry.”

The words had the opposite of their desired effect, only serving to cause the hobbit to sob harder, a violent wrench of heartache squeezing in his chest. He had wanted to try and wait it out, to attempt to let Fili conquer this his own way; but he just couldn’t take it anymore. His emotions were running rampant, threatening to bubble over at any second until he finally gave in and broke down. “It’s not your fault!” He cried out, his face crumpling while he let out a ragged breath. “None of this, none of it is in any way your fault.”
Fili looked stricken, his eyes blown wide with paralyzing panic as he shook his head at Bilbo, shame apparent across his features. “I dropped you—” he managed after a moment, his eyes flicking momentarily to the side as his voice cracked, before he forced them back up to meet the hobbit’s gaze, “I had you, and I just let you fall.”

“But you didn’t!” He shot back, unable to filter out the anger that slid in through his broken sob; the hurt at the thought that Fili still took blame, after everything they’d talked about. “You held on to that jacket. You still have it!” He reached out with his good hand, sucking in a wet, shuddering breath as he jabbed the prince hard in the chest. “You never let go Fili. Not once.”

“Then why did you fall!? The prince shouted, and for the first time since he’d arrived here Bilbo saw true emotion in the dwarf; finally devoid of any mask. “Why did you fall out from beneath me, and to such harm as you have had to endure? Tell me!”

For a moment there was nothing but silence between them, tight with broiling rage and all-consuming emotion, the two of them trembling while they struggled to keep one another’s gaze.

“But because,” Bilbo began, forcing back the urge to yell with his hand fisted and his body shaking, “the spider that attacked me on the ledge ripped my jacket and pack strap,” he licked his lips, pointedly meeting the dwarf’s gaze as he continued, “and when you grabbed me, the fabric gave way.”

Fili’s mouth shut tight with an audible click at that, staring at him with his jaw locked and his eyes watering. Bilbo shook his head, uncurling his fist and reaching out, gently wrapping his hand around Fili’s arm. “By some horrible twist of the fates my jacket gave out and I fell.” He tugged the dwarf forward onto the mattress, his lips still quivering and tears flooding down into his mouth when he continued with a hard shudder. “That’s all there is, it wasn’t your fault.”

The blonde allowed himself to be urged up onto the bed at Bilbo’s side, coming to kneel facing the hobbit, his eyes still cast to the side and his mouth trembling hard. “But I couldn’t save you.”

Bilbo felt his breath come sliding out of him with a whimper at the broken sound of those soft words; the fear, the exhaustion, the self-loathing, it all screamed out in the way that Fili shook miserably, his eyes fixed off to the far wall.

The hobbit felt a hard lump lodge in his throat, building over the existing tension that rode him down to the bone, causing his breath to ease out of him in harsh, choked sobs. “You didn’t have to save me.” He managed after a moment of struggling, shifting his grip on Fili in order to drag his hand up the blond dwarf’s arm, fisting it instead into the thick expanse of his loosened tresses. “You had to save your brother, you had to save Frodo,” he swallowed, tightening his fingers where they were curled, “you had to kill those two beastly creatures and get your party to safety; because you are a prince Fili, and heir to the throne of your kingdom. You acted as the leader you are, and must continue to be, and you can’t begrudge yourself that fact.”

As his tirade drew to a close Bilbo could see the tight tremble of the dwarf’s entire frame, his body tense and shaking where he knelt on his knees at the hobbit’s side. Then slowly, surely, Fili began to nod his head, leaning a little bit closer to the smaller man with a hard quiver of his lips.

“I’m just so mad.” The prince managed after a moment, the words choked as he let out a breathy noise, blinking hard through the sudden shine of his eyes. “At myself—” his voice cracked and he swallowed, one tear escaping first, slipping down over his dimpled cheek and into his beard, “at those damnable beasts,” he breathed in hard and ragged, his voice pinching over a tight cry, “at the whole cursed world for putting you through that.”
“Oh Filli-” Bilbo shook his head, his tears flooding back with a vengeance as he tugged the dwarf closer, pulling him to his chest for a one armed embrace. He could feel the prince struggle with his hands for a moment, unsure of where to set them before he finally curled them up and around the hobbit’s neck, drawing himself in close. He pressed his cheek to the Halfling’s, his breath hitching in a series of wretched, broken sobs as the dwarf clung to him, desperate.

“You didn’t deserve that.” Fili gritted out, his voice catching on a hitching cry as Bilbo clung to him harder, bringing his good arm down to wrap around the dwarf’s waist and moving his hand up and down on the small of his back in smooth, soothing motions. “You didn’t deserve any of this.”

“I know.” Bilbo whispered back, his breath catching while he shut his eyes with a hard swallow. “I know, but it’s okay.” He sucked in hard, stilling his hand in favor of fisting it in the fabric of Fili’s tunic, rooting the prince where he was with a desperate sigh. “I’m here, I’m alright. But…but are we?” He felt his voice breaking, staring up at the ceiling from where he lay, the blond dwarf’s arms wrapped about his throat. “Are we alright?”

The prince drew back slightly at that, his face positively wrecked as he took in a shuddering breath and scrubbed at his dampened cheek. His eyes were swollen and red, aggravated from the sting of salty tears. He regarded the hobbit in front of him carefully, Bilbo unable to fight back the distant, clawing sensation of dread that started to poke up in his gut. Then suddenly Fili let out a laugh, the sound hollowed and slightly broken as he shook his head, dragging his hand down over his mouth.

“I’ve been a fool.” The blond murmured after a moment, shaking his head at himself as he dropped his arm down and looked at Bilbo, just really looked at him; his gaze gentle and caring, growing more fond with each lingering moment. “I’ve treated you horribly.”

The hobbit couldn’t help but smile a bit at that, managing the soft expression despite the hard shudders that still worked their way through his tight frame. His eyes were swollen and red, aggravated from the sting of salty tears. He regarded the hobbit in front of him carefully, Bilbo unable to fight back the distant, clawing sensation of dread that started to poke up in his gut. Then suddenly Fili let out a laugh, the sound hollowed and slightly broken as he shook his head, dragging his hand down over his mouth.

“I’ve been a fool.” The blond murmured after a moment, shaking his head at himself as he dropped his arm down and looked at Bilbo, just really looked at him; his gaze gentle and caring, growing more fond with each lingering moment. “I’ve treated you horribly.”

The dwarf let out a noise at that, almost wounded, as though someone had knocked the very breath from his lungs. He stared down at Bilbo, his eyes opened wide with surprise. “You would take me back so easily, after how cruel I have been since you returned?”

Bilbo scoffed, offended by the notion. “I am your intended,” he stated, raising a single brow, “we are engaged, and I take such matters very seriously indeed.” He reached forward to gently squeeze the dwarf’s arm, taking in a slow breath and blinking through the last traces of tears, feeling the lump in his through slowly ebning away. “There isn’t a moment when I don’t want you near me; not a second where I don’t need you like I need the very air I breathe.”

Fili’s face fell open at that, void of all traces of mask or composure as he shuddered hard where he knelt at the hobbit’s side. “After all of this, you are still so certain?”

“With every fiber of my being,” Bilbo murmured, sounding breathless and hoarse as he spoke, “yes.”

“Mahal Bilbo,” The dwarf whimpered, leaning forward until their lips brushed, his face still scrunched up and desperate, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’m so very sorry.”

He looked incredibly young, his voice cracking and dimpled cheeks tugged downward with his trembling mouth. The sight seemed to strike straight through to the hobbit’s core, causing his heart
to squeeze painfully; Bilbo couldn’t stay mad at him, not even if he tried. “It’s alright, it’s alright,”
he soothed, their noses brushing as they nuzzled together carefully, faces slotted against one
another while he leaned up a bit more, causing their lips to just barely brush together, “please, I—”

Fili let out a broken noise, pushing those last few bare millimeters as he pressed forward into a
desperate kiss. Bilbo whimpered, his breath hitching hard in his chest and his mouth opening to the
blond prince, sagging back against the pillows. His hand trembled as he dragged it up to fist in the
dwarf’s light hair, curling his fingers through the golden strands as he groaned into the kiss, his
head swimming.

The young heir bore down on him carefully, much to Bilbo’s chagrin; the hobbit burning with the
urge to haul the bigger man closer, to drag him flush against his frame. He whined high in his
throat, pressing up desperately into the prince’s lips, chasing after him each time he drew away to
breathe.

“I missed you.” Fili sobbed out finally, his mouth brushing against the hobbits as he sucked in air in
a ragged gasp, his face still scrunched up tightly. “I missed you so damned much.”

“I missed you too.” Bilbo whined, holding the dwarf close with a firm hand still curled in his hair,
tears leaking once more down over his chin. “It was all I thought about; you, Kili and Frodo. Still
is.” He dragged his hand around, his fingers curling around the edge of the blond’s jaw-line,
digging in firmly. “You haven’t left my mind since I fell away from your side Fili. Not for a
moment.”

“Bilbo—”

“It hurt—” The hobbit pushed on, his lips trembling while he continued to speak, leaning up until
their lips slid together once more, “it hurt to have you so distant from me when I returned…I
need you Fili.”

The dwarf swallowed against Bilbo’s mouth, breathing hard with his eyes half-lidded. “I’m—” he
swallowed visibly, the hobbit following the slow bob of his throat as the prince pressed forward
again, kissing him chastely with a hushed rumble, “I’m at your service.”

Bilbo’s lips pressed together tightly as Fili spoke, his mouth quivering hard as his throat closed up.
He could feel his eyes watering, tears flooding back through him unbidden when he blinked hard
up at the dwarf, sobbing out. “And I yours”

Fili let out a low, rumbling, growl, sliding up on the bed and lifting one leg, moving to kneel with
his thighs spread across the injured man. The new position caused Bilbo to gasp sharply, partly
from the slight ache of pain that still hummed through his bones, but mostly from the delicious
swell of heat that radiated out from his groin, spreading across his frame and leaving him gasping.

“Is this okay?” The prince murmured softly, hovering with just the barest hint of pressure against
the hobbit’s thighs, supporting most of his weight on his strong, sure legs. “If it’s too much I can—”

“No.” The Halfling let out a sharp noise of protest, his good hand sliding down to squeeze hard
over the firm round of the dwarf’s hip. “No, this is perfect. This is just—” He forced himself to
swallow back the surging ramble that threatened to spill from his tongue, nerves taking the better
of his exhausted state, “this is exactly what I need.”

The dwarf gave a hard nod at that, breathing in heavily as he hovered above Bilbo’s frame,
kneeling with his legs splayed on either side of the injured man. “If we’re going to do this, we’re
going to be careful.”
He groaned, shaking his head hard as he looked up to the ceiling. “I’m not made of glass.” He countered, feeling as though Thranduil’s had healed him enough already, at least for this.

“I know.” Fili sucked in hard, gently rolling his hips down in the Halfling’s lap, his rear grinding against Bilbo’s groin, eliciting a moan from the smaller man. “I know I just-“ He dug his knees down into the mattress over the hobbit, “I just need to do this.”

Bilbo sucked in a shuddering breath, feeling his hips jerk up while he struggled to keep from jostling his still healing leg. He tried to say something, anything, but all that came out was a strangled whine. Something shifted in Fili’s demeanor at that, the blond’s eyes narrowing with a dark, heavy blush settling high on his cheeks.

“Please let me do this.” The dwarf groaned out, leaning down and pressing his lips to the side of the Halfling’s mouth, kissing his way down and across the curve of his smooth jaw.

The hobbit felt a high keen escape him, his heart fluttering in his chest where he relaxed back against the pillows, tilting his head to encourage Fili on when the prince began to suckle on his throat. “Okay.” He whimpered, feeling his cock give a hard lurch beneath his borrowed elven slip. “Okay, okay-”

Fili breathed out in a hard sigh of relief, his entire body sagging where he supported himself above Bilbo’s frame. He pressed one last, open mouthed kiss to the curve of the Halfling’s throat before drawing on his hands. “Thank you.” He groaned and pushed himself all the way up to his knees, already reaching to tug at the hem of his shirt. In one smooth motion he hauled the garment up and over his shoulders. He tossed the tunic carelessly off to the side, not so much as tearing his gaze from Bilbo as the fabric hit the ground with a dull thud. “Just lie back,” the dwarf swallowed, his expression complex while he brought his hands to his waist, already beginning to unfasten his trousers, “and let me do this for you.”

Fili breathed out in a hard sigh of relief, his entire body sagging where he supported himself above Bilbo’s frame. He pressed one last, open mouthed kiss to the curve of the Halfling’s throat before drawing on his hands. “Thank you.” He groaned and pushed himself all the way up to his knees, already reaching to tug at the hem of his shirt. In one smooth motion he hauled the garment up and over his shoulders. He tossed the tunic carelessly off to the side, not so much as tearing his gaze from Bilbo as the fabric hit the ground with a dull thud. “Just lie back,” the dwarf swallowed, his expression complex while he brought his hands to his waist, already beginning to unfasten his trousers, “and let me do this for you.”

Bilbo’s entire body tightened with a hard surge of arousal, the sensation flooding over him completely and leaving him reeling. He watched as Fili shifted off of him for the moment, sliding his pants down off of his hips. The dwarf’s movements were uncharacteristically rushed and desperate, his hands trembling uncontrollably while they peeled the trousers off from around his ankles, the prince then crawling his way back over Bilbo’s prone frame.

The hobbit watched, completely stunned with arousal as the dwarf moved to straddle his thighs, unable to look away from the bare hips that rolled up towards him, Fili’s cock coming to rest against his stomach, a heavy heat through the fabric of his shift.

With his eyes blown wide Bilbo let himself go boneless against the bed sheets, his gaze trained unblinkingingly on the dwarf, splayed across his lap. Arousal surged through him, all consuming like wild fire as it burned up his veins. He breathed in hard, his mind heavy with a thick fog and his eyes trained on the prince’s every movement.

“What are you going to do?” He whispered after a moment, feeling dizzy and heated. Even as he spoke his eyes did not leave the hard, sculpted expanse of Fili’s firm frame, his cock giving a hard lurch beneath his night shirt.

“Something different.” Fili murmured after a pause, rolling his hips down until his ass slid across the expanse of Bilbo’s arousal once more, grinding down firmly. The dwarf kept moving, rocking and twisting, eliciting breathy, sharp whines from the hobbit with each shifting movement. The sensation was so distracting that Bilbo only half noticed when Fili dragged a hand up to his mouth, coating his own fingers with careful strokes of his tongue. “Something that you’re going to enjoy.”
The Halfling made a desperate noise in the back of his throat, his hips jerking up of their own accord, trying in vain to seek more friction. He watched silently as Fili dropped his slickened hand from his mouth, moving to reach behind himself.

The motion registered as strange and Bilbo blinked, his eyes widening as he stared up at the prince in surprise. Fili only met his gaze head on, shifting up a bit more on his knees again and sliding his fingers back behind his own legs, slipping easily between them.

Bilbo felt a rush of heat slam into him, knocking the breath from his lungs and leaving his mind reeling while he stared up at the blonde, mouth dropped open in disbelief. “Fili,” he all but whimpered, his hips jerking a tiny bit from where they rested on the mattress, “you don’t have to-”

The dwarf shook his head hard, using his free hand to brace himself while he leaned forward to steal another, firm kiss. He continued to work his slicked fingers between his legs, just out of Bilbo’s sight. “It’s okay.” Pressing their mouths together one last time he knelt back up, his face flushed and his hips twitching slightly as he worked into himself, bearded lips hanging open. “I want to.”

Watching him carefully Bilbo groaned, torn between the heady pool of arousal that was broiling in his gut and a nervous sense of apprehension for what was about to happen. “What about oil?” He asked after a moment, unable to keep his gaze from sliding to where the dwarf’s hand disappeared between his own legs. “Won’t it hurt otherwise?”

“A little,” Fili murmured, sounding breathless even as he let out a small grunt of discomfort, “but it’ll be a good pain.”

At a loss for what else to do with himself Bilbo finally just reached forward, resting his palm flat against the hard expanse of one of the dwarf’s thighs. “If you’re sure-”

“I am Bilbo,” The blond moaned, the sound low and rumbling as his hips canted back into his own hand, working it deeper inside of himself, “I am so very, very sure.”

The hobbit felt a desperate sound bubble out of him at that, clear and certain realization suddenly slamming into him like a physical blow. He sucked in a shuddering breath through his clenched teeth, digging his fingers into the hard muscle of Fili’s thigh and dragging his gaze up and down the dwarf’s strong frame.

He’d never seen Fili like this; so vulnerable, so open, so exposed. His cock was slowly arching up where it hung neglected and between his spread legs Bilbo could catch the slightest glimpse of the hand moving inside the dwarf, his cock giving a hard lurch at the sight.

“You’ve done this before.” He found himself murmuring, the words ripped from him before he could so much as think twice.

“I have.” Fili’s mouth dropped open as he slowly drew his fingers out, drawing his hand back around to brace against the sheets as he leaned down, fitting his lips briefly to Bilbo’s ear. “Who do you think taught Kili to fuck so well?”

The hobbit full out whimpered at that, squirming where he was sprawled against the mattress, tilting his head as the prince leaned in to nip at his throat slightly. “Fili.”

It was a whine and a plea all in one, Bilbo squirming as the dwarf only sucked harder, pulling skin between his teeth and working it to a wide, tender bruise. The sensation left the hobbit reeling, his hips jerking up in aborted half thrusts as he struggled to keep his injured leg still.
“Fili please!”

The dwarf growled and reached down, kneeling over Bilbo’s frame as he gripped the hobbit’s hips, hoisting him up a bit further on the bed until he was seated against the pillows. Taking the care to readjust the pillow beneath the smaller man’s injured leg Fili then came to straddle Bilbo’s upper thighs, his hands already finding the hem of his night shirt.

“At your service.” The prince growled out, dragging the shift all the way up and reaching down, grasping the hobbit’s cock in his palm.

He jerked hard at the sensation, calloused fingers dragging desperate whimpers from his parted lips. Fili started up a steady motion, pumping his arousal with a firm, hard grip until the hobbit was leaking and desperate.

Bilbo’s hands were fisted tightly in the bed sheets at his side, his breath coming in short, panting gasps as he thrust his hips up into the blond’s rough hand. Then suddenly the pressure was gone, cool air hitting his slick cock with a chill that caused his whole body to shake, tremors working down his spine.

He hadn’t even realized that his eyes were closed until he felt something press against the tip of his cock, blinking them open in his sharp startle. On instinct his hips gave a thrust up, sinking into such a deliriously incredible heat that he thought he might pass out, white spotting across his vision.

“Ah,” the noise was choked and garbled as his hand was suddenly flying up from the mattress, gripping instead over Fili’s hip when the dwarf dropped himself straight down over his arousal engulfing him completely.

A shout was torn unbidden from Bilbo’s throat, his eyes rolling back while he sucked in desperately, his mind a steady mantra of, tight, tight, by Mahal too tight-

Fili wasn’t near relaxed enough, his body like a vice around the hobbit’s cock, only just barely giving to the blond’s insistent downward press.

“Ngh, wait-” Bilbo tightened his hand on Fili’s hip when he felt the dwarf start to move, staring up at the blond’s face while he panted desperately, “wait, just a second, just wait. This has to be hurting-”

“It’s not.” Fili interrupted quickly, drawing himself up despite Bilbo’s protests, only to roll his hips back down a moment later. “It’s good Bilbo, this is good.”

The hobbit couldn’t help but whine out in response, his eyes squeezing shut as the dwarf set up a quick rhythm, riding him hard while carefully avoiding all of his injuries. The blond had his eyes shut, his face screwed up in concentration and his hands braced on the mattress below them. He moved his hips at a delirious pace, his pelvis rolling constantly over Bilbo’s lap, driving his cock deeper and deeper into the prince’s tight frame.

It was all the Halfling could do not to just give in to the sensation and let Fili ride it out, barely able to resist the lure of mind-numbing bliss that was promised in the way that the dwarf’s body squeezed him. Yet he just couldn’t quite let himself give in; not with the way Fili’s cock hung neglected between his legs, only half hard; or the way the prince’s face would scrunch up in discomfort every so often, his body stiffening through his brutal pace.

This wasn’t right.
The hobbit sucked in a slow breath, bracing himself as he shifted his good hand from where it was gripped at Fili’s hip and curling it instead around the blond warrior’s cock. The dwarf gave a hard jerk at that, his pace coming to a twitching stop and his insides clenching down hard around Bilbo, the hobbit clenching his teeth to bite back a whimper.

“You, you don’t have to-” Fili started, the words falling from his lips as he scrambled to draw Bilbo’s hand away.

That’s when it hit him; *Fili wanted no pleasure in this.*

A hard surge of anger flooded through him and the hobbit sat up a bit more, propping his good leg up so that his knee was bent, his thigh pressed against the dwarf’s back. The motion sunk Fili further down on his cock, causing the blonde to let out an startled moan.

All the while Bilbo kept his firm hold on Fili’s cock, his fingers wrapped tightly around the thick, hot expanse as he gave it a slow, experimental pump. The dwarf’s whole body tensed, his hips rolling forward into the firm grip around him and subsequently fucking himself back on the hobbit’s arousal.

“What did you mean by that?” Bilbo demanded suddenly, using his bent leg for leverage as he dug his foot into the mattress, thrusting up hard into Fili where he was sprawled across his lap. The dwarf made another surprised noise at that, his cock giving a hard throb where it was squeezed firmly in the hobbit’s grip. “When you say, ‘you don’t have to,’ what is it that you mean exactly?”

Fili didn’t miss the agitation in his tone, the blond’s eyes blowing wide as a choked sound escaped him, his grip scrambling where it had returned to the bed sheets. “Bilbo-”

“You will *not* use our marital bed as a means of satisfying this distorted sense of guilt you have been carrying around since the ridge.” Bilbo all but growled, ignoring the aching protest in his body as he dug his foot down again, arching his hips and slamming straight back up into Fili’s waiting frame. He matched his pace with hard strokes to the dwarf’s cock, his fingers already slickened and sliding as caught his thumb firmly over the wet head. “I will not sit idly by and watch you *hurt yourself* for the sake of your pride *Fili,* let alone take *any* part in it.”

The dwarf keened his eyes half lidded and his teeth catching at his lips as he fucked back into Bilbo’s thrusts, guilt stark across his features. “I’m sorry, Bilbo, I’m sorry-”

“You are forgiven.” Bilbo breathed, twisting his hand now where he pumped the larger man’s arousal, his motions quickened by his slick, sliding fingers. “For all of it, for everything, even that which requires none, you are forgiven.”

Fili made a startled noise, his eyes half lidded and shining with tears, hips rolling back harder against The hobbit’s thrusts. “Ah, Bilbo-” His breath punched out of him and he let out a whimper, a heat spreading out across his body in a visible, crimson flush, “*Bilbo, Bilbo.*”

The dwarf was close, he could feel it in the way the cock in his grip began to jerk, hard tremors wracking the body he fucked into with a steadily increasing vigour. “Let go for me Fili.” He gasped, trying to sit himself up a bit further. He used his bent leg to draw the dwarf down more in his lap, pounding up into him with labored breath as he forced himself forward enough to press their lips together quickly.

“Let go of the guilt, let go of the responsibility, let go of the *loathing,*” Bilbo dropped back down against the cushions, angling his hips and continuing to thrust up in an unforgiving pace, his grip firm on the cock in his hand, “let it all go for me.”
The blond whimpered, clinging to his last threads of resistance as he gazed at Bilbo, his face pinched with desperation. “This was-” he shuddered and let out a moan, his entire frame rocking with the hobbit’s thrusts, “this was supposed to be about you. How-” his body gave another spasm, and Bilbo could see in his expression that he was right on the edge, “how are you so good to me?”

“Because,” Bilbo groaned, his heart stuttering up into his chest while his thrusting grew more frantic, coordination steadily ebbing away, “I am always at your service.”

Fili actually sobbed at that, his entire frame locking up around Bilbo while his cock gave a hard, violent throb. Then he was coming, liquid shooting up across Bilbo’s sternum in long white stripes. The dwarf’s body clenched down around him, impossibly tight as he gave a few last, desperate thrusts, into the burning heat. Then his climax struck him, sudden and disarming, release milked from him by Fili’s spasming frame.

He cried out, his whole body tensing as he stillled against the mattress, spending inside of the dwarf in thick, hot streams. Bilbo released his grip on the prince’s softened cock, his eyes fluttering shut as he rode out the aftershocks of his blinding orgasm; cock pulsing where it was buried deep inside the young warrior’s frame.

Fili was bent over him, trembling to support himself on his hands where he hovered above Bilbo’s frame. His face was red, his eyes puffy and his hair a ragged mane about his face. The hobbit let out a small puff of laughter, reeling in the sweet aftermath as he carefully reached up, mussing his hand over the dwarf’s hair. “You and your brother…” He began, affection laced in his teasing tone.

“What about my brother and I?” The dwarf scoffed, seeming to relax as he gingerly shifted off of Bilbo’s cock, wincing just slightly as he came to lie at the hobbit’s side.

“Nothing, it’s just-” the hobbit snorted, giving the mess of hair another ruff tousle, “when you get the two of you out of your braids and clips, your hair looks borderline beastly.”

That got a laugh out of the prince, his expression genuine and his eyes crinkling up with his grin. “It does, does it?” He reached a hand out to run through his own hair, his expression amused. “And what, pray-tell, kind of beast would my brother and I be?”

The hobbit smirked, regarding his prince thoughtfully when he turned his head to look at the blond where he lay at his side. He took in the satisfied look on Fili’s features, the way his golden locks seemed to fan out around him like a giant, wisping crown and thought to the creatures he’d read of in his books back at bag end, of the strange and exotic beasts whose images flashed through his head. Then suddenly one came to mind; the picture of a majestic animal, standing tall and strong among the high grasses of a foreign land. With a grin he leaned over a bit more, pressing his mouth to the tip of the dwarf’s nose. “Lions.” He stated, his tone decisive. “You two would be lions.”

“Would we, little mouse.” Fili shot back, drawing the hobbit closer for another kiss.

“Hey.” Bilbo stated, playing at offense. “I give you a creature as unique and breathtaking as a lion and all I get in return is a measly mouse?” He clucked his tongue and gave his head a firm shake. “I think I should be offended Master Dwarf.”

Fili threw back his head with a laugh. “Never underestimate a mouse Mister Baggins.” He murmured, brushing their noses together lightly. “It’s always the small ones who offer the most surprise.”

They fell silent for a time after that, just breathing in each other’s air as they curled together
gingerly, Fili mindful of his injuries.

Then suddenly the prince cleared his throat, interrupting the calm with a hesitant tone. “Bilbo?”

“Hm?” The hobbit glanced over from where he’d been staring at the ceiling, basking in the pleasant sensations of the post coital hum that rode through him.

The dwarf looked serious, his expression imploring. “Are we good?”

Bilbo couldn’t help but grin at that, leaning forward for another kiss, sighing happily into the dwarf’s mouth. “We’re more than good.” He murmured when he drew away with a grin.

“We’re perfect.”

TBC...
In the Shadow of the Mountain

Chapter Summary

After leaving the safety of Thranduil's domain the party embark on their journey from Mirkwood to Erebor; yet even so close to the city they call home, trouble still manages to find the small company.

Chapter Notes

This update was supposed to be shorter and sooner, but that didn't happen. Story of my life right?

Thank you guys for waiting patiently, and for your fantastic reviews on the last chapter. I didn't get the chance to respond to everyone, but I appreciate every one of you guys, you keep my creative juices flowing! I am forever grateful. <3

This chapter gave me a bit of a hard time, because I wrote it out of order, and proofing it turned out to be a bit of a nightmare. Please do not hesitate to let me know if I've made a mistake! Criticism is very much appreciated.

Hope you guys enjoy your long weekend, for those of you who celebrate Happy Easter, for those of you who don't Happy Saturday Night Fanfic Update WHOOOO. Anyhow, hope you like the chapter, comments and kudos are met with flailing and uncontrollable giggles!

xoxoxox

Even with Thranduil’s capable aid it took Bilbo a full week’s worth of rest to fully regain his strength. Even then they lingered simply to enjoy the chance for a reprieve.

After the first few days Bilbo had been moved into a room with Fili, Kili and Frodo, the four of them sharing a large, elven mattress. Though the three of them had been meaning to take some time to themselves in Mirkwood, with everything that happened at the ridge, they had decided instead to wait, and simply take the opportunity to stay together as a family.

They’d been hard pressed to pry Frodo from his Uncle’s side their entire stay with the elves, the little shireling clinging to him at all hours of the day. Neither Fili nor Kili had been much better, hovering at the older Halfling’s heels and tending to his every whim.

He’d been flustered by the attention at first, then flattered; until finally he had to sit his family down, and very kindly remind them that while he was still healing, he was not broken.

They gave him some room to breathe after that, but remained close by his side none the less.

Soon enough their time with the elves started to draw to a close, and once again they found
themselves preparing to leave. The same day that they started to pack, Kili and Fili approached Bilbo in their chambers, having sent Frodo with Aragorn to fetch something from the kitchen.

Together the brothers presented Bilbo with a new bead, one that the younger dwarf had carved by hand. It was wooden, a rough replica of the decorative silver that still remained clasped in Fili and Kili’s hair. He’d accepted the gift readily, unable to keep back the warm feeling of whole that washed over him when the two princes set to braiding the new token into his mass of golden hair.

While Fili assured him that the charm was temporary, that they’d have another one commissioned to match the one lost on their return to the lonely mountain, Bilbo had still been beyond delighted by the gesture. They’d all sat together afterwards, and while their moment together was brief, Bilbo still felt warmed and content like he had not been in weeks.

Packing up, as a whole, had been an interesting affair for the group. After their incident with the spiders they had lost a great deal of their supplies, including food, weaponry, and all of Kili’s clothing; they were also a mount short, being forced to re-arrange the distribution of their packs in order to compensate for the loss.

Thranduil was kind enough to see that they were given everything that they needed, even going so far as having a new bow commissioned for Bilbo. The Elf King presented him the weapon and bid them adieu as they left to pack their ponies, exchanging kind words with the hobbit before drawing away to speak seriously with Fili and Kili at length. Neither dwarf would say what they talked of with the tall, fair lord, but when Thranduil waved them off, the elf had a warm smile on his features.

Once they were packed up and on their mounts, Frodo once again with Ragnar and Bilbo seated firmly with Fili at his back, Aragorn and Legolas rode out with them towards the very north end of the tree-line. They escorted the party all the way to the edges of Mirkwood forest, bidding them farewell while their ponies crossed out from the underbrush and onto the road once more.

The two had stayed by the trees, watching until their party faded into the distance, once again pushing on towards home.

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“Hold.” Dasil raised a hand up from the front of the party, the elderly dwarf stilling his mount where he headed up the group along an old dirt road.

They were not a full day’s travel from the Lonely Mountain, having ridden in Erebor’s shadow for the better part of the morning already. It had been many days since their last real chance for rest, and even longer since the beds they’d shared in Mirkwood. They were all exhausted and worn to the bone, months of constant travel beginning to take its heavy toll.

Bilbo eased his mount to a stop at Dasil’s side, feeling Fili’s arms tighten where they were bracketed around his waist. “What is it?” The hobbit whispered, keeping his voice low and his eyes trained on the path ahead.

The old guard swallowed, his grayed beard drooping with his tight-lipped frown. “Pony’s actin’ strange, an’ I ‘ave this feelin’ like we’re bein’ followed…” He gave his head a shake, glancing to Bilbo, then to the rest of the party behind them. “Might jus’ be my mind playin’ tricks.”

“Either way,” Kili slid up beside them, easing his mount to a stop, “we should keep our eyes open, and our wits about us.”
There was a general murmur of approval throughout to group of them, Bilbo subconsciously glancing back around Fili to where Frodo was riding behind them. The shireling was still strapped firmly to Ragnar’s front, his little face curled against the guard’s wide breast.

Satisfied that the path was clear for the moment they pushed forward, moving past a series of fields to a small wooded section of the road that stretched on in between farms. Even with their brief interruption they managed to get back into a steady rhythm without issue, pushing on along the trail at a quickening pace.

Bilbo had just begun to relax back in the saddle, settling back into the easy routine of motion that riding had become, when all of a sudden a whirring sound shot through the air.

A wet thunk sounded moments later, followed by the shrill, whinnying shriek of Dasil’s pony as it’s legs gave out beneath it. Instantly the other mounts were panicked, rearing and nickering desperately while they danced about, frames wrought with nerves.

“Dasil!” Fili was drawing his sword, the older prince’s gaze fixed on where the guard was pushing away from his pony, the thick shaft of an arrow sticking out of the steed’s hind flank.

The grey haired dwarf scrambled to his feet, already pulling his war hammer up and off of his back, gaze fixed on something in the woods. “Orcs!”

Bilbo felt his mouth go dry, cold dread washing over him in an instant. The shout was so cripplingly familiar, and for one delirious moment he thought he was back years ago in the fields by Rivendell, watching his companions get torn limb from limb with a blade imbedded deep in his belly-

A feral shout from Kili shook the hobbit out of his stupor, just in time to see Fili drop down off of their pony, weapons already drawn to meet the descending blow of one of the many foul creatures that spilled out from the shadows of the forest.

Bilbo gripped the pony beneath him with his thighs, reaching up over his back and snatching at his bow. Within seconds he had the first shaft notched and released, sending it careening straight through the throat of one of the gnarled beasts. The second the orc hit the ground Bilbo shot off another arrow, barely pausing to think before releasing his draw.

He kept his movements in quick succession, managing to take out three of the creatures from on top of his mount before he was thrown violently, the mare collapsing to the ground with a spear shoved up through her gut.

The hobbit hit the ground at a roll, pressing his shoulder down hard into the dirt before he was up on his feet and running again, bow already drawn.

The orc who had attacked his mount snarled, yanking the spear out of the animal’s side and aiming this time at where Bilbo stood. The beast didn’t get the chance to attack, however, before the hobbit was firing an arrow straight through the socket of his eye.

Once the body crumpled uselessly to the ground Bilbo whipped around, his eyes wide and desperate. It was near impossible to track all of the movement around them, Foseil fending off two massive orcs to the side, Dasil felling another creature himself only to rush quickly to his brother’s aid.

Then was a snarling at Bilbo’s side, and quickly the hobbit managed to shoulder his bow, throwing Sting up just in time to parry the incoming blow. He dodged back, trying to regain his footing.
enough to charge again, raising his sword’s glowing blade.

When they clashed this time their swords locked, the hobbit’s body almost buckling under the force of the blow. He sucked in a large breath, his arms trembling with the effort it took just to hold the beast off for the moment.

“Ragnar!”

The sudden shout startled Bilbo to attention, his gaze flicking quickly off to the side where he saw the big, blonde guard, pinned down to the ground with his shield raised, a swarm of orcs surrounding him. Fili and Kili were trying to fight their way through the mass of enemy bodies, their expressions wrought with desperation.

“Frodo!”

Feeling a sudden surge of strength Bilbo let out a feral shout, forcing himself up hard enough to knock his assailant off balance. The orc stumbled, his guard dropping just enough for the hobbit to thrust in, slicing straight through the thing’s stomach.

With both hands gripping the handle he hauled sting back out of the now cooling corpse, his attention fixed immediately on Ragnar’s prone frame. The dwarf looked in bad shape, blood leaking down through the seams in his armor plating, arrows, and even a spear, wedged beneath the metal and buried deep into his back. In the struggle his helmet had been knocked loose, the dwarf fighting desperately to hold up his shield to protect himself and the shireling strapped to his chest.

Bilbo didn’t have the time to think, he just acted. He was running almost instantly, his hand already finding where he kept his ring in his pant pocket, drawing out the golden band. He wasted no time in slipping it on, both hands coming to brace around Sting’s hilt the second his body slipped from view.

With a howl he launched himself at the group of orcs, driving his blade straight through one of the creatures, sticking them from back to stomach. He could see the panic and confusion in the surrounding beasts almost immediately, their snarls raising in pitch and desperation as they scanned the path uselessly for their unseen attacker.

Somehow Bilbo managed to get to Ragnar before Fili and Kili, swinging wildly at one of the creatures as it moved to strike the dwarf again, blade raised. He caught the thing straight across the belly, it’s body crumpling to the ground in a pool of its own thick, dark blood.

As soon as he’d cleared the last of the ambushers Bilbo yanked off his ring, crouching down at Ragnar’s side. “Hey, are you still with us?” He nudged the dwarf guard carefully, letting out a breath of relief when the man slowly uncurled himself, drawing his shield back to reveal where Frodo was still huddled.

His relief at the sight of the shireling was almost intoxicating, like a vice grip had been released from his chest, allowing him to breathe again. “Thank Mahal.” The child looked frightened, but otherwise no more worse for wear. “We need to get you two out of here.”

The blond warrior gave his head a hard shake, blood trickling down his face from a wound above his brow. “M’Sorry Mister Bilbo. I don’t think I can move.”

His relief having been somewhat short-lived the hobbit cursed and drew back to glance around behind him. Fili and Kili, it seemed, had come to stand right at his back, fighting off attackers
when they started to close in once more.

“Kili!” He darted forward, his hand fisting in the back of the archer’s tunic. He tugged, the young dwarf falling back from his brother without resistance, moving with him quickly to Ragnar’s side. When they stopped he gazed at the prince imploringly, shifting the weight of the ring in his palm before slipping it into Kili’s waiting grip. “You need to take Frodo,” he swallowed, glancing down to his terrified nephew with a hard lurch of his heart, “you need to take him and run ahead to the next farm.”

“But Bilbo—” The prince looked completely taken aback, his gaze flicking back to the fight was still raging behind them.

“Please Kili.”

The dwarf fell silent, looking torn for but a moment more before closing his hand around the ring in his grasp. “Alright.”

Bilbo let out the breath he didn’t know he’d been holding, reaching up and grabbing the archer by the side of the face. He tugged the taller man down for a quick, chaste kiss, pouring as much gratitude and sincerity into the gesture as he could manage. “Thank you,” he murmured, his mouth sliding against the archer’s before he drew away, raising Sting in his hands once more. “Now go.”

Kili’s expression turned deadly serious and Bilbo watched as he slipped the ring into his pocket, turning and sprinting over toward Ragnar to carefully extract Frodo from the injured dwarf. The hobbit turned back to fight at that, throwing himself at an oncoming orc and jamming Sting up through its rib cage. The creature snarled and Bilbo dropped down, ripping his blade free and ducking between its legs. He then spun and thrust out again, this time sinking his sword through the soft flesh of the orc’s lower back.

The thing screeched and writhed as it curled forwards on itself, collapsing on the floor with a wet ‘thunk.’ Bilbo quickly glanced over towards Ragnar, noting that Kili had Frodo in arms and was carefully maneuvering the child into his sling.

Then he caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye, and his blood ran cold.

His feet were moving before he had time to think, his sword raising and a yell ripping from his throat as he propelled himself headlong at the beast, charging at Kili’s exposed back. When he rushed past he could see Fili turn; could pinpoint the moment the blond prince realized what was about to happen, see the words take shape just a breath before he started to scream for his brother.

Kili immediately turned his head, Frodo strapped down securely against his chest. The archer’s eyes locked on the orc and instinctively he turned, curling himself protectively around the shireling’s tiny frame.

Then somehow Bilbo’s frantic, pounding footfalls put him in front of the dwarf’s crouched frame. He met the orc’s blow head on, Sting humming with the aftershocks and his arms screaming in protest. The beast snarled at him, sliding his sword down to break their deadlock, slicing Bilbo across the back of his forearm in the process.

Metal tore through his flesh, sinking in by his elbow and ripping straight down to his wrist. The hobbit let out a cry of pain, the sound sharpening to something feral. Without thinking he shifted his grip on Sting, slamming the hilt straight up between the beast’s legs with all of the force he could muster.
The orc screeched in agony and Bilbo took his chance; he whipped his sword back around, this time swinging it straight up to catch the creature in the throat as it hunched over.

