Then and Now

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Summary

After the death of Thorin Oakenshield and his nephews, Bilbo returned to the Shire to live a quiet life, secretly mourning what he lost in the Battle of the Five Armies. The journey to Valinor promises to finally give him peace before he will rest forever. But sometimes things aren't as hopeless as they seem and there might be a happy end for the old hobbit after all.

Notes

It took about six or seven times of watching "The Hobbit - An Unexpected Journey" for me to finally cave and start writing again. Bad movie! And I still can't say where the idea came from, it was just floating around my head one day at work and, well, it wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

First of all, I would like to mention that I don't do unhappy endings. I do Angst, and lots of it, but sad endings need not apply. Also, considering the Creation of the Dwarves and the fact that Thorin mentions the "Halls of Waiting" on his deathbed, I believe that dwarves like elves are linked to the world and as such are able to journey to Valinor (only they tend to do it after they die). I also believe that if Námo can have his Halls, so can Aulë. And because the Valar would be somewhat racist towards the hobbits otherwise, our dearest halflings also have a chance at seeing the Undying Lands...if their deeds were great enough (by hobbit standards)
or they are involved in some Valar-plot, eh, I mean, plan. The Valar do not do plots. My story, my rules :)

Oh, and if you peeps would like to read a more explicit version of what happened during that moonlit night...let me know and I shall see what I can do about it ;)

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Beta: Beta'ed by Undomiel_48 as per usual.
Chapter 1 - Of Nightmares and Memories

Then (2941 T.A.)

The night was cool. The fire had burned down hours ago and Beorn's house...which was really more of a hall...lay in darkness. All was quiet, well, except for Bombur's snores. He seemed to be playing the *let's see if I can't keep everyone else awake* game again, and while it was never working on his fellow dwarves, Bilbo was wide awake...once again. Sighing to himself, he threw off his blanket and got to his feet. Maybe some fresh air would do him good...

Slowly and almost silently...maybe Gandalf was right about hobbits after all...he made his way to the door and stepped into the moonlit night. It was the second night after... Fire and burning flesh, cruel teeth and claws, the sickening sound of a giant white warg sinking his teeth...the screams of agony... And then the moment when all things Tookish inside of him took control and he launched himself at the orc...

"What on earth got into you?" he mumbled to himself. "You're a hobbit, not some kind of hero out of one of your books." And he wasn't. Far from it. He hadn't even known how to use that sword of his...if it wasn't a letter opener after all like Balin suggested...until about ten minutes earlier when he sort of accidentally impaled a warg's head on the blade. And then he needed five minutes to pull it out of the skull! Some hero... *What were you thinking? Jumping an orc twice your size, pretending like you're some kind of warrior, rescuing the...* He began to chuckle. He'd nearly thought of Thorin Oakenshield as a damsel in distress. As if the dwarf couldn't defend himself, as if he needed rescuing...by Bilbo of all people.

But he hadn't been able to defend himself. The chuckle died in his throat. If Bilbo hadn't acted... He couldn't even bring himself to finish that thought...it made him feel sick to his stomach and that never happened to hobbits! If he hadn't acted, the leader of their company wouldn't be simply recovering from his wounds... *He would never have reached your journey's end...* And for some reason that was inconceivable. There was no way...*But why? Why should you care?* And indeed, why should he? Thorin had been unwelcoming, unkind and downright rude at times... 'So, this is the Hobbit...' However, that had changed somewhat there, on the slopes of the Misty Mountains, just before they were attacked by the wargs...

He shrugged to himself as he walked past the dark, somewhat buzzing shapes he knew to be Beorn's beehives. *Even they can sleep, so why not you?* The urge to shout at that nasty little voice in the back of his mind was getting difficult to fight. *It's because you can't figure it out, isn't it...why you did what you did...risking your life like that...* But if he was honest with himself, there was no one else he'd rather die for... Thorin was a king, albeit without a throne at present, and Bilbo was just a hobbit of the Shire... *Who has some skill at conkers, let's not forget that...* Very useful indeed. *What you need, after all of this is over, is to settle down with a nice hobbit lass. You can't go on fawning over Thorin like some lovesick puppy, especially not in the charming little forest you're about to journey into.*

Mirkwood...Bilbo didn't like the look of it one bit. He'd rather camp out in the Old Forest than... But that was where they were headed in just a few days. *Maybe you should just call it a day and head back to the elves? Just because last time the whole goblin business interrupted you doesn't mean it was a bad idea...* Oh shut up! Oh no, he was starting to sound like that creature...and that wasn't good at all. But it was true, was it not? Except for that one moment of bravery, or brainlessness, what did Bilbo have to show for himself? The whole affair with the trolls had been a complete and utter mess, he had nearly fallen off a cliff...twice...the second time Thorin had to rescue him and almost
paid for it with his own life, and generally speaking, he had slowed the dwarves down...especially after they left Imladris.

However... 'I have never been so wrong...in all my life.' Maybe, just maybe he was of some use to the dwarves after all... Or maybe Thorin is simply grateful that you saved his life. Bilbo sighed. What would his mother say if she could see him like this? 'Bilbo Baggins, stop feeling sorry for yourself. Change the things you can and accept those you can't or you will never be happy.' And maybe, just maybe... Could it really be that Thorin was simply grateful? The way he looked at you when you gave your little speech about wanting to help them reclaim their home...you hadn't saved his neck...literally...at that point. True...Thorin had looked almost...sheepish. As if he was realising that there was more to the hobbit than he had thought so far. Maybe...

"Master Baggins..." Bilbo spun around coming face to face with none other than the object of his musings, Thorin Oakenshield. The hobbit must have been so absorbed in his thoughts, he never heard the footsteps behind him...and that in the Wild. For all Bilbo knew, Thorin could have been a wild animal or worse... 'The Wild is no place for gentle folk who can neither fight nor fend for themselves.' Nor for someone going about daydreaming...

"I never had the chance to thank you properly... Not only for saving my life, but also for this..." He lifted his shield, the old oaken branch Bilbo had thought of as firewood until Balin told them of the Battle of Azanulbizar. The oaken shield that had fallen from Thorin's grasp as he was lifted by the great eagle. The shield that Fíli and Kíli had thrust into Bilbo's hands as they were climbing down the Carrock with the words, 'You give it to Thorin...' Bilbo still hadn't figured out why Thorin's nephews had done that.

Now he just lowered his gaze and mumbled, "It was nothing...and if I hadn't done it, I'm sure Fíli, Kíli or Dwalin would have..." The grass between his toes was really quite interesting and he was so focussed on it that he failed to notice Thorin stepping closer until the dwarf gently placed his finger under Bilbo's chin and lifted his head so their eyes met once more.

"And they would have been too late..." Bilbo wanted to shake his head in denial, but firstly Thorin hadn't let go of his chin and secondly...the dwarf was right. He alone had been close enough to see what was going on, close enough to react without the danger of falling from the tree they were all perched on. "Bilbo..." The hobbit's eyes widened in surprise. Never before had Thorin called him by his given name. Until now he had only ever been the Hobbit or Master Baggins. "You saved my life and I'll forever be indebted to you..." Bilbo shook his head. There was no debt...all he cared about was that Thorin was here, alive and well.

But clearly the dwarf had other ideas. "I am. So, once we have retaken Erebor...if there is anything you need, anything at all, just say the word and I will see it done." Blue eyes gazed at him intently. "If you ever need help, I will be there..." Thorin was so close that Bilbo could smell the musky... It's like some intoxicating perfume, isn't it? And those eyes...

Deep dark pools swirling with emotions Bilbo hadn't thought the dwarf even knew of, emotions he would have sworn were as alien to Thorin as this whole adventuring was to Bilbo. And he would have been wrong. There was hope in Thorin's eyes mixed with fear...you clearly are delusional, Thorin and fear?...gratitude and pride, and something Bilbo couldn't quite discern. Or maybe you're just afraid? He's grateful, yes, but that's not all..."Bilbo..." Thorin whispered as he slowly closed the gap between them...
Bilbo woke with a start, chest aching, head pounding and tears running down his weathered face. That dream again...the worst of them all. There were many, many memories he would simply love to forget, but this one was the most painful...and also the one he treasured the most. Soon, he knew, he would be able to rest forever, and never again would the nightmares plague him. Age had caught up with him after he had left his magic ring behind...the One Ring...and now there would only be one more journey for the old hobbit.

To the Havens and beyond... Soon they would leave the Valley of Imladris behind, Rivendell that had been his home for two decades now. And he would be allowed to sail on the last ship to leave the western shores to the Undying Lands. And he would take it all with him...all that he had seen, all that he and his Ring had caused...and maybe he would find some solace there in Valinor before he died.

The pain was now a part of him, just like it was part of his nephew if he wasn't mistaken. It had begun when Thorin had banished him. When Thorin's promise of help turned to dust and he cursed Bilbo for stealing the Arkenstone. That was the day when those dark pools turned icy. And then the battle...and it's aftermath. Thorin's plea for forgiveness...his eyes glazing over as the light in them went out forever. And Fíli and Kíli...their bodies broken as they desperately tried to defend their King...defend their uncle.

There had been no one to share his grief, for no one knew... There was a new King under the Mountain and the remaining dwarves of the Company were trying to find their place in this new Kingdom of Erebor. That was what they had set out to achieve... 'And if you do, you will not be the same...' Gandalf had been right. He was going to return to the Shire, but he would never be the same again.

Back home in Bag End, in his cozy little Hobbit hole, everything reminded him of the dwarves. The ringing of the doorbell would make him hear a grumpy 'That'll be the door', the clatter of plates sounded almost like a merry dwarven song, and if someone ever knocked on his door... 'He's here.' Only he would never be here again. And the memories of those few stolen moments were all Bilbo had left.

The memory of that first night under the stars...that first hesitant kiss they had shared. The startling realisation that for all of Thorin's grumpiness there was a side to the dwarf that was kind and loving and gentle. And the moment he all but admitted that he harboured feelings for Bilbo... From the very beginning it would seem...which was why he had always been so nice to the hobbit. "You will understand my shock when I first saw our so-called burglar and felt something re-awaken within me that I'd thought was dead." Bilbo was mortified...after the first impression he had given, what with talk of conkers and the whole feinting routine, Thorin must have thought he was going mad. No wonder he was so charming all the time.

That night, Thorin had replaced the last vestiges of Bilbo's childhood with the firm belief that no hobbit lass...or lad as it were...would ever be able to make him feel as alive as the dwarf could with one simple glance or a gentle touch. There would be no settling down for him any more...at least not in the Shire. For Thorin spoke of their home in Erebor and their future once the dragon was gone. Little did Thorin know then of what would really come to pass. That as soon as Erebor was his, he would turn his back on Bilbo, that he too would succumb to the sickness that had nearly destroyed his grandfather. Only Fíli and Kíli had tried to make their uncle see reason, had tried to mediate between the new King and the hobbit...and until the end, they had failed.
The love, for Bilbo was sure that's what it had been, had died in Thorin's eyes and had been replaced by his lust for gold...until the day he died. Nearly begging Bilbo's forgiveness...a forgiveness that had been given even before Thorin had finished raging at the hobbit...his eyes brimming with tears, regret and heartbreak evident in his voice. His hand had searched for the hobbit's and placed his signet ring in Bilbo's palm. And then he had closed his eyes and part of Bilbo had died with him.

Back in the Shire, he had tried to pick up the pieces of his old life, but with memories around every corner and a heavy dwarven ring hanging around his neck, Bilbo knew things would never be the same...that he would never be the same. And if folk began whispering behind his back about queer Bilbo, or even worse, the Adventurer, then he was fine with it. Initially some misguided hobbit lasses had tried to court him, probably more drawn by the promise of riches than Bilbo's sunny nature, but after a decade or two that had stopped and Bilbo was left to his own devices. He was still considered a pillar of the community, but the hobbits felt that for some reason, the Master of Bag End wasn't really a part of them any more.

Then he had adopted Frodo and in a way, the young hobbit made him feel more alive again. For ten years they shared a home and finally Bilbo had someone to tell about his adventures. Not all of it of course, but most. And Frodo was an eager listener and encouraged Bilbo to put pen to paper and write his story down. Together they would study the many maps Bilbo had acquired and again and again Frodo would ask Bilbo to tell him about the elves of both Rivendell and Mirkwood. And to please leave out the part with the eight-legs. Yes, Frodo was not too fond of spiders, and now Bilbo had heard of Shelob and how she had nearly killed the younger hobbit. All because of him and his ring.

"I should have told Gandalf all these years ago...maybe then..." It wasn't the first time he said that to himself, and he knew it wouldn't be the last. He pushed himself up and gazed out of the window. The sun was only just beginning to shine upon the valley; so it was still very early...too early for the hobbit to be up and about. But sleep eluded him and thus he reached for his book upon his bedside table and took out one of his most treasured possessions. A drawing he had made one night in Mirkwood when most of the dwarves had been asleep. A drawing of Thorin giving him one of those rare smiles. That drawing and Thorin's ring were more precious to him than even the Ring had ever been.

Mirkwood... Bilbo had been right; it was the most horrific place he had ever ventured into...even Smaug's lair was less terrifying. There was one enemy, he was big and you really couldn't miss him. In that forest... That ever constant feeling they were being watched, and then the spiders... But in a way, the time in Mirkwood...at least before Bombur took a tumble into the river...had been the happiest time in Bilbo's life. Each night Thorin would tell him of his past, of Erebor and Ered Luin, and Fili and Kili were as avid listeners as Bilbo himself. And for some reason, the two brothers didn't think it odd in the least that Thorin and Bilbo... On the contrary. "We haven't seen him smile like that in the longest time, Bilbo. So don't listen to what the others will say, you're part of the family now. Mother will be so happy."

And maybe Dís would have been happy. But when Bilbo finally met her upon his second visit to Erebor, he saw a dwarven woman grieving, mourning both the death of her two sons and her brother. And Bilbo was glad that she did hardly more than acknowledge his presence as she had her brother's bearings and tore open wounds that had barely closed. He spent hours sitting in Thorin's tomb and had to finally tear himself away. But even here, in Imladris, shadows of the past kept haunting him. Elrond had seen it, had offered some kind of elvish healing, but Bilbo had politely declined. The pain was part of him, as were the memories and the nightmares, and he would sooner give up his life than be healed.
He sat there, Thorin's ring in his hand and the drawing on his lap, and the tears welled up again. His days were now filled with regret and sadness, and it became increasingly difficult to keep up the façade of the somewhat strange but very much amiable hobbit. Too much had happened because of him. His ring had all but destroyed Frodo's life and Bilbo would never forgive himself for that. And how many lives could he have potentially saved if he had been honest about his precious? What if it had been destroyed sooner? What if... What if was a dangerous game to play. Soon there wouldn't be any more what ifs, any more doubts and regrets. Soon he would know peace. Soon... Little did he know what would be...soon.
Chapter 2 - White Shores

Don't pay too much attention to what Thorin's nephews tell him about the *Choice*. The truth is being revealed when they talk amongst themselves.

One established pairing is being alluded to here, though I don't think I will ever write anything explicit about them. It's one of my all time favourites, so obviously it had to be put into the story: Glorfindel / Erestor. And then we obviously have Galadriel / Celeborn and Celebrían / Elrond.

And lastly, when Frodo speaks of the two High Kings (of the Ñoldor), he's referring to Turgon and Gil-galad as they are the two he's likely to have heard of from both Glorfindel and Elrond.

And sorry about the cliff-hanger...I had this written up differently, but then added something to the 'Now' part and simply had to cut it down ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Then (2941 T.A.)

Thorin awoke to the beaming faces of his nephews. Hang on...they were dead, and he was pretty sure that he wasn't among the living any more either. The last thing he remembered was Bilbo's face, those beautiful grey eyes filled with pain... Pain at his passing. Pain that they wouldn't have the future Thorin had promised him. Pain that even the few months they could have had... "Welcome to fair Valinor, Uncle," Kíli beamed. "It would seem the elves have it wrong after all and they don't own this place." His grin widened if that was even possible, "And I have it on very good authority that there are even a few hobbits around..."

"Well, apparently Durin's Folk have a choice to make when they die," Fíli explained. "We can either go and spend the rest of our days in the Halls of Aulë, or we can dwell here with some of our kin. Don't worry, Uncle, we kind of...made the choice for you..." At least he had the grace to look a bit guilty. "And there's a catch..." Fíli bit his lower lip and looked pleadingly at his younger brother. But Kíli was apparently really busy checking his fingernails, and his coat, and then his boots. Fíli sighed. "Well, as Valinor was made for the elves originally, us dwarves sort of, you know, have to get over our dislike of the Firstborn." Firstborn?! Everyone knew that the dwarves had been around first and had been put to sleep again because Ilúvatar wanted his precious elves to be...the *Firstborn* race. "We are given a lifetime to come to terms with the elves, and if we can't or won't, we are going to the Halls. The Halls looked like a boring place by the way...judging by what we were shown."
"And if you go to the Halls, Uncle, you will never get to see...certain people again..." Kíli grinned once more, and if Thorin wasn't mistaken, he was this close to actually bouncing. And for a moment, Thorin almost shared his nephew's smile. He might see Bilbo again, might be able to undo all the hurt he had caused because he had to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and got a bit fixated on the treasures of Erebor. He might get the chance to finally be the best dwarf he could possibly be and to show his hobbit just how much he really meant to Thorin. And if he had to swallow down his anger and hatred for the elves as a whole race...Bilbo Baggins was worth it.

However, certain people would also mean..."Your mother is going to kill me!" The two brothers looked at each other, shrugged, and reassured Thorin that Mother couldn't possibly kill Thorin in Valinor, she might rant and rave and scream and shout and even thump him a bit, but there would definitely be no killing. "You died defending me, what were you thinking?!" Thorin knew they had only done what was right and proper, but still. The prospect of his dearest sister... He sighed and dropped back down onto the soft pillow wishing, and not for the last time, that he was really dead and gone and not in this elf-infested place where his sister would eventually show up to give him a few choice words...

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"I'd say that went better than expected...At least he didn't throw anything at us..." Fíli grinned at his brother who just shrugged. "I mean, Aulë was right; if he had asked Thorin to make the choice..." Their uncle would probably have chosen the Halls. Just because. And before even being informed about the hobbits and dwarves who roamed Valinor along the elves. Fíli sort of understood Thorin's anger, no, make that rage, where the pointy-ears were concerned, but really...he took it a bit too far.

"Ecthelion will be happy...someone new he can annoy with his tales of balrogs and fountains," Kíli snickered. They had met the Lord of the Fountain straight after their little chat with Aulë and had immediately realised that not all elves were stuck up tree-huggers like their uncle had made them believe. "Thorin will be so very happy... Do you think 'Thel will do it though? You know, speak to his friends about..."

"Well he offered. He said life had been so boring with only a few dwarves and hobbits around, so anything that might make the Halls, you know, less appealing... I think he's a bit sick of having only elves for company... We just have to ensure that Thorin doesn't run into Thingol or there'll be murder..." Yes, the former ruler of Doriath did not take kindly to dwarves...or anything shorter than elves really...and Ecthelion had suggested they stay clear of the blonde. Not that that was a problem whatsoever, for Valinor was almost as large a continent as Middle-earth, so it was easy for the hoity-toity elf and all of his friends to be as far away from the dwarf settlements as possible. Especially if the brothers' plan was going to work out. The plan they'd hatched when first speaking to Aulë...

The brothers had died within seconds of each other and had woken at the same time. They knew they were...well...not dead any more, but that they had died. They were together though, so whatever could possibly happen, they would be able to face it as a team. And what happened was Aulë. The Vala had appeared in dwarf form, only somewhat taller than your average, or not so average, dwarf. And he had informed them that they could either stay in the Halls or dwell in Valinor proper. The visions of the Halls he made then appear in front of them were...dull...to say the least. Durin himself was there, apparently still pondering the whole Balrog incident and unwilling to admit that he might have mucked up somewhere along the way. And with him were almost all the dwarf lords of old, apparently unwilling to go anywhere that wasn't 'dwarf only territory'. For some reason neither their grandfather nor great-grandfather were there.
No, they were in the visions of Valinor, discussing things with...were those really elves?! Their uncle had apparently exaggerated the whole dislike between Erebor and their elven neighbours a bit. Yes, like there's a little bit of water in the ocean. So Thrór and Thráin were both there... And that was when Fíli asked, "So if we go to Valinor, can we have a new Kingdom under the Mountain?" And Aulë just laughed and nodded. A Vala...laughing... Astounding didn't quite cut it.

"There is a slight catch though. If you do decide on dwelling in Valinor, you will have to get along with all of its inhabitants. Including the elves." He emphasized that last bit, and gazed at them intently. "And while I do not believe this will be any problem for the two of you, there are dwarves who will join us here soon who might be...less agreeable." There was no question in the brothers' minds as to who Aulë was referring to. So they had failed protecting Thorin... "Having said that, some of my kind have plans and for those to work, certain dwarves need to be in Valinor. So I think it might be best if the two of you were to...explain about the Choice. And feel free to...improvise..." The Vala surely wasn't suggesting... "Those dwarves need to be here, or else I will never hear the end of it..." Hang on; Aulë was actually scared of someone? Only two of the other Valar could possibly fit that bill, Manwë himself, and his wife, Varda.

The two young dwarves looked at each other, shrugged and bowed, "At your service." And Fíli added, "We'll make sure they make the right choice." Aulë had beamed at them like a proud father and then showed them the way out of the dusty Halls. Outside they were greeted by an Elvish company...a welcoming committee of sorts it would seem. They were lead by a tall...well, all elves were tall but...dark-haired male, dressed in blue robes, the image of a fountain emblazoned on his chest.

When he saw the two dwarves...Aulë had meanwhile disappeared...he placed his hand over his heart and gave them a slight bow. "Welcome to Valinor, Fíli and Kíli of Erebor. My name is Ecthelion, Lord of the Fountain and I will be your guide this fine day." He all but shooed his companions away and beckoned the dwarves to follow him. They heard him mumble something under his breath and first thought it might be Elvish but then they caught bits of it like "...stupid Turgon..." and "...was most definitely not my fault..." and so on. At least he made no comment about them being of Durin's race. Elves could be just as snobbish as their uncle seemed to be. Ecthelion suddenly stopped in his tracks and Fíli had to grab Kíli by the neck or he would have bumped into the elf.

"Right... So first of all let us drop those wretched formalities... Call me 'Thel. And secondly, you two look as if you like a prank or two...and there is this thing I am planing and I might need some help with it..." And within all of thirty minutes the two young dwarves had not only made a friend and ally, but also found a fellow prankster and co-conspirator. Thorin...and indeed all the inhabitants of Valinor...wouldn't know what hit them. And ‘Thel had promised to help them with their little New Erebor project. He'd found out where Thrór and Thráin had made a home and with the two quickly on board as well, the first phase of the plan was put into action...recruitment.

"So, how did it go?" Ecthelion had wandered into the little cottage the two brothers, and now their uncle, called home...at least for the time being, a bundle of scrolls under his left arm and a basket with something that smelled simply delicious in his right. "Did he buy it?" Kíli made shushing sounds while Fíli pushed the elf out of the door.

"You know, he might be headstrong and all that good stuff, but he can hear! And believe me, I am not going to explain certain...things...to him just yet. We did what we had to and that's the end of it." Fíli glared at the elf. "We failed saving him, we'll be damned if we fail him again...and Aulë for that matter. Don't want to know what an angry Vala looks like if that's alright with you." Ecthelion just nodded and handed the basket to Kíli, who almost immediately sauntered off with it in the direction of the kitchen. The elf then held out the scrolls like a peace offering.
"Blueprints... Thrór and Thráin stuck their heads together for two days and came up with this. It is just a start obviously, but..." Fíli unrolled one of the scrolls and gasped. These were magnificent. Similar enough to Erebor to remind them of their home, but different as well so it could really be a fresh start. "And I do apologise. I...I know that he must not know the truth, at least not yet. Maybe once that hobbit of his is here?" He sighed. "I really wish we could find out what is going on back there... I do miss 'Fin... And I would love to know what the Valar are plotting this time. Last I checked, their plans were always, well...you know..." He suddenly looked up at the blue sky as if he was expecting to be struck down by lightning. "Well, they let 'Fin and me die and then sent him back instead of me. Not very smart if you ask me..." The blond dwarf just shook his head and went back to the scroll in his hand. They might have only known Ecthelion for a short while, but they had heard about the whole dying and rebirth business a few times already and knew exactly what 'Thel thought of it all.

The elf and Fíli were still perusing the blueprints when the door of the cottage burst open a few minutes later. "Oh, you're finally up," Fíli grinned. "Uncle, please meet Lord Ecthelion of the Fountain. He'll be staying for dinner." And if it had been possible to die of heart attack in Valinor, Fíli was pretty sure his uncle would have...

Now (3021 T.A.)

It was really like Gandalf had said...the sea was like silver glass, calm and quiet despite the wind that carried the ship to the west; to white shores where both he and Frodo would be able to heal before the end. "Galadriel said it wouldn't be long now, Uncle," Frodo glanced at him hopefully. "To be honest, I can't wait to feel solid ground under my feet again...all this water..." Yes, for a hobbit, no matter how adventurous, water was still something to be avoided wherever possible. And especially for Frodo, having lost both his parents in a boating accident... The younger hobbit raised a hand to shade his eyes and then pointed excitedly, more excitedly than he had been ever since... "There it is...Valinor! We're finally here!"

Círdan himself walked over to them and nodded, "Indeed, young Frodo. There they are, the White Shores of Aman. Give it another hour, my dear hobbits, and we will be there. And I am sure there will be quite a few people there waiting...for the Lady of Lórien and the Lord of Rivendell." There had been an ever so slight pause, and Bilbo began to wonder. What on earth could he mean though? Surely there are no elves who would be waiting for you or Frodo... Unless they want to see the Ring-bearers with their own eyes. Was that his destiny then? To be paraded around as the foolish hobbit who found the One Ring? And poor Frodo as well? Frodo, who had been fending off the pull of the Ring for so long, until finally, at the Cracks of Doom he lost his fight and claimed the Ring for himself; thus failing his quest. If it hadn't been for Gollum... At least Bilbo had done the right thing in not killing the creature. Yes, at least there was that...

Slowly all the elves travelling with them appeared from the bowels of the ship, eyes bright and small smiles playing around their lips as they beheld the shore that was creeping ever nearer. Only Galadriel looked somewhat saddened. And no wonder. She had said farewell to her husband and there was no way of knowing when Lord Celeborn would finally make his own journey to the West. And Elrond...he had left behind all three of his children, and only two would ever join him in Valinor. Arwen would stay behind and eventually fade and die. But at least he would finally see his wife again... And Galadriel her daughter and only child. And everyone on the ship knew, in detail, whom Lord Glorfindel was eager to see again. It had been Ecthelion here and Ecthelion there the whole journey, and if Master Erestor had eventually stayed as far away from his mate as possible, Bilbo couldn't begrudge him that. How those two had ever...
Yes, everyone had someone waiting for them there beyond the white shores. But not the two hobbits. For them it would be a foreign place and they would be the outsiders, no matter how much their elven friends tried to make them feel welcome. *How will you ever be able to fit in? Amongst elven nobility and brave warriors? What will two hobbits of the Shire amount to?* Two Ring-bearers... His hand went to his chest, feeling the heavy ring under his shirt, a sad smile on his lips. He had been a Ring-bearer indeed, though not only in the way Frodo had been. And sometimes it seemed that it was Thorin's ring that weighed so much heavier than...

"Uncle? Are you alright?" Bilbo just nodded, his hand dropping to his side again. Frodo knew of the ring, though Bilbo had still been unable to find the words to express exactly what it meant to him. How very much he treasured the ring; far more than his sword or Mithril shirt. How giving up the One Ring had been painful, but how it would have been impossible to forsake the heavy dwarven band. He sighed and turned to his nephew, giving him a small smile. Frodo had endured enough and there was no need for him to live through Bilbo's nightmares as well. And maybe they would finally ease though the old hobbit wasn't sure that was what he wanted.

"We will be able to meet the High Kings, Bilbo, both of them... And Glorfindel's friend... We will have two elves talking about balrogs..." Frodo looked slightly sick at the thought. "But maybe Gandalf can turn the tables on them and tell them about Durin's Bane..." Frodo still held on to that plan it seemed. So far it hadn't worked on Glorfindel, so Bilbo wasn't going to get his hopes up for the future. "And they will want to know about the Quest, won't they?" Bilbo nodded slowly. "I wish I had made another copy of our book...but maybe we could rewrite it?" Frodo trailed off, mumbling about books and balrogs and rings... At least they would have each other. Yes, there was always that. Little did Bilbo know just what, or rather *who*, was waiting for him...

Chapter End Notes

More Valinor to follow soon, stay tuned :(
Chapter 3 - Reunion

Chapter Summary

I think the chapter title says it all really...

Chapter Notes

Once a person steps foot on Valinor grounds, aging reverts to a point when they were in their prime. There is no further aging after that either, so any children born in Valinor will grow older normally until they reach their prime as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

The ship had finally reached the harbour, and disembarkment was in full swing when the two hobbits at last walked down the gangway, closely followed by Gandalf. "There he is!" Bilbo heard a shout that sounded somewhat familiar followed by "Excuse me, pardon me, coming through" and then he was lifted by two pairs of arms and hugged so tightly that he was worried he might faint or worse. "We missed you so much, we finally have our burglar back!" Fíli? Kíli? Oh no, it was official. He had lost his mind. But he couldn't think of a better way to go, not really.

Someone chuckled behind them. And as Bilbo turned, his eyes all of a sudden sharper than they had been for years, Gandalf had suddenly disappeared and there was a fair haired elf in the wizard's robes standing where the Gandalf had been. "I see you will be in good hands, Bilbo. As will you I'm sure Frodo..." He chuckled again, "Oh don't look at me like that. You didn't really think the old wizard was out of tricks, did you?" And then he turned to the two dwarves who still had an arm each around Bilbo. "And you two, close your mouths, will you? It's unbecoming of dwarves of Durin's line." He brushed past dwarves and hobbits alike. "If you should need me, send word to Olórin...or He-who-used-to-be-Gandalf if you wish." Yes, Bilbo had most definitely lost his mind...

Then the two young dwarves pushed him forward, dragging a startled Frodo with them and... "Balin? Ori?" It wasn't possible. Dwarves didn't go to Valinor, they just didn't! Or maybe...

"Ah, Bilbo... And Master Frodo... Balin, Son of Fundin...at your service." But it was a much younger Balin that bowed to both hobbits, his hair and beard not the white of snow, but a grey that was closer to being black than white. And Ori just smiled one of his shy smiles and bowed as well.

Frodo stood next to Bilbo and looked beyond shell-shocked. "Um, Frodo...these are Fíli and Kíli, and Balin, and here's Ori too." Frodo just stared. "How did you...how can you be...how is this possible?"

Fíli smiled at the other dwarves and then at Bilbo. "All will be explained, but for now...why don't you leave your nephew with us? I'm sure he knows who we are, right?" Bilbo nodded. "Good. That's settled then. We've heard so much about the quest of the Fellowship from all the elves coming..."
across these past few years, but we finally want to hear the whole story, you know, from someone who lived it. We promise we won't bite him or anything nasty. And look, Balin is here, and Ori... They're no fun at all when it comes to...you know... Ouch!" Balin had smacked him across the head at that last part and Fíli grumbled to himself. "He's acting like he's still my teacher!"

"And I will always be, young Fíli, until the day you're old and grey...and as that will never happen unless you venture into the Halls..." Balin smirked. He actually smirked! And winked at Bilbo. "Don't worry, laddie, we have it all under control, and young Frodo will be perfectly safe with us. But..." and at that he turned more serious, "there is someone who has been waiting patiently to see you and I'm afraid his patience is about to run out, if it hasn't done so already." He turned and pointed towards a lone figure with two ponies standing apart from the hustle and bustle of the harbour. Bilbo's heart skipped a beat. It could not be... "Eighty years is a long time, Master Baggins..." And Bilbo couldn't agree more.

"Frodo...will you be alright if I..."

His nephew looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then nodded, "They are your friends, right? And I know at least one of their company, so... And Uncle..." Bilbo raised an eyebrow at the younger hobbit, "you, um, you look like that hobbit in your drawing again...you know, the one that was private and I was supposed to keep my sticky paws off? I think Valinor will indeed be very good for us." And then he turned to Balin and Ori. "Bilbo told me that you both were scholars of some sort. I would love to hear about dwarven customs and so on. Gimli was always very secretive about these things..."

"Go to him," Kíli whispered into his ear then. "There is much you will wish to discuss." Bilbo made to leave but Kíli suddenly pulled him into another embrace. "We missed you so much, all of us did. Promise you won't leave us again?" Bilbo was about to point out that the dwarves had done the leaving, in quite a spectacular way, but thought better of it and just nodded. Kíli smiled broadly as he let Bilbo go at long last, but then shouted something in Khuzdul as his brother smacked him over the head.

"Let him go, brother, or Thorin will have your hide." Turning to Bilbo, Fíli added, "Forgive him please, but apparently this whole death business has killed off all the sanity Kíli may or may not have possessed before. Debatable, I know..." He grinned and then pushed Bilbo in the direction of Thorin. Thorin... Everything else seemed to melt away as he slowly approached the dwarf. He looked almost the same as he had the first time they had met. Maybe there was less grey in his hair and beard, and maybe his eyes were less stern... "Master Baggins..." Oh? Bilbo's heart sank. So they were back to Master Baggins, were they? But then... "Bilbo...you...you must be tired after the long journey." Um, what? "And my good-for-nothing nephews have decreed you should be staying with us for the time being. Don't worry, it's not far." Hello to you, too. Yes, I've missed you as well, I can't believe I'm actually here with you... Thorin threw him the reigns of one of the ponies. "Let's be off." Unbelievable!

They had been trotting along a small dirt path for about an hour, and Bilbo was seriously considering turning back and spending time with dwarves who actually acknowledged his presence and had missed him by the looks of it, when Thorin announced that they had arrived. So, this small cottage was where the former King under the Mountain was staying now? No wonder he was His Grumpiness himself. But really, eighty years and now this?! He was sure even Gollum would have greeted him with more emotions after such a long time...except that Gollum was dead and would probably have tried to kill Bilbo for stealing his Precious. But even that sounded more fun than Thorin Oakenshield's silent treatment.
Silently the dwarf took the ponies into the stables next to the cottage proper, silently he lead Bilbo inside and equally silently did he prepare tea and placed a steaming cup in front of the hobbit. Bilbo was about to burst. Thorin's back was to him and he was just about to start yelling at the stoic dwarf when... "I know I already asked your forgiveness, but... Bilbo...I am sorry." He turned around then, and those eyes... The eyes Bilbo had been dreaming of for eighty long years. "I cannot even begin to explain why I acted the way I did. It was as if I needed to possess the Arkenstone and when you took it to Bard... I couldn't think clearly anymore. Part of me was screaming that I was pushing away the best thing in my life, but I did it anyway." He sighed...a sound that tore open all the old wounds and healed them at the same time.

Thorin was still his. His stubborn, frustrating, arrogant, rude, beloved dwarf. His dwarf who could heal all his scars with a simple word... He hadn't needed Elrond's elvish medicine, he had needed this. "I know I will never be able to undo the hurts I have caused you, wittingly and those that were beyond my control..." Like the whole dying part... "But I swear I will try. If you will let me, I will try..." His whole face was so open, so vulnerable in that moment...and then suddenly it hardened again. "Though, I am sure there are things you will not want to rekindle. None of the elves would speak of it, but I'm sure you settled down eventually. Eighty years is a long time..."

And that was it. "How dare you, Thorin Oakenshield? How dare you?! Do you really think that I would be able to just forget and go back to being a proper and respectable hobbit with a cute little wife and a houseful of children?! Is that what you think of me?!" Thorin had the grace to look startled, but that simply wasn't enough right then. "But you're right. Yes, I was married. All these years. To a pig-headed son of elves!" He reached inside his shirt and pulled out the chain with Thorin's signet ring. Holding it up for Thorin to see, he shouted, "Here! See this?!! Ever since you gave this to me I have considered myself tied to you, even if it was only your memory! I couldn't have taken a wife or lover or whatever you think I've had, couldn't have betrayed you in such a way! But maybe you have... Actually, I'm quite sure you have since you think like that of me, but..." And his heart broke again, tears filling his eyes.

Until he felt strong arms lift him off the bench he had sunken down upon at the end of his outburst and he was pulled into an embrace. "I had to know..." Thorin breathed into his ear, "Eighty years is a long time, and you had no way of knowing that there was even a chance we could be reunited. I had at least that." His hand closed over Bilbo's right that was still holding the ring, "I was hoping you'd know what I was trying to say with it..." It had been a far shot from the usual dwarven courting rituals, but Thorin was dying then, and there was no other way to show Bilbo... "I will make it up to you...I will try to make you forget all those years..."

Bilbo had had enough...enough of talking at least. And thus he silenced Thorin the only way he knew would work. For the first time it was the hobbit who took charge of the kiss, and it was Bilbo who pushed Thorin to the bedchamber. And as they began exploring each other, bodies no longer marred by scars, Bilbo was still dominating. And as he finally sank into the furnace beneath him he knew...he had finally come home.

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Thorin woke to the sound of birds singing just outside the window. He hurt in places he hadn't known existed before last night and smiled to himself. His burglar could be quite possessive if he wanted to be. His burglar... Bilbo had wrapped himself around Thorin during the night, his slumbering head resting on the dwarf's broad chest; the rest of him seemed to have melded itself to Thorin's side. And the dwarf couldn't think of anything better. Bilbo was here, was still his... Despite the years, there had never been anyone else, of that Thorin was sure now. So his nephews had been
calling him crazy and stupid for even entertaining the thought, but... After everything he had put the hobbit through before his death... *You're mine, and you always will be...*

He had felt that way even before aging had been reversed as Bilbo stepped onto Valinor ground. He would have loved the white-haired hobbit just as much as he did the younger hobbit that was now sleeping in his arms. Maybe not quite as fiercely, but... The days and weeks leading up to this day had been torturous. They had known of the Last Ship, had known the Ring-bearers would be on it, all of them. And Thorin started snapping at every little thing... A blueprint wasn't the way Thorin had wanted it to be, even if it was better, and he would throw a fit. If dinner wasn't served at the exact time Thorin expected it... It had gotten so bad, Fíli and Kíli had temporarily moved out and were staying at Balin's now. Even though their old teacher still treated them like small dwarflings at times... He owed them an apology for that.

But he owed so much more to the hobbit next to him. And it was thus that Thorin Oakenshield, former King under the Mountain and now King of the new Kingdom of Erebor closed his eyes. *I will do whatever it takes to stay with him. You hear me Aulë? Even if that means being civil to the tree-hugging elves. I will do everything in my power to stay here with him. So don't even think about dragging me to the Halls. I choose Valinor with everything that's in it. Including Thingol of Doriath!* And something seemed to lift off of him. He couldn't say what it was, but he felt...more alive now that it was gone.

There was much he would have to explain to Bilbo, much they would have to discuss. The whole *Arkenstone Incident* as he referred to it in his own mind first and foremost. The fact that he had come so dangerously close to killing Bilbo...something he would never be able to forgive himself for; something that still made him wake in cold sweat almost every night. For in his dreams, or nightmares as it were, no one had stopped him. And he had seen Bilbo's broken body, had cradled the hobbit's *corpse*, or had thrown himself off the very same wall moments after... All over a stupid piece of *rock*! Even Thrór had by now admitted that there was something dark about the stone and had been glad it was now lost to them forever.

And then Bilbo's ring...the ring the hobbit had used on an almost permanent basis in Thranduil's caverns...to help them. Thorin dreaded to think what it had done to Bilbo, what using it for so long had broken within the halfling. What sort of hold had it taken and whether it was like that *gem*? And there was the topic that Thorin would have loved to avoid at all costs but knew he couldn't. Those eighty years... Eighty long years Bilbo had been alone...almost completely alone as far as Thorin could tell. Grieving, mourning...while Thorin had been here with his family, building a new life for the dwarves of...Valinor. How could he even begin to make amends for that? For something that hadn't been in his power to begin with... He sighed as he pulled Bilbo closer. The hobbit was here, that was the main thing. Everything else they could face...together.

That thought put a smile on his face. They were together again, after years of waiting, of longing... It was a shame he would have to share Bilbo and it would take all the restraint Thorin possessed not to be the greedy, jealous dwarf he knew he could be. For there were others who wished to see the hobbit, least of all his father and grandfather. Bilbo had been essential in the retaking of the Mountain, and that in itself made the hobbit an honorary member of their family. And that annoying elf. Yes, Ecthelion was helpful and all, but he was still... *Nothing Aulë, nothing at all. Ecthelion is charming and really nice...* His choice would be the death of him... Yes, there was the Lord of the Fountain, and of course Balin and Ori. And then there were two hobbits...

Chapter End Notes
A more explicit version of the night's events could be made available if there is interest
*whistles*

Oh, and I give you all three guesses who those two hobbits might be...
Interlude - You're Mine

Chapter Notes

Alright, so here it is, the explicitness that has been requested. This is set just between the time jump in the previous chapter. I do apologise that it's not just fluff, some plot elements sneaked their way in.

The whole idea of Bilbo in a dress at the end...that's blatendly borrowed from Moonbeam's lovely story **Recovery, Redemption and Romance**. I just thought the idea was priceless so...there you are.

Interlude - You're Mine

"I had to know..." Thorin breathed into his ear, "Eighty years is a long time, and you had no way of knowing that there was even a chance we could be reunited. I had at least that." His hand closed over Bilbo's right that was still holding the ring. "I was hoping you'd know what I was trying to say with it..." It had been a far shot from the usual dwarven courting rituals, but Thorin was dying then, and there was no other way to show Bilbo... "I will make it up to you...I will try to make you forget all those years..."

Bilbo had had enough...enough of talking at least. And thus he silenced Thorin the only way he knew would work. Tangling his fingers in the dwarf's long hair, he pulled Thorin's face down until their lips met in a kiss that was nothing like that first chaste kiss they had shared all those years ago. Back then, Bilbo had been too shocked by what was happening to properly participate, but now he took charge. His tongue delved into the dwarf's mouth, mapping it with as much attention as he had given the maps he drew back in Bag End. That little flick of his tongue made Thorin moan, and that nibble to the dwarf's lower lip made Thorin pull him closer yet. And Bilbo filed everything away for future use.

When they finally pulled apart, they were both panting and Thorin's eyes, those beautiful eyes, were more black pupil than deep blue iris. "Bilbo..." No! No more words! It had been eighty years since they had been together, eighty years since their last night in Esgaroth. And something snapped in the usually so quiet and composed hobbit. Quickly getting his bearings he all but pushed Thorin towards the door, earning him a smile and a husky, "Someone's eager..." Well yes, thank you very much. It had been way too long, and Thorin's stupid ideas of a hobbit wife and children... He was going to show his dwarf once and for all that there was no one else, that there could be no one but Thorin.

Reaching the bedchamber at long last, Bilbo all but attacked the lacing of the dwarf's tunic...blue, like his travelling outfit had been, blue like his eyes... But Thorin's hands were just as busy with the hobbit's somewhat oversized clothes...his older self had been a little more on the round side of things. Before long they were both bare chested and barefoot, and Bilbo pushed the dwarf onto the soft bed, and gasped. All the scars he remembered, the scars he had traced with lips and fingers, they were gone. Thorin's chest was only hard planes now, as if chiselled out of rock. Tenderly he ran his fingers through the curly hair...Valar, how he had missed the softness of it...until his palm came to rest over Thorin's rapidly beating heart. It was beating...strongly and powerfully and so very much alive. Not like the last time Bilbo's hands had rested on the dwarf's chest...
After Thorin had presented Bilbo with his ring, the hobbit had reached up for one last caress, his hand coming to rest on Thorin's bandaged chest. And he had felt it, the final flutter of the dwarven king's heart, and then it had been silent and the world had turned darker for his passing. Unwanted tears welled in Bilbo's eyes, and he angrily tried to blink them away lest Thorin would see them. But he was too late. Gently, Thorin wiped them away, eyes searching the hobbit's. And as if he could read Bilbo's mind, he whispered, "It's not a dream, Bilbo... But if it were, never let us awaken." He pulled Bilbo down to place a tender kiss on the hobbit's forehead.

Bilbo smiled when he pulled away, tears forgotten. Yes, this was real, that beating heart under his palm was real...but if it should be a dream, yes, he never wished to wake. How he had yearned to see Thorin's face again, to touch it even if it was only one last time. But it wouldn't be. They had all the time in the world now and nothing and no one would ever be able to tear them apart again. Not even a second Arkenstone, Bilbo would see to that. So he moved his hands, fingers trailing a path to Thorin's collarbone and then up to his chin and the soft scratch of the dwarf's beard, the lips that could light up his world with a simple smile...lips that were now somewhat swollen from their kiss. The noble nose, and strong forehead. And the soft curls, still touched by silver in places...

His heart was swelling with every passing moment, healing itself. Thorin was his. His! And with that thought, he brought their lips back together in a more tender kiss than the first one, although eventually desire took over and their tongues were sliding together in an endless duel...or so it would have been if the need for air hadn't forced them apart eventually. And when Bilbo felt something press into the soft skin of his thigh, he chuckled, "Who's eager now?" Thorin tried to pull him down for another kiss, but Bilbo wriggled out of the dwarf's grasp. "Now now...patience is a virtue." Thorin just growled at him, but the growl turned into a moan as Bilbo slid down the dwarf's body to come to rest between those strong legs, his lips mere inches from Thorin's straining hardness.

Grey eyes caught blue, and Bilbo ran the tip of his tongue over his lips. To know how much Thorin wanted him, that after eighty years he still held as much power over him...it nearly undid Bilbo right then. But he took a deep breath to catch himself and slowly undid the lacings of Thorin's pants. Soon he could see his prize outlined through the fabric of the dwarf's undergarments, and unable to help himself, he blew cold air on it. Thorin shuddered, eyes shut tight, his right hand clenched in a fist on his forehead. "Please..." So needy, so very un-kingly...and all because of a small hobbit. Bilbo smirked. Where before, places had always been reversed, now it was Thorin writhing under the hobbit's ministrations, and it was Thorin who made those noises that fueled both Bilbo's braveness and his desire to possess what was his.

Within minutes, the remainder of the dwarf's clothing had been dealt with and Bilbo's mouth was stretched around Thorin's hardness. And the taste that flooded Bilbo's very being, so quintessentially Thorin... he could feel himself growing addicted to it. How could he have forgotten that? And that musky scent... Bilbo could have spent hours drinking it all in, all the sensations and would have still remained thirsty for more. But Thorin's large hands gently but insistently pulled him up into a kiss and then rested his forehead against the hobbit's. Oh Valar, his eyes... Filled with so much trust and love along with desire... "Please..." Bilbo could hardly believe that the great Thorin Oakenshield was asking him for...

A small vial of scented oil was placed into his suddenly shaking hands. "Are you sure?" He had to know, needed the confirmation. What he got was a nod and a tender kiss and some whispered...endearments?...in Khuzdul. Just the sound of that secret dwarven language made Bilbo's heart beat faster. Thorin should be forbidden from ever using it around the hobbit. From that very first time when Thorin, with just one word, shut up the other companions...Bilbo had felt it in his very marrow. So authoritative, so passionate... So very different from the whispers Bilbo heard now,
but it would always, *always*, have the same effect on the hobbit.

Another deep breath stopped his fingers from shaking too much as he slowly and gently prepared the dwarf beneath him, eyes firmly fixed on Thorin's face so he would see if he caused the dwarf any discomfort. He couldn't bare that. After shedding the rest of his garments, he liberally coated himself and once more inquired if Thorin was indeed willing to go through with this. Bilbo was ready to trade places in a heartbeat, no matter how exhilarated he felt by being given control over their lovemaking. And for a moment he believed that he would have to do exactly that. Thorin looked...apprehensive...but then he nodded, "Please..." And Bilbo sank into tightness and heat, into the very furnace beneath him; Thorin's fire threatening to burn him to a cinder, body and soul.

He held still then, his body's needs secondary to the desire to make sure Thorin was alright, to give the dwarf time to grow accustomed to the intrusion. And when Thorin rolled his hips experimentally, Bilbo knew he could finally move again and released the breath he had been holding. Slowly they rocked together, and Bilbo would have loved to keep up the slow and languid pace, would have loved to take as much time as possible. But it had been too long, and they were both too close to their peaks already. And when Thorin's hand closed around his own arousal, Bilbo's joined him and after only a few strokes, Thorin contracted around him and Bilbo felt himself falling...falling...and only the solid body beneath him anchored him. He slumped down on Thorin's chest and for a few minutes the world went blissfully black.

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When he came to, he had been placed on his back and a warm cloth was clearing away the evidence of their coupling. A warm cloth in a big dwarven hand... Thorin's hand. And everything came flooding back...they were in Valinor, they were together. Bilbo could only smile up at his dwarf, his hands reaching for Thorin's face and, pulling himself up, he placed a soft kiss on the dwarf's lips. He would have loved to stay like this forever, if it hadn't been for his stomach that had chosen precisely that moment to make itself heard.

Thorin chuckled, "I'm glad to see that you're still a proper hobbit...yes, your stomach is still working like clockwork." Bilbo swatted the dwarf's arm, or tried to. His hand was caught in a bigger one, and a gentle kiss was placed on his knuckles. "I will see what I can find in the kitchen before you eat yourself up from the inside out..." Quickly pulling on his pants, Thorin almost ran from the room before Bilbo could throw something at him. A proper hobbit indeed. He would show Thorin how very proper he could be! After he found something to wear...

His old clothes, strewn all over the floor, were at least two sizes too big for him now. And so he got up and padded over to the large chest of drawers that stood next to the fireplace. It was getting chilly, so Bilbo decided to get a fire started once he'd made himself somewhat more presentable...to Thorin at least. He opened the top drawer and found some shirts and pants, Thorin's of course, so he wouldn't even have to try the pants... Grabbing a shirt, he pulled it over his head and almost burst into laughter. It looked like a dress on him. Oh well, he would probably have to make do with his old garments until such a time he could buy some new ones. He had seen a market at the harbour earlier from the corner of his eyes, and even a few hobbits... So maybe he would be able to procure some new clothing...

Busying himself with flint and stone...he had watched Óin and Glóin often enough as they set up camp...he soon had a roaring fire going. The warmth was soaking into his bones and he smiled to himself. That morning he had still wondered how he would fit into Valinor, and now...his life had been turned upside down. His dwarven friends were here... and Thorin. Above all Thorin. Instinctively he reached into the shirt and drew out the ring. How he had ever called the One Ring
his Precious was beyond him now. It was this ring that was his most precious possession. But even that paled in comparison to how precious Thorin himself was to Bilbo... Shaking his head to himself, his eyes fell once more on the chest of drawers, and, his curiosity peaked, Bilbo wandered over to it again.

Pulling open the second drawer, Bilbo nearly froze in shock. It could not be... There lay an exact copy of the armour and travelling gear Thorin had worn throughout most of their adventures. The velvety tunic, a blue so dark it almost seemed black, the fur coat... Bilbo still remembered Thorin putting it around his shoulders during the cold nights in Mirkwood and his hand reached out to stroke the soft fur. He had loved those moments when it seemed to be just the two of them, had lived for them. And now...what they had shared just moments ago meant so much more. There was no more doubt about what the future might hold, no more worries...at least in that respect.

The touch of a gentle hand to the small of his back made Bilbo nearly jump out of his skin. "I'm sorry...I didn't mean to startle you." Thorin placed a kiss on his temple. "This is what I wore when I woke up... I left it in this drawer until...today. It's how you knew me, I didn't want you to think you were seeing a ghost..."

"Frodo has to see you in this... I've told him so much about you...and the rest of the Company." Frodo... For a moment he wondered how his nephew was doing, but then fingers stroking his cheek gently brought him back to the present.

"And he will, I am looking forward to meeting him. A remarkable hobbit, just like his uncle... Who is either wearing a dress or my shirt..." Bilbo glared. "Open the bottom drawer." The hobbit complied and found a wrapped pack. "A gift from Aulë... He visited two weeks ago informing us that the Last Ship would arrive soon. Then he handed this to me with the words, 'For Master Baggins' and left." Bilbo looked up questioningly. "Oh I don't know what it is, Bilbo. It is, after all, for you."

Holding his breath, Bilbo slowly undid the ties and opened the wrapping. And both he and Thorin gasped. "It's my old clothes." And indeed it was his shirt and pants, his waistcoat...buttons and all...and his red jacket. "Thorin..."

"It would seem the powers that be want to both remind us of the past, but also give us a chance to reforge our fate..." He reverently stroked the velvet of the coat. "We are not who we were back then, Bilbo. Will you allow me to get to know my burglar again? And I promise, no more Arkenstones..." Placing the garments on top of the chest of drawers, Bilbo threw his arms around the tall dwarf, nodding into his shoulder. "I will make it up to you, Bilbo... I will..." And then the hobbit's stomach once again announced it's presence and Thorin chuckled, "Right after we do something about that ravenous beast you seem to harbour within you..." And with that he pulled Bilbo to the bed and the tray with food and plates and also a jug of ale and two tankards.

And as Bilbo decimated the food laid out before him, ever so often glancing at the smiling dwarf next to him, the hobbit knew that, at long last, he had come home.

TBC.
Chapter 4 - Of Hobbits and Courting

Then (2942 T.A.)

"Uncle Thorin! You won't believe it! You won't believe who's here!" Kíli was...bouncing. Again. He'd been doing that almost every day since Thorin, Thrór and Thráin had put their heads together and had chosen the ideal mountain for their little project. Ecthelion, also known as that annoying elf who thought he practically lived with the three dwarves, had gathered some elven prospectors and they had determined that the mountain would be a worthy replacement for Erebor. Gold and silver veins were running under their feet, and even some Mithril. And gems...lots of gems. Thorin was hoping though that there wouldn't be another Arkenstone. That whole business had ended...not so well.

Every time he thought of the accursed jewel he saw those sad grey eyes, saw the heartbreak that before he had been too blind to see. He wished he could turn back time and simply shake himself. The stupid stone wasn't worth even half as much as Bilbo. Why couldn't he see that before? Why couldn't he trust...if not Bard and the humans, then at least his burglar? And his nephews for that matter? But no, he had to banish Bilbo...no, worse. He'd tried to kill the hobbit...and whatever time they might have had together, they instead spent apart. Because of him... Because his lust for gold and that stone had been greater than his feelings for the hobbit. Only that wasn't the truth, was it? He simply hadn't been able to stop himself...and the more he thought about it, the more it became apparent that he, Thorin Oakenshield, who'd always prided himself on being in control of his actions, had basically been watching himself, unable to stop what he was doing as he was under the influence of...

"Uncle?" Fíli nudged him in the side, "are you even listening to us?" Thorin simply nodded, trying to dispel the thoughts that kept haunting him. "Well, we went to the market just outside of Tirion and...well, there was this hobbit lady and she overheard us talking to a vendor." Thorin raised a questioning eyebrow at his older nephew. "Well, we were just making conversation and all we said was how we had been to Hobbiton and how wonderful hobbit cuisine is... She pretty much cornered us as we were about to leave and demanded we tell her more. Well, it seems like she knows Bilbo...intimately..." Why was Kíli smirking at that? That was anything but good news considering he had to try and get along with the other races in Valinor and now this. He somehow doubted that killing a hobbit would be seen as getting along...

"Uncle...wipe that murderous glare off your face... I don't think Bilbo would thank you for killing his mother." His...mother? "Belladonna Took, eh, Baggins herself. We sort of...told her about the quest and all, and we might have mentioned some...other things as well..." He blushed a bright red. "Well, it's about time someone else knew anyway." That was added in a more stubborn manner and Thorin...
could feel a headache coming on. He'd had his reasons to keep his relationship with the hobbit a secret. Except that right now he couldn't recall it, try as hard as he might. "So, um, she wants to meet you...urgently. She...and this is a direct quote, so don't hit the messenger...wants to meet the dwarf who thinks he's good enough for her son." By Aulë, he really wished he was just dead and gone...

And he still wished the same when two days later he found himself in the hobbit settlement of New Delving...which sounded more like a dwarven name, but he wasn't about to point that out...and was stared down by a short, but very formidable hobbit woman. And a somewhat less formidable, but equally staring gentlehobbit. Bilbo's parents, in the flesh. "So, Thorin Oakenshield...you think you can just go and break my son's heart, do you?" They had come to the whole battle and dying part and Thorin wished he had that magic ring Bilbo had used several times during their quest. Though he wasn't sure if Belladonna wouldn't be able to see him still, invisible or not.

"I'm sure he didn't die on purpose, dear..." Belladonna shot her husband one of those glares that make any male step softly around the offended female. Thorin was sure that even King Thingol wouldn't dare to speak up when faced with that glare...though he would plot the most gruesome revenge afterwards.

"That is of no interest to me, Bungo. Poor Bilbo..." Her eyes...so similar to her son's that it was somewhat uncomfortable...were once again fixed on Thorin. "You... When my son reaches here, and I am sure he will, you will do your utmost to see him happy. With or without you! And if that means you have to kiss and cuddle the elves, then that is what you will do! Or you will find out what it means to make a Took angry! I may just be a hobbit, but..." Thorin had a hunch that there was no just to Belladonna, no matter how you looked at it. All of a sudden her eyes softened. "But if you care about him as much as I think you do..." And then he had found himself with an armful of hobbit. However, when Belladonna finally released him, she twitched his nose. "You better be worth it, Thorin Oakenshield, or all the dwarves in Valinor won't be able to save you..."

Now (3021 T.A.)

"So how would you like your eggs?" Bilbo was bustling around the kitchen as if he had lived there all his life and hadn't just arrived the previous day. "I'm glad the pantry is so well stocked, but I think I will still have to go to a market and buy some of those nasty green foods that Ori loves so much." He chuckled, and then stopped in his tracks. "They are selling fresh vegetables, right?" Thorin nodded, then smirked at Bilbo's relieved sigh. Hobbits did take their food very seriously indeed, he had learnt that in the past eighty years. And woe be tight if you didn't like something they prepared for you...or maybe that was just Belladonna Baggins. "Well, you three will finally get to try some proper hobbit cooking. I never got the chance...before..."

Thorin reached for Bilbo's hands and for a moment he wondered if he should tell Bilbo about his parents. But Belladonna had given him seven days, and by Aulë, he would use them. So instead he whispered, "We have all the time in the world now, my hobbit. And I'm sure my nephews would love to try whatever you prepare." Gazing deeply into the hobbit's eyes, he added, "As would I..." Placing a gentle kiss on Bilbo's lips, he pulled him closer until they were wrapped in a tight embrace.

That was, until the smell of something burning came from the stove and Bilbo rushed off, muttering that he'd never ever let anything burn before. Thorin thought he even heard something about useless dwarves, but surely Bilbo would never say anything like that...surely not. But whatever it was the hobbit mumbled, Thorin would take it, and more...too glad was he that his hobbit was once again with him, that he was finally whole again. And he decided that it was time to make things right, to do
things the proper way... by dwarven standards at least. Belladonna would probably still hurt him in her own way, but...

So while Bilbo was taking care of the burned eggs and trying for an unburned batch, Thorin excused himself for a second and went to his... no, their bedchamber to retrieve the first of two small boxes he kept in his bedside table. The one with an image of a mountain... the Lonely Mountain... on it. Kíli had taken care of the inlay... thin strands of copper that ran through the dark wood as if they had always been there. The second box had the crest of the House of Durin emblazoned on its lid; tiny sapphires set in rows by Fíli. Both his nephews had all but demanded to be somehow involved in the courting gifts and hadn't taken no for an answer.

Thorin sighed to himself. *Please let him understand what this truly means...* He did not really doubt the hobbit, but still... This was the point of no return and if Bilbo decided that the dwarven ways were too... foreign... *Then we will have to do it the hobbit way I guess.* His father and grandfather would probably die of shock... or close to it... but Thorin would never again put anything or anyone else before his burglar. Even if that meant finding out about hobbit courting rituals from... *Your mother-in-law?* From Belladonna!

Returning to the kitchen, Thorin was greeted by the sight of a smiling halfling and the tastiest breakfast he had seen since... He couldn't even remember. Well, courting could wait until after breakfast. After all, Bilbo had always told them that food was important on their journey... So he sat down and dug into the food Bilbo had prepared.

"You should give cooking lessons to my nephews. This is quite..." Bilbo cocked his head expectantly. "Lovely of course. You hobbits know how to prepare the best meals in all of Middle-earth. And beyond it would seem." He winked at the blushing halfling who was now sitting across from him. "When we first met, I never really got to sample your cooking. And on the road it was Bombur who did all the cooking for us. And then..." *And then you went all crazy over some stupid jewel.* "I'm glad I finally get to see you in your element."

"Well, this kitchen is a much nicer place than the trolls' cooking pot for example. Less dangerous as well. Even though I don't seem to be able to get rid of certain dwarves..." he grinned. "Not that I would want to..." Grey eyes met blue, sparkling with mirth and happiness. "But really, us hobbits are domestic creatures so I would thank you if we could hold off with the next adventure for a while..."

"Well, that depends on what you would call an adventure..." Thorin reached inside his coat and retrieved the small box. He then took Bilbo's smaller hand into his and placed the box in the hobbit's palm. "I have broken almost every rule when it comes to... how these things are done in dwarven society. But we have another chance now, and I have a chance to make things right." Bilbo stared at the box in confusion. "Open it..." The hobbit complied and gasped.

"I was hopeful. I had to be..." And that was the truth. For all the planning and construction works, Thorin had never been able to completely settle in his new life, a part of him still lingering in the East. So finally Balin, who by then knew all about Thorin and the burglar, had suggested that Thorin could work on *something* for the time when Bilbo would be amongst them once more. And while his old friend and mentor didn't say in so many words what this *something* should be, it was more than implied. "Will you allow me..." Thorin's voice was unsteady despite his attempts to suppress his fears...
of rejection. But Bilbo gave him one of those shy smiles and nodded.

Reaching across the table, Thorin gently stroked the hobbit's cheek before twining three strands of his hair together. The dwarf's heart was pounding inside his chest and he was sure Bilbo could hear it. Still shaky fingers handed him the bead when he was finished with the braid, "So this means we are now...betrothed?" The hobbit's eyes were searching, pleading, and Thorin was only too happy to nod.

"If that is what you wish..." Thorin only had time to blink once or twice as the hobbit quickly rose to his feet and rounded the table, practically launching himself into the dwarf's arms. "I take that as a yes then..." And then all thought was abandoned once more in favour of soft touches, and tender kisses...and if that was not exactly following the rules of courtship, then that was really too bad...

Then (2994 T.A.)

"Just leave me be, Balin. I know you mean well, but there's nothing to talk about." It was still weird to see this much younger looking Balin instead of the white-haired, grandfatherly dwarf. But right now Thorin would have preferred not to see any version of his old friend...and his nephews were dead. No, beyond dead. He would find the most gruesome torture methods, might even ask Thingol for advice. They deserved it! That, and more!

When Balin and Ori had first showed up, Thorin had berated them for their utter stupidity. Especially Balin should have known better than...Moria! Ori could maybe be forgiven for his lack of judgement; he was young and followed the lead of his elders. Even though he could have found another elder to follow! But Balin? What had he been thinking?! He had been there in the Dimrill Dale, had seen the devastation the legions of orcs brought upon them, and still he had deemed it wise to just go and try again!

Thrór had failed, but obviously Balin the Great, Lord of Moria would succeed. Had everyone forgotten about one tiny little big and major problem where Moria was concerned. He had voiced his concerns to his grandfather but had been overruled. But for Balin to forget about Shadow and Flame...after he had taught Thorin the history of their people, of Durin... And even though Balin succeeded initially, had he really believed that Durin's Bane had simply disappeared? Moved on to greener pastures? Balrogs weren't like this, or at least Thorin didn't think so. It was madness, no, scratch that...it was insanity!

And maybe Thorin had told Balin all of this and more...on a daily basis...sometimes several times a day. And maybe, just maybe, it was getting somewhat tiresome for all involved. Maybe. That still didn't give his nephews the right to go blabbing about certain things. For example his relationship with Bilbo. And the fact that he'd royally screwed up. Big time! Almost killing a friend over gold and a stupid jewel was bad enough, but to do it to the one you...love...was unforgivable.

It wasn't as if Thorin didn't know that, as if he didn't beat himself up over it every sleepless night. He'd loved the hobbit even through all the craziness...so how on earth had he been able to act the way he had?! But it was one thing if he asked himself that question...over and over...but quite another if his old mentor did so. Especially after the whole Moria debacle. Balin simply had no right to sit on his high horse, not anymore. But clearly the older dwarf didn't see it that way...

"Oh, but there is, laddie. I mean, the lot of us always suspected and some of us even took bets on when you would, you know, make it official..." Hold on, his friends had been betting on him and
Bilbo? How could they! Wait...they all knew?! "But when you banished him, we all thought we'd been delusional. Granted, he'd been siding with the elves and humans, but still..." But still...you still loved him and were screaming at yourself all the while you were... You broke his heart, but you broke yours as well...

"Just leave it alone, Balin. Master Baggins is lucky he no longer has to deal with stubborn dwarves in general, and me in particular. I'm sure he's better off now, back home in his cosy hobbit hole." Was it really impossible to die in Valinor? Because Thorin's heart surely felt as if it was about to break into a million pieces.

Balin shook his head. "I'm not so sure about that. The last time I saw him... He was trying, I give him that, desperately trying to be as cheerful as folks might expect. But every time he looked at me... It was as if he wished there was another dwarf in his kitchen. He seemed...broken somehow, in a way that couldn't be healed. And then..." Balin cleared his throat, gazing intently at Thorin. "I caught a glimpse of something that I thought was just a trick of the light, but now... Thorin...your signet ring. It was lost after the battle, or so we thought. But I had the distinct impression that it was right there, around Bilbo's neck..." Bilbo was wearing his ring...the only thing Thorin had been able to give him...

And that was the moment Thorin truly began to hope...hope that his deathbed apology hadn't been too little, too late; that Bilbo still... That there was a chance Bilbo would eventually come to Valinor as well... He still didn't quite understand about the hobbits coming to Valinor or not, it seemed like it was somehow linked to their importance to hobbit society, or their links to the great families... Bilbo surely fit that bill.

Balin had evidently continued his little monologue and was now raising a questioning eyebrow at him. "You're thinking too much, laddie. For once go with what your heart tells you..." Thorin's heart was almost overflowing with the knowledge that, at least some forty-five years earlier, Bilbo had been wearing his ring...and while forty-five years was a long time, there was hope. "You should, you know, maybe prepare something for when he gets here." Thorin blinked. Surely Balin couldn't be suggesting... "Which shouldn't be all that much longer if I understand anything about hobbits and their life expectancy..." Balin gave Thorin a pat on the shoulder, "Mistakes have been made, but I'm sure you will be able to undo them, or I don't know anything any more..." Thorin was half-tempted to point out that Balin clearly hadn't known anything about balrogs and orcs, but he held his breath.

Bilbo had been wearing his ring; years after Thorin's passing. Years after that last caress of soft hobbit hands on his broken body. And something the dwarf had thought was dead and buried, even though he wasn't, awoke within him. If, no, when Bilbo finally joined them, he would do what Belladonna had instructed him to do. He would do everything in his power to make the hobbit forget...forget especially the day on the walls and everything that happened after. And he would make Bilbo understand just how deep his feelings ran, and always had done. And so Thorin started to work on something...only it would take much longer than Balin had anticipated for Bilbo to finally join them.
Passed the 2k hits by a long shot, wahoo! Thanks for reading and all the kudos :)

Now (3021 T.A.)

It was a while later and Bilbo had finally pulled himself away from Thorin and was now standing in the small bathroom of the little cottage. Small though it was, it was equipped with all amenities his hobbit heart could ever desire...but right then Bilbo couldn't have cared less for the big bathtub...though he had wondered briefly if it would be large enough for two...or the fancy oils and soaps. He was staring at his own reflection, or more to the point, at the bead that adorned his hair. A dwarven courting bead. *His* bead.

He had known what it meant the moment he opened the little box. After all, he had been spending those eighty years all but torturing himself by reading about dwarven customs and Erebor before the dragon and the line of Durin...and Thorin Oakenshield himself. He had wanted, no *needed*, to know what Thorin was trying to say with the ring...and all the other little things he had done before the Arkenstone had torn them apart. Bilbo had never blamed Thorin, had somehow always felt that it had been the jewel, that beautiful, wondrous stone, that had been the source of Thorin's madness.

However, he had never been able to find anything about rings in particular. Of course jewellery was as much a courting gift in dwarven culture as could be expected, but it was courting beads that held special significance. There was the whole issue of Thorin dying at the time though, so once again Bilbo had needed even more books to help him. Thorin's ring had been more than just an old heirloom he finally found out. It had marked him as King, King under the Mountain and King of Durin's Folk. And he had given it away. Had given it to Bilbo. And when the hobbit realised that, he'd broken down. Right there, in Rivendell's Library. No wonder Elrond had decided to poke his nose into Bilbo's business afterwards.

But Thorin had all but given him his kingship just to show him... No, there was no *just* there. And if it had been possible, Bilbo's heart would have broken again. Elrond had guessed that Bilbo's *condition* had something to do with his journey to Erebor, but luckily he hadn't been able to figure out what exactly ailed the hobbit...

And now...now Thorin had given him a bead as well. Tears appeared in Bilbo's eyes and his chest tightened as if his heart were about to burst. Thorin had trusted that Bilbo would eventually find his way to Valinor. He had created that beautiful bead, a bead depicting their past, and if Bilbo remembered correctly there would be another one, for their future. The second one would be given at the end of their courtship and would signify that, by dwarven reckoning, they were married. And that was when Bilbo began planning... He would need help though, and he knew two dwarves who would be all too happy to assist him...or they had changed in a way that Bilbo didn't think possible. He dabbed at his tears and smiled instead. Thorin would be beyond surprised, but Bilbo would have to act fast and that meant slipping away from the dwarven king...
"And then Bilbo charged at the orc and they both toppled over...and then he took out that dagger of his and stabbed him. We'd all thought Uncle Thorin was a goner, but no... Bilbo was just brilliant!" Kíli's eyes were sparkling with happiness, and maybe some remnants of fear for his uncle. "And then on the Carrock, I thought Thorin had completely lost it as he all but yelled at our beloved burglar, but then... Oh Frodo, you should have seen Bilbo's face...it was priceless. He looked beyond stunned but then he smiled and..." He exchanged a knowing look with his brother, "Well, let's just say we knew that Bilbo felt exactly like our uncle."

"Yes, Thorin had never ever treated anyone so...rude really, from the beginning. So we kind of figured out that he was trying to cover up something and then in the Misty Mountains...there was that look of absolute horror on his face when he thought our burglar might fall down that cliff...the way he saved Bilbo and straight away went on and on about how he didn't have a place amongst us... It was plain as anything." Fili chuckled. "Who would have thought that the great Thorin Oakenshield would fall, and fall hard I might add, for a small hobbit of the Shire?"

"Mother?" Kíli suggested. "She always said that Thorin would find his equal not amongst our people as everyone would only see the King and not Thorin. And Bilbo most definitely didn't see a very kingly dwarf, I'm telling you." No, apparently Thorin had been something of a bastard to Frodo's uncle...something that, on one hand, didn't sit well with the young hobbit at all, but on the other hand... Frodo had caught Bilbo's eyes just after the older hobbit had seemed Thorin and...to say that Bilbo looked somewhat happy was like saying hobbits tended to be somewhat round around the middle. Kíli's gaze became solemn as his added, "I only wish mother could have seen them together..." and promptly earned himself a slap across the back of the head courtesy of his brother.

"You really are dim at times, brother dear. She will see them, or have you suddenly forgotten where we are? Where mother will be as well once she passes. Not that I wish that for her obviously, but... I sort of do..." Fili looked at Frodo sheepishly, "Well, we miss her. And the rest of the company. And despite the way Balin treats us...as if we were little more than dwarflings...we were happy when he and Ori joined us."

Balin, who had so far been sitting quietly near the fireplace reading an old elven tome, now looked up and smiled. "And trust me, I was beyond surprised to see your faces again, laddie. But very glad indeed. Though I could have done without Thorin berating me day in, day out." To see Balin was beyond weird for Frodo. He had been at the dwarf's tomb there, in the Chamber of Mazarbul. And now he was sitting across from the hobbit as if it was the most normal thing ever. And maybe it was. Maybe the Valar truly believed that all of them deserved this second chance after a life of hardship.

Frodo was still lost in his thoughts when the door to the living quarters opened to admit both Ori and Bilbo...young Bilbo. That really was something Frodo had to get used to. Bilbo looked more like an older brother now and it was strange to still refer to the other hobbit as his uncle. "Look who I ran into on the way," Ori said with a smile. "Fili? Kíli? Bilbo would like a word with you if you please..."

"What have they been up to now?" Balin inquired, which prompted a loud, "We didn't do anything!" from the two brothers.

Bilbo chuckled, "Nothing...yet. Though I'm hoping they could help me with something..." Bilbo stepped further into the room and that's when Frodo, and apparently everyone else noticed the bead.

"By Aulë, he gave it to you already? Fili! We're going to have another uncle!" Kíli pulled Bilbo into what looked to be a chest-crushing embrace and Fili completed the group hug by attaching himself to
Bilbo's back. Balin only muttered that maybe Thorin would finally stop with the brooding now that he had his burglar back.

"So what do you want with us?" Fili asked after the brothers finally released a startled Bilbo. "Whatever you think happened...we didn't do it." At that Frodo couldn't help himself but start laughing. The two young dwarves were almost exact copies of a certain Meriadoc Brandybuck and Peregrin Took. So it really hadn't been surprising that Frodo felt right at home with them. His laughter though earned him glares from two pairs of eyes. "And what, pray tell, is so funny, Master Hobbit?"

"Nothing, nothing... It's just...you two remind me of some very dear friends... Nothing to worry about." The glares didn't lessen one bit. "Um..."

Luckily Ori came to his rescue then, "Frodo, I found some of the books I was talking about last night. Would you like to look at them now?" Frodo was only too happy to nod as he ushered the young dwarf out of the room.

And just as the door closed behind them he heard Kili mumble, "I think we have to teach him manners, brother. It is just plain rude to laugh at someone and not fill them in properly as to what's so funny..."

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"So?" Fili asked, pulling his still glaring brother away from the door and closer to where Balin was sitting, "How may we be of service to you, Master Burglar?" Master Burglar indeed. Bilbo felt both annoyed and giddy at the same time. How he had missed the two young dwarves. "Whatever it is, we shall do our utmost to fulfil your wishes... Well, with some exceptions. Ouch!" This time it was Kili's turn to get clonked on the head by a slightly greenish looking Fili.

"I don't want to think about what Thorin and Bilbo get up to, thank you very much!" Bilbo blushed a bright red, both at the thought in general and at the memory of the previous night. The way Thorin had let him take charge of their lovemaking... It was way too warm in the room, Bilbo decided. Nothing at all to do with the fact that a large quantity of his blood was pooling...where it really shouldn't be at that moment. And at a mere memory at that!

So Bilbo cleared his throat and, trying to think of anything but a certain willful dwarf, got down to business. "Well, you saw the bead. And as I understand it, the gesture is normally returned in dwarven society, am I right?" Three heads nodded. "You might have noticed on our journey, but I'm not a blacksmith or jeweller, so... I was wondering if you could help me craft my own courting beads...as a surprise for your uncle."

Fili and Kili looked at each other and then, as one, bowed and chanted, "At your service." And Bilbo was tempted to rub his eyes to make sure that he wasn't back in his hobbit hole and they were once again at the beginning of their journey to Erebor.

"You two have got to stop doing that," Balin chided. "Poor Bilbo looks as if he's seen a ghost." Did he? "And Bilbo, I think this is a most wonderful idea. It will show all those dwarves who had thought to try and court Thorin that he is spoken for." Wait what? "Oh come on, laddie. Thorin is King! Of course there would be those who'd try and turn things to their advantage. Just because we're in Valinor doesn't mean we stopped being dwarves... But don't worry...Thorin wouldn't give that lot the time of day... I mean...he gave you his ring when he died, didn't he?" How did Balin... "I saw it when Gandalf and I visited. And Bilbo, giving you that ring meant that there could never be
Bilbo nodded, "I know... I...I did some reading..." Tears brimmed his eyes once more at the memory...

"Oh great, now look what you've done, Balin!" Kíli scolded his teacher. "It's all over and done with. We all know how Thorin has been these past eighty years, and..." he turned to the hobbit, "there's only ever been Bilbo for him." And then he added in little more than a whisper, "Thorin's been miserable really, so I hope you intend to make him...you know...unmiserable."

"And I think that a bead or two could go a long way with that. Along with...other things that we would rather not hear anything about if you don't mind, Bilbo. We love you and Thorin dearly, but there really is such a thing as too much information." Fíli shuddered visibly, and a small part of Bilbo was sorely tempted to let the brothers know exactly what he had done to their uncle the previous night and how much they had both enjoyed each other's company. But he was not going to scar the two for life...especially not now that it seemed that said life would be eternal.

So instead he simply mentioned the bead again and the two brothers nearly fell over themselves with helpfulness. "We should go see Thel... Oh Bilbo, you're going to love Ecthelion...well, if you can tune out when he goes on and on about that balrog thing..." Hang on, Ecthelion of the Fountain? Glorfindel's friend? Oh dear, please just no! "But he can gain us access to the elven forges...as I don't think you want Thorin to find out that the three of us have been snooping around the dwarven ones...right?" Bilbo nodded absentmindedly, still thinking about the stories of balrogs he had been subjected to almost every evening in the Hall of Fire. "Well, that's settled then...let's be off." Kíli waved at Balin and pushed both his brother and the hobbit out of the door.

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Thorin was livid! There was no other word to describe it. Arkenstone livid to be exact. "I'll just go to the market near the harbour. I shouldn't take more than a couple of hours," he had said. And, "Oh no, don't worry about me. I'm a grown hobbit, I'll find my way." Then he had kissed Thorin with a fervour that would have reduced any lesser dwarf to a puddle of goo and sauntered out of the door as if he wasn't affected at all. The gall! Not to mention that all of that had been eight hours ago! He would have to sit Bilbo down and explain the concept of a couple of hours to him. He'd only just gotten the hobbit back, for Aulë's sake! What was Bilbo thinking?!

Pacing back and forth in the living room didn't help either. Oh why hadn't he moved them all into New Erebor yet?! It would be so much easier to find... No! He had to trust Bilbo. In more ways than one. The hobbit had survived eighty years of being apart, he could surely take care of himself in Valinor. And there also was no way he would suddenly change his mind about Thorin and seek someone else's company. That was ludicrous, and Thorin knew it. But guilt and fear weren't rational feelings and despite Bilbo's arrival, Thorin was still plagued by both.

The moment the door had closed behind the hobbit, Thorin had felt bereft. As if the past couple of hours had been merely a dream and that reality was still the lonely life he had known before and after a small hobbit of Bag End had shone a light onto the dark days Thorin was existing in. But then he had seen the open box on the kitchen table and his by then racing heart had calmed down. Whatever he needs, you will give to him, Thorin Oakenshield. And if he wants to gift everything you own to the blasted elves, then you will have to trust him...as he will have his reasons for doing so. He did with the Arkenstone, only you were being a gold-crazed moron and didn't see it. And then you banished him and we all know how well that worked out. You should be thanking Aulë and indeed all of the Valar for this second chance and not go and be a...a dwarf!
Thorin sighed to himself. Dwarves were known to be somewhat possessive, guarding whatever they considered theirs with a jealousy that came close to a dragon guarding his hoard. It wasn't as dark as the gold-sickness that had plagued him and most of his companions. Thorin was more and more convinced that had been the influence of the Arkenstone, but for anyone not accustomed to dwarven culture it would still seem strange to say the least. It wasn't as if dwarves coveted gold and jewels the same way they cared about their chosen mates; that one person they loved with a fierce passion unheard of in any other race. But dwarves believed that anything they held dear someone else might desire as well...