Sting sliced easily across the orc’s flesh, a spray of blood washing over the blue blade and the beast’s cry cutting off with a wet gurgle. It’s body dropped to the ground at a dead wait, limbs twitching slightly against the ground.

Bilbo heaved in a breath, his heartbeat pounding in his ears and his mind racing as he whipped around to where Kili knelt behind him. There was blood splattered across the back of the archer’s cloak, but when the dwarf turned around with Frodo in arms the shireling had not been so much as touched. He didn’t have time to be relieved, a noise of exasperation escaping him when Kili paused, staring at him with wide eyes; the young prince was pale with shock, his gaze tinged with just the barest hint of wonder.

“What are you doing?” Bilbo snapped at him, reaching out to grab at his cloak and wincing when the motion tugged at the laceration across his arm. He ignored the pain, giving the young prince a hard shove in the back, forcing him further down the road and out of harm’s way. “Go!”

Kili stumbled, casting one last glance over his shoulder, Frodo screaming out a frantic “Uncle Bilbo!” before the archer took off at a sprint, racing down the path.

The older hobbit watched them go for as long as he could afford, finally feeling like he could breathe again, before he turned back to where Ragnar lay prone. He raced over to the burly dwarf’s side and placed himself directly in front of the dwarf, already sheathing Sting and reaching for his bow.

Fili was doing a fair enough job at keeping their attackers back from the injured guard, Foseil and Dasil cutting down the ones he pushed back towards the woods; all of which gave Bilbo plenty of room to shoot with.

He already had an arrow out and notched before he felt a large hand curl around his ankle, startling him slightly out of his concentration. He kept the weapon poised and ready, his gaze flicking down to where Ragnar lay behind him. The dwarf was getting pale, his skin flushed white in contrast to his golden blonde hair. “Go with them Bilbo.” Ragnar choked out, his eyes losing focus slightly as he gingerly released his grip on the hobbit’s ankle. “Flee with your family. Don’t risk your life for the likes of me.”

The hobbit couldn’t help the scandalized look that slid across his features, anger and disbelief bubbling up in his gut. “Not an option.” He turned back to the fight, quickly finding a target and loosing the arrow, sending it slamming straight through the orc’s thick throat, toppling it to the ground. As he reached back for another shaft from his quiver he glanced over at Ragnar, his expression grave. “I will not leave another friend to die.”

The memory stung, his mouth tightening as images flooded unbidden to his mind: The strangled shout had drawn his attention, the hobbit’s gaze flicking across the bloodied grasses until it landed on Sandrey’s frame. The man was sprawled against the ground, blood staining his teeth as he reached desperately for the hobbit where he stood…

He felt a hot flare of rage flicker up inside of him, his next arrow slamming into an orc’s temple before he even registered releasing it.

Ragnar let out a sharp breath behind him, the last of his objections dying on his tongue when the hobbit turned again, flashing him a firm look over his shoulder. “Alright.” The guard conceded, wincing and lowering his body back down to the ground, his limbs trembling with exhaustion. “I’ll
just lie here an’ try to stay alive for you then.”

“You’d better.” Bilbo snapped, before he let out a wearied sigh, his tone softening slightly. “And thank you.” He then took a step closer to where the burly dwarf lay, his sights already fixed on another orc across the road.

He released his draw, and the beast fell.

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“Alright,” Dasil knelt over Ragnar, the blond guard lying prone on the ground with his armour torn away, plate by plate, to reveal the damage beneath, “are ye done wit’ those stitches?”

Bilbo pushed the needle through the last pinched up section of flesh, pulling the suture taught. He secured it with a tight knot and bit off the dangling remains of the sturdy thread. “Yeah.” He dropped the hooked instrument in the small cup of water they’d set by the medical kit, shifting to kneel at Dasil’s side. “What do you need?”

The dwarf motioned him closer, pointing to the last of the puncture wounds, an arrow that had struck Ragnar’s ribs, just beneath his shoulder blade. The shaft had been broken off in all of the chaos, and now the head was wedged inside the blond’s flesh. Bilbo made a sympathetic noise in the back of his throat, eyeing the wound with a slow shake of his head.

“My fingers ’re too large.” Dasil explained to him, holding his hand out over the injury. “I need ye te try an’ work the rest of the arrow out ‘fore we bandage ‘im up.”

Ragnar made a groaning noise from where he’d buried his head in his hands, a bunch of fabric piled up beneath his cheek in an attempt at providing the dwarf some measure of comfort. “Please tell me that’s the last of it.”

“It is.” Bilbo soothed quietly, his sleeves already rolled up as he set back to work, carefully maneuvering the metal head from where it was imbedded in the dwarf’s firm muscle. “Just this last one to go, I promise.”

The dwarf made a pained noise of acknowledgment, burying his face down further into his arms. He stayed amazingly still as Bilbo set to work, the hobbit’s tiny fingers grasping firmly at the edge of the metal.

They hadn’t moved Ragnar an inch since they felled the last orc, Dasil and Bilbo instantly falling to the blond guard’s side.

It took all of them, Fili and Foseil as well, to carefully pull apart the burly warrior’s armor, piling the bloodied metal plates off to the side. After the elder dwarven brothers set to work easing arrows out of Ragnar’s tattered back, Bilbo turning to Fili to send the prince off after his brother and Frodo.

Fili had hesitated, fussing over Bilbo’s injured arm and wiping at the blood that was spattered across his small frame. The hobbit had been instant, instructing him to find them a cart or wagon that they might use to take Ragnar the rest of the way to Erebor. The ponies that hadn’t spooked and fled during the skirmish lay dead on the ground about them, packs split open with their contents strewn across the road.

It had taken some convincing, but finally the prince reluctantly parted, kissing Bilbo firmly, desperately, before he took off down the path towards the next farm house.
That had been some time ago, and Bilbo had been working with Dasil on Ragnar’s injuries ever since. The blond guard was proving to be an easy patient, staying, for the most part, still where he lay face down against the ground, his wounded back exposed.

The pain was no doubt excruciating, and Bilbo felt an empathetic twinge course through him, causing him to shudder. He forced himself to stay focused, his hands steady and his breathing calm. With a final, careful tug he managed to wrench the arrowhead free, blood welling up from the now exposed laceration.

Dasil was on it in a heartbeat, covering the cut with a cloth and pressing down, holding pressure there firmly. Ragnar was moaning out in pain, his head shaking where it was ducked into the fabric beneath his face.

Stitching up that final wound seemed to take ages, the injured dwarf squirming and groaning as he tried in vain to keep still. “I’m sorry.” Bilbo murmured, working as quickly as he could manage, Dasil’s fingers pinching at the warrior’s flesh to ease his progress along. “I’m sorry, we’re almost done.”

He pushed the needle through three more times, flinching sympathetically at each pained noise that escaped the dwarven guard. “That’s it, that’s it right there.” He tied off the last stitch and sat back on his heels, letting out a quick breath of relief. “Now we just have to get you all wrapped up.”

“Thank Mahal.” Ragnar rumbled out, his head still buried.

They set about wrapping the burly blond up, binding his torso snugly. Supplies were limited, so they used the cloth sparingly, trying to secure it down in all of the places it was needed most. Their progress was quick, and Ragnar’s back was almost completely dressed by the time they heard the first signs of movement on the path ahead.

Foseil, whose hands were otherwise unoccupied, immediately started his way up the trail, his sword drawn and his posture defensive. He returned moments later, however, waving to them and announcing that the princes were on their way back.

Bilbo had looked up suddenly at that, desperate to see his family; to reassure himself that they were safe.

Dasil noticed the way he tensed at his side, nudging the hobbit back and away from Ragnar’s frame with a dismissive wave of the hand. “Ye’ve done all ye can fer now, Mister Baggins.” He flicked his eyes up the path significantly, a small smile quirking across his features. “Ye should go te ‘em.”

Bilbo bit at his lips, his teeth sinking into the soft flesh as he glanced over his shoulder at the road. “Are you certain?”

The old dwarf nodded his head, working on securing the last of Ragnar’s wrappings. “Aye, now go.”

“Thank you.” Bilbo returned Dasil’s smile, leaning down to pat their patient on the shoulder reassuringly. “I’ll be back Ragnar.”

“I’ll be here-” the warrior grunted, glancing up over his shoulder through thick tendrils of his blond hair, “go on.”

The hobbit nodded, already drawing to his feet. He turned down the path, his feet automatically picking up to a quick jog when he passed by Foseil further up the road.
He could see Fili and Kili where they walked, dragging a heavy wooden wagon between them. At
the sight of him the younger dwarf looked up, waving to him frantically.

“Bilbo!”

That was all it took to bring the Halfling to a run, pounding across the dirt towards the three of
them, his heart racing in his chest. He dashed forward until he was right in front of them, stopping
just short of the brothers and watching them drop the cart clutched tightly in their grip.

Kili came first, his hands reaching out to Bilbo on instinct. The archer was within inches of him
when he stopped, reaching down instead and drawing a frantic shireling out of his sling.

Before he even realized he was moving Bilbo had dragged his nephew into his arms, cuddling the
child close to his chest. Frodo instantly grabbed onto the older hobbit, pressing his face up into his
throat with a whimpering sob.

Only once he had the boy tucked under his chin did Kili step forward, his hands trembling. He
raised them slowly to cup around Bilbo’s cheeks, his lips pursed together tightly and his jaw
clenched. He didn’t say anything, he just leaned forward and brought their mouths together. The
kiss was deep and slow, his breathing hitching slightly when Kili dragged a hand up to twist in his
honey curls.

He didn’t know how long they stood there, just shuddering and breathing in each other’s air, but
eventually he found the strength to force himself to draw away. “Later,” he murmured when
immediately Kili started to speak, the dwarf’s face crumpling, “later, I promise we will talk about
all of this, but Ragnar is in terribly bad shape, and I need you to take Frodo again.” He swallowed,
tipping his head forward until their brows were pressed together. “We’re all okay, everything is
okay.”

The young prince gave him a jerky nod, the motion nuzzling their faces together just slight, before
he straightened. “Alright.” Kili gingerly reached out, curling his arms around Frodo’s waist and
carefully drawing him away from the older Halfling once more. “Sorry about this little one, but
you heard your uncle.”

Surprisingly Frodo gave little complaint, grasping just briefly at Bilbo’s face as he was pulled up
and giving his cheek a firm kiss. He didn’t look pleased, but he stayed quiet where he was tucked
up into Kili’s arms, the archer stepping off to the side to ease the child back into the sling across
his chest.

As soon as his brother drew away Fili stepped up in his place, pushing close to Bilbo and catching
the hobbit under the chin. He pressed a kiss first to his forehead, then trailed down between his
eyes, to his nose, until he sealed their moths together, silencing the smaller man’s breathy gasp.

He was perfectly happy to melt into the prince for the moment, his entire body relaxing. Fili’s
hands felt good where they were spanned across his flesh, framing his jaw and his throat with a
burning touch.

When the older prince finally drew back he reached instantly to Bilbo’s injured arm, frowning and
eying the wide gash there, edges crusted with hard ridges of dried blood. “You haven’t had this
looked at?”

“Haven’t had the time.” The hobbit informed him firmly, raising a single brow. “If you recall,
Ragnar was bleeding out on the road when you left us.”
Fili shook his head, his expression softening. “I meant no harm,” he explained, carefully lowering the smaller man’s arm and reaching down to tear a wide strip of fabric off of his tunic, “I simply spoke out of concern.”

Bilbo felt his heart stutter in his chest when Fili started to wrap the strip around his wound, binding his arm crudely from wrist to elbow. The prince was quick about it, efficient even in the way he tied off the ends, covering the injury snugly. “I know,” Bilbo managed to breathe out, licking his lips and reaching up with his other hand, cupping the blond’s bearded cheek, “and for that, I am grateful.”

He got a cheeky grin out of the dwarf at that, Fili leaning down to steal one last quick kiss before he straightened and pulled away completely. “Is there anything else we can help with?”

“You really there’s only one thing left for us to do,” The hobbit started back towards the rest of the party, pausing momentarily to allow Fili and Kili to catch up where they dragged the wagon, “and it’s going to take all of us”

“We need to get Ragnar into that cart.”

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Bilbo swallowed, his eyes fixed on the ground while he walked, breathing in hard through his nose. He tightened his grip on the wagon’s handle, bearing down into the dirt and shoving forward with all the strength he could muster.

Fili pushed on at his other side, back bowed and breathing labored while they slowly made their way towards the gates of Erebor. Already they were in sight of Dale, their path marred with curious onlookers; men folk regarding them strangely while the dwarves awarded them with more wide-eyed wonder.

“How,” Fili puffed out a breath, panting as they shoved forward, Foseil and Dasil pushing the wagon from behind, “how far from the gate are we?”

“Not far.” Kili called back, walking a few steps in front of them, glancing back every few moments. “I don’t think the guards have spotted us yet.”

“What, are they asleep?” Fili groaned out, exasperation leaking through his tone as he let out another grunt.

“They’re not expecting us.” Bilbo told him pointedly, trying his best to keep his own temper in check. With a swallow he pushed forward, plowing through the heavy ache of exhaustion. The wagon was heavy and difficult to maneuver, but it proved a blessing none the less; Ragnar had passed out cold half way to the mountain, his breath coming out in hitched wheezes where he lay. Bilbo glanced back to him briefly, before shaking his head and fixing his gaze back on the ground. “We were supposed to be here days ago.”

The blond made a tight noise of resignation in the back of his throat, his lips pursing while he bore forward, muttering miserably under his breath.

With trembling sigh Bilbo focused his attention back on the ground, pushing forward up the steady incline towards the mountain’s gates, a sheen of sweat already blooming out across his flesh. They didn’t have to continue forward for much longer, a loud commotion sounding ahead before a group of figures decked in armor came dashing up to the group of them.

Kili slowed down to a stop at the sight of the guards, waiting for Fili and Bilbo to slide up to his
slide before suddenly they were surrounded by dwarves, bombarding them with an onslaught of Khuzdul, bodies closing in on them from all sides. Bilbo released his grip on the wagon and stepped forward towards Kili, his hand curling in the back of the archer’s tunic instinctively. He scanned the mass of unfamiliar faces, now feeling apprehensive of the looming mountain that crept up to the skyline at his front.

“Hey,” Kili glanced at him over his shoulder, shifting the grip he had on Frodo in his sling and reaching back around himself to grab at Bilbo’s hip, gently urging the Halfling to press up to his side. Fili stood in front of the group of them, talking quietly to a burly dwarf with a long black moustache. The rest of the guards took up the wagon, already pushing Ragnar towards Erebor in haste. Foseil and Dasil hurried along at the unconscious dwarf’s side, pausing to have a brief word with Kili, waving Frodo and Bilbo off before they disappeared into the mountain.

The older hobbit’s mouth tightened and watched them go for a time, his attention then shifting to where Frodo was pressed to Kili’s chest. The shireling was shivering, his cheek snug against the archer’s breast. “Hey little one,” he soothed, keeping his voice low while he reached up, closing his hand briefly over the back of his nephew’s head, “how are you holding up?”

Frodo made a small, miserable noise, his eyes wearied and his lips tugged down in a deep frown. “I’m tired.” The little one murmured, voice tinged with strain. “And I’m hungry, and I’m cold-”

“You’re cold?” Kili exclaimed, tone placating while he tugged his borrowed elven cloak around from his back, wrapping it about the child where he hung in his sling. “Now that won’t do will it?”

“No, not at all.” Bilbo agreed, offering the prince a tired smile and leaning over to the side to rest his head on his shoulder for a moment. When he straightened again he flicked his attention back to Frodo, his expression soft. “Can’t have you catching a chill, hm?”

The shireling made a noise of agreement, snuggling himself up further to Kili’s chest until he had his little head tucked under the prince’s chin. The poor child looked a wreck, dark circles blooming under his eyes and the color all but drained from his round, chubby cheeks.

The ambush had taken its toll on them, all of them, but it seemed as though Frodo was the one the most worse for wear. Bilbo felt his heart squeeze tightly in his chest at the thought of the trauma that his poor nephew had been forced to endure, his lips thinning out into a tight lipped frown. They would have to be cautious with the hobbit-ling for a while, at least until the shock of the change wore off; it was no easy task for small folk of his sensitive age and delicate demeanor to endure such trying ventures.

“It’s almost over sweet thing,” he cooed softly, giving the back of Frodo’s head one last quick squeeze before he dropped his hands back down to his side, “just a little longer, and we’ll be home.”

Kili flushed bright red at that, smiling down at Bilbo even as Frodo gave his uncle a small nod, fisting his little hands into the fabric of the dwarf’s tunic. “Okay.”

Just moments later Fili dropped back to frame Bilbo’s other side, one hand gently coming to rest against the small of the hobbit’s back while he gestured the three of them forward. “Come.” He nudged the Halfling along, walking at a quick pace while they followed the guard as a group, the blond’s jaw clenched and his expression tense.

“What is it?” Bilbo asked, unable to help but notice the way that the older prince carried himself, shoulders tense and trembling with nerves. “What’s wrong?”
“It’s nothing, just-” The blond let out a tight sigh, dragging his free hand up to his face and giving his head a hard shake. For a moment, Bilbo was unsure whether or not the prince would give him an honest answer, only then Fili made a resigned noise, continuing on. “Apparently, Molden, Fibur, and Phobur only showed up here three days passed.”

“What?” Bilbo hissed, his brows pinched together in confusion. “They should have arrived weeks ago!”

“I know.” Fili shook his head, his hand coming over to clasp over jaw. “There’s more,” he trailed off, licking his lips with a furrowed brow, “apparently mother has been away from the city on business, and returned just this morning with Gandalf. They were also delayed by the raids.”

“Mahal, you don’t think mum fought do you?” Kili asked, fear lacing his tone at the mention of the Lady Dis. “What did she even leave the city for in the first place?”

“And why is Gandalf with her?” Bilbo piped up, glancing between them. “Not that I’m not glad to see him, but…”

“I don’t know,” The blond looked nervous again, flicking his gaze about them while they moved steadily closer to the mountain entrance, “the guard could not afford me details, he just told me that she’s alright. She’s apparently in the medical wing with a few members of her party at the moment.”

“We should go see her.” Kili urged his brother desperately, still holding his cloak around Frodo firmly.

“We will,” Fili soothed carefully. “soon, I promise. I just think we should get our hobbits someplace where they can settle first, hm?”

That seemed to sober the archer immediately, his tense frame relaxing. They approached the massive mountain face, walking towards the entrance to the great dwarven city at the heels of the burly guard. They all fell silent, Bilbo watching as Frodo slowly, reluctantly began to peel himself back from where he’d been plastered to the dwarf’s chest. It seemed as though curiosity was getting the better of the little shireling, his head craning as he gazed about them, his eyes blown wide with wonder.

The entrance to the mountain was as spectacular as Bilbo remembered, if only now repaired and polished from the years of damage it suffered at Smaug’s neglect.

The shireling made a bright noise of surprise when they finally approached the threshold of the massive entryway, dwarves standing guard at pillars scattered about them. He seemed delighted by everything around them, slowly but surely relaxing in Kili’s hold while he took in the wonders of the mighty dwarven city.

Bilbo, on the other hand, was feeling distinctly more apprehensive.

He tried to school back the nervous flutter of his heart in his chest, already mindful of the stares that they were receiving, eyes training on him where he trailed at Fili and Kili’s heels. The hobbit sucked in a hard breath and came to a sudden stop, pausing just before entering the expansive halls, his blood rushing through his ears in a deafening torrent.

Fili stopped immediately after him, turning to look over his shoulder at the Halfling with a mild expression of concern. “Is everything alright?”

The hobbit swallowed, his tongue darting out to carefully trace along the seam of his lips while he
glanced about him, feeling all but terrified. “It’s fine I just-” It had been years, long, painful, lonely years since he’d last stepped foot in this place, “I’m just nervous, that’s all.”

Making a noise of understanding in the back of his throat the prince stepped back towards him, gently wrapping his arm around the hobbit’s hip once more. “Completely understandable,” The blonde informed him, his smile soft when he carefully urged the small man forward, “if you’d like, we could walk in together?”

Bilbo found himself nodding before he’d actually even registered the question, leaning into the young warrior’s side while they hurried to catch up to Frodo and Kili, the older hobbit’s gaze still fixed about them anxiously.

The halls of Erebor where just as overwhelmingly large as Bilbo remembered, his heart hammering in his chest while they strolled deeper and deeper into the mountain, each turn and new corridor serving to strengthen the gripping sensation of disorientation that consumed him. He pulled himself tighter to Fili’s side, ignoring the looks they garnered from passing dwarves, some pausing to bow their heads respectfully to the princes, while others simply regarded at the group of them with wide stares of confusion and disbelief.

Bilbo tried not to dwell on the prickling sensation of eyes, trained on him while they walked, following their every step until they disappeared around curving bends, in the long, intricately carved halls. Instead he focused on the feel of Fili’s grip on his hip, and on their steady motion forward, one foot after the other, deeper into the mountain.

“Bilbo Baggins!”

The shout was startling, seemingly out of nowhere as the hobbit skidded to a sudden stop, looking about them in confusion. Then Kili glanced off down a side passageway, a bright noise escaping the archer. Bilbo had the time to blink in the direction the archer was staring before suddenly a body was careening into his front, sending him stumbling backwards a few steps.

The first thing he recognized was that wonderful, amazing, ridiculous hat, squished up against his face. The dwarf dragged him into a crushing hug, his arms a solid band about the Halfling’s waist. “Bofur!” He exclaimed, unable to hide the sudden rush of excitement that flooded through him. He wrapped his arms around the dwarf’s shoulders with a bright laugh, allowing himself to be hefted up into the toymaker’s arms. “Oh my friend is it ever so good to see you.”

“Aye lad.” Bofur gave him another firm squeeze, gripping around his sides before he reluctantly dropped the hobbit back to his feet. “An I might say the same for ye; yer a sight for sore eyes Bilbo.” He drew away a bit, giving the Halfling one last firm clap over the shoulder. ”Wasn’t sure we’d ever see you ‘round these parts again.”

“I sent word.” Bilbo told him softly. “With Phobur’s party. Though I have been told they arrived but a few days passed”

“Aye, with two of ‘em on bed rest, at the moment.” The dwarf gave a sad shake of his head. “We’ve been having more orc problems than I’d care to say as of late.”

The hobbit’s eyes narrowed in understanding and he swallowed. “We ran into concerns of a similar sort this very morning.”

Bofur’s eyes darkened slightly at that, a scowl dropping down over his features. “Another raid?” His gaze flicked to Fili and Kili while he spoke. “This close to the city?”
The older prince gave him a solemn nod, his jaw clenched slightly. “Not a full day’s ride from the gates.”

With a curse the toymaker brought a hand to his mouth dragging it over his lips. “You should tell the Lady Dis immediately-”

“Why not Thorin?” Kili murmured, looking concerned. When Bofur only flinched the young dwarf simply shook his head. “Never mind, I know the answer.” He sighed with a lick across his lips. “We were just going to get Bilbo and Frodo here settled down in our room before we see to mother…”

“I could escort our burglar to the royal chambers if ye’d like-” The toymaker offered, before blinking in confusion. “Wait, what in the name of Aule is a Frodo?”

Bilbo couldn’t help the puff of laughter that escaped him at that, shaking his head with a nudge to the dwarf’s side. “My nephew.” He explained, cutting straight to the chase through a breathy chuckle, motion towards where the shireling was watching him from beneath Kili’s cloak, his head resting underneath the dwarf’s strong chin. “A new addition to my life since I saw you last.”

Bofur blinked over at the tiny child, strapped to the young prince’s chest. His shock was evident, brows pinched together and mouth parted slightly in a clear line of confusion. The dwarf seemed to struggle with his words for the moment before he brought a hand up to his brow, knocking his hat askew. “He’s so small.”

Kili let out a small laugh at that, the archer unable to resist a smile while he stepped closer, opening his cloak to reveal where the shireling was strapped to his chest. Frodo watched Bofur with wide eyes, taking in his curling braids and large floppy hat with a slight sound of wonder. “The newest member of our family,” the archer stated, leaning down to press a kiss to the side of the hobbit-ling’s cheek, “Frodo, this here is Mister Bofur. A good friend of your uncle’s, and of ours.”

The small child smiled up at the toymaker with a slight blush, a little shy as he extended out a small arm. “Pleasure to meet you.”

Bofur looked positively beside himself with delight, his grin bright and his eyes wide. “Well, I would reckon’ that pleasure would be all mine, Mister Frodo Baggins.” He reached out, clasping the shireling’s tiny hand in his own and giving him a firm shake.

The little hobbit made a pleased sound, seemingly charmed by the dwarf’s light hearted charisma. While the child was occupied Fili slid up to Bilbo’s side, leaning down to speak to him in a soft, quiet tone. “Are you sure this is alright?” He asked, reaching out to gently squeeze an arm around the hobbit’s waist. “It would be no trouble for us to take you to our chambers first, then seek out our mother after.”

“No, no.” Bilbo assured him softly, reaching up to curl his hand around Fili’s chin, squeezing there affectionately. “It’s been months since you last saw your her. You two should go, fill her in on everything that has happened in your absence.”

He lingered there for a moment with his hand cupping the blond’s cheek firmly, until suddenly he remembered where they were. Dwarves around them had come to stop and stare, many of them now fixing the prince and the hobbit with wide-eyed shock and disbelief. Feeling suddenly self-conscious Bilbo gingerly drew back, letting his hand drop and giving his shoulder a sheepish shrug. “Bofur will keep us company until you return.”
“Alright.” Fili raised an eyebrow at the hobbit’s turn towards shy, glancing around and leveling the onlookers with a small glare. Most of the dwarves knew well enough to go back to business, leaving Bilbo to sight out a gusting breath of relief. The dwarf prince chuckled lightly, stepping forward and cupping the Halfling’s face in his hands. He leaned down and sealed their mouths together, kissing him deeply and thoroughly in the torch lit hall.

Bofur made a startled noise at their side, regarding the pair with a raised brow while they gingerly drew apart. The dwarf looked to the hobbit’s hair, noting the braid and make-shift bead with a look of pleased surprise. “Congratulations are in order,” the dwarf stated with a raise of his brow, flicking his eyes to Fili and Kili as well, “for all three of ye it appears!”

The hobbit flushed and scratched at the back of his head, unable to keep from smiling as he leveled the toymaker with a fond look. “Thank you.” He felt his face burning red with heat, the sensation spreading high across his cheek bones and over the bridge of his nose. “I am still dreading the moment the King finds out I’ve gone and eloped with his sister-sons, but we are quite happily a family now.”

Bofur made another pleased sound, leaning in and wrapping Bilbo up into another crushing hug. “I am so very happy for ye lad.” His voice was soft and comforting. “This has been a long time coming.”

The hobbit drew away with a bright noise, unable to keep back the stupid happy grin that flitted across his features. “I can tell you all about it while you show me to my room?”

“Sounds like a plan to me.” The toymaker drew back a touch, stepping aside for Kili when the archer approached.

The young dwarf already had Frodo out of the sling, the shireling reaching out for his uncle as they drew near. Bilbo happily accepted the child into his arms, propping him up on his hip with a smile. “Are you excited to see where we’re staying tonight?” He cooed to his nephew, raising a hand up to carefully brush the bangs back from the hobbit-ling’s brow.

“Mhmhm,” Frodo made a pleased sound in the back of his throat, turning in his uncle’s grip and gesturing towards the two princes where they stood, “you won’t be long? Right?”

“Of course we won’t sweet thing.” Fili assured him, stepping forward and pressing his kiss to the top of the shireling’s brow. He did the same for Bilbo, smiling at the way the Halfling flushed at the contact.

“That’s right,” Kili stepped up again, reaching out to nudge the shireling’s chin gently, “you take care of your uncle for us in the mean time, hm?”

“Of course!” The child exclaimed, offended that the archer even had to ask.

With a light hearted chuckle the young dwarf then turned to Bilbo, leaning forward to seal their mouths together. Someone dropped something as they walked by, the noise startling the hobbit back and away from Kili’s grip. A passing miner was scrambling to pick back up a heavy sack of precious rock, his gaze flicking up constantly to the two princes and the Halfling. Kili followed Bilbo’s gaze with the slight quirk of his eyebrow, before he grabbed at the hobbit’s face once more, drawing him into a slower, deeper kiss.

“Rest easy.” He murmured against the Halfling’s lips. “We’ll bring mother up to meet you soon. Just focus on getting settled for now.”
Bilbo nodded, his breath coming out in a slight shudder while he leaned in, taking a last chaste kiss. “See you shortly.”

With that both dwarves drew away, moving back towards their accompanying guard and veering off down an adjacent hall. They waved to Frodo while the departed, watching the pair of hobbits constantly over their shoulders.

Once they were well out of sight Bofur nudged Bilbo alongside him, the two of them falling into an easy conversation while the hobbit hiked Frodo up further onto his hip. The toymaker’s presence made the walk to the royal quarters more than pleasant, acting as tour guide for them the deeper they moved into the mountain.

It didn’t take long for more dwarves to come into sight, swelling seas of unfamiliar faces, rolling out on either of Bilbo’s sides. The hobbit felt slightly intimidated by the rising action, his eyes widening and his grip tightening on his nephew at his side. Bofur stuck close to them, however, navigating gracefully past the crowds with a practiced sort of ease.

“A bit further now,” the toymaker called back to them as them came to a stop at a particularly busy juncture in the passage, “the royal wing is separate from the rest of the city.”

Bilbo nodded to him, grateful for the company while they explored their way through the towering halls. Eventually the mass of bodies began to taper away, only a few lingering dwarves standing at various points along their path. Even the décor, Bilbo noted, became more and more intricate the further into the mountain they travelled.

Thick heavy curtains of fine velvets were draped about bold and intricately carved walls, drawing them down the warmly lit passage with a radiating sense of grandeur. While the halls were impressive, however, none of it stood in comparison with the princes’ bedroom when they finally arrived.

At first Bilbo had simply assumed that they were in the wrong chamber. In fact, he had been half way through turning around and telling Bofur as such when he noticed the fine collection of bows mounted on the wall in the corner, the design unmistakably Kili’s. The room, however, seemed too grand for a prince’s; it’s high arching ceilings and thick, fur rugs were far more befitting of something like a king. The floors were decorated with intricate and colourful tiles, leading off into a chamber in the far corner, which had the appearance of a private bath house.

The hobbit gaped where he stood, his mouth dropped open and his eyes blown wide.

When last he’d visited the mountain, the place had been in near ruin, and what with the battle and the incident with the Arkenstone, Bilbo truly had no opportunity to look around. Yet still, nothing in his grandest imaginations had come even close to the reality of Fili and Kili’s fine chamber.

“Oh wow!” Frodo exclaimed, his demeanor shifting almost immediately. His eyes lit up, his cheeks warming to a rosy glow and his hands tapping on his uncle’s shoulders excitedly. He was squirming to get down, almost unable to contain himself in the older hobbit’s grip. “This is the biggest room I have ever seen!”

“Isn’t it just-” Bilbo responded breathlessly, unable to tear his eyes from where they were scanning the wonders about him; not even when he lowered down on one knee to set Frodo comfortably on the ground. “I have to admit, I have seen my fair share in the past few years, but this…” He felt his mouth break open into a wide smile, his head shaking in rampant disbelief, “this is just incredible.”

“An this is just the princes’ chamber” Bofur cut in gently, his focus on the shireling as the child
began to dash about, excitement practically leaking off of his tiny frame. “I’m sure they’ll have a room for ye, all to yer self once ye get settled.”

“Yep!” Frodo agreed, sounding very sure of himself. “Fili and Kili already promised that I could have my own room with a huge bed! And a nice big chest for all of my clothes!”

“Oh my, now that does sound exciting.” The dwarf moved over to sit on the mattress in the center of the room, continuing to chat idly with Frodo while the child buzzed around.

Bilbo, on the other hand, took the moment to walk the room himself, his eyes trained on the walls with wonder. It was beyond spacious, enormous really, with towering archers and thick rock walls that seemed to be imbedded into the very body of the mountain itself.

It was so completely and drastically different than bag end, yet still as he slowly circled the massive chambers, something warm and familiar curling in his chest.

This was their home now. A place for their family to call their own.

After leaving the shire, after all of the struggles and hardships they’d faced on their path, they had finally made it.

His smile bloomed brighter, splitting up into a wide grin while he padded his way towards the door at the back of the room, occupying himself with exploring the baths, idly listening his nephew dash about.

He was still a mess from the ambush that morning, and from his part in carrying Ragnar back to Erebor; his clothes were stained with sweat and blood, a thin coat of dirt clinging to his skin.

Bilbo raised his hands, wincing at the mess beneath his fingernails and glancing about the room for a place for a quick wash. There were a series of washbasins mounted on the wall, seemingly carved out of the very rock itself. He grabbed at the cuff of his sleeve, gingerly rolling it up over the laceration on his arm while he moved forward, already eyeing the folded pile of cloth on a nearby shelf.

He dipped his fingers lazily in the bowl, delighted by the pleasant warmth of the water. Idly he glanced over his shoulder, eyeing the pool of water in the center of the room. The promise of a hot bath was almost too tempting to pass up. That’s where he found himself, quite drastically torn between having a wash with Frodo now and waiting on Fili and Kili, when a knock sounded from the distant hallway.

Bilbo straightened and turned off the faucet, his shirt still rolled up to his elbow. He walked back into the other room, his eyes immediately finding Bofur with a slight frown. The dwarf looked just as confused as he was, Frodo standing frozen where he’d been dashing through the center of the thick, fur, throw rug.

“How Fili and Kili knock?” The hobbit asked, his eyes still trained on Bofur even while he started towards the door, motioning Frodo back towards the toymaker on the bed. It was their room, after all.

The dwarf’s jaw locked. “I doubt it.”

Bilbo scowled, waiting until his nephew came to stand next to Bofur by the mattress before he moved to answer.

The knocking continued all the while, raising in frequency and desperation until Bilbo finally
managed to haul the heavy wood open, blinking out into the hallway beyond.

He was entirely taken aback to see a rather frantic Ori on the other side, staring at the scribe owlishly even as the young dwarf ushered him back into the room.

“Ori.” He reached out to the startled looking dwarf, his hand curling around his shoulder while he tried to meet his eyes. “Ori what is it, what-?”

The scribe just shook his head frantically, shutting the door behind them again and latching it. “There’s no time just, they’re almost here.”

“Who’s almost here?” Bilbo asked, looking startled when Ori pushed past him, glancing around the room until his eyes fell on Bofur where he sat, having pulled Frodo into his lap.

As soon as the scribe saw the little shireling he let out a sigh of relief. “Good, Gandalf said your nephew would be with you,” then he scowled, turning as he looked about frantically, “but where are the crown princes?”

“Down in the medical wing.” Bofur piped up, rising from the bed with Frodo tucked up in his arms. He had the child balanced on one of his biceps, letting his tiny arms curl around his neck. “They’ve gone to find the Lady Dis but…Ori what in Mahal’s name is happening here?”

The scribe looked nervous, glancing between Bofur and Bilbo before he finally answered in a quiet voice. “They’re coming to collect Bilbo,” he swallowed, his eyes fixing on the hobbit as he offered him an apologetic look, “for an audience with the King.”

The Halfling felt his heart stutter to a stop in his chest, panic gripping him completely. Thorin, he was going to see Thorin. The thought struck him like a blade, slicing into his core and leaving behind it a hollow ache that spread out through his chest. A sudden surge of fear punched into him, leaving him breathless and stumbling.

He couldn’t do this alone.

“I can’t,” he managed, shaking his hand and raising a hand to his mouth when it gave a hard tremble, “I can’t go in there without Fili and Kili.”

Ori winced at that, stepping forward to gently ease Bilbo’s hands back down from his mouth, meeting the hobbit’s eyes head on. “I know, I was really hoping they’d be here with you already.”

The scribe shook his head, leading the hobbit towards the door, Bofur following with Frodo in turn. When Bilbo’s lip gave another quiver Ori quickly continued, trying to reassure him while he pulled them back out and into the hallway. “Everything will be fine. Gandalf told me to take you, and the princes, to the Lady Dis. If they are already with her, then we simply need to track them down.”

“That should be easy enough.” Bofur came to a stop at Bilbo’s side, already handing Frodo off when the older hobbit reached up for him, curling his nephew up against his side. “I just sent the boys off in the direction of the healers, before I collected our burglar and his lovely kin.”

Frodo reached his hands up to wrap around the back of Bilbo’s throat, pulling himself tightly to his Uncle’s body and burying his face in his shoulder. The older Halfling hiked him up further in his arms, flashing Ori and Bofur a quick nod. “Lead the way.”

The older dwarf nodded to him, his hat tipping forward slightly as he started down the hall at a quick pace, Bilbo following right behind with Ori taking up at his heels. Instinctively they all knew to move quietly, cautious of running into the men that Thorin had sent up after the hobbit.
They’d only just made it back through to the bustling, arching halls that they’d passed through earlier, when suddenly a shout stopped Bofur in his tracks. It was Khuzdul, and in the mass of people Bilbo couldn’t quite make out where it was coming from. He brought a hand to the back of Frodo’s head, pulling his nephew down more firmly against him as he adjusted the arm resting under the small child’s legs.

The shireling was silent as the grave, now clutching to the back of Bilbo’s battle-stained tunic with small, trembling hands.

The older hobbit sucked in a sharp breath, startling as the shout sounded again, only this time louder. Then Bofur was turning around, ushering him quickly back in the direction they came. Ori reached out as well, his hands curling in the side of Bilbo’s shirt and tugging him sharply, starting off through the crowd.

The shouting was almost constant at their heels, growling and echoing against the massive, intricately carved walls.

“What are they saying?” Bilbo hissed back to the toymaker breathlessly, his grip on Frodo iron as they weaved their way through the corridor. When he glanced over his shoulder the dwarf looked hesitant, his brows pinched together tightly. “Bofur please.”

“They’re…” Bofur swallowed, pushing his hands against the small of the hobbit’s back whenever he slowed, urging him forward, “they’re calling for you to stop.”

The small man frowned tightly, glaring back behind him once more, “And?”

When Bofur didn’t answer, Bilbo had a fairly good idea just what those guards were calling out to him. The name, betrayer, flashed through his mind; bitter and piercing, driving agony deep into his flesh. He swallowed hard, shaking his head and forcing himself forward with Ori’s incessant tugging, his feet falling heavily behind him.

They rounded another corner, Bilbo’s eyes momentarily fixed on the ground while he hiked the shireling closer in his arms, feeling Frodo whimper out a breath of distress against his collarbone. Only then suddenly he was colliding with Ori’s back, struggling to maintain his balance with his nephew clutching to his throat.

Bofur’s hand on his shoulder steadied him, the toymaker squeezing there firmly, his grip tense. With a blink Bilbo finally regained his composure enough glance ahead, recognizing immediately what it was that had made the scribe stop.

“Oh.” Bilbo swallowed, taking a step back into Bofur behind him, eyeing the group of palace guards with a tight clench of horror in his chest. He wasn’t ready to face Thorin, not alone.

One of the guards stepped forward, staring down at Ori with a gruff snarl of Khuzdul. When the young scribe gave no sign of movement the man snarled, reaching down and grabbing at the smaller dwarf’s shirt.

“Wait!” Panic flooded through Bilbo and he raced forward quickly, grabbing onto the scribe and hauling him away from the dwarf’s grip. Once Ori had stumbled back to where Bofur stood, Bilbo put himself between the guards and his friends, still clutching Frodo carefully to his chest. “It’s me you want, is it not?”

The guard locked eyes on him, his face impassive. After a tense moment he switched into a low, rumbling Westron, regarding the hobbit with thinly veiled disdain. “His Majesty, Thorin
Oakenshield, has demanded the presence of his company’s ex-burglar.”

With that the guard curled a hand around his forearm, yanking him forward down the hall. When the hobbit hesitated he gave him a firm shove in the back, causing him to stumble.

Instantly Bofur and Ori broke out into violent objection from where they stood in the hall, storming forwards until the guards began to draw their blades.

“Don’t!” Bilbo called back quickly, turning over his shoulder even as the guard continued to strong arm him away. “Just find Fili and Kili,” he swallowed, raising his voice as he was pushed farther and farther down the hall, “I’ll be alright.”

“Bilbo!” Bofur sounded desperate, his voice breaking as it bounced down the hall after him.

The hobbit got one last look at his friends, their expressions taken with all-consuming panic, before he was whisked around a corner and out of sight. They passed various groups of dwarves while they walked, men, and even a few women, standing off to the side in small crowds. Bilbo was forced past them through the mountain, the guard’s hand a constant pressure at his back.

“Uncle Bilbo,” Frodo whispered, his tone hushed and whimpering. The child’s grip tightened and he curled himself closer to the older Halfling’s frame, “I’m scared.”

“Oh sweet heart,” Bilbo felt his chest tighten painfully, his hand running soothingly up and down the expanse of the shireling’s small back, “I know you are, but it’s alright. Things seem frightening now, but I promise they’ll get better.”

Frodo gave a shaky nod where he had his face buried, his hands tightening and his breath coming out in a trembling whine. “I wish Fili and Kili were here.”

Bilbo’s throat closed up at that, his heart pounding up against his ribs while the guard behind him pushed him forward faster. “Me too little one.” He whispered, angling to press his lips to the shireling’s mop of dark curls. “They will be, soon. We just have to be brave in the meantime. Do you think you can do that?” He kept his eyes up and glancing around even as he pressed his cheek to the top of his nephew’s head. “For me?”

The little hobbit-ling gave a nod, forgoing further answer while he clung to his uncle’s neck, his tiny frame still trembling.

It broke his heart to see Frodo so completely rattled; his complexion pale and his body wrought with hard shakes. The child had been doing so well when they’d first made it to the mountain, especially considering the horrors he’d witnessed that morning; now however, the boy was entirely terrified, his whole body tensing each time Bilbo was given a shove forward, the hobbit stumbling down the hall.

It didn’t take much longer for them to reach the towering doors that let to Erebor’s elaborate throne room, his heart lodging hard in his throat at the sight of them. The guard shoving him along suddenly stopped, reaching out to grab at Bilbo’s arm and hauling him back as well, grip unrelenting. “You stay here, and you do not move.”

The hobbit simply nodded, fighting back the urge to scowl and gritting his teeth when the dwarf’s grip tightened over his bicep painfully.

Seemingly satisfied the guard left him standing in front of the massive doors, two more dwarves sliding up to stand at his side while the first slipped into the room beyond. For the brief moment the door was open Bilbo could hear shouting, familiar voices that he could almost place, only to
have the room sealed shut again, leaving him standing outside in silence.

He didn’t try to speak to any of the unfamiliar dwarves that crowded in around him, focusing on holding Frodo close and rocking the child in his arms soothingly.

Even still shireling shifted relentlessly in his grip, looking panicked and positively stricken as he gingerly peeked around from his uncle’s shoulder. “What are we waiting for?”

Bilbo shook his head, unsure of how to answer his nephew, simply clutching him closer and breathing in tightly. “I don’t know sweet heart.” His eyes flicked back towards the door, brows pinched together in concern. “I don’t know.”

The two hobbits fell silent after that, Frodo shivering and holding himself to his uncle carefully, the older Halfling hushing him and rubbing his back in what he hoped to be a soothing manner. He’d only just barely managed to calm the shireling, when a loud noise echoed through the hallway around them.

Bilbo started, looking up just in time to see the massive doors eased open again, loud voices bouncing towards them.

“Of all of the foolish decisions I have witnessed in my time Thorin Oakenshield, this is by far one of the worst!”

The hobbit blinked sharply as the familiar, booming tone reached his ear, his eyes widening. Frodo too seemed to perk up at that, his gaze finding his uncle’s in surprise. “Is that Mister Gandalf?”

“I think so.” Bilbo swallowed, running his tongue along his lips as he got his a glimpse inside the throne room. Sure enough, the wizard’s familiar frame came storming down and out of the room, escorted by a group of armed dwarven guards.

“You Majesty you can’t do this!” Another shout, from a small figure being hurried along at Gandalf’s side. Bilbo would recognize Nori’s hair anywhere, the dwarf’s stylized star sticking out even in the massive chamber. “Please, Thorin he is one of us!”

There was no response given to their outcry, except for firm shoves from the guards that pushed them out, sending the two stumbling into the hall.

Frodo was still clinging to Bilbo carefully, but his gaze was now focused on the dwarf and wizard where they stood, the guards blocking them from re-entering the room.

“Damnation to the stubbornness of dwarves,” Gandalf roared as the doors behind them were sealed once more. The wizard growled and spun on heel, only to blink in surprise at the sight of Bilbo and Frodo where they stood at his feet.

Instantly the tall man’s expression softened, his eyes lowering while he dropped down to kneel at the hobbit’s side. “Bilbo, my friend.”

“Bilbo?” Nori let out a noise of shock, the sound mixed with regret. The dwarf immediately slid up beside Gandalf, looking to the hobbit and his nephew with a sad smile. “It is so good to see you.”

The Halffling couldn’t help but smile up at the wizard and his old thieving companion, hitching Frodo a little closer against his hip. “I can safely say the same. It is just wonderful to see you all again.” His eyes slipped towards the door at their front of their own accord, his features paling slightly. “I only wish that everyone felt the same.”
Gandalf made a noise of aggravation and distress, looking over his shoulder to the throne room with a hard shake of his head. “Bilbo, you must understand.” He started, turning back to look at the hobbit head on. “You can take nothing he says to heart. I fear something is terribly wrong with our King Under the Mountain.”

“Wrong?” Bilbo whispered, his eyes blown wide. “What do you mean?”

“It is a sickness of the mind.” The wizard told him quickly, his voice lowering and his eyes flicking to the guards about them. “I have spoken to the Lady Dis about it in detail as of late, though we have not yet found a means of ridding him of this gold fever.”

Bilbo let out a trembling breath, closing his eyes with a hard shake of his head.

“I can’t expose Frodo to Thorin like this.” He pleaded with the wizard quietly. He hadn’t wanted to leave the shireling with someone he didn’t know, but Gandalf had been a familiar face around bag end. He had no doubt that Frodo would be more than comfortable in the tall man’s company.

Already he was beginning to ease the young hobbit off of his shoulder, hushing his nephew’s protests when he set him on the ground, urging him towards the wizard. “Please Gandalf, he’s seen too much already.”

The tall man’s lips pursed together in a tight frown but he reached out to Frodo none the same, tugging the shireling forward until he was standing, clutched to his thick, heavy robes. “You should not have to do this alone Bilbo.”

“I won’t be,” the hobbit assured him quickly, feeling his heart clench painfully when Frodo let out a whimper at the wizard’s side, “or at least, not for long. Bofur and Ori have gone to find the princes and Lady Dis.” He swallowed hard andlicked his lips, the gesture nervous. “In the mean time, I don’t have much other choice, now do I?”

Gandalf’s tightly locked jaw was all the answer he needed.

With a heavy breath Bilbo flicked his gaze between his two friends, settling finally on Nori with a strained smile. “Thank you for defending my name, it means the world to me-”

A loud sound cut him off short, the doors easing open once more. The same guard that had led him earlier re-emerged, gesturing to the hobbit firmly. Bilbo felt his breath catch in his throat, blinding fear threatening to consume him completely as he stepped forward, pressing a kiss to Frodo’s head. “I’m sorry sweet heart, I have to go.”

“No,” The shireling shook his head, “I can’t leave you. I promised Kili I’d take care of you.”

The words struck into him like a punch to the gut, leaving him reeling. He desperately tried to school back the tremble that threatened to overtake him completely. He focused on gently cupping his nephew’s face, rubbing his cheeks in a slow, reassuring manner.

“It’s alright sweet heart, you already have.” He gently drew back, his throat closing up when Frodo reached out after him, his hands open and grasping desperately. It took everything he had to force himself away. He walked around his friends and flashed them one last, trembling smile before he turned towards the heavy doorway. His limbs felt like lead, growing heavier with each agonizing step towards the expansive throne room, the small man unable to hold back the hard shake of his shoulders.

The moment he stepped through the threshold he could hear the guards start to close the doors at his back, his heart sinking heavily at the noise. He was about to walk forward, eyes already starting
towards the far end of the room to where he knew the throne was waiting, when a series of startled shouts caught his attention.

He whipped back around just in time to hear Gandalf’s startled cry of “Frodo!” before the shireling was ducking through the rapidly closing gap between the doors. Bilbo let out a shocked shout, darting forward when the child scrambled to a stop, careening headlong into his uncle’s larger frame.

He just barely managed to catch the hobbit-ling around the waist before he toppled head first into the ground, steadying him against his chest with a small grunt of surprise. “Frodo,” he hissed, dropping down to his knees, panic sliding through him, “Frodo sweet heart, I need you to go back outside and wait with Gandalf—”

“No.” The shireling whimpered, shaking his head firmly. He wasn’t crying yet, but he looked close, his big blue eyes brimming with tears. “No Uncle Bilbo I won’t leave you!” He wrapped his hands in the fabric of Bilbo’s pant leg, holding firm. “You’re not alone, remember? We’re a family.”

The older hobbit felt his heart pinch in his chest, resignation washing over him. He sighed and straightened to stand, reaching down to take one of the shireling’s small hands in his own. “Alright, but be on your best behavior.” He whispered, his voice still low and his back to the rest of the room. “Don’t speak unless you’re addressed, alright? Thorin is King after all, and what do we have to remember around kings?”

“Our manners.” Frodo answered automatically.

“That’s right.” Bilbo took in a shuddering breath, squeezing his nephew’s hand and pulling him up to his side.

Together they turned towards the expansive hall that was the throne room, a shudder coursing through Bilbo while he took in the flood of unfamiliar faces that framed the center aisle, eyes focused on the two Halflings where they stood.

Bilbo swallowed heavily, his panic rising and his heart slamming against his ribs hard. He could feel Frodo shifting at his side, drawing the shireling closer while they walked.

The throne was huge, positively towering at the far end of the room; a figure lounging in the grand, intricately carved seat. Even from a distance he recognized the dwarf, his blood running cold and a clammy sweat breaking out across his flesh.

Thorin Oakenshield.

He couldn’t bring himself to meet the king’s gaze while he walked, unconsciously guiding Frodo to move behind him just a touch, shielding him with his own frame. Each step forward drove the sinking sensation of dread harder into his belly, weighing down and down until he legs felt like lead.

Finally he found himself at the foot of the throne, guards spanning out on either side of him, their impassive gazes trained on his small frame. Bilbo straightened his shoulders and tried his best to muster what was left of his courage, Frodo clinging now at his pant leg with the hand that wasn’t already clutched to his uncle’s.

With a slow, steady breath the hobbit looked up, his eyes searching out the king’s where he sat, towering above him.
However, no sooner did their gazes lock did Bilbo feel the cold punch of fear slam through him, his breath catching hard in his chest.

_Thorin Oakenshield did not look pleased._

_TBC..._
Chapter Summary

Bilbo finds himself under fire in the throne room, and must defend himself in front of a gold-fevered Thorin long enough for Fili and Kili to come to his rescue, or risk being forced out of Erebor once again; but without his friends and with Frodo trapped alongside him, none of the long awaited conversation with the king goes as planned.

Chapter Notes

Wow guys.

I just wanted to let you guys know, that this chapter right here is pretty much the reason that *When Lions Meet a Mouse* is what it is today. I had part of this chapter written waaay back in January, and so I've been working towards this for months now, and I'm very excited now that it's finally being included in the story!

I'm so sorry for the long delay in posting, this was a difficult update to write, and my week kind of got away on me.

Either way you guys, your support continues to be one of the most amazing parts of my involvement in fandom. I've received some amazing reviews, and some equally amazing criticism over the past few chapters, and I appreciate each and every bit of it!

Hope you guys like this chapter, I'm SO SORRY FOR THE ANGST GUYS JUST STICK WITH ME WE ARE HITTING THE CLIMAX THE PAIN WILL BE OVER SOON.

Comments and Kudos leave me cackling like a loon! <3

“*Bilbo Baggins.*”

Thorin’s low baritone boomed through the expansive chambers, causing the hobbit to shudder where he stood at the foot of the throne, his nephew tucked behind his back.

He forced himself to meet the king’s gaze head on, feeling all together exhausted and petrified. A hard weight settled in his stomach, building with the slow rise of dread in his chest and squeezing painfully over his lungs. It took everything he had to remember his courtesies, drawing his injured arm to his chest and bowing to the man he once called friend. He kept his other hand wrapped firmly around Frodo where the shireling was pressed to the back of his legs, little fingers clenched to the fabric of his trousers.

“*Your highness.*” He paused before he straightened, slightly unsure of how long he was required to bow. “You—” he swallowed, licking his lips and flicking his gaze around the throne, noting many regal looking dwarves that he could not recognize, fanning out at Thorin’s feet. Then his eyes
caught a familiar face, hope flickering in his chest. Balin stood at the base of the throne, his features marred with a deep scowl. When he met Bilbo’s gaze the expression softened to something apologetic, before the hobbit was forced to look away, his eyes finding Thorin once more. “You summoned for me?”

The dwarf king regarded him coldly, his face devoid of any familiarity, set in a dark scowl. “I did.” Even from where he stood far below him Bilbo could see the way Thorin tightened his grip on the finely carved armrest of his throne. “I have to admit, I was surprised such a thing was necessary, as I assumed you would be the one seeking out my audience.”

The words were spitting, dripping with spite in a way that had the Halfling flinching back, Frodo shifting nervously at his heels. “I-”

Thorin didn’t afford him the opportunity to finish, pushing on with a low, rumbling growl. “Considering how generous I have been in reversing your exile, I thought it would have at least occurred to you to formally inform me of your arrival in my city before you went and made yourself at home.”

Bilbo simply gaped, his heart lurching hard in his chest and panic beginning to ebb its way up his spine. He tried to come up with a response, something, anything in a desperate attempt avoid the king’s impending wrath. His shattered nerves wreaked havoc on his already fragile mind, and he found himself fumbling to find his words. “Apologies, I meant no offense, there were circumstances-”

“Circumstances.” Thorin scoffed, his tone deadly. “Are these circumstances similar to the ones that previously led you to betray your friends and companions, stealing from us our most precious treasure?”

The hobbit flinched back at the mention of the Arkenstone, swallowing through the hard lump in his throat. He glanced about the chamber around him, fighting not to wince away from the piercing stares that bore into him from the massive crowd. This was not how he had expected this conversation to unfold.

He steeled his nerves, forcing himself to meet the king’s gaze and answer in an even tone. “It was never my intention to cause any harm Thorin-” the dwarf shot him a deadly look, his gaze laden with such biting malice that Bilbo found himself scrambling to correct his wording, “my apologies, your majesty, we would have come to you right away, but we were ambushed this morning, and one of our party was gravely injured-”

“Ambushed?” Concern flitted through the cold, dark mask across Thorin’s features, his shoulders tightening with a sudden wash of fear. “Fili, Kili, are they-”

“Alive and well I promise you.” Bilbo hastily interjected, watching the panic begin to flood across the king’s face. “They went to find their mother, they shouldn’t be long if you would only wait-”

“Wait? Why would I wait?” The concern was gone as quickly as it came, Thorin’s voice snapping out as a bitter snarl. “It is not my sister-sons with whom I need to speak; they did not betray me.”

Bilbo shook his head, his lip trembling and his teeth catching hard on the inside of his cheek. “Betrayal was the farthest thing from my mind all of those years ago,” it was a struggle to swallow, his mouth bone dry and his tongue rough like sandpaper, “surely you must know that?”

Thorin’s jaw tensed and his teeth ground together visibly. “The only thing I know, Halfling,” the dwarf gritted out, his expression dangerous, “is that you abandoned your loyalties to our company,
went behind my back, and stole my people’s greatest treasure.”

“I—” The hobbit stuttered, flinching away at the booming growl that bounced through the expansive chamber. The King didn’t give him a chance to speak, however, pushing on in that same brutal tone.

“You took advantage of our time of need, of my trust,” Thorin’s voice was raising in pitch with each passing moment, until he was shouting full on at the cowering hobbit, his face flushed red with rage, “gave no warning, no explanation—”

“Then please, please just allow me to explain.” Bilbo gasped out desperately, his heart clenching hard in his chest and his eyes stinging sharply against the flood of tears that suddenly threatened to spill down his cheeks. “My lord, I beg of you, give me the opportunity to make this right.”

“Make it right?” The king let out a hollow chuckle, the sound as biting as it was bitter. “What makes you believe you could possibly set this right?”

The hobbit was completely taken aback, feeling as though he’d been physically struck in the chest. The air was knocked from his lungs in a wounded gasp and he staggered back a step, knocking Frodo where the boy clung to his legs. There was nothing Bilbo could do to hold back the noise of distress that escaped him, unbidden, clamping his mouth down around the sound. Despite his efforts the shireling behind him let out a concerned whimper, but otherwise remained silent, only tightening his grip on the fabric of his uncle’s trousers.

Thorin wasn’t done, however, shifting forward in his chair to leer over at the Halfling where he shivered below him. The stark loathing in the dwarf’s gaze was terrifying, and Bilbo felt physically ill at the weight of it, crushing down over his small frame. “You do not know what you as of me, Halfling,” he spat, “to forgive so easily such a grievous offence; committed not only against myself, but the entirety of my people as well.”

Bilbo winced, finding himself scrambling for a response; everything he said seemed to only drive the dwarf king further into his rage. He had been so cautious since he’d stepped foot in the expansive chambers, mindful of his wording, of his manners, but no matter what he did he was met with vicious anger.

“If it had been for any lesser cause, your majesty, I assure you the thought would have never crossed my mind.” He breathed in hard through his nose and forced himself to continue, sounding helpless and lost. “It just,” his throat closed up slightly and he choked, coughing through the surge of emotion, “it just seemed such a small thing to give, to see that none of you came to unnecessary harm—”

“Losing the Arkenstone was an unnecessary harm.” Thorin roared, slamming his hands down violently over the hard, metal expanse of the throne’s arm rests. “You overstepped your contract, Burglar. Your aid was hardly desired, nor was it necessary.” The words bounced violently about the halls, echoing into the distance until they were interrupted by Thorin’s rumbling tone once more. “We have no need of you, Betrayer; we have never had need of you—”

“Stop it, please, please stop it!” A tiny voice cut through Thorin’s tirade, Frodo suddenly throwing himself around and in front of his uncle, tearing away from the older hobbit and addressing the king directly. The child was trembling, his entire frame wrought with tension, his words coming out desperate and unsteady. “Stop hurting Uncle Bilbo!”

“Frodo—” The older hobbit felt his breath hitch hard and he scrambled forward, trying to catch his nephew when the child scrambled towards the throne.
Thorin fell silent, his eyes widening almost comically and his mouth dropping open slightly from where he sat, towering above them. The dwarf king’s gaze followed the shireling all the way to the foot of his throne, the entire room quieting to a series of hushed murmurs at the sound of the child’s small voice.

Frodo was sniffling, coming to a stop directly in front of Thorin and craning his neck up to search to dwarf out. “You’re going to make him cry!” The little shireling whimpered, the words somehow still echoing dramatically throughout the expansive chamber. His lips quivered and he ducked his head back down, his little shoulders hunching up. “I don’t want Uncle Bilbo to cry anymore.”

“Oh Frodo-“ The older hobbit felt his heart squeeze tight in his chest, that heavy lump in his throat growing thicker while he moved up to his nephew’s side, gathering the child up against his side, “it’s alright, it’s okay.”

“No it’s not!“ The shireling turned in his hold, fat tears already rolling down his tiny, rounded cheeks and his mouth trembling hard. “They hurt you. He’s hurting you.”

Bilbo quickly hushed the boy, his breath stuttering with a slam of fear in his gut when Thorin cleared his throat, the sound loud and harsh in the eerie silence of the room. The hobbit quickly bent down, crowding Frodo up into his arms and clutching the shireling to his chest. Instantly he felt the child snivel and curl up closer to him, near sobbing with his face buried into the collar of the older Halfling’s tunic.

When he finally forced his gaze back up to the throne he found that Thorin was watching him, his expression complex. No one spoke for some time, the only sounds the rustling of movement in the crowd and Frodo’s soft, breathy whimpers against his uncle’s shoulder.

Then finally the king started to speak, some of the acid having leeched out of his tone. “You have never before mentioned a babe,” Thorin began, sitting forward slightly and regarding Frodo, noticing him for the first time, “how is it that you’ve come upon this child?”

“Frodo,” Bilbo corrected automatically, before he remembered himself and added quickly, “his name is Frodo, Thor… your majesty.”

The dwarf raised a single eyebrow at that, a little more of that cold, hard darkness setting back into the creases of his brow. “So you mean to say he isn’t yours?”

Bilbo had to bite back the noise of offense that threatened to spill past his lips, jaw clenching hard. “He is as much mine as any child would be to a parent,” he began, unable to resist the pull of his brows into a sharp scowl, “but I am not his father, if that’s what you mean,” he snapped, before pausing, licking his lips, and glancing down to the shireling, curled up to his chest, “Drogo Baggins and Primula Baggins were wonderful parents, I do not mean to replace them, merely to
love my nephew with all my heart in their place.”

“I can’t say I care much for your tone, Halfling.” The dwarf king growled, his hands tightening on their grips around the arm rests beneath them. “I would mind your tongue.”

“I have said nothing against you, my lord,” Bilbo locked his jaw, forcing back the disgruntled offense and anger that still broiled through him, “nor will I. I am not here to give you any sort of trouble.”

“Then why?” Thorin snapped, rising from his throne and starting a slow decent down towards the ground below. Bilbo felt his heart leap up into his throat, the hobbit subconsciously moving away with each step the king took towards him. “Why have you returned here, Bilbo Baggins?”

The hobbit’s retreat was halted by the noise of metal clashing against metal behind him, two dwarven guards dropping their spears together in order to block his escape. He gazed at them for a moment in disbelief, the expression still stark across his features when he turned back towards where the king closed in on him. “Because your nephews came for me, with their mother’s blessing, and with your permission. Or at least,” he swallowed hard, feeling the anger and indignation slowly burn away to the dragging weight of fear, “at least that is what I was told.”

Thorin’s tone was dangerous when he spoke, his eyes narrowed and fixed firmly on the hobbit where he stood. “I gave them permission, but of what consequence is that to my question?” He stepped forward again, Bilbo unable to help but flinch and drag Frodo closer to his chest. “I want to know why. Why have you returned?” The king didn’t give him time to answer, his expression dangerous, darkened by something that Bilbo couldn’t quite place. Instead Thorin just pushed on, his voice digging and spiteful. “You who spoke so often of home, who was so desperate to return there at journey’s end.”

Bilbo swallowed, bringing a hand up to curl in the back of his nephew’s head, holding him closer where he was pressed to his throat. He felt a wave of nauseating fear was over him, cold like dread that rested in his belly. He didn’t understand how Thorin could say such things, when it was by the man’s own hands that he was forced away. “You know why I came,” Bilbo managed, just barely able to keep the tremble out of his voice, “you know how much I care about you, all of you. I helped fight to get your home back, you…you called me family once.”

Thorin looked away at that, his jaw locked tight and his eyes trained firmly on the ground. He wasn’t protesting, however, and Bilbo was more than willing to take that as a sign for the better. “I came, because I no longer belong in Hobbiton, lazing amongst the grassy shire hills.” He offered, his voice soft and self-conscious. He once again became abundantly aware of the figures that surrounded them, a sea of eyes fixed silently on their frames. “And,” swallowing he raised a hand to his hair, subconsciously brushing his fingers against the braid that was tucked into his honey blond curls, “and I came because Fili and Kili, they…they asked me to.”

When he met the king’s gaze once more Thorin was staring at him, his expression going from shock to something more heated; like broiling rage. The bigger man’s gaze was fixed on Bilbo’s hand, watching where his fingers rested against his make-shift, wooden courting bead. Instantly the hobbit jerked his arm down to wrap back around Frodo’s frame, but it was too late.

The King Under the Mountain had seen it all, still staring at the braid even as Bilbo shrunk in on himself, his shoulders hunched up to his ears. He could already see the emotions cycling across Thorin’s face; disbelief, confusion, and fiery, unforgiving anger.

“What is that?” Venom dripped from the king’s voice and he stepped up in front of Bilbo, towering over the small man and his nephew. Thorin’s gaze never shifted from the bead, nestled in his hair,
his jaw clenching and his face growing hot with rage. “What have you done?!"

“Nothing!” Bilbo replied desperately, curling in on Frodo tighter, unable to tear his gaze from the dwarf in front of him. “I’ve done nothing, I swear-”

“Do not lie to me Halfling.” Thorin snapped, reaching out and grasping onto the braid. The hobbit jerked back immediately, crying out in shock and pain when the king held strong for a moment, pulling firmly. With a growl he released Bilbo once more, sending the small man stumbling back, scrambling to keep his hold on his nephew.

“While crudely made, that is a dwarven courtship bead, and a braid to match. Neither things taken lightly by my people. You mean to tell me that you have done nothing?” The King Under the Mountain spat, looming over Bilbo and forcing him back until he once again bumped into the dwarven guards, blocking all chance of escape or reprieve from Thorin’s harsh words. “You mean to tell me that you did not engage in ceremony with my nephews, without so much as my consent?”

The hobbit stuttered, any and all response he might have had dying on his tongue as he felt an overwhelming surge of terror twist into his gut. This was never intended to be a conversation he was to have with Thorin alone; he needed Fili and Kili, needed their mother Dis, or Gandalf, Ragnar, Dasil, Bofur, someone…anyone. With a hard swallow he blinked up at the king, his heart pounding painfully against his ribs. “I never-”

"No."

"No lies from you Halfling, no more pretty words to hide your real intentions. If you at all value my hospitality you will answer me plainly, and you will answer me now."

Frodo let out a violent whimper from where he was scrambling closer to his uncle, burying his face into the older hobbit’s thick, golden curls. Bilbo felt his heart break at the sound of his nephew’s distress, only adding to the turmoil that threatened to broil over in his gut, leaving him desperate and reeling. He opened his mouth to respond, slamming it shut tight again over a hard quiver. Only once he’d managed to regain some of his composure, sucking in hard through his clenched teeth, did he finally manage to answer, the sound broken and quiet. “They asked me.

“They asked-” The king made a noise of disbelief, dragging his hands up over his face and growling sharply. Thorin took a step back, running a hand over his mouth, looking at Bilbo as if he were something deplorable. “Is this why your party’s arrival was delayed?” He snarled, pointing an accusing finger at the smaller man. “Because you were awaiting the opportunity ensnare my nephews first?!”

“No! Of course not!” Bilbo interjected, voice trembling with desperation. If the dwarf king heard him, he gave no indication, simply pushing forward with his growling rant.

“They are young and impressionable, and you would take advantage of this?” Thorin snarled and walked over to where a decorative metal vase was resting, sending it sprawling across the ground with a violent kick. It clanged to a stop, the noise bouncing down through the chamber with the
king’s mighty shout. “You who will not live to be half of their full age!?"

The hobbit’s lip trembled hard, his hand desperately wrapping around Frodo’s head, trying to cover the little shireling’s ears. “I-

“This is why you have come.” Thorin interrupted him sharply, false realization flitting across the dwarf’s features. “To steal even more from my house, from my line!” He roared, causing Bilbo to flinch down again, no longer able to keep the king’s darkened gaze. “First you spirited the Arkenstone to those abominable tree-lovers you call friends, and now you seek to take away my sister-sons as well? To steal from me my own heir!?”

“That’s not true Thorin and you know it!” Bilbo objected, his voice desperate and pleading. “Once you knew how sincerely I felt about those boys; how much I still care for them.” He tightened his grip on Frodo against his collar, trying to keep his touch soothing. “They are my family.”

The king let out a roaring growl, snarling something at him in Khuzdul that had the surrounding crowds shifting and murmuring in shock. “You are not their family Halfling.” He snarled, stomping back over to where the hobbit stood, his voice cold and unforgiving. “They may have allowed you to crawl beneath their blankets at night, but do not dare mistake such frivolous affairs for love.” The words were spat out, dripping from the king’s lips like venom. “You are not the first idle conquest that my nephews have bedded, and I sincerely doubt you will be the last-

Bilbo made a choked noise of shock and agony, feeling himself begin shatter piece by piece as the words tore into him, picking apart all of the hope and assurance that he’d been fighting to rebuild since the day Fili and Kili showed up at his door at Bag End. Desperately he tried to cover his nephew’s ears, his own eyes stinging with tears when he felt the child stiffen and start to sob beneath him. “Thorin you don’t mean that-

“Your majesty please!”

Balin rushed forward from his post by the throne, finally having had enough of standing idly by during Thorin’s vicious tirade. The dwarf looked furious, his white brows pinched down tightly in a disapproving scowl. “There is a child present.”

That seemed to halt the King Under the Mountain, if only for a moment, his gaze flicking back to where his oldest friend and advisor now stood. “A child-” the dwarf blinked, and suddenly it was like a glaze had been cleared from his darkened eyes, as if he was recognizing Frodo for the very first time. Thorin’s expression almost softened, his gaze fixed on the shireling’s frame.

The room was silent save for Frodo’s smothered sobs, his little body trembling where he clutched to his uncle’s shoulder. Bilbo swallowed, feeling the faintest flickering of hope surge back up in his chest; only to have the sensation shrivel and die when Thorin’s expression darkened once more, his body tense and his expression chilling.

“You are right, of course. We must think of the child.” He locked his jaw, gaze fixed on Frodo where he was curled against his uncle’s shoulder. “The throne room is no place for a sniveling babe, after all. Balin.”

The older dwarf was frowning, his eyes trained on Bilbo in concern even as he reluctantly answered his king, his tone tight. “Yes majesty?”

“See him out to the hall, and find him some place where his wailing might be better tolerated.”

“But majesty-”
“Now Balin.”

Bilbo felt his blood run cold at the determination in Thorin’s tone, his heart lodging painfully in his throat. A few years ago, he would not have thought twice about immediately telling off the so-called King Under the Mountain for behaving in such a cruel and unreasonable manner; but things had changed, Thorin had changed.

He took in a shuddering breath and simply gazed at Balin imploringly as the Fundin dwarf approached. “I’m sorry,” he offered the hobbit, his words soft and genuine, “I will see that he is comfortable until you are finished.”

Bilbo let out a shuddering breath, shaking his head in resignation. “Gandalf should be outside,” he murmured, reaching out to gently clutch Balin’s arm, “bring Frodo to him.”

“I will I promise, I’ll take good care of him.” The Fundin warrior nodded his head serenely, his movements hesitant even as he extended his arms out to the child clinging to Bilbo’s front. “Now then, Frodo was it? There’s a good lad.”

The shireling immediately began to struggle when the dwarf got his arms around his small waist, clinging to his Uncle with his tiny, desperate grip.

Bilbo had to fight back the initial panic that swelled in him, his entire being brimming with the overwhelming urge to protect his child. He had to remind himself that this was Balin, his old friend and companion, not anyone who would ever mean the shireling any sort of harm.

Brimming with reservation the older Halfling began to carefully work on the grip that his tiny nephew had him in, his heart slamming harder into his throat with each passing second.

“Everything is alright sweet thing, go with Balin. He is a good friend of mine, he will see you looked after. I’ll be along shortly, I promise I-”

“No, no!” Frodo wailed and fought desperately to cling to Bilbo’s front, his fingers catching in his shirt, stretching the fabric while they struggled to pry the small child loose. “No no, Uncle Bilbo please! I don’t want to leave you. Uncle Bilbo! Don’t make me go, I don’t want to go.”

“It’s okay Frodo, it’s okay.” Bilbo’s breath hitched on a hard sob that he didn’t know he’d been withholding, his whole body tense with despair. He felt his heart shatter when Balin finally managed to tug the shireling away, the child inconsolable, screaming and crying when he was dragged bodily from the older Halfling’s side.

“Uncle Bilbo, please, please, Uncle Bilbo!” The child was sobbing, hysterical and grasping for him while Balin tucked him up into his arms, his little face bright red and washed with tears.

The older Halfling shoved a hand up over his mouth, squeezing down; it was taking every inch of himself to fight the urge to dash over and snatch the hobbit babe back. All of his instincts were screaming at him to hold his nephew close, to soothe him until the child’s ragged sobs were nothing more than a fleeting memory.

“Frodo please forgive me,” he choked out, his throat closing up and his eyes watering uncontrollably, “I’m so sorry sweet thing, I’m sorry-”

“Uncle Bilbo!”

The dwarves around them had burst into a swell of concerned murmurs, all eyes focused on where Balin was wrestling with the struggling child. Even Thorin’s dark expression seemed to falter as Frodo’s cries continued, increasing in pitch and desperation.
Bilbo could hardly watch, tears sliding down his cheeks in big, fat streams. Then finally he gave in
to the heart break, feeling physically nauseous from his tiny nephew’s distress, breathy sobs
escaping him unbidden.

The guards drew their spears back, allowing Balin room to start back towards the door, Frodo full
on screaming and scrambling to crawl his way back over the dwarf’s back. Thorin stood there and
watched, looking determined yet less and less sure by the moment, his expression twinged with
something akin to concern.

Then suddenly a loud, dramatic crash sounded throughout the massive chambers, the large doors
thrown open and a loud voice booming throughout the hall. “What in the name of Aule is going on
in here!?”

Bilbo started at the harsh, authoritative tone that seemed to instantly silence the building chaos in
the room. He found his eyes torn briefly from his nephew’s frame, watching the crowds part
further, shifting back to give the new comer space, their gazes wide with awe.

As the figure drew closer Bilbo began understand their reaction, finding that it mirrored his own.
The woman who strode proudly down the center aisle towards them was tall by dwarven standards,
her long, raven black hair bound back from her face in a series of intricate, jeweled braids. Similar
trinkets had been carefully weaved into the hair that grew along her jaw, stretching down from her
hairline to curl at her hard cut chin, jingling lightly with each fierce step she took forward.

Her build was strong beneath her flowing robes, muscles shifting visibly under the thin fabric of
her tunic; yet still there was something about the woman’s exotic beauty that was entirely
breathtaking, only matched by the intensity of her scowl.

The longer he gazed upon her, the more the hobbit found himself taken aback by how familiar her
strong face seemed. It was as though he had seen her before, like an old friend from years past.

Then he caught sight of the two figures trailing along at the woman’s heels.

“Oh.” Was all he could manage as the woman approached, his heart squeezing in his chest and his
breath hiccupping violently. Fili and Kili walked just behind her, their expressions a mix of gravity
and concern as they scanned around the throne for Bilbo and his nephew. The younger prince
noticed Frodo first, making an aborted attempt to run to the child before his brother pulled him
back, forcing him in line behind his mother. Kili didn’t look pleased, but he relented, his gaze
trained on where Balin held the shireling and his expression dark.

At that moment he knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that the woman the two princes followed
was their mother and, as it were, King Thorin’s sister; Lady Dis, princess of Erebor. Putting a name
to the face caused in him a sudden burst of clarity, and he found himself idly thinking that he now
knew where the brothers had inherited their fierce, sculpted beauty.

Finally Bilbo forced himself to meet the dwarf woman’s gaze head on, only to find that her focus
had shifted. As she reached the end of the aisle she turned from Thorin, tunic fluttering out behind
her when she walked directly up to where Balin stood. The hobbit-ling in his arms had gone quiet,
his small eyes blown wide while he watched the new comers. It seemed the child hadn’t seen Fili
and Kili just yet, completely taken by the princess as she drew closer.

When she came to a stop at Balin’s front Frodo suddenly seemed to recognize Dis for what she
was, a mother, and his face once again crumpled miserably. He let out a choked sobbing noise,
reaching out to her from Balin’s grasp with his arms extended and his hands curling at the air in
small, aborted grabbing motions.
Dis’ expression softened immediately, her disposition sweet when she bent down to where the hobbit babe was clutched, scooping him up immediately into her arms with a soft noise of reassurance. “There, there, little one.” She soothed, her hand instantly coming to rub up and down Frodo’s back. He clutched at her desperately, his small head tucked up firmly beneath her chin. “That’s it.”

The room was silent for the time that she stood there, humming and rocking back and forth, smoothing her thick fingers along the expanse of the shireling’s trembling spine, until he began to calm.

Bilbo felt as though his heart would shatter at the sight, overwhelmed by the strange mix of relief and gut wrenching sorrow that washed over him. It had been months since Frodo had last interacted with a strong, motherly figure, even longer since he’d felt real affection from one.

While Bilbo had done the best he could to serve the roles of his nephew’s late parents, he knew that sometimes he was a poor substitute at best. Fili and Kili did wonders to fill the gap from their loss, but when they were absent, he at times felt helpless to provide Frodo with the comfort that he so desperately needed.

Shaking his head he forced himself out of his thoughts with a shuddering breath. He focused instead on where Dis stood, Frodo in her arms; watching the way the shireling slowly began to relax and feeling the tight vice that had squeezed around his chest begin to ease in turn.

Fili and Kili had followed their mother over to Balin, hovering at her side, their gazes flicking between where she held the shireling, to their Uncle, to where Bilbo stood, shaking. He could see the way they longed to come to him, their expressions crestfallen and their hands fisted at their sides. He tried to assure them the best that he could, offering a weak smile and a small nod of the head as if to say, ‘it’s alright, I’m okay.’

They hardly seemed convinced, but they settled, standing silently at their mother’s heels, their eyes constantly flicking back to find his own. Dis seemed to hold a real sway of power in these halls, the entire chamber watching her movements with baited breath. Even Thorin had gone completely still, his body frozen and his complexion washed white with panic.

Bilbo couldn’t help but sag slightly in relief at the thought that there were at least some things that still got through to the King Under the Mountain.

After what seemed like hours the shireling calmed completely in Dis’ hold, curling into her chest and pressing his face against the soft fabric of her tunic. Only then did the princess turn her attention back to the rest of the room, one arm propped beneath the shireling’s rear to keep him positioned on her hip.

When her gaze finally dragged over to his own Bilbo felt an involuntary shudder course through him. She was so striking in her features; Kili’s jaw with Fili’s prominent nose, and Thorin’s dark tresses with just the lightest glimmer of silver sprayed throughout it. He swallowed, licking his lips in a nervous gesture and bowing his head politely. When he rose he found that she was smiling at him, and he couldn’t help but return the gesture, pouring as much gratitude into it as he could manage.

_Her eyes were impossibly sweet for how fiercely she carried herself_, he decided as she gazed at him, her lips still quirked up softly. Then her gaze dropped to his chest and she frowned. Bilbo blinked, looking down and realizing that he’d been clutching at his breast over his aching heart, his injured forearm exposed, bloodied bandages bared to the room.
Instantly her demeanor shifted and she glanced over her shoulder, her lips thinning into a disapproving scowl when she caught Thorin Oakenshield in her sights.

“Kili, if you would.”

The young prince immediately obeyed when his mother called for him, coming to hover at her side. Frodo released his hold on the woman readily as Kili came up behind him, turning to wrap his arms around the archer with a desperate whine.

“Alright little one,” he cooed, folding the shireling up against his chest and kissing the top of his head, holding to him desperately, “I have you now, everything is alright.”

“Uncle Bilbo.” Frodo whined, the words ringing throughout the room despite being muffled by the archer’s tunic.

Fili stiffened at the sound, his gaze meeting his mother’s imploringly. Dis gave a firm nod and her eldest son dashed towards where Bilbo stood, his expression stricken.

The hobbit sucked in a shuddering breath, opening his arms to Fili when the dwarf slammed into him, dragging him bodily into a tight embrace. Bilbo made a choked noise, the sound wet and ragged, his hands clamoring for purchase across the bigger man’s shoulders. They didn’t say anything, not with such a grand audience watching; instead Fili just held him close, pulling at the fabric of his tunic desperately, as if he was afraid the Halfling would vanish.

“I’m okay.” Bilbo managed to force out, his breathing easing to something slower, more calm. That got a nod out of the dwarf, and instantly he could feel his crushing embrace start to relax.