And if that was true for ordinary dwarves, it was doubly so for Thorin Oakenshield. Before meeting Bilbo, he had been convinced that love and happiness was for other people...no matter what Dís had had to say about the matter. His life was dedicated to the sole goal of reclaiming his lost homeland, to lead his people back to Erebor. But then a simple hobbit had turned his entire world upside down, and by Aulë how he had fought those feelings that threatened to consume him. At first it had been easy; a mocking comment here, 'He looks more like a grocer than a burglar', a condescending stare there... But then Balin had told the Company about the Battle of Azanulbizar and the hobbit had looked at him with something akin to awe...

And then came the whole affair with the trolls... When his nephews ran into the camp and announced that four of their ponies...and he still didn't quite understand just how Fíli and Kíli had let a troll waltz into their camp to steal ponies without noticing it...and that their burglar had gone to get them back. Three mountain trolls, and his burglar was on his own. Thorin didn't have time then to wonder why he was so afraid for the hobbit, why he was more than rushing them all to grab their arms and follow his nephews. Of course he had downplayed it all afterwards, hadn't even been willing to give Bilbo the credit he'd deserved... And in the Misty Mountains...he hadn't even had the time to think before he acted and jumped down to save Bilbo from falling down the cliff. Obviously he'd had to put the hobbit down straight after again. And then Bilbo had wanted to leave... It had taken all of Thorin's self-control not to speak up...

He loved the hobbit with a fierceness that made Fëanor's obsession with the Silmaril pale in comparison. If he hadn't died after the battle, he would have taken Bilbo as his Royal Consort, customs and banishment be damned. And he would have kept the hobbit by his side, jealously guarding his every step...and he had the feeling he would have driven Bilbo mad with it, if not worse...driven him away. He couldn't do that and that meant learning to trust his hobbit. Even when Bilbo was hours late returning from a trip to the market... His hands were clenched into fists as he gritted his teeth. This was supposed to be easy, then why was it so hard for him? Because you are Thorin Oakenshield and thought it best to not only fall for a hobbit, but this particular one. Bilbo was going to drive you crazy at the best of times...but it's a good kind of crazy, isn't it? Better than that stone...

And that was true enough. Yes, he would have to fight his very nature, but for Bilbo and the hobbit's happiness that was a small price to pay. So instead of tearing into the hobbit when he finally returned, all Thorin did was raise a questioning eyebrow, teasingly asking, "A couple of hours, Master Baggins? Hobbit time seems to work in very mysterious ways..."

In reply he received a big smile, "I'm sorry, I must have lost track of time. But I got everything done so I won't have to leave for a few days." He winked at that. "Unless of course you have other plans..."

Taking the basket from Bilbo's grasp...it was filled with all kinds of vegetables and the prospect of vegetarian food made Thorin groan...he placed it on the kitchen table and then pulled the hobbit into
a tight embrace. "Oh, I have made plans, my burglar, and believe me, none require us to step outside..." He ran calloused fingers over the sensitive tip of the hobbit's right ear and continued in little more than a growl, "Eighty years is a long time, and I believe we have some catching up to do..." And if Bilbo's actions during the next few hours were any indication, the hobbit shared that sentiment...
Chapter 6 - Of Elven Mischief-makers

Chapter Notes

We are going decidedly Silmarillion-y with this chapter. Enter Ecthelion's POV. And there's a new pairing mentioned at the very end of the chapter, but I won't spoil it :P

Also, there is a reason for Ecthelion's obvious grudge against Thingol. Both Ecthelion and Glorfindel were once seeking entrance into Doriath but were denied. And on top of that, I needed some sort of a villain for a future plot line, and Thingol is simply the prime candidate.

And my reasons for making Turgon High King are simple, I love him. Always have. And I can't wait for him to decide to rebuild Gondolin for that will be fabulous. On that note, since Valinor is now on a different plane of existence than Arda, the Valar are able to, shall we say, expand the continent as they see fit. So they would have granted all of our lovely Beleriand elves a carbon copy of their old realms. Or rather, they gave them places where they could rebuild their old realms... And the same is true for the dwarves and hobbits. So there is a new Erebor but also a site that could be Moria again (without the balrog)...

Translation of Elvish: Mellonen - my friend

Now (3021 T.A.)

"So, at the moment there's only the two of you, Thorin...who I have yet to meet I might add...Balin, Ori and Master Óin? But he is away at the mountain and couldn't be at the harbour because of that. And of course there is Dáin..." Kíli nodded like a proud teacher. And in a very warped way he was. The mere thought gave his brother nightmares. Balin was bad enough, but Kíli?! "And then there's your grandfather and great-grandfather...and quite a few dwarves that perished when Smaug attacked and those that died in the Battle of Erebor..." Kíli nodded again, still with that expression and Fíli had to turn away before he did some permanent damage to his beloved brother...beyond the damage Kíli had obviously already suffered. Though at times Fíli wondered if it had been enough...

So he huffed and stalked away, as far away as he was able. Kíli and Frodo exchanged confused glances before going back to their little lesson in dwarven culture that had turned into a listing of the dwarves of Valinor. Fíli still didn't quite understand how it all had happened, he only knew that it should be him and not Kíli who instructed the young hobbit. He was the older of the two dwarves, wiser, more mature... And obviously utterly and totally gullible. The bet had sounded like a good idea at the time. After four days, there simply was no way that Thorin and Bilbo were still... He felt sick to the stomach. There were things that a nephew should never see his uncle do, and that was most definitely one of them!

"I'm going to take care of all your chores for a whole month if you do it, brother," Kíli had said. "And you can talk with Frodo as much as you like and teach him more of dwarvish ways and the Company and all that... All you have to do is take a peek into Thorin's window for more than, oh I don't know, a minute?" Thel and Fin had chuckled, and now Fíli knew that should have been
Enough to not make him agree. But foolish as he was, agree he did. And it was early in the morning, the sun had barely risen so chances were, if anything, the two occupants of the cottage would still be fast asleep. Famous last words... They weren't. They were very much awake...too awake! He was going to kill his brother and the two elves!

Eventually Kíli had admitted that the two elf lords had pulled the exact same prank on him the previous morning, getting themselves out of playing messenger between Lord Elrond and High King Turgon. That explained why Kíli was nowhere to be found the previous day. But that didn't mean he had to do the same to his brother, and for a whole month at that! Just you wait... Oh yes, he would braid Kíli's hair again...for a start, nice ribbons like the hobbit lasses wore them...

"Um, Fíli?" That was Frodo. "Kíli says you know much more about the history of Durin's House than he does as he always dozed off during your classes..." Fíli blinked. The dozing off part was true, but why was Kíli...? His brother caught his eyes from across the room, mouthing the word "Sorry" before looking down again, apparently once more reading his book. "And he also has some stuff to do, or so he says. So would you mind..." Fíli nodded absentmindedly before excusing himself for a minute or three.

"Brother?" he asked when he was standing over Kíli.

The dark-haired dwarf just shrugged, "I realised it's not much fun if you're the victim of a prank, so... I'm sorry. And you're better at all this..." he gestured in the general direction of the old tomes that were lying on the nearby table. That was true, to an extend. Yes, Fíli was more knowledgeable when it came to dwarven history and customs, but Kíli knew so much more about the other races and their enemies. "I just...I just wanted to see if I could..." Brown eyes met blue, sadness swirling in them. "I really like Frodo..."

"And you are a great teacher to him, Kíli." The moment the words escaped, Fíli knew them to be true. Yes, Kíli was the happy go lucky dwarf everyone perceived him as. Yes, he loved causing havoc and being a mischief maker. But there was more to his brother, more than met the eye. And even Fíli forgot at times like this. "I'm sorry as well...I'm just still somewhat shaken up what with...you know..." Kíli nodded. "I think it's high time for us to somehow get back at our dearest elven friends..." His brother smiled at that. "But I think first, we should go and continue Frodo's lesson. Together."

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"Fin? I think we may have outdone ourselves with this one... And not in a good way." Ecthelion was pacing in circles around the bench his friend and fellow mischief maker was sitting upon. "They are my friends, Fin, and I think seeing Thorin like that... It may have scared them both for life. Not to mention that we got Kíli to trick his brother..." He ran elegant fingers through his long, jet black hair. "I think we should go and explain. And apologise." Yes, Ecthelion had to admit that it had been kind of fun to see the young dwarves' faces, but now he realised just how hurt especially Fíli must have been when his own brother...

Glorfindel nodded slowly, "Maybe you are right... It was more than braiding golden flowers into your hair and tying it all off with colourful ribbons. And even more than turning my hair purple for a whole week..." Ecthelion had to stifle a chuckle. That had indeed been a sight to behold, Glorfindel of the Golden Flower...or rather, of the Purple Flower... "It was not funny, mellonen. But I guess neither was our little stunt for the dwarves..." The golden haired elf sighed, "I suppose we better do it sooner rather than later. Judging by your tales, they might already be plotting their revenge, and that would be beyond counterproductive considering..." Considering the two elves were hoping to recruit
Fíli and Kíli into the ranks of the *Terrors of Valinor*, and that little prank had been some sort of induction. Only it had backfired, and badly.

So a few hours later they found themselves in Balin's cottage...Ecthelion could not wait until the dwarves were finally back in their mountain halls...gazing upon two somewhat fuming dwarves. Both elves bowed and Ecthelion spoke, "Fíli and Kíli of Erebor...we...we would like to apologise. We did not mean to hurt you, we just..." He gazed at the blond Eldar next to him. "Amongst our kin, love is celebrated wherever and whenever it appears, even if it is amongst our close family and friends. It seems we have underestimated the cultural differences between our two races... That is...I would not exactly be too happy seeing Glorfindel and Erestor...but I guess I could see the funny side in a prank."

"And Fíli," Glorfindel continued, "we are sorry that we got your brother to lure you into this as well. We just...we thought it would be a good way to introduce you to...well...our way of causing mischief. Only you two seem to be quite mad at us right now..."

Finally, after exchanging glances with his brother, Fíli spoke up. "So you didn't do this out of malice, out of a wish to see us squirm?" Both Ecthelion and Glorfindel shook their heads. "And you didn't know that we might be slightly shocked by what you two knew we would see?"

Ecthelion gave the two dwarves a sheepish look. "I thought you might be pleased actually. You were both so eager for Thorin to be happy again, and for Master Baggins to finally arrive..."

"Thel," Kíli all but whined, "I think you scared us both for the rest of eternity! Yes, we are beyond happy that Bilbo is here, that our Bilbo is here, but...while we are aware that he's not just playing cards with Thorin, we don't really need to see it. Just thinking about it makes my stomach go all queasy..." And sure enough, the dark-haired dwarf looked decidedly unwell. "But...if you truly didn't mean to...I guess we can forgive you, right Fíli?" His brother nodded. And Ecthelion released the breath he had not even been aware of holding.

"Thank you. From the bottom of my heart. I am loathe to lose the best friends I have known these past eighty years. Oh do not look at me like that, Fin!" Glorfindel had turned to him with a beaten puppy look on his face. "It did not work back in Gondolin, it did not work in the Halls... What makes you think it will work now?" The Lord of the Golden Flower just shrugged and murmured something that sounded like "Worth a try." Ecthelion just shook his head in resignation. "Besides, King Turgon might be less than happy if our actions severed the ties we have been building with the Dwarves of New Erebor. As I do not believe your uncle would readily forgive us hurting his heirs..."

Fíli and Kíli grinned at that. "Do you really think we'd have told him?" Fíli asked. "We may be a lot of things, but suicidal isn't one of them. Thorin would have our hides if he found out that we saw...that. Us dwarves can be quite possessive when it comes to the ones we love, and don't forget, we are talking about Thorin Oakenshield here..."

"Yes, our uncle wouldn't care if you made us do it or not, he would simply...try and find a way of killing us...slowly and painfully." Kíli shuddered. "Not that he would do it of course. Mother would skin him alive if he did...as would Bilbo I guess. He always liked us. Though, if he knew what we saw...he might help Thorin instead... Considering how flustered he would get during those nights we spent in Mirkwood, and Thorin would drape his furs over his shoulders and hold him close." Kíli chuckled at the memories. "Yes, I think he would definitely side with Thorin. At any rate, there's no way we'd ever have told anyone about... you know. We were just planning how to get back at you." And then he poked out his tongue at them, and how very mature was that?
"So," Glorfindel enquired, "no grudges?" More head-shaking. "Right, that is very well as you two are now officially inducted into a most secretive society. So far it only has four members, but I am sure once Elladan and Elrohir come to Valinor, they will be eager to join as well." He glanced at Ecthelion and winked, "I have trained them well, mellonen, too well if you listen to Elrond or Erestor. Especially Erestor. Really, at times I do not understand how I could have fallen for someone so..." He caught himself then, apparently realising what he was saying, "Eh, yes, be that as it may... Welcome, Fíli and Kíli to the Terrors of Valinor. We will teach dwarves, elves and hobbits that just because they are in the Undying Lands, things can still go somewhat wrong..."

"And above and beyond that," Ecthelion was going to have words with his golden friend, "we would offer you both our everlasting friendship, you and your people. I have never met two dwarves who were so willing to befriend an elf, and for that I will forever be grateful. Even though I did not want to go to the Halls to greet you..." The dwarves just grinned and bowed, chanting their usual "At your service" and invited the two elves to join them for dinner.

Then (2941 T.A.)

It was not fair, not fair at all. So maybe the last prank had been a bit... But Turgon had been a most delightful sight with his hair resembling a bird's nest. Sugar water instead of soap had been his most brilliant hair related idea yet. And that was counting Glorfindel's purple hair. It had taken Turgon four hours to wash all the stickiness out of his hair, helped by a most definitely not chuckling Queen Elenwë. And afterwards he had shouted for someone to bring him the head of the Lord of the bloody Fountain, attached to his body or not. And Ecthelion had known he was in trouble. Turgon did not swear, ever! Only this time he had.

Whether it was because of the prank itself or the fact that even his wife had laughed at the proud Ñoldo, it did not matter. Turgon had murder in his eyes, akin to every time someone mentioned the name of the traitor, Maeglin. Oh yes, Ecthelion was in dangerous waters this time.

But he and his prank had most definitely not been the reason King Thrór had stormed out of his meeting with the High King, muttering about idiotic elves. No, that had been Turgon himself. Or rather, it had been Turgon, but indirectly. The problem was really...and big surprise there...Thingol, king of all things shiny. King of 'no, you cannot enter my realm, have fun in the mountains'. King of 'Valinor belongs to the First-born and not those pesky dwarves'.

Little did it matter to Thingol that said pesky dwarves were assisting Finrod and his queen Amarië in rebuilding Finrod's old stronghold in Beleriand, Nargothrond. The dwarves were too close to the new Realm of Doriath, and that was that. And instead of speaking of his...issues with Finrod, Thingol had turned to the one elf he had something of a decent relationship with... Turgon, his High King; though under normal circumstances, Thingol did not care a whit about Turgon's rank, would even openly question Turgon's right to rule and claim that he himself had as much right to be High King of the Elves of Valinor.

And thus, Turgon in turn had had the pleasure of telling King Thrór to maybe meet with Finrod in Tirion instead. And that had ended with a rather fuming Thrór and a High King with a massive headache. He even overheard Turgon wondering out loud if the dwarves might be willing to help him find a secret valley in the mountains so he could have his Hidden Kingdom back and could give that stupid title of High King back to either his predecessor or his successor, though Ecthelion doubted that either Fingon or Gil-galad would be particularly interested in that honour again. Anything to get away from that elf! Ecthelion did agree with that part. He was most definitely no friend of Thingol's, still remembering the doors of Menegroth remaining shut to him and his
companions...

And then the news had reached them that more heirs of Durin would reach the Undying Lands soon, and would probably chose Valinor over the Halls. And obviously there would have to be an envoy of the High King to greet them and make them feel welcome. And clearly Turgon had neither forgotten Ecthelion's last prank nor the fact that the Lord of the Fountain hated being part of such envoys. Which was precisely why he was ordered to head this one. He would have rather fought Gothmog again, drowning and all. But all his excuses did not help, all his most brilliant reasons why this elf or that should go in his stead.

But when he met the two young dwarves, their eyes sparkling with mischief, he had know that this must have been preordained...probably by Varda. The Lady of the Stars seemed to approve of Ecthelion's ideas of a good time, or why else would she have basically ordered Námo to finally allow Ecthelion to be reborn as well? Fíli and Kíli were mischief makers just like him, or he was not one of the Eldar. Yes, Turgon had suggested as much...'You, you son of a goat...', but the High King had been upset and...and would regret sending Ecthelion on this little errand.

Before long they had struck up a friendship, and he had met their uncle, who seemed to harbour a weird aversion towards the First-born. But Ecthelion was sure he would be able to help with that. After all, he had been appointed their elven liaison by Turgon. Though he and Thorin Oakenshield would have to have a word about Orcrist. Why was a dwarf running around with his sword?! And then one day Fíli and Kíli let something about a certain halfling slip, and soon the three of them were busy making plans for Bilbo's arrival. Some of the blueprints for this little project of the dwarves would have to be altered, and obviously there would have to be a hobbit settlement as well, right outside the great gates of New Erebor. "A bit like Dale really, just without men and with more hobbits," Kíli had said. "Oh and Thel? Do you think some elves would like to settle near the mountain as well?" He nodded, knowing at least a handful of his kin who would love to learn from the dwarves where metalwork and gem crafting were concerned.

Years later, Ecthelion would think back to that fateful moment, that day when he first met two dwarves of the line of Durin. And if Turgon had voiced complaints about his own decision...due to certain things that had happened in Tirion as if by chance...it only made Ecthelion even more gleeful. There was only one thing missing now...Glorfindel. And if he voiced this once or twice a day to Ereinion, his lover did not seem to mind too much, though for some reason he began to always secure the lead of long excursions...something that he had avoided at any cost before... Oh well, former High Kings that had died at the hands of Sauron himself were weird, or at least his very own one was...
Chapter 7 - Many Meetings

Chapter Notes

If this chapter is a bit more...crack-fic-ish...I totally blame Fíli, Kíli, 'Thel and Fin. They made me write it... Also, while everything seems to be all lovey-dovey and fluffy at the moment, Angst shall return in the next chapter...

Also, I would like to thank everyone who's commented so far, and especially to those of you who make me think of things I had not considered before...you are truly amazing (and you know who you are ;) ).

I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, and there'll be more later this week (plus, there's another 'Interlude' coming up as well *grins*).

Now (3021 T.A.)

It had been a week since Bilbo's arrival, and with the exception of that second day, Bilbo had not left the little cottage once. Thorin had seen to that. But now it had arrived, the Day of Reckoning as he referred to it in his own mind. Today, the hobbits would descend upon their little haven, and not only the hobbits, but also Balin, Ori, his nephews, that crazy elf, Bilbo's nephew, Thorin's father and grandfather and so on and so forth. For a split second it was back, that urge to just off himself somehow. But then he heard the clatter of dishes from the kitchen and knew that there was so much more in his life worth living for... Except that Bilbo might want to kill him as well for keeping certain things a secret from him for so long.

Taking a deep breath, he walked into the kitchen, stopping dead in his tracks. Bilbo was covered in flour, head to toe, and was glaring daggers at the bag lying on the kitchen floor. He had obviously tried to drag it off the shelf and had managed to upend it, its contents spilling all over the hobbit. When he heard Thorin enter, his glare shifted to the dwarf as if daring him to say anything. But Thorin already knew that glare from Belladonna and wouldn't have said anything if he was paid in gold and gems for it. There was nothing worse than an angry Baggins. So all Thorin did was bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing. He took the broom and cleaned up the mess on the floor. Then he reached for Bilbo's hand and led him to the bath chamber.

And when the tub was filled, Bilbo's glare had finally lessened and had been replaced by a frown. "I just wanted to bake some scones for tonight as I understand we will have guests..." What?! How did he? "Oh, I may have forgotten to mention that I ran into your nephews the day I went to the market..." Deep breaths, Thorin, just breathe. Killing your heirs will not solve your problems. Oh, but it might! Bilbo must have seen the thunderous face, and quickly added, "They didn't mean to tell me, I basically forced it out of them. When they left, I even heard them mutter that their new uncle was just as mean as their old one..." Now the hobbit's eyes were sparkling, and that contented expression on his face was infectious.

His nephews had taken it all in stride it would seem, and had really embraced the notion of a hobbit uncle as if it was the most natural thing ever. Come to think of it, they probably had something to do with how accepting Thrór and Thráin were... His chest was swelling with pride and love for the two;
yes, they could drive him insane at times, but he could not have wished for better companions during those long eighty years. They had kept him from despairing during the first few months and years, when the memories of what he had done to Bilbo had been haunting him every waking and sleeping moment. They had called him stupid when he had declared that Bilbo was better off without him. And they had fuelled that first flame of hope, fickle though it was...

"Scones, huh?" Bilbo nodded absentmindedly as he removed his floury clothes and climbed into the tub. And while Thorin knew that he really should take care of the hobbit's clothes, he could not help himself as he shed his own garments to join Bilbo in the warm water...to wash his hair of course, nothing untoward. And if something untoward did happen, it was entirely Bilbo's fault for turning in Thorin's arms after the soap had been rinsed out of his hair, his lips seeking Thorin's while his nimble hands disappeared beneath the waterline...

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An hour later the smell of freshly-baked goods was wafting through the air and Bilbo once again looked the gentlehobbit he had been back in the Shire. And Thorin...oh Valar, Thorin... He wore his travelling outfit except for the fur coat and Bilbo had had to pinch himself twice already for fear that they were back in Bag End, and the whole journey, and those eighty lonely years, were yet ahead of them. But Thorin had never given him such open smiles back then, had never held him so gently, had never kissed him so tenderly... Bilbo blinked, catching himself. It simply wouldn't do for his mother to see him all flustered like a tween.

Thorin had finally told him and Bilbo was slightly worried...what exactly had his mother done to the normally so collected dwarf? He looked...apprehensive really was the best way to describe it. Well, whatever it was, Bilbo would simply not stand for it. Yes, he loved his parents and had missed them dearly. But Thorin had never given him such open smiles back then, had never held him so gently, had never kissed him so tenderly... Bilbo blinked, catching himself. It simply wouldn't do for his mother to see him all flustered like a tween.

He'd just taken a tray of blueberry muffins out of the oven when he heard a knock on the door, followed by a cheerful, "Anyone home?" And then two young dwarves walked into the kitchen as if following a trail...well, they were in a way. "It smells absolutely delicious, what did you make us, Uncle Bilbo? Ouch!" Kíli rubbed the back of his head while Fíli just stood there, an expression of perfect innocence on his face. Still Bilbo could hear the muttered, "We've talked about calling him that!"

Kíli cleared his voice and smiled sweetly, too sweetly. "So, what did you make for us, Bilbo? Balin said we couldn't have desserts for lunch today so I'm absolutely famished..." He reached for the muffins, the still very hot muffins, picked one up, and dropped it with a yelp. "You could have said!" he whined, blowing cold air on the quickly reddening tips of his fingers. Bilbo just chuckled. "It's not funny! Now I'll have nightmares of food that is trying to burn me..."

While Kíli continued to complain, Fíli caught Bilbo's eye and handed over a small wooden box. "I hope it meets your expectations," he whispered. And it did, and more than that. The bead was beyond perfect and Bilbo couldn't wait to present it to Thorin. After today's events. If they did make it through the day that was. He smiled at both dwarves and mouthed, "Thank you!" and got two smiles in return...though Kíli was still going on and on about being scared for life by the muffin and that Bilbo was cruel.

Eventually he trailed off and shrugged. "Best way to ensure that Thorin stays away..." he whispered with a sparkle in his dark eyes. "He could never handle either of us having a tantrum." So they had planned this as a distraction. Sneaky, very sneaky. But also very effective. Bilbo had his bead and
Thorin would be beyond surprised... "So, anything we can help you with? You know, like sample the food, dress the table...sample some more food..." This time he caught Fili's hand before it impacted. "Really brother, our new uncle will think we enjoy abusing one another, or worse...that we're into..." And then both dwarves turned bright red and stepped away from one another. "We're not! I love this loon dearly, but not like...you know, you love uncle! So don't believe the rumours..."

"Not that there are any..." Fili chimed in. "But Ecthelion has been known to spread some vicious lies for entertainment purposes, so..." Glances were exchanged and the grins the brothers wore suddenly did not bode well. "You know, for example that you and uncle were so busy being reunited, neither of you left the cottage for all of five days..." And if the two dwarves looked slightly sicklish, Bilbo didn't really see it for he felt like his head might explode from embarrassment. But he did hear Fili saying, "Told you he was even more touchy than us."

"You two... Out! Tables outside, in the garden. Make sure they're set. And you better not show your faces to me any time soon again or..." He glanced around and reached for a frying pan. "Or I will test how hard your heads really are!"

And they ran. Faster than Bilbo had ever seen the two dwarves move. And apparently they ran straight into Thorin if the apologies he could hear moments later were anything to go by. "Sorry Uncle. We're just helping Bilbo. Lovely to see you two by the way. You look well. We're just...going to set the tables, yes. See you later." Then the back door closed noisily and a chuckling Thorin entered the kitchen.

"Whatever they were up to, and I'm not sure I want to know, you really put the fear of Aulë into them." He reached for Bilbo's hand... he had dropped the frying pan again... and pulled the hobbit flush against his body. "No wonder my heart knew its mate from the beginning, there is feistiness under all those gentle and calm layers..." Seeking to distract Bilbo with a kiss, Thorin's hand almost made it to the scones before it was slapped away by Bilbo.

"I might begin to think you only love me for the food." Thorin laughed, and what a glorious sound it was, and proceeded to convince the hobbit that this was foolishness. When they finally came up for air, Bilbo had to hold onto Thorin to keep his balance. "Or maybe not..." he grinned as he slowly stepped away. But then he saw the scone in the dwarf's hand and it was too late to rescue it. "Thorin Oakenshield! Out of my kitchen! Go help your nephews or else...!"

"Um, hello Uncle..." Oh no. They had been so absorbed in their little exchange...and a rather steamy kiss, oh Valar...they hadn't heard the door, nor the footsteps in the hallway. Ori and Balin beamed, but Frodo looked...

"Frodo... I... We..." Be calm, Bilbo. He's not a child. Just...be calm. Great advice. "Frodo, may I present Thorin Oakenshield..." Thorin bowed...wait, Thorin bowed?!

"It is a pleasure and an honour to finally meet you, Frodo Baggins of the Shire."

"The pleasure is mutual, Thorin Oakenshield." Frodo bowed in turn and Bilbo could only stand there and stare. "Though..." Uh-oh. "If you ever leave my uncle again, I will hunt you down and feed you to the Eagles!" He huffed...Frodo, dear sweet Frodo huffed at the great Thorin Oakenshield. And Thorin simply nodded. Could this day become any more surreal?

It turned out that, yes, it could. "Where is he? Where is my son?!" Of course, knocking or using the doorbell was totally overrated. Just walk in, why don't you. Don't give me a moment to prepare myself for this, I don't need it... "Bilbo!" And then he was hugged within an inch of his life by both
his mother and father and it was only the feel of Thorin's hand on his back that kept him grounded. Eventually the two hobbits released Bilbo and Belladonna stepped back, only to glare at Thorin. "You see, I've told you he would join us eventually." And then... *Did she just reach up and twitch Thorin's nose?*! "But I see you've made your intentions clear," she pointed at the bead, "and are in the process of making an honest hobbit of my boy. Though...I don't recall you ever asking for our blessing...not officially."

Thorin put his arm around Bilbo's shoulder, pulling the hobbit closer. "Forgive me, Mistress Baggins, but I believe it isn't up to you..." And then he gave Bilbo the warmest smile he had ever seen, his eyes brimming with love and trust and happiness. And Bilbo felt himself go weak in the knees. "Bilbo, you've already accepted my bead as a courting gift, but I would ask you now, before your family, will you allow me to make you mine? Will you be my heart and my soul before Aulë and the rest of the Valar? Will you be my most treasured jewel?" Bilbo cringed at that, though he knew that Thorin was only following the very strict guidelines of those first vows in dwarven courtship. But then he deviated from them. "Will you be my burglar once more, Bilbo Baggins, and consort to the King of New Erebor?"

Silence filled the kitchen as Bilbo struggled to find the right words to reply. But there were none. No words could ever express what he felt right then. So he reached for the little box and held it out for Thorin to see. "Fíli and Kíli helped me with it," he whispered. The two dwarves in question had joined them in the kitchen just before Thorin made his speech and looked shell shocked and yet so very proud of their uncle. "May I?" Thorin nodded silently. And so Bilbo placed a new braid into Thorin's soft curls, fingers shaking as he went. Next to one of the existing braids... Finally he finished with the bead, gold with mithril, just like his own. Gandalf's rune, that *mark* on Bilbo's door that had led Thorin into his life on one side, and Erebor on the other. The bead of their past...

He thought he heard someone sniffle and thought it would be his mother, but... "Well, now that that's settled, who will help me with all the food we brought?" *That* was his mother! And it was his father that dabbed at his eyes. Fíli and Kíli were the first to respond and bowed to Belladonna offering their services. Frodo and Ori joined them and finally only Balin and Bungo remained in the kitchen with Bilbo and Thorin.

"Master Dwarf," Bungo said, "I have this new pipeweek with me, a cross of Old Toby and Longbottom Leaf. I thought you might like to sample it..." And then they were gone as well.

"So you know of our courting rites?" Thorin inquired gently. "I never thought... Will you ever cease to surprise me, my hobbit?"

Bilbo shook his head, smiling. "I did some reading in those long years." And for the first time, the thought of those eighty years didn't hurt. They were behind them, those years of longing and loneliness. "I love you, Thorin Oakenshield, and...I would love to be your burglar once more." That was easier than saying that, yes, he would be the King's consort. And Thorin's answering smile almost blinded him. There was nothing to say anymore, so Bilbo gently stroked the dwarf's new braid and the bead and then placed a tender kiss on Thorin's lips.

Which was how Thrór and Thráin found them. "So...this is the hobbit?" a deep rumbling voice asked and Bilbo jumped, literally jumped.

"Grandfather...I begged you not to do that. Fíli and Kíli had no right to ever tell you about..." So it had been King Thrór...

"Thorin, my grandsons had their reasons I'm sure. After all, how else would we know about the evils
that stone brought upon our family?" Thráin turned to Bilbo, who was trying to find a way of
disappearing without his ring. "Thráin, at your service." He bowed. To him, to a small hobbit of the
Shire. Why did they have to destroy his old ring again? Ah, yes...that business with Sauron. Bugger.
"Gandalf, or whatever name he goes by now, told us a lot about you, Master Baggins, and we all are
indebted to you. You saved my son's life, and now you are saving him from himself and his
charming..."

"Father!" Thorin's voice sounded pained.

"Yes, son. Leave the boy alone. He's suffered enough, don't you think?" Thráin just shrugged.
"Anyway, Master Hobbit...it is true what my son says. We are indebted to you. So I, too, am at your
service." And when Thrór, King Thrór bowed his head to him... it was just too much. And so Bilbo
treated the dwarves to a repeat performance of his most glorious fainting act, barely registering
Thorin's arms catching him as he dropped to the floor.

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"Rather delicate, is he not?" Thorin glared at the laughing elf and his smirking companion. "Oh do not
give me that look, Thorin. I just think it quaint that after all he had to endure, all he has
experienced, a bowing dwarf can still make him faint." Well, it hadn't been any dwarf, but Thrór...
"You look happy, Thorin, son of Thráin. Well, maybe not right now, but... I am glad you finally
have your burglar again, and that you two seem to be progressing well in your courtship." The elf
pointed at Thorin's hair and the new braid and bead. "It is quite lovely, and I am glad I was allowed
to assist Master Baggins and your nephews in making it." Wait, Ecthelion had been involved? And
then Thorin finally realised. That day Bilbo had gone to the market.

Smiling down at the hobbit in his arms, he gently stroked his soft cheeks. And finally Bilbo's eyelids
fluttered open and startled grey eyes met their dark blue counterparts. "Not again!" Bilbo groaned.
"And in front of your father and grandfather no less..."

Thrór, who had struck up a conversation with Glorfindel, was turning toward the hobbit, smiling.
"Don't trouble yourself over that, Master Baggins. Fainting is much better than King Thingol's
reaction..."

Ecthelion and Glorfindel just glared at the mentioning of the Sindar king. "We always believe that
dwarves had, you know, attitude problems where our race was concerned. But Thingol is taking it all
to a whole new level." Thorin knew of the history the raven-haired elf had with Thingol, and that it
was shared by the Lord of the Golden Flower. And he'd had to admit that some elves weren't as bad
as...others.

Bilbo, who by then had gotten to his feet again, still looked beyond embarrassed. Thrór, sensing the
hobbit's discomfort, gave him a pat on the shoulder, "Don't worry, laddie. It's all a bit much, isn't it?
Seeing your parents again, meeting people you thought were legends..." He shook his head. "I'm not,
Master Baggins. It took dying and decades in Valinor until I finally realised just how foolish I've
been. About many things, like Moria..."

Thorin was startled. Never before had he heard his grandfather speak so candidly, least of all in front
of elves...and Bilbo. Bilbo, who now gave Thrór a small smile and bowed, "At your service, King
Thrór." And once again Thorin realised that under all the soft and gentle outward appearance lay the
bravest and strongest heart Thorin had ever beheld. He had been a fool to ever think Bilbo had no
place amongst the Company, that he had no place in Thorin's very soul.
Thrór patted Bilbo's shoulder again, then turned towards Glorfindel and nodded curtly. "Oh yes... Thorin, King of New Erebor, my Lord Elrond wishes to convey his greetings and his best wishes to you and Master Baggins. He bade me to give you this..." The blond elf unceremoniously put a basket into Thorin's hands. "It is an assortment of Rivendell's finest cuisine, including our fabled meat pies." Bilbo had started coughing next to Thorin who just stared at the basket. Elves didn't eat meat, or else why would they have presented the Company with nothing but... As if he could read Thorin's mind, Glorfindel continued, "You really should have listened to Mithrandir and kept your mouth shut. We had this lovely dinner planned, with venison and salmon and crayfish. But then Elrond decided that, no, we would only have salads and vegetables..."

Oh no... If the other dwarves ever found out... "And trust me, meats prepared by elven cooks are not to be trifled with," Bilbo breathed into his ear and then gave in to the giggling he had suppressed. And all Thorin could do was to give Glorfindel an apologetic smile and pull the hobbit closer to him. Whatever else the day might bring, he would probably be able to face it. As long as Bilbo was by his side.
Chapter Summary

I was asked for Angst, and I was asked when there would be a serious conversation between Thorin and Bilbo...you get both in one in this chapter :) There's an interlude after this chapter again btw, so stay tuned.

Chapter Notes

There's a scene in this chapter that's been massively inspired by this lovely drawing of Kaciart.

Now (3021 T.A.)

It had been an eventful day, and Thorin and Bilbo had desperately needed a warm bath to wind down. And this time it had really just been a bath. Bilbo was so tired, he'd nearly have drowned on several occasions if it hadn't been for Thorin's strong arms around his waist. Now the hobbit was already fast asleep while Thorin was still musing over what the past day had brought them.

First and foremost there was the bead. Thorin had been fighting the urge to pinch himself when Bilbo presented him with it. For the hobbit to do that, to embrace Thorin's culture in such a way... Thorin's heart had been overflowing with love and the need to make Bilbo as happy as possible for the rest of...eternity. He now ran his fingers over his new braid and the bead, smiling to himself. The two beads shared the image of Erebor, but Bilbo had chosen Gandalf's rune as well. And when he had explained his reasoning to Thorin while they were sitting at the table outside, surrounded by friends and family, Thorin hadn't been able to keep himself from leaning closer to place a gentle kiss on the hobbit's lips. "It was that mark that brought you into my life, and without it, we may never have found each other."

The thought of life without Bilbo...it was simply unimaginable. There was no life without the gentle hobbit who had, as Thráin had aptly put it, saved him from himself. From those first timid kisses and soft touches beneath a moonlit sky, to that night in Esgaroth when both their bodies and souls became one after weeks of longing... Thorin could still see Bilbo's eyes that night, scared but yet so very trusting, could still feel each hesitant touch, and he could still hear each whispered "Thorin" that touched his very core far beyond what desire and ecstasy ever could reach. These memories were blending into those of the past week, creating a collage of everything that was *Bilbo* in his mind that made warmth spread throughout Thorin's body.

And Bilbo was forever his now. When Thorin had spoken the words, those long overdue words, he had meant every one of them. They weren't simply the proper words to be spoken; they burnt themselves into his soul, especially the ones that he added himself. And Bilbo had accepted, had said that, yes, he would be the King's burglar once more. His burglar...and he had thought Bilbo looked more like a grocer... His burglar would never have to steal anything again, but he knew it would be easier for Bilbo to think of himself as a burglar than what he truly would be. He would rule their new
kingdom by Thorin's side and thus he would finally receive the recognition Thorin had failed to bestow upon him...before.

This was something Thráin mentioned at the end of the gathering. After Belladonna and Frodo had carried a very happy Bungo off home, Balin, Ori and his nephews had left after raiding the food supplies one last time...Thorin guessed that it had been mostly his nephews doing the raiding...and the two annoying elves had bid them farewell as well. Thrór had dragged Bilbo away for a game of stones...after the whole fainting incident, his grandfather had taken more than a liking to the hobbit, and Thorin had to mentally kick himself for the pangs of jealousy he felt occasionally. Thráin was sitting next to his son and... "He is a remarkable creature, Thorin. You can call yourself lucky he is so forgiving..." And then it had come to the very harsh light of day that those two nephews of his...who would need some lessons in shutting up...had told Thráin exactly what had happened that day on the walls.

Those where the unbidden memories. Memories that Thorin had suppressed successfully since Bilbo had come into his life again. But now they came crushing down on him with the force of an avalanche. The words he had spoken, the way Bilbo had struggled in his grasp, and the sadness in his eyes when he turned towards Thorin one last time. But that was not the worst of it. His mind conjured up those nightmarish images again, of Bilbo's crushed body, of those beautiful grey eyes glazed over in death... And it didn't matter that the body he pulled into his arms was warm and full of life, it was those eyes that haunted him into his dreams...

Once more he was on the walls of Erebor, shouting at Bilbo, at the hobbit who had betrayed him and the Company to the accursed elves and humans. But it wasn't quite like always. "You might as well have torn out my heart, you traitor," he roared at Bilbo, "for that is what you gave them when you handed over the Arkenstone!" The halfling's eyes were brimming with tears, but Thorin went on, "That was your plan all along, wasn't it? Ever since we were taken prisoner by the elves! You and Thranduil have been in league ever since!" Bilbo shook his head, feebly trying to reach for Thorin. "You lay with me to gain my trust...you..." Why was no one stopping him? He was tearing Bilbo to shreds and even Fíli and Kíli simply stood there and let him carry on.

"Thorin...I only did what I thought best..." A hesitant touch, a warm hand barely brushing Thorin's clenched fist. But Thorin felt it as if it was a red-hot poker and caught Bilbo's wrist in a viselike grip. "Thorin...I love..."

"No!" he snapped, and he could see Bilbo crumble before him. "Don't you dare speak those words! You took my heart and trampled on it to gain riches, you deceitful little worm!" Stop it! Why would no one interfere? Where was Gandalf?! "I trusted you! But I was right all along. You should never have come! I was a fool to follow the wizard's advice!" He could feel the madness settle over his mind like a shroud, and for a moment, Bilbo morphed into Azog...it was but a mere moment, but it was enough...

Thorin reached for the dagger he carried, a big fat ruby crowning the hilt. "Here, take this too!" And he thrust the cold steel into Bilbo's chest. And even as Bilbo was dying, he kept whispering "I love you...I love you..." His gentle voice was piercing through whatever haze Thorin had been in, despite those terrible gurgling noises, and as Bilbo dropped to the cold stone, so did the dwarven king. And gentle hands reached up for one last caress, and those haunting eyes...they were filled not with fear, but with understanding and love... And then he was gone, and he was suddenly alone in the cold and biting wind. "Bilbo, no... Please, dear Aulë, no!"

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Bilbo had woken to sounds of distress and had quickly realised that Thorin was gripped in the vicious grasp of a nightmare. He tried to shake the dwarf awake, but to no avail. And then he heard it, a most heart wrenching sound, "Bilbo, no... Please, dear Aulë, no!" and there were tears streaming down Thorin's cheeks. "Please no, please come back... Bilbo...forgive me..." Such a broken sound it was, and Bilbo felt as if his heart was being torn apart.

"Thorin please, wake up..." Bilbo was crying himself by now, shaking the dwarf's larger frame with all his might. "It's alright, Thorin. I'm here. Please..." And finally Thorin opened his eyes. Bilbo released a sigh of relief, smiling through the sheen of tears. "You had a nightmare...a bad one by the looks of it..."

He leaned down then to kiss Thorin's tears away, to mend whatever wounds the nightmare had opened, but...Thorin pushed him away. Gently, but still... "I...I killed you..." he rasped. "I killed you... I...I killed that part of you that was gentle and loving and warm that day on the walls. Not like I do in my dreams, in my nightmares." He sat up then, those beautiful strong hands resting in his lap. "I killed you, Bilbo... How can you stand being near me, how can you bear my touch?" This wasn't good. Though if Bilbo was honest, he had feared as much. He had heard Thráin mention... It must have brought all the guilt back to the surface, all the self-loathing, all the doubts.

"Thorin please," placing a gentle hand upon Thorin's arm, he waited. For Thorin to turn to him, or for rejection, he did not know. But the dwarf didn't move, so Bilbo ventured on. "I am here, I have chosen to be here. Right here, by your side. There is but one thing unbearable about your touch...the thought of living without it." His eyes were stinging with unshed tears, and he had to swallow several times before he was able to continue. "And you didn't kill me, nor any part of me. I knew..."

"I was mad with gold-lust and jealousy... But I still had no right..."

Then a warm hand covered his, "It is but a stone, Bilbo. You are worth so much more than that, if only you could see it. You were never just a plain hobbit, not to me." And for a short moment, Thorin gazed into Bilbo's eyes, into Bilbo's soul. "But I took that away as well. I failed you in this as well... No matter how often I told you..."

"You mean like I've told you several times that there is nothing you need to be forgiven for really?" Bilbo smirked slightly, but Thorin just shrugged. "Thorin, I knew what I was doing and what the consequences would, in all likelihood, be. I still did it. I would rather have earned your scorn than see you dead. And..." he gently stroked Thorin's arm, "you wouldn't have done it. I knew that the whole time, even when your hands wrapped around my throat. I could see it in your eyes. You were so hurt, so full of rage, but I could see your love for me shining through it all. I knew you would never have done what you threatened. And yes, you hurt me, but I had hurt you as well. We were both at fault. I should have...I don't know...tried harder to get through to you. Please Thorin, there is nothing to forgive..."

Thorin made a sound that was half a sob and half a moan, and then he turned and gathered Bilbo to him, holding him tightly against his chest. "If you had died, if I..." Bilbo placed a hand over Thorin's lips, eyes catching the dwarf's gaze. Only when Thorin nodded did he remove his fingers. "I
wouldn't have survived you long. I...wouldn't have had the strength to live for all those decades without you by my side, Bilbo... Even here in Valinor, there were times when I wished for the everlasting sleep."

"When you closed your eyes that last time, I thought I would die with you. I...I cried for what seemed like weeks, and as soon as I was able, I left. I couldn't stay for the funerals, Thorin. I...I thought I might just lie down next to you and let them entomb us together. I ran, but wherever I went, there were memories of you. And I lived for those precious few memories... As painful as they were, as painful as it was to go on, I knew that if I died, there would be no one to remember anymore. And I had your ring, and with it, I had a part of you. And I could dream..." Bilbo buried his face in Thorin's shoulder, tears falling freely now. "I hardly dreamt of that day on the walls, Thorin...and when I did, it was never a true nightmare. My nightmares were quite different..."

He could feel Thorin's lips pressing a tender kiss to his unruly curls, could feel the dwarf's calloused fingers stroke his back in an attempt to soothe the hobbit. "I longed for that which you think I cannot bear...your touch. I longed to feel your arms around me, holding me." Bilbo lifted his head, gazing intently into Thorin's eyes. "Even after you banished me, knowing that there was still hope, that you still loved me...if it hadn't been for the battle, I would have fought for you...for us. There never was anything to be forgiven."

"But I tried to..."

"Did you? Think, Thorin...remember. Did you really for just one moment intend to go through with that unspoken threat?" Bilbo knew the answer, had known it with every fiber of his being even as his feet were dangling high above the ground.

"I..." and then Thorin shook his head, and there was relief in those dark blue pools, as if he could finally see something he had been blinded to by his self-loathing for all these long years. "Part of me wanted to, the part that was so gold-crazed... But while that part was strong, it was my heart that was ruling my actions that day. I thought you had betrayed us...not the Company, but us. I could not understand why you would choose the elves and humans over me. Over us. I...I wanted to shake you, to make you see reason, but you stuck by what you believed was right...by what was right. And I wanted to make you pay for that betrayal, wanted to hurt you just like you had hurt me. But I could never have let you go. Despite your treason, I could never have brought you harm like that..."

Bilbo smiled up at the dwarf, "Now you see? You banished me from your sight not because I had betrayed the King...though everyone believed that was the reason. I knew better. You thought I had betrayed what we had, when all I did was try to protect..." Soft lips pressing against his cut him off.

"We were both somewhat foolish I think," Thorin whispered after he pulled away. "But I feel that without the shock of your betrayal I would not have snapped out of this gold-lust and the desire to possess the Arkenstone. But after...what use would I have for all the riches in Erebor if I could not share them with you? I only wish I could have swallowed my pride and made the exchange..."

"It is all behind us now... And when I now look back on the time in Esgaroth and Erebor, all I think of is that night..." Which wasn't true, at least not entirely. There was another memory he seemingly couldn't shake. Not of that day on the walls that seemed to be haunting Thorin, no. It was the memories of Thorin's lifeless body, of the kiss Bilbo had pressed to the dwarf's forehead in a final farewell. Now more than ever did he remember that day for the hobbit knew that he wouldn't be able to endure heartbreak like that again, not after all he had now shared with Thorin. But he also knew that he could never tell Thorin...or he would simply replace the self-loathing over that attempt to kill Bilbo with self-loathing over dying..."
So he swallowed and then pulled back, his palm coming to rest over Thorin's heart. "I had never known what it could be like to connect with another being like that, but then you showed me and... I could see that fire in your eyes, but you held it back for me. You were so loving and gentle... And I longed for that with all my heart...to have it again, if only for one more time. It was those memories that were my most treasured...nightmare. To see you, touch you, and feel you in my sleep, but never when waking...it was the most wonderful torture. It made me want to sleep forever, never to wake, as you would be with me then. But..." his hand closed around the ring that was still hanging around his neck, "I had this, I had this one token... And I knew I couldn't let go. Had to find out what it meant..." He smiled shyly, "You gave me everything that you are with this ring, Thorin...and I knew that we had parted not with grudges but love in our hearts..."

Thorin's hands cupped Bilbo's face then, and the dwarf's eyes were mirror images of what they had been that night in Lake-town. "I feared you only accepted my apologies and the ring because I was dying. I was...even more of an idiot than my nephews believed. They...back in Erebor, they tried to get me to seek you out after I turned my back on you, but I... I thought I had lost you, that my gold-lust had driven you away and forced you to side with my enemies. I was so blind..." He swallowed before continuing, "I vow that, if we are ever again at odds with each other, I will listen to you. I won't just plow ahead. I let gold and a stupid stone tear us apart once, but I promise that that will never happen again. I have misjudged you time and again, my hobbit, have allowed pride and jealousy to drive a wedge between us, but no more. If you decide that all the wealth of our new kingdom should go to our dearest tree-huggers, then I will see it done."

Bilbo chuckled at that. "Truth be told, Thranduil's claims upon your gold were...somewhat over the top. Esgaroth had been destroyed, but Thranduil's Halls hadn't seen battle in any form or fashion... But he had struck up a deal with Bard, so there really was nothing for it." Thorin nodded. "You should know this though...Thranduil regretted his actions. After the battle, and later when I visited his Halls again... He said that something was tearing at his very soul... He...when he makes his journey, you two should try and put the past behind you..."

Thorin's eyes darkened, but he still nodded. "If that is your wish..."

"It is...we have all the ages ahead of us now, what use is there to dwell on the past?" And that was true. Bilbo hoped that Thorin would finally be able to let go of all the guilt that seemed to have been his ever-present companion for all these eighty years. And maybe they could take some of the old memories to reforge them into something beautiful and new. "You remember that night?" Thorin cocked an eyebrow before realisation made his entire face light up. "Well, since we are both awake anyway..." The dwarven king smirked, all the strain seeping away into nothingness. "Maybe you could turn my nightmares into the most pleasant drea..." He was cut off by a tender kiss...
Chapter Notes

After the Angst in the last chapter, I thought it was time for more fluff so... As always, plot elements sneaked their way in and I'm...sorry I'm not sorry? :P

And maybe they could take some of the old memories to reforge them into something beautiful and new. "You remember that night?" Thorin cocked an eyebrow before realisation made his entire face light up. "Well, since we are both awake anyway..." The dwarven king smirked, all the strain seeping away into nothingness. "Maybe you could turn my nightmares into the most pleasant drea..." Bilbo was cut off by a tender kiss.

Bilbo's hand was still resting on Thorin's chest, and the dwarf felt it flutter, much like it had done all these years ago in Esgaroth. Bilbo had been so scared back then, but also so trusting. And if Thorin was honest with himself, that trusting innocence had been one of the most endearing things to him.

Now, as he had then, Bilbo melted into the kiss, and the dwarf only deepened the kiss once he knew that the precious creature next to him was ready. Part of Thorin's mind was laughing at the concept, reminding him how very much ready Bilbo had been earlier in the bath. But somehow the past week had still been tainted by all those resentments and fears that had been bubbling under the surface. That self-loathing that had been part of Thorin ever since...ever since he'd sent Bilbo away. It was gone now, replaced by mere regret at the time they had spent apart instead of together. And in a way that made this night almost like their first one.

With the exchange of the courting beads, this would also be the first time of being one in the eyes of dwarven society, any of their previous encounters nothing more than a means to an end. Not that that had ever been the case. He'd known he had found his equal...at the latest that night when they had shared their first kiss. But dwarven convention dictated that the giving and receiving of courting beads should precede any joining of body and soul... And Thorin hadn't expected to ever receive a bead himself, but was still prepared to continue at least his part of the courting rituals, conventions be damned. But once again Bilbo had surprised him...

Feeling the hobbit's lips part under his, he pulled Bilbo closer as he explored the hobbit's mouth before his tongue found its mate and they engaged in a sweet and loving duel of their own. His fingers were running through Bilbo's soft hair until they reached the braid he had placed there six days ago. Yours...he always has been yours. That thought made the dwarf smile into the kiss, and then he gasped as the mouth under his was withdrawn and Bilbo bit him, gently, on the bottom lip, "And what is so funny, Master Dwarf?" Bilbo's eyes were sparkling merrily, and his fingers found their way into Thorin's black locks and to the new braid. "Now we really are betrothed, even by dwarven standards. And as long as we both wear our braids and beads, we are considered as one, right?"

Thorin nodded. Bilbo had indeed learnt as much about his culture as possible, and he promised to himself that he would find a way to reciprocate. Though hopefully Frodo would be able to enlighten him. He really didn't want to have that conversation with Belladonna. It would be interesting enough to ask Bilbo's nephew about hobbit courting rites as it was. Twining his fingers with the hobbits, he
rested his forehead against Bilbo's. "In one year's time, we will either exchange another set of beads, or the bond will be broken." Bilbo nodded. "However, I don't think that has ever happened in living memory. Dwarves only court the person whom we call our equal, and I feel that hobbits are not so different from us in that respect."

"No, we aren't. The only time such a bond is broken is when death takes one of a couple. And very rarely the survivor then finds another mate. The same really as it is in dwarven society." Which it was. "And as for that one year...I've been yours since...well...since the day we first met. Must have been your charming personality or something..." he winked. "What's another year? Will give me more time to design the second bead." And for his nephews to drive Thorin crazy with their knowledge of said design which they could obviously hint at, but that, at the end of the day, was super secret so they couldn't possibly tell him about it. But he couldn't really begrudge them their happiness, not after the past eighty years.

"And I will have to hide yours where you won't be able to find it..." He took a deep breath before continuing, "We will exchange the second set of beads...in front of the entire court." The hobbit groaned, burying his head in Thorin's shoulder again. "Bilbo, I am king, and I do not see either my grandfather nor my father agreeing to take over the crown...simply to enable us to have a more private ceremony." That earned him a chuckle, and grey eyes met his again. "We will then speak the words that you no doubt already know, and you will have to add the vows of the King's consort and co-ruler. For that is what you will be..."

Bilbo paused for a long moment, but then leaned closer to place a tender kiss on Thorin's lips. "As long as you don't call me that too often, and I can still be your burglar... I would fight Smaug with my own two hands to be with you..." That sweet smile on Bilbo's lips reached his eyes, and Thorin felt as if he could easily lose himself in those grey pools.

"Then this truly is a new beginning, my burglar. The past is behind us, and our future is ahead. And if I recall correctly, there were certain memories you wished to be replaced..." Bilbo shuddered in his arms as Thorin began trailing small kisses down the length of his neck. But then he stopped, suddenly realising an oversight on his part. Something he had been meaning to tell Bilbo on numerous occasions, only for one reason or another, he had always lost the nerve. Now though there was no more turning back...as if there ever was...so Thorin gently touched the hobbit's chin, moving his head until their eyes met. "Bilbo...I..." *Come on Thorin, it's not that hard. Bilbo has told you thousands of times.* "I love you."

One moment they had been gazing at each other, the next Bilbo had launched himself at Thorin, holding him in a tight embrace. "And I love you, Thorin." And with those whispered words, he leaned in for another kiss, deepening it almost immediately, those soft hands roaming over Thorin's chest and shoulders to finally comb through his hair. What else could Thorin do but respond in kind. Gently he pressed the hobbit into the mattress, eliciting the most delicious sounds from Bilbo. Twining their fingers together, Thorin pinned the hobbit's hands on either side of his head while kissing a trail down his neck, the dwarf's tongue coming out ever so often for a moist caress. Bilbo was writhing underneath him, his head moving back and forth on the pillow, even as Thorin reached the hobbit's collarbone. Thorin chuckled, but the chuckle turned to a moan when Bilbo ground his hips into the dwarf's, making it abundantly clear just how much he was enjoying Thorin's ministrations. That was something he most definitely hadn't done that night in Lake-town. The hobbit's body had responded to Thorin's every touch as it did now, but Bilbo himself had been so very shy, almost unable to believe that the dwarven king could find him even remotely appealing. But Thorin had successfully replaced that silly notion with the truth; that to him there could be no one but the hobbit.
And now that they were betrothed...it only took you eighty years, well done...but then again, you were parted...he would make sure that Bilbo never felt unworthy. If anything, it was Thorin who had to prove his worth. And he had all eternity to do just that.

Grinding down his own hips made Bilbo arch off the bed, and when he slumped back down, pleading eyes met Thorin's. "Please...I need..." Oh, Thorin knew exactly what the hobbit needed, but Bilbo would have to wait a while longer for his release. Nibbling on the hobbit's collarbone he slowly moved down Bilbo's chest until his mouth was poised mere centimetres above the hobbit's nipple. Once his eyes found Bilbo's he blew on the little nub and the hobbit's eyes widened as he drew in a deep breath. "Thorin..." The dwarf grinned. Who would have thought that Bilbo Baggins, gentlehobbit of the Shire would ever make noises like this? So needy, so very passionate that even the great Thorin Oakenshield had to pause and catch himself before he came undone.

"What is it that you want, my hobbit? Tell me..." He sucked the little nub into his mouth and knew that his tongue was driving Bilbo mad with need. But the hobbit had asked for those memories to be replaced, so Thorin was going to follow that request to the letter...even if it killed him. Bilbo's hands were pushing up against his own but the hobbit knew full well that such actions were futile. Thorin was stronger by far, not that he would ever use that strength again to hold the hobbit against his will. Let it go. He told you to stop dwelling on it, didn't he? Easier said than done. At least he now knew that for all the threat, he never ever would have harmed the hobbit.

"Thorin?" Bilbo raised his eyebrows, "Less brooding and more," he raised his hips, pressing his arousal into Thorin's stomach, "more doing something about this..." Beneath the lust, Thorin could see concern in Bilbo's eyes. The hobbit's hands pushed against Thorin's once more and he released them. Bilbo gently stroked the dwarf's face and whispered, "I love you." And again, "I love you." Those tenderly spoken words dispelled the remnants of regret and guilt, and Thorin leaned into the hobbit's gentle touch before taking hold of Bilbo's wrists and pressing a kiss to both of his palms. "You're mine," Bilbo stated simply, "and I'll forever be yours." And then the corners of the hobbit's mouth twitched and the sweet smile turned into a smirk. "Make me yours, my betrothed. Claim me...no more holding back."

The hobbit's words set Thorin's blood on fire and he growled, "You will regret ever saying that, Master Burglar." Bilbo shuddered at the sultry tone, hips bucking up involuntary. "You are indeed mine, and I will mark you as you have marked me. Your name is branded into my very soul and you have set aflame that which I thought was lying in ruins." Placing a final kiss onto Bilbo's nipple, he moved to its twin, submitting it to the same treatment. Bilbo's hands were fisted into the sheets and he made those sweet keening noises that meant he was dangerously close to the brink. "Oh no, you will not leave me behind, my hobbit..." Fingers surrounded the base of Bilbo's arousal in a tight grip and the hobbit whined in need. "You wished to be claimed...and you will be...in due course." And with that he slid down to capture his prize in the wet cavern of his mouth and swallowed Bilbo whole.

"Thorin!" Bilbo's hands were suddenly buried in Thorin's hair, "Please, oh Valar..." They wouldn't help Bilbo now. He was at Thorin's mercy, just as much as Thorin was at the hobbit's. Thorin stilled completely, a finger pointing at the bedside table and it took a good minute for Bilbo's lust-fogged mind to realise what the dwarf was asking for. The small vial was placed into Thorin's hand and Thorin set out to bringing the hobbit painfully close to the precipice...as close as the dwarf himself was by now...while nimble fingers prepared Bilbo for their joining. Releasing Bilbo from his lips, Thorin knelt back between the hobbit's spread legs and thrust the vial back into the half-crazed halfling's hands. Bilbo groaned, but quickly coated Thorin before winding his legs around the dwarf's hips.
And then, for a moment, Bilbo seemed to regain control over his body and threatened, "Unless you stop being such a tease, Master Oakenshield, I may have to tell my mother that you are cruel and unkind... She won't stop to ask why before bringing out the frying pan..." How could he possibly be so in control of his faculties? And to mention his mother?! "Please, Thorin..." How could he refuse that pleading voice? Especially since Bilbo's wishes matched his own.

He sank into the pliant body beneath him, setting a quick pace as neither of them would be able to hold out for much longer. And indeed, within minutes Bilbo cried out Thorin's name, and the hobbit's release pulled Thorin's from him as well. Bracing himself on shaking arms so he wouldn't crush his betrothed, Thorin slowly pulled away and slumped down next to that exquisite creature who had stolen his heart and soul. And apparently his breath as well it would seem.

It was Bilbo who got to unsteady feet to clean away the mess he had made of himself and Thorin, tenderly wiping the dwarf's stomach clean. Upon his return from the bath chamber, Bilbo knelt down on the bed and took Thorin's right hand in his. Fingers were idly tracing patterns on the dwarf's palm, following the lifeline before a kiss was pressed to it. "You held back so much that night, and any other since I arrived in Valinor. Thorin...I'm not afraid of that fire that courses through your veins, for it is within me too. It is..." Was that reluctance in the hobbit's eyes? "It is very un-hobbitish. But maybe...maybe some of that dwarven fierceness is now also part of me. Maybe our souls truly are one...and maybe that was the real reason I could hold on for those eighty years. Because somehow you were still with me..."

And if Thorin was honest with himself, he too had felt that warm presence at the back of his mind, especially when the nightmares became too terrible or the simple fact that he was alive and not dead and gone became unbearable. There was that warmth that reminded him of his gentle hobbit and somehow he could suddenly go on. "Maybe you're right. Maybe Aulë and Yavanna have bound us together beyond what we thought so far. Maybe there is a deeper meaning to all of this, and there are things at work that we cannot comprehend. Or why else would Aulë have allowed my nephews to make certain decisions for me?"

Bilbo grinned, "Because you would have been too stubborn to make the right decisions and would be sitting next to Lord Durin wondering where it all went wrong? And I would be all alone here, fending off your nephews all on my own, missing you. And soon I wouldn't be able to stop myself from trying to beat down the doors of Aulë's Halls to get you out so I could tell you what a fool you were..." Thorin laughed as he captured the hobbit's lips in a tender kiss.

"Whatever their plan is, and however many elves it involves, I am glad they have chosen me for it. You truly are a burglar, Bilbo Baggins, for you stole my soul that night we first met. It has been yours ever since, as has my heart."

Bilbo smiled softly and leaned forward to rest his head against Thorin's shoulder. "I thought I would be alone for the rest of my life and then one day Gandalf showed up and turned my life upside down. And I think I should really thank him for that. He gave me a family and introduced me to the rudest, most maddening, but also most wonderful dwarf in the whole of Middle-earth. Eighty years are a small price to pay for an eternity of that." And then he added with a chuckle, "Oh yes, eighty years are nothing compared to the pleasure of seeing my mother twitching your nose..."

Thorin had been stroking Bilbo's back but had stopped at that last bit. "Your mother is a formidable hobbit and I'll be damned if I ever upset her. I only fear the day my sister will join us for she will become fast friends with Belladonna and then we can all start digging our graves..." Bilbo chuckled again but the chuckle quickly turned into a yawn. "We should rest, my hobbit. For within a week we will be on our way to our mountain..." New Erebor where another member of the Company was
eagerly awaiting their arrival.

Bilbo nodded sleepily. "No more nightmares, agreed? I need my rest before you're dragging me off on the road again and I will miss at least three meals again each and every day..." Lifting his head off its resting place, Bilbo locked gazes with Thorin. "But I would follow you wherever you go, even if there was another dragon at the end of the journey."

"No more dragons, I promise. And...no more nightmares. Only pleasant dreams of you by my side, ruling over our people. One year, Bilbo, and then we will truly be one..." And as he gathered the hobbit to him under the blankets, Bilbo's head resting on the dwarf's broad chest, Thorin couldn't wait for that one year to pass so he could finally make the hobbit his for all the world to see. It had taken eighty years and many sleepless nights filled with nightmares to get to this point, but as Bilbo had stated before, what was all that time compared to an eternity together? And this time it was these thoughts that were on Thorin's mind when he closed his eyes. And there were no nightmares waiting for him but a dream of his hobbit in dwarven garments, two braids framing his gentle face, a mithril circlet resting on his brow...his consort and husband...
Chapter 9 - Preparations

Chapter Summary

As we are about to go on a road trip, eh...you know what I mean...we will need to pack a few things...

Chapter Notes

Soon, very soon, Angst will return with a vengeance. But for now, enjoy the calm before the storm.

A little note on Óin's rebirth into Valinor. As I see it, if a dwarf (or elf) dies in battle in a 'regular' fashion, i.e. being slashed by a sword, hit over the head, used as an arrow-cushion, they get reborn fairly quickly. If, however, a body is being maimed or the dying dwarf (or elf) is clinging on to life, their rebirth is taking somewhat longer. Which is why Óin didn't show up with Balin and Ori as he was maimed by the Watcher. And it also explains how Fili and Kili had time to strike up a friendship with Ecthelion before Thorin showed up.

Oh, and Fili and Kili are an absolute delight...just felt like saying that :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

"I have the feeling something's missing..." Kili was scratching his so-called beard and Thorin was wondering for the hundredth time why he had allowed Bilbo to talk him into this. "Let them do the organising, they are your heirs so you should start trusting them with things. And besides, we can spend some more time alone..." Only Bilbo's idea of spending time alone was not quite the same as Thorin's.

After the night of their little celebration, the nightmare and the subsequent lovemaking, Thorin had done exactly what Bilbo had asked. He had let go of all his fears that he might inadvertently hurt his betrothed, and while their encounters were still loving and tender, the dwarven king no longer held back. But no matter how passionate he was, Bilbo matched him with an intensity that took Thorin's breath away.

And the mere thought of it made his blood rush south and pool in places it really shouldn't considering he was around his nephews. Besides, even if he had been alone with Bilbo, Master Baggins would probably have told him to get a grip and to not distract him. "We had a week of doing little else than getting reacquainted, Thorin, and we will have all eternity. But right now I have to do my own bit of planning. For once, I have a bit more notice before I set out on a journey with Thorin and Company, and I will use that time, thank you very much." And whenever they were...as Bilbo had put it so persuasively...alone, Thorin was roped into those plans.
Plans that involved visiting the hobbit market in New Delving, visiting Bilbo's parents, visiting Frodo... That day, Bilbo had announced they would have to return to the market once more for some last minute acquisitions, and Thorin was more than happy to leave his nephews behind. If something was missing on their journey, Fíli and Kíli would have to do their best to make do with what they had. But did Fíli really have to shout after them, "Enjoy your market day, you two lovebirds!" Lovebirds? Lovebirds?! Of course it was nice that his nephews had embraced the news of their betrothal with so much joy and happiness, but to call them that... Though as their ponies trotted next to each other and he reached out for Bilbo's hand, he had to admit that maybe they were acting like...like adults who were in love. But he would still have some choice words with his nephews...they could tease Thorin and Bilbo in private, but not in front of others!

When they finally reached the market, Bilbo made a beeline for a tailor shop. "I will most definitely not forget to bring my pocket handkerchiefs this time around." Alright, Thorin had smirked at that remembering how upset Bilbo had been when he had found out he had forgotten those. And how shocked he had been that Bilbo's antics had been almost endearing. Unfortunately Bilbo had seen the smirk... "And what, pray tell, is so funny?" That glare was enough to send lesser dwarves, like his nephews for example, into hysterics. But Thorin knew such a reaction would be rather unwise under the circumstances. However, the glare was short-lived and Bilbo himself began chuckling and buried his face in Thorin's furs.

He had taken to wearing his travelling clothes again at Bilbo's insistence and now he found the hobbit idly stroking the soft fur or the smooth velvet more often than not. And while such open displays of affection were new to Thorin, he wouldn't have changed things for all the gold in Erebor, no, make that in the whole of Arda. He wrapped his arms around the chuckling hobbit and placed a kiss on the unruly curls that covered his head. He would have to get Bilbo to grow them out. The King's consort needed longer hair, long enough to put certain clasps and beads into it. Not to mention the courting beads and braids...Bilbo would simply look stunning. And if certain parts of the dwarf's anatomy jumped at that mental image, then that was perfectly natural. Not that Bilbo agreed with that.

"Thorin Oakenshield!" The hobbit pulled away as if stung by... "We're in a very public place, amongst my kin no less!" He glared, but when he straightened his jacket, Thorin realised that... Bilbo noticed Thorin's inquisitive glances and glowered, "It's entirely your fault. I was a respectable gentlehobbit of the Shire before you came into my life..."

Thorin pulled the hobbit back into his arms. "And I was a miserable old dwarf who dwelt entirely too much on the past. You have filled me with life and joy and happiness, my dear hobbit, and I will be damned if I'll ever apologise for that. However, I do know where to draw the line...though not for propriety's sake. You are mine, and thus no one else will ever get to see you..." It was obvious that Bilbo knew the rest of that sentence since he pulled Thorin's head down for a not exactly chaste kiss. And if some of the passing hobbits stopped and stared, neither of them cared a whit. When Bilbo drew back finally, he actually stared right back. "My my, Master Baggins, you are becoming very dwarvish indeed. Next thing will be growing a beard I'd wager."

Bilbo just shrugged, "I was Mad Bilbo Baggins in the Shire anyway, don't see why I should change that. But a beard, no thank you. I'm still a hobbit and we don't do facial hair." Thorin mock-sighed. "And don't give me that, Master Dwarf, if you know what's good for you. Now lets be off to buy those handkerchiefs..." Bilbo reached for his hand to pull him along, but Thorin didn't move. Glancing over his shoulder, Bilbo frowned at the dwarf, "Something the matter?" When there was no reply, the hobbit turned to face Thorin once more, grey eyes looking up at the dwarf questioningly. "Thorin?"
Thorin reached out to gently comb through Bilbo's curls. "No beard, no... But..." The hobbit's hair was so soft under his fingers, so very much like Bilbo himself. "What about your hair? Your braid... your braids would look so much better if you had longer hair...

And Bilbo just smiled and pecked the dwarf on the tip of his nose. "One less thing to buy then... no shears. Though, truth be told, I was already considering it myself. Not too long though, else my mother will start calling me her little girl or something like that again. She did it before when I was a young boy and wouldn't let her cut my hair for about a month because I wanted to have hair as long as that of the elves. Eventually I let her do it because some of the hobbit lasses were chasing me with ribbons..."

"No ribbons, I promise you. Just another bead or two..." The dwarf's calloused fingers had come to rest on Bilbo's braid as they did so often of late. "My hobbit... my burglar... my betrothed. I never thought I would be able to say that last. But now I want the whole world to know that you're mine. Not because I am king..."

"But because you are the most infuriating, rude, obnoxious and procrastinating dwarf ever," Bilbo smirked. "Now, can we go? I don't want to have to resort to using someone's ripped off pocket again..." Thorin simply nodded and allowed the hobbit to pull him along.

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"Right, so we have the cram, dried meats, dried fruits, some of Bilbo's pickled vegetables, apples, the ale casks, water flasks..." Kíli was rattling down his list for the tenth time, still convinced something was missing. And while Fíli had really tried to help his brother, the blond dwarf was by now convinced that the only thing missing was Kíli's brain. He had probably traded it in for that new bow of his. It was quite lovely indeed, of elven make and all that, but Kíli had paid quite a hefty price for it. Thorin wouldn't be very happy about it though. Being... civil to the elves was one thing, but the way Kíli was going... Soon he'd be asking those Lórien elves whether he could join their archery training and at that point their uncle would probably hit the roof.

It was one thing for an heir of Durin to embrace this new alliance with the elves, but it was quite another... Then again, Fíli had seen Thorin and Ecthelion discuss elvish weapons in general and Orcrist in particular and had even locked blades during several sparring sessions. But as always with Thorin, even if his nephews did exactly the same as their uncle, he might not see it thusly. Maybe he should warn Kíli before he got himself into more trouble. However, Fíli then remembered the fact that Bilbo was with them now. And Bilbo would be able to keep Thorin in check in ways that no one had ever thought possible.

After a quick glance over to his still mumbling brother, Fíli decided to use the time... Kíli could be hours at this rate... and work on his own sword skills. But just as he was getting ready to abuse a poor tree for fencing practice, Kíli shouted, "Oh Aulë, of course! How could I forget?!" Head turning to his now beaming brother, Fíli sighed and placed his swords back in their sheath. Practice would have to wait it seemed. "Fíli! I can't believe you didn't think of it either. I mean, how could we forget?"

"Yes, yes... you may have to elaborate a bit on this... What is it that I should have remembered? What could be so essential for our journey?" Kíli just grinned. "Brother... please? Just tell me?"

Kíli bounded to his side, still smiling like a loony. "Well, think... There was something a member of our merry Company was very very eager to have and when he noticed he'd forgotten about it..."

And then Fíli knew. Of course! "Bilbo's pocket handkerchiefs! We have to get him some. Knowing
Thorin and Bilbo, they will be too busy...shopping...to do any actual shopping." Fíli shuddered, "You don't suppose the idea of them...shopping...is ever going to get less..."

Kíli shrugged. "I hope so, brother. As I don't suppose they will ever get enough of shopping..." He chuckled, "But Fíli...the thought of them brings such joy to my heart. How long has Thorin been alone? How many years before he ever met Bilbo has he spent only by himself? And I know that mother always said he would find his special person not among our people but the other races... However, part of me always wondered if she was just trying to tease him with it. You know, by implying it might be an elf..." He grinned. "But then we met Bilbo, and I so hoped... Then we came here, and I know he tried to hide it, but I was so worried... And now..."

"I never thought Thorin could be this happy, this carefree. It's as if we have a totally different dwarf for an uncle now. As if simply having Bilbo by his side again, and being able to show him just how much he means to Thorin...it's as if our dearest hobbit has torn down all those walls Thorin had erected around himself. Bilbo had cracked them before, but now they are gone... And Bilbo...they are simply made for each other." Fíli frowned, "And as terrible as this may sound, I don't believe they would have been like this if Thorin had survived the battle. He might have upheld the banishment simply out of a feeling of being undeserving of Bilbo's forgiveness...you saw him after." Brown eyes met his, sadness evident in their depth. "He was...broken. Not Thorin Oakenshield, King under the Mountain. But Thorin..."

"I wanted to go after Bilbo, Fíli...get him to come back. Make him see..." Kíli nodded, "But I was so scared he would turn down the request. I could see why he had done what he did and knew how unjust Thorin's treatment of him had been. But both their hearts were broken that day... I wish I had done it, though. Maybe they could have spent those eighty years together rather than apart." Fíli wrapped his arms around his brother's shoulders. "You're right. If he had survived, Thorin wouldn't have felt like he had a right to ask Bilbo's forgiveness. Though I think Bilbo might not have taken no for an answer. Maybe if we had survived as well..."

"To kick Thorin's sorry backside into action you mean?" Kíli nodded and chuckled. "Who knows, brother. All I know is that they are in a better place now, especially now they both wear their beads. Ever since that day, they've been so much..." Kíli nodded again. "It's as if a weight has been lifted from both of them. More so than before. I am so happy for them, and so glad that Aulë granted us the ability to make this come to pass...in a roundabout way." It was true, though. If Thorin had been left to his own devices, his choice would have likely taken him to the Halls. He had died with hatred of everything elven in his heart, and it had taken months until he was at least civil to Ecthelion. There was no way he would have chosen Valinor of his own volition.

"Sometimes... Sometimes I long to find what they have as well. To find someone to share my life with other than my stupid older brother." Kíli stuck out his tongue like the small dwarfling he sometimes still was...mentally at least. But then his eyes became pensive again as he continued, "But what dwarf would ever take me? Sure, there always were a lot of young dwarves who would smile at me or even wink...but the moment I turned my back I could hear the giggling."

A fierce desire to protect his younger brother came over Fíli then and he hugged Kíli tightly. "You will find your special someone, as well as I. I promise. And who knows...maybe we too will have to look further afield than our own race..." He had seen how some of the elven archers had eyed his brother and he knew that at least to them, he was beautiful. Why couldn't Kíli see that? Did the deeds of his own kin hurt him so much that he couldn't see appreciation in the eyes of others? Elves who had just arrived from Arda, who didn't know who Kíli was...

Unfortunately it was also said elves who encouraged Kíli in his archery, and that was indeed
something dwarves generally frowned upon. It was something for those pointy-ears, not for dwarves. Dwarves used swords and axes... And most of the young dwarves his brother had mentioned wouldn't wait to see just how deadly Kíli could be with his bow, or indeed his sword. He was an archer with hardly anything worth calling a beard and that was that.

And Fíli vowed then, if only to himself, that he would see his brother as happy as his uncle was right now. Until then however..."Let us simply enjoy our uncles happiness for now. Even though some aspects of it are somewhat...too much to contemplate. I'm still shocked that Thorin actually...and in front of all of us. Well, not Thrór and Thráin but they found out about it quicker than you can draw an arrow. I think it was Balin..."

Kíli smiled as he disentangled himself from his brother's embrace. "Balin was beside himself with joy that night. Unfortunately you were too drunk to stay up, and Ori had disappeared into the library with Frodo, but Balin and I sat smoking Bungo's new leaf for hours. He was so happy, Fíli. 'Your uncle is finally whole again,' he said. But then he added, 'As is Master Baggins...' And then I made him spill. Oh Fíli, Bilbo was so sad, so very sad. All these years. We had each other and Thorin, and then Balin and Ori. And then finally Óin. Bilbo had no one for most of those years. All he had was... Oh, you don't know about it yet! Fíli, Thorin had given Bilbo his ring. His signet ring. And Balin carried it throughout these years. I saw it hanging around his neck when he busied himself in the garden yesterday..."

His...ring? Thorin had told them that he had asked Bilbo's forgiveness upon his deathbed, but this..."You don't suppose Bilbo knew what it meant?"

Kíli shrugged, "Not straight away... But judging by how much Bilbo knows of our culture and how little he knew on our journey, I think it's fair to say that he did some reading... And he knew all about the beads, Fíli, knew exactly what to put on the first one and I bet he has a good idea what should go on the second one as well..." Brown eyes sparkled with mirth, "And we shall be in the most awesome position of knowing what's on both of them long before Thorin and Bilbo..." They had long since seen Thorin's second bead, after all they had so graciously offered their assistance with the two boxes to their uncle. And obviously they would both be involved in Bilbo's second bead, so..."Do you think Bilbo will once again chose something like Thorin? I nearly fell over my own feet when Bilbo mentioned the mountain..."

That had indeed been a surprise, one that only showed the two brothers once more just how deep Thorin and Bilbo's connection truly went. "It's as if they really are...one. One soul. Oh Kíli, I cannot wait for mother to see them. She will be so proud... Well, after she kills Thorin for taking us with him on the journey and, you know, sorta causing our deaths..." And then the two brothers struck up a discussion about soul-bonds and how to secure their mother didn't murder their uncle...

Chapter End Notes

And a big thank you to everyone for sticking around, leaving kudos and / or comments. You are all awesome :) And if you want, you can also be awesome on Tumblr:P It's lonely over there.
Chapter 10 - Setting Out

Chapter Summary

And they are off...well...once the leader of the Company has woken that is :)

Chapter Notes

This is the last angst-free chapter for a while, so enjoy it ;)

I'm playing around with Thráin's eye-wound a bit (as he already had it in Erebor in the movie even though he really only took the wound in the Battle of Azanulbizar) and link it to the death of Thorin's mother.

Now (3021 T.A.)

"Thorin...wake up." Bilbo was standing next to the bed, wringing his hands. It was the day they were to start their journey and folks were slowly starting to arrive at the little cottage, but their great leader, Thorin Oakenshield, King of New Erebor, was still fast asleep. Bilbo had known their nightly activities would be a bad idea, but when gazing into Thorin's eyes, darkened with lust as they were, all reason evaporated and Bilbo's own desires had taken over. But luckily, he was a light sleeper so he had heard the knock on the door at break of dawn...

"Uncle still not awake?" Kíli stuck his head into the door, and smirked. "Well, there's a fool-proof remedy for that." And with that, he threw something in Bilbo's general direction. A wash cloth, icy cold, that impacted with the hobbit's face. "Oh, sorry...my aim with arrows is much better, I guarantee it." Then the young dwarf quickly turned and disappeared, obviously fearing Bilbo's wrath. The hobbit, still shivering from the cold, stared down at the cloth in his hands. Well, if Thorin didn't want to wake on his own...