The prince drew away and cupped his smooth, rounded face with one hand, searching his eyes for a moment with the tight downturn of his lips. Bilbo leaned into the touch and brought a hand up to cover Fili’s own, relaxing where he stood.

Only when Kili finally stepped up to Bilbo’s side, framing the hobbit between him and his brother, did Fili finally pull back completely.

Neither brother moved far after that, standing one at each side of him, Frodo cradled up to the younger prince’s throat. Instantly Bilbo felt a wash of relief slam into him, tension slowly starting to seep back out of his frame with the steady rhythm of his breath. Thorin’s words were still fresh, raw and grating in the back of his mind, but he would not allow them to cast doubt on the family that he had worked so hard for.

When he finally came back to himself enough to glance back up to the rest of the room, Bilbo found Dis watching the four of them, her expression fond. He flushed at the attention, offering her his best attempt at a smile and just barely managing to school back the quiver in his lips. Her expression changed slightly at that, still soft and welcoming, but with a harder edge to her gaze. She waited long enough to be sure that the group of them were composed and safely reunited before she snapped her head back around, her narrowing eyes picking out her brother instantly. The expression on her striking features was positively scalding, her lips curling up in a snarl and her hands finding her strong hips, bracing there.

“Since when,” she began, her voice rising with each step she took towards the king, “does the mighty line of Durin pride itself in humiliating friends and bringing small babes to tears, hm?”

“I may have called him that once, but Bilbo Baggins has not been my friend in many years.” Thorin responded, his tone still bitter, only now lacking the vicious conviction from earlier. The King
Under the Mountain watched his sister carefully, his expression guarded and his posture stiff with something like fear. “He comes back to my kingdom, by my own generous will, and yet he does not so much as appear before me—”

“If you had but given Mister Baggins the opportunity I am sure he would have informed you that they were attacked this morning, by orcs, well into the farmlands surrounding Erebor. Not even a full day’s ride from here, Thorin.” The king looked almost guilty at that, wincing away from his sister’s dangerous tone. “He would have told you that they nearly lost one of their guards, that Bilbo himself was injured, and as it appears, still has yet to be properly treated.”

She gestured towards where Bilbo stood, his injured arm dangling at his side. “Have you even looked at him Thorin? He’s bleeding through his wrappings for Mahal’s sake.” Dis continued on, her eyes narrowing. “Do you even know how he happened upon such a wound?”

At Thorin’s slow, hesitant shake of his head the woman growled, shoving right up in her brother’s face. “He was saving Kili from certain death; my youngest child, your sister-son.”

The king’s eyes widened slightly and he looked over towards where the four of them were standing. He didn’t look to Bilbo, his gaze immediately finding the younger of the two princes. “Kili,” He murmured, his expression falling to a wave of concern, “is that true?”

Bilbo flicked his gaze up to the archer at his side, watching Kili shift his grip on Frodo, allowing the shireling to bury his face further into the crook of his throat. The prince’s jaw locked and he regarded his uncle darkly, anger suddenly burning in his eyes. “He did,” the archer managed, visibly struggling to keep his demeanor calm, “not for the first time, might I remind you.”

Thorin stiffened at that, and Bilbo could practically see the objection forming in his head, only then Dis interjected, her tone firm and authoritative. “You have terrorized the hobbits enough already this evening,” she snapped, turning away from him and starting back towards where her sons stood, “I will not stand idly by and watch you further humiliate the man who gave us our home back.”

Instantly her brother was objecting, scrambling to shout something after her in Khuzdul. Dis ignored him completely, finally coming to a stop in front of the four of them, her gaze trained on Bilbo. “It is a pleasure to finally meet you Mister Baggins.” She greeted, her voice low but her expression kind. “My only wish is that it were under better circumstances.”

The hobbit offered her the small, ghost of a smile, feeling Fili’s hand tighten slightly where it was bracketed around him. “A sentiment we both share.”

She nodded to him, reaching out and gently clasping him on the shoulder, before glancing between her sons at his side. “Take Mister Baggins to my chamber and properly dress his wound. I will be along shortly with Thorin, as well as the rest of your old company, and then we are going to resolve this thing once and for all.” She stated firmly, reaching up to touch each of her boys’ faces, cupping them lightly before pulling away. “I will not have any more heartbreak in our family over this.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Kili nodded to his mother, before frowning and tightening his grip on the shireling in his arms, “though, I really don’t think we should be exposing Frodo to any more if this.”

Fili immediately nodded, glancing at where his brother held the hobbit-ling. “I agree,” he flicked his gaze down to Bilbo at his side, his tone questioning, “I think it might be best for Frodo to have a visit with Dasil in sick bay?”
The older hobbit made a sound of agreement where he stood, swallowing and flicking his gaze back up to Dis. The woman straightened, her frame effectively blocking Thorin from his sights. “Thank you.”

“Think nothing of it.” She assured him softly, carefully reaching out to him. His first instinct was to flinch, still on edge from earlier, before he forced himself to calm. Her hand gently brushed over the braid in his curls, the tips of her fingers roving over the intricate carvings of the wooden bead, fastened to the end. “We are family now, after all.”

Bilbo felt a hot flush of happiness flood through him at that, his cheeks warming with a bright blush. He didn’t get the chance to respond, however, before she was ushering the three of them back towards the exit of the chamber.

“How go. Go on.” She watched them start off, pausing to give the back of Frodo’s head an affectionate ruffle. The child drew away from Kili long enough to smile at her and offer her a wave, before he tucked his face back beneath the archer’s chin.

“What is this!” Thorin’s voice boomed out from behind them and on instinct Bilbo froze, halting suddenly where they walked. Fili merely tightened his grip, urging the hobbit along past the crowds of wide eyed stares, the surrounding dwarves regarding them cautiously.

“I did not give them permission to leave!”

“They do not need your permission, they have mine.” Dis snarled back from behind them, her tone dangerous. They were just about to the doors, and no one had yet tried to stop them, nothing but the woman’s voice chasing after them at their heels. “I saw fit to save my sons the trauma of witnessing this. If you do not want an audience, I would suggest you do the same and dismiss your open court, else they will simply be forced to endure it; because you and I, brother, are having words, whether you like it or not.”

The guards at the doors hesitated slightly when the four of them approached, their gazes flicking back to where the king stood, engaged in heated argument with his sister. One snarling growl from Fili sent them scrambling into action, however, and soon the four of them were slipping out of the massive chamber and into the halls beyond.

“…seen such disrespectful behavior in all of my life…that flimsy metal thing you have fastened to your forehead does not give you authority to be a complete and total arse-”

The doors were shut on Dis’ snarling rant behind them, a gusting sigh of relief escaping Bilbo before he could stop it. He sagged against the grip that Fili had around him, his heart still thrumming painfully in his chest.

“Bilbo!”

He blinked up just in time to see Bofur and Ori dashing over, Nori and Gandalf close at their heels. The young scribe looked the most stricken, his eyebrows pinched down in concern.

“Are you alright?” Ori gasped, coming to a stop in front of the hobbit, his hands fluttering about nervously. “We heard the shouting—”

“I’m alright, I can assure you that.” Bilbo eased, swallowing and licking at his lips nervously. “Though this isn’t the end of that particular conversation. The lady Dis has asked for us to gather in her chamber to talk, all of us.”

Nori frowned, uncrossing his arms where he stood at his brothers back and regarding the hobbit
with a raised brow. “What do you mean?”

“All of the original company.” Bofur interjected, his expression carefully neutral. At Bilbo’s nod the toymaker let out a sigh, rubbing a hand up over his mouth. “They’re all scattered ‘bout the mountain today, but I’m sure between the three of us, we’ll be able to round ’em all up.”

“If you could, we would be eternally grateful.” Fili stated, his posture relaxing slightly. “We want to try and get Bilbo straight to our mother’s rooms.”

“You can leave it to us.” Nori assured him, offering them a firm nod of his head.

Bilbo offered the three of them a smile, his gaze finally landing on Bofur. “Thank you.”

The toymaker simply waved at him dismissively. With that the three dwarves bid their momentary farewells, heading off down various passages in the massive city, off in search of their missing companions.

Feeling slightly reassured the hobbit turned his attention to Gandalf, looking to the tall man with a pleading smile. “Would it be possible for me to ask a favor of you, before you come to join us in Lady Dis’ chambers?”

“Anything, my old friend.” The wizard offered him, readjusting his grip on his staff with the slight incline of his head in the hobbit’s direction.

“Would you be able to take Frodo down to the sick bay? There should be a group of three guards there that we travelled with, Ragnar, Dalil and Foseil. Ragnar was just admitted this morning, but the other two know Frodo quite well.” He couldn’t help but turn and reach out to his nephew where he was curled against Kili’s throat, his hand carefully working through the young shireling’s curls. “They will keep him company until we’re able to retrieve him.”

Frodo drew away from Kili slightly at his Uncle’s touch, his expression crestfallen. He didn’t fight this time, simply clung to the archer with a hard quiver of his lips. “Do I have to go, Uncle Bilbo?”

The older hobbit made a sympathetic noise in the back of his throat, gently brushing Frodo’s bangs back from across his brow. “I am afraid so little one,” he offered, running his fingers down to cup the child’s soft cheeks, “we won’t be long though, then we can all have a nice hot bath together, and have something good to eat, alright?”

The shireling seemed hesitant, but relented none the less. When Gandalf approached to draw him out of Kili’s arms he went easily, wrapping his little hands in the wizard’s cloak instead.

Once he had the child in hand Gandalf nodded to Bilbo and the two princes. “I will see that he gets to your companions safely.”

“Thank you.” The hobbit felt Fili’s arm tighten around him, Kili slipping right up against his other side. He caught his nephew’s eyes and blew him a kiss, waving even as the brothers started to move, ushering him down a hallway off to the side. “I love you, you be good okay?”

“Okay.” Frodo looked crestfallen even as he waved to the three of them, Fili and Kili both pausing long enough to blow the small child kisses where he was clutched in Gandalf’s arms.

Only once they completely out of sight did Bilbo stop waving, his arm falling down limply to his side. He felt exhausted, both physically and emotionally, his whole body a mess of tension and nerves.
They didn’t say anything as they walked along the expansive corridors of the Lonely Mountain; though Fili and Kili did make a noted effort to stay close to his side, guiding him gently along the torch-lit floors. The route was becoming familiar, his mind skipping over the sights he recognized while they pushed deeper into the heart of the city.

It seemed to take no time at all to be back at the brothers’ room this time, Bilbo recognizing the intricately carved entrance way almost immediately. They didn’t stop there, however, pushing on further down the hallway, past a series of chambers until they reached a towering set of double doors.

If Bilbo had found Fili and Kili’s room impressive, it truly paled in comparison to the grandeur that was their mother’s.

High arching ceilings pinched together in decorative rib vaults, the smooth stone arching up to a central dome. A massive chandelier hung from the very top of the rounded structure, dangling with a bright glow of candlelight on gold. The whole structure was a marvel to him, his eyes wide and his neck craning while he glanced about.

“Bilbo.”

Kili’s voice drew him out of his daze, and blinking he realized he was no longer at the brothers’ sides. The younger of the two waved him over from where he’d wandered off, directing him down a hall from the sitting room they’d entered into and towards a smaller, more brightly lit chamber. Bilbo found himself maneuvered into a seat by the edge of a large bath, Kili’s hands firm on his shoulders while his brother moved off to retrieve the medical kit his mother had spoken of.

He had been barely seated for more than a moment when the archer suddenly drew back. “Oh!” He patted down his front, fishing something out of one of his pockets and holding his fist out to Bilbo. “I almost forgot about this.”

He turned his hand up, opening his fingers to reveal the single, golden band that lay nestled in his palm. Bilbo let out a sigh of relief and held out his hand for the ring, glad that his one, remaining material treasure was still safe and sound.

When the archer didn’t immediately turn it over, however, he frowned. “Kili?”

The sound of his name seemed to snap the dwarf out of his daze, eyes finally raising from where he had the ring cradled in his hand. He blinked at Bilbo, before a sound of realization escaped him. “Oh, right. Yes, this is yours.” He reached out, slowly and hesitantly dropping the band of metal into the hobbit’s waiting grip, watching as Bilbo frantically tucked it away into the breast pocket of his tunic. “Sorry, I forgot to return it earlier.”

The hobbit leveled him with a calculating look, feeling slightly reserved, before he slowly relaxed, reaching out and cupping Kili’s face affectionately. “It couldn’t be helped, what with all of the action we’ve seen since this morning.” He leaned forward and pressed their lips together in a firm kiss. “Thank you, for keeping it safe for me.”

The archer drew back with a smile, his tongue slipping out between his teeth slightly. “You are most welcome.”

Bilbo felt his own lips quirk up brightly, shaking his head as he settled down where he sat, glancing at his injured arm. The Lady Dis had been correct, he had bled almost completely through his bindings, leaving the fabric moist with dark crimson liquid.
“I hope she has a needle in there,” he remarked idly when the blond prince returned to kneel in front of him, “I would like to stitch this up if I could.”

Fili frowned from where he knelt, watching the hobbit with furrowed brows. “We were just going to re-wrap it for now, have someone see to it properly later-”

“I promise you, I will be fine.” The hobbit assured him softly, gently urging the prince to open up the kit. “I am fairly practiced at this by now.”

The two dwarves shared a look, Fili hesitating even as he drew a curved needle from amidst the supplies, eying Bilbo carefully. “You will let us help, won’t you?”

He couldn’t help the warm swell of affection that flooded through him at that, smiling softly while he reached out to pluck the needle and sterile thread from the dwarf. “Of course.” He leaned forward, pressing his mouth to Fili’s chastely. “I will always welcome your aid.”

He drew back, turning to Kili and setting his supplies on his lap. The archer leaned in to steal his own quick kiss, before he began to slowly help unravel the strips of Fili’s tunic from where they were bound around Bilbo’s arm.

Setting about stitching up his forearm was as horrendous as he’d originally anticipated, though he plowed through it easily enough; ever since his fall in Mirkwood, most pain seemed to give him little bother.

Fili and Kili were by him every step of the process, offering help whenever they could. One would keep the sides of the wound pinched firmly together while he worked the needle through them, the other would help to pull the sutures taught, trying in vain to ease the hard tremble of his fingers.

By the time he finally finished Bilbo found he no longer had the coordination left to tie the final knot, his hands shaking with the pain and adrenaline. Luckily Fili took immediate notice, snatching up the last of the sterile thread and securing it firmly, much to the hobbit’s immediate relief. He sagged to the side, finding Kili already ready and waiting to brace against him, supporting his limp frame.

The archer was murmuring things to him softly, lips pressing into the thick tufts of his honey blond curls and his hands rubbing soothing patterns across the expanse of his small back.

“Are you alright?” Fili asked him softly, bringing up a knife to cut off the excess thread and scooping up a thick roll of fresh cloth bandages. “You’ve lost all of the color in your cheeks.”

“Yes, I am. I just-” He let out a shuddering breath, holding his arm up again for the dwarf to wrap, wincing at the tight squeeze of fabric against his raw flesh. His chest still felt tight, a low hum of nerves and anxiety riding in his belly, causing his whole body to shudder. “I’m feeling a bit shaken up, is all.”

“As you have every right to be.” The blond prince assured him, continuing to bind the cloth up until he hit the juncture of the hobbit’s elbow. He tucked the fabric into itself, fastening it securely before he shifted, snatching up Bilbo’s hand instead and squeezing there firmly. “Thorin had no right to put you through that.”

“And in front of Frodo no less.” Kili growled, straightening slightly but keeping an arm wrapped around the hobbit’s waist. “Never in my life have I ever been so furious with that man. I don’t give a damn if he is our uncle, and the king, I will not see you treated so horrifically-”

“It’s alright.” Bilbo assured them, finding himself choking up despite his best efforts. “It truly is
not his fault. This is not your Uncle, this is a man who is unwell, a man who needs help. I don’t hate him for what he’s done,” he swallowed, blinking hard against the sting in his eyes, “I doubt I could, even if I tried.”

Both brothers stared at him silently at that, looking shocked and even somewhat confused. Only then Fili let out a noise of disbelief, his head shaking slowly. “Even after all of this, you’d still defend him?”

Bilbo stuttered slightly, his eyes flicking between the two princes. “Of course.” He managed finally, shrugging his shoulders self-consciously. “Thorin is a good man and a good King; but this gold fever has just about taken him completely.”

He reached out to the archer, taking his hand so that he now held onto them both, squeezing firmly. “He is our family. The only thing I want is to see him well again.”

There was another beat of silence, before Kili tightened his fingers where they were entwined with the hobbit’s. “You never cease to amaze us Bilbo.” He murmured, his voice thick with something akin to wonder. The young dwarf pushed up, pressing their mouths together in a series of quick, chaste kisses. “What did we ever do to deserve someone as wonderful as you?”

“You came back for me.” Bilbo told them frankly, licking his lips when the archer finally drew back. He glanced over to where Fili sat on his other side, squeezing the blond’s hand. “You faced all of the hardships of that arduous journey and you came back for me.”

His throat felt tight, his heart fluttering in his chest and a hot blush burning across his cheeks when he finished. “You brought me home.”

Fili made a broken noise, shifting forward where he knelt until he was close enough to steal his own set of kisses, pressing forward with a growing sense of desperation that had the hobbit groaning.

He could feel Kili shifting up at his side, the younger prince’s mouth sliding along the curve of his ear while Fili kissed him deeper, harder, leaving him breathless.

He allowed himself to get lost in the sensation, his mind spinning and his heart swollen with the dull ache of longing. The tension was slowly leaving his tight frame, all of the anxiety and nerves slipping out of him between the slick slide of their lips.

Kili had worked his way down to his throat, nibbling lightly on the juncture of his shoulder when a loud knock suddenly sounded from the distant sitting room. The noise startled the three of them out of their daze, Fili drawing away first while his brother lingered, leaning up to press one last chaste kiss to the underside of the hobbit’s jaw.

Both brothers rose to stand, Kili already starting towards the door while Fili reached out, offering a hand to the Halfling where he sat. Bilbo accepted it without hesitation, allowing himself to be dragged up and into the blond dwarf’s chest, staggering slightly on his feet.

The prince draped an arm around Bilbo’s waist, his fingers curling over the smooth curve of his hip and digging in there firmly. The sensation was familiar, comforting, and the hobbit couldn’t help but lean back into the dwarf’s hold.

With a shuddering sigh he focused on steeling himself for what lay ahead, his teeth digging in to the swell of his lower lip.

“You are certain you’re alright?” Fili asked him softly, taking note of the nervous habit with a
slight frown.

“I am.” The hobbit assured him quickly, releasing his lip and offering the prince a smile. “I just want this to be over with.”

“I know.” The look that Fili flashed him was impossibly fond, his hand tightening ever so slightly when they heard the door open in the far room, Kili inviting the newcomers into their mothers chambers. At the sound the dwarf turned to him, his expression questioning. “Are you ready?”

Bilbo licked his lips, his heart giving a hard lurch in his chest and his stomach flipping painfully.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

*TBC*...
Chapter Summary

Bilbo finally faces the entire company after three long years in exile. With Fili, Kili, and Lady Dis at his side he faces Thorin and the gold fever in order to win his right to live with his family in Erebor once more.

Chapter Notes

The last five pages of this have not been Beta-d

I have to be at a gig now so I have to go but here I'm so sorry I suck and didn't post before please don't hate me I love you all you are amazinggg I will proof this later.

Surprisingly, it was Ori who arrived first, Dori and Dwalin at his heels.

They had just barely managed to settle into the sitting room when the three dwarves arrived, Dori and Dwalin immediately regarding Bilbo with a strange sort of tension. While they greeted him genuinely enough, they hovered around him awkwardly, as if he were someone strange and unfamiliar. They lacked the warmth that Ori and Bofur had showed him, or even the steadfast support he’d received from Nori. He looked to them imploringly, unable to help the feeling of dejection that washed over him when his old friends struggled to so much as meet his gaze.

Fili kept his mind off of it well enough, tucking the Halfling against his side on the love seat, an arm wrapped around his small waist while Ori and Kili went about gathering extra chairs from the dining room down the hall. Bilbo had objected at first, offering his assistance, but Fili had held firm to him, crowding him up close to his side.

After a while the hobbit finally relented and allowed himself to simply relax back in older prince’s hold, self-conscious of the looks Dwalin was throwing him. The warrior had settled down into the seat offered to him by Ori, the young scribe flushing before he ducked back into the other room to fetch more. The dwarrow’s gaze was fixed firmly on Fili’s hands, watching them with each shift they made along Bilbo’s frame. His expression was complex with just a hint of disapproval, dragging his brows down over the bridge of his nose.

Whatever it was that had managed to set the warrior on edge, Fili didn’t seem to care in the slightest. He simply wrapped himself more firmly around the Halfling while he began to engage in conversation with the scowling dwarrow, inquiring about Erebor’s current state of affairs. Bilbo had objected to him by Ori, the young scribe flushing before he ducked back into the other room to fetch more. The dwarrow’s gaze was fixed firmly on Fili’s hands, watching them with each shift they made along Bilbo’s frame. His expression was complex with just a hint of disapproval, dragging his brows down over the bridge of his nose.

By the time Nori arrived with Bifur, Oin, and Gloin in tow, all of the chairs were set up and the atmosphere in the room was much more pleasant. As they all began to find their seats Ori settled
on the couch with his oldest brother, turning the conversation to the topic of Bilbo’s young nephew, Frodo. The scribe had only caught the barest of glimpses of the child in all of the chaos earlier, but he’d seen enough, it seemed, to be immediately enamored by the small boy.

At the mention of Frodo Kili had instantly reappeared, greeting their newly arrived companions before immediately starting in on a lengthy explanation of the joy and wonder that was Bilbo’s little nephew. While he started to tell the room all about the tiny shireling he made a point to come over and wiggle his way into the love seat alongside where his brother and the hobbit already sat.

Bilbo had let out a noise of shock and embarrassment when the archer first reached down, lifting him bodily into his arms in order to switch their positions, leaving Kili pressed firmly to Fili’s side, the Halfling sprawled across their laps.

There had been a few choked noises of shock at that, and Bilbo had to fight back a sudden surge of spluttering indignation. When he twisted to gape up at the archer, however, Kili looked beyond pleased with himself, a bright grin spread across his stubbled cheeks. The young prince carried on with his description of Frodo, recounting the boy’s archery skills with a bright glow of pride that had Bilbo relaxing despite himself. He could hardly help the warm sensation of contentedness that filled him, fighting through the shattered nerves that still rocked his small frame.

Bilbo shifted where he was sprawled over the brothers’ laps, leaning up towards Fili and sliding his face close to the older prince’s ear, whispering to him.

"Is this really okay?" He hissed, fighting the tension that tried to claw its way back up his spine when he thought back to the, conversation, he’d had with Thorin earlier. With a nervous lick of his lips he glanced back over his shoulder, wincing at the shocked expression on some of the dwarves’ faces. “Oin looks as though he is going to faint, and I am fairly certain Dwalin is plotting my painful and immediate end.”

Fili chuckled, tipping his head down to press his mouth to the hobbit’s firmly. The contact caused Bilbo to start, making a sharp noise of surprise before he slowly relaxed into the prince’s hold. Fili kissed him soundly, his large hands curled around the Halfling’s legs where they rested in his lap. When he finally drew back they were both panting breathlessly, their eyes half lidded and a fiery blush blooming across Bilbo’s cheeks.

“They are merely being protective.” The prince assured him softly, reaching up and squeezing the Halfling’s face gently. “Courtship beads are noticed fairly quickly in our culture, and it is quite common for dwarves to treat the potential suitors of family members with suspicion. Most of the company consider us their kin by some means or another, so really it is to be expected.”

“How is it that this is the first I’m hearing of such things?” Bilbo frowned, regarding Fili with a slight air of disapproval. “I was not aware that I had to fight for the hands of you and your brother.”

“Fight is a bit of a strong word for it,” Fili assured him, wincing slightly at the frown the hobbit was flashing him, “they just want the best for us.”

Bilbo considered that for a moment, before his expression slowly melted to something softer. “I don’t suppose I can fault them for that.” He murmured, before letting out a puffing breath. “However, they are just going to have to adjust quickly. I am not a mere suitor to you boys, and us hobbits highly value the affections out of intended.”

Fili leaned forward again, smiling down at the hobbit before he brushed their lips back together in a chaste kiss. “A fact that Kili and I have understood for quite some time, and something that we love and embrace.” The prince murmured, pulling back to angle up and press his mouth firmly to
the top of the Halfling’s nose, “however, while dwarves are fiercely physical with their partners in private, public displays of affection are relatively rare.”

“Oh.” Bilbo suddenly felt foolish, his face heating up and his head ducking slightly. For hobbits, courtships were expected to be proper and decent affairs, yet partners were still incredibly intimate with one another, even outside the home. “Oh I hadn’t thought-”

“It’s alright, there is really no need to sound so apologetic.” The prince assured him carefully, shifting his hands to squeeze at Bilbo’s cheeks, his thumbs rubbing soothing circles into the soft round of his flesh. “Our friends and our family will come to terms with what we have between us. Kili and I wouldn’t have our relationship change, not for the world.”

The hobbit stared at him, feeling slightly stunned for a moment, before a bright grin twitched up his features. “Thank you.” He murmured, pressing back up to steal another peck of the lips. “You two are far too good for me.”

Fili leveled him with a look at that, visibly unimpressed. “Don’t be starting on that now,” the prince chided, chasing after him for one last kiss, “you’ve done more than enough to deserve all of our affections, and then some. Now, why don’t you stop all of this worrying, and try to relax some?”

“Relax?” Bilbo scoffed, glancing over his shoulder to where Dwalin still sat, a deep scowl set across his brow. With a resigned shake of his head he found himself shifting back to lounge across both brothers laps once more. “If you say so.”

“I do say so.” Fili shot back, dropping his hands to curl around the Halfling’s shins, squeezing firmly. “In fact, I insist.”

Bilbo couldn’t help the easy smile that slid across his cheeks at that. He relaxed back against the arm rest of the chair behind him, humming happily when Kili dropped an arm to curl over his stomach, holding there possessively.

The young archer was telling the room at large about the birthday they’d been too at the Gamgee house; about the tiny shirelings that had swarmed the dwarves with bright eyes and tiny, grabbing hands. Kili’s enthusiasm and his pointedly adorable descriptions soon had the room won over almost completely. Even Dwalin had started to relax, his expression softening where he sat, listening attentively.

Bilbo snuggled himself down further against the dwarves beneath him, letting his head loll forward to drop on Kili’s chest and tucking his legs right up against Fili’s stomach. He was still exhausted, emotionally frayed and wound far too tight for his own good; yet as he slowly began to relax, giving in to the all consuming comfort that seemed to surround him.

He let his eyes droop closed, cheek nuzzling up to rest directly over the archer’s breast, listening to the steady beat of his heart beneath his ear. His body felt heavy, weighed down by the trying events of the day, and the long, arduous journey that they’d only just left behind them. Despite his exhaustion he knew he would not get much opportunity to rest; not until this conflict with Thorin was brought to resolution.

So for the moment he allowed himself a brief reprieve, feeling his breath steady and his mind drift off to a warm, dark abyss.

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He hadn’t realized how soundly he’d been asleep until a figure was leaning over him, whiskery hair scraping at his cheek.

“I’m afraid it is time for you to get up Bilbo.” Fili soothed, pressing his lips chastely to the side of the hobbit’s jaw. Bilbo made a small noise, almost like groan, when the blond prince drew back, blinking and rubbing at his eyes sleepy.

“M’sorry, I nodded of.” He murmured, shifting where he still sat curled up on Kili’s lap, the older of the two brothers hovering over them in the chair.

“Don’t apologize, it’s more than alright.” The archer assured him at his back, shifting forward and helping the hobbit ease off of his thighs. “You obviously needed the chance for a rest.”

“We all do though.” Bilbo protested quietly, allowing himself to be gently eased to his feet none the less. He shook himself out of his hazy, sleep-fogged state, blinking about the room and noting that a weighted silence seemed to have fallen around them. He stiffened, his hand immediately shooting out to curl in Fili’s tunic in front of him. He looked up to the blond warrior, mouthing silently to him, ‘Thorin is here?’

At the elder prince’s slow nod Bilbo felt his blood run cold. He forced himself to stay calm, taking in a long, slow breath and quickly straightening his shirt vest, beyond grateful that Fili’s larger frame blocked him from sight of the rest of the room. He had been preparing for this conversation for months, and yet now that it was finally upon him he found with a staggering slam of dread that he still wasn’t ready.

The hour was far too late, however, to be second guessing himself and his boys. So with another careful breath Bilbo finished straightening his blood-stained clothing, nodding to Fili and feeling Kili shift up behind him in turn. They moved together, coming to stand in front of the rest of the room.

With one quick glance about himself he found that Bofur had arrived with Bombur, as well as Gandalf, Dis, Balin, and of course...Thorin Oakenshield.

When he laid eyes on the dwarf king he felt his entire body lock up, that same petrifying fear that had haunted him in the throne room coming back full force. Thorin had apparently just arrived, standing hovering in the open doorway with Dis and Balin at his heels. He was watching his nephews where they stood with Bilbo, dutifully ignoring the small hobbit’s gaze.

“Allright now, that will be quite enough of that.” It was Dis who finally broke the awkward silence, grabbing her brother from behind and curling her hands around his shoulders. She pushed forward, forcing him bodily into the room and steering him towards a large empty seat by the sitting room’s hearth. “I’ll not have you awkwardly hovering in my own doorway for the sake of that insufferable pride of yours.”

Thorin’s expression was deadly, a dark scowl falling over his features, yet miraculously he went along with his sister’s insistent nudging. He fell into the cushioned seat heavily, his arms already folding across his chest and his jaw clenched tight, muscles tensing in his throat.

“The sight made Bilbo swallow hard, a cold sinking sensation of dread settling into his stomach. Thorin’s wild rage seemed to have been tempered somewhat by his sister’s presence, but something dark still burned in those piercing eyes, something chillingly like hate. The hobbit took in a shuddering breath and reached out to Fili and Kili at his sides subtly. He curled his fingers into their tunics for a moment, squeezing there before he forced himself to pull away, mindful of Thorin’s hard stare.
Dis released her brother’s shoulders, walking around him and moving towards where Bilbo stood with his sons at his side. She looked to both Fili and Kili in turn, her expression softening instantly to something affectionate and proud. The change was so startling that Bilbo found himself blinking up at her in awe; amazed that such a strong, regal dwarf could shift so effortlessly from domineering to maternal.

She looked genuinely happy for her boys, taking the time to lean down to each of them in turn, bringing their foreheads together firmly. Bilbo watched the interaction with a sharp burst of nostalgia, thinking to how Balin and Dwalin had greeted when he’d first met them back at Bag End. Dis was more gentle, moving from Fili to cup Kili’s cheeks and press their brows together, nudging him slightly with her nose before she drew back.

Both princes were grinning broadly when she pulled away, accepting her affections with an enthusiasm that brought a smile twitching unbidden up across Bilbo’s lips. He was so distracted by Fili and Kili that he failed to notice when Dis’ gaze shifted, unaware of her attention until he turned and met her eyes with a small start.

She simply smiled down at him and extended a hand, her eyes lighting up when he took it without hesitation. “I’m afraid I owe you an apology, as we never did get the chance to be formally introduced, Bilbo Baggins of the shire.”

The hobbit flushed, squeezing her fingers when they curled around his, offering her a small sheepish shrug of his shoulders. “We were not given opportunity, nothing that you could have possibly avoided.” He offered her a smile of his own, giving her hand a firm shake. “Besides you are hardly of need for introduction, I recognized you the moment I saw you, Lady Dis, Princess of Erebor.”

“Yes still,” the dwarf woman practically beamed, slowly releasing his hand and coming to clasp his shoulder instead, “it is a pleasure to finally meet the man who has so thoroughly stolen my sons’ hearts.”

Bilbo turned practically scarlet at that, ducking his head until his chin was tucked down into his chest. “The-” he swallowed, stumbling over the words slightly, “the pleasure is all mine I can assure you.”

“You are quite the modest one,” Dis commented idly, flicking her gaze up to her sons and raising her eyebrows, “especially considering that most of my kin owes you their lives.”

“Oh, well I-” The hobbit, licked his lips nervously and lowered his voice, still mindful of where Thorin sat across the room, “they are my family too, or at least they considered me as such at the time…what else was I to do but save them?”

Dis’ expression grew impossibly fonder after that and she stepped back slightly, evaluating him with a gentle gaze. “You are just as remarkable as my boys have led me to believe.” She nodded to him respectfully, her smile soft and easy. “We will have to spend some time getting to know one another, you and I; but for now I am afraid there are other issues that need to be discussed.”

Bilbo nodded, glancing around the rest of the silent room, noting that all eyes were trained on their frames, watching their interaction with baited breath. He bit his lip, resisting the urge to fall back behind Fili and Kili again, to avoid facing the conversation that he knew was coming.

Sure enough Dis drew away from the three of them, the stern mask falling back over her features while she regarded the rest of the room diplomatically. “By now I am sure you have all figured out why it is that I’ve asked you to gather here-”
Bilbo glanced around the room while the princess started to speak, meeting Bofur’s eyes first and relaxing slightly at the warm, reassuring smile the toymaker sent him. He scanned the rest of the company and found most met his eyes apologetically, or offered him small smiles. Even Dwalin’s soured expression had begun to melt away under the constant barrage of Ori’s firm looks, the scribe proving to be fiercely protective of their resident hobbit.

Bilbo found himself relaxing despite it all, reassured in the knowledge that some of his friends at least still cared for him; that maybe there was a chance to salvage his family here after all.

“-in the past two years that I have spent here under the mountain, I have been told a great deal about your company’s burglar, Mister Bilbo Baggins. From a surprising many I heard false, spiteful lies, that served to paint this brave man as something he is not. From my sons, and from a select few among you, however, I was given a much more realistic glimpse of who Mister Baggins is as a person.” She stepped forward into the center of the room, her attention now focused almost exclusively on Thorin. “Shortly after which, I petitioned my brother to have Fili and Kili sent to the shire, to retrieve an individual who I believe was greatly wronged by every person in this room.”

A general murmur broke out around them, Bilbo stiffening where he stood between the two princes. Kili reached out to him immediately, the younger dwarf stepping right up to his side, raising a hand to squeeze over his small shoulder. He relaxed at that, trying to focus on the feeling of the brothers at his sides, on his burning determination to keep his family together.

“Has he now?” Thorin spat back at his sister, his gaze flicking over to the Halfling where he stood. When he finally addressed the smaller man he did so with a forced sort of calm, his jaw clenched tight. “Tell me, how is it that you came to be wronged, Mister Baggins, when after committing a grievous offence against my people, you were allowed to return to the home you so longed for over the length of our company’s arduous journey?”

“I-” Bilbo swallowed, his heart seizing in his chest while he flicked his gaze around the room. All of the dwarves were staring at them now, Ori looking like he wanted nothing more to object to Thorin’s curt statement, Bofur’s jaw clenched tight and his eyes narrowed, fixed on their king. “I do not disagree that I caused your people some great harm in stealing away the Arkenstone, and I will not deny that I did once desire to return to bag end, a place I considered my home. Yet things have changed, I have changed. My home is no longer in the shire, my home is with my family, here. That is why I need Why?” Thorin snapped, his tone still dangerous but the raw strength of his wrath somewhat tempered by Dis’ presence. “Why now Burglar; after all of these years, do you finally choose to justify your betrayal?”

Bilbo was so taken aback by the absurdity of the statement that for a moment all he could do was stare at the King in open disbelief. When he finally managed to collect himself enough to respond his voice was trembling violently, tone wrought with raw emotion. “Do you really not remember robbing me of the chance to explain myself? Sending me away without so much as granting me audience at the end of that horrific battle?” His lips quivered and he clenched his jaw tightly, fighting back the surge of emotion that tightened in his throat. “You denied me the chance to speak, to even say goodbye.”

The king’s jaw locked, and there was a general rustle of movement about them, the company’s attention fixed on Bilbo where he stood in the heart of the sitting room. The hobbit swallowed at the darkness that still lingered in Thorin’s gaze, feeling exposed and vulnerable to the chilling hatred that broiled there.

“You forced me away from here, away from this company, who meant the world to me. When I left, I was not going home, I was leaving it.” He fought back the quiver of his lip, forcing his voice
to remain steady. “The shire may be home to most hobbits, but that is only because most hobbits live in the shire. This company is my family, and so in the tradition of my people, this mountain is my home; something I fought to reclaim with you, something that I gave up my entire lifestyle for, and would gladly do again.”

“You blame me then,” Thorin snapped, his brows pinching down over the bridge of his nose, “for sending you away after you committed such a grievous offense against me?”

“No, I do not begrudge you in the least; in fact, even at the time I did not expect you to react any differently.” The Halfling shook his head, rubbing his hand up over his mouth in a nervous gesture. “I understood the consequences of my actions when I first took the Arkenstone, and I do not regret that decision. I would have done anything to save you, all of you. For a time, you were the only people I called family.”

Bilbo swallowed, shaking his head and dropping his hand back down to his side. “In a way, I suppose I am glad you banished me all of those years ago, for if you hadn’t I fear I may have simply stayed in Erebor, with my new family, and I may never have heard news of my cousins’ passing. I would have never returned to bag end to bring my dear nephew Frodo into my life.”

“So why return?” The king rumbled, his voice still low and controlled, eyes trained on Dis where she stood, keeping a watchful eye on her brother. “Why follow Fili and Kili back along the long road to Erebor, when you had your blessed shire and a child to call your own? Why not stay where you could settle down with a woman of your own kind, why rob my nephews of the chance to have a real life, with a more worthy partner?”

Fili and Kili instantly made noises of objection at the hobbit’s heels, stilled only when Bilbo held a hand out to them, urging them back. Thorin’s words struck deep, a slice of pain that tore through his heart, causing his chest to squeeze painfully. These were fears he’d long since buried, left behind when he gave away his family home, forging the long trek back to Erebor once more. Now the king ripped them up to the surface, dragging them out of him one word at a time.

“You once understood the depth of my relationship with Fili and Kili.” He began, his words careful and his tone reserved. “There was a time when you even gave me your blessing—”

“A time long since past.” Thorin reminded him firmly.

The hobbit didn’t allow himself to be dissuaded, a swell of indignation bubbling up inside of him. He could feel Fili shift closer to him, the two brothers directly at his back, their hands pressing down over the curve of his spine, a comforting pressure. He let their presence be his strength, straightening and raising his chin to stare at the king head on, his expression serious and his heart swelling in his chest. “Since that time my affections for your nephews have only grown, exponentially so Thorin; beyond anything I can even put into words.” He swallowed, his face heating up but his expression deadly serious. “There could never be anyone else for me but them,” in tandem both brothers tightened their hands in the back of his tunic, their grips firm and constant, “I love them Thorin, and I will continue to love them until the day that I die.”

It was the first time that he’d said the word out loud, in Fili and Kili presence at the very least; and the reaction was instantaneous. He could hear the younger sucke in a quick gasp, his breath catching while Fili merely groaned, stepping impossibly closer until he was flush against Bilbo’s back. They were restraining themselves, that much he could tell, their bodies practically vibrating with the urge to pull him back into the comfort and safety of their embrace.

It was a confession that they hadn’t even had the opportunity to make yet, words that were meant to be shared in calm and comfort, away from prying ears. Bilbo regretted it almost immediately,
fighting the urge to take the statement back while he flicked his gaze about him nervously.

The rest of the room hummed with a mix of shocked and delighted responses, Ori actually beaming while Dwalin sat and gaped, shifting his attention between the hobbit and Thorin’s darkening gaze.

The king had fisted his hands over the armrests of his seat, his eyes narrowing and his teeth gritting together in a dangerous growl. “You dare to deem yourself worthy of their affections?” He shouted, anger lacing back into his tone and his entire body tensing with a vicious spur of rage. “You are nothing more than a fleeting fancy in their idle days of youth, you don’t deserve them Halfling, and you will never deserve them-”

“Thorin enough!”