Bilbo's hand, and the cloth, were mere inches away from Thorin's face when a hand closed around the hobbit's wrist, gently but still unrelenting. "I don't think this would be very wise, Master Baggins," Thorin growled. Oh, so he was awake after all? Blue eyes fluttered open, his gaze a mixture of annoyance, love and... Surely Thorin wasn't hoping... "I was hoping my betrothed would be able to come up with another way to wake me..." Yes, he was apparently. "It will be a while until everyone has arrived, especially the elves will probably need hours yet to brush their hair and place it just so. We have time..." The sultry voice was almost enough to overpower Bilbo. Almost.

"We don't have time for that, Master Dwarf. While I can appreciate that you wish to make the most of things, I do not intend to start this journey unable to sit in the saddle." Did the great Thorin Oakenshield pout?! Surely that wasn't possible. But he had released Bilbo's wrist, arms crossed over his chest... "So, in the interest of my health, I think you better cool down somewhat." And with that he planted the cloth squarely on Thorin's face, then turned quickly and made a run for the door. "You better get ready before King Thrór and Thráin arrive..." And he shut the door on some rather colourful curses. He knew he'd pay for this in some way, but oh, it had been worth it.
Turning from the door, the hobbit chuckled to himself, and after taking only four or five steps, bumped into Kíli. The young dwarf had apparently been loitering near the door and was now in hysterics. "That was brilliant, Bilbo! You're dead, but it was still brilliant! I don't think I heard Thorin swear like that ever since Fili and I were little and...and..." He bit his lower lip and then shook his head, "Nothing really. We were perfect little dwarflings, honest." Of course, and Smaug had been really friendly. Somehow, some way, Bilbo would find out what the two rascal nephews had been up to during their childhood. After avoiding certain death at the hands of his betrothed, that was.

And the sound of the opening door of the bedchamber made that an important endeavour indeed. Apparently Kíli shared the sentiment as he turned on his heels and raced for the kitchen. The hobbit, unfortunately, wasn't quite fast enough. Strong arms encircled his waist from behind pulling his back flush against a muscled chest. "That was truly wicked of you, my hobbit. Befitting a dwarfling..." The words, though spoken harshly, did not hold the venom they might have done on their first journey together. Calloused hands stroked Bilbo's chest and stomach soothingly before the hobbit was turned around in the embrace and Thorin rested his forehead against Bilbo's. "Are you ready, my burglar? The road awaits, but this time there won't be a dragon at the end of it, but our kingdom."

"Our kingdom...you hear that? Eighty years ago he had referred to Erebor as your home but always his kingdom, but now..." Shivers ran up and down Bilbo's spine. The thought of Thorin wishing to share his rule with a small and simple hobbit...with him...it had Bilbo almost gasping for air. He nodded meekly, whispering, "I would follow you anywhere, Thorin, anywhere." His voice was growing more forceful now, "Even if Smaug and the Arkenstone waited at the end, I would fight them both and this time, this time I wouldn't let you succumb to the gold-lust. I would remind you time and again that I was there, by your side, that I wouldn't leave you."

"Forever," Bilbo replied. "Forever." It was more than a promise, it was a vow and he sealed it with another gentle kiss. A kiss that was only broken by someone clearing their throat rather noisily behind Bilbo.

"Sorry to interrupt you two, but... You may wish to don your travelling gear, Thorin. Your father and grandfather have arrived to bid us adieu and even our elven friends are with us already. You owe me some gold for that..." Thorin groaned and Balin smirked before winking at the startled Bilbo. "Oh, nothing to worry about, laddie. Your betrothed and I just had a little bet regarding the arrival of Lord Ecthelion and Glorfindel. And he's lost." Dwarves and their love for betting... "Oh, and Thorin...you might want to give me your nephews' shares as well as they won't be so gracious..." Thorin just harrumphed and, after pressing his lips to Bilbo's forehead, disappeared into the bedchamber. Only to reemerge five minutes later in his travelling outfit, three small coin bags in his hand.

"Here! Though I may ask our elven friends if someone spoke to them about the time they would be expected here. And if anyone has..." There was a dangerous glint in Thorin's eyes, and Bilbo promised himself that he would make darn sure to never ever find himself at the receiving end of it.

Balin, however, seemed completely unflustered. "Now come on, Thorin. Do you really think I would break the rules of betting in such an obvious way?" The hobbit quickly made a mental note to never bet against Balin as the older dwarf hadn't said he wouldn't break the rules of gambling...only that he wouldn't break them in such a way. "And neither would your rascal nephews. We are
honourable dwarves, and you would do well to remember that." Thorin's glare did not lessen a bit. "Oh well, as I was saying...Thrár and Thráin are here. Surely you don't want them to wait around, now do you?"

An hour later the sun had fully risen and the travelling party was almost ready to set out. Thór and Thráin would join them until they reached Tirion, but the two elves had apparently asked their respective lords for leave to continue on to the mountain with them. Oh joy. Two pointy-ears in Erebor. What's next? But the truth was that he didn't mind having Ecthelion and Glorfindel amongst their new Company as Fíli and Kíli insisted on calling their little travelling group. But he would be damned if he ever admitted as much. Though he had a feeling that Bilbo had guessed already. The hobbit was way too smart for his own good, and for Thorin's peace of mind.

Bilbo himself was currently busying himself with last minute preparations, but once in a while Thorin could see the hobbit's hand reach inside his jacket pocket to check that, yes, the pocket handkerchief was really there and he wouldn't set out without it again. Just as Thorin was about to turn back to his own pony to secure Orcrist, Kíli walked up to Bilbo, beaming. Now this could be interesting. Especially as a certain pair of elves was following behind his younger nephew. "Bilbo! I hope you find everything how you would like it?" Bilbo nodded, confusion evident in his gaze. "And I made sure you wouldn't lack these either..." With that, Kíli revealed a small stack of handkerchiefs, tied together with a silk bow.

Bilbo was now positively sputtering. "I...that is..." Looking around, his eyes locked with Thorin's and he gazed at the dwarf imploringly. Thorin smiled as he slowly walked over.

"Yes, thank you very much indeed. I will not want for handkerchiefs on this journey or any other in the future I don't think." He turned to his pony again to stow away the two bundles and it was then that Frodo pulled Thorin aside.

"There was a small pile of kerchiefs in his hand as well. "I think he would have dropped dead or something if I had given these to him as well." The young hobbit was biting his lower lip and pushed the bundle into Thorin's hands. "Could you give them to him? When he is not mortally embarrassed? I...I didn't know others would give him any, and I know how upset he was the last time he didn't bring them..."

Thorin nodded, "That he was indeed, Master Frodo. So much so that I was inclined towards telling him to just go back to his little cosy hobbit hole and forget all about the quest."

"And why didn't you?" Inquisitive eyes caught and held the dwarf's. "Why didn't you just send him back?"
Thorin pulled the hobbit further away from the others and then turned to face him. "How much do you know about dwarven culture?" Frodo shrugged. "I was, am, an heir of Durin the Deathless, I was bound by my heritage as much as one could be bound by chains. The quest was ever on my mind, like a curse... I knew that I had to reclaim Erebor, but I also knew that going back, after so many years...I feared that I would end like my grandfather, and I did. You could call it a self-fulfilling prophecy if you wish. I feared it would happen all along, that there would be nothing to stop it... And then I set foot into Bag End."

"You... You went on the journey fully expecting that it would be your undoing?" Thorin shrugged. "I didn't know..."

"It is something we have in common it would seem. And you had Master Gamgee like I..."

Frodo shook his head vehemently. "Not quite like that. But you...Uncle Bilbo..."

"If you ever have the pleasure of meeting my sister, she will tell you that I was destined to meet your uncle. And she would probably be right in saying that." Thorin sighed, running his fingers through his hair. His hand, as so often of late, came to rest on the courting bead. "The moment I saw him, I knew. And that very same moment I vowed to not let him get close to me, to keep him away whatever the cost. But I couldn't..." He couldn't believe he was telling anyone and least of all Bilbo's nephew about this, but the way Frodo was looking at him...some of the pain Thorin had known himself was reflected in the hobbit's eyes... "I nearly succeeded in the Misty Mountains, but even if we hadn't been captured by the goblins, I do not believe I would have been able to let him go."

"Sometimes I wished I could send Sam away...send him back home. But I...I needed him. Especially once we had encountered Smeagol. I couldn't have done it without Sam. And still I failed him at the end." The hobbit lowered his gaze and Thorin was convinced he could see Frodo's eyes brimming with unshed tears. "I wonder if Bilbo had been less fragile...if he had gone in my stead." That made Thorin pause. Bilbo? Going to Mordor and Mount Doom? "He didn't tell you, did he? He volunteered. Before I did. He said he would go. And before he did, I could see his hand reach inside his shirt as if...he took strength from something within..."

His ring...Bilbo had drawn strength from *his* ring. His hobbit had...volunteered to set out to find his doom. *Loyalty, honour, a willing heart...you thought you found that within the dwarves of your company. But they were always there in Bilbo as well.* "Your uncle will never cease to amaze me...and I thought he was no more than a grocer..." He clasped the hobbit's shoulder, "You asked me a question, Frodo. Why couldn't I send Bilbo away? Because for all my vows to not let him touch me, he had made a home in my heart the moment I saw him. Because I knew that without him, we would in all likelihood not succeed. And I cannot explain why it took Azog's attack and my brush with death for me to admit this to myself and Bilbo. Nor do I know why I let the gold-lust take me, why I didn't fight it... But I know that I will be forever thankful to whoever it was that gave me a second chance at this...a chance to make things right."

Frodo beamed at him, "So you *do* love him as he loves you. He never told me, I didn't even know of the ring until we were on the ship from the Havens, but I always knew that he had lost more than friends in that battle... But now...I never thought Bilbo could be so happy. Well, when he isn't all flustered and embarrassed." The hobbit winked but then turned instartlement when someone...Bilbo of all people...tapped him on the shoulder.

"I heard that, nephew," Bilbo said with mock-disapproval. "We are about ready, so you may want to see to your pony..." Frodo nodded and rushed off. "And I see my nephew was so kind to provide
some more handkerchiefs. Valar! I will never be allowed to forget about that particular incident, will I?"

Shaking his head, Thorin pulled his hobbit into an embrace, "I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you. But they only mean well. And it was a perfect opportunity for Frodo and I to speak of certain things. Like you volunteering to go to Mordor for example." Bilbo pulled away, gaze part worried, part indignant. "You must be the bravest hobbit ever, Bilbo Baggins." The hobbit's eyes softened as he reached up to caress Thorin's cheek. The dwarf king quickly covered the smaller hand with his, still craving the physical contact even after the weeks they had spent together. Part of him apparently still feared that all this was but a dream, but the warm hand beneath his was real, as were the lips he brushed with his in a chaste and fleeting kiss.

Bilbo suddenly broke the embrace and took a few steps back. "None of that, Master Dwarf, or we will never be able to leave. Now..." he held out his hands, "give me those handkerchiefs so I can put them with the others and go find your father. He was looking for you." But when he took the small bundle from Thorin, his hand lingered on the dwarf's. "Thank you...for allowing Frodo to see you the way I do. For not putting up those walls for him."

"Within a year, he will be my nephew as he is yours. Besides," he grinned, "I really do not wish to be fed to the Eagles of Manwë." Bilbo smiled back at him and nodded before walking to his pony. Thorin, in turn, went to find Thráin.

His father was sitting outside the cottage on a little bench Bilbo so loved to spend his afternoons smoking on. When he saw Thorin approach, Thráin got to his feet. "Ah, there you are. There is something I wish to discuss with you before we are off." He reached inside his coat and retrieved a small...cloak clasp. "This was your mother's..." It was beautiful; made of mithril, it had the same design as his signet ring. "I gave it to her on the day of our bonding ceremony. She would have wanted it to go to your betrothed. Though she probably didn't expect it to be a hobbit." Thráin smiled at that and placed the clasp in Thorin's hands. "Never take his love for granted, never take him for granted. And listen to him, son. Don't make the same mistakes I did...they made me lose her." His mother, and his sight in his left eye...and even though he had regained his eyesight here in Valinor, Thorin's mother was still lost to him, to both of them.

She would remain in the Halls, the memory of her death still haunting her. And ever since the Battle of Azanulbizar, she had Frerin by her side, the brother who had been so very much like Thorin, who might never chose to live amongst the elves who betrayed them. Maybe, one day, they would choose to be with their family again, would see their kingdom restored to its former glory. But as Thorin carefully ran his fingers over the clasp he knew that now he had a new family. A family that consisted of his rascal nephews and the three dwarves of his Company that had so far found their way to Valinor. And then there was one, no, now they were two...two elves who didn't seem to take a hint when he growled at them to go away. And two hobbits. Frodo and Bilbo...his burglar. And it was time to lead his family home at long last...
Chapter 11 - On the Road

Chapter Summary

We are truly on the road now...yay!

Chapter Notes

**Translation of Khuzdul:** uzayang - greatest love, ukrâd - greatest heart, âzyungâl - lover (beloved), âzyungel - love of love (greatest love)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

When they reached Tirion that day, Thrór and Thráin bid them farewell. The older dwarf had taken Bilbo aside for a moment and gazed at the hobbit almost sternly. "Take care of my grandson, Master Baggins. His happiness now depends on you and you only. With you by his side, he will be a better king than I ever was. You taught him compassion and kindness when all he had known for long years were suffering and hardship. And you cured him of the sickness that is the curse of our line. Never again will gold or jewels have that hold over him." The dwarf smiled down at him then. "He could not have chosen a more worthy person to share his life with."

Bilbo blushed as always when someone mentioned his *worth*. Part of him still marvelled at the course his life had taken when he met the grumpy dwarven king. It was the same part that could still not quite believe that the attraction he had felt almost immediately was not only reciprocated but that Thorin was willing to share everything in his life with a small hobbit of the Shire. "It is not only like that for Thorin, my king." Thrór cleared his throat, but Bilbo simply shrugged. There was just no way that he would call the former King under the Mountain by his name as the dwarf had insisted. "I...I cannot even fathom life without him. I couldn't go back now, not ever. You think I make him a better ruler, but he makes me want to be the best I could ever be. And he does that with everyone around him. He inspired such loyalty and faith in all members of the Company. That was him, all him."

"So do you, Master Hobbit, so do you. Fíli and Kíli would probably follow you as much as they would Thorin, and my grandson himself..." Thrór sighed, "The darkness of the past eighty years has finally been lifted off of him and there are no words to express my gratitude for it. There were times when I worried for him...even here in Valinor. But he would not speak of the past, would not speak of you. It was my granddaughter's sons that finally enlightened both myself and Thráin. And then we finally understood why Thorin was little more than an empty shell at times. It is you who completes him. And know this, Bilbo Baggins of the Shire. No dwarf in our kingdom will ever begrudge you your place by the King's side. For they have witnessed his heartache and will now see how changed he is."

How did Thrór know that... "I...I am but a hobbit..."
"No, you are the hobbit who helped reclaim Erebor. Who risked the wrath of a King to prevent bloodshed by stealing the Arkenstone. The hobbit who gave up so much to help a group of dwarves he didn't know. We will not soon forget that."

Thrán had joined them at that point and added, "And you have given my son the greatest gift ever, and I will not soon forget that." Bilbo lowered his gaze in embarrassment, but an almost gentle touch to his forearm made him lift his head again. "I would ask this of you, Master Baggins. Watch over my son and grandsons. And make sure that Fíli and Kíli don't get into too much trouble." That was almost asking for the impossible. But Bilbo nodded. "You are part of the House of Durin now, you and your nephew. And within a year, I will be able to call you my son." Thrán's face was altered beyond belief by the beaming smile he then bestowed upon the hobbit. "And I know of nothing that would make me prouder than being able to do just that."

Then both dwarves bowed ever so slightly again and Bilbo had to fight the urge to faint. It simply wouldn't do. "Now, I believe the High King will wish to address this new Company, and my father and I are expected as well, so we will bid you farewell now." Thrán turned, but then, as if as an afterthought added, "Oh and Master Hobbit, it can grow quite chilly up in the mountains. You may want to wear a cloak...I'm sure my son can assist with that." And if knowing glances were exchanged between the two dwarves, Bilbo could not discern their meaning.

"Farewell for now, Bilbo Baggins. I do not doubt that we will meet again soon." And then Thrór was gone as well and Bilbo walked back to where the rest of the Company was waiting, still awed by just how accepting the two dwarf lords were of him. "Maybe you aren't just a simple hobbit after all? Because if you were, how could you have possibly won the heart of a king?"

Of the very king who now held out his hand to him and pulled him close. "Are you ready to meet the king of all the pointy-ears?" Bilbo snorted at that and raised his hand to his own ears. "Oh, forgive me, almost all of the pointy-ears in Valinor. I'm still hoping that he changed his mind about the two elves, but knowing Turgon, I'm afraid he won't do me that particular favour. For some reason I think the High King will be glad to see the backs of Ecthelion and Glorfindel..."

Thorin might have elaborated more, but at that moment a group of dark-haired elves appeared amongst them, led by a tall male wearing a golden circlet upon his brow. The High King himself. And he was smiling. At Bilbo! "Master Baggins, finally we meet." Then he gave a curt nod to Thrór, "Everything is ready, and trade should be picking up as well now that you will begin construction of the mines. We will be sending our craftsmen to the Mountain within the month." Thorin nodded. "Lord Elrond has expressed an interest in the settlement," Bilbo could feel the dwarf king tense beside him, "I believe he thinks there is reason for you both to make amends...and he also wishes to be near his hobbit friend." Once again he smiled at Bilbo. "I foresee this to be the beginning of more than just a coexistence, King Thorin, something that I for one would welcome...even though some of my kind may be opposed to the very idea."

Was Turgon suggesting... "Erebor would be honoured to call Tirion its ally." And did Thorin... Bilbo pinched himself. Surely this was not possible. "And we will be happy to send some of our surveyors to Nargothrond once the plans of our mines have been finalised."

"I shall send word to Finrod." Turgon bowed ever so slightly, but Bilbo could tell that Thorin was beyond surprised. The tall elf then turned back to Bilbo, "And I hope that we will be able to talk next time we meet, Master Baggins. I have heard much about you from the Lords Elrond and Glorfindel, and from your nephew..." Frodo had spoken to the High King?! "For now though I have to leave you. Farewell, and may your journey be safe and swift." Then he added with a grin...a grin, "And if the Lord of the Fountain gets too troublesome for you, feel free to throw him off a cliff." Then he
turned away and was gone.

Bilbo simply stared after him before rounding on the dwarf next to him, "You seem to be getting along quite well with the people you claim to hate, Master Oakenshield. I was worried that you only put up with them for my sake, but..."

"Turgon is unlike any elf I met in Middle-earth. He thinks of us as his equals, if not in height then in everything else. He's said as much to me when I first met him. Granted, back then I did not feel like cooperating with him very much. It took Ecthelion years of whittling down my false pride by insinuating himself into the planning of our new realm and making sure I knew just how helpful the elves were to us. Turgon is nothing like Thranduil, which can't be said of Thingol. I met him once and, trust me, if I never meet him again, it will be too soon." Thorin linked their fingers together and lowered his eyes to gaze at their locked hands. "It is true that in the beginning the only reason I, as you phrased it, put up with them was because there was that ever so slight possibility of being given a second chance with you. But since then I've seen the error in my ways. They were our allies before, and so they shall be again."

And maybe they would be more in due course. With Elrond as close as Bilbo imagined, there would be many chances to interact with the elf lord, many chances to move beyond the misconceptions and misgivings of the past. But for now he simply kissed Thorin and whispered, "And here I thought dwarves were too stubborn to see their own folly." The dwarven king huffed at that, but Bilbo silenced him with another kiss. "I am so very proud of you. And I love you, more than I will ever be able to express." He could see Kíli approach and quickly pulled himself away from his betrothed. "I fear we are holding up the Company, so we may have to continue this conversation later..." Thorin chuckled as they joined everyone and they set out yet again, going north and west.

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Thráin had been right. It was getting colder and once again Bilbo wished he had taken up Thorin's offer of a cloak for the day's ride. But no, he was going to be fine with his coat, thank you very much. It had been enough in the Misty Mountains, it would be enough here. But maybe he could ask when they stopped for the night. "Uncle..." That was Fíli. "I think we should seek shelter. Those clouds look rather threatening and it would be foolish to be caught out in a thunderstorm in this terrain." Bilbo could only agree with that. The terrain Fíli had referred to was very similar to the Misty Mountains and the hobbit could only recall too well how fun the thunderstorm there had been. It was one thing to be cold, but quite another to be cold and wet. It was just a shame he couldn't stop to pick some of the wild chives and parsley...the fresh herbs would make their dinner so much nicer.

"Agreed. Scout ahead you two and find a suitable spot. Big enough for the tents mind you, I don't think the idea of spending a night out in the rain is appealing to our elven friends." Thorin smirked at Ecthelion and Glorfindel who pretended as if they hadn't heard the insult. By now Bilbo knew that such affronts were said in jest only and he could have sworn that something like a friendship was growing between the dwarven king and the two elf lords. Actually, he was willing to bet that Thorin already thought of Lord Ecthelion as a friend, though obviously he would rather die than admit to it.

It was a little while later that Kíli returned. "There is a clearing just up ahead. Big enough for all the tents and the ponies and horses. Fíli stayed behind to get a fire going but we will have to hurry if we plan on eating today. The storm is about to break." And indeed the clouds had grown even darker urging everyone to move faster. Once the clearing had been reached, Fíli and Kíli made short work of setting up the tents while Bilbo fussed over the cooking. The elves had caught some rabbits the previous day and thus tonight there would be another feast, this time of rabbit stew. By the time the ponies and horses had been taken care of, Bilbo was stirring the stew, the big pot emitting the most
The evening was growing colder still, and the knowledge of the imminent thunderstorm made Bilbo shudder. "You are cold, hobbit. I knew it. Let me..." Bilbo half-expected the warmth of Thorin's fur coat around his shoulders, but no. It was a hobbit-sized cloak that was placed around him, must like the one Frodo wore. And then he saw the clasp. "Thorin..." He inhaled, words having escaped him for the moment.

"My father gave it to me...it was my mother's. Befitting the King's chosen one." The design was identical to Thorin's ring and the hobbit's hand went to the place where it hung around his neck. "You are one of the House of Durin now, uzayang, and now everyone will know you to be just that." Bilbo's brow furrowed at the unfamiliar word. "Bilbo, what is it?" And then Thorin smiled, and it was the warmest smile Bilbo had ever seen the dwarf bestow on anyone. His eyes were sparkling as he gently took Bilbo's hand in his. "I think we should think about asking Balin or Ori to teach you our language. For if you knew it...ukrâd." Thorin was enjoying this far too much, so Bilbo prodded him in the ribs. The dwarf just chuckled.

Both heads snapped around when they heard someone...Fíli...clear his throat rather noisily. "I didn't mean to spy on you two, honest, but uncle...you are being unkind to Bilbo. So if you won't tell him, Kíli and I will be all too glad to. And we will not only translate, but also give a running commentary..."

"That won't be necessary," Thorin all but growled at his nephew. "But as you're here anyway, make yourselves useful and stir the lovely dinner Bilbo has prepared for us. We will be back shortly." With that, he dragged the startled hobbit to his feet and into their tent. Thorin's nephews would pay for their snickering, Bilbo was sure of that. Thorin turned to Bilbo in the dim twilight and the hobbit shivered at the gentleness in Thorin's eyes. "I have never known anyone with a greater heart, so you are ukrâd, the greatest heart. And you are my greatest love...uzayang."

And just as Thorin was about to initiate another kiss, Balin coughed rather noisily outside the tent. "And while this is really and truly romantic, we are all hungry and those clouds look like they mean business. I don't think watered-down stew will be nearly as nice as...you know...the original version of it. So would you two mind terribly if I asked you to join us and..." Thorin opened the tent flaps at that point, staring down at his old friend and tutor. But Balin didn't flinch. "You can't scare me, laddie. Not after what I've just heard. You should beg Aulë for mercy so I don't accidentally let some of those things slip to my dearest brother when he joins us..." Valar, Balin was blackmailing Thorin, and apparently was succeeding as the dwarf king merely glared for a moment longer before pulling
Bilbo along with him towards the fire.

They were just in time. Half an hour after they were finished with dinner their fire had been extinguished by the downpour and everyone had fled into their respective tents. Thunder could be heard, and lighting made the camp appear bright as day for brief moments. But for some reason Thorin seemed to like the turn of events. He had already been lying on his bedroll when Bilbo entered the tent having been kept behind by Balin who offered his services for Khuzdul lessons. With a feral growl, Thorin had pulled the startled hobbit on top of himself and proceeded to kiss him within an inch of his life. "It's been a week, my betrothed, a week! And in this weather, no one will hear you moan my name, or cry out as I make you come undone..." And cry out Bilbo did...several times.

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The sound of happy chattering woke Thorin the next morning and, finding Bilbo gone, the dwarf quickly donned his garments and left the tent. The sun had barely risen but if they set out soon, they might be able to see Erebor come evening. And Thorin longed for nothing more than to show Bilbo, show his hobbit their new home. It would still take another week to reach the mountain, but soon they'd be there. Home. Though aren't you home wherever he is? That was true. And that was when he noticed that the hobbit was nowhere to be seen. "Where's Bilbo?"

Balin shrugged, "He went to find some herbs. Said he saw them yesterday before we stopped. Should be back soon." Thorin was already halfway through the camp following the trail they had come the previous day when the older dwarf called after him, "And please, whatever you do, be quiet this time. The thunder muffled most, but not all sounds of your nightly activities..." He chuckled and went back to his cram. Dear Aulë, Bilbo would kill him if he ever found out. But maybe, just maybe he could prevent that from happening. Even if it involved bribery. Thorin Oakenshield was not above that, not where Bilbo's peace of mind was concerned. And his own for that matter.

He had only walked for ten minutes when he found the site of the mudslide...the very recent mudslide. And his heart stopped in his chest. There, a few feet away from him, lay Bilbo. The hobbit had obviously noticed what was about to happen to the hillside and had tried to get away. Only his foot had been caught in the root of a tree and he had fallen to the ground. Thorin rushed to Bilbo's lifeless body to find that he had struck his head, hard. There was blood on the rock under his head, and blood on the hobbit's temple. "Dear Aulë, no... Bilbo..." And as he gathered the small form to him, he murmured over and over, "Come back to me, Bilbo...don't leave me..."

Chapter End Notes

Um...please don't hate me? And if you kill me I can't post anything else, which might be counterproductive :P
Chapter 12 - Waiting

Um, I'm not so sorry? But I would like to thank everyone for the kudos, comments, subscribing and generally reading. I'm confident this chapter will crack the 6k hits, so yay!

**Translation of Elvish:** Noro lim - run fast (ride fast), Mellonen - my friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

Whenever someone asked Thorin later, he couldn't recall how he had returned to the camp. One moment he was on his knees by Bilbo's side, the next he was stumbling almost blindly into the camp. The Company were laughing at something Balin said, and it was Ecthelion who commented, loudly, "Well, it looks like an early start is out of the question, Master Dwarf. Clearly Thorin has exhausted our dearest hobbit to such an extent he now has to carry him." Balin and both elves chuckled, Ori put a comforting hand on Frodo's shoulder and his nephews...

"What happened?" It was Kíli who first noticed that something was wrong, and it was Kíli who rushed over to Thorin's side. "Bilbo?" And then he saw the crusted blood on Bilbo's temple. "No...what...what happened? Uncle?"

"I need to lay him down. Out of my way..." Thorin rasped, and Kíli all but ran towards the tent Bilbo had shared with the dwarven king to open the tent flaps. "He needs rest...he simply needs to rest." *You wish it were so, don't you? You would lay down your life to make him open his eyes.* And as he lowered his precious burden onto the bedroll, the bedroll they had shared throughout their journey, where only last night they had shared... Thorin blinked, furious at himself. He would not break down! He had to be strong, for Bilbo.

"Thorin...what happened?" That was Balin, Frodo standing beside him. "Did he..."

"How could you all just let him run off on his own?! You know how treacherous the mountains can be! How could you, Balin?!!" Thorin was shouting the last, but Balin didn't back down, didn't look away. Instead he knelt down next to his king and put his arm around Thorin's shoulders. "He won't wake... Why won't he wake?" Thorin whispered. "I...I found him. He had tripped over a root and... He fell and his head..." he swallowed and reached out to gently stroke Bilbo's face, "He hit a rock."

Suddenly Frodo was there as well, wrapping his arms around the king, holding on tightly. "He will be fine. He has to be fine!"

It was hard for Thorin to rouse himself. But as long as he was busying himself, he wouldn't have to face the possibility of... *No! Don't even think of that. He will be fine.* "Stay with him," he told Frodo and then pushed Balin out of the tent. "Fíli, Kíli. Ride ahead and fetch Óin. Tell them to send a waggon..." Fíli was already readying his pony, but Kíli simply stood next to the tent and didn't move. "Do it now!"
"No," Kili whispered.

"What? Kili this is not the time to argue with me..." Thorin was getting dangerously close to losing his temper.

"No, I will not leave him, Thorin. I won't go." And before Thorin could say another word, Kili ducked into the tent.

"I...I can go with Fili," Ori volunteered. "I can arrange for the waggon to be sent back as a matter of urgency and... I can go." Thorin knew that everyone was looking at him to see how he would react. Fili especially seemed beyond worried. Not surprising considering Kili's actions. But Thorin simply nodded. "We will be as fast as we can possibly be, my King..."

Fili had finished his preparations by then and was now walking over to his uncle. "Ori is right, Thorin. We will return with aid before you even know it." And then he pulled the older dwarf into a hug. "I don't know what's gotten into Kili, but don't be too hard on him. I think he's doing a great job of that himself already." Thorin didn't reply, but wrapped his arms around his nephew and held him tightly. "He will be fine. Bilbo will be fine. He's fought wargs and orcs and massive spiders. He's played at riddles with a dragon, Uncle. He will be fine." Then Fili pulled back and motioned for Ori to hurry.

The two elves who so far had been standing aside, talking amongst themselves, were now approaching Thorin. "Allow me to take a look at Master Baggins," Glorfindel said. "I might not be a healer like Lord Elrond, but I may be able to do...something."

Thorin nodded towards the tent, but as Glorfindel started towards it, the dwarf reached for the elf's wrist and held it in a viselike grip. "Don't hurt him. Whatever you do, don't hurt him."

The Elda smiled and nodded, "You have my word, Master Oakenshield." Then he entered the tent and Thorin was left to stand just inside the entrance. "He is out cold, but his breathing is even. If there is a fracture, it is not..." He trailed off, but Thorin knew what Glorfindel had been about to say. Fatal, it wasn't fatal. "He also seems to have broken his ankle, and this I can do something about. But..." he turned towards Ecthelion, who was standing next to Thorin. "You have to return to Tirion and get my Lord Elrond. He will know what to do if Bilbo does not wake within a few days." With a worried look at the hobbit on the bedroll he added, "Noro lim, mellonen, noro lim." Thorin didn't know what it meant, but Ecthelion simply nodded, bowed to the dwarf king and quickly readied his horse. Within minutes he was gone, as were Fili and Ori.

A few hours later Thorin was sitting on a log near the rekindled fire, staring into the flames. He would not think of what might happen, could not think of it. He would be strong, if not for himself, then for Bilbo and the remainder of his Company. Bilbo... He had felt so small and vulnerable in his arms, light as a feather...almost unreal. Surely the Valar couldn't be this cruel...to return Bilbo to him, the missing part of his soul, only to rip the hobbit away from him again after only a few weeks. His eyes were stinging again, and once more he blinked away the unshed tears angrily. Bilbo would be fine and there was no reason for tears.

"Uncle?" Kili hadn't spoken since he had all but defied Thorin. He hadn't left Bilbo's side...until now. Fear closed around Thorin's heart like an icy hand, squeezing tightly. Bilbo... "This is my fault. If I had thought to bring more herbs, Bilbo wouldn't have gone off. He wouldn't..." His nephew's voice was breaking, and there were tears in those dark brown eyes. "I should have followed him, to make sure he was safe... It's my fault..."
That was ludicrous. How could Kíli even think such a thing?! "Sit with me." The young dwarf complied but would not catch Thorin's eye. "This isn't your fault, Kíli. Bilbo went in search for those herbs because he saw them yesterday, not because you didn't think to bring any. You did well preparing this journey...and I am proud of you." Thorin reached out to touch the younger dwarf, but Kíli flinched away. "And Bilbo is proud of you. If he could see you now..."

"He...he can't leave us. He can't go..." And with that, Kíli broke down. This time he didn't move away as Thorin wrapped his arms around him but buried his face in his uncle's furs. "I love him, Uncle. I love how happy he makes you... He can't leave..." And Thorin could only agree. *Please Aulë, don't let him leave me and go where I can't follow.*

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In the days that followed, it was Balin that took over the lead of their little group, running the day to day duties of keeping the camp as efficient as possible. He was aided almost exclusively by the Lord of the Golden Flower who, after checking on Bilbo every morning, would see to everyone getting fed, even if it meant almost forcing food down both Thorin's and Kíli's throats. Especially the youngest dwarf amongst them had been hit extremely hard by Bilbo's continuing unconsciousness, but Thorin fared hardly any better.

After the initial outburst, their king had withdrawn himself from almost anyone, sitting by the fire most of the day and staring at something only he could see. When someone would approach him, the pain in Thorin's eyes was gutting; clearly he expected news of...the worst kind. And no matter how often Glorfindel assured them all that Bilbo was in a stable condition, that he would wake when his body had healed, it was clear that Thorin was losing hope fast.

Surprisingly, Frodo didn't despair. He had conviction and believed in the healing powers the elves possessed. He himself had been saved by Lord Elrond once, after having been unconscious for days as well. "Bilbo always had a thick skull, he has to have considering all the times he butted heads with Lobelia." But despite his words, the young hobbit's worry was palpable and there was nothing Balin could do to ease his pain. Words were inadequate, or so Balin thought.

Three days after Bilbo's accident, evening found Frodo, Glorfindel and Balin around the fire. Kíli was with Bilbo as always, nothing and no one seemed to be able to tear him from the hobbit's side, and Thorin had wandered off...probably to where he had found Bilbo. Balin had tried to reason with his king, had tried to make Thorin see that he was grieving the loss of something that hadn't been taken from him, that Bilbo was very much alive still, albeit unconscious. But to no avail. Thorin hadn't shouted, hadn't said anything. He had only glanced at Balin, his eyes doing all the talking for him. And Balin began to fear for the king. Before Bilbo's arrival, Thorin had merely existed, but with the hobbit by his side, the dwarf king had been given a new lease of life, and now... What would happen if Bilbo never woke...or worse...

Glorfindel was once again assuring Frodo that his uncle would be fine, that he had seen such prolonged times of unconsciousness before after someone suffered a head injury. "He will wake. His ankle is healing remarkably well, his breathing is even and regular and his heartbeat is strong...stronger than I would have expected in someone so small. He is a fighter, always was. Besides, we are in Valinor. Things are a bit different here than in Arda." And while the elf lord wouldn't elaborate, his words clearly gave Frodo much comfort. Glorfindel's gaze fell on Balin then. "How is he doing, Lord Balin?" The old dwarf only shook his head. "I wish I could reassure him somehow. But I suspect he believes me to simply wish to ease his pain... And maybe I would be the same. If it were Erestor in that tent..."
"I worry about him, and Kili. Neither of them has slept for more than a few hours since it happened, and..." Frodo looked up at Balin, pleadingly. "Is there nothing we can do? Kili is blaming himself for what happened to Bilbo, and no matter what Thorin or I tell him, he just won't believe us. I know how headstrong Bilbo can be, he would have gone to get those herbs even if Kili had brought the entire cottage kitchen with us." The young hobbit sighed. "But Kili won't listen to me. He was entrusted with organising our journey, and he thinks he's failed us all. And he loves Bilbo...I never knew how much my uncle meant to the Company... The thought of being responsible for Bilbo getting hurt..."

"It was already telling that he let Fili go on without him. They were never apart for more than a few hours, if that. And now..." Balin gazed at the fire, the flames flickering merely, not caring for the worries of dwarves, hobbits or elves. "Master Baggins was...he was the heart of our Company, Frodo. Especially after he'd saved Thorin's life. None of us could believe that this small creature was willing to face down the pale orc, to put himself between certain death and Thorin... But he did. And we all saw him in a different light after it. But Thorin...the change in him was palpable, it was as if some of the weight on his shoulders had been lifted and he allowed himself one of the simplest of pleasures. He allowed himself to love and be loved in turn. Allowed himself to be happy. Which in turn made Bilbo part of their family in the eyes of Fili and Kili. Kili had been seeking out my brother's advice until then for...pretty much anything. But after...it was Bilbo he turned to." And now the young dwarf couldn't do so. Seeing those sad brown eyes had nearly broken Balin's heart.

"I do not believe anything we say or do will change how young Kili feels, and what he thinks of himself. I think there is only one person who can bring him back to us, who can ease Kili's suffering. And unfortunately he is unconscious at present." Glorfindel smiled sadly. "I do not doubt that I would have been the same...had I survived the fall of Gondolin. I should have been there by Ecthelion's side when he faced down Gothmog. And it does not matter that I was exactly where I was needed, I still blamed myself. 'Thel...he was livid when he figured it out. I think he even scared Námo lashing out at me as he did. But no one else could have done it.

"So there is nothing we can do?" Frodo asked the blond elf, who smiled ruefully before shaking his head.

"All we can do is wait, Master Frodo. For Bilbo to wake...for Lord Elrond to arrive..." he sighed and added in a whisper, "At least we are not waiting for the thing both Thorin and Kili seem to be expecting. Yavanna and Aulë...they would not take Bilbo away from Thorin like this. The Valar are not cruel in that way. However, I feel that this was meant to happen, that it somehow is part of their plan..."

"And how, Master Elf, could this possibly be part of anyone's grand plan?" Thorin had returned to the camp unbeknownst to the three companions and was now glaring daggers at the Elda. "Why would anyone want to hurt Bilbo for some stupid plan?! Tell me this, Lord of the Golden Flower, if it was your lover in that tent, would you suffer anyone saying such a thing? Would you let them keep their tongue?" Glorfindel had risen to his feet, but despite the difference in height, it still seemed as if Thorin was towering over the elf. "Explain to me, oh wise Elda, what I have done to displease the Valar so much that they will not let me have at least this happiness? If we are destined as Bilbo believes, then why do they continuously tear us apart? Why did they allow for the gold-lust to cloud my better judgement, why did they allow the Arkenstone to seem more important than the hobbit I loved? Why?!"

By the end, Thorin's hand was resting on the hilt of Orcrist and he was standing dangerously close to Glorfindel. But the elf only reached out to touch Thorin's shoulder. "I do not know, my friend. What
I do know though is this. There are but a few in Eä who would have borne this as you and Master Baggins have. You have faced such hardships together, and apart, and still you held on to the love you share. You are stronger than many of my kin, those whose passions swept them away and drowned them. Your feelings...they give you strength. I saw it, more than my Lord Elrond did, in those years Bilbo lived amongst us. It was not only the One Ring that kept him alive through all these lonely years, Master Oakenshield. It was his love for you." And then he added with a warm smile, "And it is that love that will keep him alive now as well."

Thorin turned to look at the tent. "I hope you are right...I hope you are right." The previous anger had been washed away by sorrow more profound than it had ever been. Balin had seen Thorin like this before, longing with all his heart for their burglar. But back then, Bilbo had been beyond reach, living out his days in Arda. Now though he was near, just a few meters away, but just as far as he had ever been.

And as Thorin slumped down on the log next to Balin, the older dwarf's arm went around his king's shoulder almost of its own volition. "Listen to Lord Glorfindel, laddie. Bilbo will be good as new soon, and he will be less than amused to find that you've been fretting so much." And if Balin remembered the hobbit correctly, Bilbo would be that, and more. "He didn't leave you when you told him he wasn't part of the Company, when you all but told him to just go back home. Why would he leave you now? I don't believe Master Baggins is a fool, Thorin, and it would be beyond foolish of him to depart now." Please, Aulë, help them through this. And bring Bilbo back to us all...

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Inside the tent, Kíli was sitting by Bilbo's side, the hobbit's hand clutched in his own. This was his fault, and it didn't matter that everyone thought he was being an idiot for thinking so. He should have brought more herbs, he knew after all how much hobbits loved their herbs. And he should have insisted on accompanying the hobbit. No matter how ill at ease he had been around Bilbo that morning after hearing... And now he wished he could hear his uncle and Bilbo in the throes of passion once more. He would give everything to be able to stumble into a clearing to find them in each other's arms...to see Bilbo lower his eyes in embarrassment at having been caught. But those eyes wouldn't open, and as Kíli pressed a kiss to Bilbo's knuckles, more tears started to fall from the dwarf's eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 13 - Don't Leave Me

Chapter Summary

Elrond to the rescue...or something like that ;)

Chapter Notes

I've been asked before to explain the nature of Valinor, especially in terms to death and rebirth. I think Elrond's words in this chapter sum it up quite nicely.

Edit: This chapter ties in with my very sad songfic The Dance as far as the description of the Battle of the Five Armies is concerned. In the songfic, you get Bilbo's point of view whereas in this chapter, you get Thorin's. So if you haven't read it yet, do so (after all, you know that all will be well in the end).

Also, a big thank you to everyone who commented or left kudos so far. You guys, and of course my Thorin and Bilbo muses, keep me going. And more than 6k hits! Wahoo!

Translation of Khuzdul: uzayang - greatest love, ughvashâ - greatest treasure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

They had reached the mountain two weeks after Bilbo had fallen. Óin and the rest of the healers had done all they could, but now there was nothing but to wait. Bilbo would wake once he was ready, Óin had assured Thorin, but the King of Erebor was slowly losing what remained of his hope. While they had been encamped and later on the road once more, Thorin had been able to somehow deny the gravity of the situation to himself. Bilbo was simply resting. But now they had reached Erebor and the fact that the hobbit wasn't there to share the joy of coming home with Thorin was painfully obvious. Yes, Bilbo was alive, but he still was far away beyond reach. And Thorin missed his betrothed more than he thought possible; missed his gentle touch, the sparkle in his beautiful grey eyes, the sound of his voice... And the hope to have that again was fading fast.

Until, three days after they themselves had arrived, the sound of approaching horses roused Thorin from Bilbo's bedside. "This may not be the best of times for us to meet again, King Thorin, but I am glad to see you nonetheless." Lord Elrond smiled as he handed his reins over to Ecthelion. "Lead me to our patient." With a glance at Thorin, he added, "Do not worry, Master Oakenshield. I have known Bilbo for a long time now, and I know he will be well. You have my word." The last sparked something within Thorin. Elrond had given his word, and Thorin desperately wanted to trust in that, wanted to believe that Bilbo would indeed be well.

Slowly he followed the elven lord into the large tent that had been set up in a hollow a few miles away from the main gates of Erebor. Óin had decreed that Bilbo would need fresh air so he hadn't been taken into the infirmary but an infirmary had been brought to the hobbit. There, on a field bed,
lay the most precious thing in Eä, his betrothed. His chest was rising and falling and his cheeks were their usual rosy red. He looked to be asleep only, as if he would wake any moment. But Thorin knew that it was no normal sleep, that those eyes wouldn't open...

"The ankle is healing nicely, Glorfindel did well. And there are no obvious injuries beyond that." The elf's fingers gently touched Bilbo's temple, and he sighed...though if it was a sigh of relief or worry, Thorin did not know. "There is no fracture. However, he does have a concussion...which is probably the reason he has remained unconscious. The swelling had to recede..." He turned to face Kíli who, as always, was sitting on the floor near the end of Bilbo's bed. "Master Kíli, I understand Master Óin has been taking care of Bilbo?" Kíli nodded. "Would you be so kind to get him to come here? I would speak with him..." And for the first time in weeks, Thorin's young nephew jumped to his feet and left Bilbo's side. "I sense much grief and pain in him, Master Oakenshield. And in you..."

Thorin had moved around the bed and was now gently stroking the back of Bilbo's hand. "I cannot lose him... Whatever it is you need, it will be yours." Elrond simply bestowed a rueful smile on the dwarf. "And I...I do regret how I behaved at our last meeting. And not only because my behaviour seems to have cost us all a nice banquet." The smile slipped into a grin, not a mocking one though. "I have since then learned that not all elves are the same, that some are trustworthy and will not betray alliances once they are forged. And even the gravest insults may lead to the greatest gift..."

"You speak of Thranduil and his son, do you not?" Thorin nodded. "Bilbo told me...of both your, and I quote your betrothed, 'disgraceful behaviour towards the elven king' and the battle...and how it was the Greenwood prince who..." Elrond was interrupted by the arrival of Óin and Kíli. "Ah, Master Óin. I require your help with a few things." Then the elf rounded on both Kíli and Thorin. "As for you two, I would ask you to leave us for a while. Have something to eat and stretch your legs. We will send for you when we are done." Óin nodded in agreement and all but shoved the two dwarves in question out of the tent. Kíli sighed and whispered something to his uncle, but Thorin's thoughts were elsewhere...on a battlefield far to the east.

Then (2941 T.A.)

The orc toppled over, his head rolling away. The Goblin Cleaver had once again done its name justice. There was carnage all around Thorin, but at least the dwarves were now fighting alongside the men of Esgaroth and the accursed woodelves, not against them. He had seen Dwalin break the neck of a goblin who was about to gut one of Bard's followers, and had seen an elf fall to a cruel orc axe that had been about to split Ori's skull. An elf giving his live for a dwarf? Unthinkable. And yet he had seen it.

Then he heard it...the growl of a white warg that haunted him in his nightmares. He turned, brandishing Orcrist. There he was. Azog. The defiler smiled cruelly and Thorin realised that he was surrounded. "Thorin, son of Thráin...this battlefield shall be your grave..." The common tongue sounded foreign coming from the pale orc, it sounded almost savage and more like the Orcish tongue than Westron. "And this time, there will be no halfling to save you, this time you're mine!" Bilbo! How did he know about Bilbo? "And when I'm done with you, Dwarf King, I will find your little guardian...and I might keep him." No! Not that. And some of Thorin's feelings seemed to be apparent because Azog suddenly sneered, "Or maybe I should make you watch...

He turned to a few of the orcs and rasped an order at them. They smirked before slipping away. However, in doing so, Azog had weakened his own position significantly. With a battle-cry of
"Khazâd ai-mênu!" Thorin swirled around, Orcrist slashing at orcs and wargs. By the time Azog had noticed what was happening, the rest of the orcs were dead or dying. And he slunk back into the mayhem of the battle, hatred in his watery eyes and the promise that he would be back to see the death of Thorin Oakenshield. "Not if I kill you first, you filth," Thorin growled to himself before joining Dwalin as he was hacking his way through some Misty Mountain goblins.

It was hours later, and the Great Eagles had joined the battle, when Thorin saw the pale orc again. Only, he didn't. He was just turning after having decapitated another Gundabad orc when he saw...Bilbo. No! What is he doing here? He should be back in Esgaroth, safe and sound and as far away from you as possible. He tried to prevent this bloodshed and you... He was standing over the dead body of a goblin, dark blood staining the blade of his small elven sword and to Thorin, he was the epitome of a warrior. His hobbit... No, he no longer deserved to call Bilbo that. Not after what he had done. Then Bilbo's eyes caught his and... Oh Aulë! The pain in their grey depths, but also... After all you've done to him, he still loves you. He still hopes...

Thorin took a few steps towards the hobbit, eyes never leaving Bilbo's. His heart was racing in his chest, and not because he was exhausted by the long hours of fighting. Did he dare hope? A small smile light up Bilbo's face and Thorin's eyes were suddenly stinging with unshed tears. In all the devastation that surrounded them, they had found each other again. And Bilbo seemed to be willing to forgive...

He was only a few steps away from the hobbit when he saw Azog... The pale orc was closer to Bilbo than Thorin himself, too close. His mace was raised in preparation of the strike that would surely shatter the halfling's skull and take Bilbo away from the king forever. "Your little pet first, and then you." Bilbo spun around just as Azog brought down his arm to land the killing blow. One second, Thorin was sure he would lose the greatest treasure he had ever known, the next... Bilbo was gone, and Azog had dropped the mace, an arrow piercing his wrist. An elven arrow. And more arrows had felled the foul beast Azog had been riding. Out of the corner of his eye, Thorin saw the son of King Thranduil... Legolas?...drawing nearer. He had replaced his bow and was now wielding a sword.

"He is mine," Thorin muttered as he drew closer to the defiler. Was that fear in the orc's eyes? Thorin didn't care. He had threatened Bilbo's life, and Thorin knew that given half a chance, Azog would have proven exactly why he was called Defiler. The thought of that creature touching Bilbo... Now it would never come to pass. "You killed my grandfather, you filth. You swore to eradicate my entire line. You failed!" Azog snarled something, but Thorin didn't care. He raised Orcrist and brought the blade down, severing the pale orc's head from his body. Azog the Defiler was no more. At long last his lust for revenge had been quenched.

But where was Bilbo? Hopefully he had used that magic ring of his and simply run for his life. The elf...Legolas...had reached his side and was staring down at Azog's corpse. "He was a vile creature and I am glad that he has at last met his end." Blue eyes, so much like his father's, met Thorin's. But there was no mockery in them, no disdain, no hatred. Only... concern. "Where did the halfling go? One moment he was there, the next he was gone..."

"I have to find him, I..." Thorin had to make sure that Bilbo was safe. And that you may one day be forgiven. You would lay down your life for him, wouldn't you? His life, and more.

Legolas nodded. "I will help you, King Thorin, if you will allow it. To undo some of the harm my father has caused you." And thus they set out to find a small hobbit in the madness of battle. Little did Thorin know that Azog's son, Bolg, would find his father's corpse only shortly after and that he would vow to avenge him. That before long, Bolg would track Thorin down, that Fili and Kili
would try to defend their uncle, that they would fall. And that, as he was giving Bolg the wound that
killed him, the orc would repay Thorin by shattering his ribcage... That when the battle was done,
Thorin would see Bilbo again, though only for a few, fleeting moments before he joined his nephews
in death.

Now (3021 T.A.)

Daylight was fading away by the time Thorin was called back to Bilbo's tent. Kíli had followed, as
expected, but was now sitting outside, seeking comfort in his brother's embrace. He was still
unwilling to venture further from Bilbo's side than absolutely necessary and thus, it was Fíli who
would find him in the hours of darkness. Thorin had tried to reason with his younger nephew, but he
failed just like Frodo, Glorfindel and Balin had. And slowly he started to believe that only one
person would be able to ease Kíli's heartbreak, and that was Bilbo himself.

The dwarf king was seated by the hobbit's bedside now, his fingers tracing the line of Bilbo's jaw,
his soft cheeks, his forehead. He looked so peaceful; the rising and falling of his chest, the even
sound of his breathing... As if he truly was only asleep. As if Thorin could wake him with a kiss and
a whispered, "Bilbo..." the way he would rouse the hobbit each and every morning since he had
arrived in Valinor. Pressing his lips to Bilbo's forehead, Thorin could feel something fracture within
him and he let go of that tight hold he had on his fears. The sound that was escaping him was
heartrending, and he finally allowed the unshed tears that had been an ever-present companion since
he had found Bilbo all those long days ago to fall.

"Uzayang...please don't...don't leave me." Burying his face in Bilbo's curls, he breathed in the scent
that was *home*, the scent that promised gentle grey eyes and softly whispered words of affection and
love. The scent that he had first noticed on the Carrock and that he craved since the second night
they had spent at Beorn's. "Ughvashâ, please come back to me." His voice was ragged, and every
time he drew a breath, a sound of utter agony escaped his lips...but he was beyond caring. "The
world is darker without you and I don't know how much longer I can hold on. To have lost you once
was more painful than I can ever express...to lose you again..." Better to return to stone. To never
feel again.

"You will not lose him, Thorin Oakenshield." Of course, of all people to walk into the tent, it had to
be Elrond. But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but Bilbo. He was weak, he knew that. A stronger
dwarf would be able to see past his own heartache and rule his kingdom; if not for himself, then for
his people. Thorin couldn't. It was Fíli who made the decisions now, aided by Dáin, and his nephew
proved to be a better leader than Thorin had ever been.

Suddenly a warm hand was on his shoulder, and Thorin glanced up at the elf. Elrond
seemed...concerned. "It is not weakness that makes you wish for him to come back. Love is never
weakness. Thorin..." Gentle hands pulled Thorin from his seat and supported him. "I do not think I
have ever seen a love as strong as that which you share with Master Baggins. You are meant to be
together, and always were. It is not weakness that you place him above and beyond any duty you
have toward your own people." Could the elf read minds? "But understand this...while your fears are
more than understandable, they are for naught. We are in Valinor now where even wounds that
would have been fatal in Arda will eventually heal. And even if someone were to die, eventually
they would be able to return...like the poor souls who were slaughtered at Alqualondë."

Blinking, Thorin tried to process what he had just heard. Bilbo would...he wasn't going to... And
then he saw Elrond smile down at him and part of his soul righted itself, and a darkness lifted off of
"You need to sleep, Master Oakenshield, for he will need your strength as much as you need his." Sleep? How could he find sleep without Bilbo by his side? But once again, Elrond seemed to be reading his very thoughts. "I have arranged for another cot to be brought here. Hold him close, let him feel that you are here with him. And who knows, that alone may be enough to rouse him from his sleep." The elf caught Thorin's gaze, staring at him intently, "Do not forget that love is the greatest treasure of all, and it is stronger than death itself. It was your love for Bilbo that made you hold on after the battle, was it not?" Thorin nodded his agreement. "And it is Bilbo's love for you that will see him through this."

And later, when he returned from his evening meal...Ecthelion had dragged him off not even asking if he was hungry...there was a second cot in the tent, flush against Bilbo's. The hobbit's blanket had been replaced by...the large quilt from the royal apartments. The quilt he had longed to share with Bilbo. Shrugging out of his fur coat, Thorin sat on the edge of his cot to undo the lacings of his boots before removing them along with his socks. The belt was next, followed by his blue tunic and armour. Just like those first nights at Esgaroth, when Bilbo was so sick. You would hold him in your arms as if he was the most precious thing in the world. And he was, he still was.

Slipping under the quilt at last, he gathered the hobbit to him and somehow Bilbo's head came to rest on Thorin's chest as it had then and Thorin could feel every breath his betrothed would take through his thin linen shirt. The dwarf's arms encircled his hobbit's waist, pulling him even closer and it was strange. The last time he had held Bilbo had been when he had carried him back to their camp and the hobbit had felt so very fragile, so small and weak as if he was made of the finest glass. But now...this was his Bilbo. There was the strong heartbeat against his side, the weight of Bilbo's head on his chest, the feel of those hairy feet brushing his ankles... And for the first time since the accident, Thorin did not think of what could be, he simply dreamed of sparkling grey eyes gazing at him lovingly.

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Grey light filtered into the tent, waking Thorin from his slumber. For the first time in weeks, he felt rested. Maybe...maybe the wine Ecthelion had coaxed him into drinking had helped with that. But Thorin knew that it was mostly the closeness to Bilbo that had done the trick. His still sleep-muddled brain registered the familiar warmth of the hobbit next to him, felt the halfling's hand caress his cheek. Wait a moment...

His mind was suddenly very clear, all vestiges of sleep dissipating. Tipping his head downward, he gasped. Grey eyes caught his and held his gaze, grey eyes that were open and filled with such joy and love and happiness. Thorin's fingers brushed the hobbit's temple and it was warm and whole and there was no more blood staining his fingertips. And Bilbo's hands tangled in the dwarf's hair, pulling his head further down until they were just a breath away from each other. Thorin closed the gap and sighed into the kiss. And if his cheeks were suddenly stained with tears, he didn't mind. All that mattered was the precious creature in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings, I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 14 - Awake

Chapter Summary

He is awake again, however that only solves one problem we are facing at the moment...

Chapter Notes

As always, thanks for the comments, kudos and stuffs :) You guys are awesome!

Translation of Khuzdul: AZYUNGEL - love of love (greatest love), UKRÂD - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

Bilbo felt like waking from a long sleep, as if his eyelids had almost forgotten how to open. They felt heavier than they had any right to, but the hobbit persevered and forced them to move. It was weird...he remembered the mudslide, remembered tripping... Why was he lying on a bed? Not that he minded waking up next to the furnace that was Thorin, but... He could feel the dwarf stir and moved his hand from the broad chest it was resting on to Thorin's cheek. The skin was warm and soft under his fingers and the beard tickled his sensitive fingertips. How he had longed to reach out and touch...caress...during the first part of their journey all those years ago. And now nothing would part them again.

Thorin's eyelids fluttered open and he gazed down at Bilbo with such wonder in his eyes, such relief...as if he was waking from a nightmare. Calloused fingers were gently touching the hobbit's temple then, as if afraid to break the thinnest of glass. And Bilbo's hands found their way into the dwarf's hair, pulling him near, and Thorin closed the gap, sighing into the tender kiss as if it had been the longest of times since the last time they had kissed. Bilbo felt the ragged sobs before his mind fully processed the wetness against his cheeks. Why is he crying? Dear Valar, please not another nightmare. Why didn't he wake me? Bilbo broke the kiss and pushed himself up on his elbows...and that small movement made him feel more exhausted than he had thought possible. What was wrong with him?

Leaning in, he kissed Thorin's tears away and tried to smile encouragingly, but he knew he failed at both. The tears kept coming, and judging by the way the king's arms pulled him as close as possible... "AZYUNGEL...what is wrong? Please tell me, Thorin..." Why was his voice so raspy? It felt almost as if he hadn't used it for a while. And where did the bed and quilt come from? And the tent! Oh... "I... How long, Thorin? How long was I unconscious?" How long did he think he had lost you yet again? That thought made him feel cold, made his heart clench in his chest. The pain in those blue orbs nearly took his breath away. What else could he do but to caress Thorin's face, knowing full well that nothing he did now would be able to take the agony away...the agony the dwarf had felt for...however long Bilbo had been unconscious.
"It's been...two weeks and four days since I found you..." Oh no. "I...I thought you dead for a second, but then I felt you breathing, and it's been my lifeline ever since. As long as you were breathing, there was hope." Thorin lowered his gaze, "Though I was beginning to lose... Bilbo, I don't know how I survived those eighty years without you, I know that I couldn't...not now. Not after learning that I always had your love, your forgiveness...If I were to lose you now, it would be the end of me." Then his eyes met the hobbit's again, and suddenly there was a sparkle in them, and despite the tears that were still falling, a smile was on his lips. "But I won't...will never lose you. Not here. Or so Lord Elrond assured me. Whatever...whatever happens, we would always find our way back to the other."

Elrond was here? And more to the point, Thorin had been listening to the elf lord?! "I'm...sorry I put you through this, but... Maybe this was all part of the plan of whoever it is that brought us together again, brought us together in the first place. As it seemingly made you talk to Lord Elrond and acknowledge him as the friend he is and...it made you stop seeing him as the enemy." Thorin shrugged. "He showed me nothing but kindness, Thorin...and he knew, I'm sure he knew. Even before we did..."

"He did... I don't know how much he knew of the future, but he knew that I loved you. And that you felt the same." Thorin cleared his throat, his voice becoming stronger with every word he said, "I was a fool to ever think of love as a weakness, and of duty as more important. Had I listened to my heart...I would have made you mine before we ever reached Rivendell. I would have trusted you and believed in you when you voiced your concerns about...my obsession with the Arkenstone." The dwarf's hands closed around Bilbo's wrists, prying them away from his face. Sitting up, he pulled the hobbit close, "Always I put duty before family, before my own feelings. And instead of lending me strength, it weakened me. It made me susceptible to the gold-lust, it brought doom upon me. Gandalf was right. My pride was my downfall. And it would have been so easy to..."

"And yet your pride is part of the reason I fell in love with you, Thorin Oakenshield." He placed a kiss on Thorin's skin. "It is a part of you...as is your heart. You need both, my king. An iron fist and a compassionate touch. As long as your pride won't stop you from listening to others..." Thorin smiled ruefully. Was his mind going back to that day again, to the days that went before? "Don't dwell on the past, Thorin. You cannot hope to change it, think of the future...the future that we will be sharing. A future where you will hopefully be able to let go of past resentments and, judging by your words concerning Lord Elrond, you're already doing so..."

Thorin sighed, "I wish the Valar had found another way to drive home that point. A way that didn't involve you getting hurt..." And this time Bilbo knew that, yes, he was recalling the day on the battlements, but there was no pain in Thorin's eyes, but wistfulness. "I promise that I will listen, even if I you are completely ridiculous. I will listen. And once you are well enough, once your strength has returned, I will take you out on the walls and replace those memories if I may..." The hobbit nodded mutely, fighting the tears that now threatened to spill from his eyes. "And I will ask Balin to create a little herb garden for you on the balcony of the Royal Apartments. So you won't have to go wandering off again..." There was a dangerous gleam in the dwarf's eyes, heralding something that Bilbo would have to address and soon.

But right now, the hobbit didn't have the energy to argue and could only agree with Thorin about having to regain his strength. His stomach, it seemed, was wholeheartedly agreeing with that. "Oh dear..." Thorin chuckled as he released the hobbit and got out of the bed. "I don't think I've ever been so hungry in all my life. Not even in Mirkwood..." And those days had been miserable. "I was right after all. As soon as I join Thorin and Company on a little journey, I'll have to go without my seven meals a day. I just never thought I would have to go without any food whatsoever." He grinned at
the dwarf before blushing when his stomach gave another rumble.

"I will go and see what I can get for you..." He opened the tent flaps and froze. "Oh Kíli..." Weak as he was, the tone of Thorin's voice made Bilbo stumble to his feet, the quilt around his shoulders. And when he got to Thorin's side he saw... Kíli sitting on the grass outside the tent, knees drawn up to his chest in an attempt to stay somewhat warm during the night. He was sleeping, but the hobbit could tell that it wasn't a restful sleep. "He...he blames himself for what happened, Bilbo. And we tried, I...I tried as best as I could, but I was so worried myself... He wouldn't listen, ukrâd." Why would Kíli... "He thinks if he had packed more herbs for you, or if he had joined you that morning... He stayed behind with us, wouldn't leave your side, while Fíli rode ahead to fetch help." Kíli... "Please," Thorin's eyes were pleading, "try to speak to him... While I get something to eat and let Óin and Elrond know that you're finally awake." Pressing his lips to the hobbit's forehead, Thorin whispered, "Thank you for coming back to me. I love you, ukrâd, I love you."

Those words alone were almost enough to reduce Bilbo to weeping. And Thorin's eyes... "I love you, Thorin Oakenshield. How could I not come back to you? When you hold my heart in your hands..." Smiling, the dwarf stepped away from Bilbo and, after squeezing the hobbit's hand, he turned and walked towards one of the other tents that stood clustered together in a small clearing. Bilbo sank to his knees next to Kíli and, taking the quilt off his shoulders, wrapped it around the sleeping dwarf. Who started awake the moment Bilbo touched him. "Shhhh, dear one, it's alright. It's all alright again."

Startled brown eyes met his and Kíli gasped. "B...Bilbo?" And then those eyes were brimming with tears and Bilbo wrapped his arms around the young dwarf as he was shaking with broken sobs. "I...I'm so sorry. So sorry, Bilbo... It's all my..."

"It's not your fault, Kíli! Never your fault." But Kíli only shook his head.

"It is... I should have...brought more herbs for you. I should have...gone to collect them for you. I should have...come with you. I failed you..." Bilbo's heart already felt as if it had been pierced, but it was the next thing Kíli said that made Bilbo feel as if he were bleeding out. "I failed you just like I did Thorin... I wasn't strong enough to defend him. He still died... And if he hadn't, if he hadn't fallen, you could have been together...you could..." Had he always been plagued by this guilt, or had it been Bilbo's accident that brought it all to the fore?

"Kíli! You gave your life for Thorin, your life! You didn't fail him, and you didn't fail me, either. It's not your fault that I didn't see the root sticking out of the mud and... It's not your fault." He held tightly onto the dwarf and wondered how he could make Kíli see things for what they really were, how he could help him. "It's not your fault, Kíli, it's not your fault..." he whispered over and over again. And it was like this that Fíli and Thorin found them.

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The smile on Thorin's face had told Fíli exactly what had happened before his uncle and king could even open his mouth to speak. "He's awake?" A merely rhetorical question, the answer was there in the blue pools that sparkled with happiness. "By Aulê, at last! How is he? Aside from terribly weak I would imagine?"

"He is still our burglar, and still very much a hobbit. Complaining that going on a journey with us dwarves was always going to leave him close to starvation..." Thorin's smile had turned wistful, a frown slowly replacing it altogether. "He is with Kíli now. I hope..." Kíli. His brother had been withdrawn when they had finally reached the slopes of the mountain and wouldn't leave Bilbo's side.
for more than a few moments here and there. He was guilt-ridden and no matter what Fíli and Thorin, and even Frodo and Glorfindel said, Kíli would just shake his head. "If anyone can bring your brother back to his senses, it's Bilbo. He seems to be very good at making us Longbeards see reason..."

"I hope so, Thorin, I really do. I'm just afraid there's more to this than Bilbo's accident." Kíli had always been brilliant at masking his feelings, even from his own brother. So who knew what other fears and doubts were tormenting the usually so happy and cheerful dwarf. It wouldn't be long until he found out.

They were sitting outside the healing tent, Bilbo holding his brother tightly, the hobbit's eyes red and bloodshot. "He's asleep again, he's utterly exhausted." He kissed the top of Kíli's head and sighed, "How could we not see? How did we not realise?" See what? Realise what? "He blames himself for your death, Thorin. He gave his life to defend you, and yet he blames himself." This was even worse than Fíli had anticipated. And indeed, how could he have been so blind to his brother's plight? "He's so good at hiding everything, holding it all in and covering it with a smile and a laugh and some silliness. But all his guards...they must have simply evaporated when... I didn't know he cared so much about me."

"Bilbo! We all did. And we totally did not agree with Thorin's," he glared at his uncle, "treatment of you. But we weren't going to say anything, not until... When we escaped the goblins, and you weren't there, we all felt the loss keenly. But then you returned and saved Thorin's life... On the Carrock, if he had truly talked down on you then for saving his life, trust me, a lot of us would have spoken up. Loyalty to the king or not." And then Fíli smiled, first at Thorin, then at Bilbo. "But instead our uncle surprised all of us, including himself I'd wager, and embraced you. And Kíli and I knew... After that, you were part of the family. So you may not have been courting officially, but for us you were like...like a second uncle. And the thought of losing you is just as unimaginable as losing Thorin..."

Thorin had bent down to take hold of Kíli and was now lifting him into his arms. To Fíli it was as if time had been reversed and their uncle was carrying his baby brother to bed. "He needs to rest...he didn't sleep very much ever since... And he's in a worse state than I was yesterday when Elrond all but ordered me to sleep. Fíli? Make sure Bilbo is back in the tent before Óin and Elrond arrive, and that he eats. And if you see that blond nuisance of an elf, ask him to find your brother's tent. He shouldn't be alone when he wakes." Fíli nodded and helped Bilbo to his feet.

They had only taken a few steps when Bilbo's knees gave way and Fíli had to wrap his arm around the hobbit's waist to hold him up. "I think I'm weaker than I guessed before. I...thank you, Fíli."

Sitting down on the side of the bed, the young dwarf still didn't release the hobbit. "I...I was so very worried. And when you arrived and...you were still unconscious... Seeing you like that, it was killing Thorin. And my brother. I tried...tried to be strong for their sake but the truth is...I can't imagine life without you in it. Even if the thought is disturbing at times." Bilbo elbowed him in the ribs, but Fíli could see the blush that reached the very tips of the hobbit's ears. "But Bilbo... Our elven friends have taught Kíli and I something...love should always be celebrated. And while I still...cringe at the thought of you and Thorin, it still fills my heart with joy that you have found such happiness."

"On the ship...I...I thought I would find only one thing in Valinor. The sweet embrace of death. And I was alright with it. I was actually almost looking forward to sleeping without waking. In my dreams, the three of you were still alive, were happy and smiling. And Thorin..." Fíli squeezed the hobbit's hand. He'd guessed that the time apart had been hard on Bilbo as well as Thorin, but to hear it from the hobbit...it tore at Fíli's heart. "And then I saw you...well, I should really say 'and then you
crushed me in that embrace of yours', but you know what I mean." The young dwarf nodded, grinning. "I thought I had lost my mind but was more than happy with that. "But to see Thorin... To know he'd been waiting for me all these long years, longed for me just like I did for him... I'd thought that what we shared on the journey was happiness, but it pales in comparison to what we have now."

Bilbo smiled up at him then, and the way the hobbit's grey eyes sparkled filled Fíli's heart with the wish to know love like this as well. But more so to have Kíli know this happiness. Kíli... "It was so hard to not have you around anymore, especially for my brother. You had become like a second...well...father figure really. To both of us. And to have that taken away...it was bad for me, but for Kíli... He never knew our father, you see. He died in a skirmish when our mother was carrying Kíli and... He suffered such a great loss before he was even born, and then to lose you as well...I think something broke within him. But he kept it a secret, even from me. I wish...I wish I had known. To carry that with him, and the guilt he obviously feels over Thorin's death..."

"He's good at covering it up, his feelings I mean. A smile here, a silly comment there, and that's how people perceived him. I'm guilty of that as well, Fíli." Bilbo sighed, "We have to help him, we have to show him that he's not a failure, that we love him. That he's worthy of being loved..."

"He's always been ridiculed by our own people. Behind his back, yes, but he still knew. If you asked him, if you got him to answer you honestly, you would find that he thinks he's ugly and undeserving. He believes he will be alone for the rest of his life and I so wish..." Running his fingers through his hair, Fíli caught Bilbo's gaze, pleading with the hobbit. "We have to do something. I can't bear to see him like that; so forlorn..."

"I promise you we will. Between yourself, Thorin and I we will get through to him. And as my heart was mended, so shall we mend his. I give you my word, Fíli. We will see it done."

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 15 - Erebor Awaits

Chapter Notes

100 kudos!!! WEEEEEEE! And going on 7200 hits *faints* You're all amazing :)

Translation of Khuzdul: Âzyungel - love of love (greatest love - I'm using it more to say 'my love' though), Ukrâd - greatest heart.

Translation of Elvish: Mellonen - my friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

When Thorin returned to the healing tent, Bilbo was busy devouring about the same amount of food Bombur would call a nice dinner. His hobbit truly was a bottomless pit when it came to matters of the stomach. Fili sat by Bilbo's side, seemingly lost in thought. "He is still asleep," Thorin said. Fili's brow furrowed as he sighed. "I can't believe it never occurred to me he would feel this way. That he could think he failed me when he gave his life defending me. Both of you. That was the ultimate sacrifice and it is I who should feel undeserving, not him. Never him." Bilbo nodded around a mouthful of ham. "And aside from the fact that your mother will have my hide over getting you two killed, I do... I wasn't worthy of such a great sacrifice. I had brought it on myself by not agreeing to part with a portion of the treasure; by my unwillingness to do what I knew would be right. What the two of you told me in no uncertain terms was right."

"You are our uncle and our king. We love you even when we don't agree with your actions." Fili looked at Bilbo and then Thorin, "I don't think there is anyone we would have rather given our lives for than either of the two of you. Well, mother of course, but I think we all would have locked her up if she'd even thought of joining a battle like that." He smirked and then turned serious again. "I'm going to stay with him. I'm sure he'll be better already when he wakes, considering you're back amongst the living, Bilbo. But we will have to..." The hobbit nodded. "I'm glad as well, more than glad." Halfway out of the tent, he turned. "I left Balin in charge of the construction work, but I think it's time our kin saw their king again..."

Thorin sighed, "Once I know that Bilbo is truly alright. Arrange a meeting for tomorrow if you will." He caught his hobbit's eyes then and smirked, "And don't forget, Fili, the future consort should be privy to any such meetings..." Seeing Bilbo almost choke made him regret his words. Almost. It was true, as Thorin's betrothed, Bilbo had the right to attend any meeting he wished. But Thorin also wanted to keep the hobbit near, to not let Bilbo out of his sight. Fili smiled and turned once more to leave. "And make sure your brother knows he is loved..." His nephew froze for a second, but then gave a curt nod over his shoulder and was gone.

"He was shaking so badly when I held him, Thorin, so badly. And I couldn't console him. He was clinging to me as if I was the rock that kept him from drowning." The food was suddenly forgotten as Bilbo pulled Thorin down to sit beside him. "I will not rest until he lets go of that silly notion of being responsible for what happened to me. But I will need your help with the rest..."
Once again Thorin felt his heart overflow with love and he marvelled at his own stupidity. How in Durin's name had he ever been able to look at Bilbo without seeing the loving and caring hobbit he was? How could he have missed the strength that was such an integral part of the halfling? How could he have ever thought that he'd be able to ignore his feelings for Bilbo when they were growing stronger every day of their journey? Thorin Oakenshield, you were a fool. More than a fool... "I will make him understand that dying in vain to protect me wasn't his fault. That it wasn't in vain. I got to see you, one last time." His hand was reaching inside Bilbo's shirt, closing around his ring, "I got to give you this. Something you could hold onto when...

"When the walls were closing in on me...when the pain got too much to bear... Thorin, just seeing you on the battlefield was more than I dared to hope for. While I knew your love for me was still alive, I also... You saved me. I only wish I had been there to save you as well..." His breath came ragged, as if he was fighting his tears. "But you stayed with me long enough for me to know that you were...you...again. That you forgave me..." Thorin made to speak, but Bilbo's gaze brooked no argument and he remained silent. "Nothing of that, âzyungel. Never again. Accept that I never held what passed between us that day against you. And that I know now that you realised what I was doing, even though you still couldn't do the right thing." Thorin smiled ruefully. That had been his greatest folly. To put pride before everything else. "You have to forgive yourself, or else how can we ask Kíli to do so?"

"How is it that you will always come out on top of an argument if you set your mind to it?" Bilbo simply shrugged and kissed the side of the dwarf's face. "My nephews' sacrifice...it gave us those few precious moments, and it is time Kíli knew how grateful I am for that. When Balin told me that you'd been wearing my ring..." his hands lifted almost on their own to Bilbo's face, cupping it, "it made me hope. I only regret that I couldn't let you know..."

"I wouldn't be surprised if at least one of our Company knew... Gandalf spoke often of you, and not as if you were dead and gone, mind you. I just wish..."

"It would seem we have to speak to him and...thank him. For trying." Bilbo nodded, leaning into Thorin's touch. "But not right now, my hobbit. Right now you have to eat so you can attend that terribly important meeting tomorrow. And so I can show you our kingdom if Óin and Elrond will allow it...

"You may be an expert at leading our people, Master Oakenshield, but you are not a healer." Had the mentioning of Óin's name somehow summoned the dwarf himself or was this all just a coincidence? "I see you are on your way to recovery, Master Burglar. I'm pleased to see it." Óin was smiling down at Bilbo, as did Elrond who was standing behind the dwarf. And Bilbo... "Oh stop gawping, Master Baggins. I know I look different, what with the lack of that blasted ear trumpet, but I'm still me." The hobbit swallowed. "I can still read the portents and use my poultices, so don't you worry. Being ripped to shreds by a giant squid is not going to stop a son of Gróin." Which wasn't entirely true given the fact that he had spent far longer in the Halls of Aulê than Ori and Balin, recovering from his injuries.

Bilbo bounced to his feet then, much more vigorous than he had been a few hours ago. He threw his arms around the startled dwarven healer. "It's so good to see another member of the Company. I have missed you all so much. And when I heard..." Óin patted Bilbo's back awkwardly, worried eyes meeting Thorin's. But where such a display of affection might have previously set the dwarf king off in a jealous rage, now he simply smiled and nodded. He knew within his heart that Bilbo was his, that no matter who he embraced, it was merely an expression of friendship. Thorin would still have to ask the hobbit to refrain from such behaviour in front of...well...non-members of their old Company. Most dwarves would not understand that hobbits were more comfortable with openly
displaying their feelings.

"It is good to see you on your own two feet again, Bilbo Baggins." Elrond bowed his head ever so slightly as he gazed at the hobbit who still clung to Óin before turning towards Thorin. "You see, Master Oakenshield, in the end it was not a question of healing skills at all. All he needed was to be near you." Bilbo gasped and stepped away from Óin, his head going back and forth between Thorin and the elf lord before his gaze settled on Elrond. "Oh, do not look at me like this, mellonen. Did you truly think your betrothed and I would argue over old slights? We were both at fault. Besides, there were more important matters to discuss, would you not agree, King Thorin?" Bilbo's head went back to the dwarf and Elrond chuckled. "Matters such as your wellbeing, Bilbo. But now that you are awake, I am wondering if we could address some other issues as well."

"As long as said issues have nothing to do with...elvish eating habits...I'd be more than happy to. My nephew is arranging a meeting for tomorrow to discuss the ongoing construction works. If you want to, you could join us." Bilbo stared at him, his mouth opening and closing without any sound leaving the hobbit's lips. "I understand you wished to lead on the elvish settlement anyway, so we might as well get you started with that." Elrond nodded with a slight smile, but it was Bilbo's expression that nearly stopped Thorin's heart from beating. The hobbit was practically glowing with pride and joy and happiness, and Thorin vowed to do everything in his power to make his betrothed look upon him like that more often. Even if it meant being civil, no, almost friendly to the pointy-ears.

"I shall seek out your nephew then," the elf's eyes held Thorin's gaze, questioningly. "And if there is anything I can do to assist... You have but to ask." Turning to Óin, he added, "I have no objections to Bilbo attending meetings or seeing Erebor. If he takes care not to tax himself too much." The last words were spoken with a stern expression, eyes on Bilbo himself. Who had the grace to blush. "You have refused my aid in Imladris, and I understand why you did so. But this time you will do as Óin and I say, or we will recommend bed rest, and I suspect Master Oakenshield will see it done."

He nodded towards Thorin and then Óin, and, with another frown in Bilbo's direction, he left the tent.

"Now why aren't you eating, Master Baggins? You have been out cold for two long weeks, you need the sustenance. So sit down that I may look at your ankle." Bilbo's brow furrowed in question. "It was broken, in case you were wondering. But it is almost healed fully now. I still recommend resting it whenever possible, but other than that, you should be good as new in a few more days. If you continue to eat!" The way Bilbo suddenly shovelled food into his mouth made Thorin fear the hobbit would make himself sick before long. But no. Even once everything was gone, he nodded when Óin asked if he wanted anything else. "Well, it is lunchtime, so maybe I arrange for something to be brought to you. Both of you. Because I know you haven't been taking care of yourself very well ever since our hobbit had his fall...my king." The pause before he added the honorific was almost long enough to constitute an insult. Not that Óin was wrong.

"That would be lovely, Óin, thank you. Maybe we can move it outside, though? I feel like I could do with fresh air. And before... I wouldn't mind some privacy to refresh myself and maybe a change of clothes..." Thorin smiled down at the hobbit. "Well, I don't know about you, but I think I could do with a wash." He winked and added, "As could you."

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Bilbo rubbed his now full stomach and sighed happily. He finally felt like a proper hobbit again. Dressed in clean clothes and no longer starving, the world seemed brighter. "I am quite ready for another adventure now, my king." Smiling warmly at the dwarf sitting across from him, Bilbo got to his feet. "So where is this mountain you have been telling me about?" It wasn't as if he didn't know
already. Fíli had told him that their little town of tents had been set up in a hollow two miles away from the main gates. Without climbing up and out of the hollow, Erebor wasn't visible.