A snarling shout sliced through the king’s tirade, cutting him off short and leaving him blinking in stunned silence over towards his sister; but it was not Dis that had spoken.

Bilbo’s head snapped back, his startled gaze finding Kili as the archer launched himself forward, his posture stiff and his gaze burning with unrestrained fury. The hobbit actually gasped at the sight, his heart lurching in his chest at the darkened expression that fell over the young prince’s. He had never seen Kili so angry, not in all the time that he had known him, even through the multitude of hardships they’d already endured.

The archer moved in front of Bilbo slightly, blocking him from his uncle’s fierce gaze and snapping at the man in a sharp, biting tone. “You have no idea, no clue the damage that you have caused us over the years.” The young prince gestured towards the older dwarf, jabbing his finger at him with a fierce sort of conviction. “You have been too wrapped up in riches and your obsession with that damnable rock to see all of the pain right in front of you, all of the hurt.”

Thorin looked completely taken aback for a moment, his eyes blown wide with shock and his mouth hanging slightly open. He seemed to take some time to process his nephew’s words, his expression slowly melting to something like startled disapproval. “Kili,” he hissed, pushing out of his chair and stalking forward to where the pair of them stood, “I am your uncle and your king, you have no right-”

“He has no right?!” Fili growled, suddenly halfway across the room and right in the older dwarf’s space, shoving himself between his Thorin and his brother. “You are the one that has no right. No right to treat Bilbo with such blatant dishonor, when he has done nothing but fight for our family since the day we barged uninvited through his front door-”

Bilbo felt his breath catch violently at Fili’s steadily raising tone, the blond’s shoulders a tight line and his hands dropping down to clench into fists at his sides. If Thorin had been shocked before, he was completely appalled now, actually stumbling back into his chair when the heir to the throne gave his foot a hard stomp, his voice echoing in a booming shout.

“-after everything that he has been forced to endure, you do not get to speak to him like that, not anymore, and certainly not in our presence!” Fili raged, his face flushed red and his entire body vibrating with tension. “You are as ignorant as you are stubborn uncle, but so help me if you try to hurt our hobbit again Kili and I will not stand idly by!”

“He betrayed us Fili!” Thorin snarled suddenly from where he sat once more, expression shifting in a heartbeat to something raw and brimming with hate. “He betrayed our people!”

“He did no such thing an’ ye know it!”
Bofur’s voice cut in so suddenly that Bilbo jumped where he stood, his heart jolting hard in his chest. The toymaker shoved up to his feet, his expression stark with fury on his friends behalf. “Bilbo gave up everything for our people, to take back Erebor, to save yer family.”

“You did not see him that day!” To everyone’s shock it was Ori’s voice that snapped up next, firm and echoing despite his usually quiet demeanor. The young scribe was trying to push up from his seat, stilled only by his brother’s firm hold on his tunic, Dori’s eyes widening slightly in panic. “I saw how much pain he was in, the damage he’d endured from the battle; but it was more than that, you devastated him Thorin.”

“How could you not even let him say goodbye-”

“Damage, what do you mean damage! No one ever mentioned any damage-”

“Haven’t we wronged him enough already-”

The room erupted into a series of concerned shouts, dwarves rising from their seats when they began to stand, drowning one another out in a spiraling mess of furious noise. Bilbo felt his chest tighten, his eyes scanning around frantically while the entire company devolved into a series of arguments, their postures tense and their voices angry.

This was nowhere near how he had planned for this conversation to go. No matter how unreasonable he was being, Bilbo never intended to cast blame on Thorin for the hardships he had endured. He had merely wanted this to be about forgiveness, about acceptance and understanding; not about creating further conflict and anger, like what was broiling through the deafening roar of voices around him.

Finally, when Bilbo could take it no longer, he forced himself forward, his hands finding Fili and Kili’s shoulders first, noting with a hard surge of relief that both immediately stilled and quieted at his touch. The brothers looked to him, concern creasing across their gazes in the chaos that surrounded them. Bilbo merely swallowed and shook his head, before he cleared his throat with a loud cough.

“Everyone!” He tried, calling out over the swell of voices and stepping into the center of the room, his eyes scanning about him. “That is quite enough!”

A few seemed to heed him, Balin, Oin and Gloin halting immediately to regard him in confusion. The voices were still raising, however, and soon he was shouting just to be heard. “I said enough!”

He could practically feel the tension in the air when the sharp swell of noise finally died down, all gazes suddenly fixed on his small frame. Bilbo sucked in a sharp breath, his face warming under the fierce attention. His stomach twisted nervously, his heart thudding against his ribs; he had to force back the panic before he was finally able to speak, clearing his throat with a cough. “We are not going to get anywhere like this.” He managed after a moment, his tone still thick with emotion. “It is not my intention to cast the blame on anyone here, or to seek retribution, or justice.”

When he swallowed his throat closed up painfully, causing his stomach to lurch. “All I seek here is understanding, and perhaps,” he swallowed, his hand reaching up to curl over his injured forearm, squeezing to ground himself with the pain, “if you felt so inclined...forgiveness.”

He looked up to Thorin at that, the king staring at him with his eyes blown wide. Still he made no move to interrupt Bilbo, the rest of the room watching on in deafening silence. The hobbit took it all as a sign to push forward, forcing himself to keep the steady gaze of the King Under the Mountain.
“I just want you to know what it meant for me to come back here, to understand what I went through when you sent me away.” His voice caught slightly and he coughed, his hand still squeezing down over his injured forearm. “To see the consequences I have ultimately suffered for my actions with the Arkenstone.”

Thorin’s gaze instantly dropped to the hobbit’s bandaged forearm, his expression turning incredulous. “A scraped arm is hardly consequence in comparison to the loss of my people’s greatest treasure.”

“How dare you—” Kili snarled, storming forward until his mother reached out, catching the front of his tunic and halting his advance on his uncle.

Dis wasn’t looking at her son, however, her eyes were trained instead on Thorin where he stood, her expression dark and dangerous. “You will allow Mister Baggins to finish his tale before you pass judgments, brother.” She snarled, her voice rumbling on a low growl. “Bear in mind this is the very man who saved not only your sorry hide, but also the lives of my two treasured sons; my only children. Whom, might I add, you recklessly endangered with that damnable pride of yours.”

The king’s mouth had dropped open during his sister’s tirade, his eyes widening while he scrambled for a response. “Dis, you do not understand—”

“What is it that I do not understand, hm?” She hissed, releasing her grip on Kili to gesture over at Thorin violently. “That you almost got yourself and your nephews killed; and do you know what that would have left me with Thorin? Nothing! I would have had no one. I would have been left alone in this miserable world to finally see the end of our so called glorious line of Durin.”

“I—” Thorin started, before he cut himself off sharply, his eyes dropping to fix on the ground. When he said nothing more Dis simply turned towards Bilbo, nodding at him to continue. The Halfling swallowed, his tongue darting nervously across his lips and his gaze flicking about the room.

“There’s nothing that I can tell you to make you understand what I have been through,” he licked his lips, looking over his shoulder to where Fili and Kili stood at his back, before he reached down to clasp at the fastenings of his tunic, “so I think it would be best for me to show you.”

With a quick tug he had the ties of his top undone, his heart fluttering nervously when the company began to shift and murmur amongst themselves.

“What’re ye doin’ lad?” It was Gloin who finally broke the silence, looking mildly scandalized when the hobbit tugged his tunic straight off and dropped it to the ground, leaving only his under shirt beneath.

“That is a good question, Halfling,” Thorin snarled in agreement, only to have his tone soften, tempered by his sister’s pointed glare, “where is the relevance in this?”

Bilbo forced himself to meet the King’s gaze, his hands fluttering around the waist band of his trousers, fingers bunching in his shirt where it was tucked within it. “Nothing that I can say to you will change the opinion you hold of me, that much I can tell.” He began, tugging at the fabric of his underclothes until he had the shirt un-tucked from the hem of his pants. “So I’m going to do the only thing I can,” he swallowed, nerves lurching and stomach flipping violently, his gaze flicking briefly back over his shoulder to where Fili and Kili stood, “I’m going to show you.”

“Show us—” Thorin sounded confused, his voice cutting off short with a sharp inhalation of breath
when Bilbo tugged the last layer of fabric up and off of his torso, letting it slip down to pile atop his tunic on the thick throw rug.

The way the king’s eyes widened was almost comical, his mouth dropping open and the color seeping from his cheeks as his gaze locked on the hobbit’s exposed flesh. The entire room went silent, baited breaths catching sharply when the last bare inches of his chest were exposed.

At first he could not even bring himself to raise his gaze from where he’d fixed it to the floor, feeling exposed and vulnerable in the flickering glow of candle light. He’d done this before, many times now; put his scars on display for all to see. Only now he had even more marks to add to the sea of fading scars, scattered across his chest.

He glanced down his front, noting the gnarled, circular puncture wound, now puckered and healed, that rested over his ribs. Instinctively he raised his good arm, pressing his palm down over the mark.

“Bilbo.”

The hobbit recognized Balin’s voice without so much as looking up; could hear the trembling emotion in the old dwarrow’s tone. He kept his gaze lowered, dropping his hand back down and clearing his throat a bit self-consciously. “Not all of it is from the battle,” he managed after a moment, glancing towards the bandage wrapped firmly around his forearm and giving his shoulder a small, half-shrug, “some are, mind you, but others are more...recent.”

“Can you still call him betrayer brother?” Dis piped up, her gaze fixed on the Halfling and her expression darkening. She rounded suddenly on her sibling then, her strong, bearded jaw clenching with her gritted teeth. “Can you still claim that you are the one innocent of any wrong doing, even after witnessing all of the harm that your actions have wrought?”

“Not all.” Kili cut in, his tone dark. The room cast curious eyes on the prince, even Dis finding him, her expression questioning.

“Surely ye don’-” Bofur looked positively devastated, his voice catching and his gaze fixed on the mess that was Bilbo’s chest, “surely ye don’ mean to say that there’s more?”

The hobbit’s jaw tensed, his teeth clenching together tightly. He couldn’t bring himself to respond, not right away, his hands dropping down to fist in the fabric of his trousers.

A hand came to settle on the small of his back, fingers spanning out in a comforting pressure against his spine. He leaned back into the touch, shuddering hard when Fili pushed forward to press against him, a solid line at his back.

“Show them Bilbo.” The blond prince murmured, leaning down to fit his lips against one of the hobbit’s ears. “They should understand...we all owe you that much.”

The hobbit let out a hitched breath, feeling Kili slide up beside his brother, the two princes a comfortable heat at his back. He leaned back into their touch, mentally steeling himself, his heart jumping painfully in his chest.

“Alright.” He finally relented, shoulders sagging. He leaned over, wrapping his fingers into the fabric of his pant leg and starting to tug it up, bunching it over the top of his knee. With each inch of skin revealed he felt his breath grow shorter, over-conscious of the scarred remains of his shin, the skin a line of puckered, bright crimson along where the bone had pierced through his flesh.

It was still easily the most raw of his wounds, overshadowed only by the fresh gore that still
stretched across his forearm; the gash opening him from wrist to elbow. He swallowed and looked away from the scar, still unsettled by the sight of it, even so long after it was healed.

The room around him was weighted with silence, the sensation draping heavily over the hobbit and leaving him squirming. He could feel the eyes that flickered across his frame, unable to help picking up the hitched gasps and hushed, Khuzdul curses as his companions took in his battered frame with disbelief.

“No one makes a journey that long without suffering a few scratches.” Bilbo finally murmured, breaking the heavy lull with a slight cough. “I can hold no one responsible for my injuries except for myself and the fates,” he swallowed, looking around nervously until he found Gandalf’s gaze, the wizard flashing him a reassuring nod, his expression carefully neutral, “I understood the consequences of every action I took, and I regret none of them; for without some of these marks, the people whom I care most for in this world would no longer be with me and that…that is just unfathomable.”

His words did little to ease the shocked faces of the company around him, Bombur going green and Oin gaping at his twisted scars in horror. Even Thorin seemed completely taken aback by the sheer amount of damage still evidenced across his reddened flesh. The king was staring at his leg, his mouth dropped open and his expression shifting to something entirely stricken.

Finally another voice broke the silence, Dis taking a step forward towards Bilbo, her fingers dropping down to hover just above the scarred puncture mark over his ribs. He gave her a hesitant nod and she allowed her hand to brush against the raised flesh, her expression turning to something like devastation before she pulled back.

“I’d recognize this wound anywhere.” She murmured, tracing where the spider’s stinger had breached him before she drew back, something hard settling into her gaze. “This was the attack meant for my son.”

She glanced over to Kili while she spoke, the young archer nodding to her gravely. With a hard swallow Dis shook her head, stepping back from where she had shielded Bilbo from the rest of the room, her gaze still fixed on the hobbit’s small frame. “Tell us,” she stated, nodding to him with an incline of her firm cut jaw, “we all should know how you came to such harm.”

The Halfling ducked his head a bit shyly at her steady attention, flicking his gaze down his chest self-consciously. “Which ones would you like to hear about?”

She clicked her teeth together, her gaze finding Thorin where he sat by the hearth at her back. “All of them”

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Recounting his scars had been far more difficult than he could have ever expected.

Even after all of the talks he’d had with the shirelings back at bag end, and with the hard conversations he’d endured with Fili and Kili, outlining his old injuries to a room full of his closest companions still left him feeling nervous and jittery.

His palms were slicked with sweat, a steady heat sliding across his flesh while his fevered nerves rode him ragged.

Somehow he managed to keep pushing through it all, talking despite the heavy weight of dread that suddenly settled in his stomach, his gaze falling to the ground and staying fixed there, despite all of
his best efforts.

He’d started in the most logical place; the beginning.

Going over his experiences with the Battle of Five Armies had brought back a series of emotions that he had thought long since buried, his eyes stinging and his throat closing up while he went over the fight, voice trembling. Despite everything, he had still been slightly taken aback by the genuine surprise on Thorin’s features when he first pointed out his oldest scar, explaining the favour he’d garnered from Thranduil by saving the elf lord’s life. The King Under the Mountain truly had not questioned the quick intervention of the elves at the end of the conflict; had refused to listen to any mention of Bilbo’s efforts to rescue the line of Durin from a premature end.

Thorin had been pale and shaky after that, following Bilbo’s words with a growing expression of dread across his features, mouth dropped open in what the hobbit eventually identified as unrestrained horror.

Bilbo had finally forced himself to look up to his old friend, and found that once he did, he could no longer look away. He watched as the king cycled through a series of emotions, followed the dwarf’s violent shudder when he told of the orc attack on the caravan he’d been travelling with, of being stabbed through and watching his entire company of men fall.

Finally, he started to go over the wounds he’d received on their recent travels through the wild, southern forests of Mirkwood.

“We had been trying to avoid a nest that blocked the road, but when we attempted the gorge pass, we were ambushed by a group of spiders.” The hobbit shuddered at the memory, his heart seizing in his chest when the image of those snapping pincers and twisted, black furred limbs flashed across his mind. “Kili was cornered, he’d already lost his pony over the edge of the cliff…what else could I do but help?”

“You did more than help,” the archer objected from behind him, teeth clenched through a hard swallow, “you saved my life, and you damn near died in the process.”

“It’s alright.” The hobbit turned to Kili with a soothing noise, reaching out to the young prince briefly, before turning back to the rest of the room with a self-conscious flush. “I had a scare is all. I took a hit to the chest from the spider’s stinger, but not before I managed to stick it good myself.”

He swallowed and shrugged, his hand raising to rub at the mark over his ribs. “Unfortunately the beast took me with it when it toppled over into the gorge,” he could remember that moment when the ground gave out beneath him, his mind slipping into darkness and his body dropping down hard into the air, “my shin was badly broken, I was severely concussed, but I survived. One of your royal guard, Dasil, was kind enough to teach me first aid before we left bag end. I would not be here today if it was not for his teachings.”

Thorin finally looked up at that, his stricken gaze shifting to find Bilbo’s where he stood. The king looked wrecked, his brows pinched together and a hand coming up to rub roughly over his mouth. “As it appears my nephews would not be here, if it were not for your-” emotion seemed to get the better of the dwarf, his voice catching slightly and his expression crumpling further, “your selfless actions.”

Bilbo sucked in hard, a surge of dizzying hope flaring through him, causing him to suck in sharply through his clenched teeth. “What other choice did I have?” He managed, his voice cracking. “I love him, I love both of them, I could never let any harm fall to them.”
“How?” Thorin managed, the sound choked and confused. “How, after all of these years, can you still be so loyal to them, that you would throw away your own life to save one of their own?”

The hobbit found himself frowning, shaking his head in disbelief. “Have you not heard a word I have said to you?” He started forward, breaking away from Fili and Kili and walking towards their uncle where he sat. “Do you not understand how much I care for them? For you?”

Thorin shook his head, his mouth starting to tremble beneath the thick tufts of his beard. “Oh Thorin,” the Halfling didn’t stop until he was directly at the King’s front, his head still slowly shaking, “have you become so lost to the gold that you can’t even recognize those that love you most.”

He swallowed hard, reaching out despite the squeeze of terror in his chest, horrified that the king would lash out at him in response. He forced himself to lay his palm against the side of his old friend’s face, fingers cupping his cheek softly. Thorin let out a shuddering breath at the contact, his eyes flickering shut.

“What happened to you Thorin?” He whispered, feeling his breath catch and his eyes sting with brimming tears. “What happened to the man who led our modest company on an impossible quest to retake the great dwarven city?”

“I do not know.” The king finally whispered, his expression crumpling with the broken sound. “I do not know how I could have been so willfully blind, how I could have caused you so much harm, after everything you have done for my kin—”

Bilbo swallowed, his head nodding and his lips quivering hard. “It’s alright Thorin, I forgive you.”

“How can you?” The dwarf gasped, drawing back out of his grip and growling at himself. “How can you forgive me when I have been too self absorbed to see all of the pain I have caused? What kind of man am I?”

“A man who needs help.” It was Dis who finally spoke up, coming to stand alongside Bilbo at her brother’s front, her expression soft and imploring. “You are unwell Thorin. Something that I think you’ve known for some time.” When he didn’t respond she continued, reaching out brush the king’s bangs from his brow. “Gandalf and I, we’ve been searching for a means to help you.”

Thorin blinked up at her, his distress fading to confusion and his gaze flicking to where the wizard stood in the corner of the room. “Is this true?” He murmured, his voice a bare whisper. “Is there still hope left for me?”

“Is there always hope your majesty.” Gandalf assured him, leaning with his hands folded at the top of his staff. “You just need to accept the helping hand offered, or you will be lost to this fever, and to your family, forever.”

The king took in a shuddering breath, already nodding despite the tense ridge set across his shoulders. “I will not allow myself to be lost to my people, nor to my kin.” He swallowed, his gaze then sliding over to land on Bilbo where the hobbit stood, hovering in front of his larger, seated frame. “I will not fail you all, not again.”

The hobbit sucked in hard, licking his lips with the trace of a smile quirking across his cheeks. “You have never failed us Thorin. You have the potential to be a great king, I have always believed that.” He murmured, bracing his arms across his chest. He heard footsteps sliding up at his heels, Fili and Kili coming to stand behind him, the younger dwarf curling his arms around
Bilbo’s bicep. “You just got a little lost is all.”

Thorin nodded, his entire body shaking and his hands scrambling to reach out to his sister, fingers curling over her arm. She leaned forward squeezing onto him firmly, her eyes shining over with the hint of tears. “I never meant to cause so much harm.”

“We know.” Dis soothed, holding to him firmly. “We have been trying to make you see for some time that you have not been yourself,” she glanced over her shoulder to Bilbo at that, unable to keep from smiling, “it just took the words of a small burglar to make you understand.”

“For which I will be eternally grateful.” Thorin murmured, his gaze flicking over to find the Halfling where he stood. “I will never be able to repay you for what you have done for my family, but if there is anything that I might be able to do for you-”

The hobbit sagged back against Fili and Kili behind him, letting them hold his weight while a shuddering breath escaped him. “A chance for reprieve would be most welcome.”

The day had been long, too long, and he was just about dead on his feet. His mind had also turned to Frodo, worry beginning to eat away at his gut when he thought about his young nephew. The shireling was probably beside himself with worry and exhaustion; the sooner they were all together again, the better.

“Of course.” Thorin nodded to him eagerly, his gaze flicking up to where Fili and Kili stood at Bilbo’s back. His nephews still seemed reserved towards their uncle, emotion still raw across their tense frames. “Take all the time you need, I just-” He swallowed, dropping his sister’s arm to drag his hands up over his face, “I just hope you’ll one day find it in your hearts to forgive me.”

Kili swallowed hard and looked to the side, but Fili simply nodded, his hand tightening where it rested on Bilbo’s frame. “You’ll receive what forgiveness is warranted.” The older prince murmured, drawing the hobbit back towards himself and his brother. “In the mean time, however, our family needs our time to rest. We’ve had a long few months with very little chance to ourselves.”

“Ah-” The king winced, dropping back further into his chair and fixing his gaze on the floor, “but of course.”

“We still have some talking to do amongst ourselves and the rest of the company,” Gandalf informed them, nodding his head in their direction, “the Lady Dis will be able to fill you in come morning.”

“Thank you.” Bilbo murmured, suddenly barely able to fight the heavy pull of his eyelids, threatening to close. “All of you, for listening.”

“Do not thank us,” Balin shook his head where he sat, his long white beard shifting with the gesture, “just focus on washing up and getting some rest.”

“We will.” Kili assured them, his tone still clipped while he began to urge the hobbit away, sandwiching his smaller frame between him and his brother. Ori had moved to gather up Bilbo’s tunic and undershirt, holding it out to the hobbit as the princes drew him closer. He accepted the garment from the scribe gratefully, pausing long enough to tug the layers of fabric on, covering up the sea of scars, spattered across his chest.

Bilbo had enough time to gesture a quick goodbye to the company in the room, noting the way their concerned gazes followed him with a heavy tug to his heart.
The hardest part was over.

He forced his feet to carry him forward, his head up and his composure intact while they moved into the hall, the heavy doors clicking shut behind him. Only then did Bilbo allow himself to lose control completely, tears springing up unbidden from his eyes as the burden of the day’s events began to weigh down on him.

He let out a shuddering sob, feeling Kili curl down over his shoulder while Fili tugged the pair of them up closer to his side.

Not a word was uttered between them while the three of them made their way past the brothers’ room, moving without pause towards where Frodo was waiting for them, deeper in the mountain.

Bilbo clutched to the two of them, allowing himself to let go of the turmoil of emotions that had been riding him all day.

“Everything is going to work out.”

He did not even realize he had spoken until the words were bouncing back to him against the expansive walls of Erebor’s corridors. When the two dwarves moved closer to him in response he let out a shaky breath, tightening the grip he had on the two of them.

“We’re home.”

TBC…
Cresting the Peak

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Frodo begin to settle into life in Erebor with Fili and Kili. With more reunions with old acquaintances, and more tense conversations to be had, there is still a ways to go before the hobbits can truly call the Lonely Mountain home.

Chapter Notes

So I AM SO SORRY FOR THE RIDICULOUS HORRIFIC AND COMPLETELY LAME HIATUS I JUST PUT YOU GUYS THROUGH.

I have reasons, I really do, but I'm not going to clog up the beginning of the story with them, so if you are interested in a bit of a longer version of my recent events you can visit the end notes at the bottom of the page! In the meantime here is the abridged version.

TL;DR Getting ready for school is hard, relationships and breakups suck, I had hardcore writers block but I'm better, except OH NO I AM LEAVING THE COUNTRY ON THE 18th I WILL NOT BE BACK TILL THE 30th of JULY BUT I PROMISE YOU I WILL UPDATE THROUGHOUT AUGUST.

Thanks again for being so supportive/awesome guys. You are honestly the best.

BEST.

I apologize in advance for any errors, and I hope this chapter does your brilliant support justice <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ah!” Bilbo winced, once again just barely resisting the overwhelming urge to yank his arm back from Oin’s firm grip. The elderly dwarrow held steady, tutting to himself while he drew the hobbit’s limb further into his lap.

“Easy now ther’ lad,” he drawled, his tone scolding and his expression stern, “if ye’d quit yer squirmin’ this’d be over much quick’r.”

The Halfling bit down on his lip hard, forcing himself to stay still, his gaze locked on Oin where he worked. “Sorry.” He managed through the flesh clenched between his teeth. “It’s just tender is all.”

Oin looked at him funny and it was obvious that he didn’t quite pick up what Bilbo had said, simply returning to his work and grumbling under his breath while he finished securing the last of the sutures, sealing the bloodied expanse of his wound. “-should’ve come straight te me fer this. I saw ye why didn’ ye say somethin’? An’ weren’t ye down ‘ere last night? Should’ve had er looked at then, can’t believe ye waited so long-”
Bilbo bit his lip harder through another wince, watching when Oin started to wrap his arm up from wrist to elbow. The old man tugged the bindings snug, tight enough to keep secured but not so much as to cause undue pain. The dwarrow no doubt had a point; Bilbo knew that his wound would have been best treated immediately upon arriving at Erebor, but after having to deal with Thorin in one of his darker moods, he had been too exhausted to consider seeking aid.

“How are you doing?”

A warm, familiar grip curled over his shoulder, fingers squeezing over his flesh in a comforting manner. It took some effort to avoid leaning back into the touch, his gaze flicking over his shoulder to where Kili had leaned down next to him, the archer’s stubble brushing against his cheek.

“I am holding strong.” Bilbo assured him as softly as he could manage, trying to resist the urge to grit his teeth against each lingering twinge and snap of pain. Oin was half way done the bindings now, still grumbling under his breath about Bilbo’s apparent lack of regard for his own well-being. He felt Kili’s hand shift to gently rub down his back, smoothing over his tunic covered flesh in firm, steady motions. “How is Frodo faring?”

“Fili took him across the way to visit Ragnar,” the young dwarf assured him gently, pressing his mouth to the side of Bilbo’s ear, “he was worried about you, but appeared to be tempered once he got to sit with his favourite warrior on the cot.”

The hobbit warmed immediately at the words, relaxing in Oin’s grip while he tied off the bindings, leaving his arm fully secured.

“An’ there we go.” Oin clapped his hands together and sat back slightly, waving for Bilbo to move up and off of the stool he had been occupying. The hobbit complied, shifting away and waiting for the dwarf while he bustled around the shelves behind them. As soon as he straightened Kili pushed up behind him, his larger frame a solid warmth against his back.

When Oin returned he had a container of salve in his hands and a small stoppered bottle. “Ye should take this once a day, an’ apply the cream when’er the skin feels tight’r dry.”

“I will.” Bilbo assured him, repeating himself again louder when the elderly dwarf shot him a puzzled look. He accepted the medicine gratefully and allowed Oin to bind up his arm in a sling to keep him from jostling his stitches. With the limb cradled gently against his chest he was ushered back out into the hall, Oin grumbling at him in a firm tone to come in for checkups daily to ensure no infection took hold.

Kili stayed pressed up firmly to his side while they moved, one of the archer’s firm hands coming to splay wide across the small of his back. Bilbo allowed himself to relax into the touch, the prince steering him down the hall of the medical wing towards where Ragnar’s room was located.

“Oin is remarkably good at his job, especially given his age.” The hobbit commented idly, allowing Kili to tug him up further against his broad side as a group of healers bustled past them, carrying a groaning dwarf with a pick axe wound to the foot. The Halfling was staring at his now wrapped arm, looking at the pristine, crisp bandages with an idle sort of interest.

“He had best be.” Kili scoffed, tightening his grip on the back of the smaller man’s shirt, holding firm to Bilbo while a large guard maneuvered around them, the big man’s scowling gaze fixed on the hobbit’s frame. “He has had plenty of years of practice, after all.”

Bilbo nodded with a hum of agreement, but his attention was somewhat torn between the prince and the sea of gazes that seemed to follow them everywhere they went. It was the first time since
they had grabbed Frodo from the infirmary the evening before that Fili and Kili had allowed the two Halflings to leave their quarters. For the night and better part of the following day they had all stayed holed up in the massive, luxurious chambers, enjoying the chance to bathe, freshen up, and relax. They took all of their meals in the bedroom until well after lunch, Fili and Kili even ordering up extra food in between dining to ensure that Frodo got more than enough to sate his hobbit appetite.

What was left of their packs had been brought up to the room, but Bilbo had found with a slight twinge of sorrow that they had lost the majority of the supplies that they had started their trip out with. When they left the shire, he had been hoping to take some of Bag End with them. The fates, as it seemed, had other plans.

They unpacked what little they had left, Bilbo setting up the picture of Drogo and Primula on a low lying table in the sitting room. Frodo seemed to enjoy having the picture so close, the tiny shireling taking to pausing to look each time he passed by.

Bilbo could still see the heart ache there, and he knew that part of it would never go away. Losing family was not something that one just simply got over. Though even in the scarce time they’d had to settle into Erebor so far, Bilbo could feel the slight flickers of hope begin to swell up inside of him. Fili and Kili offered Frodo every inch of affection that the boy could possibly desire, instantly settling him into their home and showing him all of their things. They had even gone so far as to dig out a few of their old childhood tunics, which their mother Dis had kept for them, tucked away in their finely carved clothing chests.

Frodo had been beyond delighted to dress like the rest of the dwarves that he had seen, and with Bilbo watching with an amused smile, Fili and Kili managed to wrestle the shireling into a thick, quilted tunic with a luxurious fur trim.

Only after they had finally managed to get the small child all dressed up and ready did they finally emerge from their chambers. Fili and Kili were decorated in fine, princely robes when they finally exited the room, Bilbo having settled into one of the nicer elven cloths that he had received during their stay in Mirkwood with Legolas and Thranduil.

Bilbo was surprised when there were no guards to meet them outside of the boys’ chamber, but as it appeared, the princes moved freely about Erebor, without chaperone. In a way it had been a huge relief; the hobbit was still wary of many of the dwarrow they passed, especially the stony faced guards who regarded him with pinched brows and downturned lips.

“Did I lose you again, Mister Boggins?” Kili asked suddenly, his voice rumbling next to Bilbo’s ear when the dwarf leaned down to press a kiss to his cheek.

The Halfling blinked, looking up and realizing with a small start that they had been hovering in the threshold of Ragnar’s doorway, the hallway bustling about around them. He flushed a bit, colour rising up his cheeks while he tipped his head back to regard Kili with a self-depreciating smile.

“I am afraid you did, my liege,” he shot back, which earned him a light, playful pinch to his good side. He chuckled at that, leaning back into Kili where they hovered in the hall. “There has been a lot to dwell on as of late, so I must apologize now if my mind starts to wander.”

“Mm.” The archer hummed in his understanding, drawing Bilbo closer to his side and pressing a kiss to the top of the hobbit’s head. “Your mind can wander all it wants now, we are home,” he drew forward a bit, offering his elbow to Bilbo’s good arm, “we have all the time in the world to get lost in thought…and other things.”
He couldn’t help the snorted laugh that escaped him at Kili’s cheeky look, nearly spluttering at the way the dwarf’s tongue peeked out between his grinning teeth. “Kili please, I am trying to keep my composure here.” Glancing around he was suddenly painfully aware of the number of eyes around the hallway that had come to rest on them where they stood. He felt his chest tighten and he drew subconsciously closer to the prince’s larger frame. “We are in *public*, remember?”

Kili seemed to consider that for a moment, his eyes flicking over to follow Bilbo’s gaze, before he let out a dismissive noise. “We are practically married by your people’s standards,” he insisted, drawing the hobbit right up to his side and turning back towards the thick curtain that separated Ragnar’s room from the hall, “I see no reason to be *prudish* with my affections.”

“*Prudish*,” Bilbo exclaimed in mock awe, “my oh my, quite the adventurous vocabulary today, my love.”

The prince made an offended noise while he pushed back the fabric in front of them, using his other arm to draw Bilbo along behind him. “Now that was just uncalled for,” he stated, shaking his head, “and when I was in the middle of doting, that’s right *doting*, I know what that word means as well—”

“*Uncle Kili! Uncle Bilbo!*”

Kili nearly tripped over his own feet at the casual use of the title, his face heating up as he visibly scrambled to locate the small shireling in the room. Frodo had called both brothers ‘uncle’ on a few occasions since they had left Mirkwood, but neither dwarf seemed to tire of the sound of it.

When Bilbo finally looked away from the archer’s brightly lit face he nearly stumbled backwards out through the falling curtain. Much to his shock the room was crowded with bodies, Dasil and Foseil sitting in stools against the far wall, Fili sitting at the edge of Ragnar’s bedside. The warrior was lying propped up on his stomach, pillows clutched underneath his chest and face so he could glance over to the side, where an unfamiliar figure was hovering over him.

Bilbo blinked, noting with some shock that a dwarven woman sat on the edge of the warrior’s cot, Frodo settled onto her lap. She was strong and stocky, but had a sort of elegance about her sturdy curves that was truly breathtaking. She had more scruff than Dis, her auburn beard thick but short, curling neatly over her chin.

A hand suddenly dropped down over her shoulder, and Bilbo followed the line of the arm up to another, more familiar figure.

“*Molden!*” He exclaimed, unable to help the feeling of delight at seeing the dwarven guard for the first time in months. His joy was short lived, however, when he got a good look at the man, concern immediately flooding across his features. “What in the name of Mahal happened to you??”

The dark haired dwarrow had the wherewithal to flush, ducking his head a bit where he had himself propped up on crutches, his leg bound up tightly in a series of bandages. Cloth was wrapped too around his forehead and throat, slightly pinkened from exposure to blood. “Much the same thing that happened to you I hear.”

Bilbo nodded in understanding, already moving towards the dwarf while he spoke, his eyebrows still pinched together deeply. “*A raid*?”

“Aye.” Molden’s jaw locked a bit and he shifted forward, leaning heavily on his crutches while he maneuvered to meet Bilbo half way. He regarded the hobbit’s own injury with a heavy scowl, his shoulders tensing. “We have been told that the Lady Dis was attacked travelling with the Grey
Wizard as well.”

“The raids are happening far too frequently for my liking.” Fili piped up from where he sat at Ragnar’s bedside, his gaze serious when he locked eyes with Kili at Bilbo’s back. “Quite frankly I’m surprised that uncle has not as of yet made attempt to put a stop to them.”

Molden let out a hollow chuckle at that, shifting slightly where he supported himself on his one good leg. “His highness would not even heed us about the orc attacks until his own sister arrived with a similar story of her own.” He shook his head, his gaze flicking off to the far wall. “Phobur’s still bed ridden, Fibur’s barely left his side since we arrived, yet still our King saw fit to ignore our warnings.”

“An’ his majesty asn’t so much as stepped foot in th’ medical wing since he took power.” The dwarven woman suddenly piped up, shifting Frodo where the boy had settled in her lap. The shireling had his small hands curled in the fabric of her top, fingers squeezing around the soft linen. “He ’as n’ere claimed te be a King of the People.”

“He could be though,” Bilbo cut in quickly, unable to help himself while he glanced about the room, “Thorin has the skill and the heart to be a good, honourable king. He just…” he swallowed thinking back to the terror he had felt, facing his old friend where he sat, towering on that massive throne, “he just got a little lost is all.”

The woman seemed to consider him carefully after that, the wisdom of her age shining through her tough features. Then suddenly a wide smile broke out across her cheeks, her soft beard curving with the upturn of her plump, pink lips. “Bilbo Baggins, is it then?”

Before he could find the voice to answer Frodo piped up, his nephew turning excitedly in the woman’s grasp. “Yep! That is my Uncle Bilbo, he is a strong, brave warrior.”

The hobbit spluttered at that, a heavy flush racing across his cheeks with the heat of a burning wild fire. His head was shaking before he’d even registered the thought to speak, his hands raised up in protest. “I am no warrior, and I am certainly not known for my bravery.” He stated through Frodo’s immediate protests. He shot his nephew a small look and the shireling quieted, still looking as though he very much wanted to object. “I am merely a friend of dwarf kind, including your king. All I want is to help set things right here…if I can.”

The woman nodded thoughtfully and shifted her grip on Frodo in her lap. With a skilled ease she lifted the child up and set him on his feet by the bed, rising to stand and instantly walking towards where Bilbo stood. Frodo trailed along beside her, coming right up to bounce on his toes at his Uncle’s side, looking up at him with a bright smile. Bilbo returned the gesture before turning to the dwarven woman, blinking up at her when she finally came to a stop, once again taken aback by how familiar her strong features seemed; though he was almost entirely certain that he had never met this woman before in all of his life.

“Bilbo Baggins o’ the shire,” she regarded him with something of a serene smile, etched across her chiseled features, “My name’s Lesole, dutiful wife o’ the dwarrow Molden,” she offered him a small bow at that, inclining her head towards him, “at yer service, Master Hobbit.”

Bilbo was too busy staring at the woman at first to respond, desperately trying to think back to the brief family history he had been provided by the royal guards when they first arrived in the shire, escorting Princes Fili and Kili to his door step. “If you are Molden’s wife, then that makes you…”

“-sister to Dasil an’ Foseil o’ the royal guard, cousin to Ragnar Steelfoot, yes.” The greeting she offered him was genuine and soft, her gaze flicking back to where the latter still lay prone across
his cot. “My family, it appears, owes ye a great debt fer keeping our loved ones alive. Particularly as they ‘re the trained guards, and ye ‘re not.”

Ragnar seemed to flush at that, ducking his head a bit where he was pressed into the mattress; Foseil and Dasil too looked sheepish, perched against the wall.

“It was nothing spectacular, really.” He insisted suddenly feeling flustered and embarrassed while he fought to keep the woman’s eyes. She was regarding her family fiercely, before her gaze fell back to his own, causing his heart to jump in surprise. “I mean,” he quickly rambled on, feeling the flaring heat wash over the bridge of his nose while he struggled to find his composure, “I would have done the same for any friend. For months your family fought to keep mine safe with every fibre of their beings…how could I not respond in kind?”

Lesole made a humming sound of acknowledgement but shook her head at Bilbo almost disapprovingly. “It won’ do to ‘ave ye so humble Mister Baggins, yer far braver than ye give yerself credit for.” She then glanced towards where Kili stood at the hobbit’s back. “Especially considering that yer rescue of Ragnar also involved the protection of our youngest crown prince.”

“You took up my duty,” Ragnar craned his head up from his pillow, finding Bilbo where the hobbit stood, flushing, “you defended my charge, our prince, you bled for him…and when he was safely out of harm’s way you still stood by my side against those orc brutes.”

“Aye,” Dasil spoke up, his voice trembling through the room, “an without yer help Bilbo, I would ‘ave never been able te seal ‘im up so well.”

“I-” Bilbo glanced about, scratching at the back of his head when he finally met Kili’s gaze. The archer gave him a firm nod, the motion encouraging and steady. “I was merely trying to do my part.” He offered, with the barest shrug of his shoulders. “I did not mean to be brave, in fact I assure you my actions were quite selfish. I just…” he trailed off, licking his lips, “…I could not bear to lose a friend, not another one.”

“That is hardly selfish.” Fili piped up, sounding incredulous where he was perched by the bed. “It’s as brave as it is caring.”

The hobbit flushed harder, ducking his head with yet another shrug of his good shoulder. “If you say so.”

“We do say so. In fact, ye will forever ‘ave my thanks, an’ the gratitude of all of my kin.” Lesole told him quite frankly, without any sort of fanfare about it. “If ye ever find yerself or yer loved ones in need, know that our family will always fall to yer aid.”

Bilbo was sure his face was burning scarlet by that point, his head ducking down sheepishly. Even with his chin tucked down to his chest he could still see Lesole’s smile grow impossibly fonder at his modesty and she reached out, clapping over his shoulder with her strong, calloused palm. Her grip was as firm as any dwarrow he had ever met, fingers gripping with a precise strength that served as testament to what must have been years of practice as a smithy.

“Thank you.” He finally managed as she held firm to him, his chest squeezing with a surge of emotion. He glanced around the room at all the dwarves crowded there, the very family who’s loyalty to him had just been declared in Lesole’s firm tone. Erebor, as it turned out, would not be such a lonely place after all. “Thank you. This truly means more to me than I can say.”