"Are you sure you won't die of starvation if you go without food for an hour or two?" Thorin's eyes twinkled merrily as he, too, rose to his feet and walked around the table to pull the hobbit flush against his chest. And while Bilbo had been of a mind to give the dwarf a tongue-lashing for that comment, he was now rather happy with where he was. Feeling indignant could wait until later. Burying his face in the furs of Thorin's coat, he could feel the dwarf's lips in his curls, pressing soft kisses this and that way. "Thank you, thank you for not leaving me..." Bilbo tilted his head upwards and gasped. For the briefest moment, the pain was back in Thorin's eyes, the same agony Bilbo had seen in those blue pools that very morning.

"How could I possibly leave you when you hold my heart in the palm of your hand?" Tangling his hands in Thorin's curls, he pulled the dwarf down for a kiss. "If you think that a simple knock to the head is going to rid you of me, I'm afraid you're setting yourself up for disappointment." Bilbo smirked and was thrilled to see mirth creep into Thorin's eyes. "So you might want to get used to the idea of having me around for a long, long time. I know I'm a terrible bother and have really no place amongst..." He was cut off by nimble fingers finding the most ticklish part of his neck before soft lips swallowed his helpless laughter.

When Thorin finally drew back, he was beaming down at Bilbo, whispering, "Oh, you do have a place amongst us, even if I was too stubborn to see it for a long while. And it's right by my side. There's no way I'd ever want to be rid of you. Never did, not really." Bilbo sighed happily. Big dwarven hands found their smaller hobbit counterparts, and, lacing their fingers, Thorin added, "So what do you say, ukîrâd? Are you ready to see our kingdom?" The hobbit nodded, smiling. "Well then...let me get the ponies and we will be off." And after placing another lingering kiss on Bilbo's lips, Thorin walked off and disappeared from sight.

Bilbo, still smiling to himself, sat back down in his chair, contemplating the turn of events. Kíli's feelings of guilt, though they had come as a shock, were not really surprising to the hobbit. He had always known that there was more to Thorin's younger nephew than what met the eye at first glance. Only Bilbo hadn't known the depth of the dwarf's feelings. It would take time and effort on all their parts to rid Kíli of his fears, doubts, and the guilt. But they would do it, they had to. And in his heart of hearts, Bilbo knew that they would. With Thorin and Fíli's help, Kíli's heart would be mended. Even if it took another eighty years. Though the hobbit hoped it wouldn't take quite as long.

Meeting Óin again had been...different from what he had expected. There was no more ear trumpet, and Óin's hair and beard were jet black now and no longer the white and grey the hobbit had become accustomed to on their journey to Erebor. But no matter how Valinor had changed him, he was still the kind healer he had always been. The way he had spoken of the Watcher though, it made chills run up and down Bilbo's spine. Frodo's tales of the beast had painted a very vivid picture in the older hobbit's mind, and to think that poor Óin... No one deserved such a fate, least of all the dwarf who had always taken care of everyone else.

And then there was Thorin... The pain in the dwarf's eyes had made Bilbo's blood run cold but to see that pain bleed away...it had been miraculous to behold. To know that he held such power over the proud dwarf king was both exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. Bilbo had always felt that Thorin loved him just as fiercely as he loved the dwarf, but to have it confirmed... It took Bilbo's breath away. Little more than two months ago, he had embarked a ship at the Grey Havens, fully intending to be spending the last days and weeks of his life at peace, Frodo by his side. And with every passing day on the sea, his heart had felt...lighter somehow. As if the pain in his heart was slowly seeping away and the clouds were lifting. But he never dared to hope that there might be
something beyond the harbours of Valinor that would turn his life, his whole existence upside down.

"A gold coin for your thoughts, Master Baggins..." Thorin gazed down at Bilbo questioningly, and the hobbit jumped. Some burglar he was, allowing Thorin to sneak up on him in such a way.

"I was just... I was thinking of the Grey Havens. Of embarking on the journey west, of being convinced it would be my last ever journey... Nothing turned out the way I imagined then, and I am beyond happy about it. Being a hobbit, I should hate changes, but being by your side...it makes me see things in a different way. It makes me believe that change can be good, and maybe it is time for us hobbits to understand that. And what greater change could there be for this hobbit than to move from a small and cosy hobbit hole, or a cottage, into a dwarven mountain?" Thorin smirked at that, and Bilbo wondered if a jab to the king's ribs was in order. The twinkle in the dwarf's eyes made him decide against it. *Let him keep his secrets. You will surely find out soon enough.*

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... [Eowyn's Musings](http://www.tumblr.com). I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter Notes

Bilbo's garden is very much a rock garden, a smallish patch of grass and lots of flowers and greens that grow in mountainous terrain. I basically imagine part of the 'balcony' to be covered not with stones but with soil and greens, but with walls running around its entirety. The aforementioned herb garden will still need to be created.

I'm still amazed at the hits I got for the last chapter, and a big thank you for the kudos and a huge thank you to a very special person who always comments...so THANK YOU, sweetie :)

Translation of Khuzdul:

Ughvashâ - greatest treasure, Ukrâd - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (3021 T.A.)

Bilbo's eyes had widened almost comically when he laid eyes on the mountain for the first time and Thorin felt his heart swell in his chest. He had longed to show the hobbit Erebor, to see his face when Bilbo beheld the mountain for the first time. And his hobbit's expression was all the dwarf had expected it to be, and more. The pride and awe in those grey eyes...it made the memory of those long years fade to nothingness. Bilbo was here now, and that was that.

"You saw the mountain at its worst, but this, this is what it was like before the dragon came. Before the Arkenstone was found." Bilbo reached out to touch Thorin's hand, lacing their fingers together. The ponies stood unmoving, as if they knew not to disturb their riders. "I would ask you how you found the mountain when you visited but...I don't wish to remind you of..." Your tomb, where he wished to lie down beside you.

"Dáin had done his best to restore it to its former glory, but... I could not really see it. Bofur led me around but it just wasn't the same. It wasn't you. And Bofur knew, else he wouldn't have led me to the tombs after only a little while. There...there was a statue of you..." Bilbo's voice was breaking and Thorin squeezed the hobbit's hand encouragingly. He had to be able to see their home with new eyes, needed to let go of his memories. "It was so lifelike, Thorin. And I so wished it would...start walking down the pedestal and... But I prefer this," he gestured at their laced hands, "You're warm and alive and not a statue come to life. You're not the same dwarf you used to be, or maybe I'm only really seeing all of you now." He smiled shyly. "Back then, I never truly dared to think of you as mine. And now..."

"Yours," Thorin whispered before bringing Bilbo's hand to his lips, kissing the hobbit's knuckles. "And this is our kingdom, my hobbit. It is time that you saw it up close." With that, Thorin motioned Bilbo to follow him. The road was lined with lamps so that the path was clearly visible even in the dark. Pointing to the west, Thorin began explaining their plans in detail. "There is fertile ground about a mile from here, and even some small hills that would make it a perfect place for a hobbit settlement. Your father was quite intrigued by the idea..." Bilbo nodded numbly, but the expression on his face was simply priceless. Apparently he still found it rather hard to believe that Bungo
Bilbo's hand went to his braid, "will be a nice and quiet affair...by hobbit standards, that is. She will have the whole place in an uproar, and not just the hobbitfolk. She will involve dwarves and elves as well, and I think if she could, even the Valar." Thorin chuckled at the idea of having the Valar attend their bonding ceremony. "You laugh now, but wait until you meet a very determined Belladonna Baggins. To call her a force to be reckoned with isn't given her justice enough."

"And why are you looking so surprised at that? We might be the small people, but we do have taste. And while not all hobbits are aware just where their newest trinket came from, you would be surprised how many dwarven items could be found in the Shire." The hobbit's eyes met Thorin's then, merriment in their grey depth. But then... "And elven ones for that matter," he added with a grin.

"Well, I can't blame the small people for their lapse in judgement where that is concerned. At least hobbits have splendid taste where other things are concerned," he winked at a blushing Bilbo. "I would stop this, Master Baggins." The hobbit made a sound at the back of his throat that sounded like, "Huh?" so Thorin elaborated. "The blushing, Bilbo. It makes me want to see if I can't make you flushed all over, and that would mean cutting our tour short and making straight for the Royal Chambers. Which in turn would probably mean that both Óin and Lord Elrond are going to skin me alive, so.. Stop it." But instead of following Thorin's request, Bilbo's blush only deepened. Thorin groaned.

"I don't recall Óin or Elrond saying anything like that, my betrothed." Surely Bilbo wasn't suggesting... "All they said was that I should take things slow..." The hobbit was drawing up to him and then he felt a small hand on his thigh, the simple touch burning the skin underneath his breeches. "And I recall something you told me in Esgaroth...after... You said that in Erebor, I wouldn't have to worry about anyone hearing what we were doing as your chambers were soundproof. I would like to put that theory to the test, my King..." Every word made the blood pulse in Thorin's veins as it pooled in his groin. Any lesser dwarf than Thorin Oakenshield would have been squirming in his saddle and it was just through sheer force of will that the king refrained from doing so as well.

It still took all his self-control to wrap a hand around Bilbo's wrist and not move it higher up on his thigh but to lift it to his lips to kiss the hobbit's palm. "Soon, my hobbit. Soon. But I think you would rather our people didn't start gossiping the first day you are here." Bilbo sighed and nodded, withdrawing his hand altogether. He hadn't thought of that it would seem. "Public displays of affection are not uncommon amongst dwarves, but there are things that I will not share with anyone.
They are for my eyes alone, **ughvashâ**. And if the hobbit was now glaring daggers at him, obviously trying...and failing...to will away the bulge in his trousers, Thorin surely couldn't be blamed for that. "Let's move on, my betrothed. Our people long to see the hobbit who was so brave and faced the dragon on his own, the hobbit who made me long to be a better dwarf, a better king."

Slowly they made their way down the road, the great gates drawing ever closer. Thorin saw Bilbo lift his head and followed the hobbit's gaze to the battlements. They looked different than they had... During the initial planning stages, Thorin couldn't stand the idea of them bearing any resemblance to their counterparts in Middle-earth but he also felt as if he deserved the constant reminder of what he had done to Bilbo. But it was his nephews who had straight away insisted on a different design, pointing out certain **flaws**. Bilbo smiled at him now, no, positively beamed at him. "**New memories, Thorin... Better memories.**" The dwarf could only agree. Then Bilbo pointed up, at the smaller battlements, halfway up the mountain. "What's that? I don't recall Erebor..."

"**Erebor never needed a garden for the king's consort, Bilbo. Now we do.**" The hobbit gasped. "**Originally it was planned as a simple balcony for the king's chambers, but there were two rather insistent dwarves involved in the planning who wouldn't let go of their firm belief that Uncle Bilbo would need a place to be hobbitish, even in the Mountain.**" Then an idea struck him. "**Maybe you could ask Kíli to help you with it? I don't know how much you will be able to do before the first snows, but...**"

Bilbo nodded slowly. "**Not much, no. But there are certain things Kíli might teach me. Frodo told me how he enjoyed his lessons with your nephews, so... It breaks my heart to think he believes himself...**"

"**Worthless.**" Thorin swallowed. "**I never knew, Bilbo. That he blamed himself for what happened to me. It wasn't his fault, never his fault. But I'm afraid he won't even listen at the moment. However, when he does, I will make him understand that sacrificing himself meant that I could have those precious few moments with you. The memory of it haunted me, but I also treasured it as I thought it was the last time...**"

"And yet, the first thing you said to me after **eighty long years** was 'Master Baggins' and then it all went downhill from that. How could you think that I wouldn't love you still, that I didn't still miss you, that I wouldn't long for you... Stubborn dwarves, the lot of you! I swear Kíli has it from you. Have an opinion and then stick with it no matter what." The hobbit's expression had been almost angry, but it softened then. "**But I know that with the right incentive, you can be swayed. Although I wish it hadn't involved Azog...**"

"**It didn't. Even if you hadn't saved my life, your little monologue after you miraculously reappeared was enough to destroy the remainder of my, as you call it, stubbornness. But seeing you put yourself between me and that orc...I thought my heart would shatter. After that, there was no way I could not seek you out that night...**" His mind graciously provided him with flashes of that first kiss they had shared, the first time he had held his hobbit in his arms, the first time Bilbo had come undone under his ministrations... He swallowed hard and then glared at Bilbo's knowing smile. Well, he wouldn't smile for much longer. "**Remember how you wanted to relive the memory of Esgaroth? Think what we can do in your garden, ukârd... Only you will need to be more quiet so the guards below us won't know what their king is doing to his hobbit...**"

Bilbo seemed mortified, though Thorin wondered if it was because of what he had proposed or because of the hobbit's obvious reaction to said proposal. "**And they make someone like you their king? I always thought kings were supposed to be refined and honourable and tactful and kind. Right now, I don't see any of those things in you. And now, I would like to continue our tour if you don't**"
mind, thank you very much." Thorin laughed before urging his pony onwards to catch up with the disgruntled hobbit. Oh yes, they would make use of Bilbo's garden in more ways than just the most obvious.

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Dáin had done remarkable work in his absence, Thorin had to give him that. Where there had been scaffolding still when he left for Tirion almost three months ago, the walls were now inlaid with precious metals and gems. Railings had been affixed to most of the walkways...Bilbo was obviously very glad to see that...and both the Throne Room and the main market had been completed to Thorin's specifications. The market was busy and the dwarf king could tell that the hobbit by his side was itching to look at the wares. That was before folk began to bow to him. "Why would they bow to a simple hobbit? I'm nothing special..."

"You are, Bilbo. Even if you weren't my betrothed, you are still the hobbit who helped us regain our homeland. You would still be a most trusted member of my council. But as it is, you will be their king's consort, you will rule by my side and as such my kin show you the honours you deserve. It would be a grave insult if you asked them to stop." Which was true enough. "You are part of the royal household now, and the sooner you accept that, the better. I'm afraid the time to choose whether you want this life or not is long gone. You're not just a simple hobbit; no simple hobbit would have run out of his door to go on an adventure with a company of dwarves he barely knew. You're extraordinary, always were. No matter what I said to discourage you from continuing the journey. All that was was, well, me being my not so smart self." Bilbo chuckled despite his embarrassment. "You're so much more than a grocer..."

"This is all so very grand though. I'm afraid it'll be far too big for a hobbit, for me. I never want to disappoint you and I fear that I shall." Pleading grey eyes were seeking affirmation, and Thorin gave it only too gladly. Pulling the hobbit closer, he rested his forehead against Bilbo's and could feel the halfling's breathing slow down until it was almost normal again. "I never want you to be disappointed in me again..." That blasted, blasted stone! And Bilbo had asked him to let go of the guilt when it so clearly still gnawed at the hobbit.

"That wasn't me, Bilbo. It was the gold..." The hobbit shook his head. What then?

"Only because I worried about you. It was clear to me that the idea of going down the river filled you with terror, so..." Bilbo stepped out of the embrace then, his mouth forming a voiceless 'Oh!' "There was but one time I felt disappointment because of you...when we thought you had left us. Before you so miraculously appeared in our midst. I was disappointed that I had seemingly succeeded in driving you away, but I hadn't..."

"So I didn't imagine that...you did sound hurt. I simply couldn't fathom why you would be when all you had done up until then was try to drive me away." The hobbit smiled at the memory. "I guess that was my last chance to sneak away, huh?" Thorin nodded, trying to be as serious as possible when his chest was about to burst with happiness. "Well, that's too bad then. I guess I will just have to stick around then and be terribly embarrassed instead. At least the dwarves here aren't Thráin or King Thrór, so I won't faint...again." There was a sheepish grin on Bilbo's lips as he said the last bit, but then it faded away and was replaced by a shy smile. "What else do you have in store for me then,
my King? What else is there you wish to show me?"

There was more, much more Bilbo needed to see, but at that moment, there was only one place Thorin wanted to take the hobbit. So when they finally stood in front of the gem-encrusted doors of the royal wing and Bilbo's eyes once again resembled saucers, Thorin couldn't stop the shivers going up and down his spine. He had dreamt of this, of having his hobbit by his side. Until now, the rooms beyond the great doors had been too empty, devoid of life, no matter the chaos his two nephews sometimes created. Most nights Thorin had been spending in his study, working on more blueprints or other papers until he fell asleep at his desk. The bed had been cold, too cold without his hobbit beside him. Now though...

Pushing open the doors, Thorin nodded to the two guards on watch duty, "Has everything been taken care of?"

"Yes, Sire. And Lord Balin instructed us to not let anyone past for the remainder of the day." The guard then turned towards Bilbo, bowing again, "My Lord, my name is Ragnar, at your service. It is an honour to finally meet you."

This time, Bilbo held his ground. "Thank you, Ragnar. I am...pleased to make your acquaintance as well." If he all but ran into the royal quarters, it couldn't lessen the pride Thorin felt in that moment.

"Thank you, Ragnar. And as you said, no interruptions until the morrow. Unless it's something that can't wait." The guard bowed yet again and Thorin followed Bilbo past the doors that closed behind him with a loud bang.

Several doors were leading away from the central hall; rooms for all members of the royal household. Reaching for Bilbo's hand, he began walking towards the doors at the far end of the hall. "Kíli and Fíli have the rooms to either side of ours, however they spend most of their time in Kíli's, something about the view being better from there. But I won't begrudge them seeking out each other's company. How could I?" They had reached the end of the hall and Thorin motioned for Bilbo to open the doors. And as expected, the hobbit gasped as he stepped inside his new home...

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 17 - To Make You See

Chapter Summary

Quarters are inspected, nephews are dealt with and Fíli is taking care of his brother.

Chapter Notes

Here you are, their quarters. If you have trouble imagining the layout, do let me know (as Domi couldn't quite imagine things until I drew her a rough sketch). It's interlude time once more in the next installment, so stay tuned :)

Translation of Khuzdul: Âzyungel - love of love (greatest love).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

"My entire hobbit hole could easily fit in here. Into this, the living quarters..." His eyes were alight with joy as he saw the rows of bookshelves and he walked over to one of them to run his fingers over the spines. "My, my, Master Oakenshield...Sindarin? And I guess you're going to tell me that it's just a matter of 'know your enemies', yes?" Bilbo smirked and winked and Thorin simply shrugged. "This is wonderful..."

"And you haven't seen the the Great Library yet, Bilbo. Ori is so proud. Though, I think he might rope your nephew into working there. So please, don't let Ori see just how happy the books make you, alright? I would like my future husband and consort by my side and not in a dusty library." Thorin chuckled quietly, but Bilbo gazed at him in startlement. "What is it?"

"Frodo! He doesn't know yet, does he? That I woke?" The hobbit made to cross the room for the doors, but Thorin stopped him by placing his arm around Bilbo's waist. "He has to know..."

"He does. I ran into him this morning when you sat with Kíli. He...he had the audacity to mutter something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like 'I told you so'." Bilbo released a relieved sigh and turned in Thorin's arms to look up at the dwarf, questioningly. "Frodo was convinced you would be fine eventually. Said something about you butting heads with some relatives of yours on a regular basis. The Sackville-Baggins?" Oh dear, Frodo had to bring Lobelia into this, did he? "And between him and Glorfindel, they tried to get through to both myself and Kíli, but..."

"But the both of you wouldn't hear of it because you are, well, stubborn dwarves..." It was Thorin's turn to look rather sheepish then. "I only wish you had believed him, had trusted that I wouldn't leave you. I told you before that I would be willing to fight the Valar themselves to be with you, so even if I had passed...I would have returned to you. Never again will I spend another eighty years without you." Those blue eyes seemed haunted now, and Bilbo quickly made light of the matter, lest the remainder of the day would be spent brooding over things that couldn't be changed. "So if there should be another time when I'm...sleeping for longer than I should, just think of it as hibernating.
And know that I'll always, always come back to you. If I have to fight Eru himself."

"There won't be a next time, Bilbo! I won't allow it." Thorin's tone of voice left no room for arguments. "And if that means I'll have to keep you close, then that is what will happen..." Excuse me?! You might be weaker than his mightiness, but how dare he?! Bilbo was about to let Thorin know exactly what he thought of that brilliant plan when, surprisingly, the king himself muttered, "No... I can't do that, can I?" Hands cupped Bilbo's face, and blue eyes held his, "You are my betrothed, and I trust you. Watching your every step would be no proof of that, but of the opposite. I won't repeat my mistakes, my hobbit. Only know that I can't be without you. Not now, not ever. Not after I had this glimpse at what life could be."

Blinking away the tears that threatened to spill, Bilbo placed his right hand over Thorin's heart. "And you won't have to. I promise." Then he recalled something from a time that seemed ages past now. "Remember how you would tell me of Erebor, of how you wanted me to stay with you?" The dwarf nodded. "Until I stepped onto Valinor soil, until I saw you standing there with the ponies, I thought those plans had been nothing but a lovely dream. But now... You simply forgot to mention that you would die in between and that we would have to be parted for all those long years..." Thorin smiled ruefully. "However, even if you had told me all that, and more, I would still have chosen to follow you. Because ultimately, it brought us here... To this moment. And that is all that matters."

"Wiser than Balin..." Bilbo frowned, but Thorin kissed his forehead as if to dispel the furrows on the hobbit's brow. "Hobbits always see things in a more...positive manner than us dwarves. When you lay...sleeping and Frodo simply refused to believe anything than that you would wake up once you were ready for it, part of me thought him cruel and callous. Now I see that I was wrong. And it grieves me to know what you both had to endure, and yet...somehow you retained some of that inherent positive thinking. Kíli and I on the other hand... We were, as you put it, stubborn dwarves."

"Not as stubborn as you once were, Thorin Oakenshield. Or else there would be no books in Sindarin on the shelves. And you wouldn't try to harness your protectiveness but would let it run wild and drive me crazy. I thank you for that especially. I promise to be careful in the mountain, and not go where you tell me I shouldn't. As you're trusting me, I'm trusting you not to use that power to keep me confined to these rooms. Lovely as they are I'm sure. Even though I haven't seen much beyond the books..." Thorin's hands fell away from his face then, and he was suddenly pulled into a tight embrace. Which ended, just as suddenly.

"There's but one place I forbid you to go. Just as I have discouraged my nephews." Curiosity peaked, Bilbo raised an eyebrow in a manner that hailed of Lord Elrond. "The mines, my burglar, the mines. We are only now starting to build and secure them, and they are a dangerous place, even for our dwarven engineers. And obviously I would rather see you steer clear of the library, but I know such a wish is futile." Thorin added the last with a wry smile as if he truly didn't want the hobbit to go near the place. "But if Balin is to begin teaching you our sacred language, there is really only one place to do so. Just...don't allow Ori to bribe you with his knitting, or you will forever be enslaved to him and his books."

Bilbo chuckled, "That can't possibly happen when I'm already enslaved to the King of Erebor. Books or no books." The dwarf gazed down at him tenderly. "And you are sure? That you want me to learn your language? I know how dwarves tend to keep their secrets close to their hearts, and..."

"You are my betrothed, Bilbo Baggins. That makes you one of my kin, despite your pointy ears, hairy feet and general lack of facial hair." The smirk was soon replaced by a pained 'Ouch' as Bilbo pinched the dwarf's side. Hard. "Spousal abuse, huh? Is that what I can look forward to then? And people are probably of the opinion that it is I who..." This time, the hobbit's hand was caught before
it could make impact. Blue eyes, sparkling with mirth met with grey. "I can see though where you are getting it from. Your mother is a formidable lady indeed." Thorin turned sober then. "But Bilbo, I would share all our secrets with you if that would please you. You are one of us. Both you and your nephew. Though I’m sure between Ori and my nephews, yours now as well, Frodo’s education has already begun. And I hope that one day he will return the favour and tell us more about the...taming and care of a hobbit."

"Oh you insufferable dwarf, you!" Bilbo chuckled as he tried to free his hands from Thorin’s grasp. "Taming and care indeed. I hope I'll find a book detailing the taming and care of dwarven kings who think far too highly of themselves. I'll learn Khuzdul just for that." The dwarf had finally released his hands and Bilbo reached up to tangle his fingers in the dark tresses of Thorin’s hair. The king's gaze had softened, his arms once more encircling the smaller frame of the hobbit. "Ever since I left Erebor, I never felt at home...no matter where I went. My hobbit hole, the place I’d thought of so often with longing while we were on the road, it was too small. And it was lacking that which I needed most. Even Rivendell was only a place I chose to stay, never a home. After eighty long years, I've finally come home..." Bilbo beamed at his betrothed, and then added with a wink, "And I’d love to see some more of it if it's all the same to you..."

"As I recall, you were the one who interrupted your own exploration. Let us remedy that, shall we?" Thorin gestured this way and that, explaining as he went. There were two doors on either side of the living area; to the right were two studies, one for the king, and one for Bilbo. A door linked them, but when Thorin saw Bilbo’s mournful gaze, he suggested that it was possible to move his own desk into Bilbo’s study. Not as an indulgence toward the hobbit, but simply because of the large doors leading onto the balcony and into Bilbo’s garden that would let the light of day into the study. "We'll be needing less candles and crystals that way," the king had added matter-of-factly. Thorin’s current study could be transformed into a small library. Once again, not to please the hobbit but out of necessity. "You will bring so many books into these rooms, we will be running out of shelving space in no time..."

The balcony was spanning the entire length of the king’s apartments and could be reached through large doors in the study, living chambers and the bed chamber. The garden proper had been built into the mountainside itself, but planters had been placed all over the actual balcony. Right now, there were only winter shrubs and some runners growing, the grass in the garden slowly giving in to the dropping temperatures. The most amazing thing though was the view. Bilbo stood and stared, arms on the railings and his head resting on his arms. With the open air above his head, he could feel the last vestiges of worry fade away; worry that life within the mountain might prove to be too oppressive, but everything was so very airy and their chambers so light and... "I can’t believe you added hobbit furniture."

When they stepped back into the living area, the next room Thorin showed Bilbo was the small...by dwarven standards...but well-stocked kitchen. "So...was this Kíli’s idea as well? To get me to bake him more scones?" Thorin shook his head.

"I remembered how much you were bemoaning your seven meals a day, and while the royal kitchens are busy from dawn to dusk, if not longer, I thought you might enjoy having your own domain...once you joined me here..." Each and every time Thorin spoke of the past, of planning the
apartments they were now to share, his eyes filled with grief and such loneliness that it was nearly enough to break Bilbo's heart yet again.

"I am with you, âzyungel. And I'll never leave..."

"Oh by Durin's beard, Bilbo! You can't call Uncle Thorin that! How are we ever to look at him again and not think of him as...well...that!" Fíli and Kíli must have stepped into the chambers while Thorin and Bilbo were in the kitchen, and Kíli was now standing there, eyes wide in mock-shock. Kíli...who was smiling. Who seemed to be back to his cheerful self. Kíli, who beamed too brightly for it to be sincere after the morning he'd had.

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When Kíli woke, he didn't make any attempts to deny what had happened that morning...or the weeks before. He had given his brother a sad smile and shrugged, "I guess there's no way you are going to forget, is there?" Fíli had shaken his head and pulled Kíli into a hug. "I'm sorry I worried you all," the younger dwarf had whispered, before begging Fíli to at least let him pretend that things were back to normal that day. And Fíli hadn't had the courage to tell his brother that there was no way Bilbo would allow such a thing, no matter what.

They had stopped by the kitchens on their way to the Royal Apartments; both Kíli and Bilbo still needed sustenance and it would be easier to get the brunette to eat something under the pretense that it was for the hobbit's benefit. Laden down with food they had entered the King's chambers, and Fíli knew his brother's glorious plan was not going to work out the moment he saw the expression on Bilbo's face. Of course Kíli had a point in regards to hearing their uncle and king being addressed as...that. And under normal circumstances, his brother's reaction would have been expected as well. However, these weren't normal circumstances.

And when Bilbo motioned for Thorin to relieve Kíli of the food he was carrying and the hobbit then embraced the younger dwarf...Kíli broke down again. The sight made Fíli's heart bleed, feeling so very helpless and unable to do anything to ease his brother's pain. "It's alright, dear one," Bilbo murmured into Kíli's shoulder, over and over again. "Come sit with me?" Kíli nodded meekly and allowed the hobbit to drag him over to one of the hobbit-made sofas. Fíli caught his uncle's gaze, worried and yet so proud whenever he glanced at Bilbo... To see them here, in these very chambers, together...it felt like all the years of pushing for adjustments to the blueprints had finally paid off. And suddenly he remembered that Kíli had been the driving force behind it all. Which gave him an idea.

"So how are you liking your new chambers, Bilbo? I guess Uncle Thorin already told you how Kíli and I made sure that things would be as hobbit-friendly as possible? Well, especially my brother..." Kíli's head shot up, tear-stained face turning to his brother, a frown marring his features. "I'm right, aren't I, brother dear? You were the one who insisted on certain alterations, from the battlements to the bookshelves here." Kíli lowered his gaze in embarrassment and made to get up from the sofa.

But Bilbo caught his arm, "You have done all this? And still you think you have to atone? Oh Kíli..."

"I just...I wanted to make sure that you would be happy here. That you wouldn't be reminded of...how things were when Smaug was gone and Thorin..." His shoulders were shaking again, but he was fighting valiantly to keep the sobs down. "I didn't want you...to leave us again after finding Erebor too..."

It was then that Thorin moved to the sofa, and...Fíli could hardly believe his eyes, but Thorin bowed
before Kíli before whispering, "I owe you more thanks that you will ever know. If I had but known how you struggled, how you struggled all your life. I was meant to be a father to you, and I failed in that. I pushed you to be something you are not and failed to see the depth of your devotion to both myself and later also Bilbo." Kíli looked beyond startled and he grasped Bilbo's hand tightly to anchor himself in a world that, at least in his eyes, had just been tipped over on its head. "If not for you and your brother, Kíli, I wouldn't have survived the first years here. I would have begged Aulë to let me return to stone. But you gave me hope that maybe one day I would be able to properly make amends..."

Thorin's gaze fell on Bilbo then, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth, "And it was your conviction that made me hope..." His eyes went back to Kíli, "You made the spark of hope light up within my heart, Kíli. You! And I will never be able to thank you enough for that."

"And your sacrifice, yours and Fíli's...it allowed me to have this." Bilbo had drawn the chain from underneath his shirt and presented Kíli with the ring resting in his palm. "I don't think I could have held on without it. You never failed me, or Thorin. What can we do to make you see that?" And with that, Kíli was pulled into a tight embrace again. Thorin sat down as well, his arms around both the hobbit and Kíli...what else was Fíli to do but to walk over to them, to his family, and to kneel down in front of his brother, head resting in Kíli's lap. Please Aulë, make him see that he is loved. Make him understand that he could never fail us, that we would gladly lay down our lives for him.

Hours later when night was falling and lamps had been lit, Kíli's smile felt more real. There was a healthy flush gracing his face, and his eyes had some of their sparkle back. Between him and Bilbo, the food had disappeared at an almost alarming speed, and when he hugged the hobbit before they left for their own chambers, the embrace was no longer almost painfully tight. Fíli pulled his brother along to his chambers and Kíli's complaints at being manhandled were light-hearted. There still was a battle ahead, Fíli knew, but with the help of Thorin and Bilbo, they would endure...for Kíli.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Bilbo glanced at the door even after it had closed behind the two young dwarves. Strong arms were wrapped around his waist and he was pulled flush against Thorin's chest. "Thank you, ukrâd. I don't know how we would weather this storm without you." Bilbo smiled wryly to himself, his left hand finding Thorin's as it lay on his stomach and he laced their fingers together. "You have brought such a change to our lives, such joy...and only now do I really see the strain I put on both my nephews before. How I..."

The hobbit released Thorin's hand then and turned in his arms. "Don't even think that. You tried to be a father and uncle to them at the same time. And their king. Your love for them was evident throughout our journey... You did the best you could, and they know it. And Kíli...he will be fine, I promise. There is so much he still feels he cannot tell anyone, not even his brother... It will take time, but Thorin," there was nothing wry about the smile he bestowed upon the dwarf, "if we have anything now, it is time." The full meaning of that statement suddenly hit the hobbit much like that stupid rock his head had impacted on two weeks before. Time. They finally had time. As much as they could ever wish for. And they were wasting it standing here when they could be...

He could feel the blush creep up to the tips of his ears and down his neck even before Thorin commented on it. But comment the dwarf did. "You seem flushed, Master Baggins. Shall I call for Óin or Lord Elrond? Or do you simply require rest after this day?" Blush or not, Bilbo could still elbow Thorin in the ribs. "Back to spousal abuse, huh?" The hobbit could hear the mirth in Thorin's voice all the while he buried his burning face against the dwarf's chest. "I don't know if I'm inclined to let it go this time. Not after what you did on our ride here and those glances you've been giving me all throughout today." So Thorin had noticed. Now that his hunger for food had been satisfied...for now, Elrond had said he would still need to regain his strength and would thusly feel close to starving for a while longer...another kind of hunger was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Especially now that he saw Thorin in Erebor, in the kingdom he had fought so hard to regain. Granted it wasn't the mountain Bilbo had seen him struggle for, but the dwarf seemed so much happier now than he ever had back in Middle-earth. And he knew a part of Thorin probably still feared that the day had only been a dream and Bilbo was still lying on his cot in the healing tent, unconscious. There was only one way to lay the king's fears to rest. Or maybe there were more courses of action, but Bilbo wholeheartedly chose the most enjoyable one. So in lieu of a reply, he tangled his fingers in Thorin's hair and pulled him down into a searing kiss.

While the dwarf had been startled for a moment, he quickly caught on, his tongue delving past his hobbit's lips to tangle with its mate. Bilbo gasped into the kiss, amazed by the urgency and sheer need that rolled off of Thorin in waves. When at last air became a priority and the dwarf reluctantly broke the kiss, his pupils were dilated and he was breathing heavily. Bilbo suspected that he looked just as dishevelled as the dwarf and couldn't help but smirk. The desire and love in those sapphire
pools emboldened the hobbit and he ran a finger down the dwarf's broad chest, stopping at the heavy belt. Thorin had divested himself of his fur coat when they had first reached their chambers, so now there were only three layers of clothing between the hobbit's questing fingers and the dwarf's skin.

Noisily, the belt clattered to the floor and Bilbo's fingers attacked the fastenings of the armoured tunic as Thorin shrugged out of his velvety coat. Thorin chuckled at Bilbo's frustrated sigh...the fastenings clearly had a mind of their own and didn't feel like cooperating with the hobbit. Bilbo's glare faded at the sight of Thorin's sparkling eyes and the faint smile that graced the dwarf's lips. Bigger hands covered Bilbo's, then Thorin made short work of the armour and before long it had joined the belt and coat. The hobbit's jacket was next and then he found himself pressed flush against the king's chest once more. "I believe I have not finished showing you all of our apartments, uzayang. Let me remedy that..."

All of a sudden, the floor disappeared from under Bilbo's feet as he was lifted up. His legs wound around the dwarf's hips automatically and his arms went around strong shoulders as he nuzzled Thorin's neck. If that made the dwarf's breath hitch then that was just too bad. "You know I can walk just fine, right?" He was blowing on the sensitive tip of the king's ear then, making him shudder. "I'm not an invalid, despite what you may be thinking, Master Dwarf."

"You are still recovering... And if you object any more then I might have to go and seek out Óin and Lord Elrond and ask them if you're not too weak still and shouldn't exert yourself the way you obviously want to." Thorin's groan as Bilbo began nibbling at his earlobe belied his previous words. "Bilbo..." Thorin's voice was shaking and the hobbit smiled a secretive little smile and was just about to attack the dwarf's neck again when he heard a door being kicked open and he found himself on his feet again. The dwarven king was breathing heavily and visibly fought to regain some semblance of control.

"Thorin?" his voice was now laced with concern. Desire was still coursing through his veins, but his love for the dwarf overpowered any lust fueled haze and always would. Thorin's wellbeing and happiness would always outrank any need for a tryst, no matter how much he longed for it. "What is the matter?" He was about to reach out to touch the dwarf's arm when he was pulled into an embrace, gentler than the last. Thorin's hand wound it's way under the hobbit's chin, coaxed it up until their eyes met once more. Oh Valar, those eyes. How he had been able to look into those pools and not see the depth of the dwarf's emotion was beyond him now. All his fears, regrets and doubts...spoken and unspoken...were there right beside his hopes and dreams and his love. Above all else, there was that all-consuming love he felt for Bilbo and the hobbit was sure his knees would give out at any second.

"This was the last room in the Royal Chambers...the last room they finished. About five years back. I couldn't...I could not set foot in here without longing to have you by my side. These chambers, they were never mine only. They were ours, always." The pain that Bilbo expected to see at these words was there in Thorin's eyes. But it was dwarfed by the longing the king had spoken of. Longing that Bilbo knew only too well. And while he had felt it keenest when visiting the rebuilt Esgaroth, where he had stayed in a room not so different from the one... The yearning to be near Thorin again had always been there. And it had nothing to do with their actions that night in Lake-town. Oh, he had desired that as well, but the longing was for so much more.

Hesitantly, Bilbo touched Thorin's cheek and shivered as the dwarf leaned into the touch. Closing his eyes tightly, he breathed, "I would have been the happiest hobbit to ever live if we had stayed in our little cottage. Words cannot describe what this means to me..." Slowly he opened his eyes again and nearly gasped at the expression on Thorin's face. "You have been so thoughtful of what I might wish for, but Thorin, with you by my side I would happily spend my days in Gollum's cave. I don't need
rows of books, and hobbit furniture and a garden to be happy. I only need you. I don't know that I'll ever be able to thank you enough, you and your...our...nephews."

Blue eyes caught grey, held them as the dwarf whispered, "Turn around, ukrâd. Turn around and see why I couldn't spend even one night in this room until this day." And Bilbo did, and nearly stumbled over his own feet. The huge bed was nothing like the ones he had seen in Erebor after Smaug had fallen. Those had been clearly of dwarven make, just like this one clearly wasn't. "It was Kíli's idea once more, but I was glad he dealt with it from conception to delivery. The thought of your mother finding out about it..." It was beautiful and reminded Bilbo so much of his own small bed in Bag End. Hang on...

"Kíli was snooping around in my bedroom, wasn't he? When I was..." Lying on the floor having fainted?

"He only wanted to get a cool cloth for your head...but clearly he committed certain things to his memory..." Thorin pointed at the various chairs and tables, all a perfect marriage of dwarven and hobbit designs. "It kept our nephews busy for a long time to craft all this. Even though I'm sure they didn't think beyond us sleeping on the bed when they carved it..."

Bilbo could hear the smirk and shook his head with a laugh. "And what is it that they didn't think of, my King?" The hobbit turned, his fingers swiftly undoing the lacings of Thorin's tunic. "What could you possibly wish to do with me on our bed..." the tunic was removed and hobbit fingers moved to another set of lacings, all the while stopping to brush over the straining hardness that seemingly waited to be released, "...that isn't sleeping?" The almost innocent question was in stark contrast to Bilbo's actions and Thorin almost growled at the hobbit like a caged animal.

"There are so many things I wish to do to you...but they will have to wait. Tonight, all I wish to do is to hold you and make you feel cherished and loved." Thorin leaned down then, to trail kisses down the side of Bilbo's neck to his collarbone. His shirt was pushed off his shoulders...he hadn't even noticed the dwarf start on the buttons...and he quickly let it drop to the floor. "I won't put any strain on you tonight. I just...I need..."

Bilbo nodded. He knew exactly what Thorin needed. Not the raging passion that had threatened to consume them earlier, but something more loving, something sweeter. Something that made the dwarf believe that Bilbo truly was alive and well. And if the hobbit was honest with himself, it was what he wanted as well. So he took the king's hand in his and stumbled blindly to the bed. The rest of their garments dropped along the way as if as an afterthought, and when the backs of his thighs hit the bed, he sat down and pulled Thorin to sit beside him. They were both aroused, but for that brief moment the need became secondary and they were both simply revelling in each other's presence.

Thorin leaned in to rest his forehead against Bilbo's, his eyelids fluttering shut as he took a ragged breath. "I thought I had lost you again. It felt like the Arkenstone all over again, only that this time it was you who was taken from me, and...I was losing my way yet again. Though it made me realise just how foolish I had been back then. You are so much more valuable to me, my living breathing Arkenstone. It is beyond me how I could fall under its spell so completely when I had you by my side, ughvashâ. But I know, even if it was here, right now, it wouldn't have any power over me." The hobbit was both relieved and fearful hearing this. Did he truly have such a hold on the dwarven king? And could it be that Thorin himself also...

Stroking the bearded cheek, Bilbo whispered against dwarf's lips, "As long as you don't try to place me in a setting and put facets into me... Thorin...I think it is the same for me. I tried to push you out of my mind when the pain got unbearable and yet I couldn't. I was fighting a losing battle and only
when I admitted defeat did I know some semblance of peace. You have as much sway over me as that jewel had over you. And who knows; if anyone had tried to take your ring away from me, maybe I too would have turned murderous," Bilbo chuckled at the last, letting Thorin know that he felt no more pain at the memory. "But that's over now. I have finally come home...and who would have thought I'd ever think of a dwarven mountain as my home and not my cosy hobbit hole..."

Thorin's eyes opened, and they were sparkling like the starlit sky. "Never repeat what I'm about to say, but...if you were to settle in Tirion or whatever settlement Elrond is planning, I'd call it my home as well." And with that he closed the gap between them and placed an almost chaste kiss on Bilbo's lips. And it remained that way for all of two seconds before the raging fire they had both subdued for a while once again broke loose, threatening to pull them under in a maelstrom of desire. Thorin pushed Bilbo down onto the mattress gently. And the hobbit went, more than willingly. Hands tangled in Thorin's black and silver hair as he tried to devour the dwarf's mouth.

Thorin broke away with an almost pained groan, breathing heavily. "Slow down...we've to...slow down. Or I really will be skinned alive for going against the express orders of your healers. And while Óin might hesitate to raise a hand against his king, I'm quite sure Elrond wouldn't." Even Bilbo's lust-fogged mind had to admit that the dwarf's words had merit. Thus he nodded weakly and moved up the bed so he could rest against the pillows. But as he reached for Thorin again, his hand was swatted away. "A moment if you please." The dwarf's eyes were shut tightly once more, his breathing uneven at best and when Bilbo's eyes wandered down the king's torso, he smirked when he beheld the glistening pearls... How he longed to lean down and taste them; to be consumed by the taste and scent of Thorin... But he knew if he tried, Thorin would probably end it all there and then.

So he rested his head against the soft pillows, trying to reign in the desire that made his blood run hot. But Valar, how he craved Thorin's touch. Concentrating on his breathing, he barely noticed Thorin shift on the bed until the dwarf gently motioned for him to turn onto his side. Tender kisses were pressed to his shoulders and neck and he lost himself in the sensation until he felt a probing finger at his opening and he pushed back onto it almost immediately. "Slowly," Thorin growled, but before long one finger was joined by a second and then a third. And when the dwarf found that special spot, Bilbo arched his back and moaned into the pillow. How he was supposed to remain composed and take things easy under such an onslaught of pleasure, he did not know.

And then at long last the fingers were withdrawn only to be replaced by Thorin's hardness and it was only the dwarf's hold on his hips that grounded Bilbo. The slow and languid pace Thorin set was driving the hobbit almost insane and brought tears to his eyes. "Thorin," he cried over and over again. However, he knew it would be to no avail. Once the king's mind was set on a course of action, he would stick to it, even if it killed him. Or the both of you as it were... Accursed dwarven stubbornness. He wasn't made of glass! But whenever he tried to move his hips to encourage the dwarf to go faster, the hold on his hips turned almost viselike.

Thorin had been nuzzling Bilbo's neck, ear and hair, but all of a sudden he began nibbling the sensitive tip of the hobbit's ear just as he was angling his thrusts just that way and Bilbo saw stars. He bit into his pillow to muffle his scream and the dwarf used the opportunity to latch onto the soft skin of his neck and Bilbo knew there'd be a mark the next day. And the thought of that, of walking around marked by Thorin Oakenshield for everyone to see, tipped the hobbit over the edge. With a strangled moan of Thorin's name, he found his release, but he wasn't alone. Khuzdul endearments falling from his lips, the dwarf joined Bilbo in oblivion.

It was when their hearts had slowed down and their breathing had returned to normal, that Thorin pulled out and away from Bilbo. He got off the bed and padded towards a door the hobbit hadn't seen before. To the bath chamber. Thorin held out his hand, "Unless you wish to go to sleep in the
state you're in now, I believe a bath is in order. Besides, you haven't seen this room yet..." Groaning loudly, Bilbo pushed himself up and joined Thorin. And gazed in wonder at the chamber before him.

Where in the cottage they had had a bathtub that was just big enough for the two of them, they now had a basin let into the floor. The tiles were warm underfoot, tiles that reminded him of... "Do I want to know what other rooms your nephew committed to his memory, or would that leave me scarred for life?" Thorin chuckled and shrugged as he knelt next to the basin to work a multitude of tabs. And before long, they were sitting in the warmest water, and Bilbo felt krinks he hadn't even felt before fade away under Thorin's gentle touch. Normally, such touches would eventually lead to more lovemaking, but for now, Bilbo was content to just lean back in his dwarf's strong embrace and be content.

And if he couldn't recall how he got out of the bath and back into their bed the next day, it did not matter all too much. For he could remember the last words Thorin had whispered to him. "Welcome home, ukrâd. Welcome home."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 18 - Snow Comes to Erebor

Chapter Summary

There’s snowy fun, some angst and fluff; what more could you possibly want?

Chapter Notes

Notes: I blame my Thorin for the ending. Entirely! I didn't mean to write a cliffy (of sorts), I really really didn't. Just, um, use your imagination if you want to know what happens next, okay? For I shan't be writing another interlude so soon after the last. No sir! Not even for blue-eyed dwarves, no matter how they plead with me :P

Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

"Bilbo, come quick! You have to see this. They're behaving like children! And everyone calls me immature." Kíli pouted, but there was mirth in his eyes and he bounced up and down as he watched the hobbit wrap himself up warmly. Snow had come to Erebor a week after Bilbo had woken and now Yuletide was drawing near and the halfling had the entire mountain in an uproar. A festival in winter was a novelty the dwarves were only too happy to adopt. All the happy smiles and glowing faces had touched even Kíli's heart and he was slowly becoming the dwarf he had always been; buoyant and cheerful with a knack for mischief. He still carried the guilt around with him like a cloak, but found it hard to keep everything bottled up, especially when Bilbo gave him one of those looks.

Only the previous evening, he had been seated by the fire...Bilbo by his side...while Thorin and Fíli had been busy with papers and blueprints and what have you. Thel had stormed off in a huff an hour before and had only just rejoined them with both Elrond and Fin in tow. Normally he would have found a way to eavesdrop on the conversation in the study, but not that night. Quite the contrary. He told Bilbo of his earliest memories, of realising that Thorin wasn't his father like he'd always thought, but that his father had died before his birth. That he would never know him. He told the hobbit how he had cried himself to sleep for so many nights and how he had taken to sleeping in Fíli's bed to make sure nothing would ever happen to his brother. And Bilbo had listened and had held him when the tears began to fall.

Later they found out that Ecthelion had wanted some input into the Yule celebrations and that Fíli, not Thorin, had told him to make the necessary arrangements...which included getting deliveries of mirovar and other delicacies from Tirion as soon as possible...to put an elven touch to the festivities. Thel had clearly been less than happy about that and had dragged Lord Elrond and Fin away from their supper to support him. However, as it had been Thel's idea, Fin and Elrond had agreed that it should fall to Ecthelion to get the necessities as well. So they had bid him farewell that morning and seen him riding off into the snow, storm clouds gathering above his head. He would have to be fast
indeed, what with Yule approaching and less than a month to go.

Bilbo had finally turned himself into a thick bundle of wool and furs...Thorin had insisted on those...and knitted goodies with a hobbit filling and was giving Fíli one of those looks that meant someone was in trouble. Kíli only hoped it wasn't him. "So what are they doing that is so childish? And who, pray tell, are they in the first place?"

Oh, hadn't he said so already? He motioned for the bundle that was Bilbo to follow him out of the Royal Wing. "I'll tell you while we're walking if that's alright with you." Bilbo nodded. Or at least Kíli thought he did; it was hard to tell with all the layers. "Well, it all started quite innocently really. Fíli threw a snowball at Frodo, you know, just because it's the first real snow we're having this winter and...well..." Maybe they were just big children, he and his brother, but they were young after all, compared to a certain other dwarf who really should know better. "Frodo obviously wanted to retaliate but unfortunately... Uncle had stepped up to Fíli at that point and Frodo kind of missed his aim and hit Thorin squarely in the face. It was a truly magical moment with Thorin spitting snow and shaking himself. Only..."

"What is your uncle doing to my nephew?!!" Oh dear, Thorin is your uncle all of a sudden.

"When I left, he was in the process of turning Frodo into a snow hobbit...but then Balin and Ori stepped in on behalf of Frodo and...it all went downhill from there." Bilbo growled, Bilbo actually growled. "But don't worry, they were all laughing as well. Even Frodo...under all the snow Thorin had piled upon him." The hobbit just harrumpfed as they walked through the main gates out of the mountain and into what had turned into a massive snow battle. The entire populace of Erebor had apparently joined in...well, not the entire populace, but a large portion of it. The few dwarflings living in the mountain squealed with joy as their mothers chased after them; brandishing scarves, mittens and woolen hats.

It was relatively easy to pick out Thorin and the others in all the mayhem, and Bilbo practically stormed over to them. But before the hobbit could start yelling at the king, a snowball landed in his face...thrown by none other than Frodo. He had apparently freed himself from Thorin's clutches and was now thoroughly enjoying himself. As were Fíli, Thorin and all the others. Even Óin had joined in and was now surrounded by little ones telling him how he was an expert at building snow forts. Well, only one way to find out if he truly was. Dragging Fíli away from where he was building up a stock of snowballs, Kíli joined Óin and offered their services in the construction of the most amazing snow fort Valinor had ever seen.

And when after a few hours their empty stomachs forced them back inside, Kíli felt happier than he had in...forever. After Bilbo had finished glaring at Thorin and the subsequent kissing and doe-eye-making, Bilbo had once again appeared by Kíli's side to supervise. The hobbit's presence was like a balm, soothing the young dwarf's aching heart. And if both Thorin and Fíli looked at them with proud smiles, even better. His family was with him, was there for him; whether he wanted them to or not. However, where before he had tried to deal with all his demons by himself, he had been forced to realise that he couldn't. That he needed help.

There were things he had never been able to share with anyone, not even with Fíli. Especially not with Fíli. Not out of distrust for his brother, but out of the need to not cause the blond dwarf any pain beyond what he surely felt anyway. But now he had Bilbo, who refused to back down. And he could confide in the hobbit, could tell him about his father, about feeling lost for all of his life, about the teasing remarks... Bilbo never judged, never scolded. He only ever held Kíli and told him again and again that he was loved. That he had a family who would do everything to see him happy. And to let go of those feelings of guilt regarding Thorin's death and Bilbo's accident. Slowly, ever so
slowly, Kíli was beginning to believe, to hope...

Now, sitting in the King's Apartments, he caught his brother's gaze and Fíli smiled at him. Then his brother gestured towards Bilbo with his head and winked. The hobbit was still nibbling on something even though lunch had been over for an hour or so. Thorin naming him a *bottomless pit* seemed more than called for, despite Bilbo's complaints. He was so focused on the eating hobbit that he nearly jumped when arms encircled his waist and he was pulled into a tight hug. "I always knew he'd be good for Thorin, but... I'm glad you allowed him in. I know there are things you do not wish to trouble me with, but Kíli, I know. I've always known. But I understand why you never came to me about it either." Fíli sighed, his blue eyes pleading, "I am sorry how I behaved towards you as a child..."

"Hush, brother. I was your annoying baby brother, and trust me, I knew exactly how to drive you up the wall. You, mother and Thorin. I just... And later on, you were my *best* friend, Fíli. Not only my brother. How could I ever cause you pain?" His shoulders slumped as he lowered his gaze, but Fíli's hand was there to stop him.

"Whenever you are ready, Kíli...talk to me. I don't care if it opens up old wounds, you are worth so much more than that." Fíli squeezed his hand then and Kíli could only nod. "Trust us not to abandon you, all of us. For we do love you; even though you're a pig-headed son of trolls, who can't tell the sharp end of a sword from the blunt. It's why Thorin suggested you use a bow...harder to shoot yourself than to stab..." Whatever else he had meant to say was lost in helpless giggles as Kíli tickled his brother within an inch of his life. And later, when they were lying side by side on Fíli's bed, discussing their plans for the Yule festivities, Kíli vowed that he would tell his brother. Only not just yet. But soon...

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"Whatever you are doing to Kíli, it is working. I don't recall him ever seeking the presence of another quite like he seeks out yours. Not even his brother's..." He smiled at the blushing hobbit, and then added in a very tongue-in-cheek way, "Should I be jealous? After all, he is younger than me and..."

"And I suggest you don't continue this line of thought or you will be spending the night out on the balcony, in the snow." Bilbo looked up from the book he'd been reading, and glared at Thorin. "We can call ourselves lucky that Kíli didn't push me away the first time I tried to speak to him, don't you think?" The dwarf nodded, and so Bilbo continued, "I love them both just as much as I love Frodo, and it pains me to know that Kíli... He brings such joy and laughter to us all, when he himself is so tortured." He sighed and dropped the book onto his thighs, fingers pinching the bridge of his nose. "He's so practiced at hiding his true feelings behind that mask of happiness...it reminds me of myself."

Thorin didn't have to ask what Bilbo meant by that. They had both led half-lives during their separation and there was nothing he could do to take that pain away from the hobbit. So he did the only thing possible. Getting up, he walked past the fireplace and knelt by Bilbo's side, taking the hobbit's hands in his. "That's behind you now, ukrâd. You will never again have to pretend that you're fine even when you're not." Lifting Bilbo's hands to his lips, he kissed both palms before continuing. "You have left the need for doing so behind you the moment you stepped on that ship at the Havens. Because no matter what, I would have been here, waiting. Even if you were still that frail old hobbit; I would still love you. You'd still be *my* burglar."

He had been staring at their hands, fingers entwined and only now noticed the tears that were running down Bilbo cheeks. And yet the hobbit smiled. "I am glad though...glad that I'm not my old
self anymore. My...my eyesight was slowly failing me, and I knew that before long, I wouldn't be able to see that drawing of you anymore. Not properly. And Thorin, if I was that worried about a **drawing**, how much harder do you think it would have been not to see the real thing? Though I would have been able to see you with my hands." He gently pulled his hands from Thorin's grasp then and began to map the dwarf's face with his fingers. Thorin leaned into the touch, his eyes fluttering shut. "He...the old me...he still loved you as fiercely as before though, longed for you..." Bilbo's voice was hitching then, and without seeing the halfling's face, Thorin knew he was blushing.

Opening his eyes, he leaned in to kiss the tip of Bilbo's nose, his fingers catching a stray lock of auburn hair and brushing it back. Soon it would be long enough for more braiding. "And I for him. Even before you set foot on Valinor soil and age was lifted off of you, simply knowing it was you. I was appalled to say the least, that I entertained such thoughts before I knew you truly had forgiven me." The blush intensified. "And then, when you stood before me, I... You are the most beautiful creature I ever beheld, Bilbo Baggins, and your beauty has very little to do with your outward appearance. Though," he lowered his gaze, only to look back up through his lashes, "it did help in the beginning. Or rather, it didn't."

"Well, I am terribly sorry to inform you that for me it was your outward appearance that pulled me in at first. And those brief glimpses when you let down your guard...your eyes...I thought I might drown in their depth. But I assure you, it wasn't your charming personality." The dwarf huffed. "I assure you that I was as charming as I could ever be." Bilbo shot him one of those looks, as if the hobbit was wondering if Thorin had lost his mind. "You were witness of how I treated my nephews, were you not? And if you ask them, or Balin, they will tell you that it's a sign of..."

"If you're trying to tell me that I should have been happy to be sneered at each and every day, I'm going to wonder if your affections have waned since as you aren't rude anymore, nor do you belittle me. Quite the contrary." Thorin shrugged as the hobbit chuckled happily. "Though I am glad...I'm not sure I could have endured another month or two of being called a grocer, nuisance, and whatever else it was. I much prefer betrothed to any of them. Even though it means having to endure people bowing to me or asking me for advice. Only today, Ragnar inquired if I knew of a cure for his wife's morning sickness."

"And if I was informed correctly, you did. Some sort of tea, was it not?" Bilbo nodded as the blush made a return. "Which works better than the poultice Óin recommended." Another nod, and the hobbit glanced away, clearly embarrassed. But Thorin was having none of that. Gently he cupped the halfling's face, turning his head so their eyes met again. "Tell me if I am asking too much, if this is not what you want. If being my official consort..." His voice was breaking and he was unable to continue. Fear gripped his heart and held it in an iron grip. What if Bilbo truly was unhappy? Could he...

His line of thought was utterly interrupted by soft lips on his, and by sparkling grey eyes that thawed the wall of ice his fear, close to panic, had erected around Thorin's heart. And then Bilbo smiled at him. "Do I feel undeserving of the honours bestowed upon me? Yes. I am a hobbit and not of noble birth or anything even remotely like that. But I knew what I was getting myself into when...when we shared our first kiss. Even though I was convinced you would brush me aside once you had reclaimed your mountain." Warm fingers touched the side of Thorin's face, stroking his temples. "Do I wish at times we could go back to our cottage? Yes. But I knew that I was accepting the courting bead of a king and not of a lesser dwarf. I love you, Thorin Oakenshield, and you will never know how much. There is nowhere I would rather be than by your side. Only...forgive this foolish hobbit..."
for feeling less than worthy at times..."

"It is that which makes you worthy, Bilbo. I never understood that until... Until we lost it all. But after the dragon took Erebor... Especially after Moria, I felt as if we had failed our people, as if the Line of Durin had failed. We built a new home in the Blue Mountains, yes. And we prospered. There was trade between our halls and the Shire and Bree...and even some elves, though I never sanctioned that, I assure you. That was my beloved sister going behind my back." Dís...sweet, beloved, infuriating Dís. How he missed her. Despite the fact that she would kill him the moment she saw him. "We could have been happy there, should have been happy there. But I thought, foolishly, that I did not deserve to be called 'King' unless I had that stone. Unless we had reclaimed our homeland. However, if I hadn't felt that way, I would never have met a certain hobbit, who, ever so slowly, changed my life...for the better."

Bilbo threw his arms around the dwarf then, the book that had still been resting on his knees falling to the floor. Thorin was startled for a second or two before he pulled the hobbit closer to him and held him in a tight embrace. His hobbit. Who had apparently been studying Khuzdul by the looks of it. Smiling into Bilbo's hair, he read the book's title. It was the very first book young dwarves were given as they began their lessons of their secret language. He had been an idiot...again...to believe Bilbo didn't want to be with him, to rule with him. The hobbit was embracing it all, and it was only his humility that made him embarrassed whenever someone bowed or asked advice. Breathing in the scent of the precious creature in his arms, he wished for winter, spring and summer to pass as quickly as they could. It was still such a long time until he could finally, finally...

"You are thinking so loudly that I can almost hear your thoughts," Bilbo mumbled into Thorin's neck before pulling away and returning to his seat, picking up the book as he went. "Do I want to know what you're pondering this time?"

"I'm only thinking of the moment I can give you the second bead and place another braid into your hair. I cannot wait to see you in dwarven garments, with the consort's circlet upon your brow. And I long to take you to these chambers afterwards, and make love to my... What?" Bilbo's face had turned from inquisitive to thoughtful and then to something akin to gleeful.

"The bead, huh? I think you just gave me the perfect excuse to keep Kíli busy, to make him feel very much needed." His laughter filled the room before he continued, "Oh, but it will be torturous for you. To know that your nephews both will be a part of the bead's conception and creation while you'll have to wait for months yet to see it." Whoever said that hobbits were sweet and kind creatures, maybe even a bit slow at times and that the only thing they truly worried about was the next meal...whoever that was had been a bloody liar. Yes, Bilbo loved his food and drink, but he adored books and maps and knowledge almost as fervently, if not more. And there definitely was a mischievous streak to him...one that didn't stop at teasing Thorin but that also extended to...other things.

And he would show his hobbit that this dwarf could match whatever mischief Bilbo could come up with. Thus, he pried the book from Bilbo's fingers and shifted his position so he knelt between the hobbit's thighs. "And I will make you pay for each mention of said bead, ukrâd. I will make you scream..." Bilbo must have seen the feral look Thorin bestowed upon him, for he swallowed, pupils dilating. And the dwarf smirked as his hands undid the buttons of the hobbit's trousers and he reached inside to claim his prize...
Find me on Tumblr... [Eowyn's Musings](#). I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 19 - Of Solstice Past and Yule Present

Chapter Summary

Erestor joins the story with his take on past events, and Thorin gets his wish to see Bilbo in dwarven garb sooner than he expected.

Chapter Notes

I adore Erestor and I simply wanted him to play a somewhat more prominent role so...he's a close friend of Bilbo's now. Also, as we know hardly anything about him, I decided to put him into Gondolin as well and thus give him his own little slice of Hell (i.e. Glorfindel's death). Mean, yes? And proud of it!

Translation of Elvish: Mellonen - my friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Then (3019 T.A.)

It was over, if was finally over. This would be the first winter solstice where they knew, knew beyond any doubt that Sauron had been vanquished. That Saruman the traitor was no more and Middle-earth could finally begin to heal. Though he feared the same could not be said for their guest. Bilbo Baggins was quiet, eyes scanning the pages of the book he was reading, but Erestor guessed the hobbit's mind was not following the Lay of Lúthien. No, it was preoccupied with something else. The way it seemed to be so often.

Bilbo would not speak of it. Would not reveal what was troubling him so. Erestor had initially suspected it was worry for his nephew's wellbeing. He had left all his possessions to Frodo, and by the sounds of it, there were certain relations who might give the young hobbit grief over it. But by the time the One Ring had been revealed for what it was, Erestor had let go of that foolish notion. Bilbo was not afraid, he was...grieving.

Grief...a feeling Erestor was only too familiar with. After Gondolin's fall, Erestor had been relieved to find Glorfindel still alive and well. Until the balrog attacked the refugees. He had seen it all, had seen the golden elf fight this most gruesome adversary until Shadow and Flame consumed even the bright light of the Elda and Glorfindel fell to his death. And Erestor wanted to join him, wanted to die with his beloved. But fate had other plans for him.

For too many years he had dwelt alone, no matter how many friends he had surrounding him. Elrond had been kind, and the new High King as well; but something within Erestor had died and there was only blackness where his heart had been before. And then, as if by miracle, Glorfindel had appeared in Imladris. His Glorfindel. Radiant and golden and so very much alive. At first Erestor had not believed his eyes. Clearly he had been mistaken, it could not possibly be... So he had run and hid in his rooms. And then the soft knock on his door, and it had opened and Glorfindel had been standing in front of him, and there had been tears of joy and tender kisses and...
Erestor caught himself before his mind could provide him with images that were inappropriate for Elrond's library, especially not when there was someone else around. He knew though, back then when he had lost Glorfindel, he had been close to fading from the world of the living...and he would not have cared if it had happened. After all, it would have reunited him with his beloved. And Bilbo...he could sense the same pain in the old hobbit and wished there was something he could do. He and Glorfindel. For the Elda had seen it too. As had Elrond. The Lord of Imladris had offered elven healing to Bilbo, but the hobbit had rejected it. Even after he had broken down in these very rooms. Erestor did not know the specifics, but he and Glorfindel had their suspicions.

It had to be something about those dwarves the hobbit had been travelling with all those years ago. The way he had reacted to seeing Glóin...as if the dwarf was a ghost, a spectre of Bilbo's past, still haunting him. But then they had embraced, and Glóin had whispered, "I know, laddie, I know," and that had been that. The dwarf had all but moved into Bilbo's rooms, probably talking of times long gone. But now the dwarves had returned to their mountain after news of their king's death had reached the valley. There was another King under the Mountain now, King Thorin III. Erestor had been the one to inform Bilbo of it, and finally, finally the puzzle pieces had fallen into place. King Thorin... Oakenshield, not Stonehelm.

For months after, Erestor had given Bilbo ample opportunities to speak about his heartbreak, but the hobbit had kept his silence. Even after the elf had told him of Gondolin, of the nightmares that had been hounding him since that fateful day. Until Glorfindel had returned to his side. Bilbo had simply smiled, had told him how lucky they both were to have each other. And then the hobbit had excused himself, and Erestor had seen the hobbit clutch at something underneath his shirt, had seen Bilbo's eyes go watery. That night, he had cursed himself. Some advisor and friend he had been to the halfling. Instead of helping Bilbo, he had only accomplished one thing...to open the wounds even more. He had told his hobbit friend of his own heartbreak but subsequent happiness, forgetting that for Bilbo there would be no happily ever after.

It was then that both he and Glorfindel had come to the decision to turn this solstice into something special. The elves of Imladris normally did not celebrate the winter solstice, but this year would be different. Anything to make Bilbo see that there was joy yet to be found in the world. Even though it would never be enough to break through the pain and heartache he wore like an armour.

That evening, as Bilbo was sitting in his favourite armchair, reading of Beren and Lúthien, Erestor broke the silence. "I have read of the Yule Festival hobbits celebrate this time of the year, mellonen. And it gave Glorfindel and I an excuse to prepare a special celebration this solstice. So if my Lord ever asks you about it, please just nod and confirm what we told him. That is, that you knew of our plans and love the idea." Bilbo looked stunned, but not in a bad way. On the contrary. Before long, there was even a faint smile gracing his features, and that was indeed an achievement.

"As long as you don't expect me to help out. I'll gladly eat and drink anything you put in front of me though...you know, to test the quality of the food." Bilbo winked then, and Erestor could hardly believe his eyes. So there was a remnant of a happier hobbit left under all his grief. And the elf vowed that, with Glorfindel's help, he would try and bring out this side of Bilbo more often. No one should spend the remainder of their days in misery...not after Sauron had fallen. Bilbo Baggins would know joy again, even if it was fleeting and ever overshadowed by feelings of loss. He would see it done.

Now (3021 T.A.)
Bilbo was standing on the balcony, wrapped in furs, gazing down at the sea of lights in the valley beyond the main gates. Elven lights and dwarven, mingled together to make the night as bright as day. He could see hobbits run this way and that, and he didn't need to behold their faces to know they were smiling. It was Yule after all and food was aplenty, as was drink, and there would be gifts and dancing. The dwarves of Erebor had gladly joined in with the Shirefolk, had not only adopted the hobbit festival but made it their own. Bilbo suspected that Fili and Kili were responsible for that. They had taken the idea of gift-giving to a whole new level and especially the dwarflings were squealing delightedly at the sheer number of boxes they received.

But most surprising were the elves. Except, they weren't. Bilbo could still remember the first solstice after Sauron's fall, and all of the following ones. But this time... Ecthelion had returned just a few days ago, carts of elvish goodies in tow. But not only carts. He also brought company.

Celebrían was there, and the former High King, Gil-galad. Galadriel was riding by her daughter's side, smiling brightly and when she beheld the hustle and bustle that was the preparations of the festivities, she laughed...and it sounded like bells chiming. Erestor had come as well, and Lindir, and indeed many of the elves who used to live in Rivendell. An impromptu meeting was set up then, and Bilbo was asked to attend alongside Thorin.

Erestor had been seeking out the company of Bilbo once he had given Glorfindel a glance that spoke of love and promises that made Bilbo chuckle to himself. And then the elf had knelt in front of Bilbo and had embraced him, "I wish you had spoken of it, mellonen, and not held it all in. But to see you with him now...it makes my heart sing with joy. Too long have you been alone, and now you will never have to be again."

Thorin, who had witnessed the exchange, shot Erestor a thunderous yet teasing glance and muttered under his breath, "Keep your hands off, pointy ear!"

Erestor had simply glared and replied, "I have been his friend when you were enjoying yourself in Valinor, so back off, dwarven dinner-destroyer."

Bilbo, who by now had been fearing the worst, was beyond surprised by what happened next. Thorin bowed to Erestor. "You have my eternal gratitude for that." And then he added with a smirk, "However, kindly remove your hands from my betrothed lest I chop them off." He pointedly gripped the hilt of Orcrist and Erestor shook his head as he got back to his feet. "Now Lord Elrond tells me you like books and are a scholar of dwarven history. Maybe you would care to see our library? I'm sure Bilbo could lead the way..." Thorin's eyes caught the hobbit's, and Bilbo had to swallow around the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat. Thorin not only entrusted him with a visitor...friend or not...but also trusted him to find his way to the library. Alone. Along walkways spanning casms Bilbo rather didn't think of.

He breathed a "Thank you" and Thorin gave a curt nod before turning back to Erestor. "Though please, take that blond menace with you. He's driving everyone up the wall with his ideas for the
festival." The elf smiled wryly, but assured Thorin that he would try his very best. Though if Bilbo's memories of Imladris were anything to go by, even his best wouldn't be good enough to keep Glorfindel from making a nuisance of himself if he put his mind to it.

Soon after, they were both ensconced in the library, Ori nearly bursting with pride at Erestor's praise. Frodo was there was well, eyes bright with joy as he handed books and maps to the elf. Frodo had made a home for himself in the library it seemed, and was happier than Bilbo had...ever seen him, really. He spent his days with Balin and Ori, and occasionally with Thorin's nephews as well and he was beyond content. It made something uncoil in the pit of Bilbo's stomach to see Frodo like this...that remnant of guilt at having been somewhat distant for the entire time Frodo had lived with him.

They spent as much time among the books as possible during the next few days, until duty...and a festival...called them back above ground.

Tonight was the winter solstice, a time to let go of the past and embrace the future, and Bilbo would do so wholeheartedly. His future was laid out before him as if on a table with the most delicious food, and he couldn't wait to begin tasting each and every dish. The new year would bring new growth to Erebor and the most anticipated event since...the retaking of Erebor. A wedding. Their wedding. Balin had told Bilbo that preparations would begin as early as March and that there would be certain rituals the both of them would have to undergo in the time leading up to the big day. Rituals and royal appearances as his friend had called them. Like the one that very night.

For under the furs wasn't his usual hobbitish attire. There were robes...robes! Dwarven ones at that. Crafted specifically for him, for the future consort of the king. They were...overwhelmingly beautiful. The finest silks and the softest of velvets in warm colours that reminded Bilbo of his travelling attire. The outer robes were the same red as his coat, and the inner the green of his waistcoat. At least he had been allowed to wear his own pants underneath all the splendor. He still felt decidedly overdressed, but he wasn't going to mention that to Thorin. Not after all the times he had assured the dwarf that he was fine with his lot in life. Oh yes, and what a horrible lot it is. Spending forever with the dwarf you love, being by his side...ruling with him.

He was so focused on his thoughts and the goings-on down below, he didn't hear the soft footsteps behind him, didn't notice Thorin walk up to him until the dwarf wrapped his arms around the smaller frame of the hobbit. "It is time, Ukrâd. Let us get you warmed up before we have to face the snows down there, and the cold." The dwarf pulled Bilbo back inside the study they now shared, and the hobbit went more than willingly. That was, until he glanced at his desk.

"No!"

"Bilbo..."

"Under no circumstances, Thorin! I've told you, and I've told Balin...and everyone else who would listen. I will not wear it!" There on his maps sat the object of much discussion over the past few days. A beautiful mithril circlet.

"It's your right as..."

"No! We're not yet..." Sighing, Bilbo tried to collect himself. "I will not wear it until we are truly bonded. I don't want to...jinx it." He lowered his gaze as he began to fidget with his robes.

"It's not the circlet you will be wearing as my consort, Bilbo. I have yet to craft it." Bilbo frowned at
the floor. "This..." he could hear more than see how Thorin gestured at the circlet, "it's the circlet of
the king's intended. Just like the robes mark you as my betrothed." Oh...darn. He had been so busy
fending off the piece of jewellery that he hadn't allowed anyone to explain its significance. Well
done, Bilbo. Well done! "Please..." Bilbo quickly crossed the floor to where Thorin was standing by
the desk, holding out his hand for the circlet. But instead of cold metal, a warm hand grasped his
while another was placed underneath his chin. "I know you do not like it, but I promise there won't
be many occasions that call for full regalia. Trust me, I can think of better things than carrying this
thing," he looked up at his crown, "on my head."

Bilbo chuckled, "So here we are then, a king who doesn't want to wear his crown, and his hobbit
betrothed who will not wear his circlet." He stepped back a little to take in the sight of Thorin. He
was...stunning. Deep blue robes covered a familiar armoured tunic, showing that he was both a
warrior and a dwarf of peace. "They let you wear your shirt and breeches..."

"That's because I know how to say no when Balin starts going crazy. A skill you have yet to learn.
However," he was suddenly very much aware of the dwarf's eyes on him, "I am very pleased with
the result, my hobbit. Though I am not sure I still wish to share you with our subjects. Maybe I
should become one of those awfully jealous kings who lock their mates up somewhere and don't
allow anyone to see them..."

"And if you want me to let you touch me ever again, you will forget about that splendid idea right
now. I'm not some prize to be locked away somewhere, Thorin Oakenshield. I have elected to be
here. Even if I have to run around like...this." He ran his hands up and down the robes.

"There was but one time when I entertained such thoughts, and I wasn't myself then. I thought to put
you and the Arkenstone in my rooms, never to let you leave again." The dwarf's faint smile was
rueful, but soon it was replaced by a real and warm smile, and Valar, it made Bilbo weak in the
knees. "I would not force you to stay, but to know you do it willingly..." He had reached for the
circlet, and he was now holding it up in both hands. "May I, my betrothed? May I show the world
that I chose you to share my life?" Bilbo could only nod and inhale deeply as the circlet was placed
on his head. It was as light as a feather, just like his shirt had been. His shirt...

It had been returned to him by Gandalf after the battle before the Black Gates of Mordor. The wizard
had found it in all the mayhem and given it back to its rightful owner with the words "He wanted
you to have it, and while it was gracious of you to lend it to your nephew, I think it's time you had it
once more." His shirt... It had been Thorin's gift to him... His gift!

"I...I need just one second," Bilbo held up his index finger as he rounded his desk and rummaged
through several drawers until he found it. His gift for Thorin. "You have given me so much already.
I have a future now that I never thought I would have. You have taken all the pain away and
replaced it with love and happiness and so much joy my heart seems to be overflowing with it.
Today is not only the first day of Yule, it is also a day to remember the past and to let go of it. And to
look to the future. I..." The book suddenly felt very heavy in his hands, but he still presented it to
Thorin, fingers trembling as the dwarf took it. "This is my past, but not like the book I gave to Frodo.
Not like the story we are now re-writing. This is the story of...of my heart, Thorin. It is a diary, the
book I started scribbling in after the Carrock. It...I..." Oh Valar, he was stuttering like a tween! What
would his mother say? "I was writing it to you. Today, I made the last entry and tomorrow, I will
start a new one."

"Bilbo..." Thorin's arms were wound tightly around him then, and the dwarf kissed him softly before
pulling back, one of those special smiles on his lips. "My Bilbo..."
Whatever else Thorin had been about to say was cut off by a loud knock, the clearing of a throat and a cheerful, "Duty calls, you two. You can continue being sappy after you attended the, you know, festivities." And if looks could kill, Balin would have been a very dead dwarf.

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 20 - Gifts Given and Gifts Received

Chapter Summary

I think Thorin and Bilbo are in that honeymoon stage right now and can’t get enough of each other... Well, they have my blessings, unreservedly.

Chapter Notes

**Notes the first:** Wow, 10.000 hits *faints* Just...wow. You guys are amazing *bounces* And as a gift to you all, I’m going to take up to five prompts to write either a little ficlet for you, or maybe even integrate something into this story (or one of it’s sequels). How does that sound?

**Notes the second:** Give you three guesses who those two hobbits are ;)

**Notes the third:** This will be the last update for two weeks I’m afraid as first it’s my birthday and then I’ll be travelling abroad (however, that hopefully means that I’ll get some writing done). So the next update is scheduled for Friday, 31st of May. However, I will be posting a ficlet either later today or tomorrow to tide you all over a bit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

Whoever said that dwarves were more resilient to the cold than other races surely must have been lying. Because he felt the cold, acutely! Pulling the furs closer around himself, Kíli built a little cocoon of warmth as he leaned into his brother. "Cold?" Fíli asked, and the younger dwarf simply nodded. "It's because you're so lanky and won't put on any weight no matter how much you eat. Which is unfair by the way." Kíli poked out his tongue. "And now you're behaving like a little dwarfling."

"At least people worry about dwarflings. Apparently now that I'm grown up, I can freeze to death." Fíli rolled his eyes. "Well, you know what I mean. Why do we have to be out in the snow again? Because my hands are frozen solid and I'm afraid my fingers might fall off. And I need them, you know, for my archery. Then again, you wouldn't know a bow from an arrow, so why am I wasting breath telling you about it... Ouch!" Why on earth had Fíli just smacked him over the head? *You know very well why, just like you know why you're outside in the middle of the night.* He did. Though he chose to not acknowledge it.

Let go of the past and face your future...that was easier said than done. Bilbo, Thorin and Fíli were trying, that was true, but not even their attentiveness and love could quieten that voice at the back of his head that would seek him out at night when Fíli was asleep by his side and speak to him of his failures. Of how he wasn't a worthy heir both of Durin himself and of Thorin. And worse yet, that voice told him that they knew, that they all knew of his failings, that they laughed behind his back.
But as terrible as those whispered words were, they were also causing him to doubt. There was no way that Bilbo, sweet Bilbo, would laugh at him. There was not a cruel bone in the hobbit, and that thought alone gave Kíli pause. Maybe that voice had been lying to him all along. Maybe... He did not dare hope.

"Bilbo looks amazing, doesn't he?" his brother's question roused him and returned them to the cold night. But he would rather freeze than listen to... "And Thorin? He's practically beaming with pride. I've never... They look so happy together, even though I wonder what uncle did to get Bilbo to wear the circlet. He was ever so opposed to it the last time someone mentioned it."

Fíli shrugged. "But whatever it was, our dearest hobbit no longer seems to have whatever reservations he may have had." The blond smiled then, one of those infectious smiles and the corners of Kíli's mouth moved of their own volition. "I cannot wait until they are officially bonded. Bilbo...he will be good for Erebor, more than good."

Kíli wholeheartedly agreed with that. The hobbit had been the heart and soul of their Company all those years ago and now... He had become the heart of their family in only a few weeks and soon he would be the heart of the Kingdom of Erebor as well. Whether it was Bilbo's innate goodness, or the kindness he showed everyone around him, Kíli didn't know. Then a thought came to him and he chuckled quietly to himself. Or maybe it was simply the fact that he had somehow managed to wrap Thorin around his little finger. There was no doubt in his mind that their uncle would do anything and everything for the hobbit, and that Bilbo would do the same for the king. And then he remembered something else, his smile turning into a grin. "You still owe me quite a bit of gold, brother dear..."

Fíli looked beyond startled. "What? Why?" Had he really thought Kíli wouldn't remember? Eventually? That private little bet they had agreed upon that very first evening...

"Do you not recall? The few years you have on me must really have addled your wits, brother. Bilbo! And Thorin!" Fíli stared at him blankly. "The bet... You know, our bet?!

"And you know that our bet?" His brother blinked, but showed no other sign of remembering. Kíli sighed. And people called him a scatterbrain. "Bag End? Any of this ring a bell?"

"Bag End? Any of this ring a bell?" And finally Fíli gasped. And shook his head. "That's null and void. We died. Thorin died. And even if death doesn't break the bonds of the bet then it is you who is owing gold...to me." What? "As I recall, you said there'd be a wedding within the next two years. And unless I'm very much mistaken, which I'm not, there wasn't one. It's taken them eighty-two years. So...pay up."

"No, no, no... Thorin's death put the whole thing on hold. So in fact, they are nowhere near the two year mark." His logic was sound and solid and even Fíli would have to admit that. Only his brother was still shaking his head.

"Those were not the terms of our bet, brother. And you know it full well." Blue eyes sparkled merrily as Fíli's outstretched hand came into view. "Now pay up."

Right, so his brother wanted to be mean like that. Oh, Kíli could do that as well. "But brother..." He put on his best puppy dog expression before continuing, "Do you really think those eighty dreadful years should be counted? You know as well as I do that if Thorin hadn't died..." Fíli now glared at him. Good. "You've seen him, brother. You know that he didn't really lead a life until the day Bilbo arrived at the Harbours. And you know how fast they both acted then. Do you really..."

"You don't play fair!" A bag of coins was thrust into Kíli's hand then, amidst much grumbling from his brother. But then that faded and Fíli smiled at the royal couple. "I would have given more than
the gold, Kíli, more than my life if it were possible, to get them to the here and now sooner. Without all the heartbreak.” Kíli nodded, his gaze following his brother’s. Bilbo and Thorin were about to release a lantern into the starlit sky; a bright flame, shining a light into the future. And as he glanced around at all the smiling faces of dwarves, elves and hobbits, Kíli allowed himself to believe that maybe, maybe, even his future would have light in it to counter the darkness.

It was an hour later that Kíli found himself next to Frodo. Fíli had wandered off to speak with Bilbo and Thorin about the fireworks Gandalf, or whatever name he went by now, had sent to Erebor to be lit the following evening. There were some massive rockets there, one of which had made Bilbo chuckle and shake his head for some reason. Frodo had told him about some books he had found in the library, eyes bright with wonderment. But the hobbit was clearly as cold as Kíli was himself; he was constantly blowing warm air on his fingers and rubbed his hands together in a feeble attempt to keep them from freezing. It was then that Ori walked up to them, a wrapped gift in his mittened hands.

"Hello Kíli...Frodo. I...I understand that it is a hobbit tradition to give gifts on this day, so...” He placed the gift into Frodo’s hands and bit his lower lip. Now hold on just a minute...

"That's...that's awfully kind of you. I...I have something for you as well. Kíli? Would you mind holding this for me for just a moment?” Kíli smiled sweetly and took hold of the proffered gift. Frodo then reached inside the layers of furs he was wearing and pulled out a small parcel that he thrust into Ori’s hands. "It's not much, and I'll still have to add to it, but... I thought you might like it.” The young dwarf smiles shyly as he opened the gift gingerly, taking care not to tear the paper. Kíli rolled his eyes and grinned at the same time. Ori, Ori, Ori... Who'd have thought. Finally the...book...was unwrapped and Ori beamed. "A book on hobbit culture. Oh but that is perfect! Thank you.” Frodo smiled at him and Ori looked away, clearly embarrassed. Dear sweet Aulë, he would need help if he ever wanted to get anywhere...

Handing Ori's present back to Frodo, he muttered, "Your turn now, and I hope it's not another boring book.” Both Frodo and Ori shot him glares, but Kíli was simply grinning. Folk being totally and utterly oblivious was kind of endearing. Especially if it meant that he and his brother, and indeed their elven friends, could meddle.

The hobbit had turned his attention back to the gift and had opened the wrapping to reveal... "Oh Ori, these are wonderful. I was already wondering if I should ask you to knit me some.” Mittens! Ori had made Frodo mittens. Ori had made something for Frodo. Oh, this was simply brilliant. And not any mittens either. The wool was the same blue as Frodo’s eyes and they looked warm and soft.

"So Ori? If you're giving mittens and other knitwear to people this Yule, when can I expect mine? And Fíli has been complaining about the cold as well...” He hadn't, but that was beside the point. "And look at Thorin's future consort. Bilbo is practically crawling into his robes...” Ori flushed as Kíli had known he would and muttered something about "soon” and "before the year is out” and then he fled, clutching his book to his chest. And the way Frodo stared at his retreating form... It was matchmaking time again. It had worked with Thorin and Bilbo after all, what with giving the hobbit Thorin's oaken shield. And if they hadn't stopped dancing around each other at that point, they'd already decided on a course of action to see them lip locked before they got to Erebor.

Turning back to the hobbit, Kíli inquired, "You like him, don't you?" Sometimes being blunt was the best course of action, Kíli had found. Not often, actually almost never, but he was sure that this was one of those few moments when it was called for. And Frodo nodded... Hah!

"I mean, he is a great friend to me. Much like Fíli and yourself.” Of course... "He's given me
something to do where I feared I would be...something of an outcast. Frodo Baggins, the silly hobbit who nearly messed everything up and..." Kíli pulled Frodo into a hug then. Matchmaking could wait for now; Frodo needed a friend.

"That was never going to happen. At least not from us. You're as much a part of our family now as Bilbo is. When the ship docked, I expected to get my uncle back, but I got a cousin as well. And what you achieved, I don't think I could have. You held out for so long, don't be too hard on yourself for falling under the Ring's spell at the end. You are stronger than you think, Frodo Baggins. Just like your uncle." Stronger than any of us, he added silently. So much stronger than us.

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"He won't believe his eyes. Come, come, we have to find him." Bilbo was giddy with excitement as he pushed two flabbergasted hobbits ahead of himself. Thorin walked behind them, a faint smile on his face. He could already envision Frodo's face; blue eyes wide in shock, mouth slightly agape...Maybe he would faint like Bilbo did on numerous occasions. Now where was Balin when he needed the older dwarf? Surely he wouldn't be opposed to a little bet or two.

Bilbo turned to him then and smiled, and all thoughts of fainting hobbits and bets were forgotten. His hobbit looked radiant in his new garb and the circlet on his brow, the circlet Bilbo had fought over so very hard. Seeing it made Thorin's heart sing. It marked the halfling as his, his betrothed. No one else would ever know Bilbo's touch, no one else would ever see the hobbit in the throes of passion. And above all, no one but him would ever have Bilbo's love. The love Thorin still felt undeserving of, but he wouldn't question his luck at having been given a second chance. A chance not only to atone for his mistakes, but also one to make Bilbo the happiest he could possibly be.

The lantern had been a symbol of that. Of finally letting go of the past and stepping into a bright future. And how could it be anything but bright? With Bilbo by his side he would be able to weather any storm, anything the Valar chose to throw at him. With Bilbo they would be able to withstand everything.

Catching up with the hobbits, Thorin caught Bilbo's hand, lacing their fingers. *Let everyone see how happy their king is, huh?* Indeed. Bilbo was not only loved by Thorin, but by all the dwarves of Erebor and cheers rose up around them at this display of affection. His hobbit, as expected, blushed to the very tips of his pointy ears. But his smile didn't slip and he even nodded his head at a few familiar faces. Thorin could just about stop himself from pulling Bilbo into his arms and kissing him, thoroughly. *That* would surely be the halfling's undoing. And while a fainting Bilbo was a sight to behold, he would surely die of embarrassment if it happened out in the open and for everyone to see. So Thorin contented himself with bringing the hobbit's hand to his lips.

And Bilbo smiled up at him, his eyes holding promises of so much more than chaste kisses and Thorin had to catch himself before he stumbled over his own feet. Bilbo...his sweet, little, *innocent* burglar...had changed greatly over the past few weeks. Yes, he was still shying away from being shown the respect he deserved, but he had embraced other aspects wholeheartedly. Giving advice, helping the dwarves of Erebor, and adding his own brand of counsel to decisions...Bilbo excelled at them. Even though at times he still could not believe that folk would ask his opinion in the first place. And then there were the changes behind the closed doors of their quarters.

It seemed that after his accident, Bilbo had finally come to terms with the fact that Thorin would not, *could not* be without him. And that in turn had made something within the hobbit settle into place and he had become more...mischievous and more willing to state his needs and desires. *It could, of course, have also been the knowledge of...forever... That you will have eternity together and that*
nothing will tear you apart ever again. Well, whatever it was, it was intoxicating to the dwarf. He could no longer remember what life had been like without the hobbit by his side, and he didn't want to recall it either. Life was worth nothing if he couldn't hold Bilbo throughout the night, if he couldn't wake to the sight of an auburn mop of hair on his chest and the feel of the hobbit's body fused to his side. And you also appreciate his counsel, do you not? Oh yes, he did. He had learned the hard way that ignoring Bilbo's advice could be fatal. It had been before...

And then, tonight, the halfling had given him the most precious of gifts. Thorin had only been able to leaf through it quickly, but he could already see that Bilbo had truly given him his heart and soul with the book. The joy and wonderment of the first pages, and then the pain...pain that stretched far and wide, that filled almost all of the pages, until... Until he got to the last section, and the joy of the first pages paled in comparison to the love that poured off of every word. Knowing that this was at the end of all the pain...it gave him the strength to read it in its entirety. Eventually. When he was sure he wouldn't drown in a sea of guilt over his betrothed's suffering. And maybe, one day, he would be able to put into words how much he had truly longed for Bilbo during those eighty years, and how much he had always loved the hobbit. How foolish he had been to deny himself this happiness in the beginning...

They were nearing their quarry now; Frodo was standing with Fili and Kili, deep in conversation. The young hobbit was laughing about something, and his younger nephew joined in, and for a moment Thorin felt his heart swell inside his chest. Kili laughed, and after the recent weeks, that was truly wondrous. Bilbo's grip on his hand tightened, and he smiled faintly at the dwarf king. "He's healing, Thorin. Slowly but surely he is healing." Thorin nodded and relief flooded his entire body. Kili would be alright, eventually. And until then, and even after, he would have the support of his family, be it dwarven or of hobbitkind.

"If it wasn't for you, my hobbit, we would have lost him. At some point, he would have succumbed to all the pain he's been carrying with him for so long, and that light that shines so brightly within him would have been extinguished forever. And we would have been none the wiser." He glanced at their laced fingers then, the lighter hobbit skin and his tanned dwarven one. "I know now without a doubt that you were meant to come into our lives. That all of this was meant to happen." And it was Bilbo then who halted their little procession, and it was the hobbit who moved to stand in front of Thorin and closed the gap between them until their mouths were but a breath away. And then he kissed the king, pouring all his love into that tender brush of lips.

And he didn't blush at all at the cheers erupting around them; instead he simply smiled up at Thorin. "I owe great thanks to Gandalf for picking me to be the fourteenth member of your Company... I am just afraid any kind of 'thank you' won't be enough." Thorin chuckled and then turned the hobbit around to look at his young nephew. The noise around them had alerted Fili, Kili and Frodo and while the two young dwarves smiled at him and Bilbo, Frodo stared at the other two hobbits, mouth agape. Why oh why had there been no one bet with...

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 21 - A Conspiracy

Chapter Summary

It's time for a little conspiracy :)

Chapter Notes

I am back from my travels and have indeed done some writing. However, not as much as I would have hoped (who knew travelling could be so exhausting? Thus, I would like to announce that I'll probably cut down the updates of this to once a week as I'm currently writing two birthday stories and really have to start on the Big Bang Fic.

I will, however, work on certain prompts (Erestor/Glorfindel reunion being one of them, which will probably end up being a ficlet and not part of the story proper) and if there's anything else anyone would like to see, do drop a comment.

Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (3021 T.A.)

Primula and Drogo smiled as they held their son between them. And Frodo, well Frodo was still quite shell-shocked. And for some reason Thorin looked almost disappointed at the young hobbit's reaction. What had he expected? For Frodo to faint like he himself had done on several occasions now? Oh wait, he probably had. And for the dwarf it would probably constitute something funny as well. Curse the foolishness of the dwarves. How had he gotten himself entangled in their affairs anyway? Wait, Gandalf. Silly wizard. And Bilbo owed his happiness to him. Even though his happiness was currently displeased that poor Frodo hadn't fainted at the sight of his parents. Dwarves!

Eventually Frodo visibly calmed and a smile that lit up his entire face appeared on his lips. "Ma? Pa? Oh I've missed you so much!" Primula was crying, and Drogo wasn't too far away from it either. Bilbo took this as a cue to leave and give the family some privacy. But just as he was about to drag Kili away from Frodo's side...Fili had already stepped back and stood with Thorin now...his nephew caught his eyes. "Thank you, Bilbo. I... This is the best Yule present ever. Thank you." And his tears of joy joined his mothers. Bilbo simply nodded and took hold of Kili's arm. The dark-haired dwarf beamed and allowed the hobbit to drag him away.

Once they were out of earshot though, Thorin and Fili having joined them, Kili rounded on Bilbo, "How did you manage this? We would have known it if Frodo's parents had been around...your mother would have made sure that we met them. So how..." Bilbo just shrugged and muttered something noncommittal about Yavanna and her children. "Oh very well then, keep your secrets. Maybe I should also keep mine then. Even though I'm desperate to tell you about it." Kili grinned. Grinned like the Kili of old. The sight of it warmed Bilbo's heart and he felt Thorin's presence beside
him before a strong arm was wrapped around his shoulders. The king had seen it, too.

"And what secret is that, oh nephew of mine?" Thorin's voice was filled with mirth and warmth, and Kíli smiled almost shyly at his uncle. There had apparently been but a few times when the older dwarf had spoken in this manner to Kíli, and he revelled in it. More than that, Thorin was interested in whatever mischief Kíli was up to now.

"Well... I think Bilbo's nephew may be entering some sort of romantic entanglement. Actually, I'm quite sure of it." Bilbo blinked. Frodo? In love? But with who? And then he saw his nephew's mitten hands as they held on to both his mother and father. And suddenly everything fell into place. Ori! Of course. They had been spending nearly every waking moment in each other's company. And Frodo was working with him in the library. "Though, I do not believe the two of them are aware of their feelings as yet. Or maybe they are, but they probably believe they are unrequited. Even though it's quite clear they are very much returned." Kíli was beaming; like a little child with a new toy. A new toy?!

"You will stay out of this! Do you hear me, Kíli? No matchmaking or anything of the kind." The young dwarf's face fell and immediately Bilbo regretted his words.

"But Bilbo... If it hadn't been for Fíli and myself, you and Thorin might still be dancing around each other." Excuse me? "Remember the shield? We gave it to you and I'm quite sure it had some sort of influence on uncle and pushed him into action. Oh..." Apparently Kíli had only now remembered that the dwarf in question was standing with them as well, and could hear each and every word.

But neither Kíli nor Bilbo could have ever foreseen Thorin's reaction. "So that was your doing? I might have known." There was no bite to his words, no venom, and no anger at his nephews for meddling in things they shouldn't have. "While I was more than happy to have my shield back, it had very little to do with my decision to pursue our dearest burglar, to follow the path my heart had laid out before me." Bilbo simply stared. They hadn't really spoken of that night at Beorn's, at least not in detail. And the hobbit had never questioned why Thorin had been seeking him out. From the corner of his eye he saw Fíli drag Kíli further away to give them some privacy. The golden-haired dwarf winked at Bilbo and smiled.

And Thorin... He rested his forehead against Bilbo's, whispering, "To hold you in my arms on the Carrock...it was as if I'd finally found something I never even knew I was missing. And while there was a chance that you'd reject me, I had to know. I had to find out if you cared as much as I did. Though putting yourself between me and certain death was a pretty good indication that you did. Even though part of me wanted to shout at you for doing something so stupid." That made Bilbo chuckle. "You could have been killed, ukrâd, taken away from me forever." Then his eyes turned thoughtful and he added, "Well, maybe not forever, but I would have believed it to be forever until meeting you again on these shores."

"I could hardly allow that orc to cut off your head, now could I?" The memory had lost its terror, and he could now smile at it, albeit a bit ruefully. "I had gotten quite attached to having you around, even though you were constantly berating me for this, that or the other." It was Thorin's turn to smile wistfully. "I simply knew that I would regret it for the rest of my life if I didn't at least try to save you. But even after you embraced me, I never dared to even dream that you would...that you could... However, I am more than glad that you did."

He reached up to cup the dwarf's face so he could properly gaze into those sapphire pools. "Because despite all the attentions that I now receive...attentions that I never wanted, that are so very much not what a gentlehobbit should be looking for...despite the fact that you are driving me up the wall with
your dwarven stubbornness at times and despite the pain we both had to suffer through, I love you, Thorin Oakenshield. And I've never been as happy as I am now. And how could I not be? With you by my side." A smile was tugging at the corners of his mouth as he added, "And to think that Frodo may find the same thing...with a quiet soul like Ori...it fills my heart with such joy."

"He has suffered through much, it is true. More than either of us will ever know, and yet, I almost envy him." That gave Bilbo pause. Pain and hope were warring across the dwarf's face, but his eyes retained their warmth as he gazed down at the hobbit. "He never had to live with the memory of tears streaming down your face, with the knowledge that I was leaving behind the most precious thing I ever called my own. Every time you smile at me now is like a precious gift, Bilbo, and I will never be able to thank my foolish nephews enough for making certain decisions on my behalf and dragging me into this elf-infested land. So in a way, Kili is right. Without them, we would not be as we are now. And our hearts would forever bleed for one another." He fell silent then, his hands taking hold of Bilbo's wrists to pull them away from his face. He turned the hobbit's hands over then and leaned down to kiss his knuckles.

Bilbo blinked back the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes. There were no words to express how he felt in that very moment, no words at all. So he simply smiled, trying to convey his emotions that way. And Thorin understood. This was what that night had been all about. A celebration of the future they would share. They were no longer parted and nothing would ever tear them asunder again. And as the dwarf had put it, their hearts would never again bleed for each other.

"Um, sorry to interrupt, but people are staring at you two. With massive smiles, yes, but... I think Bilbo might feel somewhat uncomfortable with it." Fili's expression was one of worry, mixed with a healthy dose of mirth. But Bilbo simply shrugged. He wouldn't allow staring dwarves to stop him from showing his betrothed how beloved he was. And so, instead of shying away from Thorin, he instead freed his hands from the dwarf's grasp and pulled his head down for a kiss. A chaste kiss, but a kiss no less. Kili snickered and Fili sighed, "Or you can just ignore what I said and continue being all lovey dovey. Not that it's anything strange for dwarven eyes to see a king and his mate in this way, but I thought you were too...delicate. But trust our burglar to surprise us all yet again and rise above and beyond the bounds of his race and beat all those silly feelings of embarrassment." And if he hadn't been Thorin's heir and they hadn't been surrounded by their subjects, Bilbo was sure Fili would have stuck out his tongue at him.

Kili was holding on to his brother's shoulder, almost doubling over with laughter. "The look...on your face, Bilbo. It's priceless!" The young dwarf was almost hyperventilating and drew some funny looks from bypassers, but he didn't care. Or simply couldn't stop. And his brother wasn't any better with his smug expression, like a cat that just had a bowl of cream.

There was only one way to somehow regain control over the situation, and that was to give the two of them something new to focus on. He murmured, "I'm sorry Frodo," to himself before addressing the two young dwarves in front of him. "So how are you going to go about it then? Both Frodo and Ori are more than shy when it comes to new friends, let alone anything deeper. And I can assure you that Frodo will not make the first move, even once he acknowledges the feeling you claim he harbours for our dear scribe. He is very much a Baggins in that way. I know I wouldn't have approached Thorin..."

"Oh really, I hadn't noticed," Bilbo deadpanned. "Thanks for telling me lest I marry him instead of
"I'm afraid you would have to battle it out with your nephew now," Thorin shot back. "I think you had better stay where you are now. And help Ori and Frodo along." He kissed the side of Bilbo's head before turning his attention to his nephews. "So what do you propose we do?" We? Was Thorin actually going to join in with the matchmaking? Frodo and Ori were doomed! But maybe they were doomed to be happy together and surely that couldn't be bad.

"Well..." Kíli's brow was furrowed as if he was deep in thought, and Fíli glanced at his brother, bemused by his antics. "I am convinced they care about one another. Their gifts and the way they exchanged them, it was very obvious really. Did you know Frodo made a book for Ori? On hobbit customs and the like? And Ori knit Frodo mittens that are the same shade as your nephew's eyes, Bilbo." A book? That must have taken Frodo weeks if not... Kíli was studying him, he could tell. Especially when he nodded to himself and grinned. "See, I'm not making this up."

"We have to make sure, Kíli. I admit that your arguments are sound, but..." Frodo had suffered so much and if he could find the happiness he himself had found in the arms of Thorin, well, he would only gladly help things along. "I will speak with Frodo, will mention Ori and the Yule present... I will be able to read him better than the lot of you."

"Why Bilbo," Kíli crooned, "that's positively wicked of you. And it will work, I'm sure of it." The young dwarf's brow furrowed then as if he was lost in thought. "So if you take care of Frodo, who of us should deal with our dearest scribe?" The grin on his face was positively frightening and as he turned to his brother, Fíli swallowed. "How about you, brother dear? At least he won't be too suspicious if you show up in the library. He would simply know something was up if I did. After all, there's no way I would ever set foot in there normally."

Thorin sighed, "And believe me, Kíli, it shows."

Kíli's eyes narrowed as they focused on his uncle. "At least I didn't think a jewel was more important than Bilbo." Oh dear, that was a low blow. And Kíli seemed to realise that as soon as the words had left his mouth. "I'm sorry, Thorin. I shouldn't have said that."

But Thorin, who had stiffened at his nephew's words, was shaking his head. "No, you are right. There is wisdom in you that I simply didn't see before. I should have listened to you, the three of you. I won't make that mistake again, I promise you." The youngest dwarf just stared open mouthed and his brother wasn't faring much better. "You were always eager to make friends amongst the other races, and I discouraged you from doing so. I didn't understand that it could be to our advantage. Especially not where the elves were concerned. And I paid the ultimate price for it. But worse than that, I dragged you down with me." Bilbo's hand had closed around Thorin's at that, and he was stroking the back of it now with his thumb. Small, soothing circles that made the dwarf tighten the grip he had on the hobbit. "Your kind of wisdom can't be found in books, Kíli, it comes from within you."

Kíli had moved forward and was now standing right in front of his uncle. Who released Bilbo's hand and pulled his nephew into a tight embrace. The hobbit exchanged glances with Fíli at that and walked over to stand by the blond's side. "That has been a long time coming," Fíli whispered. "Thorin never told Kíli, not even here in Valinor. Never told him that he was proud of Kíli. I could see it, and I thought my brother could as well, but..." He sighed before continuing, "He clearly didn't. He still cries at night, Bilbo, when he thinks I'm asleep. It's as if he is missing an integral part of his soul and nothing I do can help him. I'm afraid for him. How long can he exist like this?" And as Bilbo gazed up at the dwarf, he wondered if it was only Kíli who was incomplete. But he also knew
that Fíli wouldn't say. Thorin's heir would always put his brother's happiness before his own and, not for the first time, the hobbit worried that Kíli wasn't the only one who was plagued by guilt.

So Bilbo simply smiled ruefully and nodded, "I have seen it, too. But if we manage to keep him busy, we can maybe give him a lifeline until such time..." Fíli gave a curt nod. And maybe it will also keep him occupied... Indeed. "I promise I will do everything I can to make him see that he is loved." 'And you,' he added silently.

The brunette had stepped back now and was smiling shyly. It was as if he had only now realised that the festivities were still very much ongoing around them, and that the king had hugged him in plain sight of his subjects, the elves and the hobbits. Bilbo could see Elrond in the distance, smiling as he leaned closer to his wife and whispered something into Celebrían's ear. They both inclined their heads to him then and Bilbo smiled back. A little further away were Ecthelion and Glorfindel, with their mates, discussing something or other rather animatedly. Ecthelion was gesturing and the blond Elda stood stoically, shaking his head. Erestor and Ereinion were clearly rolling their eyes at the two of them in bemusement. Whatever it was the elves were arguing about, he wasn't sure he wanted to know. But he was equally sure he would before long.

"So," Thorin murmured, clearly aware of his nephew's discomfort. "If Bilbo interrogates Frodo, and you deal with Ori, and they both do have feelings for each other...what should our next step be." He pointedly looked at Kíli, who blushed. He obviously wasn't used to be leading in...anything really. Even though Bilbo knew from Thorin's descriptions of the construction of their new kingdom that Kíli had, in fact, been majorly involved in pretty much everything. From conception to finished product. But the young dwarf apparently didn't see it that way.

"Well, locking them into a room won't work with them. They'll just talk about maps and books and other boring things." That earned Kíli a glare from the hobbit. Books were anything but boring, thank you very much indeed. "Not that it would have worked with the two of you until after Azog...and why did I just say that? Fee! I'm giving myself mental scars!" Fíli snickered and ruffled his brother's hair. "I will have to drink myself into a stupor to forget all about it again." He sighed dejectedly. And Bilbo had to bite the inside of his mouth to keep from laughing. One look at Thorin confirmed the king wasn't faring any better. "Anyway, I believe we should then begin to drop, you know, hints. For example we could tell Frodo that Ori really loves the book... And so on. You get the general idea."

Bilbo nodded, as did the two other dwarves. "Then we are in agreement." Thorin turned to the hobbit with a smile. "And your nephew won't know what hit him." Blue eyes sparkled merrily and Bilbo couldn't help himself but lean up to brush his lips against the dwarf's.

"That we are, Master Oakenshield. That we are..."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 22 - The Plans of Elves

Chapter Summary

The Third Age has finally come to an end and the Forth Age is upon us. Though for some reason it is not as peaceful in Aman as it should be...

Chapter Notes

I am truly amazed at the amount of hits, kudos and subscriptions this story has accumulated. And a special thank you to each and every one of you who's commented as well, it means the world to me to see that people are enjoying this story as much as I do while writing it.

And I'm still waiting for some of you to give me prompts btw...you know, for correctly guessing that it was Frodo's parents and all that :)


See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

It was the dawn of the Fourth Age, the Age of Men, an age of peace in Middle-earth. The old kingdom in the north was being rebuilt and both Rohan and Gondor were blooming under their new kings. Life in Arda was indeed peaceful after the fall of Sauron. Life in Aman, however, was not so. Especially not for Master Erestor, formerly of Imladris and currently of Erebor. Maybe he should tell King Thorin that he thought of himself like that. The dwarf's face would surely cheer him up. And oh, how he needed some cheering up.

For the second time is as many hours he wished he could sail back to live in Rivendell with Elrond's sons. Would Círdan allow him to? He knew it would only be temporary, but surely another century or so would see the end of Glorfindel's fight with Ecthelion. Maybe Ereinion would like to accompany him since he was hearing about it every waking moment as well, Erestor was certain. And it was not so much the fact that the two friends were fighting, it was what they were fighting about. More than once Erestor had simply wanted to throw up his arms and take things into his own hands. Because as things were at the moment, Ecthelion and Glorfindel surely would not act until the time to do so was running out.

It all began with Ecthelion's visit to Turgon's court. When the Lord of the Fountain reached Tirion to retrieve certain festival-related necessities, he all but forced his way into an ongoing council session. It was his right as an elven noble, but up until then he had never showed much...if any...interest in such meetings. Or so Erestor had been told. But he clearly had some time to spare while he waited for mirovar and other elvish delicacies to be made ready for the journey back to Erebor, and maybe the topic of the discussion was of interest to him as well. Turgon had apparently changed his mind in regards to the elvish settlement near Erebor. Or perhaps it had been Thingol who had changed his
mind for him.

The blond Sindar had appeared in Tirion shortly after the small company of dwarves, elves and hobbits had left for Erebor and he had been anything but happy. Before long he had started to accuse Turgon of siding with their enemies and when he heard that the two Balrog slayers had joined King Thorin's party, Thingol was beyond livid. "The crown suits you ill, King Turgon. And I know that you will pay for this, eventually." A sneer on his lips, he had turned around then and left Turgon's audience chamber. And the High King had reached a point where he was actively seeking a way to live his days without the more than irritating Teleri elf.

And apparently he had found just the way to do that. Which was what that council meeting had been about. No longer would the elven settlement near Erebor be a rebuilt Imladris. Oh no. Very much like Dale had been on the doorstep of the dwarven kingdom in Arda, so would there be an elven city within eyeshot of the new Kingdom of Erebor. King Thorin would be elated, Erestor was sure. And it would not be a small city either. Turgon envisioned white towers and turrets, and silver bells singing joyously. Gondolin rebuilt, only not within a hidden valley, but within reach of the greatest dwarven kingdom in Aman. And Turgon would move the court of the High King there with the utter conviction that Thingol would not journey there to harass him any further.

Ecthelion had been stupid enough to voice his joy at this turn of events more than once with the result that he was chosen to bring the news not only to Lord Elrond but to King Thorin as well. And that was the cause of the argument between the Lord of the Fountain and Glorfindel. Foolish as Ecthelion had been to make his opinion known, he knew that telling Thorin of certain changes in the plans that had been agreed previously, well, it was a somewhat suicidal mission indeed. And somehow Ecthelion believed that Glorfindel should come to his rescue. At least he had stated as much the night of the Yule Festival.

Which had been two weeks ago. And during those two weeks, not much progress had been made, much to Erestor's dismay. At least Elrond had been informed. The former master of Rivendell had simply shrugged and wished them well...for telling the dwarven king would surely not go as smoothly as telling him had done. For days the two warriors had pondered Elrond's words, and then they had truly begun arguing. Initially Erestor had attempted to help his mate. After all, Turgon had tasked Ecthelion with this mission, not the blond Elda. But the Lord of the Fountain had given him a look as if he wondered when Erestor had become so dense and stated that, in Gondolin, if one of them was given a task, they both were expected to see it done. And for some reason, Glorfindel agreed with that.

Now they were discussing how to tell Thorin and whether or not to enlist someone else's help. Elrond was a prime candidate as, since he had taken care of Bilbo, the dwarven king grudgingly accepted the peredhel. Erestor had to admit that this idea had some merit, though why involve Lord Elrond if they could straight away approach Bilbo himself. The hobbit was an elf-friend after all and would probably love the idea of a truly magnificent elven city only a few miles away from Erebor. But once more both Glorfindel and Ecthelion gave him looks and stated that the halfling had been through too much already and they would not wish to bring Thorin's scorn down on his unsuspecting mate. The raven-haired advisor simply wanted to take them both and ram their heads into the nearest wall. Clearly they had no idea what Bilbo had endured and just how devoted the dwarven king was to him.

The hobbit had been a Ring-bearer, and somehow Erestor did not only think of the One Ring when calling Bilbo that in his own mind. The other ring, Thorin's ring, must have been weighing him down at least as heavily as Sauron's Ring of Power, if not more so. He had also faced down countless orcs, the creature Gollum, giant spiders and, above all else, Smaug the Golden. If he had
been able to play at riddles with the dragon, telling Thorin of Turgon's new plans would be child's play. But clearly the great Balrog Slayers thought otherwise.

And when Glorfindel once again turned to him for advice, advice they would only ignore anyway, Erestor had had enough. He stormed out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him and sighing in relief. Despite the confused glances passing dwarves bestowed upon him. The advisor still marvelled at the shorter race and their ability to frown down at elves that were, in stature at least, so much greater than they were themselves. Their king had mastered this and even Erestor had been made to feel small on occasion. Though each time Bilbo had quickly reprimanded the dwarf for it, and in the end it had been Thorin who had looked rather sheepish. Such was the power Erestor's hobbit friend held over his betrothed, and it warmed the elf's heart to know that after all those long years of loneliness and longing, Bilbo was finally happy with the dwarf who had stolen his heart and who had held it during the time they had spent apart.

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Smiling to himself, Erestor made his way from the guest quarters to the Royal Wing. He knew he would either find Bilbo there or in the Great Library with his nephew. Once more he found himself glancing around in wonderment. Despite the fact that they were in the mountain itself, the dwarven city was airy and both columns and walkways seemed as weightless as elven ones would. Gold and silver were wrought into the stone as if they were a part of it and Erestor could not deny the beauty of the dwarvish patterns that seemed to surround him; stark angles and straight lines were almost a welcome change from the filigrane architecture of his kin. And after he had seen the quarters Bilbo shared with the king for the first time, after seeing all the hobbit influenced furnishings and the garden, Erestor felt his heart swell for his friend.

And now those little things, unimportant apparently in the eyes of his beloved and Ecthelion, filled Erestor with conviction. If anyone could tell Thorin of the changed plans, tell him without any fear of being at the receiving end of one of those fabled dwarven rages, it was Bilbo. The dwarven king loved his hobbit, and every time Erestor saw them together, he was amazed again. How had two so different creatures found a common ground, and more than that, how had they not only opened their hearts for the other, but remained faithful over the cause of eighty long years? So far, Erestor had only ever witnessed such devotion amongst his own people.

Seeing Thorin with his future consort also forced Erestor to reconsider his opinion of the Children of Aulë. The dwarven king was overcoming his dislike of elves more and more with every passing day, and his kin were all but embracing the Firstborn like long-lost friends. Not at all like enemies of old. Before long, Erestor found himself sharing elven knowledge with Durin's Folk, especially with Ori and Balin. And for him this had been unthinkable up until...the Council. Only then had the advisor realised that to keep apart was to be alone. And no one could afford to be alone in those dark days.

Living within the mountain had further opened his eyes and he was now embracing the dialogue with the dwarven scholars. He had always believed that it was the dwarves who were the masters of grudges and misconceptions and only now did he realise that the elves were just as ready to think badly of the shorter race. And for the first time in millennia he thought back to Thingol and how the blond had found his end. Temporary though it was. Yes, it had been the greed of the dwarves. Or so it seemed on the surface. But Thingol had opened his heart to the same greed, had allowed the lust for the Silmaril to consume him. The Sinda should have known better, especially after the fate of Fëanor and his sons.

It was hard for Erestor to finally admit that he had been wrong in his opinion of the dwarves. Elrond, ever the advocate of all the Free Peoples of Eä, had once again been right. Only together they had been strong enough to overcome Sauron, and together they would build a new life in Aman. If Thorin ever agreed to Turgon's new idea.
The raven-haired elf had finally reached the Royal Wing and was greeted by Ragnar, one of the
dwarven guards. "Master Erestor, may the Valar shelter you in their hands on this fine day." He
bowed deeply, smiling as he straightened. "I'm afraid you will find the quarters empty. The King is
in a council meeting with the two young princes and Master Baggins left an hour ago. For the
Library I'd wager." Erestor's serene face nearly slipped at the mentioning of wagers. Dwarves were
more than fond of placing bets on everything and nothing and some elves...not him...had lost quite a
bit of coin to the Longbeards already. "You can wait inside, but I don't know when they will return."

"Thank you, Master Ragnar, but that will not be necessary. I am sure I will be able to find Master
Bilbo in the Library as you said." The dwarf bowed again and Erestor turned towards another
walkway. He should reach the Library, and Bilbo, within ten minutes.

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"Ori found these maps of Ered Luin, Uncle. Oh, how I wish we could have seen the dwarven
settlements there." Bilbo smiled to himself. It had been 'Ori this' and 'Ori that' ever since he had
stepped foot into the Library an hour ago. The dwarf in question was nowhere to be seen and the
older hobbit suspected that he, too, had been dragged to the council meeting. The only way he had
been able to avoid such a fate was by assuring both Thorin and his nephews that he would use the
time to speak to Frodo. Thorin had nodded at that, and Fíli had given him a broad grin. Only Kíli has
seemed torn between glee and misery. The young dwarf hated any sort of official meeting, and the
council was the worst thing ever in his eyes.

"You could always ask Thorin about it, my boy. He will be pleased indeed to tell you of it and
answer any questions you might have." Which was true enough. Over the past few weeks, his
nephew and betrothed had spent many an hour in each other's company, speaking quietly of Smaug
and Erebor and the Ring. They were kindred spirits, Thorin and Frodo, and it warmed Bilbo's heart
to know the two most important beings in his world got on so very well indeed.

Frodo nodded thoughtfully. "I think I will do that. If you're sure he wouldn't mind." Bilbo smiled and
the younger hobbit continued, "I would like to write something about the Third Age, Uncle. So folks
who weren't part of it, at least not in Middle-earth, can learn about it." That was a wonderful idea,
Bilbo had to agree. And maybe it would give Frodo a chance to work through all he had
experienced. While he had already put everything to paper before, back in Arda the young hobbit
had still been plagued by nightmares. And by that wound that never fully healed. But the influence
of the Morgul blade had fallen away. Frodo was truly happy now and could revisit his adventures
without the old pains and hurts. Much the way that Bilbo could, though not quite. Frodo still missed
his companions, especially Sam. But maybe, maybe Ori could fill that void...

Before Bilbo could comment, the door to the Library opened and Erestor stepped inside, smiling and
bowing as he saw the two hobbits. "Ah, Bilbo. I was looking for you. Could I have a word with
you?" Oh dear. So the day had finally arrived and he was about to be dragged into whatever was
going on between Glorfindel and Ecthelion. Because, if Erestor had simply wanted to chat, he
wouldn't have chosen those words. He motioned for the elf to follow him to a quieter area of the
Library and they sat down on a bench. "I am sorry to trouble you with this, it is just...I am at the end
of my tether."

And so Erestor told him all about Turgon and Thingol, and the new plans the High King had come
up with. "So let me get this straight. You want me to tell Thorin because if Glorfindel and Ecthelion
were left to their own devices, construction would begin before my betrothed ever heard of certain
changes?" Erestor simply sighed and nodded weakly. "Could it be that the two Balrog Slayers are
somewhat scared of Thorin? Scared of a *dwarf*?" Not that Thorin wasn't powerful and fear-inducing, no. But the two elves in question had always made such a show of their own feats, of their grandeur, that Bilbo hadn't thought they would be afraid of anything. But clearly...

"Not scared as such. They just...they do not want to be yelled at I suppose. Not when it really is Thingol's fault and Turgon's decision. Though I personally believe that it is a good idea. Just think, Bilbo. Trade will be blossoming sooner than we ever hoped for and, well, we can still learn much from one another." The elf was frowning somewhat as he said the last, and Bilbo had to keep from chuckling. So Erestor was finally getting over his own prejudices where the dwarves were concerned? Good. That was more than good. "Will you help? I am not asking the future consort of the King of Erebor, but my friend. Will you aid me so that I may read in my own chambers again without being disturbed by two arguing elves? So that I may sleep again at night without waking every so often to the sound of my beloved rambling about Thorin and Turgon and the unfairness of the universe?"

The hobbit did chuckle then. "I had no idea it was that bad. But I guess once they found a topic to debate, they won't let up until the issue at hand has been resolved...or it solved itself as it were." Erestor gave him a long-suffering look. "Fear not, you're not the only one who is blessed with a mate prone to doing just that. You should have seen Thorin on our journey to Erebor and later...the Arkenstone was all he talked about in the end." A warm hand came to rest on his shoulder and he smiled ruefully. "He wasn't himself then. And he never was the dwarf he is now. You didn't know him back then, mellonen, not really. But it should be apparent even to you...how much he's changed."

"He is happy. I do not believe he was truly happy before, Bilbo." The elf looked serene, eyes glazed over as if he was remembering something from a time long ago. "It is the same for my beloved...in Gondolin we lived in what we thought was safety, but there was always the worry that Morgoth would find us. And Glorfindel, he felt it keenly. Then in Arda...oh Bilbo, when he returned to me I thought I had died of grief and gone to the Halls." He signed, and the hobbit thought he even saw the glistening of tears in the corners of his friend's eyes. "But he was still so very worried. About Sauron, about what Morgoth pupil could and would unleash upon us all. Here in Aman..." Now Erestor's eyes were sparkling. "For the first time ever, he is truly content. At peace. And while he was here before, in Mandos, I know he was... As strange as it sounds, he was still fading. Because his soul was..."

"Wasn't complete. He was missing you." The Ñoldo nodded, and Bilbo laid his hand over the elf's. It had dropped from the hobbit's shoulder a while back and was clutching at the edge of the bench. "You are both at peace now, well, unless Thingol shows up again." Even Erestor had to smirk at that. "Well, I did what I came to do here, so why don't we both go and seek out our dearest king? I'm sure he won't react the way Glorfindel and Ecthelion believe he will."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... **Eowyn's Musings**. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 23 - The Heart of a Hobbit

Chapter Notes

Another installment, and Thorin's reaction may surprise you...

Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart. Âzyungel - love of love (greatest love).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

He had been right about one thing. Thorin hadn't reacted the way the two Balrog Slayers had clearly believed he would. But even Bilbo had been wrong with his own anticipations. "At least that would save us the long journey to Tirion. And you won't have a chance to search for herbs in the mountains again." And he had smirked at that last bit. Smirked! Gone was the look of fear whenever Bilbo's little accident was mentioned; and while that was good, the hobbit was still somewhat irked. He wasn't a tween anymore who had to be kept on a leash or something like that. But he had to admit, he was glad that Thorin saw reason...where the elves were concerned of all things.

Erestor didn't fare much better than the hobbit. He seemed...almost shellshocked. "So you are approving the new plans?" Thorin nodded. "Well then, I shall send word to King Turgon. If you will excuse me?" He bowed to the dwarven king and then to Bilbo and left.

Once the elf was gone, Bilbo turned to his betrothed. "Alright then, who are you and what have you done to Thorin?" His words from so long ago came back to mind. 'Confusticate these dwarves,' he had said. Only this time it was he who was utterly confused. Again. "You...you don't like the elves. You've made that abundantly clear. And I know you are now trading with them, and I guess you feel some semblance of friendship for Ecthelion and maybe even Glorfindel and Elrond, but this?! This won't just be some terraces and a few houses, Thorin. It will be..."

"A city, maybe even grander than Tirion. I was listening, Bilbo." Thorin winked at him in a very disconcerting manner. "I thought you of all people would be pleased." Well, he was. But still. "My hobbit, you are forgetting that I'm not the same dwarf you knew in Arda. I lived amongst those pointy ears for eighty years and, well, they aren't all like Thranduil. Even though some are worse." He was clearly referring to Thingol. "We have all been given a second chance. I will not repeat the mistakes I made and reject elven assistance. Even if that means living with them on our doorstep."

He cupped Bilbo's face and stroked the hobbit's cheeks. "I will not deny that it will take time to get used to having elven neighbours, but they are far better than orcs." Bilbo blinked. "Well, somewhat better," Thorin added with a smirk.

"At least Turgon doesn't want to take your head every time he sees you." The dwarf nodded and Bilbo turned his head to place a kiss in the palm of Thorin's hand. "And here I was worried you would hate the idea. But you truly will never cease to amaze me, my betrothed." He was proud and relieved, and maybe even somewhat gloating. Glorfindel and Ecthelion had been wary, and worried how Thorin would react. And the dwarf had surprised them all.
They stood like that for a few minutes before Bilbo remembered the rest of his day and he stepped away from the king with a grin. "Kíli was right by the way. At least where Frodo is concerned." Thorin raised an eyebrow at that and Bilbo wondered just how much time the dwarf had spent around Lord Elrond. This was truly a gesture that reminded him very much of the elf. "Well, I finally found a reason, and the time, to remain in the Library for more than a few moments, and...Frodo mentioned Ori's name more often than I think I ever mentioned yours."

Thorin shot him a glare before he smiled rather smugly. "You didn't have to mention my name, ukraď, as I was right there by your side. Always within reach." Thorin's voice was dropping to a rather sultry level, and Bilbo threw up his hands in defeat. "What is it, my hobbit? Are you feeling unwell?" There was a predatory quality to the way the dwarf was looking at him now, and the hobbit was wondering if his betrothed truly intended for them to be...together...in the small council chamber. "You seem flushed, Burglar. Maybe you should take off some of those layers of clothing you are wearing."

Oh Valar, he did intend to... There was only one thing Bilbo could say now to stop the dwarf in his tracks. "So you no longer fear that someone could see that which is only yours, my King? To see me, in the throes of passion, crying out your name? Do you maybe wish for your advisors to know your future consort in such a manner?" Thorin looked horrified as Bilbo had known he would. It was the hobbit's turn now to take a step towards the king, and another and another, until he was only a few inches away. "Tonight, âzyungel, tonight." And he closed the gap between them and placed his lips over the dwarf's, and into that kiss he poured all his love and passion in lieu of a spoken promise of what tonight would bring.

Once they were forced apart by sheer need of air, Bilbo smiled up at his dwarf, stroking Thorin's bearded cheek. "I have to leave you now, I'm afraid. Óin has requested my assistance with something, and Elrond as well. I wonder...do you think they wish to quiz me on hobbit healing techniques or something like that?" The king made a noncommittal sound, but the slight smirk playing on his lips was answer enough. "Oh how could you do that to me? I am not a healer, I never was. Óin should seek out my mother's help, she knows so much more about herbs and tinctures and ointments and... Why me?"

"Because you are here, my betrothed. And despite what you may think, you are helping our people." He cleared his throat then and took both of Bilbo's hands in his. "When spring comes, I would ask you to assist not only with the negotiations with the elves, for there will be negotiations, but also with something my kin has never done before. We never had the luxury to pay much heed to it, but now, in these peaceful times..." Thorin was stumbling over his own words, which was more than unusual. "I think it is time we looked into doing some farmwork ourselves." Oh. "I'm thinking trees mainly, and grapes and other fruit. Our grain will still come from the elves and hobbits, but...I know that my sister always loved her little garden in the Blue Mountains and she enjoyed being able to make her own jams and compotes. If she found such joy in it, maybe other dwarves would do so as well. And I know," he said with a beaming smile, "I know you would love it."

Bilbo nodded, "I would be delighted, Thorin. Truly. It would be an honour to pass on my knowledge." He was still marvelling at the fact that, after eighty years of construction, life was only now beginning in Erebor. But he knew that to dwarves, construction that only lasted eighty years was unusually quick, especially if it was of a kingdom as grand as theirs. "And as for the elves, I already guessed as much. And I wouldn't have it any other way." Then he placed a soft kiss on Thorin's lips and drew his hands from the dwarf's grasp. "Don't forget though...tonight." And with a laugh and a wink, he left Thorin. Breathing heavily for some reason the hobbit could not for the life of him make out.
He watched Bilbo's retreating back, trying to catch his breath. His hobbit truly knew how to make his heart beat faster and his blood turn to liquid fire. But that was nothing compared to the love he felt for his betrothed. Especially now that he had seen Bilbo's beautiful soul laid bare to his eyes on the pages of that book, the book that had become his most treasured possession. He carried it with him at all times now, unbeknownst to Bilbo, and would read certain passages over and over again. And not only the ones that spoke of the hobbit's delight and joy at having been reunited with his dwarf, no. Those he cherished the most, but they were not the ones he found himself coming back to again and again...

The first time he had opened the book had been a few days after Bilbo had given it to him. He was sitting in their study, the hobbit outside enjoying the snow with Fíli and Kíli, and Thorin knew that it was time. Time to face Bilbo's pain and agony the way the halfling had faced his own. He was afraid though, afraid of what lay within those pages. Afraid to see the full extend of what his words on the walls and then his passing had done to his beloved. But he was a king of dwarves and he wouldn't allow his fears to control him and so, after catching his breath one last time, he opened it.

And smiled at the words on the very first page. Bilbo had been torn between his joy at Thorin's survival and his utter confusion at having been hugged by the dwarf. And Thorin could see now that Bilbo, too, had loved him even then. He never wrote it, but it was still obvious every time he mentioned the dwarf's name. Then came the entry about the time they spent at Beorn's, and Thorin felt his heart beat faster when he read of the turmoil Bilbo's emotions had been in, and how calm the halfling felt after they had finally admitted their attraction, their love. Mirkwood followed, and the king was startled at his hobbit's braveness. And his humbleness. He made his fight with the spiders sound like child's play. Then came Thranduil...

Here, for the first time, did he realise the extent of Bilbo's confusion and grief at Thorin's distrust and near hatred for the elves. Again and again did Bilbo bring it up, wondered how Thorin could despise the very people who brought him solace when he lived amongst them. And the dwarf vowed then to do better. To not let Thranduil's betrayal overshadow all of his dealings with the elves. Not that he wasn't doing so already. Ecthelion was something akin to a friend, Glorfindel was getting close to it as well and Elrond... After what the half-elf had done for both him and Bilbo after the hobbit's fall, there was more than just respect he had to admit grudgingly, if only to himself.

Thorin barely could read about Lake-town. Bilbo's feelings, right there on the page, were painful to behold knowing as he did what was to follow after. His beloved hobbit had harboured such doubts, and the dwarf had wiped them away during that night, that one night they had been allowed to share. And the king could remember still, recalled every soft sigh and every shy moan of his halfling, could hear the whispered "I love you" and it tore his heart apart. For on the next pages came the mountain, Smaug, and the Arkenstone. More than ever did Thorin understand why Bilbo had acted the way he had. He had been so afraid for them all, had so wished to prevent the bloodshed that was to come. And then... The day on the walls. Tears fell on the page, leaving marks similar to those already there. Bilbo had been crying while writing this.

The battle and its aftermath were a blur, as was the journey back to the Shire. Bilbo was heartbroken and it was as if something within him had died. There had been no mentioning of their last meeting, though his ring featured in almost every entry from now on. Only years later, after the visit of Balin and Gandalf, did Bilbo finally speak of the tent...of Thorin's death. Bilbo's words were horrific to read; his agony, the wounds on his soul...they were still so very raw, and the hobbit wrote that he knew they would never heal. And that he didn't want them to. That the ring, his drawing and this
pain in his chest were now the only reminders he had left of his beloved dwarf. Things didn't change much, not even after Frodo came to live with the halfling. The grief was part of Bilbo, just as it had been of Thorin. Oh yes, he remembered. The longing that lived forever in his bleeding heart, but at least he had known the hobbit was still alive. He could hope that one day, somehow, they would be together again. Bilbo never had that.

The visit to Erebor and Esgaroth...oh, how Thorin wished he could have been there with his betrothed. To turn his suffering into joy... There were pages upon pages about the tombs, about meeting Dís and the remaining dwarves of the Company. The king was shaking like a leaf as he perused them. Oh Aulê, how had he been able to stand such torments? Bilbo truly was stronger than all of them put together. And somehow, that strength came from Thorin's ring, from the memory of the love they had shared. So at least in that Thorin had done right by his beloved. His last actions in *that* life had enabled Bilbo to hold on until they could be reunited.

The years in Rivendell seemed to have been a time of quiet contemplation, and of making friends with the resident elves, especially Master Erestor. Bilbo wrote of how close he had come to telling the elf of his heartbreak the winter after Sauron's fall. But he hadn't. He had felt that his pain was his and his alone, and he all but cherished it. Even his nightmares were almost a welcome reminder of what had been, of how much they had loved one another. That it had been real and not simply a figment of the old hobbit's imagination. But he still longed for the end, longed for the endless sleep for in his dreams he would once again be with Thorin. It was the waking world that seemed to be more torturous than even the worst nightmare. And for some reason it wasn't dreams of the battle or even of that day on the walls that were nightmares to the halfling at the end. It was the dreams of their first kiss, of their night in Esgaroth...

Eventually, Thorin felt as if he couldn't stand any more, as if his heart was being torn to shreds simply by witnessing how wounded his beloved had been. But then came the journey to the Havens, and the ship. And then Valinor. He laughed at Bilbo's outrage at Thorin's initial reaction, shook his head at how stupid he had been to think the hobbit could have moved on, and sighed at his body's reaction to the description of their first night together. Bilbo had been quite possessive indeed. Each entry now ended with another sentence, the previous 'I miss you, Thorin' having been replaced by 'I love you, my dwarf' or a variation of it. Bilbo's anger at himself for being unconscious for so long was utterly endearing to Thorin, though the king would never admit as much.

And the very last entry...it spoke of Bilbo's hopes and dreams for their future together, including his desperate wish that Thorin could truly come to like the elves and especially those the hobbit called his friends. There also was the plea to the Valar that his dwarf could finally let go of the past, would no longer blame himself for things that had come to pass all those years ago. One part especially touched Thorin's heart.

> I can no longer remember the look on your face that day, can no longer hear your voice as you banished me. All that has been replaced with the warmth in your eyes as you presented me with your bead, with the love in your voice as you first showed me around our mountain. The past no longer holds any power over me, and I pray it is the same for you. We have all the ages of the world now to be with each other, to find new ways to bring laughter, joy and pleasure to one another. You are beloved to me, and always have been. And I cannot wait to begin this new journey, as long as I have you by my side.

After reading this, and re-reading it more often than he could count, Thorin felt that last shred of doubt and self-loathing lift off of him. Bilbo had forgiven him and only wished that the king could do so as well. And while part of him would always remember and regret his actions under the influence of the gold, it would no longer affect him in the here and now. The past was truly behind them now,
and Thorin would make sure that their future would be just like Bilbo wished it would be.

Now, watching the door close behind the halfling, he nodded to himself. He had done the right thing. The elves were their allies once again, and Thorin would no longer let his past grudges influence his decisions. Well, unless Thranduil of Mirkwood was involved. Or Thingol. He would not, could not forget how the King of Greenwood as he called himself, had treated them. Nor how Thingol behaved on an almost daily basis. The things his father and grandfather had to put up with because of the Sinda. And Erestor's description of what had made Turgon change his mind only strengthened his belief that, while most elves in Aman were somewhat decent, there were those that should be avoided at all cost.

So if he could help Turgon avoid Thingol by allowing the capital city of Valinor to move to Erebor's doorstep, well, he would be only too happy to see it done. And if it made Bilbo smile and marvel at how he had changed, then that was an added bonus. He was still Thorin Oakenshield, after all, still a dwarf who would seek to advance himself if he could. Even if that only meant that he would not be sleeping very much...tonight.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be an interlude, darn it! But then Bilbo started thinking, and planning and...the rest is history. Interlude next though, because I'm pretty sure they want to get some *nods*

Translation of Elvish: Mellonen - my friend.


See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

Bilbo was not idle after leaving Thorin behind in the council chamber. And he fully intended to make tonight memorable indeed. He was still shocked by the king's reaction to Erestor's news, but he was so very happy about it as well. Clearly Thorin had read his book and was truly making a fresh start, even where the elves were concerned. Not that the hobbit had expected much resistance to Turgon's new plans anyway. Though he had anticipated at least some and to find Thorin simply agreeing... Well, at least he had been there to witness Erestor's startled face. Not that his own had been much better he guessed. And he probably looked stunned once again when Thorin spoke of orchards and farming. True enough, the dwarves now had the time to think of such things, but to actually try and implement them... Bilbo was beyond excited.

So as he walked towards Elrond's chambers, he was truly impatient to get the meeting over and done with. But as always, fate would not let him have his wish. Which wasn't exactly true considering he was very much by Thorin's side again, but that was beside the point. "Mellonen. Do come in please. I just heard the news from Erestor..." Oh. So the two Balrog Slayers hadn't even told Elrond that he was not going to have his home away from home. "I cannot believe the king took it so very well. But I assume that is mostly thanks to you." Bilbo shrugged, gazing pleadingly at Óin who sat in a chair, perusing a thick volume. But the dwarf smiled and shook his head. No help would come from him. "I have to admit, I always longed to live in one of the great elven cities. In Gondolin or Nargothrond. It would appear that I do get my wish after all."

"You don't mind? I'm sure there is room for a small pavilion near the waterfall, and a few terraces. I don't see why we cannot have both." The truth was that he had wanted to show Thorin just how beautiful Rivendell had been and now... "A lot of the craftsmen of Imladris came across the sea with us. I am sure they would love to assist with it."

"Master Baggins, I believe you have more interest in the rebuilding of fair Rivendell than I knew until now." He sat down and motioned for Bilbo to do the same. "I would not ask it of your betrothed, Bilbo. But...if you would like to see it done, maybe you could speak with Thorin." What was wrong with the elves?! However, as he himself wanted to see Imladris rebuild, he simply nodded. "Very well then. And we shall truly be indebted to you. Not that we are not so already." The hobbit blinked at that. "I do not only speak of what you did for Glorfindel and Ecthelion today, mellonen, but everything you did back in the Valley. And now as well. King Thorin could still be distrustful of my kin, and while I know a lot of his changed perspective is due to circumstance and
the Lord of the Fountain being so very, you know, persistent, much of it is also thanks to you. Your love has softened his heart, which was as stone when I first met him. Unbeknownst to you, you have healed something within him that I am not sure he knew himself was broken."

Óin cleared his throat. "While this is all very interesting I'm sure, I'm not here to hear about our king's...private life." He gave Bilbo a pointed look, who felt rather sorry for himself as he hadn't said a word on the subject. "What I came here for was knowledge of all those nifty herbs and teas you have been recommending to some of my charges. I do so appreciate your help, Master Bilbo. In some of the cases I truly was at wit's end." Bilbo was flustered and blushed. "Now now, none of that, dear Burglar. I would have thought that by now you are accepting the fact that you do make a difference. Always have."

He averted his eyes and mumbled, "Except you thought I was an expert if I recall correctly, and we both know that wasn't the case."

"And yet you got us out of a few pickles, Master Baggins. Especially our king. It's good you're back with him, I did worry about his wellbeing these past few years." Bilbo snorted. Few years was more than an understatement. From what he had heard so far, he surmised that Thorin had been a mere shadow of himself ever since he woke in Aman. "Now, less talk of matters that really are none of our business, Lord Elrond, and more of herbs and such." Bilbo smiled wryly and sighed, resigning himself to sitting here for the next few hours, being quizzed on hobbit healing methods.

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It was four hours later that he finally bid Elrond and Óin farewell and made his way to the main food market. While the elf lord and the dwarf had been dissecting almost every word he'd said, Bilbo hadn't been idle and had formed a plan for the evening and night ahead. If everything went according to said plan, there wouldn't be a doubt left in Thorin's heart regarding Bilbo's feelings, not that the hobbit thought there were any to begin with. He now smiled to himself as he picked through all the foods on offer. Had he ever done a proper hobbit dinner for Thorin before? He didn't think so. Their first weeks in the cottage had been about things other than food for the most part...not that there hadn't been hobbit cooking...and here in Erebor food had been brought to them most nights from the large kitchens that provided the royal household and their guests. It was high time Bilbo finally used his own little kitchen.

Tonight there would be a feast laid out before his dwarf. He had secured some beautiful venison and would roast some of it while other, smaller bits would become a pie. There were some berries, fresh despite the time of the year, and some fresh cream. And then he saw a bottle of an elven red and he nearly bounced with joy. Elven wines were simply delicious, he knew; and while it was somewhat overpriced, he was only too happy to pay the merchant and add the bottle to his basket. The herbs vendor made big eyes when she saw how much he was buying, and bowed time and again, thanking Bilbo over and over and eventually ended by blessing him and the king. "It is an honour, Master Baggins, an honour." The hobbit squirmed but endured the attention. But he was still glad when he could return to the relative calm and quiet of his chambers.

It did not take long to prepare the pie at all, and he was happy to have two ovens so while he used one for baking various things, the other could be dedicated to the roast. And oh, the roast smelled heavenly after only half an hour. He had only seasoned it lightly to not overpower the venison's own taste and now it sat there on a tray with a few onions and carrots, which would eventually become part of the gravy. The same vegetables, and some taters, were also used for the pie, which was now only waiting to be cooked...or baked as it were. Bilbo moved to the fruit next, and scratched his chin. What to do with them? Leave them as they were and eat them with the cream, or set some aside to
make a few cakes? He shook his head, unable to decide. Scones first then. But once they were in the
oven, filling the kitchen with a lovely aroma that fought the roast's, he once again returned to the
question of what to do with the berries.

Eventually he decided to make a small cake and leave the rest for...later. He blushed to the tips of his
pointy ears at his own thoughts and cursed the way his body responded. "Not yet, Bilbo, not yet," he
chided himself, willing his hardness away. He still marvelled at times that he had become such a
sensual being. But it truly wasn't a surprise considering how passionate Thorin was...for him, only
for him. You truly are more Took than Baggins, aren't you? Yes, he supposed he was. And the
luckiest hobbit to ever live as well. To have Thorin's love was wondrous indeed. "Food first,
everything else later." He shook his head to banish thoughts of...of his dwarf. Your dwarf hovering
above you, you mean? Showing you the extend of his love for you? That voice sounded far too smug.

Once the cakes had been prepared and the taters were on the boil, Bilbo prepared the last dish. He
knew that Thorin would probably not even look at the salad, but the hobbit loved his greens and if he
could have fresh salad in the middle of winter, he would, thank you very much. And then he was
done. With cooking at least. Next he would lay the table and make himself more presentable. There
was flour in his hair and he had no idea how it had gotten there. Lowering the heat of the stove and
both ovens, he walked out into the living quarters and to the cupboard that held their dishes and
cutlery. He reached for the hobbit pottery and dwarven silverware without a second thought and set
the small dining table with two candlesticks and some dried flowers. The bottle of red was also there,
open and breathing. The glasses were of elven make, and Bilbo smiled a secret little smile. There had
been a time, back in Arda, when Thorin had been anything but happy to even touch anything made
by the elves. He had come a long way.

With everything prepared, he moved to the bedroom and undressed while running a bath to wash his
hair. He only allowed himself a few minutes in the wonderfully warm water before he quickly dried
off and put some oil on his braid. It helped the hair stay in place and made the braid shine softly. The
rest of his unruly curls would dry on their own. He dressed in some of his finest clothes; brown
suede trousers and a cream shirt made of the finest silk...nothing else. No smallclothes, eh? So sure of
yourself... Oh yes, after the earlier exchange between him and Thorin, he was more than sure. Sure
enough to leave some furs closer to one of the two fireplaces, though he was blushing profusely as
he did so. They had made love on the furs before, but it had always been a spur of the moment thing
and never part of an elaborate plan, least of all his plan.

Oh no, his mind was once again flooding him with memories of burning touches and scorching
kisses, making him shiver with need to be one with his betrothed. This simply wouldn't do. Berating
himself, he stepped out onto the balcony and into the freezing winter air. The torches along the road
had already been lit and there was lots of bustling in the city of tents where some of the workers still
lived while more living quarters were being opened up within the mountain. The dwarves didn't
seem to mind the cold too much and the sound of song drifted up from the cooking fires. Cooking!
Racing back inside, he rescued the potatoes from turning to mush. Barely. The roast was done as
well, and the cakes, and now there was nothing left to do but to wait.

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The day had been long and torturous, especially given the fact how much Thorin had longed for
evening to come so he could return to Bilbo and remind the hobbit of his promise. So when he
rounded the corner and finally saw the huge doors to the royal wing, he sighed in relief. The day had
been filled with too many meetings and if he never saw some of the dwarves making requests of their
king again, it would be too soon. Ragnar bowed to him, and then opened the doors. "Your Majesty."
Thorin nodded back at him, but then turned to face the guard. "How is your wife now? I hope she is no longer plagued by the sickness?"

"Oh no, your Majesty. Thank you for asking." Ragnar beamed. "Master Baggins' suggestions worked a treat, I don't know if we'll ever be able to thank him enough. My wife is even considering naming the little one Bilbo, if it's a boy. I hope you don't mind..."

"Not at all, Ragnar. Not at all. Though my betrothed might faint when he hears it." He smirked, and the guard returned the smile slowly. "No interruptions for the rest of the night, Ragnar. Unless the mountain is falling apart." And with that he turned and strode through the doors and up the long hallway until he reached the doors to the rooms he shared with Bilbo. Pushing them open, he blinked. The living quarters were darker than normally. The only sources of light were the two fireplaces and two candles on the small dining table. And the sparkling eyes of Bilbo standing by one of the fires, smiling at him merrily.

Bilbo was breathtaking. The silken shirt clung to his form in places, leaving very little to the imagination and yet it made the halfling look modest, far too modest for Thorin's liking and he had to fight the urge to cross the distance between them to tear it off his betrothed. And the suede trousers... He swallowed hard, feeling the first stirrings of desire in his loins. Apparently the hobbit hadn't forgotten, quite the contrary. He was out to drive Thorin crazy with lust and was doing a very good job at it so far. The light of the fire bathed him in an orange light, his hair shining red. And there was the sparkle of his bead and the king felt overwhelmed by the love he felt for the wondrous creature before him. Passion could wait for now.

He slowly walked to where Bilbo was standing, and belatedly noticed the wonderful smell of food wafting into the room from the kitchen. He raised a questioning eyebrow. "I thought we could have a quiet night without interruptions." The hobbit winked and ran his hand down the front of Thorin's tunic making the king gasp. "So we could have a nice dinner. I cooked since I realised that I never quite got around to showing you the advantages of good hobbit cooking. As I recall, I was too busy doing other things during those weeks in our little cottage." Whoever had said that hobbits were uptight creatures, unable to say anything even slightly passionate without blushing was sadly mistaken. At least where Master Bilbo Baggins of Bag End was concerned. Bilbo stood there, fingers playing with the lacings of his tunic, looking completely calm and unabashed. Thorin could remember a time, not too long ago, when words like this would have made the hobbit flush profusely, but not today.

Two could play this little game though. With a smirk, Thorin leaned in to lick a path from the lobe of one ear to its pointy tip, making the hobbit groan and shiver. "And what was it you were so busy doing, âzyungâl?" he asked, breathing into Bilbo's ear. From the corner of his eye, he saw the hobbit's tongue dart out to wet his lips and he couldn't help but chase it with his own, pulling the halfling into a searing kiss. His breeches were uncomfortably tight suddenly, and he could feel a responding hardness against his thigh. One of his hands was buried in Bilbo's soft curls while the other moved over the soft fabric of the silken shirt and came to rest on the swell of the hobbit's backside. The moment he started kneading the soft flesh there though, Bilbo pushed him away, breathing heavily. His eyes were dilated, the grey hardly visible any more and his lips, oh...they were red and swollen and begged for more. But Thorin would restrain himself. Even if it killed him, which he feared it just might.

"You... Not fair..." Bilbo was panting, his eyes closing as he fought to regain his cool. It would be so easy to ravage him like this, to simply gather the hobbit close and give in to the desire to be one. But Bilbo had planned this, had cooked for him and prepared this wonderful surprise and he wasn't going to ruin the hobbit's plans simply to satisfy his needs. Even though he knew Bilbo would be willing,
more than willing.

So instead of pulling his betrothed close again, he stepped back and willed his hardness away. "I do apologise Bilbo, though not for wanting you. That will never change, ukrâd, not as long as I draw breath. Not ever."

The hobbit nodded slowly, his eyes opening once more. "I wouldn't want you to. For I desire your touch just as much. Only not right now. Right now we will eat and after, well, there are such things I would do to you. Oh darn it." And he all but rushed to the tall doors of the balcony and threw them open. "You will be the death of me, Master Oakenshield," he called over his shoulder, taking in deep breaths of the cold night air.

Thorin stepped up to him, smiling down at his beloved. "I am sorely tempted to show you...but I believe there is food to be eaten, and I'm ravenous." He didn't specify what he was hungry for, and Bilbo glared at him.

"We are behaving like tweens in heat. And no, I never was one in case you were wondering. As you well know." Thorin nodded and kissed Bilbo's forehead tenderly, and the hobbit sighed, leaning into his touch.

"Dinner then?" The king held out his hand and waited for Bilbo to take it. "So what is it that smells so wonderfully?" The hobbit chuckled and pulled him back inside.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings, I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Thorin lead them back inside, waiting for a moment while Bilbo closed the balcony doors. He smiled as he saw the table, a perfect mixture of dwarven and hobbit tableware and the flowers were a reminder of spring that would come eventually, taking with it all the snow that was piling up outside. Or maybe Bilbo had been thinking of autumn, for they were flowers of autumn, and what that season would mean for the both of them this year. He smiled to himself as he thought of the celebration that would be upon them in nine months, less than nine months now. Bilbo would finally be his completely, and he would belong to none other but his hobbit. As much as he would lay claim to the hobbit, Bilbo would claim him in turn and his heart sped up with longing.

"I hope you like it," Bilbo was biting his lower lip, his gaze averted. "It's just...I wanted tonight to be just about us, you and me. I wanted to...to show you how proud I am of you. How proud I am to be with you." Slowly he raised his eyes to meet Thorin's, and within those grey pools was such warmth, such wonder that the king nearly staggered backwards from the intensity of it. "You surprised me, and I wouldn't be too astonished if we heard that our two resident Balrog Slayers suffered from a heart attack once Erestor told them the news. They hadn't even told Elrond if you can believe that. Facing Balrogs, sure, but not you nor Elrond. Go figure." The dwarf chuckled at that. It really did seem like it. He stood up straighter suddenly, his chest puffed with pride. "Oh don't do that. They might be scared of you, but I'm not. Haven't been ever since you embraced me on the Carrock, so just cut it out."

"Oh, I'm sure you can. After all, you want me to be like this, don't you? You want me to be your co-ruler, do you not? And as such..." Bilbo trailed off and Thorin huffed. But all of a sudden he had an
armful of hobbit, and he knew he could deal with anything. "But Thorin, they were bowing again to me today, and told me how happy they were to have my custom. It's so hard to get used to that. Even though..." He stepped away and Thorin let him go reluctantly. "Back in the Shire, people were saying the exact same thing. I wonder, though, whether that was more to do with the rumours of Bag End and the gold that I supposedly brought home from my travels. They never knew that I would have traded it all in to have you back."

The dwarf nodded, "You have me now, though. And I'm never leaving you again." A small smile graced Bilbo's face at those words, and he once again wrapped his arms around Thorin, his face buried in the furs of the king's cloak. "And know this; despite of what you may think, the dwarves here do not honour you because of gold or titles. They love you because of who you are. Not the Saviour of Erebor, nor the future consort of their King. They love you for being Bilbo Baggins of the Shire...or of Erebor as it were. They adore the hobbit who has chosen to live amongst them over the rolling hills of New Delving, or indeed the new hobbit settlement that will be built near the Mountain. They have seen now how you help us all. Though I have heard whispers... There is a worry that you might grow tired of their broody old King and leave."

The headshake came immediately and Bilbo was beaming up at him. "I'd sooner go without any food for a whole age of the world than leave you. And broody? I don't even know what they could possibly mean by that." He winked and Thorin had to lean down and kiss his beloved. Bilbo sighed happily into the kiss before breaking it to run his fingers through the dwarf's hair. "I guess as I learn to accept all the honours they bestow upon me, they will learn that I'm here to stay. Just like I would have stayed in the Lonely Mountain if you hadn't..." There was only the briefest glimpse of pain in Bilbo's eyes and then he swallowed and soldiered on. "If you hadn't gone to Aman to prepare a new home for us. I would have stayed. And if you had upheld the banishment, I would have fought you teeth and nails until you'd have seen reason. Though I somehow think you wouldn't have been able to for too long. The Company may have forced you into taking it back." And the smirk was back, as was the twinkle in Bilbo's eyes.

"I don't know what I would have done, but I know that the gold had lost its hold over me the moment you walked away, the moment I forced you to leave." The hobbit cupped his face then, stroking Thorin's cheeks with his thumbs. "But I don't think I could have let you go. Even if I'd have fought you initially, I don't think I would have been able to resist for too long. We were meant to be together, Bilbo. And nothing could ever change that, not even my own stubbornness." And as the hobbit raised an eyebrow, he added, "I will never confirm that I said this by the way, just in case you're getting ideas. I'm not stubborn at all, it's all in your head, ukrâd." Then he rested his forehead against Bilbo's and they both stood like that for a few minutes. Until the hobbit's stomach began to rumble.

Bilbo blushed and smiled apologetically. "Food?" The dwarf nodded and took his seat. Taking the wine bottle that was handed to him, he filled the two glasses; elven crystal Thorin noted with a sigh. "They were a gift, Master Oakenshield. And as such, we will be using them, so stop pretending you're upset. Because I know it's but a pretense." Thorin shrugged. "I'll get everything out of the kitchen, so please give me a moment or two." And indeed it didn't take much longer than that. Bilbo was clearly half-starved already. "I made some salad..." Thorin's eyes narrowed. "And a venison roast and pie. And some taters." That was better. Even though the dwarf had to admit that the salad looked quite nice as well, especially with the small pieces of bacon Bilbo had added to it. He got up then and pulled out Bilbo's chair for him, using the opportunity to place a gentle kiss on the hobbit's cheek. "Thank you," he whispered in his beloved's ear and a smile appeared on Bilbo's face, spreading until those small lines around his eyes crinkled up and the dwarf had to kiss them as well. But then the hobbit's stomach growled yet again, and with a chuckle, Thorin let go of his
betrothed and took his own seat again. "It all looks lovely, Bilbo. If I tell our dearest nephews they will be green with envy. Unless you would be willing to prepare such a feast again and let them join us?"

Bilbo gave him a glare that would sent lesser dwarves into a fit of tears, and he was wise enough to at least look somewhat sheepish. "Of course I would. In case you haven't noticed I'm a hobbit, and hobbits love to cook. Though...if you missed it until now, I think we have a serious problem on our hands." He pretended to be honestly concerned for a moment before laughing. "No, I don't think anyone could mistake me for a dwarf...no beard, pointy ears, hairy feet..."

"And the biggest heart I ever had the pleasure to behold." Thorin raised his glass then, gazing into those beautiful grey eyes. "To us and our future together, my betrothed." Bilbo swallowed and nodded, bringing his own glass to the dwarf's. The wine was rich in flavour and Thorin could tell that it would complement the venison perfectly. "Bloody elves," he muttered under his breath, but loud enough for Bilbo to hear and he simply shook his head at Thorin. "Well, maybe they will be willing to share the secrets of winemaking with us, otherwise we will just have to rely on our resident hobbit."

"I don't think Frodo knows all that much about making wine, but you feel free to ask him," Bilbo deadpanned. And then his hand went to his chest in mock-surprise. "Oh, you mean me? Well, next time express yourself better, Master Oakenshield. Just so there's no confusions." Thorin felt tempted to stick out his tongue at the halfling, but he wasn't a dwarfling anymore and there was only so much his pride would allow him to do. So he just shrugged and loaded his plate with a sample of everything laid out before him, even the salad. Bilbo did so too, and for the longest time they were silently enjoying their meal.

Eventually, Thorin sat back and took another drink from his glass. "This was truly a joy. Thank you, Bilbo."

The hobbit beamed, quickly gathered up the dishes and returned them and the leftovers to the kitchen. After a few minutes he came back with a small cake and a bowl of fruit. The bowl he placed near the fireplace before joining Thorin at the table. "Let me just get the cream." Berries and cream, and the fireplace. His mind was suddenly in overdrive, conjuring up images that made him gasp and he felt himself growing hard again. He squirmed in his seat just as Bilbo returned with a bowl of freshly whipped cream, a smirk on his face as if he knew about Thorin's predicament. "I believe the cake can wait, don't you?" He smiled slyly, setting down the cream next to the bowl of fruit and beckoned for the dwarf to join him. "Sit down in your armchair, my love." Thorin did as instructed, unable to stop moaning as the hobbit sank to his knees before him. "Let me take of your boots and then I'm sure I'll find a way to make you more comfortable..."

The boots were dealt with in record time, and Bilbo licked his lips as he pushed Thorin's legs further apart so he could kneel between them. Fingers were skimming over the lacings of his breeches even while his clever hobbit opened the king's heavy belt with the other hand. Thorin lifted just the slightest bit to divest himself of both his furs and coat before sinking back in the softness of the armchair. With a smile, Bilbo reached under the tunic, pushing it up, but just enough to open the lacings of the breeches. But he didn't push them apart. Instead, he began massaging Thorin through the fabric, making him groan with need. "Please, Bilbo..."

"Well, since you're asking so nicely." With another smirk, Bilbo freed Thorin from his clothing and swallowed him whole. The dwarf forced himself not to thrust up into that moist heat, but he couldn't stop his hands from burying themselves in Bilbo's auburn curls. The hobbit hummed his agreement, leaning slightly into the touch of the strong dwarven hands. And then he set out to make Thorin
forget his own name. Swallowing around his length, Bilbo pressed his tongue to the underside before moving up to swivel it around the sensitive head. And then he resumed the motion again and again until the dwarf saw stars and bit his lower lip to keep from moaning. Not that it worked. Soon he was reduced to whimpers and when Bilbo ran one hand up his chest again to pinch a nipple, Thorin let out a strangled groan and fell to pieces, safe in the knowledge that his betrothed was there to catch him.

And Bilbo did. Swallowing to catch every last bit of Thorin's essence, the hobbit held him down as he rode out the waves of pleasure. Afterwards, Bilbo sat back on his legs, licking his lips. "Almost as good as the best food," he whispered, which, coming from a hobbit, was the greatest compliment imaginable. "Now, what should we do with you?" There was a gleam in Bilbo's eyes that spoke of his playfulness, but also his love. That was always there, even during the most delicious tortures he could concoct for Thorin. He crawled closer again, hands on his tunic. He pushed it up slowly, trailing kisses as he exposed the dwarf's skin. Finally it was pushed off and the hobbit stood, pulling Thorin with him.

The king raked his eyes over the hobbit's still fully clad form, hands reaching for the buttons of the halfling's shirt, but the were swatted away. "Bilbo?" His betrothed simply shook his head and once again dropped to his knees to pull down Thorin's breeches and smallclothes.

"Lie by the fire, âzyungel. On the furs. I'll join you momentarily." The dwarf's hands itched to touch Bilbo's naked skin but he forced himself to be patient and once again followed the hobbit's wishes. Padding over to the fireplace, Thorin once again smiled to himself. Bilbo had indeed planned all of this to the smallest detail. The furs were warm and soft under his bare feet and when he turned, his hobbit stood before him with the berries and cream. "I don't know where they found these, but they must have come from somewhere in the south where they don't get snows. Just some raspberries and blackberries, but they are juicy and sweet." Juicy and sweet... 'Just like Bilbo,' his mind provided helpfully, and Thorin had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing.

Instead he pulled the hobbit, bowls and all, flush against his chest, tilting his head up just so and kissed him tenderly, still tasting himself when his tongue delved into the moist cave of Bilbo's mouth. "Ughvashâ," he whispered once they parted, "my beautiful burglar." Bilbo's eyes were dilated, and had been for a while now, and Thorin reached down to cup his hardness through the fabric of the hobbit's trousers. Bilbo gasped at the touch, unable to keep his hips from bucking to increase the friction. "Won't you let me do something about this? It feels quite...constricted." His own member was stirring again and he longed to be one with his beloved. He would never grow tired of this, never bore of having the smaller creature in his arms and by his side. They would have to thank Gandalf for bringing them together. At some point. Most definitely not now.

Bilbo shook his head again, stepping back. "Later..." He was breathing rather heavily, and Thorin smirked before lying down against the furs. One arm under his head, he reached for the hobbit with the other, wondering how he must be looking to Bilbo. His naked body lying against the furs, the light of the fire dancing on his skin, his burgeoning hardness dark against his thigh. Like an offering, he guessed, and if there was one person in Eä he would allow to see him like this, it was Bilbo. His hobbit, who was swallowing several times before taking the proffered hand, knelt by the dwarf's side. "Beautiful," he whispered, "You are more beautiful than anything and anyone else I have ever seen."

Taking a deep breath, Bilbo suddenly straddled him, the hobbit still fully clothed and it drew a shudder from Thorin. "Stay still," the hobbit whispered, and Thorin obediently buried his hands in the furs, clawing at them, the need to touch his beloved becoming almost overpowering. Especially when Bilbo's nimble fingers began to undo the buttons of his shirt, revealing the pale skin beneath.
The silk slipped from his arms and was discarded without paying it any further notice. Then Bilbo reached for the bowl of berries, choosing a raspberry and dipped it into the cream. He brought it to Thorin's mouth, tracing his lips before he relinquished it and the sweetness of it exploded on the dwarf's tongue. But that sweetness was nothing compared to the kiss the hobbit then bestowed upon him...sweet and passionate and full of promise.