“Nonsense!” Ragnar managed to growl out from where he was lying. “There is not a single being in this room who’s respect, loyalty, and admiration you haven’t won through your own brave,
“selfless actions.”

Lesole nodded to the warrior over her shoulder before her attention fixed back to Bilbo at her front. “Without ye, we would have long ago lost our King, our Princes, our very own kin.”

“We owe ye a great debt, Bilbo Baggins.” Dasil added in while he shifted forwards to perch on the edge of his stool, “all of Erebor owes you.”

“I-” The halfling stuttered, feeling his chest tighten, “I just wanted to keep everyone safe.”

Kili slid right up behind him and wrapped an arm around his waist, dragging his back flush against him, holding him firm. The motion made Bilbo feel exposed, off kilter, so bared in front of the room, packed with people. Then at his side Frodo’s small fingers curled into his pant leg, grounding him in a way he could not even express. Finally there was a shifting sound, a chair scraping across the floor while Fili pushed himself to stand, already making his way over to where his brother and the two hobbits stood.

Bilbo felt his flush burn hotter at the elder heir’s approach, his gaze unable to leave Fili’s, even as the blond slid straight up to his side, standing at Frodo’s back with his hand curling over the older Halfling’s shoulder protectively. “You have done more than that Bilbo,” the prince murmured, dropping his voice slightly, “you have given not only us, but our people our home.”

“Ye ‘ave no need te be so modest with what ye ‘ave don fer Erebor.” Foseil cleared his throat, nodding his head towards Bilbo with a firm expression. “Ye ‘ave been nothin’ but good fer us Mister Baggins, an’ I dare say ye’ll do a lot of good yet.”

“Ye ‘ave a good effect on our city, an’ everyone inside.” Dasil added after his brother. “Lord knows we could use someone like ye around here.”

“That’s an understatement.” Molden stated where he stood by his wife’s side. “Everything has been out of sorts in the mountain since we returned, and Thorin...” Molden trailed off, adjusting his grip on his crutches and shifting slightly where he was balanced. “He has been entirely unreasonable. Would not have the guards carry messages to our loved ones until just yesterday. We did not even manage to get that letter of yours off to the royal scribe until late last night-”

“Letter?” Bilbo blinked, the beginnings of a frown working its way across his features. Then sudden realization shot through him, startling and harsh. The letter he had sent with Phobur all those months ago.

“Oh.” He let out a noise bordering all too closely on desperation, remembering with a burning sense of clarity all of the things that he had written down, all of his pains, his frustrations, his fears. It had been meant to arrive weeks before their own caravan, to be read and contemplated over for days by the company at large. He had only meant to give his old friends some forewarning about how he felt; about his shattered, emotional state upon seeing Fili and Kili again after being alone for so long.

Back then he had been afraid, but worse still, he had been angry. If memory served him well, his writing had been direct, and while it had not been entirely accusatory, he had not shied away from expressing the sheer amount of hurt that he had been subject to at the company’s hands.

It had been written before he had the time to truly understand the extent of Thorin’s building madness.

If Ori had the letter, chances were that others had already seen it. Bilbo felt a sudden rush of heat to
his face, the sensation striking him with such a force that he actually stumbled back a step. If Thorin had received the letter now…all of the progress that they had made the evening before could have been compromised.

He could not recall his exact wording in the message he had sent all those months back, but he could recall the bitter heart break that he had felt at the time. Once he would not have hesitated to share in such honesty with Thorin Oakenshield, now however he could be sure of nothing when it came to the King Under the Mountain.

“Bilbo-”

The hobbit blinked, turning to see Fili regarding him with his brows pinched in concern. “What is it?”

He tried to respond, finding that as he took in the two brothers and Frodo at his side, his fears began to ebb back, sounding small and silly even in his own mind. “It-” he swallowed and gave his head a hard shake, suddenly feeling ridiculous, “it’s nothing really. I am afraid my mind is getting away on me again.”

His anxiousness must have roused Frodo’s attention, as the Shireling began to wrap his tiny arms around his uncle’s. Bilbo looked down to the child, reaching his good arm to brace against his small shoulders, forcing back the lingering sense of dread that rode a tight line across his shoulders, causing his whole frame to tense. Frodo dragged himself closer as his uncle stiffened, pressing his face to the fabric of the tunic at Bilbo’s hip.

“I don’t believe you are being completely frank with us Bilbo,” Fili pressed again, his arms crossed and his eyebrows raised, “you are amoung friends here.”

“Aye,” Foseil agreed from where he sat at the wall, “no man nor woman in this room would, er rather, could e’r cast judgment on ye.”

Bilbo swallowed with a nod, once again feeling a pleasant warmth seep in through the flustered panic that was thrumming in chest, allowing him to think clearly while he breathed a little easier. Frodo still kept himself tucked up against his uncle’s leg, his small, clinging frame a comfort in itself. “I kid you not when I say it is nothing of import,” Fili and Kili shot him twin looks of disbelief and he hastily continued, trying to avoid their scorn, “it’s only…I had thought, upon composing it, that the letter would arrive long before we did ourselves.”

He felt his gaze flick down to the floor much of its own accord, his nerves still bubbling distantly in his gut. “I also wrote it before I understood the full extent of your uncle’s…condition.” He flicked his gaze up at that, watching as the brothers stiffened in tandem, their lips thinning almost eerily in time. “I was much more frank about my heart break in the letter than I had been last night. It was my intention to warn the company of my vulnerable state by being as direct as possible. And-” he swallowed again, finding it more difficult this time, causing him to clear his throat with a rough cough, “and I have to admit, at the time I was feeling hurt not just by you two, but by all of them.”

He shrugged, tightening his grip on Frodo when he felt the child shift closer to his leg. “I wanted them to know how abandoned I felt, how alone I was when I had to make that lonely hike back on my own. I was not kind about it and-“

“You are worried that Ori’s already shown it to Thorin-” Fili cut in sharply, understanding flooding across his features.
Kili took a moment longer to catch on, confusion creasing his brow while he looked between his brother and their hobbits. Only then something seemed to click within him, his eyes widening a touch and his mouth dropping open. “You think he is going to be angry with you.”

Bilbo felt his lips tighten into a thin line, the muscles in his shoulders bunching up sharply. “We may have your Uncle’s favour for the moment, but I was not so... *accusatory* when I spoke to him last night.” He slid his tongue out between his lips, running along their dried cracked surface in a small, nervous gesture. “When I wrote that letter, I was still so angry, so *heartbroken* and I—” his breath caught a bit and he tried to cover it with a cough, his eyes once again finding the floor, “I do not know how Thorin will react if he sees it.”

Silence met him when he finally finished, resounding and almost deafening in the small, packed room.

Then Kili cleared his throat, stepping forward to stand in front of Bilbo, forcing the hobbit to meet his gaze head on. Only once he had Bilbo’s full attention did the young prince finally speak, his eyebrows steadily raising. “I personally think, *Mister Baggins*, that you have done far too much good for our kingdom and our family for a simple letter containing nothing more than the truth to make any real difference to *anything*.” The archer stated, his tone firm. “If our uncle even has half the brain I thought he did and any basic understanding of the concept of friendship, he will forgive your frankness.”

Bilbo felt the tight curl of panic that had settled in his chest start to loosen, his shoulders relaxing and his good hand smoothing down the span of his nephew’s back where Frodo still clung to him, his hands digging in to the fabric of his trouser pants. Locked in Kili’s gaze he could do nothing to help the quirking smile that had begun to worm it’s way up his features, splitting across his cheeks. “Thank you Kili, that—”

“-was far more eloquent than I would have expected of you little brother.” Fili cut in teasingly, offering the archer a playful jab. “Have you been going over your letters again?”

“What is with people and insulting my intelligence today?” Kili exclaimed, exasperated. “I may, at times, be a touch daft, but I am not *that* daft.”

“Kili you are not daft!” Frodo protested, suddenly peeling himself away from Bilbo’s legs to run up to the dwarf, his hands curling around the archer’s calves. “You are a funny and very brave warrior.” He stated firmly, looking offended by the very notion of the prince doubting himself. “Ah! That is right little one.” The archer’s demeanor instantly shifted and he bent down a bit, curling his hands beneath the shireling’s biceps and hoisting him easily up into his arms. Frodo clutched to Kili’s fine furs, resting comfortably against the dwarf’s side with a happy noise. “Looks like I have at least one supporter here,” the young prince shot his brother a look, “Frodo thinks I am intelligent.”

“No,” Fili countered, a smug smirk quirking up his dimpled cheek, “Frodo here thinks you are *amusing*.”

“*Why I*.”

Bilbo cut off the archer’s spluttering retort with a quick step between the brothers, clearing his throat rather firmly. “Oh no, you are not going to start bickering at poor Ragnar’s bedside.” He stated with a sharp cluck of his tongue. “Lord knows the man has had enough of that nonsense in the *months* he has been trapped our company.” He added teasingly.
“How kind of you Master Baggins,” the injured dwaarrow piped up dramatically from where he lay prone on the bed, managing to turn just enough to meet Bilbo’s gaze, “to consider my weakened nerves in this, my time of gravest need.”

Lesole snorted over a laugh, which got a chuckle out of Molden, and then soon the rest of the room followed in suit, Bilbo watching them dissolve into laughter with a shake of his head and a wide grin. With the atmosphere once again light and comfortable he stepped to the side to give Fili a nudge. The prince peered down at him and instantly seemed to understand, giving him a firm nod and clearing his throat significantly.

“Oh that note, I think we will be taking our leave.” He gestured towards his brother, Kili nodding and stepping back towards them. Fili then turned to the injured dwaarrow on the bed, nodding his head. “You served us bravely and honourably, and you have proven to be a great friend Ragnar. We are beyond grateful to see you faring so well; however, we have taken enough of yours and your family’s time.”

“We enjoyed yer company, don’t ye go doubting that.” Lesole assured them, stepping back towards Ragnar’s bedside where Molden still balanced on his crutch. “Ye go see te supper an’ find yerselves some time te relax. Ye no doubt need it ‘fter such a long journey.”

“Thank you.” Bilbo smiled, stepping back when the princes started to move towards the curtain that separated them from the bustling hallway beyond. “We will be sure to come and visit again soon.”

“Please do.” Ragnar refrained from waving, giving his head a small nod rather than do anything to risk pulling his injuries. “Your company is always welcome, especially when you bring my favourite little hobbit along with you.”

Frodo made a bright noise of delight at that, waving emphatically to Ragnar and the rest of the company in the room while they bid their farewells.

Bilbo still felt a faint, bubbling sensation of fear, broiling within him; even still, as they walked along the still foreign, yet strangely warm halls of Erebor, he found himself steadily beginning to relax.

He fell into line with Fili while they walked, Kili just a few steps ahead of them, pointing down the halls they passed and rattling off the names of rooms and fancy halls spread out throughout the mountain. Frodo buzzing with a constant stream of bright questions, his tiny voice echoing across the twisting floors at their front.

They got more attention than Bilbo strictly desired, but with the light, airy sound of Frodo’s laughter bouncing back to them as Kili responded to him in jovial tones, he could not bring himself to care.

He brushed off the heavy weight that had been dragging down at his shoulders, allowing himself to simply relax and enjoy the slow stroll back towards the royal chambers.

His ease was short lived, it seemed, as when they finally rounded the corner to their wing, they found themselves in unexpected company. Kili was a good few steps at their front, but surprisingly it was Fili who stopped first, his hand subconsciously catching the hem of Bilbo’s tunic as he stillled.

The hobbit blinked up at him, his eyebrows creasing in confusion, yet Fili was not looking at him; he was staring ahead, his expression forcibly blank. Bilbo blinked, fear jutting up his spine and his
shoulders tensing in a tight line as he followed the prince’s gaze.

Ahead of them Kili came to a stop mid sentence, his body freezing at the sight of the trio standing by the door to their bed chambers. Bilbo felt his heart drop and he had to school his face to a mask of calm.

Ori stood with his head ducked, looking as though he wished for all the world he were anywhere else at the moment. The guilt was practically radiating off of his hunched frame, mixed with something visibly akin to determination.

Dis stood directly at the scribe’s back, her eyes soft but her face schooled carefully blank. Bilbo could already feel the well of dread sliding into his gut, causing his blood to run ice cold. He did not want to look to the third figure, he already knew who it was.

With a hard swallow he finally forced himself to glance up to where Thorin stood at his sister’s side, something clenched within the king’s tense grip.

*The letter.*

Bilbo felt his mouth dry up, his tongue sticky like cotton and his heart fluttering painfully in his chest. All of the nerves he thought he had squashed came rushing back with a vengeance, his fears suddenly realized right in front of them.

“Fili-” He hissed, unable to keep himself from speaking as he swallowed through the lump that had suddenly lodged in his throat. Something was gripped between his fingers and it took him a moment to realize that he had reached out, clutching tightly to the prince’s sleeve.

No sooner had he spoken did Fili move, his frame sliding in front of the hobbit, obscuring the trio by their bed chambers from view. “We do not have to talk with them about this, not now, not ever if that is what you wish.” The dwarf stated, his voice hushed. “I will ask them to leave, *without hesitation.*”

Bilbo was shaking his head before he was even aware of himself, already too tired of running to attempt it any longer. They needed to face this head on, *as a family,* and they needed to do it now. “No,” he began to move forward, pulling Fili along with the grip he had on his shirt sleeve, “this is good, this is how we move on.”

The prince looked unsteady for a moment, before he smoothly fell into line at the hobbit’s side. Kili glanced over his shoulder at them as they passed, taking their cue and walking along at their heels with a silent shireling curled against his shoulder.

“*Bilbo.*” Dis was the first to speak when they approached, her tone near apologetic. She watched their movements carefully, noting their sudden caution with a softening of her eyes. “I am terribly sorry to confront you so suddenly as this, yet there is a matter that has just come to our attention, needing to be addressed presently.”

“If-” To Bilbo’s shock it was Thorin who spoke next, clearing his throat and rubbing at the back of his neck with his free hand, “if it would be convenient for you, that is.”

The hobbit felt his mouth slide open slightly, unable to hide the disbelief that flitted across his features. He had expected a great many things from Thorin upon his reading the letter; *this,* however, was not one of them. Through his stunned demeanor a thought managed to slide into the forefront of his mind. *Perhaps his effect on the King the night before had been more grand than he had originally fathomed.*
He blinked, suddenly aware of the sensation that he was being watched. He glanced around nervously, finding that all eyes had fallen on him. With a blast of heat to his cheeks he motioned towards the massive doors to their chamber, reaching out and grasping onto the heavy handle. “It would be most convenient, as a matter of fact.” He gave the heavy wood a hard push with his good arm, gesturing his head in the direction of the doorway. “Though I think it would suit everyone best if we moved this conversation inside, hm?”

Bilbo was incredibly proud of himself for managing to still the tremble in his voice, swallowing through the nerves that he shoved back while he nodded for Kili and Fili to head in first. The brothers shared a look, yet still they relented almost immediately. They moved past the threshold with a silent, wide eyed hobbit-ling still clutching to the younger prince’s throat.

After them Dis moved easily into the room, offering Bilbo a soft expression and a sure nod. He smiled at her in return, managing to fight back the nerves that still twisted in his gut. Ori scurried in next with his shoulders hunched and his eyes blown wide. He offered Bilbo an apologetic look and ducked past the doorway, walking to hover over by the soft, cushioned seats in the sitting room.

Bilbo’s heart squeezed tightly in his chest, a cool wave of anxiety prickling over his flesh when he forced himself to turn and greet their last visitor.

Thorin had his eyes averted, his expression laced with guilt and his hands still clutching the letter tightly. The sight of the dwarf so rattled actually served to lessen the tension that had curled in the hobbit’s gut, and with a shaky breath he allowed himself to smile. “Thorin.” When the king looked up he offered him a reassuring nod, stepping back from the doorway slightly to make more room.

That seemed to get Thorin moving, and once he was firmly in the room Bilbo shut the door behind them, sealing out the hallway beyond. That was where he stayed for the moment, hand still clutching the brass door knob and eyes glued to the expansive frame of the wood. With a steadying breath he steeled his nerves and turned, eyes scanning the company gathered in the sitting room.

Surprisingly, it was Thorin who spoke first, clearing his throat loudly in the quiet room.

“We have not come to take up your time this evening, or rather,” the king scratched at his beard where he stood, his gaze suddenly finding the ceiling and his shoulders hunching up, “not much of it in any case.”

“Of course.” Bilbo felt his heart beat begin to slow, something akin to calm settling into his chest, allowing him to breathe easier. He gestured with his hand, motioning towards one of the vacant wooden chairs, poised around the room. “Care to take a seat?”

“No, no I-” He swallowed, shaking his head with a tired sigh, “I will stand, thank you. What I have to say will not take long, but I must say it.”

The hobbit nodded, rubbing nervously at the bicep of his injured arm. He offered the king a serene nod, biting at the flush of his lower lip slightly. “By all means.”

Thorin offered him a nod in return, glancing behind him to where Dis was seated, her eyes flicking between the two of them thoughtfully. When she caught her brother’s gaze she offered him a reassuring nod, expression soft.

Looking only slightly more reassured the king cleared his throat, once again speaking in a soft, remorseful tone. “By now I am sure you are aware that we have all read the letter you sent with your first arriving party. That I-” he scrunched up the paper in his hands a little, his expression pinching, “I have.”
Bilbo could only nod, feeling panic tighten in his chest, only to school it down with a firm, careful breath. “I was hoping it would be read.” Not necessarily by the King himself, but it had been intended for the company…a chance to give them an honest look into the life he had been leading without them, pushed away in his exile from Erebor. “I just wanted to let everyone know how I had been feeling since I left the mountain, I was—”

He swallowed, licking his lips as the confession stalled in his throat. Then he reminded himself once more that he had written everything in the letter already, and flushed in his own self-admonishment. “I was angry for a long time Thorin, something that I kept pushed down and bottled up, along with all of the hurt I returned to the shire with. It was hard for me to push that away, to let go of all of the pain—”

Thorin raised a hand up suddenly and instinctively Bilbo stopped, his heart pounding in his chest. He watched the king unblinkingly while he waited for him to speak. The room was silent, Fili and Kili shifting out of the corner of his eye, their attention focused steadily on their uncle and their expressions tense. Frodo remained silent where he was curled against Kili’s chest, his gaze trained wordlessly on the pair in the center of the room.

When the king finally spoke it was quieter than Bilbo could have ever expected, his pale eyes finding the hobbit’s and his jaw clenching. “You need not justify your actions Bilbo,” he stated, reaching up to run a hand anxiously over his bearded mouth, “nothing written on this paper is unfounded or misplaced; none of your hurt, none of your anger, and I—”

Bilbo felt himself sag in relief at Thorin’s sudden rush of understanding, his heart still hammering in his chest and his face heated while he stared at the dwarf with eyes blown wide.

The king stepped forward, coming closer to Bilbo and looking down at the injured hobbit with a guilt laden gaze. “I owe you my most sincerest apology.” His voice rumbled throughout the room, and someone made a sharp noise of disbelief. Thorin actually winced at that, continuing on in a quieter tone. “When you arrived, when I saw that braid in your hair, that bead…” he trailed off and licked his lips nervously, his head shaking, “the only thing I could think was that you had somehow managed to steal my nephews away from me. That you had taken advantage of their youth and their inexperience, and manipulated them into marrying you for your own gains. I was just, filled with this unbelievable rage and I—”

Thorin tore his gaze away from Bilbo’s, staring resolutely at the floor instead while he took in a slow, rumbling breath. “I was wrong to treat you so cruelly; to scream at you, to humiliate you and terrify your child. Especially when,” he breathed in again, this time his voice pinching as he pushed on, “especially when you had no intention of even returning with them, let alone wedding them, when they showed up at your front door.”

“Oh, well,” Bilbo scratched at his chin slightly, glancing off to the side where Fili and Kili stood, still tense and silent as the grave, “I, well, I suppose I accept your apology, but you should also know that I understand why you reacted the way you did.”

“That does not excuse me, or my behavior towards you in the past few years.” Thorin stepped forward again, carefully reaching out to clasp a hand around Bilbo’s good shoulder. “I just, I needed to let you know, how truly sorry I am.”

“I know,” The hobbit reached up to clasp over Thorin’s hand with his own, offering the dwarf King a reassuring smile, “and it means the world to me that you took the time to let me tell me.”

Thorin nodded, his lips pulled tightly together and his shoulders still slightly tense. The king stepped back, however, offering Bilbo something close to a smile in return.
The hobbit then cleared his throat, deciding it was best to clarify a few things while they had broached the topic. “I am glad that you understand that my intentions towards your nephews have never been anything but genuine, however,” he forcibly met the King’s eyes, his brows raised and his lips drawn together into a thin line, “I must reiterate that I am entirely serious about my marriage to your sister sons.”

He looked over his shoulder at that, catching Kili’s eyes first where the archer stood, Frodo’s arms still curled around his neck. They shared a smile before he moved his attention to Fili, the older prince relaxing visibly when their gazes locked and giving him a quick nod.

Reassured Bilbo pushed forward, looking back to Thorin, his expression entirely serious. “By my people’s standards, we are all but wed. I respect your people’s need for their own ceremony, and I will concede to that. However,” he straightened, raising his head and holding his chin high, “do not expect me to be swayed from their side for the purpose of appeasing you, or anyone else for that matter.”

Thorin seemed to consider that, something complex and unreadable flashing across his features. Then slowly he seemed to relent, his arms folding snugly across his chest. “Fair enough.” He offered with a thoughtful nod, looking resigned yet still tense with a visible line of discomfort that to tighten over his shoulders. “On another day, we will have to begin discussing the formalities of such an occasion…from our culture’s perspective.”

Bilbo offered him another smile at that, relaxing with a deep breath that seemed to cause his entire body to deflate. Tension leaked away and he was filled instead with a tight, cool sense of relief, soothing over his frayed nerves. “Another day.”

The king nodded, his attention drifting over to where his sister sons stood, expression dropping to something akin to remorse. Then with a small lick of his lips he let his gaze flick around the chamber at large, clearing his throat. “I suppose, then, we have taken up enough of your time.” His attention shifted to Ori and Dis, both dwarves perking up under Thorin’s gaze. “It would be best for us now to take our leave, I think.”

“Ah, but talking was not the only reason that we came by, was it brother?” Dis piped up, moving to rise from where she was seated on the settee.

“It wasn’t?” Bilbo blinked, confusion creasing over his features when he watched Ori straighten as well, the scribe looking between the princess and her brother.

Thorin seemed to suddenly understand Dis’ meaning, looking slightly sheepish. “Of course, I had nearly forgotten.” His posture was hunched again, curled up with the awkwardness that seemed to waft off of the king in thick plumes. “Dis and I were discussing possibly borrowing the little Halfling-”

“Frodo.” Kili corrected sharply from where he stood by his brother, the child hanging off of his neck, regarding the rest of them in interest. “His name is Frodo.”

“Ah,” The king actually winced at that, scratching at the back of his head and looking towards his sister, as if seeking assistance, “of course.”

“Ever the eloquent one, brother.” Dis rolled her eyes, strolling over to where her sons stood with the shireling. Kili gave him over easily enough, lifting Frodo up when the child moved to curl his arms around Dis’ throat, allowing the dwarven woman to hike him up against her side. “We simply thought that it might be nice for the three of you to have some reprieve for the evening.”
“You-” Bilbo swallowed, flicking his gaze between Fili and Kili, and where Dis currently stood, Frodo clutched in her arms. The child had already relaxed into the Dwarven princess’ hold, curling so that he was nestled with his head tucked under her chin. Thorin’s attention too had fixed on the small hobbit-ling, his expression softer than Bilbo had seen it in years. “You are sure you would not mind? It’s no burden for Frodo to spend time with us, we have grown quite used to each other’s constant company-”

“Yet is it not fitting for ones as newlywed as yourselves to have some opportunity for reprieve?” Dis countered, moving over towards where Thorin stood. She gently reached out to him with one hand, clasping his shoulder firmly with Frodo still pressed to her chest. “You three should have the evening for yourselves, take some time to relax.”

“What will you be doing?” Kili piped up, looking slightly wary at the idea of parting from Frodo for the evening, a sentiment that Bilbo most definitely felt in kind.

“Well,” Dis began once she had pulled Thorin up to her side. The King was focused almost exclusively on where the shireling was cuddled against her chest, watching Frodo with a distinct and obvious curiosity. “I believe it’s about time that my brother and I get to know the newest addition to our family.”

Bilbo felt his throat catch at that, watching with a tight wrench in his chest when Frodo actually grinned, reaching up to press his small hands against the curve of Dis’ lightly bearded jaw.

“Family time!” The shireling exclaimed, beaming up at the dwarven woman. Then the child added, almost as an afterthought, “but no more yelling.”

“Right, no more yelling.” Dis assured him, flashing her brother a significant look. Thorin’s expression fell slightly and he ducked his head, his shoulders hiking up to his ears. The guilt across his features was stark and plain, almost startling to see after witnessing Thorin’s brash, unforgiving temperament.

The king cleared his throat, glancing around them with a slight nod of his head. “No more yelling.” He managed, his voice sounding strained, laced with regret.

Bilbo looked between the siblings, weighing their offer as he chewed carefully on the inside of his cheek. He then stepped forward, coming up to Frodo, reaching to brush his nephew’s bangs off of his forehead. “You are sure this is okay little one?” He let his fingers drop back down, cupping the boy’s cheek with an affectionate squeeze. “You can sleep here tonight if that is what you prefer.”

Frodo seemed to contemplate that for a moment, tiny face screwing up in concentration while he clutched at Dis’ shoulders. “No, I want to see the other rooms here.” The boy stated firmly, providing his reasoning with a minute bob of his little head. “This is home now, right?”

“Right.” Bilbo dropped his hand back with a chuckle and offered his nephew a warm smile. “A good chance for more exploring right?”

Frodo made a bright noise of assent at that, before leaning closer to his uncle and trying his best at a whisper. “I want Thorin to show me his room.” He stated with a giggle. “Our room is huge so his must be giant!”

The hobbit couldn’t help but chuckle at his nephew’s antics, leaning up to peck the boy on his forehead briefly. “That it must! You will have to tell me all about it at breakfast tomorrow, alright?”

“Okay.” Frodo let go of Dis’ shoulders with one hand, pressing it to his mouth before reaching out
to pat his uncle’s forehead. “Good night Uncle Bilbo!”

“Good night Frodo.”

Almost on cue Kili had somehow materialized at Bilbo’s side, having snuck up just in time to receive the next giggling goodnight from the small shireling. Frodo got a kiss from Fili before waving at Ori over Dis’ shoulder, the princess bidding them goodnight with Thorin at her heels.

Ori was the last to leave, and apologized profusely to Bilbo as he slipped out the large chamber doors.

“I did not intend to cause you any stress.” The scribe assured the three of them quickly, his face flushed and his demeanor flustered. “I just…once I read what you had written, I just felt that Princess Dis and the king needed to know…”

When he trailed off, looking a little lost in his regret, Bilbo could not help but reach forward, minding his sling when he clasped his good hand over the dwarf’s shoulder.

“You did nothing wrong Ori.” He assured the court scribe, keeping his expression light and easy. “While I have to admit, I was afraid at first of Thorin’s reaction to the letter, I can see now that they both needed to know—” he swallowed, licking his lips when he drew back and away from Ori, falling into place between Fili and Kili at his back, “they needed to understand how hurt I felt in those years I spent alone, yet I doubt I would have been brave enough to bring that to their attention on my own.”

“You did the right thing Ori.” Fili piped up, his voice strangely reassuring as he offered the younger dwarf a firm nod. “We all owe you our thanks.”

The scribe blushed, stepping back out into the hall and ducking his head slightly. “I consider each of you to be among my closest friends,” he stated, looking embarrassed and flustered, “if I were in your position, I would like to think you would have done the same.”

“And we would have.” Kili assured him firmly, stepping forward and actually grabbing onto the scribe, pulling him sharply up to his chest for a firm hug. “You have done a great deal for our family Ori, we could never forget that.”

The younger dwarf was actually smiling when Kili finally drew back, offering the three of them one more shy nod of his head when he backed up further into the hallway. “I will leave you three to get some rest,” he paused, his expression turning somewhat hopeful, “if you have time tomorrow, you should sit and have a meal with my brothers and I. We still have a great deal of catching up to do.”

“That sounds wonderful.” Bilbo offered him a grin, feeling himself relax completely when Kili stepped back to his side, leaving Ori to start off down the hall alone. The hobbit waved to him as he left, his expression soft. “Again, really Ori, thank you!”

The call echoed after the young dwarf’s retreating figure, the three of them hovering in the doorway until Ori’s footsteps began to fade off into the distance, the scribe’s back disappeared down the torch lit floors. Once they were truly alone Bilbo let out the weighted sigh he had been holding, sagging against Kili at his side. The archer immediately wrapped an arm around his waist, tugging him close and leaning down to press a kiss to his forehead.

“That was stressful.” The young prince admitted after a moment, his mouth still pressed into the bed of Bilbo’s soft curls. “Though I think in all honesty it went better than expected.”
Bilbo let out a breathy laugh, leaning further into Kili while Fili stepped ahead of them, moving to seal the large double doors to their bed chambers. “Far better, actually.” He admitted, remembering the sheer horror he had felt at the thought of Thorin reading his letter. “Seems to me my fears were all but unfounded.”

“I would not quite say that.” Fili objected as he finished closing the doors all the way, leaving them blissfully alone for the first time in weeks. “You had all of the reasons in the world to be apprehensive, even afraid. Our Uncle has been nothing if not unreasonable in the past, why should you now view him any differently?”

There was an edge of bitterness in the older prince’s tone that drove a twist of discomfort into Bilbo’s gut. He did not cherish the thought of Fili and Kili holding their Uncle in any sort of ill contempt, especially while Thorin was struggling against the influence of something so strong and deadly as the gold fever. If what he knew of the history of Erebor was any indication, it seemed that it was not the first time that this sickness of the mind had plagued the line of Durin, costing the people they ruled greatly. He could never wish such a horrific fate upon Thorin or his people.

“Your uncle is fighting for us right now Fili.” He stated, his expression deadly serious. “He is struggling against a disease that is slowly consuming him, mind and soul, twisting his instincts and making each decision he has a battle against his own conscious; and he is terrified.”

Kili sucked in sharply and Bilbo watched as the muscles in Fili’s jaw clenched and locked. Neither prince spoke however, their eyes trained on him in deadly silence.

“I think I understand Thorin, in a way.” Bilbo continued after a moment, clearing his throat sharply. “Suddenly he had a resurrected kingdom to rule, people who needed governing, land which needed protecting; years of compounded responsibility crashing down over his shoulders all at once. I know your uncle, and while he is powerful, his true strength lies within his blood.”

He flicked his gaze between the brothers at that, his eyebrows slightly raised as he looked over them significantly. Kili, ever the open book, looked instantly guilty, his face flushing slightly and his eyes blown wide. Fili, on the other hand, simply swallowed, his expression a carefully schooled mask.

With a knowing look Bilbo continued, bringing his hand up to curl around the bicep of his injured arm. “After I left—”

“Were wrongly exiled.” Fili corrected firmly.

Bilbo could not help a small smile, unable to keep back the curl of warmth that settled in his chest at the thought of the prince’s readiness to defend him. “After my exile,” he tried again, still watching the two dwarves carefully, “you drifted from Thorin…did you not?”

Kili bit at his lip and looked down to the ground while Fili simply bristled, bracing his arms across his chest. “What else would you have had us do?” He argued, his shoulders visibly tensing in a tight line. “It felt as though he had ripped the beating hearts from our very chest, without heed or care for the damage it would do.” His teeth clenched together slightly and his lips thinned into a tight frown. “How could we do anything but drift away from a man so cruel.”

“We could not face him,” Kili admitted more softly, his gaze still fixed firmly on the hard floor beneath their feet, “not after what he did to you…to us.”

“I know, and believe me when I say that I do not know of any being who would have acted any differently in your circumstances. However, that said—” he offered a shrug, wincing slightly when it
jostled his sling, causing the stitches in his arm to pull sharply, “with that said, you must have noticed the pattern in your uncle’s behavior?”

At their twin, blank expressions Bilbo bit his lip, torn between overwhelming fondness and sharp frustration with his boys. “You mentioned when you first arrived at Bag End, that Thorin’s attitude had begun to improve dramatically when your mother finally arrived in Erebor, yes?”

“Right.” Kili nodded, his eyebrows pinched together in confusion. “However, I do not see how-”

“Just hold on,” Bilbo gently cut in, raising up his good arm to still the archer mid sentence, “hear me out.” Both brothers went silent again, watching him carefully while he spoke. “When your mother joined you here, it gave Thorin someone to offer him support. As harsh as Dis is with her brother, she loves him unconditionally. Her presence gave him something to anchor to, allowing him to pull away from the fever long enough to permit you two to seek me out in the first place. However, according to Lesole, in recent months Thorin has once again regressed into the sickness, because shortly after you left—”

“Mother left too.” Kili whispered, his eyes widening impossibly further and his mouth dropping open in cold realization.

“He had no family left to ground him.” Bilbo offered with a sad shake of his head. “You see now why I do not wish either of you to feel ill will towards your uncle. His companions, even those as close as Balin, are still his subjects in the end. Blood, however, runs thicker than rule.” The hobbit flicked his gaze from Kili to his older brother, watching the blond dwarf’s reaction with a calculating gaze. “When Thorin has his family, he has people who can keep in check the building madness inside of him.”

He stepped forward, reaching out to Fili first, clasping the older prince’s arm. “He is going to have to fight, tooth and nail, in order to heal from here.” He murmured, releasing the blond and turning to his brother, offering him a reassuring squeeze of his own. “If we cannot put aside our own hurt to help him, I am honestly not sure if he will be able to pull through this. You do understand that, don’t you?”

Fili bit down on his lip, looking completely torn as he ripped his gaze away from Bilbo, looking off to the side instead. “I just feel so frustrated.” He admitted after a moment, shaking his head with an incredulous noise. “How are you not more angry with him?”

“I am furious with him.” Bilbo corrected, snapping the words out with more vigour than he’d originally intended. “How could I not be, after the way he treated me? After everything that I did for him and his people? After he tore me from the ones I love the most and forced me to suffer the road home, alone.”

Fili looked slightly shocked by the edge to his tone, and instantly the hobbit found himself deflating. “I spent three years with all of that lonely anger boiling up inside of me. It will take a great many more before Thorin Oakenshield will once again be held in my regard. However,” he glanced between them, his expression firm, “he is, and has always been, one of my most dearly held companions, and I refuse to push him away in this, his time of need.”

A long silence fell on the room after Bilbo finally finished, both brothers now watching the hobbit with varying degrees of shock and wonder.

“You-” Kili began, the first to snap out of his trance with a hard shake of his head, “you are just incredible, have I ever told you that?”
Bilbo could do nothing to stop the way he seemed to relax at the archer’s light tone, tension seeping out of his body, replaced with a comfortable, familiar heat. “On occasion.”

“That nearly enough if you ask me.” The archer insisted, stepping up into the hobbit’s space and bending to press their lips together chastely. He waited for Bilbo to relax completely before he drew away again, a fond smile across his lips. “I am glad you are here with us, Mister Boggins.”

A laugh slipped from Bilbo unbidden and he swatted out playfully with his free hand, shaking his head at the use of the ridiculous nickname. “Against all better judgment, I am glad as well.” He teased, flicking his gaze over to where Fili stood, the blond’s expression slowly shifting to something hopelessly fond. Bilbo shot the older prince a soft smile, feeling his heart give a hard lurch in his chest. “I can’t even fathom life without you two.”

A low rumble escaped Fili and the warrior stepped forward slowly, his strides easy, graceful like a large cat. “The feeling is very much mutual.” He assured the hobbit, leaning down to brush his bearded lips against the underside of his smooth chin.

“You and Frodo,” Kili piped up from beside him, careful not to jostle the injured hobbit while he leaned down to nudge his nose against the line of Bilbo’s throat, “you are our family now.”

Somehow, in all the times the brothers had said it, Bilbo never tired of hearing that he was their family now. That, and finding Frodo, made the expanse of long, lonely years all the more worth it. With a contented sigh he leaned into Kili’s touch a bit, looking up to Fili at his side. “On that wonderful note, I say we forgo any more serious conversations for the evening; particularly given our relatively scarce opportunities for time alone in the past few months.”

“I agree whole heartedly.” Kili was practically beaming, leaning up from Bilbo’s shoulder to press a kiss to the lobe of the Halfling’s ear. “Have anything particular in mind for the evening?”

The hobbit made a contented noise and smiled. “To be honest, I haven’t a clue.” He glanced up at Fili, offering the dwarf a cheeky grin. “What about you? Any ideas?”

The blond prince raised a single eyebrow, his expression lighting up and dimples creasing his cheeks.

“Oh, I can think of a few.”

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“Daily baths.”

Bilbo let out a sigh of relief, kicking off his trousers where he sat on the bed before starting to work at the sling across his chest. “I always forget how much I appreciate a good, lengthy soak before I go without for weeks on end.”

“A warm soak too.” Kili had already lost his trousers, working off his tunic and tossing it over towards a chest by the wall. “I will never get tired of steaming baths and hot springs.”

“Me neither.” Fili chuckled from directly at Bilbo’s back. The hobbit jumped slightly before relaxing, allowing the blond dwarf to assist in unfastening the sling, strewn across his shoulders. “Particularly when they hold such sweet memories for us.”

The prince’s voice came out as a low rumble next to his ear, causing Bilbo to shudder with a curl of pleasure. Instantly he was brought back to that first time, all those years ago, when he stumbled by chance on a dozing prince on a sunny boulder in the springs. His throat closed up a bit at the
thought, a well of emotion and hard arousal flooding through him without much warning. He willed himself to calm, a smile creeping across his mouth when he turned his head over his shoulder, catching Fili’s chin with his lips. “Wonderful times that surely deserve frequent revisiting.”

Fili grinned, kissing him once more while he finished undoing the sling, setting it aside and gently urging Bilbo up and off of the bed. “What are we waiting for then?”

“If you two stopped dawdling we would not be.” Kili stood, as naked as they were, arms crossed where he leaned in the doorway to the baths. “Shall we?”

Bilbo shook his head with a fond expression and started into the other room, passing the archer with a brief, cheeky grin.

The evening had been entirely relaxing thus far, spent lounging in the sitting room while they ordered up foods from the kitchens, discussing various aspects of Erebor life to which Bilbo had yet to be introduced. It all seemed like a great deal to become accustomed to, yet the hobbit reveled in each tidbit the brothers divulged about their culture and city; about the place that they would all call home. They enjoyed fine brews and the luxury of each other’s company until they had just about cleared each plate they had requested, then they started their leisurely strip when they migrated towards the baths on Fili’s suggestion.

It was not a decision to be regretted.

Bilbo was the first into the water, mindful of his carefully bandaged forearm even as he stepped into the hot water, a content sigh slipping out from between his lips. “Oh that is nice.” He stretched, feeling his joints crack and his muscles protest weakly, still stiff from hard months of travel on the road. The heat of the water seemed to target the ache that resonated from his very core, bleeding it from him and causing him to relax with each step he took deeper into the water. “Very, very nice.”

“Mind your arm.” Kili slid into the tub right after him, coming up behind him and briefly curling one of his hands around Bilbo’s hip. “Oin would have a fit if he found out we ruined his bandaging.”

“I cannot actually imagine that,” the hobbit admitted with a soft hum, “Oin having a fit I mean. He just seems too old and wise for that sort of thing.”

“You would be surprised.” Fili came up to the edge of the tub last, moving down the rock steps into the water. Once the steaming liquid was up to his navel he stopped, leaning back to sit on one of the lower ledges with his chest and shoulders still comfortably dry. Both brothers had taken the time to shed their usual braids, their courtship beads resting with Bilbo’s own wooden one on the dresser in the main chamber.

The hobbit floated away from Kili slightly, keeping one arm raised while he ducked himself completely under in the water, coming up with his hair dripping down over his shoulders and his bangs slicked across his brow.

It was heavenly to be able to feel so clean after what seemed like months of constant sweat and grime on the road. An adventurer he was, but he was also a hobbit, and he could not deny the part of himself that cringed at dirt beneath his nails, and fretted over the mud that occasionally caked in his honey curls.

“Not that I dislike travel,” He commented idly, still holding his arm up while he walked back
towards the shallower water where Kili had come to sit at his brother’s side, “but I am
immeasurably grateful to be settled again.”

“Here here.” The younger dwarf made an appreciative noise, drawing a hand up out of the water to
slick back his still dry locks. “I for one have not felt this relaxed for what seems like years.”

Fili hummed in approval, his gaze flicking over towards where Bilbo stood in the steaming water,
still a few feet away. “Though I can think of one way to make this even more relaxing.”

He laced the word with so much dripping intention that Bilbo felt his stomach tighten, twisting in
arousal. Swallowing the hobbit offered him a playful look, idly tracing his lower lip with the fat tip
of his tongue. “Oh I am not sure,” he drawled, sauntering forward a few more steps, before
stopping once again out of reach, “how could this possibly get any more relaxing?” He reached up
and gave his wet mass of curls a slow tousle, smile still plastered across his lips.

Fili let out a groan, spreading his legs a little where he sat, knees bent beneath the water. “Well,
you could stop being a merciless tease for one.”

There was nothing Bilbo could do to keep back the chuckle that bubbled up in his throat, his head
shaking even when he took mercy on the older prince, moving the rest of the way forward until he
was standing between the spread ‘v’ of the dwarf’s thighs.

As he moved Kili shifted closer to his brother, crossing his palms over one of the blond’s shoulders
and dropping his chin down to rest on the backs of his hands.

None of them said anything for a while, Bilbo reaching down to grasp at Fili’s thighs when one of
the prince’s hands slid along his side and down over the round of his rear. Cold, sharp anticipation
slid into him and he found himself pushing back even through the first burning press of Fili’s
fingers when they breached him. He opened his mouth through a deep, calming breath,
concentrating on the feel of the prince inside of him, twisting and stretching him for the first time
in ages.

It had been so long that the initial shock of pain was almost startling, but Bilbo was determined to
take the sensation in stride. He stepped a little closer between the blond’s legs, his attention
shifting to where Kili was leaning against his brother’s shoulder. He moved his grip from Fili’s
thighs, turning instead to grasp the younger prince’s face, drawing him into a slow, leisurely kiss.

Kili responded eagerly, pulling his hands out from where they were rested beneath his chin. With a
groan he sat forward over Fili’s shoulder to get a better angle in the kiss. It was deep and intimate
in a way they could only afford in private, and Bilbo shuddered from the force of the
overwhelming want that suddenly consumed him.

The archer seemed to melt into the kiss, keening softly whenever their lips parted and chasing
Bilbo’s mouth back down. They slid together easily, all lips and tongue with just the barest hint of
teeth. It was distracting enough to push him past the initial discomfort of Fili working into his
body, fingers twisting and spreading him wide in a way that slowly burned towards pleasure.

It was not long before he began to feel hot with the sensation, steam and arousal making his eyes
blur and his head spin. Overwhelmed, Bilbo finally pulled away from Kili, a desperate noise
falling from his lips. He rocked back against the older prince’s hand, his head shaking as a constant
mantra of soft, breathy sounds bubbled up his throat.

“Enough, enough enough-” Bilbo groaned, his hands coming up to squeeze at Fili’s biceps,
attempting to still the blond’s teasing movements with little avail. “Please, it’s been far too long
“Alright, alright.” Fili soothed, pressing forward to slide chaste kisses against the underside of Bilbo’s jaw. He slowly withdrew his hand, gently nibbling on the hobbit’s chin and murmuring soft phrases of comfort against his flesh.

Bilbo sucked in a slow breath, feeling the hot build of pleasure slowly recede from where it had been creeping up his spine.

He was so caught up in regaining his senses that he hardly noticed the shift of movement at their side until something solid and hot slid up against his back; a slick frame that pressed firm, molding against him with the slow slide of hands down his hips to his thighs. Bilbo couldn’t help but curl back into Kili when the archer rolled his hips forward, grinding his pelvis against the smooth curve of the hobbit’s ass.

“We need to do this more often.” He found himself murmuring, the words escaping him without a second thought. “Much, much more often.”

Kili made a rumbling noise of agreement, dipping his head down to kiss at the back of Bilbo’s neck while he trailed his hands around to wrap around under each of his legs. With a sharp breath he hoisted up, hauling the Halfling out of the water before setting him back down, only this time astride his brother’s spread thighs.

Bilbo made a high whining noise in the back of his throat, shifting deliberately when his groin slid against Fili’s, their flushed arousals brushing together with a sharp burst of pleasure. “We will find a way to do this every day if we can.” The older prince growled at his front, reaching out to gingerly grasp the hobbit’s injured arm, lifting to curl it around his neck, out of harm’s way. The motion only seemed to draw Bilbo closer, his breath rushing out of him in a sharp gasp and his head spinning with the sudden rush of blood south. “Anything you need, anything at all, we are at your service.”

The Halfling groaned, his face heating up as he curled his injured arm around Fili’s back, using the other hand to steady himself on the blond’s shoulder. “I will never tire of hearing that.” He admitted breathlessly, groaning when he felt Kili’s hands return to his hips from behind.

“That is a blessing, as I doubt he will ever tire of saying it.” The archer teased lightly, trailing his fingers down to beneath Bilbo’s ass and gripping there.

The hobbit let out a sharp noise of surprise, Kili suddenly forcing him up and onto his knees where he straddled Fili’s lap, his good hand digging into the warrior’s shoulder hard for purchase. Fingers suddenly squeezed at his hips, steadying him while the older prince helped position him, leaning forward to nip playfully at the smooth flesh of his jaw. “You are one to talk, Kili.” Fili shot back to his brother from where he was kissing his way down Bilbo’s throat, eliciting all manner of wanton noise from the trembling hobbit. “You are just as bad as I am and you know it.”

The archer simply laughed at that, the noise light and rumbling, sending shivers down Bilbo’s spine. One of his hands slid away from where it had been squeezed around his ass cheek, dropping back while Kili began to nip his way across the hobbit’s shoulder. “Relax.”

At the word Bilbo forced himself to do just that, sagging back slightly even as a blunt pressure, impossibly wide, pushed up against him. He took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm through the familiar stretching sensation.

He could barely remember the last time they had done this, but he was certain that this time took
much longer for him to relax. He sucked in hard through his nose, his body sliding down inch by inch as both brothers murmured reassuring words to him, a pair of lips at each ear. The burning and dull ache of pain gave way to something impossibly full when he was finally completely seated on their cocks, his legs trembling with the effort to keep himself upright.

“*Mahal Bilbo* you feel so good.” Fili groaned, pressing up until their foreheads bumped together gently, nuzzling there.

“Why in the name of *Aule* did we wait so bloody long to do this again?” Kili echoed his brother’s sentiment with a subconscious roll of his hips, driving him up further into Bilbo’s tight frame and dragging him against the older prince’s cock.

Both Fili and Bilbo gasped out at the sensation, the latter scrambling to keep his balance while minding the injured limb he had hooked around the blond dwarf’s shoulder. “If you will remember,” he managed to pant out, subconsciously lifting up a little on his knees, hissing as the brothers slid out of him slightly, before he rolled his hips back down, “we were without the luxuries of time or privacy for the majority of our trip.”

“Excuses.” Kili panted back, his tone light through a breathy chuckle.

“Well I-” The hobbit cut off short as the archer pushed up again, thrusting into Bilbo’s frame and causing Fili to shift, bucking beneath them. “Oh, oh-”

His words began to blur together into a stream of gasping noises, both brothers starting up a brutal and almost simultaneous pace, dragging against each other while they pushed up hard into Bilbo’s waiting frame.

He could feel the force of it in his stomach, punching the air out of his lungs as they fucked into him with an energy and determination that spoke volumes of the restraint they had been forced to endure for the long weeks now behind them. Bilbo wanted to push back, wanted to give as hard as he got, but with only one arm to brace himself he was barely keeping upright, his whole body flushed with desperation and hot, flaming arousal. All traces of pain had vanished, replaced with that familiar, wholly complete sensation that edged too close to pleasure for him to handle. Then Kili pressed forward a little more, sandwiching Bilbo between his strong chest and his brother where he sat. The motion lodged the archer deeper into his body, his cock pinching against his prostate and causing him to thrash where he knelt.

“Ah!” His whole body clenched and Fili cursed, just barely managing to stop Bilbo from dropping his injured arm back down to the water below.

“Hey, careful.” The blond prince gasped out, a heavy flush across his own cheeks when he cautiously wrapped the bandaged limb around the back of his neck once more. “Mind your arm.”

“I-” The words were knocked out of him when Kili shifted again, this time propping one foot up on a step below them, allowing him to fuck into the hobbit harder, faster, his fingers digging red crescents into the flesh of his hips, “I am trying, I-”

He once again dissolved into a wordless moan, his whole body shuddering forward until he had both arms around wrapped around Fili’s shoulders, his face buried into the crook of his neck. “Ah, ah!”

The older dwarf leaned back slightly, one arm a firm band around Bilbo’s waist, the other propped against the step beside them, giving him the leverage to fuck up into the Halfling, working to
match his brother’s brutal pace.

Bilbo closed his eyes tight, pleasure burning through his veins like a molten fire, reducing him to a mess of shivers when he struggled to fight back the steady prickling sensation of the climax, building at the base of his spine.

“I need, I-” He was rambling against Fili’s flesh, the words a harsh stutter from the hard thrusts that rocked his small body, “Oh, there, there-”

He was so lost in the merciless onslaught of pleasure that he did not notice the rising crest of his orgasm until it slammed into him, so sudden and blinding that it ripped a violent shout from his throat. He slumped forward against Fili’s chest; would have slipped off to the side if the blond warrior hadn’t been holding him so tightly.

They were still moving, pushing up inside of him as he twitched and spasmed, clenching down around them with the aftershock of his release.

Then suddenly Kili leaned forward, sealing his mouth around Bilbo’s shoulder and biting down, hard. The smaller man yelped at the sensation, bucking down and earning a startled curse from Fili who tensed as his cock suddenly stilled and pulsed inside of the Halfling, climax hitting him hard.

Kili released Bilbo’s shoulder with a breathy groan, his hips giving one, two more deep, brutal thrusts before he too stilled, his whole body tensing with his sharp cry. His hands dug hard into Bilbo’s hips, bruising as he followed his brother to ride out his orgasm, wringing all three of them of the very last of their pleasure. Finally the archer stilled, forcing himself to pull out and draw away with a breathless sigh.

“That was-” Kili turned on shaking legs and dropped back down next to Fili, slouching against his brother’s side. “That was-”

“Fantastic?” Fili supplied with a chuckle, shifting his grip on the Halfling and lifting him up and off of his cock.

The hobbit gasped when Fili’s cock finally slid out of him, his whole body twitching at the strange sensation. “Mystifying?” He offered, smiling as, with a small deal of effort, he managed to maneuver himself up and over to the blond prince’s other side, careful to keep his arm above the water when he sunk down where he sat on the step, plastered comfortably against Fili’s side.

“Spectacular?”

“Wondrous?”

“It’s okay brother, we all have trouble remembering our words at times.”

“Ha ha.” Kili shot the two of them an exasperated look, slouching back in the water a little with a huff. “I was going to say worthy of an encore, but apparently none of my ideas are worth listening to, so…”

“An encore hm?” Bilbo leaned forward a bit to glance across Fili to where the archer was sitting. “Now that is the best idea I have heard all night.”

“Hey! What about my idea to have a leisurely soak in the tub?” The older prince argued, sending Bilbo an accusatory look.

Bilbo smiled apologetically. “Why don’t we call it a close second?”
“Thank you for that.” Fili rolled his eyes, but relented none the less when Bilbo leaned up to ask for a kiss.

When he drew back the hobbit grinned, rising to push out further into the bath once more. “I for one would like to actually get a nice wash in before we give it another go,” he glanced between the two of them cheekily, his now drying curls dangling down around his ears, “if that is alright with the two of you that is.”

“Perfectly fine.” Fili grinned, leaning forward a bit and pushing out in the water, ducking under in a smooth motion. When he came back up he shook his head hard, long blonde locks sticking to his face and throat in thick strands. “We have all night together after all.”

“That is where you are wrong.” Kili shook his head with a chuckle, walking out to join the two of them in the middle of the bath. “We have more than just tonight.”

“We have the rest of our lives.”

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

Okay so! Time for the long explanation as to what has gone on in my life in the last month, and what you should expect from me in the next few months.

As I have no doubt informed you guys I have been accepted at University of Queens in Kingston for Law School, so the last month and a bit has been spent packing and sorting and getting ready to move away from the house I've occupied for the last four years of my university career. This, along with my work schedule, as well as my music hobby, has kept me incredibly busy. However none of these are the true reason for how long it's taken for me to update this time around.

Now, it's neither here nor there, but I have a notoriously bad luck streak with relationships and a natural cynicism towards dating in general. However just over two months ago now I met a boy who sort of changed the way I thought about all of that. We started dating, and I honestly have not been so attached to a romantic partner in my life. Unfortunately, due to the fact that I'm moving away, and he is much earlier in his education process than I am, and due to his own personal issues, he broke up with me a few weeks ago. I'm sort of embarrassed to say that I was wayyyy less okay with this than I would have liked.

This, combined with some serious health complications for my grandmother, and some relationship-based issues I was having with a close friend of mine, created an emotional nightmare for me which completely eradicated my ability to write ANYTHING. It was one of the most brutal writers blocks I have had in years. I had to struggle to find my voice again, to get into the frame of mind to write a functional, happy relationship between people who genuinely love each other.

However I have managed to pull my socks up and hop back on the writing horse so to speak!

Only now we have another problem, as I have been given a fantastic opportunity to go
backpacking in Europe and Scotland with my best friend starting next Tuesday, June 18th, and I will not be back until the 30th of August.

This unfortunately means that I once again have to put you guys on a one month hiatus. I am so sorry about this, but I really just want to assure you guys that I am no where near abandoning or stopping this work. Hell I have two more hobbit movies yet to come out to traumatize/inspire me to plug on with this series.

You guys have been so supportive with me through all of this, and I just want you to know that I appreciate each and every one of your comments, posts, reviews, and kudos. They really really mean the world to me, and so does your patience.

I hope this chapter was great for you guys, and I hope that you can be patient with me while I'm away for my travels this summer.

I LOVE YOU ALL. XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOX
Diplomats and Difficult Talks

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Dis explore his first opportunity to act as Ambassador to Erebor in a meeting with the people of Mirkwood and Dale, leaving behind his family for the first time since his arrival at Erebor.

Upon their return Bilbo makes a crucial request of Thorin, and gives him something that the king had been aching for for some time.

Chapter Notes

GUYS IT IS 4:30 IN THE MORNING HERE

I actually have really good excuses as to why this chapter took so long to get out there, but I don't have the energy to type them out now. ALSO THIS CHAPTER IS NOT COMPLETELY BETA'D YET. Because it is past 4 in the morning and I am exhausted. But I wanted to post it anyways

SO IF YOU SEE MISTAKES BEFORE I GET UP TO PROOF THE LAST OF THIS TOMORROW AROUND 10AM (Canada Ontario Time) THEN PLEASE PLEASE LET ME KNOW

THIS IS THE LAST CHAPTER OF THIS STORY IN THE ARC. Which means I am now onto THE VERY LAST story in "When Lions Meet a Mouse"

WHooooo!

No guarantees as to the frequency of my updates, but I WILL FINISH THIS I AM GOD DAMNED DETERMINED

P.s. I am sorry for my mistakes as I am sure there will be many of them. I will add better notes and proof everything tomorrow!

Criticism and concerns always welcome!

xoxoxoxoxoxooxx

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Edit: Alright so I have already started to proofread this chapter, and I have had some mistakes pointed out to me by the lovely Jimiel (and again thank you darling), so I have no doubt in my mind that this work still needs a nice self-beta work over when I am not drunk at 4 in the morning (*cough* last night *cough*). HOWEVER I am about to go rock climbing, so the rest of the editing/a more detailed end note explaining my absence (if you are interested in knowing how my life's been :P) as well as letting you guys know a little bit about my plans for the rest of this series! <3

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**Edit of the Edit:** Still working my way through the beta but there is now an end note for anyone interested in what’s been happening with me since June, as well as my plans for the final installment in When Lions Meet a Mouse (and my future plans for this series). Cheers Loves! xoxo

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Bilbo shifted nervously where he hovered inside the sealed doors of the chambers he shared with Fili and Kili. He had his head tilted down, chin tucked to his chest while he fiddled with the fine gold clasps of his leather tunic top. The cloak that was fastened to his thick shoulder pads had a trimming of fine furs, coloured dark in traditional dwarvish fashion. A thick golden belt cinched his tunic at the hips, carved in fine, intricate patterns that still left him reeling with awe. Everything he wore now was so extravagant, Erebor's strange customs slowly but surely taking their hold on him in the year since he had returned to the mighty dwarven kingdom.

While the dwarves had some casual clothing, reminiscent of shire fashion, commissioned for himself and Frodo (and to his delight, Fili and Kili as well), they were rarely worn; reserved for lazy afternoons tittering about the royal wing, or long days spent tutoring his nephew in the palace’s expansive library. For the most part their entire family adorned dwarvish garments, allowing for easier assimilation into Erebor’s society and re-asserting their status within the expansive mountain city. He and Frodo still garnered strange looks from those they passed, but the longer they remained in the company of the royal family, the more the dwarven community seemed to accept them as their own. Bilbo was fiercely proud of that fact, yet he found himself, on occasion, lamenting the loss of his shire-roots.

It was not as though he minded the steady series of changes; they were, in fact, quite expected, and he was absolutely delighted to adopt the culture of his family. Yet there was just still this part of him that was overwhelmed by the drastic turn that his life had taken. He had gone from a simple shire hobbit, adventurer or not, to being treated like royalty in the kingdom under the Lonely Mountain.

He still had a hard time believing that he was allowed to feel this happy, to be so comfortably settled with the friends and family who he held so dearly. It felt as though all of the heartache, the pain, the fear, just melted away; and for the first time since that fateful battle all those years ago, he was really and truly happy.

It was that very fact that made him so nervous in the end.

He felt as though he was constantly balancing on the edge of something horrible, as though at any moment he would make a mistake, and all of the calm would come shattering down.

He dropped his hands back from where he had been fiddling with his clothing, fingers finding his pocket and drawing out a small, intricately carved box that he had hidden there. Sliding it into his palm he took in its smooth, finely crafted appearance, feeling his chest tighten at the thought of what was inside.

"**Bilbo?**"

He had barely heard the footsteps coming up behind him until hands landed on his hips, a body stepping up to mold in a solid line against his back. "Is everything alright? You look pensive."

Bilbo relaxed against Fili’s larger frame almost immediately, dropping his free hand down so that
he could curl his fingers over the prince's where they rested. He glanced back over his shoulder, smiling when the blond dwarf leaned down to kiss the round of his cheek. "Just nerves, I am sure." He offered, feeling his body relax inch by inch when those arms tightened around his waist, Fili enveloping him in a warm embrace. "This is a big day for me."

"A big day for all of us, if everything goes as it should." Fili told him, his voice soft. "You are more than ready for this. I believe in you."

The hobbit couldn't help but chuckle slightly, turning in Fili's embrace to lean up and peck him on the lips, smile ever present. "That makes one of us at least."

"Better make that two." Kili strolled in from the baths, damp spots on his tunic and his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Frodo was clinging to his throat, wrapped up in a thick, fluffy towel, damp hair still plastered to his forehead.

"Three!" The child chimed, patting his hands excitedly over Kili's shoulders while he grinned at the larger hobbit. "I believe in you too Uncle Bilbo!"

"You do?" He exclaimed, stepping out of Fili's embrace in order to come up to Kili's side, leaning in to give his nephew a kiss on the forehead. "Well, that makes me feel a lot better little one."

Frodo beamed, closing his eyes with a giggle when Bilbo gave his cheeks kisses next. As he drew back the child curled tighter around Kili's throat, still beaming while he pressed the top of his damp hair up underneath his chin. The younger prince didn't seem to mind getting wet, grinning at Bilbo and curling the hobbit-ling closer. "You will be fantastic, we all know it."

He flushed a little, feeling more at ease with the unwavering support of his family. He reached out, touching Kili's face lightly, before nodding. "This is all just so new to me, I can do nothing to help feeling a little nervous. Especially leaving you all behind for so long."

His eyes dropped down of their own accord while he spoke, flicking to where the small box still rested in his palm.

Fili's gaze seemed to trace the movement and his brows furrowed in confusion. "What do you have there?" He asked, stepping forward and leaning around the hobbit to get a better look.

Bilbo flushed, flashing the blond a small smile and holding out his hand, offering up the container. "It is for you actually, I was hoping you could look after it while I am away."

The older dwarf's frown only seemed to deepen, creases wrinkling across his brow while he carefully eased up the lid of the small box. "Bilbo-" The noise Fili made was nothing short of alarmed, his eyes widening and his mouth dropping open. He drew out the small courtship bead that they had commissioned for him a few weeks after arriving back to Erebor. It was a fine strip of silver, a small, delicately cut ruby nestled in the center, framed by rounded droplets of emeralds, curling around the expanse of the bead. "You cannot possibly mean to leave this behind?!"

"What is it?" Kili stepped forward, before his own expression melted to one of shock. "Bilbo! This is yours to keep-"

"I know, I know!" The hobbit cut in quickly, stepping forward and taking the younger dwarf's face in both of his hands for a moment, squeezing his cheeks and offering him the most reassuring smile he could manage. "I only mean to leave it somewhere safe, after what happened to the last one; I do not wish to lose another precious treasure on that treacherous path."

"But-" Kili's distress did not waver and Frodo too had begun to look concerned, his small brows
furrowed and his mouth trembling slightly.

“I will not be going without.” Bilbo assured, taking a small step back and reaching up to run his fingers over the courtship braid that was tucked behind his ear. As he drew it out something swung around to the side of his cheek: the same wooden bead they had carved for him in the stead of the one he had lost in Mirkwood, all that time ago. “I kept this one, just for such an occasion.”

That seemed to do some good in easing the young archer’s fears and he nodded, straightening and drawing Frodo closer, rubbing a soothing hand up the damp shireling’s back. “Alright, so long as you have something.”

“I do, you really have nothing to fear.” The older Halfling smiled at the two of them, reaching up to ruffle his nephew’s hair affectionately. “I only mean to keep it safe.”

"We could still come with you, if you so wish.” Fili murmured, easing the bead back in its container and slipping it into his pocket before he stepped up, resting his hands on Bilbo's shoulders, squeezing firmly. "The journey is a long one, but we would gladly make it, all of us, together. We could keep you safe too."

The thought caused Bilbo's heart to swell and he smiled, reaching up and curling his hand over Fili’s where the blond stood at his back. It was a conversation they had had on multiple occasions in the many months leading up to his inevitable departure. At first, he had been more than tempted to accept his family’s offer to join him, but the idea of putting them through the peril of travelling the roads to Mirkwood was just too much to bear. If they were here, he could at the very least be certain that they were safe and sound, waiting to see him upon his return. "The thought warms me in ways that I cannot express," he murmured, glancing over his shoulder to Fili before smiling at Frodo and Kili at his front, “however I fear that this is a mission I must undertake on my own.”

"Not completely." Kili pointed out, raising his eyebrows significantly.

Bilbo smiled, moving to answer when a well-timed knock sounded against their massive doorway. His grin only widened and he turned to glance towards the source of the noise. "No, not completely."

It was Fili who moved first, releasing his grip on Bilbo's shoulders and stepping across their front foyer towards the massive entrance way to the room. He pulled the towering door open, smiling at the figure standing on the other side. "Mother."

"Good morning Fili." Dis clasped her son's cheek in her firm, calloused palm, smiling at him sweetly. She glanced around his side at the rest of the room. "Oh how lovely, the whole family is here to see us off!"

"Dis!" Frodo chimed brightly, releasing Kili's neck and waving to the dwarven princess excitedly.

She laughed and stepped forward into the room, approaching her youngest son to grab at the shireling in his grasp. She clutched at one of the small child's hands, bringing it to her mouth in a brief kiss. Frodo giggled in delight, flushing and leaning his head back into Kili's throat, suddenly bashful.

While he was more than comfortable with the lady Dis, she still seemed to fluster the shireling with her grace and poise. Bilbo knew the feeling, finding himself smiling simply at the sight of her. There was something just so...effortlessly and undeniably royal about the woman that she left his heart fluttering.
He and Dis had grown to know each other quite well in the past year, working closely in preparation for this very day; countless hours of work, finally coming to fruition. He sucked in a slow breath, the feeling of excited urgency steadily washing over him. There was no point in delaying any longer. He turned back towards his family, flicking his gaze between them with a small smile. "I am afraid this is where I must leave you all."

Frodo's expression fell slightly and Dis released her grip on his hand. When the shireling gestured for him Bilbo came forward again, taking his tiny fingers and folding them into his palms. "I will miss you little one." He confided, leaning forward to press his mouth to the tiny child's forehead. "You will take care of Fili and Kili for me, won't you?"

Frodo nodded fiercely, his small expression serious. "I will, I promise."

"Thank you." He told his nephew sincerely, before his gaze flicked up to Kili where he held Frodo snugly in his grip. Bilbo smiled and leaned up slightly, pressing his mouth to the archer's in a soft, lingering kiss. When he drew back he licked his lips, his eyes flicking open to meet Kili's. "I suppose I will miss you too."

"You suppose?" The young prince gasped out, his tone laced with mock offense. "It won't do to have you lying to me, Master Baggins."

"Master Baggins?" Bilbo scoffed, shaking his head when Kili leaned forward with a chuckle, sealing their lips together once more. The hobbit melted into the gesture, holding himself back only so he did not crush his still damp nephew between them.

When he finally pulled away Bilbo could not help but smile. "I will be home before you know it."

Kili's face lit up and he tucked Frodo further into his arms, offering the older hobbit a soft expression. "We will hold you to that."

"You had better." He stepped away, lingering by the pair before he flicked his gaze over to where Fili stood now with Dis by the door.

The blond prince reached out, gesturing him forward with a steady arm. He was visibly struggling to stay strong, his expression was pinched, wrought with a subtle twinge of emotion that added to the inherent charm that seemed to encompass the dwarrow as a whole. It warmed Bilbo's heart, bubbling heat flaring up all the way to his cheeks, skin flushing red. He went to the prince easily, smiling while he pressed forward into Fili's strong embrace.

The blond curled around him, leaning down to rest his mouth against the crown of Bilbo's head. "You be safe out there." He murmured, something thick catching in his voice. All of the fear and worry from their long trip to Erebor all those months ago rung through the prince’s soft words and Bilbo swallowed, tightening his hands in the bigger man’s tunic. He tilted his head up to meet Fili’s mouth in a chaste kiss, offering him the most reassuring smile he could manage. After a moment the dwarf nodded, licking his lips and glancing over the hobbit's shoulder to his mother, his expression scrunching further. "Both of you."

"We will be," Dis assured him softly, waiting for him to smile at her in return before stepping over towards Kili and Frodo to offer them a firm embrace, pressing her lips to both of their foreheads chastely. Bilbo watched them from where he was wrapped up in Fili's arms, his heart squeezing at the sight of Kili, clinging to his mother in the moments before she pulled away.
"I am so sorry, but I am afraid we should be leaving." The hobbit finally stated, still curled up against Fili's chest. He flicked his gaze away from where Dis stood with Kili and Frodo, his eyes finding the older prince's easily. "I will miss you."

"As will I." Fili smiled sadly and leaned down, sealing their lips together in a hard, lingering kiss. "Do not stray too long on those roads. Find the elven woods carefully, securely, and come back to us, as quickly as your meetings will allow."

"I will," Bilbo breathed, leaning up for one last firm, press of their mouths, "I will, I promise."

He took a step away finally, forcing himself to pull back from the dwarf's warm embrace. Fili dragged his fingers down his arm as he drew away, stopping to squeeze his hand firmly before finally letting go.

Bilbo turned to Dis, his lips quirkling in a thin smile. "Are you ready?"

"But of course." The woman returned the gesture, drawing away from her youngest son and moving over to Fili to embrace him firmly. He wrapped his arms around her, burying his face in her neck and holding her for a time, before she finally stepped away to come to stand at Bilbo's side. "Be good, the lot of you." She scanned the trio in the room, her expression still soft. "We will return before you know it."

Kili stepped up to Fili's side, just beside the door to the hall. Frodo was curled up against his chest, still wrapped in his thick towel. With a quiver of his lip the shireling waved to them, his expression falling when he met the older hobbit's gaze. "I love you Uncle Bilbo!"

Bilbo felt a squeeze of pain in his chest at the sight, his stomach twisting uncomfortably. "Love you too." He murmured back, fighting the urge to linger even as he and Dis stepped out the doors and into the massive hallway. His gaze flicked to Fili and Kili and they met his eyes unwaveringly. "All of you."

He received no response, not in words. He could see it in their smiles, the soft shine of their gazes when Dis eased the door shut behind them.

Bilbo stood there for a moment, staring at the entrance to their massive chambers with a nervous flutter in his chest. This was the first time that he would be separated from his family since his fall from the ravine. The distance had been hard on them, all of them; but this time was different.

"Master Baggins."

Dis' hand gently touched his shoulder and Bilbo turned, smiling at her. "Shall we?" She intoned softly, offering him her arm.

He couldn't help but relax at the gesture, his own smile curling up his cheeks while he took the offered limb, already turning to walk arm and arm together down the expansive hall. "Let's shall."

There was a comfortable silence between them while they moved away from the royal wing, the dwarrow and guards who they passed all stopping to bow to their beloved princess. Despite knowing that it was not specifically for him, Bilbo could not help but feel flustered by the abundance of attention.

"You are blushing, Master Bilbo." Dis murmured, her tone teasing.

He flushed harder, his shoulders crawling up to his ears even as he let out a light laugh. "I can’t help it I’m afraid." He confided, offering her a smile. "I am still unused to all the attention that you
royal lot garner.”

“You will do,” She assured softly, “with time.”

Letting out a laugh he followed her down into the main halls of the city, the massive mountain gates slowly coming into view. “I certainly hope so-”

“Bilbo!”

A familiar shout snagged his attention, eyes lighting up when they landed on the threshold of Erebor’s massive entranceway. He felt himself drawing away from Dis, a wide grin blooming across his features. “Bofur, Ori!”

They hurried towards him even as he and the princess arrived at the hefty doors, waving enthusiastically.

Bofur reached them first, his hat sliding slightly askew over his brow when he tilted his head, offering them a wide smile. The toymaker paused long enough to give the princess a respectful nod, “Highness,” before his focus shifted to his friend at her side, “Bilbo, how are ye feelin’? So close to leavin’ home again?”

The hobbit felt his face warm pleasantly at the mention of Erebor being his home, unable to keep his grin from widening where it split up his cheeks.

“A bit nervous, but excited to finally put myself to some use here.” He admitted, biting at the inside of his lip, glancing towards the space beyond the massive doors. “There is a long journey ahead of us.”

Ori smiled shyly at the two of them, flushing slightly at Dis from where he had slid up to Bofur’s side. “We have the carts all packed up for the two of you your Highness.”

“Why thank you Ori.” The princess offered him a bright grin in response, seemingly delighted by the young dwarf’s shy demeanour. She no doubt knew him quite well, with the amount of time he seemed to have spent with her sons in years past. “Though that hardly seems the role of the court scribe.”

“I did not mind, and neither did Bofur!” Ori insisted quickly, his face heating up before he turned to Bilbo. “Though my friend, are you certain this is what you wish to do? You earned your share fairly and I am sure that his highness meant for you to keep it-”

“Ori,” he interrupted gently, offering the young dwarf an easy smile, “this will be a closure for me, one that I have waited for for some time.”

That seemed to ease the dwarf’s apparent apprehension and he shakily returned the gesture, his expression soft. “You are a good man, Bilbo Baggins.”

“A great man even, I’d venture te say.” Bofur reached out, clasping Bilbo’s shoulder gently and offering him a wide grin. “An’ a man that should get goin’. Ye’ll be wantin’ te make good time today. Shall we walk the two of ye te yer horses?”

Dis smiled, stepping forward when the toymaker turned to lead the way. “That would be delightful, thank you.”

Ori waited for Bilbo to follow in turn, smiling at the hobbit while they made their way out to where the caravan was waiting. When they stepped out from the massive doorway he could not
help but think back to the last time he had left the Lonely Mountain, his heart squeezing in his chest.

This time, it was not merely the city he reclaimed, and this time he was not leaving it behind him. It was his home and his family to return to.

This time, everything was different.

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Bilbo shifted nervously where he was seated, his mount moving steadily along the tree lined paths of Mirkwood forest. The roads had been easier than he ever remembered them being. This time they travelled in quite a large group with the caravan sending scouts ahead to mark their path while they worked their way deeper into the foray of trees. They were in the last, dragging stretches of their journey and would arrive before nightfall if all went well.

The thought had him thrumming with nervous energy; so much so that he could not seem, for the life of him, to stay still. His pony, resting between his knees, nickered in annoyance, picking up on his anxieties even as she trotted forward steadily.

"Sorry girl." He murmured, noting the way her ears flicked back in distress. He reached down, smoothing his hand over the length of her neck in a comforting manner. "All is well, no need to worry."

"I could say the same thing for you."

He startled slightly at the voice, nerves still on edge, before he reigned in his reaction and forced himself to sag back into the saddle. "Lady Dis." He nodded to her with a smile, watching while she urged her own pony to a trot at his side. "It’s not that I’m not worried per se, just a tad...apprehensive if you would."

"And I, for one, do not blame you in the slightest." The woman's eyes flicked up to scan the trees around them, frown creasing over her brow. "This place must hold mixed feelings for you."

Bilbo nodded, his teeth clicking together tightly when the memories of his last visit flashed unbidden through his mind. "It does, but good ones too. I am always eager to visit my friends." He offered her, managing a twitching smile.

"Why you always take such a liking to those tree-loving...folk, is really beyond me."

Dwalin's voice cut in from in front of them, the dwarrow slowing down his mount until he was riding alongside Bilbo and the princess. "I’ve ne’r trusted those fancy, fair skinned-"

"Master Dwalin," Dis chided softly, raising her eyebrows and scoffing in mock offense, “I do hope you will not speak so flippantly of our hosts once we arrive."

The seasoned warrior had the wherewithal to flush guiltily, ducking his head and avoiding the princess’ teasing gaze. “’Course not highness-"

“Please, Dis will do just fine.” She let out a light laugh, shaking her head fondly in the dwarrow’s direction. “As I feel as though I am constantly reminding you, old friend, such formalities are
hardly necessary."

“Ye’ll hav’ to remind me again, m’afraid.” He returned, still flushing even while he relaxed in his saddle. He offered her a warm smile. “S’well engrained habit, my lady.”

“You are impossible.” She shook her head, a full grin blooming across her features despite herself.

The interaction was familiar, something that Bilbo had seen countless times before in the year since his family had arrived back at the Lonely Mountain. He had always known that the company of dwarves were close, but Balin and Dwalin seemed to have a more intimate relationship with the royal family than any of the other dwarves in Erebor.

He had expected that they would have guards along their journey, but he had been pleasantly surprised when Dwalin had announced that he was to head up the caravan’s defences. Dis seemed delighted by his presence, and Bilbo was more than happy to share the road with his old friend. He and Dwalin had had their differences in the past, but the year he had spent in Erebor had helped him once again find himself in the dwarrow’s high regard.

Half listening to their gentle banter Bilbo forced himself to relax, thinking to the days ahead of them. They would be engaging both the elves and the people of Dale, discussing their shared boundaries, and the surprising growth in number of their mutual enemies.

For hours he was lost in thought, barely noticing when Dis and Dwalin pulled ahead to the front of the caravan, presumably to check on their progress. He was snapped out of his reverie only when they paused to eat, breaking briefly on the pathway, minding to stay clear of the shadows cast by the thick foliage around them.

They made good time once they packed back up and started deeper into the wood. The afternoon had only just begun to wane into night when their scouts came riding back to them, ponies following at the heels of a large colt, bearing an elven rider.

It was beyond relieving to be guided through the last stretch of road, Bilbo’s nerves easing away almost completely when the scenery around them became more and more familiar. The elves of Mirkwood were waiting for them when they arrived, already taking their mounts and inviting them into the depths of their city for food and drink. They all went along easy enough, the dwarven guards seemingly wary of the tall folk that surrounded them, but relaxing significantly at the ease with which Bilbo and Dis accepted their presence.

He was slightly disappointed when he found neither Legolas nor Thranduil in the dining halls. Very few elves came and went from the table, seemingly content to allow the dwarves some time to adjust to their new surroundings and the chance to fill their stomachs with hot food.

So for the moment he resolved to simply enjoy the company of the many dwarrow that he had gotten to know along the path from Erebor, still revelling in the luck they had been blessed with on the way. They had been exceptionally careful, true, but it was almost unbelievable how uneventful their journey had been. They had suffered no ambush or injury and, miraculously, had stayed on schedule for their arrival. It had made the whole trip much easier on the hobbit, despite the heavy ache in his chest from missing his family.

“Wine, Mister Baggins?” Dis’ voice pulled him out of his thoughts and he offered her a smile, holding out his cup to be filled.

“Why of course my lady, thank you.” He flushed a little when she poured his drink, still taken aback each time he remembered that he dined with royalty. Dis just carried herself so casually
around him, making him feel as at ease as her sons did back home.

She finished and set the decanter down, raising her glass to toast his playfully. “It would do well for us to enjoy this night of easy company and good drink.” She smiled at him, bringing the wine to her lips and taking a generous sip. “The envoy from Dale arrives tomorrow, and we will have naught but business to think of then.”

“Too true.” He laughed, drinking down his own glass and relaxing into his chair, feeling more at ease than he had in some time.

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While Bilbo had held no illusions of these talks coming about quickly and easy, he found himself rather taken aback by the sheer length of the days that ticked by, trapped at the long table with dwarves, men, and elf-kind alike. He had his cheek cupped in one hand, his elbow rested on the wooden surface below him while he listened to one of Bard’s advisors discuss potential trade routes through Mirkwood.

It was a topic that could have been engaging enough, what with all the talk of Spiders and Orc raids, ambushing supply caravans along the treacherous paths; but the man was so painfully dry about it all. He spoke in a slow, lazy drawl, taking what felt like ages to finish what ultimately turned out to be fairly straightforward, simple concepts. It was beyond boring, it was downright aggravating.

Even Bard himself appeared to have lost interest completely, his eyes slightly glazed and fixed on some point in the distance. He made no move to stop the man from speaking, however, instead seemingly satisfied with tuning him out completely.

“He has not managed to put you to sleep yet, has he?”

The familiar whisper caught him off guard and Bilbo felt his chin slip from his hand, teetering forward dangerously where he was perched in his seat. He just barely managed to bite back the cry of shock, righting himself and glancing around the table to ensure that no one had seen his fumbling.

Only Dis seemed to be glancing his way, seated with Dwalin directly across the table. She offered him a cheeky smile, before quickly turning her attention back towards where the human ambassador was speaking. The elves had created tall chairs for all of the dwarves and for Bilbo to sit in, bringing them up to the same stature as the rest of the table for discussion. The height made Dis seem even more powerful and poised, her lips pursed and her eyes focussed.

Bilbo flushed scarlet, ducking his head a bit before deftly glancing to his side. Legolas was smiling at him, the expression soft and teasing.

“I am trying to pay attention.” Bilbo shot back, staying as quiet as he could manage. He flicked his gaze back up to where Thranduil sat at the head of the table, seemingly still listening to what was being said. “I just feel as though we have been talking about this all day.”