More berries were pressed to his lips, some they shared between them in kisses that grew more and more heated. And by the time Bilbo trailed heated kisses down the king's neck and chest, paying special attention to his nipples, Thorin was reduced to whimpers, hands straining to caress, to touch. "Please..." Dear Aulë, he sounded so very needy, but this was Bilbo, and the hobbit had seen the worst of him. It was only right he should also see just what he was doing to the proud dwarven king. "More please."

Bilbo smirked and then there was a vial of oil in his hands, and Thorin sighed relieved. The vial was placed by the fire to warm it while Bilbo lifted off to remove his trousers, and the dwarf gasped when he saw that they were indeed all the hobbit had been wearing. Bilbo chuckled, "Hobbits are creatures of pleasure, Master Dwarf, and if we can we will plan accordingly. Though...I'm not sure all hobbits would go for this understanding of pleasure, I blame you for that entirely."

"I gladly take the blame for that, Burglar, and more if you will just hurry up." Bilbo nodded as he stroked himself once or twice. And just as Thorin was about to wrap his strong legs around the hobbit's hips to give him better access, Bilbo crawled on top of him again and... "By Durin's beard, Bilbo!" His betrothed had coated his fingers with the warm oil, which Thorin had expected. But then...he had reached around himself and... The dwarf's brain could hardly comprehend what the hobbit was doing. He grew harder still and his self-restraint and control snapped and he drew the halfling down into a kiss that left them both breathless.

Soon, Bilbo was ready, and his hands wrapped around Thorin's hardness, spreading oil. Then he lifted, moved upwards, and... "Oh Valar, Thorin..." Slowly he sank down until he was once more seated in the dwarf's lap. Only this time, the dwarf was buried deep inside his beloved's body, velvety heat surrounding him. Then Bilbo began to move and his normally so gentle face turned to a mask of desire. Thorin matched his movements, thrusting up when the hobbit pushed down, trying to angle himself just so. And he smirked the moment Bilbo groaned loudly...he had found what he'd been looking for. Over and over he brushed that spot, reducing the hobbit to incoherent babbling.

They were both nearing the precipice, and Thorin wrapped his hand around Bilbo, stroking him on each upward thrust and before long, he fell apart, taking his betrothed with him. The hobbit slumped forward, shudders convulsing his body, and Thorin held him until he stilled. "Sweet Aulë..." His burglar lifted his head and nodded, slowly sitting up and pulling himself off of the dwarf. Thorin didn't know where the warm cloth came from, and didn't care.

Bilbo cleaned them both and then stood, extending his hand to the king. "I think it's time for some cake now." And Thorin chuckled and took the proffered hand.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter Notes

This week's chapter comes a bit late as I am busy busy writing my parts of the Tolkien Big Bang story I am writing with the lovely Anoriell. So I'm afraid I'm a bit behind on this here story, but I promise I'm still writing it :) The next chapter won't go up next week though I don't think as I still need to write 1k words for it to get to my normal 3k per chapter ;) But I am getting there. So the current ETA of chapter 26 is the 22nd of July :)


Edit: Had a minor "copy/paste" malfunction and all Kili's turned to Fili's but that has been resolved now :) Both brothers are back now :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

"Awww, look Fee, it's all melting." Kili was staring out of the windows of his brother's room, bemoaning the snows that slowly but steadily gave way to fresh shots and the coming of Spring. The blond dwarf had tried to argue that this was the way of nature, that even their little snow fort would have to disappear eventually. But the brunette still acted as if his world was coming to an end. "Now we will have to find other ways to drag Frodo and Ori outside. They are starting to collect dust in that library of theirs, I'm telling you." Fili rolled his eyes. It was true, the young dwarf and the hobbit were spending most of their waking hours amongst dusty shelves and old scrolls, but they spent the time together. And wasn't that what they wanted to happen?

Kili had been very much involved in their matchmaking plans, and if he didn't know his brother was still suffering from nightmares, he would have said Kili was bad as new. But he still woke up to hear the younger dwarf whimpering, tears streaming down his face on occasion. He was still calling out for Thorin, clearly still feeling like he'd let their uncle down. True, the dreams only haunted him some nights now, but they were still a part of him, the guilt still there. And Fili? He was slowly coming to terms with the fact that things had to transpire the way they had; that even their deaths had been part of Aulë's plan. Aulë's and Yavanna's plan. Nonetheless, there was something amiss. He hadn't felt it before, not in all the years they spent in Aman after they woke again. But now, seeing Thorin and Bilbo, and even Frodo and Ori...a wound had opened up inside him and he didn't know how to stop the pain. Did not know what his soul was yearning for. Did Kili feel the same?

"Fee? Fili! Are you even listening to me?" The blond shook himself out of his musings and gave his brother an apologetic smile. "And they say I never pay attention. I'm so going to tell Bilbo." Yes, this was the dwarf he had known back in Arda; and how he had hated him at times. "Anyway, I was saying, the caravan from Tirion should be here soon, I think even the High King will be amongst them. Oh Fili, I'm so very excited. An elven city! Right here, within reach of Erebor. No more riding through the mountains for days to get to Tirion or Nargothrond. It will be right here." Kili's ability to grasp the obvious was truly astounding at times. It was the old "There's another way in" all over
again. But at least this was the old Kíli returning, his happy go lucky brother who drove him up the wall at times.

"I'm still amazed Thorin didn't have a seizure or something like that. Whatever it is that Bilbo puts into his tea, it's working." he grinned mischievously and Kíli nodded happily. They had recently started to speak of this whole tea thing as neither of them particularly wanted to think of the things their uncle truly got up to with his betrothed. It was just wrong. Bilbo was their sweet little hobbit and not a creature of... You are setting yourself up for mental scarring, I hope you're aware of that. He was, oh dear Aulë, he was. Tea, they were simply drinking tea. Nothing else. And how do you explain that mark on Thorin's neck then? The one he displayed rather proudly at the council meeting this morning... Was it too early to drown his sorrows in mirovar?

"I overheard Bilbo speak to Elrond the other day. Not on purpose, they were in the Library and I was trying to find Ori and Frodo." Kíli's was treating him to the sweetest smile, which meant that he had most definitely been eavesdropping. "You know he won't let us get away with that. On the contrary. I've seen papers upon papers on his desk the other day and when he beheld me looking at him, he smirked. I think our dearest hobbit has plans for us that we might not like very much." His brother groaned, finally stepping away from the windows. "However, Balin has been acting strangely as well. He asked if we both could be in my rooms after the midday meal as he had something to discuss with the both of us. There are some weird things happening in our mountain, brother, and I am afraid of what it all means." He grinned and Kíli launched himself at him, tickling the blond into submission.

"As long as we still have time for our matchmaking project, I will welcome anything Uncle Bilbo has in store for us. He wouldn't harm us. At least not permanently." Fíli agreed, at least to some extent. After all, there were plenty of non-permanent ways to harm them, one of which being...tea. They were just drinking tea. Oh, but he needed to get those unbidden images out of his head, and quickly as well. His expression must have been pained, for Kíli remarked, "Are you alright, brother? I didn't break you, did I?" He meant with the tickling, so Fíli shook his head. "You're not again...you know..." A nod this time. Fíli sighed and slumped down on the sofa next to the blond. "I so wish to have what they do. Heck, I'd even take what Ori and Frodo have. I...I feel so alone at times, and I'm so happy that I still have you. But what if you find someone? I'll be..."

Fíli shook his head, "You won't be alone, I will make sure of that. But I know what you mean. I feel...I feel envious of Thorin and Bilbo, and I hate myself for it. Eighty long years they were parted, they deserve this happiness. And yet... It feels as if something shifted only just recently, and I feel an emptiness within me that wasn't there before. As if someone flipped a lever and..."
which made Fíli frown. He felt the same ache, to his very bones and it was settling there. Surely that
wasn't a good thing. They had both witnessed what such longing could do; over eighty years it had
been an ever present part of Thorin, and they had both worried about their uncle.

Fíli was about to say something when there was a knock on the door and a moment later, Balin
entered the chambers. "Ah, there you are." The older dwarf was carrying various bundles and
scrolls, and Fíli jumped to his feet to take some from their mentor. "Thank you, thank you." Everything
was set down on the desk at the far end of the room in what Fíli thought of as his study and Balin
smiled at them both. Kíli had joined them and was gazing curiously at the assorted
parchments and especially at the bundles. Fíli knew he was simply itching to unwrap them. "Now,
you are aware that certain things will come to pass very soon and I will need your help to make sure
everything happens the way it should." He nodded to himself and then fixed both the young princes
with such a stare that there was nothing for them to do but to bow and chant their customary "At
your service".

Then (2941 T.A.)

Galadriel first felt the call of her Mirror after she had returned to Caras Galadhon. It drew her near,
and yet she resisted it, feeling within her soul that it would show her a vision of suffering and pain.
Soon her mind was filled with other thoughts again, with the planning of an attack on Barad Guldur.
After the Necromancer had been driven out, there was the fear and doubt that it had not been a
simple human sorcerer like Saruman insisted. No, she had felt the evil, an evil she knew only too
well. And more and more did she begin to agree with Mithrandir. It was Sauron. The Enemy of the
Free Peoples had returned because of the failing of Men, of Isildur. But unlike Elrond, she did not
think the Line of Kings had failed them altogether. There was new hope...Estel.

A small boy of ten who would one day carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. He would
need all the help the elves could give him, no matter what mistakes his ancestors had committed.
Mithrandir had been right. Right to chose Bilbo Baggins to aid the dwarves, right to look beyond
elves and men. For weeks had she pondered these thoughts until, one day, something squeezed her
heart so tightly she thought she might die from the pain. And she heard, from afar, the death cries of
two young dwarves she had seen only fleetingly in Imladris. The Mirror's call was stronger than
before, and she could no longer withstand it. By the time she glanced into its depth, she unwittingly
witnessed a most heartbreaking exchange between King Thorin Oakenshield and the little hobbit,
and she felt Bilbo's pain as keenly as if it were her own. A single tear ran down her cheek; she, who
some called cold as stone. And she knew, the time had come.

She did not share what she had seen with anyone, not even her husband. Though she did tell
Celeborn of the other. It would be he who had to help and assist, she felt it. "They will need you
before the end. There are things that I cannot see, and that worries me, hervennen. Something is
coming that is greater than us, stronger. But I feel that force will not help us defeat it. Maybe...maybe
it is as Mithrandir says and we have to look even to the smallest of persons..." Celeborn had nodded,
urging her to continue. "They have passed to the West now, all three of them. And their lives, their
new lives, are twined with..." She could not speak the names, but her husband knew. Like he always
did.

"They will be well. You have seen it, have you not?" She nodded, frowning. It did not matter that
the Mirror had shown her what would be, eventually. She knew that the vision had been...foggy at
best, as if the future was still undecided. Their future. "Do not trouble yourself, meloth. I also feel
the shadow, but I sense that it will pass and that life will bloom once again when it does. Though...I
do fear the Council is failing. Be on your guard." He was right. The Council was indeed failing. She had felt it in Imladris. One of their number would betray them before the end, though why she could not fathom. Not yet.

"Our future, the future of the Free Peoples, I feel it rests not with us anymore. It is the other races we have to place our trust in, and I am afraid that many of us will be reluctant to do so." Her son-in-law was one of them, and Thranduil of Greenwood. Elrond had been witness of Isildur's greed and Thranduil... She hoped that before the end, he would be able to overcome his hatred of the dwarves. There was evil in Erebor, even now that the dragon had been defeated. Evil and yet...evil it was not. It was confusing her, and she did not like feeling this way.

Celeborn embraced her then, "Be strong for our people and know that whatever you decide, you will have my support. As always." She smiled, almost shyly. They had lived for millennia by each other's sides, and yet her husband could still make her feel like a young elf-maiden. "And do not trouble yourself with thoughts of that which you cannot change. Their fates, as you say, are twined. As are their hearts, unbeknownst to them as that may be. We can only hope that it will stay this way for a long time yet so they will never face the choice we had to make so often." The choice between duty and love he meant. She nodded and then kissed him and her heart was calmer, the fear fading away until all that remained was a mere memory. But she knew it would return to her thoughts, eventually.

Now (1 F.A.)

"So he truly wishes to rebuild Gondolin?" Elrond nodded, and her laughter rang throughout the peredhel's chambers. "It truly shall be a Stone of Song this time, or rather of many songs, for it will not only be the voices of elves that will sing. There will be dwarven song also, and the merrymaking of the hobbits." She smiled brightly, gazing at her husband and her mother. Elrond still marvelled at how changed Celebrían was; all the pain that had been in her eyes after her ordeal gone from her gaze now, and they shone once more with love and affection. And mirth at this moment. "Who would have thought it possible? But if anyone could have achieved it, it is Turgon."

Surely not Thingol was what she was truly saying, but there was no need to speak of the blond. They all shared the same opinion where he was concerned. "I do believe that Bilbo had a hand in it as well. It most definitely was not our Balrog Slayers, no matter what they might tell you. All they did was tell me and Erestor. And then confuse matters by allowing Bilbo to think they had not even told me. I only just noticed this yesterday when I was speaking with our dearest hobbit." He had been debating leaving Bilbo in the dark and thinking that Glorfindel and Ecthelion had been cowardly to the point where they had not told Elrond either. But he had decided on the truth, and the halflings laughter had made it worth it.

"Oh, speaking of Bilbo, he told me that Ori was looking for a translation of the Lay of Lúthien and I offered to assist with it." She got to her feet then and, placing a kiss on both her husband's and her mother's cheek, she left the rooms they currently called their own.

"She seems happy, Elrond, I am glad. Too long have you missed her." He nodded with a sigh. "I know what troubles you. But my daughter knows, and accepts. She will never see Arwen again, and it hurts her deeply. But she has you by her side again, which gives her the strength to weather even this tempest." Her eyes caught his as she asked, "Have you spoken of it? Of what happened to her?" They had, though Elrond would sooner forget about it all. For her to endure all that, alone without him by her side to protect her...he still blamed himself, and knew that Elladan and Elrohir did so as well. Galadriel smiled. "Your sons will reach here soon enough, and when they do, all will be well."
"But not for a while yet. You have seen it, have you not?" She smiled mysteriously, and he sighed once more. "They will not forsake their sister, and you know it. They will stay in Imladris until after..." He could not bring himself to even think about it. His beautiful daughter, Undómiel. She was beyond their reach now, forever. She would fade, would die, and the world would grow darker for her passing. And yet, there was new light in his life, or rather renewed light. His wife was with him again, and maybe one day there would be another sparkling ray. Not to replace Arwen's fading light, but to honour her memory.

"What will be, will be, Elrond. I know that much even without my Mirror." She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder and gazed at him. "Arwen had to follow her heart and even Aman would have been no solace to her. She will forever live on in our hearts. And still she lives, and there will be more life before death takes her from us. Although I feel that even the race of man have a place where they can be after their life in Arda is ended. Arwen will be with Elessar again and we shall have peace within our hearts." Did she really believe that? He hoped, oh how he hoped.

"I have seen something else as well, and I am sure that you have, too." She nodded, frowning. "Their feelings have awoken, Galadriel. How long do you think will they endure until the longing becomes too strong? Even the House of Durin has its limits. What if they are too late?"

She shook her golden head, "This is the plan of the Valar. And they do not make mistakes. Fíli and Kíli are stronger than you think." She inclined her head. "You know this to be true." He thought he knew, yes. But after Bilbo's accident... "It only shows how much they love the hobbit, nothing more. Kíli will not break, and neither will his brother. And all their wounds will be healed in time. Just as they will be a soothing balm..." Elrond walked to the tall windows and gazed outside. She was right, as always. In time everything would be resolved. And if there was something they had aplenty now, it was time.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 26 - Planning for the Future

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who pointed out my Fíli / Kíli mix up :) Muchly appreciated that ;)

And as always, thank you for reading, kudos-ing, commenting and all that *group hugs all around*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

Bilbo buried deeper into his coat, or tried to. He should have taken up Thorin on his offer of furs, but some of the dwarf's own stubbornness must have rubbed off on him, or maybe it was simply his Tookish side rearing its head. Not that it did anything else of late. Kíli had remarked something along those lines only a few days ago. "You really aren't a Baggins anymore, are you, Uncle? Maybe you should change your name to Bilbo Took?" Bilbo had glared at the young dwarf, but he did have a point. Not that he was going to go and do it. It would break his father's heart, no matter how proud his mother would be. Kíli had thrown up his hands as if to defend himself and had then made another suggestion. "Alright then, not Took. But how about Bilbo Oakenshield? You will marry Thorin soon after all." Thorin himself had looked rather intrigued then, grinning from ear to ear almost. And poor Bilbo had been forced to barricade himself in the kitchen and only came forth once he had made fresh scones to distract his beloved family.

The hobbit sighed. Why was it so cold still when today was the first day of spring? But what he saw there outside the great gates of Erebor made his heart beat faster with excitement. The dwarven city of tents was made to appear small by the white and silver tents of the elven craftsmen and architects. Turgon truly seemed set on his plans to see Gondolin as a twinkling jewel and a citadel of song once more. Right outside a dwarven mountain no less. And while that was already amazing enough, the sight that truly showed him just how far Thorin had come in his acceptance of the elves was seeing dwarven and elven workers sit together around a cooking fire and sharing stories and song. Though he did not like the sound of *Bilbo Baggins, Hero of Erebor* one bit.

Further up the road and towards the small hill that would eventually be the centre of the elven city, he could make out two familiar figures. Together again as well. He smiled to himself and made a mental note to tell his three dwarven co-conspirators of this most recent development. Quickly he walked up to them both and when they noticed him, Frodo waved. "Uncle! They are already trying to figure out where the walls will be. Although Turgon has decreed that there would be no walls this time. No walls but a moat instead. With beautiful bridges crossing it." Bilbo could picture it already. A white city rising from the plain, the hill crowned with a citadel. A strong and proud elven city, bustling with life. "How long do you think it will take to build? Erebor took all of eighty years after all and still is not completed."

It was Ori who replied with a chuckled, "Yes, but the Mountain is different. Apart from the natural caves and openings, we had to cut the city from stone, whereas building houses and palaces and the like should not take all that long. Not that it won't be beautiful in its own right, Tirion is after all. And
the other elven cities. Or so I've heard. Dwarves aren't welcome everywhere so I couldn't see them all with my own two eyes..." There was an air of sadness surrounding the dwarf, and once again Bilbo felt anger at the one elf who had made things the way they were now. But the hobbit also knew that over time other elven rulers would join in with Turgon, realising that trading with Erebor would be too lucrative to pass up on it. And eventually Menegroth would stand alone. Though part of him was loathe to see what Thingol would do when that happened.

"They will be using the white marble from Erebor, right?" Ori nodded, smiling proudly. The dwarven mountain would provide the stones the elven city would be build with. That in and of itself was remarkable. "And also the coloured stones if I'm not mistaken?" The young dwarf positively beamed and Frodo smiled at him. Which in turn made Bilbo chuckle to himself; quietly, so the others did not notice. "They will be employing dwarven craftsmen and workers as well, or so Thorin says. And our king has grudgingly agreed to let elven stonemasons into the Mountain to beautify some of the guestrooms. I thought he was going to have a fit initially, but he calmed rather quickly." Especially once Bilbo kissed him sweetly, and... He still managed to blush whenever he thought of certain things he and his betrothed got up to in the privacy of their chambers.

Frodo, having seen his uncle's blush, groaned. "I am sure he did. Though I would rather not know how you managed to achieved such a feat." The younger hobbit had clearly spent too much time with Fili and Kili. They had taken to referring to...something...as Bilbo and Thorin having tea, and the halfling wasn't sure if he wanted to know what they were thinking about. However, he had an inkling and was rather sure that he was right with his guess. "But I am glad the king allows it. He was kind enough to sit with me as well so I could interview him for my book. He was very patient with me, answering each and every of my questions. Oh Bilbo, I would have loved to visit the dwarven halls in the Ered Luin. Though...maybe not. They probably are no longer as grand as they used to be when Thorin ruled there..."

Bilbo nodded sadly. His young nephew was right. Many realms that once had prospered had fallen into decay, and even fair Rivendell would eventually fade and be forgotten. But other kingdoms would rise and prosper, Dale and Erebor amongst them. There was hope yet for Arda. "I know what you mean, Frodo. I don't think I could have set foot into the Blue Mountains without..." Without yearning to be with the dwarf who had ruled there. And Frodo indeed seemed to understand him for he hugged Bilbo tightly, smiling sadly.

"It was nothing compared to Erebor, Master Bilbo," Ori explained. "The new Erebor I mean. There is laughter here, and song. And not the old song of the Misty Mountains and our lost home, no. They are songs of happy days and peaceful nights, of hope and dreams and their fulfilment." The young dwarf beamed at them both, his eyes lingering on Frodo for just a bit too long to be a coincidence before he averted them shyly. "I have also heard a new song...of the Saviour of Erebor and the Keeper of the King's heart." Bilbo groaned. Oh yes, that song. He had heard it, too, and wished he could forget. "I know you do not seek position or power, but Master Bilbo, you have them both. You didn't take them by force, they were freely given to you and it would be a terrible insult if you were to deny my kin the honours they wish to bestow upon you." He gasped then, his eyes going wide. "Oh dear, begging your pardon. It is not my place to lecture the future consort..."

The two hobbits exchanged a glance and burst out laughing. Ori's entire face turned red with embarrassment, and even his ears were flushed. By the time Bilbo was able to catch his breath, Ori was wringing his hands, his feet moving this way and that. "Oh Ori, forgive me but... I am still me, I am still your friend. We were both companions, were we not? If anyone can lecture me when I'm being insensitive where dwarven customs are concerned, it is you. You and Balin. The two of you were always a source of wisdom amongst the dwarves of the Company. Though, don't tell Thorin I said so." They dwarf nodded meekly before daring to raise his head again. "And please, call me
Bilbo. The rest of the world may call me 'Master', but not my friends. Well, they may, but only in jest."

Ori nodded, brow furrowed as he processed the hobbit's words. "Very...very well...Bilbo." He smiled, shyness giving way to bravery and happiness. "I...I would like to ask a favour of you...if you do not mind that is." Bilbo nodded for him to continue. "I...I would like to speak to Lord Elrond. About Rivendell and the other elven realms of Arda. Master Erestor has promised to talk to me as well about it, but I would love to hear from one of the Ring-bearers." And while there were two of them currently residing in the Mountain, Bilbo understood that Elrond seemed more approachable than his mother-in-law. Galadriel...she sent shivers up and down the hobbit's spine, her eyes never simply looking, but piercing into his very soul. And that smile of hers was beyond disconcerting.

She had also taken an interest in Fíli and Kíli, which worried the hobbit. Whenever he saw her and Thorin's nephews...their nephews were around, she would follow them with her eyes, a wry smile playing around her lips. Had she seen something in her Mirror before crossing the sea? Or could she still look into the future? Whatever it was that she saw in regards to the young dwarves, it worried Bilbo greatly. So far he hadn't told Thorin about this, but the longer it went on the harder it got to keep it from his betrothed. "Uncle?" Frodo gave him a worried look and Bilbo shook his head to dispel the troubling thoughts. They were in Valinor after all. What was the worst that could befall the two rascal dwarves?

"I am fine, just...lost in thought is all." His nephew nodded and sighed as if that were nothing new. And maybe it wasn't. How many times had the old Bilbo lost himself in daydreams of a certain dwarf when Frodo had tried to talk to him in Bag End? Too often probably. Still, that didn't give the younger hobbit the right to look so long-suffering. "I believe I will have to speak to your parents, Frodo. You fail to show the proper respect to your elders." And what did Frodo do? He stuck out his tongue. Bilbo chuckled, "Oh, but it is good to see you so carefree again, dearest nephew." That shy smile made Bilbo wonder just how much time he truly spend around Ori. Ori...who had asked him something and he hadn't replied. Turning to the dwarf, he smiled, "I will speak to him as soon as I can. Though I believe he is currently trying to find reasons to not kill his Senechal and the Lord of the Fountain. They seem to know everything there is to know about constructing a city even though Turgon has placed Elrond in charge of the constructions."

Oh yes, Glorfindel and Ecthelion were once again in the process of endearing themselves to everyone around them. Bilbo was wondering exactly how long it was going to take until Elrond had enough and kicked them out. And as if the dwarf could read his mind, Ori suddenly suggested, "We could place bets, Master...I mean Bilbo. I'm sure Balin would join in, as would the king and his nephews. Bets on how long the Balrog Slayers will be allowed to stay anywhere near Lord Elrond's chambers. I believe even Master Erestor would join in. He looked rather miserable the last time I saw him." Poor Erestor had probably been subjected to Glorfindel's glorious ideas much more than his lord. Which would explain why he could be found so very frequently in Erebor's library.

It was testament to how very dwarvish he had become when, instead of complaining about dwarves and their betting habits, he reached inside his coat to withdraw a small purse. "A week. From today." Frodo gasped. "And I will let you know Thorin's opinion on the matter as soon as I can. As for Fíli and Kíli...they will meet us here soon, so we can run it by them." Ori nodded happily and Bilbo turned to his nephew. "And what do you think, dearest Frodo?" He smiled sweetly at the way the younger hobbit was staring back, all flustered and scandalised. Turning just his head towards the dwarf, he whispered in a conspiratorial manner, "I think Frodo here needs a little while longer to place his bet, let's give him until the morrow."

Frodo groaned, but before he could voice any complaints or argue his case, Fíli and Kíli had joined
them. And quickly placed their bets. Fíli, ever the tactician, placed a bet on the day before Bilbo's own bet. But Kíli was more of a rascal. "I give them two more days. No more than that." Ori took their money and only then pointed out that they could not in any way attempt to influence the outcome. Kíli's face fell. "I just want to go have a little chat with my good friend Ecthelion. And maybe mention some architectural features that would look really amazing in an elven city. Like a statue of Uncle." He beamed. Yes, Elrond would surely find that perfectly agreeable. Not!

"Now, shall we go and take a closer look? It is what we're here for after all, is it not?" He was not about to admit it, but he was freezing. And moving around would surely help with that. As they moved closer to the construction site, the hobbit thought longingly of the furs that were still lying on his bed...

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Erestor had once again managed the impossible. He had escaped. And he vowed that if Glorfindel mentioned Gondolin, or stones, or construction, or any of another thousand words again, he would be sleeping on the floor that night. That night, and for as many nights as it took to make him stop talking about that subject, and that subject alone. They were no architects! Yes, they had lived in Gondolin, but Elrond had overseen the construction of Imladris. And yes, they knew how beautiful the city had been, but the former Lord of Imladris knew how to build a beautiful realm as well. There would be another kinslaying, Erestor feared, if the two Balrog Slayers did not cease their idiotic behaviour soon. Very soon.

He had just found a rather interesting looking tome on dwarven courtship...someone had simply left it lying on one of the tables in the library...when Balin found him. "Ah, Master Erestor. I've been looking for you. And you found my book." Wait? Balin had been searching for him? For him?! Why? And why would the older dwarf be interested in dwarven... Oh. It finally dawned on him. Oh no. "I was hoping you could assist me. As a friend of Bilbo's." Curse the dwarves. They never played fair and Balin was one of the worst. "I have been placed in charge of their bonding ceremony, the wedding that is. Our dearest hobbit's mother is going to deal with the festivities and the feast, but..." The dwarf's face fell. "I had only a short time with Bilbo. Always did I plan to go back to the Shire, to visit him, but I never quite worked up the nerve to do so. The pain in his eyes, and his desperate attempts to hide it; it broke my heart to see him like that."

Erestor nodded and sighed, pointing at the chair opposite his. "I know what you speak of. It was hard to see him try so hard to act jovial when inside he was bleeding, aching. It has been a privilege to win his friendship and trust, even though it never ran deep enough for him to confide in me. I knew though, I figured it out eventually. And felt helpless to ease his suffering. Ever we were able to put a smile on his face, yes, but if it reached his soul is another matter." Balin nodded sadly. "But that is a thing of the past, Master Dwarf. Our friend has found his happiness, and by the Valar, I never thought I would ever say this, but I thank King Thorin each and every day for putting this light back into Bilbo's eyes. He is changed, our hobbit, and it seems that his life is only now truly beginning. Even though I do not think he is likely to get over his aversion to being called a lord any time soon."

The dwarf chuckled, "Aye. Though it's gotten worse. There's a song in the camps, telling the story of the great King Thorin Oakenshield and the Hero of Erebor. I believe Thorin loves it, but Bilbo..." Erestor had heard the song Balin was clearly referring to, and he was certain that his hobbit friend did not appreciate the attention one bit. "Will you help me, Master Erestor? There are things I simply do not know about our future consort, and I cannot ask him outright. He would become very suspicious, and quickly too. I could quiz Thorin, I suppose, but I don't want him to know about the plans until the day of the great celebration. And it will be great, Master Elf, it will be. A festival not only celebrating their union, but also of the peaceful relations we now have with our hobbit
neighbours and more importantly, after so long, with the *Firstborn.*

The dark-haired elf blinked. Had Balin truly referred to his kin as...as that? Dwarves were usually rather unwilling to acknowledge the fact that the elves were the firstborn Children of Ilúvatar, and in a way, Erestor understood that. Aulë had awoken the dwarves before the elves had opened their eyes to the light of the stars, incurring the wrath of Eru himself. They had been put back to sleep then, and lay in slumber under the mountains for many a long year until their time had finally come. To be called *Firstborn* by a dwarf was...unimaginable really and showed just how far the two races had come. At least some of their numbers. And so, with a beaming smile, Erestor got to his feet and bowed to the seated dwarf. "It would be an honour to assist you and to work alongside you. We will make their day one to remember indeed."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... *Eowyn's Musings*. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 27 - Of Letters and Plans

Chapter Summary

Enter Turgon, his lovely wife and the age old question whether another kinslaying would really be such a bad idea. And two young dwarves are walking in the rain, feeling terribly sorry for themselves...

Chapter Notes

Thank you once again for all the comments, Tumblr followers, hits, kudos, and so on and so forth. You're all awesome, and for that you get a new chapter...cool, eh? ;) As I'm already more than halfway through the next, I'm pretty sure that will come out next week and I can go back to my normal posting schedule with it. Big Bang fic is shaping up nicely as well, in case anyone was wondering / cares :D


See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

Turgon sighed as he put down the letter. His temples were pounding and he longed to throw something at the nearest wall. He would not do such a thing, of course, but oh, how he wanted to. His eyes fell on the beautifully crafted lamp on his desk and he smiled. He had made the right choice, he knew. His kin no longer afforded the luxury of deeming themselves apart from the other races. They had caused as much harm as dwarves and men put together, if not more. They had slaughtered each other, and for what? Some stupid gems that should have been given to the Valar upon their request. Maybe the dwarves had been right to distrust them, especially after Thingol...

Everything somehow always came back to the Sindarin elf. And he had thought he would be granted a respite of peace after their last meeting. Oh, how he wished Fingon or their father had taken the crown... Or that Ingwë had not decreed that after thousands of years, he would pass on the title of High King of all Elves. Revered though he was, he longed for peace, especially after the Fall of Beleriand and the influx of elves of maybe a less than friendly nature. Had he been referring to Thingol when saying this? Not only to the golden-haired elf, of course, but maybe in part? There was that urge again, the urge to destroy something. Though not this wonderful lamp, no. He did not believe that Thorin would look kindly upon one of his guests destroying the furnishings of his rooms, even though it was the High King himself.

A storm was brewing outside and this had effectively put an end to any and all construction works. Of their new city, that was. Not within Erebor. Only a few chambers from his, elven stonemasons were busy carving leaves and vines out of cold stone, and woodworkers debated how to put elven touches to the dwarven furnishings. He had passed on both their offers, as had his wife. They both took delight in the strong lines and almost harsh angles of the dwarven designs, and he knew that
Thorin, while pretending not to care, had secretly been very pleased. Turgon had to admit that he liked the dwarven king, more than he had ever thought it possible to like a dwarf. And his hobbit mate, well, Bilbo Baggins was truly of import, not only because he had been a Ring-bearer, no. He had changed Thorin for the better, and was in the process of doing so with everyone around him. And he did not even know it! Maybe he should ask the hobbit to have a word with Thingol. But no, he could not do that to the kind and joyous halfling.

Getting to his feet, he walked over to the balcony doors. It had started to rain and large drops of water fell on the slabs of marble and saturated the grass. His balcony, much like that of the royal couple, was more of a garden than something hewn from rock, even though that was exactly what it was. A lot of soil had been shifted to create the illusion of stepping into a small meadow. Spring flowers were already blooming, and Elenwë would sit among them many an hour, reading this or that book that she had found in the bowels of the great Library of Erebor. She had also taken to teaching Sindarin to those who wished to learn, enabling the dwarven scholars to share in elven knowledge. One of her first pupils had been Óin, the healer, and right now she was helping him translate one of Elrond's books on various ailments. Maybe one day, the dwarves would reciprocate and share their own tongue with the elves and teach them... But even if that never happened, Ori and Balin had granted them access to all their books, be they in Westron or indeed in that secret language of the dwarves. For there were some elves who did speak Khuzdul.

He sighed, turning back to his desk. The letter lay there, mocking him. It was filled with barely veiled insults and even a rather covert suggestion that maybe someone else would be a better leader of the Elves of Valinor, seeing that he had left the path of wisdom and sided with those who would steal from their kin and betray them to their deaths if they could. In other words, he had apparently sided with the dwarves and turned his back on the elves. It was funny really, considering how many elven lords had already sent missives saying how much they applauded him for his plans to move the capital city and to rebuild one of the jewels of Beleriand. Especially Finrod was beyond pleased and was already suggesting trade routes between Nargothrond and both Gondolin and Tirion. And of course the dwarven Kingdom of Erebor. Apparently Finrod had had enough of certain meddling Sindarin elves and had decided to invite the former kings of Durin's line, Thrór and Thráin, to dwell with him in the caverns they had helped shape. Thingol though did not know of this as yet, or else it would surely have been a part of his letter.

He simply wanted to burn it and forget all about it. But he knew he could not. He was High King after all. He would have to find a way to write a reply to Thingol that would not spark a war on Aman's soil. "It is him again, is it not, hervennen?" Elenwë had silently entered the chambers as was her wont and she was now gazing at him, concern in her deep blue eyes. There was a warmth about her that he had missed desperately in Gondolin, and not for the first time did he wonder if things would have turned out differently had she not perished during the crossing of the Helcaraxë. Maybe...maybe she would have seen signs of warning that must have been there. Or maybe she could have tempered Maeglin's emotions... "And now you are thinking of your city again. Stop. You cannot undo past mistakes. You can only seize this second chance that has been given to us all. To him as well."

She could be referring to Thingol, yes. Or to the Traitor. But the way she was glancing at the letter made him believe that she was, in fact, speaking of the Sinda. "You are right of course. But he makes it extremely hard to not consider a second kinslaying as a worthwhile option." She chuckled, smiling warmly. "What would you advise?" She raised a curved eyebrow, shrugging. He sighed. "I will reply, do not worry. I will remain civil and not respond to his accusations except by telling him that I am broadening our horizons, not betraying elven values."

"And you are not, you know this. On the contrary. Our kind is supposed to embrace the other races,
not avoid them." Her eyes were sparkling with anger that only Thingol seemed to be able to evoke in her. "He is. His hatred of the dwarves is excessive. Not unfounded, I grant you, but very much exaggerated. He has brought his fate upon himself by seeking that which should have been returned to the Valar by Fëanor himself. The Silmaril were never ours to possess. They touch our hearts and fill them with greed, and even the most noble among us may fall. It is as if Fëanor's desire to keep them to himself has tainted them, and then Morgoth's touch has sullied them further. Maybe that is why Elu Thingol is the way he is. And the grief over losing his daughter..." She looked to him now, pleadingly, and he went to to embrace her and to hold her close. "I could not bear it if I lost our sweet Idril, and to know that Lúthien will never be by his side again...that he all but brought this fate upon himself..."

It was easy to forget that Thingol had been a father once, that he had woken to find his beloved Lúthien gone forever. But instead of finding solace with his wife, he had decided to chose a path of rage. Rage against everything and anything that he might not fully agree with, and mostly against Aulë and his Children. He would not dare voice his dislike of the Vala openly, but Turgon had no doubt regarding how the blond Sinda felt. How Melian found the strength to stay with Thingol, he knew not. "Elenwë?" Her eyes met his, anger fading from them as calm settled over her again. "I would never put a jewel over the lives of my family. You and Idril are the most precious beings in this world to me." She smiled at that. "And soon we will have Gondolin reborn, not secret and hidden though, but proud to call Erebor its neighbour." Elenwë nodded and kissed him gently, and soon he forgot all about letters and Thingol.

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"Yikes!" A thick droplet of water had found its way under Kíli's hood and tunic, and was now rolling down his back. He was cold and wet and miserable. "How is this helping with Bilbo and Thorin's wedding anyway?" Maybe he had been asking this question a few too many times already, but really...there was no reason for Fíli to glare at him quite like this. "What?! I'm just asking." His brother simply huffed, pulling his own cloak closer. "Couldn't we at least wait until tomorrow? So we don't drown while walking around?"

"Do you want to explain to Balin that we kind of forgot to go and speak to Elrond about the wedding? Do you? Because I most certainly do not." Fíli gave him another glare and then trotted onwards to the elven tents further up the road. They could at least have taken a pony, Kíli mused. But for once he remained quiet, not wanting to annoy the other dwarf even further. It wasn't as if it was only his fault. Fíli had forgotten as well after all. Balin had given them a choice. Either speak to Master Erestor or Lord Elrond. Now Erestor was intimidating, but Elrond had healed Bilbo, so in a way he was something like family. At least that was how they had initially seen it when they had been asked to chose. Only after Balin was gone, they realised that Elrond was also the former Lord of Imladris, a great warrior and healer who would probably frown on them if they were foolish enough to ask his assistance. Especially now that he was overseeing the construction works.

So for days they had made up excuses to not speak with the peredhel. They had to keep an eye on their other project after all, especially after Bilbo had told them exactly what he had witnessed on numerous occasions now. The only problem was that both Frodo and Ori seemed to be utterly oblivious of both their own feelings and the other's as well. What was one to do? And then Fíli had the genius idea to ask Frodo about hobbit courting rites, right in front of Ori. The way the younger dwarf had blushed before scurrying off had been hilarious to say the least. Frodo had been very much forthcoming with information, clearly believing that it was all for Thorin and Bilbo's wedding. The fool! And Bilbo, who had accidentally come to the Library that very moment, had reported that Ori had been standing just around the corner and very much within earshot.
The plan for today had been that Bilbo leave a book on dwarven courting customs lying about somewhere for Frodo to find. After all, the future consort had every reason to study something like this, but with all the work he was doing and the wedding looming closer and closer, he was almost expected to be a little scatterbrained. But with Bilbo taking over for the day, there was nothing left for them to do but finally talk to the former Lord of Imladris. Who so happened to be in the overseer's tent near the construction site of the great elven city. Clearly there were things he could still see to despite the downpour that had put an end to all building works. "Couldn't he come back to the Mountain again instead of staying out here in the rain?" Kíli lamented again, brown eyes big and miserable as they caught Fíli's.

"He clearly has things to attend to, and all his paperwork will be out here, in the tent. Besides, you have seen Glorfindel and Ecthelion, haven't you? Peering over blueprints and the like. I am pretty sure Lord Elrond would do pretty much anything to avoid them." Fíli's face fell as he said that last bit, obviously thinking of the bets that had been placed. It seemed like none of them would win as Elrond had started avoiding the two Balrog Slayers instead of outright telling them to get lost. Not that he would use those exact words anyway, but he might say something to that effect. One more day, and Fíli would lose, and another for Bilbo to be out of pocket. He already was, and he was very much saddened by it. Their friends had truly let them down.

"Who will the money go to, do you think?" Fíli raised an eyebrow as if to ask where he'd left his brains that day. And then he remembered. Thorin! That traitor of an uncle had gone against them all by betting on Elrond to never kick out the two banes of his existence but to find an alternative that suited him. He had won the moment the tent had been set up. Burn him! "Well, I hope he will spend it wisely. On something for Bilbo. At least one of us will reap the fruits of this sad endeavor then." His brother shook his head, making watery pearls fly this and that way, and made a noise that seemed to be caught somewhere between a sigh and a giggle.

They were drawing near now, and the tent seemed to loom up ahead where it should have been a welcome sight in this atrocious weather. "Let me do the talking," Fíli whispered, and his brother was only too happy to nod. The two elves guarding the entrance of the tent bowed their heads to them, offering them towels to dry off at least somewhat. "We are here to speak to Lord Elrond if we may. We have something of great importance to discuss with him and could not wait for his return to the Mountain." Kíli was about to say something, for he begged to differ, but thought better of it. Fíli had said to keep quiet so he would. For now at least. They were led inside without any question; after all, they were the nephews of the dwarven king and deserved to be treated with respect.

Elrond himself was standing over a table filled with papers that looked more complicated than the blueprints for Erebor had been. Gondolin would be a masterpiece of elven craftsmanship, but, and that made Kíli smile, there were also dwarven influences visible. Guest houses that had surely been designed by dwarven architects would stand side by side with elven palaces, and he felt a rush of pride towards both his uncle and the High King Turgon. They had both come very far indeed. "You approve then, young Kíli?" Elrond's question pulled him out of his reverie and he blinked in startlement. "I know you can read these," he pointed at the scrolls, "so what do you think of them?"

Looking to his brother for permission to speak, he only received an eyeroll in reply. Very well then. "It will be magnificent. Just as beautiful as Erebor, only in a different way. And to see that both realms will be...well...displaying the designs of the other... I cannot wait to see it, to tell you the truth. I love the elven guest rooms in our Mountain. It almost feels as if one is outside with all the vines and leaves. It is a wonder to behold. Or so Bilbo says and I agree with him." He averted his gaze and blushed. "Gondolin will be wonderful and I cannot wait to see the markets and maybe stay at an inn and challenge more elves to a drinking game and..."
"...and I think that is quite enough," Fíli laughed. "Forgive my brother's rambling. I think it's an aftereffect of dying and being dropped on his head as a child. There is no telling which was worse for his mental faculties." Kíli just glared. It wasn't his fault that both Thorin and Fíli had been inattentive so very often, and he had a tendency of falling onto his head. If anything they should be glad he had turned out as well as he had. Elrond smiled at him before turning to Fíli with a frown. Apparently the elven lord didn't think there was anything wrong with his enthusiasm and exuberance.

"Your brother is right in his assumptions though, Master Fíli. Gondolin will be a jewel, both of elven and dwarven craft. With a bit of hobbit architecture thrown in for good measure. Bilbo and Frodo were kind enough to make drawings for me, and the good people of New Delving are sending woodworkers and stonemasons once they have finished preparing the fields." Now that Elrond had mentioned it, Kíli could see the holes for windows and doors in various hills within the walls of the city. Though he was wondering how the hobbits would like the moat. After all, halflings weren't too keen on water. Which was an understatement. "So what may I do for you? It must be important indeed for you to brave the storm raging outside."

Fíli nodded and began explaining. "Well, you know that Lord Balin is organising the wedding and bonding of our uncles. But he wishes all of Bilbo's friends to partake in the celebration. And as you are one of them..." The peredhel smiled and nodded. And that was it. Soon they were sitting together by the brazier, warming their hands on mugs of mead, discussing the feast and listening to tales of Bilbo's years at the Last Homely House. Both dwarves reached for each other's hands as it became more and more apparent just how much Bilbo had missed Thorin, how much he had grieved. For them as well. And they vowed, silently, with just one look at each other, that the wedding would be everything that had been missing from their hobbit's life for so long. It would be warm and sunny, and happy and fun; a celebration of the love that every one of their people could see so plainly written across both Bilbo's and Thorin's face whenever they were together. It would be a spectacle to be remembered forever.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 28 - The Scarf

Chapter Summary

Is it an eagle? Is it a plane? Nope, it’s an eanie meanie cliffie :P

Chapter Notes

As always a massive thanks to all of you who've read, kudo'ed and commented :) You guys rock :D

**Translation of Elvish:** Peredhel - Half-elf.

**Translation of Khuzdul:** Âzyungâl - lover (beloved). Âzyungel - love of love (greatest love). Ukrâd - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

It was one of the first warm days of the year, and Bilbo was sitting in his little garden smoking his pipe. Down the road, construction had started in earnest, and already Gondolin was a shining jewel with stacks of white marble marking where houses and palaces would soon rise from the plain. Rocks...no...boulders had been brought in from the Pelóri Mountains and an artificial hill had been erected in what was to become the centre of the city. There, a great tower and citadel would be erected, and the palace not far from it. The roofs, the hobbit had heard, would be gold plated, gleaming in the sunlight. It would indeed be a sight to behold, beautiful in a different way than Erebor.

For the Mountain was wondrous indeed. Even Erestor had grudgingly agreed that yes, dwarven architecture held beauty as well, though unlike that of his own kin. And now Bilbo even wondered if his friend would wish to leave Erebor once the elven city was finished. Glorfindel and Ecthelion would probably stay behind as well, or split their time between the Mountain and Gondolin; and it seemed that the High King was perfectly content and happy about that. Bilbo didn't want to know what was going on between Turgon and the Lords of Flower and Fountain, because it surely was not good. They had probably annoyed the king one too many times, which was not surprising at all.

"There you are." Thorin's voice was warm and gentle, and Bilbo closed his eyes for a moment, savouring the soft timbre. Few people ever got to hear it, and he thought himself very lucky indeed to be counted amongst those who did. "I see you managed to escape Glorfindel? Our nephews seem to have been less fortunate." Thorin stepped into view with a smirk, and Bilbo simply nodded. Oh yes, he had escaped. Just before the newest rendition of the great tale of 'How Glorfindel the Great killed the Balrog of Morgoth'. He was glad that he had witnessed the running up to one of those storytelling sessions on numerous occasions in Imladris, so when he saw the first signs, he fled. Fíli and Kíli had been less wise. Yes, maybe Bilbo could have warned them, but where would be the fun...
in that?

The hobbit shrugged as his betrothed sat down by his side. "They need to learn to watch out for the little things, Thorin. There are warning signs. He will clear his throat oftentimes, and wander about aimlessly. Maybe even pick up a book on histories and sigh at it. Loudly. Then he will sit down, by a fire if possible. And he will stare into the flames. At that point you should run." The king chuckled. "If you don't, you're done for. Because once he starts, and you attempt to leave, he will use those eyes of his on you. And they are a weapon to be reckoned with, Thorin. They can turn even Lord Elrond into a whimpering elfling. I've seen it with my own eyes. There's only one person I know to be immune to them. Erestor. He can doze through Glorfindel's stories and our dearest Lord of the Golden Flower will not even bat an eyelash. Even Ecthelion is not so privileged."

"It's called being in love, Bilbo. You should try it at some point." Thorin received both a raised eyebrow for that and an armful of hobbit. In one smooth movement, Bilbo had put down his pipe and straddled his dwarf, arms wrapped around the Thorin's neck. "Oh, so you wish to try right now, do you?" Blue eyes sparkled with mirth and the first stirrings of lust and the halfling moved his hips just so, eliciting a hiss from the king. "You do not play fair, Master Baggins, not fair at all. Especially as you know full well that this will have to wait. Unless you wish me to ravage you right here and right now without any time for..." Bilbo shut him up with a kiss and when they came up for air, Thorin growled. "I will make you pay for that. Tonight, âzyungâl. Tonight. For now I must away to inspect the mines. As you yourself pointed out I should do." That was true, the hobbit had to agree. But now that it was interfering with his needs and wants, he was not so happy about it anymore. They were both hard from that one kiss, and it took all of his willpower to clamber off of Thorin and sit down next to him.

"I shall hold you to that, my King." The dwarf groaned again, pulling Bilbo into an almost brutal kiss that left them both breathless. "You should go before I lose what control I have left, âzyungel. Or the mines will have to inspect themselves, I'm afraid." Thorin nodded, unable to speak for a moment it would seem. He stood, his legs somewhat shaky and Bilbo giggled. "I hope you won't be too weak though, tonight. For I hope to lie with you under the stars, out here on the soft grass. The way I dreamed so often after my return to the Shire." His betrothed nodded, his large hand coming up to stroke down the halfling's cheek. And the smile playing around those lips, together with the soft glow in sapphire pools...those had nothing to do with the passion that was ever burning between them. No. They were knowing and filled with love. They had time. All the time in the world.

But before Thorin pulled away, he seemed to recall just why he had been searching for his hobbit in the first place. "My nephews tell me that they have given up on that foolish bet of yours. Even Balin seems to have admitted defeat. That leaves only you and Ori now. Why don't you go to the library and talk to him? And give him this..." He pulled a familiar-looking scarf from his cloak. "Kili may or may not have lifted it from your nephew, but you can always tell Ori you found it. And would like him to return it for you. Maybe even today while Frodo is visiting with his parents out in the tents. It can still get cool in the evening, so Frodo may need the warmth of his scarf..."

That was brilliant thinking, and Bilbo bounded to his feet to hug the dwarf. "This means he has to go meet the parents, you know that." Thorin shrugged, but there was a smirk dancing around the corners of his mouth. "An important step that is, in hobbit courting. It shows that you care about your love enough to endure your future in-laws. And trust me, at times that truly is a chore and then some. And while Ori may not understand the significance, Frodo will surely realise how much our young dwarf cares about him. Which will hopefully prompt him into action for we all agreed that if it were up to Ori, they would still be dancing around each other in a century." He smiled at the knowledge that they had centuries and more, that Frodo would be able to let go of his hurts just like he had done.
Thorin had sighed rather loudly at the mention of 'in-laws', and was now kissing Bilbo's forehead. "I would brave even the fabled and infamous Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Though luckily she has not yet made an appearance. Maybe the Valar decided that Valinor cannot handle her?" The hobbit chuckled. Lobelia had died a year before they had departed Arda, and he was sure that she would resurface. Eventually. He almost waited for the day, just to see her face when she realised that he, her most hated relative, was now the consort of the King of Erebor and friends with elven nobles. "So you will go?" Thorin's words startled him for a moment before he realised what the dwarf was asking. He nodded. Oh yes, he would go and nudge Ori just a little bit.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful? Another union between our two races? Not that I believe we will be the only ones anyway. I have seen a few of your miners eye some of the hobbit lasses, and lads, with barely veiled interest, and they received smiles in return. Always a good sign that." The first hobbit settlers had arrived just the previous day, to ascertain that the elven provisions for hobbit homes in Gondolin were agreeable and to begin surveying the pastures and hills to see where they could set up fields and homes later on. And as expected, both Frodo's parents and his mother had been among them. They had spent last night entertaining Belladonna, and if Bilbo was not very much mistaken, Thorin was still rather apprehensive around her. What did he think? That she would advise her son to go against his heart's desires and leave the dwarf? Like that was going to happen!

Thorin bestowed one of those special smiles upon him, and Bilbo felt himself melting. It was the same smile he had first beheld on the Carrock, after the dwarf had surprised the hobbit, and probably himself as well, by pulling Bilbo into that tight embrace. "It would indeed. Though I am afraid there might be other unions as well. Unions that I'm not sure about..." Oh yes, Bilbo had seen the signs. And he thought it was rather cute, though he would never ever voice that particular bit around his dwarf. Thorin may just have a heart attack. "Elves, Bilbo! Elves! I'm not saying we should go back to the old animosity, but some of the workmen, well, they are taking this newfound friendship a bit too far." And yet Thorin knew full well that both elves and dwarves only ever loved once and thus, those budding romances between the two races were meant to be. But clearly that didn't mean that the king liked it.

Bilbo glanced down at the grass between his feet so Thorin wouldn't see his smirk. The dwarf still did though, and huffed. "You cannot halt fate, âzyungel, you of all people should know this. Or have you already forgotten?" Thorin snorted. He had not. "Well there you are. I know you fought it, but let's be honest...weren't you happier after embracing it...and me...on the Carrock?" The dwarf stood and walked over to the battlement, looking out on the road and tents below. Bilbo followed. "You can admit it, you know? It won't hurt you to say, 'You are right, Bilbo. I mean, you are most of the time anyway, but you are especially right in this. I was an utter fool to not see what was right in front of me.'" Whatever else the hobbit had wanted to say was cut off by insistent lips covering his, and strong arms that pulled him against Thorin's chest.

"I love you," Thorin breathed into the halfling's ear once he broke the kiss. "I love you, my insufferable hobbit." That got the dwarf two hobbit fingers poking his sides just so, and he had to step back to capture Bilbo's hands before he was reduced to fits of laughter. "Now now, Master Baggins. Less of this and more of," he leaned in again, "that." This time the kiss was short and sweet, and Thorin obviously did not wish to break it even as he did. "We have to leave this for later, ukràd. The both of us have places to go and people to see. But I promise you, Bilbo. The moment those doors close behind us tonight, there will be no more interruptions. I will make you scream for mercy before I'm done with you."

That promise sent shivers up and down the hobbit's spine and he was very tempted to throw convention to the wind and let the Master Miner wait another day for his king. And Ori and Frodo, well, they could pine for a while longer, couldn't they? But Thorin seemed to be able to read his
mind, for he touched his forehead to Bilbo's, whispering, "It will be so much better if we have to wait until we can be together, my hobbit. And you know it." The halfling wanted to argue, wanted to point out various reasons why here and now would be just as good, if not better, but there really were none. They both had their duties to attend to, and his did not only consist of being a matchmaker. He was going to meet with his father later on to discuss orchards and vineyards and the like, and Elrond had also asked to meet with him. "Tomorrow though, after the Council meeting that you are attending as well, we have all the time you could wish for. And I have something to show you as well. We have found a garden of crystals. Shimmering and shining in all the colours you can think of. A garden within the mountain."

"Oh, but that sounds wonderful, Thorin. I would love to see it indeed. And if you wait just a minute, I will store away my pipe and get my papers for my meeting later on. With my father." He added the last at Thorin's curious expression. "Apparently they found a few places that would be perfect for orchards. And even two or three that would be ideal for vineyards. I believe Turgon will send an elven gardener as well. The High King is seemingly very keen to work with the rest of us, and I think he wouldn't be opposed to placing elves and dwarves in charge of both, together you know." The king nodded thoughtfully. "It will be good for elves and dwarves to work together. Especially as we will all be living in such close proximity. It'd be foolish not to do so."

At long last, Thorin nodded. "You are wise indeed. Just as Turgon said only the other day." That gave the hobbit pause, a frown creasing his brow. "You didn't think we weren't talking about you, my hobbit, did you? You are my future consort, and I am happy to call you that. And proud of all that you have done for us so far." Bilbo nodded, and gave the dwarven king a shy smile. He still didn't feel all too comfortable with the honours Thorin seemingly desired to bestow upon him, but he also felt pride at it. "Now, if you don't mind, we have to leave. Or they will send guards to fetch us, and we do not want that, now do we?" No, they most definitely did not. That had happened once before when they had gotten somewhat...distracted...and Balin being Balin had sent Ragnar into their chambers. Luckily they had not divested themselves of their clothing yet, and they were in the bedchamber so heard the dwarf before he could get an eyeful.

"Let me just grab my things then." He quickly pocketed his pipe and weed and all but ran through the open doors of their study to gather up the satchel that held various papers and parchments. "The scarf, Thorin. You have to give me the scarf so I can get Ori to return it." The king chuckled and all but threw the knitwear at the hobbit. "Thanks...I guess. For this alone you owe me, my dwarf. Throwing things at your consort is not a very nice thing, no matter who you are. And for a king..."

Thorin laughed, "Yes, but you are forgetting a rather important fact. You aren't my consort yet. I will do all my throwing now so I have it out of my system by the time we speak the vows." Bilbo glared at the dwarf, shaking his head. "Oh, forgive me, ukrâd. It was a scarf after all, not an axe or worse." He pulled the hobbit close and Bilbo went willingly. "I wish it was night already and I didn't have to let you slip from my grasp. But alas duty calls as Balin would say, and we both have to part ways. Though I will walk with you to the library." He placed one last and rather chaste kiss on the halfling's lips before walking out into the living chamber. "I shall order dinner to be delivered to our rooms though..." He pushed open the door then, walking out into the grand hallway and Bilbo had to run to keep up.

"That is a wise idea, my King. Particularly since I do not know when I'll be able to steal away from my father and Lord Elrond. And Turgon's gardeners. But before you suggest throwing all the pointy-ears off a cliff somewhere, let me just add that I love speaking with them." Thorin had done just that. A while ago and in jest, but he had said it. Ragnar bowed to them as they passed the great doors of the royal wing, and Bilbo bid him a good day. They reached the library sooner than the hobbit would have liked and they parted ways, smiling. Taking a deep breath, Bilbo stepped into the library,
clouds of dust rising from old scrolls and books and settling on every surface they could. "Oh dear, have Turgon's scribes brought even more old dwarven tomes?"

From deep within, Ori's voice came, happiness and excitement evident in his words, "Oh yes. And they are amazing. Look, some speak of Belegost and Nogrod the great dwarven cities of the Blue Mountains in the First Age. I cannot wait to read all of the accounts and make copies of the books. They are rather fragile as is to be expected, and I still do not understand how they survived at all." A lot of the knowledge of Beleriand had indeed sunken beneath the waves with it, but some had miraculously made it back to Aman and had been in the care of the elves of Tirion. "Will you have time in the coming days and weeks to assist me? I'm afraid Frodo has been called away to spend more time with his family." That forlorn look on the young dwarf's face as he finally came into view would have told him all he needed to know about Ori's feelings for his young nephew...if he didn't know already.

"Of course, it will help me with my Khuzdul as well, and that can only be of advantage. Though, I am wondering if you could help me with something..." Ori's eyes lit up at the prospect of being able to assist his hobbit friend. After that, it wasn't hard to get him to take the scarf and all but run from the library. Bilbo had to smirk at how eager he was to leave the books he so treasured behind to bring Frodo's possession back to him. He was still sniggering to himself about it as he was sitting with his father and Elrond drinking tea in the peredhel's tent. Which was when he received the news...

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 29 - Unwelcome News

Chapter Summary

If I were Bilbo, I'd run for the hills. But luckily (oh yes, for once I believe myself lucky) I am not, so he can deal with...stuffs...all by himself :) 

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay in posting, stuffs happened *shrugs* I hope to get back to my normal writing / posting cycle soon. But please do not be alarmed if the next chapter won't be out for another 2 weeks ;)

Also, as always, thanks for commenting, kudo-ing and reading *happy dance*

**Translation of Elvish:** Peredhel - Half-elf. Mellonen - My friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

The Master Miner, Tulk, kept on talking about all the different gems that had been found in this newest tunnel and Thorin sighed to himself. They had been walking around for hours now, and the king was growing somewhat tired. Additionally, his mind was somewhere...quite different already. Bilbo would beg for mercy before he was done with him tonight, and oh, how he was looking forward to having his way with his soon-to-be consort under the blanket of a starry sky. "We think there is some Mithril down below as well, your Majesty." What? Mithril? Suddenly Thorin was very much attentive again, giving the Master of the Mines a questioning look. "Yes, Mithril. One of the lads saw something shine, silvery at that. That can only mean one thing. Our elven friends will be beside themselves when they hear of it." Elven friends. How the mighty have fallen, my King. It was better than the bloodshed of the past, well, unless one thought of Thingol's blood being spilled. Even Turgon agreed to some extent that the Sinda had brought his fate upon himself.

"How soon until you will be able to survey the vein?" The silvery metal had been the root of Khazad-dûm's wealth and had never been found in Erebor. But to be able to mine it now, here in Valinor... The Mines had traded it with the elves of Lothlórien, and he would surely find interest within Turgon's court as well. Hard as steel it was, and light as a feather. Worthy of a king. He remembered giving Bilbo his Mithril shirt before his memories grew dim and were more about feelings than actual incidents. Greed and lust had filled his days, and in the end... No, that was in the past. He had been forgiven and had also finally been able to let go of his self loathing. However, he already knew how to facilitate the Mithril under their feet. Not a shirt this time, no. A ring. A ring to match the circlet that was already waiting for the day of their bonding.

"Oh, as soon as we clear the last bits of rock from this mineshaft, your Majesty. Some of my excavators are below right now, preparing the powder. Would you like to take a look? The explosion should be safe enough." Thorin nodded, eager to see just how much of the most precious metal lay
beneath their feet. "Well then, follow me please." Tulk lead the way down the mineshaft, workers bowing to their king as he passed. "You can see that we have much gold and platinum. But soon we will come to the diamond deposits. And sapphires, and if you will pardon me, they are the colour of your Majesty's eyes. I am sure Master Bilbo would like to see them." He coughed suddenly. "I mean no disrespect. Forgive me." Thorin smiled. He was sure the Master of the Mines was correct. Yes. His hobbit would like to see the blue stones. He seemed rather fixated on the colour and the king could not fathom why that might be. Of course you can't. It is not like you've been fantasizing about him for the last eighty years. And you haven't gathered everything to you that even remotely reminded you of him. That grey scarf for example? The colour of his eyes? Coincidence that? He simply huffed to himself.

It was only a short while later that they reached the very bottom of the shaft where two dwarves were busy preparing blackpowder to clear the rock separating them from the Mithril. The miners also used pickaxes, of course. But for the most precious metal...they wanted to get to it sooner rather than later and that called for the use of more...explosive things. The two bowed deeply, their beards touching the uneven floor. "None of that," Thorin said, giving them both a nod. "Just pretend I'm not here and get on with your work." He knew that was nigh impossible, but he wished to be of as little interference as possible.

Soon, they stepped back, pouring some of the powder on the floor as they went. "This should just take a moment, your Majesty. If you would step back?" Thorin did, and Tulk turned to the two other dwarves. "Get on with it. Our king doesn't have all day." They nodded in unison, one opening the small lantern he held in his hands, taking out the candle to ignite the black powder. "Now I hope you didn't use too little..." They hadn't. In fact, they had used too much. The Mithril was closer than they had expected. The force of the explosion turned on the four dwarves, bringing down part of the tunnel. One of the excavators seemed to be in shock with what was happening around him and did not move, and Thorin rushed to his side to push him in the direction of safety. Only to have a large piece of rock land on his foot and ankle, throwing him to the floor...

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Bungo had just commented on the elves prowess at cooking, wondering if they might be willing to share some of their recipes, especially for those delicious little cakes Elrond had brought with him, when Kíli burst into the tent. "Bilbo. Thank the Valar I found you. It's Uncle Thorin, Bilbo. There was...an accident in the mines." Tears welled from brown eyes that were large with panic. "He's, he's unconscious, Bilbo." There was no need to add the 'like you were', they were all thinking it. Bilbo got to his feet, rushing to the young dwarf and pulling him close. "I'm so frightened, Uncle," Kíli sobbed. "They sent me to find you, but I think they simply wanted to be rid of me." He turned in the hobbit's arms, facing Elrond who was standing as well now. "Would you...would you look at him? You made Bilbo better before, maybe you can..."

"Of course, my young friend. I will do everything in my power to hasten the king's recovery. Master Bungo, forgive me for leaving you so suddenly; we will continue this conversation later. And I will ask someone to send a selection of recipes to you and your lovely wife." The peredhel bowed before reaching for his healing supplies. "Lead the way, young Kíli. And do not fret. Your uncle will be fine. Unconscious he may be now, but not for long, I assure you. He has a hard head." That very nearly made Bilbo snicker, and it brought a smile to his face. Worried though he was, he knew in his heart that his betrothed would be well before long. He had been after all. What really troubled him though was Kíli. The young dwarf was taking this rather badly and Bilbo would have to make sure he didn't get caught in that vicious cycle of self-loathing and fear again. It had been so very hard to break him free the first time around.
His father had walked up to him, and was now placing a warm hand on his shoulder, "He'll be fine, lad. Lord Elrond is right. Between Thorin and your mother I don't know who is more headstrong." That did make Bilbo laugh. "It's why they get along so well; if they're not butting heads, that is." Gazing at the other hobbit gratefully, Bilbo gave him a quick hug. "I shall return to our tents then, and start planning. Of course, we will eventually have to discuss with king Thorin whatever we come up with. However, for the time being I think I know what is needed. And you, my son, know where you're needed right now, I'm sure. It's not with your old father, I assure you. Though, do keep us informed, alright?" Bilbo nodded, knowing full well what his mother would do if she did not receive updates on the wellbeing of her future son-in-law.

Leaving the tent, they walked down the road towards Erebor, Kíli by the hobbit's side. The young dwarf was quiet and would wring his hands ever so often. It had already started. "You know this isn't your fault. It could have happened to anyone. Not that I know what... Kíli?" He put a hand on the dwarf's arm. "What exactly happened? I know Thorin went to inspect the mines, but surely he wasn't running through the tunnels unprotected?" Then again, dwarven heads were notoriously hard as Elrond had pointed out before, so...

"They found Mithril," came the reply, spoken in a monotonous voice devoid of any emotion. "Uncle wanted to see. They were just about to clear the last of the rock. But they used too much powder and, well, it sort of backfired on them. One of the excavators froze or something, and Thorin...he pushed him out of the way and got hit himself. A rock caught his foot and made him fall..." He stopped suddenly, and before Bilbo knew what was happening, Kíli had pulled him into his arms. The young dwarf was sobbing now, and Elrond simply nodded to the hobbit, walking on. "It's all so very much like your accident, Uncle. I can't...I can't even breathe. I'm so scared. Óin says he will be well again in no time, but...first you and now Thorin. You can't ever leave, Bilbo."

"I won't, dear one. I won't. And Thorin will be fine as well. You know it. Soon enough he will be driving us all crazy again." Gently he stroked Kíli's cheek, managing a smile. "Although it does put a damper on my plans for the evening. Your uncle had promised me certain things and now he's going to back out on the grounds of being injured. It's not fair, I'm telling you, Kíli." The young dwarf hiccupped then, caught between laughing and crying. "Now let us go and see how he is faring. I have a sneaking suspicion that he will be the worst patient ever..." Later on, Bilbo would wonder if his words had been truth, or if they had simply jinxed things. But for now, he was blissfully oblivious of what lay ahead, and with a more cheerful...and complaining Kíli, he walked towards the Mountain.

"Why did you have to give me more mental scars, Uncle?" the dwarf was complaining once more when Bilbo pushed open the doors to their rooms. Óin was there, deep in conversation with Lord Elrond, but they both looked up when they entered. The smiles on their faces were pained, but still comforting. And it didn't take long to figure out just why they appeared so glum. From the bedroom, shouts could be heard, shouts in Thorin's booming voice. Bilbo didn't understand the words, but it didn't take a genius to figure out that the dwarven king was less than pleased. "Oh good, he's awake again." Kíli breathed a sigh of relief next to the hobbit, but then stopped dead in his tracks. "Oh no! He's awake." Bilbo turned to glance at the young dwarf questioningly. "You remember what you said about worst patient ever? I think your wish has come true. And I suddenly remember that I have things to do and places to be. Places far away from..."
sickbed manners, but it was still polite to ask. Especially when Elrond and Óin looked as if something dreadful had just happened to them. They approached the two healers, and Bilbo forced a smile on his face that wasn't altogether honest. However, it was the best he could muster right then, and it was the thought that counted. "How is he? Not unconscious anymore I see, or rather hear."

Óin groaned, "He is too awake for my liking, Master Bilbo." There it was again, Master Bilbo. The halfling had given up correcting the old dwarf though, it was no use. Óin was too reverent of his current, and future position to address him as anything but 'Bilbo', the hobbit would have a fit. "He threw one of his pillows at me when I announced he would have to remain in bed for at least three to five days. Lord Elrond only narrowly evaded another missile and now I'm afraid Master Fíli is exposed to the king's temper. Maybe you could calm him somewhat? It would make taking care of him so much easier if he wasn't like this." Oh dear. This was worse than Bilbo had expected after hearing all the shouting. To throw things at one's healers was just very bad manners.

"I can try. But I've never witnessed him this angry before. Well, except for that one time and the circumstances were a bit different then. He wasn't quite himself." Óin nodded, and so did Kíli after huffing sadly. "But now... Being unable to move around as he wants to will be very hard on him. It would have been on me, but luckily I was sleeping." The young dwarf by his side elbowed him in the ribs then, glaring. 'I'm sorry, Kíli, but it's true. Rest suits me ill now. And has ever since I first ran out of my door to follow you all. It was never the same after. When I returned, I wasn't the same anymore. I longed for mountains and the feeling of sun and wind on my face, and I..." Suddenly he was pulled into Kíli's strong arms, and the dwarf held him tightly.

"I know, Uncle. I know. You have no idea how much we longed to have you with us as well. How much Thorin missed you." A shout could once again be heard coming from the bed chamber, and the young dwarf chuckled, "I know he is not exactly timid right now, but this is nothing compared to how moody he was back then. You temper him, you calm him when his feathers are ruffled like no one else ever could. Not even mother. She would try, but since she is just as hard-headed and hot-blooded things mostly turned into a shouting match and nothing ever got done until Balin stepped in. And even he cannot handle Thorin like you can. However, if it's all the same to you, I do not wish to know how you do it. I'd like to retain whatever is left of my sanity. Not that it's a lot according to Fíli."

"What is what according to me?" Fíli was just exiting the bed chamber, his face white as a sheet. "Oh, Bilbo. Nice to see you. He's all yours. After all, he's your betrothed. You can have him all to yourself. I'm sure even Óin and Lord Elrond would rather leave here before they get yelled at some more. He's been like this ever since he woke up, and he argued for about twenty minutes with me before swallowing the medicine Óin brought with him. And he won't go anywhere near the poultice Lord Elrond has given us, no pun intended. You see, he can't walk so he can't go anywhere anyway. He said, and I quote, he's a dwarf and doesn't need elven pampering." Fíli's eyes were pleading, all but begging Bilbo to relieve him of his duties.

He sighed, "Hand it to me, then, and I will see it done." The blond nodded, a smile appearing on his face as he handed over a small earthen pot. "If I don't make it back alive, would you tell my parents that I love them, and Frodo...well, you know what to tell Frodo." Both Kíli and Fíli snickered. "It was lovely knowing you all, but I must now bid you farewell. Flee this place while you still can." Óin huffed, but Elrond was smirking slightly.

"You will be fine, Uncle. After all, you're the Keeper of the King's..." Kíli's face fell at Bilbo's glare. "Nothing. You are simply Thorin's betrothed and he loves you. He wouldn't harm you, not permanently that is. Then again, nothing is really permanent anymore... Well, Fíli and I best be
going. There are things we need to take care of that aren't here." He pulled both the hobbit and his brother close. "We have to check up on Frodo and Ori. Who knows, maybe today's plan has finally brought us a step closer to our goal." Bilbo had told both Fíli and Kíli about Thorin's plan before he set out to Elrond's tent earlier, and they had been filled with glee.

Nodding, Bilbo pulled away. He turned to the two healers who simply nodded at him. "He will be fine. And the sooner the better, for all involved." Elrond was shaking his head, looking towards the bedroom. "His current mood reminds me of our first meeting. Only back then he seemed to be in higher spirits..." Oh dear, that was bad. "Master Óin, I think our work here is done for today. I shall visit again tomorrow to see how our patient fares." He bowed, but it was obvious that he wished to leave as soon as possible.

"Thank you for looking after Thorin for me, mellonen. And you as well, Master Óin, I thank you for your help. I shall do my best to calm him if it is possible. And if not, well, there are enough rooms I can hide from the king." Fíli and Kíli, who were already standing by the door, giggled. He even thought he heard something along the lines of 'can always stay with us', but he wasn't sure. Before long though he was alone, his feet leaden as he walked towards the bed chamber's doors. Towards his doom he feared. Don't be silly. You have seen him at his worst. He is hurt, and that's all there is to it. Yes, yes. And this time, there was no Arkenstone involved, or anything even remotely like it. Just some elven poultice. So Bilbo took a deep breath and pushed open the doors.

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 30 - The Worst Patient Ever

Chapter Summary

There's bad patients, and then there's Thorin. That about covers it :P

Chapter Notes

Once again a big sorry for the delay. I've been busy with stuffs, and sick (yep, it's officially turning autumn and I get my cold / flu stuff). But I think the next chapter won't take this long to post ;)

As always, thank you all for commenting, kudo-ing and reading. Always makes me smile it does :)

Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart, Âzyungel - love of love (greatest love).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He wouldn't admit it to anyone else, but Thorin felt sorry for himself. He had quite possibly saved the excavator from the Halls, and now he had to pay the price for it. His head was ringing and his foot...it felt like someone was driving hot spikes through it. He had been offered some elven poultice but he had politely declined. He was of Durin's Folk and did not need to be pampered. He would heal soon enough and that was that. Only, soon enough seemed to be longer than he had thought it would be. Days, Óin had said. Maybe even five days! Bed rest was one thing, but for that long?! He heard muffled voices outside the door, and huffed. Fíli was probably complaining about his unwillingness to comply, or maybe it was the two healers that somehow hadn't appreciated the pillows he had aimed at their heads. Fools, the lot of them!

The door opened suddenly, and Thorin already prepared himself for more useless suggestions, but... It was Bilbo who entered. Concern was written all over the hobbit's face, and somehow it was seeing the worry in his beloved's eyes that calmed him. At least somewhat. The king did, however, see the earthen pot of elven poultice. He sighed. "So now they send you in with that stuff? How very cowardly of them." He looked away; but he had apparently moved too quickly and couldn't quite suppress the pained hiss that left his lips. Bilbo was by his side within seconds, the pot on the bedside table, forgotten for the moment. "I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm sure our two resident healers already filled you in. Broken bones and a concussed head. Nothing to worry about."

The hobbit snorted. "Indeed. You could have been killed!" Oh, so trying to play it down had apparently been the wrong course of action. "Do you have any idea how worried you made everyone? How scared I was? Not that I could show it for Kíli needed my strength. He...he thought of me and how long I was unconscious. He was so afraid that the same would be happening again." He caught his breath then, starting to hyperventilate. But when he reached for Thorin's hand, it was
like a death grip and his eyes were filled with remembered pain. His next words were little more than a whisper, so soft that the dwarf had to listen attentively to hear them. "I thought I would find... The tent... I saw you in that tent again. And while I know that death is not final here, that you would return, I couldn't... In a way I am glad Kíli was there, needing me, for otherwise I don't know what I would have done."

"I am sorry I worried you." How could he have forgotten about his beloved and how hard the news would be on him? On his nephews, both of them. And he had thrown nothing but abuse at Fíli... And Óin and Lord Elrond. When all they had tried to do was help him. Curse his dwarven hotheadedness. "I..." But Bilbo shook his head, silencing him.

"You saved a life today. I cannot fault you for what you did, only the outcome of it all. And I don't mean the fact that you are hurt; that was beyond your control. What isn't is how you are acting now. You are miserable and have been told you need to rest, but that's no reason to make everyone else around you a target. Least of all your family or those who wish to aid you. You may hurl abuse at me, but I won't have you treat others that way." There was a fire in the hobbit's eyes that told Thorin that arguing would be an exercise in futility. Not that he particularly felt like fighting with his betrothed anyway. Bilbo was right. That didn't mean he didn't grumble when the halfling pushed away the blanket covering him to apply the poultice. And he didn't say anything about how nice it felt on his skin, how his ankle was aching less almost straight away. He would keep that much of his dignity.

Once Bilbo was done fussing over him, Thorin took hold of the hobbit's hands. He had been stroking the blanket nervously, and the dwarf felt yet another pang of guilt. He'd done this. And instead of being grateful to be alive, though bedridden, he had been less than kind. "It is alright, ukrâd. I am well. Or will be again soon. I will never leave you again, not like I did before. I swear it." The halfling averted his eyes, and Thorin didn't have to be a genius to know why. "Please, don't..." He didn't know how to continue. 'Don't be upset?' 'Don't cry?' "Bilbo..." He reached up to touch his betrothed's face then, turning his head around and brushing at the tears that fell from grey eyes. "I won't leave you," he whispered again, and this time the hobbit nodded and sighed.

"I will hold you to that. For if you don't, Aulë won't be able to bring me from plotting murder myself." He chuckled weakly, but his hold on Thorin's hand tightened. "You are well," he breathed. "Oh, you are well." And then he smiled, watery but it was still one of those beautiful smiles that he only ever bestowed on the dwarf. He pulled a hand away, then, searching in his pockets for a handkerchief and once it had been found, he dabbed at his eyes. Once the tears had been dealt with, the smile suddenly faded into a rather put-upon expression, which startled the king. Until Bilbo muttered, "You will truly do anything to get out of spending time with me...out in our garden...under the stars." Thorin groaned at that. If only his head hadn't been pounding... "If this is how things are before we are wed, I hate to think of our married life."

Thorin could only glare. "I promise I will make you pay for those words. As soon as my head doesn't kill me anymore, and my leg is cooperating once again, I will make you beg for mercy. And when I do take you, you will moan my name loudly enough for the whole mountain to hear you. You are mine, Bilbo Baggins, and I will spend eternity to prove it to you." Bilbo simply grinned. "You think that's funny, do you? We shall see." He was growling those last few words, but the hobbit's smile never faltered. On the contrary. It only increased in brilliance, and the dwarf could think of no other way to wipe it off his face than to pull him down into a kiss that left both of them light headed. The world was spinning for a few moments, but then it once again halted, centred around this precious creature perched on his bedside. "I am sorry." His voice was rough, and in his mind he could hear an echo from the past, 'I am sorry I doubted you.'
The situation back then had been similar in a way, but so very different as well. He'd known his own heart, and was hoping that Bilbo might come to feel the same way eventually. Little did he know... Now he had the surety he had been lacking then. He knew without the shadow of a doubt that the hobbit loved him just as fiercely; just as passionately. And he drew strength from it. It would make the next couple of days bearable, or so he hoped. He would adhere to Óin's orders, for he knew it would please his betrothed. But he wouldn't be happy about it.

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Bedrest did not agree with Thorin. They had all known it, but every passing day they were more and more reminded of the fact. The dwarf would allow Bilbo to apply the elven poultice, but it was becoming quite apparent that he was growing restless. It fell to the halfling to calm the ruffled king, to keep him busy with papers and ledgers and decisions that needed to be made and couldn't wait until Thorin was hale again. Often though the hobbit was called away, having to attend council meetings on the dwarf's behalf, and those hours grew tiresome for those keeping Thorin company. Four days after the accident in the mines, that particular honour was Kíli's. His uncle had been sleeping when Bilbo was called away, and had rested throughout most of the afternoon, but now he was stirring. And there was nothing worse than a grouchy, still half-asleep Thorin Oakenshield.

"So where did he go this time?!" It was half a question and half a demand, with a hint of an accusation thrown into the mix. Kíli was about to reply, but was interrupted by his uncle. "He must be growing tired of sitting around an invalid all day. Before long, he will wish to move to different chambers, won't he?" The young dwarf sighed and shook his head, reaching for the king’s hand, which was immediately pulled out from under his. "I do not require your pity. Nor do I wish to be pampered any further. I am no child, my nephew, and it is high time I return to my duties." Kíli could only gasp. While his leg was healing fast, Óin and Elrond were still insisting he remain in bed for a few more days. To not jeopardise the mending process. Thorin knew this.

"Uncle... Bilbo will be back very soon, and you know that it's not as if he is leaving your side because he wants to. He has no choice but to attend those terribly boring meetings. Even Fíli has been drawn into them, me too, but I wriggled out of it today." The king studied him darkly. "And you know that Bilbo is not going to leave you. You're not an invalid. You should hear him speak of you. He's so very proud of you. For saving that miner's life, I mean. We all are. And he keeps giving Fíli and I nightmares and mental scars to last...forever." He tried to smile, but the other dwarf’s expression made him falter.

He had seen it before. Only once, but it had been branded in his memory. Anger and fear and determination fused into one. Oh dear Aulë, why could Bilbo not hurry back? Thorin needed the hobbit, and Kíli didn't know what to do. If the king had decided on one course of action, there was only one person who might be able to talk him out of it. And that person was most definitely not him. "And why do you think it matters whether Bilbo is here or not? Do I need his permission now? Am I not your King anymore?!" Aulë, no. He was angry, and now Kíli feared he had inadvertently brought Thorin's rage down upon their hobbit...who was least deserving of it. "I do not care what my betrothed has to say on the matter; or our so-called healers. I have been resting for long enough." With that he threw off the blankets and sat up, wincing as he did. "And I assure you, there will be more scars for you and your brother for I will prove to Bilbo that I haven't lost my prowess."

This was bad. No, scratch that. This was Arkenstone bad. Clearly Thorin truly believed that Bilbo was close to leaving him, that there was nothing worth staying for but...drinking tea. Briefly, Kíli wondered what had brought his uncle to this, to doubting his betrothed's love. Couldn't he see how the hobbit's eyes would light up whenever he glanced at the king? Had he forgotten that Bilbo had been faithful for eighty long years? But then he realised that this had very little to do with the hobbit
at all. Thorin had been weakened by this, physically. And no matter what, he had always been able
to rely on the strength of his body. Until now. If he was honest, they all had been of like minds.
Which was the reason why he had reacted so violently to the news of the accident. Thorin was a
rock that had never shown any cracks. Not outwardly. And while the cracks were mending now...

"Stop daydreaming and get me my boots, tunic and coat." Kíli blinked. What tunic? Surely he didn't
mean to wear his armoured... Of course he did. And there was nothing to do but to obey. Arguing
would only rile the older dwarf up even more, as would dawdling. His back was to the bed when he
heard a pained grunt, but he ignored it. There was nothing he could say anyway. All too soon,
Thorin stood by the bed, fully dressed and ready to go. That was when Bilbo walked into the
room...and Kíli longed to disappear into thin air.

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The meeting had been long and tedious, but eventually they had come to an agreement. Curse the
stubbornness of dwarves and elves alike. To get those two parties to work together was still quite a
feat, especially when some on both sides remembered the First Age and what had come to pass with
the Silmaril. Somehow, conversation always managed to come back to what had occurred all those
ages ago and he was growing tired of it. It had been Fíli who had brought them all to heel by
pointing out that the past was just that, and that they should strive towards the future and not quarrel
about things long gone. The elves, Ñoldor to boot, had to admit that the blond's words were sound
and it was the dwarves who had grumbled for a while longer before finally agreeing to the plans.

And what plans they were. Bilbo couldn't wait to give Thorin the good news, for that's what it was.
Very good news indeed. And something the dwarven king had been striving for himself. It was a
shame he hadn't been able to witness his ideas come to fruition. The elves of Gondolin would be
granted access to all the precious metals and gems the dwarves were mining for, including the
Mithril, in exchange for dwarven tomes that had been salvaged before the drowning of Beleriand.
Amongst other things. Ori would be elated, as would Frodo. And if Bilbo was being honest, he was
looking forward to perusing the tomes as well and further his knowledge of both Khuzdul and
Sindarin, maybe even Quenya. And so, by the time he reached the Royal Wing, he was almost
skipping with joy and a feelings of accomplishment. That was, until he saw Ragnar's face.

The guard looked haggard, almost scared, and Bilbo worried that the king had taken a turn for the
worst. He hurried up to the dwarf, who began to bow, but was stopped by Bilbo's hand on his arm.
"What is it? You look as if you've seen a ghost. Is it Thorin?" And with a sigh, Ragnar explained
how the king had decreed that he would be leaving his quarters within the hour and messengers had
been sent to King Thingol and Lord Elrond to summon them to an impromptu meeting. On one
hand, the hobbit could scarcely believe what he was hearing, but on the other... "Oh no, he is not!"
was all he said before pushing open the doors and racing down the hallway to the second set of
doors. He pushed through them as well to come face to face with his betrothed. Fully dressed. Even
wearing his sword on his side.

Thorin glanced up as the hobbit burst in, sneering. "Oh, so you return finally? To see me off, I'd
wager. As you can see, I am quite capable of walking again and as such I shall join you once more in
the running of my kingdom. Though I assume you managed just fine on your own and don't need me
anymore." What was this madness?! Kíli was standing behind his uncle, face gaunt and eyes wide
and pleading as they searched Bilbo's.

Taking a deep breath, the hobbit swallowed down the anger that was bubbling just under the surface.
"Thorin? You know you shouldn't be up yet. Both Óin and Lord Elrond..."
He was rudely interrupted by a sneered, "I am no longer going to listen to your elven friend. I know my own body better than he does and I know when I am ready. And I am ready now!" He thundered, and Bilbo had to force himself to stay still and not jump backwards. He had seen this rage before, directed at himself as well, but this time he knew there was no jewel involved, only boredom and maybe fear that too much was put upon Bilbo's shoulders. It had to be.

And so the halfling tried again. "Âzyungel, please. Only a few more days. Please do not jeopardise the healing process after you've been so patient."

"I will not spend another hour cooped up in bed. I will not! I am king and I shall return to my duties now. You can either join me or remain behind, it is of no import to me." He faltered then, for a moment, and Bilbo could see realisation flicker in those sapphire pools. Thorin's mouth opened, and the hobbit was sure it was to whisper an apology, but then the dwarf snapped it shut again and brushed past Bilbo instead. He turned in the doorway, hand on the doorframe to steady himself...whether because of his anger or his weakness the hobbit didn't know but guessed it was both. "If you wish to come and find me, I will be in the small audience chamber." And then he strode down the hallway as if nothing was wrong at all.

"I...I'm so sorry, Uncle Bilbo. I tried." Kíli's voice was small, and when the halfling turned, brown eyes were brimming with unshed tears. "He wouldn't listen. He said...he said you were going to leave him because he's an invalid. It so reminded me of...of how he was in Erebor. When the gold took hold of his mind and he was so focused on the Arkenstone. He won't hurt you again, will he? He won't..."

"There is but one person he is going to hurt with this foolishness, dear one. And that is himself." He was fuming himself, and only years of dealing with one Lobelia Sackville-Baggins enabled him to keep his cool. "Believe me, before long he will come crawling, begging for forgiveness. And maybe he will receive it. Maybe." Kíli gasped but then nodded, walking up to Bilbo and hugging him. "You know that I love him, that he means the world to me?" Another nod. "But right about now, I would love to strangle him!"

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Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 31 - Fool of a King

Chapter Summary

Um, so what do we have here? A fuming Bilbo, and idiotic Thorin AND a reading Kili? Reading? I didn't know he could read :P

As always, thank you all for commenting, kudo-ing and reading. Always makes me smile it does :)


Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now (1 F.A.)

Fili had joined his brother and their hobbit uncle as soon as he had heard about Thorin's ... behaviour. He wanted to call it a childish tantrum, but if anyone had the right to do so, it was Bilbo who was seething with anger. Even now after an hour had passed. Kili had taken to reading a book...Kili...reading!!...and was clearly trying to ignore what was happening right under their noses. He was obviously afraid that their little family unit was about to break apart and there was nothing Fili could do to ease his brother's fears. Even though he was certain nothing of that kind was going to happen. And he was equally certain that he did not want to be in Thorin's place the next time his uncle and their hobbit crossed paths. There was a fire in Bilbo's eyes that was, in a word, scary.

The halfling was currently standing by the huge doors leading out onto the balcony, staring at the grey clouds that had gathered all afternoon. Soon it would be raining. Fitting. "He is going to hurt himself because of his stubbornness." Fili blinked. Those were the first words anyone had spoken in a long while. And Bilbo was right, of course. Thorin's ankle was still not fully healed and now...now he was putting everything at risk again and for what? His bruised ego? The fear of losing Bilbo that was the most ludicrous thing Fili had heard in ages? The blond dwarf sighed, stepping up to the hobbit, a hand coming up to rest on Bilbo's shoulder. The halfling turned and nodded in thanks before turning back to studying the clouds. "To think that he believes I would ever...that I could... It's just madness!"

"I don't think he truly meant that. He simply doesn't deal well with being ill. None of us are. We don't have sicknesses like you do, Bilbo, as you know, and as such being stuck in bed feels rather unnatural to us. And that's the calmest and gentlest of dwarves. Ori would hate it, you see. But for Thorin...it must be nigh unbearable." The hobbit nodded, frowning at his own reflection. "It's not an excuse for his behaviour, but maybe an explanation?" Bilbo shrugged, and then, to Fili's great surprise, he turned and walked over to where Kili was sitting. The brunette was seemingly engrossed in his book, but the older dwarf knew that this was just for show. There was no way his brother could concentrate on anything under the current circumstances.
Bilbo sat down next to the young dwarf, his arm wrapping around Kíli's waist. "I love your uncle. I have longed to be reunited with him for eighty long years, and I would have gladly taken his anger again if that meant he was alive and well. So this means nothing in the long run. But I will still give him a piece of my mind once he's fallen flat on his face. And I think we can all agree that he will do so." Kíli nodded and, with a sigh, put down the book. "I might even borrow one of my mother's frying pans, though I fear I might damage the pan more than Thorin's head. Hard as it is." Kíli's head came to rest on the hobbit's shoulder, big brown eyes gazing up at Bilbo's face. "I promise you though, nothing is ever going to tear us apart again. And I know that in his heart of hearts, Thorin knows this as well."

"He wasn't listening to me at all. And I was hoping he would to you, but then... Then he didn't. He was so angry. Like the day..." The day Thorin had nearly thrown Bilbo to his death. They all knew it and yet none of them was willing to say the words. "He wasn't himself that day either. I'm just afraid that he..."

"He won't. It's like your brother said. Thorin is the worst patient imaginable, but since I don't think any of us ever witnessed him being bedridden before, we simply underestimated the situation. This is not like the gold sickness. It's boredom." Kíli pulled away at that, blinking. "I will cure him of it, don't you worry. After I'm done shouting at him. He will learn that I am no longer the meek little hobbit he met all those years ago." Fíli had to chuckle at that, and two sets of eyes turned to him. But then Bilbo began laughing as well, and eventually Kíli joined in. And when they finally calmed, the brunette mumbled something that sounded very much like, "I really don't want to swap places with Uncle Thorin when you have a go at him. You are truly a formidable hobbit."

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Elrond was not pleased. Not pleased at all. When he had received his summons...for summons they were and not a mere request...to meet with the King of Erebor, he had assumed he would be expected in the private chambers of the royal couple. Which would have been just fine. Thorin was well on his way to full recovery and moving about in his own rooms was probably a good thing. As long as he did not tire himself out too much. However, when the peredhel had heard where the meeting was going to be, his human side nearly overtook him and he almost cursed. Walking around his own apartments was one thing. Traversing a good part of Erebor to get to the audience chambers was quite another.

So when he walked into the room, he was of a mind to tell the king exactly what he thought of his escapades. But he was forestalled by a glare and glower and then pulled aside by Turgon himself. "We all know this will end badly for him. Let us not make matters even worse by calling him on his foolishness," the High King whispered under his breath. "Though I am certain Master Baggins will make sure that this will not happen again anytime soon. And I am glad that I will not be around to see it." Elrond had to agree with that assessment of the situation and thus, with a sigh and a glare of his own, he took his seat next to King Turgon.

When minutes later, Balin sat by his other side, he had to chuckle at how the older dwarf was huffing and puffing, shaking his head so much that the former Lord of Imladris feared it would fall off. "Fool of a dwarf. Bilbo is not going to let him forget this, you have my word on that. If anything, the years he spent alone and grieving have given our dearest hobbit strength he may not have possessed before. He may not look it, but he is more than capable of curbing Thorin's anger and idiocy. And our king knows so as well. Even though right now it would appear that he has forgotten about it. Maybe the bedrest has softened his brain or something." Elrond could barely keep from chuckling at Balin's indignation, for that would surely have brought Thorin’s rage down upon the both of them.
So Elrond simply sat back and tried not to look up when the dwarven king sat in his own seat, gritting his teeth in pain. He also paid Thorin no heed whatsoever when he tried to stand for emphasis at one point, only to fall back into his chair. He simply felt saddened on Bilbo's behalf. For it wouldn't be Master Oakenshield who paid for this, or at least not only. It was the hobbit. He would have to deal with his bedridden betrothed for much longer than anticipated originally. And the peredhel would make sure that the dwarf rested. Óin would back him up on it as well. Oh, Óin would be livid to hear of Thorin's folly.

It was also rather interesting to watch how, initially extremely irate, Thorin mellowed over the space of only a few hours, and how eventually a small, somewhat sad smile appeared on his face. Balin had just finished recounting that morning's meeting between dwarves and elves, paying special tribute to Bilbo's efforts. And in truth, it had been the hobbit's gentle nature and his thorough understanding of both elven and dwarven culture that had brought success. Even Erestor had been ashamed of himself when he let his old prejudices haunt him yet again and cloud his judgement. "Bilbo eventually had to put his foot down as the future Royal Consort to stop those fools we call our Council from making even bigger...well...fools of themselves. It's thanks to him and the High King that agreement was reached at last. And it will do us good, I assure you. All of us." He looked pointedly at Turgon and Elrond, and the peredhel could see the High King smile from the corner of his eye.

"He did well," Thorin said with a nod. And then he whispered under his breath, but still loud enough for Elrond's elven ears to pick it up, "Better than I could have." And he wanted to agree, simply because the dwarven king was acting so very infuriating at the moment. But he could not. Thorin had worked just as hard to see this come to pass as Bilbo. Elrond was astounded at the change within the dwarf. And not all of it could be attributed to the hobbit's calming influence. In part it was, that was for certain. But there was also the fact that both Thorin's father and grandfather had more than embraced their new situation and the elven inhabitants of Aman. Well, with one glaring exception, but he did not care to dwell on King Thingol. None of the elves of Turgon's court did. Thorin had, albeit grudgingly, joined Thrór and Thráin in their negotiations with the elves, or so Gil-galad and Ecthelion had told the peredhel. And now... Things truly were different.

"He did indeed," Balin agreed, and for a moment Elrond thought the older dwarf would leave it at that. But as he glanced over, he could see how that initially so stern face softened, and Balin's gentle nature came to the fore. "But he couldn't have done any of it if it wasn't for you, Thorin. Without you backing him up, his word would be for nought." The king looked up at that, swallowing. "Erebor is lucky to have you both." There was just the slightest hint of mirth in the dwarf's voice, something that anyone who did not know him well would miss. Thorin, however, knew and nodded. And then he seemed to shrink even more into his seat and one did not have to be a genius to figure out that he was contrite over...something. Probably his behaviour towards the hobbit before he had left their chambers. Elrond was sure they had argued. Otherwise Bilbo would be here now, by his betrothed's side.

"I do agree with you, Master Balin. We are all lucky to have both our resident hobbit and King Thorin ruling under the mountain. Though, that is not entirely true. You are no longer simply king of Erebor, but the land around it as well. And I am proud to call you our ally." Elrond could barely keep himself from gasping. True, they were allied, but to hear the High King say as much? Thingol would have a fit when he heard of it. And he most surely would. Somehow the Sinda always learned of these things. "I hope to see the bond between our people strengthen over time until such a day that we can forget the past and look forward to a future we will share as friends." Oh yes, Thingol would be livid. Which was probably one of the reasons Turgon was saying it. To show the King of Doriath that he was not cowed nor intimidated. The Line of Durin was now entwined with the Ñoldor in alliance and an ever strengthening friendship, and
nothing would destroy this. Not even the mate of one of the Maiar.

Turgon's words also served as a signal that the meeting was over, and with a graceful nod towards Thorin, he got to his feet and left in a flurry of robes. The few dwarven councilors followed suit, and soon the only ones remaining where Balin, Elrond himself, and the dwarven king. When Elrond turned from the doorway having watched everyone slip away, he found himself the object of Thorin's attention. The dwarf seemed to be weighing his options for a moment, before he sighed. "I have been a fool. I should not have left my chambers and I thank you for not pointing out as much when you set foot into this room, Lord Elrond." That was the closest akin to an apology Elrond had ever heard from the dwarf's lips. "Though I fear I will need your assistance now." The peredhel nodded, but Thorin's attention had already shifted to Balin. "Would you see if you can find Bilbo?" Yes, they had been rowing. And now the dwarven king was clearly going to have to plead with the hobbit for mercy. This would be entertaining...

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Elrond had renewed his strong recommendation that Thorin remain put, which came as no surprise to the dwarven king. It wasn't as if he wanted to move around. At least not now, with his foot pulsing as if the ankle was newly broken. The elven lord has assured him that wasn't the case, but it was hard to believe it. "It is simply swollen because you used it more than was wise. It will be fine if you do as both Óin and myself have suggested and remain in your quarters. You can move around, providing you let someone help you." Thorin nodded, knowing that Elrond spoke true. He had been a fool, and whatever anyone, and especially Bilbo, now had to say to him, he deserved it, and so much more.

As it turned out, he didn't have to wait long to hear exactly what his betrothed thought of him. Only a few moments later the door opened to admit not only Balin and Bilbo, but Kíli and Fíli as well. His younger nephew was glaring daggers at him while the older one tried to keep his brother from, as it appeared, committing murder. But as always, his gaze was involuntarily drawn towards his hobbit. His beloved Bilbo he had shouted at. A king he might be, but at that moment he wished to disappear into thin air at seeing the hurt and pain on his beloved's face. And the anger. Thank the Valar, at least he was angry and not only wounded. Anger Thorin could deal with. Or so he thought before the hobbit spoke.

"So now you are asking for my help? Now you suddenly need me again? After you so very pointedly declared that my presence, or lack thereof, was of no import to you?" He turned to Lord Elrond then, smiling. And that smile was a stark contrast to the glare Thorin himself had received. "Forgive me, mellonen, but I'm afraid this cannot wait. So please do not think badly of me for what I am saying to...to my betrothed." His eyes were grey steel when they caught Thorin's again. "You made your nephew cry! There is no excuse for that, Thorin. None whatsoever. You were behaving unkingly and childish, pushing away those who were doing their all to help you! I guess I should have known better than to think you had truly changed!" He was visibly seething, and his gaze turned to liquid fire when he delivered his final blow. "And to top it all off, you send Balin to me to summon me to your side. To do what exactly? To tell me that my help is no longer required?! That I am no longer..."

"No!" Thorin had thought he could bear everything the hobbit would throw at him. But this. Not this. He had to interrupt Bilbo, or his heart would have splintered into a million pieces. Never again. "I...I know I don't deserve your help, anyone's help, not after how I acted. I cannot explain what came over me. I only know that I woke and you were not there and I was overwhelmed by this fear that somehow you were gone. For what would you want with an invalid?" The steel in Bilbo's eyes melted at that, and he took a step towards the dwarven king, but Thorin raised his hand to stop him. "Hear me out. I don't deserve to even ask your forgiveness." He looked to Kíli for a moment, "Or
yours for that matter." He sighed and closed his eyes then. "But I'm doing so despite it all. I have never needed help as desperately as I do now, Bilbo; your help. And it is the hardest thing for me to admit as much. But..."

His words were cut short by gentle hands cupping his face, and soft lips that pressed against his own. Thorin's eyes flew open in surprise and shock, and he gazed upon a smiling, if still a bit stern, face. "I let you speak, now you will do me the courtesy of allowing me to finish what I meant to say. For even had you told me that I was no longer needed, I would have fought you. Don't think that I am still the meek little hobbit you once knew. I have spent too many years without you to let you slip away now. Even if that means fighting you and your...your stupidity." Thorin snorted. "You know I am right. We are one, ukrâd, and even though I may have wanted to feed you to a dragon earlier, I will never leave your side. If I have to chain myself to you." And then he smacked Thorin's head for good measure, rubbing his hand in pain straight after. "By Aulë, why do you dwarves have to have such hard skulls."

"So that we can bear all the necessary hits across our heads to drill some sense into us?" Now it was Bilbo's turn to snort, before the snort became a sigh when Thorin kissed the hobbit's palm. "I am sorry. And I promise that I will listen to Lord Elrond and Óin from now on."

The hobbit nodded, "I will try and relocate the most important meetings to our chambers so you can be a part of them. That way, I won't have to leave your side. Oh, and I think I should warn you. If any of this ever reaches the ears of my mother, she will come after you, with one of her frying pans." Thorin groaned and prayed that, somehow, this would forever be kept from one Belladonna Baggin.

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 32 - Of Tea and Apologies

Chapter Summary

Apologies are made and the importance of tea is explained. And two young dwarves are setting themselves up for a galore of mental scaring. Oh well *shrugs*

Thank you for your comments (keep them coming for the make me write faster :) ) and kudos and some such. I'm afraid this chapter did not turn out the way I wanted it because the two aforementioned young dwarves decided to chat with their hobbit uncle and so I didn't get to Bilbo / Thorin stuffs. Ohhhh well, it's all in the next chapter :D Which has a cliffy of sorts. And I know, I'm mean for saying that already ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now (1 F.A.)

It didn't take long to return Thorin to their chambers and the bedroom. He could walk, though it clearly caused him pain, and more often than not he had to rely on Bilbo's help to remain upright. Elrond had offered to carry the dwarven king, but any such offer had been declined, politely. And not by Thorin. The hobbit had simply raised his eyebrow at the peredhel, shaking his head. "I think I can take care of my betrothed just fine, thank you very much indeed." The dwarf had chuckled, his hand coming to rest on Bilbo's shoulder. But then the hobbit had turned to him, glowering, "I didn't say just how I'm going to take care of you, so wipe that smile off your face. King you may be, but you are also my future husband. Who has some making up to do." He gave an emphatic nod then, and they set off.

By the time they reached their rooms, Thorin was exhausted and all but tumbled into bed. "Thank you," he whispered, and not for the first time. He allowed Elrond to fuss over his ankle once more and didn't raise any objections when the elven poultice was applied. And when Óin finally entered the chamber, the dwarven king even allowed the healer to dress him down for being foolish. "What were you thinking, my King? It is a miracle that you didn't set yourself back even further!" The mix of indignation and subservience nearly made Thorin chuckle, but he thought it best not to upset Óin any further. "You will have to remain in bed for another couple of days. Though you may walk around your chambers, if you get someone to help you." Glancing at Bilbo only confirmed the king's suspicion. The hobbit looked smug; like a cat after eating a bowl of cream.

Thorin nodded in agreement, for there was very little else he could have done without upsetting his betrothed even more. He knew that not all was well between them, and hoped that, once they were alone, Bilbo would allow him to explain himself once more. And he would apologise for his abysmal behaviour. Until even the smallest shred of pain was gone from his beloved's heart and his eyes were once again gazing at Thorin with light and joy, not anger and misery. The hobbit's words had helped, though. To know beyond the shadow of a doubt that Bilbo would never ever leave him now ... it had laid to rest fears he hadn't known he was still harbouring. Had they not put the past behind them? It seemed that times of stress still awakened the old ghosts, and it was hard to shake them. Waking without Bilbo near ... it had reminded him too much of those long and lonely years they had spent apart; years that now he would not be able to survive. He would tell the hobbit, would bare his soul
When the door finally shut behind the two healers, Thorin turned to his nephews. Speaking to them would be easier and would give him time to think about exactly what to say to Bilbo. "I owe you both apologies," he began, and they both blinked in surprise. That in and of itself showed him just how ill he had treated them. "You both stood by me through everything fate threw at me. Even death. You have seen me grieve and have heard me cry out Bilbo's name in the dead of the night. You have witnessed my joy when my beloved was returned to me, and worried with me when he fell. And I have repaid you by shouting at you, and by making you fear that your family was falling apart yet again. I am sorry." He turned to Kíli, shocked to see wetness on his cheeks. "I did not know I still feared to lose him, but Kíli, waking without him near; I couldn't think. I am sorry I hurt you."

The two young dwarves exchanged glances and then threw themselves on the bed, on either side of Thorin, hugging him. "It's alright, Uncle," Fíli murmured. "We wouldn't want to be without our hobbit either." Kíli simply nodded against Thorin's neck, sighing and sniffling. And Bilbo stood by the balcony doors, smiling. He nodded and then opened the doors and stepped outside. To give them room. And maybe to clear his own head as well.

Kíli raised his head, staring at Bilbo's back through the glass. "Will you be alright? I have never seen Bilbo this angry." Thorin chuckled. He had. It hadn't lasted long, but he'd had one of those Tookish dressing downs before. "Is this funny to you? The prospect of losing Bilbo should terrify you, and not be a source of amusement." Sticking out his lower lip, he began to pout. Like a dwarfling.

The king simply shook his head. "It isn't. And you know that, Kíli. But Bilbo...the day the ship docked, I made the mistake to suggest that he may have moved on. Eighty years are a long time after all, and... It did not go over well. He yelled at me and held out my ring, telling me how he had been mourning me, how he had considered himself married to me all this time. He was furious, maybe more even more so than today." Gently, he touched Kíli's cheek. "And you heard him. He won't leave. I have to trust in that, have to believe that to be true. And if I search my own heart, I know it is. One day, one day soon I hope, you will understand. Both of you deserve happiness in your lives. I only hope that you will share your joy with Bilbo and I, for we both wish for nothing more than for you to find those you are destined to be with."

"I am sure we will. It's not like Kíli doesn't have enough suitors as it is." His brother growled and slapped the blond across the back of his head. "Ouch. Uncalled for. I'm only telling the truth, brother-dear, and don't say it isn't so for you would be lying. You've seen the elves..." Oh no, not elves! Kíli simply stuck out his tongue, scrambling to his knees. "We should leave you now. Both Óin and Elrond said you need to rest. And you still have to speak to Bilbo." There was compassion in Fíli's voice, but also a little bit of gloating. Which he deserved. "Shall we tell him that we are off and that you are asking for him?" Thorin closed his eyes and nodded. His nephew didn't have to see that he was scared. "Good. And we shall arrange for some food to be brought up as well. At least for our hobbit as he didn't take any lunch so he must be starving by now." He winked and crawled off the bed, Kíli following suit.

"Behave, Uncle. We love Bilbo and we will be very cross with you if you make him angry yet again. He's scary when he's angry. I...I even picked up a book so I could avoid looking at him." Fíli snorted, muttering that he had known Kíli wasn't actually reading, and the brunette gave him a sour look. "It's all uncle's fault anyway. And I can read just fine. I simply choose not to!" He grumbled some more under his breath, but then beamed at Thorin. "Thank you, Uncle. I was afraid you would behave like...like you did that terrible day on the battlements, but you turned it all around. Now," he turned to his brother, "Let's get out of here so our uncles can make up properly. Even though I think there will be no tea this time around." Fíli started giggling, and tried to cover it up by coughing.
which only made him chuckle more.

Thorin's eyes narrowed," Tea? What do you mean there won't be any tea? I assure you, that will be one of the first things Bilbo will make sure I have. He thinks tea can solve the world's problems. I'm sure he would have tried to reason with Smaug over a nice cup of tea if he had been able to... Now why are you two in hysterics?" They were. Fíli was holding on to his brother, tears streaming down his face while Kíli looked torn between laughing and being ill.

"To suggest that Bilbo would take tea with Smaug..." Fíli forced the words out before another fit of giggles took hold of him.

"It's wrong, that's what it is. Uncle Bilbo only takes tea with you, Uncle Thorin." Kíli grumbled at the same time, confusing the king completely. Until it dawned on him. They both had emphasised the word tea in a certain conspiratorial way, and finally something clicked in his mind. And he felt slightly sickened as well by the implication of Bilbo and Smaug... But why on earth were they talking about them having tea in the first place. He asked as much and Kíli growled. "Because we don't need additional mental scarring. It's enough to watch the two of you when you forget we're in the same room and we most definitely do not want to know what you get up to when we are not! So we have decided to refer to...that...as you having tea."

Fíli's laughing fit slowly came to an end and he turned to nod at Thorin in agreement. "Don't get us wrong, we love the both of you and are really thrilled that you are so happy. But you both are like parents to us, so there are a few things that we don't want to know. And others," his voice turned small and faint, and so very much not like himself, "that we don't even what to think about. You two fighting is one of them. You're our family and we want you both in our lives. Even if that means that we will have to live through you...almost having tea."

Thorin sat up properly then, realising once more that, despite their years, both Fíli and Kíli were still young and that they needed stability. They had never really known it growing up and somehow, strangely enough, dying had presented them with a chance to finally build something permanent. Something that would last. "Come here," he whispered, holding out his hands to both of them. It only took them a few seconds to sit back on the bed and bury their heads in his hair. "I promise you, I will do everything I can to ensure that Bilbo remains right where he is. It is not only the two of you that need him around. I am not myself without him. He makes me the dwarf I always wanted to be. I will face down Ilúvatar himself if I have to. For Bilbo, I would do anything." He meant it. From the bottom of his heart.

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Bilbo gasped. He had heard every word that had been said in the bedchamber, having moved towards the doors when Fíli and Kíli had gotten up to leave. The mention of tea had intrigued him, just as it had Thorin, and the revelation of what it truly meant had left him...dumbstruck. No. He would not have taken tea with Smaug, thank you very much. But then Fíli had stopped laughing, and the hobbit had had to strain his ears to catch what he was saying; and it had nearly broken his heart. He had been about to move into the room to hug his nephew when Thorin had beaten him to it. And his betrothed's words...even if he had still been upset, how could he be after that? His beloved needed him as much as he needed Thorin by his side. Sinking to a bench by the side of the doors, he closed his eyes and leaned his head against the stone behind him.

The sounds coming from the room were more cheerful now and a few minutes later, Kíli stuck his head through the doors, "Uncle? Oh, there you are." He smiled and sank down next to the halfling. "He's all mellowed up for you, so you can go easy on him." The brunette grinned, nudging Bilbo in
the side. Then, after studying the hobbit's face for a moment, he frowned. "You heard, didn't you?" Bilbo remained silent, but for Kíli that was answer enough. He sighed and hugged the halfling. "Fíli acts like everything is fine. As if he doesn't fear anything and yet...he does. He has feelings like the rest of us, he's only had to learn to hide them being the older brother and all that. He loves you just as much as I do, and I know that it was me who went to pieces when you...when you fell, but I know he worried as well. To think you and uncle might..."

"That will never happen, Kíli. I swear it. When I lost him, I lost part of myself. And I am never going back to that. Kíli, there were times when I longed for death myself, so the emptiness would go away. I held his ring and cried myself to sleep more often than I care to remember. Even when Frodo moved into Bag End...it wasn't enough. I love him dearly, but it was too late. It was...it was as if my heart had turned to ice, and a thorn hedge had grown around it. He couldn't tear it down, no matter how hard he tried. I was broken. And then, when I saw him standing there, at the harbour, I thought I had finally lost my mind. But it didn't scare me. I was glad." Kíli hugged him tighter then, and Fíli, who had just walked out onto the balcony himself, closing the door behind him, sat down on the hobbit's other side, mirroring his brother. "I think my heart only started beating again when I knew that he still loved me, even after all that time."

It was the blond who now spoke up, but only after kissing Bilbo's brow. "He hated himself for the longest time; for what he did to you on the battlements. But more importantly for leaving you. I don't think there is anything he would have rather done than share those eighty years with you. Grow old with you. He thought he didn't deserve another chance, but I know he was hoping for it all the same. We all were. When Balin, Óin and Ori joined us, Thorin would all but beg our mentor to tell him about you. He missed you so. He...we are not supposed to even know, and he most definitely would have our hides for telling you, but..."

"He has a drawing of you," Kíli blurted out. "He drew it the day he woke in the cottage. And I'm sure there are more, but we only ever saw one. We have seen him gaze at it oftentimes when he pretended to read a book. His expression said it all, really. We were worried, to be honest. That he would not last until you finally joined us. It's bad, I know, but part of me was hoping you would...you know."

"Bilbo knew. And how he had longed for it at times. Now, his heart nearly broke at the extend of Thorin's pain, pain the dwarf had hardly ever acknowledged. "I know that it was the same for you, and that you probably do not wish to dwell on it anymore, but...we missed you so."

"And I missed you. How could I not? But you are wrong, Kíli. I do not mind thinking of it now that it's over. Especially at times when your uncle is...well...his charming self I remember how life was without him and believe me, I am not going back to that. He can throw me off the battlements for all I care; I will just come back to haunt him. And I know that he would never do so. Wouldn't have done so even without Gandalf's interference. I could see it in his eyes. He called me a traitor, but I knew what he meant. Had you not...gone ahead, I would have stayed with him, would have fought for him. That hasn't changed. On the contrary. I know he loves me; I've known that since...since our stay at Beorn's. In my heart I knew. And that is all that matters." It was, it really was. There was no doubt. Thorin loved him just as fiercely as Bilbo loved the dwarf.

"You will forgive him then?" Fíli asked hopefully, earning himself a smack to the back of his head and a disapproving glance from his brother. "What? I'm just asking. I know it's pretty obvious, but it's polite to ask. Balin would be so disappointed in you, Kíli, if you haven't even learned that much."

The brunette stuck his tongue out at his brother and then turned his head to show that he was going to ignored him now. "And I suppose we really should be going. Or else Thorin will be asleep by the time Bilbo returns to his side."

"I doubt that," Bilbo smiled. "Thank you, for telling me about your uncle. And for always staying by
his side no matter how bad things were. He can be proud to call you his nephews. As I am. But Fíli, there truly is no question. How could I not forgive him? Believe me, there are things that he isn't too happy about that I'm doing. Like set the elves upon him." The two young dwarves giggled. "He doesn't complain, or not too much. So how could I begrudge him being...being afraid? Maybe it was a good thing in the long run. Now I know that he still held on to that fear that I might leave him. And I can work on beating the truth into that thick skull of his. The truth that I will never go, and that I will always, always love him." He received hugs from both dwarves, and happy smiles. Well, that simply would not do, now would it? "And I shall also tell him that I cannot wait to take tea with him again." The way both Fíli and Kíli jumped away from him was almost comical, as was the manner in which they bid him goodbye, scuttling back inside as fast as their legs would carry them.

He sat there for a moment longer, smiling. He would have fun with this, for a while at least. Until they had found a new way to talk about him and Thorin. Tea indeed. And wouldn't you like to enjoy some of that again. Remember his promise? To make you scream? Bilbo did, and pleasurable shivers coursed through him at the thought. Evening was closing in on the mountain, lanterns had been lit a while ago on the construction site of the elven city and the hobbit was certain the dwarves by the gates had followed suit as well by now. It was time to speak with his betrothed, and to kiss him until his fears were but a thing of the past.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 33 - Love Knows no Bounds

Chapter Summary

Bilbo and Thorin have the talk, there is some gardening and crying (I sorry) and a hobbit gets hurt ... but maybe not all that much :P It's semi-cliffie time!!!


Chapter Notes

Cheesy title courtesy of my darling beta, so if you wanna complain about the sappiness of it, go find her :P

As usual, a big thank you to all of you for reading, kudo'ing, bookmarking and commenting <3 You is awesome sauce *nods* Now, there's one more chapter and then there's an interlude again ;) And this one comes with artwork and I'm ever so excited about sharing it *bounces* Must go write smutty stuffs!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

Thorin had heard muffled voices through the closed glass doors, and if he was not very much mistaken, he had caught the word 'tea' quite clearly. So Bilbo had heard. He had to grin at that. His hobbit would not soon let their nephews live that one down. He knew that, as a kind uncle, he should feel sorry for them. But they had brought this upon themselves. His hobbit... Bilbo had been quiet almost the entire way back to their chambers, unless he had snarled at something or someone. Or glared in his direction. But his beloved's voice had been warm as he was speaking to Kíli and Fíli, warm and loving. And then full of mirth...and something else.

Still, he was afraid that Bilbo was having second thoughts in regards to his pledge to never leave Thorin's side, but his fears didn't have time to take hold again as in that very moment, the halfling entered the bedchamber. And smiled. Thorin was sure that the hobbit had no idea just what that smile was doing to him. If Bilbo glanced at him like this, he would agree to everything. Well, almost everything. Part of him screamed at himself for giving the hobbit so much power over him, but his heart shut that small voice up, pointing out how much happier his life was with Bilbo in it. He couldn't lose him. Wouldn't lose him. He'd had a glimpse of this, and then it had been taken away from him and he had been banished to endure an eternity of loneliness. And he had condemned the hobbit to the same fate.

However, they had been given a second chance, and Thorin would not waste it. Not that he had a choice in it at all he guessed. Not where Bilbo was concerned. If the hobbit made up his mind, then...then his mind was truly made up and he would listen to no arguments. Which, the dwarf realised, was for the better most of the times. The hobbit had a level head, or at least he was less
irrational than the king himself was so often. Bilbo wouldn't let his passions and feelings run away with him, unless of course they were alone and, as his nephews would put it, shared a nice cup of tea. Then there was nothing level-headed about the hobbit, and he turned into a creature that was a slave to its own desires. How much he loved seeing the scholar and mediator change that way, and he finally became aware of the fact that while Bilbo had power over him, he, too, had power over the halfling. A mere touch, or a glance even, could kindle that flame within his betrothed, and it thrilled him that he was the only one who would ever see the hobbit in the throes of passion. His hobbit.

His hobbit who was now turning back to the doors he had just come through, closing them. And yet his hand was still resting on the door handle, as if lost in thought. "Is it true? What you said earlier, do you really feel that way? You would face down Ilúvatar himself? For me?" So he had heard that, too? Bilbo slowly moved his head to glance at him, and Thorin found himself unable to speak. He could only nod, and try to smile. "I would do the same," the hobbit whispered. "That, and so much more. If I had to, I would travel to the Void and battle Morgoth." Then he suddenly smirked. "After all, Morgoth should be child's play after fighting with you." He stuck out his tongue and then launched himself at the bed and was lying next to him within moments.

And Thorin held on to his hobbit as if for dear life. Maybe he did at that. "I am sorry, Bilbo. I do not know why I doubted you, why I doubted our bond. Balin took great pleasure in telling me just how foolish I had been, and how much you have done for our people. You brought Turgon's people and ours together and forged new alliances, and how did I repay you? By shouting at you and hurting you. By hurting our nephews. If I were any less selfish I would tell you that I am not good enough for you; that you should leave. But I can't. I cannot be without you, never again." Gently he reached out to pull his betrothed closer, his fingers running through that unruly hair, his thumb coming to rest on Bilbo's braid. "I love you, Bilbo Baggins. At times I forget what losing you would mean, and when I remember, when I realise what I have done, I thank the Maker that you are still by my side. I could not..."

Gentle fingers covered his lips, stopping his wordflow. "Enough. I know you, Thorin. Don't forget that I fell in love with you when you quite obviously wanted me gone. It was your courage and the way you cared for those near and dear to you that made me love you, even before you ever showed me any kindness. The only reason I left before, and stayed away, was ... was Gandalf. He was afraid you would harm me, truly afraid. He wouldn't let me return to your side, no matter how much I wanted to. When he found out I had run out onto the battlefield he was less than happy. Much like you if I recall correctly." Thorin nodded, kissing the fingers that still lay over his mouth. "I know you, âzyungel. You can tell me I am no longer wanted, no longer needed a thousand times and I will fight you. For I know your heart." Bilbo's smile was brighter than any jewel.

He closed his hand over Bilbo's wrist then, pulling the hand away from his lips, but not before kissing it one more time. "You were in my heart from the moment I saw you. No, no I think that is wrong. You were always there. Always. I knew that I was missing something, and I foolishly thought it was Erebor and that accursed stone. It was you, Bilbo. It had to be you. No one else would now be able to achieve what you have. Elves and dwarves, working together? Sharing their wisdoms and artistry? It is barely conceivable. I have heard a lot this afternoon, and I am humbled. Especially in the light of my own behaviour. To accuse you of..." He held on to that hand that wanted to cover his mouth again. "No, let me speak. I am sorry. I am sorry that I never spoke of the fear that was still in my heart. I swear to you, that it is gone. I simply ... I feared that you would see me the way I saw myself. Weak and broken, not nearly strong enough to be a king."

Bilbo's brow furrowed, and then he shook his head. "Everything I ever said about pig-headed dwarves; it is more than true where you are concerned. Thorin!" The hobbit sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "You saved that miner. You were courageous and brave and every bit how a king
should be. And you were hurt. That is no weakness. I've only ever seen it as a mark of your deed. The price you had to pay for the life you saved. You see it as a weakness, but I ... I am so proud to call you mine." His eyes were misting over with tears, but he smiled. "It reminded me of that night in the Misty Mountains when you saved me, do you remember? You risked your life for me, even though you wanted me gone. You could have left me to die, but you didn't. You acted without a thought, taking care of one of your subjects as it were. And yes, you acted foolishly, risking yourself as you did, but how I admired you for it. Until you all but told me that I had no place amongst you. Oh no, wait, you did say exactly that."

"You think that my ankle is ... a battle scar I should carry proudly?" The hobbit nodded. That confused Thorin, but maybe Bilbo was right. Maybe it was not the weakness the dwarven king had thought it had been. "And do not mention that dreadful night. You will never know how I fought the urge to pull you into my arms and never let you go. How seeing you walk away from me tore at my heart. How worried I was realising that you were not with us, after. But you are wrong. I did not act without a thought. And I didn't save a mere subject, Bilbo. Had you perished, part of me would have died with you. And I would have hated myself for the rest of my life, which, admittedly, would have been even shorter than it turned out to be." He looked away. "What I said to Dwalin ... I cannot explain. Words simply..."

"Run away with you at times?" Bilbo was cupping his face, turning it around again. "I hadn't noticed," he grinned. "Thorin, I am not saying that your words did not hurt, just as much as they did back then. But I have learned something since. Well, a lot of things actually, but that is beside the point. I have learned that dwarves are fiercely loyal to those they love. And I have seen you scold your nephews, but still I always knew you loved them. I know now that you sometimes speak before you think. That you regret your actions more than anyone else. That you feel the pain of those you hurt manifold. Unless it's a foolish elven king we shall not mention for he deserved your words, and many more."

"I wish I could undo..." This time it was Bilbo's lips that shut him up with the most tender and loving kiss Thorin could imagine.

"I wasn't finished yet," the hobbit chuckled when he pulled away. "I saw the regret in your eyes. And always, always have I seen the love you have for me. Under all your anger and fear and sometimes even rage, I always know you love me. Dwarves only love once, do they not?" Thorin nodded mutely. "Well, then you better get used to the fact that you are stuck with me. Hobbits ... once we have chosen our mate, that's it. It's like I explained earlier to your nephews; I will always love you, even though at times I feel like strangling you for being an utter bastard." And then those lips returned, only slightly less gentle but infinitely more passionate. "I wish I could show you," Bilbo panted once the kiss broke and the king tried to regain his breath. "I wish I could show you right now just how much I love you, ukrâd."

Thorin groaned, feeling parts of him respond to his betrothed's words. "This is your revenge, is it not?" The way the hobbit blinked and smiled all innocently was answer enough. "When you know full well that Elrond and Óin would kill me if I did anything even remotely like what you are suggesting." His mind was working vigorously at trying to find a way that would not put any strain on his ankle, but only drew up blanks. And Bilbo knew! "Don't think that I have forgotten, ughvashâ. You and I will soon be out there, under the stars, and I will make you scream my name." The halfling gulped, swallowing and Thorin was very happy to feel how his words now affected Bilbo.

"You are truly wicked, Master Dwarf," the hobbit lamented, pulling away from Thorin's side to take deep breaths. "But you are right, we cannot, not until your ankle is fully healed. So, seeing as we
cannot sate our hunger for one another, I suggest dinner instead." That made the king chuckle. His betrothed truly was a hobbit. Bilbo's eyebrow shot up, and he shook his head. "You think this is funny? That I've not eaten since luncheon? It is dire news for any decent hobbit. Dreadful really." His smirk faded as soon as it had come, and he sat back on his knees, reaching out for Thorin's hands. "I meant what I said. I would fight Morgoth to remain by your side. I love you, my betrothed. I love you.” And then he kissed the backs of the king's hands, and Thorin felt his heart flow over. Somehow, he had been forgiven. Bilbo was still here. Was still his.

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"So I was saying to Fíli, we should maybe be a bit more, you know, proactive? Uncle is doing a lot to make sure Frodo and Ori are working together, but unfortunately that's it. They are working. Nothing else." Kíli sighed, rubbing his face. They were sitting in Bilbo's garden, all helping the hobbit in one way or another. Except for Thorin, who was supervising. As far as the young dwarf was concerned though, his uncle was simply lazy. If he and Fíli had been roped into helping their hobbit plant flowers and some such, then his betrothed should lend his assistance as well. But Thorin had simply pointed at his ankle, his almost healed ankle, had smirked and then returned to his pipe.

Bilbo paused, hands covered in dirt, and raised an eyebrow. "What do you suggest? Locking them into a room and wait to see what might happen? Knowing those two, not much. They would simply find a topic to discuss and would do that until we unlocked the door." The hobbit sighed, glancing down at the small rose plant he had just put into the ground, as if he was hoping he had placed it in the right spot and that it would survive the harsh weather of the mountain or some other gardenerish stuff that Kíli didn't understand. "It is painfully obvious that they care about one another, but I don't know how to make them see that. I think Ori is too shy and Frodo ... he feels as if he is too damaged for anyone to love him. He said so himself when I saw him yesterday. Well, not explicitly but it was implied. He was saying how happy he was for Thorin and I, but that he believed he would never find happiness like we have. He also said he was fine with that as here at least he could find joy again. That he'd already found it, and so much more than he dared hope for."

Kíli's face fell, and so did his brother's. This was bad news. He was about to say something when Thorin's voice made all of them jump. Well, Kíli at least. "Maybe I should speak to your nephew? He seems to feel much like I do myself at times. After everything that happened with the Arkenstone, the crimes I committed and nearly committed," he glanced to Bilbo and the halfling reached out to touch the king's hand, dirt or not, "I didn't believe I deserved to have our burglar by my side. But we all have been given a new chance, and it would be a shame if Frodo did not use it. Or if he waited for years."

"It is not that easy, dear Kíli," Bilbo replied. "If Frodo truly believes he is unworthy because of what happened with my stupid ring... Thorin...he thought I might not want to rekindle certain aspects of our relationship, as I'm sure you know by now. I had to shout at him to make him realise that I didn't care what he thought or didn't think. I spent eighty years longing for him, and that was that. If I had not done so, do you think we would be here, right now?" Kíli wanted to say that, yes, he very much believed they would be. But he couldn't. If Thorin had pushed the hobbit away, or been truly indifferent and Bilbo's temper had been anything but what it was... "I simply cannot see Ori do anything of the kind." He looked to Thorin then, and Kíli felt as if they were intruding on their uncles having a moment. "If you talked to Frodo, I am not sure anything would change. He believes the Arkenstone to be quite different than the One Ring."
A lone tear escaped Bilbo's eye then, and before anyone could react, anyone but him that was, Kíli was hugging the hobbit tightly. "It was just your magic ring, Bilbo. You couldn't have known. And you offered to take it to Mordor, didn't you. And we would have come with you. We would have. If we hadn't fallen in battle, you would have been a wonderful consort, and..." And he was beginning to babble, he knew, but he couldn't help himself. Bilbo was shaking in his arms, and for a moment Kíli feared for his hobbit uncle, looking worriedly at Thorin. The king had set his pipe aside and was now sinking to the floor next to Kíli, enveloping both his nephew and betrothed in a strong embrace. Fíli joined them momentarily and they held Bilbo as he cried for Frodo.

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Ori's words of warning had been just a little bit too late, and instead of retrieving just one book, Frodo had upended the entire shelf, the wooden plank coming down on his hand. He didn't need to be a healer to know that it was broken, and Ori moved as quickly as possible to move the books away and place the shelf back where it belonged. There was such fear in the young dwarf's eyes, and so much compassion that the hobbit nearly regretted the words he had spoken to his uncle the previous day. But Ori deserved better. Especially Ori. He was kind and gentle and always trying to lift Frodo's spirits. He was worthy of being with someone who could give him what he deserved; not a foolish halfling who had nearly destroyed Arda.

He averted his gaze, and so he didn't see Ori's hand come up to gently take his. His head spun around in surprise, and he held his breath as the dwarf's other hand covered his mangled one. "We have to get you to Óin. I fear your bones have shattered." He removed his hand, his eyes catching Frodo's. They were frozen, both shocked and shaking, but then Ori leaned down and placed his lips where his hand had been just a moment ago...

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 34 - Surprising Wisdom

Chapter Summary

We have more Bilbo / Thorin here, and a certain hobbit is working up an appetite...
Interlude next if you see what I mean ;)****

Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart. Uzayang - greatest love. Ughvashâ -
greatest treasure. Âzyungâl - lover (beloved).

Chapter Notes

I am sorry about the delay in posting this, but ... HOBBIT in cinemas again :P And oh
my gosh, the plot bunnies! *shooos them away*

Thank you as always for reading, kudoing, commenting and bookmarking :D

Happy Christmas to you all <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

"He will be fine. It's just a few broken bones. Bilbo," Thorin's arm came up to stop the hobbit from
pacing the space before the fireplace one more time, and a gentle hand pulled Bilbo closer until he
found himself sitting in the king's lap. "You have heard our two healers, have you not? Even Primula
wasn't as upset as you are. Why is that?" The dwarf knew of course, but just because he had asked
for a certain tome from the library did not make him responsible for what had happened. If anything
it was Thorin's fault for not making sure the bookshelves were sturdier.

The hobbit simply shrugged and shivered, leaning closer to Thorin's warmth. "This is all my fault. I
don't mean that Frodo got hurt today, but that he deems himself unworthy. Had I not found the ring,
or had I allowed Gandalf more than a cursory glance at it before...maybe none of this would have
happened." The king shook his head, kissing Bilbo's hair. "I know. I know. If none of this would
have happened then Ori would never have met Frodo and would forever be missing the one he was
destined to be with. Or maybe not. Frodo would still end up here, eventually, wouldn't he?"

Thorin wanted to argue, wanted to tell his betrothed that everything had happened for a reason. That
it had been predestined, just like the fact that Gandalf had chosen Bilbo to be the Company's burglar.
But the hobbit was hurting and blamed himself yet again, so he simply held him as he began to sob
against the dwarf's shoulder. However, he could only stand the silence between them for so long and
eventually whispered, "Had you not found the Ring, Bilbo, I would have lost you before I ever
found you. I can never regret that. Never, ukrâd, never. I only wish I had not left you behind. That is
my only regret. Those eighty years, I cannot begin to fathom how we survived them. All I know is
that I am glad how it all played out. And Frodo...he will heal, as will you."
Thorin lowered his head then and touched his forehead to Bilbo's until they were breathing the same air. "And you have saved me. You stood by me even though I was pushing you away and belittled you. You rescued me more times than I can tell, and I know that you regret not being able to protect me on the battlefield. But Bilbo, you did. Simply by being there you soothed my heart. I knew then that I could have forgiveness, and that was all that mattered. And I knew then that I had not lost your love, that your heart was still mine. I was a fool to think that you could ever take a wife or another lover when I could not. I was only ever yours, and you were only ever mine."

The king didn't know who had initiated it, but one moment they were still a breath apart and the next their lips had found each other, and Thorin could taste the salt of the hobbit's tears, could feel him sigh into the kiss. Bilbo's arms came up to wrap around the dwarf's neck and he turned in Thorin's lap so they were chest to chest. For once, there was nothing carnal about the kiss, though it was passionate. It was simply the hobbit's way to respond to the king's little monologue. Something that was safer than words might be in that very moment. And when they parted, Bilbo was smiling despite his tears, his fingers tangled in Thorin's hair. The dwarf knew that the halfling had reservations still and did not believe his words completely, but this was a step in the right direction. "Maybe...maybe it is true. Maybe I cannot see the wisdom in your words," he smirked at that and Thorin snorted. "And I know that our meeting was fated; how could it not have been? Gandalf choosing me over another dwarf or a different hobbit...and trust me there were a lot of Tooks better suited for the job...it was no coincidence. But heroes? I do not know about that. Frodo surely is, but me? I never felt very heroic. More like a bumbling fool who was in over his head and so far out of his depth that it was almost comical. And yet, had I not run out of my door, I would never have found love and a family I hold dearer than the one I left behind in the Shire. It is little wonder that I could not settle back into my old life, even though I pretended to. No, surely I'm no hero, but my adventures changed me, and I wouldn't want to go back if I was offered the chance to do so."

"I still feel responsible for what happened today," the hobbit said somewhat grumpily. Bilbo didn't
like to be proven wrong, or at least finding himself faced with sound arguments he had no comeback for. Normally it was, after all, he who triumphed in discussions. "And to think that he was still more concerned about me getting my book than his own poor hand." Thorin glanced over to the side table that was weighed down by the old tome. It was a history of his people, of the Line of Durin when they dwelt in Beleriand. It had been a surprise to the king to find just how many dwarven relics had been saved and secured by the Ñoldor to the point where they even took them across the sea when they returned to Aman.

"It is not your duty to make sure the library is safe to work it. It is mine. I am king and at the end of the day the wellbeing of everyone within Erebor is my main concern and it is my duty to watch out over our subjects and guests. It is I who is to blame, not you." Once again the hobbit fixed him with a very Tookish glare, and Thorin had to smirk. "And you heard Frodo. Ori tried to warn him to be careful. Do not worry so much, ukrâd. Frodo is well and the injury he took today will be forgotten in but a few weeks; sooner than my own." That made Bilbo chuckle and bump his shoulder into Thorin's. "Watch yourself, my hobbit. We wouldn't want you to hurt your bones as well." The chuckle turned to a giggle then, and for a while all the dwarf could do was hold his betrothed who was shaking with laughter.

When he calmed down, he smiled at the king, his head coming to rest on the shoulder he had just bumped into. "How is it that you are suddenly the calming influence and I am ruled by my emotions? Surely something happened somewhere, and I am not sure I like it." He lifted his eyes to Thorin's, batting his lashes. "You haven't complained about being confined to our chambers, nor about the elven poultice. Who are you and what have you done to my betrothed?" The king grinned and winked. "I...I am proud of you, I really am. On our journey to the Lonely Mountain, you would not have reacted this way. Not even had it been your nephews who were saddened over something. On the contrary. You have changed..."

"For the better I hope?" Bilbo smiled and nodded. "We have all grown and are no longer who we used to be. Eighty years is a long time to realise one's mistakes. I have made so many on that journey, Bilbo, and my leadership was failing a long time before we reached Esgaroth. You were the heart of the Company, not me. And I tore you away from our companions when I exiled you. I owe them all apologies for that. If my sister does not kill me first for how ill I treated you. And for getting her sons killed. I am sure she knows the tales, and..." Bilbo's lips covered his suddenly and when the hobbit pulled back he smirked.

"That's better. Things are back to normal." The king raised a questioning eyebrow and the smile turned beaming. "Don't you think that she will be too happy to see you all alive and well to think of committing murder? And I will defend you, do not worry. And so will Fili and Kili." The hobbit had begun to toy with Thorin's hair idly and was now sighing rather wistfully. "Did I hear Óin and Elrond correctly? Your ankle is fully healed?" Oh, so his betrothed had heard. "I wonder... Maybe we should put that to the test? Though not on the balcony. I don't want to destroy what we worked on today. Well, what you supervised I should say." Bilbo's clever hand had snuck in under the dwarf's tunic and he was now carding his fingers through the hair on his chest.

Thorin shivered at the hobbit's touch, the way he always did. His body responded, as Bilbo had known it would, and the king growled. "Don't make promises you cannot or won't keep, ughvashâ. You are right, though, I have been allowed to return to my duties, but I will let you be the judge of what I can and cannot do as yet. And I would have you by my side at council meetings as well." He had grown used to having the hobbit's input over the past week when any meeting had taken place in their study. Bilbo's grasp on what was needed to run a kingdom and aid their elven allies while they were building their city was astounding, and Thorin knew that even the councilors had grown used to seeing the halfling not only attend their sessions but make suggestions that effectively were orders.
Bilbo did not speak as a mere advisor, but as the future consort of their king and co-ruler of Erebor. Some of the old dwarves might have had reservations, but they would not go against the will of their king.

"Oh, I fully intend to keep my promise, âzyungâl. Tonight. We shall dine and then ... we have a lovely fireplace in our bed chamber, Thorin. And I do not think we've ever truly made use of it." He winked, his hand slipping out from under his tunic, only to cover the lacings of the dwarf's breeches and massage there. Thorin groaned, loudly. "You cannot imagine how much I missed you, how much I long to be with you again. Now even more so than before, for Balin has told me that we will have to abstain for a month before the wedding." Thorin sighed, but nodded. It was true, even though he had tried his best to make his old advisor and mentor see reason. Failing that, he had pushed that particular fact to the very farthest recesses of his mind and had not wanted to dwell on it again until it became imperative to do so.

"I'm afraid Balin is right. I have tried to talk sense into him, but he demands we adhere to tradition in this. Be glad he doesn't force us to sleep apart, for he would be within his rights to do so as well. He trusts us, and it would be wrong of us to betray him. No matter how great the temptation will be." He kissed the tip of Bilbo's ear then, whispering, "He would also be able to demand he witness our union once we are bonded in front of our people. But he has said, and I quote, 'I've heard you two the night before Bilbo's accident, and I'm fairly certain that you will consummate your union the moment the door shuts behind you, so I'll pass.' The entire camp heard, I'm afraid..." The hobbit's blush was endearing to say the least, and the way he buried his face in Thorin's hair was even more so.

"We should simply marry in accordance to hobbit customs and then we wouldn't be in this mess." But then Bilbo gasped, and shook his head vigorously. "Or rather not. We'd be in even more trouble then. Forget I ever mentioned it. Dwarven customs are most wonderful." The hobbit's reaction piqued Thorin's curiosity and he made a mental note that he would ask someone, not Belladonna, about the wedding traditions of hobbits. But that thought quickly dissolved into nothing when Bilbo moved his hips; by accident or purposefully, Thorin couldn't say. Until his betrothed spoke again that was. "So, we have a few months still to make the most of things, and then thirty long days without touch?" On purpose then.

Thorin shook his head, smiling. He cupped Bilbo's face, lifting it so their eyes met once again. "No. I will still be able to hold you at night, for if I did not, sleep would not come to me very easily. And we can be like we are now as well, if you can keep from wriggling around so very enticingly that is." The hobbit gave Thorin a put-upon look, but only managed to keep his face frozen for a moment before chuckling. The dwarf followed suit, but then, as one, they became serious once more. "There are more things to explore, Bilbo, than the other's body, no matter how tempting that might be. Passion and desire play an important part in dwarven marriages, but it is our souls that are bound as one as well. That is what the month before the wedding ceremony is about. To give both parties a chance to fully comprehend the gravity of what they are about to enter in. We only love once, Bilbo, it is true. But many a dwarven lad and lass have mistaken desire for love. To abstain for a month..."

"It gives both parties the chance to truly search their hearts without being distracted by their carnal desires? Thorin, I've had eighty years of that. I know that there can never be another. Not for me." Bilbo's eyes were loving and gentle, and he brought his hands up to touch the dwarf's face, stroking it tenderly. "I know who you are, but to be given a month to get to know you even better ... it might not be such a bad idea after all." He smiled and, closing his eyes, touched his forehead to Thorin's. "And you will have to teach me what it is that will be expected of me once we are wed. As long as you can hold me like this, that is all I'll need. I've missed you. More than I can ever say."
"Nothing will ever tear us apart again. I promise. There will be times when you or I will have to leave the Mountain to travel elsewhere, but my heart will never be further from yours as it is now. It never was, Bilbo. You held it since the night Gandalf opened the door of Bag End to let me in." The king pulled back just slightly to kiss Bilbo's brow. "And I know you. I know your braveness and your courage. I know your loyalty and your wisdom. The dwarves of Erebor are lucky to have you here, ughvashâ, and I'm the luckiest of them all. Don't think I do not know how much you missed me when every day I woke without you near was torture."

The hobbit smiled, his fingers closing around Thorin's braid and betrothal bead. "Never again. We've had eighty years of enforced celibacy, we will be able to survive another month." Thorin was about to point out how the two things could hardly be compared but remained silent. Bilbo knew. How could he not? "But not yet." And suddenly the fire had returned to those gentle grey eyes, and the halfling's hands pulled Thorin down into a kiss that was not loving or gentle, but filled with passion. "I am glad that the wedding is scheduled to coincide with my birthday for otherwise I may be very cross with Balin," Bilbo muttered once he broke away, breathing heavily. "Now, let me up so I may see about food and you can prepare a bath for us." He winked and bounded to his feet. "Hurry, my King, for I am starved..."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Interlude - Hunger

Chapter Summary

Wishing you all a Happy New Hobbity Year, and I give you the next interlude for Then and Now. Bilbo be a bit hungry, ya know...


Chapter Notes

I am very thrilled to have an illustration to go with this chapter. A lovely digital painting by the amazing Jadedsilk. It is in not work safe, so be prepared ... all I'm saying ;) Thank you so much, sweetie. It's beautiful. And you can see a teaser of it further down the post with a link to the full drawing included.

Thank you as always for reading, kudoing, commenting and bookmarking :D

By the time Bilbo returned, servants carrying trays of food in his tracks, a bath had been run and Thorin was hiding inside the bedchamber, clad in nought but his skin. The hobbit had probably tried to simply pick the dishes he wanted and take them to their rooms himself, but had been overruled. A future consort did not carry his own food, it simply was not done. Thorin smirked, his head coming to rest against the solid wood of the door. He would be disgruntled about that, especially now that he could hear the servants rummage in Bilbo's little kitchen to ensure the food remained warm until he and the king ate it. Smirking, the dwarf made his way back to the bathroom, there to await his betrothed.

And when Bilbo finally entered, he stopped dead in his tracks. "Thorin..." his right hand came up to this throat, but his left went somewhere else entirely. Good. So the dwarf's current positioning and actions had the desired effect. He was sitting in the large tub facing the door, his eyes burning embers that were undressing the hobbit where he stood. His left arm lay on the edge of the water basin, hand beckoning to Bilbo. But his other hand was under the waterline, and Thorin was sure his betrothed had no difficulty guessing what it was doing there. "You started dinner without me," Bilbo eventually gasped out. "How very impolite of you." His eyes were no longer on Thorin's face, but trained on the king's right arm where it moved beneath the water.

As if in a trance, Bilbo divested himself of his clothing, and Thorin guessed that only rigid self control and the hobbit's appreciation of the fine garments had stopped him from stepping into the water still fully dressed. When at last he was naked, his need very much interested and ready, he wasted no time but stepped down into the basin and walked through the warm water to where Thorin was sitting. "I grew bored, my hobbit, and you know what I do when I am bored..." The dwarf smirked, but then moaned as Bilbo's hand joined his own, stroking the king to full hardness.
"Mine. You are touching what is mine, Thorin." The hunger in both Bilbo's eyes and voice made the dwarf shudder with want. It was hard to pry his hands away and reach for the oil that was sitting on the edge of the tub, but they would need it, and need it soon. It had been weeks, and unlike the month of being celibate they would have to endure, this time without any lovemaking had come without warning. If Thorin was honest with himself, it had played a large part in his bout of idiocy a week back. Now there was nothing he wanted more than to be one with his betrothed once more, to hold Bilbo close and to know that he would never lose this. That the halfling would always be by his side. Morgoth, he'd fight Morgoth to stay with Thorin.

For a moment it was this thought that made him shiver and not his need to bury himself in his betrothed's oh so pliant body. But when Bilbo whispered his name, when he kissed the dwarf's lips tenderly, lovingly, Thorin remembered where they were, and why they were here. With a growl, the king claimed the hobbit's lips, and before long he was mapping Bilbo's mouth, exploring it with his tongue and at the same time playing with Bilbo's. That kiss was enough to disintegrate that feeble remainder of his patience and he pulled the hobbit closer so he was seated in the dwarven king's lap. The hobbit's hands were buried in Thorin's hair, pulling at it once in a while and serving to heighten the dwarf's pleasure.

Panting, Thorin finally broke the kiss, and he smiled as he gazed upon Bilbo's face. His lips were swollen, his breathing was ragged and his eyes ... those beautiful grey eyes were almost entirely made of pupils, dilated with desire as they were. "The oil?" the hobbit enquired, reaching for the vial as Thorin held it out. "Let me just..." And then he opened the flask, pouring some of the liquid on his fingers and lifted himself out of the water somewhat, holding on to Thorin's strong back with one hand while the other... The king gasped, his need throbbing when he realised what Bilbo was about to do.

Grey eyes, filled with lust, held his, and time both flew by and stood still at the same time. Suddenly, Bilbo lifted himself up once more, his hands closing around Thorin's need and spreading some of the viscous liquid, and then, finally, he was engulfed in satiny heat as the hobbit sank down upon him until he was seated in the king's lap once more. Bilbo's lips had formed a silent 'Oh' and a blissful expression was on that beloved face. "Bilbo," the dwarf rasped, "my betrothed..." The halfling smiled, eyes sparking. His arms were once again wound around Thorin's neck, and slowly he began to move his hips.

It was a gentle rocking motion that should have ensured that they both would last for quite some time, but it had been too long and too sudden, and they were both already closer than they wanted to admit. Too soon, their movements became more powerful, and erratic, Bilbo sliding up and down Thorin's need, and the dwarf meeting each and every stroke, making the hobbit moan and mewl, the delicious noises echoing in the bath chamber. Bilbo was sobbing now, though not from pain. "I love you," he whispered through his tears. "Oh Valar... Please, Thorin, touch me." He could never deny his hobbit anything, and this was no exception. His hand closed around Bilbo, stroking him in time with the movements of his hips.

Bilbo was beautiful like this; cheeks flushed, eyes half closed and his lips swollen from the kisses they had shared. Thorin brought up his other hand to wipe away the hobbit's tears, the gesture gentle despite the heat and urgency between them. He seemed to be so fragile and yet, there was strength to the halfling that was beyond surprising. His heart though, that was the most amazing thing. Fiercely loyal and steadfast, and oh so forgiving. And passionate. Passionate enough that he could not only keep up with Thorin, but astound him on numerous occasions. Like right then. Bilbo had let go of the dwarf's neck and was bending backwards, his hands now resting on Thorin's strong thighs. His head was thrown back, but his eyes were still firmly trained on Thorin's face.
"Close, ukrâd, so very close." Grey had turned to near black, and Thorin found himself drowning in those beautiful orbs. Bilbo's need and desire were swimming in them, yes, but so was all the love he felt for the dwarven king. And it were the hobbit's eyes that nearly tipped Thorin over the edge. But no, Bilbo first. And so he shifted minutely, and on the next thrust he were sure he would hit... Oh yes. Bilbo groaned loudly, and then again and again, until at last, Thorin's name on his lips, he came undone. The contractions around him brought Thorin to completion as well, and he pulled the hobbit closer, burying his face against Bilbo's neck. This was home. Not the mountain around them, nor this marvellous land. No, Bilbo was home.

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His lungs were burning and his thighs were on fire, but Bilbo had never felt this alive. Well, not in a long time. And yes, two weeks was a very long time. The prospect of a whole month was not appealing in the slightest and yet, in a way, he were almost looking forward to it. For when the month ended, they would be married. They would speak their vows in front of not only their people, but also their allies, hobbits and elves alike. They would finally be one. Not that they weren't already, but to be able to call Thorin his husband... He shivered at the thought, and smiled. Carefully he moved first one and then the other arm around the dwarf's neck, holding on as he nuzzled into Thorin's long hair. "You have no idea how much I missed this," he whispered, earning a chuckle in response.

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure if I were you, âzyungel. You are not the only one who has been longing for this, as you very well know. I will always want you, will always need you. Only you, my hobbit, only you." He lifted his head then, and Bilbo's eyes were caught by sapphire blue that shone with love and warmth and a gentle hand wiped away the last remnants of the hobbit's tears. "Don't cry, âzyungel. I never want to see you in tears again. Unless of course they are tears of joy." Bilbo grinned at that. They both knew that it was a rather silly request, considering how much time they now had, but it were touching nonetheless. "I will do my utmost to never make you cry again. Especially not the way Balin told me..."

"Then don't leave me again," the hobbit deadpanned. Strangely enough, there were no pain anymore when he thought of Thorin's passing. How could there be when the dwarf were holding him in his arms, and he were warm and alive, their bodies still one... "That is the only way you could make me cry again in such a manner, but I know that you won't and thus, I will never shed tears like that again. Though... I wonder. I know you will not leave me, but is that because you want to stay with me or because you are afraid that I will tear down the Halls of Waiting to drag you out by your hair?"

Thorin laughed out loud and shook his head. "You may jest, but the thought of you tearing through Mandos is rather scary. And I know you would do it as well. After all, who is Nâmo compared to Morgoth?" Bilbo nodded earnestly, for a second or two, and then began giggling. "Will you bring your mother's frying pan? Just to be certain you get your way?" The hobbit poked Thorin in the side and then moved his hands to his sides, which had started to hurt from laughing so hard. Thorin held him, and kissed his forehead and the side of his neck. "I promise," he whispered, "I will never leave you again. Once was more than enough, I assure you. To know that you forgave me, that you still loved me despite my actions, it were both a balm and an aching thorn. I would have done anything to stay with you. Anything, Bilbo."

The laughter abated, and the hobbit nodded, arms once more wrapped around his betrothed. "I know. It was the same for me, Thorin. But to have your ring, it was an ever-present reminder that you had loved me. And maybe, somewhere deep down inside my broken heart, I knew that you still did. Love me that is. That you were somewhere out there, thinking of me."
"Every waking moment, Bilbo. There was not a single second when you were not on my mind. When I was not hoping that you would find your way to these shores. Though," and the dwarf lowered his gaze then, "I've behaved rather badly when you did finally arrive. Do you wish to know what I wanted to do? Instead of standing around quietly, riding ahead of you mutely, and saying those stupid things?" Bilbo nodded, his breath hitching in his throat. "I wanted to drop the reins and run towards you, I wanted to pull you into my arms and not let go, ever. I wanted to kiss you, Bilbo, and lose myself in you. I wanted to beg your forgiveness and pledge my love all at the same time. But I was afraid, so afraid that you had found someone truly worthy of you. I know ... I know that I am not." He signed as he reached up to touch Bilbo's braid. "However, I am also too selfish to let you go."

"You're not the only one who is rather selfish, ukrâd. And I believe you are worthy. It is I who is lacking in so many aspects, but I am learning." Thorin was about to speak up, to deny Bilbo's words, but the hobbit silenced any argument by placing his lips on the king's. "It does not matter," he whispered against the dwarf's mouth. "It does not matter what you said or what I did or didn't do. All that matters is that our hearts are entwined. I saw yours ... noble and loving and strong. And pure, Thorin. The goldlust, it clouded your thoughts, yes, but it never touched your heart." He placed his hand on his betrothed's chest then, feeling that great heart beat against his palm.

Thorin nodded, clearly signalling that he would not pursue this argument further. Gently, he lifted Bilbo, breaking their connection. Then again, that wasn't true at all. The hobbit smiled, realising that their hearts were always as one, even though their bodies were not. Gently, the dwarf was then washing them both, mindful to always keep Bilbo close, and every so often placing a kiss on the hobbit's skin. Bilbo felt as if he was floating; warm and safe and exactly where he wanted to be. He sighed contentedly, but then, as always, his stomach rumbled, announcing that it was still around and expected sustenance.

Before long they were seated in front of the warm fireplace, furs beneath them keeping the cold of the mountain away. Their dinner was spread out all around them, and despite his ongoing protests that he could cook for himself just fine, and thank you very much, Bilbo had to admit that he truly enjoyed everything that had been brought up from the kitchens. Especially the roast duck was simply beautifully done, and with the cranberry compote on the side he was rather put upon when Thorin asked to taste it. He was hovering over the plate like a vulture, and eventually the king decided that, in order to have just the slightest taste, he might have to resort to other means than simply asking. And so Bilbo suddenly found himself kissed rather thoroughly.

Suddenly, his hunger for food was secondary, and his hunger for ... something quite different came to the fore once again. His hands quickly undid the tie of Thorin's robes, and he could feel the dwarf chuckle into the kiss. When the king pulled away, his gaze was feral, and yet also gentle at the same time. "What would you say if I suggested we take a break from eating and have some dessert before continuing?" He smirked and Bilbo could only nod, still trying to catch his breath. Thorin quickly gathered up the various plates and returned them to the kitchen to keep everything warm, and by the time he rejoined the hobbit, he had divested himself of his robes, whereas Bilbo had only managed to
take off the tie of his. And when he raised his hands to pull them off his shoulders, Thorin growled and shook his head. "No, leave them. You are my prize, ughvashâ, and mine to unwrap."

"Then come and claim what is yours, my King, for I desire nothing more." And then he remembered something, and grinned, "Come to me, âzyungâl, for I wish to take tea with you..." He wriggled his eyebrows suggestively, but at seeing Thorin's expression, he began to giggle. The dwarf seemed torn between want, which was rather hard to miss given the state of certain parts of him, and a laughing fit that bordered on being hysterical.

"Let me guess, my hobbit. You will never ever let them live that one down." Bilbo shook his head and grinned rather smugly. "You know that they meant no harm by it, though I agree, it is rather funny. Maybe we should invite Elrond and the Lady Celebrían for tea one afternoon, and tell our dearest nephews about it?" His eyes were sparkling mischievously as he slowly sauntered over to the furs.

"They have brought it upon themselves, don't you agree? To think, having tea with Smaug, the thought!" Bilbo giggled again, but the moment Thorin lowered himself to the furs and moved closer, arms coming up to gather the hobbit to him, his mirth abated and turned to a beaming smile. "Though I would rather not think of Fíli and Kíli right now. There are better things to be done after all." His right hand was once again burring him through the fabric of his robes, and the other was busy pushing the piece of garment off the hobbit's shoulder. Then it slid upwards, along his neck. And when their lips finally met, all thoughts of Kíli and Fíli fled, and once more passion took over. And as Thorin laid him down on the soft furs, Bilbo's last conscious thought was that he must be the luckiest hobbit ever to live. For none other would ever hold the most precious of treasures. The heart of Thorin Oakenshield, King of Erebor.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 35 - A Reason to Celebrate?

Chapter Summary

This is once again an rather elvesie chapter, with some Bilbo / Balin interaction thrown in. And there are more *Silmarillion* references again :D Enjoy!


Chapter Notes

Massive apologies for being soooo late with this. I'm currently writing a Big Bang story, and am also fairly busy at work, so... Sowwies?

And as always thank you ever so much for commenting, kudoing, and simply reading my story. You guys keep me going ... well, and obviously Thorin and Bilbo do as well :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

"So tell me again why you're not looking forward to the festival. I mean, it's a festival! What's not to look forward to?" Kíli's eyes were like big brown saucers, and Fíli felt the urge to either pinch the bridge of his nose; or throw his brother over the terrace wall. He opted for the first option, surmising that certain members of his family might be somewhat cross with him if he murdered his sibling. Although...would he not be doing everyone a favour?

It was pretty clear, at least to him, why the two Balrog Slayers could not bring themselves to feel joy at the prospect of celebrating the festival of Tarnin Austa considering that it was during the celebrations of this particular festival that Gondolin was attacked and destroyed. However, to his dearest *idiot* of a brother, any celebration was reason for cheer. And maybe that was for the best as well, considering how quiet Kíli was at times. Unnaturally so. Then again, he had perked up recently, and Fíli wondered if that might be because of all the time he now spent with some of Turgon's elves, archers all of them. The blond didn't know what his brother got up to with them, and truthfully, he did not want to know either. All he cared about was that Kíli was beaming whenever he returned from the city of tents surrounding the great building site.

Fíli had thrown himself into the perusal of history tomes, which coincided just nicely with keeping an eye on Frodo and Ori. Thorin seemed to think that something had shifted between the two of them, but the blond could see no indication of that. They worked together amiably, but nothing more than that. Or maybe they thought he was watching them, and... Well, that would put a damper on things. He would have to discuss it with his three co-conspirators, that was for certain. Even though two of them seemed to be more interested in each other at the moment than in their little project. It was truly
sickening to see Thorin act like a lovesick puppy at times, especially since Fíli had the sneaking suspicion that he was doing it on purpose. Just like he was talking about having tea more often than he’d ever had before. And every time he did, both he and Kíli cringed. And Bilbo, their sweet and loving hobbit, what was he doing? He giggled.

"...and I know Erestor will not let me out of his sight, fearing Balrogs around every corner." Fíli blinked as he realised that Glorfindel had been talking ... for some time by the looks of it. "But maybe it will not be as bad as we think. After all, nothing bad can happen now that we are in Valinor. And we know for a fact that the worst thing that could befall us here, simply will not. Thingol would not visit a place so close to a dwarven settlement." The Elda chuckled, but the blond dwarf could tell that the elf was still troubled. "Turgon's decision still surprises me. I do not believe he upheld the tradition of Tarnin Austa after his death and rebirth, did he?" Ecthelion shook his head, but would not turn from where he gazed out of the window. "Then why is he so intent on celebrating now?"

"Because he has finally regained that which he longed to see restored. Gondolin. The city he always wished Elenwë could have seen. Surely you remember; for he spoke of it oftentimes. He wants her to see the fair city in all its glory, and this festival was one of the most beautiful ones. Until that snake in the grass betrayed us..." The anger that was apparent in the Ñoldo's voice nearly made Fíli recoil. Never before had he heard Ecthelion use this tone, no matter what, or who, he spoke of. "Our queen thinks he deserves a second chance, but she did not know him. She does not know the darkness in his heart." He turned suddenly, blinking. "I ... I beg your pardon, mellynen. This is precisely why I do not wish to think of the festival. It reminds me of him and his misdeeds. Of Maeglin!" He spat the name as if it were a worm that had found its way onto his tongue.

Glorfindel cautiously approached his friend, the two dwarves clearly forgotten for the moment. "Maybe the Lady Elenwë is right, 'Thel. Maybe it is wrong of us all to hold on to the past in this manner. Maeglin died for his sins, and is atoning for them. Should he ever be given a new chance by the Valar, it will be because he has repented, has seen the error in his ways." Ecthelion laughed rather harshly at that. "I know you do not think it possible, but even that irritating Sindar was given a second chance. Not that he is making good use of it if you ask me."

"That is true. And while Thingol's sins were nothing like his, they are no less vile. Trading one's own daughter for a cold jewel..." Fíli had read about that. Lúthien Tinúviel who had chosen a mortal life after falling in love with Beren. Thingol had promised Beren the hand of his daughter if the human could procure one of the three Silmaril for him. "I do not understand why he is allowed to continue the way he does. Nothing but hatred, greed and envy fills his heart."

But Glorfindel shook his head. "If that were so, Melian would not still be by his side. There must be good within him, too, only we have not seen it." He placed his hand on Ecthelion's shoulder, pulling him into an embrace. "Erestor feared that the past might catch up with us now that our fair city is being rebuild, but I say we will not let it. Our anger and fear, they blind us and make us miss the beauty that is all around us." He turned to face the two dwarves then, "And it makes you frighten our poor little friends." That made Kíli stutter and Glorfindel giggled. "See, Kee cannot even form words anymore. Well done, 'Thel. Well done."