Legolas nodded, still smiling, and reached up clasp a hand over Bilbo’s forearm at the table. “You will get your turn to speak soon enough. I am certain the people of Dale will have little to speak of in the coming days, considering how much they have spoken already.”

“Let us hope so.” Bilbo shot back with a smile. “As much as I would love to listen to further concerns of trade routes through your forest home, I am afraid I may not continue to have the
There was a noise at the front of the table, Thranduil clearing his throat and flashing the two of them a significant look. Bilbo flushed hard and quickly turned his head back towards the man who was speaking while Legolas simply offered his father a helpless smile, easing back in his seat and scratching his chin sheepishly.

They had no other opportunity to speak that day, the meeting dragging on into the late hours of the evening when they all retired to a luxurious hall for a hot dinner. The conversation around the table was significantly serious, the topic of business still floating in the air despite the meeting chambers being left at their heels.

Bilbo tried his best to stay focussed on the topics that were being discussed about him, but the more the conversations seemed to drag on, the more he found his mind wandering to other, more private concerns.

He had spoken with Dis at length in the past year about the implications that his relationship with her sons would hold in their Mountain home. Hobbits, it seemed, had far fewer formalities when it came to becoming wed than dwarven folk.

Dis had been incredibly patient, taking time when they were supposed to be preparing for their diplomatic exchanges to instead educate Bilbo on the formalities of Ereborean culture, and the significance of becoming betrothed to someone of as high a standing as Fili and Kili held.

He soon lost interest in the dinner conversation completely, excusing himself with a polite smile and clutching his cup to his chest while he strolled out of the fine dining chambers, wandering aimlessly down the hall into a smaller room beyond.

There he found a quaint balcony with a bench and a few chairs facing out into the woods. He strolled outside, setting his glass down on the seat of the bench and moving over to the carefully carved railing. It stood taller than him, so he was forced to peer through the gaps in the body of it, taking in the darkened wood around him while he lost himself in thought.

He was so distracted by the expanse of his own mind that he hardly noticed the footsteps approaching him from behind. In fact, he had not realized that he was no longer alone until someone cleared their throat from his side, a soft feminine ring that struck him instantly with a warm sense of familiarity.

Without bothering to glance up he relaxed where he stood, a small smile quirking up his features. “You did not have to follow me out here my lady.” He offered before flashing her a small smile over his shoulder.

“No I did not.” Dis returned the gesture, moving over to the bench with a fine elven glass and a decanter of honey coloured liquor in her grasp. She set them down next to Bilbo’s own, easing herself up onto the Bench at their side and gesturing for the hobbit to come join her. “Yet I find myself seeking out your company all the same.”

She smiled when he slowly made his way to her, taking a seat on the bench with their cups between them. Dis lifted the Decanter, pouring herself a healthy amount of the sweet liquid before turning and doing the same for him. He accepted the cup gratefully, ducking his head subconsciously and taking a nervous gulp of his drink.

There was a silence between them for a while, nothing but the gentle rustling of the evening breeze in the trees, and the steady hum of life from the forest to fill the quiet in the air.
“Seems to me you have something on your mind master Baggins.” Dis stated finally, her tone gentle. She glanced over to him and leaned back against the finely carved elven bench and brought her own cup to her lips.

Bilbo flushed and ducked his head into his glass slightly. “I-”

He had not meant for his thoughts to wander, and still was not certain that this was a conversation he wanted to have just yet, “I do, but it is of no consequence to the current affairs at hand.”

“But of consequence to you, no doubt.” She countered, raising an eyebrow significantly.

Bilbo felt distinctly caught, his face heating up and his shoulders inching towards his ears. He fought back the urge to curl in on himself completely, instead trying to find the strength to voice his fears.

“Of consequence, yes.” He conceded finally, his breath rushing out of him in an exhausted gust. “I just-”

Swallowing he licked his lips, flicking his gaze up to look at the canopy of the trees around them. “I am still nervous about tomorrow. Legolas believes I will have my chance to speak.”

“Oh?” Dis regarded him carefully, giving the liquid in her glass a careful swirl. “And your concern lies in your plead for alliance?”

“No no.” He objected quickly, his expression turning serious. “I am certain that we will be able to leave here with an alliance with both man and elf. I have to admit I am rather looking forward to pointing out the foolishness of all of our ways in years past…no offense meant of course, my lady.”

“None taken.” Her smile widened and she raised a brow at him, nudging his leg gently with her foot. “So if it is not the alliance that concerns you, I am left to assume that it is our other proposition that has you all worked up?”

Bilbo ducked his head, flustered at having been seen through so easily. “I am just afraid that Thranduil and Bard might refuse. Then I would be right back where I started.”

Dis made a sympathetic noise in the back of her throat, easing closer on the seat and reaching out to set a hand over his shoulder. “You remember, we have talked about this before. You needn’t do any of this to earn my brother’s approval, you already have it.” She assured him quietly. “You could go home without ever proposing your offer to the elves and the men of Dale, and my brother would still not refuse you when you ask him.”

“That is beyond the point.” He countered, offering her a strained smile. “This is something that I feel I have to do, if that makes any sense. As a way of gaining…I do not know, perhaps-”

“Some closure?” Dis offered, her tone soft.

His lips tightened into a thin line and he nodded, fingers curling more firmly around his glass. “I am not afraid to ask this of Thranduil, nor do I really fear refusal from the Bard, yet still there is so much uncertainty in all of this that I am left feeling…uneasy.”

“Something that is completely understandable.” She assured him, releasing his shoulder and taking another sip of her drink. “Though if you let fear get the better of you now, I do not believe you will find the closure you are looking for.” She looked out towards the darkened woodland at their front, her expression serene. “I believe in you Bilbo Baggins, I believe in your ability to do what all else feel is impossible, and I believe that you will be able to sway the hearts of both men and elf.
tomorrow, in all of the topics upon which you encroach.”

He let her words sink in, his lips slowly curling up into a smile and his grip loosening comfortably on his glass. “Thank you Dis.” He stated nodding to her when she turned to meet his gaze. “You give wonderful advice my friend, and you are right, there is no point in doubting myself now. All I can do is carry on with our plan, and hope for the best.”

“Exactly.” She leaned forward to clink their glasses together, the sound light and airy while it echoed through the night air. “Now, what do you say about heading back inside and finishing up the evening with the rest of our companions?”

“I say that sounds lovely.” Bilbo slid off of the bench, turning to offer Dis his hand in turn. “My lady?”

“Why thank you.” She accepted his offered arm, easing up from the seat and moving with him back towards where the rest of the company was supping.

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Bilbo watched, tension roiling in his gut as Dwalin continued to argue with one of Thranduil’s appointed counsel, his back stiff and his teeth clenched.

To say that the talks that day were not going as planned was an egregious understatement.

They had started out on a positive enough note, Dis speaking first, acting in her role as royal delegate to the great dwarven city of Erebor. She spoke at length to the table of the trials of re-homing all of their people whom had been displaced to the Blue Mountains, of the tribulations that came with defending their land from constant attack, and the ever present task of repairing the damage dealt to their city by Smaug the Terrible.

As strong and boisterous as ever she made quite the sight, sitting proudly with her back straight and her expression fierce while she outlined the concerns that still plagued her ever-settling people.

It was only after the princess had finished her speech, passing the conversation on to Dwalin whom Thorin had appointed to represent the militant will of the people of Erebor, that things began to sour.

Dwalin for his part had started out well enough, talking plainly and simply about the city’s defensive concerns, as well as pointing out what he felt to be glaring issues in both Mirkwood and Dale’s own defences. While the dwarf was on his absolute best behaviour, it was still glaringly apparent that he held no real love for the Elves, often avoiding their gazes completely and speaking instead to the men of the room, treating the seated fairfolk as though they were little more than an annoyance in his presence.

This did not seem to sit well with the Elven counsel, who in return took to stalling his conversation with blatant interjections of a border-lining offensive nature.

Dwalin took the first few comments in stride, but when one of Thranduil’s counsel made an admittedly ill-conceived joke about the relationship between the height of a dwarf and the ability to fight, the dwarrow abandoned all pretense of even temperament and went at the elf in earnest.

The argument between the two blossomed until some of the other dwaves joined in, their deep rumbling tones shooting back and forth across the table. It did not take long before more of the elves had started in on the bickering; even the men had begun to sneer and shoot comments back and forth.
Thranduil, Bard and Dis were trying with increasing desperation to reign the meeting back under control when Bilbo finally decided that he had had enough.

Without a thought he slammed his hands down on the table, the noise barely audible amidst the roar of angry voices. With a huff he worked his way up onto his chair, before crawling up onto the table, much to the bewilderment of Legolas at his side.

“Alright, alright.” He stated, raising his hands imploringly to the angered dignitaries now that he was in the center of the table. “That is quite enough of that.”

Only none of them seemed to hear him, or at least none paid him any head.

Feeling increasingly more cross he folded his arms over his chest, his brows pinching down over his nose while sucked in a large breath, raising his foot to give the table a punishing stomp. “I said enough!”

The shout carried surprisingly well despite the loud rumbling in the room, all parties falling into a shocked silence as they finally seemed to recognize that there was an angry hobbit standing in the midst of them all, looking less than impressed.

Once they had settled into their stunned silence Bilbo cleared his throat, offering Thranduil an apologetic look. “I am sorry for being unorthodox, but I am afraid I am sick and tired of all of us dancing around the issue here.” He flicked his gaze over to where the majority of the dwaves sat.

“Dwalin and the rest of you lot,” he paused, his gaze flicking over to where Dis sat, “excusing you of course my lady-“

She offered him a surprised nod, her expression beginning to shift more towards amused than shocked.

Satisfied Bilbo continued, his eyes still fixed on the company whom he had departed from Erebor with. “I am ashamed of your behaviour right now, we are guests in this house and dignitaries at this table, and as the Lady Dis has, in the past year, given me authority as Ambassador to Erebor I will not tolerate such nonsense from grown dwarves.”

They flushed guiltily, and those that looked as though ready to object were soon silenced by their neighbours. As a group they settled back into their chairs, shifting awkwardly with a red tinge creeping up to their ears.

“Terribly sorry about tha’ Bilbo.” Dwalin stated after a moment, looking down right ashamed where he sat. “S’pose tha’ all got right out of hand.”

“You suppose.” Bilbo shook his head, once again finding himself exasperated by the stubborn nature of dwarves. “Either way I will not tolerate such rude demeanors on this trip any further, do you understand?”

There was a general murmur of ascension which seemed to please the hobbit well enough, and when he glanced over he found that even Dis was looking satisfied, offering him a proud smile.

Encouraged he pushed forward, turning his attention next to the men and fairfolk seated around the table. “And as for the rest of you,” he started, before flicking his eyes briefly back to where Bard sat with Thranduil, “excusing of course, Bard and yourself majesty,” they both offered him understanding nods, and so he pushed forward, getting ready to lay down a good old fashioned Baggins scolding, “I am rightly ashamed of you lot. We are here as representatives of our respective people, and here you are hollering at each other like a ruddy bunch of misbehaving
One of the men made a spluttering noise in the back of his throat, but before he could object, Bilbo pushed forward, his hands finding his hips and his expression stern. “Unless you are about to apologize to the distinguished leaders in this room for your grossly inappropriate behaviour I quite frankly do not want to hear it.”

The man seemed to dwell on that for a moment, before he wisely closed his mouth and sat back, his eyes finding the table.

“That’s what I thought.” Bilbo shook his head, not even attempting to withhold the disappointment that dripped from his tone. “I motion that we put a stop to such erroneous digressions and get straight to the matter at hand, the real reason that we are all gathered here this day.”

“And what would that be, hobbit?” One of the Elves spoke up, her tone more curious than spiteful.

Bilbo shook his head, his gaze flicking around the table, still determined and firm. “The protection of our lands, of our people. And I do not speak only of dwarves here, I speak of all of you.” He locked his jaw, his eyes finding Thranduil and Bard at the head of the table, expression serious. “We are under siege here, all of us. Our roads and cities are raided, our scouts overwhelmed by ambush after ambush, and there is no denying that even the mighty realm of Mirkwood has begun to feel the sting of the darkness that is steadily encroaching on our land.”

Subconsciously he drew his hand to his chest pocket, the one right above his heart. There the ring sat, nestled in a kerchief, where he had kept it since his arrival at Erebor. “The alliances that rest between us now are tenuous at best.” He stated slowly, calmly, carefully gauging the reactions on each face at the table. “I would move to have this meeting focus on resolving that issue. I would move to form a true bond between us, all of us, one that will serve to stand up to these encroaching evils in the uncertain times ahead.”

A stunned silence seemed to overtake the room, but when Bilbo glanced up to the head of the table Thranduil was smiling, something akin to pride glimmering in his eyes. Then suddenly Dis cleared her throat from his side, drawing his attention away and offering him an easy smile. “I think it would serve our parties well to hear more on this proposition…though perhaps from your seat?”

“Oh!” Bilbo flushed scarlet, hit by the sudden realization that he was still, in fact, standing in the center of the table. He nearly toppled to the ground in his scramble to get back to his seat, Legolas reaching out to catch him when he teetered too far over the edge. With the elf prince’s help he managed to get himself settled again, looking sheepish and embarrassed.

“Terribly sorry about that.” He stated, scratching at his chin self-consciously.

“Not at all.” Thranduil gave him a respectful nod, though the twitch of his lips was distinctly amused. “Do continue.”

“Alright, well…”

Digging deep into the training that Dis had put him through in the past year, as well as his own personal experiences, he began to give a detailed outline of what a proper alliance between all three peoples might entail.

Some at the table seemed skeptical at first, strained looks and raised eyebrows shooting back and forth while he spoke. Though as he brought up more of his concerns, the ambassadors slowly but surely seemed to come to an understanding of his point.
He brought up the sheer numbers in which the orcs were turning up, addressing the rising instances of goblins, leaving their dwellings deep underground, and pointing out the startling increase in the activities of the great spiders in Mirkwood’s dense treeline. All concerns, he pointed out, that could be remedied through a strong, mutually beneficial alliance between elves, men and dwarves alike.

Surprisingly, it did not take long for people to start agreeing with him. Bard’s men began to point out their concerns with the raids, to which Dwalin assured them that the dwarves of Erebor were privy to far in advance of the people of Dale. This led to a discussion on scouting parties, and how to map out potential risk zones where ambush was most likely to take place along the winding trade routes that curled out across the lands.

By the time the conversation turned to potential remedies for the concerns with the darkness overwhelming the elven territories within Mirkwood, Bilbo was able to cease talking completely. Instead he sat back, unable to keep from smiling while the conversations moved further and further towards the acceptance of a full blown alliance between their three peoples.

The rest of the afternoon burned by quickly, talks seeming to move faster than they had in all the days before. Bilbo was so engrossed in the conversation that he was physically startled when Thranduil finally interjected, proposing to draw the meeting to a close for the evening.

“I think that we have exhausted this issue for now, as I am sure you all will agree.” The mighty elven king shifted in his seat, leaning forward slightly to set his hands on the table. “I think now would be an appropriate time to retire for dinner, unless anyone else had anything to add?”

Bilbo bit his lip, catching Dis’ eye and wincing at the pointed look she flashed him. Now, it seemed, was as good a time as any to ask the question that had been eating at him since their party had left Erebor some weeks back.

Just when it looked as though the table was readying to empty the hobbit cleared his throat, sitting up in his chair as tall as he could manage. “Actually,” he swallowed, his fingers itching to run over the ring that he had resting in his shirt pocket out of nervous habit, “there is one last thing I wish to propose to you all…”

“Oh?” Bard raised an eyebrow, glancing to Dis and Thranduil before flashing Bilbo a questioning look. “And what exactly would that be, Master Baggins?”

“Well I-” His voice croaked, nerves getting the better of him for a moment and his throat closing up tightly. With a hard shake of his head he coughed, stealing his courage and fighting back the anxious swell that squeezed in his chest. “There is something of some import that I wish to propose to you all…”

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After the final conclusion of the talks with the elves, men and dwarf alike bid their farewells to their fair hosts and set back on the road to home.

In the face of everything the way back from Mirkwood seemed to take eons longer than the trip there. Bilbo felt the hours of the day stretch on and on, like a heavy wait bearing down over his shoulders. Though in reality, it took them far less time on the winding path home. With the end of the conference their caravan was able to leave behind some of their load, lightening the carriages and quickening their ponies’ steps while they trotted along the long dirt roads.

They moved quickly from the lingering shadows of the forest’s stretching trees, moving across the farmlands and hills that spread out towards Erebor with ease. They travelled with the men folk for
a great deal of the time, Bilbo taking the opportunity to solidify the budding alliance they had worked to strike up between the dwarves and the men of Dale. Bard of course, he was already familiar enough with, and so the two of them were more than companionable. So he tried to divide his time up with the other riders who accompanied them as well, unencumbered by the obvious differences in their heights.

The men seemed wary of him at first, regarding him curiously and remaining cautious with their steeds when he rode his pony along at their sides. He determinedly continued to seek out their company, until mostly of the envoy eventually knew him by name. Dis seemed pleased by his efforts, and after some time even Dwalin and the other dwarven guard began to join him in his social ventures.

When it eventually came time for the two groups to part ways they had become quite comfortable in each other’s company. Sharing drink and food became common place, along with the spread of easy conversation. Bilbo would even have gone so far to say that some of the company had even made friends.

Their farewells were brief, albeit surprisingly heartfelt; especially considering the years of bad blood that rested between the people of dwarf and men. They saw Bard’s people off to their own city and carried on the last, small stretches of their own way.

It should have passed by quickly, but with each passing mile Bilbo felt the satchel at his side grow heavier with the building weight of his nerves in his chest. He was desperate to see his family, the length of the weeks behind him dragging at his heart, causing it to clench painfully at the thought of seeing the people he loved most.

Yet there was one more thing that was left to do before he could sink back into the comforts of his mountain home…

“Ye look nervous, Master Baggins.” Dwalin drawled at his side, drawing the hobbit out of his thoughts.

They were readily approaching Erebor’s massive doors, the city’s entrance looming ahead and causing Bilbo’s heart to stutter violently. He swallowed, offering Dwalin his best smile and shaking his head. “I would be lying if I said I was anything but, Master Dwalin.” He adjusted his grip on the reigns in his hands, squeezing them tightly. “This could be the resolution I have been working towards for all of these years, I cannot help but dread the idea of making a mistake.”

Dwalin’s expression softened, the dwarrow offering him an easy, reassuring smile. “Ah hardly think there’d be a way fer ye to mess this up, burglar.” The word was laced with teasing affection and Bilbo could do nothing to help his smile. “Ye’ve done too much good fer our people. In my opinion, you needn’t even do anything else, ye already ‘ave resolution here. S’ yer home now, an’ Thorin’s long since forgiven ye, an’ begged forgiveness in return.”

“Thank you for saying so,” The hobbit offered I return, feeling the tight knot in his chest loosen slightly, “yet after all we have spoken about tradition in the past few weeks, this is something that I must do. It is the only way for me to feel as though I have set everything right.”

If anything that seemed to set Dwalin’s grin spreading wider, and he increased his pace, making Bilbo urge his own pony on. “An’ that right there, Bilbo Baggins, is why ye ‘ave nothin’ te worry about.”

Bilbo simply sagged in his saddle in response, lips curling up further while he and Dwalin trotted up the last stretch towards where the caravan had started to unload. Dis was there waiting, already
off of her mount, her robes straightened and her expression easy.

“Ready?” She asked, reaching up to help Bilbo down off of his pony.

The hobbit flushed gratefully, steadying himself on his feet before offering the princess what he hoped to be his most self-determined expression. “As ready as I will ever be.” He brushed his hands down his front, fingers catching on the strap of his satchel and curling there.

Without another word the three of them began to make their way into the towering city of Erebor, familiar sights warming and welcoming while they moved.

During the last stretches of their trip Bilbo had taken the opportunity to discuss his plans with both Dwalin and Dis, the two dwarves agreeing with his decision to visit Thorin first upon their arrival back in Erebor. While they would no doubtedly have plenty of time to compose and present a formal record of their excursion to the King at a later time, there was still one pressing matter to which Bilbo intended to attend.

So that was how they found themselves at the door to the King’s chambers, Dis stepping up in front of them to give the heavy frame a hard, resounding knock.

Silence met them for the first few moments, before a muffled ‘enter’ resounded from within the room.

Bilbo felt his heart seize at the sound and he quickly glanced at Dis, his stomach tightening painfully. The woman offered him the most reassuring of smiles, carefully easing open the door even as the hobbit felt his resolve starting to waver.

“Easy does it lad.” Dwalin clapped his hands down over Bilbo’s shoulders, squeezing lightly before he stepped in front of the hobbit, starting into the room at Dis’ heels. “You have nothing to worry about.”

Bilbo let out a harsh breath, his heart still jack-hammering in his chest. “Alright.” His hands found the strap of his satchel, squeezing there even as he forced himself into the room at Dis and Dwalin’s heels. “I can do this.”

Thorin’s chambers were thankfully void of unwitting third parties, the King himself stepping out from a back room while they strolled further into the entry way.

“You have returned!” Thorin sounded beyond pleased when he took the sight of the three of them in, decked in his usual royal garb. He headed straight towards them, looking quite as though his excitement was threatening to boil over. “We did not expect you for another few days yet!”

Dis went to her brother first, her expression melting to one of pure joy when he instantly reached out to fold her into a firm embrace. “We met with little difficulties on the road.” She explained, curling her arms around her brother and squeezing him firmly. “We did not expect to be back so soon ourselves, otherwise we would have contacted you to give you prior knowledge.”

Thorin shook his head with a smile, leaning down to bury his face in her neck and letting out a relieved sigh. “It matters not, I am simply glad to see that you have returned safe and sound.”

The two embraced in silence for a time before the king finally released his hold on Dis, leaning in to touch their foreheads together lightly before he turned to Dwalin. They locked arms, hands curled around their elbows while they leaned in for a brief embrace. While no words were passed between them the gesture was still both friendly and familiar, a testament to years of steady companionship and trust.
Bilbo felt his heart stutter in his chest when Thorin finally drew away, the King’s gaze finding him where he stood. Dwalin and Dis moved back, allowing the hobbit to take those few, stuttering steps towards where the king stood.

“Bilbo.” Thorin’s voice was laced with a surprising amount of affection, startling the hobbit out of his stupor as the King stepped towards him, hand extended. “You have been missed, my friend.”

For a moment Bilbo floundered before he managed to steel himself, reaching out to take the King’s outstretched arm, clasping it firmly. “You were missed as well majesty.” He offered, his lips quirking up into a smile despite the nervous fluttering of his heart in his chest. “As was Erebor. It has been too long since we were home.”

He got a smile in return, the King releasing his hand in order to clasp him on the shoulder in a friendly manner. “Well, we are all undoubtedly pleased to welcome you back.” Thorin squeezed gently before drawing away completely. His expression shifted to something serious, locking on Bilbo’s for the moment before scanning up to find his sister where she stood at the hobbit’s back. “I take it the talks went well?”

“Exceedingly so.” Dis assured him readily, a smile quirking up her features. “Bilbo was a more than valuable asset as an ambassador. I would say he almost single handedly assured our continued and strengthened alliance with both the folk of man and elf.”

Thorin seemed to relax visibly at that, his own smile quirking across his lips. “Something that I am not at all surprised to hear.” He returned his gaze to Bilbo’s, his expression reassuring. “Gandalf and my sister both assured me that you would find success with the tall-folk. I was wrong to have ever doubted your abilities my friend.”

“That you were.” Bilbo shot back, attempting to keep his tone playful. “As I can assure you, the talks went off without a hitch.”

“That is fantastic to hear.” Thorin offered him a firm nod, before his smile faded slightly. “Although if you do not mind me asking as such, why have you come to my chambers this evening? Surely this news could have waited until the morn. I know that my nephews and your young mister Frodo have been waiting anxiously for your return, why have you not gone straight to their sides?”

“Well—” Bilbo suddenly felt self-conscious. His throat felt bone dry and the weight of the bag over his shoulder was becoming terribly apparent. He knew that there was no real reason for the sharp twist of nerves that seemed to settle in his belly, yet that did nothing to ease off his building sense of dread.

This was no time, however, to surrender to simple discomfort.

With a hard swallow he flitted his gaze around the room, scanning each familiar face with a slow, anxious lick of his lips. There was a part of him that wanted to leave; to avoid Thorin’s question, avoid the very thing had come to the King for in the first place; the very thing he had been working towards since his arrival in Erebor all those months ago. He knew that Fili and Kili were waiting for him back in the room, little Frodo at their sides: his family. The weeks since he had last seen them felt like years, stretching out at his back. The thought weighed on his mind, calling to him with a twist of temptation that was agonizingly difficult to ignore.

Just a few rooms down the hall his family was waiting for him, and he wanted nothing more than to vanish away and flee to their sides.
Yet still it was for that very family that he now found himself in Thorin’s chambers, exhausted, travel weary, and very much determined. He had decided long ago that he was finished with running; *he would not flee from this.*

So he steeled his nerves, breathing in sharply through his nose and glancing to where Dwalin and Dis stood, just at his back. The gruff dwarrow offered him a warm smile. It was almost jarring, the expression brighter and more reassuring than Bilbo had ever seen on him before. With another hard swallow Bilbo returned the gesture, his gaze flicking to the princess at Dwalin’s side.

Dis simply nodded, reaching forward the bare few inches between them to rest her hand on the small of his back. The touch was soft, fleeting, yet filled with more comfort and reassurance than he could ever have thought possible. He had support here; he was among friends.

With one last deep breath he pushed back all of the doubt, all of the fear, and cleared his throat with a firm cough. Then he forced his eyes up, gaze flicking back to where Thorin stood in the middle of the chamber. “Yes.” He reached up subconsciously and gave the strap of his satchel a tight squeeze. “Yes, there is something more you could do for me today highne-”

He stopped himself with a hard shake of the head, determination flooding back through him while he lifted his chin up firmly. There had been enough dancing around this particular issue for a lifetime. There was nothing left to do but simply cut to the chase, the words suddenly bubbling in his throat, ready to fall from his lips without a moment’s delay. “Thorin, King Under the Mountain, and one of my dearest, closest companions—” he took a few steps forward, locking gazes with the dwarf and finding his expression to be open, albeit confused. It gave him the courage that he needed to take that final leap of faith, his jaw locked and his shoulders set in a tight line. “—I have come to formally seek your permission for the hands of your sister-sons, Fili and Kili, in marriage.”

The words seemed to echo against the hard stone walls of the King’s chambers, Thorin’s eyes widening slightly when Bilbo finally forced out the words through the tight squeeze of his chest. The king seemed taken aback, his mouth parted slightly and his expression wide and open. For a time, there was silence.

Not a soul among let out a sound, as if the very air had been sucked out of the room, leaving a heavy sense of stagnation that seemed to swallow Bilbo whole.

The hobbit felt his nerves return tenfold, panic building with each passing moment without comment or response. He shifted anxiously and struggled to fight back the burning flush of embarrassment that flooded over his cheeks. “A—although perhaps, now that I think about it—” he felt his resolve crumbling, his Baggins side screaming in indignation over the rude imposition that he must have caused Thorin in springing such dramatic news on him so suddenly, “perhaps this is not the best of times for this, we have after all only just returned and…and perhaps I should just go. We can always speak of this another time, and I—”

He had not realized that he had begun to back away, his body shrinking in on itself under the heavy weight of the gazes in the room, all pinned on his small frame. Only then Thorin stepped forward, reaching out quite suddenly to halt his retreat. “Bilbo no—”

The King stopped him with a firm grip on his wrist, his expression as embarrassed as it was imploring. “I… I meant no offense, I was merely caught off guard.” He explained in haste, his cheeks colouring slightly and his eyes dropping shamefully to the floor. “I had only thought… I thought we had discussed this matter before, that you were determined to wed my nephews, with or without my approval.” He swallowed, gingerly dropping the hobbit’s hand from where it had been
clenched in his fingers, taking a respectful step back and raising his gaze back up to meet Bilbo’s own. “I had expected to hear a great number of things from you upon your arrival back in the kingdom, but this…this was not one of them.”

Bilbo relaxed, the heavy sense of dread and embarrassment evaporating almost instantly. He tightened his grip on the straps of his bag and his lips twitched up in a careful smile. “Well, as it seems, it is in your nature to underestimate me.” He reminded him, not unkindly.

“So it seems.” Thorin shook his head, reaching up to scratch at his beard with a heavy sigh. “You need not be so nervous, Bilbo. This past year…since your return, I have seen the error in my ways.” His expression shifted to something akin to guilt and he glanced off to the side. “I would like to think that I am not the same man who caused you so much harm all those years ago.”

The hobbit stepped forward, reaching up to clasp one of his hands around the King’s shoulder. “I believe that Thorin, I truly do.”

“Then you should know also that need not request my permission for union with my nephews, as you already have it.” Thorin assured him suddenly, sounding so firm and assured that Bilbo felt his heart swell painfully in his chest.

“That means the world to me Thorin.” He managed after a moment, swallowing through the hard lump that had wedged in his throat. “Yet I have, in the last year, spoken at great length with your sister regarding the grave importance of tradition and ceremony to your people, and I want nothing more than to honour that…to honour you.”

The King shook his head. He looked sheepish, his eyes down cast and his shoulders hunched. “You must believe me when I tell you that you already have. You have honoured me, my home, my people—”

“And even still, there is yet something that I feel I must do. Something that the Lady Dis has helped me carefully orchestrate since long before we left on our trip.” Bilbo insisted, pulling on the strap of his satchel until he had the bag settled across his stomach, fingers fluttering nervously over the opening. After a deep breath he dug his hands inside, drawing out a small package, bound up carefully in soft, elven cloth. “I only ask that you take what I am offering not just for yourself, but for all of your kind.”

Confusion creased Thorin’s brow and he glanced behind the hobbit, his gaze falling on his sister. She simply smiled, Dwalin mirroring the expression at her side. Looking all the more taken aback he let his gaze fall back to the small being at his front, expression slightly pinched. “Bilbo, wha—”

He never had the chance to finish as Bilbo carefully unfolded the wrappings on the object, something round and gleaming, nestled in the pool of fabric between his palms. Thorin’s eyes widened, shining and confused, his lower lip quivering when his mouth dropped open.

“Is that—?” the dwarf choked off with a wounded noise, his expression crumpling and his shoulders hunching up to his ears. He took a trembling step forward, cautious and unsure, not unlike a skittish colt. When it looked as though the king would stop Bilbo met him part way, his mouth dry and his head nodding in what he hoped to be a reassuring manner.

“It is a gift.” The hobbit offered, the noise garbled through the thick lump that had lodged in his throat. Bilbo licked his lips and gazed up at the king, extending out his hands as steadily as he could manage. “A sign of goodwill, from the men and the elves who wish to be your allies, and from family that hopes to join with your own.”
The Arkenstone shone like a beacon in the expansive, dimly lit room. The low glimmer of torches, fastened to the wall seemed to dance off of the carefully polished surface, reflecting in the king’s gaze, impossibly wide.

Thorin reached out only to hault, fingers hovering just inches above the precious, gleaming gem. He let out a trembling breath, the sound broken and ragged. “But-” his brows sunk down low over his eyes and his expression pinched, making the king look fragile and time-worn, disbelief apparent in the wide drop of his jaw, “but how?”

Bilbo coloured slightly, feeling more than a little self-conscious as he offered his old friend a helpless shrug. “I simply made a trade, to return to your people something that was never mine to take in the first place.”

Dis piped up at that, taking a step forward to hover next to Bilbo at her brother’s side. “He offered the Elves of Mirkwood and the people of Dale the share of gold you awarded him from the treasury.” She supplied, unable to stop the curling grin that crept up across her mouth. “They were more than happy to accept a tangible sum, one that could be split fairly between them, in the stead of sharing the stone.”

“Bilbo.” Thorin tore his gaze from where it had flicked to his sister, turning back to Bilbo with a helpless expression. He was shaking his head, his whole body tense and a thick sheen of liquid beginning to pool in his wide-blown eyes. “I can’t take this from you, that gold—” his arms dropped down to his side and his hands tightened into fists, “it was yours to keep. You earned it, you deserved to have it, to do with it what you would—”

“And I did.” Bilbo interrupted firmly. “I chose to offer those riches up in exchange for something that I felt could be put to good use here among your…our people.”

“I—” Thorin made a choked noise, drawing a hand to his mouth to try to stifle the tremble in his tone, “I do not know what to say.”

“Then do not say anything.” Bilbo took a step forward, reaching out to fold the king’s hand closed around the Arkenstone. “Take this gift as what it is, the first step in the formal wedding ceremony for myself and your sister-sons, and the first step towards making your people whole again.”

For a moment it looked as though the mighty dwarrow would object. Then with a hard swallow Thorin finally nodded, drawing the Arkenstone to his chest and glancing up to meet Bilbo’s gaze. “Then consider this my acceptance, and my blessing for my nephew’s hands in marriage.” The king took a shuddering breath, reaching up with his free hand to wipe briefly at his eyes. “You have more than proven yourself in this and every other regard my friend. I happily accept this most generous gift, and I wish for you nothing but happiness here in your new home.”

Bilbo swallowed hard, feeling as though his chest would surely burst from the intensity of the joy that consumed him. “Thank you Thorin, I cannot begin to tell you how much this means to me—”

Without warning the hobbit suddenly found himself cut off short by a loud clashing sound, the door to Thorin’s chambers having been thrown open and bouncing violently against the wall beside.

There was a sudden flurry of movement before Bilbo found himself on the receiving end of a fierce embrace, something tiny colliding into him and nearly causing him to lose his footing. He let out a noise of surprise, reaching down to brace Frodo where the small hobbitling had curled himself around his waist.
“Uncle Bilbo!” The child chimed, burying his face into the older halfling’s stomach and wrapping his arms as far around his hips as he could manage. “I knew you were back! I knew it I knew it!”

“Frodo! What have we told you about knocking-” A surprised shout signaled the arrival of a very dishevelled looking Kili. The young dwarf skidding into the room through the jarred door, his hair strewn across his forehead and his gaze darting about the room frantically. Then his focus landed on Bilbo and his eyes widened almost comically. “Oh-

Bilbo kept one arm splayed firmly across Frodo’s back but with the other he gestured the young archer forward, a grin spreading across his features. “Kili.”

Just like that the young prince raced forward, colliding with Bilbo in a manner that showed only concern for Frodo’s safety pinned between them and nothing else.

Kili wrapped his arms around the older hobbit’s neck, diving straight in for a firm, pressing kiss that almost cause Bilbo to topple backwards. All of the heartache and the loneliness of the last month came pouring back and the Halfling had to steel himself against the rush of tears that threatened to engulf him. “Kili, Kili-”

“Oh god,” the archer breathed, pulling back enough to push in for another kiss, sealing their mouths together sharply, “it is so good to see you, you have no idea.”

“Oh, I think I have an idea.” Bilbo reached out when Kili pulled away from the kiss, dragging the young prince back in for a longer, deeper one that caused his toes to curl against the firm, cool tile of Thorin’s chambers.

It was only once he and Kili finally drew away, the dwarf offering him a bright grin, that Bilbo noticed a third figure, standing in the doorway.

“Fili.”

The blond prince stood frozen, his mouth dropped open slightly and his eyes wide.

At the sound of his name however he seemed to come to his senses, stumbling forward in a manner that seemed almost reflexive.

Kili quickly reached down, scooping Frodo up in his arms despite the shireling’s objections and stepping back to allow Fili room. The older dwarf looked completely stricken, slowly sliding up to Bilbo’s side before he stopped, hovering just at the hobbit’s front.

Bilbo made a desperate noise at that, reaching up with both hands to grab Fili’s collar, tugging the blond down to seal their mouths together roughly.

It was everything that he had been missing over the past long, drawn out weeks. It was desperate and laced with passion, Fili’s hands coming up to fist in the hobbit’s hair when he deepened the kiss, his tongue sliding in past the seam of his lips.

Bilbo groaned, clinging desperately to the blond and letting his eyes flutter shut. He lost track of time, lost track of the people around him, focussed only on the feeling of those rough fingers against his scalp.

When he finally drew back to breathe Bilbo let out a desperate noise, the sound laced with all of the ache and desperation that had been building since the day he’d left Erebor all those weeks ago. “I missed you,” his voice hitched on a shaking breath, “all of you, I missed you so damned much.”
“Bilbo-” Fili growled, dropping down to drag the hobbit forward again, crushing their bodies together in a fierce hug.

They stayed like that for a time, simply holding each other, before finally Bilbo slowly forced himself to draw back. He felt his breath hitch, his eyes flicking over towards where Kili stood, Frodo cradled in his grasp. He swallowed, offering them the best, most sincere smile he could manage. “I cannot even begin to express how glad I am to see you all.”

Frodo made a displeased noise at that, the sound rumbling in the back of his throat while he squirmed in Kili’s grip. “Why did you come here Uncle Bilbo? Why not come see us right away?”

“Oh sweet heart,” Bilbo pulled away from Fili, moving over to his nephew and cupping his small face, placing a firm kiss to his brow, “there was something I needed to discuss with Thorin, something very important.”

The child looked distinctly displeased at that, but even still he slowly and hesitantly gave his uncle a small nod. “About the elves?”

“Not quite actually,” Bilbo shook his head, feeling Fili slide up behind him, crowding him up towards where Kili stood with Frodo in his arms, “I needed to talk to him about something else actually. Something much, much more important.”

He could practically feel Fili frowning behind him, the older prince’s hand finding his shoulder and squeezing there, concern evident in his touch. “What do you mean?”

Bilbo reached up, his fingers finding Fili’s while he offered Kili a reassuring smile. “Well, I had to ask your Uncle for something.”

The archer frowned slightly at that, hitching Frodo further up on his hip and offering the hobbit a confused frown. “What?”

At that Bilbo couldn’t help but beam, warmth bubbling up through his chest. He squeezed Fili’s hand tighter, drawing the two of them closer towards where Kili stood.

“Why, for your hands in marriage of course.”

End.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Hello lovelies, it has truly been far too long since I last posted and for that I am very sorry.

As most of you know, I spent the majority of my summer traveling through Europe with my best friend. It was a fantastic trip overall, including camping, hiking, and backpacking, some soul searching, and mountain climbing! :)

Upon my return to Canada, I immediately had to prepare for my move to Kingston, where I have now successfully started my first year of law school! A big hustle and bustle of activity that took up the majority of my time.
Once I got settled into class I figured getting the chapter written would be a simple affair.

Unfortunately I then managed to give myself whiplash and a concussion during my orientation week. Hahaha. I was in a neckbrace and on muscle relaxants for some time. Then even once I got the brace off my specialist insisted that I avoid recreational writing and reading until part way towards the end of October because of my concussion.

HOWEVER! With my cognitive abilities slowly returning I have managed to get myself back to the relative norm. And hence this chapter came to be!

Either way, we are coming to the end of this series, and up next we have a series of what I hope to be shorter, dynamic chapters outlining the final step in Fili, Kili and Bilbo's relationship. Their marriage! :P

My point in trying to keep the chapters a touch shorter is so that I can hopefully update more consistently, and so that it takes me less time to Beta my work. :)

Once this final arc is finished, it will be the end of "When Lions Meet a Mouse"

HOWEVER! Once I wrap all of this up, I am thinking of starting a smaller, sister series to this one, where I (as mentioned in my notes earlier in The Lonely Road Home) explore Fili and Kili's perspective of the series. If this is something you guys are still interested in, feel free to fire suggestions or requests my way! I will make note of them when I start working on this next series.

Either way this has been a ridiculously intense ride guys. I have never written a fanfiction series so long in my life. In fact, this is the longest work in general I have ever written! I will be sad to see it finished, but we still have one more story to go in When Lions Meet a Mouse, and more of Fili and Kili's perspective to come later.

Thanks so much for continuing to be patient and supportive of me while I work through my stuff irl, it means a lot to me that you guys are so sweet about me trying to balance my life and my writing.

You are the best! Seriously. BEST. xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxox

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!