Kíli shook his head, his eyes sparkling with indignant rage. "I'm not a 'little friend' of yours. And I'm not frightened either. Don't forget, we died as well." He huffed and marched from the room then, and Fíli had to chuckle. His brother had begun to view his own death as a badge of honour of sorts, and more often than not did his elven friends ask him, nay, almost beg him to tell them about the Halls and meeting Aulë. Elves were, the blond had found, rather intrigued by the dwarves and curious to learn everything they could from his own kin. It also seemed that most of the Firstborn, with some
glaring exceptions of course, truly began to embrace the new alliances with both the dwarves of Durin's Folk and the hobbits. Where before the three races had been divided and only having limited interactions, now there was a wholeness to Valinor that had not been there before.

Ecthelion smirked as well, and shrugged. "Whatever got into him seems to be rather good for him, you know... Maybe we should congratulate whoever it is that is getting into him on a job well done?" Eyes twinkling, the Lord of the Fountain winked at Glorfindel and then Fili, and the young dwarf wanted to run and hide somewhere. He didn't want to hear nor think about anyone... Nope. Kili was simply talking with the elven archers and practicing his bowmanship. That was all. "You know, Fin, I think it is Anorion. The dark-haired archer who keeps getting teased over his name. Not that it is very surprising. With that name, one would assume he was like you. You know, blond and so on."

"And so on? I do not know what you are talking about." And then Glorfindel stuck his tongue out at his old friend before pulling him closer and disturbing his hairstyle a bit. Which was something he could not easily do with his two dwarven friends, and there had been many complaints about Fili and Kili's braids already. Once he was done rearranging Ecthelion's long tresses, he stepped back with a grin, and nodded. "He is kind though, and unattached. Which is surprising given how very handsome he is."

"You know, if Erestor could hear you now, he would think you only married him for his looks. Shallow, mellonen. Very shallow indeed." The raven-haired Ñoldo managed to keep up his stern expression for all of five seconds before starting to giggle. "I am so very proud of you. Taught you well, I did," he chuckled, shaking so hard he was forced to sit down. "Do not trouble your pretty little head, Fin. Anorion will find his match. Eventually. Though I do not believe it is our dwarven friend. I think there is another destined to be with Kee." Ecthelion now glanced at Fili once more, his eyes filled with genuine hope and love for his young dwarven friend. "And with Fee as well. You will see, Fili. If Glorfindel and I found someone who will have us, and trust me, it was hard convincing Erestor... He was so very much in love with his silly books, it was a close call." He grinned again and Glorfindel huffed. "Anyway, if we found love, then it will be exceedingly easy for the two of you. Especially since I believe things have already been set in motion."

That made Fili pause. "What do you mean?" But in lieu of answering Ecthelion simply smiled mysteriously and exchanged glances with Glorfindel. "Oh, alright then. You keep your secrets. Just don't forget ... they won't save you from the festival." It was almost enough to make him feel guilty, the way the two elves looked at him, dumbstruck. Almost. They had brought it upon themselves after all. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have matters to attend to." Chores. But even they were better than listening to the two elves make comments about his and Kili's lovelife, whether in the present or the future did not matter. Make comments and then not go into details. Or go into details.

He shook his head to clear his mind and then stood, bowing to them both. "I shall see you later. I have to go meet with Master Baggins now. Uncle Bilbo had a few ideas and Kili and I have been tasked with seeing them come to fruition. But unfortunately my brother has once again run off, so it's fallen to me..." In other words, Kili was doing something far more important again. With Anorion. Oh no, he did not want to think about it. He would have nightmares. Maybe he should think of his uncles having tea. Surely that would be less disturbing than thinking of his brother and the elven archer. He all but ran from the room, kicking the door shut behind him. And nearly collided with Balin in his eagerness. The day could not get any worse now.

"Ah, Fili. I have been looking for you and your brother. I understand you will be riding out to the hobbit settlement? To Dwarfing?" The hobbits should be shot for their way of naming things. Dwarfing. Really? Just because it was close to the dwarven mountain didn't mean... Thorin and
Bilbo had many a discussion about it and Fíli knew the king would not soon drop the matter. It was silly. "...so be so kind and tell him, yes?" Oh? Oh darn. Balin had still been talking to him and the blond had no idea what his old tutor wanted him to do. "Here," the older dwarf held out a scroll, "I wrote all of it down. In case I ran into Kíli and not you. You know how he is. Daydreaming his time away and missing it completely when others are talking to him." Thank Aulë for that!

Fíli took the scroll and gave it a cursory glance. Ah. He was supposed to speak to Master Bungo. Good. "I will relay your message. Do not worry, Balin. I have to speak to him at Bilbo's behest anyway, so..."

"Good. The sooner we can start, the faster we will have solved our mead problems." Ah. So someone was drinking too much mead and now they had to find a way to replenish it before the festival. "I just wish the Skin-changer was here with his giant bees." Balin sighed. "Oh well, can't be helped. Though I promise you, if I find the culprit..." For once, Fíli was innocent. Well, sort of. He knew who the culprits were, but as it was all for a semi-good cause, he would not get his fellow mischief makers into trouble. Not when the elf at the receiving end of this particular prank was none other than Thingol, the Dwarf Hater. "Now, run along. I have your uncle to deal with now. The hobbit one. He is still trying to argue certain customs away and it is not getting him anywhere."

Fíli had an inkling of which custom Balin was speaking, and he had no interest in hearing any more about it. "Well, enjoy your little chat with Bilbo then, I'm off to see his father." And with that he walked away, fighting down the urge to run. It would not do, and Balin would begin to ask questions. No. Slowly. But before he rode off to Dwarfing, he would find his brother. It was not fair that only he was made to suffer.

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"So no one suspects?" Balin shook his head. "And I was called a liar and a thief. I should have told Smaug to have a word with you instead." Bilbo snickered. "But Balin, it is not very nice to scar poor Fíli like this. To make him believe that I am harassing you about the abstinence bit. You make me appear needy. Though, maybe that will come in handy when the time comes..." The old dwarf grinned and nodded. "And I will be a bundle of nerves, you know this." Bilbo sank into his chair, head in hands. "I do not know if I can do it, Balin. It is true that I am learning; more and more every day. But..."

"If anyone can do it, laddy, it's you. But if you prefer to speak the words in Westron only, that is fine as well. It will be just as binding." Balin patted his shoulder, and Bilbo nodded. "I don't even know what Thorin intends to do. The ceremony itself is very much yours. Your vows, your words. All I will do is take your hands and place them together. That is all. Afterwards, Thorin might wish to place your crown on your head, but even that is not truly a necessity. The moment you are pronounced his husband, you are his consort as well, your word only second to that of the king. Though at times I believe folk will listen to you more than they do him." The old dwarf smiled then. "Just say what your heart tells you. It's always best that way I found."

Bilbo frowned at that. Balin? In love? It seemed a strange thing, but then again not surprising. The old dwarf had a warm heart and had always been there for Bilbo, from the very start. The hobbit could still remember the little wink Balin had bestowed upon him after welcoming him to the Company of Thorin Oakenshield. Warm, yes. That was one of the first words that sprang to his mind when thinking of Balin, Son of Fundin. Surely there had been someone drawn to that warmth... "Did you... Was there someone? I am sorry if I'm overstepping, but... where is she? Why is she not here, with you?"
The old dwarf chuckled wryly. "I've not been old and white-haired all my life, you know?" He pointed at his grey beard. "There was indeed someone who, for some reason, thought the world of me. And I did. I did tell him. Every day we were granted, I made sure he knew how he'd enriched my life." He sighed and sank down on one of the chairs by the fire. "He was kind and gentle and loving. And a fool. He was so young, and I his tutor. But he still managed to break down my better judgement and reasoning. It was hard, Bilbo, not to love him, or rather not to admit to myself that I did. His siblings knew, but not his elders. And when he died..." He shook his head then. "I do not know why he is not here. I never got to see him in the Halls. But Bilbo, I do not regret my choice. Even though I wish he had made the same..."

There were tears in Balin's eyes, and the hobbit squeezed his friend's shoulder. "I am sorry. But there is still hope, isn't there? He could still choose to join us."

But Balin shook his head, "I doubt it. Thorin ... you know how he felt about the elves, don't you? However, knowing that there was a chance to be with you again, even if it was small, it was enough motivation for him to endure the Firstborn. And he's made friends amongst them, even though he is probably still loathe to admit as much." He sighed, a sad smile on his face. "My One ... he died with even more hatred in his heart, knowing only the betrayal of King Thranduil and not the help of Lord Elrond. I do not think he would choose to live amongst elves, not even for me. Besides, he might not know what happened to me. Who knows what those in the Halls learn of life in Arda? But it matters not, Bilbo. I have my friends. I have family. And even though there is not a day that passes that I do not wish for him to be by my side again, I am happy. To see my king smile the way he does, it brings me joy. I've seen him through all his ups and downs, laddie, but never have I witnessed him as carefree as he is now. To have you by his side again..."

"Now let us see. What did you write so far... Ah yes. You may wish to go over the translation again..." Oh yes, his vows. He brought a footstool to Balin's chair, crouching next to the old dwarf and they began to work. Vows first, matchmaking after.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 36 - A Broken Heart

Chapter Summary

A look at the past, and mebbe a little foreshadowing of the future?


Chapter Notes

Thank you as always for your continuing support <3 I'm happy to announce that I am now sorta done with my Big Bang story, so will have time to focus more on this story again :) Good, eh?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Then (2799 T.A.)

"You cannot wish to go through with it. You will not be able to keep a clear head." Balin was pacing the length of the small tent, trying his utmost to make the younger dwarf in front of him see reason. But no. Stubborn he was. Stubborn like the rest of his family. He turned to the crown prince, studying maps of the valley. "Thorin, make him understand. He has to stay behind. I don't care what the king demands ... I..."

"The king would be displeased indeed, but," Thorin turned to face his mentor's mate, "your father will not be when he finds that you survived the battle. You are reckless, and for you to fight by Balin's side ... no, it is a bad idea. Nadaduh. Listen to us. If you do not wish to stay behind then at least take your place by Dwalin's side, as the king decreed. I believe he knows, if not the full extend of your bond, he is at least aware that you care for one another. And he knows how dangerous that can be. At least consider it, Frerin." But the younger dwarf simply shook his head, arms crossed over his chest. "I tried," Thorin murmured with a sigh.

"I don't see what all the fuss is about. It will be just another battle with them, nothing major. Tomorrow night we will be laughing at your worries." Frerin glanced from Balin to Thorin and then back again. "We have our allies with us, what could possibly go wrong?" He glanced at the map, and Balin could see those dark blue eyes wandering until they fell on... "Well, they could show up to stab us in the back of course. Again!" The older dwarf sighed and shook his head. Even Thorin wasn't so completely set against the elves ... who might become their neighbours if they succeeded in retaking the Mines. But Frerin... Seeing how Thranduil broke his vows of allegiance after Smaug's attack had turned the younger dwarven prince against all of the Firstborn, and even Balin's words could not change his lover's mind.

But the older dwarf had not given up yet. "Âzyungâl, please. I will not be able to concentrate on anything if you fight near me. Always will I look out for you, and that could be dangerous in the heat of battle. You know this. Why won't you listen?" But the younger dwarf's expression turned sulky
and it was obvious that he would not accept any arguments, no matter how reasonable. At times, Balin was reminded of just how young Frerin was and he felt that their bond was wrong. He had not yet reached his maturity, and already had he bound himself to the older dwarf. Not that Balin was as old as he looked. For some reason his hair had started to go grey just after he had turned eighty, but Frerin loved it. The way he always stroked both Balin's beard and hair were testament to that.

"It's no use, Balin. He's made up his mind. Maybe you could tie him to the bed or something? Or knock him out cold in the morning?" Thorin chuckled at the murderous look his brother shot him. "Well, I think we should all catch some sleep. I shall see you on the field of battle." And then the crown prince was gone.

"It will be fine, you'll see. I'm made of stronger stuff than those orcs." Strong arms came up around Balin, and he was pulled close enough for a kiss. "I will take care, I promise..." But the older dwarf had the terrible feeling that this would be a promise Frerin was not going to be able to keep.

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Now (1 F.A.)

"There was a commotion on the battlefield, and Frerin fought his way to Balin. But there was no time. The orc had already nocked an arrow and my brother threw himself into its path. Balin was ... heartbroken is not strong enough a word. Bilbo, I thought he would lay down and die as well. His tears, they seemed endless and I never knew that it was possible to cry so hard and for so long." Thorin frowned then, and glanced up at his hobbit. "I know now that I was wrong. Balin told me how you grieved, more so than he ever did." He gently touched his hand to the hobbit's chest, feeling that strong heartbeat. "And believe me when I say that not one night passed between the day that I woke to the night when you were finally in my arms again that I did not cry with the agony of being torn from your side. I then knew Balin's pain; intimately."

They were sitting in front of the fireplace in their living quarters, Bilbo in the king's lap, the hobbit's hands gently stroking through Thorin's hair. The moment Bilbo had entered the room that evening, he had asked about Balin and while the dwarf had first tried to discourage his betrothed from his line of enquiry, eventually Thorin had caved. Revisiting those memories though had been heartbreaking for him as well. Frerin had been too young to be on the battlefield that day, and far too passionate to ever think of his own well-being. The only good that ever came of his brother's untimely death was that Thráin finally acknowledged his second son's feelings for his older mentor, and gave them his blessing. Too late.

"That night when you saved me, Bilbo... I saw him. I saw Frerin and I so feared that you would get yourself killed the way he did. And I so hoped that I was right about your motives for doing so. When I followed you into the dark at Beorn's, I was afraid that I was mistaken, afraid that you would run the moment you realised the depth of my feelings for you." The hobbit raised an eyebrow at Thorin and then shook his head. "I know it was foolish of me, and you have told me so on numerous occasions, but ...I had treated you so badly. But Bilbo, it was that night of fire that I finally understood how Frerin and Balin felt. I was not afraid for myself, but for you. When I saw you ... I saw Frerin taking that arrow for Balin and I ... I couldn't stand myself. You were so courageous and I ... I had only ever belittled you."

"I wasn't courageous at all. I was terrified. But I couldn't just let you die either. I knew that would regret it for the rest of my life. And I would have." Bilbo sighed. "You know that I would have gladly given my life for yours though, right? I still would." Grey eyes were sincere and earnest as they caught sapphire blue. "But to think that Balin spent most of his life missing his beloved... I
never knew that our lives had been so similar. Only I got you back. And I'm never ever letting you go again. Why do you think Frerin did not leave the Halls? Even after he must have found out that Balin is now here..."

"My brother's hatred for the elves is strong. Stronger maybe than his conviction that Balin is truly here. There is no way for us to speak to those in our Maker's care, and so we can only hope that Aulë will let him know at some point." Thorin frowned. "And I do not wish to hear you say that, no matter that it's true. I do not deserve it. Nor do I deserve you and your unwavering faith in me. I have hurt you and yet all you ever do is tell me you love me and that you will not leave. What did I do to..."

"You gave me your heart." Bilbo said this as if it explained everything. And maybe to the hobbit it did. "Let us speak of all the things I have done to you, ukrâd, for I fear you are forgetting them and only ever remember what you did to hurt me." Thorin shook his head then, sighing. "You see? You don't have to thank me for loving you, or figure out why I do. Just like I am not forever second-guessing my own luck at winning the heart of the most wonderful, if a bit headstrong, dwarf in the whole of Arda and Aman. For that is what you are to me. And to know you are mine, it fills me with so much joy and happiness. And not a small amount of glee when I see those courtiers falling all over themselves so you may notice them. They will never know you the way I do."

Thorin laughed at that. "So you are enjoying those envious looks now? I remember a hobbit who was rather ashamed of the attention bestowed upon him when he first came to Erebor. A foolish halfling, who didn't seem to understand that he means the world to the King under the Mountain and that said king would do everything to make him happy." He kissed the tip of Bilbo's nose then, who chuckled in delight. "But you are right. No one else will ever be as close to me as you are; but then again, you bewitched me with your hobbit magic. I truly stood no chance."

Bilbo poked the king in the ribs, making him snort. "Hobbit magic, as if. Must be very weak magic considering how long you resisted the temptation. I thought I might have to resort to deploying the most horrible weapon of them all. Kîli's eyes. No one can resist them." The hobbit giggled and Thorin pulled him closer yet, resting his chin upon that curly head. Bilbo fell silent after a while, and the dwarf was almost certain he had fallen asleep when he asked, "Do you think that is why Balin wished to return to Moria? Do you think he felt his end draw near and wanted to be close to Frerin?"

At times, Bilbo's insight still managed to surprise the dwarven king and this was one of those times. "You ... you might be right there, âzyungel. He died in the very vale where battle was raging before. Maybe even ... there was a tomb erected for all the fallen, but another for those of royal blood. I ... I like to think of it that way at least." He swallowed. "Frerin was the only one to fall, the only member of Durin's line to lose his life. I would imagine that Balin spend a lot of his time there. And to fall there; I do not think anything else could have brought him more joy in death." He sighed, his breathing shaky with unshed tears. "I could wring Frerin's neck! So close and yet so far. I could see Balin's pain when he realised that my brother was not here, but at the time I shared that pain and... But now..."

"Now you no longer feel that pain," Bilbo said, somehow both sad for Balin, but happy for himself and Thorin at the same time. "I wish there was something we could do. Like walk up to the Halls and demand that Frerin stop being an idiot maybe?" The dwarf king chuckled at that. "I mean it. You know I would have done the same thing if you had been there still. Actually, that's not right. I would have torn down the gates with my own two hands and dragged you out of Mandos by your hair." The hobbit nodded to emphasise his words; as if that were necessary.

"And this is why I am the luckiest dwarf to ever exist. I don't believe anyone else has ever been
loved so fiercely before." He pulled Bilbo closer and kissed one slender shoulder through the fabric of his betrothed's shirt. "I'm afraid, passionate as we are, we are twice as stubborn. It took a hobbit to tear down all the walls I had built around myself, something no dwarf in their right mind would have attempted. But you were resilient when I was glaring at you, and even when I spoke harshly to you. At least most of the time. My brave little hobbit. My beloved." Thorin sighed, "Though Balin loves Frerin, he would never do what you would have. He believes Frerin saw the error in his ways to fall for someone older and of Balin's station. It is my brother who will have to fight for our old mentor, for I promise you, Balin will never expect anything from him. I think he has come to terms with the fact that he will forever be alone."

"But that is unfair! Your brother is here, I am sure he is. And yes, there's elves all over the place, but ... Thorin I would live amongst goblins and worse if it meant I could be near you." There were tears in Bilbo's eyes, tears of anger at Frerin's stupidity the dwarf guessed. "How can he..."

"Hush, my love. I am sure my brother's dislike of the elves is not the only reason. There is also our mother, and I am sure he is with her. He will be loathe to leave her and I do not know that she will ever join us. Her death was... I believe gruesome is the only way to describe it. It is how my father lost his eye. They were travelling from the Iron Hills where they were visiting with our kin." He gently stroked Bilbo's back, glad to have the hobbit near as he recalled what had happened. "They were ambushed. By orcs coming down from the north. They ... they had torches, Bilbo. And they thought it was fun to set aflame the carriage my mother was travelling in. She couldn't get out. My father tried to save her. He tried. But it was too late..." Tears had begun falling from his eyes, and he hadn't noticed the hobbit turn to wipe them away, grey eyes mirroring Thorin's pain.

"I like to think that Frerin is with her now. And I hope that one day, she will be joining us as well. She ... she would love you. She was always concerned about the one I would chose as my mate. I remember her saying once that my mate would have to be strong as mithril to deal with me. And she was right. You are stronger than even the strongest of steel." He caught one of Bilbo's hands and kissed his palm. "It brings me peace to think she is no longer alone. But I think her being in the Halls is particularly hard on my father. She wasn't a dwarven princess, you see. She was the daughter of the foreman of the mines. My grandfather though, having known a loveless marriage himself, did not stand in their way. On the contrary. He wanted his son to know what he himself had not."

Suddenly a smile lit up Bilbo's face. "That is why they did not try to persuade you to not bind yourself to me. That's why they were so welcoming." Thorin nodded, once again reminded that his hobbit was smarter than a lot of his councilors. "I hope she will eventually join us for I would dearly love to meet her. And then she and my mother can stick their heads together and ... on second thought, maybe that's not such a good idea after all." He was giggling though, his eyes warm and loving. "And it would please your father, I am certain, to have his wife restored to his side."

"It is all he wishes for now, I can tell. He does not aspire to rule anyone. He never has. I think it was my father's and grandfather's intention for me to take the crown after... But that didn't happen. We lost Erebor and with that all plans were for naught. We both had to lead our people after the king's death, but I know that father longed for the end." He remembered Thráin walking their halls in Dunland and later the Blue Mountains like a ghost. He did not belong there, and he never felt at home. It fell to Thorin and Dís to make decisions of import while he lived in the past.

"You see, despite his love for my mother, he would never try to influence her. Coming here; it will be her decision and no one else's. Just like he decided to dwell in Valinor, she made the decision to remain with our Maker for the time being. Her wounds were grievous after all. And Frerin will stay by her side. So if and when she chooses to leave the safety of the Halls behind, he will hopefully follow. He ... it was very hard on him to lose her, and Dís, she was but a dwarfling when mother
died. But Frerin ... I think he blamed father for it. Which is another reason why he might have chosen to stay behind. I remember though; she desperately wanted to go on the journey. She hadn't left the Mountain since Frerin's birth; unless you count her occasional excursions into Dale and Esgaroth. Father had been reluctant ... and he never forgave himself. Not even after reaching these shores."

"I believe there is hope yet. Both for your father and for Balin. I do not believe that Mahal would let any of his children lead only half a life for all eternity. Yavanna wouldn't allow it." He smirked before continuing, "And right now, one of her children is hoping to meet both his future mother-in-law and brother-in-law. Now, considering the fact that I'm here, within your arms once more, which is something I longed for with all my heart while you were ... gone, I would think that my prayers might once again be heard."

"Don't forget, my betrothed, that I, too, wished for nothing else. If you believe that there is a chance, then so shall I. Seeing my father and Balin, knowing their grief, it pains me. And I hope that one day soon, our prayers will come to fruition." He leaned down to kiss the side of Bilbo's neck, before breathing into that pointed hobbit ear. "Now, rumours are ripe within Erebor and I have to admit that I am curious as well. What were you doing with Balin? Other than speak of the past I mean." Bilbo blushed and the king vowed to find out just what was going on. After dealing with certain reactions that blush had almost instantly prompted.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 37 - Revelations

Chapter Summary

We are on our way to the Elven festival, but first the time has come for some revelations *whistles* And some Bilbo / Thorin schmoopiness :)

Translation of Elvish: Tarnin Austa - Gates of Summer.
Translation of Khuzdul: Ukrâd - greatest heart. Ázyungel - love of love (greatest love).

Chapter Notes

And I am back :) With another chapter and all :) I'd also like to say a big thank you for staying with this story. More to follow soon (and feedback helps make soon sooner :P) :D

Been busy writing my [Hobbit Story Big Bang](Try) entry, which is now up for your reading pleasure (if you haven't done so already). I give you Try.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now (1 F.A.)

Lanterns lined the road between the great gates of the dwarven mountain and the building site of the grand elven city. It took shape quicker and quicker now, which was not surprising. The last snows had long since receded from the paths of the Pelóri Mountains, and caravans were arriving weekly from Tirion with building supplies and materials. And even the Valar seemed to take an interest in Gondolin, or at least Bilbo believed so. A great eagle had appeared a morning not so long ago, carrying two richly adorned stoles for the High King and Queen. To be placed upon their new thrones within their new city.

"I'm nervous," Bilbo admitted. They had been asked to speak a few words on behalf of the dwarves and hobbits, something Thorin was clearly not at all fussed about, but Bilbo... Well, if he was honest, the only time he had ever truly given a public speech had been at his one hundred and eleventieth birthday, and he still remembered how cross a certain wizard had been with him over it. Not the speech itself, but his whole vanishing act. "I don't do very well with this kind of stuff."
"You will be fine, and you know it yourself. And besides, you won't be alone now will you? Unless of course it is my presence that makes you nervous." Even in the twilight of the lanterns Bilbo could see the smirk that graced his betrothed's face. He huffed. "I mean, if that is the case, maybe you want to rethink what is to happen in the not so very distant future. And I do not speak of your birthday, ukrâd, for I am afraid there really is nothing you can do about growing older and wiser."

"That's not funny, oh great King under the Mountain. If you think that I waited for eighty long years for this moment to come and then let you slip from my grasp, you are sadly mistaken. You will marry me, and after one month of longing for your touch, I will know it again that night and it will be the best birthday present I've ever given to someone." Thorin blinked and shook his head once he understood what Bilbo meant. "What? You think I'm not a good enough gift, do you? Have I not reduced you to squirming and moaning last night? And only with my hands, mind you. We shan't talk of the noises I evoked when I put my mouth to use, nor the ones that tumbled from those kingly lips when I..."

He couldn't finish that thought because a certain dwarven king decided that enough was enough, stopped dead in his tracks and silenced his hobbit in a most delicious way. The hobbit was flustered when at last he was set down again. Set down! The guts of the dwarven king! Flustered, and smiling rather broadly. Though words would be spoken of this, of the manhandling at the very least. Later. When Bilbo was not flushed and unable to string two words together. Not when he wanted to drag the dwarf into a bush and demand he follow through on the unspoken promise he had just given the hobbit.

"I love you, Bilbo Baggins," Thorin whispered then, and was immediately forgiven. And it was quite clear that he knew it. But there was no gloating, just love and longing in those beautiful eyes. "I longed for this, Bilbo. To have you by my side, as my husband. Ever since that morning on the Carrock. I knew it could only ever be you. My brave hobbit." That made Bilbo blush, and he was glad for the darkness surrounding them. Surely Thorin would not be able to see. Oh, but he could feel it. For right then a gentle dwarven hand touched his cheek. "Don't be embarrassed. You ... you must know that it is the truth. You were the only one who ever made my heart sing, the only one I ever wanted to hold close and never let go again. You have no idea how hard it was to do exactly that."

"You didn't have to on my account," Bilbo smiled. "I was ... I was startled at first, but then I never wanted to leave your embrace. I felt so safe, I always felt safe in your arms, âzyungel, always. Strangely enough even when you held me by my throat," Thorin hissed at the memory. "No, you will listen to me. I still felt safe. I knew that you would not hurt me. I knew it. I've always known it. Trust me in that." The dwarf huffed, but eventually nodded. "My heart and soul, they know yours. And they call out to you. Oh my!" he suddenly exclaimed. "That's it! That's what I will put into my vows." He was positively bouncing now. "That's so much better than all the things I wrote so far. It's simple, and yet, it's the truth."

"So that is what you and Balin are working on, huh?" Oh bugger! But there was no way he could deny it now that Thorin was asking him directly. "Don't forget there is no time limit, nor a minimum amount of words. As long as the words you do speak come from your heart, that is all that matters." Were there tears in Thorin's eyes? Bilbo could not be sure but it looked like it. "I cannot wait, ukrâd, to make you mine. I wish we did not have to wait for eighty long years to make it so, but I promise you, never again will we be parted like that. Simply because I know where the Halls are, and you do as well. Not even a Vala will stand in my way, my hobbit. Not when you are at the end of my path."

The kiss that followed those words left them both just as breathless as the previous one, despite it being the most gentle and loving kind. And they were still lip-locked when their nephews, all three
of them, caught up with them, Ori in tow as always. "Oh please," Kíli complained loudly. "Get a
room! Your subjects don't need to see what you do behind closed doors." The hobbit and dwarven
king ignored him, smiling into the kiss. "Alright, fine. Maybe your subjects do want to see it, but
your nephews don't. Uncle Bilbo, Frodo looks green. I suggest you stop." But Bilbo could hear his
nephew giggle, proving Kíli a liar.

In the end, it was the need to breathe that broke the two apart, and as one, they turned to their
gathered family. "Be glad, my nephew, that we are not taking tea instead. Surely that would be the
most wonderful gossip for weeks on end." Bilbo elbowed his betrothed, but grinned. Kíli was
leaning on his brother, both of them groaning, and Frodo blinked in confusion, exchanging glances
with Ori. "You see, young Frodo, my good-for-nothing nephews here have decided to take an
interest in what goes on in our bedroom. And they have started to refer to it as taking tea." The eyes
of the young hobbit widened almost comically, and then he started laughing. And if only for that, it
had all been worth it.

Frodo seemed, on a whole, to be more balanced and happy than he had been before, making Bilbo
wonder if Thorin was right. Maybe Frodo and Ori had come to an understanding as the dwarf
believed. There were many signs to support such an assumption after all. Like the way Ori was now
laying a hand on Frodo's shoulder to keep him from doubling over in his mirth. Friends would do
such a thing, but the warmth in the young dwarf's eyes spoke of deeper emotions than mere
friendship. And when his nephew grasped that gentle hand with his own, Bilbo finally had enough
of this guessing game.

"So, how long were you two going to wait before announcing your relationship to us all?" he
enquired rather bluntly, something he had learned from his dwarven friends, that worked better on
occasion than beating around the bush like hobbits normally would. Gasps filled the warm night air,
but Ori and Frodo looked ... smug. Yes, there was no better way to describe it. They were both
smug.

"I don't know, Uncle. Maybe until you four admitted that you were working towards getting us to
admit our feelings? To each other that is? We didn't notice straight away, but please. I didn't walk
across half of Middle-earth and remained as oblivious as..." he bit his bottom lip and then shrugged,
"as another of my companions." Pippin. No doubt he was speaking of Peregrin Took. "Anyway,
while I do appreciate what you were trying to do, Ori and I can take care of ourselves just fine. And I
know that I said things that may have made you fear I would never even try, but you should know
better than anyone else that we are but pawns in this. Just like you couldn't fight your feelings for
King Thorin, I stood no real chance. Not without hurting Ori." The young dwarf in question
swallowed hard as Frodo took his hand. "And that is the one thing, Uncle, the one thing I could not
bear."

Bilbo nodded and turned his head to glance at his betrothed. Thorin's eyes were resting on him, and
had probably done so ever since he had asked his question. "He is right, ukrâd. You and I both know
it. Neither of us meant to fall for the other at the start of our journey, and yet, we did. Almost straight
away. When I saw you, I knew that you would be important, Bilbo. And I tried my utmost to deny it.
You know this as well. But on the Carrock ... I saw, and for the first time truly acknowledged, what
my harsh words were doing to you. And I couldn't ... I couldn't continue." He touched the hobbit's
cheek, stroking Bilbo's soft skin with the pad of his thumb. "It is why I knew that something had
happened between your nephew and our scholar here. That day when Frodo broke his hand."

"Yes, I had a feeling that King Thorin might be the first to know," Frodo admitted. "We spoke a few
times of your journey, Uncle, and he told me how he had first come to realise what you meant to
him, and then how he had come to understand that he could not push you away anymore. Not after
you saved his life. For there truly was but one reason for you to do so. That you, too, cared. It opened my eyes. I don't think that Ori and I would have come this far had you not told me, Ki...

Thorin cleared his throat, and Frodo shook his head. "I mean Thorin. I'd still have thought I was doing the right thing not acknowledging what my heart wanted. I might not have told Ori that he was a burden, or that he was lost, but I still hurt him by always calling him a friend, and saying how glad I was to have found such a dear friend."

The young dwarf made to interject, to deny Frodo's words, but the hobbit simply took the other's hand, squeezing it tightly. "No. You know very well that I am right. You may have never said it, but I could tell the difference between how things were before that day, and the aftermath of my silly little accident." Frodo turned back to Bilbo and Thorin then, beaming. "It wasn't me, you know, who took matters into his own hands. It was Ori. He was so very sorry about my hand and he... he kissed it. And I froze." He chuckled. "Ori thought I was going to reject him, and started to apologise but I... I couldn't see him hurting anymore. And so I caught his arm, with my poor broken hand that I had totally forgotten and somehow we ended up much like we found you two just a few minutes ago. And then Ori took me to Óin."

"So kisses first, healer after?" Thorin asked with a big grin. "I like your style, Frodo. Your uncle wouldn't hear of such a thing, always fussing over my injuries, even if it's just a splinter." Oh yes, the splinter. Bilbo remembered it well and also how infected the small wound had become and how long it had festered. He elbowed Thorin in the ribs, but remained quiet, rather satisfied when his betrothed grunted in sudden and unexpected pain. "But," the dwarf eventually continued while rubbing his side, "as you can see he has no qualms concerning injuries that he himself inflicts. Your uncle, Frodo Baggins, is a bully."

"Which is why you love him, though, isn't it? He's the only one who will stand up to you, my King." Ori was trying to hide behind Fíli and attempted to drag Frodo with him, but the young hobbit stood his ground. "And it's the same for Bilbo. You're the only one for him. I think he would have died of boredom had he settled for another hobbit, even a Took. I've always known that there were things about his journey that he never told anyone. It was clear that he was heartbroken, and equally obvious that it was no longer so once you were reunited. I am happy for you. Both of you."

Thorin had put his hand around Bilbo's waist, and had pulled his betrothed closer when Frodo spoke of his uncle's broken heart. Now he was smiling down at Bilbo, and the hobbit felt as if he was everything to the dwarven king and he swallowed. "You are correct, young Frodo. There's never been anyone else for me. And the only thing I regret is that I never travelled to the Shire before that evening. I would give anything to see Bilbo in Bag End, surrounded by the things he held dear. I would love to wake in his little bedroom and smell toast, eggs and bacon. To see him sit by the fire, reading a book or perusing a map. I never saw his face like it is now, peaceful and truly happy. And, like it did the first time I beheld its beauty, it takes my breath away."

Bilbo was close to tears, and Ori seemed to have given in to them already. But Kíli had different ideas altogether. "You two are truly sickeningly sappy at times. Uncle, I promise you that mother won't let you live this down when she joins us. Thorin Oakenshield, grandmaster of 'love does not exist, it is but a fancy', not only in love but besotted with it." He stuck out his tongue at the same time as Thorin turned around to glare at his nephew. "It won't work. Not anymore, Uncle. I know how happy you are, and you won't be able to fool anyone. Frown at me all you want."

The young dwarf then rounded on Frodo and Ori. "And you... You've been an item for weeks! And not once did you think to tell any of us. Aren't we your friends? Shouldn't we know that we have yet another reason to celebrate?" He crossed his arms in front of his chest and did most definitely not pout. No, not at all. His lower lip was not at all pushed forward and wasn't trembling either.
Frodo grinned. "You mean so the four of you could congratulate yourselves on a job well done?" Bilbo blinked. And then blinked again. Of course. His nephew was, indeed, a Baggins ... and not some block headed Bracegirdle from Hardbottle; just like he had explained to Gandalf so many years ago. He had picked up on what the four conspirators had been up to, and turned it against them. Somehow, despite being somewhat upset at Frodo for not saying a word, he was also proud of the younger hobbit. "Besides, we didn't know for all that long. A few weeks at most. It all fell into place after Fíli once more pointed out how happy you are, Uncle. With your *dwarven* mate. And then Kíli was talking to Ori about how he wished he had someone like Bilbo, and, well, it all came together and we realised what you tried to do for so very long. We do appreciate it."

"We only wanted to make you two see what was so obvious to us," Bilbo explained then. "And we are very happy to see that you are now very much aware of it." And then he hugged both Ori and Frodo, his heart beating with the pride of a father. "I wish you all the luck in the world and all the happiness you so deserve." He pulled back then, studying his young nephew. "I hope though that you have told your mother. She'll never forgive you if you haven't, you know that."

"She knows, Uncle. We made both father and mother swear that they would not breathe a word to you. We ... we owe this to you. We do. And we wanted to find a way to thank you for it. Properly." He looked to Ori then. "We thought of something as well. Something we will gift you on your wedding day." That sparked Bilbo's curiosity, as Frodo clearly must have known it would. He glowered at his nephew. Who smirked back. "And we will not disclose any further information about what it is." He then turned away from his uncle and to Kíli and Fíli. "We also decided on a similar gift for you, even though it is not going to be finished yet." There was a mysterious smile on the young hobbit's face, and when he turned back to Bilbo, Ori's hand in his, he winked at his uncle. "I think we should be going though, or we will be late for the festival." And that was that.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... **Eowyn's Musings.** I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Chapter 38 - Past, Present and Future Entwined

Chapter Summary

Some more schmoopiness, and musings of the past and very imminent future :)

Chapter Notes

Posting this from work ... shhhhhh ... so I might have to refresh it tomorrow with some more of the formatting I normally do in DreamWeaver :P

Thank you as always for bookmarking, kudoing, commenting (they really do keep me going :) so thank you to you all) and subscribing :)

The next chapter will involve some scheming nephews :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Warm light was welcoming them to Gondolin, and the scent of spring flowers permeated the air. Bilbo's eyes were sparkling happily, and Thorin's heart skipped a beat or two. His betrothed was ... beautiful. He recalled that day they first set foot into the Valley of Imladris, remembering a similar expression on that beloved face. He'd been a fool not to simply embrace what his heart was telling him ... and the hobbit, but to instead belittle Bilbo's love of the elves. He had learned, the hard way some might say, that it had been he who was mistaken. He had hated everything elven when his grudge lay with one elven ruler in particular. And even such a grudge was ... if not unfounded then at least somewhat ... well ... idiotic. Thranduil himself had been snubbed by Thrór, something his grandfather had admitted was a silly thing to do, and Thorin's expectations of help would have meant certain death for many soldiers of the Woodland Realm.

Thorin had paid a hefty price for his foolishness and dragged everyone around him with him. Especially Bilbo. He still remembered how haggard the hobbit had been in the dungeons of Thranduil's caverns. Thin and weak, and yet he had never blamed Thorin for what had happened. Never again would his betrothed suffer in such a way, he vowed in that moment, pulling Bilbo closer to him. Much to the delight of his nephews. Looking over his shoulder at them, the king grinned, "Are you feeling ill, dearest Fíli and Kíli? Too sick mayhaps to attend the festival?" The way their mouths opened and closed without any sound escaping their lips was marvellous to watch.

Until Bilbo elbowed him in the side. "You, oh great King under the Mountain, are supposed to set an example for them, not tease them within an inch of their lives. It is unbecoming, funny though it might be." Snickers could be heard, followed by grumbling. And the hobbit turned, a bright smile on his face, and addressed the two young dwarves as if they were dwarflings. "It is true. You are just as bad as your uncle. I know you don't want to know about tea and the like, but surely a kiss or two is preferable to how Thorin was before I joined you?" Kíli gasped at that, and Fíli looked contrite.
They both nodded as one. "We're sorry, Uncles. You are right of course, Bilbo. To see you two so happy ... it is more than we ever dared wish for while we were on the journey. And especially after all these long and lonely years, it is heartwarming to see Thorin smile again." Fíli explained. "I don't think he smiled more than a handful of times while you were still across the sea." The king's arm tightened around Bilbo's waist, and he glared at his nephews. But to no avail. "No Uncle. Bilbo deserves to know. And you have to give up this silly notion of maybe deserving whatever you suffered while you were parted. It is foolish." Fíli's eyes sparkled almost angrily, and Kíli nodded in agreement with his brother. "Bilbo, not a day went by that you weren't missed. By all of us. And to have you here with us ... at times it still seems like a dream. Our family, while still not complete, it feels whole again. The way it was on the journey to Erebor. You and Thorin, and the two of us. Family. And now it's growing what with Frodo joining, and Ori, too."

Bilbo had tears in his eyes by now, just as Thorin had feared. But he ... smiled? "I missed you, too. Oh Fíli, every day I wished I could bring you back. Every day I would take out the only things I had left of you all, the map and Thorin's ring and ... and I would wish for nothing else but to be given a chance to see you just one last time. And I know how my betrothed fared, even though he is a foolish dwarf and thinks he deserved such pain." He leaned closer to the dwarven king then, beaming up at him through the sheen of tears. "I promise you two that I will ensure that he is only happy from now on, and that he will never be lonely again." And with that he pulled Thorin's head down for a tender kiss, and the smile he bestowed upon the dwarf when that kiss broke could have melted the heart of Morgoth himself.

"That's all we want," Kíli murmured, leaning against his brother, a silly grin on his face. He turned to Frodo and Ori, who did their best to shield them from the many passersby that made their way up to the highest square in the city. Building work was still far from finished, and the king's palace was still only halfway to being completed. Still, the festivities would be held there. Outside and in the halls and chambers that were already open for use.

Thorin still felt slightly sick at the thought of attending an elven festival, but his hobbit had glared at him whenever he had raised an objection to them going. Especially the day when the king had pointed out the fact that they would, essentially, be celebrating on top and inside a building site. "Thorin Oakenshield! You are not wriggling out of this. But I shall talk to King Turgon to ensure that you will be nowhere that is unsafe. You know, like a mineshaft where explosives are being handled!" Then Bilbo had stormed off, leaving the dwarven king in an ocean of regret. Bringing up the whole accident business with his betrothed never worked out well. And Bilbo was right of course. He had acted like ... like an idiot. And he had never realised just how afraid the hobbit must have been.

When Bilbo had returned that evening, he came with assurances that the sites of the festival would be as safe as, if not safer than the mountain. Then he had disappeared to the library and by the time he had finally opened the large doors to their chambers again, Thorin had been riven with guilt. "Bilbo, I am sorry. I just ... it is hard for me not to think of that festival in Thranduil's Caverns when it comes to elven feasts. It's not an excuse, I know. Especially after all the work you put into bringing our two races together. I noticed, most of us have."

The hobbit had looked at Thorin warily, but had eventually nodded, sitting down next to the dwarf where he had been perched on the edge of their bed. "It is a great honour, and I am sure that Turgon didn't make the decision lightly. To not only extend an invitation but to make you his honoured guest and offering you a part in the ceremonies ... it is so much more. He is extending his hand to you not as your neighbour, but as a friend. He is neither Thranduil nor Thingol. He is your ally. No one will cast us into a dungeon this time. On the contrary. Though ... I do understand you. We were asking the wood elves' help and what we got was... But after all these years I would hope King Turgon has
proven as much to you and our people. And I admit I am nervous as well. While I attended may feasts in Imladris, I was never the centre of attention. But with you by my side I know I can do what is expected."

And it was the hope in Bilbo's eyes that made Thorin's decision for him. He could no longer look to the past and ignore what his stubbornness was doing to his betrothed. "Then I better come along, right? And with you by my side I think I can endure." Taking the hobbit into his arms, he placed a kiss onto that unruly hair, whispering, "I can endure anything with you by my side. There is only one thing that would undo me, and that would be to lose you. And I won't. Never again. Just ... don't ask me to become friends with Thingol, alright? I think that would kill me." Bilbo had made a face then, grey eyes no longer holding anger or sadness. And after those words, there was no more talking for a while as the hobbit showed Thorin that he had been forgiven.

"Ah! Here you are," Balin's voice cut through the king's reverie, and maybe that was for the best as a festival was no place to think about ... that. "Thought you'd gotten lost. The festival is about to begin and you are needed. Bilbo as well. Come on, lads. Hurry." The grey-haired dwarf shook his head and smiled. "Really, you're behaving like two younglings, totally besotted with each other." Kíli groaned. "They've been making eyes at each other again, haven't they?"

"And worse," Thorin's younger nephew complained now that he'd found an audience who was not threatening him. "They stopped along the road and had one of their lovey-dovey little chats again. It's sickening, Balin." Kíli caught his uncle's eye then, and added quickly, "But also sweet and heart-warming. It's good to see our uncles reunited once more. Even though it's hard work at times." He stuck out his tongue at Thorin then and pulled his brother along. "We'll see you on the plaza. We'll probably be near the wine vendor." And with that they were off, running as if their lives depended on it. Which they did.

Balin shook his head, "They need to settle down. They're still like dwarflings at heart, and that simply will not do anymore. They are princes, even though they will never ascend to the throne. Besides, it can't be easy for them to see you both and to, essentially, be alone."

Thorin swallowed, eyes going to Bilbo. Who nodded, his face solemn. They both felt the same way about the two young dwarves. And Balin as well. "If anyone deserves happiness, it is them," the halfling whispered eventually. "And I know Kíli found ... well ... a lover, but it's not the same. I hope that, soon, there will be someone for them. Someone they can love and who loves them in turn. Maybe an elf or two..." The hobbit batted his lashes at Thorin, and the king groaned. Not that. Please not that. Anything but elves. "I mean, Kíli's special friend is an elf after all, so somehow it must work despite the height..."

"Yes, thank you, beloved. I won't be able to sleep for a week now." Bilbo chuckled, clearly amused by the king's suffering. "Balin?" Thorin turned to his old adviser. "Is it too late to call off the wedding and all that goes with it? I fear my betrothed is cruel and unkind." An elbow landed in his stomach. "And he's brutal as well. Abusive even."

"Uncle Bilbo isn't cruel, Master Balin," Frodo chimed in. "He's just holding his own, and I believe our king would have it no other way." The young hobbit was right, Thorin had to admit, if only to himself. "And King Thorin is the only one who can make Bilbo happy. There is no abuse, only love between them. The way it should be." And Frodo's words were confirmed manifold in those
beautiful grey eyes that gazed up at the dwarven king.

"You're not wriggling out of this, Thorin Oakenshield," Bilbo smiled. "You all but asked for my hand in marriage on your death bed, and after eighty years... There simply is no way out." And then the hobbit reached up to touch the bead in Thorin's hair, and they were kissing again, much to the delight of Balin. And apparently also Frodo and Ori.

"I see your nephews were correct," the older dwarf eventually commented. "And while it is truly heartwarming to see you like this, we still have to hurry to the citadel. The sun is setting fast, and words have to be spoken before night falls." Balin was probably correct, but the hobbit in his arms rendered Thorin quite powerless. "My King? You can have your betrothed all to yourself soon enough once more, for tomorrow there are no meetings of the council and I have kept both your schedules, well, not free, but the only meeting you have is with each other. That way I did not lie to anyone who asked to see either of you." Bilbo pulled away and smiled at Balin in thanks. "And I also decided that you deserve some time alone, away from here. You will travel to Tirion in a month's time, and can stay at your cottage until you will have to return. For the last month before the wedding, you are required here. Not because I don't trust you to keep to our traditions, but to fend off Mistress Baggins at least somewhat while I make the last preparations for the big day."

"And you think I can stop my mother? Balin, I may have been able to riddle with Smaug, but ... no one stands in the way of Belladonna Baggins née Took. Least of all her son. But I will still try my best." And with those words, Bilbo took the king's hand. "Shall we? I don't want to be late." Thorin shrugged, but allowed the hobbit to pull him along. Bilbo's enthusiasm was infectious though, and soon the dwarven king began to appreciate everything his betrothed pointed out to him. Starting with the hobbit holes the halfling was obviously very excited to see. Very close to them though were buildings that were clearly of dwarf-make and could only be homes for Thorin's kin. Bilbo's little plan was truly working it would seem. Dwarves and elves not only worked together but were quickly becoming friends as well. *Friends!* If only those remaining in the Halls could see.

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Bilbo had heard about this so called 'choice' from Fíli and Kíli of course, but then Balin had informed him that the whole 'getting along' part simply meant that the dwarves were not supposed to kill their elven neighbours; nothing more, nothing less. But the old dwarf had also told Bilbo that there must have been a reason for Thorin's nephews to ... well ... lie to their uncle. And that Aulë must have had a reason as well to not allow Thorin to decide for himself. "I believe, laddie, that our dearest king might have stayed in the Halls simply because. And Aulë might not have been able to point out that there was a chance that you could follow him to these shores. So let's just assume it was all done for the best. And let us not trouble Thorin with it." Bilbo had agreed of course, though it did not sit well with him to keep a secret such as this. But he saw the merit of doing so, even though he dreaded the day Thorin found out about it. Fíli and Kíli would be dead dwarves, that was for certain.
And so the hobbit simply whispered, "I am very grateful that you did, for I don't fancy spending my
days hammering at the doors to the Halls, and then trying to find my stubborn dwarf in their gloom.
I've heard enough about them to last me until the end of all things from Lord Glorfindel. I don't recall
him having one good word to say about them. Boring and dull and such. That was the least abrasive
description he could come up with I think. You would have hated it, I'm sure. Besides, think of the
days and maybe weeks we might have lost. Think of the bead you wouldn't have had to gift me."

"I don't regret a day spent amongst the elves, Bilbo. Not one." Thorin's voice was low, and the
hobbit had to pay close attention to catch what his betrothed was saying. Clearly the king was willing
to admit as much, but not to anyone but Bilbo. "You know my one regret, and that has nothing to do
with the elves. And yet, it feels senseless now to dwell on it. I can see it in your eyes that whatever
pain was in our past, spent together and apart, is no longer there. A mere memory that brings with it
nothing but joy at how we are now. And I find myself drifting ... and a new regret taking over." The
hobbit raised a questioning eyebrow, and Thorin chuckled, "Oh. It is nothing. Only the fact that you
are still not mine completely. That it will still take months until I can call you my husband. And then
there is the matter of that one month..."

"Which we will spend planning our future together. Don't think for just one moment that we will be
awake enough in the evening to even think of doing anything but fall asleep in each other's arms. I
have planned for it already with Balin. There is much to be done before we leave again for our
honeymoon." Thorin had grudgingly allowed the hobbit to plan the four weeks they had been gifted.
Four weeks that would be just for the two of them, with no work whatsoever. Unlike the month
spent at their cottage. There would still be meetings to be attended at Tirion, and orders would need
to be signed urgently by either the king himself or his future consort. But their honeymoon...

Bilbo smiled to himself. It would truly be magical. And the best part about it was that Thorin had
absolutely no clue what was in store for him. Balin knew, of course, as did Fili and Kili. And Bilbo
knew that soon the two young dwarves would begin teasing their uncle mercilessly with the
knowledge they had, and he did not. But for now they were still here. And as they finally crested the
last ramp, even Thorin gasped. The square before the royal palace was awash with candlelight, and
those little lanterns Bilbo had first fallen in love with in Rivendell. Everything seemed warm and
golden, the setting sun only adding to the effect. It barely touched the highest spires now, still
encased in scaffolding. The hobbit turned to his betrothed then, whispering, "This will be a night to
remember..."
Chapter 39 - A Plan is Forged

Chapter Summary

The two brothers and Anorion forge a plan that might make Thorin's head explode, and Bilbo is amused.

Chapter Notes

I'd like to thank you all once again for bookmarking, subscribing, kudoing and commenting (and please keep especially the comments coming, they do make my day / week :) and I'm kinda curious what peeps make of things as well) :)

Also, thanks to everyone who's started reading the first chapter of my new story, yay!!!

**Translation of Elvish:** Mellonen - my friend.

**Translation of Khuzdul:** Ukrâd - greatest heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Now (1 F.A.)

The speeches had been a success, well, as far as such a tedious thing could ever be. But Bilbo and Thorin had truly been magnificent, even Kíli had to admit as much. Standing side by side, with Turgon and his queen behind them, they recited the words that had been penned specifically for this occasion. Words speaking of a joint future between elves, dwarves and hobbits. A future of plenty and prosperity. "I'm betting a crown on uncle exploding before the night is out," the dark-haired dwarf had muttered to his brother at one point, but Fíli had simply shaken his head. Which, in hindsight, had been rather kind of the blond. Because Thorin hadn't exploded at all. He had only smiled, mostly at Bilbo, but also at everyone gathered in the square.

Anorion had joined the two dwarves, and had placed his arm around Kíli's shoulder. "It is truly wonderful to see our races joined together in something akin to harmony now. Too long have we fought not only amongst ourselves but also with each other. Too long have some of us neglected to see the differences between Durin's Folk and other, less savoury dwarven families." The elf smiled down at the dark-haired dwarf, and Kíli nodded. "I was one of those who required convincing, I am afraid. And maybe the way I eventually was convinced is not the best, but..."

"But I would truly prefer if you left it at that, Anorion. Thank you very much." Fíli had gone pale, and was staring into his mug of cider. Kíli frowned to see his brother like that, having not truly realised before how much his own ... dalliance with Anorion drove home the fact that the blond was alone. Not that it was anything like the love their uncles shared, or even Frodo and Ori. They were friends, and while their hearts were not claimed yet, they allowed themselves to take pleasure in each other's company. Just like Fíli had back in the Blue Mountains before their journey to Erebor. There,
everyone had called Kíli too beautiful to be a full-blooded dwarf and some where even accusing him of having elvish blood. Fíli had stood up for his brother, yes, but still... The brunette had always felt out of place, and now, for the first time, he had not only made friends, but had found a, well, lover. Was Fíli jealous of that?

"I am not certain I follow, Master Fíli," Anorion smiled. "It was seeing your uncle cross blades with Lord Ecthelion. Blades that are identical. I never thought I would see an elven weapon in dwarven hands, nor for an elf to suffer a dwarf wielding his own blade. And there was the Lord of the Fountain, clearly more than happy to allow Orcrist to remain with King Thorin. Although, he does refer to it as Orcrist Two." He chuckled. "I am not certain if King Turgon will be so understanding when he finds out that Olórin wields Glamdring. Maia or not."

From the corner of his eye, Kíli saw his brother blink and then shake his head. "I am sorry. I shouldn't..." He took a deep breath, and both the brown-haired dwarf and the elf turned to him. "I'm an idiot. And no, I'm not going to write that down for you Kíli. And I won't say it again, either." He grinned then and stuck out his tongue. "I've always taken care of this loot here, Anorion, and it's hard to come to terms with the fact that I might not have to do so anymore. That he's finally found someone who cares about him the way I do. Well, maybe in a slightly different way, and I truly don't need to know any details about it, but... I owe you thanks. And also an apology. I've been somewhat... not myself of late. Kee and I always stuck together and now, suddenly, I find myself with time on my hands and don't quite know what to do with it." The blond shrugged. "I've tried books, but that was really just a cover to spy on our friends. I don't have to do that anymore now, do I?"

It was Anorion who replied, "Well, I am sure you would be more than welcome to join the sparring sessions of the King's Guard. After all, your brother is attending them more regularly than some of my fellows." Kíli could have kissed the elf. And would. Later. This way, he could once again spend more time with his brother, learn from the elves and be near his lover. "Besides, I am sure it would please your uncle very much, and you two look as if that could be of interest to you." The elf winked, and both Fíli and Kíli snickered. Revenge for all that talk of tea and the lovey dovey behaviour.

"He's been torturing us again, and I think Bilbo is catching on now. Do you think King Turgon might allow us to... you know... officially join the King's Guard?" Kíli's eyes were pleading, and he was alternately gazing at Anorion and his brother. The latter of which was shaking his head, but his blue eyes were sparkling with mirth. "Bilbo will like the idea. After all, he's always advocating how we should work closely with the elves. He'll keep Uncle Thorin from killing us. Might even convince him that it's the most wonderful idea since they thought of finally tying the knot."

"Firstly, Kee, they couldn't exactly get married before, and Uncle Thorin was rather quick with his proposal. I mean, Bilbo hadn't even been with him for a day before he sported the braid." Fíli shrugged. "It's true and you know it, brother dear. However, and secondly, you might be right. We should talk to our hobbit uncle first. It would give us something to do that doesn't involve boring council meetings, you know?"

Kíli nodded vigorously, "Anything's better than those. And besides, what's the point? You and I will never take over Uncle Thorin's rule, not that I'd want to. The crown looks rather uncomfortable to say the least..."

"Of course, Kíli. That is the most important part about being a king. The crown." Anorion chuckled and winked at Fíli, making the brunette glare daggers at them both. "You are correct though," the elf eventually conceded, "The throne would suit you ill. Both of you. I am not saying you would not be wise and good kings, but I cannot see the desire to rule in your hearts. You would both be able to
lead your people, but somehow I do not think you were born to do it. Not the way King Thorin was. And Master Baggins. To think that we owe so much to two hobbits. Two halflings. I know they believed that we would think them foolish for dealing with Sauron's Ring of Power, but the opposite is the case. Even our High King would not have been able to resist such an evil. He would bestow the greatest honours upon them both if he thought they would allow it."

Fili shook his head, "I don't think that's a good idea. Uncle Bilbo still thinks he was a fool, no matter the good he accomplished while using the Ring. And Frodo ... he's lost so much because of it. He nearly turned away from love because he feels ... tainted. Oh wait, you don't know yet, do you?" Kili looked to his brother in confusion before realising what he was talking about. And Anorion... The elf raised an eyebrow in question and shook his head. "Well, Uncle Thorin and Bilbo were rather sappy again all the way here, and then all of a sudden Bilbo blurted out with the question of how long Frodo and Ori were going to wait before informing their family of what was going on between them. Completely blew our cover, he did. Only, he didn't. Frodo and Ori already knew what we were up to. But anyway, they are, in fact, an item. Just like we wanted them to be."

"We shall keep that in mind the next time we are trying to get two friends to admit their feelings to each other," Kili deadpanned. "Who knows. Maybe you will find yourself at the receiving end yourself." He stuck out his tongue, but his teasing quickly came to an end when Anorion leaned down to kiss him. In the middle of Gondolin. During an important festival. When the elf pulled back, the young dwarf was flushed and tried to find something to do with his sweaty hands that didn't involve tearing his lover's clothes off.

Anorion chuckled. "I am counting on that, dearest Kili. For, as you very well know, I have a very hard time admitting my feelings. I cannot imagine what it will be like when I finally meet the one I am meant for. Although, I hope that you, the both of you, will either find your one true loves before me or at the same time." He gently caressed Kili's face and then nodded to Fili.

The blond shrugged. "It will happen when it is meant to. No sooner, but also no later. Although, I hope you two will find true love at the same time. Anything else would be cruel." He grinned. "I still don't quite get how the two of you can be ... well ... how you are," he gestured at them with both hands, almost spilling his cider. "Darn it. You see, now you even make me nearly waste my drink. Very mean of you." He was grinning though. And somehow Kili knew that his brother understood him better than he let on. Fili might not have taken a lover, but he, too, was longing for something akin to what Thorin shared with Bilbo. That all-consuming love that swept you off your feet. For a brief moment, he and Anorion had thought that maybe... But the love they felt for one another, and love it was, was borne of friendship and maybe physical attraction. They cared for each other, deeply. But Kili knew that the elven archer wasn't his ... his One. The one Aulë had intended for him.

Maybe it could have been Tauriel. Maybe it still could be her. He had felt rather strongly about her, but somehow the years spent in Aman had made those feelings fade. To the point where even he had to admit that it might have been a simple infatuation. And desire. After spending all of his youth as something like a laughing stock amongst his peers for being too pretty, having someone truly take an interest in him had been enough for Kili to think he was head over heels. But were she here now, the young dwarf would probably seek out her friendship more than anything else. He had seen how love had held Thorin in its grip even after his uncle had thought Bilbo lost to him forever. It had been nothing like that for Kili. He had dreamt of Tauriel maybe for a year after waking, but now he could
hardly remember the sound of her voice, or the colour of her eyes.

"...and as usual, Kíli is daydreaming and not listening to us at all," Anorion teased and the brunette nearly jumped out of his skin. How long had he been lost in thought? "Now that you decided to join us again, mellonen, I was just saying to your brother that I would speak to my captain, for formality's sake. And Fíli will do the same. As a friend." It so happened that Anorion's commander was none other than Ecthelion, which was part of the reason that no one had batted so much as an eyelash when Kíli first started to join the elven archers for their training sessions.

"He still grumbles about the whole thing," Fíli chuckled. "What did he say again, Kee? 'I am not a bleeding bow-wielding arrow-shooting whimp!'" And then he'd realised Kíli glaring at him and he'd gotten all flustered and mumbled something like 'Not that there is anything wrong with bow and arrow. A bow is a fine weapon indeed.' And so on. It was hilarious. But I think what 'Thel really took offence to was the fact that Glorfindel was made commander of the swordsmen. And overall Captain of the King's Guard. Not that he wanted either position. Not really. But Turgon didn't even ask his opinion. Or Glorfindel's for that matter. I think they both did something without involving us that landed them both in this mess. Though it could work in our favour now."

Anorion's brow was furrowed in thought, and then his eyes lit up and he grinned. "I heard something about shelves breaking under a too heavy load. In the royal quarters. Some of the books belonged not to the High King, but Queen Elenwë. Turgon was not pleased at all. So if there was but a shred of a hint that the whole thing might have been the handiwork of your friends... It really comes as no surprise that Turgon would bestow upon them such high honours. Honours he knew the Lord of the Fountain and the Lord of the Golden Flower desperately tried to avoid. Did you know Ecthelion took it so far as to nominate his own lover? Erenion was rather unhappy with him."

"Oh, so that's the reason he left for Tirion so quickly? Lovers' spat?" Fíli grinned. "Serves 'Thel right for pulling such a stunt. It's almost as bad as King Turgon deciding he didn't want to be High King anymore and simply passing the crown to Gil-galad. I think he'd commit suicide and then just stay in the Halls. Permanently." Kíli nodded, giggling. Ecthelion really had landed himself in a lot of trouble if even his mate decided to take flight.

The brunette was about to say as much when Thorin and Bilbo joined them. "Ah, King Thorin and Master Baggins," Anorion greeted them, bowing lowly. "I was wondering if you could spare me a moment, your Majesty? There are a few things regarding the wedding festivities that I would discuss with you. On behalf of my commander, that is." Was he making this up or did Ecthelion really ask the elf to speak to Thorin? Kíli wasn't sure, but hey, it gave them a chance to speak to Bilbo alone. So when Thorin shrugged and motioned for Anorion to follow him, his lover simply winked at both Fíli and Kíli and then it was just the two brothers and their hobbit uncle.

"So, Uncle Bilbo? Are you having a good time?" Fíli smiled warmly, but the hobbit's eyes narrowed suspiciously; clearly he could tell that something was up. "There's one or two things we wanted to talk to you about without Thorin around. We had this brilliant idea, but we fear Uncle Thorin wouldn't even hear us out before telling us 'No'. Or having a heart attack. Or both." Bilbo chuckled, and didn't stop until they had told him their plan and he had agreed to help them. And Kíli was glad that it wasn't going to be him who'd break the news to the dwarven king.

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"No! Absolutely not!" Thorin was livid. And it probably didn't help at all that Bilbo thought the dwarf's reaction was simply hilariously funny and was giggling without even attempting to hide his glee. "Under no circumstances will my nephews become members of King Turgon's guard! If they
feel like finally living up to everyone's expectations then they will join the guards of Erebor! And that's final!" Well, that had gone better than expected. And worse as well. One of the biggest problems Bilbo had at that moment was this: Thorin was rather ... appealing when he was angry. His eyes were sparkling and his voice was deep and brooding. But no. He was having this conversation for a reason other than lying with his betrothed. Not that that wouldn't be a perfectly good reason in and of itself.

"Thorin," the hobbit began, patting the seat next to him on the sofa that the dwarf had vacated the moment Bilbo had brought up this most wonderful idea of Thorin's nephews. "Would you please sit down? You're making me dizzy." The only response he received was a glower. "Please, ukrâd? For me?" He knew he wasn't playing fair, but then at times that was necessary with a stubborn dwarf like Thorin Oakenshield. The endearment had the expected effect and the king slumped down next to him, still glaring. "Just think about it for one second? Wouldn't it be more of a statement if your heirs were to join Turgon's guard? It would show everyone that the old animosity is truly a thing of the past, more so than any grand gestures and feasts could ever do. Besides, it would probably drive Thingol mad. And that is always a good thing, isn't it?"

Bilbo knew that in that moment he had won. The gleam in Thorin's eyes was indication enough that the idea of upsetting Thingol won out against the king's own reservations. And the dwarf knew that Bilbo knew. "Cruel, just like I said to Balin." He huffed, but his eyes turned warm as they caught the hobbit's. "I am holding you responsible for this. If it all blows up in our faces then it will be on you." Bilbo shrugged. That was better than he had expected. "Let this be your first act as my consort, even though we still are not married. Time seems to slow down for some reason, but in three months you will be mine. Though I wish it could be this day. No matter how tired we both are..." And they were.

It was still early in the morning, and they had only just returned from the elven city. Or elven building site as Thorin referred to it mostly. Dawn had been greeted by song, and a huge feast had appeared from the bowels of the royal palace. There had been enough food to feed a whole army for at least a week, or just enough to keep a party of hobbits happy. But no sleep and lovely food made for very tired guests, and they had not been the first to take their leave. True to his word, they had found upon their return that the rest of the day was kept completely free, and they could spend it however they saw fit.

"You are right of course, but alas we cannot bind our hands in marriage just yet. So I suggest we do the best with the day we have been granted today, and look forward to our holiday in a month's time. But for now," he yawned and then giggled. "I think we should retire for a while. Or we shall fall asleep standing up. And that is not my idea of fun at all."

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr... Eowyn's Musings. I know, the name's a big surprise :P
Bilbo is feeling uneasy, and two dwarven princes behave like overexcited puppies, well, especially one of them.

Chapter Notes

I'd like to thank you all once again for bookmarking, subscribing, kudoing and commenting :D And big apologies for not posting this for ages! I honestly don't know where time went. Another chapter is also ready to go, so hopefully it won't be another ... almost 3 months :P

Translation of Khuzdul: Ughvashâ - greatest treasure, Ukrâd - greatest heart

Now (1 F.A.)

Despite Thorin's words on the morning of the festival, time seemed to speed up somehow, and soon the day of their departure drew near. On one hand, Bilbo was rather excited to see Tirion again, and the cottage. But on the other... He felt as if they should not be leaving the mountain. In the pit of his stomach a feeling was growing, stronger and stronger every day, of impending doom. But when he spoke to Balin about it, and later mentioned it to Fíli, he was told that it was probably just wedding jitters. "You're just nervous, Uncle Bilbo," the blond dwarf had said. "About travelling the mountains again as well as the whole marriage thing. No matter how long you've been waiting for it, it's a big step." Then Fíli had hugged him, and even kissed the hobbit's brow ... something that would send Thorin into a jealous rage if he were present. "You know we all love you. I mean, literally, we all do. Even those who once tried to garner uncle's affections. There's no one in Erebor or Gondolin who doesn't look forward to the big day."

But despite all the kind words and reassurances, Bilbo couldn't shake the feeling that something was going to happen. Something bad. When he finally confided in Thorin, he was more than surprised by the dwarf's response. Where before he might have laughed in the hobbit's face, and belittled him for his worries, he now sat down in his armchair and pulled Bilbo into his lap. "While I agree with Balin and truly believe it is just nerves, which I know more about than I care to admit by the way, you can always seek Lord Elrond's counsel. You know he would be only too happy to assist you after all the times he tried to do so and was turned away." Bilbo blinked at that. "Oh yes, he told me. He offered you healing and you denied that anything was even wrong with you. When it was clear as day that your heart was broken. His words, not mine."

The hobbit blushed, hiding his face against the dwarf's shoulder. "It was all I had left," he whispered. "I know he was aware that something was wrong with me, and I am quite certain he could at least guess what it was. Especially after I..." he fell silent and didn't continue until Thorin had gently turned the hobbit's head so he was facing his betrothed. "I broke down in the library reading about
your ring and what it stood for. And I realised just how much you were giving me when you passed it on to me. I guess it once again drove home just how much I had lost that day and I so wished that things could have been different." He shrugged. "I'm not sure I feel that way anymore. Because I don't think I could be any happier than I am now. I am where I longed to be for all these years, quite literally. In your arms. And there is no better place in the whole world."

"And still you worry," Thorin whisper fondly, smiling down at the hobbit. "Nothing bad is going to happen, I promise. Do you want to know how I can be so certain of that?" Bilbo nodded. "I won't be going anywhere near the mines until we depart, and once we are on the road, I don't intend to let you out of my sight even for a moment. Well, you know what I mean." The halfling's breath caught in his throat at the pain in Thorin's voice. "Finding you lying there was so much worse than anything else that ever happened to me, ughvashâ. I didn't think anything like that could occur, here, in the Undying Lands. And yet there you were..." A big dwarven hand closed around Bilbo's and gently lifted it to Thorin's lips. "Thinking of that makes me truly realise how foolish I behaved after my little accident." The hobbit coughed and raised an eyebrow. "Fine. My accident. I didn't think that you might be just as worried for me as I was for you. I'm sorry."

"I know. I know you are. And I know how hard it is for you, the great Thorin Oakenshield, to admit that you were wrong. To say that you are sorry. But there is no need to apologise again. I said my piece, and so did you. And we also scared our dearest nephews away, so that is always a bonus." Thorin nodded, the sweetest of smiles upon his face. Bilbo would never ever tell the dwarf though; who knew how he'd react to being called 'sweet'. "I just ... I feel restless and I don't know why. Everything is going better than expected. Just yesterday father told me that the grain fields are doing rather well, and the vines are growing nicely. Obviously there won't be any grapes this year, but he's now hoping that we will be able to have the first harvest in the next already."

Thorin's smile grew. "So we shall have wine soon? That is good news indeed. However, as long as there's apples and such, we can still have cider. And I heard that the bees are happy as well in their new home. We might be able to make mead in the winter." Of course. To a dwarf, that was a very important thing, and if Bilbo was honest with himself, he had grown rather fond of the sweet drink as well. Elven wine, or miruvor, was nice enough, but somehow it was dwarven drink that suited him better. Even Lord Elrond had realised this before long, and there had always been a keg or two from Erebor in the cellars of Imladris, strictly for the hobbit to drink ... much to Glorfindel's disdain. One day soon he would have to find a quiet moment to thank the peredhel for all he had done. Not just for him but seemingly also for Thorin. And Frodo. No, he couldn't forget about Frodo.

Frodo, who was so cheerful now, and carefree and happy. Frodo, who surely would have a braid in his hair before long. And if he didn't, Bilbo would set Fíli and Kíli on Ori. And maybe even have a word with Bungo and Petunia. Although, they had both grown rather fond of Ori and were not the confrontational kind anyway. Maybe Bilbo's own mother instead? Belladonna never had qualms about shouting at someone if she believed the situation called for it. And it did. Then again, Thorin had told the hobbit that only a few days ago Frodo had come to him for advice. Advice regarding different braids and bead designs. Even the meaning of several precious stones... Maybe this time it would be Bilbo's nephew who took matters into his own hands.

"A coin for your thoughts, Master Baggins," Thorin rumbled eventually, and, catching Bilbo unawares, he nuzzled into the hobbit's neck. Shivers ran up and down Bilbo's spine, and he tried to push the dwarf away ... with no success whatsoever. But then the king lifted his head, eyes sparkling, and whispered, "You were lost in thought, and I can't have your mind wander off into the unknown and maybe to another. I'm too old to find someone else willing to put up with me." Bilbo growled. Since poking the dwarf never worked out, the hobbit now resorted to tickling the king instead. And that did work. Thorin chuckled, trying to take hold of Bilbo's hands, but the halfling
was too fast.

"Too old, are you? I think you're just old enough for me, oh King under the Mountain. And not nearly old enough to not have courtiers and others fall over themselves to garner your attention. If you were so inclined, Master Oakenshield, you would be able to replace me within the hour. So I think it is I who should worry when your mind wanders, not the other way around. I mean, who would want a hobbit such as myself?" He was batting his lashes at the dwarf, mirth written all over his face.

Somehow Thorin managed to keep from laughing, even though a smile was tugging at the corners of his mouth. "You are quite correct, I fear. I guess it is best that I took pity on you, is it not? You would be all lonesome otherwise, and we can't have that." Sighing, he looked at the fire, dancing merrily on the hearth. But when he looked up, his eyes were warm and the smile had broken through. "I can't even say that without feeling rather foolish; can you?" Bilbo shook his head, grinning. "When there is no one else for either of us. You are my One, and I am lucky to have you by my side. Too many of my kin do not." The king's smile faltered, and was replace by wistfulness. "They say Valinor is a place of happiness, where all our sufferings are ended. I find that unfortunately it isn't. It was a dream, I fear. Something we could look forward to in Arda. But the only thing we have truly lost here is the threat of orcs and goblins, and all the other vile creatures of the enemy. Dwarves, however, are still dwarves. And the elves are the same as well." He blinked and once again smiled at Bilbo warmly. "It took a hobbit's touch to break down the walls we build between our races over thousands of years. My hobbit's hand."

The gentlehobbit in Bilbo wanted to run and hide, and already did he feel his cheeks heat up with an embarrassed blush. But no. He wasn't that oh so very proper hobbit anymore, was he? He was Thorin's burglar, a Ring-bearer and Dragon-riddler. And so instead of turning away, he smiled at the dwarf, albeit a bit shyly. "It wasn't just my doing, ukrâd. If it wasn't for your father and grandfather, for you, we would not be where we are now. You are a changed dwarf, and at times I hardly recognise you at all. But that is a good thing." Thorin huffed, trying to look all ruffled feathers and flustered, but it only made the hobbit giggle. "Admit it. You weren't exactly known for your love of the elves."

"And I still am not," the king deadpanned. "I am known for my love of a certain halfling though, and since he is rather besotted with the elves, I thought I'd give this friendship thing a try." Thorin caught his hands before they could attack the dwarf's sides again, and brought them to his lips. "Now what do you think you're doing? Attacking your king is not a wise course of action. Not even for the future consort. I may have to punish you for it tonight..." He kissed Bilbo's knuckles then, but the hobbit barely felt the soft touch of lips and the scraping of the dwarf's beard. His mind was too busy conjuring up images of what said punishment might entail, and for the remainder of that day, and the next, Bilbo's mind was not weighed down by dark thoughts.

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"So what did King Turgon say?" Kíli was positively bouncing, and Anorion had a hard time calming the overly eager dwarf, who was really acting like an over-excited puppy. Bilbo was standing in the doorway still, having just returned from his meeting with the elven ruler, and looked somewhat shell shocked. Clearly he hadn't expected to find two dwarves and an elven warrior in his rooms upon his return, but then again he should have. After all, Kíli had spoken of little else for the past few weeks, to the point where even Fíli was growing tired of his brother's enthusiasm. Not that it was a bad thing. Seeing the dark-haired dwarf so excited was heartwarming indeed. Even Thorin had had to admit as much. Bilbo had all but forced him to.
"Hello to you, too, dearest nephew. You will allow me to get out of my drenched clothes first before you accost me, won't you?" Fíli blinked as he hadn't seen it up until now, and clearly his brother hadn't either, but Bilbo was leaving puddles on the floor and when the blond turned to the high windows, he saw that the heavens had opened in a rather spectacular way. "It's a bit damp outside," the hobbit continued chuckling now, dropping his cloak rather unceremoniously on the marbles. "If my mother could see this, she'd have me by my ears, but seeing as she's not here..." The hobbit's coat followed the cloak. "Would you be a dearie and pick them up and give them to Ragnar? He was close to tearing them from me once he saw me and remembered that I can catch a cold even though you dwarves can't. He wants to dry them. Or something."

"They look like throwing away material to me," Kíli interjected, his eyes huge. "Are you ... are you cold, Uncle? Let me make you a hot bath for your feet at least. They must be freezing." And before Bilbo could say anything, the young dwarf darted into the bedroom and out of sight. The hobbit simply shook his head and shrugged. There was nothing else to be done when Kíli was like this. However, the thought of sinking his feet into warm water was appealing, as they were cold indeed and the marble floor didn't do anything to help that. So when Kíli came back with a rather large bucket and a basin for just this purpose, the hobbit allowed himself to be fussed over and was soon sitting in his favourite armchair by the fire, his feet slowly regaining life. Now, if he could just have his pipe and a nice book, he truly would have been a very contented hobbit.

Only, that wasn't going to happen. For as soon as he looked somewhat comfortable, Kíli began bombarding him with questions again, and this time Fíli and Anorion joined in as well. "Alright, alright," the besieged hobbit finally waved his arms in frustration. "I'll tell you. But please, at least sit down?" The three of them had been all but standing over him and he felt just a little crowded. They complied of course, as speedily as was possible at that. "Now, King Turgon first thought I was joking of course and he laughed in my face telling me how Thorin would never ever allow his own nephews to be in his guard. Friendship or not, he just couldn't believe that our dearest king of 'I hate everything elven' could truly have come this far. But when I assured him that I was telling the truth, he just stared at me as if seeing me for the first time. And then he said something very weird. 'I always felt that a part of him was missing, all these years. But now he has found it again, and he is truly becoming the king he was always meant to be.' What did he mean by that?"

Fíli laughed, "I thought that was fairly obvious. Uncle Thorin was miserable without you. We all were. You are the only one who could ever temper his moods; his anger. And you were the only one who was allowed to speak kindly of elves without being killed on sight. You are ... you are his other half, and he is yours. You were made to be together, to complement each other. Two halves of one whole. It's why he was acting the way he did on our journey ... because he didn't think he deserved this kind of happiness. And I think he ... he knew we were going to our deaths so he was harsh to make you stay behind. To protect you. It's Thorin, you know? It doesn't have to make sense." The blond shrugged and grinned. "I would have thought you had realised all this by now though, Master Boggins. After all, we're relying on your smarts here." He stuck out his tongue and didn't seem at all phased when Bilbo fixed him with his best death-glare. "Yeah, that's scary on Thorin, but on you it's just ... cute."

Grumbling, the hobbit looked down at his feet and wriggled his toes. Oh, the water was glorious. "I just ... I don't want to think of him as sad and alone. Even if it's in the past. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened had I given in to the urge to take my own life, you know? I missed him so desperately at times. But I guess we had to go through these eighty years to fully understand what we had lost, or stood to lose more like. And Thorin had to befriend the elves." He chuckled at that last, but his smile faded at Kíli's shocked expression, those big eyes slowly filling with tears. "Oh dear one, don't look at me like that. I didn't do it, did I? It's just that I wanted the pain to go away some days. We had so little time, and yet your uncle had made a home for himself in my heart and when
he was gone..." The hobbit shook his head. "But no more of that. I am sorry I ever mentioned it. I promise I will not leave you. You'll grow sick of me before long, Kíli dear."

The young dwarf simply dropped to his knees by Bilbo's side and slowly placed his head upon the hobbit's knee as if afraid he might be reprimanded for it. It was Fíli who broke the silence eventually, sitting down on Bilbo's other side. "He just remembers how badly Thorin was at times, I think. We feared he might do something to himself, you know? But Bilbo, it is in the past now and the future is light and joyful. You and uncle are to be married! And nothing and no one will stop you from it. And you will be happy for all time. Here, together. With us." That last bit was for his brother's benefit, and Kíli raised his head and nodded.

"Indeed. And before long the two of you shall also find the ones you were meant to be with, and you as well, Anorion." He smiled at the elf who had stepped up behind Kíli, gently stroking the dwarf's dark hair. "Your uncle might not understand what you share, but I do. I thought, foolishly perhaps, that it was the same for Thorin and I, or at least for him." Kíli's face scrunched up in mock-horror, and the hobbit had to chuckle. "You care for each other is what I meant, and you enjoy each other's company. That is all I need to know about it. Unless I can terrify Thorin with it, of course." Now even Anorion turned pale, much to Bilbo's amusement. "By the Valar, if you cannot be honest about things now, what will you do when you meet your true loves? Go into hiding? And I somehow feel you will meet them together, the three of them. Anything else would just be cruel."

Fíli was sighing then, and Kíli and Anorion shared a long moment. But when they looked at Bilbo again, they nodded. "I hope so, too. But more so for my silly older brother than myself. You see, he is in love with his stupid books I think, and that's not healthy at all." Kíli stuck out his tongue at his brother who reached across Bilbo's lap to ruffle the brunette's hair.

"So anyway, tomorrow morning, you two are expected to report to Ecthelion. And Anorion, you are tasked with arranging for proper gear and armour to be made for these two here. For they are now part of the High King's Guard." Kíli's eyes sparkled happily and Fíli smiled. Surely Thorin could not say anything against it now.

Chapter End Notes

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